

East-West Center Oral History Project: Terry Rambo



Terry Rambo

A. Terry Rambo, joined the Environment and Policy Institute in 1980, serving as its Director (1992-97). He was EWC Representative in Vietnam from 1997-2000. From 2000 to 2004 he was a Professor at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of Kyoto University. Rambo has lived in Southeast Asia for many years, conducting research and teaching in Vietnam (during and after the war), Thailand, and Malaysia. His specialty is Human Ecology and he played a key role in creating the Southeast Asian Universities Agroecosystem Network (SUAN). He currently resides in Thailand where he serves as a Special Professor in the International Graduate Program on System Approaches in Agriculture of Khon Kaen University. He is also a visiting professor at Hanoi Agricultural University, Vietnam, and an EWC Adjunct Fellow in the Environment study area of the Research Program. His book *Searching for Vietnam* (2005) is a collection of his major work on Vietnamese society and culture from the past 40 years. Rambo's work in Vietnam is the subject of the chapter "Crossing Ideological Divides" in *The East-West Center Legacy*.

Read Rambo's interview narrative (see separate pdf)

- **Personal Background**
- **Life Before EWC** - Research in Vietnam - University of Malaya
- **Institutional Transitions** - Environment and Policy Institute (EAPI) - Maynard Hufschmidt, EAPI Director - Director, EAPI - Stepping Down as Director
- **Intellectual Innovations** - Pioneer Work in Flood Prevention
- **Partnerships and Networks** - Southeast Asian Universities Agroecosystem Network (SUAN) - SUAN/Vietnamese Program - Indo-China Initiative - Work in Vietnam (1997-2000)
- **Ties That Last** - Marriage to Patma Vityakon - EWC Support Staff
- **Life After EWC** - Kyoto University - Khon Kaen University/Retirement - Publishing *Searching for Vietnam*
- **EWC's Impact** - Alumni - The Mission

Interview Quotes

“I’ve looked at my academic career and the way I keep moving. And quite a bit of my work has been on shifting cultivation. I’ve decided I really am a “shifting cultivator” academically. That I work on an area and then abandon it and go on to something else. And once in a while I’ll be a “rotating shifting cultivator.” I’ll come back and pick it up again as I did with Vietnam.”

“You know, the work Larry Hamilton did with “forest hydrology” was pioneering. It was basically looking at the idea that planting trees will stop floods. The common belief was that deforestation causes floods in the rainy seasons, and droughts in the dry season. Larry organized a group of researchers from all over Asia -- top people in all of the Asian countries and from the U.S. -- and they pursued this. They put out a book and Larry wrote an incredibly important paper called -- *Myths and Misperceptions* -- in which it was shown that trees don’t prevent floods. If you get enough rainfall, you’ll get a flood. It doesn’t matter how many trees you have. And in the dry season trees actually reduce water flow because they use water. If your purpose is to provide water for lowland areas, then good grass cover is actually better than trees. And Larry felt terrible because he was the original tree hugger.”

These narratives, which reflect interviewees’ personal perceptions, opinions and memories, may contain errors of fact. They do not reflect positions or versions of history officially approved by the East-West Center.

LINK (as of 06/12/2020)

<https://www.eastwestcenter.org/research/research-information-services/oral-history-project/terry-rambo>