The concept of the IIAS workshop ‘Vietnamese Peasants’ Activity: an Interaction Between Culture and Nature’ was to present the results of the research on the village of Bach Coc, situated in Nam Dinh province in the Red River Delta of Vietnam – rural – society. The results of these research projects were, until this workshop, only available in the Japanese language, so the workshop allowed a wider dissemination of these results and their discussion in the presence of a broader audience.

Almost from the beginning of the workshop, the term ‘domestic socialism’, describing a key concept of Sakurai’s interpretation of village life in Bach Coc, was criticized by several contributors. Terry Rambo remarked that in a standard interpretation of the term ‘socialism’, a collective – in most cases state ownership – of production means is necessary to qualify for this label, whereas according to Sakurai, there is a system of cooperation in the management of land owned by individual households. During the ‘socialist’ period of collective state management and ownership in agriculture, Sakurai explained there to have been a strong disengagement of the peasants, who were attached to the system of ‘domestic socialism’: the over-control and state involvement in that period was in contradiction with the village’s own system of management of agricultural and economic affairs. On the level of terminology, some discrepancy can be found between the nomination of ‘socialist’ for the period of state ownership and management, and the term ‘domestic socialism’, seen exactly in direct opposition to the former.

Questioning time was grouped together at the end of each panel, so that the more popular presentations or subjects regrettably encroached on the time of the more exclusive ones, and in general there were only ten minutes left for discussion of the whole panel. The panel discussions were vivid, although in some cases language problems arose. As almost everyone in the audience was familiar with the Vietnamese language, in some cases it would have made sense to use it as the conference language instead of English.

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Young woman picking corn stalks in a village of Bac Ninh province.