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Introduction by James McAllister, Williams College

Mark Phillip Bradley's central purpose in *Vietnam at War* is to offer his readers "a sharp departure from prevailing narratives in the West, which have until recently rendered the Vietnamese invisible in the making of their own history." It is difficult to imagine a scholar better suited to this task than Bradley. A gifted writer, very comfortable working in American, European and Vietnamese archives, Bradley is the author of the highly acclaimed *Imagining Vietnam & America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*. In a field that constantly debates the proper balance to be struck between American, Vietnamese, and international actors—a divide that Christoph Giebel captures in the distinction between "Viet Nam Studies" and "Viet Nam War Studies"—*Imagining Vietnam & America* is a rare work of scholarship that seamlessly integrates cultural and diplomatic history from multiple perspectives.¹

As Peter Zinoman notes in his review, it is important to understand that *Vietnam at War* is a textbook and not a specialized monograph. It is designed to be a concise and accessible source for a wider audience of undergraduates and general readers that is not eagerly waiting for the next issue of *Diplomatic History* or the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* to arrive in the mail. Given this intended audience, it is safe to say most readers of *Vietnam at War* will not understand or appreciate how much the book seeks to incorporate the most important new scholarship of the last twenty years and how different it is from the U.S.-centric scholarship found in earlier textbooks. As seen in the reviews in this roundtable, specialists will argue vehemently over many different aspects of Bradley's narrative. Nevertheless, as Zinoman argues, "Clear, concise, comprehensive, and adorned with revealing photographs and instructive suggestions for further reading, *Vietnam at War* is perfectly crafted for use in an undergraduate course."

In his construction of a narrative that places far more weight on Vietnamese perspectives than American or French perspectives, some readers of *Vietnam at War* might conclude that Bradley has gone too far in the other direction. In his review, Lloyd Gardner rightly notes the absence from the index of such familiar figures as Edward Lansdale, Henry Cabot Lodge, Maxwell Taylor and William Westmoreland. One could easily add to Gardner's list other American officials who usually loom quite large in traditional accounts; Robert McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, George Ball and Walt Rostow are also missing from Bradley's index and his larger narrative. As Gardner somewhat rhetorically asks, "How can that be?" However, it is worth noting that Gardner is by far the most enthusiastic of all of the reviewers despite the focus in his own extensive research on the American side of the conflict.

The stark contrast between Gardner's unalloyed enthusiasm and the far more critical commentaries of the other reviewers in this roundtable is hard to miss. One might

¹ Where Bradley himself falls in these schools is subject to debate. I would place him equally in both camps, but in his review Peter Zinoman describes Bradley as "an important figure in Vietnam War Studies and the Americanist wing of the field of "international history."

reasonably expect that so-called U.S. centric scholars, or scholars most concerned with the high politics of diplomacy and war, would tend to be the most critical of Bradley's goals in *Vietnam at War*. The contrasts so often drawn between the "old" literature on the war focused on American actors and archival sources, and the "new" literature which focuses on Vietnamese actors often conveys the impression that this division is the most important one in the field. But, as Gardner's review suggests, many so-called U.S.-centric and Vietnam War scholars have been quite receptive to recent attempts to place the Vietnamese in what he calls the "center-stage."

If the conflict between "Viet Nam War Studies" and "Viet Nam Studies" can sometimes be over-exaggerated, it is also apparent that the conflicts and disagreements among Viet Nam scholars are all too real. These disagreements should not be surprising since the inclusion of more Vietnamese voices does not resolve the question of which voices will be included or how a given author will assess those voices. Despite their shared commitment to an intellectual understanding of Vietnamese history, it is also not surprising that Christoph Geibel, Keith Taylor, and Peter Zinoman all raise very fundamental criticisms of Bradley's narrative. While praising many different elements of *Vietnam at War*, Giebel argues that Bradley ultimately fails to transcend the limitations of U.S.-centric historiography. In his view, "Bradley wants to add Vietnamese voices to existing narratives about the war in Viet Nam without realizing that such a move would necessitate expanding if not confronting the historiographical conventions and conceptual frameworks in which these older, U.S.-centric histories were able to flourish....we may hear these additional Vietnamese voices, but they will remain unintelligible and garbled....Inclusion of Vietnamese actors to an on-going stage play, so to say, is insufficient if the script itself is written, once again, by Americans."

In very different ways, both Taylor and Zinoman echo Giebel's concern about Bradley's fidelity to older historical frameworks. Bradley does not explicitly address or rehash the familiar debates between so-called orthodox and revisionist historians, but there is little doubt that his own sympathies are much closer to the orthodox school. In his "Prelude" to *Vietnam at War*, Bradley draws a contrast between American decision-makers who saw the North Vietnamese as surrogates of Moscow and Beijing, and the National Liberation Front (NLF) as a puppet of Hanoi, and the anti-war movement which he argues was "severely critical of the South Vietnamese state and strongly supportive of what they saw as the as the struggle for liberation by North Vietnam and the NLF." Bradley does not take an explicit position on this standard debate, but his own position is quite clearly orthodox. In Taylor's view, *Vietnam at War* merely "retells the well-worn interpretation of the war that developed out of the American anti-war movement of the 1960's...it offers little about the war that has not already been asserted about the war for decades, and it fails to engage other views or even acknowledge them."

One certainly does not have to endorse Taylor's own explicitly revisionist perspective to acknowledge that his criticisms have some merit. Giebel argues that Bradley has written a book "that doesn't want to offend, that avoids, with few exceptions, sharper edges." His view is correct in the sense that Bradley's book is very compatible with the traditional orthodox interpretation of the Vietnam wars, but Taylor's scathing review makes it clear

that revisionist scholars will likely find Bradley's account of both the Northern and Southern contestants to be quite offensive. Revisionists will contest Bradley's emphasis on the independence of the North Vietnamese from its communist allies, the degree of relative autonomy of the NLF from Hanoi, and the way he treats controversial topics like Northern land reform and acts of terrorism by communist forces. Revisionists are also likely to argue that Bradley is much too critical of the regime established by Ngo Dinh Diem and adds little to the standard orthodox portrayal of Diem, one that even scholars who are not revisionist, such as Edward Miller and Philip Catton, have done much to revise in recent years. As both Taylor and Zinoman point out, Bradley tends to assimilate the new and important scholarship of Miller, Catton, Lien-Hang Nguyen, and Sophie Quinn-Judge into the existing orthodox narrative without pointedly examining how this research poses a basic challenge to traditional views of actors in both the North and the South.²

This introduction is certainly not the place to weigh in at any length on the deep ideological divide that separates Bradley and Taylor, or the larger debate between orthodox and revisionist historians. If it were not for Peter Zinoman's lengthy and incisive critique, it might be tempting to conclude that the study of the Vietnam War (or the American War in Vietnam) is destined to refight old and tired ideological battles forever. As the co-editor of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Zinoman is uniquely qualified to evaluate how well Bradley's narrative incorporates and reflects the most recent literature based on Vietnamese sources. In contrast to Taylor's relentless critique, Zinoman acknowledges both the strengths and weaknesses of *Vietnam at War*. But there is no also doubt that he too finds the central weakness of the book to be Bradley's "staunch fidelity" to the views of the orthodox school. In his view, what is most impressive about the new scholarship on the war is precisely how it challenges "approaches to the conflict that embrace the entire package of positions typically associated with either the 'orthodox' or the 'revisionist' school. Indeed, a willingness to embrace a mottled range of arguments about the conflict regardless of whether or not they support the old-left leaning or right-leaning positions may be seen as the most salutary feature of the new scholarship." One could not ask for a better or more comprehensive guide to the recent literature, and its complicated relationship to *Vietnam at War*, than the one provided by Zinoman. It should be required reading for anyone interested in the various conflicts between America and North Vietnam, as well as the numerous ideological and political conflicts between various Vietnamese actors over the course of the twentieth century. Both undergraduates and academics can learn a great deal from both Bradley's book and the insightful critiques it inspired.

² See Edward Miller, "Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945-1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* (October 2004), pp. 433-58; Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive," in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Feb.-Aug.2006), pp. 4-58; and Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: the Missing Years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

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Lloyd Gardner is Research Professor of History at Rutgers University, where he has taught since 1963. He received his Ph.D. at Wisconsin in 1960. He is a former president of SHAFR, and the author or editor of a dozen or so books including *Pay Any Price: Lyndon Johnson and the Wars for Vietnam* (1995); co-editor with Marilyn Young, *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam* (2008); *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of U.S. Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (2008); and *Three Kings: The Rise of an American Empire in the Middle East after World War II* (2009) which will have a forthcoming roundtable.

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York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 17-28; Introductory essays and annotations with Olga Dror, *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 2006). Editor with Frederic Mantine, *Monde du Viet Nam – Vietnam World*, a book of essays to honor Professor Nguyen The Anh (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2008).

Peter Zinoman is Associate Professor of History and Southeast Asian Studies at the University of California, Berkeley. He is the author of the *Colonial Bastille: A History of Imprisonment in Vietnam, 1862-1940* and the editor and co-translator of *Dumb Luck: A Novel by Vu Trong Phung*. He is also the editor-in-chief of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*. He is currently completing a study of Vu Trong Phung and colonial modernity in interwar Hanoi. His most recent essay “Nhan Van Giai Pham and Vietnamese ‘Reform Communism’ during the 1950s: A Revisionist Interpretation” will appear in the *Journal of Cold War Studies* in Winter 2011.

Mark Bradley's "Vietnam at War" is a succinct history of the war we all know from innumerable books explaining how the United States got involved from the Domino Thesis to the tragic ending as the last helicopters lifted off the rooftop of a building near the embassy. But it is much more. This is a book that emphasizes the war from the inside out, something we know much less about and need to understand. In this reading the Great Powers that surround the war with their geopolitical calculations and maneuvers are seen as they really were: peripheral players who have a great impact shaping immediate events, but are not the central factors in the larger scheme of things. As one might expect, this is discomfiting both to the traditional narrative of the war, and what is sometimes called the new history of the war. I looked for some of my favorite characters – famous and infamous – and they were not there! How can that be? How can one write about the origins of American involvement without mentioning the "Colonel" – Edward Lansdale? Also missing from the index are Henry Cabot Lodge, Maxwell Taylor and William Westmoreland. Bradley's answer, I would think, is that all these actors we assign starring roles are really bit players, who swell a scene or two, but soon leave the stage.

Center stage here belongs to the Vietnamese. Arguing that position does not mean the war was fought without being influenced by the powers, both materially and ideologically. But it does mean that World War II did not lift the curtain on Vietnam's struggles and internal divisions. Reaching back to the early twentieth Century, Bradley displays for the reader's consideration various explanations nationalists proposed for Vietnam's unhappy position under French colonialism. The starting point, argued early nationalists, had to be a change in the attitudes of elites. Perhaps the most interesting of these new currents of thought, given the ultimate outcome of the war, was the Vietnamese adaptation of Social Darwinism to account for the country's subservience to the French, and how that theory suggested to some intellectuals colonialism's worst aspect: it stifled the individual's opportunities to achieve his (and therefore, by extension, the nation's) potential. Vietnamese intellectuals, ironically, were becoming more interested in Herbert Spencer at a time when American "progressives" looked upon his ideas as barriers to reform. The self-awareness of Vietnamese thinkers about how traditional religious and cultural thought kept Vietnam in isolation, and held back a successful nationalist strategy, did not pre-determine the final Communist victory. Ho Chi Minh's backers in the Soviet Union and China aided his cause, but he continues today to be revered as "Uncle Ho" even by anti-Communists with deeply scarred memories of the war. Bradley's most valuable contribution, it can be argued, is to show his readers the varieties and complexity of the Vietnamese people's struggle for independence.

When we lecture we like to think of wars as not one phenomenon, but many conflicts going on at the same time. Bradley takes this one step further. He sees many civil wars going on at the same time, with various participants joining in loose alliances and then splitting apart. As this is the case, he leaves plenty of room for speculation about how the war might have been different, for example, had there not been the NLF-destroying 1968 Tet offensive. Others have pointed out that if there was any doubt about NLF subservience to

Hanoi, Tet settled the matter. Certainly the losses the NLF suffered made the DRV the lead actor in the final years of the “American” War. It is commonly believed that Saigon was a more cosmopolitan center than Hanoi, which looked inward for culture and answers. Ho Chi Minh was no Stalin look-alike, but Hanoi’s brand of Communism was stricter stuff after 1954 than the NLF advertised. Perhaps it would not have mattered all that much, but one wishes that Bradley could have found space to delve into those questions of traditional cultural differences between north and south. The post 1975 history of Vietnam makes the question all the more interesting. No doubt the ideological overlay Vietnamese Communists imposed accounts for some of the attitudes and postwar frictions, but we would like to know more about how north and south differed.

Contributing to the book’s appeal (in many ways) is Bradley’s use of Vietnamese literature to illustrate his argument. The very first sentence of his book begins with the recounting of a story written in the 1990s about a young man, the son of a mandarin, who seeks magical powers so as to lead his countrymen to their destiny. It is the story of Ho Chi Minh. But the author of the story makes clear (as does Bradley). that for Vietnam it remains an unfinished project. Hence the searcher’s tale appears again at the end of the book, with this comment from Bradley, “After three decades of post-war peace, the multiple worlds that the Vietnamese articulated and imagined over more than a century of colonialism, revolution, and war remain in the process of becoming.” (p.196) Throughout the book Bradley shows us many similar instances of the way Vietnamese writers get at the truth of their country’s experiences, and the reactions to those experiences. What that achieves is to give the narrative a three-dimensional feel missing in so many monographs and even in big sprawling books about the international history of the war. In some ways, obviously, it is easier to include such illustrations in a book that concentrates on the war looking out from one central point, instead of looking in, but it displays, nevertheless, a confidence in literary sources that other historians might well consider with a view to its possibilities to enhance their own writings.

Along the way, Bradley also sends a number of sacred cows out to pasture. One of the best examples concerns Franklin D. Roosevelt’s proposed solution to the question of what ought to be done with French Indochina after the war. Roosevelt and American liberals in general had little confidence in, or use for, Paris’s desperate ambition to regain its colony. Neither did conservatives, for that matter, except the European Division of the State Department. FDR’s solution for Indochina, and for other colonies orphaned (in a sense) by the war and Japanese occupation, was to establish a trusteeship for up to twenty-five years. Bradley concludes that “twenty-five years of tutelage would have been unlikely to sit well with Vietnamese revolutionaries already in the process of establishing an independent state.” (p. 53) It is an arguable position. Such a solution might have depended upon the willingness of American policymakers to invite the leaders of the revolution to demonstrate their ability to establish a government. However that might be, the really important thing here is to note that changing French masters for even a temporary regime headed by Americans, for all the good intentions behind the idea, deprives people of their own history, their own choices. In that way, as in others, the Vietnam Wars have been a hard lesson for Americans to absorb and reckon with in their thinking. Even John Foster Dulles in 1954 at the time of the Geneva Conference told a group of senators and Congressmen that the mistake had

been made in 1945 when FDR's policy had not been followed. But since it hadn't, he warned them, it was now necessary to step in and guide the French out so that the nature of the struggle between East and West could become crystal clear. Setting Vietnam into that Cold War framework, whether one did so because of a failure to act properly in 1945, or admitted, as Dulles did, that there had once been an opportunity neglected, made Vietnamese history dependent upon American choices.

Moreover, American policymakers crippled themselves with a history framework that made Munich and Yalta all part of the same day in infamy as Pearl Harbor. To take a different sort of example illustrates the point. While there are those who believe that if FDR's policy had been implemented, there would have been no war, there are also those who contend that the way the Americans fought the war made it a sure loser. Some argue that was because the graduated escalation Lyndon Johnson attempted in order to avoid another Korea gave the North Vietnamese time to prepare their defenses and hence to defeat the purposes of the bombing – no matter how many tons were dropped over North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and Cambodia. Bradley is not unaware of the argument, and suggests it has a measure of truth within it. It may have prolonged the war by postponing American defeat. Others argue that the wrong war was being waged on the ground. The search and destroy policy followed up until Tet was, it is asserted, self-defeating. When General Westmoreland was replaced, a better war was fought and the light at the end of the tunnel had been re-lit. But Bradley counters with the 1966 uprising at Danang that, even though it was suppressed by military forces loyal for the moment to Saigon, and has been too much neglected by historians, remains a good indication of the regime's continuing inability to establish its legitimacy. At the heart of any successful strategy had to be a legitimate government in Saigon. And that never happened.

In a thoughtful coda about Vietnam today, Bradley discusses the re-emergence of old ways of thinking. For years after 1975 Vietnam was a locked down state, and one of the poorest. Not all of its problems, however, were a result of Hanoi's policies, for there was also the international embargo on the country imposed by the United States, and a series of struggles with erstwhile allies, especially China. But much of that changed when Vietnam decided to pursue an open market system while continuing a closed political system. Several trends in Vietnam's unfinished revolution are observable in Vietnam today, including revived interest in religion and older traditions, alongside a youth culture that dominates urban life and, as a Vietnamese guide told me on a recent trip, concentrates on cell -phones, mopeds, and the opposite sex. There is a struggle going on over the proper memory of the war, which Bradley is particularly good at explaining through literature. Indeed, one can add, the famous Chu Lai tunnel complex has been turned into a recreation center, with tennis courts and a new hotel nearby. Meanwhile, out in the hinterland on the coast, the main north-south road divides the old Danang military base from luxury condos and hotels on the seashore where American troops landed in 1965. These exclusive spa-spots advertise (always in English) the finest seacoast in Southeast Asia. Vietnamese cemeteries were moved to make way for the living wealthy. In towns, as Bradley notes, the red Vietnamese flag with the yellow star flies over KFC outlets and Seven-Elevens.

Mark Bradley's keen observations on the past and present in Vietnam make this a book that deserves to be and will be, the subject of many class discussions inside the academy, but also among all those interested in the war and its contested outcome. It is the right book, at the right time.

In my Viet Nam Wars class at the University of Washington, I regularly show Peter Davis' 1974 documentary *Hearts & Minds*, a film that always provokes lively student debate, especially about a few particularly disturbing scenes. Undoubtedly, towards the end of *Hearts & Minds*, the short clip from Davis' interview with General William Westmoreland ranks among the film's most famous/infamous scenes. Sitting in a serene, park-like setting, the retired former commander of United States (US) forces in Viet Nam during the phase of rapid escalation of the war holds forth how "the Oriental doesn't put the same high price on life as the Westerner," how "life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient," and "as the philosophy of the Orient, eh, expresses it, uh, life is not important." Davis, who allowed Westmoreland three takes in which the general repeated his statement without correction, embedded the clip in extended, haunting scenes of intense Vietnamese grief: a heart-broken father in tears somewhere in northern Viet Nam, whose young daughter had just perished in an apparent random terror bombing of their farm by a U.S. jet, and an inconsolable boy, his body uncontrollably shaking in bottomless despair, at the funeral of his father, an Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) officer. The ensuing controversy is well known: Davis was accused of emotional manipulation for a cutting technique that highlighted Westmoreland's ignorance, callousness, and racism and the implied connection to the unprecedented levels of U.S. military violence against non-Western people. Davis' detractors were enraged not just by the presumed offense of "manipulative" cuts and juxtapositions, I would argue, but in some ways by the unavoidable visibility, the very presence of Vietnamese in *Hearts & Minds*. Davis had the audacity to give Vietnamese a voice about the warfare raging in Viet Nam, an equality in subjectivity and authority with Americans that, in 1974 and for perhaps most U.S. audiences, was explosive and unsettling. After all, contemporary American debates about the war in Viet Nam were habitually self-referential and insular.

Since the end of the war in Viet Nam in 1975, the vast majority of the many thousands of English-language works on the war, both scholarly and popular, have continued to put U.S. actions, decision-making, experiences, and suffering center-stage. Vietnamese are habitually treated with far less attention, curiosity and empathy, and rarely in detail, with nuance, and on equal terms. There are a variety of reasons for this phenomenon, both large and small, but among the more fundamental ones are nationalist tropes of U.S. messianic exceptionalism and the cultural-political prerogatives of the U.S. empire. As one can see from other examples in history and around the world, exceptionalism and empire engender positionalities and analytics that preclude the recognition of reciprocity and the equal standing of those caught in the imperial gaze.

Mark Bradley is to be applauded for setting out in his *Vietnam at War* to correct that stark imbalance and to introduce to a broader readership how the Vietnamese in multiple ways determined, influenced, comprehended, experienced, and lived through the decades of upheaval and war. Along the way he examines an impressive array of Vietnamese self-expressions and sources, from the traditionalist to the post-modern, from the mundane to the intricacies of intellectual debates, from high-stakes diplomatic and military

maneuverings to strategies for simple survival. In some passages, particularly on intellectual and cultural life, Bradley shows an erudition and command of his materials that has few peers. Yet, he manages to write in an easily accessible style that will recommend his book for a wider, interested audience and in particular for course adoption in undergraduate classes on the war, on Viet Nam, Southeast Asia, and the Western-Asian encounter. (Later editions would benefit from a bit of editing and corrections regarding Vietnamese terms and a few misspellings.)

Bradley's main theme and recurring argument are that throughout the twentieth century the Vietnamese, out of their own historical trajectories and cultural practices, as well as in reaction to pressures from the outside, were continuously engaged in vigorous debates about modernity, national identity, and the proper balance between the collective, various communities, and the individual. These debates in turn gave rise to a variety of political-ideological orientations and social movements that reflected competing visions of the future for an independent Viet Nam in a complex world, as well as sustained contestations—often times violent ones—over meaning and strategies. Vietnamese actors were thus extraordinarily influential in shaping the course of events and curtailing the objectives of intervening foreign powers. In the end, however, Bradley argues, no single Vietnamese force, not even communism (which came closest), could impose and successfully implement its specific agenda. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of the broader questions fought over in the previous decades remain unresolved.

In the field of Viet Nam Studies, such a concept of twentieth century Vietnamese history has been rather uncontroversial for a while. It is a sad commentary on the field of Viet Nam War Studies, however, that this argument bears repeating, and Bradley deserves much credit for insisting on Vietnamese cultural, ideological, social and political diversity when narrating the colonial antecedents for war, the wars themselves, and their aftermath. In this he positions himself very consciously against prevailing and still powerful teleologies that seek to simplify the past and homogenize the Vietnamese: on the one hand, colonial and neo-colonial notions of Western (and, perhaps, Chinese) superiority that downplay Vietnamese sophistication and agency; on the other hand, dichotomies that would reduce the wars to “communism” versus “nationalism,” or—on the flip side, collapsing the revolution with the nation—“liberators” versus “foreign aggressors” and their “puppets.”

It is in this area, however, that I want to raise my first concern, a minor one, about *Vietnam at War*. In his eagerness to show the pluralism of Vietnamese visions for the nation, Bradley overuses such terms as “ambiguities,” “tensions,” and “contradictions.” A forceful reminder to the reader early in the book that, notwithstanding prevailing nationalist narratives, Vietnamese society and culture had, over time, developed in plural, differentiated directions and intricate, heterogeneous ways would have sufficed. After all, what complex society and culture does not contain measures of contradictory tendencies and views? In a post-9/11 world, where imperialist interventions and aggressive war once again come cloaked in the specious discourses of civilizational hierarchies and the putative need for “nation building” by Westerners among non-white people, the repetitive references to “tensions” and “uncertainties” in Vietnamese intellectual life and politics could, I fear, be misread. The complexity and fracturing Bradley wants to convey could

instead, in the reader's mind, be seen as a lack of indigenous sophistication and an inability to competently manage one's own affairs. In such a misreading, it would then be up to a white author and a Western audience to uncover, as it were, "lingering ambiguities" and "unresolved tensions" that Vietnamese themselves were unable to comprehend or fix. Likewise, Vietnamese contestations over ideas, epistemes, and mnemonic practices easily mirror similar debates occurring in many modern societies around the world. To describe such to-be-expected arguments and conflicts with the term "war," as the dust cover does ("revolutionary war of ideas" ... "war of memories"), is hyperbolic. In a commendable project to normalize Vietnamese historical actors and render them legible to (mainly) a U.S. college audience raised in an environment of exceptionalist and hierarchical notions of the world, terminologies matter.

I have few issues with the facts presented in the book, and Bradley's treatment of the various Vietnamese factions and parties to the ensuing conflicts is generally fair, insightful and nuanced. Some of the author's interpretations and analyses differ from mine, of course, as can be expected with fellow historians, and I will mention a few examples below. But a larger concern of mine with Bradley's book is that the author wants to do too much in too little space. The book comes across as rather short for Bradley's ambitious agenda and, consequently, a bit uneven and inconsistent in its themes and foci. Should Vietnamese be fore-grounded in this history? Certainly for the era of French domination, but later on U.S. actors and motivation receive equal billing. Who should be the main "native informants"? Educated elites prior to 1945, but political and military leaders thereafter, and commoners and foot soldiers during the depth of violence. What influences are most prominent in the unfolding of events? Intellectual debates, cultural reorientations, and ideological experimentations at first, only to be displaced somewhat by international diplomacy and military strategies.

The initial part on colonial Viet Nam is mainly focused—and extremely well at that—on the manifold cultural, intellectual and ideological reorientations that occurred during the first three decades of the twentieth century. While briefly pointing to the economic deprivations suffered by the general population and the new restrictive legal and bureaucratic order established by France, Bradley is particularly interested in urban, educated elites: the early patriotic literati, the modernist writers and thinkers, the brash young radicals, the romantic poets and novelists. Few French make appearances in these pages. That changes in and after 1945. Bradley's focus now shifts towards Viet Nam's revolutionary independence leaders of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (DRVN) and their political and military opponents, mainly French at first, and then increasingly American. Ideologies, strategies, and military and political events begin to dominate the unfolding history. With the French defeated and gone, power brokers of the Republic of Viet Nam (RVN)—Ngo Dinh Diem chiefly among them—U.S. diplomats and "nation builders," as well as leaders of the DRVN and the communist-led National Liberation Front of Southern Viet Nam (NLF) drive the narrative about the fateful descent into yet another, even more horrific conflagration.

In chapter 4, *Experiencing War*, Bradley "pauses" (115) to linger more on the human experiences of war, subdivided—strangely enough—into "South Vietnam at War," "The

American War and North Vietnamese Society,” and “The NLF at War,” as if the NLF were separate from “South Viet Nam.” By and large I found these pages to be quite moving, as Bradley is sensitive to the sufferings, dislocations, terror, and yearnings of Vietnamese of different classes, regions, generations, genders, religions, and allegiances. It is here where the reader can find precious nuggets of social history, surprising tidbits of the quotidian gleaned and rescued from the soul-crushing vortex of violence, the endless negotiations and compromises required to retain a sense of meaning and sanity and ensure survival among competing forces. I wish Bradley had sustained his careful and almost tender interest in Vietnamese lived experiences more consequentially throughout the book, including the period of French domination, where equally rich sources from literature, memoirs and media are readily available, as well as the final phase of the American war and beyond. Alas, it is but a pause.

In chapter 5, “War’s End,” easily the weakest part of the book, we are back to presidents, diplomats, and warriors. In the book’s earlier parts on colonial Viet Nam, the French stayed completely in the background, and their policy and strategy decisions were more implied than spelled out in order for Vietnamese modernity to struggle prominently into being. But now, 1968 and on to 1975, the pages are populated in equal measure by U.S. and rival Vietnamese leaders, as they negotiate, strategize, deceive and bomb, bomb, bomb, with a sprinkling of Maoist ruthlessness, shifty self-interest added for good measure. If the book is advertised as providing a long-neglected entry into Vietnamese experiences, comprehensions, and making sense of war, Bradley is in danger of losing his focus in this chapter, a focus only somewhat recovered in the coda with its renewed emphasis on cultural searching and political uncertainties in contemporary Viet Nam.

In that sense, chapter 5 is an utterly conventional depiction of the later stages of the war in Viet Nam, a story that reinforces Cold War-era frames rather than contributing to their greatly overdue dismantling and reconceptualization. In particular, Bradley narrates the war in its later, more conventional phases as one between two discrete entities, “North Viet Nam” or “the North,” and “South Viet Nam” or “the South.” “South Viet Nam” is then conveniently equated with the RVN, and as a consequence the NLF, though equally southern, and arguably with at least as much southern popular support as the RVN, is awkwardly treated as outside that category and more or less ignored. Nowhere does the reader learn that both the DRVN and the RVN (and the RVN’s predecessor, the Associated State of Viet Nam [ASVN]) had all-Vietnamese claims to sole legitimate authority, that mainstream Vietnamese nationalism rested in large measure on notions of the country’s territorial unity—after all, outside interventions had used artificial territorial divisions as a favorite tool for dominating the Vietnamese—and that the Geneva Accords of 1954 explicitly reaffirmed Viet Nam’s unity. The false binary of two discrete states separated by the 17th parallel, I would argue, was a U.S.-imposed propaganda frame with particular potency after the scheduled unification elections of 1956 had been denied by Sai Gon and Washington, DC. Only later, after much southern territory had been lost to revolutionary control and its very survival was at stake, did the RVN adopt a similar spatial conception of the conflict.

Particularly in chapter 5, Bradley does not problematize the Western conventions of “North Viet Nam” versus “South Viet Nam.” But that leaves his readers ill-equipped to fully understand the Paris Agreement and its connections to the Geneva Accords. Fulfilling the Geneva mandate, the DRVN had temporarily withdrawn its military from south of the 17th parallel, only to witness the elections of 1956 denied and tens of thousands of its now unprotected supporters terrorized and killed there under the U.S.-armed RVN. But the DRVN, or revolutionary nationalists more generally, had not given up claims to the south as an integral part of their Vietnamese state. In their understanding, they had every right and an obligation to liberate the southern part of Viet Nam with southern-based forces from within and by moving DRVN troops south. The U.S. framing of the conflict as a northern communist invasion of “South Viet Nam,” where the “North Vietnamese Army” (“NVA”) and even southerners opposed to the RVN had no legitimate business as “foreign” aggressors, was fundamentally at odds with such revolutionary nationalist conceptualizations. Hence, after the bitter experiences of the later 1950s, it would have been inconceivable, indeed absurd, for the DRVN and the NLF to accept U.S. demands in 1972/73 of an “NVA” “withdrawal north.” At the very least, Bradley should have given the revolutionary nationalist framing of the spatial dimensions of the war the same legitimacy in his narrative as the artificial US/RVN binary of “North Viet Nam” and “South Viet Nam” he appears to fully embrace.

This brings me to my last point. *Vietnam at War* with all its commendable intentions to lend a voice to Vietnamese experiences and perspectives is a book that doesn’t want to offend, that avoids, with few exceptions, sharper edges. My most basic issue with this book is therefore that Bradley wants to add Vietnamese voices to existing narratives about the war in Viet Nam without realizing that such a move would necessitate expanding if not confronting the historiographical conventions and conceptual frameworks in which these older, U.S.-centric histories were able to flourish. Without questioning and recasting the basic building blocks of those standard histories of the war, we may hear these additional Vietnamese voices, but they will remain unintelligible and garbled. We may even empathize with them, but it is an essentially paternalistic gesture of formalistic inclusion. As long as imperialist invasions, self-arrogated rights to intervening in and manipulating weaker societies and nations, and unleashing unimaginable levels of violence on non-white people in a quest for domination remain normalized and unproblematic and an unquestioned backdrop, Vietnamese experiences will have to bend to those U.S.-centric, exceptionalist narratives.

How interesting and refreshing it would be to de-center these Western assumptions, to make them strange and un-normal, to create the space for Vietnamese perspectives – and to see oneself in an entirely different light. A history where there is not a “coming of French colonial rule” (10) but an instance of a larger Western imperialist war for domination, exploitation, and profit. A history that speaks not just diffidently of a “racialized lens” (53) or a “racialist lens” (55) through which Americans rendered Vietnamese as inferior and backward, but plainly of racism, deeply embedded notions of white privilege and violent systems of western superiority. A history that portrays Vietnamese modernity not just as a reaction to, and implicit reconfirmation of, the “civilizing mission”—or “benchmarking,” to use a more contemporary term—but one that

embraces as well its other dimensions, the psychological deformations brought about by ruling ideas of white supremacy and related attacks on basic human dignity, passed on through the generations to be painfully unlearned.

I applaud *Vietnam at War* for its timely and commendable intention to bring more balance to Viet Nam War Studies by including Vietnamese voices and experiences. But inclusion of Vietnamese actors to an on-going stage play, so to say, is insufficient if the script itself is written, once again, by Americans. Inclusion requires recognition, not only of the other, but also of the strangeness in oneself.

This book retells the well-worn interpretation of the war that developed out of the American anti-war movement of the 1960s. It does show more knowledge about modern Vietnamese literature than books about the war normally display, but, this aside, it offers little about the war that has not already been asserted for decades, and it fails to engage other views or even to acknowledge them. This, along with its brevity, which leaves important events in silence, arouses curiosity about why it was written. The author's answer to this in his "acknowledgments" is that the book was written from lecture notes that accumulated during years of teaching. Unfortunately, there is little here that is not available for students elsewhere, and there is much about the war that students deserve to learn but that is not included.

Mark Bradley makes a sound statement on page 10: "... for the Vietnamese, like many colonized peoples, decolonization was just as much about the working out of contending conceptions of the self, society, and the state that first emerged under colonial rule as it was about realizing post-colonial independence." However, the rest of the book does not pursue the possibilities opened by this perspective but is instead, for the most part, an apologia for the revolutionary and totalitarian "conception" that eventually prevailed in the process of "realizing post-colonial independence."

The author romanticizes "pre-colonial rural society" as "operating through . . . universal social norms to produce relatively stable levels of familial and individual well-being" and contrasts this with the "French conquest," which "brought profound disruptions to the political and social organization of Vietnamese society and to the lives of indigenous elite and peasants." (pp. 14-15) In fact, Vietnamese society prior to the French conquest was already experiencing profound disruptions, and French rule, particularly in the north, re-established a modicum of public order that had not existed for decades.¹

The idealization of pre-colonial times and the demonization of the French colonial regime is a common prelude for the idea that communist collectivism was a return to "the Confucian moral order." The author cites the Hanoi propagandist Nguyen Khac Vien for this

¹ Major rebellions against the Nguyen dynasty led by men claiming to be princes of the former Le dynasty swept through large parts of northern Vietnam beginning in the 1830s and then repeatedly in the 1850s and 1860s. Remnants of the Taiping Rebellion in China gained control of the upland territories along the Chinese border beginning in the 1860s and controlled the northern mountains, giving refuge and support to bands of Vietnamese outlaws, until the French arrived in the 1880s. Beginning in the mid 1870s, Chinese pirates and their Vietnamese confederates kidnapped large numbers of women and children in coastal provinces and sold them into slavery in China. By the time of the French "pacification" of northern Vietnam in the late 1880s and early 1890s, "patriotic" efforts to resist the French led by educated Vietnamese in the Red River plain were quickly brushed aside and the main challenge to French rule was the general breakdown of government that had been underway for decades. In the Mekong plain, the French imagined that they had caused a disruption of village society and economy to create a rural proletariat, but the regime of large landholders and a mobile peasantry had been characteristic of Vietnamese settlement in the Mekong since the early eighteenth century.

interpretation and for the peculiar idea that Confucian morality was strongest not among elites but among rural villagers (pp. 36-37), a colonial (and communist) interpretation designed to dismiss troublesome intellectuals and to find “the real Vietnam” among the peasants (and workers). This idea was popularized in the United States during the war by Paul Mus, John T. McAllister, and Frances Fitzgerald;² it ignores pre-colonial popular culture, the effects of French colonialism upon village life, urbanization, the dynamic and diverse intellectual life among Vietnamese in the early twentieth century, and the fact that Vietnamese culture and society was not contained within “the Confucian moral order.”³

In a further simplification of the past, the author argues that Ho Chi Minh stood for a united front policy of patriotic nationalism in contrast to a class struggle policy of revolutionary internationalism (pp. 25-26). The author could have benefitted from Sophie Quinn-Judge’s book on Ho Chi Minh, which uses Comintern archives to present a more complex view of this issue.⁴ Ho Chi Minh made use of both tendencies at different times, but the need to make him the paragon of only one tendency enables a naive interpretation of the National Liberation Front of the early 1960s as a return to “the principles guiding the broad-based Viet Minh front in the August Revolution of 1945 and the French war, including the ideas of all-class nationalism and more moderate approaches to the social and economic transformation of rural and urban life.” (p. 95) Ho Chi Minh applied these “principles” in a time of weakness, and he finally abandoned them when the PRC arrived on the border in 1950.⁵ The author shows no awareness of the fact that in 1960 the National Liberation Front (NLF) was not the front for an isolated and fugitive regime seeking survival in the mountains, as was the Viet Minh Front in the late 1940s, but was rather the front for a government in Hanoi, supported by a supply line and powerful foreign allies. As for the immoderately homicidal northern land reform of the 1950s, the author imagines that it was an aberration in an otherwise praiseworthy policy line: “. . . the NLF’s land reform programme avoided the excesses of the northern land reform in the mid-1950s and returned to the moderate DRV policies of the 1940s.” (p. 96) This ideologically driven scrambling of the past fails to note that the DRV was in no position to implement any land reform policy in the 1940s.⁶

² Paul Mus, *Sociologie d'une guerre* (Paris: Seuil, 1952); John T. McAllister, *Vietnam: the Origins of Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); John T. McAlister and Paul Mus, *The Vietnamese and Their Revolution* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Frances Fitzgerald, *Fire in the Lake: The Vietnamese and the Americans in Vietnam* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1972).

³ Shawn McHale, “Mapping a Vietnamese Confucian Past and Its Transition to Modernity,” in Benjamin A. Elman, John B. Duncan, and Herman Ooms, eds., *Rethinking Confucianism: Past and Present in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam* (Los Angeles: UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series, 2002), pp. 397-430. K. W. Taylor, “Vietnamese Confucian Narratives,” in Elman, Duncan, and Ooms, pp. 337-369.

⁴ Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2002).

⁵ Tuong Vu, “‘It’s time for the Indochinese Revolution to show its true colours’: The radical turn of Vietnamese politics in 1948,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 40 (3):519-542.

⁶ Alex Thai Dinh Vo, “Agrarian Policies in North Vietnam During the Resistance War, 1945-1953,” (M.A. Thesis, Cornell University, 2010).

Bradley's treatment of Ngo Dinh Diem and the first southern republic (1955-1963) follows a well-worn interpretive path. He introduces the topic with a detailed description of the immolation of Thich Quang Duc on a Saigon street corner on June 11, 1963 (p. 77). Dramatic episodes of resistance and repression in the north did not have the attention of international news people, but the author uses Thich Quang Duc's death to condemn Diem's "often heavy handed and always relentless efforts to crush opposition" and the "authoritarian and dictatorial nature of Diem's government" (p. 78) as if the same were not also true, to an even greater degree, about the Hanoi regime. What this book misses is how American views of Diem were shaped by a freely operating American press corps, which included people hoping to bring down the established government, something impossible in the north. This produced a distorted perspective on the Vietnamese struggle in the American press with grave consequences for U. S. policy. Both Vietnamese regimes were "authoritarian and dictatorial," though there is no doubt that Hanoi was more so than was Saigon. The important difference between the two governments was related to their external alliances and to the forms of government espoused by their allies.

The author writes: "Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic and its supporters in the South hoped for the peaceful unification of Vietnam under communist control, as did their allies in Moscow and Beijing." (p. 78) It can equally be said that many Vietnamese and their allies hoped for peaceful unification without "communist control." Furthermore, until Lyndon Johnson escalated U.S. involvement in 1965, Moscow did not have much interest in the Vietnamese situation, was unwilling to make an issue of reunification elections, and in 1957 was ready to pose in favor of two Vietnams in the United Nations in order to make a diplomatic point about Germany. As for China, it favored a guerrilla war in southern Vietnam to distract the U.S. but did not favor Vietnamese unification, as became clear in the 1970s when this was achieved under Soviet auspices.

Bradley's narrative of the war is based upon the idea that it was caused by Ngo Dinh Diem's reckless, incompetent, and brutal government. He proposes four steps to develop this idea. First, he describes Diem's government in terms that could be applied with even greater accuracy to the government in Hanoi: "clandestine network of supporters," "increasingly powerful security police," a "somewhat shadowy" ruling party, "obstinacy and an unwavering certainty in his own virtue and wisdom," "an authoritarian government intolerant of dissent that was willing to suppress its opponents brutally," "heavy-handed censorship," "arbitrary arrests," "brutal private vendettas," the creation of "forces loyal to the regime rather than the state" (pp. 85-87).

Secondly, the author declares that southerners, both rural and urban, were accordingly "embittered" (pp. 88 and 91) against Diem's government. Without evidence, and despite Philip Catton's book on the topic, the author simplistically dismisses the southern government's rural policies as without any redeeming features. He mentions that Diem's famous sister-in-law, "Madame Nhu," was "the daughter of a wealthy landlord" (p. 85). But he fails to mention that her father, Tran Van Chuong, a career diplomat, was embittered against Diem because Diem's land reform (less brutal and less efficient than land reform in the north) had affected his absentee holdings. Chuong served as Diem's ambassador to the

U.S. until shortly before Diem's death in late 1963, when he was dismissed because of his alienation from Diem.⁷

Bradley argues that Diem was opposed by "leading southern moderate political figures" in the so-called Caravelle Group that publicly, and seemingly with the approval of prominent Americans, denounced Diem's government in 1960. He expands this group's opposition to Diem to include "middle-class professionals in Saigon" and the "middle class" in general (pp. 88-89). He fails to contextualize these people as a Francophile colonial residue, exactly those whom Diem was trying to replace with a younger generation of leaders and administrators whose nationalism had not been mesmerized by deference to France or by the prospect of rising with American influence.⁸

Not understanding this, the author further fails to contextualize the attempted coup of November 1960 (p. 89) as what it was: disgruntled military officers who, considering the drumbeat of critical American attitudes toward Diem being publicly expressed, thought that they acted with U.S. approval.⁹ Diem knew that he had to avoid the poisons of excessively pro-French and excessively pro-American policies in order to be taken seriously as a national leader. But idle Saigon intellectuals dreamed of riding the wind of American power. It is a mystery why the author considers these people to have been "moderates."

The third step in the author's story is that Diem's irrational policies aroused a rural insurgency against him. Here, he features the wartime propaganda booklet published in Hanoi in 1968 and translated as Nguyen Thi Dinh's memoir, "No Other Road to Take" (pp. 94 and 98), which has become a foundational text for academic judgments against Diem. He repeats the idea that "strategic hamlets" were "borrowed from efforts to defeat communist insurgency in Malaya in the 1950s" (p. 97), although Philip Catton has shown this not to have been the case.¹⁰ Furthermore, he refers to the communist use of "terror" approvingly because it was "more effective," while Diem's use of terror was merely "arbitrary" (p. 97). He imagines that the NLF launched a "revolutionary debate" in villages and cities (p. 99), as

⁷ Arthur J. Dommen, *The Indochinese Experience of the French and the Americans: Nationalism and Communism in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 529 and 544. On Diem's land reform, see: Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002); on Diem's land reform, see pp. 51-56.

⁸ Dommen, pp. 410-411; Catton, p. 79.

⁹ George McT. Kahin, *Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), pp. 123-125.

¹⁰ Catton, chapters 4 and 5.

if the insurgency grew out of discussion groups.¹¹ He reports the messages of communist propagandists in villages as if they represented an actual state of affairs (p. 96).

The final step is the author's assertion that the Hanoi government, despite its "reticence" and "hesitation," and that it "continued to advocate a peaceful . . . struggle for national reunification," was filled with "alarm" and was "pushed . . . toward armed struggle" by "Diem's increasingly draconian repression." (pp. 89-92). He makes a simplistic and erroneous connection between Khrushchev's "peaceful coexistence" speech of 1956 and Hanoi's supposedly pacifist policy (p. 92) when, in fact, in 1956, those who advocated initiating armed insurgency in the south began their ascent to power in Hanoi, led by Le Duan and Le Duc Tho.

The author misses no opportunity to denigrate Ngo Dinh Diem, referring to him as "quixotic" (p. 81), obstinate, intolerant, and brutal (p. 86); the author reports that "many Vietnamese" viewed Diem's government as "illegitimate" (p. 84). On the other hand he describes the Hanoi government as moderate and reasonable. As so many others have done, he makes Ngo Dinh Diem the scapegoat for American policy failure in Vietnam. Enough new scholarship is now available to make this interpretation difficult to maintain, despite its wide acceptance.¹² This is an important point, because blaming the outbreak of the war on Ngo Dinh Diem is the linchpin of the interpretation of the war favored by the author.

Bradley emphasizes that Diem "repudiated the reunification elections promised by the Geneva accords" (p. 86, restated on p. 90) as evidence of Diem's guilt for starting the next war. This oft-repeated idea ignores the fact that Diem never agreed to the Geneva Accords, considering them to have been a protocol for France to escape from its Indochina entanglement, a colonial agreement imposed on Saigon by outside powers. Furthermore, none of the major powers involved in the Geneva negotiations, including the PRC and the USSR, showed any serious concern about holding elections; they were content to pay lip service to a united Vietnam while expecting it to remain divided and thereby eliminated as a Cold War hot spot.¹³ It was obvious to them that Vietnam could not be reunited peacefully in the Cold War context.

The author neglects the decisions taken by the Vietnamese communists that led to war, decisions related not simply to what was going on in South Vietnam but more directly to

¹¹ On the Hanoi role in producing the insurgency in South Vietnam, see: Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1972), pp. 107-108, note 5; David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War*, 2 vols. (New York: M. W. Sharpe, 2003), I:212ff.

¹² Catton; Edward Miller, "Grand Designs: Vision, Power and Nation Building in America's Alliance with Ngo Dinh Diem, 1954-1960" (Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 2004).

¹³ K. W. Taylor, "China and Vietnam: Looking for a New Version of an Old Relationship," in Jayne S. Werner and Luu Doan Huynh, eds., *The Vietnam War: Vietnamese and American Perspectives* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1993), pp. 277-278.

factional struggles for ascendancy in Hanoi, as has been documented by Lien-Hang T. Nguyen.¹⁴ Another omission is the Kennedy administration's decision to negotiate a "neutralization" of Laos, which effectively conceded southern Laos to Hanoi as a relatively safe zone for communist logistics and recuperation, which was a strategic handicap against Saigon for the remainder of the war. The book tends to ignore or downplay the most decisive factor that caused the war: North Vietnam's political and military intervention into South Vietnam. The author, blaming the victim, implies that South Vietnam eventually fell under the weight of its own failure, as if the North Vietnamese army, benefitting from the continued support of its allies, unlike the South, had little to do with it.

Bradley's interpretation of military and political events in 1963 follows the incessantly recycled scapegoat interpretation of Ngo Dinh Diem's government. The Battle of Ap Bac in January 1963 has become in nearly every account of the war the iconic event revealing that the Saigon government was losing militarily. The author follows this line although Ap Bac was but one of many battlefield engagements at that time, most of which were favorable to Saigon. Ap Bac became a famous indication of Saigon incompetence because of the self-promotion of the American advisor John Paul Vann, who covered his own errors in the engagement by slandering the South Vietnamese government to American reporters.¹⁵ In fact, until Ngo Dinh Diem's death in November, the South Vietnamese army was generally operating successfully against communist forces.¹⁶ The author's undocumented assertions that "on the military side, the NLF forces had increasing success in engaging Diem's army and came to control as much as three-quarters of the territory of southern Vietnam by the end of 1963," (p. 99) and that this was a time of "escalating popular support" (p. 100) of the NLF are far from proven. It is true that "by the end of 1963" the control of the Saigon government over the countryside was rapidly deteriorating, but this was due to the dismantling of the Saigon administration after Diem's death in early November.

Similarly, the author's account of the Buddhist movement of 1963 emphasizes that the issue was "religious freedom" (p. 101), but he does not mention that the leader of the Buddhist movement, Thich Tri Quang, refused any prospect for a peaceful resolution and made no secret of his aim to bring down the Diem government.¹⁷ The author's vague claim that "The government's representatives in Hue ordered the police to fire on the protesters" (p. 102) ignores the evidence from the events at the Hue radio station on the evening of

¹⁴ Lien Hang T. Nguyen, "Between the Storms: North Vietnam's Strategy during the Second Indochina War (1955-73)," Yale University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2008.

¹⁵ Mark Moyer, *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), chapter 8, offers an interpretation of the battle that raises many questions about what in most books on the war has become a fixed idea.

¹⁶ Moyer, pp. 254-258.

¹⁷ Anne Blair, *Lodge in Vietnam: A Patriot Abroad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 58.

May 8, 1963, which reveals that Thich Tri Quang was determined to provoke an incident and that responsibility for initiating the violence has never been clearly established.¹⁸

Bradley asserts: “In fact it was the Buddhist protests of 1963 rather than the NLF that brought about the fall of the Diem government . . .” (p. 101). While it is true that reports about the Buddhist protests in the American press significantly affected Kennedy administration policy, neither these protests nor the NLF brought down Ngo Dinh Diem. It was the U.S. government that brought down Diem through its encouragement of a conspiracy among Vietnamese military officers. The author writes: “By October, [U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot] Lodge and several local CIA operatives were in contact with dissident generals in Diem’s army, who were making plans for a coup.” (p. 104) The author ignores the fact that Lodge had arrived in mid-August believing that his brief was to engineer a “regime change” and, with the blessing of his superiors in Washington, D.C. (the famous telegram of August 24 from the State Department) immediately began to push potential coup leaders toward action. It took him two months to persuade them to take his advice rather than the advice of General Paul Harkins, commander of the U.S. advisory mission in Vietnam, who, representing Pentagon opinion, opposed any effort to unseat Diem. Kennedy put the weight of his administration behind Lodge’s policy and eventually secured the end of the Diem government. The “dissident generals” would never have acted without the assurance of U.S. approval, which Lodge unambiguously gave.¹⁹

The author’s superficial discussion of Saigon politics during 1964-67 (pp. 116-117) misses the significance of what on the surface appears as a chaos of coups but in a more fundamental sense was a process of building a wartime government that included representative participation by a variety of political parties with a diversity of opinions about public policy. The Second Republic led by Nguyen Van Thieu (1967-1975) held regularly scheduled presidential and legislative elections and tolerated relative freedoms of speech and press that were a clear alternative to the totalitarian regime in the north. The author writes, without indicating the basis of his judgment, that at this time there was “a growing sense among many southerners about the futility of the conflict.” (p. 116) This was probably true, but it is also true that many southerners remained determined to resist the imposition of a communist regime in their country. And it is also true that a sense of “the futility of the conflict” was expressed in the north at that time, prompting the communist party in 1967 to imprison several of its members who dissented from the policy of war. The author mentions this as a “murky” event (p. 137).

Instead of seeing the presidential election of 1967, in which Thieu obtained a winning plurality of only 37%, as evidence of a relatively open and fair election, a notable achievement in wartime, and an indication of what the war was about, Bradley sees it as “a further demonstration of widespread antipathy to Thieu’s military government” (p. 117), not acknowledging that this was a civilian government operating under a newly adopted

¹⁸ Dommen, pp. 507-511.

¹⁹ Blair’s book describes in detail Lodge’s efforts to overthrow Diem.

constitution. The author takes the stability of this “second republic” as an indication of the suppression of dissent (p. 125), ignoring the relative freedom and lack of censorship in the south compared to the north. On the other hand, Bradley approvingly refers to how “the northern state carefully sought to foster popular support for the war and to keep military and civilian morale high,” and how northern society was “much more cohesive” than southern society (p. 128). What the author neglects to mention is the totalitarian price of this northern “cohesiveness.”

Similarly he writes that communist military units were “considerably more cohesive” than units of the Saigon army, which was fighting for “often opaque goals.” The goal of living in a non-communist society may be “opaque” to the author, but it certainly was not for many Vietnamese in the 1960s and 1970s. The author uses Robert Brigham’s portrayal of the South Vietnamese Army²⁰ to denigrate its morale and effectiveness. (pp. 120 and 155) He does not mention that soldiers in the southern army fought with great bravery with weapons supplied by the U.S. that were inferior to the weapons of their enemy²¹; or that in 1972, at a time when nearly all U.S. ground troops had been redeployed out of Vietnam but the U.S. was still providing logistical and advisory support, the southern army halted and pushed back an all-out three-prong invasion from the north.

The author does acknowledge that corruption was endemic in both northern and southern regimes (pp. 121 and 134). And he acknowledges that, in the south compared with the north, literature and the arts were freer to express personal feelings and to criticize the government; but for him this is an indication of “a prevailing mood of war-weariness.” (p. 124) This assumes that the conformity of totalitarianism is somehow more admirable than the diversity of freedom.

Bradley portrays the My Lai massacre of “an estimated 150 elders, women, children, and babies” as if American war atrocities were a normal occurrence (pp. 118-119). As for the communist massacre of “2,800 South Vietnamese” at Hue in 1968, according to the author, it suggests that “the communist insurgency was as capable as the United States and the South Vietnamese of using terror as an instrument of war” (p. 152), as if the U.S. and the South Vietnamese set the standard for the use of terror, a surprisingly partisan and unsustainable opinion. He correctly notes that the 1968 Tet fighting turned U.S. public opinion against the war, but incorrectly assumes the same was true in South Vietnam. He refers to the “psychological shock of the Tet attacks throughout southern Vietnam” but this had an opposite effect from what he implies. The communist attacks in 1968 provoked a strong public rallying of southerners behind the Saigon government,²² something ignored by the author.

²⁰ Robert K. Brigham, *ARVN: Life and Death in the south Vietnamese Army* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006); see Martin Loicano’s review of this book in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2, 2 (2007):303-305.

²¹ Martin Loicano, “Military and Political Roles of Weapons Systems in the Republic of Viet Nam Armed forces,” Cornell University Ph.D. dissertation, 2008.

²² Dommen, pp. 668-672.

The author writes in the context of events prior to March 1970, when Sihanouk was overthrown, that “Sihanouk vehemently protested Nixon’s secret bombing” of Cambodia. (p. 160) In fact, Sihanouk was complicit with U.S. bombing of Vietnamese communist forces in Cambodia prior to his overthrow, and he joined the communist camp in denouncing U.S. bombing only after he was no longer in power.

Bradley finds something negative even in Nixon’s policy of reducing American participation in the war: “Nixon embraced a policy of Vietnamization that reflected a persisting American belief that it was the United States who would make South Vietnam Vietnamese.” (p. 154) With this logic, one could equally say that Soviet determination to support Hanoi to final victory indicated a Soviet belief that only they could make South Vietnam Vietnamese. The author does not seem to understand why Nixon signed the Paris Agreement of January 1973 (p. 169), apparently unaware of the fact that an anti-war Congress elected in 1972 threatened to shut off funding for any further involvement in Vietnam. He asserts “the uncomfortable fact that the North did militarily defeat the United States and its South Vietnamese ally” (p. 179); in fact, North Vietnam defeated South Vietnam with the full support of the Soviet Union after the U.S. was no longer involved and South Vietnam was bereft of allies.

Discussing more recent events, the author mentions the billions of dollars sent to Vietnam by “diasporic Vietnamese” (p. 179), but he does not pause to consider that this money, which has become an important source of investment in a Vietnam characterized, in the words of the author, by “rampant corruption within the state and party over the spoils of the economic reforms” (p. 178), was earned by the hard-work and entrepreneurial skill of refugee Vietnamese struggling as immigrants in foreign lands, the very people whose vision for a modern Vietnam was crushed by the victors of 1975. The author also mentions a “widespread religious revival” in recent years (pp. 186-188) but fails to mention ongoing religious persecution in Vietnam.

There are indications near the end of the book that the author has a certain stirring of mind toward a more balanced evaluation of the two Vietnams that represented competing visions for a post-colonial Vietnam,²³ but the book remains entangled in fashionable myths about the war without any discernible awareness of the limitations of these myths and of new scholarship that challenges them.

²³ For more on this point, see K. W. Taylor, “The Vietnamese Civil War of 1955-1975 in Historical Perspective,” in Andrew Wiest and Michael J. Doidge, eds., *Triumph Revisited: Historians Battle for the Vietnam War* (New York: Routledge, 2010), pp. 17-28.

*Vietnam-Centrism, the "Orthodox" School and Mark Bradley's Vietnam at War*¹

New history textbooks deserve critical scrutiny, especially those written by leading research scholars in their areas of expertise. Unlike specialized monographs, textbooks attract large audiences and shape public opinion outside the walls of academia. For areas of historical enquiry split between conflicting schools of interpretation or undergoing rapid change, textbooks can help to disseminate to a general readership new developments in the scholarly literature and the most up-to-date thinking about controversial issues. They may also provide a service to scholars in the field who are narrowly focused upon specific problems by calling attention to how new research may be confirming or challenging larger interpretive frameworks within which their own work may be embedded.

Mark Bradley's *Vietnam at War*, a new general history of the conflicts that engulfed Indochina between 1946 and 1975, fulfills all of these criteria. As the author of a number of widely-read studies including the prize-winning monograph *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919-1950*, Bradley is an important figure in Vietnam War Studies and the Americanist wing of the field of "international history".² Moreover, the study of Vietnam's wars provides a textbook example of a polarized field. Since the late 1960s, it has pitted an "orthodox" school of left-liberal scholars – opposed to the American intervention, more critical of the authoritarian Republic of Vietnam (RVN) than the communist Democratic of Vietnam (DRV), and convinced of the local origins and relative autonomy of the southern insurgency – against a "revisionist" school of right-leaning scholars who hold opposing views. Finally, owing to a series of developments starting in the late 1980s – the Communist Party of Vietnam's pursuit of "renovation," the end of the Cold War, the rise of a post-war generation of scholars and the partial opening of archives throughout Vietnam and the ex-communist world – the field has recently undergone dramatic change. Eschewing an older preoccupation with the causes and consequences of the American intervention, many scholars of the war – or wars – are now pursuing three newer lines of enquiry. They are paying more attention to the global context in which the conflict was waged. They are exploring the complexities of its local Vietnamese dynamics. And they are challenging approaches to the conflict that embrace the entire package of positions typically associated with either the "orthodox" or the "revisionist" school. Indeed, a willingness to embrace a mottled range of arguments about the conflict regardless of whether or not they support the old left-leaning or right-leaning positions may be seen as the most salutary feature of the new scholarship

¹ This piece was commissioned jointly by New Mandala and *H-Diplo* and appears simultaneously on the two sites. To access the review on New Mandala, please see <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2011/05/23/review-of-vietnam-at-war-tlcnmrev-xxii/>.

² Mark Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919- 1950* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

Vietnam at War's "Prelude" touches upon these important trends. It alludes to the crucial role in the conflict played by "global actors in the Soviet Union, France, Great Britain, eastern [sic] Europe, China, South Korea, and newly decolonizing states in South and Southeast Asia" (p. 5). It laments the "diametrically opposed" positions that have divided the field (p. 4). Most importantly, it criticizes the U.S.-centrism of "prevailing narratives in the West, which have until recently rendered the Vietnamese almost invisible in the making of their own history" (p. 3). In contrast, Bradley pitches his project as an attempt to re-center the Vietnamese experience. "My overarching focus," he insists, "remains on the Vietnamese themselves and their own multiple perspectives on the war" (p. 5)

Vietnam at War's engagement with the first of these three important trends is strong. It makes good use of scholarship produced by international and diplomatic historians such as Ilya Gaiduk, Ang Cheng Guan, Chen Jian, Mark Lawrence and Qiang Zhai to situate Vietnam's wars in a broader global context. But its success as a Vietnam-centric narrative is mixed, and it never manages to transcend the "orthodox" temptation characteristic of much of the earlier scholarship. Problems in these two areas come from different sources. The inadequate Vietnam-centrism of *Vietnam at War* derives partially from the limitations of the Vietnam Studies scholarship on which it relies, little of which focuses directly on the war or wars *per se*. But it also stems from a tendency to disregard relevant sources in Vietnamese. Bradley's dated fidelity to the "orthodox" school is harder to explain. But although they arise for different reasons, the inadequate Vietnam-centrism and enduring "orthodoxy" of *Vietnam at War* reinforce each other in the way that Bradley's "orthodox" commitments discourage him from acknowledging some of the most significant contributions of the Vietnam Studies scholarship.

Before any close examination of its substance, this book's high level of craftsmanship deserves recognition. Like all of Bradley's work, *Vietnam at War* is well organized and fluidly written. It manages to pack a huge amount of information into a slightly less than two hundred pages of text. Unusually for a textbook treatment of the topic, it features a serious introduction to pre-war Vietnamese history and a thoughtful "coda" on post-war representations of the conflict. The history of Vietnam's wars themselves is treated in four chapters. Chapter Two, on "The French War," examines the decade-long military confrontation (1946-54) pitting the anti-colonial, communist-led Việt Minh against France and an assortment of Vietnamese allies. It ends with the battle of Điện Biên Phủ, the signing of the Geneva Accords, and a brief account of the early years of DRV rule in the north. The third chapter, "The Coming of the American War," follows three crucial stories unfolding in the southern half of the country between 1954 and 1965: the development of an authoritarian state, the rise of a lethal communist insurgency, and the growth of an overbearing program of American support including, eventually, the introduction of ground troops. Chapter Four, "Experiencing War," surveys the military history of the conflict through 1968, paying special attention to the ruinous social and human consequences of American bombing and counter-insurgency campaigns. In Chapter Five, entitled "War's End," Bradley narrates the eventful final phase of the conflict starting with the 1968 Tết Offensive and ending with the fall of Saigon to communist forces in 1975. A final section of this chapter describes the misrule and return to military confrontation

presided over by the victorious communist leadership during the post-war decade, but it ends on an optimistic note with the onset of “renovation” during the mid-1980s.

Clear, concise, comprehensive, and adorned with revealing photographs and instructive suggestions for further reading, *Vietnam at War* is perfectly crafted for use in an undergraduate course. Among graduate students and professional scholars, however, *Vietnam at War* might be given a more critical reception.

VIETNAM AT WAR, VIETNAMESE STUDIES, VIETNAM-CENTRISM

In his introduction, Bradley implies that his central research method entails mining the field of Vietnam Studies in the West for material overlooked in more conventional histories of the long conflict. He praises the field’s “deep engagement with Vietnamese-, French- and Chinese-language sources” and compares it favorably to the best research produced in Asian Studies (p. 4). “In the late 1970s and early 1980s,” he writes (rather optimistically), “some of the most sophisticated and important work in Asian history came from historians studying Vietnam” (p. 4). After tracing the growth of the field under the influence of the reforms of the late 1980s, Bradley announces: “this new work, of which my own research has been a part, drives the analysis offered in this book” (p. 5).

But this source base has its limitations. As one scholar of the conflict has recently pointed out, younger historians of Vietnam in the West have, until very recently, concentrated on other topics and “produced little actual research on the war.”³ The same goes for much of the recent work in political science, anthropology, and cultural studies. Bradley does what he can with this scholarship (especially in his treatment of the pre-war and post-war eras) but, in the final analysis, it functions more to embellish his narrative of the wars than fundamentally to shape it.

A larger problem is Bradley’s failure to consult many relevant sources in Vietnamese, a language that he knows and has used to good effect in previous studies. Since *Vietnam at War* is a wide-ranging work of historical synthesis, it should not be expected to engage directly with archival collections or material from the Vietnamese press of the period. But its status as a textbook does not explain its neglect of a vast secondary scholarship produced in the communist and non-communist zones of the country or by Vietnamese scholars living overseas. Many of these accounts are marred by biases of one sort or another, but such partisanship should enhance rather than diminish their value for a Vietnam-centric approach, as it may provide a revealing window into local perspectives. For insight into wartime decision-making in the DRV, no source is as valuable as the fifty-four volume collection *Complete Party Documents* released in Hanoi between 1998 and 2008.⁴ But *Vietnam at War* never cites this invaluable published resource. Memoirs and

³ Edward Miller, “War Stories: The Taylor-Buzzanco Debate and How We Think About the Vietnam War,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 1, 1-2 (February/August 2006), p. 455.

⁴ *Văn kiện Đảng Toàn Tập*, 54 vols. (Hanoi: Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 1998-2008).

fiction represent another useful source, especially given Bradley's interest in Vietnamese points of view. But although he exploits material from these genres, he almost never strays from the tiny handful of works (or excerpts from works) available in English translation. As a result, *Vietnam at War* misses an opportunity to introduce its audience to an enormous reservoir of Vietnamese perspectives on important episodes in the conflict. The fact that more writings from the tightly controlled communist side have been translated into English than from the RVN furthers skews the presentation. To take one example, Bradley's account of the Tết Offensive, a climactic moment of the conflict for many Vietnamese, cites a single wooden quotation from an English-language version of the memoir of Việt Cộng general Trần Văn Trà while ignoring a rich body of largely uncensored southern memoirs and fiction that reveal how civilians experienced the horrific fratricidal bloodletting of the campaign (p. 153).⁵

Because of the paucity of available translations that provide insight into popular attitudes towards the conflict in the RVN, *Vietnam at War* repeatedly cites Alexander Woodside's brief 1969 article, "Some Southern Vietnamese Writers Look at the War." It excerpts one of Woodside's translations from a newspaper advice column that chastised Saigon women who "'threw themselves into an excessively extravagant life' that caused 'grave damage' to the family" (p. 122). This interesting example reflects popular disgust with consumer culture in the South but Bradley reduces the complexity of southern sentiments on this issue by not citing the last section of Woodside's translation which includes the final line "...I imagine that we will not imitate the wretched life of the Communists but we must restrict every kind of mindless, excessive extravagance."⁶

Bradley's over-reliance on English-language secondary sources may be partially responsible for an occasional tone-deafness in some of his formulations. For example, he repeatedly conflates "the Vietnamese" with the Vietnamese communists as in the following statement: "Against the hopes of the Vietnamese and Chinese that a negotiated settlement at Geneva would diminish the American threat to the Vietnamese revolution, the US commitment to Vietnam vastly accelerated in the aftermath of Dien Bien Phu and Geneva" (p. 71). The language here elides the fact that significant numbers of Vietnamese saw the communists – correctly or not – as a greater threat than the Americans to the realization of a revolution that was both anti-colonial and genuinely emancipatory. Later, he writes: "By the end of 1965 southern and much of central Vietnam was engulfed in a military struggle that Vietnamese would come to call the American War (*chiến tranh Mỹ*)" (p. 78). This kind

⁵ VAW, 153. See, for example Nhã Ca's memoir *Giải khăn xô cho Huế* [A funeral band for Huế] and her novel *Tình ca trong lửa đỏ* [Love song in the red flame]. Also, see Thảo Trường's short story, "Viên đạn bắn vào nhà Thực" [A bullet in Thực's house] in the well known collection *Những truyện ngắn hay nhất của quê hương chúng ta: hai mươi năm văn học miền nam, 1954-1973* [The best stories of our homeland: twenty years of southern literature, 1954-1973], (Saigon: Sống, 1973), 557-571 and Nguyễn Mộng Giác's novel, *Mùa biển động, Tập 3* [Season of the stormy ocean, Vol. 3] (California: Văn Nghệ, 1999).

⁶ Alec [as he called himself for this article, instead of the usual 'Alexander'] Woodside, "Some Southern Vietnamese Writers Look at the War," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* II, 1 (October 1969), p. 57.

of formulation erases the perspective of millions of ardently anti-communist Vietnamese, few of whom viewed the war in this way. More significantly, the grammatically clumsy “chiến tranh Mỹ” rings false. It was, indeed, rarely if ever employed by northerners or southern insurgents, whose usage tended to follow an official discourse that labeled the conflict “chiến tranh/kháng chiến chống Mỹ”, (the war/resistance against the Americans) or “chiến tranh/kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước” (the war/resistance against the Americans to save the country).

VIETNAM AT WAR AND THE ORTHODOX SCHOOL

Bradley’s effort to foreground the Vietnamese experience must be seen as a relatively novel approach to the conflict. But his understanding of the Vietnamese dimensions of the country’s wars is less innovative, primarily because of his staunch fidelity to the “orthodox” school. This view of the conflict emerged out of arguments advanced by the anti-war movement during the 1960s and 1970s to challenge U.S. military support for the RVN.⁷ It features critical appraisals of the methods and motives behind the American intervention, but it also advances arguments about Vietnamese dynamics of the conflict that undermined the case for the American intervention. It argues that HỒ Chí Minh and much of the DRV leadership were nationalists first and communists second. It dismisses the RVN as an illegitimate state propped up by U.S. support and ruling tyrannically over a hastily improvised pseudo-nation. While belittling the RVN as a U.S. puppet, it emphasizes the autonomy of the DRV from its global communist patrons and the autonomy of the southern insurgency from the DRV. Finally, it portrays DRV decision-makers as a broadly popular, moderate, and risk-averse leadership-group forced to take military action in the South by the belligerence of the RVN and the U.S. Although they have always been challenged by right-leaning scholars and politicians, not to mention Vietnamese supporters of the RVN, “orthodox” interpretations have long enjoyed great authority in the Western academy. Over the past decade or so, however, a body of original research has emerged (often in the margins of self-consciously “orthodox” accounts) to call into question some “orthodox” views of the Vietnamese dynamics of the conflict.⁸ While the balance of evidence remains insufficient to enshrine a new orthodoxy, it is probably fair to say that the state of our knowledge points in ambiguous directions and that many important issues concerning the history of the conflict should be seen as open, unresolved questions.

HỒ Chí Minh: Nationalist or Communist?

⁷ My characterization of the “orthodox school” and the “revisionist school” is admittedly schematic. For more elaborate depictions of the conflict between the two schools, see Andrew Wiest and Michael Doidge eds., *Triumph Revisited: Historians Battle for the Vietnam War* (New York and London: Routledge, 2010).

⁸ To be clear, my reference here is to the work of scholars conducting primary research on the Vietnamese side of the war and/or relevant aspects of modern Vietnamese political history. The scholarship to which I refer does not include Mark Moyar’s *Triumph Forsaken: The Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), which relies on select translated sources in order to substitute tendentious revisionist arguments about the Vietnamese dynamics of the conflict for tendentious orthodox ones.

Vietnam at War follows the “orthodox” approach by depicting Hồ Chí Minh as an ardent nationalist with only a secondary (and superficial) commitment to class struggle and proletarian internationalism. In the 1920s, according to Bradley, “Ho envisaged progressive elites and peasant masses united through patriotic ties and the desire for social reform coming together to throw off French colonialism” (p. 26). In the early 1930s, he wanted “to build a communist movement shaped by a broad-based patriotic and nationalist coalition” (p. 28). Hồ Chí Minh’s exile in Moscow in the mid 1930s created conditions permitting a hard turn to the left by the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) that contrasted with his preference for “inclusive nationalism” (p. 28). The foundation of the Việt Minh during the early 1940s “recalled the more inclusive radical vision for the Vietnamese communist movement that Ho Chi Minh had advocated in the late 1920s, and marked, at least for the moment, the retreat of the class based politics ascendant in the 1930s” (p. 25).

To verify this seamless portrayal, *Vietnam at War* cherry-picks from the secondary scholarship, drawing attention to the significance of material that verifies Hồ Chí Minh’s “inclusive nationalism” while ignoring evidence of countervailing ideological commitments. It also advances a number of unsubstantiated claims and interpretations, virtually all of which bolster the “orthodox” approach. Viewed in isolation, these missteps appear relatively minor (and some are clearly “judgment calls” or innocent mistakes), but together they suggest a purposeful effort to air-brush the portrait of the communist leader. To root Hồ Chí Minh’s anti-colonial nationalism in a family tradition, Bradley describes his father, Nguyễn Sinh Huy, as “a minor scholar-official deeply involved in anti-colonial activities” (p. 25). But the relevant archives disclose scant evidence of his anti-colonial activism. According to Sophie Quinn-Judge, Nguyễn Sinh Huy ran afoul of the colonial administration after it found him “guilty of brutality under the influence of alcohol” for presiding over the “caning of a man in his jurisdiction who died sometime later.”⁹ In the absence of concrete (much less deep) evidence of anti-colonial activism, Quinn-Judge concludes that Nguyễn Sinh Huy “had no overt involvement in the ferment that led to the tax revolts of 1908” and that the nature and intensity of his sympathy for the reform movement “is not known.”¹⁰

Bradley finds additional evidence for Hồ Chí Minh’s ardent nationalism in the priority that he accorded to the national revolution rather than the world revolution in *Road to Revolution*, a training manual that he produced for the Revolutionary Youth League in 1927. After acknowledging the influence of Leninism on the ideas found in the pamphlet, Bradley writes: “But in the *Road to Revolution*, Ho emphasized the immediate imperative of the ‘national question’ rather than ‘social revolution’ or class issues, borrowing as much from indigenous political discourse and the ideas of Jefferson, Gandhi and Sun Yixian as he did from Marx and Lenin” (p. 26). In contrast to this claim that the priority accorded the

⁹ Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: the Missing Years, 1919-1941* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 22 and 23.

national revolution in the *Road to Revolution* runs against the grain of classical Leninism, it is more likely that the “two-stage revolution” endorsed in the pamphlet was lifted directly from Lenin’s *Thesis on National and Colonial Questions*.¹¹ Moreover, although *Road to Revolution* quotes two lines from the *Declaration of Independence* in a brief discussion of the shortcomings of the American Revolution and chides the “Annamese” for being less revolutionary than their less heavily exploited colonial American counterparts, it never mentions Jefferson, Gandhi or Sun Yixian. Nor does it address, much less seriously entertain, their political ideas. Pierre Brocheux reaches a different conclusion about the treatment of some of the same non-Marxist thinkers in Hồ Chí Minh’s writing for the Youth League, noting that it “discussed reformism, anarchism, Gandhism, and the Three People’s Principals of Sun Yat-Sen – in order, of course, to point out their limitations.”¹²

Soviet and Chinese Connections

To further diminish Hồ Chí Minh’s commitment to international communism, *Vietnam at War* emphasizes tensions between Hồ Chí Minh and Stalin and the Soviet political establishment. For example, it notes that, while living in Moscow during the late 1930s, Hồ Chí Minh “underwent severe criticism for his alleged nationalist proclivities and sympathy with the bourgeoisie” (p. 59). But although Vietnamese rivals challenged Hồ Chí Minh’s communist credentials during the decade as part of a power struggle within the ICP, Soviet records indicate little more than the possibility that Russian officials targeted him for committing “mistakes in security procedure” that led to the arrest of comrades during the early 1930s.¹³ Bradley traces the endurance of putative tensions between Hồ Chí Minh and Stalin into the 1950s by highlighting the Soviet leader’s “cool reception” of the Vietnamese communist leader at the start of the decade (p. 59). But the evidence for this interpretation – derived mostly from the memoirs of Khrushchev and French Stalinists – is thin, and recent scholarship on the written correspondence between them during this era notes that “the tone between the two leaders was extremely polite, and even to a certain degree loving, this in spite of accusations that Stalin distrusted Ho Chi Minh.”¹⁴ Additional research may not support this interpretation, but readers should be made aware that the current state of our knowledge includes this kind of countervailing evidence.

The failure of *Vietnam at War* to cite primary sources or secondary scholarship that point to Hồ Chí Minh’s affinities for Stalinism and communist internationalism makes these

¹¹ Most scholars support this view. See, for example, Alexander Woodside, *Community and Revolution In Vietnam* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin: 1976), pp. 168-171; Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 85, and Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh*, p. 100.

¹² Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography* [translated by Claire Duiker] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 38.

¹³ Quinn-Judge, p. 59.

¹⁴ Mari Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949-64* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 25.

claims even more questionable. It makes no mention of his founding membership in the ultra-Stalinist French Communist Party or of the partisan anti-Trotskyism and pro-Stalinism of his published writings between the 1930s and the 1950s. It also ignores Christopher Goscha's research on Hồ Chí Minh's role as the Comintern's point-man for the creation of the Malayan Communist Party, the Thai Communist Party, and the Laotian Communist Party and on his efforts to create a transnational Indochinese communist bloc.¹⁵ Nor does it cite the "fairly crude anti-Trotskyist propaganda" and endorsement of the Moscow show trials that Hồ Chí Minh penned in the ICP newspaper *Notre Voix* during 1938.¹⁶ In addition, it disregards Hồ Chí Minh's extensive published writing about the Soviet Union during the 1950s which, according to one recent study, "conveyed the happy life, advanced technology, economic success and progressive society there."¹⁷ *Vietnam at War* overlooks Hồ Chí Minh's personal obituary for Stalin published in March 1953 and entitled "Comrade Stalin: Glorious Friend of the Vietnamese People."¹⁸ These well-documented, easily accessible items from the historical record may not tell the whole story, and additional context may raise questions about the conclusions towards which they seem to point. But the wholesale neglect of them in *Vietnam at War* seems unwarranted, given the relevant light that they shed on this crucial figure.

Bradley's treatment of relations between the DRV and communist China is more nuanced, but his approach exhibits a tendency, typical of "orthodox" accounts, to emphasize tensions and disagreements between the two sides and to blame Chinese advisors for errors and excesses committed by the DRV. This tendency reinforces the "orthodox" position by stressing the independence of the DRV from Chinese influence and diminishing the culpability of the Vietnamese communist leadership for the failure of its policies. Consistent with this approach, Bradley attributes the early setbacks and high casualty rates suffered by DRV forces at Điện Biên Phủ to bad Chinese advice regarding the efficacy of a strategy based on human wave attacks. It was only after "heated disputes with the Chinese," Bradley insists, that the Việt Minh leadership shifted to more successful siege tactics (p. 66). In a similar vein, Bradley holds Chinese advisors partially responsible for the failures of the land reform of the mid-1950s. He writes: "The disastrous experience with land reform, in which Chinese advisers had been central to its conception and implementation, heightened Vietnamese concerns about Chinese aims and motives" (p. 72).

¹⁵See Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam or Indochina? Contesting Concepts of Space in Vietnamese Nationalism, 1887-1954* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 1995), and *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954* (Richmond, U. K.: Curzon Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Quinn-Judge, p. 233.

¹⁷ Tuong Vu, "'To Be Patriotic is to Build Socialism': Communist Ideology in Vietnam's Civil War," in Tuong Vu and Wasana Wongsurawat eds., *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 39.

¹⁸ Hồ Chí Minh, "Đồng chí Sta-Lin: Người Bạn Vĩ Đại Của Nhân Dân Việt Nam," *Văn Nghệ* XL (March 1953), pp. 1-3; reprinted in *Sưu Tập Văn Nghệ, 1948-1954, Tập 6 (1953)* [Compilation of Literary Arts] (Hanoi: Hội Nhà Văn, 2005), pp. 71-73.

Such speculative interpretations have been recycled repeatedly in “orthodox” accounts, but the available documentary record provides only weak support for them. The most recent research, on Điện Biên Phủ for example, clearly points in different, indeed contrary, directions.¹⁹

To further emphasize connections between Hồ Chí Minh’s project and indigenous Vietnamese traditions, *Vietnam at War* rehashes an argument put forward by the DRV propagandist Nguyễn Khắc Viện (and elaborated in many “orthodox” accounts) suggesting that the Việt Minh promoted Confucian virtues and frames of reference in its public discourse during the Second World War. “The decision to do so was more than simple expediency,” Bradley contends, since the Marxist and Confucian world view “shared an emphasis on the problems of social organization, the need for the elite to guide the masses and the primacy of self-sacrifice for the collective” (p. 36). There may be something to this argument but the failure to consider a much more explicit strain of anti-feudalism and anti-Confucianism in Việt Minh and Vietnamese communist discourse makes the treatment of the issue seem strained and transparently one-sided.

DRV Repression

Unlike the most partisan “orthodox” accounts, *Vietnam at War* discusses at some length a series of radical and repressive domestic campaigns launched by the communist party when it was under Hồ Chí Minh’s leadership during the 1940s and 1950s. These included the intimidation and murder of large numbers of domestic political opponents during 1945-46, the violent land reform of the mid-1950s, and the crushing of the reformist *Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm* movement towards the end of that decade. But Bradley’s preferred mode for framing and describing these brutal campaigns functions to re-direct responsibility for them away from the DRV leadership. Admitting that “the party’s activities could involve intimidation, coercion and sometimes assassination,” he points out that “these practices re-emerged in 1945 and 1946 when agents of the DRV killed hundreds of its domestic political opponents” (p. 46). However, his brief analysis of the repression blurs the issue of accountability: “To an extent, the political killings in this period were less the official policy of the state than a reflection of its continuing inability to control local forces associated with it” (p. 46). Not only does he fail to cite evidence in support of this position, but he ignores important recent research on the episode by François Guillemot that employs local histories of the DRV security police to place the likely number of victims of the campaign in the tens of thousands.²⁰

¹⁹ Christopher Goscha has surveyed the Vietnamese sources on the alleged disagreements between Chinese advisors and Việt Minh commanders at Điện Biên Phủ over the cancellation of the wave attacks. He concludes that “Giap’s decision was thus not necessarily taken ‘against’ Chinese advice.” See “Building Force: Asian Origins of Twentieth-Century Military Science in Vietnam (1905-54),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XXXIV, 3 (October 2003), p. 558, note 65.

²⁰ François Guillemot, “Au Coeur de la fracture vietnamienne: l’élimination de l’opposition nationaliste et anticolonialiste dans le Nord du Vietnam (1945-1946)” in Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé, eds., *Naissance d’un État-parti: Le Vietnam depuis 1945* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), pp. 175-222.

To establish that the notorious land reform was a rational response to “war induced” hardship, *Vietnam at War* prefaces its brief narrative of this episode with a description of the “destructive impact of the war on the Vietnamese economy” (p. 69). It then contrasts the radical nature of land reform during the 1950s with more “moderate efforts to redistribute land in the late 1940s,” a move that emphasizes the exceptional character of the later policy (p. 69). Moving to the event itself, the book insists that the land reform of the mid-1950s was “initially popular among poorer peasants” before allowing that “the process was divisive and often violent and its excesses unleashed further chaos in the countryside” (p. 69). The absence of a concrete subject in this formulation is characteristic of Bradley’s language when discussing episodes in which the communist party initiated political repression or extra-judicial killing on a large scale. Rather than holding specific political leaders or institutions to account, he identifies “the process” and “its excesses” as the primary culprit. His consistent use of the passive voice to describe the sinister consequences of the policy functions in a similar way. “Land reform teams were instructed [by whom?] to identify abusive landlords and rich peasants even when a village had none” (pp. 69-70). “Many households were wrongly classified and punished [by whom?]” (p. 70). “A campaign of terror against rural people identified as “wicked and tyrannical” landlords [by whom?] led to public trials and executions [staged by what body?]” (p. 70). In regard to the vexed issue of the killings mandated by the policy, Bradley gets slightly more specific, fingering “agents of the state” as the primary executioners (p. 70). But his categorical declaration that “between 3,000 and 15,000 people” were put to death as a result of the policy seems low; publically available party documents indicate that the state was prepared to kill roughly 8,000 individuals during the preliminary rent reduction campaign leading up to the formal start of land reform.²¹

Vietnam at War commits numerous errors in its discussion of the reformist movement known as *Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm*. It alleges that the movement “raised the banner of ‘arts-for-arts-sake’” but its leaders never promoted apolitical art; they merely demanded freedom for artists and intellectuals to pursue a range of agendas free from state control (p. 70). It claims that Trần Dần was arrested for publishing “We Will Win” (p. 72), but this controversial poem first appeared in the Spring issue of *Giai Phẩm* – during, that is, the period of his imprisonment. More significantly, the book’s preoccupation with Trần Dần’s novel about the Battle of Điện Biên Phủ, *Men, Men, Waves, Waves* leads to the conclusion that “the affair was shaped by contestations over the meaning of the French War,” despite the fact that the movement’s key publications were silent on this particular topic (p. 71). Rather, *Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm* focused overwhelmingly on the repressive character of the DRV’s cultural policies while voicing support for movements of de-Stalinization gaining strength throughout the communist world. Moreover, given the wide range of issues raised by the historians, philosophers, musicians, journalists, critics, and lawyers that participated in *Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm*, the exclusive focus on the story of Trần Dần (no other member of

²¹ “Chỉ thị của Bộ Chính trị về mấy vấn đề đặc biệt trong phát động quần chúng, 4/5/1953” [Politburo Directive on a few special Issues in mass mobilization, May 4, 1953], *Văn kiện Đảng Toàn Tập*, Vol. 14, pp. 201–206.

the movement is mentioned) conveys an overly narrow picture of intellectual opposition to the party-state during the era.

The RVN

Bradley's account of the origins of the RVN acknowledges recent scholarship that challenges the "orthodox" assertion that its leadership was handpicked by the United States.²² But it conveys a general impression of the southern state that conforms closely to the "orthodox" view. Unlike Peter Hansen, whose recent research reveals the complex regional, sociological, and motivational dynamics behind the mass migrations from communist territory in 1954-55, Bradley emphasizes how the "initial fears" of Catholic migrants were "inflamed by propaganda campaigns" (p. 79).²³ *Vietnam at War* concedes that Ngô Đình Diệm possessed nationalist credentials, but its assessment of the RVN leader is uniformly uncharitable. The treatment of the RVN catalogues a familiar list of sins including nepotism, corruption, rigged elections, media censorship, failed land policies, over-reliance on American aid, anti-communist witch-hunts, and the repression of the regime's political opponents, including segments of the Buddhist church. But it fails to consider one of the liveliest and most Vietnam-centric bodies of research in the field that is reassessing the political project of Ngô Đình Diệm and the complexity of southern Vietnamese politics and society.²⁴ While scholars in this field disagree about the character of the Ngô Đình Diệm government, they all endow it with superior agency and internal dynamism than *Vietnam at War*. Bradley is doubtless correct to depict the RVN as "an authoritarian government intolerant of dissent that was willing to suppress its opponents brutally," but he fails to notice (or perhaps to concede) that a slightly modified version of this portrait might just as easily be applied to the DRV (favoritism, corruption, no elections, no independent media, botched land reform, failed collectivization, over-reliance on aid from China and Eastern Europe, and the silencing of all political opponents) (p. 87). In a similar vein, Bradley may be right to dismiss the official development goals behind the

²² In particular, Edward Miller, "Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh Diem, 1945-1954," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* XXXV, 3 (October 2004), pp. 433-48.

²³ For Peter Hansen's argument, see "Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* IV, 3 (Fall 2009), pp. 173-211.

²⁴ Nu-Anh Tran, "South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965-1969," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* I,1-2 (February/August 2006), pp. 169-209; Mathew Masur, "Exhibiting Signs of Resistance: South Vietnam's Struggle for Legitimacy, 1954-1960," *Diplomatic History* 33,2 (April 2009), pp. 293-313; Jessica Chapman, "The Sect Crisis of 1955 and the American Commitment to Ngô Đình Diệm," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5,1 (Winter 2010), pp. 37-85; Jessica Chapman, "Staging Democracy: South Vietnam's 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai," *Diplomatic History* 30, 4 (September 2006), pp. 671-703; Edward Miller, "The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture, and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem," in Goscha and Osterman, eds., *Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1945-1962* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 376-402; *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, Stan B-H Tan, "Swiddens, Resettlements, Sedentarization and Villages": State Formation among the Central Highlanders of Vietnam under the First Republic, 1955-1961," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* I,1-2 (February/August 2006), pp. 210-252.

RVN's agrovillage program – “the real motivation,” he insists, “was rural security and population control” – but his skepticism of the government's stated objectives for the program is inconsistent with his naive defense of the DRV's equally weak economic justification for its land reform (p. 87).

The Southern Insurgency

On the extremely complex question of the rise of the insurgency in the RVN, *Vietnam at War* follows the “orthodox” line, a narrative emphasizing the indigenous roots and relative autonomy of the southern insurgents. The basic story concerns a partnership between two political groupings – the southern communists and the DRV leadership – that shared a desire for national reunification under communist leadership but disagreed about the pace and method for bringing it about. Besieged by Ngô Đình Diệm's ruthless security services, the southern communists pressured the DRV leadership to sanction violent measures against the RVN. But the risk-averse and war-weary DRV dragged its feet. In Bradley's telling, the DRV's policy during this period (1954-1960) was marked by a preference for “peaceful if protracted struggle,” “a northern reticence,” and an “inclination to go slow” (p. 90). Eventually, however, politburo member Lê Duẩn took up the cause of the southern revolutionaries, prompting the DRV to support a “more forceful response to the actions of the Diem government” (p. 91). What followed, in Bradley's account, was a series of (subject-less) initiatives: “local southern militias *were formed* in the Mekong Delta,” and “campaigns of terror against local provincial Diem officials *were also initiated*” (p. 91; italics added). Subsequently, “*efforts were made* to unify the scattered military forces of the insurgency” and a “new military organization *was given* the name the People's Liberation Armed Forces” (p. 94; italics added). Moving from the subject-less formulation to one with a double-subject, Bradley describes how the “DRV and the southern insurgency drew on the principles guiding the broad-based Viet Minh front ... to found the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam on 20 December 1960” (pp. 94-95). At the center of this new organization was “COSVN, which made political and military policy along with the party and state leadership in Hanoi” (p. 95). To account for Hanoi's leading role in the southern conflict by the early 1960s, the narrative describes how the collaborative partnership at the center of this tale morphed gradually into a hierarchical relationship marked by the command and control of the DRV leadership over the insurgents. This process climaxed following the end of the war in 1975, when the DRV elbowed aside the southern communists, disbanding them as an organized force.

The narrative tics marring this story reflect the political imperatives that shaped the “orthodox” account when it was first put forward by anti-war scholars during the 1960s. Chief among these was a desire to challenge the official U.S. view that the insurgency was a creation and tool of the northern Vietnamese communists. This imperative explains why *Vietnam at War* repeatedly emphasizes the existence during the mid 1950s of what it calls an “embattled regional and local communist leadership in the South” capable of lobbying the DRV politburo to champion its agenda (p. 91). The assertion that the “southern communist insurgency reconstituted itself in the late 1950s and early 1960s” serves to underline this point still further, as does the depiction of the movement as a purposeful agent with its own regionally specific policies and points of view (p. 140). With this

emphasis in mind, one striking omission in Bradley's treatment of the insurgency is its lack of any consideration of the identity of its indigenous southern leadership during the period when it was allegedly relatively independent of the DRV. While he refers briefly to the twin figurehead-spokeswomen of the movement, Madam Nguyễn Thị Định and Madam Nguyễn Thị Bình, as well as the famously powerless Minister of Justice in the Provisional Revolutionary Government, Trương Như Tảng, Bradley does not name a single operational leader of the southern insurgency. Moreover, while his language suggests the enduring presence of a partially autonomous (but typically anonymous) southern leadership through the mid 1960s, this shadowy force vanishes during the planning of the 1968 Tết Offensive, which involved "vigorous debates among the top Hanoi leadership in 1967" (p. 148).

The omissions and misplaced emphases at the heart of Bradley's account call out for a consideration of a modified narrative in which the DRV channeled and inflamed popular grievances in the South, transforming them into an institutionally coherent insurgency by initiating the formation of the NLF and outfitting and training its armed units. In addition to accounting for the absence of an indigenous leadership of the insurgency, a virtue of this version of events is that it explains the remarkable fact that the three dominant figures at COSVN during the course of its existence – Nguyễn Văn Linh, Nguyễn Chí Thanh, and Phạm Hùng – were also members of the DRV politburo. The fact that the leaders of COSVN and the leaders of the politburo were essentially one and the same raises questions about Bradley's central story of two coherent but unequal political groupings acting in concert to build and set policy for the insurgency. It also undermines the "orthodox" notion that the leaders of the southern insurgency were sidelined after the war since Nguyễn Văn Linh became the secretary-general of the VCP only a decade after the war's end.

VIETNAM CENTRISM AND THE "ORTHODOX" SCHOOL

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of *Vietnam at War* is its tendency to cite approvingly new Vietnam-centric scholarship but to overlook major conclusions of that scholarship when they fail to support the "orthodox view." Two additional examples of this recurring pattern include the discussion of the strategic hamlet program and the Tết Offensive.

Vietnam at War's treatment of strategic hamlets relies on Philip Catton's ground-breaking recent history of the program in his important book *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam*.²⁵ Based on a reading of newly unearthed RVN documents from National Archive No. 2 in Hồ Chí Minh City, Catton demonstrates that the program was conceived by Ngô Đình Diệm's brother Ngô Đình Nhu to embody values like self-reliance and collective security promoted by the RVN state ideology of Personalism. Catton's thesis challenges the argument widely promoted in "orthodox" accounts that the program was strongly shaped by Robert Thompson's draconian blueprint for defeating the communist insurgency in British Malaya. "This proposal," Catton writes, referring to the British experience, "is often credited with exerting a formative influence on the emergence of

²⁵ Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2002).

strategic hamlets but the latter owed much more to the evolution of the regime's own thinking than to any imported blueprints."²⁶ The Vietnam-centrism of Catton's thesis here should appeal to Bradley but he ignores it, emphasizing instead the bellicose security objectives behind the program and the example provided by British efforts to crush the communist insurgency in Malaya (pp. 96-97).

In a similar vein, *Vietnam at War's* discussion of the DRV decision to launch the Tết Offensive in 1968 touts the significance of Lien-Hang T. Nguyen's pioneering research article about the topic while disregarding its most important conclusions. Entitled, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tết Offensive," the article reviews debates between DRV military strategists and Chinese and Soviet attitudes towards the campaign, but it breaks new ground by suggesting that planning for the offensive may have been shaped by bitter factional politics within the politburo (manifested in large-scale purges of dovish policy intellectuals from the communist party elite in 1963 and again in 1967) that were themselves linked to the troubled social and economic situation in the North. This emphasis on "the intersection of Hà Nội's foreign and domestic policies" departs from conventional approaches that tend to view DRV military policy as the exclusive product of strategic imperatives, on the one hand, and the ebb and flow of Chinese and Soviet influence, on the other.²⁷ It also aligns the dynamics of DRV military policy with standard interpretive approaches to military policy in the RVN and the United States that have long emphasized the significance of complex entanglements between war-making and domestic politics. Nguyen's analysis undermines the spirit of "orthodox" accounts in its suggestion that the DRV's decision to launch one of the most lethal campaigns of its long wars was determined by an unusually ruthless episode of communist bureaucratic infighting. It also hints that some members of the communist leadership may have supported military escalation in the South as a means to cope with the political consequences of the shortcomings of the DRV's economic and social policies in the North. It is perhaps for this reason that *Vietnam at War* ignores the crucial domestic dimension of Nguyen's argument, focusing instead on her more familiar account of the impact of the Chinese and Soviet posture towards the Tết Offensive and disagreements between the Generals Võ Nguyên Giáp and Nguyễn Chí Thanh over military strategy. Here, again, *Vietnam at War* neglects the most significant, innovative and, arguably, the most Vietnam-centric aspect of an important new piece of research about the conflict.

In each of these cases, Bradley's fidelity to the "orthodox" view clashes with his stated aspirations towards Vietnam-centrism. On one level, this clash is not surprising; nothing inherent in the Vietnam-centric approach leads it to provide support for either the "orthodox" or the "revisionist" school. However, as *Vietnam at War* demonstrates,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 96. In a footnote, Catton lists the influential "orthodox" scholars who subscribe to this view. They include Frances Fitzgerald, George Kahin, George Herring, Marilyn Young, and David Kaiser.

²⁷ Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The War Politburo: North Vietnam's Diplomatic and Political Road to the Tet Offensive," in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 1/1-2 (Feb.-Aug.2006), 27. Bradley calls the article "the best introduction to Vietnamese decision-making on the Tet Offensive and its impact"; *Vietnam at War*, p. 201.

dogmatic fidelity to either one of these schools in Vietnam War studies can pose a real threat to the achievement of Vietnam-centrism and to the production of a truly innovative and up-to-date history of the conflict.

Response by Mark Philip Bradley, University of Chicago

Having four of the leading figures in Vietnamese history and Vietnam war studies engage with my work is a great privilege. I am grateful to them and learned much from their commentary. But rather than take up their specific critiques here, it strikes me as more productive to focus on what draws all of us together: a larger and pressing concern about the kinds of narratives we can tell about the Vietnamese past and present, and the place of Vietnam in the global histories of war and decolonization in the twentieth century.

The Cold War not only cast a long and destructive shadow over Vietnam in real historical time, it has also distorted our historical understanding of the experiences of war in Vietnam. That it did so as the war unfolded is perhaps no surprise given the polarized politics of the period. At that time the nature of the United States' 'enemies' and 'allies' in Vietnam tended to be rendered in monochromatic and unidimensional terms. For American supporters of the war, the leadership of North Vietnam was seen as surrogates of Moscow and Beijing and the National Liberation Front (NLF) in turn as a puppet of the north. South Vietnam's political and military leaders were lionized as anticommunist saviors. When they no longer suited American purposes and were dismissed as corrupt incompetents (regime change in South Vietnam was not an infrequent occurrence), a new non-communist savior was always waiting in the wings. Opponents of the war in the United States saw these players in almost diametrically opposed terms. They were severely critical of the very legitimacy of the South Vietnamese state and strongly supportive of what they saw as the struggle for national liberation and socialist transformation by the North and the NLF.

Now more than thirty years since the American war in Vietnam came to an end, it is distressing that many of these same interpretative categories are still framing how we study and talk about the Vietnamese dimensions of the war. If back in the day the "orthodox" view mapped onto support for the war and "revisionists" were its fiercest critics, now those same categories are often (and confusingly) inverted. Those labeled as the new "orthodox" historians (and in some readings of my work here I seem to be pegged as one) are scored for being too gentle with North Vietnam and too harsh on the South while "revisionists" seek to again lift up the "South Vietnamese as savior" view predominant among the war's orthodox supporters in the 1960s and 1970s.

Without question we can and should tell more critical histories of the high politics of the wartime northern and southern Vietnamese states (and of the National Liberation Front). Peter Zinoman usefully points to the gradual (though still very limited) opening of primary materials in Vietnam that allow scholars to begin to do this. Keith Taylor's insistence that these new materials will form the basis of a "rise and rise" narrative of South Vietnamese politics is more puzzling to me. Ultimately such a return to Cold War categories threatens to impoverish the historical imagination.

The problem of the Cold War prism transcends the study of the Vietnam wars. Despite the richness of much of the “new international history” of the Cold War, the object of study has often remained what Heonik Kwon calls “the geopolitical Cold War” in his brilliant recent book *The Other Cold War*.¹ Kwon pushes us to think more expansively about the ways in which decolonization, and the postcolonial and the lived experiences of states, societies and individuals in a variety of geographical contexts shaped the Cold War’s multiple meanings. Christoph Giebel in his comments here urges us in a similar direction for the study of the Vietnam wars, and I think he is quite right to insist on the need to be more attentive than we have been to the complexities of the quotidian and myriad Vietnamese ways of seeing the war and its aftermath.

We do have traces now of what a transformative narrative of the war might begin to look like in the excellent more recent studies by David Hunt and David Elliott on the National Liberation Front, and from Heonik Kwon on Vietnamese war memory.² And very soon we will have considerably more as senior and younger scholars complete a number of very exciting projects currently in progress (alas work that wasn’t fully available to me as I wrote *Vietnam at War*) that moves more fluidly between top down and bottom up narratives of the war, especially in southern Vietnam where we still know so little about its politics and culture after 1945: Christopher Goscha and Shaun McHale on the cultural politics of the south in the 1940s, Sophie Quinn-Judge on the elusive “third front,” Edward Miller and Jessica Chapman’s reconsiderations of the Diem period and Lien T. Hang Nguyen’s path breaking study of Vietnamese decision making in the end game of the war to name just a few.

None of this work is “orthodox.” Nor is it “revisionist.” Indeed what is especially exciting about it is the insistence that discussions of high politics must be embedded in the varieties of everyday Vietnamese political, social and cultural practice. As the work of these scholars suggests, neither the geopolitical nor the experiential alone provide a sufficient analytical scaffolding. It is in tracing their entanglements that we can finally throw off the baggage of the Cold War optic and begin to craft new histories, and novel conceptual categories, that better help us understand the wars for Vietnam and their place in the twentieth century world.

Those of us who study the war in and out of Vietnam don’t quite yet know what new stories we will tell about the thirty years war in Vietnam. But we do know the ones we have told for too many decades no longer have the power to instruct.

¹ Heonik Kwon, *The Other Cold War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

² David Hunt, *Vietnam’s Southern Revolution: From Peasant Insurrection to Total War, 1959-1968* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009); David W. P. Elliott, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, 2006); and Heonik Kwon, *After the Massacre: Commemoration and Consolation in Ha My and My Lai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) and *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008)

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