

WHAT SHOULD WE TEACH OUR CHILDREN?: THE VIETNAM WAR IN VIETNAMESE HISTORY TEXTBOOKS, 1975-2000

BY LAM THIEU HIEN (ETHAN)

Introduction

The massive body of literature devoted to the Vietnam War testifies to its pivotal status in American and Vietnamese histories. Yet, it faces a historiographical dilemma. Documentation on the conflict continues to be mostly dominated by American scholars, who utilize American and South Vietnamese perspectives. Even as growing segments of these scholars attempt to introduce mainland Vietnamese perspectives into the conversation, these works continue to downplay how the contemporary Vietnamese communist regime understands the conflict.¹ Simultaneously, the lack of Vietnamese language sources readily available in English and general distrust towards these sources exacerbated the one-sidedness of the conflict's historiography. Such a distorted view does not help to advance scholarly understanding of the country and its ties with the conflict. At the same time, it disregards the complexities of Vietnam's relationship with communism and the dynamics of everyday communist experiences. As Glennys Young points out, communist regimes and societies go beyond transforming themselves into the higher stage of historical development.² They also envision and enforce a transformation of the self through self-realization that unfolds from within and without through institutional apparatuses.³ Following Young's cue, this paper attempts to fill this gap by examining Vietnamese textbooks, thereby highlighting the ways in which the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) constructs the history of the conflict and sustains its legitimacy and relevance.

Within the Vietnamese context, education has been at the center stage of the CPV's socialist-building project. In the 1979 "Resolution of the Politburo on Education Reforms", education was seen as an essential tool for "ideological and cultural revolutions," a component with "great usefulness to accomplish the historical mission victoriously" and a means to cultivate the new socialist "person" and culture with "socialist and nationalist characteristics found on the

¹ I refer Vietnamese who stay in Vietnam as mainland Vietnamese. From now on, I use the capitalised "North" and "South" to mean the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the Republic of Vietnam (ROV), respectively. I use the miniscule "north" and "south" to mean the different region of Vietnam.

² Glennys Young, *The Communist Experience in the Twentieth Century: A Global History Through Source* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), xviii.

³ Young, *The Communist Experience*, xviii, xix-xxi.

basis of Marxism-Leninism and socialist collectivism.”^{4 5} Within this parameter, history education plays the utmost importance.⁶ Accordingly, history textbooks must occupy a central role in pedagogy. An analysis of history textbooks is practical for other reasons. Only two decades after the War, the CPV abandoned the planned economy and formally ended the Subsidy Era (in Vietnamese: Thoi Bao cap), while recognizing the market as the principle for economic operation. Meanwhile, its closest ally and primary aid source, the Soviet Union collapsed, signifying that there was no turning back or room for errors for the Party in its road ahead. Consequentially, it forced the regime to plan its move carefully so as not to lose its grip on power. Vietnam, in time, established closer ties with its former foes, the United States and China. These developments seemingly contradicted and discredited why the conflict was fought in the first place and effectively challenged the regime’s legitimacy. Nevertheless, despite many changes in social, political, and economic conditions, the regime continued to maintain its power. History education and primarily, historical interpretation in history textbooks remained relatively unimpacted by “foreign” influences, unlike other state-controlled ideologues. This suggests that any deviations in historical narratives of the conflict, must, therefore, result from the CPV’s changing narratives, at the regime’s will.

For these reasons, this paper draws upon a number of history textbooks used in primary schools, middle schools, and high schools that were published between 1976 and 2000. It argues that how the CPV portrays the War, on the one hand, aligns with Marxist views of history yet on the other, deprives the understanding of the conflict as one that involved two halves of the country. These characteristics instill political ideologies in audiences’ mind and dictate what an ideal Vietnamese in the new post-War political system should think and how they should behave. That is, one must not only be anti-imperialist and later on, class conscious, but also be a nationalistic Vietnamese person, without regionally prejudiced connotations. It also argues that the CPV’s portrayal of the War conveys that violence is justified to build a prosperous and morally pure nation. Highlighting how the narratives of the conflict change over time, this paper argues that the regime adapts the textbooks to make sense of

⁴ I do all translation of Vietnamese texts to English. While attempting my best efforts, it is inevitable that some words lose meanings when translated into English. In such case, I will provide additional definition where needed in the Notes section.

⁵ Communist Party of Vietnam, “Resolution of the Politburo on Education Reforms” [Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về Cải cách Giáo dục] 14-NQ/TW, 11 January 1979, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1979* [Van kien Dang: Toan tap — 1979], vol. 40 (Hanoi: National Political Press [Nha Xuat ban Chinh tri Quoc gia], 2005), 7-9.

⁶ Communist Party, “Resolution,” 28.

contemporary political events and deal with traumatic experiences of violence.

The Textbooks

The textbooks used in this paper are part of a private collection in response to recent increasing interests in the Vietnamese education system (and experiences) of the past. All have been scanned and made available online. The collection includes materials in different academic subjects, published in different eras and regions, giving a partial lens into the variety of learning experiences in different social and political settings. The size of the collection is vast, but this paper only examines a narrower subset of eight textbooks: Three textbooks target students in Grade 5, published in 1975, 1985, and 1994. Two target students in Grade 9, published in 1985 and 1999. Three other targets at students in Grade 12, published in 1975, 1988, and 2000. Of these, textbooks published before 1990 must receive some close examinations. Although reunification was already in place, northern Vietnam and southern Vietnam continued to maintain distinct cultural institutions: while northern students took only ten years to graduate, southern Vietnamese only graduated after twelve years of general education.⁷ For that reason, textbooks published before 1988 were used primarily by Vietnamese students south of the seventeenth parallel and represented a localized interpretation of history that fits with the respective social, political, and economic reality.⁸

State monopolies on textbook publication are not a new phenomenon in Vietnam and are not unique to the country either.⁹ Most textbooks examined are compiled and published by the Education Press, which is a state-run publisher and set up by the Ministry of Education and Training in 1957. The only exceptions in this subset are the 1975 textbooks, which were instead compiled by the short-lived Liberation Press. Textbooks are also compiled collectively, though it was not until at least 1999 that the primary editors were named. This

⁷ Even in the early 1970s, North Vietnamese education officials have demonstrated admiration for the twelve-year education system in South Vietnam. The first step to integration began in 1981, when the ten-year education system in the North switched to eleven-year education system, suggesting that preparation had already been made before the War. The disparity between the regions continues until 1992, when the twelve-year education system applied across the country.

⁸ All textbooks examined are consulted from *Thuong Mai truong Xua*, www.thuongmaitruongxua.vn. For a complete listing of textbooks, see Appendix A.

⁹ Apparently, ROV maintained an active and lively private textbooks compilation industry. While the ministry responsible for education under the ROV also published some textbooks, they were not widely circulated as the government lacked the capital to do so. Hence, it was common for secondary school teachers to compile and publish textbooks of their own. However, these textbooks fall out of the scope of this paper, and I do not include them.

change seems to indicate a move to assert accountability on authors and editors and instill trustworthiness of the source through transparency. Furthermore, secondary school's textbook publication regime in Vietnam is peculiar in that textbooks are reprinted annually, and new reprints may or may not include changes. As a result, there might be alternations that these textbooks do not capture. Regardless of how minor these changes are, considering the significant gap between the publications, a chronological approach to trace how textbooks change over time is not logistically possible. Instead, this paper seeks to identify key themes and events of the Vietnam War mentioned in these textbooks, highlight the commonalities and differences between them, and see how the Vietnam War changes over time as it relates to the CPV.

Being Vietnamese, Becoming Vietnamese

When the North Vietnamese force entered Saigon, they not only had to take over the collapsed political apparatus of South Vietnam but also inherited an extremely politicized generation of youth. Their peculiar time of “liberation” created a state of uncertainty. While schools were required to operate as usual, as well as the examination that was planned in summer, the new regime had to adapt them into the new political environment. In June, a short two months after “liberation,” the CPV urged the “revolutionary education system in the South to rapidly eradicate the backward and reactionary natures of American and puppet government’s neo-colonist education system in newly liberated areas.”^{10 11} At the same time, it called for an immediate baptizing of all teaching staffs with “basics of present revolutionary conditions and duties, and revolutionary

¹⁰ Communist Party of Vietnam, “Directive of the Board of Secretariats on Educational Affairs in the South After the Day of Complete Liberation” [Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu ve Cong tac Giao duc o Mien Nam sau Ngay Hoan toan Giai phong], 221-CT/TW, 17 June 1976, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1975* [Van kien Dang: Toan tap — 1975], vol. 36 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2004), 225.

¹¹ The “examination” I refer here is the Baccalaureate examination which is modelled after the French Baccalaureate. I make some guess here on when the examination was supposed to be held based on various scarce information compiled from memoirs and several websites, or the so-called “memorial sites,” dedicated to remembering anything related to the Republic of Vietnam. After the “liberation” at the end of April, students were asked to return to school, and schools were requested to finish the curriculum. It is unsure whether the curriculum was significantly modified, and the students were asked to use the new 1975 textbook, as I examined here, since I cannot find a credible source that confirms so. The examination was held in September with several alternations. See Nguyen Van Thanh, “Phan 12: E- Giao duc va Thi cu tu Nam 1975 den Nay” [Part 12: E- Education and Examination from 1975 to Now], *Education and Examination Through Times in Vietnam*, originally published May 2005, last accessed 29 November 2020, www.ninh-hoa.com/bk-ThuyNguyen_GiaoDucvaThiCu-12.htm.

lines.”¹² As David G. Marr observes, while teachers in “science, medicine, and engineering found that little had changed in their conditions of employment, except that they had to attend occasional political instruction sessions,” those in social sciences and the humanities “had to assimilate and endorse sweeping alterations in course content before being permitted to lecture again.”¹³ The directive also called for outright discrimination against those whom they saw as “reactionary” for refusing to cooperate.¹⁴

From this perspective, the post-War authority understandably wanted the youth to continue to be as politically enthusiastic as they were during the conflict. As Olga Dror demonstrates, various newspapers in the DRV had raised enthusiasms when “the Vietcong had managed to recruit many youngsters between the ages of 14 and 16.”¹⁵ At the same time, however, they wanted youth to be enthusiastic in the correct ways and in *their* vision. As often as Southern youth could switch their political allegiance during the conflict, they could also easily place their loyalty elsewhere and challenge the newly established regime’s legitimacy in the post-War year. Hence, it was not a surprise when the authority seemed uninterested in radically sowing loyalty among students in similar ways as those in political re-education camps — actions that many South Vietnamese and foreign observers usually associated and overgeneralized with the communist regime in the post-War years.

Indeed, one would expect textbooks circulated immediately after 1975 to be radical. On the contrary, they maintain a balance between nationalist and the new communist narratives. Textbooks of all eras and for all audiences avoid labelling the Vietnam War as a “war” and mute the term “civil war.”¹⁶ This terminology suggests that the new authority steered away from recognizing the North-South division as well as the antagonism stemming from regional divides. In other words, it demonstrates an attempt to not “other” the southern Vietnamese populace by portraying the conflict not as one fought between South Vietnamese and North Vietnamese, but as one fought between the *Vietnamese* and the Americans.

However, not calling the “Vietnam War” as a “war” is just one step in

¹² Communist Party, “Directive,” 233.

¹³ David G. Marr, “Tertiary Education Research, and the Information Sciences in Vietnam,” in *Postwar Vietnam: Dilemmas of Socialist Development*, ed. David G. Marr and Christine P. White (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 16.

¹⁴ Communist Party, “Directive,” 233.

¹⁵ Olga Dror, *Making Two Vietnams: War and Youth Identities, 1965-1975* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 58.

¹⁶ I borrow this term from Marilyn B. Young, “Epilogue: The Vietnam War in American Memory,” in *Vietnam and America: The Most Comprehensive Documented History of the Vietnam War*, ed. Marvin E. Gettleman et al, revised and enlarged 2nd eds. (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1995), 516.

satisfying nationalistic fervor maintained by South Vietnamese students at the time. Instead, all textbooks emphasized the conflict as a “revolution” and describe it as “nationalistic,” “democratic,” and “popular.” Yet, with these terms, textbooks are divided on the treatment of the conflict. The 1975 high school textbook, for example, goes as far as to explicitly argue the conflict’s spiritual ties with the August Revolution in 1945. It reads, “The compatriots and soldiers of the South, with heroic vigor, intelligence, and strategising talent, have applied and improved to the highest levels experiences of the *August Revolution* and the previous *Anti-French Resistance*.”¹⁷ Later textbooks, however, are more ambiguous in making such bold connections. The 1988 publication only makes a brief note, “After 30 years of resilient fighting, the Vietnamese people have beaten the French imperialists [...] and has beaten the American imperialists.”¹⁸ The 1985 middle school publication, cuts ties with August Revolution in 1945 completely and implies, “However, in 1954, our revolutionary force was not strong enough to liberate the whole country; the enemies have lost but not been completely beaten.”¹⁹

Here, one can see that the authors muddle between 1945 and 1954 as a starting point to establish continuities in revolutionary history. This is repeated in textbooks that serve a unified Vietnam’s audience: in particular, the 1999 and 2000 textbooks do not establish clear connections with the August Revolution in 1945, but the 1985 and 1994 primary school textbooks do. What explains this inconsistency? By conflating the term “revolution” to, on the one hand, charge the conflict as a separate and localized revolution, and on the other, see the conflict as a national phenomenon and continuation of the 1945 event, the authority asserts that the Vietnam War was essentially a colonial war and equates the twenty-year division between the DRV and the ROV as exogenously imposed upon the country. The “liberation” in 1975, hence, was not only historically necessary and relevant but also nationalistic. Furthermore, the term instills new nationalist narratives and dishonors those of the ROV as “phony.” For those who entered school shortly after 1975, this is to warn students to abandon the nationalist discourse of the fallen regime in favor of the “new” nationalism presented in the textbooks. As such, the textbooks feed into nationalism shared among South Vietnamese students while applauding and “correcting” their sentiments to fit into the new political regime.

But “revolution” goes beyond a simple historical, nationalistic aura. As

¹⁷ *History Grade 12 General Class: Book 2* [Lich su Lop 12 Pho thong: Tap 2] (Ho Chi Minh City: Liberation Education Press [Nha Xuat ban Giao duc Giai phong], 1975), 107-108.

¹⁸ *History Grade 12 General Class: Book 2* [Lich su Lop 12 Pho thong: Tap 2], 10th reprint (Ho Chi Minh City: Education Press [Nha Xuat ban Giao duc], 1988), 189.

¹⁹ *History Grade 9 General Class* [Lich su Lop 9 Pho thong], 9th reprint (Ho Chi Minh City: Education Press, 1985), 117.

any self-respecting socialist regime, the use of “revolution” must align with the classist connotation under Marxist-Leninist interpretations. Linking with “revolution,” the textbooks liberally sprinkle terms such as “neo-colony” to describe the divided South and “imperialist” to portray the United States. Publications circulated before 1990 employ this description whenever the United States appears as an actor in historical narratives. Concurrently, they also add in terms such as “contradiction” and “struggle” very typical of Marxist-Leninist didactic. Such liberal uses perhaps serve a dual purpose: they introduce students with Marxist vocabularies and at the same time, render the conflict in more familiar through terminologies introduced before in other disciplines. Yet, given the political conditions at the time, repeated appearances of these terminologies also reinforce the “new” image of the conflict in students’ mind. Textbooks, therefore, serve as a tool to introduce and reinforce in students the Marxist-Leninist ideas.

More vividly, these Marxist-Leninist connotations also apply to the ways in which the textbooks describe how the Vietnam War came to terms as an armed conflict. In this matter, the textbooks all begin with the creation of SEATO. As the 1975 high school textbook reads, “In September 1954, American imperialists summoned a conference in Manila to establish a conquering military alliance bloc called ‘Southeast Asia [Collective] Defense Pact’... This pact placed southern Vietnam into their ‘protectorate’ area in an illegal way.”²⁰ Looking more inwardly, the narratives continue by mentioning “atrocities” committed by Ngo Dinh Diem’s regime — something that the new post-War regime does not shy away from. The 1988 textbook, for instance, goes at length, such as “[stealing] away lands gained by peasants during the [1945] revolution,” turning the south into bases for American military actions, “[transforming] the south to consume idling goods [...], under the guise of ‘economic aid’,” and “[perverting] southern Vietnamese [...] to live a deprave life.”²¹ In all textbooks, the narratives put forward the argument, albeit differently worded, that Diem’s regime is “authoritarian and fascist” and “extremely cruel.” Here, one can trace the language about “imperialism” and “fascism” liberally employed in these textbooks to Lenin’s thesis.²² As a fervent follower of Marxism-*Leninism*, over solely Marxism, this strong linguistic appeal come as no surprise.²³ American “imperialists” militarism and economic

²⁰ *History Grade 12* (1975), 24-25.

²¹ *History Grade 12* (1988), 92-94.

²² Vladimir Ilych Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, first published in April 1917, last accessed 29 November 2020, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/.

²³ While the CPV’s political doctrine is the so-called Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh, in many official accounts, claim to have read only Lenin’s many theses. See Pierre Brocheux, *Ho Chi Minh: A Biography*, trans. Claire Duiker (New York, NY: Cambridge

grabbing conform with interpretation in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, which Le Duan, one of the highest-ranked member of the CPV, masterfully pens,

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, capitalism has developed into imperialism; monopoly has replaced free competition. To harness maximum profit, those monopoly capitalists not only increasingly exploited workers and working people in the country but also waged colonial invasion, exported capitals, and transformed small, weak, and backward nations into sources that supplied cheap raw materials and markets that consumed its excess goods.²⁴

All narratives then provide contrasting images to highlight the agony between the regime and the “people,” a move that manipulates and dichotomizes historical narratives. The 2000 textbook, echoing previous publications, on the one hand, reads, “[Diem] organized a series of siege, massacre, and imprisonment” all those who did not agree with Diem, and “With a motto ‘destroy communism without mercy’ [and] ‘rather mistakenly killing than missing out,’ American-Diem uses many savage slaughtering methods....”²⁵ On the other, the textbooks mention many protests that sprung up and emphasize their peacefulness and cross-class nature. The 1988 textbook writes: after the “Peace Movement” agitated by “intelligentsia and urbanites,” “thirty thousand workers in Hue” and “more than 200 thousand workers” joined the strike while farmers struggled against the new land reforms and journalists “did not stop displaying and accusing many policies that were against the people and treasonous of Ngo Dinh Diem.”²⁶ However, the narratives then point to these movements’ susceptibility to being suppressed and put down. According to the 1999 textbook, “revolutionary forces only react with political struggles, so it

University Press, 2007), 14. For official statement, see Ho Chi Minh, “The Path Which Led Me to Leninism” [Con duong Dan Toi den Chu nghia Lenin], originally published 22 April 1960, in *Ho Chi Minh: Completed Works — 1959-1960* [Ho Chi Minh: Toan Tap — 1959-1960], vol. 12, 3rd ed. (Hanoi: National Political – Truth Press [Nha Xuat ban Chinh tri Quoc gia – Su that], 2011), 561-563.

²⁴ Le Duan, “Lenin and the Vietnamese Revolution: A Speech at a Solemn Rally to Commemorate the Ninetieth Anniversary of the Birthday of V. I. Lenin, April 1960” [Chu nghia Lenin va Cach mang Viet Nam: Bai noi tai Cuoc Mit tinh Trong the Ky niem Lan thu 90 Ngay sinh V. I. Lenin, thang Tu 1960], in *Le Duan: Completed Works — 1950-1965* [Le Duan: Toan tap — 1950-1965], vol. 1 (Hanoi: National Political – Truth Press, 2007). See also Lenin, *Imperialism*.

²⁵ Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) [Bo Giao duc va Dao tao], *History Grade 12: Book 2* [Lich su Lop 12: Tap 2], 8th reprint, ed. Dinh Xuan Lam, Nguyen Xuan Minh, and Tran Ba De (Ho Chi Minh City: Education Press, 2000),

²⁶ *History Grade 12* (1988), 95.

was damaged quite heavily.”²⁷ Along this line of reasoning, an armed response is needed to counter Diem’s squash of revolutionary actions. In these circumstances, the Party then “has timely assessed the situation and clearly outlines, ‘The fundamental lines of the revolution in the south [...] primarily [involves political resistance] combines with [the use of] armed force.’”²⁸ Unsurprisingly, after the Party’s reassessment, “uprising movements of the mass” spread across the South and was particularly successful in the Ben Tre with the Dong Khoi movement, where “an autonomous people’s committee was formed” and “farming land of rich landlords was confiscated and given out to poor toiling peasants.”²⁹

One observation can be made here. Despite the “nationalistic,” “democratic,” and “popular” nature of the “revolution” in the South, the textbooks, especially those published between 1975 and 1988, focus almost exclusively on the movements initiated by the peasantry and the workers. The Vietnamese Marxist-Leninists see these two social classes as the primary force of their socialist revolution. This goes against the fact that the anti-Diem and anti-American movements at this time were largely guided by students and intelligentsia, sometimes involving individuals who held high-ranked office. Nevertheless, because of this silence, the textbooks force its audience to see themselves narrowly in the two social classes ideologically permitted to exist in the new socialist political reality. The dual and somewhat circular observation is exactly what Gotelind Müller argues in *Designing History in East Asian Textbooks: Identity Politics and Transnational Inspiration*, where she emphasizes that textbooks engage students and other audiences in a process called “political socialization.”³⁰ Given the new political reality, the textbooks, as examined, through its selective choice of language, do not only present themselves as manifestos of new orders but also familiarize or “socialize” students with the new changes. In other words, what one can expect when reading these narratives is that denouncing Diem is not only meant to instill nationalism among students but also inculcate the students with anti-imperialist and internationalist—thus, Marxist—spirits. Being Vietnamese and being anti-imperialist and internationalist is, therefore, fundamentally and forcefully synonymous.

Nevertheless, there is another lurking ideological motive behind this kind of narrative. Recalling how the textbooks call the North as “having gained

²⁷ MOET, *History Grade 9: Book 2* [Lich su 9: Tap 2], 10th reprint, ed. Ho Song and Nguyen Kien (Hanoi: Education Press, 1999), 88.

²⁸ MOET, *History Grade 9* (1999), 88.

²⁹ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 129-131.

³⁰ Gotelind Müller, ed., *Designing History in East Asian Textbooks: Identity Politics and Transnational Inspiration* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), 1.

necessary conditions to transitioning into the socialist revolutionary period.”³¹ However, by viewing the conflict the way the textbooks do, as Vietnamese against Americans, one can detect the sublime ideological implication: Vietnam was in a severely incomplete transitory period, and the South remains in the lower stage of historical material development which, according to the Marxist-Leninist worldview, is capitalism.³² Only through such lens can the existence of a capitalist South pose not only a “possibility that capitalism is going to recover” but an active and direct threat to the “socialism.”³³ To uphold the “revolution” then, it is logical to have a concentrated political apparatus, or “proletarian dictatorship,” as Marxist-Leninists theorize.³⁴ The CPV assumes this responsibility.

Another issue remains. So far, “revolution” and other narratives of these textbooks all point to a balance between nationalism and classism. This seems contradictory considering that orthodox Marxism and Leninism tend to discard the national aspect in favor of internationalism in political theorization and application. It is imperative to stress that whether Marxist, Leninist or neither, the “imperialism” and “fascism” that these textbooks liberally sprinkle in their narratives still reflect an internationalist connotation. According to an article written by Giovanni Arrighi, Terrence K. Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein,

The national struggle and the class struggle have been seen as related historically, and so theoretically, but as different in kind because their historical trajectories differ, the one toward reproducing the capitalist world-economy by extending and deepening its interstate plane of operations, the other toward eliminating the capitalist world-economy by eliminating its defining bourgeois-proletarian relation.³⁵

How can the CPV explain this contradiction? As Huynh Kim Khanh argues, unlike other hardcore socialist regimes, the CPV blurs the lines between classism and nationalism in their political and theoretical foundation.³⁶ This goes beyond, say, the Communist Party of China, which Arif Dirlik observed during the Chinese Revolution placed nationalist movements as equal to class

³¹ *History Grade 12* (1975), 27.

³² Eero Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World: Marxist-Leninist Doctrine and the Changes in International Relations, 1975-93* (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press Inc., 1997), 29-31.

³³ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 29-31.

³⁴ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 29-31.

³⁵ Giovanni Arrighi, Terrence K. Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein, “The Liberation of Class Struggle,” *Review (Fernand Braudel Centre)* 10, no. 3 (Winter 1987): 403, www.jstor.org/stable/40241065.

³⁶ Huynh Kim Khanh, “The Vietnamese Communist Movement Revisited,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* (1976): 453-457, www.jstor.com/stable/27908295.

struggles.³⁷ Furthermore, in contrast to Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, the CPV's strong and repeated emphasis that the conflict as a "revolution" cannot be understood simply as a matter of ideological and political conception.³⁸ According to Khanh, this comes much from the Party's peculiar founding history, that is its colonial contexts, which helps to translate that nationalism *always* trumps Marxist appeals, for it has real political necessities to establish support, thence, legitimacy among the Vietnamese mass.³⁹ One can also observe that narratives remain consistent across eras and audiences, reflecting an effort to tell a common story about the path towards revolutionary violence. However, these consistencies serve other functions as well. As Gotelind Müller elaborates later on, the "role of curricula for history and related school subjects in inculcating rigid, homogenous and totalist visions of the national 'self'."⁴⁰ Yet, given the appearance of the Party as a "wise" and prophetic institution, divine and powerful against all odds, the textbooks clearly aim to accustom them to see the Party and the State as intertwined and necessary. They also aim to help them to understand Marxism-Leninism as an "accurate" historical force. With the post-War context in mind, this surely gives legitimacy for the new regime that was taking hold of power.

Educate or Indoctrinate?

Textbooks, communist or not, always contain biases and ideological components in their narratives. With this kind of reading, it would be wrong to overemphasize that the authors of these textbooks only aim to indoctrinate its audience. Doing so would reduce recipients of these narratives as passive subjects who accept whatever is presented. As Young comments, "Communist citizens [...] constructed complicated and messy relationships to Communist ideology and the Communist political system more generally."⁴¹ In other words, the attitudes of textbook recipients may range from completely supporting the ideology and its political regime to a variety of skepticism or complete dissidence. Nevertheless, as the previous section indicates, textbooks do not just enforce a vision of the future socialist society and socialist citizens – something that the CPV can control; textbooks also are shaped by society. For the authors, it must be recognized, are also products of what Marx theorized as "superstructure" — something over which the CPV has little control. In that sense, textbooks must compromise the conditions of the individuals,

³⁷ Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 54.

³⁸ Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein, "Liberation of Class Struggle," 403-404.

³⁹ Khanh, "Vietnamese Communist," 453-457.

⁴⁰ Müller, *Designing History*, 1.

⁴¹ Young, *Communist Experience*, 120.

subsequently, their “micro” vision, or the “base,” and the larger imposition of the state, or the new “superstructure.” At the convergence of the two, Raymond Williams argues, textbooks must present some form of reality, albeit ideological.⁴² With this in mind, the authors of these textbooks must seek to teach historical events and provide accurate, albeit limited, factual information, not just simply seeing textbooks as a pure ideological propagating means.

Indeed, the desire to instill accurate information beyond the boundary of ideology can be seen in how each history lesson is organized. From 1975 to at least 1988, the textbooks do not feature any questions that would perhaps engage students with history lessons. In contrast, authors of the 2000 publication do not only seek to encourage students to actively learn history, given they prompt questions frequently, but also to urge the textbooks’ audience to critically interpret history through “how” and “why” questions. For example, in the subsection that discusses the Vietnam War between 1961 and 1965, the textbooks prompt the following questions,

1. *How* have the people and the army of the south fought against “Special War” of American – Nguy?
2. *How* has the resistance struggle of the people and army of the south against the scheme and actions of American – Nguy between 1954 and 1965 impacted the protection of the socialist North?^{43 44}

The mere inclusion of these questions indicates that authors of textbooks published before at least 1988 saw these more as a means of indoctrination (which is expected considering the political conditions mentioned above) and a more passive way of organizing history lesson. One can also observe the 2000 textbook invited students to deliberate historical information. And given the sensitivity that history can present and the temporal proximity to the conflict, textbooks must provide a good measure of historical information.

For another example, let us consider the 1988 textbooks and the 2000 publication. Despite the fact that the latter has its narratives completely

⁴² Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” in *British Marxist Criticism*, ed. Victor N. Paananen (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 474.

⁴³ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 141.

⁴⁴ I make a direct translation here with the term “Special War” (in Vietnamese: Chien tranh Dac biet). “Special War” is how Vietnamese historiography calls American strategy proposed by Eugene Staley, an economist from Stanford University, and Maxwell D. Taylor, who served first as a Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and later on, as an ambassador to South Vietnam. American historiography often refers the “Special War” as McNamara-Taylor strategy. I am unaware of why Vietnamese historiography chooses this term. On the other hand, Nguy (偽) is a Sino-Vietnamese word/character/term that means “fake” or “illegitimate.” Vietnamese historiographies use this term to refer to the ROV, signifying its political illegitimate and puppetry nature to the Americans.

rewritten, the two textbooks maintain discussions on the period's most crucial events — the McNamara-Taylor fact-finding mission, the deployment of troops in Vietnam, the implementation of “Strategic Hamlet,” the founding of the Liberation Army of Vietnam, and the Battle of Ap Bac and its subsequent developments — relatively intact. One key change made, however, is that the 2000 textbook mentions in detail the Buddhist Crisis in 1963, a prelude to the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem.⁴⁵ That these textbook authors expanded their scope of narratives to include more events and portray the conflict more comprehensively demonstrates their desire to ensure accurate and factual history lessons.

Besides, it is not difficult to point out that the 1999 and 2000 textbooks are significantly less didactic than those published in previous decades. By the turn of the century, most polemical and emotionally loaded language had fallen out of use. How textbooks refer to Americans represents a prime example. Whereas the “imperialists” label had been so fervently applied to United States in the earlier publications, as mentioned above, by the turn of the century, it is employed more sparingly if it is used at all. The 2000 textbook only describes the United States as “imperialists” a handful of times in the first chapter that discusses the Vietnam War and even opts for the more formal name to label the United States in parts that discuss the Paris Peace Accord in the early 1970s.⁴⁶ This assessment is also compatible with more recently published textbooks that no longer feature the quotes and teachings of Ho Chi Minh or political assessments taken directly from the Party's directives.⁴⁷ It seems like triggering and maintaining revolutionary attitudes is no longer the underlying motivation for textbooks authors.

Indeed, this shift can be attributed to the fact that when the 1999 and 2000 textbooks were published, enough generations of Vietnamese had been trained under its education system that the need to quickly sow loyalty and familiarity with the new political environments was no longer a priority. Essentially, the highly politicized and nationalistic attitudes of southern Vietnamese public had been neutralized; therefore, the CPV found the less didactical language more permissible when its presence and actions were no longer challenged. Indeed, one can best see this shift in various education policy directives published by the CPV. In the Board of Secretariats' Direction compiled 1975 and the Politburo' Resolution produced in 1979, one can observe that the regime overtly emphasized the role of education in cultivating a “collective of labors [...] that suit the increasingly demanding requirements in

⁴⁵ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 140.

⁴⁶ For “imperialists”, see MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 140. For formal term, see MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 165.

⁴⁷ *History Grade 12* (1988), 119.

the socialism-building project.”⁴⁸ Likewise, it should be no surprise that “socialism” appears in high frequency in the two documents. The 1975 and 1980s textbooks are products of these political directives. This explains why the textbooks’ narratives are embedded with terms and articles that are particularly revolutionary. Nonetheless, the Standing Committee’s Resolution published in 1993 no longer connects education with socialism building. Interestingly, it mentions “socialism” once and calls for more attention on “teaching Marxism-Leninism [and] Ho Chi Minh Thought” without explicating its main purpose.⁴⁹ Within this context, the 1999 and 2000 textbooks are no longer concerned with socialism-building; hence, the textbook authors could strip away the revolutionary-laden lexicons.

A cursory reading of the 1999 and 2000 textbooks might convey the changes that these publications underwent to return history education to its foremost function: “education.” Max Hocutt provides interesting insight on this issue. He argues that while “indoctrination seeks to inculcate belief, which may or may not be true,” “education seeks to inculcate knowledge, belief in proven truth.”⁵⁰ As Hocutt elaborates, while indoctrination portrays history from “only one side of the story” by handpicking only pieces of evidence that support the belief and suppressing others, education presents history with a diversity of opinions yet “only to the degree to which [the evidence] supported [the narratives].”⁵¹ According to this definition, textbooks published between 1975 and 1988 are clearly less concerned with educating history and more concerned with indoctrinating students based on their ideologically and emotionally laced languages and the omission of questions that informally suppress the possibility of diverging private opinions. Alternatively, the 1999 and 2000 publication align more with “education” purposes, as Hocutt argues.

Or do they? While later publications remove elements that are generally considered subjective to foster a more objective view of history, the motives become disputable when the 2000 textbook also purges appendices attached at the end of each chapter, which contain relevant excerpts from memoirs and interviews of political figures or revolutionary heroes, but also official documents, relevant statistics and information compiled by the authors themselves.⁵² Of course, one would expect that the contents in these appendices

⁴⁸ Communist Party of Vietnam, “Resolution,” 9.

⁴⁹ Party Central Executive Committee, “Resolution on the Continuing Renovating of Education and Training Matters” [Nghị quyết về Tiếp tục Đổi mới trong Sự nghiệp Giáo dục và Đào tạo] 04-NQ/HNTW, 14 January 1993.

⁵⁰ Max Hocutt, “Indoctrination v. Education,” *Academic Questions* 18, no. 3 (September 2005): 35-36, doi.org/10.1007/s12129-005-1016-y.

⁵¹ Hocutt, “Indoctrination v. Education,” 35-36.

⁵² Compare *History Grade 12* (1975), 73-76; *History Grade 12* (1988), 131-133, and MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000).

would serve greatly in illustrating the Vietnam War for the textbooks' audiences and affirming the revolutionary stance and the regime's ideology. Especially on the second purpose, it is questionable why the regime would back the removal of such ideologically persuasive tools when its legitimacy and credibility heavily relied on them and effectively subordinate ideology to historical information. However, the 1986 Speech by Truong Chinh, the CPV affirmed that it no longer differentiated between pure ideological works and real-life practices in socialism building in the realm of education, where education must "combine teaching [and] learning with productive labors, scientific experiments and researches, [and] application of technological advancement."⁵³ In other words, history became equated with technical knowledge that could be attained through real-life interactions. Whether to include the appendices, thus increasing its ideological efficacy, or not makes no difference and is no longer important and necessary. Ideology could still be instilled without explicit mentioning in textbooks. One could see how little the 1999 and 2000 textbooks depart from the 1975 and 1980s publications when according to Norbert Gaworek, in communist education, "history that is written not only reflects the philosophy and policy of the regime; it is its auxiliary. As such it must explain current policies and events in terms of the founding myths and charters provided by Marx and Lenin."⁵⁴ That is to say, history is a technical tool used to help students better understand society and, in particular, what Vietnam came to be.

This leaves the first purpose relatively unanswered, however. To understand the first purpose, one must adopt a more pragmatic evaluation of the function of history. Indeed, the questionable motive is far more understandable when we consider this seemingly radical break from past narratives with the function that historical narrative has in dealing with conflicts and its memories,

⁵³ Truong Chinh, "Political Report of the Communist Party of Vietnam Central Executive Committee at the Sixth National Delegation Congress of the Party: Given by Comrade Truong Chinh, General Secretary of Party Central Executive Committee (Fifth Session), President of the Council of the State" [Bao cao Chinh tri Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang Cong san Viet Nam tai Dai hoi Dai bieu Toan quoc Lan thu VI cua Dang: Do Dong chi Truong Chinh, Tong Bi thu Ban Chap hanh Trung uong Dang (Khoa V), Chu tich Hoi dong Nha nuoc, Trinh bay," 15 December 1986, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1986* [Van kien Dang: Toan tap — 1986], vol. 47 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2006), 773.

⁵⁴ Norbert H. Gaworek, "Education, Ideology, and Politics: History in Soviet Primary and Secondary Schools," *The History Teacher* 11, no. 1 (November 1977): 56, www.jstor.org/stable/492726

and the context in which these textbooks were published.

Trauma: Remembering and Forgetting

As Stuart Foster and Keith Crawford argue in *What Shall We Tell the Children?: International Perspectives on School History Textbooks*, history and its construction in textbooks are “intensely political [activities].”⁵⁵ This stems from a standpoint that history textbooks are discursive means to propagate “shared attitudes and the construction of shared memories.”⁵⁶ In other words, one must understand textbooks as a two-layer politics: as how the regime can translate conflicts so they are conceivable to an ordinary audience on the one hand, and as to how the regime can fit the conflict into the political conditions that it faces on the other.

From a pragmatic assessment of the Vietnam War, one cannot deny the sheer traumatic scales of the “shared attitudes” and “shared memories.” The conflict’s temporal proximity to when these textbooks are published only aggravates the grueling trauma. So much so that Vietnamese historiographies have avoided dealing with these traumatic experiences in a frank manner. One of a few articles brave enough to compile the numbers comprehensively, “Consequence of the Vietnam War (1954-1975) – Several Issues Discussed” claims that on the Vietnamese side there were around two million civilian deaths, over two million civilians with permanent bodily damages, and another two million people exposed to toxic chemical properties.⁵⁷ War sacrifices numbered around nine hundred thousand—a third have yet to be found.⁵⁸

Yet, these numbers did not speak much for the mundane, every day, and on-the-ground experiences of civilians: Vietnamese historiographies have consistently neglected, censored, and even outright condemned and forbade discussions of this topic. Indeed, in harmony with mainstream historiographies, despite many chances to include these statistics into the narratives, all textbooks are vague and often skip over quantitating the scale and the effect of the War on

⁵⁵ Stuart J. Foster and Keith A. Crawford, ed., *What Shall We Tell the Children?: International Perspectives on School History Textbook* (Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing, 2006), 6.

⁵⁶ Foster and Crawford, ed., *What Shall We Tell the Children?*, 4.

⁵⁷ University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University, Hanoi [Đại học Khoa học và Xã hội Nhân văn, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội], “Consequence of the Vietnam War (1954-1975) – Several Issues Discussed” [Hậu quả của Cuộc Chiến tranh Việt Nam (1954-1975) – May Van de Ban luan], originally published 29 April 2015, last accessed 01 December 2020, www.uss.h.vnu.edu.vn/d6/vi-VN/news2/Hau-qua-cua-cuoc-chien-tranh-Viet-Nam-1954-1975-may-van-de-ban-luan-6-616-11757.

⁵⁸ USSH, “Consequence.”

the Vietnamese side, overall. Reflecting on the Tet Offensive, the 2000 textbook, for example, makes only one note: “In the second and third phase of the general offensive and resistance [campaign], our forces faced not least disadvantages and damages.” No numbers follow nor are there terms that connote violence. In a rare sight, the 1975 and 1985 textbooks demonstrate a more genuine attempt to quantify the range and the human impacts of Agent Orange as well as the amount of napalm the American dropped on the South, but they do not go on far enough to discuss the long-term impacts of such atrocities, especially in the 1985 textbook, when enough time has passed for the consequences to surface.⁵⁹ At the same time, this also explains why when Bao Ninh’s *The Sorrow of War*, which deals very critically with the experiences during and after the War, was finally allowed to publish in the 1980s. David W. P. Elliott calls the reactions from domestic readers and critics “sensational.”⁶⁰

Nevertheless, these textbook authors are not alone when they choose to leave out the gruesome and violent parts of the Vietnam War. The fact that War trauma is a very personal or specific experience makes the description about the pains and controversies in textbooks necessarily abstract: while the students may see and acknowledge the violence, they could never relive the trauma when learning it. When studying Indian textbooks, Sylvie Guichard notices that these publications present violence “very cursorily and in a very general and abstract away.”⁶¹ According to Guichard, “In a post-conflict situation, the content of history textbooks is seen as potentially helping or hindering reconciliation.”⁶² Along this line of reasoning, textbook authors might have chosen to leave out the traumas and violence of War to facilitate reconciliation between social groups with emotional ties to the conflict. In the Vietnamese case, that would be between the North and the South Vietnamese. While we have clearly seen that the CPV had no misgivings about the widespread persecution against many South Vietnamese, it is also clear that only a limited group of people were incarcerated for a prolonged period of time: those had held influential positions or had served in South Vietnam’s political, administrative, and military apparatuses. Also, shortly before the Fall of Saigon, the CPV instructed cadres in newly liberated territories to temporarily utilize any individuals with their technical skills, including soldiers and military officers — anti-communist and reactionary as most of them might have been in the eyes of the CPV — in post-liberated works and promised that they could return to their hometowns as well

⁵⁹ *History Grade 12* (1975), 55-56; *History Grade 12* (1988), 111-112.

⁶⁰ David W. P. Elliott, *Changing Worlds: Vietnam’s Transition from Cold War to Globalisation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53.

⁶¹ Sylvie Guichard, “The Indian Nation and Selective Amnesia: Representing Conflicts and Violence in Indian History Textbooks,” *Nations and Nationalism* 19, no. 1 (2013): 78, 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2012.00556.x.

⁶² Guichard, “The Indian Nation,” 80.

as employments in domains outside the military once the War was over.⁶³ Officials have also claimed that the fact they did not pursue trials on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity on these individuals, and that they, once released, would nominally civil liberties again as evidence for the CPV's works towards national reconciliation.⁶⁴ Thus, by not extolling details about the suffering that Vietnamese on any sides experienced, all textbooks also seek to prevent potential conflicts between those whose families had served the CPV and the Vietcong and those whose families had allegiant with the South Vietnamese government.

Of course, in the highly political atmospheres that these policies were carried out, one must take these claims with a grain of salt. As Tran Huu Quang observes, post-conflict reconciliation in Vietnam was fairly limited and, in many cases, agitated resentments from the mass population. Poor and harsh living conditions for those in the re-education camps, political harassments of those whose relatives were in re-education, and the total surrender of the material wealth of the South Vietnamese populace would only make it easy for many to connect the bleak post-War outlook with the atrocities committed by the Northern forces against South Vietnam. Partially blaming the mentality of "drunken with victory," where the victor, the CPV, asserted excessive "propaganda and celebration of one side's achievements in warfare and victory," Tran Huu Quang laments the lack of mobilization and subsequently, the quick disbandment of "groups or components," which he saw as "could have played an important catalytic role in the reconciliation progress": social and cultural organizations, independent newspapers, the so-called "Third Segment," and even the National Liberation Front.⁶⁵ Hence, reconciliation in the post-War is achieved by leaving out violent details in narratives. Textbook authors, especially for the 1988 publication, avoid agitating disillusionment from South Vietnamese towards the new regime.

Clearly, textbook authors and the new post-War regime are particularly anxious in dealing with the violence of the War directly. However, this

⁶³ Communist Party of Vietnam, "Directives from the Board of Secretariats on the Policies Towards Imprisoned and Surrendered Soldiers in the New Situations" [Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu ve Chinh sach doi voi Tu, Hang binh trong Tinh hình Moi], 218-CT/TW, 18 April 1975, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1975*, vol. 36 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2006), 122.

⁶⁴ Ginetta Sagan and Stephen Denney, "Re-Education in Unliberated Vietnam: Loneliness, Suffering, and Death," *The Indochina Newsletter*, October-November 1982, www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~sdenney/Vietnam-Reeducation-Camps-1982.

⁶⁵ Tran Huu Quang, "The Question of Reconciliation in Vietnam: A Relevant Social Issue," in "Peace and Reconciliation in Vietnam," ed. Sophie Quinn-Judge, special issue, *Peace & Change* 30, no. 4 (October 2013): 419-421, doi.org/10.1111/pech.12038.

reluctance to deal with traumatic experiences, especially painful memories caused by the “our” side suggests that the regime is particularly torn with its desire to teach history “objectively” and indoctrinate. In other words, purging and censoring primary sources that are supportive of historical narratives is not a retreat from objectivity that characterized history textbooks at the turn of the century. Instead, it is a move to remove emotional elements in an effort to portray history objectively. In one observation, Patrizia Violi critiques the term “history” and argues that even though “[history and memory] are interwoven in highly complex ways,” they are two distinct entities.⁶⁶ As Violi demonstrates further, the thin line between history and memory often results in “the collective memory [...] diverging from historical reality.”⁶⁷ The history that textbooks try to reconstruct can only be understood as an attempt to re-represent memory in an objective light.

Nevertheless, despite the “national” aura of trauma and violence that the textbooks in this subset demonstrate, the bombs, Agent Orange, and all the deaths that the textbooks might tally are still personal experiences. At most, they are collective trauma, which is remembered strictly by those within the specified community. Here, this paper borrows Benedict Anderson’s definition of a “nation” as an “imagined political community.”⁶⁸ However, contrary to Anderson, this paper extracts from that “nation” and focuses solely on one “community.” Because “community” is imagined, its image must be drawn from individuals, yet the necessity to fit the collective translates to a need to bypass individual experiences in favor of common, albeit abstract, narratives. Examining German and Jewish identities in the post-Holocaust era, Johannes Pfäfflin agrees, “The suspension of differentiation in favor of a shared, albeit broken, German identity meant that, for a long time, individual fates could not be acknowledged — that is to say, remorse and grieving were suspended as well.”⁶⁹ In a similar light, the textbook authors’ decision to shun the individual’s traumas, to minimize or removes gruesome details (even if they are directed towards the collective) and particularly in the 1999 and 2000 textbooks, to tone down polemical and emotionally pumped lexicons from the narratives functions to suspend the pain and the grief from collective memories. Effectively, the 1999 and 2000 textbooks build up a shield of self-defense against the memory of the War and against reliving the events. By carefully selecting which parts of

⁶⁶ Patrizia Violi, *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Space, and History*, trans. Alastair McEwen (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017), 9-10.

⁶⁷ Violi, *Landscapes of Memory*, 9-10.

⁶⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 6.

⁶⁹ Johannes Pfäfflin, “From Broken Identities to Repair: German-Jewish Dialogue,” in *History, Trauma, and Shame: Engaging the Past Through Second Generation Dialogue*, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 141.

history to include in the narratives, all textbooks forge a collective “official” amnesia. Forgetting, in this sense, becomes a means to deal with and remember the War without dealing with it head-on.

This does not mean that the textbooks do not deal with suffering during the War; they just do so without mentioning the suffering at all. Guichard argues that understanding violence necessitates an “an individual emotional component” that “supplement the explanations of the socio-historical context” and in turn, demands shifting “the level in the discourse from structures to actors or from ‘high politics’ to common people.”⁷⁰ In other words, to understand violence, discussions about it must focus on recreating the individual experiences and employing language comprehensible to the person. By the turn of the century, perhaps the only textbooks in the examined subset that continue to deal with individual sufferings are those targeted at primary school audiences. Following trends of middle school and high school textbooks, the 1985 and 1994 textbooks purge several interesting articles, one of which is reading called “The American-Diem Militants Cannibalize” that displays gruesome details to the young audience.⁷¹ However, they also retain and add more biography-style articles that skip the term “damages” and use more frank terms such as “sacrifice” and “dead.”⁷² Some examples include “Remember My Words!” which recalls the death of Nguyen Van Troi, or “Nguyen Ba Ngoc Forgets Oneself to Save Two Young Children” which recounts the sacrifice of a primary-school-age boy. It is not difficult to understand why: the abstract and vague references made in middle school and high school textbooks would render violence, and the history of the War, incomprehensible to primary schoolers. However, while the direct and gruesome languages are more freely used in narratives, there are still gaps in narratives that textbooks refuse to abridge.

Recalling that “nation” and its narratives — history — are imagined, it is logical to say that nation can be imagined in many ways. While the primary textbooks incorporate individuals’ sufferings into their narratives, the personalities honored therein are isolated cases and little resemble the experiences of actual civilians. Both the 1985 and 1994 textbooks ignore the *actual* voices and only capture a specific moment of these characters, without dealing much with their personal self, which would fundamentally impact how

⁷⁰ Guichard, “The Indian Nation,” 81.

⁷¹ Compare *History Grade 5 General Class* [Lich su Lop 5 Pho thong] (Ho Chi Minh City: Liberation Education Press, 1975), 94; *Tales of History Grade 5* [Truyen ke Lich su Lop 5], ed. Hoang Nguyen Cat and Pham Ky Ta (Ho Chi Minh City: Education Press, 1985), 127-128; *Tales of History Grade 5* [Truyen ke Lich su Lop 5], 8th reprint, ed. Hoang Nguyen Cat and Pham Ky Ta (Ho Chi Minh City: Education Press, 1994), 128-129.

⁷² *Tales of History Grade 5* (1985), 79-85; *Tales of History Grade 5* (1994), 79-84.

they perceive the violence of War. Another commonality among the biography-style articles is how the narratives about these individuals are structured. For example, “Remember My Words!” reads, “The [enemies’] commanders quickly ordered [the firing squad] to have [Nguyen Van Troi] immediately shot. The first round of bullets was released, the voice of the 24-year-old youth hoarsened.”⁷³ Then, the reading abruptly comments, “Brother Nguyen Van Troi has died, but his indomitable, heroic courageous spirit endured with the Fatherland.”^{74 75} Indeed, the individuals that the textbooks depict neither feel pain nor express mundane, human interests, except for the selfless cause for the “nation” at large, while their deaths disseminate lessons for others to look after. These descriptions fit the definition of “heroes” that James W. Loewen argues in his analysis of American textbooks.⁷⁶

As Scott Allison and George Goethals emphasize, “Heroes fulfil us emotionally... Heroes inspire us to aim higher. They make us feel good to be a member of the group or society in which they do their heroic work.”⁷⁷ Essentially, textbooks transform these individuals into role models. The primary school textbooks infuse these “role models” with traits such as selflessness for (the love of) the nation and more subtly, bravery. For primary schoolers, these themes are not unfamiliar; they are consistent with the Five Lessons of Ho Chi Minh.⁷⁸ According to official claim, given its wartime origin, these “lessons” are essential to establish morality needed to defend and construct socialism, as this

⁷³ *Tales of History Grade 5* (1985), 80; *Tales of History Grade 5* (1994), 80.

⁷⁴ *Tales of History Grade 5* (1985), 80; *Tales of History Grade 5* (1994), 80.

⁷⁵ “Brother” is the closest translation for “Anh” which in Vietnamese is both an honourable, friendly, and comradery way to address a man/boy whose age is more senior than the speaker or who the speaker pays respect. “Fatherland” is the closest translation I can get for “non song dat nuoc” which word by word in Vietnamese means “mountains, rivers, land, and waters.” Vietnamese has diverse ways to address their patria.

⁷⁶ James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 11, quoted in in James Zajda, Tatyana Tsyrlina-Spady, and Michael Lovorn, ed., *Globalisation and Historiography of National Leaders: Symbolic Representation in School Textbooks* (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2017), 4.

⁷⁷ Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, *Heroes: What They Do and Why We Need Them* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 188, quoted in Zajda, Tsyrlina-Spady, and Lovorn, *Globalisation and Historiography*, 4.

⁷⁸ Five Lessons of Ho Chi Minh (in Vietnamese: Nam Dieu Bac Ho Day), includes

Love Your Country, Love Your People	Yeu To quoc, Yeu Dong bao
Study Well, Labour Well	Hoc tap tot, Lao dong tot
Be United. Be Disciplined.	Doan ket tot, Ky luat tot
Keep the Sanitation (Very) Well.	Giu gin Ve sinh that tot
Humility. Honesty. Bravery.	Khiem ton, That tha, Dung cam

paper has mentioned above about the textbooks' view of the Vietnam War.⁷⁹ By embedding these individuals with Ho Chi Minh's lessons, the primary school textbooks aim to rally their young audience to continue upholding and supporting these moral values and the revolutionary spirit. The ability to uphold these values elevate Vietnamese who live up to the role models, above their enemies as morally superior entities. The War, then, appears as a testament to revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist, and Ho Chi Minh-style morality.

Crisis and Morality: Navigating Through Uncertainty

Addressing and emphasizing morality, especially from the mid-1980s onward when these textbooks were published, also indicates the socialist values and morality were in crisis. Indeed, historians have offered many opinions on this matter. It is imperative to re-emphasize here that while this paper has liberally labelled textbooks according to their respective publication year, these publications are ideological products of at least a decade prior. That means the 1999 publication should be correctly understood as a reflection of 1990, and so forth. The considerable time lag in the contents, as well as the ideological discourses embedded within, is likely because Vietnamese textbooks are not regularly rewritten and instead reprinted, with minor changes. This is most evident when one compares middle school and high school textbooks published in the 1970s and 1980s: the contents are identical, with some very minor alternations.

Indeed, a cursory look might offer that the Vietnamese socialist moral and value crisis was a direct reflection of the general crisis in the Soviet Union by the late 1970s and early 1980s because Vietnam orbited relatively neatly within the Soviet sphere of political, ideological, and economic influence in the first decade after the War. Thus, the CPV would likewise adopt similar political, ideological, and economic postures as the Soviet. Therefore, Vietnam would experience a similar crisis. This is even more convincing considering that, when speaking at the Sixth Congress of the CPV, Nguyen Van Linh affirmed that “the sense of renovation” was “inspired by the Twenty-seventh Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress and the restructuring of the Soviet Union.”⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union – Student Union at the University of Danang [Doan Thanh nien – Hoi Sinh vien Dai hoc Da Nang], “Origins of the Five Lessons of Ho Chi Minh Teaching Adolescents and Children” [Xuat xu cua 5 Dieu Bac Ho Day Thieu nien va Nhi dong], *Youth of the University of Danang* [Tuoi tre Dai hoc Da Nang], last accessed 03 December 2020, tuoitredhcn.udn.vn/chu-tich-ho-chi-minh/hoc-tap-va-lam-theo-loi-bac/xuat-xu-cua-5-dieu-bac-day-thieu-nien-nhi-dong-899.html.

⁸⁰ David Wurfel, “*Doi Moi* in Comparative Perspectives,” in *Reinventing Socialism: Doi Moi in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. William S. Turley and Mark Selden (New York, NY: Routledge, 1993), 19.

However, this reasoning drastically ignores that these two political entities would end up on opposite trajectory. While the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, Vietnam persisted on, and the CPV consolidated its political power. Likewise, this reasoning would portray the Vietnam War as a proxy ploy of the Soviet Union. This would ignore the character of the National Liberation Front (NLF). While it was established by cadres who remained in the South after 1954, the NLF largely enlisted Southern nationalists and intelligentsia and in particular, organized most rallies and military attacks in the South before Northern armies could substantially join in — hence, its struggles against the ROV and the Americans were relatively independent from the CPV, though closely linked.

Eero Palmujoki agrees. In an extensive analysis of the CPV's theoretical rhetoric and Vietnam's behaviors in international relations, Palmujoki argues that the CPV's ideological orthodoxy and inaccurate theorization, instead of the Soviet influence, were the main factors contributing to the Vietnamese socialist moral and value decay.⁸¹ Indeed, by the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Soviet Union no longer held the classical Marxist-Leninist concept of proletarian internationalism prominent in its didactical lexicons. It was accepted that since socialism had reached the mature stage in the Soviet Union, the new concept of internationalism—that is socialist internationalism, which seeks solidarity on the state over the class line—was necessary.⁸² Nevertheless, despite the changing ideological landscape, the CPV remained committed to proletarian internationalism, which continued to see class as the principal analytical agent, and was reluctant to switch to the new concept. In fact, the CPV had good reasons to trust the classical Marxist-Leninist concept. In contrast to socialist internationalism, the Marxist-Leninist concept articulates a more militant version of revolutionary solidarity and worldview.⁸³ For the Vietnamese who just concluded twenty years of fighting, proletarian internationalism, as such, not only justifies the revolutionary lines the CPV adopted during the War but also fittingly explains the elevated position that the CPV had internationally and among national liberation movement. Meanwhile, the global trajectories by in the late 1970s and early 1980s were never more optimistic and affirming for the CPV from an ideological standpoint. Besides the victory over the Americans which signifies on-site the superiority of the socialist camp over the capitalist

⁸¹ Eero Palmujoki so far provides the most comprehensive look on Vietnamese ideological synthesis. However, I am unable to write in depth nor reproduce much of his fascinating reflections on the topic, partially because the semantic and discourse analysis approach he used is not within the scope of this paper, but largely because his analysis proves to be too detailed and lengthy that it would dilute the focus of this paper.

⁸² Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 52.

⁸³ Tobias Rupperecht, *Soviet Internationalism After Stalin: Interaction and Exchange Between the USSR and Latin America During the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 9-11.

world, successes of various Marxist revolutions in many parts of the world, and the United States' retreat from and decreasing influence in Asia Pacific as well as its internal political crisis seemed to match the early symptoms of the capitalist crisis that Marx and Lenin predicted.

However, it does seem that the CPV had been too confident. A premise for proletarian internationalism is the solidarity between proletariats transcending the national line. Yet, by focusing entirely on class and disregarding the hardening nation-state element in their worldview, the Vietnamese seemed to miscalculate the extensive implications of inter-socialist camp rifts. It became clear in the post-War years that principles of proletarian internationalism were severely compromised by both the Soviet Union and China for their military and political strategic planning. And after the United States left Vietnam, rivalries heated up between these two socialist superpowers. Clearly, proletarian solidarity central to Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist worldview could not explicate why two socialist countries and comrades-in-arms would turn against each other, especially when Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist theorists expected it to be only temporary and likely projected that common ideological interpretation would reconcile the two.⁸⁴ For the most part, an effort to remain independent from both the Soviet Union and China provided some leeway for Vietnamese ideological integrity. However, when the Sino-Soviet disputes turned into Sino-Vietnamese maritime disputes, then the Vietnamese decision to occupy Kampuchea in 1978, and the Chinese "lesson" on Vietnam the next year, the CPV's inability to produce any coherent Marxist-Leninist interpretations to these events demonstrate that the ideology was highly inappropriate in the new post-War situations.⁸⁵ Within this logic, between 1975 and 1978, the CPV's reluctance to provide any interpretations and commentaries demonstrate its intent to ensure consistency between its thoughts and its actions. When it did speak, the CPV's Marxist-Leninist languages "had no real referent."⁸⁶ In a regime that builds and justifies its legitimacy on a coherent ideological framework, the CPV's inability to provide a consistent and meaningful interpretation of the world poses an imminent threat to the its ability to hold power at home and retain the credibility just gained abroad.

Being more conservative, however, does not mean the CPV was not susceptible to change nor were all of these changes endorsed voluntarily. One such change could be observed with Hanoi's slow but persuasive endorsement of socialist internationalism after the country's admission into the Council of

⁸⁴ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 47.

⁸⁵ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 73.

⁸⁶ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 72.

Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA).^{87 88} Being part of the CMEA, however, meant that Vietnam's economy would have to be more integrated into Soviet spheres of influence and adopt the Soviet model of development, which focused heavily on rapid industrialization.⁸⁹ However, while the rapid industrialization was necessary to fast-track Vietnam's transition into socialism, the subsistent post-War economic conditions and the sheer scale of the project meant that Vietnam had to rely heavily on other socialist countries, critically challenged Vietnam's own sovereign and independent position. The CPV's ideological posture was further compromised when it had to "[agree with Moscow] on a common approach to the world situation."⁹⁰ Of course, the "common approach" that Moscow wished to refer here was nothing else but "peaceful coexistence."⁹¹ Essentially, Vietnam had been stripped away its ability to maneuver its diplomatic lines, which openly undermined the CPV's nationalism stance and subsequently, its credibility in the eyes of a highly politicized and nationalistic population.

The CPV's adoption of socialist internationalism, however, was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the concept called for "socialist self-determination and the responsibility of the socialist community to act as the guardian of the sovereignty of the Communist Party in each country."⁹² That other socialist states had the right to intervene in Vietnamese domestic affairs

⁸⁷ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 80-81.

⁸⁸ Another change that Palmujoki observes is the CPV's re-adoption of more conventional terms such as national independence, sovereignty, and self-reliance. Since these terms do not fall within the Marxist-Leninist parameters, I choose not to include them. However, it is relevant as a side note because according to Huynh Kim Khanh, besides Marxism-Leninism, nationalism provides another source of justification for the CPV's existence as well as the changing world situation. Along this line of reasoning, wherever Marxism-Leninism could not explain, the CPV substituted nationalistic rhetoric to affirm its ideological credibility and legitimacy by seeing Vietnamese disputes with the Chinese over maritime issues and the Kampucheans as defence against threats to the nation. However, for much of the 1980s, nationalism could only be only a tint in the CPV's foreign policy rhetoric; its move towards orthodox Marxism-Leninism leaves little viability for nationalism to dominate mainstream interpretation.

⁸⁹ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 80.

⁹⁰ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 79-82.

⁹¹ This was affirmed in the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed between Moscow and Hanoi in 1978, after the forceful but necessary move to integrate economically as well as after consistent pressure to encourage Vietnam to abide some more political obligations. Historians have debated since if this Treat was a tactical move to secure Moscow's strategic postures in Asia or a theoretical move which sees the interconnectedness between material conditions and political attitudes as a natural development that "[reinforces] the old themes of proletarian internationalism and the struggle of national liberation movements."

⁹² Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 96.

clearly contradicted and threatened the CPV's emphasis on sovereignty, independence, and self-reliance. On the other, the concept, once used by the Soviets to justify its intervention in Czechoslovakia, was now similarly employed by Hanoi to validate its actions in Kampuchea to safeguard Indochina against "imperialists and reactionaries who have great ambitions in Southeast Asia."⁹³ Indeed, the new language — socialist internationalism and "peaceful coexistence" — did give some room to maneuver. Nevertheless, it did not free the Vietnamese from contradiction. Together with "peaceful coexistence" which signified that Vietnam now accepted the existence and actions of imperialist nations, socialist internationalism questioned the validity of the CPV's image as an anti-imperialist and national liberation supporting force. It even exposed its "imperialistic" nature with political affairs in Indochina. From an ideological perspective, criticism from the global audience and the persistence of the "the Kampuchean question [...] despite Hanoi's every attempt to evade it" demonstrated that Vietnamese Marxism-Leninism could no longer buy political support or adapt to the rapidly changing post-War world situation.⁹⁴

Hence, it is evident that the Vietnamese ideological framework, regardless of the concept of internationalism it adopted, could not fit with the changing post-War conditions. Another consequence, Palmujoki observes, is the growing gap between Vietnamese theoretical framework and the actual political environment at play. Of course, this "political environment" applies to the country's economic issues. In contrast to Palmujoki, Elliott lends a similarly excellent observation on the impact of ideological orthodoxy on Vietnamese internal politics by instead focusing more on economic concerns as the centerpiece of Vietnamese socialist moral and values decay.

One of the promises for the post-Vietnam War era was the fundamental transformation of the country into a socialist state. But for the socialism equation to work, it needed not only the complete elimination of the bourgeois class but also for some level of material abundance and well-being to be guaranteed. It seems clear in Elliott's observation that the CPV seemed to focus too much on the first clause and erroneously disregarded the latter. Mai Chi Tho recalled, of the "comprador bourgeoisie" being targeted in the two campaigns designated as X1 and X2 that the CPV implemented immediately after the April victory, there was a "considerable number [of whom] focused purely on 'doing business.'"⁹⁵ Yet, according to Mai Chi Tho, the strict application of this "arbitrary" policy had essentially "[wiped] out the strong points and existing material base" — properties, capitals, and facilities — that would not only neatly satisfy post-War recovery plan but also ironically, socialist

⁹³ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 98.

⁹⁴ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 138.

⁹⁵ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 36-37.

transformation.^{96 97} Gabriel Kolko would not be surprised with the economic chaos in post-War Vietnam when he observes that the entire Vietnamese communist apparatuses, North and South, did not have even the concrete post-War economic plan in mind.⁹⁸ The contrast between the failures of the first two five-year plans that sought to rapidly industrialize Vietnam along Soviet lines and “[the paralysis and total depletion]” of the South’s “entire industrial production” seems like a vivid coincidence.⁹⁹ While those who lived in the South suffered the most from this rapid post-War socialist transformation, North Vietnamese also felt disappointed with the material subsistence conditions during the post-War year.¹⁰⁰

These unfavorable conditions made the population doubt the efficacy of the promised post-War socialist utopia. As Elliott observes, “Even the Northern leadership of the early postwar period has been the subject of revisionist attempts to explain away the failures of ‘socialist transformation’ and exonerate the party.”¹⁰¹ In other words, similar to the CPV’s inability to explain changing world conditions with Marxist-Leninist ideologues, the subtle realizations in Hanoi indicated the inefficacy of Marxist-Leninist style of economic organization. However, early efforts to reform what Northern leadership saw as the “unprincipled cutting of corners” and “undermining [of] socialism,” took some interesting turns.¹⁰² While the conditions of the South — namely, its recent experiences with nonsocialist mode of economic organization and the significant material betterment — would logically point to top officials who were either Southerners or had celled in the South as responsible for reforms,

⁹⁶ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 37.

⁹⁷ Readers should take some cautions when reading Mai Chi Tho’s words. Even though Mai Chi Tho does not refer the ethnicity of those who were allegedly branded as “comprador bourgeoisie,” it was clear given the context that these individuals were ethnic Chinese. Before 1975, although the ethnic Chinese constituted a small proportion of the South Vietnamese total population, they monopolised in almost all aspects of the economy, from wholesale, retail sales, exports, and credit lending. Likewise, they were the one who owned most of the “strong points and existing material base” of South Vietnamese economy. The wholesale attack on the Chinese constituted the so-called “Chinese issue,” which was one of many reasons that historians have argued contributed to the worsening Sino-Vietnamese relations. For a more detailed examination of this issue, see Nicholas Khoo, *Collateral Damages: Sino-Soviet Rivalry and the Termination of the Sino-Vietnamese Alliance* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2011). For Mai Chi Tho’s quote, see Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 36-37.

⁹⁸ Gabriel Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975: Winning a War and Losing the Peace,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 25, no. 1 (1995): 8, doi.org/10.1080/00472339580000021.

⁹⁹ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 37.

¹⁰⁰ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 32.

¹⁰¹ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 38.

¹⁰² Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 34.

supporters for economic changes had various backgrounds. In fact, Premier Pham Van Dong, the highest official of the both the DRV and the post-War government, and Nguyen Van Linh, an ex-Vietcong and the then General Secretary of the CPV, virtually the highest-ranking official in Vietnamese political apparatus, all urged against adopting economic lines as in the North.¹⁰³ These two were not the only ones. In an interesting observation, Dang Phong comments that “Almost all of the people who took the lead in ‘breaking out’ were revolutionary warriors who had defended the nation and the Party, [and] had waded through blood during the Anti-American Resistance.”¹⁰⁴ Here, it is clear from Dang Phong’s words that the general perception equates these “revolutionary warriors” as heroes similar to those in the aforementioned primary textbooks.

The diverse backgrounds indicate that the departure from orthodox Marxism-Leninism had occurred at least before 1975. However, this does not mean that all cadres opposed the CPV’s goal of socialism. On the contrary, the diverse backgrounds demonstrated to the CPV that there existed another way to achieve socialism and made it question whether the conservative option or collectivism had been the most suitable one. In other words, it was essentially a challenge to not only the CPV’s political and economic lines but also its credibility in upholding a subsistence style of socialism. Interestingly, more conservative leaders of the CPV continued to accuse the deviation on the North-South divide. In 1982, for example, Hanoi sent overseers to Ho Chi Minh City to “‘crush the rebellion,’” and in 1986, “Some Hanoi officials saw the South as ‘the source of corruption, political deviation, and many-faceted sabotage’” with some did not shy to even assert that “South Vietnam is in a state of moral secession.”¹⁰⁵

In contrast with Palmujoki and Elliott, Kolko focuses more on fundamental changes that affected Vietnamese socialist morality and values and argues that it was the Party as a whole, not the changing world conditions or individual cadres, that initiated the decay. In other words, the Party was not the victim but the cause of its own troubles. Since its inception, the CPV, like any other Marxist-Leninist party, faced a dilemma between its branding as a mass-mobilization party and its emulation of Leninist theory of democratic centralism, which gave its power to an elite few. However, as Kolko reasons,

¹⁰³ In September 1975, in a reception of Southern cadres, Pham Van Dong said, “You are here to visit places, look, and learn in a discriminating manner. Do not imitate the North — if you force [the South] into the mold of cooperatives [like those in the North] there will be a great outcry.” Nguyen Van Linh, in fact, turned blind eyes to “blatant violations of policy of necessary” to ensure production and internal trades to post-War Saigon were maintained. For quotes, see Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 35, 38.

¹⁰⁴ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 44.

¹⁰⁵ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 45-51.

this dilemma is “far less likely to become a source of crisis” as long as the party could “successfully implement something of the socialist notion of egalitarianism that coexists with organizational hegemony.”¹⁰⁶ Up until the 1975 victory, the Vietnam War *is* that “something.” However, when the War ended, the CPV was left with an emptiness that it could not reconcile with the outpouring optimism and prospects of the mass. Just as problematic in 1975 as in 1945, the pressure to be both the party of the mass and practicing democratic centralism influenced heavily on the characteristics of the CPV’s cadres. According to Kolko, nearly half of the two million Party members in 1990, joined after 1975.¹⁰⁷ The motivation for joining varies; however, it became clear after 1975 that the rapid growth in membership was overwhelmingly attributed to “outright opportunists” who saw the Party as a pass for preferential access to opportunities and social mobility in a supposedly egalitarian society.¹⁰⁸ The CPV was cognizant of this problem but could not ignore these individuals, especially those who joined shortly after the War, for they possessed the skills and flexibility that the regime critically needed.¹⁰⁹

The rapid growth of membership, too, compromised the “quality and social character of the Party’s ranks.”¹¹⁰ A report estimates that by 1991, the majority of the CPV’s members were highly incompetent ideologically and did not even demonstrate their “exemplary vanguard role.”¹¹¹ If by 1990 the Party had already seen such dramatic scale of issues, conditions between 1975 and the eve of *Doi Moi* could only be worse. Quoting a senior leader in 1990, Kolko notes that “thirty to forty per cent of the Party should be purged.”¹¹² Meanwhile, corruption was widespread, partially as the result of subsistence pay, and more likely because of the atmospheres of changing doctrine. As Kolko observes, getting rich becomes the official encouragement and virtues of the Party in 1988, while “the historical origins and consequences of wealth” were completely ignored.¹¹³ Effectively, by the mid-1980s, the CPV name had lost its revolutionary and ideological stance. If the founding socialist morality and values of the CPV was egalitarianism, then the outright devaluation of these principles for the sake of political relevance were a prime showcase of the CPV’s moral downfall.

As Palmujoki argues, ideology is auto-communication—the ability to

¹⁰⁶ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 10.

¹⁰⁷ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 11.

¹⁰⁸ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 11.

¹⁰⁹ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 11.

¹¹⁰ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 11.

¹¹¹ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 12.

¹¹² Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 13.

¹¹³ Kolko, “Vietnam Since 1975,” 24.

communicate embedded ideas without explicit use of terms.¹¹⁴ Hence, it is apparent why the regime and textbook authors refuse to change the narratives: wordings in textbooks remained unchanged between 1975 until at least 1992. This is a vivid attempt to perpetuate the “reality” of the 1975 textbook as long as possible, effectively “being ignorant” to the changing political landscapes. It is, thence, also apparent why the regime and the textbook authors of the 1999 and 2000 publications purged traumatic events from narratives and emphasized high moral figures. On the one hand, by emphasizing “revolution” and including internationalist connotations in textbooks’ narratives, all textbooks, and especially those published in the 1980s, justify the country’s loosening grip on independence, sovereignty, and self-reliance by placing the Vietnam War in a worldwide revolutionary movement. In doing so, they shield their audience from understanding the conflict in some other definitions during the crumbling of and divergence from Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist doctrine. On the other, by removing unpleasant scenes, textbook authors for the 1999 and 2000 publications seek to offer a sanitized version of history, where the sacrifices were subtly acknowledged as worthwhile to the revolution and post-War conditions, despite unfavorable circumstances that would potentially discredit Vietnamese revolutionary, anti-imperialist stance, and the miserable post-War economic conditions. Finally, by emphasizing moral figures, the textbooks not only inculcate their audiences to mirror these figures, but they also serve warn against adopting the perceptions that ordinary citizens adopted. Yet the Party condemned revolutionary warriors who went against the Party’s lines for moral failings.

However, the unambiguous evidence of North-South language adopted even by those who have advocated most to see Vietnam as one nation and the Vietnam War as one between the Vietnamese against the Americans questions the effectiveness and the sincerity of the post-War regime in truly reunifying the country.

Making Sense of the Riches

In previous sections, this paper has examined the textbooks’ attempts to shield their audiences from traumatic events and changing ideological landscapes, both globally and at home. This is not to say the regime fails to provide accurate historical information. On the contrary, the regime depends heavily on its ideological integrity. This deliberate ignorance of changes that appear consistently in all textbooks presents an alternative interpretation of reality that is highly ideological and that embodies an effort to preserve the regime’s credibility, legitimacy, and relevance in an evolving world. This helps

¹¹⁴ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 10-11.

students understand how Vietnamese society came to be. So far, this paper has examined how the regime and textbook authors relate their ideological framework with contemporary events and vice versa. However, one may be tempted to ask, given that history does not only offer a lens to the past but also a way to understand the present, how could the regime and textbook authors justify the contemporary events with the past events? Framed another way, how can the regime and textbook authors establish a sense of historical continuities? This is especially critical when by the 1990s, Vietnam underwent a myriad of social, political, and economic changes that the gap between textbooks' rhetoric and real-life events seems to have grown beyond compromise.

Let us first look at how the pre-1990s and the 2000 textbooks describe the economy during the War. Whereas all textbooks highlight the socialist character of the Vietnamese economy during the first five-year economic plan between 1961 and 1965, especially the cooperative/collective nature, much of the 2000 textbook's rhetoric, which has already been significantly less didactical about the importance of economic development to tackle "poverty [and] backwardness" can be read as attempts to justify the CPV's new approach to the economy. In the 1988 textbook, the authors accentuate that agricultural cooperatives were "consolidated [and] continued to be expanded in scale to transform [existing] cooperatives into the more advanced form," with the established network of irrigation systems and specialized facilities such as seed treatment center "built" by the state to support the cooperatives.¹¹⁵ According to the authors, as a result of these supports, "by the end of 1965, over a thousand agricultural cooperatives have been equipped with machines" and over "seven hundred cooperatives have achieved or exceed the five tons per hectare yield," all of which contributed to a growth of nearly seven per cent and a step closer to establishing new relations of production.¹¹⁶ A similar impetus lays behind the focus on industries, where the 1975 textbook also mentions the variety of heavy industrial complexes as well as those from light industries that produced "eighty-percent [of the total] domestic consumer goods with 12000 different products."¹¹⁷

Students reading these textbooks between 1975 and 1990 would find it easy to identify the similarities between the economic directives during the first five-year plan and one during the post-War years. In April 1978, Hanoi issued a directive that called for vigorous cooperativization of agriculture in southern Vietnam.¹¹⁸ By 1979, nearly two thousand cooperatives were formed in the

¹¹⁵ *History Grade 12* (1988),

¹¹⁶ *History Grade 12* (1988),

¹¹⁷ *History Grade 12* (1975),

¹¹⁸ Communist Party of Vietnam, "Directive of the Politburo on the Consolidation and Promotion of Agricultural Rehabilitation in the South" [Chi thi cua Bo Chinh tri ve Viec Nam vung va Day manh Cong tac Cai tao Nong nghiep o mien Nam], 43-CT/TW, 14

south, along with another two thousand production teams.¹¹⁹ In 1986, cooperatives became the dominant forms of economic organization in Vietnam, the majority of which unsurprisingly concentrated in agriculture and industries.¹²⁰ Though controls were more lenient in 1981 and 1988 to respond to the reduced agricultural productivities, cooperatives remained the primary medium of economic production and transaction in the Vietnamese economy.¹²¹

¹²² By explaining historical precedents of economic collectivization, the 1975 and 1988 textbooks, in particular, do two things. First, they affirm the superiority of collectivization and encourage students to understand that this way of organizing the economy is natural and crucial for post-War reconstruction. Second, they introduce southern students with the socialist way of economic organizations and familiarize them with the CPV's economic socialization policies in the south.

The 2000 textbook follows similar narration motives as those published in 1975 and 1988 in regard to the first five-year plan. However, unlike the pre-

April 1978, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1978* [Van kien Dang: Toan tap — 1978], vol. 39 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2005).

¹¹⁹ Ngo Vinh Long, "The Socialisation of South Vietnam," in *The Third Indochina War: Conflict Between China, Vietnam, and Cambodia, 1972-1979*, ed. Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge (London: Routledge, 2006), 142.

¹²⁰ The Economic Committee of the National Assembly of Vietnam [Uy ban Kinh te cua Quoc hoi] and United Nations Development Programme in Vietnam, "The Development of Cooperatives and The Role of Cooperatives in Social Security" [Su Phat trien cua Hop tac xa va Vai tro cua Hop tac xa doi voi An sinh Xa hoi] (Hanoi: Knowledge Press [Nha Xuat ban Tri thuc], 2012), 33-40.

¹²¹ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Review Report on Agriculture and Food of OECD: Agricultural Policies of Vietnam 2015* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2015), 138-139, dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264235151-en.

¹²² The first policy, executed in 1981, only obligated farmers to contribute a predetermined amount of their produces to the cooperatives. The second policy, and the most detrimental to cooperatives, was executed in 1988, where agricultural productions were now transferred to individual farmers, instead of cooperatives; cooperatives now only acted as the middleperson to facilitate transaction and technological supports. See Communist Party of Vietnam, "Directives from the Board of Secretariats on Renovating on Contractual Matters and Expanding 'Product Contracting to Working Teams and Workers' in Agricultural Cooperatives" [Chi thi cua Ban Bi thu: Cai tien Cong tac Khoan, Mo rong 'Khoan San pham den Nhom Lao dong va Nguoi Lao dong' trong Hop tac xa Nong nghiep], 100-CT/TW, 13 January 1981, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1981* [Van kien Dang: Toan tap — 1981], vol. 39 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2005). See also Communist Party of Vietnam, "Directive of the Politburo on Renovating Agricultural Economic Management" [Chi thi cua Bo Chinh tri ve Viac Doi moi Quan ly Kinh te Nong nghiep], 10-NQ/TW, 05 April 1988, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1988-1989* [Van kien Dang: Toan tap — 1988-1989], vol. 46 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2006).

1990 textbooks, the 2000 textbook, while labelling the economy between 1961 and 1965 as centrally planned, refuses to extoll such characteristics in narrations. For example, the authors in the 1975 and 1988 textbooks accentuate, “Our State has set out the primary target for the first five-year plan” with “*intentions* to bring the value of industrial and handicraft outputs up on average seventeen per cent per annum,” “state-run economic sector [...] will gradually enhance its advantages,” and so forth, all to ensure that “socialist relations of production *will more and more* perfect.”¹²³ Yet, details of how the State determined the goals of the economic plan do not appear in the 2000 textbook’s discussions at all, especially in regards to “relations of production,” something in that a proclaimed Marxist-Leninist state would be deeply interested. Similarly, it also focuses less on agricultural cooperatives. Whereas the 1975 and 1988 textbooks describe how cooperatives become more ingrained in the Vietnamese economy, the 2000 textbook assumes the natural presence of this form of economic organization without detailing much about its consolidation and growth. This is most telling when one observes how the authors arrange the description of economic development in the first five-year plan. Irrigation facilities and machinery, and farmers — elements which Marxists would label as “force of production” are mentioned first, before the cooperatives — or in Marxist terminologies, “relations of productions” — are described.¹²⁴

The shifting attitudes towards different components of Marxist analyses of the economy are consistent with the ideological climate of Vietnam on the eves of *Doi Moi*. By the early 1980s, leaderships of the CPV were concerned by local official’s intensifying deviations from the CPV’s economic directives in midst of an economic crisis. The solution to this threat was to reframe how the Party thought about the economy, which involved refitting existing theorization for the new economic conditions and consulting different models from inside and outside the socialist world. Nguyen Van Linh asserts that “it was necessary to solicit investments from capitalists and to help Vietnam get rich,” but those who benefited most from this — what he called as “‘socialist’ bourgeoisie” — would be “held in check by Vietnam’s socialist framework” with their excess cash “invested in production in goods for society.”¹²⁵ Also, according to Elliott, Truong Chinh, then, by the mid-1980s, was the General Secretary of the CPV, [...] subtly reversed his long-standing view that the “relations of production” were more important than the “forces of production,” that is, the right economic organization would produce the best results and the way to increase production was to have tight central planning and agricultural

¹²³ *History Grade 12* (1988), 86-87.

¹²⁴ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 135.

¹²⁵ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 82.

cooperativization.¹²⁶

By describing the first five-year plan with nothing but just a thin label of “planned economy,” the 2000 textbook justifies that the Vietnamese economy was still fundamentally socialist, softening the dramatic shift the economy was experiencing in the early 1990s that were probably surprising and ideologically contradicting to what many students have learnt in lower grades.

A similar impetus explains why the authors of the 2000 textbook adopt new language in their narratives. To compensate for the decreased importance of socialist agricultural, as well as industrial transformations, the most recent textbook introduces another kind of economic activity: commerce. The textbook reads, “In commerce, state-run commercial ventures were prioritized by the State to develop so [they] had dominated the *market*.”¹²⁷ Similarly, the textbook also highlights that to ensure economic development during the first five-year plan, the State “has [made] capital investments to construct the economy”; in agriculture, the State “prioritized *investments* to construct and develop [agricultural facilities]”; and in industries, the State “has prioritized *capital investments* for development.”¹²⁸ Terms such as “market” and “capital investments” are unprecedented in textbook narratives. In Marxist articulation, these lexicons lay far outside the parameters of what socialism should look like and fundamentally challenge the scientific and rational nature of the ideology. In this context, “market” denotes an irrational and unconscious organization of productive activity of all member of society: “the market is the very soil on which bourgeois social relations in their entirety and bourgeois social consciousness arises.”¹²⁹ Meanwhile, “capital investment” — or, “investment” — connotes an expectation of profit in return, or extracting some surplus of values. In fact, these features—the “market” and the “extraction of surplus of values,” along with private ownership of means of production, the advancement of capital, and the dependency of wage labors by the majority of the population—are defining characteristics of capitalism.¹³⁰ The only difference here that sets Vietnamese socialism apart is the State taking over the role of the bourgeoisie or private individuals in a non-planned economy.

It seems apparent that the logic of the new economy since *Doi Moi* is some toleration of the State’s engagement in capitalism. The conclusion drafted by the Politburo in 1986 recognized the existence of a multisector economy,

¹²⁶ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 39.

¹²⁷ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 136.

¹²⁸ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 135.

¹²⁹ *Encyclopedia of Marxism*, s.v., “Market,” last accessed 21 December 2020, www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/m/a.htm#market.

¹³⁰ *Encyclopedia of Marxism*, s.v., “Capitalism,” last accessed 21 December 2020, www.marxists.org/glossary/terms/c/a.htm#capitalism.

where private, “small commodity-producing economy,” “private capitalist economy” — or petit-bourgeois economy — and “private-public joint venture economy” — or “semi-socialist economy” — as an objective necessity and called for appropriate use of “these economic sectors, for the benefits of socialism.”¹³¹ The meaning of the socialist economy was also redefined, where the socialist market is a conglomeration, “struggle,” “intertwining and complement” between an “organized economy,” or planned economy, and “free market.”¹³² An unpublished resolution of the Politburo in 1986 also called for an abolishment of the subsidy system and demanded all state-run enterprises operate accordingly to the principles of the market.¹³³ By embedding “un-socialist” terms to describe the first five-year planned economy, the authors seek to expose and familiarize the students with the principles of the new Vietnamese economy since *Doi Moi* and create an alternative historical precedent with the ultimate goal being to justify the regime’s changing ideological standpoints.

Comprehending the World

Perhaps the most remarkable change between the pre-1990s and the 2000 textbooks has to do with how the authors emphasize one issue in relations to another. The latter publication devotes a greater proportion of its narratives to topics relating to economic development during the War. Along with using less didactical rhetoric and fewer revolutionary references, as mentioned above, it appears that material well-being is treated equally if not more importantly than military successes in the 2000 textbook. For example, the newest publication in the examined subset dedicates two separate sections to examining economic activities and recovery during Operation Rolling Thunder (1965-1968); the 1988 textbooks, in contrast, touch on the issues very briefly and embed them into the larger discussion of the Americans’ aforementioned military campaign.^{134 135} At

¹³¹ See Communist Party of Vietnam, “Conclusions of the Conference of the Politburo on Some Issues of Economic Standpoints” [Ket luat cua Hoi nghi Bo Chinh tri ve Viec mot so Van de thuoac Quan diem Kinh te], 20 September 1986, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1986*, vol. 47 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2006).

¹³² Communist Party of Vietnam, “Conclusions of the Conference.”

¹³³ See Communist Party of Vietnam, “Resolution of the Politburo on Maintaining the Self-Determining Right to Production and Business of Base Economic Units” [Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị và Ban Thường vụ Bộ Chính trị về Bảo đảm Quyền Tự chủ Sản xuất, Kinh doanh của Các Đơn vị Kinh tế Co so], 306-NQ/TW, 8 April 1986, in *Documents of the Party: Complete Set — 1986*, vol. 47 (Hanoi: National Political Press, 2006).

¹³⁴ Compare *History Grade 12* (1988), 134-150, and MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 146-160.

¹³⁵ I use the term Operation Rolling Thunder for easy reference. Operation Rolling Thunder is the title given to a strategic aerial bombardment campaign against the DRV with four main objectives: (1) to boost the morale of the South Vietnamese forces; (2) to

first glance, the new balance between the two domains in the 2000 textbook — the economy and the military — seems contradictory to how the Vietnam War has always been understood in terms of why it was waged: that is, national liberation and socialist construction. However, the new balance is entirely consistent with the CPV's changing political and ideological attitudes at the turn of the century. A look into Vietnamese foreign policies is particularly effective because, since the 1980s, they have become more responsive to new changes.

The crisis in socialist morality and values as mentioned above had placed Vietnam in a political deadlock, for neither proletarian internationalism nor socialist internationalism could provide Vietnam with a consistent and comprehensive answer to the changing world. In either theoretical framework, Vietnam's occupation of Kampuchea seems inevitable and both lead to the prioritization of military security above anything else. Whereas proletarian internationalism justified Vietnam's militant fervors, socialist internationalism validated its intervention in Kampuchea. Within this domain, the international backlash that limited Vietnamese trade options and poor economic situations sufficient clearly cast a warning to Vietnamese leadership. Firstly, in 1986, the Party re-identified its objectives on foreign affairs to "take advantage of favorable international conditions to build socialism and defend the nation and proactively create a stable environment to focus on economic development."¹³⁶ Concerns over national defense and military security persist, which indicates that there had been a considerable imbalance in Vietnamese foreign affairs' objectives. As Le Hong Hiep notes, the 1998 Resolution 13 illuminates that military security has been reduced to a negligible level while it redetermines the goals of Vietnam's foreign policy, which, then, were "to assist the stabilization of the political system and to facilitate the country's economic renovation."¹³⁷ Though, this does not mean military security is not crucial; it does indicate that the textbook no longer assigns as much importance to military concerns as before. Hence, the 2000 textbook's equal focus on economic development and military security is a way to impress upon students that economic policies have historical precedents and that the Vietnam War is equally a military struggle and a socioeconomic struggle. Through the new rhetoric, the 2000 textbook's authors also seek to provide students with enough foundation to help them

force North Vietnamese supports for communist insurgency in South Vietnam; (3) to destroy strategic facilities, such as transportation systems, industrial complexes, and defence bases; and (4) to halt transportation of soldiers and materials to South Vietnam. The Vietnamese, however, call it the First Sabotaging War Against the North (in Vietnamese: Chien tranh Pha hoai mien Bac lan thu Nhat).

¹³⁶ Le Hong Hiep, "Introduction: The Making of Vietnam's Foreign Policy Under *Doi Moi*," in *Vietnam's Foreign Policy under Doi Moi*, ed. Le Hong Hiep and Anton Tsetov (Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2018), 9.

¹³⁷ Le Hong Hiep, "Introduction," 9.

familiarize with and justify the CPV's foreign policies. At the same time, they highlight where the primary concerns of the State are located and given that material well-being is more intimately connected with the daily life, the textbook likewise subtly provides exposure and initiates students to internalize and take on these concerns. Hence, the goal would be helping students to understand economic development under *Doi Moi* conditions is also constructing socialism.

In addition to intensifying attention on economic issues, the reduced concentration of military successes also fits with the CPV's awareness in 1989 when the national security situation no longer involved direct military confrontation but "low-intensity warfare and military deterrence" and the so-called "peaceful evolution."¹³⁸ Writing in *Quan doi Nhan dan* in 1989, Nguyen Van Linh argued that in the faces of all these concerns, Vietnam needs a "new thinking about the role of the military," which while recognized "past experiences of 'liberation struggle' was 'precious,'" they were "not relevant to the current circumstances," and "political, economic, and diplomatic factors also [played] a key role in the mission of defending the country."¹³⁹ Similarly, Premier Do Muoi also argued that the military "would need to be sustained at a level 'just enough' to assure Vietnam's defense."¹⁴⁰ The ultimate solution was identified, again, in Resolution 13. In addition to altering the economic-military balance, it also removes socialist-themed worldview, in particular the two internationalisms, and centers "multidirectional foreign-policy orientation" as the primary concept of Vietnam's foreign policy.¹⁴¹ Here, the "multidirectional foreign-policy orientation" is telling because it suggests that previously Vietnam had seen the world as a strong dichotomy between the "us," which consists of Vietnam and its friendly and socialist allies, and the "other," which consists of imperialist, capitalist, and other hostile enemies. Hence, a strong military was required to defend the country against threats. Therefore, because these threats disappear or lessen in the new circumstances, the more assertive militaristic rhetoric is no longer relevant. In this context, the textbook authors justify and set the "right" attitudes in response to the Vietnam's retraction of military forces and revolutionary stance, its reduced global prestige, and its expanding diplomatic ties.

Another way of making sense of the present is by emphasizing Vietnam's diplomatic ties during the War. For example, in the high school textbooks published in 1975 and 1988, the authors assert increasing importance and positive connotations towards the Soviet Union. Whereas the 1975 textbook emphasizes that Vietnam received "significant and effective [amount of] aid

¹³⁸ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 75.

¹³⁹ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 79-80.

¹⁴⁰ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 64.

¹⁴¹ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 62.

from the Soviet Union, China, and the brotherly [socialist] states,” the 1988 textbook drops “China” from the phrase and maintains only “significant and effective [amount of] aid from the Soviet Union *and* the brotherly [socialist] states.”¹⁴² This small but substantial change signifies that the authors seek to affirm that only the Soviet Union should be considered favorable and trustworthy during the Vietnamese revolution. The textbook consolidates the students’ worldview so that the Soviet Union stands at the center and Vietnam orbits in its universe. As mentioned above, when the 1975 and 1988 textbooks were published, the CPV shifted its ideological focus from the broad Marxist-Leninist concept to the more pro-Soviet one. By explaining the intimate ties between Vietnam and the Soviet Union through wartime aids, the pre-1990s textbooks seek to “naturalize” the Soviet-Vietnamese ties, familiarize students with the Treaty as a natural development, and justify Vietnam’s dependency on the Soviet Union.

However, this omission in the 1988 textbook suggests that confirming the ties with one country also means cutting ties with another, at least in the Vietnamese post-War context. A similar impetus drove the textbook’s negative, if not polemical, connotations toward China. Indeed, another way to look at the phrase above is when the textbook authors drop China from the phrase, they also dictate the country as no longer trust- and noteworthy. To provide another example, the authors seem to blame the devastating effect of the Vietnam War on the Chinese military advisors’ inaccurate “advice” to the Vietnamese military. The 1988 textbook reads, “Leaders in China ‘recommended’ us to fight a protracted war.”¹⁴³ According Edward Katzenbach and Gene Hanrahan, the “protracted war” that the textbook authors mocked (by the use of quotation, thus amplifying the insincerity of such recommendation) and criticised stands as the centerpiece of Maoist ideology.¹⁴⁴ Along this line of reasoning, it is apparent that the regime considered China as similarly possessing incorrect ideology. Indeed, since the Sino-Vietnamese disputes, Vietnamese media had been engaging in an “all-out attack against China, which did not calm down until the end of the 1980s.”¹⁴⁵ From that, one can posit this more subtle attack against China as part of the larger, more systematic trend. Similarly, in the 1988 textbook, the compilers include an additional sentence not found in the 1975 publication: “Nixon arrived in Beijing and with those Chinese ruling reactionaries plotted the scheme to destroy Vietnamese revolution.”¹⁴⁶ While the

¹⁴² *History Grade 12* (1975), 95; *History 12* (1988), 152.

¹⁴³ *History Grade 12* (1988), 96.

¹⁴⁴ Edward L. Katzenbach and Gene Z. Hanrahan, “The Revolutionary Strategy of Mao Tse-Tung,” *Political Science Quarterly* 70, no. 3 (September 1955): 331, doi.org/10.2307/2145469.

¹⁴⁵ Palmujoki, *Vietnam and the World*, 78.

¹⁴⁶ *History Grade 12* (1988), 143.

sentence focuses primarily on Nixon, yet given that the CPV has been consistent about the Vietnam War as also an anti-American resistance, describing how the Chinese leaderships cooperated with the Americans is a convenient way to conflate China as counterrevolutionary and partially responsible for the unfavorable outcomes of the War and its aftermath. As such, the textbooks' featuring China's counterrevolutionary policies against Vietnam is a way to expose, albeit limitedly, students to issues of intra-socialist camp relations and help them understand why Vietnam broke ties with China. Authors of the 1975 and 1980s textbooks also prompt students to think that Sino-Vietnamese maritime disputes and 1979 war were schemed by imperialist forces. More importantly, the antagonism presented here resonates a theme not unfamiliar for textbooks' audiences: that Vietnam has always resisted against Chinese domination and annexation. The publications evidently try to establish historical continuities by evoking nationalism. Hence justifying the Vietnam War as a purely nationalistic cause.¹⁴⁷

As one would expect, in the 2000 textbook, this emphasis disappears from the narratives. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist camp in the late 1980s and early 1990s make it absurd for the 2000 textbook's authors to glorify their past support. The normalization of Sino-Vietnamese diplomatic ties would also make the polemics against China that were used in the pre-1990s textbooks particularly damaging to Vietnam. Xinhua News Agency, for example, reports that by 2003, China was already Vietnam's second largest trading partner.¹⁴⁸ A report compiled by the General Department of Vietnam Customs reveals that up until 2005 (conveniently when the 2000 textbook was replaced by the newer textbooks in the wake of the new curriculum), Vietnamese economy increasingly depended on China: bilateral trade volume amounted to less than a billion in 1991, reached 16.7 billion in 2000 and doubled to over 32 billion dollars in 2005.¹⁴⁹ Clearly, agitating anti-Chinese sentiments, which could have been done effectively through textbooks, proved

¹⁴⁷ In 1979, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam published *The Truth About Vietnam-China Relations in the Past Thirty Years* [Su that ve Quan he Viet Nam – Trung Quoc trong Ba muoi Nam Qua], commonly referred in the 1988 textbook as the *White Book* [Sach trang], that includes several important documents and that, according to the publisher, claims to “expose the reactionary faces of the expansionist Beijing gangs towards [Vietnam] for a long time.” See *The Truth About Vietnam-China Relations in the Past Thirty Years* [Su that ve Quan he Viet Nam – Trung Quoc trong Ba muoi Nam Qua] (Hanoi: The Truth Press [Nha Xuat ban Su that], 1979).

¹⁴⁸ “China-Vietnam Bilateral Relations,” *Xinhua English*, 23 October 2003, english.sina.com/1/2005/1028/51407.html.

¹⁴⁹ See Table 1 and Figure 1, cited from Le Dang Minh, “China-Vietnam Trade Relations: Realities, Issues, and Solutions,” *Van Hien University Journal of Science* 4, no. 3 (November 2016): 20-21, www.vhu.edu.vn/Resources/Docs/SubDomain/qlkh/3%20Le%20Dang%20Minh.pdf.

economically and politically risky for the CPV and the textbook authors to venture in. Hence, the 2000 textbook's failure to mention the Soviet Union and the socialist camp, and China helps students make sense of the post-War diplomatic ties and economic interdependency of Vietnam. Though chapters on the Vietnam War do not express their political attitudes besides the aforementioned details, the next chapter in the 2000 textbook, which examines Vietnam between 1975 and 1979, affirms the country's new look on China. It reads,

China is an intimate neighbor of Vietnam, in the process of revolutionary struggle, the peoples of the two countries had once closely attached with each other and united to assist each other; however, when the Polpot junto had hostile actions against Vietnam, *a number of people* in the Chinese leadership, yet, at that time, agreed and supported [them].¹⁵⁰

The Vietnamese textbook authors only blame specific people instead of every individual of Chinese leadership. An effort to separate the unfavorable elements from the Chinese leadership indicates that the regime seeks to preserve the inherent positive views towards China. In doing so, the 2000 textbook helps students to understand that the normalization of diplomatic relations with China is a necessary step to reconcile the past for the sake of the present economic interests.

Resilience Against the Changes

Indeed, as the previous section suggests, textbook authors, especially those of the 2000 publication, critically engage in shaping and changing the narratives about the Vietnam War so that it facilitates students' understanding of the present events. However, making senses of the present also implies the necessity to convey students to understand why the regime persists, while its comrade states and the socialist camp had crumbled. The question now: how could the CPV justify itself in the new conditions?

Amidst this new changing "present," one point remains relatively constant: the supremacy of the Party-State. In almost any military campaign, the 2000 textbook, as in those previous publications, stresses the Party and the State's correct understanding and identification of the issues as the precursory to success. For example, in discussing Nixon's Vietnamization of the Vietnam War, the textbook stresses, despite some losses in the early years of the resisting campaign, "Following to the Tet wishes at the beginning of 1969 of President Ho Chi Minh [...] and the sacred will that He [Ho Chi Minh] had left behind before passing away, peoples and the armies of the South along with the peoples and the armies of the North exerted and magnified the anti-American resistance

¹⁵⁰ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 184.

and save the country.”¹⁵¹ Here, the Party and the State the 2000 textbook describes played a leadership and, to a certain extent, spiritual role in leading the Vietnam War. Similarly, examining the Easter Offensive in 1972, the textbook describes, “Taking advantage of the enemy loopholes due to misjudgments about the time, the scale, and the directions of our advancement, our armed forces pursued the directive of the Politburo of May 1971 and began strategically and accurately advanced according to the plan of the Central Military Commissar.”^{152 153} The fact that the armed forces are described in the 2000 textbook as with the ability to act immediately implies that the Party and the State had foreseen and “accurately” evaluated the situations.

Especially in the realm of the economy, the Party-State is described as having a more active and decisive role in the 2000 textbook. In several paragraphs discussing the first five-year economic plan, the textbook authors choose to phrase that “the State had increased capital investments for the economic construction [...],” or “the State prioritized investment in construction and development of [agricultural facilities],” instead of “the economic was invested with capitals from the State” or like how the 1988 textbook is compiled, “[agricultural facilities] was prioritized to be constructed and developed by the State,” respectively.¹⁵⁴ This subtle change, from the passive voice in the 1988 textbook to a more active voice in the 2000 textbook, does not change the result of the achievement; however, it helps to reorientate the focus from the acts to the actors. This illuminates the role of the Party and the State. It is also useful to compare the way the pre-1990s and the 2000 textbooks describe how the CPV and the State sought to amend the effects of the conflict and to recover and develop the economy. The 1988 textbook reads,

[The unfavorable conditions of the United States in both North and South Vietnam in 1968] created advantageous conditions for the North to further stimulate socialist construction and aided the South. [...] The people of the North had to quickly amend the wounds of War [and], concurrently, make use of peacetime to selflessly labor, advancing [oneself] into the productive and construction front. [...] [And] turning the pain [of Ho Chi Minh’s pass away] into strength, the whole Party, the whole mass vowed to seriously pursue the

¹⁵¹ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 153.

¹⁵² MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 155.

¹⁵³ Easter Offensive was a military campaign by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces against the South Vietnamese and American forces in 1972. As Operation Rolling Thunder, I use this term for the sake of convenience in references. The first attack occurred on 30 March, only a few days before Easter, 2 April, and one day before Good Friday, hence, explained the name on the American side. The South Vietnamese, however, called it Red Fiery Summer (in Vietnamese: Mua he Do lua). However, the North Vietnamese termed this campaign as the 1972 Spring – Summer Offensive (in Vietnamese: Chien dich Xuan – He 1972).

¹⁵⁴ Compared *History Grade 12* (1988), 88, and MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 135.

sacred will of President Ho and united tightly around the Party Central Executive Committee.¹⁵⁵

In contrast, the 2000 textbook reads,

In the new situation, the Party and the State prioritized amending the war consequences, [and] recovering and developing the economy. [...] Pursuing the policies of the Party, the State, and the sacred Will of President Ho Chi Minh, by the end of 1969, three large political campaigns had been launched. [...] Responding to the three large political campaigns of the Party and the State, our people of the North exaltedly push for emulation [in various social, political, and economic activities].¹⁵⁶

Already, the repeated term “the Party and the State” indicates that the textbook authors stress their importance in the eyes of the students. However, there are few implications to this rhetoric. A brief comparison between texts that are dedicated to describing military achievements and ones dedicated to outlining economic attainments indicate that the term “the Party and the State” only appears in the latter. From this, the textbook authors likely seek to instill in the students’ perceptions that the CPV and the various economic developments for which it is responsible must be intimately connected. In other words, one can see through the 2000 textbook that the Party increasingly depends on economic performance to define itself. According to another article by Le Hong Hiep, the textbook’s rhetoric is consistent with what the author terms as “performance-based legitimacy.” As described above, the inability of Marxist-Leninist to explain the post-War situations made the CPV looked incapable and politically irrelevant by the late 1980s. Furthermore, as Le Hong Hiep argues, the end of the Vietnam War on the one hand, and the outbreak of the Sino-Vietnamese and Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict on the other, both exhausted and discredited the CPV’s nationalist stance and “historical mission” of defending the country’s sovereignty.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, as the author points out, “socio-economic performance emerged as the only feasible legitimation mode for the CPV.”¹⁵⁸ As such, the new emphasis is an essential move to save the regime’s legitimacy and sustain its survival. The 2000 textbook, therefore, becomes a means to propagate the legitimacy of the regime and justify its prolonged position in power even after the fall of the socialist camp.

Moreover, all textbooks stress the need for the proletarian Party leadership by implying that the lack of working-class and the CPV’s leadership

¹⁵⁵ *History Grade 12* (1988), 141-142.

¹⁵⁶ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 156-157.

¹⁵⁷ Le Hong Hiep, “Performance-based Legitimacy: The Case of the Communist Party of Vietnam and *Doi Moi*,” *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 34, no. 2 (2012), 156, www.jstor.org/stable/41756339.

¹⁵⁸ Le Hong Hiep, “Performance-based Legitimacy,” 158.

would lead to Vietnam losing its sovereignty and becoming susceptible to the scheme of imperialist forces. The 2000 textbook, in particular, argues that the “overarching factor [to Vietnamese victory against the Americans] is the leadership of the Worker’s Party of Vietnam — *the vanguard team of the working class of Vietnam* [my emphasis].”¹⁵⁹ This reinforced the idea that the CPV plays a critical role in the success of Vietnamese revolution, which is the message the Truong Chinh gave out in his speech in 1986.¹⁶⁰ However, this emphasis had a more pragmatic undertone. Indeed, when the 2000 textbook was first published in 1992, the rather totalitarian control over both the military and economic spheres indicates the CPV’s fear of other looming threats: pluralism and economism. While the CPV in the mid-1980s did allow certain conversations about political reforms and liberalization to be made, the collapse of all socialist regimes in Eastern Europe proved a horror to the Vietnamese. As Bui Tin claims in his private writings, already in 1990, the CPV had determined that “the collapse of the socialist countries in Eastern Europe was due to plots to overthrow them by imperialism and the reactionary gangs inside and outside those countries, of the CIA and the Vatican.”¹⁶¹ Similarly, as Nguyen Van Linh recalled in 2005, the poor economy allowed the emergence of “rightist opportunist ideology” that claimed “‘socialist’ and ‘capitalist’ did not make any difference for commerce [...] it was all right as long as production increased and the livelihood of the people was improved.”¹⁶² Along this line of reasoning, the appearance of the non-CPV and opposing forces proved dangerous to the regime’s legitimacy. Logically, its appearance in the 2000 textbook was a way to reinforce the CPV’s power by exposing students to only the CPV and its messages and shield them from “reactionary” or foreign ideas.

Unfortunately, the centrality of the CPV also meant that other forces once integral to the conflict would have to be purged, the most prominent one being the NLF. The 2000 textbook fails to clarify that many military campaigns were planned and waged entirely by the Vietcong forces. For example, in the Easter Offensive in 1972, whereas the 1988 textbook reads, “The Liberation Army, with coordination of local armed force and the mass political force, had advanced against the enemy on three main forces,” the 2000 textbook only denotes, “*Our* armed force advanced with strong intensity [and] with large scale, [and] in a short time penetrated the three strongest defensive fronts of the

¹⁵⁹ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 180.

¹⁶⁰ Truong Chinh emphasised, “From the realities and practices of revolutionary [works] in the past few years, we [the Party] drew out [that] we need to construct the Party whose political mission is equivalent to a ruling party that leads the people to conduct a socialist revolution.” See Truong Chinh, “Political Report,” 712.

¹⁶¹ Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 92.

¹⁶² Elliott, *Changing Worlds*, 67, 82.

enemy.”¹⁶³ This narrative clearly conflates the North Vietnamese forces and the NLF. In 1986, a group of veterans of the communist movement in southern Vietnam formed an independent Club of Former Resistance Fighters.¹⁶⁴ As Carlyle Thayer notes, “Its leadership comprised several notable high-ranking southern party and military figures.”¹⁶⁵ While the initial goal was to address the poor socioeconomic conditions faced by many veterans in the post-War year in 1986, the group became overtly political, attracted larger audience — many were party and army veterans —, and began to petition to challenge the CPV’s “mono-organizational socialism.”¹⁶⁶ It is possible that because of this, the NLF was distrusted. Thus, given the high political vigilance that the CPV vowed after 1986, it was more convenient to leave the NLF out altogether. Yet, it is also possible that this conflated narrative in the 2000 textbook was meant to reinforce students’ belief that the CPV was committed to genuine reconciliation and reunification. The 2000 textbook is a prime example of these concerns.

From North-South to north-south to Vietnam

Guichard argued that the contents of history textbooks will make or break the reconciliation process of any nation. Indeed, beneath the veneer of the Vietnam War that is free from personal and communal trauma, all textbooks, and especially those published in the year 2000, must deal with another kind of painful experiences: the national trauma of humiliation. It is tempting to immediately limit the term “national trauma” with respect to only the present-day unified Vietnam since the division between the two regions/ex-political entities had technically been amended. However, Anderson’s concept of the “nation” as an “imagined political community” suggests that one should also find the political line that divides the communities. The North-South (or north-south) mentality illuminates many painful experiences of national humiliation unique to the populace in each region/ex-political entity.

Whether it be in North or South or unified Vietnam, the conflict entails the same repercussions. Writing about the traumas in the United States, Arthur G. Neal distinguishes collective national trauma from personal trauma in that the former “involves sufficient damage to the social system that discourse throughout the nation is directed toward the repair work that needs to be done.”¹⁶⁷ From this analysis, when the “integrity of the social order” and “shared

¹⁶³ Compared *History Grade 12* (1988), 138, and MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 155.

¹⁶⁴ Carlyle Thayer, “Political Legitimacy in Vietnam: Challenge and Response,” *Politics & Policy* 38, no. 3 (June 2010): 428, doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-1346.2010.00242.x.

¹⁶⁵ Thayer, “Political Legitimacy,” 428.

¹⁶⁶ Thayer, “Political Legitimacy,” 428-429.

¹⁶⁷ Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Major Events in the American Century* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), 5.

values” are threatened, nations are compelled to “repair” the trauma and the wounds that it causes.¹⁶⁸ Even though textbooks seem indifferent to the personal and collective trauma that the soldiers and civilians experienced during the War, they directly confront the collective national trauma of being humiliated. But the question here is not *what* humiliation the textbooks deal with, but *whose* humiliation the textbooks tackle. As described throughout this paper, the textbooks promote nationalism by emphasizing that the War was fought between Vietnamese *and* the Americans—not between the two Vietnams—by portraying those fighting against the South Vietnamese regime and the Americans as heroes, and by highlighting the Vietnamese victory over the enemy. Thus, evoking the sense of patriotism that counter the collective trauma of partition. This narrative fits with the rhetoric of the unified Vietnam, where the trauma identified would be the painful experiences of the prolonged *inability* to reconcile.

Similarly, from a regional perspective, the textbooks promote ideological integrity by liberally incorporating Marxist-Leninist terms in their narratives, even in purely non-socialist and non-Marxist-Leninist settings and by describing war heroes with terminologies of Ho Chi Minh morality to counter the ideological defeat in the post-War year. In the 2000 textbook, Ho Chi Minh morality becomes more prominent in the narratives and is more associated with economic issues. Discussing North Vietnamese economy activities during Operation Rolling Thunder, the 2000 textbook’s authors emphasize, “In fighting and production, anti-American and save-the-country patriotic emulation movements intensified, demonstrating the lucent verity: ‘Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.’”¹⁶⁹ The narratives then continue, “Our military and people of the North clearly show the strength of a nation with a rich *patriotic* tradition, that loves socialism; clearly show the *diligent labor spirit*, the *brave* fighting spirit, and the revolutionary heroism.”¹⁷⁰ Of course, it is not difficult to understand why. Ho Chi Minh’s morality and Thoughts, according to official claims, are,

[Comprehensive] and profound [systems] of views on the fundamental issues of the Vietnamese revolution, [and] the result of the inheritance and development of fine [Vietnamese] *traditional* values of the nation and the quintessence of human culture [and] the application and creative development of *Marxism-Leninism* in Vietnam’s specific conditions.¹⁷¹

In essence, the balance between nationalist ideals and Marxist-Leninist

¹⁶⁸ Neal, *National Trauma*, 5.

¹⁶⁹ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 148.

¹⁷⁰ MOET, *History Grade 12* (2000), 148-149.

¹⁷¹ Van Thi Thanh Mai, “The Values of Ho Chi Minh Thoughts Are Undeniable!” [Gia tri tu tuong Ho Chi Minh La Khong the Phu nhan!], *Propaganda* [Tuyen giao], last

principles make Ho Chi Minh morality and Thoughts useful tools for the CPV in the changing tides of global conditions. Indeed, the CPV officially extolled Ho Chi Minh morality and Thoughts in the early 1990s when many reforms initiated by the CPV removed much of the socialist contents in actions.¹⁷² In other words, they provide the CPV with nothing but the Marxist-Leninist brand name that the Party desperately needed to continue to justify its existence while also delivering the nationalism the CPV increasingly relied upon.

Nevertheless, while the textbooks promote economic development and elucidate the CPV's reorientation to material well-being by throwing in non-Marxist terms, these promotions aimed only to justify the collectivization and cooperativization of the economy in the South after the War ended. Little has been done to recognize the material well-being confiscated and destroyed in the "arbitrary" socialization policies in the South during the post-War year or the deaths of many South Vietnamese due to confrontation between the two sides and of South Vietnamese soldiers who served the Saigon regime. In this way, textbooks leave the humiliation of the South/south Vietnamese relatively untouched.

Nevertheless, examining the complex psychological and cultural responses to defeat, Wolfgang Schivelbusch argues that nations react to national traumas in phases. They go from blaming and abdicating responsibilities to the losing authorities, attributing the enemy as morally inferior while claiming spiritual morality on the losing self, learning from the winner to denying defeat and awaiting for future revenge and hopeful vision of renewal.¹⁷³ The textbooks' representation of the Vietnam War addresses each of these stages. For the national humiliation of the North Vietnamese, they portray the Vietnamese, equipped with Marxist-Leninist and Ho Chi Minh moral ideals, as morally superior to the South Vietnamese and the Americans, using insulting terms in Marxist-Leninist frameworks such as "imperialist" or "neocolonialist" to denigrate the enemy, enraged at the moral falling of South Vietnamese society, and looking toward the CPV for guidance to recover themselves from unrevolutionary actions and avenge the defeats that, at any time, would result in success. For unified Vietnam, the new post-War regime's adoption of the market economy and the South's twelve-year education system, the "rebellious" act of several former southern resistance fighters in the mid-1980s, and the mass exodus of refugees during the 1980s demonstrate the inability of the CPV to coercively remove the social, political, and cultural influence and failure to reconcile with many former South Vietnam's populace. Reciprocally, for the

modified 9 April 2020, tuyengiao.vn/bao-ve-nen-tang-tu-tuong-cua-dang/gia-tri-tu-tuong-ho-chi-minh-la-khong-the-phu-nhan-127447.

¹⁷² Le Hong Hiep, "Performance-based Legitimacy," 157.

¹⁷³ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 10-35.

South Vietnamese, addressing defeat culminates in the revival of its material wealth since the beginning of *Doi Moi*.

Such implications lead to a conflicting legacy of the War. While the textbooks seek to incorporate national trauma into the trajectory of historical development by addressing these stages, the conflict could not result in a renewal stage and a propellant to its vision of an ideal socialist future but allowed many practices in the former South to interrogate who had *really* won the War. By addressing these stages, the textbooks connect the national trauma of humiliation in the past with post-War realities and use the history of the Vietnam War to help all heal and move beyond the painful memories of the conflict.

Conclusion

This essay hopes to provide insight into how the Vietnamese mainlanders perceive the Vietnam War as a counterweight to the Western gaze of the conflict. As the process of delving deeply into the pages of Vietnamese history textbooks of different eras and of different grade level drags on, this paper also seeks to provide some insight on the childhood experiences of a Vietnamese student through the most often overlooked aspect in the lives of a citizen in a communist regime: education.

Indeed, while Western historians often look at the Vietnam War as a conflict between the two Vietnams, looking through the narratives, textbook authors see the Vietnam war as a national liberation war that operates strictly on the Vietnamese-versus-Americans paradigm. The Vietnamese authority also sees the Vietnam War as an anti-(neo)-colonial war with roots from colonial past and a part of the global socialist revolution. Indeed, through a conscious choice of terminologies and formulated narratives, the textbook authors inculcate Marxist-Leninist and communist ideology.

On the other hand, it is a common perception from the Western point of view that the socialist childhood “often appeared as ideological rigid, politically controlled, and therefore entirely homogenous.”¹⁷⁴ However, as the authors warn in the introductory chapter of the *History Grade 6* textbook, “[While] learning [history] and talking of the past, [one] should not mechanically imitate the past and instead, must apply it appropriately with the requirements of the present and

¹⁷⁴ Nelli Piattoeva, Iveta Silova, and Zsuzsa Millei, “Remembering Childhood, Rewriting (Post)Socialist Lives,” in *Childhood and Schooling in Post(Socialist Societies: Memories of Everyday Life*, ed. Nelli Piattoeva, Iveta Silova, and Zsuzsa Millei (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 3; MOET, *History Grade 6* [Lich su Lop 6], 14th reprint, ed. Nguyen Kien and Nguyen Cao Luy (Ho Chi Minh City: Education Press, 2001), 4.

the vision of the future.”¹⁷⁵ Indeed, it would be bad practice to disregard the complexity of the history textbooks used during the post-War era to see the authors’ efforts of coercively feeding Marxist-Leninist and nationalist ideology into the students’ mind as their sole goal. The aims of the authors and the regime are more varied and complicated than that. Besides ideology, the textbooks also teach students about Vietnamese history and the post-*Doi Moi* textbook, in particular, prioritizes education over indoctrination by requesting students to interrogate historical information. The authors also explain the current affairs by adopting terminologies of the new era and justify contemporary policies by drawing (and in many ways, re-creating) parallel historical precedents. The narratives also subsume personal traumas for the sake of reconciliation yet confront the national traumas head-on and engage in a cathartic repair work through stages of defeat to envision a better future communist society.

Looking at the proposition given by the author of *History Grade 6*, one can also infer that the textbooks’ narratives value diverse topics and stream of thoughts differently and “appropriately with the requirements of the present.” Whereas textbooks circulated within years after the War overemphasize the revolutionary, communist, and nationalist spirits, that aim dwindles the more one approaches the turn of the century. Emphasizing material well-being and deemphasizing military successes in the 2000 textbook, for example, is a sign that the authors fit the narratives to the *Doi Moi* era. And in a time of crisis, textbook authors try to shield students away from uncertainty and immoral gestures.

Most of all, textbooks are legitimizing tools. High-tide revolutionary spirits in the immediate aftermath of the post-War year present a powerful energy to harness for supports as well as to maintain for the greater socialist political project; hence, the authors incorporate these elements into their narratives. They needed South Vietnamese students to be loyal to the new post-War regime. The socialist camp also showed signs of distress in the late 1980s, which meant strengthening the Marxist-Leninist historical viewpoint. When the socialist order finally collapsed and prosperity became more important than revolutionary gestures, an economic-centered rhetoric was utilized to demonstrate and justify the regime’s existence.

This paper also introduces the concept of “political socialization.” As one observes, the intricate aims of the authors suggest that while ideological indoctrination is important, formulating a common history through a set “proven truth” that can be corroborated with personal memories so students can perceive as part of one “imagined community” is essential. Thus, no matter how indoctrinating the textbooks’ rhetoric might seem to an outside reader, the main aim of history textbooks is, after all, to teach students about real historical events and ensure that students can participate in a nation whose shared memory

is the Vietnam War. In this sense, political socialization, forces students to “socialize,” that is to familiarize themselves with the society and the structure within which they belong. To do so, textbooks require students to link the Vietnam War to current affairs — from Vietnamese posture in Indochina to the conflict with China and the new-found prosperity after *Doi Moi*. On the other hand, political socialization also involves students in the collective emotion of pain and trauma. Such understanding is only possible when the national trauma is more important than the personal trauma subsumed, though not all memories and traumas are treated equally.

Similarly, one can see that the strategies that textbook authors adopted to introduce various ideologies are not at all different from those adopted by other countries. The fact that Neal’s, Guichard’s, Schivelbusch’s and many more scholars’ theories about historical memory play out in Vietnamese history textbooks confirm that the CPV’s approach to national history, especially a defining and highly controversial chapter in Vietnamese history such as the Vietnam War, is hardly the exception. One can expand this observation to argue that the CPV’s strategies of ideological promotion are neither unique to Vietnam nor to the CPV. As Foster and Crawford argue, “the manipulation of national histories [is] not confined to fledgling nations or to one-party totalitarian states.”¹⁷⁶ And, just as how the West gazes upon the socialist education experiences as “rigid,” “controlled,” and “homogenous,” a similar force is playing out in Western history curriculum. Whereas the socialist education is perceived in this way because it is *socialist*, one must wonder whether history education in the West is more, “rigid,” “controlled,” and “homogenous” simply because the ideology it attempts to inculcate is even harder to detect.

In a few years’ time, Vietnam will again overhaul its aging curriculum (the last update was in 2005). Unlike previous curriculum, the regime now only dictates very briefly what the contents of history will be, and private authors are welcomed and encouraged to participate in the writing process. A few years’ time also marks nearly forty years since the country embraced the market economy and other things that an orthodox Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist would decry as capitalist, and almost half a century since the Vietnam War ended. It will be interesting to see how the conflict evolves in the narratives. Will the orthodox Marxist-Leninist doctrine once again dominate the narratives of the textbook? Will nationalism persist, in midst of increasing hostile geopolitical conditions? Or will the materialistic tone become mainstream when the country envisions itself as a prosperous nation in the ten-year time? No matter what, one thing is clear: ideology will still be the force that drives education since even the most ideological textbooks still aim to teach history, current events and how to grapple historical memories.

¹⁷⁶ Foster and Crawford, ed., *What Shall We Tell the Children?*, 7.

