

Study cites dioxin spray, cancer link

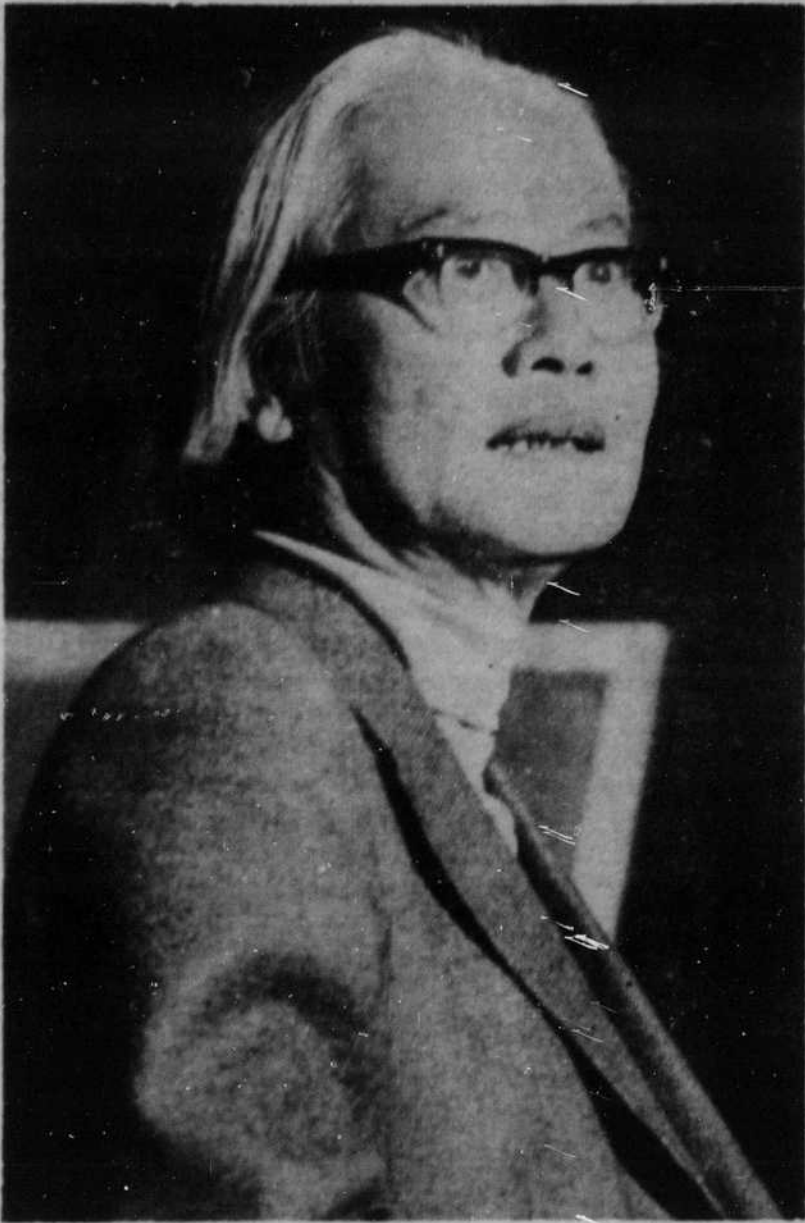


Photo by Jeffrey Burns

Dioxin may cause cancer, according to Dr. Ton That Tung. He discussed results of his study which probes the effects of Agent Orange on Vietnamese people, Friday in an EMU Cultural Forum-sponsored talk. Tung's study is under fire from one of dioxin's main producers, Dow Chemical Co.

By CATHERINE SIEGNER
Of the Emerald

A North Vietnamese scientist told a large crowd Friday that his studies of Vietnamese peasants have led him to hypothesize that exposure to dioxin can cause cancer.

Dr. Ton That Tung emphasized during his talk in the EMU Forum that his hypothesis still needs corroboration. Tung, also a physician, is currently on a five-week tour of the United States, sharing his scientific and medical findings. Tung spoke French during his discussion; Romance Language Prof. Louis Olivier translated.

Tung said his studies began in 1969 at the height of the Vietnam War. American troops had sprayed the defoliant Agent Orange, which contains the contaminant dioxin, at the rate of five pounds per acre over the Asian countryside since 1962 in an attempt to ruin crops and deprive enemy soldiers of cover.

"Where there had been spraying, we talked with the local populations that had been exposed," Tung explained. "We believe the local people are better suited to judge what they can see happening."

Tung said the peasants reported miscarriages, stillbirths, and congenital defects. "As scientists, we did the best we could to judge the validity of these reports. We established the fact of chromosome changes in the victims' blood."

Tung said the changes prompted his research team to suspect a previously unknown chemical product.

He showed slides of peasants and of the denuded Vietnamese landscape sprayed with Agent Orange. The hills still looked bleak and dusty 10 years after the spraying. The people had birth defects and "a kind of acne from direct penetration through the skin" Tung said.

He said all the victims had "chromosome abnormalities considerably different than the usual Vietnamese condition." Because these

chromosome studies had come under question, Tung added, the research team did further studies in 1977 using three different groups of people.

"The results of the second study permitted us to speculate that a new substance had entered the picture, and that it must be dioxin."

Citing early studies of dioxin's effect on laboratory animals, Tung said it causes a "disappearance of immunity against infection, and the animals become more susceptible to cancers."

He said the liver is the "target organ of dioxin," and that three types of cancer — of the liver, lower pharynx and lungs — appeared in rats given a steady diet of dioxin.

"These are experimental results," Tung reminded the audience. "We aren't entitled to extrapolate from animal studies to humans. We need studies from the human side and this isn't easy."

He said one of the reasons for his tour is to establish contacts and create a team to conduct further research. "We need studies of 50,000 to 100,000 people. Vietnam can't conduct such experiments."

Tung said Vietnamese cancer statistics show an increase in the three cancers, and that a larger sampling is needed for more definite conclusions.

Tung's research has been criticized by Dow Chemical Co., one of the major producers of dioxin, for not covering a sufficient period after the spraying and for citing "inadequate and insufficient" data.

His findings were also challenged Friday by a contingent of professors from Oregon State University, including Dr. Michael Newton. After Tung's presentation Newton claimed there is no evidence Agent Orange was ever sprayed on humans in Vietnam.

Tung was asked if, since the U.S. is responsible for the spraying, it is also responsible for the results. He answered that there is a "certain moral responsibility, but you know how governments are. Governments don't generally assume moral responsibilities."

RCYB

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vanced Placement History. I know about oppression."

Vaughn admits he overstepped his authority when he plunged into the crowd at 1 p.m. and told the model delegates to leave. "I saw violence in the air," he says. "I tried to end it. That wasn't my job."

Vaughn then told an RCYB member to come up to his office where he suspended the group.

"The poster violation is an excuse," says Postmen. "We speak openly; we're Communists. They're afraid our ideas are taking root."

Postman believes the suspension is part of a national movement against the brigade. "Already the organization has been expelled or put on probation at University of

California at Berkeley, the University of Washington, The University of Hawaii, Kent State, Ohio State and Portland State.

Postman says the ETCYB's eight members were pleased with Friday's confrontation. "We expect argument," adds Postman. "It's a healthy characteristic of youth to question."

Vaughn says he will reinstate the group if it cleans up its stick-on posters around campus. But the RCYB members say they have no intention of cleaning up their propaganda.

"Revolution is growing," says Postman. "If they thought the '60s were bad dreams, the '80s will be a nightmare. They'll have revolution whether they like it or not."

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