

“BEING VIETNAMESE”: THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES DURING THE EARLY COLD WAR

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the early U.S.-D.R.V. relationship by analyzing related myths and exploring Viet Minh policies. I go beyond the previous literature to examine the Viet Minh government's modernization and anti-imperialist projects, both of which proved critical to D.R.V. policy evolution and the evolution of a new national identity.

During the French era, as Vietnamese thinkers rethought the meaning of "being Vietnamese," groups like the Viet Minh determined that modernization was the essential to Vietnam's independence and that imperialist states like the U.S. posed a serious threat to their revolution and their independence. I argue that D.R.V. officials dismissed all possibility of a real alliance with the U.S. long before 1950. Soviet and Chinese mentors later provided development aid to Hanoi, while the D.R.V. maintained its autonomy and avoided becoming a client state by seeking alliances with other decolonizing countries. In doing so, Vietnamese leaders gained their own chances to mentor others and improve their status on the world stage.

After Geneva, Hanoi continued to advance modernization in the North using a variety of methods, but its officials also heightened their complaints against the U.S. In particular, the D.R.V. denounced America's invasion of South Vietnam and its "puppet" government in Saigon as evidence of an imperialist plot. In advocating an anti-imperialist line and modernized future, D.R.V. leaders elaborated a new national identity, tying modernization and anti-imperialism inextricably to "being Vietnamese." Yet modernization presented serious challenges and Hanoi's faith in anti-imperialism had its drawbacks, limiting their ability to critique and evaluate the U.S. threat fully.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

*“What do Americans think about Vietnamese people?
Do they consider us as Negroes in America?”¹*

The *Washington Post* received a letter from a Vietnamese teenager named Le-My², which the editors featured with her photo in the Sunday, February 25, 1958 edition. The young girl asked a series of questions about the United States, queries so thought-provoking that some concluded her letter was either communist-inspired or a hoax. She stated that 95 percent of Vietnamese did not like the U.S., insinuated that corporations influenced President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s decisions, and claimed that the Soviets were far ahead technologically. She also inquired about race relations and slavery. Le-My cited Little Rock as “a big shame hung over America,” and wondered whether or not the U.S. would handle the Vietnamese in the same ways that African Americans had been treated.

A mini-furor erupted. The *Post* received 271 responses from the public in the next five days alone. Alfred Friendly, the editor to whom Le-My’s letter had been addressed, highlighted more than twenty of the replies in a special section of the following Sunday, March 9th edition.³ Later, organizations like the American Friends of Vietnam (A.F.V.) reprinted her letter, and prominent Americans such as the public intellectual Leo Cherne quoted her in their speeches.⁴

Le My’s correspondence and the reactions reveal significant facets of Cold War era U.S.-Vietnam relations. She conveyed an image of the U.S. that was less than stellar, which unsettled

¹ “She Asks for an Answer” *The Washington Post*, February 25, 1958.

² For the purposes of this dissertation, I use proper and place names that are familiar to English-speaking readers (such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh) without their Vietnamese diacritics or as they are rendered in publications. Otherwise, I provide the Vietnamese spelling to avoid confusion and aid pronunciation. When Vietnamese sources alter the spelling of a proper or place name, I include the English spelling in brackets when possible.

³ “Readers Answer Letter of Vietnamese Girl” *The Washington Post* March 9, 1958.

⁴ For more on the A.F.V., see Joseph Morgan, *The Vietnam Lobby: The Americans Friends of Vietnam, 1955-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); on Cherne see Andrew F. Smith, *Rescuing the World: The Life and Times of Leo Cherne* (New York: SUNY Press, 2002).

the newspaper's readership. Le-My's knowledge of American racial tensions appeared up-to-date, thus affirming a commonly-held belief that racial issues at home damaged U.S. credibility abroad. Communism, as an accusation against the Vietnamese teen or as a threat to Vietnam, figured in a significant number of letters. Some insinuated that this "Le-My" was a communist agent or that she had been naïvely swayed by Moscow's propaganda. Some mentioned the entire letter might be a Soviet trick; others were angered that a major American newspaper would fall for a communist ploy by publishing a piece of fiction. A few readers tried to help the young girl by explaining America's intention to bring democracy and development to her country. Others tried to educate her on the Cold War, explaining that the Soviets had started such rumors in order to dupe unwitting Vietnamese people. Silences can also be telling. Her question on the role of racism in U.S.-Vietnam relations curiously elicited no direct reactions. Most respondents spoke only about progress in American race relations. A few argued that prejudice must also exist in Vietnam, implying that racial bias was both natural and universal.⁵

This episode is significant in conveying how American readers imagined Le-My (and by extension Vietnam), as well as how they regarded their home country. In reading her words, Americans encountered an alternate version of the U.S. that challenged the established exceptionalist view. Their replies also reveal how the Cold War had heightened sensitivity to America's international reputation. Respondents either dismissed her letter as an example of communist lies or as evidence of how much benighted Third World peoples needed the U.S.

Contribution

In analyzing Cold War era events in Vietnam through Vietnamese sources, scholars are mostly interested in South Vietnam. Jessica Chapman, for instance, explores the political controversies surrounding the Saigon government and Matthew Masur traces various cultural

⁵ "Readers Answer Letter of Vietnamese Girl" *The Washington Post* March 9, 1958.

efforts to establish an authentic image for South Vietnam.⁶ Only a few scholars rigorously examine Hanoi's outlook, but in differing contexts and often guided by American exceptionalism. Mark Bradley's *Imaging Vietnam and America* was one of the earliest examples of research by a scholar of U.S. foreign relations that relied extensively upon Vietnamese language sources.⁷ He exaggerates America's importance, determining that Vietnamese reformers found inspiration in the U.S. revolution, lionized famous American presidents, and placed American ideals at the center of their search for independence.

The issue of limited sources has also presented difficulties for researchers. Pierre Asselin, for instance, analyzes the 1954 Geneva Agreements, challenging the view that the Soviets and Chinese strong-armed the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (D.R.V.) into accepting the division of Vietnam.⁸ He traces the internal fractures and power plays that altered the Party's perspective in the latter half of the 1950s. His use of published Party sources, which he admits are problematic, fail to explain convincingly how and why the D.R.V. shifted to violent struggle when it did. By contrast, Lien-Hang Nguyen makes good use of archival documents and other sources to explore the international context of the Vietnam War. She delves even deeper than Asselin into Party rivalries, beginning her analysis with the repercussions of the Sino-Soviet split on Vietnamese political fractures.⁹ Focusing on the years leading up to the Tet Offensive, Nguyen uses an impressive array of Vietnamese government sources to demonstrate that the image of a unified Vietnam Worker's Party had little basis in fact. She also rightly points out that D.R.V. leaders employed creative and cautious diplomatic tactics to offset the difficulties wrought by Sino-Soviet tensions.

⁶ See Jessica M. Chapman, "Staging Democracy: South Vietnam's 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai" *Diplomatic History* 30/4 (September 2006), 671-703 and Matthew Masur, "Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954-1960" *Diplomatic History* 33/2 (April 2009), 293-313.

⁷ Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

⁸ See Pierre Asselin, "Choosing Peace: Hanoi and the Geneva Agreement on Vietnam, 1954-1955" *Journal of Cold War Studies* 9/2 (Spring 2007), 95-126.

⁹ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1/1-2 (February 2006), 4-58.

My work differs markedly from these approaches by concentrating specifically on the D.R.V. during the early Cold War years and using unpublished Vietnamese language government sources to analyze this period. In writing on the Viet Minh government (and its subsequent incarnation as North Vietnam), I rely mainly on sources from National Archives III in Hanoi, where I benefited greatly from access to Vietnamese government documents from the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, the Office of the Prime Minister, as well as that of the National Assembly. While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is all but closed to foreign researchers, other offices' files contained Ministry of Foreign Affairs documents that provided insights into the foreign policy process. Also, I made extensive use of the National Library, especially its contemporary publications and newspapers. Finally, I relied upon published sources when necessary, especially Party documents, collections of letters, and other government sources. My dissertation also draws upon investigations of sources from the presidential libraries of Harry S Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy, as well as the National Archives at College Park, the Vietnam Center at Texas Tech University, the National Security Archive, and the Fort Bragg Special Warfare Archive. Memoirs and published primary documents from the U.S. State Department's *Foreign Relations of the United States* series, as well as Cold War International History Project translations, have also proved critical to my work.

My dissertation centers on D.R.V. policies, relying on Vietnamese and English language sources that show, contrary to American exceptionalist narratives, the U.S. had no credible opportunity to establish relations with the Viet Minh government from 1945 to the early 1960s. Concentrating on the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education, and the Office of the Prime Minister, my dissertation also reveals critical intersections between domestic and foreign policy in the D.R.V. I argue that the Viet Minh believed that modernization and anti-imperialism were key to an independent future for Vietnam. They dismissed all possibility of a real alliance with the U.S., linked themselves strategically with the Soviet and Chinese, and concurrently sought alliances outside the communist bloc in the decolonizing world to gain prestige and also equalize the influence of Moscow and Beijing. In doing so, the D.R.V. elaborated a national identity for Vietnamese people, but limited the government's ability to analyze their enemies.

Looking In and Out

Since declaring independence (and perhaps even earlier), U.S. leaders pursued imperial goals with hesitation: political debates between internationalist advocates and isolationist factions (often portrayed as imperialists and anti-imperialists) ebbed and flowed in relation to contemporary issues. As historians like Eric Love and Paul Kramer argue, nineteenth century proponents of empire as well as advocates of isolation extended and reinforced racialized conceptions of other peoples (as well as of Americans themselves).¹⁰ A wide range of ideas converged to support Washington's convictions of an ascendant destiny: social Darwinism, scientific racism, and even social sciences like anthropology and history, bolstered turn of the century racial categorizations. Racial hierarchies offered Americans a way to manage and control difference at home and overseas, serving "As a central point of cultural reference" that foreign policymakers could use in assessing "foreign problems without fear that the concept itself would arouse domestic controversy."¹¹ Americans also believed that their racial hierarchy worked as a universal rule. They presumed that non-whites acknowledged white American superiority and accepted their lesser status. Therefore, U.S. policymakers expressed shock when non-whites did not display appropriate deference and dismissed such reactions as further evidence of such people's ignorance and retarded development. Emilio Aguinaldo and Sitting Bull are but two examples of such leaders who failed to "understand" the ascendancy of the American way.

When the U.S. emerged as a superpower, the nation moved from posing as an "onlooker" to an unashamedly crusading intervener. At that time, Americans possessed little firsthand knowledge of Indochina. Washington had only attended to Southeast Asia inasmuch as it concerned the Allied effort in World War II.¹² Paradoxically, the U.S. relied on France to "know"

¹⁰ Paul Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, and the United States and the Philippines*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Eric T. L. Love, *Race over Empire: Racism and U.S. Imperialism, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

¹¹ Michael H. Hunt, *Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 90-91; 52.

Vietnam at the same time that Washington criticized French colonial ineptitude, serving the double purpose of confirming Vietnamese inferiority and indicting the French as failed colonizers.¹³ As a result, American policy experts studied French colonial reports and yet judged them unreliable prior to turning the first page.

Later tagged as the zone “most likely to cause difficulties,” Indochina captured the interest of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He cited the comparative harmony in the Philippines to aver that the U.S. had been much more effective colonizers and lamented (perhaps gleefully) France’s failure. Roosevelt conceded that the Vietnamese were not ready for self-rule and concluded that American aid was necessary.¹⁴ Judging decolonization as an opportunity for the U.S. to further its global aims and fulfill its exceptional destiny, Roosevelt believed that Washington could influence emerging nations and expand America’s sphere of influence.

F.D.R., however, was an exception. Most European and American leaders considered decolonizing areas to be dangerously unstable, preferring continued colonialism rather than an unpredictable future.¹⁵ France, England, nationalist China, and even the U.S. State Department opposed Roosevelt’s trusteeship plan for Indochina, convinced that volatility would result because these peoples were incapable of self-rule or of understanding the threat of communism. No consensus on Indochina emerged during World War II, but, just prior to his death, the president

¹² George C. Herring, “‘A Good Stout Effort’: John Foster Dulles and the Indochina Crisis, 1954-1955” in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, ed. Richard H. Immerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 214.

¹³ For more on these developments, see Shakila Yacob, “Model of Welfare Capitalism? The United States Rubber Company in Southeast Asia, 1910-1942” *Business History Conference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), 136-174; and Mark Philip Bradley, “Slouching Toward Bethlehem: Culture, Diplomacy and the Origins of the Cold War in Vietnam” in *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-1966*, ed. Christian G. Appy (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 12.

¹⁴ Frank Costigliola, *France and the United States: The Cold Alliance since World War II* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992), 27.

¹⁵ Bradley, “Slouching Toward Bethlehem”, 21; Lloyd Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu, 1941-1954* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1988), 30-39; Warren F. Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War* (New York: W. Morrow, 1997), 299-305.

moved toward placating his European allies, all but abandoning the trusteeship proposal.¹⁶

Washington thus relegated Indochina to an ancillary issue, viewing it as either an Asian security factor or one that could make or break America's plans for postwar Europe.

This feeble beginning to U.S.-Vietnam relations in no way foreshadowed how significant they would become to one another. Today Vietnam still serves as a symbol for Americans, not just of the Cold War, but as a defining moment in U.S. foreign policy. Every U.S. intervention since 1975 has been compared to Vietnam; larger policy questions of America's role in the world are often measured by what transpired in Southeast Asia. Moreover, studies of Vietnam are often framed by how the U.S. could have avoided the Vietnam War,¹⁷ a flawed approach. Vietnam, as a policy concern, remained on the sidelines until the anti-communist code brought it to the forefront. In doing so, the disingenuousness of Washington's professed anti-imperialism became manifest. Instead of seizing the chance to demonstrate American liberal ideals, U.S. officials clung to anti-communism and modernization, ideologies that still influence the ways in which researchers approach Vietnam today.

In examining the assumptions surrounding early Cold War U.S.-D.R.V. relations, this dissertation uncovers a more complex U.S.-D.R.V. relationship than the previous literature suggests. This study will thereby become integral to larger conversations even as it provides a foundation for subsequent research. I maintain that U.S. policymakers' mind-sets were swayed by Cold War imperatives, which caused them to incorporate ideologies with familiar viewpoints to rank and distinguish peoples, similar to the calibrations characterized by Mark Bradley as "racialized cultural hierarchies"¹⁸ At the same time, U.S. policymakers, focused on their rivalry with the Soviets, worried that domestic racial problems would damage America's credibility

¹⁶ Stein Tonneson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and de Gaulle in a World at War* (Oslo: Sage Publications, 1991), 13-19 and chapter 7. For more on FDR's complicated personality, see Kimball, *The Juggler*; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); and Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 52.

¹⁷ Recognizing the drawbacks of all the varied incarnations of terminology, here the phrases "First Indochinese War" and "Second Indochinese War" will be used. Many of my sources also use "Vietnam War" and thus it will appear as well. For more information, see Katharya Um, "The 'Vietnam War': What's in a Name?" *Amerasia Journal* 31/2 (2005), 134-139.

¹⁸ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 6; 46-48.

among decolonizing peoples like the Vietnamese.¹⁹ As a result, during the early Cold War years, Washington set out to restore America's international image, an effort often undermined by its actions overseas.

D.R.V. leaders, meanwhile, relied upon a much different version of the world than Washington leaders anticipated. Viet Minh members conceived of a world divided into imperialist and anti-imperialist camps, but they also ranked countries using modernization criteria. My study demonstrates that the D.R.V possessed cultural and ideological assumptions unique to their context, which, in turn, led their governments to filter out information that clashed with these prevailing beliefs.²⁰ Concepts of identity and difference evolved much differently in Hanoi than in Washington. The Vietnamese encountered versions of race that intersected with indigenous concepts of difference, some of which brought empowerment (yellow peril) while others masked enemies as friends (Japan). Vietnamese reformers and radicals concluded that modernization was fundamental to successful independence. Concurrently, the Viet Minh, in particular, critiqued racism as a uniquely imperialist tool used to divide nations and make them more easily exploitable. By the advent of the new government in 1945, Vietnamese notions of belonging became increasingly state-centered, defined by an emphasis on modernization and anti-imperialist policies.

The portrait of Vietnam, as painted by Washington, lacked the nuance necessary to appreciate Hanoi's intentions. Independence and autonomy were paramount concerns for the Viet Minh. To meet these objectives, Vietnamese communists relied upon anti-imperialism and modernization to unify the population against enemy threats at home as well as allies' potential avarice. During the critical years of the early Cold War, these officials also looked abroad, forging relations not only with the U.S.S.R. and P.R.C., but also decolonizing African and Asian states.

¹⁹ John David Skrentny, "The Effect of the Cold War on African American Civil Rights: America and the World Audience, 1945-1968" *Theory and Society* 27 (1998), 245, 256, and 270. See also Richard F. Rosser, "Soviet Opposition to Racial Discrimination in the United Nations" *Russian Review* 21/1 (January 1962), 27, 25-37.

²⁰ See Richard H. Immerman, "Psychology," in Michael J. Hogan and Thomas J. Paterson, eds., *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 106-122.

In their efforts to preserve the nation's sovereignty, moreover, Vietnamese policy makers consolidated and drove the evolution of a new national identity.

Whether or not Le-My's letter was genuine, its 1958 publication and the replies reveal critical aspects of U.S.-Vietnam relations that set the stage for my research. I examine and analyze the myths surrounding the early relationship between the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, with emphasis on the period 1945-1960.²¹ For decades scholars have debated the relationship between the two. Put differently, historians of both the United States and Vietnam, as well as other scholars, journalists, and informed observers, have addressed the question of whether in the immediate aftermath of World War II the United States, increasingly infected by Cold War thinking and anxieties, behaved in a manner that laid the foundation for its military intervention in Vietnam two decades later. Indeed, the received wisdom is that between 1945 and 1950 the United States missed an opportunity to establish at least a *modus vivendi* with Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh-led Communists, to reinforce Vietnam's nationalism and hence suspicion of both the Chinese and Soviets, and consequently, to avoid the tragedy of the Vietnam War. I argue in this dissertation that there was no such missed opportunity.

The D.R.V. did not seek a serious alliance with the U.S. prior to 1950, but aimed only to keep the imperialists at bay. During the French era, as Vietnamese thinkers rethought the meaning of "being Vietnamese," groups like the Viet Minh determined that modernization was the essential to Vietnam's independence and that imperialist states like the U.S. posed a serious threat to their future. Vietnamese communists had historically agreed on the dangers of U.S. imperialism and forged an independent foreign policy course based on anti-imperialist convictions. They did not hold out hope for American aid or view the U.S. as a key player in Vietnam's future, although Vietnamese leaders did perceive a need to mollify Washington. An alliance with the U.S., moreover, would have undermined the Viet Minh's pursuit of its revolutionary project. As such, Viet Minh leaders implemented various strategies based on

²¹ The year 1945 marks the beginning of decolonization and the Cold War, as well as the establishment of the D.R.V. Decolonization was a process that preceded 1945, but that year represents a watershed that altered decolonization's pace and character. My analysis ends with the early 1960s, just prior to the "formal" outbreak of war with the U.S.

contemporary realities and pressures that were misread by Washington officials, and also subsequent scholars of U.S.-Vietnam relations.

The Viet Minh pursued its project of transformation by dedicating its government to modernization and anti-imperialism. The D.R.V. defined modernization as a way of “catching up” with “modern” countries through accelerated development of their economy, political system, as well as Vietnamese society and culture. In many ways this replicated the U.S. modernization project.²² The Viet Minh promoted modernization as an expressway for undeveloped countries to become developed. They also encouraged an integrated approach to modernization, believing that socio-cultural transformation was just or nearly as important as industrial and economic growth. Yet the D.R.V. effort often lacked the hubris that marked America’s modernization project in South Vietnam. Prominent Vietnamese thinkers and leaders sought to learn from models like their allies and other decolonizing countries. In the end, however, the D.R.V. subscribed to the hierarchical precepts of modernization ideology, viewing emerging African states as mentoring opportunities that would improve North Vietnam’s global stature.

After 1950, Soviet and Chinese mentors provided development aid, while the D.R.V. maintained its autonomy and avoided becoming a client state by seeking alliances with other decolonizing countries. In doing so, Vietnamese leaders gained their own chances to mentor others and improve their status on the world stage. After Geneva, Hanoi continued to advance modernization in the North, but its officials also heightened their complaints against the U.S, primarily by denouncing America’s invasion of South Vietnam and its “puppet” government in Saigon as an imperialist plot. In advocating an anti-imperialist line, Viet Minh leaders elaborated a new national identity, defining modernization and anti-imperialism as inextricably tied to “being Vietnamese.” Yet Hanoi’s faith in anti-imperialism had its drawbacks, most especially in evaluations of the U.S. threat and the ways in which the D.R.V. overlooked racism as a significant charge against Washington.

²² See Michael E. Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution: Modernization, Development, and U.S. Foreign Policy from the Cold War to the Present* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

CHAPTER 2

BEING VIETNAMESE: A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY TO 1945

*Look at those men with blue eyes and yellow beards. They are not our fathers, nor are they our brothers. How can they squat here, defecating on our heads? Are the men from Vietnam not ashamed of that situation?*²³

Weary of the French abuses he had encountered throughout his entire lifetime, Phan Bội Châu, the prominent scholar and reformer, posed the above challenge to his Vietnamese peers in 1907. In obvious frustration, Châu criticized the Vietnamese as passively accepting the worst kind of humiliations from the French. He rejected European colonizers as not only visually alien, but also as a group divorced from Vietnam's peoples by bloodline and kinship, thus delimiting what it meant to be Vietnamese in phenotypic, biological, and familial senses. For Châu, being Vietnamese was so clear as to require no further explanation.

Discovering the meaning of "being Vietnamese" is critical to understanding how the D.R.V. sought to re-create Vietnamese society and national identity, and in doing so, minimized if not eliminated the likelihood of a bilateral relationship with Cold War America. Yet such an investigation of what it means to "be" Vietnamese is complicated by various realities. Obvious linguistic challenges and limited source materials affect studies of the precolonial period. Moreover, questions of identity are obscured by twentieth century events, which have modified how the country's history is presented. For instance, Vietnam's present government presents a historical narrative that emphasizes patterns of invasion and resistance in a triumphal tale of victory. Patricia Pelley questions the accuracy of such interpretations, especially those that advance a pre-destined, exceptional Vietnamese identity characterized by harmonious domestic cohesion in times of outside intervention.²⁴ In terms of Vietnamese identity, researchers have tended to promote nation-state analyses, whereas others have used a globally-framed approach.

²³ Phan Bội Châu, *The New Vietnam*, (1907) translated and excerpted in Trương Bửu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 107.

²⁴ See Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1-16.

Michael Adas, for example, determines that, along with Koreans, “the Vietnamese were the only people formally colonized in the industrial age who possessed a strong sense of ethnic and cultural identity and who historically aspired to an ideal of political unity.” He then maintains that this “pre-existing nationalism” influenced Vietnamese interactions with outsiders like the French.²⁵ While his observation is probably correct, this view tends to exclude local realities such as ethnic tensions, regional diversity, and political dissension.

This chapter focuses on educated Vietnamese and how they described belonging in the context of anti-colonialism that ultimately proved so salient to the DRV’s hostility toward the United States. I consider this discussion far from the last word on Vietnamese identity and more a contribution to ongoing debates over the meaning of “being Vietnamese.” Biology and geography probably circumscribed who was and was not Vietnamese in pre-colonial times, as did the “imagined communities” of supernatural belief systems and political control. Ideas from powerful neighbors like China and Japan also contributed to these definitions. During the French period, Vietnamese thinkers encountered Chinese and Japanese scholarly debates on western theories of identity and development. China and Japan translated foreign texts and produced original works that synthesized and adapted western ideas to their respective contexts. Both countries, for instance, transformed the West’s racial ranking systems into new versions that argued “yellow” people were equal, or even superior, to whites.²⁶ The Japanese, in particular, elaborated a narrative that tied successful modernization to racial superiority. Early twentieth century Vietnamese, then, received renovated versions of western racial ideas that emphasized the high potential of “yellow” peoples. Influenced by Chinese and Japanese claims, Vietnamese intellectuals applied hierarchical concepts to their anti-colonialism via modernization-based evaluations.

²⁵ Michael Adas, “A Colonial War in a Postcolonial Era,” in *America, the Vietnam War, and the World: Comparative and International Perspectives*, ed. Andreas W. Daum, Lloyd C. Gardner, and Wilfried Mausbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 39.

²⁶ Debates on whether or not race is a “western” idea and how it intersects (and part ways) with the nation are especially relevant to my study. Frank Dikotter’s research on China challenges the belief that “a variety of racial narratives could be reduced to one model which is universal in its origins (the west), its causes (capitalist society), and its effects (colonization).” See Dikotter, “Racial Identities in China,” 409.

Vietnamese reconsiderations of identity also resulted from France's civilizing mission, complete with its acculturation policies and racial assumptions. Elite Vietnamese absorbed and normalized western notions of modernization and progress, but concurrently questioned western racial precepts. Although some degree of racialization took place in the reformist era, racial concepts did not empower Vietnamese thinkers. Communist adherents rejected racial hierarchies outright, while other leading Vietnamese explored (and dismissed) the possibilities of racial unity. Many agreed that their people and country were "backward." Yet, in the same breath, they also rejected French racial hierarchies that placed the Vietnamese permanently below Europeans. As in other colonized areas, they had "slowly began subscribing to the ethos of progress that was inherent in the late colonial project" and viewed their "inferiority" as a temporary condition that could be altered. The implications for future relations with the United States were ominous.²⁷

Early Influences on Identity

The borders of today's Vietnam (still contested at times by its neighbors) are easy enough to locate on a world map. Yet, one can argue the state now known as Vietnam came into existence only in the mid-nineteenth century, built upon varying historical versions of Vietnamese polity. The present narrative of a Vietnam pre-destined to stretch from the Red River to the Mekong Delta has little basis in fact. The iteration of a "national" Vietnamese identity is most likely a twentieth century phenomenon, fueled by state-sponsored interpretations of Vietnam's history as a series of wars, a predestined unified independence, and a long history.²⁸ Western

²⁷ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 78. See also Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).

²⁸ For a fuller discussion of these issues, see Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 16-68 and David E.F. Henley, "Ethnographic Integration and Exclusion in Anticolonial Nationalism: Indonesia and Indochina" *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 37/2 (April 1995), 286-324. The most famous and probably most-read Vietnamese version of the interpretation detailed is Nguyễn Khắc Viện, *Vietnam: A Long History* (Hanoi: Thế Giới Publishers, 2007). For the contrasting region-centered approach, see Li Tana, "An Alternative Vietnam: The Nguyen Kingdom in the 17th and 18th Century" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29/1 (March 1998), 111-121; idem., Nguyen

scholarship has also debated the existence of political consciousness in Vietnam, resulting in conflicting images of the Vietnamese ranging from virtually apolitical to profit-motivated.²⁹

Previously, peoples now part of modern Vietnam possessed other forms of belonging that ignored or superseded claims to “being Vietnamese” as imagined through the prism of the nation-state. Pre-French forms of “Vietnamese” identity can be conceived of as less a nationalist expression than dynamic abstractions. Exchange most likely inspired early group definition. Those who came to use “Viet” self-referentially noted variances in lifestyle, most particularly distinguishing between their lowland, wet rice cultivation and highland residents who used slash-and-burn agricultural methods.³⁰ The northern region was a crossroads of commerce that produced significant hybridization. The area’s history of trade (land and sea), militant uprisings against state control, migration and invasion of the southern “frontiers,” and continuous negotiations of borders suggest the presence of an eclectic set of identities that were constantly being renegotiated.

Most significantly, a blood-based, locale-rooted identity shaped how the early “Viet” included and excluded. To define belonging, early Vietnamese peoples relied upon markers like kinship and family, birthplace and village residence, language, as well as phenotypic indicators, all of which implicitly reaffirmed the significance of bloodline. Being Vietnamese meant, in part,

Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries (Ithaca, New York: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1998); Keith W. Taylor, Surface Orientations in Vietnam: Beyond Histories of Nation and Region” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57/4 (November 1998), 949-978; Nola Cooke, “Southern Regionalism and the Composition of the Nguyen Ruling Elite, 1802-1882” *Asian Studies Review* 23/2 (June 1999), 205-231; and Choi Byung Wook, “South Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mang, 1820-1841: Central Policies and Local Response” (Ph.D. dissertation, Australian National University, 1999). For an overview of recent Vietnamese approaches, see Dinh Xuan Lam and Pham Hong Tung, “Vietnamese Historiography: Development and Contributions in the Doi Moi Period” *Social Sciences Information Review* 3/2 (June 2009), 3-10.

²⁹ See James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) and Samuel L. Popkin, *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

³⁰ David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 7-8.

being able to claim these relationships. Such identifiers preserved a “Vietnamese-ness” in extra-village marriages and other migrations.

Reflections on difference and belonging took hold in the area because the indigenous population confronted challenges to the region’s stability, most notably in the “thousand years” of rule by China. A distinct and common “Vietnamese” identity emerged around the time of the Lý Dynasty (1010-1225), defined by a decidedly non-Confucian government administrative system as well as singular cultural practices like blackening teeth with lacquer.³¹ In this era, Vietnamese leaders formed alliances with non-Vietnamese through marriage as a “way of managing barbarian others.” At the same time, the the Lê and Nguyễn governments set boundaries between the Vietnamese and others through legal codes. The laws “sought to limit contact between Viet peoples and barbarian others and in some cases prohibited it altogether.”³² As such, the elites possessed a definite idea of “being Vietnamese” that needed to be managed and protected.

Some evidence from pre-colonial Vietnam also suggests that the Vietnamese subscribed to a form of “colorism,” or classification based on skin shade. Colorist concepts may have originated independently, but may have also been influenced by China (as well as Japan and Korea). The Chinese held strong beliefs about skin shades since, according to conservative estimates, at least the Han Dynasty. Skin color served as reference points of class and attractiveness, with whiter skin prized (especially in women), and darker skin ridiculed and condemned. Wealthy Vietnamese stayed indoors out of direct sunlight and, consequently, they often (but not always) possessed paler skin than manual laborers who worked outside. Historically, white skin indicated an individual’s wealth and success; concurrently darker skin tones revealed a person’s poverty. Those seeking to maintain or gain higher status protected their skin by avoiding direct sunlight. This colorism had less to do with biologically-based hierarchies than visible signals of class rank.³³ As a consequence, the use of parasols and other

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Patricia Pelley, “Barbarians and ‘Younger Brothers’: The Remaking of Race in Postcolonial Vietnam” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 29/2 (September 1998),

³³ Hiroshi Wagatsuma, “The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan Body Image” in *Racism: A Global Reader* edited by Kevin Reilly, Stephen Kaufman and Angela Bodino (New York: M.E.

types of sun shades were commonplace, as was clothing that completely covered an individual's skin to prevent tanning. A litany of methods could be used to attain and/or maintain pale skin, with various herbs, foods, and cosmetics prescribed as whiteners. The Vietnamese literary community proclaimed the virtues of "whiteness" and pale skin, mainly in reference to women.

While extolling the virtues of white skin, a political identification with "yellow" emerged in the region long before the West exported its racial hierarchies. Centuries of Chinese rule and geographic proximity meant that Sinicized ideas of belonging would be brought to the Vietnamese, who then transformed and applied these concepts to cultivate additional expressions of "being Vietnamese."³⁴ For instance, the categorization of the Han as "yellow" in China predated western imperialism as "a positive symbol of imperial nobility actively mobilized by reformers who transformed it into a powerful and effective means of identification." Just as the Chinese revered their "Yellow Emperor," the Vietnamese embraced a similar notion. Hué emperors employed yellow as a royal color for their banners and apparel, imbuing it with positive and/or elite connotations.³⁵ Whether or not western references to these people as "yellow" was a coincidence remains to be seen. Still, the fact that an idea of "yellow people" existed in pre-colonial days suggests that any subsequent use of "yellow" by Vietnamese thinkers during the colonial era could have more than one meaning.³⁶

Sharpe, 2002), 27-37 and Thomas F. Cash and Thomas Pruzinsky, eds., *A Handbook of Theory, Research, and Clinical Practice* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003), 245. On colorism, see Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Shades of Difference: Why Skin Color Matters* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009). Today in Vietnam this practice continues. Women carry umbrellas on sunny days, elbow-length gloves and wide-brimmed hats are donned before driving a motorbike, a majority of skin creams contain whitening agents, and friends tease each other about being too "đen" (black). Babies are also brought into the colorist equation, as exclamations of "trắng thế!" (so white!) are the ultimate compliment for a newborn.

³⁴ Marr, *Vietnamese Anti-Colonialism*, 19.

³⁵ Frank Dikotter, "Racial Identities in China" in *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan*, ed. by Frank Dikotter (London: Hurst, 1997), 410.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-11 and 19-21. Many Vietnamese leaders kept their distance from China as a way of preserving Vietnam's sovereignty and distinctiveness. Others took great pride in close ties to China, viewing good relations as evidence of Vietnam's importance. The scholar-gentry, in particular, encouraged these links and even relied on China's aid in times of trouble. As a result, Vietnamese depictions of the Chinese oscillated between aggressive neighbors and valuable allies.

Events in China also created alarm in Vietnam, resulting in extended segregation policies to separate foreigners from indigenous residents. Pre-colonial Vietnamese interactions with westerners had been limited to missionaries and commercial exchanges on the gun and cannon markets. Europeans, however, became Vietnam's "dominant intellectual and psychological problem" in the mid-19th century.³⁷ The Nguyễn emperors kept a close eye on Europe's activities in Asia and took steps to protect their country. Emperor Minh Mạng (1820-1841) bragged, albeit prematurely, that he had saved Vietnam from China's fate during the Opium Wars by forbidding European residence. His strict policies kept westerners at a distance, as did other laws that forbade interactions with non-Vietnamese peoples and set limits on marriage, areas of residence, contractual duties, and commercial exchanges.³⁸

The Sino-Viet relationship had other implications for Vietnamese identity-making. Chinese elites historically understood the Vietnamese (whom they called the "Yueh") to be a southern minority group.³⁹ During the Han dynasty, China absorbed many ethnic peoples, but the "southern barbarians" preserved their traditions, customs, and language while submitting annual tributes to the Chinese emperor.⁴⁰ When they debated western theories during the late 19th century, educated Chinese borrowed racial ideas as "scientific" fact in order to unify the population and compel political order.⁴¹ Gregory Blue explains that social Darwinism arrived in

³⁷ Anthony Reid. *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia* (Silkworm Books: Chiang Mai, Thailand: 1999), 246-248.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 249. Reid argues that most Southeast Asians viewed western encroachment as part of Heaven's will and thus beyond their control. Emperor Minh Mạng, however, is an exception to this.

³⁹ For a brief discussion of the "Yueh," see Alexander Barton Woodside, *Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Vietnamese and Chinese Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 1988), 299, nt. 26. See also Erica Brindley, "Barbarians or Not? Ethnicity and Changing Conceptions of the Ancient Yue (Viet) Peoples, ca. 400-50 B.C." *Asia Major* 16/1 (2003): 1-32.

⁴⁰ The Chinese conceived of geography in concentric circles emanating from the "Middle Kingdom", as described as late as 1889 by the philosopher, Tan Sitong. In his estimation, China remained the center of the world, but had been joined by Vietnam, Burma, Korea, and Tibet. For more, see Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 50 and *idem.*, "Racial Identities in China," 407.

⁴¹ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, *idem.*, ed., *The Construction of Racial Identities in China and Japan* (London: Hurst, 1997); *idem.*, "Group Definition and the Idea of

the region through the work of Yan Fu, a popular, late 19th century Chinese scholar who translated texts on social Darwinism and scientific racism.⁴² As a result, the Chinese condemned European invaders as uncivilized, hairy apes, questioned assumptions of white supremacy, and began replacing Confucian principles with those rooted in biological differences.⁴³ The Han stood apart from others in the anti-Manchu protests and promulgated concerns about “race suicide.” Liang Qichao, a prominent late Qing scholar, believed that races “developed” in a cyclical manner and that race surpassed the nation-state as a tool of organizing the world. He donned his historian’s cap for a February 1902 article that reveals Chinese views of identity and difference:

What is history? History is nothing but the account of the development and strife of human races. There is no history without race. . . [I]t is no exaggeration to say that the racial problem is the biggest problem in the world . . . The essence of history is to follow the tracks of the rise and fall of every race over thousands of years. The spirit of history is to uncover the reasons for the rise and fall of every race over thousands of years.⁴⁴

China’s racial discourse overtook other explanations of difference and spread throughout the region. They argued that both “yellow” and “white” peoples would rule the other, inferior colors.⁴⁵ China moved beyond circular models, phenotypic definitions, and “historical cultural borrowings” to cultivate connections with the oppressed in “a broad, non-Western, global space.” Karl cites “tongzhong” as an example. The Chinese term meant the same “kind” or “race”, but became so flexible that it “could refer to neighbors like the Koreans or Vietnamese, but at other times also encompassed Indians, Cubans, Hawaiians, and even Poles.”⁴⁶

‘Race’ in Modern China (1793-1949) in *Racism: A Global Reader* edited by Kevin Reilly, Stephen Kaufman and Angela Bodino (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 207.

⁴² Blue, “Gobineau on China,” 130. Yan Fu is also written as Yen Fu (Wade-Giles). On Yan Fu, see also Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 67-71.

⁴³ Dikotter, “Group Definition,” 207.

⁴⁴ Ishikawa Yoshihiro, “Anti-Manchu Racism and the Rise of Anthropology in Early 20th Century China” Tokyo University, Unpublished paper. <http://www.chinajapan.org/articles/15/15ishikawa7-26.pdf> For more on theories like China’s “white peril” notion, See Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 50; 75.

⁴⁵ Dikotter, “Racial Identities in China,” 407. See also Rebecca E. Karl “Creating Asia: China in the World at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century” *The American Historical Review* 103/4 (October 1998), 1097.

⁴⁶ Karl, “Creating Asia,” 1101 and 1104.

These notes on China are critical to understanding the evolution of a 20th century Vietnamese identity, because, at the same time that educated Vietnamese despaired of French control, the Chinese offered promising answers to colonialism. Having endured Manchu rule as well as European encroachment, the Chinese had studied and modified western theories to fit the Han context. China offered interpretations that promised progress through modernization, a premise bolstered by Japan's example. Early century Vietnamese scholars regularly exchanged ideas with their Chinese peers, assuring the transmission of such worldviews. These Vietnamese elites, furthermore, passed through a Sinicized education system that allowed Vietnam's intellectuals access to Chinese (as well as Japanese) writings. They gained exposure to theoretical trends in China, especially variations on concepts like racial identity and social Darwinism.

This is not to suggest that China alone inspired educated Vietnamese to rethink belonging; Japan also provided its interpretations. The Japanese upheld the "miracle of modernization," just as did the Chinese, but expressed their sense of belonging through racial affiliation more explicitly. Tokyo leaders wanted to unify "yellow" people and divided the racial category into subgroups. Under this line of thinking, the Japanese were the most superior form of yellow people because their race was purest.⁴⁷ What is more, early twentieth century Japanese defined "yellow" in opposition to "white" powers. For instance, scholar Ou Jujia used the aforementioned term "tongzhong" to demonstrate "a more literal ethnic-racial sameness" by linking U.S. condescension toward "primitive" Filipinos with a "white" conspiracy against Japan and China.⁴⁸ Such writers emphasized Japan's racial purity to reinforce the image of the country's exceptionalism and to explain its success in modernization. Prince Konoe Atsumaro advocated Sino-Japanese collaboration to ward off the "white" threat. Mori Ogai, a Japanese intellectual and modernization advocate, summed up Japan's position in November 1903: "Like it

⁴⁷ For more on Japan and the concept of purity, see Dower, "Race, Language, and War in Two Cultures: World War II in Asia" in *The War in American Culture: Society and Consciousness during World War II* edited by Lewis A. Erenberg and Susan E. Hirsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 204-205, 231-232 and Andrew Simpson, *Language and National Identity in Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 1109.

or not we are fated to oppose the White [sic] race.” Victory over Russia in 1905 offered additional evidence of eroding white dominance, used to bolster predications of rising yellow power, with Japan at the helm. Japanese theorists also welcomed the empowering aspects of western racial thought, especially the “yellow peril” myth. Many, in fact, believed in the inevitability of a global race war and that “China and Japan would together be regarded as ‘the sworn enemies of the whites.’”⁴⁹

Despite its inclusive-sounding calls for “yellow brotherhood,” Japan often locked horns with China. Both nations agreed that Asians held a high racial position through their re-imagination of western racial hierarchies. Japan’s insistence that its supremacy within “yellow” circles be acknowledged, however, damaged relations with China; heightened tensions and mistrust thus characterized Sino-Japanese affairs. Chinese leaders asserted that Japan’s growth and expansion was uncannily similar to European imperialism. In fact, Beijing officials often lumped the Japanese together with “white” nations in their critiques of imperialism prior to the Maoist era. They argued that modernization had not made the Japanese “white,” but acting in an expansionist manner had.

This was an important distinction, one which employed a moral judgment about how modernization should be employed. In a November 1907 article “On the Recent Trends in Asia,” Chinese scholar Liu Shipei complained that Japan had become part of the “white” imperial problem. He proposed that all Asians should work with China to stave off “white” and Japanese control through cultural and linguistic solidarity (based on Chinese forms).⁵⁰ In turn, Japan touted its successful modernization policies and enjoyed citing China’s lack of similar programs. In measuring other yellow people through the lens of development, Japanese leaders assumed that “less modern” Asian societies required guidance. Their profitable expansion programs and triumphs against westerners, Japanese writers explained, demonstrated that Tokyo was poised to lead Asia.

⁴⁹ Blue, “Gobineau on China,” 130-32.

⁵⁰ Karl, “Creating Asia,” 1115-1116.

Vietnamese anti-colonialists found little appeal in talk of racial supremacy or a burgeoning race war. Some scholars like Phan Bội Châu did identify “being Vietnamese” in specifically racial ways, using terms that conveyed a deep, biological and familial links. In his “Ái Chủng” poem, written by 1911, he called for the people to “mưu sao kéo lại giống vàng” (“take back the yellow race/lineage”). He advanced a definition of “being Vietnamese” as “da vàng máu đỏ con dòng Hùng Vương” (“yellow skin, red blood of Hung Kings’ people).” Urging unity against the French, he identified “Vietnamese-ness” through the thousands of years of their existence as a “race,” as well as in geographic and other familial assertions of belonging.⁵¹

Châu’s use of race, however, was outweighed by his other modernist concerns. Vietnam’s “backwardness” had created its colonial predicament, he believed, and remained a barrier to its freedom. Breaking with previous reformist scholars who had promoted a revival of the past governing system, he asserted that closer relations with Japan would help Vietnam modernize according to an “Asian” model. Like many of his contemporaries, Châu interpreted Japan’s victory against the Russians racially, proving that Asians could challenge European supremacy. As would continue to be the case, development and independence trumped race for the Vietnamese.⁵²

In advocating this line of thought on Vietnam’s potential, he was not alone. Most educated Vietnamese of this period found nothing strange in calling Vietnam “backward.” Many factions, including Vietnamese communists, came to blame the former “feudal” political order for Vietnam’s failure to fulfill its potential. Vietnamese millenarian movements, highly influenced by modernization thought, borrowed selectively from western education systems, economic theories, and government structures, with plans to surpass the West in the future.⁵³ Most Vietnamese anti-

⁵¹ Phan Bội Châu, “Ái Chủng” in Đặng Thai Mai, ed., *Văn Thơ Cách Mạng Việt Nam: Đầu thế kỷ XX, 1900-1925* (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất bản Giải Phóng, 1976), 352-53. Another scholar has determined that Châu’s racial beliefs were reflected in the flag of his Vietnam Restoration League. The historian states that the yellow section of the group’s flag represented the Vietnamese symbolically as a reference to their skin color. See Vĩnh Sinh, *Việt Nam và Nhật Bản: Giao Lưu Văn Hóa* (TP HCM: NXB Văn Nghệ, 2001), 296-298.

⁵² William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (Sydney: Allen and Urwin, 2002), 26. See also Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History* (London: International Thomson Publishing, 1968), 121.

colonial leaders concluded that a modernizing program would be necessary for postcolonial recovery and sustained autonomy. These thinkers presumed that “progress” would be a necessary element of any viable independence bid. Modernization ideology bloomed, with Vietnamese from multiple political and ideological backgrounds agreeing that the best solution lay in the pursuit of development.

To modernize efficiently and effectively, early twentieth century Vietnamese theorists looked abroad. As mentioned earlier, Châu recommended that his students study in Japan to understand successful modernization methods as well as to develop their sense of self-worth and fight the “slave mentality.”⁵⁴ He created the Việt Nam Duy Tân Hội (Vietnam Modernization Association) in 1904 and traveled to Tokyo late that year “to train young Vietnamese patriots for the coming struggle for national independence.”⁵⁵ Believing that history had taught the Vietnamese to accept foreign rule obediently rather than struggle for freedom, Châu blamed the feudal system and hoped the Japanese example would inspire similarly-patterned modernization in Vietnam.⁵⁶

This is not to suggest that Châu’s admiration for “Asian” models was unbounded. He complained in 1905 to former Japanese Prime Minister Okuma Shigenobu that Japan had failed in its duty. He reasoned that “Vietnam is common to Japan in race, culture, and continental positioning, yet the French gangsters are left to spread their bestial venom without fear.” Châu then went on to question why the most powerful people in Asia (the Japanese) had allowed

⁵³ Reid, *Charting the Shape of Early Modern Southeast Asia*, 260. Reid’s analysis oversimplifies the situation in Vietnam, but can be useful for demonstrating the main points of divergence among anti-colonialists. For more on the complex political differences in Vietnam during this period, see Hue-Tam Ho Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

⁵⁴ He also pursued these goals beginning with his Phong trào Đông Du (Eastward Movement), which lasted from 1905-1909.

⁵⁵ Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 26.

⁵⁶ Châu and others were expelled from Japan as part of a cooperation agreement with France, which provided Tokyo access to French Indochina’s coal, rubber, tin, and zinc with small to no tariffs. See Kiyoko Kurusu Nitz, “Independence without Nationalists? The Japanese and Vietnamese Nationalism during the Japanese Period, 1940-45” *The Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15/1 (March 1984), 109-111.

colonialism to enter their own backyard. Châu dismissed the China example, equating the Chinese and French in *The New Vietnam* (1907). He argued that both countries intended to exploit the Vietnamese economically. He also lamented how the Vietnamese “feed foreigners the resources that Heaven and Earth have given us.”⁵⁷ In fact, the Vietnamese population had long drawn clear lines between themselves and outsiders, which may have affected the success of Châu’s foreign-model aspirations.⁵⁸ .

For the “complete modernization” of Vietnam, then, Châu focused on the Japan model.

Many of his plans, in fact, reflected racial ideas that contemporary Japanese promoted:

The life of thousands of Vietnamese people is not worth that of a French dog; the moral prestige of hundreds of our officials does not prevail over that of a French woman. Look at those men with blue eyes and yellow beard. They are not our fathers, nor are they our brothers. How can they squat here, defecating on our heads? Are the men from Vietnam not ashamed of that situation? As long as our bodies remain able, we should try to flatten the crest of the open ocean; we should be determined to kill the enemy in order to raise the energy of the yellow race of ours.⁵⁹

With deep conviction, Châu argued that the Vietnamese should copy Japan’s successes in development to gain independence. Should Vietnam successfully modernize, he argued, “our own people will know more than the people of Europe and America, so that we won’t have to invite any foreigner anymore.” Chau, quite literally, was putting the United States on notice.⁶⁰

So, too, did Châu’s contemporary and famed scholar, Phan Chu Trinh, although from a completely different perspective.⁶¹ Trinh rejected Châu’s outward-looking approach. Despite being impressed by Japan’s modernization, Trinh argued that reliance “on foreign help is foolish” (*vọng ngoại tắc ngu*) and advocated a wholly Vietnamese modernization. He lamented Vietnam’s

⁵⁷ Phan Bội Châu, *The New Vietnam*, 116.

⁵⁸ In the case of Chinese merchants, for example, they traded along Vietnam’s coast, settled in the country, and even controversially married Vietnamese women and produced families. The Chinese provided highly desirable goods and yet threatened to weaken Vietnam’s economy and bloodline. A potential boycott of Chinese goods in 1919, for instance, claimed that Vietnamese girls who married wealthy Chinese merchants were nothing less than traitors to Vietnam. See Micheline Lessard, “Organisons-nous! Racial Antagonism and Vietnamese Economic Nationalism in the Early Twentieth Century” *French Colonial History* 8 (2007):184–188.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 113, and 107.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 107.

lack of development, reasoning that it needed to modernize in order to make a case for independence. Disagreeing with Châu's emphasis on outsider assistance, Trinh wanted French officials to fulfill their duties as colonizers and assist in Vietnam's modernization. Upon his return from a visit to Châu in Japan, Trinh established the famous Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục in Hanoi (Free School of the Eastern Capital or Tonkin Free School). The co-ed institution stressed modernization, offering courses in western theories and technology, and also sponsored public debates on modernization theories, rejecting Confucian educational elitism.⁶²

Sino-Japanese rivalry thus became critical to the worldview of Vietnamese anti-colonialists. Japanese and Chinese power and proximity allowed ideas about modernization, anti-imperialism, and racial hierarchies to be transmitted to Vietnam. Still, the context in Vietnam differed greatly, as China and Japan never suffered from a formal European takeover. In particular, France's "deep settler colonialism" challenged the Vietnamese to reconfigure their identity and a series of reformers and anti-colonialists emerged to share ideas among themselves and with others. In the search for answers as to why their land had been colonized, how to regain autonomy, and what form postcolonial Vietnam should take, most Vietnamese intellectuals absorbed modernization's tenets.

By the First World War, educated Vietnamese had been exposed to western works sent by the Meiji Japanese and China's self-strengthening reformers. These translations used the Asian context to explain (and alter) western theories such as those of Herbert Spencer. One Chinese textbook "described five races of humans in competing for supremacy, with yellow and white peoples as rivals for the top position."⁶³ Phạm Quỳnh, the francophile editor of *Nam Phong* (*Southern Wind*) warned that if "assimilation were to make us into artificial Frenchmen, to de-assimilate us from our race, from our culture, then assimilation would be dangerous; it would be treacherous."⁶⁴ His estimation that the loss of race and culture could create an "artificial"

⁶² Later, Trinh would go to Paris and work closely with Ho Chi Minh and others as part of "The Group of Vietnamese Patriots." See Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 57-59.

⁶³ Frank Dikotter, *The Age of Openness: China Before Mao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 66.

European is significant, in that it demonstrates that he believed “being Vietnamese” to be biological. Quỳnh and Nguyễn An Ninh also contemplated the thinning blood line in Vietnam, echoing Trinh’s concerns about race suicide.⁶⁵ They suggested a “yellow versus white” or even “non-white versus white” resistance, an idea that ultimately garnered minor support. The ideal of racial unity also briefly captivated Nguyễn Thế Truyền, who argued in June 1927 that that in a colonial situation such as Vietnam’s, racial unity must take priority over class considerations.⁶⁶ Thus, Quỳnh, Ninh, and Truyền interpreted colonialism as a risk to the Vietnamese race and as a potential force to battle European colonialism.

Such examples suggest that Vietnam’s educated elite toyed with broadly-defined racial anti-colonialism around the time of the Great War. Yet the amalgamation of theoretical influences did little to alter Vietnamese conclusions that the lack of Vietnam’s modernization was not one vulnerability, but *the* critical weakness. Racially speaking, Vietnamese thinkers believed they had no cause for alarm; white superiority was a temporary condition bolstered by successful modernization. As a result, Vietnam’s anti-colonial leaders believed that locally-initiated progress and development could rectify their colonial situation.⁶⁷ Their French rulers, however, would disagree.

French Frameworks

France brought its worldview to bear in Vietnam, inspiring anti-colonialism, a re-examination of Vietnamese identity, and also introducing new brands of modernity and nationhood. Upon the advent of colonial control, France remade the “Vietnamese” into

⁶⁴ Trương Bửu Lâm, ed., *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 78.

⁶⁵ For more on Nguyễn An Ninh, see Christopher Goscha, “Vietnam or Indochina: Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954” (Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, 1995), 30 and 37-38. In 1925, Ninh promoted the possibility of a multi-national “yellow” unity based on Chinese assistance in 1925. See Nguyễn An Ninh, “France in Indochina” translated and excerpted in Trương Bửu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced*, 201-202.

⁶⁶ Hue Tam Ho-Tai, *Radicalism and the Origins of the Vietnamese Revolution*, 234 and 78-79.

⁶⁷ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 12-14.

“Indochinese” and lumped them together with a variety of indigenous peoples. While popular in administrative and bureaucratic circles, the category of “*Indochinoise*” did not have a lasting impact on the population’s patterns of identification. For Paris, however, scientific racism and social Darwinism influenced early images of the so-called Indochinese, leading to conflated representations of Vietnam as a small “mongrelized” copy of China. French trademark designers, for instance, used reductive representations that employed Chinese and Japanese symbols to depict the “Annamites.”⁶⁸ Within Vietnam, French colons cultivated a set of static Vietnamese “types” based on gender, age, position, and level of francophone acculturation: the “mandarin,” the “nha-que,” the “congai” and the “boy.”⁶⁹ For French residents, early fictional tales of the exotic and mysterious land led to critiques of Vietnam as a “land of pathogenic danger,” whose climate and diseases were special problems.⁷⁰ Vietnamese traditions like teeth-blackening repulsed the colonizers, as did other allegedly unsanitary or uncivilized habits.⁷¹ French anthropologists used blood-typing to explain differences between westerners and Vietnamese, employing biology-based evaluations to rationalize colonization.⁷² Colonizers also harped on “the essential cultural incorrigibility” of Indochina’s “yellow” population to reaffirm the need for French rule.⁷³ Colonial ethnographers conceptualized Vietnam as a “fragmented” society, and the

⁶⁸ For French trademarks, see Dana S. Hale “French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic” in Sue Peabody and Tyler Edward Stovall, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, 141-45. For the best and most detailed quantitative and literary evidence of French abuses, see Ngo Vinh Long, *Before the Revolution: The Vietnamese Peasants under the French* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and Gisele Luce Bousquet and Pierre Brocheux, “Henriette Bui: The Narrative of Vietnam’s First Woman Doctor” in *Viet-Nam Expose: French Scholarship on Twentieth-Century Vietnamese Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 290-297.

⁶⁹ Michael G. Vann. “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Variation and Difference in French Racism in Colonial Indochine” in Sue Peabody and Tyler Edward Stovall, eds. *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 187.

⁷⁰ Michael G. Vann, “Of Le Cafard and Other Tropical Threats: Disease and White Colonial Culture in Indochina” in *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations* edited by Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 96.

⁷¹ Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 74.

⁷² Christina E. Firpo. “Lost Boys: ‘Abandoned’ Eurasian Children and the Management of the Racial Topography in Colonial Indochina, 1938-1945” *French Colonial Studies* 8 (2007): 209.

French-controlled government altered indigenous forms of identity through manipulation of ethnic diversity.⁷⁴ Their missionaries, traders, administrators, settlers, and scholars contributed “distinctive understandings of race, culture, and polity [that] profoundly affected the thought and action of Asians as well as Europeans.”⁷⁵

French leaders tried to maintain the racial line in Vietnam. Miscegenation became such a serious concern that a systematic effort to preserve white racial purity resulted in the importation of French women through the Societe Francaise d'Emigration des Femmes (SFEF).⁷⁶ Colonizers also removed “white” Eurasian babies from Vietnamese mothers to raise them in the superior French culture, a move that both affirmed francophone primacy and bolstered the colon population.⁷⁷ When the colonial government promoted integrated youth movements “to join together Indochinese and European youth . . . [through] organizations and rhetoric that rejected the racial divisions found in the French nation,” the colonizers were not instituting a new, multicultural policy. Instead, such tactics reaffirmed Vietnamese inferiority and “otherness” by underscoring France’s *mission civilisatrice*. The French believed that their colonial subjects should “see themselves as having less value than their superiors and to believe that their indigenous cultures were doomed to extinction.”⁷⁸

⁷³ Peter Zinnoman, *The Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940*, 34-35.

⁷⁴ For more on ethnic diversity in Vietnam, see Oscar Salemink, *The Ethnography of Vietnam's Central Highlanders: A Historical Contextualization, 1850-1990* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003) and, most especially, the second chapter entitled “The Land of the Việ̣t and Việ̣t Nam” in Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 69-112.

⁷⁵ Susan Bayly. “French Anthropology and the Durkheimians in Colonial Indochina” *Modern Asian Studies* 34/3 (July 2000), 581-622, 581.

⁷⁶ Marie-Paule Ha, “French Women and the Empire” in *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations* edited by Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (New York: Lexington Books, 2005), 110.

⁷⁷ Firpo, “Lost Boys,” 373. On a side note, the author estimates that about 59,000 French lived in Indochina in 1940. Firpo has also shown that mixed children had to be considered “white enough” to be taken from their Vietnamese mothers, while darker children were left behind. See Firpo, “Crises of Whiteness in Colonial Indochina: The Removal of Abandoned Eurasian Children from the Vietnamese Milieu, 1890-1956” *Journal of Social History* (Spring 2010), 599.

⁷⁸ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 74.

Colonialism introduced the Vietnamese population to French policies, both de jure and de facto. Urban dwellers and the educated typically experienced the most regular contact with their colonizers, whereas rural peoples experienced colonialism less directly through taxes, labor conscription, and interactions with Vietnamese collaborators. As a whole, many Vietnamese encountered France through daily observable cues, such as foreigners in positions of power, an influx of French art and architecture, and sensory confrère with alien cultural practices in fashion, religion, and even dining. French cuisine signified colonialism, for instance, as new smells of pastries, cheeses, and coffees altered Vietnam's olfactory landscape.

The French education system, established in 1911, also normalized contact with all things French. Vietnamese students learned to marvel at France's contributions to Indochina through courses in geography, literature, language, and history.⁷⁹ French instructors taught Vietnamese pupils to be good colonial subjects by highlighting "the virtues of manual labor, the backwardness of their race and culture, and the benefits of French rule." As a rule, educational institutions "stressed the inability of Vietnamese to perform even the most menial task without French guidance." In history class, for instance, students learned that "Vietnamese leaders, when left to themselves, were ignorant, superstitious, self-seeking, and unconcerned with the welfare of others." Beyond the primary school level, "French teachers often intensified aspects of the curriculum" that positioned the Vietnamese as a lesser people whose protests proved they could be easily manipulated by outside forces.⁸⁰

At the same time, Paris promoted modernization through acculturation in Indochina. They claimed that Vietnamese inferiority could be improved (not cured) by a superior and "modern" French upbringing. While racial definitions of "Annamites" may have disparaged them

⁷⁹ Goscha, "Vietnam or Indochina," 18-19.

⁸⁰ Gail P. Kelly, "Conflict in the Classroom: A Case Study from Vietnam, 1918-38" *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 8/2 (1987), 196. For more on the role of Vietnamese teachers and students, see Micheline R. Lessard, "'We Know . . . the Duties We Must Fulfill: Modern 'Mothers and Fathers' of the Vietnamese Nation" *French Colonial History* 3 (2003), 119-142. On the French colonial education system, see also Gail P. Kelly, "The Presentation of Indigenous Society in the Schools of French West Africa and Indochina, 1918 to 1938" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26/3 (July 1984), 523-542 and idem., "Schooling and National Integration: The Case of Interwar Vietnam" *Comparative Education* 18/2 (1982), 175-195.

vis-à-vis Europeans, concurrently the French posited Vietnamese as the highest-ranking group of Indochina. This hierarchy may have taken root easily within Vietnamese circles, as such concepts corresponded to pre-existing prejudices toward Lao, Cambodian, and minority peoples in the region.

Doubtless, the French policies and attitudes described influenced Vietnamese ideas about their identity and place in the world.⁸¹ For instance, indigenous evaluations of physical and cultural traits transformed during the colonial era, as Vietnamese notions of fashion and beauty integrated western ideals with traditionally desirable traits. For instance, white skin still ranked highly, but “high” noses and light or curly hair became prized attributes. If a Vietnamese was described as “French-looking,” it was a compliment. At the same time, Vietnamese inhabitants developed less flattering stereotypes of French residents, issuing denigrating commentaries on their excessive body hair and larger size.

The small percentage of Vietnamese who embraced French cultural values faced a difficult road. Collaborators had reasons for assisting the French: financial gain, prestige, pragmatism, and/or a sincere desire to acculturate. As with Fanon’s *petit bourgeois*, Vietnamese francophiles enjoyed power and privilege by accepting France’s version of the world. Many believed they were, in fact, helping Vietnam, by advocating modernization through French tutelage. Those Vietnamese who imitated their colonizers immoderately were mocked by their countrymen as “muddy French.”⁸² Inter-marriage was treated similarly; Vietnamese communities often ostracized these “traitors.”⁸³ Public disapproval of francophone Vietnamese paralleled older patterns of criticism leveled at Vietnamese-Chinese marriages.

Most significantly, collaborators did not become foreigners in the eyes of Vietnamese society. By the Second World War, French colonialists and francophile Vietnamese alike claimed

⁸¹ For more on the relationship between French policies and Vietnamese identity, see Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004).

⁸² Trương Bửu Lâm, *Colonialism Experienced*, 52-53.

⁸³ See Christopher E. Goscha, “The ‘Modern Barbarian:’ Nguyen Van Vinh and the Complexity of Colonial Modernity in Vietnam” *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 3/1 (2004): 135-169.

that the peoples of Indochina had begun to “fuse” into one group.⁸⁴ Pro-French Vietnamese garnered condemnation and derision in their home villages for losing touch with their culture, traditions, and language, but the general population still spoke of these people as Vietnamese, albeit with a few uncomplimentary adjectives. As a result, Vietnamese society did not define “belonging” as a choice, but rather an identity that went much deeper than language or culture.

France created its most dangerous Vietnamese critics through education in western political ideals and revolutionary traditions. During the First World War, Vietnamese critiques of westerners rejected assumptions of indigenous inferiority. The global conflict confirmed rumors that the West was inherently unstable and uprooted lingering belief in Europe’s invincibility. By the interwar period, regular dissent erupted against French rule, with demands for accelerated modernization. Students led protests against French teachers for referencing them as a “heap of pigs” or even “cattle” and calling them “members of a dirty race ... [and] savages.” The youth protested discriminatory practices like being moved to the back of the class to make room for French children. Fueled by the ten percent that the French deigned to educate beyond primary school, Vietnam’s “talented tenth” called for a revised form of liberation based on belief in modernization.⁸⁵

Educated Vietnamese also sought to reverse the inferiority complex brought on by colonialism. In the colonial setting, the psychological basis of the colonizers’ strength can be appropriated and altered by the colonized, especially the educated elite, to strengthen unity, provide strategies and tactics of political disaffiliation, and expand their ability to revolt. Fanon calls this “cultural nationalism,” a turn taken by Vietnamese elites. They pursued the development of “a new self-confidence based both on an understanding of the past achievements of their countries and the weaknesses in their past economic, cultural and political behavior.” Many continued to cite France as an obstacle, but to a new and modern future rather than dynastic reform. Divorcing themselves from earlier theorists, communist leaders and many other

⁸⁴ Goscha, “Vietnam or Indochina”, 50.

⁸⁵ Kelly, “Conflict in the Classroom,” 196. She calculates that less than ten percent of the Vietnamese, primarily children of well-positioned families, were educated by the French by 1938. I take the “talented tenth” idea from W.E.B. DuBois. See W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1903, 1994), 65.

political groups critiqued the past order as “backward” and blamed feudalism for the French invasion. Such theorists blamed past emperors’ policies for Vietnam’s stymied development and vulnerability to foreign invasion.⁸⁶ These thinkers admitted that France had made contributions in areas like infrastructure, but they also argued that the same colonizers had intentionally blocked Vietnam’s modernization. A number of Vietnamese radicals proposed remaking society, believing their colonial condition and traditional culture had been mutually reinforcing factors. Revolutionary groups like the Viet Minh moved beyond racial theories to envision the future and the use of social Darwinism dissipated, although its impact echoed through the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁷

Japan and “Brotherhood”

World War II created a complex set of realities in Vietnam that seemed promising in the conflict’s early stages. Within decades, Europeans had twice proven themselves unstable by waging regional civil wars (World Wars I and II).⁸⁸ Multiple Japanese victories against the U.S. and Britain “decisively shattered both the aura of Western invincibility and the myth of racial superiority upon which it rested.”⁸⁹ African Americans and anti-colonial groups gained inspiration at the thought of allying against whites, and even initially encouraged Japan’s expansionist goals.⁹⁰ Vietnamese elites like Vũ Văn An, who resided in Japan during this period, equated victories over the Allied powers as signifying the “liberation of our Indochinese race.”⁹¹ Many

⁸⁶ Ibid., 85-86 and 81.

⁸⁷ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 25.

⁸⁸ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 87.

⁸⁹ Robert J. McMahon, *The Limits of Empire: The United States and Southeast Asia since World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 19.

⁹⁰ For more on African American links to China and Japan, see Marc Gallicchio, *The African American Encounter with Japan and China: Black Internationalism, 1895-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Vietnamese political groups employed a cultural nationalist outlook and initially viewed Japanese involvement in Indochina with hope.⁹²

No country dismissed the myth of white supremacy more readily than Japan. Japanese assumptions of racial ascendancy grew in tandem with their program of expansion, but their reliance on race quickly became a complicated endeavor. As the superior subgroup of the yellow race, the Japanese claimed a duty to protect their “yellow brothers” against the white, western threat, as well as to assist them with modernization. In Vietnam, the Japanese contrasted themselves with the French and criticized France’s use of “racial and xenophobic” propaganda in Indochina, while advocating an Oriental unity against the Europeans.⁹³ Japan’s propaganda scorned Western rule and encouraged Vietnam, as well as Burma, the Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and others to become part of an Asian challenge to Europe.⁹⁴ Firpo estimates that more than 35,000 Japanese arrived in Vietnam by the end of 1941, primarily military police and soldiers. They implemented programs to propagandize Japan’s modernization, which aimed at “demystifying the white man’s superiority.”⁹⁵ In addition, they introduced films, magazines, books, and Japanese language classes for the edification of the Vietnamese.⁹⁶

Still, Tokyo chiefs negotiated their racialization of the war carefully. Lieutenant Colonel Cho Kato of the Military Affairs Section of the Ministry of War, in a April 11, 1942, speech, asked

⁹¹ David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 110. See also Mỹ-Vân Trần, *A Vietnamese Royal Exile in Japan: Prince Cường Để, 1882-1951* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), 170 and 194.

⁹² Francois Guillemot, “Vietnamese Nationalist Revolutionaries and the Japanese Occupation: The Case of the Dai Viet Parties, 1936-1946” in Li Narangoa and R. B. Cribb, eds., *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1945* (New York: Routledge Press, 2003), 221-229. Guillemot identifies three pro-Japanese parties: Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng, Đại Việt Quốc Xã, and Đại Việt Dân Chính.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 367, 371, and 382.

⁹⁴ For more on French policies in this period, see Anne Raffin, “The Integration of Difference in French Indochina during World War II: Organizations and Ideology Concerning Youth” *Theory and Society* 31/3 (June 2002), 365-390. For a contemporary American view of Japanese racial policies in Asia, see Saul K. Padover, “Japanese Race Propaganda” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 7/2 (Summer 1943), 191-204.

⁹⁵ Firpo, “Lost Boys,” 382.

⁹⁶ For more on Japan’s policies in Vietnam, see Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 81-92.

for “friendly” interactions with white Axis countries, noting that “Since the present war is not a racial war between the white and colored races, it is essential that we refrain from denouncing nationals of the Axis countries en masse as whites.” Others worried that Vietnamese “national liberation could easily degenerate into racial war.”⁹⁷ The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs decided to call their Indochina policy a liberation rather than an area they had conquered. They implemented calls for “racial brotherhood” and promised an “Asia for the Asians” in Vietnam. At the same time, Tokyo also worried that Vietnam posed a racial danger to the Japanese, especially in terms of miscegenation. Sleeping with the enemy, they believed, would adversely affect Japan’s racial purity. Military officers admonished soldiers to avoid “interactions” that could have a negative impact on Japan’s “race.” Although Japanese propagandists called for yellow unity, Tokyo strategists conceded that such close relations were not intended to bring about equal and complete integration. In other words, their nation could be a model, Japan’s leaders agreed, but any “assimilation was perceived to be an asymmetrical process.”⁹⁸

The idea of racial brotherhood proved counterproductive in Vietnam, where Japan treated its conquests as “Asia for the Japanese.” They promised freedom for the Vietnamese, but replicated colonialism’s abuses, resulting in a disaffected population. Japanese atrocities and extortionist policies made even those Vietnamese who had initially been supportive of Japan turn against their “liberators.” Vietnamese awe at Japanese soldiers’ military prowess and discipline turned to resentment when they exploited the country’s assets and supplies with no thought as to the consequences. Tokyo requisitioned nearly all of Vietnam’s resources in the winter of 1944-45, for example, causing widespread distress and leading to terrible famine and millions of deaths from starvation. A small fraction of Vietnamese, notably Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo followers, continued to assist Japan, driven in part by their belief that the Japanese represented Vietnam’s

⁹⁷ Masaya Shiraishi and Motoo Furuta “Two Features of Japan’s Indochina Policy during the Pacific War” in *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s: Translation of Contemporary Japanese* edited by Saya S. Shiraishi and Motoo Furuta (Ithaca: SEAP Publications, 1992), 80 and 60. The comments on race war come from a Major General Sanada, head of Japan’s Ūa Ministry Military Affairs Bureau and coordinator of the Supreme War Plans Council.

⁹⁸ Michael Weiner, *Race and Migration in Imperial Japan* (New York: Routledge Press, 1994), 30-31.

best hope.⁹⁹ These exceptions stood in contrast to the majority of Vietnamese, who had developed anti-Japanese sentiments.

Japanese decisions after the war further highlighted the fickle nature of racial ties. Japanese officials may have urged Vietnam to become Asia's new leader against "white imperialism" upon Tokyo's surrender.¹⁰⁰ A sizeable number of soldiers also stayed on in Vietnam, welcomed by Viet Minh leaders as experienced fighters and knowledgeable advisors. Approximately 5000 Japanese remained to work with the new D.R.V. government. Other Japanese in Vietnam chose to collaborate with the French, while some cooperated with Chinese and British troops arriving to oversee the transfer of power. Still, not all Japanese deserters joined one side or the other; many who remained avoided politics altogether.¹⁰¹

Postwar Vietnamese lamented their "house with three masters," as the French, the Japanese, and even former imperial leaders had failed the population. Each had proclaimed their benevolent intentions, but had ultimately exploited Vietnam. In the case of Japan, Tokyo's inconsistencies highlighted the fickle nature of the racial ties propounded by Japanese propaganda. By the time of the August Revolution, Vietnamese of all political persuasions had little faith in pan-Asian ties or racial brotherhood. Vietnamese communists, meanwhile, had already shelved ideals of racial unity in favor of a wholly different path to independence.

⁹⁹ Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 90-92 and 83-86. For more on the Cao Đài, see Serguei A. Blagov, *Caodaism: Vietnamese Traditionalism and Its Leap into Modernity* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2001). On the Hòa Hảo, see Long Thành Nam Nguyễn and Serguei A. Blagov, *Hoa Hao Buddhism in the Course of Vietnam's History* (Huntington, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2003).

¹⁰⁰ Archimedes L. A. Patti, *Why Vietnam? Prelude to America's Albatross* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 203-204.

¹⁰¹ Christopher E. Goscha, "Belated Asian Allies: The Technical and Military Contributions of Japanese Deserters, 1945-1950" in *A Companion to the Vietnam War* edited by Marilyn Blatt Young and Robert Buzzanco, 46-48.

Race and the Viet Minh

Ho Chi Minh had been attracted to the West's espousal of liberal ideals, but he became disenchanted by western realities. Despite America's supposed freedoms, for instance, Ho knew that racial inequality in the U.S. was rampant. After all, Ho had lived in Boston and New York. He may also have resided in Harlem for a time, been witness to a Marcus Garvey talk, and even toured the segregated South. Later, once established in Paris, he wrote articles examining the U.S. through the practice of lynching and also the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) organization. According to Ho, capitalism and the discovery of the New World had led to a rebirth of slavery in the Americas. He provided a highly-detailed account of a lynching, walking readers through one such murder, step by agonizing step.¹⁰² Citing the high numbers of suspicious deaths of African Americans between 1916 and 1918, he presented damning statistics and details to depict a U.S. under siege by its double standards.

Rather than interpret these issues as mere racism, Ho determined that economic jealousies underlay hostilities within the U.S. America was divided, he argued, not just on the basis of skin color, but also, and more importantly, because of class disparities. Ho rejected racial explanations of tensions in the U.S. as subordinate if not incidental to the real problem. He detailed the realities of being non-white in the United States, expressed outrage at America's racial hypocrisy, and went on to point out that poor white Americans also suffered. Noting, for instance, that white Americans who defended blacks also received ill-treatment, he reasoned that internal U.S. tensions lay beyond the color line. According to Ho, economic rivalries caused these rifts and capitalism, not racism, undermined America's promises of equality.¹⁰³

¹⁰² It is doubtful that Ho witnessed a lynching in person, but he wrote as though he was an eyewitness. In his article, he describes an array of emotions and provides other sensory information, as well as specific details such as how the crowd grabbed the victims' teeth as souvenirs.

¹⁰³ Ho Chi Minh, "Lynching: A Little Known Aspect of American Civilization" and "The KKK" in Bernard B. Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh: On Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-1966* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984). The lynching article has been cited as first appearing in a 1924 edition of *La Paria*, a newspaper founded by Ho in Paris, as well as in edition 59 of *La Correspondence Internationale* in the same year. See Charles Fenn, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Scribner's

Ho's analysis of racial issues in the United States coincided with his expanded sensitivity to bias within Europe's revolutionary circles. At the French Socialist Party meeting in Tours in December 1920, he challenged popular assumptions about Vietnam. Conceding that Indochina was "backward," Ho claimed that this condition had nothing to do with any innate inferiority of the indigenous peoples. Rather, he explained, French colonialism had blocked Indochinese modernization.¹⁰⁴ He told the Tours audience that the Paris-backed colonizers had "discriminated against" the Vietnamese, which limited their ability to develop. He then offered evidence of French racism, highlighting dangerous conditions and common violations of basic freedoms.

Two years later, Ho expanded this argument in the May 25 issue of *L'Humanite*. He complained that racism shaped some comrades' thinking, warning that this would endanger communist and socialist movements. According to Ho, class unity was a more viable force than racial concord. He denounced France's "artificial racial hierarchy" as having divisive tendencies among "forces which ought to unite." Complaining that "French workers look upon the native as an inferior and negligible human being, incapable of understanding and still less of taking action," he explained that this was the colonialist perspective. Arguing that oppressed peoples from the metropole and the colonies needed to band together, Ho also predicted that race would have no place in the coming revolution.¹⁰⁵ Racial beliefs, a disturbing colonial relic, had misled his white contemporaries, Ho reasoned, which prevented them from appreciating members from colonized countries.

In rejecting racial inequality to emphasize class tensions, Ho accepted analyses based on modernization and development. Modernization precepts went hand in hand with Marxist goals, as defined by the Viet Minh. When he founded the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (a precursor to the I.C.P.) in the spring of 1925, Ho Chi Minh wrote a training manual called *The Road to Revolution* (1927). Within its pages, Ho fused Marxist-Leninist thought with

Publishing, 1973), 26 and Jean Lacouture, *Ho Chi Minh* (New York: Random House, 1968), 17-18.

¹⁰⁴ Ho Chi Minh, "Speech at the Tours Congress: December 1920" in *Ho Chi Minh: Selected Writings, 1920-1969*, (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1994), 15-17.

¹⁰⁵ Ho Chi Minh, "Some Consideration on the Colonial Question" in Bernard B. Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution and War: Selected Writings, 1920-1966* (New American Library, 1967), 27.

Vietnamese terms and Confucian ideas to analyze his country's future.¹⁰⁶ He argued that the Vietnamese situation was more urgent than America's had been because "the French want money but they also want to do away with our race." American ideals of freedom and equality were only theoretical and had yet to be realized, he observed, which would lead to a second revolution, led by poor Americans who had not received the rights promised to them.¹⁰⁷ *The Road to Revolution's* subtext – that both countries were journeying to a similar endpoint – demonstrated that he did not consider the U.S to be exceptional, but just one of many states traversing linear and predictable continuums of development.

The new D.R.V. state did not overtly racialize its problems, in the sense that racial language and frameworks were not employed. Rather, these officials demonstrated latent Orientalist tendencies. Experiences during the French and Japanese periods accented the ideals of progress and development, which intertwined with earlier ideas from the Vietnamese intelligentsia to explain the country's loss of freedom. Across the political spectrum in the early twentieth century, leading Vietnamese thinkers concluded that their country's "backwardness" had been the culprit in Vietnam's downfall. They believed this racialized assessment of their country and also thought that maxims like "progress" and "modernization" were the panacea. Both ideals became near obsessions for Viet Minh leaders. As a consequence, the D.R.V. forged a path to independence and post-colonialism almost entirely dependent on rapid economic, political and socio-cultural development as defined by a code that ranked the world's countries in a racialized manner. By accepting these concepts, the Viet Minh government embarked on an enormous push to address perceived Vietnamese failings through modernization, which would bring about sustainable independence.

After World War II, Viet Minh chiefs continued to view racism as a tool in the imperialist arsenal, especially in his evaluations of the U.S. Just as in his early writings, Ho tied race to class, arguing that American racial bias had its roots in people's anger at economic exploitation.

¹⁰⁶ See "Introduction" in Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism* for further elaboration of this idea.

¹⁰⁷ Bradley, *Imagining America and Vietnam*, 34-36.

In one editorial, Ho translated a letter signed by 54 African American soldiers in Korea that had been published in the *Pittsburg News*.¹⁰⁸ In their petition, the black troops questioned the war and their own role in it. Claiming that many African American soldiers and their families felt similarly, Ho then offered a lengthy excerpt from the soldiers' statement: "The black soldiers here are still treated badly. Our mothers and children are suffering the separation. We do not have freedom, so for whom are we sacrificing?" The president cited the soldiers' complaints that African Americans had no freedom in the U.S. and yet "our government is bringing freedom to other nations. This is unreasonable." Ho then explained the meaning of this letter, stating that "U.S. imperialists often talk about their policies of freedom and democracy, however, the chattel slavery system remains among American blacks." He warned that this economic exploitation had benefited Washington and predicted that the U.S. would extend such "slavery" throughout the world. The president posited: "Six years ago, the German fascists had the same ambitions as the U.S., but they failed. So too will the U.S. be defeated."¹⁰⁹ Linking capitalist exploitation with American racism, Ho wanted readers to understand that Washington aimed to take advantage of other countries in order to benefit economically, using any means necessary.

In other editorials, the D.R.V. president accused Washington of systemic racism and maintained that this was prime evidence of America's lack of "civilization." In "Degraded Culture," he cited "cruel criminal actions such as sentencing seven innocent blacks in Martinsville and six in Trenton." He asserted that Americans also tried to spread racist culture abroad, but that "the seeds of a future American culture, a fresh one, are being nurtured by the workers, the black people, and their friends."¹¹⁰ In the "The U.S. is a Bad Country," Ho related the story of a black Catholic priest named Man who often protected other African Americans. According to Ho, two white men drenched the priest in gasoline, set him on fire, and yet "the American courts did not

¹⁰⁸ *Pittsburgh News* was one of the largest African American newspapers in the U.S. at that time.

¹⁰⁹ D.X., "Black Skin, Warm Hearts" ("Da đen nhưng lòng đỏ") in *Mỹ quốc là nước xấu [The U.S. Is a Bad Country]* (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, January 1952), 35-36. The edition upon which I rely was reprinted on March 9, 1955, but the articles are from 1949 to 1952 and come from both *Nhân dân* and *Cứu quốc*. Researchers have demonstrated that Ho used the pseudonyms D.X. and C.B., among many others.

¹¹⁰ C.B., "American Society and Culture: Degraded Culture" ("Xã hội và văn hóa Mỹ: Văn hóa suy đồi") in *The US is a Bad Country*, 25-26.

pay attention to the two murderers.” Returning to a subject he had first engaged in the 1920s, Ho detailed the inner workings of the KKK, remarking that the organization exemplified the “true nature” of American civilization. Writing as DX, he detailed Klan activities, such as murdering blacks and communists by hiring assassination teams. He deplored their terrorist activities and compared their beliefs to those of Adolf Hitler.¹¹¹

Ho also presented another unflattering portrait of racism that centered on discrimination in Washington, D.C. Ho accused the capital city of serving as a racist example for American citizens. He maintained that “U.S.-style democracy” was code for barring African Americans from “white restaurants, motels, theaters and schools.” U.S. congressional delegates on a tour of Washington, according to Ho, encountered direct evidence of segregation and exclaimed: “Shame on our country!” In the capital no one hid racist beliefs, Ho observed, and even foreign dignitaries were subject to discrimination. In one case, theater attendants removed the Abyssinian ambassador “because he had dark skin.” A D.C. clinic even refused “to accept a pregnant African American woman in labor,” giving her no alternative but “to give birth on the pavement” outside. Ho derisively concluded that, even after death, city officials upheld racial segregation, with “different cemeteries for whites, blacks, and dogs.”¹¹²

Taken out of context, this evidence seems to suggest that, at least for Ho Chi Minh, American racial practices were highly significant. Yet these details are a tiny percentage of a large canon of works on the U.S. by Ho and others. Ho condemned the racism of France, the U.S., as well as its manifestations within communist and socialist circles. The evidence suggests that Japan’s invasion reaffirmed the Viet Minh’s anti-racial stance. In terms of the US, these sources stress American racism to create an image of an imperialist country, but they do not appear frequently. Commentaries on American foreign policy appeared much more often than analysis of domestic affairs, as subsequent chapters will show. Ho applied a handful of racism stories in an effort to discount America’s claims of freedom and equality, but he did not see

¹¹¹ D.X., “The Ku Klux Klan” (“Ku-Klu-Klan”) in *The US is a Bad Country*, 29-30.

¹¹² C.B., “American Society and Culture: Stinking Society” (“Xã hội và văn hóa Mỹ: Xã hội hôi thối”) in *The US is a Bad Country*, 23-24.

racism as a threat to Vietnam. Rather, he believed that America's racial oppression was one of many tactics used to achieve the central goal of imperialists: economic exploitation.

Conclusion

In terms of a wholly Vietnamese identity, early encounters with "others" had inspired early articulations of who was and was not "Vietnamese." Chinese and Japanese power and proximity, as well as the Sino-Japanese rivalry, became critical to the worldview of Vietnamese anti-colonialists. Yet the context in Vietnam differed greatly, as China and Japan never endured formal European takeover. In particular, France's "deep settler colonialism" challenged the Vietnamese to reconfigure their identity and a series of reformers and anti-colonialists emerged to share ideas among themselves and with others. In the search for answers as to why their land had been colonized, how to regain autonomy, and what form postcolonial Vietnam should take, most Vietnamese intellectuals absorbed modernization's tenets.

The most immediate impetus to negotiating difference in Vietnam in the early twentieth century arose in response to French colonialism. By the French era, Vietnamese anti-colonialists drew upon pre-existing narratives to express a historical identity, call for unity in opposing French rule, and extend the quest for modernization. Some used racial concepts in poetic claims of unity against the French or in moments of cultural nationalism to stress Vietnam's long and proud history. Others accepted racial reasoning when it highlighted Vietnam's lack of development. In moments when conflict forced the inhabitants to define more clearly the gap between "us" and "them," Vietnamese elites called upon ideas from China, Japan, and France, as well as their own indigenous concepts of identity. By at least 1945, the Vietnamese determined that race did not make for relations. The French had abused them because of their race; the Japanese had exploited them using race. Of the many political groups in Vietnam, the Viet Minh had been one of the first to oppose racial affiliation and stress modernization as the key to sustained autonomy.

The next chapter examines the "missed opportunities" that supposedly dogged U.S.-Vietnam relations during the early Cold War years. D.R.V. government documents and

contemporary publications demonstrate that the U.S. could have done very little between 1945 and 1950 to win the long-term allegiance of the Viet Minh. While western scholars focus on how more prudent decision-making might have avoided a tragic American intervention in Vietnam, they ignore the basic beliefs and goals of the D.R.V. leadership.

CHAPTER 3

THE D.R.V. AND AMERICA'S MISSED OPPORTUNITIES, 1945-1950

*"[T]he Great American Republic is a good friend of ours."*¹¹³

For many scholars of foreign policy, the story of early U.S.-D.R.V. relations is one of those moments when, had a different decision been made, history could have taken an alternate course, usually for the better. Narratives that focus on "missing out" typically emphasize the same events to draw these conclusions: O.S.S.-Viet Minh cooperation, Ho's unanswered letters to President Truman, and U.S.S.R./P.R.C. official recognition of the D.R.V. in 1950. Some propose that Viet Minh foreign policy leaders took a "wait-and-see" approach, thus implying that the Viet Minh government hoped Washington would offer its support. In subscribing to this perspective, proponents highlight Ho's decision to dissolve the Indochinese Communist Party (I.C.P.) in 1945, his attempts to contact the U.S. (through backchannels in addition to direct correspondence), and his directive against anti-American statements up to 1950. According to this evidence, The Viet Minh government courted Washington, which proved unresponsive, thereby causing the D.R.V. to embrace the U.S.S.R. and P.R.C. camp.¹¹⁴ At that point, the story usually concludes, the U.S. lost its final chance to influence the D.R.V. and, by extension, avoid the Vietnam War.

The "missed opportunity" thesis is seductive, in large part because it reconciles American exceptionalism with the Vietnamese communist victory. Both orthodox and revisionist interpretations rely on such missed chances, whether as a central theme or a foundational assumption. In the bid to explain how the U.S. came to fight in the Vietnam War, researchers lock on to small events (even a single letter) and conclude that they were significant turning

¹¹³ Võ Nguyên Giáp, "Address by D.R.V. Minister of Interior Võ Nguyên Giáp to the Vietnamese People on Independence Day," (September 2, 1945) quoted in Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 196.

¹¹⁴ For the best recent assessment of these approaches, see Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, "The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochinese War," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4/3 (2009), 1-16.

points. While such a historiographical phenomenon is predictable, given the depths to which Vietnam has affected the American psyche, it is also risky. The evidence used in these accounts is frequently divorced from the larger picture. For instance, many assume that Viet Minh officials believed in the benefits of an alliance with the U.S, which they did not. In U.S.-Vietnam studies, works that analyze evidence with an eye toward rescuing, redeeming, or reconciling America's "special" role in the world are misled. Scholars who position the U.S. as the central protagonist/antagonist make skewed calculations because they omit the Viet Minh from the equation. This is more than just bad math. Works built around assumptions that fail to consider Vietnamese views are, in fact, the ones who have missed an opportunity.

In this chapter I examine Viet Minh policy toward the U.S. between 1945 and 1950, utilizing anti-imperialism to demystify the so-called "missed opportunities." While acknowledging the existence of ideological differences among Vietnamese moderates and hard-liners, I focus my evaluation on products of state power, such as policy plans and domestic propaganda programs. These sources allow for an analysis of D.R.V. assumptions and perceptions as well as objectives and intentions. Rather than assume that Washington, time and again, missed chances to avoid the Vietnam War, I abandon Americentric teleological frameworks to integrate more evidence from the Viet Minh and re-examine possible moments of omission or oversight. Therefore, my research seeks subvert American exceptionalist perspectives.

This chapter demonstrates that D.R.V. policy possessed a much different character than previously thought. While Washington focused on containing communism and bringing modern American influence to bear around the world, the U.S. moved further away from an anti-imperialist position. Meanwhile, Vietnamese sources demonstrate that a clear, official, anti-imperialist position on the U.S. existed prior to 1950, a stance which does not suggest that Viet Minh leaders sought American saviors. Washington was far too dangerous to pin their hopes upon, D.R.V. leaders concurred, because of its inherently imperialist nature.

In these sensitive years, the D.R.V.'s most pressing goals were independence and modernization. In pursuing these aims, however, the new nation needed to convince interventionist world powers that Vietnam posed no threat to the national security of others.

Under Ho's guidance, the D.R.V. kept its distance from the international communist community as a matter of expediency rather than a signal for American support. Guided by anti-imperialism as well as a practical awareness of anti-communism, the Viet Minh offered few opportunities for Washington to miss.

Enter the Americans

In explaining U.S.-D.R.V. relations, the history of how Vietnam imagined America warrants summarizing. From the time of emperors through the colonial era, Vietnamese writers referred to the U.S. in neutral or positive terms, establishing only occasional contact. For a brief period, as previously explained, some Vietnamese anti-colonialists viewed the U.S. as an exceptional case. Information about the U.S. rarely came to Vietnam along a direct path, but was "refracted through Chinese, Japanese, French, and Russian commentaries on American history and society."¹¹⁵ Vietnamese thinkers then promoted America as one of several possible models of successful revolution and development. Educated Vietnamese could read stories, for instance, of political leaders like George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. Reformers liked the ideals of America's Founding Fathers, especially concepts like freedom, equality, and progress.¹¹⁶ As Mark Bradley has written, they lavished "unwavering praise" on the U.S., calling America "Mỹ" (beautiful) and "Hoa Kỳ" (flowery flag) and lauding the country's achievements uncritically. Phan Bội Châu considered President Washington worthy of emulation; Phan Chu Trinh depicted the America Revolution as a long-fought, heroic battle. A 1929 biography even praised President Abraham Lincoln's leadership in ending slavery, a circumstance the biographer likened to Vietnam's colonial predicament.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Bradley, *Imagining America and Vietnam*, 11.

¹¹⁶ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 76.

¹¹⁷ Bradley, *Imagining America and Vietnam*, 17-25.

This flattery should not be taken as evidence that the U.S. served as a “city on a hill” for the Vietnamese.¹¹⁸ Bradley overstates America’s influence when he concludes that U.S. icons became “exemplary models for collective action to overcome the impersonal political and social forces of French colonialism.” He also goes to far when claiming that America played “a critical symbolic role in the struggle of young radicals to redefine the relationship between the individual and society and articulate a new anticolonial vision.”¹¹⁹ When Vietnamese anti-colonialists read and wrote about America, they understood the country through the lens of their present-day dilemma. The U.S. provided just one among many examples for anti-colonialists, as others like China, Japan, and India likewise offered precedents for successful liberation that were closer to home, more recent, and, arguably, more pertinent.

The American archetype, moreover, was not just a potential model of what to do, but also of what not to become. Early on, Vietnamese socialists and communists, among others, studied the exploitative aspects of capitalism and questioned America’s close ties with European colonialists. Washington’s “special” relationships with Paris and London contradicted U.S. proclamations on liberty and freedom, as did a mounting list of foreign interventions. Some Vietnamese rejected the U.S. model because they believed that the country had innately imperialist designs.

As a result, Nguyễn Ái Quốc’s (Ho’s) oft-cited Versailles venture in 1918 to meet with President Woodrow Wilson does not deserve the “missed opportunity” label. Wilson embodied the crux of contradictions in American foreign and domestic policy – not the best person upon whom to pin great anti-colonial hopes.¹²⁰ A few years after their non-meeting at Versailles, Ho

¹¹⁸ See John Winthrop’s sermon, the basis for many American exceptionalist interpretations in “A Model of Christian Charity” in Alan Helmer and Andrew Dalbanco, eds., *The Puritan in America: A Narrative Anthology* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1985), 71-74.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12, 17, 25-26, and 31.

¹²⁰ Wilson often spoke of a liberal internationalist policy and advocated national self-determination, but for Europe, not the entire world. The president’s domestic race relations record, suggested that his support for non-whites, in the U.S. and beyond, was far from robust. His rejection of the racial equality statement at the League of Nations is further confirmation of this point. For more on Wilson’s views of such issues, see Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10-11, 169-171; *idem.*, *Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy in American*

explained that Wilson had deceived the world with his “self-determination talk” and had been “a big fraud.”¹²¹

Vietnamese communists perpetuated an image of America as an active imperialist power up to the Second World War. At the First Party Congress of the I.C.P. in 1930, participants evaluated the U.S. based on labor issues and its failure to support independence movements. The Congress summarized U.S. domestic failures as abuse of workers. Noting the Great Depression’s effects, members estimated that “millions” of American laborers were on strike “to protest farm-produce price cutting and high taxes.” Party representatives then passed a resolution that positioned America at the center of global imperialism, agreeing that “Britain and the U.S. vie for hegemony over the world, and the U.S. and Japan over the Pacific.” As for future strategy, Party leaders proposed that “in its daily struggle, meetings, discourse, newspapers, books, leaflets,” the I.C.P. should focus on “contrast[ing] imperialist agendas with that of the Soviets and Chinese.”¹²² In this way, they relied on anti-imperialism to evaluate foreign affairs, but the government also used it to prepare the Vietnamese population for long-term independence.

More than a decade later, Viet Minh cadre began working closely with the Americans. Ho was already known in Washington circles; the State Department had investigated him since at least late 1942. He had even spent time in an Office of War Information (OWI) library in China after his release from prison. After months of negotiating, Office of Strategic Service (O.S.S.)

Foreign Relations (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 22-29 and 127-129; Joan Hoff, *A Faustian Foreign Policy from Woodrow Wilson to George W. Bush: Dreams of Perfectibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 39-41; John Milton Cooper, *The Warrior and the Priest: Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 57.

¹²¹ Ho Chi Minh, “The Anti-French Resistance” in *Ho Chi Minh: Selected Writings, 1920-1969*, (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 1994), 22-23. The editors identify this article as being written at some point between 1921 and 1926.

¹²² “Political Resolution of the First Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party, 27-31 March 1935” in *75 Years of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, 1930-2005: A Selection of Documents from Nine Party Congresses* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2005), 78-79 and 99. The new party consisted not only of Ho’s friends, but also Vietnamese from rival groups who had little knowledge of Ho and held no special faith in his leadership. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Ho had a considerable impact on how I.C.P. members viewed the U.S.

agents and Viet Minh envoys met in July 1945, in the final year of World War II. The “Deer Team,” a U.S. advisory group, parachuted into the dense forests and mountainous terrain of the Vietnam-China border area. According to reports from both sides, they cooperated amicably and enjoyed friendly interactions. In the heat of the summer months, the U.S. “advisors” trained Viet Minh soldiers to use American-manufactured rifles, mortars and ammunition.¹²³ As has been noted often, on September 2, 1945, a Vietnamese entourage arrived in American cars at Ba Dinh Square in Hanoi. The man formerly known to the O.S.S. as “Lucius” and “Agent 19” climbed a platform to read aloud Vietnam’s Declaration of Independence. Lifting his first lines from a copy of the American Declaration of 1776 (reportedly provided by an O.S.S. operative), Ho stood on the dais with U.S. agents nearby.¹²⁴ Subsequently, the new Minister of Interior, Võ Nguyên Giáp, addressed the crowd, proclaiming that “The United States of America are [sic] a Republic which has no territorial interests in this country. They have paid the greatest contribution to the Vietnamese fight against fascist Japan, our enemy, and so the Great American Republic is a good friend of ours.” Vietnam’s goal now, Giáp explained, should be “unification and solidarity.”¹²⁵ Soon after, two P-38 Lightnings flew overhead, reportedly interpreted by the Hanoi audience as a symbol of America’s support.¹²⁶ Upon their return stateside, O.S.S. agents went on the record to validate Ho’s nationalist inclinations.¹²⁷ Advisors like Major Archimedes Patti became loyal advocates of Ho’s group who stressed that Viet Minh agents had rescued U.S. pilots and furnished intelligence to the Allies. Patti has since recalled that Ho even linked Vietnam’s colonial

¹²³ Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 282-84.

¹²⁴ Patti, *Why Vietnam?*, 223-224; Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2001), 93-100; Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 292. For more on O.S.S.-Viet Minh relations during the Second World War, see also Dixee R. Bartholomew-Feis, *The O.S.S. and Ho Chi Minh: Unexpected Allies in the War Against Japan*, (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

¹²⁵ Giáp, “Address by D.R.V. Minister of Interior Võ Nguyên Giáp to the Vietnamese People on Independence Day,” 196.

¹²⁶ Patti, *Why Viet Nam?*, 223-24 and Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 537.

¹²⁷ O.S.S. Data on Viet Minh, October 1945, Folder 10, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University and Ronald Spector, “Allied Intelligence and Indochina, 1943-45,” *Pacific Historical Review* 51/1 (1982), 23-50.

experience with that of the U.S. and also equated himself with George Washington, another parallel that scholars like to use.¹²⁸

These brief instances of Viet Minh-O.S.S. cooperation have been christened by scholars as evidence that in the years ahead the United States “missed opportunities” to cement good relations with Vietnam and detach it from the communist bloc. The wartime rendezvous figures prominently in western analyses that highlight Ho’s nationalism to argue that Washington should have taken a prominent anti-colonial stand and backed Vietnam’s independence. Continuing along these lines, historians blame anti-communist U.S. officials who later treated Ho with suspicion and dismissed the Viet Minh as too inexperienced, too small, and of “no real importance.” These short-sighted American leaders, the narratives argue, chose to back European countries first in the postwar era, to the detriment of its policies elsewhere.¹²⁹ Cold War pressures undercut O.S.S.-Viet Minh harmony quickly. The U.S. Department of State, split between specialists on Europe and the Far East, could not agree on policies to benefit both Europe and Asia. As a result, promises of U.S. support disappeared, therefore, under a cloud of bureaucratic wrangling, increasingly frantic anti-communism, and preferential treatment for European allies.

The issue of Washington’s short-sightedness, however, is much less significant than Viet Minh anti-imperialism. Vietnamese communist leaders did not abandon their anti-imperialist convictions to join with the U.S during the Second World War. Rather, the collaboration was simply a means to an end. Much of what transpired during Viet Minh-O.S.S. collaboration indicates that the Vietnamese focused on ousting the Japanese rather than extending their alliance base. They may also have been employing a version of “critical collaboration,” advanced first by Phan Chu Trinh and often employed by Ho, which allowed for temporary coalitions with

¹²⁸ Quoted in Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 62.

¹²⁹ Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh*, 285 and 282.

opposing groups during difficult times to further their main goals.¹³⁰ Viet Minh expediency and anti-fascism won out, only briefly, over their anti-imperialist convictions.

As for the day of Vietnamese independence, Ho used the Americans' presence for pragmatic reasons – he did not plan to be chauffeured in Fords forever. With U.S. representatives on hand, the D.R.V. appeared to have been recognized by a developed world power. The show of personal friendship (O.S.S. agents) combined with a display of U.S. military might (the flyover) to intimate that Ho had strong backers who believed in his ability to free Vietnam. As Quinn-Judge asserts, this gave Ho Chi Minh a “stamp” of legitimacy at home and abroad, helping consolidate his claims to leadership.¹³¹ Although U.S. actions hinted at the start of a powerful alliance (a view encouraged by Ho), in reality, Viet Minh leaders had not experienced a change of heart. Ho and his contemporaries had no illusions about Washington's imperialist aims. While not an ideologue, the D.R.V. president made decisions based on how they would affect his ultimate goal of independence. Believing the U.S. had serious imperialist inclinations, Ho could not readily entrust the future of his country to such allies.

1945 proved to be both a great victory for the Viet Minh and also the beginning of diplomatic and domestic challenges. The successful August Revolution and establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam demonstrated both the sincerity and abilities of the Vietnamese communist leadership. Yet French colonialism and World War II Japan had ravaged the country, ongoing famine took the lives of over two million, dire financial difficulties loomed, and organizational conundrums and a failing infrastructure all required immediate attention. Postwar occupation forces, moreover, seemed less intent on rounding up Japanese troops than finding

¹³⁰ Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years, 1919-1941* (London: C. Hurst and Company Publishers, Ltd., 2003), 24.

¹³¹ See Sophie Quinn-Judge, “Through a Glass Darkly: Reading the History of the Vietnamese Communist Party, 1945-1975” in Mark Philip Bradley and Marilyn Blatt Young, eds., *Making Sense of the Vietnam Wars: Local, National, and Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 119-134.

ways to benefit from their time in Vietnam.¹³² Thus, the euphoria of declaring independence quickly gave way to the sobering realization that at the time Vietnam was a mess.

After founding the new government, Viet Minh decision makers faced highly complex tasks, especially that of ensuring Vietnam's stability and keeping France out of the country. The D.R.V. quickly went to work to strengthen the nation, organizing general elections for the National Assembly in January 1946. The representatives then voted to supply direct and immediate economic aid to the population. Meanwhile, Viet Minh diplomats hoped to convince their former colonial masters to stay home, but the French had already begun scheming for their return. Paris, in fact, had unveiled the new "Indochinese Federation" on March 24, 1945 to replace the former Indochinese Union. France touted the change as "the promise of a new era."¹³³ Both French and Vietnamese leaders wished to avoid conflict, holding negotiations in Da Lat in the spring of 1946 and again in the summer at Fontainebleau. Ho's hotly-debated concessions at the latter demonstrated the degree to which he believed it necessary to parley with Paris.¹³⁴ The president even cultivated a long-term friendship with postwar French administrator of Tonkin, Jean Sainteney, an intimacy probably both genuine and strategic. D.R.V. representatives went so far as to ask influential countries like the U.S. to step in and persuade France to relinquish its claims. Viet Minh independence dreams became nightmares, however, when the French war erupted in December 1946. Early military setbacks forced the D.R.V. to relocate to the northern mountains, weakening its administrative capacity and its ability to maintain Vietnam's independence.

The Viet Minh government had hoped that Washington would pressure Paris to accept D.R.V. sovereignty, but the leadership had little faith in American altruism. Representatives like Phạm Ngọc Thạch contacted U.S. agents abroad, setting up talks with American representatives

¹³² See David Marr, *Vietnam 1945* and John Springhall, "'Kicking out the Vietminh': How Britain Allowed France to Reoccupy South Indochina, 1945-46" *Journal of Contemporary History* 2005 40/1, 115-130.

¹³³ Ellen J. Hammer "Blueprinting a New Indochina" *Pacific Affairs* (1948), 252.

¹³⁴ See Stein Tonnesson, *Vietnam 1946: How the War Began* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 81-89 and Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 201-206.

in Bangkok over a four month period in 1947. He aimed to win America's "recognition of the D.R.V. and mediation of the war with the French." In addition, he requested loans, technical aid, and the establishment of cultural exchange programs. In return, he offered preferences for U.S. businesses. Thach "was thoroughly convinced," U.S. officials reported back to Washington, that U.S. commercial interests "could make an immense contribution to the development of the country [Vietnam]." They also noted that Thach seemed to consider Washington as a potential "sponsor." He courted U.S. officials' favor with appeals to American exceptionalism by claiming that "Americans are considered to be a separate people" from Europeans, implying that the Vietnamese saw Americans as somehow different and special. At least one U.S. agent was even inspired to draw parallels between Vietnam and America. The official opined in his report that "we [the U.S.] ourselves fought for and gained our independence under a situation considered to be similar to that as exists in Indo China today."¹³⁵

Yet Ho and his cohort continued to disparage the U.S. as an imperialist power privately in this period. President Ho warned former Vietnamese emperor Bảo Đại that the Americans were "capitalists first" and had an interest only in "replacing France."¹³⁶ Although we now know President Truman and China leader Chiang Kai-shek "looked favorably on the recently formed D.R.V., [and] hoped the French would recognize it" in 1946, there is no evidence to suggest that the Viet Minh understood this.¹³⁷ Moreover, even if such sentiments had been common knowledge, D.R.V. officials would probably not have changed their estimations of Washington's imperialist intent. As early as 1947, Viet Minh government leaders surmised that, in the coming years, the world would be divided between the Soviet Union and the United States, the anti-imperialists and the imperialists. Behind closed doors at official gatherings, they censured

¹³⁵ "Political Aims and Philosophy of the Viet Minh Government of French Indochina, and Their Attitude toward America and Americans" 30 September 1945, Folder 10, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. See also Bradley, *Imagining America and Vietnam*, 146-51.

¹³⁶ Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 65-66. The new government included Viet Minh adherents as well as nationalist parties' representatives from the *Việt Nam Quốc dân Đảng* (V.N.Q.D.D.) and *Việt Nam Cách mệnh Đồng minh Hội* (D.M.H.). Bảo Đại abdicated his throne on August 25, 1945, becoming "Supreme Advisor" in the D.R.V., a post he held for approximately one year.

¹³⁷ Tonnesson, *Vietnam 1946*, 17.

American interventions around the world. D.R.V. leaders privately denounced U.S. activities in the Middle East, for instance, lamenting Turkey's transformation into a "virtual colony" of America. As the First Indochinese War expanded, Viet Minh analysts made predictions about future French moves by assuming that Washington would be there to assist Paris. They identified serious crises facing France, including Algerian railroad strikes and diplomatic tensions with "powerful countries" (the U.S., England, and the U.S.S.R.). Yet they also believed that Americans would not stop aiding the French.¹³⁸ In the highest government circles, D.R.V. political figures condemned this assistance as evidence of Washington's true imperialist intentions. They surmised that the U.S. made its support contingent upon gaining future economic benefits from France's colonies. As a result, D.R.V. chiefs denounced all pre-1950 American donations to France, even wheat and corn.¹³⁹

When the U.S. encouraged and aided the French war, Viet Minh leaders made certain that these facts were publicized at home and abroad. D.R.V. officials condemned not only Washington, but others who assisted the French, like Britain, India, and Japan. Economically, Viet Minh government officials claimed, France needed the U.S. because their finances were in decline. In exchange, Paris had extended the war.¹⁴⁰ Because of U.S. policy, the Party contended in early 1948, the French intended to divide, cheat, rob, rape, and destroy the

¹³⁸ Phủ Thủ Tướng (Prime Minister's Office), "Tính chất chung và một vài đặc điểm của cuộc cách mạng giải phóng ở Nam Bộ" ["General Characteristics and Some Aspects of the Liberation Revolution in South Vietnam"] Báo cáo về tình hình Nam Bộ sau 3 năm kháng chiến (1946-1948) [Report on the Situation in Southern Vietnam after 3 Years of Resistance War], Phủ Thủ Tướng 103, LTT III.

¹³⁹ Phủ Thủ Tướng (Prime Minister's Office), "Bản tóm tắt về tình hình thế giới và trong nước," ["Summary Report of the International and Domestic Situation"], (1949), 13-15, Báo cáo tình hình chung trong năm 1947 của UBKCHCLK, [General Situation Report in 1947 by the War Resistance Administration of Interzone X], Phủ Thủ Tướng 10, LTT III.

¹⁴⁰ The All-People and All-Sided Resistance War Line and the Protracted Fight Against the Aggressive French Colonialists, the Important Victories During the First Years of the Resistance War, 1948, Folder 14, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. This document appears to be part of a book and dated incorrectly as 1948.

country.¹⁴¹ In secret meetings and official reports, Vietnamese officials of this time often expressed similar sentiments.

Because of international isolation, France's return, and anti-communist expansion, the D.R.V. projected a softened image at the end of the decade. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted in late 1949 that "Our foreign affairs have not gained an official position. For a long time now, the international political situation has not been favorable." Only their lower-level diplomatic activities had been fruitful, policy chiefs acknowledged. Such minor successes included unofficial exchanges of diplomatic representatives, visits with global organizations, overseas research missions, recruitment of foreign professionals, some trade agreements, and membership in international peace organizations dedicated to fighting imperialism.¹⁴² Therefore, to meet the challenges of anti-communism, D.R.V. chiefs used official requests and meetings as well as publications to sidestep the communism issue while catering to the American ego. Viet Minh agents encouraged former O.S.S. contacts, who were still enamored with the Vietnamese fighters, to support the Viet Minh in Washington. Information campaigns and officials statements deliberately emphasized the nationalist aspects of Ho's administration.

In addition, D.R.V. overseas publications reflect their awareness of anti-communism's power. Vietnam's government depicted itself as a benign decolonizing country through carefully-controlled public relations campaigns. Vietnam's Information Service in Paris, for instance, produced neutrally-worded publications in English to introduce the new D.R.V. government to the world. During the late 1940s, this Paris-based group issued information booklets that seemed to

¹⁴¹ Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam [Communist Party of Vietnam], "Nghị quyết Hội nghị Trung Ương mở rộng" [Resolution of the Extended Central Committee Meeting] (January 15-17, 1948) Văn kiện Đảng Toàn tập Tập 9 (1948) (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất bản Chính trị Quốc gia, 2001), 16-50. Hanoi officials also stated that the southern Vietnamese experience with colonialism had been different, that they relied "absolutely" on France, and that this collaboration had led to a loss of their "nationality." See Phủ Thủ Tướng (Prime Minister's Office), "Tính chất chung và một vài đặc điểm của cuộc cách mạng giải phóng ở Nam Bộ" ["General Characteristics and Some Aspects of the Liberation Revolution in South Vietnam"], Báo cáo về tình hình Nam Bộ sau 3 năm kháng chiến (1946-1948) ["Report on the General Situation in Southern Vietnam (1946-1948)"], Phủ Thủ Tướng 103 (1946-1948), LTT III.

¹⁴² Phủ Thủ Tướng (Prime Minister's Office), "Biên bản Hội đồng Chính phủ tháng 11-1950: Thượng khẩn" ["Minutes of Government Cabinet Council Meeting in November 1950: Top Emergency"], (November 1950), Biên bản các phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ năm 1950 [Minutes of Government Cabinet Council Meetings in 1950], Phủ Thủ Tướng 318, LTT III.

be configured to attract even the most rabid of anti-communists. These works highlighted Vietnam's democratic ideals, made no mention of communist affiliation, and expressed hopes for an unfettered and peaceful independence. "The Democratic Republic of Viet Nam" (1948), for instance, introduced official D.R.V. documents in English, including the text of the Vietnamese Declaration of Independence, as well as details of their democratic election process, lyrics to the D.R.V. national anthem, charts on village organization, and anti-illiteracy campaign statistics.¹⁴³ Published the following year, "Achievements of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam" touted the political, economic, social, and cultural accomplishments of the nation since its founding. Also in English, this pamphlet emphasized D.R.V. dedication to the ideals of freedom and equality, again making no mention of communism. The text concluded with a translated compilation of positive media comments on the D.R.V. from a wide range of ideological corners of the world, including the U.S. and the Soviet Union, plus Eastern European, Indian, and Southeast Asian sources.¹⁴⁴

Through these works, the Viet Minh government targeted a wide range of readers and presented an ostensibly non-controversial image. D.R.V. propagandists designed them to allay anti-communist concerns of overseas audiences. To stay well away from postwar conflicts, Viet Minh chiefs directed English-language information programs with anti-communism in mind. After all, their most pressing goal was independence, not leading international communism. The D.R.V. thus targeted interventionist western powers with persuasive tactics that insisted Vietnam merited liberation and posed no threat to the national security of others.

Other, more direct, overtures to Washington served the same purpose. President Ho's letters to President Truman, beginning February 1945, so central to "missed opportunity" theorists, called for the U.S. to ensure the end of French colonialism, drew comparisons to America's experience with the Philippines, and even requested cultural exchange with the U.S. During this period, Ho also replaced some cabinet members with more moderate figures, a move

¹⁴³ Viet Nam Information Service, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam" Documents from Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1948), 1948, Folder 15, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

¹⁴⁴ Viet Nam Information Service, "Achievements of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam" Documents from Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1949), 1949, Folder 15, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

some researchers interpret as calculated to gain U.S. approval. In 1945, the Vietnamese president also dissolved the I.C.P., a decision construed by some scholars as proof that Ho desired America's goodwill.¹⁴⁵ President Ho personally reached out to local U.S. representatives, meeting in late 1946 with Abbot Low Moffat, a State Department Asia specialist. According to Moffat's reports, Ho requested aid from the U.S. against French violations, and may have offered Cam Ranh Bay to the U.S. Navy. Moffat also claimed that Ho seemed to feel "desperately alone."¹⁴⁶ Subsequently, Ho met with U.S. officials in Paris during the summer of 1947, and held further discussions with Moffat after the French bombardment of Hải Phòng.¹⁴⁷

This evidence does not mean that Viet Minh leaders held out special hope for U.S. assistance. Ho Chi Minh never stood waiting at the post office for Harry Truman's response. He also contacted other potential allies in Europe, Asia, and Africa at the same time. Among these, President Ho initiated correspondence with Truman's rival, Soviet Premier Josef Stalin (who likewise failed to respond).¹⁴⁸ After World War II, Stalin wanted clear, pro-communist statements of allegiance from potential allies, which Ho did not offer immediately. Internal Vietnamese political disputes among moderates and hardliners also created negative impressions of Vietnamese-style communism in Moscow. In addition, Ho, with little explanation, dissolved the I.C.P. in November 1945, within the first days of the new government's existence.¹⁴⁹ Such

¹⁴⁵ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 150.

¹⁴⁶ William J. Duiker, *Sacred War: Nationalism and Revolution in a Divided Vietnam*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 60-61.

¹⁴⁷ U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1946. Vol. VIII: The Far East* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1986), 52-54 and 67-69. A summary of the Moffatt episode can be found in Gary R. Hess, *Vietnam and the U.S., Origins and Legacy of War, 1941-1945*, (Twayne Publishers, 1990), 36-38. Moffat's report states that Cam Ranh was not offered by Ho, but rather by Hoàng Minh Giám, serving as Deputy Foreign Minister at that time. An excerpted version of this report is included in D. Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, Volume 1 (New York: E. M. Coleman Enterprises, 1979), 129-30.

¹⁴⁸ Christopher Goscha argues that, when "Faced with full-scale war with the French and unable to gain concrete support from the Americans, the party needed to reactivate its communist diplomacy and re-establish its contacts with the communist world." See Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?: The Difficult Integration of Vietnam into the Internationalist Communist Movement (1945-1950)" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1/1-2 (2006), 66.

¹⁴⁹ Goscha's "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?", 60-63. Goscha speculates that Ho probably hoped to quell the claims of political rivals at home, but the decision resulted in serious doubts about

controversial acts divided Party members and restricted D.R.V. foreign affairs. Recent evidence indicates that the moves are best explained as Ho's attempt to destroy divisive tendencies within the Party and to undercut the political power of his rivals.¹⁵⁰ These decisions combined with Stalin's fears of Titoism to reinforce the Soviet leader's suspicions of Vietnamese duplicity and Ho Chi Minh's unreliability.

The Viet Minh government's early decisions aimed at keeping anti-communists and imperialists at bay may have detached the D.R.V. from the Soviets temporarily, but not from the communist community. Vietnamese communists believed Western alliances meant imperialist interventions. This assessment is further supported by D.R.V. attempts to gain aid from countries other than the U.S. In some cases, this was not government-ordered, as when Lê Hy and Trần Ngọc Danh struck out on their own to end D.R.V. isolation and advance their cause in Moscow.¹⁵¹ Vietnamese officials did, however, instruct foreign offices in Thailand and France to contact the Soviets, which occurred sometimes on nearly the same days that they met with U.S. officials. For instance, as mentioned previously, Thạc used the Bangkok office to contact American deputies, but he also met Moscow operatives and appeal for Soviet aid.¹⁵² In France, Viet Minh agents contacted French Communist Party (F.C.P.) members in hopes of passing on messages to Moscow. At the spring 1947 Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi, D.R.V. delegate Trần Văn Giàu met with Soviet representatives to ask for aid in the French war, but failed. Overseas D.R.V. offices could boast a few accomplishments in meetings with Soviet officials, but they continually sought contact with Moscow through overseas offices.¹⁵³ These overtures demonstrate that the D.R.V. did not intend to tie Vietnam's destiny to American aid.

Vietnamese communism among members of the international communist community. See also Quinn-Judge, "Through a Glass Darkly" 119-120.

¹⁵⁰ Quinn-Judge, "Through a Glass Darkly," 119-135; *Balazs Szalontai*, "Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1954-1956," *Cold War History* 5 (November 2005): 395-426.

¹⁵¹ None of their efforts were successful. See Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?" 70-85.

¹⁵² Bradley, *Imagining American and Vietnam*, 146. For additional details on Thach's efforts to woo these countries, see 149-51.

¹⁵³ Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?," 62-77.

By the end of the decade, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs hoped to better their situation. Complaining that they had few formal foreign ties, the ministry noted that the D.R.V. had relied on “external propaganda rather than official diplomacy” during its first years.¹⁵⁴ Few of their efforts met with measureable success; the Viet Minh government’s isolation from the international communist community, in official terms, has not been overstated. In 1949, the ministry set two primary goals for the following year: to acquire official recognition and to nurture relations with friendly countries. Both objectives indicate that the D.R.V. felt ready for and in need of formal alliances. They hoped to obtain “more practical and positive contributions” to Vietnam’s development and its independence war.¹⁵⁵

This evidence undermines the “missed opportunity” arguments. Examination of anti-imperialism and anti-communism demonstrate that the D.R.V. did not pursue an alliance with the U.S. after World War II. Contemporary concerns caused Viet Minh leaders to take less than transparent steps in the short-term, but only to achieve long-term goals. With lingering Japanese, distracted Chinese, returning French, reticent Soviets, and internal political rivalries, the Viet Minh had enough problems without provoking the Americans to intervene. Vietnamese communists firmly believed that the U.S. was intrinsically imperialist and a danger to national sovereignty. Despite Washington’s belief that its assistance was invaluable, the D.R.V. did not seek saviors in America.

¹⁵⁴ Bộ Ngoại giao (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) “Đề án chương trình nội chính, ngoại giao năm 1950” [“Program Plan of Internal Affairs, Diplomacy in 1950”], (undated, probably late 1949), “Chương trình công tác nội chính, ngoại giao và kinh tế đã được các cuộc Hội nghị Liên bộ thông qua năm 1950” [Work Program of Internal Affairs, Diplomacy, and Economics Passed by the Inter-Ministerial Conference in 1950], Phủ Thủ Tướng 320, LTT III.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. See also Phủ Thủ Tướng, “Chương trình nội chính ngoại giao năm 1950” [“Schedule of Domestic and Foreign Affairs for 1950”] (1950), “Chương trình công tác nội chính, ngoại giao và kinh tế đã được các cuộc Hội nghị Liên bộ thông qua năm 1950” [Work Program of Internal Affairs, Diplomacy, and Economics Passed by the Inter-Ministerial Conference in 1950], Phủ Thủ Tướng 320, LTT III.

“The U.S. is a Bad Country” and other Tales

Another commonly-cited missed opportunity dates to the first half of 1950. In those months, scholars point out, the Soviets and Chinese officially recognized the D.R.V., the Viet Minh government lifted its ban on public anti-U.S. expressions, and, Washington began publicly to fund the French war.¹⁵⁶ Researchers extrapolate a series of conclusions that mark this period as pivotal, claiming these events made Washington’s involvement in Vietnam inevitable. The most common interpretations stress that, in the zero sum calculations of the early Cold War, the Viet Minh government chose the Soviet side because the U.S. had not been helpful, either in keeping France out of Vietnam or aiding the country’s new government. Therefore, these writers argue, the last chance for America to avoid the path to the Vietnam War disappeared.

Once again, the idea that Washington “missed out” distorts the U.S.-D.R.V. relations. Contemporary Vietnamese government assessments, planning sessions, and information programs demonstrate that the events of early 1950 did not “doom” the U.S. to wage war in Vietnam. Viet Minh elites identified Washington as an imperialist enemy long before 1950, and they understood that the force of anti-communism was strong in the U.S. D.R.V. planners believed that the U.S. would support France and interfere in Vietnam. As a result, Viet Minh chiefs allowed (and perhaps encouraged) the growth of anti-American sentiment. Researchers who identify 1950 as a watershed overestimate the value of American assistance and discount the power of anti-imperialism and anti-communism.

Viet Minh anti-imperialist convictions may have even outweighed official injunctions against anti-American statements. As quoted by Christopher Goscha, the Party reminded its members in 1948 that “when it comes to public matters, it is formally prohibited to write, in any document, newspaper or book, one single word or one single line capable of incurring harmful repercussions on the foreign policy of our government in terms of its relations with the United

¹⁵⁶ The first direct American commitment to fund the French war in Indochina came in the form of official aid to the Associated States of Indochina, (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), announced by Dean Acheson on May 8, 1950. However, U.S. financing of France’s Indochinese affairs can be traced to the previous decade.

States of America.”¹⁵⁷ Records of translation and publication, as well as government documents, however, demonstrate that this edict may not have been made to indicate the Viet Minh’s desire for U.S. aid.

This evidence is especially significant because the Viet Minh government’s nationwide literacy program, begun in 1945, was creating a reading population. According to Nguyễn Khắc Viện,, children taught their parents, old people studied with the young, and over two and a half million learned to read in the campaign’s first year.¹⁵⁸ While the actual figures may be in dispute, D.R.V. leaders unambiguously wanted the Vietnamese people to understand the government’s national goals and aspirations; they also needed them to comprehend looming dangers from imperialist powers. When the P.R.C and U.S.S.R. officially recognized the D.R.V. in 1950, such texts hit Vietnamese shelves and newsstands almost overnight. Indeed, officials may well have correlated their literacy campaign to the intensification of their publication efforts.¹⁵⁹

Prior to 1950, Soviet and Chinese anti-American publications arrived in the D.R.V. and, because they corresponded to existing Viet Minh convictions, they enjoyed swift translation and publication. As early as 1946, the Soviets, as well as Chinese communists, provided the Viet Minh government with a ready-made range of publications. While it is still unclear as to whether or not these works arrived in Vietnam via formal agreement, the texts’ translation and subsequent publication indicate that D.R.V. leaders considered them useful. Major topics included agriculture, economics, culture, literature, political ideology, and foreign relations, along with anti-U.S. propaganda.

The Truth Publication House (Nhà Xuất Bản Sự Thật), part of the then-Ministry of Politics, was founded in December 1945 as the central clearing house for many such sources. The publisher’s offices opened in Hanoi and, once war broke out, were removed to the Việt Bắc region along with the rest of the Viet Minh government, where it operated from 1946 to 1954. The

¹⁵⁷ Goscha, “Courting Diplomatic Disaster,” 82-83.

¹⁵⁸ Nguyễn Khắc Viện, *Vietnam: A Long History* (Hanoi: Thế Giới Publishers, 1993), 243.

¹⁵⁹ For a more complete discussion of the literacy campaigns, see Kim N. B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2002), 223-232.

Truth promoted original Vietnamese works such as *Breaking the Chains: Some Historical Documents from the March 3 Putsch to August 1945 Revolution*, which recorded D.R.V. successes.¹⁶⁰ A significant segment of the staff, however, stayed busy with translating doctrinal studies from Russian and Chinese, even extending its work schedule to deal with the weekly shipments. These works included titles like *Is the Soviet Union a Democracy?*,¹⁶¹ *Fascist Countries and Democratic Countries: Basic Class Practices of the French Communist Party*,¹⁶² *History of the Soviet Communist Party*,¹⁶³ *Declaration of the Communist Party*,¹⁶⁴ and *The Chinese Communist Party and Revolutionary War*.¹⁶⁵ Vietnamese readers could also consult general works like *China's Land Issues*,¹⁶⁶ *The Russian Peasant*,¹⁶⁷ *The Issue of Literature and the Arts*,¹⁶⁸ *New Democratic Regime*,¹⁶⁹ and *Coalition Government: Political Reports Read on*

¹⁶⁰ *Chặt xiềng: những tài liệu lịch sử tự chính biến tháng 3 đến cách mạng tháng 8-1945* [*Breaking the Chains: Some Historical Documents from the March 3 Putsch to August 1945 Revolution*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1946).

¹⁶¹ *Liên Xô có phải là nước dân chủ không?* [*Is the Soviet Union a Democracy?*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1946).

¹⁶² *Nhà nước phát xít và nhà nước dân chủ: lớp huấn luyện sơ cấp của Đảng Cộng sản Pháp* [*Fascist Country and Democratic Country: Basic Class Training of the French Communist Party*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1946).

¹⁶³ *Lịch sử Đảng Cộng sản (Bôn Sê Vích) Liên Xô* [*Soviet (Bolshevik) Communist Party History*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1946).

¹⁶⁴ C.Mác - Ph.Ăngghen [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels], *Tuyên ngôn của Đảng Cộng sản* [*Communist Manifesto*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1946).

¹⁶⁵ Trần Huy Liệu, *Đảng Cộng sản Tàu và chiến tranh cách mạng* [*The Chinese Communist Party and Revolutionary War*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1946).

¹⁶⁶ Văn Tâm, *Vấn đề ruộng đất ở Trung Hoa* [*China's Land Issues*], (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949).

¹⁶⁷ *Nông dân Nga* [*Russian Peasants*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949).

¹⁶⁸ Mao Trạch Đông [Mao Zedong], *Vấn đề Văn học và Nghệ thuật* [*The Issue of Literature and the Arts*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949).

¹⁶⁹ Hilari Mine Varga, *Chế độ dân chủ mới* [*New Democratic Regime*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949) and Ghêoocghi Đimitơrôp (Georgi Dimitrov) *Chế độ dân chủ mới* [*New Democratic Regime*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949).

April, 24, 1945 at the 7th National Representative Chinese Communist Party Congress.¹⁷⁰ It is important to stress that none of these works are light reading. Most publications were beyond the scope of average citizens and were surely intended for only a small percentage of readers or as reference works.

Sự Thật also led the bid to shape the image of the U.S. for the wider Vietnamese population. General evaluations like Bách Hóa's overview of early U.S. history from 1949 emerged as part of a multi-work series on revolutionary eras, entitled *A Historical Summary of World Revolutions: The American Revolution*.¹⁷¹ Vietnamese readers could also indulge in American literature, which arrived via the Soviet Union. Mark Twain offered his homespun wisdom to Vietnam via Moscow in two tales published as one volume in 1948 with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.¹⁷² Theodore Dreiser made his debut the following year with a title, no doubt welcomed by Vietnamese censors, *An American Tragedy*.¹⁷³ But it was a much less well-known American, Annabelle Bucar, who made the most prominent splash in Vietnam.¹⁷⁴ Her book, *The Truth about American Diplomats*, was widely-

¹⁷⁰ Ghêoocghi Đimitorôp (Georgi Dimitrov) and Mao Trạch Đông, *Chính phủ liên hiệp: Báo cáo chính trị đọc ngày 24-4-45 tại Đại hội đại biểu toàn quốc lần thứ 7 của Đảng Cộng sản Trung Quốc [United Government: Political Report Read on April 24, 1945 at the 7th National Chinese Communist Party Congress]* (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949).

¹⁷¹ Bach Hao, *Lược sử các cuộc cách mạng trên thế giới: Cách mạng Hoa Kỳ [A Historical Summary of World Revolutions: The America Revolution]* (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949).

¹⁷² Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1948).

¹⁷³ Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1949).

¹⁷⁴ Annabelle Bucar, *The Truth about American Diplomats* (Moscow: New Times, 1949.) Another edition was published in Moscow in 1951. I also located another Russian-language work sent to Hanoi and cited as Bo-Ca-Nhi (A-na-boi-nhi), *Mỹ quốc ngoại giao quần chân tuần tưởng* (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1950). The author's name has also been given as "Annabella Bucar" and "Annabelle Bucard." *Time Magazine* gave brief attention to her story on March 8, 1948:

In Moscow, a 33-year-old Clairton, Pa. girl named Annabella Bucar announced that she had been secretly married to a Russian singer, quit her job in the U.S. Embassy to become a Soviet housewife. Back in the U.S. her father, an Austrian immigrant, immediately disowned her

cited in the U.S.S.R. A former secretary at the U.S. embassy in Moscow, Bucar had defected to the Soviet Union, married a Russian man, and produced an exposé of the American intelligence community based on her experiences in the U.S. Foreign Service. Among her top allegations, Bucar contended that a host of American spies had been stationed in Moscow pretending to be U.S. diplomats and their staff. The English version of her book arrived in Vietnam via Moscow in 1949. Translation into Vietnamese began immediately.

Beyond the presence of foreign works, state-sponsored Vietnamese writers composed and/or published depictions of America as imperialism incarnate by at least 1949.¹⁷⁵ The Truth publishers, for instance, may have had off-the-record permission to ignore this policy. For instance, the Vietnamese-language version of *China's Military Situation and the Anti-Democratic Policies of the U.S. in Asia* in 1949 shows that The Truth translated and disseminated anti-American works. The Chinese author offered a scathing indictment of American international behavior, claiming that Washington held anti-Asian views and thus had continued to interfere in entirely Asian issues. The writer warned that, since the U.S. had meddled in China, the Americans would also intrude even more deeply in Indochina.¹⁷⁶ The Bucar book and the Chinese-produced text reinforced the image of America as an imperialist power that was out of touch with revolutions taking place around the world. Such examples expressed a foreign rather than D.R.V. perspective, and therefore in principle did not violate the ban on anti-American

See <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,853246,00.html> (Accessed February 2, 2004). Major newspapers also covered her defection. See "U.S. Embassy Aide Quits in Moscow," *New York Times*, February 28, 1948.

¹⁷⁵ Determining how long these authors labored to produce these works is difficult. The publication dates of 1949 through February of 1950 indicate, however, that they had not only researched their subjects prior to official recognition, but had been thinking about and discussing these topics for some time.

¹⁷⁶ *Tình hình chiến sự Trung Quốc và chính sách chống dân chủ của Mỹ ở Đông Á [China's Military Situation and the Anti-Democratic Policies of the U.S. in Asia]* (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1949). Many other Chinese texts on the U.S. that arrived in Vietnam prior to 1950 were not translated. More than thirty books I checked at the National Library had only their titles translated into Vietnamese. Upon examining the actual book, the text remained in Chinese. Additionally, the Vietnamese renderings of these titles are curiously unintelligible at times to this researcher as well as native speakers. They await future researchers' investigation.

statements. The fact remains, nevertheless, that the Viet Minh government approved, translated, and circulated these works before 1950.

Vietnamese-authored works on the U.S. also provide a clear demonstration that the Party's proscription on anti-American writings was hollow. D.R.V. writers researched, wrote, and published texts that condemned U.S. imperialist activities, such as *Discussing British-American Contradictions* and *What is Democracy to the U.S.?* The former vigorously condemned the foreign affairs of Washington and London, arguing that disagreements between the two would continue to weaken both countries. The latter mocked America's claims of democracy by pointing out various examples of domestic inequality, labor unrest, and overseas debacles that exposed Washington's imperialist plans. Juxtaposing quotations from America's Declaration of Independence with more recent news, the author made a strong case against those who proclaimed the U.S. to be an arbiter of freedom.¹⁷⁷

D.R.V. and Party newspaper articles and editorials likewise reinforced an anti-imperialism stance and America's imperialist image. President Ho Chi Minh became personally involved, using his own writings to explain the realities of American domestic and foreign affairs *prior* to 1950. To indict the U.S as an imperialist power and threat to Vietnam, Ho drew upon on his extensive experience as a writer. Using several nom de plumes, the president published hundreds of anti-U.S. exposés in major Viet Minh government newspapers, primarily *Nhân Dân* [*The People*] and *Cứu Quốc* [*National Salvation*]. An edited collection of his articles, with Ho writing as "C.B." and "D.X.", appeared under the title *Mỹ Quốc là Nước Xấu* or *The U.S. is a Bad Country*. His commentaries, the editors proclaimed, "detailed the evils, cruelty, and abuses of the American imperialists over the previous six years."¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁷ *Luận Anh - Mỹ mâu thuẫn* [*Discussing American-British Contradictions*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1950) and *Mỹ quốc dân chủ mà?* [*What Is Democracy to US Imperialists?*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, 1950).

¹⁷⁸ *Mỹ quốc là nước xấu* [*The U.S. Is a Bad Country*] (Hà Nội, Nhà Xuất bản Sự Thật, January 1952). The edition upon which I rely was reprinted on March 9, 1955, but the articles are from 1949 to 1952. While none are listed with their original dates, contextual clues allow many to be traced to earlier years.

The D.R.V. president's articles reveal a host of different points that all pointed to America's innate imperialism. He highlighted, for instance, the general conceit that defined Washington's domestic and foreign affairs. C.B. [Ho] maintained that the U.S. was guilty of both immorality and egotism. He stated that America "often shows off . . . that it has the highest buildings, the most money . . . The only thing the U.S. doesn't want to show is that the U.S. is the craziest country in the world."¹⁷⁹ In another piece on America's egotism, D.X. [also Ho] described how U.S. officials bragged about the nation's financial assets and atomic bombs. They had plenty of money, he asserted, so they even "paid foreign soldiers to fight for them."¹⁸⁰ He contrasted Soviet and U.S. military budgets to prove Moscow's sincerity in its peace efforts and Washington's lies about wanting to avoid war.¹⁸¹ Writing as D.X., Ho even cited Harry Truman's notorious reaction to poor reviews of his daughter's piano recital as evidence of the U.S. president's arrogance. He quoted Truman's expletives and diatribes, concluding that "the president of such a strong nation, leading the world's imperialists . . . should not have used such awful words to threaten someone, just like a bad bull."¹⁸²

American culture also became fodder for Ho's anti-imperialist criticisms in articles that can probably be traced to 1950 or later. He called U.S. popular culture a "spiritual poison" that incited teens to commit crimes in imitation of popular films. In a later editorial, he railed against how the U.S. introduced this "poison" to southern Vietnamese. Citing a *New York Times* article on monthly U.S.I.A. distributions of "thousands of handouts, handbooks, pictures, and textbooks about American history written in Vietnamese," he warned that impending U.S.I.A. publication of 300,000 Vietnamese-language books proved that the Americans "consciously" planned to "poison" southern Vietnam.¹⁸³ The D.R.V. president also pointed out that American culture was

¹⁷⁹ C.B., "Điện rồ nhất thế giới" ["Craziest in the World"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 17-18.

¹⁸⁰ D.X., "Ba hoa" ["Bragging"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 11-12.

¹⁸¹ C.B., "Vài con số" ["Some Statistics"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 20.

¹⁸² D.X., "Văn chương, văn hóa, văn minh Mỹ" ["Literature, Culture, and Civilization in the U.S."] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 31-32.

¹⁸³ No author, "Văn hóa Mỹ hay là thuốc độc tinh thần" ["American Culture or Spiritual Poison"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 30.

rapidly declining, because U.S. citizens had abandoned democracy in favor of anti-communism. Ho noted that, during a survey, polled Americans were read passages from the U.S. Declaration of Independence. He explained that most could not identify the document, and one respondent even remarked that it sounded “Soviet.” Pointing to such evidence, Ho maintained that “heartless” and “ungrateful” Americans had “forgotten their roots” and “betrayed their ancestors.”¹⁸⁴

In another series of articles that most likely appeared in 1950 onward, the D.R.V. president expressed special condemnation for U.S. activities in Korea. Drawing from rumors, news stories, and official reports, he deplored how Americans boasted about bombings, jailing, rapes and killings in Korea. He cited 875 reports of rapes and murders by U.S. soldiers in Seoul alone. In addition, Ho described a tiny prison cell in the future South Korean capital, run by the U.S. Army, which held “54 women and 12 newborns.” He ridiculed this prison as a prime example of “U.S. morality.”¹⁸⁵ In another piece, D.X. mocked the White House, stating that “America thought it would be a small war, now they have lost so many – like a well without a bottom.”¹⁸⁶ After explaining that “the U.S. expected to swallow Korea in a few months,” he claimed that the Americans had lost, along with their allies, “500,000 men – each month needing 15,000 liters of blood to save the lives of American soldiers.”¹⁸⁷ U.S. soldiers in Korea, Ho wrote, had shamelessly admitted to such atrocities as stealing, beatings, and arson. In one example he maintained that four of them had raped a Korean woman even though she was four-months pregnant.¹⁸⁸ Calling the country a “devil” for its cruelty, D.X. alleged that the U.S. used napalm and germ warfare, poisoning large areas of Korea and reducing them to deserts. America also

¹⁸⁴ D.X., “Một chuyện buồn cười” [“A Funny Story”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 8.

¹⁸⁵ See C.B., “Đạo đức của Mỹ” [“The Morality of the U.S.”] and “Chiến lược Mỹ ở Triều Tiên” [“U.S. Strategies in Korea”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 14-15.

¹⁸⁶ D.X., “‘Tiểu chiến’ và ‘Đại chiến’” [“‘Small War’ and ‘Big War’”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 17.

¹⁸⁷ D.X., “15 Vạn lít máu” [“150 Thousand Liters of Blood”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 16.

¹⁸⁸ D.X., “Đi theo ma mặc áo giấy” [“Swim With the Tide”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 22-23. The title comes from a Vietnamese saying that literally translates “if you follow ghosts, you wear paper clothes.”

reportedly conducted experiments on Chinese volunteer soldiers; Ho referenced a *Newsweek* expose on a plan to inject pro-communist Koreans with smallpox to infect enemy soldiers.¹⁸⁹ Ho also maintained that antiwar sentiment pervaded the U.S., informing his readers that a stunning “9/10 of Americans want their troops to leave Korea” and translating a teacher’s letter (published in a U.S. newspaper) about how his male high school students worried about going to war.¹⁹⁰ Contending that Washington would not end the war, Ho declared that the U.S. had sabotaged negotiations because “peace destroyed profits.”¹⁹¹ Through his writings on Korea, Ho cultivated a view of Washington as populated by brutal imperialist warmongers.

Ho touched upon many other topics that bared America’s domestic problems and foreign conflicts, creating an image of a beleaguered and hypocritical nation. He detailed subjects like bribery,¹⁹² professors, writers, artists, and songwriters jailed or deported,¹⁹³ higher taxes to fund the military,¹⁹⁴ suicides of guilty U.S. officials,¹⁹⁵ Americans eating out of garbage bins,¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁹ D.X., “Quỷ sứ Mỹ” [“An Evil Named America”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 21-22. Ho gave the date April 9 for the *Newsweek* article, but so far I have been unable to locate it.

¹⁹⁰ C.B., “Dân Mỹ chống chiến tranh” [“Americans Against War”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 33-34 and D.X., “Thanh niên Mỹ chống chiến tranh” [“American Youth Against War”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 35.

¹⁹¹ D.X., “Vi sao” [“Why?”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 19.

¹⁹² D.X., “Công lý của Mỹ” [“American Justice”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 6.

¹⁹³ D.X., “Tự do và hòa bình kiểu Mỹ” [“American-Style Peace and Freedom”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*,

¹⁹⁴ C.B., “Mỹ chuẩn bị đi ăn cướp” [“The U.S. Prepares to rob”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 13.

¹⁹⁵ D.X., “Mình làm mình chịu” [“You Reap What You Sow”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 20-21. My translation of this Vietnamese proverb is based on an understanding that it is somewhat equivalent to the English sayings, “you reap what you sow” and “you made your bed, so now you have to lie in it.” In the article, the author commented on recent deaths of high-ranking U.S. officials, claiming they had reaped what they had sowed. He singled out a former Secretary of Defense, “Pho-ret-tan” (probably Secretary of Defense James Forrestal), claiming that the man had gone mad and jumped from a 13th floor window to commit suicide because he had been “thinking about the atomic bomb too much.” Forrestal did die under circumstances that suggest suicide.

¹⁹⁶ D.X. “Đời sống ở Mỹ” [“American Life”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 27-28. Of note is how D.X. writes in first person, stating for example that “I saw people eating out of garbage bins.” This may be a case of artistic license or, less likely, Ho may have been drawing upon his memories of the U.S.

needless and painful deaths due to an under-funded health care system,¹⁹⁷ shortages of meat and clothes, and low salaries caused by U.S. foreign aid policies,¹⁹⁸ and atomic weapons.¹⁹⁹ In his pre-1950 works, Ho cited America's conflicts with West Germany, England, and Japan,²⁰⁰ as well as U.S. responses to the Hukbalahap (Huk) rebellion in the Philippines.²⁰¹ He characterized Chinese Nationalists, South Koreans, and pro-U.S. Filipinos as traitors. The Americans aided these groups, he claimed, even though "their own people hate them."²⁰² Emphasizing Vietnam's previous abuse by the Japanese, D.X. tied Japan to the U.S. Stating that the "Vietnamese people can never forget" the Japanese invasion, Ho cautioned that an impending U.S.-Japan agreement would allow America to bribe Tokyo in order to facilitate Washington's exploitation of Vietnam.²⁰³

Ho frequently juxtaposed quotations from everyday Americans with those of prominent Washington officials to depict the U.S. as divided between those in power and those with common sense. In one instance, he cited Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas, who was a "strict anti-communist" and had been to Asia "three times in three years." According to Ho, Douglas had "admitted that the wave of independence and revolution in Asia cannot be

¹⁹⁷ D.X. "Nhân đạo của Mỹ" ["The Humanity of the U.S."] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 28; C.B., "Xã hội và văn hóa Mỹ" ["American Society and Culture"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 23-24.

¹⁹⁸ D.X., "Mộ cha không khóc, khóc mộ mới" ["Father's Grave No Tears, Tears at the Termite Mound"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 32. The article's title is a Vietnamese proverb that refers to someone who ignores their responsibility to engage in useless actions. It literally means that, rather crying at your father's grave, you spend your time crying in front of a termite hill.

¹⁹⁹ C.B., "Đùng . . . Đùng!" ["Bang . . . Bang!"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 36-37.

²⁰⁰ C.B., "Mỹ thất bại ở Trung Quốc như thế nào?" ["How Was the U.S. Defeated in China?"], 37-39; D.X., "Nhân dân Đức phản bội Mỹ" ["German People Oppose the U.S."], 40; C.B., "Phương Tây và Phương Đông" ["West and East"], 34-35; D.X., "Làm ra con ở chủ nhà đôi nơi" ["To Make People Know the Line between Servant and Master"], 9-10; D.X., "Ơn huệ của Mỹ" ["America's Favor"] (on West Germany), 12-13; and D.X., "Lỗ vốn" ["Capital Lost"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 40-41.

²⁰¹ C.B., "Huc (Huk)" ["Huk"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 42.

²⁰² Điền rò nhất Thế giới" ["Craziest in the World"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 17-18.

²⁰³ D.X., "Mỹ nổi giáo cho giặc" ["America Assists Our Enemy"] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 10-11.

contained.”²⁰⁴ Relying on similar sources, the D.R.V. president mocked White House claims of democracy and portrayed the general population as resentful victims of Washington rather than loyal citizens. Ho even asserted that another American revolution was pending, one that paralleled the goals of his own D.R.V.

Although the Party had issued a directive banning public anti-American statements in the D.R.V. before 1950, these restrictions were not rigorously enforced. Although a majority of the aforementioned articles probably came after 1950, at least some were published in 1949. As such, this evidence shows that the ban may have been relaxed, since some D.R.V.-approved books and newspapers moved from veiled remarks to outright condemnation of America prior to 1950. Ho advanced negative representations of the U.S. prior to gaining official alliances with Moscow and Beijing to expand the public’s awareness of the growing U.S. threat. The articles were first published in popular newspapers to reach a wide audience. Ho wrote in simple language, using a narrative style and sometimes sensationalized examples, guaranteed to capture public interest and be intelligible to unsophisticated readers. At the very least, these sources reveal that the Viet Minh government had been preparing for a stand against the Americans. Because many of these depictions pre-dated the D.R.V.’s integration into the international communist community, the strong influence of anti-imperialism among the Viet Minh becomes clearer. For the D.R.V., Washington was an imperialist villain, an enemy to denounce. The time between Viet Minh-O.S.S. cooperation in 1945 and Soviet/Chinese formal recognition in 1950 should not be seen as a period in which the D.R.V. wavered between two powerful camps. Those five years can be better understood as an era defined by D.R.V. anti-imperialism and influenced greatly by the rise of anti-communism.

Antagonistic representations of America encountered few barriers within the Viet Minh government after 1949. State-backed writers set out to inform the Vietnamese public, and the world, of Washington’s imperialist intentions in Vietnam and elsewhere. When the valve finally

²⁰⁴ D.X., “Mỹ đã phá sản ở Châu Á” [“America Collapsed in Asia”] in *The U.S. Is a Bad Country*, 43. Ho states that this man “Douglas” was “head of the U.S. Supreme Court.” He is probably referring to William O. Douglas, who was never Chief Justice, but he was the longest serving Supreme Court justice in U.S. history, from 1939 to 1975.

opened fully, the tone of D.R.V. criticisms expanded beyond previous parameters, centering on Washington's failings in foreign affairs and U.S. financial and militaristic encouragement of the 1st Indochinese War.

Conclusion

In assessing "missed opportunities" and challenging American exceptionalist views, the Viet Minh government's early anti-imperialist position is critical. Evidence of this stance contradicts interpretations that claim the U.S. missed chances to improve relations. Works that stress that Vietnamese communists were nationalists reveal more about researchers discomfort and/or rejection of communism than D.R.V. foreign policy goals. Scholars employ these narratives to show that the war in Vietnam could have been avoided. Their tendency to look for alternate outcomes is predictable, even cathartic. But they neglect the importance of Vietnamese views and exaggerated America's value.

The most commonly-cited missed chances fall apart under the light of analyses of anti-imperialism. Viet Minh work with the O.S.S. was a means to an end, not an effort to cultivate a long-term alliance. Indigenous sources show that expediency and anti-fascism won out, briefly, over Vietnamese communist anti-imperialist convictions. The I.C.P. dissolution and ban on anti-American statements reflected the contemporary pressures brought by anti-communism. Since the U.S. (and its allies) had turned from fighting fascism to battling communism, D.R.V. foreign policy makers downplayed their communist ties through written and personal exchanges, as well as overseas information programs. The Viet Minh government distanced itself from the international communist community in order to avoid becoming a target of Western imperialism. Washington's oft-cited "missed opportunities" are manifestations of wishful thinking, primarily by scholars.

The following chapter, which examines relations between the D.R.V., Soviet Union, and China, as well as Asia and Africa, reflects the "true" nature ideology of Vietnam's ideology. In the 1950s, Moscow and Beijing mentored Hanoi in modernization, and, in turn, D.R.V. foreign policy

makers pursued close relations with China and the Soviet Union. In broadening cultural exchange programs with both countries, the Viet Minh government hoped to authenticate its dedication to international communism and also gain valuable lessons in modernization.

The D.R.V. accepted its role as a pupil of the Chinese and Soviets, but retained a degree of autonomy that is best exemplified by Hanoi's search for other allies. Hoping to gain higher prominence on the world stage and assert their independence of action, D.R.V. leaders set out to tutor emerging African and Asian states. In these countries, however, anti-communism, political and economic instabilities, as well as racial concepts all complicated D.R.V. attempts to lead the decolonizing world. Hanoi officials used modernization indicators to evaluate their African allies, thus becoming mentors to their own "little brothers."

CHAPTER 4

MENTORS AND MENTORED: THE D.R.V. AND THE WORLD AFTER 1950

“All revolutionary tasks are good, but cultural work is best.”²⁰⁵

Upon official recognition by the Soviet Union and People’s Republic of China (P.R.C.), the Viet Minh anticipated that both countries would become mentors for their new government. D.R.V. leaders believed that the road to modernity required knowledge that their northern neighbors possessed. They quickly secured a range of U.S.S.R. and P.R.C. assistance programs promoting industrial growth, agricultural innovation, educational improvement, and cultural exchange that lasted through the 1950s. Back in the U.S., policy makers interpreted events in Vietnam through the lens of anti-communism. As a result, Washington assumed all D.R.V. decisions had been directed by Moscow as part of a communist conspiracy for world domination. In reality, the Soviets and Chinese may have viewed Vietnam as a “little brother,” but Viet Minh government officials did not allow these Cold War guidance counselors to define their country. Neither mentor ruled Vietnam as a client state.

Although scholars routinely emphasize Hanoi’s relations with “big” powers like Moscow and Beijing, and for that matter Paris and Washington, the new Vietnamese government viewed the world more broadly than is typically acknowledged. Rather than rely on their mentors to assure an autonomous future, D.R.V. leaders pursued alliances outside the communist bloc. In this way, they hoped to protect Vietnam’s sovereignty, its independence of action, as well as to gain prestige by becoming a leader within the decolonizing world. D.R.V. chiefs additionally believed that their newly-acquired expertise (through Soviet and Chinese tutelage) could and should be shared with other emerging nations in Asia and Africa.²⁰⁶ Just as Moscow and Beijing

²⁰⁵ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Thủ tướng Phạm Văn Đồng nói chuyện với Hội nghị” [“Prime Minister Pham Van Dong’s Talk at the Conference”] (May 30, 1956), Hội nghị văn hóa toàn quốc từ 25/5-1/6/1956 [National Cultural Conference May 25-June 1, 1956], Bộ Văn hóa 21, Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Thứ III [National Archives III].

²⁰⁶ I have found little evidence of significant D.R.V. attention to Latin America prior to the Bay of Pigs incident in 1961. At that time, the North Vietnamese proclaimed their support, held talks, and submitted numerous petitions to condemn the attack. See the files Bộ Giáo dục (Ministry of

counseled the D.R.V., Hanoi leaders believed, so too could Vietnamese communists advise their own “little brothers.” In this way, the Viet Minh government reconciled its role as a pupil through its advisory and aid work beyond the international communist community. Therefore, in a curious twist of fate, the D.R.V. acquired the unique position of serving simultaneously as both mentor and mentored.

The Viet Minh government’s widely-cast net of foreign relations meant that its leaders came across methods of structuring liberation struggles and postcolonial development that did not always correspond to Vietnamese communist visions. Some non-aligned groups, for instance, hesitated to accept D.R.V. overtures; other anti-communist leaders rejected Viet Minh offers outright. To attract a wider base of allies, the D.R.V. minimized its communist affiliations and took to flashing its anti-colonial credentials. When overseas revolutionaries used race as a means of affiliation and empowerment, Viet Minh foreign policy makers sidestepped these frameworks and turned to what they had in common – a history of colonial exploitation. In this manner, D.R.V. foreign affairs leaders adhered to communist precepts and still interacted with and influenced non-aligned and anti-communist areas.

Once Hanoi signed cooperation agreements in Africa, officials promoted one-way Vietnamese beneficence rather than reciprocal exchanges. D.R.V. policymakers defined modernization as a critical component of sustained sovereignty at home and also promoted it in African nations. North Vietnam replicated Soviet and Chinese contributions to Vietnam in their aid to Africa, assisting in areas like agriculture, education, industry, and culture. Vietnamese communists considered modernization to be the universal answer to postcolonial woes. Viet Minh government leaders believed, moreover, that they had a duty to share their knowledge of

Education), Tập Kiến nghị của học sinh, giáo viên các đơn vị thuộc Bộ Giáo dục phản đối Đế quốc Mỹ xâm lược Cu Ba năm 1961 [Recommendation Set by Students and Teachers of Ministry of Education Unites to Oppose the U.S. Imperialist Invasion of Cuba in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 542 and Phủ Thủ Tướng (Prime Minister’s Office), "Kế hoạch hợp tác văn hóa KHKT với Cu Ba và Hiệp định hợp tác truyền thanh và tuyên truyền giữa Đài tiếng nói Việt Nam và Đài vô tuyến truyền hình cách mạng Cu Ba năm 1961" [Cultural, Scientific, and Technological Cooperation Plan with Cuba and the Cooperative and Communication Agreement between Voice of Vietnam Radio and Cuba Revolutionary Television in 1961], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7801, LTT III.

successful revolutionary struggle and modern development techniques with other formerly colonized peoples.

Yet, D.R.V. administrators did not believe Africans could offer much in return. Cultural deals between North Vietnam and Africa during the late 1950s demonstrate that Vietnamese communists had absorbed the hierarchical assumptions of modernization. In essence, Hanoi viewed Africans as peoples who needed to be mentored and had little expertise to share with Vietnam. Using modernization as a barometer to appraise others countries (as well as their own), Vietnamese chiefs envisioned a worldwide hierarchy based upon development indicators. Among Vietnamese communists, modernization perpetuated biased assessments of the world, even as they proclaimed an ostensibly scientific approach to foreign affairs. Vietnamese leaders acquiesced to being mentored, but salvaged their international status by becoming mentors to others that, they believed, ranked lower than themselves.

Racial thought became important in postcolonial Africa in ways that it did not in D.R.V. circles, a critical difference that affected how North Vietnam broached relations with African countries. Although some early century Vietnamese thinkers had expressed their identity racially, by the end of World War II, Vietnamese communists did not frame their battle as “yellow versus white” or their struggle as “colored” versus “white.” Vietnamese communism enabled adherents to forge an identity through broad condemnation of colonial abuse and exploitation. They leveled such accusations at the French and also pre-colonial “feudal” Vietnamese leaders who, according to the D.R.V., had also taken advantage of the people. In Africa, discussion of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism as “black verses white” circulated prominently, in stark contrast to Hanoi’s conversations. African denunciations of abuse targeted western colonialism and the racism that underpinned decades of oppression. D.R.V. leaders empathized with African colonial suffering, but Vietnam’s historical experiences with race had produced an aversion to racial appeals, as previous chapters demonstrate. North Vietnamese leaders instead placed their faith in anti-imperialism and modernization, which promised both security and progress.

Neighborhood Diplomats

Viet Minh leaders had begun thinking of their broader mission in the world from the D.R.V.'s first years. Starting in their own backyard, Vietnamese communists sought alliances with neighbors, mainly to conduct war against the French more effectively and to increase their prestige. Believing foreign affairs to be critical for Vietnam's future, the government stressed contact with South and Southeast Asian countries.²⁰⁷ As Bradley maintains, "a supra-national consciousness and increased indigenous efforts to promote regional cooperation" influenced Hanoi's early stabs at diplomacy.²⁰⁸ In the French war's uncertain first stages, Ho and his cohort welcomed statements of encouragement from countries like Burma, Indonesia, and Malaya. These countries could offer little else, since they had yet to achieve full independence and needed their funds for battles at home. During the early Cold War years, then, such public statements became the currency of the anti-colonial set – words were all they could afford.

D.R.V. efforts to organize on a regional level reveal not only their search for substantive aid, but also their desire to gain a leadership role in a global crusade against imperialism and the vestiges of imperialism. Vietnamese representatives proudly attended the 1947 Inter-Asian Relations Conference, held between March 23 and April 2 in New Delhi., which welcomed twenty-eight Asian countries, plus an Egyptian delegation representing all of Africa.²⁰⁹ Trần Văn Giàu and Trần Văn Luân, both D.R.V. agents in Bangkok, and Mai Thế Châu, the D.R.V. representative in India, called for "diplomatic recognition and a more activist regional diplomacy," as well as assistance in the struggle against France. While in India, Giàu made a compelling case for unity, observing that America had its Monroe Doctrine and Europe had moved toward federation, so Asian nations should also come together, "not against Europe, nor against

²⁰⁷ The All-People and All-Sided Resistance War Line and the Protracted Fight Against the Aggressive French Colonialists, the Important Victories During the First Years of the Resistance War, The Vietnam Archive, 49.

²⁰⁸ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 151-52.

²⁰⁹ Fred R. von der Mehden, "Southeast Asian Relations with Africa" *Asian Survey* 57 (July 1965), 344. The conference has also been called the Asian Relations Conference.

America, but to fight and protect our freedom.” The conference also garnered more statements of unequivocal support for the Viet Minh in their fight against the French. The most extravagant proclamations came from Indonesia and Burma, whereas India and China offered “less effusive” comments and additional countries expressed sympathy.²¹⁰

Such region-wide meetings made the D.R.V. hopeful for a leading role. Burma, India, Indonesia, and Thailand took turns hosting conferences soon after the 1947 gathering to explore the possibilities of a union. D.R.V. agents attended, bolstered by support from the region’s charismatic leaders (Aung Sen and U Nu in Burma, Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in India, Sukarno in Indonesia, and Pridi Phanomyong in Thailand). When the Thai capital hosted top D.R.V., Thai, Burmese, Indonesian, Laotian, and Malayan officials to hash out terms for a “Southeast Asian League” on September 8, 1947, Viet Minh government leaders were elated. The delegates planned to form “a nongovernmental organization, aiming to promote the study, research, and exchange of ideas on Southeast Asia as the foundation for the ultimate establishment of a Southeast Asian federation.” Sadly for D.R.V. chiefs, the League remained little more than an idea.²¹¹ Each country faced domestic pressures, most especially Thailand, which endured a November 1947 military coup, as well as Vietnam, whose independence war expanded. As a result, aspirations for a regional union faded.

Southeast Asian connections, however, did bear some fruit. Aung Sen offered public statements backing the D.R.V., whereas Pridi Phanomyong, without formally recognizing the Viet Minh government, allowed the Representational Office of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (R.O.D.R.V. or Văn phòng đại diện Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng hòa) to open in Bangkok. In Burma, the D.R.V. later coordinated with the newly-formed U Nu government to relocate R.O.D.R.V. to Rangoon. Supervised by Trần Văn Luân, the office assumed many of the formerly Bangkok-based R.O.D.R.V.’s former duties, including propaganda and intelligence gathering.²¹² In

²¹⁰ Trần Đức Thảo, “Vietnam and Eastern Asia” *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 6/4 (August 1947), 409.

²¹¹ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 157.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 153, 150-51, and 155. The duties of R.O.D.R.V. included broadening friendship networks and wooing potential allies, as well as shaping Southeast Asian and overseas

addition, the D.R.V. also gained surreptitious aid and “fostered ties of nationalism and anticolonialism that made possible the organization of clandestine regional networks to obtain arms, military supplies, and medicines needed for the war against the French.” Various unofficial expressions of Thai support resulted, especially financial contributions, military equipment, and even lines of credit. Bangkok became a base for sizeable covert arms purchases through “arrangements with sellers in Burma, Singapore, and the Philippines” as well as Hong Kong and Canton. Up to 1949, as Bradley demonstrates, underground arms deals “in Southeast Asia and southern China played a critical role in the ability of the Vietnamese to hold their own against the French.”²¹³

Some groups in Laos and Cambodia also offered significant wartime help. During the First Indochinese War, sympathetic Lao and Cambodian-based organizations provided intelligence as well as operations bases that transported material aid into Vietnam. Both neighbors also became sites of refuge for the Viet Minh, offering safe havens for beleaguered soldiers. In turn, Hanoi championed the countries’ socialist and communist movements, urging uprisings and aiding the formation of factions like the Pathet Lao. By March 1951, attendees at the D.R.V., Cambodia, and Laos Alliance Conference affirmed their stand “against the common enemy – the aggressive French colonialists and U.S. interventionists.”²¹⁴ Additionally, ethnic minority groups along the border both protected and transported arms bound for the Viet Minh, who had sent cadre to live and work with these groups. These agents learned minority languages and traditions and also “educated” hill peoples about new techniques in agriculture, medicine, and technology. These early interactions set the stage for the D.R.V. to intervene

Vietnamese opinion. The office housed the World Front for Democracy and also Vietnam News Service (V.N.S.) branches that produced pamphlets aimed at foreign diplomats and officials. Phạm Ngọc Thạch arrived in Bangkok in early 1947, both to contact the Soviets and court the Truman administration. See Goscha, “Courting Diplomatic Disaster?,” 66-69.

²¹³ Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America*, 158-159.

²¹⁴ The All-People and All-Sided Resistance War Line and the Protracted Fight Against the Aggressive French Colonialists, the Important Victories During the First Years of the Resistance War, The Vietnam Archive, 49.

repeatedly in Laotian, Cambodian, ethnic minority political and military dramas using, the rationales of anti-imperialist aid and modernization assistance.

In forming friendships abroad, the Viet Minh found that anti-communism presented a stumbling block. Not only did the U.S. actively advance its brand of anti-communism overseas, but the D.R.V. also competed with the well-funded, French-created, rival Vietnamese government. The State of Vietnam had gained minor credibility with the presence of a recognizable figurehead, former emperor Bảo Đại. He had abdicated the throne in 1945 in favor of the Viet Minh, but resurfaced just four years later, agreeing to serve as chief and prime minister of the State of Vietnam.²¹⁵ The Bảo Đại government ranked communism as more dangerous than imperialism, and its representatives claimed to speak for the “real” government of Vietnam. For instance, the State of Vietnam sent Vietnam Information Mission Head, Nguyen Duy Thanh, to convince New Delhi leaders to establish relations with the Bảo Đại state. Thanh discussed his past as a communist in “My Four Years with the Viet Minh,” a talk given at the Indian Council of World Affairs meeting of October 30, 1950. Serving as “Special Envoy of the Viet-Nam Government” (meaning the State of Vietnam) to India, he proposed that communism was “another enemy more dangerous than the old dying colonialism.” He cautioned that the D.R.V. had “fascist tendencies” and recommended that “India should not and could not stand aloof very long” from the Vietnam question. Stressing a broad-based anti-communism, Thanh advocated a “united stand of all Asians who have not already gone behind the iron curtain.”²¹⁶ Just a day later

²¹⁵ Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam*, 65-66. Bảo Đại abdicated his throne on 25 August 1945, becoming “Supreme Advisor” in the D.R.V., a post he held for one year before the French forced him to leave. Afterwards, Bảo Đại was brought back to Vietnam to head the new, pro-French government. The State of Vietnam based on its short-lived predecessor, the Provisional Central Government of Vietnam (headed by Nguyễn Văn Xuân), lasted just one year. For an extensive look at its information campaigns critiquing Ho Chi Minh, see the file Phủ Thủ tướng [Prime Minister’s Office], Tập tài liệu, truyền đơn báo chí phản ánh tuyên truyền của Ngụy quyền năm 1945-1953” [Booklets, Leaflets of the State of Vietnam Propaganda Press in 1945-1953], Phủ Thủ tướng 761, LTT III.

²¹⁶ My Four Years with the Viet Minh, Nguyen Duy Thanh, Special Envoy of the Viet-Nam Government & Head of the Viet-Nam Information Mission in India, 1950, Folder 17, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 16. See also Nguyen Duy Thanh (Nguyeen Zuy Thanh), Dr., April 1981, Folder 02, Box 11, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 08 - Biography, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

at the Bombay Rotary Club, he expounded upon these ideas, arguing that “the issue that is being fought over in our country [Vietnam] is essentially an Asian issue.” He explained that “we in Vietnam stand as your sentinels. We are fighting your battle too . . . If we go down, what next? Possibly India!”²¹⁷

Through such appeals, Bảo Đại agents employed anti-communism to great effect. They represented communists as part of a monolithic threat that could only be stopped by defense-oriented regional solidarity. Enmity between these competing governments spread outside Vietnam’s borders and confounded both administrations’ foreign affairs. Many countries resolved to interact unofficially with both governments until the matter resolved itself. For instance, organizers of the 1947 Inter-Asian Relations Conference invited both Vietnamese governments, but refused to recognize either officially. This set a trend that would be imitated by other countries during this period.²¹⁸ While New Delhi officials did not establish a formal alliance with either polity at the time, State of Vietnam representatives contributed to an atmosphere of uncertainty about Vietnam’s future.

The D.R.V. confronted such assaults on its image by stressing its commitment to anti-imperialism and anti-colonial achievements. Indian leaders had encouraged the Viet Minh’s anti-colonial struggle and, at the end of the First Indochinese War, they welcomed Hanoi to the pantheon of successful anti-colonial movements. In October 1954, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru arrived as the first foreign dignitary to visit the country after France’s defeat.²¹⁹ The former leader of the Anti-Imperialist League as well as icon of India’s independence movement, Nehru expressed his admiration for what the Viet Minh had accomplished. The D.R.V. later opened its consulate general in New Delhi in 1956, and Ho later traveled to India in February 1958, greeted

²¹⁷ “What Next?” Nguyen Duy Thanh, Special Envoy of the Viet-Nam Government & Head of the Viet-Nam Information Mission in India, 1950, Folder 17, Box 03, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 17.

²¹⁸ Ramesh Thakur, “India’s Vietnam Policy, 1946-1979” *Asian Survey* 19/10 (October 1979), 959.

²¹⁹ “Lời phát biểu trong bữa tiệc mừng Thủ tướng Neru” [Speech at the Banquet for Prime Minister Neru] (October, 19, 1954) in *Chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh với các chính khách Quốc tế*, Compiled by Trần Đương và Nguyễn Thị Minh Hương (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất bản Thông Tấn, 2007), 289-290.

warmly “by Nehru as ‘a great revolutionary and an almost legendary hero.’”²²⁰ Winning the war against France authenticated the Viet Minh’s credentials and granted them considerable cachet in revolutionary circles.

The D.R.V. drive to take a leading role regionally, however, met with limited success, a fact best illustrated by the Bandung Conference. Held April 7-24, 1955, this “first truly Afro-Asian conference” boasted representation by 29 countries (21 Asian and seven African nations).²²¹ Yugoslavia rounded out the guest list, with Marshall Tito himself in attendance. The delegates were the “who’s who” in decolonization: Indonesian President Ahmed Sukarno, Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Ghanaian Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and even Chinese Premier Chou En Lai. Vietnam was represented twice, as had become the custom, with both the D.R.V. and the State of Vietnam (which became the Republic of Vietnam in that year) in attendance. Deputy Prime Minister Pham Van Dong managed to pull off a minor public relations coup. He arrived in India prior to the conference and traveled on to Rangoon, where he and Indian Prime Minister Nehru flew together to Bandung.²²² The Deputy Prime Minister’s formidable “Indochina” entourage included not only Indian leaders, but also Cambodian and Laotian delegates led by Prime Minister Katay and Prince Sihanouk. Their assemblage impressed onlookers. Canadian observers commented that “In contrast to this the South Vietnamese delegation was rather weak and appeared to be on the defensive.”²²³

²²⁰ Thakur, “India’s Vietnam Policy, 962. Full diplomatic relations would not be established until January 7, 1972. For more on the U.S.-Indian relationship in this period, see Andrew J. Rotter, “Feeding Beggars: Class, Caste, and Status in Indo-U.S. Relations, 1947-1964” in Christian G. Appy, ed., *Cold War Constructions: The Political Culture of United States Imperialism, 1945-66* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 2000), 67-85.

²²¹ Mehden, “Southeast Asian Relations with Africa,” 344.

²²² Hồ Chí Minh was slated to head the delegation; however, for reasons not evident, he remained in Vietnam. See “Ho Chi Minh Going to Parley” *New York Times* (March 27, 1955), 33 and “Ho Chi Minh May Miss Talk” *New York Times* (April 4, 1955).

²²³ Documents on Canadian External Relations. “The Asian-African Conference.” Chapter VII: Far East, Part 7: Bandung Conference of Non-aligned Nations. Volume 21-780. Ottawa: Secretary of State for External Affairs Office, July 27, 1955. <http://www.international.gc.ca/departement/history-histoire/dcer/details-en.asp?intRefid=1309> (Accessed April 3, 2012).

Despite their “strength in numbers” strategy, the Hanoi delegation’s high expectations for the Bandung conference went unrealized. Viet Minh representatives assumed that their recent defeat of France would assure them a starring role at Bandung. It did not. The official agenda omitted any reference to Indochina, and conference speakers avoided mention of the French war or the recent Geneva agreements. Sukarno’s opening speech on April 18 illustrates this not-so-subtle marginalization of the D.R.V. The Indonesian leader mentioned Indochina only to laud his own country’s role in the peace settlement, which he called an example of successful Asian cooperation.²²⁴ Sukarno dodged the ongoing Vietnam rivalry, but, in the process, he shunned the most relevant example of anti-colonialism. Anti-communism may have inhibited the organizers, either because their countries believed in communist stereotypes popularized by the West or had close economic ties to pro-capitalist nations.

After the meeting, D.R.V. representatives came back to Hanoi and put a celebratory spin on the conference as “a glorious victory of peace and national independence movements.” They further claimed that “even the most war-like imperialist country had to take note of such a huge demonstration.”²²⁵ In reality, the conference had been anti-climactic for Hanoi foreign policymakers. Regionally, the Viet Minh government had made only small diplomatic gains during its first ten years. Instead, the main support for Vietnamese communists, especially prior to 1954, would come from their ideological brothers from the North.

Soviet and Chinese Mentors

Studies of the D.R.V.-U.S.S.R.-P.R.C. relationship show that, although some Vietnamese had traveled abroad prior to 1945 and formed contacts in the Soviet Union and China, the Viet Minh government achieved little until formal diplomatic relations opened. Afterward, Moscow and

²²⁴ President Sukarno of Indonesia, “Speech at the Opening of the Bandung Conference” (April 18, 1955) <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1955sukarno-bandong.html> Accessed January 28, 2010.

²²⁵ See Trần Văn Giàu, *Hòa bình hay Chiến tranh? [Peace or War?]* (Hà Nội: NXB Xây dựng, 1955).

Beijing strategists assume the role of mentor for Vietnamese communists. D.R.V. officials agreed to this tutorial system as the fastest road to modernization, which would promote and protect their independence. At different times and in different fields, each mentor took the lead in tutoring their Vietnamese communist counterparts. Neither the Soviets nor the Chinese wavered, however, from promoting anti-imperialism and modernization in the D.R.V. In turn, Viet Minh government agents embraced this aid as critical to D.R.V. goals.

The P.R.C. provided the strongest Asian-based friendship for the Viet Minh government. From 1945 onward, D.R.V. policy makers followed the Chinese civil war closely, believing its outcome would determine whether America would intervene more actively in the First Indochinese War. By the 3rd National Resistance Conference in February 1950, future Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng, serving at the time as Minister of Finance, celebrated Mao's recent victory. Linking events in China with those in Vietnam, he observed that the "over-extended" U.S. might not continue aiding the French war and promised that the Vietnamese "will have nothing to worry about."²²⁶ Giáp, who also spoke at the conference, went even further. He denounced the French as "employees for the U.S. imperialists" in the First Indochinese war, a fight waged only to serve American interests. He characterized Mao's success in China as a U.S. foreign policy debacle that boded ill for any American plans to invade Vietnam.²²⁷

The emphasis by both men on reassuring D.R.V. citizens that the U.S. would not intervene in Vietnam is telling. Despite top-level convictions that America would, indeed, invade Vietnam, the two men spoke to the contrary. This indicates that fear of the U.S. was common among Vietnamese residents and that the government probably hoped to calm their anxieties while maintaining anti-U.S. sentiment. Their comments further show that Beijing's victory was not only a Viet Minh confidence-booster, but also a welcome obstacle to expanded U.S. interference in Vietnam's war for independence.

²²⁶ Speech by Phạm Văn Đồng at the 3rd National Resistance Conference, "Tủ khai mạc và báo cáo chính trị" [Opening and Political Reports] (February 5-13, 1950), "Hồ sơ Hội nghị KCHC toàn quốc lần thứ III" [Profile of the 3rd National Resistance Conference], Phủ Thủ Tướng 322, LTT III.

²²⁷ Speech by Võ Nguyên Giáp at the 3rd National Resistance Conference (February 5-13, 1950), "Hồ sơ Hội nghị KCHC toàn quốc lần thứ III" [Profile of the 3rd National Resistance Conference], Phủ Thủ Tướng 322 (1950), LTT III.

China's new rulers quickly assumed a leading role in the international communist community, which would directly affect Vietnamese affairs in the 1950s. Mao Zedong envisioned a special role for his country as a tutor to its neighbors, including the "smaller dragon." He advocated an aggressively anti-imperialist stance in Vietnam and encouraged Vietnamese progress through Beijing's mentorship. In turn, the D.R.V. made various requests to the P.R.C., including appeals for military experts and weapons and medicine. As historian Qiang Zhai demonstrates, Chairman Mao fast-tracked this assistance to Vietnam in order to develop an image and identity for the new Chinese government and also to advance an Asian brand of communism, and Stalin encouraged this approach.²²⁸

But Moscow's main focus was Europe, not Asia. In Indochina, Stalin relied on the French Communist Party rather than direct contact with the D.R.V. He never provided the extensive military aid that the Viet Minh desired. After formal relations were established, Nikita Khrushchev witnessed the interactions between Stalin and Ho in late January 1950. He commented that the Soviet premier seemed disdainful of the Vietnamese leader, patronizing him during an official dinner in Moscow.²²⁹ Stalin left Asia to China's tutelage because he viewed the P.R.C. as qualified to shoulder the burden. This left the Soviet Union free to take the lead in European issues.²³⁰ Few Viet Minh efforts to gain substantive Soviet military assistance met with success prior to Stalin's death in 1953, despite concerted D.R.V. efforts to form closer ties with Moscow.²³¹ By contrast, as of late 1949, Mao began supplying the People's Army of Vietnam

²²⁸ See Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 13-21 and Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damage: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 26.

²²⁹ Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy Toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963* (Washington, D.C.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 6.

²³⁰ Dieter Heinzig, *The Soviet Union and Communist China, 1945-1950: The Arduous Road to the Alliance* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 304-306 and Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949-1964: Changing Alliances* (New York: Routledge Press, 2005), 1-11.

²³¹ Goscha, "Courting Diplomatic Disaster?," 62-77.

with weapons, training, advisors, funding, and even plans for military campaigns against the French.²³²

Yet the Soviets did not overlook the chance to influence Vietnamese communist doctrine and economic development. The U.S.S.R. provided the D.R.V. with books, documents, and cultural materials, and upon official recognition of the Vietnamese state, the influx of Moscow-sponsored experts expanded, mainly in the form of Russian language teachers, cultural delegates, as well as economic and technical specialists. After the death of Stalin and his consolidation of authority,, Khrushchev's shifts in domestic and foreign policy (recognizing Tito and pursuing de-Stalinization and "peaceful co-existence") generated tensions with the P.R.C. Throughout these events, nevertheless, the D.R.V. remained a pupil of both.²³³

Indochina evaporated from contemporary maps in 1954, replaced by the the states of Laos and Cambodia, and two Vietnams. As outlined by the Geneva Accords, Vietnam's split was to be temporary, with nationwide elections scheduled for two years hence. Proponents reasoned that the division would be brief and bring about stability; critics decried it as an unnatural fracture created by the worst of cold war interventionism. D.R.V. officials used the years after 1954 to focus on building the North, planning for unification, and issuing criticisms of Washington and the new Saigon government. Disappointment may have shaded D.R.V. relations with the Soviets and Chinese at the Geneva Conference in 1954, but Hanoi's immediate needs prevailed.²³⁴

In the post-Geneva years, Hanoi continued to accept and call for aid from its two big allies. D.R.V. officials viewed war-torn Vietnam as a "backward" country in need of rapid development through foreign assistance. Within North Vietnam, a core group, including Politburo members Lê Duẩn, Lê Đức Thọ, and Trường Chinh, openly rallied for China to serve as their primary mentor, whereas Ho and his closest confidants promoted the benefits of Soviet tutelage.

²³² Priscilla Mary Roberts, *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the World beyond Asia*, (Palo Alto: CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 58.

²³³ See Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 62.

²³⁴ For more on the 1954 Geneva Conference as well as evolution of Soviet and Chinese economic and military assistance to the D.R.V., see Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949-1964: Changing Alliances* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Despite such ideological fissures, Vietnamese communists uniformly agreed that they required outside assistance. A *Nhân Dân* editorial celebrating the 1957 anniversary of France's defeat explained that "Our country is a backward agricultural country, which relies on dispersed and individual production. In this situation, it is impossible to quickly realize socialism in our country."²³⁵ High-level Hanoi officials, in fact, often used the term "backward" to describe Vietnam, indicating how deeply modernization values had been ingrained. "In a backward agricultural country such as Vietnam," explained Ho, "the task of transforming an old society into a new one is more intricate and difficult than merely chasing the enemies out of the country."²³⁶

Reasons to step up D.R.V. development came from not only pressures of the First Indochinese War, but also area conflicts like the Korean War. In the early 1950s, top Vietnamese officials enjoyed news of U.S.-France disagreements and rising public anti-war sentiment in Paris and Washington. As for the future, the Prime Minister's cabinet predicted that the U.S. would add more money and weapons for the French war. The modern military might of the Americans was not questioned, but Hanoi chiefs claimed that "the French invaders are still in trouble."²³⁷ Invariably, they cited the ongoing Korean War. In top D.R.V. circles, the general perception was that Korea provided an important distraction for America. Voice of Vietnam (V.O.V.) radio coverage of the Korean War, beginning in early July 1950, linked a "coming general Vietnam counter-offensive" against the U.S. and France with Korean events.²³⁸ The Prime Minister's

²³⁵ Nhan Dan Hails Resistance Anniversary, 20 December 1957, Folder 16, Box 04, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

²³⁶ "Ho Explains Socialism's Superiority" 22 May 1958, Folder 01, Box 25, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

²³⁷ Thủ Tướng, Tổng thư ký Hội đồng Chính phủ Cù Huy Cận [Prime Minister, Secretary General of the Council of Ministers Cu Huy Can], "Biên bản Hội đồng Chính phủ tháng 11-1950" [Minutes of Government Council Meeting in November 1950], (December 6, 1950), "Biên bản các phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ trong năm 1950" [Minutes of Government Council Meetings in 1950], Phủ Thủ Tướng 318, LTT III.

²³⁸ Ibid and CIA Foreign Broadcast Information Division, "Foreign Radio Comments Related to the Situation in Korea, July 3-4, 1950) and "Communist Vietnam's 'Coming General Counter-Offensive'" (July 4, 1950), File: Foreign Radio Comments July-August 1950, Box 212, PSF: Intel File, 1946-53, Papers of Harry S Truman, Truman Library.

office noted that the U.S. was “stuck” in Korea, especially after their the Chinese intervention, and that America was relying on France to fight in Vietnam. When D.R.V. officials celebrated huge French losses, they also warned that this could be reversed. They agreed that the U.S. would interfere more strongly in Vietnam once they withdrew from Korea.²³⁹ Expressing no doubts that Washington had designs on Vietnam, Hanoi leaders openly wondered how long the U.S. would be diverted. Postwar events seemed to prove them right.

With the country’s division, a weak economy diminished by recent natural disasters and warfare, as well as lingering “feudal and imperialistic cultures,” Hanoi emphasized modernization. For instance, the D.R.V. gladly accepted enlarged aid packages from Moscow after 1954.²⁴⁰ Kathryn Statler calculates that the Soviets provided “40 million rubles for economic assistance and development and sent industrial equipment, 275 experts, goods, and food.” Moscow also promoted industry in North Vietnam, assisting with tin and tea production, hydroelectric power and electricity distribution, as well as the mining of valuable resources like coal, uranium, zinc, lead, and wolfram. In addition, they promoted infrastructural modernization, including development of the Hai Phong port. Soviet representatives built medical facilities in Vietnam and Kremlin officials offered additional training in the U.S.S.R. to 249 Vietnamese.²⁴¹

China and the Soviet Union also dispensed calls for official and cultural exchange that promoted the continued modernization of North Vietnam. P.R.C. chiefs formally invited President Ho Chi Minh, as well as Phạm Ngọc Thạch and Ung Văn Khiêm, to be part of a 10-member delegation for a month-long visit to Beijing between June 22 and July 21, 1955. Beijing

²³⁹ Thủ Tướng, Tổng thư ký Hội đồng Chính phủ Cù Huy Cận [Prime Minister, Secretary General of the Council of Ministers Cu Huy Can], “Biên bản Hội đồng Chính phủ tháng 11-1950” [Minutes of Government Council Meeting in November 1950], (December 6, 1950), “Biên bản các phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ trong năm 1950” [Minutes of Government Council Meetings in 1950], Phủ Thủ Tướng 318, LTT III.

²⁴⁰ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), “Báo cáo tổng quát: Tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại tới nay” [Summary Report: Status of Work and Cultural Achievements of the D.R.V. from the Day Peace Was Restored to Now] (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III.

²⁴¹ Kathryn C. Statler, *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam*, (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 228. In 1954, one ruble was valued at four U.S. dollars, making the 40 million rubles worth 160 million USD.

encouraged long visits and issued invitations for D.R.V. representatives to tour the country, participate in conferences, and introduce Vietnamese culture. In 1955 Hanoi delegates participated in shows and cultural activities across China, as well as a conference on antibiotics and even a marksmanship competition. Moscow hosted the World Conference of Mothers in July, welcoming a delegation of D.R.V. women. At the end of the month, the same women were hosted by the All-China Democratic Women's Federation while on their way home. The China Peace Committee also opened its doors from July 18 to August 9, 1955 to a 30-member D.R.V. delegation returning from the World Peace Assembly in Helsinki. The following month, on September 17, young D.R.V. emissaries attended the "National Conference of Active Young Builders of Socialism" in Beijing, led by Hoang Van Dang, a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Committee's Vietnam Youth Association for National Salvation. China also offered medical assistance and, between 1954 and 1956, Vietnamese students regularly arrived at the Asian Students Sanatorium for tuberculosis treatment.²⁴²

Moscow and Beijing became known for greeting D.R.V. cultural ambassadors warmly. From April 20 to October 28, 1955, a 58-member Vietnamese song and dance troupe toured both countries, led by Lưu Trọng Lư from the D.R.V. Federation of Literary and Art Circles. From September 28 to December 5, 1955 eleven Vietnamese journalists and writers, led by Đặng Thai Mai, flew to China for training. From the 4th to the 30th of December, a Vietnamese group from the Vietnam-China Friendship Association took up temporary residence in Beijing. A Catholic D.R.V. delegation extended its stay in China from December 23, 1955 to January 4, 1956, to hold talks in Beijing with Ho Cheng Hsian, Director of the Bureau for Religious Affairs of the State Council, after participating in Poland's meeting of Catholic and Christian Leaders of European Countries. On February 27, 1956, two D.R.V. theatrical delegations from the Ministry of Culture

²⁴² Peking-Hanoi Travelers: 1955-56, 1956, Folder 19, Box 05, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. See also Bộ Giáo dục (Ministry of Education), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác đào tạo nước ngoài từ 1950-1964 (Summary Report of Foreign Training Mission from 1950-1964), Bộ Giáo dục 605, LTT III and Phủ Thủ Tướng (Prime Minister's Office), "Tập tài liệu về Hội nghị nghiên cứu nghề cá giữa 4 nước Việt Nam, Liên Xô, Trung Quốc, Triều Tiên và phiên họp toàn thể lần thứ I của Ủy ban nghiên cứu nghề cá toàn bộ Thái Bình Dương năm 1956" [Booklets on Fisheries Conference between the 4 Countries of Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, North Korea and the First Plenary Session of Pacific Ocean Fisheries Study Committee in 1956], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7586, LTT III.

attended the Chinese Theatrical Festival in Beijing at the express invitation of China's Ministry of Culture. Other 1956 D.R.V. delegations received the red carpet treatment, including civil aviation delegates, broadcasters, labor leaders, fisheries researchers, and women's organizations. On April 30, Trần Văn Jeru, a Vietnamese professor of philosophy, stepped off a plane in China's capital with a seven-member education group to tour schools and universities in Nanking, Shanghai, and other cities. Cao Văn Minh arrived in the same month, leading a minority group delegation (composed of 23 representatives of various ethnic groups from northern Vietnam) to visit weaving mills and tour cotton and tea plantations. During an April 27th to July 21st tour, Sa Văn Minh, Chair of the Administrative Committee of the Thai-Meo Autonomous Region, brought another 26 ethnic minority representatives to travel in China and attend May Day celebrations in Beijing.²⁴³ In fact, few weeks of 1955 and 1956 passed without the arrival of a Vietnamese envoy in a Chinese city.

North Vietnam had expansive ideas for international exchange. The D.R.V. Ministry of Foreign Affairs called upon the Ministry of Culture to open diplomatic offices to implement foreign policies. One of the Ministry of Culture's original goals was to develop relations with others cultures, so foreign affairs cadre cooperated with the cultural staff to build ties with other countries.²⁴⁴ A 1954 Ministry of Culture report urged exchanges with Lao and Cambodian neighbors, as well as movements for peace and democracy in the world. Special plans for South Vietnam included exchanges in science, education and even sports competitions. Another ministry report of the same month stated that the D.R.V. should "introduce our just war to the world" and keep an international focus even in domestic operations.²⁴⁵ The Ministry's first official

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), "Báo cáo tổng quát: Tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại tới nay" [Summary Report: Status of Work and Cultural Achievements of the D.R.V. from the Day Peace Was Restored to Now] (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III.

²⁴⁵ Phủ Thủ Tướng [Prime Minister's Office], "Chương trình công tác năm 1954 của Chính phủ" [Working Program of Government in 1954] (February 1954), "Chương trình công tác năm 1954 của Chính phủ [Working Program of Government in 1954], Phủ Thủ Tướng 517, LTT III.

foreign exchange plan, approved in December 1955, included cooperative agreements with the U.S.S.R. and China, plus Hungary, Mongolia, and Czechoslovakia.²⁴⁶ In 1956 alone, the Ministry aided the D.R.V. in hosting some 46 foreign ensembles and sending another 49 groups abroad to “friendly countries.” With the Ministry’s help, the government also initiated a nationwide anti-illiteracy plan and amplified officer training. None of this, Ministry chiefs acknowledged, could have been possible without Soviet and Chinese aid.²⁴⁷

To repay the kindness of their mentors and gain a degree of prestige, the D.R.V. extended its own invitations. P.R.C. officials and associations enjoyed great fanfare upon arrival in North Vietnam. Between August 28 and November 25, 1955, led by China’s Vice-Minister of Culture, a Chinese art union conducted a goodwill tour on the 10th anniversary of Vietnam’s August Revolution and Independence Day. The first Chinese group of its kind to enter Vietnam, members included singers and dancers, plus an opera troupe. On September 27, 1955, the D.R.V. marked Vietnam’s first annual P.R.C. National Day, followed by a week-long celebration sponsored by the D.R.V. Ministry of Culture and the Vietnam-China Friendship Association. Chinese dignitaries were also among the first greeted at Hanoi’s new Revolution and Resistance Museum, established by the National Cultural Conference in 1956.²⁴⁸ The D.R.V. invited Soviet journalists for a three week tour of the country and opportunities to advise their Vietnamese counterparts.²⁴⁹ Upon concluding a Sino-Vietnamese film contract on July 16, 1955, distribution

²⁴⁶ Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa), “Báo cáo công tác năm 1955 của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài” [Office Summary Report of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries] (Document is dated both December 15 and 22, 1955), Bộ Văn hóa 1, LTT III.

²⁴⁷ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), “Báo cáo tổng quát: Tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại tới nay” [Summary Report: Status of Work and Cultural Achievements of the D.R.V. from the Day Peace Was Restored to Now] (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III.

²⁴⁸ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Thông tư v/v tổ chức trưng bày tài liệu và hiện vật chuẩn bị thành lập bảo tàng cách mạng và kháng chiến” [Circular on Organizing the Exhibition of Documents and Items to Provide for the Foundation of the Revolution and Resistance Museum], (July 4, 1956), “Thông tư, báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, các Ty văn hóa về công tác bảo tồn bảo tàng năm 1956” [Circular, Report of Ministry of Culture, Department of Cultural Regarding Museum and Conservation Works], Bộ Văn hóa 889, LTT III.

of Chinese films in Vietnam began. Soon after, eleven Chinese films premiered during Hanoi's "China Film Week." On October 2, the capital city hosted an exhibition of P.R.C. achievements, sponsored by the D.R.V. Ministry of Culture and the Vietnam-China Friendship Association. The U.S.S.R. and P.R.C., along with specialists from Poland, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and North Korea, sent a range of experts to North Vietnam in 1956 as well, which provided their Vietnamese peers chances to made regular visits to their new friends in return.²⁵⁰ The numbers of Chinese visitors also multiplied, with trade delegations, agricultural exchanges, and women's groups all bringing their know-how to Vietnam.²⁵¹ D.R.V. newspapers and periodicals gave full coverage to these visits as well as others, using them to advertise Hanoi's strong friendships and to encourage additional visitor stopovers.

Sino-Vietnamese exchanges in these years also reveal P.R.C. plans to influence North Vietnamese affairs. On January 24, 1956, Tôn Đức Thắng, the National Assembly Standing Committee chair, arrived in Beijing at the invitation of Liu Shaoqui, the CCP First Vice-Chair. Mao Zedong personally received him on the night of his arrival, reportedly giving Thắng the royal treatment during his four-day visit. The following month, Trường Chinh and Lê Đức Thọ, both pro-Chinese VWP leaders, arrived for five days, before heading to Moscow for the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. At the end of the conference, both men again returned to Beijing. At the urging of Liu Shaoqui and Chen Yun, they decided to remain in China from March 13 to April 6.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ The Vietnam News Agency invited the Soviet journalists, who arrived March 26, 1960. See United States Foreign Broadcast Information Service, "Foreign Radio Broadcasts" in *FBIS White Book*, (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan, 1960), Issues 51-55.

²⁵⁰ Letter to Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture) from Bộ trưởng Bộ Thương nghiệp [Minister of Trade] Phan Anh, (September 12, 1956), Hiệp định chương trình hợp tác văn hóa với nước ngoài năm 1956 của Bộ Văn hóa [Agreement on Cultural Cooperation Programs with Foreign Countries in 1956 by the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 1058, LTT III. For more on correspondence between President Ho Chi Minh and D.R.V. allies of this period, see *Chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh với các chính khách quốc tế* compiled by Trần Dương and Nguyễn Thị Minh Hương (Hà Nội: Nhà Xuất bản Thông Tấn, 2007).

²⁵¹ Peking-Hanoi Travelers: 1955-56, 1956, Folder 19, Box 05, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

²⁵² Ibid.

The timing could not have been less coincidental. Such patterns of high-level exchanges, especially their frequency and duration, provide robust evidence that Chinese officials targeted prominent North Vietnamese contemporaries for special tutoring.²⁵³ Available evidence suggests that, as the Sino-Soviet relationship began to deteriorate, Hanoi maintained a general balance in exchanges with both sets of foreign comrades. Still, eminent D.R.V. officials accepted offers of extended stays in Moscow and Beijing, trips which often coincided with major events and international meetings. At the beginning of 1957, the Department of Publications explained that their summary report of 1956 would be delayed for less than clear reasons such as “obstacles” and the need to wait for “the return of the delegation from China.”²⁵⁴ As other scholars have noted, factions within the D.R.V. had emerged by the mid- to late-1950s, leading to major repercussions in North Vietnam’s foreign policy and strategies in South Vietnam.²⁵⁵

Still, P.R.C. persuasion had its limits. Beijing leaders believed that a special relationship would and should grow between China and Vietnam because both were Asian countries (the bond was more geographic than racial or ethnic). Chairman Mao saw things differently. He especially enjoyed his role as mentor, believing that his brand of communism had more relevance for the Vietnamese. Differences in revolutionary theory expanded the gulf between Moscow and Beijing, Mao maintained, because their communisms diverged racially. Although “the discourse of race was officially abolished in 1949” in China and “the idea of racial exclusiveness became taboo,” racial thought did not vanish from P.R.C. estimations. Frank Dikotter explains that, in the 1950s, “The artificial dichotomization between Chinese and Westerners in biological terms of ‘race’ was merely reformulated in terms of ‘class.’” In fact, he observes, China’s communists “increasingly harped on the theme of biological differences between Soviets and Chinese” in their

²⁵³ See Phủ Thủ Tướng, Kế hoạch hợp tác văn hóa năm 1958 với Trung Quốc [Planning for Cultural Relations with China in 1958], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7675, LTT III.

²⁵⁴ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Hiện nay chúng tôi đang tiến hành làm tổng kết công tác năm 1956” [“We are Now Making the Working Summary for 1956”] (January 28, 1957), Kế hoạch, báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị, [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan by the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

²⁵⁵ See Lien-Hang T. Nguyen’s “The War Politburo: North Vietnam’s Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1/1.2 (February 2006), 4-58.

propaganda and official statements.²⁵⁶ The P.R.C. head, bent on making communism “more Asian,” called attention to racial ideas. Mao pointed out, for instance, that decolonizing areas were primarily non-white and thus could not accept nor trust any white leadership. He also claimed that the Soviets had a much more “European” view of communism.²⁵⁷ Mao argued that his vision differed greatly from Khrushchev’s calls for “peaceful coexistence,” which ignored disturbing realities of abuse in places like South Vietnam. He criticized the “whiteness” of Soviet leaders, their tendency to think in a western way, and their limited ability to understand or meet Asian needs. Mao claimed that “the white Soviets would never commit wholeheartedly to anti-imperialist struggle.”²⁵⁸

The P.R.C. shared these views with visitors during their growing impasse with the Soviet Union, racializing the rift to broaden Beijing’s influence. When Mao spoke to a group of African delegates visiting China in May 1959, he explained that “what imperialism fears most is the awakening of the Asian, African and Latin American peoples, the awakening of the peoples of all countries.” He intimated that a race war could break out, stating that the struggle of Africans and Asians “will witness an even greater upsurge” against the Americans.²⁵⁹ In a later talk with African visitors on August 9, 1963, Mao expanded on his views of racism. He denounced racial inequality, called for unity against racism, and claimed that racial discrimination was a worldwide phenomenon. Mao went on to explain that “in reality, racial problems are class problems.”²⁶⁰ Arguably, the Chinese leader used race to further relations with Africans. Yet, with an emerging Sino-Soviet impasse, the P.R.C. drew a racial line between themselves and the U.S.S.R., doubtless sharing these views with the North Vietnamese. Available evidence suggests that Hanoi

²⁵⁶ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 191 and 194.

²⁵⁷ David Hunt “The My Tho Grapevine and the Sino-Soviet Split” in *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, 83-88.

²⁵⁸ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 195.

²⁵⁹ Mao Zedong, “The People Of Asia, Africa And Latin America Should Unite And Drive American Imperialism Back To Where It Came From” (May 7, 1959) in *Chairman Mao Tse-tung’s Important Talks with Guests from Asia, Africa, and Latin America*, (Peking:Foreign Languages Press, 1960), 2-8.

²⁶⁰ Dikotter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, 192.

had evaded blatantly racial constructs since their government's inception. D.R.V. policy leaders had promoted non-racial and even anti-racial explanations of world affairs. Early on, President Ho Chi Minh dismissed hierarchical thinking, whether racial or otherwise:

Our comrades have racial differences and differences in regard to class backgrounds but they have the same ideology and the same objectives. They live and die together and share their joys and hardships and, consequently, it is necessary to have solidarity.²⁶¹

During the French war, the Viet Minh published a handful of propaganda tracts that applied colorist themes, such as disdain for dark skin. Shawn McHale claims that these campaigns used the image of barbaric African soldiers fighting for France to inspire racial fears.²⁶² The tracts that McHale cites, however, suggest only that the Vietnamese would become darker or burned black by contact with these black soldiers. Such propaganda "othered" the African members of the French military, suggested they were barbaric, and also played upon ideas about skin hues. In a Western sense, this seems to suggest racism, but one could also argue that such a propaganda line was formed through a combination of colorist ideas and xenophobia.

In addition, D.R.V. chiefs stressed domestic pluralism and ideologically-rooted international contradictions rather than anti-white prejudices in its exhortations against the war. Without denying "ethnic" variations at home, Viet Minh leaders argued that such differences mattered little in three important areas: the overall liberation struggle, the modernization effort, and the reunification bid. In fact, as early as 1950, leading Vietnamese communists believed that racial and ethnic differences weakened group cohesiveness. Pham Van Dong speculated in that year that the French faced a major weakness due to their "complicated composition of troops,"

²⁶¹ The All-People and All-Sided Resistance War Line and the Protracted Fight Against the Aggressive French Colonialists, the Important Victories During the First Years of the Resistance War, 1948, Folder 14, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. The document is labeled 1948, but may be misdated, because it includes a January 1949 speech on page 37.

²⁶² Shawn McHale, "Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War, 1945-1954." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4/3 (Fall 2009), 98-138. McHale examines Viet Minh propaganda that played on fears of becoming darker or black. His conclusions are questionable in that his sources are limited to a small area and he also does not address the possibility of other concepts of color and difference.

which would hamper their efforts to wage war in Vietnam.²⁶³ Such statements echoed official reports that determined the French had weakened its cause by using colonial troops who had little real desire to fight; it was not a comment on the racial makeup of the army. Thus, D.R.V. policy makers advanced a holistic national identity that embraced (and also marginalized) Vietnam's multi-ethnic population.

The Ministry of Culture issued explicit rules on pluralist themes for information programs in 1956. Cadre were not only "prohibited to [sic] propagandize war or anything that could damage the cease-fire or the strengthening of peace and national unification," but they were also "forbidden to propagandize national separation." Additionally, after being "forbidden to reveal national secrets," Party members also proscribed propaganda "that makes hatred between countries."²⁶⁴ Vietnam Worker's Party (V.W.P.) study documents instructed members to reject all forms of dividing the people, emphasizing that "The Party objects to all narrow nationalistic tendencies, being conscious about one's own race, the inclination to rely on other countries and lack of self-reliance."²⁶⁵ D.R.V. leaders stood firm against any outside force or concept that could create internal tensions, although exactly why this pluralist emphasis appeared when it did deserves more investigation, especially in light of top-level power struggles in Hanoi and the widening divide between pro-Moscow and pro-China officials.²⁶⁶ What we do know is that Mao's

²⁶³ Speech by Phạm Văn Đồng, (February 5-13, 1950), "Hồ sơ Hội nghị KCHC toàn quốc lần thứ III" [File of the 3rd National Resistance Conference], Phủ Thủ Tướng 322, LTT III.

²⁶⁴ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], No title (1956), Chỉ thị công văn của Bộ Văn hóa về công tác xuất bản, phát hành sách năm 1956, Bộ Văn hóa 1014, LTT III.

²⁶⁵ How to be a Good Communist: 1960, 1960, Folder 01, Box 25, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University and How to Become a Good Party Member" 1960, Folder 01, Box 25, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 9.

²⁶⁶ During this period in South Vietnam's Central Highlands, an ethnic minority organization called Bajakara, founded in May 1958, headed an autonomy movement. Bajakara cited racial discrimination as a key complaint in their U.N. petition and held several protests, which led to the formation of F.U.L.R.O. (The United Front for the Liberation of Oppressed Races or Front Uni de Lutte des Races Opprimées or Mặt trận Thống nhất Đấu tranh của các Sắc tộc bị Áp bức). No D.R.V. documents on this event have come to light, but Hanoi was doubtless aware of the unrest. For more on Bajakara and F.U.L.R.O., see Oscar Saleminck, *The Ethnography of Vietnam's Central Highlanders*, 257-266.

intimation of a racial divide within the communist world probably did not influence D.R.V. domestic policies or foreign policies.

From 1955 through 1957, Hanoi's foreign interactions expanded throughout the communist bloc through Ministry of Culture exchanges. D.R.V. performers, writers, and other cultural representatives showcased their talents and gained feedback and training from their mentors. Ministry officials assigned 25 cultural delegations with 149 officers to study and share information with the Soviet Union, China, as well as countries in Eastern Europe.²⁶⁷ The D.R.V. Ministry of Culture carefully screened skilled Vietnamese performers with "sound ideology" to train abroad and perform in cultural festivals. Afterward, the Ministry reasoned, they could then be trusted to tour South Vietnam.²⁶⁸ They received Soviet and Chinese training in libraries, cinemas, films, and ensembles. The two countries even aided in constructing 38 broadcasting systems for North Vietnam. With their mentors' help, the Ministry of Culture observed in 1957, Vietnamese literature and other forms of art had flourished.²⁶⁹ Hanoi gladly received Moscow and Beijing publications as well. By July 1956, such imports skyrocketed to their highest levels. Soviet works included those on politics (21,000 books), economics (370), technical sciences (1032), literature (17,613), art (7129) for a total of 47,190, or 23% of total imports during the first half of 1956. Chinese texts included subjects like politics (7909), economics (2060), technical

²⁶⁷ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), "Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957" [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], (December 20, 1957), Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III and Thornton, "Foreign Relations of the Asian Communist Satellites," 347-48. For a summary of exchanges, see Phủ Thủ Tướng, "Tập tài liệu về Hội nghị nghiên cứu nghề cá giữa 4 nước Việt Nam, Liên Xô, Trung Quốc, Triều Tiên và phiên họp toàn thể lần thứ I của Ủy ban nghiên cứu nghề cá toàn bộ Thái Bình Dương năm 1956 [Booklets on Fisheries Conference between the 4 Countries of Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, North Korea and the First Plenary Session of Pacific Ocean Fisheries Study Committee in 1956], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7586, LTT III.

²⁶⁸ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), "Báo cáo tổng quát: Tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại tới nay" [Summary Report: Status of Work and Cultural Achievements of the D.R.V. from the Day Peace Was Restored to Now] (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III. See also Thornton, "Foreign Relations of the Asian Communist Satellites," 347-48.

²⁶⁹ See Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], Báo cáo tổng kết 3 năm 1955-1957 của ngành phát hành sách [Summary Report of 3 Years 1955-57 of Book Publishing], Bộ Văn hóa 1016, LTT III.

sciences (5243), literature and textbooks (77,339), art (8875) for a total of 101,426 or an estimated 50% of imported books.²⁷⁰ D.R.V. officials allocated Russian and Chinese study texts not only to schools, but also to farmers, hoping they could learn critical foreign languages. Ministry officials additionally disseminated photos, records, and art from their comrades across the communist world so that Vietnamese citizens could absorb more modern forms of knowledge.²⁷¹

Vietnamese communists had become students of the Soviets and Chinese, but they maintained their autonomy. At times, Hanoi disagreed with the advice provided by its two primary mentors. Despite fraternal pressure, the North Vietnamese pushed for better terms during the Geneva Conference long after the Chinese tried to persuade them to accept the less than appealing aspects of the agreement. In addition, when the Soviets recommended that both North and South Vietnam be welcomed into the United Nations (U.N.) in the late 1950s, D.R.V. officials objected vehemently to this notion and did not bow to their mentors' wishes. The Russian historian Illya Gaiduk explains that "Hanoi clearly could not openly discount the principle of peaceful coexistence, but the North Vietnamese supported it only if it did not contradict their plans with respect to the South."²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), "Báo cáo tổng quát: Tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại tới nay" [Summary Report: Status of Work and Cultural Achievements of the D.R.V. from the Day Peace Was Restored to Now] (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III. French works appeared to a lesser degree, with politics (2799), technical sciences (1987), literature (4), and art (478), totaling 5264, nearly 2.5% of total imports. See also Phủ Thủ Tướng, Kế hoạch mời chuyên gia và cử cán bộ đi thực tập khảo sát ở nước ngoài năm 1961 của các Bộ [Ministries' Plan to Invite Experts and Send Officials to Foreign Countries in 1961], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7774, LTT III, which contains a large number of statistical data on exchanges with the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, and other allies.

²⁷¹ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), "Báo cáo tổng quát: Tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại tới nay" [Summary Report: Status of Work and Cultural Achievements of the D.R.V. from the Day Peace Was Restored to Now] (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III.

²⁷² Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam*, 89 and 93.

Throughout the 1950s, then, the Soviets and Chinese assisted North Vietnam's development and, in turn, the Vietnamese sent their own cultural and political offerings. Both mentors viewed the D.R.V. as significant to their national security interests in terms of their international image and total alliance force. Vietnamese communist officials expressed gratitude for their assistance, believing that their "backward" state required assistance to modernize, remain independent, and meet upcoming challenges. At the end of the 1950s, however, growing ideological differences between Beijing and Moscow complicated North Vietnamese foreign affairs. The 1960 D.R.V. political platform stressed that the Soviets led all socialist countries and that North Vietnam should "strengthen ties with Moscow as well as Asian and African countries."²⁷³ Top-level Hanoi leaders developed approaches that met the needs of both mentors and yet kept them on the road to achieving D.R.V. objectives. Practical diplomacy, as it were, kept the tutor-pupil relationship intact.

African Solutions

By the end of the Second Indochinese War in 1975, North Vietnamese specialists and soldiers regularly rubbed elbows with comrades in countries like Algeria, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau. During these countries' independence wars and postcolonial development, Hanoi representatives came to assist. D.R.V. programs for Africa emerged in the mid-1950s, predicated upon the notion that North Vietnam could and should serve as a modernization mentor. In doing so, Vietnamese communists hoped to gain increased status in the world through establishing commercial ventures as well as advisory programs and cultural plans.²⁷⁴ To meet the

²⁷³ Hồ sơ về triển lãm 15 năm chiến đấu và xây dựng nước Việt Nam dân chủ cộng hòa, "Dự thảo đề cương triển lãm: Thành tích 15 năm thành lập nước VNDCCH" ["Draft Political Platform: Exhibition of Achievements over 15 years of Building the D.R.V."], Bộ Văn hóa 943, LTT III. See also How to be a Good Communist: 1960, 1960, Folder 01, Box 25, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University and Study Document "How to Become a Good Party Member" 1960, Folder 01, Box 25, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 9.

²⁷⁴ Recently, Merle L. Pribbenow, working with the Cold War International History Project, translated documents that demonstrate the Viet Minh government provided submachine guns to

complexities wrought by Africa's diverse anti-colonialisms, North Vietnam's leaders portrayed the D.R.V. as part of an international brotherhood of oppressed peoples. Yet this relationship became defined by Hanoi's views of modernization, which limited how they appreciated African abilities.

The D.R.V. did not play a particularly critical role in early African liberation efforts, but it did offer inspiration. Ho Chi Minh had some direct impact, as in the case of the March 1947 Malagasy Uprising of the *Mouvement Democratique de la Renovation Malagache* (MDRM). The rebellion against France may have resulted, in small part, from a 1946 meeting of Malagasy leaders Jeseph Raseta and Joseph Ravoahangy with President Ho in Paris. The D.R.V. president reportedly encouraged them to pursue a more violent anti-colonial struggle, ironically while he was in the midst of negotiations with France.²⁷⁵ In a symbolic sense, Hanoi also wielded significant anti-colonial standing. The 1954 victory against France made the D.R.V. a cause célèbre in the decolonizing world. "Dien Bien Phu" became synonymous with liberation struggles; people celebrated Ho's story in faraway countries as if he was one of their own. Moreover, anti-colonialists in Algeria and French West Africa found inspiration to continue their fight by citing the First Indochinese War as evidence that France could be undone.

After the war, D.R.V. leader encountered a complex set of anti-colonialisms in Africa. Europeans had divided the continent and altered indigenous economic, political, cultural, social, religious, and even linguistic patterns. These colonizers also introduced policies that differed from each other as well as within their respective areas of control. For instance, Britain's policies in Nigeria contrasted greatly with its programs in Kenya, as environmental realities, ethnic and religious diversity, as well as indigenous resistance patterns called for alternate strategies. As a matter of course, Kenyan anti-colonial leaders of the 1960s such as Jomo Kenyatta proposed

Algeria in mid-1958. See Excerpt from *Ordnance: Chronology of Historical Events, Volume 1 (Biên niên sự kiện lịch sử quân khí, Tập 1)*, Hanoi: People's Army Publishing House, 1996. Translated for CWIHP by Merle Pribbenow. The document is available online at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/e-dossier-no-25-vietnam-covertly-supplied-weapons-to-revolutionaries-algeria-and-latin> (Accessed February 27, 2012).

²⁷⁵ Douglas Little, "Cold War and Colonialism in Africa: The United States, France, and the Madagascar Revolt of 1947" *The Pacific Historical Review* 59/4 (November 1990), 529.

principles of resistance that differed sharply from those of Nigeria's Nnamdi Azikwe and Obafemi Awolowo. In some cases, Africans successfully negotiated their freedom, as in the case of Leopold Senghor in Senegal. In others, African leaders had to wage long and bitter wars for liberation, as in the example of Amilcar Cabral in Guinea-Bissau.

Newly-liberated Africans agreed to reject or alter previous incarnations of western (white) racial hierarchies. Colonizers used racial rationales for marginalization and injustice, even espousing racially-coded reasons for independence delays. African thinkers and politicians responded in various ways. Senghor, for instance, acknowledged the superiority of French culture, but simultaneously lauded the value of African contributions. By doing so, he appeased French racial convictions by promoting francophone acculturation even as he advocated Senegal's independence.²⁷⁶ In contrast, Kenyatta and Cabral rejected the West's hierarchy of race as a tool of colonialism. Both applauded armed opposition to the racist policies of Britain and Portugal, but also drew strength from pan-African nationalist sentiments rooted in racial definitions.²⁷⁷

While a complete discussion of race and revolutionary nationalism is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to note that, in the 1950s, what linked divergent African movements was racial consciousness. Any foreign country aiming to set up relations with Africa would thus need to acknowledge this reality. African political groups and other organizations used race to rally members, incite revolution, and instill a sense of pride. Unifying peoples within and across cultural, class, and national lines, African leaders stressed racial unity by framing the world as "black" verses "white," or, in the case of Afro-Asian groups, "people of color" versus "whites." From the 5th Pan-African Congress in 1945 to more global structures like the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) established in 1957, racial appeals abounded. They underwrote African methods of networking, strategizing, moral support, financing, and conflict resolutions through the 1950s. Naturally, a wide spectrum of racialization emerged. Senghor's

²⁷⁶ Leopold Sedar Senghor, *On African Socialism* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1964).

²⁷⁷ See Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962) and Patrick Chabal, *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

negritude competed with Diop's case for black African superiority, as did Sekou Toure's dabbles with Marxist conceptualizations that embraced racial awareness. Racial thought did not preclude socialist or Marxist precepts in Africa, but it did influence the ways in which such ideologies could be integrated into liberation efforts.

What is also significant to the context of D.R.V.- Africa relations is that African political leaders, in accepting certain racial "facts," ran into difficulties with the racialized hierarchies that modernization affirmed. Most assigned blame to European colonizers for Africa's problems, while employing Franz Fanon's "cultural nationalist" approach to re-make their identity.²⁷⁸ In doing so, some Africans embraced racial theories by reversing them. Afrocentric writers like Cheikh Anta Diop, for example, promoted biological definitions of race to argue for black Africa's historical supremacy over Europe.²⁷⁹ Nearly all political leaders promoted some version of racial pride to unify their nations and counter assumptions of inferiority. They found empowerment in rejecting European estimations of their worth, but they pursued futures defined by the West's modernization model. By challenging western racial rankings and yet absorbing modernization hierarchies, African revolutionaries invariably wrestled with characterizations of their continent as "behind" and "backward."

Hanoi, meanwhile, had taken a different ideological path. Vietnamese leaders had not racialized their independence war and they did not claim racism as a motive for increased American intervention. Instead, stressed a "color-blind" concept of imperialism and, accepting the precepts of modernization, agreed their country was "behind." Race had no role in either Hanoi's alliance bids or its domestic planning process; racial unity had no value for North Vietnamese officials who advanced a socialist future for the nation. As a result, the D.R.V. view of the world relied upon modernization criteria, which placed Vietnam in the "backward" category, but positioned Africa as even more so. In sum, Hanoi unconsciously replicated and perpetuated

²⁷⁸ See Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963). Fanon, the Martinique-born psychiatrist in Algeria, concentrated on the psychological dimensions of racism and colonialism, which led to his explorations of their pernicious effects on the minds of black Africans.

²⁷⁹ See Cheikh Anta Diop, *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State* (Westport: Lawrence Hill & Co, 1978).

older racial hierarchies through use of modernization in its relations with Africa during the early Cold War.

This phenomenon developed quickly after 1954. Prior to the victory at Dien Bien Phu and the Geneva Accords, Vietnamese communists had been focused on its war with France and had paid minimal attention to Africa. After Geneva, D.R.V. policy experts viewed African countries as opportunities to increase their country's prestige. Since many Africans were still in the process of decolonizing, such alliances could not be formalized right away, but they could accept assistance. In the late 1950s, then, Vietnamese communists called for more contact with Africans, mainly in the form of cultural and educational exchange as well as aid packages. North Vietnam's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) joined with the Ministry of Education to "keep in touch with socialist countries as well as Africa and Asia" as early as 1955.²⁸⁰

More often than not, Hanoi's propaganda and D.R.V. official documents reveal, these leaders felt they had a duty to encourage resistance and provide support to emerging African countries. As a 1957 *Nhan Dan* editorial reasoned, "The resistance of our people has great significance with respect to the work of defending world peace. It has encouraged the oppressed peoples, especially the Asian and African peoples, to push forward their people's liberation movements and to fight colonialism."²⁸¹ The Viet Minh government was a symbol to the world, D.R.V. propagandists argued, an example of successful anti-colonialism that had great significance for peoples seeking to oust European rulers. Therefore, they had a duty to inspire others who were less fortunate through anti-imperialist and modernization programs.

By the end of the 1950s, Africa became a higher North Vietnamese priority. D.R.V. policy planners created a national plan for 1960 that proposed broadening their stake in Africa

²⁸⁰ Bộ Văn hóa, Báo cáo của Ban Liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài về cuộc triển lãm giới thiệu hình ảnh các nước tại Việt Nam năm 1955 [Report of Foreign Cultural Communication Department on the Exhibition of Countries' Images in Vietnam in 1955] Bộ Văn hóa 1048, LTT III and Bộ Văn hóa, Đề án, báo cáo về công tác triển lãm, tuyên truyền giới thiệu Việt Nam ở nước ngoài năm 1955 [Project Report on the Exhibition, Propaganda, and Introduction of Vietnam Abroad in 1955], Bộ Văn hóa 1049, LTT III.

²⁸¹ *Nhan Dan Hails Resistance Anniversary*, 20 December 1957, Folder 16, Box 04, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University.

politically, culturally, and economically. Vietnamese policy makers repeated early assertions that increased interactions with African countries, among other alliances, had increased the D.R.V.'s global prestige. Also in 1960, when a Hanoi exhibition celebrated D.R.V. achievements, the organizers reserved significant spots for “attention to the support of and strengthening relations with “socialist, Asian, and African allies.”²⁸² In the following year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared a detailed, three-year plan to meet African appeals. Officials envisaged a huge increase in the number of Vietnamese personnel that would be needed in Africa, believing that up to fifteen additional African countries were on the verge of developing formal ties with the D.R.V. Of twenty-eight independent African countries, one report explained, only Guinea, Mali, and Morocco (and recently Senegal) had any “real relations” with the D.R.V., but more African nations would have to seek closer relations with Hanoi. Analysts anticipated official recognition from countries like Senegal, Tunisia, Algeria, Togo, Niger, Ghana, Somalia, Ethiopia, and others within three years. To meet these countries' needs, policy planners reckoned that 150 teachers, 150 doctors and pharmacists, 30 financial experts, 50 engineers, and 50 agricultural experts would be required. In addition, the Ministry observed, two-thirds of overseas staff would need to know French and another third should speak English.²⁸³

In preparing to aid Africa, D.R.V. policy makers revealed both their optimism and biases. Positive views of widening relations with Africa, one report explained, resulted from “increasingly established relationships with nationalist countries” as well as other business and cultural transactions. Ministry of Education officials argued that Africa was significant to Vietnam's future: “We really need to support and increase relationships with newly independent African countries.”

²⁸² Bộ Văn hóa, “Dự thảo đề cương triển lãm: Thành tích 15 năm thành lập nước VNDCCH” [“Draft Political Platform: Exhibition of Achievements over 15 Years of Building the D.R.V.”], Hồ sơ về triển lãm 15 năm chiến đấu và xây dựng nước Việt Nam Dân Chủ Cộng Hòa [Records of the 15 Years of Fighting and Building the D.R.V. Exhibition], Bộ Văn hóa 943, LTT III.

²⁸³ Bộ Giáo dục, “Tờ trình về vấn đề dự trù số cán bộ chuyên môn ta sẽ gửi đi giúp các nước Châu Phi trong thời gian 2 năm tới” [The Report Estimates on the Professional Staff to Be Sent to Help African Countries in Two Years] (April 28, 1961), Bản dự trù số lượng và chính sách đối với cán bộ chuyên môn đi giúp các nước Châu Phi của Ban công tác đối ngoại TW và Công Đoàn Bộ giáo dục năm 1961 [The Expected Number and Policies for Professional Staff to Assist the African Countries of the Central Foreign Affairs Office and Ministry of Education Union in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 541, LTT III.

Education officers argued that this was necessary “to intensify our effects in Africa, [and] to support these countries’ liberation from western slave culture.” They maintained that Africans continued to struggle against colonial influence and lacked enough experts to develop on their own. Ministry of Education policy analysts concluded that, for Africa, “our help is quite necessary.”²⁸⁴

This “necessary help” only reached appreciable heights in 1961 through Hanoi’s participation in Afro-Asian conferences as well as assistance programs. In February, the Prime Minister appointed a standing delegation for visits to Asian and African countries, which included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, members of the Cultural Exchange Commission, the Deputy Chief of the Bureau of Western Asia and Africa under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and also a Ministry of Foreign Affairs Department of Africa agent. The group visited Guinea, Mali, Ghana, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco, Sudan, and Ethiopia, among others.²⁸⁵ During the Afro-Asian Women’s Solidarity Conference held in Cairo in March 1961, a D.R.V. representative listed as Nguyen Ty Banh arrived after attending the Plenary Committee of the larger Conference of Afro-Asian Solidarity.²⁸⁶ She traveled as part of a larger 1961 D.R.V. tour of Africa, by the new D.R.V. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ung Văn Khiêm. It was Khiêm who orchestrated the establishment of diplomatic relations with a number of Africans and laid the foundation for future negotiations.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Phủ Thủ Tướng, “Kính gửi Ủy Ban Thường vụ Quốc hội” [To the National Assembly Standing Committee], (February 21, 1961) Công văn của Bộ Ngoại giao, Phủ Thủ Tướng v/v cử một đoàn cán bộ của Chính phủ đi thăm các nước Châu Á và Châu Phi năm 1961-1962 [Dispatch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister’s Office on Sending a Delegation of Government Officials to Visit Asian and African Countries in 1961-1962], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7789, LTT III.

²⁸⁶ Laura E. Bier, “Our Sisters in Struggle: Non-Alignment, Afro-Asian Identity, and National Identity in the Egyptian Women’s Press, 1952-1967” Working Paper #4, (April 2002), International Center for Advanced Studies, New York University, 19. <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/icas/LauraBier.pdf> (Accessed January 17, 2012). The name of the D.R.V. delegate has probably been recorded incorrectly; I suspect this is Nguyễn Thị Bình.

²⁸⁷ Phủ Thủ Tướng, “Kính gửi Ủy Ban Thường vụ Quốc hội” [To the National Assembly Standing Committee], (February 21, 1961) Công văn của Bộ Ngoại giao, Phủ Thủ Tướng v/v cử một đoàn cán bộ của Chính phủ đi thăm các nước Châu Á và Châu Phi năm 1961-1962 [Dispatch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister’s Office on Sending a Delegation of Government Officials to Visit Asian and African Countries in 1961-1962], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7789, LTT III.

African aid appeals for development assistance during these years confirmed Hanoi's view that D.R.V. help was vital for Africa. For instance, in April 1961 the Ministry of Education informed the Committee on Foreign Affairs that both Guinea and Mali had called for specialists in education and medicine, plus engineers for bridge and road construction. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with several other offices, made immediate plans to fulfill these requests and also extend cultural exchange programs in both countries. Lengthy discussion of the monetary costs ensued among ministry chiefs. None objected to the financial burden per se, but some expressed concern that the D.R.V. could not raise sufficient enough capital in a short amount of time.²⁸⁸ Descriptions of such requests from Africa also indicated it was Vietnam's responsibility to assist these allies, with repeated references to Hanoi's "duty" in African countries.

Ministry officials claimed high returns on minor African investments. For example, the Ministry of Education sent just four teachers to Guinea in 1961 and yet Ministry analysts professed that this had resulted in much closer diplomatic ties between the two countries. Ministry officials further speculated that large benefits could be gained by continued aid to not only Guinea, but also Mali. Both countries needed more capital for economic development, North Vietnamese reports concluded, as well as specialized officers. They also listed Africa's need for education, health, and agricultural experts; Guinea had even made a special request for banking and credit authorities.²⁸⁹ After a month-long visit from a Guinean education mission to North Vietnam, two D.R.V. education specialists traveled to Guinea to kick off an anti-illiteracy

²⁸⁸ Bộ Giáo dục, "To trình ve van de du tru so oan bo chuyen mon ta se gui di giup cac nuoc chau fi thong thoi gian 2 nam toi" [[The Report Estimates on the Professional Staff to Be Sent to Help African Countries in Two Years], (April 28, 1961), Bản dự trù số lượng và chính sách đối với cán bộ chuyên môn đi giúp các nước Châu Phi của Ban công tác đối ngoại TW và Công Đoàn Bộ giáo dục năm 1961 [The Expected Number and Policies for Professional Staff to Assist the African Countries of the Central Foreign Affairs Office and Ministry of Education Union in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 541, LTT III. See also Phủ Thủ Tướng, Kế hoạch, hiệp định hợp tác văn hóa năm 1961 với Ghine [Plan, Cultural Cooperation Agreement with Guinea], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7805, LTT III and Phủ Thủ Tướng, Công văn của Bộ Ngoại giao, UBKHNN v/v mời phái đoàn kinh tế Mali thăm Việt Nam và Hiệp định hợp tác văn hóa với Mali năm 1961 [], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7825, LTT III.

²⁸⁹ Ibid and Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam [Vietnam Worker's Party], Đề án của ngành giáo dục về chính sách đối với Châu Phi ["Project of Ministry of Education in Regards to Policy for Africa], (July 15, 1961), Bản dự trù số lượng và chính sách đối với cán bộ chuyên môn đi giúp các nước Châu Phi của Ban công tác đối ngoại TW và Công Đoàn Bộ giáo dục năm 1961 [The Expected Number and Policies for Professional Staff to Assist African Countries by the Central Foreign Affairs Board and the Ministry of Education Union in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 541, LTT III.

campaign modeled on that of the D.R.V. Education Ministry chiefs also created an education exhibition for Guinea that they planned to send to Mali at a later date. During the 1962-63 academic year, Hanoi offered scholarships to five students from Mali and another five from Guinea to study in Vietnam. Ministry of Education officers also formulated a proposal to open a teacher's college in Guinea and later Mali as well.²⁹⁰ By aiding Africa, reports claimed, the D.R.V. would continue to receive great benefits.

In some ways, the D.R.V. did gain advantages from their stake in Africa. Through previously established contacts in Mali and other countries, requests came pouring into North Vietnam, which policy makers regarded as evidence of Vietnam's increasing stature. For instance, a Cameroon women's association and the Togo Freedom Youth Union asked the D.R.V. for permission to enroll their students in North Vietnamese universities. Ministry staff used such appeals as evidence of Hanoi's expanding international importance. When natural disasters befell both Madagascar and Algeria, the countries looked to the D.R.V. for help, which North Vietnam granted with little debate.²⁹¹ Mali, Guinea, and Nigeria continued to turn to D.R.V. specialists, and the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education kept careful note of their needs. In doing so, Ministry staff often commented that such requests proved North Vietnam's global stature.²⁹² As of September 1962, the D.R.V. boasted of full diplomatic recognition from Yugoslavia, Guinea, and Mali, as well as sub-diplomatic recognition (consulate-general) from India, Indonesia, Burma, France, and the United Kingdom. Trade relations also expanded with countries like Cambodia, Iraq, Egypt, and Yemen.²⁹³ The Prime Minister's Office remarked that

²⁹⁰ Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam [Vietnam Worker's Party], Đề án của ngành giáo dục về chính sách đối với Châu Phi ["Project of Ministry of Education in regards to Policy for Africa] (July 15, 1961), Bản dự trù số lượng và chính sách đối với cán bộ chuyên môn đi giúp các nước Châu Phi của Ban công tác đối ngoại TW và Công Đoàn Bộ giáo dục năm 1961 [The Expected Number and Policy for Professional Staff to Assist African Countries of the Central Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education Union in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 541, LTT III.

²⁹¹ Thomas Perry Thornton, "Foreign Relations of the Asian Communist Satellites" *Pacific Affairs* 35/4 (Winter 1962-63), 348.

²⁹² Bộ Giáo dục, ["Seventeen Regulations about the Duties of the Ministry of Education and Students"] (June 29, 1964), Điều lệ về công tác đối ngoại của Bộ Giáo dục năm 1964 [Regulations for Foreign Affairs in the Ministry of Education in 1964], Bộ Giáo dục 597, LTT III.

these striking advances had been made possible in great part by the overseas efforts of the Ministries of Culture and Education in Africa, Europe, and Asia.²⁹⁴

Another reason that North Vietnamese chiefs took such pleasure in their African accomplishments was that they used such evidence to emphasize South Vietnam's limited achievements. The Ministry of Education gleefully noted in a mid-1961 report that President Ngo Dinh Diem had all but failed in Africa. An official predicted that Hanoi would supply additional economic assistance and expanded cultural cooperation to Africa, unlike Saigon. The South Vietnamese government had gained diplomatic ties with some African countries, the Education Ministry admitted, but the North's prestige was high throughout Africa. According to one D.R.V. report, Hanoi's successes in African education and health programs, as well as other forms of aid, had been considerable and, by contrast, Saigon could claim almost nothing.²⁹⁵

Not all went smoothly for the D.R.V. in Africa. Dealing with racial consciousness as well as anti-communism presented a special challenge. A mid-1961 V.W.P. report observed that newly independent African nations had developed a wide range of political attitudes, and Party heads complained of imperialist interference in Africa by countries like the U.S. America's anti-communist influence in African countries reportedly caused Hanoi leaders considerable

²⁹³ Thomas Perry Thornton, "Foreign Relations of the Asian Communist Satellites." *Pacific Affairs* 35, no. 4 (Winter 1962-63), 344, 346, and 352.

²⁹⁴ Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa), Department of Cultural Exchange With Foreign Countries (Ministry of Culture), [Statistics on Exchanges], (February 8, 1961), Báo cáo thống kê về nhiệm vụ với các nước Á Phi và các nước tư bản chủ nghĩa năm 1961 của vụ trao đổi văn hóa với nước ngoài (Statistic Report on Missions to Asian and African Countries and Capitalist Countries in 1961), Phủ Thủ Tướng 7773, LTT III. See also Phủ Thủ Tướng, "Kính gửi Ủy Ban Thường vụ Quốc hội" ["To the National Assembly Standing Committee"], (February 21, 1961) Công văn của Bộ Ngoại giao, Phủ Thủ Tướng v/v cử một đoàn cán bộ của Chính phủ đi thăm các nước Châu Á và Châu Phi năm 1961-1962 [Dispatch of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prime Minister's Office on Sending a Delegation of Government Officials to Visit Asian and African Countries in 1961-1962], Phủ Thủ Tướng 7789, LTT III.

²⁹⁵ Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam [Vietnam Worker's Party], Đề án của ngành giáo dục về chính sách đối với Châu Phi ["Project of Ministry of Education in regards to policy for Africa"] (July 15, 1961), Bản dự trù số lượng và chính sách đối với cán bộ chuyên môn đi giúp các nước Châu Phi của Ban công tác đối ngoại TW và Công Đoàn Bộ giáo dục năm 1961 [The Expected Number and Policy for Professional Staff to Assist African Countries of the Central Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education Union in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 541, LTT III.

headaches.²⁹⁶ Phạm Ngọc Thuần was made Chair of the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (C.C.R.F.C.) in 1963. Hanoi tasked Thuần with extending D.R.V. relations to non-aligned and non-communist African states. A former foreign policy advisor and ambassador to East Germany, as well as “a leading spokesman of the Catholic communists,” Thuần had represented the D.R.V. abroad often. He had attended Iraq’s Third National Day festivities in July 1961 and signed official diplomatic recognition agreements with Mauretania, Ghana, and Senegal.²⁹⁷

Ministry of Foreign Affairs leaders probably selected Thuần for his past successes in dealing with anti-communism. He had formed Vietnam’s Asian-African Unity Committee on July 20, 1961, and, a few months later in August, led North Vietnam in hosting the “International Students Conference” with the theme “16 Years of Building and Developing Education in the D.R.V.” The conference emphasized how Asian, African, and Latin American countries could achieve greatness if they shared their experiences of oppression. The Vietnamese delegates boasted of their history of resisting France and emphasized their anti-colonial struggles. They also explained how, in northern Vietnam, education had been reorganized, teachers had been retrained more fully in Marxism-Leninism, and illiteracy had been virtually wiped out through adult education programs, vocational schools, and universities.²⁹⁸ As head of the C.C.R.F.C., Thuần led D.R.V. friendship delegations that promoted less controversial versions of North Vietnam. In 1965 alone, he traveled extensively across Africa and the Middle East, visiting such countries as the United Arab Republic (Egypt and Syria), Tanzania, Mauretania, Ghana, Congo-Brazzaville,

²⁹⁶ Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam [Vietnam Worker’s Party], Đề án của ngành giáo dục về chính sách đối với Châu Phi [“Project of Ministry of Education in regards to policy for Africa] (July 15, 1961), Bản dự trù số lượng và chính sách đối với cán bộ chuyên môn đi giúp các nước Châu Phi của Ban công tác đối ngoại TW và Công Đoàn Bộ giáo dục năm 1961 [The Expected Number and Policy for Professional Staff to Assist African Countries of the Central Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Education Union in 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 541, LTT III.

²⁹⁷ Phạm Ngọc Thuận: Chairman of the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, No Date, Folder 13, Box 13, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 08 - Biography, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

²⁹⁸ Bộ Giáo dục, “Báo cáo hội nghị sinh viên quốc tế ở Hà Nội” (“Report of the International Students Conference in Hanoi”), (September 1961), Hội nghị sinh viên quốc tế tổ chức tại Việt Nam tháng 9-1961 [International Students Meeting Organized in Vietnam in September 1961], Bộ Giáo dục 543, LTT III.

Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and the Central African Republic. While in these areas, he relied upon his previous work in presenting a “less-communist” image of North Vietnam.²⁹⁹

In addition, North Vietnam’s Africa policy developed a curious paradox. D.R.V. ministries formulated policies for Africa that demonstrated Hanoi’s devotion to modernization, yet, in doing so, they assumed that Africans would take, not give. Each of the aforementioned programs for D.R.V. technical assistance, cultural cooperation and educational proposals were, in reality, one-way plans for assistance. African representatives did visit North Vietnam, but mainly for training or information sessions, as well as diplomatic discussions. The so-called D.R.V.-Africa “exchanges” in education, culture, health, agriculture, and industry were anything but reciprocal. Hanoi did not request Africa’s aid, even while the D.R.V. actively sought assistance from other countries. Instead, their plans show that North Vietnamese leaders imagined Africa as a site for Vietnamese tutelage, not international exchange. This may reveal the degree to which condescension influenced D.R.V. policies. The Soviets and Chinese, guilty of their own paternalistic approach toward Vietnam, typically kept the playing field level in terms of exchanges. As shown earlier in this chapter, Moscow, Beijing, and Hanoi kept up a steady back and forth of books, information, and representatives to meetings, seminars, and workshops throughout the 1950s. In D.R.V.-African relations, fewer gestures or tokens of mutual respect appeared.

With such evidence in mind, what becomes clear is that Hanoi welcomed the chance to serve as a mentor for African countries. The North Vietnamese presumed that Africans faced the same challenges of development and understood the woes of postcolonial modernization. D.R.V. foreign program officials also did not speculate on the causes for African requests or comment on differences in culture, biology, or even climate to explain these nations’ hardships. They concentrated on bringing relief and predicting harmonious bonds with Africa in the future. While no blatantly racial stereotypes or biases appear in the available records of Hanoi’s foreign policy process, the North Vietnamese used modernization criteria and its innately racialized hierarchies to assess African countries. The D.R.V. almost always cast assumptions about Africans in the

²⁹⁹ Pham Ngoc Thuan: Chairman of the Commission for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, No Date, Folder 13, Box 13, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 08 - Biography, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University.

language of modernization, evaluating them based on measurements of modern development. Few D.R.V. reports mention reciprocal exchanges with Africa, despite the fact that some of these countries had attained a stronger position. The D.R.V. formed policies based on what North Vietnam could offer Africa, without considering what African nations could provide to the Vietnamese.

In the period between 1954 and the early 1960s, then, the expansion of North Vietnamese-African relations can be attributed to a variety of factors. As more countries declared their independence and won battles to secure their liberation, the D.R.V., identifying itself as the anti-imperialist gold standard, welcomed them. Strategically, this was probably a smart move in that Hanoi was able to set up a force of African allies, broad commercial possibilities, and avenues to influence African decisions. Yet contemporary criticism within the D.R.V. indicated that the government lacked cogent policies, clear regulations, and necessary preparations for foreign programs. By persisting in enlarging overseas programs, North Vietnam increased pressure on its already over-burdened cadre.

Conclusion

During the 1950s, the D.R.V. pursued a wide range of diplomatic options while concurrently developing its defensive capabilities and economic stability. This meant that Hanoi welcomed even purely symbolic gestures, such as public testimonials, token privileges, and conference invitations, from decolonizing peoples. North Vietnam reached out to Asian and African nations, not only believing that opportunities existed beyond the major world powers, but also based on the conviction that the D.R.V. had a responsibility to lead others and had earned the right to do so. The fact that North Vietnam conducted such overseas endeavors while still facing difficult circumstances at home indicates that Vietnamese communists sincerely believed in the importance of such alliances and the status they would bring. With “soft power” options relatively inexpensive and easy to implement, Hanoi could penetrate potentially friendly countries without risking enormous financial burdens. They contacted their counterparts outside the

communist bloc, to mixed reactions, but the fact that they did so and hurdled enormous ideological differences in the process indicates that the D.R.V. continued to envision its own global mission.

Hanoi's foreign policy initiatives encountered ideological difficulties. Anti-communism presented a major concern, causing Hanoi to battle with opponents inside Vietnam as well as anti-communist detractors abroad. Recognizing that many African leaders relied upon anti-white sentiment built from anti-colonialism and anti-racism, North Vietnam's leaders maintained their distance from racializations. They drew upon notions of oppression and brotherhood, which better resonated among decolonizing peoples. Rather than building anti-white or pro-"people of color" movements, which would have easily fit into postcolonial discourse, Hanoi pursued relationships with Africans and other Asians predicated upon their common history with colonial repression and economic exploitation. In doing so, the D.R.V. built a foundation for their own rise in international affairs, serving as a modernization mentor to many emerging countries. This brought the D.R.V. government not only further legitimacy and allies, but also status on the international stage. Their eager responses to African appeals, especially within the context of continued internal political conflict and intervention, illustrate how well these requests fit in with the D.R.V.'s self-image.

Therefore, the Viet Minh government did not form relationships beyond the communist bloc with the intention of extending communism. Instead, officials aimed for eminence in world affairs by becoming mentors. Hanoi intended to broaden its base of allies, provide aid and advice in modernization, and by doing so promote the D.R.V.'s reputation internationally. There is some indication that commercial ties, as well as geostrategic considerations, also played a role in early D.R.V.-Africa relations. Future research will show that the D.R.V. intended to gain advantages beyond international status and expanded alliances.

The following chapter explores the extensive role of culture in Hanoi's pursuit of modernization and anti-imperialism. North Vietnam often celebrated and broadcast its accomplishments during the late 1950s, reporting significant progress in fields as varied as industry, agriculture, literature, and the arts. Government sources show, however, that

modernization came at a price. Bureaucratic wrangling, administrative ineptitude, and corruption became everyday themes in official reports. Anti-imperialism, meanwhile, brought unity and moral strength to North Vietnam. D.R.V. propagandists critiqued America (and Saigon) from nearly every angle, highlighting Washington's imperialist policies. Yet, by exclusively pursuing an anti-imperialist strategy, Hanoi failed to exploiting all aspects of Washington's foreign policy weaknesses, most especially the issue of racism in U.S. foreign policy toward Vietnam.

CHAPTER 5

AFTER GENEVA: D.R.V. MODERNIZATION AND ANTI-IMPERIALISM

In mid-1954, Vietnamese communist leaders missed out on what should have been a non-stop celebration of their Dien Bien Phu victory. At the Geneva Conference, Hanoi power brokers exchanged well-earned vacations for lessons in diplomatic maneuvering. Afterward, they returned home and set about the business of running a “North Vietnam.” The situation did not look promising, with the state divided and American interference intensifying. Vietnam quickly became the setting for a major Cold War cultural contest between Hanoi and Washington.

To meet these challenges, D.R.V. leaders maintained their focus on northern development and extended their anti-U.S. campaigns to include the Saigon government. Hanoi believed that continued modernization would serve as a bulwark against imperialism and thus assure their sovereignty. At home and on the world stage, North Vietnamese officials also boasted of the country’s modern achievements to perpetuate positive images of their country and improve its global ranking. Meanwhile, the D.R.V. relied upon anti-imperialism to unite its residents and influence international opinion, denouncing American efforts in South Vietnam as an invasion. Information campaigns often contrasted stories of Washington’s exploitative policies with Hanoi’s democratic government. In doing so, North Vietnamese leaders hoped to undermine the South Vietnamese regime and U.S. efforts. They also hoped to project an image of the D.R.V. as a legitimate state plagued by illegal and unwelcome exploitation.

In advocating modernization and anti-imperialism, D.R.V. leaders also elaborated a national identity. Hanoi officials anticipated a reunified Vietnam, but understood that this might not occur in the near future. As such, Party and government officials tasked education and cultural cadre with fostering modernization and anti-imperialist information programs. In doing so, North Vietnam aimed to modernize the Vietnamese by making progress and development the basis for civic initiatives. As such, they encouraged a definition of “being Vietnamese” that went beyond previous cultural and biological terms. At the same time, North Vietnam’s propagandists

used anti-imperialism to contrast American defects with Vietnamese virtues. Put another way, Hanoi officials defined who the Vietnamese were by denouncing what they were not. As a result, D.R.V. programs to strengthen the North, unify the population, and consolidate public opinion altered and added to prior definitions of what it meant to be Vietnamese.

During this period, Hanoi also shifted its focus from fighting France to denouncing the U.S. as imperialist villains. Their expanding indictments of U.S. strategies in Vietnam centered on America's scheme to set Vietnamese "brothers" against one another. Washington's "divide and conquer" approach, North Vietnamese officials complained, exemplified imperialist cruelty.

This chapter does not seek to provide a definitive account of North Vietnam in the late 1950s. Rather, my research focuses on the ways in which the D.R.V. used modernization and anti-imperialism to deal with post-Geneva challenges. I reveal the ways in which both approaches resulted in the elaboration of a national identity. I also examine the limitations of modernization and anti-imperialism in dominating North Vietnam's domestic and foreign policy process. I trace the role and ultimate influence of each, offering new insights into North Vietnam as well as the role of ideology in foreign affairs.

Ministries of Modernization

Hanoi's policy planning sessions of the late 1950s reveal no major debates on modernization, save for how to accelerate it in order to end North Vietnam's "backwardness." Because D.R.V. leaders had absorbed the hierarchical tenets of modernization, they believed that continued progress would not only assure North Vietnam's sovereignty, but also prepare the population for an unknown future. Scientific approaches to industry and agriculture, as well as culture and education, then, seemed not only wise, but also quite necessary. In concentrating on modernization after Geneva, Hanoi policy makers looked to many government offices, including the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education. D.R.V. leaders believed these two ministries would play a critical role in making North Vietnam a showplace of modern socialism while blocking undesirable influence from the Americans moving in next door. Top officials and

Party leaders instructed both ministries to improve modernization, which would strengthen their country, protect them against U.S. invasion, and further legitimize their government at home and overseas.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng, who held the office from 1955 to 1975, North Vietnam pursued modernization by producing a wealth of “scientific” studies. Quantitative research and analysis of government programs held sway in a manner of which Robert McNamara would have enthusiastically approved. The prime minister’s office expected this type of information, requesting numerous assessments and, in turn, receiving statistics-laden responses. As a case in point, a 1959 ministry evaluation listed multiple projects from the previous five years, along with extensive lists of numerical data, with written analyses that insisted cultural programs had “made great progress.” The report included lengthy attachments on artists, composers, and performers, listing their names along with their personal information, along with cultural activities at multiple levels of society, including “outlying villages, hamlets, factories, and wards.” In one section of the document, the ministry calculated that North Vietnam’s libraries had grown from one in 1955 to 33 in 1958 and that the new libraries possessed “more than 500 thousand books, serving 751,722 readers.”³⁰⁰ The Ministry of Culture regularly produced similar reports during the latter half of the 1950s. According to Kim N.B. Ninh, the Ministry of Culture “came to have formidable power over the social and intellectual life of the country.”³⁰¹ Part of this power was legitimated by the Ministry’s production of statistical reports. As Ninh reveals, this quantitative frenzy extended to the public sphere, as “legions of cadres compiled these statistics, which saturated newspapers, the radio, and all government publications.”³⁰² The sheer volume of year-end reports, progress statements, and multi-year summaries indicate that statistical analysis had gained wide acceptance in North Vietnam. Hanoi

³⁰⁰ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], (August 1959), “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], Bộ Văn hóa 54, LTT III.

³⁰¹ Ninh, *A World Transformed*, 165-169. For a thorough examination of the Ministry, its activities, and its relationship to intellectual society and the socialist impulse, see 164-203.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 170.

believed education could bring about successful modernization and its researchers used quantitative methods to demonstrate ministry successes. These reports also show statistics, as a symbol of modern analysis, became de rigeur among education and cultural officials.

In addition to such “scientific” methodologies, Hanoi also pursued modernization by warning its officials about the growing contest with Washington and Saigon. The D.R.V. National Plan for 1956 cautioned, for instance, that “the enemy now opposes our country not only in economic, military, and political fields, but also in culture.” As such, Hanoi established two main tasks for the government: economic recovery and cultural development. All ministries joined in the effort to counter U.S. and South Vietnamese plans, but the Ministry of Culture headed these efforts. Cultural officers aimed to modernize the North on a broad scale through the arts and education, as well as through propaganda and information programs. Working in tandem with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cultural officials popularized themes that promoted modernization.

V.W.P. leaders and top office-holders quickly formulated cultural initiatives to modernize the population. Party chiefs directed the formation of cultural houses and clubs as the “public cultural bodies of the Party” throughout North Vietnam.³⁰³ Envisioned as a new center of cultural life for Vietnamese people, the secretariat ordered that clubs be established at factories, construction sites, farms, production groups, offices, schools, and trade unions. Lack of participation inspired Party heads to issue warnings about clubs that had become entertainment venues. They reminded participants to take their “clubbing” seriously and educate others in “modern ways.”³⁰⁴ Such clubs expanded in tandem with the resurgence in Ministry literacy campaigns. In a 1955 report to the National Assembly, then-Vice Premier Phạm Văn Đồng cited D.R.V. successes in eradicating illiteracy and complimented writers and artists for their

³⁰³ For an excellent assessment of cultural houses and clubs, see *Ibid.*, 180-184.

³⁰⁴ Bộ Văn Hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Chỉ thị về việc lãnh đạo, tổ chức công tác Câu lạc bộ trong các nhà máy, công trường, nông trường, tập đoàn sản xuất, cơ quan, trường học, thành phố” [“Instructions for Leading and Organizing Club Activities in Factories, Construction Sites, Farms, Production Groups, Offices, Schools, and Cities”] (1959), “Đề cương của Bộ văn hóa về công tác văn hóa quần chúng năm 1959” [Outline of Ministry of Culture Regarding Mass Culture in 1959], Bộ Văn Hóa 931, LTT III.

assistance. He stated “all the vestiges of obscurantism left behind in Vietnamese society by imperialist and feudal rule” could be erased through the development of a fully literate population, which would lead to Vietnamese modernity.³⁰⁵

In the mid-1950s, the prime minister’s office also created civilian education programs to build support for the government’s goals and encourage patriotic sentiment. By the end of the decade, “Thousands of worker’s clubs and rural cultural houses [had been] opened for the purposes of both education and entertainment.” These sites possessed “thousands of small bookcases and reading rooms in rural areas, factories, schools, and quarters” as well as meeting and study spaces.³⁰⁶ Groups met regularly to read to one another, to share information, and hold discussions. Civic organization campaigns of the late 1950s thus advanced modernization by encouraging Vietnamese people throughout the North to participate in the country’s development.

North Vietnam’s modernization, then, was partly defined in terms of literacy and education programs. Both required materials that the Ministry of Culture provided to the public. Anticipating an expanded literate population, the ministry produced publications that could be understood by even new readers. Government publishing houses reported production of 5,658,626 books in 1955, compared to a nationwide total of 1,570,000 in 1939 under French rule.³⁰⁷ The D.R.V. published thirteen million books by the end of the decade, mainly texts on modern agricultural and industrial techniques. Many of these works are especially notable for their use of basic language, hand-drawn illustrations, and even black and white photos to assist readers in understanding modern concepts. The ministry’s import department used its budget

³⁰⁵ Vice-Premier Phạm Văn Đồng, “Report to National Assembly: Achievements of the Vietnamese People’s War of Resistance,” 1955, Folder 14, Box 05, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 33-36.

³⁰⁶ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], (August 1959), “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], Bộ Văn hóa 54, LTT III.

³⁰⁷ Cục Xuất bản (Bộ Văn hóa) [Foreign Book Publication Department, Ministry of Culture], “Kế hoạch xuất bản sách ngoại văn năm 1956” [“Plan for Foreign Book Publication in 1956”], (June 1956) “Kế hoạch báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị” [“Planning report on the Implementation of the 1956 Publication Department Plans and Agencies”], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

(and often requested additional monies) “to collect technical documents and scientific inventions from other countries.” The staff translated works from communist bloc countries and sought advice from their Moscow and Beijing mentors. The ministry’s Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries (D.C.C.F.C.) also translated political, economic, cultural, and language study texts. They also published various documents, art images, and collectable stamps.³⁰⁸ D.R.V. figures for 1956 show that textbooks and foreign language study books topped their import lists. Additionally, an estimated 616,029 foreign newspapers had arrived, mostly Soviet and Chinese, with others from France, Hungary, Rumania, and East Germany. French and Chinese economic studies had been best-sellers in that year; in fact, according to ministry staff, not enough had been imported. By 1957, import receiving and distribution facilities had to be expanded to meet their growing roster of publications, as lengthy statistical analyses revealed.³⁰⁹

A literate population was one thing; unfettered access to unacceptable reading materials was another. During this period, Minister of Culture Hoàng Minh Giám developed a censorship policy to protect the public and also encourage modern notions of civic responsibility. He ordered cultural cadre throughout the North to sift through holdings and remove works unfit for public consumption. The Minister personally tackled the issue, creating exhaustive instructions on seizing dangerous books in June 1956. Detailing the need for this “clean-up,” Giám explained that shops possessed caches of offensive old books and newspapers, including “politically

³⁰⁸ Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries, (Ministry of Culture)], “Báo cáo tổng kết cuộc kiểm tra công tác của Vụ trao đổi văn hóa với nước ngoài năm 1956-1957” (1956), Bộ Văn hóa 1057 and Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa), “Báo cáo công tác năm 1955 của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài” [Office Summary Report of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries] (Document is dated both December 15 and 22, 1955), Bộ Văn hóa 1, LTT III.

³⁰⁹ Phòng nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of International Books and Newspapers Importation (Ministry of Culture)], “Báo cáo tình hình nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế 1956” [“Report on the International Book Import Situation in 1956”], (January 21, 1957), Kế hoạch, báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục xuất bản và các đơn vị, [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan of the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III. See also Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Kế hoạch xuất bản năm 1957” [1957 Publication Plan], (1957) Chỉ thị kế hoạch năm 1957 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị [Planning Instructions for 1957 of the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 174, LTT III.

reactionary” or “backward books and newspapers (romance, detective, French histories).” He noted that textbooks and some classics, namely Shakespeare and Moliere, could be retained. However, reactionary works, especially U.S. publications, should be removed. Cultural staff needed to “re-organize” all bookshops and also justify confiscations by explaining their perils to bookstore owners. The ministry additionally made shop owners responsible for culling their holdings and submitting all objectionable materials to government officials. Giám ordered workshops on how to talk to professors, teachers, parents, and students about removing books to “fight against enslavement culture.”³¹⁰ This policy encouraged civic responsibility as critical to modernity and sovereignty. Vietnamese citizens thus served on the front-lines of an information war, defining North Vietnam through popular rejection of such hazardous publications.

In addition, D.R.V. ministries undertook the duty of promoting North Vietnam abroad. The Ministry of Culture was far from a purely domestic agency, having established the aforementioned D.C.C.F.C. in the same year of the ministry’s founding. D.C.C.F.C. staff worked on the previously cited cultural exchange programs, but their other main duties included translation of foreign language works and producing Vietnamese books in other languages, mainly French and English.³¹¹ Working with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister’s office, the Department’s staff and other Ministry workers researched and developed representations of North Vietnam to be sent abroad.

³¹⁰ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Dàn bài nói chuyện với giáo sư, giáo viên, đại biểu phụ huynh học sinh và học sinh về vấn đề thu hồi sách báo kỷ luật tuyên truyền” [“Outline Talk to Professors, Teachers, Parent and Student Representatives about Problems in Disciplined Recovery of Propaganda Books”] (June 27, 1956), Chỉ thị, công văn của Bộ Văn hóa về công tác xuất bản phát hành sách năm 1956 [“Ministry Instructions on the Publication and Distribution of books in 1956”], Bộ Văn hóa 1014, LTT III and Bộ Văn hóa, “Dàn bài nói chuyện với các hiệu sách” [“Settlement Talks with Bookstores”] (June 27, 1956), Chỉ thị, công văn của Bộ Văn hóa về công tác xuất bản phát hành sách năm 1956 [“Ministry Instructions on the Publication and Distribution of Books in 1956”], Bộ Văn hóa 1014, LTT III.

³¹¹ Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries, (Ministry of Culture)], “Báo cáo tổng kết cuộc kiểm tra công tác của Vụ trao đổi văn hóa với nước ngoài năm 1956-1957” (1956), Bộ Văn hóa 1057 and Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa), “Báo cáo công tác năm 1955 của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài” [Office Summary Report of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries] (The document is dated both December 15 and 22, 1955), Bộ Văn hóa 1, LTT III.

The Department promoted positive images of North Vietnam in the U.S.S.R., P.R.C., and other communist bloc countries. The D.R.V. Ministry of Culture often affirmed the value of “external cultural relationships” by citing the Soviet Union and China specifically, so that “they can believe in our success.” North Vietnam produced books, newspapers, photos, as well as museum and art exhibitions. These officials anticipated that recipient countries would send their own products in return, and thus the Vietnamese could benefit from others’ experiences with building socialism.³¹² Reflecting on the 1954-1959 period, Ministry officials expressed gratitude to the Soviets and Chinese in providing “tens of thousands of newspapers, books, films, as well as literary, art, scientific, and educational works and documents.” North Vietnamese students had also been accepted for study in Moscow, Beijing, and other socialist countries, while both countries had sent experts in film, theater, museums, and music. The D.R.V. proclaimed that Soviet and Chinese aid, along with that from East Germany and other communist bloc friends, had “brought their enthusiasm” and “contributed greatly” to D.R.V. cultural development.³¹³

Hanoi officials also directed its information programs at less-predictable areas in an effort to broaden awareness of North Vietnam. Ministry of Culture officials held an expansive worldview and, when they identified a country that knew little about the D.R.V., cultural cadre quickly responded. In 1955, for instance, Ministry officials lamented that the Ceylonese possessed little knowledge of Vietnam. In response to this information, ministry planners quickly established a D.R.V.-Ceylon cultural commission and organized a photography and painting exhibition in Ceylon, held on July 20, 1955. The Ministry of Culture created an extensive, seven-page list of plans for Ceylon, including contributions like newspapers, exhibits, performances, and friendship delegations. In providing these resources, Hanoi officials reasoned that the Ceylonese would be inspired to support the D.R.V. “in our socialist movement in the North and fighting against

³¹² Hoàng Minh Giám, “Chỉ thị về việc lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp Việt Nam năm 1957” [translate] (September 24, 1956), Chỉ thị của Bộ Văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957 [Instructions by the Ministry of Culture to Guide Cultural Development Planning in 1957], Bộ Văn hóa 170, LTT III.

³¹³ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], (August 1959), “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], Bộ Văn hóa 54, LTT III.

America and imperialism in the South” as well as encouraging Ceylon’s revolution and its anti-imperialist sentiment.³¹⁴ If a small country like Ceylon could inspire such a reaction, then other larger, more prominent nations could look forward to special attention from North Vietnam.

Ministry of Culture reports indicate that Hanoi staff also sought to influence international opinion through advertising. The ministry sent products to South Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union, England, Romania, West Germany, Belgium, Pakistan, Israel, and France as well as all countries with embassies in North Vietnam in 1955 alone.³¹⁵ D.R.V. publication houses began with small goals, publishing just 38 books in English and French during the Ministry’s first year, as well as cooperating with *Vietnam Image* newspaper to compile volumes on the English and French languages.³¹⁶ As time went on, Ministry staff translated other books on politics, economics, cultural topics, and language study.³¹⁷ They created texts on Vietnam’s traditional culture that targeted anti-communist and non-aligned countries like France, West Germany, England, Canada, Australia, Indonesia, and India. Cultural officials expressed hope that these

³¹⁴ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Dự thảo đề án tổ chức triển lãm tranh ảnh ở Xay Lan nhân ngày 20 tháng 7” [“Draft Plan of Painting Exhibition in Ceylon on July 20”], (No Date), Đề án, báo cáo về công tác triển lãm, tuyên truyền giới thiệu Việt Nam ở nước ngoài năm 1955 [Plan, Report on the Exhibition, Introducing Vietnamese Propaganda Aboard in 1955], Bộ Văn hóa 1049, LTT III.

³¹⁵ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo tổng kết công tác năm 1955” [“Office Summary Report 1955”], (December 22, 1955), Báo cáo công tác năm 1955 của vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài [The 1955 Work Report of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries], Bộ Văn hóa 1, LTT III.

³¹⁶ Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries, (Ministry of Culture)], “Báo cáo tổng kết cuộc kiểm tra công tác của Vụ trao đổi văn hóa với nước ngoài năm 1956-1957” (1956), Bộ Văn hóa 1057 and Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa), “Báo cáo công tác năm 1955 của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài” [Office Summary Report of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries] (The document is dated both December 15 and 22, 1955), Bộ Văn hóa 1, LTT III.

³¹⁷ Phòng nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of International Books and Newspapers Importation (Ministry of Culture)], “Báo cáo tình hình nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế 1956” [“Report on the International Book Import Situation in 1956”], (January 21, 1957), Kế hoạch, báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục xuất bản và các đơn vị, [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan of the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

works would introduce the D.R.V. in capitalist countries and possibly forge new networks of exchange.³¹⁸

Ministry reviews concluded that they had succeeded in their endeavors to shape international opinion. Hanoi's first full-fledged cultural export plan had focused heavily on current events and general information about North Vietnam's government and citizens. Vietnamese songs and fairy tales appeared in English and French, as well as documents on the D.R.V., its flag, symbol, and national anthem. The Ministry's translation teams did not produce the same works for every country and probably had specific lists for particular groups of foreign readers.³¹⁹ Cultural officials reported later that, in the first quarter of 1956 alone, North Vietnam exported 540 books and exactly 43,564 newspapers. By the end of 1956, Ministry chiefs proudly presented statistical proof of their achievements: book exports had increased 469%, exported newspapers had grown 267%, and photography exports had swelled to a remarkable 617%. The dearth of ready materials, one official complained, had "restrained" their triumph, because they had failed to produce enough books, pictures, photos, postcards, and stamps.³²⁰ In the following year, Hanoi provided many more publications on the D.R.V. within the democratic socialist bloc and other countries like England, Belgium, West Germany, France, Hong Kong, and Myanmar.³²¹ Again, statistical analysis, as a modern form of evaluation, appeared to prove that the Ministry had accomplished its goals.

³¹⁸ Cục Xuất bản (Bộ Văn hóa) [Foreign Book Publication Department (Ministry of Culture)], "Kế hoạch xuất bản sách ngoại văn năm 1956" [Plan for Foreign Book Publication in 1956], (June 1956) Kế hoạch báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan by Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

³²⁰ Trưởng phòng xuất khẩu, Nguyễn Hữu Định [Manager of the Export Department, Nguyen Huu Dinh], "Giải thích về việc thực hiện kế hoạch toàn năm 1956" ["Explanation of Implementation of the 1956 Plan"], (January 11, 1957), Kế hoạch báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị [Report on the Situation of Implementing the 1956 Plan], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

³²¹ Trưởng phòng xuất khẩu, Nguyễn Hữu Định [Manager of the Export Department, Nguyen Huu Dinh], "Giải thích về việc thực hiện kế hoạch toàn năm 1956" ["Explanation of Implementation of the 1956 Plan"], (January 11, 1957), Kế hoạch báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị [Report on the Situation of Implementing the 1956 Plan], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

To further these connections, Ministry of Culture chiefs extended their advertising campaigns in the last years of the 1950s. Planning administrators suggested a range of options, including pre-publication announcements of new books, along with release of their tables of contents. Hanoi's newspapers could also be marketed abroad, cultural cadre proposed, as could North Vietnamese television broadcasts. Policy staff even published a 1957 D.R.V. calendar to capture foreign attention and promote North Vietnam. Ministry officials advised against sending too much information to any single country, but instead recommended that cultural materials be presented to as many nations as possible. For this reason, ministry staff repeatedly requested more export materials for countries like West Germany, Japan, Belgium, Canada, India, and Indonesia. Ministry leaders pledged to fulfill all requests for written materials from foreign countries, as well as to establish educational cultural exchanges with France, India, Myanmar, and Laos. They even promised to normalize cultural relations with South Vietnam.³²²

One of the reportedly most successful Ministry foreign affairs pursuits was in student and expert exchange. According to a 1956 account, cultural exchanges encouraged even "bourgeois countries like India, France, Laos, and Japan" to seek relations with North Vietnam. The D.R.V. boasted of its close relations with Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, India, China, North Korea, Japan, Poland, and the U.S.S.R. These countries had all sent poets, writers, journalists, directors, editors, physicians, and educators to Hanoi. Because of their visits, officials proclaimed, North Vietnamese students and scholars had taken part in highly informative discussions and workshops. In turn, highly skilled D.R.V. representatives had returned the visits, participating in everything from international political meetings to sports performances. Some even trained abroad to become professionals, the ministry bragged, and, in turn, North Vietnam had embraced foreign countries' economic and cultural specialists. A report on 1956 catalogued Hanoi's signed cultural agreements with Hungary, Rumania, France and the U.S.S.R., as well as its annual cultural exchange programs with "friendly countries.

³²² Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], "Nhiệm vụ phương châm và kế hoạch trao đổi văn hóa năm 1957" ["Mission Guidelines and Cultural Exchange Plans in 1957"], (No date), Báo cáo của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài về công tác trao đổi văn hóa năm 1956 [Report of the Department of Communication with Foreign Countries about Cultural Exchange Work in 1956], Bộ Văn hóa 1051, LTT III.

Well into the early 1960s, Soviet and Chinese experts still mentored North Vietnamese pupils. The D.R.V. prime minister frequently requested more Moscow and Beijing experts and also sent Vietnamese officials to study in both countries. An estimated 130 Vietnamese government employees, for instance, arrived for training in the U.S.S.R. in 1961 and many more went to eastern European countries to learn about modernization techniques.³²³ What is more, thousands of Vietnamese university students studied in the Soviet Union and China between 1961 and 1964.³²⁴

As such, modern ministry programs helped foreign countries to understand more about North Vietnam's modernization. Analysts observed that such exchange programs "recommended the best things about us" to other countries.³²⁵ By attending international gatherings and institutions, D.R.V. chiefs reasoned, Vietnamese representatives could not only master advanced methods and modern ideas, but they could also share information on their country. North Vietnam's rapid modernization became a talking point for these D.R.V. diplomats, who hoped to improve the nation's reputation and status overseas. Cultural exchange meetings also brought foreign guests to Hanoi, giving Vietnamese leaders a chance to show off examples of North

³²³ Phủ Thủ tướng, [Prime Minister's Office], "Kế hoạch mời chuyên gia và cử cán bộ đi thực tập khảo sát ở nước ngoài năm 1961 của các Bộ, các ngành do UBKHNN, Vụ trao đổi văn hóa với nước ngoài, cục chuyên gia tổng hợp trình Phủ Thủ tướng" [Plans on Inviting Foreign Experts and Comrades by the Ministries and the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries and Sending Officers to Survey, Study, and Apprentice in Foreign Countries in 1961] (February 8, 1961), Phủ Thủ tướng 7774, LTT III. This file contains additional details on exchanges with the U.S.S.R. and Eastern Europe.

³²⁴ A majority of Vietnamese students studied in the Soviet Union during the late 1950s, but a significant minority also attended schools in China. See Bộ Giáo dục [Ministry of Education], Tập tài liệu của Bộ Giáo dục về lưu học sinh, nghiên cứu sinh Liên Xô sang Việt Nam năm 1961-1964 [Ministry of Education Documents on Students Studying Abroad, Student Researchers of the Soviet Union Coming to Vietnam during 1961-64], Bộ Giáo dục 548, LTT III.

³²⁵ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], "Kiểm điểm công tác trao đổi văn hóa với các nước ngoài năm 1956" ["Review of Cultural Exchange with Foreign Countries in 1956"], (No date), Báo cáo của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài về công tác trao đổi văn hóa năm 1956 [Report of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries about Cultural Exchange Work in 1956], Bộ Văn Hóa 1051, LTT III. See also Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries], Báo cáo tổng kết cuộc kiểm tra công tác của Vụ trao đổi văn hóa với nước ngoài năm 1956-1957 [Summary Report of the Offices of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries], Bộ Văn hóa 1057 and Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], Hiệp định, chương trình hợp tác văn hóa với nước ngoài năm 1956 của Bộ văn hóa [Agreement on Cultural Cooperation Program with Foreign Countries in 1956 by the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 1058, LTT III.

Vietnam's progress. At an International Students' Meeting in 1961, the organizers designed an entire session around assessments of North Vietnam's anti-illiteracy and supplemental education programs. President Ho Chi Minh even appeared, assuring full attendance. Vietnam's previous illiteracy rates of 95 to 100%, Ho explained, had been the "fiendish method of French colonialism to govern Vietnamese people." He asserted that that Paris had even admitted its reluctance to teach the Vietnamese, since providing knowledge to indigenous peoples was a "very foolish" idea. Since its creation, he continued, the D.R.V. had reversed this policy, allowing for dramatic increases in Vietnamese literacy.³²⁶

Hanoi leaders recognized that modern media could be critical to successful progress. Under Minister Giám's guidance, cinema specialists went to work, creating suitable movies and films. The ministry restricted film imports and backed North Vietnamese movie productions. Lowered taxes and film rental rates allowed ticket price reductions, which officials claimed had attracted more movie-goers. While in the past, movies had been "only for wealthy, idle people," the ministry argued that now films had "become an indispensable spiritual dish for staff, workers, and all classes." Officials primarily backed production of news and documentaries and the prime minister requested specific reports that painstakingly assessed the progress, impact, and future of film. Newsreels spent an estimated 30% of screen time on agricultural subjects, approximately 25% on industrial topics, and another 6% on news from D.R.V. allies. Such films had been used successfully in a range of ways, such as to fight an ongoing drought, to cover P.R.C. Premier Zhou En Lai's visit, and to introduce Hungarian dance. North Vietnam still featured a few foreign films, but they were sanitized through selective subtitling and dubbing.³²⁷ By 1959, hundreds of newsreels and documentaries, as well as the first made-for-television series, "Chung một dòng

³²⁶ Bộ Giáo dục [Ministry of Education], "Hội nghị sinh viên Quốc tế tổ chức tại Việt Nam tháng 9 năm 1961", [File on International Students' Meeting Organized in Viet Nam in September 1961], (September 1961) Báo cáo Hội nghị sinh viên Quốc tế họp ở Hà Nội [Report of the International Students' Meeting in Hanoi], Bộ Giáo dục 543, LTT III.

³²⁷ Xưởng phim Việt Nam, Cục Điện ảnh (Bộ Văn hóa) [Vietnam Film Studio, Cinema Department (Ministry of Culture)], "Báo cáo tổng kết tình hình 1 năm của Xưởng" ["One Year Summary Report of the Studio Situation"], (No date), Kế hoạch và báo cáo thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Doanh nghiệp Quốc gia chiếu bóng và Xưởng phim Việt Nam [Plan and Report on Implementation of 1956 Plan by the Vietnam National Cinema and Vietnam Film Studio], Bộ Văn hóa 166, LTT III.

sông" [Together on the Same River], which promoted Vietnam's reunification, had been shown. As one cultural official remarked, movies were considered "our clever tool of ideal struggle," a significant component in "the ideal cultural revolution," and critical to building Vietnamese socialism and unity.³²⁸

Since movie theaters existed primarily in urban areas, the ministry also organized traveling cinema and theater groups to spread messages of modernization and unification in rural locales. Claiming almost 42 million viewers in 1958, Ministry of Culture cadre determined that the film community had "strongly developed." The total number of cinema teams also expanded, growing from 94 in 1955 to 180 in 1958. They showed films and held discussions, becoming popular with rural residents.³²⁹ In another masterful stroke of mathematical calculation, the Ministry stated that these ensembles had performed for exactly 1,693,638 watchers in 1958. Actors performed works that supported D.R.V. goals and the playwrights offered stories that intertwined traditional themes with modern issues. The ministry believed their work to be of great import, so much so that they increased their funding and subsidized their studies at art schools in 1959.³³⁰

In another attempt to educate the public and promote North Vietnam to foreign visitors, museums offered another way to advance the cause of modernization. The Department of Museum Preservation began construction and expansion of museums in 1945, but received little

³²⁸ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of Museum Preservation (Ministry of Culture)], "Bản tổng kết đợt học tập 'Bảo mật phòng gian'" [Summary of the Course "Security and Spy Prevention"], (January 3, 1963) Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa 1963 [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1963], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³²⁹ Xưởng phim Việt Nam, Cục Điện ảnh (Bộ Văn hóa) [Vietnam Film Studio, Cinema Department (Ministry of Culture)], "Báo cáo tổng kết tình hình 1 năm của Xưởng" ["One Year Summary Report of the Studio Situation"], (No date), Kế hoạch và báo cáo thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Doanh nghiệp Quốc gia chiếu bóng và Xưởng phim Việt Nam [Plan and Report on Implementation of 1956 Plan by the Vietnam National Cinema and Vietnam Film Studio], Bộ Văn hóa 166, LTT III.

³³⁰ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), "5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa, 1954-1959" ["Five Years of Cultural Development"], (August 1959), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959 ["Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development, 1954-1959"], Bộ Văn hóa 54, LTT III.

to no funding until after the French war.³³¹ At the 3rd Party Conference, V.W.P. members laid out specific plans for museum development, most particularly the History Museum in Hanoi. With Party and government instructions, curators created a portrait of Vietnam's long and unified history by citing French archaeologists and Vietnamese Marxist historians. The museum highlighted Vietnam's industrial and agricultural development and lavished praise on the Soviets and Chinese for their assistance. Panoramas also mocked France and the U.S., blaming both for creating war in a peaceful country. Despite lukewarm domestic interest, museum organizers reported virtually complete success to the ministry through extensive statistical data. They compared the 13,000 domestic visitors in 1939 to 115,699 in 1959, 161,679 visitors in 1960, and 236,916 in 1961.³³² Curators promoted the museum's value to the Ministry, which, they argued, rested in its ability to represent North Vietnam in a modern light.

At the end of the 1950s, the Ministry congratulated itself on implementing a broad range of successful cultural initiatives to strengthen modernization. Citing the aforementioned statistics as well as lengthy lists of names and titles, their evaluation concluded with positive generalities like "the North has been transformed" and "The people's cultural life has remarkably improved." Using culture "to serve political and economic tasks as well as improve people's cultural life," the assessment determined, had successfully strengthened Vietnamese society, allowed citizens to learn from "other countries' advanced culture," and formed "a new culture with traditional form

³³¹ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Tiến, [Department of Museum Preservation], "Nhiệm vụ chức năng chủ yếu của bảo tồn bảo tàng" ["Main Tasks and Functions of Museum Preservation"], (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security and Spy Prevention in Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III.

³³² Viện Bảo tàng Lịch sử (Bộ Văn hóa) [Museum of History (Ministry of Culture)], "Báo cáo tình hình phòng gian bảo mật, bảo vệ cơ quan năm 1962" ["Report on the Situation of Ensuring Security, Protecting Offices in 1962"], (No date) Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962"] Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III. On cultural sabotage and possible enemy theft, see Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Tiến, [Department of Museum Preservation], "Nhiệm vụ chức năng chủ yếu của bảo tồn bảo tàng" ["Main Tasks and Functions of Museum Preservation"], (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962"], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III.

and socialist content."³³³ If accurate, these conclusions intimated that the Ministry of Culture had led a successful revolution in modernization at home.

Overall, the Ministry of Culture, along with the Ministry of Education, supported and advanced North Vietnam's modernization. During this period of intellectual and ideological crises, policy errors (land reform), as well as increased pressure from South Vietnam, the ministries focused on modernization as a force enabling unity and development. The Ministry guided North Vietnam's image abroad by expanding exports that would encourage more foreign imports and solidify established alliances. Cultural chiefs believed that fields like science and technology, as well as literature and the arts, had benefited from previous import programs by their Soviet and Chinese mentors as well as other friendly countries. For Hanoi, modernization meant safety, in the sense that increased progress would help to assure the country's stability and security. Modernization also meant that Vietnam could attain higher status on the world stage. Yet, as this chapter will later show, the promises of modernization did not always manifest in reality.

Denouncing American Imperialism

Anti-imperialism linked with Hanoi's domestic modernization imperative in the late 1950s. The growing American presence and Saigon's new government dismayed North Vietnamese chiefs, who believed that events in South Vietnam posed a dire threat. D.R.V. officials accused the U.S. of imperialist invasion in official speeches throughout the latter half of the decade. Meanwhile, government-sponsored publications maintained that Washington and Saigon promised to deter Vietnam's reunification, "poison" the people spiritually and culturally, and exploit the country for their own gain. Anti-imperialism, according to North Vietnamese leaders, would unify the population, deter anti-communist advances, and expose America's imperialist conspiracies in Vietnam.

To advance anti-imperialism, Hanoi relied on extensive information programs. In fact, the D.R.V. was no stranger to tactics of persuasion. The Viet Minh had featured propaganda

³³³ Ibid.

programs during the First Indochinese War, using various methods of psychological warfare against the French as well as their American supporters. The Ministry of Culture, which headed these efforts, had originated as the Ministry of Politics in 1945 before being recast as the Ministry of Propaganda.³³⁴ After the French war, ministry leaders summarized their progress in terms of large-scale economic mobilization and “propaganda against the American imperialists and the Diệm administration.”³³⁵ In fact, throughout this period, anti-imperialist information programs served as the first line of defense for North Vietnam.

The 1954 Geneva Conference and the creation of “South Vietnam” had inspired North Vietnam’s propaganda machine to magnify its attacks on the U.S. D.R.V. newspapers like *Nhân dân* regularly assaulted Washington for the meeting’s difficulties. The article “Unveiling the Geneva Conference Saboteurs!” explained that Washington hoped to disrupt the Geneva proceedings and characterized a speech by U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as “warlike and very stubborn.”³³⁶ Hanoi also assailed Washington in book-length forms, such as Nam Mộc’s *The American-French Imperialists are Culprits Waging and Extending Invasion Wars to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos* from April 1954. Nam Mộc directly implicated the U.S. in promoting and extending the French war through “American money, weapons, airplanes, tanks, and people.” He provided a detailed list of grievances, blaming both Paris and Washington for robberies, high taxes, forced conscription, drinking, gambling, promiscuity, and “obscene” books and films. The author listed thirty-six American businesses and wealthy citizens poised to exploit resources in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.³³⁷ Thus, he determined that the U.S. threatened Vietnamese people culturally, economically, and militarily.

³³⁴ Ninh, *A World Transformed*, 171. Ninh rightly notes that, in Vietnamese, the term for propaganda does not have the negative connotations that it does in English.

³³⁵ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Hiện nay chúng tôi đang tiến hành làm tổng kết công tác năm 1956” [“We are Now Making the Working Summary for 1956”] (January 28, 1957), Kế hoạch, báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị, [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan by the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

³³⁶ “Vạch mặt bọn phá hoại Hội nghị Giơ ne vơ!” [“Unveiling the Geneva Conference Saboteurs!”] *Nhân dân* [The People] 179 (April 25, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 25-28.

On the last day of the Geneva conference, Hanoi released Nguyễn Viêt Chung's book *The American Empire is Just a Paper Tiger*. The author characterized Americans as arrogant people, who boasted of being "powerful, rich, beautiful, free, democratic, etc." He mocked Washington for claiming that the "American lifestyle is the standard model" and ridiculed their claims to economic and technological superiority. U.S. foreign policy, Chung claimed, was a complete disaster. During China's civil conflict and the Korean War, American soldiers' low morale and huge desertions had brought about "the utter defeat of the US imperialists." America's domestic affairs were also in a terrible state, he maintained, with racism, McCarthyism, illegal F.B.I. surveillance of private citizens, required loyalty oaths, and even book burnings. Washington liked war because it brought the U.S. economic benefits, whereas the U.S. had no "chance to exploit other peoples" and "pushed the U.S. into economic crises." Thus, he claimed, Dulles and other Americans had tried to prevent a peace agreement from being forged at the Geneva Conference.³³⁸

North Vietnam continued denouncing the U.S. after 1954, but reversed direction on France. Previously, Phạm Văn Đồng summed up the government's position at that time in no uncertain terms: "Despite numerous conflicts between the French and American imperialists, they all are pursuing the same aim of conquering our country."³³⁹ *Nhân dân* also attacked Diem's "poison culture" in mid-1954 with articles like "Ngô Đình Diệm, Lackey of American Imperialists

³³⁷ Nam Mộc, *Chính Đế quốc Pháp Mỹ là thủ phạm gây ra và kéo dài chiến tranh xâm lược Việt Nam và Miên Lào [The American-French Imperialists are Culprits Waging and Extending Invasion Wars to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos]* (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1954), 25, 27-29, and 35-41.

³³⁸ Nguyễn Viêt Chung, *Đế quốc Mỹ chỉ là con hổ giấy [Imperialist America is Just a Paper Tiger]* (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1954), 5-6, 11-13, 19-22, and 24-27. The actual closing date of the conference was July 21st, but North Vietnamese commemorations were held annually on the 20th. The "paper tiger" description of America was a common theme in Chinese propaganda and probably demonstrates the influence of Beijing on Vietnamese propagandists. See Ralph L. Powell, "Great Powers and Atomic Bombs are 'Paper Tigers'" *The China Quarterly* 23 (July-September 1965), 55-63.

³³⁹ Vice-Premier Phạm Văn Đồng, "Report to National Assembly: Achievements of the Vietnamese People's War of Resistance," 1955, Folder 14, Box 05, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 33.

and French War Supporters.”³⁴⁰ The distinction made of “war supporters” was significant. By late 1954, *Nhân dân* campaigned to discredit America and the Diệm regime.³⁴¹ For instance, the newspaper recounted failed Geneva sabotage schemes by Eisenhower and Dulles in “Soon Overcoming Any Difficulties in Restoring Peace to Indochina.”³⁴² The editors claimed that “American imperialism is the most dangerous enemy” of the Vietnamese people. The U.S. had created “many evils in our nation,” and according to one journalist, “We need to notify people that American imperialists are bloodthirsty devils.”³⁴³ *Nhân dân* reporters approached France with a more conciliatory tone. One writer explained that U.S. plots at Geneva had been “against the interests and hopes of French people and most of the political and economic circles in France.” The reporter maintained that “French people were always close friends of the Vietnamese people and wanted to cooperate with our nation in a peaceful way.” According to *Nhân dân*, “the American imperialists cooperated with the betrayers of French interests to sabotage our peace and prevent negotiations between Vietnam and France.”³⁴⁴ According to this new approach, French war proponents and political leaders had been traitors working for Washington, but the French people, as a whole, were portrayed as pro-Vietnamese independence. Such reasoning

³⁴⁰ “Ngô Đình Diệm, một con bài của Đế quốc Mỹ và hiếu chiến Pháp” [Ngo Dinh Diem, Lackey of American Imperialists and French Warmongers] *Nhân dân [The People]*, 201 (July 6, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 29-31.

³⁴¹ “Hưởng ứng bức thư của Bộ Tổng tư lệnh gửi Ủy ban Quốc tế kiên quyết đấu tranh chống âm mưu phá hoại Hiệp định của bọn Đế quốc Mỹ và bè lũ tay sai” [“General Headquarters’ Letter of Response to the I.C.C. Representing the Determination to Fight against Sabotage of the Armistice Agreements by American Imperialists and Their Lackeys”] *Nhân dân [The People]*, 284 (December 9, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 49-55.

³⁴² “Kiên quyết gạt mọi trở ngại để mau chóng lập lại hòa bình ở Đông Dương” [Soon Overcoming Any Difficulties in Restoring Peace to Indochina] *Nhân dân [The People]*, 206 (July 21, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 32-35.

³⁴³ “Hãy mở một phong trào đấu tranh rộng rãi chống Đế quốc Mỹ âm mưu phá hoại hòa bình, thống nhất độc lập dân chủ của nước ta” [Expand the Movement of Struggle against the Sabotage Plot of American Imperialists to Fight for Peace, Unity, Independence, and Democracy for Our Nation] *Nhân dân [The People]*, 285 (December 10, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 56-60.

³⁴⁴ “Đập tan âm mưu của Đế quốc Mỹ, những phần tử thực dân Pháp phá hoại Hiệp định và bè lũ Ngô Đình Diệm, tay sai của chúng” [“Conspiracy to Crush the American Empire, Some French Colonialist Elements to Destroy the Geneva Agreement, and Ngo Dinh Diem’s Clique and Their Minions”] *Nhân dân [The People]*, 287 (December 12, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 61-67.

paved the way for the D.R.V. to separate a government's policies from the desires of a nation's people. Hanoi could thus claim friendly relations with the French (and later Americans) while simultaneously denouncing France (and the U.S.).

In the meantime, North Vietnam publicly objected to Washington's role in the exodus of possibly a million Catholics and other refugees during "Operation Passage to Freedom." Between 1954 and 1955, many northerners moved to South Vietnam in a circus-like affair. Colonel Edward G. Lansdale's rumor campaigns frightened Vietnamese with claims that Hanoi would abuse and execute remaining Catholics, the Viet Minh would confiscate their lands, and the U.S. would use atomic weapons on the North.³⁴⁵ D.R.V. leaders issued rebuttals, mocking the relocation program's failures.³⁴⁶ Intending to reveal the "despicable nature" of Washington and Saigon, the D.R.V. assigned writers, artists, and other delegations to Catholic areas to collect information. The Land Reform Ensemble, Dien Bien Phu Ensemble, Central Traditional Operetta Company, Golden Bell Ensemble, and the Kim Phung Ensemble performed skits and plays with titles like "Go or Stay", "Love of Country", and "A Case of Human Trafficking." Catholic priests allegedly tried to prevent audiences from gathering, but North Vietnamese cultural cadre reported that thousands attended, with "some moved to tears."³⁴⁷

During this time, Hanoi cultural officials also called for international condemnation of U.S. imperialism in South Vietnam. English translations of Vietnamese books on the Ngô Đình Diệm regime appeared during the first half of the year, as did French versions of *Terror and Reprisals*

³⁴⁵ Seth Jacobs, *Cold War Mandarin: Ngo Dinh Diem and the Origins of America's War in Vietnam, 1950–1963* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 52-56 and Seth Jacobs, *America's Miracle Man in Vietnam: Ngo Dinh Diem, Religion, Race, and U.S. Intervention in Southeast Asia, 1950–1957* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 132-33. See also Ronald Frankum, *Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954–55*. (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2007) and "Lansdale Team's Report on Covert Saigon Mission in 1954 and 1955," Document 95, Volume 1, *The Pentagon Papers*, Gravel Edition, 573-83.

³⁴⁶ According to the final agreement, Article 14(d) allowed for a 300-day period of free movement between the two Vietnams, ending May 18, 1955.

³⁴⁷ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], "Báo cáo tình hình hoạt động của sân khấu tham gia đấu tranh thống nhất Tổ quốc 1954-1961" ["Report on Theater Activities to Support the Struggle for Unification, 1959-61"], (September 22, 1961), Báo cáo tình hình hoạt động của sân khấu tham gia đấu tranh thống nhất Tổ quốc 1954-1961 [Report on Theater Activities to Support the Struggle for Unification, 1959-61], Bộ Văn hóa 964, LTT III.

*in the South, North of the 17th Parallel, and The Geneva Conference.*³⁴⁸ Such texts detailed U.S. violations of the Geneva agreements, America's plans to establish an empire in the South, and the cruelties of Washington and Saigon. Describing murders and other acts of violence against the South Vietnamese, overseas-bound propaganda called for international censure of U.S. foreign policy.³⁴⁹

Hanoi propagandists also purported to reveal America's worldwide imperialist plots. Lê Quang Ngọc's *The Conflicts between the U.S. and England* claimed to bare the poor state of U.S. foreign affairs by maintaining that former Washington allies had been alienated. In particular, he noted a postwar rift between the U.S. and England had been caused by America's greed. Truman's Point Four Program, the author elaborated, targeted countries tied to England in an effort to establish American control. U.S. foreign policy, the D.R.V. argued, was therefore imperialist toward even its European allies. The author also condemned American imperialism in the formation of NATO as well as recent U.S. activities in the Philippines, Middle East, China, and Korea. Because of Washington's actions, he argued, the Vietnamese had lost their admiration for American ideals and heroes.³⁵⁰ Similar charges appeared in a Vietnamese translation of the Soviet magazine, *New Age*, in February 1955, which also presented America's Point Four program as an imperialist plan.³⁵¹

³⁴⁸ Cục Xuất bản (Bộ Văn hóa) [Foreign Book Publication Department (Ministry of Culture)], "Kế hoạch xuất bản sách ngoại văn năm 1956" [Plan for Foreign Book Publication in 1956], (June 1956) Kế hoạch báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan by Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

³⁴⁹ Hoàng Minh Giám, "Chỉ thị về việc của Bộ Văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957" ["Ministry of Culture Instructions and Guide for Planning of Cultural Development in 1957"], (September 24, 1956) Chỉ thị của Bộ Văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957 [Instructions by the Ministry of Culture to Guide Cultural Development Plans in 1957], Bộ Văn hóa 170, LTT III.

³⁵⁰ Lê Quang Ngọc, *Mâu thuẫn Mỹ Anh* [*The Conflicts between the US and England*], (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, May 19, 1955), 4-6, 13, and 24.

³⁵¹ Dot-Ca-Rep, *Sự thật về vấn đề viện trợ Mỹ -Diệ̣m 4 - Trục lợi và xâm lược* [*The Truth About the American Aid Issue "Point Four": Mercenaries and Invasion*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, February 1955). The book is a translation of a single issue of the Soviet magazine, *New Age*, dated August 28, 1954. I have been unable to locate the author's full name.

According to North Vietnamese campaigns, imperialist approaches also characterized U.S. domestic policies. Nguyễn Việt Chung, after denouncing Americans' lifestyle, society, and culture, claimed that imperialist policies were at fault. Washington's anti-communism adversely affected the cultural life of everyday Americans, he claimed, as well as that of "Authors, historians, musicians, painters, cultural activists, and educators." He cited the "barbarously fascist regime of McCarthy" as well as unlawful F.B.I. surveillance techniques and arrests.³⁵² In addition, he took a particularly hard look at race relations in America. The author condemned events in Trenton and Martinsville as convictions of innocent people by an imperialist-led court system. He also related the August 1953 story of integration in Chicago, when a black veteran moved into a new house and "over 1000 white people came to throw stones at his house, breaking the windows and all members of his family were injured."³⁵³ Chung also described a February 1952 incident, when over 10 armed white people killed a black man named "Robert Locoer." According to the author, in one Texas county, 400 blacks had been "barbarously massacred." The author maintained that "not only black people were victims" in the U.S., but also "white workers, farmers, and peace lovers."³⁵⁴ Chung concluded that Washington's imperialist nature caused all its citizens to suffer.

American citizens also aided the ministry in substantiating their case against U.S. imperialism. Ministry of Culture officials promoted U.S. writers who critiqued Washington's policies in ways that Hanoi believed would corroborate North Vietnam's image of America. Victor Perlo, a Russian-American Marxist economist, wrote *American Imperialism* while serving as an economist for the Brookings Institution in 1951. His book, detailing the evolution of U.S. imperialist tendencies, was translated into Vietnamese in 1955.³⁵⁵ A prominent American

³⁵² Nguyễn Việt Chung, "Đế quốc Mỹ chỉ là con hổ giấy" [The American Imperialists Are Just a Paper Tiger] (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1954), 38, 41, 20-21.

³⁵³ He is probably referring to Trumbull Park Homes, where race riots broke out on August 5, 1953. An African American couple, Betty and Donald Howard, moved in the neighborhood as part of an attempt to integrate the Chicago housing project, but met with extreme violence from their white neighbors.

³⁵⁴ Nguyễn Việt Chung, "Đế quốc Mỹ chỉ là con hổ giấy" [The American Imperialists Are Just a Paper Tiger] (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1954), 38, 41, 20-21.

communist leader who had already received attention previously in Hanoi publishing circles, William Foster, gained additional fame with a translation of his *Summary of American Politics*.³⁵⁶ The D.R.V. also published other books by American writers, including *Atomic Imperialism* (*Nguyên tử Đế quốc chủ nghĩa*) by James S. Allen, which played upon fears of atomic warfare by warning of Washington's intention to use such weapons.³⁵⁷

Such condemnations remained comparatively minor targets for criticism, however, as a large majority of post-1954 D.R.V. works reviled the U.S. for its activities *within* Vietnam. The Party encouraged the development of such original works at the 1956 Party Congress. There, V.W.P. leaders agreed that "our people's principal enemies are the American imperialists and their agents who still occupy half our country and are preparing for war."³⁵⁸ Hanoi's top anti-U.S. complaints appeared in titles like *U.S.-Diem Destroys the Peaceful Reunification of Our Country* and *The Agreement to Invade Southeast Asia, the New Adventure of American Imperialists*.³⁵⁹ North Vietnamese authors, using a combination of international sources and local evidence, traced Washington's plan to take over Vietnam to the World War II era. Ngô Trọng Bản's *The U.S. Invasion Plot in Indochina* cited the *New York Times*, *Life*, *Weekly News*, Agence Press-France (AFP), *Le Monde*, and *The Economist* to demonstrate that the U.S. had "long-cherished world domination" and viewed decolonization as an economic opportunity. Quoting an

³⁵⁵ V. Pec-lo [Victor Perlo], *Mỹ quốc Đế quốc chủ nghĩa* [*American Imperialism*] (1955). Perlo is also noted for allegedly heading a Soviet spy ring in the US.

³⁵⁶ William Z. Foster, *Mỹ Châu chính trị sử cương* [*Summary of American Politics*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1956).

³⁵⁷ James S. Allen, *Nguyên tử Đế quốc chủ nghĩa* [*Atomic Imperialism*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1954). Harry Haywood's *Negro Liberation* and Foster's *The Negro People in American History* also appeared in Hanoi, but both remained in English. See William Z. Foster's *The Negro People in American History* (New York: International Publishers, 1954) and Harry Haywood, *Negro Liberation*. New York: International Publishers, 1948). For more on their participation in communist circles, see David Childs, "The Cold War and the 'British Road'" *Journal of Contemporary History* 23/4 (October 1988), 551-572.

³⁵⁸ Speech Closing The Ninth Session Of The Central Committee Of The Vietnam Workers Party, 24 April 1956, Folder 23, Box 07, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 2.

³⁵⁹ C.B., *Mỹ Diêm phá hoại hòa bình, thống nhất của nước ta* [*U.S.-Diem Destroys the Peaceful Reunification of Our Country*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1955) and No author, "Hiệp ước xâm lược Đông Nam Á, cuộc phiêu lưu mới của Đế quốc Mỹ" [*The Agreement to Invade Southeast Asia, the New Adventure of American Imperialists*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1955).

Eisenhower speech from August 21, 1953, he claimed that Americans wanted to manage Vietnam's natural resources and market potential. Financiers like Nelson Rockefeller had kept "a covetous eye on Indochina" since at least 1945, the author complained, and used secretive methods to plan future exploitation. For instance, the Florida Phosphate Company had arrived to "aid" Vietnam, but actually evaluated Vietnam's mineral deposits. American delegations arrived under the guise of economic assistance, he observed, but actually analyzed economic opportunities to help U.S. companies seize resources. He noted that sales of American cigarettes, textiles, and cars in Vietnam had increased as these companies took over French holdings.³⁶⁰ *Nhân dân* and other publications used this theme as well, issuing warnings that Washington would invade and divide Vietnam permanently.³⁶¹

North Vietnam's propagandists questioned America's invincibility. *Nhân dân* explained that the U.S. was Vietnam's "archenemy" because it had helped France, sponsored "gangs of lackeys" to violate the Geneva agreements, forced France to sign the Manila Treaty, and sent General Joseph Collins to destroy peace in Indochina. The United States, the newspaper maintained, "is savage and cruel, but it is only a paper tiger." World opposition to the U.S. had expanded, the journalists noted, exemplified by opposition to the Manila Treaty by India, Indonesia, and Myanmar. In a significant re-write of Vietnamese history, the reporters cited the 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu as one of several times the D.R.V. had defeated the U.S. They explained that, at the battle, the Viet Minh had been able to overcome "Airplanes, cannons, weapons, even the most modern weapons that America used" and "smashed" U.S. political and military strategies. *Nhân dân* editors also boasted that Hanoi had blocked U.S. sabotage plans at Geneva and restored peace. The newspaper announced that "The Vietnamese people are hostile to America" and "actively struggle" together with other countries to "make the American

³⁶⁰ Ngô Trọng Bản, *Âm mưu xâm lược của Mỹ ở Đông Dương [The US Invasion Plot in Indochina]* (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1955), 5, 8-10, 13.

³⁶¹ "Loi Nha Xuất Bản" ["Publisher's Preface"], *Đả đảo đế quốc Mỹ tiếp tục can thiệp vào Đông Dương! [Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!]* (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, January 1, 1955), 3-4.

imperialists fail in disgrace.” They exhorted people to join a “Patriots against America” movement and make sure friends and neighbors understood and opposed Washington’s “malicious ruses.”³⁶²

The Ministry of Culture complained that Vietnam’s partition “is the great obstacle to the cause of development” and the “My-Diem administration” had “depraved culture and reactionary gangs poisoning our people, especially the youth.” To combat these difficulties, the report explained, Hanoi continued to rely upon cultural work.³⁶³ The Ministry thus headed cultural offensives to demystify the enemy through theater groups’ performances. North Vietnamese troupes initially focused on the 1954 exodus by showcasing a number of anti-migration plays. Playwrights tackled current events that demonstrated imperialist abuses, as in December 1958, when reports surfaced that the U.S. and Diem had allegedly poisoned rice at Phu Loi Prison, which killed over 100,000 people. During the following month, the Ministry sponsored a large number plays on this “savage crime.” The Department of Art cooperated with the Association of Vietnamese Performing Artists to express their outrage over a period of ten days, performing plays and folksongs like “Phu Loi Hatred” and “A Nightmare.” In their productions, playwrights accused Diem of terrorism and extolled the virtues of pro-Hanoi southerners. They also attacked the U.S. as imperialist warmongers in plays like “Eisenhower’s Disgraceful Trip.”³⁶⁴

³⁶² *Tài liệu phổ biến ở cơ sở nhiệt liệt tham gia phong trào yêu nước chống Mỹ; Giữ gìn và hòa bình thực hiện thống nhất hoàn thành độc lập và dân chủ trong khắp nước ta* [Popular Material at Grassroots Level Warmly Participating in Patriotic Movements against America: Keeping and Reinforcing the Peace, Realizing Unity, Accomplishing Independence and Democracy Nationwide] (Independent publication, 1955).

³⁶³ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo tổng quát tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa của nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại đến nay” [“Report on the General Situation and Cultural Achievements of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from When Peace Was Restored to Now”], (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Report of the Ministry of Culture Summarizing Culture Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III.

³⁶⁴ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo tình hình hoạt động của sân khấu tham gia đấu tranh thống nhất Tổ quốc 1954-1961” [“Report on the Activities of the Stage to Support the Struggle for Unification, 1959-61”], (September 22, 1961), Báo cáo tình hình hoạt động của sân khấu tham gia đấu tranh thống nhất Tổ quốc 1954-1961 [Report on the Activities of the Stage to Support the Struggle for Unification, 1959-61], Bộ Văn hóa 964, LTT III.

North Vietnam's anti-imperialism continued strongly into the early 1960s, led by the most prominent of government officials. In his opening address to the 3rd Party Congress on September 5, 1960, President Ho Chi Minh blamed the U.S. and Diem of putting South Vietnam "through hell under their ruthless rule." Ho emphasized that Hanoi supported all those in the world "in their great struggle against the imperialists, especially the American imperialists."³⁶⁵ Party chiefs reported to the National Assembly that "the U.S. imperialists and their henchmen" used "the most barbarous atrocities and terror." They accused the U.S. of "re-imposing colonial and feudal rule upon our whole country," making South Vietnam a colony, and being "the most dangerous and cruel enemies of our people."³⁶⁶ Vituperative themes against Saigon and Washington's policies and leaders in D.R.V. publications expanded into the 1960s as well. The ministry's publication schedule included American authors like the aforementioned William Z. Foster, who made his re-appearance with a translation of his *Outline Political History of the Americans (From World War I to 1951 and History of the Communist Party of the United States*.³⁶⁷ With *South Vietnam: Military Base of American Imperialists*, Hà Văn Lầu made serious indictments of the US, focusing on how America used SEATO to control Asia, had already brought nuclear weapons to South Vietnam, and preparing for war by building airports and roads and increasing the number of advisors. These were, he observed, all violations of the Geneva agreements.³⁶⁸ As for Vietnamese works, *American Imperialists Get Out!* best characterizes the popular North Vietnamese approach to U.S.-related topics.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁵ Ho Chi Minh, "Opening Address to the Congress" (September 5, 1960) in *75 Years of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, 1930-2005: A Selection of Documents from Nine Party Congresses* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2005), 163 and 166-167.

³⁶⁶ "Political Report of the 2nd Central Committee to the Congress" (September 5, 1960) in *75 Years of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, 1930-2005: A Selection of Documents from Nine Party Congresses* (Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers, 2005), 170 and 173-177.

³⁶⁷ Pho-Sto (W.Z.) [William Z. Foster], *Đại cương lịch sử chính trị Châu Mỹ (Từ chiến tranh thế giới thứ nhất đến năm 1951)* [*General American Political History (From World War I to 1951)*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1960).

³⁶⁸ Hà Văn Lầu, *Miền Nam Việt Nam, Căn cứ quân sự của đế quốc Mỹ* [South Vietnam: Military Base of American Imperialists] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, May 1960), 11, 18-29.

³⁶⁹ *Đế quốc Mỹ rút đi!* [*American Imperialists Get Out!*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1960). Other 1960 publications include *Bão táp chống Mỹ (Tập bài hát chống Mỹ và đấu tranh thống nhất Tổ*

Throughout the 1950s, most especially after 1954, Hanoi extended its anti-imperialist crusade to unify Vietnamese people against the U.S. To do so, the D.R.V. produced newspapers, books, and pamphlets that called Washington every derogatory name in the anti-imperialist book. North Vietnamese accusations against the U.S. moved beyond mere interference to invasion, fascism, and terrorism. According to Hanoi, America was an imperialist destroyer that threatening to “poison” Vietnamese people and society, just as they had in their own country.

Realities and Results

For North Vietnam, modernization promised a path to progress, security, and stability in very uncertain times. Meanwhile, anti-imperialism, Hanoi officials reasoned, would ensure popular opposition to America’s activities in Vietnam. By sustaining both approaches through the late 1950s, the D.R.V. government sought to unify the population and provide a plan for Vietnam’s future. Yet, beyond their intended effects, other critical results emerged.

First, in pursuing modernization and anti-imperialism, a pattern of departmental infighting surfaced. When problems arose, bureaucratic finger-pointing undercut morale and claims of success. Staff reports and memos indicated that domestic and foreign cultural work had not gone smoothly. From vague objections to constant delays and the lack of organization, to more specific grievances, workers mostly complained that they did not yet have a clear understanding of the Ministry’s goals. Despite the import department’s glowing statistics, for instance, its staff also admitted shortages, organizational issues, and inexperienced workers. At one point they even had to demand more people with Russian and Chinese language skills to meet their high production quotas.³⁷⁰ Cadre revealed that scheduled book publications had occurred too late or

quốc] [*Storm against the U.S (Practice Songs against the U.S. and for the National Reunification Struggle)*] (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1960); *Mỹ Diệt phải thủ tiêu luật Phát xít [U.S.-Diem Must Kill Fascist Laws]* Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1960; and *Một tổ chức gián điệp của Mỹ- Diệt đã đưa ra xét xử [A U.S.-Diem Spy Ring on Trial]* (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1960).

³⁷⁰ Phòng nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of International Books and Newspapers Importation (Ministry of Culture)], “Báo cáo tình hình nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế

not at all, blaming blamed the lack of a “comprehensive and active plan.” The most common complaint, in fact, was the absence of specific directions from top officials.³⁷¹ Bureaucratic and organizational woes hounded ministry programs, evaluators complained, because the staff lacked a comprehensive cultural plan and needed a full-scale distribution program. From editing errors to political fractures and even the dearth of formalized exchange agreements, such modernization failures had also contributed to the growth of negativity.³⁷² One report confessed that Hanoi’s “shortcomings” and “mistakes in agrarian reform” had led to the emergence of “vestiges of a rising backward culture.”³⁷³ The Ministry of Culture, according to internal investigations, remained beleaguered by inefficiency and incompetence.³⁷⁴ Museum and film departments issued the same types of criticisms.³⁷⁵ Curators revealed that historical artifacts had been stolen;

1956” [“Report of International Book and Newspaper Importation in 1956”], (January 21, 1957), Kế hoạch, báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị, [Planning Report on the Implementation of 1956 Plan of the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

³⁷¹ Hoàng Minh Giám, “Giải thích về lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa” [“Explaining the Cultural Development Plans”], (September 24, 1956), Chỉ thị của Bộ văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957 [Instructions from the Ministry of Culture to Guide Cultural Development Plans in 1957], Bộ Văn hóa 170, LTT III.

³⁷² Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], Báo cáo của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài về công tác trao đổi văn hóa năm [Work Report for 1955 of the Department of Cultural Communication with Foreign Countries], (December 22, 1955), Bộ Văn hóa 1, LTT III.

³⁷³ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], (August 1959), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959 [Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development], Bộ Văn Hóa 54, LTT III.

³⁷⁴ Bộ Văn hóa (Ministry of Culture), “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa, tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957” [Summary Report by Ministry of Culture on Cultural Work over 3 Years, 1955-1957], (December 20, 1957), Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III. For more on future plans as well as a summary of cultural exports, see Hoàng Minh Giám, “Chỉ thị của Bộ Văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957” [Instructions by the Ministry of Culture to Guide Cultural Development Planning in 1957], (September 24, 1956), Bộ Văn hóa 170 and Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Kế hoạch bồi dưỡng cán nhắc cán bộ năm 1960 và 5 năm 1960-1965 của Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture Officer Training and Consideration Plan in 1960 and over 5 Years, 1960-1965], (April 1960), Bộ Văn hóa 758, LTT III.

³⁷⁵ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Tiến [Department of Museum Preservation], “Nhiệm vụ chức năng chủ yếu của bảo tồn bảo tàng” [“Main Tasks and Functions of Museum Preservation”], (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III. The History Museum also cited issues like young and “immature” leaders, poor training, stealing, “backward and feudal ideas,” weak management, plus

most shockingly, the Vietnamese emperor's seal had been "misplaced."³⁷⁶ Film department chiefs acknowledged their organizational issues, blaming the absence of clear ministry direction.³⁷⁷ Movie teams reportedly lacked equipment, anticipated experts never arrived, and production offices had been forced to move. Accused of ineffectiveness, filmmakers responded that D.R.V. chiefs "wanted perfection," but top cultural officials were "like fish out of water."³⁷⁸ The ministry also confessed that audiences found their completed films in agriculture and industry less than scintillating.³⁷⁹

nitpicking over mislaid documents, loose regulations (staff sleeping overnight in offices with "unescorted" visitors), lost fans, misplaced pens, and missing clothes. In turn, curators charged staff with losing official seals, reemploying spies, and a general lack of "feeling" and knowledge. Open access to valuable objects, multiple copies of keys, and employees who repeatedly stole office supplies (for black market resale) added to the museum's problems. See Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Tiến [Department of Museum Preservation], "Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian Vụ bảo tồn bảo tàng" ["Report on the Security and Spy Situation in the Department of Museum Preservation"] (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1963 [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1963], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³⁷⁶ On the loss of the emperor's seal and resulting disputes, see Hồ sơ về việc mất cắp hiện vật ở viện bảo tàng lịch sử năm 1961-1964 [Files on Stolen Artifacts in the History Museum in 1961-1964], Bộ Văn hóa 976, LTT III. This object carried great significance and was handed over publicly in 1945 by Bảo Đại to the Viet Minh. Its loss inspired extensive communications between offices assigning blame to each other. The seal was never recovered.

³⁷⁷ Xưởng phim Việt Nam, Cục Điện ảnh (Bộ Văn hóa) [Vietnam Film Studio, Cinema Department (Ministry of Culture)], "Báo cáo tổng kết tình hình 1 năm của Xưởng" ["One Year Summary Report of the Studio Situation"], (No date), Kế hoạch và báo cáo thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Doanh nghiệp Quốc gia chiếu bóng và Xưởng phim Việt Nam [Plan and Report on Implementation of 1956 Plan by the Vietnam National Cinema and Vietnam Film Studio], Bộ Văn hóa 166, LTT III. Other complaints included movies that focused too much on Hanoi and urban areas rather than on rural and countryside topics. Staf admitted that newsreels lacked real power, ignored significant events, and were released too late. In one instance, President Ho's Tet holiday greeting had been released three full months after the lunar new year. In another case, a film on confronting drought played in theaters during widespread flooding.

³⁷⁸ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], "Quá trình phát triển các rạp chiếu bóng ở Hà Nội qua các thời kỳ" ["The Development Process of Cinemas in Hanoi over Time period"] (1957), Báo cáo công tác chiếu bóng từ năm 1953-1957 của doanh nghiệp chiếu bóng Quốc gia Việt Nam [Report on Cinema Work from 1953-57 by Vietnam National Cinema], Bộ Văn hóa 185, LTT III.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. See also Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], "Chính sách cải tạo ngành kinh doanh chiếu bóng tư nhân theo xã hội chủ nghĩa" ["Policy of Transforming the Private Cinema Business in accordance with Socialism"], (January 1959), "Tài liệu về cải tạo tư bản tư doanh trong ngành văn hóa năm 1959 của Bộ văn hóa và các đơn vị trực thuộc" [Documentation of Venture Capitalist Improvements in the Cultural Sector in 1959 of Ministry of Culture and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 56, LTT III. Specific films that received little acclaim included a documentary on the

Hanoi's reliance on modern assessment methods allowed officials to manipulate the evidence or even hide serious problems. Lengthy reports and extensive statistical analyses buried less than satisfactory results and also made minor accomplishments appear to be stunning feats. In a particularly congratulatory 1956 export evaluation, for instance, cultural staff compiled remarkable figures to demonstrate their accomplishments. What ministry staff neglected to mention was that these figures used the previous year's statistics, when there had been no official cultural programs. As a result, "increases" in export production levels could be touted as an astonishing achievement in foreign affairs.³⁸⁰ Such cases reveal a North Vietnamese bureaucratic culture of "pressure to perform" that influenced how office reports were framed.

When high-level D.R.V. officials admitted mistakes or problems, they tended to attack their staff's slow-speed modernization. For instance, when acknowledging "errors" within export programs, including conflicts in opinions, leadership, planning, and organization, ministry leaders blamed a general lack of development and low comprehension of effective methods among their workers. They claimed that cultural cadre did not yet possess a "full understanding" of the meaning and mission of culture to "serve foreign relations." Ministry agents, in turn, complained that the leadership "failed to comprehend the value" of cultural work to influence political situations and speed up development.³⁸¹

Not only did cultural modernization programs fall short, but anti-imperialist plans also met serious impediments. Internal complaints about the anti-imperialist approach bombarded the Ministry of Culture. None objected to anti-imperialism, but they remained confused about "how to

plight of southern Vietnamese as well as "Friendship Struggle" (on a North Korean delegation's visit) and "President Ho Chi Minh Overseas" (on his visits to China, the U.S.S.R., and Mongolia).

³⁸⁰ Cục Xuất bản (Bộ Văn hóa) [Foreign Book Publication Department (Ministry of Culture)], "Kế hoạch xuất bản sách ngoại văn năm 1956" ["Foreign Book Publication Plan in 1956"], (June 1956) Kế hoạch báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan by the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 165, LTT III.

³⁸¹ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], "Kiểm điểm công tác trao đổi văn hóa với các nước ngoài năm 1956" ["Review of Cultural Exchange with Foreign Countries in 1956"], (No date), Báo cáo của Vụ liên lạc văn hóa với nước ngoài về công tác trao đổi văn hóa năm 1956 ["Report of the Department of Communication with Foreign Countries about Cultural Exchange Work in 1956"], Bộ Văn hóa 1051, LTT III.

serve the fight for national unity.” For example, the lack of continuity in anti-imperialist themes puzzled cadre, as did the low number of shows advancing an anti-imperialist line and the stiff repetition and formulaic approaches that cultural leaders had recommended. Ministry heads countered these grievances by criticizing their personnel’s limited and late efforts to promote an anti-imperialist culture. For example, officials claimed that movies, art, plays, radio broadcasts and exhibitions had failed to concentrate on their “The South and North are One, Vietnam is One” slogan. They additionally observed that staff had not been able to halt the advance of American culture in the North and South.³⁸²

Ministry researchers also lay blame at the feet of past foreign influence. According to one report, France had “Propagated a suppressible, depraved, reactionary culture to poison Vietnamese people” by encouraging “backward customs, superstitious activities, and bad habits such as drinking, gambling, and drugs.” French colonialists had hoped “to weaken our people’s spirit” by terrorizing intellectuals, writers, and artists and issuing “reactionary books, newspapers, and movies in order to build a mercenary force and divide Vietnam.” Officials agreed that “the impact of the enslaving, feudal, imperialist, and capitalist cultures has still been very heavy” despite their best efforts at modernizing the population. They then blamed “the depraved and cowboy culture of the American imperialists” that had purportedly spread throughout Vietnam.³⁸³ When the French government indicated its willingness to hold talks with the D.R.V., one author exhorted Vietnamese people to remember the past. He explained the French “colonial essence” meant that North Vietnam could not use the French against the U.S., because “Leaning on one

³⁸² Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Đề cương công tác văn hóa phục vụ đấu tranh thống nhất” [“Outline of Culture for the Struggle for Unification”] (August 16, 1956), Đề cương của Bộ Văn hóa, báo cáo của doanh nghiệp chiếu bóng quốc gia, Ban tuyên truyền liên khu 3 về công tác văn hóa phục vụ đấu tranh thống nhất nước nhà năm 1956 [Ministry of Culture Draft Platform, Report by the National Cinema and Propaganda Board, Interregional Zone 3 on Cultural Work Serving the Fight for National Unity in 1956], Bộ Văn hóa 887, LTT III. See also Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], (August 1959), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959 [Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development], Bộ Văn Hóa 54, LTT III.

³⁸³ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959” [“Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development”], (August 1959), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa về 5 năm phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa 1954-1959 [Report by the Ministry of Culture on 5 Years of Cultural Development], Bộ Văn Hóa 54, LTT III.

government to overthrow another will never be a good way.” Instead, he counseled Hanoi to play off the U.S. and France against each other or, at the very least, persuade France to halt its support of American policies.³⁸⁴

Hanoi’s strong promotion of modernization and anti-imperialism also brought forth a second result: new articulations of national identity. Touting progress in all areas as necessary and desirable, D.R.V. leaders made modernization a key component of patriotism and promoted education as critical to North Vietnam’s development. In stressing literacy and an awareness of current events, Hanoi chiefs believed that citizens could continue learning from successful foreign models, take pride in Vietnam’s “glorious” history and accomplishments, as well as share the unique traditions and features of Vietnamese people. In promoting cultural and educational advancement, the Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Education ministries exhorted North Vietnam’s population to study appropriate materials and learn about new ideas that would bring them into the modern age. Vietnamese people could also participate in modern activities like movie-going and even museum visits, cultural offerings that taught D.R.V. residents about their country and what it meant to belong.

Anti-imperialism also proved critical to popularizing ideas about belonging. To protect against the imperialist threat, Hanoi propaganda campaigns distinguished Vietnamese people from their enemies. In fact, such programs held a special position in the D.R.V. cultural offensive against Washington and the Saigon regime. Hanoi employed a variety of cultural tactics, using publications, writers, and performers to spread the messages that Vietnam was meant to be one country, the U.S. and Diem were enemies of the Vietnamese, and only effective modernization could protect Vietnam’s independence from imperialist predators.

For domestic and foreign audiences, Hanoi endorsed a new version of Vietnam’s past that elaborated a D.R.V. national identity. State-sponsored histories boasted nearly 4000 years of history driven by a united population, a proven record of ousting invaders, and a dedication to

³⁸⁴ Use and Exploitation of France -U.S. Discrepancy, November 1962, Folder 06, Box 06, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 05 - National Liberation Front, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University. This is a translation of *Tien Phong Magazine*, Issue 7 dated October-November 1962.

modern development.³⁸⁵ North Vietnamese historians thus created narratives that equated resistance with “being Vietnamese.” This new chronicle also intimated that some force of predestination guaranteed Vietnam’s reunification. The Ministry of Culture applied this theme in its cultural programs, normalizing the expectation that Vietnam would again be unified in the near future. Ministry chiefs ordered the continued production of such political books and requested that related depictions appear in materials bound for overseas consumption.³⁸⁶

The D.R.V. also promoted such themes in its information programs targeting the South Vietnamese. In particular, Party leaders took a cultural nationalist approach to promote a unified identity in communications above and below the 17th parallel. Hanoi claimed that southerners wanted to fight for their freedom, had endured unimaginable threats and abuse by the Saigon government, and had been valiant and tireless in pursuit of reunification. North Vietnam created public campaigns to applaud the southern resisters as brave men and women worthy of emulation. A dual image of “being Vietnamese” thus emerged, stressing the heroic modernizers of the North and the equally fearless communist rebels in the South. D.R.V. representations reconciled northern goals with southern realities, so that “being Vietnamese” could still be defined by bloodline and birthplace, but it was also dependent upon political affiliation and patriotism.

Many times, Hanoi advanced the meaning of “being Vietnamese” in contrast to what it meant to be American. For instance, Dương Bạch Mai maintained that the Party had led the fight against imperialism and “removed the inferiority complex resulting from almost a century of foreign domination” in a 1958 V.O.V. message to South Vietnam. He averred:

Today when the Algerian people attack enemy posts, the word “Dien Bien Phu” constitutes the vanguard slogan in their assault. The Arab people have publicly stated that they are following the example of Vietnam and Ho Chi Minh in the struggle against the American imperialists and the Eisenhower doctrine. The

³⁸⁵ Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam*, 46-67.

³⁸⁶ Phòng nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế (Bộ Văn hóa) [Department of International Book and Newspaper Importation (Ministry of Culture)] “Báo cáo tình hình nhập khẩu sách báo Quốc tế 1956” [“Report on International Book and Newspaper Importation in 1956”], (January 21, 1957), “Kế hoạch, báo cáo tình hình thực hiện kế hoạch năm 1956 của Cục Xuất bản và các đơn vị” [Planning Report on the Implementation of the 1956 Plan of the Publication Department and Agencies], Bộ Văn Hóa 165, LTT III.

Indian and Burmese people have recently wholeheartedly praised our leader Ho Chi Minh, who has heroically struggled for the freedom of mankind.”³⁸⁷

Mai also offered his view of what “being Vietnamese” meant by explaining what they were not: “The Vietnamese people detest those who are not loyal, courteous, wise, and reliable.” The author also described Vietnam’s enemies, like France, which “bitterly detested the cultural richness and spirit of the Vietnamese people.” He then predicted that Washington leaders, who “shamelessly” used bribery and terror tactics, “will dig their own graves.”³⁸⁸ The Ministry agreed, claiming that Vietnam’s partition “is the great obstacle to the cause of development” and the “My-Diem administration” relied upon tactics like “depraved culture and reactionary gangs poisoning our people, especially the youth.”³⁸⁹

A third result of anti-imperialism and modernization materialized in Hanoi’s policy making circles. D.R.V. foreign affairs leaders rejected lines of attack that went outside the main precepts of communism. As a result, Hanoi embraced anti-imperialism so fiercely that they sometimes missed exploitable flaws in U.S. foreign policy. In the case of covert operations, D.R.V. leaders complained of spying by Americans and South Vietnamese “lackeys” and took rapid steps to combat the problem. In the case of racist U.S. policies, the same Hanoi officials failed to exploit the issue. Propagandists condemned racial violence in America and recognized that Washington worried about its racist image. Yet, when complaining that Americans encouraged Vietnamese to murder other Vietnamese, information operatives did not connect this to racism.

D.R.V. leaders, concerned with insidious plots by American imperialists, detected a spy crisis in the late 1950s. Covert operatives and secret agents of the U.S. and South Vietnam had

³⁸⁷ Duong Bach Mai Hails Party Anniversary, 02 March 1958, Folder 25, Box 07, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 06 - Democratic Republic of Vietnam, The Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, 1. This is a translated transcript of a Voice of Vietnam broadcast to South Vietnam.

³⁸⁸ Ibid.

³⁸⁹ Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Báo cáo tổng quát tình hình công tác và thành tích hoạt động văn hóa của nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa từ ngày hòa bình lập lại đến nay” [“Report on the General Situation and Cultural Achievements of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from When Peace Was Restored to Now”], (December 20, 1957), Báo cáo của Bộ Văn hóa tổng hợp tình hình công tác văn hóa 3 năm 1955-1957 [Report of the Ministry of Culture Summarizing Culture Work over Three Years, 1955-1957], Bộ Văn hóa 19, LTT III.

purportedly infiltrated the entire Ministry of Culture and other government offices.³⁹⁰ Advising vigilance, film department cadre noted that “enemies” had spread rumors, broken machines, discredited actors as spies, and even posed as directors. Top officials warned cinema bureaus to guard secrets, defend against sabotage and propaganda, and take care in relationships with people corrupted by the Americans. One security official declared that imperialist spies had planned an “evil-minded conspiracy to damage socialism in the North.”³⁹¹ Hanoi’s cultural officers accused the Majestic and Palace cinemas of being “agents” for “imperialist colonial gangs” because they showed U.S., British, and French movies that promoted “overly-romantic, pessimistic, and negative themes” that would lead to the degeneration of Vietnamese culture and morality.³⁹² Film department officials issued warnings about the cultural schemes of “capitalist enemies” and even “a spy organ” that planned to help Paris “reinvade and dominate Vietnam.” Another critic listed the names of “dangerous” contacts among the staff, including an “abnormal” woman who had married several times and an officer who allowed a friend with “questionable behavior” to listen to enemy radio broadcasts. Reportedly, high-ranking officials, influenced by the Americans, had paid for their officers to enjoy prostitutes and even turned their private homes into “dens of iniquity.” One cultural analyst speculated that enemy spies had “two standard methods: money and girls.” With this approach, he warned, the U.S. could “corner our

³⁹⁰ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Báo cáo về bảo mật phòng gian” [“Report on the Spy Problem”] (December 17, 1962), “Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa 1963, [“Summary report on Security and spying prevention of the Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1963”], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³⁹¹ See also Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Yêu cầu của cuộc vận động học tập nghị quyết 39 và chỉ thị 40 của Trung Ương Đảng” [“Requirements of the Movement of Implementing Resolution 39 and Directive 40 of the Party Central Committee”], (April 19, 1963), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa 1963, [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³⁹² Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Quá trình phát triển các rạp chiếu bóng ở Hà Nội qua các thời kỳ” [“The Development Process of Cinemas in Hanoi over Time”], (1957), Báo cáo công tác chiếu bóng từ năm 1953-1957 của doanh nghiệp chiếu bóng quốc gia Việt Nam [Report on Cinema Work from 1953-57 by Vietnam National Cinema], Bộ Văn hóa 185, LTT III. The report did not list the names of the foreign movies to which they objected.

comrades.”³⁹³ Department of Conservation Chief Đặng Xuân Thiều claimed that “feudalist and reactionary Vietnamese” intended to attack the North using undercover operatives. These spies, he maintained, had bribed officials as well as stolen or destroyed valuable cultural artifacts.³⁹⁴ Even secret cadre training manuals included warnings about spy infiltration. According to secret cadre documents, Americans had bribed some Party members, forced them into reactionary organizations, or even encouraged some to commit adultery, embezzlement and other crimes.³⁹⁵ In sum, Hanoi began to see spies at every turn.

To combat this problem, officials developed several strategies. First, the Ministry of Culture designed a security awareness course to teach personnel that “The enemy’s plots depend on us more than on themselves.” The class taught anti-spy measures and broadcast information to the wider population on how to identify these traitors.³⁹⁶ Next, offices like the

³⁹³ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Báo cáo về bảo mật phòng gian” [“Report on the Spy Problem”] (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa 1963 [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1963], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³⁹⁴ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Nhiệm vụ chức năng chủ yếu của bảo tồn bảo tàng” [“Main Tasks and Functions of Museum Preservation”], (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on the Security of Agencies Directly Under the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III. See also Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Báo cáo bảo mật phòng gian” [“Report on Security and Spy Prevention”], (January 3, 1963), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security of Agencies Under the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 709 and Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Yêu cầu của cuộc vận động học tập nghị quyết 39 và chỉ thị 40 của Trung Ương Đảng” [“Requirements of the Movement of Implementing Resolution 39 and Directive 40 of the Party Central Committee”], (April 19, 1963), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa 1963, [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³⁹⁵ Phòng Tuyên Huấn (Bureau of Propaganda and Training), “Tài liệu học tập: Âm mưu Mỹ Diệt ở Miền Nam và đối sách của ta” [“Study Document: American-Diem Conspiracy in Southern Vietnam and Our Reaction”] (No city: Nhà Xuất bản Phòng Tuyên Huấn, Ủy Ban cải cách ruộng đất Liên khu 4” [Bureau of Propaganda and Training, Committee of Land Reform – Military Zone 4], February 1956), 2-9. The author went on to argue that education was the answer to these issues. See 12-16 and especially 17.

³⁹⁶ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Yêu cầu của cuộc vận động học tập nghị quyết 39 và chỉ thị 40 của Trung Ương Đảng” [“Requirements of the Movement of Implementing Resolution 39 and Directive 40 of the Party Central Committee”], (April 19, 1963), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn

Department of Film prepared delegations for travel abroad by warning that “if vigilance is not attended to or some secrets are revealed, even a small thing, it can cause serious consequences.”³⁹⁷ They instructed D.R.V. representatives abroad to watch their conversations, since they might reveal Hanoi’s movie production difficulties. Spies could then use this information to “distort” North Vietnam’s image.³⁹⁸ Film chiefs warned their staff to issue invitations to movie experts cautiously, since they might try to gather information on which films Hanoi leaders viewed and where they saw them. Finally, publication houses also spread information on possible spy issues, using the topic to contrast Hanoi’s peaceful intentions with the “cunning” plots of those in Washington and Saigon.³⁹⁹

These anti-spy measures extended throughout cultural offices and even into the private lives of the staff. The Vietnamese Revolutionary Museum joined the chorus, citing enemy infiltration, “sophisticated and villainous” intrigues in their offices, and penetration by southern Vietnamese spies. The museum’s Vice-Manager Trần Văn Trinh initiated an independent investigation and discovered major breaches of security and blatant derelictions of duty in film offices, including exposure of secrets and staff who boasted of their covert tasks to family and friends.⁴⁰⁰ The Central Issue and Publication Department, for example, warned that new staff

hóa 1963, [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture], Bộ Văn hóa 725, LTT III.

³⁹⁷ Vụ Bảo tồn Bảo tàng Đặng Xuân Thiều [Department of Museum Preservation], “Nhiệm vụ chức năng chủ yếu của bảo tồn bảo tàng” [“Main Tasks and Functions of Museum Preservation”], (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III.

³⁹⁸ Ibid. See also Bộ Văn hóa [Ministry of Culture], “Chính sách cải tạo ngành kinh doanh chiếu bóng tư nhân theo xã hội chủ nghĩa” [“Policy of Transforming the Private Cinema Business in accordance with Socialism”], (January 1959), Tài liệu về cải tạo tư bản tự doanh trong ngành văn hóa năm 1959 của Bộ văn hóa và các đơn vị trực thuộc [Documentation on Venture Capitalist Improvements in the Cultural Sector in 1959 of Ministry of Culture and Agencies], Bộ Văn hóa 56, LTT III.

³⁹⁹ Hoàng Minh Giám, “Chỉ thị về việc của Bộ Văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957” [“Ministry of Culture Instructions and Guide for Planning of Cultural Development in 1957”], (September 24, 1956) Chỉ thị của Bộ Văn hóa hướng dẫn lập kế hoạch phát triển sự nghiệp văn hóa năm 1957 [Instructions by the Ministry of Culture to Guide Cultural Development Plans in 1957], Bộ Văn hóa 170, LTT III.

had been hired too rapidly and without complete background checks. Two Party officials even sent a list of suspected spy names as well as their possible wrongdoings.⁴⁰¹

Hanoi officials approached the spy problem with efficiency, but they failed to tackle what they termed America's "most egregious scheme." According to North Vietnam, the U.S. strategy to divide Vietnamese people by forcing them to kill one another was unusually cruel. This was not a new accusation; the Viet Minh leveled related criticisms at the French during the 1st Indochinese War. Vietnamese communist officials leaders believed the French, encouraged by the Americans, had "stubbornly prolonged the filthy war" by using a strategy of "using Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese and using war to feed war."⁴⁰²

After 1954, Hanoi extended similar indictments to the U.S.: the Americans had invaded South Vietnam and were forcing Vietnamese to slaughter each other. *Nhân dân* denounced Washington's scheme to make "Asians kill Asians" in an editorial that explained the U.S. "threatened the freedom and security of Southeast Asian countries . . . They are the common enemy of the people in Asia and the world as well."⁴⁰³ In April 1954, *Nhân dân* editors accused the US of dividing the Vietnamese and seeking "to cheat and separate Asian people."⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰⁰ Bảo tàng Cách mạng Việt Nam, Phó Giám đốc Trần Văn Trinh [Vietnamese Revolutionary Museum, Vice Director Tran Van Trinh], "Tổng kết lớp học tập bảo mật phòng gian của Viện Bảo tàng Cách mạng Việt Nam" [Summary of Classroom Learning on Security and Spy Prevention of the Vietnam Revolutionary Museum], (December 17, 1962), Báo cáo tình hình bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn hóa năm 1962 [Report on Security and Spy Prevention in Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III.

⁴⁰¹ Bí thư Chi bộ Nguyễn Nhất Hoài và Giám đốc cơ quan Lê Thái Bình [Party Cell Leader Nguyen Nhat Hoai and Director Le Thai Binh], "Báo cáo để chuẩn bị phát động phong trào bảo mật phòng gian trong cơ quan" [Report in Preparation to Launch Office Security and Spy Prevention Movement], (April 4 1962), Báo cáo tổng kết công tác bảo mật phòng gian của các đơn vị trực thuộc Bộ Văn Hóa năm 1962 [Summary Report on Security and Spy Prevention of Agencies under the Ministry of Culture in 1962], Bộ Văn hóa 709, LTT III. The department was founded November 13, 1956 according to Decision 555/VH-TC, and later became the Central Issue State Store.

⁴⁰² The All-People and All-Sided Resistance War Line and the Protracted Fight Against the Aggressive French Colonialists, the Important Victories During the First Years of the Resistance War, 1948, Folder 14, Box 02, Douglas Pike Collection: Unit 13 - The Early History of Vietnam, The Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University. This document seems to be part of a book and dated incorrectly as 1948.

⁴⁰³ "Đả đảo Đế quốc Mỹ can thiệp trắng trợn vào chiến tranh Đông Dương! ["Oppose the Obvious Interference of American Imperialists in the Indochinese War!"] *Nhân dân* [The People] 166 (February 20, 1954) and "Hãy chặn bàn tay can thiệp của Mỹ lại!" ["Stop the Interference of

Book-length assessments also emphasized Washington's plan to make Vietnamese peoples massacre each other. Ngô Trọng Bản observed in *America's Invasion Plot in Indochina* that the U.S. had even tried "to drive a wedge" between ethnic Vietnamese and minority groups. Using this "cunning plot," the critic maintained, Washington wanted to make "Asians fight Asians" and "Vietnamese fight Vietnamese."⁴⁰⁵ Quoting U.S. Secretary of State Dulles, the writer observed that the U.S. had wanted the French to follow the U.S. model from Korea by using indigenous troops. The U.S. even sent Vietnamese soldiers to South Korea to study training and conscription methods. The author called this Dulles' strategy of "fighting on other people's blood." In the late 1950s, he noted, similar American plans to divide Vietnamese people. Bản also deplored America's plan to create a legionnaire army from Taiwanese, Filipino, and South Korean soldiers, which would be "controlled by a white military officer."⁴⁰⁶ Another author charged both the U.S. and France creating a supposed Vietnam civil war "to conceal their conspiracy" of making Vietnamese fight each other to continue the conflict.⁴⁰⁷ Nam Mộc complained in his 1955 work that the U.S. had "cheated, seduced, [and] threatened" people, especially Catholics, tricking them into migrating southward to become "slaves and cannon-fodder." Ostensibly drawing upon A.F.P., U.P.I., and N.B.C. sources, the author asserted that Washington regularly sold the refugees to rubber plantations in South America. Other refugees who remained in South Vietnam, he continued, faced concentration camp-like conditions, with overcrowding, famine, lack

America!"] *Nhân dân [The People]* 167 (February 25, 1954). The editorials are published in *Đã đảo để quốc Mỹ tiếp tục can thiệp vào Đông Dương! [Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!]* (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, January 1, 1955), 11-14 and 15-19.

⁴⁰⁴ Việt-Miên-Lào nhất trí chiến đấu đánh bại Đế quốc Pháp – Mỹ ["Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos Determined to Fight against American-French Imperialism"] *Nhân dân [The People]* 176 (April 10, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 20-24.

⁴⁰⁵ Ngô Trọng Bản, *Âm mưu xâm lược của Mỹ ở Đông Dương [America's Invasion Plot in Indochina]* (Hà Nội: NXB Sự Thật, 1955).

⁴⁰⁶ "Việt-Miên-Lào nhất trí chiến đấu đánh bại Đế quốc Pháp – Mỹ" ["Vietnam-Cambodia-Laos Determined to Fight against American-French Imperialism"] *Nhân dân [The People]* 176 (April 10, 1954) in *Prevent US Imperialism from Interfering in Indochina!*, 12.

⁴⁰⁷ Nam Mộc, *Chính Đế quốc Pháp Mỹ là thủ phạm gây ra và kéo dài chiến tranh xâm lược Việt Nam và Miên Lào [The American-French Imperialists are Culprits Waging and Extending Invasion Wars to Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos]* Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1954), 25, 27-29, and 35-41.

of sanitation, barbed wire, guards, child trafficking, and forced prostitution.⁴⁰⁸ All of these conditions, he claimed, resulted from America's plan to have Vietnamese murder one another.

In addition to published sources, top secret cadre study materials also emphasized U.S. culpability in dividing and killing Vietnamese people. One guide condemned America's creation of a southern mercenary army as "using Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese, using Asians to fight Asians." Anti-communism, anti-colonialism, and anti-feudalism were U.S. slogans, the documents noted, but in name only. In reality, "anti-communism" meant that dissenters were terrorized or murdered, "anti-colonialism" meant U.S. imperialism had replaced French colonialism, and "anti-feudalism" could be understood as the overthrow of Emperor Bảo Đại for the dictator Diệm. These study texts maintained, as did most North Vietnamese publications of the era, that Diệm was inextricably linked with the U.S., referring to them consistently as a package deal: "Mỹ-Diệm" (U.S.-Diem). Cadre learned that "Mỹ-Diệm" hoped to turn back the clock and copy "fascist ancestors" like Hitler, Mussolini, and Japan in their dealings with Vietnamese people.⁴⁰⁹

Hanoi leaders studied U.S. foreign affairs and exploited America's domestic racial inequalities, but they failed to connect the two. Washington's foreign policy experts worried about America's racial reputation, a concern that expanded over the course of the 1950s. Hanoi, in turn, made minor mention of U.S. racial tensions in domestic information programs. Yet, in official circles as well as in international complaints against America's invasion, they did not label Washington leaders as racists.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., *Nâng cao cảnh giác củng cố hòa bình chặn đế quốc Mỹ và tay sai [To Raise Vigilance and Consolidate Peace to Stay the Hands of the U.S. Warmongers and Lackeys]* (Hà Nội: NXB Thế Giới, 1955), 3, 6, 12, 7, 11. Characterizing the U.S. as an "evil force" and "evil influence," the author listed American ceasefire violations, refusals to return prisoners, as well as robberies and arrests. In particular, he condemned U.S. Navy Task Force 90 in relocating Vietnamese southward for its reported barbarism and cruel behavior.

⁴⁰⁹ Phòng Tuyên Huấn (Bureau of Propaganda and Training), "Tài liệu học tập: Âm mưu Mỹ Diệm ở Miền Nam và đối sách của ta" ["Study Document: American-Diem Conspiracy in Southern Vietnam and Our Reaction"] (No city: Nhà Xuất bản Phòng Tuyên Huấn, Ủy Ban cải cách ruộng đất Liên khu 4" [Bureau of Propaganda and Training, Committee of Land Reform – Military Zone 4], February 1956), 2-9. The author went on to argue that education was the answer to these issues. See 12-16 and especially 17.

Instead of attacking the U.S. for racism abroad, the D.R.V. highlighted America's policy of "using Vietnamese to fight Vietnamese" without making a strong indictment against Washington. D.R.V. domestic propaganda underscored Washington's policy of using Vietnamese to slay one another, but only as evidence of America's imperialist nature. Cultural cadre did not charge the U.S. with racism on the international stage or in domestic information campaigns. It may be worth noting that the Soviets, as "white" allies of Hanoi, made North Vietnamese accusations of racism somewhat problematic.⁴¹⁰ Yet, with the Soviets claiming an anti-racist stance and Mao increasingly harping on racial difference in the emerging Sino-Soviet split, charges of racism against the U.S. could have been employed to great effect. In the case of U.S.-DRV relations, therefore, Washington's efforts to claim anti-racism were unnecessary. North Vietnamese officials all but ignored the racist implications of American foreign policy in Vietnam. Hanoi failed to locate Washington's "Achilles' heel" of race, demonstrating the limits of North Vietnam's anti-imperialist outlook.

Conclusion

My research shows that, throughout the latter half of the 1950s, the Ministry of Culture spearheaded Hanoi's modernization drives broadly, in not only economic and political arenas, but also in social, civic, and cultural realms. To develop a modern country, the D.R.V. established new Vietnamese cultural and social patterns through its policies. The North Vietnamese population did not just participate in industrial growth during the se years, but they also partook in government-sponsored events at clubs, theaters, and libraries. By contributing and joining D.R.V. and Party-sanctioned activities, citizens could help Vietnam to modernize and thus protect Vietnam's independence.

The Ministry of Culture also fostered anti-imperialism through domestic propaganda and information programs that defined the US vis-à-vis the D.R.V. Hanoi deplored the abusive

⁴¹⁰ Statler makes this point in passing, quoting a Canadian observer who remarked that there were more "white faces" in Hanoi after Geneva than there had ever been during the French period. See Statler, *Replacing France*, 231.

policies of the U.S and Saigon governments in South Vietnam. In addition, the D.R.V. characterized Americans in a negative light, explaining the tribulations of average Americans and informing the North Vietnamese of the flaws in the U.S. system. Propagandists contrasted these failures with positive Vietnamese qualities to claim moral superiority over the Americans. As a result, the D.R.V. exercised a great deal of influence over the formation of a new Vietnamese national identity by promoting modernization ideals and anti-imperialist sentiment.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Late in the Eisenhower era, the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.) finished work on a survey in South Vietnam, part of their “Far East Public Opinion Barometer” series, entitled “The Image of America among Vietnamese University Students.” When given the opportunity to indicate the aspect they liked *least* about the U.S., South Vietnamese students listed a wide variety of examples, from nuclear weapons to dressing like cowboys. Of serious interest to the research team, however, were the top two responses. The second highest complaint was Americans’ “lack of feeling, too proud, superiority complex,” and the top critique was “race discrimination.” Combined, 56% of the respondents listed these two as their most prominent charges against the U.S., five times the next highest response.⁴¹¹

America brandished its exceptionalism in South Vietnam through anti-communist principles and modernization ideals, both rooted in a racialized view of foreign relations. From the 1950s through the 1960s, they replicated French patterns of dismissing Vietnamese culture and language in favor of introducing “superior” American institutions and practices.⁴¹² From the beginning of Washington’s interest in Vietnam, U.S. officials complained that the Viet Minh played on the “political immaturity” of the Vietnamese people to link their cause with anti-colonialism.⁴¹³ Some believed early on that the Vietnamese possessed “a deep-seated hatred and distrust” that had been “inspired by Communist propaganda and the desire of the Oriental to ‘push the white

⁴¹¹ “The Image of America among Vietnamese University Students” December 1959; File FE:22; Box 1 Office of Research, Public Opinion Barometer Reports, 1955-60, #1-23; Record Group 306: Records of the United States Information Agency (U.S.I.A.); National Archives at College Park, College Park, MD.

⁴¹² Statler, *Replacing France*, 258.

⁴¹³ “Preliminary Evaluation of Our National Psychological Strategy” (May 7, 1952), pages 23-24; File: Waging Psychological Warfare Against the Communists, 1951-53 [13 of 18], Student Research File, Psychological Warfare 48 Box 1 of 1, Truman Library.

man out of Asia.”⁴¹⁴ Maintaining that “white troops will always be associated with colonialism,” U.S. advisors argued that “Much of the stigma of colonialism can be removed if, where necessary, yellow men will be killed by yellow men rather than by white men alone.”⁴¹⁵ American analysts believed that whites needed to be less visible and allow the Vietnamese to fight their “civil war,” at least visually.

By the 1960s, not much had changed. American advisors in South Vietnam connected the colonial experience and racial predilections with South Vietnamese problems. The Taylor Report explained that “The Vietnamese, however, have a traditional xenophobia” and “having passed through Western colonialism, the Vietnamese are particularly alert to any evidence of a reimposition of Caucasian control of their affairs.”⁴¹⁶ Rostow advised President John F. Kennedy in 1961 that the North Vietnamese had “been reading our fears of white men in Asia.”⁴¹⁷ Senator Mike Mansfield wrote to Kennedy with worry that the U.S. presence “could well be considered a revival of colonial action.”⁴¹⁸ Theodore H. White, the journalist made famous for connecting Kennedy with Camelot, wrote to JFK that “the gross fact of race-hatred, hatred of the white man in general, originally of the French, now converted by clever Communist tactics into a hatred of Americans” would play a significant role. He concluded that “the presence of the white American troops will feed the race-hate of the Vietnamese.”⁴¹⁹ In assessing the impact of introducing U.S.

⁴¹⁴ “Military Group Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia” (August 5, 1950), page 14; Student Research File (B File) Pacific Rim: Indochina, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines. #31B Box 2 of 2, Truman Library.

⁴¹⁵ “Final Report of Joint MDAP Survey Mission to Southeast Asia” (December 11, 1950), page 9; Student Research File (B File) Pacific Rim: Indochina, Thailand, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia, and the Philippines; Box 2 of 2 #31B, Truman Library.

⁴¹⁶ “Walt R. Rostow Working Copy of Taylor Report – Covert Annex” (November 3, 1961); National Security Files (NSF) Countries Box 203; File: Vietnam Subject, Taylor Report 11/3/61; John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, Boston, Massachusetts.

⁴¹⁷ Walt W. Rostow Memorandum to John F. Kennedy (November 11, 1961); National Security Files (NSF) Countries Box 195; Vietnam General 11/11-11/13/61, Page 1; Kennedy Library.

⁴¹⁸ Senator Mike Mansfield to John F. Kennedy, (November 2, 1961), National Security Files (NSF) Countries Box 194A; File: FBIS Special Memorandum, Vietnam General, 11/6/61; Page 1; Kennedy Library.

⁴¹⁹ Letter to John F. Kennedy from Theodore H. White (October 11, 1961); Presidential Office Files (POF) Countries Box 128; File: 9 Vietnam General, 1960-61, Page 1; Kennedy Library.

combat forces, the JCS was told that such acts “would stir up a big fuss throughout Asia about reintroduction of forces of white colonialism . . . [and] little question that a propaganda issue will be made of this.”⁴²⁰ On the brink of full-fledged war, then, U.S. analysts continued to look at race because Washington could not accept that the D.R.V. rejected the world capitalist order.

Meanwhile, as this dissertation shows, the D.R.V. aimed to keep the U.S. as an imperialist threat, out of Vietnam prior to 1950 by skillfully balancing its early diplomatic affairs. Viet Minh leaders had rethought what it was to “be Vietnamese” and concluded that modernization could assure and sustain Vietnam’s sovereignty. They also agreed that the U.S., as an imperialist nation, would eventually jeopardize Vietnam’s independence. As a result, the Viet Minh founded the D.R.V. based on the principle of anti-imperialism. An alliance with the U.S. would imperil Vietnam’s future and , although Vietnamese leaders did perceive a need to mollify Washington. An alliance with the U.S., moreover, would impede the central goals of the Viet Minh’s revolutionary project.

They also committed the new government to modernization. D.R.V. officials believed that the country needed to “catch up” with developed countries and pursued this objective through a wide range of programs. From economic growth to cultural performances, Hanoi sought to make Vietnam “modern” by accepting Soviet and Chinese aid. These mentors assisted Hanoi’s development and also proved to be useful allies to deter expanded enemy aggression. At the same time, fears of unwelcome Soviet or Chinese interference did not fade in Hanoi. To protect its autonomy, the D.R.V. looked beyond the international communist community to other former colonies for additional alliances. D.R.V. leaders believed they could offer decolonizing countries the chance to learn from Hanoi’s expertise in modernization. North Vietnamese leaders thus pursued opportunities to mentor their African allies and simultaneously increase their international standing. In pursuing opportunities to mentor other countries, however, the D.R.V. perpetuated ideological hierarchies that “imperialist” countries also employed.

⁴²⁰ Commander in Chief, Pacific (CINCPAC) to Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), “Pros and Cons of Introducing US Combat Forces into South Vietnam” (October 20, 1961) National Security Files (NSF) Countries Box 194A; Vietnam General 10/20-10/26/61, Page 2 ; Kennedy Library.

After Geneva and well into the 1960s, Hanoi continued to advance modernization in the North and heightened their complaints against U.S imperialism. From Hanoi's perspective, the lack of nationwide elections, America's increasing presence in South Vietnam, and the Saigon governments failures and antagonism confirmed that an imperialist plot had taken hold next door. North Vietnam thus relied upon its anti-imperialist nationalism, which had prepared the new country for a long struggle against the U.S. D.R.V. officials had also recognized other potential dangers and negotiated tricky diplomatic waters to ensure the nation's autonomy in the late 1950s. The Viet Minh government had linked Vietnam's modernization to the Soviets and Chinese, a move complicated by rising tensions between Moscow and Beijing. Concurrently, Hanoi continued to seek alliances outside the communist bloc to demonstrate its independence of action as well as to improve its standing in the world. In taking this path, the anti-imperialist modernization model served to solidify and guide the Vietnamese communist struggle for freedom and autonomy through the Second Indochinese War.

This is not to suggest that Hanoi's path to victory against the Americans was assured. Facing domestic modernization woes, a Sino-Soviet split that exacerbated V.W.P. rivalries, as well as very real complications in South Vietnam, a D.R.V. win was far from certain in the early 1960s. In particular, the decision to escalate Hanoi's efforts in South Vietnam to that of violent struggle put an additional burden on an already over-extended D.R.V. government. To alleviate the costs of this decision, government officials expanded their emphasis on anti-imperialist propaganda in both North and South Vietnam through the end of the 1960s.

Yet, in advocating anti-imperialism and modernization as essential to Vietnam's future, Hanoi leaders had also begun to delineate a new national identity. D.R.V. policies and programs tied both to the meaning of "being Vietnamese" in the North. Hanoi's faith in anti-imperialism had its drawbacks, however, most especially in evaluations of the U.S. threat and the ways in which the D.R.V. overlooked racism as a significant charge against Washington. Later, as the war waged on, the D.R.V. would correct this oversight to some degree, targeting American soldiers with propaganda campaigns that centered on U.S. racial tensions. Particularly in the late 1960s, psychological warfare programs focused on African American soldiers to assert a racial

brotherhood with the Vietnamese and to question why any person of color would be “fighting a white man’s war.”

Much of what would transpire in the 1960s suggests that Hanoi’s emphasis on anti-imperialism and modernization had been a useful strategy. D.R.V. officials used America’s interference in South Vietnam as evidence that their anti-imperialist position had been correct and thus built significant support for the Hanoi government. North Vietnam’s leaders would not question the promises of modernization and, throughout the 1960s, they persisted in the cause of building North Vietnam (with varying degrees of Soviet and Chinese assistance). A range of exchange programs with communist bloc countries like Poland, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia expanded as well, in tandem with Hanoi’s broadened plans to mentor African countries like Nigeria, Mali, and Guinea. As a result, during the Second Indochinese War, both anti-imperialism and modernization would continue to prove critical to D.R.V. domestic and foreign policies, and, perhaps most significantly, to the continued evolution of a new Vietnamese identity.

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