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In *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam, 1920–1963*, editors Tuong Vu and Nu Anh Tran present ten distinct chapters which detail the previously unexplored subject of Vietnamese Republicanism. The book challenges the long-standing orthodox perspectives in American and Vietnamese literature on both the Vietnam War and South Vietnam (the Republic of Vietnam or RVN).¹ This book addresses a wide body of research and recounts the dynamic evolution of Vietnamese republicanism. This evolution gestated in colonial times, flourished during the Vietnam War era, and impacts the Vietnamese American community today. Vietnamese ideology was historically developed on the conceptual foundation that republicanism would lead to democracy and national salvation. The book combines an explanation of that idea through the lens of literature, the press, liberalism, and democracy.

This accessible volume is organized chronologically into ten separate parts, and with each chapter utilizing previously unused archival sources. In the introduction, Nu Anh Tran and Tuong Vu provide a comprehensive historical review of republicanism’s progress from the initial controversies among the Vietnamese elite on republicanism in the early twentieth century, to its existence during the First Republic (1955–1963).² The comparison between the Republic of Vietnam and the Republic of Korea underscores a common heritage, with each regime having adopted a distinct brand of republicanism based on their distinct historical contexts.

The first chapter, “A Republican Moment in the Study of Modern Vietnam,” by Peter Zinoman traces the chronological evolution of republicanism in Vietnam.³ Zinoman, utilizing a wealth of previous research,

¹ Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (Penguin Books, 1997); Max Hastings, *Vietnam: An Epic Tragedy, 1945–1975*, (Harper Perennial, 2019); Trần Nam Tiến, *Ngoại giao chính quyền Sài Gòn (1955–1963)* (General Publishing House, 2020); Trần Nam Tiến and Hà Minh Hồng, *Mặt trận dân tộc giải phóng miền Nam Việt Nam (1960–1977)* (General Publishing House, 2010); Vietnam Ministry of Defense, *Lịch sử chống Mỹ cứu nước 1954–1975, Vol VIII: Toàn thắng* (National Political Publishing House, 2008); Vietnam Ministry of Defense, *Đại thắng mùa xuân, 1975: Văn kiện Đảng* (National Political Publishing House, 2005); Vietnam Ministry of Defense, *Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập, Vol 26, 1975* (Hanoi: National Political Publishing House, 2004).

² Nu Anh Tran and Tuong Vu, “Introduction: Rethinking Vietnamese Republicanism,” in Nu Anh Tran and Tuong Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam, 1920–1963* (University of Hawaii Press, 2023): 1–25. Hereafter Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*.

³ Peter Zinoman, “A Republican Moment in the Study of Modern Vietnam,” in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 26–42.

offers a new perspective to dispute the contention that the RVN was simply a loyal client of American foreign policy. Zinoman marks the efforts of the revolutionary Confucian scholar Phan Châu Trinh, who, according to Joseph Buttinger,⁴ floated the idea of republicanism in Vietnam in 1967 (28). This statement was reinforced by historian Vinh Sinh's findings in 2009.⁵ Sinh's compilation of Trinh's works is replete with the concepts of popular rights, democracy, and self-rule (28-30). Zinoman credits Christopher Goscha for expanding the horizon on historical republicanism in Vietnam (30-31). Goscha marks 1920 as the birthplace of modern Vietnamese republicanism, when the diverse political activities of the Vietnamese elite were in full swing.⁶

Zinoman also offers three key reasons for the tardy progress of the historical inquiry into Vietnam's republicanism. First, there was a lukewarm response from colonial-era Vietnamese activists who had a penchant for other ideological terminology, including Communism, socialism, anarchism, Stalinism, Trotskyism, constitutionalism, and nationalism (30-32). Second, the well-trodden ground of Vietnam War literature treated Communists as at-large representatives of Vietnamese (32-33). Third, a new generation of Vietnamese scholars has taken up interest in the topic. As such, Zinoman adds colors to history with two historical illustrations of Vietnam Republicanism, one in a commentary on the historiography of the Republic of Vietnam (1955-1975), and the other in a review of the 2016 novel *The Sympathizer* by the Vietnamese American author Viet Thanh Nguyen.⁷

On the RVN, Zinoman recognizes that a competitive political culture, a civil society, and anti-totalitarian idealism were critical elements to stimulate the growth of republicanism. Zinoman sees these elements in South Vietnam in the disapproval of US military involvement, in the open-door policy of the RVN to foreigners, and in the unscrupulous remarks of scholars as soon as Saigon was toppled in 1975. The emergence of revisionist historians in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries rectified previous judgments about the RVN and paved the way for new literature on South Vietnamese republicanism (32-34). In contrast, *The Sympathizer* does not recognize the change in South Vietnamese perspective because the author, Viet Thanh Nguyen, does not recognize the positive outcomes of republican progress in the South, instead seeing only a range of social fatigue, such as brassy prostitutes, cowardly generals, and corrupt officials (35-37). A recent body of research from Alex Thai Vo and Nu Anh Tran, and Olga Dror's translations of Southern Vietnamese fiction, casts South Vietnam in both a sympathetic and unbiased light.⁸

Chapter 2, by Nguyễn Lương Hải Khôi, is a review of the significance of *Việt Nam Sử Luận* and the role of Vietnamese historian Trần Trọng Kim on early republicanism.⁹ Composed by Kim in 1919, *Việt Nam Sử*

⁴ Joseph Buttinger, *Vietnam: A Political History* (Frederick A. Praeger, 1968).

⁵ Vinh Sinh, *Phan Châu Trinh and His Political Writings* (Cornell University Press, 2009).

⁶ Christopher Goscha, *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam* (Penguin, 2017).

⁷ Nguyen Viet Thanh, *The Sympathizer* (Corsair, 2016).

⁸ Linda Ho Peché, Alex-Thai Dinh Vo, Tuong Vu, *Toward a Framework for Vietnamese American Studies: History, Community, and Memory* (Temple University Press, 2023); Nu Anh Tran, *Disunion: Anticommunist Nationalism and the Making of the Republic of Vietnam* (University of Hawaii Press, 2022); Nhã Ca, trans. Olga Dror, *Mourning Headband for Hue* (University of Indiana Press, 2014).

⁹ Nguyễn Lương Hải Khôi, "Early Republicans' Concept of the Nation: Trần Trọng Kim and Việt Nam sử luận," in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 43-60.

Lược provided readers with sequential stories of Vietnamese history, and it was the first modern study of Vietnamese history written in the Romanized Vietnamese script (quốc ngữ) (43-44). Prior to 1945, Vietnamese scholars Vũ Ngọc Phan, Thiếu Sơn, and Nguyễn Văn Tố complimented the high-quality historical work by Kim. Though jaundicing Communist historians' judgments in North Vietnam, *Việt Nam Sử Lược* was an invaluable book on South Vietnam's academics and education. It not only set the national soul as a foundational element of the country, it also imparted novel terms of politics in colonial Vietnam, such as evolution (tiến hóa), politics (chính trị), polity (chính thể), history (lịch sử), ethnic nation (quốc gia dân tộc), national language (quốc ngữ), the people (nhân dân), ideology (tư tưởng), patriotism (lòng yêu nước), competition (cạnh tranh), civilization (văn minh), technology (kỹ thuật), and education (giáo dục) (45-56). Khôi centers a key innovation of Kim as his urging of the youth to speak their minds by identifying themselves in their current society.

Besides nationalism, Kim also interpreted a composition of literature, art, religion, ideas, social forces, and education, manifesting a stronger sense of past-and-present connections to trace the evolution of the nation and to offer a better conceptual understanding for the youth on their country's origins. In his book, Kim also reassessed the Nguyễn dynasty and its failure to save the country from French colonists. Kim also promoted *The Tale of Kieu*, which displayed Vietnamese creativity and showed the richness of the Vietnamese language.¹⁰ Writing amid dark colonial times, Kim employed the historic example of Vietnam's conquest of the Champa Kingdom, which enlarged the Vietnamese civilization in the southern land of Vietnam, to give readers a bright scenario of the country triumphing over France and gaining independence. Throughout the chapter, Khôi places *Việt Nam Sử Lược* and Trần Trọng Kim in contrast to Communists' more dire evaluation of Vietnam's history. She posits that this book merits an invaluable early work of Vietnamese history, which not only whetted the appetite for a national soul, but also a vision of an independent Vietnam.

Chapter 3, by Martina Thuc Nhi Nguyen, concentrates on the striking contrast between French republican ideas and the Self-Reliant Literary Group¹¹ of the 1930s.¹² Nguyen explains that the Self-Reliant Literary Group accepted neither France's imperial project nor the prolongation of the monarchy. As the Group members did not believe in violence to achieve their means, the Self-Reliant Literary Group attempted to translate what France proclaimed into the reality of Tonkin, granting the Tonkinese people a range of political and legal rights and reforms. Distinct from the philosophy of Vietnamese writer Vũ Trọng Phụng, the Group members devised a plan to advance a dynamic nationalist agenda by partnering with other

¹⁰ *The Tale of Kieu* was written by Nguyen Du, a famous Vietnamese poet in the early nineteenth century. The original title in Vietnamese is Đoạn Trường Tân Thanh (斷腸新聲, "A New Cry from a Broken Heart"), but it is better known as *Truyện Kiều*.

¹¹ This group is named *Tự lực văn đoàn* in Vietnamese. It was a literary association operating in Tonkin during 1930s, and the founders include Nhất Linh, Khái Hưng, Hoàng Đạo, Thạch Lam, Tú Mỡ, Thế lữ, and Xuân Diệu. The purpose was not only an adoption of literary reform, but unlimited to education, art, and political activism.

¹² Martina Thucnhi Nguyen, "The Self-Reliant Literary Group and Colonial Republicanism in the 1930s," in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 61-80.

political groups (62-63). Through their methodologies were different, both groups espoused the idea of universal democracy, which would form the root of democratic statehood in Vietnam.

Nguyen first examines the activity of the Chamber of the People's Representatives in Tonkin, underscoring the effect of two major publications, *Mores*¹³ and *These Days*.¹⁴ *These Days* employed a novel approach on the role of the press, investigating the multiple social classes of Tonkin (65). As opposed to *Mores*, which portrayed the representatives of the Chamber in mere caricature, *These Days* investigated the efficacy of the representatives. By employing modern journalistic interviewing techniques in its reporting, *These Days* not only exposed the Chamber's inefficiency, but also influenced the democratic reform movement. Nguyen explores the work of the writer Hoàng Đạo, a member of the Self-Reliant Literary Group, who eschewed broad criticisms of the Chamber, and instead called for the expansion of power and privileges in the Chamber for Vietnamese suffrage (67-69). Accordingly, *These Days* committed itself to sowing seeds of republican ideology and nationalism in Vietnam. Hoàng Đạo, however, was not a radical. Though he ardently resisted assimilation with the French, he depended on the French administration to promote Vietnamese self-determination, preferring a scenario of gradual decolonization of Vietnam. Hoàng Đạo believed in first localizing the colonial legal system, believing that this would lay a foundation for democracy in Vietnam.

Given their openness to partnerships, Nguyen provides insight into the interesting collaboration of the Self-Reliant Literary Group and the Communist *Le Travail*, which shared a joint vision to achieve an autonomous status, and which worked to design a local independent political climate (71). In the end, the Self-Reliant Literary Group sacrificed its existence rather than acquiesce to a political system under a constitutional monarchy. Yet, their desire for Vietnamese self-determination created an atmosphere of republicanism.

Chapter 4, by Yen Vu, examines the nationalism of the obscure writer Trần Văn Tùng.¹⁵ Vu dates the first writing of Tùng to 1949, and notes that his four consecutive essays in *Editions de La Belle Page* in Paris from 1950 to 1953 were revelatory examinations of Vietnamese nationalism. Before conducting an analysis of Tùng's works, Vu expertly contextualizes the complexity of Vietnamese nationalism (82-83). She compares Tùng's vision of nationalism with that of Ambassador to the United States Vũ Văn Thái. Both Thái and Tùng believed that nationalism required consistent reflection and devotion to people's needs (85). Tùng interpreted the essence of Vietnamese nationalism as Vietnamese self-rule based upon their own aspirations. This belief originated from compassion for his native country and resistance to foreign enemies. Tùng's nationalism was distinct from Communism, and he attempted to introduce the renewal of his country by fostering a new relationship between Asia and France and by encouraging a new generation of nationalists (91). Tùng's form of nationalism was a form of republicanism that tied national development to the achievement of freedom and fundamental rights of the Vietnamese people.

¹³ The Vietnamese name of this edition is *Phong hóa*.

¹⁴ The Vietnamese name of this edition is *Ngày nay*.

¹⁵ Yen Vu "Trần Văn Tùng's Vision of a New Nationalism for a New Vietnam," in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 81-99.

Although Tùng was influenced by French ideology, Vietnamese particularities colorfully added to his concept throughout his works. Vu examines Tùng's conception of nationalism through the call to the youth of Bạch Yến—a female protagonist of his story who embodied his idea of a remarkable change in society in its hour of need (88). As noted, Vú portrays Tùng's unclouded vision of nationalism as distinct from Communism given that it was attached to values of liberty, democracy, and individualism, and describes it as an ideology that would elevate the role of Vietnamese people in the international community. This can be seen in the integration of Vietnam into the modern world by virtue of cultural absorption. When facing with a dilemma when first France and then the United States engaged in Vietnam, Tùng referred to the choice of Vietnamese people, which concentrated on a sense of liberty and how to discern Vietnamese causes and identities in an integrated world.

Jurist René Cassin's preface of *Le Viet-Nam face à son destin* fostered a notion of Tùng's Vietnamese nationalism, which is based upon equality, justice, and fraternity and went beyond Tùng's expectations, inspiring a larger readership as well as the spread of human rights (90-91).¹⁶ Tùng extolled the need to take great advantage of the foreign aid of France and America prior to removing alien elements for the development of Vietnam. He also stimulated the growth of the young Vietnamese generation, who would make turning points in national history thanks to their creativity and exploration rather than violence and insurrection. Tùng persistently opposed President Ngô Đình Diệm's oppressive and tyrannic policy to erode RVN democracy and sent several letters to American politicians, asking them to rescue the values of freedom and democracy.

Chapter 5, "How Democratic Should Vietnam Be?" by Nu Anh Tran focuses on the debate on the degree of democracy in the first Republic of Vietnam and its constitutional transition in 1955-1956.¹⁷ Tran opens her chapter by detailing the controversy among RVN politicians involving a dispute over what level of democracy should be achieved. Eventually, two rival factions emerged. One was the "Diemists," who vigorously supported the perspective of President Diệm, and the other was comprised of politicians and intellectuals who called for a multiparty system (101-102). The sheer diversity of political parties in South Vietnam stirred its political instability. While attempting to build a presidential regime in this constitutional transition, Diệm confronted large opposition from politicians who believed that a national assembly was integral to a democratic regime. Diệm prevaricated on holding elections for an assembly, and instead wielded his political power to compel his election as the chief executive. Under the guise of suppressing the Communists in South Vietnam, Diệm, supported by the sect parties, curtailed civil liberties in South Vietnam. They connived to hold an election that enabled the swept-in Diệm as the new president of the RVN in 1956. Tran refers to a strenuous attempt by Dr. Phan Quang Đán¹⁸, who pressed for freedom of speech and civil liberties but failed to orient RVN's politics to follow the path of democracy (102).

¹⁶ Trần Văn Tùng & René Cassin, *Le Viet-Nam face à son destin* (Editions de la Belle Page, 1950).

¹⁷ Tran "How Democratic Should Vietnam Be? The Constitutional Transition of 1955-1956 and the Debate on Democracy," in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 100-119.

¹⁸ Phan Quang Đán (1918-2004), was a South Vietnamese politician and a doctor. During the First Republic (1955-1963), Đán acted as an oppositionist of Diem era and failed to hold his political position as an Assembly deputy and detained after the 1960 coup d'état. He was released in 1963 and acted as People Mobilization and Open Arms Program minister as well as a deputy minister of Social Affairs Ministry under the Second Republic (1967-1975).

Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, Tran acknowledges that those talks laid the groundwork for genuine democracy in South Vietnam.

In chapter 6, “Personalism, Liberal Capitalism, and the Strategic Hamlet Campaign,” Duy Lap Nguyen scrutinizes the philosophy of Personalism and its impact on the ideological foundation of the First Republic of Vietnam.¹⁹ After a forensic examination of the original principles of personalism as espoused by the French philosopher Emmanuel Mounier, Nguyen shows that a central tenet of Personalism, that production must serve humans and meet personal needs and interests, contradicted the precepts of occidental culture (121, 124). Nguyen argues that Diệm used Personalism to establish democracy in the RVN. Though Nguyen reserves judgment on whether the Strategic Hamlet Program²⁰ effectively targeted Communist oppression, he does posit that Personalism in the rural areas of South Vietnam allowed for bottom-up democracy in Vietnamese villages [Dân chủ làng xã] (126-127). While Diệm has been derided for his authoritarianism in literature,²¹ Nguyen posits that Diệm paid attention to the leading role of villages instead of focusing solely on centralizing power. Diệm and his brother-in-law and chief advisor, Ngô Đình Nhu, viewed the developing bourgeois in the urban areas as an obstacle to building genuine democracy.

As a result, the Strategic Hamlet Program provided Diệm and Nhu with the opportunity to give full attention to the peasantry, underscoring the vital role of rural areas in generating a democratic society. Diệm counted upon this force to frame the democratic bone of RVN’s politics before removing Communists from controlled areas. In general, this program aimed to fulfil two missions: the decentralization of the RVN government and an upholding of Diệm’s reputation in light of the distortions from Communist propaganda, and to reach the majority of the country’s population in the rural areas in an effort to create the type of bottom-up democracy that the US espoused (134). This effort was met with skepticism and hostility from American and Vietnamese elites, who hindered the efforts of Diệm and Nhu to democratize society. Nguyen concludes that the downfall of Diệm did not stem from the efforts of the Communists, but from urban opposition that was ironically “wholly unconnected with pacification effort per se” (136).

In chapter 7, “‘They Eat the Flesh of Children’: Migration, Resettlement, and Sectionalism in South Vietnam, 1954–1957,” Jason A. Picard examines the *Bắc di Cư* [the Northern refugees], who were a critical force in Diệm’s regime, representing the Vietnamese who rejected the Communist North and resettled in South Vietnam.²² While other scholars have examined the Northern immigrants’ vital role in the First

¹⁹ Duy Lap Nguyen, “Personalism, Liberal Capitalism, and the Strategic Hamlet Campaign,” in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 120-142.

²⁰ This program is “Ấp Chiến Lược” in Vietnamese. Also see more in Osborne Milton E. *Strategic Hamlets in South Vietnam: A Survey and Comparison* (Cornell University, 1965); Philip E. Catton. “Counterinsurgency and Nation Building: The Strategic Hamlet Programme in South Vietnam, 1961–1963,” *The International History Review* 21:4 (1999), 918-940.

²¹ For example, Lê Cung, *Phong trào Phật giáo miền Nam Việt Nam năm 1963*, (Hue: Thuận Hóa, 2008); Phạm Xanh, “Hoạt động của các phe phái đối lập trong chính quyền Sài Gòn và sự sụp đổ của chính quyền Ngô Đình Diệm năm 1963,” *Vietnam Journal of Historical Research* 4 (2005); Trần Văn Giàu, *Miền Nam giữ vững thành đồng, Tập 2 (1961–1963)* (Khoa học xã hội, 1966).

²² Jason A. Picard, “‘They Eat the Flesh of Children’: Migration, Resettlement, and Sectionalism in South Vietnam, 1954–1957,” in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 143-163.

Republic, Picard focuses on sectionalism, which deepened rifts between the native and *Bắc di Cư*.²³ This rift originated in the medieval period when there existed clear regional and state distinction between Tonkin (Đàng Ngoài) and Cochinchina (Đàng Trong). It was nurtured during colonial times and sheds light on the essence of the conflict in South Vietnam. The presence of a large number of Northerners in their lands stoked the lingering apprehension of the native Cochinchinese residents, thereby aggravating the political climate in the South. Though Diệm diagnosed this situation and ran a North-South Compassion Campaign, the situation continued to deteriorate. Picard presents a case study of Cái Sắn, focusing not on Catholic favoritism, but on sectionalism (155-159). Diệm, who desired to join the *Bắc di Cư* and the native into a cohesive South Vietnamese population, was stymied by an ancestral mistrust.

Chapter 8, “Creating the National Library in Saigon: Colonial Legacies, Republican Visions, and Reading Publics, 1946–1958,” by Cindy Nguyen explores the significance of the National Library to preserve Vietnamese culture and foster the development of national literature and history.²⁴ Though historians have previously examined the national library, Nguyen takes a unique approach in viewing this institution as a custodian of Vietnamese culture.²⁵ After detailing the origin of the National Library, Nguyen marks 1946 as its founding when it was renamed Thư viện Quốc gia Việt Nam (National Library of Vietnam). Since its inception, the library aided the transition of Vietnamese culture by promoting the richness of Vietnamese documents. Nguyen reveals an attempt by librarians who sought Vietnamese translations of French books on sciences and technology and the process of Vietnamese language standardization (167-171). This is an example of the process of the decolonization of Vietnam, which initiated a project of language and culture promotion. Diverse sources in multiple languages assisted readers in understanding Vietnamese culture.

After the fall of Điện Biên Phủ in 1954, and the signing of the Geneva Accords, critical boxes of documents were transferred to Saigon, concluding the colonial lineage of the French and Hanoi libraries with the creation of the National Library in Saigon (173). A huge project of the National Library with a larger space for readers was implemented in 1956, and librarians attempted to supplement and assess the library’s sources. The tripod of the library includes information, education, and entertainment dedicated to creating a large number of readers, mainly students, and to help gain a better level of Vietnamese literacy and knowledge. There is an availability of sources from Hanoi, which are temporarily preserved in an abandoned hall of Petrus Ký, which is referred to as General Library, and the government also refurbished an excellent space for readers from Chợ Lớn region (177-179). Although a merger plan was infeasible for numerous reasons, the National Library and General Library opened the gates of knowledge to South

²³ Ronald Frankum, *Operation Passage to Freedom: The United States Navy in Vietnam, 1954–55* (Texas Tech University Press, 2007); Phan Phát Huồn, *Việt Nam Giáo Sử, 2 tập* (Saigon: Cứu Thế Tùng Thư, 1962–1965); Bùi Đức Sinh, *Giáo hội Công giáo ở Việt Nam, 1975–2000* (Asian Printing, 2001); Peter Hansen, “Bac Di Cu: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954–59,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4:3 (2009): 173–211.

²⁴ Cindy Nguyen, “Creating the National Library in Saigon: Colonial Legacies, Republican Visions, and Reading Publics, 1946–1958,” in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 164–185.

²⁵ Lê Thanh Huyền, “Hoạt động của thư viện Quốc gia Việt Nam thời Pháp thuộc,” *Tạp chí Xưa và Nay*, 114 (2012): 13–17; Lê Văn Việt, Nguyễn Hữu Viêm, and Phạm Thế Khang, *Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam—90 năm xây dựng và phát triển* (Thư Viện Quốc Gia, 2007); National Library of Vietnam, *Thư Viện Quốc Gia Việt Nam: 85 năm xây dựng và trưởng thành, 1917–2002* (Thư Viện Quốc Gia, 2002).

Vietnamese readers and lifted the level of universal literacy. However, Nguyen also indicates the chief impediments of the library, including a lack of personnel, improper training, and poor infrastructure, and leaves an open question on its function: whether the library should be focused on academic research or for the unrestricted use of the public.

Chapter 9, “Striving for the Quintessence: Building a New Identity of National Literature Based on Creative Freedom,” is an examination by Hoàng Phong Tuấn and Nguyễn Thị Minh of the new identities of national literature in the RVN, which came to fruition because of newfound creative freedom.²⁶ Tuấn and Minh examine the periodicals *Culture Today* (Văn hóa ngày nay), *Encyclopedia* (Bách khoa), and *Creativity* (Sáng tạo) (183). In the first phase of this research, Tuan and Minh refer to a dilemma of Vietnamese writers, who climatized themselves in a new cultural sphere, where they absorbed both world culture and their original culture. As clearly reflected in the *Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm*²⁷, South Vietnam, in their perception, would become a ripe area of creative freedom, as no such freedom existed in the North. Tuấn and Minh focus on writer Mai Thảo, who appreciated Saigon as the heart of the new cultural sphere and democratic freedom. Meanwhile, poet Quách Thoại, writer Nguyễn Sỹ Tế, and artist Nguyễn Thành Vinh cultivated sympathy with Mai Thảo since émigré groups reposed hope in this new land, where creative freedom was encouraged (191). Collectively they proffered a hand for mass transformation of national literature, which was out of question in the North where the DRV strictly curtailed creative freedom. In the émigré authors’ mindset, the North held their memories, but the South offered a path for the quintessence of art in a free society. In the second phase of this chapter, Tuấn and Minh denote the two missions of national literature, namely renovation and diversity. While mentioning great works of bustling authors in the Self-Reliant Group or other writers as an instrument to recentralize the norm of national literature, Mai Thảo and other artists spurred a heated debate on the diversity of literature. They built art from a diverse climate of opinion, and believed a variety of voices were optimal for creative national art. As such, literary magazines functioned as a forum for in-depth discussion and a stage of updated literary trends and styles. However, creative freedom in the South confronted vast challenges from political and social contexts and obliged writers to reflect on life, reality, and war. While coping with criticism, Mai Thảo still fueled his belief in the strength of creative freedom in national literature, which remained vigorous and upheld democratic principles (196-197). Mai Thảo called for a collective effort based on a liberal mind and creative freedom that one would thrive on the ground of freedom and democracy, all the while struggling with the dismal reality.

²⁶ Hoàng Phong Tuấn and Nguyễn Thị Minh, “Striving for the Quintessence: Building a New Identity of National Literature Based on Creative Freedom,” in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam: 186-201*.

²⁷ Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm affair is a political and cultural movement in North Vietnam during the end of 1950s. Two periodicals, namely, *Nhân Văn* (Humanities) and *Giai Phẩm* (Masterpieces) were introduced to public with the hope of freedom of speech, creativity, and human rights. In tune with the *Chinese Hundred Flowers Campaign*, Hanoi suppressed these two editions, detained and tended to re-educate writers as well as linked them to “reactionary” elements of the government. See more in Kim N.B. Ninh, *A World Transformed: the Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965* (University of Michigan Press, 2002); Boudarel Georges, *Cent fleurs ecloses dans la nuit du Vietnam. Communisme et dissidence 1954-1956*. (Jacques Bertoin, 1991); Balázs Szalontai, “Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955-56,” *Cold War History*, Vol. 5, Issue 4 (November 2005): 395-426.

The closing chapter by Y Thien Nguyen explores the role of state propaganda, which was marketed as social knowledge.²⁸ A noticeable aspect of Nguyen's research is the interpretation that the South's anti-Communism originated from the unique perspective of the country's experiences rather than from an application of American anti-Communism. Nguyen concentrates on the Political Study Program (PSP) activities, a long-standing project among government administrative agents (205). Instead of only reviewing the state's role, Nguyen seeks to understand the role of civil servants and the administrative work of the government. The political study, which had a series of seminars, workshops, and meetings to debate democracy and current social affairs, developed into the platform for the Cần Lao Party. Nguyen underscores the continuity of practice and ideas of the PSP throughout the history of RVN. While the PSP of the First Republic focused on discussion and education, despite the end of the Diệm administration, it continued during the Interregnum (1963–1967) and the Second Republic (1967–1975). However, the program failed to convince the RVN cadre. Nguyen posits that the Geneva Accords dominated the RVN's PSP over the course of the First Republic (214–215). The program meant the RVN justified its opposition to an allegedly unjust and unfree general election controlled by the DRV.

When the First Republic collapsed, the Geneva Accords continued to have a lingering impact on South Vietnamese leaders' discourse. General Nguyễn Khánh, who decreed July 20 as a National Day of Resentment, is a typical example (220). Over the course of the Second Republic, the Geneva Accords were reused in Thiệu's ideas on peace when he lambasted a flagrant violation of the DRV into the RVN's territories and its breach of the signed Paris Accords of 1973. Instead of utilizing political study in materials to promote the image of the regime, President Thiệu continued to graft anti-Communism and Communists' aggressive actions in the South and treated South Vietnam as a victor of peace. As such, anti-Communism did not dominate the ideology for Vietnamese Americans after the Fall of Saigon in 1975. This idea shaped a constitution of identities, namely, political culture, norms, thought, knowledge, and belief, which were imperative to the development of Vietnamese Americans (222–223). Anti-Communism can be seen as a tonic effect of Republican states for their progenies. Going beyond the purpose of propaganda, this ideology helped defend the Vietnamese American community from Communist infiltrators and made them feel connected with the community's past.

Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam, 1920–1963 is an invaluable work, which sheds a light on the historical and political evolution of a Vietnamese Republican Nation from the dawn of modern nationalism Vietnamese movements in early twentieth century to the end of the First Republic of Vietnam in 1963. In the realm of that political evolution, one can see strenuous attempts of Vietnamese politicians and intelligentsia to build a robust version of Vietnamese republicanism. The book has a constellation of exciting chapters that thoroughly reveal republicanism thought in literature, history, political debates, and policymaking. The book, which not only provides in-depth pieces of research powered by new evidence from the former RVN, also handsomely contributes to the modern history of Vietnamese thoughts and challenges conventional wisdom based upon the perspectives of the Vietnamese Communist Party.

²⁸ Y Thien Nguyen, "When State Propaganda Becomes Social Knowledge," in Tran and Vu, eds., *Building a Republican Nation in Vietnam*: 202–230.

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