

IDEOLOGY IN URBAN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1950-1975

A Dissertation

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by

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Abstract

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This dissertation addresses the subject of noncommunist political and cultural ideology in urban South Vietnam during 1954-1975. It contributes to the historiography of the Vietnam War, specifically on the long-neglected Republic of Vietnam (RVN) that has received greater attention in the last decade. The basic argument is that the postcolonial ideological vision of most urban South Vietnamese diverged greatly from that of the Vietnamese communist revolutionaries. This vision explains for the puzzling question on why the communist revolutionaries were far more effective in winning the minds and hearts of Vietnamese in countryside than in cities. At the same time, this vision was complicated by the uneasy relationship with the Americans.

The dissertation examines four aspects in particular. First is the construction of anticommunism: Although influenced by Cold War bipolarity, anticommunism in urban South Vietnam was shaped initially and primarily by earlier differences about modernity and post-colonialism. It was intensified through intra-Vietnamese experiences of the First Indochina War.

The second aspect is the promotion of individualism. Instead of the socialist person as advocated by communist revolutionaries, urban South Vietnamese promoted a *bourgeois petit* vision of the postcolonial person. Much of the sources for this promotion came from the West, especially France and the U.S. But it was left to urban South Vietnamese writers to interpret and promote what this person ought to be.

The third one concerns the development of nationalism. Urban South Vietnam continued to uphold the views of nationalism developed during late colonialism, such as the elevation of national heroes and the essentialization of Vietnamese civilization. Noncommunist South Vietnamese urbanites were influenced by ethnic nationalism, although they also developed the tendency to look towards other newly independent nations for nationalistic inspiration and ideas about their own postcolonial nation.

The last aspect has to do with the relationship with Americans: The views of urban South Vietnamese on the U.S. were generally positive during the early years of the RVN. But there was also wariness that burst into resentment and anti-Americanism after Washington Americanized the war in 1965. The dissertation looks into two very different urban groups in order to extract the variety of sources about anti-Americanism.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the summer of 1923, twenty-five-year-old C.S. Lewis was at Oxford University and wrote the following in one of his many letters to his father:

Before everything else let me thank you heartily... I hope some day to repay these long years of education in the only way in which they can be repaid – by success and distinction in the kind of life which they aim at. But that is partly in the power of fortune and in the meantime I can only record that I am not foolish enough to take these things for granted and that the thought of how much you are doing for me is often, even insistently, before my mind.

No longer young but middle-aged, thinking about not only my father but also many people during my graduate studies, I nonetheless share the sentiments of young man Lewis. After this dissertation, any formal academic acknowledgments will likely be short due to page limit imposed by publishers. So I shall seize upon this opportunity to pen a paean of sorts: an essay of appreciation, thanksgiving, gratitude, indebtedness. (I will try to keep it under ten pages.) A Vietnamese proverb goes, *Đi một ngày đàng, học một sàng khôn*: Travel for a day and learn a sieve-full of wisdom. Substitute “years” for “a day” and “history” for “wisdom,” and you get a fair idea about the long journey I had. As early as my first year of working on the dissertation, I jotted down the names of people and institutions that I wanted to make sure of thanking at the end. At some point I stopped keeping track, no doubt because it took me a lot longer to finish and because there were so many to remember. I am bound to forget some of the names that ought to appear in this section. Forgiveness is humbly requested ahead of time.

The first acknowledgment must go to the Graduate School and the Department of History at the University of Notre Dame. Money talks – and it enables. Financial support from the Department and the Graduate School, in forms of fellowships and grants for research and travels, made it possible for me to engage in reading, writing, thinking, visiting archives, presenting papers, and, no less significant, teaching about the Vietnam War for the first time. Within the Department, I am much grateful for various Directors of Graduate Studies who helped me with institutional support over the years. A special thanks goes to Remie Constable who served as DGS during my first three years. She recruited me, dispensed wise counsel, and, for an important semester, led a valuable weekly meeting for teaching assistants.

Having read more than a few dissertation acknowledgments, I was struck by a general lack of references to the people involved in one's studies prior to the dissertation phase. It could not be a sign of ingratitude, but perhaps the consequence of a certain unspoken rule about acknowledging assistance during dissertation work only? Anyway, my pre-doctoral training was all-too-formative that I shall not let it pass unmentioned. "We little note," wrote Michael Kammen not long ago in the *Reviews of American History*, "how often historians declare that their undergraduate mentors made all the difference, and in many cases are remembered with greater enthusiasm than their graduate school committee." Prof. Kammen's insight might well be true about many historians, even most. But perhaps because I did not major in history in college, a large chunk of my enthusiasm has to do with professors in graduate school. It began at the Catholic University of America, where I spent one semester and received a terrific introduction to graduate studies of history from three wonderful teachers: Uta-Renate

Blumenthal, Stephen West, and Robert Schneider. Individually and collectively, they showed me the breadth and depth of historical inquiry and, indirectly, persuaded me that I was meant to go after Clio. In particular, Prof. Schneider, now editor of the *American Historical Review*, did a masterly job in his course on methodology and opened my mind to the glories and pitfalls about different historical approaches. At Notre Dame, I was blessed to learn from an assortment of specialists: Thomas Slaughter, David Waldstreicher, James Turner, John McGreevy, and Wilson Miscamble in American history; Gary Hamburg, Semion Lyandres, and Thomas Kselman in modern European history; and Dian Murray in modern Chinese history. Participating in their seminars and colloquia and individual studies constituted some of the happiest times in my life, in and out of academia. Each setting was unique for the composition of people, the selectivity of subject matters, and the interactions between the two. All of them were memorable. One instance will have to suffice here: Jim Turner's colloquium on nineteenth-century America was as large in the number of participants as it was abundant and varied in humor – dry, wry, witty, otherwise. Excellence in teaching is close to my heart, and my first exposure of teaching came from assisting Jay Dolan, Steve Brady, Jon Coleman, and Marc Rodriguez in their courses. In my last two years in residence, I benefited from participation in the Graduate Writing Group led by Doris Bergen and, later, Alex Martin. In between were many valuable departmental colloquia and enhancing one-on-one conversations with Dan Graff, Julia Thomas, Gail Bederman, Brad Gregory, and Fr. Tom Blantz, among others. My experience of the Department was nothing but remarkable, starting with a faculty that were as top-notch in research as they were generous in time and spirit. Thank you all, Docs!



The ideal life, Mark Twain famously said, would consist of “good friends, good books, and a sleepy conscience.” I hope that my conscience has been alert than sleepy. But I sure could claim to having had more than a few good books and good friends during the years in South Bend. There were too many conversations with too many people – both “intellectually stimulating” and “shooting the breeze” varieties; both within and without of the Department of History – that I *will* unintentionally forget some names here. I wish to thank Jennifer Dasal, Steve Nazaran, David Thunder, James Helmer, Matt Mendham, Matt Allison, Ryan Berndt, Maria Valenzuela, Dan Borses, Julie Bergner, Mimi Arima, Aida Ramos, Cong Nguyen, Sam Cahill, David Swartz, Danielle Du Bois Gottwig, Erin Miller, Neil Dhingra, Tom Rzeznik, Andrew and Suzanne Orr, Michael Kelly, Charles Strauss, Melinda Grimsley-Smith, and Teasel-Muir Harmony. I shall not forget my first teaching assignment with Angel Cortes and Mike Lee. Where else but at Notre Dame that the three TAs for a popular class on Irish-American history included a Cuban-born, a Korean-born, and a Vietnamese-born grad students? I owe a deep gratitude to Joan Arbery and Hans Roegele for their abiding friendship perhaps best captured by those Riesling-sipping gatherings on Wednesday evenings. Thanks also goes to Sean Brennan, with whom I shared long conversations on history, sports, movies, and other topics over lunch at various restaurants throughout the South Bend area. Sean and David Swartz have also inspired me with their productivity, best exemplified by the quality books that they brought out not too long after graduation and on top of many family obligations. Thank you, fellas, all of you, for having shared in the experience.

Moving on to the dissertation itself, I am thoroughly thankful for the members of my committee: Dian Murray, John McGreevy, Jonathan Nashel, and Wilson Miscamble.

I received much encouragement from them during research and writing, and it goes without saying that their critical comments were enormously helpful and insightful. In different ways, they forced me to think more deeply, widely, and sharply. In addition, they exerted more formative influence on me than they might have realized. Prior to obtaining ABD status, I benefited from their works in, respectively, social, intellectual, cultural, and diplomatic history. Then and later, their advice helped me navigate among the possibilities and challenges of dissertation work. To a still impressionable student drawn to research topics as different as fast food history and the history of seminary curricula, John McGreevy pointed at the obvious fact that I knew Vietnamese and should use it for research. When I was about to leave for the first research trip, Jonathan Nashel cautioned me to be careful with newspapers because they could easily draw me to all sorts of directions. While it took me a long time to complete this dissertation, it might have been longer had it not been for Jonathan's seasoned advice. Before the same trip, Dian Murray asked a simple yet probing question: "What exactly is this dissertation about?" The question haunted me for the next eighteen months, albeit helpfully, as I navigated through a sea of materials from Cornell University and elsewhere. In a sense, this dissertation could not take the shape that it did without Dian's pristine question. I wish to thank all three readers for their work and support on my behalf.

Most of all, I am indebted to the Rev. Wilson Miscamble, CSC, for his agreement to be my advisor and his dedicated service afterwards. Like at least two generations of undergraduate students at Notre Dame now, I know him as "Fr. Bill" who speaks with a slight Aussie accent and calls students "mates." In my second year at Notre Dame, he called attention to George Herring's important essay about South Vietnamese: the

lynchpin of my dissertation. During the research phase, he provided wonderful and plentiful intellectual and moral support. He read my drafts with great care and gave countless corrections and critical comments. His support has been invaluable for my growth as a historian, and there is no question that his patience with this problem student has earned him a ticket to heaven. Moreover, my wife and I are grateful for his moral support during a challenging time. Thank you, Padre, for everything!

Going on the road, I wish to thank the staff at the Vietnam Center and Archive at Texas Tech University for an informative tour and for answering various email questions since then. One day into my first trip to Cornell, I learned that most materials in the John M. Echols Collection were located at the Library Annex. I went to the Annex the next morning and, in a sense, have never left it. I wish to thank John Howard and other staff members at the Annex for their speedy, reliable, and cheerful service. “Time flies when you’re having goal-motivated fun,” said a statement from the Association for Psychological Science. There were few other places outside of the Annex’s reading room that I felt more motivated and had more fun. It remains one of my favorite places on earth, thanks in no small part to its staff. Because the bulk of my primary materials consisted of Vietnamese-language publications, I depended heavily on Interlibrary Loan at the institutions where I was associated during the course of the dissertation. At Notre Dame, Kenneth Kinslow and his staff provided unparalleled service to an eager researcher who wanted to get his hands on a seemingly endless stream of books and periodicals from Ann Arbor to Paris. At University of California, Riverside (UCR), Janet Moores and her staff were unfailing in assisting me obtain another long stream of materials from the UC Libraries system and elsewhere. At Cal State San Bernardino

(CSUSB), Lee Bayer was always prompt in responding to my requests. In a sense, the archives came to me thanks to the fine work of those Interlibrary Loan folks. To them I sing a song of gladness and thanksgiving.

My dissertation led me to Vietnam Studies, and there are a number of people that I wish to acknowledge here. I first met Lien-Hang Nguyen when she was at Harvard on another of her prestigious fellowships. She bought me lunch and filled me in about Vietnam Studies and the people who populated it. This was the beginning to many encounters, conversations, and communications about the Vietnam War and Vietnamese history with a host of people. I recall, for instances, a long after-dinner conversation with Ed Wehrle in South Bend while dropping him off at campus, a talk with Ken MacLean during a conference cruise on Lake Union in Seattle, and a most hilarious time driving and conversing with Seth Jacobs on snowy Interstate 10 in Massachusetts. They were only three of many happy exchanges with historians and other scholars. For their insights and assistance, I wish to single out Sophie Quinn-Judge, Philippe Peycam, Peter Hansen, Peter Zinoman, Tuong Vu, Grace Chew, Thuy Tranviet, Christoph Giebel, Shawn McHale, Matthew Masur, Ang Cheng Guan, David Hunt, and Jason Gibbs. Extra gratitude is owed to Nu-Anh Tran, Wynn Wilcox, and Edward Miller for providing incisive comments on an early draft of an early dissertation chapter. I used to joke that my dissertation would be completed when Ed Miller finished his book on Ngo Dinh Diem. I am now happy to report that the dissertation defense occurred around the same time as the release of his important monograph from Harvard University Press. Elsewhere, I wish to credit the Vietnam Studies Group (VSG) and its excellent discussion listserv that has spurred many stimulating threads on sundry topics about the Vietnam

War and Vietnamese history, culture, and language. There is nothing like this listserv, to put it mildly, and I would like to thank Judith Henchy for her long-time service in overseeing and moderating the listserv. A general appreciation goes to the many posters who have answered my questions or enlightened me on countless subject matters. Another appreciation – a somewhat unusual one – goes to François Guillemot and Christopher Goscha for several articles they published before and during my dissertation work. I have never met them, or even exchanged a single email with either. (I once heard Goscha speak for a minute at a VSG meeting.) But there is no question that I was inspired by their scrappy and inventive efforts to sort through disparate materials and put together fascinating narratives and persuasive analyses in those articles. In a way, they showed me how to look and what to do with Vietnamese-language published sources. Their works reflect the broader creativity and productivity from a new generation of historians, and I am fortunate to have benefited from this new wave of research.

A Notre Dame pre-doctoral fellowship brought me to UCR for an academic year, and I wish to pass on my appreciation to several individuals for their hospitality and generosity. The first thanks goes to Deborah Wong for her welcoming and cheerful spirit in organizing my presentation for SEATRiP. Elsewhere on campus, Mariam Lam bought me a delicious lunch and acquainted me to the field of Vietnamese American studies. (On this subject, I wish to thank also Lan Duong, Thuy Vo Dang, and Dan Tsang for their insights and conversations.) For two summery months, Christina Schwenkel and her husband Rudi left me in charge of their lovely little home. I am still sorry that several of their plants died due to my negligence. But I remain grateful for the use of their place as “home away from home” during what turned out to be a critical revision and

experimentation on how I would teach the Vietnam War. Above all, my gratitude goes to David Biggs who served as my host and mentor during the fellowship year. I learned a lot from watching him teach about the Vietnam Wars, and a lot more from knowing him. His support for me went far and beyond his line of duty, and his friendship has been invaluable to me long after the fellowship. Speaking of teaching, it is difficult to think of my growth as a historian of the Vietnam Conflict without the students that took my course on the war at Notre Dame, UCR, and the Palm Desert Campus of CSUSB. Without knowing it, they provided me with an opportunity to craft and re-craft a coherent and interesting history of the war and even to integrate a small portion of my research into lectures. With hope and excitement, I look forward to students who will take the course in the future. With fondness and appreciation, I look back to students who took it in the last few years.

Beyond the confines of academia, my affection and gratitude goes to the members of my family, both immediate and extended. My parents Hân and Hồng, my siblings Hà, Huy, and Nga, my sister-in-law Loan and brother-in-law Cường, and my nieces and nephews provided moral support and put me up at their places on many occasions. I owed a big thanks to a number of relatives who took me in during my travels for research and conferences: chị Cúc, anh Đai, Quỳnh, Bảo, Xuân, Toàn, and Quyên in Massachusetts; anh Hải and chị Mỹ in Pennsylvania; Chiến and Trang in Texas; and Thảo and Bửu, cô Liên and chú Lịch, and cô Doan and Lisa and Jason in California. Another appreciation goes to fellow Notre Dame history grad student Dixie Lane, who led me to the Dillon household in Riverside. It was a joy to have shared my daily life with Jim, Johnny, and Jimmy during my fellowship year, and I remain grateful for their

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I have reached the end of the tenth page, and formal acknowledgments will have to stop here. But gratitude and appreciation goes on in the heart. *Xin chân thành cảm ơn mọi người:* My sincere thanks to all of you!

INTRODUCTION  
URBAN SOUTH VIETNAM IN THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE  
AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Wartime Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities have fared poorly in Western histories, narratives, and imaginaries, especially American ones. Speaking a year after the arrival of U.S. combat troops to the Southeast Asian country, Senator William Fulbright, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and a strong critic of intervention, remarked famously that Saigon “has become an American brothel.”<sup>1</sup> More than a few Americans would have concurred in the bordello image. “I’ve got mixed feelings about Saigon,” a Marine lance corporal stationed in South Vietnam wrote in a letter dated in the same month as Fulbright’s remark, “and as a foreigner, I will probably lean towards the bad on this.” He found the physical “filth” in the city to be “beyond anyone’s wildest dreams,” and that he could “never live in Saigon with a family or by myself because there is such a difference in conditions.” The Marine advised his intended readers not to “believe in this old saying about how wise the old folks are from the Far East.” Why? Because they had a “knack for using ‘ear-catching’ sayings and ways to express or bring about what they want to say, but no more than the American

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<sup>1</sup> “Saigon No brothel, Mrs. Lord Asserts,” *New York Times* (May 7, 1966), 11. According to Fulbright, he said that Saigon was “literally and figuratively an American brothel” and expressed “regret” for the controversy around the remark made in passing while addressing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. However, Fulbright insisted that the press had misconstrued his remark. See “Apologia pro Verbis Suis,” *Time* (May 27, 1966), <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,835664,00.html>; and Randall Bennett Woods, *Fulbright: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 424.



salesman.” Other Vietnamese in Saigon were “mostly money-hungry [and] anti-American,” with bar girls especially skillful at manipulating Americans to “throw away their money on different bars all the time.” Even worse, the Vietnamese “even cheat one another and you can’t trust them.”<sup>2</sup>

The Marine’s private judgments found echoes and confirmations in numerous public publications and statements during the war. “Saigon itself has never looked worse,” remarked the reporter A. J. Langguth after his third stay in South Vietnam. “It has,” he added, comparatively, “surpassed Milan and Chicago to challenge Calcutta as the worst city on earth.”<sup>3</sup> Invoking two other world cities, Frances FitzGerald offered in her award-winning book *Fire in the Lake* that a “Tokyo or Berlin could perhaps accommodate an American occupation and survive with some of its privacy intact, some of its leaders uncorrupted.” Saigon, however, was a “small and terrified city,” and the “vast influx of American dollars had almost as much influence on it as the bombing had on the countryside.”<sup>4</sup> FitzGerald elaborated on the corruption enabled by American money and stated that “only a small elite had profited” in the First Indochina War “a considerable sector of the urban population was involved” by the Second. They were restaurant owners and hotel managers, government and Post Exchange (PX) clerks, bar girls and prostitutes, professional beggars and drugs dealers and pimps and thieves: in short, “a Brechtian cast of characters in the midst of a new Thirty Years’ War.”<sup>5</sup> In even

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard Edelman, ed., *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (New York, 1985), 107.

<sup>3</sup> A. J. Langguth, “1964: Exhilaration 1968: Frustration 1970: Hopelessness,” *New York Times* (October 4, 1970), 220. Langguth had worked for *Time* and was based in Saigon.

<sup>4</sup> Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Back Bay Publishing, 2002), 351-352. The original edition was from Little, Brown, and Company, 1972.

<sup>5</sup> FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 350; it refers to William Fulbright’s “brothel” remark but gives the wrong year.

greater details, William Lederer, co-author of the best-selling novel *The Ugly American* and frequent visitor to South Vietnam, wrote about encountering “small Vietnamese boys” in Cho Lon, Saigon’s Chinatown district, demanding ‘watch-your-jeep [or scooter] for money.’” “These miniature gangsters,” the novelist wryly recalled, “shook down American customers almost directly in front of the U.S. Army guards.” Near the U.S. embassy, he found the “Little Black Market” that was “only one bit of crookedness in the vast cesspool of cupidity.” Most items at black markets in urban South Vietnam were either stolen from PXs or sold illegally by people that ran them, making racketeering a swollen business among Vietnamese, Americans, Filipinos, and South Koreans. Entering one PX, Lederer found clerks to be Vietnamese women that spoke “little, if any, English” and were “on average... uninterested and discourteous.” Private quarters were not pleasant either. Entering a house rented to Americans by Vietnamese, Lederer smelled a stench that “came from sewage which backs up through the toilet every time there is rain.” The roof had holes; the kitchen had no stove; the landlord, “a major in the South Vietnamese Army,” demanded any furniture brought in by American renters would stay there after the tenants leave. At least the major took advantage of the more wealthy Americans rather than the less well-off Vietnamese. More repulsive were the Saigon police that exploited the people they were supposed to protect – their own people – for money and power.<sup>6</sup>

Even more sympathetic Western visitors and observers found much to dislike or despair about the urban scene. In *The Face of South Vietnam*, a coffee-table-size book whose pages evenly divided between text and photographs taken mostly in cities during

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<sup>6</sup> William J. Lederer, *Our Own Worst Enemy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1968), 94, 98, 101, and 130.

1965 and 1966, there appear a number of visual images showing what might have passed for normality. Not unexpectedly for a country at war, there are also many more photographs of suffering, conflict, chaos, and problems. For every photograph showing playful urban schoolgirls in the national long dress (*ao dai*), there are three or four showing homeless children and parents in refugee camps or hospitals. For each image of residents celebrating a wedding in the neighborhood or admiring Modigliani-like paintings at a gallery, there are several of them burying a family member, protesting against the American presence, or looking helpless or hopeless. The text of the book confirms the uneven dualities. “It is necessary to know Saigon,” wrote the co-author Dean Brellis, “if you are to know anything about South Vietnam.” Why? Because towns and hamlets of Vietnam “are its lifeblood, but Saigon... is the town of dreams.” Yet, having seen Saigon during 1950, Brellis found “it has shrunk” in the mid-1960s. The city “had become a victim of changing times” as misfortune “appeared everywhere, gutters filled with trash and garbage, and [there was] a slow painful course of the traffic, far more intense and noisy than I had expected.” Survival was the main theme of the place: “Everyone is helpful in Saigon” but “for a price.” These survivors could be preteen boys that “work and hustle the streets, waiting for a sucker of a GI to come along, or a billfold to be picked.” Or they were grown-up sellers of dolls who had “no beauty left in their face,” who sat “immobile, morose, waiting for a customer” and, when spotting one, shouted, “Number one, number one, doll.” Or they were people from the countryside who “have run away from the war, from the villages and the land they belong,” a part of the “penniless influx that comprehends only one fact – that something good might happen in Saigon.” The city, in short, was “frantic with struggle,” had “a disturbing element,”

and featured “deceit,” which became “more pronounced as the war goes on and disillusion [was] based on every street corner.”<sup>7</sup>

Echoing Brelis’ growing despair was that of Robert Shaplen, reporter and sympathetic visitor to South Vietnam. Returning to Saigon in spring 1962, Shaplen found the city, which he “had always regarded as the loveliest of Southeast Asian capitals,” to have kept “its sense of buoyancy and well-being” even after recent imposition of morality laws by Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu, member of the National Assembly and sister-in-law to President Ngo Dinh Diem. At the same time, Saigon was “not far removed from the violent fratricidal revolution that was raging throughout the countryside, including areas a scant dozen miles from the city.” The airport Tan Son Nhut, for example, was no longer “drowsy” but “noisy.” Helicopters picked up and dropped off Vietnamese soldiers “like beetles”; “fighters and bombers buzzed” above; ships traveled below “bringing materials of war”; and streets were “teemed with uniformed Vietnamese and Americans.” The ominous signs turned pure ugliness two years later as Shaplen left the country shortly before the coup by General Nguyen Khanh over the military government that had overthrown Diem. The journalist returned to find Khanh as the new head of state and the city with a “new air of stridency.” Now prostitutes were “more brazen”; beggars “more professional”; and native “Teddy boys... went out of their way to pick fights with American servicemen.” “More than ever before in all the years I had known it,” Shaplen concluded by way of comparing the city to the human psyche, “Saigon seemed raw at the edges, as if the sores and strains it had so long

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<sup>7</sup> Dean Brelis and Jill Kremetz, *The Face of South Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), 10, 12, and 16-18. Brelis wrote the text and Kremetz took the photographs.

endured might at any moment prove too much too bear, and the whole city would fall apart.”<sup>8</sup>

It indeed fell apart by 1972, if not earlier. Making another visit that spring, Shaplen described the city, even when empty of American GIs, to be full of “tawdriness” and “dementia.” Visible were “demented people all over Saigon – most of them simply victims of war,” including ranting and raving “deranged war widows.” Even with fewer potential American customers, prostitutes continued to ply their trades while infections of venereal diseases were estimated at sixty-five percent. Present too were new and more numerous Teddy boys: “street boys of Saigon – wild, tough youngsters, many of them as young as nine or ten, and many of them orphans.” When not working as shoeshine boys, they picked pockets of pedestrians and stole from market shops and stalls and spent money on cigarettes and marijuana. Also ubiquitous were beggars, who could be anywhere from three years old to seventy. “Saigonese beggary,” the journalist observed, “has become more than an expression of poverty and despair,” plus a “special quality of self-degradation to it – of self-hatred and hatred of the foreigner who has reduced the whole society to shame and dependency.” There were also gangs of Vietnamese hippies, most of whom were “harmless” but some did jump on American GIs and civilians when not “deftly snatching watches off the wrists of pedestrians.” An American friend of Shaplen spoke more bluntly, “Poor Vietnam is the whore, America the pimp.” The neat formula might have guided the placement of sympathy from Western visitors, but did not make urban Vietnamese more bearable. In addition, there were omnipresent rats, noisy motorbikes, and terrible pollution. Echoing A. J. Langguth’s earlier comparison of the

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution: The U.S. in Vietnam, 1946-1966*, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 161 and 245.

city to Calcutta as the worst on earth, Shaplen thought Saigon possibly “the most heavily polluted city in the world, not excluding New York or Los Angeles.” “There is no doubt,” the journalist concluded more in sorrow than anger, “the Americans have altered the entire fabric of Saigon life, and one feels that a new breakdown is inevitable unless something drastic is done.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Postwar popular perceptions of urban South Vietnam**

Breakdown and regime change indeed arrived three springs later when South Vietnam lost ground rapidly to communist advances and surrendered unconditionally to the People’s Army (PAVN) from North Vietnam and the southern revolutionary National Liberation Front (NLF). The swift and ignominious end to an overlong conflict gave Americans another confirmation that U.S. involvement was a horrible mistake at best and a crime at worst. Through photographic images such as those of South Vietnamese climbing the walls of the American embassy in Saigon to escape the impending revolutionaries, the end of the Vietnam War perpetuated earlier perceptions of urban South Vietnam as a chaotic and awful place to be. It did not end there, however, as recollections and evaluations during the 1980s enlarged and deepened these perceptions. In his bestselling popular history of the war, the journalist Stanley Karnow described Saigon, Da Nang, Bien Hoa, and Vung Tau after American intervention as “cities that now acquired an almost medieval cast as beggars and hawkers roamed the streets,

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Shaplen, “Life in Saigon: Spring 1972,” *Reporting Vietnam: American Journalism 1959-1975* (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 554-557, 563, and 605. This article was first published in *The New Yorker* (April 15, 1972).

whining and tugging at Americans for money.”<sup>10</sup> In another bestseller, Neil Sheehan’s award-winning account of Colonel John Paul Vann, ordinary urban South Vietnamese appear variably as poor soldiers, refugees, workers for U.S. companies, or those “employed in the business of amusing the foreigners.” The last category had “prostitutes... at the top, followed by their pimps, and then by the taxi drivers who carried the Americans to and from their pleasures.” Elite among prostitutes were the bar girls, “pathetic creatures [that] flaunted themselves in makeup and clothes they did not know how to wear.” The bar girls “swelled their Vietnamese breasts with injections of silicone to attract the bosom-conscious Americans” and “had their eyelids Westernized by cosmetic surgery,” a practice that became “popular among young upper-class Saigonese women.” There were many refugees living in slums and scavenging at American dumps. There were beggars – “South Vietnam had always had some beggars,” wrote Sheehan – that included “widows, orphans, and amputees begging from Americans.” There were children that shouted at Americans for money and “formed gangs to pick pockets and steal.” Worst, however, were the people on top: “the generals and the Madame Generals, their friends the Mrs. Colonels, the Chinese middlemen in Cholon, and all the lesser crooks in the Saigon regime had laid before them an unprecedented feast of corruption, gargantuan in scale.” In particular, Sheehan singled out a military officer who was known as the “Icehouse General” for peddling the ice craved by Americans. The loathsome cast of characters included also rich Vietnamese and Chinese businessmen that took advantage of the construction boom geared towards the American presence by bribing for building permits, and narcotics dealers who made

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Viking Press, 1983), 439.

deep profits from supplying heroin to American soldiers and opium to their South Vietnamese counterparts.<sup>11</sup> Sheehan's portrayal of Saigon is closer to Lederer's than those of Shaplen, Brelis, and Fulbright. While the later group largely blamed American intervention for urban problem, Sheehan and Lederer expressed repulsion and even cynicism at the people there.

A variety of visual aids reinforced such perception. Similar to the voluminous photography during the war that confirmed written reports by Robert Shaplen and Brelis, postwar popular culture provided plenty of visual constructions to illustrate Sheehan's swift and forceful characterizations of urban South Vietnam. In Hollywood movies of the 1980s, Vietnamese urbanites typically appeared as peripheral or stock characters, typically as prostitutes, pickpockets, pimps, drug addicts, or people on the receiving ends of American largess. When given more time on the screen, as the principal Vietnamese character in the comedy *Good Morning, Vietnam*, they would turn out to be the Viet Cong in disguise. On stage, they appeared in the London and Broadway hit *Miss Saigon* as exploitative pimps, pathetic prostitutes, and helpless refugees. On television, the well-received PBS documentary series *Vietnam: A Television War* showed South Vietnamese in cities primarily as victims, survivors, and, in case of soldiers, young men who searched pockets of dead bodies for change during the Tet Offensive. For every few seconds of footage showing urban Boy Scouts playing together, there would be half a minute about bargirls and refugees. The only urbanites shown with any perceivable agency were the Buddhists in Hue and Saigon that took to the street and protested against the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in the spring and summer of 1963. Even there, they were seen to have

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<sup>11</sup> Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*, (New York: Random House, 1988), 624-627.



reacted to Diem's repression than to have exercised direction of their own, and vanished from the documentary's screen as suddenly as they appeared.<sup>12</sup>

The companion volumes to the documentary series devoted a little more space to them and other urbanites. It was more of the same. One volume, for instance, includes a section called "Saigon USA." Not only that the title betrays the American-centric perspective, but the text and accompanying photographs also give the distinct impression that it was a place of slum dwellers, bargirls, prostitutes, homeless children, black marketers of all ages, construction workers employed by US companies, and a small number of well-off youths that avidly followed American pop culture in the forms of rock music and Hollywood movies. The caption to one of the photographs – "Wartime Saigon was a hodgepodge of sights and sounds, a whirlwind of crowds, garish sights, honking vehicles, and, as this photo shows (at center), pickpockets" – sums up the perspective of both book and documentary.<sup>13</sup>

Such points of view did not change after the 1980s. In the well-received memoir of former CBS News reporter John Laurence, downtown Da Nang is described as being "full of bars: rows of crude, bright-colored joints that catered to Americans," where men "got drunk and affectionate and imagined the Vietnamese bar girls actually cared for their

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<sup>12</sup> There were wartime precedents to this depiction of suddenness. Narrating the same protests, Robert Shaplen, for instance, put them under the heading "The Buddhist Revolt Erupts." As suggested by the choice of verb, the protests were portrayed as unforeseen, sudden, episodic, and devoid of context other than Diem's repressiveness; see Shaplen, *The Lost Revolution*, 191. Another example was urban students that took to the street. The journalist and photographer Malcolm Browne described them as instigators of "riots" and "mass riots," that is, spontaneous and unorganized. As for Vietnamese in general, Browne considered them "by and large... apolitical anarchists in tendency, most need[ing] some kind of higher authority toward which they can turn with a degree of trust." See Malcolm W. Browne, *The New Face of War*, rev. ed. (Indianapolis and New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1968), 280 and 278. In short, there seemed to be no discernible patterns to political behavior and activities among urban South Vietnamese.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Doyle, Stephen Weiss, and the Editors of Boston Publishing Company, *A Collision of Cultures* (Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1984), 66-93.

company.” The same was true of Saigon, which was populated by bar girls and bar owners: the latter “mostly older Vietnamese men and women who had the dark forbidding appearance of gangsters and were reputed to have connections with the military.” The black market was massive and universal: “virtually everyone in the country,” wrote Laurence, “who could get U.S. dollars – soldiers, civilians, diplomats – exchanged them illegally on the black market for Vietnamese piastres” and made nice profits along the way.<sup>14</sup> Another memoir, by the American Tela Zasloff who accompanied her husband to the South Vietnamese capital for six months in 1964, describes Saigon before Americanization as “not really a city of war” but nonetheless a “disturbing dream.”<sup>15</sup> Zasloff recalled a few pleasant memories in the book, such as a well-attended piano concert that she gave, or locally grown papayas that tasted delicious. But they were easily outranked by negative experiences, such as finding traditional Vietnamese paintings “garish and crude,” or seeing mangos with a “slightly rotting smell” and durians that “sat like a big green bomb in the marketplace and emitted the odor of a stable in midsummer with no breeze.” The worst were people in Saigon and Hue: aggressive beggars, intense political demonstrators, sad-looking tennis instructors, dishonest cooks and housekeepers, and street children that followed Zasloff and tried to touch her arms or threw pebbles at her back and legs. They made up the bulk of her experience of urban South Vietnam, and were as awful as the foul-smelling durians and garish-looking paintings encountered elsewhere during the half-year stay.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> John Laurence, *The Cat from Hué* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002), 77 and 339-340.

<sup>15</sup> Zela Zasloff, *Saigon Dreaming: Recollections of Indochina Days* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 3.

<sup>16</sup> Zasloff, *Saigon Dreaming*, 21 and 23.

Even Westerners who were not repelled by the natives saw largely troubling things, physically and morally. “The Saigon I knew,” recalls the Canadian Janice Tait, who lived in Saigon with her diplomat husband and traveled with him to Hanoi and Hai Phong during two of his official trips, “was a vibrant, dynamic city, pulsing with life and energy... [and] freedom, enterprise, and colour – a sharp contrast with Hanoi.”<sup>17</sup> All the same, her “first experience of South Vietnam at war was the sight of a long line of shacks set back from the highway, each with an open front,” which “looked like stalls at a bazaar” with American soldiers lolling “carelessly about in various states of undress” while the women “appeared to cling to them.” Subsequent encounters with prostitutes and Amerasian children led Tait to the “bitter irony of an army visiting such suffering on the very people it had been sent to ‘protect’” as well as to the judgment that “Vietnamese women and children would be lifelong victims of the war.”<sup>18</sup> For Bobbie Keith, known at the time as “Bobbie the weathergirl” due to her appearances on the nightly news broadcast of Armed Forces Television, there were pleasant memories of parties, cookouts, movies on rooftops, even a swimming pool and “popcorn, for crying out loud.” But Keith also found that “you always had that rather ominous presence of the war around you,” with “bird’s-eye view of helicopters gunships flying around and air strikes in the distance” and “the duplicity of the whole thing.” The feeling extended to the Vietnamese. Apropos of the unavoidable bar girls, Keith actually “got along very well with most of them,” finding that “they usually supported their families and in many cases they were the sole breadwinner.” Nonetheless, she recalled that “some bar girls saw me as competition and I did have one crack of glass over my head one time.” Once, a bar

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<sup>17</sup> Janice Tait, *The Devil’s Snare: A Memoir of Saigon* (Toronto: McGilligan, 2005), 157-158.

<sup>18</sup> Tait, *The Devil’s Snare*, 9 and 55.

girl “set my hair on fire.” Most frightening was the mistress of a French restaurateur. This Vietnamese woman did not believe Keith when told that the TV weathergirl was not having an affair with the Frenchman; one night, she attacked Keith “with her nails” that gave “scratches down my arms” and, in turn, received a bloody nose from the American. The mistress later put out a contract on Keith’s life and prompted the weathergirl to procure a bodyguard for a time. “I think,” Keith concluded unceremoniously, “that [woman] probably scared me more than the Viet Cong.”<sup>19</sup>

Given the predominance of such views and experiences, it is not at all surprising that the first major English-language anthology of writings about Saigon portrays the city during wartime as problematic at best and horrific at worst. Published by Oxford University Press as part of its *Literary Anthologies of Asia*, the book spans two centuries of mostly Western writings that are divided chronologically into five sections.<sup>20</sup> The section on the war period, whose title “When the Americans Came and Went” foreshadows the familiar U.S.-centric perspective, consists of seventeen selections. They include well-known sources such as *The Quiet American*, *The Ugly American*, and Michael Herr’s *Dispatch*. But there are also less familiar ones such as a report on the fall of Saigon from an Australian journalist and a poem from an American woman who, similar to Janice Tait and Tela Zasloff, accompanied her husband to Saigon. Although the selections vary in more than degree of familiarity, they are strikingly similar in portraying the city between the early 1950s to the mid-1970s as a place of dangers,

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<sup>19</sup> Christian G. Appy, *Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered from All Sides* (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 181-182.

<sup>20</sup> Anastasia Edwards, ed., *Saigon: Mistress of the Mekong* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). The anthology includes only a handful of Vietnamese voices among the seventy-four selections. Only one of seventeen selections on the war period came from Vietnamese, but it too is concerned with Americans rather than Vietnamese.

darkness, chaos, and cheap human values. (Ironically, one of the few sunny scenes in this section is the piano concert from Zasloff's anti-Saigon memoir.) One selection, for instance, focuses on riverboat brothels; the next, on opium dens in the suburban Chinatown Cho Lon. The selection from Michael Herr describes that being in Saigon "was like sitting inside the folded petals of a poisonous flower." Among the inhabitants of the folded petals were "the Cowboys," or teenagers and youths that traveled in gangs and "could snap a Rolex off your wrist like a hawk hitting a field mouse." The Cowboys hung out with the "students" all day at two popular spots in the city, screaming obscure arguments at each other, cadging off Americans, stealing tips from the tables, reading Pléiade editions of Proust, Malraux, Camus." One tried to speak to Herr, but all the American could understand was the native's "obsessive comparison between Rome and Washington, and that he seemed to believe that [Edgar Allan] Poe had been a French writer."<sup>21</sup> Simplistic typologies dominate Herr's and other selections. The lone selection that portrays any one South Vietnamese in details has to do with the notorious Madame Nhu at a press conference. Equipped with the ironic title "Twisting for Madame Nhu," a reference to her ban of dancing the twist in public, it portrays her as simultaneously ignorant and condescending. Recording her suggestion that natural disasters such as famine must be used to rid the communist enemies, it implies that she was fanatical and possibly mad.<sup>22</sup>

Madame Nhu might have been an oddity: one of the "dragon ladies" that populated American thinking about Asian women with proximity to political power. But

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Herr, "Cowboy Energy," in Edwards, ed., *Saigon*, 234.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Hughes, "Twisting for Madame Nhu," in Edwards, ed., *Saigon*, 222-224. The editor's note to this selection leaves no doubt on how one should think of her, commenting that she was "considered by many to be evil."

ordinary Vietnamese were hardly any less bewildering. In a selection initially published in 1984, the author recalls a short visit to Saigon during the war. To his credit, he owns up to his unfamiliarity with the country: “I was walking through Vietnam’s past with the same ignorance as I had walked through its present.” His experience, however, was no better than Herr’s. The city, he writes, had “the colours of dying” and “was glazed in rain.” There were “bicycles and trishaws everywhere, a treadmill of lean yellow legs.” The women “emerged from their sordid apartment blocks with the cold immaculacy of mannequins and tripped along rubber-strewn pavements in a titter of high heels.” Inside the National Archaeological Museum was not much better than the outdoors sights of prostitutes and rickshaw drivers. “Nothing was lit” there, and fragments “from extinguished dynasties were scattered indecipherably in its gloom.” The last hours in the country were even worse, as he encountered incompetent Vietnamese police then bureaucratic American MPs. The people were incomprehensible and the place was alien. “Even now, years later,” he concludes, “when people ask me if I ever went to Vietnam, I find myself saying that I never did.”<sup>23</sup>

The lone poetic selection of the anthology also shows Vietnamese as group than individuals. The author recalls her experience of helping some Saigoneses put on a production of *Macbeth*. The first half of the poem suggests that the preparation and rehearsals went quite well, and the American was pleased with the “perfect” first act at the performance. By the second act, however, she was “stunned” to see the native cast produce a second Lady Macbeth, a second Banquo, and additional witches. She later

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<sup>23</sup> Colin Thurbon, “A Night in Vietnam,” in Edwards, ed., *Saigon Saigon: Mistress of the Mekong*, 227.

talked to the Vietnamese, and their answer was that “their way was more democratic.”

The poem ends,

I told my friend the expert,  
‘Calm down,’ she said.  
‘You’ll get it. But here’s a hint.  
There are 50 daily newspapers in Saigon.’<sup>24</sup>

The droll remark from the poet’s friend brings to mind Charles de Gaulle’s famous saying about the difficulty of governing France because it had hundreds of different kinds of cheese. Republican Saigon was not a country, only a city. But the implication is clear: how difficult it must be for a foreigner to understand a city that had dozens of different dailies? Published three years into the new millennium, the anthology shows a collective opinion that wartime Saigon, though not always dangerous, was a constantly bewildering place to be.

### **Urban South Vietnam in historiography, 1954-1990**

On the basis of the examples above, it is not a surprise that the historiography on urban South Vietnam before 1990 tended to mirror journalistic, literary, and memory works. Only few popular accounts attempted to present the points of view of urban South Vietnamese, and most of the rest stressed Americans over Vietnamese, native reaction over action, and destruction over construction.<sup>25</sup> Similar, historical publications during

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<sup>24</sup> Wendy Wilder Larsen, “Winning Their Hearts and Minds,” in Edwards, ed., *Saigon*, 251.

<sup>25</sup> Three wartime accounts that present the views of some urban South Vietnamese in their own right are Piero Gheddo, *The Cross and the Bo-Tree: Catholics and Buddhists in Vietnam*, Charles Underhill Quinn, trans. (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1970); Alfred Hassler, *Saigon, USA* (New York: Richard W. Baron, 1970); Harry Haas and Nguyen Bao Cong, *Vietnam: The Other Conflict* (London and Sydney: Sheed and Ward, 1971). Interestingly, all of them concern religion, especially Buddhists and Catholics. The American-centric title notwithstanding, Hassler’s book looks into the so-called Third Force among the people in Saigon and other cities. The authors spent extensive time with the subjects of the

the war reflected American concerns in addition to being partisan in tone and relatively thin in sources.<sup>26</sup>

Yet, this correspondence between historiography and journalism was neither necessary nor predetermined. On the contrary, the 1960s and 1970s saw a growing scholarship from social scientists that addressed American involvement but also took seriously the activism and agency of urban South Vietnamese. Most of these works were concerned with South Vietnamese politics, and they often examined this aspect in Saigon and other cities.<sup>27</sup> Other works focused on the urban society and its accompanying issues.<sup>28</sup> In particular, the 1970s also saw a number of U.S.-based dissertations and theses from Vietnamese and Americans that viewed urbanites as agents in their own

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books, did many interviews, and, used a small number of Vietnamese published sources to help present the points of view from a number of South Vietnamese.

<sup>26</sup> A prominent history that blames the communists is P. J. Honey, *Genesis of a Tragedy: The Historical Background to the Vietnam War* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1968). Also defending U.S. policies is Chester A. Bain, *Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict* (Engelwood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967). On the other hand, George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (NY: Dial Press, 1967) places the blame squarely on the U.S. Arguably the most even-handed history published during the war is Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation under Stress* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964). Although a member of the Michigan State University Advisory Group, the author presented a rare South Vietnamese-centered history, which however stops at the end of 1963.

<sup>27</sup> Howard R. Penniman, *Elections in South Vietnam* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, and Stanford: Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, 1972); Allan E. Goodman, *Politics in War: The Base of Political Communities in South Vietnam* (1973); John C. Donnell and Charles A. Joiner, ed., *Electoral Politics in South Vietnam* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974). There were a number of articles in *Asian Survey*, *Pacific Affairs*, and other academic journals that address urban issues, usually on politics or economy. Examples are David Wurfel, "The Saigon Political Elite: Focus on Four Cabinets," *Asian Survey* 7:8 (August 1967): 527-539; John C. Donnell and Charles A. Joiner, "South Vietnam: 'Struggle' Politics and the Bigger War," *Asian Survey* 7:1 (January 1967): 53-68; Peter King, "The Political Balance in Saigon," *Pacific Affairs* 44:3 (1971): 401-420. While they varied in themes, perspectives, and conclusions, the social scientists were trained in area studies and were more inclined than customary to take urbanites as more autonomous agents.

<sup>28</sup> Charles A. Joiner, *Public Administration in the Saigon Metropolitan Area: Study of the Evolution and Development of a Southeast Asian Urban Community and Its Problems* (Saigon: Michigan State University, Vietnam Advisory Group, 1962); Marilyn W. Hoskins and Eleanor Murray Shepherd, *Life in a Vietnamese Urban Quarter*, rev. ed. (Carbondale, IL: Center for Vietnamese Studies, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, 1965); Allan E. Goodman and Lawrence M. Franks, *Between War and Peace: A Profile of Migrants to Saigon* (New York: Asia Society, 1974).



right.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, they marked a significant shift from the overwhelming emphasis on social aspects, typically grim ones, from journalists and popular writers. On their basis, it was likely that the historiography would have picked up on their themes and presented a more rounded picture of urban South Vietnamese than those projected in popular avenues.

The abrupt defeat of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) in 1975, however, promptly put an end to the momentum of scholarship on urban South Vietnam. Postwar historiography followed suit and generated a massive amount of publications about the Vietnam War but, until the 1990s, very little about South Vietnamese. American-centered in approach and sources, the historiography during this period concentrated on military, diplomatic, and political aspects of the war. With rare exceptions, the three interpretative strands at this time – the dominant orthodox, the smaller revisionist, and the undersized neo-Marxist – sought to answer questions about decisions made by Americans, processes initiated and undertaken by Americans, and impact and outcomes upon Americans.<sup>30</sup> As a result, the various Vietnamese sides (including North Vietnam) appeared diminished in importance. Most of the attention devoted to Vietnamese dealt

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<sup>29</sup> Le Van Hoa, "Correlates of the Politically Radical-Conservative Attitudes among Buddhist Clergyman Leaders in South Vietnam." Ph.D. dissertation, Sociology, University of Kentucky, 1973); Tran Kiem-Luu, "Economic Development in Vietnam: The Role of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy," (Thesis, George Washington University, 1975); Pham Chi Do, "Inflationary Finance in Wartime South Vietnam: 1960-1972," (Ph.D. dissertation, Economics, University of Pennsylvania, 1976); William Roy Crawford, "The Impact of Political Violence on Marketing Development in South Vietnam: 1955 through 1972," (Ph.D. dissertation, Marketing, University of Alabama, 1976); Clifton G. Barton, "Credit and Commercial Control: Strategies and Methods of Chinese Businessmen in South Vietnam," (Ph.D. dissertation, Cultural Anthropology, Cornell, 1977); David L. Hess, "The Educated Vietnamese Middle Class of Metropolitan Saigon and their Legacy of Confucian Authority, 1954-1975," (Ph.D. dissertation, History, New York University, 1977).

<sup>30</sup> An overview of historiography focusing on military and diplomatic aspects up to the early 1990s is Gary R. Hess, "The Unending Debate: Historians and the Vietnam War," in Michael J. Hogan, ed., *America in the World: The Historiography of American Foreign Relations since 1941* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 358-394. A book-length update is Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2009).

with contestations in the countryside, and generally the urban sector was buried beneath this voluminous scholarship. As previously noted, it did not help that popular culture in fiction, movies, and television documentaries during this period persisted in (and probably amplified) wartime perceptions about Saigon and other cities.<sup>31</sup> There were no serious attempts to complicate or counter these perceptions. The few memoirs from South Vietnamese officials, self-serving as common of the genre, did little to affect popular or academic views.<sup>32</sup>

Again, it did not have to be that way, at least not for the lack of sources. It is true that the archives in Saigon, Hanoi, and elsewhere in postwar Vietnam were not available to researchers. But as Mark Philip Bradley, a second-generation historian of the Vietnam War, pointed out years later, “there were always plenty of materials historians could work with: published sources, documents in French and American archives, the Vietnamese-language press and, importantly, the incredibly sophisticated world of Vietnamese arts and letters.”<sup>33</sup> For a variety of reasons, however, interests on the subject were virtually non-existent. Consequently, the historiography in the 1970s and 1980s considered urban South Vietnamese through the lens of factors other than themselves.

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<sup>31</sup> It has been noted, for example, that Hollywood movies in the 1980s tend to divide South Vietnam into what one scholar has called “urban and rural jungles.” See Sharon D. Downey, “Top Guns in Vietnam: The Pilot as Protected Warrior Hero,” in Marilyn J. Matelski and Nancy Lynch Street, ed., *War and Film in Vietnam: Historical and Critical Essays*, (New York: McFarland, 2003), 119. According to this binary depiction, the American grunts’ “off-combat time tends to be marked by the decadent underbelly of urban South Vietnam or in the Doors-dominated, hashish-filled tents on military or makeshift bases.” On the other hand, during combat they “are enveloped within a terror-ridden, chaotic, jungle ‘inferno’ that strips them of the men’s will to act except for the purpose of sheer survival.” The rural jungle was deadly, but the urban one was hardly normal either.

<sup>32</sup> Nguyen Cao Ky, *Twenty Year and Twenty Days* (New York: Stein and Day, 1976); Tran Van Don, *Our Endless War: Inside Vietnam* (San Rafael, CA and London: Presidio Press, 1978); Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987); Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, and Brian M. Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders* (New York: Crane, Russak & Company, 1980).

<sup>33</sup> David Anderson, Mark Philip Bradley, et al., “Interchange: Legacy of the Vietnam War,” *Journal of American History* 92:2 (September 2006): 453.

This historiographical characteristic was true even of George Kahin, who went further than any other historian at the time to discuss the roles of urban South Vietnamese during the conflict. In his well-received political and diplomatic history about events leading up to American intervention in 1965 and Buddhist protests in 1966, Kahin skillfully wove a tapestry of actions, reactions, and interactions among the political leadership in Washington and Saigon, the South Vietnamese military, and Buddhists in Saigon, Hue, and Da Nang.<sup>34</sup> He highlighted the mixture of religious affiliations, political alliances, and military maneuverings among the various Vietnamese sectors, *plus* actions generated by these intermingled relationships. More than other important Americanist works at the time, he also stressed indigenous origins of the conflict.

The welcoming attention notwithstanding, the book, as indicated by both title and subtitle, is still very American-focused. Except for the Buddhists, there were few shades about other noncommunist Vietnamese. South Vietnamese military and government leaders might be at the front of Kahin's argument, but Americans remained at its center. Kahin began and ended with the U.S., and concentrated on how and how much that American decisions would have affected South Vietnamese political and military leaders. Closer to our purpose, *Intervention* views the existence of the middle class in South Vietnamese cities as more or less an American creation. The book is relentless on the premise that the livelihood of the urban bourgeoisie was intrinsically tied to American money. For example, it considers the "centerpiece" of U.S. aid to be "the expanding bourgeoisie in the South, many times greater than the tiny group that France's colonial economy had sustained." It calls American funding an "enormous umbilical cord" that

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<sup>34</sup> George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

tapped “into an American economy six thousand miles away,” and asserts that the aid “carried the lifeblood of a ‘new middle’ class that South Vietnam could never have begun to support on its own.” On the next page, it discusses the Commercial (or Commodity) Import Program (CIP) and states that understanding this program is essential if “one seeks to understand the burgeoning of the Vietnamese middle class under Diem and how his political backing, and that of his successors, became so well rooted in South Vietnam’s urban society.” The conclusion is that “there is no doubt that during its two decades of operation the Commercial Import Program, together with other elements of U.S. economic support of the Saigon regime, substantially expanded South Vietnam’s middle class and helped purchase its political loyalty to both the Saigon regime and its American sponsor.”<sup>35</sup> Subsequent statements confirm this conclusion: for instance, that although “in Saigon and other cities there were 20-to-25-percent unemployment rates and extensive slum areas, the expanding middle class for the most part enjoyed a continuing prosperity, thanks to the sustained flow of American aid.”<sup>36</sup> Unremitting in its economic focus, *Intervention* considers middle-class urbanites in relation to the U.S. dollar and little else.

Though far from utilizing the available sources noted in Mark Philip Bradley’s observation, Kahin nonetheless came closer than previous historians by shifting through a very large amount of available American sources, a number of oral interviews with Buddhist leaders and NLF members, and a sprinkling of Vietnamese-language newspapers. Not availing themselves of such sources, other historians either avoided the subject of urban South Vietnam all together, or tackled it but through interpretative

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<sup>35</sup> Kahin, *Intervention*, 84-86 and 88.

<sup>36</sup> Kahin, *Intervention*, 100.

prohess rather than the marshalling of evidence. The prime example of the latter kind is Gabriel Kolko's *Anatomy of a War*, also one of the first comprehensive histories of the war. Among the earliest revisionists in Cold War history, Kolko held a consistently radical and neo-Marxian reading of the Vietnam conflict. He insisted on the binary contrast between the indigenous revolutionary forces and the American imperialist ones, and put noncommunist and anticommunist Vietnamese largely on the side. When he addressed urban South Vietnamese at all, he characterized them primarily in terms of association to French colonialism. "The French colonial experience," he wrote in *Anatomy of a War*, "was not a casual affair for the large part of the urbanized, educated Vietnamese," and "French education and values profoundly affected the south's pre-1945 urban social order." Allowing that this social order "incorporated many more than just those receiving direct economic benefits from the French presence," Kolko, without naming who the "many more" were, nonetheless took all groups in this social order to be "shallow, diverse, and dependent as their class base." In addition, they "constituted the only large, natural element with even a remote chance of creating a substantial anti-Communist coalition." Kolko's view of anticommunists was consistent to his binary view that the war was an affair between revolutionaries and imperialists; indeed, he called the Vietnam conflict "only very superficially a civil war." The implication is that there is little or no need to study it from the point of view of the Vietnamese anticommunists since they were neither true nor influential participants in the violent competition for the outcome of postcolonial Vietnam.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 91-92. One notable difference is that Kolko took Ngo Dinh Diem's independence from the U.S. more seriously than most all historians at the time. Nonetheless, he framed Diem in conventional terms: repressive, nepotistic, and incomprehensible. Hence, "Diem's

Unusual at the time for an academic history – and praiseworthy for our purposes – Kolko devoted a chapter in *Anatomy of a War* to the impact of warfare on the urban society. He made a number of theoretically interesting, memorably worded, and potentially fruitful insights. South Vietnamese cities, for example, could be divided into “truly urban centers” and “frontier conglomerations” that were created by the Americanization of the war. Or, the “family was a traumatized population’s last anchor of stability and security” in urban areas. But he soon lapsed into conventional descriptions of the wartime urban life, some of which are couched in journalistic language. “The young,” for example, “lacked their parents’ political experience and values ... [and] many thrived on the sidewalk culture of incessant noise, congestion, and human interaction which throbbed amid the dust of cities.” Or, on American GIs, they “corrupted a significant fraction of the women and hypnotized the men with clothes, motorcycles, and their musical styles.” Or, the urban intellectuals who “were as fragile in South Vietnam as they are anywhere, full of moods, variations, and typical equivocations.” Even though some of them later joined the NLF, American domination and native passivity in urban areas became too much that “the Revolution simply could not reach this lumpen constituency, and it never claimed to have succeeded in doing so.”<sup>38</sup> Kolko’s dismissive explanation of South Vietnamese urbanites was consistent with the reductionism inherent in his radical reading of the war.<sup>39</sup>

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ideological pretensions immediately became dysfunctional even in a region which always had a ready market for philosophical mumbo jumbo, and his exotic ideas made him appear all the more remote and obscure to the people” (84).

<sup>38</sup> Kolko, *Anatomy of a War*, 205-206.

<sup>39</sup> For a judicious and lucid review of *Anatomy of War and Intervention*, see George C. Herring, “America and Vietnam: The Debate Continues,” *The American Historical Review* 92:2 (April 1987), 350-362. It also reviews R. B. Smith, *An International History of the Vietnam War: The Kennedy Strategy* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1985), or the second volume of Smith’s international history.

If George Kahin were the historian's counterpart to the journalists Robert Shaplen or Dean Brelis because he placed the blame on American money and weaponry, Gabriel Kolko would have been that to Neil Sheehan or William Lederer who saw little good about urban South Vietnam. William Duiker, on the other hand, would be closer to Janice Tait by virtue of having a more sympathetic view to the non- and anticommunist urban Vietnamese. The sympathy was somewhat ironic because Duiker has specialized on the communist side: as it was, one of a few historians from the Vietnam generation to study Vietnamese communism.

In *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, Duiker described the urbanites as they were seen from the communist perspective. "Trained to view social change through the prism of Marxist-Leninist class analysis," he wrote, "the Communists saw the bourgeois nationalists in the South as isolated from the masses, afflicted with inveterate factionalism, and tarred with the brush of collaboration with the imperialists." In particular, "the urban classes were often vacillating and their attitudes had been affected by decades of direct exposure to French and U.S. influence." For their anti-revolutionary sins and afflictions, however, the bourgeois urban Vietnamese could not be defeated easily. On the contrary, South Vietnamese cities "presented the knottiest problem for the Communists." To communist revolutionaries, Duiker acknowledged, cities were "the realm of the enemy, the one area in South Vietnam that the revolution, despite efforts for more than a generation, had been unable to crack."<sup>40</sup> Even though the Communist Party "had a fairly broad appeal... in both urban and rural areas," revolutionary leaders must have been somewhat disappointed by their failure to operate more

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<sup>40</sup> William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 179 and 227-228. The first edition was published in 1981.

effectively in the cities. Active support in urban areas never reached the levels apparently expected by the party. This failure was generally ascribed in internal documents to organizational weaknesses, or to the influence of the ‘noxious weeds’ of bourgeois attitudes in the cities of South Vietnam. Whatever the reason, the failure to build a more dynamic movement in Saigon, Da Nang, and Hué was undoubtedly a factor in compelling the Party to turn to a more military approach.<sup>41</sup>

Here is an intriguing insight about urban South Vietnam in relation to the conflict, something that Duiker did not pursue since it lay outside the central concerns of his work. Nonetheless, it illustrates the possibility of a line of inquiry beyond long-standing assumptions: Why did the communists fail to win over urban South Vietnamese? The neo-Marxian Gabriel Kolko might have responded that failure had to do with those “noxious weeds” of colonial and capitalist decadence. The Americanist George Kahin might have replied that it was the U.S. dollar and military presence that prevented the urbanites from supporting the communists. But these answers would be simplistic at best. It seems almost impossible to answer this question without taking the urbanites as autonomous subjects of inquiry and studying them in their own right.

Nonetheless, few historians were interested to pursue this subject. Publications with considerable content on urban South Vietnam were usually organizational histories authorized or supported by one or another organization active in the war. They considered Vietnamese but inevitably focused on American actors.<sup>42</sup> Or they concentrated on their roles, as indicated by the title of an in-depth study on refugees, as victims and survivors. Concerning Vietnamese in both rural and urban areas, this important study examines major events of displacement throughout the entire South

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<sup>41</sup> Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 358.

<sup>42</sup> C.H. William Ruhe, Norman W. Hoover, and Ira Singer, *Saigon Medical School: An Experiment in International Medical Education: An Account of the American Medical Association's Medical Education Project in South Vietnam, 1966-1975* (np: American Medical Association, 1988).



Vietnamese period, from the refugee movement in 1954-1955 to the final evacuation in 1975. Because the author had worked on the ground for several years in South Vietnam and was closely involved with a number of South Vietnamese officials, the book reveals glimpses of native agency, including those from urban people. It mentions, for example, the student work camp in Cam Lo (near the DMZ) that was set up by the Saigon government's Ministry of Youth in 1967. Coming from Saigon, Da-Nang, Hue, Dalat, and Quang-Tri, the students worked in two-week shifts on various tasks, and the project "was valuable to the middle-class students as well as the refugees."<sup>43</sup> The narrative is peppered with stories about the activities of government figures, especially Drs. Nguyen Phuc Que and Phan Quang Dan who were, respectively, Commissioner for the Special Commissariat for Refugees and director of the Land Development and Hamlet Building program. It was among few works from this period that allow for South Vietnamese capacity, even though the capacity was in reacting to instead of generating events.

Perhaps the most notable publication concerning urban South Vietnam during this period is a product of non-academics: a monograph published under the auspices of the U.S. Army Center of Military History entitled *The South Vietnamese Society*. Written by two former South Vietnamese officers, the monograph is relatively brief in size and largely impressionistic in content. Its significance derives from the potency of the authors' insights rather than any research they did. Seeking plausible causes for the eventual fall of South Vietnam to the communists, the authors worked on the premise that the South Vietnamese "society was clearly polarized into two segments, the rural and the

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<sup>43</sup> Louis A. Wiesner, *Victims and Survivors: Displaced Persons and Other War Victims in Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988), 135.

urban, each with a way of life and attitudes entirely different from the other.”<sup>44</sup> Such a dichotomy helps to explain the different receptions that South Vietnamese had towards Americans. On the one hand, most “educated urban Vietnamese saw the United States as the epitome of democracy, the most affluent and modern nation on earth, a world power without colonial ambitions... and finally as a staunchly anti-Communist friend.” On the other hand, the US was a “total stranger” to Vietnamese in the countryside, and when it “entered the war some rural people regarded it, through the refracting prism of Communist propaganda, as an aggressor.” By attributing American problems in the countryside to “Communist propaganda,” the authors downplayed the abilities of the NLF to mobilize supporters: a questionable perspective when held up against wartime and postwar studies. Not completely convincing either is their generalization about how educated Vietnamese viewed Americans. But they also acknowledged the large gap between the two sides – educated Vietnamese presumably included – and insisted that “very few Vietnamese had a chance to know Americans as individuals” and, conversely, “the majority of the American people probably knew little about Vietnam.”<sup>45</sup> Although they did not intend to suggest new lines of inquiry, their recognition of wide historical and cultural chasm that separated noncommunist and anticommunist urban Vietnamese from their American allies.

Far from giving a revisionist reading of the conflict, the monograph emphasizes and confirms conventional wisdom about the problematic relationship between the U.S. and South Vietnam in general – and Americans and urban South Vietnamese in

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<sup>44</sup> Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1980), 154.

<sup>45</sup> Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 55-56.

particular. On the former, the authors wrote, for example, that there were number of South Vietnamese nationalists “who seriously questioned the usefulness of what they were doing and especially the wisdom of American participation in the war.” On the latter, they averred that, among other things, “the urban society of South Vietnam became more and more materialistic-oriented” as a result of Americanization, and that this “materialistic race... broke up families, fostered crimes, and fomented juvenile delinquency.”<sup>46</sup> But unlike virtually all scholarly studies, however, the monograph also points to a number of positive achievements (from the South Vietnamese point of view) before and even during American intervention, such as expansion in land communications, construction of roads and infrastructure, public health, and education. Moreover, it suggests a host of other issues for possible scholarly consideration. On politics, for example, it mentions issues as different as developments in voting and democratic consciousness; the complicated history and dynamics of factionalism and discrimination; family rule as related to the First Republic; and the influence of wives to military and political leaders especially during the Second Republic. On society, it offers topics such as the impact of American culture on urban youths; divergent cultural concepts of time and action (e.g., American “optimum approach” vs. Vietnamese “multiple approach”); and how Americans might have viewed Vietnamese through the prism of French writers. Although not a product of scholarship, *The South Vietnamese Society* nonetheless illustrates the kinds of insights that academic research could benefit from the experiences and observations of people from another side. The author’s point about American viewing of Vietnamese through the prism of French writers, for example,

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<sup>46</sup> Hinh and Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society*, 69 and 70.

was astonishingly prescient because archive-based scholarship would come to the same point nearly two decades later.<sup>47</sup>

### **Urban South Vietnam in historiography, 1990-present**

The relative invisibility of urban South Vietnamese amid the rich U.S.-focused historiography did not go unnoticed. Ten years after the publication of *The South Vietnamese Society*, George Herring, the unofficial dean of the first generation of American historians of the war, used his presidential address to the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) to address the “conspicuous” absence of South Vietnamese in historiography. Echoing the wide chasm addressed in *The South Vietnamese Society*, Herring quoted a remark made by Bui Diem, former South Vietnamese ambassador to Washington, and called attention to the recognizable but unspoken point that Americans and South Vietnamese were “peoples far apart” from one another. In Herring’s view, “analysis of the relations between these two allies... can tell us much about why the war took the course it did” as well as “the way we relate to other peoples and about the impact of our intervention on other nations.”<sup>48</sup> He went on to address a number of subtopics, primarily military and diplomatic but also cultural, to underscore some of the severest problems between Americans and South Vietnamese during and after the period of direct American intervention.

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<sup>47</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>48</sup> George C. Herring, “‘Peoples Quite Apart’: Americans, South Vietnamese, and the War in Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History* 14:1 (Winter 1990): 1. The phrase is quoted in Hosmer, *The Fall of South Vietnam*, 33.

Herring's address was illustrative in argument, suggestive in insights, and apposite in timing. The late 1980s and the early 1990s saw two developments that soon affected scholarship on the war: the Cold War was moving to an end, and the Vietnamese Communist Party shifted from a socialist economic model to a Chinese-inspired one to engage the global economy and reestablish full relations with the US. In turn, these twin developments led to the opening of a number of archives in Eastern Europe, China, and Vietnam, allowing a new generation of historians access to hitherto unavailable documents and innovative ways to conceptualize the studies of the war. Consequently, historiography since the mid-1990s has seen several innovations.

It should be said right away that the opening of new archives has hardly deterred American-centered research that emphasizes military and diplomatic matters. In some ways, this research has continued apace after the Cold War.<sup>49</sup> There are, after all, newly released U.S. documents. There are also documents that were long available for a long time but never put to use. Though still minor, Vietnamese actors have appeared in greater frequency within this strand of historiography. But there have been innovations as well, as this strand of historiography has addressed subjects as varied as modernization theory, nation-building, labor unions, non-government organizations, and military law.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Representative examples are H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Johnson, McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997); David Kaiser, *American Tragedy: Kennedy, Johnson, and the Origins of the Vietnam War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2000); and Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). The last is a controversial revisionist work that utilizes Vietnamese-language sources in translation and gives more attention to the South Vietnamese side than most works in this category. Nonetheless, its questions and answers come clearly from an American-centric framework. For other works in this category, see Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America's Lost War*.

<sup>50</sup> Michael E. Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 151-207; Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful Alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (East Lansing: University of Michigan State Press, 1998); William

Some works also reflect the influence of the “cultural turn” that emphasizes less traditional categories such as race, religion, popular culture, and memory.<sup>51</sup> As a whole, these studies have broadened the scope of studies and have contributed to the ever-changing conception on how the war should be viewed and interpreted. Some also pay attention to South Vietnamese actors that had been neglected, including urban ones such as the Confederation of Labor.

In addition to new developments in American-centered scholarship, post-Cold War historiography has seen two distinctive directions: internationalist and Vietnamese. The internationalist historiography addresses primarily the diplomatic dimension in one or another alliance among the state actors: among the U.S., France, and Great Britain;<sup>52</sup> among the U.S., France, and South Vietnam;<sup>53</sup> between Hanoi and Beijing;<sup>54</sup> between

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Rosenau, *U.S. Internal Security Assistance to South Vietnam* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005); William Thomas Allison, *Military Justice in Vietnam: The Rule of Law in an American War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2007); James Carter, *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building, 1954-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>51</sup> James T. Fisher, *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1937–1961* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997); Seth Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004); Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale’s Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Patrick Hagopian, *The Vietnam War in American Memory: Veterans, Memorials, and the Politics of Healing* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); Michael J. Allen, *Until the Last Man Comes Home: POWs, MIAs, and the Unending Vietnam War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>52</sup> Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999); Peter Busch, *All the Way with JFK? Britain, the US, and the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>53</sup> Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007);

<sup>54</sup> Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Priscilla Roberts, ed., *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the Cold War* (Alto Palo: Stanford University Press, 2006).

Hanoi and Moscow;<sup>55</sup> among the Southeast Asian states;<sup>56</sup> and a host of other relationships.<sup>57</sup> To varying degrees, these works complicate long-standing narratives about the origins, developments, and conclusions of American involvement in Indochina.<sup>58</sup> They also show deeper involvement on the part of South Vietnamese leaders, especially Bao Dai, Ngo Dinh Diem, and Nguyen Van Thieu.

Not surprisingly, it is in the Vietnamese-centric direction that South Vietnamese actors figure most prominently. Thus far, works in this scholarship have focused on politics, diplomacy, and military matters within one of the three Vietnamese entities: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the NLF, or the RVN. In addition to American, French, and Vietnamese sources long available to researchers, this scholarship utilizes post-Cold War access to Vietnamese, Chinese, Soviet, and other Eastern European archives. The access has resulted in a far greater understanding about the DRV.<sup>59</sup> More

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<sup>55</sup> Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996); Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy Toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> Ang Cheng Guan, *Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger, ed., *International Perspectives on Vietnam* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000); Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbach, eds., *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives* (Washington, DC: The German Institute; and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>58</sup> Two works deserve special notice for their innovative emphases. First is Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, which makes use of American, French, and Vietnamese sources to interpret the origins of the conflict between the U.S. and the Vietnamese communists through the lens of culture and race. Most scholarship that is influenced by the cultural turn concentrates on one side, but this work employs multi-archival research to look at both sides. The second work is Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001). Using largely American sources, it nonetheless focuses on indigenous actors and, as indicated by the title, extends the scope of the conflict to all of Indochina rather than only Vietnam.

<sup>59</sup> William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Ang Cheng Guan, *The Vietnam War from the Other Side: The Vietnamese Communists' Perspective* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Pierre Asselin, "Hanoi and Americanization of the War in Vietnam: New Evidence from Vietnam," *Pacific Historical Review* 74:3 (2005): 427-439; Pierre

modest but not inconsiderable is the recent scholarship on the NLF, which examines its diplomatic, social, and environmental aspects in addition political and military ones.<sup>60</sup>

Scholarship on the RVN has also focused on its society, politics, military, and diplomacy.<sup>61</sup> In particular, it has ignited an important shift in historiography about Ngo Dinh Diem. Some of this scholarship re-examines the complex relations between Diem and the U.S. It also disputes the long-standing characterizations of Diem as an old-

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Asselin, "Choosing Peace: Hanoi and the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, 1954-1955," *The Journal of Cold War Studies*, 9:2 (Spring 2007): 95-126; Sophie Quinn-Judge, "The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967-68," *Cold War History* 5:4 (November 2005): 479-500; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (Fall 2006): 4-58; Lien-Hang Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Raleigh, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Tuong Vu, "It's Time for the Revolution to Show Its True Colors: The Radical Turn in Vietnamese Politics in 1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40: 3 (October 2009): 519-542; Tuong Vu, "From Cheering to Volunteering: Vietnamese Communists and the Arrival of the Cold War, 1940-1951," in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 172-204. A special note must be said of Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État né de la Guerre 1945-1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011), of which the author plans to have an English version in the future.

<sup>60</sup> Robert K. Brigham, *Guerrilla Diplomacy: The NLF's Foreign Relations and the Viet Nam War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003); David Biggs, "Managing a Rebel Landscape: Conservation, Pioneers, and the Revolutionary Past in the U Minh Forest, Vietnam," *Environmental History* 10:3 (July 2005), 448-476; Larry Berman, *Perfect Spy: The Incredible Double Life of Pham Xuan An Time Magazine Reporter and Vietnamese Communist Agent* (New York: Collins, 2007); David Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008). See also William J. Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1995), which devotes more attention to the NLF than most general histories.

<sup>61</sup> Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002); Robert J. Topmiller, "Struggling for Peace: South Vietnamese Buddhist Women and Resistance to the Vietnam War," *Journal of Women's History* 17:3 (November 2005), 133-157; Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Live and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006); Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York: New York University Press, 2007). See also the following works that employ American sources but address South Vietnamese actors to a significant degree: Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*; Mark Moyer, "Political Monks: The Militant Buddhist Movement during the Vietnam War," *Modern Asian Studies* 38:4 (2004): 749-784; James McAllister, "'Only Religions Count in Vietnam': Thich Tri Quang and the Vietnam War," *Modern Asian Studies* 42: 4 (2008): 751-782; James McAllister, "'A Fiasco of Noble Proportions': The Johnson Administration and the South Vietnamese Elections of 1967," *The Pacific Historical Review* 73:4 (November 2004): 619-651; James McAllister, "What Can One Man Do? Nguyen Duc Thang and the Limits of Reform in South Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:2 (2009): 117-153.



fashioned mandarin and portrays of him as a modernizer, albeit idiosyncratic and dependent on repression for control.<sup>62</sup>

Within the Vietnamese-centered direction, there is a subset that examines the interplay between culture, politics, and society. The most productive scholarship in this subset concerns the DRV, especially on the period 1948 to 1960. This period saw the Communist Party consolidate power and begin implementing socialist policies in constructing the postcolonial nation.<sup>63</sup> While it concentrates on internal developments, this scholarship sheds some light on how those internal factors might have affected the Poliburo's decision-making regarding military engagement vis-à-vis the US and South Vietnam. Although not as extensive, scholarship on the NLF for this subset sees two

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<sup>62</sup> Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Edward Miller, "Vision, Power, and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945-1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35:3 (October 2004): 447-456; Jessica M. Chapman, "Staging Democracy: South Vietnam's 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai," *Diplomatic History* 30:4 (September 2006): 671-703; Matthew Masur, "Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954-1960," *Diplomatic History* 33:2 (April 2009): 293-313; Edward Miller, "The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture, and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem," in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 376-402. See also recent dissertations focusing on Diem and the U.S.: Edward Garvey Miller, "Grand Designs: Vision, Power, and Nation Building in America's Alliance with Ngo Dinh Diem, 1954-1960" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2004); Matthew Masur, "Hearts and Minds: Cultural Nation-Building in South Vietnam, 1954-1963" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Ohio State, 2004); Jessica Chapman, "Debating the Will of Heaven: South Vietnamese Politics and Nationalism in International Perspective, 1953-1956" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Santa Barbara, 2006); Jessica Elkind, "The First Casualties: American Nation-Building in South Vietnam, 1955-1965" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2006).

<sup>63</sup> Kim N.B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002); Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Christoph Giebel, *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004); Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Tuong Vu, "Workers and the Socialist State: North Vietnam's State-Labor Relations, 1945-1970," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 329-356; Ken McLean, "Manifest Socialism: The Labor of Representation in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:1 (Winter 2007): 27-79; Balazs Szalontai, "Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955-56," *Cold War History* 5:4 (November 2005): 395-426; Trân Thi Liên, "The Catholic Question in North Vietnam: From Polish Sources, 1954-56," *Cold War History* 5:4 (November 2005): 427-449; and Martin Grossheim, "'Revisionism' in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: New Evidence from the East German Archives," *Cold War History* 5:4 (November 2005): 451-477.

excellent studies from David Elliott and David Hunt.<sup>64</sup> The South Vietnamese side has also emerged in this subset, albeit more piecemeal than the scholarship on North Vietnam and more fragmented than that on the NLF. In his 1993 monograph on the aftermath of the Tet Offensive, for example, the military historian Ronald Spector included two chapters on urban South Vietnamese. As reflected by the titles – “Corruption Is Everywhere” and “In the Rear with the Gear, the Sergeant Major, and the Beer” – they are traditionalist in perspectives and concerns. Another military historian, John Prados gave urban South Vietnamese greater agency. His wide-ranging book of essays on the war includes two short chapters – “Bullets, Bombs, and Buddhists” and “Profile: Buddhist in a Sea of Fire” (the latter on the bonze Thich Nhat Hanh) – that portray urban South Vietnam as site of dynamic political contestations for the future of the country. Another chapter draws from Prados’ notes kept during the war about the upper leadership of the South Vietnamese army. Not diverging from the long-standing view that the leaders were not effective as a group, Prados nonetheless considered them an important subject that deserves greater research and analysis.<sup>65</sup>

So far, however, it has been the Buddhists rather than the generals that capture scholarly interests. As Ngo Dinh Diem has become the most prominent subject among South Vietnamese in recent historiography, the urban Buddhists aptly take second place and have produced a mini-debate about their roles. For Mark Moyar, they appear to be rigged by communist agents. For Robert Topmiller and James McAllister, however, they

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<sup>64</sup> Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*; David Hunt, *Vietnam’s Southern Revolution*.

<sup>65</sup> Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: Free Press, 1993); John Prados, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995).

exercised a “third force” nationalism to challenge both the Saigon regime and the NLF.<sup>66</sup> At the least, the debate illustrates the need for greater research into one of the most important urban groups in South Vietnam.<sup>67</sup>

Moving beyond particular groups and into the broader subject of culture and society, however, it was a social scientist rather than historian that produced the first major scholarly breakthrough. In *Understanding Vietnam*, the anthropologist Neil Jamieson, who had done fieldwork in South Vietnam during the 1960s, utilized a number of Vietnamese-language published sources to cast the Vietnam conflict beyond the confines of the period 1950-1975 that has defined so much of Vietnam War historiography. Jamieson’s *Understanding Vietnam* reaches back to the early colonial period and especially the early modern period in Vietnamese history, to outline and examine (if in broad strokes) modern developments in thought and ideas that alternatively altered and modified Vietnamese tradition. Next, it interprets the period 1940-1954 as one that saw the “emergence of two competing models for building a modern nation,” a period that the communist-led Vietminh certainly dominated but did not represent the only choice for Vietnamese.<sup>68</sup> The subsequent emergence of the South Vietnamese state, therefore, was a result of design as much as contingency. Aided by conceptual strengths from training in the social sciences, Jamieson saw the Vietnam War not only as an armed

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<sup>66</sup> Moyer, “Political Monks”; Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed*; McAllister, ““Only Religions Count in Vietnam’.” See also Miller, “War Stories,” 469-470.

<sup>67</sup> Edward Miller’s new study on Diem, which came out at the same time that this dissertation was completed, traces Buddhist activism to the Buddhist Revival that started in the 1920s and 1930s and presents their conflict with the Diem’s government to be one of competing modernizing visions among noncommunist Vietnamese about postcolonial Vietnam. See Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>68</sup> Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 176-233.

conflict but also a conflict of fiercely opposing ideas among Vietnamese about modernity and postcolonial nationhood.

Regarding the South Vietnamese society, Jamieson was acutely aware of American popular jaundices, commenting, for example, that “Americans who derived their image of Vietnam from the visible turmoil of the 1960s... often failed to realize how deeply the core values of traditional Vietnam remained embedded in the hearts of almost all Vietnamese.”<sup>69</sup> He examined how the people of South Vietnam encountered, welcomed, rejected, adapted, or modified new changes brought forth by the association with the U.S. He also devoted a generous portion of the book to the South Vietnamese urban society during the Americanization of the war. Jamieson argued anthropologically that members in this society – street children, prostitutes, bar girls, and others – developed various “subsystems” to cope, survive, and even prosper during warfare. The bar girls, for example, “constituted a distinctive sociocultural unit, a community of sorts, one that was deviant and disapproved of, to be sure, yet one that conformed to dominant mores more than most people imagined.” Similarly, the prostitutes formed network “linked in interlocking clusters of friend and acquaintances who shared information, provided each other with emotional support, and... practiced mutual assistance in the form of loans, home remedies for illness, and sometimes shared living quarters and a common commissary.”<sup>70</sup> From this perspective, the prostitutes appeared not so much as pathetic or manipulative creatures in popular portrayals, but as capable navigators among a host of old and new values on the one hand and problems created by warfare on the other hand.

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<sup>69</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 296.

<sup>70</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 332-333.

In addition to proposing explanatory devices for a possible social history about urban South Vietnamese, Jamieson engaged in the role of intellectual historian. He alternated between interpreting fieldwork and experiences among South Vietnamese and dissecting a sampling of Vietnamese poetry, fiction, and music created from late colonialism to the divisional period. Along the way, he enumerated a number of insights about the large gap between the American and South Vietnamese experience. Shifting between personal experiences and formal sources, Jamieson showed that South Vietnamese, especially the urbanites, could be seen beyond their former shadowy existence as people with their own history and vision. He recognized that it was a “frustrated vision” brought about in part by warfare and Americanization.<sup>71</sup> But they *did* have a vision, one with affinity and continuity to earlier developments. As illustrated in subsequent historiography, Jamieson has helped open new ways of thinking and new lines of inquiry about South Vietnamese in general and urban ones in particular.<sup>72</sup>

There has been, however, little scholarship about urban South Vietnamese since Jamieson’s important book. Perhaps most prominent are two books published by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at Northern Illinois University: David Haines’s study of the South Vietnamese household and John Schafer’s monograph on the writer Vo

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<sup>71</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 307.

<sup>72</sup> See Nu-Anh Tran, “South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965–1969,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (2006): 169-209. Concentrating on South Vietnamese political identity, Tran finds that “Jamieson’s work analyzes passive critiques of the American presence rather than the specific content of South Vietnamese definitions of identity affected by the Americans.” Nonetheless, she acknowledges the debt to insights from Jamieson (and the South Vietnamese essayist Vo Phien) on this subject and seeks “to extend Jamieson’s and Vo Phien’s arguments” rather than to refute them (198 and 171).

Phien.<sup>73</sup> The first book is geared towards social history and provides much information and many insights about Saigon and other major cities. An anthropologist by training, Haines uses censuses and records collected under the RVN government to show that the South Vietnamese household in both urban and rural did not remain static but underwent considerable changes. From a scholar in literature, the second book concerns a writer who joined and left the Viet Minh during the First Indochina War and later became a prominent Saigon-based anticommunist writer of essays, literary criticism, and fiction. Schafer's monograph encompasses Vo Phien's entire life and works, and gives important implications about the urban South Vietnamese intellectual and cultural life in the long context of colonialism and revolution, warfare and national division, Americanization and (for a number of former South Vietnamese) postwar life in the U.S.

### **South Vietnamese public opinion and ideology**

These two works notwithstanding, urban South Vietnam remains more or less *incognita terra* in the historiography of the conflict.<sup>74</sup> A sustained focus on this subject, however, would enlarge the scope of inquiry about the Vietnam War and deepen the understanding of the complexities involved. One complexity had to do with public opinion on the part of urban South Vietnamese. The significance of this aspect has been

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<sup>73</sup> David W. Haines, *The Limits of Kinship: South Vietnamese Households, 1954-1975* (DeKalb, IL: Southeast Asia Publications, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2006); John C. Schafer, *Võ Phiến and the Sadness of Exile* (DeKalb, IL: Southeast Asia Publications, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2006.)

<sup>74</sup> A rare recent article wholly about urban South Vietnam is Stewart Lone, "Remembering Life in Urban South Vietnam, circa 1965-1975," in Stewart Lone, ed., *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Asia: From the Taiping Rebellion to the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 219-246. It utilizes a small amount of interviews and English-language periodicals published in South Vietnam. The meager quantity makes it appear more impressionistic than scholarly, but it also illustrates the possibilities for deeper research.

commented by, among others, the diplomatic historian Mark Lawrence. A specialist in international diplomacy of the Vietnam Conflict, Lawrence nonetheless recognizes the need for research about Vietnamese societies. As he observes in a review of Robert Topmiller's monograph on the urban Buddhists,

Scholars can now write with considerable confidence, for example, about North Vietnamese, Chinese, or Soviet decision-making. Yet, one dimension of the war – unquestionably one of the most important to any overall appraisal – has remained cloaked in mystery: the attitudes and opinions of ordinary Vietnamese in whose name leaders in Hanoi, Saigon, and Washington carried on the fight.<sup>75</sup>

In other words, the dominant top-down historiography of the conflict may benefit from research from more bottom-up directions. Further, as Lawrence comments the book itself, “Merely by highlighting urban settings, Topmiller makes clear that scholars must look beyond the peasantry – the overwhelming focus of nearly all inquiry into South Vietnamese opinion – to grasp the full complexity of the subject.”<sup>76</sup> The implication could not be clearer: research on the urbanites would bring balance to the greater scholarship on the people in the countryside.

For my purpose, it was, as William Duiker first pointed out three decades ago, Saigon and other urban areas that the communist revolutionaries encountered by far the most difficulty in their effort to win the hearts and minds of South Vietnamese. There were a number of urban sympathizers to the revolutionary side, and the communists put in place what seemed to be an effective network of spies and informers in Saigon and

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<sup>75</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, “Review of Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed*,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 10:4 (Fall 2008), 154-155.

<sup>76</sup> Lawrence, “Review,” 154.

other cities.<sup>77</sup> Yet they never established anything close to a strong or lasting base of support in any major city: a fact ruefully acknowledged by postwar communist historiography.<sup>78</sup> Certainly, security provided by the RVN and the U.S. played a major role in deterring possible penetration and propaganda by the communist revolutionaries. But as best illustrated by the Tet Offensive, there was no indication whatsoever that urban South Vietnamese supported revolutionary forces. This occurred in spite of problems and difficulties that the urbanites had vis-à-vis the massive American presence. Notwithstanding their complicated and problematic relationship with the U.S., they were not amendable to the revolution as run by the NLF and the DRV. Were there factors at work besides security that deterred revolutionary advances into urban South Vietnam? Or, to reverse the question, *what could it be about urban South Vietnamese* that kept them from supporting the communists?

These questions are far-reaching in possibilities and implications, and this dissertation does not pretend to give a full answer to it. There is too much not known about urban South Vietnam at this point that, in all likelihood, an attempt to generate an overarching interpretation would soon encounter evidence to the contrary. More modestly, the dissertation seeks to account for William Duiker's insight by going behind the façade of warfare to examine some of the thoughts and ideas generated by noncommunist and anticommunist urban South Vietnamese themselves. It shows them in their own terms rather in the terms set forth by communist historiography or earlier

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<sup>77</sup> See Berman, *Perfect Spy*; Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, *Lich Su Dang Bo Dang Cong San Viet Nam Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh: Tap II (1954-1975) So Thao* [History of the Party Committee of the Vietnamese Communist Party in Ho Chi Minh City: Volume II (1954-1975), Rough Draft] (Ho Chi Minh City: NXB Ho Chi Minh City, 2000), 272-273.



American historiography. What kinds of subjects and concerns, it asks, did urban South Vietnamese articulate among themselves? What occupied their minds and influenced their outlooks? What did they think about the communists, about the Americans, and about themselves? The dissertation endeavors to uncover and illuminate on the mindsets among urban South Vietnamese, and to contribute to the little-known subject of public opinion as discussed by Mark Lawrence.

To reach this goal, I have concentrated on a number of South Vietnamese publications. They are – to return one last time to Mark Philip Bradley’s observation – among the “published sources,” “Vietnamese-language press,” and “sophisticated world of Vietnamese arts and letters” that have been available for researchers in the U.S. for decades but rarely if ever utilized. The bulk of these publications were first published in Saigon during the divisional period of 1954-1975. They were written and produced mostly by South Vietnamese, most of who, as far as I could determine, were either living in Saigon or were closely connected to it. (Most of the rest were in Hue and France.) In part, its use of sources takes the lead from two excellent (and, in some ways, opposing) intellectual histories about the late colonial period from the historians David Marr and Shawn McHale.<sup>79</sup> Drawing from the concept “public sphere,” McHale looks into Confucian, communist, and Buddhist texts to suggest the plurality of Vietnamese voices that competed for attention and supporters during late colonialism.<sup>80</sup> Focusing on the new generation of intelligentsia, Marr utilizes a wider cornucopia of publications and

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<sup>79</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004).

<sup>80</sup> McHale considers three different articulations on the public square: Jurgen Habermas (in the case of Europe), David Strand (China), and Mary Elizabeth Berry (Japan); see McHale, *Print and Power*, 9-11.

grouped them into eight headings: e.g., “ethics and politics,” “language and literacy,” and “the question of women.” Scrutinizing these publications, Marr and McHale extract and determine the concerns and beliefs of different Vietnamese groups, such as intellectuals, traditionalists, and peasants. Taking on a different period but similar to their works, this dissertation determines and elucidates some of the themes and topics that concerned and occupied the minds of urban South Vietnamese before, during, and after the Americanization of the war.

Another reason for the focus on publications has to do with recent renewed attention to ideology, especially in the historiography of the Cold War. In recent years, a number of scholars of Cold War history have revisited and re-emphasized the roles of ideology in the origins and developments of the Cold War. This is especially true for diplomatic and international histories of governments or leaders such as Stalin and Mao.<sup>81</sup> But attention has been paid too to ideology in society and culture, including America society.<sup>82</sup> Much of Vietnamese-centric scholarship has also addressed the prominence of ideology before and during the Vietnam Conflict.<sup>83</sup> Seeking to account

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<sup>81</sup> Examples are Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Jian Chen, *Mao and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Lorenz M. Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Vladislav Martinovich Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008).

<sup>82</sup> Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Laura A. Belmonte, *Selling the American Way: U.S. Propaganda and the Cold War* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Osgood, *Total Cold War*; Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War*.

<sup>83</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*; Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*; Miller, “Grand Designs”; Miller, “The Diplomacy of Personalism”; Tran, “South Vietnamese Identity”; Quinn-Judge, “The Ideological Debate in the DRV”; Vu, “It’s Time for the Revolution to Show Its True Colors”; Vu, “From Cheering to Volunteering”; Tuong Vu, “Dreams of Paradise: The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam,” *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* 2 (August 2008): 255-285.

for the refusal of most urbanites to join the communist revolution, the dissertation concentrates on their ideological culture that was articulated especially in print. Essentially, it argues that the prevalent ideology of Saigon and other urban areas of South Vietnam differed too greatly from that of the communist revolutionaries. Specifically, it addresses four topics about this prevalent ideology: an antagonism towards communism; an embrace of an increasingly individualist ethos; a non-Marxist view about the nation and nationalism; and the relationship vis-à-vis the Americans, especially anti-Americanism during the period of direct intervention.

### **Organization of the dissertation**

I recognize that these topics are related to one another in a number of ways. At the same time, having sifted through a large amount of Vietnamese publications, I have found there are distinct sets of themes – and at times also distinct sets of publications – to warrant treating each topic separately. Accordingly, the first two chapters address the issue of anticommunism. Chapter One provides a background about political and ideological divergence dated to late colonialism. Chapter Two examines the critique of communism from anticommunist South Vietnamese, especially from Diem and urban-based northern émigrés. Notwithstanding the over-familiar Cold War mantra that the U.S. aimed to support the building of a “viable, anticommunist state” in South Vietnam, there has been scant understanding of what anticommunism might have meant to South Vietnamese. I examine a body of publications that could be called “anticommunist literature” and argue that the anticommunist writers in the urban South reached back

especially to the still-fresh experience with the Vietminh during the period 1945-1954 to make sense of the present.

One aspect in the critique of communism had to do with the Communist Party's opposition to "bourgeois individualism," and the next two chapters extract and delineate the meaning and development of a petit bourgeois ethics among urban South Vietnamese. Chapter Three places the development of South Vietnamese individualism on a line of continuity to some of the most popular and potent thinking among the Vietnamese intelligentsia during the late colonial period. Chapter Four examines two sets of popular publications to illustrate the kinds of personhood and petit bourgeois ethos that the urbanites aspired to for their postcolonial lives. Tackling a separate topic, Chapter Five addresses the production and development of nationalism in the urban South by focusing on selected periodicals and series of popular histories and cultural writings. It argues that instead of socialist internationalism as advocated by the communist revolutionaries, urban South Vietnamese were in favor of a more narrow nationalism developed during late colonialism. At the same time, they looked towards some postcolonial nations, such as India and Israel, for ideas and inspiration about building that of their own.

Closely related to this development of noncommunist nationalism are South Vietnamese perceptions of their relationship to the U.S. Using a variety of sources, Chapters Six and Seven consider pro- and anti-American attitudes and ideas, respectively. It shows that there was a shift from a welcoming if somewhat wary attitude towards to the U.S. in the 1950s and early 1960s, to one of growing frustration and open anti-Americanism by the late 1960s and early 1970s. The chapter examines the appeal of

the partnership with the U.S. for urban South Vietnamese as well as the roots and causes of rifts and chasms within the partnership.

There is at least one overarching theme in considering these topics, which is that South Vietnam was not a brand new creation but saw a number of continuities to the past. South Vietnamese anticommunism was shaped especially by experiences during August Revolution and the First Indochina War. The growing individualistic ethos in urban South Vietnam was neither a French nor American product, but was part of an ongoing process of Vietnamese adaptation since late colonialism. Noncommunist nationalism in urban South Vietnam, too, was also of one piece with the kind of nationalism promoted in late colonialism, which had much to do with the promotion of ethnic and dynastic heroes. In important ways, it diverged greatly from the communist brand of nationalism, which co-existed with socialist internationalism, about which urban South Vietnamese did not much care. Complicating these strands of continuity, however, was the relationship between noncommunist urban South Vietnamese and the U.S. My reading of South Vietnamese sources suggests that urban South Vietnamese were more occupied with postcolonial issues than Cold War issues, especially in the period prior to American intervention. In many ways, American concerns with the Cold War ran counter to the postcolonial concerns of the urbanites. The differences, moreover, were magnified by the Americanization of the war. More precisely, the ways that Washington conducted the war might have saved South Vietnam in the short run, but they also contributed to lingering suspicions about American domination in running South Vietnamese affairs. These varying perceptions between them and their Cold War-focused American allies

contributed significantly to the difficulties in relations discussed in the monograph *The South Vietnamese Society* and George Herring's presidential address.

## CHAPTER ONE

### VIETNAMESE COMMUNISM AND ANTICOMMUNISM UNTIL 1954

This chapter begins with a survey of historiography about Vietnamese anticommunism and notes the relative lack of scholarship on its ideological aspects. Showing that its history was significantly different from American anticommunism and should be understood in its own terms, the chapter then traces the roots of this anticommunism to developments during the first half of the twentieth century. It does so by synthesizing the historical literature about late colonial Vietnam in the last thirty years. While this scholarship has broadened the understanding of Vietnamese intellectual and political developments, none of it has focused on anticommunism as a subject in its own right. This synthesis also utilizes a number of Vietnamese-language memoirs and communist organizational histories for the crucial period of 1945-1954. It contends that the ideological conflict that helped to define the Second Indochina War could not be understood from the Cold War alone, but that it had deep roots in intellectual and political conflicts among Vietnamese since the early twentieth century.

The chapter describes these developments in a chronological order: (1) the shift from old-style rebellions to early attempts at modernization by the Vietnamese elites between the 1900s and the 1920s; (2) the growth of and competition among communist and noncommunist political parties during the 1920s and 1930s; (3) different kinds and levels of anticommunism from the Catholic Church, the colonial authorities, and the

intelligentsia during the same decades; (4) the jockeying for power among communist and anticommunist groups during the Second World War; and, most significant, (5) the intra-Vietnamese violence during the period 1945-1952. Focusing on Viet Minh revolutionary violence and political repression against noncommunist and Trotskyist Vietnamese, I make the argument that it was not the Cold War but intra-Vietnamese violence during the period of decolonization (some of which coincided with the first years of the Cold War) that most significantly shaped anticommunism in South Vietnam.

### **South Vietnamese anticommunism in historiography**

Anticommunism was an apparent commonality for the United States and South Vietnam throughout their complicated and ultimately unsuccessful relationship. For Washington, anticommunism formed the rationale of its support for the Saigon government, a position summarized in the oft-repeated declaration that the U.S. aimed to support the building of a “viable, noncommunist South Vietnam.” But in spite of this commonality – or perhaps because of it – there has been little about the ideas and meanings of Vietnamese anticommunism in Vietnam War historiography. For the most part, the ideological and intellectual components of the subject have been assumed rather than studied, labeled rather than defined and elaborated. That is, if they were labeled at all. Between the Second Indochina War and the end of the Cold War, the historical literature either set aside the subject or referred to mean the American variety of anticommunism rather than that of the governments and people affiliated to the Republic



of Vietnam (RVN).<sup>1</sup> When South Vietnamese anticommunism was named at all, it typically revolved around a particular political manifestation from the Saigon government, such as the Agroville program from Ngo Dinh Diem, the land reform under Nguyen Van Thieu, and government-backed organizations.<sup>2</sup> There was very little on historical and intellectual developments of anticommunism.<sup>3</sup> This lacuna has stood in striking contrast to the scholarship on the history of Vietnamese communism as a political and intellectual movement. The publishing gap between the two subjects only grew greater during 1975-1990.<sup>4</sup>

Post-Cold War archival access in the former Soviet bloc, China, and Vietnam has continued to deepen the history of Vietnamese communism: on Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, the Communist Party until the end of World War II, and, for our purpose, cultural and political ideology of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).<sup>5</sup> On the

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<sup>1</sup> A representative example is George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Anchor Books, 1987), whose index contains the entry “anti-communism” (539). The entry points at four references, and the longest and most important by far concerns American anticommunism vis-à-vis U.S. diplomacy in the 1940s. Of two references about Vietnamese, one describes Ngo Dinh Diem briefly as to have possessed “a strong anticommunism,” and the other quotes McGeorge Bundy that “all anti-Communist Vietnamese” would regard neutralization as “betrayal.” They are, in short, prescriptive than descriptive.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph J. Zasloff, “Rural Resettlement in South Viet Nam: The Agroville Program,” *Pacific Affairs* 34: 4 (Winter 1962): 327-340; Samuel L. Popkin, “Pacification: Politics and the Village,” *Asian Survey*, 10: 8 (August 1970): 662-671; Charles A. Joiner and Roy Jumper, “Organizing Bureaucrats: South Vietnam’s National Revolutionary Civil Servants’ League,” *Asian Survey*, 3:4 (April 1963): 203-215; Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation under Stress* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1964), 160-189. The last is a chapter called “Anti-Communism and Popular Freedom.” It names several anticommunist periodicals in South Vietnam, but focuses squarely on military and political programs.

<sup>3</sup> Noncommunist movements (along with those of the communists) figure most prominently in Alexander B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976). It focuses on developments during late colonialism, but also has some analysis on southern Vietnam after 1954.

<sup>4</sup> There are too many to list, but among the most important postwar works are William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981, 1996); David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> For examples, William J. Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000); Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Cecil B.

contrary, post-Cold War historiography has barely noted South Vietnamese anticommunism as a causal or underlying factor in the conflict. For example, the first book-length treatment of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), a social history of the South Vietnamese institution, makes the supportable claim that many “ARVN soldiers enlisted... because of their commitment to anticommunism and the rhetoric contained in [nationalistic] documents and speeches.”<sup>6</sup> Another recent work on ARVN, focusing on two mid-level officers whose lives diverged dramatically after their captures by the enemy in 1972, makes similar points. It describes one of the officers to have been driven “by his personal hatred for the communists,” hatred that was informed in part by the participation of his own father as an officer in the Vietnamese National Army, predecessor of ARVN under the State of Vietnam which was created in 1949 by the French and led by former emperor Bao Dai.<sup>7</sup> The book asserts further that “millions of Vietnamese chose to support the fledgling Bao Dai regime over the specter of the permanent triumph of communist forces in Vietnam” for reason of “religion, anticommunism, self-preservation, or greed.” These supporters also “believed that it was more patriotic, even more Vietnamese, to follow their own emperor and his more traditionalist form of nationalism than to support Ho Chi Minh and the foreign and

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Currey, *Victory At Any Cost: The Genius of Viet Nam's Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap* (Washington and London: Brassey's, 1997); Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Christoph Giebel, *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004); Kim N.B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the South Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 120.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army: Heroism and Betrayal in the ARVN* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), 33-34.

uncomfortably European concept of Marxism.”<sup>8</sup> Still, a third example, a synthesis-minded general history of the war, views the communist-led revolution as dependent on terror and forced indoctrination as much as on national liberation and land redistribution.<sup>9</sup> It further recognizes that “no amount of American money and military support could have sustained a struggle until 1975 had there not existed... a huge opposition to communist rule.” It adds that the “opposition was united only by its hatred of the communists.”<sup>10</sup> It also acknowledges the commitment of the Vietnamese anticommunists to have survived as long as they did even as their Saigon governments were weak and had to face an aggressive enemy in Hanoi. Because Hanoi played off well China and the Soviet Union against each other while extracting aid from both of them, the book is mistaken in calling North Vietnam a client state. But it highlights the roles of Vietnamese anticommunists in a conflict that had been portrayed too often as one between the U.S. and the communists.

In acknowledging that anticommunism was a major motivational factor for at least a minority of South Vietnamese, recent historiography signals a small but not insignificant development. At the same time, it remains murky on specifics such as, for instance, what the “commitment to anticommunism” could have meant to ARVN soldiers; or how the unified “hatred of communism” among members of the opposition might have come to be in the first place. Moreover, the frequent if not also blanket usage

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<sup>8</sup> Wiest, *Vietnam's Forgotten Army*, 20.

<sup>9</sup> Gerard J. DeGroot, *A Noble Cause? America and the Vietnam War* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), See also the discussion of the book in Kendrick Oliver, “Towards a New Moral History of the Vietnam War,” *The Historical Journal* 47: 3 (September 2004): 761.

<sup>10</sup> DeGroot, *A Noble Cause?*, 84-85.

of the word “hatred” in descriptions of anticommunists, has highlighted the emotive quality of their opposition without illuminating possible intellectual content.

As illustrated by some of the primary sources in the next chapter, it is difficult to deny that anticommunists were driven by hatred and fear of communism. But their heightened emotions were also informed and shaped by two factors: experiences of revolutionary communism, and the ideas and ideals about the future of Vietnam among anticommunists themselves.<sup>11</sup> Those ideas might not have been as articulate as those believed and propagated by the communist revolutionaries. But they were decidedly non-Marxist or, in some cases, explicitly anti-Marxist. Examination of South Vietnamese anticommunism would need to take into account its intellectual components: a rather difficult task given the long-standing emphasis of emotive over cognitive aspects.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Scholarship before 1975 recognized without elaborating on experiential aspects of anticommunism more than postwar historiography. “Hatred of communism is widespread,” wrote two American scholars in the early 1960s when discussing South Vietnamese civilians in areas controlled by the RVN. They added that “although such sentiments were no doubt inculcated through first-hand experiences rather than through indoctrination sessions.” See Joiner and Jumper, “Organizing Bureaucrats,” 214. This is not to say that anticommunist propaganda did not play a role, or that the extent of “first-hand experience” could be pinpointed precisely. But the role of experience, even if small-scale, should not be discounted. The larger point is that postwar historiography might have been influenced by the fact that the outcome of the conflict was known. As a result, it was inclined to attribute anticommunist hatred to propaganda rather than to experience.

<sup>12</sup> There is a parallel to the historiography of American anticommunism. Between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s, there was a similar emphasis on emotion over thought – more specifically, hysteria over rationality – in the scholarship about U.S. anticommunism, especially on the Red Scare and McCarthyism. The subject still arouses considerable debates, and there is not yet a scholarly consensus. Nonetheless, the last two decades have produced a more even-handed historiography that places anticommunism in the broader and longer context of U.S. history that considers irrational *and* rational causes for anticommunism. Two examples of general histories are M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within, 1830-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); and Richard Gid Powers, *Not Without Honor: The History of American Anticommunism* (New York: Free Press, 1995). Even opposing views now analyze the subject in context of the long view: see, for examples, John Earl Hayes, “The Cold War Debate Continues: A Traditionalist View of Historical Writing on Domestic Communism and Anti-Communism,” *Journal of Cold War History* 2:1 (Winter 2000): 76-115; and Ellen Schrecker, *The Age of McCarthyism: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford / St. Martin’s, 2002), 5-19.

## Understanding South Vietnamese anticommunism

The lack of scholarship on intellectual and ideological content is complicated further by the fact that South Vietnamese anticommunism was not a singular quantity but consisted of a variety of political expressions. A plurality of South Vietnamese, possibly a majority, was not drawn to communism in any meaningful sense.<sup>13</sup> But as exemplified by the conflict between Ngo Dinh Diem and the rural religious sects Hoa Hao and Cao Dai and the secular Saigon-based Binh Xuyen in 1955 – or that between Diem and the urban Buddhists in 1963 – noncommunist South Vietnamese were divided into a number of groups that frequently came up against one another. This political fragmentation, as suggested by the diplomatic historian Edward Miller, makes it “difficult to see how political developments in South Vietnam can be reduced to a single, all-encompassing struggle between communism and anticommunism.” Such reductionism would ignore the fact that “some of the most consequential political developments in South Vietnam during the war resulted from conflicts among noncommunist groups,” and that those conflicts “were driven by more than mere cravings for power; they were also shaped by disagreements over how modernity should be defined and pursued.”<sup>14</sup>

Miller’s argument is well taken. In addition to the Diemists, the Buddhists, the Hoa Hoa, and the Cao Dai, South Vietnam saw the participation of the Catholics, the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, and a multiplicity of political parties. The last

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<sup>13</sup> A number of NLF members, especially those among the educated class in southern Vietnam, joined the organization out of anti-Americanism than revolutionary convictions. “We had no choice,” as Duong Quynh Hoa, a former NLF deputy minister who became a postwar critic of the Communist Party, said in 1981, “We had to get rid of the foreigners.” See Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, second ed. (New York: Penguin, 1997), 37. A longer recollection is Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985).

<sup>14</sup> Edward Miller, “War Stories: The Taylor-Buzzanco Debate and How We Think about the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (2006): 472.

included the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang, commonly abbreviated as the VNQDD); the Great Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Viet Nam Dai Viet Dang, the largest of several Great Viet parties and usually referred to as Great Viet or Dai Viet); and a host of other groups.<sup>15</sup> Given the possible multiplicity of their ideologies and agendas, these groups might not have agreed on the course to fight communism at all. It remains a task for historians to uncover and compare the agendas and ideologies of these groups, and how they played out and interacted with one another in the South Vietnam.<sup>16</sup>

This multiplicity notwithstanding, it is difficult to consider anticommunism, *as a political attitude and an intellectual component of a group's larger ideology*, as anything than a defining feature for most noncommunist South Vietnamese groups. Many anticommunists did not support Diem's personalist ideology, and certainly at least some of them were critical of the excesses from the "Denouncing Communist" campaign and other policies under his regime. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, many anticommunists also leveled strong criticism and dissent at the Nguyen Van Thieu government. But even if they might have argued over the means to fight the communists, they certainly did not disagree with Diem's or Thieu's fundamental anticommunist stand. To judge from political publications that proliferated under both regimes, the "hatred of communism" was perhaps *the only major commonality that kept together the Saigon government and other anticommunists in South Vietnam*, fragile that their unity might have been.

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<sup>15</sup> An overview of noncommunist political parties from 1900 to 1975, including those during the South Vietnamese period, is François Guillemot, "Penser le nationalisme révolutionnaire au Viet Nam: Identités politiques et itinéraires singuliers à la recherche d'une hypothétique "Troisième voie"" [Thinking about revolutionary nationalism in Viet Nam: Political identities and unusual itineraries in search of a hypothetical "Third Way"], *Moussons* 13-14 (2009): 147-184.

<sup>16</sup> A related effort towards this direction is Chapman, "Debating the Will of Heaven."

This commonality was especially true of urban anticommunists, whose relationship with the Diem government was often ambiguous and occasionally came to blows. In a rare successful collaboration, however, they constructed an ideological critique of communism between the mid-1950s and the early 1960s. Before examining this critique, this chapter gives the background for it. It argues that the ideological conflict between communists and anticommunists became most explicit in the 1940s, but its roots were dated to the turn of the twentieth century.

### **The roots of Vietnamese communism and anticommunism:**

#### **Old-style rebellions to political parties**

Vietnamese anticommunism might have reached its apex in southern Vietnam after the Geneva Conference of 1954, but its origins reached back to at least the late colonial period, albeit in more complex ways. At the turn of the twentieth century, local and regional anticolonial rebellions had repeatedly failed to displace French rule. Many among the Vietnamese scholar-gentry – mandarins and literati trained in neo-Confucian ethics – began to recognize the limits to the rebellions, particularly the Save the King (Can Vuong) movement. As the historian David Marr has described, Save the King was “never national in scope” and rarely a mass movement. Its leaders

mobilized the local peasantry more for common soldiering and logistical backup than for the provision of comprehensive intelligence on the enemy or impressive political response and support. There was no thought of generating anything that could be labeled revolutionary. In short, this apparent minority of the scholar-gentry acted as their idealistic ethic instructed, and some peasants loyally followed, as they had in resistance against the Chinese in previous centuries. But the French were not the Chinese [due to their weaponry and modern organization].<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California

The failure prompted many among the scholar-gentry to turn towards reform. They considered alternative ways to achieve national independence. They were further motivated by Social Darwinism, which made its way from Herbert Spencer to Vietnam through the writings of Chinese literati. In their reading of Social Darwinism, the reformists were frightened by the distinct possibility of their country being swallowed by colonialism to the point of complete extinction.<sup>18</sup> They became interested in the Japanese modernizing experiment, and read avidly the writings of Chinese proponents of modernization, especially Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao. Their range of activities included the “Easter Study” program, which raised funds and sent educated young Vietnamese to Japan for studies of modern subjects. Out of this exposure to Japanese modernist and Chinese reformist ideas, the Vietnamese elites started to cast their eyes beyond their patriotic tradition and towards modern nationalism as already embraced by Japan and the West.

Another effort towards modernization was the Tonkin Free School in Hanoi (1907-1908), founded and run by many reformists from the north and north-center of Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> As advocates of the “new learning,” they wrote and published textbooks, composed patriotic songs, and gave lectures to the general public that promoted new practices. An example was hair-cutting for men, now advocated for health reasons to

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Press, 1971), 76; for more on the Save the King and other rebellions, see 26-76. For an economic angle on rebellions, particularly the issue of taxation, see Philippe Le Failler, “Village Rebellions in the Tonkin Delta, 1900-1905,” in Gisele Bousquet and Pierre Brocheux, ed., *Viêt-Nam Exposé: French Scholarship on Twentieth-Century Vietnamese Society* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 61-86.

<sup>18</sup> Called *che do thuc dan*, the literal meaning of colonialism in Vietnamese is “the people-eating system”.

<sup>19</sup> Colonial names for the three regions of Vietnam were Cochinchina for the south, Annam for the central region, and Tonkin for the north. Like Cambodia and Laos, Cochinchina was a colony ruled directly by France, which in turn devoted more economical investment to it. Annam and Tonkin were legally protectorates, but the French exerted political control on them very much like they did Cochinchina.



replace the long-standing practice of bunning up one's hair in the belief that uncut hair represented linkage to one's ancestors. Another was the use of the Romanized writing script instead of the more difficult Chinese or the Chinese-imitative Vietnamese demotic ones. Although the Romanized script had been created two centuries before by a European missionary for the purpose of spreading the Catholic faith, Vietnamese elites viewed it as alien to their Chinese-infused tradition. The reformists, however, saw that it offered easier access towards mass literacy.

The Tonkin Free School was forced to close after only one year and the reformists were constantly watched and harassed by the colonial authorities.<sup>20</sup> Yet their movement was successful in sparking interests about modernization among educated Vietnamese. The success came at a cost, however, as the reformists did not agree on the means to achieve national independence. On one side were radical figures best represented by Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940), prominent leader of the Eastern Study and later an influence on Ngo Dinh Diem's personalist ideology. Chau favored the use of violence to overthrow colonialism and established a clandestine political party for that purpose. In contrast to him were advocates of non-violent means, especially the reformist Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926) who declined to join Chau's secret and illegal organization and preferred to advocate change in the open. Living in France for fourteen years, Trinh also organized a group to support Vietnamese students in France.<sup>21</sup> Because the colonial

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<sup>20</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc: Phong Trao Duy Tan Dau Tien o Viet Nam* [The Tonkin Free School: The First Modernization Movement in Vietnam], second edition (Saigon: La Boi, 1968). Although classically trained scholars made up the majority of the Reform Movement, there were some graduates from the colonial School of Interpreters that favored "new learning" and the use of the Romanized script even more than their older contemporaries.

<sup>21</sup> One factor in the rise of Vietnamese living in France was World War I, which sent thousands of Indochinese to Europe to support France in war efforts. When the armistice was signed in 1917, there were over 43,000 Vietnamese soldiers and 49,000 Vietnamese workers in France, along with 5,500 soldiers and 2,000 workers elsewhere in Europe. See Kimloan Hill, "Strangers in a Foreign Land: Vietnamese Soldiers

authorities kept a careful eye on advocates of both violent and non-violent means, this divergence was bridged by the focus on their common enemy. But it also signaled serious internal division among the reform generation.

In addition to educational and intellectual reforms was the formation of modern-style political parties. In many ways, this formation was a part of the search for organized communities central to the Vietnamese revolution that spanned most of the twentieth century. While new and revived religious sects among peasants and working-class Vietnamese played important roles in this search for new forms of communities, modern political parties were central to the elites centered in cities and major towns.<sup>22</sup> Most influential in this respect was Phan Boi Chau, who had initially favored a Vietnamese constitutional monarchy on the model of Japan, but later grew to admire Sun Yat-sen and advocate republicanism. Inspired by Sun's formation of the Guomindang as well as the Chinese Revolution of 1911, Chau helped to found the Vietnamese Restoration League (Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi) in the same year: the first revolutionary party in modern Vietnamese history. Rather rudimentarily, the League employed modern techniques of recruitment, training, and organization. To gain visibility, it carried out occasional acts of violence and terrorism against colonists and collaborators. The League killed two French army officers in Hanoi and the Vietnamese governor of a northern province in 1913. In Saigon, it influenced members of secret societies and religious sects to attack the colonial police headquarters. Also engaged in terrorism was another secret

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and Workers in France during World War I," in Nhung Tuyen Tran and Anthony Reid, eds., *Việt Nam: Borderless Histories* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 275. Some of them remained in France after the war to pursue economic and other interests.

<sup>22</sup> The most valuable study of new organized communities remains Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*.

organization, the Society of Like Hearts (Tam Tam Xa) established by former followers of Chau. The Like Hearts assassinated a “treacherous” Vietnamese in 1922 and, two years later, attempted another at the colonial Governor-General. These and other acts of violence raised the profiles of the organizations to their compatriots, but also brought repressive reprisals from the authorities and generated disagreements among Vietnamese about the means and purposes of their revolutionary activities.

Dramatic as they might have appeared, these and other acts of violence, especially a failed but well-publicized uprising in 1917 at the northern prison Thai Nguyen, were largely isolated events and did not lead to widespread violence. This was true even during the second half of the 1920s, which, following the Restoration League and the Like Hearts, saw the appearances of new political parties in various leanings: reformist, anarchist, nationalist, communist, and Trotskyist. With the exception of the reformist and southern-based Constitutionalist Party, the parties were clandestine and revolutionary.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, the main agent of change remained the realm of thought and ideas rather than organized political agitation. The arrest and trial of Phan Boi Chau in 1925 and the death of Phan Chau Trinh from tuberculosis the next year marked the end of a quarter-century of efforts from the Vietnamese reformers. (Chau would spend the remainder of his life under house arrest in Hue.) In their place emerged a new generation of educated Vietnamese commonly called the intelligentsia.

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<sup>23</sup> In chronological order, the Constitutionalist Party, the only legal and non-revolutionary party, was founded in 1923 in southern Vietnam. The same year also saw the start of the Trotskyist party Young Annam, also in the south. Three important parties were started in 1925: the proto-communist and northern-based Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (the Youth League); the central-based and Marxist-leaning New Vietnamese Revolutionary Party (the New Viet); and the southern-based and anarchist Hope of Youth Party. The year 1927 saw the Hope of Youth become the Nguyen An Ninh Secret Society and the establishment of the northern-based Vietnamese Nationalist Party (*Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang*, or VNQDD). A summary of political parties under colonialism and until 1954, including the smaller ones, can be found in Nguyen Khac Ngu, *Dai Cuong ve cac Dang Phai Chinh Tri Viet Nam* [A general guide on Vietnamese political parties] (Toronto: Tu Sach Nghien Cuu Su Dia, 1989), 16-60.

Like their predecessors from the Reform Movement during the 1900s and 1910s, the intelligentsia of the 1920s sought and experimented with modernist ideas from Europe, Japan, China, and elsewhere – albeit more intensely and openly. They sought national independence, but were driven also by restless desires for personal freedom from traditional family system, institutions, and morality. Their search therefore became one of dual purpose: liberation from the constraints of both colonialism and tradition. Theirs was a largely urban experience, particularly in Saigon, which saw a constrained but nonetheless lively spread of radical ideas. On the whole, these youthful and cosmopolitan Vietnamese contributed to what the historian Hue-Tam Ho Tai has called “the experimental, and most individualistic, stage of the Vietnamese Revolution.”<sup>24</sup>

The leading figure of this stage was the southerner Nguyen An Ninh (1900-1943), the most able and well-known Vietnamese public speaker and agitator of his time. Born in Saigon, Ninh received primary and secondary education in colonial schools before spending two years at the University of Hanoi, then the lone institution of higher learning in Indochina. He next went to France, enrolled in law at the Sorbonne, and became involved into expatriate political activities. Returning to Saigon in 1923, Ninh started the newspaper *Cloche Fêlée* to publish criticism of the colonial regime, propagate radical ideas about personal freedom on a host of issues, and advocated a kind of rebellious anarchism as protest to colonial rule as well as Vietnamese tradition. Coupled with a brash style and public persona, Ninh drew imitators from other parts of the country and contributed to making Saigon the chief publishing city in Indochina for a time. In the words of the best intellectual biographer of Ninh, his political ideas were “a profoundly

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<sup>24</sup> Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 258.

idealistic opposition to authoritarianism, in which national independence was only a logical extension of individual freedom.”<sup>25</sup> Ninh founded a clandestine political party named after himself, but was too much of a thinker to have been an effective politician. He excelled in political pamphleteering than hands-on organization, and his secret society was a collection of non-doctrinaire energized admirers than fervent adherents. As William Duiker has suggested, had Ninh “persisted in motivating his enthusiastic following in the direction of organized political protest, perhaps along the line of Mahatma Gandhi’s movement in India, the Vietnamese nationalist movement might have taken a different course.”<sup>26</sup> But Ninh was not an adept organizer, and his base of political support was strongest in Saigon but weak elsewhere. In any event, he was often arrested and imprisoned by the colonial authorities, and died in captivity. In the long run, his most significant contribution was perhaps elevating a new kind of revolutionary consciousness among enthusiastic educated youth Vietnamese, who would become active members of communist and noncommunist organizations during the 1930s and 1940s.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, however, many of these youths were still searching for leaders with a strong revolutionary program. Clandestine political parties based in northern and central Vietnam were better suited for this task. Most significant were the New Vietnamese Revolutionary Party (or the New Viet), which was Marxist-leaning but had no affiliation to Moscow; the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (or Youth League), founded by Ho Chi Minh and oriented towards Marxist-Leninism; and the VNQDD, founded by Nguyen Thai Hoc and inspired by the Chinese Guomintang.

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<sup>25</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 45; the quotation is from Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 83.

<sup>26</sup> Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 12.

Although ideologically different, the three parties were similar in that they were oriented towards the more radical and revolutionary orientation in contemporary China rather than the more moderate one in France. In other words, they were closer to Phan Boi Chau than Phan Chu Trinh. They advocated the use of violence and adapted Leninist techniques of organization and discipline for internal structure.<sup>27</sup> They stood in contrast to southern Vietnam, which was dominated by the reformist Constitutionalist Party and populist religious movements such as the eclectic Cao Dai and the Buddhist-derivative Hoa Hao.

Of particular influence were Ho Chi Minh and Nguyen Thai Hoc, both of who, similar to Phan Chu Trinh before, unsuccessfully petitioned for reform or outside assistance. At the Versailles Conference after World War I, Ho tried but was prevented to reach Woodrow Wilson to ask for his influence on European politics towards the colonies. At Hanoi in 1926, Hoc fruitlessly petitioned the governor-general of Indochina for economic and educational reforms. The utter lack of interest on the part of European and American authorities contributed to their disillusionment with reformist possibilities and subsequently to their entrance into clandestine revolutionary politics. As well known, Ho soon became a founding member of the French Communist Party, made his way to Moscow, and joined the Comintern before returning to southern China to found the Youth League. Nguyen Thai Hoc's route to his own political party was less circuitous, geographically and politically. In the same year of his petition, three members of the intelligentsia open a publishing house in Hanoi for the purpose of printing and distributing writings and translations related to revolution, especially the Chinese

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<sup>27</sup> Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 185.

Revolution and Sun Yat-sen's political philosophy of "Three Peoples." Through his association with the publishing house that led to contacts with an extensive network of would-be revolutionaries, Hoc formally established the VNQDD at the end of 1927. Though founded after the Youth League and the New Viet, it quickly became the largest and most important Vietnamese revolutionary organization in the late 1920s. Similar to the Restoration League and the Like Hearts Society before, it occasionally resorted to assassinations of Vietnamese "collaborators" but, for the most part, escaped suppression from the colonial authorities.<sup>28</sup>

After the VNQDD commenced a premature uprising in early 1930, however, Hoc was arrested and promptly executed. His party survived and remained an important political player in revolutionary politics well into the 1940s, but never came close to the popular pedigree or membership of its first two years. On the other hand, three communist groups came together to form the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) under Ho Chi Minh.<sup>29</sup> The ICP was not spared of internal problems. Only months after the

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<sup>28</sup> The most informative history of the VNQDD remains Hoang Van Dao, *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: Lich Su Tranh Dau Can Dai 1927-1954* [The Vietnamese Nationalist Party: A Modern History of Struggle, 1927-1954] (Saigon, 1970); see 77-78 for a description of its early assassinations of Vietnamese collaborators. An English translation is Hoang Van Dao, *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of A National Struggle: 1927-1954*, trans. by Huynh Khue (Pittsburgh: Rose Dogs Books, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> The events leading to the formation of the ICP in 1930 were convoluted. Having come under the influence of Lenin's anti-imperialism, Ho made his way from Paris to Moscow in 1923. In early 1925, he went to southern China as a Comintern representative, got into contact with Vietnamese groups, and founded the Youth League whose members came primarily from northern Vietnam. In 1927, however, clash between the Guomindang and Chinese communists forced Ho to return to Moscow and leave the leadership of the League to others. The League recruited members from all three Vietnamese regions but was also fractured by internal division. Some northern members broke away and formed the Indochinese Communist Party in 1929, prompting the Youth League to rename itself the Annamite Communist Party. Around the same time, the New Viet, some of whose members were Marxist-leaning but not affiliated to Moscow, changed its name to the Indochinese Communist League. The competition among the three communist parties threatened to fracture the communist movement further. It took a major conference in January 1930 – held in Hong Kong and presided over by Ho who came from Thailand – to bring forth reconciliation and formation of three groups into a single organization under the name Indochinese Communist Party. Even there, the situation remained complicated by different emphases among internal groups, as some argued for national liberation while others emphasized the Comintern's proletarian line. See R. B. Smith, "The Foundation of the Indochinese Communist Party, 1929-1930," *Modern Asian*

founding, in fact, more radical members of the party criticized Ho's more moderate approach of combining socialist internationalism and national liberation. They favored proletarian internationalism above all else, came to dominate the ICP, and launched a nationwide worker-peasant movement during 1930-1931. The movement, whose most famous activism was the Nghe Tinh Soviet rebellion in central Vietnam, was suppressed brutally by the colonial authorities.<sup>30</sup> It took another decade before the ICP launched a similar movement in southern Vietnam. Although it too failed to obtain its immediate goals, the movement placed the ICP in a viable and advantageous position over noncommunist political parties during the critical last year of World War II.

In any event, the formation of the ICP was pivotal in that its Marxist ideology not only replaced Nguyen An Ninh's anarchic vision, but also offered an attractive alternative to the VNQDD's Guomindang-inspired philosophy. The ongoing socialist experiment in the Soviet Union provided a concrete exemplar of revolutionary possibility to a number of young and educated Vietnamese.<sup>31</sup> Marxist-Leninism availed them to a breathtaking conceptual framework based on class analysis, a developed and ready-made revolutionary program, and a clear-cut alternative to less defined radicalism of Nguyen An Ninh. In David Marr's succinct wording, Marxism "possessed scientific credentials equal to Social Darwinism plus a firm moral stance."<sup>32</sup> Or, in Hue-Tam Ho Tai's longer description of this important transition,

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*Studies* 32:4 (October 1998): 769-805. More generally, the successful Hong Kong conference and the failed uprising of the VNQDD made early 1930 a turning point in the history of the Vietnamese revolution.

<sup>30</sup> See Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 151-154.

<sup>31</sup> A detailed example is given in Tuong Vu, "Dreams of Paradise: The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam," *Ab Imperio: Studies of New Imperial History and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space* 2 (August 2008), 255-285.

<sup>32</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 415.



The introduction of the idiom of class-based social analysis produced a drastic intellectual reorientation which effectively ended the radical phase of the Vietnamese Revolution. This reorientation involved a rethinking of the role of the revolutionary party (and of the individual within it) and of the social processes which give rise to revolution. It substituted the masses for the individual, class for generation, society for the family, and economics for culture. Whereas radicals had believed that a unitary struggle for the liberation of the nation as a whole would serve as an operational framework for the emancipation of the individual, Marxists cast the struggle against imperialism in terms of conflicts between classes. Marxism downplayed the importance of the individual and redefined the position of the revolutionary party within society by calling attention to the role of the masses in the revolutionary process. Thus, if the 1920s were the decade of the rebellious individual, the 1930s became the decade of the proletarian masses, with class struggle replacing intergenerational conflict as the motive force of revolution.<sup>33</sup>

Ideological appeal notwithstanding, the transition from radicalism to Marxist-Leninism did not mean the latter was an instant success among the Vietnamese intelligentsia. To the contrary, Marxist doctrines drew only a fraction of youthful revolutionaries during the late 1920s and early 1930s, and the ICP had only about 5000 members even at the start of the August Revolution in 1945. In addition, there was deep divide among Vietnamese Marxists during the 1930s, since some adhered to Stalin and the Third International while others became Trotskyists and supported the Fourth International. Upon their return to Vietnam in the early 1930s from studies in France, the Trotskyists cooperated with the Stalinists on a number of projects, including the publishing of the influential newspaper *La Lutte* in Saigon. But they also organized themselves into “Left Opposition” and were critical of the Stalinist line. By 1937, the Trotskyists and Stalinists were bitterly against each other because of both internal problems and external developments, especially the Popular Front that was supported by the Stalinists and opposed by the Trotskyists. Thereafter the division between the

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<sup>33</sup> Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 226-227.

Stalinists and Trotskyists proved unbridgeable and culminated in the liquidation of the latter by the former during and after the August Revolution.<sup>34</sup>

The growing dominance of the Stalinists could be spotted in the relationship between them and noncommunist nationalists. There had been a meeting in 1928 to negotiate a possible merger between the Youth League and the VNQDD, the latter by far the largest of noncommunist parties and even surpassed the Youth League in membership. Even though both organizations employed similar control apparatus, the attempt quickly failed because the VNQDD would not agree to the Youth League's insistence on having a central committee outside of Vietnam. The VNQDD also disagreed with the Youth League on the revolutionary pedigree of their respective leaders: at the meeting, for example, the main representative of the VNQDD "shouted" at his Youth League counterparts that Ho Chi Minh was not as revolutionary as Nguyen Thai Hoc. Another attempt to meet in Thailand was unsuccessful, and the two groups went their separate ways but with growing antagonism. The VNQDD also looked into a possible merger with either the Nguyen An Ninh Secret Society or a smaller noncommunist group in the north, but nothing came of the effort due to disagreement in strategy.<sup>35</sup> Then and later, the difficulty in alliance formation among noncommunist

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<sup>34</sup> There was, again, a geographical or regional divide among early Vietnamese Marxists. While the Stalinists consisted of Vietnamese from all regions, Trotskyists were almost exclusively southerners, a fact attributable to circumstances of southern students in France as well as to the more individualistic and less communitarian of southern history and culture. On the conflict between Trotskyists and Stalinists, see Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 224-257; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 387-400; Ngo Van, *Viet Nam 1920-1945: Cach Mang va Phan Cach Mang thoi Do Ho Thuoc Dia* [Vietnam 1920-1945: Revolution and Counter-Revolution during Colonial Rule] (Montreuil, France and Amarillo, TX: Chuong Re / L'Insomniaque, 2000), 197-266. The last title was written by a former Trotskyist; the French version is Ngo Van, *Việt-Nam 1920-1945: Révolution et contre-révolution sous la domination coloniale* (Paris: Nautilus, 2000), 203-273.

<sup>35</sup> Nhuong Tong, *Nguyen Thai Hoc 1902-1930*, revised edition (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1956), 41-43; the author was a leader of the VNQDD and one of a few original leaders that survived colonial execution. See also Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 218.

nationalists was a central weakness in their organizational competition vis-à-vis the communists.<sup>36</sup>

There were other internal and external factors that led to the eventual dominance of the communists over other political parties. They included differences in organizational skills; death or survival of leaders; ability to change and adapt after initial failure; recruitment of new members; intensity or relaxation of colonial repression; and events having to do with the Great Powers and international changes. For instance, the VNQDD suffered from having most of its core membership executed after the failed uprising in 1930. In contrast, Ho Chi Minh was able to convince three communist organizations to merge into the ICP. The communists also learned from their mistakes in mobilization and adapted better tactics and strategies. They shifted, for example, from an emphasis on proletarian recruitment in the mid-1920s, to supporting an alliance of workers and peasants in the late 1920s and early 1930, to mobilizing the peasant masses in the mid- and late 1930s.<sup>37</sup> Although their base of support was still far from dominant in the early 1940s, the communists showed an agile and persistent ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

It benefited too from good recruiting strategies. Like the noncommunist underground parties, the ICP suffered from ruthless arrests, imprisonment, and

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<sup>36</sup> It has been suggested that mutual bickering, jealousies, and other divisive occurrences – common obstacles to the formation and maintenance of political alliances among Vietnamese – were outcomes of long-standing bureaucratic interest groups, secret societies, and regional differences in Vietnamese history. See Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 13.

<sup>37</sup> The years 1930-1931 saw a significant series of rural protests and demonstrations against tax levies and other economically related issues. Foremost among the protests was the Soviet Nghe-Tinh, which took place in the central provinces of Nghe An and Ha Tinh and began on May Day, 1930. Supported by the local ICP committee, it led the peasants to depose colonial control temporarily and establish their own institutions in the form of soviets. These actions led the ICP's provincial committee to commit the entire party to supporting soviets. Subsequently, colonial forces removed the soviets and brutally suppressed the people involved.

executions by the French authorities during the early 1930s. But it could ably channel Leninist organizational principles into practice and rebuilt even while in confinement. Facing serious constraints, the ICP nonetheless continued to create cells and networks, formed seemingly non-political fronts (such as prisoners' association) to mislead the authorities, continued to train subordinate members, and recruited new members from noncommunist parties.<sup>38</sup> By the time they got back in touch with Ho Chi Minh in the early 1940s, they remained one among many anticolonial groups, yet with stronger organization than any of them.

### **Anticommunism among Catholics, colonialists, and intelligentsia**

In political terms, the competition between Stalinist and Trotskyist revolutionaries during the late 1920s and early 1930s marked intra-communist disputes while that between Stalinists and noncommunist nationalists the start of polarity between Vietnamese communism and anticommunism. It was, however, more of a political than ideological competition. For the latter, the most vocal opposition to communism came from sources other than the political parties: the colonial authorities and the Catholic Church.

Although many non-Catholic Vietnamese viewed them as intertwined due in part to the association between French missionaries and colonization in the nineteenth century, the two entities were in fact quite different from each other in interests and methods. They also had different reasons for opposing Marxism. In fact, as the historian

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<sup>38</sup> Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 200-239.

Charles Keith has shown recently, early anticommunism among Vietnamese Catholics had a lot to do with challenging French colonialism. Influenced by European Social Catholicism begun in the 1870s and strengthened by Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in the early 1890s, Vietnamese Catholics in the 1930s started a number of progressive associations inspired by the Catholic Action movement in Europe. This kind of activism was not always in the interest of the colonial state, and Catholics were critical of the secularism of the French state and pointed to colonial oppression of Indochinese as a cause for the spread of communism.<sup>39</sup>

Rising tension notwithstanding, both sides considered communism a direct threat to their existence and published many anticommunist materials. For the colonial administration, the communists were to be stopped and suppressed just like any other organization that violently challenged colonial rule. Besides, communist internationalism openly called for the overthrow of the liberal and imperial systems that lay at the core of modern France itself. The Catholic clergy, on the other hand, viewed communism as synonymous to atheism and, therefore, a grave threat to the Church in Indochina and elsewhere in the globe. Reflecting European ecclesiastical alarms about the spread of Marxist-Leninism in Russia, Catholic leaders in Vietnam began a moral crusade against communism even before the formation of the ICP. Anticommunist messages were integrated into Catholic moral instructions and Catholic children were taught that communism attacked the Church, the family, and the "moral order." Frequent were references to "the evil of Communism," and some Catholic print materials went as far as

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Keith, "Vietnamese Catholic Anti-Communism: The Origins of an Idea and a Movement, 1919-1954," paper given at the Graduate Student Conference on Southeast Asian Studies, Cornell University, March 2008. My appreciation goes to Prof. Keith (Michigan State University) for providing me a copy of this paper. A more detailed treatment on the subject is Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church From Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 177-207.

to attack even the Chinese revolutionary Sun Yat-sen and modernizers Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, equating them to, respectively, Lenin, Engels, and Marx. Catholic publications sometimes attacked positivism, utilitarianism, egalitarianism, and, as the case of a Hue-based Catholic periodical, even “atheistic” Buddhism.<sup>40</sup> Vivid was the Church’s anticommunist rhetoric that the colonial authorities borrowed some for their own propaganda. One colonial leaflet, for example, had an illustration of communists burning books and beating a teacher. Another showed a “Vietnamese tree” being chopped down by several Vietnamese communists at the order of a Russian Marxist. A third leaflet warned of communist lure and pretense by showing a young woman labeled “Communism” dancing in front of a village elder.<sup>41</sup>

These colorful if overwrought portrayals of communism from the colonial and ecclesiastical authorities were meant to strike terror into the hearts of ordinary Vietnamese. For many Vietnamese Catholics during the 1930s, however, anticommunism was not merely propaganda but an increasingly significant issue with palpable implications and consequences. This was best illustrated in the killing of the Fr. Pierre Khang during the rebellion of the ICP-led Nghe Tinh Soviet movement in 1930-1931. Contemporary Catholic accounts of the killing attributed the priest’s death to “communists” in the movement. They had previously threatened to attack Khang and the Catholics under his pastorage, and succeeded in killing him and several villagers on May 2, 1931. The attackers also burned the church building and forbade parishioners from burying the dead. Not surprisingly, episodes like this were widely circulated among

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<sup>40</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 84.

<sup>41</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 86-88.

Catholics and, after the defeat of the rebellion, became materials for stronger denunciations of communism in Catholic publications.

In particular, the Popular Front period saw a growth in the Catholic press whose readership extended from major cities to towns and even the countryside. Based in Hue, the periodical *For the Lord (Vi Chua)*, whose priest-editor Nguyen Van Thich had written perhaps the best-known Vietnamese-language pamphlet against communism during the 1920s, offered many philosophical and theological critiques of communism. It discussed, for examples, leftist European thinkers such as George Sorel as well as Catholic responses to communism such as Pope Pius XI's 1939 encyclical *Divini Redemptoris (On Atheistic Communism)*. In Saigon and under the editorship of layman Nguyen Huu My, the newspaper *La croix d'Indochine* became perhaps the loudest anticommunist voice of its time among Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Strongly supported by the Catholic property-owning bourgeoisie in the city, it persistently attacked communist abolition of private property and targeted especially the opinions of the rival paper *La Lutte* run by Vietnamese Stalinists and Trotskyists in a rare collaboration.<sup>42</sup>

While ecclesiastical and colonialist anticommunist rhetoric was consistently strong, anticommunism was nonetheless limited in its overall impact during this period. In comparison to the 1940s, revolutionary violence during the 1930s affected only a minority of Vietnamese, mostly Catholics.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, there was also growing tension

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<sup>42</sup> This section on Fr. Pierre Khang and the Catholic press during the Popular Front is drawn mostly from Keith, "Vietnamese Catholic Anti-Communism." Additional information on Nguyen Van Thich is from Do Tan Huong, "Linh Muc Giuse Maria Nguyen Van Thich (1891-1978)" [Reverend Joseph Marie Nguyen Van Thich (1891-1978)], in *Nhung Neo Duong Viet Nam* [Roads of Vietnam] (2007), accessible at <http://www.dunglac.org/index.php?m=module3&v=chapter&ib=197&ict=1402>.

<sup>43</sup> Besides attacking Catholics, the Nghe Tinh Soviet movement also burned pagodas and attacked houses of people categorized as "reactionary landlords." See Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 155.

between the communists on the one hand and the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, or Buddhists on the other. Similar to new and revived religious sects in China, these groups, as the historian Alexander Woodside has described, “very obviously did not believe that communism had found adequate solutions for the traumas of social disintegration.” The sects and the ICP certainly tried to draw people from the other side to themselves during the 1930s. Nonetheless, their encounters did not arise to bloodshed as in the 1940s.<sup>44</sup> Most Vietnamese probably did not connect real-life experiences to sensationalistic depictions of Marxist-Leninism as something to be feared from afar. Among youthful members of the urban intelligentsia, it remained in the realm of intellectual debates rather than that of concrete action. As seen in the next chapter, the Hanoi-based Self-Strength Literary Group (Tu Luc Van Doan), perhaps the most dominant literary and cultural influence upon Vietnamese educated youths during the 1930s, was certainly opposed to class struggle and Marxism. Yet, it did not make anticommunism an issue and instead focused on criticizing the old order and advocating Europeanization of the Vietnamese society. Many budding communist and noncommunist intellectuals were friends who tried to persuade but did not resort to violence to push one another to their respective ideologies.

In this respect, the poet and publisher Nguyen Vy, a devout Buddhist and noncommunist nationalist, gave an exemplifying recollection. Hailed from central Vietnam and living in Hanoi during the 1930s, Vy knew Vo Nguyen Giap and Truong Chinh: later Politburo members of the ICP and, respectively, the military victor at Dien Bien Phu and the leading Party theorist on socialist culture. Giap and Chinh were already adherents of Marxist-Leninism, and Giap loaned Vy dozens of French-language

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<sup>44</sup> For more on the Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, and Buddhism vis-à-vis communism from the 1920s to the 1940s, see Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam*, 182-200. The quotation is from 183.



leftist magazines and books from Marxist authors that included Lenin, Bukharin, and Maurice Thorez (leader of the French Communist Party). Although anticolonial and anti-fascist, Vy was nonetheless “disappointed” in communist theory and thought that Marxism, “if applied in Vietnam, would certainly destroy all moral foundations on the family, society, nation, the Vietnamese people, even the personal self.” Giap’s attempts to persuade Vy did not lead to anything, and vice versa. But they remained friendly with each other, and often bantered when running into each other on the street. During one of those encounters, they were joined by Giap’s wife; Dang Thai Mai, a close friend and fellow Marxist believer of Giap; Mai’s nine-year-old daughter; and Luu Trong Lu, a renowned member of the romantic “New Poetry” movement and who personally favored a Japanese-backed noncommunist political party. Their banter revolved around the girl’s love for martial arts popular fiction. They asked which country she would fight against – France, Japan, or Russia – and each of the adults tried to sway her to attack the country perceived as their ideological enemy but not their favored country. When pressed, the girl answered that she would fight “any country that attacks” Vietnam. The conversation ended in laughter, and the friends parted ways as leisurely as they had met.<sup>45</sup>

In the years after, Giap’s wife died in the colonial prison and he married Mai’s daughter. Luu Trong Lu abandoned support for the noncommunist group, joined the Viet Minh after the August Revolution, remained in the north after the Geneva Conference, and became the head of the Communist Party-controlled Literature Club (Hoi Nha Van). Nguyen Vy was imprisoned by the occupying Japanese during World War II and became a major publisher in Saigon after the Geneva Conference. The diverging paths, however,

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<sup>45</sup> Nguyen Vy, *Tuan Chang Trai Nuoc Viet* [Tuan, Young Man of Vietnam] (Saigon, 1970), 381-394; the quotation is from 383.

did not take place until years later. At the time, communism and anticommunism were mostly in the realm of leisurely debates rather than activism for most of the budding Vietnamese intelligentsia. Like Nguyen Vy, most educated urbanites were neither Catholic nor supporters of colonialism, and their lack of attraction to Marxism was not necessarily because it was against Catholic or colonial interests. Rather they considered that it would have, in the words of a scholar of Vietnamese communism, “sacrificed traditional Vietnamese patriotism to proletarian internationalism.”<sup>46</sup> Or, as another scholar put it, the communists “interpreted patriotism as outmoded tradition and internationalism as modern, a judgment with which most Vietnamese [at the time] disagreed.”<sup>47</sup> Although it could be intense at times, disagreements between Marxists and non-Marxists were, for the most part, abstractions than specific programs.

In the meantime, the ICP were ahead of their opponents – the revolutionary VNQDD, the reformist political parties, and the Trotskyists – in building structure and spreading ideology. But it remained far from dominating the anticolonial movement and, in fact, encountered vigorous competition for influence and membership from several newly formed noncommunist parties as well as continuing challenge from the religious sects. This was especially true during the Popular Front period, which saw a relaxation of colonial suppression of political activities. Most important of these noncommunist nationalist parties was a quartet of organizations whose names shared the common designation “Great Viet” (Dai Viet). By far the largest and most consequential group was the Great Vietnamese Nationalist Party. (The abbreviated “Great Viet” usually referred

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<sup>46</sup> Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 188.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel L. Popkin, “Colonialism and the Ideological Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution: A Review Article,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 44:2 (February 1985), 353.

to this particular party.) Smaller but not insignificant for the time were the Great Vietnamese National-Socialist Party, the Great Vietnamese Humanist Party, and the Great Vietnamese Authentic People's Party. In geography, all four parties began in northern Vietnam. In orientation, they were noncommunist, anticolonial, and either republican or monarchist. While much remains unknown about their ideological programs, they appealed to the political and cultural glories of past dynasties, especially the Ly and the Tran. (Dai Viet was the official name of Vietnam under these dynasties.) In Western political lexicon, they would be classified to have right-wing attitudes. They certainly opposed socialist internationalism, and it appeared that at least a number of their leaders admired European fascist regimes that were on the rise at the time.<sup>48</sup> The Great Viet, in particular, re-emphasized Social Darwinism as the basis for the drive toward independence.<sup>49</sup> The multiplicity of the Great Viet parties illustrated the fragmentation that plagued noncommunist nationalists throughout the twentieth century. Similar to the growth of the VNQDD in the late 1920s, the appearance of the Great Viet parties in the late 1930s revealed the competitiveness of varying political visions and agendas among Vietnamese during late colonialism. On the other hand, the multiplicity indicated that the ideological appeal of Marxist-Leninism as espoused by the ICP, while increasingly prominent in the national landscape, was far from definitive or inevitable.

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<sup>48</sup> François Guillemot, "La tentation 'fasciste' des luttes anticoloniales Dai Viet: Nationalisme et anticommunisme dans le Viêt-Nam des années 1932-1945" [The "Fascist" temptation of the Great Viet's anticolonial struggle: Nationalism and anticommunism in Vietnam, 1932-1945], *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* [Twentieth Century: Review of History] 104 (2009): 45-66; François Guillemot, "Vietnamese Nationalist Revolutionaries and the Japanese Occupation: The Case of the Dai Viet Parties (1936-1946)," in Li Narangoa and R. B. Cribb, eds., *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1945* (London: Routledge, 2003), 221-248.

<sup>49</sup> On its political philosophy and early history, see Quang Minh, *Cach Mang Viet Nam Thoi Can Kim: Dai Viet Quoc Dan Dang 1938-1995* [The Vietnamese Revolution in the Modern Era: The Great Vietnamese Nationalist Party, 1938-1995] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1996), 11-191.

The 1940s brought perhaps the most consequential developments in the ideological landscape among Vietnamese. As the globe experienced the maelstrom that was World War II, events in Vietnam occurred at a dazzlingly – or, depending on one’s perspective, dizzily – fast pace. Vietnamese anticommunism also altered significantly in response to dramatic changes. No longer was it confined to colorful condemnations from the Catholic and colonial presses, shouting matches among members of clandestine political parties, recruitment of new members, or theoretical debates among the urban intelligentsia. Rather, it came out of direct and often violent confrontations between the communists and the larger but disjointed mix of Trotskyists, noncommunist revolutionary and nationalist parties, and adherents of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Catholic religions.

After the unexpected capitulation of France to Germany, there was an agreement between Japan and Vichy France that recognized the sovereignty of the latter while allowing the former to station troops in Indochina. Sensing a possibility for independence in the time ahead, communist and noncommunist groups began to jockey for position. In the southern Mekong delta, the Cao Dai leaders gave overt support to the Japanese, hoping it would lead to eventual autonomy for the sect. In similar hopes, albeit for national independence than regional autonomy, some of the Great Viet parties made gestures of accommodation towards the Japanese occupiers. In the meantime, the VNQDD sought support from the anti-Japanese Guomindang and was headquartered in southern China.<sup>50</sup>

Stronger than any single noncommunist group in the early 1940s, the ICP was nonetheless small in size and impact and had to compete vigorously with the

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<sup>50</sup> My-Van Tran, “Japan and Vietnam's Cao daists: A Wartime Relationship (1939-45),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27:1 (March 1996): 179-193.

noncommunists for support. While local organizations were relatively strong, as a whole ICP members suffered from at least three problems: a loose network of national coordination, the return of colonial arrest and imprisonment after the Popular Front, and two ill-planned uprisings in the fall of 1940. The second failed uprising took place in southern Vietnam and was especially devastating as colonial authorities ruthlessly cracked down on communist suspects.<sup>51</sup> Still, the ICP benefited from the return of Ho Chi Minh to southern China after an absence of seven years. While in Hong Kong in 1931, Ho was arrested by the British authorities for anticolonial activities. Thanks to a mix of legal intervention and Britain's relatively liberal laws, he was eventually released rather than extradited to Indochina, where execution most certainly awaited. One of his supporters, the president of the Hong Kong bar, came up with the ruse that Ho was hospitalized and killed by tuberculosis. The death was widely believed to be true, and he eventually made his way back to Moscow in 1934 and enrolled in the Lenin School. He kept a low profile during this unusual period that saw the Moscow Trials on the one hand and the Popular Front on the other. His role within the ICP was also diminished and his request to return to China was denied in 1936. The Soviets and other ICP leaders thought some of his views were rightist, and a Comintern committee investigated him for orthodoxy. Thanks partly to the shifting international climate of the Popular Front, Ho was eventually allowed by Stalin to leave Moscow in 1938. He made his way back to

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<sup>51</sup> Conveying the impact of the uprising on a local southern ICP committee (with important consequences for the NLF period) is Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 32-59. See also *Lich Su Khoi Nghia Nam Ky* [The History of the Southern Uprising] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2002). It should be read with caution, as the case with official and semi-official communist revolutionary histories. Nonetheless, it provides many pieces of information about communist setbacks in 1940 as well as organizational and other lessons learned by the communists five years later.

China and spent some months with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) before arriving at Guomindang-controlled Kunming in early 1940.<sup>52</sup>

Ho had been out of touch with the ICP, which in any event suffered from renewed colonial repression since the end of the Popular Front. Patiently, he befriended a number of noncommunists, including a follower of Phan Boi Chau that had founded the Vietnamese Independence League, commonly called the Viet Minh. After Ho reunited with the ICP in early 1941, this founder would let him use the same name and shorthand for a new united organization led by the ICP. Ho return to power within the ICP benefited from the deaths of many ICP leaders during his time in Moscow. He helped to shape new strategy by changing the outward emphasis from the spreading of international Marxism to the more immediate goal of national liberation. Ho's aim for the Viet Minh organization was to attract noncommunist support, and he signified this intention by having a noncommunist nationalist, albeit with sympathies to the communists, as chairman of the new organization. He and the ICP also began to plan for military units and strategize for a general uprising in the future.

Communist victory was hardly inevitable, however, and the year 1942 saw the arrest and temporary imprisonment of Ho by the Chinese authorities. Anticolonial politics and Guomindang patronage also played large roles in setting back the ICP. Vietnamese noncommunist leaders in the Chinese province Jingxi, for example, welcomed the arrival of an esteemed noncommunist nationalist, who in turn persuaded them to force out ICP members. The Guomindang also sponsored a conference for unity among noncommunist parties, resulting in the formation of the Vietnamese

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<sup>52</sup> Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh*, 53-65; Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, 191-220.

Revolutionary League (Viet Nam Cach Mang Dong Minh Hoi, or DMH). The leadership of the new organization, however, was incompetent. Now deprived of communists, the Viet Minh did not fare better either, and in fact it disintegrated by the middle of the following year. The Chinese organized another conference in 1944, this time with almost all major political parties, including the ICP that was represented by Ho Chi Minh, now out of prison. Facing many charges from noncommunists, Ho nonetheless helped to persuade the formation of a new DMH for the purpose of national liberation. The presidency of the organization fell to a noncommunist leader, but Ho was chosen as alternative. Although the VNQDD continued to control the new DMH, the momentum had begun to shift to the communists.<sup>53</sup> Ho also resurrected the Viet Minh organization, whose military wing would be led by Vo Nguyen Giap. The ICP remained the strongest of anticolonial groups, though not by much.

### **Intra-Vietnamese violence and the intensification of anticommunism, 1945-1954**

The twists and turns of events during 1945 helped to shift the advantage more decisively to the ICP. Operations by the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) in northern Vietnam led to a brief cooperation between the Americans and the Viet Minh during the spring and summer.<sup>54</sup> In March, the Japanese held a coup against the French, who were technically no longer under Vichy but Gaullist rule. They allowed the emperor Bao Dai to declare independence for Vietnam and formed a government led by the

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<sup>53</sup> For more on the reorganization of the DMH, see King C. Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938-1954* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60-77.

<sup>54</sup> An account is Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The OSS and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against Japan* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

respected scholar Tran Trong Kim. The short-lived Empire of Vietnam, as this Japanese-backed political entity was formally known, affected not a few achievements (such as renaming of streets and places) and contributed to the heightening of nationalist sentiments among Vietnamese.<sup>55</sup> But it also faced enormous problems, especially a massive famine in the northern and central regions that killed an estimated two million Vietnamese by the end. In addition, the Kim government consisted of mostly conservative and moderate men and appeared cautious to revolutionary and progressive Vietnamese, who maintained a wait-and-see attitude. It did not help that the Japanese occupiers maintained much of the political and military control over the country. When Japan surrendered to the Allied powers in August, it was therefore not surprising that the Kim government collapsed quickly.

Having anticipated Japan's imminent end, communist and noncommunist groups jockeyed furiously for positions during the spring and summer. In northern Vietnam, the VNQDD and the Great Viet created a new formal alliance in May while independently operating several military training schools. In the south, the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao sects took advantage to solidify power in their areas of influence while expressing support for Japan's "pan-Asianism." In particular, the Hoa Hao was in firm control of the Chau Doc Province bordering Cambodia. Having been suppressed after the Popular Front, the Trotskyists in Saigon reconstituted themselves into the Revolutionary Workers Party (Dang Tho Thuyen Cach Mang). The Party attempted to reestablish contacts with the smaller number of Trotskyists in the north and expanded activities among workers in Nam Dinh and Hai Phong. Against them were ICP-associated Stalinists that formed the

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<sup>55</sup> The Empire of Vietnam is an under-researched subject, and the best single discussion remains Vu Ngu Chieu, "The Other Side of the 1945 Vietnamese Revolution: The Empire of Viet-Nam (March-August 1945)," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45:2 (February 1986): 293-328.



Vanguard Youths (Thanh Nien Tien Phong) in April and attracted hundreds of new members with nationalistic rather than communist appeal. Using nationalistic rhetoric, the Vanguard constantly attacked the Trotskyists and called for “the People’s government to punish them”: that is, by assassination.<sup>56</sup> Episodes like this foreshadowed the revolutionary violence that soon engulfed Vietnamese anticolonial politics.

As it was, communist and noncommunist Vietnamese already attacked and eliminated one another well before Ho Chi Minh’s declaration of independence in Hanoi. At the time, the mutual liquidation was overshadowed by the Viet Minh’s killings of Japanese troops. As David Marr has shown, however, in practice “most Viet Minh groups probably spent as much time selecting Vietnamese ‘traitors’ and ‘reactionaries’ for elimination as trying to kill Japanese.” Because of difficulties in communication, much of the violence, at least on the communist side, was decided on the local level rather than directives from the central leadership. As Marr explains, although the Viet Minh sanctioned these acts of violence, “no rules appear to have been distributed for determining which enemies of the Revolution were capable of redemption and which not.” More consequential was the targeted violence:

A number of Viet Minh ‘honor teams’ (doi danh du) materialized, dedicated to eliminating traitors. Leaflets signed by these teams lacked the subtlety of other Viet Minh propaganda. For example, a broadside titled ‘Merit is Welcome, [but] Crimes Must Result in Execution!’ listed government employees falling into two categories by name and warned everyone to make their political choices quickly or face dire consequences.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ngo Van, *Viet Nam 1920-1945*, 307.

<sup>57</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 234.

It was at this point that the conflict between the ICP on the one hand and various noncommunist groups commenced, albeit not always in the open. Because of the significance it bore on South Vietnamese anticommunism later, it is important to dwell in this history with some details. As local ICP committees were left to their own devices, revolutionary violence varied from one area to another in kinds and degrees. In the northern mountain area, for example, Viet Minh officials exercised considerable “red terror” on Vietnamese officials. On the other hand, the Viet Minh in the Red River Delta preferred to “threaten or cajole government officials than to eliminate them.” Still, many lower-level officials were killed.<sup>58</sup> In Hanoi, too, there were many assassinations of real and potential rivals. An official history of Hanoi’s Viet Minh security police, for instance, recounts the assassinations of a high-ranking member of the VNQDD, an “enthusiastic intelligence gatherer”, another male who had worked for French intelligence before switching to the Japanese, a Vietnamese who “headed a reactionary political group” supported by the Japanese, a woman who ran a café-type establishment described as a “first-rate establishment for the Japanese police”, and “dozens of other secret police and evil Vietnamese” working for the Japanese.<sup>59</sup> In the northern coastal region along the city of Hai Phong, the Viet Minh-friendly military leader Nguyen Binh and his underlings attacked noncommunist nationalist groups, including members of the DMH.<sup>60</sup> They also attempted to assassinate a number of important noncommunist leaders, including one in the Great Viet.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 235.

<sup>59</sup> *Cong An Thu Do: Nhung Chang Duong Lich Su* [Capitol Police: Stages in History] (Hanoi: Cong An Nhan Dan, 1990), 18. Among the most common labels assigned to the killed were “traitors” or “lackeys” (*tay sai*), “reactionaries” (*phan dong*), or “evil Vietnamese” (*Viet gian*).

<sup>60</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, “A ‘Popular’ Side of the Vietnamese Army: General Nguyen Binh and War in the South,” in Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît De Tréglodé, ed., *Naissance d’un État-Parti: Le*

As events unfolded rapidly in August, the VNQDD, Great Viets, and other noncommunist groups were unsure on how to react. Their hesitancy and slowness helped to enable ICP local committees to organize the takeover in Hanoi.<sup>62</sup> In Hue, the Viet Minh quickly took over the now collapsed Kim government and forced Bao Dai to abdicate. The situation in Saigon was less clear at first, as the Japanese passed on power to the United National Front led by a noncommunist nationalist and consisted of seven groups that included the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, Buddhists, and the communist Vanguard Youths. A week later, however, the Vanguard Youths held the most power. Parallel to these developments was the escalation of intra-Vietnamese violence, which continued well after the month of August. Evidence in recent research and communist histories has indicated that the communists were more successful at eliminating their real and potential rivals than the other way around. An estimate puts the number of deaths of “alleged enemies of the Revolution” at several thousands for late August and September alone, and “tens of thousands” of others were detained for weeks and even months.<sup>63</sup> The Viet Minh decimated the Trotskyists in the south and succeeded considerably elsewhere against their Fourth International opponents. In the north and center, the VNQDD and other noncommunist nationalists put up better fights, but the advantage went the way of the Viet Minh. An official history of the People’s Army reveals, for instance, that Viet

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*Việt Nam depuis 1945 / The Birth of a Party-State: Vietnam since 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 332-335.

<sup>61</sup> Duong Chinh, “Hoat Dong Viet Minh cua Co Quan 88 Pho La Com (Nay la Hoang Van Thu) Hai Phong” [Vietminh Activities of the Office at 88 La Com Street (Now Hoang Van Thu Street) in Hai Phong], in Vo An Dong, ed., *Hoi Ky cac Nhan Chung Lich Su Thanh Pho Hai Phong: Quyen 1* [Memoirs of Historical Witnesses in the City of Hai Phong: Volume 1] (Hai Phong: NXB Hai Phong, 2003), 34.

<sup>62</sup> While the Viet Minh gained control of major cities, they were far from controlling other parts of the country. In northern Vietnam, for example, the VNQDD took over three provinces shortly before or after the Viet Minh takeover of Hanoi; see Hoang Van Dao, *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang*, 258. It could be safely assumed that the VNQDD sought to eliminate Viet Minh members in those provinces.

<sup>63</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 519.

Minh “national defense” (ve quoc quan) and “self-defense” (tu ve) groups throughout northern Vietnam engaged in episodic fights against three enemies during late 1945 and early 1946: the French, the Chinese, and the noncommunist Vietnamese, especially the VNQDD and DMH. Fighting the last category was especially “complicated,” involving the police and “the people” in addition to the defense corps. It also meant a variety of tactics depending on location and circumstance: “isolating” the noncommunist enemies from their comrades and supporters, “surrounding” them with revolutionary forces, “punishing [i.e., assassinating]” them even “in front of the Chiang troops,” and “protecting” areas already controlled from possible invasion of “traitors” and “colaborators.”<sup>64</sup>

Utilizing revolutionary violence, the Viet Minh also achieved domination in the realm of publication and propaganda. Noncommunist parties and alliances set up several newspapers in Hanoi to counter the Viet Minh newspaper *Truth* (*Su That*) and other periodicals.<sup>65</sup> But they did not last long due to attacks from the Viet Minh. Because many South Vietnamese anticommunist writers were living in Hanoi and other northern areas during this time, much of their construction of South Vietnamese anticommunism later came from the experience of (or proximity to) Viet Minh violence in 1945 and after. Outwardly, Ho Chi Minh invited some noncommunist nationalists to join his government in order to present a unified front to Vietnamese and foreigners alike. This was

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<sup>64</sup> *Lich Su Quan Doi Nhan Dan Viet Nam: Tap 1* [History of the People’s Army of Vietnam, Book 1] (Hanoi: Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 1977), 213-217. Like many official histories, there are no particular authors listed for this one. Its authorship is attributed to “the Research Committee for Military History at the Political Bureau.”

<sup>65</sup> Hoang Tuong, *Viet Nam Dau Tranh 1930-1945: Qua Trinh Cach Mang Chong Thuc Dan va Cong San cua cac Dang Phai Quoc Gia* [The Struggle of Vietnam 1930-1945: Revolutionary Stages of Nationalist Parties Against Colonialism and Communism] (Westminster, CA: Van Khoa, 1987), 76-77. *Truth* was probably modeled on *Pravda* and later became the DRV’s principal official publication.

especially true in the Viet Minh's dealings with the Allied-mandated Chinese and British occupational forces as well as the returning French authorities. In private, however, the ICP leadership, sometimes at the local level and sometimes at the national level, ordered or allowed campaigns of terror against noncommunist elements that included the VNQDD, the Great Viet parties, and, to a lesser extent, the religious sects in the south.

Several factors played into the success of the Viet Minh, including the departure of Chinese nationalist troops in mid-1946. Having provided the greatest support for the VNQDD before, the Guomindang left the organization to its own devices when it withdrew troops from northern Vietnam. For their own reasons, the French did not interfere into Viet Minh liquidation of other anticolonial Vietnamese.<sup>66</sup> Another factor for the success of the Viet Minh was their access to and control of the police files stored in the archives that the French Sûreté left behind after the Japanese coup in March 1945. The Public Security and Intelligence Services of the Viet Minh found the archives a powerful instrument to track down or monitor real and potential opponents. As described by the historian Christopher Goscha, the Vietminh intelligence leaders for the first time “were able to access the policing machine which had put many of the very men poring over those archives behind bars a few years earlier”; they were “dazzled” by the “modern intelligence apparatus they discovered in Hanoi, Hue and Saigon.” Not only the Viet Minh cadres picked up valuable lessons from the French intelligence apparatus for future application; more immediately, their access to the he access to the Sûreté files allowed

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<sup>66</sup> These points on the Guomindang and especially the French are made with vivid details in Françoise Guillemot, “Au cœur de la fracture vietnamienne: L'élimination de l'opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Viêt Nam (1945-1954) [The heart of Vietnamese rupture: The elimination of nationalist and anticolonial opposition in northern Vietnam (1945-1954)], in *Naissance d'un État-Parti*, 175-216.

them to identify and arrest or liquidate colonial spies, agents, and potential foes.<sup>67</sup> From the information, the security police quickly learned colonial techniques of torture (including a technique that “did not leave any visible marks”) and applied them to ferret information from arrested rivals.<sup>68</sup> While much remains unknown about the use of these files, it is clear that they provided the Viet Minh substantial help in tracking down opponents of the revolution.

While the level of violence varied from place to place, it occurred in all parts of the country and involved some of the best-known political and cultural figures. Among Vietnamese killed in the central region shortly after the demise of the Empire of Vietnam were the Trotskyist leader Ta Thu Thau, the prominent mandarin scholar Pham Quynh, and the court mandarin Ngo Dinh Khoi – the last an older brother of Diem. Diem himself was arrested was later arrested and brought to Ho Chi Minh. He refused Ho’s offer to join the Viet Minh and was released, possibly out of Ho’s calculation for gaining noncommunist support.<sup>69</sup> Not so fortunate were Vietnamese previously in charge of the secret police or local administration, including the county chief of Quang Tri and the provincial chief of Quang Binh.<sup>70</sup> In both the north and center, members of

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<sup>67</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, “Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at War (1945-1950),” *Intelligence and National Security* 22;1 (February 2007): 105.

<sup>68</sup> See Goscha, “Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization,” 128-131. “Significantly,” observes Goscha, “torture during this early period was mainly used against other Vietnamese. This was especially the case in 1945-1946, when the DRV was engaged in a civil war against anticommunist Vietnamese nationalist parties.” In the south, “torture became a common practice in 1949 when it was learned or feared that French-backed ‘reactionary’ nationalist party spies had penetrated the Public Security forces,” leading the Vietminh to again resort to torture on its own members as it had done extensively in a case in the north during 1948 (129). It was not until at least the early 1950s, when the nascent DRV state controlled its territories more tightly, that the Vietminh security services would have largely abandoned the use of torture.

<sup>69</sup> Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 348.

<sup>70</sup> *Lich Su Khang Chien Chong Thuc Dan Phap cua Quan va Dan Lien Khu IV (1945-1954)* [Anticolonial History Against France of the Military and the People in Zone IV, 1945-1954] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2003), 89.

noncommunist political parties were targeted especially in mid-1946. Between the withdrawal of Chinese troops from the north in June 1946 and the arrival of the French army in December, the Viet Minh executed many members of the DMH in the north and center.<sup>71</sup> In Hanoi, arrests and killings of VNQDD members grew in the middle of 1946, including a well-known raid of the organization's regional headquarters in the On Nhu Hau Street.<sup>72</sup> A Viet Minh honor team killed the leader of the most important Great Viet party in the same year, and another team killed the famed novelist and Great Viet prominent member Khai Hung when he traveled to his wife's province the next year. In the historic town Hoi An of central Vietnam, the local Viet Minh committee targeted especially the Trotskyists and the Cao Dai during the first days of the August Revolution due to the perception that these non-Viet Minh groups had some success in spreading their rhetoric among some of the local people.<sup>73</sup> Even as the Viet Minh attracted unaffiliated noncommunist Vietnamese to the war efforts against the French, it made great efforts and generally succeeded in eliminating members of rival political parties and organizations.

Due to colonial repression after the failed southern rebellion in 1940, the Viet Minh was less organized in the south and was cut off from the national committee. In April 1945, however, the southern representative finally met with Truong Chinh, the ICP's General Secretary. Direct communication was re-established, and directives were

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<sup>71</sup> Nguyen Tri Van, et al., *Red File: Fifty Years of Violations of Human Rights in Communist Vietnam, 1945-1995* (Montclair, CA: Vietnam Human Rights Watch, 1995), 30-33; Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and Americans*, 153-154.

<sup>72</sup> On Viet Minh campaigns in Hanoi, see *Cong An Thu Do*, 42-90.

<sup>73</sup> Vo Chi Cong, *Tren Nhung Chang Duong Cach Mang (Hoi Ky)* [On the Revolutionary Roads: A Memoir] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2001), 91. The author later became a founding member of the NLF and, after the war, held the ceremonious position of the country's presidency for 1987-1992.

issued to target Trotskyists and Japanese-friendly noncommunists.<sup>74</sup> The release of communist revolutionaries from prison nonetheless energized and furthered the works of Viet Minh security and military apparati. Before and after the arrival of British expeditionary troops in mid-September 1945 that returned control of the Saigon area to the foreigners, southern communists eliminated most major Trotskyists. These and earlier killings of Trotskyists prompted Bay Vien, leader of the Binh Xuyen group that would fight Diem's army in 1955, to sever ties with the Viet Minh.<sup>75</sup> Among the victims was the Trotskyist leader Duong Van Giao.<sup>76</sup> Throughout metropolitan Saigon, revolutionary forces targeted Trotskyist and non-Trotskyist men of letters as well as people associated to journalism and the press.<sup>77</sup> In suburban Long Thanh, the Viet Minh secret police arrested of the entire leadership of "a group that called themselves an anticolonial organization."<sup>78</sup> In the province Binh Duong slightly to the north of Saigon, the Viet Minh not only succeeded in political takeover but also, as claimed by a local Party history, prevented "reactionaries" from seizing back power as the case in several other southern provinces. Still, the Viet Minh failed to "punish" some of the noncommunists, who later "fanatically sought to destroy the anticolonial [i.e., Viet Minh]

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<sup>74</sup> *Lich Su Dang Bo Tinh Binh Duong* [History of the Party Committee of the Binh Duong Province] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2003), 105-106.

<sup>75</sup> Ngo Van, *Viet Nam 1920-1945*, 350-351.

<sup>76</sup> *Cong An Nam Bo trong Khang Chien Chong Thuc Dan Phap Xam Luoc* [Southern Police during the War against the Invading French] (Ho Chi Minh City: NXB Cong An Nhan Dan, 1993), 78. This book was published ahead of the fiftieth anniversary of the "People's Police," and its collective authorship includes Mai Chi Tho, head of the Vietminh southern police apparatus and younger brother of Le Duc Tho, member of the Politburo and negotiator at the Paris Peace Conference.

<sup>77</sup> Shawn McHale, "Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Việt Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War (1945-1954)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:3 (Fall 2009): 110. "While Vietnamese journalists had always played partisan roles in intellectual and political debates, the partisan nature of those debates sharpened," writes McHale, "Increasingly, the printed word served as a weapon in an ideological struggle."

<sup>78</sup> *Cong An Nam Bo trong Khang Chien*, 83.



movement.”<sup>79</sup> Conceived in the womb of intellectual debates and religious propaganda, Vietnamese anticommunism was born as a result of military and political violence such as this episode.

The Hoa Hao provided another example of the antagonism towards the Viet Minh in the south. A week after Ho Chi Minh’s declaration of independence, the sect rallied fifteen thousand of its members the city of Can Tho. Their goal was to seize power from the Viet Minh authorities, but the Viet Minh succeeded in protecting the city and maintained the governing leadership as in Binh Duong. They also captured three leaders of the Hoa Hao, including a younger brother of the sect’s founder.<sup>80</sup> This encounter undoubtedly worsened relations between the Viet Minh and the Hoa Hao, and contributed directly to the latter’s antagonism against the former during the war. Retaliatory and other acts of intra-Vietnamese violence continued as the Viet Minh worked to build the National Army, a united anticolonial force consisted noncommunist as well as noncommunist elements. The leader of this army was the aforementioned General Nguyen Binh, sent by Ho Chi Minh from Hai Phong to the south in part because he had once lived in southern Vietnam. Binh’s heavy-handed tactics worked in maintaining a semblance of unity within the Army during 1946. By early 1947, however, he was angered by collaboration with the French by the religious sects Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa to further their own autonomy. Binh ordered attacks on the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, and arrested and executed the founder and leader of the latter.<sup>81</sup> Even when war against the colonial French commenced at the end of 1946, the conflict between the Viet Minh and

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<sup>79</sup> *Lich Su Dang Bo Tinh Binh Duong*, 121 and 123.

<sup>80</sup> *Lich Su Dang Bo Tinh Bac Lieu, Tap I (1927-1975)* [The History of the Bac Lieu Provincial Party: Volume I, 1927-1975] (Bac Lieu, 2002), 111.

<sup>81</sup> Goscha, “A ‘Popular’ Side of the Vietnamese Army,” 342-343.

the sects continue to escalate.<sup>82</sup> It contributed to the military and governing break-up of southern Vietnam what the political scientist William Turley has called “fiefdoms” and the anthropologist Neil Jamieson has termed “supervillages.”<sup>83</sup> The Viet Minh, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao, and Binh Xuyen (which was in control of commercial riverine routes and the Saigon area) had their own armies and territories. Even the Catholics, fewer than in the north, controlled some areas, especially in the Dong Thap Province.<sup>84</sup> The complicated arrangements and interactions would further political and ideological division among Vietnamese after the war, leading to the face-off between Diem and the sects in 1955.<sup>85</sup>

Though not without complications, the situation in northern Vietnam was more clear-cut than in the south. For the first half of the anticolonial war, the Viet Minh retreated to the mountains along the borders of China and Laos, the French controlled the cities, and the Catholics ran their “autonomous zones” in the dioceses of Phat Diem and Bui Chu, both south of Hai Phong. This division reflected deterioration within Catholic-Viet Minh relationship since the August Revolution, when Ho Chi Minh courted Catholic support for independence and the ecclesiastical leadership responded with considerable

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<sup>82</sup> It is not common to find acknowledgments of noncommunist fighting abilities in postwar communist organizational histories. But there are some, and one describes that Viet Minh troops were “not willing” to engage Cao Dai troops because the latter, even “without many guns,” were “religious fanatics” that violently opposed the Viet Minh. See *Cong An Nam Bo trong Khang Chien*, 119.

<sup>83</sup> William Turley, *The Second Indochina War: A Concise Political and Military History*, second ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 29; Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 215.

<sup>84</sup> There were no more than 350,000 Catholics, including about 200 priests, in southern Vietnam in the late 1940s. See Le Tien Giang, *Cong Giao Khang Chien Nam Bo 1945-1954, Hoi Ky* [Anticolonial Catholics in the South, 1945-1954: A Memoir] (Saigon, 1972), 41. Only a minority was actively involved in the anticolonial movement centered in the “Catholic anticolonial zone” in the Dong Thap Province.

<sup>85</sup> One southern group that saw impressive growth during the First Indochina War without resorting to a militia was the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor, led by the energetic Tran Quoc Buu. Along with the Cao Dai, to whom he was friendly, Buu had sided with the Viet Minh in 1945 out of a desire for independence. By 1947, however, he broke irretrievably with the communists and devoted total attention to the new cause of trade unionism. See Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 34-49.

warmth. For example, Nguyen Ba Tong, the first Vietnamese to be ordained bishop, sent the Vatican a letter asking for papal prayer and blessing towards Vietnamese independence. One of Tong's colleagues, Bishop Le Huu Tu of the Phat Diem Diocese, was invited by Ho to be an "advisor" to the Viet Minh: an invitation to which Tu agreed. Important enough was Tu that he could intervene to ask Ho to release some of the people from the area arrested by the Viet Minh.<sup>86</sup> Somewhat parallel to its relationship with the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao areas in the south, the Viet Minh tried not to interfere in Catholic areas. Their relations, however, grew tense after 1947, and fighting between the Viet Minh and Catholics occasionally broke out. Furthermore, several anticolonial and noncommunist parties, including surviving members of the DMH and Great Viet parties, fled to Catholic zones after encountering Viet Minh repression elsewhere.<sup>87</sup> Among their numbers was Bui Diem, who was a nephew of Tran Trong Kim, member of the Great Viet, and future ambassador to the U.S. In Phat Diem, the non-Catholic Diem met up with two former noncommunist university friends also in hiding. One was Nghiem Xuan Hong, a Buddhist attorney that later wrote an important treatise about noncommunist nationalism in South Vietnam.<sup>88</sup> Even Catholics in the Viet Minh Zone IV, located in northern-central Vietnam and endowed with a long regional revolutionary tradition, presented many challenges to the Viet Minh. The Church there ran schools with curriculum infused by anticommunist content and organized Catholic anticommunist

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<sup>86</sup> Doan Doc Thu and Xuan Huy, *Giam Muc Le Huu Tu & Phat Diem, 1945-1954* [Bishop Le Huu Tu and the Phat Diem Diocese, 1945-1954] (Saigon, 1973), 172.

<sup>87</sup> On noncommunist parties in Phat Diem, see Doan Doc Thu and Xuan Huy, *Giam Muc Le Huu Tu & Phat Diem*, 168-170; on armed conflict between Catholics and the Viet Minh, see 171-175.

<sup>88</sup> Bui Diem, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 51-61.

organizations and supported non-Catholic ones.<sup>89</sup> After the creation of the French-backed noncommunist State of Vietnam in 1949, Catholic leaders generally recognized the authority of this political entity over their territory. It was not ecclesiastical anticommunist propaganda in the abstract as in the 1920s and 1930s, but unfolding events during the late 1940s and early 1950s that the communist-Catholic divide became unbridgeable in northern Vietnam. The tension and conflict during this period also helped to inform and propel the subsequent massive migration of Catholics to the south.

Anticommunist sentiments and beliefs among Catholics and other noncommunist Vietnamese were furthered after the victory of the CCP over the Guomindang. Having been largely isolated from the Chinese communists during the first three years of the anticolonial war, the Viet Minh gained a tremendous amount of diplomatic, material, and human support from Mao Zedong and the CCP after 1949. Thanks to Mao's persistent pleading on their behalf, the Vietnamese communists obtained the long sought-after diplomatic recognition from the USSR and other Eastern European communist nations. The Viet Minh leadership promptly resurrected the Communist Party and renamed it the Vietnamese Workers Party. The Workers Party returned to an active promotion of class warfare and began to implement a range of socialist policies in land reform, cultural productions, organizational discipline, and other matters.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> *Lich Su Khang Chien Chong Thuc Dan Phap cua Quan va Dan Lien Khu IV*, 256.

<sup>90</sup> There are two somewhat different interpretations about the Viet Minh's rapid shift from downplaying to promoting class warfare. One focuses on the DRV's difficulties in getting support from the Soviet Union during the second half of the 1940s. Stalin was greatly concerned with Tito and, in light of Ho Chi Minh's advocacy of national liberation, had doubts about Ho's loyalty to international communism. Even in early 1950, the Viet Minh's prospects for Soviet recognition remained dim. It was only with critical backing from Mao and the Chinese communists that the Viet Minh obtained the desired recognition in 1950. In return, the DRV sped up socialist political and economic measures in order to prove allegiance to the international line. See Christopher E. Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945-1950)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (Fall 2006): 59-103. The "near meltdown of Vietnamese communist diplomacy

One immediate result of these developments in the early 1950s was the number of noncommunist members of the Viet Minh that left the organization and fled to French-controlled zones. Many of them were urbanites from Hanoi and elsewhere, and they found new Viet Minh policies too restrictive if not oppressive. Among the best-known examples of noncommunist nationalists fleeing the Viet Minh is the musician Pham Duy. Born in Hanoi and son of a young and progressive member of the Tonkin Free School and the Reform Movement, Duy attended the prestigious Thang Long high school and counted Vo Nguyen Giap among his teachers. Considering himself a nationalist but not a revolutionary, he joined the Viet Minh at the start of the First Indochina War and was assigned to the central zone, where he met and married his wife, the singer Thai Hang. Duy composed a number of nationalist and anticolonial songs and, along with other musicians, performed to Viet Minh troops. After the infusion of CCP's support for the Viet Minh, however, he found the atmosphere increasingly oppressive. Along with his wife, their infant, and several in-laws, Duy left the Viet Minh zone and returned to Hanoi

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in 1950," writes Goscha, "helps us to understand better why the party was so keen on applying radical social revolution and taking control of the state *before* the national war with the French was even finished" (90). The second interpretation emphasizes the eagerness and commitment of the Vietnamese communists to socialist internationalism. Utilizing party documents, it points to the insistence of many Vietnamese communists on the inseparability of national liberation on the one hand and world revolution and class warfare on the other hand. It considers that the communists viewed relations between the socialist bloc and the imperialist bloc to be essentially binary and ultimately irreconcilable. Finally, it argues that the Vietnamese communists actively sought to bring the Cold War to Indochina. See Tuong Vu, "It's Time for the Revolution to Show Its True Colors: The Radical Turn in Vietnamese Politics in 1948," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40: 3 (October 2009), 519-542; and Tuong Vu, "From Cheering to Volunteering: Vietnamese Communists and the Arrival of the Cold War, 1940-1951," in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 172-204.

in mid-1951.<sup>91</sup> There he ran into his friend Ta Ty, a budding painter who had also joined the Viet Minh but left exactly a year earlier.<sup>92</sup>

They were only two of many noncommunist nationalists that did not belong to a political party and, therefore, did not experience Viet Minh violence, as did the VNQDD, Great Viets, and others. But their own experience of artistic restriction in the late 1940s and early 1950s led to departure from the movement. Although the conditions in southern Vietnam were different, there were parallels to their experience there. Another example is the writer Xuan Tuoc, who later wrote a number of textbooks for junior high and high school students in the RVN. Tuoc joined the Viet Minh at the outbreak of war, but left in 1950 after witnessing, among other things, the practice of “three categories of eating” that gave higher-level cadres better food. He also blamed the death of his daughter on preferential treatment towards higher-level officials, in that she was low in priority when it came to access to medicine and medication.<sup>93</sup> Examples like Tuoc’s illustrated that the cooperation could have gone only so far. For the common purpose of independence, ideological differences were laid aside but returned with vengeance, figuratively and literally. By the time of the Geneva Conference in 1954, the rifts between the Viet Minh and noncommunist nationalists were too wide to bridge, and anticommunist writers were availed to an abundance of experiences vis-à-vis the ICP, the Viet Minh, and the Workers Party.

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<sup>91</sup> See Pham Duy, *Hoi Ky: Thoi Cach Mang Khang Chien* [Memoir: The Period of Revolutionary Resistance] (Midway City, CA: Pham Duy Cuong Musical Productions, 1989).

<sup>92</sup> Ta Ty, *Nhung Khuon Mat Van Nghe da Di Qua Doi Toi: Hoi Ky* [Portraits of Artists Who Have Passed through My Life: A Memoir] (San Jose: Thang Mo, 1990), 120.

<sup>93</sup> Xuan Tuoc, *60 Nam Cam But: Hoi Ky* [Sixty Years of Writing: A Memoir] (Houston: Van Hoa, 2000), 40-41.

## Conclusion

Based on secondary sources as well as memoirs and communist organizational histories, the narrative above shows that there were significant political and intellectual divisions among Vietnamese on communism from the 1920s to the early 1950s.<sup>94</sup> As early as the mid-1920s, there was already ideological divergence among anticolonial Vietnamese on issues such as independence and the future of Vietnam. Empowered by the development of the Russian Revolution and the success of the Bolsheviks, a number of educated Vietnamese were drawn to Marxist-Leninism and the early Soviet experiment. In the meantime, some others were taken with the Chinese Revolution and the Republican experiment of Sun Yat-sen. Still, some remained impressed by the earlier (and apparently successful) Japanese experiment with modernization, and believed that it provided the best possible blueprint for the future of Vietnam. Embodied by the French and American Revolution, Western inspiration also drew a small number of adherents.

Especially important was the period between 1945 and 1950, or before the U.S., the USSR, and China were formally involved in Indochina through diplomatic recognition of either the DRV or the State of Vietnam. The violence committed among Vietnamese during this period of decolonization was deeper and more far-reaching than previously realized, and contributed directly and decisively to ideological division in the post-1954 period. Historians, however, have not related this history to what has been called the “hatred of communism” in South Vietnam. While there had been ideological opposition prior to 1945, most notably from Catholics, it was not until the period 1945-

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<sup>94</sup> I wish to thank Prof. Shawn McHale (George Washington University) who suggested the utility of communist organizational histories on the topic of intra-Vietnamese violence.

1954 that there was a dramatic intensification of sentiments against communism among a plurality (and, likely, a majority) of leading noncommunist Vietnamese. This hatred was a consequence of intra-Vietnamese violence, particularly Viet Minh revolutionary violence that, as demonstrated in the next chapter, provided specific materials for the construction of an ideologically anticommunist critique during the rule of Ngo Dinh Diem. For South Vietnamese anticommunists, the “hatred” was rooted in what they experienced as deception or betrayal, and they viewed the Communist Party to have had set aside class struggle and emphasized national liberation in the early 1940s, only to be explicit of its original intention when returning to class struggle at the end of the decade.

The situation was complicated by the fact that many noncommunist nationalists did not want to support the French either during the First Indochina War. Some considered French influence undue even after the creation of the noncommunist State of Vietnam and the Vietnamese National Army in the late 1940s. Others, including those returning to Hanoi and other urban areas, felt events were beyond their control and adopted a wait-and-see attitude towards the outcome of the war. In some ways, their perspective favored the Viet Minh, who, in the words of William Duiker, “did not win in the cities [but] could console themselves that the French attitude prevented many urban moderates from siding with the enemy.”<sup>95</sup> Some of the Vietnamese, urban moderates and else, indeed went at great length to avoid any appearance of overt compromise or collaboration with the long-time colonial enemy. One was Ngo Dinh Diem, who wisely avoided the potential problem by leaving Indochina all together and sought support in Europe and especially the U.S. In the next chapter, we consider Diem’s anticommunist

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<sup>95</sup> Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*, 174.



ideology as well as the critique of communism constructed by urban-based South Vietnamese.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CRITIQUE OF COMMUNISM IN URBAN SOUTH VIETNAM

As the United States enlarged its military and diplomatic commitment to Indochina in the 1950s, a number of American individuals and institutions actively publicized the dangers of communism in this corner of the world to American society at large. In 1954, for example, the Catholic navy physician Thomas Dooley was involved in Operation Passage to Freedom that assisted northern Vietnamese move south. Amidst of the busy work in Hai Phong, Dooley found time to send a steady stream of letters to the newspaper St. Louis Globe-Democrat about the event. His experience was further expanded in the book *Deliver Us from Evil*, which quickly became one of the most popular books among Catholics as well as non-Catholics, was serialized in *Reader's Digest*, and made the author a cultural hero of mid-century America. (Two subsequent books, on his experiences in Laos and with apparent anticommunist messages, were also bestsellers.) In the words of Dooley's best biographer to date, "no American played a larger role in announcing the arrival of South Vietnam as a new ally whose fate was decisively bound to that of the United States."<sup>1</sup> His reception of South Vietnam's highest honor awarded to a foreigner, given by Ngo Dinh Diem himself in the spring of 1955,

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<sup>1</sup> James T. Fisher, *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1937–1961* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 34. An analysis of Dooley's books is Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945-1961* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), 89-99. A second, focusing on *Deliver Us from Evil* and its effects on Americans, is Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 153-162.

provided a confirmation to Americans that the U.S. was correct in helping the Asian noncommunist government fight communism.

Dooley was hardly alone in calling attention to the anticommunist cause in South Vietnam during the early years of divided Vietnam. Also active in publicizing the flight and plight of the refugees was his co-religionist Francis Spellman, cardinal of the Archdiocese of New York. After hearing from Vietnamese bishops, Spellman wrote a pastoral letter to show support for the émigrés and U.S. effort to aid them. The letter was read at Sunday masses in the archdiocese. Having known Ngo Dinh Diem during Diem's stay in the U.S., Spellman also visited Vietnam in early 1955 and was greeted by thousands of Vietnamese at the airport.<sup>2</sup> Secular efforts were also abundant. Under the leadership of Henry Luce, *Time* magazine warned Americans of the communist threat in Indochina as early as 1947. An advocate of intervention in Asia, Luce was among the earliest and most enthusiastic supporters of Diem and U.S. aid to Diem's fragile government.<sup>3</sup> On the other coast of the country, Hollywood contributed a small but not insignificant part in alerting Americans about the hazardous growth of communism in Southeast Asia. Best known for its features *The Quiet American* and *The Ugly American* that were made in the early 1960s, Hollywood's Indochina-themed products actually began with *A Yank in Indo-China* (1952), whose title copied those of earlier popular war movies and whose content closely reflected them in depicting American heroism amidst

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<sup>2</sup> Wilson D. Miscamble, C.S.C, "Francis Cardinal Spellman and 'Spellman's War'," in David L. Anderson, *The Human Tradition in the Vietnam Era* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2000), 9; Christopher J. Kauffman, "Politics, Programs, and Protests: Catholic Relief Services in Vietnam, 1954-1975," *The Catholic Historical Review* 91:2(April 2005)" 230.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Edwin Herzstein, *Henry R. Luce, Time, and the American Crusade in Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 117-119 and 193-206.

great adversity on foreign soil.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent features included *Jump into Hell* (1955), which depicted brave French forces fighting the Viet Minh at Dien Bien Phu; and *China's Gate* (1957), also about the First Indochina War but with an American protagonist and an Asian but Moscow-controlled communist antagonist.<sup>5</sup> American support for containing communism in South Vietnam went well beyond the realms of popular culture and organized religion. From the magazines *Encounter* and *Foreign Affairs* to the establishment of the organization American Friends of Vietnam, many prominent intellectual, political, and cultural figures in the U.S. (and Western Europe) alerted or lent their support to the anticommunist cause in South Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> These are only a few examples of cultural and political anticommunism constructed and propagated by Americans in regard to South Vietnam. These efforts were aimed at the American public, and there is a solid historiography on early successes at arousing anticommunist sentiments and attitudes from Americans in the 1950s and early 1960s as well as problems at sustaining them during the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, there is

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<sup>4</sup> Earlier films of similar titles included *A Yank in the R.A.F* (1941), *A Yank in Lybia* (1942), *A Yank in Australia* (1943), *A Yank in London* (1945), and *A Yank in Korea* (1951).

<sup>5</sup> Scott Laderman, "Hollywood's Vietnam, 1929-1964: Scripting Intervention, Spotting Injustice," *Pacific Historical Review* 78:4 (2009): 578-607; Tony Shaw, *Hollywood's Cold War* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 208-209.

<sup>6</sup> See Robert R. Tomes, *Apocalypse Then: American Intellectuals and the Vietnam War, 1954-1975* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 33-56; Joseph G. Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The American Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 1-61.

<sup>7</sup> Additional examples are Caroline Page, *U.S. Official Propaganda during the Vietnam War, 1965-1973: The Limits of Persuasion* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Edmund F. Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain: The AFL-CIO and the Vietnam War* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005); Jonathan Nashel, *Edward Lansdale's Cold War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005); Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2008).

little scholarship about the shaping and spreading of anticommunism on the part of the Vietnamese during the same period.<sup>8</sup>

This chapter aims to redress the relatively blank slate of knowledge. Given Ngo Dinh Diem's significance as a foremost anticommunist in South Vietnam, it begins with a section on his personalist ideology and its receptions by Vietnamese and Americans. It makes clear that as a whole, this ideology did not persuade Vietnamese and Americans in the long run. Yet, it also argues that the anticommunist aspects of Diem's ideology dovetailed to the broader anticommunism among many South Vietnamese and received support from them. Next, the chapter compares anticommunist propaganda in rural and urban areas. Noting that urban South Vietnamese experienced greater exposure to anticommunist rhetoric than their rural counterparts, it addresses the convergence of urban anticommunist voices that joined Diem's to construct an anticommunist critique during the early period of South Vietnam. Although urban anticommunists did not necessarily get along with Diem's government (or even among themselves), they nonetheless shared and articulated a critique of communism that was intellectually coherent as it was emotionally heightened. Finally, the chapter examines the content of this anticommunist critique and draw out specific themes and emphases from anticommunist publications.

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<sup>8</sup> A recent work is Matthew Masur, "Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954-1960," *Diplomatic History* 33:2 (April 2009): 293-313.

## **Communitarianism and anticommunism in Diemist personalist ideology**

When Ngo Dinh Diem arrived to Saigon in the summer of 1954 to take up the post of prime minister in the Bao Dai-headed State of Vietnam, he had been away from Vietnam for almost four years. His absence from the country was much shorter than that of Ho Chi Minh, but the outcome was far more spectacular. When Ho stepped foot on Vietnam in 1941 for the first time in three decades, he did not have a lot of support from foreign powers, including Stalin who was then preoccupied with the Nazi invasion in Europe. In contrast, Diem had the backing from a number of politically important Americans in 1954, including members of the Eisenhower administration. The support was far from total, and in fact it was in doubt until at least the following year. Nonetheless, Diem's beginning upon returning to Vietnam was a much more promising when compared to that of his political and ideological opponent Ho thirteen years earlier.<sup>9</sup>

Anticommunist sentiments, too, were already intense among noncommunist nationalists in Saigon and elsewhere at the time of Diem's return. The Viet Minh victory at Dien Bien Phu and result of the peace accords at Geneva only confirmed the urgency that many anticommunists felt about the dominance of the Workers Party and the need to offer an explicit ideological and political critique of Vietnamese communism. The migration of nearly 900,000 northerners to southern Vietnam during 1954-1955

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<sup>9</sup> There was little archival research on pre-1955 relations between Diem and the U.S. during the Cold War, but it has grown considerably in the past two decades. Among the most important are David L. Anderson, *Trapped by Success: The Eisenhower Administration and Vietnam, 1953-1961* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 1-64; Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 1-30; Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, esp. 25-59; Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 117-153; Edward Miller, "Vision, Power, and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945-1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35:3 (October 2004): 447-456. The last two works give greater emphasis on Diem's initiatives.

heightened the atmosphere. This atmosphere was reflected in the droves of anticommunist publications from government and private publishing houses. Amid the denunciation of communism, some of these publications also extolled the virtues of Diemist personalism. Because it was the ideological backbone to the regime, this is an appropriate place to begin an examination of the South Vietnamese intellectual and ideological critique of communism.<sup>10</sup>

As uncovered in recent historiography, Diemist personalism might have been abstruse but was not empty, eclectic but not reactionary. Having borrowed and combined ideas from French personalist critique of materialism as well as twentieth-century Vietnamese interpretations of Confucian humanism, Diem and his younger brother Ngo Dinh Nhu considered it an appropriate way to navigate the extremes of communism and capitalism. In the words of the historian Philip Catton, they thought the hybrid ideology “could serve as a framework for the modernization of South Vietnam” and “would provide a vehicle for the rejuvenation of certain indigenous traditions and the elaboration of a new formula for nation building”: in short, “an authentic ‘third way’ to modernity.”<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, Diemist personalism considered the three greatest enemies of postcolonial Vietnam to be “Communism, Underdevelopment, and Disunity.”<sup>12</sup> That communism was considered the first of the enemies, indicates the centrality of

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<sup>10</sup> The Vietnamese term *nhan vi* is derivative from classical Chinese – *nhan* meaning “person” and *vi* “dignity” – and could be translated as “dignity of the person.” When added to *ly thuyet* (philosophy) or *chu nghia* (ideology), it becomes “personalism.” *Nhan vi* appears in the Preamble of the RVN’s 1956 Constitution. The official English translation of the document, however, renders it simply as “the person” rather than “dignity of the person” or “personalism”.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 42-43.

<sup>12</sup> Sometimes they were said to be “Colonialism, Feudalism, and Communism,” with the assumption that underdevelopment was a legacy of French colonialism and Vietnamese feudal past. Subsequently the “three enemies” were overshadowed by what could be called “three friends”: “Personalism, Community, and Collective Advancement.” See Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure*, 37 and 46.

anticommunism to the ideological core of the South Vietnamese state. Personalism, declared a Diem's follower, was an "ideology to combat Communist ideology."<sup>13</sup> Or, as elaborated by an official trainer of cadres for the Personalist Party, the Saigon government "chose Personalism to be the foundation for its Republican system 'so that a firm foundation of virtue, spirit, and philosophy could be created for its citizens [so they] build a Personalist Republic as well as an effective opposition to communism.'"<sup>14</sup> The clumsy and roundabout description is illustrative of the regime's problems in propagating and popularizing its own ideology to South Vietnamese. Similar to the brief and blunt assessment above, however, it confirms the centrality of anticommunism in the Diemist political doctrine.

For his part, Diem considered Marxism to be unanimous to "atheistic materialism." This association was in line with Diem's devout Catholicism on the one hand and French personalism as espoused by the Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier on the other hand. It was from Mounier that Diem and the more theoretically inclined Nhu drew some of the inspiration and content for their political ideology.<sup>15</sup> But it would be misleading to place the anticommunism of the Ngo brothers on Catholicism.

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<sup>13</sup> "Personalism Ngo Khac Tinh," (no date), Folder 14, Box 3, John Donnell Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 1. Hereafter this collection is cited as John Donnell Collection.

<sup>14</sup> Vu Tam Anh, "Nhan Vi Triet Luan va Thuc Hanh" [Personalism in Theory and Practice] (1961), 2. A copy is kept in Folder 14, Box 03, John Donnell Collection. The author was vice president of the Vietnamese National Alliance Front (*Mat Tran Quoc Gia Lien Hiep Viet Nam*) under the sponsorship of Diem's government, and this talk was used for the purpose of training cadres at the Vinh Long Training Center for Personalism, named for the town where it was located.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that neither "communism" nor "anticommunism" appears in the text of the 1956 Constitution. But a government booklet containing the text of the Constitution and an explanatory section quotes Diem's references to modern political developments and asserts that he was "rejecting both extremes of fascism and communism." See *The Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam* (Saigon: The Secretariat of State for Information, 1959), 4.



In fact, it did not start with religion but encompassed broader humanistic concerns.<sup>16</sup> For a start, Nhu was supposedly the biggest influence on Diem vis-à-vis French personalism.<sup>17</sup> But even Nhu did not take wholesale the philosophy of Mounier or, for that matter, that of any other Westerner. Rather, he spoke favorably of “Asian traditional philosophies” – Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism – which he regarded as “systems [that] contain permanent and universal values.” “The cultural revision that is being undertaken in Asia at present,” Nhu said in a formal address in 1959, “is clearly oriented toward finding an equilibrium between Personalism and the traditional communitarian values.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, Nhu considered French personalism a contributor to – not a totality of – a postcolonial noncommunist and nationalist ideology.

In addition to Mounier’s personalism, Diem himself drew and selected from Vietnamese interpretations of Confucianism from the 1920s and 1930s. In fact, *prior to* his acquaintance with the ideas of the French philosopher, Diem had already looked for guidance in noncommunist thought particularly from Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940), the leading Vietnamese anticolonial leader of the previous generation. Like other Vietnamese patriots, Diem held Chau in high esteem; like some of them, he visited Chau

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<sup>16</sup> For longer expositions on these points, see Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure*, 37-44 and 118-129.

<sup>17</sup> According to Huynh Van Lang, head of the Foreign Exchange Office during the First Republic, it was Ngo Dinh Nhu that came up with the Vietnamese translation “*nhan vi*” for personalism. Lang first met Nhu in 1949 in the highlands resort town Dalat and joined the Committee for Sociological Research (*Nhom Nghien Cuu Xa Hoi*), which was founded by Nhu, the Catholic priest Ferdinand Parrel, and several others. Lang became the secretary for the group, and was also in charge of publishing the group’s journal *Cong Luc* [Collective Strength], whose 500 copies were distributed in Saigon and the highlands. Lang commented that the journal was more often given for free than sold because “the pages were ill-looking and the content was dry and hard to understand.” See Huynh Van Lang, *Nhan Chung Mot Che Do: Tap 1* [Witness to a Regime: Volume 1] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 2000), 282- 292.

<sup>18</sup> Ngo Dinh Nhu, “A Sketch of the Social Principles of the Asian Traditional Philosophies,” 8. Nhu delivered this address at the Seminar for European and Asian Unionists at Dien Hong Palace in Saigon on January 29, 1959. A typewritten copy is kept in Folder 22, Box 2, John Donnell Collection. The Vietnamese version is Ngo Dinh Nhu, “Vai Nhan Xet ve Nguyen Tac Xa Hoi do Triet Ly Truyen Thong A Dong,” *Que Huong* [Country] 2 (August 1959): 11-20.

during the latter's house arrest in Hue. From Chau, Diem grew to consider the utility of applying Confucianism as an alternative to communism for the building of postcolonial Vietnam. Like Chau and modern proponents of Confucianism, Diem employed and adapted major Confucian concepts such as "loyalty" (*thanh*, from the Chinese *cheng*) and "trust" (*tin*, from the Chinese *xin*), previously meant for the relationship between subject and ruler, to refer to the relationship between citizens and the modern nation-state. Contrary to the more economic and materialist Marxist view, the Confucian-based person also possesses "soul" and "spirit" that strives for higher purposes.<sup>19</sup> From this Confucian and humanist perspective, Diem considered communism not only atheistic but also reductionist and not at all concerned with human values other than material improvement. Consequently, his government's "pronouncements focused on Confucius' broadly humanist values, contrasting them with communist ideology."<sup>20</sup>

So highly did Diem value Confucianism that, in 1956, he made his birthday an official holiday, complete with sport events and commemorative dance performances by schoolgirls. His government also rebuilt Confucian temples and monuments.<sup>21</sup> Diem's deep regard for the sage could be spotted in an address to Vietnamese on this occasion in 1959. Calling Confucius "the eternal Master of the Asian peoples" and sprinkling the

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<sup>19</sup> For more on this point, see Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 27-28 and 136-140. I wish to thank Prof. Miller (Dartmouth College) for providing me a copy of these pages. See also Masur, "Hearts and Minds," 43-44.

<sup>20</sup> Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 43. Catton adds that the Ngo brothers did not embrace Confucianism wholeheartedly but picked and chose some of its aspects while downplaying others. For example, "they devoted little attention to the more parochial aspects of his doctrine, namely his obsession with familial obligations." As a result, "Diem did refer to the family as a vital pillar of society, yet... evidently rejected the notion that patriotic citizens and a modern state could be created by 'family morality written large.'" While this example of downplaying the family illustrates the degree of sophistication in selection, there is some irony in that the regime has been frequently identified as a form of family rule.

<sup>21</sup> Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 93.

address with several quotations from his texts, Diem explained that the sage is deserving of the designation because his teachings would be “appropriate to the deepest spiritual thirst of the human soul” at “any given time.” Most immediately, Confucianism would be a counterweight to “the wave of materialism” that

has entered the gate of our country. It aims to destroy the spiritual foundation left by our ancestors. It would sever emotional links between ancestors and descendants, between parents and children, between spouses and siblings. It seeks to deliver us to a world without spirit, without feeling and duty (*tinh nghia*), without a sense of shame. It is desirous of making us into producing creatures without knowing about their origins and solutions [to their problems].<sup>22</sup>

The attack on communism took up the first third of the address, and the remainder was devoted to elevate the Master’s teaching about belief in the divine and, more importantly, on “the belief in spiritual quality of the human soul” (*tin pham gia linh thieng cua tam hon nhan loai*). This division is nonetheless revealing. If the address made clear of the significance of Confucianism for Diem, it also illustrates the vagueness in the way he articulated the revelancy of the sage to what he called “the great revolution in undeveloped countries of Asia and Africa,” that is, a postcolonial modernizing revolution that was nonetheless rooted in certain concepts from the rich East Asian past.<sup>23</sup>

### **Vietnamese receptions of Diem’s personalist ideology**

If Diemist personalism was not without intellectual merits, it must be said too, that it was poorly propagated by the regime. Given the conditions at the time, however, it

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<sup>22</sup> The address was reprinted as “Thong Diep cua Tong Thong nhan Ngay Thanh Dan cua Duc Khong Tu (Ngay 18-9-1959)” [Presidential Address on Confucius Day, September 18, 1959] *Gio Moi* [New Wind] 51 (October 5, 1959): 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Thong Diep cua Tong Thong,” 3.

must be said too that any regime would have faced mounting challenges to propagate successfully a new political ideology at the time. There were several reasons for this difficulty. First, the fragmented structure, quarrelsome character, and multiplicity of ideas in South Vietnamese politics would have made it difficult for at least some of noncommunist groups – and more likely many – to acquiesce to and support Diemist personalism. Second, as North and South Vietnams were deeply engaged in competitive nation building against each other, Diem had not the luxury of time, the advantage of experience, or a large following of dedicated cadres well-trained in ideology as did the Vietnamese Workers Party (the official name of the Communist Party between 1950 and 1976). Third, as illustrated by the early history of Vietnamese communism, the introduction novel political concepts to the Vietnamese masses often encountered indifference, misunderstanding, misapplication, or a combination of these factors.

The last point merits some elaboration for comparative purposes. In their quest to popularize Marxist ideas to the Vietnamese masses during the 1920s and 1930s, the communists had to go through many errors and trials, sometimes with deadly consequences. As the vast majority of Vietnamese at the time was thoroughly unfamiliar with Marxist concepts and language, receptivity to Marxism was very limited.

Communist revolutionaries recognized the problem especially after the failure of the Nghe Tinh rebellion in 1930-1931; they forced themselves to change their packaging and delivery of Marxist and internationalist messages to the masses.<sup>24</sup> But they continued to

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<sup>24</sup> See McHale, *Print and Power*, 102-142. “Early Vietnamese communists,” writes McHale, “[when] faced with the choice of indigenizing communism... or maintaining its ideological purity, usually chose the latter. At first, this severely limited its appeal [because] Vietnamese often fell back on preexisting frameworks of interpretation, thus subverting the communist message.” Although the results were better over time, it “had only partially succeeded by 1945” and it “may not have been until the 1950s that a large percentage of Vietnamese came to understand the communist interpretive matrix” (141-142).

encounter considerable difficulties that prompted them to resort not infrequently to the appeal of national liberation to win over the masses. Even the training of new cadres could be challenging. At the end of 1946, for instance, the Viet Minh propaganda unit in the southern coastal Vung Tau area had forty trainees. The future cadres were enthusiastic to learn about Viet Minh policies, but also found Leninist methods of “criticism and self-criticism” to be “completely novel.”<sup>25</sup>

Although it was a very different context after 1954 – Diem was not pursued or repressed by any authority but was in fact in charge – he faced similarly mounting problems as the early revolutionaries did. Given the urgency of nation building, the conceptual complexity of his ideology, and the broader challenge to popularize novel political concepts (on the part of the ruling regime) and to grasp them (on the part of the South Vietnamese masses), he did not make the best use of the time allotted. As seen in surviving documents from training centers of the regime-backed Revolutionary Labor Personalist Party, there was strong philosophical coherence to the content of Diemist personalism, even if some of the terminology might have been somewhat abstract for the average Party member in training.<sup>26</sup> To most South Vietnamese, however, the doctrine was far often invoked than explained, and much better hoisted and broadcasted than illustrated and supported. Not unlike Diem’s early and recurrent invocation of “a total

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<sup>25</sup> *Lịch Sử Ban Tuyên Giáo Tỉnh Ủy Bà Rịa – Vũng Tàu (1930-2005)* [History of the Propaganda Unit in the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Province, 1930-2005] (Hanoi: Chinh Tri Quoc Gia, 2005), 58.

<sup>26</sup> “N.V. Course Material Vinh Long Center,” Folder 16, Box 3, John Donnell Collection. This course material lists twenty “lessons,” starting with an overview of personalism and ending with the subject “The National Family.” In between are lessons such as “Essay on Creationism,” “The Hazards of Atheism,” “Human Freedom,” “Human Conscience,” “Responsibilities and Rights,” “Freedom of Worship,” and “Rights to Private Property.” Members in training at the Center were required to have obtained at least a ninth-grade education; see “Personalism Ngo Khac Tinh,” Folder 14, Box 3, John Donnell Collection, 1. In addition, a “basic course will be offered ... for those who do not have any particularly high [educational] level, for 3 hours a week for 3 weeks” (2).

revolution,” the regime’s intonation of personalism was frequent but also fuzzy, leaving the majority of the citizenry confused than convinced.

Even its supporters seemed unsure of its meanings. An example is the monthly *Southern Wind* (*Gio Nam*), published by the government-sponsored Alliance of National Revolutionary Civil Servants, which had a membership of 41,200 in 1955 and 65,400 three years later.<sup>27</sup> Many articles in the journal carried phrases lauding personalism, including “the Personalist Republican government.” But there was very little exposition or discussion of the doctrine, as if the editor had decided personalism to be too unfamiliar for the journal’s writers and therefore was best left untouched. In the rare occasions that Personalism seemed to be at the front and center of a piece, the content was disappointing. An instance is a poem called “Personalist Love,” written to honor graduates of the thirty-sixth class at the Vinh Long Personalist Center. The title appeared promising enough. Instead of being expository, however, nearly half of the content was explicitly anticommunist while the remainder traveled in propagandist slogans such as “We are fortunate to live the Personalist life / In the air of liberty.”<sup>28</sup> Somewhat better was an article that offered an explanation about the concept “mind” and “the way.” But it was also muddled. It named, for instance, the Christian concept “the way, the truth, and the life” and the neo-Confucianist five virtues of “humanity, righteousness, propriety, knowledge, and integrity,” but without explaining how they were related to one another,

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<sup>27</sup> “Thanh Tich Cong Tac Nam 1958-1959 cua LDCCCMQG,” [The Achievements of the Alliance of National Revolutionary Civil Servants in 1958-1959] *Gio Nam* [Southern Wind] (February 1, 1959): 16. A higher number was given in a speech marking the fourth anniversary of the Alliance by Lam Le Trinh, the head of the RVN’s Department of Interior and the Alliance’s national executive committee. According to Trinh, membership “rose from 40,000 to 82,000” between 1955 and 1958. This speech was published in *Gio Nam* (June 1, 1959): 2. See Joiner and Jumper, “Organizing Bureaucrats” for an assessment of the organization.

<sup>28</sup> Nguyen Van Phuong, “Tinh Nhan Vi” [Personalist Love], *Gio Nam* 35 (August 5, 1961): 21.

or even how each one was applicable to the time. The article ended with an announcement about the formation of a new government-sponsored anticommunist group, and it appeared that the authors were obliged to write the theoretical and muddled explanation before they reached the political news.<sup>29</sup> It was not a successful attempt, to put it mildly. Unlike concepts such as nationalism and communism, personalism was novel to Vietnamese political vocabulary. It was not a total surprise that most South Vietnamese did not understand its fine points or even the broad structure that encompassed them.

### **American reception of Diemist personalism**

In regard to the Americans, Diem's government either avoided or minimized speaking about personalism, partly because of discomfort from U.S. officials and partly because of difficulties in explaining the doctrine to a Western audience.<sup>30</sup> When Diem made a triumphant state visit to the U.S. in 1957, for instance, he made a series of speeches at Congress, the Supreme Court, the Council on Foreign Relations, two universities, among others. During a speech at Seton Hall University, a Catholic institution not far from the Maryknoll seminary where he lived four years earlier, Diem alluded to personalism by referring to the "paramount value of the human person" and

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<sup>29</sup> Nam Son and Nguyen Ich, "Tri Duc va Dao Duc" [Mind and Virtue], *Gio Nam* 44 (May 5, 1962), 11-13. The organization was called the Anticommunist and Anti-Enemy Alliance (Lien Doan Tru Gian Diet Cong).

<sup>30</sup> According to Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 224-225, "Ambassador Frederick Nolting and other American officials fretted over the term 'personalism'" because they were afraid that "it would be viewed as a concept of political leadership implying dictatorship." On the other hand, French ambassador Jean Payart thought there was a parallel between Diem and US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and said that the two men considered "the essential vice of Marxism... was the crushing of the individual and injury of human nature."

quoting the RVN's Constitution of 1955 to have highlighted "the transcendent values of the human person whose free, harmonious and complete development on the individual as well as on the communal plane must be the object of all state activity."<sup>31</sup> Diem even invoked the virtues *thanh* and *tin* – loyalty and trust – by their Vietnamese names. It was the closest to an explication on the ideology to the American audience, and Diem stayed close to statements that were either related to policies or echoed American terminology. The same was true of the English-language pamphlet *Ngo Dinh Diem of Viet Nam* published ahead of the visit and clearly meant for U.S. officials as well as the American public. The bulk of the pamphlet was an article about Diem's political philosophy, but it did not mention personalism at all. Instead, it tried to make Diem palatable to the American public and describes him as anticommunist, nationalist, progressive, democratic, and "well grounded in both western and traditional cultures."<sup>32</sup>

Another pamphlet, clearly meant for Westerners because it was in English and French, was about Diem's victory over the Binh Xuyen sect in 1955 and uplifted him through several photographs. They showed Diem consulting with military officers in charge of the operation against the sect, standing and smiling with some of the victorious officers and soldiers, decorating one of them, and hugging another. Furthermore, the text associated two former prime ministers of the State of Vietnam to "betrayal" and "feudalism," thus implying that Diem was, in contrast, a nationalist and a modernizer. Its

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<sup>31</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, "Address at Seton Hall upon receiving the degree of Doctor of Law "Honoris Causa" from that University (Seton Hall, May 12, 1957)," in *The Emergence of Free Vietnam: Major Addresses Delivered by President Ngo Dinh Diem during His Official Visit to the United States of America* (Saigon: Presidency of the Republic of Viet-Nam, 1957), 20.

<sup>32</sup> *Ngo Dinh Diem of Viet-Nam* (Saigon: Press Office, Presidency of the Republic of Vietnam, 1957). The article in the pamphlet was a reprint of Phuc Thien, "President Ngo Dinh Diem's Political Philosophy," *The Times of Vietnam* (October 6, 13, and 20, 1956). It also appeared in the booklet *President Ngo Dinh Diem's Political Philosophy: a Special Edition of the Review Horizons* (Saigon, 1956).



conclusion left the clear impression of his ability: he had ably led other nationalists to “the period of unification [in South Vietnam]... in order to stand against Communism in the North.”<sup>33</sup> Given the small amount of text in the pamphlet, it was not a surprise that the pamphlet did not mention personalism by name. But the word was also assiduously avoided even during a well-publicized RVN-sponsored exhibit on Vietnamese art and archeology at the Smithsonian Institution in 1960, the first exhibit of its kind on American soil.<sup>34</sup> Given the strong possibility for misunderstanding, it was probably wise to avoid the word at all. Yet its absence also revealed Diem’s problem in propagating the official ideology to his most important ally as well as an ideological gap between the two sides.

For their part, few if any American officials understood Diemist personalism either. After two months as ambassador to South Vietnam, for instance, Fredrick Nolting, who consistently supported Diem during his tenure in the Kennedy administration, thought that personalism “does not mean personal dictatorship but rather the requirement for individual development much in the Aristotelian sense.”<sup>35</sup> When not mischaracterizing it as blatantly as Nolting, U.S. officials might have simplified it in their own ideological images. Reporting about Diem’s Personalist Party, for instance, Nolting’s predecessor Elbridge Durbrow allowed that personalism was “sort of a guided

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<sup>33</sup> “The Victory of Rung Sat / La Victoire de Rung Sat” (Saigon, 1955), 46. A copy of the pamphlet is kept in Folder 18, Box 03, Unit 11: Monographs, Douglas Pike Collection, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

<sup>34</sup> Masur, “Exhibiting Signs of Resistance,” 299.

<sup>35</sup> “Telegram from the Embassy in Vietnam to the Department of State, July 14, 1961,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1961-1963, Volume I: Vietnam 1961*, Document 92. It is accessible at <http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v01/d92>. (This series is hereafter cited as *FRUS* followed by year(s) and volume.) Nolting added in this telegram that personalism was “perhaps too lofty for popular understanding, but is certainly in my judgment sound and right, and compatible with US interests”: an over-optimistic reading, to be sure.

democracy on the non-communist side of the fence run by leaders who apparently sincerely believe in rights for the individual and do not believe that the masses should be forced to work for the state in the totalitarian way practiced by the communists.”<sup>36</sup> While Durbrow’s invocation of communist totalitarianism would meet with approval at the Saigon presidential palace, his stress on individual rights was rather off of the communalism at the heart of the Diemist ideology. Better was another report sent two months later and devoted wholly to explaining the ideology to officials in Washington. Though “Western and Catholic in inspiration,” Durbrow wrote, personalism was “declared to reflect the ‘middle way’ of Confucian philosophy.” His went on, however, to say that “Personalist suspicion of parliaments, and the apparent absence of criticism or dissent in a Personalist society, appear to accord well with Diem’s practice of benevolent authoritarianism.”<sup>37</sup> It would be difficult to dispute Durbrow’s remark about Diem’s authoritarianism. But his identification of the doctrine to the absence of political dissent reflected American views on democratic practice rather than neo-Confucian advocacy of social harmony inherent to Diemist personalism.

At the same time, Dubrow was not mistaken when observing that the Diemist ideology appeared “to command no particular dedicated following among Vietnamese intellectuals or functionaries,” or that there seemed to be “little popular acceptance” from South Vietnamese at large.<sup>38</sup> Social harmony might have been a powerful ingredient to draw noncommunist Vietnamese, but it was not expressed well at all by the regime. The

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<sup>36</sup> “Letter from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Dubrow) to the Director of the Office of Asian Affairs (Kocher), October 8, 1958,” *FRUS 1958-1960: Volume I*, 89-90.

<sup>37</sup> “Despatch from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, December 22, 1958,” *FRUS 1958-1960: Volume I*, 110 and 112.

<sup>38</sup> “Despatch from the Ambassador in Vietnam (Durbrow) to the Department of State, December 22, 1958,” *FRUS 1958-1960: Volume I*, 111.

difficulty in articulation could be found in the rare case of an American enthusiast for the doctrine such as John H. Richardson. Chief of the CIA Saigon station in 1962, Richardson is described by an internal CIA history to have had an “intellectual affinity” with Ngo Dinh Nhu. He found Nhu’s “theoretical and intellectual effort relates very much to the practicalities of national and personal power,” and actively backed the Ngo brothers’ Strategic Hamlet Program.<sup>39</sup> Yet Richardson did not explain why such potent connections between idea and practice. Of the few other Americans who might have understood Diemist personalism, they could not help in any meaningful way to bridge the intellectual and cultural gap between Diem and the Americans. One was Gouverneur Palding, a Catholic writer for the liberal anticommunist newsmagazine *The Reporter*, whom Diem met and struck a friendship during his self-exile to the U.S.<sup>40</sup> Another was the political scientist John Donnell, who knew Vietnamese and published what the esteemed observer Bernard Fall called “the first intelligent attempt to bring about an understanding to the English-speaking world of the philosophical base of the Diem regime.”<sup>41</sup> The effort was nonetheless too little. Besides, Donnell considered personalism a combination of “neo-Thomism with a Marxian economic analysis of the weakness of capitalism”: an inaccurate rendering because neither neo-Thomism nor the Marxist anti-capitalist critique was among Diem’s sources.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Thomas L. Ahern, Jr., *CIA and the House of Ngo: Covert Action in South Vietnam, 1954-1963* (Washington, DC: Center for the Study of Intelligence, 2000), 157. This declassified internal history is available on the CIA website: <http://www.foia.cia.gov/vietnam.asp>.

<sup>40</sup> Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 6.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Fall, Review of *Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam since Independence*, *Journal of Asian Studies* 22:2 (February 1963), 225.

<sup>42</sup> John Donnell, “Personalism in Vietnam,” in Wesley R. Fishel, ed., *Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam since Independence* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962), 34. Donnell’s articles and others in the book were originally from a conference sponsored by the American Friends of Vietnam in 1959.

Ultimately, it was not so much theoretical understanding but disagreement with his regime's political actions that drove the wedge between Diem and many of his American supporters. The working relationship between his government and Michigan State University Advisory Group, for instance, began auspiciously but came to a complete halt in 1962 due to political and diplomatic differences. Another group, the lobbying American Friends of Vietnam that was formed in 1955 for the purpose of supporting Diem, began to turn sour on him by the end of the decade.<sup>43</sup> The loss of support came mainly from a widening gap on American expectations about political liberalization and related issues. All the same, it did not help that Diem failed to communicate and articulate his postcolonial personalist vision to even his most enthusiastic American supporters.

### **Anticommunist propaganda from Diem and the U.S. in the countryside**

The vagueness of Diem's articulation of neo-Confucian and other communitarian aspects of personalism contributed the weakness of a broad-based noncommunist political ideology in South Vietnam. Less problematic, however, were its anticommunist messages, which were easier to articulate and illustrate, and also easier to understand. While only a select minority seems to have grasped personalism to write about it at length, there were many more South Vietnamese that believed they were familiar with communism to offer a critique. As seen in the next section, there was not a shortage of non-Diemist anticommunists that willingly engaged in propagating about the dangers of

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<sup>43</sup> See, respectively, John Ernst, *Forging a Fateful alliance: Michigan State University and the Vietnam War* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 115-139; Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby*, 62-76.

Marxist-Leninism to other South Vietnamese. Their construction of an anticommunist critique went a long way to give an ideological confidence to the RVN during and after Diem's rule.

Before addressing this construction, however, it helps to note differences about anticommunist propaganda in rural and urban areas. Diem's government had many problems in maintaining the support of the American audience, and its failure to explicate its ideology to many of its own employees was troublesome. But most consequential was its lack of ultimate success in rallying the majority of South Vietnamese rural masses to the Saigon side. While the "Denouncing Communist" campaign was enormously successful in quantitative terms at first, its brutality also alienated large segments of the peasant population and enabled the Viet Cong to regain their footing. With Hanoi's decision to devote resources to armed struggle in the south and to establish the NLF, the southern revolutionaries picked up the pieces and quickly presented themselves as the biggest threat to Saigon. While support for the NLF varied from province to province – and from one period to another – the revolutionary Viet Cong were able to obtain short- and long-term backing from sizable segments of the peasant population through a combination of factors and methods: organizational experience that reached back to the late colonial period; persuasive ideological indoctrination of new members; selective and effective terror against South Vietnamese officials; and competent appeals to individual and communal interests such as land and village security among peasants.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> On the first three factors, see George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare: From the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (Westport, CT: Praeger Security International, 1961, 2006); Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*. For a summary of scholarship on the last factor, see Tuong Vu, "Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:2 (2007): 199.

Saigon was well aware of these grave challenges and had ambitious plans to fight against revolutionary appeals to the rural masses. In particular, the Ngo brothers aimed to simultaneously revitalize and modernize the countryside through a number of programs: not only the Agrovillage and Strategic Hamlet programs, but also those that, in line with Vietnamese historical tradition of southward movement, relocated people to the highlands and other resettlement areas. The results were decidedly mixed: resettlements in the highlands and elsewhere achieved modest if uneven successes; the Agrovillages largely failed; and the Strategic Hamlet program, interrupted by the 1963 coup, encountered serious troubles from the start. Even with an enormous amount of American aid, Diem's regime was overwhelmed by internal and external factors, and its most ambitiously conceived programs eventually failed when put to practice. Even programs of resettlement and modernization in the Mekong Delta and elsewhere in rural areas encountered considerable challenges and produced mixed results at best.<sup>45</sup>

The eventual failure of these programs also meant Diem's failure in spreading anticommunism among rural South Vietnamese. Certainly it was not for a lack of trying. Throughout the nine years of rule, his government worked very hard at spreading its nationalistic and anticommunist propaganda that was typically coupled to promises of greater security and better material improvement. Between 1957 and 1960, the RVN's Department of Information increased publication and distribution of printed materials, expanded radio broadcasts, and established a film center. Through its arm of the

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<sup>45</sup> See Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*, 51-208; Stan B-H Tan, "'Swiddens, Resettlements, Sedentarizations, and Villages': State Formation among the Central Highlanders of Vietnam under the First Republic, 1955-1961," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (2006): 210-252; David Biggs, *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011), 202-215; David Biggs, "Breaking from the Colonial Mold: Water Engineering and the Failure of Nation-Building in the Plain of Reeds, Vietnam," *Technology and Culture* 49 (July 2008): 611-620.

provincial Information Service, the Department employed a variety of means ranging from traditional megaphones to technologically advanced “radio-cine-cars,” from using a “mobile group for exhibition” that traveled to and showed documentaries and theatrical movies to villages, to placing news and propaganda items on “information boards” for the entire hamlet to read. (Towns and larger hamlets might have had also “information halls” or “information posts,” with desks and chairs and more reading materials.)<sup>46</sup> Using these means, the government trumpeted its accomplishment on the one hand and voiced long and loud criticisms of communist failures on the other hand.

The U.S. actively assisted South Vietnam in spreading anticommunist propaganda. As early as 1950, the U.S. government already devoted a variety of resources to assist the State of Vietnam and later the RVN through a number of means, most notably the Special Technical and Economic Mission (STEM). Staffed with about two hundred employees and stationed in Saigon and Hanoi (plus Phnom Penh and Vientiane), STEM in particular took advantage of the fact that they were not required to work through the French authorities as their military advisory counterparts. When not assisting in Franco-Vietnamese technical and civil projects, the mission offered the Vietnamese a variety of information tools such as exhibits, tracts, pamphlets, posters, musical records, and technical films, all of which were designed to celebrate technological advances and other aspects of American civilization.<sup>47</sup> At a critical time, the U.S Navy was also employed in the fight against Vietnamese communism. During

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<sup>46</sup> Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” 45-52. Photographs of these communicative means are shown in Thai Van Kiem, *Vietnam, Past and Present* (np: Commercial Transworld Edition, 1957), 358-366.

<sup>47</sup> For more details on these points, see Statler, *Replacing France*, 39-44; Ronald B. Frankum, Jr., *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954-1955* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 16-39; Ronald H. Spector, *Advice and Support: The Early Years, 1941-1960* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983), 120-121.

Operation Passage to Freedom in 1954-1955, naval personnel provided massive monetary and technical assistance to move northerners to the south as well as to remove equipments from falling to Viet Minh hands. Like the State of Vietnam officials, American personnel referred to the émigrés as refugees. To counter Viet Minh propaganda about American and South Vietnamese oppression, American sailors generously offered the émigrés aboard food, cigarettes, and friendly smiles. “To overcome negative stories,” describes the best history of the Operation, “it was often simply a matter of trying to make the Vietnamese as comfortable as possible.”<sup>48</sup> The material largess from the U.S. was clearly meant to win adherents to the American ideals of liberty and abundance and away from socialist internationalism.

Americans also provided assistance through the United States Information Service (USIS). The agency provided funding and specific services to the anticommunist propaganda efforts. One example was producing over 50 million printed materials in about 180 titles during the second half of 1954.<sup>49</sup> Another example was hiring Vietnamese traveling troupes to perform anti-Vietminh skits and publishing the Vietnamese-language journal *Free World (The Gioi Tu Do)* that carried “pro-democracy and some anti-communist material.”<sup>50</sup> It helped Radio Vietnam enlarge broadcasting capacity in Saigon and build new stations in the cities of Nha Trang, Quang Ngai, and Can Tho. USIS provided much funding to Radio Vietnam: for example, \$12.5 million

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<sup>48</sup> Frankum, *Operation Passage to Freedom*, 112.

<sup>49</sup> Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower’s Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 118.

<sup>50</sup> For more on USIS activities in South Vietnam during 1954-1963, see Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” 72-91.



during 1956-1972 while the RVN put up only \$2.5 during 1965-1972.<sup>51</sup> In rural areas, however, these propaganda efforts were interrupted and disrupted by revolutionary guerillas. In some areas, government officials were frequently sidelined and overwhelmed by revolutionary presence. They could be derailed also by the government's internal problems, or by a combination of these and other factors, such as peasant attitudes vis-à-vis the government in charge. "Ten years of Communist indoctrination followed by five years of intense anti-Communist propaganda," as the Hue-based American consul Theodore J. C. Heavner explained, "have only reinforced the peasant's traditional fear of government and politics," and as a result, the peasant "will accept whatever regime imposes itself on him, but he reserves his loyalties for his family."<sup>52</sup> It was an unenviable position that the Saigon regime was facing, and its repressive practices brought initial success but at the cost of reinforcing the fears and anxieties among the peasants.

In addition, the Diem government faced enormous challenges in communicating the content of its anticommunist messages to a less literate audience among the peasants. Its cadres might have been many in number, but they did not show the level of sophistication and effectiveness that their more seasoned communist counterparts seemed to have achieved. In early 1957, for instance, a report about the Department of Information noted that there "appears to be an excessive amount of emphasis placed upon

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas W. Hoffer and Lawrence W. Lichty, "Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)," in John A. Lent, ed., *Broadcasting in Asia and the Pacific: A Continental Survey of Radio and Television* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 96.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 412.

repetitive political propaganda to the detriment of more positive types of information.”<sup>53</sup>

Later attempts to improve the content and delivery of messages did not seem to change many hearts. In failing to persuade the peasants from favoring the republican Saigon government over revolutionary forces, Diem left a legacy that damaged not only his own government but also haunted and hurt subsequent ones in Saigon.<sup>54</sup>

### **Anticommunist rhetoric in urban South Vietnam**

In contrast to the countryside, South Vietnamese urban areas saw a considerably stronger and steadier anticommunism. At the least, anticommunist rhetoric in cities was more visible and consistent; its styles more varied in kinds and numbers; and the plurality of discourse more conducive to the more literate urban population.<sup>55</sup> This occurred in spite of the persistent problems and differences between Diem and many urbanites. Not infrequently, Vietnam War historiography has noted the low regard that the Ngo brothers

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<sup>53</sup> Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group, “Report on the Organization of the Department of Information and Youth and Sports” (January 15, 1957), Folder 34, Box 1, Michigan State University Vietnam Advisory Group Collection, Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 3-4. This report also notes that such “repetitive political propaganda” was most common in the central region, attributing this occurrence to the close relation between the Department of Information and the government-directed National Revolutionary Movement there.

<sup>54</sup> For three stories of relative success on the part of the RVN to win the hearts and minds of rural South Vietnamese – stories that are revealing of what might have worked for the Saigon government as well as what it was up against – see David W.P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975*, Vol. 1 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 190-192. It concerns one provincial chief and two district chiefs that employed political means to dissuade support for the revolutionary side. The Viet Cong, however, assassinated one of the district chiefs, and the provincial chief was removed by “an increasingly paranoid Diem, who saw any successes or even initiatives from his subordinates as unacceptable challenges to his position.” The latter’s own account, which encompasses other matters (such as trying to convert Viet Cong prisoners to the noncommunist nationalist cause) can be found in Nguyen Tran, *Cong va Toi* [Deeds and Misdeeds] (Los Alamitos, CA: XuanThu, 1992), 225-239. According to Tran, it was his disagreement with Ngo Dinh Nhu about pacification strategy that led to Diem’s decision to remove him from the post; see 258-262.

<sup>55</sup> Greater access to printed materials and stronger familiarity to new concepts (such as “countryman” and “citizens”) in cities could be traced back to the colonial period. See McHale, *Print and Power*, 38; Patrick Lloyd Hatcher, *The Suicide of an Elite: American Internationalists and Vietnam* (Alto Palo: Stanford University Press, 1990), 125-126.

held for the urban elite and the control they attempted to impose on urban associations and organizations such as the press, university students, and the leadership of the trade union movement.<sup>56</sup> Archival evidence supports this claim about the Ngos; discussing the relationship between Western and Asian cultural heritage, for example, Nhu referred to “some urban intellectual circles” as people that were “cut off from the masses and from history.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, urban support for their rule was inconsistent and unsteady. The best-known example of this problem is the manifesto in 1960 by the “Caravelle Group,” named after the landmark hotel in Saigon, that consisted of eighteen anticommunist urban-based politicians and sect leaders and called for, among other things, political liberalization.

Even urban intellectuals in the know about French personalism were critical of the Ngos. One was Ly Chanh Trung, a professor of philosophy at the University of Saigon. There is more about Trung and the left-leaning Catholic intellectuals in Chapter Seven. Here, it suffices to note that Trung met Diem in 1953 when the former was a doctoral student in Belgium and latter was living in self-exile in Europe. Diem came to dinner with a group of Vietnamese students at Louvain and showcased his legendary talkativeness while “sitting as if motionless” and smoking nearly a pack of cigarettes. Trung was disappointed in Diem’s inclination towards the U.S. For his part, Diem confided to the rector of Louvain University that he found the Vietnamese students there too Marxist-friendly, and later, as South Vietnam’s leader, warned his cabinet at least

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<sup>56</sup> Examples are Scigliano, *South Vietnam under Stress*, 174; Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure*, 33; Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken*, 37; Wehrle, *Between a River and a Mountain*, 67-74; Ellen J. Hammer, *A Death in November: America in Vietnam, 1963* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1987), 234.

<sup>57</sup> Ngo Dinh Nhu, “A Sketch of the Social Principles,” 1.

once to “watch out for the troublesome Louvain crowd.”<sup>58</sup> Equally problematic was the absence of a strong grass-roots base in cities. One instance is the membership of the regime-supported National Revolutionary Movement, which rose from about 10,000 in 1955 to half a million in 1959. But only 42,000 lived inside Saigon.<sup>59</sup> The Ngos rightly devoted their attention to the countryside. But they seemed to have underestimated urban forces, and it was not a surprise that urbanites showed a lot of jubilation and optimism after the overthrow of his government in 1963.

These serious problems, however, did not mean that the urbanites did not share with Diem an opposition to Marxism and the Workers Party. Diem might not be able to articulate well the fine points of his personalist vision to the urban political and cultural elites. But it was easier to articulate anticommunist messages, and Diem received strong backing from the urban elites on this count, at least at the beginning of his rule. The combined efforts of the government, anticommunist groups, and individuals helped propagate South Vietnamese urbanites to greater anticommunist rhetoric than could be reached in the highlands and countryside. Created during 1954-1963 were a number of cultural-political organizations that aided in the task of spreading anticommunism. Besides the Defense Department-run Steering Committee for the Denouncing Communism Campaign (Uy Ban Chi Dao Chien Dich To Cong) that directed the well-known Diemist campaign, were government-supported organizations such as the Viet Pen Group (Nhom But Viet), the Vietnamese Society for Asian Culture (Hoi Viet Nam Van Hoa A Chau), and the Society for Free Vietnamese Culture (Hoi Tu Do Van Hoa

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<sup>58</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, *Nhung Ngay Buon Non* [Days of Nausea] (Saigon: Doi Dien, 1971), 133-135. But Trung also noted, “Diem did not show any discrimination towards us” (136).

<sup>59</sup> Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans*, 294. Dommen suggests that the Ngos’ prejudice against the urban elite was similar to that of King Sihanouk in Cambodia.

Viet Nam), all founded in 1957. Three years later saw the establishment of similarly named Society of Vietnamese Culture (Hoi Van Hoa Viet Nam) and Society for a Spiritual Culture (Hoi Van Hoa Duy Linh).<sup>60</sup> Through censorship and policing of anti-governmental materials, urbanites were also sheltered from revolutionary rhetoric and propaganda as found in many rural areas. Both government (national and local) and non-governmental groups (e.g., Catholics, students, workers) actively organized anticommunist rallies and demonstrations. As the urban press and publishing industry grew each year, there were also many and readily available publications with explicit or implicit anticommunist content. In 1954, for example, there were 543 Vietnamese-language “literary works,” plus thirty-one in Chinese and nineteen in French. The next year, the numbers were 717 in Vietnamese, eighteen in Chinese, and only three in French. As for periodicals, Saigon had eight Vietnamese-language dailies and thirty “reviews and magazines” in January 1955. A year later, the numbers grew to sixteen dailies and thirty-two magazines. In the same period, French-language dailies grew from one to two but magazines went from seven to five. Chinese-language periodicals also went down slightly: from twelve to ten dailies, and four to two magazines. On the other hand, 1955 saw the appearance of the first English-language newspaper, the *Times of Vietnam*, in the country.<sup>61</sup>

The South Vietnamese government also distributed a massive amount of information and propaganda. In early 1955, its Department of Information issued 2000 daily news bulletins. Each month, it also published about 8000 bulletins “with photos,”

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<sup>60</sup> Tran Trong Dang Dan, *Van Hoa, Van Nghe... Nam Viet Nam 1954-1975* [Culture and Arts in South Vietnam, 1954-1975], second ed. (Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000), 84.

<sup>61</sup> Thai Van Kiem, *Vietnam, Past and Present*, 368,

30,000 bulletins “with patriotic slogans,” and 365,000 propaganda leaflets. Numerous in urban areas were government-sponsored information halls and posts that kept abreast pro-government and anticommunist news and propaganda. Located in Saigon’s suburban Cho Lon, the largest hall drew 4000 to 6000 visitors each day.<sup>62</sup> By 1957, there were fifty-two such halls put up in Saigon metropolitan area, along with fifty “information boards” in “most frequented places” such as movie theaters. There were also twenty radio broadcast posts.<sup>63</sup> Directly and indirectly, anticommunist rhetoric infused broadcasts on radio and, later, television. A thorough study of anticommunist propaganda by the Saigon government in urban areas remains to be seen, but the available evidence suggests that it was abundant in broadcasting.<sup>64</sup> Similar to the countryside, the government received financial, technical, and other kinds of aid and assistance from the U.S. In 1958, for instance, USIS targeted “actual and potential elite” for informational activities: specifically, top government and military officials;

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<sup>62</sup> Phan Quang Bong, “Mot Nam Chien Dau cua Nha Thong Tin Nam Viet [A Year of Fighting for the Department of Information of Southern Vietnam],” in *Lua Viet* [Vietnamese Fire] (Saigon, 1955): 63. The author worked for the Department of Information, and the publication was a special Lunar New Year’s issue by the émigré organization Corps of [Former] Students of Hanoi University.

<sup>63</sup> Thai Van Kiem, *Vietnam, Past and Present*, 360.

<sup>64</sup> It could be excessive at times, and even anticommunists might have found government anticommunist propaganda overwhelming and ineffective. A former director of national radio broadcasting recalls an illuminating example. In the mid-1960s, South Vietnam had thirteen radio stations, all run by the government with technical support from the US and Australia. Programs varied from station to station, but typically consisted of a combination of news reports, interviews, commentaries, music (both popular and military), and local-specific programs. In 1966, however, the ARVN general Nguyen Chanh Thi, in charge of Corps I military region which included Hue and Da Nang, ordered the radio stations in those cities to broadcast only three kinds of programs: news on the military and the war front, anticommunist commentary, and military music. In spite of pleas and arguments from officials in charge, including the aforementioned director, Thi did not yield and the stations had to follow his order. Responses from listeners, however, were generally negative, including those from ARVN soldiers stationed in highlands and border areas that wanted to hear programs unrelated to military topics, such as popular Vietnamese music. Thi eventually changed his mind and allowed the stations broadcast according to the more mixed programming model of Radio Saigon. See Huy Quang Vu Duc Vinh, “Nho Ve Mien Dat Tu Do Xua” [Remembering the Old Free Country], *Dac San Truyen Thong Quoc Gia: Ky Niem Hop Mat California* [The Special Issue of the National Bureau of Communication: Commemoration of the 2005 Reunion in California] (np: 2005), 31-37.

professionals in education, arts and letters, journalism, medicine, law, and engineering; students; and members of the clergy. Noting that many of these South Vietnamese lived in Saigon and Hue, USIS established its centers in those cities.<sup>65</sup>

In addition to the material dimension was the human aspect. Besides the efforts of the U.S. and RVN governments, many South Vietnamese non-government groups and private citizens published a massive number of anticommunist materials during the first few years of Diemist rule. It is true that there was a lot of competition for political power and influence among urban noncommunist groups, including the Buddhists, the Catholics, the Confederation of Labor, the various political parties, and, of course, the Diemists. Nonetheless, with the possible exception of the Buddhists whose leaders and followers included at least a plurality of neutralists, members of these groups were vocal in denouncing communist theory and practice. They sometimes cooperated with the government, especially during the first few years after the Geneva Conference. One revealing example occurred in 1956 at the detention center in Bien Hoa, where the Diem regime kept a number of communist suspects as well as noncommunist rivals. The Great Viets in detention formed a cell within the Center, and the leader asked the Center's authorities for permission to open classes for "training and studies of anticommunism." Permission was granted, and several Great Viet detainees served as lecturers or "trainers." One of them gave lectures on "three stages of Communist strategy" and the second, the future member of the RVN's Upper House during the Second Republic, on the Viet Minh and anticolonial resistance. A third lecturer was the leader of the Great Viet cell and spoke on Viet Minh tax policies on agriculture. Not long after his release

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<sup>65</sup> Masur, "Hearts and Minds," 81.

from the Center, To Van, the first speaker, published his lectures in book form, whose copies were in turn purchased by the RVN's Bureau of Information for "distribution at local communities and use in studies sessions."<sup>66</sup> The second speaker, Thai Lang Nghiem, published two anticommunist books on the topics of national unity and reunification.<sup>67</sup>

This example illustrates the freshness of experience with the Viet Minh during the First Indochina War and the accompanying urgency that many South Vietnamese urban writers felt about propagating about the problems of communism. It was hardly a surprise to see that South Vietnamese writers, in the description of the essayist and former Viet Minh member Vo Phien, "inaugurated the period after Geneva with works that were heavily political and with strong emphasis on the issue of [communism versus anticommunism]."<sup>68</sup> With the consent and encouragement of the Diem government, a sizable anticommunist literature appeared during the early South Vietnamese period: books, tracts, pamphlets, and also columns, essays, poems, and short stories in magazines and newspapers. Together with government-produced materials, it amounted to a rigorous critique of communism that set the tone and content for the remainder of the RVN and well into the postwar era. This body of anticommunist literature is worth exploring because it helps to uncover some of the shared ideological concerns and occupations among urban South Vietnamese.

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<sup>66</sup> Quang Minh, *Cach Mang Viet Nam Thoi Can Kim*, 263-265. The published lectures are under To Van, *Sach Luoc Ba Giai Doan cua Cong San* [Communist Strategy in Three Phases] (Saigon: Chong Cong, 1956).

<sup>67</sup> Thai Lang Nghiem, *Doan Ket Luan* [Essay on Unity] (Saigon: Kinh Duong, 1957); *Ban ve Thong Nhat Dat Nuoc* [Discussing Reunification of the Country] (Saigon: Kinh Duong, 1959).

<sup>68</sup> Vo Phien, *Literature in South Vietnam, 1954-1975* (Melbourne: Vietnamese Language and Cultural Publications, 1992), 124.



## Northern émigrés and the urgency of constructing an anticommunist critique

The next chapter offers more details about Saigon as a favorable place in the post-Geneva period for the spreading and engagement of noncommunist cultural and political ideology. Here, however, it must be noted that a significant feature of the ideological critique of communism was the presence of a large number of educated and urban northern émigrés that came to the urban south. Some of the émigrés, such as musician Pham Duy already noted near the end of Chapter One, had come south in search of work before the Geneva Conference. Most, however, left the north during the post-Geneva migration of 1954-1955. In addition, the latter group migrated for political rather than economic reasons, such as out of fear for Viet Minh repression. Their arrival to the south quickly led to a dominant presence of anticommunist rhetoric and publications by northerners between the mid-1950s and the early 1960s.

To a significant degree, the presence of an educated and urbanized group of northern émigrés provided a striking contrast to the largely working-class and Catholic background of the majority of émigrés during 1954-1955. This point must be emphasized because the outstanding feature of the migration in English-language historiography has been Catholicism, in that most northerners that came south were Catholic.<sup>69</sup> It is true that Catholics formed the bulk of northern refugees, and that their

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<sup>69</sup> Among recent U.S.-focused historiography on the migration that stresses the Catholic feature of the migration are Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam*, 127-171; Fisher, *Dr. America*, 27-65; Frankum, *Operation Passage to Freedom*. This historiography generally emphasizes American roles in facilitating Catholic migration. Offering a Vietnamese-centric perspective is the historian of religion Peter Hansen, whose works utilized RVN's and other Vietnamese sources to argue that the most important factor for Catholics migrate was their pastors. See Peter Hansen, "Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:3 (Fall 2009): 173-211; Peter Hansen, "The Virgin Heads South: Northern Catholic Refugees and Their Clergy in

number significantly enlarged the previously smaller Catholic population in the south.<sup>70</sup> It is true too that a number of leaders of Catholic refugees were among the most vocal critics of communism. One of the most visible South Vietnamese anticommunist political organizers, for instance, was Fr. Hoang Quynh, who had co-directed an anticommunist militia called Catholic Youth Self-Defense Group in Phat Diem during the First Indochina War.<sup>71</sup> The priest headed or co-headed a number of anticommunist organizations, including the All-People Anticommunist Front (Mat Tran Toan Dan Chong Cong) and the Catholic Citizens United Force (Luc Luong Cong Dan Cong Giao Dai Doan Ket). The latter, established during the Americanization phase of the war, was fervently anticommunist and stood against the Paris peace negotiation, neutralism, and even American decision to stop bombing the north.<sup>72</sup> Although anticommunist publications by Catholics were well outnumbered by those from non-Catholics, they remained a presence in the urban life. The editors of two of long-running newspapers in Saigon, *Freedom (Tu Do)* and *Building (Xay Dung)* were also Catholic émigrés, and at least one of them a priest. Another northern Catholic, Nghiem Xuan Thien, published the periodical *Contemporary Time (Thoi Luan)* during the early years of Diem's rule, wrote

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South Vietnam, 1954-1964," in Thomas David DuBois, ed., *Casting Faiths: Imperialism and the Transformation of Religion in East and Southeast Asia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 129-152.

<sup>70</sup> There were 1,900,000 Vietnamese Catholics before the Geneva Conference, with 27.4 percent in the southern ecclesiastical provinces of Saigon and Hue. This number leaped to 61.6 percent after the migration. See Hansen, "Bắc Di Cư," 177.

<sup>71</sup> Nguyen Van Canh, *Vietnam under Communism*, 169. Anticommunist expressions among Catholics were enhanced in part by authorial structure and clerical control among émigré Catholic communities. With mixed success, leaders of these communities sought to keep their northern flocks separate from southern Catholics. See Hansen, "The Virgin Heads South."

<sup>72</sup> Nguyen Khac Ngu, *Dai Cuong ve cac Dang Phai Chinh Tri Viet Nam* [A General Guide on Vietnamese Political Parties] (Toronto: Tu Sach Nghien Cuu Su Dia, 1989), 82 and 98.

an anticommunist book in Vietnamese, and edited another in English.<sup>73</sup> Just as there had been a number of anticommunist Catholic voices during late colonialism, there was no shortage of them in the south after 1954. One difference, however, was that late-colonial Catholic voices hailed from three regions but South Vietnamese ones were mostly northern refugees. The RVN did not see an anticommunist newspaper of southern origin that was comparable to the Saigon-based *La Croix d'Indochine* during the late 1930s. As for the fiercely anticommunist priest-editor of the Hue-based periodical *For the Lord* in the same period, he became involved with the Catholic Boy Scouts during the 1940s, served as their national chaplain in 1953, and seemed to disappear from publishing all together.<sup>74</sup>

In short, northern Catholic anticommunist presence in Saigon was strong, especially in organization. At the same time, the long-standing Catholic-centric emphasis of the migration obscures two facts: the not insignificant number of non-Catholics in general, and the mostly non-Catholic cultural leadership in South Vietnam in particular. Among over 860,000 refugees were about 676,000 Catholics, but also a little over 1000 Protestants and almost 183,000 that were classified as Buddhists: the last not an inconsiderable number.<sup>75</sup> Catholics might have been picked to staff many political positions in the Diem's government. But their number was small among both established

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<sup>73</sup> Diem's government sought to curb criticism from the press, and sharing the same religion with Diem did not save Thien from jail. According to Nguyen Duy Hinh and Tran Dinh Tho, *The South Vietnamese Society* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1980), Thien "alerted the public to 'the threat posed by Diem's policies that alienated the people'" in the March 15, 1958 issue, and an irate Diem "ordered [Thien] sentenced to ten months in prison, seized the offending newspaper issue, and suspended its publication" (131).

<sup>74</sup> Do Tan Huong, "Linh Muc Giuse Maria Nguyen Van Thich (1891-1978)" [Reverend Joseph Marie Nguyen Van Thich (1891-1978)], in *Nhung Neo Duong Viet Nam* [Roads of Vietnam] (2007), accessible at <http://www.dunglac.org/index.php?m=module3&v=chapter&ib=197&ict=1402>.

<sup>75</sup> Pham Ngoc Chi, *Resettlement of the Refugees of North Vietnam* (Saigon, 1955), 1.

and rising members of the émigré leadership in the arts, literature, and education. This leadership, in turn, came to dominate the culture of urban South Vietnam during 1954-1975. Among non-Catholic leading émigrés were the journalist Tam Lang; the actress Kieu Chinh; the film director Doan Chau Mau; the publisher Nguyen Dinh Vuong; the musicians Pham Duy and Pham Dinh Chuong; the photographers Tran Cao Linh and Nguyen Cao Dam; the poets Cung Tram Tuong and Vu Hoang Chuong; the novelists Nhat Tien and Duyen Anh; and the scholars Nguyen Dang Thuc, Nghiem Tham, Toan Anh, and Pham Cong Thien.<sup>76</sup> Among anticommunist writers, a few identified themselves as Catholic while others did so as Buddhists. For most, however, there were no indications of either their religious background or whether it played a significant role in their stand. What bound anticommunist writers together were similar experiences of the Viet Minh, not religious commonalities except for an opposition to what they perceived as communist suppression of religious practices and organizations.

There were significant consequences to the massive and somewhat sudden presence of northern émigrés in the urban south. In the long run, they and (to a lesser extent) people of central origins came to dominate political organization and, correspondingly, lessened the influence of southern groups. They were certainly helped by pacification and cooptation of the Cao Dai and Hoa Hao by of the Diem regime in 1955, and the religious sects became more fragmented in political grouping afterwards.<sup>77</sup> Strong was the northern dominance that some southern intellectuals were later compelled to begin organizations with southerners-only membership and aimed at “restoring”

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<sup>76</sup> This information is determined from *Nhan Vat Viet Nam [Who's Who of Vietnam]* (Saigon, 1973), which includes religious background for most profiles.

<sup>77</sup> See Nguyen Khac Ngu, *Dai Cuong ve cac Dang Phai Chinh Tri Viet Nam*, 81-82 for a list of Hoa Hao political factions, and 84-85 for the Cao Dai's.

southern noncommunist and anticommunist voices in the politics and culture of South Vietnam.<sup>78</sup> The dominance of northerners and Catholics might have also contributed to the sympathies of some neutralist urban southerners towards the NLF later.<sup>79</sup> As a whole, however, the dominance helped to ensure a strong presence of anticommunist rhetoric in Saigon and most urban areas.

In any event, northern émigrés in prestigious cultural and political positions began a new anticommunist discourse and activism as soon as they arrived to the south. Groups such as Students of Hanoi University (Doan Hoc Sinh Dai Hoc Ha Noi) and the Corps of Émigré Students (Hoc Sinh Di Cu) – the majority of whose membership were most likely non-Catholic – organized anticommunist rallies, including one at the Saigon’s Majestic Hotel where a DRV group was staying.<sup>80</sup> During a demonstration on the second anniversary of the Geneva Peace Accords – called “Day of National Shame” (Ngay Quoc Han) by anticommunists – participants marched to the office of the International Committee for Supervision and Control, set up to monitor post-Geneva arrangements, to voice their displeasure at the result of the Accords. They also attacked the office of a weekly that ran articles perceived to be communist-friendly, including one that advocated

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<sup>78</sup> Three major groups were the Southern Restoration Movement (Phong Trao Phuc Hung Mien Nam), the Free South Block (Khoi Mien Nam Tu Do), and the Elders Club (Hoi Lien Truong). See Nguyen Khac Ngu, *Dai Cuong ve cac Dang Phai Chinh Tri Viet Nam* 98-99.

<sup>79</sup> In Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 36-37, Tang named northern Catholics as a factor. In addition to southern organizations named in the previous note, there were several political organizations founded or dominated by southerners that the Saigon government considered to be “communist-friendly.” Two examples are the Golden Dragon Force (Luc Luong Rong Vang) headed by the Buddhist monk Thich Don Hau, and the Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peaceful Forces (Lien Minh Dan Toc Dan Chu Hoa Binh) whose membership included the physician Duong Quynh Hoa. During the Tet Offensive, many members of these organizations, including Hau and Hoa, left RVN-controlled areas and went to NLF zones. Hoa became the minister of health for the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), the government arm of the NLF. See Nguyen Khac Ngu, *Dai Cuong ve cac Dang Phai Chinh Tri Viet Nam*, 96-97. An account of the formation and activities of Alliance is Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir*, 130-144.

<sup>80</sup> Nguyen Khac Ngu, *Dai Cuong ve cac Dang Phai Chinh Tri Viet Nam*, 62.

negotiation with the DRV. The fact that the demonstrators shouted the slogan “Go north and kill commies” was suggestive of the northern origin of at least some (and possibly many) among the demonstration.<sup>81</sup> This incident was also indicative of the important roles that publications, the focus of the remainder of this chapter, for northern émigrés. This was particularly true of writers then entering the middle years of their lives. According to the aforementioned writer Vo Phien, there were overlapping generations of writers among noncommunist South Vietnamese: the old, the middle-aged, and the young. The first group included authors in the forties and fifties at the start of the anticolonial war, who had already established and solidified their reputation. They could be referred to as antebellum writers. While many of them were involved in the cultural scene of Saigon and South Vietnam upon arrival, their impact was either short-lived or limited or both. On the other hand, members of the last group were in their teens when the war began and did not make their names until the early 1960s at the earliest, and more commonly in the middle and later years of the period. They did not have direct experience with communism, or were too young to be significantly impressed to the point of making it a central theme of their works. Instead, they would be most concerned about the problems in South Vietnam in the late 1960s and early 1970s instead: the decline of morality, political authoritarianism, unending warfare, and uncertainty about the future.<sup>82</sup>

Younger writers would appear later in the urban scene. In the mid-1950s, however, it was the middle group that made the most immediate as well as lasting

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<sup>81</sup> Nguyen Cong Khanh, *Lich Su Bao Chi Sai Gon – TP Ho Chi Minh (1865-1995)* [A History of Periodicals in Saigon – Ho Chi Minh City, 1865-1995] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tong Hop Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, 2006), 309. The weekly was *Tien Thu* [Attack and Defense].

<sup>82</sup> John C. Schafer, *Võ Phiến and the Sadness of Exile* (DeKalb, IL: Southeast Asia Publications, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 51-52.

impact.<sup>83</sup> Most figures of the group were born during the 1910s and 1920s in either the north or the center. They were educated in prestigious institutions in Hanoi, Hue, or France. They had direct involvement with or against the Viet Minh during the war, and began their most productive works upon coming to the Saigon. Among the prominent figures of this group were the non-fiction writer Nguyen Manh Con, the attorney Nghiem Xuan Hong, the professor of literature Nguyen Dang Thuc, the schoolteacher and textbook writer Nguyen Sy Te, the poet Thanh Tam Tuyen, the dramatist Vu Khac Khoan, and the novelists Mai Thao and Doan Quoc Sy. Some of them, such as Mai Thao and Doan Quoc Sy, had joined the Viet Minh at the start of the war but left the organization sometimes during the conflict. Others, such as Nghiem Xuan Hong who had belonged to one of the smaller Great Viet parties, were often on the run from the communists. Given their prominence and the close ties between the civilian and governmental sectors, most of them were involved with the Saigon government or its military in some capacity after 1954. Nguyen Manh Con, for example, was an ARVN officer in propaganda affairs and one of the editors for the official periodical of the Steering Committee for the Denouncing Communism Campaign. Thanh Tam Tuyen taught at the Dalat College of Political Warfare in the 1960s and edited the official monthly magazine of the Defense Department, and Nghiem Xuan Hong ran the Prime Minister's office in the government of General Nguyen Khanh. Joining the northerners were writers that came or were based in the center. One was Vo Phien himself, who had joined, turned against, and been imprisoned by the Viet Minh before release in accordance of the Geneva Peace Conference.

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<sup>83</sup> Schafer, *Võ Phiến and the Sadness of Exile*, 51.

Northerners such as these writers were at the forefront of the cultural-political ideological offensive against communism. An examination of early South Vietnamese publications shows that they and other anticommunists believed fiercely in their opposition to Marxism. It is possible that they had to push anticommunism vehemently in part due to their inadequacy in articulating a clear and convincing nationalist ideology to themselves and other Vietnamese. As suggested by Nghiem Xuan Hong, anticommunists were painfully aware of their lack of a strong and appealing political program.<sup>84</sup> It was feasible too that they manipulated anticommunism to generate fears and rally popular support that they sorely needed. A number of writings, for example, pounded over and over again on the theme of communist large-scale and systematic network of lies, deceptions, and brutalities. Nonetheless, these possible exaggerations only highlighted their grave fears of communist rule. Although the tone of many anticommunist publications verged on propaganda at times, the content reflects genuine fears and beliefs of their writers. Communist control of North Vietnam after the Geneva Conference drove their fears several notches upward, but their experiences of Viet Minh violence and manipulation before and during the First Indochina War were sufficient to warrant reasonable causes for such fears.

Anticommunist print materials came in different kinds. Some stories and arguments amounted to little more than crude caricatures; others, however, were tightly drawn and elongated into dozens and hundreds of pages. Some writings, such as a short fictionalized tale that won a government-sponsored national contest and is about the experiences of a young northerner living under communist rule during the First Indochina

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<sup>84</sup> Nghiem Xuan Hong, *Lich Trinh Dien Tien cua Phong Trao Quoc Gia Viet Nam* [Chronological developments of the Vietnamese nationalist movement] (Saigon: Quan Diem, 1958).



War, were little better than slogan-like propaganda in content and form.<sup>85</sup> But others, such as a novel of about the August Revolution by Nguyen Manh Con and two previously mentioned book-long essays by Thai Lang Nghiem, showed great nuances in describing differences and problems related to the issue of communism versus noncommunist nationalism.<sup>86</sup> In between these two extremes were anticommunist periodicals by major émigré writers, which by necessity ran shorter pieces but were often crafted carefully. Near the end of 1955, for instance, Mai Thao, Thanh Tam Tuyen, Nguyen Sy Te, and several other northern émigrés in Saigon published *The Vietnamese (Nguoi Viet)*. It ran for merely four issues before Mai Thao and Thanh Tam Tuyen joined Doan Quoc Sy the next year to start the much better-known journal *Creativity (Sang Tao)*. Yet *The Vietnamese* were representative of the early South Vietnamese anticommunist concerns through titles such as “Peace and the Geneva Conference,” “The Issue of Social Classes,” “The Essence of Communist Arts,” “Marxism and Vietnamese Arts,” “The Arts and Revolution,” and “We Must Protect [Our] Independent Culture,” the last from, obviously, Marxist influence.<sup>87</sup> In the same year, Nguyen Dang Thuc published the *Journal of the Arts (Van Nghe Tap San)*. Nghiem Xuan Hong, Vu Khac

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<sup>85</sup> Nhi Hung, *Thanh Nien Quoc Gia duoi Ach Viet Cong* [Nationalist Youths under Communist Yokes] (Saigon, 1956). This book won a prize in the 1956 national contest sponsored by the Office of Culture under the Department of Communication of the Diem government.

<sup>86</sup> Nguyen Manh Con, *Lạc Duong vao Lich Su 1945* [Getting Lost into History, 1945] (Saigon: Giao Diem, 1965). Although published in the mid-1960s, the end of the text indicates that at least some of it was first drafted by October 1958. Given the common thematic treatment to publications in the 1950s, it is a possibility that it was published in a shorter form (or even serialized) in a periodical in the late 1950s or early 1960s, but I have not been able to confirm this.

<sup>87</sup> Duong Nghiem Mau, “Thanh Tam Tuyen va Nhung Nguoi Ban Truoc Khi co Tap Chi *Sang Tao*” [Thanh Tam Tuyen and His Friends before the Periodical *Creativity*], *Hop Luu* [Confluence] 110 (August-September 2010), <http://www.hopluu.net/default.aspx?LangID=3&tabId=521&ArticleID=1061>. The author was another émigré writer, albeit of the younger generation, that later published several well-received, existentialism-themed novels in Saigon.

Khoan, and fellow émigré and writer Mac Do ran the journal *Viewpoint (Quan Diem)* and a small publishing house for their books. In Hue, Vo Phien and his friend the poet Do Tan published the journal *New Harvest Season (Mua Lua Moi)*. During the second half of the 1950s, virtually all of major émigrés writers were associated with urban-based anticommunist periodicals in one way or another.

The flourishing of anticommunist publications indicated a deep urgency among émigré and other writers in alerting Vietnamese to – and educating them on – the dangers of communism. The urgency came from the belief that the communists were able to dupe many Vietnamese that were either ignorant or insufficiently educated about Marxism. “Until August 1945,” opened one anticommunist tract, “the Vietnamese people did not possess a point of view about communism, not having read much about communism, not having been explained about the meaning of communism.”<sup>88</sup> Another tract, authored by future senator Lang Xuan Nghiem under the Second Republic, considered the period around the year 1945 a “period where the political consciousness of our people barely stepped out of colonialism” and, therefore, “was still low.”<sup>89</sup> A third tract, penned by Nguyen Manh Con, offered that some “free Vietnamese in the Republic of Vietnam have committed a big mistake in not comprehending the strategy of the enemy, and in having underestimated its action and tactics.” Written by the director of the “Condemn Communism” Campaign, the preface of the tract averred “our side has a regrettable problem... which is a lack of adequate knowledge of Communist doctrines among people who had witnessed communist activities” and, conversely, “a lack of witnessing of

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<sup>88</sup> Phan Van Thu, *Chu Nghia Cong San voi Xa Hoi Viet Nam* [Communism and the Vietnamese Society] (n.p., 1954), 5.

<sup>89</sup> Thai Lang Nghiem, *Doan Ket Luan*, 69.

Communist activities for intellectuals that are knowledgeable of theories.”<sup>90</sup> The last pointed to the author’s apprehension that noncommunist Vietnamese might have given in to too much fear, sympathy, or admiration of communists. As stated by an article in the journal of the government-backed Alliance of National Revolutionary Civil Servants, after “the signing of the Geneva Accords the Viet Cong ably exploited the psychological state among some [noncommunist] elites and civil servants and persuaded them remain” in the north.<sup>91</sup> Combined to the recognition that the communists had held the upper hand in the quest for independence, the fear that Vietnamese could still be duped by communist policies and propaganda compelled the anticommunists to wage a battle to win the hearts and minds of other Vietnamese. It was a battle that started well before the phrase became popular in U.S. discourse and policies towards South Vietnam.

### **Emergence of “escape” and “imprisonment” as anticommunist themes**

The content of the anticommunist critique focused on three areas: politics, economics, and culture. They were, respectively, critique of revolutionary violence and political repression, class struggle, and thought control. Before getting to each of them, however, it is important to discuss two central themes that figured throughout this critique: escape and imprisonment.

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<sup>90</sup> Nguyen Kien Trung, *Viet Minh, Nguoi Di Dau?* [Viet Minh, Where Have You Gone?] (Saigon, 1957), iii and 7. Nguyen Manh Con usually used the pen name Nguyen Kien Trung for his anticommunist writings.

<sup>91</sup> Nguyen Bich Lien, “Tren Con Duong Chong Cong: Mot Mac Cam Tai Hai” [On the Anticommunist Path: A Hazardous Complex!], *Gio Nam* [Southern Wind] 12 (June 1, 1959): 9.

In light of the large-scale migration of 1954-1955, it is not surprising that an outstanding theme of the early South Vietnamese critique was fleeing or escaping communism. Three subtexts underscore this theme of escape. First, anticommunist writers consistently pointed to political, economic, and cultural repression as primary reason to flee Viet Minh rule. Second, they illustrated that while many Vietnamese fled through legal channels, others did so illegally, particularly during the First Indochina War. Third, they showed that after Geneva, many northerners wrestled painfully with the decision to go south, only making because they considered staying would amount to imprisonment and possible death. By highlighting these reasons, anticommunist publications legitimized and even celebrated the decision made by émigrés to leave the north for the south.

These subtexts are exemplified by a tract subtitled “Why I migrated” and published at the end of 1954. In the narrative, the author recalled his bitterness after learning from a Hanoi newspaper that the French had signed the Geneva Peace Accords. He next describes the difficulties that he and others faced between “the end of July and the end of September” as they juggled their options. On the one hand, they saw banners in Vietnamese, French, and English that urged Hanoi residents to move south; heard about “enslaving policies” imposed in Viet Minh-controlled areas by the Communists; and noted “insulting” attitudes and behavior towards them from some working-class people. On the other hand, they felt uncertainty and fear about moving to a new and unfamiliar land. In the end, he decided on the latter. The author explains that decision came from testimonies from both people that had spent some time in Viet Minh areas as well as those still there but could not leave. At the bottom, however, he considers it

having to do with communist antagonism towards middle-class Vietnamese like himself. “The majority of Vietnamese in inner Hanoi were bourgeois and petit bourgeois,” he writes, “and the warfare waged at them has become more apparent and, in fact, was approaching its climax at the time.”<sup>92</sup>

In a similar vein, Hoang Van Chi, who later wrote an influential book on the land reform of the DRV, sympathized with the dilemma facing many non-Communists at the time. A chemist by training and a socialist by inclination, Chi joined the Viet Minh in 1942 and served as a military surgeon and director of the national mint, among other jobs. Nonetheless he was classified as a “landlord” and put under arrest in 1954.<sup>93</sup> Later released with the encouragement to join the Viet Minh-controlled Socialist Party, Chi struggled with the decision to stay or flee. “If I move south,” he wrote, “How would I learn anything about my brother that has been imprisoned for the past two years? Or how I could help my sister-in-law and her three young children?” Traditional familial obligations, then, played a major role in the mind of Chi and, presumably, many other northerners. But Chi made up his mind after watching an “East German movie about Hitler’s extermination of the Jews,” because Chi he “made a comparison and saw that Communism was crueler than fascism.” Hitler tried to kill Jews quickly, Chi reasoned, but “Ho Chi Minh, having betrayed anti-colonial Vietnamese nationalists, categorized them as reactionaries and landlords and isolated them so they would die gradually of

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<sup>92</sup> Hung Thanh, *Vao Nam (Vi Sao Toi Di Cu?)* [Going South (Why Did I Migrate?)] (Saigon: Tia Nang, 1954), 8.

<sup>93</sup> Hoang Van Chi, *The Fate of the Last Viets* (Saigon: Hoa Mai, 1956), 7-8 and 30.

hunger.” There were no other alternatives but heading south, even if tugged by strong familial attachment and concern.<sup>94</sup>

To our contemporary ears, Chi’s comparison of communist practices to Hitler’s anti-Semitic policies might sound overreaching or inappropriate. But since the comparison was aimed at Vietnamese, most of who had a simplistic understanding of the history of European anti-Semitism, the intention was draw parallel to the concept of mass death and to illustrate grave fears among many northerners, especially the fear of being branded members of the bourgeoisie. Another tract, titled *Tales of Escapees*, justified these fears by enumerating and elaborating on a number of economic and political policies in cities and the countryside. In scenes that eerily foreshadowed postwar imposition of similar policies on the southern population, the tract described the rapidity of economic and political control by the new government. As the Viet Minh took over the management of governmental and military buildings, they assured the urban population that the Party would be “generous” to former collaborators to the French or the State of Vietnam. Quickly enough, though, the new rulers imposed a number of new taxes on private businesses, forced industrialists and merchants to attend a series of political meetings, and intimidated them into abandoning or signing over their businesses and property. Intimidation and control extended to other areas, including household registration and limited travel, accusations and trials of landlords in the countryside, and arrests and imprisonment of “complainers” and “reactionaries” in urban areas.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Hoang Van Chi, “Phat Roi Le” [Weeping Buddha], *Van Nghe Tap San* [Cultural Review] 6 (October 1955): 110-111. Due to some of his writings published in English, Chi was probably the best-known early South Vietnamese anticommunist writer in the West. He dedicated *The Fate of the Last Viets* to his imprisoned brother, his sister-in-law, and their children.

<sup>95</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Thanh, *Truyen Nguoi Vuot Tuyen* [Tales of Escapees] (Saigon, 1959).

The author of *Tales of Escapees* signified the significance and immediacy of migrating south by indicating that he wrote the tract at the Center for Welcoming Escapees (Trung Tam Tiep Don Dong Bao Vuot Tuyen). Reinforcing the anticommunist origin of this migration were narratives about escaping Viet Minh rule *during* the First Indochina War. In a tract called matter-of-factly *Prisons and Escapes*, the narrator recounts his experiences of Viet Minh zones in central and northern Vietnam during the second half of the 1940s. Initially “invited” by the police to leave his village for the provincial town for his “own security,” he and others were later accused to be “individual reactionaries” and held in one or another prison camp. Each of the camps held between 200 to 2000 inmates; in turn, inmates were placed in barracks divided according to gender and categories of political or “economic” prisoners. Even after release – and only to areas well controlled by the Viet Minh – former inmates were required to report regularly to cadres. For these and other reasons, inmates turned their mind to devising one or another way to escape the camps and head to French- or Catholic-controlled zones.<sup>96</sup>

In *Tales of Escapees* and similar narratives, communist prisons became a central image while communist imprisonment became a central theme. In one of these, the author described at length his experience as a political prisoner during the First Indochina War as the main reason for his post-Geneva move to the south.<sup>97</sup> Another narrative, an eerie preview of postwar re-education camps, described daily life in a Viet Minh labor camp in Yen Bai Province as a mixture of political indoctrination (“auto-criticism,

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<sup>96</sup> Thanh Thao, *Tu Nguc va Thoat Ly* [Prisons and Escapes] (Saigon, 1957).

<sup>97</sup> To Quang Son, *Tai Sao Toi Chon Mien Nam Thanh Tri Nhan Vi* [Why I Chose the South, the Fort of Personalism] (Saigon: Phan Thanh Gian, 1963).

denunciation, and especially the compulsory accusation followed by torture”); manual labor in the field, complete with “producing competitions” to generate production among prisoners; and conditions that barely kept inmates alive. There were no physicians to tend the sick, and prisoners were constantly “on alert” and “could not keep [their] composure.” The conditions were horrible to the point that at least two of the inmates killed themselves.<sup>98</sup>

At times, the critique drew parallels between colonial and communist imprisonment. *Prisons and Escapes* describes four different categories of Viet Minh imprisonment and comments that the penitentiaries, the toughest category, were not unlike those once run by the French in Con Dao and Lao Bao. Difficult too was the category of provincial prisons: “Communist imprisonment of nationalists at a high hill in Chu Le,” the narrator wrote, “was not different from colonial imprisonment of Vietnamese patriots at Dac To and Dac Suat.” He added by asking rhetorically, “Why did the colonialists and Communists give me the same designation: *homme dangereux* and *nguai nguy hiem* [dangerous person]?”<sup>99</sup> A somewhat different take on the colonial-communist trope could be found in a large-size pamphlet entitled *Colonial Prisons, Communist Yokes* that came under the auspices of the Committee Supporting the Movement against Communism in the North.<sup>100</sup> Peppered with conversations and personal observations, the story begins with colonial military losses in 1950-1951 that led to forced drafting of young men into the army and fiercer crackdown of suspected anti-

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<sup>98</sup> Nguyen Dinh Lang, “The Horrid Fate of Prisoners-of-War in Viet Cong Hands,” in Nghiem Xuan Thien, ed., *Blood On Their Hands: A Collection of True Stories, Stories of Actual Happenings, Compiled by “La Gazette de Saigon (September-December 1955)”* (Saigon, 1956), 62-65.

<sup>99</sup> Thanh Thao, *Tu Nguc va Thoat Ly*, 90.

<sup>100</sup> Tran Vu, *Nguc Tu Thuc Dan, Gong Cum Cong San* [Colonial Prisons, Communist Yokes] (Saigon, 1957).



French Vietnamese. Thirty years old at the end of 1951, the narrator was living in Nam Dinh after having spent a year in the Viet Minh prison Ly Ba So.<sup>101</sup> Arrested and beaten in French jail, he was moved to the Nam Dinh prison camp where he quickly learned that some of guards were in fact communists in disguise and that they especially disliked noncommunist Vietnamese that had left the Viet Minh. The prisoners themselves divided themselves into “Communist” and “Nationalist” sections, eyed each other warily, and even broke into fights. The narrator was also threatened for having been a “traitor,” but was moved along with some others to another prison camp guarded by Vietnamese working for the French Sûrête. They were later shipped to a prison on the southern Phu Quoc Island, where prisoners sang so many “marching songs” that many he “felt it was not a French but Communist Viet Minh prison.” The narrator learned that the Viet Minh prisoners, aided by their guards, had killed at least two noncommunist prisoners and forced others to do hard labor. It was only after the French handed over the prison to the State of Vietnam that the tides began to turn for the noncommunist prisoners. After the Geneva Conference Accords, many of them decided to remain in the south instead of returning to the north, against the demand of the DRV representative that visited the prison according to the stipulations of the Accords.

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<sup>101</sup> Ly Ba So was a well-known communist prison in the Thanh Hoa Province in lower northern Vietnam. Because of surrounding mountains, the Viet Minh established a number of prisons in the area. A brief postwar account of a Catholic young man from the Bui Chu area that was arrested and sent to Ly Ba So in 1954 is Nguyen Cao Hoang, “Linh Muc Giuse Maria Hoang Gia Hue, 1886-1954: Vi Tong Do Truyen Ba Kinh Man Coi [Father Joseph Maria Hoang Gia Hue, 1886-1954: Apostle of the Rosary], Chapter Seven: <http://xuanha.net/S-TongdoKMC-hoangiahue/7bivietcongbat.htm>. Another account relates its author’s father kept there by the Viet Minh in 1948 until after the Geneva Conference Accords, which allowed for release of prisoners. See Do Van Phuc, *Cuoi Tang Dia Nguc* [The Bottom of Hell] (Texas: Vietland, 2008), which is also accessible at <http://www.michaelpdo.com/XuanPhuoc13.htm>. Like many former prisons in Viet Minh zones, Ly Ba So was used as a “re-education camp” after 1975 to keep former RVN officials and ARVN officers under direct control.

These different examples show that it was often through the lens of colonialism that South Vietnamese writers sought to interpret the harrowing experiences of imprisonment, intimidation, and hard labor under communism. It was a lens that would have struck familiarity with Vietnamese readers that had direct or indirect experiences with the extensive colonial prison system. Employing this lens, South Vietnamese writers might have overstretched the parallels between the two regimes while ignoring important differences in goals and methods. Nonetheless, they brought forth vivid images about life under communist rule, in which actual prisons and labor camps were only one part of the larger imprisonment. In this light, it is not a surprise to see anticommunist writers revel in describing escapes from Viet Minh-controlled areas and treat it as a move from darkness to light. In particular, the departure of northerners to the south in 1954-1955 was celebrated in official and non-official publications alike as “The Great Migration” or “The Historical Migration.” A government commemorative publication made sure to call that the émigrés “lovers of freedom” and includes photographs showing them leave in ships, boats, ferries, planes, rails, trucks, ox- or human-driven carts, and by foot. Peppered too are pictures of them waiting in ragged makeshift tents, by railroad tracks, and at beaches and ports and airports.<sup>102</sup> In the hands of anticommunist writers, the migration was the culmination of smaller escapes from postcolonial confinement that had turned out to be worse than colonial imprisonment. To an extent, it was described in quasi-mythic terminology. More importantly, it was embedded in the germinating political language of noncommunist urban South Vietnamese as an escape from imprisonment.

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<sup>102</sup> Tran Quoc Bao, *Cuoc Di Cu Vi Dai trong Lich Su The Gioi Can Kim* [The Great Migration in the History of the Modern World] (Saigon, 1956).

## **The critique of revolutionary violence and political repression**

The twin themes of imprisonment and escape drew attention to the Vietnamese experience of living under communist control. Most significantly, they pointed to three categories in the early South Vietnamese anticommunist critique: revolutionary violence and repression, class struggle, and thought control. In describing Viet Minh control and escapes from it, anticommunist writers also addressed questions such as, “Why such control?” and “What have we escaped from?” Their answers to these questions constituted the heart of the critique, sought to delegitimize the creation and maintenance of the DRV, and helped provide an ideological rationale for the legitimacy of the anticommunist state centered in Saigon.

In light of Viet Minh domination since 1945, an outstanding concern among anticommunist writers had to do with revolutionary violence against noncommunist Vietnamese between the August Revolution and the Geneva Conference. Not unlike postwar overseas Vietnamese that spent an inordinate amount of ink on the rapid fall of the RVN in 1975 and the period before Renovation in 1986, post-Geneva anticommunists wrote a great deal about the sixteen months between the August Revolution and the outbreak of the First Indochina War. The Revolution and its immediate aftermath were significant for the extent of repression that the Vietminh committed against its real and potential enemies. “Aiming to eliminate the nationalist parties,” read the caption of an article about the First Indochina War in *Southern Wind*, “the Viet Cong were determined to derail national anti-colonialism” by attempting to make peace with the French. In addition, the revolution illustrated the kind of directions that the Party would take once in

political power. Much of the blame went to communist repression. “As the Communists gradually monopolized the resistance,” Nghiem Xuan Hong wrote, “the nationalist movement was divided and broken up by their repression.”<sup>103</sup>

Accordingly, an alternative interpretation of the August Revolution began to float among anticommunist circles during the First Indochina War and came to fruition at the beginning of South Vietnam. According to this interpretation, the Communist Party took advantage of a political chaos to seize power. The result was an illegal coup: the commonly used phrase was “cuop chinh quyen,” literally “robbing the power to govern.” But how did the Communists manage to rob the governing power? One common attribution was their skillful manipulation of popular anti-colonial sentiments and readiness for activism. “Such was the MILIEU allowing for the commencement ofdf struggle [against colonialism],” Nguyen Manh Con writes, and when combined to the effective organization of the ICP, popular support for the Viet Minh grew so quick that “in many areas... people eagerly awaited and actively looked for a ‘young man cadre’ to enlist, or help with money and weapons.”<sup>104</sup> The desire for independence was intoxicating and, therefore, was open for skillful communist manipulation. An example of communist effectiveness is the decision by the ICP to change the name of the group inherited from Ho Han Lam, from the Vietnamese Revolutionary League to the Vietnamese Independence League, to emphasize the agenda of “independence.”

This controversial change in name matched the earlier controversial adoption of the name Viet Minh. One anticommunist tract, for example, pointed to the

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<sup>103</sup> Nghiem Xuan Hong, *Lich Trinh Dien Tien cua Phong Trao Quoc Gia Viet Nam*, 70.

<sup>104</sup> Nguyen Kien Trung, *Dem Tam Tinh Viet Lich Su* [Writing history with all the heart] (Saigon: Nguyen Dinh Vuong, 1958), 31 (emphasis by author) and 33. This book was first serialized in the journal *Chi Dao* [Steering].

noncommunist Vietnamese Revolutionary League to have been the first organization to use the shorthand Viet Minh, or Allied Vietnam. But Ho Chi Minh adopted it for their front organization, upon their return from southern China. By the time the nationalist League came back, they found their old shorthand usurped and had to make do with the new shorthand Viet Cach (Revolutionary Vietnam, the same organization as the DMH). The tract presented the ICP's appropriation of the shorthand Viet Minh as an instance of duplicity for the end of power.<sup>105</sup> The former Viet Minh member Hoang Van Chi pointed out another example of Viet Minh skillfulness, this time during the First Indochina War. Prior to Ho Chi Minh's visit to Beijing in 1950, Chi claimed, Viet Minh slogans were anticolonial in expression and intent. As the Viet Minh began to implement explicitly socialist policies, however, they considered "sudden changes in sloganeering might be confusing to the masses" so they "changed them gradually, one word today, another word tomorrow, until the slogans lost their original meanings."<sup>106</sup>

If anticommunists agreed on the skillfulness of the ICP in garnering popular support for independence, they were most critical of Communist intention behind the aim of independence. Why opposing communism, Nguyen Manh Con asked, when communists declare independence and prosperity for the people? Because "according to Marx, [Vietnamese communists] do not believe in 'independence' as solution" in itself. Another writer, the pamphleteer To Van, was more explicit in criticizing the ICP's drive for independence as the first phase in the Maoist "three phases" doctrine: national liberation, bourgeois populism, and "pure socialism". Paramount in the first phase were

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<sup>105</sup> To Van, *Sach Luoc Ba Giai Doan cua Cong San*, 27 (note 1) and 31.

<sup>106</sup> Hoang Van Chi, *Tu Thuc Dan den Cong San* [From Colonialism to Communism] (Saigon: Chan Troi Moi, 1962), 104.

creating political alliances across social classes and giving economic incentives such as tax reductions and respecting private property. But the goal of the first phase was the next phase, and like many other writers, Van considered the dissolution of the ICP, the creation of an government by alliance, and the creation of the second front, the Lien Viet, to be stepping stones in the path of three phases.<sup>107</sup> If political manipulation of the drive for independence was the right hand of communist strategy, armed repression was its left. South Vietnamese anticommunist literature stresses the ICP's liquidation of noncommunist leaders and followers as signs and symptoms of anti-nationalism, since only "foreigners" killed Vietnamese. In a tract written in epistolary form, Nguyen Manh Con, for example, reminded readers that the Viet Minh started eliminate their opponents as early as the evening of August 19, 1945 – or barely a day into the Revolution. Over 200 members of the nationalist Restoration Militia (Phuc Quoc Quan) in Bao Lac were invited to a Viet Minh banquet only to be arrested and killed.<sup>108</sup> Revolutionary violence such as this instance became an anticommunist theme that would be repeated frequently during the Second Indochina War.

Sprinkled in the anticommunist critique in print are segments and vignettes of opposition to Viet Minh growth and hegemony. Some accounts noted that it was the nationalists that struck first at the communists. Others highlighted the opposition of the Viet Cach and Viet Quoc against the Viet Minh in Hanoi after the August Revolution. Described as heroic, these noncommunist attempts were nonetheless shown as ultimately ineffectual and short-lived. More common were stories and arguments that place

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<sup>107</sup> Nguyen Kien Trung, *Dem Tam Tinh Viet Lich Su*, 66; To Van, *Sach Luoc Ba Giai Doan cua Cong San*, 10-11 and 37.

<sup>108</sup> Nguyen Kien Trung, *Dem Tam Tinh Viet Lich Su*, 61-62.

noncommunist Vietnamese as victims. Some took after the colonial-communist trope found in writings about imprisonment, portraying Vietnamese to have been caught between the Viet Minh and the French in warfare. A short story published in the semimonthly *Variety* (*Bach Khoa*), popular among highbrow readers, illustrated this difficulty. The narrator of the story, a young man symbolically named Nam, returned to his village whose location was not specified but, judging by the description of the village gate and the bamboo fences, was in the north. The Viet Minh had controlled the area and arrested or killed a number of “educated young men” in the area. Having expected the French to arrive, the Viet Minh ordered villagers to evacuate. The village was still largely empty when Nam returned during an evening, and upon entering the gate he saw a human corpse being hanged upon a jackfruit tree. Frightened, he ran into the lit house of an elderly man, who told him that the deceased was a villager commonly known as “Mr. Mad Nhan.” Along with other elderly and handicapped villagers, Mad Nhan was left behind because “the Viet Minh reasoned that they had to go into the woods and mountains so why taking along burdens like those people.” Mad Nhan and several villagers, including a Mrs. Bang, decided to live together in one house and, after running out of food, had to search for fruits and grain in the surrounding area. One night, Mrs. Bang thirsted for something “salty,” prompting Mad Nhan to go to the house of another villager to ask for some sauce. The villager yelled at him, however, and in anger he burned her house. French soldiers from a station nearby came and shot at the house, believing that the Viet Minh was behind the fire. Mad Nhan came out and laughed at them, and the soldiers beat him up and shot him to death. They hung him on the jackfruit tree and placed a sign in blood, “Terrorist Viet Minh! No burial!”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Minh Duc, “Cai Chet cua Ong Nhan Khung” [The Death of Mr. Mad Nhan], *Bach Khoa*

Anticommunist writers, in short, credited the Viet Minh for most of the violence and placed the rest at the hands of the colonial authorities: an instance of, again, communist-colonialist trope. Employing this trope to associate two very different regimes to each other, they also extended it to other examples, albeit in varying degrees.<sup>110</sup> Hoang Van Chi, for instance, considered Viet Minh land reform a variation of suppression in the countryside. The title of his best-known book, *From Colonialism to Communism*, was suggestive of the association. Another example is the Geneva Conference: anticommunist writers frequently emphasized the fact that only France and the DRV signed the peace agreements. A tract entitled *The Seventeenth Parallel*, for instance, considered the conference “a meeting of weary war parties” and the ceasefire a mutual recognition between the Viet Minh and French that a continuity of hostilities could lead to a Korea-like conflict, lessen their own significance, and transfer the leading roles to the U.S. and the USSR.<sup>111</sup> Another example is the famine of 1944-1945. One tract placed the blame squarely on the French (rather than the Japanese) and traced the roots of the disaster to changes in colonial policies in October 1943. It included a story about a village notable and landlord who foresaw the possible devastation in the changes. When the famine was approaching, he distributed foodstuff to villagers. They were grateful, but “former imprisoned communists” propagated that his action was meant to

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[Variety] 9 (May 15, 1957), 55-58.

<sup>110</sup> This association was sometimes short-handed through the term *Thuc Cong*, which is a contraction of *thuc dan* (colonialism) and *cong san* (communism).

<sup>111</sup> Duong Chau, *Vy Tuyen 17* [The Seventeenth Parallel] (Saigon: Thu Xa Dep, 1955), 94-95. Duong Chau was the penname of Pham Van Son, a South Vietnamese military officer and historian. He had published *Viet Nam Tranh Dau Su* [A History of Vietnamese Struggle] (1949), an anti-foreign and anticolonial history of Vietnam; and *Viet Nam Can Dai Su Yeu* [Essential History of Modern Vietnam] (1952), specifically for high school students. He subsequently published *Viet Su Tan Bien* [New history of Vietnam], a seven-volume work that covers antiquities to the present, plus two histories of ARVN.



keep villagers alive to labor for him later.<sup>112</sup> Indirect was the association of repressive colonial policies to communist agitation. In the hands of at least some anticommunist writers, colonialism and communism were two sides of the same coin, with political repression as their common denominator.

### **The critique of class struggle**

Because the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of proletariat socialism remained the core of Marxism, a critique of class struggle was central to South Vietnamese anticommunist writers. If they were repulsed by revolutionary and armed repression in the first phase of Communist consolidation of power, they concentrated on class struggle as the logical next step for the Viet Minh, perhaps *the* single most important difference between communism and nationalism. Hence, stressing that the communist revolutionaries fought the French and eliminating noncommunist nationalists at the same time, Thai Lang Nghiem concluded that the Communist Party did not “struggle for a nation, a people, a bourgeois society, but instead for a proletariat class” that was, ironically, consisted of members from the bourgeoisies itself. Likewise, because Nghiem Xuan Hong considered noncommunist bourgeoisie and intelligentsia to lead postcolonial Vietnam, he reserved his strongest criticism for communist repression of these two groups.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Tran Van Mai, *Ai Gay Nen Toi (Vu Hai Trieu Nguoi Chet Doi Nam At Dau)* [Who Caused the Crime? The Famine of Two Million of Deaths in the Year of the Rooster] (Saigon, 1956), 16.

<sup>113</sup> Thai Lang Nghiem, *Doan Ket Luan*, 90-91; Nghiem Xuan Hong, *Lich Trinh Dien Tien cua Phong Trao Quoc Gia Viet Nam*, 77.

The South Vietnamese critique of communism focused on a series of Hanoi's policies. As enumerated by the pamphleteer To Van, one policy was new income tax targeted at merchants and industrialists while another aimed at monetary control (including gold) of the general population, particularly at "bourgeois" families. A third policy was "housing control" aimed at confiscating houses and land belonged to foreign nationals and Vietnamese families that had left for the south. A fourth was "state labor" policy that forced the poor and unemployed to perform state projects; and a fifth (and the most important) was land reform targeted at landlords as well as urbanites with land in the countryside.<sup>114</sup> The two major targets of these policies, then, were landlords and the bourgeoisie. The first involved the land reform of 1953-1956 that took place in communist-controlled territories, while the second started after the Geneva Conference and concentrated in urban areas.<sup>115</sup>

In this category of the critique, anticommunist writers shifted from the August Revolution to the First Indochina War, especially its second half. Some accounts dated the shift at the end of 1950, after the anniversary of the October Revolution in the Soviet Union. One tract, for example, states that it "was then that [new] policies about agricultural taxes were elevated to their crucial place, so to create appropriate conditions for the [new] war on class struggle." Nguyen Manh Con, too, considered the same year crucial, especially because it coincided to the re-emergence of the Communist Party

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<sup>114</sup> To Van, *Sach Luoc Ba Giai Doan cua Cong San*, 42-43.

<sup>115</sup> By far, English-language scholarship on North Vietnamese class campaigns during this the period has concentrated on the land reform. See Edwin E. Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983); and Balazs Szalontai, "Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955-56," *Cold War History* 5:4 (November 2005), 395-426.

under the new name Vietnamese Workers Party.<sup>116</sup> Nghiem Xuan Hong, however, marked 1952-1973 as the unbridgeable dividing line between two stages.<sup>117</sup> Their different datings indicated particular emphases they wanted to make. Specific years aside, anticommunist writers agreed that the early 1950s marked the turning point in the progress of the Viet Minh's domination of the country.

This critique of communist liquidation of the bourgeoisie appealed to tradition and argued that the communist were attempting to impose an alien doctrine on Vietnam. "Our society has never had class divisions so extreme," one tract declared, "that led to the conflicts of interests, as in Western societies." It added that the Vietnamese society has been "incapable of producing either capitalists that took all resources in their hands, nor laborers that lost all opportunities and resources for independence." At the same time, some parts of the critique revealed the affinity that many anticommunists had for the ideals of the French Revolution. However anti-French were the anticommunists, they were more sympathetic to the French Revolution than the Russian Revolution. One tract, for example, stated that the "French Revolution of 1870 was a most daring and progressive revolution in modern history" and "yet it respected *private property* and guaranteed *individual liberty*" (original emphasis).<sup>118</sup>

France was not the only Western noncommunist country meriting positive references in the critique of class struggle. Great Britain and the US were also mentioned at times, usually as counterweight to or evidences against Marxist convictions of inherent

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<sup>116</sup> Nguyen Van Lang, *Nhung Hien Tuong Dau Tranh Giai Cap ngoai Vi Tuyen* [Phenomena of Class Struggle above the Seventeenth Parallel] (Saigon, 1958), 44; Nguyen Kien Trung, *Viet Minh Nguoi Di Dau*, 75.

<sup>117</sup> Nghiem Xuan Hong, *Lich Trinh Dien Tien cua Phong Trao Quoc Gia Viet Nam*, 73.

<sup>118</sup> Phan Van Thu, *Chu nghia Cong San voi Xa Hoi Viet Nam*, 38 and 8.

linkages between class warfare and economic development. In this instance, we see a measure of influence exerted by the global Cold War on South Vietnamese anticommunist discourse.<sup>119</sup> In addition, because the discourse considered Vietnamese Communists a part of worldwide Communist movement, there were expectedly many more references to Soviet Union and China. Hence, the discourse interpreted the fact that the Viet Minh started land reform before the end of the First Indochina War, by placing it in the international context: namely, the campaign of land reform occurred at the time it did because of the Chinese communist victory in the mainland as well as Soviet criticism of the ICP for slowness in building socialism.<sup>120</sup> In this respect, the discourse aligned itself to Western anticommunist ideas and rhetoric.

Nonetheless, it was not Western but nationalist ideas and local experiences that dominated and shaped the basic contours of the South Vietnamese anticommunist discourse. Populating in many of the publications are stories, tales, anecdotes, and other narratives that illustrated economic problems encountered by property-owners. As exemplified by *Tales of Escapees*, anticommunist writers zoomed in on the rapid pace of economic control imposed on residents of Hai Phong and other urban areas. In July 1955, for instance the cadres immediately made demands on businesses and citizens to pay a new “improvement tax” towards urban industries and buildings. The following month saw the new monetary policies that required families and businesses to itemize their gold and silver while putting gold and silver trading under state control. September saw new policies that gave the state increasing control on housing.<sup>121</sup> Similar to post-

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<sup>119</sup> For example, Nguyen Van Lang, *Nhung Hien Tuong Dau Tranh Giai Cap*, 178.

<sup>120</sup> Nguyen Van Lang, *Nhung Hien Tuong Dau Tranh Giai Cap*, 23-24.

<sup>121</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Thanh, *Truyen Ngoi Vuot Tuyen*, 15-42.

unification anti-bourgeois policies in the second half of the 1970s, speedy legal and economic measures were employed to establish hegemony over economic activities.

The anticommunist critique paid more attention to class struggle in the countryside. According to one tract, the VWP relied on a class-based formula to achieve its initial aims in land reform: the Party should “depend on landless peasants, unite with owners of little land, neutralize middle-class farmers, and demolish wealthy landowners.”<sup>122</sup> Subsequent rounds of reform would strip property from middle-class owners, hence providing state-controlled land to the lowest rungs of farmers for production goals as well as creating moral debts towards the Party. Another theme was the ways that cadres ritualized tax policies and tax collections to homogenize an environment of loyalty to the Party. One tract detailed a “tax-collecting parade” in which the cadres organized a nine-hour parade, complete with a revolutionary percussion youth band, taken in a village that concluded with taxpayers publicly and ritually make “tax donations” as well as “vows” of upholding their tax-paying duties in the future.<sup>123</sup>

Anticommunist critique of communist policies and practices about taxes and property indicated the propensity of the urban South Vietnamese to lend support to a pro-bourgeois society in postcolonial Vietnam. It is not the place to discuss the propensity here, and it suffices to note that the South Vietnamese anticommunists interpreted class struggle as the crucial cause of political and cultural disorder for the country. As summarized by one writer, communist policies led to a four-fold outcome: destruction of private ownership, demolition of propertied families, destruction of nationalism, and

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<sup>122</sup> Nguyen Van Lang, *Nhung Hien Tuong Dau Tranh Giai Cap*, 62.

<sup>123</sup> Vu Dinh Vinh, *Ben Kia Buc Man Tre* [The Other Side of the Bamboo Curtain] (Saigon: Phuong Hoang, 1956), 22-24.

elimination of religious worship. In the end, communist policies “have harmed the country, made the people miserable, and created havoc to the order of our families and society.”<sup>124</sup> The critique of class struggle, then, was not merely about an economic critique. Certainly, it was concerned with private property. But it was also a critique of communist beliefs about the nation, the family, and the role of religious beliefs and practices in both of those entities. It was critical of Marxist instigation of class-based hatred among Vietnamese, which was counter-productive to aspirations of postcolonial economic prosperity as well as political independence.

Ultimately, the anticommunist critique of class warfare was concerned about the direction of developing a postcolonial Vietnam appropriate to “Vietnamese values” and tradition. The critique considers Marxist class warfare as a wrong-headed tool for analyzing Vietnamese history and culture. The critique argued that Marxism reduces Vietnamese history to one of production and ignores cultural values emphasizing the role of the family, the village, and other “humane” institutions. In its single-mindedness, the critique strayed off at times. In the main, however, the critique of class struggle connected itself to the critique of revolutionary violence as evidence of an inherently anti-nationalist project.

### **The critique of thought control**

For early South Vietnamese writers, communist efforts at brainwashing and thought control were the last piece of the tripartite critique. The writers considered the three parts to be interdependent: that is, revolutionary violence and repression eliminated

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<sup>124</sup> Phan Van Thu, *Chu nghia Cong San voi Xa Hoi Viet Nam*, 28.

the most important political opponents; class struggle mobilized peasants to denounce and eliminate real and potential economic opponents of the Party; and control of cultural productions placed Vietnamese of all stripes at the mercy of the Party over what to express and what not to express. There were also accompanying stages: just as revolutionary violence cleared the field for ridding the bourgeoisie, class struggle formed the basis for communist promotion and patronage of socialist realism over anything else. But according to Nguyen Dang Thuc, who taught at University of Saigon and, in the 1960s, the Buddhist Van Hanh University, “Vietnamese arts today carry ideals of nationalism, not ideals of class struggle.”<sup>125</sup> Anticommunist writers believed that as the basis for the building of postcolonial Vietnam, class struggle was wrong-headed for cultural productions as it was for economic development.

While there were vignettes of this criticism during 1954-1955, the critique of thought control was centered on the Nhan Van Giai Pham (NVGP) Affair. Its name derived from two periodicals – *Humanity* (*Nhan Van*) and *Beautiful Works* (*Giai Pham*) – that were published between 1955 and 1957 by two groups of dissident intellectuals and artists in Hanoi. The Workers Party had allowed the publication of the journals due in part to post-Stalin Soviet revisionism. But it quickly found the journals too critical of its control of the arts, especially the advocacy of socialist realism at the exclusion of other strands of thought and ideas. Unlike a number of renowned writers and artists who had previously denounced their Romanticism-influenced works in favor of revolutionary literature, the dissident intellectuals used a number of essays, poems, and cartoons to deride the state. Dissident criticism also included some against the botched land reform

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<sup>125</sup> Nguyen Dang Thuc, “Van Nghe Dan Toc hay Van Nghe Giai Cap?” [A Nationalist or a Class-Based Culture?] *Van Nghe Tap San* [Journal of the Arts] 5 (September 1955), 1-7.

whose mistakes the Party admitted in May 1956 (albeit with characteristic euphemisms). By the end of the year, the Party launched an “anti-revisionist” attacks against the journals. Articles, essays, and “letters from readers” appeared in government-approved magazines and newspapers, and the DRV put a number of dissidents on trial or forced them to recant their writings.<sup>126</sup>

Not unexpectedly, the NVGP Affair was a *cause célèbre* among South Vietnamese anticommunists, many of who considered themselves members of the intelligentsia and, therefore, perfect targets of the Party had they lived in the north. Published were details about the writers and their trials; and reprinting of writings from the two periodicals. More importantly, the Affair provided them a clear case for their construction against thought control. The Affair was seen as among the last steps towards the consolidation of a totalitarian state, with features borrowed from Stalinism and Maoism in addition to characteristics of Marxist-Leninism. The arrests of dissident writers were symptomatic of the larger anti-revisionist character of the Workers Party.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> For more on the Affair, see Ninh, *A World Transformed*, 121-193; Shawn McHale, “Vietnamese Marxism, Dissent, and the Politics of Postcolonial Memory: Tran Duc Thao, 1946-1993,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61:1 (February 2002), 7-31; Tuan Ngoc Nguyen, “Socialist Realism in Vietnamese Literature: An Analysis of the Relationship between Literature and Politics” (Melbourne: Victoria University, 2004), 216-253. The most recent analysis is Peter Zinoman, “Nhan Van Giai Pham and Vietnamese Reform Communism,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:1 (Winter 2011): 60–100. Zinoman places the Affair in the international context of communist reform in Eastern Europe. A helpful response to Zinoman’s argument is Shawn McHale’s review of the article at H-Diplo (September 12, 2011): <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR320.pdf>.

<sup>127</sup> For examples, *Tram Hoa Dua No tren Dat Bac* [Hundreds of Blooming Flowers in the North] (Saigon: Mat Tran Bao Ve Tu Do Van Hoa, 1959); *So Phan Tri Thuc Mien Bac (qua Vu Tran Duc Thao)* [The Fate of Northern Intelligentsia (through the Case of Tran Duc Thao)] (Saigon: Van Huu A Chau, 1959); Nguyen Van An, *Vu An Tu Tuong Dau Tranh o Mien Bac* [The Case of Ideological Struggle in the North] (Saigon, 1960); Nguyen Van An, *Phan Khoi va Cuoc Dau Tranh Tu Tuong o Mien Bac* [Phan Khoi and the Ideological Struggle in the North] (Saigon: Uy Ban Trung Uong Chong Chinh Sach No Dich Van Hoa o Mien Bac, 1961). Responsible for the first title was the Front to Protect Free Culture; responsible for the last title (and probably the third title) was the Central Committee Against Ideological Repression in the North.



The critique of the Affair worked on two levels. First, it pointed to factors that gave rise to thawing openness of the Workers Party to intellectuals at first. These included the death of Stalin, the revisionism of Khrushchev, the “let thousands of flowers bloom” campaign in China, the more independent directions of communists in Poland and Hungary, and the “self-correction” of the Workers Party after the problematic land reform. Anticommunist writers, however, stressed factors related to Vietnamese dissident intellectuals themselves. Political conditions, for instance, forced writers and artists to toe the Party’s line in order to make a living. There were a few cultural leaders at the top that benefited from better quality of life. But for most, it was a pitiable living, materially and spiritually speaking. The dissent came out in part of the disparity between the new ruling class and the mass of cultural makers. Another part had to do with the sacrifices the dissidents made during the anticolonial war. Now that the war was over but they were not accorded the roles they had expected for peacetime. In short, betrayal was implied to be at the heart of this dissident movement.<sup>128</sup>

While the critique of thought control focused on the NVGP Affair, it noted that there had been a process of thought control at work long before the Affair itself. Some anticommunist writers dated the beginning of the process to 1950, when the Communist Party was explicit about what writers and artists could and could not produce. One tract, for instance, cites the example of General Nguyen Son, a “Tito among Vietnamese Communists,” who in his capacity as military leader of the Viet Minh Zone 4 had allowed considerable freedom of expression among writers and other cultural makers. But after Son was transferred from this post for another in China, “the life of the artists

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<sup>128</sup> *Tram Hoa Dua No tren Dat Bac*, 6-18. See also Nguyen Van An, *Phan Khoi va Cuoc Dau Tranh Tu Tuong o Mien Bac*, 13-26.

and writers in Zone 4 began to turn dark.”<sup>129</sup> Another tract was critical of the distinction between “bourgeois intellectuals” and “socialist intellectuals” as advocated by the Viet Minh. The distinctions proved divisive to the anticolonial movement. They bestowed the respectable term “intellectual” on Viet Minh members with little education but whose families were classified as favorable to the revolution (i.e., landless). Conversely, they put at risk those with greater education.<sup>130</sup> In sum, anticommunist writers considered the treatment of dissidents during the NVGP Affair not in separation but in continuity to earlier Viet Minh policies.

Finally, anticommunist writers interpreted the arrests of dissident writers to be symptomatic of the larger anti-revisionist character of the Workers Party. Besides noncommunist dissidents, even members of the Party could be easily put away for any signs of deviation. One tract, for example, discusses Yugoslav revisionism to Marxist orthodoxy and reactions to it from several Communist countries. First, it quotes and summarizes anti-revisionist criticisms by leading Communists, including member of the Vietnamese Politburo Le Duan. Next, it publishes a number of “self-corrections” by several prominent North Vietnamese writers and scholars, written out of pressure by the Party to renounce any possible revisionist thinking about the Party or the country.<sup>131</sup> The implication was clear: even if Party members desired changes, they were at the mercy of the leadership at top, which concentrated power in the hand of a minority and which would not have permitted ideological or structural changes at all.

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<sup>129</sup> *Tram Hoa Dua No tren Dat Bac*, 21.

<sup>130</sup> Thanh Lam, *Nhung Vu An Lich Su* [Trials of Historical Proportion] (Saigon, 1956), 57-58.

<sup>131</sup> Quoc Bao, *Phong Trao Khao Duyet lai Mac-Xit* [Movement for Marxist Revisionism] (n.p., 1959).

Similar to the critique of class struggle, the critique of thought control associated the suppression of ideas to anti-nationalism. Anticommunists appealed to tradition and family as a basis against thought control. For some, dread of communist brainwashing came from the Marxist project of creating the “new person” in a “new society.” Since the new society is to be “pure socialist,” the creation of the new person would involve two stages. In the first stage, communists would disconnect one from one’s “ancestral customs” and influences from “family, religion, and morals.” In the second, they introduce new customs and “principles” and aim at remaking one to be a “child of the Revolution” instead of a mother and father.<sup>132</sup> This critique, in turn, invokes phrases such as “offspring of Confucius and Mencius” that appealed to deep-seated cultural and “nationalist” values.

### **Conclusion**

Long after the Vietnam War had ended, the former ARVN officer Pham Van Lieu, who had been closely involved in a failed coup against Ngo Dinh Diem in 1960, made the following remark about anticommunist ideological training in the South Vietnamese military,

These sessions of ‘denouncing communists’ are meant to educate our soldiers by bringing up and denouncing Viet Minh crimes, so they would also understand and despise communism. We are not meant to manipulate these sessions for purposes of spreading propaganda, or recruiting for a political party or a political organization... We need to denounce strongly such cases. Anyone among us that had seen and heard such things, should tell them so everyone would know.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Nghiem Xuan Thien, *Phong Trao Quoc Gia Viet Nam*, 184-185.

<sup>133</sup> Pham Van Lieu, *Tra Ta Song Nui: Hoi Ky, Tap 1: 1928-1963* [Give Us Back Our Country: Memoir, Volume 1, 1928-1963] (Houston: Van Hoa, 2002), 340-341.

Lieu's assertion to the contrary, it is difficult to think that South Vietnamese anticommunist rhetoric did not aim to "manipulate" or "spread propaganda" about the Viet Minh and the Viet Cong. At least some of the anticommunist materials surveyed above well qualified as propaganda, in that they aimed to spread fear about and horror at the enemy. Not unlike anticommunist publications from Catholics and the colonial authorities in the 1920s and 1930s, some of the South Vietnamese anticommunist messages constructed in the early period and, indeed, later were crude and outrageous in content, form, or both.

At the same time, as suggested by Lieu's reference to "seeing" and "hearing" about the Viet Minh, anticommunist writers from Saigon and elsewhere sought to bear witness to the experiences of living under communist rule. Gravely concerned with developments in the recent past, they sought to construct and develop a coherent critique of Marxist-Leninism and its adoption by Vietnamese communists. Pointing to experience, reason, and tradition, they argued that revolutionary Marxism would be a mistaken and costly path for the future of postcolonial Vietnam. Building this critique, they at times borrowed and adapted some of the language and concepts from Cold War thinking in the West. For the most part, however, the critique was a native product that reflected the experience of noncommunist Vietnamese vis-à-vis the communists, especially during the August Revolution and the First Indochina War, but also before the former and after the latter. Moreover, the early South Vietnamese construction of anticommunism was, in some ways, led by northern émigrés and reflected the more brutal realities of warfare in the north during the anticolonial war. This intensity of experience would be translated into intensity of language, resulting in the fact that the

early South Vietnamese critique shaped how anticommunist Vietnamese would think about the Vietnamese Communist Party in decades to come.

The focus of this chapter is squarely on the anticommunist critique in the period 1954-1963. But the shaping and spreading of this critique remained strong in the subsequent periods of Americanization and Vietnamization. This was true even though urban noncommunist South Vietnamese did not view communism and anticommunism the same way. During the period of Americanization, for instance, some urbanites advocated neutralism and negotiation with the NLF. By and large, however, their voices were decidedly in the minority, as many factors continued to influence the urban scene and contributed to a far stronger ideological anticommunism among urbanites than their counterparts in the countryside. The critique of communism was easily accessible, thanks in part to funding from Saigon government, the USIS and other American agencies, and other foreign and domestic sources, and the wide exposure to anticommunist materials no doubt contributed to the lessening of revolutionary appeal from the Communist Party and, later, the NFL. Contributing to this exposure were a number of vocal anticommunist writers, artists, and other political and cultural producers in urban areas. There were many forms of interaction between ordinary citizens and leaders in politics, culture, and the arts in cities: for examples, lectures; exhibits; rallies; conversations at cafés and other public as well as private venues; radio and television programs; and, of course, print materials. Finally, the relative safety from warfare also sheltered urban residents from getting first-hand experience of possible military destruction at the hands of the South Vietnamese or American armed forces. This safety helped to make them believe (or persist in believing) that the Viet Cong and North

Vietnamese communists were main culprits of the violent conflict. Later, the Tet Offensive helped confirm this conviction among many urbanites in spite of war-weariness and growing anti-Americanism, the latter came out of their nationalistic sentiments rather than any sympathies for the communist revolutionaries.

Still, anticommunism alone did not account for the lack of support from urban South Vietnamese for the revolutionaries. A major component of noncommunist ideology in the urban South had to do with how the urbanites viewed the postcolonial and modernist person. Those views differed substantially from the socialist views of the person, and they are the topic for the next two chapters.

CHAPTER THREE  
INDIVIDUALISM IN URBAN SOUTH VIETNAM:  
BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The urban promotion of the noncommunist postcolonial person in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) is the subject of this and the next chapters. The present chapter begins by addressing the different views about the person as propagated by Vietnamese communists and the Ngo Dinh Diem's government. Noting that both views ultimately failed to win over the Vietnamese masses, the chapter points to the promotion of a petit bourgeois ethos and ethics in urban South Vietnam. This promotion outlasted the socialism advocated and imposed by the Vietnamese communists, and helped to account for the ideological divergence among Vietnamese during their long armed conflict. The chapter then traces the origin of this divergence to the urban culture of the late colonial period and focuses on developments in Hanoi. The period between the 1920s and the early 1940s saw a blossoming of ideas concerning the modern person among Vietnamese urbanites, especially those in Hanoi. This chapter exposes the continuity between the urban cultures of late-colonial Hanoi and post-Geneva Saigon, and the next chapter illustrates it with a case study of two series of popular nonfiction books published in Republican Saigon.

## **The socialist view of the postcolonial person in North Vietnam**

In the long and violent struggle among Vietnamese communist revolutionaries and noncommunist nationalists, one of the most consequential ideological differences lay in their varying attitudes about social classes, especially the petit bourgeoisie and its relationship to the postcolonial nation and society. During the first half of the First Indochina War, the collective desire for independence kept this variance at bay among various political groups. Yet, the tension inherent was never far from surface, always ready to clash. As two American specialists of Indochina observed during the war, with prescience if also simplification,

Opposition to the Viet Minh leadership of the [Democratic] Republic embraces mutually hostile and unintegrated elements, ranging from Trotskyites who will have no traffic with imperialism or the bourgeoisie, to religious or propertied conservatives who anticipate persecution once the need to maintain internal unity has been removed by the ending of the anti-French struggle. Thus the opposition to the Viet Minh is far less cohesive than are its supporters, and it is based more on fear of the future than on hostility to the government's present middle-of-the-road policy. So long as the Viet Minh successfully conducts the armed struggle against the return of colonialism and avoids controversial domestic issues, and so long as Bao Dai appears in the light of a French puppet, there is little danger of a break in the nationalist-communist coalition supporting the Republic. But should the Viet Minh ally itself with the unpopular Chinese, appear to have become Soviet-dominated, or compromise with the French on the issues of unity and sovereignty, it may forfeit the mass support it now seems to enjoy.<sup>1</sup>

It came to just that in the Vietminh's relations with the communist Chinese after the latter's victory over the Guomindang in 1949. Nearly simultaneous to the Truman's administration decision to throw support to France in early 1950, the formal alliance between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the People's Republic of China

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Thompson and Richard Adloff, *The Left Wing in Southeast Asia* (New York: William Sloan Associates, 1950), 35. The book was published under the auspices of the International Secretariat, Institute of Pacific Relations.



(PRC) marked a clear rupture in the already tenuous alliance between Vietnamese communists and noncommunists during the first half of the First Indochina War. As the involvement of the PRC, the Soviet Union, and the U.S. helped to transform the anti-colonial conflict into an international Cold War battleground, the Viet Minh leadership publicly reconstituted its political party, now called the Vietnamese Workers Party. It began to implement socialist policies regarding social classes, and also voiced openly and loudly a negative assessment against the bourgeoisie in particular and “individualism” in general.<sup>2</sup>

While this assessment carried an overarching denunciatory thrust, it was not always singular but, depending on the context and time, included a small range of evaluative shades. Among the most uncompromising opinions were those of Le Duan, General Secretary of the Party for 1960-1986.<sup>3</sup> Giving a well-known speech about the intelligentsia in 1957, Le Duan set them up against the peasants that were consistently held by the Party to be true revolutionaries. In contrast to the peasants, he considered pre-independence intellectuals to be patriotic but also entrenched in individualist sentimentality, insufficient in revolutionary zeal, and too petit bourgeois to embrace socialist modernism.<sup>4</sup> Broader in scope and more forceful in tone, two years later Le

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<sup>2</sup> On international and ideological developments related directly to the shift in the policies of Workers Party, see Tuong Vu, “From Cheering to Volunteering: Vietnamese Communists and the Arrival of the Cold War, 1940-1951,” in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2009), 172-204; Tuong Vu, “It’s Time for the Revolution to Show Its True Colors: The Radical Turn in Vietnamese Politics in 1948,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 40:3 (2009): 519-542; Christopher E. Goscha, “Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945-1950),” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1:1-2 (Fall 2006): 59-103.

<sup>3</sup> For the period 1960-1976, the Workers Party did not hold the position of Secretary General but First Secretary, which was Le Duan’s. He was formally installed as Secretary General of the (renamed) Vietnamese Communist Party in 1976.

<sup>4</sup> A discussion of this speech is Susan Bayly, *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age: Vietnam, India and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 84-86.

Duan attributed the creation of the entire Vietnamese petit bourgeoisie to post-World War I colonial policies of economic expansion. Leaving no doubt to his stand, he called this new class “scared” and “weak” without any qualification.<sup>5</sup>

Somewhat less critical of petit bourgeois Vietnamese was Truong Chinh, the Poliburo member that led the DRV’s land reform during the mid-1950s. In the same year that Le Duan made the second remark, Truong Chinh described the Workers Party’s attitudes toward various classes of rural Vietnamese in an address to the National Assembly. Not surprisingly, he voiced the loudest denunciation of “landlords and wealthy farmers” while expressing support for landless peasants and “low mid-level farmers” (*trung nong cap duoi*) that owned a small lot of land but whose conditions put them in danger of losing the little they had. Less unequivocal, however, was his view of “upper mid-level farmers” (*trung nong cap tren*) that were, in term of their land ownership and vested interest in further possession of property, the petit bourgeois of the countryside. On the one hand, Truong Chinh considered them “also oppressed and heavily exploited” by colonial and imperial authorities and, therefore, potential allies of the revolution. On the other hand, he cautioned that when it came to the movement to collectivize agriculture, the upper mid-level farmers “were generally hesitant, having a wait-and-see attitude.” He also attributed this to the fact that they “had better means of production and a more comfortable lifestyle.” Nonetheless, Truong Chinh affirmed that the Workers Party could properly “educate” these farmers, and that eventually they would “see clearly that collectivism is more beneficial than private production” and

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<sup>5</sup> Le Duan, *Mot Vai Dac Diem cua Cach Mang Viet Nam* [A Few Features of the Vietnamese Revolution] (Hanoi: Su That, 1959), 5.

would “participate enthusiastically in agricultural collectives.”<sup>6</sup> Left unsaid were earlier difficulties in land reform that led to a more conciliatory tone about the upper mid-level farmers.

Le Duan’s contempt for the Vietnamese petit bourgeoisie – and Truong Chinh’s more benign if wary attitude towards its classified members in the countryside – were of course rooted in the Marxist-Leninist tenet that the bourgeois class was too protective of its material gains and social standing to lend total support to or engage genuinely in revolutionary changes. The Vietnamese communists took this anti-bourgeois stand seriously. Indeed, the above example from Truong Chinh reflected a tactical and temporary compromise rather than a change of thought to his ideological commitment in economic matters. In the arena of culture, where he arguably exerted the most lasting influence, there was little if any compromise.<sup>7</sup> This ideological stand manifested in action in many forms during the construction of socialism in northern Vietnam in the 1950s. The Workers Party devised a wide range of policies, programs, and practices that sought to eliminate or minimize real and perceived bourgeois attitudes, behavior, and influences. The previous chapter has noted the energy that the Viet Minh leadership spent in the late 1940s to rid lingering traits of bourgeois romanticism among writers and artists while forging socialist realism as the lone acceptable viewpoint. There are many other instances. One is the dramatic de-individualization among Viet Minh soldiers and officers. As observed by the historian David Marr, for instance, early photos of Viet

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<sup>6</sup> Truong Chinh, *Kien Quyét Dua Nong Thon Mien Bac Nuoc Ta qua Con Duong Hop Tac Hoa Nong Nghiep Tien Len Xa Hoi Chu Nghia* [Determined to Bring the Countryside in Our Nation’s North to Socialism through the Path of Agricultural Collectivization] (Hanoi: Su That, 1959), 41-42. Truong Chinh made the report during the nineteenth meeting of the DRV’s National Assembly in May 1959.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, the following collection of writings and speeches from the 1940s to the 1980s: Truong Chinh, *Ve Van Hoa Van Nghe* [On Culture and the Arts] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 2006).

Minh troops showed “diverse poses and facial expressions, the jaunty caps, scarves and other fashion statements” among soldiers and “Japanese swords, Chinese pistols, walking sticks or cavalry-style riding boots” carried by their unit commanders. Such expressions of individuality, however, were completely out by 1951, when the Party leadership standardized uniforms and military-related materials, purged or demoted charismatic commanders, and introduced re-education campaigns that were “designed to intensify hatred for the enemy, heighten class consciousness and foster total unity of purpose.”<sup>8</sup>

Another example of de-individualization is the sophisticated efforts in the late 1950s to change attitudes of students at universities and technical schools. These efforts combined study sessions, working on public projects with the masses in the countryside, and persuasion by the state-controlled media’s re-emphasis on solidarity and resistance of foreign enemies. Having undergone such a process, the students, as one of them wrote, would have overcome the earlier “individualism” and adopted “a viewpoint to serve the people.”<sup>9</sup> Within the Party’s membership itself, individualism was to be expunged as much as possible. The uncomfortable fact that most leaders (including Truong Chinh) hailed from backgrounds that were far closer to the bourgeoisie than the peasantry, necessitated the state-sanctioned publications of many revolutionary prison memoirs from Party members that stressed the memoirists’ ideological education in colonial confinement while fudging, concealing, or excising their previous formal education and more elevated familial or social standings.<sup>10</sup> These and other acts were meant to erase

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<sup>8</sup> David Marr, “Concepts of ‘Individual’ and ‘Self’ in Twentieth-Century Vietnam,” *Modern Asian Studies*, 34: 4 (October 2000): 790-791.

<sup>9</sup> Ken Maclean, “Manifest Socialism: The Labor of Representation in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1956-1959),” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:1 (Winter 2007): 27-79, especially 58-65.

<sup>10</sup> Peter Zinoman, “Reading Revolutionary Prison Memoirs,” in Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California

class differences among members of the Party, whose rhetoric considered nationalism and class-based ideology to go hand-in-hand. “Our Party,” said Ho Chi Minh in an address to a conference on Party history in 1959, “has many examples of courage... that trust in the Party, in the revolution, in the future of class vision and the Country.” Ho elaborated,

Our Party members are very ordinary people because we all are descendants from the proletariat class. [We] belong to working-class people, we are loyal to the property-less class, and we are determined to fight in the struggle for the people. That is all. It is precisely because we are ordinary that we are significant. There is no use for us, other than to be of use for the Country, for class vision, for the people.<sup>11</sup>

Note the linkages among the quartet of Country, Party, Revolution, and Class: a point that Party leaders consistently reiterated throughout the 1950s. As American involvement in South Vietnam enlarged in the 1960s, the Workers Party shifted its rhetoric from a class-based nationalism back to the anti-foreign and anti-colonial nationalism similar to that during the 1940s. After 1975, however, the communist leadership returned again to class-based policies in an attempt to speed up economic nationalization and socialization. Wartime and postwar attempts to transform class division – or, at least, to eliminate the petit bourgeoisie – did not induce the desired

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Press, 2001), 21-45. Zinoman notes that even Ho Chi Minh, who was jailed briefly in Hong Kong by the British and in southern China by a Chinese warlord but was never in the French colonial prison, was compelled to publish a “prison diary” in 1960. It was stated that Ho wrote the diary while in the Chinese jail, but there has been no evidence to support the allegation.

<sup>11</sup> Ho Chi Minh, Le Duan, et al., *Ban ve Chu Nghia Anh Hung Cach Mang* [Discussions about Revolutionary Heroism] (Hanoi: Nha Xuat Ban Quan Doi Nhan Dan, 1966), 13. In Party speeches and documents, usages and meanings of the word “class” and related phrases could be confusing. First, the literal meaning of the words *giai cap* is “class.” In communist usage, however, the words were often used to mean “the proletariat class,” “the working class,” or, as translated here, “class vision.” Second, *giai cap lao dong* means literally “the working class” or, alternatively, “the proletariat class.” Third, *giai cap cong nhan* means literally “the proletariat class” while, fourth, *giai cap vo san* could be translated as either (literally) “the property-less class” or (figuratively) “the proletariat class.” To avoid confusion, I use the literal translations for the last three cases (*giai cap lao dong*, *giai cap cong nhan*, and *giai cap vo san*) and exercise my own judgments when it comes to translating *giai cap*.

effects, and the communist state was frequently compelled to make allowances for one or another segment of its citizenry.<sup>12</sup> All the same, so entrenched was the anti-bourgeois and anti-individualist line that it consistently shaped official policies for three and a half decades in the drive towards collectivization.

This is not to say that the forceful advocacy of the class-based and socialist person by the Communist Party during 1950-1985 bore lasting success. On the contrary, there is a growing amount of evidence and scholarly analysis on problems and hindrances to the implementation of these policies.<sup>13</sup> They led to pauses and mild modifications in policies, and eventually to a clear shift of direction through Renovation (*Doi Moi*) at the Sixth Party Congress in 1986.<sup>14</sup> Ideology did not always engender desired action for the Vietnamese communists. Nonetheless, the persistence for thirty-five years of the socialist conception of the person by the Communist Party illustrated a major difference to the political, economic, and cultural ideology of the person in South Vietnam.

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<sup>12</sup> On citizens' resistance to and negotiation of the DRV's economic and political programs, see Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005); Tuong Vu, "Workers and the Socialist State: North Vietnam's State-Labor Relations, 1945-1970," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38 (2005): 329-356; Maclean, "Manifest Socialism," which examines the Bac-Hung-Hai public work to show broader labor-related problems in implementing state policies. On SRV's policies and effects, see Trung Dinh Dang, "Post-1975 Collective Farming in Southern Vietnam: How Local Politics Contributed to the Failure of and the Shift in National Agrarian Policy," *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 8:2 (2009): 299-331.

<sup>13</sup> See Florence Yvon-Tran, "The Chronicle of a Failure: Collectivization in Northern Vietnam, 1958-1988," in Gisele Bousquet and Pierre Brocheux, ed., *Việt-Nam Exposé: French Scholarship on Twentieth-Century Vietnamese Society* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 331-355.

<sup>14</sup> An essential document on Renovation is the political report of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The official English translation is found in *Seventy-Five Years of the Communist Party of Viet Nam [1930-2005]: A Selection of Documents from Nine Party Congresses* (Hanoi: The Gioi, 1995), 645-775.

## The Diemist promotion of the postcolonial person

Like the Hanoi regime, the various Saigon governments frequently intoned the rhetoric of equality and egalitarianism. Unlike Hanoi, however, Saigon never possessed a sharply defined ideology about social classes or the human person. While this absence might have served to undermine ideological persuasiveness in the state-building competition vis-à-vis the communists, it was not for a lack of sincere trying. As shown in the previous chapter, the Ngo Dinh Diem government attempted to counter the appeal of communism by its version of personalism. Diemist personalism sought to chart a course between collectivism and capitalism, and the strong and frequent condemnation of communism was tempered by occasional caution about uncontrolled individualism.

It must be said that Diem was not distrustful of all forms of individualism. He was against the excesses of individualism (*chu nghĩa cá nhân*) that many noncommunist Vietnamese considered to be embodied in Western capitalism. But he was also cognizant of aspirations among noncommunist Vietnamese towards a petit bourgeois ethos and ethics. In contrast to Diem's anticommunist rhetoric, this recognition was more mute and indirect and, therefore, easy to miss. But it could be spotted in a number of places from his public documents, especially those concerning young adults, youths, and students.<sup>15</sup> Delivering an address at the graduation of "youth cadres" in late 1954, for example, Diem remarked that the cadres had by now "come of age" – the words he used were *tuoi lap than*, a twentieth-century phrase that were commonly used and that means literally "the age of creating the self." But, as he sympathetically noted, the contemporary "social and

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<sup>15</sup> In English, "youth" usually implies "teenager." The Vietnamese term *thanh nien*, however, is commonly translated as "youth" but usually means young adults between the age of eighteen and thirty.

economic situation” of the newly postcolonial nation was “lacking” and the young cadres were left “without the means to advance yourselves” and “without the means for your future.”<sup>16</sup> Implicit in the sympathy and within the context of the speech was Diem’s acknowledgement of the desires among cadres to be better educated and to get the chance to get ahead as some in the earlier generation of intelligentsia did during late colonialism. The next year, Diem addressed the National Conference of Youth Cadres and urged them “begin to build your own selves (*tu ban than*) first and foremost.” He elaborated the areas of self-making to be “conduct of a person with worthiness, cleanliness, trust and righteousness, honor, self-control, willingness to make sacrifice and service,” and also a “healthy body capable of adventures and endurance of struggles in life,” and “a life compatible to high ideals of human morality, a life respectful of human dignity [*nhan vi*, or personalism] and magnanimity towards society.”<sup>17</sup> At an award ceremony for school students in the following summer, he stated that “the country needs many talented people and many specialists to develop the nation,” then urged them, “Remember, your studies not only are *for the benefits of yourselves and your families*, but also for your worthy citizenship of Free and Independent Vietnam.” (Emphasis added.)<sup>18</sup> As often the case in his addresses to Vietnamese, Diem framed these statements and encouragement to

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<sup>16</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Hieu Trieu Thanh Nien (Dien Van Doc trong Dip Le Man Khoa Lop Can Bo Thanh Nien, 25-11-1954) [Call of Youths (Appeal on the Occasion of Graduation for Youth Cadres, November 25, 1954)], in *Con Duong Chinh Nghia: Doc Lap Dan Chu: Hieu Trieu va Dien Van Quan Trong cua Tong Thong Ngo Dinh Diem* [The Path of Righteousness: Independence and Democracy: Major Appeals and Addresses of President Ngo Dinh Diem], Vol. I (Saigon: Phu Tong Thong, 1956), 202.

<sup>17</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Huan Thi Goi Dai Hoi Can Bo Thanh Nien Toan Quoc (12-4-1955) [Address of Recommendation to the National Conference of Youth Cadres, April 12, 1955], in *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, Vol. I, 205.

<sup>18</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Huan Tu cua Tong Thong nhan Dip Le Phat Phan Thuong cho Hoc Sinh Mua He Nam 1956” [Address of Recommendation from the President on the Occasion of Award Ceremony for Students in the Summer of 1956], in *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, Vol. II, 207. This volume was also published in 1956.



noncommunist nationalism and, as illustrated by the second example above, sometimes to his personalist ideology. More noteworthy was the focus on individual persons, their aspirations for self-advancement, and, not infrequently, the context of their families.

In many ways, indeed, it was the family rather than social classes that stood at the heart of Diemist ideology about the postcolonial person. It is true that in public speeches and addresses to Americans and other foreigners, Diem usually framed ideological pronouncements in terms of society and civilization, and the family did not figure much at all.<sup>19</sup> It did, however, in his speeches towards the domestic audience. By far, the most common term that he used to refer to Vietnamese was *dong bao* – “people” or “fellow men and women”. But *gia dinh*, “the family,” also made strategic appearances. Celebrating the International Day of Human Rights at the end of 1954, for example, Diem referred to “the boundaries of the individual and the family” as well as the larger “environments of politics, society, culture, [and] religion.”<sup>20</sup> “Thousands of families,” he said in an appeal to government workers in the aftermath of the Battle of Saigon, “are now homeless and without clothes and food.”<sup>21</sup> Addressing two thousands of former communist cadres and party members, he called them *anh chi em*: a phrase that means

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<sup>19</sup> See, for examples, Ngo Dinh Diem, *The Emergence of Free Vietnam: Major Addresses Delivered by President Ngo Dinh Diem during His Official Visit to the United States of America* (Saigon: Presidency of the Republic of Viet-Nam, 1957); Ngo Dinh Diem, *Toward Better Mutual Understanding: Speeches Delivered by President Ngo Dinh Diem during His State Visits to Thailand, Australia, and Korea* (Saigon: Presidency of the Republic of Viet-Nam, 1957). An exposition on Diem’s view of civilization is Edward Miller, “The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture, and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem,” in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 376-402.

<sup>20</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Tuyen Bo Ngay Quoc Te Nhan Quyen (10-12-1954)” [Proclamation on the International Day of Human Rights, December 10, 1954], *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, Vol. I, 26.

<sup>21</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Ho Hao Cong Chuc Tang Cac Dong Bao Nan Nhan Mot Ngay Luong” [Appeal to Civil Servants to Donate Their Salary of One Day to Our Victimized People], *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, Vol. I, 190.

literally “brothers and sisters” and that could be used in conversation with non-family members to indicate familiarity or affection. Diem also referred to them twice in the opening of the speech as “members of the family” before reverting to “people.”<sup>22</sup> Not surprisingly, the family was most visible in speeches to youths, children, and students, such as his counsel to schoolchildren that they “be studious, develop qualities, obey teachers and parents, help friends.” Why? Because they would be “the formula to help you grow into talented and virtuous persons that perpetuate our [national] heroic history and carry on the works of your parents to develop the country.”<sup>23</sup> Inherent to the Diemist vision of the postcolonial person was this linkage of the family to citizenship and nation-building.

The importance of the family was reiterated in other Diemist publications. One instance is the journal *Southern Wind*, published by the government-sponsored Alliance of National Revolutionary Civil Servants. Amidst its mostly political coverage were many advocacies of and references to the centrality of the family in the noncommunist nation. According to a lecture given at the National Conference of Women Civil Servants in 1959 and published in the journal, the family is “the cell of society.” Quoting Auguste Comte, the female speaker also called the family “the ongoing school for community life.” She did not fail to quote Diem – in this case a speech he gave to the National Assembly – to the effect that the traditional foundation of the Vietnamese

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<sup>22</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Huan Thi cua Tong Thong nhan Dip 2000 Cuu Can Bo va Dang Vien Cong San Ly Khai Toi Yet Kien Tong Thong (26-2-1956) [Address of the President on the Occasion of the Meeting with Two Thousand Former Communist Cadres and Party Members, February 26, 1956], *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, Vol. II, 103.

<sup>23</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Huan Tu cua Ngo Tong Thong Goi Cac Em Nhi Dong va Hoc Sinh Toan Quoc Nhan Dip Tet Trung Thu Nam 1955” [National Address of President Ngo to Children and Students on the Occasion of the Mid-Autumn Festival 1955], *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, Vol. II, 201-202.

society was “the family and the village.”<sup>24</sup> Another issue published a translation of an essay by the French novelist André Maurois that expressed favorable ideas about the family. Also telling was the introduction in which the translator took note of knowing a “foreigner” (presumably a Westerner) that encountered South Vietnamese families and expressed “the most admiration” for “our organization of the family.”<sup>25</sup> The prominence of the family could be found also in the fiction – short stories and serialized novels – found in the back of many issues. One was a popular serialized story by the northern émigré Duyen Anh, then in his twenties and at the start of an illustrious writing career in Saigon. The story became well known among urban readers and was published and reprinted several times in book form. It concerned a group of urban teenagers and youths that were either without families or, more often, alienated from theirs. They struggled living off the street as shoeshine and newspaper boys, and gathered in small gangs as substitute families. Some were arrested and put in jail, some fell in love, and some did both. Privately and semi-publicly, they longed for either a chance to make up with their parents, or a close family that never existed in the first place. Familial sentimentality suffused the novel, and the absence of a stable and loving family life was seen as the root of many social problems in the newly independent nation.<sup>26</sup>

The centrality of the postcolonial family was more explicit in a booklet titled *The Light of Personalism*. The booklet was geared to a popular audience, perhaps even illiterate Vietnamese as long as someone could read it out loud to them. The narrative

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<sup>24</sup> Bui Thi Yen, “Phu Nu Cong Chuc va Gia Dinh” [Women Civil Servants and the Family], *Gio Nam* [Southern Wind] 12 (June 1, 1959): 21.

<sup>25</sup> André Maurois, “Gia Dinh” [Family], Trieu Dau, trans., *Gio Nam* 18 (March 1, 1960): 28.

<sup>26</sup> Duyen Anh, *Dieu Ru Nuoc Mat* [Lullaby of Tears] (Saigon: Doi Moi, 1965). The serialization began in *Gio Nam* 33 (June 5, 1961): 48-50.

consisted of a conversation between a married couple. It was composed in popular and unsophisticated verse, with the wife in the role of questioner and the husband replier. The beginning was rather dull, as the husband gave rather vague answers to his wife's question about the meaning of personalism and the "personalist revolution." But it quickly became appealing when he explained that the "main benefit" of this revolution would be the "personalist economy." Best was the account offered for the basis for this economy: that is, "there must be wealth before there is justice." He declared,

Most needed in the present time  
Are food, clothes, money,  
A home to sleep each night  
[Living for] four seasons without poverty and loneliness.<sup>27</sup>

The conception of a protective home was closely allied to the personalist family. Visible on the pages of the booklet was the petit bourgeois family: free of Marxist notions about social classes and the socialist person, yet without the individualistic excesses believed to have polluted Western capitalism. Elaborating the meanings of this concept, the husband described the ideal home to be "sanitary," "full of [fresh] air," "comfortably off," yet also "appropriately traditional," and ultimately "warm." It was also spacious: there were "[bed]room for parents" and "rooms for children," the latter separately for boys and girls and implying greater notions about gender-based privacy. In the backyard would be a "private garden": a place to grow fruits and vegetables as also a symbol of social status so that outsiders "would not look down" on the family. These and other features of the home were meant to provide a "means for [children to do their] studies." Moreover, the children/students would be fed "food that is current and age-

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<sup>27</sup> Truc Lam Linh, *Anh Sang Nhan Vi (Tho Pho Thong Doi Thoai)* [The Light of Personalism (A Popular Poem in Conversational Form)] (Saigon: 1956), 16-17.

appropriate”: that is, up to contemporary standards of nutrition). Their clothes would be “clean,” “fashionably contemporary,” and “inexpensive” – the last for the purpose of “saving.” Elsewhere, the husband noted the need to save money for the future, but also urged the family to spend money to “buy books in order to deepen the mind.”<sup>28</sup>

The significance of the semi-nuclear and growingly individualized home is repeated and elaborated elsewhere in the booklet.<sup>29</sup> But it does not stop at home, since Diemist personalism envisioned the family tightly connected to other segments of society. There should be, for instance, “many of relations and friends” to help and assist in the studies of the children/students. The booklet “the right of property must be clear” and encourages “the balance of rights in economic leadership.” “The rights of capitalists and workers,” for example, “should be held in balance so there is harmonious co-existence.” It discourages monopoly and “exploiters” aiming for high profits, and encourages the creation of cooperatives for the purpose of “common profit.” The overall economic goal of Diemist personalism looked to be prosperity for the Vietnamese family, but without the cutthroat competitiveness that supposedly characterized capitalism as practiced in the West.<sup>30</sup> The Diemist vision of the family-based postcolonial person, in short, was very different from the class-based person found in Marxism. Simplified as it was in the booklet, its rhetoric was not alien but, to the contrary, quite familiar to urban South Vietnamese.

For reasons noted in the previous chapter, however, Diem’s ideology on the whole did not win over South Vietnamese in the long run. His repressive tactics

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<sup>28</sup> Truc Lam Linh, *Anh Sang Nhan Vi*, 17-19.

<sup>29</sup> Truc Lam Linh, *Anh Sang Nhan Vi*, 41-45.

<sup>30</sup> Truc Lam Linh, *Anh Sang Nhan Vi*, 21-22.

alienated many segments of the masses and his regime gained no more than fleeting support from most of them. Finally, the most intractable problem remained the tenacity of communist revolutionaries in the southern countryside and Diem's inability to pull the rural masses away from them. Through the campaign "Denouncing Communists," Diem's government made a full attempt at throttling the revolutionary movement, and at first it looked that the regime was on the way to victory. But several factors, including Saigon's problems in land reform and Hanoi's decision to devote resources to help the south, helped the revolutionary forces weather the furious storm. Subsequent attempts to defeat the revolutionaries, in the forms of the Agrovillage and the Strategic Hamlet Programs, were ambitious in scale but did not fare well in execution. The latter program, dubbed "Diem's last failure" in Philip Catton's study of the regime, was indicative of its larger failure to inspire and instruct the southern population, especially in the countryside but also in urban areas.

### **Individualism in urban South Vietnam**

The lack of an effective state ideology during and after Diem, however, does not mean an absence of discernable tendencies and convictions about the postcolonial person and society among urban noncommunist South Vietnamese. To the contrary, the role of the family as envisioned in the Diemist ideology was elevated more loudly and more frequently in the culture and society of Saigon and other urban areas. Elevated too were other aspects of the modern bourgeois ethos, such as personal effort and initiative, entrepreneurship, and engagement in community work. For a long time, the

historiography of the Vietnam War (and that of modern Vietnam) was largely silent on this point, and only until the 1990s that it began to enter scholarly studies seriously.<sup>31</sup>

This scholarship suggests that individualist ethos was being articulated and developed to an unprecedented degree during the two decades of Saigon's rule. It was developed well enough that postwar attempt to speed up collectivization were more or less bound to fail. It took until the second half of the 1980s for the socialist Vietnamese state to begin shifting course in the form of Renovation. But the dynamics that ensured the eventual failure of socialism was already there, in the form of non-compliance and resistance to postwar socialist policies and programs. In comparison to personalism, Vietnamese socialism had a longer life – and more numerous ardent believers. Both, however, shared the same fate and were rejected by southern Vietnamese, especially the urban people. Urban Vietnamese in the south did not take to personalism because they did not understand what it really meant. They later refused socialism because it was incompatible to the individualist ethos to which they had been accustomed before and during Saigon rule.<sup>32</sup>

To understand the wartime South Vietnamese urban mindset, it is therefore critical to explore the Vietnamese development of individualism that found a fertile

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<sup>31</sup> Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); David W. Haines, *The Limits of Kinship: South Vietnamese Households, 1954-1975* (DeKalb, IL: Southeast Asia Publications, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, 2006); Stewart Lone, "Remembering Life in Urban South Vietnam, circa 1965-1975," in Stewart Lone, ed., *Daily Lives of Civilians in Wartime Asia: From the Taiping Rebellion to the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT and London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 219-246.

<sup>32</sup> An account of urban life following the North Vietnamese victory is Nguyen Long (with Harry H. Kendall), *After Saigon Fell: Daily Life under the Vietnamese Communists* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1981). During the war, Long was a Buddhist that opposed Diem and Thieu, aligned himself to the antiwar movement, studied at and obtained a doctorate from Berkeley, and taught at Saigon's Buddhist university Van Hanh. In 1979 he left Vietnam during the "boat people" exodus. The book includes his personal experiences of the new system as well as observations about how southern Vietnamese worked around or resisted state policies.

ground in Saigon and other southern cities. The scope of this dissertation allows for examining only a select number of publications that encouraged and promoted the growth of more individualist values. I choose to concentrate on them primarily because they were among the most popular South Vietnamese publications and, therefore, reflective of the broader promotion of individualism at the time. But it must be stated right away that South Vietnamese individualism is as large a historical topic as it has been little explored.<sup>33</sup> The topic has many sources, most of which remain untapped. Through this chapter and the next one, this dissertation is among the first efforts to study the topic. It is my hope that future scholarship will uncover one or more of its aspects in greater details.

Before examining this specific body of works, however, it is imperative to describe the background to the promotion of individualism in Saigon. Especially important was the transition from pre-1954 Hanoi to post-1954 Saigon, the latter of which saw the migration of many established and budding cultural makers to the urban south.

### **Sources from late colonial urban culture**

In regard to the South Vietnamese promotion of individualism, its roots came from late colonial urban life, especially during the 1920s and 1930s. The conditions were

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<sup>33</sup> English-language scholarship on twentieth-century Vietnamese individualism tends to skip the South Vietnamese period. One example is Marr, "Concepts of 'Individual' and 'Self' in Twentieth-Century Vietnam," which moves chronologically from pre-colonialism to colonialism to the DRV to postwar Vietnam, bypassing the RVN altogether. A second example is Mark Philip Bradley, "Becoming *Van Minh*: Civilizational Discourse and Visions of the Self in Twentieth-Century Vietnam," *Journal of World History* 15:1 (2004): 65-83, which concentrates on the 1920s and 1930s then jumps to the 1980s and 1990s, in this case bypassing both the RVN and DRV. There is much to learn from these articles, as evidenced by citations of them in this dissertation. But they indicate too that an area for research is southern developments during the divisional period.



many. Economically, World War I marked a small but important turning point in helping to create (as Le Duan correctly observed) a petit bourgeois class of Vietnamese.<sup>34</sup> The participation of Indochinese in Europe during the war provided many Vietnamese a direct experience of the West. Economic changes during the 1920s also prompted a small number of Vietnamese into entrepreneurial enterprises such as textile, food and alcohol, metal production, commercial painting, brickmaking, and printing. A few natives even ventured into fields that were overwhelmingly dominated by French and ethnic Chinese, such as rubber and shipping.<sup>35</sup>

A major phenomenon was the elevation of youths, particularly students and teachers that were urban residents due to geographical locations of the colonial educational system. Tiny in number, these students and teachers nonetheless considered themselves no less as “mothers and fathers” of the Vietnamese nation. Starting with seemingly small-scale grievances over issues such as pay and classroom conditions, their protests grew in scope as well as frequency. Expulsion and other repressive measures from the colonial authorities only helped to radicalize students, prompting many to join

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<sup>34</sup> Commercial and banking activities before World War I (and still for much of the postwar years) were dominated by French, ethnic Chinese, and, in much smaller number, Indians that came from both French and British India. Some Vietnamese did attempt to open businesses. Unlike postwar entrepreneurs whose goals were monetary profit, however, those attempts were typically for nationalist causes. A major example is the Tonkin Free School (*Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc*) in Hanoi, which was open in 1906. Run by members of the scholar-gentry and aimed at providing Vietnamese youths with a pedagogical center for new learning, the School took after Phan Boi Chau’s Eastward Movement (*Phong Trao Dong Du*), which organized and sent Vietnamese students to Japan to learn about modernization towards the goal of national independence. The School not only ran classes but also published nationalist tracts and poetry as well as translations of textbooks from Chinese nationalists. To help financing itself, the School started a number of small businesses in textile production, rice trading, tea making, and selling domestic products such as shoes and feather fans. Two of the supporters even tried to run a plantation, which eventually failed. See Nguyen Hien Le, *Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc* [The Eastern Capitol School] (Saigon: La Boi, 1968).

<sup>35</sup> Nguyen Vinh Phuc, Le Van Lan, and Nguyen Minh Tuong, *Lich Su Thang Long Ha Noi* [A History of Thang Long Ha Noi] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tre, 2005), 329-330. Thang Long is a dynastic name of Hanoi.

illegal political parties later.<sup>36</sup> But it was not merely self-elevation; even before the 1920s, sectors of Vietnamese society had already begun to look hopefully upon these youthful intellectuals as leaders for the national future. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, their greater visibility and bolder organizational efforts gave them ever greater moral stature and political significance.

In the realm of ideas, the late colonial period saw a fervent, even feverish, absorption of new thinking from Europe, China, and Japan. Signifying the shift from the scholar-gentry generation to that of the intelligentsia, urban Vietnam saw a leap in books and especially periodicals that presented voices from reformists, progressives, and radicals.<sup>37</sup> From urban intellectuals such as the moderate-collaborationist mandarin Pham Quynh in the late 1910s to the radical southerner Nguyen An Ninh in the 1920s to the progressive northern Self-Strength Literary Group in the 1930s, a dazzling array of new ideas reached Vietnamese about the individual and its place in society, in effect providing new models about the individual and self-development as alternatives to traditional concepts about self-cultivation. Most of these ideas were not Marxist in content or even orientation; in fact, advocates of Marxism encountered considerable difficulty in propagating it to the larger society.<sup>38</sup> As shown in Chapter One, well before

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<sup>36</sup> Micheline R. Lessard, "'We Know... the Duties We Must Fulfill': Modern 'Mothers and Fathers' of the Vietnamese Nation," *French Colonial History* 3 (2003): 119-142. See also Lessard, "Tradition for Rebellion: Vietnamese Students and Teachers and Anticolonial Resistance, 1888-1931" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1995), 242-268; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 146-170, which concerns student strikes in 1926.

<sup>37</sup> Scholarship on the Vietnamese intelligentsia during late colonialism includes David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*. See also Trinh Van Thao, "The 1925 Generation of Vietnamese Intellectuals and Their Roles in the Struggle for Independence," in Bousquet and Brocheux, eds., *Viêt-Nam Exposé*, 251-277.

<sup>38</sup> The limited receptivity of Marxism among Vietnamese during late colonialism had a lot to do with unfamiliarity to its concepts and language from the intended audience; see Shawn McHale, *Print and*

Ho Chi Minh and the communists affected discernable political changes, it was the radicalism of Ninh that shaped the first stage in the Vietnamese revolution during the 1920s. Similarly, as the communists (and other anticolonial groups) struggled mightily to survive colonial repression during the 1930s, it was not Marxism but progressive social critique and re-elevation of the individual from the Self-Strength Literary Group that captured the most attention from urban readers and exerted significant influence over their subsequent embrace of the new.<sup>39</sup>

Different in tone but equally influential were changes in the arts that provided new outlets for the growth of individualist values. In 1925, the colonial authorities established the Indochinese Institute of Fine Arts (*Cao Dang My Thuat Dong Duong*), which brought out nearly 200 painters, sculptors, and other artists in the next twenty years.<sup>40</sup> Proliferating too was popular music. Prompted by the arrival of Western-style spoken drama, Hanoi and Haiphong saw the earliest Vietnamese popular songs composed according to Western notation.<sup>41</sup> As for live theater itself, traditional musical theater was “reformed” while spoken drama received its first ever production by a Vietnamese cast, performing Molière’s *La Malade Imaginaire*. Soon after, several Vietnamese wrote their

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*Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004) 102-142.

<sup>39</sup> On Nguyen Anh Ninh, see Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 72-78. “For young Vietnamese growing up in the 1920s,” Tai argues, “it was Nguyen An Ninh, rather than... the shadowy Nguyen Ai Quoc [i.e., Ho Chi Minh], who epitomized the experience of exile in France” (72). On Hoang Dao, see Le Huu Muc, *Hoang Dao, Ly Thuyet Gia cua Tu Luc Van Doan* [Hoang Dao, Theorist of the Self-Strength Literary Group] (Hue: Nhan Thuc, 1957).

<sup>40</sup> Nguyen Vinh Phuc, et al., *Lich Su Thang Long Ha Noi*, 349.

<sup>41</sup> Jason Gibbs, “Spoken Theater, La Scène Tonkinoise, and the First Modern Vietnamese Songs,” *Asian Music* 31, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1999/2000): 1-33; Jason Gibbs, “The West’s Songs, Our Songs: The Introduction of Western Popular Music in Vietnam before 1940,” *Asian Music* 35:1 (Fall 2003/Winter 2004): 57-83; and Nguyen Thuy Kha, “Cua Bien Hai Phong, Mot Ngon Nguon Van Nghe” [The Sea Town Haiphong: A Source of Artistic Creation], in *Nua The Ky Tan Nhac* [Half a Century of Modern Music] (Danang: Da Nang, 1998), 18-21.

own plays about Vietnamese life and had them produced and performed. Still, even in 1945 Hanoi did not have any theaters specifically for the new drama. On the other hand, there were about half a dozen of cinema theaters that showed movies imported from Europe and Hollywood.<sup>42</sup>

It was literature, however, that provided the most significant and lasting expressions in favor of individualist values. Encouraged by a growing number of readers literate in the Latinized Vietnamese script, periodicals and other publications proliferated and young intellectuals grew more confident and daring in voicing their views. Influenced by nineteenth-century Romanticism as well as early twentieth-century French symbolist poets, the New Poetry (*Tho Moi*) accelerated and intensified the tendency in Vietnamese poetry since mid-eighteenth century towards the personal than the official. Most New Poets were northerners such as Phan Khoi, Luu Trong Lu, and The Lu, and they experimented with free verse and praised individual will and personal feelings.<sup>43</sup> Fiction writers turned attention to lives of ordinary people, offered social critique through the lens of stories, and sometimes lambasted long-standing familial and social conventions that suppressed or limited personal choices. There were a few popular southern novelists, notably Ho Bieu Chanh.<sup>44</sup> But it was mostly Hanoi-based writers,

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<sup>42</sup> Phan Ke Hoanh and Huynh Ly, *Buoc Dau Tim Hieu Lich Su Kich Noi Viet Nam truoc Cach Mang Thang Tam* [First Steps towards Research on Spoken Drama before the August Revolution] (Hanoi: Van Hoa, 1978), 19-25, cited in Gibbs, "Spoken Theater," 2-3; and Nguyen Vinh Phuc, et al., *Lich Su Thang Long Ha Noi*, 348. A brief background on the modern theater is Wynn Wilcox, "Women, Westernisation and the Origins of Modern Vietnamese Theatre," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 37:2 (June 2006): 210-215.

<sup>43</sup> See Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 100-117.

<sup>44</sup> See Hoang Ngoc Thanh, *Vietnam's Social and Political Development as Seen through the Modern Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991). On the transition from verse story-telling to early fiction, see Cao Thi Nhu-Quynh and John C. Shafer, "From Verse Narrative to Novel: The Development of Prose Fiction in Vietnam," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 47:4 (November 1988): 756-777. On Ho Bieu Chanh and other southern novelists, see John C. Schafer and The Uyen, "The Novel Emerges in Cochinchina," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52:4 (November 1993): 854-884.

including Vu Trong Phung and members of the Self-Strength Literary Group, that garnered the most attention and exerted the greatest impact among Vietnamese at the time.<sup>45</sup> In the words of the scholar Neil Jamieson, late colonial literature showed a clear shift of focus “from the general to the specifics, from the objective to the subjective, from reason (*ly*) and ethics (*nghia*) to emotions (*tin*h), from society to the individual.”<sup>46</sup>

The shift was not without ambiguity or controversy. “Straddling this world of the old and the new,” writes the historian George Dutton about one of the two most popular Vietnamese cartoon characters during the late colonial period, “Ly Toet was not merely a mechanism for repudiating the old-fashioned and the out-of-date, but very much a reflection of the in-between status of many people still undecided about what to keep and what to discard in an era of enormous change.”<sup>47</sup> The same could be said about Vietnamese urban attitudes towards individualism during the 1920s and 1930s: straddling old and new points of views, even its advocates approached it with a mix of welcoming excitement and cautious apprehensiveness. One example is the appearance of tracts and pamphlets that encouraged money making, with titles such as *Paragons of How to Get Rich*, *Forty-one Occupations Requiring Little Capital*, and *Wealth is Better than Nobility*. These and similar publications bespoke of growing entrepreneurial interests among segments of post-WWI Vietnamese. Not unexpectedly, such apparent self-

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<sup>45</sup> On Vu Trong Phung, see the introduction to Vu Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck: A Novel*, translated by Nguyen Nguyet Cam and Peter Zinoman (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 1-30. On the Self-Strength Literary Group, see Greg Lockhart, “Broken Journey: Nhat Linh’s *Going to France*,” *East Asian History* 8 (1994), 73-95; Doan Quoc Sy, *Tu Luc Van Doan* [The Self-Strength Literary Group] (Saigon: Hong Ha, 1960); Nhat Thinh, *Chan Dung Nhat Linh* [Portrait of Nhat Linh] (Saigon: Song Moi, 1971).

<sup>46</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 111.

<sup>47</sup> George Dutton, “Ly Toet in the City: Coming to Terms with the Modern in 1930s Vietnam,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:1 (Winter 2007): 105. Ly Toet could be translated as “Toet the Hamlet Chief.” The other comic character is Xa Xe, or “Xe the Village Chief,” and there is also a third and less well-known one called Bang Banh. Neither, however, is mentioned in the article.

interests were met with opposition from traditionalist Vietnamese that still viewed traders and merchants with condescension and negativity. But even anti-traditionalists were opposed to such ideas, warning that the encouragement of self-interest would lead to excessive individualism, the same kind discouraged by Ngo Dinh Diem later in South Vietnam.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Self-Strength, the Battle of the Novels, and trajectories about the person**

Complicating conflicting emotions about the subject were voices against individualism from intellectuals of Marxist orientation.<sup>49</sup> An emblematic illustration of the competition between the two sides is the “The Battle of the Novels” during the 1930s. As illustrated by the episode about Vo Nguyen Giap and the poet Nguyen Vy in Chapter One, young Marxist and non-Marxist intellectuals were often friendly but remained firmly at odds in ideology. Fiction writers, however, were more confrontational, perhaps because their medium accorded a way to attack ideological opponents without resorting to direct name-calling. In this case, the Battle showcased several paradigmatic novels from three northern writers. On one side was the prolific fiction writer Nguyen Cong Hoan. On the other side were the novelists Nhat Linh and Khai Hung (pennames of Nguyen Tuong Tam and Tran Khanh Giu, respectively) who had co-founded the celebrated Hanoi-based Self-Strength Literary Group (Tu Luc Van Doan).

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<sup>48</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 123-127.

<sup>49</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 127-134.

The Self-Strength was by far the most read and important literary group of its time.<sup>50</sup> But for several reasons, it was not embraced by a number of Hanoi intellectuals. Much of this had to do with different orientations as well as personal animosity. According to the classification of the Catholic priest and literary scholar Thanh Lang, there were four major groups among the intellectual generation of the 1930s. One was the Self-Strength, the most prominent embodiment of the progressives. Next were the traditionalists and neo-traditionalists, such as the mandarin essayist Pham Quynh. Third was a motley group of writers from different points of view: traditionalists, determinists, and Marxist-leaning intellectuals. They were united only by a dislike of the haughty Self-Strength, and their diverse voices were found especially in four Hanoi journals during the mid-1930s: *Megaphone (Loa)*, *Saturday Novel (Tieu Thuyet Thu Bay)*, *Hanoi Review (Ha Noi Bao)*, and *Beneficial (Ich Huu)*. Last were the Marxists, the weakest of the quartet and without a major periodical.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps because of its exalted position, the Self-Strength inevitably faced considerable opposition from the other groups. The group further perpetuated factionalism in some biting pages of its journals, especially the book reviews. These pages prompted anger, jealousy, and youthful posturing from not a few Hanoi writers. The editor and fiction writer Vu Bang, instance, got together with two

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<sup>50</sup> There were other Literary Groups in all regions of Vietnam, but none was close to having the recognition and influence as the Self-Strength. According to Xuan Tuoc, a southerner who joined the Vietminh during the First Indochina War but later left and wrote about fifty textbooks for the South Vietnamese educational programs, the most important southern group in the late 1930s and 1940s was the United Literary Group (Hop Quan Van Doan), which met in Saigon's suburb Gia Dinh. Outside metropolitan Saigon were two smaller ones: the Ben Tre Literary Group (Ben Tre Van Doan) and Sa Giang Literary Group (Sa Giang Van Doan). In addition, there were the Young Friends Group (Nhom Ban Tre), which sold several titles of popular historical fiction; and the Vinh Trang Pagoda Group, several of whose members later joined the Vietminh and lived in North Vietnam after 1954. See Xuan Tuoc, *60 Nam Cam But: Hoi Ky* [Sixty Years of Writing: A Memoir] (Houston: Van Hoa, 2000), 11-17.

<sup>51</sup> Thanh Lang, *Pho Binh Van Hoc The He 1932* [Cultural Criticism of the 1932 Generation], 2 vols. (Saigon: Phong Trao Van Hoa, 1972-1973). An online reproduction is at the website *Chim Viet Canh Nam*: <http://chimviet.free.fr/vanhoc/thanhlng/thl1050.htm>.

others to create the periodical *Girl Duck* (later changed to *Boy Duck*) – the “first satirical periodical in northern Vietnam,” according to Bang – to attack the Self-Strength.<sup>52</sup> The prodigious fiction and reportage writer Vu Trong Phung, too, mocked the group’s Eurocentric elitism and caricatured several of its members in his famous novel *Dumb Luck*.<sup>53</sup> The important Marxist determinist Truong Tuu specifically railed against the group in an essay on the dangers of the capitalist ideology into Vietnam. “*The Self-Strength employs literature to serve capitalism*,” he concluded, “Such is the truth, such it is.” (Original emphasis.)<sup>54</sup> All the same, the criticism revealed the wide-ranging impact that the group had over young educated Vietnamese throughout the country through its periodicals and novels.

In chronological order, the first work to appear in the seesaw “Battle of the Novels” was Khai Hung’s *In the Midst of Spring* (*Nua Chung Xuan*, first serialized in 1933). Its protagonist is a young woman from a lower middle-class provincial literati background. When visiting her younger brother in Hanoi, she met a young man that had known her family and they later fell in love with each other. From an upper-class background, the young man feared objections to the union from his widowed mother on

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<sup>52</sup> Vu Bang, “Binh ‘Doa Le My Tuu’ của Thach Lam” [Thach Lam’s Bottle of ‘Great Plum Wine’], *Muoi Chin Chan Dung Nha Van cung Thoi* [Nineteen Portraits of Contemporary Writers] (Hanoi: Dai Hoc Quoc Gia, 2002), 357-358. This is a reprint of an article originally published in the Saigon journal *Giao Diem* in December 1971. Thach Lam was a member of the Self-Strength Literary Group and a younger brother of Nhat Linh.

<sup>53</sup> See Peter Zinnoman, “Introduction,” in Vu Trong Phung, *Dumb Luck: A Novel*, 18-20. According to the poet and publisher Nguyen Vy, who knew Phung well in Hanoi, Phung hated most Nhat Linh and The Lu (the premier poet of the Self-Strength) but was nice to Khai Hung; see Nguyen Vy, *Van Thi Si Tien Chien* [Antebellum Poets and Prose Writers] (Hanoi: Hoi Nha Van, 1994; this is a slightly edited reprint of the original title from Saigon: Khai Tri, 1970), 56.

<sup>54</sup> Truong Tuu, “Luan Ly Tu San va Anh Huong của No trong Van Chuong Viet Nam Hien Dai” [Capitalist Ethics and Its Influence in Modern Vietnamese Literature], *Tao Dan* [Poetic Society] 11 (August 16, 1939): 870; reprinted in *Tao Dan 1939: Suu Tap Tron Bo* [Poetic Society, 1930: Complete Collection] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 1998), 1060. The name was taken after a court poetic society founded at the end of the Fifteenth Century by the Le Dynasty.



the basis of class differences. He deceived the protagonist into thinking that his mother gave approval, and she became pregnant some months later. Surprised by pregnancy and manipulated by his mother, the young man grew uncertain. The protagonist left her lover, moved to an impoverished neighborhood, and raised her child on her own while supporting the education of her brother. In her self-determination, she turned down romantic interests from a physician and an artist. Her former lover married a young woman from a prestigious family but their marriage was not happy. He eventually found out the truth sought out the protagonist and tried to convince her to renew their relationship. The protagonist, however, thought that it would cause further unhappiness for all parties involved. She had felt robbed when he abandoned her and married his wife; now, the wife would feel robbed if he took his former lover as a concubine. There were also his children and her son. “Shouldn’t we sacrifice” she asked rhetorically, “our love and our happiness for the sake of all these people?” The end revealed the protagonist-heroine’s clarity, resolve, and maturity: all the more impressive because the protagonist was barely literate and was not highly educated.

Having written about the Battle of the Novels, Neil Jamieson calls *In the Midst of Spring* paradigmatic of “moral individualism” because it focused not on the clashes among the characters but on how the protagonist’s capable navigation through them. In Jamieson’s summary, Khai Hung and the Self-Strength Literary Group

acknowledged the reality of human frailty and social evils, but they emphasized the capacity of the individual human being for love and courage, for self-sacrifice and dedication. They portrayed the beauty of nature, the warmth of friendship, the satisfaction of achievement, the possibility of progress through individual initiative. They advocated the virtues of self-reliance, optimism, and an unwavering love of life. With

these ideals, they were a dominant force from 1932 to 1937 and their strong influence continued long thereafter.<sup>55</sup>

The beauty of nature, the warmth of friendship, the satisfaction of achievement, the possibility of progress through individual initiative, the virtues of self-reliance and optimism and abiding love of life: these emphases about the modern individual promoted by the Self-Strength did not desist after the 1930s but would see development and continuity in urban South Vietnam during the period of 1954-1975.

Nonetheless, some critics faulted the fiction of the Self-Strength to be insufficiently informed about class and social structures. One was Nguyen Cong Hoan, a teacher in the northern provinces of Lao Kay and Nam Dinh and a former member of the VNQDD.<sup>56</sup> A year after *In the Midst of Spring*, Hoan began serialize his novel *Golden Branches, Leaves of Jade (Canh Vang La Ngoc)* in the popular periodical *Saturday Novel*, edited by the aforementioned Vu Bang. The novel also centered on a young woman, albeit from an upper-class mandarin background, that fell in love with a student from a literati background. The switch-around in the main couple's backgrounds foreshadowed a very different outcome from Khai Hung's novel: the protagonist of Hoan's novel also became pregnant but was forced by her parents to have an abortion and died as a result. Hoan had a stronger grasp on class-consciousness. He saw, as Jamieson puts it, "saw the individual in society as far more vulnerable and less efficacious than did [the Self-Strength]." He was also critical of the Vietnamese governing class and earned much enmity and suspicion from members of this class. Even the provincial chief of education went to see Hoan and, probably out of embarrassment that such criticism came

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<sup>55</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 125.

<sup>56</sup> See the biographical essay on Hoan by Le Minh in Nguyen Cong Hoan, *Tuyen Tap Nguyen Cong Hoan: Tap 1* [The Selected Nguyen Cong Hoan: Volume 1] (Hanoi: Hoi Nha Van, 2000), 9-36.

from one of his own employees, tried but did not succeed in persuading Hoan to drop either teaching or writing.<sup>57</sup>

The lines drawn between individualism and class-consciousness foreshadowed the deeper ideological divergence in the 1950s. The Battle continued with Nhat Linh's *Breaking the Ties* (*Doan Tuyet*), also about an educated young woman who fell in love with a student, but was forced to marry someone else. The birth of her son ended with the infant's death due to her mother-in-law's superstition, and her husband took a concubine to ensure a male heir. A nocturnal argument led to the accidental death of her husband at her hand, and a lengthy trial in the French court ensued. It ended in a not-guilty verdict, thanks to the eloquent defense attorney who put forth arguments such as, "Preserve the family by all means [but] please do not confuse preserving the family with preserving slavery"; and "These people who have absorbed the new culture have been imbued with ideas of humanity and individual freedom... This desire is very legitimate." The verdict signaled the protagonist's cutting of all ties, moving her into a future completely on her own.

In *Breaking the Ties*, the Literary Group's advocacy for separating the individual from "tradition" went up another notch: Jamieson considers it representative of "militant individualism," the furthest a Vietnamese could possibly remove himself or herself from tradition at the time. It was too controversial, and Nguyen Cong Hoan promptly wrote *Miss Minh, The Schoolteacher* (*Co Giao Minh*) in response as "a rebuke to individualism." This time, the now-obligatory female protagonist came from a similar background as her counterpart in *Breaking the Ties*. Forced into marriage with someone

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<sup>57</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 126; and Nguyen Cong Hoan, *Tuyen Tap Nguyen Cong Hoan: Tap 2* [The Selected Nguyen Cong Hoan: Volume 2] (Hanoi: Hoi Nha Van, 2000), 7-8.

she did not love, she secretly arranged to have her teaching job transferred from the province to Hanoi. In the end, however, she stayed and worked hard at changing the situation from within, resulting in mutual respect and affection. From Hoan's perspective, it was clear that breaking the ties "was a foolish and selfish thing to do."<sup>58</sup> Predictably, there were fierce attacks against the novel from the Self-Strength. But Hoan did not respond in kind this time and both sides went on with their writing without openly attacking each other. For the remainder of the 1930s, the Self-Strength co-founders wrote four more novels centered on the theme of the individual in the family while Hoan penned several that emphasized mandarin oppression in the countryside and growing class-conscious organization among the peasantry.

By the start of the next decade, moreover, the interests of urban Vietnamese shifted from literature to political theory, from debates over Western-oriented cultural adaptation to ones over national independence and the means to achieve it. This shift reflected another change: from late colonialism to the beginning of decolonization precipitated by the breakout of World War II and the occupation of Japan. There were new writers in the urban cultural scene throughout Vietnam, but none exerted literary influence that way that Nguyen Cong Hoan or any single writer did. In addition, Hanoi in the early 1940s had not a single dominating intellectual group to replace the Self-Strength but several smaller and less influential groups: the New People (Tan Dan), the New Mind (Tri Tan), the Clear Voice (Thanh Nghi), and the Han Thuyen, the last named after a thirteen-century mandarin-scholar. Yet, the Battle of the Novels not only revealed the sharply differing takes during the 1930s on the individual among late colonial

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<sup>58</sup> Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*, 154.

Vietnamese intelligentsia. It also foreshadowed the larger ideological split among Vietnamese in the latter half of the 1940s and beyond. The split was further illustrated and symbolized by the different directions of the three principals. In different ways, they were engaged in political activism between the end of the Popular Front period and the start of the First Indochina War. By far the most prominent was Nhat Linh, whose life turned into a rapid series of political activities. In the late 1930s he founded one of the Great Viet (Dai Viet) political parties, which later merged with the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, whose membership had once included Hoan. After Pearl Harbor, he left Vietnam for southern China and was arrested by the suspicious Chinese, only to be released later along with Ho Chi Minh. He joined a number of noncommunist nationalists to form the Vietnamese Revolutionary Alliance (Viet Nam Cach Mang Dong Minh Hoi) whose abbreviated name Vietminh would be appropriated later by Ho's organization. Waiting out for the end of World War II, he spent his time reading on politics and learning English and the Han script. In 1944, he became a representative for the VNQDD in new alliance, which this time included Ho's organization due to Chinese pressure. The two sides did not get along, but the August Revolution gave the momentum to the Vietminh. Nhat Linh joined Ho Chi Minh-led coalition government as minister of foreign affairs, and participated in the failed Franco-Vietnamese Conference in Dalat. Not long after he left the Vietminh, which in any event did not really hold a place for his brand of politics. He spent the first years of the First Indochina War in China and, along with several other noncommunist nationalists, organized an anticolonial and anticommunist political front to support Bao Dai. The organization dissipated in 1950, and Nhat Linh returned to Hanoi the following year to resume writing and

publishing. In 1953 he moved south, first to Dalat then Saigon, where he completed his last novels and started a short-lived journal. But his time had passed, and he became a revered member of the past than an influential participant in the present. In addition, the remnants of his former Great Viet group were suppressed by the Diem government, like other nationalist political parties. In 1960 he organized another front, this time supporting the unsuccessful coup against Diem, an act that in turn prompted the regime to put him under house arrest. Three years later, as the Buddhist crisis was coming to a boil, he made headlines one last time by committing suicide in a protest against the regime.

At least Nhat Linh died by his own will. Much less fortunate was his friend and collaborator Khai Hung, who had been arrested along with Hoang Dao, fellow Self-Strength member and younger brother of Nhat Linh. Sent to the northern border until 1943, they were back to Hanoi after the Japanese coup that led to the creation of the Empire of Vietnam and published a new edition of the group's journal *Today (Thoi Nay)*, this time as an official organ of the VNQDD.<sup>59</sup> But the August Revolution disrupted the life of the journal, this time signaling the end to all meaningful publishing activities of the Self-Strength as a whole. After the First Indochina War broke out, Khai Hung left Hanoi and headed for his wife's province, where he was trapped and killed by the Vietminh. Opposite to his fate was that of his former literary rival Nguyen Cong Hoan. During the Popular Front period, Hoan joined the Vietnamese branch of the French Socialist Party and, like Khai Hung and Hoang Dao, was harassed and arrested by the colonial

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<sup>59</sup> Nguyen Thai, founder and publisher of the first English-language newspapers in South Vietnam, asserted that because nationalist political ideas were banned at the time, "the only channel for the VNQDD ideas" was the Self-Strength Literary Group, whose two journals "avoided direct confrontation with the French authorities by resorting to humor and satire." See Nguyen Thai, "South Vietnam," in John A. Lent, ed., *The Asian Newspapers' Reluctant Revolution* (Ames, IA: The Iowa State University Press, 1971), 238. Thai supports his statement by pointing to the re-publication of *Today* in 1945. However, the relationship between the Self-Strength and the VNQDD *prior to 1945* remains unclear.

authorities. Jailed by the Japanese during the Occupation, he joined the Vietminh after the August Revolution and served as director of the Office of Propaganda in the north. During the First Indochina War, he worked as director of a military school and editor of its magazine. After the conflict, he returned to Hanoi and became the first president of the Union of Vietnamese Writers. The Second Indochina War saw his remaining son sent south to fight the Americans and South Vietnamese. Hoan lost his son to the war, like many other parents. Unlike Nhat Linh and Khai Hung, however, he lived to see the end of the quarter-century conflict before passing away in 1977.<sup>60</sup>

In ways real and symbolic, the very different ends to the three late-colonial novelists bespoke of the larger tumultuous ideological conflict among prominent Vietnamese then or later. Their divergence saw parallels in many instances, even among Vietnamese who had been friends. One example is, again, that of Vo Nguyen Giap, Nguyen Vy, and Luu Trong Luu already described in Chapter One. Another example involved no less an important figure than Ho Chi Minh. During the early 1920s in Paris, Ho met and became close friends with the fellow anti-colonial compatriot Nguyen The Truyen, who had come from Hanoi to France to study engineering. Truyen joined the French Communist Party, and both he and Ho were elected to the executive committee of the Party. Truyen, however, later left the organization to find a reformist and noncommunist group while Ho, as well known, went to Moscow and became a member of the Comintern.<sup>61</sup> Forward to 1953, Truyen was a firm noncommunist and won the majority of the votes during Hanoi's municipal elections. Ho wrote the next year and offered him the post of vice president of the DRV, but he turned it down and wrote back

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<sup>60</sup> Nguyen Cong Hoan, *Tuyen Tap Nguyen Cong Hoan: Tap 1*, 21-23.

<sup>61</sup> Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 78, 85, and 157.

that “each of us [has] chosen to serve the country in his own way.”<sup>62</sup> Truyen would move to Saigon after the Geneva Conference, and ran against Ngo Dinh Diem for the presidency in the 1960 election. He lived in quiet afterwards, and died in September 1969, two weeks after Ho’s own death.

The intra-Vietnamese ideological conflict was, in short, too large and too difficult to resolve. Certainly it was larger than the Cold War that had enveloped Vietnam at the start of the 1950s. By the mid-decade, the conflict shifted geographically from the rural-urban divide that pitted the revolutionary Viet Minh against others, to a more clearly defined contest between a tightly controlled North and a politically contested South. Echoing the North-South division of Korea and the East-West division of Germany, the halving of Vietnam was a reflection of Cold War realities. Greater, however, it was a result of a long-standing contestation for different kinds of modernity as perceived by different groups of Vietnamese. The division disrupted hopes and aspirations among Vietnamese for a postcolonial nation. At the same time, it reflected clashes and disagreements among themselves: clashes and disagreements that were in place long before Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Conference.

### **From Hanoi to Saigon: transition and continuity during colonization**

Revolution and warfare, however, disrupted but did not stop the momentum for individualism among the urban population, even that of Hanoi during 1947-1954.<sup>63</sup> The

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<sup>62</sup> Georges Boudarel and Nguyen Van Ky, *Hanoi: City of the Rising Dragon* (Latham, MD and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 107-108. According to Pierre Bocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 210, the year Ho offered Truyen the position was 1946.

<sup>63</sup> “Continuity” here refers to linkages of cultural discourse on individualism between late colonialism and South Vietnam. It does *not* refer in any ways to the “continuity thesis” about



retreat of the Viet Minh to the countryside made it possible to publish and perform noncommunist materials in Hanoi without the threat of the Viet Minh police and soldiers. Thanks to the defections of many members among the intelligentsia from the Viet Minh, especially after 1949, the noncommunist cultural scene in the urban north regained some of its illustrious glory. In reputation, Hanoi remained the center of non-socialist artistic productions even during the first half of the 1950s. The émigré Dieu Tan was a young student at the time and recalled seeing a number of theatrical productions of spoken drama at the Opera House. Most of the plays had to do with either social or social-cum-nationalistic themes, and one production saw performances from Vu Hoang Chuong and Dinh Hung, both rising practitioners of New Poetry that had left the Vietminh to return to Hanoi (and, later, left Hanoi for Saigon). There were also live performances by both established and budding poets and musicians, and talks and exhibits of painting and photography by artists who left the Vietminh.<sup>64</sup> At the end of 1951, for instance, the painter Ta Ty, who had left the Vietminh the year before, held an exhibit called *Avant-Garde (Tien Tien)* and sold ninety percent of about fifty paintings.<sup>65</sup> Photography also received a huge boost when the first major exhibit appeared in 1952 at the landmark

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Confucianism and communism, a thesis that was once popular but has been challenged since the 1980s. On this particular thesis, see Nguyen Khac Vien, "Confucianism and Marxism in Vietnam," in Nguyen Khac Vien, eds., *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam* (Berkeley: Indochina Research Center, 1974), 15-74. A variation is found in Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972). Recent works that challenge this thesis include Robert K. Brigham, "Ho Chi Minh, Confucianism, and Marxism" in David Anderson and John Ernst, eds., *The War That Never Ends: New Perspectives on the Vietnam War* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 105-120; William Duiker, "In Search of Ho Chi Minh," in Marilyn Young and Robert Buzzanco, eds., *A Companion to the Vietnam War* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), 17-36; Kim N. B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1967* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), esp. 3-10 and 238-239.

<sup>64</sup> Dieu Tan, *Hoi Ky* [Memoir] (Canada: Lang Van, 2004), 278-303.

<sup>65</sup> Ta Ty, *Nhung Khuon Mat Van Nghe da Di Qua Doi Toi: Hoi Ky* [Portraits of Cultural Makers Who Passed through My Life: A Memoir] (San Jose: Thang Mo, 1990), 119.

Opera House. A review reported that the exhibit featured the works of over twenty photographers. Noting that the frames and papers of the works were mediocre in quality, the review nonetheless gave high praise to the display as a whole. It singled out a number of photographs, especially of natural settings entitled in the likes of “Autumnal Fishing Net” and “Quiet Sunlight”; or of portraiture with names such “Grandmother and Grandchild” and “Smooth Hair,” the latter of a young woman.<sup>66</sup>

For those who could afford tickets, European and American movies were again shown. Truong Ky, later an important organizer of pop music in Republican Saigon, was attending a Christian Brothers-run grade school in Hanoi in the early 1950s and, recalled watching Zorro movies in theater, listening to Vietnamese romantic and patriotic pop songs on records, and read children’s tales from a local publisher.<sup>67</sup> Another teenager, the writer Nguyen Thi Ngoc Dung, remembered going to the theater with her married and older sisters to watch *Gone With The Wind*, Charlie Chaplin’s *Limelight*, and Disney animated movies. She went to see also the popular singing group *Southern Wind*, consisted of native Hanoians that moved to Saigon, when it returned to tour the city.<sup>68</sup> The social life of the city also regained some of its earlier glamour. The future ARVN officer Le Dinh Chau remembered a similar atmosphere upon returning to Hanoi after several years of living in a Viet Minh zone. In his late teens, Chau went to work for his uncle, who just returned from studies in France and opened classes on clothing design.

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<sup>66</sup> Le Ngoc Minh, “So Luoc ve Nhiep Anh Nghe Thuat Viet Nam” [An Outline about the Photographic Arts in Vietnam], the website *VN-USA Photographic Association* (June 15, 2008): <http://www.vnuspa.org/?act=news&id=171&pid=69>; Mac Do, “Xem Trung Bay Anh o Nha Hat Lon” [Viewing Photographs at the Opera House] *Pho Thong* [Popular] 6 (March 1952), 149-152.

<sup>67</sup> Truong Ky, *Mot Thoi Nhac Tre* [A Time of Pop Music] (Montreal, 2002), 9.

<sup>68</sup> Nguyen Thi Ngoc Dung, *Phuong Van No ben Troi Ha Noi* [Flame Tree Flowers Still Blossom in Hanoi], revised edition (Arlington, VA: To Hop Xuat Ban Mien Dong Hoa Ky, 2005), 178-179 and 191.

The first month saw only about a dozen of students, mostly teenage girls, but the classes were filled to capacity afterwards. The uncle-instructor ended the term with a fashion-cum-dancing show. Invited guests included students from the College of Art, members of the literary and publishing scene, and women from the city's wealthy and upper-middle classes. The style of the evening was decisively bourgeois, including Western ballroom dancing, young Vietnamese and French women singing romantic songs in their respective languages, and five young women modeling dresses designed according to the latest Parisian trends.<sup>69</sup>

There was of course a larger reading public than school students. Writers in Hanoi continued to publish fiction and poetry, and new weeklies and monthlies appeared thanks in part to “returnees” from the Vietminh zones. Certainly, warfare and difficult economic conditions imposed many limitations on the creativeness of these non-socialist writers and artists. To make ends meet, for instance, Vu Hoang Chuong and Dinh Hung had to teach mathematics and language, respectively.<sup>70</sup> Another author, the popular fiction writer Nguyen Minh Lang, ran a tailor's shop and literally penned his stories in between customers.<sup>71</sup> These constraints and difficulties were large and frequent, leading to a lower output of creative works during the late 1940s and early 1950s. It did not help that a small but steady number of rising cultural makers left Hanoi for Saigon and other southern cities. One of the best-known examples is the musician Pham Duy, who had

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<sup>69</sup> Le Dinh Chieu, *Chien Tuyen Tu Do Ven Song Hong* [The Free War Zone by the Red River] (Garden Grove, CA: Tu Luc, 2002), 91-96.

<sup>70</sup> Vu Bang, *Muoi Chin Chan Dung Nha Van cung Thoi* [Nineteen Portraits of Contemporary Writers] (Hanoi: Dai Hoc Quoc Gia, 2002), 51. The title of the essay under citation is “Di Sau vao Tam Su Vu Hoang Chuong” [Getting into Vu Hoang Chuong's Confidence] and was originally published in the Saigon journal *Van Hoc* [Literature] 97 (November 15, 1969). A friend of the two poets recalled that even with their jobs, they had to depend on financial help from friends, especially Dinh Hung whose new wife was pregnant; see Ta Ty, *Nhung Khuon Mat Van Nghe da Di Qua Doi Toi*, 118.

<sup>71</sup> Dieu Tan, *Hoi Ky*, 295-296.

joined the Vietminh-led resistance as a non-Party member but returned to Hanoi in mid-1951 with his wife, one-year-old son, and other family members. But after satiating their hunger for the cinema by catching Italian new realist movies like *The Bicycle Thief* in the theater, they were bored in Hanoi. After two weeks back to the city, Pham Duy thought it difficult to make a living there and promptly flew to Saigon, where he had spent some time before the August Revolution as member of a traveling musical troupe. Finding the southern city “seemingly more peaceful and prosperous” than his last visit, Duy landed an advance from a record producer and used it to purchase airfare for members of his immediate family, extended family, and in-laws, including three singers that formed the well-known Thang Long vocal trio.<sup>72</sup>

Like Nhat Linh before them, Pham Duy and his musical family (extended to include in-laws) exemplified the already shifting cultural landscape from the urban north to the urban south prior to the Geneva Conference.<sup>73</sup> Historiography of the Vietnam Conflict has long emphasized rupture: the August Revolution in 1945 that suddenly brought the Vietminh to power; the Geneva Conference Accord in 1954 that unexpectedly divided Vietnam into two and brought nearly a million northerners to the south, the relatively quick build-up of US combat troops in 1965; and the unexpectedly rapid fall of South Vietnam in 1975. It is therefore easy to miss or ignore continuities, especially those of non-military and non-political nature. The northern émigré Vu Bang, for example, was a major presence of the Hanoi literary scene before 1945. Like most

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<sup>72</sup> See Pham Duy, *Hoi Ky: Thoi Cach Mang Khang Chien* [Memoir: The Period of Revolutionary Resistance] (Midway City, CA: Pham Duy Cuong Musical Productions, 1989), 334-337.

<sup>73</sup> It is difficult if not impossible to estimate the number of Hanoi-based intellectuals going south during the First Indochina War. But post-Geneva recollections (such as Pham Duy’s memoirs) indicate that those who that went south were usually in search of employment: an economic factor rather than political reasons during the migration of 1954-1955.

other émigrés, he did not leave for the south until after the Geneva Conference. But as revealed in his recollections published in the late 1960s in Saigon, he began to write for three southern periodicals in the late 1940s.<sup>74</sup> Monetary motives such as the lack of employment in Hanoi commenced the movement of Hanoi-based noncommunist elite to Saigon well before the massive exodus prompted by the decisions of the Geneva Conference.

Nonetheless, few Vietnamese then or later would have disputed that Hanoi remained the cultural center of the country during the second phase of the colonial war. For all the money and innovation and opportunities that Saigon could have offered, Hanoi was still home – literally or symbolically – to too many established and rising cultural makers. In the mind of Vietnamese intellectuals at the time, such status meant that the ancient capital remained the national center for creative energy.<sup>75</sup> At the end of 1949, when the Ministry of Information of the newly established State of Vietnam looked for writers and editors to start a magazine to promote the Bao Dai Solution and noncommunist nationalism, it turned to Hanoi rather than Hue or Saigon. Among its staff were the veteran Vu Bang and on-the-rise painter and illustrator Ta Ty.<sup>76</sup> The elevated

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<sup>74</sup> Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao* [Forty Years of Exaggeration] (Saigon, 1969; reprint, Fort Smith, AR: Song Moi, 1980), 204. Bang wrote that he worked there “during the [State of Vietnam] governments of Tran Van Huu [and] Nguyen Van Tam,” which ran between 1950 and 1953.

<sup>75</sup> An example of these sentiments could be found in Thanh Phuong, “Cam Tuong cua Mot Nguoi Moi Hoi Cu” [Thoughts from a Recent Returnee], *Van Hoa Nguyet San* [The Cultural Review] 1 (May 1952): 53-56. (This Hanoi-based journal appeared under the auspices of the State of Vietnam’s Department of Education and Youths.) Possibly reflecting the desire to cling to the past during a time of political and military uncertainty, the article painted the city in terms of permanency, calling it “still Hanoi of the [antebellum] past; refined, mannered, and ordered Hanoi; Hanoi of millennia of culture.” Alluding to ongoing warfare, it added, “Although it has gone through dangerous and violent days, Hanoi has not been overwhelmed by the waves of warfare taking away the essence of the country” (53).

<sup>76</sup> Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao*, 186-187. This magazine was called *Viet Nam* and later became *Courrier du Viet Nam*. The language was French, and it was probably aimed at an audience of Westerners and educated Vietnamese.

status of Hanoi looked to be uncontested still. Abruptly, however, it changed soon after the Geneva Conference. The Workers Party moved quickly to control the intelligentsia in Hanoi and the rest of the urban north, and Vu Bang migrated south in 1954 along with many other elite urbanites. (Ta Ty had left for the south the year before after enlisting in the military in 1953.) As shown in the last chapter, the same influx that contributed to the construction of an anticommunist critique enabled Saigon to pick up and continue the noncommunist promotion of individualism with verve and variety.

One reason for this blossoming was the lack of a single dominating intellectual cluster like the Self-Strength Literary Group had been in 1930s. Between the absence of his peers and the decline of his own creative abilities, Nhat Linh's post-Geneva fiction and non-fiction were nowhere close to the power and influence of his earlier writings. Nonetheless, his presence in Saigon until death was symbolic of the continuity.<sup>77</sup> More substantially, the writings of his Literary Group were re-published widely for the general public and incorporated generously into the educational curriculum of the South Vietnamese state. Antebellum writings from the Self-Strength's former opponents Nguyen Cong Hoan and Vu Trong Phung were also republished and held in esteem.<sup>78</sup> But it was the Self-Strength that exerted the greatest impact on the generation of non- and

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<sup>77</sup> On Nhat Linh during the Diem period, see Nhat Thinh, *Chan Dung Nhat Linh*, 163-219; and Vo Phien, *Truyen Mien Nam, Tap Mot* [Southern Fiction, Volume One] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1992), 9-47.

<sup>78</sup> In addition to republishing their books, urban South Vietnam honored antebellum writers in other forms. On December 25, 1970, for example, the National Institute of Music and Drama held a commemoration of Vu Trong Phung that included the attendance of the head of the RVN's Department of Culture; a performance of a play adapted from Phung's novel *Giong To* [The Storm]; and a talk from Tam Lang, author of the renowned antebellum reportage *Toi Keo Xe* [I Pull the Rickshaw] and an old friend of Phung. In his talk, Tam Lang noted that North Vietnam saw translations of some of Phung's writings into Russian and Czech and urged the South Vietnamese government to further the reputation of Phung and other antebellum authors by translating their works into other languages. See "Tuong Niem Van Hao Vu Trong Phung va Trinh Dien Kich Pham Nghi Hach" [Commemoration of the Writer Vu Trong Phung and Performance of the Play 'Deputy Authoritarian'], *Y Thuc* [Awareness] 7-8 (January 1971): 185-186.

anticommunist urban writers and other cultural makers that either came of age or reached maturity in urban South Vietnam.

The impact could be glimpsed from a number of postwar memoirs that noted the positive and formative influence that the Self-Strength had during their youths in the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s. One example is the musician Le Thuong, who, prior to his laicization and activities during the South Vietnamese period, had been a Catholic religious (by the name of Brother Bénigne) and teacher at the school Thomas d’Aquin in the northern city of Nam Dinh. According to one of his former students from the 1940s, Le Thuong’s room “always had novels from the Self-Strength Literary Group.”<sup>79</sup> Another example is the previously noted painter and sculptor Ta Ty, who considered important painters during his coming-of-age to be To Ngoc Van and Nguyen Gia Tri; talented poets to be Han Mac Tu, Dinh Hung, Vu Hoang Chuong, Nguyen Binh, and Tham Tam; and significant prose writers to be Khai Hung, Nhat Linh, and Thach Lam. Most of them were based in Hanoi, and the last three were leading members of the Self-Strength.<sup>80</sup> A third example is Nguyen Thuy Long, who wrote some of the best-known social fiction in Republican Saigon. Originally from the north, Long was ten years old in 1950 and spent the summer of that year in Hanoi doing “all kinds of kids’ entertainment [such as] playing coin games, collecting programs at the cinema, going to the movies, and reading fiction.” He caught movies like Charlie Chaplin’s *The Kid* and read “all sorts of fiction”: from martial arts stories to serialized fiction in newspapers to “novels from

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<sup>79</sup> Pham Ngoc Luy, *Hoi Ky mot Doi Ngoai: Tap I* [Memoir of a Life: Volume 1] [Yashio, Japan: Tan Van, 1993], 79.

<sup>80</sup> Ta Ty, *Nhung Khuon Mat Van Nghe da Di Qua Doi Toi*, 17.

the Self-Strength Literary Group that I greatly admired.”<sup>81</sup> Still, another popular novelist was Madame Tung Long, who grew up in Danang and the town Tam Quan of central Vietnam during the 1920s and 1930s. A writer of fiction about family and romantic relationships – and the first major Vietnamese newspaper advice columnist – she recalled devouring in her girlhood serialized Chinese and Chinese-inspired fiction; French novels such as Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, Hector Malot’s *Sans Famille*, and Alphonse Daudet’s *La Petit Chose*; and Vietnamese modern fiction and poetry by Nguyen Cong Hoan, Le Van Truong, Tan Da, and the group which published the journal *Saturday’s Novel*. But most important was the works of Nhat Linh and Khai Hung’s coterie. It was, in Madame Tung Long’s words, “my long-time dream to write like the Self-Strength Literary Group, to whom I was a loyal reader at the time.”<sup>82</sup> The respect and reverence for the group could be spotted even in contemporary governmental documents. Giving a historical sketch of the modern Vietnamese press, for example, a booklet about Saigon’s new press law in the early 1970s named three antebellum influential journals that educated and entertained. Two of them, *Mores (Phong Hoa)* and *Today (Ngay Nay)*, were produced by the Self-Strength.<sup>83</sup> It was these sorts of little compliments that sometimes best illustrated the lasting impact of the Self-Strength on the wartime urban culture.

The continuity was also one of atmosphere, in that Saigon provided the kind of public space and activities familiar to former residents of late colonial Hanoi. Having

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<sup>81</sup> Nguyen Thuy Long, *Thuo Mo Lam Van Si* [The Time I Dreamed of Becoming a Prose Writer] (Irvine, CA: Tuoi Xanh, 2000), 7-8.

<sup>82</sup> Tung Long, *Hoi Ky Ba Tung Long* [The Memoir of Madame Tung Long] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tre, 2003), 27-28, 30, and 77-78. E

<sup>83</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Phach, “The New Press Law of Vietnam,” Washington, DC: The Embassy of Vietnam, 1970), 2.



interviewed a number of Hanoi's intellectuals during the post-Renovation period, the anthropologist Susan Bayly has written about late colonial Hanoi as followed:

People old enough to recall their parents' accounts of Hanoi life in the 1930s and early 1940s have told me that before the anti-French war, city-dwellers [of modest, lower-middle-class means]... could afford newspapers and illustrated reviews, as well as occasional cinema attendance. They saw plays and frequented the urban concert halls where patriotic music was performed under bland titles which misled the censors into thinking that the lyrics were those of harmless popular love songs. The more prosperous could even aspire to modest luxuries such as locally printed books, French cigarettes and other Western-style consumer products, and visits with their children to the young people's amusement parks in the city centre with its pony rides and exhibition pavilions: my older friends recall natural history displays with animal skeletons and pictorial tableaux showing the circulation of blood and the classes and *phyla* of the animal kingdom. And everyone mentions the lakeside cafes where as students and young adults, they or their parents debated politics and poetry with their *lycee*-educated friends.<sup>84</sup>

With some modifications, the same description could be said about the atmosphere in Saigon and, to a lesser extent, smaller southern cities from the early 1950s to the end of the Second Indochina War. Patriotic music was heard openly rather than sneakily on radio, television, records and, later, cheaper and easily copied cassette tapes. More frequently played were Western-notated popular songs that exploded in compositions, recordings, and popularity after the anticolonial war. Called "yellow music" after the war to signal its contrast to revolutionary "red music," they were a perfect channel for promoting petit bourgeois values such as the feeling (or deprivation) of romantic love, friendship, and privacy.<sup>85</sup> From an array of private and government publishers, books and periodicals, both locally and nationally printed, were no longer luxurious but widely available and relatively inexpensive. Fueled by increasing

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<sup>84</sup> Bayly, *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age*, 36-37.

<sup>85</sup> Philip Taylor, *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam's South* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2001), 23-55.

consumption of coffee and cigarette and popular music, Saigon saw a boom in cafés. Wartime writings and postwar recollections indicate that cafés were ubiquitous in Saigon, which in turn drew an ever growing number of students, intellectuals, politicians, writers, artists, journalists, businessmen, and even laborers.<sup>86</sup> Most cafés were local establishments run by southern Vietnamese and ethnic Chinese, with the latter typically catering to a working-class clientele.<sup>87</sup> But there were also a few that relocated south from Hanoi after Geneva that, given the suddenness of the migration, expectedly recreated as close as possible a northern atmosphere inside to draw émigré patrons. Movies theaters in Saigon were also greater than Hanoi in number and access. In addition to the Palace (frequented by the French) and the Trung Quoc (or China, frequented by Vietnamese), late colonial Hanoi saw the Pathé, Cinéma Tonkinois, Family, Majestic, and Olympia. In Republican Saigon, moviegoers could choose from thirty theaters, some of which were equipped with stages for live musical and dramatic performances.<sup>88</sup> Larger influx of movies from the US, Western Europe, and Hong Kong

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<sup>86</sup> For examples, two essays written before 1975 are Ngo Dinh Van, “Ca Phe: Mot Thoi Trang” [Cafés: A New Style], *Dat Moi* [New Land] 7 (October 6, 1968): 7; and Nguyen Tien, “Phong Trao Nghe Bang Nhac” [The Trend of Listening to Cassette Music], *Doi* [Life] 115 (December 30, 1971): 21. Among post-1975 recollections are Nguyen Phu Long, “Ca Phe con Nho Giot” [Dripping Coffee], *Nguoi Viet* (March 30, 2011): <http://www.nguoi-viet.com/absolutenm2/templates/?a=128913&z=54>; and Nguyen Manh An Dan, “Saigon, Quan Café va Tuoi Lang Thang” [Saigon, Cafés, and the Wandering Age], *VietInet* (September 9, 2003): <http://www.vietInet.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=19>.

<sup>87</sup> See Nguyen Thuy Long, *Thuo Mo Lam Van Si*, 51-56; and T. Van, “Van Hoa Ca Phe” [The Café Culture], the website *T-Van* (October 22, 2007): <http://t-van.net/wordpress/2007/10/vanhoacaphe/>.

<sup>88</sup> Boudarel and Ky, *Hanoi*, 62. It notes too that about 500 movies were shown in 1937-1938; see also Nguyen Vinh Phuc, et al., *Lich Su Thang Long Ha Noi*, 350. The figure for movie theaters in Saigon comes from Nguyen Ang Ca, “San Khau Cai Luong Da Duoc 41 Tuoi” [Reformed Drama Marks Forty-One Years], *Pho Thong* [Popular] 1 (November 1, 1958): 87. The article mentions that there were only three or four theaters for reformed drama in Saigon at the time, and also estimates that 90% of followers of reformed drama were women and working-class Vietnamese while 75% of movie fans were intellectuals, students, and “new groups of youths today.” As if to underscore the last point, the very next article in the same issue is a recollection of a budding film director about watching Douglas Fairbanks in *The Thief of Baghdad* in 1928, when he was in junior high school. An informal list of movie theaters in Saigon, compiled from memory, is Tran Dang Chi, “Rap Xi-Ne Sai Gon truoc 1975” [Movie Theaters in Saigon

provided relatively inexpensive entertainment for the masses and, for some young people, a dating site acceptable for themselves if not also their parents.<sup>89</sup> In addition, Saigon had more tearooms for live music, dance halls for ballroom dancing, and restaurants that served Chinese, French, and other cuisines.<sup>90</sup>

The urban scenario thus sketched may not seem remarkable until it is placed in the contrasting context of the urban society in wartime northern Vietnam, which was increasingly controlled by the Workers Party and closely watched by its affiliated neighborhood committees and city organizations. In addition, collectivization in the 1950s and American bombing in the 1960s and early 1970s left northern cities with smaller population and bereft of livelihood.<sup>91</sup> Like the rest of North Vietnam, Hanoi and Haiphong saw a massive disruption from the late colonial urban culture while their southern counterparts witnessed a significant continuity to it. Not a repetition or duplication, it should be emphasized, but a continual movement and development of much of the non-socialist tradition established in late colonialism.

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before 1975], [www.trandangchi.blogspot.com](http://www.trandangchi.blogspot.com) (November 14, 2007): <http://www.trandangchi.blogspot.com/2007/11/rap-xi-n-sai-gon-trc-1975>.

<sup>89</sup> Recollections of movie theaters for dating purposes include Tran Dang Chi, “Rap Xi-Ne Sai Gon truoc 1975”; and Ly Qui Chung, *Hoi Ky Khong Ten* [Nameless Memoir] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tre, 2004), 22-23 and 67. Chung was a journalist and an elected member of the Lower House during the Second Republic, and best known as an opposition politician to the Nguyen Van Thieu government.

<sup>90</sup> Even before World War II, Hanoi residents went to restaurants much less than their southern contemporaries, preferring food sold by vendors. See Nguyen Vy, *Tuan Chang Trai Nuoc Viet* [Tuan, Young Man of Vietnam], vol. 2 (Saigon, 1971), 40.

<sup>91</sup> The urban population of North Vietnam was at 997,000 in 1955 (out of 13.5 million) and grew to over 1,500,000 in 1960 and 2,113,000 in 1965. Because of American bombing, however, it went down to 1,840,000 in 1970. As for Hanoi, it had an estimated population of 380,000-400,000 people in 1954 and grew to 643,576 in 1960. With its boundaries redrawn and its area tripled in 1961, the population leaped to 900,427. With American bombing in the second half of the 1960s, many residents went to the countryside and the population was reduced to about 400,000 for 1967-1968. It grew back to 710,000 in 1970 and 1,200,000 in April 1972. The Christmas bombing of 1972, however, prompted new rounds of evacuation and lowered the number to 480,000. Only after the Paris Peace Accords that the city’s population grew without further disruption. See Table 6.1 from Nigel Thrift and Dean Forbes, *The Price of War: Urbanization in Vietnam 1954-1985* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 89.

The post-Geneva influx of northern émigrés, as already discussed in the previous chapter, was one of the most significant linkages in this continuity. But there was also an influx of institutions, exemplified by the relocation of several elite colonial schools from Hanoi to Saigon. Best-known of these was the Chu Van An, which began operation in 1907 as one of nine French-Vietnamese schools.<sup>92</sup> Although the colonial authorities named it Collège du Protectorat, Vietnamese called it Truong Buoï – literally, the Pomelo School (or Pomelo Academy) due to its proximity to the commonly called “pomelo market” in northern Hanoi. As the most famous of the French-Vietnamese schools, the Pomelo counted among its illustrious alumni people as different as Nguyen Cong Hoan, Nghiem Xuan Hong, and Doan Them.<sup>93</sup> It was shut down after the start of the First Indochina War and reopened in early 1948 with the new name Chu Van An, after an educator-mandarin in the Tran Dynasty. The academic year 1948-1949 also saw the establishment of the sister school Truong Vuong, named after the female Vietnamese patriot that rebelled against the Chinese in the first millennium. Two years later, large enrollment at Chu Van An led to the creation of another boys’ school, this time named after the mandarin-poet Nguyen Trai of the Le Dynasty. After Geneva, all three schools moved to Saigon and ran on borrowed facilities for a time before obtaining their own quarters elsewhere in the city.<sup>94</sup>

Another example of intellectual migration to the south is the College of Law in

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<sup>92</sup> French-Vietnamese schools were different from French *lycées* (of which there were three) in a number of ways, including the makeup of faculty. There were both French and Vietnamese teachers at French-Vietnamese schools, but faculty members at *lycées* were almost always French.

<sup>93</sup> Doan Them attended the school during 1931-1935 and Nghiem Xuan Hong for 1934-1938, according to *Truong Buoï* [The Pomelo School] (March 1966): 57 and 62. The journal was considered an “internal periodical” (*noi san*) meant for distribution among students, alumni, and supporters. References to Nguyen Cong Hoan’s years as student at the school are found throughout his memoir *Nho Gi Ghi Nay* [Jotting Down Whatever Remembered] (Hanoi: Thanh Nien, 2005).

<sup>94</sup> See *Gio Moi* [New Wind] 8 (November 1961): 80-88.

Hanoi. Founded by the colonial authorities as an elite training school for administration, the institution changed its name from Ecole Supérieure d'Administration Indochinoise to Ecole Supérieure de Droit in 1933. It changed again to Faculty de Droit in 1938, when it became a branch of the law school at University of Paris. Graduates of the College included prominent Vietnamese such as Truong Tu Anh, founder of the most prominent Great Viet Party; Vu Van Hien, the minister of finance in the Japan-backed government of Tran Trong Kim in 1945; Phan Anh, the minister of youths in the Kim government and, later, of defense in the Ho Chi Minh coalition government; and Vu Van Mau, the minister of foreign affairs in the Diem government.<sup>95</sup> Closed temporarily after the breakout of the First Indochina War, the school was reopened in 1947 and had its first Vietnamese director in 1952. In the early 1950s, a number of its alumni and members began to publish *Popular (Pho Thong)*, a periodical with a tilt towards decolonialization and postcolonial issues on politics, law, history, literature, and the arts. (As suggested by the name, however, the periodical aimed at a wider readership and published many non-law writers.) After the Geneva Conference, the school's faculty south and joined the smaller Saigon branch, which had been opened in 1946 at the University of Saigon, to form the new Saigon College of Law in 1955. Although there were famous *lycées* and other academic institutions in the urban South, the arrivals of the Hanoi institutions such as the College of Law and the former Pomelo Academy provided an instant and massive

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<sup>95</sup> Nguyen Van Cung and Thien Y, "Gioi Thieu Lich Su Dai Cuong ve Cac Truong Luat Viet Nam: Luat Khoa Dai Hoc Duong Saigon" [Introduction to the General History of Law Schools in Vietnam: The Saigon College of Law], the website *Cau Lac Bo Luat Khoa Viet Nam, Vietnamese Law Society, VILAS*: <http://www.luatkhoavietsam.com/jsp/tulieu-luatkhoa-truongluat.jsp>; Doan Thanh Liem, "Hoi Tuong cua Mot Sinh Vien Truong Luat Sai Gon Khoa 1958" [Recollections from a Graduate of the Saigon College of Law, Class of 1958], the website *Ai Huu Luat Khoa*, accessible at [http://www.aihuuluatkhoa.com/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/Hoi\\_tuong\\_cua\\_mot\\_sinh\\_vien\\_truong\\_luat\\_6323014.doc](http://www.aihuuluatkhoa.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/Hoi_tuong_cua_mot_sinh_vien_truong_luat_6323014.doc).

boost to the reputation in Saigon. As noted in a report by an American academic visitor to the city, “most of the older schools and faculties were [originally] founded in Hanoi rather than in Saigon” and “a majority of professors and students” went south after the Geneva Accords. The report noted that the “numbers of students attending universities in the North and the South are comparable, the level of instruction and the quality of the teaching staff and the student body are far superior in the South.”<sup>96</sup>

In addition to teaching and helping to change the curriculum (such as lecturing in Vietnamese instead of French), several émigré members at the merged Law School had been closely involved with *Popular*. In Saigon, they began publishing the influential journal *Country (Que Huong)*, which will be visited in Chapter Six of this dissertation. One of the professors, the aforementioned Vu Van Mau, served as editor at beginning while serving as the state’s minister of foreign affairs. Indeed, publications were another realm where ideological continuity could be spotted. There was, for instance, a number of books that had been written either before or during the First Indochina War but, due to warfare and related difficulties, did not see publication until the 1950s in Saigon. In 1941-1942, for example, the novelist and publisher Vu Bang wrote a series of essays about the novel that was meant for publication in the weekly *Center-North Sunday (Trung Bac Chu Nhat)*. But it was not until 1955, after his migration to the south, that the manuscript was published in book form.<sup>97</sup> A similar case was the scholar Nguyen Duy

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<sup>96</sup> “Some Notes Concerning Higher Education in Vietnam, 06 January 1959,” Folder 36, Box 08, Douglas Pike Collection, Other Manuscript – American Friends of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, 1. The report noted that there were 4,038 students at the University of Saigon, and almost half were in the School of Law. It is likely that a plurality, if not majority, originally came from Hanoi. The document shows that the report came under the auspices of the Committee on International Exchange of Persons, which was under the Washington, D.C.-based Conference Board of Associated Research Councils.

<sup>97</sup> Vu Bang, *Khao Ve Tieu Thuyet* [Discussing the Novel] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1955), 170-171.

Can, a southerner who taught high school, lectured at University of Saigon, and edited the daily *Freedom [Tu Do]* during the divisional period. Can edited three weeklies during the 1930s and published four books on philosophy and classic literature between 1935 and 1940. In the early 1940s he wrote one manuscript about courage of great men and another about how to develop a critical mind, but could not publish them due to political and military upheavals. It was not until the early 1950s that they came out in book form and, judging from the number of reprints, were among the best-known nonfiction titles in South Vietnam.<sup>98</sup> A third example is Nguyen Hien Le, a native northerner who moved south in the mid-1930s because of work. Before the August Revolution, Le penned nearly a dozen of manuscripts on various subjects in history, literature, travels, and self-improvement – plus, in his own words, “almost enough materials for several more books”. The anticolonial war, however, delayed their publications, and several manuscripts were also lost due to theft and warfare-related moving. Most of these manuscripts, including one that the author later rewrote, came out in print between 1951 and 1975.<sup>99</sup>

There is more in the next chapter about Le, Can, and Vu Bang. At this time, it must be noted that the publications of their aforementioned books provided an example of linkage and continuity between two periods disrupted by the First Indochina War. In

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<sup>98</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Cai Dung cua Thanh Nhan* [Courage of Great Men] (Saigon: P. Van Tui, 1951; reprint from Houston: Xuan Thu, 1983); and *Thuat Tu Tuong* [The Art of Thinking] (Saigon: P. Van Tui, 1952; reprint from Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, 1986). The end of the books indicated that they were written in 1942 and 1940, respectively. Also in the preface of *Cai Dung cua Thanh Nhan*, Can wrote apparently in reference to World War II and the Japanese Occupation, “I wrote this book about ten years ago... and did not think it would be published when humankind was living next to a volcano that might explode any given time.” A reprint from Khai Tri also indicates that the book had been printed six times by 1968 while the second was printed five times. Information about Can’s life is from *Nhan Vat Viet Nam* [Who’s Who of Vietnam] (Saigon: Viet Nam Thong Tan Xa, 1973), 118-121.

<sup>99</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap I* [Memoirs: Volume 1] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1989), 241-242; and *Hoi Ki: Tap II* [Memoirs: Volume 2] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1990), 53-54.

the immediate aftermath of the war, intellectuals and artists in the north were constrained and forced to adopt socialist realism in the arts and Marxism in philosophy. On the other hand, their southern counterparts, even with certain limitations, were able to develop and modify the reformist intellectual climate of late colonialism in a number of areas.<sup>100</sup> This continuity would be difficult without the influx of people and institutions from Hanoi to Saigon.

In addition to this influx, urban South Vietnam saw a small but not insignificant number of young intellectuals from all regions that went abroad for studies and returned shortly after the Geneva Conference. One of them was Tran Bich Lan, better known by his penname Nguyen Sa. Born into a Hanoi family whose father worked in commerce, Nguyen Sa was fifteen when the First Indochina War broke out, prompting his family to leave Hanoi for the northern Ha Dong. There the teenager was arrested and imprisoned for a short time. The family returned to Hanoi, and in 1949 he was sent to France for further schooling. After graduating from high school in 1953, Nguyen Sa went to Paris to study philosophy at the Sorbonne, met and married his wife in 1955, and returned to Vietnam in early 1956. It was Saigon rather than Hanoi that they returned, and the new husband made a living teaching philosophy at Chu Van An and, later, several other private high schools as well as the University of Saigon. To the larger public, he quickly established his poetic reputation through the publication of his first volume of poetry,

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<sup>100</sup> According to Xuan Vu, a writer that stayed in the north after Geneva and defected to South Vietnam in the late 1960s, the Hanoi intelligentsia was divided into three groups during the second half of the 1950s: members and supporters of the Humanities and Literary Works (Nhan Van Giai Pham) Group, pro-Party people that opposed the Group, and those that kept silent or at least did not express overt sentiments either way. In the last group, Xuan Vu counted Nguyen Tuan, Nguyen Hong, To Hoai, and Doan Gioi, all among established antebellum writers and whose pre-1945 works continued to be published and read in South Vietnam. See Xuan Vu, *Van Nghe Si Mien Bac nhu Toi Biet* [Writers and Artists in the North that I Knew] (Westminster, CA: Nguoi Viet, 1991), 145.



which included *The Silken Dress from Ha Dong (Ao Lua Ha Dong)*. It quickly became one of the most beloved poems from twentieth-century Vietnam and, like several other poems of his, was turned into a popular song later. The beginning couplet showed clear influences of late colonial New Poetry, with a touch of the poet's experience of living in Paris.

*Nang Saigon, anh di ma chot mat,  
Boi vi em mac ao lua Ha Dong.*

*Walking under Saigon's sun I suddenly feel cool,  
Because you have on a silken dress from Ha Dong.*

There was no advocacy for political or social revolution, but deeply personal and petit bourgeois sentiments that were materialized in a northern silken dress juxtaposed to the heat of the urban south. Similar sentiments are found in other poems such as *My Dear, Is there Anything New in Paris? (Paris Co Gi La Khong Em?)* and *The Age of Thirteen (Tuoi Muoi Ba)*, both were later set to music in Republican Saigon.<sup>101</sup> Besides writing poetry and teaching, Nguyen Sa was busy with publishing. He wrote for the journal *Creativity (Sang Tao)*, founded in 1956 by the émigré novelist Mai Thao who famously claimed in the first issue that the cultural center of Vietnam had shifted from Hanoi to Saigon. Four years later, he started his own journal called *Modern (Hien Dai)*. The journal did not last long, but Nguyen Sa kept writing for various journals, especially on post-World War II French philosophy and literature.<sup>102</sup>

Another northerner that went to South Vietnam after studies in France was Nguyen Van Trung, who obtained a doctorate in philosophy from Louvain University.

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<sup>101</sup> All three poems were set to music by Ngo Thuy Mien, and were first recorded in the album *Tinh Khuc Ngo Thuy Mien* [Ballads by Ngo Thuy Mien] (Saigon, 1974).

<sup>102</sup> Nguyen Sa, *Hoi Ky* [Memoir] (Irvine, CA: Doi, 1998), 5-6 and 44.

Trung returned to Vietnam in 1955 and joined the faculty at the newly established University of Hue. There he founded the periodical *University (Dai Hoc)*. Leaving Hue and moving to Saigon in the early 1960s, Trung eventually taught until 1975 in the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Saigon. During the period of Americanization, Trung co-founded the important journal *Country (Dat Nuoc)*. Through the journal, he joined a growing number of noncommunist left-leaning and independent urban intellectuals to offer alternative voices about the armed conflict and the place of the noncommunist but anti-intervention person in it. Along with southerners that went abroad for studies, northern émigrés like Trung and Nguyen Sa settled in urban South Vietnam and contributed to the intellectual and cultural development of the non-socialist person after independence.

### Conclusion

As noted above, the inaugural issue of *Creativity* saw the following claim from co-founder and editor Mai Thao,

Saigon has stepped into its role. It has accepted its responsibility. After Hanoi left its responsibility. The cultural flame has crossed borders and came here today. The paralysis, the destructiveness, and the breakup [in Hanoi] have shifted youthful currents to Saigon to create another youthful livelihood. The city – the pearl of Asia, the quintessence of the country – has possessed the color of a fertile land on which fresh fauna of the cultural season, where concrete achievements and results are growing and shaping into charts and structures.<sup>103</sup>

The poetic if over-inflated tone of the remark aside, there was a good measure of truth in Mai Thao's observation that Saigon was replacing Hanoi as the cultural capital of

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<sup>103</sup> Mai Thao, "Sai Gon Thu Do Van Hoa Viet Nam" [Saigon: Cultural Capitol of Vietnam], *Sang Tao* [Creativity] 1 (October 1956): 2.

noncommunist thought in Vietnam. It was made possible by the migration of northerners to the urban south, the return of Vietnamese from abroad, and the arrival of new talents from the provinces in the south and center of Vietnam looking for opportunities. U.S. aid helped to finance the Diem's regime and pumped money and materials into an economy that in turn supported noncommunist intellectuals, educators, writers, and artists. Mai Thao's observation was further confirmed by the suppression of intellectuals during the *Humanity-Good Works* Affair in the same year that his journal began publication.

All of this did not mean that noncommunist urbanites were unrestrained in what they could promote. The Diem government kept watch over the cultural scene in Saigon and elsewhere, and viewed many urban intellectuals with distance and even alarm. Amidst the mutual cautiousness, however, there was much commonality between them about promoting a more petit bourgeois ethos among Vietnamese. Unlike the advocacy of anticommunism, however, this promotion more subdued in tone. But it was also richer in content, more varied in kinds, and more consequential in the long run. Due to the deeply politicized nature of anticommunism, anticommunist writers enunciated their political messages loudly, urgently, even crudely. Although their rhetoric was informed by experiences and encounters with the Viet Minh, it was also driven by fear and hatred while its expressions were characterized by warnings and denunciations. In relative contrast, the promotion of the noncommunist and postcolonial person was characterized by encouragement, invitation, and appeal to non-socialist models of modernity. Through print and the audio-visual media, these models were circulated widely in cities and promoted in varying degrees of subtlety or directness. Overwhelming was the exposure

to these materials and their accompanying messages during wartime that the postwar regime, for its many hard-pressed attempts to suppress and wipe out South Vietnamese cultural influences and vestiges, ultimately gave up its own model and gave in to at least some of those non-socialist alternatives.

In many ways, the eventual “return” to a noncommunist model in postwar Vietnam was indicative of the continuity of the development of noncommunist thought about the postcolonial person. This promotion had an energetic if somewhat chaotic start during the late colonial urban culture that was centered in Hanoi. It came to a pause during the dramatic events of the 1940s, but picked up again in the early 1950s. Its center shifted decidedly to Saigon after 1954, and it continued vigorously until 1975. Postwar collectivization and other state-led effort put a complete haul to it for over a decade, but could not desist the views propagated and habituated by southern Vietnamese during the divisional period. As it was, the Communist Party eventually accepted the failure of its collectivist policies and, consequently, began to change course in the mid-1980s, which saw a partial return to this promotion, first in southern Vietnam then in the rest of the country. Illustrative of this history is the popular and influential books under the heading “Learning To Be Human.” It is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR  
THE PROMOTION OF “LEARNING TO BE HUMAN”

This chapter provides an illustration of the advocacy of individualism in urban South Vietnam by examining the South Vietnamese book series *Learning To Be Human* (*Hoc Lam Nguoi*). By all account, the series included some of the best-known and most popular nonfiction published during the divisional period of Vietnam. How popular? According to an advertisement that appeared in the back pages of most copies of the books during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the bookseller Khai Tri, which also ran the largest bookstore in Saigon before 1975, listed no fewer than sixty-four titles and prefaced them with the claim that some 800,000 copies had been sold. (Another list, spread over four inside pages, had eighty-five titles.)<sup>1</sup> If true – and there are no apparent reasons to think the claim was highly if at all exaggerated – then it looked to be a resounding commercial success in a country where each printing typically ran to 1000 or 2000 copies, and where books and periodicals were routinely passed on from one reader to another then to the next.

What was “Learning To Be Human”? As noted in another advertisement-cum-declaration found on the back of many books in the series, *hoc lam nguoi* is a borrowing from the French *culture humaine* – “human culture” or “human cultivation” – that

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<sup>1</sup> The two lists did not correspond with each other in order. Also, the first list showed only titles, but the second had titles, authors, and brief descriptions. Most likely because the shorter list fit into one page, it appeared far more frequently than the longer list. But since the longer list was more complete, it will serve as a reference here.

connoted humanistic learning.<sup>2</sup> A well-composed piece of advertisement, it consisted of seven sentences broken into six paragraphs, and moved from the general to the specific and from fear to hope. “As living has become more and more competitive, quick-paced, and difficult,” stated the opening sentence, “we each look for a guiding light [and] a foundation to support our search for a life that is brighter, better, and more stable.” The second sentence employed the common sales tactic of provoking fear: “Unfortunately, many people cannot weather the storm that inescapably come to all of us [at one time or another] and lose their hopes and energy and let circumstances take over.” The third sentence saw the “if only” hook common in advertisement: “If they knew methods to train themselves and to use their internal riches wisely, no matter how weak or wretched at the start, they could have raised their head gradually and strengthened their lives towards a glowing future.” Next was the heart of the advertisement, the selling point: “All these methods teach us to direct our lives in three aspects: *body* (health), *intellect* (success), *soul* (happiness) – methods towards the training... that we call ‘Learning to be human’.” (Emphasis in the original.) The fifth paragraph, the only with more than one sentence, made the sales pitch for the product: “In these books, we choose works of value, both originals and translations” that carried “no meaningless theories” but “would address in concrete ways the practical issues.” The advertisement ended with an affirmation that the publishers had “no prejudices and no division” discrimination” but sought only to “gather opinions and ideas” from like-minded writers to share with readers.

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<sup>2</sup> Subsequent renderings into English of the phrase as “character training” and “self-improvement” by overseas Vietnamese are narrower in meaning and denote, respectively, ethical and psychological concerns.

The primary aim of the series was to provide guidance in order to improve and fulfill three areas: the body and its fulfillment that is health (*the chat* and *suc khoe*); the intellect and its aim at success (*tri thuc* and *thanh cong*), and the self or soul and its goal of happiness (*tam hon* and *hanh phuc*). The all-encompassing quality of this tripartite view about human life explains the multitude of themes and topics in the series. They went from propositions on work and vocational training to inspiring tales of leaders and innovators, from ways to improve one's will and memory to ways make more money, from marriage and raising children to friendship and social interaction.

Focusing on the series, this chapter seeks to illustrate two significant aspects about South Vietnamese ideology about the person as advocated by noncommunist urban writers. First, it shows intellectual linkages between late colonial Hanoi and post-independent Saigon: linkages that had been generalized in the previous chapter. Second, it illustrates that there was an ideological promotion of a *petit bourgeois* ethos that stressed personal growth and initiative in learning and work, the importance of love and stability for the nuclear family, and development of virtue amidst the growingly capitalistic economy. The narrative of this chapter is chronological. It begins with three writers during late colonialism. It then discusses the transition from Hanoi to Saigon in late 1940s and early 1950s, when the first tracts of the series came out in Saigon. Next, it looks into the publisher of the series and the larger environment that accounted for the quick growth of the series. Finally, it examines some of the contributors to the series, especially the most illustrious name as well as three other important ones.

## Seeds from the 1930s:

### Pham Quynh's translation of *La Vie Sage* and Hoang Dao's *Ten Points for Reflection*

There was a classical tradition about self-cultivation in Vietnamese culture, and like most things in this culture, it derived from external sources. In this case, they are the revered Three Religions (*Tam Giao*) of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism.

Fundamental to this tradition was the concept *tu*, which derived from the Chinese *hsiu* that means to correct, repair, reform, or improve. Confucianists would strive towards *tu than* (self-correction or self-perfection) and *tu tam* (cultivation of the heart-mind);

Daoists towards *tu luyen* (training, as in alchemy and other meditative arts in order to attain wisdom); and Buddhists towards *tu niem* (perfection of one's thought and

imagination).<sup>3</sup> Most familiar to mandarins, educated people, and even the masses was the four-fold precept that originated from the Confucian classic *Great Learning* and placed self-cultivation as part of teleological sequence of action: cultivate the self, regulate the family, govern the state, and pacify the world.<sup>4</sup> Because morality and social harmony were central to the Confucianist view, self-cultivation meant first and foremost the attainment of virtues (instead of, for instance, knowledge) that would maintain or lead to the orderliness of society.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Thien Do, *Vietnamese Supernaturalism: Views from the Southern Region* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 133.

<sup>4</sup> See David G. Marr, "Concepts of 'Individual' and 'Self' in Twentieth-Century Vietnam," *Modern Asian Studies* 34:4 (October 2000), 773. The original sequence included four other concepts that precede the quartet listed above: redefine objects, deepen one's knowledge, establish concepts, and rectify the heart-mind. Similar to the fifth concept, "cultivate the self," they were concerned with the individual person. Over time, however, they were subsumed into "cultivate the self."

<sup>5</sup> On the historical development on this subject, see P. J. Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000). See also Tu Wei-Ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as a Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 51-65.



Vietnamese encounters with the West under colonialism, especially during the period 1920-1945, led to growing exposure to and interest in Western ideas about self-improvement. Increasingly, the urban intelligentsia either translated Western writings on the subject, or wrote about it on the basis of Western sources. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, the mandarin and prolific literateur Pham Quynh published a translation of Paul Carton's *La Vie Sage*: the first major translation of a Western book on modern self-improvement.<sup>6</sup> Carton was a French physician best remembered for having challenged orthodox medicine and promoted naturopathy and vegetarianism. He was also a prolific writer whose publications included a vegetarian cookbook that was translated into English and other major European languages.<sup>7</sup> He published *La Vie Sage* in 1918 that offered commentaries on the classic *Golden Verses of Pythagoras*. The book addressed three stages of life, in which the foundation of the preparatory stage was religious belief. Next would be the training stage, where the person learns to respect one's parents and friends while training one's mind and health. Carton devoted the bulk of the book to this stage, including some pages on the benefits of vegetarianism. Most of them, however, addressed a number of personal virtues, including uprightness, determination, foresight, and modesty. Last was the stage of achievement, when the person would be habituated to self-criticism and meditation for continual clarity of mind.

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<sup>6</sup> Thuong Chi, *Doi Dao Ly* [The Life of Morals, translation of Paul Carton, *La Vie Sage: Commentaires sur les vers d'or des Pythagoriciens*] (Hanoi: Vien Dong An Duong, 1936). Thuong Chi was the literary name of Pham Quynh. He had serialized the translation in his journal *Nam Phong* [Southern Wind] between 1929 and 1932.

<sup>7</sup> See George Weisz, "A Moment of Synthesis: Medical Holism in France between the Wars," in Christopher Lawrence and George Weisz, eds., *Greater Than the Parts: Holism in Biomedicine, 1920-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 71; Arouna P. Ouédraogo, "Food and the Purification of Society: Dr Paul Carton and Vegetarianism in Interwar France," *The Society for the Social History of Medicine* 14: 2 (2001), 223-245.

Pham Quynh personally sought permission from the author for the translation.<sup>8</sup> Part of its appeal could be traced to the translator's skillful and frequent usage of traditional terms and concepts such as the Confucian "gentleman" (*quan tu*) and Taoist "the way" (*dao*) to bridge his potential readers to a more Western mindset like his own. In the preface to the translation, he did not fail to note that Pythagoras lived around the time of Confucius. Another part had to do with the interest about modern self-cultivation. "Our citizens are presently uncertain on how to behave in society," he stated in the same preface, "the old style has been weakened [and] a new way is yet to be determined." For this reason, books like Carton's "should be propagated" because "righteous truth is the same" whether it came from "Eastern or Western antiquity."<sup>9</sup> Pham Quynh's translation showed that there was much about self-cultivation that Vietnamese could learn from the West. In fact, the first publisher of *Learning To Be Human* later honored the translation by reprinting for the series in the early 1950s.

Like much else about Pham Quynh, however, the book was elitist in tone and content. Thanks to its publication in the most famous periodical of the 1920s, it was most likely that many educated Vietnamese read it. As reflected by the infrequency of reprints, however, it probably appealed mostly to older and more philosophically minded Vietnamese. Its historical significance lay in its introduction of a potentially compatible idea to Vietnamese elite rather than producing any strong and immediate impact. After its publication, urban Vietnamese continued to publish and read materials on self-cultivation that were either decisively old-style or moderately sprinkled with Western

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<sup>8</sup> This was noted in the translator's preface, Thuong Chi, *Doi Dao Ly*, 3. Pham Quynh also translated a collection of sayings from Marcus Aurelius and another of the Stoic Epictetus. Unlike *La Vie Sage*, however, they were not modern interpretations but straightforward translations.

<sup>9</sup> Thuong Chi, *Doi Dao Ly*, 2.

ideas. Representing the former was a translation of a Chinese tract called *Valuable Advice on Self-Cultivation*, which sought to reaffirm neo-Confucianist ideals amidst modernity.<sup>10</sup> Published in the early 1930s, the tract included prefaces from author and translator alike, both of who lamented the loss of traditional virtue amidst the fast pace of modernization. More positive of Westernization yet still cautious of its possible excesses was the mandarin Nguyen Quy Toan, who founded an institute for physical education in Hanoi. Under the imprint of another important Hanoi journal, Toan published a tract entitled simply *Self-Cultivation*.<sup>11</sup> Having retained the neo-Confucian concept of “the gentleman,” Quy nonetheless argued for the elevation of logic, science, and physical education in learning and self-cultivation. Although he never stated so explicitly, he aimed his target chiefly at Vietnamese youth rather than the older elite. The text of his book frequently suggested what educated youth should read, learn, imitate, and exercise. It was also divided into three even sections on health, intellect, and virtue (or soul): the tripartite scheme later adapted by *Learning To Be Human*. Finally, Toan’s tone was neither accusatory of the old nor overtly celebratory of the new. It was calm and even-handed, and it recognized the value of the past while suggesting ways that youth could benefit from the ideas in the present.

This advocacy of youth and education by urban Vietnamese intellectuals in Hanoi during the 1930s and 1940s was indeed the direct origin for the future series *Learning To Be Human*. The previous chapter describes the conditions that enabled this advocacy,

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<sup>10</sup> Quan Tru Van, *Tu Than Buu Cham (Sach Day Tu Than)* [Valuable Advice for Self-Cultivation: Teaching Book on Self-Cultivation], translated by Truong Hoa Dan (Saigon: Duc Luu Phuong, 1930).

<sup>11</sup> Nguyen Quy Toan, *Tu Than* [Self-Cultivation] (Hanoi: Trung Bac Tan Van, 1930). Toan’s institute is virtually forgotten today. But it was instrumental in its days for spreading modern sports among Vietnamese: cycling, tennis, and soccer. See “Ngày 28/9/1928: Doan Tuyen Thu Viet Nam Dau Tien Ra Nuoc Ngoai Thi Dau” [September 28, 1928: The First Trip Abroad for Competition of the Vietnamese Soccer Team]: [http://www.tvad.com.vn/vn/newsctl.aspx?arId=24489&grpId=88&cms\\_action=0](http://www.tvad.com.vn/vn/newsctl.aspx?arId=24489&grpId=88&cms_action=0).

and Nguyen Quy Toan certainly made his contribution to it through his book and his institute. But it was another figure that yielded by far the most powerful voice urging for change among Vietnamese youth. Given the extensive influence of the Self-Strength Literary Group, it is not surprising that this figure was one of its members: the essayist Hoang Dao (1907-1948), a younger brother of the group's co-leader Nhat Linh. Like his brothers and others in the group, Hoang Dao wrote some fiction, including a novel. Unlike them, however, his intellectual prowess came best from his reportage and essays. His court reports, first published in the Self-Strength's journal *Today (Ngay Nay)*, were avidly read and became an instant classic upon publication in book form. It was, however, his manifesto *Ten Points for Reflection (Muoi Dieu Tam Niem)* that has been most celebrated and best remembered. The manifesto projected a powerfully underlying ethos oriented towards "oneself" in the context of bringing radical changes to the Vietnamese society. Modeled partly after Japanese school slogans for students, it first appeared in installments in *Today* during 1936.<sup>12</sup> The manifesto proved instantly popular, came out in book form in 1939, and went through numerous reprints afterwards.<sup>13</sup>

Hoang Dao gave a short essay on each of the ten points. In themselves, the ten points are succinct in prose, accounting partly for the success of the entire essay.

1. Follow the new without hesitation.
2. Believe in progress.
3. Live according to an aspiration (*ly tuong*).

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<sup>12</sup> The Japanese source was the Imperial Rescript on Education (1890) that was posted at all Japanese schools and memorized by students. There were also ten points to the Rescript, four of which concerned Confucian relations among family members and friends, and most of the rest on moral virtues. In other words, Hoang Dao borrowed the form from the Rescript for the manifesto, but the content was distinctly his own.

<sup>13</sup> Le Huu Muc, *Hoang Dao, Ly Thuyet Gia cua Tu Luc Van Doan* [Hoang Dao: Theorist of the Self-Strength Literary Group] (Hue: Nhan Thuc, 1957), 13.

4. Perform social work.
5. Build the will and character.
6. Bring women out of the family into society.
7. Train the mind to be scientific (i.e., anti-superstitious).
8. Aim for legacy and not renown.
9. Build a healthy body.
10. Organize and methodize work.

The prose was uncompromising and fierce in tone, explicit in his repudiation of the old, and total in advocacy for the new. Hoang Dao must have prompted a good deal of discomfort among conservative Vietnamese and probably some moderate intellectuals of his generation. Still, so powerful were the succinctness of prose and the swiftness of ideas that his essay continued to be read long after its initial appearance.

Like other members of his literary group, Hoang Dao was invested in politics rather than culture during the 1940s. His death from illness in 1948 was another signal to the waning of Self-Strength from the cultural scene among noncommunist Vietnamese. Similar to the reputation of the group, however, his remained high in South Vietnam. Some of his writings were incorporated into the educational curriculum of the RVN, and *Ten Points for Reflection* in particular was frequently republished and anthologized. Further, a series of literary guides for junior high and high school students devoted an entire volume on his manifesto. Only two other late colonial authors were honored in this way – Nhat Linh and Khai Hung, giving another illustration of the Self-Strength’s influence in South Vietnam – and the remainder of volumes concerned prominent writers from early colonial and pre-colonial eras. Calling Hoang Dao “extreme” and “absolutist” in his basic orientation, the guide nonetheless placed it in the context of the time of writing, when the “Vietnamese society was still full of the old ways and superstitions, keeping our people backward and our country poor.” Instead of faulting Hoang Dao on the extremism to which they might not agree, the authors of the book extolled him for

calling up youth to change both bodies and minds “so they could fulfill their duties to the country.”<sup>14</sup> Elsewhere in the South Vietnamese urban culture, his reputation was encapsulated along lines such as, “Hoang Dao was an enthusiastic writer that called modern youths to reflect on how to live”: blandly phrased praises that nonetheless showed deep respect to his energetic contribution.<sup>15</sup>

For many educated Vietnamese in late-colonial Vietnam and postcolonial South Vietnam, the appeal of Hoang Dao was his call for change. Similar to many contemporary advocates of modernization, he called for revolution. The emphasis, however, was not on the political but on the personal and social, and in that order. “We need to have two revolutions,” he declared in *Ten Points for Reflection*, “One is the revolution within.” (The other revolution was to be “outside the family and in society.”) But before action, he added, “we must think so that our actions belong to those of a progressive mind.”<sup>16</sup> There was vagueness to his declarations: “forceful (if sometimes fuzzy)” is a historian’s verdict on the essay.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, Hoang Dao’s call for rigorous self-shaping before engaging in social and political change helped to set the stage for the specificities in many of the books from the series *Learning to Be Human*.

Perfectly in line with the general outlook of the Self-Strength Literary Group, Hoang Dao identified “progressive mind” with Westernization. “Following the new,” he stated apropos of the first point, “means Westernization.” But it was not unconditional

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<sup>14</sup> Tai Van Ru and Nguyen Ba Luong, *Luat De ve Hoang Dao* [Essay on Hoang Dao: Ten Points for Reflection] (Saigon: Tao Dan, 1961), 24.

<sup>15</sup> Nguyen Dinh Bao, “Hoang Dao, Nha Van cua Ly Tuong [Hoang Dao: Writer of Ideals], *Thoi Nay* [Today] 3 (October 1, 1959), 57.

<sup>16</sup> Hoang Dao, *Muoi Dieu Tam Niem* [Ten Points for Reflection] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1967), 18. See also Le Huu Muc, *Hoang Dao*, 13-14.

<sup>17</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 440.

Westernization, certainly not “dressing to Parisian fashion, dancing correctly, or making one’s nose long or one’s eyes blue.” Rather, it meant “locating the quintessence of Western civilization and applying it to our lives.” Moreover, Westernization did not imply a wholesale abandonment of Vietnamese tradition. As Vietnamese had learned and adapted from the Chinese civilization without losing its “spirit” (*tin h than*) in the past, he assured, they would not lose their “particularity” in adapting to the West.<sup>18</sup> Reinforcing this call for Westernization was the manifesto’s second point: belief in progress. “We must believe in ourselves,” he stated, “and believe in the motives of our soul, [and] in our own progress as well as the progress of humanity.”<sup>19</sup> Reflecting the still-felt influence of Social Darwinism among the Vietnamese intelligentsia, the point also indicated the elevation of the individual in Hoang Dao’s modernizing scheme. Most of the remainder of the manifesto continued this elevation. On the third point, Hoang Dao acknowledged that Vietnamese youths were “confused and knew not what action to take” because they were torn by new learning at school on the one hand and the hold of tradition at home on the other hand. The imperative solution, he proposed, was having an “ideal” to follow. For Hoang Dao, choosing an ideal was “a most important act” in one’s life because, teleologically speaking, one would “achieve happiness” in gearing action towards that ideal.<sup>20</sup> Further, as the eighth point of the manifesto indicated, the motive for one’s ideal should not be externally driven “fame” but consequential “legacy.” To illustrate the difference between fame and legacy, the author praised several Vietnamese

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<sup>18</sup> Hoang Dao, *Muoi Dieu Tam Niem*, 18.

<sup>19</sup> Hoang Dao, *Muoi Dieu Tam Niem*, 25.

<sup>20</sup> Hoang Dao, *Muoi Dieu Tam Niem*, 28-31.

men from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – literary figures as well as a famous mandarin who led expansion effort in the southern frontier – that set themselves apart from other educated men by the virtue of their pioneering works rather than a possession or pursuit of esteemed mandarin position.

*Ten Points for Reflection* also discussed several characteristics necessary for the pursuit of one's ideal. The headings underlay the significance of personal "training": training willpower (fifth), training the mind (seventh), and training a healthy body (eighth). These were among the seeds and slogans for many of the concepts subsequently found in the South Vietnamese series. Even the fourth point, which called for membership in social organizations, exuded the personal rather than the collective. "Large [i.e., multi-generational] family is no longer apt for our time," he wrote, it was instead "a time of the *individual*... [and] of *organizations, organizations in the broad sense*" (emphasis in the original).<sup>21</sup> Two things could be inferred from the statement and the context of the manifesto. First, although Hoang Dao did not explicitly endorse the nuclear family, his elevation of the individual was coupled to his criticism of constraints imposed by the traditional family. Second, he considered modern organizations an effective outlet for the pursuit of one's private ideal. "*Individuals* should unite and form bonds of talent and ability," he declared, "so to reach the world of science." More specifically, "people of the same professions, of the same welfare, should come together to yield power for self-protection [and] to improve their professional skills."<sup>22</sup> Social organizations were meant to support the individual, not the other way around. As reflected in his comment about "dressing to Parisian fashion," Hoang Dao did not

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<sup>21</sup> Hoang Dao, *Muoi Dieu Tam Niem*, 36.

<sup>22</sup> Hoang Dao, *Muoi Dieu Tam Niem*, 37.



approve excessive individualism. As expressed in his reportages and elsewhere, he was also concerned about the Vietnamese nation as a whole. But it was the primacy of the individual and the call for self-purposefulness and betterment that crystallized *Ten Points for Reflection*.

### **Developments in the 1940s: Le Van Sieu and the promotion of “practical work”**

The theoretical framework in Hoang Dao’s manifesto foreshadowed longer expositions on the subject of the individual in the 1940s and 1950s. Apropos of the subject at hand, the most important writer that provided a link between Hoang Dao and the *Learning to Be Human* series was Le Van Sieu (1911-1995). A Hanoi native, Sieu was born into a petit bourgeois family that ran a small business and attended school in the city. Along with his childhood friend Truong Tuu, later a poet and independent Marxist intellectual, he was however expelled for participating in a nationwide commemoration of the patriot Phan Chu Trinh’s death in 1926. Sieu studied on his own and came under the influence of Montesquieu and Rousseau, especially the latter’s pedagogical novel *Emile*. In 1929 he enrolled in the School for Industrial Trades in Haiphong along with Tuu and another friend that later became a general in the South Vietnamese military. The three friends attended the school so to learn a trade in case they went to France for higher education and needed to find work there to support their education. For their trades, Tuu learned bronze-making, Le chose iron-making, and Sieu, taking after the title character of *Emile*, decided on wood modeling. Sieu graduated in 1932 but did not go to France and instead worked as a manager for a French company for a time. After an unsuccessful try at commerce, he took on a series of company jobs in lumber, construction, railroad, and

electricity, and also took a correspondence course on journalism from the *École Universelle par Correspondance* in Paris.<sup>23</sup>

Occupied with non-intellectual works and raising a large family, Sieu came late to writing. During the period of the Popular Front, he had read Marx and Lenin but was most into Trotsky. In the late 1930s, he worked a number of jobs mostly related to water control. Again he took correspondence courses, this time on civil engineering and from another Parisian institution. The courses also led him to a number of books on technical training. By the early 1940s, he joined Truong Tuu's Hanoi-based intellectual group Han Thuyen, named after a thirteenth-century mandarin that popularized the Vietnamese demotic script Nom. Along with the intellectual groups Clear Voice (Thanh Nghi) and New Mind (Tri Tan), both also based in Hanoi, the Han Thuyen was among the most widely read groups of intelligentsia during the first half of the 1940s.<sup>24</sup> Marking a shift from the dominance of fiction and poetry during the 1930s, the three groups published primarily nonfiction and research: Vietnamese history, political philosophy, literary criticism, and literary history. The Clear Voice and the New Mind groups were known chiefly for magazines under the same names. While the Han Thuyen published a short-

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<sup>23</sup> This background to Sieu and the Han Thuyen comes from Nguieu Ngu I, *Song va Viet voi...* [Living and Writing with...] (Saigon: Ngay Xanh, 1966; reprint, Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1988), 96-119. The book is a collection of articles on twelve South Vietnamese writers for the journal *Bach Khoa* [Variety] in the 1960s, and the spelling of the author's name Nguyen as "Nguieu" was deliberate. Among the writers interviewed was Le Van Sieu, who denied here the rumor that the Han Thuyen group was under the sponsorship of the French secret police. After the Geneva Conference, Truong Tuu remained in the north, participated in the literary *Humanities-Beautiful Works* Affair discussed in Chapter Two, and was silenced as a result.

<sup>24</sup> A fourth group was the New People [Tan Dan], which clustered around the publishing company of the same name owned by Vu Dinh Long. Best known as author of the first modern Vietnamese play to be performed on stage, Long started the company in 1925. He also ran at least five popular literary and cultural magazines during 1935-1943. Long's publishing business was so prolific that the Self-Strength mocked him as a "book baron" rather than cultural producer. See Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao* [Forty Years of Lying] (Saigon: Pham Quang Khai, 1969; reprint by Fort Smith, AR: Song Moi, 1980), 129. In comparison to the other groups, the New People did not have a distinctive orientation. It was not so much a movement as a collection of writers with ties to Long's company and periodicals.

lived journal called *New Literature (Van Moi)*, it was known far more for the books under its name.<sup>25</sup> Shortly before the start of the First Indochina War, it also formed a well-run distributing company called Oriental (*Phuong Dong*) that took over distribution for several other publishers. Le Van Sieu was in charge of organizing and running the distributor.<sup>26</sup> It was also different from the other groups in basic orientation. The New Mind focused on historical writing, often romanticized the past, and was more traditional and distrustful of the masses. The Clear Voice was more moderate and favored Westernization in the tradition of the Self-Strength.<sup>27</sup> It also promoted the kind of nationalism advocated by the “National Revolution” ideology of Vichy France, and some articles addressed the subject of education for Vietnamese youth.<sup>28</sup>

The Han Thuyen was generally more deterministic in its analysis of history and literature. But because its members were independent Marxists rather than Marxist-Leninists, they earned the wrath of the Viet Minh’s leadership. In early 1945, for instance, future Politburo member Truong Chinh called the Clear Voice “nationalist bourgeois”; the New Mind “feudalist”; and the Han Thuyen, paradoxically, “Trotskyist” as well as “petit bourgeois.”<sup>29</sup> Three years later, Truong Chinh, now formally in charge of cultural matters within the Viet Minh organization, was more lenient about the Clear

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the group Clear Voice and its journal, see the following memoir by its editor: Vu Dinh Hoe, *Hoi Ky Thanh Nghi* [Memoir of the Clear Voice] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Nguen Ngu I, *Song va Viet voi*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> Thuy Khue, “Con Duong Tu Tuong cua Truong Tuu va Nhom Han Thuyen” [The Intellectual Road of Truong Tuu and the Han Thuyen Group] (2008): <http://thuykhue.free.fr/st/t/TruongTuu2.html>.

<sup>28</sup> On the National Revolution and Vietnamese youth organizations, see Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Truong Chinh, “May Nguyen Tac Lon cua Cuoc Van Dong Van Hoa Moi Viet Nam Luc Nay” [Some Major Principles for the Current Cultural Movement in Vietnam], reprinted in Truong Chinh, *Ve Van Hoa Nghe Thuat* [On Culture and the Arts] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 2006), 72. The article first appeared in the Viet Minh periodical *Tien Phong* [Pioneer] 2 (January 12, 1945).

Voice, perhaps because its editor was serving as Minister of Education in Ho Chi Minh's coalition government while some other former members were supporters of the Viet Minh. But he continued to fault the Han Thuyen for advocating "European bourgeois idealism" (*duy tam tu san*) and for emphasizing determinism over revolutionary volunteerism, the latter of which was more in line with orthodox Marxism.<sup>30</sup> The advocacy of artistic independence by the Han Thuyen still did not sit well with the Viet Minh leaders. The major members of the group joined the Viet Minh-led resistance movement after war broke out, but at least one of them, Nguyen Duc Quynh, protested against the pressure towards socialist realism and other artistic controlling measures.<sup>31</sup> After the war, Truong Tuu remained in the north, wrote for the independent journals *Good Works* and *Humanities*, and was silenced like other members of this intellectual dissident movement.

Antagonism to advocacy of intellectual independence was probably one reason for Truong Chinh's puzzling classification of the Han Thuyen as Trotskyist and petit bourgeois. Another reason might have been the fact that there were two somewhat different categories among the publications of the group. The best-known works, especially from Truong Tuu, usually took a deterministic outlook. But lesser known works showed what could pass for calls of self-help and personal improvement. The

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<sup>30</sup> Truong Chinh, "Chu Nghia Mac va Van Hoa Viet Nam" [Marxism and Vietnamese Culture], in Truong Chinh, *Ve Van Hoa Nghe Thuat*, 110-111. The speech was first delivered at the Viet Minh's second National Cultural Congress in July 1948. See also Ninh, *A World Transformed*, 34-36; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 364.

<sup>31</sup> See Mai Thao, "Ngoi Sao Han Thuyen" [The Han Thuyen Star], originally published in the April 1976 issue of *Van* [Literature]: <http://damau.org/archives/15192>. Mai Thao, a non-member of the Han Thuyen, also joined the resistance but later left. He recalled that most members of the Han Thuyen, "with the exception of Le Van Sieu," were at an important cultural conference in north-central Vietnam in 1948. As pressure to employ socialist realism surfaced during the conference, Nguyen Duc Quynh spoke out humorously against possible censorship. Like Mai Thao, Quynh left the resistance before the war was over and moved to South Vietnam after the Geneva Conference.

physician Pham Ngoc Khue, for example, wrote three tracts on the improvement of physical health and mental judgment: *A New Health*, *The Source of Vitality*, and *To Reform Vitality*.<sup>32</sup> In the first tract, Khue attacked Vietnamese tendency to attribute weakness to externalities such as climate and heredity. He called it “passive health” and promoted instead “active health.” Khue thought that there should be reform at the state level to support active health among the citizenry, but until then individuals should create their “own little path” to their own active health.<sup>33</sup> The second tract further attacked materialism, idealism, and spiritualism as hindrances to vitality, and urged Vietnamese to be more attuned to “naturalism.” Khue was particularly savage to idealism, which he meant romanticism, and considered it a negative force that sapped and weakened potential vitality among Vietnamese youth.<sup>34</sup> In *Renewing Vitality*, he moved from theoretical observations and arguments to offer practical lessons on eating, exercise, and mental training. According to a review of the tract, Khue explained that Western “capitalists and proletarians... are more and more distant from natural living,” hence accounting for the draw of naturalism. The Vietnamese case was different: “simple living is still the case for most people, but there has grown a class that worked diligently to gain private property,” which was the bourgeois class. The growth of this class was

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<sup>32</sup> The Vietnamese titles for these books are, respectively, *Mot Sac Khoe Moi*, *Nguon Sinh Luc*, and *Cai Tao Sinh Luc*. I was unable to find any of their copies and have gathered their content from reviews instead.

<sup>33</sup> Dieu Anh, “Doc Sach *Mot Sac Khoe Moi* va *Nguon Sinh Luc*” [Reading *A New Health* and *The Source of Vitality*], *Thanh Nghi* [Clear Voice] 6 (November 1941): 12.

<sup>34</sup> Dieu Anh, “Doc Sach *Mot Sac Khoe Moi*,” 13 and 15.

among the reasons that the reviewer recommended Khue's book to Vietnamese.<sup>35</sup> This seemed to be the case with other books of Khue.<sup>36</sup>

Like Khue's publications, Le Van Sieu's belonged to the category of self-improvement rather than deterministic history and philosophy. He wrote four books for the Han Thuyen group: two "introductory" tracts about, respectively, Henry Ford and Taylorism, and two guidebooks for Vietnamese youth.<sup>37</sup> His interest in Ford, Taylorism, and the industrial workplace were dated to his days at the School for Industrial Trades and grew during the first years of his professional career. His correspondence courses and independent reading since the Popular Front must have also contributed to his desire to publish. In some ways, however, Sieu's professional interest was secondary to his concern for Vietnamese youths. In his own words, he recalled his dismay at "the bad habit of studying word-for-word among our youths" as well as their lack of attention to "professional practice."<sup>38</sup> This concern led him to write three "compasses" to promote

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<sup>35</sup> L.H.V., "Doc Sach Moi" [Reading New Books], *Thanh Nghi* [Clear Voice] 47 (October 16, 1943): 29. It described the author and the book as followed: "M. Pham Nhu Khue is an enthusiast of 'naturalism' as promoted by several European and American physicians. In several earlier books he focused on describing its theory... Now [in this book] he shifts to practice: how to breathe, to eat, to exercise the body and the mind, etc."

<sup>36</sup> "Dr. Pham-Ngoc-Khue's books on popular medicine were well received," wrote two historians of Vietnamese history, "as were Le Van Sieu's on industrial technology." See Maurice M. Durand and Nguyen Tran Huan, "The Twentieth Century," in *An Introduction to Vietnamese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), reprinted in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, vol. 102 (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 2001), 355.

<sup>37</sup> According to Nguyen Vy, a friend of both Sieu and Truong Tuu, he "never saw Sieu write anything," not even "talking about literature," from the time they met to Vy's imprisonment in 1941. At a Saigon bookstore in the mid-1950s, Vy was therefore very surprised to come across a book by Sieu on Vietnamese literature during the Ly Dynasty, thinking initially that it must have been from another Le Van Sieu. Unaware that Sieu's first book came out shortly after his arrest and imprisonment, Vy wrote, "Le Van Sieu of antebellum Hanoi has become a writer in postwar Saigon." See Nguyen Vy, *Van Thi Si Tien Chien*, 185 and 297-298.

<sup>38</sup> Nguen Ngu I, *Song va Viet voi*, 97-99.

practical work (as opposed to the more theoretical kind). Han Thuyen published two of these books: *Youth and Vocational Practice* and *Ethics for Vocational Practice*.<sup>39</sup>

Similar to Hoang Dao, Sieu advocated Westernization and was fond of using the dichotomy of “old vs. new” in the advocacy. In the preface of *Youth and Vocational Practice*, the most comprehensive and important of three books on the subject, he wrote, “Perhaps today we Vietnamese... are still unsure of what from the old ethics to keep and what to let go in order to live compatibly in the new society.”<sup>40</sup> Aimed at promoting specialization, Sieu devoted nearly half of the book to itemize the problems of the older views on work and career. They included “mistakes” in categorizing professions, especially the biases of Confucianism that placed merchants below scholars, farmers, and workers. Mistaken too were public opinion and “family education” that placed formal degrees over expertise and professionalism. The same was true of Vietnamese cultural prejudices that tended to shine on prestige than achievement, fame than influence. In their place – and subverting the traditional bias against commerce and related careers – Sieu promoted *thuc nghiep*, which means “practical work” or “practical vocation.” Sieu distinguished it from two other major categories of work: “legal vocation” (*dao nghiep*), which had to do with the creation and enforcement of the law; and “literary vocation” (*van nghiep*), which actually did not mean specifically writing but encompassed all works related to formal teaching as well as “educating the spirit.” In contrast, practical vocation was about “professions related to research, invention, exchange of goods so to assist people in areas of eating, living, clothing, traveling, entertaining, healing”: in short,

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<sup>39</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep* [Youths and Vocational Practice] (Hanoi: Han Thuyen, 1941); *Luan Ly Thuc Nghiep* [Ethics for Vocational Practice] (Hanoi: Han Thuyen, 1942). The third book was *Mot Nen Hoc Thuc Nghiep* [A Vocational Education] (Hanoi: The Gioi, 1948).

<sup>40</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep*, 7.

careers “related to the material.”<sup>41</sup> Vietnamese, he argued, needed to become better at practical vocation – and fast. It was important because it would “reveal the life spirit” and “concretize the progress” of a nation. To illustrate how much Vietnamese had to catch up with the West, Sieu went on to disapprovingly itemize some of the common “backward” daily practices in eating and other areas quoted above.<sup>42</sup>

Success in practical vocation meant more than mere work, however, and Sieu promoted a four-folded development in body, emotion, mind (or spirit), and only then career. Taking a page from Hoang Dao’s manifesto, he made a list of eleven “musts” to answer the question, “What to do to become a person of vocational practice?” Some of the necessary qualities were “being healthy in body, mind, and emotion,” “being observant,” “being adaptable to changing circumstances,” “knowing how to apply one’s own skills,” and “knowing how to apply the skills of other people.”<sup>43</sup> Another list of six qualities also appeared earlier in the book: having an independent spirit in studies, being practical in research, possessing a critical mind in judgment, aiming for certainty after careful thinking, having the courage to express right and wrong as well as the responsibility for one’s communication.<sup>44</sup> Lists like these came to be a common feature in *Learning To Be Human* and other promotional publications. More important, they illustrated the promotion of a petit bourgeois ethos much similar to individual-oriented how-to ethics in the West.

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<sup>41</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep*, 87. Beside these three categories, Sieu made note of careers “that need specialization” but were “immoral,” such as theft, prostitution, and running casinos or opium dens. He placed them under the category of “illegal vocation.”

<sup>42</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep*, 89-91.

<sup>43</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep*, 128-133.

<sup>44</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep*, 46-47.



Another feature in the promotional literature was the invocation of Western and Eastern historical figures to bolster the point writers wanted to make. As noted above, Hoang Dao referred to several famous Vietnamese in his manifesto. Sieu did the same in the following passage of his book, albeit to non-Vietnamese figures:

We thought that people succeeded because of their pursuit of fame, profit, or both. We were wrong. Fame and profit are mere baits for the mediocre.

If only for fame, Pasteur would not have researched further and came up with his theory on bacteriology. [After all] his hitherto invention of anti-rabi medication already made him famous throughout the world.

Confucius spent years traveling to different countries to persuade people of his philosophy, not to seek reputation and admiration accorded to him today. It was the same with Jesus Christ, the same with the Buddha.<sup>45</sup>

Pasteur, Confucius, Jesus, and the Buddha: two safely revered historical figures each from East and West. More often, however, Sieu evoked more Western than Eastern names, and the Eastern names (as in this case) tend to be more distant in time than their Western counterparts. He largely ignored the differences among the great men and women and, instead, chose to concentrate on the common qualities that made possible their achievements. Behind the account was an assumption that virtues and values were universal: cross-temporal, cross-cultural, and transnational in a time of high nationalism. The implication was that universalism would enable Vietnamese and other Easterners could catch up to the West.

Similar to Sieu, South Vietnamese writers of *Learning to Be Human* later targeted youths and young adults as their subject and audience. As Sieu did in his tracts, they employed in theirs the same strategy of blending old and new and of East and West. In both cases, however, the stronger emphasis was unmistakably on the “newer” West than

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<sup>45</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Thanh Nien va Thuc Nghiep*, 48-49.

the “older” East. In this way, they and Sieu modified the tone of Hoang Dao’s advocacy of total Westernization and made the idea of modernization more palatable to a proudly nationalistic audience.<sup>46</sup> They also sharpened Hoang Dao’s theoretical suggestiveness and oriented it towards more specific guidelines. In Sieu’s case, it came under the heading of “vocational practice”; in their case, it was under the category called *humaine culture*. Although far less known than the Self-Strength writer, Sieu served an important role that provided an intellectual transition from Hoang Dao to the South Vietnamese writers of *Learning To Be Human*.

### **Transition to Saigon during decolonization: Pham Van Tuoi**

After the outbreak of the First Indochina War, Sieu left Hanoi and joined the anticolonial resistance. He was arrested by French forces and eventually returned to Hanoi, where he engaged in another series of industrial jobs. He moved to Saigon in 1949 for a job with a traveling company before working for a metallic-chemical company. It was in 1952 that he returned to the urban publishing world of the south, managing the weekly *New [Moi]* for the publisher Pham Van Tuoi. At the end of 1953, he became editor for another journal, *Oriental [Phuong Dong]*, remembered for its advocacy of political neutralism in Vietnam. After the Geneva Conference, Sieu contributed for a number of periodicals, and participated with Tuoi in running a short-lived journal called *Capability [Dac Luc]*. Like many titles of books and periodicals at

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<sup>46</sup> It should be recalled, however, that the examples given by in Hoang Dao’s manifesto were Vietnamese rather than Westerners.

the time, the name of the journal was telling of the promotional mindset among many publishers and writers at the time.

Sieu's move from Hanoi to Saigon occurred in the same year that the French-backed and noncommunist State of Vietnam was created. In some ways, his migration in 1949 was symbolic of a geographical shift of the cultural center for noncommunist Vietnamese. It is true that the most significant movement of noncommunist cultural figures from Hanoi to the urban south did not occur until 1954-1955. But the piecemeal and non-dramatic start of this shift was not without important consequences. It was prompted by the departure of many Hanoi artists and intellectuals from Hanoi to join the anticolonial resistance, then by new opportunities for work and advancement in Saigon. In other words, the push factor of 1954-1955 was strong, but the pull factor in earlier years should not be underestimated. As early as 1945, for instance, the poet and publisher Nguyen Vy left Hanoi after over a decade of living there and went to Saigon to run the first of a string of newspapers and cultural magazines. As noted in Chapter One, the musician Pham Duy left the Viet Minh to go back to Hanoi only to move permanently to Saigon in 1951 to enter the most productive stage of his long career. In the same year, the family of Hoang Hai Thuy, an eighteen-year-old and budding writer, moved to Saigon from Ha Dong, a town barely outside of Hanoi.<sup>47</sup> The next year, Thuy won a prize for the best short story by a Saigon daily. He was also hired to work as a reporter for the same paper, thanks to the introduction of a cousin-in-law who had joined the Viet Minh at the start of the anticolonial war but left later. The job marked the beginning of a career in writing and translating fiction in addition to works for newspapers, magazines,

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<sup>47</sup> Ha Dong became a district of Hanoi in the 2000s.

and, after American direct intervention, the Saigon office of USAID. In the following year, Thuy applied for work at the newly established radio station of the National Vietnamese Army. He did not get a job there – he was employed at the propaganda unit instead – but at the station met Thanh Nam, a slightly older émigré that left Hanoi also in 1953.<sup>48</sup> A self-taught writer raised in the northern city of Nam Dinh, Thanh Nam first wrote books of children’s fiction in Hanoi, switched to writing for newspapers and magazines, and eventually moved to Saigon to work for a popular weekly. He later helped to run two cultural journals in Saigon during the 1960s and also worked for the RVN’s Center of Psychological Warfare.<sup>49</sup> Another that left Hanoi in 1953 was the painter Ta Ty, who entered training for the officer corps of the State of Vietnam military and later also worked in psychological warfare for the RVN. The military thus offered an unexpected route to the shift from Hanoi to Saigon.

In Sieu’s case, he left Hanoi for a job in management but came to edit Pham Van Tuoi’s weekly. In spite of his subsequent influence on the cultural scene, not a lot is known about Tuoi. The only publication that bore his real name as author first appeared in the early 1940s. It was a book about weight lifting and exercise: a popular subject in urban Vietnam exemplified by Pham Nhu Khue’s *Reforming Vitality* and prompted in part by the spread of the Boy Scouts and other noncommunist youth associations encouraged by the ideology and policies of Vichy’s National Revolution. Tuoi subsequently republished the book as the first volume for *Learning To Be Human*.<sup>50</sup> The

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<sup>48</sup> Hoang Hai Thuy, *Viet o Rung Phong* [Writing from the Virginian Woods] (Falls Church, VA: Tieng Que Huong, 2004), 351-352; Hoang Hai Thuy, “Lang Bao Sai Gon” [Journalism in Saigon], October 29, 2010: <http://hoanghaithuy.wordpress.com/2010/10/29/lang-bao-sai-gon/>.

<sup>49</sup> Le Bao Hoang, *Tac Gia Viet Nam* [Vietnamese Authors] (Miami: SongVan, 2005), 583.

<sup>50</sup> Pham Van Tuoi, *Bap Thit Truoc Da* [Foremost Are Muscles] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1951). The introduction also said that it was completed in 1938 and first published in 1942. The preface was also

introduction indicated that it was written in the Deep South town of Bac Lieu, and the text made a reference to taking the train from Saigon to Hanoi: thus suggestive that Tuoi's origin was southern.<sup>51</sup> But he also wrote under the penname Pham Cao Tung and, as discussed later in this chapter, contributed a significant number of publications to the series *Learning To Be Human* as well as another called *Entrepreneurship*.<sup>52</sup> From the dedication of a tract for *Entrepreneurship*, we learn that his wife's first name is Hoi and she was his first collaborator in business.<sup>53</sup> From the dedication of a tract for *Learning To Be Human*, it is known that he had at least an oldest brother who was "my second mother that had helped me become human."<sup>54</sup> Other pieces of information come from memoirs and recollections. The painter Ta Ty knew Tuoi through Le Van Sieu and was hired by Tuoi to draw illustrations for several book covers. He confirmed the publisher's southern origin when recalling that Tuoi to have been "smart" and "measured" in conversation "unlike most southerners" who tended to speak off the cuff. Ta Ty also found Tuoi to have treated contributors "fairly and sensitively."<sup>55</sup> From one of Tuoi's

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dated 1938 and was penned by a physician, probably meant to impart professional authority to the tract. In Duyen Anh, *Ngay Xua Con Be* [When We Were Young] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1970), the author recalls reading Tuoi's book when he was a high school student in Hanoi in the 1940s.

<sup>51</sup> Pham Van Tuoi, *Bap Thit Truoc Da*, 61.

<sup>52</sup> This information came from an interview of Hoang Xuan Viet that was conducted by a Vietnamese American journalist. Tuong Thang, Interview with Hoang Xuan Viet (January 24, 2006): <http://www.vietnamexodus.org/vne/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=170>. The interview was conducted on December 27, 2005 during Viet's visit to the U.S. in which he considered applying for permanent residence. (He later decided to return to Vietnam.) It was posted on the date above at the website [www.vietnamexodus.org](http://www.vietnamexodus.org). As by November 2010, the website had been hijacked and the interview is no longer available on the replacement website, [www.vietnamexodus.info](http://www.vietnamexodus.info). An audio recording of the interview, however, is in this author's possession.

<sup>53</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Nghe Ban Hang: Nhung Bi Quyet de Ban Hang va Ban Manh* [The Business of Sales: Formulae on Selling and Selling Well] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1953).

<sup>54</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Muon Nen Nguoi: Phuong Phap Lap Than cua Cac Ban Tre* [Wanting to Become Human: Ways for Youths to Establish Themselves] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1952).

<sup>55</sup> Ta Ty, *Nhung Khuon Mat Van Nghe da Di Qua Doi Toi: Hoi Ky* [Past Cultural Figures Through My Life: A Memoir] (San Jose: Thang Mo, 1990), 203.

writers, it was revealed that he once wrote a humorous article in the column “Social Gossip” of the newspaper *Dong Nai* (the name of a river outside of Saigon) in the early 1960s and under the pen name “Mr. Driver” (Tu Xe).<sup>56</sup> From two other writers, it was known that he had worked in the tailoring business before turning to publishing in either 1949 or 1950, and left the business to go back to tailoring in the early 1960s.<sup>57</sup>

Tuoi published the weekly *New* (whose copies are unfortunately non-extant in libraries and archives) from an office housed in a former bookstore in Saigon that also became a meeting place for many writers and booklovers.<sup>58</sup> Over the course of the 1950s he brought out no fewer than seven series: *Entrepreneurship*, *Exceptional Lives*, *Thought*, *Classic Literature*, *Popular Literature*, *Learning and Understanding*, and *Learning to Be Human*. Except for the last one, however, they were short-lived and most had only a handful of titles before discontinuity.<sup>59</sup> In fact, *Learning To Be Human* was Tuoi’s only series to have lasted into the 1960s. The first volumes appeared in the early 1950s, not long after the establishment of the State of Vietnam but far from the outcome of the First Indochina War. One notable feature of Tuoi’s books was the relative absence of grammatical and spelling errors, which plagued many Vietnamese-language publications at the time. (It was not uncommon to find a list of “corrected spellings” attached to the end of a book published in Vietnam at the time.) According to a

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<sup>56</sup> See Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao*, 223.

<sup>57</sup> Tuong Thang, Interview with Hoang Xuan Viet; Nguyen Hien Le, “Tren 10 Nam Cam But va Xuat Ban” [Over Ten Years of Writing and Publishing], *Bach Khoa* [Variety] 243 (February 1, 1967), 8. This is the second half of a two-part article; the entire article was republished in Nguyen Hien Le, *Muoi Cau Chuyen Van Chuong* [Ten Literary Stories] (Saigon: Tri Dang, 1975; reprint, Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1986), 35-51.

<sup>58</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Muoi Cau Chuyen Van Chuong*, 43.

<sup>59</sup> The Vietnamese titles were, respectively, *Doanh Nghiep*, *Cac Cuoc Doi Ngoai Hang*, *Tu Tuong*, *Sach Van Hoa Co Dien*, *Sach Van Chuong Binh Dan*, *Hoc va Hieu*, and *Hoc Lam Nguoi*.

contributor to the series, this relative absence could be attributed to Tuoi and his friend Le Tho Xuan, who ran a printing house and later a private school in Saigon. Both Tuoi and Xuan were sticklers for grammar and spelling and, by implication, careful proofreaders. In particular, Xuan often helped writers correct their manuscripts. Tuoi had ambitious plans, and even considered publishing another series of books based on the popular series *Que sais-je? (What Do I Know?)* published by the Presses Universitaires de France since 1941. The plans, however, did not come to fruition.<sup>60</sup> After he left publishing and returned to tailoring, the publishing and distributing company Khai Tri (literally, “Pioneer of the Mind”), owner of the bookstore by the same name in Saigon, took over distribution of the series. Khai Tri was also responsible for publishing the majority of volumes in the series while most of the rest came from the small publishing house of Nguyen Hien Le, one of the major contributors to the series.

The popularity of *Learning To Be Human* reflected the wider context of interest in publications about similar themes and topics. One example is the series *Learning Citizens (Nguoi Dan Hoc Tap)*, whose title was telling of post-independence concerns among members of the noncommunist Vietnamese intelligentsia.<sup>61</sup> *Learning Citizen* was

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<sup>60</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II* [Memoir: Volume 2] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1990), 87 and 90; Le, “Tren 10 Nam Cam But va Xuat Ban,” 10. Xuan’s care for spelling was confirmed in Nguyen Duy Can, “Cam Tuong cua Toi ve Quyen Sai Gon Nam Xua cua Vuong Hong Sen” [My Thoughts on the book *Saigon in the Old Days* by Vuong Hong Sen], in Vuong Hong Sen, *Sai Gon Nam Xua* [Saigon in the Old Days], 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1969), 298.

<sup>61</sup> Similar to the advertisement for *Learning To Be Human*, there was a page-long advertisement found on the first pages of the tracts in *The Learning Citizens*. Reflecting the name of the series, the advertisement stated that the publisher brought out these books because “Vietnamese today need to put a lot of effort into learning for the sake of making anew a strong and competitive Vietnamese nation among nations”; and that “CITIZENS must understand the duties and rights of a CITIZEN in an independent nation and of a PERSON in the world” (emphases in the original). The immediate goal was to make available “popular and basic books” on “politics, economics, social studies, cultural studies, the arts, entertainment, the professions,” so that Vietnamese could “improve on health, mind, and virtue according to a new humanism that is wholesome and sensible to the good life.” In other words, even though *The Learning Citizens* shared many of similar thematic concerns as *Learning To Be Human*, it was more explicit about citizenship. But as a whole, the series was not as popular as *Learning To Be Human* and

a product of World (The Gioi), an already well-known publishing house owned by Nguyen Van Hoi that relocated from Hanoi to Saigon after the Geneva Conference. Another difference was the degree of output. Although it began several years after *Learning To Be Human*, the series brought out at least fifty tracts between 1956 and 1957, surpassing the output of Tuoi's series for a time. Like its publisher, however, it went out of business by the end of the decade while *Learning To Be Human* continued to publish new titles well into the early 1970s. But there were also connections between the series. Hoi, for instance, joined Pham Van Tuoi and others to run a distributing house for their products.<sup>62</sup> There were at least a couple of writers that contributed to both series. One was Truc Chi, who wrote several highly readable tracts on citizenship and economics for *Learning Citizens*, one tract on citizenship for *Learning To Be Human*, and another on money management for Tuoi's series *Entrepreneurship*.<sup>63</sup> The second contributor was Vu Bang, a northern émigré writer and journalist whose reputation was already well established by the time he came to the south. Before moving to Saigon, Bang met Pham Van Tuoi during the latter's visit to Hanoi. At Tuoi's invitation, he contributed many articles for the magazine *New*, including a series of articles later collected into his famous book about northern cuisine. The articles also led two American officials to track him down. They had recently opened an office of USIS in Hanoi and wanted to hire him to work on new projects. For a time, Vu Bang wrote and

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stopped publishing by the late 1950s. (Nonetheless, some of the individual tracts, especially those on marriage by Vu Bang, were republished in the 1960s.)

<sup>62</sup> Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao*, 205.

<sup>63</sup> There were at least three other twentieth-century Vietnamese that wrote by the name of Truc Chi, including Hoang Van Hoan, a member of the Politburo and defector to China in 1979. They were from the north or center. Most likely, however, this Truc Chi was a southerner. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, or before his formal involvement with The Gioi and P. Van Tuoi, he had published several introduction-like tracts on economics, capitalism, and sociology. All came out of the Saigon presses, suggesting that he was living in Saigon, or had close connections to the intellectual circles there, or both.



translated materials for USIS, including a number of articles for the U.S.-funded Vietnamese-language journals *Young (Tre)* and *Free World (The Gioi Tu Do)*.<sup>64</sup> After his migration to Saigon, Bang was further impressed by Tuoi's publishing and distributing arrangement and signed up to make a contribution to *Learning To Be Human*. In this case, the book was a translation of *La Vie Simple*, the classic treatise by the French clergyman Charles Wagner that had been enormously popular on both sides of the Atlantic at the turn of the century. Stronger was Bang's association to *Learning Citizens*, for which he wrote at least eleven tracts, mostly about marriage and family life, under either his name or one of three pennames.<sup>65</sup> Even after *Learning Citizens* ceased operation as a series, some of these tracts were reprinted during the 1960s due to the popularity of subjects and, it should be added, the accessible style of Vu Bang.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao*, 177-182.

<sup>65</sup> Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao*, 204-205. See also Trieu Xuan, "Nha Van Vu Bang, Nguoi Lu Hanh Co Don" [The Writer Vu Bang: A Lonely Traveler], in Trieu Xuan, ed., *Vu Bang Toan Tap: I* [The Complete Vu Bang: Volume 1] (Hanoi: Van Nghe, 2006), 15. The pennames were Hoang Thi Tram (a female name), Vu Tuong Khanh, and Le Tam. In the 1960s, Vu Bang once again worked for Nguyen Van Hoi, in this case, Hoi's new weekly called, unsurprisingly, *World* (267).

<sup>66</sup> It should be added that Vu Bang remained in Saigon after 1975 and died in 1984 in poverty. In the 1990s a communist military officer claimed that the writer had been in contact with him after 1954. He and two other officers urged the government to "recognize" his ties to the revolution, which the Department of Defense did in 2000. See Trieu Xuan, "Nha Van Vu Bang," 12-15. See also Van Gia, "Vu Bang, Nguoi Nghe Si Tau Khuc Nhac Hon Non Nuoc" [Vu Bang: The Artist Playing Music of National Spirit], in Nguyen Dang Diep et al., *Chan Dung Cac Nha Van Viet Nam Hien Dai: Tap Mot* [Portraits of Modern Vietnamese Writers: Volume One] (Hanoi: Giao Duc, 2005), 238-253. According to Van Gia, his ties went back further. Like many intellectuals, noncommunist and communist alike, Vu Bang left Hanoi when war broke out in late 1946. But he returned in 1948, allegedly upon order from the Viet Minh. In 1952, he "officially became a member within the espionage network directed by the leader Tran Van Hoi." Then in October 1954, he "received secret order to move promptly to Saigon with the same leader to continue espionage" (240). The sources above are vague on details and without citations, and it remains unclear what might have constituted Vu Bang's ties to the DRV before and after 1954. It is also unclear why the officers waited so long after his death to write the government. Certainly, it was possible that Vu Bang had ties to the Viet Minh: many intellectuals did. It was possible too that he agreed to engage in espionage work. But it is completely unclear what he was supposed to gather and pass on to the DRV. As far as I know, he did not publicize any possible ties after 1975. Or anyone vouched for his ties while he was still alive. His main social outlet, as spotted in memoirs of others, seemed to be with former noncommunist South Vietnamese writers. Without further evidence, therefore, I think it is best to consider the efforts of the officers as a way to make Vu Bang's life in South Vietnam more palatable to the official view regarding noncommunist writers in the RVN. Once the person was officially approved, his writings could be legally

Le Van Sieu contributed two tracts on the history of Vietnamese literature to *Learning Citizens*. Although he did not publish anything for *Learning To Be Human*, he contributed two titles on “Vietnamese civilization” to Tuoi’s series *Thought*. In 1957, Sieu published his own books under the name “Country” (Dat Nuoc) and had ambitious plans that included seven nonfiction series aimed at the general audience: *National Essences, National Studies, Popular Medicine, Children, Women, Students and Youths, and Learning to Be a Moral Human*.<sup>67</sup> The plans did not materialize, but Sieu managed to publish several tracts. They included a pair of treatises meant for the last of the series just named, and they reiterated his earlier concern about Vietnamese youth and recommendations for them. In the first treatise, *What Is the Purpose of Learning?*, Sieu offered three criticisms and warnings about education. Its purpose, he argued, should not be for social prestige, that its method should not be repetition, and that its orientation should not be one of “gang behavior” (i.e., totalitarianism) like Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Stalinist Russia. He recommended instead that Vietnamese emphasize an orientation towards specialization and seek social influence as the ultimate outcome.<sup>68</sup> As for the second tract, *Changing the Ways to Work*, Sieu addressed it specifically to “merchants and industrialists.” He quoted and reconfirmed the points made in *Youths and Vocational Practice*, and provided an overview of the contemporary economic situation. Starting with an overview of recent development, Sieu acknowledged disruption of economic development by warfare only to stress the need to change Vietnamese points of

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republished, which was indeed the case. To be sure, Vu Bang’s writings were apolitical, and were not problematic for republication as the postwar regime relaxed its cultural policies since the late 1980s.

<sup>67</sup> The last series was called *Hoc De Nen Nguoi*, and I translate it as *Learning to Become a Moral Person* because the words *nen nguoi* suggest an ethical expectation about a person.

<sup>68</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Hoc De Lam Gi?* [What Is the Purpose of Learning?] (Saigon: Dat Nuoc, 1957).

view about commerce on the one hand and ways to improve business on the other hand. Sieu also elaborated on a number of principles towards commercial and industrial success. Some of them had to do with self-development, such as developing the virtues of patience and trust. Some had to do with skills, such as financial control, human management, and customer service.<sup>69</sup>

Except for these tracts, Le Van Sieu shifted his attention from vocational training to Vietnamese history and literature. He worked for at least two government periodicals: the political journal *National Revolution* [*Cach Mang Quoc Gia*] then the cultural magazine *Bright Light of the South* [*Sang Doi Mien Nam*].<sup>70</sup> At the important week-long National Cultural Congress held in early 1957 and organized by the RVN's Minister of Information, he was among two dozens speakers that addressed a variety of subjects regarding noncommunist Vietnamese culture: law, sciences, the arts, education, and culture. Sieu spoke on "Vietnamese literature" and gave a short historical account of pre-modern as well as modern literature that saw transnational influences. He considered the RVN as an opportunity to continue the transnational character of Vietnamese literature and proposed eight goals, including translating Vietnamese classic literature and classic works from other nations into the vernacular, organizing a more unified Vietnamese grammar, and popularizing literature among the masses.<sup>71</sup> After the publication of his two books on learning and work in the same year, Sieu concentrated on literary history and no

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<sup>69</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Sua Doi Le Loi Lam Viec (Thuong Gia va Ky Nghe Gia)* [Changing the Ways of Work (for Merchants and Industrialists)] (Saigon: Dat Nuoc, 1957). Sieu commented that the earlier books were "out of date" and, therefore, were not reprinted (10).

<sup>70</sup> Ta Ty, *Nhung Khuon Mat Van Nghe da Di Qua Doi Toi*, 207.

<sup>71</sup> Le Van Sieu, "Van Hoc Viet Nam" [Vietnamese Literature], *Dai Hoi Van Hoa Toan Quoc 1957* [The National Cultural Congress, 1957] (Saigon, 1957), 90-112. Also recorded is the question-and-answer session that followed the address.

longer wrote on *Learning To Be Human* themes. In his place were a number of younger writers, including a quartet closely affiliated to Pham Van Tuoi's series.

### **Continuity from Hanoi: The early prominence of Nguyen Hien Le**

By far, the most famous writer of *Learning To Be Human* and similar books was Nguyen Hien Le. One reason for the reputation was the sheer quantity of his publications overall. With over one hundred books published before 1975, he was certainly one of the most productive writers on either side of the seventeenth parallel in divided Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> Le's reputation since the end of the Vietnam War has remained strong, and overseas Vietnamese republished many of his works during the late 1970s and 1980s, and local and national presses in Vietnam did the same in 1990s and 2000s.<sup>73</sup> At least two books of appreciation have been published about him.<sup>74</sup> Thanks to his writings about his life and work, which included an informative memoir, much more is known about him than any other writer of *Learning To Be Human*.<sup>75</sup> In addition, his

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<sup>72</sup> Le's publications are listed in the appendix in Nguyen Hien Le, *Doi Viet Van cua Toi* [My Writing Life] (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1986), 261-274. This book carries excerpts from his memoir that are related specifically to writing. The appendix, however, appears in this book and not the memoir. It shows that Le had 109 titles published between 1951 and 1975, plus articles and essays for periodicals.

<sup>73</sup> For example, the four-volume *Tuyen Tap Nguyen Hien Le* [The Selected Nguyen Hien Le], (Hanoi: Van Hoa, 2006). It is arranged under four categories: philosophy (or, more accurately, history of philosophy), history, language, and literature (or more accurately, literary history and criticism).

<sup>74</sup> The first is Chau Hai Ky, *Nguyen Hien Le: Cuoc Doi va Tac Pham* [Nguyen Hien Le: Life and Works] (Hanoi: Van Hoa, 1993), who was able to do limited interview of Le in 1973. The manuscript of Ky's book was completed in the mid-1970s and would have been published but for the demise of the RVN in 1975. Similar to most noncommunist authors affiliated to the RVN, publication was not possible until after 1987 – hence the late date of publication – and Ky added a section on Le's life after 1975. The second book is the collection of essays by various authors, evenly divided between people that knew him and those who did not. Except for one, they were a lot younger than Le, and their appreciations focus on his works, including *Learning To Be Human* and related books. See Le Anh Dung et al., *Nguyen Hien Le: Con Nguoi va Tac Pham* [Nguyen Hien Le: Person and Works] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tre, 2003).

<sup>75</sup> The memoir was published in first in the U.S. then in Vietnam. The first version consists of three volumes on, respectively, the period up to the outbreak of the First Indochina War, the period of

tracts for *Learning To Be Human* were connected in a number of ways to his other publications. For these reasons, it is illuminating to describe his life and intellectual developments in details.

Born in 1912 in the north, Le attended the prestigious Collège du Protectorat (the Pomelo) and then the College of Public Work in Hanoi and graduated from the latter in 1934. He had wanted to go to Laos for work, but his widowed mother objected to it and he went south instead for a position in the colonial Department of Hydraulics. The first two years in the job led him to travel extensively throughout the Mekong delta. He also met a southern young woman in the town Long Xuyen and proposed marriage to her. She turned him down, however, and he subsequently married another woman met in the area. His wife was a daughter of Trinh Dinh Huyen, who had graduated from the College of Public Works about twenty years before Le. Huyen was also an older brother of the Saigon attorney Trinh Dinh Thao, who later headed the Department of Justice under the Tran Trong Kim government in 1945, became an oppositional figure to Diem after 1954, and was a prominent figure in the NLF after the Tet Offensive in 1968.<sup>76</sup>

Le and his wife had a son and later moved to Saigon for an office job.<sup>77</sup> Prior to 1945, he learned Chinese, Han (the old Chinese-based Vietnamese script), and English on

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1947-1975, and the post-1975 period: Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki* [Memoir], 3 vols. (Westminster, CA: 1989-1990). The second version was published in one volume and several sections, especially Le's criticism of the post-1975 government, were censored and left out: Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ky Nguyen Hien Le* [The Memoir of Nguyen Hien Le] (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Nghe, 1993). Citations of the memoir come from the three-volume version.

<sup>76</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap I*, 195-196; Trinh Dinh Thao and Trinh Dinh Khai, *Décolonisation du Viêt Nam: un avocat témoigne* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 15.

<sup>77</sup> He remained in love with the first woman and, years later, sought his wife's permission to "marry" her as his second wife. The ceremony was performed at home. While the marriage was not legal, the practice was still accepted by many Vietnamese at the time and the state almost never intervened. In their arrangement, Le and his first wife remained living in Saigon while the second wife continued to live in Long Xuyen, where he lived for small parts of the year. In 1972, his first wife went to France to visit their only child and his family. The second wife came to Saigon to look after him until the return of the

his own. He read widely on a variety of subjects, including, in his own words, “all the books from the Self-Strength Literary Group [and] the Han Thuyen group.”<sup>78</sup> Besides translating several books from French and Chinese, he wrote several manuscripts on literature, philosophy, education, and travel. In 1944, he went back to Hanoi to take the examination for a higher rank in engineering but did not succeed: a rare occasion of failure in his life. He returned to Saigon only to Long Xuyen when the First Indochina War broke out.<sup>79</sup>

Le had planned a short stay in Long Xuyen but ended up living there until 1953. To make ends meet, he began to learn about Eastern medicine but soon was asked by Nguyen Ngoc Tho, the mayor of Long Xuyen and later the vice president of Ngo Dinh Diem, to teach his son and nephew. Several other government officials asked for his service, and for the next several years Le taught math, languages, and writing at home and then, at Tho’s request, at the new public school in town. His reading became more selective but still wide-ranging: education, languages, Chinese literature, biographies, “organization” studies, and *culture humaine*. Le’s interest in organization studies led him to sign up for correspondence courses from two organizations in France.<sup>80</sup> The first was the Paris-based Ecole d’Organisation Scientifique du Travail (EOST), which was started by the Comité National de l’Organisation Française that, in turn, had been influenced by

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first wife. Due to the needs of the son’s family and the events of 1975, however, the first wife lived in France for the rest of her life. As a result, Le and his second wife were under the same roof from 1972 until his death in 1984. See Chau Hai Ky, *Nguyen Hien Le*, 111-115; and Quach Tan, *Hoi Ky Quach Tan* [The Memoir of Quach Tan] (Hanoi: Hoi Nha Van, 2003), 442.

<sup>78</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap I*, 226.

<sup>79</sup> See Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap I*; and Nguen Ngu I, *Song va Viet voi*, 308-335, originally published in the journal *Bach Khoa* in 1965.

<sup>80</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 17-18 and 28-31.

the Taylorist scientific management movement in the U.S.<sup>81</sup> The second was the French branch of the famous London-based Pelman Institute, best known for its programs in “memory training” and “mental training.” The founder of the Institute was also under American influence – in this case, the popularity of correspondence courses on writing in America – and later ran the London Correspondence School, whose specialty was writing.<sup>82</sup>

Le’s interest in correspondence courses reflected the ambitions of many urban educated Vietnamese to further their knowledge and success during late colonialism and decolonization through distant-learning education. As previously noted, Le Van Sieu took correspondence courses in journalism and civil engineering at two different times and from two different Parisian correspondence schools. Similar to Sieu, the older brother of the leader of the Clear Voice took courses from Paris in order to prepare for a national examination in civil engineering.<sup>83</sup> So did an acquaintance of the writer Truc Chi from the National School in Hue, albeit in business and language. A native of central

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<sup>81</sup> Ludovic Cailluet, “Selective Adaptation of American Management Models: The Long-term Relationships of Pechiney with the United States,” in Mattias Kipping and Ove Bjarnar, eds., *The Americanisation of European Business: The Marshall Plan and the Transfer of U.S. Management Models* (Routledge: London and New York, 1998), 194.

<sup>82</sup> The origin of the Pelman Institute at the turn of the century is traced the popularization of a series of booklets on “memory training” by the Englishman William Joseph Ennever, who was connected to the American Christopher Louis Pelman (who nonetheless lived in Britain). See “The Pelman School of Memory, The Pelman Institute and Pelmansism,” at <http://www.ennever.com/histories/history386p.php>; and John Karp, *The Man with Half a Million Followers: The Life of W. J. Ennever* (2007): <http://www.ennever.com/histories/history386jk.php>. On American influence upon Ennever, see Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talent: The Democratization of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 23-24. For a brief history on the origin and growth of correspondence study courses in the U.S., see Gary A. Berg, *Why Distance Learning?: Higher Education Administrative Practices* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 7-12.

<sup>83</sup> Vu Dinh Hoe, *Hoi Ky Thanh Nghi*, 553-554. Hoe stated that the French authorities discriminated against non-French citizens and few slots were given to them after the examination. His brother did very well in the technical section but not as well in the linguistic section. It resulted in his failing to pass the examination: a “wicked common tactic against Vietnamese natives,” according to Hoe. This might have been the situation for Nguyen Hien Le’s failure as well.

Vietnam, this acquaintance completed only the ninth grade due to sickness and the death of his father. To help his mother, he discontinued schooling and worked at the family business that supplied rice, salt, and woods to central provinces. He also signed up for courses at the *École Universelle* and, by Truc Chi's account, considerably enlarged the business.<sup>84</sup> A number of budding musicians also took correspondence courses in music theory and composition during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>85</sup> An example is the musician Le Trong Nguyen, who taught himself before he could afford music school. Nguyen self-taught on the basis of two sources: music texts borrowed from a Catholic establishment, and a correspondence course in composition from the *École Universelle*, the same institution where Sieu signed up for courses in journalism. Upon the completion of the course, Nguyen was accepted into the mainstream Paris-based organization *Société des Auteurs, Compositeurs et Éditeurs de Musique (SEACEM)*.<sup>86</sup> In Le's case, it is not clear what kinds of courses he took from EOOST, but his memoir stated that he took courses from the Pelman Institute in "d'éducation et de librairie" and "technique littéraire." Along with his wide reading, these correspondence courses helped to launch the first major stage of his publishing career.

The period in Long Xuyen was simultaneously busy in work and productive in writing for Le. He met and befriended several people of similar interests in the area, including Ngo Trong Hieu, the father of two of Le's students. A southern Catholic

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<sup>84</sup> Truc Chi, "May Hong" [Pink Clouds], *Go va Da: Tuy But* [Wood and Stone: Essays] (Gardena, CA: Van Moi, 2002), 146-148.

<sup>85</sup> Jason Gibbs, "Nhac Tien Chien: The Origin of Vietnamese Popular Music," *Things Asia* (July 1, 1998): <http://www.thingsasian.com/stories-photos/1211>. See also Note 10.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas D. Le, "Le Trong Nguyen (1926-2004): Nang Chieu" [Le Trong Nguyen and the Song *Afternoon Light*], in *Vietnamese Song Lyrics* (July 15, 2007): <http://thehuuvandan.org/songlyrics.html>; Truc Chi, "Noi Chuyen voi Nhac Si Le Trong Nguyen" [Conversation with the Musician Le Trong Nguyen], *Go va Da*, 279-280.



whose penname was Paulus Hieu, he was closely involved in South Vietnamese politics: chief of the Bureau of Finance in Long Xuyen under the State of Vietnam; director of the Treasury, Special Envoy to Cambodia, and Minister of Civic Action in Ngo Dinh Diem's government; and an elected representative in the Lower House of the RVN's Second Republic.<sup>87</sup> Le showed Hieu a manuscript about organizing work, which had been based on Le's homework for correspondence courses as well as other books purchased by mail from France. Hieu was impressed by the manuscript and proposed that he invest money to print the book, send copies to bookstores in Saigon and Hanoi for distribution, and split any profit with the author. Called *Scientific Management for Work*, the book saw two thousand copies printed at the end of 1949, sold out in two years, and broke even on Hieu's investment. Although there was not monetary profit, the first-time author gained notice from a number of important people in Saigon, including Pham Van Tuoi. Through Tuoi, Le later met Le Van Sieu and Nguyen Duy Can, the latter a future contributor to *Learning To Be Human*. The new connections also led to the publication of several articles by him for the periodical on language and the organization of work: two of his strongest interests at the time. Le also received a letter from Thien Giang, a southerner, former Trotskyist, and member of the anticolonial movement for the greater part of the First Indochina War. Thien Giang could not find work in the government sector after the Geneva Conference due to his involvement with the Viet Minh. He taught private schools in Saigon instead, and wrote on education, sometimes with his wife, the writer

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<sup>87</sup> "Ngo Trong Hieu," *Who's Who in Vietnam* (Saigon: Vietnam Press, 1974), 292; Nguyen Hien Le, *Doi Viet Van cua Toi*, 62.

Van Trang.<sup>88</sup> This began a friendship between the two men, resulting in collaboration on a popular and well-received four-volume book about world history.<sup>89</sup>

*Scientific Management for Work* was updated and reprinted at least twice by the mid-1960s.<sup>90</sup> Similar to Le Van Sieu, its author opened with a call for Western-style modernization accompanied by a face-saving comparison to the Eastern tradition. “On religion, philosophy, literature, and the arts,” Le wrote in the original preface to the book,

there are not many differences between the East and the West. They have brilliant and novel [creations] and we have our own depth and charm. But on science, we are behind them thousands of steps... Not only the masses, but even the majority of our intellectuals are habituated to having ill-founded judgment. They believe whatever is said without [careful] judgment. They work without method and program... This habit of lacking judgment, this lack of the scientific spirit, is a hazard that binds us to a slave-like status, that [prevents us from] catching up with them and [from] contributing to the cultural development of humanity.<sup>91</sup>

Armed with nearly forty French-language sources listed in the bibliography, Le repeated this claim in the opening chapter. There were two kinds of organization: that according to experience – “the East knew only this kind,” he wrote in a characteristically swift generalization, “and Westerners until the eighteenth century” – and that according to

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<sup>88</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 30-33 and 81; Nguyen Hien Le, *Doi Viet Van cua Toi*, 273. During the 1960s, Thien Giang and his wife participated in a literary group that was a front for the NLF, and left Saigon with the NLF after the Tet Offensive. I wish to thank Prof. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (Harvard University), who is a niece of Van Trang, for this piece of information about her and Thien Giang.

<sup>89</sup> Several years before the Tet Offensive, Thien Giang asked Le if he would like to join the NLF. Le said no and they began to grow more distant with each other. See Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 149.

<sup>90</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 35. Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Cong Viec theo Khoa Hoc* [Scientific Management for Work] updated ed. (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1958; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa - Thong Tin, 2003). The 1958 edition was updated from the original 1949 edition self published by Hieu and Le, and there was a new preface in addition to the original one. (This was explained at the start of the 2003 reprint.) Oddly, it was not among the titles listed by Le himself in the appendix of *Doi Viet Van cua Toi*, possibly because Le did not have a copy in his library when compiling this bibliography and forgot about it. There have been a vast number of reprints and editions of Le’s books, and I try here to list the original edition as much as possible. I have depended on a variety of sources for this, but most helpful is the information in Chau Hai Ky, *Nguyen Hien Le*, 121-145.

<sup>91</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Cong Viec theo Khoa Hoc*, 6.

science.<sup>92</sup> The opening section made note of the trail-blazing theoretical contributions from Descartes, Claude Bernard, and John Stuart Mill, and the next two and longer sections were devoted to modern management theories about the workplace from Henri Fayol and Frederick Taylor. The final section was a synthesis on the subject of “appropriate conditions for work.”

Le’s enthusiasm for scientific management was somewhat misplaced because the application of the doctrine in industrial countries peaked during the 1920s but was replaced by Fordism in the 1940s. The last section of his book, however, indicated that his concern had to do with Vietnamese rather than Westerners, and his interest in the subject revealed a fundamental preoccupation with national development. One area was specialization. “Our country,” he intoned, “does not yet have courses” for workers whereas in “civilized countries factories hold classes in the evening to further technical training for their workers.”<sup>93</sup> On general education, he thought that unlike the more practical Anglo-American educational system, the French system “leaned on theory above all.” As a result, Vietnamese “academic programs educate [our students] broadly but not deeply”: that is, lacking practice and strong specialization. It was a complaint similar to Le Van Sieu’s lament about the lack of vocational practice.<sup>94</sup> Another area in need of improvement was leadership, an important component to theories of scientific management. Although Vietnamese industrial conditions remained poor, Le urged owners and managers of factories and offices to consider often the conditions of workers and the work place, and seek to improve them. He even linked profit and nationalism,

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<sup>92</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Cong Viec theo Khoa Hoc*, 17-18.

<sup>93</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Cong Viec theo Khoa Hoc*, 231.

<sup>94</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Cong Viec theo Khoa Hoc*, 236.

suggesting that such improvement would help to make workers “less prone to sickness so to serve the Country and bring greater profit to the owner.” In other words, investment on improvement in the work place was considered “profitable expense for the nation and the company,” or an expression of the owner’s nationalism.<sup>95</sup> Le was similar to the majority of contemporary noncommunist intellectuals in distrusting excessive individualism because they feared it would remove the person from commitment to building of the postcolonial nation.

Encouraged by the relative success of his first book and inspired by his teaching experience, Le published another tract called *Lodestone for Students* on how to improve organizational skills of students. He did not seek financial assistance from Paulus Hieu this time, but used his own money and paid the only printer in Long Xuyen for 1000 copies. For distribution, he sent them to Pham Van Tuoi, who commented that the tract was “valuable” in content but its physical appearance was “ill-looking.” Tuoi asked Le for permission and reprinted it for the new series *Learning To Be Human*. In all, it was reprinted three times by Tuoi during the 1950s and once by Le during the 1960s. At 3000 copies each time, the number was twice or thrice more than a typical reprinting at the time.<sup>96</sup> The first of several books on education from Le, *Lodestone* was also the most practical. Divided into four sections, it began with a discussion of the “requisites” for productive learning: having good health, sufficient materials, and appropriate placement of classroom and student’s capability. The second section addressed how to incorporate learning at home and school in order to learn more quickly and save more time. (Still

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<sup>95</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Cong Viec theo Khoa Hoc*, 286-287.

<sup>96</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 33. It was (and still is) common for Vietnamese publishers to give the number of copies among the information related to the publication at the end of a book.

very much absorbed by “scientific management,” Le frequently used the phrase in reference to justify his observations and advices.) The third section offered a number of “techniques” for studying, reviewing, and doing homework on mathematics, writing, and other subjects. The final section was a “supplement” that offered a theoretical discussion about the dynamics of school and home, and also advice on how to improve memory of reading materials. Le’s personal experience infused the book. As Le claimed in the preface of the book, his pedagogical goal and method were different from conventional practice. He did not aim to “instruct” but “guide” students so that they did their own work, and only “checked and made corrections” to their work. “In short,” he stated, “I wanted to teach them to teach themselves.”<sup>97</sup>

The number of reprints and sales of *Lodestone* reflected the strong interest of middle-class and upper middle-class Vietnamese that wanted their children to succeed in school.<sup>98</sup> There was also the matter of supply: the only other major book on the subject at the time was a translation of a popular French student guidebook by Le’s friend Thien Giang, also published as part of *Learning To Be Human*.<sup>99</sup> This imbalance of supply and demand propelled *Lodestone* into something of a bestseller for its time. Four decades after the first appearance of the book, the physician and writer Do Hong Ngoc recalled his initial encounter with the tract in 1956. Fifteen years old and living outside of Saigon

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<sup>97</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Kim Chi Nam cua Hoc Sinh* [Lodestone for Students] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1951, 1957).

<sup>98</sup> In addition to Vietnamese buyers of the book, there could be a number of others that could not afford to purchase a copy, but borrowed one from their friends or relatives and copied into their notebooks sections and passages that most interested them. Put it another way, it is quite conceivable that the readership of this book was larger than the numbers of copies printed and bought.

<sup>99</sup> Thien Giang, *Muon Thanh Ngoai Hoc Tro Gioi* [How to Become a Successful Student, a translation of M. Lavarenne, *Voulez-vous que vos enfants soient de bons élèves?*] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1954). It was listed as the third volume in the series, after Pham Van Tuoi’s *Foremost Are Muscles* and Le’s *Lodestone for Students*.

at the time, Ngoc was out of school for an unspecified amount of time in order to help his widow mother and her small vendor business. Walking by a street vendor of books one day, he bought a copy of Le's book, an event that he described to have "changed" his life. He followed the instructions of the book, designed his own review and studies, caught up with the level of schooling for his age, went to medical school (after, presumably, graduating from high school), and eventually worked as a physician. In the early 1970s, Ngoc published a "supplementary" tract to Le's book called *Common Habits Among Students to Avoid*, and even successfully obtained a preface from Le. "Most valuable of *Lodestone for Students*," Ngoc wrote, "is that it inspired in me a self-conviction on how to organize and succeed in learning."<sup>100</sup> Thanks to its republication since the 1990s, the postwar generations of Vietnamese have been introduced to the book and, in some cases, have benefited from its accessible style. The fiction writer Duong Thuy, for instance, recently recalled that she "applied quite a bit" of advice and recommendations from *Lodestone* during her years of studies and, in turn, has recommended it to the current generation of Vietnamese students.<sup>101</sup> Le himself recalled that many parents personally thanked him for the book because it helped their children improve their studies.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Do Hong Ngoc, "Sach va Nguoi" [Books and Persons], *Nhung Nguoi Tre La Lung* [Unusual Young Persons] (Ho Chi Minh City: Tong Hop Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, 2001), available at <http://vnthuquan.net/%28S%28dij3s5uu1onkuzquhviccc45%29%29/truyen/truyen.aspx?tid=2qtqv3m3237nvn1nqn1n1n31n343tq83a3q3m3237n1n>. See also Do Hong Ngoc, "Ong Nguyen Hien Le va Toi" [Mr. Nguyen Hien Le and Me], in *Nguyen Hien Le: Con Nguoi va Tac Pham*, 57-65. The latter essay notes (61) that Ngoc already had this recollection in an article written in honor of Le in *Bach Khoa* [Variety], no. 426 (April 20, 1975), the last issue of the journal, but I have not been able to locate a copy of this issue.

<sup>101</sup> Duong Thuy, "Tho Goi Cac Ban Sinh-Sinh Vien: No Pain No Gain" [Letter to Students: No Pain No Gain] (May 2010), the website *Duong Thuy*: <http://duongthuy.net/share.php?id=1&cid=144&page=1>.

<sup>102</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 34.

Le followed the success of *Lodestone* with *The Generation of Tomorrow*, which he dedicated to Paulus Hieu “in thanksgiving.”<sup>103</sup> Published also for *Learning To Be Human*, it was a lot more theoretical than the advice-spinning *Lodestone*. It concerned pedagogical philosophy, and Le noted in the preface that there were “a lot of books on children psychology and the ‘New Education’” in the West but only one such book in Vietnamese.<sup>104</sup> The book in reference was from Thien Giang and advocated the methodology of the Belgian educator and neurologist Ovide Decroly. Sometimes called the “European John Dewey,” Decroly had been among the advocates of a worldwide (if loose) educational reform movement called the “New Educational Fellowship” that stressed active pedagogical techniques.<sup>105</sup> His particular contribution was the identification of five basic needs among children, ranging from the need for food to that for association. He was, in the words of the historian Victor Acker, “a strong believer in making the children become self-sufficient individuals by developing the knowledge of

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<sup>103</sup> Le reciprocated Hieu’s friendship in other ways. In 1962, Hieu headed the RVN’s Ministry of Information, Youths, and Civil Affairs (known also as Civic Action), and was considered as one of the most trusted members of Diem’s government circle. For a cultural project, he looked for established writers to translate Western books into Vietnamese then distribute them to South Vietnamese youth at either low or no cost. He knew that Le had translated Somerset Maugham’s *Of Human Bondage*, and asked the writer to have it published as part of the project. Although Le was not sympathetic to Diem, he gave the translation to Hieu out of gratitude and friendship. It was published under the government’s auspices, and Le revised it in 1974 and had it published by a private publisher. See Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 315-316. Hieu’s trusted relationship with Diem is suggested in Lam Le Trinh, “Chin Nam Ben Canh Tong Thong Ngo Dinh Diem – Man Dam voi Cuu Dong Ly Quach Tong Duc” [Nine Years Next to President Ngo Dinh Diem: Conversation with Former Director Quach Tong Duc], *Vietnam Review* (September 18, 2005), <http://www.vietnamreview.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1504>; Quoc Dai, *Ai Giet Anh Em Ngo Dinh Diem* [Who Killed the Ngo Brothers?] (Hanoi: Thanh Nien, 2003), available at <http://vnthuquan.net/truyen/truyentext.aspx?tid=2qtqv3m3237nvn0nqnvnqn31n343tq83a3q3m3237nnn>.

<sup>104</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *The He Ngay Mai (Mot Phuong Phap Giao Duc Moi)* [The Generation of Tomorrow: A New Method of Education] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1953, 1957), ix.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas S. Popkewitz, *Inventing the Modern Self and John Dewey: Modernities and the Traveling of Pragmatism in Education* (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 26.

their own needs.”<sup>106</sup> Believing that a child would learn best by observation, association, and expression, he de-emphasized the use of textbooks in the classroom and instead promoted “learning by doing.”<sup>107</sup> In turn, Thien Giang strongly promoted Decroly’s ideas in his book, which was published under a short-lived series called *New Education*. The tract included photographs of school children in the U.S. and Europe. More significantly, there were three photographs of Vietnamese students learning and playing at a newly established elementary school in Saigon that experimented with some of Decroly’s ideas.<sup>108</sup> The implication was that this kind of education was a good possibility for the rapidly decolonizing Vietnamese society.

Not surprisingly, Le’s own book approved some of the similar ideas, and at one point he named Decroly’s five basic needs of children. But it was also broader than Thien Giang’s tract. The bibliographical list of “consulting books” indicated that he borrowed more widely, including French-language academic and popular publications from John Dewey, the French reformer Célestin Freinet, and other European psychologists and educators. By far, however, the most quoted source was a Vietnamese book called *A New Foundation of Education for Vietnam*. First published in 1941, its author was Thai Phi, a teacher of Vietnamese language and literature at a private school in Hanoi during late colonialism. (It is not clear whether it was a junior high or high school.) *A New Foundation* was the best known of several tracts on education that he

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<sup>106</sup> Victor Acker, *The French Educator Célestin Freinet (1896-1966): An Inquiry into How His Ideas Shaped Education* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 30. See also the chapter on Decroly in Adolphe Erich Meyer, *Modern European Educators and Their Work* (Freeport, NY: Books For Libraries Press, 1971), 35-51.

<sup>107</sup> Meyer, *Modern European Educators and Their Work*, 44.

<sup>108</sup> Thien Giang, *De Dao Tao nen Ngoai Hoc Tro Hoan Toan (Phuong Phap Decroly)* [Training the Complete Student: The Decroly Method] (Saigon: Nam Viet, 1950).



wrote at the time, and offered an indictment of Vietnamese students. It accused students, for example, of lacking discipline when in school and pursuing mindless fashion and entertainment when outside. (“The name Marlene Dietrich,” lamented Thai Phi, “provoked more thought in them than [the eleventh-century Vietnamese military hero] Ly Thuong Kiet.”)<sup>109</sup> It also offered a series of principles for correcting those problems. Predictably, the tract generated strong reactions. A review in the *Clear Voice*’s journal, for instance, found the author’s assessment of Vietnamese students to have been limited to his experiences at private schools without consideration for students elsewhere, including universities. It also faulted the solutions offered by Thai Phi to be “rushed” and “disconnected.” Yet the reviewer also praised the book for clarity of writing, well-meaning intention, and dedication towards the future of Vietnamese youth.<sup>110</sup> The significance of the tract to Vietnamese intelligentsia could be seen in the fact that it was reprinted in Hanoi at least five times by the early 1950s, and at least once in Saigon in the 1960s. Given Le’s frequent references to it, Thai Phi’s tract clearly and significantly affected his thinking about education for a new generation of Vietnamese now on the verge of independence.

Like the reviewer in *Clear Voice* a decade before, Le was equally critical of and favorable to Thai Phi, albeit in a different way. He quoted Thai Phi’s proposition that “the purpose of education is adapting youth to... economic and spiritual conditions of society in the future,” a task that would necessitate those in charge to determine “what that future society is like” and “to shape youth as if shaping instruments.” Calling the

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<sup>109</sup> Thai Phi, *Mot Nen Giao Duc Viet Nam Moi* [A New Foundation of Education for Vietnam], (Hanoi: Doi Moi, 1941), 42.

<sup>110</sup> Dieu Anh, “Van De Thanh Nien voi Quyen *Mot Nen Giao Duc Viet Nam Moi*” [The Issue of Youth in *A New Education for Vietnam*], *Thanh Nghi* [Clear Voice] 5 (October 1941): 15, 22, and 28.

proposition “not necessarily incorrect but also unclear,” Le suggested that Thai Phi’s book came out during World War II and reflected the uncertainties at the time. There had been a tendency to elevate society over the individual, which Thai Phi seemed to favor out of fear of moral disorder, and Le specifically named wartime Japan, Italy, and Germany as victimizers of their nation’s youth.<sup>111</sup> The consequences of World War II and the demise of the fascist regimes showed that it was not the way to educate youth. On the other hand, the educational philosophy of Decroly and other Western promoters of the “New Education” might have gone too far in the direction of the individual. “The purpose of education,” Le declared, “is to sow the seed of happiness for the individual as well as for society.”<sup>112</sup> In other words, he advocated a form of moderate individualism that balanced the needs of society: a point that he reiterated throughout the book.

Le also picked up from Thai Phi’s criticism of “bad habits” by Vietnamese students and thought that it was not specific enough. He listed no fewer than twenty such habits and divided them into three categories. The first category included “universal” vices such as pride. The second were those inculcated by traditional Vietnamese “big familism,” such as dependency, a lack of adaptability, and ill treatment of people below one’s station. The third category was bad habits caused by the emphasis of the educational system on intellect over ethics, and included disrespect for educators and a lack of critical thinking.<sup>113</sup> Similar to Thai Phi, Le proposed solutions after identifying problems. In this case, he considered the most important task of education to be twofold: “eliminating individualism” (meaning excessive individualism) while developing “moral

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<sup>111</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *The He Ngay Mai*, 19.

<sup>112</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *The He Ngay Mai*, 25.

<sup>113</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *The He Ngay Mai*, 67-71.

education” in addition to “intellectual education.” The remainder of the book was devoted to various ways to achieve the twin goals.

Two things should be said about *The Generation of Tomorrow*. First, Le’s many references to Thai Phi provided another illustration of the continuity of the urban and non-socialist tradition between Hanoi in the 1930s and 1940s and Saigon in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>114</sup> Second, the questions asked by Thai Phi and Le himself reflected some of the concerns among noncommunist elites and intellectuals about the decolonizing process and the postcolonial nation that, in their mind, would arrive in the near future. In this case, the concerns were about educating Vietnamese youth without sacrificing either individuality or social harmony. It could be said that the balance between individual and society was foremost in the mind of Le and other writers of *Learning To Be Human*. Even though most books in the series addressed self-improvement, respect for society (or, sometimes, the nation) was often implied. Although they were different from Ngo Dinh Diem in many ways, the series contributors shared Diem’s desire to steer away from totalitarianism on the one hand and, on the other hand, from what they perceived to be hyper-individualism made possible by the worst aspects of Western capitalism.

Besides *The Generation of Tomorrow* and *Lodestone for Students* for Pham Van Tuoi’s series, Le’s teaching experience led him to publish several textbooks on algebra,

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<sup>114</sup> Thai Phi died in 1945, a victim of mistaken identity. He had been arrested by the French authorities in 1942, but freed by the Japanese during the Occupation. Like some of the noncommunist nationalists, he was pro-Japanese. He wrote a tract about Japanese education and even became a member of the Japanese gendarme. In suburban Saigon in 1945, he was taken by the Viet Minh-led Vanguard Youths for a French collaborator and was executed. This was recounted in an appendix to the 1968 reprint of Thai Phi’s classic: Long Dien, “Bai Hoc Thai Phi” [The Lesson of Thai Phi], in Thai Phi, *Mot Nen Giao Duc Viet Nam Moi* [A New Foundation of Education for Vietnam] (Saigon: Sinh Vien, 1968), 144-145. His friend, the writer Thai Son, was living next to him and recounted his arrest by the Vanguard Youths on September 29, 1945 on the charge that he had shot “the people.” Thai Son thought he was innocent of the charge, but was probably arrested and executed for his pro-Japanese sympathies. See Thai Son, *No But Nghien hay Nghia Dong Bao* [Literary Debt or Loyalty to the People], in *Thieu Son Toan Tap: Tap 2* [The Complete Works of Thai Son: Volume II] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 2003), 614-615.

geometry, and student guides on examination preparation. Having taught writing, he brought out also a textbook-like tract called *Composition*. Pham Van Tuoi again published it, this time as a part of a short-lived series called *Learning and Understanding*. It took Le six months to compose *Composition*, which was longer than usual because he wanted to read widely in preparation: Vietnamese literature, French literature, and a number of French writing guides, including two well-known and frequently updated works called *Les ennemis de l'art d'écrire* and the three-volume *Le style au microscope*. Le completed the manuscript at the end of 1952 and Pham Van Tuoi “published it immediately.” The book was well received, partly because composition was a popular topic at the time and partly because the author aimed the book at adult readers as well as students.<sup>115</sup> The poet Bang Ba Lan, who taught literature in a Hanoi high school during the First Indochina War, recalled having a discussion with a ninth grade student about about poetry. Surprised by the student’s sharp comments, he kept asking the student about possible sources, and the student brought him a copy of the book and showed a particular passage there.<sup>116</sup> It was, again, his accessible style and winning attitude that drew readers. “I am not advising young readers to choose writing as a profession,” he wrote in the preface, “But I think that everyone should learn to write prose as a refined hobby.” Further, this was not necessarily for publication but so “we could record our own feelings and thoughts during a trip or a tumultuous event for the reading pleasure of our friends, or our own recollection when we are older.”<sup>117</sup> This was very much a petit

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<sup>115</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 38.

<sup>116</sup> Bang Ba Lan, *Vai Ky Niem ve May Van Thi Si Hien Dai* [A Few Memories about Some Modern Writers and Poets] (Saigon: Xay Dung, 1962), 35-36. Lan wrote that the year was 1952, but it was likely the year after because the book was not published until 1953.

<sup>117</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Luyen Van: Cach Viet va Sua Van* [Composition: How to Write and Revise Prose] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1953; reprint by Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1980), 14.

bourgeois sentiment. The success of the book led him to write two additional volumes that were published four years later. Although all these books were not for *Learning To Be Human*, they reflected some of the reasons for the popularity of his works: it was lucid, readable, and accessible.

Le's reverence of effective writing for personal pleasure and edification was illustrative – perhaps even representative – of the intellectual momentum towards individualistic values in urban South Vietnam. On the one hand, he called for reforming the language because Vietnamese was gradually becoming the standard language of instruction in schools.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, the reform was exactly that: reformist changes in continuity to precedents set by Vietnamese modernizers in late colonialism, and not a radical overhaul as attempted by the DRV.<sup>119</sup> The fact that *Composition* was peppered with examples of late colonial prose of urban writers, especially from the Self-Strength Literary Group, underscores the influence of and continuity to the tradition of the earlier period. Le directly acknowledged the continuity elsewhere. He recognized Pham Van Tuoi to be instrumental in starting *Learning To Be Human*, but also considered Tuoi “not the pioneer” in publishing these kinds of books. He attributed their origin to earlier sources instead. One source was the Han Thuyen, which “published a few tracts about entrepreneurship and professional ethics” in the 1940s: clearly a reference to the publications of Le Van Sieu and others.<sup>120</sup> Another was an unnamed writer who either “wrote or translated an [unnamed] book about the scientific spirit that

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<sup>118</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Luyen Van*, v.

<sup>119</sup> For a study of the broader context about reformist and radical changes in education, see Theevaporn Vasavakul, “Schools and Politics in South and North Vietnam: A Comparative Study of State Apparatus, State Policy, and State Power (1945-1965),” 2 vols. (PhD diss., Cornell University, 1994).

<sup>120</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, “Tren 10 Nam Cam But va Xuat Ban,” 9. This quotation and the next two were reprinted almost word for word in Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 51.

won the Alexandre de Rhodes literary award.”<sup>121</sup> Still, an earlier source was the Self-Strength which “published *Ten Points for Reflection* by Hoang Dao and translated some parts of *Le chemin du bonheur* by Victor Pauchet”: the latter a philosophical-physiological treatise by a French surgeon famous for his innovative method on the battlefield during World War I.<sup>122</sup> The success of these earlier sources reflected the desire among the Vietnamese intelligentsia to “reform the spirit of youth so to adapt to the times” and that the new “generation of youth would be pioneers in the economic development to come.” Pham Van Tuoi caught wind of this desire to reform and prepare the next generation as early as at the start of World War II. But he was not well connected, and it was the Han Thuyen and others that set the stage for his eventual success in the 1950s.<sup>123</sup>

Le recognized the larger significance of the Self-Strength and the Han Thuyen in an earlier essay about modern cultural developments in China and Vietnam. There were “progressive” and “moderate” elements in both countries, he wrote, but the progressives came to dominate in China after the 1911 Revolution and in Vietnam during the shift towards Westernization in the 1920s and 1930s. In the Chinese case, it was the communists that dominated the progressive faction. The Vietnamese situation, however, was different, and the communists “could not operate publicly” until 1945. As a result, Le thought, the strongest progressive influence in Vietnam came not from the

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<sup>121</sup> The unnamed book “on the scientific spirit” was possibly another work by Pham Ngoc Khue called *Oc Khoa Hoc* [The Scientific Mind] (Hanoi: Han Thuyen, 1943).

<sup>122</sup> Pauchet’s book was later translated by Thien Giang and Pham Cao Tung as *Con Duong Hanh Phuc* [The Path of Happiness] and published for *Learning To Be Human*. According to the introduction, signed by “translators” but probably written by Thien Giang only, he first read it “around 1940,” when he was “separated from human society” and imprisoned in the sparsely populated Truong Son mountains in central Vietnam.

<sup>123</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 51-52.

Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) but three successive urban groups: the Southern Wind in the 1920s, the Self-Strength in the 1930s, and the Han Thuyen for the first half of the 1940s. Le qualified that these groups were “of course only relatively progressive,” which is to say that they were not as radical as the ICP.<sup>124</sup> These comments reflected Le’s general attitude about the humanistic tradition in modern Vietnam. On the one hand, he was sympathetic to the Viet Minh for their leadership during the anticolonial war. On the other hand, he followed events and developments about land reform and other issues in North Vietnam and read many publications from Ngo Dinh Diem’s campaign “Denouncing Communists” as well as foreign sources on Soviet and Maoist Chinese societies.<sup>125</sup> The significance that he ascribed to the Southern Wind, the Self-Strength, and the Han Thuyen meant that he placed himself in continuity to the antebellum intellectual tradition that was Hanoi-based in location, reformist in temperament, and friendly to the West in approach.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, “Phat Huy Van Hoa Truyen Thong” [Developing Traditional Culture], in *Vai Van De Xay Dung Van Hoa* [Several Issues Concerning Cultural Development] (Saigon: Tao Dan, 1968): 61. The article was originally published in the journal *Tin Van* [Literary News], 9-11 (May-June 1967). The Southern Wind was named after the Hanoi-based monthly of the same name, which ran from 1917 to 1932 and whose publisher, editor, and most important writer was the mandarin-scholar Pham Quynh. “The Self-Strength Literary Group replaced the Southern Wind,” Le wrote, “then the Han Thuyen received more praise from youth than the Self-Strength.”

<sup>125</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap III* (Westminster, CA: Van Nghe, 1988), 18-19.

<sup>126</sup> Somewhat paradoxically, Le commented in passing in his memoir that before 1975 he nonetheless thought that communism would have been “more just” than capitalism. It clearly contradicted the fact that Le actively promoted the kind of petit bourgeois person condemned (in theory if not also practice) in a communist society, and the fact that his writings showed no discernably favorable disposition to communism. To quote him in full:

Reading about twenty books on communism in Russia, China, and Eastern Europe, I abhorred Stalin and Mao, but still thought that communism was more just than capitalism, especially communism in North Vietnam under the anticolonial leadership of President Ho. It was respected by eight or nine out of ten Vietnamese and admired by the world, so it could not be brutal as Russia and China and the [Communist] Party would have corrected immediately any mistakes made. Such was the attitude of the majority of the Saigon intelligentsia, not only mine (Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap III*, 19-20).

A possible explanation for the apparent contradiction is Le’s tendency towards lumping, as illustrated abundantly in his books for *Learning To Be Human*. Questionable, for example, was his statement about

Le continued the theme of organization and management in *Scientific Management for Work* and *Lodestone for Students* with *Managing the Family*, also published for *Learning To Be Human*. He commented in the preface that urban middle-class families were facing three related issues: a growing demand of housework, a growing lack of time, and difficulty to hire good help. He noted too that the weekly *New* had carried a column called “Lodestone for Housewives,” which suggested also that the improvement of housework was a growing interest among middle-class Vietnamese. Ironically, Le found the advice from the column rather disorganized, remembering that they were “loose” and “without a system.” This prompted him to write the tract in order “to explain the spirit [of organization], to point out important rules [about organization], and to give a variety of examples so the reader would know how to put them into practice.” Le acknowledged his sources and their origins in the preface, with attention to Christine Frederick, who had been an editor of *Ladies’ Home Journal*, a popular speaker of the Chautauqua lecture circuit, and the well-known promoter of the Taylorist “household efficiency” through her popular books and correspondence courses in the U.S.<sup>127</sup> Le used the French version of Frederick’s *Household Engineering*, but also

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“the attitude of the majority of the Saigon intelligentsia.” It was perhaps a result of his lack of association with urban anticommunists. (Le was well known for avoiding social events in order to concentrate on reading and writing.) Problematic too was his assertion that “eight or nine out of ten Vietnamese” respected Ho Chi Minh, the Viet Minh, or North Vietnam. Indeed, the third volume of his memoir was basically a lumping indictment of the post-1975 regime, and in some ways he was as anticommunist after 1975 as some of the northern émigrés had been in 1954. My own speculation is that Le’s view of Vietnamese communism before 1975 was influenced by a combination of factors: dissatisfaction with the political instability of the Saigon regime, opposition to the military Americanization of the war, abhorrence against “excessive individualism” believed to be inherent to capitalism, social and familial connections to NLF and NLF-friendly people such as Thien Giang and Trinh Dinh Thao (his uncle-in-law), and a hope that the leading role of the Vietnamese communists in the First Indochina War meant that their Marxism was a distant second to their patriotism in priority. His published comments on these matters were typically brief, and perhaps his large but unavailable correspondence would better shed light on them.

<sup>127</sup> For more on Frederick and household efficiency, see Janice William Rutherford, *Selling Mrs. Consumer: Christine Frederick and the Rise of Household Efficiency* (Athens: University of Georgia Press,



*L'organisation familiale pour une vie plus facile...* by the French writer H. L. Rumpf; “small books” [i.e., less well-known] such as *Mamans, avec moins de fatigue* by the François Sébileau, a French writer and Catholic leader of a youth movement; and popular magazines such as *Marie-France*. As often the case, it was a potpourri of accessible Western sources that Le in turn made accessible to the Vietnamese readership.<sup>128</sup>

Le’s borrowing from Western writers on efficiency, especially American ones, was also in continuity to the phenomenon of Vietnamese borrowings and adaptations from the West in late colonialism. Having swept over Europe previously, American ideas about efficiency and self-improvement began to trickle down into urban Vietnam during the 1930s and especially early 1940s, usually through French translations and French secondary sources. As already noted, Le Van Sieu had been avidly interested in Taylorism for a time during the early 1940s. Another illustration is the inaugural issue of the *New Mind* journal in 1941 that included a page-long translation of a passage from *Training for Efficiency* by the Orison Swett Marden (1850-1924), the founder of the American magazine *Success* and a prolific writer of motivational books. This particular passage was characteristic of the self-help movement and the capitalist confidence before the Great Depression. It described “hardship” as “our benefactor” because it helped to “prevent and get rid of competitors that are not as good and lead us to the path of victory,” and naming eight great men who had indeed emerged victorious from grave challenges.<sup>129</sup>

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2003); Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies’ Home Journal, Gender, and the Promises of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 61-77.

<sup>128</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Gia Dinh* [Managing the Family] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1953), ix.

<sup>129</sup> “Quan Niem Mot Hoc Gia My voi Nhan Sinh: ‘Cho Thay Song Ca ma Ra Tay Cheo!’” [The Perspective of an American Scholar on Human Livelihood: Desist Not from Rowing When Facing High

Le too started *Managing the Family* by calling several great men from the West – Edison, Pasteur, Flaubert, and Comte de Buffon – as examples of dedication and excellence in their fields of work. Effective household organization too, he intoned, must have started with the dedication to housework, which was “different from dedication to her husband and children” but also prerequisite for improving organization in the house.<sup>130</sup> The book was given to topics such financial management, management of time and hired help, arrangement of the household, and rest and exercise. Recommended were qualities such as “critical thinking” and ethical values such as simplicity. To illustrate some of these ideas, Le drew from his own experiences – a common practice in self-improvement literature, and of course accessible to a Vietnamese audience – but also from Western sources. Most important of the latter was the family of Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, two American pioneers of industrial engineering. Having described the Gilbreths and their famous “time and motion” study in *Scientific Management for Work*, he now devoted an early chapter on their family as drawn from *Cheaper by a Dozen*, the bestselling memoir authored by two of the Gilbreth children, and approvingly referred to the Gilbreth experiences for the remainder of *Managing the Family*.

In addition to using a variety of sources to write original books, Le also translated or adapted several single popular Western books on psychology and self-help during the first half of the 1950s. (While the degree of adaptation varied from book to book, and I will use “adaptation” or “translation” depending on an individual title.) Four of these titles were published for *Learning To Be Human: L'èducation des sentiments* by the

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Tides!] *Tri Tan [New Mind]* 1 (June 3, 1941): 8. The translation was unsigned. “Desist not from rowing when facing high tides” is a Vietnamese proverb.

<sup>130</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *To Chuc Gia Dinh*, 12.

Frenchman Pierre-Félix Thomas; *Give Yourself a Chance* by the Englishman Gordon Byron; and *Public Speaking* and *How to Win Friends and Influence People* by the American Dale Carnegie. Le had translated *L'éducation des sentiments*, a treatise in psychology and moral philosophy about the inculcation of emotions in children and adults, back in 1941. He even wrote a preface for the manuscript that made note of Thai Phi's newly released tract on education, but could not find a publisher for it until over a decade later.<sup>131</sup> Perhaps more than any of Le's books described so far, the content of this adaptation, divided in twenty-six chapters, best exemplified the ideal of moderate individualism advanced in *Learning To Be Human*. After the first six chapters on psychology and education of education in general, the next eight focused on six specific emotions at an "individual-leaning" level: fear, anger, curiosity, self-control, self-possession, and sensitivity. They were followed by twelve chapters on "group-leaning" qualities: friendship, patriotism, pity, competitiveness, admiration for great people, love of truth (and the corresponding vice of lying), love of entertainment, love of beauty, love of goodness, and religious feeling.<sup>132</sup> In other words, self-oriented feelings were to be trained and guided along with other-oriented sentiments and motivations. It would be a familiar argument in a number of tracts published later for *Learning To Be Human*: one seeks to excel in mental capability and physical health simultaneously as in the relationship with one's society.

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<sup>131</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Huan Luyen Tinh Cam* [Training the Emotions, adaptation of Pierre-Félix Thomas, *L'éducation des sentiments* (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1951; reprint, Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1964), 6. Nguyen Hien Le, *Muoi Cau Chuyen Van Chuong*, 162.

<sup>132</sup> For a discussion on promotion of the sentiment of pity in the original work, see Gonzalo J. Sánchez, *Pity in Fin-de-Siècle French Culture: "Liberté, Égalité, Pitié"* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2004), 91-93.

The encouragement of moral virtues and qualities in the adaptation of *L'èducation des sentiments* was reinforced in that of *Give Yourself a Chance*, albeit with a far more vivid “how to” style. Taking the original subtitle *Seven Steps to Success* for his title, Le delivered the text essentially as a breezy collection of “formulas” and maxims about self-help and inserted references about Vietnam and Vietnamese throughout.<sup>133</sup> As the seven chapters in the book were each devoted to one of seven steps (or, rather, qualities), the text read like an updated version of Hoang Dao’s *Ten Points for Reflection*:

1. Train one’s confidence and will.
2. Train character.
3. Win the hearts of other people.
4. Exercise and protect the body.
5. Use the Vietnamese language wisely.<sup>134</sup>
6. Train the mind.
7. Find work and prepare well for advancement.

Characteristic of his writings in the early 1950s, Le did not neglect to urge Western-style modernization among his readers. In the translator’s preface to the book, he readily acknowledged that the “majority of our people lack the productive spirit of Westerners,” and called for personal initiative by juxtaposing East and West. “There is a saying in the West,” he wrote, “*God helps those who help themselves*; and there is a saying in the East, *Heaven aids the healthy and enfeeble the frail*.” (The latter came from the Chinese classic *Book of Means*.) It was repeated unambiguously: “We must be prepared and wait

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<sup>133</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Bay Buoc den Thanh Cong* [Seven Steps to Success, adaptation of Gordon Byron, *Give Yourself A Chance (The Seven Steps to Success)* (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1952; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa Thong Tin, 2001). Le considered this translation one of his five tracts on the theme of management, published for either *Learning To Be Human* or independently. The fifth was *To Chuc Cong Viec Lam An: Kim Chi Nam cua Nha Doanh Nghiep* [Managing Work: Lodestone for the Entrepreneur] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1967), and was listed as belonging to *Learning To Be Human*. I have not been able to locate a copy of this book, only its table of contents from an online advertisement of a reprint: <http://tinmua.com.vn/catalog/sach-quan-tri/58/saharavncom/6/to-chuc-cong-viec-lam-an--kim-chi-nam-cua-nha-doanh-nghiep-%28nguyen-hien-le%29/12047/>. The table of contents suggests that it was very similar to *Scientific Management of Work*.

<sup>134</sup> It was, of course, “Use the English language well” that appeared in the original text.

to capitalize on opportunities and not allowing ourselves falling asleep when they knock on our door... In short, we must create our own opportunities.”<sup>135</sup> The emphasis was distinctly on aiming for individual achievements, taking risks, and seizing on possibilities.

Le’s adaptations of the Dale Carnegie classics on influencing people and public speaking were first published in 1951 and 1953, respectively. For *Public Speaking*, he added some Vietnamese and Chinese examples to those in the original. For the most part, the adaptation stuck close to the original, divided people into extroverts and introverts, and offered solutions to the timidity and other hindering problems. Le remembered that “it sold well” but did not say exactly how well.<sup>136</sup> He was more precise on the adapted translation of Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, claiming that it saw “fifteen or sixteen reprints” between 1951 and 1975 and sold over 50,000 copies: an astonishing number in Vietnam at the time.<sup>137</sup> In sales and reputation, it was his commercial success *par excellence*.<sup>138</sup> Paulus Hieu had introduced Le to the book (and *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, also from Carnegie), and he was immediately taken by their messages. With Hieu’s assistance, he translated the first book from the English original as well as a French translation, mainly because his English was not as good as his French. Le Vietnamized the title as *Dac Nhan Tam*, a classic Chinese-

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<sup>135</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Bay Buoc den Thanh Cong*, 6-7.

<sup>136</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 42.

<sup>137</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 40.

<sup>138</sup> I have not been able to locate a copy of the original 1951 edition, and used here is P. Hieu and Nguyen Hien Le, *Dac Nhan Tam: Bi Quayet de Thanh Cong* [Winning the Human Heart: Formula for Success], updated edition (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1968; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, 1984). This edition retained the original preface and did not offer a new one. Le added, however, a postscript and an appendix.

derivative phrase that means *To Win the Human Heart* or *To Satisfy the Hearts of People*.<sup>139</sup> (Hereafter, the adaptation will be referred as *Winning the Human Heart*.)<sup>140</sup>

Le and Hieu completed the translators' preface to the book on Christmas Day 1950. It stated that this adaptation had the same purpose as *Scientific Management for Work* and was complementary to it in helping readers "succeed in the walk of life," through "winning the hearts of other people" more broadly rather than merely in the workplace. The co-adapters added that Western societies offered many opportunities to learn these techniques through correspondence courses, but "our country does not have such courses" and there were few "books that are practical and not over-theoretical, that could help us work out the issues commonly faced in daily life".<sup>141</sup> The content itself necessarily reflected Carnegie's preoccupation with business in a capitalistic society.<sup>142</sup> Reflecting its American origin, the adaptation also portrayed the influential person as generally optimistic. True to the original text, it focused on ways to persuade other people to take one's point of view and do one's bidding. Among them were "six ways to friendliness," such as listening attentively and keeping a smile on one's face. Then there were "twelve methods to lead people to one's way of thinking," which included avoiding

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<sup>139</sup> Le had used the phrase in his very first book, *Scientific Management for Work*, stating that "ngươi chi huy truoc het phai la nguoi dac nhan tam": the leader is foremost a winner of the human hearts (293). It appeared again as the third "step" in his adaptation of the Gordon Byron's tract, as seen above.

<sup>140</sup> For an analysis of the Chinese-derivative phrase, see Anvi Hoang, "Dale Carnegie and How to Win Vietnamese Readership: American and Vietnamese Cultures through the Translation of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*" (MA Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2003), 50-55.

<sup>141</sup> P. Hieu and Nguyen Hien Le, *Dac Nhan Tam*, xiv-xv.

<sup>142</sup> More scholarly analyses of Carnegie's book include Richard M. Huber, *The American Idea of Success* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 226-250; and Gail Thain Parker, "How To Win Friends and Influence People: Dale Carnegie and the Problem of Sincerity," *American Quarterly* 29:5 (Winter 1977): 506-518. More popular (and celebratory) are Giles Kemp and Edward Clafin, *Dale Carnegie: The Man Who Influenced Millions* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 141-157; Tom Sant, *The Giants of Sales: What Dale Carnegie, John Patterson, Elmer Wheeler, and Joe Girard Can Teach You about Real Sales Success* (New York: AMACON, 2006), 104-109.

the appearance of “winning” and not calling someone wrong or “mistaken.” There were also “nine ways to change people without making them mad,” such as acknowledging one’s own mistakes before criticizing someone else. Reflecting the nuclear family structure in the capitalist society, the book also offered “nine advices to cultivate happiness in the family,” such as avoiding constant criticism of one’s spouse and treating him or her as an “honored guest.”

As reflected by figures in sales and reprints, *Winning the Human Heart* was very well received among the Vietnamese readership. Truong Ky, the most important promoter of Western pop music in Saigon during the 1960s and 1970s, recalled reading the book (as well as the adaptation of *Public Speaking*) with enthusiasm during his years as a student at a private Catholic high school in Saigon.<sup>143</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Ngan, a former ARVN officer and present-day Vietnamese-Canadian MC of the overseas Vietnamese popular variety show *Paris By Night*, recalled reading Le’s translation in his school days.<sup>144</sup> Another reader remembered finding the book (and two other tracts of Le) in his uncle’s small library and reading it avidly.<sup>145</sup> The success came from, again, the lucidity that was characteristic of Le’s writing.<sup>146</sup> For instance, the adapters frequently shortened the original text and employed formal yet accessible language.<sup>147</sup> Upon request by a classicist-minded reader, in 1968 Le added an appendix of several stories from Chinese

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<sup>143</sup> Truong Ky, *Mot Thoi Nhac Tre* [A Time of Pop Music] (Montreal, 2002), 71.

<sup>144</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Ngan, *Ky Niem San Khau* [Memories of the Stage] (Place unknown: Thuy Nga, 2010), 139.

<sup>145</sup> Nguyen Duy Chinh, “Song Dep” [Living Well], in *Nguyen Hien Le, Con Ngoai va Tac Pham*, 135.

<sup>146</sup> Le and Hieu did not indicate how much each was responsible for the adaptation, but it seemed that Le had the larger share due to his writing experience and similarities in style to his other books in the early 1950s.

<sup>147</sup> For a longer analysis about Le’s style and technique, see Hoang, “Dale Carnegie and How to Win Vietnamese Readership,” 59-75.

sources and a passage from Tolstoy's *War and Peace* to illustrate the timelessness of Carnegie's twentieth-century maxims.<sup>148</sup>

In November 1953, Le left Long Xuyen and returned to Saigon. By then, he had published several titles for *Learning To Be Human*, and also had a manuscript on efficiency in business prepared for Tuoi's series *Entrepreneurship*. This series was short-lived and carried far fewer titles than *Learning To Be Human*, but they closely resembled each other in the emphasis on individual achievement and organization. Published the next year, a month and a half before the end of the battle of Dien Bien Phu and four months before the conclusion of the Geneva Conference, Le's manuscript saw references to Taylor and Fayol on some of its pages. The content, however, was dominated by the ideas of Herbert Newton Casson (1869-1951).<sup>149</sup> In chronological order, Casson was a small-town Methodist minister in Canada that was defrocked by his church for heresy; a fervent socialist in Boston that opposed the Spanish-American War but turned bitter at the pro-war support from his followers; a committed capitalist in New York that wrote for Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* and Frank Munsey's *Munsey Magazine*, worked with the efficiency expert Harrington Emerson, and founded a hugely successful advertisement company; and a successful advocate of business efficiency in Great Britain. Publisher of the magazine *Efficiency*, he was a prolific writer on the subject and, in the words of a historian of management, typically commenced his books by

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<sup>148</sup> See P. Hieu and Nguyen Hien Le, *Dac Nhan Tam*, 295. Le called this reader "Ong" (sir), a term used to address a man of one's own age or older. This in turn suggested that this book drew middle-aged readers in addition to younger ones such as Truong Ky and Nguyen Duy Chinh.

<sup>149</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hieu Nang: Cham Ngon cua Nha Doanh Nghiep* [Efficiency: Axioms of the Entrepreneur] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1954).



“discussing failings of management and how these can be cured through the application of efficiency.”<sup>150</sup>

Le too began his tract with a reference to failure, albeit one relevant to the Vietnamese situation. In the preface, he recalled visits to the northern countryside during his teenage years as well as romantic sentiments about the leisure and peacefulness among rural Vietnamese that those visits provoked in him. But he abruptly interrupted the nostalgic recollections by declaring that such a way of life was not over but also problematic. “The lives of our ancestors,” he wrote, “were leisurely and peaceful, but also limited” in many ways: nutrition, materials, and knowledge. In contrast, today “we are more busy, work more, and worry more, but also gain many happy things unknown to our ancestors, experience many wonders in the universe, enjoy many conveniences made possible by science.”<sup>151</sup> A continuity of this way of life, however, demanded that Vietnamese be more efficient in the areas of thinking and making judgments; using time, energy, and money; working and relating to people, “especially the virtue of cooperation because results depend on the assistance of other people and that assistance depends on your assistance to them.”<sup>152</sup> Accordingly, individual chapters were devoted to a series of desirable and interrelated qualities for the efficient businessman: optimism and zeal, adventurousness, thinking and judging, planning and executing work, rest and entertainment, choosing employees and getting the best out of them, honesty with customers, wise use of advertisement, and managing finance. The tract ended with the

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<sup>150</sup> Morgan Witzel, *Fifty Key Figures in Management* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 48-56. The quotation is from p. 52.

<sup>151</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hieu Nang*, viii.

<sup>152</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hieu Nang*, ix.

story of Henry Ford as an example of someone that “benefited humanity” through the exercise of all those qualities in efficiency. Nonetheless, Ford’s “greatest virtue in business,” Le wrote, “was that *he did not think of his own interest but found ways to serve society* so that rich and poor alike could benefit from scientific inventions and conveniences made possible by technology.”<sup>153</sup>

Putting theory into practice, Le and his wife were involved in two small self-run businesses upon their permanent move to Saigon: a classroom of elementary students as well as a publishing house. Both businesses were located at their home and, capitalizing on his growing reputation, were named after Le.<sup>154</sup> His wife ran the classroom and he devoted his time to reading, writing, and running the small publishing business. The first book that came out under this imprint was *Self-Learning for Success*, which was meant as a supplement or follow-up to *Lodestone for Students*.<sup>155</sup> Whereas *Lodestone* addressed issues related to student life, *Self-Learning* aimed at learning after formal schooling. It offered ways to improve one’s knowledge, such as attending lectures and taking correspondence courses, but focused particularly on reading. Le recommended a rounded reading program in the humanities and sciences, and advised the studies of foreign languages. Suggested too were writing and translating activities, which of course reflected Le’s own interests. As he claimed in the preface, he was rather lost when it came to reading and self-learning after graduation from college in the 1930s. It took him

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<sup>153</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hieu Nang*, 152. He later republished the book with a slightly different subtitle: Nguyen Hien Le, *Hieu Nang: Bi Quyét Thanh Công trong Doanh Nghiệp* [Efficiency: Method to Success in Entrepreneurship] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1970).

<sup>154</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 76-77. As exemplified by both Le and Pham Van Tuoi, it was common for businesses in South Vietnam to carry the names of their owners: a not insignificant indication of the growing shift towards personal ownership and identity. The practice could be spotted in, among other places, newspaper advertisements. In contrast, the Workers Party discouraged and possibly banned the practice in the north.

<sup>155</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 92-93.

years of hit-and-miss experimentation before gaining a clear sense on how to learn and what to read in order to become a modern and educated person. The book was meant as a guide so that young readers would not be lost and confused as he had once been.<sup>156</sup>

Another title in the self-help genre was a handy tract on “training fortitude for one’s life.” Several readers had said to Le that they eagerly read *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* and other books, but found it difficult to translate theory into practice. Le considered the root of this difficulty to be a lack of “fortitude” (*nghi luc*), and that fortitude was a necessary starter for the quest of self-improvement. The tract was a response to this issue, evenly divided between analyzing the relationship between success and fortitude on the one hand and offering a number of recommendations on how to “train” for greater fortitude.<sup>157</sup> Although the tract was not labeled *Learning To Be Human*, for all intent and purpose it could have easily fit into the series.

After moving permanently to Saigon, Le took back copyrights of his earlier books from Pham Van Tuoi after their contracts expired and made a number of reprints under his own imprint. But he asked Tuoi to continue distributing the books, which Tuoi did until leaving publishing and returning to tailoring. By 1960, Le was too consumed with writing to keep up with independent publishing. He self-published only a few selected manuscripts, some of which also carried “Learning To Be Human” on the front page, and left the rest to Khai Tri and other publishers. By interest and habit, he was a

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<sup>156</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Tu Hoc de Thanh Cong* [Self-Learning for Success] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1954). In the 1960s, it was updated, renamed, and republished as a part of a series called *Con Duong Thanh Cong* [The Path to Success] for another publisher: Nguyen Hien Le, *Tu Hoc: Mot Nhu Cau cua Thoi Dai* [Self-Learning: A Means of Our Times] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1967; reprint, Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, n.d.).

<sup>157</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Ren Nghi Luc de Lap Than* [Training Fortitude for One’s Life] (Saigon, Nguyen Hien Le, 1956; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa Thong Tin, 2000).

writer and reader. Now that he was in high demand as writer, his financial status was more secure and he did not need to spend more than a minimal time in self-publishing.<sup>158</sup>

### Nguyen Hien Le after the Geneva Conference

During the three years after the Geneva Conference, Le brought out four more adaptations of popular Western self-help books: *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* from Dale Carnegie; *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead* and *Don't Grow Old, Grow Up!* from Carnegie's wife Dorothy; and *How to Live on 24 Hours A Day* by the British novelist Arnold Bennett. The first, which he again collaborated with Paulus Hieu and which was given to Tuoi's *Learning To Be Human*, was by far the closest to a faithful translation that he did up to this point. The translators did not Vietnamize the content at all but stayed close to the original. The only changes were those of removal, as they shortened some of the chapters, excluded two of the first thirty chapters, and left out all of the book's last section on thirty-two "true stories" from various Americans on the subject "how I conquered worry."<sup>159</sup> Completed in 1951 but not published until four years later, the translation also saw several reprints during the divisional period. Although it did not sell as well as the adaptation of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, it nonetheless did brisk business at about 30,000 copies. Le recalled too that several readers remarked to him that they liked it even more than *How to Win Friends*

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<sup>158</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 89-91 and 159-160.

<sup>159</sup> Nguyen Hien Le (with P. Hieu), *Quang Ganh Lo Di va Vui Song* [translation of Dale Carnegie, *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1955; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2001).

*and Influence People*, and suggested that the translation provided some relief to readers who, like other Vietnamese, experienced great stress that was induced by warfare.<sup>160</sup>

Le independently translated and published the other classics from Arnold Bennett and Dorothy Carnegie. Best remembered for the phrase, “In the realm of time there is no aristocracy of wealth, and no aristocracy of intellect” (because everyone begins the day with twenty-four hours), Bennett’s *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* offered maxims rather than the anecdotes-filled narrative in *How to Stop Worrying and Enjoy Life*. But similar to his translation of the latter, Le was straightforward in this translation and, thanks to the relative brevity of the original, left out very little of the text.<sup>161</sup> His translations of *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead* and *Don’t Grow Old, Grow Up!* were also faithful to the original texts, and Le restricted his commentary to short prefaces and a small number of footnotes.<sup>162</sup> The translation of *How to Help Your Husband* approved of the original’s thesis, widely accepted in 1950s America, that stressed marriage over career and promoted the notion that supporting husbands to be among the most important tasks for married women.<sup>163</sup> Of the latter translation, the closest reference to the East was a comment he made about a passage written by Dorothy

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<sup>160</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 41-42.

<sup>161</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Song 24 Gio Mot Ngay* [translation of Arnold Bennett, *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day*] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1955, 1964).

<sup>162</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Giup Chong Thanh Cong* [translation of Dorothy Carnegie, *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead*] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1956; reprint, Houston: Xuan Thu, n.d.)

<sup>163</sup> The title of Dorothy Carnegie’s book was sometimes extended to be *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead in His Social and Business Life*. For an analysis of the broader context in the U.S. that takes note of the book, see Kristin Cellelo, *Making Marriage Work: A History of Marriage and Divorce in the Twentieth-Century United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 72-82.

Carnegie on egalitarian humanity: that it sounded “like Zen.”<sup>164</sup> For the most part, Le let the original authors speak directly to readers.

Le also began writing for *Variety* (*Bach Khoa*), a semimonthly started by Huynh Van Lang, who was at the time the head of the RVN Office for Foreign Exchange.<sup>165</sup> *Variety* was among the longest-running and well-respected periodicals of any kind in the RVN, published from early 1957 to April 1975 with rare interruptions (such as the Tet Offensive).<sup>166</sup> Along with the essayist and fiction writer Vo Phien, Le was the most productive writer for the journal and contributed to 242 of its 426 issues.<sup>167</sup> Starting with an article on Edgar Allen Poe’s poem *The Raven* in the fourth issue, Le embarked on writing about a wide range of topics for the semimonthly: literature, language, history, geography, religion, politics, cultural issues, and book reviews. Of particular interest was a large number of biographical writings that ranged from sketches of a few pages long to narratives that were dozens of pages. In most cases, Le republished them into book form. One such collection was *Exemplars of Greatness* that included pieces on Benjamin

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<sup>164</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Luyen Tinh Than* [Training the Spirit, translation of Dorothy Carnegie, *Don’t Grow Old, Grow Up!*] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1957; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000). In the late 1960s, it was republished as part of the new series *The Path of Success* [*Con Duong Thanh Cong*] for the publisher Thanh Tan in Saigon.

<sup>165</sup> For an account of the founding and first years of *Variety*, see Huynh Van Lang, *Nhan Chung mot Che Do: Mot Chuong Hoi Ky, Tap Mot* [Witness to a Regime: A Memoir, Volume One] (Westminster, CA: 2000), 418-430.

<sup>166</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap II*, 255. For a list of his articles to the journal, see Nguyen Hien Le, *Doi Viet Van cua Toi*, 265-270.

<sup>167</sup> Interestingly, the contributors to *Variety* held a wide mix of political opinions, especially after direct American intervention. Vo Phien was strongly and consistently anticommunist while Vu Hanh was sympathetic to the NLF and joined the organization in secret. According to Le, Doan Them and Phan Van Tao were against the communists but not warm to the Americans; in any event, they rarely expressed their sentiments publicly. Nguyen Ngu I and Le Ngo Chau – the latter served as the journal’s publisher after 1963 – were somewhat sympathetic to the NLF but did not express anti-American and anti-Thieu sentiments. Le himself was a critic of the North Vietnamese regime, including its collectivist policies and its treatment of the *Humanities – Beautiful Works* Affair and other problems. But his relations with the Diem government was cool, and later he was critical of American intervention and the Thieu government in private. On Le’s experience with *Variety*, see *Hoi Ki: Tap 2*, 250-259.

Franklin, Abraham Lincoln, Leo Tolstoy, Heinrich Schliemann (the German archeologist), Gandhi, the ancient Chinese statesman Guan Zhong, and the Ming general and neo-Confucianist philosopher Wang Yangming.<sup>168</sup> The second *Exemplars* collection was *Exemplars of Sacrifice*, focused on scientists and inventors: Newton, Pasteur, Marie and Pierre Curie, Rudolf Diesel, and Thomas Edison, among others. It was followed by *Exemplars of Patience*, which, like the first one, described prominent figures in a variety of fields, including Helen Keller, Alexander Fleming, the Wright Brothers, Florence Nightingale, and Gamal Nasser. The fourth collection was *Exemplars of Struggle*, which carried a somewhat unusual mix of four literary and two political figures: Voltaire, Byron, Dostoevsky, Jack London; Mustapha Kémal, and Ibn Saud (the first ruler of modern Saudi Arabia).<sup>169</sup>

Showing once again the influence of Dale Carnegie, he also published *Forty Models of Success*, a translation of Carnegie's own biographical sketches of prominent Americans and Europeans in a variety of fields.<sup>170</sup> Le had published a shorter version of this book in 1957 entitled *What Did They Do to Be Successful?* This version contained twenty-six sketches – twenty-five from Carnegie and one (on Henry Ford) from Le

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<sup>168</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Guong Danh Nhan* [Exemplars of Renown] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1959; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000). Mine is a somewhat loose translation of the title, which literally means “exemplars of famous people,” “exemplars of great people,” or “exemplars of great men.” “People” does not appear in the title of any other *Exemplars* book.

<sup>169</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Guong Hi Sinh* [Exemplars of Sacrifice] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1962; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2001). Nguyen Hien Le, *Guong Kien Nhan* [Exemplars of Patience] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1964; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000). Nguyen Hien Le, *Guong Chien Dau* [Exemplars of Struggle] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1966; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2003).

<sup>170</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Bon Muoi Guong Thanh Cong* [Forty Exemplars of Success], translation of selections from Dale Carnegie, *Five Minute Biographies*, *Biographical Roundup*, and *Little Known Facts about Well Known People* (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1968; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000).

himself – and Le wrote a preface that was reprinted in the new and longer version.<sup>171</sup> “I know not,” he remarked in this preface with reference to two famous writers and a successful innovator of automobiles,

the lesson that you draw [from these stories], but I was optimistic after reading them. Creating a legacy is not too difficult, [however] you must set a goal then work toward it with **patience, patience, patience**. Were you to fail in writing for five or ten years but persist, were you to be rejected eighteen times when looking for work but persist, like Zane Grey and Somerset Maughan who persisted in writing amidst of cold and hunger, like Eddie Rickenbaker who was not at all dispirited. Then sooner or later you would succeed. The bigger were your obstacles, the stronger your will be trained, the greater your capability be developed, the brighter your success be reached. When I was young, I used to be bitter on having been born into a poor family. Ah, how unwise had I been at that! (Emphasis in the original.)<sup>172</sup>

The passage was characteristic of the promotional conventions in the “great men” genre from writers of *Learning To Be Human*. The next collection was *Exceptional Lives*, which was exclusively on French literary figures: the Dumases, Victor Hugo, George Sand, Jules Verne, and André Maurois. The early 1970s saw the publication of *Iron Will*, which was exclusively on figures famous for their travels and exploits in foreign and faraway lands: Marco Polo, Magellan, T. E. Lawrence, the marquis de La Fayette, and the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang, whose journey to India for Buddhist scriptures in the seventh century was immortalized in the classic *Journey to the West*.<sup>173</sup> In addition to these collections, Le penned individual tracts on three figures: Albert Einstein, Bertrand

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<sup>171</sup> The Vietnamese title was *Lam Cach Nao Ho Da Thanh Cong?* (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1957). In the new preface for the updated edition, Le misremembered it as *Ho Da Lap Nen Su Nghiep Cach Nao?*, which means *How Did They Create Their Legacy?* The misrecollection nonetheless provided an apparent echo to the eighth point of Hoang Dao’s manifesto, “Aim for legacy instead of fame.”

<sup>172</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Bon Muoi Guong Thanh Cong*, 6-7.

<sup>173</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Cac Cuoc Doi Ngoai Hang* [Exceptional Lives] (Saigon: Ban Tre, 1969; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2001). Nguyen Hien Le, *Y Chi Sat Da* [Iron Will] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1971; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000).



Russell, and the eleventh-century Chinese poet Su Shi, also known by his literary name Su Dongpo.<sup>174</sup> Responding to the complaint of a female reader that he wrote mostly about men, he brought out a translation of fifteen sketches on “great women” from French fiction and magazine writer Marianne Monestier.<sup>175</sup> Reflecting the origin of the author, the content was mostly about European women: for examples, Maria Deraismes, the French advocate of women’s rights advocate, and H el ene Bresslau, the German Jewish humanitarian married to Albert Schweitzer. Le explained that he had written little about women because most “great works” in history were created by men, but that was to change because women have been on the rise since the nineteenth century. He closed the preface with the hope that the translation would help to raise the self-confidence of female readers and see that “they could also create brilliant legacies as men... for civilization in the future” because “they were as capable as men in all ways.”<sup>176</sup>

Collectively, these works revealed Le’s preference for balancing individual achievement on the one hand and contribution to society on the other hand. Einstein, he wrote, was guided by a belief in the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, but placed the Good (“morality”) above the True (“science”). The renowned physicist “fought for freedom,” including inner freedom from external constraints – a mark of individual achievement, but also advanced “equality in society and economy.”<sup>177</sup> They illustrated

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<sup>174</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Einstein: Doi Song va Tu Tuong* [Einstein: Life and Thought] (Saigon: Lua Thieng, 1972; reprint, Stanton, CA: Van Nghe, 1998). Nguyen Hien Le, *Bertrand Russell: Chien Si Tu Do va Hoa Binh* [Bertrand Russell: Soldier of Freedom and Peace] (Saigon: Lua Thieng, 1971). Nguyen Hien Le, *To Dong Pha* [Su Dongpo] (Saigon: Cao Thom, 1971).

<sup>175</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Muoi Lam Guong Phu Nu* [Fifteen Exemplars of Women, translation of Marianne Monestier, *Femmes d’hier et de demain, d’ici et d’ailleurs* [Women of Yesterday and Tomorrow, Here and There] (Saigon: Tri Dang, 1970; reprint, Los Alamatos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1980), vii.

<sup>176</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Muoi Lam Guong Phu Nu*, ix.

<sup>177</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Einstein*, 79-80.

too Le's *modus operandi* of looking to modern Westerners and ancient Easterners as models of postcolonial personhood.<sup>178</sup> Western figures outnumbered non-Westerners by an overwhelming margin: hardly a surprise given the fact that Le's writings derived much from Western sources. *Forty Exemplars of Success*, for instance, offered inspirational stories of primarily twentieth-century prominences: in addition to Zane Grey, Somerset Maugham, and Eddie Rickenbacker, there were, George Marshall, Walt Disney, the Mayo Brothers, Dorothy Dix, and Al Smith, among others. Significant, too, is the fact that the non-Western figures appearing on his pages were either people from the distant past, such as the monk Xuanzang in *Iron Will* or the pair of Chinese men in *Exemplars of Renown*; or twentieth-century anticolonial leaders, such as Gandhi, Nasser, and Ibn Saud. Whereas those in the latter category were meant as inspiration to (and affirmation of) the postcolonial nationalism of Le and his readers, those in the first one were employed to reaffirm their pride in and linkage to the cultural heritage of the Eastern past. Two decades before, Hoang Dao had called for a "total revolution" and complete Westernization. More temperate in tone and more moderate in content, Le dominated the discourse of his biographical writings with modern Western figures, but also made the discourse more palatable to readers with a sufficient number of references to ancient Easterners. It was an attractive formula employed frequently by urban noncommunist writers in South Vietnam.

None of these biographical collections carried the label *Learning To Be Human* as published by Pham Van Tuoi, Khai Tri, or Le himself. Nonetheless, they loudly echoed

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<sup>178</sup> Le also wrote tracts on Confucius, Mencius, and Henry David Thoreau, but they were much more about thought than life and did not carry the same inspirational from other biographical writings.

the numerous biographical and promotional references found in Le's contributions to the series and elsewhere. Indeed, few of Le's new publications after 1960 carried the imprint *Learning To Be Human*, and during the new decade he gave more and more of his self-help translations to publishers other than Khai Tri. In particular, he began an association with Thanh Tan (meaning either "virgin" or "new clarity"), previously a small publisher in Saigon that rose to importance in the latter the half of the 1960s by focusing on self-help books. Thanh Tan published a new series called *The Path of Success (Con Duong Thanh Cong)*, and several of Le's new works, including *Forty Exemplars of Success* and *Iron Will*, carried the imprint of this new series. Probably as a result of renegotiation with the publisher Khai Tri, two of his *Learning To Be Human* tracts – *Scientific Organization for Work* and *Lodestone for Students* – were also republished in *The Path of Success*.<sup>179</sup> These and other changes notwithstanding, the themes and topics of Le's new publications in the 1960s remained unchanged from his earlier contributions to *Learning To Be Human*.

Le's publications in the *Exemplars* genre also illustrated his abiding affection for translating. Having translated some foreign fiction into Vietnamese for *Variety* during the 1950s, he translated many short stories and at least five novels, including *War and Peace* and *Cry, The Beloved Country* from their French versions, during the 1960s and 1970s. (Similar to elite Vietnamese at the turn of the century that learned about Western ideas from Chinese translations because they did not yet know French, Le's generation of

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<sup>179</sup> This information comes from lists of *The Path to Success* that were sometimes published in the back pages of books in the series. Le had at least seventeen titles in this series. Some of them were published for the first time while some were republications. In addition to the two *Learning To Be Human* tracts, the latter included *Self-Learning*, *Composition*, and *Exemplars of Patience*. Finally, the inclusion of *Lodestone* and *Scientific Management of Work* in this new series accounted for the fact that their titles no longer appeared in lists of *Learning To Be Human* books in the early 1970s.

intellectuals often experienced a transfer of knowledge in the West through French translations.) But the majority of translations remained nonfiction, especially in the genre of self-improvement. In particular, the period 1965-1971 saw a stream of translations that matched Le's first gush of translations and adaptations during 1951-1956. About half of the translations in the latter period were popular self-help books from postwar America. Le self-published two of them under the imprint of *Learning To Be Human: Live a New Life* by David Guy Powers, an author most remembered now writing on public speaking; and *The Power of Positive Living* by Douglas Ellsworth Lurton, an editor and publisher.<sup>180</sup> Rather atypically, he offered three other translations to two publishers not known for producing self-help publications.<sup>181</sup> For a respected publisher of textbooks in the humanities and criticism of Vietnamese and Chinese literature, he published translations of *Winning Your Way with People* by K. C. Ingram, an editor for the Associated Press and assistant to the president of the Southern Pacific Railroad; and *You Are Not the Target* by Laura Archera Huxley, wife of Aldous and promoter of the human potential movement.<sup>182</sup> From another publisher that specialized in fiction, he brought out the translation of *You and Your Marriage* by Edward Kaufmann, a divorce attorney with three decades of experience in the field who nonetheless sought to help to

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<sup>180</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Song Doi Song Moi* [Living a New Life, adaptation of David Guy Powers, *Live a New Life*] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1965). Nguyen Hien Le, *Thang Tien tren Duong Doi* [Walk Straight on the Path of Life, adaptation of Douglas Ellsworth Lurton, *The Power of Positive Living*] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1967).

<sup>181</sup> Both of them had published some of Le's writings on literary criticism, so perhaps this connection played a determining role in Le's decision to offer the translations to them.

<sup>182</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Cach Xu The cua Nguoi Nay: Chia Khoa cua Thanh Cong va Hanh Phuc* [Social Conduct Today: Keys to Success and Happiness, adaptation of K. C. Ingram, *Winning Your Way with People*] (Saigon: Tao Dan, 1965; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, n.d.). Nguyen Hien Le, *Xay Dung Hanh Phuc: Cho Minh va cho Nguoi* [Building Happiness: For Ourselves and Others, translation of Laura Huxley, *You Are Not the Target*] (Saigon: Tao Dan, 1966; reprint, Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1988).

prevent divorces among American couples.<sup>183</sup> Three other works were translations of American physicians, and Le gave them to Thanh Tan for inclusion in the series *The Path to Success*. They included the now-classic *How to Live 365 Days a Year* from John A. Schindler, a Midwestern and small-town doctor that rose to fame after a speech he gave at the University of Wisconsin in Madison was broadcast on the radio. Another was *Freedom from Fear* by Lester Laudy Coleman, a surgeon and nationally syndicated columnist. The third was *Your Life to Enjoy* by Peter J. Steincrohn, who wrote mass-oriented books related to health issues. Also published for *The Path of Success* was also *How to Gain an Extra Hour Every Day* by Ray Josephs, a journalist and public relations consultant who offered hundreds of tips on how to save time from work and daily tasks.<sup>184</sup> Had it not been for the demise of the South Vietnam as a political entity, it was likely that Le would continue to read and translate contemporary American promoters of self-help.

Varied in some important ways, these books nonetheless shared American optimism and enthusiasm, now renewed and expanded after two devastating world wars. In turn, Le interpreted this optimism for his own purposes. Le considered the translation of *Freedom from Fear*, for instance, as complementary to *How to Stop Worrying and*

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<sup>183</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Lam Sao Giu Tinh Yeu cua Chong* [How to Keep the Love of Your Husband, translation of Edward Kaufmann, *You and Your Marriage*] (Saigon: Cao Thom, 1971).

<sup>184</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Song 365 Ngay Mot Nam* [translation of John A. Schindler, *How to Live 365 Days a Year*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1968; reprint, Glendale, CA: Tinh Hoa Mien Nam, n.d.). Nguyen Hien Le, *Trut Di Noi So* [adaptation of Lester Laudy Coleman, *Freedom from Fear*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1969; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, 1989). Nguyen Hien Le, *Song theo So Thich thi Se Song Lau* [Live Long by Living with Enjoyment, adaptation of Peter J. Steincrohn, *Your Life to Enjoy*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1971). Nguyen Hien Le, *Loi Moi Ngay Duoc Mot Gio: Cach To Chuc Doi Song Hang Ngay* [Gaining an Extras Hour Every Day: How to Organize Daily Life, translation of Ray Josephs, *How to Gain an Extra Hour Every Day*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1971; reprint, Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1989).

*Start Living* because one “treats worries while the other treats fears.”<sup>185</sup> *How to Live 365 Days a Year* sought a holistic and alternative approach to healing and paid special attention to chronic stress and what he called “emotionally induced illness.” Le stated in the preface that this reminded him of two maxims from the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi: that body and mind were not two but one, and that living well meant living according to nature.<sup>186</sup> Le’s generalization obscured rather than enlightened. But it was a strategy used often to justify learning from American and European sources. This learning was not considered a divergence from Eastern roots but seeking out the wisdom of the modern West in order to renew the timeless civilization of the East. His predisposition toward universalization could be overstretched at times. One instance was his preface to *Winning Your Way of People*, a book similar in many ways, including the title, to *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Le described the instruction of K. C. Ingram as a method “to help us forget our ego, our blind ego, so we can cooperate with other people in order to be more successful and more happy.”<sup>187</sup> This was rather different to the intention of original text, which certainly focused on human relations and the improvement of human cooperation, but also began and ended with the motives and desires of the individual. (An advertisement in the U.S. promised that the book would provide “a guide to handling people successfully” as well as “the psychology of making people *listen to you, agree with you and remember you.*”)<sup>188</sup> The “I” in Ingram, in short,

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<sup>185</sup> Quoted in Chau Hai Ky, *Nguyen Hien Le*, 141.

<sup>186</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Song 365 Ngay Mot Nam*. For an analysis of the book, see Andrew Holz, “Introduction,” in John A. Schindler, *How to Live 365 Days a Year*, revised ed. (Philadelphia and London: Running Press, 2002), 8-16.

<sup>187</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Cach Xu The cua Nguoi Nay*, vi.

<sup>188</sup> The advertisement ran on a number of popular American magazines, such as *Life* (February 27, 1950), 129, and on the back cover of *The Rotarian* (February 1951).

became the “others” in Le. The gap in interpretation could be traced to Le’s characteristic cautiousness about individualism. He promoted a moderate form of individualism – his faithfulness to Ingram’s text provided plenty of evidence for this – and he avoided appearing favorable to any notion of extreme individualism.

There was some irony to the fact that Le was very much against American intervention (without expressing it in public) but these translations of his appeared between 1965 and 1971 and coincided with the height of U.S. direct intervention in South Vietnam. Their appearance in South Vietnam reflected both the popularity of American-style self-help books and the influence that they exerted in other parts of the world in post-World War II era.<sup>189</sup> At the same time, as indicated by the preface to the adaptation of *Your Life to Enjoy*, it appeared that Le became acquainted to at least some of these books (and probably all) through French translations rather than American originals, and that he translated them either from French exclusively or from a combination of French and English.<sup>190</sup> Even with the large presence of Americans in South Vietnam, the French-educated urban elites remained in need of intermediaries due to their unfamiliarity with the Anglo-American tradition and, conversely, familiarity with the French language and Francophile arts and letters.

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<sup>189</sup> The most complete study of postwar self-improvement publications in the U.S. is Christine B. Whelan, “Self-Help Books and the Quest for Self-Control in the United States 1950-2000” (PhD Diss., University of Oxford, 2004). A work focusing on popular religious figures (such as Vincent Norman Peale and Robert Schuller) is Roy M. Anker, *Self-Help and Popular Religion in Modern American Culture: An Interpretive Guide* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999). Joseph F. Kett, *The Pursuit of Knowledge under Difficulties: From Self-Improvement to Adult Education in America, 1750-1990* (Alto Palo: Stanford University Press, 1994), 433, has noted the connection between self-help publications and courses and postwar developments in formal education.

<sup>190</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Song Theo So Thich thi Se Song Lau*, v. Le added that he was not a physician and his translations of technical terms might not be correct, and therefore felt compelled to accompany some translated terms with their French originals (viii).

Le also translated or adapted several works from non-American authors, including *Your Mind and How to Use It* by W. J. Ennever, the English journalist and founder of the Pelman Institute. In the preface, Le recalled the year 1948 when he was earning four hundred piastres a month from teaching four kids but spent five hundred piastres on correspondence courses from Pelman. His selling point was that the book cost far less than payment for such courses, but offered an easy-to-follow format similar to that of correspondence courses. The content, for instance, was broken into short passages, and each chapter ended with a series of practical exercises for the reader. Le also recommended the book for its discussion about concentration, which he regarded to be essential for individual success. Not neglecting to draw connections to the East, he stressed that Ennever's method was similar to Zen meditation and the theory of meditation (*Jing zuo*) according to the Buddhist-influenced Neo-Confucianism developed under the Song Dynasty.<sup>191</sup> But it was another translation, of *The Importance of Living* from the Chinese-American Lin Yutang, that brought out the most about the Eastern tradition. Inventor of the Chinese typewriter and a highly successful popularizer of Chinese classics, Lin wrote the book to explain the Chinese humanist tradition to a Western audience. Drawing from Chinese philosophical and literary texts, he offered readable and sometimes witty observations and descriptions about their applicability to modern life. He also played on national typologies and compared and contrasted the Chinese point of view to the American and European ones. The book covered a wide range of topics, from physical exercise to humor, from celibacy to tea- and wine-drinking, from the enjoyment of nature to the practice of religion. For the translation, Le

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<sup>191</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Con Duong Lap Than* [The Road of Establishing Oneself in Life, adaptation of W. J. Ennever, *Your Mind and How to Use It*] (Saigon: Tao Dan, 1969; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2003), 5-8.



cut out sizable portions of the long original. He claimed that potential readers would have been already familiar with the philosophical impulse behind the content of the book, but an unspoken reason might have been paper-saving paper. But it was clear that he held the book in high regard, allowing that most books had been about “the method of living” but this one was on “the art of living.”<sup>192</sup> Le’s engagement with the book must have confirmed in him the viability of the Eastern tradition even as he drew mostly from Western modernity.

Although the content of Le’s books was largely sheltered from the war, the impact of warfare and other upheavals inevitably caught up and showed up on some of the pages during the 1960s and 1970s. A case in point was his translation of *The Three Keys to Success* from Max Aitken Beaverbrook, a British politician and newspaperman commonly known as Lord Beaverbrook. Published for *The Road of Success* series, this compact translation was reminiscent of Le’s adaptation of Gordon Byron’s *Give Yourself a Chance* fifteen years earlier and addressed a series of desirable personal qualities for success especially in business. In the preface, Le recalled an anecdote from the end of World War II, when a Japanese engineer said to him and their Vietnamese colleagues that “your Vietnam is going to be independent but there is no hope that my Japan would rise again.” The Vietnamese believed the Japanese. But just over twenty years later, Japanese “Honda and Suzuki [motorcycles] were all over the [South] Vietnamese market,” a “painful reality to think about.”<sup>193</sup> Similarly, his preface to the translation of

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<sup>192</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Mot Quan Niem ve Song Dep* [A Perspective on Living Well, adaptation from Lin Yutang, *The Importance of Living* (Saigon: Tao Dan, 1965). Le wrote in the preface that he could not find a copy in English and instead translated from the Chinese version and a French translation.

<sup>193</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Tay Trang Lam Nen* [From Bare Hands to Success, translation of Lord Beaverbrook, *The Three Keys to Success*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1967; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2000), 5-6.

the French writer Paul Noël's *Fais ton chemin*, which he re-titled as *Advice to Youth* and meant for readers "between 14, 15 and 20, 21" in age, revealed an anguished heart at the long-term impact of warfare over Vietnamese youth and national development. "Our greatest worry," he wrote,

is about this war which will inevitably end. It will not destroy our people, whom the world has recognized to possess the greatest vitality in Southeast Asia. But after the return of peace, when the majority of our youth would have lost their self-confidence, their will, and their self-renewal, then what will happen to the development of our Vietnam?<sup>194</sup>

Le did not often make note of the war in his publications, but comments such as this quotation showed that it was close to his heart.<sup>195</sup> They also illustrated that much of his work for *Learning To Be Human* and related publications during the Second Indochina War was centered at the self-development of Vietnamese youth as much as did the publications during the first war. Later in the same preface, for instance, he recommended Paul Noël's tract "not because it is [philosophically] deep but because it is simple, practical, appropriate" and it "helps to solve many issues and difficulties in your school life." Le identified five specific areas: understanding one's body; understanding one's emotions and relationships with other people; training the mind in studies, reading,

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<sup>194</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Loi Khuyen Thanh Nien* [Advice to Youth, translation of Paul Noël, *Fais ton chemin*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1967). The preface was dated October 27, 1966.

<sup>195</sup> The First Indochina War provided a precedent. In the original preface to *Lodestone for Students*, dated on the Lunar New Year's in 1951, Le commented on the problem of concentration during warfare. "Although not living in war zones," he wrote, apparently on students in urban and semi-urban areas,

students must have been jolted the sound of cannons while working on a math assignment. Their thoughts must have wandered for some time before they resume their work... [Even] news such as the fall of Hankow and the fall of Seoul, printed in big letters on the front page of newspapers, must have struck their senses and lingered in their mind, reminding them of sounds of bombing and shooting! How could they not be distracted! Having difficulty in remembering [what they learned] is not only their fault, but also the fault of their situation.

and playing; developing morality and religious belief (he called this area “elevating the spirit”); and choosing an appropriate career” for the future.

Youth was also the intended audience of Le’s translation of *Lettre ouverte à un jeune homme sur la conduite de la vie* by André Maurois, the French novelist and Minister of Culture. Written in 1966 and translated by Le two years later, the tract was a response to the “hazards of our time,” perhaps Maurois’ euphemism for decadence among Western youths. It urged them to watch out for potential problems from postwar material well-being and sexual freedom, and offered his advices on a host of subjects such as intellectual growth, the use of leisure, money, marriage, writing, politics, and religious faith. Not surprisingly, Le himself heartily approved Maurois’ more conservative response to contemporary cultural upheavals in Europe. He even called the Frenchman a Confucian “gentleman” of the West because “some of his philosophy of life was compatible to Confucianism with a touch of Daoism”: a reference to the Confucian love of social order and Daoist meditation on the self.<sup>196</sup> Also of note was the translation of *Gespräche über Lebensfragen*, a short tract from the German novelist Luise Rinser that was aimed at adults rather than youth. The tract offered a series of meditations on undesirable traits such as pessimism and greed, and also personal qualities such as timeliness, forgiveness, and, very significant to Le, the virtue of “understanding youth.”<sup>197</sup> Le also reserved high praise for the compositional style and meditative content of Rinser’s book. Even though the translation was published for *The Path of Success*,

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<sup>196</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Thu Ngo Goi Tuoi Doi Muoi* [Letters to Young Adults, translation of André Maurois, *Lettre ouverte à un jeune homme sur la conduite de la vie*] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1968; reprint, Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1990), xii.

<sup>197</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Chap Nhan Cuoc Doi* [Acceptance of Life, translation of Luise Rinser, *Gespräche über Lebensfragen*] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1971; reprint, Houston: Saigon, Co., 1982). The original title meant *Discussions on Vital Issues*, but Le called his translation *Acceptance of Life*, taken after the title of the French translation he used, which was *Dire oui à la vie* (*Say Yes to Life*).

these qualities prompted him to call the tract “not the same as learning-to-be-human books sold all over bookstores” but “comparable” to Lin Yutang’s *The Importance of Living* and Maurois’ *Un Art de Vivre* for its lucid composition and meditative value.<sup>198</sup> This comment was as revealing of the popularity of *Learning To Be Human* publications in urban South Vietnam as it was demonstrative of Le’s appreciation for Rinser’s text.

In addition to translations, Le published at least two original works in self-help during the 1960s. One was *Training How to Reason*, which concerned not only logical thinking but also skills in practical judgment in matters such as conducting interviews and exercising caution about advertisements and propaganda. Self-published in 1965 under the imprint *Learning To Be Human*, this tract had a similar format to Le’s translation of Ennever’s *Your Mind and How to Use It*. Employing a mix of books from French academics and the French version of *Reader’s Digest*, the book again demonstrated Le’s skill in extracting his own synthesis from very different kinds of sources.<sup>199</sup> Also self-published but far more comprehensive in content was *The Future is in Our Hands*. In fact, it was the most comprehensive of Le’s original tracts on self-improvement, and its text was full of references to books that he had already translated or would translate later. After an opening chapter of broad strokes about “principles” of living, it devoted individual chapters on the subjects of physical health, work, rest and entertainment, self-reflection and meditation, advices for young women, and preparing for old age. In other words, Le aimed to cover the entire spectrum and all major aspects of adult life. Most notable was the subject of marriage, which, aside from the translation

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<sup>198</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Chap Nhan Cuoc Doi*, vii. *Un Art de Vivre* was translated for *Learning To Be Human* by another person.

<sup>199</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Luyen Li Tri* [Training How to Reason] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1965; reprint, Hanoi: Van Hoa – Thong Tin, 2003).

of Dorothy Carnegie's *How to Help Your Husband Get Ahead*, Le had written little elsewhere. As if to make up for it, he spent three full chapters in this book: on considerations about modern marriage, on choosing a marriage partner, and on ways to advance and protect marital happiness.<sup>200</sup>

These works were supplemented – and perhaps supplanted – by a steady stream of reprints of his contributions to *Learning To Be Human* in the 1950s.<sup>201</sup> He continued to write widely too on subjects beyond self-improvement. A prominent example was the three-volume history of Chinese literature that he co-authored with the classicist Gian Chi, a northern intellectual that joined the anticolonial resistance during the war but migrated south out of dissatisfaction of Viet Minh policies. Another well-received book was a history of Israel, a country that fascinated Le and many other noncommunist Vietnamese intellectuals for the way it achieved and maintained independence. Still, a third example was the updated edition of a history of the Tonkin Free School (first published in the mid-1950s) that has remained the standard book on the subject.

By any measure, Le's output was copious and multi-faceted, and many of his books sold very well. His correspondence was also voluminous and reflected his enduring popularity long after the publication of *Lodestone for Students*. Between 1968 and 1980, for instance, he received about thirty letters from readers, fans, and friends each month, of which he had time to reply about two-thirds.<sup>202</sup> His reputation rested on a

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<sup>200</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Tuong Lai o Tay Ta* [The Future is in Our Hands] (Saigon: Nguyen Hien Le, 1962).

<sup>201</sup> Most of Le's translations of Western works during the 1960s and 1970s did not see reprints until after 1990. The disruption of 1975 and postwar consequences were a major reason for this long pause. But the 1960s and early 1970s also saw many other translations, adaptations, and original works from a larger pool of urban South Vietnamese writers, and Le faced far greater competition than he did in the 1950s.

<sup>202</sup> Quach Tan, *Hoi Ky Quach Tan*, 445.

multiplicity of genres, and he was most original when writing about the Vietnamese language, personal travel, and the aforementioned history of the Tonkin Free School. For the most part, he was a reader, adapter, translator, and popularizer of literature, Chinese classics, and, of course, self-improvement and *culture humaine*.

Thanks to his early involvement with Pham Van Tuoi's *Learning To Be Human*, his name has been nearly synonymous with the series. The many reprints and editions between 1952 and 1975 helped to ensure this, and so did the fact that many of his books and translations outside the series addressed similar themes and topics. Like almost all former South Vietnamese noncommunist writers, most of his publications were prohibited from open circulation after the demise of the RVN. Shortly after the postwar regime changed course through Renovation in 1987, however, they began to reappear in reprints: at first with parts cut out sometimes; then in full as they had appeared in urban South Vietnam. In the era of Vietnamese integration into the global and post-Cold War capitalist system, his is the most complete body of works among all South Vietnamese authors to have reappeared thus far, and some of his unpublished manuscripts were also brought out for the first time.<sup>203</sup>

### **Minor writers for *Learning to Be Human***

Although Le was by far the best-known and likely most-read writer for *Learning To Be Human*, he was only one of dozens of contributors during the quarter-century existence of the series in Republican Saigon. As noted, Le's friend Thien Giang, co-

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<sup>203</sup> For examples, three biographical tracts on Gogol, Turgenev, and Chekhov, all published in 2000.

translated with Pham Van Tuoi the classic *Le Chemin de Bonheur* by Victor Pauchet. With at least five reprints by 1962, it was among the most successful tracts of the series.<sup>204</sup> Thien Giang probably wrote the preface alone, in which he recalled the first time he read Pauchet's tract in original, "some twelve years ago, or around 1940" while isolated by imprisonment in the Truong Son Mountains.<sup>205</sup> He credited the book for having helped him regain "zeal for life" and "happiness" through three areas: recovery of health, displacement of pessimism by hopefulness, and progress in learning. (They corresponded to the tripartite interrelationship of personal health, mind, and intellect promoted by *Learning To Be Human*.) The first third of the tract was devoted to physical health and its relation to mental health. The remainder focused on the "training of mind and virtues" and dispensed thoughts and advices on a host of qualities, including self-control, calmness, concentration, and charitable attitude towards other people. The book "does not offer a method to change human society," explained Thien Giang, "It offers a guide for people that have lost confidence in life so they can recover it." A longer commentary on Pauchet further revealed his occupation with adjustment and adaptation to social and economic changes affecting modern Vietnam:

[Living] in a society without balance... especially in major cities, [many] people have become exhausted. Dr. Pauchet thinks about them and, from a scientific perspective, helps them search for happiness. He is different from the religious thinker that considers happiness to be found in the future. He is different from the sociologist that builds happiness by reforming society. Dr. Pauchet helps people create happiness from existing circumstances and situations of their society. His kind of

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<sup>204</sup> Thien Giang and Pham Cao Tung, *Con Duong Hanh Phuc: Phuong Phap Tu Giao Duc* [The Way of Happiness: A Method in Self-Teaching, translation of Victor Pauchet, *Le Chemin de Bonheur*] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1962). P. Van Tuoi had published the original edition, probably in 1952.

<sup>205</sup> Thien Giang and Pham Cao Tung, *Con Duong Hanh Phuc*, 5.

happiness could be created anywhere: in a palace or a tent, amidst a vast society or within the four walls of a prison.<sup>206</sup>

Other translations from Thien Giang for the series were two pedagogical tracts: the previously noted student guide *Voulez-vous, que vos enfants soient de bons élèves?*; and *Conseils aux parents*, a classic from the educational reformer Célestin Freinet that offered twenty-five practical advices to parents assisting children in their studies.<sup>207</sup> The student-oriented guides and translations from Thien Giang and Le in turn reflected the broader emphasis on the nuclear family in urban South Vietnam. Success in marriage, for example, was the subject of several tracts by minor contributors to *Learning To Be Human*. One example was *The Married Life* from Huynh Duc Quang, whose accessibility was characterized by simple sentences, short paragraphs, and apt quotations from a number of classic and modern writers, especially the Self-Strength. Early in the book, the author devoted a chapter to raise a number of objections to polygamy and divorce, two still important issues for Vietnamese. He then attempted to walk a fine line between the still-powerful weight of tradition and the tempting draw of Western individualism. Having implied, for instance, that arranged marriage was outdated, he nonetheless cautioned young unmarried Vietnamese on the subjectivity of excessive romantic feelings and urged them to consult their parents on related matters prior to marriage. On the other hand, he recommended that parents educate their children “so

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<sup>206</sup> Thien Giang and Pham Cao Tung, *Con Duong Hanh Phuc*, 7.

<sup>207</sup> Thien Giang, *Day Con: 25 Loi Khuyen de Huong Dan Phu Huynh trong Viec Day Do Con Cai* [Teaching Children: Twenty-Five Advices to Guide Parents on Educating Their Children, translation of Célestin Freinet, *Conseils aux parents*] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1954). Later in the decade, Le's own publishing house brought out several original works by Thien Giang on education and family under the imprint *New Education*.



they make their own decisions on marriage.”<sup>208</sup> He advised young people to seek compatibility in education, social status, and similar “ideal” in a potential marital partner. The bulk of the book consisted of recommendations about engagement, marital sexual relations, management of finance and housework for wives, fatherhood and motherhood, relations with in-laws, and, more generally, principles to “protect the ideal of marriage.”

Another frequently reprinted tract, *Wives and Husbands*, co-authored by the female writer Thuy An, first came out in 1956 but must have been written before the Geneva Conference.<sup>209</sup> Unlike *The Married Life* and many other books for *Learning To Be Human*, its narrative was mostly devoid of literary and philosophical references, and excelled in clear prose peppered by interesting anecdotes and autobiographical references. Perhaps reflecting of the divorce of the female co-author, some of its statements sounded more progressive than *The Married Life*.<sup>210</sup> It declared, for example, “Our generation today can completely decide for ourselves whom to marry.” Yet similar to the earlier tract, it advised the involvement of parents: “If we must prepare the happiness for marriage and family life when we were completely free to choose, this

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<sup>208</sup> Huynh Duc Quang, *Doi Song Lua Doi: Nhung Bi Quyet de Xay Dung Hanh Phuc Gia Dinh* [The Married Life: Keys to Build Happiness in the Family] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1955; reprint, Saigon: Khai Tri, 1974), 72.

<sup>209</sup> Thuy An and Hoang Dan, *Vo Chong: 25 Cau Chuyen Hanh Phuc Gia Dinh* [Wives and Husbands: Twenty-Five Stories about Family Happiness] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1956; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, n.d.) It is not clear who Hoang Dan (a very male-sounding name) was, and it is possible that the co-authorship was made up to give the appearance that it was the work of a man-woman team. But Thuy An was the penname of Luu Thi Yen, a female fiction writer and editor of several journals in Hanoi and Saigon during late colonialism. She remained in North Vietnam after the Geneva Conference, and was later arrested during the *Humanities - Good Works* Affair for alleged association with members of the two journals. During imprisonment, she damaged one of her eyes in protest. Under the terms of the Paris Peace Agreements, she was allowed to leave for South Vietnam in 1973 and lived in Saigon until her death in 1989. See Le Bao Hoang, *Tac Gia Viet Nam*, 614.

<sup>210</sup> Thuy An had six children with her first husband, who was an uncle of Bui Diem, the future South Vietnamese ambassador to the U.S. They later divorced and she was remarried to a member of the VNQDD that was killed under ambiguous circumstances. She dedicated this book to two of her children, both daughters. It read, “Mother thought of the two of you a lot when writing this book. With the best of wishes, I dearly pray that you will have the kinds of happiness that I did not.”

preparation should have the support of our parents or the people whose wisdom and experience we respect.”<sup>211</sup> The remainder of the tract offered recommendations on a wide range of issues and questions, such as these examples. Is compatibility in social status necessary for a successful marriage? (It depends.) Should newlyweds take a honeymoon after the wedding? (Yes.) Should a wife be jealous? (Yes, but be very careful when expressing it because it might lead to further marital damage.) How does a husband approach sex with his wife? (With patience because women are slower to arousal.) What is the basic orientation towards one’s spouse? (As one’s best friend.)

Translations continued to be a strong point of the series even as it brought out more and more original works as these guides to marriage. While Nguyen Hien Le held a monopoly over translations of Dale and Dorothy Carnegie, lesser-known translators published works from other American and European authors. One example was the journalist Te Xuyen, who translated *How to Sell Yourself to Others* by Elmer Wheeler. Wheeler was an American salesman and successful writer most remembered for the *Tested Sentences that Sell* and his five “Wheelerpoints” on the topic.<sup>212</sup> Te Xuyen also translated an etiquette manual from Jean Charles Serres, the French expert on the field, which had been published in the popular series *Que sais-je?*<sup>213</sup> Another was a popular tract on optimistic living from Raymond de Saint-Laurent, another European author that published a successful series called *Mind Training*. Entitled *Living in Optimism*, it was

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<sup>211</sup> Thuy An and Hoang Dan, *Vo Chong*, 30 and 32-33.

<sup>212</sup> Te Xuyen, *Muon Thanh Cong tren Duong Doi* [To Succeed in Life, translation of Elmer Wheeler, *How to Sell Yourself to Others*] (Saigon: Khai Tri, date unknown; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, n.d.) On Wheeler and his Wheelerpoints, see Sant, *The Giants of Sales*, 123-167.

<sup>213</sup> Te Xuyen, *Xa Giao Moi va Cac Nghi Le* [New Etiquette and Rituals, translation of Jean Charles Serres, *Le protocole et les usage*] (Saigon: Khai Tri, date unknown; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, n.d.) Serres’ tract had been published in the popular series *Que sais-je?*

divided into three broad sections: causes of pessimism; “strategies” towards “cleanliness” for one’s mind, emotions, will, and body; and practical “programs” such as self-examination, avoidance of excessive stimuli, and physical exercise. The goal, to quote the sub-subtitle, was to achieve “appropriate optimism: the midpoint between pessimism and ineffectual optimism.”<sup>214</sup> Equally telling was the introductory chapter, which asked, “Do you possess a desire to succeed to live a rich and productive life?”<sup>215</sup> While specifics of that life were left to the person, it was unmistakable that the book was meant to help individual success.

Unlike Nguyen Hien Le and Thien Giang, Te Xuyen did not offer translator’s prefaces in his translations. His translations, however, were as lucid and winning as anything that Le had translated for the same series. He did pen, however, a brief preface for a collection of biographical sketches similar to Le’s *Exemplars* tracts. Called *Exemplars of Will Power*, it told twenty-four stories of people that rose from poverty or physical disabilities to prominence. Twenty-two were Westerners such as Michaelangelo, Lincoln, Marie Curie, Elizabeth Blackwell (the first American female graduate from a medical school), and Milton Humason (the astronomer and collaborator of Edwin Hubble that began as a janitor at an observatory). The translator, however, bookended the text with two Asian figures: a Japanese teenager that discovered a new comet and a Sino-Vietnamese ship merchant, one of the wealthiest Vietnamese in the early twentieth century. The strategic placement was likely meant to suggest that Vietnamese readers

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<sup>214</sup> Te Xuyen, *Song Lac Quan: Phuong Phap Giu Tinh Than Thang Bang va Bao Dam Thanh Cong* [Living with Optimism: How to Achieve Mental Balance and Success, translation of Raymond de Saint-Laurent, *Optimisme, équilibre mental et gage de succès*] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1967; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, n.d.)

<sup>215</sup> Te Xuyen, *Song Lac Quan*, 8.

could take heart in near-contemporary examples from their own continent. More significant, the translator's preface described the book as "24 real stories... of individuals that employed extraordinary will to overcome powerful obstacles, turn defeat into victory, and ably fight off their dark fates."<sup>216</sup> Not unremarkable was the dismissal of fate, a concept that held powerful sway over Vietnamese at the time.<sup>217</sup>

### **Three contributors: Nguyen Duy Can, Pham Cao Tung, and Hoang Xuan Viet**

Between Nguyen Hien Le and minor contributors to the series, three writers stood out for the quantity of their works as well as the frequency of reprints. In reputation, indeed, their names were most associated to *Learning To Be Human* after Le. One of them, Nguyen Duy Can (1907-1997), had been active in Saigon intellectual circles well before Le published his first book. A specialist in Asian philosophy, Can was also known by his penname Thu Giang ("Thu River" or "Autumn River"), created in honor of his native southern city of My Tho. In the late 1930s, he managed, edited, and wrote for a short-lived Saigon cultural journal called *Now (Nay)* whose publisher was his own father.<sup>218</sup> By the early 1940s, he had published four books, mostly on philosophy. To judge by the lack of reprints and references in subsequent publications, they were probably not read widely. But they foreshadowed his subsequent prominence as a writer and translator of Eastern philosophy. During the Republican period, Can worked variously as editor of several journals, lecturer in Asian philosophy at the University of

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<sup>216</sup> Te Xuyen, *Guong Nghi Luc* [Exemplars of Will Power] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1967), 7.

<sup>217</sup> Te Xuyen also published two other collections in the Exemplars genre, albeit not for *Learning To Be Human*.

<sup>218</sup> Vu Hanh and Nguyen Ngoc Phan, *Van Hoc Thoi Ky 1945-1975 o Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh* [Literature During 1945-1975 in Ho Chi Minh City] (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Hoa Saigon, 2008), 319.

Saigon, and, for a time in the mid-1960s, the commissioner of the RVN's Culture and Social Welfare Ministry.<sup>219</sup> Can was among the first contributors to *Learning To Be Human* and published four tracts in consecutive years: *The Courage of Great Men* (1951), *The Art of Thinking* (1952), *Clear Thinking* (1953) and *The Art of Social Conduct Among Ancient Men* (1954). All four sold well: the tracts on thinking saw four reprints each by 1968, and each of the others five reprints. They were followed by two tracts: *Self-Learning* (1959) and *The Art of Love* (1961) that were reprinted, respectively, twice and thrice also by 1968. There was also *An Art of Living* (1962), perhaps the least-read of his *Learning To Be Human* books since it saw only one reprint by the end of the 1960s. Can then shifted almost exclusively to translating and writing about Buddhism and Chinese philosophy, and his translations of Laozi's and Zhangzi's classic texts remain standard Vietnamese translations to this day.

Can's advocacy for a more individualist Vietnamese self could be spotted back in the 1930s. "The world," he wrote philosophically in a book published at the end of the decade,

is in need of superior individuals, individuals that possess complete personality, individuals that do not allow restraints [imposed] by circumstances or temptations by the fashion of the day, individuals that courageously think about themselves and judge who they are, individuals that stand amid loud lost seep yet remain undisturbed, firm, and clear-headed... Free spirits and people of determination: presently humanity is in need of them and is waiting for them.<sup>220</sup>

Soaring that the passage might sound, it must be said immediately that Can was hardly an advocate of excessive individualism. In a tract on South Vietnamese culture and society

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<sup>219</sup> *Who's Who in Vietnam*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Saigon: Saigon Press, 1974), 97-98.

<sup>220</sup> This remark came originally from Nguyen Duy Can, *Thanh Da Van Chung* [Bells Toll in the Quiet of Night] (Saigon: Nay, 1939), and was quoted in the preface of Nguyen Duy Can, *Courage of Great Men*, 11.

published in the early 1970s, he voiced against “the ideology of class conflict” as inappropriate for the development of the postcolonial Vietnamese culture. But he also affirmed that individualism, “like socialism, carries hazardous and wrong-headed prejudices.” At stake was “the balance between the individual and society,” and Can argued that “society cannot eliminate the individual” while “the individual cannot wreck chaos on society.”<sup>221</sup> Probably alarmed by the crass materialism brought partly by the Americanization of the war, Can also railed against the “new lifestyle” of dress and behavior among Vietnamese youths, their attraction to hip Hollywood anti-heroes and trendy French existentialism, the widespread availability of books and music and movies that elevated the individual above community.<sup>222</sup> In their place, Can was in favor of “individual freedom,” albeit one in “harmony” with society. The term “individual,” he wrote, meant “not selfish sentiments... that sought their private interests without regard to the common interests of [social] organizations.” Rather, it “denotes *particular characteristics* of each person, as in differences between a rose and an orchid, between a sunflower and a Chinese violet.” In this sense, Can argued, “*Individual freedom* must be placed at the top of programs related to culture, education, and society.” (Original emphasis.)<sup>223</sup>

There were two further points to Can’s view about the individual and society. First, he located the family as the foundation for society and culture. In this, he was similar to Ngo Dinh Diem, Nguyen Hien Le, and many other noncommunist South Vietnamese. “To build a communal society,” he declared, “we have to begin at the most

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<sup>221</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Van Hoa va Giao Duc Mien Nam Di Ve Dau?* [Culture and Education in the South: Where Do They Head?] (Saigon: Nam Ha, 1970), 14-15.

<sup>222</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Van Hoa va Giao Duc Mien Nam*, 45-50.

<sup>223</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Van Hoa va Giao Duc Mien Nam*, 41-42.

basic social unit: THE FAMILY.” As a collective based on trust and love, the family would provide the ground for personal development but without the kind of self-centeredness associated to extreme individualism.<sup>224</sup> Second, Can considered education to have a dual goal: the state and society would foster personal development through “the *individualization of education*” as well as “the *socialization of education*” (original emphasis). Individualization of education meant “providing each child knowledge appropriate to his level and ability”: education would serve the child rather than the other way around. Moreover, the “education for the individual has to be a *total education*: education of the intellect, education of morals, and education of the body.”<sup>225</sup> (It was not a coincidence that this three-folded education corresponded to the tripartite aim of *Learning To Be Human* to educate “body, intellect, and soul.”) By “socialization of education,” Can meant that students should be trained and socialized in groups and associations so they learned to get along and work with one another. Sports were especially important in this respect, as they could foster teamwork as well as moral virtues.<sup>226</sup> Written in the late 1970s, Can’s book could be seen as a caution against extreme individualism on the one hand and an advocacy for a moderate model of individualism on the other hand. This context should be kept in mind when reading his tracts for *Learning To Be Human* in the 1950s and 1960s.

Given his specialization on Asian philosophy, it is not a surprise that Can’s contributions to the series usually contained a large amount of references to the Eastern tradition in addition to those from the West. His tracts were peppered with references,

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<sup>224</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Van Hoa va Giao Duc Mien Nam*, 71-72.

<sup>225</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Van Hoa va Giao Duc Mien Nam*, 76-77.

<sup>226</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Van Hoa va Giao Duc Mien Nam*, 90-98.

examples, and quotations from Laozi, Zhangzi, So Dongpo, the Leizi, and the Bhagavad Gita as much as those from Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius, Balzac, and Gustave La Bon's *The Crowd*. An illustration could be found in the second appendix of *The Courage of Great Men*, whose manuscript Can finished in 1942 after ten years of writing but was not published until *Learning To Be Human* in the early 1950s.<sup>227</sup> This appendix listed eight-four sayings and quotations on the subject of the book. Forty-five quotations were attributed to Western figures from classical Greece to modernity, thirty to Eastern sources from antiquity to the early twentieth century, and eight to no particular sources that nonetheless sounded quite Eastern. While Nguyen Hien Le and most writers of *Learning To Be Human* paid attention mostly to Western sources even when praising the East, it was Can alone that sought to blend the wisdom of both sides. It was a selling point of his books and, arguably, helped to draw older readers to the series.<sup>228</sup> In one of his tracts for the seires, he even quoted the famous passage on the fourfold classical ideal – cultivate the self, regulate the family, govern the state, and pacify the world – from the Confucian text *Great Learning*.<sup>229</sup>

The subject of *The Courage of Great Men* was composure or calmness, and Can considered it the foundation of virtues for individual greatness. “The courage of great men is composure at its extreme,” he wrote. Moreover, the composed person “is in

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<sup>227</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Cai Dung cua Thanh Nhan* [The Courage of Great Men] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1951, 1955; reprint, Houston: Xuan Thu, 1983), 7.

<sup>228</sup> It should be added that this was not always the case with Can. He published a small volume about writing literary criticism in the 1960s, and both the impressive bibliography and the appendix of sayings consisted entirely of Western sources.

<sup>229</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Thuat Tu Tuong* [The Art of Thinking] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1952; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, 1986), 46.



control of both of his Sexual Desire and Will.”<sup>230</sup> Divided into two sections, the book advocated the furthering of composure through self-reflection but also appearance, politeness, exercise, time management, and choice of friends. The second section explained six qualities related to composure: “the spirit of independence,” responsibility, the ability to persuade through suggestion rather direction, truth-telling, imagination, and judgment. In many ways, the book reflected the Vietnamese classical tradition of self-improvement. Can intended the book to be modeled on the Eastern tradition; he accordingly cited and quoted Chinese, Japanese, and Indian sources throughout the text. (Western sources appeared mostly in the aforementioned appendix.) It also did not address any specifics about composure in modern life and modern society. Can made clear of this point in his response to a review of the book: “*The Courage of Great Men* only discusses how to train the virtue of composure... What this composure is for, is another subject.”<sup>231</sup> When placed alongside Can’s other contributions to *Learning To Be Human*, however, it was clear that Can’s target was middle-class Vietnamese and his intention was to help them improve their social standing and success. In *Clear Thinking*, for instance, he referred explicitly to physicians, engineers, teachers, lawyers, machinists, and merchants.<sup>232</sup> Throughout *Self-Learning*, he evoked teachers, physicians, engineers,

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<sup>230</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Cai Dung cua Thanh Nhan*, 6 and 17.

<sup>231</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, “A Debate between Two Writers about the Power of Spirit and Violence,” in Nguyen Duy Can, *Cai Dung cua Thanh Nhan*, 201. The review had been published in *Khoa Hoc Tap Chi* [Journal of Science], Can’s response was published in *The Gioi* [World], and both were republished here.

<sup>232</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Oc Sang Suot* [*Clear Thinking*] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1952; reprint, Saigon: Khai Tri, 1960), 39.

artists, and military officers.<sup>233</sup> The latter tract also gave some attention to secondary education, a mark for an educated Vietnamese at the time.

Can did not specify any professions in *The Art of Thinking* which, similar to *The Courage of Great Men*, was also composed in the early 1940s but did not see publication for over a decade later. Rather, he appealed to the postcolonial aspirations of Vietnamese in general. “Training how to think,” he wrote, “is a necessary and urgent task for people that care about their human dignity and their responsibilities to the family, country, and humanity.”<sup>234</sup> The tract began with a quotation from Pascal but employed references and examples mostly from the Chinese and Vietnamese traditions. Yet it was implicitly critical of the prevalence of human relationship based on emotion (*tin*) over reason (*ly*) in the Eastern tradition. “In the spirit of the civilized,” he stated, “Reason is Reason and Sentiment is Sentiment.”<sup>235</sup> To help readers improve reasoning, Can gave out a number of concrete suggestions to improve one’s observation, reason, and judgment. The chapter on criticism, for instance, offered a series of questions to consider before writing a critical assessment of history. The chapter on reading spoke of the usefulness of appendixes and detailed tables of content. (Putting theory into practice, the author frequently provided this kind of tables of content in his own books.) Can later recycled and enlarged some of these ideas and suggestions in *Self-Learning*, which considered self-education a continuation from secondary education as well as a mark of modern happiness. “Happiness,” he argued, “means control over our own action, thought, and feeling” so that “each day we gain more clarity, more freedom, more broad-mindedness, which

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<sup>233</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Toi Tu Hoc [Self-Learning]* (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1961; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, 1980), 30 and 46.

<sup>234</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Thuat Tu Tuong*, 9-10.

<sup>235</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Thuat Tu Tuong*, 97.

means more newness” (or modernity).<sup>236</sup> Without using the term, Can accordingly advocated a self-education in the liberal arts. He gave a number of pointers on reading, writing, and translating – in some ways, the tract was an adult version of Nguyen Hien Le’s *Lodestone for Students* – and even reading recommendations on Western and Eastern literature and philosophy. He ended the book with eight “principles” for self-education, such as the importance of choice about what to study, regularity in schedule, and maintenance of good health.

The frequency of reprints of Can’s tracts indicated a strong measure of success, but his composition was more philosophical and less accessible than that of Nguyen Hien Le. Closer to Le’s style was Pham Van Tuoi, who, as noted, contributed to the series under the penname Pham Cao Tung.<sup>237</sup> (Because of bibliographical convention, I will use the penname in discussing the books.) Tung’s tracts were well received, perhaps for their high readability as much as for their subjects. Like Le and Can, he published most of his contributions to *Learning To Be Human* during the 1950s. In the first half, he wrote three original tracts: *The Polite Person* (1951), *Wanting to Become a Person* (1952), and *May I Speak to You Directly* (1955). Besides the co-translation of Victor Pauchet’s book with Thien Giang, he translated the inspirational essay “A Message to Garcia” from Elbert Hubbard as *The Resourceful Spirit* (1955). He also put together a collection of axioms and quotations from primarily Western sources and called it *The Purse of Human Wisdom* (1955). During the second half of the decade, he published for the series one book on the psychology of romantic love, a translation of a popular book

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<sup>236</sup> Nguyen Duy Can, *Toi Tu Hoc*, 34.

<sup>237</sup> Oddly, other than Hoang Xuan Viet, no one else – not even Nguyen Hien Le – has noted the fact that Tung and Tuoi were the same person.

*La Connaissance des Hommes* by the French author Philippe Girardes, and another translation of a classic tract by the ancient philosopher Epiclete. Tung also published a brief biography of Winston Churchill for the brief series *Extraordinary Lives*, plus three titles for *Entrepreneurship*: a well-received guidebook on sales, a co-translation (again with Thien Giang) of the classic *Axioms for Business* from the popular American writer H. N. Casson, and a translation of Casson's *Directions for Business Success*.

Tung's first contribution to *Learning To Be Human* was also his runaway commercial success. On the subject of etiquette and aimed at an urban and middle-class audience, *The Polite Person* enjoyed six reprints and one update during the first five years alone, and did not seem to be out of print for the remainder of the Republican period.<sup>238</sup> Similar to many modern Western standard texts on the subject, it defined etiquette as a way to smoothen social relations, as "grease that eases the movements of wheels."<sup>239</sup> It was divided into six sections: speaking and behavior in public places; behavior at private residences; behavior at life-marking events (such as weddings, funerals, birthday parties, and open houses); behavior over media (letters, business cards, telephone, and visits); dining etiquette; and clothing etiquette. Tung occasionally remarked on differences between Easterners and Westerners, but also tried to bridge the gap between them. He commented, for instance, that Easterners were more reserved than Westerners on public display of affection, but also insisted that Western psychologists consider self-control a most important quality. Elsewhere, he added that Westerners did

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<sup>238</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Nguoi Lich Su: Phep Xa Giao va An, Mac theo Doi Song Moi* [The Polite Person: Etiquette on Behavior, Dining, and According to the New Lifestyle] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1951; reprint, Saigon: Khai Tri, 1963). This reprint included a note from Tung (11) from the mid-1950s, saying that the book was also updated at the third printing

<sup>239</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Nguoi Lich Su*, 6.

not flaunt such display as Vietnamese might have thought, but instead reserved it for family members.<sup>240</sup> Tung also called for greater egalitarian behavior and criticized hierarchical and tradition-sanctioned behavior (such as that towards servants) as “vulgar” and “uneducated.”<sup>241</sup> The egalitarian spirit was confirmed in the concluding section of an updated edition, where Tung responded to criticism “from some readers” that the book focused on the elite. Quoting approvingly Roger Bacon that “politeness is the cloak of the spirit,” he wrote that “we only saw Persons in front of us: polite persons and impolite persons.”<sup>242</sup> (Tung sometimes capitalized the word “person” to indicate the significance of the individual.)

Although *The Polite Person* did not have a bibliography, it was unmistakable that its sources were Western and its subject individualism. This orientation is further apparent in his other publications for the series, where sources were listed or cited. Personal resourcefulness, for instance, was the subject of his pamphlet-sized translation of *A Message for Garcia* by Elbert Hubbard, an American writer and editor, exponent of the Arts and Crafts movement, defender of free enterprise, and a casualty of World War I at the sinking of the *Lusitania* in 1915. The biggest hero of the Spanish-American War, according to Hubbard, was not Teddy Roosevelt but an obscure lieutenant called Rowan who did not hesitate when President McKinley asked him to deliver a message to the insurgent General Calixto Garcia. In this translation, Tung provided an introduction that gave his own interpretation of the essay. Focusing on resourcefulness and leadership, he also tied it to nationalism. “Our country today,” he wrote, “is at a developing stage...

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<sup>240</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Nguoi Lich Su*, 9 and 17.

<sup>241</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Nguoi Lich Su*, 106-107.

<sup>242</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Nguoi Lich Su*, 202.

and of course it needs many ‘Persons’ [and] many ‘brains’ to commence great things but also many resourceful ‘hands and legs’ to carry them out.”<sup>243</sup>

A much longer exposition of these qualities was *Wanting to Become Human*. Like Nguyen Duy Can’s *The Courage of Great Men*, had been written in the early 1940s but did not see publication for a decade. The introduction indicates that Tung aimed the book at “youths that close to graduating from school and stepping into the school of life.”<sup>244</sup> It asked rhetorical questions such as “What does it mean to be a person?” and “Have we prepared ourselves to become a person?” Answering them were seven chapters on the theme “founding” or “training” (*lap*): training one’s mind, health, money, virtue, family, and life. Influenced by the “Efficiency Movement” of the Englishman Herbert Casson, Tung asserted that one should aspire to more than what there is, but also towards “clear goals rather than distant ones.” One should not “catch fishes with both hands” either, he wrote, meaning that both hands should work towards catching one fish only, not two or more fishes at the same time. More important, the person should keep in mind that “there are different purposes” for different people, but “their values are the same.”<sup>245</sup> Most important was finding and orienting oneself towards goals and purposes of one’s own making, and pursuing them with determination and even daring. In *If I May Address You Directly*, a collection of fifty-two short pieces previously written between 1952 and 1954 for his own weekly *New*, Tung treated self-improvement themes in the form of stories-cum-essays, sometimes meditatively, sometimes provocatively. His elevation of the

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<sup>243</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Tinh Than Thao Vac: Bai Hoc ve Tinh Thanh Thao Vac cua “Buc Thong Diep Goi Garcia”* [The Resourceful Spirit: A Lesson on Resourcefulness from “A Message to Garcia,” translation of Elbert Huddard, *A Message to Garcia*] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1955), xiv.

<sup>244</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Muon Nen Nguoi*, 7.

<sup>245</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Muon Nen Nguoi*, 159-164.

bourgeois individual was unmistakable in a mini-essay called “The ‘Self’ Is Not Unlovely.” “According to Pascal,” it began, “the self is unlovely when it is prideful.” In contrast, “what could be detestable” about “a young man with high ambition to make it in life... or an entrepreneur with high ambition to create a legacy”?<sup>246</sup> Characteristically, he claimed there that a young person should develop both born and acquired abilities “FOR THE FUTURE” and “SO THAT YOU WOULD HAVE NO REGRETS LATER.”<sup>247</sup> The avoidance of possible regrets would serve as a motivator for great ambitions and the fearlessness in pursuing them. “*Efficient people* always seek challenging works,” Tung wrote in another essay, “They do not desire walking on already paved roads.”<sup>248</sup> Moreover, ambitiousness is not limited to the young. In another essay, Tung wrote about a man of thirty-five years who read about the nuclear bombs dropped in Japan at the end of World War II. Up to that point, this man felt he was “SMALL” and “mosquito-like.” Upon realizing that the tiny article in the bomb could however produced tremendous effects, he “was determined to be a tiger” instead. “From then,” Tung wrote, “he took on challenging works and one kind of project after another. Many times he tasted failure, but more often success,” concluding that the man “gained an important position in society, created a magnificent and well-known legacy, and lived in happiness.”<sup>249</sup>

Among the major writers for *Learning To Be Human*, Tung was perhaps the most effective in sloganeering and the least academic in composition. His tracts were hardly devoid of citations and quotations of books in French, English, and Vietnamese. But the

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<sup>246</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Toi Co The Noi Thang voi Anh* [May I Address You Directly] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1954), 28.

<sup>247</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Toi Co The Noi Thang voi Anh*, 14.

<sup>248</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Toi Co The Noi Thang voi Anh*, 34. Tung frequently used the term *dac luc*, which is commonly translated as “capable” in English today but best translated as “efficient” in this case.

<sup>249</sup> Pham Cao Tung, *Toi Co The Noi Thang voi Anh*, 16-17.

vocabulary was common and accessible, the tone personal and clear, and the organization lucid and flowing. In contrast, the last major writer for the series, Hoang Xuan Viet (1930- ), was much drier in tone, far more academic in presentation, and more overtly moralistic in content. A Catholic southerner, Viet was born Nguyen Tung Nhan and came originally from a Catholic village in Ben Tre. He attended a Catholic grade school run by the Christian Brothers in My Tho, then junior high and high school seminaries in, respectively, Vinh Long and Saigon. He then studied philosophy at the seminary St. Joseph IV in Saigon, followed by theology at St. Sulpice (which moved from Vinh Long to Saigon in 1956). He was put in charge of the library at both seminaries and also chaired a “committee for theology and culture” at St. Sulpice.<sup>250</sup>

While the other three major writers began contributing to *Learning To Be Human* at the very start, the younger Viet did not publish his first book until the mid-1950s. Once in the business, however, he produced a steady stream of publications on philosophy, literature, and especially self-improvement. The last category consisted of dozens of tracts published either independently or for at least two series. His first three books were also contributions to *Learning To Be Human: The Virtue of Self-Control* (1955), *Divine Guide for Self-Training* (1955), and *The Virtue of Calmness* (1956).<sup>251</sup> Perhaps reflecting Viet’s seminary training, *The Virtue of Self-Control* resembled that of a sermon in tone and content. It also traveled in many principles and generalities but few examples and illustrations. Unlike most of the already published books in the series, it

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<sup>250</sup> Tuong Thang, Interview with Hoang Xuan Viet; Hoang Xuan Viet, Author’s Biography from Phuong Nam, [http://www.phuongnamvh.com/vie/author\\_detail.asp?au\\_id=1065](http://www.phuongnamvh.com/vie/author_detail.asp?au_id=1065) (accessed January 22, 2009).

<sup>251</sup> An early listing of *Learning To Be Human* from P. Van Tuoi marked these titles as #35, 36, and 47, respectively. I am unable to locate original copies of them, and have determined their years of publication on the basis of the catalog from WorldCat, and Nguyen Hien Le’s foreword to Viet’s tract *Training for Human Dignity*.



contained hardly any quotations or sources. Its best quality was brevity, as it was the shortest of his self-improvement tracts if not all of his books prior to 1975.<sup>252</sup>

Much of the same could be said about the next two tracts.<sup>253</sup> It was the fourth volume, however, that made a mark among the urban reading culture. (The first printing did not come from P. Van Tuoi, but it was incorporated into *Learning To Be Human* later.) Called *Training for Human Dignity* and published in 1957, it was divided in two parts, with the first part sketching out the concept of “spiritual education” (*tam linh duc*). The much longer second part analyzed six qualities: courage, calmness, self-direction, wisdom, optimism, and persuasiveness (*thu tam*, literally, “gaining the heart” of someone else). The bulk of ideas came from mostly French books in psychology, but Viet also strategically peppered the text with quotations and examples of “great men” from both East and West. Discussing the power of will, for instance, he invoked Napoleon, Francis de Sales, Gandhi, and the Vietnamese martial hero Quang Trung on a same page.<sup>254</sup> He used the story of McKinley, Rowan, and Garcia to make a point about responsibility. A few pages later, he illustrated a discussion on honesty with a tale from the Chinese classic *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.<sup>255</sup> In style, the book was an improvement over Viet’s previous publications. It also established an organizational pattern characteristic of his books on self-improvement: each chapter showed a bulleted outline at the start,

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<sup>252</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Duc Tu Chu: Chia Khoa cua Thanh Cong* [The Virtue of Self-Control: The Key to Success] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1955; reprint, Ca Mau: Mui Ca Mau, 2004). This reprint has over 100 pages of large print, but one in 1959 has 77 pages (as listed by WorldCat).

<sup>253</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Duc Tu Chu* [The Virtue of Self-Control], *Duc Diem Tinh* [The Virtue of Calmness] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1955). Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ngon Than de Luyen Tam* [Divine Finger for Self-Training] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1956).

<sup>254</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ren Nhan Cach (Thuat Dao Luyen Ca Tinh Dang Phuc)* [Training for Human Dignity: The Adirable Art of Shaping Individuality] (Saigon: Thanh Tan, 1957; reprint, Lancaster, PA: Xuan Thu, 1976), 113.

<sup>255</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ren Nhan Cach*, 322-323 and 326-327.

followed by numbered sections divided. (In some tracts, Viet also provided a suggestion for further reading at the end of each chapter.) Still, the paragraphs were longer, composition more theoretical, and the content more repetitive than those of Le or Tung. They accounted for the impression that Viet published more in the genre than any of the other three contributors, but were not embraced as much as any of them.

All the same, the intellectual significance of *Training for Human Dignity* was evident to Nguyen Hien Le and Le Van Sieu, who contributed, respectively, a brief foreword and a longer postscript to the tract. “I returned home,” wrote Le, “from [watching *La Vie Passionée de Van Gogh*] at the theater and saw the manuscript of *Training for Human Dignity* on the table... I read all of it after dinner.” Le called it “a valuable book that analyzes carefully a most important issue” at the time, and also “not something to read only once.”<sup>256</sup> Sieu was even more effusive in praise. “Thousands of years ago,” he wrote in his characteristically cross-temporal style, “Confucius, Lao-Tzu, the Buddha, and Jesus had applied their spiritual fire to awaken the necessary spiritual light for human life” and “used different words... to speak to the same desire of building faith on human goodness and pleasing ideals.” Contemporary life, however, looked “discouraging” due to human “consciousness” about material rights, class differences, and Darwinian competitiveness. Spiritual education was needed more than ever, and Sieu “would respectfully introduce to readers this useful work.”<sup>257</sup> The endorsement of two older writers helped to elevate Viet’s visibility among educated Vietnamese. The book itself became known enough that in the early 1960s, Viet contributed to a separate

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<sup>256</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ren Nhan Cach*, v.

<sup>257</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ren Nhan Cach*, 365-368.

series by the same name *Training for Human Dignity* for a different publisher.<sup>258</sup> He also began another series called *Success and Happiness* [*Thanh Cong va Hanh Phuc*]. Although they did not last very long, these series could easily pass for *Learning To Be Human* and consisted of titles such as *The Art of Training the Person*, *The Art of Leadership*, *The Married Life*, *The Intellectual Life*, and *Legacy and Lifespan*.

*Training for Human Dignity* also played an important role in Viet's personal life: he came very close to be ordained a priest but never became one partly because of it. By his own account, his first books were published without authorization from his superiors at the seminary or from a bishop. (Authorization, ultimately in the form of receiving a *nihil obstat* stamp from the local bishop, was a Catholic ecclesiastical requirement in Vietnam and elsewhere those days.) It seems that he was either impatient to wait for authorization or expected it might not come, and decided to send manuscripts to Pham Van Tuoi. Since the books bore his pen rather than real name, he probably escaped notice from the seminary authorities. For the publication of *Training for Human Dignity*, however, Viet sought the ecclesiastical *nihil obstat* authorization because he wanted to distribute copies of the book to friends and acquaintances as a commemorative gift of his forthcoming ordination in June 1957. Unfortunately, the printer pressed him hard for money and he had to speed up the date of publication. Vague are the details are vague on this point; in any event, the book came out the day before his scheduled ordination without having received the proper authorization. The incident prompted the seminary's French faculty to object to Ngo Dinh Thuc (Diem's brother and Viet's bishop at the time)

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<sup>258</sup> This series came out of the publisher Song Moi [New Life], and Viet authored most volumes. But the series also served as the launching pad for the writing career of Pham Con Son, who contributed two tracts. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Son became the major contributor to the series *The Road of Success*, which, as previously noted, counted the participation of Nguyen Hien Le.

of Viet's ordination. The ordination was delayed, and eventually Viet left the seminary, got married, and had two children with his wife.<sup>259</sup> Viet subsequently taught at several schools in the Ben Tre province and went to France for graduate studies in journalism and the liberal arts. In 1965, he founded the Anthropology and Sociology Institute (Hoc Vien Nhan Xa Hoc) in Saigon and taught there until 1975. He also lectured at the College of Arts and Letters at University of Saigon, at Saigon's Catholic college Minh Duc, and in forty-four towns and cities in South Vietnam. In addition, he led discussion roundtables for the radio and television in a program called "Our Issues" (*Van De cua Chung Ta*), which interviewed some 300 intellectuals and other figures.<sup>260</sup> Viet served as principal interviewer, and a number of Saigon writers and intellectuals were also closely involved in the program. For example, the novelist Nguyen Thi Thuy Vu, the poet Pho Duc, and the painter Nghieu De were in charge of discussions art. Viet would share discussions on students with two university students, Bich Loan and Ho Truong An; and discussions on poetry with two poets, Dinh Hung and Phuong Ha.<sup>261</sup> The limited information about the program nonetheless suggests that Viet's exposure to South Vietnamese extended beyond his publications.

Unlike Nguyen Hien Le, Viet was not very involved with periodicals. He did publish, however, what appears to have been a short-lived periodical called *Human Control* (*Nhan Chu*) and wrote a column called "Legacy and Lifespan" for the Saigon

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<sup>259</sup> Tuong Thang, Interview with Hoang Xuan Viet. Hoang Xuan Viet, *Gay Thien Cam* [How to Create Friendliness] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1969), 230. Tuy Hoa, "GS Hoang Xuan Viet va Dong Sach Hoc Lam Nguoi" [Prof. Hoang Xuan Viet and the Series *Learning To Be Human*], *Nong Nghiep* [Agriculture] (November 19, 2009): <http://www.baomoi.com/Info/GS-Hoang-Xuan-Viet-va-dong-sach-hoc-lam-nguoi/152/3517912.epi>.

<sup>260</sup> "Hoang Xuan Viet, Author's Biography at Phuong Nam."

<sup>261</sup> Ho Truong An, *Coi Ky Uc Trang Xanh* [The Realm of Blue Moon Memories] (Toronto: Lang Van, 1991), 133-134.

daily *Vietnamese People (Dan Viet)* in 1961-1962, later published in book form under the same name for a series called *Success and Happiness*.<sup>262</sup> Although his publishing interests also were not as wide-ranging as Le's, his books were varied enough in themes and subjects: histories of Eastern and Western philosophy, Greek and Roman poets, winners of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and political ideologies (one tract each on capitalism, Marxist-Leninism, and socio-anthropology). The bulk of publications, however, remained self-improvement types that he wrote for *Learning To Be Human*, *Training for Human Dignity*, and independently. In sheer quantity, indeed, Viet produced the largest number of self-improvement books for a single writer in South Vietnam. Some of them could be grouped according to titles. Taking after Nguyen Duy Can and others, he put a number of his books under the heading *thuat*, which means "art" or "skill," such as *The Art of Influencing People*, *The Art of Speaking*, *the Art of Self-Training*, and *The Art of Courageous Living*. Having published a volume for *Learning To Be Human* called *The Strong-Willed Person*, he wrote several others under the heading *nguai*, or "person," including *The Ideal Person*, *The Good-Habited Person*, and *The Capable Person*. The last book carried a hint about the overall goal in its lengthy and amusing subtitle: "The key to training and acquiring a mature mind, a steely inner self, and yet a banana-soft appearance on the outside."<sup>263</sup> Shorter but no less ambitious was the subtitle of *The Strong-Willed Person*: "the art of will-building for success."<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Su Nghiep va Doi Nguoi: Tieu Luan ve Danh Nhan, Giao Duc, Van Hoa, Nghe Thuat, va Xu The* [Legacy and Lifespan: Essays on Great Men, Education, Culture, the Arts, and Social Behavior] (Saigon, 1962; reprint, Houston: Xuan Thu, 1984), 9.

<sup>263</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Nguoi Ban Linh* [The Capable Person] (Saigon: Song Moi, 1961).

<sup>264</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Nguoi Chi Khi: Thuat Ren Chi de Thanh Cong* [The Strong-Willed Person: The Art of Will-Building for Success] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1960; reprint, Lancaster, PA: Xuan Thu, 1980).

In sales and esteem, Viet's greatest successes for the series were probably two companion texts on young women and young men.<sup>265</sup> Published for *Learning To Be Human* following *Training for Human Dignity*, they were reprinted many times in Saigon before 1975, by Vietnamese Americans after 1975, and in Vietnam since the 1990s.<sup>266</sup> There were already many publications on the subject of psychology of young men and young women, best exemplified by numerous short tracts on marriage. But Viet's companion volumes were the most comprehensive to date on the subject of youth psychology. Working from the widely acceptable premise that most women were called to motherhood and most men to work, they nonetheless did not analyze motherhood and work but focused instead on the psychological make-up of each gender. The first, *The Psychology of Young Women*, consisted of six long chapters. The first four sections discussed a quartet of interrelated aspects among young women: sexual life, emotional life, mental life, and social life. The fifth chapter, called "On the paths of life," went at length on four typologies of women: wives, nuns, courtesans, and widows. The last chapter discussed a variety of issues in modern life, including lust, romantic broken-heartedness, loneliness, and addiction. Viet repeated the sequence in *The Psychology of Young Men*, but added an introductory chapter and a second chapter on emotional life. (The chapter on typologies discussed four equivalents: husbands, priests, playboys, and

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<sup>265</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Tam Ly Ban Gai: Nghien Cuu Co Cau Ban Gai* [The Psychology of Young Women: Research on the Structure of Young Women] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1957; reprint, Glendale, CA: Dai Nam, 1980). Hoang Xuan Viet, *Tam Ly Ban Trai: Nghien Cuu Tam Hon Nam Thanh theo Sinh Tam Ly Hoc* [The Psychology of Young Men: Research on the Inner Life of Young Men according to Bio-Psychology] (Saigon: P. Van Tuoi, 1958; reprint, place unknown, 1985). There are no available copies from the first printing, and subsequent printings did not indicate the year of the first. But on the basis of their prefaces (dated 1955 and 1957, respectively) and a published listing of Viet's books, I believe the first volume was published in 1957 and the second in 1958.

<sup>266</sup> Their popularity could be further inferred from the fact that they are two of only three or four books from Viet that are duplicated and circulated at popular Vietnamese-language Internet sites today. In contrast, these forums show the content of Nguyen Hien Le's publications in the dozens.

widowers.) Both books cited, quoted, and acknowledged French sources, mostly on psychology, plus a sprinkling of contemporary Vietnamese publications.

The success of the books could be attributed in part to Viet's skillful combination of analysis befitting the social scientist on the one hand and, on the other hand, danger-alerting and advice-giving characteristic of the moralist. Given the subjects, Viet's analysis unabashedly (and expectedly) ascribed broad gender traits to women and men. This was especially true of the first chapters. In the last two chapters of each book, however, he somewhat broke down generalities about each gender into smaller categories. Viet was also a moralist, and spent many paragraphs cautioning against excesses in modern life, such as addiction to melodramatic novels for young women and movies for young men. But many more were given to persuading that youth was the most critical period of one's life, and that the ability to understand and control one's gender differences would lead to personal success in marriage and motherhood for women and marriage and career for men.

Viet continued to bring out book after book in Saigon, including another similar pair of companion books for the series *Training for Human Dignity*.<sup>267</sup> There was a good deal of repetition from the first pair, which illustrated a broader repetitiveness in Viet's large body of self-improvement books. Nonetheless, the fact that some of them were reprinted during the Republican period suggested that his publications continued to draw readers, if perhaps fewer than those that read Nguyen Hien Le, Nguyen Duy Can, and Pham Cao Tung. Being many years younger, he has also outlived all of them and, except

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<sup>267</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ban Gai Tren Duong Su Nghiep* [Young Women on the Road to Legacy] (Saigon: Song Moi, 1961). Hoang Xuan Viet, *Ban Trai Tren Duong Su Nghiep* [Young Men on the Road to Legacy] (Saigon: Song Moi, 1969).

for a two-year period in the U.S., continued to live in Saigon.<sup>268</sup> In 1993, he obtained permission to run private classes on the subject “Learning to Be Human.” There were few students at first, but Viet’s persistence in advertising gradually drew the participation of many teachers, engineers, physicians, attorneys, Buddhist monks, and unspecified “young Vietnamese.” Offered three evenings a week and two hours each, Viet lectured on “the art of speaking,” “winning the human hearts,” and similar subjects familiar to readers of *Learning To Be Human*.<sup>269</sup> It was hardly a coincidence that Viet’s re-entry in Saigon’s cultural life occurred as the postwar Vietnamese leadership turned away from Marxist-Leninism and towards integration into the global economy.

## Conclusion

At the start of a self-improvement tract called *Techniques to Earn Money*, the author Hong Hai told the story of a northern émigré whose humility led the author to call him not by his real name but by Ba Van Nguyen, a Vietnamese equivalent of Bob Jones or Jim Smith. Having been worked in petty trading in Hanoi, he bought a house in Hanoi for his family of wife and five kids not long before the Geneva Conference. The outcome of the Conference, however, led to his family’s departure for the south, and he could not sell the house but had to leave it for relatives to keep. In the south, he applied to settle in small city not far from Saigon, later the site of a South Vietnamese industrial complex

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<sup>268</sup> In his interview with Tuong Thang, Viet stated that he was “twenty-six years younger than Can” (which is true), “twenty years younger than Le” (to be exact, eighteen years), and “over ten years younger than” Tung/Tuoi. This suggests that Tung/Tuoi was slightly younger than Le, and that he was born sometimes between 1912 and 1920. The year of Tuoi’s death is not known, but Viet indicated in the interview that he had passed away.

<sup>269</sup> Minh Sang, “Truong Hoc Lam Nguoi” [The School of Learning to Be Human], *Nong Nghiep* (December 14, 2009): <http://nongnghiep.vn/nongnghiepvn/vi-vn/61/158/1/24/24/43903/default.aspx>.



and a major American airbase. Leaving his family at the refugee camp, he spent half a month building a hut in a neighborhood of fellow northerners but also in proximity to native southerners. After bringing his family to the new place, he began to think about how to make a living. He noticed that there were many children, both northern and southern, without schooling due to the lack of facilities and teachers. He opened a little “classroom” at his home, made some chairs from probably cheap wood, and advertised to teach kindergarten and first grade. The little enterprise was an instant success, with students filling up the classroom.

Over time, he also made a small side business by going to homes of his students and giving medical shots to their parents as needed. Noting that there was not a news reporter in his area, he contacted the publisher of a newspaper and recommended himself for a job. The publisher agreed and hired him, “whose prose is clear,” to be a writer of news and even articles. That was not all, however, as Ba also took to painting landscapes and gradually sold many paintings to buyers from Saigon. In the meantime, his wife “did not sit still.” While taking care of their children, she also worked the backyard into a garden and grew vegetables. The land was fertile enough, and soon there was plenty to eat and even to sell at the local market. The narrator ended with a visit to the family whose “house was bright” (and presumably enlarged and upgraded), “the husband and wife were healthy,” and “the children look good and ruddy.” The narrator congratulated Ba, who in turn replied that he was very worried when the family first came to small Bien Hoa. “Nonetheless” he added, “I now saw that location isn’t that important” but “if you could apply your creative imagination, you could make a decent living anywhere.”<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Hong Hai, *Bi Quyét Kiem Ra Tien [Formula to Make Money]* (Saigon: *The Gioi*, 1956), 7-14.

This tract came not from *Learning To Be Human* but the series *Learning Citizens*, but it illustrated very well the impulse and purpose behind *Learning To Be Human* in particular and the self-improvement literature in general. (In many ways, it also resembled the family in *The Light of Personalism*, the Diemist pamphlet of popular verse.) In these stories – this particular tract follows the story of Mr. Ba with an anecdote about Fred Fisher, an American inventor of the vacuum cleaner – the writers of the series celebrated, promoted, and even propagandized the ideals of hard work, determination, self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship, the nuclear family, and other petit bourgeois values. Equally significant, they promoted these ideals as appropriate for postcolonial Vietnamese and, indeed, the future of Vietnam.

Four conclusions could be drawn from the examination of *Learning To Be Human*. First, it shows that there was strong continuity in intellectual and cultural thought regarding the modern Vietnamese person between the antebellum urban culture centered in Hanoi and the postcolonial one centered in Saigon. Some of the books for *Learning To Be Human*, after all, had been written in the early 1940s but were not published until the early 1950s due to warfare and other obstacles. Once they came out, however, they did so in droves and were received with much enthusiasm.<sup>271</sup>

Second, the popularity of *Learning To Be Human* and other self-improvement publications indicated that the RVN provided a welcoming place for the growth and spreading of a more individualistic ethos about the human person. Their stated intent – “to raise the knowledge of citizens” for *Learning To Be Human* under the first publisher

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<sup>271</sup> In 1959, for example, a reviewer of a major book exhibition in Saigon noted the relative poverty of new novels and plays and, in contrast, praised books on “family and youths, especially the *Learning to Be Human* books from the publishers Pham Van Tuoi and Nguyen Hien Le.” See Tran Quoc Anh, “Xem Qua Trien Lam Sach” [Review of a Book Exhibition], *Bach Khoa* [Variety] 70 (December 1, 1959), 88.

Pham Van Tuoi – was aimed at promoting adaptations and evolutions among Vietnamese so they could better their lot in the global capitalist economy. They encouraged individual initiatives, the pursuit of personal success, small- and large-scale entrepreneurship, the nuclear family, and related petit bourgeois values. The fact that they met considerable success in sales indicated that their messages responded to and reflected the spirit of the age among noncommunist Vietnamese who, after all, made up the majority of postcolonial people in the then divided country.

Third, the growth of these books underscored a most significant divergence from the official socialist ideology of the Vietnamese Workers Party and, later, the southern-based NLF. Promotional in style, didactic in tone, and mostly Western in sources, these publications were also diverse in subject matters. But they essentially tackled the same theme: What would constitute the ideal of personhood for modern Vietnamese? Like the Vietnamese communists, noncommunist South Vietnamese frequently attacked the “old.” The heading of one of Hoang Xuan Viet’s tracts, for example, states uncompromisingly, “The more outmoded [the method], the greater the failure” (*Cang hu lau thi cang that bai*).<sup>272</sup> But the ideology promoted by the writers of the series differed vastly to that promoted by the Workers Party and the NLF. Without explicitly denouncing collectivism and determinism, the writers were critical of them by way of promoting a cultural ideology according to criteria of good health, personal wealth, and individual happiness. Given the widespread appeal of the series and similar South Vietnamese publications, it was not at all surprising that postwar urbanites in Saigon and other southern cities did not take well to economic determinism and other Marxist doctrines

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<sup>272</sup> Hoang Xuan Viet, *Thuat Ren Ngoai: ABC cua Nha Giao Duc* [The Art of Forming a Person: An Educator’s ABC] (Saigon, 1960), 84.

inherent in the official socialist ideology of the Vietnamese Communist Party. In the decade following reunification, the books were banned or suppressed, along with most books published in the former Republic of Vietnam. By the early 1990s, however, publishers from Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and other Vietnamese cities have reissued many of the volumes, typically in thin paperback editions. New translations of foreign works have also appeared, and new writers have published new books on similar topics.

Fourth, the expanding popularity of *Learning to Be Human* and similar books pointed to not-distant ideological affinities between urban South Vietnamese and popular thought currents in North America and Western Europe since the late nineteenth century. Names of non-socialist Americans and Europeans appeared prominently and favorably on the pages of these publications: sometimes on their own terms, sometimes adapted for a specific purpose, always supporting the promotional intentions of the authors. In particular, urban South Vietnamese writers were drawn to American concepts and ideas about efficiency. Furthering this favorable view of the U.S. were the countless “exemplars” of the modern person from individual Americans.

As much as a bourgeois ethos was heavily promoted in urban South Vietnam, it was never divorced from patriotic and nationalistic values because noncommunist urban South Vietnamese considered self-development and love of country as two sides of the same coin to the identity of the postcolonial person. The development of nationalism is therefore the next subject in our examination of their ideological make-up.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE DEVELOPMENT AND CONTINUITY OF NATIONALISM

Under the State of Vietnam (1949-1955) and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, 1955-1975), Saigon saw countless displays and expressions of noncommunist nationalism. An illustration at the state level is the celebration of National Day in the fall of 1959, when Ngo Dinh Diem was firmly in power. For two weeks in October and November, the government organized a number of public events, activities, and celebrations that included a major exhibition featuring no fewer than thirty-five booths. The booths emphasized governmental leadership and achievements since Diem took office five years before, such as the ten-fold growth in coal production and twenty-six-fold increase in sugar production. On the holiday itself, there were a military grand parade centered at Unification Boulevard during daytime and, in the evening, a civilian parade of floats followed by live music and fireworks. Religion was employed to support the state, as services were held simultaneously at the Catholic cathedral, a major Protestant church, and one of the largest Buddhist pagodas in Saigon. In sport, the city held a number of national-level athletic competitions in wrestling, martial arts, swimming, basketball, table tennis, and badminton. A competition in scooter racing headed to the resort town Dalat and back to the Saigon. There were also soccer matches, including one between the Cambodian national team and the team of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Movies were shown and theatrical and musical

performances took place throughout the metropolitan area for the duration.<sup>1</sup> In all appearances, the events were designed to provide leisure to the residents of the city as much as to win their allegiance towards state-sanctioned nationalism.

The RVN was not different from other postcolonial states, including the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), in holding these celebrations. But as exemplified by religious services, there were differences between the two Vietnamese states even on the surface. The RVN also expressed its version of nationalism in other ways, such as parades in honor of patriotic heroes and heroines against Chinese, Mongol, or French invaders and occupiers. These personages were commemorated further through public statues, altars, and monetary bills. Countless streets, schools, public areas, and assorted organizations were also named after them and other prominent cultural and political figures in Vietnamese history. Some of these names provided a clue to divergences in nationalism between North and South Vietnams. Two of the boulevards of Saigon, for instance, were called Thanh Thai and Dong Khanh, two Nguyen kings that were compliant to French authorities during colonialism.<sup>2</sup> It was inconceivable that streets in Hanoi or Haiphong could have carried their names, for the DRV considered them puppets to the French. That their names were retained in South Vietnam from the colonial period – Dong Khanh was also the name of the most prestigious all-girls high school in Hue – suggests that the RVN held a greater regard for the Nguyen Dynasty than

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<sup>1</sup> *Chuong Trinh Le Quoc Khanh 26-10-1959* [Program of Celebration for National Day, October 26, 1959] (Saigon: Republic of Vietnam, 1959). Information on coal and sugar productions come from the following unsigned article: “Phai Doan Bao Chi Vieng Phong Trien Lam Thanh Tich 5 Nam Chap Chanh cua Chinh Phu Viet Nam Cong Hoa” [Media Visit to the Exhibit on Five Years of Achievements Under Republican Vietnam], *Tuan San Phong Thuong Mai Saigon* [Saigon Chamber of Commerce Weekly] 225 (November 13, 1959): 30.

<sup>2</sup> “Street Names in Saigon,” Box 1, Folder 3, Jackson Bosley Collection, The Vietnam Archive.

did the DRV, placed a higher value on tradition or regional characteristics for the postcolonial nation, or had a combination of both in its cultural mindset and policies.

These examples suggest that South Vietnamese nationalism diverged significantly from that advocated by the Vietnamese communist revolutionaries. At the same time, this nationalism has remained a large and not always well-defined subject, and has not been integrated into scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, historians have barely begun to examine the historical records, some of which (especially RVN documents) are only recently available to researchers. It has been suggested, for instance, that the Ngo Dinh Diem government employed a variety of ways to construct cultural nationalism.<sup>4</sup> Or on the post-Diem period, it has been argued that South Vietnamese debates over the growing Americanization of the war in the 1960s was not a passive response but an active attempt at employing various sources to consolidate a national identity.<sup>5</sup> Another example is the multiple roles played by the Cold War on how the Ngo Dinh Diem government defined its nationalist line and pursued its political and diplomatic programs.<sup>6</sup> Still, a third example is the research into Buddhist nationalism, whose roots derived from a nationwide revival in the 1920s and whose political expressions played a major role in Diem's fall during 1963.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> An overview of the scholarship on Vietnamese nationalism is Tuong Vu, "Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2:2 (2007): 175-230.

<sup>4</sup> Mathew Masur, "Hearts and Minds: Cultural Nation-Building in South Vietnam, 1954-1963" (Ph.D. diss, The University of Ohio State, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> Nu-Anh Tran, "South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965-1969," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (2006): 169-209.

<sup>6</sup> Two papers on this subject were presented recently at the conference "The Cold War in Vietnam: New Perspectives and Sources" (Hawaii Pacific University, April 4-5, 2011): Nu-Anh Tran, "Nationalism and Internationalism: The Cold War and the Multiple Meanings of Independence in the Republic of Vietnam, 1954-1963"; and Jessica M. Chapman, "Building an Anticommunist State: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Justification for South Vietnam."

<sup>7</sup> Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam*,

This chapter seeks to contribute to this thematic research by concentrating on two popular series published in Saigon. The popularity of each series could be discerned from countless advertisements for them in magazines and on back pages of books. The first series concerned anti-colonial leaders and literary figures from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It started in 1949 and ended in the late 1950s, and consisted of two sources: reprints of several well-received tracts that had come out before First Indochina War, and new tracts by a native southerner who published them throughout the 1950s. This connection to the antebellum past is a major reason that I choose to focus on this series rather than another of similar themes. The connection provides a strong illustration of the intellectual continuity of urban noncommunist thought on nationalism that traveled from antebellum Hanoi to post-colonial Saigon. It highlighted traditional patriotism as a source of Vietnamese nationalism, but also sought to associate nationalism to modernization and even Westernization. The second series, on the other hand, focused on traditional customs in a regional context. It was the product of a northern émigré writer, and it was published between the mid-1960s and the early 1970s. Furthermore, it was intimately tied to discussions and debates about customs and culture in Hanoi and Hue before 1945. Separately and together, the two series reveal significant strands about nationalist thinking among the noncommunist urbanites.

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1964-1966 (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2002); Robert J. Topmiller, "Struggling for Peace: South Vietnamese Buddhist Women and Resistance to the Vietnam War," *Journal of Women's History* 17:3 (November 2005), 133-157; Elise DeVido, " 'Buddhism for This World': The Buddhist Revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and Its Legacy," in Philip Taylor, ed., *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 250-296. Edward Miller's forthcoming monograph on Diem will address some of the ideological roots and political consequences of Vietnamese Buddhist revivalism.



## **The colonial background on the veneration of national heroes:**

### **Phan Ke Binh's *Extraordinary Personalities***

The linkage between national heroes to modern national identity has been recognized and even emphasized by at least some of the scholarship on nationalism.<sup>8</sup> This linkage was certainly true in the case of educated Vietnamese during late colonialism. Seizing on their long martial and cultural history, they elevated a large number of men (and a few women) as a rallying point in the advocacy of the modern nation. A major turning point was the failure of various anti-colonial groups in the late nineteenth century to regain independence. As already noted in Chapter One, the best-known movement was the Save the King (Can Vuong), which was strongest in northern and central Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> Appealing to the tradition of anti-foreign and court-centered patriotism, this movement to restore full monarchical powers went on for over a decade before ending in death or captivity for most leaders by the end of the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, their military impotence was matched by a powerful cultural and political

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<sup>8</sup> The debate over nationalism has pitted the “modernists” against the “perennialists.” While the latter places a strong emphasis on the import of national heroism, the former also recognizes its place in the construction of modern nationalism. Modernists theorize that the nation was a post-Enlightenment construct while perennialists consider it to have existed in one or another form before modernity. By far the more influential group, modernists nonetheless vary in their explanations on the cause of nationalism: e.g., Ernest Gellner (industrialization), Elie Kedourie (modern ideology), Benedict Anderson (mass literacy and communication), and Tom Nairn (uneven capitalism). On the other hand, perennialists such as Hugh Seton-Watson and Adrian Hastings stress continuity to the past and national formation before the modern era. Perhaps the closest to a synthesizer is Anthony Smith, who concedes the strength of the modernists but is more sympathetic to the ideas of the perennialists. Smith advocates ethnic symbolism as the chief linkage between the pre-modern and modern eras. See Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Boston: Brandeis University Press, 2000); *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2009); and *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Malden, MA and Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> See David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). For anticolonial activities in the south, see R. B. Smith, “The Development of Opposition to French Rule in Southern Vietnam 1880-1940,” *Past and Present* 54 (February 1972): 94-129. Also helpful are Truong Buu Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Responses to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series no. 11, 1967); Mark W. McLeod, *The Vietnamese Response to French Intervention, 1892-1874* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

legacy – an entirely usable past – that was passed on to the next generations of Vietnamese elite. As explained by David Marr, the Save the King movement

provided crucial moral and intellectual continuity to the long struggle against [the French]. Many of the more sensitive Can Vuong leaders, acutely aware that they almost surely would die violent deaths long before their country was liberated, paid self-conscious attention to their personal images as patriots in the eyes of the people – including the yet unborn. The patriotic poems, anecdotes, and narratives that spread during their resistance and after their deaths were in many ways historical reality in themselves, quite apart from their objective truth or falsity.<sup>10</sup>

The offspring, followers, and other Vietnamese contemporaries of movement leaders seized upon these and other patriotic images as they contemplated and developed new solutions towards the goal of independence. They memorialized the heroism if not also specific teachings of the leaders, and made sure of their own participation when the chance arose. In his study of revolutionary processes in a northern village, for example, the anthropologist Hy Van Luong finds the tomb of an anti-colonial leader has “remained a village landmark” a century after the passing of the Save the King, and that it was “far from insignificant that his daughter continued his idealism with financial contributions to the anti-colonial cause” to the noncommunist Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD) and, later, the Viet Minh.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of a particular hero or heroine might have varied from one village to another, not too different from the practice of local elevation of a particular deity for communal worship. The situation was somewhat different in towns and cities, where local attachment to a particular personality was less pronounced, and where access to print and readership was greater. Through reform efforts such as the Eastward

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<sup>10</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 76.

<sup>11</sup> Hy V. Luong, *Tradition, Revolution, and Market Economy in a North Vietnamese Village, 1925-2006* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2010), 50.

Movement and the Modernization Society, urban intellectuals and writers capably expounded and propagated about the dead leaders of the Save the King movement on the basis of their “poems, anecdotes, and narratives.” Other prominent Vietnamese in the realm of culture were also elevated to heroic status. During the 1920s, As Marr has succinctly put it, young “Vietnamese intellectuals developed a passion for heroes.”<sup>12</sup> Some of those heroes were foreigners, as evidenced by biographical books and articles about Christopher Columbus, Catherine the Great, Napoleon, Lincoln, Sun Yat-sen, Gandhi, Thomas Edison, and Florence Nightingale.<sup>13</sup> They were used to promote a number of ideas, one of which was nationalism. The majority of the heroes and heroines, however, were native born and raised. Their elevation was meant to shape and encourage the growth of nationalist sentiments and beliefs among colonial Vietnamese.

In important ways, late colonial and South Vietnamese publications on national heroes could be traced to the influence of a book called *Stories of Extraordinary Personalities in the South Sea (Nam Hai Di Nhan Liet Truyen)*. The author was Phan Ke Binh (1875-1921), who obtained a non-doctoral degree in the neo-Confucian examination system but did not become a mandarin as allowed by the degree. Instead, he turned to teaching, writing original works, and translating Vietnamese and Chinese classics into modern Vietnamese. It was an illustrious career, and at least three of his books would exert significant impact on three different genres in noncommunist writings about nationalism. The best known of them was *Extraordinary Personalities*, a collection of short essays on fifty-two Vietnamese men and four women. Published in 1909, it saw

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<sup>12</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trail, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California, 1981), 252.

<sup>13</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 30-31.

many new editions and reprints in the next sixty years and drew the attention of new generations of educated Vietnamese.<sup>14</sup> Its excerpts also appeared in a number of South Vietnamese textbooks. There were three outstanding features about the book. First was the relative brevity of the essays. Each was between two to four pages, and the entire text amounted to fewer than 200 pages for a reprint in the late 1960s.<sup>15</sup> Second, its style was highly accessible to the general public, as the author frequently inserted illuminating anecdotes into the narrative and the vocabulary and opted for a colloquial rather than a literary approach. Third and perhaps most important, the content was variegated enough to convince Vietnamese readers that their history possessed not one but a complete set of national heroes. Binh divided them into eight categories: dynastic founders, dynastic mandarins, sages, literary talents, martial generals, persons with supernatural power, spirits, and simply “famous persons.” The last category accounted for several persons without formal association to the court or the examination system.

These qualities contributed to the enduring popularity of the book. It also helped to solidify a rapidly growing awareness among literate Vietnamese about the nation and nationalism. As the historian Alexander Woodside has noted, Binh’s friends “compared his books to the efforts made by writers in Renaissance France to translate Latin tales of medieval heroes into colloquial French.” The comparison, moreover, indicated “that Vietnamese journalists of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century quite self-consciously drew a parallel

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<sup>14</sup> “My generation,” recalled one such reader who grew up in the late colonial period, “loved reading the Chinese *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, the French *Le Comte de Monte Cristo*, and our *Stories of Extraordinary Persons in the South Sea* by Phan Ke Binh.” See Tran Thai Binh, “Phan Ke Binh,” in Duong Trung Quoc et al., eds., *Tri Thuc Viet Nam Xua va Nay* [Vietnamese Intellectuals: Past and Present] (Hanoi: Van Hoa Thong Tin, 2006), 902. As it was, Binh was among the first translators (if not the first) of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* into modern Vietnamese.

<sup>15</sup> Phan Ke Binh, *Nam Hai Di Nhan Liet Truyen* [Stories of Extraordinary Personalities in the South Sea] (Saigon: Mac Lam, 1968).

between their efforts and the creation of modern nation-states like France itself in early modern Europe.”<sup>16</sup> Binh himself was none too shy about promoting nationalism through the use of heroes. “Heroes and talented people shape the character of a country,” he declared unreservedly in the brief introduction to the book, “ours is no exception.” The stories of Vietnamese personalities, however, “not propagated widely” because “books were few” and oral transmission was incomplete or incorrect. These reasons prompted the author to write these essays on the basis of dynastic histories and other records. As Binh arranged the personalities within each category according to a chronological order, he aimed to persuade readers that the Vietnamese had a very long tradition of national heroism, literary excellence, and cultural inventiveness. Most essays concerned persons from the three dynasties between the eleventh century to the sixteenth – the Ly, the Tran, and the Le. But Binh also included some figures from antiquity and the early modern era, arguing for a long continuity within this tradition that encompassed his own time.

One of the figures in *Extraordinary Personalities* was the thirteenth-century general Tran Hung Dao, long revered for having successfully repelled two of the three Mongol invasions. In 1914, Binh collaborated with Le Van Phuc, a member of the Vietnamese Academy, on a book on the invasion and the general’s victories.<sup>17</sup> As noted in the preface, the book was purposefully modeled on *Romance of the Three Kingdom* and, therefore, should be considered historical fiction than history proper. Its dialogues, for instance, were clearly made up. Or, in accordance to a convention from the *Three Kingdoms*, each chapter ended with the question, “What is about to happen? Read the

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<sup>16</sup> Alexander Woodside, “Vietnamese History: Confucianism, Colonialism, and the Struggle for Independence,” *Vietnam Forum* 11 (Winter-Spring 1988): 42.

<sup>17</sup> In the 1920s, probably after Binh’s death, Phuc performed some revision of *Extraordinary Personalities* for the fifth printing.

next chapter to find out.” Its intention was to draw a large readership to the story, which centered on the general but also provided much background and context about the dynasty that he served. The authors meant to encourage knowledge as well as pride among Vietnamese about their past glories. “Our country became a nation long ago,” they wrote in the preface, yet “our educational system [led people] to practice not our script, learn not our history, and read not our stories” but, instead, focused on Chinese history, language, and “stories about the Tang, Yuan, Ming, and Qing.”<sup>18</sup> They intended to shift the focus decisively to the Vietnamese, crediting the Tran to have successfully “employed Buddhism” towards building “solidarity among the people” and “civilization.” The authors also alleged that the dynasty showed favorable hints towards the modern concepts of equality, constitutionalism, and local self-rule. On the other hand, as they ruefully acknowledged, dynastic histories “could not portray fully this spirit.” The failure, in turn, led Vietnamese to honor past glories and past heroes “in superstitious ways” rather than according to the “national spirit.”<sup>19</sup> They wrote the story to promote national pride for not only the general and the Tran but also Vietnamese history as a whole.

The collection of heroes in *Extraordinary Personalities* and the individual general in *Hung Dao Vuong* helped to fuel biographical publications in Hanoi and other urban localities. The latter tract also inspired and contributed to the appearance of short monographs of single individuals intended for popular consumption, including six biographies about the general. One scholarly survey has shown that out of 115

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<sup>18</sup> Le Van Phuc and Phan Ke Binh, *Hung Dao Vuong* (Hanoi: Dong Kinh An Quan, 1914), iii-iv.

<sup>19</sup> Le Van Phuc and Phan Ke Binh, *Hung Dao Vuong*, v.

Biographical books and pamphlets published between 1912 and 1944, eighty were about Vietnamese persons of the past.<sup>20</sup> At first, anti-Chinese and anti-Mongol heroes and heroines were the dominant subjects of these publications. Gradually, anti-colonial leaders also received their own tracts over the watchful eyes of the colonial authorities. They permitted, for example, three publications on the life of Phan Chu Trinh, the nationalist and reformer once arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment, shortly after his death in 1926.<sup>21</sup> Even a few anti-colonial military leaders from the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century received their own tracts. In other circumstances, memories of their deeds would have been retained and passed on through oral means. But they could be limited in geography, with the strongest sentiments typically found in the local communities where they had lived or carried out their activities. Through print, however, they were simultaneously individualized and collectivized into the pantheon of anti-foreign heroes.<sup>22</sup>

The lionization of national heroes reached new heights under the Japanese Occupation and the Vichy administration. As the colonial authorities vigorously promoted the Vichy ideology of *nátional revolution*, they unwittingly helped to prepare the nationalistic floodgates that would open at the end of World War II. In cities and towns, for instance, the regime mobilized Vietnamese youths into joining noncommunist

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<sup>20</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 259.

<sup>21</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 261. Although Phan Chu Trinh advocated the abolishment of the Vietnamese monarchy, the permission was granted presumably on the ground that his overall advocacy was reform rather than revolution and immediate overthrow of colonialism.

<sup>22</sup> Aiding this momentum towards consolidating national heroes were other kinds of nationalist constructions. An important one had to do with a change in the usage of the now familiar term “Vietnam.” See Christopher E. Goscha, “Vietnam or Indochina: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism (1887-1954)” (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995). Until the early 1930s, educated Vietnamese usually referred to their country as “Annam” and “Indochina” rather than “Viet Nam.” It was only after 1930, Goscha argues, that “this coupling... started to take on a powerful life in the minds of an expanding nationalist elite, communist and non-communist alike” (7).

organizations and movements such as the Boys Scouts, the Girls Scouts, Association des Guides de France, and Association Générale des Etudiants Indochinois. Vietnamese leaders of these movements, however, gave their own twists and interpretations of Vichy concepts. Their translations of certain French words into Vietnamese, for instance, implied clearly that they and their charges were loyal and patriotic to Vietnam rather than France.<sup>23</sup> Many smaller units of these organizations were named after Vietnamese dynastic heroes, and the movements overall were infused with ideas and concepts borrowed directly from local culture, Buddhism, and Confucianism.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps fittingly, the Japanese chose a respected scholar of Confucianism and Vietnamese history to head the government when they created the Empire of Vietnam in March 1945. Even though the Empire did not live past the month of August, it effectively seized the chance to formally elevate national heroes and enlarge Vietnamese nationalism. It replaced, for instance, urban streets of French names with those of famous Vietnamese. It also held public ceremonies to honor national heroes that ranged from mythic kings to noncommunist anti-colonial leaders that were executed merely fifteen years before.<sup>25</sup>

On the printed page, the first half of the 1940s saw to another rise in publications about national heroes and heroines. As the cultural mood had shifted decisively from reform and individualism to revolution and political activism, urban periodicals dwelled into Vietnamese history, tradition, and personalities with an eye towards independence in the not-to-distant future. Influenced by the traditionalist essentialism central to the Vichy

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<sup>23</sup> Anne Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina and Its Legacies, 1940 to 1970* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), 118.

<sup>24</sup> See Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina*, 109-154.

<sup>25</sup> Vu Ngu Chieu, "The Other Side of the 1945 Vietnamese Revolution: The Empire of Viet-Nam (March-August 1945)," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45:2 (February 1986): 309.



ideology, Vietnamese writers pushed and developed further an essentialist view of their country.<sup>26</sup> In particular, Hanoi saw a cultural weekly of the same name from the group New Mind as noted in the last chapter. The weekly brought out over 200 issues and devoted large chunks to historical subjects. According to one indexer, it published seventy-one essays of various lengths on “renowned” Vietnamese. There were also 134 articles classified as “history over the eras,” and most of them addressed particular aspects about one or more important Vietnamese in the past.<sup>27</sup> In addition to prominent names, it brought attention to less known Vietnamese, such as a founding mandarin member of the Nguyen Dynasty in the early nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup> To promote interest among readers and amateur researchers, it held a writing contest on Vietnamese history as early as in the first year of publication.<sup>29</sup> Among other purposes, these activities were meant to cohere a pantheon of national figures to illustrate continuity of the modern country to the past.

As biographical pamphlets and tracts kept coming out in a seemingly greater number, writers continued to categorize prominent Vietnamese according to achievement and contribution to national development over the millennia. This could be seen in a tract

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<sup>26</sup> The role of Vichy influence on Vietnamese nationalism is highlighted in Eric Jennings, “Conservative Confluences, ‘Nativist’ Synergy: Reinscribing Vichy’s National Revolution in Indochina, 1940-1945,” *French Historical Studies* 27:5 (Summer 2004): 601-635. See also Eric Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Petain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Alto Palo: Stanford University Press, 2004). Essentialism in Vichy ideology is discussed also in Raffin, *Youth Mobilization in Vichy Indochina*. Raffin has also called attention to the mindsets of and roles played by three colonial administrators in implementing Vichy policies: see Anne Raffin, “Tours of Duty, Cross-Identification and Introjection: The Colonial Administrative Mind in Wartime Indochina,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 21, nos. 2-3 (June/September 2008): 183-212.

<sup>27</sup> Nguyen Khac Xuyen, *Phuc Luc Phan Tich Tap Chi Tri Tan (Tap Chi Van Hoa Ra Hang Tuan), 1941-1945* [Index and Categories of the *New Mind* (Weekly Cultural Periodical), 1941-1945] (Hanoi: Hoi Khoa Hoc Lich Su Viet Nam, 1998), 291-296 and 299-309.

<sup>28</sup> Nguyen Trieu, “Nguyen Trieu Trung Hung Cong Than: Nguyen Duc Xuyen” [Nguyen Duc Xuyen: Founding Mandarin for the Restoration of the Nguyen,” *Tri Tan* 92 (April 23, 1943): 20-21.

<sup>29</sup> Notice, *Tri Tan* 24 (November 21, 1941), 8.

on the nineteenth-century Catholic polymath Truong Vinh Ky, commonly referred to as Pétrus Ky. It exemplified General Tran Hung Dao as “a setter of virtue” (*lap duc*), the founders of the Le and Nguyen Dynasties for their “meritorious work” (*lap cong*, probably referring to national independence and unification), and the Nguyen mandarin and historian Phan Phu Tien for having contributed to linguistic and cultural development (*lap ngon*).<sup>30</sup> In addition, Vietnamese writers emphasized the modernizing efforts among figures from the early modern and modern eras. Thus, the same tract placed Pétrus Ky in the third category and praised his works for having advanced linguistic and cultural understanding between East and West. Communist historiography later condemned Pétrus Ky as a collaborator with the colonial authorities while grudgingly acknowledging some of his linguistic contributions.<sup>31</sup> But in noncommunist interpretation of the 1940s and later, he was lauded variously as classicist, pedagogue, scientist, linguist, historian, and geographer. Equally significant was the justification of his involvement with the colonial authorities. The tract affirmed, for instance, that Pétrus Ky “quietly observed the situation and determined the best ways to advance the country” and “quietly went about to serve his country in spite of contemporary criticism.” It even reflected the emphasis on youth dissected in the previous chapter and stated, “Working for the nation, he placed all of his hopes on youth and brought about a new education and a new life that placed virtue and duty as foundation.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Le Thanh, *Truong Vinh Ky Bien Khao* [Research Essay about Truong Vinh Ky] (Hanoi: Tan Dan, 1943). 3.

<sup>31</sup> Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 135.

<sup>32</sup> Le Thanh, *Truong Vinh Ky Bien Khao*, 72.

## Heroism and modernization in Saigon: the series *Exemplars of the New Viet*

In the 1950s, urban South Vietnamese were highly conscious of the debt to the antebellum culture. In a well-received volume about Vietnamese literary history published in the mid-1950s, for example, Le Van Sieu had many good things to say about modernizers like Pétrus Ky and Phan Ke Binh. Sieu deemed Pétrus Ky to be most influential “not on the basis of the amount or content of original and translated works, but for showing the capability of the [new] national script in education and the spreading of ideas.”<sup>33</sup> On Binh, however, Sieu singled out particular publications for praise. Through *Extraordinary Personalities*, Sieu wrote, Phan Ke Binh “stirred... the nationalist subconsciousness on the basis of fairy tales,” adding that the stories “are not accepted by science but form an invisible and magical string that draws people towards national sacredness.” Similarly, the tract *Hung Dao Vuong* helped to “stir... the inspiration of a saint among Vietnamese for the purpose of worship and emulation.” In all, Binh “fulfilled nearly all the tasks that the cultural maker should do for the destiny of our country”: high praise indeed.<sup>34</sup>

In addition to praising antebellum predecessors, urban South Vietnamese writers also churned out an ever-growing amount of materials about prominent Vietnamese of the long and recent past: kings, princes, generals, military leaders, but also scholars, poets, and figures of culture. One of the earliest successes was the series *Exemplars of the New Viet* (*Nhung Manh Guong Tan Viet*): a namesake of its publisher, the Tan Viet.

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<sup>33</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Van Hoc Su Viet Nam* [Vietnamese Literary History] (Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City: Van Hoc, 2006), 291. This is a new and slightly annotated edition of Le Van Sieu, *Lich Su Van Hoc Viet Nam: Tu Thuong Co den Hien Dai* [Vietnamese Literary History: From Antiquities to Modernity] (Saigon: The Gioi, 1956).

<sup>34</sup> Le Van Sieu, *Van Hoc Su Viet Nam*, 391.

Little is known about the origin of this publishing houses, except that it was initially based in Hanoi. An advertisement from the 1950s found in some of its publications indicated that it was started in 1937, and that it carried some 300 titles. By far, its most famous publication was Tran Trong Kim's one-volume *Summary of Vietnamese History*, whose accessibility and popularity since the 1930s were subjected later to deep jealousy and bitter criticism from Marxist historians in the DRV.<sup>35</sup> Kim's other famous work, *Confucianism*, also belonged to Tan Viet's catalog. Most of the rest were textbooks, literary classics, literary analyses, and historical books. But there were also publications focusing on foreigners, with titles such as *The Teaching of Freud*, *The Philosophy of Einstein*, *The Philosophy of Descartes*, and *The Poet Tagore*.<sup>36</sup>

On the basis of publication dates and locations, it appears that Tan Viet moved from Hanoi to Saigon sometimes between 1946 and 1947. During the first half of the First Indochina War, it published a significant amount of fiction with nationalistic and anticolonial themes from southern writers, including those with ties to the Viet Minh.<sup>37</sup> This literature in turn reflected the fervent anticolonialism among Vietnamese at the time. As the conflict was prolonged with domestic and international complications, the literature began to wane by the end of the decade. In turn, Tan Viet again shifted direction and started to bring out biographical tracts under a series called *Vietnamese Patriots (Viet Nam Chi Si)*. The first one was in fact a reprint of a well-received book

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<sup>35</sup> An insightful analysis of this episode is Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 36-40.

<sup>36</sup> These titles were among those listed in an advertisement for Tan Viet found in issue 126-127 (January 1944) of the Hanoi journal *Tri Tan (New Mind)*.

<sup>37</sup> A consideration of these writers and their works is Nguyen Van Sam, *Van Chuong Nam Bo va Cuoc Khang Phap 1945-1950* [Southern Literature and the Anticolonial Struggle, 1945-1950] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1988). The book lists thirty novels in this genre that were published in Saigon during this period. Tan Viet was responsible for exactly half of them, plus four of fifteen collections of short stories.

about Nguyen Thai Hoc, the founder of the VNQDD that was arrested and executed after the failed rebellion in 1930. Written by Nhuong Tong (1904-1949), a high-ranking member of the VNQDD, the tract was first published in 1945 by a different publisher in Hanoi. Its appearance was significant because Hoc and the VNQDD had been subjected to the severest kind of colonial censorship. Only the Japanese occupation, the weakening of the Vichy regime, and the presence of the Empire of Vietnam could have ensured openly published materials about him. (The book was distributed on the fifteenth anniversary of the VNQDD rebellion, which was June 1945, or in the middle of the short-lived Empire.) Even there – and for unknown reasons – copies were sold in the north and not distributed in the south. When Tan Viet gave the book its first reprint in 1949, the same year that the Viet Minh successfully assassinated Nhuong Tong in Hanoi, it began in Saigon and presumably was distributed nationwide.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the background of censorship, Nhuong Tong's tract was different from the majority of previous biographical tracts in a number of respects. Because the author had known the subject well, the narration was frequently in the first- rather than the third-person voice. The content changed easily between the anecdotal and the general, and the tone between the casual and the serious. It was the same style that he used for another biographical publication: a collective biography of important VNQDD members other than Nguyen Thai Hoc.<sup>39</sup> Concentrating on only one person here, he

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<sup>38</sup> Nhuong Tong, *Nguyen Thai Hoc 1902-1930* (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1956). The circumstances around Nhuong Tong's death are discussed in Hoang Van Dao, *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: Lich Su Tranh Dau Can Dai 1927-1954* [The Vietnamese Nationalist Party: A Modern History of Struggle, 1927-1954] (Saigon, 1970), 466-467.

<sup>39</sup> Nhuong Tong, *Hoa Canh Nam [Flowers on the Southern Branch]* (Saigon, 1972; reprint, Barntrup, West Germany: Nguon Viet, 1985). This was a posthumous collection of articles that, according to the author of the introduction of the book, were published in two Hanoi periodicals during 1945 and 1946 (10).

sectioned the text into forty-four little chapters, including one chapter with one page and over a dozen of chapters with two pages each. At a total of fewer than 150 pages of text, the narrative moved breezily. At a distance of thirty-seven years from Phan Ke Binh's *Hung Dao Vuong*, it showed a liveliness very different from the relative dryness found in Binh's tract. On the basis of countless citations later, the book appeared to be an instant classic among noncommunist circles. And it provided the publisher Tan Viet an attractive title to commence this series.

The following year saw the addition of three tracts to the series. Their subjects were also anti-colonial leaders: in this case, the most famous Vietnamese with the surname Phan. (They were not related by blood.) The first of these tracts concerned Phan Dinh Phung, the most significant leader of the Save the King movement.<sup>40</sup> Similar to Nhuong Tong's, it was a reprint of a work from the antebellum period. First published in 1936 and reprinted once already, this tract was revised for Tan Viet through a greater amount of documentary insertions into the main text. The author was Dao Trinh Nhat, whose illustrious familial lineage included Luong Van Can as a great-grandfather and Luong Ngoc Quyen as the maternal grandfather. His great-grandfather was one of the founders of the Tonkin Free School, and the grandfather was the co-leader of a failed armed rebellion in 1917 that was arrested and executed like Nguyen Thai Hoc. Under these impeccable nationalist credentials, the son and grandson became well respected in the publishing circles of both Hanoi and Saigon. Although he was of northern and central origin, Saigon became his home for most of the 1930s, during which he was intimately involved in several southern periodicals, including the highly influential *Women's News*

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<sup>40</sup> Dao Trinh Nhat, *Phan Dinh Phung: Nha Lanh Dao 10 Nam Khang Chien (1886-1895) o Nghe Tinh* [Phan Dinh Phung: Leader of Ten Years of Struggle in Nghe Tinh (1886-1895)] (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1950).

(*Phu Nu Tan Van*).<sup>41</sup> Forced by the colonial authorities to leave Saigon in 1939, he subsequently returned in Hanoi and worked with Vu Bang for a time at one of the better-known magazines there.<sup>42</sup> In the late 1940s, he returned to Saigon to work in the foreign ministry of the State of Vietnam and passed away from illness in 1951, one year after Tan Viet republished his book. In 1957, Tan Viet published another of his tracts, which was about his grandfather and initially serialized, for the same series.

Dao Trinh Nhat enlivened the story of the Save the King leader with dialogues, albeit not nearly as much as Nhuong Tong's. In interpretation, he unsurprisingly portrayed the Save the King leader as a man of virtue and loyalty not only to king but also country. Praised too was his sense of moderation, justice, and lack of prejudice. Nhat explained, for example, that Phan once meted out punishment to a Vietnamese Catholic priest not because of anti-Catholicism as often assumed in the antagonistic relationship between mandarins and Catholics. Rather, it was due to the priest's "oppression of the people."<sup>43</sup> Similar to the nationalists of the 1920s and 1930s, he was critical of stubbornness among the mandarins and literati. In a chapter about the still independent Hue court facing French aggressive threats, Nhat blamed not King Tu Duc as the case with many late colonial writers, but praised the king for his virtuousness. He pinned the blame for the loss of country instead on court mandarins and officials and labeled them as "corrupted by false Confucianism" and "behind the time." In some ways, the tract reflected the commonly held views among noncommunist elite of the 1930s and

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<sup>41</sup> Vu Ngoc Phan, "Dao Trinh Nhat," *Nha Van Hien Dai* [Modern Writers], Vol. 3 (Hanoi, 1942); reprinted in *Vu Ngoc Phan Tuyen Tap: I* [Complete Vu Ngoc Phan: Volume 1] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 2008), 451; Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 222.

<sup>42</sup> Vu Bang, *Bon Muoi Nam Noi Lao* [Forty Years of Exaggeration] (Saigon, 1969; reprint, Fort Smith, AR: Song Moi, 1980), 137 and 141-143.

<sup>43</sup> Dao Trinh Nhat, *Phan Dinh Phung*, 19.

1940s: the still felt influence of Social Darwinism that prompted the fear of national extinction; the belief that one's fate was determined by obligation; and the blame on conservative mandarins, collaborators, and traitors. Conversely, there was little discussion or "lesson learned" about larger problems of failures, such as the lack of a strong nationwide network or the need for bridging urban and rural people. As many other short biographies, the book was meant for worship rather than for solutions. Nonetheless, it was an important addition to the biographical tradition because the author relied on interviews as much as documents to write the story of the failed leader. At nearly 230 pages of text, it was also the longest in the series. It was, after all, the first major book about the last of anti-colonial leaders from the old guard. Not surprisingly, it would be cited and quoted frequently in many South Vietnamese publications.

After two reprints of already well-received books, the next two publications for *Vietnamese Patriots* were original works. One concerned Phan Boi Chau, who was for noncommunist Vietnamese synonymous to Vietnamese nationalism, independence, and revolution.<sup>44</sup> The other was about Phan Chu Trinh, the yang to Chau's yin in that he preferred moderation and reform from within rather than Chau's predilection for revolutionary violence to be aided by foreign assistance.<sup>45</sup> Both tracts were written by The Nguyen, the penname of the southerner Nguyen Ba The (1925-1996). In his mid-twenties at the time of these publications, The was a schoolteacher, a novelist, and an amateur researcher.<sup>46</sup> Living and teaching in the town Can Tho, he was nonetheless

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<sup>44</sup> The Nguyen, *Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940)* (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1950), vii.

<sup>45</sup> The Nguyen, *Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926)* (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1956). This was a revised edition of the first printing in 1950. Viet Tan noted that censors forced a number of cuts in 1950 and the 1956 edition revised them to the text.

<sup>46</sup> Ho Truong An, *Chan Troi Lam Ngoc 2* [The Pearl-Tinted Horizon: Volume 2] (Oakton, VA: Minh Van, 1995), 66. Hoai Phuong, "Tu Nhung Di Cao bi Bo Quen" [From the Forgotten Posthumous



closely involved with the Saigon publishing scene and made his name there. The cover of the tract on Phan Boi Chau stated that it was “produced” by him and “distributed” by Tan Viet. It suggested that the author and publisher had an arrangement similar to that between Nguyen Hien Le and the publisher P. Van Tuoi with Le’s first book.

Apt for a schoolteacher, Nguyen Ba The aimed for readability and divided the text of each tract into brief chapters. Similar to Dao Trinh Nhat’s tract, they carried few dialogues but many direct quotations of the late heroes, some of them substantially long. Just as Nhuong Tong ended his tract with a reproduction of two letters from Nguyen Thai Hoc, each of Nguyen Ba The’s tracts contained an appendix of two or three original documents from the biographical subject himself. The documents in the tract on Phan Chu Trinh, in fact, were quite long and took more than a third of the book. Both also saw lengthy quotations from secondary sources, including an entire newspaper article. Whether or not he had intentionally imitated Dao Nhat Trinh, Nguyen Ba The was determined to convince his readers through documentation rather than only story-telling.

Like the other books, Nguyen Ba The’s twin tracts on the Phans focused on political history. But they differed in the emphasis on modernization. Nhuong Tong was concerned with the quest for independence and, conversely, largely silent about modernization. Any possible inferences to the latter would have come from Nguyen Thai Hoc’s two letters rather the narrative itself. Dao Trinh Nhat, as noted above, placed the blame on national loss on the resistance to modernization. Nguyen Ba The went further in framing his tracts in the context of modernization. Early in the tract on Phan Boi

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Manuscripts] *Viet Bao* (January 18, 2004): <http://vietbao.vn/Van-hoa/Tu-nhung-di-cao-bi-bo-quen/45122128/181/>. “Nguyen Ba The,” *Vietgle Tri Thuc Viet*: <http://www.vietgle.vn/trithucviet/detail.aspx?pid=N0VDOzAzMDM&key=Nguy%E1%BB%85n+B%C3%A1+Th%E1%BA%BF&type=A0>.

Chau, for instance, phrases such as “the path of reform and modernization” and “national prosperity” stood next to “our people” and “fire among the Viet children.”<sup>47</sup> Excerpts of Phan’s writings – related to independence but also learning, education, and modernization – were inserted into the main narrative of Phan’s life. Underscoring this was the appendix, where both of the documents were speeches aimed at students and delivered at, respectively, the elite all-boys high school in Hue and its sister school for girls. The other tract placed a stronger stress on political reform and democracy for which Phan Chu Trinh was known to have advocated. Nonetheless, Nguyen The Ba inserted his commentary into the narrative such as, “A people desiring to be self-sufficient would need first to... reform education, to build a national [system] of learning.”<sup>48</sup>

In some ways, the first four tracts of the Tan Viet’s series illustrated both linkage and development about nationalist writings among noncommunist South Vietnamese. The inclusion of the tracts by Nhuong Tong and Dao Nhat Trinh demonstrated a solid continuity in noncommunist nationalist thought from the antebellum period to the period of warfare and dramatic decolonization of the late 1940s and early 1950s. Nguyen Ba The’s tract on Phan Chu Trinh also excerpted a lengthy description from one of three biographies of the reformer published back in 1926. Second, as revealed in Nguyen Ba The’s twin tracts on the Phans, there was a subtle shift in nationalist biographical writing and interpretation by the late 1940s and early 1950s. As much of the political situation

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<sup>47</sup> The Nguyen, *Phan Boi Chau*, vii.

<sup>48</sup> The Nguyen, *Phan Chu Trinh*, 13.

had changed since the end of World War II, nationalism was associated to not merely independence but, increasingly, development, modernity, and modernization.

After this quartet of tracts, however, there was a pause in the series. It was not resumed until 1956, now under the heading *The Bookshelf "Exemplars" of the New Viet*. (The heading *Vietnamese Patriots* remained at the top of most tracts.) It is not clear what might have accounted for the pause, but the anti-colonial war and its immediate aftermath probably played a large role. Once resumed and renamed, however, the series sped up to produce a wave of new tracts for the next several years, especially during 1956 and 1957. Viet Tan put out reprints of the first four tracts, including an expanded version of that on Phan Chu Trinh. According to an advertisement, it ambitiously planned for about sixty titles. But fewer than twenty in total eventually came out of the series. This might have resulted from competition from other publishers. The lack of willing authors might have played a role as well, since there were opportunities for teaching and writing elsewhere. It was possible too that the management of Tan Viet might have decided to focus on other publications. In 1958, for example, it began publishing a textbook-like series called *Lectures (Giang Luan)* that focused on the historical background and literary analyses of the works of prominent Vietnamese literati. Of course, it could be a combination of a combination of factors.

All the same, Nguyen Ba The was indispensable to the series because he wrote virtually all of the new tracts. Nine titles came out for the series under either his real name or one of his three pennames: Nam Xuan Tho, Nhat Tam, and, again, The Nguyen. There was one tract (on Pétrus Ky) whose author was listed to be Khong Xuan Thu, which was apparently a penname since it combined the last name of Confucius and the

title of the Chinese classic *Book of Spring and Autumn*. There was not any other book listed under this author for *Exemplars of the New Viet* – and only one listed elsewhere in Tan Viet’s advertisements – it is likely that Nguyen Ba The was the real author.<sup>49</sup> His importance to the series was pronounced because there were only three other titles after 1956, and all were reprints. As noted, one was Dao Trinh Nhat’s book about his executed revolutionary grandfather.<sup>50</sup> The others were biographies of famous poets: the nineteenth-century poet Tran Te Xuong and the twentieth-century Han Mac Tu.<sup>51</sup> Written by Tran Thanh Mai, a writer and schoolteacher that joined the Viet Minh during the war and stayed in the north until his death in 1965, they were first published in 1935 and 1941, respectively. Before their inclusion into Tan Viet’s series, they saw at least two reprints each: a testimony to their popularity and influence. Their inclusion also meant that Nguyen Ba The had a chance to shine in Mai’s illustrious company: something he did not fail to do, in quantity if not also quality. To put it another way, the series consisted of reprints on the one hand and new tracts by Nguyen Ba The on the other: a proportion of two-to-one in favor of the southern schoolteacher.

One notable feature about the new additions to the series was a clear shift from military and revolutionary figures to those in literature and culture. Only two of the tracts could be said to belong to the first category: that on Dao Trinh Nhat’s grandfather, and

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<sup>49</sup> One source has credited The as author of this tract, although the date of publication is listed a year earlier; see “Nguyen Ba The,” *Vietgle Tri Thuc Viet*. The only other title by Khong Xuan Thu that I found listed on an advertisement of Tan Viet was *Nguyen Ba Hoc*, on one of the first Vietnamese fiction write to work in the modern Vietnamese script. The title was listed as a ninth-grade textbook.

<sup>50</sup> Dao Trinh Nhat, *Luong Ngoc Quyen va Cuoc Khoi Nghia Thai Nguyen 1917* [Luong Ngoc Quyen and the Thai Nguyen Rebellion of 1917] (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1957).

<sup>51</sup> Tran Thanh Mai, *Trong Giong Song Vi: Van Chuong va Than The Tran Te Xuong* [Watching the River Vi: Works and Life of Tran Te Xuong]; Tran Thanh Mai, *Han Mac Tu (1912-1940)* (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1956; reprint, Los Alamos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1987).

that on the southern diplomat and governor Phan Thanh Gian who committed suicide after military and diplomatic failure to desist further French expansion in the late 1860s. Another nineteenth-century court mandarin, Ton That Thuyet, was celebrated equally for his literary achievements and anticolonial political and military intrigue: a classic embodiment of the ideal mandarin. More explicitly, the remainder of the tracts concerned poets and writers and elevated their literary and cultural achievements into a different kind of heroism worthy of emulation. In mid-century Saigon, the shift in promoting cultural figures was made easier because the two tracts by Tran Thanh Mai had provided aspiring biographers with a blueprint for writing about them. Mai's tract on the nineteenth-century poet Tran Te Xuong was barely one hundred pages in length, but was widely considered to be the first to have married biography to literary analysis. Its success could be uneven, and the most renowned literary critic of the 1940s called it as "more biography" than criticism.<sup>52</sup> Nonetheless, this unevenness was an advantage for *Exemplars of the New Viet* since the series was intended to be biographical rather than analytical. Mai's focus on the background of and circumstances that led to the composition of particular poems served as a model for much of subsequent writing about Vietnamese poetry.

Mai's other volume concerned Han Mac Tu, who was perhaps the closest there was to a Vietnamese Keats. When it first came out in 1941, it was even more celebrated and better received than first tract. A Catholic from central Vietnam, Han Mac Tu was well versed in the classicist style but turned modernist after being influenced by French symbolism. He published some of the best-known Vietnamese poems before succumbing

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<sup>52</sup> Vu Ngoc Phan, *Vu Ngoc Phan Tuyen Tap: I*, 465.

to leprosy at the age of twenty-eight in 1940. For educated Vietnamese, a poetry-loving lot on the whole, the combination of poetic achievement and premature death promptly promised him a place in the pantheon of great Vietnamese poets. Appearing in less than a year after the death, Mai's biography helped to ensure this place. But it did not achieve this by playing nice. On the contrary, Mai was tough on the family and friends of the poet, portraying his mother, for instance, as an alcoholic. It depicted the poet as having possessed some kind of madness. But Mai's interpretation was buttressed with strong biographical context to and novel psychological insights about the poems.<sup>53</sup>

Contemporary critics found the book to have been carefully written and generally persuasive.<sup>54</sup>

At slightly over 200 pages, Mai's book did not address nationalism directly.<sup>55</sup> But there was enough interest about the Vietnamese person in each tract for Tan Viet to think it was appropriate for inclusion in *Exemplars of the New Viet*. Mai made subtle points to underscore the Vietnamese-ness of Han Mac Tu, calling him, for instance, "the most talented Vietnamese poet in musicality" comparable to the powerful foreign musicality of Chinese Tang poetry or Stéphane Mallarmé.<sup>56</sup> Or, several pages later, he

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<sup>53</sup> Upon reading the first edition of Mai's book, one of Han Mac Tu's brothers was shocked to learn about some of the biographical details. But he considered Mai's evaluation of the poetry – written "with scientific method and psychological dexterity" – to be strong and insightful. See Nguyen Ba Tin, "Tran Thanh Mai va Han Mac Tu," in *Han Mac Tu Anh Toi* [Han Mac Tu, My Older Brother] (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Nghe, 1991); available at the website *Dung Lac*: <http://www.dunglac.org/index.php?m=module3&v=chapter&ib=104&ict=525>.

<sup>54</sup> For a contemporary and highly positive evaluation, see Vu Ngoc Phan, *Vu Ngoc Phan Tuyen Tap: I*, 470-475. A recent summary of early reception of Mai's two tracts is Ton Thao Mien, "Tran Thanh Mai (1908-1965)," in Nguyen Ngoc Thien et al., *Ly Luan Phe Binh Van Hoc Viet Nam tu Dau The Ky XX den 1945* [Literary Theory and Criticism from the Start of the Twentieth Century to 1945] (Hanoi: Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 2005), 345-366.

<sup>55</sup> Although published for the series, Tan Viet sub-headed Mai's tracts as *Vietnamese Poets* rather than *Vietnamese Patriots*. It might have plans to publish new tracts under this sub-heading, but of course that was abandoned when the series was discontinued.

<sup>56</sup> Tran Thanh Mai, *Han Mac Tu*, 177.

drew parallel of the poet to Charles Lindbergh, except that the poet's flight was not across the Atlantic but in coining innovative words and phrases that were bound to soar and to "enrich and empower" the Vietnamese language. Switching from air to sea, Mai then borrowed something that Walt Whitman once said of Edgar Allen Poe: that he dreamed of a tall and thin figure [i.e., Poe or Han Mac Tu] that "stood on a fast-moving boat and seemed to find bliss and ecstasy amidst nightmares."<sup>57</sup> The implication was that Han Mac Tu's artistic achievement of the first rank was something that Vietnamese could hold forth and be proud of. His alleged madness, if controversial at first, was now seen to be comparable to that of Poe, something to add to the riches of the national literature.

Without the prowess of Mai's analysis and composition, Nguyen Ba The nonetheless strove mightily to show that literary and cultural figures before Han Mac Tu made a variety of substantial and even heroic contributions to the national culture. Perhaps the most prominent example was the tract about Nguyen Dinh Chieu, the most famous nineteenth-century poet in the south. Chieu was most known for two things: blindness due allegedly to sadness over the unexpected death of his mother, and composition of the epic poem *Luc Van Tien*. The epic concerned the adventures of the student Luc Van Tien who was blinded during his travels but later was healed, passed the national examination, became a successful military leader, and was reunited with his lost love. A fairy tale in the truest sense – the protagonist could see again thanks to an encounter with a fairy – it reflected parts of Chieu's personal as well as the contemporary situation in southern Vietnam, which was engulfed with warfare with the Khmers, the French, and among Vietnamese. Because the poem was written in the demotic Nom

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<sup>57</sup> Tran Thai Mai, *Han Mac Tu*, 183-184.

script used by some elite Vietnamese in order to distinguish from the Mandarin script, it was an easy case for twentieth-century nationalists to use in bolstering their case for cultural nationalism. In 1938, the Trotskyist Phan Van Hum, who was married to one of Chieu's great-granddaughters, brought out the first major interpretation of the poet in the twentieth century. (Tan Viet later reprinted this book, plus two of Chieu's original works that Hum had annotated.) Following suit twenty years later, Nguyen Ba The's tract on Chieu notably had many more footnotes than his earlier tracts for the series. It also included a bibliography of fifteen items (including Hum's book) and a list of twenty-seven editions of the epic: a sign of the author's special attentiveness to this particular biographical subject.<sup>58</sup>

The divided the tract into two nearly even sections: one on biography and the other an annotated selection of poet's works. He portrayed Chieu's family as loyal to the Nguyen Dynasty amidst a famous rebellion near Saigon. This internal conflict made the boy aware of political turmoil and personal vulnerability. As a result, he continued to pursue the ladder of success through studies but also began to seek peace according to the Daoist-inspired if vague precept of the "Great Way" (*Dai Dao*). Subsequent events, including the Vietnamese-Khmer conflict and his blindness, heightened this awareness and led him to abandon the pursuit of the mandarin. He turned instead to teaching and writing, but was continually hounded by deep sorrow, including that over the French conquest of southern Vietnam in the second half of the century.

More concerned more with biography than literature, Nguyen Ba The hardly discuss Chieu's famous epic poem. He instead quoted from it to describe and explain

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<sup>58</sup> Nguyen Ba The, *Nguyen Dinh Chieu (Than The va Thi Van) 1822-1888* [Nguyen Dinh Chieu: Life and Literature, 1822-1888] (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1957).



how Chieu coped with personal and political turmoil. He also spent more space than in earlier tracts to speculate at Chieu's emotion and motivation. On the period when Chieu was actively pursuing the national examination, for instance, The wrote that he was gravely disturbed by the instability of life and country. Out of these disturbances, however, he "felt the meaning of sacrifice in order to protect the beauty of life," that such self-sacrifice "was the noblest duty for a person." It prompted him into many sorts of studies, including "difficult sciences" such as medicine. Nguyen Ba The considered that this aspect of Chieu was something that Vietnamese "should bow in respect," something that "we could be proud about our country."<sup>59</sup> Yet there was more. When confronted by blindness and thwarted aspiration later in his life, Chieu felt self-pity at times but also moved beyond it by "bringing his enlightened way of the heart to serve society and people."<sup>60</sup> His dedication to writing poetry as morality lesson aimed at Vietnamese was his way of reaching this goal. In Nguyen Ba The's hand, Chieu provided an example of patriotism, personal virtue, and exercise of talent for the benefit of society and nation. The fact that the poet was blind helped to make the point that all Vietnamese, including the disabled, could participate in the affairs of the nation. The also took Chieu's cultural contributions as an example to highlight the need for national development.<sup>61</sup>

This latter theme was more pronounced in The's tract about Nguyen Van Vinh, who was born only a few years before Chieu's death and later became an early member of the intelligentsia generation. Unlike Chieu who was essentially a regionalist, Vinh

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<sup>59</sup> Nguyen Ba The, *Nguyen Dinh Chieu*, 25.

<sup>60</sup> Nguyen Ba The, *Nguyen Dinh Chieu*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> The also wrote a short tract about three minor poets, headed by Xuong Nguyet Anh, a daughter of Nguyen Dinh Chieu. She was the only woman included in the series, and the publisher placed the tract under the sub-heading *Pioneer Female Writer (Nu Si Tien Phong)*. See Nam Xuan Tho, *Xuong Nguyet Anh (Nguyen Xuan Khue) 1864-1921* (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1957).

was cosmopolitan and worked as journalist, translator, teacher, entrepreneur, and politician.<sup>62</sup> (The last role involved membership in Hanoi's municipal council.) Through his varied work, he served as a conduit between Vietnamese and French cultures and was commonly credited as a major figure of Vietnamese modernization. The tract underlined his significance by including a section of obituaries from prominent Vietnamese in addition to the biography and anthology.<sup>63</sup> As the case with Nguyen Dinh Chieu, the tract promptly praised Vinh for his innate talent but also noted the limits on his life: in this case, little access to books and libraries when he was young. It made, however, the point that Vinh's family greatly invested in his learning, spending their money on books and their energy on furthering his education. He took his examination for the School of Interpreters at the mere age of ten, started working at a provincial office at fourteen, and was set for a lifetime of financial security within the colonial system. Would that be enough for the talented interpreter? The answer was a resounding no: "How could Nguyen Van Vinh be average and satisfied with his average world?" "In spite of his early Westernization," intoned the tract, "Nguyen Van Vinh stood before the country and absorbed gradually its sacredness; the spirit of nationalism led the highly educated person to be concerned and to choose service so he would not be ashamed with his ancestors."<sup>64</sup> He turned to other venues, starting with journalism that culminated in his editorship of three prominent journals of the 1910s. (Phan Ke Binh was among the regular contributors to one of them.) The tract summarized his many achievements, especially

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<sup>62</sup> The most detailed discussion about Nguyen Van Vinh available in English is Christopher E. Goscha, "'The Modern Barbarian': Nguyen Van Vinh and the Complexity of Colonial Modernity in Vietnam," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 3:1 (1994): 99-134.

<sup>63</sup> Nhat Tam, *Nguyen Van Vinh (1882-1936)* (Saigon: Tan Viet, 1957).

<sup>64</sup> Nhat Tam, *Nguyen Van Vinh*, 7-8.

his promotion of the modern Vietnamese script so that more people could learn how to read and write. This was a very different take on Nguyen Van Vinh from post-1954 communist historiography that considered Vinh essentially a colonial collaborator and, accordingly, held him in very low regard.<sup>65</sup> On the other hand, Nguyen Ba The here reflected a far more positive view of Vinh in South Vietnam and attributed his modernizing efforts to his nationalism.

On the whole, indeed, *Exemplars of the New Viet* suggested two trajectories about Vietnamese nationalism. On the one hand, it followed the lead of the antebellum noncommunist tradition that emphasized independence. On the other hand, it stressed the need to construct and develop the country. Young Vietnamese were called to die for their country if necessary: this was the case at the start of the First Indochina War. But as warfare had desisted in 1954, there was a greater sense of building forth from the ruins of colonialism and towards prosperity. Certainly, this nationalist sense was not always clearly defined. But it was constantly perpetuated in these publications and, generally, in the urban society. Although Viet Tan discontinued *Exemplars of the New Viet* after the late 1950s, it kept reprinting the already published tracts. New publications continued to come out of other South Vietnamese presses, especially in the forms of textbooks and articles from newspapers and magazines. They helped to perpetuate the hero-based sentiments of nationalism, with almost all of the heroes associated to the ethnic Kinh majority and to the high culture dominated by the same ethnicity.

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<sup>65</sup> See Goscha, “‘The Modern Barbarian’,” 137-138. Goscha points out that as late as 1975, there was not an entry of Vinh in a major anthology of Vietnamese literature published by the DRV.

**Antebellum evaluations of culture: Phan Ke Binh's *Vietnamese Customs*  
and Dao Duy Anh's *The Outline History of Vietnamese Culture***

National heroism was hardly the only popular subject that urban South Vietnamese writers picked up and developed from the antebellum noncommunist mainstream. After all, the majority of noncommunist Vietnamese intellectuals in both periods considered Westernization to be only the latest influence on the adaptation to “Vietnamese essence.” This was implicitly acknowledged in Nguyen Ba The’s tract about Nguyen Van Vinh. Lauding Vinh for the modernizing efforts, the tract nonetheless made clear that he retained his Vietnameseness throughout his life. While stating that he “dressed in the Western style,” it also quoted him for saying – the only direct quotation from Vinh in the biographical section – that “I have been very much influenced by Confucianism.”<sup>66</sup>

Another prominent subject for urban writers and readers was regional and national customs. Many of them were engaged in researching and discussing public and private practices that, in their view, made Vietnamese a distinctive people. As with national heroes, South Vietnamese writing about customs could be traced to the influence of a single work of Phan Ke Binh. In this case, the book’s title was straightforward: *Vietnamese Customs (Viet Nam Phong Tuc)*. First serialized in a journal edited by Nguyen Van Vinh, it was collected into book form in 1915 and, on the basis of citation and quotation, was as consequential to the writing of customs as his books on heroes were to the writing about national heroism.

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<sup>66</sup> Nhat Tam, *Nguyen Van Vinh*, 9.

*Vietnamese Customs* was significant to educated Vietnamese at the time because it offered perhaps the first major summary written in the modern script about Vietnamese essentialism. “Each country has its own customs,” pronounced the very first sentence of the text, followed by an acknowledgement that the Vietnamese had derived much of its culture from the Chinese civilization. Nonetheless, as contemporary French rule “has brought pieces of Western civilization to our country,” the Vietnamese now “looked over our shoulders to see that many of the great old ways are outdated and corrupt today.” Yet it did not mean that a wholesale abandonment of the old. Rather, Vietnamese were to “choose what to change gradually [by] judging what customs were the worst” while keeping “customs that are our national essence.”<sup>67</sup> Binh meant the book to be used as a means of sifting and choosing for, eventually, the purpose of modernization.

The book was divided into three sections, each progressively longer than the one before: customs related to family life (i.e., the extended family), customs related to village life (*huong dang*), and customs related to society at large. The subtitle was *National History* and, on the face of it, Binh paradoxically affirmed Vietnamese essentialism while supposedly resorting to historicism to explain various customs. There was, however, little actual history to the content of the book. Binh engaged instead in enumerating and explicating the meanings and purposes of specific customs, sometimes implicit with approval or criticism. In the first section, for instance, he gave four possible reasons for the custom of re-burying one’s parents after three or more years after their death: lack of money at the time of death, burial ground was flooded, something unusual

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<sup>67</sup> Phan Ke Binh, *Phong Tuc Viet Nam: Bo Quoc Su (Contribution à l’histoire d’Annam)* [Vietnamese Customs: National History (Contribution to the History of Annam)] (Saigon: Phong Trao Van Hoa, 1970; reprint, Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1980), 5-6. Annam was a term commonly used by Vietnamese elite before 1930 to mean Vietnam.

occurring to the ground or the family of the living, and the desire to be near the graves belonging to prosperous families so that one's own family would be prosperous as well. (The last two reasons had to do with geomancy, or earth divination, and the family would have consulted a geomancer.) Binh was gently critical of this practice, saying that one should not remove the buried bodies of one's ancestors as long as there was "respect and affection" for them.<sup>68</sup>

Another instance of criticism could be found in the last section. At one point, Binh described customs regarding mandarins, such as their public appearance and honorifics given to them by the common people. He related these customs to the larger paternalistic system of society and, without extolling it, implicitly accepted this paternalism on one page. On the next page, however, he disapproved of the custom in which the common folk were obliged to kowtow to their mandarin. "Another matter contrary to civilization," he proclaimed, "is forcing the common people to kowtow." He said the same about corporal punishment delivered by mandarins and declared, clearly out of relief, that "it is most fortunate that the government has abandoned those practices."<sup>69</sup> The most "outdated" customs, however, were not left behind. Later in this section, for example, he dissected major categories of work and gave long explanations about and appraisals of their roles in the Vietnamese society. Near the end of the assessment of each profession, however, he lamented the shortsightedness or failure of the Vietnamese elite to have upgraded and modernized it. He sometimes ended with the

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<sup>68</sup> Phan Ke Binh, *Phong Tuc Viet Nam*, 34-36.

<sup>69</sup> Phan Ke Binh, *Phong Tuc Viet Nam*, 198-201.

hope that Western colonialism might help to improve this or that particular profession.<sup>70</sup> Thanks to the colonial College of Agriculture, for instance, Vietnamese could better their production of rice and other crops.<sup>71</sup> Or on commercial activities, he listed a number of causes to account for the small number of Vietnamese traders and capitalists. Resorting to a line out of the old European mercantilism, Binh bemoaned, “Stronger is commerce, stronger is the country; weaker is commerce, weaker is the country.”<sup>72</sup> There was no doubt about what he thought of his own country.

The combination of careful explanations and mournful criticism in the book proved a success in reception and influence to this day.<sup>73</sup> Writing in uncomplicated prose meant to promote the reading and writing of the modern script, Binh provided a comprehensive and popular book of anthropology for the educated Vietnamese. The history was thin but was successfully employed to support the premise that Vietnamese had learned from China and other great civilizations (e.g., Buddhism from India) and now could learn from the great Western civilization. Binh did not attack Vietnamese culture as the Self-Strength Literary Group did later in the 1930s. His criticism was in sorrow than anger, which made it easier for the more conservative members of the elite to hear. It helped too that he praised many things about Vietnamese customs, such as the

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<sup>70</sup> This book, again, was first serialized in a journal sponsored by the colonial authorities that planned to follow military pacification by cultural assimilation. In turn, writers were expected to give lip service to colonial rule at the least. Some of them might have believed in assimilation too, albeit not necessarily to the same degree desired by the authorities.

<sup>71</sup> Phan Ke Binh, *Phong Tuc Viet Nam*, 253-256.

<sup>72</sup> Phan Ke Binh, *Phong Tuc Viet Nam*, 265.

<sup>73</sup> For a present-day assessment, see Tran Thai Binh, “Phan Ke Binh,” 911. For an assessment from South Vietnam, see Le Van Sieu, *Van Hoc Su Viet Nam*, 391. Sieu pointed out the historical value of the book. “Whether the reader supports [Binh’s proposals of reform],” wrote Sieu, the book “at least recorded the lifestyle... so that later generations can understand it and not forget their roots.”

adaptation of Chinese music into Vietnamese styles and categories, thus allowing some solace to the pride among the more traditionalist of the elite.

*Vietnamese Customs* led to a number of publications about the subject, especially in periodicals. But it was so comprehensive and powerful that more than two decades would pass before another publication made a similar impact. The author was a schoolteacher from Hue by the name of Dao Duy Anh (1904-1988), who during the 1920s worked as office secretary at the most prominent periodical in Hue. He later joined one of the communist parties before the merge into the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930. Arrested and released by the colonial authorities, he spent the 1930s teaching, writing, and running his own small press in Hue. His publishing forays began with two dictionaries, including one translating the Chinese-based Han script into the modern Vietnamese script. It was an instant classic.<sup>74</sup> Drawn to both history and Marxism, Anh saw that he would need to be versed in the social sciences and began to read Marxist scholarship. He started collecting secondary materials in foreign languages and visited archives and libraries of friends and scholars in Hue for primary sources.<sup>75</sup> The result was *The Outline History of Vietnamese Culture*, which was well regarded among the urban elite upon publication in 1938. One instance is the journal *Poetic Society*, a prominent if short-lived Hanoi cultural journal. It provided a longer-than-usual

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<sup>74</sup> See Dao Duy Anh, *Nho Nghi Chieu Hom: Hoi Ky* [Recalling and Thinking In the Afternoon] (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Nghe, 2003), 11-61. The memoir was first circulated among Anh's friends in the mid-1970s. It was published in 1989, shortly after Anh's death, albeit with several chapters left out. The 2003 publication is a revised edition of the 1989 text but with the cuts restored.

<sup>75</sup> Dao Duy Anh, *Nho Nghi Chieu Hom*, 62-72.



summation of the book, praised its quality, and even rebuked the general public for not having discussing enough of it.<sup>76</sup>

The book lived up to the ambitious title by presenting a concise synthesis culled from an impressive amount of materials in Vietnamese, Chinese, and French. (Phan Ke Binh's work, which sat atop the bibliographies of two of the chapters, listed neither sources nor notes.) In comparison to Binh's tome, it was far stronger in history, crisper in prose, and shorter in length even though it covered more topics. These qualities gave credence to the promise in the title that it would be "history" and "outline." For these differences between the two works, however, Anh was similar to Binh in starting out that Vietnamese carried "powerful vitality" in order to live for "two thousand years amidst tough conditions of the natural environment." As this culture showed "weaknesses" when encountering "deadlock," Anh thought, as Binh did two decades earlier, that it was critically important to review Vietnamese culture comprehensively, sort out the chaff from the wheat in that culture, discard the chaff, and add new wheat to the old but still valuable one.<sup>77</sup> Although Marxist in intention, the book followed the critical path set forth by a non-Marxist and even colonialist-friendly writer two decades earlier.

Dao Duy Anh divided the text into three sections that were bookended by a short introduction and a shorter but very important conclusion. He considered many of the same topics as did Binh, and the outlines of their books were strikingly similar if differently organized. Anh, for instance, relegated entire sections on family life, village

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<sup>76</sup> Hoai Thanh, "Nhan Xem Quyen Viet Nam Van Hoa Su Cuong cua Dao Duy Anh" [Reading *The Outline History of Vietnamese Culture* by Dao Duy Anh], *Tao Dan* [Poetic Society] 11 (August 16, 1959): 878-887. This is reprinted in *Tao Dan 1939: Suu Tap Tron Bo* [Poetic Society, 1930: Complete Collection] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 1998), 1068-1077.

<sup>77</sup> Dao Duy Anh, *Viet Nam Van Hoa Su Cuong* [The Outline History of Vietnamese Culture] (Saigon: Bon Phuong, 1951; reprint, Fort Smith, AK: Song Moi, 1980), vii.

life, and national life to the middle of the book while addressing the subject of work at the start. Starting with the introduction, he provided (as noted) many more historical details to each section, and brought up-to-date some of the developments since the publication of Binh's book. In spite of his early talk on wanting to locate weaknesses within this culture, Anh actually offered very little criticism of it for most of the text. He was most concerned with locating Vietnamese essence in history, as a historian has observed, "from a dialectical perspective."<sup>78</sup> It was only through this process that Vietnamese would be able to consider their available options and choose the most appropriate one.

It was in the conclusion that Dao Duy Anh offered an analysis of the fundamental problem with Vietnamese culture. Briefly, he presented the pros and cons of possible options for the advancement of Vietnamese culture: a mixed culture, a largely Westernized culture, and a revolutionary culture. His sympathy was likely on the last option, but he did not explicitly endorse any. He moved instead to discussing three basic social classes in Vietnamese society: the small urban middle class, the equally small urban working class, and the peasants that "made up ninety percent of Vietnamese society." Anh found the first two classes to be "direct products of encounters with new [i.e., Western] culture" while the peasant class also changed by colonial rule and colonial culture. "The peasants no longer view the French," wrote he, "as fearsome [and] no longer view their products as strange."<sup>79</sup> There was, again, no explicit endorsement. Nonetheless, Anh's language illustrated that he was impatient at the urban middle class, sympathetic to the proletariat, and favoring the rural class above both.

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<sup>78</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 275.

<sup>79</sup> Dao Duy Anh, *Viet Nam Van Hoa Su Cuong*, 339-340.

Given Anh's interest to Marxism, the ending was not surprising at all. Not unexpected either was his membership with the Viet Minh after the August Revolution and the decision to stay in the north after the Geneva Conference as professor of history at Hanoi University. He was essentially a Marxist scholar with strong faith in the Vietnamese peasant class rather than the proletariat. In the late 1950s, however, he was marginally involved with the *Good Humanities – Beautiful Works* Affair, lost his university position, was disallowed to conduct original research, and was relegated to translating and annotating dynastic histories at a cultural institute.<sup>80</sup> A year after the end of the Second Indochina War, he made his first trip to Saigon in decades and visited old friends as well as writers he had read but never met, including Nguyen Hien Le. They met several times again whenever Anh came south, and according to Le, he regretted his involvement in the Affair because it stripped him of working in history. Privately, he was very critical of the northern society and the socialist system that produced it. Le also detected that the more he learned about South Vietnam before 1975, the more he was wishful for an independent life of research and writing as Le had.<sup>81</sup>

As it was, Anh's book was plentiful in information and elegant in composition that non-Marxist scholars, including those in urban South Vietnam, could welcome many of its contributions without subscribing to its Marxist-friendly conclusion. A Saigon press republished it in 1951, under the regime of State of Vietnam, and gave it at least

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<sup>80</sup> The latest consideration of the Affair – and pertinent to Anh's role in the Affair – is Peter Zinoman, "Nhan Van – Giai Pham and Vietnamese 'Reform Communism' in the 1950s: A Revisionist Interpretation," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13:1 (Winter 2011): 60-100. See also Kim N. B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002), 121-163.

<sup>81</sup> Nguyen Hien Le, *Hoi Ki: Tap 3* [Memoir: Volume 3] (Stanton, CA: Van Nghe, 1969-1972). Given the restraint placed on Anh, he said little about his visits and interactions with intellectuals in the south after 1975.

one more reprint ten years later.<sup>82</sup> In the mid-1960s, the U.S. military published an abridged version in English, apparently for the benefit of officers and soldiers engaged in the Americanization of the war.<sup>83</sup> Countless South Vietnamese noncommunist writers cited and quoted from it. The same was true of many foreign researchers in different academic disciplines and political persuasions. There was, it seemed, something in the book for everyone.

Like Phan Ke Binh's work from a generation before, Anh's book played a prominent role in arousing interest and promoting studies about the native culture and customs among the urban elite. Once again, the Hanoi journal *New Mind* played a leading role in advancing this interest during the period of Vichy rule and Japanese occupation. Even though the journal devoted a lot more space to strictly historical subjects, it ran a healthy amount of articles on culture and customs. Given the strong interest on dynastic history, there were a number of articles with titles such as "How official correspondence was written and sent in the past" and "When did the Qing force our people to wear the queue, or did the Le force [ethnic] Qing Chinese leave their hair uncut?" Some articles reflected the promotion of education among the urban elite and carried titles such as "Our old custom regarding martial arts competition" and "Charm from the past: a classroom session in the old Confucian school." Examples of articles focusing on the common folk were "The village and folk music" and "[Historical] marks of change in our costume."

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<sup>82</sup> Anh was with the Viet Minh in 1951, and the copyrights section indicated that Anh's younger brother granted permission for republication that year.

<sup>83</sup> Dao Duy Anh, *Vietnamese Culture: A General Outline* (Washington, DC: Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (Army), 1966).

Although some of the writers for *New Mind* later joined the Viet Minh and stayed in the north after 1954, there was no discernable Marxist dialectics or advocacy in these articles.<sup>84</sup> Among the things that they had in common with Phan Ke Binh and Dao Duy Anh was an emphatic focus on the customs and culture of the Kinh, by far the dominant ethnic group in Vietnam.<sup>85</sup> This focus was perhaps an unavoidable result from the heavy emphasis on Vietnamese history as a product of the Kinh.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, the cultural biases of the urban noncommunist elite helped to shape a homogenizing anticolonialism so essential to their version of nationalism. As we will see, there was a lot more about minorities in urban publications during the 1950s and 1960s. But before 1945, it was the Kinh and their attendant customs and culture that were far ahead of the minorities. As it was, the events in 1945 and the anticolonial war that broke out the next year put a pause on research and writing about Vietnamese customs among noncommunist nationalists. It resumed gradually after 1954, then vigorously in the 1960s. The place, however, was Saigon rather than Hanoi.

### **The beauties of the northern village:**

#### **Toan Anh from *Country Leisure* to *The Bouquet of the North***

In urban South Vietnam, the most popular and equally prominent writer about Vietnamese customs was easily Toan Anh, a northern émigré whose real name was

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<sup>84</sup> As it should be recalled from Chapter Four, the Viet Minh and the DRV were highly critical of the journal's methodology.

<sup>85</sup> A parallel is the long-standing dominance of the Han ethnic group in Chinese culture and history.

<sup>86</sup> It reflected, among other things, another dimension of the limited experience of the urban intelligentsia that had little contact with the minorities in the mountains, regarded the Khmers as less civilizing, and viewed the ethnic Chinese with a mix of admiration and envy.

Nguyen Van Toan (1914-2009). Born into a village close to present-day Hanoi, Toan Anh was initially taught classical Vietnamese before attending several schools in Hanoi.<sup>87</sup> He passed the examination for a secretarial position in 1935, and began to research and write about this classical style while waiting for an assignment in the colonial services.<sup>88</sup> He later worked as a tax inspector and traveled to many areas in the north. These visits enabled him to observe and record information about local traditions and customs. After a brief marriage that was annulled, he was remarried to a local beauty until her death in the last days of the 1960s.<sup>89</sup> During World War II, the couple ran a fabric store outside Hanoi, a successful enterprise with several employees and contracted to the government to distribute fabric to the provinces.<sup>90</sup>

In politics, Toan Anh was a member of the VNQDD. During 1945-1946, he was placed in charge of a party zone in the north, presumably the area around the town Vinh Yen where he was living.<sup>91</sup> It is unclear what his position entailed during this perilous time for noncommunist political groups. Although the VNQDD controlled Vinh Yen after the August Revolution, it was “circled” by the Viet Minh, which somewhat succeeded at confiscating the property and rice of his wife’s family. After a pause to the

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<sup>87</sup> This is gathered from the author’s biography on the inside cover of Toan Anh, *Bo Hoa Bac Viet* [The Northern Bouquet] (Saigon, 1959).

<sup>88</sup> Toan Anh, *Vao Lang Cam But: Hoi Ky* [Entrance to the Writing World: Memoir] (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Hoa Thong Tin, 1993), 121 and 111. This was the latter of his two memoirs and concentrated on the start of his writing and publishing career in the mid-1930s. It was organized around a number of poems that he wrote women friends, including his future wife, before his marriage. For this reason, the narration was often non-chronological and circuitous.

<sup>89</sup> See Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong: Hoi Ky* [Loving Remembrances: Memoir] (Saigon: Chi Thanh, 1970). This was his first memoir, written and published shortly after the death of his wife as a way to deal with his grief. The memoir revolved around their marriage and children. Toan Anh was never married again although it was very common at the time for men in the 50s (as he was at the time) to remarry. The reference to his first marriage appears on p. 23.

<sup>90</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 74-75.

<sup>91</sup> *Who’s Who in Vietnam* (Saigon: Saigon Press, 1974), 22.

intra-Vietnamese conflict in 1946, the Viet Minh prevailed over the VNQDD and Toan Anh moved his family to Hanoi. They opened a small store, but his wife and children were evacuated to the countryside before the outbreak of war. Toan Anh followed suit after the outbreak, albeit to the different area because he was afraid of arrest by the Viet Minh. It was not until the end of 1947 that they were reunited in Hanoi.<sup>92</sup> Compounded by the death of his beloved mother shortly after war broke out, these years were a very difficult time for the thirty-something writer.<sup>93</sup> Normalcy prevailed upon their return to Hanoi. His oldest children resumed schooling while he worked in an unspecified post for the government, and eventually for the Ministry of Social Welfare within the State of Vietnam. He also began a small printing press but had to fold it due to strong competition and his inexperienced management.<sup>94</sup>

A non-Catholic, Toan Anh moved south in 1954 with his wife and their rapidly growing family. He worked in a series of government posts, starting in the Ministry of Social Welfare during the rule of Ngo Dinh Diem. As a director, he was suspected of anti-Diem activities after a failed coup in 1960: a charge he attributed to envy on the part of members the Can Lao party in the Ministry. After six months, however, he was cleared and went back to work, albeit at the Tax Bureau.<sup>95</sup> In 1965, he moved to the Ministry of Information and worked as a librarian.<sup>96</sup> Other positions included the directorship of “action training” for the Ministry of Psychological Warfare, an inspector

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<sup>92</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 87-88 and 90-99.

<sup>93</sup> Toan Anh, “Me Toi” [My Mother], in *Bo Hoa Bac Viet* [The Bouquet of the North] (Saigon: Van Loi, 1959), 137.

<sup>94</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 111; Toan Anh, *Vao Lang Cam But*, 197-199;

<sup>95</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 128 and 151-155; Toan Anh, *Vao Lang Cam But*, 201.

<sup>96</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 157; *Who's Who in Vietnam*, 22. The latter source listed that he also worked as an “inspector” at the Ministry of Information.

post at the Ministry of Information, and the vice chairmanship of the Committee in the Humanities for the Council of Culture and Education. He also lectured at two universities and one educational institution in Saigon and Hue. For a time, he also served as the vice president of the Vietnamese chapter of International PEN.<sup>97</sup>

Although most of Toan Anh's best-known works were published in South Vietnam, he already had a body of publications before migrating south. Most of his early works were literary in nature, and he dabbled in all three major forms of literature. Starting with a poem for a Hanoi weekly in 1934 when he was still a student, he wrote many poems and published some.<sup>98</sup> He came under the sway of Vietnamese romanticism prevalent in the 1930s and, as his friend the poet Bang Ba Lan observed, never left it. As Lan remarked, Toan Anh's poetry "could be called fluent" as its "rhythm is full [and] the lyrics gentle, at times musical." On the other hand, "words and meaning are rather common" and "subject matters are mostly old-fashioned, therefore not expressive."<sup>99</sup> He was, in short, a minor poet at best. He also wrote drama, mostly comedies, and published several of them in three Hanoi journals. At least three plays were produced in Hanoi, the capitals of Laos and Cambodia, and elsewhere in northern Vietnam. Finally, he wrote fiction and published comic short stories, at least two historical novels, and several "anthropological" novellas and novels that concerned Vietnamese customs.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> *Who's Who in Vietnam*, 22.

<sup>98</sup> The circumstances around the first publication of his poem were recalled in Toan Anh, *Vao Lang Cam But*, 12-20.

<sup>99</sup> Bang Ba Lan, *Vai Ky Niem ve May Van Thi Si Hien Dai* [A Few Memories about Some Modern Writers and Poets] (Saigon: Xay Dung, 1962), 170.

<sup>100</sup> An incomplete list of his publications could be found in Toan Anh, *Vao Lang Cam But*, 5-13. Unlisted, however, are writings in periodicals, which included most of his poetry. Missing too are several titles listed in original editions.



Toan Anh's literary reputation was modest in comparison to his works on customs and regionalism. His most important literary endeavor, perhaps, was his fictionalization of minor aspects in some of his publications on customs. This was the case with his first published essay, whose subject was a classical musical style native to his province and which came out in a well-known daily started by Nguyen Van Vinh. This piece of work brought the budding author ten piasters: a nice earning when the average monthly income for his regular job was twenty-seven piasters.<sup>101</sup> More essays came out and were collected into book form in 1943. Called *Country Leisure*, it consisted of a series of tale-like essays about fourteen local and regional ways of recreation in northern Vietnam.<sup>102</sup> They included, among others, two kinds of local folk singing, two kinds of cooking competition, plus games of wrestling, hunting, fishing, cricket fighting, buffalo fighting, firecracker throwing, and kite flying. The first chapter described a singing tradition called the *quan ho* – a combination of “mandarin” and “extended family” (although its meaning and origin have been debatable) – for which the author's native province was known. This folk art was a frequent feature at spring festivals in the province, in which different pairs of unmarried women and men from different villages were dressed in embroidered traditional costumes and pitched duets against one another in a point-counterpoint manner. The success of the back-and-forth exercise depended on the memory of lyrics and the quickness of response and counter-response, among other factors. As part of the mating ritual, the male pairs often initiated a song while the females could have chosen to

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<sup>101</sup> Lai Quang Nam, “Cay Dai Thu Toan Anh: Phan 1” [The Old Tree Toan Anh], *Chim Viet Canh Nam* [Viet Bird on the Southern Branch]: <http://chimviet.free.fr/vanhoc/laiquangnam/lqnn051.htm>. The newspaper was the Hanoi-based *Trung Bac Tan Van* [New Center-North Literature].

<sup>102</sup> Toan Anh, *Phong Luu Dong Ruong: Khao Cuu ve cac Phong Tuc va Nhung Thu Choi Dep o Thon Que Xu Bac Ky* [Country Leisure: Research on Customs and Refined Recreation in the Northern Countryside] (Hanoi: Anh Hoa, 1943).

accept or decline the invitation. Depending on compatibility, a host village might invite singers from another village to stay for dinner. The meal served to warm or consolidate the relationship between two villages, resulting in a number of inter-village marriages after each folk-singing season.

The essay was accessible and easy to read, like the rest of the book. Unlike Phan Ke Binh and Dao Duy Anh, Toan Anh did not subject his essays to analysis but focused on description and illustration. In some ways, the book could be called anthropological fiction: a variation of historical fiction. The author enlivened each chapter by structuring it around one main character: the female lead of a group of singers in the first essay, a father wanting to marry off his daughters in another essay, the village school teacher in a third one, two hunting brothers in a fourth, and so on. He gave personal names to main and minor characters, thus giving some shape to an otherwise indistinguishable mass of people. But none of them were remotely developed because the center of the essay was the custom rather than this or that person. Toan Anh sketched his characters without drawing them, commencing with them in the foreground but only as a means describing the more significant background. By the end of an essay, the readers would have seen how a game or a recreation was played out, and also grasped, if broadly, its communal importance to the people engaging in it. Similar to singing the *quan ho*, for example, young unmarried women engaged in rice-cooking competitions as a means to draw unmarried members of the opposite sex. Or, cricket fighting was explained as an age ritual for older teenagers and young men: a bridge between children's games and cockfighting and raising birds for men over thirty.

*Country Leisure* was the first classic of Toan Anh's long bibliography: a result of, among other things, effective literary devices and flowing prose – the latter an offshoot of his “fluent” and “gentle” poetic writing, as noted by the poet Bang Ba Lan. The chapters read as leisurely as the games that they described, and the book was reprinted several times during the South Vietnamese period.<sup>103</sup> What might have accounted for its popularity? The author's brief preface provided a hint. “In recent time,” lamented Toan Anh, “our old games and new forms of recreation have been gradually replaced by new ones.” The fear that these games would be lost and forgotten prompted him to record them in slightly fictionalized form. “My goal,” he stated, “is to present before you the charms about which no one knew, the beauties of our country that are being forgotten.”<sup>104</sup> As illustrated in the essays, the implication was that the Vietnamese were a civilized people with humane organizations and graceful practices, and these forms of recreation were an appropriate and integral part of their culture and civilization. It was not only, however, glory and praise for Vietnamese culture. Toan Anh also brought out a thin volume entitled *Within the Green Bamboo Wall* (*Trong Luy Tre Xanh*) that, as suggested by the title, was critical of outdated customs in village life in the north such as the requirement that children had to visit all of their relatives on the first day of the lunar new year so that no one would be offended.<sup>105</sup> Here and later, however, he tended to leave the task of upbraiding the outdated to others and selected his topics for the purpose of affirming the charming. His audience seemed to respond well to this choice, as suggested

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<sup>103</sup> Like many other books of his, this book has been reprinted in postwar Vietnam since the 1990s.

<sup>104</sup> Toan Anh, *Phong Luu Dong Ruong*, 7-8.

<sup>105</sup> Toan Anh, *Truyen Ngan Lang Que* [Short Stories from the Village] (Ho Chi Minh City: Van Nghe, 1996); this is a reproduction of Toan Anh, *Trong Luy Tre Xanh: Tap Truyen Ngan* [Inside the Green Bamboo Wall: Short Stories] (Saigon: Van Loi, 1960).

by the fact that *Country Leisure* were reprinted several times but *Within the Green Bamboo Wall* only once.

In any event, these two books marked the end of the antebellum phase to Toan Anh's works. Similar to many other Vietnamese writers, the turmoil of the August Revolution and the first years of the First Indochina War prevented his works from publication in urban areas. As the political situation became more stable after the establishment of the State of Vietnam, he was able to publish three historical novels from a Hanoi press in the early 1950s, only one of which is extant. It took on the popular subject of anti-Mongol Vietnamese in the thirteenth century, and centered on two brothers that fought to drive out the invaders and avenged the death of their father.<sup>106</sup> There was nothing particularly special about the novel, as it followed many of the conventions begun by *Hung Dao Vuong* that Phan Ke Binh had co-written three decades ago. Nonetheless, its appearance reflected the desire of many Vietnamese for an independent Vietnam and, more broadly, their strong sense of nationalism vis-à-vis foreign domination. This period also saw a reprint of *Country Leisure* that helped to confirm the continuing appeal of the tract.<sup>107</sup>

The historical fiction was followed, however, by a pause in production caused by Dien Bien Phu, the Geneva Conference, and the migration of Toan Anh's family to Saigon. Indeed, the remainder of the decade saw only two books: a collection of short stories about anti-colonial literati, and a tract praising places, people, and local characteristics in the north. Entitled *Bouquet of the North*, the latter volume reflected a

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<sup>106</sup> Toan Anh, *Thanh Guom Bac Viet: Lich Su Tieu Thuyet* [The Northern Sword: A Historical Novel] (Hanoi: Minh Tuan, 1950).

<sup>107</sup> From an advertisement found in *The Northern Sword*, the reprint must have come from the same publisher and probably in the same year.

common sentiment among many émigrés after seeing that the mandate of national elections after two years would not have been realized: missing the north terribly. During the entire South Vietnamese period, the most famous expression of this sentiment was Vu Bang's essay "Longing for the Twelve" – the number referred to the months of a typical year in the north.<sup>108</sup> The essay was begun in 1960 but was not published until the early 1970s, when emotions had been further intensified by brutal warfare.<sup>109</sup> Already in the late 1950s, however, there were countless expressions of such longing that could be found in poetry, memoirs, essays, and paintings. The preface to the tract, penned by Bui Xuan Uyen, the editor of the Saigon cultural magazine *Century (The Ky)*, recognized this impulse on the part of the émigré author. "The South of the Viet land is indeed our land," Uyen remarked, "yet Vietnamese from the North could not avoid that their heart be moved" when thinking about their ancestral region. "Maybe the North has completely changed completely by now," he added in a characteristically South Vietnamese allusion to communist rule, "but I still believe that no one could destroy the essence of our people."<sup>110</sup> The text itself focused on past instead of present, on "essences" rather than sentiments. "Each country has its own traditional customs," he wrote in the introduction, repeating the rationale already given in *Country Leisure*,

Today East and West have bumped against each other according to the law of change, altering the social life of Vietnamese. The special qualities among Vietnamese have faded and have been lost even. It is most regrettable. Standing before this inevitable change, I, as someone from a

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<sup>108</sup> Vu Bang, *Thuong Nho Muoi Hai* [Longing for the Twelve] (Saigon: Nguyen Dinh Vuong, 1972).

<sup>109</sup> When he migrated to Saigon, Vu Bang was already married and had one son. His wife and son did not leave, however, and he married someone else in Saigon and had six children with her. His first wife died in 1967, although he probably did not learn of it until later. Her death might have been a reason that compelled him to complete the essay and have it published.

<sup>110</sup> Toan Anh, *Bo Hoa Dat Bac*, 1-2.

rural background in the northern plain, am compelled to write about the beauties of the Vietnamese people that are gradually mutated into something else completely.<sup>111</sup>

Here and in subsequent publications in urban South Vietnam, the forgotten past served as the stated cause for all of his works on culture. Nonetheless, *Bouquet of the North* was different from *Country Leisure* because it focused on people rather than customs. Each essay typically focused on one geographical area and picked out something there to describe: characteristics of women or men there, or a line of work such as flower planting, tea cultivation, or the sewing craft. Toan Anh framed the topics in the context of community and family, as if untouched by the Vietnamese revolution, communist or otherwise. The last chapter touted the virtues of the author's own mother: biographical in content and evident of the longing from which he futilely tried to divert in the introduction. As in *Country Leisure*, contemporary Vietnamese readers would have been charmed by Toan Anh's depiction of the village. Descriptions of activities were intersected with those of landscape or seascape, and much folk poetry was quoted as support for the premises about village essentialism.

The quotations reflected the enormous interest in folk culture among urban South Vietnamese – folktales, folksongs, and folk poetry, and their history – which was part of a greater interest about Vietnamese literary history. Similar to the genre on national heroes and regional customs, this nationalist genre was deeply rooted in the antebellum urban culture. Phan Ke Binh, in fact, was responsible for one of the pioneering publications: a book called *Outline of Vietnamese Sinitic Literature (Viet Han Van Khao)* first published in 1918 with a focus on the Chinese-influenced literature under the major

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<sup>111</sup> Toan Anh, *Bo Hoa Dat Bac*, 4.

dynasties. The book helped to spark interest among traditionalists and the intelligentsia alike, leading to further research and debates about the national literature. By the early 1940s, a flourishing enterprise on the subject was established, culminating in the classic text *The Essential History of Vietnamese Literature* by Duong Quang Ham (1898-1946), a teacher at Hanoi's Grape Fruit School. It was later adopted and published by the RVN's Ministry of Education as a standard text for the tenth grade.<sup>112</sup> It reflected the nationalist currents in South Vietnam, with urban writers bringing out an ever-growing amount of literary histories and analyses each year, such as the aforementioned *Lectures* series from the publisher Tan Viet in the late 1950s.<sup>113</sup> As a result of this interest on elite culture, publications on folk culture took second seating. Nonetheless, they were considerable in quantity and strong in quality, thanks to efforts from academic literary scholars such as the émigré Catholic priest Thanh Lang, whose book on the subject was considered the most authoritative.<sup>114</sup> Contribution also came from serious amateur researchers, especially southerners such as the historian Huynh Minh that wanted to place southern history and culture on equal footing as those of the north.<sup>115</sup> The interest on folk

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<sup>112</sup> Duong Quang Ham, *Viet Nam Van Hoc Su Yeu* [The Essential History of Vietnamese Literature] (Saigon: Bo Quoc Gia Giao Duc, 1961).

<sup>113</sup> Other notable series in Saigon during the 1950s and 1960s included *Khao Luan* [Examination] from the publisher Nam Son, *Giang Van* [Lectures on Literature] from Song Moi, and *Luan De* [Thematic Essay] from Khai Tri. For each series, it was typical that one or two writers, usually teachers at private high schools in Saigon or Hue, were responsible for most or all of the tracts. In addition, there were many other tracts published outside any particular series. Because of their strikingly uniform style and thematic treatment, it is likely that their impact on urban students was very strong.

<sup>114</sup> Thanh Lang, *Khôi Thao Van Hoc Su Viet Nam: Van Chuong Binh Dan* [The Beginning of Vietnamese Literary History: Folk Literature] (Saigon: Van Hoi, 1957); this was a reprint of the first publication in Hanoi in 1954. Thanh Lang taught literature and language at the University of Hue and University of Saigon.

<sup>115</sup> Huynh Minh and Truc Phuong, *Viet Nam Van Hoc Binh Dan* [Vietnamese Folk Literature] (Ho Chi Minh City: Thanh Nien, 2003); this is a reprint of Nguyen Truc Phuong, *Van Hoc Binh Dan* [Folk Literature] (Saigon: Khai Tri, 1970). Huynh Minh was a bookstore owner best known for a series of southern local histories called *Xua va Nay* [Past and Present]. Their publication in the 1960s and 1970s coincided with Toan Anh's *Old Ways* series, although there is no evidence that they knew each other. Like

culture explains the propensity among many South Vietnamese writers to quote from folk poetry when writing about moral or nationalist values.

In Toan Anh's case, he quoted extensively from this literature for this tract, with only an occasional quotation from elite poetry. He used folk poetry to support a dual track of intentions: to describe the particularities of the village culture in the north on the one hand, and to essentialize their Vietnameseness on the other hand. An example could be found in the essay about the village Ngoc Ha, which was near Hanoi and known for its production of flowers. Toan Anh described the young women that traveled each day to the city to sell flowers at the market as "having the soothing gentleness from the countryside, but also the refined elegance of the city." Products of a particular locality, they were distinct from both urban young women and "fellow country girls" that worked the field daily. On the other hand, they were "industrious and hard-working like all other Vietnamese women" due in part to their upbringing "in the Eastern tradition."<sup>116</sup> Depending on one's point of view, this dual track was either contradictory or complementary.

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Toan Anh's series, Huynh Minh's has been republished in Vietnam since the late 1990s, although with the "Present" part removed. Other than local history, he also published on vegetarianism, self-improvement, the pacifist southern religious figure known as the Coconut Monk (Ong Dao Dua), and a well-received book on reading personalities through signatures. Most active in the 1960s and early 1970s, he ran a small press for a time and brought out books under his name and Truc Phuong (or, sometimes, Nguyen Truc Phuong). On the basis of advertisements, I believe that he and Truc Phuong were the same person.

<sup>116</sup> Toan Anh, *Bo Hoa Dat Bac*, 56-57. Toan Anh did not say, but it was likely that he contributed to this journal in the 1940s due to his connections to the *Trung Bac Tan Van* [New Center-North Literature].



### Remembering the civilized past: Toan Anh and the series *Old Ways*

Not as popular as *Country Leisure*, *Bouquet of the North* nonetheless provided a glimpse at Toan Anh's mindset during a relatively quiet period in his long writing life. Until the mid-1960s, in fact, he did not publish anything of distinction on the level of *Country Leisure*. In addition to *Bouquet of the North*, two novellas on the subject of customs in the village: *Past Memories (Ky Vang)* and *Past Ways (Nep Xua)*.<sup>117</sup> Subtitled *Novel on Customs*, they exemplified Toan Anh's brand of anthropological fiction better than *Country Leisure*. The stories employed convenient plots, generic characters, and a lot of conversations as a way to guide readers on a tour of the village life in the north, such as annual festivals, funerals, and relations between students and the schoolteacher of the Confucian classics. There was, however, an addition to the familiar village setting. Taking place during the early years of colonialism, *Past Ways* described a love triangle in which two young men pursued the daughter of the village's schoolteacher. The poorer but more virtuous man ended up marrying the daughter, leaving the less studious but more politically ambitious man with resentment and jealousy. Son of the head of the village, he worked his way into a lesser position among the village notables. When the colonial authorities sent out orders to track down rebels from the Save-the-King movement, he falsely accused his former romantic rival of plotting against the government and arrested him. In prison, however, the husband learned from other prisoners about the revolution against the French and the quest to build a new nation. He decided to join the revolution, escaped to inform his wife of his decision, and went into

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<sup>117</sup> Toan Anh, *Ky Vang: Tieu Thuyet Phong Tuc* [Past Memories: A Novel on Customs] (Saigon: Song Lua, 1957; reprint, Los Alamos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1989). Toan Anh, *Nep Xua: Tieu Thuyet Phong Tuc* [Past Ways: A Novel on Customs] (Saigon: Xay Dung, 1963; reprint, Houston: Xuan Thu, 1985).

hiding. Some time later, the village notable was found dead near the river, a knife in his heart. The killer was never found in spite of a rigorous investigation. The novel ended with the wife of the young revolutionary washing laundry at the river the day after the murder. There was blood in the laundry, although “it was not clear if [the blood] came from the men’s clothes or the women’s.”<sup>118</sup> As much as Toan Anh held up Vietnamese “past ways,” the conclusion to the melodramatic plot unmistakably approved the need to change the Vietnamese society.

Although *Past Ways* was published in 1963, it was two years later that Toan Anh fully returned to publishing. Once back, he churned out one book after another, many of them as thick in volume as highly praised in reception. As it was, the period 1965-1975 was the prime of his long writing and publishing career.<sup>119</sup> It was helped enormously by the librarian job, which gave him greater access to books and, by his own account, more time to read and write.<sup>120</sup> In addition, he met for the first time in twenty years Nguyen Doan Vuong, a former editor of the influential Hanoi weekly *Sunday Center-North* back in the early 1940s. Vuong was working with Lang Nhan, a respected antebellum journalist who was managing a small but prestigious press at the time. Toan Anh met Lang Nhan for the first time, probably through Vuong. It turned out to be a fateful meeting with fruitful consequences.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Xua*, 183.

<sup>119</sup> Although Nguyen Hien Le exceeded him in the number of books published in South Vietnam, Toan Anh lived many more years than Le and published many more titles in the postwar period.

<sup>120</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 156.

<sup>121</sup> Toan Anh, *Nho Thuong*, 156-157. The meeting with Nguyen Doan Vuong was recalled also in Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen* [Old Ways: Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1965; reprint, Lancaster, PA: Xuan Thu, 1981), 404.

Lang Nhan (1907-2008) merits some details here because he was an important figure in both antebellum Hanoi and post-Geneva Saigon, thus providing another example of the linkage between these two urban cultures. Born Phung Tat Dac in Nam Dinh, a northern province with many Catholics, he was however a Buddhist. He attended the Grapefruit School in Hanoi until expulsion for having joined an anti-discrimination protest against the colonial authorities. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, he was the editor and a principal writer for the influential Hanoi journal *Dong Tay* [East and West]. After the colonial authorities shut down the journal, he wrote for several journals in Hanoi and, for a stint, Saigon. He excelled in an essay form called *phiem luan*: the casual or familiar essay that seems to meander in structure but has a serious intent throughout. The range of topics varied from legal matters to matters of the heart, from the physical concept of time to the political concept of liberty. Some of the essays were later collected into two volumes – *Before the Lamp (Truoc Den)* and *Illogical Stories (Chuyen Vo Ly)* – and they were taken seriously even by critics that did not necessarily agree with his opinions.<sup>122</sup> He was also well versed in languages, and translated many Chinese and French poems into Vietnamese. Like Nguyen Van Vinh before, he was elected for a political office in Hanoi in 1940 and served until the Japanese coup in 1945. Sought by the Japanese, he took refuge at the house of the historian Tran Trong Kim, then the prime minister of the Empire of Vietnam. He lived in Hanoi for most of the First Indochina War and migrated to Saigon in 1954. Upon being asked by a friend to run a printing

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<sup>122</sup> See, for example, Vu Ngoc Phan, “Phung Tan Dac,” in *Vu Ngoc Phan Toan Tap: I*, 433-436. One of the wholly positive evaluations is Ta Ty, *Muoi Khuon Mat Van Nghe* [Ten Literary Faces] (Hanoi: Hoi Nha Van, 1996), 11-25. For the most part, this book is a reprint of *Muoi Khuon Mat Van Nghe* [Ten Literary Faces] (Saigon: Kim Lai, 1970). But it takes out the chapter on Mai Thao, the most anticommunist of the ten writers considered in the original publication. It replaces it with the chapter on the musician Trinh Cong Son, taken from Ta Ty’s sequel, *Muoi Khuon Mat Van Nghe Hom Nay* [Ten Literary Faces Today] (Saigon: La Boi, 1971).

press and a publishing house, he successfully ran these enterprises until 1975, when he left Vietnam as a refugee and ended up living in England.

In Saigon, Lang Nhan did not work in journalism but published books in addition to managing the press. Among his publication during this period were two instant classics in Vietnamese literary history: *Wordplay (Choi Chu)* and *Legends of Classic Literature (Giai Thoai Lang Nho)*. The first book organized into a dozen of categories a large amount of literary examples from late nineteenth century to the middle twentieth century. Along the way, it illustrated an impressive range of linguistic and literary devices that Vietnamese employed for various purposes, including attacking colonial authorities and corrupt Vietnamese.<sup>123</sup> More than twice thicker, the second book presented brief biographies, choice quotations, and occasional anecdotes about ninety-five literary figures from the thirteenth century to the twentieth.<sup>124</sup> Something of a handy encyclopedia, it exhaled a strong sense of literary nationalism in which virtuous figures participated. Equally nationalistic were his contributions in the 1960s to *Tales of Great Men*, a series similar to *Exemplars of the New Viet* but under the imprint of a different publisher. Using a penname created just for these tracts, Lang Nhan wrote three biographical tracts – including one on the founder of the VNQDD and three of his comrades.<sup>125</sup> Although his publishing output was not as high as that in Hanoi, Lang

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<sup>123</sup> Lang Nhan, *Choi Chu* [Word Play] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1961; reprint, Houston: Ziekeks, 1978).

<sup>124</sup> Lang Nhan, *Giai Thoai Lang Nho* [Legends of Classic Literature] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1964; reprint, 1972).

<sup>125</sup> Co Nhi Tan, *Nguyen Thai Hoc, Nguyen Thi Giang, Nguyen Khac Nhu, Le Huu Canh: Tieu Truyen Danh Nhan* [Nguyen Thai Hoc, Nguyen Thi Giang, Nguyen Khac Nhu, Le Huu Canh: Tales of Great People] (Saigon: Pham Quang Khai, 1969). The penname derived from classical Chinese and meant a “new old friend.”

Nhan held a special position as someone that established his name long ago yet continued to produce works of high quality.<sup>126</sup>

Equally important, Lang Nhan's business served as a gathering place for many noncommunist and anticommunist writers and artists, especially those of northern origin. In the early 1970s, the painter Ta Ty wrote in an essay about Lang Nhan that the latter's office was "a meeting place for writers almost every day." There Ta Ty met some of the most respected figures in their fields, such as the musician Pham Duy; the journalist Lo Rang; the poets Bang Ba Lan, Vu Hoang Chuong and Dinh Hung; and cultural writers such as Le Van Sieu and Toan Anh.<sup>127</sup> The painter did not say what kinds of conversation occurred there, or mention the types of collaboration that might have resulted from those gatherings. But his recollection suggested that Lang Nhan's office at the press played an informal but important role in the exchange of Saigon intellectuals similar to what Pham Van Tuoi's office of *Tomorrow* had done in the early 1950s. In Toan Anh's case, he must have a regular visitor there after his meeting with Lang Nhan in 1965 because the latter published one of his manuscripts not too long after. The older writer even contributed a preface to the book, which turned out to be Toan Anh's most critically acclaimed work since *Country Leisure*. It also became the first volume of a series whose name has been attached to Toan Anh's name similar to the way that *Learning To Be*

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<sup>126</sup> This was not the case for many established antebellum writers, perhaps most, that migrated south. The novelist Nhat Linh of the *Self-Strength* and the journalist Tam Lang were two prime examples of having produced inferior works or no works at all once in the south. Even the younger Vu Bang suffered in quality. His best works in South Vietnam – the essay on the twelve months of the year, a book about food in Hanoi, and the memoir of his years in journalism – derived much of their power from past experiences than from the present (which had been the case with his works before 1954).

<sup>127</sup> Ta Ty, *Muoi Khuon Mat Van Nghe*, 35.

*Human* has been attached to Nguyen Hien Le's. Called *Old Ways (Nep Cu)*, it came from the title of the book, which was *Old Ways: Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs*.<sup>128</sup>

At over 400 pages, *Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs* was Toan Anh's longest publication by far up to that time.<sup>129</sup> He was not responsible for all of the materials, however, and inserted previously published materials throughout the book as "supplements" to some of the chapters. Most were articles from South Vietnamese periodicals and especially the *New Mind*: another illustration of the staying power of the Hanoi journal upon noncommunist intellectuals.<sup>130</sup> As indicated in the introduction, the author intended the book to be the first of four volumes, each with a separate but related focus. For this volume, the focus was on rites, rituals, and customs related to the passages in a person's life. It began with a long chapter on the family that described the various roles – father, mother, grandparents, children, children-in-law, and so on – and the expectations attached to each. This formed the background for the next three chapters, which concerned conceiving children, raising children, and rituals and customs associated to each of these stages. The following three chapters were about education, in which the author described the history of the dynastic examination system, traditional schooling, and modern education. He also devoted some pages on martial education: a reflection of his long-standing interest in writing historical and anthropological fiction. Following education was the subject of marriage, which discussed, among other issues,

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<sup>128</sup> To judge from the dates of reviews from dailies and magazines, copies did not seem to have reached bookstores until the spring of 1966 although the year of publication was listed as 1965.

<sup>129</sup> To avoid confusion, I shall use *Old Ways* to refer to the series and *Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs* to mean this book.

<sup>130</sup> In the DRV and the SRV, the journal came a long way from receiving heavy criticism by cultural commissars after the August Revolution, to getting embraced by researchers and historical organizations since Renovation. This context provided a contrast to its place in South Vietnam.

polygamy, forced marriage, divorce, infidelity, and marriage with foreigners. Next was the subject of housing, which discussed issues such as factors for consideration before building a house, architectural options, and home decoration. After this was a chapter on the traditional ritual of “treating the village,” where a person that recently received an honor (such as passing an examination, getting an important position, or reaching the age of sixty) came to honor his village with a festive meal. This ritual was important because it helped to define one’s place in the village and society after marriage and before death. As it was, the author followed this chapter and rounded up the book with several chapters on death, funeral, and burial.

As apparent from the start, the book affirmed the centrality of the family in the life of Vietnamese. “The family is the foundation of society,” opened the first chapter, and that “research about Vietnamese customs necessarily begins with the Vietnamese family.” Furthermore, particular roles in the family were essential because “the family begins with individuals.”<sup>131</sup> These assertions served as Toan Anh’s rationale for beginning the book with a description of familial roles before going into customs and rituals related to the stages of life. It also underpinned the emphasis on the family familiar to the South Vietnamese culture that was reflected elsewhere, such as the anticommunist literature, the speeches of Ngo Dinh Diem, and the tracts of *Learning To Be Human* as noted earlier in this dissertation. Of course, it was not the nuclear family as found in the Diemist *The Light of Personalism* or Nguyen Hien Le’s *Organizing the Family*, but the extended family that formed the basis for *Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs*. The difference reflected Toan Anh’s primary concern with the past than the

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<sup>131</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 7.

present. More importantly, it indicated his view that strong families, with intimate and intricate ties to the village and society, formed the basis for a strong nation.

Because those ties were kept, enhanced, and maintained through customs and rituals, Toan Anh considered them to be at the heart of a nation. “Customs,” he declared in the introduction, “genuinely reflect the spirit of a country.”<sup>132</sup> The same point was made at the end of the book. “As Vietnamese,” he wrote in the conclusion, “we bend to Vietnamese customs, including many practices that are sometimes complicated,” yet “it is precisely these customs that help our people maintain our essence and foundation.”<sup>133</sup> They were unambiguous affirmations for the ethno-cultural nationalism generated and supported by the promotion of national heroes and history in the Vietnamese urban society since the 1900s. It was a view that Lang Nhan shared. Vietnamese life “now is different from the past,” he wrote in the preface and affirmed the roles of the village and the extended family, “but we cannot get away completely from the impact of circumstances, from the communal lifestyle in a society that still takes farming as its roots [and] the family as its foundation.”<sup>134</sup> The remark was as important for what it said as for what it excluded. It left out, for instance, ethnic minorities in the mountains whose basic social organization was the tribe instead of the extended family, and whose economy was slash-and-burn agriculture rather than farming. In the text, Toan Anh included two articles about the mountain minorities in the supplements on wedding and funeral. But it was little in comparison to the attention to the customs and rituals of the Kinh majority. The primacy of the Kinh’s history predominated the account, here and

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<sup>132</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 3

<sup>133</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 401.

<sup>134</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 1.



elsewhere in the series. The chapter on education, for instance, described the demands of and attending rituals to the dynastic national examination system. The cumulative effect was that the sophisticated system reflected the interests of the ruling class as well as the common people in the village. Equally, Toan Anh stressed the ethical aspects and declared, “The examination system was organized very tightly in order to ensure the primacy of fairness.”<sup>135</sup> He noted, for instance, that different officials reviewed and graded each examination thrice so its merits might not be overlooked. Attempts to bribe the people that officiated the examination were bound to fail due to the watchfulness of higher officials during each step.

Unambiguous ethno-cultural nationalism notwithstanding, it must be noted that Toan Anh was not always approving of past ways. In the same chapter on education, for instance, he stressed that traditional education was too weighty on formal examination at the expense of practical innovation, that it “valued literary thought over reality”: that is, over scientific studies. As for colonial education, he considered its purpose to be “stuffing in the head”: that is, its goal was to train a small number of Vietnamese purely for the purpose of enhancing the colonial administration.<sup>136</sup> Elsewhere, he expressed relief at the fact that certain practices, such as those regarding women caught in adultery, were no longer accepted. Nonetheless, his criticism was typically gentle in tone and rarely condemnatory. Whatever appreciation he might have for the husband-turned-revolutionary in the novella *Past Ways*, he was essentially conservative in outlook and attitude. His value for the old came partially out of wariness towards the new. “It is rather sad that as our valuable rituals and customs are fading gradually,” he stated at the

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<sup>135</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 105.

<sup>136</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 116.

start, “suddenly there appear new customs that are neither good nor beautiful upon careful review, if not depraved.”<sup>137</sup> Any outright censure would have been directed towards the new rather than the old.

Given Toan Anh’s frequent employment of fictionalization, it should be noted also that *Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs* marked a change in style in an avoidance of any such attempt. Its composition was declarative rather than illustrative, and reminiscent (if not imitative) of Phan Ke Binh’s *Vietnamese Customs*, albeit with an attitude of appreciation rather than criticism. He continued to write anthropological fiction after 1965, notably a collection of short pieces on traditional Vietnamese martial arts.<sup>138</sup> There was also another collection on bribery and corruption among government officials from the dynasties to the 1950s. It was, unsurprisingly, very critical of the practices.<sup>139</sup> But from 1965 to 1975, the majority of his works were solidly non-fictional. He contributed to the series *Old Ways* on a one-volume-per-year average: the first of a two-volume work on religion came out in 1966, the second volume in 1967, a book on village life and organization in 1968, the first of another two-volume work on festivals in 1969, and a book on traditional music in 1970. The last book was in press at the time of

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<sup>137</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Con Nguoi Viet Nam, Phong Tuc Co Truyen*, 3. The publication of the book coincided with the introduction of U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam, and it is possible that Toan Anh’s comment reflected his attitude towards this military situation. On the other hand, exemplified the prefaces to *Country Leisures* and *Bouquet of the North*, he had expressed wariness towards the new long before 1965.

<sup>138</sup> Toan Anh, *Mua Thiet Linh Nem But Chi: Tai Lieu Vo Thuat* [Flail Dancing and Spear Throwing: Documents on Martial Arts] (Saigon: Tien Bo, 1969). “Flail” is my shorthand translation in this case for what is normally called a “two-sectioned staff,” a weapon in Chinese martial arts consisted of a short staff and a flail connected by a chain. In spite of the subtitle, the book was not really a collection of records or documents, but stories written in Toan Anh’s familiar fictionalized style.

<sup>139</sup> Toan Anh, *Nghe Thuat Tham Nhung va Hoi Lo* [The Art of Corruption and Bribery] (Saigon: Hoa Dang, 1970). This work was one of only two departures from Toan Anh’s tendency to focus on salutary aspects of Vietnamese tradition. Although he stopped the timeline at the Geneva Conference, it seemed to reflect his frustration at the corruption in the South Vietnamese government in the 1960s.

the sudden death of his wife. There was a pause in the series until 1974 when the second volume on festivals came out: possibly a result of his grief over her passing.

One likely cause for this energetic productivity was the enervating reception of *Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs*. This could be spotted from several reviews from several dailies and magazines in Saigon that were reprinted in whole or parts in the first volume of the work on religion. The reviews praised the book for all major aspects: content, organization, and composition. *Public Discussion (Chinh Luan)*, possibly the largest and also most influential South Vietnamese daily at the time, found it to be “beneficial and necessary for the present generation of Vietnamese as well as the future.”<sup>140</sup> The review from the monthly *Book News (Tin Bao)*, reprinted in entirety, considered the author clever for supplementing his focus on the northern village with already published materials about ethnic minorities, but thought there were stronger materials that he could have used. Otherwise, the reviewer deemed the book excellent because it explicated the psychology and values behind assorted customs, including outdated ones. In some respects, the reviewer was even more essentialist than Toan Anh, arguing, for instance, that Vietnamese marital customs and rituals were less dependent of Chinese influence than Toan Anh thought.<sup>141</sup>

The positive reviews of the book put the series on notice and predisposed readers to the two-volume *Vietnamese Religious Beliefs*. Twice longer than the previous work, it was divided into three parts. The first one was by far the longest and addressed organized

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<sup>140</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Thuong* [Old Ways: Vietnamese Religious Beliefs, First Volume] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1967), 446. The review had appeared in *Chinh Luan* [Public Opinion] 619 (April 29, 1966).

<sup>141</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Thuong*, 454. This review was written by Le Van Hao and appeared initially in *Tin Sach* [Book News] 48 (May 1966).

religions as well as non-organized religious practices: familial practices on ancestral worship, beliefs in local deities, Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Buddhist Hoa Hao, Cao Dai, Catholicism, Protestantism, the Bah' ai faith, and Islam. The second part concerned matters related to non-organized beliefs: superstitions, astrology, palm reading, face reading, and the like. The last one was about traditional and seasonal holidays. The tone and composition of the book were similar to the first work, and reprints of articles were fewer while there were added reprints of documents related to particular religions. Enhancing the air of authority was a bibliography headed by Phan Ke Binh's *Vietnamese Customs* and consisting of nearly fifty secondary Vietnamese- and French-language sources. Among the illustrations were photographs of religious rituals and buildings taken by two northern émigrés: Nguyen Cao Dam (1916-2001), who headed the Photographic Commission in the RVN's Ministry of Information; and Tran Cao Linh (1925-1989), a lecturer at the Buddhist Van Hanh University.<sup>142</sup> Both were among the most respected and internationally recognized South Vietnamese photographers, and co-authors of the most nationalist book of photographs published in Saigon during the divisional period.<sup>143</sup> There had been book-length studies and histories of particular religions in Vietnam, but Toan Anh's was the first major Vietnamese-language publication on the subject in South Vietnam and, indeed, before.

*Vietnamese Religious Beliefs* presented the practices of organized religion from a perspective of inclusiveness and with much approval. On the one hand, declared Toan

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<sup>142</sup> *Who's Who in Vietnam*, 183 and 457. Le Ngoc Minh, "So Luoc ve Nhiep Anh Nghe Thuat Viet Nam" [An Outline of the Photographic Arts in Vietnam], *VN-USA Photographic Association* (June 15, 2008): <http://www.vnuspa.org/?act=news&id=171&pid=69>. Dam also served as the vice-president of the Vietnamese Association of Photographers.

<sup>143</sup> Nguyen Cao Dam and Tran Cao Linh, *Viet Nam Que Huong Yeu Dau* [Vietnam: Beloved Country] (Saigon: Gam Hoa, 1967). The book was also published in English as *Vietnam: Our Beloved Land* (Ruttle: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1968).

Anh at the start, “Vietnamese have always marked different religions from one another”; on the other hand, “our ancestors accepted all religions as long as they were not contrary to righteousness.”<sup>144</sup> Traditional practices, indeed, were seen as a unifying and national characteristic. Toan Anh considered Vietnamese to have showed high adaptability in fusing common tradition and particular beliefs, as exemplified by Catholic and Buddhist variations in honoring ancestors through, respectively, mass offering and the chanting of Buddhist prayers.<sup>145</sup> On the controversial issue of the intersection between Catholicism and colonialism, he distinguished the colonialists from missionaries and, likely under the influence of the most comprehensive Vietnamese-language history of Catholicism at the time, presented a favorable view of the latter group along with an emphasis on the social and educational works from Catholic religious orders.<sup>146</sup> Favorable too was the presentation on the rural Buddhist Hoa Hao, which Toan Anh did not write but “borrowed” from “a friend in the Western countryside” that adhered to the sect.<sup>147</sup> Not surprisingly, this chapter highlighted the universalist doctrines and nationalist organization of the Hoa Hao while underplaying its more superstitious aspects. But as in *Vietnamese People, Traditional Customs*, the book did not avoid superstitions and went to good length to describe many of them. Here, the author moved away from particularism to conclude that Vietnamese should not be blamed for their superstitions

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<sup>144</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Thuong*, 20.

<sup>145</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Thuong*, 52-53.

<sup>146</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Ha* [Old Ways: Vietnamese Religious Beliefs, Second Volume] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1968). The history referred above was Phan Phat Huon, *Viet Nam Giao Su* [History of Vietnamese Catholicism], 2 volumes. (Saigon: Cuu The Tung Thu, 1962-1965). A Redemptorist priest, Huon was the vice director of the Office of Chaplaincy for ARVN. In this work, he highlighted Catholic persecution by early modern Vietnamese rulers, especially the Nguyen Dynasty, and also religious repression by the communists in the twentieth century.

<sup>147</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Thuong*, 371.

because “common people in any land and any country would believe in magic and superstition.”<sup>148</sup> Although the interpretation was not always consistent, the book was consistent in portraying Vietnamese as one people in spite of the differences in their religious backgrounds.

Toan Anh returned to the familiar subject of village life in the third contribution to *Old Ways*.<sup>149</sup> Called simply *The Vietnamese Village*, it again included a number of photographs from two respected South Vietnamese photographers in addition to Nguyen Cao Dam and Tran Cao Linh. Most of the photographs were highly stylized, sharply focused, or both; and provided appealing illustrations to social, economic, and cultural life in the village. The book also carried a preface written by Nguyen Bao Tri, an ARVN lieutenant general. A northern Catholic, Tri attended the prestigious lycée Albert Sarraut and the School of Law in Hanoi. One of a few non-French students at Albert Sarraut, he became a good friend with his classmate Nguyen Sa, later one of the most prominent poets in South Vietnam.<sup>150</sup> After 1954, Tri continued law studies in Saigon, joined the military, and received some training in the U.S. He was a supporter of Nguyen Cao Ky, and served Minister of the Open Arms program during the premiership of Nguyen Cao Ky in 1966-1967.<sup>151</sup> Toan Anh probably knew Tri from his days at the Ministry of Information. They must have got along well, since they began to collaborate on a series

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<sup>148</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Tin Nguong Viet Nam, Quyen Ha*, 140.

<sup>149</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Lang Xom Viet Nam* [Old Ways: The Vietnamese Village]. (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1968).

<sup>150</sup> Cuu Long Giang Nguyen Bao Tri, “Thoi, The la Du Roi, Anh Nguyen Sa A” [That is Just Enough, My Friend Nguyen Sa], in Long An, et al., *Nguyen Sa: Tac Gia & Tac Pham, Tap II* [Nguyen Sa: Author and Works, Volume II] (California: Tac Gia va Tac Pham, 1998), 11-12.

<sup>151</sup> *Who's Who in Vietnam*, 843. Lam Quang Thi, *The Twenty-Five Year Century: A South Vietnamese General Remembers the Indochina War to the Fall of Saigon* (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2002), 136-137.

called *Outline Records of Vietnam (Viet Nam Chi Luoc)*. Their inspiration came from a number of individual local histories that came out of Saigon in the 1960s, and they planned their series to carry five volumes: an overview followed by separate volumes on three regions and the ethnic minorities in the highlands. Published also by Lang Nhan's press, the overview was written in a similar manner to *Old Ways* and was called, appropriately, *Vietnamese People, Vietnamese Land*.<sup>152</sup> Its content was divided into four unequal sections – history, culture, landscape, and lifestyle – and its text reprinted many more supplements taken from a large pool of already published materials on history and culture. (Phan Ke Binh figured large, as there were excerpts from *Vietnamese Customs, Extraordinary Personalities*, and *Hung Dao Vuong*.) In a way, the book was a compendium of Vietnamese history and culture that an educated Vietnamese was expected to know. A volume on the north followed two years later, a third volume on the ethnic minorities five years after the second, and the series ended due to the communist victory a year later.<sup>153</sup>

Besides the collaboration, Nguyen Bao Tri was the recipient of dedication in *Vietnamese Religious Beliefs*. Toan Anh called the his fellow émigré “a military general with a committed heart to the culture and arts of Vietnam, who had greatly encouraged me to publish *Vietnamese Religious Beliefs*.” In return, Tri wrote the preface to *The Vietnamese Village*. As the book came out after the Tet Offensive, he took advantage of

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<sup>152</sup> Toan Anh and Cuu Long Giang, *Nguoi Viet Dat Viet* [Vietnamese People, Vietnamese Land] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1967). Cuu Long Giang, meaning “river of nine dragons” and referring to the Mekong, was the penname of Nguyen Bao Tri.

<sup>153</sup> Toan Anh and Cuu Long Giang, *Mien Bac Khai Nguyen: Viet Nam Chi Luoc* [The Pioneering North: Outline History of Vietnam] (Saigon: Tien Bo, 1969). Toan Anh and Cuu Long Giang, *Cao Nguyen Mien Thuong: Viet Nam Chi Luoc* [The Ethnic Highlands: Outline History of Vietnam] (Saigon: Le Loi Thu Quan, 1974). The manuscript of the latter title had been completed in 1969. It is unclear whether there were any manuscripts of the other titles, tentatively called *The Courageous Center* and *The Prosperous South*.

the timing to put his own spin on the new addition to *Old Ways*. “In the struggle to liberate the country and people,” Tri started, “urban inhabitants had the chance to see the rural people sharing a communal life full of humane values and traditional culture.” The Second Indochina War, however, “has spread wide and far, from the highlands to the countryside to the cities.” With the barest acknowledgement of the destruction caused by warfare, Tri thought that an unforeseen effect was that war “has driven rural inhabitants in waves to cities, where they witness scientific and technical progress.” He saw here an opportunity for the bridging of the rural-urban divide long noticed among Vietnamese intellectuals. Referring to rural development programs in the RVN, he hoped that the state could “bring the technological civilization to the country... to update the productivity and reorganize the lifestyle and thinking of the people” there. Conversely, the state could “shift to the cities the communal spirit of the traditional culture.” For these reasons, he recommended the book because it helped to shed light on the traditional culture located in the village but recoverable for the city.<sup>154</sup>

Tri’s thought on technological improvements in the countryside appeared to derive in part from American modernization theory. Its premise was generic, and its tone evocative of a vague desire to return to values of old on the fact of mounting destructiveness. The main text, however, was stronger than anything the author had written about the village. Influenced by the works of American researchers for the Michigan State University Advisory Group, he presented the southern and central experiences of village life in addition to those in the north. Compelled by the anthropologist Gerald Hickey’s research, he grudgingly discussed different levels of class

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<sup>154</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Lang Xom Viet Nam*, 3.



in the southern village. “Foreign researchers, especially Americans,” he wrote, “have a different way to classify” villagers: that is, into upper, middle, and lower classes. Not agreeing with the classification, he nonetheless presented it to the reader. Never sympathetic to Marxism, however, he made sure to add, “This is a social classification, not a classification for class struggle.”<sup>155</sup> On the whole, when not repeating some of the things he had discussed in earlier books, *The Vietnamese Village* described the village in greater details than anything he had written, such as the symbolism of the fig tree common to many northern villages, or the roles of mutual aid societies at the village and provincial levels. At the same time, the book stretched the idealization the village further than any other of his previous works. The stylized photographs, the generous sprinkling of folk poetry, the excerpts from dynastic legal documents and case studies: these and other elements of the book were employed to draw the reader away from contemporary urban life and ponder the possibility of recreating the values found in the traditional village.

The fourth book for *Old Ways* discussed a topic that intersected religion in the second book and village life in the third book: holidays and festivals. It focused on local annual celebration and commemoration of three categories: local deities (customs), historical heroes (history), and religious figures (religion).<sup>156</sup> Most of these traditions occurred in the north, and perhaps because of this reason that there were no photographs of any event in the book. It was perhaps the weakest contribution to the *Old Ways* and further removed from the cultural scene because of the five-year gap between the first

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<sup>155</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Lang Xom Viet Nam*, 50.

<sup>156</sup> Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Hoi He Dinh Dam, Quyen Thuong* [Old Ways: Gatherings and Festivals, First Volume] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1969). Toan Anh, *Nep Cu: Hoi He Dinh Dam, Quyen Ha* [Old Ways: Gatherings and Festivals, Second Volume] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1974).

and second volumes. A lot shorter yet better was the fifth book, and the last one to be published before 1975. Taking on the subject of traditional music, it was dedicated to the author's wife in honor of their thirtieth anniversary. It also carried a preface from Nguyen Hien Le who, for all his sophisticated ideas about modernization, was openly critical of the American influence in popular culture. "For about ten year after the Geneva Conference," wrote Le," a number of people eagerly absorbed American culture for its novelty [while] others enthusiastically introduced new intellectual currents from France." But "a few years later," he continued, alluding to foreign and domestic crises in the U.S. and Western Europe, "it was the reverse as we saw the other face of the West: it possesses powerful forces and yet cannot control their own societies and only provoked chaos all over the world."<sup>157</sup> Le's criticism grew as he approached the subject of the book. He praised Toan Anh's labors of research a welcome relief to the "loud and 'barbaric' invasion of [Western] music such as jazz, twist, and bebop in recent years." Thinking back to a chance encounter with traditional singing during a mid-autumnal evening in Hanoi some forty years before, he recalled listening to it "until the sound was completely silent" and feeling as if he "never experienced such a beautiful voice" in all his life. "Western singing," he rebuked by way of comparison, "cannot evoke in me that magical feeling."<sup>158</sup> Quoting a couple of couplets from traditional songs that paid tribute to rural Vietnamese women, he concluded, "Some young women today that wear miniskirts, smoke Salem cigarettes, and drink whiskey might consider lyrics from folk

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<sup>157</sup> Toan Anh, *Cam Ca Viet Nam: Khao Cuu Phong Tuc* [Vietnamese Music: Research on Customs] (Saigon: La Boi, 1970), x. The title did not include *Old Ways*, and the publisher was not the same one that Lang Nhan managed.

<sup>158</sup> Toan Anh, *Cam Ca Viet Nam*, xi and xiii.

music outdated.” Yet “our people, like any other people, could overcome past chaos and depression... because of those mothers and wives.”<sup>159</sup>

Once past the frustration of Le’s preface, however, the book was tranquil in tone and reminiscent of *Country Leisure* in pace and subject matter. In places, it was as if Toan Anh was duplicating some of the passages from the antebellum classic. It was by far the shortest volume in the series. Yet it sought to cover all of the major topics, then some. They included the variety of musical instruments, musical categories, regional music, religious music, performance music, poetry reading, children music, and the turn to Western music in the twentieth century. Confessing that he was not a specialist on the subject, Toan Anh expressed the hope that the book would have generated interest in readers and further research from scholars. He paid tribute to antebellum cultural writers. There were two quotations in the author’s introduction, for instance: from an article by Pham Quynh and from Phan Ke Binh’s *Vietnamese Customs*. The first chapter opened with a quotation from Dao Duy Anh’s *The Outline History of Vietnamese Culture*. Not surprisingly for a book on this subject, there were many quotations of lyrics from different genres. Most exciting, perhaps, was the exposition of the uses of traditional music in Vietnamese society: as worship, as entertainment, as a means for romantic wooing, as a way to generate humor, as a relief to inner turmoil or outward weariness due to work, and so on. The exposition was done out of support for Toan Anh’s assertion in the introduction that in addition to “coarse recreation,” the Vietnamese had developed “refined leisures.”<sup>160</sup> This book focused on only one category of such refinement, and he planned subsequent volumes for *Old Ways* to be about other categories such as

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<sup>159</sup> Toan Anh, *Cam Ca Viet Nam*, xiv.

<sup>160</sup> Toan Anh, *Cam Ca Viet Nam*, 18.

landscaping, tea drinking, and games of poetry. The events in 1975 put an end to the publication of those volumes. But it is clear that his one-man series was designed to encompass many categories in the traditional and nationalist culture

### **Conclusion**

The two series dissected in this chapter, *Old Ways* and *Exemplars of the New Viet*, illustrated an important development in the noncommunist tradition about nationalism in urban South Vietnam: ethnic nationalism. In this, South Vietnamese writers found themselves in continuity of the thinking developed in the urban press during the period of 1910-1945, especially in Hanoi. Noncommunist South Vietnamese tried harder than their predecessors to be inclusive of ethnic minorities. As exemplified by publications on the highlands minorities, they were conscious of the need to include ethnic minorities in the discourse about nationalism. Toan Anh's book on traditional music spared several pages for an article about music among the highlands minorities. Elsewhere, he and Nguyen Bao Tri published an entire volume on the history and culture of these same minorities.

The aim was inclusiveness, however, was easier said than done. As they strove to find a place for ethnic minorities in the promotion of nationalism, urban writers nonetheless persisted on focusing on the history, culture, and experiences of the Kinh majority because they considered them to be the firmest foundation to develop and promote an essentialist brand of noncommunist postcolonialism and nationalism. Insofar as the majority of urban South Vietnamese belonged to the Kinh majority, they were inevitably affected by this promotion of ethnic nationalism in schools, on the streets, on

radio and television, in theaters and cafés, and, of course, on the printed page. For purposes related to self-improvement, their heroes and heroines could be (and often were) foreigners. For purposes related to patriotism, there could be foreign inspiration for patriotism and nationalism. George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, as seen in the next chapter, were among those examples. For the most part, however, these heroic figures came from the ethnic Kinh majority: an unsurprising fact given the renewed interest in dynastic history during late colonialism. Moreover, those national heroes were interpreted to be figures of patriotism *and* progress and modernization. It was not an accident that the series *Exemplars of the New Viet* plucked these heroes from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and interpreted their works as modernizing contributions to the country. It was not a contradiction to improve one's personal and familial lot while feeling great national pride and making sacrifices for the country as many ethnic Vietnamese heroes and heroines had done in the past.

This ethnic nationalism also found expression in the exposition and promotion of traditional customs. As exemplified by Toan Anh's series *Old Ways*, there could be interesting differences. Whereas antebellum writers sought to challenge the state of many customs, Toan Anh acknowledged their outdated reality while but highlighting on the "humane" aspects of traditional customs. As a reaction to the encroaching pace of modernity and modernization, the "old ways" – in the view of Toan Anh, Nguyen Hien Le, and others – could be the unifying affirmation of the essence of the Vietnamese nation. It is tempting to label this view reactionary. But given the state of culture in 1915 and 1965, it was an understandable difference between Phan Ke Binh and Toan Anh. Difference aside, it should be remembered that both Binh and Toan Anh *believed*

there was such a thing as Vietnamese essence. Their essentialism was perhaps the distinguishing feature from Marxist interpretation of culture, in which class was the determining category and culture in flux. Phan Ke Binh did not consider class at all in his analysis, and Toan Anh briefly and grudgingly. They preferred instead to focus on the history and practices of the Kinh ethnic majority, to which they belonged. They did not seek to replace this culture, but to clean out its outdated aspects while preserving their core. They began with a predominant ethno-cultural outlook, and they worked around it without ever considering leaving it for another kind of nationalism.

As revealed in the preface of Nguyen Hien Le, however, there was a vulnerable spot within ethnic nationalism that could be touched off and offended by a large foreign presence and influence. The next chapter aims to shed light on the cultural and ideological relationship between Americans and urban South Vietnamese. It will do so by examining not one or two series as here and in the previous chapter, but a variety of publications from Saigon and other South Vietnamese cities.

## CHAPTER SIX

### PERCEPTIONS OF THE U.S. BEFORE AMERICANIZATION OF THE WAR

Although the United States was formally involved in South Vietnamese affairs for a quarter of the century, the historiography of the Vietnam conflict has produced relatively little on noncommunist South Vietnamese experience of and perception about their American allies. One reason was the long-standing interest on how the U.S. affected South Vietnamese rather than the other way around. A more serious cause, perhaps, has had to do with linguistic limitation that prevents scholars from examining Vietnamese-language materials on the subjects of pro-Americanism and anti-Americanism. The issue is more pronounced when one realizes that such publications did not come in series such as *Learning To Be Human* or *Exemplars of the Great Viets*, which would be easier to track down and analyze. Instead, they came primarily from articles and essays in magazines and newspapers, which are more difficult to sift and sort through.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter begins with a discussion of noncommunist Vietnamese perceptions of the U.S. from late colonialism to the early 1950s. It then describes and explains how urban South Vietnamese saw the U.S. from 1950 until direct intervention in the 1960s. It looks at how the U.S. figured in Ngo Dinh Diem's addresses to South Vietnamese and in three periodicals closely associated to the Saigon government. It argues that the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, an important article on South Vietnamese anti-Americanism, possibly the deepest one on the subject, surveyed a single newspaper over the course of four years: Nu-Anh Tran, "South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965–1969," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1:1-2 (2006), 169-209.

figured positively in the discourse about national development among noncommunist South Vietnamese. At the same time, the positive attitude was limited by the fact that they tended to look at other postcolonial countries rather than the U.S. as a primary source of inspiration and emulation. Next, the chapter examines two periodicals from the private sector, both of which showed a highly positive attitude towards the U.S. It shows that many urban South Vietnamese were very impressed by and interested in learning about the U.S. This chapter, in short, focuses on pro-American attitudes among urban South Vietnamese.

### **The U.S. in the eyes of urban Vietnamese before 1950**

As suggested in the chapter on the series *Learning To Be Human*, many noncommunist South Vietnamese urban writers were drawn to American ideas and figures in culture, business, and politics. Their attraction did not begin out of the American presence in Indochina after 1950, but could be traced to Vietnamese understanding of the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century. Since Vietnamese did not read English, they learned about Americans and America through French, Chinese, and Japanese translations plus secondary sources.<sup>2</sup> They took the U.S. to be an extension of European civilization, and often grouped the two together in conversations and publications. A typical example came from an essay of a founder of the clandestine nationalist Vietnamese Restoration League, who wrote in the early 1910s that “the

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<sup>2</sup> They also included Russian sources since the 1920s, when a number of Vietnamese radicals went to Moscow to study.



influence of America and Europe spread all over Asia.”<sup>3</sup> This notion was perhaps best reflected in the phrase “European wind [and] American rain” (*gio Au mua My*). Widely circulated among elite circles, it illustrated the influence of Herbert Spencer and Social Darwinism on Vietnamese thinking about their place in the world. The Vietnamese elite feared that their country would be lost forever to the powerful European and American nations. They advocated a shift from neo-Confucianism towards a Social Darwinist volunteerism, but without giving up all Confucianist norms and values.<sup>4</sup>

This advocacy could be seen in the appearance of biographical references to prominent Asians, Europeans, and Americans. In the mid-1910s, for instance, the reformer Phan Chau Trinh translated a popular Japanese novel whose author was a Japanese bureaucrat that had studied in the U.S. Set primarily in the U.S. and Europe, the story followed an Asian narrator that began his travels at the Hall of Independence in Philadelphia. The story was celebratory of the U.S. as a champion of popular rights, and it was indeed Phan’s intention to educate the Vietnamese on such rights.<sup>5</sup> In addition, it highlighted the American Revolution as a product of heroic and virtuous persons such as George Washington: individuals that were thought to have carried a morality compatible

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<sup>3</sup> Nguyen Thuong Hien, “Tearful Conversation over the Mulberry Fields and the Sea (1912 or 1913,” in Truong Buu Lam, ed., *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 175.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 12-13. See also Mark Philip Bradley, “Becoming *Van Minh*: Civilizational Discourse and Visions of the Self in Twentieth-Century Vietnam,” *Journal of World History* 15:1 (2004).

<sup>5</sup> Phan did not translate from original Japanese, but from a Chinese translation (by the reformer Liang Qichao) of the novel. Moreover, he only translated the first half and made some small modifications to the Vietnamese translation. He also rendered the translation in the popular six-eight poetic form, probably because he wanted it easy to memorize. For an analysis, see Vinh Sinh, ed., *Phan Chau Trinh and His Political Writings* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program Publications, 2009), 29-33.

to some of the Confucianist values.<sup>6</sup> By the 1920s, these individuals were further celebrated in biographical tracts and pamphlets. As the historian Mark Philip Bradley has described, the Vietnamese elite “used biographic forms to glorify the triumph of individual will over historical destiny and often ascribed Confucian virtues to their subjects.”<sup>7</sup> Besides Washington, the Vietnamese held in high regard Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Edison.<sup>8</sup> Pushing for individual volunteerism, these biographical publications painted a highly positive picture of American personalities and assertiveness. Lincoln, for example, was celebrated for his patriotism, and Edison often cited as an exemplar of patience and hard work.<sup>9</sup> Generally, the U.S. was held in solid if not outstanding esteem while a number of Americans were praised for high virtue or exceptional talent.

This is not to say that there was not ambiguity about the U.S. Following the logic of Social Darwinism, for instance, the same essay from the co-founder of the Vietnamese Restoration League, for instance, lamented that the Vietnamese might end up on “the same path as the Red race of America.”<sup>10</sup> The lamentation, however, was more evocative

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<sup>6</sup> Alexander B. Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976), 39-40.

<sup>7</sup> Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 31.

<sup>8</sup> Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 30; David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 270.

<sup>9</sup> A strong parallel could be found in late imperial and early Republican China, which saw many similar biographical narratives about American figures. A Catholic college yearbook published in 1937, for instance, asked students to name a person that they most admired and wanted to emulate. The most popular names were, not surprisingly, Chiang Kai-shek and Sun Yat-sen. Next, however, were not Confucius or Zhuangzi (each receiving a few votes) or Jesus (only one vote), but Lincoln and Edison. See Richard Madsen, “Hierarchical Modernization: Tianjin’s Gong Shang College as a Model for Catholic Community in North China,” in Wen-Hsin Yeh, ed., *Becoming Chinese: Passages to Modernity and Beyond* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 174. No such evidence has been presented about the Vietnamese case. Nonetheless, the presence of many references to American figures in publications not specifically about them, helped to indicate that educated Vietnamese were holding them as exemplars.

<sup>10</sup> Nguyen Thuong Hien, “Tearful Conversation,” 176.

of Vietnamese conditions than critical of post-Columban European domination. More representative of Vietnamese perception was the essay *European and American Civilization*, which was published in 1928 as a pamphlet and widely read by the intelligentsia. Credited to a group of intellectuals, it was probably written mostly by Dao Duy Anh, whose work on culture had been discussed in the previous chapter. *Civilization* praised European and (by extension) American civilizations for having pursued the advancement of knowledge through intellectual curiosity and expansion of institutions such as universities and publishing houses. At the same time, the tract mirrored contemporary French consideration of the U.S. It considered America to have had a different historical development and, as a result, had become more “materialist” than Europe. Nonetheless, as Mark Philip Bradley has astutely observed, such distinctions were “largely descriptive than judgmental.” Europe and the U.S. were more similar than not, including the fact that the latter had also begun to seek territories and concessions as the former.<sup>11</sup>

This example demonstrates that Vietnamese views of the U.S. were more complicated than a simple matter of love for or hatred of America. The complication was furthered by the consideration that educated Vietnamese had towards non-European countries as models for independence and modernization. Due to cultural traditions as much as geographical proximity, the elite closely followed events and developments in China. Republican China and the Guomindang provided a model to them – or, at least, to members of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD).<sup>12</sup> For elite Vietnamese drawn to

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<sup>11</sup> This section is drawn from the exposition of the tract in Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 27-29.

<sup>12</sup> The political scientist Brantly Womack has called the relationship between China and Vietnam between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries “the brotherhood of oppression.” Although the two

leftist radicalism, Soviet Russia, whose unique geography placed it somewhat outside the European orbit, provided a blueprint for a socialist variety of modernity. Until at least the late 1920s, however, it was Japan that held perhaps the most prominent place in the elite imagination as a country from which the Vietnamese might possibly learn how to modernize. This imagination was hardly surprising thanks to the growing familiarity with Japan through the Easter Travels movement and the trips made by Phan Boi Chau and other patriots in the first decade of the century.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1920s, it continued to draw especially elite Vietnamese that were wary of complete Westernization. The prolific essayist Pham Quynh (1892-1945), for instance, wrote in 1929 that Japan “has succeeded completely and at the level of a master... at the most astonishing change in history in the shortest amount of time.”<sup>14</sup> Pham Quynh attributed the turnaround to both external and internal factors: Japan’s geography that made it difficult for invasion from outside, and Japanese sorting out of features from Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism into a unique whole. The pre-modern Japanese elite, for instance, absorbed Confucianist and neo-Confucianist “common morality” but avoided their tradition on politics and the examination system, which “weighed heavily on China, Vietnam, Korea” and impeded modernization.<sup>15</sup> In the end, Pham Quynh considered the Meiji Revolution less a revolution and more a restoration and translation

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countries went through different experiences – Vietnam under colonialism vs. China during the so-called “total crisis” – there were significant similarities to draw the Vietnamese elite towards their Chinese counterparts. See Brantly Womack, *China and Vietnam: The Politics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 142-161.

<sup>13</sup> See Vinh Sinh, “Introduction,” in Phan Boi Chau, *Overtured Chariots: The Autobiography of Phan Boi Chau* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 10-16. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 58-60.

<sup>14</sup> Pham Quynh, “Tam Guong Nhat Ban” [The Exemplar of Japan], in *Tieu Luan Viet Bang Tieng Phap trong Thoi Gian 1922-1932* [Essays Written in French During 1922-1932] (Hanoi: Tri Thuc, 2007), 228.

<sup>15</sup> Pham Quynh, “Tam Guong Nhat Ban,” 229.

of Japan's traditional inner strength into modernity. This opinion was perfectly in line with his view that too much Westernization would have suppressed Vietnamese traditional strength and harmed Vietnamese progress towards modernity.<sup>16</sup> Desirable was a balance of Eastern tradition and Western borrowing: a balance affirmed in an essay on education. Marshalling an array of statistics about Japanese education and a small selection of curriculum content, Pham Quynh considered Japan a complete success in "the mixing of the Asian spirit and the Western spirit."<sup>17</sup> In his eyes, Japan was *the* exemplar and inspiration for the colonial Vietnamese.

To a lesser degree, India also appealed to the sensibilities of elite Vietnamese. Attention to India of the past no doubt came in part from the Buddhist publications during the Buddhist Revival of the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> In the secular press, though, the primary focus was Gandhi's struggle for independence. Vietnamese wrote sympathetically and admiringly of both the man and his movement. There was at least one biographical tract on Gandhi by the early 1930s, and major urban periodicals praised him and the poet Tagore as inspiring modernist figures in politics and literature, respectively.<sup>19</sup> Writing in Saigon during the early 1930s, the prominent northern litterateur Phan Khoi (1887-1959), later a leader of the dissident *Humanities – Good Works* movement in North Vietnam,

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<sup>16</sup> Pham Quynh, "Tam Guong Nhat Ban," 232. See also Pham Quynh, "Nhưng Lễ Hội Phú Hoa của Trí Nang" [Gaudy Ceremonies of the Mind], in *Tieu Luan Viet Bang Tieng Phap*, 249-256. "The overwhelming import of philosophies and ideas from the West," he wrote in the latter essay, "and the destruction of the ancient Eastern morality have brought forth an imbalance in the human mind." The result was the "gaudy mind" that favored radical individualism and romanticism in China and, presumably, Vietnam. Even Japan stood in danger of losing its soul. "The liberation of the mind and soul... in Japan since 1900 has led to a real plague and suicides among the young intelligentsia" (252-253).

<sup>17</sup> Pham Quynh, "Nhưng Văn De Giáo Dục và Day Học – Nhat Ban và Đông Duong" [Issues on Education and Teaching: Japan and Indochina], in *Tieu Luan Viet Bang Tieng Phap*, 417.

<sup>18</sup> See Elise DeVido, "'Buddhism for This World': The Buddhist Revival in Vietnam, 1920 to 1951, and Its Legacy," in Philip Taylor, ed., *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2007), 250-296.

<sup>19</sup> Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 260.

called Gandhi “Saint Gandhi” in accord to the emergent practice among the Vietnamese elite. Phan Khoi explained the Indian leader’s uniqueness to have come from a rare combination of “saintliness” and “heroism,” which “are different qualities” and people “often possess one without the other.” Moreover, Gandhi manifested a fundamental difference from Westerners: “Europeans consider the body important... but [Gandhi] considers the spiritual equivalent to life,” a reference to his simplicity in eating and related habits.<sup>20</sup> Such habits found larger expression in Gandhi’s advocacy of a pre-industrial India, which was in tune with the religious mindset of many Indians. Phan Khoi did not say whether he supported this Gandhian vision. (Most likely he did not.) But he unreservedly praised Gandhi for his courage and virtue and, by implication, expressed a desire for this type of leader among the Vietnamese.

In some ways, the attraction of the Indian experiment rose while the appeal of Japan waned during the 1930s, when Vietnamese became wary of aggressive Japanese imperialist designs. Even before the Japanese occupation of Indochina, anti-Japanese sentiments were growing among at least a minority of noncommunist Vietnamese. The sentiments were probably best represented by two pamphlets by the poet and publisher Nguyen Vy that were unambiguously entitled *The Japanese Peril* and *The Enemy Is Japan*.<sup>21</sup> Anti-Japanese sentiments deepened during World War II, likely due to the brutality of the Occupation and the disappointment of the Vietnamese elite that Japan did

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<sup>20</sup> Phan Khoi, “Thoi Cuoc An Do va Cai Chan Tuong cua Thanh Gandhi” [The Situation in India and the Essence of Gandhi the Saint], in *Phan Khoi: Tac Pham Dang Bao 1931* [Phan Khoi: Periodical Writings, 1931] (Hanoi: Hoi Nha Van, 2007), 22-23. This article first appeared in the Saigon magazine *Trung Lap* [Neutral] 6365 (February 5, 1931).

<sup>21</sup> Nguyen Vy, *Cai Hoa Nhat Ban* [The Japanese Peril] (Hanoi: Bao Ngoc, 1938). Nguyen Vy, *Ke Thu La Nhat Ban* [The Enemy Is Japan] (Hanoi: Thanh Nien Tong Thu, 1939). Not surprisingly, the author was arrested and imprisoned by the Japanese during the Occupation: an event he recalled in a memoir serialized in his own Saigon magazine *Pho Thong* [Popular].

not allow the independence they had hoped for. Because of its unusual experiment among the Asian countries, Japan still figured to a significant degree in the discourse among noncommunist circles. But the urban press paid more and more attention to India. This attention only grew in Republican Saigon during the 1950s. It was not until the mid-1960s that Japan, then in the middle of a postwar economic miracle, began to regain some of the earlier admiration from educated urban South Vietnamese.

Interestingly, publications from the urban Vietnamese press continued to compliment (if indirectly) the U.S., the enemy of the Japanese Empire, even during the Japanese Occupation in World War II. The prominent Hanoi highbrow weekly *New Mind* (*Tri Tan*), for instance, spoke generally well of the U.S. during its occasional commentaries on World War II written by Nhat Nham, a member of the VNQDD.<sup>22</sup> In June 1942, for example, Nhat Nham published an article on “learning about Mexico,” in which he repeatedly pointed out Mexican strong opposition to the Axis Powers since Germany downed a Mexican ship a month earlier. Having noted past conflicts between Mexico and the U.S., he nonetheless indicated that Mexico had done the right thing in joining the U.S. against Germany. In addition, his tone was broadly approving of American attempts to persuade Latin and South American countries to join this fight.<sup>23</sup>

Nhat Nham expanded the approval several issues later, in an article on the Pan-

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<sup>22</sup> Nhat Nham’s real name was Trinh Nhu Tau. He worked in the Hanoi censor’s office during the Japanese Occupation, hence the likely reason for the lack of censorship on his relatively hopeful view of the U.S. Tau had worked at several colonial provincial administrative offices, and later became a delegate in the DRV’s coalition National Assembly. He died during the early years of the First Indochina War. See Hoang Van Dao, *Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927-1954*, Huynh Khue, trans. (Pittsburgh: Rose Dog Books, 2008); and Van Hong, “Ky Gia Nhat Nham – Cay But The He Dau cua Lang Bao Bac Giang” [The Reporter Nhat Nham: A First-Generation Writer of Bac Giang Journalism], *Van Hoa Bac Giang* (July 29, 2009): [http://vanhoabacgiang.vn/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=268:ky-gi-nht-nham-cay-but-th-h-u-ca-lang-bao-bc-giang&catid=29:danh-nhan&Itemid=63](http://vanhoabacgiang.vn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=268:ky-gi-nht-nham-cay-but-th-h-u-ca-lang-bao-bc-giang&catid=29:danh-nhan&Itemid=63).

<sup>23</sup> Nhat Nham, “Xu Me-Tay-Co (Mexique)” [Mexico], *Tri Tan* 49 (June 3, 1942): 495-496.

Americanism. The article described the Monroe Doctrine, praised President Franklin Roosevelt for his work at bridging differences between the U.S. and Mexico, reported on similar U.S. efforts with the South American states, and concluded that the U.S. was “richly capable of providing materials for a long armed conflict.”<sup>24</sup> The praise continued in a follow-up and two-part article, which further explained the Monroe Doctrine. The author noted U.S. occasional “violations” on the sovereignty of the Latin American countries and singled out James Polk in particular. But he largely focused the attention (and blame) on European interventions in the Americas, especially by the British and the French. In the end, he considered the Doctrine “not opposing to [European] expansion in the Americas through peaceful means” (e.g., financial and economic takeover), but against “European anti-democratic movements”: an obvious swipe at Nazism and perhaps communism. Trying hard to couch the content in neutral language, the article nonetheless ended with a hopeful note on the Havana Conference of 1940 and the Rio de Janeiro Conference of 1942, which saw the Monroe Doctrine elevated to a new level in collective security.<sup>25</sup>

The year 1942 saw also the appearance of a story about the first Vietnamese that set foot on American soil, first published in 1942. The author was Phan Tran Chuc (1907-1946), a noncommunist writer who edited a Hanoi magazine and published another. He was also among the most prolific popular writers of Vietnamese history and historical

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<sup>24</sup> Nhat Nham, “Van De Lien My trong Cuoc Chien Tranh Hien Thai” [Pan-Americanism during the Current Armed Conflict] *Tri Tan* 57 (July 29, 1942): 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> Nhat Nham, “Tro Lai Van De Lien My va Chu Nghia Monroe” [Revisiting Pan-Americanism and the Monroe Doctrine] *Tri Tan* 58 (August 5, 1942): 16; and 59 (August 12, 1942): 14-15.



fiction.<sup>26</sup> This particular work was called *Bui Vien and the U.S. Government*, and it gave the background and the trips abroad of a mandarin traveler in the second half of the nineteenth century for the purposes of finding assistance against the encroaching French threat.<sup>27</sup> Having met a Chinese-speaking U.S. official in Hong Kong, Bui Vien was prompted to travel to Washington, DC by the way of Tokyo and San Francisco. In the U.S. capital, he had an audience with Abraham Lincoln. Because the trip was spontaneous, he did not carry with him official documents asking the U.S. for help. After a year in Washington, he returned to Vietnam, enthusiastically recommended Vietnamese alliance with the U.S., and returned to Washington with the proper court documents. Upon his arrival, however, Bui Vien learned that Lincoln had been assassinated and went back to Vietnam without completing his mission.

The story was sketchy rather than detailed: the name of the U.S. consul in Hong Kong, for instance, was never given. The author also had the wrong American president: Bui Vien would have met Ulysses Grant rather than Lincoln. Worst of all, there is no evidence from the American side to corroborate any U.S. encounter with Bui Vien.<sup>28</sup> Factual errors aside, the book focused on Bui Vien rather than the U.S. and could be read as a tale of an elite Vietnamese trying to see the world.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the title was misleading

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<sup>26</sup> See Vu Ngoc Phan, "Phan Tran Chuc," *Nha Van Hien Dai* [Modern Writers], Vol. 3 (Hanoi, 1942), reprinted in *Vu Ngoc Phan Tuyen Tap: I* [Complete Vu Ngoc Phan: Volume I] (Hanoi: Van Hoc, 2008), 441-448.

<sup>27</sup> Phan Tran Chuc, *Bui Vien voi Chinh Phu My: Lich Su Ngoai Giao Trieu Tu Duc* [Bui Vien and the U.S. Government: A History of Diplomacy Under the Reign of King Tu Duc] (Paris: Dong Nam A, 1985). This is a near duplicate of an earlier edition (Saigon: Chinh Ky, 1952). I do not have information on the original edition, but believe it was published in Hanoi in 1942.

<sup>28</sup> This point is made in Robert Hopkins Miller, *The United States and Vietnam, 1787-1941* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1990), 274.

<sup>29</sup> As a contemporary critic pointed out, Chuc's books were interesting for their "clear reasoning," but "much of his sources was uncertain" in factuality, which led to "contradictions" in his stories. See Vu

because only a small portion of the book was devoted to the diplomat's travels and visit of the U.S. There was a lot more on Bui Vien's background, thinking, and activities after the purported trip. Certainly, the book viewed the U.S. positively. Lincoln, for instance, was considered "a global great man," which was in line with earlier Vietnamese thinking.<sup>30</sup> But the U.S. was secondary or even tertiary in emphasis, and the story illustrated the author's rather shaky knowledge of American history and tradition. All the same, the book was well received enough that it was reprinted three years later.<sup>31</sup>

In any event, the mainstream Hanoi press in the early 1940s was more occupied with countries than the U.S. On the pages of the *New Mind*, indeed, were articles about colonial and decolonizing countries and territories such as India, the Philippines, Sumatra, Timor, Macau, Somalia, and La Réunion. Prior to the Cold War, then, noncommunist Vietnamese perception of the U.S. should be placed in a nationalist, modernizing, and independence-minded context that considered non-European countries as most applicable to their situation. On the one hand, Vietnamese considered the American civilization as derivative of the European civilization and, therefore, deserving of respect and admiration appropriate to a great modern power. At the same time, their Eastern orientation and colonial status led them to view Asian and other decolonizing countries as real or potential models for emulation. Not being an imperialist power, at least not a long-standing one, the U.S. did not appear particularly threatening to

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Ngoc Phan, "Phan Tran Chuc," 447-448. Chuc's book on Bui Vien came out too late to be included in Phan's essay, but the criticism easily applied to it.

<sup>30</sup> Phan Tran Chuc, *Bui Vien voi Chinh Phu My*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> "Thu Muc An Pham cua Nha Xuat Ban Dai La" [Catalog of the Publisher Dai La]: <http://ntd1712.blogspot.com/2011/02/thu-muc-pham-cua-nha-xuat-ban-ai-la.html>. In the same year, Chuc became a member of the Japanese-sponsored Tonkin Political Committee (Uy Ban Chinh Tri Bac Ky). He died the following year. See Tran Van Giap, et al., *Luoc Truyen Cac Tac Gia Viet Nam 2* [Stories About Vietnamese Authors: Volume II] (Hanoi: Khoa Hoc Xa Hoi, 1972), 206.

Vietnamese interests. Individual Americans – entrepreneurs, inventors, politicians, and humanitarians, among others – were held up as moral exemplars for Vietnamese: a tradition that continued well into the period of South Vietnam. But urban educated Vietnamese did not hold an especially strong place for the U.S. as a model for emulation. In fact, their occupation with colonial and decolonizing countries later led at least some of them to judge the U.S. on its attitude and action towards these countries.

### **Elite perception of the U.S. in the early years of South Vietnam**

Vietnamese attitudes towards the U.S. grew more consciously positive after 1950, when the Truman Administration decided to support the “Bao Dai Solution” and formally recognized the French-backed State of Vietnam created the year before. As anticommunist Vietnamese kept a wary eye on the on-going conflict between the Viet Minh and the French, they became more interested in the U.S. as a sponsor of their battle against Vietnamese communism. Nonetheless, the interest grew slowly and reflected Vietnamese relative unfamiliarity about the U.S.

All the same, that interest undeniably grew. Phan Tran Chuc’s book on Bui Vien, for instance, saw another reprint in 1952 from a Saigon press. Another illustration of the attitudes among the noncommunist urban intelligentsia could be found in the journal *Popular (Pho Thong)*, published by friends and alumni of the Hanoi Law School between 1951 and 1953. The school was a major producer of anticommunist émigré intellectuals, and notwithstanding the name, its associated journal was geared towards the uppermost level of educated Vietnamese. Its articles were often long and detailed, and some of its authors were faculty at the school. An article in the inaugural issue suggested with a

guarded optimism that due to the Korean War, the U.S. had duly focused its attention from communist expansion in Europe to that in Asia.<sup>32</sup> A long article in another issue discussed the question of “Western or communist democracy” for postcolonial Vietnam. It positively noted the U.S. Constitution and grouped the U.S. with the two largest Western European democracies: “The British, French, and Americans value liberty and protect liberty at all costs. The Russians, on the other hand, focus on equality.”<sup>33</sup> Coming down decisively on the side of the West, the author probably bore in mind the Viet Minh’s elimination of their noncommunist rivals when stating, “Western democracy is clearly better than Marxist democracy on this point: the West does not eradicate thought currents in opposition.”<sup>34</sup> Direct interactions with Americans were also reported on the pages of the journal, including the transcript of a radio report filed by a law professor that attended a conference on Southeast Asia at Johns Hopkins University.<sup>35</sup>

The interest and enthusiasm for the U.S., however, was tempered by Vietnamese preoccupation with decolonization and decolonizing countries. The same journal published many more articles on topics such as economic conditions in Southeast Asia, the new constitution of Syria, a report on a writer’s three-day visit to Calcutta, the success of Magsaysay in the Philippines, and occasional “letters from Paris” that illustrated the continuing influence of French literature and culture on educated

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<sup>32</sup> “Au Chau hay A Chau Quan Trong? Hai Khuyh Huong Ro Ret cua Chien Thuat va Chinh Sach Ngoai Giao My” [Europe or Asia More Important? Two Clear Perspectives on Strategy and Policy of U.S. Diplomacy], *Pho Thong* [Popular] 1-2 (September-October 1951), 45-49.

<sup>33</sup> Tran Thieu Sinh, “Dung truoc Hai Nguon Tu Tuong: Dan Chu Tay Phuong va Dan Chu Mac Xit” [Standing before Two Currents of Thought: Western Democracy and Marxist Democracy], *Pho Thong* 6 (March 1952), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Tran Thieu Sinh, “Dung truoc Hai Nguon Tu Tuong,” 55.

<sup>35</sup> Vu Quoc Thong, “Hoi Nghi Johns Hopkins va Cac Van De Dong Nam A” [Johns Hopkins University Conference on Issues in Southeast Asia], *Pho Thong* 16 (March 1953), 28-35.

noncommunist Vietnamese. Even the article on “Western vs. communist democracy” included mostly examples from the English democratic tradition and only a few from the American one. Although the Vietnamese were impressed by American achievements, it is clear that they were far from familiar with the history and traditions of the U.S.

As Vietnamese anticommunists hardened their views towards the DRV during the late 1940s and early 1950s, they grew more appreciative of the U.S. as the global anticommunist leader. Not surprisingly, their interest and knowledge in the U.S. rose significantly after the Geneva Conference. The involvement and assistance from the U.S. Navy during the movement of northerners to the south in 1954-1955 generated goodwill among many Vietnamese. The Operation likely marked, for instance, the first time that many Vietnamese encountered American products such as toothpaste and shampoo: in this case provided by the agency Cooperative for American Remittance to Everywhere, Inc (CARE).<sup>36</sup> It was not a surprise either that the Ngo Dinh Diem government took the lead in promoting U.S.-RVN relations. This was clear in his speeches aimed at an American audience. In a letter to the American Friends of Vietnam Association in mid-1956, he declared, “We keep our trust in our American friends” in spite of “strong and organized distortion” from the enemies of South Vietnam.<sup>37</sup> The following year, he

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<sup>36</sup> Ronald B. Frankum, Jr., *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954-1955* (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2007), 98. Apparently, the provisions were offered to the Vietnamese in a modified form of the famous “CARE packages” widely distributed in Europe in the wake of World War II

<sup>37</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Thong Diep cua Tong Thong Goi Nhung Nguoi My Ban cua Viet Nam Nhom Hop tai Hoa Thinh Don (1-6-1956)” [Letter of the President to the Meeting of the American Friends of Vietnam in Washington, DC on June 1, 1956], in *Con Duong Chinh Nghia: Doc Lap Dan Chu: Hieu Trieu va Dien Van Quan Trong cua Tong Thong Ngo Dinh Diem* [The Path of Righteousness: Independence and Democracy: Major Appeals and Addresses of President Ngo Dinh Diem], Vol. II (Saigon: Phu Tong Thong, 1956), 52.

offered profuse praise during his state visit to the U.S.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, he sometimes noted the importance of American aid to South Vietnam in his addresses to Vietnamese. An instance was the opening of the National College of Administration that received crucial backing from the Michigan State University Advisory Group, when Diem acknowledged that the “unconditional aid” was “evidence of the close unity between two countries that share the same ideal of democracy and liberty.”<sup>39</sup>

The same positive attitude could be found in government-sponsored publications. The periodical *Southern Wind*, for instance, circulated an article about Edmund Roberts and “the first American diplomatic delegation visit Vietnam” in 1832.<sup>40</sup> Written by Thai Van Kiem, then the deputy director of cultural affairs in the RVN’s Ministry Education, the article was later incorporated into a pamphlet. Both the article and pamphlet reflected an attempt to find commonalities amidst the wide historical gaps between Vietnamese and Americans. The article and the pamphlet – the latter was published in English as *The Twain Did Meet* – also described Bui Vien’s travels to the U.S. and corrected Phan Tran Chuc’s error about the American president that the Vietnamese supposedly met.<sup>41</sup> It concluded that like John White and Edmund Roberts, Bui Vien “shares a place of honor in the list of those who have sought to bring together East and West, Vietnam and the

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<sup>38</sup> See Ngo Dinh Diem, *The Emergence of Free Vietnam: Major Addresses Delivered by President Ngo Dinh Diem during His Official Visit to the United States of America* (Saigon: Presidency of the Republic of Viet-Nam, 1957).

<sup>39</sup> Ngo Dinh Diem, “Dien Van cua Tong Thong trong Dip Le Khanh Thanh Hoc Vien Quoc Gia Hanh Chanh Ngay 12-4-1956” [Address of the President on the Opening of the National College of Administration, April 12, 1956], in *Con Duong Chinh Nghia*, 189-190.

<sup>40</sup> Thai Van Kiem, “Phai Doan Ngoai Dao Dau Tien cua My Quoc Den Viet Nam” [The First U.S. Diplomatic Delegation to Visit Vietnam], *Gio Nam* [Southern Wind] 13 (July 1, 1959), 29-30.

<sup>41</sup> Thai Van Kiem, *The Twain Did Meet: First Contacts Between Vietnam and the United States of America* (Saigon: Republic of Vietnam, 1961).

United States of America, in peace and friendship.”<sup>42</sup> It was a maudlin sentiment and an ahistorical conclusion, but succinctly illustrated the pro-American advocacy on the part of the government. Most of other U.S.-related articles were contemporary and concerned with alliances. One issue, for instance, carried a translation of an American article about the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) between the U.S. and Canada.<sup>43</sup> The same issue also published an article about the South Korean situation after the successful military coup against Syngman Rhee. The article recognized the U.S. for having “sacrificed a lot of money in Korea,” but also cited Washington’s failure of a long-term plan as one of six reasons for the contemporary malaise. In the end, however, the author did not consider the U.S. to have been involved in the coup and expressed a cautious hope for continuing aid from Washington to South Korea.<sup>44</sup>

For the most part, the circulation of the Saigon government’s attitude towards the U.S. was consistently positive. But, again, this should be placed in the context of attention paid to non-American topics and issues. Positive as Diem might sound towards Washington, it was more the exception than the rule that he noted the U.S. in his speeches and messages to South Vietnamese. He did not want to betray the sense that South Vietnam was heavily dependent on the U.S. for aid and support, and his messages focused squarely on nationalistic and anticommunist appeals rather than on the alliance with the Americans. When speaking about the “Free World,” he might invoke the U.N. as often as he did the U.S.: that is to say, not often at all. This was true too about his

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<sup>42</sup> Thai Van Kiem, *The Twain Did Meet*, 40.

<sup>43</sup> Nguyen Bui Chan, “Doi Tuan Canh Bac My” [The North American Patrol Team], *Gio Nam* 35 (August 5, 1961): 10-12. This was a “loose translation” from an article by John Hubbell.

<sup>44</sup> G.T., “Dan Toc Dai Han Se Di Ve Dau?” [To Where Are the Korean People Heading?], *Gio Nam* 35 (August 5, 1961): 22-24, 39, and 44.

speeches and addresses during his visits to noncommunist Asian countries, in which he employed a “civilization” discourse that betrayed prejudices favorable to certain countries (such as South Korea) or critical of others (such as Cambodia).<sup>45</sup> Even in speeches during his visit to Australia, Diem hardly mentioned the crucial roles played by the U.S. in South Vietnam.<sup>46</sup> He was intent on asserting the independence of the RVN at every chance and, conversely, minimizing the American presence as much as possible. Diem’s minimalism was understandable for a number of reasons, including the desire for autonomy in order to construct his Personalist republic.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, the U.S. appeared on the margin rather than at the center of the *Southern Wind*. There were by far many more articles that, for instances, praised ancient patriots and historical sites; explained about the banking system and other economic realities; reported on cultural and literary activities in South Vietnam; or attacked one or a combination of the following subjects: colonialism, traditionalism, and communism, especially Vietnamese and Chinese communism. Emphasis in the articles was placed on nationalism and citizenship instead, and there was a sizable amount of fiction throughout the run of the periodical, little of which had to do with the Americans. In short, there is

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<sup>45</sup> An exposition on Diem’s view of civilization is Edward Miller, “The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture, and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem,” in Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia (1945-1962)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 376-402. Miller attributes Diem’s practice as a consequence of entrenched colonial racist thinking, but long-standing historical relations between Vietnam and various Asian countries might have played a decisive role as well.

<sup>46</sup> See, for instances, Ngo Dinh Diem, *Toward Better Mutual Understanding: Speeches Delivered by President Ngo Dinh Diem during His State Visits to Thailand, Australia, and Korea* (Saigon: Presidency of the Republic of Viet-Nam, 1957); and Ngo Dinh Diem, *President Ngo Dinh Diem on Asia (Extracts from Speeches by President Ngo Dinh Diem)* (Saigon: Presidency of the Republic of Vietnam, Press Office, 1958).

<sup>47</sup> To balance growing American influences, Diem’s government adroitly allowed and promoted cultural and economic activities with France after the RVN drove out all major French military and political influences by 1956. See Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 240-248.



little about the U.S. in one of the most widely distributed magazines published by a government-sponsored organization whose membership consisted of mostly educated South Vietnamese.

### **Law professors, elite writers, and *Native Land***

The same could be said about periodicals geared towards a small and specialized audience. One example is the quarterly *Journal of Law and Economics* (*Luat Hoc Kinh Te Tap Chi*), published by the Law School (at the University of Saigon), whose faculty consisted mostly of émigrés from the Hanoi Law School. In many ways, it was a more professionalized and more specialized version of the Hanoi Law School's *Popular*. (It was devoid, for example, of the occasional poem that adorned the pages of *Popular*.) True to its name, the journal focused on legal and economic issues that varied in scope and topics: such as “the issue of underdevelopment,” “the relationship between the executive and legislative in the Vietnamese Constitution,” “property rights in the arts according to Vietnamese law and international law,” “The issue of agricultural development in Vietnam,” and “Is planning contrary to the democratic spirit?”<sup>48</sup> The list of authors consisted mostly of professors from the Law School, prominent South Vietnamese experts in economics, and government officials. A survey of the quarterly published from 1956 to 1964 revealed that references to the U.S. were far fewer than those about Japan, France, Great Britain, and other Western European countries. More significant, perhaps, was the preoccupation with issues in decolonized and post-colonial countries in Asia and Africa. An article about the place of the National Assembly in

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<sup>48</sup> The first three titles came from issues in 1958; the last two from 1960.

South and Southeast Asian countries forcefully contended, “Western [political] models are not compatible with Asia, were Asia to desire quick and strong economic development.”<sup>49</sup> Another instance is a long article about democracy written by a prominent law professor and published in mid-1964 took note of political developments in Indonesia, Thailand, Ghana, Algeria, and India – plus Japan and Germany before World War II. Contemporary Europe was also discussed but, remarkably, never once did the U.S. make an appearance on the pages.<sup>50</sup> The collective impression after perusing these pages is that elite South Vietnamese looked closely at other newly independent countries to measure and debate their own situation. When they looked at Western Europe and the U.S., it was only for comparative purposes, and the U.S. did not figure as a prominent intellectual or ideological frame of reference.

The journal was a highly specialized publication and was read by a very small audience. Nonetheless, several prominent faculty members were invested in another journal aimed at an educated but wider South Vietnamese readership. Called *Native Land (Que Huong)*, this monthly periodical was begun in mid-1959 and ran until 1963. At least two of its three founders were prominent members of the South Vietnamese legal-political establishment. One was Nguyen Phuong Thiep, an attorney and member of the RVN’s National Assembly. Having come from the northern-central province of Nghe Tinh, a Viet Minh stronghold, Thiep moved south in 1953 as the Viet Minh intensified the socialist revolution amidst the First Indochina War. He was associated to a small

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<sup>49</sup> Tran Van Minh, “Vai Tro cua Quoc Hoi tai Cac Tieu Nhuoc Quoc Nam va Dong Nam A Chau” [The Role of the National Assembly in Weak South and Southeast Asian Countries], *Luat Hoc Kinh Te Tap Chi* [Journal of Law and Economics] 1959:1-2 (March 31, 1960): 177. The cover showed only the year while the first page gives the specific date: hence two different years in the citation.

<sup>50</sup> Nguyen Cao Hach, “Dan Chu va Song Con” [Democracy and Livelihood], *Luat Hoc Kinh Te Tap Chi* 1963:1-2 (June 9, 1964): 1-16 and 191-197.

intellectual circle called Viewpoint (Quan Diem) that included the Hanoi émigré attorney Nghiem Xuan Hong. He also published a daily called *The Southern Voice (Tieng Mien Nam)* that promoted the cancellation of the planned general national elections to unite north and south in 1956. Thiep also served as the general secretary of the National Assembly in the early RVN, and was among the 123 members that drafted the Constitution of the RVN.<sup>51</sup> The second founder was Vu Quoc Thuc, a northern émigré best known to the American public as co-author of the Thuc-Lillienthal Report about planning for postwar South Vietnam, which was issued in 1967.<sup>52</sup> Like many noncommunist Vietnamese, Thuc had worked for the Viet Minh at the start of the First Indochina War but left the organization in mid-1948 and returned to Hanoi. He went to France and presented his doctoral thesis in law, obtaining a doctorate in law. He began teaching at the Hanoi Law School in 1951, but also went back to France for several months to obtain a master's degree in economics.<sup>53</sup> He also served as editor for most issues of *Popular*. During the Diem period, Thuc worked as Secretary for National Education in 1954 and Governor of the National Bank of Vietnam in 1955-1956. He then became the dean of the Law School while working as a consultant to the government,

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<sup>51</sup> Nguyen Huu Thong, "Tuong Lai VN Di Ve Dau?" [Where Does the Future of Vietnam Head To?] (no date): [http://tuongvangvn.com/plugins/p2\\_news/printarticle.php?p2\\_articleid=498](http://tuongvangvn.com/plugins/p2_news/printarticle.php?p2_articleid=498). Nguyen Huu Thong, "Tuong Niem Co Giao Su Nguyen Ngoc Huy" [Remembering Professor Nguyen Ngoc Huy] (July 13, 2008): <http://www.quocgiahanhchanh.com/tuongniemcogshuy.htm>. Thiep was one of fifteen members of the National Assembly originally assigned to the Drafting Committee; see Doan Them, *Hai Muoi Nam Qua: Viec Tung Ngay (1945-1964)* [The Past Twenty Years: Daily Happenings (1945-1964)] (Saigon: Nam Chi Tung Thu, 1965), 196.

<sup>52</sup> On this report, see Steven M. Neuse, *David E. Lillienthal: The Journey of an American Liberal* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 277-279. Also useful is Albert P. Williams, Jr., "South Viet-Nam's Development in a Postwar Era: A Commentary on the Thuc-Lillienthal Report," *Asian Survey* 11: 4 (April 1971): 352-370.

<sup>53</sup> Thuc remained in Vietnam after 1975, and intervention from the French government led to his emigration to France in 1978, where he has lived since. The information above comes from his recently published two-volume memoir: Vu Quoc Thuc, *Thoi Dai cua Toi, Cuon 1: Nhin Lai 100 Nam* [My Times, Volume 1: Looking Back at 100 Year] and *Thoi Dai cua Toi, Quyen 2: Doi Toi Trai Qua cac Thoi Bien* [My Times, Volume 2: My Life Through Major Changes](Westminster, CA: Nguoi Viet, 2010).

especially on matters related to national planning.<sup>54</sup> He appeared to be the main force behind the journal at first.<sup>55</sup> The publisher (and editor of the first few issues) was Hoang Kim Dan: a pseudonym of a member in the roster, possibly Nguyen Cao Hach, another émigré member of the law faculty who later became dean of the Law School. (Starting in December 1960, Dan's name disappeared from the masthead and Hach was listed as the "policy editor".)

*Native Land* was not a formally government-sponsored publication. Nonetheless, the presence of many professors and other government-related writers among its editorial board, "regular contributors," and "additional contributors" gave the monthly an impression akin to an informal but desirable stamp of approval. It was an impressive roster, including Vu Van Mau, the émigré Buddhist law professor who served as Diem's minister of foreign affairs until resigning from the post in the summer of 1963 in protest of the government's treatment of the urban Buddhists. Other contributors worked at the University of Saigon, the Institute of National Administration, the School of Politics and Economics at the University of Dalat, the (Buddhist) Van Hanh University in Saigon, and other elite South Vietnamese institutions. They specialized in law, economics, government administration, journalism, literature, philosophy, archeology, and other fields.<sup>56</sup> Some of the articles and reviews came from contributors living abroad, mostly at

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<sup>54</sup> For one of his opinions, see Vu Quoc Thuc, "National Planning in Vietnam," *Asian Survey* 1:7 (September 1961): 3-9.

<sup>55</sup> The third founder was a physician by the name of Tran Ha Trung.

<sup>56</sup> Among the contributors was Tran Thuc Linh, a left-leaning Catholic that wrote mostly on legal matters. He later became a judge in the RVN's Supreme Court and, subsequently, a NLF sympathizer. As exemplified by the journal *Variety*, there was a minor presence of left-leaning and NLF-friendly writers in some major Saigon magazines. In addition, the legal community, especially attorneys of southern origin, was an urban circle that saw some members that dissented against the RVN government, supported the NLF, or did both. But it should be emphasized that this was minority presence, and advocacy of the NLF on publications such as *Variety* and *Native Land* was hindered by editorial policies, government censorship,

cosmopolitan cities such as Paris, London, Louvain, Washington, New York, Tokyo, New Delhi, Bangkok, and Singapore. The strong roster was matched by the rich array of subjects and topics in articles and reviews. Articles in *Native Land* were shorter and less terminologically specialized than those in the *Journal of Law and Economics*. Most ran between ten and twenty pages, which was a good deal shorter than articles in the *Journal*. To judge from the “correspondence box” found at the end of many issues, *Native Land* reached a much larger readership than the *Journal*. As most issues carried between 250 and 400 pages each, it also discussed many more topics than the *Journal* did.

Like many periodicals in urban South Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s, the starting point of *Native Land* was explicitly anticommunist. “Communism is not merely a disaster,” stated the editorial statement at the start of the inaugural issue, “it is also a grave and deep challenge to the world.”<sup>57</sup> Divided evenly into two parts, the first half of the statement was in fact devoted to a reiteration of anticommunist conviction. Equally important was the second half, which contended that postcolonial Vietnamese needed to continually develop a new culture to fit the realities of the world and to avoid the hazards of communism on the one hand and the “ideology of freedom that is at times ineffectual” on the other hand: the latter a pointed reference to South Vietnamese perception of unfettered capitalism as exploitative and counter-traditional. In addition, Vietnamese were positioned for a fusion of Eastern and Western values because “our people have

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and other reasons. As far as I can determine, the majority of writers for *Native Land* were strong anticommunists and the publications in the magazine betrayed a solidly anticommunist line. Besides Tran Thuc Lich were two underground communist members: Vu Hanh, a member of the NLF; and Pham Xuan An, a reporter for *Time* that was revealed after the war to be a communist spy. Both, however, contributed very little to the monthly.

<sup>57</sup> Hoang Kim Dan, “Y Kien: De Mo Dau” [Opinion: As an Opening], *Que Huong* [Native Land] 1 (July 1959): 4.

received the greatest influences from the exemplary civilizations of the world.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, *Native Land* “believed in the widespread and effective education of the people about concepts of liberty and democracy... in the emergent leadership, the growing intelligentsia, in thinkers, in scholars and writers and artists, in the young generation [of Vietnamese] reaching towards the future with brilliant hopes.”<sup>59</sup> As found in a response to a reader’s question about the “purpose of *Native Land*,” the monthly sought to “present issues related to the construction of our New Nation” and “find a path appropriate to our people.”<sup>60</sup>

To put it another way, the journal aimed at discussing short- and long-term postcolonial issues and influencing the small but important educated class of South Vietnamese. To balance the anticommunist pieces, for examples, it published a small number of articles about Personalism, such as two short back-to-back pieces about “Personalism in Vietnam” and “parallels in Confucian and Christian social theories.”<sup>61</sup> More frequent were articles about the international communism and the Cold War,

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<sup>58</sup> Hoang Kim Dan, “Y Kien,” 8-9.

<sup>59</sup> Hoang Kim Dan, “Y Kien,” 10.

<sup>60</sup> “Hop Thu *Que Huong*” [The correspondence box of *Native Land*], *Que Huong* 6 (December 1959): 225.

<sup>61</sup> Nguyen Sa Tran Bich Lan, “Phong Trao Nhan Vi o Viet Nam” [The Personalist Movement in Vietnam], *Que Huong* 4 (October 1959): 19-23; Huynh Huu Nghia, “Tim Hieu Nhung Diem Tuong Dong ve Ly Thuyet Xa Hoi cua Khong Giao va Thien Chua Giao” [Understanding the Parallels in Social Theory between Confucianism and Christianity], *Que Huong* 4 (October 1959): 24-32. A third example is published in the inaugural issue: an article from an attorney that compared “Western democracy” and “Vietnamese Personalism.” Characteristic of publications about Personalism, he did not say much about doctrine at all, but argued for the superiority of Personalism by claiming that Western democracy “pursued materialism” while the “Southeast Asian tradition stressed spiritual values.” At the same time, he contended that the RVN shared the same “democratic ideal” with the Western nations. But it differed from them in “democratic technique” because the situation of South Vietnam was very different from those countries. Because of the different situation, the Saigon government had to impose restraints on the citizenship. It stressed, however, that these restraints were “due to the situation” and only “temporary.” See Tran Van Minh, “Thu Sach Dan Chu Tu Do Tay Phuong va Dan Chu Nhan Vi cua Viet Nam Cong Hoa” [An Attempt to Compare Free Democracy of the West and Personalist Democracy of the Republic of Vietnam], *Que Huong* 1 (July 1959): 19-30.

especially those related the Soviet Union such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Kremlin's involvement in Asia and Latin America, Soviet academic programs in Oriental Studies as a cultural Cold War instrument, and contradictions and problems within the Sino-Soviet relationship. Many articles concerned economic, political, and legal topics, such as the roles of technicians in the RVN's economic expansion, agricultural production in the countryside, the relationship between the executive and the legislative branches of government, and the roles of the National Assembly in decolonizing and newly independent countries. On cultural matters, the monthly published on subjects such as the education reform, the censorship of motion pictures as related to children, the cultures of India and Japan, and differences of emphasis in Western and Eastern arts. There were reviews of Vietnamese and foreign books, and poetry and fiction in both original and translation. Most issues also carried a section of news items on cultural activities in South Vietnam and the world.

The above context is important in order to understand the place that the U.S. held in the imagination of the noncommunist South Vietnamese postcolonial mind. That is to say, the U.S. was not unimportant to this mindset, but it was not a primary leading force either. A survey of *Native Land* shows that the periodical was preoccupied with a search for a path between communism and capitalism to work out issues and problems related to South Vietnam's postcolonial national development. In this search, the journal's contributors studied and debated the experiences and ideologies of Western and non-Western noncommunist countries, especially the newly independent ones. This tendency was further emphasized in the eighth issue of the magazine, when it began to carry the first articles of each issue under the headline "searching for an appropriate democracy for

underdeveloped Asian and African countries.”<sup>62</sup> Under this broad heading, the articles discussed and debated issues that were of both domestic and international import, and that were both specific and theoretical in content. A few articles, such as one on the development of officials and cadres in underdeveloped countries that cited classical Chinese figures, carried few references to any countries because they traveled in high abstraction.<sup>63</sup> But most articles, including several in the same issue, incorporated and weighed on examples from other newly postcolonial countries. Thus, for instance, there was an article about the enlargement of urban areas for the purpose of greater industrialization, which cited several examples from India. The next article, on political and economic conflicts, drew from an array of Western and Eastern countries but especially Russia, China, Yugoslavia, and Egypt. It concluded that similar to these four countries, the Vietnamese peasantry was passive for revolutionary changes and the leadership must have come from the urbanites.<sup>64</sup> Elsewhere, the monthly explained the roles of the Indian government for the country’s new five-year economic plan; discussed the problem of national unity among newly independent nations and considered the cases of India, Indonesia, and Pan-Arabism; reported on the situation of newly independent

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<sup>62</sup> In Vietnamese: *Di Tim Mot Con Duong Loi Dan Chu Thich Hop voi Cac Nuoc Cham Tien A Phi*. “Cac nuoc cham tien A Phi” means literally “slow-growth Asian and African countries.” The headline came from the title of an article published two issues earlier.

<sup>63</sup> Vuong Van Bac, “Van De Can Bo tai Cac Nuoc Cham Tien” [The Issue of Cadres in Underdeveloped Countries], *Que Huong* 22 (April 1961): 23-32 and 24 (June 1961): 29-47.

<sup>64</sup> Tran Van Dinh, “Van De Hoach Dinh Chinh Trang Lanh Tho tai Cac Nuoc A Chau” [The Issue of Determining and Reorganizing Territories in Asian Countries], *Que Huong* 22 (April 1961): 33-44. Hoai Nhan, “Luc Luong Cach Mang trong Cac Xa Hoi Cham Tien” [Revolutionary Forces in Underdeveloped Societies], *Que Huong* 22 (April 1961): 45-48d and 23 (May 1961): 29-47.



African countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco; or Mideast ones such as Israel, Syria, and Saudi Arabia.<sup>65</sup>

Not surprisingly, Southeast Asia was frequently featured and referenced to, as demonstrated by an article from Nguyen Cao Hach that ran for several issues and addressed the debate on culture and development.<sup>66</sup> As noted above, India figured prominently in the collective intellectual imagination of the writers. The significance could be gleaned through the title of a comprehensive article about the South Asian country: “Can India be the fortress of Free Asia?” Its conclusion – that an “Indian success would mean the victory of freedom and a victory for ourselves” – confirmed the symbolic attachment to India in the mind of many elite urban South Vietnamese.<sup>67</sup> The country came up in unexpected places, such as an editorial commentary for a special issue on education. The commentary, unsigned but probably written by Nguyen Cao Hach, warned again the danger of technical expertise at the exclusion of moral values, which many Vietnamese thought to be the case with Western education. For an alternative inspiration, the commentary exemplified Tagore’s efforts at starting elementary and secondary schools in rural India during colonialism.<sup>68</sup> Finally, although most Latin

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<sup>65</sup> Hoai Nhan, “Vai Tro cua Chinh Quyen trong Viec Thi Hanh Chuong Trinh Phat Trien Thu Bai tai An Do” [The Roles of the Government in Executing the Third Program of Development in India], *Que Huong* 18 (December 1960): 33-38. Nguyen Huu Chi, “Cac Tan Quoc Gia truoc Van De Thong Nhat” [New Nations Before the Issue of Unity], *Que Huong* 45 (March 1963): 17-28. Tran Van Minh, “Hien Tinh Cac Nuoc Cham Tien Phi Chau” [The Situation in Underdeveloped African Countries], *Que Huong* 10 (April 1960): 1-36. Phan Trong Quy, “Hien Tinh Kinh Te Can Trung Dong” [The Economic Situation in the Middle East], *Que Huong* 10 (April 1960): 37-48.

<sup>66</sup> The first installment is Nguyen Cao Hach, “Van Hoa Dong Nam A la Dong Luc hay Chuong Ngai cho Phat Trien?” [Are Southeast Asian Cultures a Force or a Hindrance to Development?], *Que Huong* 8 (February 1960): 54-62.

<sup>67</sup> Tan Phong, “An Do Co The La Mot Thanh Tri cua The Gioi Tu Do o A Chau Duoc Khong?” [Can India Be a Fortress for the Free World in Asia?], *Que Huong* 40 (October 1962): 87-113.

<sup>68</sup> “Quan Diem: Giao Duc Nham Muc Tieu Nao?” [Perspective: What Are the Aims of Education?], *Que Huong* 31 (January 1962): v-xxii.

American countries were not newly independent, their developing status drew some attention from the contributors to the monthly.<sup>69</sup>

Where did the U.S. stand in the postcolonial discourse on the pages of *Native Land*? The number of articles devoted to the U.S. was, of course, well behind those about developing and underdeveloped countries. Generally, the U.S. appeared on the pages of *Native Land* not as its own subject but as part of a larger discussion. Indeed, sometimes the U.S. appeared marginal or even non-existent in some discussions, likely due to the unfamiliarity of the South Vietnamese with American tradition and history. An article that compared Western and Eastern cultures, for example, stated that Western societies were built on the foundation of equality, fraternity, and liberty: a Francophile rather than American view of modern democracy. To support its claims, the article either cited or invoked Shakespeare, Samuel Butler, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Rembrandt, and Corot in addition to a number of Chinese and Vietnamese literary works. In contrast, there was nothing about the American tradition and experience. The only time that America was mentioned, the article mistook the British Butler for an American.

On the other hand, there were occasional articles on diplomatic relations with the U.S. and the American political-economic system. Among the topics covered were American labor unions, U.S. private investment in South Vietnam, and problems between the U.S. and Latin America, to name a few.<sup>70</sup> Elsewhere, Le Dinh Chieu, a professor of

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<sup>69</sup> For examples, Tran Khai, "Tim Hieu Nhung Khuynh Huong Chinh Tri tai cac Quoc Gia thuoc My La Tinh" [Learning about Political Leanings in Latin American Countries], *Que Huong* 34 (April 1962): 85-94; Tran Van Kien, "Chinh Tri va Phat Trien Kinh Te: Truong Hop A Can Dinh" [Politics and Economic Development: The Case of Argentina], *Que Huong* 34 (April 1962): 95-107.

<sup>70</sup> Nghiem Phu Luu, "Thu Tim Hieu Luc Luong Tho Thuyen Tai My: Nhung Ghi Xet Tong Quat ve Mot Cuoc Dinh Cong" [Trying to Learn about American Labor Force: Some General Notes on a Strike], *Que Huong* 12 (June 1960): 279-296. Tran Van Kien, "Tu Ban Tu Nhan Hoa Ky va Phat Trien Kinh Te tai Viet Nam" [U.S. Private Capitalists and Economic Development in Vietnam], *Que Huong* 23 (May 1961):

law and economics and later a Supreme Court justice, wrote about Walt Rostow.<sup>71</sup> The U.S., after all, was too important to ignore even if due to earlier unfamiliarity. Over time, the “book review” section, which tended to be European in orientation (as many other periodicals), published more and more summaries and reviews of novels and books from American authors.<sup>72</sup> There were translations of American fiction, such as short stories by John O’Hara. Most visible, however, was the “news” section, which reported frequently on U.S. activities, especially its role in the Cold War in Europe and especially Asia. Some of the reports were neutral in tone: that is, when they stuck to summarizing events and quoting U.S. officials. Commentaries were usually positive and approving, especially when the U.S. stood firm against communism. The same was largely true about the articles. “A soft stance from the U.S. at this time,” declared an article about the Cuban Missile Crisis, “would have endangered the free world, which of course includes [South] Vietnam.”<sup>73</sup>

But there were occasions when the opinion was more subdued or ambivalent. This was apparent in the very first article of the very first issue: a review and evaluation of the work of John Foster Dulles on the occasion of his death.<sup>74</sup> The author was Mac Do: a non-practicing attorney, playwright, contributor to the Hanoi Law School’s *Popular*,

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1-15. Tran Van Kien, “Nhung Kho Khan cua Hoa Ky tai My La Tinh” [Difficulties of the U.S. in Latin America], *Que Huong* 23 (May 1961): 140-148.

<sup>71</sup> Le Dinh Chieu, “Tinh Hinh The Gioi duoi Mat Giao Su Walt W. Rostow” [The State of the World under the Eyes of Professor Walt W. Rostow], *Que Huong* 23 (May 1961): 128-139; and 24 (June 1961): 80-93.

<sup>72</sup> For example, Trinh Xuyen, “Mua Gat Van Nghe 60-62 cua My Quoc” [The Harvesting Season 1960-1962 of American Arts], *Que Huong* 43 (January 1963): 221-237.

<sup>73</sup> Anh Viet, “Thu Tim Hieu Thai Do Cuong Quyet cua Hoa Ky trong Vu Cuba” [Trying to Understand the Firm Stance of the U.S. in the Case of Cuba], *Que Huong* 41 (November 1962): 26.

<sup>74</sup> Mac Do, “Truoc va Sau Dam Tang cua John Foster Dulles” [Before and After the Funeral of John Foster Dulles], *Que Huong* 1 (July 1959): 11-18.

member of Nghiem Xuan Hong's intellectual group Viewpoint, and translator of Western fiction, including Ernest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*. Measured in its tone, the article considered the late Secretary of State to have possessed two traits – forcefulness and patience – that worked well for U.S. policies of containment and rollback. It described his advocacy of rollback and massive retaliation, expressed admiration at his diplomatic travels, and enumerated his successes and failures. It considered his case unusual because Dulles received intense criticism from both “the oppressed class” and the “leading class”: the former a reference to Eastern European disappointment in American non-intervention in the Hungarian Revolution; the latter, to French and British unhappiness with U.S. non-intervention in the Suez Canal. The article concluded with the hope that his death would mark an “appropriate” adjustment to a recent shift from emphasizing ideological differences between East and West, to a more practical competition in the realm of economy and commerce.

Except for a brief reference to U.S. non-intervention in Dien Bien Phu, Mac Do's article did not discuss Dulles in regard to South Vietnam: a curious omission. Its take on Dulles left a generally mixed impression: a broadly positive assessment of Washington, but also an ambivalence about the conduct of U.S. policies as personified by the rigidity of the late Secretary. Mac Do's article suggested also that South Vietnamese anticommunists welcomed the presence of the U.S. in regional and global affairs, but were also watchful of Washington desire to dominate smaller countries. Further illustrating this attitude was a review of the best-selling political novel *The Ugly American* by Eugene Burdick and William Lederer. Written by Tu Chung, a vocally anticommunist journalist subsequently assassinated by the NLF in the mid-1960s, the

long review gave the background of the authors and the novel and a summary of the plot. It then provided a summary of favorable and unfavorable views from American critics and politicians on the controversial work, especially Senator William Fulbright's scathing criticism of the book as dishonest, irresponsible, and "shallow." Finally, it offered the reviewer's own opinion.<sup>75</sup> Although he reported Fulbright's criticism at length, Tu Chung agreed more with the *New York Times* review that the book mocked the U.S. but also "awoke" Americans towards more effective action in their fight against international communism. He argued that Burdick and Lederer were not economic specialists and the "proposals" in the novel might have sounded simplistic. But they certainly carried an important goodwill to fix and improve problems between the U.S. and their third-world anticommunist allies. Most importantly, he defended the authors for implying the need for the U.S. to be sensitive in the ways they provided aid to smaller countries. "*The Ugly American* knows that giving money is easy to do," he wrote,

but finding ways to contribute to the work and to energize [the aid recipient] would be a lot more difficult and [yet] more respectful of the dignity [of the smaller country]. *Giving aid and yet making the aid recipient feel they did not have the right to receive, would only lead to discomfort later on.* On this psychological point, it could be said that the authors were not shallow at all. (Original emphasis.)<sup>76</sup>

Tu Chung's point underscored the historical and cultural sensitivity on the part of noncommunist South Vietnamese towards the Americans. It was likely the result of an ideological assertion of nationalism and a diplomatic if anxious desire to be treated as an equal partner rather than a former colonial country. It also indicated a major issue that crossed the Cold War and postcolonialism: U.S. foreign aid. This issue showed up

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<sup>75</sup> Tu Chung, "Diem Sach: *Nguoi My Sau Xi*" [Book Review: *The Ugly American*], *Que Huong* 5 (November 1959): 203-216.

<sup>76</sup> Tu Chung, "Diem Sach: *Nguoi My Sau Xi*": 215.

throughout the run of *Native Land*, including a report about John Kennedy's presidential inauguration that came fourteen months after Tu Chung's book review. This report was divided into three parts: a description of the event as well as a translation of Kennedy's inaugural address; selected editorial comments from major newspapers throughout the noncommunist world; and a section on the new administration's aid policy to underdeveloped countries.<sup>77</sup> The report contended that U.S. aid policy had so far failed to alleviate the poverty of these countries, and noted that a recent conference of African nations in Dakar had placed conditions *on the aid provider*. "The situation on foreign aid has been turned upside down," claimed the report. "The clumsiness about foreign aid," it continued, "would prompt the losses of small countries for the West as they would turn to the East." Moreover, this switch might "alter not only the hierarchy of technical and monetary aid but also political system." The report quoted approvingly the Guinean president Ahmed Sékou Touré that "underdeveloped countries today expressed the will to be poor in liberty than rich in slavery." "On the issue of aid," it stated, "the strong nations should be very attentive to the nationalist character [of the countries] that they want to help."<sup>78</sup> It then turned to the newly inaugurated administration and applauded Kennedy's recommendation to avoid giving small countries U.S. superfluous goods and, instead, providing them with machineries and equipments for their own production. "If implemented correctly and widely in the next four years," it intoned, "President

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<sup>77</sup> "Hy Vong Moi" [A New Hope], *Que Huong* 20 (February 1961): 272-287. This report was placed under a regular and unsigned feature on global news.

<sup>78</sup> "Hy Vong Moi," 284.

Kennedy's policy of foreign aid would lead to applause from the recipient countries and shredding their inferiority complex."<sup>79</sup>

This concern for Washington's respect of developing and underdeveloped countries showed up elsewhere in the monthly. On the one hand, the monthly recognized American generosity and, equally importantly, the superiority of the U.S. system and mechanics for foreign aid over the Soviet system.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, it pointed at real and potential occasions for over-dominating the smaller countries. As an article on Washington's problems in Latin America remarked, "Generally, we could say that the majority of difficulties stumbled upon by the U.S., have come from the lack of working together with [indigenous] democratic forces, not from an unsupportive attitude."<sup>81</sup> The wariness was further complicated by an occasional desire on the part of some writers for neutrality from the Free and Communist Worlds in the Cold War. Opining about the emerging "co-existence" between the U.S. and the USSR, for instance, one article expressed the wish that the superpowers left Vietnam alone.<sup>82</sup> While this opinion was clearly in the minority, it indicated another measure of frustration about the impact of the

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<sup>79</sup> "Hy Vong Moi," 285.

<sup>80</sup> Dao Quang Huy, "Vien Tro Nga So va Vien Tro Hoa Ky cho Cac Quoc Gia Nhuoc Tieu" [Soviet and American Aid to Underdeveloped Countries], *Que Huong* 43 (January 1963): 134-147. The author applauded the mix of public and private aid from the U.S. and, in contrast, considered the government-only Soviet system less substantial. "The U.S. divides its aid," wrote he, "among almost all aspects related to the life of underdeveloped countries: agriculture, heavy industries, light industries, society, military, culture, the arts, etc., while Soviet aid emphasized only heavy industries" (146).

<sup>81</sup> Tran Van Kien, "Nhưng Kho Khan của Hoa Kỳ tại My La Tinh": 148.

<sup>82</sup> Nguyen Phan Chau, "A Chau voi Ke Hoach Cong Ton Nga My" [Asia and the Co-Existence Plan of Russia and America], *Que Huong* 6 (December 1959): 115-121. Not surprisingly, India was held as the possible alternative to postcolonial development amidst the bipolar Cold War. "If the Indian experiment would be successful," a contributor exhorted hopefully, "the country can move beyond the situation of underdevelopment through a path other than communism: the path of planning yet still respectful of freedom and democracy." See Tan Phong, "An Do Co The La Mot Thanh Tri": 113.

Cold War on postcolonial South Vietnam as well as ambivalence about U.S. involvement there.

### **Pro-Americanism in the semi-private sector: *Vietnamese and American***

In addition to publications from or affiliated to the Saigon government, there was information about and promotion of the U.S. offered in publications from different sources in the private sector. They merit our attention because at least some of them offered a more strongly pro-American attitude. As discussed previously, the series *Learning To Be Human* consistently offered positive assessment of many American figures and at least some American ideas. While it was not exclusively about Americans, it played an important role in acquainting urban South Vietnamese to at least some of American ideas about the person. Below is an examination of two Saigon periodicals readily available to the urban South Vietnamese population.

The first was possibly the most pro-American periodical distributed among educated urban South Vietnamese: the bilingual quarterly of the Vietnamese-American Friendship Association (Hoi Viet-My). Appropriately called *Vietnamese and American* (*Viet My*), it probably received funding from the USIS or the CIA and ran continuously from 1956 to the mid-1970s. Founded in 1955 as a private organization, the Association itself was co-directed by an American and a Vietnamese. Its purpose, as described by the executive director in 1957, was “to foster better understanding between the peoples of Vietnam and the United States” through activities such as teaching English to Vietnamese and Vietnamese to Americans. The Association also offered “lectures, films, exhibits, tours, and special social events which bring both nationalities together on an informal and



friendly plane.”<sup>83</sup> Lectures were given mostly by Westerners and on a host of topics and current issues, such as (to cite a quarterly calendar in 1962) “popular education and the land grant colleges in the United States,” “the Brussels World Fair through color slides,” and “the needs of primary education in Asia.”<sup>84</sup> On occasions, Vietnamese speakers graced the podium to talk in Vietnamese about the U.S., such as a Catholic priest on “the happiness of Americans” and the wife of the RVN’s Vice President Nguyen Ngoc Tho on personal “observations about American life” after a goodwill tour of the U.S.<sup>85</sup> At least once a month, several documentaries were screened, carrying titles such as “Astronaut [Alan] Shepard Reports on Space,” “President Kennedy’s News Conference No. 18,” “Forging the Alliance,” and “Fundamentals of Tennis.”<sup>86</sup> Among other regular events were concerts of classical, jazz, or Christmas music; a class in public speaking and “dramatics” (presumably aimed at Vietnamese); and orientations for newly arrived Americans to South Vietnam.<sup>87</sup> The Association organized several drama, dance, and public speaking clubs. In 1959 alone, it presented a production of *Arsenic and Old Lace* at the venerable Norodom Theatre, showed personal collection slideshows about the U.S. and other countries, and played taped concerts of American every morning.<sup>88</sup> Other hobby-oriented groups drew people interested in painting, photography, and stamp

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<sup>83</sup> “Letter: From George F Schultz to ‘American Friends of Vietnam’ concerning the journal *Viet My* (08 May 1957),” Box 15, Folder 36, Douglas Pike Collection: Other Manuscripts - American Friends of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. (Hereafter abbreviated as Pike AFV.)

<sup>84</sup> “Lich Hoat Dong Tam Ca Nguyet I, 1962” [Activity Calendar: First Quarter of 1962] *Viet My* [Vietnamese and American] VII: 1 (March 1962): 30.

<sup>85</sup> “Hoat Dong Van Hoa: Thang Bay, 1960 den Thang Hai, 1961” [Cultural Activities: July 1960 to February 1961], *Viet My* VI:1 (March 1961): 51.

<sup>86</sup> “Lich Hoat Dong Tam Ca Nguyet I, 1962”: 31.

<sup>87</sup> “Newsletter of the Vietnamese-American Association (December 1, 1958), Box 15, Folder 36, Pike AFV.

<sup>88</sup> “Newsletter of the Vietnamese-American Association (July 1, 1959), Box 15, Folder 36, Pike AFV.

collection group. There were also discussion groups, including one led by Douglas Pike and his wife, that met to discuss political and literary classics such as *The Federalist*, *The Constitution of the United States*, *Democracy in America*, *The Communist Manifesto*, Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience* and *Walden*, and *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.<sup>89</sup> Most of these events were held at the headquarters in Saigon: a modern and two-unit multi-stories building equipped with fifteen classrooms, a library, a movie hall, and a large reception hall, among others.<sup>90</sup> There were monthly coffee hours that facilitated meetings and conversations between Vietnamese and Americans.

From all appearances, the Vietnamese-American Association was a major urban promoter of South Vietnamese goodwill towards the U.S. This promotion is easily seen from a survey of issues published in the early 1960s. Each issue carried three to six articles, sometimes in both Vietnamese and English. Articles were aimed at introducing American readers to Vietnamese life, tradition, and culture; and, vice versa, Vietnamese to American life, society, and culture. On the Vietnamese side, typical subjects were "eight precious dishes," "street vendors in Saigon," the Vietnamese traditional feast day of "wandering souls," a classic Vietnamese epic poem, the northern migration of 1954-1955, and the experience of a Vietnamese college student in Oklahoma. On the American side were short pieces on subjects such as the State of Minnesota, the poet Carl Sandburg, the Old West painter Frederic Remington, the modern American novel, the American community theater, American local government, and "American business as art patron." Each issue carried a section on recent activities of the Association. Gracing the pages of

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<sup>89</sup> "Lich Hoat Dong Tam Ca Nguyet I, 1962": 31-33.

<sup>90</sup> "Vietnamese-American Association Moves to New Headquarters" and "Vice-President Inaugurates New VIET-MY Center" from *Times of Viet Nam* (24 August 1957 and 28 September 1957), Box 15, Folder 36, Pike AFV.

each issue was a generous amount of photographs that implemented the content of individual articles or illustrated the activities of the Association.

Given the aims and activities of the Association, it was hardly a surprise that the tone of the articles was friendly and upbeat on the whole. The content aimed to show the positive aspects of American life, and it sounded optimistic and even inspirational. Taking a page from *Learning To Be Human*, some articles centered on accomplished individuals, such as Sandburg and Remington. But even articles on institutions also sometimes highlighted individual achievements as reflective of the American ideal. An article on news coverage in the U.S., for instance, described the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, pointed out that it was founded by Joseph Pulitzer, and quoted him as in favor of “progress and reform,” intolerance of “injustice or corruption,” and devotion to “the public welfare,” among others.<sup>91</sup> This example illustrated a goal of American-centric articles: to celebrate the economic system that enabled many individual achievements on the one hand, and the civic spirit of the American society on the other hand. Another instance of the celebratory purpose could be found in an article that defended the free market. “Whatever the very conspicuous consumption of the very few may be,” argued the author, “redistribution of income would in reality achieve little of its avowed purpose.” He praised “economic freedom” for its “spirit of independence and self-reliance” that led to “productive activity”; and also “freedom for individual development and self-expression” for making possible “the best possible climate for creative work.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “News Coverage in the United States,” *Viet My* VI:3 (September 1961): 3.

<sup>92</sup> Gabriel Hague, “America’s Competitive Market System,” *Viet My* VII:3 (September 1962): 24. The article was originally a speech given by Hague at Kenyon College in 1957. It was reprinted perhaps because the language was not too difficult for the English-reading Vietnamese to understand, and because it reflected the quarterly’s strongly pro-American ideology.

Other contributors might have shown this celebratory purpose through specific examples. One contributor wrote about the contemporary American theater. He described the decrying sorrow of mainstream American critics about “the death of Broadway” and other professional theater. But he contended that the critics missed out on the large picture of the community theater that, “spreading over the whole country,” was “vigorous, vital, and culturally essential amateur.”<sup>93</sup> The last adjective was not meant as derogatory but a matter of pride. The article provided a brief history of the amateur theater, including the movement for the “little theatre” in the 1910s, and called the “pioneers” of this movement “self-conscious rebels and crusaders.” As such, they belonged to “the great cultural revolt in the America of this period, a revolt against slick commercial success, sentimental gentility, and anything traditional”: a revolt extending to “poetry, the novel, and the graphic arts.”<sup>94</sup> Young and educated urban South Vietnamese, steeped in respect for the modernizing if sometimes “in-your-face” ideological activism of the Self-Strength Literary Group, might have nodded their heads while reading this passage. They might also have found much to like about the evolution of the movement towards the contemporary American community theater. It was where the audience experienced the “electric excitement that leaps back and forth between an audience and real, live, flesh-and-blood actors.” There was also the “pleasure” of knowing “that actor playing the king was really the salesman from whom you bought your insurance,” or “that young girl looking so lovely as the princess – on weekdays you saw her bicycling to

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<sup>93</sup> Frank H. Durham, “The Lively Ghost: The American Community Theatre,” *Viet My* VI:4 (December 1961): 3.

<sup>94</sup> Durham, “The Lively Ghost”: 6.

the university.”<sup>95</sup> Here and elsewhere on the pages of the quarterly, the U.S. was portrayed as a progressive and democratic nation – and Americans as people possessing both creative individual initiative as well as a firm civic and communal spirit.

*Vietnamese and American* aimed to be informative about the U.S. while introducing some Vietnamese topics to its English-reading audience.<sup>96</sup> Its reports on the activities of the Association also gave some indication about the extent of cultural exchanges and interactions between Americans and urban elite South Vietnamese. But because much of its content was English, its reach to must be assumed to be limited. It was free to its members, whose numbers were rather small. A list of membership in Hue, for instance, showed that there were thirty-six Americans and just over two hundred Vietnamese (including many married couples) in 1962.<sup>97</sup> Another list at the end of the following year showed fewer than three hundred Vietnamese members and fewer than 150 Americans (not counting board members).<sup>98</sup> It was also available for subscription, but the number was likely small.<sup>99</sup> Its quarterly format was less frequent than a monthly or weekly magazine and further limited its influence. Compact and attractive though it was, it had to compete for attention against an array of popular urban periodicals. As it actively promoted and projected a highly positive image about the U.S., it was restrained by the fact that South Vietnamese for the most part were unfamiliar with the country of

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<sup>95</sup> Durham, “The Lively Ghost”: 15.

<sup>96</sup> Besides American readers living in South Vietnam, there were, as suggested by archival records in the Pike Collection, some subscribers in the U.S. While there are no available figures, it is most likely that the American readership was very small.

<sup>97</sup> “Members of the Vietnamese-American Association at Hue,” *My Viet* VII:3 (September 1962): 61-68.

<sup>98</sup> Members of the Saigon Vietnamese-American Association,” *Viet My* VIII:4 (December 1963): 45-59.

<sup>99</sup> To judge from a handful of letters of subscription found in Pike: AFV, it might have drawn more American subscribers in the U.S. than Vietnamese ones in the RVN.

Washington and Lincoln. An example is a short piece written by a non-American called “Why we like America?” As suggested by the title, it was the most pro-American article published in the quarterly during the early 1960s, and it lauded Americans for their idealism, youthful optimism, can-do spirit – and also “because they like us.” The author, however, was not a South Vietnamese but Frenchman: the novelist and biographer André Maurois.<sup>100</sup>

### **Pro-Americanism in the private sector: the semimonthly *Nowadays***

In addition to the reasons above, *Vietnamese and American* was limited in its reach because it was largely devoid of the postcolonial concerns and interests as reflected in *Southern Wind*, *Native Land*, and major periodicals in the private sector. One such periodical was the semimonthly *Nowadays* (*Thoi Nay*), which could be said to have advocated milder form of pro-Americanism in the broader context of postcolonial thinking. It began publication in 1959, merely three months after *Native Land*. Though shorter than *Native Land* – each issue had about 140 pages – it came out twice instead of once a month. This was significant because in Republican Saigon, the semimonthly was a popular format among major magazines.<sup>101</sup> Many weeklies targeted lower-class readers with soap opera-like fiction, school-age children with cartoons and detective stories, or professionals with discussions and debates related to their particular fields. The monthlies, on the other hand, geared to political and cultural matters in the likes of *Native*

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<sup>100</sup> André Maurois, “Tai Sao Chung Ta Thich Nguoi My?” [Why Do We Like Americans?], *Viet My* [Vietnam and America] 8:4 (December 1963): 14-16. This was a translation of an article published in the French popular monthly *Réalités* in 1959.

<sup>101</sup> To avoid confusion with magazines published once every two months, I use “semimonthly” instead of “bimonthly.”

*Land*. In between were semimonthlies often aimed at a middle-class educated readership (and working-class aspirants to the middle class). Their frequency was appealing to writers and readers alike. To writers, it allowed more time for their assigned compositions than did a weekly. To readers, it gave them enough time to consume those compositions but not too long of a wait until the arrival of the next issue. Finally, the book-size format of most semimonthlies (including *Nowadays*) was both handy and stable than some other spreadsheet or semi-spreadsheet periodicals.

As it turned out, *Nowadays* was among the longest-running periodicals of any kind from Republican Saigon. Except for the Tet Offensive, which disrupted the publishing trade in urban South Vietnam, it was published continuously until the very month that Saigon fell to the communists. This was significant because there were only two other major semimonthlies that commenced publication in the 1950s and lasted until 1975. One was *Variety* (*Bach Khoa*), which began in 1957 and whose regular contributors included Nguyen Hien Le. As described in an earlier chapter, *Variety* was true to its name in carrying a mixed content on culture, politics, economics, and the arts from an array of urban South Vietnamese public intellectuals. It was perhaps the most intellectually prestigious South Vietnamese magazine. The second semimonthly was *Popular* (*Pho Thong*) – not to be confused with the Hanoi Law School’s *Popular* during the early 1950s – under the control and editorship of the poet and journalist Nguyen Vy. He first published it in 1952 only to have ceased production two years later to devote time to his daily *Our People* (*Dan Ta*) and other activities.<sup>102</sup> In late 1958, he began a new edition and edited it until his death in 1971, after which his associates took over

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<sup>102</sup> “*Pho Thong Tap Chi Than Chao Ban Doc*” [*Popular Magazine Welcomes Our Readers*], *Pho Thong* [Popular] 1 (November 1, 1958), 11. Nguyen Vy also published a weekly called *Bong Lua* [Rice Seed], which ceased publication when the new edition of *Pho Thong* began.

publication until the fall of Saigon four years later. Nguyen Vy was well known for his close association with the antebellum Hanoi literary scene as well as his strong noncommunist nationalist credentials. The French authorities put him in jail for a time during the late 1930s for his anti-colonial views. During the Japanese Occupation, he was imprisoned for having published anti-imperialist and anti-Japanese tracts. As a result, *Popular* published on a variety of subjects, but had an emphasis on nationalistic matters such as Vietnamese history, geography, and especially literature. It published also memoirs of Nguyen Vy's upbringing and his literary friends in Hanoi. Finally, reflecting the poetic interest of its editor, it brought out more poems and articles about poets (both Vietnamese and foreign) than *Variety* and *Nowadays*.<sup>103</sup>

In relative contrast to *Variety* and *Popular*, the contributors at *Nowadays* were not established authors like Nguyen Vy and Nguyen Hien Le but mostly young college and high school graduates and students. Its publisher was Nguyen Van Thai, a Catholic from Hue and born in 1927. Thai obtained a degree in English (probably in Vietnam) before attending University of Michigan for graduate courses in the same subject.<sup>104</sup> In Republican Saigon, he worked variously as an attaché to the RVN's Ministry of Information, a correspondent for Reuter, a publisher for the daily *Times of Vietnam*, publisher and editor of a Vietnamese-language daily and two weeklies, and lecturer on journalism at Universities of Hue and Dalat and the Van Hanh University in Saigon. He also founded the Association of Vietnamese Professional Journalists (Hiep Hoi Chuyen

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<sup>103</sup> Nguyen Vy was occasionally involved in government. In 1952, he was elected Dalat's council president in 1952. After Diem's demise, he was member of the Council of Notables to advise the military government from the end of 1963 to 1964. In the late 1960s, he served for two years as a judge for the RVN's Presidential Awards for Literature and Culture.

<sup>104</sup> It is not clear whether he obtained a formal degree from University of Michigan.



Nghiep Bao Chi Viet Nam) and served as its president.<sup>105</sup> Other activities confirmed his credentials as a mainstream journalist: for instances, his participation in the first Asian Press Seminar, which was sponsored by the RVN's Council on Foreign Relations and brought together journalists from thirteen noncommunist Asian countries in 1970; and his election to an important committee for the Vietnamese Press Convention in the same year.<sup>106</sup> Government-related that some of his activities were, there is no evidence that his publication was anything but a product of the private sector.

It is not clear how Thai came to found *Nowadays*, but right from the start he obtained an office on the same street as the office of Nguyen Vy's semimonthly, separated by only a few houses.<sup>107</sup> Possibly because he had envisioned *Nowadays* to be part of a larger cultural project, Thai was not listed as "publisher" but "director" of the magazine. For the first dozen issues, Tran Nha was listed as "editor": most likely, a penname of Thai or his associate Khanh Giang. The latter's real name was Huynh Van Khoa (1937-2003), and he had graduated from a French-language high school in Dalat.<sup>108</sup> In early 1960, both Tran Nha's name and title were dropped from the masthead, replaced by Khanh Giang as "office secretary." The title belied the more active roles of Khanh Giang, who was the only regular presence in the office other than Thai. Most likely,

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<sup>105</sup> *Nhan Vat Viet Nam* [Who's Who of Vietnam] (Saigon, 1973), 797-798. The entry on Thai did not give the years of his various activities. According to the writer Song Thao, Thai was still living in Saigon as by 2009 and in near-blind condition. Regrettably, my effort to get in touch with him for an interview has failed thus far.

<sup>106</sup> "Asian Press Seminar '70" (April 1970), Box 20, Folder 24, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 10; "Press Convention Elects Pact Drafting Committee," *Viet-Nam Bulletin* IV:4 (March 29 - April 4, 1970): 7 (copy found in Box 01, Folder 04, Michael R. Potaski Collection, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University).

<sup>107</sup> "Le Bao Hoang Phong Van Nha Van Song Thao Ngay 11/7/2006" [Le Bao Hoang Interviews Song Thao, July 11, 2006], the website *Song Thao*: <http://www.songthao.com/phongvan-lebaohoang.htm>. A regular contributor to *Nowadays*, Song Thao's real name is Ta Son Trung and currently lives in Montreal.

<sup>108</sup> Personal email correspondence with Ta Trung Son (Song Thao), March 25, 2009.

Khanh Giang served as co-editor with Thai and recruiter of contributors to the budding magazine. Through a mutual friend, for instance, he met a student at the School of Literature of the University of Saigon by the name of Trung Son Ta, who was never formally trained in journalism but soon began to contribute regularly under the penname Song Thao and three other pennames. This lack of training was true about other contributors, except for Ha Tuc Dao, who received a bachelor's degree in journalism at University of Dalat and later wrote a master's thesis under Thai's direction.<sup>109</sup> The lack of formal training for most contributors did not deter the enthusiasm of the contributors and the organization of the publisher. By early 1960, the masthead was expanded to include nine "regular contributors," with six put in charge of the following categories: travel, science, youth, fiction, sports, and poetry.

The categories were intended towards a targeted readership. Unlike Nguyen Vy whose long experience in publishing oriented him to aim *Popular* at a broad audience, Thai aimed at young educated readers, especially students and young civil servants.<sup>110</sup> In the welcoming message of the inaugural issue, the magazine stated, "Our foremost goal is to create a bridge among people of all classes, *especially young Vietnamese men and women*, so that together we learn and understand about ourselves as well as about the wide world around us" (emphasis mine). It quickly added, however, that "our view on 'the young' is not limited to men and women around twenty years old, but including older people but still possessing a 'youthful spirit.'"<sup>111</sup> Published letters from readers in subsequent issues indicated that this goal was achieved for the most part. "I don't

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<sup>109</sup> Personal email correspondence with Ta Trung Son (Song Thao), March 25 and May 7, 2009.

<sup>110</sup> "Le Bao Hoang Phong Van Nha Van Song Thao Ngay 11/7/2006." Song Thao added that it was common to see readers following both magazines.

<sup>111</sup> "Loi Than Chao" [Welcoming Greeting], *Thoi Nay* [Nowadays] 1 (September 1, 1959), 3.

understand why the articles in *Nowadays* are unusually alluring,” wrote a reader from Dalat, “I finished one article only to want to read the next one, and like that read the entire issue.” “If I were not mistaken,” wrote a college student in Saigon, “*Nowadays* features many new writers with unfamiliar pennames, but [their articles] were very charming.” “I like not just any article in issue #1 of *Nowadays*,” went a third letter, “but all of them.” Some letters were more critical: a married engineer in Saigon, for instance, remarked that his wife found the first issue “lacking of articles for women readers” and suggested the magazine publish “more about women.”<sup>112</sup> On the whole, however, the praise outweighed the critics. In the absence of sales or subscription figures, the letters suggested that Thai’s semimonthly quickly gained a solid base readership that enabled its longevity.

One reason for its appeal was the format, which was not unlike the American *Reader’s Digest* or the French *Sélection*. Similar to *Popular*, the articles in *Nowadays* were typically shorter than the articles in *Variety* or *Native Land*. The limited length enabled *Nowadays* to run as many articles as either of these magazines. While the language of most articles was serious, it was more accessible than the language in *Variety* or *Native Land*. Its tone verged towards the youthful, supplemented by features that appealed to youth and young adults, such as puzzles (with prizes for first correct responses from readers), a column on new stamps and stamp collecting, and a free service for pen pals and personal ads. As indicated by the letters, however, the biggest draw was the subject matters. In part, they were a result of the sources used by the contributors. As told by the contributor Song Thao, Nguyen Van Thai “subscribed to many foreign

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<sup>112</sup> “Ban Doc Phe Binh *Thoi Nay*” [Reader’s Opinions on *Nowadays*], *Thoi Nay* 2 (September 15, 1959): back inside cover.

magazines,” purchased bought many foreign books, and made them readily available to his writers. Sometimes, he and Khanh Giang assigned an entire book or magazine to a writer for a particular article. (Indeed, one of the occasional features of the magazine was article-length “digested books,” a borrowing from *Reader’s Digest* and similar Western periodicals.) Song Thao was responsible for a column called “The World Under Vietnamese Eyes,” and often drew his sources from American and European popular periodicals such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *Paris Match* – plus newsletters from various embassies in Saigon.<sup>113</sup>

As a result of its purpose and sources, *Nowadays* offered many articles that were youth-oriented in topics and content. Romantic love was a common theme, as suggested by titles in the likes of “youth facing life: first love,” “dissecting love,” and translations of “immortal love letters.” On non-romantic matters were many articles that spotlighted young urban South Vietnamese, such as “the youngest member of the National Assembly” and on individual Vietnamese up-and-coming singers (especially female singers) and young professionals. Generational issues were also highlighted, as exemplified by the very first article in the first issue: “Japanese youth today: a passionate generation.” Also highlighted were Hollywood actors and actresses, American and European popular singers, and Western and Asian athletes. Some articles were devoted to Vietnamese writers, including a series on the Self-Strength Literary Group at the start of the run. More frequently featured, though, were Western writers, especially those writing in the romantic or symbolic tradition: Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, Verlaine, Hemingway, Edgar Allen Poe, Saint-Exupéry, and the contemporary French novelist

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<sup>113</sup> Personal email correspondence with Ta Trung Son (Song Thao), April 1, 2009.

Françoise Sagan, among others. Combining the categories of romance and famous authors, there was a series of articles on “the turbulent love life of the great writer...” Playing on a long-standing stereotype, it often featured French authors such as Hugo and Dumas. In addition to writers, the magazine published about athletes, musicians, politicians, scientists, and inventors, among others. Reflecting South Vietnamese postcolonial preoccupation with “great men,” it carried a series called “Maker of Events” (Nguoi Tao Thoi Cuoc) and featured contemporary figures, usually military or political ones, such as the Iraqi general and prime minister Abdul Karim Kassem, the Laotian general Kong Le, and the American admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, and Leonid Brezhnev. Enhancing the decidedly petit bourgeois tone and middlebrow content of the magazine were features such as “one hundred famous novels” and “digested books.” There were also serialized translations of fiction, such as John Le Carré’s Cold War potboiler *The Spy Who Came In From the Cold*.

Besides famous individuals, a common theme was famous places and tourist destinations, which were growing interests among young urban Vietnamese.<sup>114</sup> A few of these destinations were in Indochina, such as the resort town Dalat and the Laotian capital Vientienne. More often, however, they were faraway places: specific sights such as the Taj Mahal, Mount Fuji, and the Eiffel Tower; and larger entities such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Paris, and Amsterdam. One series described military academies, including Saint-Cyr and Saumur in France, Sandhurst and Cranwell in Great Britain, and the Dutch Koninklijke Militaire Academie. Reflecting Cold War concerns, there was a

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<sup>114</sup> One of the regular advertisements run frequently in *Nowadays* during the early 1960s came from the RVN’s Vietnam Airline. It advertised flights of weekend trips from Saigon to Hue and Danang, leaving Saturday and returning on Monday. The trips featured visits to the Nguyen palaces and royal tombs in Hue, a drive through the scenic Hai Van Pass, and swimming at the beaches in Da Nang.

noticeably large amount of articles about the nuclear weapon and the arms race, and space exploration and the space race. Other articles summarized recent discoveries and studies about fish, plants, and other scientific matters. Some articles reported on the Vietnamese economy and society, such as noise in Saigon or a provincial new factory. Others treaded on historical topics, such as the invention and development of paper. A number of pieces leaned towards the sensationalistic when describing crime, spying, and personal politics. In short, the content was a potpourri of subjects and categories.

How did the U.S. figure on the pages of *Nowadays*? While America was hardly the exclusive focus of the semimonthly, the short answer is that it figured more often and more positive than it did in *Native Land*. This was apparent from the inaugural issue that carried three articles about the U.S. The first of these articles appeared after the welcoming message and the article on Japanese youth. Nguyen Van Thai wrote it under a penname, and the title asked the question, “Why do we like the Western movies?” The question, in turn, reflected a concern among many South Vietnamese parents, teachers, and moralists that the movies had the potential to distract children (especially boys and male teenagers) from studies and work, and possibly corrupt them. Thai did not address these concerns directly, or even mention them. Instead, he focused on aesthetic aspects, especially on the criticism that the most Westerns were simplistic in plot. This might have been the case in the past, he contended, but more recently directors had come up with many fine details to make the Westerners more and more attractive. “The old Westerns had died,” he concluded, “The Westerns today are a means for famous directors and great actors to show their talents.” Further, the Westerns “provide the audience with

suspense and enjoyable entertainment in order to escape the plainness of their daily life, [so they get] the ultimate pleasure of experiencing the strongest feelings.”<sup>115</sup>

Had they read this article, some Vietnamese parental figures might become angry at the author for having ignored their concerns. But by shifting from the moral to the psychological, Thai might have struck a positive chord among the young urban readers, who faced mounting pressure about academic, professional, romantic, and marital success. For praising a quintessentially American cultural product, Thai would have scored high points also with U.S. authorities in charge of spreading American goodwill in South Vietnam. They would have liked the second article, written by Khanh Giang about the black singer Harry Belafonte.<sup>116</sup> The article portrayed the then thirty-two-years-old singer as talented but more artistically authentic than his rival, the more famous Elvis Presley. He went to such length as searching for music from the poor and refusing invitation to perform on television. Finally, Belafonte was described to have been especially proud of his skin color while helping to break barriers in the arts, such as co-starring in Hollywood movies with famous white leading actresses. Although he faced discrimination in a number of ways, the article quoted him to have expressed confidence in the U.S. government. Khanh Giang’s article was the kind of content that the U.S.

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<sup>115</sup> Trong Thang, “Tai Sao Ta Thich Xem Phim Cao Boi?” [Why Do We Like Watching Westerns?], *Thoi Nay* 1 (September 1, 1959): 15. Unlike Nguyen Vy, a writer that happened to be a publisher, Thai was not a natural writer and did not publish much in his own semimonthly. This was especially true once the magazine acquired a stable list of regular contributors.

<sup>116</sup> Khanh Giang, “Harry Belafonte: ‘Hon Ngoc Den’ cua Vu Dieu Calypso” [Harry Belafonte: ‘The Black Pearl’ of the Calypso Dance], *Thoi Nay* 1 (September 1, 1959): 30-35. It was the first article in a series called “Nhung Nhan Tai Gia Den”: “Great Black Personalities.”

Information Service would have heartily approved according because it showed a successful and integrationist story of an African-American.<sup>117</sup>

These largely affirmative sentiments about the U.S. manifested throughout the long run of *Nowadays*. Even in articles on darker aspects of the U.S., American society emerged as good and strong. This was the case of the third article in the inaugural issue. It was about the Mafia and was based on the book *Brotherhood of Evil* by the crime author Frederic Sondern, Jr. As expected from the subject, the article carried a slightly sensationalistic tone in addition to somewhat lurid details. It portrayed the illegal organization as long rooted in Sicily and potent in creating havoc on American society and headache for the government. At the same time, it described U.S. officials as determined at ridding the leadership. By assigning the power of the organization to Italy and portraying government officials as dedicated servants, the article could comfortably end the article calling the Mafia an “enemy” of American society. It was a conclusion with which few Vietnamese readers would have disagreed, and it helped to retain the sense that American society was essentially law-abiding except for a tiny minority of troublemakers whose origin was a troubled island far away.<sup>118</sup> This view of a basically good and free America was consistently portrayed in subsequent issues of *Nowadays*. The next eight issues published articles on, among others, the boxer Archie Moore, the singer Josephine Baker, the training of American pilots, the military academies in West Point and Annapolis, the Empire State Building, and Ernest Brocker: the last an

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<sup>117</sup> On the larger issue of Washington’s dealing with international images of American racism during this period, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially 18-151.

<sup>118</sup> “Ket Nghia trong Toi Ac: Dang Cuop Mafia” [Brotherhood in Crime: The Mafia], *Thoi Nay* 1 (September 1, 1959): 110-124.



American famous for capably distinguishing 9000 different smells. There was a serialized feature on learning English vocabulary, called “One Thousand Words in Basic Vocabulary” and overseen Nguyen Van Thai. There were also reviews of new Hollywood movies, usually accompanied by solid recommendation.

It was not the case at all that the semimonthly was infatuated with Americans or America. In early 1960, for instance, it ran an unsigned article on “ten most influential persons in the twentieth century.” Taking the cue from the *Paris Match* and U.S. weekly *Look*, it came up with its own list that had not a single American (unless the naturalized Einstein was counted as American). It proposed another ten names, this time including three Americans – Louis Armstrong, Thomas Edison, and Henry Ford – and asked its readers to choose ten out of twenty.<sup>119</sup> In a list dominated by Europeans, three Americans out of twenty were hardly a proof that that the semimonthly was an unabashed fan of the U.S. Nonetheless, it was undeniable that it was generally in the affirmative when writing about the U.S. Louis Armstrong, for instance, was enthusiastically described in an article as “the ambassador of jazz” while jazz was respectfully endorsed as “America’s quintessential music.”<sup>120</sup> The promotion of the trumpeter went beyond print, as the article ended with a footnote about the date of a program of Armstrong’s music would be selected by the author and played on the radio network of the RVN’s military. This enthusiasm would have pleased immensely Howard Elting, Jr., the

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<sup>119</sup> “10 Nhan Vat co Anh Huong Nhieu Nhat trong The Ky 20” [Ten Most Influential People in the Twentieth Century], *Thoi Nay* 10 (January 15, 1960): 6-14.

<sup>120</sup> Hai Nam, “Su Than Nhat Jaz: Louis Armstrong” [Louis Armstrong, Ambassador of Jazz], *Thoi Nay* 35 (March 1, 1961): 118-122.

counselor at the U.S. Embassy who thought educated South Vietnamese, especially among younger generation, would be drawn to this music.<sup>121</sup>

Aside from Nguyen Van Thai, the enthusiasm for people and things American came from the magazine's cohort of young and energetic contributors. Because they were novices to the publishing scene, Thai made their names appear small at the top of each article, a somewhat contrarian practice that drew attention from at least one reader who wrote to inquire why. Moreover, they almost always eschewed using their real names and published under one or more pseudonyms. The future physician Hoang Binh Ty, for instance, wrote his pieces under the names Do Vinh and Hoang Ha. Besides Khanh Giang, the office secretary went by Linh Khai, Minh Dat, and Bat Tu. Ha Tuc Dao, the lone staff with proper training in journalism, wrote under the *nom de plume* Phan Hoang. Besides using the pen name Song Thao, Ta Son Trung published as Phuong Uyen, Son Nhan, and Ta Suong Phung.<sup>122</sup> And so on. Under the pseudonyms, the young writers churned out one short article after another and gave the readers an impression that they were traveling all over the world and across space and time. A number of readers sent in their own contributions, some of which, as let known in a section called "Magazine's Mailbox," were accepted for publications. To judge from this mailbox, there was no shortage of potential contributors.

The appeal of the U.S. on the pages on *Nowadays* could be attributed partly to the overall policy and the choices made by the publisher and contributors. Although it published poetry regularly – it was rare to find a popular South Vietnamese magazine

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<sup>121</sup> Lisa E. Davenport, *Jazz Diplomacy: Promoting America in the Cold War Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 79.

<sup>122</sup> Personal email correspondence with Ta Trung Son (Song Thao), May 7, 2009.

without at least one or two poems in each issue, and often more – it consciously avoided taking on creative writing. Notwithstanding the articles on “digested books” (which, in any event, were too brief), it aimed not at introducing great literature to readers as *Variety* and *Popular*, but at impressing them with notions about human achievements and societal progress. As stated in an editorial response to a reader’s question about its purpose, the semimonthly “tended towards learning, understanding, and introducing the good and beautiful of our country and foreign countries, and not focusing on the arts and literature.”<sup>123</sup> The “learning” and “introducing” might have been superficial, but they suggested the eagerness to grasp the world on the part of many educated young South Vietnamese from Saigon, Hue, Nha Trang, Can Tho, and other cities and towns. It was a world that they wanted to understand and to thrive in. As revealed in the reader’s letters, they were not always pleased about some particular selections in the magazine. Some readers, for instance, recommended dropping one or more features; others, on the other hand, requested resumption of an old feature. But on the whole they found much to like. As a civil servant wrote from a Deep South province, “I am addicted to *Nowadays* to the point of asking the delivery boy on the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> of the month a dozen of times whether it has arrived.” The magazine, he continued, “has had interesting features that are special [and] helpful, and [it would be] a big loss for our knowledge had we not read them.”<sup>124</sup>

The U.S. figured rather well among these “interesting features.” For instance, an index for twenty-three issues published during the magazine’s calendar year 1960-1961

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<sup>123</sup> “Trang cua Ban” [Reader’s Page], *Thoi Nay* 45 (August 1, 1961): vi.

<sup>124</sup> “Trang cua Ban” [Reader’s Page] *Thoi Nay* 85 (April 1, 1963): v.

showed that there were fifty-one articles devoted to topics related to Vietnam.<sup>125</sup> It was by far the leading number of articles for a single country. But the second highest number, which was thirty, belonged to subjects about America and Americans. In comparison, there were twenty-two articles on France, seventeen on Great Britain, twelve on Germany (mostly on the Nazi period), nine on the Soviet Union, and seven on Japan.<sup>126</sup> Two years later, the index for 1963-1964 showed the same number on the U.S. – plus eighteen articles on Great Britain, eleven on France, eight on Japan, seven on the Soviet Union, and five on Germany. Even Vietnam carried only twenty articles: fully one-third less than the amount devoted to the U.S. (Other geographical units listed were Asia with nineteen articles and Africa with five.)<sup>127</sup> The next batch of twenty-three issues saw greater attention paid to the U.S. in thirty-four articles. In comparison, there were twenty on Japan, which suggestively pointed at a growing revived interest in Japan among Vietnamese since the 1930s. There were also sixteen on France, and only ten each on the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and divided Germany. (This time, Africa was the only other geographical unit listed and with nine articles.)<sup>128</sup> Sheer numbers of course do not tell the whole story. Nonetheless, they help to indicate the scale and scope of interest about the U.S. on the part of the *Nowadays* readers and, by implication, young and educated noncommunist residents of urban South Vietnam. Similar to the tracts for *Learning To*

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<sup>125</sup> The Lunar New Year's issue was a double issue, hence twenty-three instead of twenty-four issues for *Nowadays* and other South Vietnamese semimonthlies.

<sup>126</sup> Muc Luc Chi Tiet cua Nhung Bai Da Dang, So 25-47" [Index of Published Articles, Issues 25-47], *Thoi Nay* 49 (October 1, 1961): 133-154. There were also two indexes for the first twenty-four issues. But they were riddled with problems of counting and miscouting, as some readers pointed out, and were not reliable. The magazine promised better accounting, which resulted in this better index.

<sup>127</sup> Muc Luc Chi Tiet VI cua Nhung Bai Da Dang, So 95-118" [The Sixth Index of Published Articles, Issues 95-118], *Thoi Nay* 119 (September 1, 1964), 195-214.

<sup>128</sup> "Muc Luc Chi Tiet VII cua Nhung Bai Da Dang, So 119-142" [The Seventh Index of Published Articles, Issues 119-142], *Thoi Nay* 143 (September 1, 1965), 197-212.

*Be Human*, much of the focus was on American figures. They ranged from Buffalo Bill to Martin Luther King, from the World War I hero Alvin York (later portrayed on the screen by Gary Cooper) to an eleven-year-old prodigy and Michigan State University student by the name of Michael Grost. They were portrayed on these pages here as variously strong, persistent, courageous, creative, and inspirational – or all of these things. Even when nameless – such as members of the Secret Service in an article published after Kennedy’s assassination – they were described as the best in their profession and completely dedicated to their work regardless of the occasional failure.<sup>129</sup>

Put it another way, the appeal of the U.S. as seen on the pages of *Nowadays* was tied intimately to the larger appeal about the noncommunist world at large. Articles on the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and other totalitarian societies left readers with indelible impressions that those societies were governed by fear and the secret police. In contrast, the modern noncommunist society, best represented by the U.S., was portrayed as complex and occasionally even dangerous through examples such as the Mafia and the Secret Service. But it also offered a richness of resources, a favorable climate for human initiatives, and a particular friendliness especially towards the young, the educated, and the talented. As illustrated by the stories of Harry Belafonte and Louis Armstrong, even racial discrimination, which that the Vietnamese knew enough from their colonial legacy, could be overcome by the openness of freedom and individuality on the part of the American society. It was a vision very much appealing to many young and educated urban youth and young adults.

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<sup>129</sup> Hoang Ha, “Nhom ‘Khi Dot’ của Tong Thong My” [The ‘Monkeys’ of the U.S. President], *Thoi Nay* 117 (August 1, 1964): 71-77.

## Conclusion

The examination of publications above demonstrates a diversity of pro-American attitudes among educated urban South Vietnamese before the Americanization of the war. As represented by Diem's speeches to domestic audience, the Saigon government of the First Republic refrained from calling attention to the essential roles of the U.S. in its aid and support to South Vietnam and, instead, highlighted Vietnamese anticommunism and nationalism. As illustrated by the monthly *Native Land*, the urban elite with ties to the government also downplayed the U.S. because they looked elsewhere, especially at newly postcolonial noncommunist countries, for outlook, inspiration, and ideas on how to build their own newly independent nation. In the meantime, a small number of educated urban people became more acquainted with the U.S through activities sponsored and publications published by overtly pro-American organizations such as the Vietnamese-American Association and the periodical *Viet My*. A greater number, especially young adults, was introduced and became more familiar with the U.S. through channels from the private sector, such as the semimonthly *Nowadays*. While the content of this magazine was not exclusively about the U.S., it nonetheless occupied a most important place in the growing interest among urban readers about their world, especially the noncommunist side that was best represented by the American society and individual Americans.

This is not to say that there were only friendly or neutral sentiments towards the U.S. among urban South Vietnamese. There was also anti-Americanism, even during the 1950s and early 1960s. But anti-Americanism grew much stronger after American direct intervention in 1965. The next chapter addresses this subject by examining several other periodicals from Saigon during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE ROOTS AND GROWTH OF ANTI-AMERICANISM

In 1968, a small Saigon press brought out a slim volume about the war entitled *Vietnam and Its Issues*. The male-sounding name of the author was likely the pseudonym of an urban anticommunist political writer. The book began with the widely accepted premise among urban anticommunists that there were the “Free World” and the “Communist World,” then moved quickly to the question on how to end the war in Vietnam. The author gave partial credit to Ngo Dinh Diem for having been able to contain the spread of underground communists in South Vietnam. But he also faulted the late leader for having failed to complete anti-communist campaigns, build a “genuine” democracy, and work on an “all-encompassing social revolution.”<sup>1</sup> Still, it was the Americans that bore the brunt of his criticism. Americans had now “stepped over” the French in a “similar battle” – that is, they had replaced France – and unwittingly provided another nationalist cause for the communists and contributed to the growth of “communist-leaning” people among noncommunist South Vietnamese.<sup>2</sup> For once, American over-reliance on technology to fight the war not only underestimated communist morale but also caused destruction to and resentment from peasants. The impressive number of military installations did not help in the long run because they

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<sup>1</sup> Tong Ngoc Hung, *Vietnam va Cac Van De: Tap Tham Luan* [Vietnam and Its Issues: A Volume of Discussion] (Saigon: Khoi Hanh, 1968), 9.

<sup>2</sup> Tong Ngoc Hung, *Vietnam va Cac Van De*, 14.

became fodder for anti-South Vietnamese propaganda. Conversely, the moral of the South Vietnamese army, now relegated to security matters, was hurt by the fact that the U.S. military took over fighting so completely. Not only that Americans were “not familiar with the geography and [did] not understand Vietnamese habits.” But so dominant was the American “advisory” presence that “Vietnamese felt that Americans took away their sovereignty” and South Vietnamese encountered “difficulties because they had to follow principles and viewpoints of the Americans.”<sup>3</sup> Most of the remainder of the book discussed different viewpoints about the war, advocated an early form of Vietnamization, and urged the strengthening of democracy and social revolution among South Vietnamese.<sup>4</sup>

It is not clear exactly when in 1968 that the book was published, but the back pages showed that it passed the government censor’s office in December 21, 1967. The date is important to note because it indicates that some urban anticommunists, such as the writer above, were already very uneasy about the progress of Americanization well before the Tet Offensive. Thanks to the arrival of American combat troops, communist advances were essentially halted and the war was brought to a stalemate. But it also caused many problems, and a number of urban anticommunists recognized that Americanization was not sufficient to obtain victory the anticommunist cause. The longer that the U.S. continued to dominate South Vietnamese affairs, they thought, the more challenging it would be to defeat the Viet Cong and contain the North Vietnamese army. They became more vocal in their criticism of American conduct of the war and

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<sup>3</sup> Tong Ngoc Hung, *Vietnam va Cac Van De*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> The book used the word *chinh nghia*, which is commonly translated as “righteous cause” but can be also taken to mean “righteous ideology.”



more assertive of their desire to chart a more independent course from the Americans and to regain the sovereignty lost in part to the Americanization of the war.

Their experiences were directly related to the growth of anti-Americanism in urban South Vietnam. As an academic subject, anti-Americanism has garnered a voluminous body of historical research and argumentation.<sup>5</sup> Yet there has been very little treatment on the subject regarding the South Vietnamese case. This chapter aims to partly fill this large gap by examining the growth of noncommunist criticism of Americanization during the late 1960s and early 1970s. It looks specifically at two different groups of noncommunist urbanites. The first included Catholic left-wing intellectuals that were predisposed towards anti-Americanism out of a combination of European education, Personalist ideology, and nationalism. The second group consisted of disabled veterans of the South Vietnamese army, whose anti-American attitudes were formed by a mix of ultra-nationalism and a somewhat genderized anger at Americanization that sidestepped their contribution to the war effort. An examination of these two groups would hopefully shed light on the complexity and diversity of anti-Americanism during the second half of the 1960s and the early 1970s.

### **Emmanuel Mounier and left-leaning Catholic intellectuals**

In May 1974, the Institute of Philosophy (Vien Triet Hoc) under the Social Sciences Committee in Hanoi published in its journal *Philosophy (Triet Hoc)* back-to-back articles about two groups of South Vietnamese intellectuals in South Vietnam: the

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<sup>5</sup> An example of this literature is Brendon O'Connor and Martin Griffiths, eds., *Anti-Americanism: History, Causes, and Themes*, 4 volumes (Westport, CT: Greenwood World Pub., 2007).

“urban patriotic Buddhist intellectuals” and the “left-leaning intelligentsia in Saigon.” The journal had begun in 1966 under a slightly different name, and changed to the new name in 1973. As a public organ of the Institute, the journal was aimed at “announcing and propagating results of philosophical research in and out of the country” and “assisting in providing scientific bases towards policies of the Party and the Government.”<sup>6</sup> In the article on the Buddhists, the author noted that Buddhism exerted tremendous cultural influence in the Vietnamese past. It not merely flourished under the Ly and Tran Dynasties but also survived the fierce attacks from “feudal” Confucianists under the Le to live another day in contemporary divided Vietnam. The article credited Buddhists for having jelled religion and nationalism together. It also praised southern Buddhists for having played a critical role in deposing Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. Although it did not single out any particular Buddhist groups, the article applauded what it called the “progressive Buddhist force,” praising this movement for “having opposed the US because it is the imperialist aggressor, and not because the U.S. ‘fights communism the inappropriate way’ and ‘ineffectively.’”<sup>7</sup> The last point was meant to compare Buddhists to anticommunist South Vietnamese who were critical of the U.S. for strategic military and political shortcomings rather than for its imperialism.

Unmistakable was the enthusiastic praise the writer had for the Buddhists, for their kind of anti-Americanism placed them among true heirs to the long tradition of native patriotism and nationalism. In contrast, the author of the article on the Saigon left-

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<sup>6</sup> Nguyen Dinh Hoa, “Lich Su Phat Trien cua Tap Chi” [Historical Developments of the Journal], *Vien Triet Hoc*: [http://www.vientriethoc.com.vn/?vientriet=articles\\_deltails&id=35&cat=10&pcat=](http://www.vientriethoc.com.vn/?vientriet=articles_deltails&id=35&cat=10&pcat=)

<sup>7</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Bich, “Cuoc Dau Tran Cach Mang cua Dan Toc va Nhung Nguoi Tri Thuc Phat Tu Yeu Nuoc trong cac Thanh Thi Mien Nam” [The National Revolutionary Struggle of Patriotic Buddhist Intellectuals in Southern Cities], *Triet Hoc* [Philosophy] 5 (April 1974), 118-143.

leaning intelligentsia was detached in analysis and muted in praise for the subject under discussion. He did not find them on the wrong track of the conflict. On the contrary, though a minority among the intelligentsia in Saigon, they now professed a point of view called “returning to the people,” which was “representative of the deepest ideal and longing of the majority of young urban intellectuals.” On the other hand, he implicitly rebuked them for having taken a long time before coming to the right side: they had gone through the phase of “nationalist illusion” under Diem, then a second phase of “social revolution illusion” before the Americanization of the war jolted them towards *dan toc* – “the people” or “the nation.” But at least they did get there, to the right track, and the article concluded that the leftist intelligentsia was trustworthy. They had abandoned their “outward attitude,” implying proximity to the West. Instead, they now offer “the voice of memory that reminds us to record the crimes of the enemies as well as the horrific lessons learned from the past,” “the accusation of neo-colonialism [committed] by the Saigon regime,” and the “voice of reconciliation, empathy, and love” that would aid in the “remaining journey against colonialism.”<sup>8</sup>

Hyperbole notwithstanding, the article was noteworthy for the aforementioned implicit comparison to the laudable Buddhist activism found in the other article. Noteworthy too was the difference in the invocation of religion: in one article, the words “Buddhists” and “Buddhism” appeared at front, end, and center; in the other article, the word “Catholic” showed up exactly once. But it is hard to avoid the impression that the subject of the article were the left-leaning Catholic intellectuals of South Vietnam because most of the sources that formed the basis for the article came from the then-

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<sup>8</sup> Phong Hien, “Sai Gon, Tri Thuc Khuynh Ta va Hien Thuc Dan Toc” [Saigon: Left-Leaning Intellectuals and Nationalism], *Triet Hoc* 5 (April 1974), 88-117.

leading Catholic opposition paper in Saigon. Also, the two names most quoted (by far) were professors at the University of Saigon and among the leading Catholic intellectuals in South Vietnam. If anything, the article's title could contain the word "Catholic" just as its counterpart's title contains the word "Buddhist," and little would the content change.

One suspects that the absence of the word "Catholic" was intentional on the part of the author – and editor and censor. Perhaps they wanted to downplay the role that Catholics played in shaping an ideology that they and the Communist Party favored. Or perhaps they were trying to make the ideology sound more broad-based than it actually was in order to draw all the support they could find among the southern intelligentsia. Whatever the case, there was indeed a shift in the intellectual stream of the Catholic Left during the war, and the article was right in pointing that the start of the stream was Emmanuel Mounier. Some of the Vietnamese left-leaning Catholics first encountered Mounier in the 1950s while pursuing university degrees in Europe, especially at the University of Louvain (Belgium). Returning to their native country after the Geneva Accord, they brought back also their grasp of Personalism to the Universities of Saigon and Hue. It was possible, they thought, to apply Personalist ideas to the realities of decolonization in the southern half of their country.

Why Emmanuel Mounier? The answer has to do with his exposition of Personalism through his books and the journal *Esprit*, which he founded in 1932 and ran until his death in 1950. As seen in a previous chapter, Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Nhu were also drawn to many of Mounier's ideas. But they combined those ideas with neo-Confucianism and perhaps a host of other ideologies to create their own eclectic kind of personalism. The budding Vietnamese Catholic intellectuals came to Mounier more

directly and took in his ideas more wholesomely. All the same, it remains difficult to define Personalism even for an undiluted and non-Diemist version. One reason was that Mounier called it “a philosophy but not a system.” “Its central affirmation,” he explained, was “the existence of free and creative persons” and that “it introduces into the heart of its constructions a principle of unpredictability which excludes any desire for a definitive system.”<sup>9</sup> In place of a system, Personalism calls attention to the person and the accompanying phenomena, such as communication, “intimate conversion,” and freedom. In promoting these values, Mounier reacted against the dehumanization or de-personalization that stemmed from competing modern ideologies, including individualism, capitalism, communism, and fascism.<sup>10</sup>

This opposition also meant that there was a strong political core to Mounier’s emphasis on the absence of a system. It came in part from his reactions against positivists, materialists, and idealists during the 1920s. More significantly, it stemmed from his reactions during the 1930s to the Great Depression. As one commentator has noted, the Great Depression and its aftermath “convinced Mounier, as so many of his European contemporaries, that capitalism was dying, that liberal democracy was no longer operable, that the whole international order was in chaos – that bourgeois civilization was in its entirety in a state of profound and irreversible crisis.”<sup>11</sup> The Great Depression also left Mounier with a radical anti-capitalism. Although he attacked communism and collectivism, it was capitalism, liberalism, and individualism that bore

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Mounier, *Personalism* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1952), xv and xvi.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas R. Rourke and Rosita A. Charzarreta Rourke, *A Theory of Personalism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Amato, *Mounier and Maritain: A French Catholic Understanding of the Modern World* (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1975), 5.

the brunt of his strongest denunciations both before and after World War II. As the historian William Rauch has argued, Mounier considered the profit motive that is inherent in capitalism to be the root of most modern evils, because the “primacy of profit created the ‘bourgeois spirit’ which in turn infected the other classes in the social organism.” In Rauch’s judgment, “Mounier’s anti-capitalism was basic to all of his temporal commitments between 1932 and 1950.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, Mounier’s radical anti-capitalism was linked to his anti-Americanism. In a major English-language study of the philosopher, John Hellman considers Mounier’s postwar anti-Americanism to be a politically motivated decision that reflected his siding with the French communists against the U.S.-led Atlantic Pact.<sup>13</sup> More recently, however, Seth Armus has argued that Mounier’s anti-Americanism was more deep-rooted than previously noted. Mounier’s “postwar turn to the left,” wrote Armus, “merely revealed a long-term, consistent, and visceral dislike of America – a dislike already deeply imbedded in the personalism of the 1930s.”<sup>14</sup> Anti-Americanism was a constant in Mounier’s thought throughout the decades, and the most important. “That the anticommunism of [*Esprit*] was later reversed,” Armus stated, “suggests that disgust with America may have been the stronger of the two ideological enemies.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> R. William Rauch, Jr., *Politics and Belief in Contemporary France: Emmanuel Mounier and Christian Democracy, 1932-1950* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 90.

<sup>13</sup> John Hellman, *Emmanuel Mounier and the New Catholic Left, 1930-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), 243.

<sup>14</sup> Seth D. Armus, “The Eternal Enemy: Emmanuel Mounier’s *Esprit* and French Anti-Americanism,” *French Historical Studies* (Spring 2001), 304.

<sup>15</sup> Armus, “The Eternal Enemy,” 282. For a broader context of French anti-Americanism from Mounier and his contemporaries, see Philippe Roger, *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially 373-409, which discusses the belief among left-wing French intellectuals in anti-Americanism as a form of humanism. Mounier himself identified the U.S. with machinism and, similar to other anti-Americanists, possessed a high degree of technophobia (375-376).

Whether Mounier's anti-Americanism came before or after World War II, there is no evidence that Vietnamese Catholic and noncommunist intellectuals were openly critical of the U.S. in the 1950s. But for at least some of the students that studied in Western Europe, Mounier's version of Personalism was appealing because they were searching for a third way to navigate between capitalism and communism. A prime example of the young intellectuals could be found in Nguyen Van Trung, a northerner who went to study in France and Belgium in 1950 and returned to South Vietnam in 1955 to teach philosophy at the Universities of Hue and Saigon. As recalled by Trung in the early 1990s, post-1945 events led young Vietnamese of his generation into two starkly different choices: "to follow the Viet Minh or to be against them." On the one hand, Trung felt "friendly to the Viet Minh" and therefore could not be completely against them. On the other hand, his Catholic background also made him "wary" of communism and "unable to follow them completely." While in Europe, he was exposed to theoretical Marxism, existentialism, and Personalism. Trung studied seriously the Sartrean variety of existentialism and, to a lesser degree, Louis Althusser's structural Marxism. (Later, he often taught and wrote about Sartre and Marx.) But it was Mounier's version of Personalism that he found most appealing, enough that Trung wrote his baccalaureate thesis about the Frenchman. In addition, he and some Vietnamese students formed an *Esprit*-like group to meet and discuss politics and society in the spirit of Personalism.<sup>16</sup>

After their return to Vietnam, the young Catholic intellectuals found employment

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<sup>16</sup> The account above comes from Nguyen Van Trung, "'Tra Loi Phong Van cua 1 Nu SinhVien Phap Goc Viet Lam Luan An Tien Si Su ve Nguoi Viet Nam Du Hoc tai Phap" [Answers to Interview Questions from a Franco-Vietnamese Student Working on a Doctoral Theses about Vietnamese Students in France], April 1990, Ho Chi Minh City. I wish to thank Prof. Trung for a copy of these answers.

in teaching, publishing, and Church-related activities. In particular, Nguyen Van Trung was hired as lecturer (the equivalent of assistant professor) at the newly created University of Hue, which was founded by the Catholic priest Cao Van Luan in 1957. In spite of the religious background of its founder, the university was created for national rather than religious purposes, with both Catholics and non-Catholics among the faculty and student body.<sup>17</sup> The next year, it began publishing the bimonthly *University (Dai Hoc)*, which ran until the end of 1963. For the first three years, Nguyen Van Trung served as editor and recruited a number of young writers to the journal while contributing many articles to the journal. (In addition to writing under his real name, he sometimes used the penname Hoang Thai Linh.) The majority of contributors to *University* appeared to be non-Catholics. But there were a number of Catholics that included Tran Van Toan, a writer of philosophy and sociology; the biologist Nguyen Van Ai, director of the Pasteur Institute in Dalat; and especially Ly Chanh Trung, professor of philosophy at the University of Saigon and a close friend of Nguyen Van Trung since their student days in Europe.

Until his move to Saigon in 1961, Nguyen Van Trung was the most prominent voice of *University*. He contributed more articles than anyone else, and his subjects were as varied as the origins of the modern Latinized script of the Vietnamese language, the eighteenth-century Vietnamese epic poet Nguyen Du, the twentieth-century Francophile yet traditionalist mandarin and scholar Pham Quynh, and the intellectual development of Karl Marx. Having written his European dissertation on Buddhism, he published an

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<sup>17</sup> An account of the founding of the University of Hue is Cao Van Luan, *Ben Giong Lich Su, 1940-1965* [Alongside the Historical Stream, 1940-1965] (Saigon: Tri Dung, 1972), 299-323. See also Edward Miller, "Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngô Đình Diệm, 1945-1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (October 2004), 447.



article on the subject in the journal and elaborated it further in a book. His wide-ranging interests and fresh energy was the major force behind the journal. Moreover, the output from him and other contributors illustrated the ambitious agenda of the young intellectuals in the early postcolonial period. One of their goals was connecting the life of the mind to the new postcolonial noncommunist society at large. “The university should have its independent existence,” declared the editorial in the journal’s opening issue, yet it should “simultaneously be close to the nation and create and maintain frequent contacts and exchanges with social groups and all aspects of society.”<sup>18</sup> Reflecting these ideals, the administrators and faculty organized a weekly lecture series that featured Vietnamese, European, and American speakers on a variety of subjects. Many of these lectures would be published in and out of the journal, availing their ideas to readers at other educational institutions in South Vietnam. To judge from the tables of content and the reports on recent activities (found at the end of most issues), both the lecture series and the journal were heavier on cultural, literary, historical, and philosophical matters than politics. There were articles on, for instances, Personalist values in modern Vietnamese literature, early modern Vietnamese poetry, early modern English poetry, the meanings of sociology as a subject, and the founder of the Nguyen dynasty. Perhaps unsurprising for a journal published in a city with a long history of Buddhism, there were many articles on the religion.

*University* is not important for our purposes because it expressed anti-Americanism: it did not. There was very little about the U.S. in the pages of the journal,

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<sup>18</sup> “Loi Phi Lo” [Words Before Travel], *Dai Hoc* [University] 1 (January 1958), 3. The editorial also advocated teaching university courses in Vietnamese rather than in French. This was part of a semi-contentious debate among South Vietnamese academics in the second half of the 1950s, and the University of Hue was the pioneer in dropping French in lectures and switching to Vietnamese instead.

after all, and nothing of note to indicate anti-American attitudes from urban left-leaning Catholic intellectuals in the 1960s and 1970s. But it is important to recognize the place of this journal because it became a launching pad for Nguyen Van Trung and several young Catholic intellectuals to enter the noncommunist cultural mainstream of South Vietnam. The journal went a long way in spreading their reputation as serious cultural thinkers and leading to respect among the educated class in Saigon and other major cities. It did not hurt either that its editor and associates maintained an acceptable if cool relationship with Ngo Dinh Diem's regime. Some of them had met Diem before he came to power. According to Ly Chanh Trung, Diem was staying at a monastery in Bruges, Belgium – the time seemed to be early 1954 – and the Vietnamese Catholic students at Louvain invited him over one evening for dinner. According to Trung, Diem smoked nearly a pack of Belga cigarettes and gave one of his infamous long monologues. He avoided answering directly all but one question from the students, which was about his view on democracy: though not very familiar with democratic theories, his travels in Europe and the U.S. convinced him that American democracy was the best form. Diem's answer was not appealing to Trung and other students for three reasons: American funding to France during the First Indochina War at the time; American interference in Guatemala and other Latin American countries; and American anticommunism, especially McCarthyism, which, he alleged, had the "smell of fascism" to it. Conversely, the students did not impress Diem at all, which was not surprising in light of his unfriendly attitude towards urban intellectuals when in power. In this case, he complained to the rector of Louvain that the Vietnamese students there were being "influenced by Marxism to a degree," a complaint that prompted the rector to inquire into

the matter. During his rule, he said during a Cabinet meeting that the “Louvain group” was “troublesome” and warned his Cabinet to be wary of it. But Trung also conceded that Diem largely left them alone and did not “discriminate” against them.<sup>19</sup> There was one episode in 1961 that revealed tension between the young intellectuals and the regime, when Diem’s older brother (and appointed Archbishop of Hue) requested the Ministry of Education to move Nguyen Van Trung from Hue to Saigon.<sup>20</sup>

For the most part, however, the young professors and intellectuals were left alone to do their work, which was confined mostly to the university classroom and academic publications rather than on the street or in oppositional newspaper columns.<sup>21</sup> Among Nguyen Van Trung’s publications was a well-received book on the contradictions of French colonial ideology on the one hand and the realities of the colonial experience on the other. Written in the last years of the Diem’s regime and granted permission for publication a few weeks before Diem’s assassination, the book was one part intellectual history, one part analysis of past problems among Vietnamese political parties, one part advocacy for a noncommunist social revolution, and all parts indictment of colonial practices and hypocrisies. Instead of moving from theories to practices as one might have expected, it commenced with an indictment of colonial “realities” before turning to

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<sup>19</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, *Nhung Ngay Buon Non* [Days of Nausea] (Saigon, 1972), 133-134.

<sup>20</sup> It is not clear why Ngo Dinh Thuc, the appointed Archbishop, wanted to remove Nguyen Van Trung. According to Trung, the Archbishop considered him potentially troublesome and asked for the removal before he took up his new post in Hue. The University’s faculty was ready to draft a defense on behalf of Trung, but Trung asked Fr. Cao Van Luan, the University’s rector, to let him leave for Saigon. Trung was later hired to the faculty of the School of Arts and Letters at University of Saigon, and taught there until the end of the Second Indochina War. This account comes from Nguyen Van Trung, “Nhin Lai Nhung Chang Duong Da Qua: Tap 1, 1955-1975” [Looking Back at the Journeys Past: Vol. 1: 1955-1975], unpublished memoir, Chapter III, 14-16. I wish to thank Prof. Trung for a copy of the memoir.

<sup>21</sup> Some of the articles were collected into a series of thin volumes called *Nhan Dinh* [Judgements] and enabled Trung to reach a somewhat wider readership. At least five volumes were published in South Vietnam – in 1957, 1958, 1959, 1966, and 1969 – and most were reprinted at least once.

ideological schemes supported by the colonial authorities (and, sometimes, Vietnamese collaborators). One of its foci was the French cultural assault that began during nineteenth-century invasions and lasted until the Popular Front of the 1930s. The book did not directly mention the U.S., and the closest to an anti-American expression was its references to Western movies in which Native Americans were attacked and slaughtered by Westerners. But its railing against colonial ideologies and practices foreshadowed the growing and assertive anti-Americanism from urban left-leaning Catholic intellectuals a few years later. One section, for instance, inspected the writings of the French naval officer and novelist Pierre Loti, a leading figure in the invasion in the 1880s. Shadowing the My Lai massacre five years later, it highlighted Loti's demeaning and racist views and a massacre of Vietnamese in which he took part.<sup>22</sup> More broadly, Trung attacked the separatist practices in daily life brought forth by the colonial master-subject binary. The colonial city, he described,

is usually divided into two sections: the French quarter, the [Vietnamese] quarter, separately. The French socialized with one another, married one another, dined with one another; Vietnamese socialized with one another, married one another, dined with another. But because the French were masters [and] Vietnamese slaves, they were rich and we were poor. Over the French quarter, houses were tall and fresh, streets were clean and well-lit... The Vietnamese quarter was impoverished, the houses jam-packed and squat, the streets narrow and filthy.<sup>23</sup>

The passage revealed the resentment that many urban South Vietnamese later felt towards the massive number of Americans, who did not section off cities into quarters but could afford to rent out the best houses and offices. For Vietnamese unfamiliar with

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<sup>22</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, *Chu Nghia Thuc Dan Phap o Viet Nam: Thuc Chat va Huyen Thoai* [French Colonialism in Viet Nam: Realities and Myths] (Saigon: Nam Son, 1963), 67-79. The book's subtitle was "Part I: Culture and Politics," but there was never a sequel.

<sup>23</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, *Chu Nghia Thuc Dan Phap o Viet Nam*, 54-55.

the U.S., the seed of anti-Americanism lay in the anti-colonial perception and experience. In this case, it parlayed into the Mounierian anti-capitalist credo favored by at least some of the left-leaning Catholic intellectuals. In fact, not long after Diem's demise, Trung and his namesake friend took advantage of the more liberalizing atmosphere to articulate more loudly their advocacy of Personalism. Their primary vehicle was the journal *Journey (Hanh Trinh)*, which ran for ten issues from late 1964 to mid-1966. For the two Trungs, the Ngo brothers might have claimed Personalism as a guide to Vietnamese realities but did not really grasp Personalist meaning at all. In an article published in the second issue, Nguyen Van Trung wrote that Ngo Dinh Diem "practically did not understand Personalism" and was essentially "an authoritarian mandarin" rather than the humanist that the philosophy called for. His archbishop brother Thuc "might have admired some kind of Personalist philosophy, but certainly not the thought of Mounier." Trung noted Thuc's founding of the "Personalist Center" in the southern town of Vinh Long, where he brought in Catholic priests "from Rome or Manila" to train officials that were interested in promotion than understanding the philosophy. Moreover, the training "started with [Christian] God and moved to society," which was contrary to Mounier's interest in accounting for human dignity regardless of religion. Younger brother Nhu might have understood Personalism the most, but he "did not really believe in its force."<sup>24</sup> For these and other reasons, it was not a surprise that the Ngos proved ineffectual in persuading Vietnamese to support them and ending the threat of communism in South

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<sup>24</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, "Su That Bai cua Chu Nghia Nhan Vi? Hay Van De Y Thuc He o cac Xu Cham Tien" [The Failure of Personalism? Or the Problem of Ideology in Developing Countries], *Hanh Trinh* [Journey] 2 (November 1964), 113-114.

Vietnam.<sup>25</sup>

Ultimately, Trung thought that nationalism was not sufficient to counter communism in Vietnam. He found noncommunist political parties to be lacking in what they could offer to ordinary Vietnamese. In the book on colonialism, he believed there had been a strong revolutionary tradition among Vietnamese since at least the turn of the century. But this tradition also emphasized political purposes and neglected social revolution. The Vietnamese communists went the furthest in attempting this kind of revolution but were limited by their own class-based ideology. As for noncommunist leaders, they might have drawn some support in the struggle for independence on the basis of nationalism. But they lacked a clear ideology and a strong social theory, and predictably could not provide long-term social and political problems after gaining independence.<sup>26</sup> In the opening article of *Journey's* first issue, he was again critical of the noncommunist movement. "The nationalist attitude is a negative attitude," he argued, "strong in opposing and destroying [something else], but seems to be incapable of construction and development."<sup>27</sup> A large-scale social revolution was necessary for

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<sup>25</sup> Trung was able to obtain a response to the article from Jean Marie Domenach, then the editor of *Esprit*. Domenach reiterated some of the basic positions about Personalism, especially anti-capitalism. Domenach agreed with Trung that Personalism "should not have been a philosophy to be turned into a political system." But he also considered Personalism better attuned and responsive to the realities of industrialized countries than those in developing countries. He also found Trung to have offered "sharp" criticism yet without "suggestions for the future." See J. M. Domenach, "La Thu Tra Loi cua J. M. Domenach" [Response from J. M. Domenach], *Hanh Trinh* 2, 116-119. Domenach's criticisms of the Vietnamese Mourmierians were telling in at least two ways. First, they were non-specific in their advocacy of a social revolution, then and later. Second, their critical talent would soon shift from the advocacy of revolution to the criticism of American ideology and the Americanization of the war.

<sup>26</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, *Chu Nghia Thuc Dan Phap o Viet Nam*, 256-257. Trung quotes from an essay by Jean-Marie Domenach in *Esprit* to this effect, downplaying nationalism at the expense of social revolution.

<sup>27</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, "Tu Su That Bai cua cac Dang Phai Quoc Gia den su Pha San cua Tang Lop Truong Gia Thanh Thi trong Vai Tro Lanh Dao Cach Mang Xa Hoi truoc Ap Luc Thong Tri cua nhung Chu Nghia Thuc Dan Moi" [From the Failure of Nationalist Parties to the Bankruptcy of Urban Bourgeoisie in the Role of Leading the Social Revolution vis-à-vis the Oppressive Control of the New Colonialisms], *Hanh Trinh* 1 (October 1964), 14.

noncommunist South Vietnamese, one that would have chipped at the still “feudalist” mindset from within and “capitalist” threats from without. Trung’s attitude towards capitalism further revealed his anti-Americanism, and it was at this point that he expressed his criticism of the U.S. far more openly. Following the lead of Western critics of capitalism, he called the economic hegemony of the U.S.-led Western powers the “new colonialism.” Later in the article, he surveyed the problems in the developing world and focused on Latin America. He pointed to the United Fruit Company as a prime example of foreign (read: American) ownership and control that hindered economic self-sufficiency among the native people.<sup>28</sup> Although Trung’s criticism was not aimed exclusively at Americans, the chief culprit of the new colonialism was undeniably the capitalist system run by the government in Washington.

Anti-Americanism also surfaced in articles from other contributors. It sometimes came indirectly by way of Mounier’s Personalism. True to Mounierian skepticism towards democracy, Ly Chanh Trung argued in favor of revolution over democracy.<sup>29</sup> In an essay on the French thinker, he attacked capitalism by way of revolution. What South Vietnam needed was a “total revolution”: that is, an economic, social, and “spiritual” revolution. This Personalist and communal revolution would be distinct from nineteenth-century capitalist-cum-individualist revolutions as well as twentieth-century communist revolutions. Nonetheless, Trung was far more critical of capitalism than he was of communism. “The capitalist world is one of lonely individuals,” wrote he, “imprisoned

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<sup>28</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, “Tu Su That Bai,” 28.

<sup>29</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, “Cach Mang hay Dan Chu?” [Revolution or Democracy], *Hanh Trinh* 3-4 (January 1965), 30-33. Trung distinguished between “democratic ideal” and “democratic system,” and argued that the latter does not necessarily reflect the former. For a developing country like South Vietnam, revolution would be necessary for the eventual achievement of the democratic ideal. “Revolution is forcing oneself into discipline,” wrote he, “sacrificing [oneself] so to build tomorrow, turning down false democracy so to create the foundation for true democracy” (30).

by their particular rights and unable to sympathize with humanity.” “It is a world without love” and, therefore, “capitalists are the strongest opponents to Personalism.”<sup>30</sup>

Elsewhere in the journal, Americanism was expressed in articles focusing on other developing countries rather than on the U.S. Under the unifying theme of “socialist experiences in noncommunist countries,” it published in early 1965 separate articles on Algeria, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, and Guiana. Not surprisingly, the most anti-American voice came from the article on Cuba. It considered the Cuban revolution to be supported across the social board: the bourgeois, students, and peasants. It placed some of the blame for subsequent problems on the failure of the Castro regime to follow through on some of its promises to compensate foreign businesses. But the heavier blow was thrown at the U.S. government and American businesses for their investment policies, their desire for maintaining or expanding foreign markets, and, ultimately, their “hostile attitude” towards Castro who was then forced to align with the Soviet Union. After further analysis of the Cuban revolution, the article expressed ambivalence about its outcome, stating that it became more communist than desirable. Nonetheless, its sympathy lay squarely with Cuba and other developing countries for the primary reason that they were long threatened by “economic imperialism,” or the new kind of colonialism.<sup>31</sup>

At times, anti-Americanism from the Catholic left-wing intellectuals surfaced implicitly in interpretation of ecclesiastical documents. An example found in *Journey* is

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<sup>30</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, “Emmanuel Mounier, Con Nguoi cua Doi Thoai” [Emmanuel Mounier, Person of Dialogue], *Hanh Trinh* 9 (December 1965), 30.

<sup>31</sup> Tran Trong Phu, “Fidel Castro trong Vai Tro Lanh Dao Cach Mang Cuba” [Fidel Castro in the Leadership Role of the Cuban Revolution], *Hanh Trinh* 3-4 (January 1965), 67-84. The sources for this article included articles from the French left-wing journals *Les Temps Moderne* and *Esprit*, plus the popular magazine *L'Express*.



a commentary on the letter from Pope Paul VI to the Vietnamese bishops. The author was Nguyen Ngoc Lan, a young Redemptorist priest who subsequently became an outspoken opposition writer against the Saigon government and the U.S.<sup>32</sup> Lan had studied philosophy at the Sorbonne and was chaplain for a Vietnamese student group in France.<sup>33</sup> In this article, he spent the second half citing and quoting the document and reiterating the pontiff's desire to avoid war. The first half, however, was a personal if somewhat long-winded attack on Vietnamese dependency of American economic aid, the already disproportionate suffering among poor Vietnamese that would have worsened in wartime, and, ultimately, "democratic capitalism" that kept out the voices of the poor in the shaping of society.<sup>34</sup> Criticism against the U.S. could take more subtle forms, such as in an essay on the First Indochina War by Truong Ba Can. The author was another left-wing priest who studied in France and later served as the arch-chaplain for the South Vietnamese chapter of the international movement Young Christian Workers.<sup>35</sup> Can

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<sup>32</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Lan was a special case because the Vietnamese Redemptorist Order was largely a conservative organization then and later. He was teaching at a seminary in the city of Dalat at the time of this article, but eventually quarreled with his superiors and was moved to Saigon, where he became heavily involved in peace advocacy and opposition activities. He and a fellow Redemptorist published an opposition magazine in 1969 that ran until 1974. After the war, they were allowed to have a public voice by the communist regime in the first few years, but eventually became oppositional figures. See Bach Dien Thu Sinh, "Ve Nhan Vat Nguyen Ngoc Lan" [On the Figure of Nguyen Ngoc Lan] (January 1, 2011): <http://www.vietthuc.org/2011/01/01/v%E1%BB%81-nhan-v%E1%BA%ADt-nguy%E1%BB%85n-ng%E1%BB%8Dc-lan-2/>

<sup>33</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, "Tim Hieu Tinh Hinh Cong Giao" [Learning about the Catholic Situation], undated manuscript, 12. This manuscript was written for the postwar regime, probably in the late 1980s or early 1990s. Some of its terminology is not typical of Trung's style, but reflected the standard anti-RVN language at the time. I wish to thank Prof. Trung for a copy of this manuscript.

<sup>34</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Lan, "Nhưng Ke So Hoa Binh" [The Fearful of Peace], *Hanh Trinh* 5 (February 1965), 55-64.

<sup>35</sup> The Young Christian Workers (YCW) movement was a part of the broader European movement of Catholic Action, and specifically derived from the European Jocist movement founded by the Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in the 1920s. An overview of its beginning is Craig R. Prentiss, *Debating God's Economy: Social Justice in America on the Eve of Vatican II* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2008), 125-129. There are two short recollections from former members of South Vietnam's YCW and contemporaries of Truong Ba Can in the early 1970s: Truong Hung Thai, "Linh Muc Phe Ro Truong Ba Can: Noi Niem Biet To Cung Ai" [The Rev. Peter Truong Ba Can: To Whom Could He

provided a narration of the war based on the war chronicles of the journalist Bernard Fall and historian Philippe Deviller. He also reached several decidedly left-wing conclusions. First, the Viet Minh succeeded in the fight against the French because they possessed a dual ideology of nationalism on the one hand and class struggle on the other hand. Second, the French shifted the focus of the war from the anticolonial nature of their opponents to anticommunism because it was losing politically. Third, only the noncommunist government of Bao Dai had wanted to continue the war at the end of 1953 because it knew that its weaknesses overpowered any strength there was. Lastly, the Vietnamese were victims of the Great Powers at Geneva in 1954 and continued to be victims to the present. Can's first three points were meant at elevating the legitimacy of the Hanoi government while questioning that of Saigon. As on the last point, Can repeatedly noted American involvement in the French War and implied that South Vietnam was not independent as long as it was supported by Washington.<sup>36</sup>

### **The heightening of anti-Americanism among the Catholic Left**

Truong Ba Can's subtle anti-American criticism in early 1965 escalated to overt disapproval and denigration of the U.S. after Lyndon Johnson began to send combat troops to South Vietnam. The journal's summer issues of 1965 were packed with articles that examined the failures of Vietnamese for revolution, or questioned American motives,

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Explain Himself?], *Vien Tuong Viet Nam* [Vietnamese Perspective] (August 2009), 13-16; and Dinh Dong Phuong, "Ky Niem ve Linh Muc Truong Ba Can" [Memory about the Reverend Truong Ba Can]: <http://www.tinvasong.com/?articleId=45001>. The main target of the South Vietnamese YCW chapter was the working class, as shown in the first essay. But the second essay suggests also that in the 1970s, some YCW members turned more radical and in turn drew college students to the ranks.

<sup>36</sup> Truong Ba Can, "Nhin Lai Cuoc Chien Tranh Viet Phap" [Looking Back at the French-Vietnamese War] *Hanh Trinh* 5 (February 1965), 35-54.

strategies, and solutions regarding the escalation of the war. For Vietnamese, argued Nguyen Van Trung, the war had to do with their disagreement about ideology. But for Americans, it was about geo-political and Cold War considerations.<sup>37</sup> Vietnamese interests were not at all respected, and at least some of the blame resided with the Vietnamese due to their disunity. Other essays and articles placed the blame squarely at the feet of the U.S. As if extending Truong Ba Can's implicit criticism of Western entanglements in Vietnamese affairs, the next issue opened with a "tragedy in two acts" that began with France's failure to win over the Viet Minh and shifting rationale towards anticommunism and the creation of the State of Vietnam. The principal in the second act was of course the Americans, who "kicked out the French" after the Geneva Conference in order to make Vietnam into "one of its zones of influence." Even though Diem managed to possess "some power," U.S.-South Vietnamese relations were dictated by economic aid and the U.S. for the most part. In the end, the people responsible for Diem's demise included not only Buddhists but also the US government that was determined to shift from economic to military intervention in South Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> Another article also explained military intervention in terms of economics, albeit the American capitalist economy. It declared that the U.S. stuck to the credo, "Praise to militarized nations [and] opposition to socialist nations" because its economy had been tied to military production since the end of World War II.<sup>39</sup> The very next essay concerned U.S.

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<sup>37</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, "Chien Tranh va Cach Mang" [War and Revolution], *Hanh Trinh* 6 (June 1965), 3-22.

<sup>38</sup> Editorial, "Truoc Su Can Thiep va Chi Phoi cua Ngoai Bang" [Before the Intervention and Control of Foreigners], *Hanh Trinh* 7-8 (July 1965), 3-15.

<sup>39</sup> Nguyen Vu Van, "Hoa Ky tren Con Duong Phieu Luu Quan Su," *Hanh Trinh* 7-8, 37-62. The author credits the American journalist Fred J. Cook's *The Warfare State* (New York: Macmillan, 1962) for the basis of the article.

intervention into the Dominican Republic earlier that year. The event was cited as another evidence of American interference into Third World affairs.<sup>40</sup> Many urban South Vietnamese might have considered U.S. intervention in 1965 a necessity to save the country from communism. For others, including the contributors to *Journey*, intervention was the latest if most dramatic step in the making of the new colonialism.

Not surprisingly, *Journey's* vocal opposition raised the eyebrows of the government's censors. In a letter sent to the RVN's Ministry of Interior near the end of 1965, the Bureau for Psychological Warfare warned that the journal was "communist-friendly" and recommended confiscation of remaining issues on the basis of a legal technicality.<sup>41</sup> Although it published two more issues in December 1965 and June 1966, distribution was restricted and the magazine ended its run. By then, though, the left-wing Catholic intellectuals found other publishing channels to voice their displeasure with Americanization. They were also empowered by the Second Vatican Council and the papal shift in hierarchical attitudes towards communism. In the early phase of the Cold War, the Catholic Church had been on the forefront of anti-Communism, with Pope Pius XII denouncing communism regularly from the pulpit and trying to ally the Vatican to the Western powers.<sup>42</sup> The closing of the 1950s, however, saw a shift towards accommodation with the communist bloc from Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. Without

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<sup>40</sup> Tran Trong Phu, "Van De Cong Hoa Dominicain" [The Problem of the Dominican Republic], *Hanh Trinh* 7-8 (July 1965), 63-82. Underscoring the negative reaction, the journal also published a translation of an op/ed piece that the former Dominican president Juan Bosch, who was deposed in a 1963 military coup, wrote for the American anticommunist left-wing magazine *The New Leader*.

<sup>41</sup> This letter was dated December 5, 1965, and is found in Nguyen Van Trung, "Ho So ve Tap Chi *Hanh Trinh*" [Files on the Journal *Journey*], unpublished manuscript. I wish to thank Prof. Trung for a copy of this manuscript.

<sup>42</sup> See Frank J. Coppa, "Pope Pius XII and the Cold War: The Post-war Confrontation between Catholicism and Communism," in Dianne Kirby, ed., *Religion and the Cold War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 50-66; and Peter C. Kent, "The Lonely Cold War of Pope Pius XII," in Kirby, *Religion and the Cold War*, 67-76.

taking leave of their basic anticommunism, their tones and even policies changed in regard to the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. In addition, they oversaw Vatican II with ambitious goals towards the renewal of the Church and adaptation to modernity.<sup>43</sup>

For the left-wing Catholic intellectuals in South Vietnam, Vatican II and Paul VI's calls to end the war provided them with renewed moral justifications for its anti-Americanism. They had criticized American intervention on political grounds; now they criticized the U.S. on religious grounds as well. They also proliferated their publications. The Young Christian Workers movement (YCW), which hitherto focused on the working class, began to target and attract a greater number of student members in the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>44</sup> In mid-1970, it commenced a monthly called *Choice* [Chon] that translated a number of public documents from the Vatican and the Asian bishops, especially on issues of war and peace and communism. Some documents were accompanied by commentaries and interpretations that were liberal about Catholic relations with communism. The theme of one issue, for instance, was "Catholicism and communism from condemnation to dialogue." It reprinted excerpts from important documents regarding communism: Pius XI's anticommunist encyclical *Divini Redemptoris*, John XIII's *Pacem in Terris*, Paul VI's *Ecclesiam Suam*, and Vatican II's

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<sup>43</sup> On John XXIII's conduct of foreign policy and Vatican II, see Michael Riccards, *Vicars of Christ: Popes, Power, and Politics in the Modern World* (New York: Crossroads, 1998), 179-195; on Paul VI, see especially 201-224.

<sup>44</sup> Included in the first issue was a pronouncement from the movement that supported the urban students that engaged in anti-American and anti-Saigon protests. Signed in March 29, 1970, it called on the "working youth, within and without academic settings," to "actively connect with the students in Saigon to demand an immediate clarification from the government on arrests of students" and "restoration of the honor and right of students that had been arrested and detained illegally in recent years." See "Thong Cao cua Phong Trao Thanh Lao Cong Viet Nam ve Cuoc Tranh Dau Hien Nay cua Sinh Vien" [Announcement from the Vietnamese Young Christian Workers Movement on the Current Struggle of University Students], *Chon* [Choice] 1 (May 1, 1970), 33. This chapter does not look into high school and university students. But it should be noted that they played an important in furthering anti-Americanism in urban South Vietnam in the 1970s.

*Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). The commentaries on these documents declared that the Church's antagonistic attitude toward communism had begun to shift for a number of reasons. Dialogue with communists was difficult, as acknowledged by Paul VI. Nonetheless, communism was no longer an ideology in Russia and China only and "has spread to Europe and Asia and Africa," thus making itself a force for conversation and negotiation rather than attack.<sup>45</sup> There was also a moral obligation by the Church for dialogue because Catholicism and other major religions were responsible for the roots of atheism due to the failures of their members. Besides, atheism had put "the person" at the center. To combat atheism, Catholics would have to direct themselves towards human beings, including atheists themselves.<sup>46</sup> Another issue ran a commentary on Pope Paul's letter to a Vatican cardinal on the eightieth anniversary of Leo XIII's famed encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, the journal confirmed Pope Paul's basic position against Marxism but also qualified that his views were "observations and warnings but not criticism." Moreover, although anticommunists, "including the great majority of poor Vietnamese Catholics," considered Marxism a "materialist and godless ideology," in reality "Marxist materialism is not necessarily godless materialism."<sup>47</sup>

The commentary promised further development on this point in the next issue. It consisted mostly of an article already published a year before in another Catholic left journal, but which was seized by the Saigon censors and taken off the sales stand.

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<sup>45</sup> "De Ket Luan: Cong Giao voi Cong San qua Lich Su" [In Conclusion: Catholicism and Communism in History] *Chon* 7 (March 1971), 58.

<sup>46</sup> "De Ket Luan," 64. These points had been made in *Gaudium et Spes*.

<sup>47</sup> "Phan Chu Giai" [Commentary], *Chon* 11-12 (August 25, 1971), 128. This apostolic letter, known as "Octogesima Advnviens," was addressed to Cardinal Maurice Roy, president of the Vatican's Council of the Laity and the Pontifical Commission on Justice and Peace.

Reprinted on the pages of *Choice*, it turned out to be the most controversial article during the journal's run. Concerning the quarter-century-long construction of socialism in North Vietnam, the book-length article was penned by no other than the chaplain of YCW and earlier contributor to *Journey*, Fr. Truong Ba Can. Expanding on his argument about the First Indochina War published in *Journey*, Can covered the entirety of the North Vietnamese experience of state-building. He made sure to note major criticisms of this experience, such as land reform. But he also incorporated many statistics and numbers and statements in a primarily economic analysis of the pre-1957 period, and concluded that the DRV had overcome many adverse conditions and challenges to "have met some of its goals" towards constructing socialism.<sup>48</sup> The next five-year plan brought out new challenges, including self-acknowledged corruption on the part of the Communist Party. But it too succeeded in establishing a firm economic foundation that later proved to be pivotal to the war against the U.S. American bombing and the war effort slowed down or reduced production. Yet there were gains in the field of education, including at the university level.<sup>49</sup> "How come a small country," asked Can, "and divided and developing as the North, was able to confront a superpower like America?" Maybe it was because [it had] a firm economic and social foundation where weapons could not move it at all."<sup>50</sup> Half propaganda, half analysis, and all conviction were the moral gist of Can's article. It was initially published in the journal *Opposition* [Doi Dien], which began its run in mid-1969 and whose co-publisher was the Redemptorist Nguyen Ngoc Lan. Shortly after its publication, the article faced a firestorm of criticism from the urban anticommunist

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<sup>48</sup> Truong Ba Can, "Hai Muoi Nam Nam Xay Dung Xa Hoi Chu Nghia o Mien Bac" [Twenty-Five Years of Constructing Socialism in the North], *Chon* 13-14 (October 30, 1971), 72.

<sup>49</sup> Truong Ba Can, "Hai Muoi Nam Nam Xay Dung," 93 and 105-106.

<sup>50</sup> Truong Ba Can, "Hai Muoi Nam Nam Xay Dung," 108.

writers, plus a lawsuit from the government that was leveled at *Opposition*. Its radical conclusions might have not won any converts to socialism, but its arguments presented a steep challenge to the justification of the war on the part of anticommunist South Vietnamese. (The appendix of the reprint in *Choice* carried reprints of two responses from anticommunist writers, plus a document from the government's side of the lawsuit.) Most significant, perhaps, was its demonstration that Catholic intellectuals could support a socialist post-colonial Vietnam without seeming to betray their faith at all.

While few openly advocated for North Vietnam, the left-wing Catholic intellectuals continued to attack the Americanization of the war as ineffectual and immoral. With *Journey* coming to an end, Nguyen Van Trung began publishing a monthly called *Country* (*Dat Nuoc*) in 1967. The new journal was more varied in content and there were more articles about culture and the arts. There were also more non-Catholic contributors. Still, there was a lot of political content, including a growing and palpable frustration at the loss of independence in South Vietnam. Foreigners, observed the editorial in the first issue of the new journal, were “often surprised at the attitudes of Vietnamese after a political event, an assassination, a destructive act, or a coup d’etat” because “Vietnamese would bring forth hundreds and thousands of theories – some of which illogical, laughable, and contradictory – to explain the causes of such events.” They found Vietnamese to be “very complicated.” In truth, the editorial averred, it was not because Vietnamese were complicated but they were “no longer in control of their country.” Therefore they could not judge well but fell on “imaginary theories” to account for overwhelming events around them.<sup>51</sup> The nine-page editorial did not once mention

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<sup>51</sup> “Lam Duoc Gi? Duoc Gi Lam? Lam Gi Duoc!” [What to Do? What Are We Enabled to Do? What Can We Do?], *Dat Nuoc* [Country] 1 (November 1967), 3.



the U.S. by name. But there was no doubt that the “loss of control” was pinned at the presence of American troops since 1965.

Elsewhere, however, *Country* was not shy in attacking the U.S. Leading the way was Ly Chanh Trung, who penned an attack on political and economic treatment of black Americans. Trung placed the blame at the roots of modern capitalism, which propelled Europeans to conquer foreign lands and enslaved Africans or forced them into slavery. Apartheid in South Africa was named as the most blatant violation in contemporary time. But at least it was condemned by much of the world, including Europe. On the other hand, the integrationist policy in the U.S. also failed miserably, but it faced criticism from few in the West other than black Americans. On the scale of global population, Trung maintained, “ten million of black people in South Africa and twenty million in America” might be “small.” But these numbers reflected “a realistic experiment about the capability of white people in solving human problems appropriately according to spiritual values... and civilization”: which is to say, whites have failed to solve them. Trung named the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy – and urban riots and declarations from radical black leaders – as recent illustrations of this failure in America.<sup>52</sup> The essay was reprinted a year later in a collection of essays entitled *Learning about America*. The seemingly respectful title belied the antagonistic attitude towards the U.S. Discussing the American Revolution, for instance, Trung found it to have been “the last revolution in the classical spirit, not the first modern revolution.”<sup>53</sup> He challenged the interpretation about the U.S. from Jean-Jacques Servan-Schreiber, the

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<sup>52</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, “Nguoi Da Den va The Gioi Da Trang” [Black People and the White World], *Dat Nuoc* 1, 128-155.

<sup>53</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, *Tim Hieu Nuoc My* [Learning about America] (Saigon: Nguyen Du, 1969), 108. The implication is that the first modern revolution belonged to the French.

co-founder of the left-wing French weekly *L'Express*, who in a somewhat surprising move considered American economic power in Europe *not* a form of imperialism, and that American power on the whole was the result of energetic and successful management, communication, and education. Trung called Servan-Schreiber's view the "contradictory attitude of someone who has leaned right but still thinks that he belongs to the left."<sup>54</sup> Following European and American critics of capitalism, he argued that American values were materialistic and corrosive. In addition, the U.S. system had failed to alleviate poverty and racial injustice for black Americans. Worst was the situation in developing countries, where American imperialism was demonstrated by the fact that its provision of military aid was far greater than economic aid, so to assist the maintenance of ruling regimes favorable to Washington. (With the Americanization of the war, Trung did not need to name South Vietnam at all as a recipient of American military largess as it was obvious for all to see.) American wealth was undeniable, but so were its manifold forms of injustice and exploitation of humanity.<sup>55</sup>

Befitting of a journal led by the two Trungs, *Country* was theory-driven in its three-year run and aimed its sight at educated and elite South Vietnamese, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. Its anti-Americanism traveled from Mounierian Personalism of capitalism to a more stringent critique of American economic domination combined to war-mongering disposition. There is no question that Washington's takeover of the war generated the gist of its criticism. This anti-American attitude was struck also in the pages of more populist and popular periodicals, including Catholic ones. Perhaps the most popular periodical during Americanization was the weekly *Living the Faith* (*Song*

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<sup>54</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, *Tim Hieu Nuoc My*, 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ly Chanh Trung, *Tim Hieu Nuoc My*, 24-49.

*Dao*) under the auspices of the South Vietnamese chapter of the international movement Catholic Action. Published every Sunday from August 1966 to January 1968, it carried short articles in an eight-pager and newspaper-size format that was apparently meant to draw a larger readership than the more elite magazines that generated long articles and essays.<sup>56</sup> Because it focused on Catholics, *Living the Faith* published often on ecclesiastical matters, including shifting Catholic attitudes towards the communist bloc. The first three issues devoted at least one page each to religious practice and state-church relations in, respectively, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and Poland. The first issue headlined the signing of a diplomatic protocol between the Vatican and the Yugoslav state, calling the protocol “a model for the future.” (The two countries eventually established full diplomatic relations in 1970.) Another article made clear that Tito’s regime made life very difficult for Yugoslav Catholics, but ended with examples about better relations with the Vatican under John XXIII and now Paul VI.<sup>57</sup> The next two issues confirmed that religious life in Russia and Poland was no less dire. But there were signs of change and compromise since the early 1960s. They included the release of the Metropolitan Josef Slipyj in 1963 after seventeen years of imprisonment by the Soviets; a visit of the Soviet foreign minister to the Vatican (the first visit “in fifty years of communism by a high-ranking official of the communist government”); and the permission from the Kremlin to print 100,000 copies of the Bible. Inter-religious

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<sup>56</sup> There had been a run of this weekly in the first half of the 1960s, and Ly Chanh Trung acting as editor at one time. Unfortunately, there are no archival copies. It is unclear why it desisted publication, and one guess is that the Tet Offensive might have caused problems to publishing and distribution arrangements for the weekly. This was of course a broader problem, and a number of periodicals temporarily stopped publication while some others were discontinued completely.

<sup>57</sup> “Thoa Uoc giua Nam Tu va Vatican” [Protocol between Yugoslavia and the Vatican] and “Tai Nam Tu, Hien Tinh Cong Giao [Yugoslavia: The Catholic Situation], *Song Dao* [*Living the Faith*] 1 (August 14, 1966), 7.

relations also improved as the Russian Orthodox Church decided to send two observer-status delegates to the Second Vatican Council.<sup>58</sup> On Poland, the front page of the third issue declared that ninety percent of the Polish population continued to practice the faith. The inside pages made clear that the Polish communist government had made the lives of the faithful very difficult, especially during the period before 1956. But the past decade had alleviated some of the tension between church and state tension. There remained many challenges to the church, such as the heavy censorship against Catholic publications. But there were signs of hope, including the fact that both the state and the church commemorated “one thousand years of Poland.”<sup>59</sup> In another issue, the weekly quoted the primate of the Polish Church, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, condemning the Polish government for advocating atheism on the one hand, but on the other hand also urging of Catholics to counter communism not by hatred but by a “campaign of love.”<sup>60</sup> Dialogue and détente were promoted over continuing conflict and containment. The magazine advanced this point in its theological reflections. One of the contributors, Fr. Phuong Du, quoted Ephesians 6:10-11 with the Pauline emphasis on “battle” and “fighting” as a core of Christianity. He argued that there were “different ways of fighting,” and Catholics should have battled atheistic communism not by the force of weapons but by that of “an active faith and practices based on Justice and Charity.” He found it imperative also to distinguish between “wickedness” and “wicked people,”

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<sup>58</sup> “Cong Giao tai Nga So” [The Catholic Situation in Russia] and “Nha Nuoc Nga In 100,000 Cuon Kinh Thanh [The Russian Government Prints 100,000 Copies of the Bible], *Song Dao* 2 (August 21, 1966), 7.

<sup>59</sup> “Chinh Sach Cong Giao cua Nha Nuoc Cong San Ba Lan” [Catholic Policy from the Polish Communist Government] and “Hien Tinh Cong Giao Ba Lan” [The Current Situation of Catholic Poland], *Song Dao* 3 (August 28, 1966), 5.

<sup>60</sup> “Con Cong San vi Con Nhieu Nguoi Doi Rach” [There Remains Communism Because There Remained Many of the Poor], *Song Dao* 2 (August 21, 1966), 5.

between atheism and atheists. Catholics were to oppose the former, but also be open to the latter through dialogue rather than opposition.<sup>61</sup> Accompanying the relaxation of tension was the growing conviction that the best means to combat communism was not military build-up but social improvement of the poor. The sixth issue shifted attention from communist countries to noncommunist Brazil by highlighting long-standing structures that kept peasants and poor workers at the bottom of the economic and political ladder. It cited with hearty approval Bishop Helder Camara, who stood as an opponent of communism on the one hand and a champion of the Brazilian poor on the other hand.<sup>62</sup>

Corresponding to the weekly's advocacy for the poor and relaxation of tension with the communist world was its criticism of the U.S., especially its conduct in the war. This criticism at times focused on economic matters. The South Vietnamese people "hope that American GIs would save more," wrote Nguyen Ngoc Lan wrote in a short-lived column that ran in the early issues of the magazine. High spending by the Americans had caused leaps in inflation that further lessened the quality of living among South Vietnamese.<sup>63</sup> A similar point was made in a translated report by Michael Novak, later a prominent conservative intellectual but then an anti-war writer for the liberal *National Catholic Reporter*.<sup>64</sup> The weekly considered the Americanization to have deeply corrosive effects on the native culture. "Protect the national culture" was a

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<sup>61</sup> Fr. Phuong Du, "Nguoi Vo Than Khac Chu Nghia Vo Than" [Atheists Different from Atheism], *Song Dao* 63 (November 19, 1967), 3.

<sup>62</sup> "Tinh Trang Den Toi tai Mien Dong Bac Ba Tay" [The Dark Situation in Northwest Brazil], *Song Dao* 6 (September 8, 1966), 7; "Muon Chong Cong Phai Cai Thien Doi Song Dan Ngheo" [Fighting Communism Means Reforming the Lives of the Poor], *ibid.*, 5

<sup>63</sup> Nguyen Ngoc Lan, "Bien Co: Nhan Mot Buc Thu cua Mot Binh Si Hoa Ky" [Event: Receiving a Letter from an U.S. Soldier], *Song Dao* 1, 4; and "Chong Lam Phat My o Viet Nam" [Fighting Against American Inflation in Vietnam], *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Novak, "Nguoi My, Kim Tien, va Sac Duc tai Viet Nam" [Americans, Money, and Sex in Vietnam], *Song Dao* 58 (October 15, 1967), 3.

common rallying cry, and the magazine reported about a speaker at a cultural congress condemning “the import and tolerance of insane music, movies with nudity and sexual content, pornographic and immoral books that corrupt the spirit and destroy the progressive ideal and enthusiasm among youths.”<sup>65</sup> Here we spot a re-emphasis on *dan toc*: “the people” or “nationalism.” The theme of cultural tension underlay the re-emphasis.

One such theme was the question about Vietnamese that worked for Americans. This widespread practice during Americanization was perceived to undercut the values ascribed to traditional social hierarchy so important to Vietnamese culture. Illustrative of this cultural resentment was the following story that was published in one of the regular columns.

Mr. H, descendant of a reputed [i.e., educated] family, though didn't get to a bachelor's or doctoral degree, did earn a baccalaureate one. Having left his job because of conflict with his boss, he was invited by a friend to work at an American office, partly because his friend thought his knowledge of English was a great skill. He hesitated and only concurred after learning that his would-be boss had earned a bachelor's degree in the humanities and was known for dealing fairly and sensitively with employees. He got along great with his boss.

Near Christmas, he and his wife spent two days shopping for presents for his boss, especially since the boss recently got married to a Vietnamese woman. When the four met, Mr. H and wife were astounded to see the boss' wife was no other than their former maid – “chi Sen” as maids were commonly called by their employers. Not knowing, the American boss asked, “Did you know each other?” Mrs. H. quickly smiled and said in broken English, “My cousin.”

Another man, also called H., had worked for a Vietnamese employer - first for \$3000 a month, then now up to \$5000. His friends have been working Americans for \$8000, plus a few more grands from selling gas on the side. His friends urged him to join them – and he did without regret [for leaving] or gratitude [for his former employer].<sup>66</sup>

A related issue was the explosion of prostitution, and the weekly viewed the

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<sup>65</sup> “Bao Ve Van Hoa Dan Toc” [Protect the National Culture], *Song Dao* 1 (August 14, 1966), 5.

<sup>66</sup> Hoang Cong Vu, “Cat Trong Doi Song Hang Ngay” [Sketches from Daily Life], *Song Dao* 21 (Jan 1, 1967), 3.

American presence to have assaulted traditional Vietnamese womanhood by luring poor and perhaps also not-so-poor women into unsavory activities. In the same column, readers learned that a young woman “here called M., sophomore at a Catholic high school, had to work there to make ends meet after her father was killed in battle, her mother sick with five kids. She worked first for \$5000 a month, then \$15,000 as a prostitute. The neighbors gossiped against her, prompting her to move elsewhere.”<sup>67</sup> Even when women did not engage into prostitution, their associations with American men threatened the native men. Hence, the weekly circulated the story about a young man lamenting with his friend that the girl he liked had gone to work at an American office, then started dating an American. She was “beautiful,” “from a good family,” a “good student,” and he went to her house to ask if she would marry him. He asked, “Aren’t you afraid of losing your country and your roots?” “You sounds like only you know about loving country,” she responded, “We females have our own stand on the matter.”<sup>68</sup>

The urban setting of these and other stories underscored the growing frustration among South Vietnamese noncommunist urbanites over the Americanization of the war. And they occurred in 1966 and 1967 only. The longer the U.S. continued to dominate the situation in South Vietnam without a clear outcome, the more confused and frustrated were the urban people, including many Catholics. In their respected roles as professors, priests, and leaders, members of the Catholic left played an important role in influencing this trend in public opinion.

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<sup>67</sup> Hoang Cong Vu, “Cat Trong Doi Song Hang Ngay,” *Song Dao* 22 (Jan 8, 1967), 3.

<sup>68</sup> “Than oi! Nguoi Yeu No Di Lay My” [Sadness! His Girlfriend Is Marrying an American], *Song Dao* (July 26, 1967), 4.

It should be acknowledged that the left-wing Catholics hardly formed a monolithic bloc, and it would be a mistake to treat them as if they did not disagree among themselves. There were at least five groups among the liberal Catholic intellectuals, including a conservative one that aimed for reform only within the Vietnamese Catholic Church. The second group, as exemplified by Dr. Nguyen Van Ai, favored changes within the capitalist system. Ly Chanh Trung and Nguyen Van Trung represented the third group, which was non-communist, non-capitalist, and anti-American. The fourth group leaned closer to socialism and communism, but was wary of control over the Church by the Communist Party. The last group, represented by Truong Ba Can, was in support of the socialist system and even argued that changes within the Church would have come primarily from national liberation and politics.<sup>69</sup> But they shared in the opposition to the Americanization of the war, or at least the continuation of Americanization.

### **Ultra-nationalist anti-Americanism among disabled veterans in the early 1970s**

The left-wing Catholics were hardly the only ones that articulated an anti-American attitude during the period of Americanization. During the early 1970s, a very vocal group that protested against Washington's takeover of the war came from the unexpected quarter of disabled veterans of the South Vietnamese army (ARVN). The activities of their movement made headlines on the front pages of the Saigon dailies. At times, they even garnered attention from foreign news outlets, including the *New York Times*. To appreciate the sudden rise of this anti-American movement, it is worth

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<sup>69</sup> Nguyen Van Trung, "Tim Hieu Tinh Hinh Cong Giao," 17-18.



recalling in details some of the events that occurred in the early public protests of this movement. The first piece in the *Times* came in early April 1970, and reported a demonstration of disabled veterans in front of the Independence Palace that ended only after a presidential aide tape-recorded the demands of the veterans and said he would present the tape to President Nguyen Van Thieu. The demonstration was symptomatic of other activities, such as occupation of public lands and building of homes on them. As the *Times* put it, “hundreds of disabled veterans were building new homes on sidewalks and other land throughout downtown Saigon as a protest against the Government’s apparent lack of concern for their welfare.” The *Times* followed one such veteran, a former Infantry Ranger by the name of Pham Van Dan. Mr. Dan, who was 29 years old and recipient of five medals before his discharge in 1965 when he was shot, was classified as 70 percent disabled. After discharge, Mr. Dan and his family stayed on at his Rangers battalion compound for another two years, but had to leave when his commander was killed. After living in one hut attached to a villa in Gia Dinh, then another on the back street of Cho Lon, he joined the protest movement and, by the time the *Times* got a hold of him, “was hard at work on his new home on Yen Do Street, a previously uncluttered thoroughfare in a relatively clean neighborhood of large villas, many of them occupied by American officials.” The *Times* noted too that “Mr. Dan’s life is typical of 40,000 veterans,” and their feeling was that “[n]obody seems to care about them.”<sup>70</sup>

The local newspapers concurred with the estimate of the *Times* and gave many more details about the activities of the protesters. From *Political Opinion [Chinh Luan]*,

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<sup>70</sup> “South Vietnamese War Veterans Charge Neglect,” *New York Times* (April 5, 1970), 2.

a leading anticommunist Saigon daily, we learn that in the afternoon of March 8, there was a “bloody scuffle” between some disabled veterans and the police in front of the Bureau of Rural Development located at the corner of two major boulevards. The scuffle occurred after the veterans broke through the fences and started building huts on an “unoccupied piece of land” outside the building. The Bureau called the police, whose arrival ensued in a scuffled that resulted in a head injury to one policeman, the burning of a Suzuki police vehicle, and the running away of the veterans, apparently without any arrests. By late March, some disabled veterans had already occupied sidewalks of two major roads, the Hien Vuong and Yen Do, and others began to move into some other lots throughout the metropolitan area, including a compound at Petrus Ky Boulevard. Into April, a number of disabled veterans from the provinces came to Saigon to join in the occupation. On April 3, *Chinh Luan* estimated that there were about one hundred huts already set up in the Petrus Ky compound, fifty in another lot, and five hundred in another area. Back to the Hien Vuong and Yen Do intersection, some disabled veterans cut the barbed wires protecting the villas and set up another one hundred huts.<sup>71</sup>

In the morning of April 4, the day of the episode covered in the *New York Times*, about fifty disabled veterans, some in wheelchairs or on crutches, gathered at 9:15 AM at the Lower House of the National Assembly and gave a three-point request to the president of the House. They then marched to the Independence Palace and passed by the landmark Catholic Cathedral. At one of the intersections, however, they were met by the South Vietnamese Special Police, resulting in a scuffle as noted by the *Times*. Using batons and butts of their guns, the police resisted the advancement of the veterans,

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<sup>71</sup> This summary is gathered from various reports published in *Chinh Luan* [Political Opinion], March 11, 29-30, and 31; and April 2, 3, 4, and 5-6. They begin on p. 3 and sometimes continue to p. 10.

knocking down six veterans in wheelchairs and one veteran on crutches. But both sides seemed to show a great deal of restraint: the veteran representatives quickly urged the marchers to stop marching and stay stationed instead; the policemen were ordered to take cartridges off their pistols. Around 11:30 AM, the presidential aide came out and tape-recorded their demands. He promised to deliver the demands to his boss, and the veterans disbanded from the demonstration.<sup>72</sup>

These events occurred at the height of the protest movement, and only a full-scale study would do justice to its political and human angles. The Thieu government, for example, tried hard to meet many demands of the veterans. Additionally, there were conflicts within the leadership of the movement as well as conflicts between disabled veterans and some of Saigon's civilians over occupations of land. The protests came to a halt later in 1970, only to return, albeit in smaller and different forms, before the presidential election of October 1971.<sup>73</sup> The White House was also briefed on the developments of these protests in 1970 from its South Vietnamese representative, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. In late April, for instance, the ambassador cabled the following in his report to Washington:

The disabled veterans represent a totally different kind of problem [to Thieu than the students]. The veterans have borne heavy sacrifices for the country – as their mutilations starkly attest – and they have dropped to the social and economic bottom of the society they have been defending... Since every ARVN combat soldier knows himself to be a potential disabled veteran, the government recognized the need to deal urgently with the disabled veterans' demands. Accordingly, after the confrontation occurred, [the Saigon government] moved to take remedial steps. It presented to the National Assembly a veterans benefit bill which will

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> "S. Vietnam Veteran Sets Himself Afire," *The Washington Post* (August 17, 1971), A12; "Ky Marches in Funeral," *New York Times* (August 21, 1971), 4; and "The Disabled Stage Saigon Protest," *New York Times* (September 8, 1971), 3.

provide for rather generous pensions, and it devised a plan for providing emergency housing to the disabled in distress. The promises were well received. The veterans ceased their demonstrations and construction of shacks stopped. The government has bought time with promises, but it must now make good on them.<sup>74</sup>

For our purposes, it is possible to gauge some of more ideological reasons behind the veterans by examining available publications from them. In the first few months of the protests, the disabled veterans managed to find a temporary home in the weekly *Life (Doi)*. The magazine came out under the sponsorship of Chu Tu, a well-known anticommunist northern émigré that first came to fame as author of several sensational social novels in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He later abandoned fiction and worked full-time in journalism. Taking advantage of the more liberating atmosphere after Diem's demise, Chu Tu published the Saigon daily *Living (Song)*. The strongly anticommunist periodical was likely the reason behind a failed assassination attempt, alleged to be the work of the Viet Cong, against him in May 1966.<sup>75</sup> *Life* advertised itself as “an extreme-left and noncommunist opposition weekly.” Similar to the left-leaning Catholic professors and clergy, the magazine often voiced the need for a “social revolution.” But it sounded just as vague on how to carry out this revolution. All the same, the magazine appealed to many urban readers because it was catchy in layout and often witty in tone. It also strove to diversify its content, and usually devoted each issue to a particular topic or issue. Among the topics that graced the pages of the first thirty issues were the hippy movement, the widespread use of marijuana, the high cost of renting in cities, the anti-

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<sup>74</sup> “For the President from Bunker, USDEL France for Ambassador Habib” (April 24, 1970), Ellsworth Bunker, *The Bunker Papers: Reports to the President from Vietnam, 1967-1973*, Vol. 3 (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California at Berkeley, 1990), 767.

<sup>75</sup> The attempt and aftermath are described in *Chu Tu Khong Han Thu* [Chu Tu: No Hatred] (Saigon: Song, 1966; reprinted, Houston: Xuan Thu, 1980). This book is mostly a collection of articles by various writers originally published in *Living* and other periodicals.

war faction in urban South Vietnam, South Vietnamese soldiers and their families, economic policies, and the “achievements and sins” of Americans in Vietnam. In addition to articles devoted to these subjects, each issue carried several regular columns, with at least one written by the publisher under a pen name.

For several issues during April and May 1970, *Life* devoted a section of several pages to the movement of disabled veterans. The section was called “Wooden Crutch” (*Nang Go*), followed by a half-humorous, half-bitter caption: “Special pages for soldiers that are blind, legless, chipped away, broken up, [and] peckerless.” Appropriately, “Wooden Crutch” first appeared in the issue devoted to the disabled veterans themselves. In May, the movement brought out the first issue of its own weekly, a newspaper-sized eighteen-pager called *Steel Crutch (Nang Thép)*. It ran under the auspices the Committee for the Struggle of Rights to Life of Disabled Veterans (Uy Ban Tranh Dau Quyen Song Phe Binh), and the management included several officers of the Committee. However, there were internal disputes among the movement as well as a death of one officer, resulting in some changeovers in Committee membership and the management of the weekly. By the start of 1971, the paper started carrying a more colorful spread along with the new name *Screaming (Gao Thét)* that was published until at least September 1972.

There were several prominent themes that the disabled veterans seized and expounded upon on the pages of their two weeklies. One was their anticommunism, which, given their previous military roles and injuries, would be fully expected. Not surprising either is the theme of economic deprivation among members of the movement – not only disabled veterans but also widows and children of their deceased comrades.

“The struggle of disabled veterans has two goals, near and far,” the first issue of the weekly declares, in the regular column “Blind Soldier’s Take on Life,” “the immediate goal is possession of living quarters and treatment appropriate to the sacrifices given to the nation and society.”<sup>76</sup> Extending on the “Land to the Tiller” theme of recent land reform programs, the paper pounded on the motto “land to the tiller, housing to the disabled veteran.” In issue after issue, it called for increased benefits, better housing, better policies in hiring disabled veterans into governmental jobs, and training programs for new and appropriate lines of work. The paper argued against the proposal 138/70/HP that would determine benefits for disabled veterans and widowed families. It calculated that a child of a deceased veteran would receive about 80 piasters a month, well below the 200 piasters that the then prime minister Nguyen Cao Ky had allegedly pledged during the 1967 elections campaign. It also expressed unhappiness and anger at what it perceived to be the government’s favoritism towards former Viet Cong members who came to the SVN side through the Open Arms Program.<sup>77</sup> Bettering the material life of the disabled veterans and their families was clearly a primary goal of the movement and its publications. It also formed the basis of public responses from the South Vietnamese government. On April 10, 1970, for example, the head of the Ministry of Veterans appeared in a popular weekly television program called “The Citizens Want to Know.” His answers focused on bread-and-butter issues of housing and employment for disabled veterans and, in case of death, benefits for their widows. At one time, he expressed disagreement with the attempts to seize land and of some disabled veterans. For the most

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<sup>76</sup> Thang Dan Quen, “Tieng Keu cua Nguoi Bi Bop Co” [Voice of the Man Being Choked] *Nang Thep* 1 (May 1-8, 1970), 4. The name of the author literally means “ordinary citizen.”

<sup>77</sup> “Diec Khong So Sung” [The Deaf Fear Not Guns] *Nang Thep* 3 (May 15-22, 1970), 10.

part, though, he asked for patience and understanding and provided a long list of governmental achievements and efforts since the mid-1960s in bettering the lives of the veterans and their families.<sup>78</sup>

Gender was another major theme among the veterans – in particular, the sense that their manhood was gravely diminished in significance and influence. Throughout the issues were scattered images of disabilities and impotency. Picking up from the caption originated in the weekly *Life*, the front-page name *Steel Crutch* carried the following subtitle: “The screaming field of soldiers blind, legless, chipped, broken... pecker-less.” Plentiful were sketches of disabled and bandaged men, and many more were passages and even whole articles that describe their experiences of impotency. Bodily impotency was most obvious. For example, addressing the Special Police in the column “The Blind Piggybacking the Legless,” Dinh Trung Thu, publisher of the weekly and one of the leaders of the Committee, wrote that “without hands we can’t pull our lovers towards us, without arms we can’t embrace our wives; we can’t even hold a cap begging on the street; our wooden legs can’t chase after our disrespectful sons; without knees we can’t make love with our wives.”<sup>79</sup> But impotency extended to the political realm too, as instanced by the following passage in another article from the same issue:

Histories of national decline prove that leaders who took their countries into annihilation were undone by two causes. First, they believed in the false praise by their courtiers to the point of not seeing the truth and unable to distinguish right from wrong. Second, they were “neutered” by

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<sup>78</sup> “Phong Van Ong Tong Truong Cuu Chien Binh ve Quyen Loi cua Thuong Phe Binh: Phat Hinh Ngay 10.4.1970” [Interview with the Minister of Veterans on the Benefits of Disabled Veterans, Broadcast on April 10, 1970], in *Nguoi Dan Muon Biet: Tap I* [The Citizens Want To Know: Volume I] (Saigon: Viet Nam Thong Tan Xa, 1972), 234-242. As indicated in the introduction of the volume, this program was modeled on U.S. television political talk shows such as NBC’s “Meet the Press,” CBS’s “Face the Nation,” and ABC’s “Issues and Answers” (i).

<sup>79</sup> Dinh Trung Thu, “Thang Mu Cong Thang Que” [The Blind Carries the Legless], *Nang Thep* 1, 9.

either their women or their “Allies” and obeyed without conditions, for once neutered they possessed no ability for opposition.<sup>80</sup>

Note the blame placed on women as well as “Allies.” The weeklies expressed a good deal of frustration over the changing social mores and threats to traditional familial structure – from prostitution to the hypocrisy of wealthy women who visited wounded soldiers, from the fear that the growing prevalence of American-style canned food would put a stop to home-cooking to the frustration over having “disrespectful sons.”

Along with the sense of frustration at economic deprivation and diminished manhood, the pages of the weeklies reveal palpably the anger of the disabled veterans. I have already touched on their anger at mistreatment by the government, but there was also rage at the wealthy and powerful, especially at Vietnamese who were taking advantage of war to profit their own pockets. As the column “Blind Soldier Looks At Life” declared early on,

All Vietnamese have the authority to own lots for home-building [and] land for farming... Those greedy Vietnamese, leaning on their foreign masters to conquer land, are national traitor and foreign agents, in need of judgment and punishment from the people’s court on two crimes: crime of relying on the power of their foreign masters to bully other Vietnamese, and crime of being Vietnamese and yet oppress the Vietnamese people.<sup>81</sup>

One would expect this kind of passionate denunciation from North Vietnamese or NLF propaganda rather than from an anti-communist group such as disabled ARVN veterans. The veterans were also furious at military leaders, taking them to be corruptly self-enriching while having no intentions to give up their long-standing positions. One of their outbursts against the corrupt leaders went as followed.

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<sup>80</sup> Tho Hoan, “Thien De” [Neutering], *Nang Thép* 1, 5. The penname means literally “neuterer.”

<sup>81</sup> “Thuong Phe Binh Luc Luong Tien Phong cua Cach Mang Xa Hoi Toan Dien” [Disabled Veterans: Vanguard Force of the Total Social Revolution], *Nang Thép* 1, 4.



Foreign papers wrote that Vietnam has 8 filthy-rich generals. They are almost right; there are at least 30 filthy-rich generals. These generals have led the military for some time, some since the “ancient” French-led era. Our military has plenty of talents, so why does it depend on these “ancient” men? Why not give fresh blood to the military by inviting these ancient men to retire. Especially since they are super-rich! Being super-rich means they are cowardly... the evidence being not a single general has died during this twenty-year conflict (except for one who was killed by an air crash) while at least a few American generals have died.<sup>82</sup>

Anger too was directed at foreigners, including Americans. The passing comment above about American generals notwithstanding, the weeklies conveyed strong anti-American sentiments and attitudes. At the heart of their anti-Americanism was the experience of having lost considerable political autonomy. Commemorating the Diem coup, for example, they declared, “Southern Vietnamese do not accept American manipulation of anticommunist policy to work on capitalistic colonialism”; referring to the new relationship between America and China, it stated, “American dealings with world communism and betrayal of allies completely denounce the U.S. to be a wicked colonial nation.”<sup>83</sup> Nixon was often portrayed as manipulative, and there were more than a few caricatures of him making a deal with Mao as both standing over the map of Vietnam. But even when it comes to mutual concerns between the US and SVN, the movement viewed the former US as a thoroughly conditional senior partner. When Vice President Agnew visited Saigon, *Steel Crutch* mocked him as “ambassador of monetary aid,” adding that although it was unclear if Agnew came to persuade Thieu to accept American terms for negotiations (according to Reuters) or to discuss military matters (according to the Soviet press), it was clear enough that “American aid has strings

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<sup>82</sup> Tho Hoan, “Thien De,” *Nang Thiep* 1, 5.

<sup>83</sup> Uyen Minh, “Viet Ve Ngay 1-11-63: 8 Nam Gioi Quan Nhan Lam Cach Mang” [Writing about November 1, 1963: Eight Years of Making Revolution Among the Military] *Gao Thet* 28 (October 30, 1971), 1.

attached” now as it always did before. For their populist rhetoric, the weeklies employed colorful Vietnamese expressions and colloquialisms, and they sometimes described American policy by using the slangy phrase *tien trao chao muc*: “cash handed over and soup scooped out.” At times, the tone even took on a thoroughly contrarian point of view: as one of the brief cover-page editorials put it shortly after the 1971 South Vietnamese presidential election, “Americans are not our benefactors; on the contrary, we are their benefactors, since Vietnam took on the [anticommunist] frontier role that has born many sacrifices for the Free World.”<sup>84</sup>

Two things should be noted here. First, denunciations of the U.S. grew louder and more frequent as time passed, suggesting a growing degree of confidence and self-assertion on part of the veterans. Second, their anti-Americanism was only one piece of a larger anti-foreigner puzzle. Their anti-Americanism was a very large piece, but there were also strong anti-Chinese, anti-Soviet, and anti-French expressions. The weeklies grouped the major powers together as “foreign empires” and accused these empires “from all sides have manipulated the patriotism among Vietnamese to prompt a fully criminal war,” something that could be resolved only by a union of “movements and groups that are anticommunist and friendly to neither the US nor France.”<sup>85</sup>

Beneath the highly populist rhetoric were also touches of xenophobia. Expressed in the weeklies too were strong anti-ethnic-Chinese and anti-Cambodian sentiments. The weeklies attacked ethnic Chinese businessmen for taking advantage of the war to drive up prices. They also questioned the exemption of ethnic Chinese from serving in the

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<sup>84</sup> “Phao Dai: Chong Chu Truong Chien Tranh cua Cac De Quoc Tu Ban, Cong San cung Bon Tay Sai” [Platform: Against War Policies of Capitalist and Communist Empires and Their Henchmen] *Gao Thet* 27 (October 23-30, 1971), 1.

<sup>85</sup> Untitled editorial, *Gao Thet* 63 (August 5-12, 1972), 1.

military. As for Cambodians, the spring of 1970 saw anti-Vietnamese demonstrations in Phnom Penh, and the weeklies expressed outrage at attacks on Vietnamese. Finally, they deployed an intensely populist, “us vs. them” rhetoric to appeal to other sectors of society, dividing neatly the two sides into “them” with derogatory nicknames and “us” with formal social statuses.

“Them” include the factions of landowners, Benoit Chau [French-Vietnamese], Doi Co [French-army men], Chu Hoa [ethnic Chinese], Ba Lon [Big Women], Thang Tay [French], Thang Cha [Malays]... “Us” include disabled veterans, the majority of public and civil servants, laborers, and poor factory workers. We used to be chained by social mores, outdated morals, and laws of the strong – but we have evolved, as evidenced by “Land to the Tiller” policies. “Us” are 97% of Vietnamese that work for neither French nor Americans, or cater to powerful rulers. We had been suppressed and exploited by old and new colonialism, and new and old feudalism, to the point of having lost land to build our homes on.<sup>86</sup>

Surfacing here was a form of hyper-nationalist populism that defined inclusion relative to class boundaries and relationship to foreign countries. Moreover, the hyper-nationalism was complicated by renewed calls for social revolution, a constant theme in the post-colonial southern Vietnamese society.

Soldiers engage in battles not only to protect the country but also to create a just society... What would they do? Does patriotism force them to bear injustice and poverty in silence, to watch injustices expand each day? Or rather, isn't leveling injustices also a patriotic duty?<sup>87</sup>

It was a twist that the veterans claimed the duties of soldiers included the non-traditional task of creating and correcting justice. Yet, their terminology was not strange in light of the revolutionary rhetoric found in different quarters in urban South Vietnam during Americanization. Many other publications and groups – both neutralist and

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<sup>86</sup> “Thuong Phe Binh Luc Luong Tien Phong,” *Nang Thep* 1, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Thanh Nguyet Thanh, “Thang Mu Cong Thang Que” [The Blind Carries the Legless], *Nang Thep* 3, 9.

anticommunist, both pro-American and anti-Americans – were opening new debates about social revolution. It was apt that the veterans, who had “dropped to the social and economic bottom of the society they defend” (in the words of Ambassador Bunker), were enthusiastic supporters of revolution-bound rhetoric.

There was another context to the anti-Americanism among the disabled veterans: Vietnamization. No doubt, the protest occurred because of urgent needs among the protestors. But it also began during the first phase of major withdrawal of U.S. troops and the handover of equipment to the South Vietnamese army. When the protests first broke out, Vietnamization was going on steadily, as seen by continual withdrawal of US troops and confirmation of Nixon at a news conference on January 30, 1970 that “the policy of Vietnamization is irreversible” regardless of any progress at the Paris peace talks. Fortunately for Nixon, there *was* progress of a sort in Paris, as the secret meetings between Washington and Hanoi that started the previous summer now moved into a new phase, with Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho having their first secret meeting in February. Ordinary Vietnamese of course did not know about the secret negotiations. But Nixon’s shift in policy provided them, disabled veterans included, an outlet to express the frustration and reassert their claim for independence. The largest protests came from university and high school students, and government’s reactions were strong-handed. On January 24, for instance, the Military Court sentenced university student Mien Duc Thang to five years of hard labor for having distributed and performed his anti-war music.<sup>88</sup> There was a pause to anti-government protests, but they erupted two

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<sup>88</sup> “Nhac Si S.V. Mien Duc Thang Bi Phat 5 Nam Kho Sai” [The Student Musician Mien Duc Thang Is Sentenced to Five Years of Hard Labor] *Chinh Luaän* (January 25-26, 1970), 3. There were other anti-war musicians (Trinh Cong Son was by far the best known), but Thang was prosecuted for having

months later over the arrest of several other university students, including Huynh Tan Man, then president of the Saigon University Student Union. The students were deeply concerned with issues that directly affected them, such as mandatory conscription and tuition rises. But subsequent and more widespread protests were more overtly anti-Thieu and anti-American in tones and flavors.<sup>89</sup> The student protests lasted well into 1974, and involved a highly varied types of activities, such as burning American military jeeps, organizing exhibitions about My Lai and other American war crimes, holding “sleepless nights” of singing protest songs, and, in some individual cases, even going to the countryside to join the NLF.

Anticommunist South Vietnamese, of course, would not have joined or supported the NLF. But they were vocally critical of Americanization, its lack of success, and its creation of new problems for the Vietnamese. Looking forward to the 1970s, an article in the first issue in 1970 of the anticommunist weekly *Life* was bitter in its view of Americanization. “The role of the government and other forces in South Vietnam from 1965 to 1967,” declared the writer, “has been thankless, shameful, gloomy.” Americanization had made South Vietnamese dependent on the U.S. and, therefore, an effective means of propaganda for the communist enemy. Worse, South Vietnamese felt dominated by the American-led war effort.

[They] could not avoid seeing American soldiers, American [civilians], American rice, American money, American power all over the South. The Southern people do not like the communists, but also find it hard to like the Americans. No genuine and brave Vietnamese patriot

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composed lyrics that blamed war-mongering on the U.S. and the RVN but not on the NLF and North Vietnam.

<sup>89</sup> “Vietnam Student Protests Spread in Spite of Police,” *New York Times* (April 7, 1970), 3; “Saigon Feels War’s Strain and Chaos,” *New York Times* (May 8, 1970), 15; “Student Protesters Denouncing Thieu Also Assails the U.S.,” *New York Times* (June 16, 1970), 1; and “Saigon Students Are Making the U.S. a Major Target,” *New York Times* (July 4, 1970), 3.

could say loudly that I love America, like America, worship America, follow America, fight for America, obey orders from America, receive salary from America, and eat American food.<sup>90</sup>

The author argued for taking the fight to the north to end the war: an unrealistic solution that spoke more about the frustration of South Vietnamese than the ability of the U.S. and the RVN to wage war northward. In a similar mode, the disabled veterans wanted to obtain economic aid from the government, but also recognition of their contribution to the war effort that had been put aside when the U.S. took over the war in 1965.

In important ways, their reaction reflected a broader attitude among urban South Vietnamese towards the U.S. Along the defeat of the Buddhist Struggle Movement in the summer of 1966, the Americanization of the war put most urban South Vietnamese on either the fence or a defensive stance. As reflected in the small book *Vietnam and Its Issues* cited at the start of this chapter, many of the urbanites were grateful for U.S. intervention that prevented a collapse of the Saigon government. Nonetheless, they grew more and more uneasy with the expansion of warfare and the ways that the Americans conducted the war, often in disregard for their voices and desires. They either had to wait and see what would result from American direct participation, or swallow their humiliation at the massive foreign presence.<sup>91</sup> Coupled with the impasse of the war, the social and cultural upheavals from the American presence led to deep dissatisfaction and frustration among civilian South Vietnamese. Because the Thieu government was

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<sup>90</sup> Nguyen Huu Dong, "Tuong Lai Viet Nam nhung Nam 70" [The Future of Vietnam in the Seventies], *Doi* 16 (January 1, 1970), 14-15.

<sup>91</sup> For the Buddhist Struggle Movement, see Robert J. Topmiller, *The Lotus Unleashed: The Buddhist Peace Movement in South Vietnam, 1964-1966* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2002).

formed during the Americanization period and because it was military (rather than civilian) in origin, many South Vietnamese, correctly or not, associated Thieu and members of his government with American interests. Not far behind anti-Thieu rhetoric and demonstrations was also cultural and political anti-Americanism, which, as we had seen in the case of left-wing Catholics, had been built up for several years and was now bursting into the scene. The anti-Americanism of the disabled veterans was cut from a different piece of clothes: not the anti-capitalism of Emmanuel Mounier and other left-leaning noncommunist Western Europeans, but from an ethnic-based ultra-nationalism combined to a sense of aggrieved manhood handicapped by Americanization.

### **Conclusion**

Lyndon Johnson's decision in 1965 to escalate the war by introducing combat troops to South Vietnam had many far-reaching consequences, one of which was the rapid rise of anti-Americanization in Saigon and other cities. The longer that Americanization went on, the more vocal and critical urban South Vietnamese grew towards Washington's conduct of the war. Two, three, and more years passed by since the spring of 1965 and yet there was no end in sight for the war. This reality brought forth further anguish on the one hand and criticism on the other hand. By 1970, even an American-friendly magazine such as *Nowadays*, a subject of Chapter Six, began to publish criticism of the negative effects of U.S. troops in South Vietnam. In an issue devoted to women, it published a satire about Vietnamese women working at American

offices.<sup>92</sup> This article was an exception to the rule, and *Nowaday* was generally benign and indirect in its criticism of the U.S. The same, however, cannot be said about many other nationalist and noncommunist South Vietnamese, who expressed their displeasure towards America and its policy – and sometimes more – in unambiguous terms.

In his book on anti-Americanism in Latin America during the Cold War, the historian Alan McPherson examined three episodes: Cuba in 1959, Panama in 1964, and the Dominican Republic in 1965. These case studies led McPherson to conclude that there were different kinds of anti-Americanism in Latin America, even when anti-American events occurred within a few years of one another. Cuba provided a vivid example of revolutionary anti-Americanism; Panama was a case of conservative anti-Americanism; and the Dominican Republic an instance of “episodic” anti-Americanism.<sup>93</sup> In regard to anti-Americanism in South Vietnam, it probably would take a book-length study like McPherson’s book to do justice to the complexity of the subject. But as illustrated by the examples of the left-wing Catholics and ultra-nationalist disabled veterans above, it could be stated with strong reason that there was not a singular kind but a variety of anti-Americanism. Simultaneously, so vast was the Americanization of the war, that it brought forth a commonality in growing opposition to U.S. involvement in the war. Different groups in urban South Vietnam might have been different in ideological orientation, political interests, and base of support. But they shared a desire to regain South Vietnamese autonomy over military and political matters, and their anti-

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<sup>92</sup> Dien An, “Nghe Thuat Co Vo Lam So My” [The Art of Having a Wife Work at American Offices] *Thoi Nay* 253 (May 15, 1970), 54-58.

<sup>93</sup> Alan McPherson, *Yankee No! Anti-Americanism in U.S.-Latin American Relations* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2003).



Americanism ultimately focused on the conduct that Washington exerted when it Americanized the war in 1965.

## EPILOGUE

In 1989, the former South Vietnamese writer The Uyen published in California a book called *Saigon After Twelve Years*, meaning the city since the end of the Vietnam War.<sup>1</sup> A nephew of Nhat Linh, the co-founder of the Self-Strength Literary Group, The Uyen was born in Hanoi in 1935 and migrated into the south in 1954. In Saigon, he graduated from the prestigious Chu Van An High School that had also migrated south in 1954. He studied at Saigon's College of Literature and Education and taught Vietnamese language and literature for many years at high schools in Saigon. He was drafted into the South Vietnamese military in 1962 and eventually rose to the rank of lieutenant. He wrote throughout those years, and published several junior high school textbooks on Vietnamese literature, plus a number of short stories and essays in mainstream periodicals. Although he was neither a Catholic nor a Personalist, he nonetheless was good friends with Nguyen Van Trung and a number of liberal Catholic intellectuals in Saigon.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, he and some friends published a small mimeograph journal called *Attitude (Thai Do)*, which they distributed to their circles of friends and supporters. Similar to Trung's *Journey*, *Attitude* took the view that a noncommunist social revolution was crucial to the success of South Vietnam. The Uyen

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<sup>1</sup> The Uyen, *Saigon Sau Muoi Hai Nam* [Saigon After Twelve Years] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> The Uyen, "Nguyen Van Trung va Nhung Nguoi Ban Cong Giao Cua Toi" [Nguyen Van Trung and My Catholic Friends], *Nghi Trong Mua Xuan* [Thoughts in the Spring] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuan Thu, 1992), 87-138.

was against communism not because the communists waged revolution, but because he opposed the way they waged revolution. He did not oppose America or the Free World *per se*, but was against American policy in Vietnam because it did not succeed in warfare and did not win over noncommunist Vietnamese at all.<sup>3</sup>

In some important ways, The Uyen represented a profound experience shared by many South Vietnamese urban noncommunist and anticommunist intellectuals. These men and women did not necessarily agree about many things. Nonetheless, they shared the experience of seeing their different postcolonial visions frustrated and alienated by the expansion of warfare on the one hand and the loss of political, economic, and military control on the other hand. After the war, they shared in another profound experience: a loss of political and cultural identity that was usually accompanied by either imprisonment or having family members or close friends being imprisoned. As a military officer in the old regime, The Uyen himself went to “re-education camp” in northern Vietnam for three years. In 1987, he was allowed to leave for the U.S. under the Orderly Departure Program aimed at reuniting families. He settled in Washington State and began to write again while taking college courses for a bachelor’s degree.

*Saigon After Twelve Years* was the first book that The Uyen published in America. In comparison to other books written by other Vietnamese refugees and immigrants about the postwar regime, it was notable for criticizing the communist

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<sup>3</sup> The Uyen, “Nhom Thai Do: Nhung Ngoi Lang Man Cuoi Cung” [The Attitude Group: The Last Romantics], *Tien Ve* [Vanguard], April 2009: <http://www.tienve.org/home/literature/viewLiterature.do;jsessionid=CB29AAB2C18ABCBA56CF6E9164D89132?action=viewArtwork&artworkId=8666>. The author notes in this recollection that an occasional visitor to the group was Alexander Bardos, the cultural attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Saigon. Bardos “spoke good French, understood enough Vietnamese literature, and carried a progressive perspective.” Bardos once asked The Uyen if his group would need financial support from the U.S. The Uyen politely declined and cited terrorist attacks from the Viet Cong against publishers and writers for U.S.-funded periodicals.

government yet without overtly ferocious attacks. Instead, it took a semi-analytical approach, which compared favorably with the author's style in his wartime fiction and essays. This approach helped to empower The Uyen with greater credibility as observer of the postwar urban scene.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, he employed a clever device to draw in the readers. He treated the first half of the book as if giving a tour to a former Saigon resident that had not seen the city since the end of the war. He began with the Tan Son Nhat Airport, and used it as a starting point to discuss a particular subject matter. He then moved to other landmarks – the Republican Square, the former Liberty Boulevard whose postwar name became General Uprising Boulevard, and so on – and employed the same technique. This device suggested an intimacy even to readers that never lived in the city but nonetheless would have known many of these landmarks. Best of all was the book's content, where The Uyen took readers into a journey of the harshest life under communism that the city has ever experienced. He described and explained and analyzed all the major facets of life during this period, such as the “boat people” wave that began with Chinese-Vietnamese being forced out of the country, street life at night for young people and during the day for everyone, short- and long-term effects of the Cambodian Occupation, changes in economic policies and activities, and cultural clashes between southerners and new northern officials and immigrants.

For the many details as well as a cool narrative style, the book has remained among the most informative and even-handed portrayals of the city under communist rule. Simultaneously, it would be impossible for any former resident to have read *Saigon After Twelve Years* not long after its publication and *not* think back to the Republican

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<sup>4</sup> He noted, for instance, that postwar mobilization of youths in fire drills created a faster system of response to fires and indeed helped to reduce the numbers of fires even though there were more houses built after the war (38).

period. One of the most prominent themes in the book was the resistance of local residents to the new regime's coercive measures, both legal and extra-legal. Aimed at moving socialism so to catch up with the more advanced communist countries, the new government actively sought to eliminate the old "American-puppet" ways of life that ranged from (legal) confiscation of Republican publications to illegal attempts to stop young couples from engaging in bourgeois-infected necking in parks. Such measures did not succeed at all, at least not in the long run. The urbanites continued to read and exchange "old regime" materials, and dating couples continued their amorous activities in public areas, if more discreetly and away from the watchful police. In both active and passive ways, they resisted the attempts to rein in habits and beliefs that they had been used to for so long. Their resistance was not always successful, but neither was it futile. It helped to force the postwar regime towards relaxing many of its social, cultural, and economic policies since the late 1980s.

In important ways, *Saigon After Twelve Years* provided an answer to the question that opens this dissertation: Why was it not possible for the communist revolutionaries to win over the urban population in the course of the Vietnam War? From the exposition and analysis in this dissertation, we can conclude that their lack of success came from the fact that noncommunist urbanites were more inclined or persuaded towards modernist visions and postcolonial models *other* than the vision and model offered by the revolutionaries. The disinclination could be traced to several sources. Among rabid anticommunist Vietnamese, for instance, experiences with the communists during the August Revolution and the First Indochina War were proof that a postcolonial Vietnam under the Communist Party would have meant further class-based bloodshed, suppression

of political dissidence and religious hierarchy, and elimination of private property. For others, the kind of nationalism presented and offered by the communists looked suspicious because there was close association to Red China and the Soviet Union after 1950. Even for noncommunist Vietnamese who were sympathetic to the Viet Minh, news and stories about North Vietnam's land reforms and suppression of intellectuals in the 1950s gave them pause about lending a hand to the socialist revolutionary cause. To be sure, the effort among the anticommunists in the 1950s and 1960s to discredit the revolutionary project of the Communist Party is worthy of scholarly note.

But anticommunist propaganda was only one source – and a relatively short-term source at that. There were more long-term and more compelling reasons for the lack of support for the communist revolution in urban South Vietnam, including a desire for autonomy that was rather contrary to the vision offered by the communists. Before World War II, there had been already a wide propagation of ideas about personal autonomy, self-improvement, the nuclear family, small business ownership, and other aspects related to that large category called “the bourgeoisie.” During the 1940s, this propagation seemed to have given way to greater political and military issues and concerns that dominated the urban publications. This shift, however, did not mean that noncommunist urban Vietnamese stopped thinking about the future of their lives and their country in relation to bourgeois notions. As demonstrated in the stories about Pham Van Tuoi and Nguyen Hien Le, noncommunist intellectuals made many efforts to spread these ideas in publication amidst the late political and military uncertainties of the late 1940s and early 1950s. The noncommunist intellectuals kept alive such alternative visions about personhood and society. They might have applauded the success of the

Viet Minh in driving out the hated colonial French. But they preferred to retain their own visions about the person and society, which were decidedly not Marxist in content.

Even the kind of nationalism offered and presented by the revolutionaries did not draw much support from urban South Vietnamese. Anticommunists attacked revolutionary nationalism as too Red-infused, too class-infected, and too internationally oriented. They preferred instead a kind of ethnic nationalism perceived to be in continuity of myths, legends, dynastic glories, and social customs in the history of the majority Kinh people. As the previous generation of intellectuals had tried to do, they portrayed modern nationalism to be an extension of their ethnic roots even when trying to account for cultural varieties from other ethnic minorities. A similar point could be made about their portrayals of heroes. The Communist Party introduced and elevated a host of international heroes from the communist bloc, especially in the first years during the division period. Urban South Vietnamese preferred to honor dynastic heroes and (noncommunist) resistance figures in the long history against colonialism: from failed nineteenth-century heroes in north, south, and center; to beheaded leaders of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party in the early 1930s. They also celebrated literary, artistic, and intellectual figures whom they presumed to have created a national literature. The fact that the vast majority of these heroes and heroines belonged to the Kinh ethnicity only highlighted the already firmly accentuated ethnic nationalism celebrated in thousands of books and magazines and public events in South Vietnam.

The reasons above provided sizable ideological contrasts to their counterparts in the communist vision. It should not have surprised, then, that the revolutionaries consistently encountered difficulties in persuading urban South Vietnamese to throw out

the Saigon regime in favor of the National Liberation Front. Overthrowing a particular government? Yes, that the urbanites did more than once. But choosing the NLF for the government of South Vietnam? It was not considered a viable possibility until the RVN entered its last leg of existence in 1975. The ideological gap between the revolutionary vision and the majority of the urban population was too large to overcome. It was only through sheer military force that the revolutionaries were able to succumb the urbanites to their vision. Even there, as made clear in The Uyen's *Saigon After Twelve Years*, the postwar regime quickly encountered difficulties in force-feeding its ideology to the urban population.

Of course, the U.S. did not make it easier for the urban South Vietnamese either. All in all, American intervention complicated matters immensely for the urbanites, who reacted by falling back on their intensely felt nationalistic sentiments. As evidenced by countless translations of and publications influenced by American works, many urban Vietnamese were very curious about America and its history, ideas, and people. Carrying the superpower status inspired awe, and the Vietnamese were not immune from feeling a measure of respect if not also awe towards America. At the same time, their newly independent status led them to seek models from countries that were also emerging from colonialism, such as India and Egypt: noncommunist countries that were not always steadfast allies of Washington. Moreover, the fact that educated Vietnamese as a whole were not predisposed towards American-style capitalism also worked to limit enthusiasm for the U.S. Ultimately, though, it was Washington policy and conduct during direct intervention that made it very difficult for urban Vietnamese to remain friendly or neutral toward the U.S. Prejudices against American capitalism and imperialism among left-



leaning noncommunist urbanites were activated and elevated into outright anti-Americanism. Other nationalistic expressions, such as feelings among anticommunist soldiers that they were being handicapped by the American military and their country by the U.S. government, were quietly suppressed only to have exploded into verbal attacks of American untrustworthiness. In a paradoxical manner, the prohibitive challenges presented by U.S. intervention sharpened some of the ideological aspects of the urban South Vietnamese, especially their prideful ethnicity-based nationalism.

In the long run, however, ideologies in the former urban South Vietnam outlasted both the Americans and the victorious communist Vietnamese.<sup>5</sup> Since the late 1980s, as the postwar regime began to acknowledge its problems in managing united Vietnam, it has allowed the re-publication of a number of South Vietnamese works. The relaxation did not include anticommunist literature, which in any event had become outdated due to the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe and dramatic economic and cultural changes in China. But at least a good number of materials about the individual and about bourgeois life have been reprinted. So are a number of publications by South Vietnamese writers about nationalism. Writers have perished over time, but ideas expressed on their publications have reappeared. Urban South Vietnamese ideology enabled their believers to turn away from revolutionary visions during the war. In more than one sense, it also helped to provide the postwar society with a way out of the morass of postcolonial problems and failures.

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<sup>5</sup> There is a potentially theoretical parallel here and elsewhere to the history of the Republican era in China, which has been undergone considerable research and re-evaluation since the 1990s. See, for example, the collection of essays in Frederic Wakeman, Jr. and Richard Louis Edmonds, eds., *Reappraising Republican China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

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