UTL Research Award Reflective Statement

Research process

The prompt given for this paper was to research and write on a development issue germane to my country of interest – Vietnam and to reflect upon that issue in light of a significant theory of development— preferably one that was discussed in class. Another requirement for this paper was the inclusion of at least one primary source.

My first step was to acquaint myself with the different significant development issues in Vietnam before choosing one to focus my research on. This was mostly done through browsing popular news sources and wiki pages. In accordance with the theme of development, I also read reports and articles on Vietnam written by NGOs such as the UN and Human Rights Watch.

For this paper, I came into many dead-ends when trying to find a topic that had ample resources and I could also appropriately discuss using development theories discussed in class. For example, I initially wanted to write about the impact of Catholic missionaries in Vietnam applied to Dorothy Day’s doctrine of development described in her book *Loaves and Fishes*. Dorothy Day was a pioneer for catholic socialism in the 1920s and published a regular newspaper called *the Catholic Worker*. I intended to use a few copies of the original journal issues found at Kelly library’s collection as primary sources. However, the depth and breadth of literary sources on Vietnamese Catholicism was insufficient from both UTL and other online sources. As well, upon consulted with my course instructor, I came to the conclusion that the topic I had in mind was too broad, lacked direction, and could not be appropriately applied to Day’s theory of development.

Upon extensively searching alternative options, I decided to write about *Doi Moi*- Vietnam’s economic reform which I could apply to economist Dambisa Moyo’s theory of development as described in her book *Dead Aid*. After deciding upon this topic, I started narrowing down my search on the UTL catalogue which led me to use the interlibrary loan for books and journal database for journal articles and research papers on Doi Moi. For a paper of 15-20 pages, I wanted to cover a good breadth of topics related to Doi Moi, not just the main principles of the reforms but its impact on development from various aspects. Therefore, I soon discovered that it is not specific enough to type in *Doi Moi* on the UTL online catalogue. Therefore I modified my search to keywords such as *social impacts of Doi Moi* or *Doi Moi agricultural cooperatives dismantled*. This way, I could partition my paper into different sections including Origins, Agriculture, Decentralizing the Economy, Foreign Direct Investment, and Social Impacts.

In order to increase my pool of resources, I often referred to the appendixes at the end of books or research papers to look up additional sources. For example, I accessed Gainsborough’s book on the Vietnamese government by looking up the references of an article written by the Economist. Gainsborough’s book eventually provided a significant critique to my paper. Other
key sources cited in my paper include Kolko’s book *Vietnam: Anatomy of a Peace* and Migheli’s research paper *Do the Vietnamese support the Economic Doi Moi?*

Another useful and interesting technique I discovered is searching up key words in different sources. For example, searching social impacts of Doi Moi in the New York Times produced an article that describes the health benefits Doi Moi entailed in recent years. On the other hand, when the same search terminology was entered onto the Human Rights Watch website, I found an article that critiqued Doi Moi’s aggressive capitalization in face of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

**Choice of Sources**

Initially what drew me to the development issue of Doi Moi was the wealth of literary sources including journal articles, research papers, and books found at Robbarts that discussed this issue from various perspectives at different periods of time. For example, I found publications from the early 1990s when the reform was just starting that provided a more pessimistic stance on the economic reform. In contrast, I also found other more recent resources that presented a more supportive viewpoint on the reform in light of the most recent economic booms that the country has experienced. These changes in perspective provided an interesting critique in my paper. As well, I became aware of any cultural biases that publications from different regions may imply.

My course instructor encouraged me to turn to the Vietnamese government website as a source of primary sources not because they are less biased but because they make my paper’s argument more well-rounded. While articles from Humans Right Watch, a Western NGO, were more critical about the Vietnamese government’s economic decisions, the Vietnamese government articles only published the positive impacts of the reform. It was interesting to note the disparities in attitude that different sources presented. As well, the disparities allowed my paper to question the reliability of different sources.

My criteria for evaluating the sources differed for scholarly sources and news articles. Scholarly sources including books and research papers had to be primarily reliable sources. To ensure this, I mostly chose scholarly sources that were peer-reviewed or contained a substantial bibliography. For certain books, I checked their reliability on online book rating websites including google books. The books and research papers often provided substantial objective knowledge. However, I also developed an interest in news articles from sources such as the New Yorker and Vietnamese government website that I often did not find using the UTL catalogue. For these sources that are not scholarly, I did not evaluate their quality as much based on their reliability as the unique perspective that they presented. The stances given by the author as well as testimonials given by interviewed subjects that vary from farmers to policy makers to global leaders provided valuable subjective knowledge for my paper.