

## The First Vietnamese in America

Charles Keith

The first Vietnamese in America travelled there during the interwar era. Though few in numbers, they ranged from wealthy tourists on globetrotting adventures to poor labourers pushed to the United States by the vagaries of the world economy. Allowing their experiences of the United States to speak for themselves suggests that the broader question of America in Vietnamese culture and consciousness during the late colonial era might benefit from a more explicitly “Vietnam-centric” approach to conceptualizing early Vietnamese-American encounters. In other words, their histories are more than avatars of the war to come.

**Keywords:** Vietnam, the United States, colonialism, migration, travel.

In December 1912, a young Vietnamese man named Nguyễn Tất Thành mailed a letter from New York. It was addressed to the resident superior of the French protectorate of Annam, his place of origin. Nguyễn Tất Thành was an employee of a French steamship company whose boats were rapidly bringing Vietnamese — elite and ordinary alike — to the farthest reaches of their world. He wrote the letter in an effort to send money to his father, a district chief in Annam who had lost his job and was without an income — he had done the same from Ceylon months before. Nguyễn Tất Thành later claimed to have remained in the United States for about a year after he mailed the letter, working as a pastry chef at the Parker House Hotel in Boston. After spending some time in France and England, Nguyễn Tất Thành said he returned to New York in 1917 and part of 1918, where he worked for a wealthy Brooklyn family

and in a General Motors factory. Decades later he recalled “staring in awe at the modern skyscrapers of the Manhattan skyline and strolling with friends in Chinatown where he was impressed by the fact that Asian immigrants in the United States appeared to have equal rights in law if not in fact” (Duiker 2000, p. 50). He also claimed that “he had been strongly moved by the plight of black peoples around the world” (Duiker 2000, p. 50) after hearing the black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey speak in Harlem. Speaking about his time in New York many years later, Nguyễn Tất Thành said that he had gone there in the hope “that the United States was opposed to Western imperialism and would readily agree to assist the Vietnamese people in overthrowing the French colonial regime”, but “eventually he concluded that there was no help there” (Duiker 2000, p. 50).

The accounts of Nguyễn Tất Thành, known more widely as Hồ Chí Minh, of his early travels to the United States, recounted in official communist publications and to sympathetic American interlocutors during the 1960s, are inextricable from the charged politics and propaganda of the Vietnam War. In fact, other than the letter that he sent from New York, which may be the first documented presence of a Vietnamese in the United States, nothing about his claims can be corroborated, and core elements of his stories — notably his sense of solidarity with progressive forces in American society and politics — were likely embellished or even fabricated as part of communist efforts to cultivate political sympathy in the United States. However, Hồ Chí Minh was not alone in telling stories, real or not, about a shared Vietnamese-American history for wartime purposes. Wynn Wilcox has traced the fascinating and almost surely invented story of a trip by Bùi Viện, an official of the Vietnamese Nguyễn dynasty, to the United States to seek American support during France’s invasion of Tonkin in 1873. Bùi Viện, so the story goes, “was sent as an envoy of the emperor to the US consulate at Hong Kong”; with the help of a sympathetic American consul on the island, he went to Washington and obtained an audience with Ulysses S. Grant, “but was told by Grant that without the proper credentials

from Emperor Tự Đức no action could be taken” (Wilcox 2011, pp. 135). After the long trip home to obtain said credentials, Bùi Viện “was told via emissaries that the United States, because of political circumstances, was not in a position to grant the Vietnamese request for aid” (Wilcox 2011, pp. 135). In spite of its general implausibility and glaring errors, the story of Bùi Viện in Washington, like the stories of Hồ Chí Minh in New York, became a potent wartime political allegory. First popularized in a 1945 book by the novelist and popular historian Phan Trần Chúc, the story was retold in many South Vietnamese publications in the 1950s and 1960s, and even in a toast by Lyndon Johnson during a meeting of South Vietnamese and American delegations in Guam in 1967. During the war, Wilcox writes, the myth of Bùi Viện “provided Vietnamese historians with a way to explain why the United States, having missed opportunities to help Vietnam in the past, should not miss such opportunities in the present” (Wilcox 2011, pp. 136).<sup>1</sup>

Myth-making like this is understandable in times of war; less so are the teleologies that persist in scholarship about Vietnamese-American encounters before the era of decolonization. Robert Hopkins Miller’s *The United States and Vietnam, 1787–1941* considers only how “Vietnam’s importance to US interests” evolved from vague commercial ambitions during the nineteenth century to substantial geostrategic ones in the 1940s (Miller 1990, pp. xvii). In *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950*, Mark Phillip Bradley (2000) argues that “as the Cold War came to Vietnam ... the largely imagined Vietnam and America that were constructed during the interwar and World War II periods fundamentally shaped the contours of the postcolonial Vietnamese state and its place in the articulation of post-1945 international order” (Bradley 2000, pp. 6–7). During the interwar era, Bradley argues, the anti-colonial origins, economic dynamism, ethos of egalitarianism, and pragmatism of American history and culture had broad appeal to Vietnamese radicals. This, Bradley contends, stood in stark, even tragic, contrast to American Orientalist stereotypes of Vietnamese as a passive, effeminate race with a culture derivative of China’s,

ideas which he considers to be “an essential starting point for U.S. attitudes towards its South Vietnamese allies in the 1960s” (Bradley 2000, pp. 186–87). In both of these works, Vietnamese-American encounters before 1945 thus become a prehistory of the ambitions, misunderstandings and missed opportunities that plagued Vietnamese-American relations during the Cold War.

This article examines an unexplored dimension of colonial-era Vietnamese-American encounters: Vietnamese — other than Hồ Chí Minh or Bùi Viện — who travelled to and around the United States before 1945. Although they were few, likely several hundred at most, they came from the most elite and most marginal parts of Vietnamese society, and they left traces ranging from detailed travelogues to the barest administrative fragments. Their histories reveal, to begin with, how French colonialism dispersed Vietnamese to the most distant and unfamiliar corners of their world. Historians have shown how colonial bureaucratic and infrastructural projects shaped mobility within Indochina itself (Goscha 2012). They have explored how world wars, expositions, colonial education, and new labour markets brought Vietnamese to France and around its empire (Hémery 1975, pp. 3–54; Le Van Ho 2014; McConnell 1989). They have also revealed the transnational networks of Vietnamese revolutionary politics, which grew and operated in and around France, the Soviet Union, southern China and mainland Southeast Asia (Goscha 2016; Quinn-Judge 2002). The presence of Vietnamese in the interwar United States demonstrates how the myriad material and cultural transformations of French colonialism — which encompassed everything from steamship travel to new ideas about travel and the self — brought Vietnamese well beyond these better-known realms of Vietnamese migration to the farthest reaches of their world. This article thus offers a model for how to consider the many other unexplored sites and spaces of what might well be thought of as the first era of Vietnamese global migration.

The lives of Asian migrants who lived what Adam McKeown (2011) has called the “melancholy order” of modern migration regimes are often notoriously difficult to reconstruct, and Vietnamese in the

interwar United States are no exception. But it is clear that for those elite Vietnamese who visited interwar America, their impulse to travel there, their itineraries, and how they thought about their experiences reveal the mixed, often trivial interests and preoccupations of people who saw the interwar United States as but one of many parts of a changing mental map of their world, not as the singular political and cultural concern that it would become during the Cold War. Far less remains to reconstruct the lives of more ordinary Vietnamese whose experiences of interwar America consisted of stints working in steamships, hotels, restaurants and factories. For them, the United States was an unexpected, surely often unwanted, port of call — for work, not play — in uncertain life voyages set into motion by the forces of global capitalism. In short, for those few Vietnamese who experienced it, the United States before the Cold War was above all part of the world and the historical moment they inhabited, not a sign of a world to come. Unlike murky political metaphors and myths of tales about Hồ Chí Minh or Bùi Viện, their lives are poor origin stories that are, quite simply, of no importance to the history of the Vietnam War. Their histories, told here as fully as possible, thus suggest a need for more “Vietnam-centric” approaches to the question of how Vietnamese first encountered and perceived the United States.

### Bourgeois Tourists in the “Paradise of Yankees”

One does not do what one likes in this world, especially in the New World, otherwise known as America, for this ‘New World’ has become old since Christopher Columbus had the bad idea to discover it. This brave explorer should have left this world where it was; that way I would not have experienced the nasty event that I am about to recount (Lê Văn Đức 1928, p. 1).

Thus did Jacques Lê Văn Đức, one of colonial-era Vietnam’s most erstwhile bourgeois travellers, begin a newspaper article in 1928 detailing his ultimately doomed effort to obtain a visa for the United States. Some of the most vivid and detailed accounts of increasingly global Vietnamese sojourns came from the pens of people like Lê

Văn Đức, whose wealth and education afforded them opportunities to see the world in a way that few Vietnamese could contemplate. Lê Văn Đức wrote his article from Marseille, but in 1928, France — even Europe — was old hat for him. He had already made a pilgrimage to Rome and had travelled in Belgium, Germany, England, and elsewhere on the continent. For this reason, perhaps, he had greater ambitions for this trip. “From my departure from Saigon”, he wrote, “I had the firm intention of returning home via America, Canada, Japan and China” (Lê Văn Đức 1928, p. 1). He booked a trip with a travel agent that took him from Le Havre to New York, to be followed by stops in Washington, Montreal, Toronto, Niagara Falls, Chicago, Los Angeles, Yosemite, San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver before crossing the Atlantic to Yokohama. All that remained was the visa, but it proved a fatal detail. The American consul was not as encouraging as the one in stories about Bùi Việ; he told Lê Văn Đức that he could not issue him a visa because he was not a resident of France. To get one, he would have to return to Saigon. Heated exchanges, both epistolary and in person, continued for several weeks, but the consul did not budge and Lê Văn Đức eventually gave up. “As you see”, he concluded, “it is hard for the mortals of Europe and elsewhere to enter into the kingdom of the dollar, otherwise known as the paradise of Yankees” (Lê Văn Đức 1928, p. 1).

Lê Văn Đức’s experience will sound all too familiar to the millions of people who have tried and failed to enter the United States. However, not all interwar Vietnamese aspiring to visit “the paradise of Yankees” were turned away, and their travelogues (*du ký*) reveal how and why Vietnamese began to trickle into the United States during the interwar years, as well as what they thought of the places they encountered. Although a handful of *du ký* exist recounting Vietnamese travel in the interwar United States, it is important to note that only a tiny fraction of travellers in this era published accounts of their trips, and that far more may have shared the experiences that these texts recount. Indeed, the security apparatus that oversaw Indochinese in France often took note

of Vietnamese who, like Lê Văn Đức, had travelled to France and decided to continue on to America. One typical example is Nguyễn Văn Trường, who was one of thousands of Vietnamese to come to France during the colonial era to study. In 1933, a French official noted that Nguyễn Văn Trường, “who enjoys a life of ease thanks to subsidies provided by his father, a large landowner in the region of Hanoi, intends to visit the United States and, from there, return to his country” (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1933). He apparently enjoyed his trip, because in 1935, now a student at Institut d’Études Politiques de Paris, he again took the long way home via New York, San Francisco and Honolulu (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1933). Vietnamese like Nguyễn Văn Trường who travelled to the United States via France often did not intend to go there when they left home; those who did likely took the shorter route across the Pacific Ocean. Their requests for passports at American consulates in Hanoi or Saigon, records I was unable to find, would give clearer contours to the scope of Vietnamese travel to the United States at this time.

Perhaps the earliest detailed account of a Vietnamese journey to the United States is Bùi Thanh Vân’s account of his 1929 trip around the world. Bùi Thanh Vân is an excellent example of the relationship between French colonialism and Vietnamese mobility. Born to a poor family in rural western Cochinchina, his success in the local school won him a scholarship to study in Saigon. After his studies, he became an interpreter, a job which brought with it travel around the colony. “I began to see new places”, he recalled, “rivers, mountains, the ocean, in a word, things that I had not known of until then” (Bùi Thanh Vân 1922, p. 6). In 1910, he fulfilled a lifelong dream to travel to France, and went again in 1922. In 1929, almost sixty years old, his travel reached its apotheosis. “For ten piasters each”, he recalled,

I purchased a globe and a planisphere at Saigon’s Portail bookstore. From my living room, they illuminated the extraordinary leaps of the steamships and trains that were to take me across the universe. Occasionally, I shivered when contemplating the vision of the vast abysses of the immense oceans and continents (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, preface).

Nevertheless Bùi Thanh Vân was not cowed; in March 1929, he boarded a ship in Saigon bound for Singapore, the first leg of a journey that took him to Colombo, Durban, Cape Town, Rio de Janeiro, Santos, Sao Paulo, Montevideo, Buenos Aires, La Plata, Victoria and, on 16 July 1929, to New Orleans. After waiting for a day in quarantine for their ship to be fumigated to prevent the spread of a yellow fever epidemic sweeping through Brazil, Bùi Thanh Vân set foot in the United States. He had eight days in New Orleans, a madcap trip to New York and a stopover in Galveston before his final destination of Los Angeles. “Dressed in a European style, gray felt hat, grey flannel vest, striped slacks, yellow boots, purple raincoat, black umbrella”, he wrote, “I strolled, nose to the wind. I had not planned ahead; the sympathies of both White and Blacks alike for a stranger guided my steps” (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, p. 58).

Bùi Thanh Vân was an intrepid traveller but a mediocre ethnographer, and his accounts of these places are brief and fragmented. In New Orleans he noted the charm of the old quarter’s eighteenth-century buildings, the factories of its sprawling industrial periphery, the city’s black population and the rigid racial segregation (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, pp. 50–51). He believed he had left such things behind when he stepped out of Penn Station on to New York’s 34th street, where “the social relations of the Negro encounter no obstacles whatsoever” — he ascribed the persistent black poverty he witnessed in New York to “the question of psychological aptitude” (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, pp. 55, 57). Bùi Thanh Vân did not waste his long-awaited trip to New York; he jetted from the Bronx Zoo to the Museum of Natural History to Chinatown to Wall Street “by foot, by car, elevated railways, street cars, and subways” (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, p. 55). “Once there”, he wrote, “my personal utopia metamorphosed” into a real city that, while admirable, could not match “the magnificence of Paris”, a point of view he felt “impartial New Yorkers” would concede (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, p. 57). In that light, it was unsurprising that he struggled to rhapsodize about Galveston, whose “urban



beautification was far inferior to Saigon's" (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, p. 60), before his steamship journey through the Panama Canal ending in Los Angeles, the destination of so many Vietnamese migrants a half-century later. There he had his own confrontation with American racism, when immigration authorities let the white passengers disembark but forced Asians to remain on board for four days, regardless of their nationality or visa status. He had little to say about the city, but he noted its fashion trends, creative local efforts to avoid prohibition, and his pleasure at eating 'Indochinese' fruits for the first time in months. "America!" he concluded, "You received me with radiance, and I leave in triumph!" (Bùi Thanh Vân 1930, p. 68).

In 1941, another globetrotting Vietnamese provided his compatriots with an account of the United States, a place whose presence in Vietnamese consciousness had grown along with the newspaper sphere in the intervening decade. Lê Văn Lương, a rare interwar Vietnamese graduate of an English university, was a professor at Saigon's Chấn Thanh school when, in 1941, he decided to take his own trip around the world. He travelled in the opposite direction to Bùi Thanh Vân, going to Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Beijing, Busan, Tokyo and, finally, Yokohama, for the five-day trip across the Pacific to the American territory of Hawaii. Lê Văn Lương was no stranger to colonialism, but the island's charms led him to a mild assessment of its American variant. "As soon as he steps onto Honolulu, the traveler's first impression is of a soothing and happy atmosphere", he wrote, before launching into a lengthy explanation of surfing and the versatile term 'aloha' (Lê Văn Lương 1941*a*, p. 1). "Americans are lords (*chúa tể*) of the island", he admitted, but he commented favourably on their adoption of Hawaiian food, music, dress, and (of course) surfing (Lê Văn Lương 1941*b*, p. 1). "Racial barriers and skin color barriers don't exist on the island", he exulted; "all skin colors, white, black, yellow, or any other live together happily" (Lê Văn Lương 1941*b*, p. 1). He reduced the complex politics of the islands' relationship to America's mainland to a myth of diverse races united by "one language, one homeland, and

one flag” (Lê Văn Lương 1941*a*, p. 1). In an article that appeared just months before the attack on Pearl Harbour, Lê Văn Lương did raise the question of whether the World War’s extension to Hawaii might present difficult choices for people who had strong cultural connections and affinities for Asia, but his answer was censored (Lê Văn Lương 1941*c*, p. 3).

Then, it was across the Pacific to California: first stop, San Francisco, where Lê Văn Lương was quickly taken in by the natural beauty that beckoned from across the Golden Gate Bridge, as well as the charm of then-small towns like Marin and Sausalito. He marvelled at the fact that in these sleepy places, even one-room cabins had separate garages. Back in the city, he visited a museum and a fishery before continuing on by train to Los Angeles. First impressions were dismaying: a terribly dirty train station, few sidewalks, and not a single decent restaurant open. However, things soon improved: Lê Văn Lương marvelled at the growing city’s seemingly organic incorporation into southern California’s marvellous botanical landscape, the Spanish architecture of the historic quarters, Griffith Observatory, Gay’s Lion Farm, and Long Beach, where he was pleased to find a good French restaurant despite it being a place for the ‘popular’ classes (*bình dân*), but he was most impressed by Hollywood. American films had begun to trickle into Indochina by the 1930s, and Lê Văn Lương was thrilled to tour the major film studios and to see films and performances at the Hollywood Bowl and Grauman’s Chinese Theatre. He drove by houses of famous movie stars in Santa Monica and Beverly Hills in hopes of catching sight of one or two, but was disappointed (Lê Văn Lương 1941*d*, pp. 1, 3, 1941*f*, pp. 1, 3 and 1941*g*, pp. 1, 3). Lê Văn Lương’s final two stops on his American journey — Chicago and New York — elicited a bit less enthusiasm. He was moving east, so Chicago brought the sight of “skyscrapers as high as mountains” but little else, other than a remarkable encounter with a person claiming to be the daughter of a member of a Nguyễn dynasty delegation to France in 1867, who instead of returning to Vietnam had sailed across the Atlantic and built a life in the United States (Lê Văn Lương 1941*i*, p. 1).

He arrived in New York after a disappointing stop in Niagara Falls, and his dominant impression of “the village of gangsters” was the ubiquitous and unending noise and the relentless geometry of the streets (Lê Văn Lương 1941*j*, p. 1).

#### From Vietnam to America on the Winds of the World Economy

Bùi Thanh Vân and Lê Văn Lương went to the United States as restless Vietnamese tourists intent on seeing as many of the world’s places as they could. Others were brought there by the winds of a global economy that was increasingly connecting Indochina to once-distant world markets. Perhaps the most spectacular manifestation of the era’s industrial capitalism was world and colonial expositions. Scholars have noted the role of these events in producing and circulating exoticized representations of the non-Western world in mass media and popular culture, often through living bodies of colonial subjects (Leprun 1986). However, colonial subjects were far from just props at these cathedrals of modernity; from the 1900s into the 1930s, Vietnamese travelled to expositions (virtually all in France) of their own accord, and for many reasons. For the politically ambitious, to be chosen as an official delegate to an exposition served to mark one’s privileged status in colonial politics. For heads of enterprises, expositions meant business opportunities; for artists and artisans, they meant deep-pocketed French customers and the allure of recognition by critics; for workers, they could mean a year of often relatively high wages; for all, they were an opportunity to travel overseas to witness spectacles unparalleled in their scope and splendour. Many of these motivations and experiences are reflected in the several dozen *du ký* about Vietnamese travels to expositions during the colonial era, a rich but underused source for ‘subaltern’ experiences at these iconic events of the era of industrialization, colonization and mass consumption (Goscha 1996, pp. 253–79).

The United States became an increasingly common site for world expositions of various kinds as its economy globalized in

the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By the 1930s, the French colonial administration in Indochina sought a presence for the colony's export sector at American expositions, a fact not lost on Vietnamese observers. "In the past Asia and America were far apart, the paths between them not convenient, news of the other extremely restricted ... but now, all nations on the globe are much like people in the same house talking to one another", noted an article in *Tiếng Dân* (Kim Sinh 1939, p. 1). "France has opened the way for us to travel abroad for work and for study, but we only go to China, Japan, or France; we only have footprints in the old world; as for the new world on the other side of the globe (the Americas), Vietnamese almost never go (just a few tourists)" (Kim Sinh 1939, p. 1). "America is the richest country in the world and Indochina is participating in this exposition", continued the article; "with some luck the products of our country will help to open a road for us from here to America" (Kim Sinh 1939, p. 1). The "Century of Progress International Exposition" in Chicago, which opened in 1933, was the first major American exposition to take place during the explosion of the Vietnamese print sphere, and it received close attention in Indochinese newspapers. However, aside from general discussions about America's culture, strengthening economy, and role in the world, the exposition also generated a debate among Indochinese businessmen about the merits and drawbacks of travelling to Chicago to participate in the event. One Trần Văn Tựu, writing in *Hà Thành Ngọ Báo*, saw doing so as an unacceptable risk, given the lack of financial and logistical support that Indochinese owners of enterprises received from the colonial government to participate in expositions in France (Trần Văn Tựu 1934, p. 1). However, a group led by Phạm Chân Hưng, the proprietor of Chân Hưng jewellers on Hàng Bạc street in Hanoi and of the newspaper *Nông Công Thương*, risked the sizeable investment to make the trip on the promise of the beauty of their crafts, which had not yet reached audiences in that part of the world.

The sole known account of their trip was by one Nguyễn Bá Lộc, proprietor of one of the three Indochinese artisanal enterprises

with a presence in the exposition's 'Asian area' (*xóm Đông Phương*). Although he did not say so explicitly, his comparative observations suggest that he almost certainly had, like many other successful Indochinese artisans, sold his wares at a past exposition in France. In general, Chicago did not fare well in his eyes. The trip started on a sour note when the enterprise owners arrived to find that the price of their kiosks had gone up, despite having already placed a down payment. Nguyễn Bá Lộc had mixed feelings about Americans themselves. As a merchant, he was pleasantly surprised by what he saw as a frenetic consumerism that led visitors to spend almost indiscriminately; "they run here and there, bustling about as they look, and buy everything" (A.Đ. 1933, p. 1). However, as an artisan, he found this all a bit distasteful. He wrote dismissively of customers who bought the glossy French-language books and catalogues available at their kiosks without the ability to read them, "simply as a souvenir of the exposition" (A.Đ. 1933, p. 1). This, for him, revealed a general lack of appreciation for the works of art and crafts on display, which he also saw in the unusually large area set aside on the exposition grounds for amusements "for children and adults alike"; "all who attend the exposition", he wrote, "cannot fail to note how Americans, like the Chinese, are more interested in loudly amusing themselves than in paying attention to marvellous works of art from around the world" (A.Đ. 1933, p. 1). However, the Vietnamese journalist relating Nguyễn Bá Lộc's experiences still saw much to admire in the effort to make Americans aware of Vietnamese craftsmanship: "these days", he noted, "a trip to America is a daydream whose difficulty rivals that of scientists who desire to travel to Mars ... this trip is thus praiseworthy, and a story worth knowing" (A.Đ. 1933, p. 1). By the next major exposition in the United States, the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco in 1939, the colonial administration had caught up with the Vietnamese entrepreneurs and sent an official delegation. One of its Vietnamese members, Dương Xuân Lăng, sent postcards home to Hanoi that remained prized family objects for years afterwards (Nach and Thủy Dương Nach, n.d.).

Elite entrepreneurs like Nguyễn Bá Lộc were not the only Vietnamese to sail into the United States on the winds of the global economy. In an unpublished novel written in the early 1970s, *Con Đường Thiên Lý* (The Thousand Mile Road, posthumously published in 1989), Nguyễn Hiến Lê transformed the family lore of an acquaintance into the imagined story of Trần Trọng Khiêm, later known as Lê Kim, who in the mid-nineteenth century fled from Vietnam to avoid prosecution for killing a magistrate who had murdered Lê Kim's wife after she spurned his advances. Like thousands of other Asian migrants at this time, Lê Kim went to California to dig for gold. He spent several years in America, finding gold, living the dangers and thrills of the highly stereotyped Wild West, and working for a time as a newspaper editor before returning to Vietnam (Vu Hong Pham 2002). The unverifiable but tantalizing oral history at the origin of Nguyễn Hiến Lê's novel suggests the wholly plausible possibility that Vietnamese labourers, especially from Tonkin, may well have been among the waves of labour migrants travelling from southern China to the United States in the mid-nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, the labour migrations that Nguyễn Hiến Lê imagined were very real by the interwar era, a time when the political networks and economic forces of colonial rule and global capitalism created both pressures and incentives that brought Vietnamese to new places across the globe in search of work. Most of this took place within the colony itself; educated Vietnamese streamed into jobs in the colonial bureaucracy or in private companies in Laos or Cambodia, while labourers streamed into the Mekong Delta for jobs in rice or rubber plantations. Outside of the colony, the most common destination for migrants was France. A hundred thousand Indochinese soldiers and workers participated in the First World War; about twenty thousand more made the journey before France's shocking defeat at the outset of the next world war (Đặng Văn Long 1997; Le Van Ho 2014). Alongside these mass migrations was a small but steady migration of Indochinese to France, working at colonial expositions, on steamships, as domestic servants and in factories (Goebel 2015; Granier 2014).

Vietnamese labour migration spanned the French empire; beginning in the 1890s, the French mining firm Denis Frères recruited workers from Tonkin to work in the nickel mines of New Caledonia, part of a broader migration that included Chinese, Japanese, Javanese, and political exiles from the French Commune (Angleviel 2000, pp. 65–81). Vietnamese labourers also circulated, in small numbers, around French colonies in North and West Africa.

Few of the Vietnamese labourers who ended up in the United States during the interwar era likely planned on ending up there. Indeed, following in the footsteps of Nguyễn Tất Thành, most found their way to the United States thanks to the French steamship industry, which spanned the world during the interwar years. The extraordinary mobility of Vietnamese workers on French steamships was a sign of their marginal and precarious existence; it was not unusual for them to suddenly lose their jobs while in France, leaving them stranded in Marseille or Le Havre without a franc to their name. Often, their best, or only, solution was to take work on one of the many other steamship lines extending from these global hubs; during the interwar years, Vietnamese steamship workers who had only imagined travels spanning Saigon and Marseille often found themselves in places like Istanbul, Buenos Aires or Cape Town. Inevitably, a few wound up in the United States. Working a steamship line to America was no guarantee of setting foot on its shores, as one ship worker noted in a letter to a friend.

I just took a trip to America. I regret that when the boat arrived in New York, those with yellow skin were not allowed to disembark. The yellow race is an unhappy one! Everywhere they go, Asians are viewed poorly. Americans who travel to our country are free, and the government offers them feasts and banquets. But when we arrive in their country, they don't let us set foot on the ground. It's sickening to stay on a boat for two weeks! (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1930).

Those who ended up on shore usually entered the archives only in the event of an incident or a crime; for example, in 1923, a Vietnamese ship worker named Nguyễn Văn Đích was arrested in New

Orleans for smuggling two Chinese on to the ship in Marseille; the stowaways died during the fumigation of the ship off the American coast (ANOM, SLOTFOM n.d.a). Three years later, Đào Nhật Vinh served time in a New York prison for smuggling opium from Asia, via Le Havre, into the United States and smuggling cocaine from there back to France (ANOM, SLOTFOM n.d.b). For many of these ship workers, time in America was limited to brief stopovers on the waterfronts of major ports, but for some it was more permanent. Lê Văn Lương recounted a chance encounter with one such person during his visit to Golden Gate Park; when walking up a set of stairs to view a fish pond, he stumbled and reflexively said “excuse me” in Vietnamese. Suddenly, a fellow park-goer rushed up and began speaking back to him. He told Lê Văn Lương that he had first left Indochina to study law in Paris but had run out of money and was forced to take work on an American steamship line crossing the Atlantic. He eventually ended up on the Los Angeles-Honolulu line, which stopped in San Francisco, where he had been working for the past seven years, during which time he had not met a single other Vietnamese person. His brief time in the calm of the park before the long haul across the Pacific ended at the moment of the encounter; “rushed”, wrote Lê Văn Lương, “we exchanged pleasantries and addresses and hurriedly shook hands, he went down to the ship, and I watched him go with a sad feeling in my heart” (Lê Văn Lương 1941e).

Work on a steamship was almost surely the most important pipeline for the modest migration of Vietnamese labour to the United States during the interwar era, but there are some tantalizing fragments that suggest that this labour migration was more diverse. For example, in 1925 a Vietnamese machinist named Trần Văn Thử received a visa to travel to the United States to seek work there; he had come to France during the First World War, kept his job in a chemical factory after the war, but eventually decided to seek his fortune across the Atlantic (ANOM, SLOTFOM n.d.c). More such glimpses come from the writings of Lê Văn Lương, who had an uncanny knack for bumping into Vietnamese migrants wherever he travelled — so many,



in fact, that he gave the edited full-length version of his serialized travelogue the title “Vietnamese Compatriots Overseas” (*Đông Bào Việt Nam ở Hải Ngoại*) (Lê Văn Lương 1941*k*). If one accepts his essential claims about the encounters, early Vietnamese migrants to the United States had diverse and fascinating trajectories. In New York he learned of a Vietnamese ship worker who had worked as a *maître d’* in a hotel for several years before working as a sailor on the New York–Buenos Aires line (Lê Văn Lương 1941*j*, p. 1). Perhaps his most interesting encounter was in Los Angeles, when Lê Văn Lương met two Vietnamese working as a cameraman and a sound engineer for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. One evening they took him to dinner and told him their stories. Nguyễn Văn Cháp, originally from Cochinchina, had worked in the American film industry for ten years at the time of their encounter; Lê Văn Lương recounted that, not long after, Nguyễn Văn Cháp died in a car accident in Indochina during a stopover on a trip to France for a job at a film studio in Joinville. The other man, from a poor family in Ninh Bình province, had received a scholarship to study in France and continued on to Berlin to study sound recording, eventually ending up in Hollywood. After many years in California, both had acquired, in Lê Văn Lương’s eyes, “an unusually fast way of walking, talking, and eating that was one hundred percent American” (Lê Văn Lương 1941*h*, p. 1). Huyền had a wife from Louisiana, two children, American citizenship, and “every intention of staying in America until I die” (Lê Văn Lương 1941*h*, p. 3). Lê Văn Lương was leaving for Chicago soon, so the three took a picture together as a souvenir.

### Decolonization, Or, New Paths to an Old Destination

On 2 September 1945, the former Nguyễn Tất Thành, now Hồ Chí Minh, read aloud the Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi’s Ba Đình Square. David Marr writes: “Anxious to link Vietnam’s present with past world revolutionary traditions, and to bow diplomatically in several directions, Ho Chi Minh opened with quotations from the 1776 American Declaration

of Independence”, most famously its invocation of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (Marr 1995, p. 533). The spectre of America hanging over Ba Đình Square soon became a more tangible reality, as the United States slowly escalated its financial, diplomatic and military involvement in Vietnam, a story that has been told many, many times. One of the many consequences of this was new forms of Vietnamese migration to the United States that reflected the new realities of decolonization. Politics was one reason for this change. The communist-controlled Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) began to develop its presence in the United States soon after independence; by 1948 there was an American chapter of the “Vietnamese-American Friendship Association”, formed in Hanoi in 1945 as part of the revolutionary regime’s diplomatic charm offensive to American officials. From its headquarters on 796 Ninth Avenue in New York City, the organization’s representatives “spoke about the issue of Vietnam and spread propaganda in favor of Vietnamese civilization” and raised money for the DRV cause (MAE, CPC n.d.a). The association received support from prominent left-wing Americans like Richard Walsh, Norman Thomas, Roger Baldwin and Harold Issacs and was perhaps the earliest example of the many similar ties between DRV officials and the American left over the next generation (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1950).

As competing non-communist regimes began to emerge in Vietnam after 1945, they too served as an engine for a new and different kind of Vietnamese migration to the United States. In early 1946, Đoàn Hữu Giam, a functionary in the Autonomous Region of Cochinchina, travelled to New York to coordinate American purchases for the new state’s civil administration, and to set up a personal sideline importing American goods for resale in Saigon’s black market (ANOM, CONSPOL 1946). The formation in 1949 of the Associated State of Vietnam (ASV) led to Vietnam’s first formal diplomatic presence in the United States with the opening of the ASV’s embassy in Washington DC in 1952. Its first ambassador, Trần Văn Khá, who presented his credentials to President Truman on 1 July 1952, presided initially over a skeletal staff of four in the

embassy's office on Woodley Road behind the National Cathedral ("Diplomatic List" 1952, p. 175). By the 1960s, of course, the embassy would have a far larger home and staff. And as these diplomatic connections grew, direct travel to the United States became ever more essential to non-communist Vietnamese who sought to break the ASV out of the stranglehold of France's reconfigured post-war empire — most famously Ngô Đình Diệm, who barnstormed around the United States in the 1950s garnering support from journalists, senators, Supreme Court justices and Catholic bishops.

However, the First Indochina War also created a range of new reasons and opportunities for Vietnamese travel to the United States outside of formal diplomatic and political channels. The United States did not become a regular stop in the global travels of DRV-aligned Vietnamese — except in the famous case of Phạm Xuân Ẩn later in the 1950s, as a spy (Berman 2008). Nevertheless, for Vietnamese cultural elites outside of the communist orbit, migration to the United States became increasingly common in the 1940s, well before the United States assumed its position of influence over the non-communist Vietnamese state after partition. One emblematic illustration of this is the figure of one Tào Kim Hải. His early life was a portrait of the assimilated colonial elite; Catholic and a French citizen, he came to France for his studies in 1923, married a French woman, received a doctorate in law and became one of France's most prominent Vietnamese intellectuals, writing articles for newspapers such as *Le Petit Parisien* and *Paris-Soir*, as well as poetry and a history of Indochina that received a gold medal from *L'Académie française* in 1940. A staunch Gaullist, Tào Kim Hải took his first trip to the United States to help the Fourth Republic re-establish its empire; he was a French delegate to two international conferences in 1945 on post-war global affairs held in Hot Springs, Virginia and San Francisco. However, the rest of his life acquired a new centre of gravity; he stayed in the United States, remarried, and forged a new literary career writing for the *New Yorker*, *Esquire*, and *Gourmet* (ANOM, SLOTFOM n.d.d). Nguyễn Văn Thơ had a similar trajectory. After receiving a degree in dentistry from the Faculté de

Médecine in Paris, Nguyễn Văn Thờ returned to Vietnam to form a practice. He served as the Associated State of Vietnam's delegate to the World Assembly of Youth, which in 1951 met in Ithaca, New York. He too chose to continue his life in the United States; he continued his studies at Northwestern and did his residency in New York (*Viet Nam Bulletin*, August 1953, pp. 32–33). Although he returned to Vietnam for some time during the war, he returned to the United States for good in 1975.

Such life stories reveal how American involvement in Vietnam's decolonization began to forge new migratory patterns between the two countries during the late 1940s and early 1950s. For a young Tào Kim Hải seeking an elite education overseas during the 1920s, anywhere other than France was essentially unthinkable.<sup>2</sup> However, by the 1940s a few Vietnamese began to follow Nguyễn Văn Thờ's path and trickled into America's booming post-war universities. Nguyễn Đình Hoà, a member of an old literati family in Hanoi, had followed a typical colonial-era educational itinerary for elites and was working as a teacher when the outbreak of the war forced him to flee the city. He returned in mid-1947; after two unhappy weeks working for a French industrial firm, he took a job with the American consulate, where he impressed an important visitor: the Yale anthropologist John Embree, then working as a cultural attaché at the U.S. Consulate in Saigon. Embree urged him to apply for a scholarship from the American Institute of International Education; several months later, Nguyễn Đình Hoà was on a plane to study at Union College in Schenectady, New York, in "a country I had seen and admired only in French-subtitled movies and had occasionally read about in an old copy of Reader's Digest given to me by a G.I. whom I accosted in the street in 1945" (Nguyễn Đình Hòa 1999, p. 4). When he arrived in New York City he was met by three of the city's few Vietnamese residents. One of them, Lý Đức Lâm, came to the United States in 1942 to teach Vietnamese at the University of California-Berkeley, where he co-authored a textbook to learn Vietnamese commissioned by the American army. When Nguyễn Đình Hoà began his studies in 1948 he was one of four Vietnamese

students in the United States. He, along with Huỳnh Sanh Thông at Ohio University, would be instrumental in developing the field of Vietnamese Studies in the United States. By 1960, “729 South Vietnamese students and scholars had been trained in America”, hundreds of whom had studied public administration and law enforcement under the auspices of the Michigan State University Group (Nguyen An Tuan 2015, p. 91). They connected with one another through the General Association of Vietnamese in America (founded in 1953); after going home, they did so via the American University Alumni Association of Vietnam (founded in 1959). By the dawn of the American military intervention, in short, the increasingly intertwined projects of American imperialism and Vietnamese non-communist nationalism had given rise to a new set of forces shaping Vietnamese migration to the United States that reflected the radically new relationship between the two countries during the Cold War.

## Conclusion

The new forms and patterns of Vietnamese migration to the United States after 1945, only tentatively explored here, suggest the real limitations of twentieth-century approaches to Vietnam and America’s shared past. It may well be that Americans’ limited knowledge of and racist assumptions about Indochina, reflected in the writings of tourists and missionaries in the interwar era, helps explain why the United States intervened in Vietnam and how Americans behaved when they were there. It may also be that the many muddled political signifiers — from anti-colonial revolution to capitalist imperialism — that defined “America” for the few Vietnamese involved in radical politics during the colonial era shaped their thoughts and actions in the cultural and political landscape of the Cold War. However, the stories of migration reconstructed here suggest that for most Vietnamese, 1945 did not signify a gradual and inexorable intertwining of Vietnamese and American history; it was a sudden and radical reconfiguration of America’s presence in the consciousness of people for whom “America” meant very different things before

1945 than after it. The travels of Vietnamese in interwar America unfortunately do not offer as thorough and thoughtful a portrait of American society as the writings of Chinese travellers during this era (Arkush and Lee 1989). That said, their experiences suggest that travelling to the United States gave rise to more complex ideas about the country than the abstract, often idealistic portrait of the United States as the crucible of modern anti-colonialism that appear in the writings of Vietnamese political radicals. Even before stepping foot on America's shores, many of these travellers experienced its strict migration regime that discriminated against them because of their race, in at least one case (Bùi Thanh Vân, a French citizen) despite their legal status. Once they had entered the country, they witnessed the systemic racism that defined relationships between Americans of different skin colours, at times criticizing it and at others accepting it as the natural order of things. They evinced similarly mixed views of America's meteoric economic growth, at times marvelling at its achievements and at others criticizing the chaotic, dirty and anonymizing character of some American cities and the crass materialism of some of their residents. Perhaps most importantly, they clearly understood the interwar United States to be not just a nation but an empire, even if some of them viewed it more favourably than the empire they lived under.

These travellers were exceptions; virtually no Vietnamese travelled to the United States before 1945. However, nearly all literate and urban Vietnamese encountered America while reading newspapers, shopping in higher-end stores, going to the movies, or in occasional encounters with missionaries or employees of American companies in Vietnam. And the histories of migration explored here raise broader questions about how these other Vietnamese first thought about a country that would later loom so large in their lives. Much like it did for the few Vietnamese who actually went there, the "America" that Vietnamese encountered during the interwar era in fact represented simultaneously far more and far less than what it did for anti-colonial radicals who thought about the world principally in political terms. For most Vietnamese, "America" was not the heroic

example of the American Revolution or figures like Abraham Lincoln or George Washington, but a haphazard melange of newspaper stories about everything from the Lindbergh kidnapping to tennis; imported products like dried fruit, canned goods and machined textiles; weekend trips to watch Mae West or the Marx Brothers; or Protestant pamphlets prophesizing the end of days pressed into their reluctant hands. Anne Foster has argued that people throughout Southeast Asia during the interwar era “consumed American culture in ways which European and American observers found idiosyncratic, unsettling both expectations and fears” (Foster 2010, p. 75). Indeed, for Vietnamese before the Cold War, “America” was a mottled and jumbled tapestry of objects and meanings that historians have yet to meaningfully understand on their own terms. Those historians who explore this question beyond the few travellers who actually set foot on America’s shores will do much to disengage the history of early American-Vietnamese encounters from the war-centric narratives where this history still resides.

At the risk of being overly quixotic, allow me to offer an alternative conclusion. It is evident that even alternative narratives of early “Vietnamese-American encounters” ultimately only reinforce the war’s hegemony in metanarratives of modern Vietnamese history. Indeed, I fully admit that for most readers, myself perhaps included, the intrinsic interest of the histories reconstructed here is that they are about Vietnamese *in the United States*, not in the many other places around the world where Vietnamese travelled, worked and lived during the interwar era. However, in the end, if we reject, as I do, the idea that these histories are somehow important to the history of the Vietnam War, does any justification remain for their singularity? This article, for example, could easily have been about how Vietnamese travellers experienced Colombo, or Djibouti, or Aden — tens of thousands of Vietnamese stopped in these places on their way to and from France, and dozens left detailed impressions of them. The fact that this article is about the United States, not one of those other places, may only reinscribe the artificial exceptionalism of interwar Vietnamese-American encounters, even in trying to criticize

it. Ultimately, a more effective critique of this historiographical teleology might simply have been not to write this article at all.

### Acknowledgements

I would like to thank James Nach for kindly providing several documents that were crucial to the writing of this article.

**Charles Keith** is Associate Professor of History at Michigan State University, 506 East Circle Drive, East Lansing, MI 48824, USA; e-mail: ckeith@msu.edu.

### NOTES

1. Intriguingly, my research turned up a version of the Bùi Viện story that predates the earliest version of the story noted by Wilcox by fourteen years. Serialized in the Saigon newspaper *Đuốc Nhà Nam* on 9 and 10 February 1931 as “Một trang lịch sử ngoại giao của nước ta: chuyện ông Bùi Phùng qua Huê Kỳ” (An account from our nation’s diplomatic history: Bùi Phùng in the United States), this version claims that the intrepid ambassador-to-be was in fact Bùi Viện’s younger brother Bùi Phùng, and that his trip to America took place in response to the French invasion of Cochinchina in the late 1850s. The serialized article unfortunately stops part way through the story and only identifies its author by the initials “A.Đ.”.
2. Further research may challenge this point; Anne Foster has discovered the presence of a Vietnamese student in the United States as early as 1921, who decided to study there after a dissatisfying experience in France, where “he had been treated ‘with too much scorn and had been accorded no freedom,’ but in America, ‘the best civilization in the world’, he was learning and prospering” (Foster 2010, p. 73).

### REFERENCES

#### Archival References

Archives du Ministère des Affaires Etrangères [Archives of the Foreign Ministry], Correspondance politique et commerciale [Political and commercial correspondence] (MAE, CPC). “Activités des résidents vietnamiens” [Activities of Vietnamese residents]. 174QO (uncatalogued carton number 3), n.d.a.

Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer [National overseas archives], Fonds du Haut Commissariat de France pour l’Indochine, Service Politique [Documents of the Political Service of the French High Commissariat for Indochina]



- (ANOM, CONSPOL). “Letter from Đoàn Hữu Giam to his brother”. 25 January 1946. Dossier no. 134.
- Archives Nationales d’Outre Mer [National Overseas Archives], Fonds de la Service de Liaison avec les originaires des territoires français d’outre-mer [Documentation of the Service of liaison with natives of French overseas territories] (ANOM, SLOTFOM). “Letter from ‘Đông’ to Nguyễn Khắc Vinh”. 24 March 1930. Dossier “Đông”. XV.150.
- . “Note sur Nguyễn Văn Trường” [Note on Nguyễn Văn Trường]. May 1933. Dossier Nguyễn Văn Trường. XV.45.
- . “Note relative à l’activité de la délégation hochiminhienne” [Note regarding the activities of the Ho Chi Minh delegation]. 23 June 1948. XIV.5.
- . “Note pour Monsieur le conseiller diplomatique, Saigon. Objet: activités Viet Minh aux U.S.A.” [Note for Mr. the Diplomatic Consul, Saigon. Object: Viet Minh activities in the United States.]. 15 June 1950. Dossier Phạm Duy Âm. XV.110.
- . n.d.a. Dossier Nguyễn Văn Địch. XV.46.
- . n.d.b. Dossier Đào Nhật Vinh. XV.83.
- . n.d.c. Dossier Trần Văn Thê. XV.33.
- . n.d.d. Dossier Tào Kim Hải. XV.109.

### Published References

- A.Đ. “Một trang lịch sử ngoại giao của nước ta: chuyện ông Bùi Phùng qua Huê Kỳ” [An account from our nation’s diplomatic history: Bùi Phùng in the United States]. *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, 9 and 10 February 1931.
- . “Có mấy người Việt Nam qua Huê-kỳ dự cuộc đấu-xảo Chicago” [Some Vietnamese have gone to participate in the Chicago exposition]. *Đuốc Nhà Nam*, 14 October 1933.
- Angleviel, Frédéric. “De l’engagement comme ‘esclavage volontaire’. Le cas des Océaniens, Kanaks et Asiatiques en Nouvelle-Calédonie (1853–1963)” [Enlistment as ‘voluntary slavery’: the case of Oceanians, Kanak, and Asians in New Caledonia (1853–1963)]. *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 110, (2000): 65–81.
- Arkush, R. David, and Leo O. Lee, eds. *Land without Ghosts: Chinese Impressions of America from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Berman, Larry. *Perfect Spy: The Incredible Double Life of Pham Xuan An, Time Magazine Reporter and Vietnamese Communist Agent*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2008.
- Bradley, Mark Philip. *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of*

- Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Bùi Thanh Vân. *La France: Relations de Voyage* [France: accounts of a journey]. Huế: Imprimerie Dac Lap, 1922.
- . *Le Tour du Monde par un Annamite* [A tour of the world by an Annamite]. Huế: Imprimerie Bui Huy Tin, 1930.
- Đặng Văn Long. *Người Việt ở Pháp, 1940–1954* [Vietnamese in France, 1940–1954]. Paris: Tủ Sách Nghiên Cứu, 1997.
- “Diplomatic List”. Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office. December 1952.
- Duiker, William. *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
- Foster, Anne. *Projections of Power: The United States and Europe in Colonial Southeast Asia, 1919–1941*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2010.
- Goebel, Michael. *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Goscha, Christopher. “Récits de voyage vietnamiens et prise de conscience indochinoise (c. 1920–c.1945)” [Vietnamese travel narratives and the emergence of an Indochinese consciousness]. In *Récits de voyages asiatiques: genres, mentalités, conception de l’espace: actes du colloque EFEO-EHESS de décembre 1994* [Asian travel accounts: genres, mentalities, conceptions of space: proceedings of the EFEO-EHESS colloquium of December 1994], edited by Claudine Salmon, pp. 253–79. Paris: Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1996.
- . *Going Indochinese: Contesting Concepts of Space and Place in French Indochina*. Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012.
- . *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885–1954*. London: Routledge, 2016.
- Granier, Solene. *Domestiques Indochinois* [Indochinese domestic servants]. Paris: Editions Vendémiaire, 2014.
- Hémery, Daniel. “Du patriotisme au marxisme: l’immigration Vietnamienne en France de 1926 à 1930” [From patriotism to Marxism: Vietnamese immigration to France from 1926 until 1930]. *Le mouvement sociale* 90 (1975): 3–54.
- Kim Sinh. “Ai muốn gửi thư bằng tàu bay sang Mỹ” [To those wishing to send a letter to the United States by airplane]. *Tiếng Dân*, 23 March 1939.
- Lê Văn Đức, Jacques. “Avis a ceux qui veulent aller en Amérique” [Advice for those who want to go to America]. *L’Echo Annamite*, 6 October 1928.

- Le Van Ho, Mireille. *Des vietnamiens dans la Grande Guerre: 50000 recrues dans les usines françaises* [Vietnamese in the Great War: 50,000 recruits in French factories]. Paris: Vendémiaire, 2014.
- Lê Văn Lương. “Aloha! ... Hawaii ... Honolulu”. *Tràng Án Báo*, 23 April 1941a.
- . “Aloha! ... Hawaii ... Honolulu”. *Tràng Án Báo*, 25 April 1941b.
- . “Hawaii ... Aloha! ... Tabou”. *Tràng Án Báo*, 26 April 1941c.
- . “Bước chân đến tân thế giới” [A step towards the new world]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 12 May 1941d.
- . “Gặp một đồng bào Việt Nam tại San Francisco” [Meeting a Vietnamese compatriot in San Francisco]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 12 June 1941e.
- . “Los Angelès: kinh đô xứ California” [Los Angeles: the capital of California]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 14 and 20 June 1941f.
- . “Hollywood: kinh đô chiếu bóng” [Hollywood: the capital of film]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 21 June, 1 and 5 July 1941g.
- . “Hai người Việt Nam ở Hollywood” [Two Vietnamese in Hollywood]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 5 July 1941h.
- . “Một vị đại thân Việt Nam dưới triều Tự Đức sang Chicago (Hoa kỳ) lấy vợ người Mỹ để được một người con gái” [An official of the Tự Đức court travelled to Chicago (the United States), married an American woman and had a daughter]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 10 October 1941i.
- . “Người Việt Nam trong làng ‘gangsters’ ở Nữu Ước” [Vietnamese in New York, the village of ‘gangsters’]. *Tràng Án Báo*, 13 October 1941j.
- . *Đông Bào Việt Nam ở Hải Ngoại* [Vietnamese compatriots overseas]. Hanoi: Thủy Ký, 1941k.
- Leprun, Sylviane. *Le théâtre des colonies: Scénographie, acteurs, et discours de l’imaginaire dans les expositions, 1855–1937* [The colonial theatre: scenography, actors, and discourses of the imaginary, 1855–1937]. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1986.
- Marr, David. *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.
- McConnell, Scott. *Leftward Journey: The Education of Vietnamese Students in France, 1919–1939*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1989.
- McKeown, Adam. *Melancholy Order: Asian Migratino and the Globalization of Borders*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Miller, Robert Hopkins. *The United States and Vietnam, 1787–1941*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1990.
- Nach, James, and Thủy Dương Nach. “The Dương Minh Đồng Family of Bắc Ninh, Việt Nam: The Impact of Tradition, Colonialism, World War, and Revolution on a Vietnamese Family”. Unpublished manuscript, n.d.

- Nguyen An Tuan. "More Than Just Refugees: A Historical Overview of Vietnamese Professional Migration to the United States". *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 10, no. 3 (2015): 87–125.
- Nguyễn Đình Hoà. *From the City Inside the Red River: A Cultural Memoir of Mid-Century Vietnam*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1999.
- Quinn-Judge, Sophie. *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Trần Văn Tựu. "Lại một cuộc đầu xảo nữa" [Another exposition]. *Hà Thành Ngộ Báo*, 20 January 1934.
- Viet Nam Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (January 1953).
- 1, no. 8 (September 1953).
- Vu Hong Pham. "Beyond and Before Boat People: Vietnamese-American History before 1975". Doctoral thesis, Department of History, Cornell University, 2002.
- Wilcox, Wynn. *Allegories of the Vietnamese Past: Unification and the Production of a Modern Historical Identity*. New Haven: Yale University Council on Southeast Asian Studies, 2011.