

De Koninck, Rodolphe (1999) *Deforestation in Viet Nam*.
Ottawa, IDRC, 101 p. (ISBN 0-88936-869-4)

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Volume 44, Number 121, 2000

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/022889ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/022889ar>

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Publisher(s)

Département de géographie de l'Université Laval

ISSN

0007-9766 (print)

1708-8968 (digital)

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Cite this review

Rigg, J. (2000). Review of [De Koninck, Rodolphe (1999) *Deforestation in Viet Nam*. Ottawa, IDRC, 101 p. (ISBN 0-88936-869-4)]. *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 44(121), 97–98. <https://doi.org/10.7202/022889ar>

évidence des dynamiques du système, ce qui incite d'ailleurs le ou les rédacteurs de la conclusion à reconnaître leurs limites dans la connaissance d'un milieu singulièrement complexe et à dresser les grandes lignes d'un programme de recherche. Chemin faisant, les géographes prendront un intérêt tout particulier à la lecture de quelques chapitres : sur la riziculture et l'aménagement du milieu (J.-M. Écoutin *et al.*); sur les facteurs et acteurs de la transformation du milieu (M. Bâ *et al.*); sur les constructions régionales (F. Bertrand, qui a réalisé une analyse cartographique qui est un modèle du genre). Le seul point faible — mais il est d'importance — intéresse la bibliographie, abondante mais non hiérarchisée et sans doute incomplète, puisque plusieurs auteurs cités dans le texte ne sont pas référencés. La qualité de l'ensemble fera passer outre à cette faiblesse.

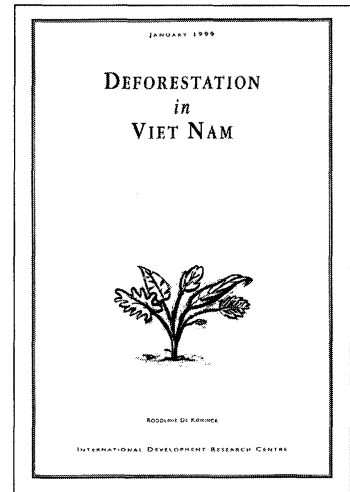
Jacques Bethemont
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DE KONINCK, Rodolphe (1999) *Deforestation in Viet Nam*.
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This short book is based on the work of a joint Vietnamese-Canadian team of researchers funded by the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The project spanned the months between April 1994 and the end of 1996 and its central objective was to assess the sources and extent of deforestation in Viet Nam. As the introductory chapters make clear, the country has suffered severe and accelerating rates of deforestation. In 1943, 43 % of Vietnam's land territory was forested; today some analysts believe this figure may have fallen to as low as 10 %. "In short, Viet Nam

must find the means to take up and counter the forest challenge. Time is running out. If comprehensive [...] and efficient policies of management, protection, and reconstitution of the forest cover are not implemented [...] Viet Nam may soon have to cope with a major deterioration of its natural environment, with catastrophic social and economic consequences" (p. 10).

Having set out the problem, De Koninck formulates his central hypothesis: that agricultural expansion is the main cause of deforestation and that the state plays a central role in the process. Furthermore, he hypothesises that others sources of deforestation are subsidiary and linked to the pivotal role played by agricultural expansion. While the initial intention was to cover the whole of the country, data deficiencies and logistical limitations forced the participants to focus on just two provinces: Tuyen Quang in the north and Lam Dong in the Central Highlands.



It is also important to stress that the work had a secondary objective: to teach the hypothetico-deductive approach to Vietnamese students and scholars. Indeed, some of the most interesting aspects of the study are those which relate to the difficulty of instilling a (western?) research culture among the Vietnamese participants. "Having more or less botched their research mandate", De Koninck writes, "several participants concluded, without providing the slightest evidence, that the ethnic minorities had to bear most of the responsibility for the ongoing deforestation of Viet Nam" (p. 27). Lack of coordination, failure to provide supporting evidence, absence of fieldwork, irresponsible judgemental statements, etc., the list of shortcomings is frank and brutal.

The final two-thirds of the book sets out the results of the work. The text is supported by excellent maps showing the erosion of forest resources over time, and numerous tables and figures. In both Tuyen Quang and Lam Dong, but to varying degrees, Kinh settlement expansion is highlighted as the key factor explaining the pattern of forest retreat. Furthermore, the role of minority shifting cultivators is largely discounted (as is the role of defoliants sprayed during the Viet Nam War). Indeed, he estimates that the ratio of deforestation that can put down to Kinh pioneer cultivators versus minority shifting cultivators at 20:1.

This is not a book that leaves one with a great sense of optimism concerning the ability of the Vietnamese authorities to conserve the little forest left. Reading between the lines, it appears that this was a "difficult" project. Tensions between the partners involved, varying agendas and conflicting research philosophies are all evident to a greater or lesser degree. The conclusions might have been predictable, but the methodical way in which the data was collected and pieced together, and the critical Vietnamese role in the process, makes the work valuable. Furthermore, De Koninck's willingness to disseminate the results to a wider audience in this way (and the IDRC's willingness to publish the results) is laudable.

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