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Introduction by Ronald Spector, The Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University

As academic metaphors go, “the Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies” appears to serve as a rather good label for what is represented by the insightful, thoroughly researched and innovative essays in the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* and the equally learned and provocative reviews presented here. While there is a great deal of diversity in the viewpoints represented in these reviews and in the introduction to the published articles by Miller and Vu, most of the authors seem to share a broad agreement about what this new approach is about. The characteristics of the new turn appear to include a rejection, or at least suspicion, of Eurocentric and American-centric understandings of the wars in Indochina, a primary focus on Vietnamese perspectives and Vietnamese agency, often based on the use of Vietnamese language sources, and an emphasis on the rich complexity and diversity of the war experiences of Vietnamese and others involved in the long wars; what **Lien-Hang Nguyen** calls a shift in “the black and white nature of the debates to Technicolor.” They also broaden the field of inquiry from what **Nu-Anh Tran** calls “a binary vision of a war fought solely between Hanoi and Washington” to one involving “a diverse variety of actors, actions and places.”

Reading these essays one is tempted to add to **Miller** and **Vu’s** assertion “the Vietnam War was a Vietnamese war” the further assertion “the Vietnam War was a war.” Military ambitions, military policies and military necessities provided the backdrop for, and sometimes drove many of the social, religious and cultural developments so well analyzed in these articles. The *Thanh Nien Xung Phong* for example, were not simply a product of nationalism, gender roles or ideology, they were a result of the ways, means and strategy with which the DRV’s leadership chose to prosecute the war.

As a war, the First Indochina War in the Mekong Delta as described by **Shawn McHale** looks markedly like other Asian conflicts occurring at the same time in Burma, Indonesia and Korea. The war in Indonesia, 1945-49 was classified by most observers as an anti-colonial war for independence against the Dutch, like the war in Indochina against the French. Upon closer examination both appear more like civil wars superimposed against the backdrop of a struggle with the colonial powers.

In many parts of Asia, World War II, the Japanese occupation, the confusion and disorganization following the Japanese collapse and subsequent attempts to reassert colonial rule led to the weakening or disappearance of the sense of trust and community described by McHale. Old quarrels and causes were revived and new ones fostered by the collapse of the old order soon developed. Traditional government at all levels became weaker and new rivals for authority appeared. The result was heightened suspicion and paranoia, violence and xenophobia. The Asian conflicts of the period consequently included not only conventional and unconventional military operations but frequently ethnic conflict, warlordism, religious strife, terrorism and brigandage. The state of mind of ordinary people in Java in 1945-47, so well described in the stories of Idrus and Pramoedya Ananta Toer, seems not unlike that of Vietnamese in the Mekong Delta during these same

years.¹ The communal violence in Malaya in this same period was at least in part, a product of similar circumstances.

The First Indochina War was a civil war in another sense as well. From its beginning it involved Vietnamese on all sides of the conflict. The FTEO, the French Expeditionary Force in Indochina always included a substantial percentage of Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians. By the end of the 1940s they constituted 31 per cent of total French regular forces in Indochina.² At that point they became the basis of the “Vietnamese National Army” when Bao Dai’s State of Vietnam received its “independence” in 1950. In addition there were the various Sect forces in the south as well as a not inconsiderable Catholic militias in the Catholic diocese in northern Vietnam like Phat Diem and Bui Chu, militias that at various times fought both the French and the Vietminh.

As is well-known, the French colonial troops also included large numbers of Moroccans, Senegalese and, Tunisians. If the aim of these newer approaches is truly to encompass a “diverse variety of actors” then the roles played by these non-Vietnamese, non-European servants of empire ought to receive more attention.

So what, finally, is the importance of this new turn in studies of the Vietnam War to readers of H-Diplo, some of whom may be, like this author, still fixated on what **James McAllister** calls “the old and tired debates” about the origins, nature and outcome of American involvement in the wars in Vietnam? Participants in those old and tired debates, whatever their perspective, generally agree that American political leaders and opinion makers knew little about Vietnam and were seldom greatly troubled by that lack of knowledge.

This does not mean, however, that Americans held no ideas, beliefs and assumptions about the Vietnamese. Indeed during the initial years of American involvement, 1963-68, there was a great deal of interest and curiosity about that Southeast Asian country which was coming more and more to dominate American politics and foreign policy. One need only recall the campus “teach-ins” at which, students, faculty, government spokesmen and experts of various kinds all came together to pool their ignorance in the search for solutions. On the other hand almost no Americans spoke or read Vietnamese, few had ever been there, and there was no Vietnamese immigrant community in the U.S.

In the absence of any first-hand information, the ways in which Americans understood and imagined Vietnam had to be mediated through third parties, who were not themselves Vietnamese. Among the most widely known, was Dr. Tom Dooley, whose book, *Deliver Us from Evil*, about his experiences as a Navy doctor working with the mass exodus of Catholics and other Vietnamese from North Vietnam to the south during 1954-55 spent weeks on the best-seller lists and, as his biographer, James T. Fisher observes, “quite literally located Vietnam on the map for Americans.”³ (Somewhere, an industrious doctoral

¹ Idrus, Surabaya, trans. S.U. Nababan and Benedict Anderson in *Indonesia*, 5, 1968, p.1. Pramoedyana Ananta Toer, *All That Is Gone*, (New York:2005)

² Michel Bodin, *La France et ses soldats, Indochine*, (Paris 2004) p.63

³ James T. Fisher, *Dr. America: The Lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1927-1961*, Amherst MA 1997) p.66.

student is probably already busy analyzing the resemblances and differences between *Deliver Us from Evil* and Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea* which has had a somewhat similar role in introducing American readers to Afghanistan.)

If Dooley put Vietnam on the map for middle-brow U.S. readers in the 1950s the book which became almost a bible, referred to by all sides in the debates of the early and mid-1960s was Bernard Fall's *The Two Vietnams* as well as his other books, *Street without Joy*, *Vietnam Witness* and *Last Reflections on a War*. Fall's expertise was endlessly invoked in Pentagon studies, editorials and political debates and he was a regular on the lecture circuit.

Educated in France, and a veteran of the World War II French underground, Fall was not an accidental visitor to Vietnam like Dooley. He had conducted extensive first-hand research in the country over a period of more than a dozen years and had witnessed the final, futile phase of the French military operations there during 1953. He was well-informed, well-connected, independent-minded and capable of far-reaching critical analysis. Yet his perspective remained essentially that of the more forward-looking French colonial leadership. He neither read nor spoke Vietnamese. He was critical of the U.S. for its anti-colonial attitudes during and immediately after World War II and for failing to adequately support France in its efforts to defeat the Vietminh in the 1950s. What Fall's readers received was a sophisticated, analytical and readable version of the French vision of Indochina in the 1940s and 50s.

If Bernard Fall explained Vietnam to the Americans of the Kennedy-Johnson years, Francis Fitzgerald's understanding of the Vietnam war in *Fire in the Lake* perfectly suited the disillusioned American visions of the 1970s. Fitzgerald's elegant and compulsively readable book, which appeared in 1973, received both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Unlike Fall, Fitzgerald's book sought not so much to improve American understanding of Vietnam as to explain how the utter lack of such understanding had led to disaster. This approach, which emphasized American ignorance, arrogance, and lack of awareness of alternate value systems, political approaches, and views of society, had tremendous appeal to American liberal critics of the war and particularly to academics.

Yet Fitzgerald's understanding of Vietnam, like that of Fall was essentially French. Her guide to Vietnamese history and cultural characteristics was the French sociologist, Paul Mus. Whatever the strengths of Mus's own work, specialists have often found Fitzgerald's distillation of Vietnamese history in *Fire in the Lake* to be less than wholly successful. Reviewing the book in the *Journal of Asian Studies*, David Marr found Fitzgerald's "depiction of Vietnamese national character to be little short of disastrous."⁴

The importance of the Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies for the non-specialist then, may not lie in any specific studies or methods exemplified by this new approach but in enabling us to go beyond the mediated constructions of Vietnam which formed the

⁴ *Journal of Asian Studies*, May 1973, pp.564-65.

unconscious foundation for much of what American leaders and opinion makers of the 1950s, 60s and 70s thought they knew about Vietnam.

This collection of research essays admirably demonstrates the de-centering approach in studies of Cold War conflicts and is part of an effort to “Vietnamize” the study of the Vietnam Wars. It “aims at new answers to some of the most persistent questions about the war.” (Intro, p. 2) In terms of the Introduction’s promise to offer fresh perspectives on “gender, race, class and religion,” these authors certainly deliver. All but one of the essays offer detailed looks at one place or group affected by war. The fifth essay, on the North Vietnamese army or PAVN, is a good example of how a fresh analytic approach can yield a clearer picture of a murky issue, in this case on the social composition of the PAVN. But in terms of “new answers to persistent questions,” I am not sure that these essays deploy enough evidence to do more than complicate our picture of the wars.

This is a major contribution, indeed, to remind us of the diversity of times and places that were linked to the Vietnam Wars, no matter what name one gives them. In particular, the patchwork picture of the Mekong Delta presented by **Shawn McHale** is a valuable corrective to the tendency to write about the Delta as though its inhabitants were all politicized tenant farmers, ready to throw off their shackles. **David Biggs** supports this more complex view in his essay on An Giang province, home to the Hoa Hao Buddhist sect and a large community of resettled Catholic refugees from the north. The guerilla strongholds of My Tho and Long An, so well described by David Elliott, David Hunt and Jeffrey Race, are not the whole story, these essays tell us.

But the question remains: where do we go with this complexity? I find it worrying that the authors of two of these essays emphasize Vietnamese agency, while shying away from questions about the strongly patriarchal nature of Vietnamese society that their research reveals. Shouldn’t we be asking the more focused question of *precisely whose* agency is being demonstrated? **Shawn McHale** offers a sophisticated look at violence in situations where there is a breakdown of trust, without really establishing who the “fanatics” of his title are (“Understanding the Fanatic Mind”). Are we dealing with communities run amok or a few instigators of violence? Are we discussing the agency of a few individuals or a more widespread social phenomenon? In the paragraphs that follow I will explain these thoughts in more detail.

Let’s begin with **David Biggs’s** fascinating topic, the Americans and their quest for development in An Giang province (pp.139-172). He describes a long-ago age of innocence abroad, when the chemical fertilizers and pesticides of the Green Revolution promised “miracle rice.” The essay provokes all sorts of questions that one would like to read more about. One of the author’s more intriguing statements is the fact that as of 1966, 75% of this peaceful province’s farmers were tenants. (p. 153) More discussion of this statistic would have been helpful to our understanding of the social dynamics in An Giang, but in itself it forces us to re-examine some of our assumptions about motivations for joining the communists. Were these tenants evenly distributed between the Hoa Hao and Catholic communities? Did the NLF have *any* success in mobilizing them? Or was the security provided by their faith communities enough to keep discontent in check?

I'm not sure what to make of the author's rejection of the "common assumption" that "American agencies such as USAID were pivotal to the commodification of agriculture in the 1960s." He sees the "makings for a rapid intensification of agriculture" as arising "from within the local population and outside the reach of government authorities." (p. 160) How does that fit with his earlier statement that it was American advisors who supported the Green Revolution through the mobilization of USAID-backed commodity imports and loans for farmers to purchase goods? (p. 157) Further along, we learn that the "local population" who were able to engage in high-yield agriculture had to be reasonably well-off: the reason that poorer farmers and tenants had a difficult time obtaining fertilizer was that the province authorities allowed wealthy entrepreneurs to sell and distribute it, thus driving up the price. The same process, combined with the mistakes of the province Rice Service chief, seems to have limited access to high-yield rice seed. After the Rice Service chief lost his allotment of seed by planting in a flood plain, the IRRI seed for a demonstration plot had to be purchased from a local farmer, who had bought his supply in My Tho. The initiative of the province authorities and the local entrepreneurs may well demonstrate Vietnamese agency in this instance, but doesn't it also amount to corruption? The U.S. was supplying the inputs for free, and the government authorities at the local level were channeling them to "wealthy entrepreneurs" who may well have been their friends or relatives. This was the segment of the local population who had the wherewithal to take part in the Green Revolution. Biggs shows that, whatever the inclinations towards agricultural experimentation that did exist among the farmers of An Giang, the spreading war put an end to nation building and U.S. efforts at modernization after Tet 68. As he explains, "... military infrastructure and operations overshadowed such programs even in a "pacified" province. (p.164) It is difficult not to conclude that, as the suppliers of all the commodity aid for the Green Revolution, as well as the weapons and budget for warfare, it was the Americans who had the preponderant influence on agricultural change or lack thereof. Perhaps the issue that Biggs wants to get at, in terms of local knowledge and agency, is one that did not come up in USAID reports. That would involve a discussion of the ecological balance in An Giang and the wisdom of planting low-yield floating rice in a flood-prone province, where farmers could easily supplement their incomes by fishing. There are a few errors in this piece that should have been caught by the editors: General Thieu's title at this time was not Prime Minister – he was Chief of the Military Directorate and ceremonial Head-of-State until he was elected President in Sept, 1967; IVS was not a Mennonite organization, but a branch of the International Voluntary Service, a secular organization.

Peter Hansen provides a path-breaking and well-documented study of the resettlement process of the Catholics who left the north in 1954. His investigation of motivations and choices throughout this migration develops a less uniform picture than has been previously available, but I am not sure that he supports the claim that these refugees were "active agents in the determination of their own fate." (p. 175) The two bishops from the northern dioceses with the heaviest concentration of Catholics, Thaddeus Le Huu Tu and Pierre Pham Ngoc Chi, were important actors. They decided even before the signing of the Geneva Accords to leave. But as Hansen points out, many of the villagers of Nam Dinh and Ninh Binh who became the "nguai di cu" or "resettled people" trusted these leaders to make their decisions. "For many northern Catholics – especially those who lived in rural

communities – the decision to stay or go hinged in no small measure on the words and deeds of priests and bishops,” he writes. (p. 182) In Hanoi, where the Archbishop chose to stay, there was a much lower percentage of Catholics who left for the south.

Hansen provides a seemingly final debunking of the idea that Catholic refugees streamed south in 1954 in response to the psywar leaflets dropped by Edward Lansdale, telling villagers that “the Virgin has left the north.” Among all of the Catholic refugees whom he interviewed, Hansen could not find a single one who recalled reading one of these leaflets, let alone being influenced by such propaganda in his decision to move south. Although Lansdale’s propaganda campaign is widely mentioned in histories of the war as a reason for the Catholic exodus, Hansen’s finding is not unexpected. Members of the Hanoi Communist Party (CP) elite such as Hoang Tung have admitted the party’s responsibility for the exodus of the Catholics and the urban bourgeoisie. The accelerated Land Reform campaign, combined with an anti-capitalist campaign carried out in urban areas following the victory at Dien Bien Phu, had already provided clear signs of the rigor with which the party intended to implement communist policies. The years of intensified class struggle after 1951, when local Viet Minh leaders from middle class backgrounds were purged from the party, were enough to convince a number of former supporters of the revolution to move south when the chance came.

Hansen’s concluding observation is that many of the resettled Catholic refugees remained in “geographically segregated, culturally distinct and religiously-based communities,” often the object of popular resentment from southerners who perceived the aid they received as special treatment. This is a somewhat sad, but at the same time, inspiring commentary on the power of Catholic organization. Many people have been surprised by the cohesion and tenacity of the Vietnamese Catholic community of New Orleans’ Ninth Ward, which is one of those essentially intact refugee communities which travelled to the south in 1954 and then on to the U.S. in 1975.

Francois Guillemot’s essay on the young women stationed along the Ho Chi Minh Trail (“Death and Suffering at First Hand”) presents one aspect of the youth mobilization which swept North Vietnam in 1965, when U.S. ground troops entered the conflict and the air war moved into high gear. For readers of Bao Ninh’s *Sorrow or War* this tale of blighted youth will be familiar. His notes show that he has combed through an impressive number of Vietnamese sources for his information, but his critique of the callous way in which these young women were used by the military is not much different from that of Karen Turner and Phan Thanh Hao’s *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam*. If these women survived to return home, their youth had passed and they were too old to be considered marriageable by their peers. Many were severely injured, yet they did not receive military honors, as they had been part of an irregular force.

Guillemot is the first scholar that I know of, however, to suggest that girls as young as thirteen may have been included in the youth shock brigades. His source for this is a publication on the Youth Shock Brigades in western Nam Bo. We should keep in mind, though, that this recruitment of children in NLF zones was probably quite different from the situation of the young northern women who spent years repairing craters on the Ho Chi

Minh trail. In NLF-controlled areas south of the 17th parallel, society had by 1967 been so disorganized by constant U.S. bombing and patrols that schools had to close and often families who refused to move into refugee camps were forced to go farther into the countryside, where there were no schools. Others joined youth organizations, starting with the Pioneers, in their home villages. I have interviewed a woman from Quang Ngai province who says that she started building punji traps at the age of ten, when she was still a school girl. But this sort of local recruitment allowed the young to live at home, and if there was a local school, to continue their studies. So it would be important for the author, if he continues this research, to provide a more differentiated picture of youth organizing, region by region.

This is not to argue that the youth of Vietnam were not turned into cannon fodder, sometimes in reaction to political mobilization campaigns that glorified self-sacrifice. But it would make Guillemot's essay feel more balanced if he had included some information on the facts of the war, such as the free-fire zones established in communist-controlled areas of the south, or the tonnage of bombs that were dropped on the Ho Chi Minh Trail by well-fed Americans living in suburban military base communities in northeast Thailand.

The danger of the "Vietnamization" turn in Vietnam War studies becomes apparent here. This is the critique made by German author Bernd Greiner, who writes that "One could argue that in general the war is written about without being actually described as such."¹ It won't strengthen our analysis of the war if we pretend that the French and the Americans were peripheral actors, any more than it would if we continued to view the Vietnamese as ciphers or monolithic blocs of communists and anti-communist true believers. This was not just a war between the DRV and the Republic of Vietnam, as Guillemot describes it (p. 17).

Shawn McHale's essay on violence in the Mekong Delta during the French War is a thought provoking effort to open up a difficult topic. But he should perhaps have attempted a more fundamental assessment of the various groups and political tendencies involved. There is so much pressure on historians to demonstrate theoretical sophistication, that the work at what David Marr calls "the coal face of history" is increasingly neglected. This essay is top heavy with theoretical references but weak on discussion of the facts. For a start, we have the leaflets accusing the French of turning Vietnamese into Africans – puzzling, disturbing, yet seemingly too complex and obscure to work as propaganda. But we need to know more about these: do we have any idea of their influence on the population? How many were distributed and over what period? According to McHale's note 2, the Viet Minh did not claim authorship of this tract or related propaganda. If it was their product, how did it serve their goals? Was this propaganda one of General Nguyen Binh's deviations from central policy? The discovery of the leaflets coincides with his tenure as commander of Viet Minh forces in the south. Without answers to these sorts of questions we are in danger of over-emphasizing the role of such leaflets, just as historians have done with Ed Lansdale's psywar from 1954.

¹ Bernd Greiner, *War Without Fronts: The USA in Vietnam*. London: The Bodley Head, 2009 (English translation), p. 12.

There are a number of other assumptions and conflation in this essay that it would be useful to unpack or throw out for discussion. For we definitely need the “fine-grained” approaches and understanding of “microdynamics on the ground” that the author calls for. (p. 103) One of these assumptions is that the Japanese occupation was a totally “decentralizing” experience for the Delta. (p.105) Although our sources on this period may be thin, it might be possible to pinpoint some experiences, such as French or Japanese military training, which brought people together within regional organizations. Another example might be the case of the Hoa Hao and their rapid growth in 1945, when Huynh Phu So was escorted by the Japanese on a tour of his religious constituency.²

Is it not worth thinking about Japanese-sponsored groups established during World War II and how these may have affected the post-war enmities in this region? Vietnamese of different political leanings, including Trotskyists, worked with the Japanese police, in Japanese-supported political parties and youth groups. The Hoa Hao were cultivated by the Japanese, while Constitutionalist leaders hoped to receive political power from them. Did this lead to the settling of scores once the allies won the war? Did the communists who had remained in prison feel warmly towards those who had profited from the Japanese interregnum, including Tran Van Giau? I find it strange that McHale fails to mention the controversies surrounding Giau when discussing violence in the south. He was often linked by his contemporaries to the death sentence passed on Constitutionalist leader Bui Quang Chieu by a people’s court in Saigon, in the autumn of 1945. The killing of OSS representative Peter Dewey on Giau’s watch is another problematic murder that endangered the Viet Minh relationship with the U.S. and seems unlikely to have been condoned by Hanoi. Tran Van Giau has, in fact, accepted responsibility for Dewey’s death in an interview with U.S. researchers.³ I mention these killings and rumors to demonstrate that the political violence in the south may have had more to do with the role of individuals than McHale would like to admit. And internal disputes among the communists “hampered attempts to act in concert” not just through 1946, as he writes (p. 106) but probably up to 1951.

In fact, I would say that this is an important dynamic (micro and macro) that McHale avoids: the nature of the communist movement in the south. If we are trying to analyze the communists’ uses of terrorism, shouldn’t we actually examine the nature of their conflicting ideologies, their leadership, their faction and disagreements? (Call it ethnography if political history seems too pedestrian.) To lump together Ho Chi Minh’s call for the destruction of roads and bridges with the 1949 appeal of an obscure writer for a “new cultural revolution” in which destruction must precede the building of the new, is to conflate two kinds of violence. (p. 109) Ho’s recommendation is standard procedure for a retreating army. But to call for destruction before building the new is an anarchist formula which was often used by those communists who advocated class war and the physical elimination of landlords. To the best of our knowledge, Ho Chi Minh did not take this

² See Pascal Bourdeaux, “Approches statistiques de la communauté du bouddhisme Hoa Hao,” in *Naissance d’un Etat-parti : le Viet Nam depuis 1945 [The Birth of a Party-State : Vietnam Since 1945]*, eds. Christopher E. Goscha and Benoit de Tréglodé. Paris : Les Indes Savantes, 2004, pp. 277-304.

³ I am grateful to Mary McDonald for this information.

position, thus earning the criticism of more radical communists, who saw him as too compromising. But Nguyen Binh, the general who took charge of Viet Minh troops in the south in late 1945, did. As Christopher Goscha writes, “Nguyen Binh used terrorism and he applied it ruthlessly. Goscha quotes from a captured document from mid-1947, in which Nguyen Binh stated: “Saigon is the center of the reactionaries, of the band of autonomists for the Nam Ky country...To destroy Saigon is a very legitimate and humane cause.”⁴ Ho Chi Minh’s government in the north had to remind him to end terrorist attacks after the cease-fire order of April 1946. Nguyen Binh was relieved of his command in 1951, and was killed shortly afterwards.

Although the VCP today avoids this kind of probing, there is enough evidence of disagreements over communist policy in the south, going back to the early 1930s, to make this a central topic in a discussion of violence in the Mekong Delta.⁵ Why didn’t Ho Chi Minh’s policy of national union take hold in the South? A partial explanation lies in the fact that the ICP leaders with the closest organizational links to the national party were executed and imprisoned after the failed Southern Uprising of 1940. But there were fundamental divisions which were of long duration between nationalist communists and those such as Truong Chinh, who wanted to accelerate class war.

To his credit, McHale notes that a complicating factor was the French skill at provoking feuds and violence among the Viet Minh and religious sects, as well as the Khmer minority. Mai Chi Tho’s comments, quoted by McHale, make it clear that the Viet Minh were easily provoked into tit-for-tat violence and lacked central discipline in the years up to 1952. (p. 114) That was when a Central Office for South Viet Nam (COSVN) replaced the Southern Regional Committee. The author also points out that spy scares were another source of disunity and caused the Viet Minh untold damage in both north and south. But at the end of this essay we are still in the dark about racist impulses among the competing groups in the Delta and how these might have been expressed in the war against the French. As a first step in exploring the idea and roots of a culture of violence in the south, we should try to quantify Viet Minh influence in different provinces, from the time that they formed a unified Southern Regional Committee in October 1945. Where did the massacres and most assassinations occur? How often did the Viet Minh claim responsibility? How much autonomy did local leaders have? Until we have more clarity and basic information on who the Viet Minh were in these years, I feel uneasy about throwing around terms like “the fanatic mind”.

The essay by **Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan** on “Trends in Military Service in Northern Vietnam” (pp. 61-97) is a significant contribution to the kind of basic analysis of communist organizations that we lack for the Viet Minh in the Mekong Delta in 1945-52. She has the advantage of a long-term survey, the Vietnam Longitudinal Survey, carried out after the war by the Institute of Sociology in Hanoi and demographers from the University of

⁴ Christopher E. Goscha, “A ‘Popular’ Side of the Vietnamese Army: General Nguyen Binh and the Early War in the South,” in *The Birth of a Party-State: Vietnam Since 1945*. Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004, p. 340.

⁵ See Sophie Quinn-Judge, *Ho Chi Minh: The Missing Years*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. I discuss this issue on pp. 173-4; 222-228; 236-246.

Washington. The interviewers asked the respondents a variety of questions about their military service. Although this survey does not account for those who died and thus underestimates total numbers of those who served, the figures and breakdowns the author produces reveal some interesting patterns. She is able to show that about three-quarters of young men who came of age during the U.S.-Vietnam War were inducted into the military; of the cohort born between 1940 and 1955, 48.9 % served for seven years or more, while another 30.5 % served for 4-6 years. This shows that not many young northerners escaped the draft in those years. Her most surprising finding is that “sons of better educated fathers were more likely to be inducted than those whose fathers were less educated.” (p. 89) While she speculates about the factors which may have influenced this imbalance, including the prestige and social mobility provided by military service, she does not mention the heavy political pressure on the middle-classes to demonstrate their devotion to the revolution. Another possibility is that the more educated Vietnamese may have been more patriotic and susceptible to calls to defend the fatherland. As she points out, there is a need for information on the social composition of the officer class and other ranks, if we are to learn more about the long-term impact of the war and its effect on social mobility. One thing that we do know is that women had less of a share in the post-war rewards of military service than the men, as only 4% of the women in the VLS survey reported serving.

In conclusion, although this may seem topsy-turvy, I would like to say something about the Introduction by **Edward Miller** and **Tuong Vu**. They underline the need to “Vietnamize” the way we study the war, but also the need to find alternative approaches to the study of the War. (p 5) The variety of methods and topics used by the authors of these research essays underlines the fruitfulness of looking at the Vietnam War from new angles. I learned a lot from all of these essays and several of them forced me to my bookshelves to read more. But is the idea of “alternative approaches” a code for demonstrating the sins of the communists and the Hanoi authorities? That would be a dangerous way to go about future research on the Vietnam Wars, because it leads to the sort of teleological approach that is often criticized in the work of historians from the 1970s, who had a more heroic view of the communists. A more rigorous attitude to communist sources is definitely in order, but this also applies to the documentary record generated by the Diem and Thieu governments.

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Any scholar interested in the Vietnam War owes a great debt of gratitude to **Edward Miller** and **Tuong Vu**, as well as the editors of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*. Miller and Vu have done a remarkable job in organizing a special issue that presents new and provocative research on a variety of subjects. Several essays in the new issue of *JVS*, such as the contributions by **Shawn McHale**, **Francois Guillemot**, and **Peter Hansen**, will certainly be welcome additions to the syllabi of my undergraduate courses on the Vietnam War in the future. **McHale's** essay begins with his discovery in French archives of Viet Minh racial propaganda denouncing the French for turning Vietnamese into black Africans. In addition to explaining why the Viet Minh employed these types of propaganda, McHale provides the reader with a graphic sense of the realities of warfare in the Mekong Delta, as well as a sophisticated theoretical analysis that will be very valuable to many scholars with broader interests than just the Vietnam War.¹ Drawing on a wide range of Vietnamese sources, **Guillemot** details the brutality and suffering of the women who served in the Youth Shock Brigades between 1950-1975. Like previous accounts of women and warfare in Vietnam, Guillemot cannot help but emphasize the tremendous heroism shown by the women who fought and worked on the Ho Chi Minh trail under horrific conditions. However, unlike the standard accounts, Guillemot's essay is also highly critical of the way these women were treated by the DRV. As he notes, "Behind the heroic pages of official propaganda and the apologetic discourse hides a reality that is much more raw, more terrible, and more tragic; it involves the disastrous fate of tens of thousands of conscripted and enthusiastic youth who were broken by the war, both physically and psychologically."² **Peter Hansen's** essay convincingly explodes a myth originally put forward by the North Vietnamese and subsequently adopted by many scholars: that Ed Lansdale and his associates played a decisive role in the massive exodus of Northern Catholics to the South between 1954-55. More importantly, Hansen helps us understand why some Northern Catholics fled while others stayed behind, as well as the role these refugees later played in the development of South Vietnam under Ngo Dinh Diem.³

One of the best features of all of the research essays in the special issue of *JVS* is what they share in common. None of the authors spends any time at all demonstrating how their research contributes to old and tired debates between orthodox and revisionist accounts of the Vietnam War. One will also not find any arguments in these essays about how their "Vietnam-centric" approach is inherently preferable or superior to either "Americanist" or "international" approaches to the Vietnam War.⁴ Indeed, all of the authors largely avoid any discussion of how their research adds anything specifically relevant to the issues that

¹ Shawn McHale, "Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 3 (October 2009), pp.98-138.

² Francois Guillemot, "Death and Suffering at First Hand: Youth Shock Brigades during the Vietnam War (1950-1975)," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 3 (October 2009), p.45.

³ Peter Hansen, "Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-59," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 3 (October 2009), pp.173-211. As Hansen notes, Lansdale himself was much more skeptical about the impact of his efforts in encouraging the southern migration.

⁴ I employ these labels with great reluctance.

Miller and **Vu** list in their introductory essay as “some of the oldest and most persistent questions about the war.” In my view, the absence of these types of claims and arguments is refreshing and welcome. The intellectual vitality of any approach to the Vietnam War can and should only be assessed by the books and articles that scholars working in that tradition produce, rather than by general arguments about the weaknesses of alternative approaches. However, there can be little doubt that the overall quality of the essays in the special issue of *JVS* richly illustrates Miller and Vu’s claim that “Vietnam War studies today is as intellectually vital and as vibrant as it has ever been.”⁵

Unfortunately, **Miller** and **Vu’s** introductory essay does engage many of the issues that the contributors wisely chose to avoid. In their view, the field of Vietnam War studies is composed of three very distinct groups of historians. “Once upon a time,” they suggest, the Vietnam War was studied by Americanists who were only concerned with the American dimensions of the war. The authors do acknowledge that some of this research from the 1970’s and 1980’s was “pathbreaking,” as well as the fact that some scholars “rightly” continue to “understand the Vietnam War as an episode in U.S. history.”⁶ However, beginning in the 1990’s, they argue that dissatisfaction with the “old” American-centric research on the Vietnam War led to the rise of scholarship focused on both the international and Vietnamese dimensions of the war. According to Miller and Vu, these two trends “are not contradictory or otherwise incompatible with each other.” No such olive branch is extended to Americanists and, judging by the tone of the rest of the essay, it seems fairly obvious that the authors do indeed see a real conflict between Americanists, international historians, and scholars pursuing the “*Vietnamization*” of Vietnam War studies. As an Americanist who has recently published an article in the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, I am not very sympathetic with the relentless drawing of lines between scholars interested in different facets of the Vietnam War.⁷

One obvious question raised by **Miller** and **Vu’s** essay is why they don’t see any contradiction or incompatibility between the work of international historians and those interested in the Vietnamese dimensions of the war. Even if we accept their fundamental criticism that American-centric accounts tend to marginalize the role of Vietnamese actors, which I do accept, it would seem that the same charge applies with equal force to many of the very best contributions of international history. For example, deservedly praised books such as Mark Lawrence’s *Assuming the Burden* may enrich our understanding of the complicated diplomacy between America, France, and Great Britain in the late 1940’s but not even the author would claim that his research necessarily helps us to better understand Vietnamese perspectives on the conflict during this period. Of course, one could also make

⁵ Edward Miller and Tuong Vu, “The Vietnamese War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 3 (October 2009), p.5.

⁶ The contrast in how Miller and Vu assess the scholarship of these three groups is clear from their footnote references. There are no specific references to any “pathbreaking” work from the 1970’s and the 1980’s or references to any specific “Americanist” scholarship apart from those concerned with the orthodox-revisionist debate or those critical of recent Vietnamese based accounts of the Diem era. In contrast, the citations to the research of international historians and historians of Vietnam are very specific and detailed.

⁷ See James McAllister, “What Can One Man Do? Nguyen Duc Thang and the Limits of Reform in South Vietnam,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 2 (2009), pp.117-153.

a similar claim about earlier “Americanist” books such as Lloyd Gardner’s *Approaching Vietnam* or Andrew Rotter’s *The Path to Vietnam*.⁸ However, since none of these authors specifically set out to understand Vietnamese perspectives in the late 1940’s, I do not fault them in the least for paying little attention to these questions. But it is still far from obvious why Miller and Vu believe that international history is compatible with the Vietnamization trend when international historians are presumably guilty of exactly the same sin of marginalizing Vietnamese voices and Vietnamese actors.

Of course, it is true that there have been heated debates in recent years between some Americanists, such as Seth Jacobs and James Carter, and proponents of Vietnamization, such as Edward Miller and Matthew Masur.⁹ But it is important to note that this current argument over the Diem era cannot be attributed to the fact that one side is relying on Vietnamese sources while the other side is relying on American sources. Let me acknowledge at the start that I wholeheartedly endorse and welcome the contributions made by Miller, Philip Catton, Jessica Chapman and Matthew Masur others in their efforts to reassess the Diem era. I vehemently disagree in particular with Jacobs’s argument that Diem was largely a puppet of the United States and that a close attention to and use of South Vietnamese sources constitutes a “trap” because “Washington ultimately held the purse strings and the whip hand.”¹⁰ As John Foster Dulles argued in May 1955, “Diem is not person to whom one can dictate. U.S. cannot undertake to force upon him government or policies which he does not like. We will do best we can. He has mind and will of his own and fact that he has survived proves he has virtues not easily replaced. Any man who would blindly accept U.S. bidding would not be worth supporting. We must reconcile ourselves to fact that Diem may be anti-French and may later become anti-American....These things are distasteful to the U.S. but they must be put up with.”¹¹ One could hardly ask for a better prediction of the subsequent course of American relations with Diem’s regime. In my view, neither the *FRUS* volumes nor other American archival sources provide much support to the idea that Americans were or wanted to be “the puppet masters” of South Vietnam, let alone that they had any great success when they tried to impose their visions on Diem. Before the coup of 1963, the American “whip hand” was rarely employed and it was even

⁸ See Mark Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p.293. The same argument could be made about Kathryn Statler’s *Replacing France: The Origins of American Intervention in Vietnam* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007). Since both Gardner and Rotter make effective use of British archival sources it may not be accurate to describe either of them as Americanists. See Lloyd Gardner, *Approaching Vietnam: From World War II through Dienbienphu* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988); and Andrew Rotter, *The Path to Vietnam: Origins of the American Commitment to Southeast Asia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987).

⁹ The fundamental issues at stake in this debate can be found in the exchange between Edward Miller and Seth Jacobs in the H-Diplo Roundtable Review of *America’s Miracle Man in South Asia*, June 12, 2007 and James Carter’s critique of Matthew Masur’s recent article in *Diplomatic History*.

¹⁰ Jacobs rejects the idea that he portrays Diem as a “puppet” but his argument is not convincing. See “Authors Response,” H-Diplo Roundtable, June 12, 2007, p.26. It is worth noting that Statler’s argument in *Replacing France* shares many features with those put forward by Jacobs and Carter. In her view, Americans were intent on “ruling South Vietnam” and determined to use Diem as “the front man for their efforts.” See Statler, *Replacing France*, pp.1, 249-250, 282.

¹¹ Telegram From the Ambassador in France (Dillon) to the Department of State, May 11, 1955, *FRUS*, p.397 (also see p.401).

more rarely successful. In short, an Americanist assessment of the Diem era can be entirely compatible with the main conclusions about the era put forward on the basis of Vietnamese sources.

None of the above is meant to imply that Americanist accounts of the Vietnam War do not suffer from many of the problems noted by Miller and Vu. Almost twenty years ago, George Herring also pointed out how “in much of the writing on the war, the South Vietnamese are conspicuous by their absence, and virtually nothing has been done on their dealings with the United States.”¹² One of the things that is most striking to me about Miller and Vu’s references to the most recent literature is the great imbalance between the substantial amount of scholarship concerning North Vietnam and the seemingly complete absence of scholarship about South Vietnam after the removal of Diem. I have no idea whether this imbalance can be explained by a lack of scholarly interest in the subsequent political or economic development of South Vietnam post-Diem or, more likely, an absence of documentary material. In any event, as the essay by David Biggs demonstrates, there is no inherent reason why Americanists cannot contribute to our knowledge of both local events in South Vietnam, such as the course of nation-building in An Giang Province, or the relationship between American officials and important South Vietnamese actors after the end of the Diem era.¹³ In conclusion, as a wise scholar noted not too long ago, there is no one correct way to study the Vietnam War and “no reason that such ‘American centric’ research agendas cannot contribute to the broader internationalization of the study of the war, provided that the scholars who pursue such agendas are willing to seek out the intersections between their work and that of their counterparts working in other languages and archives.”¹⁴

¹² George Herring, “‘Peoples Quite Apart’: Americans, South Vietnamese, and the War in Vietnam,” *Diplomatic History*, 14 (1990), pp.1-23.

¹³ David Biggs, “Americans in An Giang: Nation Building and the Particularities of Place in the Mekong Delta,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.4, Issue 3, pp.139-172. Of course, I am not suggesting that Biggs is an Americanist. But his article is based almost exclusively on reports written by American provincial advisors, documents that can be accessed at the National Archives, and which engages familiar theoretical debates over modernization.

¹⁴ Edward Miller, H-Diplo *America’s Miracle Mani in Vietnam* Roundtable, p.15.

A Long Time in Coming: A Review of the Journal of Vietnamese Studies Special Issue on the Vietnam War

The special issue of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies (JVS)* dedicated to showcasing new scholarship on what is commonly referred to as the Vietnam War coincides with the anniversary of the start of the Vietnamese conflict. Fifty years ago, the Vietnam Workers' Party (VWP) in Hanoi gave the green light to armed struggle taking place in South Vietnam, yet many of the Vietnamese perspectives on the war from both sides of the seventeenth parallel remain unknown. *JVS* seeks to shed insight into these perspectives by presenting the new wave of studies that uses Vietnamese-language sources to understand that oft-analyzed period. Although the intervening decades have witnessed the proliferation of excellent works on the American perspective, area studies concentrate on other topics in Vietnamese history rather than focusing on this tragic period. The five articles in this special issue reverse this trend and in doing so not only lend greater historical agency to Vietnamese actors, but also overturn much of the received wisdom inherited from predominately U.S.-centric studies. Indeed, this special issue has been a long time in coming.

All five essays are generally "bottom-up" in their multidisciplinary approaches, yet at the helm of this special issue are two scholars who concentrate on high politics and international history. Nonetheless, **Tuong Vu** and **Edward Miller** are perfect for the job; they are at the vanguard of what they term, with the admitted "requisite amount of historical irony," the "Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies." Whereas Vu has written extensively on the early Cold War from the elusive perspective of North Vietnamese leaders, Miller has published widely on the South with his pioneering work on the Ngo Dinh Diem administration. Their "big-picture" expertise allows them to place these articles, which address not only the well-trodden military and political dimension of the war, but also the less-explored ideological, cultural, and social dimensions of the conflict, within the larger field of Vietnam War studies. As a result, Vu and Miller's special issue of *JVS* is poised to make a great splash in a field dominated by Americanists.

Tracing the existent U.S. centric historiography as it moved from orthodoxy to revisionism, the former steeped in anti-war sentiment and the latter intent on salvaging American intervention, Vu and Miller claim that not only have these academic throwdowns consumed scholars who belong to the war generation, but they also threaten to mire later generations in endless squabbles. The articles in this special issue successfully rise above the polemical debates by focusing on Vietnamese actors using Vietnamese sources. However, Vu and Miller correctly point out that the articles should not be known for emphasizing Vietnamese agency only; they also weigh in on the contentious issues that lie at the center of the debate between orthodox and revisionist historians. The result is perhaps a move toward a post-revisionist interpretation, one that was spearheaded on the American side by George Herring, which shifts the black-and-white nature of the debates (now with my own requisite amount of racial irony) to Technicolor.

Reading **Francois Guillemot's** "Death and Suffering at First Hand: Youth Shock Brigades during the Vietnam War (1950-1975), I could not help but scribble in the margins: "war is hell, women's war is a worse hell, and women's people's war is the worst hell." Using Vietnamese and French secondary sources, Party records, as well as Vietnamese novels and poetry written by former *Thanh Nien Xung Phong* (Youth Shock Brigade) members, Guillemot analyzes the contribution of these women who were always the "first to arrive and the last to leave" on the battlefield. His work builds on the studies of Karen Turner and Sandra Taylor who collected oral testimonies of North Vietnamese women who served in the war, as well as Turner's work that revisited the plight of these forgotten veterans as well as heroic mothers, sisters, and daughters, who have been forgotten by the current regime.¹ Guillemot's presents a compelling argument that in order to understand the war for national reunification, it is important to understand how women's bodies were torn asunder. He amasses diverse sources to underscore his argument and writes in such an evocative manner that it is hard for the reader not to vicariously experience the pain that these Shock Troops suffered. By recounting the violence done to women's bodies and minds during and after their service, Guillemot does justice to their sacrifice in Vietnam's postcolonial struggles that has largely been forgotten not only by their government but also by history. Contrary to scholars who continue to present the struggle for national liberation in nothing less than glowing terms, Guillemot asserts that the communist government exploited the masses as much as they claimed to be fighting for them, and that not all who served came home to a hero's welcome.

Bussawaran Teerawichitchainan's article, "Trends in Military Service in Northern Vietnam, 1950-1995: A Sociodemographic Approach" also focuses on the North Vietnamese war effort, but this time on men and military service in the People's Army of Vietnam (VPA). The VPA, as an institution during the three wars for Indochina, for all intents and purposes remains a mystery (we still do not know how many men were mobilized during the war against the United States). As a result, and despite the best efforts of scholars such as David Marr, William Turley, and Douglas Pike, it is often misconstrued as well as mythologized. Utilizing the Vietnam Longitudinal Studies (VLS), Teerawichitchainan adopts a sociodemographic approach to analyze this rich data set in order to render transparent the VPA military selection process from 1950-1995. The VLS is one of the few social surveys that contain invaluable data on surviving Vietnamese veterans from the Red River Delta regarding their military service, including biographical details of the respondents, the timing of their induction, and the length of time they spent in the armed forces. Although Teerawichitchainan's analysis extends to all three wars in modern Vietnamese history, it is her conclusions concerning social class bias in military service for what she calls the "Vietnamese War Cohort" (or as I like to refer to as the "lost generation" since not only did more people die during this war, but we know so little about them) that is the most provocative. She shows that although the official history claims that "anti-American struggle for reunification and national salvation" produced mass volunteerism

¹ Sandra C. Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003) and Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women Must fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).

and widespread popular patriotism, the “people’s army” of North Vietnam consisted of men who perhaps did not join out of sheer revolutionary spirit and that military service was not shared equally by all. Rather, men from higher socioeconomic backgrounds bore the greater burden of fighting during the war. Following the organizational rectification campaign of the mid-1950s that sought to elevate the poorest elements of society to positions of leadership within the Party, those of higher socioeconomic status who were better educated under the French were considered as originating from “bad” class backgrounds and most likely felt compelled to serve in the VPA. Teerawichitchainan’s findings, then, problematize the pervasive portrayal of the North Vietnamese “masses” wholeheartedly volunteering and supporting the revolution.

Another misunderstood and much-maligned group includes Vietnamese Catholics who have been viewed as unpatriotic at best and traitors at worst in modern Vietnamese history. A handful of scholars have begun to correct this notion, particularly for the French colonial period, but no one has attempted to do so for the war era. **Peter Hansen’s** “*Bắc Đì Cú: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959*” shows that it is no longer correct to treat Vietnamese Catholics as a monolithic group that obeyed orders from a foreign power or betrayed nationalist causes during the period of resettlement following the Geneva Accords. Hansen disabuses Vietnam War scholars of two widely-held assumptions that speak to this misperception: first, the United States orchestrated the movement of approximately 800,000 Catholics to the South, and second, the Ngo Dinh Diem administration controlled every aspect of resettlement of these northern Catholics from that start. Using first-hand interviews of the *Bac di cu* (‘54 northern émigrés to the south) and archival materials from Ho Chi Minh City on the Diem administration, as well as studies in Vietnamese, French, and English on the “Great Transmigration,” Hansen reveals that the decisions to stay or to go were extremely complex and resists attempts at homogenization. Moreover, they were generally more rational and autonomous than has been portrayed by contemporaries or historians. Some Vietnamese Catholics chose to flee for religious reasons, others fled due to the dire economic situation in the North; some opted to leave despite exhortations of their clergy to stay; others forced their clergy to follow the flock to the South. Moreover, Hansen dispels the received wisdom that the Diem administration settled Catholics in particular locales in order to bolster his power at the outset of resettlement. Instead, Vietnamese Catholics chose where they would make their new lives in the South, particularly during the first two stages of resettlement, and when greater government supervision occurred, particularly before late 1955, there was not a grand vision to Diem’s resettlement policies. By exploring the multifaceted ways in which individuals made decisions in this period of flux, Hansen shows that Vietnamese Catholics were active agents in their departure from the North, as well as their resettlement in the South, laying to rest the notion that this much-maligned group were passive pawns who followed an alien power in a religious zero-sum game.

The penultimate article entitled, “Understanding the Fanatic Mind? The Viet Minh and Race Hatred in the First Indochina War (1945-1954), is by a leading scholar in Vietnamese Studies who has a knack for toppling reigning paradigms in modern Vietnamese history. **Shawn McHale** turns his critical gaze, previously focused on the French colonial era, to the period of decolonization and produces an article that is both empirically rich and

theoretically sophisticated. McHale opens his article with his bafflement at discovering pieces of Viet Minh propaganda spread though the Mekong Delta that spoke of French turpitude in “baking” Vietnamese men until they turned black, and of trench coat-sporting cannibalistic Moroccan soldiers “eating” Vietnamese children. In his quest to understand why the Viet Minh chose such racialized tropes and imagery in a war against French recolonization, McHale systematically goes through the relevant historiography and literature and various models and approaches and finds them all lacking. Instead, he makes a convincing argument that the answers lie in the local and the cultural. Taking us to the peripheral south of the Mekong Delta in the post-war era, McHale reveals a region that had suffered a greater degree of violence given the multitudes of groups jockeying for power including not only the French and the Viet Minh, but also between various sects and militias as well as inter-ethnic violence between Vietnamese and Khmer. In what McHale describes as an environment of “radical social uncertainty” and the “breakdown of trust structures,” the scene was set for the Viet Minh to circulate racialized imagery of savage violence. However, the Viet Minh’s decision to use cannibalism and race transformation in its propaganda was not arbitrary, it reflected the local beliefs and fears existent in the Delta. In the end, McHale argues that the prevalence of such propaganda reveals that the Viet Minh, far from enjoying full-fledged support from the inhabitants of the Mekong Delta, resorted to “fearmongering to push these peasants to their side.” (123)

The final article in this special issue by **David Biggs** entitled, “Americans in An Giang: Nation Building and the Particularities of Place in the Mekong Delta, 1966-1973,” echoes McHale’s call to scholars that the failure to understand the local context breeds faulty conclusions. Forging through well-traversed territory in the American history of the Vietnam War, namely the project of nation building in South Vietnam, Biggs is able to uncover new ground by focusing on the specific context of An Giang Province. Equipped not only with a thorough grounding in Vietnamese history, politics, society, and culture as an area studies specialist, Biggs also understands the literal terrain of what he is writing about as an environmental historian of the modern period whose research requires him to both frequent the archives as well as to go into the field. Perspective is everything. Most scholars who study this aspect of Vietnam War history tend to evaluate the successes or failures of U.S.-sponsored nation building from the American viewpoint. They tend to argue that South Vietnam was a U.S. construct or an American invention and thus commit the mistake of portraying nation building “simply as a process of inscribing American designs on a blank literary slate.” (144) Since these scholars opt not to take into account the effect of nation building on the ground, they fail to see the scores of Vietnamese actors who shaped these processes in profound ways. Only by understanding the particularities of An Giang Province (which is possible through consulting *both* American and Vietnamese materials) – the anomalously peaceful nature of the province due to the strength of Hoa Hao Buddhists in the area (at least a decade after the heightened violence referred to McHale’s article), the complex relationship between An Giang and Saigon, the important role played by Commander Nguyen Duc Thang, and even the savvy business-sense of individual farmers – and how those particularities interacted with U.S. programs can the nation building process be understood.

Fifty years after the start of the Vietnam War, we are now starting to understand the diversity of Vietnamese perspectives. And what we now know must change how we write about that war. The era of generalizing about “the Vietnamese” (whether it is Communist or non-Communist, man or woman, North or South, leader or peasant, urbanite or villager, Catholic or Buddhist, and all of the shades of gray in between) seems to be coming to an end. Taken as a whole, the *JVS* special issue has shown us that it is no longer tenable to generalize about issues ranging from the extent of popular support for the Communist war effort to the nature of the South Vietnamese state without consulting the requisite Vietnamese-language sources and the relevant area studies literature. The articles in this volume show us that these grand conclusions, which have so often been the products of top-down perspectives based solely on English-language resources with an American bias, must take into account the local within Vietnam in all of its multilayered heterogeneity.

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One of the central questions raised by **Tuong Vu** and **Ed Miller's** introductory essay is whether the "Vietnamization of Vietnam Studies" is actually new. The trend departs from the predominantly American-centered scholarship in its attention to Vietnamese aspects of the war, but, in other ways, it seems largely based on old concepts and old scholarship. Vu and Miller's selection of the term "Vietnamization" emphasizes the relationship of the new trend to American diplomatic history, but the Vietnamization of scholarly inquiry also needs to be placed within the field of Vietnam studies to assess its newness and innovation. Since the mid 1960s, Vietnam studies have focused on a singular, monolithic Vietnam, but these five essays display a multiplicity of topics that create a richer account of the war. This review article considers how the essays respond to the dominant arguments in Vietnam studies. In addition, it analyzes the extent to which the topic of inquiry has been shifted to become "Vietnamized" and how the shift in each essay contributes to our understanding of the country and the war.

At first glance, scholarly Vietnamization appears simply to apply the existing concept of Eurocentrism to a specific field of study. For the last half century or so, scholars have criticized the dominance of the West in academic literature, and students researching non-western societies have increasingly placed indigenous actors at the center of their studies. In the case of scholarly Vietnamization, if the United States is understood to occupy the same role as Europe in Eurocentrism, then it would seem that the trend is merely the latest and most egregiously belated application of the same concept. Indeed, a specifically Southeast Asian critique of Eurocentrism was enunciated almost five decades ago by John Smail. In response to critiques that colonial Southeast Asian history was too Eurocentric, Smail proposed an "autonomous history" of the region that focused on the underlying cultural pattern and social structure, where Southeast Asians would be the main characters who accepted or rejected aspects of colonial culture. Smail's article on the possibility of an Asia-centered history became a seminal piece in the field.¹ Then why has it taken so long for Vietnam War studies to become Vietnamized if the problem of Eurocentrism and the model of autonomous history have been discussed for decades?

Placing Vietnamization within Vietnam studies makes it seem even more old fashioned. In an earlier issue of the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, **Tuong Vu** surveyed American scholarship on Vietnam and divided the field into three periods: the initial period in the late 1950s to early 1960s; the second period from the mid 1960s through the 1970s; and the third period from the mid 1980s to the present.² According to Vu, it was during the second period that Vietnam studies underwent its first period of growth. In the mid 1960s, scholars began to focus on internal Vietnamese politics rather than foreign relations and began to use Vietnamese-language sources rather than relying exclusively on French and

¹ John Smail, "On the Possibility of an Autonomous History of Southeast Asia," *Journal of Southeast Asian History* 2, no. 2 (July 1961): 72-102.

² Tuong Vu, "Vietnamese Political Studies and Debates on Vietnamese Nationalism," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 2, no 2 (summer 2007): 175-230.

American ones.³ This would suggest that the scholars of the second period have already written an autonomous history of Vietnam and that scholarly Vietnamization is merely a new name for an old movement.

But in other ways, the trend departs from earlier Vietnam studies. The Vietnam-centered scholarship of the mid 1960s and 1970s was often synonymous with Hanoi-centered history, as Vu found in his state of the field essay. In terms of both sources and focus, researchers privileged the communist narrative of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) over other possible interpretations. Even the inclusion of Vietnamese-language sources was highly partisan: sources from the DRV were often uncritically accepted while sources from the American government or the U.S.-backed Republic of Vietnam (RVN) were rejected.⁴ So imbalanced was the selection that American scholarship on Vietnam sometimes bore striking resemblance to the DRV's official historiography, and both Vietnamese and American scholars portrayed the conflict as one between a powerful, coercive United States and a small but virtuous DRV, or alternatively, the southern insurgency. Even when focused on topics other than the Vietnam War, these works cast the DRV as the rightful inheritor of timeless Vietnamese nationalism. They found the dominant theme of Vietnamese history to be patterns of resistance against foreign aggression, of which the DRV's war against the U.S. was only the most recent manifestation.⁵ Though Vietnam-centered, the Vietnam chosen and created by Vietnam studies was singular and monolithic. Scholars excluded Vietnamese non-communists from discussion and dismissed the RVN as an inauthentic puppet state. Furthermore, studies of the communist camp homogenized differences within DRV society and assumed a northern population that was unanimously patriotic and supportive of state leadership. The result was scholarship that centered exclusively on the Hanoi political elite.⁶ In turn, Hanoi-centered studies informed the work of American diplomatic historians unable to conduct research in Vietnamese-language sources. Thus, many arguments originating in Hanoi were imported through Vietnam studies and combined with American-centered historiography; together, they produced a binary vision of a war fought solely between Hanoi and Washington.

Responding to American-centered and Hanoi-centered scholarship, Vietnamization shifts the focus towards indigenous historical actors while diversifying the subjects of inquiry. Unlike earlier students of Vietnam, scholars of the 1990s willingly interrogated communist sources, analyzed the internal politics and cultural world of the RVN, and suggested alternative paradigms for understanding the war.⁷ The five essays featured here present

³ Vu, 189, 193.

⁴ Vu, 193-194.

⁵ Vu, 194-195. For examples of overreliance on DRV sources, see George Kahin and John Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (New York: Dial Press, 1967); David Marr, *Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885-1925* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Gareth Porter, *The Myth of Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered* (Ithaca, NY: International Relations of East Asia Project, 1972).

⁶ Vu, 189-199 passim.

⁷ Besides the essays presented here, see also Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Philip Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2002); Christoph Giebel, *Imagined Ancestries of Vietnamese Communism: Ton Duc Thang and the Politics of History and Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004); Edward Miller, "Vision, Power and Agency: The Ascent of Ngo Dinh

diverse topics of inquiry. They span communist and non-communist Vietnamese states, analyze different elements within Vietnamese society, and explore local perspectives to question the reigning interpretations. Together, they pose the question: Which Vietnam should be at the center of inquiry?⁸

The first two articles focus on the DRV but challenge communist Vietnam's claims to patriotic unity through their study of military servicemen and women. **Francois Guillemot's** study of Youth Shock Brigades (Thanh Niên Xung Phong, TNXP) explores the physical and psychological suffering endured by young female recruits during and after the war. The TNXP program was created and executed for revolutionary purposes without consideration of human cost; after the war, recognition was belated, and official depictions of the war ignored the suffering of the recruits. Utilizing Vietnamese sources that range from state propaganda and official historiography to contemporary dissent literature, Guillemot contrasts state-endorsed images of smiling, heroic girls with accounts of hard labor, disease, hunger, psychological disorders, and continual physical discomfort. As women, the recruits also suffered women's health problems, sexual abuse, and postwar social ostracism. In this portrait, the DRV is far from the noble state admired by the previous generation of Vietnam scholars; instead, it is an exploitative system that used nationalist ideology to manipulate its young people into making inordinate sacrifices only to discard them when their youth and health were spent.

While many earlier scholars admired the DRV's total mobilization and ultimate victory, Guillemot asks whether the human cost was justified. Guillemot's focus on the TNXP rank and file enables him to probe at the ethical nature of Hanoi's decision. The state recruited brigade members from a particularly vulnerable group in Vietnamese society, the young and female, and subjected them to extreme physical and psychological hardship. In Guillemot's words, state-led patriotism was a "means of extracting human labor under extreme conditions, making it hard to determine how much of their actions arose from heroism and how much they were simply part of the quest to survive" (45). Guillemot's ethical analysis is reinforced by his gender critique. He argues that the neglect of the recruits' specific cultural and physical needs as women amounted to a form of gender-based punishment: the management of the war was masculine, and the benefits of victory went to men alone. During the war, men employed unrealistically cheerful images of brigade members to recruit naïve girls into service and soften the wartime stress for male servicemen; today, they continue to use those images to justify a masculine war for which women fought and suffered.

Diem, 1945-54," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35, no. 3 (Oct 2004): 433-458; Jessica Chapman, "Staging Democracy: South Vietnam's 1955 Referendum to Depose Bao Dai," *Diplomatic History* 30, no. 4 (Sep 2006): 671-703.

⁸ One area rarely covered by the featured essays and the new trend as a whole is the southern insurgency, especially the cultural and social life under the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam. David Elliot's *The Vietnamese War* studies the southern insurgency, but his scholarship is more an extension of earlier research conducted during the war than representative of the new trend. See David Elliot, *The Vietnamese War: Revolution and Social Change in the Mekong Delta, 1930-1975* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2002).

Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan's article also studies communist military service, but she focuses on men. Using a sociodemographic approach, Teerawichitchainan addresses basic empirical questions about the Vietnam People's Army (VPA) from the First Indochina War through the 1990s. Previous scholars have been unable to precisely determine the level of military service in northern Vietnam due to unavailable data, and her article draws on a longitudinal social survey conducted in the mid 1990s in the Red River delta. She finds that about three quarters of military age men were inducted during the Vietnam War. In contrast to before and after the war, men with higher socioeconomic status were twice as likely to serve than lower class men. From its inception through the present, Catholic men were half as likely to join the military as their non-Catholic counterparts.

Unlike Guillemot, Teerawichitchainan does not explicitly challenge the historical interpretations of the DRV or DRV-friendly scholarship, but, as Vu and Miller point out, her findings undermine claims about universal patriotism and wartime unity if higher class men had reasons to join the military other than nationalist fervor and Catholics were less likely to serve than their non-believing countrymen. In fact, she is so careful with her data that she rarely wanders from the statistics to discuss their wider implications. Although she suggests multiple possibilities for the positive selectivity for higher class men and negative selectivity for Catholics, she includes no substantial discussion of northern society, the various military organizations in the north during the First Indochina War, communist policies based on class distinction, or the relationship between communists and Catholics during the First and Second Indochina wars. Even a brief discussion of such issues would strengthen her analysis on the social impact of military service.

Another reason why these issues are important is that they speak to the limitations of her findings. For example, Teerawichitchainan entertains two explanations for the negative selectivity of Catholics in the VPA: either they were better at avoiding induction or the regime mistrusted them because they had relatives who migrated south in 1954. But there are a number of other factors that might explain low induction rates. First, Catholics could have served in military organizations other than the VPA during the First Indochina War. Prior to 1954, there were many armed forces that inducted young men, including non-communist nationalist forces, Catholic defense militias, and the Vietnamese National Army that fought for the French-supported Associated State of Vietnam. In fact, her data set is based on three provinces, Hà Nam, Nam Định, and Ninh Bình, an area home to the north's largest concentration of Catholics. During the First Indochina War, these Catholic areas were often under non-communist control and were known to be safe havens for anticommunist nationalists fleeing Việt Minh forces.⁹ Therefore, some young men from the region may have fought in other military organizations and may not be accounted for in her data set. It is unclear whether the survey included non-VPA service, if interviewees felt safe admitting to anticommunist military service, or whether non-VPA veterans migrated south in 1954 to escape possible Việt Minh punishment. In fact, her study is devoted exclusively to the VPA rather than northern military service as a whole, and the actual percentage of young men that experienced military service prior to 1954 may have been higher than her figures suggest. Second, given the similar location of the three provinces, it is unclear

⁹ Bui Diem with David Chanoff, *In the Jaws of History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 50-59.

whether her findings are representative of the rest of northern Vietnam. Since this area was especially suspect in communist eyes, unfavorable class or religious background may have been more significant to recruitment than elsewhere in the north. Perhaps a discussion of the process of recruitment and induction could have clarified these issues.

In many ways, Guillemot's and Teerawichitchainan's articles are complementary. While Guillemot's thick description of daily life uses fictional accounts and memoirs about female military service, Teerawichitchainan provides mostly empirical data on regular male soldiers. Whether Guillemot could have presented more statistical data is unclear, but it is somewhat disappointing that Teerawichitchainan does not incorporate the considerable body of war memoirs and fiction to humanize the numbers. Teerawichitchainan's quantitative examination emphasizes breadth; it charts the growth of an organization and its impact on successive generations of society. In contrast, Guillemot tries to create a composite picture of how an individual soldier might have experienced the hardships of service. Absent from his account is the percentage of girls that left civilian life to join the TNXP, and even a limited discussion of the TNXP's demographic impact would help the reader better appreciate its statistical and symbolic significance after the war. Given the provincial variation of recruitment efforts, the demographic impact of the returning girls must have had an uneven effect on northern society.

Reading the articles together also opens up new lines of inquiry. The region from which Teerawichitchainan's data set was drawn also contributed a disproportionate number of shock brigade recruits.¹⁰ One wonders if religious affiliation was significant in female as well as male induction or if the demographic impact of the VPA varied regionally as much as that of the TNXP. In communities that provided both young men and women, how did gender influence the treatment of returning veterans? Did some communities experience labor shortages and postwar social reintegration differently than others due to the different demographic impact of the two military organizations? These issues promise to further problematize monolithic portrayals of the DRV and address Guillemot's concern about who fought and for whom the war was fought.

Besides more trenchant analyses of the DRV, the Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies has also increased interest in the RVN. Like newer studies of the DRV, the RVN scholarship is a reaction to American-centered and Hanoi-centered scholarship but marks a more radical departure because it moves beyond the DRV to focus on an alternative Vietnam. The RVN has long been marginalized by both bodies of work, and ties between the U.S. and its ally were assumed to be a simplistic patron-client relationship. Older scholarship dismissed the southern regime as an insufficiently nationalist rival to the DRV, and it remains anathema in state-sanctioned historiography. Contrary to the dominant scholarship in which Americans are the prime movers, the essays by **David Biggs** and **Peter Hansen** aim to incorporate Vietnamese perspectives and return agency to Vietnamese actors.

¹⁰ Guillemot lists Nam Hà Province as one of the provinces that contributed a high number of TNXP recruits. Nam Hà Province was a wartime administrative unit that was later split into Hà Nam and NamĐịnh Provinces, two of the three provinces that provided Teerawichitchainan's data (Guillemot 26; Teerawichitchainan 67).

Biggs's article discusses American modernization projects in An Giang Province and the local conditions and actors that the projects encountered. American advisers, technicians, and engineers viewed the province as a laboratory to test out modernization theories, but bureaucracy, entrepreneurial farmers, and social and religious tensions impeded American plans. Biggs argues that writing a history of nation building within a Vietnamese historical framework will “necessarily focus on particular places and on the specific social and environmental conditions that shaped the source and outcome of the nation building projects undertaken there,” but what Biggs means by local and the benefit of conducting a local study remains unclear (141). Does “local” signify a province like An Giang, a region like the Mekong Delta, or simply Vietnamese conditions rather than the minds of American modernization theorists? After all, one would expect that bureaucracy, entrepreneurial individuals, and tensions between landowners and tenant farmers to be found throughout the delta rather than being unique to An Giang. A local or provincial focus in itself does not carry any theoretical weight, and missing from the article is any conceptual justification as to why some units of analysis are more suitable than others for writing a Vietnamese history of American nation building.

Although Biggs certainly proves that the residents of An Giang were active agents who often appropriated external aid for their own purposes, his exploration of modernization projects is not actually Vietnam-centered for a number of reasons. First, the core discussion of American projects is primarily about Americans rather than Vietnamese. In fact, the study follows a pattern often characteristic of colonial European scholarship, in which indigenous actors are significant only insofar as they modify western designs.¹¹ That Biggs' evidence for Vietnamese agency comes primarily from the records of Province Advisory Team 69 rather than Vietnamese sources amply demonstrates the importance of local actors, and it is hoped that research in Vietnamese archives will yield even more such evidence. Second, more historical contextualization is needed if American modernization projects are to be situated into a Vietnamese framework. Although the account of An Giang's local history is extended, the discussion of Saigon's nation building efforts in the decade prior to American ones is unfortunately brief. How did rural schemes such as Ngô Đình Diêm's land reform, the agricultural credit program, refugee resettlement, and agrovilles affect An Giang? Surely, the previous decade's experience with Saigon's nation building must have affected the way local Vietnamese perceived the new rural programs. One wonders if American modernization projects ever employed Vietnamese planners, technocrats, and engineers who had been involved in Saigon's projects, or if Vietnamese modernizers ever competed against the Americans and promoted alternative ideas and projects to the local population. Lastly, it is unclear whether studying foreign modernization projects is actually conducive to writing a Vietnam-centered history. If modernization programs had a “powerful indirect effect on agricultural development and the buildup of urban areas,” as Biggs concludes, perhaps an An Giang-centered account of

¹¹ Biggs' discussion of the “labyrinth” of An Giang is reminiscent of the concept of the “colonial laboratory,” in which the colonies are considered testing ground for ideas generated in the metropole (Biggs 159). For example, see Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

modernization projects would not be about modernization at all but instead would read like a history of agricultural practices, urban development, and the transformation of rural infrastructure (168).

Like Biggs' article, **Peter Hansen's** study of northern Catholics who migrated south in 1954 emphasizes Vietnamese agency over American orchestration. He refutes the claim that American psychological warfare triggered the migration, an assertion expounded by DRV propaganda, American scholars, and sympathetic wartime journalists alike. Instead, clerical leadership was the most critical factor in the migrants' decision to leave. Although the dominant American scholarship assumes that Saigon manipulated refugee resettlement for its own purposes, Hansen demonstrates that the northerners themselves were the main agents in resettlement and that Saigon only became involved in the later stages. Particularly impressive is the variety of Vietnamese sources at his command, including church histories, oral interviews in northern and southern Vietnam, RVN government documents, and DRV propaganda material. Hansen's analysis of northern Vietnamese Catholic culture is contextualized by a history of their relations with Vietnamese non-Catholics, the French, and the Việt Minh. His attention to cultural and historical specificity combined with individual narratives offers a sympathetic yet critical portrait of a long misunderstood minority. Given the ambiguous position of Catholics within Vietnamese society, Hansen's account is to be commended for its academic rigor as well as its delicate handling of so sensitive a subject.

Although not a local history like Biggs' article, Hansen's study is far more Vietnam-centered and spatially rooted. Hansen's piece seamlessly follows the historical trajectory of Catholic refugees from their northern origins through migration to southern resettlement. In contrast, Biggs' account is bifurcated: it begins with a local perspective of An Giang's history but switches halfway to the gaze of the frustrated American advisor. The rupture structurally replicates the motif of a passive landscape awaiting western activity. Although Biggs' account is geographically circumscribed within provincial boundaries, neither American designs nor Vietnamese obstacles seem socially or culturally particular to An Giang or even Vietnam, as bureaucracy and scheming locals exist in many places. Unlike the indistinguishable inhabitants of An Giang, Hansen's northern Catholics are distinct even from their southern co-religionists. Diverse Vietnamese actors with varied perspectives animate Hansen's article while the main activity of Biggs' rural residents appears to be foiling American plans.

Perhaps the outlier among the five essays is **Shawn McHale's** study of the Mekong Delta during the First Indochina War. Like the previous four articles, McHale seeks to prove the inadequacy of Cold War paradigms and nationalist narratives found in American-centered and Hanoi-centered historiography but goes farther than the others to explicitly propose an alternative approach. The somewhat meandering essay begins with Việt Minh propaganda tracts that employed anti-African racism to incite fear of French colonial forces. The remainder of the article seeks to explain why propagandists would consider racism, cannibalism, and other extreme claims to be effective. McHale rejects the Cold War framework because it leaves out non-elites and therefore fails to explain popular practices, such as ideas about race and cannibalism. He also rejects nationalist narratives because

they fail to account for internal religious and ethnic conflicts, the very sort that helped fuel the endemic violence in the delta and gave rise to racist propaganda. Instead, McHale calls for a local focus on the particular social and cultural landscape of the delta. Though not always explicitly developed, his approach explores the bottom up and top down perspectives of delta society. From the perspective of the common inhabitants, he argues that the weakness of state control and continual competition between different power groups made the delta a “liminal society” characterized by violence, political turbulence, and the breakdown of social trust. These conditions helped produce extreme ideas that were based on existing beliefs about ghosts, malevolent spirits, unnatural deaths, and prophecies. To account for the specific content of the propaganda, McHale suggests a top down approach that focuses on how the Việt Minh mobilized the existing cultural repertoire for their own political purposes. Against a backdrop of instability and the local propensity towards the supernatural, various power groups throughout the region accused each other of atrocities, including violence against civilians, bodily violations, cannibalism, and the selling of human flesh.

McHale also discusses his methodology more extensively than the other authors. He combines a local focus with a two-pronged approach that explores multiple indigenous perspectives. The essay demonstrates the advantages of this method. First, McHale’s employment of both top down and bottom up perspectives gives voice to different groups within the same society and analyzes their relationships with one another. This relocates the inquiry not merely to Vietnam but to Vietnamese society by presenting a multitude of Vietnamese perspectives, or, in this case, delta perspectives. In comparison, Biggs’ account follows the perspective of American advisers who operated in the same geographical environment as local villagers without engaging their cultural repertoire. Like McHale’s piece, Hansen’s article on northern Catholics also employs elite and non-elite perspectives within RVN society to examine the relationship between Catholic refugees and the Saigon government, though Hansen does not self-consciously discuss his methodology. Second, McHale’s analysis of the interaction between elites and non-elites offers new ways to understand old paradigms. For example, his discussion of propaganda pamphlets suggests that nationalism may have been introduced through fear and racism at the popular level: in the pamphlets, “a message of anticolonial nationalism is distilled into one of maintaining the purity of the body against a barbaric enemy” (123). This discussion of nationalism from the bottom up troubles elite claims to purity and nobility, and the local focus offers an alternative Vietnamese perspective to the reigning nationalist paradigm.

McHale’s employment of the Mekong Delta as a unit of analysis offers empirical justification for a local approach, but it is somewhat less successful as an argument against the theories and paradigms that he rejects. He clearly demonstrates that as a region southern Vietnam experienced the First Indochina War differently than northern or central Vietnam, and, therefore, constitutes its own unit of analysis. However, his argument against particular theories and paradigms is less successful due to insufficient evidence. First, the article seeks to explain the employment of extreme beliefs in propaganda material without analyzing the significance of the propaganda. How representative were these particular tracts within the larger body of Việt Minh propaganda, and how did the southern population perceive them? Although there may be no available sources to answer this

question, McHale's inquiry hinges on the assumption that Việt Minh propagandists were representative of delta residents. After all, it is only worth inquiring why propagandists believed such tracts to be effective if we assume that they accurately read the local culture and properly deployed local ideas. The accusations and counteraccusations of atrocities by different groups would seem to corroborate the existence of these beliefs, but Hansen's article is a cautionary tale against extrapolating popular thoughts and actions from propaganda material. Hansen finds that none of the Catholics he interviewed ever came into contact with American propaganda material, and it is similarly unclear if McHale's racist tracts are a window into the popular beliefs of delta society or merely the minds of unsuccessful propagandists. Second, McHale's discussion of the delta's belief in ghosts and unnatural deaths does not seem particularly specific to the region, as many societies tell ghost stories. Besides, there is a significant conceptual leap between belief in the supernatural and politically-motivated rumors about cannibalism. Although it is perfectly plausible that the breakdown in social trust facilitated such a conceptual leap, the transformation of commonplace ideas into extreme ones remains to be explained. Because there is insufficient evidence for the significance of extreme beliefs and the uniqueness of the delta's worldview, faulting any particular paradigm or theory for its inability to explain them is problematic.

When Smail called for an "autonomous history" of Southeast Asia and American scholars began using DRV sources to critique American intervention, they wrote with a backdrop of nationalist movements, decolonization, and the still-raging Cold War. The scholars of the 1990s questioned both American diplomatic history and Hanoi-centered scholarship in a radically different environment: the end of the Cold War, the re-establishment of relations between the U.S. and Vietnam, the introduction of market reforms into the reunified Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and the maturation of the postrevolutionary Vietnamese state. Thus, they question not just the American empire but nationalism and revolution as well. To different degrees, these five essays attempt to write a history of the Vietnam War that is Vietnam-centered while avoiding the singular focus of the Hanoi-centered scholarship. In their decision to shift the focus towards Vietnam, they explore a diverse variety of actors, actions, and places. In their work, there is not one but many Vietnams to be explored and explained, and the multiplicity of their inquiries offers a fuller, richer account of the war than has been provided by the dominant scholarship. If these essays are representative, then the Vietnamization of Vietnam War studies will not just advance the field; it will radically remake it.

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Editors's Response by Edward Miller, Department of History, Dartmouth College and by
Tuong Vu, Department of Political Science, University of Oregon

On behalf of all those who contributed to the special issue of JVS under review here, we are grateful to the H-Diplo editors for organizing this roundtable. Any enterprise that involves two journal editors, five article authors and four reviewers is bound to be a logistical challenge! We also thank Lien-Hang Nguyen, Sophie Quinn-Judge, Nu-Anh Tran and James McAllister for their thoughtful commentaries on the special issue. It is very gratifying that such an esteemed and talented group of Vietnam War scholars is willing to produce such a detailed and well-argued set of reviews.

In these remarks, we have mostly refrained from responding to the various points that the four reviewers have made about the individual articles in the special issue. "Our" authors can and do speak for themselves! Instead, we will focus here on some of the observations and criticisms that the reviews make about our introduction to the special issue, especially with regards to the concept of "Vietnamization." As so often happens in these roundtables, the four reviewers have approached the special issue from distinct critical perspectives, and each offers some very searching commentary that obliges us to revisit the issue from new interpretive angles.

Perhaps the most trenchant criticisms of our framing of the special issue around the concept of "Vietnamization" are those presented by **James McAllister**. McAllister perceives in our introduction a rather polemical agenda; specifically, he objects to our three-way division of Vietnam War scholars into "Americanists" (a label we do not actually use), "international historians," and the proponents of what we describe as "Vietnamization." He suggests that our drawing of these distinctions is done with the intent of critiquing or even denigrating the work of the first and second groups in order to make the third group look good by comparison. He deplores such "relentless drawing of lines between scholars interested in different facets of the Vietnam War."

McAllister here seems to have misunderstood our intent. It is certainly true, as we stated, that our main objective in preparing this special issue was to present new scholarship in the third category, i.e. work which employs Vietnamese sources as well as what we call a "Vietnamese studies approach" (p. 11). However, in highlighting this work, we did not—and do not—feel that we are in any way denigrating or dismissive of the work of scholars in the first or second category. Consider our comments on what McAllister describes as the work of "Americanists" but which we specify more precisely as "America-centric" scholarship about the war. Our point was not to suggest that the many studies of the Vietnam War which focus on American actors and American sources are useless or inferior—on the contrary, we noted the "originality and vibrancy" of this scholarship, and we acknowledged that the various questions examined in this scholarship are useful and important (p.1). Instead of dismissing this valuable body of work, we make a less sweeping, if still important, point: America-centric approaches can be helpful, but they can only take you so far. Given that Americans and the U.S. government were deeply involved

in the Vietnam War in myriad ways, it stands to reason that the study of American motives, perceptions and experiences is essential. But it also stands to reason that the incorporation of non-American sources and perspectives into Vietnam War research agendas is equally essential; such a broadening, as we point out, can lead not only to new answers for some of those old questions, but also to some important questions not previously addressed by scholars (p.2). We do not, therefore, seek to pit “Americanists” against Vietnamese Studies specialists, nor do we argue that the work produced by the latter is “inherently preferable or superior” to that of the former. Since one of us (Miller) actually is an Americanist, to make such an argument would involve an amount of self-flagellation that goes well beyond what either of us is willing to endure! It would also run contrary to our determination not to pursue “the replacement of one form of academic provincialism with another” (p.11).

By way of clarifying our views, let us consider some of the specific examples that McAllister cites. We heartily concur with McAllister that a close reading of U.S. government documents supports the contention that Ngo Dinh Diem was not a puppet of the United States, and we agree that “an Americanist assessment of the Diem era can be entirely compatible with the main conclusions... put forward on the basis of Vietnamese sources.” Nevertheless, to conclude that Diem was not an American puppet is to beg the question: what (or who) was he, exactly? In our opinion, an America-centric approach is less helpful in addressing this critical follow-up question. To be sure, U.S. sources are not irrelevant to the efforts to uncover the social, political, ideological and cultural context in which Diem formulated his beliefs and devised his policies; indeed, Masur, Chapman, Catton and others who have challenged the Diem-as-puppet thesis have made good use of American sources. But in their efforts to provide more convincing explanations for Diem’s ideas and actions, these scholars have combined U.S. materials with Vietnamese sources. In addition, they have drawn on the scholarship and insights of their counterparts in Vietnamese Studies; as a result, they offer interpretations of Diem’s motives and decisions that are much more culturally and historically nuanced than those offered in most America-centric accounts. In our view, this is as good an example as any of how “Vietnamization” can improve on America-centric scholarship without necessarily being antithetical to it.

Another relevant example has to do with the work of the “international historians” whom McAllister mentions, such as Mark Lawrence, Lloyd Gardner, and Andrew Rotter. Again, we must agree with McAllister’s most basic point: these scholars are fully deserving of the praise they have received for their pathbreaking studies of the diplomatic dimensions of the early U.S. involvement in Vietnam during the late 1940s and early 1950s. By illuminating the complex interactions between and among American, British and French agendas, they have greatly enriched our understanding of the broader international context in which the U.S. intervention in Vietnam began. At the same time, we still think it reasonable to ask: could these excellent works have been made even better by some attention to Vietnamese actors and sources? Consider Lawrence’s *Assuming the Burden* (which we singled out for special praise—see fn #6, p. 14). In this book, Lawrence brilliantly explains the French, American and British diplomatic imperatives that led to the creation of the “Bao Dai solution” during 1949-50. But he pays virtually no attention to internal Indochinese political developments involving anti-communist Vietnamese during this period—developments which seem to have been no less important than Great Power

diplomacy to the making of the “solution.” (If French officials had failed to persuade groups such as the Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao and Dai Viet to support Bao Dai, the diplomatic maneuvers might well have gone for naught.) Is it unfair to criticize Lawrence for this omission? Perhaps; his book is so innovative and insightful as to make such complaints seem niggling. Nevertheless, we maintain that these observations still suggest how the “internationalization” and the “Vietnamization” trends in the study of the war do not have to be in tension with each other—and indeed can reinforce and strengthen each other.

In her review, **Sophie Quinn-Judge** raises a set of concerns about “Vietnamization” rather different from McAllister’s. If we understand her arguments correctly, Quinn-Judge supports the “decentering approach” employed by the articles in the special issue. At the same time, Quinn-Judge has reservations about what she sees as worrisome signs within the Vietnamization trend. She suggests that the problem of Vietnamese agency is perhaps more intractable than some of the contributors let on; she also believes that some of the articles (notably Shawn McHale’s) are based on insufficient evidence. Above all, she is concerned about what she sees as a lack of “balance.” For example, she believes that François Guillemot’s essay about the sufferings of the women in the Youth Shock Brigades “would feel more balanced” if he had included certain additional facts such as the tonnage of bombs “dropped on the Ho Chi Minh Trail by well-fed Americans living in suburban military base communities in northeast Thailand.” Such facts, she argues, will guard against the tendency to reduce the French and the Americans to “peripheral actors.” In her conclusion, Quinn-Judge asks whether our call in this special issue for “alternative approaches” is really just “a code for demonstrating the sins of the communists and the Hanoi authorities.” This would, Quinn-Judge believes, be a “dangerous way to go about future research on the Vietnam War.” While acknowledging that “[a] more rigorous attitude to communist sources is definitely in order,” she states that such rigor should also be applied “to the documentary record generated by the Diem and Thieu governments.”

In response to Quinn-Judge, let us stress that the goal of promoting balance in Vietnam War scholarship lies at the heart of this special issue. We view existing scholarship on the war as seriously biased towards certain perspectives. Few would disagree with us that the study of the conflict remains heavily America-centric. (Even McAllister, as noted above, accepts our fundamental point that American-centric accounts tend to marginalize the role of Vietnamese actors.) But America-centrism is not the only problem of (im)balance lurking in the scholarship. As Nu-Anh Tran points out in her review, insofar as the existing scholarship has examined the Vietnamese dimensions of the conflict, it has done so in a rather Hanoi-centric way, in the sense that the decisions and actions of the Communist Party have received d attention from scholars to date. Ironically, this bias has persisted even in the face of remarkable asymmetries of information about the U.S. and DRV war efforts. The particular fact that Quinn-Judge believes Guillemot should have included in his article—the tonnage of American bombs dropped on Indochina during the war—is easily accessible via Google. (Zfacts.com provides the suspiciously precise figure of 6,727,084 tons!). Similarly, there is no shortage of information on issues such as American casualties, the size of the South Vietnamese armed forces, the politics practiced by Saigon generals, or the massacres perpetrated by Americans at My Lai and Son My. Yet the size of NLF and DRV forces and the number of casualties they sustained remain closely guarded secrets. The

presence of 300,000 Chinese troops and 3,000 Soviet troops in North Vietnam during the war was not known until recently when Chinese and Soviet sources became open. The internal debates among Hanoi leaders on key decisions and the purge of high-ranking pro-Soviet officials in the Party in the late 1960s remain murky. The number of landlords executed during the land reform of 1953-1956 has never been revealed. And so on. Given the welter of biases in existing historiography and these problems of information asymmetry, why is it necessary to “balance” a discussion of the qualitative experiences of the female members of the Youth Brigade with a discussion of the oft-noted fact about the massive scale of the U.S. bombing campaign?

It may be useful here to point out that Guillemot’s study is a contribution to recent work on the “culture of war.” Along with scholars such as Heonik Kwon,¹ he is borrowing from studies of other conflicts (especially the World Wars) that examine how ordinary people experienced and coped with physical suffering and deprivation. Such an approach is less about facts and evidence than about experiences and feelings, and less about political decisions and military maneuvers than about the culture and socio-cultural impacts of violence. To suggest, as Quinn-Judge does, that Guillemot should “provide a more differentiated picture of youth organizing, region by region” is to miss the main thrust of this approach. Even though Guillemot offers the best documented and most powerful account to date of the appalling way the Hanoi regime treated its female soldiers, his article seeks not an analysis of youth mobilization but an account of the pains and sufferings borne by the female body in “a war for men, against men, and led by men.” (p.47) The women in Guillemot’s essay happened to be North Vietnamese Youth Shock Brigade members, but one can imagine that similar studies could be written about millions of other ordinary Vietnamese women and children in South and North Vietnam trying to survive American bombs, communist attacks and government counterattacks in South Vietnam, hard lives in refugee camps during and after the war, the attempts to escape from Vietnam by boat in the 1980s, and the losses of their fathers, husbands, and sons to these conflicts.

From her concluding remarks, it appears that Quinn-Judge’s concern with “balance” is born at least in part by a concern about blame, and especially by a desire to avoid arguments that place too much responsibility on a single party or group. We readily agree that historians of the war should assign responsibility for the conflict according to its due, and that the sins of the Vietnamese Communists should not crowd out the many sins committed by other actors (be they Vietnamese, French or American). At the same time, however, we must point out that we do not view balance in the apportioning of blame as a key objective in the study of the war. We are much more interested in the balanced representation of facts, voices, and viewpoints in the historiography of the war. Studies which seek to promote this kind of balance might not have much to do with blame *per se*, but they can still enrich our knowledge of the war immensely.

In our view, the analysis of “Vietnamization” offered by **Nu-Anh Tran** in her thought-provoking review speaks directly to the particular problems of balance that we hoped this

¹ For example, see Heonik Kwon, *Ghosts of War in Vietnam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

special issue would address. As Tran points out, Vietnamese Studies scholars do not consider paying attention to Vietnamese sources or to Vietnamese agency to be particularly novel moves in and of themselves—after all, these scholars have been pursuing these sorts of objectives for a long time. Instead, Vietnam Studies specialists today are more interested in how the use of Vietnamese sources and attention to previously marginalized actors can serve to undermine some of the old assumptions associated with the nationalist modes of Vietnamese historiography that dominated the field until recently. As Tran observes, the articles all challenge the notion that “Vietnam” or “the Vietnamese” should be treated as unitary historical entities. This may seem an elementary point, but it is an important one that both Vietnam War scholars and Vietnamese Studies specialists often neglected prior to the 1990s. (There are exceptions, of course; Alexander Woodside’s magisterial “Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam,” published in 1976, seems in retrospect to have been far ahead of its time.)

One concluding observation about **Lien-Hang Nguyen’s** description of our perspective as a “post-revisionist” one: as we tried to suggest in our introduction, we believe that the old debate between “orthodox” and “revisionist” interpretations of the war has grown rather stale, and we do not consider ourselves to be partisans of either camp. That said, we are a bit leery of the “post-revisionist” label. In other contexts, “post-revisionism” has been portrayed as an attempt to find some middle ground between two antagonistic schools of interpretation. (This was famously true of John Lewis Gaddis’ proclamation of a “post revisionist synthesis” in Cold War history during the 1980s.) But we do not believe that the way forward lies in an attempt to split the difference between orthodoxy and revisionism. We seek neither to resolve nor to transform the old debate; we would prefer to leave it behind, even as we continue to rely on the useful insights it has generated. As recent scholarship by Mark Moyar and John Prados suggests, neither side in the debate seems ready to give up the fight, so the battles between the two camps will persist a while longer. Still, we hope that the articles in this special issue have suggested some of the new interpretive vistas that can open up when Vietnam War scholars are willing to consider new framings, methodologies and research agendas.

I thank the four reviewers for their insightful comments and constructive critiques on my essay. I will respond to each reviewer individually followed by a few summary comments.

Sophie Quinn-Judge raises two important questions: 1) about the actions of tenants in An Giang and 2) the role of USAID in fostering agricultural modernization. With regard to the statistic I quote on p. 153 (75% of An Giang's population being tenants), it is very important to consider differences within this class of people who have often been considered as a rather homogenous socio-economic group. What such works as Elliott's and Hunt's do that is so powerful with regard to delta peasants is to tease apart different motivations beyond class that might account for their joining or opposing the NLF in My Tho and Dong Thap. The same sort of work can be done in other regions of the delta (or Vietnam more generally), and results will likely show other concerns from one household to another that influenced individual actions. In the Catholic settlements (Cai San area) settled by northern refugees from 1956 to 1963, individuals were involved in a closely watched process to gradually gain land title through annual payments overseen by the RVN's Commissariat on Refugees and its Commissariat on Land Reform in the late 1950s. With the shift in local politics after Diem's death, it is not clear what happened to this process in Cai San; but my hunch from reading provincial documents and American CORDS correspondence is that many if not most of the 1956-era Catholic refugees had successfully acquired their land or were well on their way to gaining legal title by the mid-1960s. In Hoa Hao-controlled areas that included the sparsely-populated and vast floodplains of the Long Xuyen Quadrangle, tenants presumably had a relatively stable relationship with Hoa Hao sect leaders that controlled the territory in the 1950s and who returned again after 1963. I know of no Hoa Hao archives where we could look more closely into conditions for tenants inside these areas, but provincial records from 1966-68 suggest that Hoa Hao organizations at the community level played an important role in stabilizing tenant lives.

The role of Hoa Hao organizations in channeling some of the American aid segues into Quinn-Judge's second question about the role of USAID in agricultural modernization. On p. 158 for example, I mention that a local Hoa Hao office in Cho Moi distributed fertilizer and stored harvested rice for sale in lieu of a government-funded silo yet to be built due to red tape. Presumably other Hoa Hao offices performed similar services for their congregations while the Saigon government or American advisors were slow to act. Let me also clarify my position by saying that USAID played an important supporting role simply by depositing mountains of fertilizer and thousands of liters of chemicals at a compound in Long Xuyen. This material, whether through pilfering, corrupt price gouging or fair-price sales, eventually made its way into the fields and certainly had an impact on the agro-environment and on agricultural techniques. I emphasize in my article that Americans, despite their job descriptions as advisors, did little to spread high-yield rice or other modernizing technologies. However, they were quick to seize upon any successes as proof that the nation building mission was a success. They showered Mr. Thiet the private entrepreneur with good press and additional funds to turn his venture into a U.S.-

supported “experimental farm”. Also, while USAID did not play a central role in the Green Revolution transformations that did happen in Vietnam, it likely was a more central player in the much more widespread programs enacted in Thailand and the Philippines. My point is that even without American involvement, the industries involved in the Green Revolution were part of more global transactions involving industry, agricultural science, and markets. Places such as An Giang, even during wartime, could connect to more global flows of merchants and distributors -- especially those coming from Taiwan -- without USAID’s involvement. Finally, I take full blame for the article’s two errors. My misattribution of IVS as a Mennonite organization stemmed from an absent-minded conflation with the IVS records at the Mennonite Archives in Goshen, IN and that the Mennonite Central Committee maintained close correspondence with IVS from 1954-74. Keeping track of official titles for key South Vietnamese political figures such as Thieu from year to year is another one of my weak spots, and I’ll be more careful in the future.

In response to **Lien-Hang Nguyen’s** comments, let me echo her positive support for more locally-oriented studies of the Vietnam War by bringing this question to American historians: “Why should you care about such far-flung places with hard-to-pronounce names as Long Xuyen or An Giang?” With much of the Vietnam War-era records now public and these areas now welcoming foreign tourists, Vietnam offers diplomatic historians and others a chance to examine nation building in an up-close, post mortem approach that may offer insights that can be directed to more contemporary concerns about equally far-flung, hard-to-pronounce locales in southern Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. In such places as An Giang we see a fundamental opposition in play: the needs of Americans and their Saigon government allies to develop a generalizable, reproducible program to drain an insurgency movement of its appeal versus the needs of local officials and their advisors to apply central resources flexibly to respond to conditions that may be specific to a particular province, an agro-ecological zone or a village. From flexible use of central government resources to corrupt use is, of course, a slippery slope.

Without adding fuel to the fire in diplomatic historians’ debate about conventional or revisionist narratives, let me simply add to James McAllister’s point that my largely American-originating sources should be fair-game for Americanists and Vietnamists alike. There are documentary treasures awaiting discovery. While walking the stacks one day with the Vietnam War archivist, I was surprised to hear him say that until now almost all research in these records has only tapped about roughly 5% of what is there. Besides military and civil documents, there are many boxes of captured Vietnamese-language materials (CMIC records for example) as well as many province advisor files (CORDS) that include Vietnamese-language sources not otherwise available in Vietnamese archives. I suspect that Americanists typically shy away from such local-oriented records in favor of higher-level debates because they have no personal referents to these places and can’t fully appreciate their political or geographical importance. A few field trips to Vietnam and a quick course in the language could cure that. Let me also encourage those like myself trained in an area studies mold with field experience to consider the equally foreign venture into American diplomatic and military records to better understand that perspective.

Finally, **Nu-Anh Tran** raises several questions in my essay and with the notion of Vietnamization more generally. First, in response to her question what do I mean by advocating for more “local” studies of nation building, I define “local” in my research as *being located* in a place with specific, material features. Too often, we discuss historical events with reference to the state or very basic geographical locations (DMZ, central highlands, Mekong Delta), but we fail to consider what such events meant in these different places or what roles terrain or ecological changes played in these events. It’s obvious in my study that some of the central characters in my essay are Americans and not Vietnamese, but I hope that the pattern she claims I am following is like that of Alice Conklin (cited in the accompanying note) in that it critiques the Americans gaze and reads “against the grain” of their writing more along the lines of what Ann Stoler describes in her ventures in Dutch colonial archives (*Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, 2008). As to Tran’s criticism that I should provide more historical contextualization to events in An Giang, I agree that it is important to understanding local Vietnamese attitudes towards Saigon. I have studied the pre-1963 period in Vietnamese and American archives, and that material will soon be out in a forthcoming book *Quagmire: Nation-Building and Nature in the Mekong Delta* (UW Press). I wanted to assess the environmental and social effects of American CORDS programs (1966-73), and I think that made for a worthy subject of inquiry in itself. Vietnamese sources contained in the CORDS files are important; for example, they describe little-studied differences inside the Hoa Hao sect in 1967-68 that reflected very different attitudes towards the Saigon government and Saigon-approved Hoa Hao leaders. It’s not my intention to privilege American actors over Vietnamese ones in this story, but as with Stoler and others, it is important not to throw the baby out with the bathwater and at times acknowledge that Americans (like European colonials before them) often played potent roles in shaping Vietnamese experiences during the peak years of their occupation from 1966 to 1973. At the very least, these American actors serve us as amateur ethnographers who observed local affairs.

As to Tran’s last criticism that my account is bifurcated, that move was intentional and part of the critique of American actors. In my reading of Vietnamese and American sources, bifurcated experiences of those involved on the ground and those viewing from above is a constant theme in the war. I detect two very differently situated “gazes”: 1) those of Americans and Saigon-based Vietnamese counterparts traveling through the region in compressed spaces and timespans and 2) those of people locally situated in An Giang for longer periods of time whose movements through the landscape and whose views on politics were situated in memories of past conflicts pre-1963, experiences with Catholic settlers at Cai San (1956-63), and other factors. I don’t think its productive to divide these bifurcated views between American (looking down from above) and Vietnamese (looking on the ground) lest we ignore the majority of people who at times moved in between these two very different perspectives. Consider the IVS volunteer David Gitelson who embedded himself in a rural district and who perhaps knew more than any other American about how environmental conditions in the flood plain around Ba The and traditional fishing practices there worked. He understood how American military policies on free fire zones with pilots free to shoot anything moving below produced needless civilian casualties. While Gitelson’s own death reflects that he did not understand the place well enough, his subjectivity as an actor in An Giang’s wartime history cannot be reduced simply to that of

an American “colonial”. While Americans did not play such central roles in remote areas before 1960, from 1966 to 1973 they were out there all over the place, so we cannot ignore them even as we attempt to write more Vietnamese-centered histories of the wars.

In conclusion, rather than argue whether these essays fit neatly within the category of a Vietnam-centered approach to the war, I prefer to point to the different ways that these five essays approach certain aspects of warfare using different kinds of archival sources, choosing different events and subjects at different moments, and looking at the war from different places. Writing a definitive, all-encompassing history of the Vietnam War that includes so many different individual or local experiences may be a holy grail for diplomatic historians of the Vietnam War; and to those who charge down that path, good luck! I wonder, however, as the poignancy of the American experience in Vietnam continues to fade in both American and Vietnamese memories, whether the “Vietnam War” as a narrative framing might not be losing some of its attraction? For many older scholars, the war was such a formative part of their personal experience that I suppose it’s hard to imagine studying Vietnam without the war there somewhere, lurking in the rafters. Thinking ahead a generation, I think it’s likely that Vietnamists and Americanists may need to re-frame this experience, perhaps rolling American actions into different scaffolds less tied to bi-lateral diplomacy and more to such multi-lateral processes as militarization, economic integration, late Socialism, and environmental change. American and Vietnamese actors played important roles in these other framings of the modern past, but they were not the only players and that is important to remember.

Author's Response by François Guillemot, Lyons Institute of East Asian Studies (IAO), en français

Cette série d'articles du numéro spécial dirigé par Edward Miller et Tuong Vu pour le *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* [JVS] a provoqué des réactions riches, mesurées et très constructives. J'ai particulièrement aimé la contribution de Nhu-Anh Tran qui soulève de nombreuses questions sur la problématique de la « vietnamisation » des Vietnam Studies, ainsi que celle de Sophie Quynh-Judge, plus critique, mais tout aussi fructueuse. La perspective « bottom-up » et multidisciplinaires des cinq essais, soulignée par Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, me semble importante à rappeler comme fil conducteur de ce numéro spécial. Enfin, James McAllister souligne le fait que les contributeurs n'ont pas inscrits leurs recherches dans une confrontation stérile avec les autres approches historiques et je partage assez ce point de vue.

A la lecture des comptes-rendus, trois points essentiels ont retenu mon attention : 1) la question historiographique ; 2) la question des sources et de leur lecture ; 2) le parti-pris des études locales, partielles, spécifiques. En reprenant rapidement chacun de ces points, j'en profiterai pour répondre aux questions touchant plus directement mon article.

1 / Sur le premier point, je rejoins les avis des uns et des autres car ils ne sont pas exclusifs les uns envers les autres mais sont, à mon avis, relativement complémentaires. La question soulevée par Edward Miller et Tuong Vu au sujet d'une « vietnamisation » de l'historiographie des Vietnam Studies est fondamentale car elle questionne directement les sources. On ne peut plus mener une étude sur le Viêt-Nam sans faire appel aux sources vietnamiennes qu'elles soient produites à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur du pays. La profusion des écrits vietnamiens et la mise à disposition de nombreux documents vietnamiens sur internet nous obligent à considérer ces sources avec sérieux. Cet aspect de la recherche ne porte pas systématiquement préjudice aux recherches plus anciennes mais il permet de réexaminer et d'ouvrir le champ de nos connaissances sur tel ou tel sujet. Si les essais présentés dans ce numéro de JVS ne renouvellent pas fondamentalement l'historiographie de la guerre du Viêt-Nam comme le souligne Sophie Quinn-Judge, ils apportent néanmoins un éclairage nouveau sur des aspects négligés, voire encore méconnus, et permettent d'accéder à une vision plus fidèle à la réalité historique. De ce simple fait, le passage du Noir et Blanc au « Technicolor », suggéré par Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, est bienvenu et, à vrai dire, nécessaire. Pour reprendre cette image forte, il s'agira aussi de prendre en considération l'aspect humain et terre à terre de la guerre, bref de donner du relief, sans pour autant tordre la réalité, pour offrir une « vision 3D » de l'histoire de la guerre, du déroulement de la guerre et de ses interactions. Exercice ardue et périlleux que j'ai essayé de mettre en œuvre dans mon article sur les TNXP avec cette perspective d'analyser les corps en guerre (« bodies at war »).

Le clivage entre les chercheurs se fait donc plus sur leur faculté d'appréhender des sources dans la langue du pays concerné et du sujet d'étude approché, et pas seulement dans la langue anglaise, que sur des critères à proprement parler « old/new history ». En quelque sorte l'accès aux sources vietnamiennes amène forcément le chercheur vers une autre

histoire (« another history »). Il paraît évident qu'un chercheur qui travaille sur le Viêt-Nam doit être en mesure de lire, de comprendre la langue de ce pays mais aussi, si le sujet d'étude le nécessite, le chinois classique, le français et l'anglais (ou d'autres langues comme le russe, l'allemand, le lao, le cambodgien, etc.), pour saisir les interactions qui se sont déroulées au cours du XXe siècle et pour croiser les sources. Le clivage concerne donc directement l'accès aux sources, leur interprétation, leur diversité et leur confrontation.

Ceci dit, on constate néanmoins un renouveau historiographique qui prend désormais en considération le versant oublié de l'historiographie (« the forgotten side of Vietnamese historiography ») c'est-à-dire l'évolution spécifique du Sud entre 1955 et 1975, je devrais même dire entre 1945 et 1975 pour la période de la guerre. En ce sens, l'article de Shawn McHale sur la violence dans le delta du Mékong en bousculant les approches habituelles est fondateur de quelque chose.¹ La redécouverte depuis une quinzaine d'années d'une histoire ayant existé au Sud en République du Viêt-Nam (RVN) et la mise en perspective de cette histoire avec celle de la RDVN – également en cours de renouvellement comme l'ont largement démontré Tuong Vu et Edward Miller – permettra d'accéder à une vision « plus juste » de ce que fut le Viêt-Nam pendant les années de guerre. Cette « histoire en construction » donnera *in fine* une vision plus globale, très utile pour saisir ce qu'est le Viêt-Nam aujourd'hui avec ses multiples fractures et cicatrices, dont certaines paraissent encore bien douloureuses. C'est dans cette diversification des approches qu'une « nouvelle histoire » du Viêt-Nam en guerre et en révolution fait sens.

Au fur et à mesure de l'ouverture ou de la découverte d'archives importantes, cette histoire est toujours en révision (c'est le processus même de l'histoire en tant que discipline) et devrait mobiliser l'attention des chercheurs tant les sujets à étudier ou à approfondir sont nombreux. A titre d'exemple, sur le plan de l'histoire interne, peu d'études ont encore été consacrées au Viêt-Nam de Bao Đại entre 1947 et 1955 tant sous l'angle de l'histoire politique, militaire, économique ou sociale.² A ma connaissance et je peux me tromper, rien n'a encore été publié sur les Bình Xuyên (à part trois mémoires de Master en France sur le sujet) – et ceci serait une contribution absolument nécessaire à l'étude du delta du Mékong et à la compréhension du phénomène de violence – pas assez non plus sur la question des « dân công » et de la mobilisation massive de la population au Nord du côté Viêt Minh, notamment chez les ethnies minoritaires... Peu de choses également sur le rôle des Hoa Kiêu au sein du processus révolutionnaire vietnamien ou des boursiers vietnamiens du IIIe Reich et des transferts de technologie militaires allemands dans les rangs du Viêt Minh.³ De

¹ Son article très stimulant propose une perspective « bottom-up » en correspondance avec une perspective « top-down » non négligée, tout en alliant cette démarche à un dialogue entre histoire et anthropologie qui fait sens.

² Notre thèse étudie un aspect particulier de cette période à travers le rôle et l'évolution du parti Đại Việt [ĐVQĐĐ] : Guillemot, François, *Đại Việt, indépendance et révolution au Viêt-Nam. L'échec de la troisième voie (1938-1955)*, Paris, Les Indes savantes (à paraître en 2010).

³ Recherche qui a été menée par Christopher Goscha pour le cas des déserteurs japonais et, dans une perspective plus large, pour l'Asie orientale. Voir Christopher Goscha, « Belated Allies: The Technical Contributions of Japanese Deserters to the Viêt Minh, (1945-1950) », in Marilyn Young et Robert Buzzanco, eds., *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, Blackwell Publishers, 2002, pp. 37-64 & « Building Force: Asian Origins of 20th Century Military Science in Vietnam, (1905-1954) », *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, (2003), pp. 535-560.

même l'aspect transnational de la guerre est un sujet qui mérite notre attention. A ce titre, je souligne le travail de thèse, encore non édité, de Christopher Goscha sur cette dimension peu connue de la guerre d'Indochine.⁴ Sur le modèle des études publiées sur les guerres européennes contemporaines, la dimension du soldat en guerre a également été peu étudiée. Sur l'histoire sociale des mouvements caodaïstes et Hòa Hào, ont attend avec intérêt la publication des thèses de Pascal Bourdeaux et de Jérémy Jammes car elles offriront sans doute un éclairage particulier à la fragmentation sociale et étatique dans le delta du Mékong, phénomène que souligne avec justesse Shawn McHale dans son article.⁵ En clair, une histoire sociale de la guerre, vue du bas, est tout juste en cours d'élaboration.

2 / Sur le second point concernant les sources ma question est : comment envisager une histoire sociale et culturelle de la guerre sans avoir accès aux sources primaires, aux documents d'archives ? On le sait, la difficulté pour accéder aux documents d'archives au Viêt-Nam sur des sujets considérés comme sensibles nous oblige à recourir à croiser les documents de tous types en gardant bien entendu à l'esprit la nécessaire hiérarchisation et différenciation des sources. N'ayant moi-même pas eu accès directement aux archives sur les TNXP, j'ai dû recourir à de multiples sources comme le soulignent Sophie Quin-Judge et Lien-Hang T. Nguyen pour mon article.⁶ La question des sources a également interpellé Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan pour élaborer son article. D'autres sources sont relativement encore peu exploitées comme le corpus très riche de journaux vietnamiens édités entre 1945 et 1955 pendant la période coloniale. Ou, comme le fait Shawn McHale, l'utilisation des documents illustrés de propagande pendant la guerre d'Indochine. Pour la période suivante entre 1955-1975, si l'on considère la vivacité de la presse au Sud en RVN entre 1955 et 1975, on mesure mieux l'importance de cette source (voir le répertoire établi dans le dictionnaire consacré à Saigon / HCM-Ville).⁷ A titre d'exemple, le journal *Chính Luận*, quotidien incontournable au Sud avant 1975, a fait récemment l'objet d'une étude toute à l'honneur de JVS.⁸ De même, une quantité de sources journalistiques éditées en RDVN mériteraient que l'on s'y attarde. Ceci ne doit pas faire perdre de vue également que

⁴ Christopher Goscha, *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne. Réseaux, relations et économie (d'août 1945 à mai 1954)*, Paris, EPHE, thèse de doctorat d'histoire sous la direction de Nguyễn Thế Anh, 2000.

⁵ Pascal Bourdeaux, *Emergence et constitution de la communauté du Bouddhisme Hòa Hào. Contribution à l'histoire sociale du delta du Mékong (1935-1955)*, Paris, EPHE, thèse de doctorat d'histoire sous la direction de Nguyễn Thế Anh, 2003 ; Jérémy Jammes, *Le Caodaïsme, rituels médiumniques, oracles et exégèses. Approche ethnologique d'un mouvement religieux vietnamien et de ses réseaux*, Université Paris-Nanterre (Paris X), thèse de doctorat en ethnologie sous la direction de Bernard Formoso, 2006.

⁶ Le Centre n° 3 des Archives nationales (Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia số 3), localisé à Hanoi, possède une collection d'archives intitulée « Đoàn Thanh Niên Xung Phong », mais celle-ci n'apparaît pas dans l'inventaire des fonds de ce Centre publié à Hanoi en 2006. Le chercheur Ben Kerkvliet avait localisé ce dossier lors de ces différentes recherches. Voir « Notes on Archives Center No. 3 » provided by Ben Kerkvliet, « Government agency, organization, individual », Feb. 2003 (site du Vietnam Studies Group, Association for Asian Studies : <http://www.lib.washington.edu/Southeastasia/vsg/guides/lt3.html>) (page consultée le 11 décembre 2009).

⁷ Thạch Phương & Lê Trung Hoa (eds), *Từ điển Sài Gòn - Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh*, TP. HCM, Nxb Trẻ, 2008 (revised ed.), pp. 903-961.

⁸ Nu-Anh Tran, « South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965-1969, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, Nos 1-2, pp. 169-209.

de nombreux fonds d'archives en France mais aussi en Chine, en Allemagne ou en Russie et bien sûr au Viêt-Nam, restent sous-exploités.

3 / Mon troisième point revient sur ce que l'on pourrait appeler un « parti-pris méthodologique » pour effectuer une recherche sur un aspect d'un phénomène et non sur le phénomène dans son ensemble. Il est évident que l'étude « micro » d'un événement, d'une évolution, laisse de côté volontairement ou non des aspects plus « macro ». Dans le cas de mon article, cette sensation d'hyper focus sur les TNXP est d'abord née d'une évidence puis d'un choix. Compte-tenu des documents dont je disposais, il me paraissait plus intéressant de faire une histoire des corps en guerre (sujet relativement peu étudié à ce jour) en me concentrant sur l'exemple frappant des TNXP, que de faire une histoire globale ou générale de ce mouvement de jeunesse. Sur les pas du grand anthropologue Lévi-Strauss qui pratiquait « l'observation participante, » mon propos, toute modestie et toute proportion gardées, a été de tenter une « histoire participante » qui prenne en compte l'aspect humain de la guerre, les dimensions physique et psychologique de la guerre. Faire parler les corps et tenter de se rapprocher de la dureté du terrain. Ainsi le contexte extérieur, plus global, a été quelque peu effacé par cette exigence. Le questionnement de Sophie Quinn-Judge sur l'impact des bombardements mériterait un traitement à lui seul. Ces bombardements résonnent d'ailleurs dans mon texte dans ce qu'ils affectent directement ou indirectement et durablement les corps et les esprits.

Récemment, lors d'une journée d'études sur les « Violences de guerre », Vatthana Pholsena a pu démontrer que les ravages des bombardements sur la piste Ho Chi Minh, du côté du Laos, ont, surtout eu un impact social (sur les structures sociales des habitants) et psychologique forts mais aussi que les bombardements américains, au regard du tonnage versé sur cette région, ont fait montre de peu d'efficacité en ce sens qu'ils n'ont pu arrêter la circulation des hommes et des marchandises sur la piste.⁹ A l'inverse de ce cas, des bombardements urbains (cas du quartier de Zhabei à Shanghai par exemple, décrit par Christian Henriot) pendant la guerre ont été extrêmement meurtriers et n'ont laissé que peu de traces dans l'histoire.¹⁰ Dans le cas vietnamien, le bombardement de Haiphong en novembre 1946, très meurtrier sur un espace-temps réduit, serait un sujet d'étude à approfondir sur le plan de son déroulement, de son impact sur les populations locales. De toute évidence, il reste un travail à faire sur ces questions de bombardements – de leur impact sur le long terme et la résonance et leur portée historique – et de mortalité au Viêt-Nam.

Sur la question de la violence, j'abonderai dans le sens de Shawn McHale sur la nécessaire tâche de compréhension de l'espace sudiste et sur les mécanismes de la violence dans le delta. Son article, courageux dans sa remise en cause historiographique, propose la réflexion la plus poussée et forcément la plus controversée car elle bouscule les approches

⁹ Vatthana Pholsena, « Les bombardements au sud Laos (1964-1973) à travers les sources orales », Journée d'études « Violences de guerre. Aspects socioculturels de la guerre en Asie au XXe siècle », ENS LSH, IAO, Lyon, 30 octobre 2009.

¹⁰ Christian Henriot, « A Neighbourhood under Storm: Zhabei and the Shanghai Wars », [same Workshop].

conventionnelles. Pour avoir récemment travaillé sur le conflit opposant au Sud le Viêt Minh aux forces caodaïstes et Hòa Hảo, l'article de Shawn McHale, dans sa démonstration de « déconstruction sociale et culturelle » du delta du Mékong, me fournit une explication intéressante.¹¹

Quant à la question de savoir s'il s'agissait d'un conflit opposant seulement le Nord et le Sud (« This was not just a war between the DRV and the Republic of Vietnam, as Guillemot describes it ») si je reprends les termes de Sophie Quinn-Judge analysant mon article, je dois dire ce n'était ni mon sujet d'étude ni exactement mon propos. Mon souci était, en introduction de l'article, de resituer succinctement l'apparition des TNXP et de déterminer leur terrain d'action sur le territoire vietnamien.¹² Depuis les travaux de Ralph Smith, chacun sait que l'histoire de la guerre du Viêt-Nam ne se résume pas à une confrontation Nord-Sud.

Autre paramètre à prendre en compte : la longueur forcément limitée d'un article dans le cadre d'une publication de revue. A l'origine permettez-moi de rappeler que ma recherche courrait sur plus de 60 pages considérant des aspects plus généraux liés à l'histoire des TNXP et notamment les questions de reconstruction mémorielle, des enjeux historiographiques et sociétaux. La réduction a donc dû faire l'objet d'un choix. Comme le suggère également Sophie Quinn-Judge, mon article est pour moi une introduction élaborée car tout reste à faire sur ce sujet. Mon ambition est, bien sûr, d'aller plus loin. Notamment d'approfondir la question des TNXP au Sud qui est moins connue et de leur implication directe au cœur de la guerre. Plus encore, mon ambition est de mettre sur pieds un site consacré à l'étude de ce mouvement à travers l'élaboration d'une base de données (TNXP Database Project) recensant les quelques 300.000 jeunes engagés pour la cause de la guerre et qui prendrait la forme d'un instrument de travail à disposition de la communauté scientifique. Bien entendu, ce projet ne peut être que collectif, nécessitant les ressources vietnamiennes. Il permettra d'offrir une vue anthropologique du mouvement plus précise, par exemple sur l'implication de chaque provinces, et révélera peut-être des aspects ignorés. Un traitement de ce sujet à l'instar de celui proposé par Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan pour son article sur l'Armée populaire (son étude est fascinante) serait tout à fait complémentaire.

Pour conclure, de nombreux champs d'études restent à balayer pour saisir les processus qui – entre révolution et guerre – ont façonné le Viêt-Nam d'aujourd'hui. Le débat entre ancienne et nouvelle histoire paraît de ce fait moins important au regard des nouveaux sujets, des objets peu explorés, voire ignorés, qui permettront d'offrir une vision plus précise de la guerre. C'est dans ce cadre que nos cinq contributions s'inscrivent.¹³ De fait, la

¹¹ Guillemot, François, « Autopsie d'un massacre : communautés caodaïstes et Hoa Hao et stratégie politico-militaire Viêt-Minh au début de la guerre d'Indochine (Nam Bô 1947) », [same Workshop].

¹² Après 1977, les TNXP furent envoyés sur le théâtre de guerre cambodgien marquant ainsi une extension de leur champ d'action.

¹³ Contributions que j'ai particulièrement appréciées. Comme contribution à l'article de Peter Hansen, le témoignage de Gérard Tongas, témoin direct des événements au Nord Viêt-Nam lors de l'exode vers le Sud qui le scandalise, est intéressant à citer (cf. Gérard Tongas, *J'ai vécu dans l'enfer communiste au Nord-Viêt-Nam*, Paris, Nouvelles éditions Debresse, 1960, pp. 15-29).

recherche sur le Viêt-Nam est aujourd'hui plus exigeante qu'hier et ne peut plus se contenter d'une approche grossière. La complexité ne mène donc pas forcément à rien, elle ajoute à cette guerre terrible de la précision et la dimension humaine, sociale, dans toutes ces facettes, et pose la question insoluble de la nature humaine en situation de guerre. Pour reprendre une expression de Shawn McHale (p. 123) mais dans un contexte différent, l'histoire d'aujourd'hui doit être à plusieurs voix (« a polyvocal history »), à plusieurs étages en correspondance, en corrélation, en connection. Ce que Edward Miller et Tuong Vu ont parfaitement résumé : « the [Vietnam] war was a struggle in numerous dimensions and at many levels in Vietnamese society ». Cette assertion ouvre le champ des recherches à poursuivre sur ce conflit majeur du XXe siècle, encore et toujours si dérangeant pour tous ceux qui y ont participé et pour ceux qui se penchent sur le sujet.

Lyon, 14 décembre 2009

Author's Response by François Guillemot, Lyons Institute of East Asian Studies (IAO),
translated into English

This series of essays in the special issue of *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* edited by Edward Miller and Tuong Vu has stimulated valuable, measured, and very constructive responses. I particularly enjoyed **Nu-Anh Tran's** contribution which raises multiple questions about the issue of the "Vietnamization" of Vietnam Studies, as well as that of **Sophie Quinn-Judge**, which is more critical, but just as fruitful. The "bottom-up" and multidisciplinary perspective of these five essays, emphasized by **Lien-Hang T. Nguyen**, seems to me important to bear in mind as the connecting thread of this special issue. Finally, I agree with **James McAllister's** point that the contributors have not situated their research in a fruitless comparison with other historical approaches.

Reading these reviews, three key points struck me: 1) the historiographic question 2) the issue of sources and their reading 3) the bias and partiality of particular, incomplete, local studies. In briefly addressing each of these points, I will reply to questions that are most directly related to my article.

1) Regarding the first point, I agree with the opinions of the reviewers, which are in my opinion relatively complementary. The question raised by **Edward Miller** and **Tuong Vu** on the "Vietnamization" of Vietnam Studies is a fundamental one because it directly addresses the issue of sources. One can no longer carry out a study on Vietnam without consulting Vietnamese sources, whether produced inside or outside the country. The profusion of Vietnamese writings and the availability of numerous Vietnamese documents on the Internet require us to consider these sources seriously. This does not systematically bias us against earlier studies but it does allow us to reexamine and enlarge our field of knowledge on a particular subject.

If the essays in this issue of *JVS* do not fundamentally recast Vietnam War historiography, as **Sophie Quinn-Judge** argues, they do, nonetheless, shed new light on neglected, even ignored, topics, and allow one to develop a view that is more faithful to historical reality. From this simple fact, the shift from Black and White to "Technicolor," suggested by **Lien-Hang T. Nguyen**, is welcome and indeed necessary. To pick up on this striking image, it is also necessary to consider the human and "daily life" aspects of war, to highlight reality without distorting it, to provide a "3D" view of the history of the war, its unfolding, and its interactions. This is an arduous and perilous exercise that I tried to carry out in my essay on the Shock Youth Brigades [TNXP] by analyzing from this perspective "bodies at war."

The division between researchers, then, involves their capacity to understand sources in the language of the country involved (and not just in English) and in terms of the subject of study, rather than the criterion of "old" and "new" history. In a way, access to Vietnamese sources inevitably leads the researcher towards "another history". It seems obvious that a researcher working on Vietnam must read and understand the language of the country but also, if the subject requires it, classical Chinese, French, and English (or other languages like Russian, German, Lao, Khmer, and so forth) both to grasp the connections that developed

over the twentieth century as well as to cross check sources. The division thus concerns access to sources, their interpretation, their diversity, and their comparison.

Nonetheless, we can observe a historiographic revival that addresses the forgotten side of Vietnamese historiography, the particular evolution of the South from 1955 to 1975, and indeed the war from 1945 to 1975. In this sense, by shaking up traditional approaches, Shawn McHale's article on violence in the Mekong delta is groundbreaking.¹ The rediscovery over the past fifteen years of a previously existing history in the South in the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), then situating it alongside that of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam – which is also undergoing a revival, as Tuong Vu and Edward Miller have demonstrated —allows one to gain a more accurate understanding of Vietnam during its years of war. This “history in the making” will provide, *in fine*, a more global perspective, which will be very useful in understanding Vietnam today, with its multiple fissures and scars, some of which are still quite painful. It is in this diversification of approaches that a “new history” of a Vietnam in war and revolution is meaningful

As important archives are opened or discovered, this history is constantly being revised (which is the process of history itself as a discipline). This should spark the interest of researchers, as the subjects to be studied or furthered/deepened are numerous. By way of illustration, in terms of internal [Vietnamese] history, few studies have been devoted to Vietnam under Emperor Bảo Đại between 1947 and 1955 from the point of view of social, economic, military, or political history.² I could be mistaken, but to my knowledge, nothing has yet been published on the Bình Xuyên (with the exception of three Master's theses in France on the subject) – and this would be an absolutely essential contribution to the study of the Mekong delta and to our understanding of the phenomenon of violence nor on the question of conscripted laborers [*dân công*] and the massive mobilization of the northern population on the side of the Việt Minh, especially with the ethnic minorities. There is equally little on the role of the Hoa Kiều (ethnic Chinese) within the process of the Vietnamese revolution, on the Vietnamese scholarship students during the Third Reich, or on the transfer of German military technology within the ranks of the Việt Minh.³ Similarly the transnational character of the war is a topic that deserves scrutiny. In this context, let me call attention to Christopher Goscha's unpublished doctoral thesis on this little known

¹ His highly stimulating article proposes a « bottom-up » perspective connected to a not insubstantial « top-down » one, while linking this approach [*démarche*] to a dialogue between history and anthropology.

² (My thesis looks at one aspect of the period through the role of the Đại Việt Party [ĐVQĐĐ]), see: Guillemot, François, *Đại Việt, indépendance et révolution au Việt-Nam. L'échec de la troisième voie (1938-1955)* [Dai Viet, Independence, and Revolution in Vietnam: The Failure of the Third Way (1938-1955)] (Paris, Les Indes savantes, to be published in 2010).

³This research has been carried out by Christopher Goscha in the case of Japanese deserters and, in a broader perspective, for East Asia. See Christopher Goscha, “Belated Allies: The Technical Contributions of Japanese Deserters to the Việt Minh, (1945-1950),” in Marilyn Young et Robert Buzzanco, eds., *A Companion to the Vietnam War*, Blackwell Publishers, 2002, pp. 37-64 and “Building Force: Asian Origins of 20th Century Military Science in Vietnam, (1905-1954),” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, vol. 34, no. 3, (2003), pp. 535-560.

dimension of the Indochina War.⁴ The dimension of soldiers in war has also been little addressed, especially when one considers the model of studies published on contemporary European wars. Regarding the social history of the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo, the publication of the doctoral theses by Pascal Bourdeaux and Jérémy Jammes is eagerly awaited, for they clearly shed a particular light on state and social fragmentation in the delta, a phenomenon to which Shawn McHale aptly calls attention in his article.⁵ Clearly, the social history of the war, seen from below, is only now being developed.

2 / As to the second point regarding sources, my question is: how can we imagine a social and cultural history of the war without having access to primary sources or archival documents? As we all know, problems in gaining access to archival documents in Vietnam on sensitive topics forces us to use documents of all kinds all the while being careful to cross check and verify them in order to maintain the requisite hierarchical organization and differentiation of sources.. Having myself failed to gain access to archival collections on the Shock Youth Brigades [TNXP], I had to use multiple other sources, as both **Sophie Quinn-Judge** and **Lien-Hang T. Nguyen** have emphasized in their discussion of my article.⁶ Sources also constrained Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan in the development of her article. Other sources have been comparatively underexploited, such as the very rich body of Vietnamese newspapers published between 1945 and 1955 during the colonial period, or illustrated propaganda from the Indochina War (which Shawn McHale has consulted). For the period from 1955 to 1975, if we take into account the liveliness of the southern press in the RVN between 1955 and 1975, we can better evaluate the importance of this source (see the inventory in the Saigon—Ho Chi Minh City dictionary).⁷ By way of illustration, the newspaper *Chính Luận*, the South's indispensable daily before 1975, was recently studied in the *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*.⁸ Similarly, a number of newspaper sources published in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam deserve should be fully explored.

⁴ Christopher Goscha, *Le contexte asiatique de la guerre franco-vietnamienne. Réseaux, relations et économie (d'août 1945 à mai 1954)* [The Asian context of the Franco-Vietnamese war : Networks, Relations, and Economy]. Paris, EPHE, doctoral thesis written under the direction of Nguyễn Thế Anh, 2000.

⁵ Pascal Bourdeaux, *Emergence et constitution de la communauté du Bouddhisme Hòa Hảo. Contribution à l'histoire sociale du delta du Mékong (1935-1955)* [Emergence and Formation of the Buddhist Hoa Hao Community: Contribution to the social history of the Mekong delta (1935-1955)]. Paris, EPHE, doctoral thesis in history under the direction of Nguyễn Thế Anh, 2003; Jérémy Jammes, *Le Cao daïsme, rituels médiumniques, oracles et exégèses. Approche ethnologique d'un mouvement religieux vietnamien et de ses réseaux* [Cao Daim: mediumistic rituals, oracles, and exegeses. An ethnological approach to a Vietnamese religious movement and its networks] (Université Paris-Nanterre (Paris X), doctoral thesis in Ethnology under the direction of Bernard Formoso, 2006).

⁶ Archival Depot 3 of the Vietnam National Archives (Trung Tâm Lưu Trữ Quốc Gia số 3), located in Hanoi, has an archival collection named “Đoàn Thanh Niên Xung Phong” [Youth Shock Troop Brigades], but it does not appear in the inventory of archival collections of this Center published in 2006. The researcher Ben Kerkvliet pinpointed this file in the course of carrying out other research. See his “Notes on Archives Center No. 3” provided by Ben Kerkvliet, “Government agency, organization, individual,” Feb. 2003 (site of the Vietnam Studies Group, Association for Asian Studies : <http://www.lib.washington.edu/Southeastasia/vsg/guides/lt3.html> (accessed December 11 2009).

⁷ Thạch Phương and Lê Trung Hoa (eds), *Từ điển Sài Gòn - Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh* [Dictionary of Saigon and Ho Chi Minh City], (Ho Chi Minh City, Tuổi Trẻ, 2008 (revised ed.), pp. 903-961.

⁸ Nu-Anh Tran, “South Vietnamese Identity, American Intervention, and the Newspaper *Chính Luận* [Political Discussion], 1965-1969,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 1, Nos 1-2, pp. 169-209.

We should also bear in mind that many archival collections in France, China, Germany, Russia, and of course Vietnam are equally underused.

3 / My third point returns to what one can call a “methodological bias” in favor of research on one aspect of a phenomena and not on the entire phenomena itself. It is clear that a “micro” study of an event or a development may leave more “macro” issues unexplored. In the case of my article, this sense of an extreme focus on the Youth Shock Brigades was caused more by an obvious fact than by choice. Given the documents at my disposal, it seemed to me to be more interesting to write a history of bodies at war (a little studied topic to this day) by focusing on the striking example of the Youth Shock Brigades, than to carry out a broad or general history of this youth movement. Following humbly in the footsteps of the great anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, who practiced “participant observation”, my wish was to attempt a “participant history” which took into account the human face of war as well as its physical and psychological dimensions. I wanted to animate and bring bodies to life, and to fully evoke the harshness of the terrain. The broader context was thus, out of necessity, somewhat eclipsed. Sophie Quinn-Judge’s concerns over the question of the impact of bombings, something that Sophie Quinn-Judge would like to see further explored, the topic merits a study of its own. These bombings resonate in my text in that they directly, indirectly, and permanently affect bodies and minds.

Recently, during a workshop on the “Violence of War,” Vatthana Pholsena demonstrated that while the devastation of the Ho Chi Minh Trail bombing on the Laotian side of the frontier had above all a strong social (on the social structure of the inhabitants) and psychological impact, in terms of the their sheer tonnage the American bombings were of limited efficacy in that they could not halt the movement of people or goods on the Trail.⁹ In comparison, urban bombings (in the Zhabei neighborhood in Shanghai, for example, as described by Christian Henriot) during the [Chinese civil] war were extremely deadly but left few historical traces.¹⁰ In the Vietnamese case, the bombing of Haiphong in November 1946, which was very lethal over a short time and in a limited space, would be worthy of deeper study in terms of its unfolding and impact on the local population. Clearly, there is work to do on the nature of the bombings – their long-term impact, their historical meaning and effect – as well as on Vietnamese mortality.

On the question of violence, I am in complete agreement with Shawn McHale’s argument on the necessity for scholars to understand the South as well as the mechanisms of violence in the Delta. His article, bold in its historiographic reappraisal, puts forth the most thorough and inevitably the most controversial critique as it challenges conventional approaches. Having recently worked on the conflict in the South in which the Việt Minh confronted the Cao Đài and Hòa Hảo forces, I found Shawn McHale’s demonstration of the conflict’s

⁹ Vatthana Pholsena, “Les bombardements au sud Laos (1964-1973) à travers les sources orales,” [The bombing of southern Laos], Workshop on “The Violence of War. Socio-cultural Aspects of Asian Wars of the Twentieth Century,” Institut d’Asie Orientale, Lyon, 30 octobre 2009.

¹⁰ Christian Henriot, “A Neighborhood under Storm: Zhabei and the Shanghai Wars,” [same Workshop].

« cultural and social deconstruction » of the Mekong delta to be highly interesting It provided an important explanation for me.¹¹

As for the question as to whether this was only a war between the North and the South and concerning **Sophie Quinn-Judge's** statement that "This was not just a war between the DRV and the Republic of Vietnam, as Guillemot describes it," I note that this was neither my topic of study nor my argument. My concern, as outlined in the article's introduction, was to contextualize briefly the emergence of the Youth Shock Brigades and to delineate its area of operations in Vietnam.¹² From at least the time of Ralph Smith's definitive study, historians have been aware that the history of the Vietnam War cannot be reduced to a North-South conflict.

There is another stricture to consider: the necessarily limited length of an article in a journal. Originally, my study ran to more than sixty pages in length and addressed more general issues related to the history of the Youth Shock Brigades, in particular questions related to the reconstruction of memory as well as societal and historiographic issues. In reducing the article to an acceptable length, I had to make hard choices as to what material to cut. As **Sophie Quinn-Judge** also suggests, for me the article is a detailed introduction to the subject since much more remains to be done. . I intend, of course, to go much further. In particular, I plan to delve more deeply into the matter of Youth Shock Brigades in the South, which is less understood, and to the direct involvement of the Brigades at the core of the war. Beyond that, I intend to establish a website devoted to the study of this movement, developing a database (The Youth Shock Brigades Database Project), cataloguing the approximately 300,000 youth who enlisted for the war. This database will serve as a research source available to the scientific community. This project will certainly have to be a collective one, requiring Vietnamese resources. It will offer a more precise anthropological perspective of the movement, for example by charting each province's involvement, which might reveal overlooked features. A study of this topic, following the example of Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan's fascinating article on the People's Army of Vietnam, will complement similar projects.

To conclude, many fields of study await our attention if we are to understand the processes, between revolution and war, that have shaped Vietnam today. Given this fact, the debate between old and new history seems less important when we consider new topics as well as little explored or neglected ones that will allow us to develop a more accurate view of the war. It is in this context that our five *JVS* contributions are situated.¹³ Indeed, the study of

¹¹ Guillemot, François, "Autopsie d'un massacre : communautés caodaïstes et Hoa Hao et stratégie politico-militaire Viêt-Minh au début de la guerre d'Indochine (Nam Bộ 1947)," [Autopsy of a Massacre: The Hao Hao and Cao Dai communities and Viet Minh Politico-Military Strategy at the Beginning of the Indochina War (Nam Bộ, 1947)] [same Workshop].

¹² After 1977, the Youth Shock Brigades were sent into the Cambodian theater of war, extending their zone of action.

¹³ I particularly appreciated these contributions. Concerning the article by Peter Hansen, the testimony by Gérard Tongas, a shocked eyewitness to events in North Vietnam during the exodus to the South, would be a useful contribution (Gérard Tongas, *J'ai vécu dans l'enfer communiste au Nord-Viêt Nam* [I lived in the Communist hell of North Vietnam] (Paris, Nouvelles éditions Debresse, 1960), pp. 15-29.

Vietnam today is more demanding than before and can no longer be content with unrefined or general approaches. Complexity, which adds detail and a social and human dimension to all facets of this terrible war, will enrich our understanding of the topic. It poses the unresolvable question of human nature during times of war. To go back to a phrase used by Shawn McHale, but in a different context, history today must encompass multiple voices (“a polyvocal history”), occurring at several interlinking levels, each correlated and , connected. As **Edward Miller** and **Tuong Vu** aptly conclude: “the [Vietnam] war was a struggle in numerous dimensions and at many levels in Vietnamese society.” This statement opens up the field of research to be pursued on this major conflict of the twentieth century, one that is so disturbing to those who took part in it as well as, to a lesser degree, those who study it.

Lyon, 14 December 2009

Translated by Shawn McHale, Christopher Goscha, and Diane Labrosse

Author's Response by Shawn McHale, The Elliott School of International Affairs, The George Washington University

My first reaction to reading these replies on the JVS Vietnam War issue is to thank James McAllister, Nu Anh Tran, Lien Hang Nguyen, and Sophie Quinn-Judge for their thorough and thoughtful contributions to debate. In my article, I hoped to provoke reactions, but to do so with an article based on solid research. This aim, I believe, was realized.

Before anything else, I would first like to make a comment about the title of my essay ("Understanding the Fanatic Mind?"). The title of my essay is an ironic – and perhaps obscure -- reference to Jack Goody's book *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, itself a riff on Levi-Strauss's *La pensée sauvage* [The savage mind]. In titling the essay "Understanding the Fanatic Mind?" – notice the question mark -- I had hoped to convey some doubt: *which* fanatic mind is in question? Is there such a thing as a fanatic mind? Perhaps I was too coy, as both **Nu Anh Tran** and **Sophie Quinn-Judge** were perplexed over who, exactly, was fanatic. On this point, I would just like to return to the beginning of the essay, where I wrote that

The concern of this essay is not simply to "explain" this propaganda as a product of its Vietnamese social and historical context. Rather, it aims to explore a slightly different question: why would propagandists believe that such texts would resonate with the beliefs and experiences of the inhabitants of the Mekong Delta? (McHale, 100)

At the end of the essay, I reprised this idea, noting my interest in how the Viet Minh could "draw on, transform, and mobilize local cultural repertoires?" (McHale, 126). In short, I do not believe that such propaganda reflects a common Mekong delta culture of fanaticism. Instead, I believe that Viet Minh cadres saw the propaganda as a calculated way to instigate fear against the French and their troops when these cadres were at a loss for alternative ways to sway the populace.

Substantive issues were raised by all the reviewers. In terms of critiques, I particularly enjoyed reading **Nu Anh Tran's** thoughtful and nuanced reflections on my essay. **Sophie Quinn-Judge**, however, while stating that my work was "a thought provoking effort to open up a difficult topic," was troubled by my approach. She thought that I

should perhaps have attempted a more fundamental assessment of the various groups and political tendencies involved. There is so much pressure on historians to demonstrate theoretical sophistication, that the work at what David Marr calls "the coal face of history" is increasingly neglected. This essay is top heavy with theoretical references but weak on discussion of the facts.

As for my use of theory, I see no driving need to defend it. One of the virtues of History as a field is that it has a large tent: it can accommodate a wide range of scholars, including those

inclined to theory. But I would like to make two points about my use of theory in this particular essay. First, I explore theoretical and historiographical approaches, and in particular what I label historical institutionalism, and in many cases find them to be wanting. Evaluating theory here has a *negative* function: to suggest that particular avenues of approach may be deficient.

The second way I use theory is more pedestrian: to try to figure out how to ask the right questions of the texts and data before me. It is a basic hermeneutic principle that the very form of the question presupposes the answer. How many of us, for example, have seen the question “Was Ho Chi Minh a communist or a nationalist?” The very form of that question has within it the seeds of an incorrect answer. I have the modest hope that reading theory can sometimes help me craft better questions when I approach text and data.

Theory aside, is the essay “weak on discussion of facts,” as Quinn-Judge asserts? **Lien Hang Nguyen**, in contrast, came to the opposite conclusion, stating that article is “empirically rich.” In the end, I think the issue is not about facts per se as in what kinds of facts **Quinn-Judge** would like to see discussed. She would like to see more on “the nature of the communist movement in the south, “the communists’ “conflicting ideologies, their leadership, their factions and disagreements.” She would like to see more on the Japanese impact on southern Vietnam. She “finds it “strange” that I did not talk about the communist Tran Van Giau. She mentions the death of Peter Dewey—as if this should be important in some way to the essay. She talks at length about disagreements over communist policy. And so on.

In short, Quinn-Judge is suggesting that my article would be better if I wrote like a political historian who put communism and communists at the center of analysis. At this, I am not quite sure what to say. Why?

I have absolutely no animus against political history. (Or military history, for that matter!) And I have written on communism. But why would addressing the topics Quinn-Judge suggests make much of a difference in understanding cannibalism and race transformation in a Mekong delta at war? Why is mentioning Tran Van Giau at all relevant? Or Dewey? Why do the Japanese and their role before and during 1945 necessarily have much to do with events six or more years later? Why would writing about conflicting ideologies and factionalism explain the emergence of such truly strange texts? None of this is immediately clear to me.

It’s not that I am being particularly obtuse on these points. To understand my point of view, it may help to know that this article is a spin-off from my current book project on the social and cultural history of the Mekong delta in a time of war, 1945-54. I have spent approximately 15 months in Vietnamese and French archives collecting materials for this larger project, not to mention other reading since 2004 in a wide variety of Vietnamese and French secondary sources. Simply put, when one looks at the world through a local and regional prism, some of the topics Quinn-Judge suggests are either less relevant or even, like the issue of Dewey, irrelevant.

But let me return to the question: would it be possible that an enhanced focus on communists, their shifting ideologies, and their factions explain my texts better? It is indeed possible that there is a smoking gun out there, a document that explains why local cadres felt willing to deviate from communist policy and circulate such texts. I have yet to see such a text. In the end, though, even if such a text exists, I doubt it fundamentally matters. Ultimately, the reason that texts on cannibalism and race transformation circulated has nothing to do with communist policy, ideology, or factions. It has to do with how we understand Mekong delta society in a time of war, a society that was undergoing momentous transformations, and how social and cultural forces ended up shaping, in small ways and large, all who lived through that time.

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