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Author(s): Edward Miller, and Tuong Vu

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EDWARD MILLER AND TUONG VU

## The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War

Once upon a time, during the 1970s and 1980s, the Vietnam War (1959–1975) was studied mainly as an episode in American history. Anglophone authors in the United States and elsewhere wrote extensively about the war during its closing stages and during the first years of the post-war era. This early scholarship on the war included a great deal of path-breaking research that shed new light on important factual questions; it also sparked impassioned debates over how to interpret the war's origins, course, and consequences. For all of its originality and vibrancy, however, this scholarship focused overwhelmingly on American sources and the American dimensions of the war—that is, on issues having to do with American actions and American motives. Vietnamese and other non-American actors typically played only marginal roles in these accounts; few studies of the war published during these years made use of Vietnamese or other non-American sources.<sup>1</sup> The decidedly America-centric quality of most Vietnam War scholarship in this period was most clearly apparent in the perennial debate between so-called “orthodox” scholars and their “revisionist” counterparts. The questions at stake in this debate were important ones: What were the root causes of the war? Why and how did the United States become involved in Vietnam after 1950? What explains the escalation of the war over the course of the 1960s? Who was responsible for the “loss” of South Vietnam? Nevertheless, both “orthodox” and “revisionist” scholars alike

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framed their inquiries in ways that presupposed that the answers to these critical questions would hinge on the interpretation of American beliefs, actions, and decisions.<sup>2</sup>

Efforts to understand the Vietnam War as an episode in US history continue today—and rightly so, given that the war was a major event in twentieth-century American politics, society, and culture. Recently, however, growing numbers of scholars have expressed dissatisfaction with the old American-centered approaches. **Since the 1990s, this dissatisfaction has manifested itself in two key interpretive trends. First, some authors have sought to internationalize the study of the war by examining the roles played by foreign powers besides the United States.** In recent years, these authors have produced breakthrough analyses of the interventions of China and the Soviet Union in the conflict; they have also explored how other European and Asian countries helped shape the course and outcome of the conflict.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, other scholars have chosen to focus on the Vietnamese dimensions of the war—on the roles played by various Vietnamese groups and individuals and on the sources that illuminate Vietnamese decisions and motives. These two trends, though they have unfolded separately, are not contradictory or otherwise incompatible with each other, and both have enriched our understanding of the Vietnam War immensely.

This special issue of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* explores the second of this pair of trends in Vietnam War Studies. **The Vietnamization of Vietnam War Studies—we use the term deliberately, and with the requisite degree of historical irony—has manifested itself in a growing interest in the wartime roles and experiences of Vietnamese groups and individuals.**<sup>4</sup> It is also reflected in an outpouring of new research on the ways in which **Vietnamese society both shaped and was shaped by the war.** Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to reduce the process of Vietnamization to nothing more than a desire to give Vietnam and Vietnamese their due. Although the new scholarship has focused on previously overlooked actors, events, and sources, it has often done so in order to demonstrate the ways in which the Vietnamese aspects of the war are profoundly relevant to some of the major interpretive issues in the study of the conflict. In this regard, Vietnamization involves more than just the asking of new questions. It also aims to provide new answers for some of the oldest and most persistent questions about the war.

One old but still critical set of questions has to do with why the United States and the Soviet Union became involved in Vietnam in the first place.

The conventional wisdom on this point has long held that the superpowers were driven mainly or solely by a desire to achieve global dominion, and that each sought to realize its goals in Southeast Asia via alliance with Vietnamese proxies. Thus, it was Cold War logic that dictated events in Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> Recent research, however, paints a more complicated picture in which Washington's and Moscow's decisions about intervention were not exclusively of their own making. This can be seen in the efforts of British and French officials to enlist the United States in their schemes to preserve their colonial empires in Southeast Asia during the late 1940s.<sup>6</sup> It is even more apparent, however, in the deliberate and even aggressive attempts of Vietnamese elites to solicit superpower support for their postcolonial agendas.<sup>7</sup> That Vietnam was profoundly affected by the Cold War is indisputable. But it is also increasingly clear that the Cold War was affected by Vietnam, and especially by the extraordinary and deliberate efforts of Vietnamese leaders to turn superpower rivalry to their own advantage.

Another long-debated question asks about missed opportunities to avoid the Vietnam War. For years, the predominant view among scholars has maintained that US officials passed up many such opportunities—especially during the early stages of US involvement in the 1940s and 1950s. If only the United States had recognized the Hồ Chí Minh government in 1945, as one popular theory goes, the later conflict could have been avoided.<sup>8</sup> New scholarship, however, suggests that responsibility for these “lost chances for peace” cannot be placed so exclusively on the United States. Many Vietnamese communist leaders were animated not by a pragmatic desire to remain aloof from the Cold War but by a genuine enthusiasm for participation in the promotion of communist revolution on a global scale. Given these leaders' deep and consistent ideological commitments, it is likely that they would have sought to export their revolution to neighboring countries in any case.<sup>9</sup> Thus, while it is well and good to consider how the United States might have pursued alternative courses of action in the early stages of its involvement, the retrospective conclusions drawn by some former US policymakers—and by some historians—about the fundamentally benign nature of Vietnamese communist intentions seem too clever by half.<sup>10</sup>

In the same vein, several scholars have used Vietnamese sources to revise the way we understand the evolution of the political, military, and diplomatic strategies pursued over the course of the war by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the state controlled by the Vietnamese Communist Party. By making use of recently released official documents, memoirs, and other materials, these authors have shed new light on the ways in which particular shifts in strategy were connected to debates and rivalries among the party leadership. As recent work has shown, these internal disagreements over strategy were often much more contentious than previously believed.<sup>11</sup>

In addition to producing new work on the DRV, scholars have also begun to revisit the political history of the anticommunist state of South Vietnam, known after 1955 as the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). Notable recent research in this category includes several new interpretations of the life, career, and policies of the RVN's founding leader, Ngô Đình Diệm, who held power in Sài Gòn from 1954 to 1963. These interpretations, based in part on research in the official records of the RVN regime, have challenged the conventional portrayals of Ngô Đình Diệm, who has long been caricatured both by his critics and by his admirers. Instead of seeking either to denounce or to rehabilitate the South Vietnamese leader, the authors of the new research have been more interested in tracing the historical and ideological origins of Ngô Đình Diệm's beliefs, policies, and strategies.<sup>12</sup>

The new research on the political and military history of the war has been paralleled by important developments in the study of the ideological, cultural, and social dimensions of the conflict. Forthcoming work by Tuong Vu and Tuan Hoang reveals how ideology shaped perceptions of the conflict in both North and South Vietnam.<sup>13</sup> Patricia Pelley and Kim Ninh have published pathbreaking explorations of political culture in the DRV during the war years.<sup>14</sup> David Elliott and David Hunt have examined the ways in which war and revolution transformed the lives of ordinary people in the Mekong Delta.<sup>15</sup> Especially noteworthy are the writings of anthropologist Heonik Kwon, who documents the ways in which Vietnamese rural communities adapted and reimagined commemorative practices in response to the devastation and loss sustained during the war. Kwon's research builds upon other recent scholarship by European historians on

the “culture of war” that shaped the lives of soldiers and civilians during World War I and World War II. His work is a particularly good example of how Vietnam War scholars are beginning to draw on the broader intellectual and interpretive currents in the study of war and warfare in general.<sup>16</sup>

All of the scholarly works cited in the preceding paragraphs are based on research in Vietnamese sources accessed in the vernacular, and many are the product of fieldwork in Vietnam. In this regard, the Vietnamization of Vietnam War Studies can be viewed as a product of the improved research opportunities since the advent of the *Đổi Mới* [Renovation] era in 1986. However, it would be a mistake to see the process of Vietnamization as a phenomenon that has resulted solely from better access to Vietnamese documents and informants. Instead, this process should also be understood as a product of the growing conviction that alternative approaches to the study of the war are needed. Indeed, since the 1990s, the increased interest in Vietnamese sources and the determination to develop new methods and conceptual frameworks have often reinforced each other. How is one to make sense of *The Sorrow of War*, the searing novel by DRV war veteran Bảo Ninh, if one sees the Vietnam War only as “an American ordeal” (as one American textbook author would have it)?<sup>17</sup>

The five authors whose research appears in this issue are drawn from the ranks of those scholars who are working at the leading edge of the Vietnamization wave. All of them make use of Vietnamese sources; even more important, however, is the fact that they all seek to analyze various aspects of the Vietnam War by applying their expert knowledge of Vietnamese history, society, culture, and politics. In this regard, their work is representative of some of the most provocative and exciting new developments in the study of the war. Despite the huge volume of ink that has already been spilled on the Vietnam War, there is still much about the conflict that remains unexplored and poorly understood. These essays suggest that Vietnam War Studies today is as intellectually vital and as vibrant as it has ever been.

While the five essays address different aspects of the war, all of them emphasize Vietnamese agency and the sociocultural dimensions of the event as lived and experienced by Vietnamese. A wide range of Vietnamese figures appear here: North Vietnamese women who served in the Youth Shock Brigades that guarded and repaired the Hồ Chí Minh Trail,

Tonkinese Catholics who took refuge in the South in 1954 following the Geneva Accords, the members of various religious and ethnic groups in the Mekong Delta, and northern male veterans of Vietnam's many wars. If they appear at all, Americans are on the margins of these narratives, as the perpetrators of bombing raids on the Hồ Chí Minh Trail or as ineffective promoters of modernization in An Giang Province.

The focus on Vietnamese agency leads to important findings. According to popular myth, the massive flight of Catholics to the South in 1954 was the result of an American propaganda campaign conducted by the CIA. However, Peter Hansen's study of the northern Catholic refugees convincingly refutes this oft-told and highly patronizing story in which Vietnamese are depicted as passive and malleable. Almost none of the former refugees whom Hansen interviewed had seen any leaflet or poster created by the Americans. If the decision to stay or leave was influenced by anyone, it was shaped by one's parish priest, not by Colonel Edward Lansdale's agents. The migration was also critically affected by Catholic collective memories of prior episodes of Christian persecution, and by reports of anti-Catholic policies in Việt Minh-controlled zones.

In a very different way, Vietnamese agency is also apparent in the American-sponsored efforts to promote the Green Revolution in the Mekong Delta during the war. In his study of An Giang Province, David Biggs relates the case of a farmer who bought US-supplied seed varieties from the market and became a model for others to emulate. Ironically, this enterprising farmer was more successful than the United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded showcase project in the province, which lost its seeds in a flood and had to buy replacement stock from the very farmer whom the Americans were supposed to be helping. This story, though only a single anecdote, contradicts the conventional accounts in which nation building in South Vietnam is reduced to an American imperialist enterprise—as if Vietnamese participation did not matter.

The disconnections that result from an overemphasis on the American role become apparent when the American intervention in Vietnam is placed in a longer and more Vietnamese-centered historical perspective. The Vietnam War was, of course, not the only war that Vietnam endured during the postcolonial era. In retrospect, moreover, it is clear that the US

war effort was merely one in a series of major interventions by foreign powers in Vietnamese affairs. In her essay, Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan employs a data set that covers not only the “American war” but also the earlier conflict with France as well as Vietnam’s later wars with China and Cambodia. These wars were linked in myriad and intricate ways; by placing the Vietnam War in the context of other Vietnamese wars, the essays in this issue illuminate the often unexpected connections among these conflicts. For example, many scholars have portrayed the Vietnam War as a Cold War proxy conflict while neglecting its civil war aspects. By contrast, Shawn McHale demonstrates that a civil war among Vietnamese (or, more precisely, an overlapping collection of conflicts among ethnic, religious, and political groups) was already under way by 1945 in the Mekong Delta. McHale’s findings raise the interesting question of the extent to which events in the delta during the later 1950s and 1960s can be read as the continuation of these earlier conflicts among Vietnamese. Biggs makes a similar point when he shows how Americans in An Giang relied heavily on forms of local knowledge previously produced by Vietnamese and French. Teerawichitchainan identifies interesting differences and similarities in military experience and in the nature of military service in northern Vietnam over the course of several wars. During the 1960s, for example, men of higher socioeconomic status were more likely to serve in the military than during other periods. Throughout all periods of war and peace, Catholics in North Vietnam experienced less likelihood of being drafted than non-Catholics. Old assumptions about monolithic Vietnamese unity in the face of foreign invasion become very problematic in the face of these data.

Yet another way in which a focus on Vietnamese agency makes a difference has to do with greater attention to the sheer complexity of the war’s impact on Vietnamese society. Despite what many conventional accounts seem to imply, the Vietnam War was much more than an international struggle among Washington, Moscow, Beijing, Sài Gòn, and Hà Nội. Millions of Vietnamese were involved directly or indirectly in the war, and their loyalties and alignments were not always congruent to the rivalry between North and South Vietnam, or to the Cold War struggle pitting the United States against the Communist Bloc. The war was a struggle in numerous dimensions and at many levels in Vietnamese society. A focus on Vietnamese

agency allows researchers to capture that struggle in its multiple forms as it affected Vietnamese. In François Guillemot's essay, the young women warriors Hà Nội sent to fight and die along the Hồ Chí Minh Trail struggled daily not only with American bombs but also with hunger, disease, sexual abuse, and death. Female brigadiers, many of whom were scarcely teenagers when they were sent down the trail, suffered from inadequate training, shelter, and clothing, and from chronic shortages of food and medicine. Many of those who survived their time on the battlefield continue to suffer from wounds, illnesses, and social neglect decades after the war had ended.

In McHale's essay on racial hatred in the Mekong Delta during the First Indochina War (1946–1954), one learns about anti-Vietnamese riots conducted by Khmers, as well as the brutal competition between Hòa Hảo and Việt Minh forces, and the purge launched by Việt Minh leaders against suspected “traitors” in their ranks. The course and outcome of the war between France and the Việt Minh in the Mekong Delta cannot be fully understood unless these local struggles are taken into account. Significantly, as Biggs shows, the struggle between Hòa Hảo communities and communist insurgents in An Giang continued even as the American-sponsored nation-building programs unfolded there during the mid- and late-1960s. At the same time, Biggs also demonstrates that relations between the Sài Gòn government and Hòa Hảo groups were not always peaceful. Similar kinds of tensions can be glimpsed in Hansen's discussion of the experiences of Catholic migrants in the South. For Catholics who had long lived in segregated communities in the North, the idea of moving to the South was a threatening and painful prospect. Moreover, resettlement was not nearly as smooth as some have suggested, and many Catholics found themselves in conflict not only with the government headed by their coreligionist Ngô Đình Diệm but also with their own clergy. In sum, the essays in this volume demonstrate that the Vietnam War era was not only a time of military conflict but also a period of myriad social struggles that touched practically every individual Vietnamese.

Besides their strong collective emphasis on Vietnamese agency, these essays break new ground in the study of some of the sociocultural dimensions of the war that have long been neglected. The war emerges here not only as a military or political event but also as a social, economic, and

cultural process. The lines of battle were not just between “Việt Cộng” and the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) units on the one hand and RVN and American forces on the other; nor can the conflict be reduced to nothing more than a clash between the Soviet Bloc and the United States–led “Free World.” Different Vietnamese social groups played different roles in the war, and these essays advance fresh perspectives and insights on gender, race, class, and religion in Vietnam during the war years.

The findings about the Vietnamese social and cultural dynamics presented in these pages hold out the prospect of new kinds of comparative inquiries—including comparisons between Vietnam and the United States. In contrast to an official historiography of the Youth Shock Brigades that is positivist and “male,” Guillemot introduces an existentialist and female perspective that stresses the horrific suffering endured by Vietnamese female bodies during and after the war. Strikingly, however, the postwar experiences of these women seem similar in many respects to those of American male veterans insofar as many members of both groups struggled to reintegrate into their respective societies upon their return home. McHale’s essay on racial hatred in the Mekong Delta makes a similar contribution. Official Vietnamese historiography has touted the unity of the Vietnamese as one nation against foreign invaders. This narrative is clearly foreign to the delta, which became part of Vietnam only in the seventeenth century and has always been racially diverse, with native Khmers, Chinese immigrants, and Vietnamese migrants from other parts of Vietnam. The French military was also racially diverse, with a large component of African soldiers. McHale shows that ethnic violence was not uncommon between Khmers and Vietnamese during the First Indochina War and that racism rather than nationalism may better explain many acts of violence at the time. Again, this picture of the Mekong Delta resonates with what we know about racism on the American side.

Research on the US military in Vietnam has long noted that working-class Americans served in Vietnam in higher proportions than their upper-class counterparts. Interestingly, Teerawichitchainan finds an opposite, albeit less clear, trend in North Vietnam. There, young men whose parents had more education were more likely to serve in the military than the children of less educated parents. On this point, at least, the contrast with

the situation in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s could scarcely be sharper. This contrast suggests some of the ways in which Vietnamese and Americans may have invested the war and military service with different social meanings. Significantly, having educated parents did not mean “privileged family background” in North Vietnam as in American society. In North Vietnam during the war (and in all of Vietnam until the early 1990s), a “good” class background as a rule provided youth with greater upward social mobility than superior education or skills did (Vietnamese call this *chủ nghĩa thành phần* or *chủ nghĩa lý lịch*). A “good” class background, in turn, was determined by the socioeconomic status of one’s parents (and sometimes grandparents) before the communist government came to power. The educated parents of the young men and women who came of age during the Vietnam War in North Vietnam must have belonged to the elites in the colonial period, when educational opportunities were available to only a tiny minority of Vietnamese. Their children, who came from such “bad” class backgrounds, naturally faced greater pressures to show political loyalty by volunteering for the army. While Teerawichitchainan does not explicitly posit this explanation, it is corroborated by her data, which shows that children of party cadres were not more likely to be enlisted than those of ordinary parents. The complex sociological dynamics shown by Teerawichitchainan thus challenges the Vietnamese official historiography that attributes the high level of military service in North Vietnam to popular patriotism. Patriotism does not explain the different levels of military service among different social strata. A more convincing explanation is a sociological one: the total mobilization in North Vietnam may have reshaped social perceptions of military service by transforming it into the only realistic avenue for young men to achieve upward mobility.

In preparing this special issue, we have been guided by our conviction that the study of Vietnamese agency and the social and cultural dynamics of Vietnamese wartime society are intrinsically important topics that are worthy of investigation in their own right. At the same time, we are equally convinced that the Vietnamization of Vietnam War Studies is driven by much more than just a desire to give equal time to Vietnam and the Vietnamese. Some scholars have worried recently that the Vietnamization

trend may have gone too far. In their view, too much attention to Vietnamese actors and voices risks obscuring the critical fact that American power in Vietnam—whether measured by military might, economic strength, or diplomatic clout—was invariably greater than that of any Vietnamese government or group.<sup>18</sup> In our opinion, such complaints are off the mark. As the essays presented here demonstrate, the adoption of a Vietnamese Studies approach as an alternative to the America-centric scholarship of past decades **does not have to involve the replacement of one form of academic provincialism with another.** Students of the Vietnam War do not have to discount the enormous—and enormously destructive—impact of the American intervention in Vietnam in order to explore and appreciate the Vietnamese dimensions of the war. As a growing body of scholarship attests, the **study of international affairs can incorporate both the national and the transnational, and the local along with the translocal.**<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the Vietnamization turn in Vietnam War Studies is an exciting development indeed, and one that will continue to figure prominently in future research on one of the twentieth century's most destructive conflicts. ■

EDWARD MILLER is Assistant Professor of History at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. TUONG VU is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, University of Oregon, Eugene. The authors thank Trang Cao, Christopher Goscha, and Peter Zinoman for their helpful suggestions about the composition of this introduction and for their assistance in the preparation of this special issue.

KEYWORDS: *Vietnam War, Vietnam War Studies, Vietnamese wars, Second Indochina War, First Indochina War*

### Notes

1. The primary exceptions to the general lack of attention to Vietnamese actors and sources during the 1970s and 1980s were several studies of the communist-led insurgency in South Vietnam. These studies, authored mainly by political scientists and other scholars with Vietnam Studies expertise, produced many important insights about the origins and evolution of the insurgency. However, these works were rarely in dialog with the scholarship on Vietnam War diplomacy, politics, and military strategy produced during the same period.

For some key works of this type, see Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979); Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976); and Carlyle Thayer, *War by Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Vietnam 1954–1960* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).

2. “Orthodox” here refers to interpretations that assert that American leaders misunderstood the nature of the conflict in Vietnam and that these misunderstandings made a US defeat inevitable. “Revisionist” interpretations are those that maintain that the United States could and indeed would have won the Vietnam War, if not for the reprehensible (and possibly treasonous) actions of certain American leaders and/or groups. For a recent restatement of the “orthodox” view, see John Prados, *Vietnam: The History of an Unwinnable War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009). See also Gary Hess, *Vietnam: Explaining America’s Lost War* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008). The most notable—and most strident—recent contribution to “revisionist” scholarship is Mark Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1945–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). It is true, of course, that both orthodox and revisionist scholars often make reference to Vietnamese and other non-American actors in their work; it is also true that both groups of scholars sometimes make use of Vietnamese sources (usually those that have been translated into English). Invariably, however, the central questions posed by these works lead their authors to privilege American actors and American sources.
3. Key works on Chinese and Soviet involvement include Odd Arne Westad, ed., *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Indochina War, 1964–1977* (Washington, DC: Cold War International History Project, 1998); Chen Jian, “China’s Involvement in the Vietnam War, 1964–1969,” *China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995): 357–387; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communist Relations with China and the Second Indochina Conflict, 1956–1962* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997); Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1996); and Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). On the involvement of European and other Asian countries in the war, see Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press,

2005); 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); Margaret K. Gnoinska, "Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the 'Maneli Affair,'" *Cold War International History Project Working Paper 45* (March 2005), [www.wilson-center.org/topics/pubs/CWIHP\\_WP\\_45b.pdf](http://www.wilson-center.org/topics/pubs/CWIHP_WP_45b.pdf) (accessed June 30, 2009); Kathryn Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007); Christopher Goscha, *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution (1885–1954)* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999); Idem, "Vietnam and the World Outside: The Case of Vietnamese Communist Advisers in Laos (1948–1962)," *South East Asia Research* 12, no. 2 (2004): 141–185; Sutayut Osornprasop, "Amidst the Heat of the Cold War in Asia: Thailand and the American Secret War in Indochina (1960–1974)," *Cold War History* 7, no. 3 (August 2007): 349–371; Matthew Jones, "U.S. Relations with Indonesia, the Kennedy-Johnson Transition, and the Vietnam Connection, 1963–1965," *Diplomatic History* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2002): 249–273; Gregory Pemberton, *All the Way: Australia's Road to Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987).

4. In emphasizing the "Vietnamization" of Anglophone scholarship about the Vietnam War, we are aware that we are eliding the existence of a large body of Vietnamese-language writings about the conflict. Unfortunately, space limitations preclude us from presenting a detailed survey of this literature. Since the end of the war in 1975, a huge number of histories, memoirs, and other works on the war have been published in Vietnam. Because all publications in Vietnam are subject to government censorship, this literature has tended to reinforce the officially sanctioned narrative, which celebrates the communist party and the strategic and tactical decisions made by its leaders during the war. Nevertheless, these works have revealed much that was not previously known about the DRV war effort, and they have sometimes provided glimpses into the official party and government archives that are otherwise still off-limits to scholars. For an example of such official scholarship that is available in English translation, see Military History Institute of Vietnam, *Victory in Vietnam: The Official History of the People's Army of Vietnam, 1954–1975*, trans. Merle Pribbenow (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002). Significantly, some Vietnamese authors have produced works on the war that do not conform to the official narrative; these include many works by DRV veterans who have challenged official claims about the legitimacy, necessity, inevitability, and overall meaning of the conflict. Virtually all such works are novels and memoirs. For notable examples, see Bùi Tín, *Following Ho Chi Minh*, trans. Judy Stowe and Đỗ Văn (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); Idem, *From*

- Enemy to Friend*, trans. Nguyễn Ngọc Bích (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002); Dương Thu Hương, *Novel without a Name*, trans. Nina McPherson and Phan Huy Đường (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1995); Bảo Ninh, *The Sorrow of War*, trans. Phan Thanh Hải (New York: Pantheon Books, 1995); Đào Hiếu, *Lạc Đường* [Losing One's Way] (2008), available at [www.viet-studies.info/DaoHieu\\_LacDuong.htm](http://www.viet-studies.info/DaoHieu_LacDuong.htm) (accessed July 23, 2009); Nguyễn Khải, "Đi tìm cái Tôi đã mất" [Searching for My Lost Self] (2006), available at [www.viet-studies.info/NguyenKhai\\_DiTimCaiToiDaMat.htm](http://www.viet-studies.info/NguyenKhai_DiTimCaiToiDaMat.htm) (accessed July 23, 2009); and Tô Hải, *Hồi Ký Một Thằng Hèn* [Memoir of a Coward] (Falls Church, VA: Tiếng Quê Hương, 2009).
5. For a recent study that continues this line of analysis, see Gareth Porter, *Perils of Dominance: Imbalance of Power and the Road to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005). For an extended critique of this approach, see Tuong Vu, "Cold War Studies and the Cultural Cold War in Asia," in *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, eds. Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming).
  6. The outstanding account of this is Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden*.
  7. See Tuong Vu, "From Cheering to Volunteering: Vietnamese Communists and the Arrival of the Cold War 1940–1951," in *Connecting Histories: The Cold War and Decolonization in Asia, 1945–1962*, eds. Christopher Goscha and Christian Ostermann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming).
  8. Significantly, the arguments about "missed opportunities" have been advanced most forcefully by US military and government officials and by the historians who sympathize with them. For example, the argument was discussed at length in the 1960s government study that became known as the *Pentagon Papers*; it was also propounded in Archimedes Patti, *Why Viet Nam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980).
  9. See Vu, "From Cheering to Volunteering." On Vietnam's efforts to export revolution to Laos, see Goscha, "Vietnam and the World Outside."
  10. See Robert McNamara, James Blight, and Robert Brigham, *Argument without End: In Search of Answer to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York: Public Affairs, 1999).
  11. Pierre Asselin, *A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi and the Making of the Paris Agreement* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2002); Idem, "New Evidence from Vietnam," *Passport* 35, no. 3 (December 2004): 39–41; Sophie Quinn-Judge, "The Ideological Debate in the DRV and the Significance of the Anti-Party Affair, 1967–1968," *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (2005): 479–500; Idem, "Through a Glass Darkly: Reading the History of the

- Vietnamese Communist Party, 1945–1975,” in *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National and Transnational Perspectives*, eds. Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn B. Young (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 111–134; Liên-Hằng T. Nguyễn, “The War Politburo: North Vietnam’s Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tết Offensive,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (2006); Christopher E. Goscha, “Courting Diplomatic Disaster? The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945–1950),” in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, no. 1–2 (2006): 59–103; Merle L. Pribbenow II, “General Võ Nguyên Giáp and the Mysterious Evolution of the Plan for the 1968 Tết Offensive,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 3, no. 2 (2008): 1–33.
12. Philip 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 Ngô Đình Diệm, 1945–1954,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (October 2004): 433–458; Idem, “The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem,” in Goscha and Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories*; Jessica Chapman, “Staging Democracy: South Vietnam’s 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai,” *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 4 (September 2006): 671–703; and Matthew Masur, “Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam’s Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954–1960,” *Diplomatic History* 33, no. 2 (April 2009): 293–313. It is interesting to note that the reception of the new work on Ngô Đình Diệm has a certain “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” quality to it, insofar as it has been attacked by “orthodox” and “revisionist” scholars alike. Orthodox writers insist that the new scholarship seeks to “rehabilitate” Ngô Đình Diệm; at the same time, revisionists complain that the new scholarship unfairly denigrates the South Vietnamese leader. For examples of the former type of accusation, see Prados, *Vietnam: The History of*, 68 and 561n15; Robert Buzzanco, “Fear and (Self) Loathing in Lubbock: How I Learned to Quit Worrying and Love Vietnam and Iraq,” *Counterpunch*, April 16–17, 2005, [www.counterpunch.org/buzzanco004162005.html](http://www.counterpunch.org/buzzanco004162005.html) (accessed June 30, 2009); and especially James Carter, review of Matthew Masur’s “Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam’s Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954–1960,” May 2009, [www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR228.pdf](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/reviews/PDF/AR228.pdf) (accessed July 1, 2009). For the opposite view—i.e., that the new scholarship on Ngô Đình Diệm is actually an attempt to affirm the “overarching tenets” of the orthodox school—see Moyar, *Triumph Forsaken*, xii and 420n4.
13. Tuong Vu, “Dreams of Paradise: The Making of a Soviet Outpost in Vietnam,” *Ab Imperio* no. 2/2008 (August 2008): 255–285; Idem, “From Cheering to Volunteering,” in Goscha and Ostermann, eds., *Connecting Histories*; Idem, “To Be

- Patriotic Is to Build Socialism: Communist Ideology in Vietnam's Civil War," in Vu and Wongsurawat, eds. *Dynamics of the Cold War*; Tuan Hoang, "The Early South Vietnamese Critique of Communism," in Vu and Wongsurawat, eds., *Dynamics of the Cold War*.
14. Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Kim N.B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945–1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).
  15. David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930–1975*, vol. 1–2 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003); David Hunt, *Vietnam's Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War, 1959–1968* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009).
  16. Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2006); Idem, *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Idem, "Co so cach mang and the Social Network of War," in Bradley and Young, eds., *Making Sense*, 199–216.
  17. See George Donelson Moss, *Vietnam, An American Ordeal*, 5th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005).
  18. The Americanist Seth Jacobs rejects the idea that South Vietnamese leaders might have exercised effective agency vis-à-vis the United States on the grounds that "Washington ultimately held the purse strings and the whip hand" when dealing with Sài Gòn. See Seth Jacobs, "Author's Response," in "America's Miracle Man in Vietnam Roundtable Review," published by H-Diplo, June 12, 2007, [www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/AmericasMiracleMan-Roundtable.pdf](http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/AmericasMiracleMan-Roundtable.pdf) (accessed July 23, 2009). For the argument that the Vietnam War is best studied through the practice of "an America-centric international history," see Fredrik Logevall, "Politics and Foreign Relations," *Journal of American History* 95, no. 4 (2009): 1074–1078.
  19. See, for example, Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). See also Bradley and Young eds., *Making Sense*.