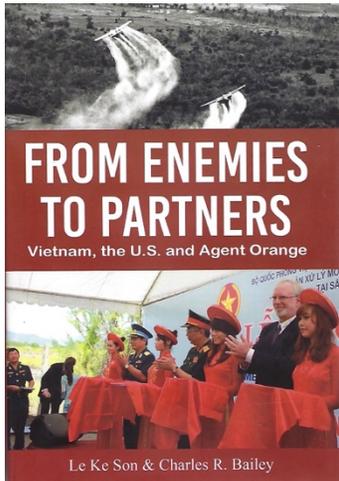
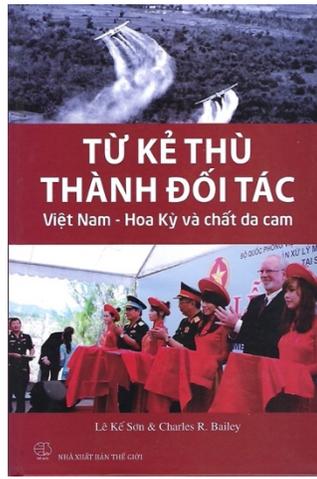


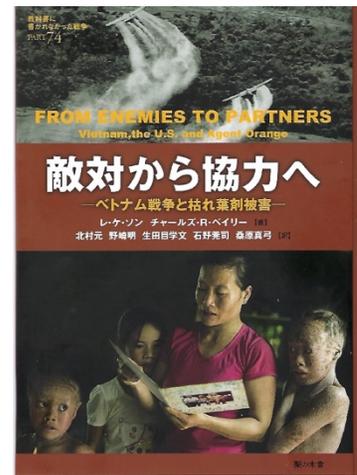
From Enemies to Partners: Vietnam, the U.S. and Agent Orange
by Le Ke Son & Charles R. Bailey



G. Anton Publishing
(Chicago) 2017



Thế giới Publishing House
(Hanoi) 2018



Pear Tree Publishing House
(Tokyo) 2022

Letter to Japanese Readers*
Le Ke Son

I am honored to write this letter to Japanese readers.

Exactly 50 years ago, when I was just 18 years old, I left the university lecture hall and joined the army during the fiercest war. Sometime later, I witnessed B-52 strategic aircraft drop bombs on Hanoi capital. Everywhere in Vietnam, there were many anti-American slogans.

In 1983, when I was a military medical doctor, I participated in research on the effects of Agent Orange on people in Ben Tre, a province in the south of Vietnam. My colleagues and I examined people living in Agent Orange sprayed areas and compared them with the disease situation of people living in areas not sprayed with Agent Orange. We could only do physical examinations and have blood cell, liver and kidney function tests. At that time, we didn't have good technology to study the persistence of dioxins in the environment and in the human body; there were no genetic or hormone tests. Conclusions about the harmful effects of Agent Orange were mainly based on epidemiological studies.

Recalling that time, I see that I had incomplete understanding of the herbicide war and its consequences for the environment and people in Vietnam. Later, when I was the Director of the Fund for the Protection of Victims of Agent Orange in Vietnam and the Chief of the Office of the National Steering Committee for Overcoming of the consequences of toxic chemicals used by the US during the war in Vietnam (Steering Committee 33), I had the opportunity to learn more carefully through research and discussion with scientists in Vietnam, Japan, the United States, Germany, Canada, etc. I also searched for documents on exchange and cooperation between agencies and officials of the two Governments of

* Japanese edition 2022, pp. 4-8.

Vietnam and the United States. These actions help me understand more and more correctly about Agent Orange/dioxin.

The U.S. government's policy of embargo against Vietnam lasted for 20 years. That led to many difficulties for us in scientific research on the consequences of Agent Orange. A national committee was established (Committee 10-80) to investigate the consequences of Agent Orange operating under conditions of limited funding, technology and little international research cooperation. The results obtained have limitations.

After the normalization of relations between the two countries, for a period of nearly 10 years, the two governments also held a number of information exchange activities. But the exchanges were often deadlocked due to different views and perceptions, especially the harmful effects of Agent Orange on people. The U.S. government publishes a list of diseases that are more or less related to dioxin. The Vietnamese government also released a list of diseases caused by dioxins. In the list of dioxin-related diseases given by the U.S. Government, there are no birth defects, a disease that the Vietnamese side always emphasizes.

If we keep arguing about science, it will go on forever and without end, while dioxin-contaminated areas that have existed for decades now still have a bad impact on the environment and people, who are exposed to dioxin and are still suffering from illness. I told officials of the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi, and members of the U.S. side of the Vietnam-US Joint Advisory Committee on Agent Orange (JAC), let's look at the facts of the consequences of Agent Orange in Vietnam to understand the true nature of the problem rather than arguing in meeting rooms and exchanging letters.

Then a turning point occurred affected by two important factors. In the summer of 2006, I directly guided the U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael Marine to visit the dioxin contaminated area at Da Nang airport. The lands are fallow and still reek of chlorine, the mud in the lake near the polluted area has a very high concentration of dioxin... these made an impression on the Ambassador. Later, when I met him again in the United States when he finished his stint in the US State Department, I asked him, what motivated him to be interested in the consequences of Agent Orange in Vietnam. Mr. Michael Marine replied that, although there were people in the U.S. Embassy who advised me not to pay attention to the Agent Orange issue in Vietnam, I found the American moral problem in this story.

The "moral problem" mentioned by the Ambassador has transcended scientific and legal issues and become the thoughts of many Americans, including those responsible for Vietnam-US relations.

In addition to the story of Ambassador M. Marine, I cannot help but mention the Ford Foundation with the role of Ms. Susan Berresford, President of the Ford Foundation, and Dr. Charles Bailey, who spent 10 years in Hanoi as the Ford Foundation Representative. It can be said that the Ford Foundation is a pioneer organization in helping Vietnam overcome the consequences of Agent Orange. Funding projects to help victims, holding talks, scientific exchanges, introducing governmental and non-governmental partners to enhance understanding and cooperation between the two countries are very important activities and effective.

What is happening today, when the U.S. side has helped Vietnam to clean up the dioxin contaminated area in Da Nang airport, is doing dioxin treatment in Bien Hoa airport and is

helping people with disabilities including Agent Orange Victims are things that even in 2005, 2006 we did not think about. It is a big step forward in about 15 years after nearly 30 years of Agent Orange in the "darkness".

However, things are still not always as expected. There are still incomplete perceptions, wrong perceptions of many people, including those responsible. In this field, there are almost always things for us to wonder and worry about. And that's why when I retired, Dr. Charles Bailey asked me, what else can we do about this. I told my old friend that maybe I would write a book on Agent Orange. And then, Dr. Charles Bailey and I wrote the book that you have in your hands.

The book was not written easily. Everything related to Agent Orange in Vietnam has been mentioned. We, with utmost effort and honesty, with an attitude of not avoiding anything, have been writing the book together for more than three years. It will be impossible to say how many emails, how many manuscripts. The final book that was released was radically different from the original book's outline.

When Dr. Charles Bailey and I interviewed Mr. Vu Khoan, former Deputy Prime Minister of Vietnam, we asked when will the story of Agent Orange in Vietnam end. Mr. Vu Khoan replied, the problem is not when it ends, but what we do to end it.

Perhaps our book was also one of the things that led to the end of this century-old sad story. The story of Agent Orange in Vietnam cannot be an "unconventional journey" as the name of a movie about Agent Orange in Vietnam by VTV4 Central Television which is quite famous in the past few years in Vietnam.

The sad story in Vietnam has something similar to the story of the two atomic bombs that the United States dropped on Japan in 1945. No one can deny its extremely heavy consequences. No one can easily forget the terrible. You have a museum of this event, mourning it but perhaps not to hate but to remind humanity not to repeat it. There is nothing better than reconciliation and growing together.

I hope that Japanese readers understand and share these feelings with me. I thank you very much for your attention to our book, and to the devastating consequences of war in my country.

I thank Mr. Hijime Kitamura, a longtime friend of mine, who has spent a lot of time and effort helping the victims of Agent Orange in Vietnam; thanks to the scientists who participated in translating our book into Japanese; thanks to Publisher and benefactors for sponsoring this work.

The last thing I want to say is that I love and respect your country.

**335 Quan Nhan
Hanoi, Vietnam
30 January 2022**