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Vietnamese Collaborationism in Vichy France

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During the Second World War, a small group of Vietnamese émigrés in Vichy France drew powerful inspiration from the ideological and material possibilities of the Nazi occupation. Their history reveals the colonial dimensions of a process of collaboration too often cast as solely European. It also sheds light on the transnational migrations and intellectual circulations that made European experiences an important part of Asian wartime political choices. Finally, their myriad trajectories after the war are a powerful example of the ideological reconfigurations and reversals of Asian politics during decolonization.

Keywords: colonialism, fascism, France, Indochina, migration, Vichy, Vietnam, World War II

In late 1973, in the twilight of the long and devastating war in Vietnam, the Hanoi doctor, intellectual, and communist propagandist Nguyễn Khắc Viện interviewed dozens of former inmates of Saigon's prisons. He argued that their stories of incarceration revealed an essential truth about the Saigon regime then at war with Vietnamese communists. "By and by," he wrote in the French newspaper *Le Monde*, "I don't distinguish the faces any more and don't remember the names, I mix up the stories; before me isn't this or that person any more – there is the South, that martyred land" of "barbed wire … watch towers … police dogs" and "American advisers instructing the torturers of Saigon." For Nguyễn Khắc Viện, these prisoners' experiences evoked another brutal regime whose violence he had witnessed as a young man decades before: "1945. The end of the Second World War. I had lived in Europe during these war years, and, like my European friends, I hardly suspected what was going on in Hitler's concentration camps.… I was far from imagining that millions of people had endured the extremities of suffering … that a doomed regime could sink to the depths of barbarism." "Vietnamese," he promised, "I will not forget."[1]

Twenty years later, in 1992, Nguyễn Khắc Viện was once again in Europe to receive France's *Grand Prix de la Francophonie* for his long career as a historian, translator, editor, and publisher. The decision elicited criticism from members of France's Vietnamese community, some of whom were barred from Vietnam because of their anti-communist politics. One of them, the scholar Đặng Phương Nghi, offered a very different story about Nguyễn Khắc Viện's life in wartime Europe. "In crowning Nguyễn Khắc Viện," she wrote, "does the *Académie Française* know that it is weaving a crown of

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[1]Nguyễn Khắc Viện's article was published in English as "With the Survivors of the Prisoners of Saigon" in the *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (Nguyễn Khắc Viện 1974). The passages cited here are from this translation.

laurels not only for a notorious Stalinist but for a sycophant of Nazi ideology?" Đặng Phương Nghi revealed episodes in the honoree's past that he had never publicly acknowledged: not only had he studied in Nazi Germany, he had written articles defending the Nazi regime. "In passing from Nazism to Communism," she wrote, "Nguyễn Khắc Viện in fact only remained true to himself, a wayward intellectual fascinated by totalitarian power" (Đặng Phương Nghi 1992).

Nguyễn Khắc Viện's life as a communist intellectual and political luminary is, on the surface, difficult to reconcile with his now-forgotten engagement with fascism. But as a young man in the radically new and uncertain context of the German occupation of France, Nguyễn Khắc Viện saw the European right as both an ideological model and a political opportunity to challenge French colonial rule over Vietnam. Scholars of wartime Europe distinguish between *collaboration*, the result either of coercion or official responsibilities, and *collaborationism*, a more active engagement with an occupying regime that reflected real ideological commitment (Kalyvas 2008). In Nazi-occupied France, while collaborators accepted the Vichy state as legitimate, collaborationists including "pacifists and fascists, Socialists and Catholics … talked more of Europe than France, viewing Hitler as a new Charlemagne reuniting Europe, or, after June 1941, as a holy crusader against Bolshevism." These disparate voices made up "a political world setting itself up against Vichy and offering a more radical vision of France's future" (Jackson 2001, 192).

This article explores about a dozen figures in the Vietnamese community in wartime France who pursued a collaborationist political agenda during the Nazi occupation as a means of achieving anti-colonial objectives. These men viewed core elements of European integral nationalism—a belief in an organic ethno-cultural national community and an authoritarian corporatist state and economy—as an ideological model for postcolonial Vietnam, and they actively engaged with Nazi authorities in hopes of achieving independence for their country. Their history reveals the intersections of metropolitan anti-colonial movements, Vietnamese and other, with European wartime collaborationism.[2]

The story of Nguyễn Khắc Viện and his fellow travelers also brings Vietnam more firmly into the transnational history of Asian integral nationalism in the era of the Second World War. The literature on Vietnam during this period focuses primarily on how local conditions produced a range of Vietnamese engagements—whether forced, opportunistic, or ideological—with the Japanese forces who occupied French Indochina from 1940 until 1945 (Guillemot 2012; Jennings 2001; Marr 1995). But for some Vietnamese political figures, like many others throughout Asia, their path to integral nationalist politics passed through Europe. Kris Manjapra has shown how, from the late nineteenth century until the Second World War, intellectual and political sojourns in Germany helped Indian elites to "break apart the ideal of an Empire in which they felt permanently trapped as colonial subjects on a seemingly endless road to imperial citizenship"; "the growth of national consciousness," he argues, "cannot be separated from the intensification of transnational bonds" (Manjapra 2014, 6, 11). The complex political visions that emerged out of these pilgrimages were never simple derivatives of European models; in the best-known case, Subhas Chandra Bose ultimately rejected the political

[2]Goebel (2015) views the influence of the European right on anti-colonial activists in Paris as the product of prewar ideological affinities, ignoring entirely the circumstances and dynamics of the war and occupation themselves.

programs of fascist Germany and Italy despite the clear influence of European integral nationalism on his ideas (Bose 2011). But for Southeast Asian leaders such as Phibun Songkhram or Ba Maw, European pilgrimages (in both cases, in France during the 1920s) led to more explicit admiration of fascist leaders and their programs (Reynolds 2004). However we ultimately choose to classify their politics, Nguyễn Khắc Viện and his fellow travelers show how transnational circulations like their sojourns in Nazi-occupied France gave European integral nationalism a decisive role in the political thought of important figures in the history of modern Vietnam.

Vietnamese Collaborationism: Origins

Searching for the prewar roots of wartime political choices poses thorny problems. A biographical approach risks being deterministic about decisions shaped first and foremost by the radically new circumstances of war and occupation. There is also often little reliable information about the early lives of some of the people studied here. And for those who became prominent later on, most sources either sidestep or prevaricate on this controversial issue. Nguyễn Khắc Viện is a good example: in his memoir, not only does he not address his pro-Nazi past, he does not even mention having *been* in Germany during the war (Nguyễn Khắc Viện 2003). Other accounts published in communist Vietnam claim that he contracted tuberculosis and entered a sanatorium at Saint-Hilaire de Touvet near Grenoble in 1942, where he remained until well after the war (Nguyễn Thị Nhất and Nguyễn Khắc Phê 2007). But French archives demonstrate that Nguyễn Khắc Viện in fact did not enter Saint-Hilaire until 1944, after he had spent time studying in Berlin and engaged in pro-Nazi political activities that go unmentioned in any work about him published in Vietnam. Biographical accounts of other figures in this story offer similar omissions or misrepresentations (Nguyễn Văn Đạo 2006).[3]

Despite such limitations, close scrutiny of the prewar histories and writings of some of these men helps to uncover important dimensions of their wartime political choices. Perhaps the most explicit political genealogy for one Vietnamese intellectual's path to collaborationism is the 1938 book *The Annam Soviets and the Disorder of the White Gods* by Đỗ Đức Hồ, a journalist who had lived in France since the early 1920s. The book explores the Nghệ-Tĩnh Soviet uprising of 1930–31 in Vietnam, which reflected years of peasant and worker discontent with colonial rule and the growing influence of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). French suppression of the uprising killed or incarcerated thousands and devastated the ICP's nascent organization. Đỗ Đức Hồ was far from alone in viewing the Nghệ-Tĩnh Soviet as a fatal indictment of colonialism and its feckless Vietnamese allies; his main fear, however, was that colonialism had "systematically destroyed all elements of social order … which would have led the intellectual elite to oppose the bolshevization of the country" (Đỗ Đức Hồ 1938, 70). For him, Nghệ-Tĩnh's nationalist veneer masked a "putsch," a new form of foreign domination—Soviet and Chinese—over Vietnam, one facilitated by France's anti-fascist *rapprochement* with the USSR and the Chinese Nationalist-Communist alliance.

[3]This source claims that Lê Văn Thiêm's wartime studies in Germany were actually in Switzerland, which is where he defended his doctoral dissertation after the war.

What was to be done? For Đỗ Đức Hồ, the specter of communism might be avoided "if the honest people of Annam found a man, a painter of the eternal traits of Annam, a sort of *Barrès Annamite*" (Đỗ Đức Hồ 1938, 70). It is unsurprising that after many years in France, Đỗ Đức Hồ's integralist dreams were nurtured by French prophets. Alongside the conservative rural idyllism of the writer Maurice Barrès, Đỗ Đức Hồ was also drawn to Charles Maurras, the father of the right-wing movement *Action Française*, whose ideas appear throughout Đỗ Đức Hồ's writings. But unlike other colonial subjects in interwar France, Đỗ Đức Hồ had no known formal involvement with far-right groups in France; like most other Vietnamese critics of colonialism and communism of the era, he ultimately pinned his hopes on Japan. His book offers a passionate defense of Japanese imperialism that stoops to ugly denials of the barbarism in Nanjing that had recently shocked the world. With the German occupation of France, Đỗ Đức Hồ would first turn to Japanese officials in Paris in his effort to help build a new political order.

However, some Vietnamese in interwar France did attempt direct engagement with Nazi Germany before the occupation. One was Nguyễn Thượng Khóa, son and grandson (respectively) of the anti-French imperial officials Nguyễn Thượng Hiền and Tôn Thất Thuyết. His family's past may have sown the seeds of Nguyễn Thượng Khóa's affinity for Germany: when in exile in China during the First World War, his father had obtained German financial support for the anti-colonial Vietnamese Restoration League (*Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội*) (Marr 1971, 229). Nguyễn Thượng Khóa came to France in 1921; by the late 1930s, he had worked as a lacquerer, a secretary, a hotel clerk, and a small-scale drug trafficker (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1923, 1937). In 1937, Nguyễn Thượng Khóa wrote a political manifesto titled "French Policy in Indochina" and sent it to Nazi officials. (The French discovered it in Nazi archives after the war.) Like Đỗ Đức Hồ, he bemoaned the political radicalism and labor unrest that had wracked Indochina since the Nghệ-Tĩnh Soviet, and he urged the Nazi regime to offer its "moral participation and material assistance" to "an immediate revolution across our territory" (ANOM, SLOTFOM, n.d.c). The vanguard of this revolution would be a secret Indochinese "National-Socialist" party (possibly the *Đại Việt Quốc Xã*, founded in 1936), whose organization and platform he outlined in the manifesto, which Nguyễn Thượng Khóa claimed (with no basis in reality) had over twenty thousand members. It is hard to know what Nguyễn Thượng Khóa hoped to accomplish with this manifesto, but it would later provide him with the *bona fides* he needed to engage with Nazi officials during the occupation.

It is instructive here to contrast Đỗ Đức Hồ and Nguyễn Thượng Khóa with another long-standing Vietnamese sympathizer in France of European integral nationalism. Hoàng Văn Cơ, descendant of the famous pro-French imperial official Hoàng Cao Khải, had come to France in the 1920s to study business but turned to journalism, writing for right-leaning newspapers like *Dépêche coloniale* and *Revue des vivants*. He also became known as a commentator on colonial issues for *Radio-Paris* and *Radiodiffusion Française*.[4] During the occupation, he would become part of the Vichy state's campaign to propagate its "national revolution" among colonial subjects in France. Hoàng Văn Cơ was a longstanding colonial insider, and his interest in right-wing nationalism translated seamlessly into his support for the Vichy state. His collaboration was meant

[4]Biographical information on Hoàng Văn Cơ is from ANOM, SLOTFOM (1950).

to preserve colonial rule, not to destroy it. But Đỗ Đức Hồ and Nguyễn Thượng Khóa were both critics of colonialism, shut out of its power structures in metropolitan France. Their collaborationism with German and Japanese officials during the war was therefore firmly anti-Vichy—it signified an ideological commitment that was fundamentally anti-colonial.

On the eve of war in 1939, a young man named Hoàng Xuân Nhị wrote an autobiographical novel that captures another experience shared by many of the Vietnamese collaborationists: traveling to France to study in the tumultuous political climate of the late 1930s. *The intimate notebooks of Heou-Tâm, a student from the Orient* tells the story of a personal liberation from a miserable youth in Vietnam defined by a cold and distant father, a domineering and cruel stepmother, a failed education, and humiliating personal relationships. Heou-Tâm's journey to France, an act of will, allows him to embrace the affective and aesthetic power of his personal struggles and transform them into things of beauty, guides to understanding the true nature of his soul. While Hoàng Xuân Nhị's emotional journey evokes what Zeev Sternhell (1995) describes as the "cultural rebellion" at the heart of European fascism, it is a real leap to read this novel as a harbinger of his wartime political choices. Unlike Đỗ Đức Hồ, Hoàng Xuân Nhị's intellectual heroes do not offer a clear ideological link to fascism: he described his novel as "an echo of 'Essai sur le regne du coeur' by Georges Duhamel," whose work would be banned by Nazi authorities and who would oppose Pétainist politics in his position as chair of *l'Académie Française*. Hoàng Xuân Nhị's other declared influence in his novel, Rainer Maria Rilke, is more complex: simply the fact of a German cultural influence on Hoàng Xuân Nhị—unusual for elite Vietnamese during the colonial era—is notable, and some Nazi-era scholars did read Rilke's "belief in 'blood' and his attachment to the irrational and the earthy" as evidence of fascist leanings (Mason 1961, 208). But Rilke's politics remain too elusive to give him credit for Hoàng Xuân Nhị's collaborationism.

That said, Hoàng Xuân Nhị's novel and his biography do offer glimpses of a young Vietnamese intellectual dissatisfied with both of the dominant political positions of his world: French colonialism and Vietnamese communism. In an long journalistic footnote that is out of place in the novel, he berates an unnamed "group of intellectuals … who preach a return to our old traditions…. [T]hey refer to this facile and insincere position as 'Franco-Annamite collaboration…. [T]his doctrine, everybody knows, is just hypocrisy…. I for myself believe in the need for entirely *new* values" (Hoằng Xuân Nhị 1939, 91–92). But as a young man, Hoàng Xuân Nhị, later an important figure in Vietnamese communist intellectual life, did not view communism as the solution to the colonial problem. In a remarkable passage in the novel, Heou-Tâm attends a demonstration in Paris against André Gide's seismic anti-Stalinist 1936 work *Return from the U.S.S.R.*, where he witnessed a partisan crowd shout down a woman's concerns about Soviet restrictions on personal liberties. "So I had this melancholy vision," he wrote. "[M]y poor country of Annam, in twenty years, in fifty years maybe. Instead of our dear countryside populated by tombs and peace, a monstrous mass of a factory spitting enormous serpents of smoke. And somewhere, in a full room like the one at the Palais de la Mutualité, in the same heavy and suffocating atmosphere, a young countrywoman also gets up and speaks indignantly about restrictions against voluntary abortion" (Hoằng Xuân Nhị 1939, 33–34). Among Hoàng Xuân Nhị's first intellectual activities in Paris after finishing

his studies was translating from Russian to French works by two Soviet writers—Maxim Gorky and Vladimir Mayakovsky—with famously fraught relationships with Stalin's regime. He was also active in Trotskyist circles in 1937, arguably the high point of prewar leftist anti-Stalinism.[5]

Hoàng Xuân Nhị's misgivings about communism are unsurprising, for he left Vietnam for France at a moment marked by, in Peter Zinoman's words, "the disagreeable behavior of local communists and the ruthlessness, hypocrisy, and sectarianism of Stalin and his rivals," the fractious collapse of the collaboration between Vietnamese Trotskyists and Stalinists in the Saigon newspaper *La lutte* in 1937, and strongly negative coverage of Soviet politics in the Vietnamese press. Zinoman argues that these events gave rise to a form of Vietnamese anti-communism that reflected neither "a defensive posture towards traditional authority" nor "a philosophical or a self-interested desire to protect capitalism" (Zinoman 2014, 129–30).

At the very same time, and partly as a result, Vietnamese like the law student Trương Tử Anh and the militant Trịnh Văn Yên, inspired by the rise of fascism in Europe and right-wing militarism in Japan and Thailand, were attempting to revive a strand of Vietnamese integral nationalism that emerged out of Social Darwinist ideas of racial community marking earlier Asian nationalist movements (Guillemot 2012). While there are no known links between Vietnamese collaborationists and this political movement, it is intriguing that Hoàng Xuân Nhị and Trương Tử Anh studied law at the *Université Indochinoise* together, and that the future collaborationists Nguyễn Khắc Viện and Lê Văn Thiêm also studied in Hanoi at this time. Another collaborationist, Nguyễn Hoán, studied in Japan in 1937, unusual for a Vietnamese student of this era. Finally, several future collaborationists (Hoàng Xuân Nhị and his brother Hoàng Xuân Mãn, Lê Văn Thiêm, and Nguyễn Khắc Viện) were all from Hà Tĩnh, the epicenter of the Nghệ-Tĩnh Soviet uprising. These men were from elite families, some of whom faced danger during the Nghệ-Tĩnh Soviet: for example, in 1930 Nguyễn Khắc Viện's father, an imperial official, had to leave his post in rural Hà Tĩnh for the city of Vinh to protect his family from reprisals by Nghệ-Tĩnh rebels. And Lê Văn Thiêm's parents both died in 1930 (although the circumstances are unclear), forcing him to go live in Qui Nhơn. It is thus quite plausible that the collaborationism of these men was influenced by local forms of anti-communism and right-wing nationalism that emerged in Vietnam before their departure for France.

A few Vietnamese collaborationists were active in leftist politics before leaving to study in France in the late 1930s. Võ Qúy Huân was also from Nghệ An, where his personal ties to local communist activists like Tôn Quang Phiệt, Đặng Thai Mai, and Nguyễn Sĩ Sách drew him into radical politics. He studied at the secondary school in the provincial capital of Vinh, where he may have overlapped with Nguyễn Khắc Viện and Hoàng Xuân Nhị (one and two years younger, respectively). In 1937, he co-edited the short-lived Popular Front newspaper *L'activité Indochinoise* in Vinh. He left for France later that year to study engineering and joined the French Communist Party (PCF) in July 1939 (Hồng Thái and Kiều Khái 2011). A similar case is Nguyễn Hữu Khương, who left for France in 1930 and joined the PCF after his studies (ANOM, SLOTFOM, n.d.e).

[5]See an undated biographical note in ANOM, SLOTFOM (n.d.a).

Finally, Phan Thuyết, son of the famous anti-French resister Phan Thành Tài, spent his youth in the household of Phan Thanh, an older cousin who was a member of the *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière*, a socialist party whose Vietnamese branch was heavily influenced by the ICP (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1938).

It is important to note that the collaborationism of these men during the war was not necessarily an ideological reversal: leftist collaborationism was widespread in Vichy France, the product of socialist pacifism and anti-communism and, on the communist side, Stalin's opportunistic alliance with the Nazis from 1939 until June 1941 (Jackson 2001). The persistence of the collaborationism of some Vietnamese PCF members after 1941 may be explained by both their anti-colonialism and their personal ties to other collaborationists in the small Vietnamese community in Paris.

Vietnamese Collaborationism: Emergence

As the German army plunged into France in May 1940, the French government and military collapsed and six to ten million people became refugees. "We had lost all point of reference," wrote one, "all our habits and all the rules of life were floating" (Jackson 2001, 120). What Marc Bloch (1968) called the "Strange Defeat" would soon spark a range of political responses from members of France's small Vietnamese community. But in that chaotic summer, most thought only of getting to safety. Nguyễn Khắc Viện was at work at the Hôpital Trousseau when a colleague urged him to leave Paris to avoid being conscripted or killed when the Germans reached the capital. As he recalled:

> I invited Hoàng Xuân Nhị and Phạm Quang Lễ to come with me. We walked gradually south, carrying camping equipment and sleeping on the side of the road. The road was full of people and vehicles: ten million French people from the northern and eastern departments were going south, cars, horses, cows and peasants, some pushing their cows down the road. A scene of total panic, no organization! Occasionally German planes flew by, which prompted no response, but cries that the German army was approaching caused crowds to scatter in panic. Not a shot was fired from the ground into the air.

The three friends made it to the Haute-Vienne, where they stayed for a week before getting a ride back to Paris. Nguyễn Khắc Viện went back to his old job in a new world (Nguyễn Khắc Viện 2015).

For the longstanding Japanese sympathizer Đỗ Đức Hồ, the Strange Defeat seemed like a long-awaited opportunity. Just three weeks after the June 23 armistice, he requested an audience with the Japanese ambassador in Paris "to concretize the Monroe Doctrine in Asia at this historic hour." "It is crucial," he wrote, "that we place our lives and bodies at the service of the Asian race that is most able to command.… [F]or Japan the 30 million Annamites will strive to the utmost" (MAE, n.d.a). After the Japanese army occupied Indochina in September, Đỗ Đức Hồ sought a more formal role in Asia's new political order. In May 1941, he co-founded the Party of Independence, a short-lived, pro-Japanese political party. It seems to have published only one newsletter: one of its articles, "Conquered to Be Sold," offered a surely apocryphal story

that Pierre Laval, Vichy's Minister of Foreign Affairs, had as Minister of Colonies offered to sell Indochina to Italy in 1936. "If I conquer," Mussolini reportedly replied, "I conquer lands where the natives lack civilization, for I will bring them the civilization of my country. Annam is a country that was civilized before my own" (MAE, n.d.b).

Đỗ Đức Hồ's plan to become Japan's man in Paris soon met with some disappointing setbacks. He clashed with other pro-Japanese Vietnamese in Paris, notably a painter named Trịnh Đình Lân who had longstanding connections to France's Japanese community. Đỗ Đức Hồ tried to exploit these connections to the benefit of his political campaign but ended up offending Trịnh Đình Lân with his dismissive attitude about Vietnamese nationalist heroes like Phan Bội Châu and Hàm Nghi (MAE 1941). For their part, Japanese officials were willing to give Đỗ Đức Hồ an audience but they had little interest in his harebrained ideas, which included returning him immediately to Indochina and placing him in a position of political importance. The only support they offered was to help obtain authorization for a pro-Japanese association, the Inter-Asiatic Friendship House (*Maison Amicale Interasiatique*), formed in October 1942, which represents the only significant engagement between Japanese and Vietnamese in occupied France.

The *Maison Amicale Interasiatique* in part simply formalized some longstanding social and cultural ties between Japanese and Vietnamese in Paris; in the association's meeting rooms on the Rue de Sommerard, members could attend events or take Japanese lessons. Many of its members were artists, including the painter Kamesuke Hiraga (1889–1971), who studied art in San Francisco before moving to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, where he met Trịnh Đình Lân (who coexisted on the association's board with Đỗ Đức Hồ despite their spat). Another member was the well-known photographer Khánh Ký (Nguyễn Đình Khánh), an early associate of Hồ Chí Minh's in Paris who had built a flourishing photography business in Saigon before bankruptcy led him to return to France in 1934. But two years before his return, Khánh Ký had gone to Tokyo to meet with Cường Để, a prince of the Nguyễn dynasty and the symbolic head of the anti-colonial Đông Du (Travel East) movement. Japan's annexation of Manchuria in 1931 may have stoked Khánh Ký's dreams of a Japanese-ruled Asia, but the trip resulted only in his arrest upon his return to Vietnam (Nguyễn Đức Hiệp 2014).

As Khánh Ký's activities suggest, the *Maison Amicale Interasiatique*'s cultural program belied an active political agenda. The group had ties to the *Société des Amis de Japon*, a right-wing, pro-Japanese group. During the war, Trịnh Đình Lân edited a Vietnamese-language newspaper, *Đại đông* (The great east), which preached collaboration with Japan.[6] It is also notable that the association had several Indian members at a time when the Axis powers actively supported Subhas Chandra Bose (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1945c). But the members of the *Maison Amicale Interasiatique* ultimately had few ways to put their political ideas into action, unsupported by Japanese officials who had little political influence in France and few reasons to support groups with minimal benefit to their war effort. Most would soon turn to the true locus of power in wartime France—German occupation authorities.

Nguyễn Khắc Viện surely protested too much when he claimed that when war broke out, he asked, "Who are Franco and Hitler?" (Nguyễn Khắc Viện 2003, 55). But unlike

[6]No issues of the newspaper appear to have survived.

Đỗ Đức Hồ, most of the Vietnamese who worked with German authorities were not politically active early in the occupation; most simply continued their studies at France's prestigious universities or their white collar jobs in medicine, engineering, and journalism. What first brought them into contact with German officials was another group of Vietnamese whose lives could not have been more different. With war looming, the French *Service de Main-D'Oeuvre Indigène* (MOI) had mobilized just under twenty thousand Vietnamese who arrived in France between November 1939 and June 1940 as *ouvriers non-spécialisés* (ONS) and were shipped off to work, mostly in munitions factories. With the French defeat, most ONS were relocated to camps in Vichy-ruled southern France to work and wait out the war. MOI officials tried their best to keep the ONS under their ideological sway. To this end, they named Hoàng Văn Cơ, the journalist and radio figure, as the head of the Colonial Section in Vichy's Ministry of Information (despite his having a Jewish wife). He propagandized the ONS via radio broadcasts and the Vietnamese newspaper *Công bình*, served as Vichy's liaison to Vietnamese student and worker associations, and gave lectures on colonial issues that "associated traditional Vietnam with the National Revolutionary *Weltanschaung*" (Jennings 2001, 159). This loyal solider of Vichy soon became a well-known and much-hated figure among the ONS as conditions in the camps degraded, food supplies ran short, illness spread, abuses grew, and the prospect of a return to Indochina faded.

As the war progressed, ONS tried a range of remedies to escape the awful conditions in MOI camps. One, perhaps unexpectedly, was to try to work for Germany. In November 1942, reacting to the Allied campaign in North Africa, the German army occupied the so-called "Zone Libre" of Vichy-ruled southern France. By that time, Germany's insatiable need for manpower had produced a massive labor regime that integrated workers throughout Europe into Germany's war economy and brought millions to Germany to replace the labor lost to the military mobilization. During their occupation of the Vichy zone, German officials became interested in the ONS idling in French camps. Beginning in 1942, the Nazis conscripted over six hundred thousand French workers to work in Germany, but most colonial workers were not part of this forced migration, "protected" by Vichy's concern that these labor deportations would hurt its colonial ambitions (Smith 2013, chap. 2). But there was no shortage of German projects in France, and the German industrial enterprise *Organisation Todt* soon began to recruit or conscript ONS to work on Mediterranean naval defenses and in factories (Desquesnes 1992). Even if almost half of the ONS ultimately worked for the German war effort in some capacity, German officials sought more Vietnamese labor than Vichy would allow (Rettig 2012, 26). And while laboring for Germany was no picnic, even MOI officials admitted that most of the ONS preferred it to the labor camps, where rampant theft of provisions for the black market and wanton abuses by guards rendered conditions unspeakably bad. By 1943, the situation in MOI camps was so bad that some ONS were begging for food at German work camps (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1943c).

Unsurprisingly, more and more ONS began to desert the camps. A few tried to go directly to Germany, where they knew they could find work (Đặng Văn Long 1997, 48). But the preferred destination for most was northern France. In June 1943, one ONS deserter wrote to two friends in the camps, urging them to come join him in Paris: "Here, the number of workers is growing, joy reigns everywhere. There are lots of distractions (we have a movie theater next door), purchases are easy, only butter is a

little expensive … act quickly!" (MAE 1943). Apart from escaping the MOI's police apparatus, most workers hoped to use an interview at the Ministry of Colonies in Paris to change their legal status as ONS (war laborers directly under MOI authority) to the vastly better one of *originaires des territoires Français d'outre-mer* outside of the authority of the MOI, a status they needed to legally obtain work and ration cards. Whether they navigated this process legally or *au noir*, ONS arriving in Paris needed contacts in the city, lodging, leads on housing and jobs, or simply the company of fellow Vietnamese. As such, one of their first destinations soon became number 11 Rue Jean Beauvais in the heart of the Latin Quarter, the home of the *Amicale Annamite*, a Vietnamese association which would soon become the hub of Vietnamese collaborationism with German occupying forces.

Vietnamese Collaborationism: Apotheosis

When the war began, there was little to distinguish the *Amicale Annamite* from other Vietnamese mutual aid associations in interwar France. Its members, Vietnamese students and professionals in Paris, expressed a respectable antipathy for French colonial rule without advancing any explicit ideological agenda (ANOM 1944). But as the *Amicale* emerged as a port of call for ONS fleeing MOI camps, it drew the attention of German officials desperate to recruit labor for their projects in northern France and Germany. In mid-1942, Võ Qúy Huân, Lâm Ngọc Huấn, and Trần Hữu Phương ousted the *Amicale*'s leadership. It is likely that the new opportunities afforded by Germany's need for labor caused this power struggle: French officials estimated that by mid-1944, German officials had paid the *Amicale* a fee for each of the more than five hundred Vietnamese workers it recruited to work in Germany, and the *Amicale* helped send many more to the *Organisation Todt*'s large-scale enterprises in northern France. To do so, the *Amicale* spearheaded a brisk traffic in "fake documents, creation of official stamps, imitation of signatures, etc." (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1943d). Nguyễn Hữu Khương, the recently ousted former leader of the *Amicale*, formed a rival group in the suburb of Montrouge described by Vichy officials as an "agency to recruit Indochinese to go work in Germany" (ANOM, SLOTFOM, n.d.d). In short, the German need for labor transformed these Vietnamese mutual aid associations into, in the words of a French official, "an employment agency for the workers of the MOI and a placement agency to benefit the *Organisation Todt*" (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1945c).

By mid-1943, the *Amicale* had grown into a national organization with chapters in Bordeaux, Grenoble, Lyon, Marseille, Montpellier, and Toulouse. The expanded *Amicale*'s stated purpose was to ameliorate the situation of the ONS and Vietnamese soldiers interned as POWs; its nationwide "Journée de la Fédération" in December 1943 called for improved conditions in the camps, better food, health care, education and vocational training, and greater efforts by MOI officials to fight corruption and abuse. The *Amicale*'s mutual aid activities were also cover for efforts to urge ONS to desert; MOI officials noted "an extremely active propaganda exercised at the heart of the *Groupement des Travailleurs Indochinois*" that "incites workers to desert and come to Paris to work for the Germans. It boasts of good conditions, comfort, the excellence of the food waiting for them; some Indochinese in Marseille from Paris have taken the opportunity to

carry out their recruiting" (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1943a). By the summer, Nguyễn Hữu Khương, former head of the Paris *Amicale*, was also going to Marseille under the auspices of his group in Montrouge to recruit ONS to desert and go to work for Germany (ANOM 1943). It is clear that the German need for labor helped facilitate, if not cause, this activity. Not only was the *Amicale* legal with registered statutes, Vichy officials noted that at the height of its anti-MOI activities, "an emissary from Berlin in Paris and Marseille," Nguyễn Thượng Khóa, the author of the pro-Axis manifesto sent to Nazi authorities in 1937, was serving as the group's liaison to German officials. In Paris, the *Amicale* had at its disposal a German-confiscated *hôtel particulier* on the Quai de Passy to temporarily lodge deserted ONS (ANOM 1944).

Much of the initial Vietnamese involvement with German officials was probably motivated less by pro-Axis political ideas than by, in the words of one Vichy official, "the sentiment of racial solidarity and mutual aid [which] seems to dominate in their group." (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1943e). But this changed when several of members of the *Amicale* accepted scholarships in mid-1943 to travel to Berlin to study. The students (Trần Văn Du, Hoàng Xuân Nhị, Nguyễn Khắc Viện, Lê Văn Thiêm, Lê Viết Hương, Nguyễn Hoán, Phan Thuyết, and perhaps others) received six thousand francs per month and room and board. They were following the lead of their friend and colleague Phạm Quang Lễ, an engineer recruited by German officials in 1942 from the École Nationale Supérieure de l'Aéronautique to work in the German aeronautical industry. French sources claim that a group known as "Studenwerh [most likely Studentenwerk] für Ausländer" (Services for Foreign Students) recruited the Vietnamese students to study in Berlin.[7] One member of this group was Pierre Fauquenot, former editor of the Saigon newspaper *L'alerte*, who in 1938 had received fifteen years in jail for taking bribes and passing intelligence to Japanese intelligence agents in Indochina (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1944c). Fauquenot escaped the notorious Clairvaux prison in northeastern France during the German invasion and made his way to Berlin. Nguyễn Thương Khóa, the *Amicale's* liaison to German officials, also recruited Vietnamese students on behalf of this Nazi group. German officials also offered scholarships to students outside of the *Amicale*, most notably the budding Marxist philosopher and activist Trần Đức Thảo, who some sources claim accepted a scholarship to go to Germany in 1943 after finishing his studies at the *Ecole Normale Supérieure* but reversed course at the last moment despite his deep immersion in contemporary German thought (ANOM, SLOTFOM, n.d.f). But it is also possible that the Vietnamese students requested the scholarships, which some sources do suggest; political inclinations aside, several may have seen study in Germany as a solution to the occupation's disruptions of their educations.

However these students ended up in Germany, the experience significantly shaped their politics. In March 1944, a group of Vietnamese students who returned from Germany founded a newspaper, *Nam Việt*, with some of their colleagues in the Paris

[7]"Dr. Goepel" may be Erhard Goepel (Göpel), a professor of art history who spent time in France "acquiring" art for the Nazi regime, even if there is no evidence of his involvement in student organizations.

Amicale.[8] Their request for authorization described *Nam Việt* as a "link of friendship" and a "liaison of existence" between Vietnamese in France and the ONS, "who are living disoriented (*dépaysé*) and isolated from the outside world for almost four years…. [T]he newspaper will help provide information about the activities of our *Amicale* and its affiliates in the provinces" (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1943b). Vichy authorities rejected the request, but *Nam Việt*'s first issue appeared anyway. For its next request the group enlisted the help of another of Indochina's shady former newspaper publishers: Henri Legrauclaude, the former director of *L'impartial* in Saigon, had also been arrested in 1940 for espionage, but the Germans released him from jail and put him to work as an assistant to Jean Luchaire, head of the Vichy collaborationist press. *Nam Việt*'s authorization history suggests that its members imagined the newspaper independently, and involved sympathetic officials only when they encountered difficulties. *Nam Việt* was quickly banned in the Vichy zone, although smuggled copies reached there anyway through *Amicale* networks.

Before the liberation brought a rapid and radical shift in its editorial position, *Nam Việt*'s coverage of the war was unabashedly pro-Axis. Bùi Thạnh (1944) argued that Japan's imperial rule in Asia was far more benign and natural than the "Anglo-American influence" that would follow from Japan's defeat.[9] *Nam Việt* followed with dread the Red Army's push across Eastern Europe in 1944; the second issue contained a translation from Nietzsche that casts an invasion by a barbarous but vital Russia as the moment when a paralyzed parliamentary Europe either discovers its own will or succumbs (Sơn Nhân 1944). And in perhaps *Nam Việt*'s most ideologically developed statement on contemporary politics, Nguyễn Khắc Viện blamed the Second World War on the divisive effects of industrialization and democratic politics in Europe. He attacked capitalism's inequality and fragmentation, but he was even more critical of parliamentary systems and class-based ideologies, arguing that dictatorial regimes (*chính phủ độc tài*) were a logical and justified reaction to Europe's political upheavals. He concluded that "99 percent" of Europeans preferred the stability of command economies and authoritarian regimes to the division of market economies and representative government (Nguyễn Khắc Viện 1944c).

Nam Việt was far more than superficial and opportunist flag-waving; it represented the deep engagement of its Vietnamese authors with the central concerns of the modern European right. The newspaper advanced a systematic critique of "materialist civilization" (*văn minh vật chất*), which Zeev Sternhell (1987, 379–80) describes as "an essential characteristic of the revolutionary right … far more an attempt morally to regenerate society as a whole and to save civilization than a movement for the liberation of the working class." Võ Qúy Huân (1944a) described the ONS's predicament as the loss of their (idealized) idyllic rural existence, ripped away from them by the "materialist civilization" of modern life; he urged workers and students to join in "collective action and

[8]Its editorial board members were Võ Qúy Huân, Trần Hữu Phương (both directors of the *Amicale*), Nguyễn Khắc Viện, Lê Viết Hương (both of whom had studied in Germany), Nguyễn Hữu Khang (who was finishing a doctorate in law), Hoàng Xuân Mãn (older brother of Hoàng Xuân Nhị, who in 1944 had returned to Berlin for a position as professor of Vietnamese), and Bùi Thạnh (a former interpreter for the ONS and student at the Ecole des Beaux Arts).
[9]It is unclear which of Nietzsche's texts this passage is drawn from.

struggle to let the whole race (*nòi giống*) live prosperously, vigorously, and gloriously together under a Vietnamese sky." Similarly, Lê Viết Hương (1944) urged Vietnamese to use the material advances of modern life to cultivate the physical body and spirit. Võ Qúy Huân (1944b) argued that capital's dominance over labor had given rise to a "damaging, divisive class struggle" that favored the interests of a class over those of society. His solution was a mediated relationship between "the action of labor" and "the action of capital," or *kinh tế liên kết*, a translation of "*economie associée*," the term used by French economic thinkers in the 1930s to describe the Nazi economy. He argued that "the Vietnamese society of tomorrow" must be integralist and participatory to avoid inequality and the division of the Vietnamese race (Võ Qúy Huân 1944c). In short, the foundation of *Nam Việt*'s editorial line was that class divisions and class-based political idioms were corrosive threats to the national and racial body.

The *Nam Việt* group also outlined a vision of a modernized authoritarian state, guided by scientific and technical expertise, as a defender of the national community. *Nam Việt* had high hopes for Japan's occupation of Indochina: it argued that Japan's war economy would kick-start a dynamic modernization that would help Vietnam transcend decades of colonial economic underdevelopment and stagnation (Nguyễn Hữu Khang 1944).[10] The *Nam Việt* group clearly saw itself as a technocratic vanguard whose knowledge would be crucial to an independent and modernized Vietnamese state. Nguyễn Khắc Viện wrote about the role of scientists (*nhà khoa học*) in Vietnamese society, casting them as a modern version of the Confucian scholar whose expertise could manage the challenges of modern life without undue conflict or division (see especially Nguyễn Khắc Viện 1944b). Lâm Ngọc Huấn (1944) called for the translation of scientific terms and ideas into Vietnamese "to popularize, little by little, the scientific spirit among our people." *Nam Việt* took up the task with articles by the doctor Hoàng Xuân Mãn on a range of medical issues; others explored the technical dimensions of battleships, tanks, and submarines critical to national strength. For Lê Viết Hương, the guiding principle of a society must be "organization" (*tổ chức*): an expert-led process of economic and political management with the goal of cooperation and harmony among social classes; the defining characteristics of what Nguyễn Khắc Viện (1944a) described as the "revolutions" (*cách mạng*) in Germany and Italy.

As German prospects in the war worsened in 1944, some Vietnamese collaborationists took the ultimate step: attempting to help the German army reverse its desperate situation on the battlefield. Vietnamese had, in fact, been part of the German military effort since 1942, when about one hundred ONS deserters made their way to Paris and found jobs with the *Nationalsozialistisches Kraftfahrkorps* (National Socialist Motor Corps, or NSKK), a paramilitary organization whose members served in the transport corps of the German army. In January 1944, four Vietnamese NSKK members, in full uniform, came to the *Maison Amicale Interasiatique* with an idea: to liberate the thousands of Vietnamese ONS and soldiers in southern France and make them a battalion of the Wehrmacht. Đỗ Đức Hồ, by now deeply frustrated by Japanese disinterest in his political projects, leapt at the chance—he hoped that a Vietnamese Wehrmacht battalion would become the core of an independent Vietnamese army after the war. He met with several

[10]See also the series of articles titled "Đông Dương có thể trở nên phong phú không?" [Could Indochina become productive?] in the May, June, and August 1944 issues of *Nam Việt*.

German officials during the spring of 1944; in May, increasingly desperate, they finally agreed to send his request up the line.

By early June, with the Wehrmacht quickly losing ground to the Allied Operation Overlord, Đỗ Đức Hồ found himself in charge of several hundred volunteers for the Vietnamese Wehrmacht battalion, stationed in a barracks in Enghien-Les-Bains north of Paris, impatiently waiting for news. Pham Lợi, one of the NSKK soldiers who had first approached Đỗ Đức Hồ, wrote to friends in the MOI camps while he waited. His two surviving letters from the summer of 1944 are beacons of optimism in the face of the bleakest realities. On July 12, he wrote, "here, we already have the commanders, captains, lieutenants and corporals of the Annamite army staff.… [O]ur comrade deserters taking refuge in Paris have flocked here to enlist in incalculable numbers." The next day he wrote, "my spirit is the spirit of a nationalist who wants to make war. [B]orn to be a hero, I will die as one, my name will be known by all of society.… [I]n war, we must awaken, courageously facing danger, to deserve the title of hero." (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1944b). But Đỗ Đức Hồ, once imbued with such lofty sentiments, now had cold feet. In early July, German officials finally agreed in principle to free the ONS, and they asked Đỗ Đức Hồ to mobilize the men at his disposal for German service. But the men apparently demanded that Đỗ Đức Hồ also pick up a gun and fight, which the middle-aged armchair warrior was reluctant to do—as he put it in a letter to a German contact, "to join a Panzer battalion at a moment when French public opinion is certain of the forthcoming American arrival in Paris requires a remarkable dose of optimism" (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1944a). He stalled for weeks, and volunteers trickled away into the Milice or to work for *Organisation Todt*. Finally, on August 9, Đỗ Đức Hồ made it known that he was ready to take up his mission. He received an order to go south to MOI camps and assess the situation, but the trains had already stopped running. His German contact gave him a final order to go prepare for combat Vietnamese soldiers interned in a camp in Vesoul near the German border. As the French police report noted, "Out of fear of reprisals Đỗ Đức Hồ did not dare to openly refuse, but M. Vestrick never saw him again."[11]

VIETNAMESE COLLABORATIONISM: AFTERMATH

Đỗ Đức Hồ's actions were not forgotten in the chaos of the liberation. Less than two weeks after he received his final order from his German contact, he was arrested by resistance forces, tried, and sentenced to twenty years' hard labor. He was in prison when he learned of Japan's creation of the independent Empire of Vietnam in March 1945. In a letter "written with my tears from a cell," he offered Vietnam's new government the expertise of a fellow inmate, a German chemist named Franz Kopp, who he proudly reported "would become the principal chemist of Annam" in exchange for Vietnamese citizenship (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1945a). He never received a reply. Đỗ Đức Hồ was released a few years later in the middle of the First Indochina War. He supported the former emperor Bảo Đại as the leader of an anti-communist Vietnamese state

[11]The most detailed document on this episode is an undated memo from the Military Government of Paris, probably from just after the liberation (ANOM, SLOTFOM, n.d.b).

because, as he wrote, "organized democracy is the square circle of which Maurras wrote. Vietnam needs an organic regime. Vietnam needs a king." Thus, in the words of one French journalist, "Đỗ Đức Hồ, who has recently affirmed himself to be one of the most ardent Vietnamese pacifists, has nevertheless not renounced the era when Maurras considered him to be one of the most lucid of the Indochinese that he had the opportunity to know" (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1953).

But the other Vietnamese collaborationists did not evince the same ideological commitment nor suffer the same fate. Several others drew the attention of the resistance; Võ Qúy Huân, head of the Paris *Amicale* and the *Nam Việt* editorial board, was also arrested in August 1944, and over the next year, France officials contemplated bringing charges against Hoàng Xuân Nhị, Hoàng Xuân Mãn, Lâm Ngọc Huấn, Nguyễn Hoán, Nguyễn Hữu Khang, and Trịnh Đình Lân. But like many French collaborationists, these men avoided prosecution for their wartime political choices. Võ Qúy Huân's PCF comrades from before the war freed him from the Drancy internment camp (ANOM 1944). Nguyễn Hữu Khang was spared thanks to having rallied to the resistance in the spring of 1944, which earned him a glowing character reference to French officials considering his arrest (and, later, a nomination for a Resistance medal) (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1945b). And as for the others, a French official put it best: "[I]n such conditions, I must point out that police or judicial action must be carried out with extreme care and caution towards those young Annamites whose anti-French actions are not absolutely proven, for such action could risk … alienating people who (even if they expressed real and at times justified criticisms) may not all be irreducibly hostile" (ANOM, SLOTFOM 1945b). The ability of these men to avoid arrest reveals how the diverse political possibilities in French society after the liberation, and the provisional French government's unclear position on colonial affairs, allowed Vietnamese collaborationists to cast aside their wartime political choices for something new.

Most Vietnamese collaborationists may have avoided arrest in the summer of 1944, but the liberation suddenly made them one of many Vietnamese political factions now operating freely. One was Vietnamese Trotskyists, who had also organized ONS deserters during the war. Until early 1944, this common cause resulted in unexpected links with the *Amicale*; southern Trotskyists in fact used Toulouse's *Amicale*, a sanctioned association with access to MOI camps, as cover for political activities. But this cooperation faded during the liberation, as Trotskyist militants founded their own popular organization (*Tranh Đấu/La Lutte*) and political party (the *Parti Indochinois Communiste Autonome*). Another reemerging force in Vietnamese politics was the French Communist Party. The PCF was the political core of the French resistance, and by mid-1944, over two thousand ONS had joined resistance units. There was even a "Battalion de Vietnam" made up entirely of ONS, led by one Trần Ngọc Diệp, who went by the nickname "Captain Saigon." As fighting gave way to politics, the PCF's associations and labor unions remained a significant influence on the ONS. Another major force in Vietnamese politics in France in the fall of 1944 were moderate elites, some with close ties to French politicians, who now sought meaningful engagement with the provisional government on colonial issues.[12]

[12]On Vietnamese politics during the second half of 1944, see ANOM (1944). A key figure in the Trotskyist-*Amicale* relationship was Lê Viết Hương, who had begun his studies in Paris before continuing them in Toulouse; after his return from Germany, Lê Viết Hương worked closely with the

In the exhilarating political climate of the liberation, representatives of these groups met in September 1944 to chart a future for Vietnamese politics in France. The meeting highlighted radically different agendas: a Trotskyist workers' revolution, the PCF's quest for political power through mass organizations, and the moderate program to make a renewed postwar Republicanism the foundation for an new Franco-Vietnamese relationship. It produced a new organization, the *Délégation Générale des Indochinois en France* (DGI), whose provisional committee hoped to build a base among the Vietnamese ONS by mobilizing workers around labor issues like working conditions and the right to organize. But by the DGI's first congress that December, its leadership was calling for not only workers' rights but also the "'establishment of a democratic regime in Indochina,' which required the universal right to vote and a political system in which the government had to answer to an elected chamber" (Rettig 2012, 35).

The DGI leadership reflected the political plurality of the moment. At its head was Bửu Hội, great-grandson of the Minh Mạng emperor and a chemistry professor at the Ecole Polytechnique, whose military service with the Free French gave him close ties to the provisional government; other moderates included the doctor Lê Tấn Vinh and Phạm Quang Lễ, recently returned from his years working as an aeronautical engineer in Germany. Trotskyist militants Hoàng Đôn Trí and Nguyễn Được were also elected, as were some radicals, notably Trần Đức Thảo, the brilliant *agrégé* from the Ecole Normale. Half of the DGI representatives, elected by the ONS, tended to lean toward the Trotskyists or the PCF. Thanks to their political connections and visibility, four former collaborationists—Hoàng Xuân Mãn, Võ Qúy Huân, Lê Viết Hương, and Trần Hữu Phương—were also elected. But the DGI's makeup and agenda show how the liberation totally eliminated pro-Axis positions from Vietnamese politics in France. The postwar ambitions of the Vietnamese collaborationists now depended on their ability and willingness to shift to a very different political platform and language.

During the following year, the collapse of the Japanese occupation of Indochina, the Vietnamese August Revolution, and the colonial ambitions of France's new government would dictate the terms of their political reinvention. Ominous signs of France's postwar agenda in Indochina were already present at the National Congress in December 1944, which took place just after the arrest of two Vietnamese Trotskyist militants in Toulouse; repression of activists (including the high-profile arrest of Trần Đức Thảo) continued into 1945. French declarations on the future of Indochina in early 1945 suggested that independence was unlikely. Meanwhile, the PCF's national political ambitions led it to turn away from meaningful support for colonial self-determination. The inclement French political context put pressure on the DGI's already-tenuous coalition; moderates eager to maintain dialogue with French officials tried to sideline Trotskyist militants, many of whom left the DGI of their own accord to fight for a workers' revolution. The DGI's dissolution by French authorities in October 1945 meant that Vietnamese political power in France would lie not in an independent metropolitan organization, but in the French

Trotskyist leader of the Toulouse *Amicale* Nguyễn Văn Phúc, an important Vietnamese Trotskyist militant. This likely explains why Bùi Thạnh, an MOI interpreter turned Trotskyist militant in Paris, was a member of the *Nam Việt* editorial board.

networks of the multiple Vietnamese governments seeking to shape their country's post-colonial future.

The centripetal force of Vietnam's wars of decolonization would lead virtually all of these men to return to Vietnam during the next fifteen years. Most were pulled into the orbit of the communist-led Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). After the DGI's dissolution, most of them became active in the League of Overseas Vietnamese (*Việt Kiều Liên Minh*) and other DRV-controlled organizations in France that emerged in 1946. Because of their exceptional training, several prominent Vietnamese collaborationists were closely cultivated by DRV officials badly in need of technical experts in the new state. The engineers Phạm Quang Lễ and Võ Qúy Huân returned to Vietnam in September 1946 on the same boat as Hồ Chí Minh after the failed negotiations at Fontainebleau. Other well-trained scientists and engineers followed in the coming years: Lê Văn Thiêm in 1949, Lê Viết Hương in 1950, and Nguyễn Hoán in 1955. They all held important positions in the DRV: Lê Viết Hương and Võ Qúy Huân at the Ministry of Industry, Lê Văn Thiêm and Nguyễn Hoán as heads of the physical and life sciences at the National University. Most famous of all these returnees was Phạm Quang Lễ, known during the war by the name Trần Đại Nghĩa, lionized in Vietnam as the "weapons king" (*vua vũ khí*) for his leadership role in the DRV's wartime armament industry (Học Viện Chính Trị Hành Chính Quốc Gia Hồ Chí Minh 2013).

Other Vietnamese collaborationists would play an important role in the humanities and social sciences in the DRV. After the August Revolution, Hoàng Xuân Nhị traveled to Allied-occupied Germany to propagandize for the DRV. He left Europe in 1946, also on the same boat as Hồ Chí Minh, to join the Việt Minh resistance in the south, where his editorial experience with *Nam Việt* helped him run a newspaper, *Tiếng nói kháng chiến* (The voice of the Maquis). He also put his German skills to good use as a political cadre in a resistance brigade that included German defectors from the French Foreign Legion.[13] He went north after partition and became the chair of the Department of Languages and Literature at the National University, a post he held for twenty-five years; he also became a prominent translator and scholar of Russian literature. His *Nam Việt* colleague Nguyễn Hữu Khang joined him at the university. But the most influential of all was Nguyễn Khắc Viện, arguably the most pro-German voice of the *Nam Việt* group. He joined the PCF in 1950 while recovering from tuberculosis in the sanatorium Saint-Hilaire de Touvet; he was probably recruited by a fellow patient, François Furet, who would later become one of the greatest historians of the French revolution and (ironically) a stalwart anti-communist. Before his expulsion from France in 1963, Nguyễn Khắc Viện was a leading figure in pro-communist Vietnamese émigré politics. In the DRV, he edited scholarly journals, translated Vietnamese literature, and authored works of history and culture including *Vietnam: A Long History*, one of the most influential histories of Vietnam ever written; he was, in many ways, communist Vietnam's principal cultural ambassador.

Several Vietnamese collaborationists who went south later became involved in pro-communist oppositional politics. The doctor Trần Văn Du was jailed several times under the Ngô Đình Diệm regime and later opposed Nguyễn Văn Thiệu (Trần Anh Tài 2007).

[13]See the entry on Hoàng Xuân Nhị in Goscha (n.d.).

The engineer Nguyễn Hữu Khương was an early member of the Alliance of National, Democratic and Peace Forces (*Liên Minh Các Lực Lượng Dân Tộc, Dân Chủ Và Hòa Bình*), an organizational arm of the National Liberation Front.[14]

Others played a role in the non-communist Republic of Vietnam. Trần Hữu Phương turned to the non-communist camp during the course of the First Indochina War; after 1954, he returned to the Republic of Vietnam to serve the new government in the Ministry of Finance and Economy and as its representative to the World Bank (*Who's Who in Vietnam* 1974, 620).[15] Lâm Ngọc Huấn, one of the *Amicale*'s three main leaders, served in the French and South Vietnamese armies during the first Indochina War and later rose to the rank of colonel; he was implicated in the 1960 coup attempt against Ngô Đình Diệm but not charged.

Others returned to civilian life; Phan Thuyết remained in Germany until 1949 working as a teacher and later returned to his family's ancestral village in Quảng Nam to open a school (Trung Nhân 1994, 158). Still others, notably Đỗ Đức Hồ and Nguyễn Thượng Khóa, never returned to Vietnam at all. As the latter's French stepdaughter remembered, "he told me that his father had been an important figure in the national struggle, but he wanted nothing to do with politics. He had given himself to opium since he was fifteen.… He initiated my mother to its pleasures, which I observed throughout my childhood, enchanted by the odor and the soft light of the lamp."[16]

As their varied aftermaths reveal, Vietnamese collaborationists in occupied France did not bear the burdens of their wartime political choices. In Vietnam itself, those who "chose the wrong camp" during the Japanese occupation became the losers in the sectarian wars of decolonization; they were shut out of political power, "trained in the mud by Vietnamese communism's political commissaries" and are still cast as "the Japanese-German clique" in much modern Vietnamese historiography (Guillemot 2012, 119). But men like Nguyễn Khắc Viện and his fellow travelers, drawn to integral nationalism in the radically different and distant European context, were able to recast themselves politically and leave their wartime choices behind them. Here, the particular conditions of decolonization in Vietnam were crucial. Much like in postwar Europe, where the imperative of national reconstructions and the competition between American and Soviet imperial influence were powerful reasons to reintegrate former enemies into national folds, competing postcolonial regimes in a divided Vietnam ignored or suppressed much about the past in their quests for institutional and ideological consolidation. The forgotten history of these men is thus a particularly good example of how the broader political reconfigurations of Asian decolonization crashed like a wave over the complexities of late colonial societies, washing away now-forgotten political cultures whose contours seem strange from a contemporary vantage point.

This forgotten episode in these men's political biographies also raises important questions about how we conceive of the history of Asian revolutionary regimes, Vietnam's

[14]On the emergence of this group, see Lê Hiếu Đằng (1993).

[15]Trần Hữu Phương's connection to the Ngô Đình Diệm regime was almost certainly the priest Cao Văn Luận, who converted him to Catholicism in 1945 in France and was one of Diệm's closest advisors.

[16]Cited in his stepdaughter's memoir of a trip to Vietnam (Ehret, n.d.).

in particular. The Vietnamese collaborationists in Vichy France may well have been "nationalist" or "anti-colonialist" (and later "communist," in most cases), but at this moment in their lives, it was their ideological commitment to European integral nationalism that most deeply shaped their politics. They were far from alone at this moment in world history, and their long lives and careers should certainly not be reduced to these wartime choices. That said, without a proper understanding of these choices, these figures—like many others in modern Asian history—remain incomplete; cardboard cutouts in an over-determined historical narrative. The experiences of these men in wartime Europe are important precisely because they clash with who we think they were. To attempt to analytically reconcile their multiple political selves is therefore to participate in a more critical history of Asian decolonization. And at least in their case, doing so raises important questions about the communist regime to which they committed their lives. The ideological appeal of European integral nationalism for men like Nguyễn Khắc Viện may simply reveal the equivocating commitments and venality of some powerful figures in the history of Vietnamese communism. But it may also suggest that these men's seemingly sudden political "reorientation" in fact simply reflects their consistent commitment to an authoritarian vision of revolutionary politics.

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