

PARKS OR PEOPLE: EXPLORING ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS FOR PROTECTED AREAS DEVELOPMENT IN VIET NAM

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Introduction:

In the last ten years, the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam has been proclaimed a 'biodiversity hotspot,' mainly due to the discovery of several new mammals previously 'unknown' to science. As a result, this small country has been the site of a concerted effort on the part of conservation organisations and international development agencies to improve environmental protection. In particular, the rise in deforestation beginning with the Franco-Viet Nam war in 1945, through the American war from 1960 to 1975, and continuing after reunification of North and South in 1975, has been characterised as the most pressing environmental issue facing the country. One solution to this problem of deforestation has been to develop many new state-managed protected areas.

These parks are, for the most part, designed with input from Western conservation organisations and development agencies (cf. Wege et al, 1999). Furthermore, on paper, the goals are to protect these areas according to Western conservation ideals. While older protected areas in Viet Nam were often demarcated on an ad hoc basis, and included a wide range of disturbed and less disturbed habitat without much thought to system-wide representation, new parks have been proposed on the basis of biodiversity protection and in areas supposedly 'pristine' enough that they need special protection from human encroachment. Mammals and birds are usually taken as the best indicators of biodiversity and 'undisturbed' habitat, and these species are used as the justification for new parks and as reasons to strictly protect the older ones. Viet Nam has justified this new policy - begun in the late 80s and early 90s - by saying it needs to 'catch up' with the rest of the world in terms of habitat coverage: "it is necessary to have appropriate proportion of area which is consistent with the natural area in the whole country or forest and forest land area, matching with the potential source of tropical forest in Viet Nam and other countries in the region and in the world" (MARD 1997b).

This should not be surprising. Most countries in the world now have some sort of protected area system that encompasses a range of species in attempts to protect biodiversity, however defined by national governments. But Viet Nam's attempts to replicate a protected area system that one could find in America faces extreme difficulties. Most importantly, Viet Nam is one of the most densely populated nations on earth. This means that there is really no area in the entire country that can accurately be described as pristine or undisturbed; years of warfare and a growing, poverty-stricken population have seen to that. Most parks in Viet Nam are surrounded by

resident populations of tens of thousands, and in some cases, hundreds of thousands of people. Yet rarely are park management plans formulated that specifically address these populations. Furthermore, almost none of the management plans for parks and reserves in Viet Nam have addressed the difficult question of how to properly manage degraded landscapes or landscapes that have been under human use for decades, and instead make assumptions that protected areas simply need to be closed off from humans in order to have ecological value again. The demarcation of new parks in the last 5 years in Vietnam has usually taken two steps: find an area ‘worthy’ of protection and decide its biodiversity value with little or no reference to past or present human use, and then argue that any human use in the future is detrimental and therefore this area needs complete protection and some form of resettlement or curtailment of resource use rights. The oddest thing about this process is the universal acknowledgment that park protection in Viet Nam is failing miserably -- Viet Nam was recently named one of the top ten countries that is losing biodiversity the fastest.¹

This paper attempts to answer the questions of why inflexible concepts of biodiversity conservation and national parks free of human use are being adopted in Viet Nam. What is the rationale, and what will be the effect? In Viet Nam, few people have stood back to criticize the process of demarcating parks and protecting ‘biodiversity’. When faced with the extinction of photogenic mammals, it seems hard to be critical of biodiversity protection. But when scientific studies of biodiversity ignore human use of resources, and when inaccurate statistics and jargon about biodiversity ‘hotspots’ are used over and over by funding agencies to justify the curtailment of resource use rights for large populations of people, then the process looks a little less benign. I will argue in this paper that social constructions of the environment of Viet Nam - whether by Western conservation agencies, the Vietnamese state, or local populations - need to be explored.² I will be arguing that Viet Nam provides a timely look at how the construction of rhetoric about ‘nature’ is leading to challenges in protecting areas for conservation. I will further argue that the situation of park protection is complicated in ways that conservation and development agencies in Viet Nam rarely address, involving sticky issues of democratic governance, local and national land use rights, corrupt officers and illegal wildlife traders, poorly trained and inadequate official park staffs, and the differing conceptions all these groups have about what is nature and what it should be used for.

The conservation paradigm and implementation in Vietnam:

Before moving on to the case of Viet Nam, I want to look briefly at what I mean when I say ‘Western’ models of park protection and ‘Western’ ideas about ecology and man’s place in it are being inappropriately applied

¹ The other countries in the top ten are Indonesia, South Africa, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Madagascar, Cameroon, Malaysia, Ivory Coast, and the Philippines (Nguyen Tuan and Dang Ba Tien, 1999).

² I take as my departure point the words from a recent volume: “We need to examine the extent to which official definitions of nature simply legitimate those of the morally and politically powerful and the degree to which they combine the definitions of different constituencies. We need to ask how particular definitions of nature serve the interests of particular groups, whether these be the conservation lobby, the Roman Catholic Church, or indigenous peoples who see advantages in reinventing a particular tradition of nature” (Ellen and Fukui 1995).

in Viet Nam. It is well known that the first national parks as such developed in the US and Europe, with the first ‘national park,’ Yellowstone, in the late 19th century. As Cosgrove notes, “In the United States, and from very early in other parts of the extended European ecumene, national parks have occupied areas regarded as wilderness, the last preserves of places untouched by the outward expansion of European imperium.” (Cosgrove 1995). The concept of wilderness – absent humans – has long since permeated conceptions of national park and protected areas. As McNeely notes, the “idea of protected areas (of which the national park is the most well-known category) has been built on a distinctly misanthropic foundation: it assumes that people are destructive of a pristine nature that needs to be protected against human depredation.” (McNeely 1997).

In more recent years, Western conservation has turned from an early emphasis on ‘wilderness’ to the more scientific-sounding ‘biodiversity conservation’. What drives biodiversity protection is an ecological paradigm that equates biodiversity with ecosystem stability and productivity, and the need for conservation of these functions. Prior to the 1980s (when there was a rise of interest in people-oriented parks and integrated conservation and development projects (IDCPs)), parks all over the world had surprisingly little variation in the ways they were demarcated and managed. The universal model seemed to be one of a) find an area worthy of conservation (often for the conservation of flagship mammal or bird species, or for generalized biodiversity value); b) make a boundary around this area; and c) keep people out as much as possible. This model is in some ways enshrined the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) international guidelines for park classification, which rank parks from 1 to 6 largely based on their degree of human disturbance or use.³ Parks falling at the high end of the spectrum, such as 4 through 6, which allow for extractive use and residence patterns, have led many conservationists to declare these areas less important and less worthy of funding and attention than the areas of stricter enforcement (1 through 3).

The IUCN classification has in many ways oversimplified the range of landscapes found in diverse areas of the world, and in a sense, the classification also demonizes those landscapes that are human-affected by ranking

³ IUCN and the World Conservation Union define a protected area as: “an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other affective means.” IUCN categorises protected areas by management objectives and interventions and has identified six distinct categories of protected areas:

I. Strict Nature Reserve/Wilderness Area: Protected area managed mainly for science and wilderness protection

II. National Park: Protected area managed mainly for ecosystem protection and recreation

III. Natural Monument: Protected area managed mainly for conservation of specific natural features

IV. Habitat/Species Management Area: Protected area managed mainly for conservation through management intervention

V. Protected Landscape/Seascape: Protected area managed mainly for landscape/seascape protection and recreation.

VI. Managed Resource Protected Area: Protected area managed mainly for the sustainable use of natural ecosystems. (See IUCN 1994).

them lower on a scale.⁴ The truth is that this classification just doesn't make sense in many areas of the world, with high populations within parks and long histories of use of natural resources in areas now proclaimed as protected. So why should a model that basically was developed in the West be applicable to other diverse areas of the world? Why are the nation-specific and local histories of parks ignored in favor that each area should fit this 6-fold system? Why are a range of local uses and goals for parks not valued?

This is certainly the case in Viet Nam, where the IUCN classifications fit uncomfortably with Viet Nam's current protected areas system. As the Asian Development Bank has noted, "To a greater extent than any other Greater Mekong Subregion country, Viet Nam's protected areas are islands in a sea of humanity." (Clarke, 1998) Many of the protected landscapes are quite small by international standards.⁵ 25 of the 71 parks and nature reserves are less than 10,000ha; only three exceed 1,000 km². All protected areas are used by people living around them, and most all also have settlements within them. A 1995 conference on Viet Nam's park system concluded that the national goal of biodiversity protection was not well served by the current disorderly system, as many reserves were too small, too isolated, were degraded, or contained little value for biodiversity conservation (Anon., 1995). The slapdash nature of Viet Nam's creation of 'protected areas' has rankled international conservation organisations for years.

Currently, the legal system of protected areas in Viet Nam is as follows. 'National parks' are usually consist of a strictly protected inner core in which almost all anthropogenic activities are banned. Outer cores allow for such activities as regenerating and replanting schemes, some 'low-impact' resource use, and recreational activities. Buffer zones that allow for regulated production activities are supposed to be managed either by or with the help of park officials, but are outside most parks' officially demarcated boundaries. Of the 11 national parks, most are accessible for tourism. These are the only protected areas managed nationally by the central state. The degree of 'biodiversity' value of the national parks is a matter of much debate, however.⁶

The second designation of biodiversity zones is in 'nature reserves.' Nature reserves are protected areas primarily designed for conservation and scientific research; tourism is not encouraged. The administration of these zones falls mainly to each of the provinces, but boundaries are to be developed with the national Ministry of Forestry (now under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development or MARD). Provincial and district officers

⁴ As an example, there was extreme consternation among international conservationists when in 1993 Laos decided against gazetted protected areas in the I-III rankings and instead chose to have "National Biodiversity Conservation Areas" which are equivalent to IUCN rank IV. See Chape, 1996.

⁵ One reason for this is because many of the so-called protected areas are former state owned logging enterprise areas which severely fragmented forest areas. Another reason for the small size is also because most protected areas are managed individually by one of the more than 60 local provinces - almost no protected areas cross provincial boundaries due to bureaucratic infighting.

⁶ For example, Ben En national park is almost entirely secondary growth as it was logged extensively up until 1993. And Ba Vi national park is estimated to have perhaps less than 30% forest cover.

of the Forest Protection Department (*Kiem Lam*) are usually the ones in charge of day-to-day management. Finally, ‘cultural, historical and environmental reserves’ (CHERs) are the last category of protected landscapes in Viet Nam; they contain historical relics and scenes with aesthetic interest. Examples include a former jailhouse for anti-French revolutionaries and the caves where Ho Chi Minh hid from the French army in the 1940s. Tourism to these areas is encouraged, and although these CHERs are administrated by the provinces with advice from the Ministry of Forestry, most are considered to contain little of scientific or ecological value (Tran Lien Phong, 1995). Conservation organizations have been pushing for years for these CHERs to be removed from the protected areas system.

This system may not work very well in practice: the confusion of who can use what resources is complicated by the fact that each of Vietnam's more than 60 provinces may be administering protected areas in different ways (as IUCN recommends, states, not localities, should management parks). As the Ministry in charge of the whole system notes, “The classification of special-use forest is inappropriate with classification standard of IUCN” (MARD 1997b). MARD wants to take over the management of all important parks and reserves from local provinces into a consolidated network and Western conservation agencies have spent millions of dollars to try to standardise the current protected areas system, move administration to the central state, and adhere to standards of world practice in conservation. Viet Nam seems to be taking the advice of an international consultant who in many reports emphasizes his dislike for Viet Nam's haphazard and localized system of protected areas, and who has argued that Vietnam ought to “adhere to internationally accepted standards if it wishes to benefit from international support for its conservation efforts” (MacKinnon et al 1989). The same author notes that the “parks should comply with the international definition – relatively large natural areas under the management of the highest national authority which contain outstanding examples of representative fauna or flora... in which human exploitative use is absent or measures to stop such uses are in process” (MacKinnon 1990). There is no debate within Viet Nam if perhaps these types of parks are unrealistic, given the country's population pressures and degraded landscapes.

The History of Protected Areas in Viet Nam

It should be noted that parks and protected areas are not a purely, ‘new’, ‘Western’ phenomenon in Asia. In Southeast Asia, many protected areas pre-date colonial rule in the region. Many were originally set up in localities and protected by customary or religious law. However, as state borders coalesced with the arrival of Europeans, many new ‘national’ protected areas began to develop. In French colonial Indochina, some areas were designated as special ‘nationally’ protected parks, such as Angkor Wat in Cambodia, designated in 1925. The French government created no official national parks in Viet Nam, however.⁷ In Viet Nam, the main precursor of

⁷ There is mention that the last Gouverneur General, Leopold Cadière, proposed in 1941 to set up 5 nature reserves in Viet Nam -- 2 areas in Son La province of Tonkin, 2 in the coastal forests around Danang (Tourane) and one area in the former capital city Hue (Cao Van Sung 1995). The Bach Ma park outside Hue was specifically to be set up to protect the Edwards Pheasant (*Lophura edwardsi*), the first example of a species-driven park protection plan in Viet

many of today's protected areas were actually colonial hill stations, set up in mountains to escape the heat of major cities like Hanoi, Hue, Faifo, and Tourane.⁸ Other quasi-protected areas included French logging concessions, although the general policy of 'indirect rule' in much of Indochina meant these areas were not really 'state' managed areas. Mass resettlement, and strict enforcement of reserve borders, were simply not possible for this densely populated and loosely colonized state. Resettlement out of 'protected' areas was not pursued, and in fact, punishment for those that were caught encroaching on forest reserves was usually limited to fines of up to several hundred piastres (Thomas 1998). The establishment of strictly enforced, human-free protected areas thus never had a colonial history in Viet Nam, as it did in parts of Africa (see the work of Neumann (1997, 1998) on the history of protected areas there leading to modern conflicts).

Historically, interest in protected areas by the government of Viet Nam can only be traced back to the early 1960s and the personal influence of Ho Chi Minh, an advocate of natural resources conservation. When Viet Nam created the first national park in 1962, President Ho Chi Minh personally dedicated Cuc Phuong National Park, one hundred miles south of Hanoi.⁹ He said then, "Forests are gold. If we know how to conserve and use them well, they will be very precious." Since then, his phrase *Rung La Vang* (forests are gold) has become a slogan for various state conservation plans.

Cuc Phuong was Viet Nam's first established national park, and since Cuc Phuong, ten more national parks have been created. In addition to national parks, there are 27 CHERs and 55 nature reserves. Many of these reserves were created by the state in two administrative orders in 1977 and 1986 (Cao Van Sung, 1995). Much of the first state-wide protected area networks in Vietnam grew in an ad hoc fashion during the American war and after reunification, with areas being chosen for protection based on such disparate factors as landscape, location, scenic beauty, and cultural importance. However, unlike other areas of the world, such as America and East Africa, protected areas in Viet Nam were not subject to mass removal of the current inhabitants when protected areas were made.

Before the BAP, one million hectares of land were in these three protected categories, and the government has said it intended to double that amount to two million ha before the year 2010 with the addition of some 71 new parks. The distribution of land is to be 254, 807 ha in national parks, 1,719,408 ha in nature reserve areas, and 145,359 ha in CHERs (MARD 1997b). The whole system is classified by the Ministry of Agriculture as the 'Special-Use Forest

Nam. However, the Japanese invasion of Indochina wiped out these plans, and they were never to be revived by the French.

⁸ The current national parks Ba Vi and Tam Dao were hillstations outside of Hanoi; the current national park Bach Ma and the nature reserve Ba Na were hillstations outside of Hue and Danang.

⁹ The former Republic of Viet Nam also made a number of war-time park openings. In 1965, ten protected areas were proposed and demarcated by Saigon authorities. According to the IUCN in 1974, South Viet Nam had over 750, 000 ha of land in protected area status. However, after reunification, many of these areas were not renewed as

System' (*rung dac diem*), to be distinguished from production forests (*rung san xuat*) and protection forests (*rung phong ho*), which are reforested watershed areas. As the name of the system indicates, environmental plans are highly biased towards forest protection and reforestation. Although many scientists have pushed for marine reserves, coastal mangrove reserves, wetlands reserves, and protected fishing areas, the majority of the current preserves in Viet Nam are terrestrial, non-coastal forested areas (Cao Van Sung, 1995). As of 2001, marine and wetlands reserves remain sorely under-represented in the protected areas system.

Looking at the protected area system that has developed to this date, it is easy to see that it is biased towards forested, mountainous ecosystems. These are also the areas where the largest numbers of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam live (15% of Viet Nam's population are non-Vietnamese, belonging to 53 distinct ethnic groups). The current system of parks and reserves predominates in these ethnic minority areas; of the nature reserves with the strictest restrictions on land uses, almost all abut areas inhabited by ethnic minorities (see Table One below). Other sensitive ecosystems populated and used by lowlanders, such as coastal mangrove forests or coral reefs, have not been emphasised in these biodiversity strategies, and in fact until recently, the government had a policy to 'exploit and utilise uncultivated lands, estuary and coastal mudflats and water bodies in the plains and basins' (Prime Ministerial decision 773/TG, 1994). The state itself has admitted that "most of the special use forests have been allocated in remote or mountainous areas under difficult geographical conditions and less developed socio-economies" (MARD, 1997b).

However, rather than recognising forest use rights of these minorities, many of whom are extremely poor and marginalized, most management plans for parks (when they actually address that there are people living around and in them) advocate strict protection for core 'biodiversity' zones of parks, where human use is not allowed. As an example, general national guidelines say that within national parks and reserves, it is prohibited to: log, exploit (excluding activities related to forest cleaning and rehabilitation), hunt animals, collect specimens under any means and forms. It is also prohibited to make loud noise or do anything that causes negative impacts on living conditions and development of all plants and animals in the special-use forest... Strict protection areas within national parks and nature preservation areas should be protected strictly. Every activity that causes negative impacts to forest is not allowed. (MARD, 1997b)

These general guidelines make no distinction between local and extra-local resource use, or between low impact (such as collecting thatch (or making loud noises!)) and high impact (poaching with semi-automatic rifles). These kinds of generalisations in management therefore hamper attempts to find individual local solutions to conservation.¹⁰

protected areas. In fact, out of the original ten areas, only two are now part of the national park system in present-day Viet Nam.

¹⁰ The most egregious case of overgeneralisation is to be found in the management plans of Yok Don National Park and Vu Quang Nature Reserve, which were both made by the same Western consultant, and which are in some passages verbatim copies of one another when assessing the impact of the park on local people. "However the density of people is not high and the area of other production zones is large enough to meet real needs. There does

The national Biodiversity Action Plan (funded by international donors and adopted by the government in 1995) singled out several parks for priority in funding and management for the next century, based on their perceived biological importance (see Table One). Table One also indicates the scope of the impact these parks may have on the large populations either inside or immediately outside their boundaries.

Table One: Major Protected Areas in Viet Nam and Close Human Populations

Name of Protected Area (Province)	Main Reason for High Biodiversity Value	High Ethnic Minorities Population? (Name of group)	Total population in park; Total out in buffer zone
Top Biodiversity Priorities in the Biodiversity Action Plan			
Pu Mat Nature Reserve (Nghe An)	Saola, Giant Muntjak	Yes (Thai)	50,000 out; inside unknown
Vu Quang Nature Reserve (Ha Tinh)	Saola, Giant Muntjak	No	20,000 out
Hoang Lien Son Nature Reserve (Lao Cai)	Endemic plants	Yes (Dao, Hmong)	300 in; 30,000 out
Ba Be National Park (Cao Bang)	Large lakes	Yes (Tay, Hmong, Dao)	1,500 in; 15,000 out
Cat Ba National Park (Hai Phong)	Island habitat, langurs	No	7,000 out
Cuc Phuong National Park (Ninh Binh)	Langurs	Yes (Muong)	8,000 out
Ke Go Nature Reserve (Ha Tinh)	Pheasants	No	30,000 out
Bach Ma National Park (Thua Thien Hue)	Pheasants	No (but some – Van Kieu, Katu)	61,000 out
Nam Ka Nature Reserve (Dac Lac)	Wetlands	Yes (Ede, Mnong)	Approx 10,000 out
Chu Yang Sinh Nature Reserve (Dac Lac)	Birds, endemic plants	Yes (Ede, Mnong, Hmong)	Approx 6,000 out
Bi Dup Nature Reserve (Lam Dong)	Wild cattle	Yes (Mnong)	N/A
Cat Tien National Park (Dong Nai)	Rhinos	Yes (Ma, Xtieng)	1,000 in; 170,000 out
Other important national parks			
Ba Vi (Ha Tay)	Plants	No, but some (Dao)	42,000 out
Yok Don (Dac Lac)	Elephants, kouprey	Y (Ede, Mnong, Lao, Jarai)	29,000 out
Ben En (Thanh Hoa)	Elephants, deer	N, but some (Thai, Tho, Muong)	1,900 in; 5,600 out
Chu Mom Ray (Kontum)	Elephants, gaur	Y (Jarai, Sedang, Ro Mam)	20,000 out
Tam Dao (Vinh Phu)	Tourism, birds	N	140,000 in & out
Con Dao (Ba Ria-Vung Tau)	Coastal islands	N	2,400 in
New Proposed Reserves of Biological Importance			
Song Thanh-Dakpring (Quang Nam)	Birds, Truong Son Muntjak	Y (Katu, Gie Trieng)	11,812 in
Ngoc Linh (Kontum)	Birds	Y (Sedang)	13, 000 out

not seem to be a real dependence on the reserve itself by local people. Their needs could be met in other ways” is found verbatim in both documents, despite the fact that the parks are quite different. Vu Quang has no minorities living around it; Yok Don has many. Yok Don is a riparian and dry deciduous park, while Vu Quang is mountainous and the site of some of the highest rainfall in Viet Nam. Claiming that these two areas both have exactly the same human problems indicates a neglect to look into the details of the socio-economic situation around parks (see MacKinnon et al. 1989, and MacKinnon, 1992).

Phong Dien (Thua Thien Hue)	Edwards pheasant, other birds	N (but some Ta Oi)	17,000 out
Dakrong (Quang Tri)	Birds	Y (Bru Van Kieu, Ta Oi)	14,000 out

[Note: the numbers of people in and out of parks is based on reporting by the park officials themselves, which is oftentimes outdated or inaccurate. Buffer zone figures may include all adjacent communes sharing a administrative border with the park, not only those communities in proximity to the park. Figures should be taken as general indicators only.]

(Sources: Andzdec Consultants, 1996; Vo Tri Chung, 2000; Ghazoul and Le Mong Chan, 1994; Le Duc Giang, 1995; Le Trong Trai and Richardson, 1999a, 1999b; MacKinnon, 1992; Ministry of Forestry, 1993; Tordoff et al., 1997; United Nations Development Program, 1996; Wikramanayake and Vu Van Dung, 1997; World Bank, 1997).

Based on broad national guidelines, individual management plans for each protected area are supposed to be drawn up. Management plans for many parks in Viet Nam have been created up by foreign consultants and international conservation NGOs. Unfortunately, these management plans often pay scant attention to the socioeconomic conditions found around parks. Most socio-economic data has obviously been collected by provincial officials, and not by a research team – resulting in very vague, mostly pejorative comments about local resource use. For example, the management plan for Ke Go Nature Reserve, where I have spent the last year doing dissertation research, is based entirely on government statistics, rather than on any interviews with local people, and gives no sense of the types or scales of local uses except to blame widespread deforestation on surrounding villages (Le Trong Trai et al., 1999).

At the same time, the NGOs working on management plans often turn around and blame the government for not paying attention to local people. According to the UNDP, which is funding one of the larger IDCPs in Viet Nam at two national parks, Yok Don and Ba Be, “Participatory management involving people who live in or nearby protected areas is a fairly recent concept in Viet Nam and elsewhere in the region. There is little capacity within government to handle this approach. Much of the current work to develop participatory management in led by NGOs, who report difficulties in getting programmes started due to government officials’ lack of understanding; inexperience or unwillingness to cooperate across institutional boundaries; and reluctance to work with communities.” (UNDP 1997).

The lack of attention to local resource use by both the government and conservationists seems at odds with trends across the world, where more emphasis is being placed on valuing local people’s contributions to protected areas management (see Carey et. al, 2000). Yet it is what is happening over and over in Viet Nam as more and more protected areas are being proposed and demarcated. More than 71 new parks have been proposed to the government by Western conservation agencies in concert with MARD (Birdlife International, 2001). I argue that one reason that local resource use is being devalued and ignored is that the Vietnamese state has a very different set of reasons for embracing conservation than Westerns funders do. One cannot accept at face value that conservation and preservation are scientific decisions made by states in a value-free manner. While Western conservationists may have their biodiversity agenda, states often have their own – involving more calculating decisions about control of people, power and property. While the delineation of many parks is spoken of in ‘scientific’ terminology, value

judgments are still made every day as to where to place parks, and for what reasons. In looking at parks as ‘social inventions,’ the decisions that states and environmental policy makers around the world use to guide natural resources management need to be problematized and explored for alternate meanings and messages, such as the control of people, the control of space, or the control of development dollars. This is what I propose to do for the case of Viet Nam.

Justification for Parks I: Money

Although the national government and the local provinces have been involved in the designation of over one hundred national parks and reserves to date, less than half actually have management boards or budgets. Many of the nature reserves also seem to contain questionable biodiversity value, in terms of unique or endangered biological resources. This is because many natural reserves are former state forest enterprises, the timber companies owned by the socialist state, and these ‘nature reserves’ have been stripped of much of their forest cover. These enterprises have been forced in the last ten years of market openness to find new ways to succeed, given declining budgets and a nation-wide ban on log exports from natural forests that was adopted in 1993 (Andzdec Consultants, 1997). Now former timber enterprises that were about to go belly-up are sometimes miraculously transformed into ‘nature reserves,’ including the well-known Vu Quang Nature Reserve, famed in recent years for the discovery of several mammals previously unknown to science. Once named as nature reserves, these areas suddenly become eligible for more conservation dollars, rather than having to independently support themselves through timber sales as was the case before.

Improving the management of parks has been generating a great deal of foreign development aid for this extremely poor country. Especially because Viet Nam was shut out of many international funding circles for the twenty years after reunification, getting international development aid is a new and important enterprise for the state. Parks have certainly proved profitable in the last few years (see Table Two). In fact, the money received in recent years from donors for the Vu Quang Nature Reserve alone is 10 times the amount budgeted by the government for *all* protected areas in Viet Nam in 1991, the year before the saola was discovered.

Table Two: Funding acquired in recent years for park management from overseas

Name of Project	Funding Source	Term	Amount (USD):
Biodiversity Action Plan	GEF	2 years	3 million
Subregional Biodiversity Forum	UNDP	3 years	1 million
Vu Quang Conservation Project	Netherlands	5 years	2.4 million
Nam Cat Tien Natl. Park	Netherlands	5years	5.8 million
PARC Project	GEF/UNDP	5 years	6.3 million
Mom Ray/Cat Tien Natl. Parks	World Bank	5 years	32 million
Pu Mat Nature Reserve	EU	5+ years	19 million
Expanding Protected Areas Network	EU	5 years	1 million
U Minh Thuong Nature Reserve	Danida	n/a	2.7 million

Abbreviations: GEF – Global Environment Facility; EU – European Union; UNDP – United Nations Development Program; PARC– Protected Areas Management for Resource Conservation Project; DANIDA – Danish International Development Agency.
(Sources: UNDP, 1996; World Bank, 1997; World Wildlife Fund, 1996)

The huge influx of western money has brought its own set of problems. The international organizations funding and implementing these projects have one major difficulty in common: their tendency to see local and state government (such as provincial or district administrators) as “local” as is necessary, or feasible. The fact that there are almost no local NGOs in Vietnam (any political activism at the local level tends to be through local party organs) means that the international NGOs combined with the national ministries have a disproportionate say over much conservation and development in the country. It also means that the international NGOs become indebted to working closely with state organs in achieving conservation goals, as there is no ‘grassroots’ sort of network with which to work, nor any local NGOs for local people.

Despite the generous donations from abroad, however, there is no doubt there are tensions between the Vietnamese state and these international funding organisations over what ‘protected areas’ and ‘conservation’ means. The Vietnamese state has liked to put highly organised and managed landscapes in some of the national parks, like a man-made botanical garden with “100 different wood species of 52 families found in Cuc Phuong” (MARD, 1997b). However, a foreign consultant complained angrily that old-growth trees were cut down to make the garden, which thereby compromised the integrity of the park. In another park, the Vietnamese management board has expressed interest in capturing and taming various wild deer species for visitors to look at, while foreign consultants thought it would result in too many deaths during captures and was unnecessary for conservation. The vice-director of the Department of Environment, Science and Technology in Dac Lac province said in a meeting with me that eco-tourism was the only hope he saw in getting enough money to manage parks given poor state budgets, and he admitted that in order to attract domestic tourists, something ‘interesting’ had to be there. Many Vietnamese living in Buon Me Thuot city, near Yok Don National Park, often told me that to just go walking and hiking in the park was ‘boring.’ Much more interesting were the domesticated elephant rides offered by a nearby village, and the chance to picnic in little huts built in a clearing along the river outside the park. A recent Global Environmental Facility project is providing eight million dollars to improve two park areas, and is to be used for ‘landscape planning’ and ‘integrated biodiversity management’, but as a foreign consultant told me, “The Vietnamese park managers think the money gets to go towards building lodges and carnival grounds and elephant rides to help them bring more tourists. You can imagine how this goes over with the international conservationists.”

The difference between foreign and Vietnamese perceptions of the role of parks was humorously exposed in a recent letter to the editor of the national English language newspaper, the Viet Nam News. The author, a German, wrote:

“Dear Sirs-

Last weekend we had the chance to visit the beautiful Cat Tien National Park, with its abundance of rare wildlife and its quiet and unspoiled nature, and enjoy the hospitality of highly professional staff with a lot of expertise and wildlife in the park. To my great surprise, on Saturday afternoon a large and noisy group

of more than a 100 people arrived, apparently on an organized tour provided by a big and well known company, and turned the park into a holiday camp. These visitors seemed to have no interest in nature at all, being very noisy throughout the night, obviously having a big party with radios, loudspeakers, and a lot of alcohol. Visits like this not only disturb the staff and the visitors but also the wildlife... The short term interest of big groups interested only in fun seems completely incompatible with the objectives of a national park, which is supposed to exist for the preservation of nature, scientific research, and the education of visitors. I would like to appeal to all your readers to stop these kinds of group visits and safeguard the future of this unique park, as it is one of the few places in Viet Nam where the rare and beautiful natural heritage is still preserved for the future.” (Viet Nam News, April 26, 2000, p3).

Anyone who has made visits to protected areas in Viet Nam will laugh with familiarity. Domestic tourism to and interest in protected areas is certainly more along the lines of ‘developed and manicured’ rather than ‘ecotourism and natural’. Lake boat trips, orchid gardens, and eating and drinking picnic areas are all more likely to appeal to Vietnamese visitors than hiking or birdwatching. The idea of ‘developing’ natural sites to make them more attractive to human visitors has a long history in Viet Nam. A number of the protected areas managed by the Ministry of Forestry harbour little biodiversity, especially the ‘cultural, historical and environmental reserves.’ Rather, these are places of historical importance (like Pac Bo cave in north Viet Nam, where Ho Chi Minh hid from the French in the 1940s), or else are managed landscapes of sightseeing value where one might take boat rides, see flower gardens, etc.¹¹ In this sense, the state appears to recognise that human-altered areas with perhaps little in the way of biodiversity also possess value as protected landscapes. In the case of CHERs, these areas are protected precisely because they have been altered, used or valued by humans. However, a foreign consultant to Viet Nam’s Tropical Forestry Action Plan review in 1990 encouraged the abolition or transference of these areas out of the protected area system, saying they were essentially valueless, and a drain on limited budgets (MacKinnon, 1990). This has just recently been promulgated by the government in the spring of 2001, with the transference of CHERs to administration by the Ministry of Culture and Information.

Justification for Parks II: People

Officially, the core zones of national parks (and nature reserves that have management plans) are to have almost no human uses.¹² In many cases, where residence within a park or reserve is not an acceptable activity, resettlement

¹¹ In fact, the preservation of ‘cultural legacies’ (*di san van hoa*) is mandated in the 1992 Constitution, Article 34: “The government and society will protect and develop the cultural relics of people: take care of the work of protection, putting in museums, repairing, and conserving the effects of legacies of history, the revolution, cultural relics, artistic works, and famous landscapes.”

¹² As one example, a management plan for Yok Don National Park admits that human use is currently low and may be sustainable, but that it is too difficult for park staffers to monitor it: “Modest levels of hunting or collecting from the reserve on a sustained and controlled basis would be theoretically possible without destroying the habitat of the wildlife or threatening wild populations. However, the practical problems of controlling such harvesting and the permanent danger of fires makes these activities incompatible with conservation objectives” (MacKinnon et al., 1989). And while the report said that the levels of harvesting in the park were so small as to “not be worth the measures that would be necessary to check that everyone was keeping to the proper permitted levels,” the fact that this small harvesting might be allowed without strict checks by the authorities was not considered.

plans exist to move local people. However, international organisations often leave out the difficult questions about resettlement from the specifics of their programmes. For example, in a EU-funded survey to delineate a new park in Quang Nam province, it was noted that 11,000 people, almost all of whom are ethnic minorities, will be living in the proposed park boundaries, but gave no indication of what is to be done with them (Wikramanayake and Vu Van Dung, 1997). It is likely that at least some of them will be targeted with forced resettlement, given recent history of protected areas planning in Viet Nam.

Scholars of Southeast Asia will recognize state-sponsored resettlement plans as an all-too-familiar theme in the region. The recent policies of environmental conservation and park establishment across the board in the region are, in some manner, the result of both long histories of state population translocation in the region, and a long and systematic dislike of highland swidden agriculture by states there (see Scott 1998; Dove 1985). Most of the parks in Southeast Asia are found in highland, forested areas that are inhabited primarily by ethnic minorities and other non-national language speaking citizens. States in Southeast Asia have always tried to change, assimilate and develop these peoples, and portraying them as too ignorant or too poor to preserve resources as well as the state can is common. By creating conservation zones and advocating resettling of local people outside of these areas, Vietnam is continuing a long history of controlling citizens through resettlement and sedentarization (see McElwee, 1999).

The one major relocation programme for 'conservation' that has already been adopted in Viet Nam was in Cuc Phuong National Park in the years 1985 to 1990. The national government ordered the resettlement of all families living in the central valley of the park, involving about 550 people of Muong ethnicity. One of the interesting justifications for the move was that the Muong people were prosperous enough to be able to survive such a transition, and that they were prosperous precisely because they were 'poaching' off park resources: "In fact the Muong people living in the park are very privileged in comparison with other peasants in the country. Besides the normal benefits from agriculture they have additional profit from illegal hunting, unlimited free fuelwood, timber for selling and unlimited pasture land for their cattle." (Szaniawski, 1987) However, the local people themselves argued against resettlement in cultural, not material, terms, and forcibly resisted the resettlement: "They affirmed that they (unlike some of the more recent settlers) had lived on the Cuc Phuong site long before the National Park was established and that it was the land of their ancestors" (Nguyen Nhu Phuong and Dembner, 1994).

Another major resettlement project that has been in the works for years but not yet implemented is at Nam Cat Tien National Park, the only known habitat of the Javan rhinoceros in Viet Nam. Park project documents usually note that a major problem is the presence within the reserve of about 600 people belonging to the Xtieng minority (while ignoring at least five logging enterprises owned by the state and a state coffee farm around the edges of the park). In 1993, a plan was first proposed to move an entire Xtieng village out of the park by promising three million Vietnamese Dong (U.S. \$200) per person who moved (Ministry of Forestry, 1993). The plan has not yet been implemented because there is no money to pay anyone, but park staff have continued to complain that "because

of tensions, they need to resettle fifty households in this area. All of village Three and Four, as well as villages K'Lo and K'it. Mr. Khanh [of the park] says, 'All of them!'" (Nhat Anh, 1999).

The Dong Nai provincial authorities had previously tried to resettle some of these villagers under a different national plan to reduce shifting cultivation but almost all of the villagers have now left the old resettlement site to return to the forest around Nam Cat Tien. Villagers recently explained their motivation for opposing resettlement to a reporter (Nhat Anh 1999). One Ma man said, "Better to be struck dead immediately and die here! If we go down [to the resettlement site] people don't know how to make a living." The head of a Ma village scheduled for resettlement added, "We don't know about living in the town. In making wet rice fields, compared with Vietnamese people, we will be losers. The food down there – our stomachs can't take it. Cabbages and cauliflowers stink when you eat them! Food of the Vietnamese people makes a person weak. If you eat that stuff, then you can't live in the forest like us." And finally, a Xtieng minority woman expressed her disappointment with the government's position by saying, "In the past, the people followed the Party, defeating the French, the Americans, and took back the homeland of our ancestors. Now life is very hard. Whatever we use, then the forest is prohibited! Our houses are shabby, and we wrote a petition asking to make new wood houses, but nobody gave us a solution. Whatever we use, we are caught and they [the national park] make a report about it. In the past, Xtieng people still lived here the way we do, so why did we have thirty-seven rhinos as well? And now if we use whatever we need, what effect does that have on the rhinos?"

Resettlement is not a good solution for many reasons besides the ones expressed above by local people. In general, resettlement in Viet Nam is usually underfunded, as the case of Nam Cat Tien shows. Plans have been on the books for years and yet there is still no movement. Planning resettlement in this way can be even more detrimental to park management as it discourages long term resource management by local people, who may choose to overexploit the area if they know they will be forced to leave in the future. And furthermore, removing one set of people may allow another in. This is particularly true in Viet Nam, which has very high migration rates to rural areas by farmers in search of land. Around Nam Cat Tien, the Ma and Xtieng minorities who have lived there for centuries could be forced to move, only to be replaced by Vietnamese pioneers who know little about forest management and can be expected to deforest to plant cash crops, as they have done in other parts of the province.

Furthermore, many international donors have very strict rules on resettlement, and are usually not supposed to use international funds to pay for such activities except in rare cases. However, in Viet Nam, there are at least two park projects currently receiving funding from a bilateral donor organization and the UN, both of whom have lengthy guidelines against resettlement, where Vietnamese park officials are *de facto* resettling resident ethnic minority populations by denying their land use claims within park boundaries, thereby forcing them to leave the area to seek new farms. The old lands are then taken over by the park, without any sort of compensation. The most egregious example is ongoing at Ba Be National Park, where park authorities are denying use of fallow swidden fields which now happen to lie within the park, even in degraded outlying areas that seemingly have little impact on

the protected core (and these are slated to be reforested with exotic trees like Eucalyptus once they are taken over). The international donor involved in this project is turning a blind eye to the forced land grab, as to ask for compensation for these farmers would require a lengthy review by the donor agency. It is ironic that the Vietnamese authorities at the park are simultaneously building a four lane road through more pristine areas of the park to facilitate 'ecotourism'.

But what is the real problem with people in parks in Vietnam? Virtually all the large "landscape" national parks in Europe contain human communities; for example the Snowdonia National Park in the UK contains approximately 25,000 people. The Adirondack park in upstate New York has tens of thousands as well. While the conservation thinking behind these landscape parks is their management can be handled in a way to promote a variety of more intensively and less intensively used landscapes, this has not been the case in most tropical parks, where it is assumed that any human use is to invite degradation. It is likely that one of the problems with people in parks in Vietnam is that these people are often the poor marginalized ethnic minorities, which have historically been at odds with the lowland Vietnamese majority. Rather than accepting their resource use in highlands areas, the state has chosen to demonize these people as 'destroyers of the forest.'

Justification for Parks III: Space

States everywhere have used a strategy of turning people out of resource-rich areas in order to either 'protect' them or exploit them 'more rationally.' States have sought political and economic control over areas such as the teak forests of Java and Burma, the mineral wealth of Irian Jaya, and the sal forests of India (Peluso 1992; Bryant 1997; Sivaramakrishnan 1999). We are now seeking this extended to protected areas. Vandergeest and Peluso (1995) have theorized that these resource control issues are the logical extension of territorial strategy of states. A trend now been seen in tropical Asia is not only to work to declare protected areas, but also the state administrative control of a range of land uses in landscapes extending outward from protected areas. There is consensus that the major parks must have buffer zones to assist in both protecting the core area and providing development to local people so they will not violate the integrity of the parks. The use of 'multiple use zones' and 'buffer zones' is a common strategy to extend control over strategic space outside legally protected areas. Though conservation organizations think buffer zones work similarly to an antacid, coating and protecting against disturbances inside natural areas and soothing the pains of hunting bans and resource loss to local people, they can often be more like a headache. Buffer zones can be used to double or triple the size of a conservation area, putting more people out of their homes, all in the name of 'development' and 'land use planning'. The use of these planning exercises to extend the control of the state into marginal areas is common in the region. At the Ke Go Nature Reserve in central Viet Nam, the 'buffer zone' includes all those communes which share a border with the park, meaning that several thousands of people living more than 20 km from the park and farming coastal paddy fields are inexplicably included as affected park populations.

As another example, a new UNDP funded project in Viet Nam, the Protected Areas and Resource Conservation (or PARC project), is designed to re-plan large areas of the highlands. According to project documents, the PARC concept is “based on the modified landscape ecology approach to conservation of biological diversity in fragmented habitats impacted by anthropocentric activities of varying intensities. Thus, the PARC site will consist of a network of linked core areas for strict protective measures integrated into a matrix of human-resource use areas. This entire landscape consisting of a mosaic of core, buffer, multiple-use, regeneration zones will comprise the PARC site”. In other words, control over how land is managed will be extended far beyond the official legal borders of the protected areas it is supposed to cover. I have been told dispiritedly by several foreign advisers that while the PARC project looked good on paper, with talk of anthropogenic landscapes, it is headed for disaster. The Vietnamese officials think ‘landscape planning’ means getting funding for the underbudgeted cadastral department to map and provide land use certificates to paddy fields; the funder had a slightly more ambitious plan of a mosaic of planning. Very little land has actually been mapped or officially allocated to any local communities. Activities thus far have mainly focused on more conventional ‘resource substitution’ activities, such as providing loans for livestock to park-affected populations (ScottWilson, 2001).

This fight over the control of space is a fundamental area in which local people should be involved, but rarely are. Local project documents, like the PARC project, claims that “local people living inside the parks and along the buffer areas will have been involved in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all project activities.” But if so, wouldn’t this include actually getting to decide where the park is? I know of no case in Viet Nam where a park was abandoned because local people decided against it. Rather, parks are almost always demarcated first. Then after boundaries have been drawn on biological or administrative principles, then local people are ‘consulted’ about how they are going to deal with these new boundaries.

Losing control over space due to protected areas in SEA is common. What is not common is compensation for this. Many projects do not bother to discuss compensation for local people who lose land and resources. Those projects that pay attention to the issue usually argue that resource substitution will be used instead of direct compensation. As the PARC project notes, “Zoning protected areas for management will alter or restrict availability and use of resources to people in some instances. Such losses and restricted access will, however, be replaced by alternative sustainable resource management strategies, substituted subsistence materials, and generation of other economic opportunities to diversify from traditional resource use patterns and to improve the quality of life of these people.” (UNDP, 1997). However, this resource substitution – such as promising agroforestry assistance in buffer zones, non-wood forest product development, etc – is almost always promised after park boundaries have been established. That means that even in situations where there is money available for alternative resource development, there is a time lag between losing resources to parks and having new opportunities outside of them. Rarely are true market values of land and livelihoods compensated for by IDCPS. It is no wonder than so many ICDP have been declared failures so far.

Perhaps the most egregious and blatant example of states wanting control of more and more space is the degradation of previously appointed protected areas by state-imposed development. Large scale developments such as mines and hydroelectric dams threaten some of the protected areas of Vietnam claimed to be of high biodiversity, but these are rarely implicated as sources of degradation. Furthermore, the Government of Viet Nam is constructing a new four lane national highway linking Hanoi and Saigon, right through several national parks and protected areas, including Phong Nha Nature Reserve, which the state once wanted to nominate for consideration by the World Heritage system. Only the persistent efforts of several well-known Vietnamese conservationists have prevented the road from plowing through Cuc Phuong National Park as well (where the Muong minority people were resettled 10 years ago to 'fully protect' the area). In other words, when the local people 'degrade', it is unacceptable. When the state 'degrades', it is national development.

The Real Problems in Paradise:

There are many problems affecting protected areas that are extremely complicated, but rarely addressed by Western conservation agencies. These include wildlife poaching and illegal timber cutting – often by authorities. A new word has appeared with increasing frequency in the Vietnamese press – “*lam tac*.” A *lam tac* is a person who poaches and deforests with impunity, usually because he has connections. One particularly egregious example was the Tanh Linh state forest enterprise case prosecuted in 1999. The thirty-six defendants in national court were accused of “violating forest protection rules, irresponsibility, corruption and illegally stockpiling military weapons” (Long Huong, 1999). The gang reportedly cut down 53,429m³ of trees -- with a value of 1.6 million U.S. dollars -- in various wildlife sanctuaries and protected forests with the tacit co-operation of local officials. Twenty-nine district and provincial officials were eventually under indictment, including the former deputy director of the provincial Binh Thuan Department of Agriculture and Forestry. If twenty-nine out of thirty-six defendants in this case are government officials, it becomes easy to see why the illegal timber problem is not just a case of small-scale cutting of firewood by local people. Rather, it is high level, often organised criminal activity, involving many branches of the government.¹³ In my fieldsite, local respondents know exactly how much it takes to bribe a forest protection official to let them use the nature reserve’s resources, and they know if they don’t pay it, their collected forest products and wood will be confiscated (and to add insult to injury, the protection officers will turn around and sell the confiscated products illegally at a profit.)

The networks of illegal wildlife trade are probably even more shadowy and complicated than the timber smuggling, as the wildlife trade involves cross-border smuggling between Laos and China as well. The trade involves relatively few people but great sums of money. Some research into the animal trade in Viet Nam in 1996

¹³ For example, the army has a large stake in the timber industry. When the former Prime Minister's ordered the end to raw log exports, he also forced three army-owned sawmills in Qui Nhon to close. In response, the army daily newspaper, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, lashed back that it was “necessary to export timber products to earn money for reforestation”, a particularly interesting justification.

estimated that about 3.5 tons of wildlife was brought by air to Hanoi every week from Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) (Vu Ngoc Thanh 1997). In June 1996, 2 tons of live animals were confiscated at Noi Bai Airport in Hanoi where the animals were on the way to China for sale (the fine for this offence was only US\$500). There was even an incident in which an airplane on route to China via Hanoi returned to HCMC to avoid capture by Hanoi authorities. This indicates the existence of a significant coordination in the transport of live wild animals. It also indicates that while local people may be involved in catching some species, the real masterminds of this operation are people who have the power and resources to be able to commandeer aircraft for their trade. High level corruption in both railroad staff and airline staff that allow logs and wildlife to pass to China, despite bans on both, are common (Duc Duc, 1999).

Many of these reports over the true nature of conflicts over resources in Viet Nam are coming from an unlikely source: the Hanoi press. While park management plans often skip around these subjects, some recent hard-hitting press articles have blamed a variety of issues for poor protected area and forest management in Viet Nam, including:

- The expansion of coffee planting by state enterprises into protected areas (Nguyen Thinh, 1999; Le Huan, 1999)
- The expansion of dragonfruit plantations into protected areas with money from government poverty reduction programs (the story read that the development plan that was going to ‘wipe out poverty and hunger’ is now ‘wiping out the forests’ (Luong Duy Cuong, 1999)).
- Government investment for reforestation in protected forests being used to plant sugarcane and other cash crops instead (Huy Ha, 1999)
- Uncontrolled migration due to rising cash crop prices for pepper this year (which requires wood stakes, and the wood is collected from protected areas (VNS, 1999)).
- Mafia-type control of logging, with 5 forest guards being killed and injured in one province alone when they have tried to stop it (Xuan Quang, 1999b)
- High level corruption in provincial departments of *Kiem Lam* (Cao Hung, 1999; Xuan Quang, 1999a)
- Demand for exotic meats in Vietnamese restaurants leading to continued poaching, despite Viet Nam’s joining of CITES several years ago (Nguyen and Dang 1999)
- Confusing policy directions from the central government that have allowed loopholes in the wildlife trade by officials of *Kiem Lam* (i.e. a policy No. 433/KL “permission to exploit common wild animals and plants in the scope of management”) (Nguyen and Dang, 1999).
- Complicit involvement in wildlife trade by customs, border guards, and the army (Nguyen Tuan, 1999)

However, because these reports have been entirely in Vietnamese, and not reprinted in the single English language newspaper, they have not been publicised outside Viet Nam. And there have been little discussion of these problems inside conservation circles or by park managers.

Conclusion

The fact that these arguments over ‘parks or people’ are continuing to this day is in some ways a result of the overgeneralizations spread about the necessity of protected areas and methods for management around the world. I argue in this paper that these over-generalizations about parks are based on two problems: one, the eternal problem that it takes less time to generalize than it does to find very specific, very localized information and solutions. And the other problem is that the entire system of Western NGO-based conservation is built on promoting these generalities and fitting parks into international categories. At the same time, states can take advantage of the rhetoric and practice of conservation to pursue their own, separate, aims.

What is really needed to improve both protected areas and human lives in Viet Nam? I am mainly arguing for more diverse solutions that recognise that people must be included in conservation plans, as they are an essential part of the landscape (and have been for many years). ‘Buffer zones’ added as an afterthought to strictly protected parks are not enough. The problems facing Viet Nam’s parks are many-fold and need to be addressed at each specific park. Instead, generalisations and misunderstandings about the role of humans in landscapes are hampering efforts. It has been easier to blame shifting agriculturalists than admit that sometimes the management boards of parks are corrupt, or that central government policies are encouraging migration, which directly leads to forest destruction. It is easier to imply all protected areas are equally valuable, and that this designation necessitates total protection for them. Making individual plans for manipulation of various disturbance regimes and regeneration schemes is much more difficult than simply saying, this area must be entirely protected from disturbance from now on.

There are some causes for hope, where local parks are acknowledging that people can be included in conservation. Medicinal plant collecting is being investigated in Ba Vi National Park, where the Dao people have a long history of traditional medicine (Tran Cong Khanh, 1995). In Hoang Lien Son Nature Reserve, people have been allowed to plant cardamom under the forest canopy, as it is a cash crop that needs shade to survive, and thus provides an incentive for forest protection (Sobey, 1997). In another case, where firewood is the problem facing a park, other areas can follow the lead of Tam Dao National Park and allocate park budgets to plant fuelwood species specifically for the needs of local people (Xuan Quang and Quang Thien, 1999). In other areas, park officials have allocated protected forest land to people for protection in “*kiem lam nhan dan*” (people’s forest protection committees) and pay villagers well for doing so. In other words, the solutions must be local, not international, and must recognise the specific and very real needs of Viet Nam’s diverse peoples, rather than trying to create another Yellowstone on the Ho Chi Minh Trail.

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