

TUONG VU

Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism

Does a Vietnamese nation exist? Is it an ancient entity, or a modern invention? Is national consciousness to be found only among political elites, or do the masses also hold such sentiments? What is the nature of Vietnamese nationalism: is it a psychological sense of patriotism, an anti-colonial ideology, or a quest for political power? What is the Vietnamese national character? What is the relationship between Vietnamese nationalism and communism? This review of the state of Vietnamese political studies¹ in the United States since the 1950s finds that these questions have preoccupied scholars of Vietnamese politics and political history more than any other topic.

Over the last fifty years, the field has undergone two growth spurts, one in the mid 1960s and the other since the mid 1980s. The first took place as the United States deepened its involvement in Vietnam, while the second occurred at the end of the Cold War. At both turning points the field expanded rapidly, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, reflecting the profound impact of political events on scholarship. At the same time, the growth spurts foreshadowed shifts in the substantive debates on the Vietnamese nation and nationalism. In particular, before the mid 1960s debates were implicit and mild in tone. Diverse views existed, but pessimism about the Vietnamese nation and doubts about its unifying power and moral character were pervasive. Despite the belief in the modern origins of nations

Journal of Vietnamese Studies, Vol. 2, Issue 2, pps. 175–230. ISSN 1559-372x, electronic ISSN 1559-3738. © 2007 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Rights and Permissions website, <http://www.ucpressjournals.com/reprintinfo.asp>. DOI: 10.1525/jvs.2007.2.2.175

that was prevalent among social scientists at the time, in Vietnamese Studies only a few believers in Vietnam as an ethnic nation existed. At the same time, some adopted an alternative concept that defined the Vietnamese nationality not along the primordial-modern dimension but as a communal identity to be found at the village level. And as for Vietnamese nationalism, most analysts viewed it as contradicting and being threatened by communism.

As the war escalated and the field experienced its first growth spurt after the mid 1960s, the tone of debate became increasingly combative and its character more polemic. The earlier pessimism was replaced in this new, more sophisticated scholarship by an optimism about the Vietnamese nation. This nation was now seen primarily as an ethnic group whose identity had been shaped over the centuries out of repeated resistance to foreign invasions. There was also a new belief in the possible affinity for and benefit of an alliance between nationalism and communism. Reflecting an important trend in the social sciences and the normative concerns of analysts, Vietnamese nationalism was now conceptualized simply as anticolonialism. Overall, the new scholarship of this period made major contributions to the understanding of Vietnamese politics, but it was also highly partisan—that is, its arguments and evidence were often deployed in not-so-subtle ways to justify certain policy positions. While no scholarship can ever be free of ideological biases, these were more pronounced and sometimes explicitly proclaimed in works written during this period.

Since the early 1980s, as the field gathered steam for a second expansive phase, the debates have become less polemic and ideological. New ways to conceptualize the Vietnamese nation have emerged that challenge earlier thinking. The existence and power of the Vietnamese nation are no longer assumed or denied in a simplistic manner, while the processes by which the nation was created or sustained receive a new scrutiny. In sync with developments in social science theory, the Vietnamese nation is now primarily viewed as a modern social construct or cultural artifact. Vietnamese nationalism is treated not only as resistance to foreign rule but also as a cover for power politics. The affinity between communism and nationalism is rejected. A welcome development is the more direct engagement of Vietnam scholarship of this third period with broad theories in the social sciences. By productively applying these theories to old questions or by using Vietnamese

cases to criticize them, current scholarship gives the topic a renewed salience and offers new vistas for future exploration.

This review is organized into three parts, corresponding to the three periods the field has experienced. In each part, I will begin by discussing political events, theoretical trends in the social sciences—especially regarding the study of nations and nationalism—and trends in related fields such as Asian or Southeast Asian Studies. The bulk of each section is devoted to the debates on questions about the Vietnamese nation and nationalism. In the conclusion I will speculate about future trends in the field, which appears to be moving away from these questions. Three areas of potential fruitful research are suggested, including changing Vietnamese loyalties in the era of globalization, the ethnic dimension of the modern Vietnamese nation, and the relationship between nationalism, socialism, and state building in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) during the war.

Early Scholarship and Doubts about the Nation

English scholarship on Vietnam's politics and political history emerged around the 1950s, in the midst of the First Indochinese War and at a high point of the Cold War. In American academic circles of the time, a brief liberal moment of hope in nationalist or anticolonial movements at the end of World War II soon made way for anxieties about the communist specter and about the challenges of nation building in many new (noncommunist) states.² These anxieties were reflected in modernization theories that came to dominate the social sciences in this period.³ In Southeast Asian Studies, these concerns were observable in the shift from George Kahin's optimistic work on Indonesian nationalism to Lucian Pye's studies of communism in Malaya and nation building in Burma and to Herbert Feith's pessimistic account of Indonesia's failed democratic experiment.⁴

In the study of nations and nationalism, the period of the fifties and sixties has been called the age of "classical modernism."⁵ Most works at the time assumed that nations and nationalism were modern phenomena, originating from Western Europe and dating no earlier than the French revolution.⁶ Classical modernists pursued two basic approaches. Some studied nationalism as the progress and diffusion of modern ideas about national loyalties.⁷ While few denied that patriotism or some form of communal feeling had

always existed, such as a man's "natural tendency to love his birthplace," these feelings were dismissed as "inarticulate" or lacking "a particular doctrine of the state or of the individual's relation to it."⁸ Similarly, ethnic ties were viewed as limited because ethnic groups were too small or too loosely organized to be called nations.⁹ A second approach taken by modernists focused on nation building or national integration processes in new countries in Asia and Africa.¹⁰ This approach sought to identify and quantify material changes in those physical (as opposed to ideological) processes such as "social mobilization" and "social communication." These processes were assumed to ultimately produce modern nations out of traditional communities.

Concerning nationalism, attitudes were mixed. Negative views associated nationalism with extremism and fanaticism.¹¹ This critical attitude was also extended to nationalist movements in Asia and Africa, which were thought to have inherited the bad traits of German and Italian nationalist movements antagonistic to liberal principles.¹² In contrast, optimism was found among modernization theorists who predicted a gradual but inevitable spread of the Westernized version of modernity through elite efforts at nation building and social mobilization.¹³ These different theories of nations, especially the negative attitude toward nationalism, were reflected to some degree in the debates in Vietnamese Studies on related issues at the time, although the echoes were muted in most cases.

Until the early 1960s, the nascent field of Vietnamese political studies was dominated by French authors; important non-French contributors were Ellen Hammer, P.J. Honey, Hoàng Văn Chí, Joseph Buttinger, and Milton Sacks. Most of the works produced in this period read like journalistic accounts or current histories, focusing on contemporary events as they unfolded. This is perhaps due to the fact that many writers in this period were either journalists or colonial officials, not professional academics.¹⁴ With a few exceptions,¹⁵ there was little interest in theorizing or even in searching for a broader paradigm to explain Vietnamese politics.

The First Indochinese War was the focal point in most studies.¹⁶ Politics among Vietnamese actors, if discussed, was treated primarily through the lens of this war. An exception was the work of Buttinger, justifiably claimed by the author as the first history of Vietnam in English (it covered Vietnamese

history up to the end of the nineteenth century).¹⁷ Toward the end of this period, a few studies began to examine internal politics under the two regimes in the divided Vietnam.¹⁸ Perhaps thanks to a detachment from everyday events in the north, which was now inaccessible to most foreign researchers, the analyses of DRV politics in these volumes indicated a higher level of abstraction in the sense that they used or applied concepts developed in the scholarship of other communist countries, such as “the new class,” “totalitarianism,” “power groups,” and “pressure groups.” Analyses of politics in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), astute or otherwise, remained wedded to the journalistic style.¹⁹

In this early period, debates about the Vietnamese nation were muted and fluid, but implicit pessimism about the Vietnamese nation and nationalism was pervasive.²⁰ Three different concepts of the Vietnamese nation can be found in the literature. In one, the Vietnamese nation is assumed to be a modern phenomenon born out of and as a reaction to Western colonialism.²¹ In this view, the Vietnamese nation is not different from the Indonesian variety. This perspective was popular among comparativists who commented broadly on “Asian nationalism” but did not offer specific arguments to illuminate the Vietnamese case. In contrast, a second perspective treated the Vietnamese nation as an ethnic group rather than as a modern phenomenon. Still a third view conceptualized Vietnamese nationality not as an ethnic but as a communal identity. Here I will focus on the second and third perspectives, which were primarily held by Vietnam specialists.

Among those who treated the Vietnamese nation as an ethnic group, Bernard Fall stands out as a nonbeliever who questioned not only the weak basis of the Vietnamese ethnic identity but also the moral claims of Vietnamese nationalism.²² In his once classic *The Two Vietnams*, Fall’s discussion of Vietnamese premodern history devotes about two pages to Vietnam’s relationship with China and seven pages to what he called “Vietnamese colonialism” and disunity among Vietnamese before Europeans arrived. Presenting a map of “Vietnam’s imperial march from 111 B.C. to 1863 A.D.,” Fall argued that the Vietnamese southward movement to absorb the Champa Kingdom and eastern Cambodia was “as thorough a job of genocide as any modern totalitarian state could have devised.”²³ As a result of this brutal march, the Champa Kingdom was completely wiped out in

150 years, and Cambodia would have had the same fate but for the intervention of Siam. Fall compared Vietnamese colonialism to the corresponding state- and nation-building processes in Europe at the same time, pointing out that the Vietnamese as colonizers were in fact superior to Europeans because they colonized people whose level of culture was at least equal to their own. In only a few pages, Fall forcefully discredited Vietnamese nationalism and lay bare its character as a quest for domination as much as one for the right to self rule.²⁴

Fall's focus on Vietnamese colonialism can be seen as an apology for French colonialism,²⁵ but it also serves to underlie a broader point, namely the fragility of the Vietnamese nation. Because the southward movement did not reach southern Vietnam until the seventeenth century, the territorial basis of the modern Vietnamese nation is viewed as shaky. Fall drove the point home to American readers: "[M]uch of what today is the Republic of Vietnam south of the 17th parallel has been 'Vietnamese' for a shorter span of time than the Eastern seaboard of the United States has been 'American.'"²⁶ Besides a doubtful territorial claim, the Vietnamese nation also lacks a political basis, Fall argued. The southward movement was in part the result of intense disunity among Vietnamese elites in the sixteenth century, and it in turn led to a civil war lasting for 150 years. Bitter quarrelling among Vietnamese, especially between southerners and northerners, was in fact their "favorite national pastime."²⁷

While acknowledging the "political sins" of the French colonial system, Fall downplayed the significance of "the colonial interlude" in Vietnamese history and asserted that political conflicts between French rulers and their Vietnamese subjects were sometimes much less intense compared to ideological clashes among Vietnamese themselves.²⁸ He noted that Trotskyites in alliance with leaders of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) were elected to the Colonial Council under the Popular Front government in the 1930s, and that a Trotskyite won a municipal election in Sài Gòn as late as 1953. In contrast, many Trotskyites were murdered by the ICP in 1945, and Fall expressed his doubt in 1963 whether a Trotskyite could safely run for office in either zone of independent Vietnam.²⁹ Fall thus suggested that the shared experience of colonialism only served as a poor basis for the formation of a modern Vietnamese nation, which at a more

fundamental level was plagued by internal conflict among Vietnamese themselves.

Hoàng Văn Chí shared with Fall a pessimism about the future of the Vietnamese nation, but he offered a different representation of its ethnic past.³⁰ In contrast with Fall, Hoàng Văn Chí described the existence of the Vietnamese nation as an unquestionable historical fact based on the recurrent patterns of resistance to foreign invasion in Vietnamese history. The high moral ground occupied by Vietnamese nationalism was beyond doubt to him. His account completely ignored the southward march in Vietnam's history and concentrated on the patterns of Chinese aggression and Vietnamese resistance. The book focused especially on Vietnamese struggles against colonial rule, from the Cần Vương [Save the King] movement to Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục [Dong Kinh Free School] to Đông Du [Eastern Travel] to the Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (VNQDDĐ) [Vietnamese Nationalist Party]. Colonialism was not an interlude, as in Fall's interpretation, but the defining experience that created a strong desire among all Vietnamese for an independent nation. For Hoàng Văn Chí, the causal ontology of the Vietnamese nation is reduced to one dimension, namely, its relations with more powerful foreign powers.³¹ His interpretation was perfunctory and unsophisticated, but within a few years, similar versions would be developed into the dominant paradigm.

While Fall and Hoàng Văn Chí disagreed about the strength and integrity of the Vietnamese nation, they both treated it as a primordial group as opposed to a modern phenomenon. A third view existed during this early period that downplayed the primordial-modern distinction and conceptualized Vietnamese nationality not as an ethnic but as a communal identity. I suspect, and future research may be able to confirm, that this view originated from French scholarship; its proponents were either French or heavily influenced by French scholarship. A pioneer of this view is Paul Mus, who was less interested in Vietnamese ethnic consciousness than in the shared communal traditions in village communities that make villagers *essentially* Vietnamese.³² As he wrote, "The villages . . . are what constitute Viet Nam, and only through them does one in crucial times learn to know the country and its national spirit."³³ In his view, these villages were an integral part of the "loosely knit" traditional system in which the Confucian state

centralized religious and military matters but left economic and social affairs to communal administration led by councils of notables.³⁴ The beauty of this system, from the perspective of centralized authority, was its inexpensiveness. However, in order for the modern Vietnamese nation with a modern economy to emerge, a modern state with a large budget was required. French colonial government attempted to build such a state and taxed peasants heavily for this purpose. Under increased demands from the colonial (modern) state, Mus argued, traditional village councils assumed greater responsibilities and became more dependent on the center. At the same time, traditional communal values lost their relevance to peasants who had been transformed into individual taxpayers. This change would, over time, translate into greater demands for political rights, or even make conditions ripe for revolution.

Mus and his American coauthor, John McAlister, disagreed with those who blamed French colonialism for the problems facing modern Vietnam.³⁵ The old Vietnamese political system rested on a balanced relationship between a ritualistic state and the autarchic village. A modern state must play different roles—as “a builder, an entrepreneur, an organizer, [and] an umpire in everyday affairs.” Any modern Vietnamese government would have had to do exactly what the French colonial government did, they argued. The issue for them was not colonial rule but the difficult transition from tradition to modernity. Colonialism “hastened” and “disguised” the transition, but it did not create it. To these authors, for traditional villages to become members of the modern nation, significant obstacles had to be overcome.

Sharing the same assumption with Mus but influenced in part by contemporary Marxist ideas in French scholarship,³⁶ Buttinger offered a mass-based theory of how the Vietnamese nation was born in the tenth century out of one thousand years of Chinese domination and how it was preserved thereafter. He described a Sino-Vietnamese elite that developed under Chinese rule, an elite that collaborated with China and embraced Chinese culture but occasionally rebelled to demand more control of native wealth and labor.³⁷ The Vietnamese peasant masses, however, remained essentially Vietnamese, clinging to pre-Chinese indigenous culture. Although the village economy was initially transformed by the introduction of Chinese

agricultural techniques, there was no interest in further changes, and village life became static. Peasants were hostile to the oppressive Sinicized elites and did not join anti-Chinese rebellions, which, in Buttinger's view, was why they all failed eventually. The key to Vietnamese national survival was the early development of solid socioeconomic organizations based on Chinese technology and culture.³⁸ These communal organizations fostered communal solidarity and preserved national identity throughout a thousand years under Chinese rule and thereafter.

Buttinger argued that by the tenth century the elites realized the need for coalition with peasants and mobilized them based on shared identity as Vietnamese. In the process, it was the elites who had to "transform themselves into something more genuinely Vietnamese," namely, to reorient themselves to Vietnamese culture as preserved in the village. Buttinger argued that during the civil war between the Trịnh and Nguyễn Houses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was again the village that saved the Vietnamese nation while elites were engaged in fraternal conflict. As he wrote, "Vietnam's national unity survived in the peasant's way of life, which was immutable like the economy of the Vietnamese village and identical all over the country. The forces of the village . . . were forever mending what the lords, the mandarins, and the rulers were tearing apart."³⁹ Buttinger thus shared with Mus an emphasis on village culture rather than elite politics, on communal instead of national or ethnic traditions. In contrast with Hoàng Văn Chí, who defined the Vietnamese nation based on Vietnamese patterns of resistance to Chinese domination, for both Mus and Buttinger the relationship between elites (the state) and peasants (society) was far more important than ethnic ties. Buttinger argued that a nation may exist independently from what the elites do, while Mus believed that a nation can be built only if the elites know how to appeal to peasants.

We shall see that the three concepts of the Vietnamese nation embraced in this early period were adopted or elaborated on in subsequent periods. For most authors during this time, the debate on Vietnam's ethnic past and its communal traditions was intimately linked to questions about the character and strength of modern Vietnamese nationalism. Their concerns included a set of several related questions about this phenomenon that involved not ancient history but the turn of events since 1945, questions that carried with

them significant policy implications. In particular, the communist leadership of Vietnamese nationalism, an exception in Southeast Asia and a “problem” from the Western perspective, demanded an explanation.⁴⁰ Was this leadership the evidence of popular support for communism? If it was, should the DRV be regarded as the legitimate government of Vietnam—representing the will of the Vietnamese nation? If not, did legitimacy rest with the government of the RVN? The policy implications of these questions were clear and urgent at the time: on the one hand, communist legitimacy implied Western diplomatic recognition of the DRV, which was contrary to existing US policy. On the other hand, the RVN’s lack of legitimacy suggested that the United States should end its support for Sài Gòn.

There was a convergence of opinion in this period that the revolution originated in 1945 as a nationalist movement but was hijacked in 1950 by communists using illegitimate tactics. But authors had a variety of explanations for this shift: Hammer blamed the French, arguing that they denied Vietnam’s legitimate demand for independence. She also criticized Vietnamese nationalists for letting themselves be outmaneuvered by communists.⁴¹ In contrast, Hoàng Văn Chí excoriated communists for betraying the national cause and for using tricks or violence to eliminate their nationalist compatriots.⁴² With access to many captured documents, Fall offered the most extensive analysis of the communist-dominated Việt Minh leadership that rose to power in 1945. He traced it to southern China in 1941, when the Việt Minh was formed as an alliance of several groups, of which the communists were a minority.⁴³ The Japanese coup of March 1945 gave the communists an advantage, and their political foresight, Fall argued, helped put them in power in 1945. Hồ Chí Minh sought to exclude other groups but had to “temporize” when threatened by Chinese occupation forces. He thus acquired nationalist credentials and consolidated power for his party by arranging for sovereignty to be transferred from Bảo Đại, organizing a fraudulent election, manipulating US Office of Strategic Services (OSS) officers, raising money to bribe Chinese generals and buy weapons, and brutally eliminating competitors. It was thus not their popularity but a combination of luck, leadership, and violence that helped communists to defeat nationalists in the movement.

Authors during this period portrayed the communists as being power hungry as well as ideologically driven. Fall noted how similar the statutes of the Vietnamese Workers' Party [Đảng Lao Động] were to those of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communist Party, despite the toned-down rhetoric of the former.⁴⁴ Honey, Fall, and Hoàng Văn Chí analyzed DRV policies on land reform, education, intellectual freedom, and foreign relations that apparently aimed not for national unity but for ideological goals.⁴⁵ As a divisive force that frustrated the aspirations of the Vietnamese nation, the communist government was not, in their view, legitimate.

While there was clear consensus in denying legitimacy to the DRV, analysts disagreed about the RVN. Up to the early 1960s several authors, including Hammer, Buttinger, and Fishel, believed that the RVN represented the national aspirations of Vietnam.⁴⁶ The political puzzle that motivated Buttinger to write his book was whether the RVN under Ngô Đình Diệm could, as he hoped, survive as an independent polity under communist "invasion."⁴⁷ The broader historical puzzle for him was why Vietnam, "the smaller dragon," could retain its independent identity next to the big dragon. By focusing his scholarly energy on understanding the miracle of Vietnamese survival in the face of Chinese aggression, he suggested hope for the RVN, which at the time appeared weaker than the DRV as an organized polity. He even predicted the ultimate doom of Vietnamese communism by asserting that the communist and pro-China Hồ Chí Minh would fail to "change the [hostile] attitude of the Vietnamese toward China." Vietnamese nationalism was the source of strength for communists in the war with France, but Buttinger argued that it now may have become "an element of [their] early disintegration" as they sought close alliance with China. Buttinger thus implicitly recommended that US policymakers invest in Ngô Đình Diệm and help him defend South Vietnam.

By the mid 1960s, however, the Sài Gòn regime had lost its nationalist credentials in the eyes of the academic community. Fall called the southern regime "a police state" (for comparison he labeled its northern counterpart a "garrison state").⁴⁸ Hoàng Văn Chí accused Western powers of supporting a "highly reactionary government in the South, thus making a propaganda gift to communist subversion."⁴⁹ To him, the remaining hope for the nation after the "communist betrayal" was dashed by southern politicians and

doomed by their misguided Western allies. Because he viewed both southern and northern rulers as dependent on external forces, Hoàng Văn Chí concluded that foreign intervention was the ultimate cause of the ill fate of the Vietnamese nation. He did not take this analysis further, but when his interpretation of modern politics is placed next to two thousand years of repeated resistance to Chinese domination, one can see the elements of a grand leitmotif in which the Vietnamese nation emerges as a victim of more powerful external forces throughout its history.⁵⁰ As will be seen below, this would become a popular theme in the scholarship, with different versions motivated by different normative concerns and blaming different foreign forces for Vietnamese victimhood.

McAlister and Mus were more willing than Fall or Hammer to concede some legitimacy to Hồ Chí Minh and his party even while acknowledging that communists manipulated their way to power. The puzzle for these analysts was not about the elite struggle between nationalists and communists for leadership, as it was for Fall. Given their assumptions about autonomous villages, the question for them was how an elitist and radical Marxist movement could attract the support of poor peasants who were deeply immersed in the traditional milieu of Vietnamese villages. The arguments, which are complex and not always clear, boil down to three main elements: First, there was the ability of communists to promote communal values through their land redistribution program.⁵¹ The Marxist cosmology, which called for total change, also appealed to peasants who believed in the “Asian concept of revolution” as meaning total change.⁵² Finally, they argued, the ICP’s decision to “give up its name”⁵³ and the abdication of Bảo Đại and his transfer of power to Hồ Chí Minh in late 1945 displayed authentic signals of a new mandate of heaven at a time of great uncertainty. These signs persuaded peasants, who were “gamblers at heart,” to bet their fates on the Việt Minh. While the conclusions of Fall and Hoàng Văn Chí had policy implications amounting to an American withdrawal or search for “a third force,” the implications of Mus and McAlister’s view was that perhaps Washington should accept Hà Nội as the legitimate government of Vietnam.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, students of Vietnamese politics conceptualized the Vietnamese nation in a variety of ways: not only by identifying its place along the ethnic–modern continuum but also by describing it as

embedded in villages based on traditional culture rather than on ethnic ties. At the same time, ambivalence about and negative views of the Vietnamese nation and nationalism continued to pervade the scholarship, with the communists generally being denied legitimacy. In the early 1960s, the field was still in its infancy and debates were indirect. Arguments and analyses manifested the normative concerns of their authors and had clear policy implications, but the influence of politics on scholarship was generally diffused when compared to the later period. The tone of the debate was also relatively mild; despite the accusations against Hoàng Văn Chí,⁵⁴ for example, his bitter criticism of US policy in the RVN makes it hard to believe that he was an American sycophant or a CIA agent. But as we shall see, when the United States expanded its involvement in Vietnam after the fall of Ngô Đình Diệm, the field entered an expansive phase in which the scholarship was sharply politicized.

Radicalized Scholarship and the New Faith in the Vietnamese Nation

By the late 1960s, political developments in the United States, especially the civil rights and antiwar movements, had radicalized academia. These movements drew numerous scholars and students out of the “ivory towers” of scholarship to become campus activists. A radical shift in social science paradigms ensued: modernization theory lost its status as the dominant perspective on development, while dependency theory, “Third World” studies, and the study of peasant revolutions were now in vogue.⁵⁵ Together with the new popularity of Marxist thought and peasant studies in academia, theories of nations and nationalism in the social sciences also experienced important modifications. Classical modernism, still the dominant approach, was now pursued by many along Marxist (as opposed to Durkheimian or Parsonian) lines and themes. New studies on “economic nationalism” in developing countries saw the phenomenon as a response to European imperialist exploitation and domination.⁵⁶ Nationalism was now equated with anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism.⁵⁷ The material (as opposed to ideological) processes by which nationalism was born continued to be elaborated; nationalism was seen as a political phenomenon rising from the social and political need for modernizing urban societies to integrate traditional rural

communities that had been broken under the pressure of industrialization.⁵⁸ In Asian and Southeast Asian Studies specifically, besides ongoing concerns about the tumultuous process of national integration in new nations,⁵⁹ works sympathetic to communist movements appeared in greater numbers.⁶⁰ If in the earlier period communists had been the villains to denounce, now they became the heroes to sing of in many studies.

American scholars grew increasingly interested in Vietnam as US involvement there deepened, fueling a spurt in the field of Vietnamese political studies. Soon American scholarship began to predominate. One type of study was either commissioned by the US government or written by researchers who had formerly been affiliated with the US government.⁶¹ Also in this group were researchers who were not funded by the US government but nonetheless relied on access and sources provided by US authorities in Vietnam, just as Fall had counted on the access provided by the French army for his pioneering study of the Việt Minh. The primary focus of these works was on the politics of revolution and counterinsurgency on the ground between the National Liberation Front (NLF)/DRV forces and the RVN.

While some authors in this category disapproved of the war, the second type of study was produced mainly by vocal critics of American policy in Vietnam.⁶² A prime example is George Kahin and John Lewis's *The United States in Vietnam*, which was clearly written for advocacy purposes and has been touted as "the bible for opponents to the war in the 1970s."⁶³ These works focused less on the politics of revolution than on the broader context of Vietnamese history and traditional culture from which the revolution emerged.

Several characteristics distinguish the scholarship of this period from that of the 1950s and early 1960s. First, the latter was primarily journalistic while the former was primarily academic, including research by scholars from many more fields: history,⁶⁴ political science,⁶⁵ sociology,⁶⁶ economics,⁶⁷ and anthropology.⁶⁸ The approaches and techniques employed in these studies were extremely diverse, ranging from statistical analyses⁶⁹ to mathematical modeling⁷⁰ to historical and literary studies.⁷¹ Theory was no longer marginalized; instead, most works now contained some theory, at least implicitly. Modernization theory informed many works, while others addressed

theoretical debates such as whether grievances and inequality caused the southern revolution. Second, Vietnam's internal politics as opposed to its external relations now occupied the central stage in many works, even though the ongoing wars of the twentieth century still lurked in the background. And finally, more native Vietnamese scholars were represented in the literature than before,⁷² and their contributions included translations of carefully selected Vietnamese texts that conveyed a certain viewpoint, whether in academic or policy debates. Although the interest in Vietnam among both the US public and academia declined significantly after the war ended in 1975,⁷³ this second period in Vietnamese scholarship extended as long as a decade afterward, mostly because of a lag in the process of research and publication. This was especially true in the case of many dissertations.⁷⁴

With new voices, more government funding, and higher political stake, the debates about the Vietnamese nation and nationalism in this period assumed a new tone and character, becoming intensely partisan and polemic. Researchers were under pressure to discuss at length their sources of funding and to disclose and disclaim at the outset their personal views of the war.⁷⁵ Calm voices were still heard, but not often.⁷⁶

There were also new attitudes toward the Vietnamese nation and fresh conceptual formulations for describing it. We have seen that earlier scholarship was either ambivalent or negative about the Vietnamese nation. By the late 1960s this attitude was held by only a marginalized minority.⁷⁷ In the following decade, a corpus of more sophisticated works effectively shifted the terms of debate; the question was no longer whether the nation existed, but when it emerged and by what mechanisms it was sustained. In the new view, the Vietnamese nation, defined as an ethnic group, was assumed to have a timeless presence that transcends tradition and modernity. This existence, scholars argued, has been proven by the fact that the Vietnam nation has been able to act as a political community with a distinct independent identity at countless times in history and has survived at great odds. Furthermore, the communist government in Hà Nội was no longer viewed as a divisive force that frustrated Vietnam's national aspirations. On the contrary, it was now almost unanimously considered the legitimate leader of Vietnamese nationalism, as well as the legitimate inheritor of the "national tradition" of resistance. The debate now shifted to the particular ways the

communist model and nationalist traditions blended. While most viewed communism as simply a tool for nationalist goals, some employed class analysis to arrive at the radical proposition that communism, and in particular class struggle, was the logical and necessary approach by which Vietnamese could fulfill their aspirations, namely, social equity. Nationalism in this view was an unfortunate compromise—the price the revolution had to pay to defeat overwhelming imperialist forces.

The greater optimism about the Vietnamese nation in the scholarship of the late 1960s owed much to the effort to take seriously the myth of nationhood long popularized in Vietnamese folklore, literature, and official historiography. Trương Bửu Lâm made a significant contribution to this trend by translating into English many Vietnamese materials, dating back to the eleventh century, that appeared to assert an independent Vietnamese identity.⁷⁸ Trương Bửu Lâm did not distinguish between traditional Vietnamese resistance to China and modern movements against French colonial rule: in his view they are all “nationalist,” although the latter embrace additional modern values such as communism or democracy. Citing modernists in the footnotes but failing to engage their arguments, he equated “national” with “ethnic.”⁷⁹ Although he discussed at least three patterns of Vietnamese reaction—including resistance, collaboration, and reform—the selected materials are predominantly about resistance.

Underlying the new attitude about the Vietnamese nation was the assumption of a linear and uninterrupted relationship between history and current events in the idea of a unified, ultimately unstoppable force sweeping through Vietnamese history over two thousand years. Kahin and Lewis, for example, called on American policy makers to heed the “pervading influence of recent Vietnamese history” because “in Vietnam, past is present.”⁸⁰ David Marr similarly asserted that “even cursory examination serves to reveal how much we are prisoners of the past as Vietnamese and foreigners both act out roles delineated many years ago.”⁸¹ “The past” in this new scholarship, defined by the “patterns” of repeated Vietnamese resistance to foreign invasion, is the same version described earlier by Hoàng Văn Chí (but not by Fall). Thus, it is not just any past, but a past *nationalized* by students of Vietnamese history. In this new nationalization project, both the research and the arguments are more sophisticated than in earlier scholarship.

Furthermore, unlike Hoàng Văn Chí's account, in which the anticolonial tradition was extended to modern time with Nguyễn Thái Học and his VNQDD, for the new scholarship it was Hồ Chí Minh and his ICP that continued the tradition.

Fall's earlier doubts about the Vietnamese nation were overcome in this later research by several arguments: Marr focused on "the Vietnamese identity," and he sidestepped the thorny issue of Vietnamese colonization of Champa and Cambodia by arguing that to Vietnamese the relationship with these less-fortunate neighbors has posed little identity problem because they are so different from Vietnamese culturally and ethnically.⁸² The Vietnamese relationship with the Chinese is far more problematic for Marr because Vietnamese are culturally similar to Chinese, historically on the receiving end of Chinese cultural influence but also maintaining their own language and resisting Chinese political dominance.

On the issue of Vietnamese national disunity, Huỳnh Kim Khánh argued that traditional Vietnam was still more unified than most other nations.⁸³ The disunity in the twentieth century was "a result of explicit policy objectives of Western colonialists and neo-colonialists and not an extension of Vietnamese tradition." Here we encounter again the image of the Vietnamese nation as a victim of foreign forces.

Marr conceded that elite disunity was not uncommon in Vietnamese history. In his view, however, this did not weaken national consciousness; in fact, it strengthened it.⁸⁴ This is because in many situations of elite infighting, some elite factions requested Chinese help, which led to a Chinese invasion. The opposing elites had no option but to reach out to peasants; if together they succeeded in fighting off the Chinese, this victory would enhance national identity and add another episode to the "patterns" of resistance.

To effectively connect the past and present in Vietnamese history, advocates of the nationalization project proposed new concepts and foci. Some eschewed the very concept of nationalism, perhaps in part because it calls attention to the discontinuity between the "traditional" world of the past and the "modern" world of the present.⁸⁵ "Anticolonialism" was adopted instead, allowing the Cần Vương, Đông Du, and Việt Minh to be lumped together and a straight line to be drawn from Phan Đình Phùng, a Cần Vương leader,

to Hồ Chí Minh, the modern communist. On the surface, this adoption of anticolonialism instead of nationalism in Vietnamese Studies seemed to follow the Marxian turn in the social science literature. However, in the broader scholarship the concept of anticolonialism served to highlight the economic exploitation of colonies by modern imperialism. In Vietnamese Studies, it was used to emphasize the power of Vietnamese ethnicity and the traditional origins of the Vietnamese nation.

Another example of conceptual innovation to show that the Vietnamese nation transcends the tradition-modernity divide is the concept of patriotism, defined as “an inward-looking, kinship-oriented concept with sentimental connotations.”⁸⁶ In this view, nationalism is regarded dismissively as a political expression of the elite and thus has limited power as “a motive force of Vietnamese group solidarity.”⁸⁷ As Huỳnh Kim Khánh argued, what has motivated the masses throughout history is patriotism, the social and institutional bases of which include ancestor worship and the “communal cult.” This latter refers in particular to the practice of worshipping village guardian spirits, many of whom were national heroes in wars against Chinese aggression. Vietnamese patriotism, in this view, was strong thanks to the country’s ethnic homogeneity and its precolonial existence as a nation with “a unified tradition, culture, language and an effective political and economic system.”⁸⁸ International sponsorship by the Soviet Union offered Vietnamese communism ideological and material support, but the movement could succeed only when it was led by “revolutionary patriots” (e.g., Hồ Chí Minh) and supported by traditional patriotism.

Continuity between past and present was made apparent thanks not only to conceptual innovations but also to historical reductionism. Complex historical relationships were reduced to the “patterns of Vietnamese resistance” to foreign powers, and complex historical actors were simplified to two kinds, “resisters” (or “patriots”) and “collaborators.” Collaborators were then dismissed, allowing selected resisters and occasional reformists (e.g., Phan Chu Trinh, who resisted with calls for cultural reform) to dominate the stage.⁸⁹ This reductionism was more than a strategy to limit one’s scope of study, something all researchers have to do—instead, it had an underlying worldview and a strong normative concern about contemporary US policy, as suggested in one account:

Without doubt, the continuity in Vietnamese anticolonialism is a highly charged, historically self-conscious resistance to oppressive, degrading foreign rule. Possessors of a proud cultural and political heritage, many Vietnamese simply refused to be cowed. In attempting as non-Vietnamese to understand this phenomenon, each of us must first ask himself some angry philosophical questions . . . , What are the nature and causes of man's terrible inhumanity toward his fellow men? How do the strong treat the weak? . . . How do the weak react? Who, in the last analysis, are really the weak ones; who, the strong?⁹⁰

In this black-and-white worldview, the complex world of human beings is reduced to “the strong” and “the weak.” Although it hints at the possibility of “the weak” defeating “the strong,” this worldview shares the same assumption as that of Hoàng Văn Chí: the Vietnamese nation is nothing but a victim of foreign forces.

Besides new concepts and sophisticated arguments, the new scholarship that discovered the Vietnamese nation in this period must be credited for bringing to the field a wide array of new sources. Especially valuable are sources from French archives on the early phase of the Vietnamese communist movement, memoirs and works by historians in both regions but especially in the north, and official documents and newspapers from the DRV. Unfortunately, there was also a tendency to use sources in ways that served partisan purposes.

Although most works managed to maintain some balance and explain how their sources were handled,⁹¹ two new partisan trends evolved: One involved unfair efforts to blatantly ignore or aggressively discredit sources whose views one didn't agree with. For example, in their extended bibliography, Kahin and Lewis failed to reference the work by Trường Chinh, a top leader of Vietnamese communism whose views were far more radical than Hồ Chí Minh's.⁹² Hoàng Văn Chí's account of the radical Land Reform in North Vietnam in the 1950s was also omitted, without explanation. These sources would contradict the authors' argument that the communists were genuine nationalists. In another study, a collection of works written by intellectuals in the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm group, which protested Hà Nội's heavy-handed cultural policy and leadership, was dismissed summarily as “unreliable” simply because it was republished and edited in Sài Gòn.⁹³ This is puzzling because these intellectuals were among Vietnam's most

prominent and talented artists, poets, scholars, and philosophers and possessed distinctively individual artistic styles; it would not be easy to fake their cartoons, poems, short stories, or theoretical arguments. Further, disputes over sources sometimes became nasty personal attacks on authors writing before the mid 1960s. Fall was thus dismissed as unreliable in part because of his “inability to read Vietnamese,” whereas Hoàng Văn Chí, despite his bitter critique of US policy and the RVN and his contribution as an eyewitness to the Land Reform,⁹⁴ was categorically discredited because work on his volume was funded in part by ostensibly nongovernment entities that may have received money from the CIA.⁹⁵

The overly cautious attitude toward sources from Sài Gòn or Washington can be contrasted with the uncritical acceptance of any information emanating from the DRV. To demonstrate that the Hà Nội regime was really nationalist, Kahin and Lewis mentioned *as evidence* that “in Hà Nội’s Historical Museum, a large room is devoted to ‘The Heroic Struggle of the Vietnamese People against Chinese Feudal Invaders.’”⁹⁶ The study that dismissed the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm collection published in Sài Gòn turned to the Vietnamese Communist Party newspaper *Nhân Dân* for information, even agreeing with its shrill accusation that Trần Đức Thảo, the French-trained philosopher involved in this affair, “attempted to use the traditional Vietnamese respect for intellectual attainment to put forward political views which conflicted with Party line.”⁹⁷ Critics of Hoàng Văn Chí similarly relied mostly on official accounts of the Land Reform from Hà Nội, which are valuable as an alternative voice to Washington and Sài Gòn propaganda but are not to be treated as any more credible, given Hà Nội’s inherent interest in underreporting the problems.⁹⁸ Official biographies and hagiographies of communist leaders published in Hà Nội were quoted liberally as truths.⁹⁹ There is no better evidence of the widespread cult of North Vietnam than when Tố Hữu, the party leader in charge of culture and ideology who was incidentally a poet of dubious talents, was introduced with unabashed admiration to Western readers as “Vietnam’s greatest living poet, and not incidentally, a respected member of the [Communist] Party Secretariat.”¹⁰⁰ The assumption at the time appeared to be that, regardless of what was said or written, anything produced in Hà Nội was truth and that DRV leaders belonged to a special creed of politicians who did not lie, even while everyone else did.

The cult of North Vietnam and the over-reliance on sources produced there may be the main reason why the scholarship of the new paradigm bears striking resemblance to Hà Nội's state-sponsored historiography, constructed by "historian cadres" who used history as a weapon in their revolutionary struggle.¹⁰¹ Although North Vietnamese historiography based on Marx's theory of class struggle was sometimes criticized during this period,¹⁰² the similarities overwhelmed the differences. Like American scholars who essentialized Vietnamese history into "patterns of resistance," official historians in the DRV also "conceived of history as a process—but a process of repetition, not development, in which exemplary moments of the past were periodically restaged."¹⁰³ Moreover, the faith in Vietnamese unity, the emphasis on "anticolonial struggles," the excessive and exclusive focus on Hồ Chí Minh and the ICP, the contempt for "collaborators," and the favorable evaluation of Land Reform in the 1950s—all of these characteristics of American scholarship were shared by Hà Nội scholars.¹⁰⁴ Patricia Pelley has credited Hà Nội bureaucrats and historians for executing the project of constructing and promoting a national past with such skill that some observers took it quite seriously.¹⁰⁵

As the imagined Vietnamese nation became popular on American campuses, the paradigm was substantially modified and clarified, if never directly challenged. For some, the assumed effortless continuity between traditional and modern Vietnam remained problematic. They argued that "anticolonialism" obscures key differences between anticolonial movements in the past and those in the present. It was pointed out that the 1885 Cần Vương edict called for popular support based on loyalty not to the country but to the king.¹⁰⁶ In support of the modernist view, William Duiker argued that prior to the twentieth century, consciousness among Vietnamese about a national identity was "primitive" and based on cultural and ethnic distinctiveness. The modern nation, which inherited this legacy, was not born until the early years of the twentieth century. Anticolonial movements before then were either traditional or transitional, not real expressions of nationalism. At best they were only expressions of "proto-nationalism," and their parallels with later movements such as Việt Minh, he argued, cannot be assumed. Further evidence challenged the notion of traditional Vietnamese resistance to China as a conflict of identity driven by a Vietnamese sense of patriotism.

Alexander Woodside pointed out, for example, that when asked why the Chinese were defeated, Lê Lợi's ministers in the 1430s did not mention the fact that Chinese were foreigners. They were defeated, it was said, because their harsh rule alienated Vietnamese.¹⁰⁷ If this account is true, had the Chinese been more benign, Vietnamese may have welcomed them as masters.

The discontinuity between tradition and modernity suggested the need to better understand the role of agents who introduced modern nationalism to Vietnam. As Woodside argued, national consciousness and cultural pride were insufficient to win independence for Vietnam.¹⁰⁸ The traditional national community in Vietnam had been weak, and it was further weakened under colonial rule. New forms of organization were needed that could link traditional communities such as family and village to the larger, modern national entity. In the quest for this new organizational form, the most successful group of Vietnamese elites, the communists, inherited traditional institutions but also created new ones.¹⁰⁹ Even if there had been some continuity between past and present, Woodside argued, it cannot be reduced to present-day actors falling back on past repertoires of action.

Still others, most prominently Duiker, argued that the exclusive focus on Vietnamese “patriots” or “resisters” indicated a simplistic understanding of the nature of modern nationalism, which they defined as more than armed resistance to foreign powers.¹¹⁰ In this view, modern national consciousness requires the development and spread of a modern language with modern concepts; this, in turn, can only occur through a modern press and educational system. Here is where noncommunists and “collaborators” such as Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phạm Quỳnh made decisive contributions.¹¹¹ In this sense, even French colonial rule, which brought the concept of the modern nation-state to Vietnam, and French policies that led to expanded modern educational opportunities for Vietnamese, must also be credited, however ironic this may sound. Armed resistance, whether based on communism or not, was only one strategy for national salvation, and in the final analysis, it might not even be the best strategy.

Works on precolonial Vietnam by Woodside and Keith Taylor further suggested that both the admiration in the American academy for Vietnamese traditional resistance to Chinese domination and the glorification of this tradition in much of the scholarship produced inside Vietnam overlooked the

complex world in which traditional Vietnam existed. On the one hand, this world included not only China but also other Southeast Asian nations. In fact, Vietnamese culture was intimately shaped by non-Chinese civilizations. In the village as well as the imperial court, Chinese institutions “dominated but [did] not monopolize.”¹¹² As Woodside pointed out, not only was the Vietnamese village class structure similar to that of many other Southeast Asian societies, but Vietnamese elites were also influenced by Chàms as much as by Chinese.¹¹³ It was their intimate connections with Chàms and Khmers that helped strengthen Vietnamese identity as distinct from Chinese.¹¹⁴ On the other hand, for Vietnamese rulers and elites preoccupied with maintaining social control, Confucianism was more relevant than nationalism. For them, resistance to China was of marginal concern compared to the imperative to internalize and impose Chinese culture on a Vietnamese society deeply embedded in Southeast Asian traditions. In any event, their preoccupation with China absorbed their creative energy and was responsible for the underdevelopment of indigenous Vietnamese culture.¹¹⁵ By emphasizing the Southeast Asian nature of Vietnamese identity, these arguments echoed—with more subtlety and sophistication—what Fall alluded to about the fragility and complexity of Vietnamese ethnic identity.

As in the earlier period, the debates during this time not only grappled with conceptualizations and interpretations of Vietnam’s past but also carried policy implications, especially about the issue of whether the communist government should be accepted as the legitimate inheritor of Vietnam’s national traditions. We have seen that up to the early 1960s the RVN was considered the bearer of the Vietnamese nationalist cause but subsequently lost this status. With the exception of a few authors, most during this time refused Hà Nội legitimacy and had a pessimistic view of the future of the Vietnamese nation. By the late 1960s, however, the new consensus was that Vietnamese communists and the government in Hà Nội *did* represent the nation. Obviously, this consensus implied a critical attitude toward US involvement in Vietnam, but in contrast with the previous decade, the critique was deeper and more blunt.¹¹⁶

For proponents of this shift in political attitude, the main challenge became how to explain away the apparent contradictions between “nationalism” and “communism.” Several implicit strategies were employed to

tackle this task. I have alluded above to one strategy, which was to reduce the complexities and present history in such a way that Hồ Chí Minh could be linked to Lý Thường Kiệt and Phan Đình Phùng. As the inheritors of a tradition of resistance to external powers, communists were thus nationalists by historical parallel. Christine White and David Elliott furnished further evidence to demonstrate that the tradition may have been extended through family ties: many communist leaders had in fact been born into families of “poor-but-honest scholars” or “patriotic scholars” before they became “socialist intellectuals.”¹¹⁷

Another strategy was to focus only on Hồ Chí Minh on the implicit assumption that all other communists were his “lieutenants” and thus did not matter. Kahin and Lewis, for example, argued that “for Ho Vietnam always took first place over communism.”¹¹⁸ Furthermore, Hồ Chí Minh, whose “revolutionary career was a continuation and development of his father’s legacy of anti-colonial struggle,” was assumed to represent larger social and cultural themes in Vietnamese history.¹¹⁹ This strategy worked because, more than the rest of his comrades, the DRV leader presented a consistently moderate image to the outside world. The secrecy of the Vietnamese Communist Party’s internal workings and the cult of Hồ Chí Minh inside Vietnam—which he contributed to¹²⁰—helped to make this assumption credible.

In trying to harmonize the relationship between Vietnamese communism and nationalism, many scholars argued that the former played only a secondary role to the latter. For example, Huỳnh Kim Khánh argued that the communist movement would have failed had it not been “grafted” to patriotism.¹²¹ Duiker asserted that “communists, like other nationalist groups . . . , wanted above all to find a solution to the *national* problem. . . . Marxism, like democracy or fascism, was a tool in this process.”¹²² This standard view was challenged by two types of arguments. One type disagreed that Vietnamese communists were essentially nationalists. Woodside’s careful reading of Hồ Chí Minh’s early writing as a young communist revolutionary, for example, indicates his ambivalence about Vietnamese culture in contrast with his great enthusiasm for internationalism.¹²³ In any event, nationalism did not really bring communists success, as was commonly believed, and this is especially evident once one looks beyond the narrow

circles of elites. William Turley and Samuel Popkin argued that during the anti-French war, Việt Minh appeals to peasants were based primarily on communal (e.g., village security) and individual (land) interests, while national loyalty was secondary.¹²⁴ The communists were successful in court- ing popular support largely because they hid their real ambitions for a social- ists revolution that would follow the national struggle.¹²⁵ Similarly, Jeffrey Race observed in his study of the southern insurgency that the Sài Gòn gov- ernment, not the insurgency, was the side that *really* employed a nationalist approach in its quest for rural support.¹²⁶ In contrast, the insurgency talked nationalism but in fact used individual and communal interests to win peas- ants' support. Contrary to what Huỳnh Kim Khánh suggested, reliance on nationalism was causing Sài Gòn to lose the war.¹²⁷

The other type of argument, made by White and Gareth Porter, claimed that Vietnamese communists were true revolutionaries and not simply nationalists such as Indonesia's Sukarno. In White's view, it was the com- munists and their leadership that distinguished the modern struggle from traditional peasant rebellions against the landed elites and Chinese armies, which only produced new exploitive and oppressive elites.¹²⁸ Based on class analyses, Porter argued that the Vietnamese struggle since 1945 was not pri- marily a national movement for independence. Rather, it was a class strug- gle between the French-created Vietnamese bourgeoisie who wanted to preserve their status, on the one hand, and impoverished peasants and semi- proletariats led by petit bourgeois elements, on the other.¹²⁹ Given the social inequality created under French colonialism, communism was thus a logi- cal development and a positive force that was indispensable if Vietnamese were to achieve social justice. In this view, there was no need to apologize for Vietnamese communism or to try to explain away its radicalism, although one may feel sorry that class struggle is obstructed both by foreign imperi- alism and by the corollary need to maintain a national coalition. The nation, in this view, becomes a negative force because it prevents class struggle from taking its supposedly natural course.¹³⁰ Rather than helping communists take power, it is a hinder to their real potential.

A final item from this period is worthy of careful examination, not for its scholarly quality but for its popularity: Frances FitzGerald's *Fire in the Lake*.¹³¹ FitzGerald was ostensibly Mus's student, and she upheld his

assumption that the essence of the Vietnamese nation could be found in village life and institutions. Yet she parted company with Mus in her attempt at developing a profile of a Vietnamese national “state of mind.” Although this attempt reminds one of the “national character” approach to studying nations that was popular in many disciplines from the 1930s through the 1950s,¹³² FitzGerald shared nothing with this approach except the assumption that such a character exists and that it can be deduced from impressions or observations of individual behavior. In particular, she argued that a central quality of this national personality is the Vietnamese tendency to defer to and depend on authority, something programmed in them since childhood. As she wrote, “The whole notion of an overwhelming power was, of course, an important theme in Vietnamese life . . . [which] had something to do with the relationship of the Vietnamese child to his father, with the idea, conceived early in childhood, that the father, and behind him the ancestors, have far-reaching control over the child.”¹³³

This assumed quality had two implications for FitzGerald’s analysis. First, she often compared Vietnamese, including their leaders, to children or described them as behaving like children. For example, when Ngô Đình Diệm was “suddenly made responsible for [his] country [in 1955], he could only react as he had been trained to in his childhood.”¹³⁴ Ngô Đình Diệm appeared as an American puppet in the hands of his master, rather than as a human being with a capacity to think and act independently: “Not only did the Americans give him the power to carry out his repression, but they gave him little alternative to a policy founded on force.”¹³⁵ All blame can thus be traced back to the United States, for as a childlike puppet Ngô Đình Diệm did not have to bear responsibility for his brutal policies.

Second, while works in the nationalization project focused on *resistance* as the dominant pattern of interaction between Vietnam and powerful foreign nations, FitzGerald concentrated instead on *dependence*. “As men tend to see the world according to their earliest and strongest impression of it,” FitzGerald argued, “the Vietnamese had transferred this image of childhood [of the father] to the relationship between two different nations.”¹³⁶ She went on to demonstrate the tendency of all Vietnamese in recent history to look to foreign powers as protectors: Despite some early resistance, French colonial rulers were accepted by most Vietnamese as legitimate. The Việt Minh’s

resistance war “was a political revolution and not a transformation of the Vietnamese personality. Through the Việt Minh the Vietnamese merely found a new ‘master,’ and it was themselves”! Whereas South Vietnamese elites “wanted the Americans to feed them and take responsibility for them,” southern peasants, “even those who once belonged to the Việt Minh, looked upon the Americans much as they had looked at the French.”¹³⁷ Emerging from this portrayal is a view of the Vietnamese people as children and dependents who were immature and who needed to be taught (either by Americans or NLF cadres) how to behave as adults.

Edward Said claimed that East Asian specialists “led a revolution during the 1960s” to challenge Orientalism,¹³⁸ which causes one to wonder whether he had read FitzGerald’s *Fire in the Lake*. Orientalism, especially its essentializing technique, was in fact the most powerful tool in her book and perhaps accounted for its great success as a work of pseudoscholarship. One of the main dogmas of Orientalism, as Said defined it, is “the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior.”¹³⁹ FitzGerald’s description of Vietnamese presented a prime example of this approach: in contrast to a dependent Vietnamese nation that “practiced the same technology for a thousand years” and was “closed” and “stands still,” she associated the United States with “global strategies” and “majestic concerns” and described it as the proponent of a “great world ideology” and a “builder of world order.” “As Americans are . . . canted towards the future, the traditional Vietnamese were directed towards the past.”¹⁴⁰ While these remarks may have some element of truth, the technique that juxtaposes the two nations in a way that essentializes and exaggerates the contrasts between them is Orientalist pure and simple.

The assumptions in *Fire in the Lake*, whether implicit or explicit, are instructive, and its popularity reveals much about the assumptions broadly shared by American cultural elites at the time and about the American practice of Orientalism.¹⁴¹ Recall that some works in the “nationalization project” of this period often carried the implicit assumption of Vietnamese as hapless victims trapped in asymmetric relationships with vastly mightier external powers. For FitzGerald, images of children and puppets replace those of victims, but the implication remains the same. Just as victims cannot

be blamed for what happened to them, neither can children or, of course, puppets. By stressing that only the United States is to be blamed—perhaps a courageous act at the time—these American authors may have felt redeemed by a sense of moral justice. Yet it should be noted that this sense of justice was gained at the expense of the right of Vietnamese to take independent action and to be responsible for it. Although Said associated Orientalism with (European) imperialism, the use of this technique by FitzGerald in criticizing the US imperialist project in the RVN indicates that American Orientalism involved a general cultural arrogance that transcended imperialism and its critics. This cultural arrogance, not in behavior but in thoughts, is implied in the way Vietnamese were portrayed—with sympathy but also with condescension. This attitude was not intended to justify Western rule, but it nonetheless suggested the West's essential superiority.

This section has examined changes in Vietnamese political studies from the late 1960s to the late 1970s. As we have seen, the field underwent massive growth as it entered its second decade, in great part thanks to the US containment project in Vietnam. American involvement stimulated scholarly interest, and the US government also provided some support for the production of scholarship. Nevertheless, the government could not dictate the content, much of which was sharply critical of US policy. For better or worse, there were important consequences of this interdependence between politics and scholarship. If the earlier period can be likened to a stage of infancy, in this second period we can speak of the field passing into adolescence—a phase in human development associated with fast growth and intemperate behavior. The tone and character of the debates about the Vietnamese nation and nationalism now became tense and often ideologically charged. While pessimism and concerns about the “communist specter” dominated the early period, idealism and impatience with American policy now pervaded the field. At the same time, scholars' creativity and hard work in introducing to the debates some Vietnamese perspectives, especially those from the north, generated more sophisticated concepts of the Vietnamese nation and greater use of Vietnamese sources. Much scholarship was devoted to proving the powerful ethnic basis of the Vietnamese nation, although toward the end of the period modernist criticisms of these “primordialist” or “perennialist” approaches began to be heard.¹⁴² There was

broad consensus on the legitimacy of the DRV as the inheritor of the Vietnamese national tradition, but the nature of the relationship between communism and nationalism remained disputed.

Maturing Scholarship: The Nation Deconstructed and Reconstructed

While the force of Vietnamese nationalism appeared unstoppable in 1975, within a few years the assumption that an ethnic Vietnamese nation existed that transcended the tradition-modernity divide would become untenable. Among other events, the victorious communist leaders had dropped their nationalist talk and moved swiftly to the next phase of their socialist revolution. Vietnam's invasion and occupation of Cambodia further suggested a complex reality in which Vietnam was not always a victim to foreign powers and in which heroes and villains were not so clearly separated as in the imagination of analysts. These events forced a reassessment of earlier ideologically charged arguments that rested naively on the moral claims of Vietnamese nationalists. Thus in 1982 Huỳnh Kim Khánh asked rhetorically, "In the union of Communist ideology and patriotism in the development of Vietnamese communism, has Marxism-Leninism been a vehicle for Vietnamese patriotism? Or has patriotism been exploited for the sake of expanding the Communist ideology?"¹⁴³ Marr also wondered about the tendency in the literature during the war years to stress the traditional strengths of Vietnamese nationalism and to focus on the ICP and Hồ Chí Minh while ignoring the larger context and reducing everyone else to convenient stereotypes:

Presumably some historians have found in it a comfortable reaffirmation of their own conservative philosophy of life. Others have tended to confuse the wish to condemn imperialism morally with the more objective question of determining exactly what factors helped or hindered the imperialist and anti-imperialist causes. Among Vietnamese Marxists there has been the additional desire for historiography always to serve politics—both when employed as an analytical tool and when used as propaganda. What is striking . . . is the way in which Vietnamese Marxist writers have emphasized historical change when analyzing colonial society or building a hard-core revolutionary following, but continuity when mobilizing a more diffuse national liberation movement.¹⁴⁴

It has thus been recognized that scholarship during the war was made to serve a variety of political actors, from the “confused” radical scholar-activists on US campuses to the manipulative Marxists in Hà Nội. Many now have become convinced that “the Vietnamese nation” was only a slogan the communists once raised to mobilize mass support, and that “it would be wrong to characterize Hồ Chí Minh or any other major Vietnamese Communist leader as a nationalist.”¹⁴⁵ This may not sound so striking a realization when one considers that many, such as Fall, Hoàng Văn Chí, Turley, Race, and Woodside, have long before come to this conclusion based on their research on Việt Minh and NLF mass-mobilizing techniques. The difference between their analysis and the new understanding, however, is that the various debates among communist circles as they competed with other political movements are now better understood. Whereas Fall expressed serious doubts about the very existence of a Vietnamese nation, students of Vietnam now have the patience and insulation from politics to examine the various tensions within the nation in more detail.

The most recent reassessment of reigning concepts and paradigms coincided with a revival of Vietnamese Studies in the United States and, more generally, the sharpening debates on the origins of nations and nationalism in the social sciences. After a decade of decline, by the late 1980s interest in Vietnam had revived and the field saw its second growth spurt. Important changes came from inside Vietnam as the government embarked on reform, ended international isolation, and offered access, however limited, to outside researchers wishing to do fieldwork and archival research. Changes also came from outside Vietnam, as the Cold War came to an end and as new archival materials in Washington, Moscow, Paris, and elsewhere became accessible. The Vietnam War continued to be the focus or background of several works,¹⁴⁶ as did Vietnam’s foreign relations.¹⁴⁷ But the literature has diversified greatly during this period. Vietnam’s internal politics have become more central than ever, whether the focus is contemporary or historical.¹⁴⁸ Entirely new research agendas, such as economic and political reform, have emerged.¹⁴⁹ Old issues concerning the twentieth-century wars are reexamined in the light of new perspectives and sources.¹⁵⁰

Like Vietnam itself, the field is far less isolated today than it used to be. Theoretical borrowing from other fields seems more common, from cultural

studies¹⁵¹ to peasant politics.¹⁵² Systematic comparisons with China¹⁵³ and with other Southeast Asian countries have been attempted; while the scholarship in earlier periods produced occasional comparative works,¹⁵⁴ systematic comparison was hampered by the lack of reliable secondary sources about Vietnam—which has become more abundant recently. The research community now has more students of Vietnam who hail from China and Southeast Asia.¹⁵⁵ Despite the migration of more than one million Vietnamese to the West, however, contributions by ethnic Vietnamese scholars remain modest.

Since the early 1980s, a number of important social science studies on nations and nationalism have contributed directly to the debates in Vietnamese Studies. These new studies have come from various schools of thought. Modernists are developing more differentiated arguments about the origins of nations that emerged when traditional societies were transformed into modern industrial ones.¹⁵⁶ Sociologist Ernest Gellner, for example, contends that nations arose from the need for a “high culture” that is specialist, literate, and based on a standardized mass educational system.¹⁵⁷ In contrast, historian John Breuilly describes nationalism as essentially a political movement aimed at gaining power, as opposed to an ideological or a sociological movement aimed at achieving social integration. Authors in the Marxist tradition, such as historian Eric Hobsbawm and political scientist Benedict Anderson, view nations as social constructs and cultural artifacts “invented” or “imagined” by elites.¹⁵⁸ Anderson in particular proposes a number of specific conditions for the rise of nations, including the decline of sacred monarchies and cosmological script communities, a revolution in the concept of time, and “print-capitalism,” which allowed the emergence of anonymous reading publics. In contrast with the modernists, historian Anthony Smith distinguishes between ethnic and national communities and argues that the ethnic factor conditions the process of nation-forming. Smith also emphasizes the sociocultural and symbolic components of these communities, rather than the demographic and political.¹⁵⁹ The birth date of the first modern nation, England, is also disputed; some now trace it back to the Middle Ages, if not further.¹⁶⁰

As in the two previous periods, the debate about the Vietnamese nation and nationalism in Vietnamese Studies since the 1980s has tended to follow

its own rhythm, although the influence of social science theories of nationalism is now much stronger. There are two main trends in this debate. First, the reified concept of a Vietnamese nation based on ethnic homogeneity and unity that once dominated the narratives of Vietnamese politics is now avoided. One suddenly finds, under the cover of the much-touted “national unity,” intense ideological and power conflicts among Vietnamese elites. Nationalism is thus portrayed implicitly as a *plural* and *contentious* political movement, a “quest for power” among elites, not simply a struggle for national independence. In general, works in this line of analysis avoid identifying Hồ Chí Minh and the communists with Vietnamese nationalism. Their scope naturally includes a far wider range of historical actors hitherto neglected—whether “patriots,” “resisters,” or “collaborators.” These include regional and local actors who were incorporated into the communist movement;¹⁶¹ those who lost to the communists such as Nguyễn An Ninh’s secret society,¹⁶² Nguyễn Tường Tam’s Self-strength Literary Group;¹⁶³ Confucian scholars and Buddhist sects;¹⁶⁴ the Trần Trọng Kim government and the New Vietnam Association, whose members played crucial roles in the Việt Minh government during 1945–1947;¹⁶⁵ and Ngô Đình Diệm and the RVN.¹⁶⁶

These works avoid the cultural arrogance of earlier works that portrayed noncommunist Vietnamese as children, victims, or puppets incapable of thinking. They eschew the teleology of earlier research and explore more fully the experiments, contentions, uncertainties, and shifting configurations of power, discourses, and identities in Vietnam’s modern history and politics.¹⁶⁷ In the emerging picture, uncertainties awaited Vietnamese at every historical turn, and this picture implicitly challenges the notion of firm and clearly defined ethnic loyalty among Vietnamese and indirectly supports the modernist position. In addition, the new scholarship collectively dispels the myth of a unified Vietnamese nation represented by a single group or monopolized by a single narrative. To varying degrees, today’s research is more successful than earlier works in not taking at face value all claims to represent “the nation” and in keeping a healthy distance between scholarly work and activist agendas.

The quest for a richer, more diverse and inclusive, yet still contentious picture of Vietnamese nationalism teaches us much about “the nation,” but

it does so by avoiding the concept. Another major approach that engages this concept directly can be found in works that investigate how national or communal consciousness has either evolved or been deliberately constructed. Both approaches unequivocally adopt the modernist position, with some modifications. The first asks how political actors came to see themselves as Vietnamese, as opposed to or *vis-à-vis* Indochinese, Chinese, and so on. Rather than assuming the existence of the nation based on parallel patterns of historical resistance, these studies reconstruct it by analyzing identity expressions or by tracing the process of identity formation at specific sites.

For example, in an ethnographic account focused on the life story of a second-rank former VNQDĐ leader, Hy Van Luong argues that national consciousness among the Vietnamese colonial elites emerged with the forced incorporation of Vietnam into the capitalist world system.¹⁶⁸ The contradictions of capitalism (its civilizing claims versus its inherent racism and economic exploitation) and its contrast with local collectivistic ideology (the “collective rights” of Vietnamese versus foreigners) fueled national sentiments among the indigenous elites. Luong seems to confirm what Race suggested earlier, that national consciousness played only a small role, if any, in the masses’ participation in revolutionary movements. Unlike Race and Popkin, who credited communal (e.g., communal welfare and security) and individual (e.g., land) incentives for drawing the masses into nationalist politics, Luong stresses traditional authority and hierarchy as the mechanisms that elites used to get the masses involved.¹⁶⁹

The new focus on national identity formation is especially informed and influenced by Anderson’s framework of nationalism. Although his theory was criticized by scholars of an earlier generation for missing some essential elements of the Vietnamese experience,¹⁷⁰ the new studies of Vietnamese identity enthusiastically embrace it. They accordingly focus on the mechanisms and venues that facilitated imaginings of a modern nation among colonial elites—such as maps, printed materials, travel writings, transportation networks, and modern bureaucratic institutions. At the same time, they introduce new contexts, conditions, and mechanisms from the Vietnamese case beyond what Anderson suggests. Peter Zinoman, for example, focuses on prisons as the colonial institution that gave rise to modern Vietnamese nationalism.¹⁷¹ This study argues that a far-flung but dense colonial prison

network, the constant circulation of inmates within it, and its representations in the press encouraged prisoners and their families to imagine and forge new collective identities based on shared experiences. Interestingly, unlike Anderson and other Marxist thinkers who view colonialism as a modern phenomenon, Zinoman demonstrates that French colonial prisons in Indochina had little to do with modernity. The assumed link between nationalism (a modern identity) and colonialism (the agent of modern institutions) in the literature is not as simple as it seems.

While Zinoman deals with national identity formation only indirectly, Christopher Goscha and Liam Kelley consider as their central puzzle the ambiguities and complexities in Vietnamese national identity. Focusing on the modern period, Goscha analyzes how colonial road and rail networks, air transportation, widely circulated newspapers, and modern schools produced a well-integrated Indochina and almost succeeded in transforming the way Annamese of all ideological colors thought of themselves.¹⁷² Rather than imagining a future Vietnamese nation, he argues, communists, nationalists, collaborators, and resisters alike were all dreaming of an Indochinese nation in which Annamese dominated. There was a strong “ethno-cultural pull” for Annamese elites, especially those in Tonkin and Annam, to fall back to their precolonial identity, but this was not destiny. In fact, communist leaders continued to harbor visions of a loosely linked Indochinese polity long after the founding of the DRV in 1945. Given the telling evidence Goscha presents, the assumption that there has existed an uninterrupted Vietnamese nation that transcends traditional and modern times is clearly problematic. Still, Goscha’s point that the imagined Indochinese nation was to be built on precolonial Vietnamese ethnic identity sounds more in line with Smith’s ethnosymbolic approach than with Anderson’s framework, which denies any role for ethnicity.

But was there *ever* a Vietnamese national identity, even in traditional society? Examining poems written by “Southern” (Annam) envoys to the “Northern Kingdom” (China) over several centuries, Liam Kelly suggests there wasn’t.¹⁷³ To generations of southern court officials, their world was not imagined or defined in ethnic terms (i.e., Annamese vs. Chinese) but in cultural terms as “domains of manifest civility” [*văn hiến chi bang* to southerners]. This world contained political boundaries but was united under a

single cultural framework centered in the Northern Kingdom, to which southerners yearned to belong. Kelley argues against earlier claims that Vietnamese had a cultural tradition distinct from that of China and that Confucianism was only an instrument Vietnamese elites borrowed to rule the masses.

Although Kelley succeeds in demonstrating that southern elites sincerely believed in a Sinocentric, Confucian world order, his subject of analysis—the views of elites—hardly justifies his denial of the existence of a distinct southern culture among the masses, as argued earlier by Woodside and Keith Taylor. While Kelley treats the nation as a cultural artifact along the same lines as the works of Hobsbawm and Anderson, his argument is placed in a traditional context outside the modern timeframe defined by those modernists. Yet Kelley also implicitly challenges Smith's theory about the powerful *ethnie*. The way southerners looked toward “the North star” and experienced the “efflorescent trail” to “the esteemed kingdom” seems similar to the way Muslims in Southeast Asia look toward and trek to Mecca: the feelings were more religious than ethnic.

Overall, social science theories inform the new works, using this approach to a greater extent than earlier and allowing them to overturn many existing assumptions about the Vietnamese nation. The other hallmark of this approach is an effort to take Vietnamese seriously on their own terms as expressed in their own words rather than depending on preconceived categories and notions that exist only in the imaginations of contemporary Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese analysts. For example, we now more fully understand how colonialism drove the formation of a modern Vietnamese collective identity, not in knee-jerk resistance to foreign rule but as the evolution of new concepts of space and loyalty. Ontologically, the community that ethnic Kinh inhabit is not limited to either the traditional world of the village or the modern Vietnamese nation but, at least in particular historical junctures, encompasses a larger space such as Indochina and the Sinocentric civilization. The Vietnamese nation thus lies in the shifting conceptual frames by which Vietnamese face the world. Vietnamese themselves in the recent scholarship have the ability to feel, think, and imagine, to be stimulated but not enslaved by foreign, abstract values, whether Sinocentric or Eurocentric, and to act according to their emotions and

beliefs. In brief, they are complex individuals and not the angry resisters, submissive collaborators, powerless victims, or inanimate puppets described in earlier literature.

Some parts of Goscha's *Vietnam or Indochina* and Zinoman's *The Colonial Bastille* extend beyond the identity formation process as a cognitive response to social changes and address deliberate attempts by governments to promote a new national identity. These studies thus belong in the category of works in this period that examine the cultural projects of the state—the colonial state and its Vietnamese communist successor—that aim at building up a collective loyalty among Vietnamese. Broadly designed as analyses of cultural politics, works of this type contribute to debunking state-created national myths or to exposing the tools and machineries behind myth-making processes (e.g., museums, shrines, state rituals, supposedly personal memoirs, language, and schools).¹⁷⁴ In these studies, the nation appears as a modern social construct, with the state playing a central role in building it.

While the politics of culture is an important topic in itself, this line of analysis may be viewed as a reaction to and a critique of earlier scholarship that accepted those myths as truths. From these new studies one learns about the great importance the communist state assigns to culture as a tool for maintaining its hegemony. One is also informed about the critical role the production of national myths has played in elite agendas, from “national liberation” to “socialist construction.” These studies show that the myth-making industry of the state has not always run smoothly: shifting revolutionary goals demand continual modifications of cultural messages; state agents disagree and fight among themselves; and local claims compete with central priorities for representation. Certainly the industry of myth-making may have scored some success with outside observers, as Pelley has suggested. But researchers have not been able to demonstrate effectively whether Vietnamese people themselves have actually formed a new national identity as a result of state cultural projects.

Since the 1980s, the field of Vietnamese political studies has expanded and matured, as evidenced in the quality of scholarship, the balanced tone in the debate, the range of issues and actors covered, and the deeper engagement with social science theories. Major conceptual and perceptual shifts have taken place: the notion of a unified ethnic Vietnamese nation has been

replaced by one that emphasizes its fluidity and fragility; its modern character and its nature as a social construct rather than as an objective reality has been affirmed; the fact that nationalism is a power struggle among Vietnamese as much as a resistance to foreign invasion has been recognized; the hands of state agents in fabricating national myths have been exposed; and the fact that “nationalism” was only a guise for “communism,” not vice versa, has been more fully understood.

Future Scholarship: Beyond the Nation?

This essay has reviewed the development of Vietnamese political studies in the English language since the end of World War II, focusing on the debates about the Vietnamese nation and nationalism that have preoccupied scholars. In analyzing these debates, I have focused on the conceptual strategies that have been employed in studying the Vietnamese nation and nationalism, while attempting to place these strategies in their appropriate political, historical, and theoretical contexts. The field has undergone two major growth spurts—one in the mid 1960s and the other since the mid 1980s. These spurts primarily stemmed from the vicissitudes of the Cold War, the changing relationship between the United States and Vietnam, and political developments in these two countries. Despite the unstable political context, the field has grown from infancy to adolescence to maturity, thus holding out hope for future growth.

Debates on the Vietnamese nation and nationalism have changed in a way that corresponds with shifting trends in the field as a whole. When the field has shifted, the character and tone of the debates, the normative attitudes toward the issues under study, and the major concepts and arguments employed—all these also shifted. Clearly, politics has had a deep impact not only on the development of the field but also on the scholarship itself.

Since the early 1980s, broader theoretical debates on nationalism in the social sciences have had a greater impact on Vietnamese Studies, perhaps due in part to the fact that the grip of politics on scholarship has diminished since the end of the war, coupled with the boom in theories of nationalism. Many works reviewed above have offered empirical evidence in support of Anderson’s theory of nationalism, which views the nation as a social construct and cultural artifact, while modifying it in view of the Vietnamese context.

More recently, however, the theory has also been challenged, its elite-centered assumptions and its obsession with the nation as a product of modernity found inadequate. For instance, in his study of competing discourses of Confucianism, communism, and Buddhism in colonial Vietnam, Shawn McHale disputes Anderson's argument that "the geography of all colonial pilgrimages is isomorphic with the boundaries of the nation." McHale's examination of a full range of printed discourses in the nation-space yields different pilgrimages and imaginings of the community that would become the Vietnamese nation.¹⁷⁵ Many such pilgrimages did not correspond with national boundaries; some had no relations at all to the future nation.

The contentious relationship between elite/national and non-elite/regional versions of history and identity has been further explored in recent works on popular religions and regional histories.¹⁷⁶ Philip Taylor's study of the discourse on modernity and the nation in southern Vietnam suggests that the elite/national version of history that has been intensively propagated by state agents since the end of the war generates only limited impact.¹⁷⁷ In a region that did not fall under the communist state's control until 1975, divergent visions of tradition and modernity continue to be contested and fragmented. As he concludes, "The ontology of time is not the preserve of the social scientists, nor the national leader, but is constantly up for grabs in the negotiation of existence."¹⁷⁸

While the field seems to be moving away from the concept of the nation, as evidenced by the work of McHale and Taylor, it is still useful for three theoretical reasons. First, forces at various levels, from global to national to local, still contend with each other to cultivate loyalty among Vietnamese. While the state has not always been successful in imposing its version of the nation and in generating loyalty, it has never stopped trying, as evidenced in the recent coordinated campaign to promote the publication of diaries of soldiers who died in the war.¹⁷⁹ As Vietnamese are more free to travel abroad and Vietnam is more integrated into the global economy and society, it will be interesting to find out whether and how the state can continue to mediate new values and concepts, such as global notions of human rights, democracy, and citizenship, that may threaten its monopoly on national loyalty.

Second, the ethnic origins of the Vietnamese nation and ethnic tensions within Vietnam are seriously understudied topics.¹⁸⁰ Despite the currently

prevalent notion of the Vietnamese nation as a modern construct, we can predict that there is much to learn in reexamining its ethnic past. Without assuming ethnic unity, as did a generation of scholars during the war, this kind of research can shed light on the role of marginalized groups in the formation of the modern Vietnamese nation. The question can be approached from many angles, but one useful way may be to examine how Vietnamese history may be interpreted from the perspectives of the Mường, the Nùng, the Khmer, the Chinese, and the Chàm, as opposed to the Kinh version.

The final reason for the continuing usefulness of the concept of the nation has to do with mass nationalism as a form of politics and its role in the construction and maintenance of the Vietnamese (communist) state. We have seen that the Việt Minh state and the southern insurgency relied on communal and material appeals to attract popular support. Nationalism played only a secondary role. We have also learned about the attempts of Ngô Đình Diệm and subsequent RVN governments to promote national loyalty in South Vietnam. Yet little is known about the mass appeals of nationalism in the DRV during its war with the RVN and how nationalism interacted with state building and socialist construction in the north during this period.¹⁸¹ Did nationalism or patriotism contribute to the DRV victory, as is often claimed, and if so, in what ways? How did nationalism help or hinder socialist revolution under the DRV? The war has long been settled, but this key piece of the puzzle remains obscure. ■

TUONG VU is Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Oregon. He is indebted to the Naval Postgraduate School, where he taught previously, for financial support and thankful for the many helpful comments from David Elliott, Chris Goscha, Ed Miller, Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm, Julie Pham, Craig Reynolds, Keith Taylor, Philip Taylor, Peter Zinoman, and other participants at the Workshop on Vietnam Studies: State of the Field, held in Berkeley, California, on April 6, 2006.

ABSTRACT

This essay reviews the study of Vietnamese politics, specifically the debates about Vietnamese nationalism that have preoccupied scholars. The field has undergone two growth spurts—one in the mid 1960s and the other since

the mid 1980s. These periods of growth were precipitated by Cold War politics and political developments in the United States and Vietnam, and the debates on Vietnamese nationalism evolved in a way that corresponded to trends in the field as a whole. When the field shifted, the tone of the debates and the major arguments advanced also shifted. Clearly, politics has had a deep impact not only on the development of the field but also on its scholarship.

KEYWORDS: *Vietnamese politics, Vietnamese nation, Vietnamese nationalism, Vietnamese communism, politics of scholarship*

Notes

1. The “field” of Vietnamese political studies is defined loosely as a body of scholarship in the English language about Vietnamese politics. In reviewing this field, the goal of the essay is to achieve comprehensiveness without losing the focus on the main issues. Toward this goal, I try not to omit any important works while including some that contribute to the argument of the essay but that in another context may be dismissed as journalism, as less than serious scholarship. Authors are included not because they can speak Vietnamese, or because they consider themselves “Vietnam specialists,” or because they are professional academics; as in any field in the social sciences, the boundaries of Vietnamese political studies have always been porous. In its infancy, nonacademics, non-Vietnamese speakers and nonspecialists loomed large, and so these authors will be found here along with the accomplished specialists of today’s scholarship. Finally, although it is labeled “political studies,” the field has never been the sole domain of political scientists, who actually have played a modest role.
2. See Mark Berger, “Decolonisation, Modernisation and Nation-Building: Political Development Theory and the Appeal of Communism in Southeast Asia, 1945–1975,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 34, no. 3 (October 2003): 421–448.
3. Berger, “Decolonisation, Modernisation and Nation-Building,” 422. See also Michael Latham, *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and “Nation Building” in the Kennedy Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
4. George Kahin, *Nationalism and Revolution in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1952); Lucian Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

- 1956), and *Politics, Personality and Nation-Building: Burma's Search for Identity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962); Herbert Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1962).
5. See Anthony Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 8–24.
 6. Hugh Seton-Watson, for example, accepted that the nation was a modern phenomenon. However, he was one of the few who argued that in many historical contexts national consciousness had long existed as the product of the state and the monarchy, of foreign conquest, of popular memory, or of religion. See his *Nationalism and Communism*, which includes essays written during 1946–1963. (New York: Praeger, 1964, especially 5–7.)
 7. See, for example, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Nationalism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1939); Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan & Co., 1944); and Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).
 8. Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 68.
 9. The Royal Institute of International Affairs, *Nationalism*, 6–7.
 10. See, for example, Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (New York: Wiley, 1953); Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (New York: Free Press, 1958).
 11. For example, Frederick Hertz, who wrote during World War II, defined nationalism as “a special form of national consciousness, characterized by the predominance of the striving for power and domination, and the subordination of all other values to these aims.” Hertz, “The Nature of Nationalism,” *Social Forces* 19, no. 3 (March 1941): 412. See also Elie Kedourie’s *Nationalism*, which presents perhaps the most eloquent critique of nationalism.
 12. Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 103–112. Even authors who were not negative about Asian and African nationalism were concerned about the prospects of civil wars and ethnic revolts. See Rupert Emerson, “An Analysis of Nationalism in Southeast Asia,” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (February 1946): 208–215.
 13. See, for example, Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication*.
 14. Journalists included Philippe Devillers, Jean Lacouture, and Bernard Fall (Fall was also a professor at Howard University). Former colonial officials included Paul Mus and Donald Lancaster, among others.
 15. Most important among these was Paul Mus, “The Role of the Village in Vietnamese Politics,” *Pacific Affairs* 22, no. 3 (September 1949): 265–272.
 16. Mus, “The Role of the Village;” Ellen Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina 1940–1955: Vietnam and the French Experience* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1955); Bernard Fall, *The Viet-Minh Regime: Government and*

- Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1956); Donald Lancaster, *The Emancipation of French Indochina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).
17. Joseph Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon: A Political History of Vietnam* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1958).
 18. P.J. Honey, ed., *North Vietnam Today: Profile of a Communist Satellite* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1962), and *Communism in North Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1965); Bernard Fall, *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1963); Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1964).
 19. See Wesley Fishel, ed., *Problems of Freedom: South Vietnam since Independence* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1961); Robert Scigliano, *South Vietnam: Nation under Stress* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1963).
 20. The only exception is Dang Chan Lieu, whose brief article of 1947 expressed optimism about the future of Vietnamese nationalism. "Annamese Nationalism," *Pacific Affairs* 20, no. 1 (March 1947): 61–66. Dang Chan Lieu's views about the Vietnamese nation are similar to those of Hoàng Văn Chí, discussed below.
 21. See Rupert Emerson, Lennox Mills, and Virginia Thompson, *Governments and Nationalism in Southeast Asia* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1942); Kenneth Perry Landon, "Nationalism in Southeastern Asia," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 2, no. 2 (February 1943): 139–152; Emerson, "An Analysis of Nationalism in Southeast Asia"; Emerson, "Paradoxes of Asian Nationalism," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (February 1954): 131–142; W. McMahon Ball, "Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (February 1952): 21–27.
 22. Another author who shared Fall's view was Virginia Thompson, who wrote not only about French Indochina but also about Southeast Asia and French Africa. Thompson's major works about French Indochina included *French Indo-China* (New York: MacMillan, 1937) and the section on comparative nationalism in Southeast Asia in Emerson, Mills, and Thompson, *Governments and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*. Because she did not write much about post-1945 Vietnam, Thompson's influence, especially on postwar scholarship, was nowhere near that of Fall. Killed in 1967 at the age of forty, Fall authored at least seven books (in English) on Vietnam and numerous articles and other writings. His major works are *The Viet-Minh Regime: Government and Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1954, 1956); *Street without Joy* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961; repr., 2005); *The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis* (New York:

- Praeger, 1963); *Hell in a Very Small Place* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1966; repr. 1967), *Viet-Nam Witness, 1953–66* (New York: Praeger, 1966); *Anatomy of a Crisis: The Laotian Crisis of 1960–1961*, ed. with an epilogue by Roger M. Smith (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1969); and *Last Reflections on a War*, preface by Dorothy Fall (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1967). None of his contemporaries were as prolific. The reprint of his books testifies further to their popularity and his influence.
23. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 12.
 24. In an argument similar to Fall's, Thompson criticized the hypocrisy of Vietnamese nationalism by commenting that Indochinese nationalism was "confined to the Annamites, who would frankly treat the Khmers and Laotians as subject people" (Emerson, Mills and Thompson, *Governments and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 205).
 25. For a critique of the biases in French scholarship, see Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon*. It is true that important French scholars such as Fall and Mus tend to downplay the harshness of colonial rule in Indochina.
 26. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 16–17.
 27. Fall, *Last Reflections on a War* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1967), 41. Thompson also notes that, besides their being prone to violence and dishonesty, Vietnamese nationalists "cannot formulate a constructive program or even agree to follow any one of their mutually jealous leaders" (Emerson, Mills, and Thompson, *Governments and Nationalism in Southeast Asia*, 205).
 28. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 26–39.
 29. Kedourie made the same point about nationalism in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa: "It is a well-known feature of recent history that nationalist parties kill members of their own nationality whom they suspect of an inclination to compromise, and in some cases a greater number of these than of the foreigners . . . fall to the assassin's bullet" (*Nationalism*, 102).
 30. Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism*. Hoàng Văn Chí focused primarily on the communist regime in North Vietnam, but his study was among the first works in English offering an interpretation of the Vietnamese nation that directly contradicted Fall's.
 31. The diction here follows Peter Hall, "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics," in *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 374. "Causal ontology" refers to "premises about the deep causal structures of the world."
 32. See Paul Mus, "The Role of the Village," and *Viet-Nam: Sociologie d'une Guerre* (Paris: du Seuil, 1952). Both works were slightly revised and republished

- in English: John McAlister and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970).
33. McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*, 52.
 34. Mus, "The Role of the Village," 266–269.
 35. McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*, 36–40.
 36. In *The Smaller Dragon*, Buttinger echoed Marxist historian Jean Chesneaux's criticism of French scholarship as "ignoring the reality of Vietnamese nationalism" (61). He also chided French authors for trying to "minimize [the] obvious racial and cultural unity of the Vietnamese people" (62). On the other hand, he criticized Lê Thành Khôi, another Marxist historian, for showing "a very definite pro-Communist bias" and for adhering to "the romantic viewpoint that national consciousness was born in the village" (9, 128).
 37. Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon*, 103–104, 108.
 38. *Ibid.*, 40–41.
 39. *Ibid.*, 172–173.
 40. For an early discussion of this "problem," see Ball, "Nationalism and Communism in Vietnam." Ball accepted both the authenticity of Vietnamese nationalism and the popularity of the communists and offered no solution to "the problem."
 41. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*, 4.
 42. Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism*.
 43. Fall, *The Viet-Minh Regime*, 1–13.
 44. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 40–42.
 45. Honey, *Communism in North Vietnam*; Fall, *The Two Vietnams*; Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism*.
 46. Hammer, *The Struggle for Indochina*; Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon*; Fishel, *Problems of Freedom*.
 47. Buttinger, *The Smaller Dragon*, 10–11.
 48. Fall, *The Two Vietnams*, 130, 272.
 49. Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 245.
 50. A simplified version of the victimhood perspective can be seen in the following lyrics, translated from "Gia Tài Của Mẹ" [Mother's Bequest], an antiwar song written by Trịnh Công Sơn and popular in the 1970s in Sài Gòn: "A thousand years under Chinese domination / A hundred years under French colonization / Twenty years of civil war / [What is] Mother Vietnam's bequest to her children? / [A country that is full of] bastards and traitors." *Cả Khúc Da Vàng: Tiếng Hát Lê Uyên* [Songs about the Yellow Race by Le Uyen], compact disc, Trịnh Công Sơn 1 (Westminster, CA: Giáng Ngọc, 1991).
 51. McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*, 160.
 52. *Ibid.*, 63.

53. *Ibid.*, 122–126. McAlister and Mus likely refer here to the announcement by ICP leaders to dissolve their party in November 1945. Both “Indochinese” and “communist” were terms that would have offended peasants’ traditional sensibilities, according to these authors.
54. See Gareth Porter, *The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam’s Land Reform Reconsidered* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University International Relations of East Asia Project Interim Report No. 2, 1972).
55. For a review of the development literature, see Atul Kohli, ed., *The State and Development in the Third World* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986).
56. For example, see Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-assertion of Asian and African Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960); John Kautsky, ed., *Political Change in Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: Wiley, 1962), especially 38–56; and Peter Worsley, *The Third World* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964).
57. For a discussion and critique of this approach, see Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 65–85.
58. Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), chapter 7.
59. See Rupert Emerson, “Post-Independence Nationalism in South and South-east Asia: A Reconsideration,” *Pacific Affairs* 44, no. 2 (Summer 1971): 173–192. See also other articles in the same issue, especially Alexander Woodside, “Ideology and Integration in Post-colonial Vietnamese Nationalism.”
60. Examples are Ruth McVey, *The Rise of Indonesian Communism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965); Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); Benedict Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972); Rex Mortimer, *Indonesian Communism under Sukarno* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1974); John Lewis, ed., *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution in Asia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974).
61. See, for example, Douglas Pike, *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1966); Edward Mitchell, “Inequality and Insurgency: A Statistical Study of South Vietnam,” *World Politics* 20, no. 3 (April 1968): 421–438; Robert Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1970); Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972); and Paul Berman, *Revolutionary Organization: Institution-Building within the People’s Liberation Armed Forces* (Lexington, MA: Lexington Books, 1974).

62. For example, see George Kahin and John Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: The Dial Press, 1967); John McAlister, *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969); David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1886–1925* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1971).
63. George Herring, “America and Vietnam: The Debate Continues,” *The American Historical Review* 92, no. 2 (April 1987): 354.
64. See King Chen, *Vietnam and China, 1938–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969); Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*; Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971); William Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976).
65. See Kahin and Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*; McAlister, *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution*; Race, *War Comes to Long An*; William Turley, “Army, Party and Society in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: Civil-Military Relations in a Mass-Mobilization System” (PhD dissertation, University of Washington, 1972); Berman, *Revolutionary Organization*.
66. See McAlister and Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution*; Jeffery Paige, “Inequality and Insurgency in Vietnam: A Re-Analysis,” *World Politics* 23 (October 1970): 24–37; and Jeffery Paige, *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World* (New York: Free Press, 1975).
67. See Sansom, *The Economics of Insurgency*.
68. See Eric Wolf, *Peasant Wars in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969).
69. See Berman, *Revolutionary Organization*; Paige, *Agrarian Revolution*.
70. See Race, *War Comes to Long An*, appendix.
71. See Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*.
72. For example, see Trương Bửu Lâm, *Patterns of Vietnamese Responses to Foreign Intervention: 1858–1900* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series no. 11, 1967); Ngô Vĩnh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants under the French* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1973); Nguyễn Khắc Viện, *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam*, trans. Linda Yarr, et al. (Berkeley: Indochina Resource Center, 1974).
73. For an explanation of this phenomenon by a participant in the antiwar movement, see David Hunt, “The Antiwar Movement after the War,” in *The Vietnam War*, ed. Jayne Werner and Luu Doan Huynh (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1993).
74. See, for example, David Elliott, “Revolutionary Re-integration: A Comparison of the Foundation of Post-liberation Political Systems in North Vietnam and

- China” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1976); Gareth Porter, “Imperialism and Social Structure in Twentieth Century Vietnam” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1976); Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979); Christine White, “Agrarian Reform and National Liberation in the Vietnamese Revolution: 1920–1957” (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1981); Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Edwin Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Ho-Tai Hue Tam, *Millenarianism and Peasant Politics in Vietnam* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); Carlyle Thayer, *War by Other Means: National Liberation and Revolution in Viet-Nam, 1954–60* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).
75. In *War Comes to Long An*, Race discloses, “I would also like to note that I conducted this research as a private citizen, without the sponsorship of any program, group, or official organization” (xviii). Donald Zagoria admits, “As an individual involved with his society and his time, I have some very definite personal views on the war in Vietnam; I have studiously attempted to put these views to one side in writing this analysis. . . . However, I believe that any author writing on Vietnam today has an obligation to his readers to state his position.” Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle: Moscow/Peking/Hà Nội* (New York: Pegasus, 1967).
76. For example, Race begins his study of the South Vietnamese insurgency by saying, “the reader will find few evil or incompetent characters in this book, but rather an account of how such a revolutionary movement was able to gain victory despite the efforts of a considerable number of honest and conscientious [government] men, acting according to their best understanding” (*War Comes to Long An*, ix).
77. An example is McAlister’s *Vietnam: The Origins of Revolution 1885–1946* (Washington, DC: Center for Research in Social Systems, 1968), which focused on the early phase of the revolution. This study, which stands in Fall’s tradition, albeit with better sources and more explicit use of theory, was sharply criticized as imbalanced and showing a “Western bias.” See Huỳnh Kim Khánh, “Review Article of John McAlister’s *Viet Nam: The Origins of Revolution*,” *Pacific Affairs* 43, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 131–132.
78. Trương Bửu Lâm, *Patterns of Vietnamese Responses*.
79. Trương Bửu Lâm’s arguments are full of self-contradictions: On one page he argued, “The recurrence of certain manifestations of regionalism must not lead us to forget the fact that the monarchy installed in Hue commanded the loyalty of the entire Vietnamese population” (31). On the next page, however, he suggested that the reason for the Cần Vương’s failure is the support by

- “an unimportant segment” of Vietnamese for anti-Cần Vương collaborators who installed a pro-French king in Huế (33).
80. Kahin and Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, 325.
81. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, xv.
82. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
83. Huỳnh Kim Khánh, “Review Article of John McAlister’s *Viet Nam*,” 131.
84. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 20–21.
85. *Ibid.*, 6.
86. Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 26–34.
87. Although Huỳnh Kim Khánh cited Leonard Doob’s *Patriotism and Nationalism: Their Psychological Foundations* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964), his concepts of patriotism and nationalism have nothing to do with Doob’s approach. Doob defines “patriotism” as the conviction that one’s personal welfare is dependent on that of his society and “nationalism” as a psychological urge to make demands or take actions for the welfare of one’s group (6). Huỳnh Kim Khánh used “patriotism” to argue for the continuity of tradition in modern Vietnam.
88. *Ibid.*, 32.
89. In *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, Marr discussed in passing the contribution of such “collaborators” as Phạm Quỳnh but dismissed them as having less understanding of “the political questions” of the time than the “resisters” (212–215). In *Vietnamese Communism*, Huỳnh Kim Khánh similarly focused only on “revolutionary patriots”; not all “resisters” received attention. The time frame in *Vietnamese Anticolonialism* is limited to 1925, leaving out the VNQDD. *Vietnamese Communism* discussed this party briefly, but the book is devoted to the ICP.
90. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 4.
91. *Ibid.*, xvi.
92. See Trường Chinh, *Primer for Revolt: The Communist Takeover in Vietnam*, introduction and notes by Bernard Fall (New York: Praeger, 1963).
93. Elliott, “Revolutionary Re-integration,” 196.
94. The point here is not to take everything Hoàng Văn Chí described as given but to use it for what it is worth. He exaggerated the number of executions during the land reform, but half of his book is devoted to a detailed analysis of mass mobilizing and control techniques used during the campaign that later scholarly studies (e.g., White’s “Agrarian Reform and National Liberation” and Moise’s *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*), relying exclusively on official sources, complement but cannot substitute for. R.B. Smith’s review best describes how this work should be treated: “Mr. Hoàng Văn Chí’s best defence is that had he not written these things, they would probably never

- have been written at all.” Sadly, this remark remains largely true today. Smith, “Review of Hoàng Văn Chí’s *From Colonialism to Communism*,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 27, no. 3, 1964: 668.
95. Gareth Porter, “The Myth of the Bloodbath,” 4–6.
 96. Kahin and Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, 5. Had the authors been more familiar with Vietnamese communist historiography and propaganda, they would have realized that the code word “feudal” in the title of the exhibition indicates clearly that Hà Nội was not against [communist] China but against only “feudal Chinese emperors,” who were also denounced in China at the time by the Chinese Communist Party.
 97. Elliott, “Revolutionary Re-integration”, 190–196.
 98. See Porter, “The Myth of the Bloodbath.”
 99. See White, “The Vietnamese Revolutionary Alliance.”
 100. David Marr and Jayne Werner, preface to *Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam*, by Nguyễn Khắc Viện, xviii. By contrast, Tố Hữu is treated in Vietnam’s school textbooks today as a “great poet” [*thi sĩ lớn*] but never as the country’s “greatest poet.”
 101. Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 22–25.
 102. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism*, 203–206.
 103. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 10.
 104. *Ibid.*, 128, 137, 198.
 105. *Ibid.*, 243.
 106. William Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam 1900–1941* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1976), 15–16.
 107. Alexander Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model* (1971, repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21.
 108. Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976).
 109. *Ibid.*, 179.
 110. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*.
 111. This argument (Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*) earned a sharp rebuff from Huỳnh Kim Khánh, who labeled Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh “the most militant among the enemies of Vietnamese anticolonialism,” and Phạm Quỳnh, the “Lord Haw Haw of Vietnam” (*Vietnamese Communism*, 39). Marr also criticized Duiker for “oversimplification” and for putting “prime emphasis on outwardly good intentions and florid patriotic rhetoric rather than careful analysis of conditions and actions mounted to achieve more immediate or more specific objectives.” See David Marr, “Nationalism and Revolution in Vietnam,” *Pacific Affairs* 50, no. 1 (Spring 1977), 87. Ngô Vĩnh Long refuted Duiker’s

- inclusion of the Constitutionalists among “nationalists” by pointing to their condemnation of the violent methods of other nationalists and peasants’ demonstrations, their public promises to French authorities to bar communism, and their pledges of loyalty to France. See Ngô Vĩnh Long, “Review of Duiker’s *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam 1900–1941*,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 36, no. 3 (May 1977): 592–593.
112. Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model*, 9.
113. *Ibid.*, 23, 31.
114. Keith Taylor, *The Birth of Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983), 299.
115. *Ibid.*, 298.
116. See, for example, Huỳnh Kim Khánh, “The War in Vietnam: The U.S. Official Line,” *Pacific Affairs*, 42, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 58–67; and David Marr, “The United States in Vietnam: A Study in Futility,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 397 (September 1971): 11–18.
117. Christine White, “The Vietnamese Revolutionary Alliance: Intellectuals, Workers, and Peasants,” in Lewis, *Peasant Rebellion and Communist Revolution*, 79–87; Elliott, “Revolutionary Re-integration,” 653.
118. Kahin and Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, 16.
119. Elliott, “Revolutionary Re-integration,” 5, 319–370.
120. See Lữ Phương, “Từ Nguyễn Tất Thành đến Hồ Chí Minh,” www.talawas.org, January 26 to February 2, 2007.
121. Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism*. Hoàng Văn Chí makes a similar albeit less elaborate point. See Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism*, 30.
122. Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism*, 17 (italics in original).
123. Woodside, *Community and Revolution*, 164–170.
124. Turley, “Army, Party and Society,” 25, 52–56; Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, 213–242.
125. Woodside, *Community and Revolution*, 222.
126. Race, *War Comes to Long An*, 179–181. Race defined the nationalist approach conventionally as “the attempt to create direct bonds of loyalty between individuals and the central government” (180). Philip Catton’s *Diem’s Final Failure* provides a detailed discussion of the attempts at nation building under Ngô Đình Diệm. See Philip Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure* (Lawrence: Kansas University Press, 2002), 25–50. A casual count of public statues erected in both north and south easily demonstrates the greater symbolic emphasis the southern regime placed on a nationalist strategy than its northern counterpart: Sài Gòn erected at least five statues of traditional heroes in the capital (Trần Nguyên Hãn, An Dương Vương, Trần Hưng Đạo, Phù Đổng Thiên Vương,

- Phan Đình Phùng), whereas Hà Nội built one of Lenin and did not have a single statue of traditional heroes until recently. Was Sài Gòn only trying to make up for its lack of nationalist credentials in other areas, or did this contrast reflect inadvertently each regime's ideological orientations?
127. This debate in Vietnamese Studies paralleled a similar debate at roughly the same time in Chinese Studies between Chalmers Johnson, who claimed that Chinese communists won the civil war thanks to their appeals to peasant patriotism, and Donald Gillin, who contended that such appeals only helped communists win support from intellectuals and offered access to peasants—their social programs were what really attracted peasant support. See Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962); and Gillin, "Review Article: 'Peasant Nationalism' in the History of Chinese Communism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 2 (February 1964): 269–289.
 128. White, "The Vietnamese Revolutionary Alliance," 76–77.
 129. Porter, "Imperialism and Social Structure."
 130. For example, in her "Agrarian Reform and National Liberation," White argued that land reform in the 1950s was a real class struggle but became difficult to implement because of the party's need to make broad alliance with other classes to win national independence.
 131. Frances FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). The book won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the Bancroft Prize for History.
 132. The approach came under attack in the 1950s, criticized for serious methodological problems besides its cultural bias. For example, see Emily Nett, "An Evaluation of the National Character Concept in Sociological Theory," *Social Forces* 36, no. 4 (May 1958): 297–303. In Vietnamese Studies, Berman's *Revolutionary Organization* uses a modified approach that groups individual attitudes into "modal attitude clusters." For a more recent analysis of the political and historical context and the debates about this approach, see Federico Neiburg et al., "Anthropology and Politics in Studies of National Character," *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (February 1998): 56–81. A more recent attempt to improve the approach is Alex Inkeles, *National Character: A Psycho-Social Perspective* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1997).
 133. FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 368.
 134. *Ibid.*, 149.
 135. *Ibid.*, 151.
 136. *Ibid.*, 369–375.
 137. Compare this remark to Mus's more positive description of peasants as "gamblers at heart."

138. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (1978, repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 301.
139. *Ibid.*, 300.
140. FitzGerald, *Fire in the Lake*, 3–39.
141. While FitzGerald's antiwar stand alienated supporters of the war, her book would not have won so many prestigious prizes had it not resonated powerfully with American cultural elites, both inside and outside of the establishment.
142. For a discussion of the debates between modernist and perennialist approaches, see Anthony Smith, *The Nation in History* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2000), 27–51.
143. Huỳnh Kim Khánh, *Vietnamese Communism*, 341.
144. David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920–1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), x.
145. *Ibid.*, 320.
146. See, for example, George Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Knopf, 1986); Douglas Dacy, *Foreign Aid, War, and Economic Development: South Vietnam 1955–1975* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Greg Lockhart, *Nations in Arms: Origins of the People's Army of Vietnam* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989); Neil Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930–1975* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2003).
147. See Anne Gilks, *The Breakdown of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance, 1970–1979* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1992); Chen Jian, "China and the First Indo-China War, 1950–64," *China Quarterly*, 133 (March 1993): 85–110; Ilya Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago: I. R. Dee, 1996); Ilya Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003); Ang Cheng Guan, *Vietnamese Communists' Relations with China and the Second Indochina Conflict, 1956–1962* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997); Stephen Morris, *Why Vietnam Invaded Cambodia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999); Carlyle Thayer and Ramses Amer, eds., *Vietnamese Foreign Policy in Transition* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999); and Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
148. See, for example, Nguyen Ngoc Luu, "Peasants, Party and Revolution: The Politics of Agrarian Transformation in Northern Vietnam, 1930–1975" (PhD dissertation, University of Amsterdam, 1987); Truong Quang, *Agricultural Collectivization and Rural Development in Vietnam: A North/South Study, 1955–1985* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit te Amsterdam, 1987); Stein Tønnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945* (London: SAGE Publications, 1991);

- Thaveeporn Vasavakul, "Schools and Politics in South and North Vietnam: A Comparative Study of State Apparatus, State Policy and State Power (1945–1965)" (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1994); Kim Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945–1965* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Russell Hiang-Kheng Heng, "Of the State, for the State, yet against the State—the Struggle Paradigm in Vietnam's Media Politics" (PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 2000).
149. See, for example, David G. Marr and Christine P. White, eds., *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas in Socialist Development* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, 1988); Melanie Beresford, *National Unification and Economic Development in Vietnam* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Adam Fforde and Stefan de Vylder, *From Plan to Market: The Economic Transition in Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996); David Koh, ed., *Negotiating the State in Vietnam* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001); Zachary Abuza, *Renovating Politics in Contemporary Vietnam* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Martin Gainsborough, *Changing Political Economy of Vietnam: The Case of Hồ Chí Minh City* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003); Regina Abrami, "Self-making, Class Struggle and Labor Autarky: The Political Origins of Private Entrepreneurship in Vietnam and China" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2002); Edmund Malesky, "At Provincial Gate: The Impact of Locally Concentrated Foreign Direct Investment on Provincial Autonomy and Economic Reform" (PhD dissertation, Duke University, 2004).
150. See Vu Ngu Chieu, "The Other Side of the Revolution: The Empire of Vietnam (March–August 1945)," *Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (February 1986): 293–328; Tonnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution*; David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995); Catton, *Diem's Final Failure*; David Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta 1930–1975* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2003).
151. See Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
152. See Benedict Kerkvliet, *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005).
153. See Anita Chan et al., eds., *Transforming Asian Socialism* (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); Abrami, "Self-Making, Class Struggle and Labor Autarky."
154. For example, see James Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976).

155. Examples are Chen Jian, Thaveeporn Vassavakul, and David Koh.
156. For a concise and recent discussion of the literature, see Liah Greenfeld and Jonathan Eastwood, “Nationalism in Comparative Perspective,” in *The Handbook of Political Sociology*, ed. Thomas Janoski et al. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 247–265.
157. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).
158. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).
159. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival of the Modern World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986); see also his *The Nation in History*, 65–72.
160. Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).
161. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*.
162. Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).
163. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*.
164. Shawn McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004).
165. Vu Ngu Chieu, “The Other Side of the Revolution.”
166. For example, see Vasavakul, “Schools and Politics;” Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam*; and Catton, *Diem’s Final Failure*. The VNQDĐ, however, curiously remains a blank space in the literature, with the exception of Hy Van Luong’s *Revolution in the Village* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1992).
167. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*. This study examines various cultural and intellectual debates in the Vietnamese popular press during the colonial era on topics such as morality education, the relationship between ethics and politics, and the role of women.
168. Luong, *Revolution in the Village*, 18–19, 94–95.
169. Revolutionaries needed to convert or court support only from an authority figure in the clan or the village. This figure would then mobilize junior people under his or her authority to work for the revolution.
170. For instance, Marr writes that Anderson “sadly underrates the forces at work on both the popular and elite levels in colonial societies which owed little or nothing to the Europeans. . . . The state established by Hồ Chí Minh probably

- owed as much to a thousand years of Vietnamese dynastic experience as to imported precedents from Paris or Moscow.” See Marr, “Review of Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 4 (August 1986): 808.
171. Peter Zinoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862–1940* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 4, 39, 241.
172. Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887–1954* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 1995). Goscha shows that most Vietnamese at the time thought of themselves as “Annamese” rather than “Vietnamese.”
173. Liam Kelley, *Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005). Kelley finds that these envoys spoke of their country and its northern neighbor not as “Vietnam” and “China” but as the “Southern Kingdom” and the “Northern Kingdom.”
174. Examples are Vasavakul, “Schools and Politics;” Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam; Ninh, A World Transformed*; Hue-Tam Ho Tai, ed., *The Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001); and Christoph Giebel, *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).
175. McHale, *Print and Power*, 180–182.
176. Philip Taylor, *Fragments of the Present: Searching for Modernity in Vietnam’s South* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2001), and *Goddess on the Rise: Pilgrimage and Popular Religion in Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004).
177. Taylor, *Fragments of the Present*.
178. *Ibid.*, 22.
179. See Đặng Thuỳ Trâm, *Nhật Ký Đặng Thuỳ Trâm* [Diary by Đặng Thuỳ Trâm], ed. Đặng Vương Hùng (Thanh Niên, 2005); Nguyễn Văn Thạc, *Mãi Mãi Tuổi Hai Mươi* [Forever Young], ed. Đặng Vương Hùng (Thanh Niên, 2005).
180. The main proponent of the ethnosymbolic theory in the social sciences is Anthony Smith. See Smith, *The Ethnic Revival of the Modern World* and *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Notable studies related to Vietnam’s ethnic minorities are Gerald Hickey, *Sons of the Mountains: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands to 1954* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), and *Free in the Forest: Ethnohistory of the Vietnamese Central Highlands 1954–1976* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982); Thomas Sikor, “The Political Economy of Decollectivization: A Study of Differentiation in and among

Black Thai Villages of Northern Vietnam” (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1999); Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003); Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam’s Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization, 1850–1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003).

181. Woodside touches on this topic in his “Ideology and Integration,” but there currently exists no substantial research on this issue.