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A Trip to Vietnam for Friendship and Solidarity (Part I)

A Trip to Vietnam for Friendship and Solidarity

Interview by Akahata with SHII Kazuo
Japanese Communist Party Executive Committee Chair

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Foreword (*)

I led a Japanese Communist Party delegation to Vietnam January 9-14, 2007. That was my first visit to Vietnam.

At Hanoi University (**), I opened my speech to a young audience by stating, “Vietnam is remembered by JCP members of my generation as part of their days of student activism.” For most Japanese people in peace and progressive forces, Vietnam is a country that achieved independence and freedom through a heroic struggle to repel the war of aggression by the United States. That is a history imprinted in our minds forever along with our participation in the struggle for international solidarity.

Today, Vietnam is advancing the *Doi Moi* (renovation) process that it began in 1986. It is on its way to major developments. Vietnam is claiming international attention not only for its high-rate economic growth but also for its success in reducing its poverty rate. Vietnam is increasing its influence in Asia and the world as it follows a path toward “socialism through a market economy.” No country has ever followed such a path. No one can tell for sure whether Vietnam can succeed in it. There can be greater complexities, trials, and difficulties ahead. However, with high expectations for their success, we would like to follow closely the Vietnamese people’s effort that will entail explorations and groping.

This book includes my interview with *Akahata* entitled “A Trip to Vietnam for Friendship and Solidarity” and my speech to students at Hanoi University under the title: “A view on the 21st century world.”

I would be very happy if this book can help provide a better understanding of what’s going on in Vietnam and for developing friendship and solidarity between Japan and Vietnam.

SHII Kazuo
February 2007

(*) This foreword was written for *Betonamu Yuko to Rentai no Tabi* (A Trip to Vietnam for Friendship and Solidarity), Shinnihon Publishing Co., Ltd, 2007.

(**) The English translation of Shii’s lecture at Hanoi University will be published in *Japan Press Weekly Special Issue - July 2007*.

Trip to Vietnam for Friendship and Solidarity

Interview with SHII Kazuo published in Akahata, January 23 and 24, 2007

Timely visit had significant results

JCP and CPV agreed to increase their relations to a new level in the 21st century

Q: The Akahata editorial office has received from readers requests for details about your recent visit to Vietnam. Could you first tell us about the purpose of this visit and about the achievements?

SHII Kazuo, JCP Executive Committee Chair: In the last 41 years, the Japanese Communist Party and the Communist Party of Vietnam have developed friendship and solidarity. We wanted to increase this relationship to meet the needs of the 21st century.

Full-fledged exchanges between the JCP and the CPV began in February 1966 when the JCP delegation led by then General Secretary MIYAMOTO Kenji and the Workers' Party of Vietnam (*) delegation led by First Secretary Le Duan held talks. FUWA Tetsuzo, director of the Social Sciences Institute and former JCP Central Committee chair, was a member of the JCP delegation. They had 30 hours of discussion over five days. President Ho Chi Minh attended a session and spoke. In the talks, the two sides confirmed that the JCP and the WPV agreed on many issues, including on the need to establish an international united front in opposition to the war of aggression against Vietnam and on the international situation. This is how our bilateral exchanges started with our militant solidarity with the Vietnamese people's struggle for national liberation in opposition to the U.S. war of aggression.

(*) The Workers' Party of Vietnam was renamed the Communist Party of Vietnam in 1976 following the victory in the Vietnam War.

Most of the members of the present JCP delegation, including myself, feel a closeness to Vietnam. In our youth, we were involved in the struggle that grew rapidly in Japan in opposition to the Vietnam war. I clearly remember attending those rallies and singing the song "Dedicating Our Lives to the People's Interests". (Note: The Japanese title is "*Jiyu Betonamu Koshinkyoku*" or "Free Vietnam March") .

In visiting Vietnam at this time, we hoped to enhance our friendship and solidarity to a new level to meet the needs of the present-day world. The CPV has been carrying out the *Doi Moi* (renovation) policy since the CPV 6th Congress in 1986, the policy line toward socialism through a market economy. Meanwhile, the JCP has adopted a new party program and is working to achieve further party advances.

I held talks with CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung, CPV Hanoi City Committee Secretary Pham Quang Nghi, (CPV Politburo member), CPV Ho Chi Minh City Committee Secretary Le Thanh Hai (CPV Politburo member), and Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences President Do Hoai Nam. In these meetings, we confirmed that our two parties have strengthened and increased our bilateral relations.

At the end of the talks, General Secretary Mahn said to me, “I believe that we are in complete agreement on the need to make an effort to raise the level of our bilateral relations in the 21st century. I hope that our good relations will continue forever. This marks an important beginning for our two parties”

This is exactly what we felt. Thus, I felt that our visit was very successful.

We saw Vietnam vibrantly engaged on its path of development

Q: This was your first trip to Vietnam, wasn't it?

Shii: It was. In April 1994, I met with the PCV delegation to Japan led by Dao Duy Tung, a CPV Politburo and Secretariat member. We had four days of talks focusing on theoretical questions. The delegation included National Assembly President Nguyen Phu Trong (former editor-in-chief of the CPV magazine *Cong Sang*). I led the JCP delegation and we had long, in-depth discussions.

At that time, I received an invitation to visit Vietnam, and after 13 years I finally realized my hope to visit Vietnam.

The CPV delegation to the JCP 24th Congress in 2006 offered me an official invitation, and I received another invitation from the CPV delegation to the Akahata Festival in November. As I was eager to fulfill this assignment, the visit was a great joy to me.

Q: I heard that the Vietnamese felt it was a very timely trip.

Shii: I think that they were saying the timing was good for them to show us their advances. The *Doi Moi* process that Vietnam has pushed ahead with over the last 20 years is making real advances. The economy has grown rapidly during the last several years at the annualized rate of 7-8%. In 2006, Vietnam achieved an 8.2% growth rate. What caught my eyes is the fact that the effort to reduce the poverty rate has also been successful. The poverty rate was 20% in 2004, down from 58% in 1994.

With the *Doi Moi* process deepening, Vietnam's position in international relations has improved. It successfully hosted the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit and joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). Our visit at this time coincided with the time when Vietnamese people were hopeful of their future development.

Shortly before our departure for Vietnam, I read a report on a Gallup International survey conducted in late last year in 53 countries and regions. One of the questions was, “So far as you are concerned, do you think that 2007 will be better or worse than 2006?” Vietnam, where 94% of the respondents answered “yes,” was the most optimistic in the world. Japan with only 19% giving “yes” responses ranked 52nd in optimism. I have mixed emotions toward these figures. I don't know whether I should feel happy or depressed. At any rate, many Vietnamese people feel hopeful that their lives will be better off. That was how I felt about Vietnamese people. I saw them cheerful in the streets and in the university where I had had exchanges with students. We really felt that Vietnam is vibrant and energetic on its way toward sound development.

Q: By the way, how was the Vietnamese climate?

Shii: Very fine. In Hanoi, our Vietnamese friends said we were there in the best season of the year. Temperatures were between 15 and 20 degrees Celsius. It was the dry season with a balmy climate. In Ho Chi Minh City, although the sunshine was strong and the temperature was high, we could refresh ourselves in the shade of a tree. In both cities, we were impressed by the beautiful greenery.

CPV General Secretary Manh and I Agreed on Cooperation on Issues of World Peace and in Theoretical Exchanges

We confirmed cooperation on issues of world order of peace, Iraq, North Korea and the task of abolishing nuclear weapons

Q: I believe the meeting with CPV General Secretary Manh turned out to be very important. Could you tell us how the discussion went?

Shii: That was my second meeting with CPV General Secretary Manh, the first being in 2002, when he had talks in Tokyo with then JCP Central Committee Chair FUWA Tetsuzo. After an hour of talks, we continued our discussion for about 2.5 hours over dinner. We discussed various issues and reached agreement on two important points.

One was that our two parties would work together for peace in Asia and the world. In our struggle in opposition to the U.S. war of aggression against Vietnam, we called for an “international united front opposing U.S. imperialism.” Today, we can work together with slogans calling for a broader unity of countries and people. In this regard, Mr. Manh and I confirmed bilateral cooperation on the struggle to establish a peaceful international order based on the United Nations Charter and to oppose any form of hegemony.

From this viewpoint, we can see a major trend emerging for peace throughout Asia. In Southeast Asia, in particular, former adversaries during the Vietnam War are together making efforts to develop the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a community of nations for peace, and Vietnam is an influential member. The Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) is in force with ASEAN at its main force. Countries that embrace more than half of the world population have joined the treaty.

Turn your eyes to the neighboring region and you will find in Eurasia a community of nations developing for peace with Russia, China, Central Asian countries, and Southeast countries participating in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

I told Mr. Manh that there are two issues that worry me in relation to the current for peace spreading throughout Asia.

One is the Iraq question. At the talks that we held in 2002 with General Secretary Manh, we confirmed our opposition to another war against Iraq. History shows that this agreement was appropriate. I said that the lawlessness in launching the war of aggression and continuing occupation of Iraq has brought about a state of “civil war” there, and that if the United States is to get out of this quagmire, it must withdraw U.S. and other foreign troops from Iraq by setting a specific time-frame.

The other is the issues relating to North Korea. Whereas it is necessary to

have North Korea give up its nuclear programs as well as nuclear weapons, it is more important than anything else to find a diplomatic and peaceful resolution to the issue. I said that it is important that North Korea comply with the United Nations Security Council resolution in 2006 and the joint statement of the Six-Party Talks of September 2005. Given the fact that this joint statement included a provision calling for the observance of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration, I said that the need is to change the Japan-North Korea relationship from one of enmity to one of cooperation.

Q: What did Mr. Manh say in response?

Shii: General Secretary Manh said, “We fully share your opinion.” On the issue of Iraq, he said, “Failure to resolve this problem now will only exacerbate the already worsening situation.” Regarding how to solve the problem of North Korea’s nuclear programs, he said, “We have the same view as yours. We believe that a solution should be found through negotiations.”

We found that our two parties are in agreement on most issues concerning the questions relating to peace throughout the world as well as in Asia. I thought it quite possible for the JCP and the CPV to cooperate in many ways in response to the needs of the 21st century to fulfill the task of establishing a peaceful order based on the United Nations Charter as agreed upon by a majority of the world’s people.

Q: The idea is that cooperation should be developed on the common ground of pressing international issues. I understand that the issue of nuclear weapons was also discussed.

Shii: Yes. Vietnam for many years has sent its delegation to the World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. I said how grateful we are for the message sent by the Vietnamese president to the World Conference every year, adding, “Vietnam is a country that has been affected for generations by chemical defoliants used by the United States for mass destruction. Japan is the only country to experience the tragedy of atomic bombings. Our two countries have similar painful experience. We should work together to eliminate all nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction from our planet.”

Mr. Manh replied, “I totally agree with you. Both the Japanese and Vietnamese peoples are victims of weapons of mass destruction. In the Vietnam War, a great number of people have fallen victim to weapons of mass destruction. We want to join forces with people of Japan and the rest of the world to rid the world of nuclear weapons.” Our two countries share enormous sufferings due to the inhumane nature of wars. I felt sure that on this issue our parties could further increase cooperation in this struggle for peace.

JCP-CPV agreement to promote theoretical exchanges is very significant

Q: In the talks, the JCP and the CPV agreed to carry out theoretical exchanges, didn’t they?

Shii: Yes, we did. I believe this is a very important agreement. I discussed this initiative by taking into account the issues each party is working on.

Vietnam is now in the *Doi Moi* renovation process. I told Mr. Manh that I am interested in *Doi Moi* from two viewpoints.

One is that *Doi Moi* is making progress on the “socialist-oriented market economy.” Its economic development is tied to a poverty reduction effort. The success of the effort is highly evaluated by the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

No country has ever taken the road to “socialism through a market economy.” Lenin tried to embark on this road under his New Economic Policy (NEP), but no one to this day has accomplished it. I wish Vietnam success in completing the road.

The other point to note is that Vietnam is applying the *Doi Moi* policy to its foreign relations. The CPV has set forth a foreign policy of “multilateralism and diversification”. This means that for the *Doi Moi* process to be successful, a peaceful international environment is necessary and that Vietnam is prepared to befriend all other countries in the international community striving for peace, independence and development, playing an active role as an ASEAN member, improving and further developing relations with China, and advancing friendly relations with Japan. Vietnam is even improving relations with the United States, the country that inflicted enormous damage during the war of aggression against Vietnam. Omni-directional diplomacy is what Vietnam is following. It is a refreshingly reasonable policy.

Q: These points that you have mentioned are what the Vietnamese are grappling with at present, aren't they?

Shii: Exactly. We are trying to study Vietnam's efforts under difficult conditions. We welcome all efforts that are reasonable. This is how we can understand each other.

Q: That's very important, isn't it?

Shii: Yes, it is. The JCP on its part has revised its Party Program by breaking ground in many theoretical areas. For example, we developed the theory about future society. We decided not to adopt the two-stage theory that had been the established theory to explain that the future society will experience a transition from socialism to communism and concluded that the “socialization of the means of production” is the key element of socialist transformation. We also made clear that in the transitional period to socialism/communism, we will follow a path of “advancing to socialism through a market economy.”

Concerning how to view the 21st century world, the JCP made a theoretical advance by keeping in mind two major structural changes that took place in the 20th century. One is that after the 1917 Russian Revolution, the world was ushered in an era of coexistence of two socio-economic systems - the system aiming for socialism and the capitalist system. The other is that overt colonialism collapsed followed by the establishment of an international order that does not allow any power to establish colonial rule. The JCP's world outlook is being developed not just on paper but through practicing opposition party diplomacy. In Japan, a highly developed capitalist country, we are facing difficulties peculiar to our society, but the JCP is striving to overcome these difficulties to pave the way for a bright future.

Although Japan and Vietnam are working under different conditions, we thought it very significant for the JCP and the CPV to develop their bilateral theoretical exchanges. In particular, discussions on issues relating to socialism,

world outlook in the 21st century, and present-day capitalism are important.

Q: In other words, the JCP and the CPV, which share common grounds with regard to issues they are facing, are going to have discussions on theoretical issues although they are working under different conditions.

Shii: Exactly. Prior to the talks with CPV General Secretary Manh, we had three hours of discussion with Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences President Do Hoai Nam focusing on theoretical issues relating to *Doi Moi* and socialism. At the end of the talks, Mr. Nam said, “We are anxious to develop scientific exchanges with you. We propose starting exchanges between the JCP’s Institute of Social Sciences and the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences.” I said, “We will be happy to promote this.”

In my talks with Mr. Manh, I explained how we are interested in the development of *Doi Moi*, and said, “Vietnam is a country that explores the road to socialism in practical terms. Although socialism is a task that we will take up in the future, we attach importance to the subject as an object of our theoretical study. Vietnam is on the path of a “socialist-oriented market economy.” Socialism is a product of a critique of capitalism. As a party working in a highly developed capitalist country, the JCP is daily experiencing many obstructions. In this sense it will indeed be significant to carry out fully-fledged theoretical exchanges between our two parties.”

Mr. Manh said in reply, “I welcome your proposal, for in-depth exchanges will not be possible in a short time frame.” It is very important that we agreed to put into practice theoretical exchanges as a long-term project.

‘We use the pole to cross the muddy river, so we can make steady progress.’

Q: How does the CPV explain the role of theory in aiming for socialism?

Shii: Throughout the talks with Mr. Manh, I strongly felt that Vietnam’s attitude was one of making much of theory on its way to advance *Doi Moi*. They implement policies, review the results, and refine theories. Then they put the theories into practice. They are always trying to combine practices and theory as an important element for developing their future course.

Mr. Manh also said as follows:

“Mr. Shii is right. *Doi Moi* is a quest for something that has never been done. We put policies into practice, review them, and explore new ways. In other words, we push ahead with *Doi Moi* just as we did during the national salvation struggle against the U.S. war of aggression. When you try to cross a river, you do not immediately know how to reach the other side, and it is important to set the pole against the river bottom to steadily and carefully advance.”

I think that by the “pole” he meant the use of theory to explain the role of theory. Using the “pole,” namely theory, they try to advance step by step to make sure that it is the right way to develop the path for the future. This word left a deep impression on me. We clearly understood their attitude of attaching importance to theory in day-to-day practice.

In Pleasant Discussion over Dinner, I Found Our Two Parties Share Common Approaches to Foreign Policy

JCP's opposition party diplomacy and Vietnam's 'omni-directional' diplomacy

Q: Was an hour of discussion followed by a dinner at the same place?

Shii: We were ushered into another room for dinner. It was very enjoyable, and we hit it off well. While enjoying dinner, we continued our discussion, in which we discovered a great deal of common ground between our two parties.

Speaking of diplomacy, for example, although our two parties are different, the CPV being a ruling party and the JCP an opposition party, both parties are developing an “omni-directional” diplomacy of having the widest possible contacts with foreign governments and political parties.

Mr. Manh said that the CPV is paying close attention to the changes taking place in Latin America. I said that the JCP Vice Chair OGATA Yasuo recently visited Venezuela and met with President Hugo Chavez. Mr. Manh then talked about the Venezuelan president's visit to Vietnam and the discussions he had with him.

Q: So, Venezuelan President Chavez is a friend of ours.

Shii: Right. Our two parties have points of common interest. I then talked about recent developments in India, in particular about three states, West Bengal, Kerala, and Tripura, where left coalitions led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) have been victorious. I also said that the JCP is very much interested in developing exchanges with them.

Mr. Manh said that the CPV's relations with India are important. He said his party has relations with India's ruling parties as well as the CPI (M) and other left parties. This is also the case with us. I told him that the JCP has contacts with the Indian National Congress as well as the CPI (M). In the effort to increase relations with foreign parties, the CPV is promoting broader exchanges.

I also explained that the JCP is developing exchanges with Islamic countries, including Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Mr. Manh said, “The CPV has relations with dozens of foreign political parties.”

I said, “In 1999, the JCP reviewed its policy on foreign relations and developed it into one of opening up to any parties, conservative as well as progressive, if they are willing to have exchanges with us. It might be ‘diversification’ in the Vietnamese way of expressing it.” We toasted the importance of diversity.

Vietnam and ROK are developing bilateral friendly relations

Q: I heard that you toasted many things. Does that mean that you hit it off with him on many issues?

Shii: I think you are right. We toasted every time we agreed on something. We had a toast more than 20 times.

One of the topics we discussed concerning diplomacy was my visit to the Republic of Korea. Last year (2006), I visited the Republic of Korea for the first time, and in what you may call “omni-directional” diplomacy, I met with leaders of all political parties that have seats in the National Assembly (South Korean parliament). I also said that in South Korea, a critical review was underway about the country’s dispatches of 50,000 troops to the Vietnam War.

General Secretary Manh explained to me how friendship between Vietnam and South Korea is increasing. He said that South Korea offered an apology for what it had done to Vietnam in the past on such occasions as his visit to South Korea as Vietnamese National Assembly president and the South Korean president’s visit to Vietnam. He explained that South Korea is involved in development and assistance projects, including construction of elementary schools in areas affected by South Korean forces during the Vietnam War.

In September last year we visited South Korea to see with our own eyes the dynamic process of developing democracy. It was good to hear that friendship is developing between Vietnam and South Korea with the latter facing up to its historical past in which it participated in the war of aggression against Vietnam. It was pleasant to find ourselves with a common friend.

More than 2 million people starved to death at the hands of Imperial Japanese Army

Q: A historical issue persists between Japan and Vietnam. I heard that you first visited a memorial dedicated to the 2,000,000 Vietnamese victims of the Japanese war of aggression.

Shii: We first visited the memorial soon after arriving in Hanoi. Between 1944 and 1945, two million Vietnamese people starved to death because the Japanese forces that invaded Vietnam took the food.

When Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung delivered a speech in the Diet (Japanese parliament) during his visit to Japan in October last year (2006), House of Representatives Speaker KONO Yohei responded to the speech by praising the “free and independent spirit of the Vietnamese people”. He said, “We must not forget the historical fact that Japan had caused enormous damage and suffering to Vietnam.” Mr. Kono was referring to the massive death by starvation during the Japanese aggression. Touching upon the House Speaker’s speech I said, “Mr. Kono made a good speech, adding that some Liberal Democratic Party politicians have good sense. I went on to say, “The JCP is a political party that firmly opposed the Japanese war of aggression although doing so meant risking our lives. I visited the war memorial (in Hanoi) and laid flowers for the victims of the aggression in the firm belief that the Japanese people must not forget the fact that the Japanese war of aggression caused extensive damage to the Vietnamese people.”

Mr. Manh said, “I’ve heard about your visit to the memorial. How heartwarming your act is!” Although the Vietnamese government does not take issue with the Japanese government over this question, the Japanese people must not forget this historical past.

Improving and increasing relations and friendship between Vietnam, China and the JCP

Q: Our Hanoi correspondent has said that the Vietnamese leaders were very impressed

by your visit to the war memorial. By the way, we heard that you discussed relations with China as well.

Shii: Although there was a period in the past when relations between Vietnam and China were bad, they seem to have greatly improved. In the 2006 APEC Summit in Hanoi, Chinese President Hu Jintao and CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh held talks and had dinner together. Mr. Manh told me that the seat I took at the dinner was the one taken by Mr. Hu Jintao at the time.

Although China and Vietnam have their own ways and styles of doing things, the common thread they share is the pursuit of socialism through a market economy. The two parties have theoretical exchanges.

The Communist Party of China explains that China is “in the primary stage of socialism,” and that “it will take 100 years to complete this stage.” The CPV says that Vietnam is in the transition period to socialism. It was interesting to hear Mr. Manh say that the Chinese side asked the Vietnamese: “How long will it take to complete the transition stage?”

Mr. Manh said, “It is an important matter that requires cautiousness. We are in the early part of the transitional period. But we have no scientific basis for stating exactly how many years it would take to complete it. It may take a long time but we will hold fast to the socialist-oriented effort.” He said that China’s reaction was, “You’re clever to make that judgment.” I also thought that Vietnam is steadfast in maintaining realism. Holding fast to the goal of achieving socialism, Vietnam is trying to advance step by step using a long-term vision. They say it’s impossible to give a timeline for accomplishing the task. That explains it all.

In its relations with the Communist Party of China, the JCP in the past faced the Mao Zedong group’s interference. We found a reasonable settlement to the dispute and normalized JCP-CPC relations in 1998. Relations between our two parties have since increased a great deal. Vietnam has improved and greatly increased its relations with China after overcoming an unfortunate history of interference.

Mr. Manh told me, “Neighboring countries are neighbors forever; no new neighbors will emerge. This is why Vietnam and China stand for the principles as expressed in the slogan: Long term stability, future orientation, good-neighborly friendship and all-round cooperation.

Both Vietnam and China are in favor of a peaceful international environment more than anything else because it’s essential for their advances to socialism. I thought it natural that their bilateral relationship will increase in peace. This is a good thing for the JCP since we maintain friendly relations with both countries.

Vietnam-U.S. relationship

Q: Let’s talk about Vietnam’s relations with the United States. U.S. President George W. Bush made a trip to Hanoi to attend the APEC Summit. Did it come up in your discussion with Vietnamese leaders?

Shii: Yes, it did. Vietnam and the United States normalized diplomatic relations in 1995. U.S. President Bush was in Vietnam to attend the APEC meeting at a time when U.S.-Vietnam economic relations were growing. I was

curious to know how the Vietnamese felt about the leader of the country that once invaded Vietnam. I asked Mr. Manh, “What did you think of President Bush’s trip to your country?” Mr. Manh said:

“We received him as a state guest. The United States in the past caused enormous damage to us. But Vietnamese people are generous enough to forgive them although we are physically small. We believe that this approach will provide new possibilities. I think that this way earns respect from many other countries. Economically, Vietnam is still a developing country, but we are warm-hearted.”

Deeply impressed by these generous words, I said to Mr. Manh, “The Vietnamese people emerged victorious over the United States twice, first in the war, and then in terms of morals. I said to Mr. Manh, “Vietnamese people prevailed twice.” We toasted again.

Discussing the ideals of socialism, we toasted ‘people as protagonists’

Q: You also discussed various issues concerning socialism, didn’t you?

Shii: Mr. Manh talked about the ideals of a socialism that the Vietnamese people are aiming for. Quoting President Ho Chi Minh’s words, he said, “The most important thing is that national independence is closely linked to socialist ideal, then to socialism itself, and that the people are the real masters of society. We take it as our ideal.” I was also impressed by his remark that “exploitation exists while the country is on the road to socialism, but that regardless of difficulties, the national budget priority must be given to the effort to reduce poverty.”

These remarks about the spirit of socialism impressed me deeply. In response, I talked about the socialism that the JCP is aiming for. I explained that the JCP Program envisages the “socialization of the means of production” as the heart of socialist transformation, stating the principle that “immediate producers are the key players” in a socialist society. In the stages of social development that precedes socialism, the JCP aims for democratic transformation of society within the framework of capitalism. I also said that in all stages of social development, it is important to make efforts to improve living standards qualitatively and quantitatively. I tried not to be very argumentative, but I felt something that the JCP Program shares much with the Vietnamese position on this issue.

Q: So, you toasted the principle that “producers are the protagonists”?

Shii: We did.

Throughout these talks I felt that Vietnam is full of confidence in its *Doi Moi* policy and is beginning to take steps steadfastly. At the same time, I felt modesty in their attitudes.

Documents of last year’s CPV 10th Congress pointed out various weaknesses and other problems, including those that need further theoretical studies.

At the end of the talks, we confirmed that the JCP and the CPV share views on many issues. We are glad that our two parties agreed to raise the level of our bilateral relationship. After the dinner, Mr. Manh accompanied us to the main entrance of the building to see us off. We were grateful for the warm hospitality

extended to the JCP delegation.

Ties between JCP and Vietnamese Government Confirmed as Official in Talks with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung

To make Japan-Vietnam friendly relations more fruitful

Q: I know how significant it is for leaders of our two parties to discuss such a wide range of issues and reach agreement on so many issues. You met with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung on the following day. This was also significant, wasn't it?

Shii: I think my meeting with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung was particularly significant in that it made relations between the JCP and the Vietnamese government official. The introductory remarks by Prime Minister Dung left deep impressions on me. He said as follows:

“In the name of the Vietnamese government, and also on my own behalf as the Vietnamese Prime Minister, I welcome the JCP delegation led by Chair Shii. I appreciate your visit to Vietnam and the results of our talks with CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh during your stay in Vietnam. Relations between Vietnam and Japan are increasing very smoothly. I am sure that JCP Chair Shii's visit to Vietnam at this time will greatly contribute to further increasing relations between our two parties, our two countries, and our two governments.”

Prime Minister Dung thus began with the words “in the name of the Vietnamese government and on my own behalf as the Prime Minister, I welcome you.” I vividly remember him articulating the Vietnamese view that the JCP delegation was visiting Vietnam at a time when relations between Japan and Vietnam are developing well.

I responded to his words of welcome by explaining our interest in the advancing *Doi Moi* process and wishing him success in it and said, “The Japanese and Vietnamese governments now maintain good relations. I hope that our two parties will explore ways to further enhance the good government-to-government relations.” Prime Minister Dung responded to me by stating, “I appreciate and welcome Chair Shii's very warm words.”

At a time when the Japanese and Vietnamese governments have good bilateral relations, the JCP is facing an important task in playing its role as an opposition party.

Q: It seems to be fashionable to think that if government-to-government relations become better, relations between the JCP as an opposition party and the governing party of the other country are likely to sour, but that is not true. We tend to imagine that if a certain government has a good relation with another country's government, the relation with opposition parties will deteriorate. That is not true, is it?

Shii: You are right. I said to Mr. Manh, “We welcome the good relationship established between Japan and Vietnam. We will do all we can as an opposition party to contribute to making the bilateral relationship more fruitful.”

At the same time, I think that the communist parties have their peculiar way of contributing to that effort. It has to do with the fact that Vietnam is socialist-oriented. That is why, I think, you are experiencing difficulty. If you intended to make your country capitalist like Japan, you would not have hard times in this

sense.”

The CPV is aiming for socialism through exploration and trial and error. Socialism is a product of a critique of capitalism, and the JCP is exploring and developing the theory and practice in a highly developed capitalist country for socialism/communism. General Secretary Manh and I agreed to promote theoretical exchanges of this kind between our two parties.

Prime Minister Dung said, “I wholeheartedly support the agreement reached in the talks between the JCP chair and the CPV general secretary to promote cooperation on theoretical aspects.”

Vietnamese media on JCP delegation to Vietnam

Q: I read some media reports that claimed that the JCP will have a more limited role to play since the Japanese and Vietnamese governments are developing good relations.

Shii: That is not true. How superficial that view is! We should welcome improving relations between our two governments. The JCP is not as narrow-minded as to throw cold water on good government-to-government relations. Stronger ties between our two parties will contribute to enriching relations between the two countries. I said that cooperation for world peace and theoretical exchanges between our two parties will be precisely what we should do to develop our party-to-party relations.

Here is a copy of *Viet Nam News* (the national English language daily) that reported my meeting with Prime Minister Dung on top of the front page with the headline: “Japanese Communist Party Leader Meets Prime Minister.” It quoted Prime Minister Dung as stating that Shii’s visit made an important contribution to further developing relations between the two parties, governments, and peoples. This report shows that the Vietnamese government regarded our visit as one that will make Japan-Vietnam relations more fruitful.

Q: In the Akahata editorial office, we were reading news from Vietnam on the Internet every day. We know that Vietnamese media covered your activities in Vietnam every day.

Shii: They extensively covered our activities in Vietnam. The January 11 issue of *Viet Nam News* gave its top news on the Shii concerning my talks with General Secretary Manh with a color photo. On the following day the same newspaper reported my meeting with Prime Minister Dung on top of the front page. *Nhan Dan* also reported these talks on the front page regarding my talks with Prime Minister Dung, also with a color photo. Television also reported the details of our activities on its seven o’clock news. *Tuoi Tre*, a daily widely read by young Vietnamese people, carried an interview with me.

Thanks to these media reports, our visit to Vietnam seemed to be widely known by the Vietnamese people. At the Army Museum in Hanoi, visiting women students who noticed the JCP delegation approached us. Hearing the Vietnamese staff explaining, “This is the Japanese Communist Party chair,” they came to me, saying, “So you are the chair of the Japanese Communist Party.” They said they knew about the JCP delegation’s visit on TV news. We ended up having a photo session with them.

Five Questions and Answers about Practice and Theory of *Doi Moi*

CPV's definition of Doi-Moi policy

Q: You used the series of talks and visits to discuss the theory and actual state of the Doi Moi (renovation) policy.

Shii: Although it was a brief visit, one of its main purposes was to obtain first-hand information about the theory and practices of the *Doi Moi* process. *Doi Moi* was a main subject of the series of our talks with CPV General Secretary Manh, Prime Minister Dung, the CPV Hanoi City Committee secretary, the CPV Ho Chi Minh Committee secretary, and the president of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

In Hanoi, we visited Song Long Plastic Cooperative (collective sector) and FPT Corporation, an IT firm (state sector). In Ho Chi Minh City, we visited Saigon Hi-tech Park Board of Management, and Quang Trung Software City (state sector). We heard from them how they are carrying out *Doi Moi*.

What we wanted to know most about *Doi Moi* is how they are trying to ensure that Vietnam's market economy is socialist-oriented.

Their explanation of the *Doi Moi* policy can be summarized as follows:

- In Vietnam, there exist 6 economic sectors: the state sector; the collectives sector; the individually-run small-sized sector, the private-invested sector; the state-invested sector; and the foreign-invested sector. These economic sectors are "important components of the socialist-oriented market economy"; they are "equal under the Constitution and other laws"; they take part in competition over a long time frame in a wholesome way to develop together.

- The state sector and the collectives sector should be "foundations of the national economy." The state sector in particular is "an important material force that orients and coordinates the state economy, and creates an environment and conditions for these economic sectors to grow together". It should discharge the leading role in the economy.

- The leading role of the state sector will be realized through market competition instead of through state monopoly. At the same time, it is emphasized that the state sector will take control of several key economic fields, or "the commanding heights of the economy," according to the president of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, in order to display its leadership role.

Q: The term "commanding heights" reminds me of Lenin's New Economic Policy, or NEP.

Shii: Right. I asked them if the term had anything to do with Lenin and they said that the CPV had conducted an intensive study of Lenin's NEP in preparation for the start of *Doi Moi*. They also said the CPV leadership studied the Vietnamese translation of "Lenin and the Market Economy (*)," a lecture given at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2002 by Tetsuzo FUWA, JCP Central Committee chair at the time.

(*) The English translation is available in *On Marx's Scientific View – A discussion of capitalism and socialism in the 21st century* (Japan Press Service in 2003)

The concept of “advancing toward socialism through a market economy” was the basis for the economic policy initiated by Lenin in 1921 after a difficult trial and error period in the aftermath of the victorious October Revolution. Fuwa talked about the following three lessons from Lenin’s experience as to what should be done to make a success of the road toward socialism through a market economy.

First, it is necessary for the socialist sector to become strong enough to not be beaten down by capitalism in market competition and to learn as much as possible from capitalist experiences, both domestic and international.

Second, it is necessary to take hold of the socialist sector, often referred to as “commanding heights” for the entire economy, so that it can exert power to direct economic development. “Commanding heights” was a military term used to describe the higher position for commanding the entire situation to use the military position to their advantage. It was very interesting to hear the Vietnamese speak using Lenin’s term.

Third, it is necessary to defend society against negative phenomena that will arise from the market economy, viz., anarchical tendencies, the law of the jungle, economic disparities, money worship, and corruption.

Although you cannot find the term “socialist sector” in Vietnamese documents, they say that the state sector should occupy the superior position in market competition, take the initiative by taking control of the nation’s key sector, namely the “commanding heights,” with the state sector and the collectives sector as the foundation of the national economy. I felt that this represents the Vietnamese practical and theoretical quest that takes into account Lenin’s NEP.

Five questions that we asked after Vietnamese explanation

Q: *What questions did you ask the Vietnamese regarding the theory and practice of Doi Moi?*

Shii: In its diplomacy, the JCP maintains the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Yet, in most of the talks we had in Vietnam, we focused on “*Doi Moi*”. They earnestly explained to us how they are implementing the *Doi Moi* policy and invited us to ask questions, and we raised several questions in our talks.

Our three hours of discussions with Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences President Do Hoai Nam were devoted to theoretical exchanges on the issue of *Doi Moi*. Following his explanation, I asked five questions. In asking these questions of him, I took into account the issues raised by JCP CC Chair Tetsuzo FUWA at the theoretical exchanges held in late 2005 with a Communist Party of China delegation(*) along with the issues peculiar to Vietnam.

(*) See *The 21st Century World and Socialism - Theoretical discussion with CPC delegation* by Tetsuzo FUWA (Japan Press Service, 2006).

My first question was about the competitiveness of the state sector and the collectives sector. If these sectors are to display their leading role to become the foundations of the national economy, I think they need to have a competitive edge in the market. The question was: "Are there enterprises capable of surviving international competition?"

In the state sector and the collectives sector, what is the status of workers in enterprises or production units? The JCP Program states that socialism/communism is characterized by "socialization of the means of production." To put it more plainly, "means, ownership and management of the means of production would be transferred to society." The principle here is that the "immediate producers are the key players." We defined this in the JCP Program as follows:

"Socialization of the means of production can take on a variety of forms of ownership, control, and management according to the situation and conditions. Although it is important to explore forms that fit in with Japanese society, we must not depart from the socialist principle that producers are the key players."

This definition is based on our far-reaching critique of former Soviet society. Although the Soviet Union had state ownership and collective ownership, the immediate individual producers were excluded from the role of controlling and managing the economy and were not treated as the key players. They were even oppressed. In the industry, they were simply employed by enterprises of state ownership. In agriculture, individual producers were organized in a system of state or collective farms known as *sovkhoses* and *kolkhozes*. We said that this is no different from the capitalist system and is far from what socialism is about. Based on this critique of Soviet society, we included in the JCP Program the principle that "producers are the key players." In this respect, I wanted to know how they are trying to achieve in practical terms the principle that "producers are the key players" in Vietnam. This was the main point of my second question.

My third question was about the effort to bring the negative effects of capitalism home to the public. Socialism is a product of a critique of capitalism. I thought that in Vietnam, it would be difficult to experience this. For example, in Vietnam, foreign investment and private sector investment are being encouraged or made under state policy. This being the fact, how can the people understand the harmful effects of capitalism? I said studying situations of capitalism around the world might help.

My fourth question was about macroeconomics. It is said that Vietnam has been successful in solving the problem of poverty. I wanted to know what macroeconomic policy they were applying to the nation's economy, and whether it has something to do with what they describe as "socialist-oriented". Our Vietnamese friends said that they pursue economic growth in conjunction with the effort to reduce poverty. I asked in what system they are doing it. The market economy is driven either by market forces as panacea and the law of the jungle under neo-liberalism, or under democratic regulations.

Vietnam's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) has given impetus to increasing connections with the global capitalist economy. This can be a hindrance as well as an opportunity for Vietnam. I wanted to know what the Vietnamese are thinking concerning this move. Lenin introduced the NEP and tried to invite foreign investment. But today, the multinational corporations have colossal power that is incomparable with large enterprises in the NEP era. I

asked them how Vietnam is trying to utilize internationalization to their advantage without being swallowed by huge international capital.

What is the Vietnamese way of increasing competitiveness?

Q: You raised very interesting questions. What were the Vietnamese responses to them?

Shii: They answered each of these questions in earnest, including some on which I felt that they were apparently making tentative theoretical exploration. They were frank in saying that there are questions that need further study and exploration.

Regarding their view that the state sector can have a competitive edge in the market, they said that they are carrying out reforms in state enterprises to make sure that they become competitive. They also said that the state sector enterprises as the commanding heights for the nation's economy will put emphasis on controlling the key industries, energy, finance, transportation, and hi-techs.

They stressed that the key element of reform in state-owned enterprises is the introduction of a joint stock system. This means that the state will take a stake in state-owned enterprises. Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences President Do Hoai Nam said, "Mr. Shii spoke about socialization of the means of production. We are trying to do this through introducing a joint stock system."

He said that under a joint stock system, part of the stake in the enterprise is held by the state while the rest of the stake is held by the employees. In this way, they are reforming enterprises in the state sector. As a result, telecom and IT software development businesses in the state sector are gaining a degree of international competitiveness.

Q: You visited FPT Corporation, which is referred to as Vietnam's brand name IT firm.

Shii: FPT Corporation in Hanoi is a hi-tech company that has achieved a rapid growth. The number of its employees has increased to 6,000 from 13 at the time of its start. They said the number will reach 15,000 in the next several years. It is indeed a fast growing company.

This firm is in the state sector. In 2002, it became a joint stock company. The state and employees are its shareholders. The state is the largest shareholder with an 8% or 9% stake. About 90% of shares are held by individual employees.

Serious quest for the implementation of the principle that 'producers are the key players'

Q: What was their response to your question regarding workers' status in business units or production units in the state sector and the collectives sector, namely the question that "individual producers are the key players"?

Shii: The two propositions, "socialization of the means of production" and immediate individual "producers as the key players," constitute the heart of the JCP Program's definition of a future society. This is why I attentively listened to Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences President Do Hoai Nam, PCV Hanoi Committee Secretary Pham Quang Nghi, and CPV Ho Chi Minh City Committee Secretary Le Thanh Hai on this issue. Their explanations can be summarized as follows:

In the state sector, the state appoints the managing director of a firm. Workers participate in its management in two ways: by sending workers' representatives to the board of management and by putting forward workers' proposals at the workplace general assembly. Workers have the right to speak about the proposed plans, and if the opinion is supported by the majority of the workers there, it will be adopted by the management.

In Ho Chi Minh City, we visited a firm called Quang Trung Software City, which is in the state sector. Answering my questions regarding workers' participation in management, an official said the company holds quarterly meetings attended by board members and workers to examine the company's financial position and adopt policies for the next quarter.

Q: What about the collectives sector?

Shii: In most cases in the collectives sector, cooperatives are running the business. The board of management of a cooperative consists of people elected from among its members. In participating in management, cooperative members have equal rights regardless of the amount of contributions they have made. They stressed that everyone involved in cooperative affairs are on an equal footing.

We visited Song Long Plastic Cooperative's factory in Hung Yen Province. It has grown into a large plastic maker. It exports its products to China and Finland. It has about 1,000 employees, and a third of them are members of the cooperative. Board members are elected from among the cooperative members. The management policy is approved at the assembly of the cooperative members.

At the assembly of cooperative members in this factory, I was invited to ask them questions. I asked, "Do you really feel that 'workers are the key players'?" One participant raised his hand and rose to state, "I am aware that I am a master because I contribute funds to the cooperative and approve the annual management plan at the assembly of the members of the cooperative."

The head of the board of management said, "If my plan to be proposed at the assembly in March is rejected, I will step down and become an ordinary member of the cooperative."

Q: You mean that members of the cooperative have the right to elect and dismiss board members?

Shii: Exactly. This clearly shows that members of the cooperative have equal rights in elections and dismissals, regardless of whether they are employees or employers.

Of course, the concept that "producers are the key players" is not easy to put into practice. Although we heard Vietnamese friends explain the concept and visited some business establishments during our short stay in Vietnam, it was clear that the CPV local committees in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City attach great importance to this question.

Q: I hear that 40% of the Vietnamese economy is concentrated in Ho Chi Minh City. Hanoi is Vietnam's capital with the country's second largest productive power after Ho Chi Minh City. I gather that what you heard in these two cities was very important.

Shii: CPV Hanoi Committee Secretary Pham Quang Nghi said that the point I made to the effect that “producers are the key players” is a very important point and explained to us in detail about workers’ status in the state sector and the collectives sector.

I said, “We believe that ‘socialization of the means of production’ is what socialism is all about. That means transferring the ownership, control, and management of the means of productions to society. State ownership or collectivization per se does not ensure the socialization of the means of production.”

Mr. Nghi immediately said, “Before we embarked on the *Doi Moi* process, we had been thinking that state ownership and collectivization mean socialism. That was what we firmly believed in, but we now know that it is only one element.” He also stressed the importance of the principle that “people are the masters.” That was a very interesting and frank exchange.

In Ho Chi Minh City, we held talks with the CPV Ho Chi Minh City Committee Secretary, Le Thanh Hai. After listening to me talk about this issue, he said, “Mr. Shii is right. It’s an important and difficult question to deal with. In fact, the collectives sector is weak. We are trying to strengthen it. I think we need a long time for further study.” I felt a candid realism in his remarks.

This issue is not very easy to carry out. However, as the JCP Program points out, human relations in which immediate individual producers are the key players will be established at business units or production units. I think it will serve as the foundation for advancing toward socialism. Throughout the discussions I had with Vietnamese friends, I realized that they are seriously probing various alternatives concerning this issue.

How can the public understand the evils of capitalism?

Q: *Let us move on to the third question. What has Vietnam been doing to help the public understand the evils of capitalism?*

Shii: They explained that in Vietnam labor disputes are taking place at foreign invested business establishments.

They said that causes of the labor disputes range from excessively long working hours to employers’ failure to carry out the terms of contracts regarding working conditions, including delays in receiving paychecks, exploitation through failure to pay insurance premiums for workers, and violence against workers. Some workers have gone on strikes in protest against workplace violence.

I asked, “How do workers respond to them?” CPV Ho Chi Minh City Committee Secretary Le Thanh Hai said, “Administrative authorities carry out the policies for guaranteeing workers’ legitimate rights.” This means that the authorities intervene in disputes to defend workers’ rights. He also said that they also take into account the employer’s interests. Thus, the administrative authorities as arbitrators propose terms of settlement to the employer, hold talks and reach agreement with them. They make efforts to understand both the labor side and the employer side. .

Mr. Hai was very frank in saying, “While we are sure that we are right, it is

very hard to put it into practice.”

On the question of the evils of capitalism, our Vietnamese friends in talks told us that it is necessary to take a hard look at the various contradictions in Vietnam and that if they are to know the essence of those contradictions, it is necessary to study the global aspects of capitalism.

I said, “In that sense, Japan is the worst example and our theoretical exchanges should be beneficial.” Our Vietnamese friends said, “We would like to study more about Japanese capitalism.”

National programs for poverty reduction

Q: That was how the importance of theoretical exchanges was confirmed in the discussions, right? Concerning the fourth question, can you tell us about the effort they are making to reduce the poverty rate?

Shii: The president of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences explained about three national programs for poverty reduction.

The first program involves budgetary allocation that gives priority to helping poverty-stricken areas.

The second program is for encouraging private sector companies to take part in poverty reduction efforts. The local government’s poverty reduction committee will request the region’s companies to come up with a plan to contribute to the effort. They also explained that local governments are making use of funds provided by profitable companies and individual high-income earners.

The third program is for launching a national movement to overcome poverty.

Thus, Mr. Nam provided us with information about how Vietnam is trying to reduce poverty through national programs.

I was in quite agreement with CPV General Secretary Manh when he said, “No matter what difficulty we face, we need to put poverty reduction measures first in the budget allocation.” This is a key element of the internationally acclaimed Vietnamese poverty reduction. I thought that this is a manifestation of the spirit of socialism.

Increasing poverty in Japan is a serious problem today, and this is in stark contrast with the serious efforts to reduce poverty being made in Vietnam whose gross domestic product is much smaller than Japan’s.

‘Integrated, but not dissolved, into the world economy’

Q: Did you discuss Vietnam’s links with the capitalist global market? On January 11, Vietnam’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) became official.

Shii: In the series of discussions I said, “I think Vietnam’s participation in the WTO will be both a chance and an ordeal.” All Vietnamese representatives I talked with agreed with me on this point.

I remember Mr. Nam (president of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences) commenting as follows:

“Vietnam’s economy will go global. But that does not mean that Vietnam is being dissolved in the world economy. It is true both in theory and in principle. Vietnam will use its integration into the world economy to adopt foreign capital, technology, and business experiences, and compete in the global market. Our guiding principle is to develop Vietnam’s socialist economy by absorbing external resources.”

So the Vietnamese are emphasizing that although Vietnam will be integrated into the global economy, it will never be dissolved into the world economy. If Vietnam gets dissolved into the world economy, it will be just another capitalist country. If Vietnam makes use of a Vietnamese integration into the global economy, it will be able to develop its socialist-oriented policy. This will be a major challenge for Vietnam. They will face difficulties and ordeals, but I found the Vietnamese position very encouraging.

I saw the Vietnamese making serious and straightforward efforts on its road to socialism

Q: Overall, what is your general comment on Doi Moi?

Shii: I would like to comment on three points.

One is that in Vietnam they are trying to develop practice and theory at the same time. I also saw them trying to study various things to theorize their practices. Last year (2006), the CPV made a full review of the 20 years of the *Doi Moi* policy in preparation for its 10th Congress. In that process, they studied the new JCP Program. I was glad to hear that the JCP Program helped deepen the understanding of the *Doi Moi* process.

Second, in carrying out the *Doi Moi* policy, Vietnam has been careful in repeating tests. The leadership attaches importance to applying policies to regions by respecting the diversity and taking into account each region’s peculiarities.

Thirdly, I saw a Vietnamese style of efforts to develop democracy. Our Vietnamese friends explained that in Vietnam’s National Assembly, members have become very invigorated and that cabinet members often face tough questions all day long. In Ho Chi Minh City as well as in Hanoi, PCV local committee officials appear on TV and directly respond to opinions and complaints raised by hundreds of callers. It is a two-hour TV program aired live once a week.

Q: Recently, Akahata reported that Prime Minister Dung would directly respond to the public through an Internet broadcast.

Shii: It was a session without rehearsal, unlike a dialogue in which questions were pre-arranged, as was the case with a county. I thought that this is the Vietnamese process of developing democracy.

Doi Moi may involve difficulties and trials but I thought that the “socialist-oriented” process in Vietnam is more than a slogan. They are making serious and straightforward efforts on the road to socialism.

I sincerely hope that Vietnam will be the first nation to complete this process. I want to hope that the Vietnamese people who defeated two imperialist powers, France and the United States, can make a success of this historic exploration.

Lecture at Hanoi University and Students' Reactions

Structural changes in the world and historical significance of the Vietnamese people's victories

Q: I heard that you had a pleasant time lecturing and discussing with Hanoi University students.

Shii: Women students dressed in *ao dai* of various colors welcomed the JCP delegation, and more than 300 students came to listen to my lecture. I introduced myself in Vietnamese that I had just learnt, saying, "*Xin chao cac ban! Toi la Shii Kazuo cua Dang Cong san Nhat Ban* (Hello everyone, I am Shii Kazuo of the Japanese Communist Party)." The audience gave me a resounding round of applause.

I said, "I remember singing the Vietnamese song 'Dedicating Our Lives to the People's Interests' when I was young. I still remember the words." The audience then asked me to sing it right then and there. I sang the opening part of the song and the students they clapped to the beat and gave me another round of applause.

Q: What was the topic of your lecture?

Shii: Considering that I had had no chance to discuss the world outlook set out in the JCP Program on my visit, I opted to talk about how we view the 21st century, focusing on the world's structural changes that took place in the 20th century, the four regional groups of the 21st century world, the evolution of the theory of imperialism in the JCP Program, and the issue of the world order of peace in the 21st century. These are themes we have set out in the JCP Program and the JCP Congress decisions. I dealt with these issues by taking into account Vietnam's involvement in the structural changes taking place in the world in the 20th century and in world affairs in the 21st century.

The Vietnamese people's victories have made a great contribution to social progress in the world. In particular, defeating colonialism and neo-colonialism was a great historic victory. Vietnam defeated French colonialism and U.S. imperialism that imposed neo-colonialism using a puppet South Vietnamese regime and invaded the North. It is undeniable that the Vietnamese people's victory was historic in that it put an end to colonialism on a global scale.

At the same time, Vietnam, a country aiming for socialism, is involved in both of the world's structural changes. So, I said that the Japanese peace and democratic forces have great admiration for the Vietnamese people's struggles and victories that contributed to influencing world history.

Being proud of history and having hope for the future

Q: What were the students' reactions?

Shii: They were very attentive and serious, applauding me from time to time.

In a comment on my lecture one student said, “I feel proud of the struggle waged by my parents’ generation.” Another student said, “I have a better understanding of what socialism is.”

I am glad to hear young Vietnamese say they are proud of the history of the Vietnamese people who have defeated two imperialist aggressors. They said that the Vietnamese song “Dedicating Ourselves to the People’s Interests” continues to be popular today among the youth. They are proud of the Vietnamese people’s victory in the national salvation war against U.S. aggression. They also wish to achieve a bright future. The students all knew about the Gallup poll that I mentioned earlier. When I asked them, “Do you know which country marked the highest percentage of respondents who answered “yes” to the question if they expected that 2007 would be a better year than 2006”, they shouted “Vietnam!” This shows how strong popular support for *Doi Moi* is. Throughout the discussion with the students, I strongly felt that Vietnam has a bright future.

The first JCP-CPV meeting and exchange students studying each other’s language

Q: I heard that most of the students in the audience were students of foreign studies

Shii: Many were students studying Japanese. Women accounted for about 70% of the audience. I spoke about the first talks held between the Japanese Communist Party and the Vietnam Workers’ Party in 1966. At the time there was no Japanese-Vietnamese interpreter. The discussions were held via Chinese, so they needed more time than usual. At President Ho Chi Minh’s proposal at that time, our two parties agreed to exchange students studying each other’s language. I said to the audience, “Many of you are now studying Japanese. I want you to remember that the starting point of studying each other’s language was the JCP-WPV talks. Those who studied at that time are now doing a good job in Japan and Vietnam.” The students showed great admiration for the effort and gave a warm round of applause.

Reminiscent of Vietnamese People’s War against US War of Aggression

Visiting site of bombing of the North and Tu Du Obstetric Hospital

Q: The Vietnamese people who defeated the U.S. aggressors are now in the Doi Moi process. How did you feel about this?

Shii: In Vietnam, I saw the scars of the U.S. war of aggression. There were some unforgettable experiences in this regard.

Arriving in Hanoi, we first visited the Kham Thien Street Memorial to lay flowers and offer incense for the victims of the U.S. bombing of the North. On the evening of December 26, 1972, 577 residents of this district were killed or injured in U.S. carpet-bombings using B-52 strategic bombers. A statue of mother carrying her baby killed in the bombing stood there, surrounded by the remaining destroyed brick walls. Parts of these walls are burnt black. This shows how heavy the bombings were. Nearby residents warmly welcomed us there. We understood how deep the scars left by the war are.

The heartbreaking experience I had at Tu Du Obstetric Hospital in Ho Chi

Minh City is unforgettable. At the hospital I met Nguyen Duc (*) and congratulated him on his recent marriage. He greeted us at the entrance of the hospital and offered us flowers. In return, we gave him a small present.

(*) When Nguyen Duc was born in 1981 he was attached to his twin brother, Nguyen Viet, as a complication of the U.S. use of chemical defoliant during the Vietnam War.

The Tu Du Obstetric Hospital has a facility called the “Peace Village” in its compound to provide treatment and rehabilitation for children affected by defoliant chemicals. As we entered the village, children energetically ran up to us, though they were born handicapped due to the effects of chemical defoliants. A child asked me to hold her in my arms. As I lifted her in my arms, she gave me a cute little kiss on my cheek.

We visited Nguyen Duc’s twin brother, Nguyen Viet, at the hospital but he was bed-ridden and unconscious. It was really heartbreaking. I hear that one in every 100 mothers gives an abnormal birth each year in this hospital.

I was really shocked when I visited a room that stores real unborn babies preserved in jar with formalin. Many unborn babies there were affected by chemical defoliants. There I saw conjoined babies, babies without eyes, and staphylococcus-poisoned babies. They were there as if quietly condemning weapons of mass destruction like chemical defoliants and dioxin. It was so heart-breaking a scene that I felt angry at the U.S. forces’ atrocities.

Cu Chi Tunnel - ‘You would fight in the same way as we did’

Q: You visited Cu Chi Tunnel, didn’t you?

Shii: Right. The huge tunnel network of Cu Chi was constructed by the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War. It is located about 75 km to the northwest of Saigon (present Ho Chi Minh City). The guide said that the tunnel network was the liberation front’s stronghold for making guerrilla attacks on U.S. forces. The site is now covered with greenery. It used to be covered with greenery until U.S. forces heavily sprayed chemical defoliants there. The guide said, “Cu Chi didn’t die. It stayed alive.”

The chemical defoliants destroyed the greenery there but Cu Chi residents hid underground. Using little shovels just 10 cm long, residents dug the 250-km tunnel by hand. They had great mobility in the guerrilla campaign there and inflicted considerable damage on the U.S. forces.

Huynh Van Chia, who participated in combat and now is an advisor to the administration of historic sites, was our guide. In the tunnel there are commanding posts, meeting rooms, sleeping chambers, rest places, kitchens, dining rooms, and first aid posts.

I asked, “How did you obtain supplies?” Mr. Chia said that they took water from the dug wells in the tunnel for themselves with support from nearby residents. I was surprised to hear that guerrillas used weapons they took from U.S. forces, remaking duds into active bombs because Cu Chi was far from the “Ho Chi Minh trail” which the guerrillas used to transport supplies. Mr. Chia also said, “The more U.S. soldiers came, the stronger we became. It was boring if they didn’t show up.”

The most dangerous thing at the time was when the U.S. forces would discover the entrances to the tunnel system. Guerrillas planted landmines to defend the rest of tunnel entrances against U.S. forces. If U.S. soldiers opened an entrance, the mines would explode and part of the tunnel caved in, preventing them from entering the tunnel. There were various pitfalls around the tunnel. If a U.S. soldier fell into a hole, an iron stick would stab him from beneath to bring death or heavy injuries. That was how guerrillas tried to block the U.S. forces. Liberation front fighters tenaciously fought against U.S. soldiers by using every possible means at their disposal. The guide said that Cu Chi came to be called “the steel-like land and the copper-like wall.” At the tunnel, I understood why even the great U.S. military power could not conquer Cu Chi.

It is said that 12,000 out of the 18,000 liberation soldiers died in Cu Chi. Half of the 6,000 survivors had injuries, Mr. Chia said. He himself lost his right hand. Despite the enormous suffering caused to them, the Vietnamese people prevailed. I listened to this story with emotion.

I said to Mr. Chia, “I am so moved at the courage and wisdom displayed by the Vietnamese people during the war. I respect your perseverance, precision, and resilience. I think that this history of your struggle is helping you deepen the *Doi Moi* process.” Mr. Chia said, “Thank you for your kind words. But if you had been in the same situation, you would have fought as we did.” Touched by this comment, I said, “I would like to accept your comment as the best tribute to us. Thank you.”

I found that the present *Doi Moi* process represents the perseverance, precision, and resilience that were displayed by the struggle in Cu Chi. It reminds me that CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh said to me at the meeting, “While summing up our practice, we also explore new ways. We are promoting the *Doi Moi* reform in the same way as we did in the national salvation war against U.S. aggression. Although there were many problems that we had to overcome to defeat the U.S. aggression, we eventually won the war. If we carefully study about the *Doi Moi* reform, we will definitely achieve the goal. This is the lesson we learned from the war.” Vietnam’s great history that defeated two major imperialist powers is inherited in the present course in its nation-building efforts.

Vibrant Vietnam and JCP’s Valuable Role

Q: How would you sum up your visit to Vietnam?

Shii: As I said, Vietnam is now experiencing a leap in its development. I’d like to stress that this trip provided us with moving encounters and helped us rediscover the valuable role the JCP is playing.

I now realize the great importance of the 41-years of solidarity between the JCP and the CPV. In every meeting we had with the CPV, our Vietnamese friends began by expressing appreciation to the JCP for our support for and solidarity with the Vietnamese people during the Vietnamese war of national salvation against U.S. aggression. In the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, there is a corner that displays photos and documents about foreign support for the Vietnamese people. There we found many *Akahata* photo news stories and posters by Japanese democratic organizations. Our delegation was so excited about this corner. A woman who guided us during our tour of the museum explained, “This is the exhibition that tells the breath of the Japanese people’s

activities in support of the Vietnamese people.” The posters vividly reminded us of our struggle against the Vietnam War, moving some of the delegation members to tears.

In 1999, when the JCP delegation led by then JCP Chair FUWA Tetsuzo visited this museum, there were few items related to Japan displayed and the museum staff asked the JCP delegation to provide materials. Later, the JCP contributed exhibition items. We were delighted to see the renovated-section on the Japanese people’s struggle.

When we visited South Korea last year (2006), I felt proud of the JCP’s struggles before and during World War II. In our recent trip to Vietnam, I felt proud of our struggles which I myself participated in to oppose the U.S. war of aggression. In Vietnam, too, I rediscovered the great history of the JCP.

On a future society, the JCP Program defines the “socialization of means of production” as the key to socialist transformation and, in particular, clarifies the principle in which “producers are protagonists.” I think the JCP’s programmatic definition of a future society has something in common with the Vietnamese way of thinking regarding the *Doi Moi* process. The JCP Program’s analysis of the world situation was useful when discussing present global issues with young Vietnamese people when I spoke at Hanoi University.

The JCP’s opposition party diplomacy is developing in harmony with the Vietnamese government’s diplomacy. The task now is for the JCP to find a way to play a role in its opposition party diplomacy at a time when government-to-government relations are good. I told Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung that the opposition party diplomacy “will further enhance our bilateral relations.” Actually, when I said this, I remembered that Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz told me at the meeting held during my visit to Pakistan last September that “the JCP’s visit to Pakistan will enrich the relationship between our two countries.” After my trip to South Korea, Pakistan, and Vietnam, I came to realize that our opposition party diplomacy is further evolving each time. The JCP Program and history as well as its policy of opposition party diplomacy are effective for making friends throughout the world, and I’m sure that this will develop into the distant future.

‘I wish you success and victory in Japan’

Q: Our struggle in Japan is all the more important than ever, isn’t it?

Shii: Yes, it is. I concluded my lecture held in Hanoi University by saying as follows:

“In the struggle to pave the way for a bright future in Japan, we are facing fierce reactionary and anti-communist attacks. This is the difficult part of our struggle peculiar to a highly developed capitalist country, and in particular Japan. The JCP is the most powerful party in terms of connection with the people at the grassroots level. We will further increase this power in order to achieve victory in the democratic revolution in Japan and to pave the way for socialism/communism.”

We made many new friends in Vietnam, the country that waged the war of national salvation against U.S. aggression and is carrying out the *Doi Moi* policy in its nation-building efforts for sovereign independence. Many Vietnamese

friends wished us success in our own endeavors. We are now renewing our determination to win a victory in the upcoming two nationwide elections.

Q: Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview.

<APPENDIX I>

JCP delegation to Vietnam

SHII Kazuo (Head of delegation)
JCP Executive Committee Chair;
House of Representatives Member

OGATA Yasuo (Deputy head of delegation)
JCP Executive Committee Vice Chair and International Bureau Director;
House of Councilors Member

MORIHARA Kimitoshi
JCP Executive Committee member and International Bureau Deputy Director

YAMAGUCHI Tomio
JCP Executive Committee member; Social Sciences Institute Vice Director

UEKI Toshio
JCP Executive Committee member; Press Service Department Head

KASAI Akira
JCP Central Committee member and International Bureau Deputy Director;
House of Representatives Member

<APPENDIX II>

JCP delegation's activities in Vietnam (January 9-14, 2007)

January 9 (Tue)

Afternoon

- Arrive at Noi Bai International Airport, Hanoi
- Visit Kham Thien Street Memorial in Hanoi and lay wreath for victims of the U.S. bombing of the North.
- Visit Binh Thuy Memorial and offer flowers to victims (2,000,000 people starved to death in 1944-1945 under the Japanese military occupation that deprived the Vietnamese people of food and forced them to grow crops exclusively for the Japanese military)
- Talks and dinner with CPV External Relations Commission Vice Chair Tran Van Hang.

January 10 (Wed)

Morning

- Visit Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and his old house
- Hold talks with Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences President Do Hoai Nam

Afternoon

- Visit Van Mieu (Temple of Literature) and the Army Museum
- Talks with CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh at CPV headquarters in Hanoi.
- Dinner with CPV General Secretary Nong Duc Manh

January 11 (Thu)

Morning

- Visit Song Long Cooperative

Afternoon

- Talks with CPV Hanoi Committee Secretary Pham Quang Nghi
- Visit FPT, telecom company
- Talks with Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung (at the National Convention Center)

January 12 (Fri)

Morning

- Visit Hanoi University President Nguyen Xuan Vang
- JCP Chair Shii gives speech to Hanoi University students

Afternoon

- Arrive at Tan Son Nhat Airport, Ho Chi Minh City

January 13 (Sat)

Morning

- Visit Saigon Hi-Tec Park board of management and Nidec (a Japanese firm operating in Vietnam)
- Visit Tu Du Obstetric Hospital and meet with Nguyen Duc (born as a Siamese twin affected by defoliant but became independent by surgery to separate the twins)

Afternoon

- Visit Quang Trung Software City and tour UK Brain IT Engineering Co
- Talks with CPV Ho Chi Minh City Committee Secretary Le Thanh Hai
- Dinner party given by CPV Ho Chi Minh City Committee Vice Secretary Nguyen Van Dua.

January 14 (Sun)

Morning

- Visit Cu Chi Tunnel, a historical site (an immense network of underground tunnels used as a base for military operations by the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam during the Vietnam War)

Afternoon

- Visit War Remnants Museum
- Visit Thong Nhat Palace, former South Vietnamese president's residence