LUGGAGE TO AMERICA: VIETNAMESE INTELLECTUAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL IMMIGRANTS IN THE NEW MILLENIUM

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is a historical and ethnographic study of new communities of Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. Focusing on contemporary patterns of migration of intellectuals and a new entrepreneurial class in Vietnam, I argue that a distinctly new genealogy of Vietnamese migration to the U.S. was prompted and shaped by Vietnamese veneration for education and intellectualism and Vietnam’s 1986 social/political transformation. With a focus on the lives of (1) professional immigrants who brought with them human capital and (2) entrepreneurial immigrants who entered the U.S. with social capital, this study seeks to broaden the extant scholarship on Vietnamese Americans which traditionally tend to confuse Vietnamese immigrants with refugees. My research points out the ways in which new immigrants increasingly and dramatically reshape the face of Vietnamese America. It also renders visible the political and social contexts in which the American-bound migration of the more privileged and wealthier Vietnamese middle class is articulated with a revitalized Vietnamese-U.S. discourse of nation and empire. Together, the distinct social backgrounds, political associations, migratory trajectories, and immigrant lives of those who participated in this study illustrate an urgent need for Vietnamese American studies and Asian immigrant studies to permit a greater degree of conceptual flexibility for Vietnamese diasporic identity.

Key terms: Vietnamese history, Vietnamese education and intellectualism, globalization, Vietnamese emigrations, Vietnamese Americans, refugees, ethnic enclaves and
economics, anticommunism, migration and human and social capital, diaspora and transnationalism, ethnography, Southeast Asian studies, U.S. immigration histories, Asian American studies.
For Vietnam
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INTRODUCTION

*Khi ta ở, chỉ là nơi đất ở
*Khi ta đi, đất đã hóa tâm hồn

[When we stay, it is merely a land to live on
When we leave, the land has evolved into a soul

Chế Lan Viên (*Tiếng Hát Con Tàu* / The Song of the Train)

In 2010, the mathematician Ngô Bảo Châu frustratingly wrote in his blog, “Recently, some people I didn’t even know and who usually pretend to be knowledgeable seemed to be concerned that Ngô Bảo Châu would walk the ‘left side’ (*lề trái*) or the ‘right side’ (*lề phải*). I would like to reply that ‘following side’ is the way of sheep, not of free people.”¹ In contemporary Vietnamese encoded political vocabulary, the term “left side” refers to the underground media, such as personal blogs, group forums, samizdat print materials, or overseas-based political and cultural websites, and the term “right side” indicates the government – controlled media system. In a broader yet more implicit definition, whereas “left side” media represents democratic activism, “right side” media allegedly signifies communist manipulation and government propaganda. Châu’s statement was a reaction to the fierce debate centered on the question of the political identity of Vietnamese intellectuals living both in Vietnam and in the West. His post drew a flurry of responses and precipitated political disputes among Vietnamese communities inside and outside of Vietnam and fueled a dialogue on the correlations between education and politics in Vietnamese society.
Châu’s political and social opinions may not have attracted much public attention had it not been for several important reasons. Châu is the first and only Vietnamese to ever receive the prestigious Fields Medal, an award that is somewhat equivalent to a Nobel Prize in the field of mathematics. Also, Châu is a Vietnamese intellectual who was born and raised in Vietnam, educated in France, has both Vietnamese and French nationalities, and currently lives in the United States. In a time when Vietnam is struggling to gain a foothold in the world’s intellectual order, Châu becomes its best representative. Similarly, in a domestic milieu of political ambivalence, where nationalism is often coercively and intentionally interpreted as state rule, by promoting and polishing Châu’s image the ruling class of Vietnam strives to intertwine communist politics and intellectualism. In the year-long wildfire which is called the “Ngô Bảo Châu phenomenon,” Vietnamese media stirred up the nation with hundreds of newspaper articles and radio talks about him. His interviews and meetings were televised and broadcast nationwide by both government propaganda and popular cultural channels. Châu literally became a conversation piece for Vietnamese of all social strata in their daily talks. Vietnamese parents look up to him as a model to chart their children’s future of pursuing a decent education abroad and becoming renowned scientists. In 2012, during the pinnacle of the frenzy, hundreds of parents in Hanoi stampeded when they pushed down the gates and fences of a primary school and stepped on each other in order to enroll their children into the school where, decades earlier, Châu began his schooling.

In the West, Châu confuses many overseas Vietnamese who are dissidents of the communist government. Although many are excited and proud of having a compatriot who carved a name for the Vietnamese in the world’s mathematics ivory tower, Châu’s background and political affiliation also arouses a significant amount of discomfort. Unlike most people of
his generation, Châu was not born in poverty. He was, in fact, the son of an elite communist
couple. Both his parents are professors and researchers at Vietnam’s prominent institutes. His
father, a former captain of the People’s Army of Vietnam who fought in the Vietnam War, is a
researcher at Vietnam National Institute of Hydromechanics, and his mother works at the Central
Hospital of Traditional Medicine. While Châu lives in the United States and works full-time as a
faculty member of the Mathematics Department at the University of Chicago, he also receives
exceptional privileges from the government of Vietnam. His awards include a US$600,000
luxury condo, the prestigious title of the youngest professor in the Vietnamese academy, and
leadership at the newly-established Institute of Advanced Mathematics Studies in Hanoi. He is a
regular guest of honor of topnotch government leaders, including the most eminent figure in
contemporary Vietnamese political theatre, Prime Minister Nguyễn Tấn Dũng. Châu is a
compelling example of new Vietnamese immigrants in the United States that the traditional
scholarship on Vietnamese Americans has not yet examined.

Another example, which is less politically compelling but still critically significant in
identifying the gaps in the extant research on Vietnamese Americans, is millionaire Lâm Ngọc
Khuân. In late 2012, Khuân, the former owner of Phương Nam Seafood Production (Công ty cổ
phân Chế biến thực phẩm Phương Nam), filed bankruptcy for his company after having settled
down in California for several months. One year earlier, having made a gross profit of US$120
million in 2010 and US$74 million worth of export value in 2011, Phương Nam was ranked
ninth among the top ten Vietnamese seafood companies. Before the incident that left thousands
of aqua-famers and eight banks in Vietnam in financial turmoil, Khuân and his family were
reported moving frequently between Vietnam and the U.S. Although Khuân was not charged
with any crimes, he and his family would have faced tremendous trouble with banks and local people in Vietnam had his immigrant visa not allowed him to seek a safe haven in the U.S.

In spite of leaving behind a gigantic debt of 200 billion đồng (approximately US$10 million), Lâm Ngọc Khuân is not considered a criminal mastermind, nor is his debt a Ponzi scheme. In fact, Khuân represents a rags-to-riches entrepreneur whose fortune was made after many years of hard work and rendered possible by socioeconomic changes in Vietnam in the last several decades. The economic downswing in Vietnam in 2012 destroyed his effort to thrive and brought an abrupt end to his career. Like many of his contemporaries, including millionairess Diệu Hiền who also failed in her multimillion dollar aqua-production in the Mekong Delta, Khuân took refuge in the U.S. by purportedly seeking sickness treatment abroad when business failure became inevitable. It is unclear as to which immigration visa he obtained, whether it was the family-based visa (including type IR for the parent of a U.S. citizen and types FB-3, FB-4 for over-21 children or siblings of a U.S. citizen) or even the investor visa EB-1. Nonetheless, it is clear that Khuân did not apply for refugee status or any other type of political asylum. Khuân is reported to have started his own bakery business in California. However, he desires, or at least has expressed his desire, to return to Vietnam. He recently wrote in a publicized letter addressing his debtors, “If my health condition allows, I dearly wish to return to Vietnam as soon as possible to help the banks [from whom he borrowed] running the business of the company.”

Immigrants like Châu and Khuân are invisible in Vietnamese American scholarship. Obviously, they contradict the popular conceptualization of overseas Vietnamese in the West as adversaries and victims of Vietnamese communists. In Châu’s case, the worldwide academic success of “children of communism” is the last thing overseas Vietnamese anticommunist communities wish to acknowledge; especially that a “child of communism” is successful in the
United States, the land that thousands of hardcore anticommunist Vietnamese call home and vow to keep [Vietnamese] communist-free. Under the fearful eyes of these staunch anticommunists, Ngô Bảo Châu represents some sorts of the enemy within or the invasion of Vietnamese communism in their backyards. Similarly, Lâm Ngọc Khuân also contradicts the grand narrative of Vietnamese Americans as refugees. Khuân is not a communist, nor does he come from an elite stratum in contemporary Vietnamese society. He is simply a working-class man who earned his prosperity through hard work and socioeconomic opportunities. His working-class, apolitical background and his [once] tremendous economic success obviously subvert the anticommunist propaganda which often declares that, except for corrupt communist officials, no one can prosper in Vietnam. And although his entrepreneurship in Vietnam ended in tragic failure, the bankruptcy cannot be blamed on the government. Khuân’s story and his presence in the U.S., therefore, is also something the Vietnamese anticommunist agenda would not want to mention.

The stories of immigrants like Chau and Khuan, which hitherto have been invisible in Vietnamese American scholarship, are the subject of this dissertation. An historical and ethnographic study that spanned several years and several countries in three continents of Asia, Europe, and Americas, my dissertation focuses on a new community of Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. that emerged after 2000. It renders visible a new genealogy of Vietnamese intellectual and entrepreneurial immigrants in the U.S. whose emigration is fostered by Vietnam-U.S. global ties rather than by political confrontations. As such, the word “luggage” in the title of this dissertation is both literal and metaphorical. On the one hand, it conjures up a more cosmopolitan and conventional image of an air passenger with luggage, which contradicts the disturbing images of destitute boatpeople. On the other hand, it suggests that new Vietnamese
immigrants—intellectuals and entrepreneurs—bring with them to the U.S. valuable assets of both social capital and human capital.

Although neither Khuân nor Châu participated in my project, the significance of their social statuses in Vietnam and their interesting migrancies intersect with and share many similarities with sixty informants who represent many other Vietnamese Americans/immigrants and whose stories shape this dissertation. Focusing on the historical/contemporary patterns of the migration of intellectuals and a new entrepreneurial class in Vietnam, I argue that a distinctly new genealogy of Vietnamese migration to the US was profoundly shaped by Vietnam’s 1986 social/political transformation, the 1995 Vietnam-US rapprochement, and the increasing globalization of the Vietnamese economy. This dissertation is buttressed by two pivotal pillars: education and the 1986 Vietnamese Socioeconomic Reform (which is known by its Vietnamese term Đổi mới). I emphatically assert that, first, education has been, and will always be, a significant vehicle, as well as an impetus, for Vietnamese migration. Employment-based immigrants use education as a means to enter and adjust their immigrant status, and family-based immigrants make their decision to emigrate based on their children’s educational opportunity. I assert, secondly, that there would not have been such a tremendous change in the nature of Vietnamese emigration, that is, from refugee to immigrant, had Đổi mới not happened. Đổi mới brought forth political normalization and economic globalization that allowed intellectuals to emigrate freely and foster the making of the entrepreneurial class in Vietnam, who would then bring social capital to foreign countries. Such vital factors, which shape the emigration every year of tens of thousands of Vietnamese to the West, in general, and to the U.S., in particular, have been largely overlooked in extant scholarship. The emerging genealogy of this contingent
of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants invites a re-mapping of Vietnamese migratory trajectories to the U.S., which, I suggest, begins with the history of Vietnam-U.S. relations.

A Brief History of Vietnam-U.S. Relations

The first American to visit Vietnam is usually mistaken to be Captain John White, a native of Marblehead, Massachusetts who visited on June 7, 1819. In fact, sixteen years before White sailed into the waters of Vũng Tàu (Cap Saint Jacques) on the brig Franklin, an American vessel named Fame had actually reached Vietnam, making her captain, Jeremiah Briggs, the first American to set foot on Vietnamese soil in May 1803. None of these earliest voyages, however, was a diplomatic mission. Instead, they were explorations for a new supplier for sugar and silk. However, repeated failure to secure commercial agreements and daily hassles with Cochinchinese (South Vietnamese) authorities and merchants frustrated the American merchants. The first “American contacts” ended with these merchants leaving Vietnam, documenting their disappointment and lamenting about “the present miserable state of this naturally fine country” that represented “no other than the source of deep regret and commiseration.”

The first American envoy who expressed keen interest in establishing diplomacy between the U.S. and Vietnam was John Shillaber, the U.S. Consul in Batavia, Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). From 1826 to 1832, Shillaber urged the U.S. government to submit a diplomatic request to the king of Đại Nam (Vietnam) and nominated himself for the U.S.’s representative position of Presidential Commissioner in the kingdom. His efforts failed miserably and no treaty was signed between the two countries. In 1832, the ship Peacock, carrying a delegation led by Special Agent Edmund Robert, who was assigned by President Andrew Jackson, arrived at Đà Nẵng (Tourane). Robert’s attempt to appeal to King Minh Mạng was rejected and he blamed the
failure on the Cochinchinese interlocutors whose work he condemned as representing “duplicity and prevarication.” On May 14, 1836, from the kingdom of Siam, Robert led a special commission returning to Đà Nẵng for another attempt at a trade treaty with Vietnam. Robert, however, had contracted a serious illness that impeded him from following the protracted diplomatic procedure with the Court at Huế. He had to be brought back to Macao for treatment, where he died on June 12 of the same year before the treaty could be finalized. Although the following years saw several attempts to continue Robert’s mission, his untimely demise put an end to the U.S.’s official effort to reach Vietnam. Nearly forty years later, in both 1874 and 1875, while facing looming colonization by France, King Tự Đức of Vietnam sent Emissary Bùi Viện to the United States to request the establishment of diplomatic relations and seek help. At the time, although Vietnam was being invaded and systematically annexed into French Indochina, colonial policies and treaties among Western superpowers pressured President Ulysses S. Grant to turn down King Tự Đức’s request. It took seven decades more for Americans to come back to Vietnam for military missions.

During French colonial rule in Indochina, the United States was a very dim silhouette on the social and political backdrop of Vietnam. The most significant U.S. cultural milestone was the introduction of Protestantism to Vietnam in 1911 by missionaries of the Christian and Missionary Alliance. The mission to Vietnam was initiated by Dr. Albert B. Simpson, who in 1887 insisted that “the great kingdom of Annam (the central part of the French Indochina) … should be considered as a prospective mission field of the Alliance.” The first three American evangelists sent by the Christian and Missionary Alliance [then the Evangelical Missionary Alliance—Hội Thánh Truyền đạo Tin Lành] to Indochina were Dr. Robert Jaffray, Reverend Paul M. Hosler, and Reverend G. Lloyd Hughes. Because the French often favored Roman
Catholicism over Protestantism, the new [American] religion did not meet with much success in Indochina. Many times it was severely oppressed by the colonial authorities. By the late 1930s, after nearly thirty years of evangelical mission, Vietnam had only 10,000 Protestants in comparison to 1.5 million Roman Catholics.¹⁰

In trading, the earliest and most popular American company doing business in Vietnam was the Standard Oil Company of New York (SOCONY). On August 22, 1909, the U.S. Consul at Saigon, Jacob E. Conner, stated that in a country of “twenty millions of people, of whom 6,000 [were] whites,” he was one of the only two Americans. The other was Miller Joblin, an “agent for Standard Oil Company.”¹¹ This company left such an impressive mark on Vietnam that half a century after its business closing in North Vietnam, Vietnamese still call the popular kerosene lamp đèn Hoa Kỳ (American lamp). While few people know that the name derives from the lamp promoted by SOCONY in the early twentieth century,¹² it is one of the few relics of early American trade in Vietnam.

The significant return of the U.S. to Vietnam occurred during the Second World War when Hồ Chí Minh’s resistance allied with America to combat the Japanese occupying force in Vietnam. Personnel of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, the predecessor of the CIA) was deployed to help the Việt Minh (abbreviation for Việt Nam Độc lập Đồng Minh Hội /League for the Independence of Vietnam) resistance with military training in exchange for their POW rescue. Leaflets with messages encouraging the rescue of POWs, written in traditional Vietnamese sin-eight-word distich metre, such as “Bộ đội Mỹ là bạn ta. Cứu bộ đội Mỹ mới là Việt Minh” (American soldiers are our friends. Saving American soldiers is the job of Việt Minh), were widely distributed. On September 2, 1945, in front of thousands of Vietnamese and several U.S. military personnel, Hồ Chí Minh read Vietnam’s Proclamation of Independence,
noting the “immortal statement” of the U.S. Declaration of Independence’s passage that declares “All men are created equal. . .” Faced with France’s threat to reclaim its former colony, Hồ also wrote a letter to President Harry S. Truman, asking for U.S. support for the young republic. The letter was intercepted by OSS Director Allen Dulles. So the Western alliance between the U.S. and France continued its legacy when the U.S. condemned Hồ Chí Minh’s provisional government and supported French expeditionary forces to re-subdue Vietnam in the Indochina War. By the end of the war, the U.S. had spent more than US$1 billion, making a contribution of 80 percent of the total war effort. Nonetheless, the French lost the war, and Vietnam was divided in half by the United Nations at the Geneva Conference, which was held from April 26 to July 20, 1954 in Switzerland. With the French colonial system destroyed by a series of exhausting wars, including the Second World War, the Indochina War, and the decolonizing movements in Africa, the United States voluntarily picked up the leading role in the conflict in Vietnam. Ngô Đình Diệm, an unpopular retired mandarin and a devout Roman Catholic, was brought back from his exile in the West and dubbed president of South Vietnam in the crusade against its rival communist North.

As soon as McCarthyism and the “domino doctrine” became a central focus of U.S. foreign policy, the U.S. decided to increase warfare supplies and “military advisors” to the South Vietnamese government. The death of John Kennedy signaled a much larger scale of U.S. intervention: from a pocket of some 2,000 military personnel in 1961, the number of G.I.s in Vietnam jumped to 16,500 in 1964. The tragedy really began when Johnson’s cabinet decided to “better protect U.S. airbases” in South Vietnam with U.S. troops. On March 8, 1965, 3500 men—two U.S. Marine Corps battalions—landed on the shores of Đà Nẵng. Four years later, U.S. soldier deployment of all armed forces in South Vietnam peaked at over a half a million.
As G.I. casualty counts quickly mounted and the financial cost became unbearable, the war became a deepening quagmire for America. Protests against the war on college and university campuses in the late 1960s gradually helped change American public opinion which later demanded that the U.S. finally withdraw ground troops from South Vietnam after the Paris Peace Accords were signed in 1972. From the first American death in the Vietnam War of U.S. Air Force Sergeant Richard B. Fitzgibbon, who was killed on June 8, 1956, to the last two American deaths of helicopter pilots William C. Nystal and Michael J. Shea on April 30, 1975, roughly sixty thousand American soldiers perished in one of the most tragic wars in U.S. history.

After the war, despite several postwar diplomatic plans that aimed to normalize Vietnam-U.S. relations during President Jimmy Carter’s terms, Cold War politics destroyed all efforts of reconnection. Provoked by the Khmer Rouge, in early 1979 Vietnam waged a war against the Democratic Kampuchea (Cambodia) and occupied the country for one decade. During this period of time, tensions ran high and Vietnam became an adversary of both the U.S. and China—the chief advocate of the Khmer Rouge. China invaded Vietnam in 1979 and bloody border conflicts lasted for a decade. Not until 1991, two years after the complete withdrawal of Vietnamese troops out of Cambodia, was the first initiative taken, with the U.S. presenting Vietnam with a roadmap “for quid-pro-quo normalization.”18 In 1994, with Vietnam’s strong cooperation on POW/MIA affairs, President Bill Clinton lifted the U.S. embargo that had been imposed on Vietnam since 1978. In July of 1995 the political normalization process was finalized and the U.S. opened an embassy in Hanoi. Five years later Clinton became the first U.S president to visit the unified Vietnam, and the Bilateral Trade Agreement was signed. In 2005, Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải became the first Vietnamese top-ranking communist leader to visit Washington D.C. In 2006, the U.S. Congress passed the Permanent Normal Trade Relations
for Vietnam, and in 2007 Vietnam entered the World Trade Organization. During the last several years, facing Chinese military growth and aggression in marine disputes in Asia, Vietnam and the U.S. increased signs of military cooperation and support are evident. Although Frederick Z. Brown contends that “rapprochement between Vietnam and the United States is in its infancy and needs time to grow,”19 American culture and lifestyle have already become a dominant force in Vietnamese society.

Ironically, today’s communist Vietnam is of particular relevance to pre-1975 South Vietnamese society, the rival brother it toppled. Sadly, the war also left behind wounds that have not healed nearly forty years after the cessation of hostilities and almost twenty years of rapprochement. Postwar emigration is among the most painful of those wounds.

Vietnamese Migration and the Politics of Việt kiều

Despite a history of thousands of years, Vietnam was rarely thought of as a migrant nation. The prominent historian Đào Duy Anh notes that “the agrarian lifestyle has rendered our nation a pacific character, commanding us to focus on stable settlement and refuse to compete [in adventures].”20 Ancient Vietnamese were deemed to be born, raised, live, marry, and finally perish in the same village where their ancestors had done similarly for hundreds, sometimes thousands, of years. Such a typical circle of life is called sau lũy tre làng (the life behind the hamlet’s bamboo hedge). As a part of homebound culture, nothing was more painful for a Vietnamese than leaving one’s village. More often than not, only individuals who faced extreme economic hardship and social oppression, or had committed serious crimes, would reluctantly choose to leave their villages. Coerced exile in the form of being expelled from the village was also considered one of the most severe punishments one may suffer. In the social structure of a
feudal Vietnamese village, the lowest and most despised residents were those who were not originally from the village. These outcast dwellers, who were stigmatized by the derogatory term “parasitic dwellers” (dân ngụ cur) regardless of their generations of local residency, were equivalent in many ways with the “untouchables” of the Indian caste system. They often lived on the edge or outside the hamlet’s bamboo hedge, were assigned to do the hardest and the most despicable public works, and discouraged to marry the locals. Thus they were vulnerable, expendable, and exploited by the whole village while benefiting very little from the community they served. Because of this cultural praxis, Vietnamese folklore and classic literature often lament about the uprootedness of a migrant as “the bird that leaves the jungle,” “the leaf that falls off the tree” and the desire to repatriate even long after one has passed away as “cáo chết ba năm quay đầu về núi” (the fox that has been dead for three years still turns his head toward the mountain). As such, migration in feudal Vietnam was, in fact, considered a condemnation rather than a desire for exploration and freedom.

Such a presumably static culture, nonetheless, did not prevent the Vietnamese from becoming a dynamic and mobile people. Historians and anthropologists believe that modern Vietnamese are descendants of one of the Bách Việt [a Hundred Viets] tribes who fled Han’s China from the modern territory of Guangxi and Guangdong provinces to Vietnam. During a thousand years of Chinese domination and Vietnamese feudal system’s conflicts, many Vietnamese were either captured and taken to China to be part of a skilled workforce or fled Vietnam for fear of political persecution. The shape of Vietnam as it is today was forged by countless southward expansions and the migration of millions of Vietnamese pilgrims, being initiated by Lê Hoàn, the founder of the Early Lê dynasty in 980, and ended by the Nguyễn dynasty at the early eighteenth century. During French colonial rule and occupation from 1858
to 1954, tens of thousands of Vietnamese were uprooted—most coercively, a few voluntarily—from their villages to other parts of Indochina and other French territories around the world, either as plantation hands or war laborers. A few Vietnamese who belonged to the elite social strata in French colonies also went to study and resettle in France and other parts of Europe. In addition, during the world wars and the Indochina War, many Vietnamese migrant laborers who were scattered around the world decided to take refuge in foreign lands to escape the relentless colonial rule and punitive conflicts in their homeland.

Modern Vietnam witnessed the climax of both domestic and international Vietnamese migrations. The partition of Vietnam in 1954 created a mass exodus of nearly one million North Vietnamese, mostly Roman Catholics, moving south and roughly 120,000 former Southern French resistance fighters moving north. The reunification of the country marked the beginning of roughly one million Vietnamese leaving Vietnam within less than a decade of the end of the war. The government’s postwar deurbanization policy and Marxist economic framework also mobilized millions of urbanites and lowland farmers to move to the Central Highlands and mountainous areas. Since the 1970s, economic struggles have been pushing millions of Vietnamese “export-laborers” to foreign countries, traditionally to former Soviet republics and Middle Eastern countries, and now to Asian economic powers such as South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. Many of these sojourners end up settling down in the host countries. In the present day, it is common for cities in Vietnam to have migrants as half of their population. In economic hubs, such as Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City, where plants and companies are located and jobs are abundant, the ratios are naturally the highest. The same phenomenon has occurred in other “boom towns” in the Central Highlands where the ancestral land of the highland minority groups
(commonly called Montagnards) is taken by the state, and the residents are pushed away by the dominant ethnic Việt migrants.

At the turn of the century, according to the latest statistics reported by the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs (Ủy ban Nhà nước về người Việt Nam ở nước ngoài)—the official state organization in charge of overseas Vietnamese—there are nearly four million Vietnamese living in 108 countries and territories outside Vietnam, with the highest concentration of more than 1.7 million in the United States and the lowest population of three in the Republic of Panama. Although these statistics may dramatically increase or decrease according to the homeland’s and host lands’ politics and economic conditions, since the late twentieth century Vietnam has already become one of the most diasporic migrant nations. As early as the 1990s, Vietnamese immigration sociologists claimed that beside the homeland population of 68 million, Vietnam also had 2.6 million Vietnamese descendants living abroad, accounting for an impressive 3.82 percent of the total population. Such a high percentage placed Vietnam only second to China with 4.23 percent (1.3 billion in China and 55 million outside China) and above three other nations with high percentages of their population overseas, including the U.K. (60 million at home and two million abroad, equivalent to 3.33 percent), India (900 million in India and 20 million abroad, equivalent to 2.22 percent), and Japan (120 million in Japan and two million overseas, equivalent to 1.66 percent).

Despite the nuanced nature of emigration, any Vietnamese who has one or more citizenships different from or in addition to Vietnamese citizenship, and who may or may not be living in a country other than Vietnam, is entitled to be Việt kiều, a linguistically Sino-rooted term for overseas (kiều) Vietnamese (Việt). Although it is difficult to locate the origins of the term, it became common during the French Resistance. The term Việt kiều yêu nước (patriotic
overseas Vietnamese) has been used for Vietnamese living in France and elsewhere who supported the cause, either with materials, manpower, or politics. Later, the term **Việt kiều hồi hương** (Vietnamese repatriates) became widespread when tens of thousands of Vietnamese returned to Vietnam, mostly from Thailand, for resettlement. In 1959, for example, a directive from the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam requested a warm welcome and a proper preparation for 70,000 **Việt kiều** from Thailand, New Guinea, French Africa, and South America who were “oppressed, exploited, and forced to live in exile” by the French colonists to “go home” (**hồi hương**).³²

Intriguingly, the long history of emigration from Vietnam and the definition of the term **Việt kiều** are not always acknowledged, let alone agreed upon by scholars. Contemporary studies written about overseas Vietnamese hardly escape the contextualization of the Vietnam War backdrop and attempts to politicize Vietnamese emigration. Until 2009, for example, a study of Vietnamese Americans still showed evidence of sloppy research and political prejudice by vaguely asserting, “Viet Kieu is a term that began to be used by the Hanoi government some three decades ago to label in a derisory way those who escaped abroad.”³³

One of the causes for such subjective claims is the dominance of Vietnamese Americans—many of whom are anticommunist—in the overseas Vietnamese population. It was, after all, U.S. imperialism, not communism, that wrought havoc in the country and fueled a mass exodus to the U.S. itself. As Lisa Lowe notes, Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. marked the “return” of displaced subjects to the “imperial center.”³⁴ Immigration scholars have noticed that in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese refugees, including those who were not related to U.S. governmental organizations or military units, often prioritized America as their desired destination. Nancy Viviani calls such priority “selection competition.”³⁵ Whereas today overseas
Vietnamese populations in many countries have declined dramatically, especially in the former Eastern bloc and even in Western lands, such as France and Ireland,\textsuperscript{36} every year tens of thousands of Vietnamese immigrants still flock to the U.S. In 2010, Vietnamese Americans have become one of the four dominant ethnic groups of Asian descent that include Chinese, Asian Indian, and Filipino Americans. Vietnamese now are living in every state and every major city in the U.S. Forty years ago, such an overwhelming population and residency rates were unthinkable.

**Vietnamese Emigrants and the Refugee Legacy in Vietnamese American Studies**

Vietnamese emigration to the United States presents one of the most massive and diverse migrations in the modern world. From a pocket of Vietnamese living in the U.S. before 1975 as students, government officials, and war brides, the end of the Vietnam War marked the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese flocking into the country in decades to come. These “waves” of Vietnamese entered the United States in different programs and at different periods of time after the end of the war.

The first wave of Vietnamese leaving the country happened during the fall of Saigon. These are often called evacuees because most of them were intentionally evacuated out of the country by the U.S. military forces. This wave began in early April 1975 when important cities of Saigon regime were crumbling under the advance of communist forces and ended in April 30 when Saigon surrendered unconditionally to the North. The program, entitled “Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program” (IRAP), was rapidly designed to pull out of Vietnam those whose lives were deemed vulnerable to the communists or valuable to the U.S. Evacuees were usually taken to U.S. bases outside Vietnam and the off-sea Seventh Fleet before being transported to the
U.S. They were then concentrated in several U.S. refugee camps such as those in Guam, Camp Pendleton in California, Fort Chaffee in Arkansas, or Indiantown Gap in Pennsylvania before being dispersed throughout the country. Approximately 130,000 evacuees, of whom many were Saigon elite, arrived in the U.S. in this wave.\(^{37}\)

The second wave of Vietnamese refugees contains the “boat people” who left from 1977 to early 1980. Several years after the war, the Vietnamese communist government carried out several crucial policies on both domestic and international scales that included the imposition of a Marxist economic framework on the Southern economy, the engagement on the war in Cambodia, and the controversial anti-Sino Vietnamese campaign. Those policies created severe hardships and a disillusionment of the future that it motivated nearly half a million Vietnamese to escape the country, either on foot to refugee camps in Thailand or by sea to other camps in Southeast Asian countries, such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Hong Kong, and the Philippines. Although this wave began as early as 1976 and lasted well into the early 1980s, its fever pitch chiefly occurred from September 1978 to July 1979. Because the majority of escapees braved the sea to get to refugee camps, emigrants of this wave are often called “boatpeople.” Nearly half of the boatpeople were of Chinese ethnicity. Although the majority of refugees were from the South, many escapees departed from the North. This wave included all social strata in Vietnamese society, from fishermen who owned small fishing boats to rich Chinese entrepreneurs who paid small fortunes for the voyages. Human loss was the greatest in such journeys, with the death toll estimated to be “10 to 15 percent of departures.”\(^{38}\) By the time Jimmy Carter signed the Refugee Act on March 17, 1980, of nearly 300,000 Vietnamese boatpeople refugees, about 170,000 had resettled in the U.S.\(^{39}\)
The third wave is forged by the repatriation of descendants of U.S. citizens in Vietnam or the Vietnamese Amerasians. Decades of U.S. involvement in the war left behind tens of thousands of Amerasians. When nearly a million U.S. servicemen and government employees came to Vietnam, prostitution and intermarriage became widespread. Most Amerasian children were born out of wedlock and abandoned by their American fathers. After the war, the majority of orphaned bi-racial children who were not adopted lived on the streets. These children, commonly called bụi đời (dust of life), were outcast by Vietnamese society and neglected by the U.S. Not until 1987 did the U.S. government implement the so-called “Amerasian Homecoming Act,” amending the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act (which allowed Amerasian children, but not their legal guardians/adopted families to immigrate) and bringing these children and their mothers or adopted family members to the U.S. By 1999, around 90,000 Amerasians and their adopted family members arrived in the U.S.\textsuperscript{40}

The fourth wave was shaped by the “Humanitarian Operation” (HO). Although a postwar political bloodbath did not occur as South Vietnamese propaganda had predicted, the communist victors did plot a retaliation plan against former employees and military personnel of the collapsed government of the South. As measures of precaution and retaliation taken by the new government, tens of thousands of military officers of the former Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam were summoned or arrested and sent to “reeducation camps” (trại cải tạo) established across the country. Many of them would perish and many others would spend decades in these camps before their release. In 1989, a program named “Special Released Re-Education Center Detainee Resettlement Program” (SRRCDRP), or simply called HO, was opened for those who had been detained and released from reeducation camps to emigrate to the U.S. The program ended on December 30, 1994 and by then had brought approximately 200,000 Vietnamese to the
U.S. Later, another program entitled Humanitarian Resettlement (HR) was put into effect from June 6, 2006 to June 25, 2008 to replace the expired HO program.

The fifth wave is delineated by immigrants, rather than refugees, who qualify for the “Orderly Departure Program” (ODP). This is the most popular and the most long-lasting wave of Vietnamese immigration to the U.S. The program was designed to lessen the chaos of a multitude of Vietnamese trying to emigrate during the boatpeople fever. As the name would suggest, the Vietnamese government and UNHCR tried to control the frenzy by granting permission to those who wished to leave the country in an orderly departure timeframe. Since 1979, the program has admitted more than 300,000 immigrants to the United States. The majority of these were sponsored by their family members who left in the previous waves.

Separate from these waves are several other special programs with much lower numbers of immigrant acceptances, including the “Parole in the Public Interest” (subjects of this program are also known as “Public Interest Parolees” or PIP) and the “Resettlement Opportunity for Vietnamese Returnees” (ROVR). PIP was a provision extended from the Specter Amendment (formerly Lautenberg Amendment) to literally “parole” into the U.S. particular individuals who face imminent danger and are unable to go to a third country for refugee processing. This program only applies to citizens of several countries, such as the former Soviet republics, Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam. ROVR derived from the 1989 UNHCR’s “scanning program,” named the “Comprehensive Plan of Action,” that attempted to filter and return to Vietnam those who escaped for reasons other than political persecution and human rights violations. During this scanning process, more than 20,000 Vietnamese were disqualified and returned to Vietnam from refugee camps in Southeast Asian countries.
Under the influence of such traumatic events, it is not surprising that scholarship on Vietnamese American immutably centers on the antagonist root of war and refuge. Early Vietnamese American scholarship focuses extensively on the torturous memory of war victims, their haunting sufferings on long journeys seeking “freedom,” and their struggle to “make it in America.” After decades of settlement, and especially after the end of Cold War when anti-communist sentiment in the American public’s mind gradually faded and new social problems arose, academic attention has switched to the construction of identity, the making of communities, and the cultural conflict between generations. Recent works tend to examine young American-born generations under the same umbrella of the social issues affecting other American youngsters, such as education and crime. In an attempt to categorize scholarly works regarding Vietnamese Americans—which sometimes intersect and converge with scholarship on other Asian American communities—I identify several “genres.”

The first category is introductory or survey literature on Vietnamese ethnicity in America. These scholarly works usually belong to certain general projects that aim at offering a rigid understanding of the Vietnamese ethnic group as a constituent part of U.S. cultural pluralism. They try to give a succinct and systematic introduction to Vietnamese history and culture before exploring aspects of immigrant lives of Vietnamese Americans in a brief, yet informative, collection. Typical examples of this genre include Michelle E. Houle’s *The Vietnamese*,41 Lori Coleman’s *Vietnamese in America*,42 Alan Wachtel’s *Southeast Asian Americans*,43 and Hien Duc Do’s *The Vietnamese Americans*.44

The second category is narratives of survivors. This popular genre attracts academics and nonacademics alike. It combines both oral history and academic analysis. Even though it was first dominated by collections and analyses of Vietnamese boat people, it was quickly followed
by heart-wrenching tales of other Indochinese peoples such as Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians. Despite different travel itineraries and times of departure, they usually share something in common: being devastated by decades of war and victimized by political retaliation, economic coercion, and ethnic discrimination. While some later authors were either refugees or descendants of refugees, many pioneers of this genre were Western scholars. Significant works include James M. Freeman’s *Hearts of Sorrow: Vietnamese American Lives*,

Paul James Rutledge’s *The Vietnamese Experience in America*,

Mary Terrell Cargill and Jade Quang Huynh’s *Voices of Vietnamese Boat People: Nineteen Narratives of Escape and Survival*, and Sucheng Chan’s *The Vietnamese American 1.5 Generation: Stories of War, Revolution, Flight, and New Beginning*. 

The third category includes scholarship that focuses on ethnic enclaves, community making, and minority cultural intersections and divergences. For Vietnamese living in the United States, the struggle to negotiate ethnic identity and national culture goes beyond the spectrum of “white versus nonwhite” conflicts. Many minority groups, including Vietnamese Americans, find themselves trapped by the ignorance of the American public who tends to think of them as a homogenous ethnic group whose members “all look alike.” In the field of Vietnamese American Studies, many scholars explore this ambivalence by studying how Vietnamese Americans unite and divide culturally without and within their ethnic enclaves. Localization and research in certain locations—mostly in the form of ethnographic works—is important to recognize the Vietnamese ethnic “self” in the diversity of other minority groups. Works of this category include Kibria Nazli’s *Family Tightrope, the Changing Lives of Vietnamese Americans*, Nhi T. Lieu, *The American Dream in Vietnamese*, Winston Tseng’s *Immigrant Community Services in Chinese and Vietnamese enclaves*, Karin Aguilar-San Juan’s *Little Saigon: Staying Vietnamese*
in America,\textsuperscript{52} Charles C. Muzny’s \textit{The Vietnamese in Oklahoma City: A Study in Ethnic Change},\textsuperscript{53} and Jae-Hyup Lee’s \textit{Dynamics of Ethnic Identity: Three Asian American Communities in Philadelphia}.\textsuperscript{54}

The fourth category explores issues of conflicts, problems, assimilation and adaptation among Vietnamese youth. There is a significant volume of research on the young generation, descendants of the refugees. These works focus mostly on the social issues arising among groups of young Asian Americans: gangs, education, cultural identity, and cultural conflicts between them and their parents. They include Lynne Tsuboi Saito’s \textit{Ethnic Identity and Motivation: Socio-Cultural Factors in the Educational Achievement of Vietnamese American Students},\textsuperscript{55} Patrick Du Phuoc Long with Laura Richard’s \textit{The Dream Shattered: Vietnamese Gangs in America},\textsuperscript{56} and Min Zhou and Carl L. Banston III’s \textit{Growing Up American- How Vietnamese Children Adapt to Life in the United States}.\textsuperscript{57}

In a larger political and cultural spectrum, because these works are largely shaped by the politics of the refugee, Vietnamese Americans (\textit{Việt kiềuMỹ}) have often been portrayed as the political outcasts of communist Vietnam and/or the cultural product of a hybrid culture in ethnic enclaves. In most scholarly works where the \textit{Việt kiềuMỹ} identity is defined, such politicization and appropriation are unequivocal. For example, in a literature review, Monique Thuy Dung Truong frames Vietnamese Americans as those who arrived in the U.S. before, during, and after 1975 with experience of, and relations with, the evacuation, the boatpeople flight, and the ODP beneficiaries, or who “have been or will be born in the United States.”\textsuperscript{58} She also suggests that her definition can be used as a “corrective guideline for further studies” of the Vietnamese American.\textsuperscript{59} In her book on Vietnamese popular culture and diaspora in the U.S., Lieu not only “borrowed” from Truong such “practical definition of the term \textit{Vietnamese American}” but also
“expand(s) the term to include those who have settled outside of the United States that constitute the Vietnamese diaspora.” More cautiously, Valverde defines the term Việt kiều as a reference “to the overseas Vietnamese population but is mostly used in Vietnam to describe specifically those who return for work, study, visits, and so on.” She nonetheless returns to the assumption of Việt kiều as Vietnamese refugees by asserting that for the economic needs during the socioeconomic reform of Đổi mới, “the Vietnamese government […] took great pains to rename its overseas population. Those who left after 1975 were once labeled My Nguy (American puppets) but now are referred to by names like Kieu Bao (people coming from the same womb).”

Each of the aforesaid definitions shows its own shortcomings. Written in the early 1990s, a time when rapprochement was still in its formative years, Truong fails to foresee the social changes in Vietnam and the coming of tens of thousands of Vietnamese immigrants whose migratory paths are different and whose experiences are distinctive from the traditional refugees. Lieu is ambiguous when she aggregates all overseas Vietnamese under the term Vietnamese American. Valverde’s suggestion of Việt kiều as returning overseas Vietnamese is quite subjective and more of a personal claim than a social/linguistic fact. And as I have earlier discussed at length about the history of Vietnamese emigration, her suggestion of Việt kiều as a universal term for communist victimization is subjective.

To be fair, within the contexts and areas of their works, which do not escape the traditional boundary of exilic communities and the postwar traumatic notion, such definitions might be understandable. But in a larger scope, while these inquiries and the academic areas they cover are important, they do not sufficiently account for the shifting and multifaceted nature of Vietnamese immigration and diaspora studies. The stories of Vietnamese
emigration/immigration, especially to the U.S., therefore, are refracted only through refugee experiences. As the examples of Ngô Bảo Châu and Lâm Ngọc Khuân strongly suggest, Vietnamese migration in the current millennium has entered a new chapter that disengages from the antagonist past and converges with the world’s migration. Their modes of emigration and immigration critically engage the Việt kiều-refugees’ binary and argue that such definitions no longer sufficiently represent an overall identity of Vietnamese Americans.

Figure 1. Under an overbridge at the gateway to Fields Corner, Dorchester, Boston: the three-stripped yellow flag of the defunct Republic of Vietnam (or the “heritage flag”) depicted in this mural represents the Vietnamese-ness of the local community. In the diasporic Vietnamese refugee communities in the U.S. and elsewhere, the flag is the signature for Vietnamese anticommunism and the opposing symbol to the yellow-starred red flag of communist Vietnam. To many Vietnamese immigrants, however, this “heritage flag” signifies intimidation, oppression, and alienation rather than Vietnamese culture and heritage in the U.S.

Research and Methodology

In an effort to highlight the plight of Vietnamese boatpeople, Freeman asserts that according to his research, “people often overlooked the distinction between immigrants and refugees.”63 Agreeing to disagree, I argue that because too much emphasis has been placed on
the refugee phenomenon, the distinction between boatpeople refugees and contemporary Vietnamese immigrants has been intentionally blurred. According to contemporary migration theory, refugees are distinct from immigrants of all types, including economic, tied moving, and ideological immigrants, because, unlike immigrants, their emigration is motivated by persecution and potential danger. For example, Barry R. Chiswick states that “Economic migrants are those who move […] primarily because of their own economic opportunities. These opportunities may be in the form of earnings, employment, training, or other economic benefits for themselves or their descendants”; tied movers are “those who move because of other family members”; ideological migrants are “those who move voluntarily for political, religious, or other ideological reasons”; and refugees are “those who move because of real or imagined fears concerning their safety and freedom.” Extant scholarship, thus, barely touch on the immigrant nature of Vietnamese Americans. Despite the fact that recent research on Vietnamese American communities may also include informants who arrived recently, none of these studies has rigorously examined them as subjects of a different immigrant genealogy. And thus, an important and fast-growing community of professional and entrepreneurial immigrants from Vietnam has virtually gone unnoticed.

First, what constitutes the newness of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants in my study is the central role of education in shaping migrancy. In Western scholarship, Vietnam is often regarded as an agrarian country, and Vietnamese immigrants are thought of chiefly as farmers and ex-soldiers. Conclusions drawn by Western scholarship assuming Vietnamese immigrants to be desperate refugees are ahistorical, at best, and derogatory, at worst. Because the Vietnamese refugee is highly politicized by the U.S. in order to justify its intervention in the Vietnam War, it is also powerful and poignant to depict the uprootedness of a poorly-educated people who are
expelled from their street business or village’s rice paddies. The dilemma of “the birds that leave
the jungle,” therefore, may well support U.S. anticommunist propaganda. Such approaches to
Vietnamese immigration and cultural diaspora are biased and dangerous because they
intentionally overlook and even degrade a long-established nation with a great desire for
knowledge, a deep history of intellectualism, and deep respect for education. It is, to use a
Vietnamese fable, similar to “thầy bói xem voi”: each blind fortune teller touches a part of an
elephant and defines what an elephant is based on what they have touched. Vietnamese
immigration, thus, cannot be thoroughly and concisely studied without a close reference to
Vietnamese education.

Second, the transformation of economic conditions and the redefining of social class play
an essential role in forging the distinctiveness of the groups of immigrants in my study. Đổi mới,
the first initiative for globalizing Vietnam, is a crucial milestone in the contemporary history of
Vietnam. By creating and fostering a contingent of entrepreneurs, and bridging Vietnam to the
world, it both facilitates and defines the newer genealogy of Vietnamese immigration.
Spearheaded by Secretary General Nguyễn Văn Linh in early 1980s, the “wind of change”
became official in 1986. With the “Open Door” policy and the motto of a “Market Economy
under the Orientation of Socialism” (Nền kinh tế thị trường theo định hướng xã hội chủ nghĩa),
Vietnam demolished its decade-long isolation and Marxist economy, establishing relations with
the West and setting up a capitalist economy in the country. In the wake of Đổi mới’s
international relations reform, President Bill Clinton lifted the economic embargo on Vietnam
and restored diplomatic relations between the two countries. In the following decades there were
dramatic changes in the country’s economy and a radical shift to Western culture and education
among Vietnamese. Vietnamese youth began flocking to the U.S. for an education by the
thousands every year. Many of them decided to adjust their student/scholar visas to settle down in this former-adversary country upon the completion of their studies. The desire for a better future for their children, now fostered by stronger economic conditions in Vietnam, also prompts thousands of Vietnamese middle-class to apply for a family-based immigration visa. Their journeys to the new land are primarily a quest for educational advancement and life opportunities for their children and not for “freedom.” In short, in a new postwar era, a new genealogy of Vietnamese immigration to the U.S. is becoming more pronounced and visible. My dissertation, an ethnographic study, documents their history of emigration and delineates the patterns of their immigrant lives.

This project is prompted by a final assignment for an Ethnic Studies course in spring semester 2010 taught by my advisor, Dr. Sridevi Menon, wherein I, under the pressure of looking for an ethnographic project, turned to my Vietnamese friends for help. This group was constituted of twelve project participants, including those with U.S. nationality, permanent residency (green card), and Việt kiều-aspiring graduates who were on the verge of the adjustment of their F1 and J1 student/scholar visas to H1B employment visa. I later plunged deeper into researching a newer genealogy of Vietnamese emigration and decided to focus my dissertation on such a genealogy. Nonetheless, instead of focusing only on intellectual immigrants, I expanded the research to include entrepreneurial immigrants as well.

My research focuses on immigrants who recently came to the U.S., prioritizing those who arrived between 2000 and 2011. However, the actual time is more flexible. Most entrepreneurial informants arrived within the last five years, with the longest residents having been living in the country since 2000, and the most recent ones having just immigrated in 2010. The selection of this timeframe is based on several assumptions. First, the economic conditions following nearly
twenty years after Đổi mới, including both upswings and downswings, have conclusively shaped this distinctive group of new Vietnamese entrepreneurs. And secondly, their average time of five years living in the U.S. has matured their personal experiences of America and provides them with a clear comparative base with their experiences in Vietnam. The timeline for the intellectual group may vary. In this project, alongside participants who came to the United States in late 1980s as immigrant scientists, I also recruited participants who came in the second half of the first decade of the 2000s on student visas and later adjusted their status to immigration visas through employment. These variables have resulted from the fact that, whereas I investigate entrepreneurial immigrants on the basis of economic changes, I focus more on the migratory trajectories rendered by different historical educational exchange programs in the case of intellectual immigrants.

The ethnographic research for this project officially began in early 2010 and ended in January 2013. Of the twelve participants of my class project, two no longer reside in the U.S. and from two I could not obtain permission to use their existing interviews. When the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) approved my research application in December 8, 2011, I immediately initiated my fieldwork and interviews. I first re-interviewed nine former informants, including one who had returned to resettle in Vietnam. With their permission, I also reused some information from the previous project that was pertinent and valuable to my dissertation. I also recruited eleven more informants for my intellectual immigrant interviewees (hereafter called group#1). This group includes three adolescents at sixteen and seventeen years of age who are children of the intellectual immigrants. Of the total twenty informants of group#1, at the time of their interviews, fourteen were U.S. citizens (including two American-born adolescents and twelve naturalized adults), and six were green-card holders. Except for four informants with
whom I had to set up phone interviews, I managed to interview all others face-to-face in their cities of residency.

Nearly one year before the HSRB permission was granted, I had explored the possibility of, and laid the foundation for, recruiting informants of the entrepreneurial immigrant group (hereafter called group#2). From a small number of my former students from the Saigon Institute of Technology in Hồ Chí Minh City with whom I reconnected in the United States after their immigration to the country, I applied the snowballing method to expand my informant network. Although not until the paperwork process was completed did I interview them, as early as January 2011 I had acquired a prospective list of six families in Boston, Massachusetts and four families in Orange County, California who agreed to participate in my project. The number of prospective informants was fourteen people on the West Coast and twenty four on the East Coast. However, this number mutated significantly once I initiated my field research. Whereas the actual number of informants in Boston dropped to only ten people, I was able to recruit nineteen informants from the Orange County area. Such a decline of participants in Boston, as one of my former students who resided in the city and who was my voluntary recruiting agent on the East Coast explained, was caused by the migration to other cities of many new immigrants who had volunteered to participate. The high population of Vietnamese living in Orange County fostered the recruitment, making it more convenient to expand the number of informants than in Boston. For this group, apart from these twenty-nine face-to-face interviews, I also had two phone interviews with two others who lived in San Diego, California and Louisville, Colorado. Similar to the phone interviewees of group#1, their dispersal and long-distance impeded my visits.
Although my line of inquiry concentrates on the new immigrants who primarily arrived in the U.S. within the last decade, I later decided to include a small pool of nine evacuee and refugee informants in my research. This extension helps to address any possible biased analysis and conclusion. As I mentioned earlier, my project is born out of the need to fill the gaps in extant Vietnamese American scholarship whose most serious pitfall is overlooking the existence of the new immigrants. The inclusion of the voices of evacuees and refugees not only diversifies my research and strengthens my argument for the need to redefine Vietnamese American communities but also works as a comparative vehicle to buttress my findings and analyses of the new immigration genealogy. Research of this group of refugee informants (hereafter called group#3) was conducted after I received HSRB’s approval of the project’s amendment and modification on November 26, 2012. All members of this group were interviewed by the face-to-face method.

In-depth interviews of sixty informants of three groups were chiefly conducted within one hour, regardless of face-to-face or telephone methods. However, many interviews exceeded one hour and several interviews lasted for more than two hours. In these cases, interviewees usually pressed the need to talk more about their lives and voluntarily extended the interviews. Although most participants were interviewed once, some, especially those who had participated in my class project earlier, were re-interviewed twice, or even three times. All official interviews were digitally recorded with interviewees’ knowledge. On-site and off-record information, which sometimes are used in this project, were verbally permitted by informants. Except for some exceptional cases when informants preferred English over Vietnamese, the language used in interviews was chiefly Vietnamese. Hence, informants’ quotations used in this monograph, hence, are my translations unless otherwise specified. Some quotations from Vietnamese texts,
including academic writings, poems, and songs, unavailable in English versions, are also translated by me. Any shortcomings in the translation are mine.

This project is not a classical ethnography wherein the ethnographer—a stranger—arrives in a community, lives with the locals for years, learns their language and culture, and writes a book. Nor is it a traditionally localized ethnography, wherein the ethnographer explores the local community and claims his or her “insider” status to conduct a project. I deliberately extend my project to include trans-community, trans-state, and transnational focus. Because the pivotal hypothesis of this project is that extant ethnographies on Vietnamese Americans tend to be locally centralized and biased, the various ethnographic sites are intended to provide a more comprehensive and inclusive analysis of the varied Vietnamese American/immigrant lived experience.

As an ethnography, my dissertation also involved extensive and intensive participant observation that included Vietnamese diasporic rituals and religious practices, festivals and celebrations, and everyday activities in the home and in workplaces. My ethnographic sites included the Little Saigon neighborhood in California, Dorchester and Quincy in the Boston area, a city in Kentucky, a suburban city near Atlanta, and seven Midwest cities near Bowling Green, Ohio. In April 2012, I spent two weeks conducting ethnographic work among group#2 in Boston. In May 2012, I lived ten days in Garden Grove, Little Saigon, doing research among group#2 in local communities. During the fall breaks of 2011 and 2012, I spent two weeks each time in Kentucky, living with my informants of group#1. For all other communities and informants in the neighborhood of Bowling Green, Ohio, I commuted extensively to participate in and observe their everyday life.
The project also engaged research in Vietnam. I spent three months in Ho Chi Minh City, Nha Trang, and Hanoi in Vietnam, conducting both archival and ethnographic research. During my three-month trip to Vietnam in the summer of 2011, I conducted intensive research at several major libraries in Hồ Chí Minh City, including the General Science Library of Hồ Chí Minh City and the library of Vietnam National University- the University of Social Science and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City, and the Nguyễn Thúc Hao library of Vinh University, Nghe An Province. I also conducted field research and talked to several informants in those two major cities of Vietnam.

Doing ethnography on the Vietnamese American has always been treated as contentious and risky work. Many ethnographers, mostly college professors who literally live in, and virtually rely on, sites of Vietnamese American ethnic enclaves to develop both their research and their teaching career, have admitted their fear of being outcasts once their research reveals some uncomfortable truths and upsets the locals. Such fear might be coupled with a sense of betrayal to those who help them to do the research. This is particularly true when research touches on the controversial and highly heated topic of Vietnamese anticommunism. Valverde confesses, “I too am familiar with the fears […] [I was] once afraid that my writings would cause me to be labeled a communist and therefore make it difficult to simultaneously research and be a part of the Vietnamese American community.” Similarly, Thuy Vo Dang, a graduate student whose research focuses on the San Diego anticommunist Vietnamese community, admits in her dissertation that, “My fear of being dubbed a “communist” made me take a safer route.” San Juan also expresses her anxiety after traveling to Vietnam with “a bunch of lefty antiwar peacenicks” and “spoke with officials of the Communist Party”: “I worry what he [one of her
As a Vietnamese graduate student living in a college town where the known Vietnamese community, including Vietnamese nationals and Vietnamese Americans, consists of less than ten people, I do not have such fear. My status, however, switched accordingly in each site. During my field research in notorious sites of strong anticommunist fevers such as Dorchester and Little Saigon, I was embraced by my group#2 project participants as a teacher (my informants were usually my former students, their parents, relatives, and friends) who attentively listens to their lamentations, confusion, and hopes in the foreign land. When I traveled and talked to group#3, I was a graduate student from Vietnam who was curious to learn about their life shifts in the adopted land. To the informants of group#1, I was a fellow Vietnamese who was predictably following their trajectory: coming to America, striving for an education, and aspiring to be a researcher and a teacher at an American institution. For the four years of my doctoral program in the U.S., I did not live in an actual Vietnamese community. Rather, I lived in an *imagined community*, to borrow Benedict Anderson’s term. In my own world of researching and living, I have never been either intimidated by, or indebted to, such an anticommunist Vietnamese community.

Yet, while enjoying more freedom than some other researchers in the field, I fully acknowledge that my informants may not share such privileges. They are entrenched in places where risks might come from either within or without their communities. If their identities are revealed, they might face harassments or retaliation from both Vietnamese American anticommunists and Vietnamese government authorities. Therefore, in this project, all measures are taken to protect their identities. In California and Boston where the ethnic enclaves are vast,
and the populations of Vietnamese are greater, I am able to pinpoint the locations and use the
cities’ names. In all other smaller cities where the possibility of my informants’ identities being
recognizable is realistic, I choose to use pseudonyms or switch the names of the cities. To protect
my informants from being vulnerable to identity disclosure, all personal names are pseudonyms.

With respect to Vietnamese people and culture, except for the names that have been
internationalized such as “Vietnam” or “Vietnamese,” all geographic and personal names in this
monograph, including the actual ones and the pseudonyms, are written with the diacritical marks
and letter distinctions of the Vietnamese language. Vietnamese authors whose names are written
in English way (i.e., An Nguyen T.) in related publications will be honored in the way their
names are mentioned. Respectively, Vietnamese authors whose names are written in Vietnamese
way (i.e., Nguyễn Tuấn An) will also be honored by the way they prefer their names to be
written.

Several major terminologies used for occupations and social classes in this monograph
might be as ambiguous as they are interchangeable. Whereas it is more convenient to name
group#3 “evacuees and refugees” or “previous waves,” the names for group#1 and group#2 are
more contentious. In this project, I use the terms “well-educated”/ “professional”/“intellectuals”/
“intelligentsia”/ “literati” for group#1 and the terms “middle class”/ “entrepreneurs” for group#2.
For both groups, I use the terms “new immigrants”/ “newer immigrants”/ “recent Vietnamese
immigrants”/ “immigrants of a newer genealogy.” All the above terminologies might be used
interchangeably and share the same meaning with other words of their categories. I simply use
different terms in different contexts as I find them pertinent.

Such flexibility, I admit, derives from the complexity of the nature of my informants’
occupations and my failure to sometimes linguistically bridge the two cultures of Vietnam and
America. For example, because my group#2 does not include any from the Vietnamese super rich class, in this project, “entrepreneur” chiefly means middle class Vietnamese who run their own businesses. In Vietnam, this social class is often vaguely named as *buôn bán* which encompasses a vast spectrum of occupations from small businesses (*tiểu thương*), such as street vendors and shop owners, to middle and large businesses (*doanh nhân*), such as retail chain businesses or large companies. Similarly, although the term “professional” connotes a broad spectrum of social occupations and academic certifications, my work primarily focuses on those with advanced degrees and who are either scholars or scientists working at universities and research centers. Similarly, the term “intellectual” consists of both science-trained specialists and humanities scholars. Drawing on Michel Foucault who once distinguished the “specific intellectual” in his writing as those whose work sphere is situated in “the hospital, the laboratory, the university…” from the classic “writer intellectual” who is “the spokesman of the universal,” I identify my intellectual informants as obviously “specific” ones.

In the Vietnamese cultural and political context, such a clarification of group#1 is particularly important. In April 2011, after voicing his support of Cù Huy Hà Vũ, a vocal advocate for democratic changes in Vietnam (who was then arrested and charged with anti-government activities by the Vietnamese communists), Ngô Bảo Châu was severely criticized by the communist-controlled *Công An Nhân Dân* [People’s Public Security] *Newspaper* as “way too arbitrary” (*quá tùy tiện*) and “mistaken” (*ngộ nhận*). As merely a mathematician, the newspaper reminds, he has been *mistakenly* hailed as “someone akin to a philosopher, a political scientist, and a sociologist who has the ability to judge the multifaceted life aspects in Vietnam.” In writing my project, I do not wish to enter such a linguistic dispute. Rather, I attempt to categorize my informants in a more sociological sense. After all, even Foucault himself once admitted:
“I’ve met people who write novels, others who treat the sick; people who work in economics and
others who compose electronic music. I’ve met people who teach, people who paint, and people
of whom I have never really understood what they do. But intellectuals? Never.”

This dissertation consists of five chapters which weave together a rich history of
Vietnamese education, economy, politics, culture, and migration. Together, they chart the ways
in which education, intellect, and social changes prompt the emigration of a new genealogy of
intellectual and entrepreneurial Vietnamese to the United States and probe the making of this
new, distinct generation of Vietnamese Americans.

Chapter one contextualizes the Vietnamese traditional veneration for intellectuals and
education as the impetus for Vietnamese emigration. In this chapter, I delineate the long history
of Vietnamese education and intellectuals through sociopolitical stages of feudalism,
colonialism, communism and imperialism, and globalism. Such efforts foster my thesis that
Vietnam is, in fact, a country of a millennial history of “culture and constitutions” (văn hiến)
and that Vietnamese migration is deeply entrenched in such history. This foundational chapter
therefore charts the course for the whole dissertation.

The second chapter examines the histories of the Vietnamese intellectual diaspora with a
particular concentration on the migration of intellectuals to the U.S. My research on France, the
former Soviet bloc, and the U.S. points to strategic geopolitical alliances and the shaping of three
distinct genealogies of the Vietnamese diaspora of intellectuals. By demonstrating the nuanced
and compelling modes of entry of intellectual Vietnamese immigrants, this chapter asserts that
Vietnamese intellectuals have been entering the U.S. long before the first evacuees, and long
after the last refugees arrived in the country. Hence, it questions the notion of Vietnamese in the
U.S. as solely war refugees and uprooted working class.
In chapter three, my study switches to the making of a Vietnamese entrepreneurial stratum from a period of postwar isolation to a contemporary Vietnam that is increasingly participating in processes of globalization and includes their struggles of labor and social status in the U.S. This chapter is divided into two distinct socioeconomic sites of Vietnam and America wherein I examine how political and social changes impact the lives of these immigrants with social capital. Key to this chapter are the Đổi mới movement in Vietnam and the proletarianization of entrepreneurial immigrants in the U.S.

The fourth chapter studies how U.S. education and kinship ties fuel the impetus to emigrate and how cultural conflicts and ideological differences create the divergences of Vietnamese communities across the U.S. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the social myths of educational success and kinship values project the Vietnamese American as the “model minority.” I propose the making of three new types of Vietnamese communities in the U.S. that include the small and separated communities, enclaves inside an enclave, and imagined communities of the intellectual immigrants.

Chapter five elucidates the triangularity of home, citizenship and transnationalism of new Vietnamese immigrants and opens up a fresh dialogue on the future of Vietnamese American Studies. Central to this chapter is the argument that these new Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S.—for whom I coin the phrase “sojourner immigrant”—are agents of change, whose conceptualization of home and citizenship significantly challenges the extant studies of Vietnamese-U.S. transnationalism and redefines what constitute Việt kiều and Việt kiều Mỹ in the new millennium.
CHAPTER I

THE STORY OF OUR FOREFATHERS: VIETNAMESE EDUCATION AND INTELLIGENTSIA AND MIGRATION

Sống vững chải bốn ngàn năm sừng sừng

Lưng deo gươm tay mềm mại bút hoa

(Living sturdily for four thousand imposing years
A sword slung on the back, soft hands master the art of writing)

Huy Cận (Đi Trên Mảnh Đất Này/Walking on This Land)

Professional Émigrés: Three Stories

Nguyễn Xuân Báć

Born in 1964, Professor Báć grew up during the escalation of the Vietnam War when the U.S. began heavy bombing campaigns over North Vietnam after the Gulf of Tonkin incident. However, compared to most Vietnamese families of the time, his family was lucky. His parents did not lose any of their six children to the Vietnam War or the other succeeding wars.¹

Moreover, although Báć and all of his siblings were growing up in a poor family, and during such a hard time, all of them successfully passed the qualifying university entrance exams and graduated from their universities with top honors. Considering Vietnam’s total college/university enrollment of 137,000 in 1975 and of 225,000 in 1979,² such achievements were exceptional. Báć attributed the academic success of his family to a scholar-gentry lineage (dòng dội khoa bảng), echoing the Vietnamese belief that intelligence is determined by genetics and academic success limited to certain elite families.
In 1977, when he was entering high-school, Bác was selected to study at Vinh University, Nghệ An, the elite high school for mathematically-gifted students. In the last year of his high school at Vinh University, as a winner of a national high school mathematics contest, Bác was chosen to participate in the selective national team to compete in the 1981 International Mathematical Olympiad contest. Unfortunately, the team was unable to enter the contest since it was held in the United States and, because of Cold War politics, Vietnam did not participate in the event. Thus, Bác “missed [his] first ticket to America.”

Missing the contest in America was the first, but not the last, challenge Bác faced in his dream of going abroad. Despite his outstanding academic achievement, his “tainted” family background disqualified his application to study abroad. As Bác explained, his proud academic lineage turned out to be a “bad resume.” His grandfather, a scholar mandarin who worked as the county chief of Vinh City, was dismissed by the provisional revolutionary government in 1945. Worse, his grandfather and one of his uncles “left for enemy-occupied territory” (dinh te ve te) to the South in 1954, sealing the fate of their family in the North as descendants of traitors.

My grandfather—an old scholar-turned-mandarin—was a friend of Ngô Đình Diệm [the first president of South Vietnam]. As a coincidence, his brother [who came with him to the South] also had the same name as Nguyễn Văn Thiệu [another president of South Vietnam] so it was really a hard time for us. Kids used to follow us everywhere to bully us and called us names such as “đồ Thiệu Kỳ bán nước hôi tanh” (stinky treacherous Thieu Ky). After 1975 the harassment petered out but the prejudice stayed the same […] All of my friends [in the Olympiad team] were going to study abroad but not me. All of them were children of Party members and cadres.
Despite his predicament, Bác went to East Germany to study in 1982, thanks to the great support of one of his former teachers in Vinh. This circumstance buttressed his lifetime belief of having “quý nhân phù trợ” (the protection of a guardian angel). Bác graduated with honors from the mathematics department of Friedrich Schiller University of Jena and returned to Hanoi in 1988. He soon found himself joining an army of unemployed Vietnamese intelligentsia at the brink of the socioeconomic Đổi mới. Luckily, one year later, he secured a job at the National Economics University. This time, the “guardian angel” was a professor from his hometown. Bác survived the country’s socioeconomic and political upheavals with much uncertainty and unease until he successfully applied for a doctoral scholarship in mathematics at Tübingen University in the newly-unified Germany. Bác stayed in Germany from 1994 to 1998 when he graduated with his doctoral degree.

Bác’s “ticket to America” came when he was invited by one of his friends, a Vietnamese mathematics professor at Ohio University, to an international mathematics conference held in the U.S. The friend then offered Bác a visiting professorship in his department, which he reluctantly refused because of his lack of proficiency in English. When Bác asked for a scholarship to study English for one year at Ohio University, his friend suggested he do another PhD at the university. He accepted the offer and started working on his second PhD in mathematics. His wife, Hà, also joined him in the U.S. after the Southeast Asian Studies Department at Ohio University offered her financial aid for a master’s degree.

In 2002 the couple found jobs in Louisville, Kentucky. Bác, with his two PhD degrees, joined the faculty of a university in the area, and Hà, who had acquired two master’s degrees from Ohio University, worked for the city’s planning department. The family enjoys an upper middle-class lifestyle in a newly-established white suburb. Both of their children, a 12-year-old
daughter and a 6-year-old son, were born in the U.S. In 2009, Professor Nguyễn Xuân Bác and his wife applied for naturalization and became U.S. citizens. Upon his retirement, Bác plans to spend six months in Vietnam and six months in the U.S. in a year. “I think when the kids grow up they will leave for other states or cities, and they may visit us only once a year. What should an old couple do by sitting around here?”

I met Bác and Hà in 2011 at their home in Kentucky. In 2012, I visited them again and interviewed both of them.

Nguyễn Tuấn Ngọc

Dr. Ngọc is from Hanoi. He was born in 1973 into an elite political family. His mother worked as a chief scientific reporter for the government-run network Vietnam Television, and his father had been a department head in the Vietnam Ministry of Sciences and Technology. Both of them were well educated, which was a privilege in their wartime generation. Ngọc went to the famous Hanoi-Amsterdam Gifted School where he majored in physics. In 1990, after high school, he went to Moscow to attend the Plekhanov Russian Academy of Economics, from where he graduated with honors in 1995.

Returning to Vietnam with a bachelor’s degree in economics, Ngọc was dissatisfied with a socialist education. He complains: “Not much difference between studying economics in Russia and in Vietnam. Maybe a little bit better, but it’s almost the same. The knowledge was outdated and Russian professors of economics were almost unfamiliar with doing research. They had little knowledge of the discipline.” Ngọc’s witnessing of the political changes in the Soviet Union gave him a perspective that differed from those of previous generations of Vietnamese students educated in Eastern Europe.
After nearly two years working for the state-run Vietnam Airlines, Ngọc again went to Europe for a six-month training course for young managers sponsored by the European Union. He then won a scholarship to pursue a master’s degree in advanced economics at the University of New South Wales, Australia which he completed in 1999. Upon his return, being “tired of the money-making business,” Ngọc joined the Government Office, working as a member of the Prime Minister’s Research Council. In 2003, Ngọc went to study public policy at Harvard University and earned a PhD from that elite institute in 2009. His good academic performance and impressive working background landed him a faculty position at one of Indiana’s top research institutes. Ngọc’s younger brother also came to the U.S. and in 2011 graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology with a doctoral degree in economics. He is currently teaching at a major university in Missouri.

Despite his busy life in America, Ngọc stays close to Vietnam. He visits Vietnam every year both for pleasure and business. Even though he is not a member of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Ngọc has close ties to Vietnam and is deeply invested in Vietnam’s educational development. He is a co-founder and the executive director of the Vietnam Young Leader Award. Every year, under the co-sponsorship of the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and his university in Indiana, this prestigious fellowship selects five outstanding Vietnamese government officials to pursue MA and doctoral degrees in public policy and environment policy programs at the university. During his six-year stay in Boston, Ngọc was the active chairperson of the Vietnamese Student League of universities and colleges in Boston and the East Coast area. Ngọc and his family, except the younger son who is an American citizen by birth, acquired “green cards” in 2010. Ngọc is not very excited about U.S.
citizenship. He told me he would only apply for naturalization, provided he would not have to relinquish his Vietnamese citizenship.

I was introduced to Ngọc by an informant in 2010. I interviewed him three times by phone in 2012. I have not met him in person.

Lê Hoài Thương

Dr. Thương was born in 1982 into a scholar-gentry family. The family’s intellectual legacy can be traced to her great-grandfather, an eminent scholar who has been memorialized with a boulevard named after him in Hanoi. Thương considers her family to be middle class intelligentsia who are “certainly not poor, but not too rich, either.” Her father, a Russian-educated mathematics professor at the National Economics University, was among the first scholars of the postwar generation to earn a MA degree in international commerce from the Institut Supérieur du Commerce (ISC Paris School of Management) in 1991 and completed his PhD in statistics in 1993 in Vietnam. As a family tradition, both he and his wife, an instructor at a business college in Hanoi, focused on Thương and her sister’s education, ensuring they received the best possible education.

In 1999, Thương was admitted to the much coveted economics department at the National Economics University and graduated as a top student. When she was attending a Dutch MBA program in Hanoi, one of her father’s former colleagues introduced her to a master’s program in mathematics at Western Kentucky University. Thương applied for the program and went to America in 2004. After receiving a master’s degree in pure math from Western Kentucky University in 2006, Thương applied for a PhD in statistics at Bowling Green State University, Ohio. One year later, she brought her husband, Dương, whom she had married in 2007, to join her in America.
In August 2010, Thương was hired as a tenure-track faculty at a university in Louisville, Kentucky. Dương was not that lucky, although he had obtained a master’s degree in business from BGSU. After one year of exhausting himself in the unpromising hunt for work in the white-collar job market, he reluctantly took a part-time job working night shifts at the local Walmart. In summer 2011, after they were granted permanent residency, the family traveled back to Vietnam for a short visit. Thương is preparing to enroll her younger sister and some young cousins in her university next year. She also plans to apply for her parents’ immigration to the U.S. once she gains U.S. citizenship. They are expecting a second child sometime in December 2012. Thương says she loves Vietnam, but she prefers living in America for her career and her children’s education. “At least until we receive citizenship, we are not much concerned with the decision of staying in American or going back to Vietnam.”

I met Thương and Dương in 2009 in Bowling Green. I lived with them for one year, from 2009 to 2010. I also visited them twice at their home in Kentucky in 2011 and 2012. I interviewed them in 2010 and in 2012.

The stories of Bắc, Ngọc, and Thương represent a genealogy of recent migration of Vietnamese intellectuals to the U.S. Bắc belongs to the older generation of socialist-educated “old-timers” (as he likes to call himself). Ngọc represents the transitional generation whose experiences traverse both the “old” and the “new” eras. Thương is part of a new generation of Vietnamese who are able to enjoy the prosperity rendered by the Đổi mới Vietnam at a very early age. Each story charts a different migrant trajectory. Yet, together they show how Vietnam’s educational and social privileges foster the lives of a group of Vietnamese intellectuals in the U.S. Furthermore, regardless of different migratory trajectories and educational paths, their academic journeys affirm a pivotal force in Vietnamese culture: Confucianism.
Confucianism shaped a thousand-year-old history of education and intellectuality in Vietnam. Vietnamese yearning for personal advancement through education and their great respect for intellectuals reflect the social mobility that education fosters as well as the assumed moral integrity and wisdom of scholars. Historically, Vietnamese society was divided into four distinctive occupational categories of sĩ, nông, công, thương (literati, peasants, artisans, and merchants). Of these, the literati ranked first and foremost. Similarly, the literati/teacher role was second only to the “son of heaven” (the king) in the patriarchic social order quân, sư, phụ (king → teacher → father). Although after a thousand of years of social changes, both feudal occupational limits and the feudal social hierarchy have long been dismantled, the values of education and the role of intellectuals are still significant in Vietnamese culture. Many aspects of Vietnamese life, regardless of being in the homeland or in the diaspora are rooted in such Confucian educational values.

Privileged thus in Vietnamese culture, education and intellectuals play very important roles in contextualizing Vietnamese emigration to the U.S. and the rest of the world. Therefore, this chapter provides the historical background that forges the status of intellectuals and the value of education in Vietnamese society. Moreover, I describe how the veneration for education has shaped migratory paths for advanced scholarship in places outside Vietnam. I essentially challenge the misconception that overseas Vietnamese, particularly U.S. Vietnamese, are merely postwar exilic communities. Instead, I argue that contemporary genealogies of migration are linked to a history of Vietnamese who sought advanced-levels of education abroad.

This chapter next provides an in-depth study of Vietnamese history of education and intellectuality through five different phases: Confucian origins, French colonial elitism, postcolonial divergence of the two Vietnams, the postwar/pre-Đổi mới dilemma, and the
contemporary westward propensity. I argue that any attempt to map contemporary Vietnamese emigration and diaspora is incomplete without a thorough study of such a history.

**Vietnamese Confucianism**

In his discussion of Confucianism as a colonial tool of Chinese domination in ancient Vietnam, the historian Nguyên Khắc Viên writes:

The Han feudal dynasty carried out a policy of systematic cultural assimilation, the empire having to be unified on all levels. The first concern was to impose veneration for the emperor, Son of Heaven; its ideographic script was enforced as a vehicle for the official doctrine, Confucianism. In the centre of human obligations was absolute loyalty to the monarch who ruled not only human society but also the kingdom of genii. A closely-woven network of obligations and rites hemmed in social and individual life, strictly governing the relations between parents and children, husband and wife, between friends, between the subjects and the imperial administration which tried to replace old customs by the laws and ties inspired by the Confucian doctrine.4

As one of the most eminent scholars of modern Vietnam, Nguyễn Khắc Viên was very critical of the Chinese imposition of Confucian doctrine in Vietnam. Yet, like many other Vietnamese scholars, in his writings he often accepts the Confucian code of morality and educational values as part of Vietnamese tradition. Such contradictory positions stem from a thousand years of Chinese rule that, while fueling Vietnamese patriots’ rejection of Chinese culture and doctrines, also embedded Confucianism into Vietnamese life. Although state Confucianism began to decline in Cochinchina (South Vietnam) in 1892, and the 1919 Confucian civil service examination was the last of its kind in Vietnam, the vestiges of
Confucian beliefs and practices are still evident, both in education and the Vietnamese way of life. Scholars often agree that regardless of many educational reforms, well into the twenty-first century Vietnam is still struggling to abolish the Confucian mentality of seeing examinations as the most important validation of one’s intellectual superiority and a candidate’s qualification for public office.⁵

It is important to note that the Confucian doctrine that was introduced to the country under the Han dynasty was modified over the years by the Vietnamese and used as a practical guide to life rather than as a philosophy.⁶ And because most Vietnamese culturally and religiously practice a combination of the “three doctrines” (Tam Giáo)⁷ of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism and some local customs,⁸ Vietnamese early education was forged by these social values. The first imperial examination held in 1075 under the Lý dynasty tested candidates’ knowledge of Tam Giáo and the following examinations of 1086, 1152, 1165, 1185, 1193, and 1195 also adhered to the same mission.⁹ The successful candidates of these examinations were more Tam Giáo scholars rather than Confucian academicians. Similarly, Quốc Tử Giám, the first Vietnamese university built in 1076, was not devoted entirely to the learning of Confucianism.

Only when the Lý was successfully overthrown by the Trần in 1232 was the first Confucian-based examination conducted that included “subjects of composition of poems, royal ordinances and proclamations, and essays on classical literature.”⁶¹⁰ The Confucian academic title hierarchy, such as the three levels (tam khởi),¹¹ was then introduced in 1247. Throughout the country, more academic institutes were erected to promote the learning of Chinese literature and philosophy that included the Confucian Four Books “Tứ Thư” (Great Teaching, Doctrine of the Mean, the Analects, and Mencius) and the Chinese Five Classics “Ngũ Kinh” (Classic of
The development of Confucian education and examination served a double purpose, creating a
“mandarin bureaucracy” and “increasing access of educated commoners to public office.”

After the Trần dynasty, other succeeding monarchies continued to maintain and expand
Confucian learning in Vietnam. The Confucian idea of a classless education became popular
when in 1428 Quốc Tử Giám began admitting qualified students from not only royal and elite
families but also the commoners. In 1484, stone slabs inscribed with the names of all “doctors”
(tiến sĩ) were erected in the Temple of Confucius (Văn Miếu) to honor those who achieved the
highest academic title. Confucian education was such a successful model that “between 1529
and 1787, 102 competitions were held and 1,136 candidates became tiến sĩ.”

In 1802, the Nguyễn defeated the Tây Sơn, ending a hundred years of social strife and
political turmoil. For the next century, Confucian value and education became even stronger.
Examinations were held every three years with thousands of candidates trying to carve a niche in
the national academy and secure a position in the feudal administrative structure. More
complicated and rigid regulations were issued and strictly enforced. For example, candidates had
to first be qualified by the “purity” of their personal and family backgrounds. Those with a
“tainted” family background of the past three generations were immediately disqualified.
Although examination topics were still based on Confucian knowledge, candidates were required
to possess extensive knowledge of royal ordinances and proclamations, national culture,
literature, and history. Competitions were extremely selective: of thousands of candidates
throughout the country, only a few hundred made it through the regional examinations and even
closer could enter the imperial level. Only a dozen of the finalists who passed the central
competitions were nominated to prestigious positions in the feudal mandarin hierarchy and enjoyed both power and honor according to their exam ranking.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Figure 2.} “Đám cưới chuột” (Rat’s wedding). This famous Vietnamese traditional woodcut painting from Đồng Hồ village depicts a folk allegory in which a [rat] trạng nguyên (in his academic attire) is leading his marriage.

The Confucian educational system, however, revealed many pitfalls. Not only did its doctrinal male chauvinism exclude women from being educated, but also the rigidity of the mandarin examinations failed to select talented people to administer the country. As early as the fifteenth century, historian Ngô Sĩ Liên was already criticizing the shortcomings of the administrative exams, saying, “Of the people passing the examinations, the majority had no talents.”\textsuperscript{17} Toward the end of the seventeenth century, paralleled with the crisis of Vietnamese feudalism, Confucianism quickly lost its prestige. In the eyes of many scholars, it became a “dry bones” doctrine that did little to help alleviate the nation’s strife and the sufferings of the people. The scholars-turned-mandarins became slaves of the monarchy instead of examples of men of knowledge and righteousness. In the mid-eighteenth century, a scholar who joined the Lê Duy Mật’s peasant revolt and was arrested challenged his captor who questioned his Confucian
morality: “For a long time already, all ideas of hierarchy and value have disappeared. How can one distinguish between the rebels and those who are supposed to be on the right path?”  

During the reign of the Nguyễn, examinations became grounds for corruption and cheating and many candidates “contented themselves with reproducing models and clichés and indulged in [the] empty exercise of style.” Old-fashioned Vietnamese Confucian scholars kept “raving about outdated contents in examinations,” and education was firmly harnessed by the “hundred-year-old knowledge.” Despite several attempts to reform examinations, topics were repetitive and candidates were able to memorize the essential themes to “recycle” them in their exams. Many smuggled textbooks into the exams, and some even had others take the exams for them. In some cases, sordid tricks were used in examinations to slander rigorous and brilliant candidates. Even the famous scholar and patriot Phan Bội Châu was condemned for the violation of bringing textbooks into the examination area in the 1897 local exam. Some believed it to have been an act of revenge by one of the examination guards with whom he had argued the day before the exam. To others, it was foul play committed by another candidate. Whatever the truth was, it was obvious that to the majority, Confucianism was no longer an appropriate model of intellectualism.

Nonetheless, for many Vietnamese scholars who adhered to the core values of Confucianism, the most important award was not reputation, nor was it the social benefit their academic successes brought. Like his Chinese counterparts, the central point of being an intellectual was the superior way of life of bậc quân tử (honorable man). Although his utmost social commitment was trung quân ái quốc (patriotism and loyalty to the king), the “honorable man” often willingly gave up his power in the mandarin bureaucracy and stepped down to the position of a commoner whenever he felt the monarchy he served no longer deserved to rule and
his aid was not appreciated. As a common practice, he would then retire to his home village
where he would live the quiet life of a hermit or teach village children. Nonetheless, his act of
treo ăn từ quan (hanging the mandarin seal, resigning from the post) and his return to a modest
life did not mean he was no longer responsible for the people and national security; the
“honorable man” would aid his country whenever needed with whatever means he had.
Woodside asserts, “When intellectuals ‘advanced,’ they became civil servants. When they
‘withdrew,’ they became teachers. But whichever pole of action they clustered around, they were
compelled to ‘help those in danger,’ to bring order out of chaos, and in general to work ‘to save
the age’ (cứu thế).” The Confucian “honorable man” therefore was expected to be intellectually
superior, have administrative talent and, more importantly, great morality. Such virtues would be
challenged, contested, and transformed when the shadow of European colonialism loomed over
Vietnam in the mid-nineteenth century.

**French Colonial Education and the Emergence of Modern Intellectuals**

**Colonial Education: Replacing the Old, Limiting the New**

In 1858, French and Spanish warships attacked the coastal city of Đà Nẵng, beginning
nearly a hundred years of French colonialism in Vietnam. Right after its imposition of colonial
rule in Vietnam in the second half of the nineteenth century, the French began systematically
introducing a “Western educational system” to the country. The system included metropolitan-
style schooling, colonial schooling and, to some extent, traditional Confucian schooling. French
educational policies were executed throughout the country in an attempt to quickly colonize
Vietnam.
By introducing a new colonial educational system and eliminating the old one, French administrators successfully decreased the number of schools and students at all levels. During the course of nearly a century of conquest and “civilization,” 90 percent of school-aged children in Vietnam could not attend school. The development of colonial schools, according to Gail Kelly, “had little to do with training skilled workers, with ‘civilizing’ or assimilating the Vietnamese, or allowing them to develop along their own lines.” French education in Vietnam, at its worst, was designed to “carry out Malthusianism” on its colonies, and at best, was to train a very limited number of underling functionaries for the colonial administrative system. The colonizers ensured that while this education produced a much-needed contingent of colonial servants, it would firmly prevent the colonized from either rising to political power or to intellectual advancement.

As a part of Indochina, Vietnam was divided into three states that included the Cochinchina colony (South Vietnam) and the two protectorates of Tonkin (North Vietnam) and Annam (Central Vietnam). With a population of 17.1 million people out of the total of 20 million people in Indochina, Vietnamese states quickly became the loci of colonial education. The first colonial school was founded in Cochinchina in the late 1860s to train interpreters and public servants. With the expansion of French domination and the capitulation of the Nguyễn dynasty, colonial schools began to appear in Tonkin in 1886 and in Annam in 1896. In 1918, Governor-General Albert Sarraut’s Code of Public Instruction was passed and enforced by French education policy-makers to standardize education in Indochina. Confucian civil service examinations were officially terminated the next year, and Confucian education was sidelined and persisted only in rural towns and villages in Tonkin and Annam.
Toward the 1920s, a system of colonial education was established throughout Indochina. General education included several different types of Catholic schooling (*enseignement congréganiste*), public schooling (*enseignement public*), and French metropolitan and indigenous (*enseignement libre*) private schooling. Degrees were bestowed accordingly: *Certificat d’Estudes Primières Complémentaires Indochinoises* (elementary school graduate); *Brevet ler Cycle –Brevet Élémentaire* and *Diplôme d’Études Complémentaires Indochinoises* (junior high school graduate); and *Baccalauréat Première Partie* and *Baccalauréat Deuxième Partie* (high school graduate). Although it might sound diverse, colonial general education actually minimized Vietnamese access to education and maximized class/racial stratification and academic challenges to reduce the number of graduates. The number of colonial schools equivalent to high school education at the best time was never more than six in the whole of Vietnam, of which three were exclusively for European students. Micheline R. Lessard contends:

Out of an Indochinese population of about 20 million, the estimated student enrollments for the *écoles franco-indigènes* totaled 175,845 in 1924 and 197,713 in 1925. Of the small number attending school, moreover, a mere handful managed to complete their studies. In 1925, for instance, only 395 students received a *diplôme d’études primaires supérieures* in all of Indochina, and only nine received a *brevet secondaire franco-annamite*.

Similar to other French colonies in Africa and Asia, Vietnam’s education was subject to racialization and class privilege. The first model of French metropolitan schooling was introduced in Cochinchina to serve the children of the *colons* (French residents). Many of them, being poor and outcast in France, migrated to the colonies looking for wealth and an improved social status. The assertion of racial supremacy and citizenship privilege over the Vietnamese
thus became a part of this search, and a private education was a signature of the upper-class colons. The colons’ anxiety over the potential for indigenous social/political upward mobility via elite education resulted in race and class-based admission policies to curtail indigenous students from entering these schools. The financial bar was also raised high. Tuition for non-European students was at times “equivalent to the yearly income of a Vietnamese principal.”35 Thus, except for the children of some Cochinchinese wealthy land-owners and influential subordinates—most of whom had French citizenship—elite schooling was reserved almost exclusively for French citizens.

The reforms of 1918 created a standardized system of schooling, from primary school to higher education. Professional schools of collèges and lycées were mainly vocational schools that trained administrative personnel and tradesmen. The first medical school was opened in 1902 to train nurses and pharmacist assistants. On May 16, 1906, Indochinese Governor-General Jean Baptiste Paul Beau signed a decree founding the Université Indochinoise (Indochinese University)—the crown of Indochinese education.36 Located in Hanoi, until the 1930s it was the only French-established university outside of France. The foundation of the university also marked the closing of the colonial administrative school system, including the Ecole des Mandarins à Hanoi (Hanoi School of Mandarins) and the Ecole d’Administration à Hué (Hue School of Administration).

Intended as a school for French colonial subjects, Indochinese University was only an undergraduate training school. In its heyday the university was comprised of five colleges: (1) Ecole supérieure de Droit et Administration (College of Law and Administration); (2) Ecole supérieure des Sciences (College of Sciences); (3) Ecole supérieure de Médecine (Medical College); (4) Ecole supérieure du Génie Civil (Civil Engineering College); and (5) Ecole supérieure de l’Ingénieur (College of Engineers).
supérieure des Lettres (College of Literature). The university appeared ill-fated from the beginning. It was closed down after the first academic year and only reopened a decade later in 1917. It was removed, renamed, and re-staffed several times after 1945 and completely changed in 1954.

Unlike the general educational system which allowed students of Franco-Vietnamese schools to study in both French and the romanized Vietnamese writing system of quốc ngữ, French was the mandatory teaching medium at the university. Except for the Ecole supérieure des Lettres, which offered courses in Far East geography and history, East Asian languages and classics, and Indochinese studies, Vietnamese culture and history were excluded in the curricula of most colleges. Because the university was established exclusively to meet colonial demands for an underling native workforce, and intended to minimize the flow of Indochinese tertiary students going to France for an education, the university had never seen an enrollment of more than 300 students.

Caught in the Crossfire: Intellectuals in the Transitional Period

In the early stage of French colonization from the mid-1860s to the 1920s, Confucianism still pervaded intellectual and social life in Tonkin and Annam. In Cochinchina, even though Confucian education receded, Confucian-imbued nationalism still persisted. While many Confucian scholars continued to serve the Nguyễn court and/or the newly established colonial bureaucracy, many others fiercely resisted French occupation by joining patriotic and resistance movements. From 1885 to 1889, many scholars and mandarins joined the Cần Vương (Aid the King) insurgents, whose objective was to help young King Hàm Nghi expel the French. When Hàm Nghi was captured and expatriated to Algeria in 1888 and the movement wound down,
intellectual insurgents who successfully evaded French capture and incarceration often withdrew to seclusion. Many of them, embittered by the monarchy’s capitulation and enraged by the colonial government, used their Confucian training and literary talent to combat French colonialism.

One significant model of early Confucian defiance was Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, a former scholar-turned-mandarin in the court of King Gia Long. After witnessing the surrender of the Vietnamese monarchy to France, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu retired to his hometown where he opened a school for poor children. The verse “thà đui mà giữ đạo nhà,” from one of his patriotic poems, represents the Confucian ideology of loyalty and nationalism: “better blind to keep the traditional way.” When a French official offered to return his confiscated land in Gia Định to silence his nationalist voice, he is reported to have said, “When our common land, our country has been lost, how is it possible to have individual land?”

Figure 3. “Thầy đồ Cóc” (The Frog Teacher). Another well-known Đông Hồ woodcut painting depicts a traditional classroom where a Confucian scholar teaches young students of his village.

Scholars-turned-teachers, like Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, formed such a potentially revolutionary group that they became great political concerns under the eyes of the colonial government. The anxiety over subversive Confucian scholars prompted French colonists to
eliminate the Confucian civil examination in 1919 and strategically replace Confucian education with the colonial education system in the early twentieth century. However, the nationalist spirit of the “Confucian-educated, retired-mandarin” revolutionary intellectuals continued to inspire later social reformers such as Phan Bội Châu and Phan Châu Trinh, who founded the Renewal (Duy Tân) movement in the early twentieth century.

Yet, at a transitional period of time when politics were turbulent and social and cultural values were constantly contested and shifting, many Vietnamese scholars resisted Confucianism, seeing it as the cause of the loss of the country and the pitfalls of the nation’s progress. Among the first scholars who protested against the old guard of Confucianism was Nguyễn Trường Tộ. In 1866, he criticized Confucian advocates as those who “confined themselves to a territory where they self-adored their superiority and incompatibility” and “ridiculed the [Western] aggressors without knowing that those had learnt and utilized their technology with much more sophisticated improvement.” Decades later, the reformers of Duy Tân also targeted Confucianism and monarchical hierarchy as the perpetrators of the nation’s backwardness and enslavement. The movement aimed at “enlightening people’s mind” (Khai dân trí), “boosting people’s morale” (Chấn dân khí), and “improving people’s lives” (Hậu dân sinh). In March 1907, the Tonkin Free School (Đông Kinh Nghĩa thục) was established in Hanoi by intellectual reformers to foster Vietnamese students’ Western learning and to embrace modernization as a quest for Vietnam’s independence and prosperity. Core textbooks, such as Văn Minh Tân Học Sách (The Civilization of New Learning), were printed in neither Chinese nor French but in the newly-introduced quốc ngữ. Even though the school was short-lived (it was shut down in 1908 by French authority), it laid a crucial landmark in the history of Vietnam’s nationalism.
The demise of Confucianism signaled the rise of a generation of “new-learning” (tân học) Vietnamese intellectuals. From the 1920s to the 1940s, Vietnam, especially Cochinchina, witnessed significant changes in its sociocultural life with thousands of people adopting the French culture, including wearing Western clothing and speaking French. These cultural shifts were profoundly influenced by the students and graduates of French université, collèges and lycées both inside and outside Indochina. These young elites fostered the making of the Vietnamese modern intelligentsia and sidelined the old guard of Vietnamese Confucian education.

Interestingly enough, although they embraced the “new learning” and advocated westward social reforms, a large number of these modern scholars were born into scholar-gentry families and often had their first childhood education in Confucian classics. They therefore often considered Confucianism as a part of their intellectual growth. In 1920, the scholar and politician Trần Trọng Kim devoted much writing, including the famous Việt Nam Sử Lược (A Brief History of Vietnam), to Confucianism which he highly praised. Decades later, Nguyễn Khắc Viện also admitted, “In school we no longer studied Confucian texts, but our fathers, our uncles, our elders, were either mandarins or literati, all imbued with the principles of Confucianism. The pressure of Confucian orthodoxy weighed on our youth.” Much of the Confucian social value in Vietnamese society and the Vietnamese diasporic communities are inherited from the “new-learning” scholars.

The Land Reform Movement and the Rejection of the Feudal/Colonial Past

The fiercest modern attack on Vietnamese Confucian values happened during the first years of the young Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the mid-1950s. A series of state
policies condemned anything related to the past, including customs and rituals derived from
Confucianism as “superstitious,” “wasteful,” “backward,” “feudal,” and “oppressive.”47 In an
attempt to dismantle the relics of feudalism and colonialism, both material and non-material
values were targeted. While the denouncement of feudal and colonial ideologies prepared for the
mass introduction of Marxist ideology, the public dismantling of material relics was a means of
eradicating superstition and feudal and colonial oppression. The attack, as Hy V. Luong notes,
was “mainly rooted in the ideology of the Marxist-Leninist government, which considered ritual
activities not compatible with the objective of state-organized socialist construction and a
modern scientific era.”48 Coupled with the Land Reform Movement (Cải cách ruộng đất), the
campaign had such a lasting impact that my informants whose geographic and cultural
backgrounds are rooted in this history are always eager to talk about it.

Designed as a nationwide movement from 1954 to 1956 to abolish the landlord class and
redistribute agrarian land in North Vietnam, the Land Reform Movement was a catastrophe like
Mao Tse-tung’s agrarian movement, the model it mimicked. During the movement, the First
Secretary of the Communist Lao Động (Labor) Party, Trường Chinh, had mobilized a force of
tens of thousands of cadres and farmer associates to redistribute the agricultural land and to
purify, politically and culturally, the rural population. The results were devastating. Some rightist
scholars claimed that approximately 50,000 people were outright executed,49 and 450,000
suffered tremendously, with a total death toll of 500,000.50 While these numbers might have
been fabricated or exaggerated to serve postwar Western anticommunist propaganda51 and to
justify U.S. intervention in Vietnam,52 the loss of life was obviously tremendous. By the time the
movement ended, many lives had perished, many cultural artifacts and historic sites had been
dismantled, and centuries-old cultural praxis, including the intellectual heritage, had been either
rejected or disdained. In a short time, the government reactions to the Land Reform switched from “praising the farmers’ merits and the cadres’ effort” and “calling for the supports of farmers and every social class” in the movement in March 26, 1955 to quickly “issue legal procedure” to “vindicate and release the slandered victims” in a nationwide scope in October 18, 1956. A series of correction and reform policies and orders were urgently issued by the government in an effort to combat the violent chaos in the rural areas, including the Directive of the National Assembly signed by Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng on September 9, 1956, the Resolution of the National Assembly signed by Prime Minister Tôn Đức Thắng on January 18, 1957, and the Government’s Circulars signed by Prime Minister Phan Kế Toại on January 1, 1957 and January 12, 1957. In such documents, the government admitted the deadly wrongdoings in the Land Reform and directed quick responses to restore order and correct the mistakes committed.

Of all the rural areas in North Vietnam that were touched by the campaign, the two Panhandle provinces of Nghệ An and Hà Tĩnh (often called Nghệ Tĩnh) probably suffered the most. For centuries Nghệ Tĩnh has always been known as “the learned land” (đất học) for its natives’ great desire for learning and for producing a large number of the nation’s top scholars. Simultaneously, the area is deemed the “cradle of revolution” with the legacy of the 1930-1931 Soviet Nghệ Tĩnh (the first communist-led agrarian unrest that temporarily overthrew local French rule), and is the homeland of many prominent anti-colonist revolutionaries, including Phan Bội Châu, Phan Đình Phùng, and Hồ Chí Minh. Ironically, the avant-garde role demanded Nghệ Tĩnh to be a model of the sociocultural reform. In Nghệ Tĩnh, most ritual sites were destroyed during the campaign period. Communal houses (đình) where Confucian relics, such as imperial certificates and altars of the villages’ Confucian scholars were kept, were targeted. They were either converted to village People’s Committee offices and collective storages or simply
abandoned to rot. Shrines and temples of Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism were sometimes subject to demolition or oblivion.

Several of my informants were very interested to tell me how the agrarian reform affected the intellectual and spiritual relics of their home villages. Đặng Nam, a professor at a university in Ohio, recalled the movement in his village in Thanh Chương district, Nghệ An province:

I was a small boy at that time, but I still can recall the campaign. Guys from district people’s committee arrived to our village and there was a huge meeting that night. Villagers gathered at the village yard with torches burnt and loud drum beat. The next day, early at 5 am in the morning young boys and girls led by Red guard-style cadres\textsuperscript{60} snaked to the communal house. They started pulling out everything inside the house: altar, weaponry exhibiting racks, curtains…everything! Then there was a huge bonfire created in the middle of the house’s yard and people tossed everything they found into the fire. There was a leader, and he was there with a loudspeaker roaring: “Down with feudalism! Down with colonialism! Burn everything feudal! Burn everything oppressive!” And everyone else screamed after him: “Down! Down! Down!” Our village was very famous for the scholarly tradition with many successful examinees. The imperial certificates, the biographies…so many things were destroyed that day.

Another informant, Dr. Lê Tính, a thirty-nine-year-old professor at a university in Boston and a native of Đức Thọ district, Hà Tĩnh province, told his story:

My village lies between the Hồng Lĩnh Mountains and the Lam River. It’s a small village of roughly a thousand people but we had two Tiến sĩ and many scholars of lower titles. In fact, our village's tutelary deity (thành hoàng)\textsuperscript{61} was a Confucian scholar. I was a buffalo-boy and we used to graze our cattle at a place called Nhà Thánh. It was a big area with
many big old trees and some ruined temples. The temples were very old; they were constructions of lateritic bricks with mortar made of sugar-cane syrup, slaked lime, and sand as we were told later. The ruins were covered with mistletoes and ivy. I didn’t know what Nhà Thánh really meant. I thought it was the house (nhà) of deities (thành) but I was not very curious about them. Later when I grew up my grandmother told me that the whole area was once an ancient architecture of a Confucian temple dedicated to Confucius, his followers, and the local literati. The structure was a sacred place until it was demolished during the Land Reform.

The Persistence of a Scholarly Legacy

In recent years, the vestiges of Confucianism and feudalism have been restored in an effort to promote Vietnamese nationalism in the wake of the “open-door” political reconciliation agenda and globalization. Since the beginning of the 1990s, state policies that aim to “recycle the past,” (to borrow Ho Tam Hue Tai’s term) or to “restructure cultural nationalism” (to borrow Hy Van Luong’s term) became widespread. Striving to bring back to life many old customs and traditions, festivals of folklore culture (Lễ hội văn hóa dân gian) were celebrated from the grassroots level, such as the firecracker festival in Đồng Kỳ village to the national Royal Nam Giao Sacrifice in the old imperial city of Huế. Confucian and other ancient ritual sites have been being restored and dedicated as “historical sites of national culture” (di tích lịch sử văn hóa quốc gia). In Thanh Chương district, although the communal house in Dr. Đặng Nam’s village has been totally dismantled, miles away the neighboring Võ Liệt communal house luckily survived the purge and is now a certified “historical site of national culture.” Mimicking the Confucian Temple in Hanoi, the house was erected in 1859 to serve as the meeting place for the local
Confucian Association of Literature (Hội Văn). In 1930, it also became the headquarters of the local anti-colonists of the Soviet Nghệ Tĩnh. These examples show how the intellectual glory of the past is intertwined with revolutionary ideology to foster what I call Vietnamese “neo-nationalism.” The reconstruction of intellectual and nationalist heritage is evident in many Vietnamese intellectual families I visited.

When I visited them in the winter of 2012, Professor Đặng Nam lived with his wife in a small three bedroom house in a quiet suburban area in Dayton. His only son was attending an Ivy League school in New England. In his study, where the interview was conducted, there was an ornate wooden altar solemnly positioned on the wall in the middle of the study. The altar was made of ironwood and beautifully decorated with carved dragons and phoenixes. There were a ceramic incense burner and two pictures sitting on the altar. One was a portrait of a young man in Việt Minh-style khaki uniform and a camouflage-netted pitch-helmet on his head. The young man had a cheerful smile on his face, but his big smart eyes that looked straight at the beholders were determined. He is the father that Dr. Nam lost in the early stage of the Vietnam War, who was a French-educated schoolteacher before joining the Việt Minh in the 1950s. A little higher than his father’s portrait hung a picture of a mid-aged man sitting on a big armchair. The man was dressed in the Nguyễn court attire with a two-winged mandarin hat and a long dress embroidered with Oriental royal motifs of clouds and phoenixes. The man in this picture was Nam’s great-grandfather, a phó bảng (junior doctor) under the Nguyễn monarchy. Nam brought everything to his house in Dayton from Vietnam: the altar, the pictures, and even the incense burner with some of the burnt joysticks in it. Being the tổ chức (the patriarch of a clan), he brought his father’s picture to worship in America. His great-grandfather’s picture was also
brought to America as a reminder of the intellectual lineage that he and his children are entitled to share and compelled to maintain.

As I found out, every informant with a background of scholar-gentry would mention it with great pride, attribute to it their personal academic successes, and hope for the continuation of the family’s academic reputation. The expectation, however, also places a burden on the descendant of an academic elite family. Lê Hoài Thương, for example, always feels the pressure of bearing the academic reputation of her family’s patriarchs, including her father’s, her grandfather’s, and her great-grandfather’s:

Dad is very proud of me, and he always has a very high expectation from me. Dad knows that this school [the university where she is teaching] is not a very good school so he thinks that I can work here for several years, then apply for a better one. For example, those big universities in California because at home people think California is so big and most excellent universities are located there. Dad also asked me how I was doing with the research and whether or not I wanted to work with Ngô Bảo Châu so he could write me a letter of introduction because he knew Châu. He expects a lot from me but I always have to tell him that I can’t do that, please do not nurture that illusion. I said I was not that good and if I was tenured I would settle down in this university. He always over-assesses me because of our ancestors’ great achievements.

In her memoir The Sacred Willow, Vietnamese-American writer Duong Van Mai Elliott, a 1975 evacuee, spends much of her writing tracing her Confucian scholar heritage from her father, her uncle, her grandfather, her great-grandfather to her great-great-grandfather. The family’s vicissitudes were embedded in the nation’s intellectual history and interwoven with geographic transitions from a rural northern village, to Saigon, and finally to an American city.
The “willow,” as she metaphorically names it, is the Duongs and the Vietnamese people who “have survived through the turmoil” by bending “with the wind but remain unbroken.” The academic heritage gives her a distinct identity among the Vietnamese elite living in the U.S. In the same vein, my intellectual informants also emphasize their glorious intellectual past to cherish the pride of being elite émigrés whose immigration is a gain, not a burden, for the host country.

Postcolonial Education in the Two Vietnams and the State of the Decolonized Intellectuals

The Revolution and Mass Education

On September 2, 1945, in Ba Đình Square, Hanoi, Hồ Chí Minh read the proclamation of independence, declaring the country’s independence from French rule and the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Peace did not follow since France quickly reasserted its domination over Vietnam, leading to the Indochina War. The war ended in 1954 with the final victory belonging to the Vietnamese resistance. However, while the French defeat in Điện Biên Phủ put a permanent end to colonization in Vietnam, it only began a new chapter of the nation’s struggle that would last another twenty years. The 1954 Genève Accord partitioned Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel, forming North Vietnam (DRV), led by Hồ Chí Minh, and South Vietnam (Republic of Vietnam or RVN), governed by Ngô Đình Diệm’s American-backed government. The agreement of a general election and reunification after two years of secession was dishonored, and Vietnam remained divided for the next twenty years. And so was the nation’s education.

As early as the beginning of the Indochina War in 1946, Professor Nguyễn Khánh Toàn, then the Undersecretary of the DRV’s Ministry of National Education (Bộ Giáo dục Quốc gia),
launched an educational renewal movement. In an important article written about “the new
democratic education,” he strongly rejected the continuity of the French model of education in
the freed Vietnam, calling its advocates as those who were influenced by the “thought of
enslavement inherited from a colonial education.” He went further by emphasizing that French
“Medieval-style” education “has always been way too backward compared to other advanced
countries.” He urged the nation to quickly “REEDUCATE PEOPLE’S THOUGHT” with a
new and different revolutionary education:

Therefore, in order to [re]build a nation and a new life with new content, we cannot use
the old tools (lợi khí cũ), which means the old thought and methodology. The national
education is a very important part [of the nation] that has to take the responsibility to
immediately carry out campaigns to reeducate people’s thought. As such, to bear this
heavy yet glorious task the [new] education first has to self-reeducate and self-adjust. Put
it another way, it has to self-criticize to see the backwardness, uselessness, and old-
fashion imbued in its heritage of the colonial education. It must be brave enough and
capable enough to reexamine its [educational] package to throw away what is no longer
pertinent and preserve and develop what is helpful for the nation’s progress.

Right after the declaration of independence, Hồ Chí Minh’s provisional government
launched the so-called Mass Education Movement (Phong trào Bình dân Học vụ) to attack both
mass illiteracy and colonial education on a large scale. Taking up what was left by the
Association of Dissemination of Quốc ngữ Studies (Hội truyền bá chữ quốc ngữ), the
Department of Mass Education (Nha Bình dân Học vụ) led a very successful movement.
Between September 1945 and December 1946, it reported that 2,520,678 illiterate Vietnamese
were taught how to read and write in quốc ngữ. Despite the escalation of the Indochina War,
the movement continued to thrive. It is reported that at the end of 1958 93.4 percent of the lowland population, from thirteen-year-old teenagers to fifty-year-old elders, was literate. The promotion of quốc ngữ as the compulsory language achieved multiple purposes: eradicating the old system of colonial education, liberating Vietnam from the dominance of Confucianism, and spreading Marxist ideology and nationalism to consolidate the power of the provisional government.

The Soviet Model of Higher Education in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam

Nowhere was the role of French-educated intellectuals as vital as in higher education in the DRV. Intellectuals such as Dr. Hồ Đắc Di, Dr. Tôn Thất Tùng, Professor Đặng Thái Mai, and Professor Vũ Đình Hòe, to name just a few, were the key figures in the construction of the government’s educational and academic mission. Not only did they help to design the system, they also chaired and staffed the most important positions in universities and colleges. Although universities were later diversified with new faculties who were trained in communist countries, the reputation of the French-educated intellectuals was hardly challenged, let alone superseded, by the younger generation.

Before the French expeditionary corps’ withdrawal from the North, DRV higher education institutes were not fully established and functioning. In the Nghệ Tĩnh and Việt Bắc areas, pre-college mathematics classes were opened in 1947. The first two, the College of Foreign Languages and the College of Civil Engineering, were established in 1947, followed by the College of Laws in 1948 and the College of Fine Arts in 1949. In 1950, the DRV had colleges in Nanning, China, the College of Fundamental Sciences and an affiliate of the Normal College. Later, in the early 1950s, the College of Medicine and Pharmacy also began offering
its first courses. Under the extreme conditions of the war, these colleges relied mostly on the human and material resources inherited from the regime they were trying to overthrow.

After 1954, among the first prominent universities restructured and upgraded from preexisting colleges were Hanoi University of Teacher Training in the North in 1951, Vietnam Medical University, University of Sciences and Technology, and Hanoi University in 1956. These universities mostly inherited infrastructures and teaching facilities from the former Université de Hà Nội—a successor of Indochina University during the French re-occupation—and were staffed mainly by academic elites trained before 1945. Many other universities and colleges were later founded in Hanoi and other important cities. Education was often used as political/cultural propaganda and competition between the two Vietnams. Vinh Normal University, for instance, was hurriedly founded in Nghệ An in 1959 as a response by the North to Ngô Đình Diệm’s decision to establish Huế University in 1957 on the other side of the seventeenth parallel.

Because higher education was a means to foster the superiority of the oppositional regimes, its development was a priority. Hồ Chí Minh stated clearly from the first days of the new state that “an ignorant race is a weak one.” The communists were determined to keep up with the set goals of “three [educational] principles”: “national, scientific, and popular.” Despite many challenges that the new country faced, higher education developed considerably in North Vietnam. If in 1939 there were only 600 students enrolled in Indochinese University, the total enrollment of universities doubled just one year after the cessation of hostilities (1,200 in 1955), and dramatically increased the next year (26,000 in 1956). Even during the pinnacle of the Vietnam War and the hard times of postwar international conflicts, the effort to build a strong educational system was evident. There were 53,000 students enrolling in North Vietnam’s
universities and colleges in 1972, 137,000 in 1975, and 225,000 in the whole of Vietnam in 1979. Until Đổi mới, students in North Vietnam enjoyed a virtually free higher education with learning and living expenses sponsored by the state.

Obviously, in a communist state, schools espousing communist ideologies overwhelmingly dominated the training of young intellectuals. Students of the DRV were compelled to declare absolute loyalty to the Party and the government. Nguyễn Khắc Viện describes the Vietnamese socialist education as a system that “closely links political and armed struggle, production work and school education.” Nguyễn Khánh Toàn demands that it must be “politicalized,” the term he explains as not only meaning to “add several hours every week of [Marxist] political science to the teaching curriculum,” but also incorporating into every subject the teaching of “the sacred duty to serve and to liberate people.” Hence, subjects of the humanities and social sciences were very limited and well-controlled. Although in the very early days the Indochinese Communist Party declared the right of democratic education as “freedom of reading; freedom of opening school; freedom of studying,” students were rarely allowed to read anything at all apart from the materials selected and assigned by the Party. One informant told the story of his father’s college years in the 1960s, which he described as in “a boot camp” where he “dictated Marxist, Leninist, and Maoist teachings all day” because “they needed them for exams on political studies, literature, history, and for the regular Hồ Chí Minh’s Communist Youth Association meetings and group criticism.” Because it was embedded in ideology, higher education was not for everyone. Many people who did not belong to the “core class” (thành phần cơ bản) of farmers, workers, or revolutionaries were excluded from college admission.

In general education, although the DRV promoted an education for the masses, it also fostered elitism. As early as in 1965, elite high schools to train the best young minds were hosted
by tertiary institutes in Hanoi and several other provinces. In order to enter an elite school, candidates had to possess outstanding scholastic merit, have a politically “clean” vita, and successfully pass an extremely selective entrance exam. Out of hundreds, sometime thousands, of high school students, only a handful of talented ones could be admitted to an elite high school. Because of such challenges of a Confucian-influenced elitism, former students often take great pride in their alumni status. My informants who were the alumni of elite high schools usually considered that success as important and proud as their later tertiary and advanced education.

But the Vietnam War took a heavy toll on North Vietnam’s educational system. Beginning in 1964, after the Tonkin Resolution passed by U.S. Congress that aimed at retaliating against North Vietnam for the August 4 Gulf of Tonkin incident, American bombing campaigns were devastating. North Vietnamese infrastructure was largely gone, including higher education facilities. In order to survive the aerial destruction, most universities had to evacuate to remote border or rural areas. At the climax of U.S. bombing in 1972, for instance, Hanoi alone had to evacuate 50,000 tertiary students and 260,000 students from elementary to high-school levels—virtually the whole learned community of the city—to rural areas. With limited study materials, poor wartime facilities, and truncated learning programs, the quality decreased dramatically.

More critically, the escalation of war efforts exhausted much of the human resources of the North. When the war ended in 1975, of the roughly a half million young North Vietnamese who died, tens of thousands of them were university students and prospective students, graduates, and teachers. In 1971, for instance, North Vietnam issued a total conscription, which pushed a division-sized body of tertiary students to the bloody theatres of Quảng Trị and the Central Highlands. Student casualties were so high that recently in the De-militarized Zone
(DMZ) a splendid monument was erected by surviving student-soldiers, dedicated to their fallen fellow students. In the People’s Army and among communist veterans, the date June 6 is now used to commemorate the large-scale 9/6/1971 student enlistment. That day witnessed the draft and enlistment of nearly 3,500 university students and instructors, most of whom were deployed to Division 325 and later joined four other divisions of the People’s Army in the battle of Quảng Trị Citadel in 1972. Only a small number survived after nearly three months of fierce fighting in the “summer of red fire” (Mùa hè đỏ lửa). Such losses of material and human resources doomed the future of Vietnam’s education for the decades to come.

Surviving the Iron Fist: Northern Intellectuals, Nationalism, Rebellion and the Nhân văn-Giai phẩm Affair

Although Vietnamese Marxist nationalists were at times resentful of the feudal and colonial past, the pre-1945 intellectual class was essential to the revolution and the new republic. And because nationalism and patriotism were the core values of the Vietnamese intellectuals, a great number of French-educated and Confucian scholars enthusiastically embraced Marxist ideology and joined the revolution. Thus, intellectuals who worked for the DRV were called upon as “people’s intelligentsia,” ones who were “not separated from the people, despised the people” but “united with the people.” Such intellectuals, as McHale contends, “[saw] themselves as part of the revolution” and “often left their old colonial selves behind.” Many of them rejected social privileges to live and work under life-threatening conditions in the “Free Zone.” Overseas Vietnamese intellectuals, such as Trần Đại Nghĩa and Trần Đức Thảo, returned from France to join the cause. Others, such as Nguyễn Khắc Viên, travelled to France to
persuade both French and Vietnamese soldiers in French armed forces to support the revolution. Professor Đặng Thái Mai describes these patriotic intellectuals of the time:

[They] applied themselves with enthusiasm and energy to whatever activity their country demanded of them in time of war. They fought alongside ordinary coolies, resisted their country's enemies side by side with the peasants. They shared with these men the terrible privations of life in the jungle and, like them, they lived and worked in an atmosphere of the most fervent patriotism.”

But the communist-led revolution also pushed away many other intellectuals. During the Indochina War, the ideological conflicts between Hồ’s government and the noncommunist intellectuals grew irredeemably. As nationalists, not communists, they were embittered by the grip of the communists and repented of their participation in the revolution. With this political repercussion, some of them joined a contingent of intellectuals working in the “State Zone” and finally fled south in 1954. Among these were Nguyễn Xuân Bá’s grandfather and grand-uncle. The pro-democratic intellectuals loyal to the DRV (some stayed because of their strong anti-colonial sentiment and a distaste for Diệm’s regime) would soon confront the dictatorial iron fist in the scandalous Nhân văn-Giai phẩm affair.

What happened in the intellectual and artist revisionary movement between 1955 and 1958 was a national controversy, ignited by discontent about the control of the central government over the arts and letters. As early as 1950, the poet Hoàng Cầm protested against this control by advising that “the Party should not put its hand into the arts.” In 1954 he and Trần Dàn—another poet—initiated an outcry for “returning the art leadership to the artists” and “eradicating the Party’s control and military disciplines” within the People’s Army Art Organization. Political critic Nhu Phong also reports that the poet Tố Hữu—who was,
ironically enough, one of the leaders of the counter-revisionist movement—recalled in the Van Nghe Magazine of June 1958 the “whispered comment” made by “all intellectuals with meritorious service” that “the Party can supply expert leadership in fighting the enemy, but now is the period for constructive work. The Party can no longer lead, but should give way to the intellectuals.”

Artists/intellectuals also sought to give a voice to the outside world of the backlash against the imprisonment of the arts and academia. P.J. Honey notes that in 1955 a member of the Democratic Party of North Vietnam named Dang-quan-Son had openly criticized “the attitude of the great majority of the Lao-dông Party cadres towards the intellectuals and the bourgeois classes” in a meeting between the foreign Agence France Presse and the Central Committee of the Fatherland Front. Dissent of the regime’s totalitarianism culminated quickly when the government not only failed to stabilize postwar (the Indochina War) Vietnamese society but also created more chaos and suffering, especially with the notorious Land Reform. The frustration and sorrow about the state of suffering and the doomed future were implied by Trần Đàn:

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\begin{align*}
&Tôi bước đi \\
&Không thấy phố \\
&Không thấy nhà \\
&Chỉ thấy mưa sa \\
&trên màu cờ đỏ.
\end{align*}
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The renewal movements of many international communist states in the early 1950s offered a great opportunity for Vietnamese dissidents. In Poland and Hungary, people revolted against the governments and Russian domination. In the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev took
power and, with his famous speech at the 20th Party Congress on February 25, 1956, condemned Stalin’s purges and called for an end to the cult of personality. In China, communist leaders such as Liu Shao-ch’i initiated the “*Hundred Flowers Blossom*” movement, urging the nation to let a “hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend.” Such international incidents and internal social unrest fostered the revolt of the DRV’s artist and intellectual community.

The name *Nhân văn-Giai phẩm* (Humanity-Beautiful Works)* is derived from two leading periodicals *Nhân văn* (Humanity) and *Giai phẩm* (Beautiful Works). The first issue of *Giai phẩm* Magazine entitled *Giai phẩm mùa xuân* (Beautiful Works of the Spring) was published in spring 1956. When the first copies were quickly confiscated and the editor was put under arrest, it was republished in the second half of 1956. Several other *Giai phẩm* publications were continued until the end of 1956, including the editions of *Giai phẩm mùa xuân* (Beautiful Works of the Spring), *Giai phẩm mùa thu* (Beautiful Works of the Autumn) and *Giai phẩm mùa đông* (Beautiful Works of the Winter). The *Nhân văn*, chaired by the senior scholar Phan Khôi published the first issue on September 15, 1956 and lasted until the sixth issue of November 30, 1956. Both periodicals became defunct within the year 1956.

Penned by a large group of the most well-known scholars and artists of the time (most of whom were prominent figures in the DRV government and Lao Động Party), the newspaper used short stories, political cartoons, poems, and political critiques to attack the abuses of “bureaucracy, factionalism, and the cult of personality” ubiquitous in the central government.* Authors often channeled their opposition to DRV political totalitarianism through calls for democratic freedom and thought reform. Public support was very strong. In the case of the *Nhân văn* alone, “the first issue of 2,000 copies and the second issue of 6,000 copies were both sold
out on the day of publication.”

More importantly, inspired by senior artists and intellectuals—many of whom were key professors at DRV universities—“the students of the universities in Hanoi published their own journal, Dat Moi (New Land), in which they, too, attacked the Party.”

First, the government attempted to quell the movement by forming anti-revisionist newspapers and utilizing the Party’s Nhân Dân Newspaper to attack and suppress the voice of the Nhân văn-Giai phẩm group. Government-controlled press was a critical tool to reveal the faces of the “reactionaries”: “hundreds of newspaper articles all spoke with one voice, reviling seven writers and three intellectuals regarded as the representatives of the anti-Party tendency.” Tố Hữu published a book, in which he charged, “Unclothing the stinky Nhân văn - Giai phẩm we will see a nest of reactionaries, including spies, sureté, thugs, Trotskyites, treacherous bourgeoisies and landlords clustered in devil lairs with prostitutes, opium bongs, anti-communist texts, and pornographic material.” He also grouped together the democratic advocates, whom he called “special characteristics,” (biệt tính) “from the former French sureté Phan Khôi, Trần Duy to the spy Thụy An; from the Trotskyist Trương Tửu, Trần Đức Thảo to the anti-Party Nguyễn Hữu Đặng, Trần Đàn, Lê Đạt,” and concluded that “they share the commonality of elements of landlord and traitorous bourgeois class, who stubbornly defended their old social privileges and intentionally revolted the revolution and the regime.”

When the popularity of the movement threatened to supersede the State’s control, a full-scale crackdown began. All oppositional media were shut down. Publications were confiscated and the possession of these materials qualified for verdicts of political revolt and “reactionaries.” Most contributors were arrested and tried. The background of each dissident was scrutinized and in most cases, they were vilified. Nhu Phong reports that for more than a month, from March 3 to
April 14, 304 reformers were forced to attend re-education courses, in which they were compelled to publish self-criticisms to confess their wrongdoings and acts of Trotskyist subversion during their participation in the Nhân văn-Giai Phẩm. 108 Professor Trần Đức Thảo, the most well-known modern Vietnamese philosopher, was also arrested and forced into “self-criticism.” 109 The same catastrophic fates would follow non-conformists. Jason Gibbs mentions that even the most prestigious North Vietnamese musician, Văn Cao, suffered heavy retaliation. The composer of the national anthem “Tiến Quân Ca” (Advancing Army Song) was stripped of all his titles and professional positions and sent to an exilic “fact-finding” trip in a remote area after attending reeducation sessions and publishing “self-criticism.” 110

The result of the anti-Nhân văn-Giai phẩm affair was long-lasting and devastating. Until the purge was finally quelled in the late 1950s, many pillars of the nation’s intellectuals and arts were dismissed and removed from their artistic/academic positions. Some of them, such as Phan Khôi, died of despair and dishonor. Those who survived had to accept “rehabilitation” and led a quiet, forgetful, and struggling life. Among these was Trần Đức Thảo who died in poverty in France in 1993, several years after gaining permission from the liberalized political authority of Vietnam to go for treatment for his sickness.

One decade after the 1986 Đổi mới, many Nhân văn-Giai phẩm former members were vindicated and honored with the nation’s most prestigious awards, including the Hồ Chí Minh Award, the Social Sciences Award, the Musical Award, and the State Award 111 The redemption, however, arrived too late, because of all the condemned, no one but Lê Đạt, Nguyễn Văn Tý, and Hoàng Cầm survived long enough to witness the vindication.

Against all odds, the Nhân văn-Giai phẩm featured several quintessential accounts of the Vietnamese intelligentsia: a great bond to nationalism, a social commitment, and the morality
and sacrifice inherited from the past generations of intellectuals. More importantly, the legacy the movement left behind is significantly vital to the rise of the democratic freedom struggle of Vietnamese intellectuals both inside and outside the country in the recent years.

Colonial and Imperial Models of Education in the Republic of Vietnam

Unlike the communist North where only the public school system was allowed to function, South Vietnam diversified its education with a complex system of public schools, semi-public schools, and private schools. Until 1970, 2.4 million secondary school students were enrolled in the RVN, an increase of 89.6 percent compared to 1.3 million students in 1960. High school education enrollment increased from 203,760 in 1960 to 636,921 in 1970, an increase of 213 percent. Similarly, the South boasted a more diverse tertiary system than that in the North.

Before 1945 there was virtually no university in South Vietnam. The first affiliates of Université de Hà Nội were established in the South in 1949 after France “granted” Vietnam’s independence to Emperor Bảo Đại. Early affiliates included the College of Fine Arts of Indochina (École des Beaux Arts de L’Indochine), the Medical College (École de Médecine) and College of Administration (École de Droit et d’Administration). After the Genève Accords, much of the Université de Hà Nội’s resources were moved to the South to found the Saigon University. The newly-established university complex was comprised of thirteen individual universities, colleges, and centers. Two other academic institutes were also founded in the two major cities of Huế and Cần Thơ. In South Vietnam, university enrollment also saw a twofold increase every five years: 13,035 in 1960, 23,662 in 1965, and 46,053 in 1970. Until the 1970s, except for Cần Thơ University which was designed after the American model, most universities continued to follow the French structure and curriculum.
However, at the end of the 1960s, simultaneous with the growing political links and economic/military dependence on the U.S., South Vietnam’s education quickly gravitated towards the U.S. model. Teaching curricula were adjusted to help high school students to better prepare for either the American-oriented Vietnamese universities or universities in the U.S. Universities in the South also began to model themselves after Cần Thơ University. In the same vein, students’ and scholars’ preference for U.S. educational destinations increased quickly. William Cummings and Wing-Cheung So point out, “In 1964, 79% of Vietnamese students went to France, and only 12% to the United States. With increasing American involvement in Vietnam, by 1970 the number of Vietnamese coming to the United States for study equaled those going to France.”

The shift from French education to U.S. education also created a more diverse body of university faculties. Whereas earlier in the 1950s, Saigon University was staffed mainly by professors trained in France and at the Indochina University, from the 1960s universities started hiring more graduates from other Western sources. Thus, beside professors who held French D.E.S., Agrégé, and Doctorat degrees, there were others with MA, MS, and PhD degrees from English-speaking countries, especially from the U.S. During their stays in the U.S. in the late 1960s, these scholars and students eye-witnessed the anti-Vietnam War movement and social unrest in the heart of the empire and were exposed to more liberal and progressive thoughts. Such eye-opening experiences and liberal education constructed and consolidated a sense of nationalism and anti-imperialism among many returnees.
In the early 1960s, the tension between the RVN government and intellectuals, especially young university students, broke out after years of Diệm’s political nepotism and Catholic favoritism. In 1963, according to the *New York Times*, it was reported to Vietnamese government and U.S. officials with great concern that “the Communist Vietcong forces [were] winning Vietnamese students to their side” with clear evidence that “about 200 students [had] slipped away to nearby Communist bases and started training with the Communists.”\(^{119}\) The *New York Times* estimated that there were “about 10,000 university students in Saigon” and anti-government feeling was “running high among them” to the level of being “considered extremely widespread.”\(^{120}\) Between August and September of the same year, 600 students and sixteen professors were arrested for anti-government protests, amounting to a total number of 4,000 student and intellectual dissidents arrested by October.\(^{121}\) The situation of students revolting and joining the Communist forces was so critical that it was one of the six highlights in Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge’s secret report to the U.S. Department of State and President John Kennedy, dated September 20, 1963, suggesting the elimination of Diệm’s nepotism. The letter reports, “Student problem had by no means been resolved and was in fact very grave. [General Duong Van] Minh said he knew that students were going over to VC but cited no numbers or facts in support.”\(^{122}\) Forty-two days after the report, Diệm and his brother, Nhu, were assassinated in the CIA-directed *coup d’état*.

Nonetheless, the violent overthrow of Diệm’s regime did not improve the situation. With the Thieu- Ky junta being rigged in the presidential election of 1967, an angry student and intellectual community channeled protests to both the South Vietnamese and the U.S. governments. Organized student bodies, such as the Saigon University Students’ Association
with its 2,500 members, attacked the U.S. for supporting the political fraudulence and the deployment of hundreds of thousands of American soldiers to Vietnam. One reporter observed that “an apparently intensifying anti-American mood among South Vietnamese students, civil servants, and editorial writers is troubling United States officials.” In 1971, tension ran high with hundreds of anti-American student protests in Saigon, including attacks on U.S. facilities and transportation means. On September 12, 1971, before the reelection of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, dozens of students circled the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, “unfurl[ing] banners denouncing President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, scatter[ing] small anti-American leaflets, toss[ing] several fire bombs at United States vehicles and splatter[ing] red paint on a section of the wall and sidewalk around the embassy.”

Student and intellectual anti-war activism was often coupled with nationalism and sympathy to the North’s struggle for reunification. Intellectual dissidents also included people of different social backgrounds and religions instead of merely Marxist activists. Alexander Woodside notes the case of historian Trương Bá Cần, a Catholic priest ordained in Paris’s Notre Dame Cathedral and the holder of a doctorate in History from Sorbonne University, who published an article in a Southern intellectual journal arguing “in effect” that “only the Vietnamese Communists understood how to carry out a national revolution.” This was a bold statement, considering the animosity between the Roman Catholic Vietnamese and the Vietnamese communists (especially when Cần was a Northern Catholic refugee), and a deadly blow to both the politically-controlled dogmatism of the Church and the Catholic-oriented government of the South. The journal Đối Diện (Face to Face) was shut down for six months and Trương Bá Cần was imprisoned for nine months. In 1971, little did Woodside know that Father
Cần remained in Vietnam after the war and led the progressive “Catholicism and the Nation” (Công giáo và Dân tộc) Journal from 1991 until his death in 2009.

**The Doom of the Great Victory: Vietnam Education and Vietnamese Intellectuals Post-Reunification and Pre-Đổi mới**

Little scholarship on Vietnam’s education probes the period from the reunification to the Đổi mới (that is, from 1975 to 1986). Scholars tend to dismiss this period as being of no importance in the making of the country. Even at such an important conference as the International Forum on Vietnam Education (Diễn đàn Quốc tế về Giáo dục Việt nam), which was held in Hanoi in June 2004, for instance, this period was barely discussed. Of all papers presented at the forum, including in Vietnamese and in English, there was only a half sentence in a lengthy report of Professor Trần Quốc Toản which contends that “Vietnam education in the last decade has fixed the serious decrease in education of the 80s” before continuing with the issues of the present and in the future. In one of the post-Đổi mới collections of Vietnam education edited by David Sloper and Le Thac Can, the authors admit that “the literature of reunification and its consequences which developed after 1975 has been supplanted by the growth of the literature of doi moi…” This neglected section, however, played a crucial role in the Vietnamese intellectual diaspora of both the boatpeople refugees and the newer immigrants to the U.S.

After 1975, South Vietnam’s higher education was largely abolished and quickly standardized to fit the Northern model. The hasty assertion of socialist education on the South seriously weakened its higher education and consequently, the whole nation’s educational system. With little appreciation of the “old regime” educational system, the government of the
Socialist Republic of Vietnam launched attempts to “de-capitalize” and “purify” the system. The purge backfired terribly. Teaching quality dramatically decreased, and the number of teaching faculty shrank. In the academy, noncooperation, rejection, and distrust intensified the strained relations between intellectuals and the state. Universities were understaffed because most faculties either left Vietnam or were fired by the communists.

Most universities in the South were renamed and restructured. Saigon University, once a multi-disciplinary institution with thirteen affiliates under its management, was disbanded. Some universities were temporarily closed, and others were permanently shut down. Several others were dismissed, and their infrastructures and facilities were converted to serve different constituencies and purposes. Of all eighteen institutions of Southern higher education, many were defunct. By 1980, five years after Reunification, Vietnam had only 118 higher educational institutes (eighty-five universities and thirty-three vocational colleges) with 17,300 lecturers and 146,000 students to serve a population of nearly 54 million people.

One of my Southern informants, Trần Văn Lê, was a junior in the Agricultural Technology Department at Minh Đức Catholic University when the country united. The school was closed permanently, and thus his education was disrupted. Like Lê, many students whose education was disrupted by the Reunification were left stranded, and those who finally could go back to their schools faced tremendous difficulties because of reforms in curricula, teaching materials, and teaching methodology. They were still a lucky minority. Many students were not able to continue their study due to the closing of their schools, the discontinuation of their fields, and especially, the discrimination they experienced because of their personal and family backgrounds.
Social discrimination also created a great shortage of teaching staff. If the first wave of evacuees in 1975 had inflicted a wound on the body of South Vietnam’s university faculties, the second wave of refugees in the late 1970s struck a deadly blow to the suffering system. Hundreds, if not thousands, of the best-trained school teachers and college professors emigrated from Vietnam, leaving behind a gap that the North not able to fill. Those who remained and really wished to make a contribution in the reconstruction of the country were discriminated against by the new government, who often considered them as “the leftovers of the old regime” (tàn dư chế độ cũ), and thus were often unjustifiably disqualified on the basis of ideology. Such discrimination was especially strong in the fields of the social sciences and the humanities, although the shortage of human resources sometimes forced the communist authority to recruit employees of the old regime. Dr. Trần Thị Thanh, who graduated from Saigon Pedagogical University in 1973 and taught at a grammar school in Long Xuyên province for two years before the reunification, shared her story:

Most of my friends fled Vietnam in 1975. At that time, people with an English degree feared the oncoming persecution so most of them escaped. I stayed because I was poor. Also, I was pregnant and very close to labor. I was afraid that I would be fired, but then they [the communists] allowed English to be taught and they did not have enough teachers so they accepted me too. They brought a lot of Northerner teachers south but for English they did not have enough. I was lucky because if I chose to study another subject, I would be unemployed for sure [laughter]. I was transferred to a normal college in 1985. The school was not able to recruit English teachers. They asked for help from the Ministry [of Education] but there was no supply. Then they started looking around for local resources and that was how I was recruited. There was a female teacher from the
North, who was the daughter of an important cadre, also taught English but the English program was mostly staffed by the local teachers.

Thanh’s case was not unique. Scholarship on Vietnamese refugees often mentioned stories of intellectuals who remained in Vietnam after 1975 only to face ideological discrimination. One typical account is Nguyen Long, who held a PhD from a U.S. institution in 1973 and became the academic dean of Van Hanh University, a Buddhist university in the South. An antiwar Buddhist Vietnamese, he opted to stay in the hope that he could help reconstruct the war-torn country. However, Long only faced discrimination and oppression from the new government. He was unemployed and lived in endless poverty. Like thousands of other educated Vietnamese, Long finally took a boat and left Vietnam for the U.S. He survived the deadly journey to tell his experience of everyday life under the communist rule in Hồ Chí Minh City. The mistreatment and insularity of the Communist government thus led to deadly consequences for postwar Vietnam’s educational system.

In North Vietnam, where the purge of education was not applicable, the postwar conditions of education and intellectuals were not much better. The invasion of Cambodia placed Vietnam in international isolation. The economy sank to a point where the academy could barely survive, let alone thrive, and intellectuals often had to live on incomes from sources of work other than their occupation, if they could keep the job at all. I discovered that the subject of poverty and despair always became the focal point of discussion whenever I talked to Vietnamese intellectuals about their memories of that time. For example, the following passage from Trần Ngọc Hà describes the typical life of a middle-class educated Vietnamese family in the early 1980s:
After I and my sister were born, my father [a school teacher] decided to further his study while working to provide for my family. Dad only returned home in the weekend and was only able to bring home some food coupons. Mum too was working two jobs; one at the village primary school and another in the village market as a small rice vendor. She literally supported the whole family including the husband and three children. I was a third-grader at the time yet I worked so hard to help my Mum by gathering dry grass for cooking fire and herding ducks and geese. I also helped Dad to make bricks to build a house. At the weekend when Dad returned from school we would knead clay to mould brick. Every weekend we made a couple of dozens of clay bricks and three years later when we finally accumulated enough, we baked them and built a small brick house. Five years of my father’s university education was so miserable.

Even for the elite class of overseas students, who returned to Vietnam in the 1980s, conditions were not much better. Bắc supplemented his wife’s story, illustrating the life of a young and promising intellectual who graduated from an East German university at the threshold of the Đổi mới era:

I was disappointed when I could not find a job upon my return in 1988. When I was looking for a job outside the academia to survive, some of my colleagues tried to talk me into border-crossing (vượt biên). They went to Hong Kong and became teachers for the Vietnamese refugees. They later were arranged by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to go to France to study and now are still living in France. Even though I was disillusioned with the regime, I still thought that it was treacherous to escape. Then I continued a very hard life as it was from the beginning: queuing up for hours to buy rice, kerosene, and fish sauce with ration coupons.
As such, what happened in the next twenty years after the reunification was one of the gloomiest chapters of Vietnam education and the Vietnamese intellectuals. Discrimination and unemployment forced thousands of Southern elites to escape the country. Domestic chaos and international isolation placed education behind other survival priorities. Poverty and resource scarcity drove many intellectuals out of the academy. This situation lasted well into the 1990s when the Đổi mới, after many transitional struggles, finally brought a wind of change to the country.


Opening the Door: Vietnamese Education in the Struggle for a Better Reformation

Two years after the approval of the decisive “open-door” policy, the establishment of Thăng Long (Ascending Dragon) University in 1988 signaled a change in Vietnam education. True to its name, the university is the first “dragon” to soar into the sky of the renewed Vietnam. This was a pilot project that the government was very reluctant to allow. Although founded as a not-for-profit institute, Thăng Long challenges the dictatorial role of socialist education by introducing the model of an independent university that is free from the control of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) regarding human resources, facilities, admission, finance, and management. New terms such as “an intellectual economy” (Nền kinh tế trí thức) and “educational socialization” (Xã hội hóa giáo dục) were coined and cited intensively, signaling the decentralization of Vietnamese education. In Vietnam, this social/educational change was exalted as “an entrepreneurial development” in Vietnam.
Six years after Thăng Long University, the MOET finally opened wide the door to all models of higher education, including public universities (financed and managed by the MOET and other governmental ministries), semi-state universities (co-run by the state and other Vietnamese social organizations), people-established universities (established and run by Vietnamese social organizations), private universities (established and run by some individuals who are citizens of Vietnam), and international universities (affiliates of foreign universities in Vietnam).

Vietnamese education has also been intensively diversifying its training models. Instead of offering mostly the regular model (chính qui), it now performs a variety of forms such as the regular (chính qui), the non-regular (mở rộng), the on-the-job (tại chức), the distant (từ xa), and the joint (liên kết) models. The diversity of training models provides educational accesses to many learners who are either disqualified by the regular model, which is heavily influenced by both the Confucian and the French styles of elite examination, or unable to attend a full-time training schedule.

In the last few decades, Vietnam witnessed a mushrooming of higher education institutions. From a pocket of universities and colleges in 1990, it is reported that by 2001 Vietnam had 393 higher education institutes and by 2012, this number is about 600. In a national seminar on education, the Director of Vietnam Research Center for Higher Education and Profession, Vietnam Institute of Education Research, Doctor Lê Đông Phương claimed that “no country in the world could build 400 universities within less than twenty years like Vietnam.” His statement was, however, not a compliment but a criticism.

The biggest problem that this fast-growing education faces is the quality of teaching and learning. Although in 1990 Vietnam was among the countries with the highest literacy rate in the
world (88 percent of Vietnamese were literate in comparison with 45 percent in less developed
countries and 64 percent in developing countries), its weakness lay in higher education. The
essential part of this problem is a crisis in college and university teachers. For example, between
1976 and 2006 only 8,383 PhD degrees were conferred in Vietnam, while the number of
tertiary institutes grew almost tenfold. Most universities, especially non-state-owned models, are
critically understaffed. Pham L.H. and Fry note that between 1993 and 2000, the Vietnamese
student body increased 3.96 times while the faculty body only rose 1.47 times, creating a ratio of
1:29 and making the Vietnamese instructor/students ratio “one of the highest in the world.” The
ratio has not changed much during the years because the increase in instructors is always
surpassed by the increase in college enrollment. In 2003, for example, the ratio only slightly
decreased with one instructor for twenty-seven students. What makes the situation more
critical is the majority of Vietnamese college teachers are not qualified for their job. Many
university lecturers have only a bachelor’s degree and show no sign of a pursuit for advanced
studies in the future.

Yet the critical shortage of researchers and college professors is only a part of the
teaching problem. Fraud and cheating are rampant in graduate schools in Vietnam. Academic
titles and degrees, including doctorates, can be, and are bought due to the corruption and
mismanagement of the system and the authorities. The situation is so alarming that on May 1,
2007 the Minister of MOET, Nguyễn Minh Hiền, announced at the National Post-graduate
 Admission Seminar that of the 8,383 domestically-trained PhD degree holders, nearly 2,500 (30
percent) are of “poor quality.”

Another cause for these problems lies in the anxieties of the central government, seen in
its reluctance to grant freedom of education and freedom within the academy. On the one hand,
the government recognizes the inevitability of a democratic educational system in an era of globalization. On the other, the democratization of education intensifies its fears of losing its grip on power. For example, whereas the government boasts its support of the “socialization” of education and opens the educational market for foreign investors, the educational law does not recognize the “commercialization” of education. This confusion enrages many reformers. One of those is Nguyễn Thế Long who argues strongly that the law not only confused the situation but also denied the role of educational service as a “special commodity.” Others such as Đặng Quốc Bảo and Nguyễn Đặc Hùng protest that there must be an “educational revolution” within Vietnamese society and Vietnamese government. Nonetheless, the central government’s attempt to harness education recently reaffirmed:

The goals of education of Vietnam is to train the all-round Vietnamese with morals, knowledge, physical health, aesthetic sense and profession, loyal to the ideology of national independence and socialism; to shape and cultivate one’s personality, quality and ability, satisfying the demands of building and defending the Fatherland.

U.S. education, buttressed by U.S. corporatism and neocolonial politics, sets more challenges for the Vietnamese Communist Party. Since the return of the Fulbright Program in 1992, U.S. education has had the strongest influence on Vietnam’s higher education. Major American research institutes, such as the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Harvard University, and Stanford Research Center—which were once targets of protests by both Northerners and Southerners alike before 1975 for “fostering Americanization and dependence”—are now cordially welcomed, if not begged, to return to “help” Vietnam. Although the communist government always keeps its guard high, the role of U.S. education is
much needed because it is a vital part of the Vietnam-U.S diplomatic agenda on which Vietnam heavily relies to develop its economy.

Thus, Vietnam-U.S. educational/economic partnership is embraced by both countries. In three continuous years, 2008 through 2010, three educational conferences were held, convened and hosted by U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Michael W. Michalak. These were the 2008 “American Support for Education in Vietnam” conference in Hanoi; the 2009 “Higher Education in Vietnam: American-Vietnamese Partnerships” in Hồ Chí Minh City; and the 2010 “Building Partnerships in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges for the U.S. and Vietnam” in Hanoi. Besides representatives from prestigious U.S. higher education institutions, each conference attracted hundreds of giant American corporations, such as United Airlines, Boeing Commercial Airplane, and Emerson Electric, to name a few. Conferences on educational exchange are often attended by important figures of the Vietnamese government who themselves are alumni of U.S. universities. Despite being constantly under the radar of the old guards in the Vietnamese politburo, the return of U.S. influence on Vietnam is now very evident.

To the West! To the West!

Because of the weakness of Vietnam’s advanced study programs, many graduate students seek their studies in foreign countries, especially in the West. In the U.S., for example, from 2,523 students in 2001, this number jumped to 14,888 students a decade later with 20 percent being graduate students. On June 17, 2010, Vice Prime Minister Nguyễn Thiện Nhân signed the 911/911/QĐ-TTg decree, approving the training of 20,000 PhDs between 2010 and 2020. Designed to have 10,000 PhDs trained abroad, 10,000 PhDs trained in Vietnam, and 3,000 PhDs trained by joint programs between Vietnam and another country, this resolution would cost
Vietnam 700 million U.S. dollars. One year later, these ambitions soared even higher when the MOET proposed a revised plan, requesting the government fund a doctoral training project for 29,000 Vietnamese from then to 2020. This modified proposal emphasized more on overseas Ph.D. training. Interestingly enough, the tendency of sending Vietnamese graduates for advanced studies in the West opens the door to a new wave of Vietnamese intellectuals settling down in the U.S., as will be discussed intensively in chapter two.

If the poor quality of advanced training in Vietnam is the main reason that fosters this westward movement of Vietnamese graduate students, the learning of tens of thousands of Vietnamese undergraduates in overseas institutions is enabled by several different causes. First, Đổi mới creates a new entrepreneurial class who accumulate enough wealth to send their children abroad. Second, admissions to public universities, especially the top-ranking ones, are still limited and very competitive. Only a small percentage of high school graduates are qualified by the Confucian-laden college input examinations. Others would have to either pay dearly for an international school in Vietnam or enroll into one of the many less prestigious non-state-owned schools. Third, however, the Confucian mentality, which is very robust and widespread, often assesses educational quality by examinations rather than learning efforts, and thus creates a strong discrimination toward any graduates from a non-public university and a non-regular model. Disqualified by this discrimination, those who have not been qualified by the input examinations and trained at a public school often face the risk of unemployment. In 2011 and 2012, for example, Hanoi and the two Northern provinces of Nam Định and Hải Dương passed regional regulations that officially disqualified applications from non-public university graduates to serve in public office and state-owned corporations. Fearing for the future of their children, anyone who can afford the cost often chooses to send them abroad, hoping that a
foreign degree will help them enter the job market with an enhanced status. As will be delineated in chapter four, the desire for a good education for their children essentially shapes the decision of many middle-class Vietnamese to migrate to the US. Many of these migrants use the phrase “refugees of education” (tị nạn giáo dục)\textsuperscript{152} to characterize and justify their emigration from Vietnam.

On April 7, 2009, Senator John McCain, a former U.S. Air Force POW of Hanoi, exuberantly elaborated the globalization-based relations between the U.S. and Vietnam in front of hundreds of Vietnamese students of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, the future politicians of the nation:

Yet today, in the midst of a global recession, we hear voices in the United States and in Asia that condemn globalization, and urge a return to the failed policies of economic isolationism that would not only delay recovery but worsen the current crisis. We must not heed them. They live in the past, and having learned none of its lessons, romanticize a future for the world that would arrest the progress of humanity by rejecting the inevitable changes and opportunities caused by the ever freer flow of goods and services in a global economy. We should not fear the interdependence of a global economy. On the contrary, we should embrace it as the best possible path toward greater prosperity for all. Open markets have been the engine of mankind’s prosperity for centuries and, by seeking the opportunities they offer, they will remain so.\textsuperscript{153}

Inevitably, globalization is slowly but surely driving Vietnam into the orbit of U.S. educational, political, and economic dependence. Yet, these changes also foster the making of a new genealogy of Vietnamese intellectual and middle-class immigrants who critically reconceptualize the term Việt kiều in the U.S.
Conclusion

The Vietnamese Studies scholar Alexander Woodside once attempted to understand the cultural similarities that integrated Vietnamese on both sides of the halved nation during the climax of the Vietnam War. Drawing on Northerner writer Nguyễn Hồng Phong as a primary source, Woodside provides an interesting analysis of the making of the so-called “Vietnamese soul.” He suggests that the “collective personality” of the Vietnamese is forged by five components of which the last one is “symbolized by virtuosity with both the sword and the classical guitar,” one that is “both martial and poetic.”

Woodside’s argument is compelling. However, the motif of the sword and the pen is more often seen in Vietnamese culture. In traditional Vietnamese houses, owners usually decorate their living rooms and their ancestral altars with a pair of vermillion lacquered and girdled wood-panels or a wooden board or poster with precepts written on a scroll, with a sword and a brush centered on opposite sides of the scroll. The symbolic Vietnamese character represents the willingness to defend the nation and a great respect for learning, a tradition derived from a thousand years of war but also a thousand years of intellectualism. Unfortunately, Western scholarship of Vietnamese immigration usually prefers to look at the sword rather than the pen.

For too long, Vietnamese immigrants have often been portrayed as refugees of war and poverty and who are uneducated. This presumption derives from many reasons, including a lax association between different academic fields (for example, Vietnamese American Studies with classic Vietnam studies) and the use by the United States of refugee policy as foreign policy which capitalizes on Vietnamese-American suffering to justify its involvement in the war. This chapter has attempted to delineate the long history of Vietnamese intellectuals and education to
challenge that presumption. By doing so, it will also help to contextualize the making of a new generation of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants in the new millennium in the chapters to come.
Our country from a very old time
Always diligently and uninterruptedly followed Chinese learning.
Aping old-fashioned and narrow-minded skills,
We are paralyzed in a state of near-exhaustion.
What do we know from the outside? From America? From Europe?

(Vân Minh Tân Học Sách- Tonkin Free School Textbook) ¹

During my fieldwork, I also had the opportunity to meet with distinguished Northern Vietnamese professors who migrated to America before the U.S. embassy was reopened in Vietnam in 1995. Most of these specialists, who usually work in the fields of science and technology, were not trained in the U.S. Instead, they often obtained their education or professional training in the Soviet bloc or in more “friendly” Western countries such as France or Canada.² Moreover, some of my informants resided outside Vietnam before they came to the U.S. Hence, it is important to avoid the assumption that all Vietnamese scholars/scientists acquiring U.S. permanent residency or citizenship came from Vietnam as non-immigrant students and exchange scholars and later adjusted their statuses in the U.S. The history of the Vietnamese intellectual diaspora therefore is more complex and multifaceted than commonly understood.
This chapter traces the history of a Vietnamese diaspora of intellectuals from the early twentieth century to 2012 by examining three different sites of their education and academic life and their migratory paths to America. These include the making of Vietnamese intellectual communities in France, the former socialist bloc, and the United States. Although China and Vietnam have a long, well-established relationship promoted through educational exchange programs and tens of thousands of Vietnamese have been educated in China since the 1940s, few Chinese-educated Vietnamese intellectuals have been known to migrate to the U.S. For that reason, I chose to exclude China. The same would be true to other less-popular destinations for higher education for Vietnamese. My focus on France, the former Soviet bloc, and the U.S. points to strategic geopolitical alliances and the shaping of three distinct genealogies of the Vietnamese diaspora of intellectuals.

Firstly, the relationship between empire and colony makes France vital and special to the Vietnamese intelligentsia. This relationship forged the first foreign-trained Vietnamese intellectual diaspora. With its unique role as the former colonizer of Vietnam and a close ally of the United States, France serves as an important bridge between the U.S. and Vietnam for transnational Vietnamese intellectuals in France, America, and Vietnam. The co-existence of both anti- and pro-communist Vietnamese communities in France also indicates diverse ideological loyalties in Vietnamese American communities.

Secondly, generations of Vietnamese intellectuals trained in formerly communist countries and the movement of these well-educated Vietnamese immigrants from Eastern Europe to America is crucial to understanding the Vietnamese American diaspora. By examining the “brain drain” of socialist-trained Vietnamese, this study will address a gap in Vietnam Studies and Vietnamese American Studies. More importantly, since this elite class played a critical role
in the making and transition of Vietnam to a postcolonial state for half a century and probably will continue to do so for decades to come, the lives of those who lived and studied in Eastern European countries during this time will elucidate the social conditions and social changes in Vietnam before, during, and after the Đổi mới; which in turn provides the contexts for the migration of some elite Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S.

Thirdly, scholars have paid little attention to the emergence of a Vietnamese intellectual community in the U.S. Those who do at best explore the political life of a group of Vietnamese students and intellectuals living in the U.S. before 1975 or provide a cursory overview of contemporary Vietnamese American scholars. In the field of education or cultural adaptation, youth studies-oriented scholarship tends to discuss primarily the success of Vietnamese refugees or Vietnamese American youth in academia. Such studies leave out an important account of intellectual Vietnamese immigrants who are either American-educated or educated outside the U.S. A more systematic and complete study of Vietnamese intellectuals in America is therefore needed.

The French Connection: Early Diasporic Intellectuals, Nationalism and Marxist Struggle

Children of Colonialism: The First Foreign-Trained Vietnamese Intellectuals

Despite the fact that Confucian education influenced Vietnamese culture and education for a thousand years, it is not known how many scholars were trained in China. The first generation of modern Vietnamese scholars to be trained outside Vietnam was drawn from Southern Vietnamese Catholic elites. Many of them were brought to monasteries in Penang, Malaysia by European Jesuits to be trained in Latin, Chinese, and the newly-invented
Vietnamese writing system of quốc ngữ.³ In Saigon, according to the L’Indochine Moderne report, a complex and complete apparatus of Catholic schools, hospitals, offices, orphanages, churches, a publishing house, and periodicals was established and in use as early as 1828 followed by the official founding of the Cochinchinese Missions Society in 1884.⁴ Sons of Catholic elites educated in monasteries sometimes served both as the mediators between European missionaries and the natives and as linguists for the colonial administration at its early stage. Eminent scholars of this generation include Trương Vĩnh Ký or Pétrus Ký, the founding father of modern Vietnamese quốc ngữ journalism and Huỳnh Tịnh Của or Paulus Cúa, the father of the first modern Vietnamese quốc ngữ dictionary Đại Nam quốc âm tự vị. Trương Vĩnh Ký, for example, went to study abroad under the patronage of a Christian mission even before the French colonization of Vietnam.⁵ Because quốc ngữ was deeply rooted in the missionary effort to dismantle the Confucian past as well as to reduce Chinese cultural influence in Vietnam in order to make way for Western [Christian] “civilization,” the first generation of Southern religious returnees were also the strongest advocates of the dissemination of quốc ngữ.

At the same time, conservative Northern elites tended to dissent from this movement. Compared to a more liberal and progressive Southern counterpart, Northerners emphasized a stronger loyalty to the monarchy and were committed to a more conservative sense of nationalism. This sentiment explains how and why the South was more open to foreign education in the first decades of the twentieth century.

One important movement of overseas education in the early twentieth-century Vietnamese society that was driven by anti-colonialism and combined both nationalism and education was the Động Du (Go East) movement. Derived from the former royalist and nationalist Duy Tân (Renewal) movement, Phan Bội Châu and his partner Prince Cường Để
proposed the *Đông Du* movement that looked to Japan (the East) for military aid to overthrow French colonization in Vietnam (*cầu viện*) and for an education that would enlighten Vietnamese compatriots (*cầu học*). The movement was greatly inspired by the Meiji reforms and the decisive victory of Japan Empire in the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War. From 1905 to 1908, approximately 200 Vietnamese students enrolled in the *Chấn Võ* and *Đông Á Đồng Văn* schools in Tokyo, of whom 100 were Cochinchinese, 50 were Annamese, and 40 were Tonkinese. Students were taught both academic and military subjects. Many students were recruited from wealthy and patriotic families in the South who expressed their loyalty to King Gia Long through his descendant Prince Cường Để and expected their children to hold important positions in the kingdom if French colonization was to be overthrown. Thus, the program’s expenses were covered mostly by rich Cochinchinese plantation owners and entrepreneurs. However, the movement ceased to exist in 1909 after being repressed by the French and their Japanese collaborators. Both Phan Bội Châu and Cường Để were deported. Châu was sent back to the Annam and lived the rest of his life under house arrest. Cường Để later made it back to Japan and lived there until his death in 1951. No student of *Đông Du* was reported to stay in Japan although some of them chose to live in China. Hence, even though *Đông Du* was a vital intellectual movement of colonial Vietnam, it did not play an important role in pre-1945 Vietnamese intellectual diaspora.

Since the early 1900s, when the colonial administration had been well-established in Indochina and going to the “motherland,” France, for an education became popular, Cochinchina was the leading territory sending students to France. Colonial rule in Cochinchina enabled the development of a small Vietnamese upper class whose ambition was not only to rule their compatriots but also to achieve the social status of the French *colons*. The elite social strata
were comprised of the two most influential groups: the Mekong Delta landlords and the powerful Vietnamese subordinates in the colonial administration. Many of them sent their children to France, expecting their descendants to continue their grip on social power through an overseas education. Among the earliest Vietnamese students to study in France were the sons of notorious Vietnamese collaborationists Trần Bá Thọ, the member of the Colonial Council (conseiller colonial) and the son of the county chief Trần Bá Lộc, and Huỳnh Công Miên, the son of the military commander Huỳnh Công Tấn. Others who benefited from the French policy of agricultural development and exploitation, also had their sons educated in France. Some of these early overseas students eventually managed to obtain French nationality. Some of them became prominent intellectuals of the South. Many young Vietnamese went to France for other purposes such as pleasure and to gain “reputation” rather than for the sake of an education. Also, not everyone pursued academic programs. Many, especially the urban youth from Saigon, simply went to apprentice in lucrative trades such as tailoring, photography, or mechanics. The “privileges” of being the only French colony in Indochina and the formidable agricultural economy made Cochinchinese students a dominant force in the early Vietnamese student community in France. Gail Kelly notes:

In 1930, there were 547 Vietnamese studying in Paris, 479 of whom were Cochinchinese. At Aix there were 81 Cochinchinese, five Annamese, and 14 Tonkinese; at Bordeaux 50 Cochinchinese, no Tonkinese, and four Annamese. All students on the university level were Cochinchinese; in Poitiers, Rennes, and Lyon only Cochinchinese studied. The schools with the greatest possibilities for cross-regional integration were the Academy of Paris with 150 Cochinchinese, 19 Annamese and 40 Tonkinese and Toulouse with 20 Tonkinese and 55 Cochinchinese (none from Annam).
The number of Vietnamese students studying in France during the colonial period increased and decreased in response to the fluctuations in international and colonial economies and politics. Whereas in 1928 the total number was 1,800 high-school and tertiary students, of which 1,100 lived in Paris, 200 lived in Aix-en-Provence, and 110 attained educations in Toulouse, in 1932 the total number declined to 695 Vietnamese pursuing educations in the whole country. The high index of 1928 was a result of the colonial administration forcing Indochinese civil servants to obtain French diplomas in 1925, which led to a colonial school crisis and a demand for French degrees. The low index of 1932 was generated by the bad economy when the global economic recession hit France.

Wartime policy also greatly influenced immigration. France demanded manpower from the colonies to serve her war machine. Vietnamese were recruited to work in military factories (Main d’Oeuvre Indigène or “MOI”) or to fight as foot soldiers on the battle fronts (tirailleurs). Once France recovered from the economic depression, the number of Vietnamese students going to France increased. The Vietnamese population in France peaked between 1940 and 1946 when the total number of students, intellectuals, artisans, soldiers, and workers was nearly 25,000. There were also changes in the geography of this demography. Since 1950 when the total number of Vietnamese students reached 7,550 persons, Tonkinese students had superseded Cochinchinese students, becoming the largest regional constituency among Vietnamese intellectuals in France. With France having the highest population of Vietnamese outside Vietnam, Paris was still the centre of the Vietnamese intellectual community. Of the 3,850 Vietnamese residents, 3,000 were students and elite professionals.
“Spoiled Children of the Empire”: Marxist and Nationalist Intellectual Rebels

Writing about the Vietnamese students living in France during the interwar period from 1919 to 1939, Scott McConnell argues that most students coming to France during this time tended to revolt against the colonial administration instead of becoming its collaborators. Trần Đức Thảo, for instance, testified: “I am a child of French imperialism.... But although a child, I also hated French imperialism.” The Vietnamese intellectual community in France thus played a vital role in providing overseas support for Vietnamese decolonization decades before the August 1945 Revolution. Toward the 1930s, students’ anti-colonialism and nationalism were often imbued with Marxist ideology since it was “the only major political institution in interwar France that advocated independence for Vietnam.” The revolutionary tactic of using the master’s weapon to combat the master’s oppression was deployed by Vietnamese students and intellectuals who fought French colonialism with the knowledge and political skills learned in France. Among the most renowned Vietnamese nationalists and Marxists of the time were Hồ Hữu Tường, Nguyễn Thế Truyền, Phan Văn Trường, Tạ Thu Thâu, Phan Văn Hùm, and Nguyễn An Ninh. Their modes of struggle included social criticism in Marxist newspapers and journals, protest movements to free arrested revolutionaries, and organizing and participating in anti-colonial secret societies and democratic parties.

Inspired by the liberation of Paris in August 25, 1944, Vietnamese in France in general and Vietnamese intellectuals in France in particular became more interested in the politics of both the host and the home countries. Their social and political position among the postwar French public also gained significant strength. A congress was convened at Avignon in December 1944 and attended by 200 Vietnamese delegates to launch crucial campaigns that aimed at improving the lives of Vietnamese workers in France and sought political solutions for
Vietnam. The philosopher Trần Đức Thảo and several other formidable intellectual figures were voted to lead a new program named “General Delegation of Indochinese in France” (*Délégation Générale des Indochinois en France*), which fought for the rights of Indochinese workers in France, demanding “good food, warm clothing, full employment, and repatriation to Indochina.”\(^{27}\) The program also went beyond simply improving workers’ lives. It carried out successful literary campaigns, sending students to educate members of the Vietnamese working class in France.

Although the movement was first dominated by Trotskyist and Stalinist groups, later in 1946 when the majority of Vietnamese workers were repatriated to Vietnam, “the intellectual group increased in numbers as well as in political activity.”\(^{28}\) Marxist intellectual groups such as “General Delegation of Indochinese in France” or the “Cultural Union” (*Union Culturelle*) triumphed over other less significant loyalist groups such as the Bao Dai Delegation or the “Association of Overseas Vietnamese Students [in France]” (*Association des Etudiants Vietnamiens à l’Entranger*).\(^{29}\) Even in the period of political turbulence when political opportunists such as Governor Phạm Văn Giao who was both anti-communist and anti-monarchy, and Vietnamese Catholic cliques that were pro-Ngô Đình Diệm entered and confused the homeland political situation, pro-DRV (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or North Vietnam) intellectual activists still prevailed. In general, the Vietnamese intellectuals and students in France were an important element in the struggles for Vietnamese independence both before and after the birth of DRV and well into the end of the Vietnam War.
The Struggle for Independence and Việt kiều in France

The August Revolution and the nine-year-resistance against French rule began a new chapter in the Vietnamese diaspora of intellectuals. On one hand, students and scholars living overseas decided to go back to Vietnam to join the struggle for decolonization. On the other hand, some took advantage of this political turbulence to settle down in foreign countries. Among the best known returnees were Trần Đại Nghĩa, the first modern weaponeer of DRV who left France with Hồ Chí Minh in 1946, and Trần Đức Thảo who abandoned his faculty position at Sorbonne University to return to Vietnam in 1951. Vietnamese in France became the greatest overseas supporters for Indochinese decolonization and Hồ Chí Minh’s government. Virginia Thompson noted in one of the first studies of the overseas Vietnamese communities that right after the Revolution, despite the lack of information about the new government of Hồ Chí Minh, “all of the Vietnamese in France enthusiastically supported the Republic [DRV].”

Before the August Revolution in 1945, few Vietnamesesettled down in France. One of the earliest Vietnamese French was a woman named Nguyễn Thị Liên who accompanied her French husband to France in 1826. Her husband, Mr. Vannier, was hired by King Gia Long to train his navy. He returned to France with his Vietnamese wife and children when he eventually fell out of King Minh Mạng’s favor. In 1863, the Vietnamese delegation to France met the aging Nguyễn Thị Liên in Paris and the Grand Counselor Phan Thanh Giản, the head of the embassy, recorded this incident in his journal.

Not all Vietnamese students, especially the Cochinchinese, who had French citizenship, decided to stay in the “motherland.” Although the average length of stay for a Vietnamese student ranged from six to seven years, most returned to Vietnam after completing their programs. Several factors may have shaped their decision to return to Vietnam: (1) French
society stigmatized Indochinese as a lesser race and job market discrimination prevented them from competing with white professionals while colonial policy also discouraged immigration from the colonies. (2) Vietnamese patriarchal traditions expected the intellectuals, mostly male, to take care of their clan or family businesses and rituals. (3) For many of the returnees, good social positions and job opportunities awaited them in Vietnam and a sense of nationalism urged many to serve their country. (4) During this period, Vietnamese people were still strongly bound to their homeland and immigration to Western countries appeared strange to many.

Unfortunately, no census provides the exact number of Vietnamese residents in France before the Revolution or even offers an accurate population count of Vietnamese living in France today. As Marie-Eve Blanc points out, the French census fails either to distinguish ethnic origins from national origin or citizenship (for example, a Vietnamese and a Hmong would share the same ethnic group) or to keep track of the countries of origin of immigrants (on being naturalized, those with Vietnamese ethnicity “disappear” from the national census). As a consequence, it is difficult to locate the precise number of Vietnamese intellectuals who resided in France, especially when it was a modest number compared to the majority of Vietnamese émigrés with working class or military background brought to France during the two world wars.

According to Thompson, in the years after WWII France saw a very small number of around 3,000 Vietnamese settling down in the country, of whom about 1,000 were “relics” of the previous war. She also notes that “only a minority were intellectuals, either students or former students, preferred to remain in France.” Some decided to stay due to some reasons such as the long delay of boatlifts for repatriated Indochinese in the 1940s. In 1951, there were approximately 8,000 Vietnamese in France, many of them then were intellectuals or students who either chose to stay or returned to France after a period of time working in Vietnam. A
considerable number already had French citizenship and many of them had married local women.\textsuperscript{40}

Early scholars of Vietnamese colonial studies like Thompson tend to assume that Vietnamese professionals stayed in France because they were “treated as Frenchmen” both “professionally and socially” and that their return to Vietnam would “entail a marked decline in their status.”\textsuperscript{41} However, even though their training might secure them a job and their French citizenship or local spouses might entitle them to some certain places in French society, disdain and discrimination toward colonial subjects were widespread. They were called by pejorative slurs such as \textit{nhà quê} (Vietnamese for “redneck” or “famer”), \textit{les jaunes} (French for “yellow”) or \textit{les citrons} (French for “lemon”).\textsuperscript{42} In many cases, those who were political activists were subject to government surveillance, police harassment, arrest, and deportation. Thus, the main reason for many to stay in France was similar to most of their compatriots who managed to stay in other industrialized countries after completing their studies: to avoid the war-torn country of Vietnam during the course of the Indochina War. This pattern continued to shape a genealogy of Vietnamese graduates seeking safe havens in Western countries such as France, Canada, Germany, England, and especially the United States.

\textbf{Post 1954 and the Franco-Vietnamese Postcolonial Relationship}

After the defeat of France in Indochina and the “temporary” partition of Vietnam in 1954, Vietnamese students and scholars going to France were predominantly from the Republic of Vietnam. Because the Southern Vietnamese educational system in the first decade was largely embedded in the old colonial style and its higher education relied heavily on France, the former “motherland” was the most prestigious destination. On the other hand, the role of the French
language as an official medium of teaching and a means of communication popular among Southern elite and urbanites made French education most accessible.\(^{43}\) Only from the late 1960s onwards was France superseded by the U.S. as a new destination for the Vietnamese intellectuals.

During the war, France was a strong base for pro-Hanoi and nationalist activists, many of whom were students and intellectuals of the South who were political dissidents of the Saigon regime. The DRV thus had a great influence and relatively strong control of the intellectual community in France. This patriotic tradition continued through the decades of the Vietnam War and continues to divide the Vietnamese community in France today where ideological differences between the pre-1975 Vietnamese with communist sympathies and immigrants and the newly-arrived anti-communist refugees.\(^{44}\)

In the wake of the reunification of North and South Vietnam, France was a prominent destination for elite escapees. Nancy Viviani notes that “highly qualified” Vietnamese tended to seek settlement in the U.S., Canada, and France.\(^{45}\) Aihwa Ong also observes that many well-educated Cambodian refugees shared one thing in common with well-educated Vietnamese refugees: they both chose France for settlement.\(^{46}\) Of around 150,000 evacuees, refugees, and immigrants to France between 1975 and 1989,\(^{47}\) many of them were the Saigon elite whose background, either military or intellectual, were rooted in French training and education. Émigrés who preferred France to America may have their decision made out of either frustration and anger over the American “betrayal” of the RVN, a distaste for American imperialism, political and cultural differences with the majority of Vietnamese refugee community in the U.S., or simply because their French-educated skills were not marketable in America and elsewhere. In the health sector, for example, doctors, dentists, or pharmacists were permitted to continue
practicing their professions in France with few additional requirements thanks to the equivalence in their training, their familiarity with French culture, and their proficiency in the French language. Of 57 percent Vietnamese medical professionals evacuated from Vietnam, many came to France and made up a total number of some 2,000 Vietnamese doctors living and working in France in 1995.48

Thanks to strong bi-lateral ties and relatively stable diplomatic relations, France was Vietnam’s gateway to the West during the economic downturn and political turbulence of the postwar period. Under U.S. embargo, France was one of the few main channels that connected the Việt kiều to the homeland. Remittances, funds, and gifts—which at the time were critical to many Vietnamese who had overseas relatives—often found their way through France. French Việt kiều visiting home also enjoyed more privileges compared to those from countries such as the U.S. Their trips and stays were much less harassing and state-monitored. Among the first Vietnamese to “go home” were Vietnamese French intellectuals. Because of their sympathies toward the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Vietnamese intellectuals in France were among the first in the Vietnamese diaspora to reconnect with and support the country politically, culturally, and intellectually, even during the peak of its international criticism and isolation.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the dismantling of the socialist bloc in 1990, the Vietnamese Central politburo reluctantly opened the country to the West. France was certainly a priority in Vietnam’s diplomacy. In 1993, with the visit of François Mitterrand, the first French president and also the first Western president to come to Vietnam in the post-Đổi mới era, relations between France and its former colony were boosted to a higher level and extended to a broader scope. Other French presidents also enthusiastically followed Mitterrand’s road. President Jacques Chirac visited Vietnam twice in 1997 and 2004, and President François
Fillon paid an official visit to Vietnam in 2009. Today, France is still the “privileged partner” (*partenaire privilégié*) and the “principal interlocutor” (*principal interlocuteur*) of Vietnam in Europe.⁴⁹

The focal points of French diplomatic strategy in Vietnam, apart from the bilateral economic cooperation and support, are culture and education. Since 1990, at least three French cultural centers have been opened in three major cities of Vietnam: in Huế, in Hanoi (the *L’escape*), and in Hồ Chí Minh City (IDECAF). A multitude of French language associations and clubs have also been established. In universities in Vietnam, French language is also introduced either as a teaching medium or a means of cultural dissemination and exchange. French “high quality” undergraduate and graduate programs such as the *L’Excellence Européenne en Management* (CFVG, 1992), the *Programme de Formation d’Ingénieurs d’Excellence au Vietnam* (PFIEV, 1997), and the *Pôles Universitaires Français Hanoi* (PUF, 2006) have been operating in Vietnam for decades, awarding French-accredited degrees to Vietnamese students of multi-levels. The flagship of French education in Vietnam is perhaps the multimillion-dollar University of Science and Technology Hanoi (USTH) which was established in 2009 based on the French model and staffed by both French and Vietnamese faculty. These cultural and educational endeavors enrich the Franco-Vietnamese postcolonial relations.

The return of French education, however, has never been an easy task. In education, while the Russian domination has been fading with the collapse of the Soviet Union, France finds formidable competitors from everywhere in the English-speaking world: from the Pacific (Australia and New Zealand), within Europe (U.K), and especially from the other side of the Atlantic Ocean (the U.S.). The reliance on the French language, usually France’s most effective weapon in reasserting its domination of its former colonies, fails miserably in Vietnam.
Vietnamese anti-colonialism in the past was so strong that the French language and French culture were largely subject to elimination after the independence. After 1945, for example, the attempted erasure of its colonial past confined the use of French to academics and the elite class in the South while it almost disappeared from the North. Apart from colonial architecture and a few exceptional French scientists such as Alexandre Yersin or Louis Pasteur, whose works had made tremendous contributions to the foundation of Vietnamese sciences and healthcare, many of the vestiges of colonial rule were destroyed. Vietnam became, and still remains, the only former French colony where the French language is less favored and less studied than other foreign languages such as English, Chinese, and Russian. Only a few universities in Vietnam offer French studies or French language programs. French studies programs at Hanoi National University and Huế University, which were the first and the best programs sponsored by the French government, struggle to survive because of low enrolment. Even their own students prefer English studies and more than often gravitate towards it by picking English as a backup subject for their future careers. The efforts made in decades to induce Vietnam into the “Internationale de la Francophonie” do not seem to be very promising.

Regardless of the unsuccessful effort to make French the lingua franca of the modern Vietnamese intellectual community and the endeavor to re-Gallicize Vietnamese higher education, France has entered into educational agreements with Vietnam that have sent thousands of Vietnamese students to France since the early 1990s. Most French university affiliates in Vietnam have enabled their students to transfer their credits to universities in France for tertiary continuity or other programs of advanced study. France explores various possibilities to increase the number of Vietnamese students enrolling in French higher educational institutes: a co-pay plan between the two governments, Vietnamese government scholarships, and a
considerable number of scholarships paid by the French government and schools for outstanding applicants to post-graduate study. In the school-year 2006-2007, for example, of several thousand Vietnamese students in France, 554 were sponsored by various French scholarships.\textsuperscript{50} The \textit{Programme de Bourses d’Excellence}—the flagship of the French government’s fellowship and comparable to the American Fulbright Fellowship program—has been offering around ten doctoral scholarships and twenty master’s scholarships for qualified applicants to pursue graduate programs in major French universities. Educational Project 322 of the Vietnamese government also renders possible French education to a considerably large number of Vietnamese graduate students. In the last phase of the project in 2009, for example, of the sixty scholarship recipients, twenty-six were sent to France for doctoral degree programs.\textsuperscript{51}

Thanks to the variety of educational accesses and a lenient visa policy, France is one of the leading receiving countries of Vietnamese students in Europe since 1990. Several of my informants and their family members were the beneficiaries of such programs and policies, including Lê Hoài Thương’s father, who came to France for a Master’s program in 1990, and Trần Thị Mỹ, who earned a French MBA in Vietnam in 1997 and a Master’s degree in Accounting in France in 2000. Postcolonial Franco-Vietnamese educational relations also create a new trajectory of young Vietnamese intellectuals who are educated in France and then make their way to the U.S. Most French-educated Vietnamese students return home after completing their programs and a few who wish to migrate to the U.S. are usually those who are proficient in English and trained in the fields of technology and the sciences, and especially in mathematics. Like most foreign-trained Vietnamese intellectuals migrating to America in late 1990s, early 2000s, the traditional strength in mathematics and sciences is a privilege for their immigration and resettlement.
From Communism to Capitalism: Socialist-Educated Intellectuals and Their Westward Journeys

My dear friends, we have become screwballs since we began to study math

Whoever has a son don’t allow him to follow us

Looking smart but raggedly poor

Why should we even exist when we have nobody to love?

xxx

I put on “King Joe” Jeans, T-shirt, American sunglasses

Who can tell that guy has studied math?

Despite the swell clothes, my courtship is pretty rudimentary

Don’t despise, the university didn’t teach me that subject.

xxx

Returning to the home country, first thing is to visit the girl next door

Entering the front yard, (I) spill out a bunch of formulas

Although they are spoken in Russian, she understands

Unsurprisingly enough, she has long been “Westernized.”

xxx

Then we hold hands, exchanging vows under the crescent

I promise that from now on I will no longer study math

The television set and the sewing machine will be shared

The bicycle is yours but the hog-feeding job is mine.

The song “Bài hát học Toán”—the Song of Mathematics Students—quoted above mimics the revolutionary song “Trên Biển Quê Hương”—On the Home Sea—composed by the musician
Đức Minh. The song originally praises the beauty of Quảng Bình province’s coast and the bravery of the local militias who kept it safe from American aggression during the Vietnam War. The author of the “Bài hát học Toán” is Professor Vũ Xuân Hưng, a mathematician trained in Belarus (formerly in the Soviet Union) who has been teaching at Georgia University, Georgia for ten years. I met Dr. Hưng and his wife, Mrs. Giang, and their son at a small gathering in Louisville, Kentucky during my second trip to the site in winter 2011. It was on this occasion that he proudly sang the song for an audience of mostly Vietnamese intellectual immigrants who, like him, were trained in the former socialist bloc.

Dr. Hưng’s song successfully paints a colorful picture of a generation of Vietnamese intellectuals who were educated in countries in the former socialist bloc during the 1970s and 1980s. It first undercuts the image of a typical Vietnamese intellectual: a mathematician who was so busy with the ivy tower that he almost became alienated from the world outside and his family life. It then signals the capitalistic transformation of Vietnamese society in the late 1980s; one that moved from the idealistic communism of “pure people’s intellectuals” to the materialist dream of “King Joe” jeans, “T-shirt,” and “American sunglasses.” Finally, it conjures up the irony of the Vietnamese economy in the 1980s where in a middle-class urban family one saw the co-existence between European luxury goods such as a TV set, a bicycle, a sewing machine and a family sustained financially by pig husbandry. The song therefore satirically, yet realistically and proudly, reflects the making of a socialist-trained Vietnamese intellectual on the threshold of Đổi mới.

Although Soviet-trained alumni have overwhelmingly dominated the Vietnamese academy (and to a broader scope, Vietnamese cultural, social, economical, and especially political and military aspects) since the 1960s, the scholarship devoted entirely to this subject is
very limited. During my three-month trip to Vietnam in summer 2011, I spent hours of intensive research at several major libraries in Hồ Chí Minh City, including the General Science Library of Hồ Chí Minh City and the library of Vietnam National University- the University of Social Science and Humanities in Hồ Chí Minh City, but found very little information on this overseas student genealogy. I also requested the deputy director of Vinh University’s library access and research guidance to the wealth of textual data at the university library but did not have much more success. Evidently, the lives of socialist-trained Vietnamese scholars have not been well-documented even in Vietnam.

Brothers-at-Arms and Pre-reunification Soviet Education

Scholars usually mark the early 1950s when French forces were expelled from North Vietnam as a milestone in the history of Vietnamese students in the communist bloc. This account excludes those who studied in the Soviet Union during the struggle for independence before and several years after the birth of the DRV. The first Vietnamese students in European communist countries were perhaps a handful of Marxists in the Soviet Union in the 1920s. These students were in the USSR for political rather than academic training. During the 1930s, however, some Marxist scholars started attending the Soviet Union’s academic institutes for degree-granting programs, mainly through the network of International Communist Associations in France. During this period, the Soviet Union proved to be unsupportive of the establishment of the Vietnamese Communist Party, indifferent in Vietnam’s struggle of decolonizing, and reluctant to recognize the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (the Soviet Union only proclaimed recognition of the DRV five years after its birth and after China had done so).
Therefore, Vietnamese students were sent to socialist European nations only in the late 1950s, increasing steadily in the 1970s and 1980s, and then declining dramatically at the beginning of the 1990s. The reluctance and restraint in the Soviet Union’s policy towards its ally (which was later seen in its failure to support the DRV’s application for membership in the United Nations in 1948 and in 1951 and in its collusion in the 1954 partition decision) fostered Vietnam’s frustration and distrust towards the Soviet Union.\(^{54}\) It explains why there were more students from the DRV who studied in China than in Eastern Europe before the first half of the 1950s.

When diplomatic relations between the two communist countries, China and the Soviet Union, became irremediably conflictual during the 1950s and led to a critical split later in the same decade, the Soviet Union got more interested in the DRV. On the one hand, the Soviet Union became an official and more important ally to North Vietnam, providing military support and enhancing Soviet-Vietnamese relations (in 1965, the Soviet Union initiated enormous military aids programs for the DRV, quickly balancing and gradually replacing the predominant Chinese role as the DRV’s ally); on the other, it dramatically increased educational support by bringing a great number of Vietnamese students to the Soviet Union and its Eastern European allies. Of all destinations, the Soviet Union was the most in receiving Vietnamese students during this period. Prior to 1990, of the 4,500\(^{55}\) Vietnamese doctoral degree holders who returned from the socialist bloc, 3,500 were trained in the USSR.\(^{56}\) From 1959 to 1984, about 60,000 Vietnamese specialists and skilled workers and 18,000 vocational students were trained under the Soviet program of educational assistance and in 1986 Vietnam still maintained educational cooperation with fifteen Soviet universities.\(^{57}\) Also, from 1951 to 1990 a total number of about 34,000 students with bachelor’s degrees and 72,000 technicians returned from
the Eastern bloc. While Vietnamese students were dispatched to many states in the Soviet Union and to the Eastern bloc, an education in Russia was understandably the most desirable since Russian culture and education were introduced to North Vietnam in the 1960s and came to dominate Vietnamese society. School curricula of all educational level were modeled after the Russian one and Russian language replaced French and Chinese to be the most common foreign language taught and used. As some of my informants joked, until the dismantling of the Soviet Union in 1990, Russia was “the United States for North Vietnamese.”

The numbers of Vietnamese students and non-immigrant trainees in other republics also rose and declined in tune with Russian policies toward Vietnam. For example, scholars note that in Poland from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1990s, while overall immigration was “statistically not significant,” the inflow of Vietnamese students under government patronage (titled “socialist cooperation”) was “quite visible.” In the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR), Vietnamese students and orphans began arriving to the country as early as in 1956. In early 1970s, every year some 500 Vietnamese students enrolled in various educational institutes throughout the CSSR under the sponsorships of the Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa (Central Committee of the Czechoslovak Communist Party), Ústřední rada odborů (Central Trade Union Council), and the Czechoslovak government. A fewer number of Vietnamese students were distributed among other Soviet-influenced republics such as Hungary, Romani, and Bulgaria. The Vietnam War and Vietnam’s reliance on Soviet warfare technology and weaponry in decades to come also commanded a great number of Vietnamese military cadets and warfare technicians to be trained in Soviet military academies.

Of the countries receiving Vietnamese students and intellectuals, Germany remained an exceptional case. First, unlike most other countries in the West, the history of Vietnamese
studying in Germany can be traced back to World War II when Vietnam was still a part of Indochina. After France was defeated and occupied by Germany in 1943, nearly 10 percent of the 13,000 Vietnamese in France—mainly workers-soldiers—were captured and forced to serve with the Germans in labor camps. A small number of Vietnamese students accepted German grants and went to study in Germany. Although this group was motivated by the nationalist principle of “the enemies of my enemies are my friends” and many of them finally tried to make it back to France after a few years living in Germany because “Germany was losing” and they found “living conditions in the Reich were becoming very difficult,” they were undeniably the first Vietnamese students to study in Germany. Because there is no specific record about them and a few hundred other Vietnamese prisoners-of-war, it is possible that at least some of them remained in Germany and hence became the first Vietnamese Germans.

Second, Vietnamese students in Germany after the nation’s division came from two different trajectories: in the 1950s, North Vietnamese students went to the German Democratic Republic (GDR/East Germany) and South Vietnamese students came to the Federal Republic of Germany (FDG/West Germany). Within two decades from 1966 to 1986, there were 13,000 students, intellectuals, and experts trained in the GDR. The number of students who went to West Germany is unavailable but it is estimated to be lower than students who went to East Germany due to the collapse of South Vietnam in 1975.

Third, unlike other former Eastern bloc nations, Germany currently harbors two different genealogies of Vietnamese immigrants: one is of former students and contract workers of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and the other is of post-war refugees. With a total population of approximately 115,000 to 200,000 and two ideologically oppositional camps, Vietnamese communities in Germany remain sharply divided in most aspects of life.
There is no account of Vietnamese intellectuals staying in Soviet states and its socialist allies before 1975. Being imbued with a keen sense of nationalism and the desire to return to serve the country, graduates exuberantly returned home after completing their programs. Due to the close and effective cooperation between the DRV and overseas institutes, host countries in Eastern Europe often kept a close surveillance on international students, making sure they would return immediately once their programs were finished. And diplomatically, there was virtually no policy for asylum-seekers from Vietnam in Eastern Europe. North Vietnamese intellectuals hence had few rewards or incentives to staying back. Even if some of them had considered remaining in the host countries, it would have been impossible for them to do so. Dr. Đặng Nam, who studied in the Ukraine from 1968 to 1975, told me that it never crossed his mind of escaping Vietnam. “The only thought we had every day was trying our best to study so that upon our return we could serve well our country […] The only thing we felt sorry about our mission [of studying abroad] was that we could not literally take arms to join the cause back at home. That was the thing we wanted to do more than studying.” Nam was not exaggerating; most young North Vietnamese of his generation were ready to sacrifice for the war, and in fact many who returned had fought and died in battle fields, especially in summer 1972.

The Era of Change, Intellectual Crimes, and the Age of Northern Brain Drain

The North Vietnamese brain drain began in small numbers in the years after Vietnam’s reunification, and escalated dramatically towards the end of 1980s. A considerable number of highly-trained professionals, especially in the field of mathematics and science, managed to stay in Europe. Because mathematics has always been Vietnam’s academic strongpoint and Soviet training in the fields of mathematics and natural science was acclaimed worldwide, many
Vietnamese mathematical talents were sent to the Soviet bloc after participating in and winning national and international contests, especially the International Mathematical Olympiad and other Scientific Olympics. Four of my informants—Dr. Bắc, Dr. Nam, Dr. Hưng, and Dr. Trần Dắc Phong—used to be members of Vietnam’s National Olympic Mathematics teams, and three of them were Olympiad medalists. Most of them continued to shine in Soviet academia. Dr. Hưng, for example, won three first prizes and one second prize in the Belarusian Annual College Mathematical Contests and a third prize in the Soviet Federal Mathematical Contest during his five years in an undergraduate program.

Although Vietnamese intellectuals tended to return to Vietnam, many of them managed to go back to Europe after working for a few years. From 1974 to late 1990s, in mathematics alone, Vietnam claimed to have lost 145 mathematicians (of which 127 were medalists) to the brain drain. During the 1980s, many of them came to Western Europe. When the Soviet bloc collapsed in 1990, most of them gradually found their way to the West. As early as 1992, a number of people like my aforementioned informants finally went to the U.S., either from Vietnam or other countries. To many, the impetus to leave Vietnam in the 1980s was precipitated by the extremely poor postwar economic condition and the devastating state of Vietnam’s academy. They often dodged the surveillance of both the Vietnamese and the host-country’s authorities to escape into the underground or to another country. Others in Vietnam had no choice but to go back to the host-country they had left, hoping for a better life for themselves and a means to support their desperate families at home.

From the late 1970s onward, another mass immigration of well-educated Vietnamese to the Soviet bloc shook the nation: tens of thousands of makeshift interpreters and foremen, who were university-educated and fluent in foreign languages, volunteered to accompany the mass
“labor export” (xuất khẩu lao động) from Vietnam to Eastern Europe. This giant wave of labor export was born out of the country’s economic devastation in the post-war era and Vietnam’s decision to denounce Chinese influence and gravitate toward the Soviet Union’s side. In the year 1978, Vietnam-Soviet relations were strengthened by two important agreements: the June 30, 1978 Admission of Vietnam to the Council for Mutual Economic Aid (CMEA, also known as COMECON) and the November 3, 1978 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Whereas the latter focused on military support and mutual defense between the Soviet Union and Vietnam, the first one enabled Vietnam to receive financial aid and to send contingents of workers and trainees to work in countries of CMEA members.

The CMEA had a multipurpose agenda. It helped to utilize a considerable segment of unemployed Vietnamese youth. It also offered a feasible channel for Vietnam to pay off its gigantic war debts and loans and it would create a much needed trained-workforce, especially in industrial fields. Most workers were contracted to work in heavy-industrial sites such as constructions related to oil industry or machinery plants although many others were assigned to work in light industries such as textile or garment factories. Begun in 1979 and completed sometime in 1990, the exact number of contract workers sent abroad was not consistently publicized by the Vietnamese government. For example, in 1981 alone, some scholars reported that “over 30,000” young Vietnamese came to work in Vietnam’s CMEA partners while some others estimated it to be “some 50,000.”

Although the majority of the workers would go to the Soviet Union, they were also dispatched to all other socialist countries. Between 1980 and 1990, there were around 60,000 contract workers working in GDR. In the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, it is estimated that “between 70,000 and 120,000 young Vietnamese went through a system of “voluntary labour” in
the course of the 80s.”73 One contract would last from 2 to 5 years, depending on situations and countries. With better wages compared to their income in Vietnam, many managed to extend their stay, both legally and illegally.

Because most of the young men and women were not able to speak the languages of their host countries, tens of thousands of educated Vietnamese were recruited to work as interpreters, translators, and team leaders. Many of these Vietnamese had been either trained in Russian language programs in Vietnamese universities or former students in the countries they were required for the job. Because Russian was the most popular language, college instructors proficient in the language were mobilized and they themselves were very pleased to go.

The competition for “slots” of interpreters, however, was fierce and bribery was almost a part of the business. The amount of bribery depended on the country to which one wished to go. To both workers and students, Germany was usually the first priority. Dr. Bắc told me that his monthly allowance was double his fellow students’ in Russia and his living standard was also much better. Regardless of the hassles and the high “kick-back” expenses, many professionals were trying their best for a chance to change their material circumstances. The term đi Tây (go West)74 usually meant đổi đời (changing life) although for many people it was not the case. At Vinh University, where I used to work, nearly 100 percent of the Russian faculty—about twenty teachers—had participated in those labor-export programs. In other departments, the large number of teachers who were trained in the Soviet Union also had attended with the same positions. My uncle who studied Physics in the Ukraine and returned home in 1977 also quit his teaching position at the Department of Physics at Vinh University and joined the exodus to Russia in 1988. He finally returned in 1993 and resumed his career at the university. Many of his friends, however, did not.
In the decades before the 1980s, the typical image of a foreign-trained intellectual was that of a young man who returned to Vietnam with boxes of scientific books, worked at a research academy with glasses on his nose and a lunch box on the handle-bar of his *Sputnik* bicycle, speaking elegantly a Vietnamese language sprinkled with Russian words and scientific jargon. The intellectual, often trained in the fields of mathematics and science, was considered an ideal suitor of most urban girls. Visitors to a family who have a son-in-law who returned from a Soviet university often noticed the traditional wooden *Matryoshka* nesting dolls sitting on a small living room cabinet; a plastic Christmas tree with Russian ornaments standing in the corner of the room; a heavy Russian-made cast-iron electric fan with “elephant ear” blades blowing cool wind into the faces of the attendants; a crude-looking giant record-player playing either some ebullient Russian revolutionary songs or Tchaikovsky’s *Lebedinoye ozero* (Swan Lake) opera for the awed guests. Hung on the wall were probably several copies of artwork by famous Russian painters such as Issak Ilich Levitan’s *The Golden Autumn* or Ivan Kramskoi’s *Unknown Woman*. The mother-in-law of the proud intellectual would serve tea in fragile porcelain cups decorated with classical Russian motifs. The father would insist his male guest taste some Russian Vodka “brought straight from Russia by my son-in-law.” More often than not, the parents would point at framed pictures of a smart-looking smiling young man standing in front of either the onion-shaped rooftop of the Saint Basil's Cathedral in the Red Square or the splendid Bolshoi Theatre and assert proudly: “My family doesn’t care about prosperity or property. We only care about education [and that is why we choose this respectable educated man to be our in-law].” The image of the respectable man, therefore, was signified not by wealth but by a few elegant iconic items of a supposedly superior and exotic culture of “the [socialist] West” he had brought home. This in turn put him in a separate class and placed him at the same level as the foreign elites who
had educated and transformed him culturally and academically. The socialist intellectual (*trí thức xã hội chủ nghĩa*) shifted the depiction of the Vietnamese intelligentsia although the intellectual continued to be object of the people’s veneration as had been his forefathers, the Confucian honorable man (*quân tử*) and the French-civilized gentleman (*văn minh*).

Toward the second half of the 1980s, things began to change. Đổi mới’s market mechanism accommodated new social values. Materialism appeared to replace many cultural values and the traditional veneration for a “pure” intelligentsia began to crumble. The young, humble intellectual living in his ivy tower packed with Russian books was no longer a symbol of a great mind. Instead, his austerity became an object of scorn. His wealth of scientific knowledge was devalued by the newly-emerged profiteers and black market masters, many of whom were intended to be a part of the nation’s intelligentsia. The *Sputnik* bicycle was replaced by the more desirable Czechoslovakian-made *Jawa* and *Babetta* mopeds or the German *Simson* motorcycles. Radios and record-players no longer dominated mass entertainment because television became more popular—although the industry was still in its infancy with only one channel aired by the central government—paving the way for the introduction of the bulky Polish *Neptune* television set to the living rooms of the well-to-do. Food, for some, became more easily available and the awkward Russian *Saratov* refrigerator found its way to the kitchens of the upper class. Because commodities were associated with those who “went West,” these luxuries required overseas Vietnamese to make trading in the black market, instead of academic training, the focal point of their stay in a foreign land. Thus, for contemporary Vietnamese intellectuals living in “the West,” wealth was the measure of success instead of intellectual capital. Dr. Hưng, who returned to Vietnam in 1987 with an outstanding academic record found himself so alienated in Vietnam at the dawn of this consumerism that he promised “no longer to study math.” He, however,
contributed to this fast-changing culture because he too brought home a TV set, a sewing machine, and a bicycle and, ironically enough, became a master of “hog husbandry.”

During the 1980s, the rumor spread of a “friendship education,” which implied the support of a dubious Soviet educational policy to its Vietnamese ally by granting the less prestigious junior doctoral degrees. Some Soviet-trained Vietnamese credentials were deemed worthless and their degrees were sometimes suspected to have been obtained fraudulently. In some parts of Vietnam, the terms “Doctor of iron” (tiến sĩ bàn là) or “Doctor of Minsk” (tiến sĩ xe Minsk) are still used to mock those who earned their junior doctorates from underground “dissertation mills.”

Smuggling and black market also became popular among Vietnamese students in the Soviet bloc. Students usually tried to smuggle merchandise into the receiving countries to make some money to send home. Except for a few wounded war veterans or children of ‘fallen heroes’ (liệt sĩ), the Vietnamese government seldom took care of their students’ needs. An inter-ministry circular in 1984 required students who went abroad for a period of over two years had to purchase the following clothing from the government:

1. For men: one woolen suit, one woolen sweatshirt, one pair of Vietnamese-made shoes, and one leatherette suitcase.

2. For women: two pair of pants, one woolen sweatshirt, one pair of Vietnamese-made sandals, and one leatherette suitcase

Although many prospective students had to purchase these items, the prices were very cheap and they were not available to other Vietnamese in the rationing system. My informants told me that they often sold their issued outfits immediately in the black market for a profit which was much needed for their family or for their trips.
Every trip was an opportunity for Vietnamese students and exchange scholars to improve their family economy by committing petty-smuggling. Because they were not allowed to bring more personal items than they would need in the foreign countries, students tried smuggle extra T-shirts and denim clothes by simply putting on as many as they could. The merchandise, often fake products of Thailand, was extremely desirable in the Eastern European black market. Informants going to Europe in the early 1990s all told me stories of how they cheated the customs system to make some extra money. Hà recalled the pre-departure of one-year-training in Moscow during the last years of Soviet Union’s existence:

People advised me to bring denim skirts and T-shirts but be careful because if more than two items of each kind were found, they would be confiscated. I put on five layers of jeans skirts and nearly ten T-shirts. It was hot and I could barely walk into the checking points. For almost two days airborne and transits I was almost dying because the clothes tightened me up as a log. But I had to endure it because those hidden merchandizes would be my pocket money and helped me send some remittance to my family.

Corruption and bribery among the authorities were also evident in my informants’ stories. One informant told me:

After when we came to Moscow, I learnt that most of my friends brought five times more merchandise than I did [he brought some T-shirts, jeans, watches, and cosmetics]. They sold the goods and made thousands of rubles while I made only some hundreds. They said that they had dealt with the custom officers, sweetening the deal with bribery so that their merchandise was allowed to get through.

The economic downturn forced Vietnamese students and intellectuals to trade and sell in local market imported goods. Students and exchange scholars began to improvise in order to
improve their financial condition. Dr. Nguyễn Tuấn Ngọc, a student in Moscow from 1990 to 1995, told me how he entered the trade:

My mother wanted to send me money and to make it profitable, she sent me a big container of goods through her friend’s network. The container was huge and packed with thousands of women’s panties. I received the container at my dormitory and I sold the merchandizes there. I sold them to other Vietnamese retailers in the open markets. It only took me a half a day to sell them all. I couldn’t remember exactly how much I made but I think somewhere around US$500.

The merchandise sold on the black market quickly went beyond some packets of small essential goods smuggled into European host countries or the small scale of trade workers. The democratic changes and economic chaos placed many former socialist governments in internal turmoil, making them neglect their international residents. Situated in a political and social “gray area,” small violations quickly mutated to serious crimes.

The first Vietnamese to move from petty-offenses to the level of organized crime were the contract workers, whose living standards were the lowest and who were often abused and exploited by both the local authorities and the Vietnamese government. Already underpaid by their employers, their modest payments were usually cut by the Vietnamese government to help pay the country’s foreign debt. In many socialist countries, illegal sweatshops were built to manufacture merchandise for mushrooming black markets. By the 1990s, Vietnamese criminal networks involving smuggling, extortion, human trafficking, and even gang wars accelerated and became professionally-organized. Notorious Vietnamese gangs usually targeted their compatriots with activities ranging from extortion, rape, stealing, and robbery, to human trafficking. Gang
wars became so rampant that during August 1996 in Berlin alone there were thirty-five murders among Vietnamese rival gangs.\textsuperscript{79}

The social chaos also made it possible for many Vietnamese students and scholars to enter the underworld of the Vietnamese criminal network. Some of the most ruthless organizations were either led by the educated elite or had important figures of the elite. Thanks to their social knowledge and fluency in the foreign language, former university students usually held leading roles in organized criminal activities. Nožina notes that in the Czech Republic, criminal organizations in the first half of 1990s were often led by “former student [s] of Czech university[ies] fluent in the Czech language, with a good social and economic background in the country from communist times.”\textsuperscript{80} For instance, she notes that the “boss” of one of the most powerful underground organizations in Czech was a PhD degree holder from a Czech university during the communist rule. This man and his deputy, the “last Vietnamese chairman of the leftist International Student Federation,” had connections “up to the circles of the Czech economic elite […] and the political-economic elite in Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{81} The man had the greatest influence on the Vietnamese community in Prague and was referred to as the “honorable man” by his compatriots.\textsuperscript{82}

For Vietnamese intellectuals in Eastern Europe during the 1980s and the 1990s, the road to the West was often facilitated by official professional occasions such as international conferences in “neutral” nations (French was the most popular case) or by illegal border crossing. For those who wanted to get out of the socialist bloc, Germany was the closest threshold to the Western world. In the 1980s, Vietnamese intellectuals began to join the exodus to the West through the Berlin passage. Dr. Bắc told me that in the early 1980s, the Vietnamese student community sometimes had friends who “disappeared” only to “emerge” several years
later in Italy and France. In 1988 when he returned to Vietnam, he noticed that Vietnamese students and scholars escaping to West Germany had become a “phenomenon.” Thanks to rudimentary immigration laws and ineffective police and border control, the Czech Republic was the most convenient gateway to Germany from the Eastern side of Europe. During the 1990s, the inflow of Vietnamese migrating to Germany through its borders reached to approximately 10,000. It cost anywhere from US$ 5,000 to US$ 6,500 to “smuggle” one Vietnamese from Russia to West Germany.

Yet, to many, Germany was not necessarily the final destination. From Germany, Vietnamese émigrés continued to disperse to other parts of Europe and North America. Many undocumented residents in Germany accepted the financial compensation of 3,000 marks paid by the German government in 1991 in exchange for repatriation. But instead of going home they managed to migrate to another European country. Others, like my informants, found their way to the United States.

Post-Đổi mới and Soviet Education

By the early 1990s, while the number of Vietnamese students going to Western Europe—with or without financial support from the host countries—began increasing dramatically, the exchange education between Vietnam and the former European socialist nations (with the exception of Germany) decreased respectively. Because of the dismantling of the Soviet Union, funding for Vietnamese students to former Soviet states ceased to exist. Of the total number of 1,975 students sent abroad by the government during the course of six years from early 1990 to the end of 1996, 698 were sent to Australia and 123 were sent to Thailand but only 200 were sent to Russia and Eastern European countries. The anxiety about the impact that democratic
changes in the Eastern bloc may leave on Vietnamese students and scholars prompted the Vietnamese government to curtail eastward educational flow. The caution was well-founded. Intrigued by democratic changes in their host countries, overseas Vietnamese students initiated pro-democratic activities by means of underground newspapers and anti-government groups. In Czech Republic, for example, a “samizdat” newspaper named Diễn Đàn (Forum) was published by Lê Thăng Nhàn—a medical student and a former soldier for six years in the anti-Khmer Rouge war—to spread democratic ideology while its student writers vowed to return to Vietnam to “openly oppose their hard-line Communist Government.” In 1992, Southeast Asian studies scholar Kai M. Shellhorn noted that the return of tens of thousands of Vietnamese contract-workers, supported by the socialist-educated Vietnamese, posed such a great political threat to the government monopoly that “all foreign educational programmes [came] under governmental revision.”

Vietnamese educational exchange to Russia only slightly resumed a decade later. In December 13, 2000, an agreement signed between the SRVN and Russian Federation allowed a notable number of Vietnamese students to study in Russia. The contract, loosely translated as “Educating Vietnamese Citizens In Russian Federation Under Debt-Serving Agreement,” was in fact a way for Russia to retrieve through education the seemingly uncollectable debt from the Vietnamese government. With a total budget of US$48 million, during the course of ten years of implementation from 2001 to 2011, the project had sent about 600 undergraduates and twenty graduates to Russia.

Despite the fact that 53 percent of the 17,000 Vietnamese students sent abroad between 1987 and 2000 went to the former Soviet bloc and the current number of Vietnamese students in the former Soviet states is still at thousands strong, Russian and other Eastern bloc education
have lost the position they once enjoyed. The reasons are clear. 1. A socialist education—except for science and math—is considered inferior in the Vietnamese market economy (Dr. Ngọc’s testimony about his Russian education in economics is one example) 2. After the open-door of the 1990s, Vietnamese students and scholars had the opportunity to switch to the more preferable Western institutions (Ngọc admitted that he would not have gone to Russia if in 1990 he had an option to the West) 3. While the financially-troubled former socialist countries are unable to secure aid or scholarships for international students, Western countries have excellent resources 4. Security and safety are perhaps the biggest concerns of international students and the seemingly unmanageable situation of racist crimes in many Soviet states, especially in Russia, make many think twice. Even in a less hostile country like the Czech Republic, Vietnamese students often faced racial assaults and insults. The brutal murder of Vũ Anh Tuấn, a Vietnamese student in Saint Petersburg, by seventeen Russian skinhead teenagers in 2004 seriously tarnished Russia’s image. Of the seventeen arrested skinheads, only nine were convicted of unrelated offenses. Although the Vietnamese government showed its concern by complaining to their Russian counterpart, the case was closed. Dr. Ngọc also testified about one of his three near-death experiences when he was attacked by a racist gang of about seven or eight Russian teenagers with a bulldog. These aforesaid reasons made Eastern Europe an increasingly unattractive destination for education. Perhaps cheap living expenses and low tuitions are among the very few driving forces for both the government and self-funded families to continue sending Vietnamese students to the former “socialist utopia.”

Regardless of changes in politics, economy, culture, and education, the Soviet legacy is still persistent in Vietnam today. Vestiges of Russian cultural domination can be found almost everywhere in Vietnam: from the Lenin Park in central Hanoi with a giant sculpture of Vladimir
Ilyich Lenin to the Russian House in the most-visited part of District 1 downtown Hồ Chí Minh City. Half-forgotten yet still splendid memorials erected to commemorate Russian workers and soldiers are found in the Russian-sponsored Hòa Bình Hydraulic Power Plant and in the once Russian naval base of Camranh Bay. More intriguingly, in Lái Thiêu—one of Hồ Chí Minh City’s suburban district—a tomb built in the 1980s to memorialize twelve Tsar sailors of the defeated Diana warship who died in Saigon in 1904 after escaping the Japanese Empire’s Navy siege at Port Arthur still exists and is considered an icon of “Viet-Russo friendship” and “brother-in-arms.” It is important to note here that most cemeteries of South Vietnamese killed-in-action soldiers, including the gigantic Biên Hòa Military Cemetery, and the Saigon French Soldier Cemetery have been either bulldozed or abandoned for decades, the myth of “international friendship,” “brothers and sisters of the same womb” (đồng bào) and “Vietnamese humanitarianism” is an irony. Often understood as veneration for Soviet imperialism, these relics remind Vietnamese people of Soviet cultural subjugation and political enslavement rather than friendship and comradeship as propagandized by the Vietnamese government.

More than just vestiges of a bygone empire, Russian culture and Marxist ideology are still being used intensively by the communist government to consolidate its political and social power. The lodestar political ideology in Vietnam is “Marxist Leninism with Hồ Chí Minh’s ideology” instead of any other Marxist framework. The term connotes both Russian-centered Marxist doctrine (Leninism) and Vietnamese Marxist nationalism (Hồ Chí Minh’s ideology), in which the first is a focal point. Until today, government propaganda keeps affirming the superiority of the Soviet past and the socialist culture. ironically enough, Vietnam is even more exuberant than Russia in practicing Soviet rituals, including the birthday of Lenin, the “Soviet Great Victory over the Nazi Germany in the National Defense War,” and especially the annual
celebrations of the “Great October Revolution.”94 On the days of these ceremonies, the central media often mesmerize audience with three-hour-long exclusive television and radio shows hosted by former Soviet-educated intellectuals and celebrities exalting and recycling the old glory of the “great brother” or the “great friend.”

**Figure 4.** Statue of V.I. Lenin in the park named after him in central Hanoi. In Hanoi, a much bigger park—now Thống Nhất (Reunification) Park—once also bore the name “Lenin.”

**Vietnamese Intellectuals in the United States**

In Vietnamese American studies, few scholars pay close attention to Vietnamese living in the U.S. before 1975 although since 1990s, several Asian immigration historians such as Ruben G. Rumbaut and Ronald Takaki have acknowledged their existence. Rumbault notes that the number of Vietnamese in the U.S. between 1952 and 1959 was more than 20095 and Takaki puts this population to be 603 in 1964.96 Nonetheless, both of them consider these statistics to be Vietnamese “living” or “arriving” in America and do not clarify whether they include American citizens or permanent resident aliens. Takaki also points out that “unlike the other Asian groups, the 1975 wave of Vietnamese migrants did not choose to come here” and “they had no decision
By seeing these Vietnamese as political refugees, he not only supports the idea of Vietnamese victimization in Vietnam but also ignores the role and the lives of pre-1975 Vietnamese Americans, including those who came as exchange students and scholars.

Only recently has a younger generation of Vietnamese American scholars tried to reread Vietnamese American history beyond the shadow of the Vietnam War and its aftermath. Some scholars probed the questions of who were the first Vietnamese students to arrive in the United States and what were their roles in shaping the Vietnamese American community. An essay by Tram Quang Nguyen published in 2001 is devoted entirely to the anti-imperialism movements of Vietnamese students in the U.S. before 1975—mostly California-based—and the struggle of postwar Vietnam-sympathizers in some intensively anti-communist area of California’s cities. In 2003, Vu Pham published an article in *Amerasia Journal*, reexamining the history of Vietnamese Americans by studying the presence of Vietnamese students and scholars in the U.S. before the end of the Vietnam War. He concludes that this sort of research “open avenues toward depicting Vietnamese Americans as agents of change.” Nguyen and Pham further corroborate this in their essays which challenge the notion of Vietnamese Americans as post-1975 anti-communist refugees and highlight the role of Vietnamese students and intellectuals during the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, since these studies leave out the current and the future trends of intellectual immigrants in the post-rapprochement era, the scholarship is incomplete.

**The Dawn of Vietnamese Students and Intellectuals in America**

Because of French colonial education which tended to drive colonized students toward the “motherland,” not many cases of Vietnamese students and scholars in the U.S. before 1950 were recorded. Although the Fulbright Fellowship, whose goal was “to assist in the development
of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world,”100 was founded in 1946, it was not until after 1954 that the opportunities offered to Vietnamese students to enter U.S. schools were utilized fully.

The first Vietnamese students coming to the U.S., hence, were not the beneficiaries of the American anticommunist doctrine. One example is the former Director of the Yale Southeast Asian Refugee Project Huỳnh Sanh Thông who came to the U.S. in 1948 as a political dissident and a former political prisoner of French authority. Thông attended Ohio University the same year and graduated with a BA in Economics and continued to work in the academy as a brilliant translator who helped introduce hundreds of Vietnamese literary texts to the English-speaking world.101 In another example, in July 16, 1949 the long defunct newspaper Phúc Hưng (Renaissance) covered a story about a student named Dang Hien Binh, a graduate of Hanoi Law School who was admitted an undergraduate at Yale University. According to the article, “Mr. Dang Hien Binh left Hanoi for Saigon. Yesterday, he boarded a plane for the United States to take up a scholarship. Yale University gave him a scholarship of 3,000 dollars.”102 Huỳnh Sanh Thông and Dang Hien Binh are among the first, if not the first, Vietnamese students under French occupation known to have attended an undergraduate program at an American university.

Similarly, no evidence of anti-communist aid was found in the case of the first Vietnamese graduate students. Among the earliest Vietnamese graduate students to be trained in the U.S. was Đỗ Văn Lý, who earned a master’s degree in Political Science from Columbia University in 1948. He became a career diplomat under Ngô Đình Diệm’s government and after Diệm’s assassination, he resigned from his post of the South Vietnam Ambassador to the U.S., returning to Vietnam and committing his life to the Cao Đài religion. Before switching his political side in 1950, Lý was the head of the Vietnamese-American Friendship Association
which tried to make the U.S. recognize Hồ Chí Minh’s provisional government. Another significant example is Dr. Nguyễn Xuân Oánh, who came to the U.S. in 1950 and earned a PhD in Economics from Harvard. Upon his return to Vietnam in 1963, he was promoted to several key positions in the South Vietnamese government, including the Governor of Vietnam National Bank and the Deputy Prime Minister under Diệm’s regime in 1963, and the Acting Prime Minister under General Nguyễn Khánh’s regime from 1964 to 1965. More interestingly, Dr. Nguyễn Xuân Oánh was among few former South Vietnamese intellectuals and politicians who refused to leave Vietnam after the reunification. He was highly respected even by the communist regime and was the key international law consultant and economic aide to both Võ Văn Kiệt and Nguyễn Văn Linh, the “founding fathers” of Đổi mới. Lý and Oánh may then have founded the first generation of Vietnamese intellectuals in the U.S.

The Fulbright Act of 1946 and the Smith-Mundt Act in 1948 gradually came into effect with the birth of the Republic of Vietnam in 1954. While these programs were “to acquaint Americans with the world as it is and to acquaint students and scholars from many lands with America as it is,” they were also a means of replacing the old French influence in Vietnam with a new variant of American cultural and educational neocolonialism. From 1954 to 1960, 729 South Vietnamese students and scholars were trained in the United States. These students were funded by various American governmental and private organizations. Most common patronage came from U.S. government such as the Agency for International Development (A.I.D). Some came from private funding groups such as the religiously-affiliated universities which accepted Vietnamese students through international Catholic network and influential religious figures. The South Vietnamese government and wealthy families also funded many students to the U.S. Still, in the early half of the 1960s, the number of Vietnamese students and
scholars in America was very modest in comparison to that in France. In 1963, for example, of the total number of 2,796 overseas [South] Vietnamese students, 1,715 went to France whereas only 430 came to the U.S.\textsuperscript{107}

As South Vietnam increased its reliance on the U.S., the U.S. government multiplied its educational support. In June 1972, Maurice J. Williams, the Deputy Administrator of A.I.D. reported that 3,703 Vietnamese students had been trained in the U.S. since 1957 in an agreement between the U.S. and the RVN.\textsuperscript{108} Especially, the number of Vietnamese students and intellectuals in American rose dramatically after Lyndon Johnson came into the White House. Not surprisingly, with the onset of the Vietnam War, the number of Southern military cadets and technicians sent to training centers of warfare technology and military academy was an extremely important part of U.S. exchange education agenda.

In their study of Asian student trends to the U.S. during the course of the second half of the twentieth century, William Cummings and Wing-Cheung So highlight eight important pulling features which include:

(1) The improving Asian-American political links (2) The increased volume of Asian-American economic exchange (3) The sharp increase in Asian immigration to the United States (4) The increasing similarity in the structure and content of Asian and American educational systems (5) The absorptive capacity of American higher education (6) The quality of American higher education (7) The complementarity of Asian demand and American supply (8) The opportunities provided in American higher education to cover educational costs through part-time work.\textsuperscript{109}

In the case of South Vietnam, most of these features fit well in the context of a neo-colonized nation. 1. As Ngô Đình Diệm’s regime was trying to rupture the resilient control of
France, RVN turned to the U.S. for protection from the “red menace,” a job that Cold War America was more than willing to do. The political relationship deepened after Diệm was overthrown in a coup d'état and replaced by Khánh and later, by Thiệu and Kỳ’s military junta.

RVN was not an industrialized country. Its fragile economy virtually relied on American war aid. Toward the end of the 1960s, the U.S. was on its way to successfully introducing its educational system in South Vietnam to replace the old French system. Whereas many countries had only a few top-ranking educational institutions, the U.S. had several premier institutions. As Eric Ashby notes, America is “a place of Any Person, Any Study.”

Flexibility and the availability of all levels of American higher education provided Vietnamese students with several excellent options for advanced study, a luxury that French elitism failed to afford. American education offered a variety of subjects, including a diverse array of fields in the humanities and social sciences. In comparison, an education in France or Russia—the other two major receiving countries of Vietnamese overseas students—offered very limited choices.

Students who came to the U.S. on a limited budget could easily find part-time jobs to cover their financial shortage because of good U.S. economy and generally tolerant policies on student’s work during the 1960s and the 1970s. These opportunities were obviously very important to attract many smart but not well-to-do Vietnamese students to turn to the U.S. Interestingly enough, almost four decades after the war Vietnamese students are still drawn to the U.S. for most of the above reasons.

Vietnamese Students and the Antiwar Movement

As early as the 1950s, Vietnamese students and scholars in America began grouping under several organizations. The earliest and also the largest one, according to Pham, is the
religiously-based Vietnamese Catholic Student Association in America founded by Father Emmanuel Jacques in 1950. With an increasing body of Vietnamese students in the U.S. in the 1960s, students in different locations also founded different groups such as the Vietnamese Student’s Group in New England or the Vietnamese Student Association in San Diego. Because of the scattered population of Vietnamese in different states, most organizations held their own publications as a means to connect their fellow students living across the country, discussing issues related to their country-at-war, and exchanging and spreading understandings of Vietnamese culture—especially through vehicles of language, literature, and history—to an American audience. Toward the end of the 1960s student groups soon became engulfed by the social upheavals in American society and the anti-Vietnam War movement.

The anti-imperialism movement of Vietnamese students in the U.S. did not become full-fledged until the second half of the 1960s. The reasons were simple. First, the majority of Vietnamese students in America at that time came from the South Vietnamese elite social strata who would not want to speak against the system they benefited from. Second, except for students and the intellectual community, the American public was largely indifferent to the war or still in favor of the U.S. government’s anti-communist propaganda.

The first Vietnamese student to be credited with anti-war and anti-American activism is Ngô Vĩnh Long, now a professor of history at the University of Maine. A young student descended from a revolutionary family background, Long entered the student movement in Saigon, defying both Ngô Đình Diệm and General Khánh’s regimes. Upon his arrival in the U.S. in 1964, he was said to be the first Vietnamese undergraduate to be admitted directly from Vietnam to Harvard with a scholarship. Pitting himself against nearly 350 Vietnamese, Long publicly voiced his opinion about the pitfalls of American involvement in Vietnam and the
corruption of the South Vietnamese government. He began travelling with distinguished American intellectuals such as Howard Zinn of Harvard and Noam Chomsky of MIT on anti-war teach-ins sessions. Long also published an anti-war newspaper named Thời Báo Gà (Chicken Times) which he described as “the longest newsletter of the peace movement” because “it lasted for six years.”

Toward the beginning of the 1970s with President Richard Nixon’s aggressive policies on Vietnam, the Vietnamese student movement picked up the momentum. The focal points in the working agenda of anti-war Vietnamese students in America included public demands for American withdrawal from Vietnam, fierce criticism of the corruption of the South Vietnamese government, enthusiastic supports for the peace points of the National Liberation Front (NLF), and more broadly: the end of the war in Vietnam and the reunification of the country. The number of leftist students and intellectuals also increased dramatically. In 1972 the Union of Vietnamese in the United States was formed in Los Angeles and was comprised of 2,000 to 3,000 members. Leftist activists turned to the NLF’s peace points seeking to end the Vietnam War. On January 31, 1972, for example, more than 1,000 people attended the talk delivered by the Union delegates at the Pauley Ballroom on the UC Berkeley campus in front of a stage decorated with DRV’s red flag and Hồ Chí Minh’s famous statement “Nothing is more precious than Independence and Freedom.” Nguyễn Thái Bình, the hero and soul of the leftist movement “walked onstage [of the University of Washington] for his diploma and took off his black graduation gown to reveal a demand to stop the war and free Vietnam, written in his blood.” After Binh’s assassination in July 2, 1972, a brigade named after him joined the Nisei Week Parade in Little Tokyo in Los Angeles to “hit hard against U.S. imperialism” and to “let the community know where we are coming from and what we stand for.”
Soon enough, the South Vietnamese government and their supporters also launched numerous counterattacks on the movement. As early as 1965, a delegation of five Vietnamese university students from Saigon was sponsored by the right-wing American Friends of Vietnam, Inc. to tour campuses in America, trying to “sell Saigon’s view of the Vietnam war to American collegiate critics.” Government-backed activists like Nguyen Ngoc Bich, a graduate student at Columbia University and a representative for RVN Embassy in the U.S., enthusiastically participated in campaigns that supported American engagement in Vietnam. He also wrote articles characterizing Northerners as historical aggressors and oppressors of the South. Despite many efforts made, the counterattacks were often unsuccessful. At Berkeley, for instance, after “repeated efforts” to meet with student critics, the student delegation was told that American students “just don’t have time for such meetings.” At Columbia, although they had an audience of “several hundred,” the targeted audience of the Committee to End the War in Vietnam set no meeting with them. Nguyen Ngoc Bich also faced tremendous hostility from his audience as seen in the food thrown at him, the harassment, and accusations [from American parents] of “allowing their sons to die in Vietnam.”

Retaliation and terrorism were also commonly used by the RVN to confront and repress student activists. In June 1972, President Nguyen Van Thieu requested an immediate termination of the studies and repatriation of seven Vietnamese students under the auspices of A.I.D. as a consequence of their political activity in the U.S. Although their orders of termination were later revoked and they were allowed to complete their programs, the students’ appeals for political asylum due to the threat of being killed by Nguyen Van Thiệu upon their arrival in South Vietnam were denied and one of them, Nguyen Thai Binh, was brutally murdered.
The End of the Vietnam War and a Diaspora of Vietnamese Intellectuals in the U.S.

As early as the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a modest number of Indochinese began going to the U.S. However, they were sojourners working at low-paying jobs rather than immigrants. The most famous sojourner at that time was Hồ Chí Minh—the future President of Vietnam—who came to America in 1911. Known as Ba, he lived in New York and Boston until 1913, working mostly as a baker for the Ommi Parker House in Boston before traveling to London for work where he became “one of the first Vietnamese migrant workers” in the U.K. In the U.S., before 1949 there is no record of Vietnamese either being granted permanent resident status in the U.S. or naturalized by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

The absence of Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. during this period resulted from both French colonial rule, which limited Indochinese emigration to other Western countries, and the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 that excluded all “Orientals,” except for Pilipino and Hawaiian workers, to migrate to the country. According to U.S. Office of Immigration Statistics, the first immigrants who claimed Vietnam as their country of last residence were granted green cards in 1950, and by 1959, 290 immigrants were also awarded permanent residency. This number increased tenfold during the course of the next decade, constituting a total number of 2,949 immigrants from Vietnam with permanent resident status in the country. While it is obvious that the majority of these were not Vietnamese citizens, these figures confirm the increasing use of Vietnam as a convenient passage to America after the collapse of French colonial rule in Indochina.

Toward the end of the Vietnam War, even though the number of Vietnamese going to America increased sharply from 200 in the 1952-1959 period to 15,000 in 1970-1974, the INS
reported only 650 arrived on immigrant visas. Nonetheless, the Vietnamese intellectual community had put roots in the country even before the war ended. They were either intellectuals migrating for professional advancement and political dissent or students fearing an unstable future in their war-torn country and trying to stay back. This community had diverse emigration backgrounds, including political dissidents such as Hoàng Văn Chí, a dissident of both Hồ Chí Minh and Ngô Đình Diệm’s governments who migrated to America from France in 1965; Nhu Phong, an important scholar and a political prisoner under Diem; Trương Bửu Lâm, a professor at the History Department of the University of Hawaii at Manoa; and Nguyễn Đình Hòa, a professor at Southern Illinois University. A larger number of former American-trained students for whom Pham coins the term the “silent refugees” also formed part of the migration. Although they comprised a small number, their role was vital to the establishment of a professional community of scholars as they were the first to introduce in the U.S. Vietnamese studies that was not shaped by Western perspectives but by the voice of native scholars.

Đổi mới and Educational Channels to the West: The New Vietnamese Intellectuals

The end of the Vietnam War profoundly influenced Vietnamese students and scholars in the U.S. in different ways. On the one hand, it ruptured the flow of Vietnamese students and scholars to America through exchange programs. On the other, it created a significant population of intellectuals. Vietnamese intellectuals and students who had come to the U.S. during the war became stateless when South Vietnam was unified into the North. Similar to thousands of Chinese students who became stranded after 1949, they opted to stay in the host country. Many professionals and scholars who were evacuated in April 1975 also came to the U.S. Other intellectual refugees who tried to escape Vietnam as boatpeople in the years to come also added
to this pool of intellectuals. On the U.S. side, the post-war strategy of evacuating Vietnamese with intellectual capital was well-planned. For example, two weeks before the fall of Saigon, U.S. Embassy personnel announced their intention to bring most of the professors of the Saigon Medical University to America. \(^{133}\) Although many evacuees, including the professionals, wanted to return to Vietnam after Saigon fell, they were often persuaded by U.S. anti-communist propaganda and American refugee camp officers, warning them a “bloodbath” in Vietnam would occur sooner or later. \(^{134}\) Being highly valuable assets to the host country, professional refugees of the 1979 wave were also certainly prioritized in the working agenda of Jimmy Carter’s 1980 Refugee Act.

After the war ended, Vietnam had very limited access to Western education. From 1975 to 1979, there were only 200 Vietnamese students trained in non-communist countries, primarily the United Kingdom and France and mostly in language courses. However, disagreement on the war in Cambodia terminated this educational exchange in 1979. \(^{135}\) Vietnam largely relied on Soviet educational program until 1990.

The post-Đổi mới era signaled a significant change in Vietnam’s participation in Western educational exchange programs. Abuza reports that by 1990, Vietnam “had established official relations with 40 countries, seven NGOs, 10 international institutes, and many higher education schools and other organizations.” \(^ {136}\) By 1995 Vietnam had somewhat successfully solved the problems of higher education finance by securing US$40 million from the Official Development Assistance (ODA), US$20.5 million from the United Nations, and US$110 million from both World Bank and the Asian Development Bank for tertiary education. \(^ {137}\) A significant amount of these funding assistances was spent on education abroad. There were also internal struggles over the direction of Vietnam’s efforts to provide higher education to its citizens. The decision to
integrate Vietnam into the world’s economy suggested that the nation abandon or at least reduce its dependence on Soviet education. The demise of the Soviet Union which abruptly halted educational assistance and socioeconomic development projects had silenced the conservatives. In 1992, Article 43 of the State Constitution was amended to assert the need to expand “international exchanges and cooperation” with foreign countries in many fields, including education. In the same year, Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt issued a directive on foreign educational exchange, appointing several conditions under which Vietnamese students were eligible to study abroad. Born out of these crucial moments was a new generation of American-bound Vietnamese students and intellectuals, some of whom would later become U.S. residents and join the existing body of American intellectuals of Vietnamese descent.

The first and foremost program of educational exchange between the U.S. and Vietnam was the Fulbright Program, which returned to Vietnam in 1992. Instituted three years before the official rapprochement and the reopening of the U.S. embassy in Vietnam, the fellowship was an effort by the U.S. Congress to encourage the Clinton cabinet to reconcile with Vietnam. Although the stated objectives of the program were to foster Vietnam’s strength in economics, international law, and human rights, and the competition process and applicants’ quality based on scholarly merits and the potential contribution to Vietnam’s development, it is clear that long-term political change was a priority. A considerable number of the first generation of Fulbright grantees during the 1990s were key figures nominated by Vietnam and hand-picked by the U.S. Among them were Nguyễn Thiện Nhân, the future Prime Minister of Vietnam who attended a master’s program of Public Policy at the University of Oregon in 1993 and Phạm Bình Minh, the future Foreign Minister who came to study Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in 1992. The 300,000 dollars allocated for Vietnamese Fulbright students in 1992 became 2.5 million
dollars in 2011. This budget includes a variety of operations and programs to foster the educational link between the two countries. Programs and activities can be both degree-granting and non-degree-granting and also based on mutual exchange.

The Fulbright program in Vietnam now hosts six different sections, including the U.S. Fulbright Program, Vietnamese Fulbright Scholar Program, the U.S. Fulbright Student Program, the Fulbright Vietnamese Student Program, English Teaching Assistantship Program (ETA), Fulbright Specialist Program (FSP), and a Fulbright Economics Teaching Program in Hồ Chí Minh City co-taught by both the Hồ Chí Minh University of Economics and Harvard Kennedy School granting master’s degrees in Public Policy. Every year around one hundred Vietnamese scholars and students come to the U.S. for different types of training and dozens of American scholars, specialists, and students go to Vietnam to teach, research, and study.

Another important milestone in U.S.-Vietnam educational exchange history is the establishment of the Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF), a scholarship-for-debt program that converts Vietnam’s war debt into educational exchange. Initiated by former U.S. President Bill Clinton, the project has been functioning on an annual budget of five million dollars since 2001 and will continue until 2018. As of November 2011, 157 fellows (of all 378 intended grantees) have finished their training programs. Unlike the Fulbright fellowship, which only sponsors master’s degree programs with a focus on governmental management, business, law, and policy-making, VEF concentrates on doctoral degree candidates in the fields of science and technology.

But the U.S. government is not the main, let alone the sole, sponsor of Vietnamese students to the U.S. Other institutions offering opportunities for Vietnamese students and scholars include non-governmental organizations such as the Ford Foundation and university-to-
university programs. The government of Vietnam also has its own billion-dollar fund to train technocrats and governmental managers abroad, especially in the U.S. The costly Educational Project 322 is a good example. During the course of ten years and a budget of 2.500 billion Vietnam đòng (approximately US$120 million), 1,074 PhD, 984 MA, 723 BA, and 233 technical degree holders graduated by 2011. A significant number of the students were returnees from the U.S. Beginning in the early 2000s, many giant state corporations and private companies also started sending employees and children of key cadres to America. As early as the 1990s, wealthy state-owned corporations such as the Vietnam Petroleum Corporation spent millions of dollars on both cadre training and the undergraduate education in America.

For most Vietnamese students, however, their families were the most important source of financial assistance. Many students had then found their way to the U.S. before the rapprochement and before any official financial support from either Vietnam or the U.S. governments. In 1992, in an interview with the *New York Times* correspondent, the director of the U.S.-Indochina Reconciliation Project Mr. John McAuliff confirmed that “the numbers of students coming here increased dramatically in 1991.” Within the crucial timeframe of 1992 and 1995, for example, there were 2,300 Vietnamese students studying abroad who used personal fund to pay for their education in America. In 1999, two American educational fairs in Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh city attracted a great number of attendees—5,000 in Hanoi and 7,000 in Hồ Chí Minh City. Interested young students, most of them were high-school and university students, “surged in, overflowing the exhibition area where school booths had been set up” right at the time the ribbon was cut. Of 14,888 Vietnamese students in America in 2010-2011, 74.2 percent (11,052 students) were undergraduates. Because funding agencies in Vietnam and abroad have always prioritized graduate study, most of these students were sponsored by their
families. The number of undergraduate students obtaining Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT) is also very high.

A New Generation of Vietnamese Intellectuals in the U.S.

During my research, I have encountered several scholars of the early generation of SRVN intellectuals who went to the U.S. on academic business and later opted to settle in the country. Two of my informants, Dr. Trần Đắc Phong and Dr. Đặng Nam, were among the first to settle in the U.S. Phong was holding an important position at a Vietnamese research center when he attended a physics conference in Japan in 1987 where he met some American scientists. Impressed by his research, they kept in touch with him and in 1989 he was invited to present his research in a conference in California. On being asked if he wished to extend his stay for a project, Phong agreed. After the six-month-project ended, Dr. Phong was granted a research position in a research university in California. In 1991, Dr. Phong successfully applied to the U.S. Embassy in Thailand to sponsor his family to join him in the U.S. Dr. Nam’s case is also similar. He was a professor at a prominent science-focused university in Vietnam. In 1986 he worked with an international mathematics team in Vietnam which had several members from the Democratic Republic of Germany. After the project ended in 1987, he was offered a research scholarship to the GDR, which he refused. To his surprise, sometime in 1989 he received a letter from one of his German colleagues saying that his relative, a professor from the Federal Republic of Germany, had a keen interest in his research field and would like to send him an invitation to a conference in America. Dr. Nam accepted the invitation and in summer 1989 he went to the U.S. under the sponsorship of a German academic fund. During his time in America, Dr. Nam successfully applied to work at a major university in Ohio. Nam returned to Vietnam
for one year and brought his family to America. Ms. Vân, the math instructor at the Ohio University, also went to America in 1994 before the opening of the U.S. embassy in Hanoi. A young graduate from a Vietnamese university, she followed her husband, who had already been a professor in Ohio since 1992, to America. Unfortunately, I was not able to talk with her husband because he recently resettled in Vietnam.

During the 1990s, students and scholars who benefited from official educational exchange programs rarely migrated to America. Few Fulbright students are known to settle down in the country after completing their program. The reasons are apparent. First, the first generation of Fulbright grantees were mostly mid-aged and were not allowed to bring their families with them. Until the 2000s when this policy was changed, the J1 visa required grantees to immediately leave the U.S. within a window of one month after the completion of their program. Without a family and restricted by visa timing, such scholars did not find the opportunity to stay. Second, many Vietnamese alumni at the time were either junior/senior governmental officials or important employees of either Vietnamese or international corporation who found it pointless to exchange their careers for an uncertain future in America. Third, the economic boom in Vietnam actually provided much better job opportunities and living standards for someone with a prestigious fellowship and desirable American degree. Fourth, because programs usually only offered funding for master’s degrees and many of them were for the fields of management or public policy, it was not easy for grantees to compete with their American counterparts (although a great number of Ford Foundation or Fulbright Fellowship entered Ivy League schools). Thus, apart from a few exceptions such as Vietnamese who were allowed to stay because of their marriages to American citizens, most Vietnamese graduates in the 1990s came home. The success of restraining Vietnamese intellectual flow to the U.S. was the result of Vietnamese and
U.S. government’s efforts that aimed at preventing a “brain drain” from “crimp[ing] the nascent bilateral relationship.”

The number of intellectuals trying to stay in the U.S. has increased since the 2000s. Those who came on F1 visas, either as undergraduates or graduates, have found employment and acquired residency permits. These students are free from any obligations. Besides, their young ages also give them more freedom to pursue careers in the host country. During this time, the Vietnamese government has also spent considerable funds on different overseas programs. However, because of lax overseas student management, there is no effective method to “force” graduates to return to Vietnam upon their graduation. Unlike the Fulbright Fellowship, other exchange programs such as VEF are more supportive and more “lenient” in providing graduates both considerable training time and valuable training resources. In an effort to better train post-graduate fellows as well as to create the ties between Vietnamese alumni and U.S. academic institutes and corporate sectors, VEF encourages and offers graduates a window of time to be trained in the U.S. after their academic programs. From 2003 to 2009, the Academic Training (AT) period offered by VEF was eighteen months for master’s degree holders and thirty-six months for doctoral degree holders. For grantees of 2010 and beyond, this window has been reduced to eighteen months for both sorts of degree holders. VEF also has helped AT fellows be hosted by seventy prestigious academic institutes or giant corporations, including General Motor, Google Inc., Johns Hopkins University, and Stanford University. For aspiring immigrants, AT policy renders possible both a great working experience and connections to the job market. Moreover, Vietnamese graduates with PhD degrees in either science or technology avoid the challenges that their fellows in humanities, social sciences, or business often have to
struggle with in order to settle in the U.S. such as the English fluency and/or a poor background of such programs in Vietnam.

Understandably, VEF did not give out any statistics of those who did not return to Vietnam after their stay of both education and training had expired. However, the reduction in the AT period for PhD fellows from thirty-six months to eighteen months in recent years is an indication that status-adjustment of students has become a concern. The same would be applicable to all other Vietnamese intellectual immigrants with different modes of emigration. In the year 2010, the total number of Vietnamese temporary workers and their families was 1,487, of which the number of workers in specialty occupations granted H1B visa was 607.\footnote{153} Compared to other countries such as Taiwan (8,806 H1B visa issued) or the United Kingdom (17,099 H1B visa issued),\footnote{154} this number might look small. However, consider a short period of time from the U.S.-Vietnam normalization to present, that number signals a new wave of professional immigration. The number of 253 Vietnamese obtaining permanent residency in 2010 through employment-based preference\footnote{155} well buttresses this theory. Because most Vietnamese professionals obtain “green cards” through occupational channels of academic institutes and technological corporations, the migration of some of the finest minds of the country to the U.S. is not surprising.

The “new wave” of intellectual émigrés, thus, is comprised of scholars who had several different modes of entering the U.S. In my study, apart from the aforementioned 1980s and 1990s group, I have worked closely with two immigrants who came to the U.S. as undergraduate students, eight immigrants who used to be either “freelance” or scholarship-sponsored graduate students, and three scholars and scientists who settled down in the U.S. after working in several foreign countries. Several others, mostly wives of other informants, have university degrees but
have not enrolled in any American university nor have they held stable jobs. All these informants have either permanent residency or citizenship.

**Figure 5.** The “American dream”: intellectual immigrants of the younger generation.

Nguyễn Đình Hải and Phạm Tú Oanh, who married in Oklahoma, came to the US as undergraduate students. The son and the daughter of two mid-ranking officials of the state-owned Vietnam Petroleum Corporation, they were sent to the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma in 2000 under the sponsorship of their parents’ company. After completing their program in 2004, both of them continued their graduate work at the University of Toledo, Ohio. Hải graduated in 2009 with a PhD in Mechanical Engineering and landed a job at one of the University of Minnesota’s campuses. Oanh has been working at graduate school for a PhD in Economics at the University of Toledo since 2004. Hải recently was offered a faculty position at one campus of the California State University system, which he accepted.

The majority of my informants are those who have acquired their undergraduate education elsewhere before going to the U.S. for graduate programs. Apart from Thương, Dương, Hà, and Ngọc, whom I have introduced previously, the three others also came for either
masters or doctoral degrees. Dr. Trần Thị Thanh, the former English teacher in Long An that I mentioned in Chapter 1, went to Bowling Green State University to get a PhD in Rhetoric Writing in 2002 under the sponsorship of a Mennonite group in Ohio. Before pursuing her PhD, Thanh already had an MA degree in TESOL from an Australian university. In 2006, she graduated and married an American. In 2011, however, both Dr. Thanh and her husband went back to Vietnam and settled down permanently in her hometown. Another informant, Văn, got her undergraduate degree at Ohio University, Ohio in 1999 although she did graduate from a Vietnamese university in 1994. She continued to pursue a Master’s degree in Mathematics and since then has been a math instructor at the school. Another informant, Nguyễn Minh Đức, went to pursue a Master’s degree at Arkansas State University in 2001 and ended up also taking a PhD degree in Civil Engineering in 2005. Before coming to the U.S., he was a student of Hanoi University of Civil Engineering. Dr. Đức has been a researcher at an Asphalt Technology research center at a university in Alabama since 2007. The last informant, Dr. Lê Tính, was a college instructor in Hanoi before he came to New York University to do another MBA in 2001 under a government scholarship. Dr. Tính returned home for two years before making the second trip to New York City College for a PhD in Economics. Upon his graduation in 2008, he was offered a job at a university in Boston and has settled there now.

Three professors—Bắc, Hưng, and Hoàng Mạnh Tiến—came to America during the 2000s with doctoral degrees from another country. Except for Bắc, the other two did not do another PhD in America. Hưng was a professor at Kuwait University from 1995 to 2003 before he accepted the position of Distinguished Chair at the Georgia University. The last informant, Dr. Tiến, attended Hanoi University of Technology from where he graduated with a BA degree in Computer Science in 2000. The next year, Tiến came to Canada, pursuing first a Master’s degree
then a PhD degree in that field. In 2005, he graduated and found a job at a Canadian university. In 2009, he migrated to America and began teaching at a university in Ohio. Like many other young intellectuals going to America in the 2000s, Tiến relied on financial aid for his graduate education rather than a government scholarship.

If the first generation of scholars (of the 1980s and the 1990s) left Vietnam intentionally, the next generation usually arrived in the U.S. and settled here under some unexpected circumstances. To many, America was not the “promised land” to which they aspired to come. Both Hải and Oanh assured me that they in fact neither wanted to nor opted to go to America first. Both of them were admitted to prestigious schools in Vietnam and the idea of going to America was not very attractive. For Hải, that scholarship gave him “a chance to go abroad and study and just because [he] was curious about going abroad for another opportunity to travel, to know more things, not necessary because [he] knew if [he] had [a] degree from US [he] would have [a] better life or better career.”¹⁵⁶ Oanh also said that the decision to go to America, from applying for the scholarship to choosing an undergraduate major, was her mother’s, not hers. “For me, there was not many different (sic) between going to America and studying in Vietnam. I actually didn’t want to go. I didn’t really ‘grasp’ the opportunity or thought that America was wonderful or a ‘gold mine’ or something ‘extraordinary.’”¹⁵⁷ Similarly, Thượng told me that she went for a master’s degree at Western Kentucky University not because of its academic quality or her curiosity. It was just a free education and a chance to get out of her family for a while and it was also a chance for her to fulfill her father’s wish. Even Dr. Bắc did not think of America as the land where he would settle down. The reason he first wanted to study at Ohio University was simply. “Because my English was poor and I wanted to study English in America for one year before going back home. An English certificate and English efficiency would be very valuable in
Vietnam.” Dr. Hưng migrated to America from Kuwait simply because the Second Gulf War had turned the Middle East into a dangerous and unstable area and he had the offer from one of his college classmates who was teaching at that university.

The flexibility and feasibility of U.S. higher education also played an important part in Vietnamese intellectuals’ decision to come to the U.S. Even though American college education is costly and few scholarships are offered to international students, U.S. higher education provides the opportunity for advanced studies for those who are capable and “bona fide” with sufficient financial resources. Having experienced the difficulties of continuing the post-graduate academic path in Vietnam and the rigidity and bureaucracy of Vietnamese education, many Vietnamese students and intellectuals happily embraced the generous financial aid offered for advanced study in their fields. Besides, as scholars of exceptional potential, American graduate programs—especially in mathematics and science—did not pose serious challenges to talented students. Dr. Lê Tính said that after his MBA from New York University and his teaching and working experience in Vietnam, the PhD program in Economics was “not much a difficult test.” Oanh said that she did her double majors in Energy Management and Finance “without much effort” and the reason she went for a PhD because after one year of internship and an MBA, she found it “very easy to apply for a PhD financial aid.” It is even much easier for those in Mathematics since they were well-trained in a mathematics-oriented Vietnamese educational system and European universities. Dr. Bắc said after decades of rigorous training in “neck-hanging” institutes in Vietnam and Europe and a PhD degree in Mathematics from Germany, the PhD program in Ohio University was “just fun.” Thương, who intended to stay only for a master’s degree in Math ended up enrolling in a PhD program because she wanted to bring her
husband to the U.S. and share with him “the great opportunity to have a free graduate degree.”

She reasoned:

I am 100% sure that the academic pursuit here is financially easier than in many countries, especially in Vietnam. Especially to bona fide learners, financial aid is very available. Meanwhile in Vietnam, as you know, the concept of financial aid does not exist. If I want to pursue a PhD degree in Vietnam I will surely have to take it part-time. I will have to work for a living while studying or I will have to live on my parents for five or six more years in order to focus better on my program. I don’t think I want to do that. Obviously, in Vietnam no one will pay you to study. In here they pay us just to study.

In the same vein, Oanh told me:

If I didn’t go to America I wouldn’t apply for graduate study. America offers chances and encourages people to go for PhDs. It is extremely hard in Vietnam. Here if you are hard working and you really like to study, they have a lot of scholarships available and that is the key point for anyone who wants to pursue an education. It’s hard to keep your normal life and pay for tuition. But in Vietnam most people think that after [the] undergraduate [degree] that’s enough and [you] just have to work.158

Unlike the 1975 and 1979 refugee intellectuals, Vietnamese politics and economy are not the impetus for the new wave of immigrant intellectuals. The reasons for their immigration to the U.S. might be slightly different from one another, but in general most of my informants pointed to the disadvantages of Vietnam’s higher education. They mainly identified the lack of or inadequate facilitation for research and the insufficient investment by the government in the subjects they majored in. Hải said even though money would not be a problem for him in
Vietnam, he stayed in America “in order to live a meaningful life and actually do what I want to do”:

So if now I return to Vietnam I couldn’t do much for the society because the facilities are limited in Vietnam. The community of researchers they don’t have in Vietnam. While if I stay here, I have those accesses. I can enhance my knowledge, my communication, and my education as well. And my ability to actually do something new. So I don’t want to stay here to make money but to maximize my potential as a researcher and an educator.¹⁵⁹

His wife, Oanh, who affirmed the “working environment [to be] the most important thing,” noted:

At this moment, I tend to think I would like to stay because with a PhD degree going back they don’t really care much about us that much […] Lots of my friends who find themselves in that situation with PhD degrees going back home and they have very bad experience about people don’t care about what they have. It’s Ok if their family has connection. Otherwise you have to think, you go home after that much time of study and you have that kind of knowledge but nobody really cares about your knowledge.¹⁶⁰

Similarly, Thương answered that question twice, both before and after she found a job at an American university. And after two years, her answer remained almost the same:

My major and my degree can easily land me a job in Vietnam. At my father’s department (the Mathematics Department of National Economics University) I would be more than welcome. But in these days, young professors tend to spend time on making money. They teach everywhere. They make very good money but then that sort of hard work take [s] too much time and effort. It is impossible to become a true researcher with that lifestyle
and environment. I think I can use my knowledge in a Vietnamese university. But only partially, not everything can be made use of.

Because neither Hải nor Thượng nor Oanh had worked in Vietnam, I checked with the older generation who actually had experience working in Vietnam to see if they shared these observations. Dr. Ngọc said:

I have worked in the field of public policy in Vietnam so I really want to do something for the country. But in the situation right now in Vietnam, it is very difficult to do something really helpful there. Why? Because there are so many excellent minds in Vietnam and so far they have been able to do much. I do hope when the time comes and they [the government leaders] really want a real change I will be able to bring my research and my knowledge to help. But at this moment, I can do better for Vietnam by offering consultancy to the needed parties and bringing students from Vietnam to study here. Coming home now doesn’t benefit either me or the [Vietnamese] society.

Dr. Hưng, who had served for four years in Vietnam’s National Mathematics Institute and taught for nine years at Kuwait University, said that his academic position in America offered him much less than his former positions:

My friends in Vietnam are all very successful and prosperous (thành công and thành đạt). If I stayed in Vietnam, I would be successful and prosperous too. It’s only because I think my expertise is more desired in America, not because of money or power. If it is power and money, then the U.S. is a wrong place for me. However, I am doing what I feel very comfortable doing and living a worry-free life here. I don’t have to be concerned about taking bribe money from my students or doing demeaning things.
Because most new Vietnamese professional immigrants appreciate the chances of career development and professional advancement in the U.S. rather than the demand of economic necessities, they only accept jobs that are worthy and equivalent to their training and expertise. Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbault argue that professional immigrants “tend to enter at the bottom of their respective occupational ladders and to progress from there” although they “seldom accept menial jobs.”161 This notion is not pertinent in the case of the 21st century Vietnamese professional immigrants. All of my informants, except for those who actually came with F2 or J2 dependent visas and stay in the U.S. for their spouse’s career rather than theirs, made it clear that they would not settle down in America with a less prestigious job. All of them started their careers in either academia or the corporate world with meritorious and respectable positions. Exceptional scientists like Dr. Nam, Dr. Phong, and Dr. Hưng were appointed as full professors when they arrived at their universities. Dr. Hưng only migrated to America on the condition that he was given the highest position in his field at the university and guaranteed quick processing of permanent residency for his family. Like Dr. Bác, all of them successfully obtained an employment-based “green card” without Labor Certification (the First Preference Category reserved for Outstanding Researcher/Professor with Petition Form I-140). Younger intellectuals also only applied for the position of assistant professor at well-ranked universities. As I was told, their determination of “go big or go home” often concurs with their supervisors. Dr. Thương actually said that her advisor swore not to write recommendation letters to community colleges for her and she herself had not considered applying there.

Thus, social privileges, class statuses, and educational elitism play a crucial role in the making of the new Vietnamese intellectual community in the U.S. Political power and economic conditions have always been ensuring elite Vietnamese the best possible education, most
successful career, and the easiest and shortest path to immigration. Although the Confucian-style university entrance examination is open to all candidates, including children of the poor and minorities, wealthy and powerful families have found new ways to obtain a good education for their children by sending them to international universities either in Vietnam or abroad. The Saigon Institute of Technology where I used to teach is considered to be a transitional college to American universities. Taking into consideration its general tuition of roughly US$15,000 plus an equivalent amount of living expense in Hồ Chí Minh City, it is obvious that most Vietnamese students cannot afford an American education even when it is “on Vietnamese soil” as the school boasts. Certainly, for not-so-well-to-do undergraduate students, going to America without full financial assistance is impossible.

Because most Vietnamese live in rural areas where the quality of education is much inferior to those in urban areas, English language—the vital means to bridge their Vietnamese education to an American education—is poorly taught, if it is taught at all. This leads to the dominance of urbanites in all pools of scholarships. Although international sponsors always attempt to recruit more students from less privileged communities, the task so far seems impossible. The Fulbright Scholarship is one example. Being placed directly under the management of the American Committee of Learned Societies (ACLS) and the executive board of the Institute of International Education (IIE), the fellowship encourages competitors with minority backgrounds and from underprivileged areas of residency to apply. The effort rarely pays off. In the list of more than 400 alumni from 1992 to 2009, with some exceptions of Chinese Vietnamese, no non-Kinh ethnic name is spotted.

Similarly, grantees from Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City overwhelmingly dominate the alumni. Of the total sixty-one provinces and cities of the country, only fourteen have candidates
selected for the scholarship in which finalists from Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City account for the majority of the list of grantees. Until now, after twenty years of the Fulbright Program in Vietnam, Vinh University—the academic center of the whole area —claims to have only two teachers selected as finalists. Of the twenty-six fellows of 2003, only five were not residents of Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City; one came from Can Tho, two from Da Nang, one from Nghe An, and one from Lam Dong. The same problem happens to the VEF: until 2012, 58 percent of its grantees have come from the North (mainly Hanoi). Although the representatives of the fellowships claim they have “made a strong effort to achieve equal representation of fellows throughout the country,” the result indicates clearly that candidates from underdeveloped areas are often disqualified if they apply at all. The statistics are revealing of the disadvantages faced by rural and minority students when we take into account Vietnam has sixty-one provinces and major cities.

The geographic and social stratifications are clearly shown in my informants’ family backgrounds. None of the younger generation professional informants in my project comes from provinces or small cities. Most of them are tied to either political power or a wealthy background in Vietnam. Many of them have parents who were educated in Russia and other foreign countries. Oanh’s parents were educated in Poland, Ngọc and Hàis’ fathers were educated in Russia, Thương’s father acquired both Russian and French education, Tiến’s father got his education from Germany while his mother got hers from Hungary. Tính’s father received his degrees from Ukraine. Because this elite socialist-educated generation often held prestigious (which also means lucrative) positions in government or universities, the tradition of social privileges and educational elitism is maintained. When asked if their family backgrounds and
their resident privileges have greatly influenced their education and immigration, everyone concurred. Here are the responses I had from two of my privileged informants.

An: With your family background in Vietnam, do you think you belong to this small number of privileged and elite Vietnamese youngsters that your family gives you more than you make?

Hải: Yes, I think so. As I mentioned I got scholarship from my Dad’s company, so that means my dad had an upper managerial position in the company and the company is one of the biggest companies in the nation so that puts my family in upper middle-class in term of social statuses compared to the others and at the same time of the whole country which was not very rich at that time. So the privilege I have from my Dad’s status gives me better chances to obtained better scholarship and better educational opportunity compared to other students.¹⁶⁴

Thương: I think I belong to the elite class, especially when considering the great educational opportunity I was given in Vietnam[…] My success is mostly granted by my family, from financial support to future orientation. If I was born in a small town or provincial family without those privileges I am certainly not as successful as I am right now. I do try myself all the time, but to be fair I don’t think I could study abroad if born and nurtured in a more difficult situation. I probably went to college but I surely wouldn’t go higher. [laughter]

Vietnamese often cite an old poem that bitterly satires the social elite heritage and power transitionalism of feudalism: “Con vua thì lại làm vua; Con sứi ở chùa lại quyết là đa” (The son of a king will eventually be crowned; the son of a watchman in a Buddhist temple will continue to sweep fallen banyan leaves). Interestingly, today the poem still resonates among Vietnamese
at home and abroad. Social and political elitism have always shaped Vietnam’s internal social class hierarchy but now also extend to Vietnamese diasporic privileges.

Conclusion

For more than a hundred years, Vietnamese intellectual diasporas have always been a part of the country’s history of dependence on foreign countries, be it French colonial or postcolonial ties, the Russian economic and military bondages, or the American globalizing orbit. Intellectual emigration (or brain drain) created by the histories of empire and nation, while weakening Vietnam’s internal force, generates and nurtures a diversity of Vietnamese culture all over the world. The role of Vietnamese intellectual communities in the making of Vietnamese diasporas, although often overlooked by most scholars in the field of overseas Vietnamese studies, has always been crucial. Since the early stage of the major Vietnamese community settlement in the U.S., Nguyen Manh Hung has raised the question of how the refugee intellectual community of Vietnamese scholars could contribute to the formation of Vietnamese studies in the U.S. One of his main arguments is that “it is likely that Vietnamese American Studies will be an outgrowth of studies on Vietnam rather than as a product of Asian American Studies” 165 Later generations of scholars may argue conversely that Asian American Studies is too broad a term166 and thus Vietnamese American Studies should diverge from the giant body of Asian Studies. By charting the history of Vietnamese intellectual diaspora and exploring the significant characteristics of different genealogies of Vietnamese intellectual immigrations, my study argues no studies of a specific group of [intellectual] Vietnamese living abroad could be thoroughly understood without being articulated in the context of the intellectual history of Vietnam and of different Vietnamese immigrations of intellectuals.
Unlike the narrative that many writers have taken for granted, Vietnamese intellectuals, although often subversive and rebellious, are far from simple victims of communist oppression. They are in fact most noteworthy for their nationalism, anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. Even within the heartland of anti-communist Vietnamese community in the U.S., scholars and scientists are closely tied to Vietnam. Many eminent scholars have also declared their disapproval of the Vietnamese American anti-communist community. In 2004, a group of well-known contemporary Vietnamese American scholars and professors signed the Azine statement, denouncing allegiance with radical, politicized Vietnamese Americans by declaring:

Non-Vietnamese-Americans, and even many Vietnamese-Americans, may think that the Vietnamese-American community is united behind such an act [of anti-communism]. This is not so. Many Vietnamese Americans have no wish to continue the fight against communism, but are very reluctant to say so, since an extremist element in the Vietnamese-American community resorts to protests, shouting and even violence to quell such disagreement….Many of us have long started redefining our relationship with Vietnam through our work, travels, commerce and social connection.  

The formation of a new Vietnamese intellectual immigration pattern to the U.S., although still in its infancy, complicates the Vietnamese diaspora in the country. Together with tens of thousands of Vietnamese immigrating to the U.S. every year in the last decades, they create a very diverse and interesting generation of Vietnamese Americans in the new millennium. While they share many things in common, each group has its own history and cultural characteristics that both converge and diverge from each other and from the older Vietnamese immigrant communities.
CHAPTER III
YOUNG CUBS IN A NEW JUNGLE: VIETNAMESE ENTREPRENEURIAL IMMIGRANTS IN AMERICA

Doạn trường ai có qua cầu mới hay
(Suffering is known only by those who have suffered)
Nguyễn Du (Truyện Kiều/The Tale of Kieu)

Entrepreneurial Émigrés: Three Stories
Trương Văn Hồng and Nguyễn Thị Na

Mr. Trương Văn Hồng’s family emigrated from Nha Trang City in January, 2010. Upon their arrival, they resettled in Greater Boston, Massachusetts and remained in a working-class neighborhood in Quincy. The family has four members: Hồng, the father, aged fifty; Nguyễn Thị Na, the wife, aged forty-five; the two sons, Huy, twenty-four, and Phan, sixteen. The family and Na’s brother’s family of five were brought to the U.S. at the same time by Na’s father. Na’s oldest sister’s family had escaped Vietnam in 1980 as boatpeople and were able to sponsor the youngest sister in 1990. In 1995, Na’s parents also came to the United States, and in 2010 they sponsored the nine members of their daughter’s and son’s families. Hồng’s family, including an aging mother, two brothers, and a sister, all lived in Vietnam.

Hồng and Na married in 1987. Their first son, Huy, was born in 1989. In 1990, Hồng and some of his engineer friends founded a small company, working as a sub-contractor for Vietnam’s state corporation Vinashin and the Korean Hyundai joint-venture in the shipyard industry. Na stayed home to help her parents run an electronic appliance shop in Nha Trang until
1991 when she started her own shop. When Na’s parents migrated to the U.S. in 1995, she inherited their fast-growing business in Nha Trang. A very diligent and smart businesswoman, Na accumulated enough capital to expand her business to the blossoming aquacultural business. From 2000 to 2005, she invested hundreds of thousands of U.S. dollars into lobster sharecropping, generating approximately US$30,000 in annual revenue. She also multiplied her capital in real estate investment when Vietnam’s real estate market suddenly crashed in 2006. In their heyday, they employed twelve people in their multiple businesses.

By 2008, their businesses began showing some worrisome signs. In the business of electronic appliances, mushrooming international and domestic retail corporations in urban Vietnam put many traditional local shops out of business. After several protracted failures in aquatic production, Hồng and Na sold their farms. However, they continued to own some home appliance shops.

In 2009, both Hồng’s family and his brother’s family received notifications from the U.S. Consulate General in Hồ Chí Minh City approving their applications for U.S. immigration under the family-based visa. Being middle-class and deeply rooted in Vietnam, they were reluctant to leave the city they had grown up in and the lifestyle with which they were acquainted to face an uncertain beginning in a new and distant country. However, they finally decided to emigrate.

Disaster soon struck upon their arrival in Boston when Na’s brother died of some protracted diseases in the second week of his emigration. A veteran of the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) who fought in the Vietnamese-Cambodian War, he was survived by his wife and three children, all of whom were now jobless. His oldest son, also a PAVN veteran, later suffered serious mental illness and was taken back to Vietnam for medical and mental treatment.
in April 2012. Both families lived with Na’s oldest sister’s family for one year until tensions arose and became irreconcilable. Then, Na’s family moved to Na’s younger sister’s house only to find out that daily conflicts again jeopardized their relationship. After six months the family decided to rent their own place in Germantown, Quincy.

Huy waited for six months for the finalization of his in-state status before enrolling in college. Like most Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. who do not qualify for professions due to the lack of an appropriate degree and social networks, he and his mother worked seasonal jobs and enrolled in a manicure school at the same time. After receiving her manicure certificate, Na began working for several local nail shops. Huy finally enrolled in Bunker Hill Community College, the mecca of many young Vietnamese immigrants in Boston, while working for a local Wendy’s fast-food restaurant. Hồng attended some English courses for new immigrants in town and drifted between menial seasonal jobs. Because they worked many jobs with different time schedules, family members rarely saw each other. When the “American dream” was mentioned, Hồng philosophized: “Before going to America, I thought America was a paradise. When I first saw America, America was no paradise. After one month living in America, I knew America had never ever been a paradise.”

I met Huy in 2008 at the Saigon Institute of Technology. Six months after my departure for the U.S., his family emigrated. Since then, Huy and I have maintained a very close relationship through phone calls. In winter 2011, Huy and two of his cousins came to visit me in Bowling Green. In November 2012, he returned with another cousin. I interviewed both of his cousins at my place. I also interviewed all four members of his family in Boston in April 2012.
Nguyễn Thị Yến Ly and Trần Việt Hoàng

Forty-six-year-old Nguyễn Thị Yến Ly and her husband, Trần Việt Hoàng, fifty, brought their two college-aged children, Thi and Dũng, to America in 2009. Prior to their emigration, the family lived in District 1, Hồ Chí Minh City. Ms. Ly was born into a family with no significant political background, but her husband was the son of a former Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) colonel. Ly graduated in 1986 from the Central College of Preschool Education at Hồ Chí Minh City. She taught at a primary school in Hồ Chí Minh City for one year before leaving the job to get married to Hoàng, who was then a young manager of an aqua-production company in Phan Thiết province. In 1990 they moved to Hồ Chí Minh City to start their own business. As the only family members who stayed behind when other relatives had left for the U.S, they were finally sponsored by Hoàng’s mother to emigrate to the U.S.

Ms. Ly and Mr. Hoàng did not have many complaints about their life in Vietnam. Although postwar commercial restrictions and a collectivized economy caused a decade of economic devastation, their families managed to offer them a college education and an adequate lifestyle. In Hồ Chí Minh City, Hoàng’s mother ran their underground rubber workshop, manufacturing and distributing the then-needed bicycle and motorcycle tires and tubes for the local market. In Phan Thiết, Ly’s family worked for a local collective fishing company. Hoàng’s father died in a re-education camp in the early 1980s. His incarceration and death later qualified his widow and five children for immigration to the U.S. under the Humanitarian Operation program in 1990. Hoàng, being married at the time, stayed in Vietnam with his wife.

In Hồ Chí Minh City, their business advanced steadily. Within ten years, Hoàng and Ly transformed a small home appliance kiosk in a local market into a wholesale company. Prior to their departure, the family-run company supplied home appliances and interior decoration...
merchandise nationwide. The company had outlets in a dozen provinces and cities and hired scores of employees. They also invested in real estate which was worth somewhere in the neighborhood of a million dollars. Their two children were sent to a private college. Although they were not “super rich,” Ly and Hoàng testified that they “belonged to the upper middle-class” in Vietnam.

Two months after their arrival in the U.S., in February 2010, they bought a $350,000 townhouse in the city of Westminster. Living in the heartland of the Vietnamese American community, the current economic recession and new culture took them by surprise. Like most Vietnamese female immigrants, Ly took a manicure training course. However, she chose first to babysit instead of becoming a manicurist because of her distaste for the trade. But after two weeks she decided to drop the job because “even for such a low-paying job, at least three or four people competed unhealthily.” Finally, after one year of staying unemployed, she reluctantly joined the Vietnamese nail technician community. Hoàng was not much luckier. After seven months looking for a job with countless rejections, he finally worked as a janitor at a local Vietnamese bakery. Although they were still financially stable thanks to the assets they brought with from Vietnam, both the current income and job types were clearly not what they expected.

Their two children enrolled in the local Golden West Community College, a traditional mecca for new Vietnamese immigrants in the area. The children seemed to assimilate well into the new environment and enjoyed their new lives in America. Their relationship with their relatives, including the grandmother, aunts, and cousins, however, turned sour over some money dispute. Thi told me that apart from her father, no one in the family had contacted their relatives for a year. Both parents told me that when the children graduated from college and found jobs, they would go back to Vietnam.
Thi was my former student and also my deputy at SaigonTech’s Student Union from 2007 to 2009. In June 2012, I interviewed all four members of the family at their home in Westminster.

Trần Văn Sanh

Thirty-four-year-old Trần Văn Sanh is from Cần Thơ City in Mekong Delta and has been living in California for two years. I was introduced to Sanh by one of my former students who was his classmate at Golden West Community College. In June 2012, I interviewed him in my hotel room in Garden Grove. The youngest child and the only son of a family of three children, his father died when he was eight. An uncle on his mother’s side braved the deadly sea route to the Philippines and was accepted to immigrate to America in 1980. Ten years later, he sponsored most of his family members to join him in his adopted land. Some paperwork issues postponed Sanh’s mother’s emigration until 2000. At that time, Sanh’s two older sisters had married, and he was already over 21 years old, which forfeited them from emigrating to the U.S. Because there was no one to take care of the aging and sick grandmother in America, his mother reluctantly left her children for America.

Sanh graduated from Cần Thơ University in 2000 and started working for the local Commercial Technology Department. In 2009, after receiving a certificate from the Fulbright Program of Public Policy training in Hồ Chí Minh City, Sanh moved and started to work for some state-owned offshore oil-rigs in Vũng Tàu. A young bachelor with the salary of US$700 per month, Sanh led an enjoyable life in the beautiful beach city. Sanh told me he emigrated because his mother was alone in America after his grandmother died and also because he wanted to “try a new opportunity.” “I knew well before leaving that life was tough here. I didn’t have
high hope about America so I was not too devastated.” He also said that his being a bachelor made it easier for him to leave for a new land.

Upon his arrival, Sanh was jobless for six months. He stayed with his mother in one of his uncle’s houses in Little Saigon. His mother was paid a small amount of money by the state of California to take care of his grandmother. After the grandmother passed away in 2006, she was supported by her brothers and a modest welfare check of $150 a month. Sanh later moved to Los Angeles where he lived with another uncle and took up nail-care training. He remained there until 2011, working at a nail salon for six months, when he finally qualified to enroll in Golden West Community College. Sang told me he would return to Vietnam after getting a university degree in America.

The above stories provide glimpses of the lives of a group of entrepreneurial and white-collar Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. Because their migratory luggage includes both social capital and human capital, their migrancy significantly differs from other Vietnamese refugees and immigrants. Unlike many previous compatriots, they came to the U.S. particularly to reunite with their family members and to seize intellectual and occupational opportunities for their children rather than for political repression/persecution or personal economic necessity. Unlike professional migrants, they possessed a considerable amount of liquid assets accumulated after decades of working in an increasingly capitalized and globalized Vietnam; and the human capital they brought to the U.S. was business experience. In contemporary migration theories, they are defined both as “tied movers” (those who migrate primarily to live with their family members) and as “economic migrants” (whose decisions to emigrate are made with the hopes of better educational, occupational, and economic opportunities for their children).
Based on the historical transformations of Vietnam’s socioeconomy and the lived experiences of my informants, this chapter charts the long journey of Vietnamese entrepreneurial immigrants to the United States, from the birth of this social stratum in the late 1970s to their struggles of social and occupational adaptation in the U.S. in the 2000s. Several important questions are asked: How did postwar socioeconomic policies influence the making of Vietnamese entrepreneurial/white-collar strata? To what extent did globalization and international integration facilitate a new migratory path for entrepreneurial Vietnamese émigrés to the U.S.? As “tied movers,” what challenges do they face in the new land? How have they been struggling in the process of occupational resettlement and economic resettlement in culturally different ethnic enclaves and in a society that often hinders non-English-speaking middle-class immigrants from professional jobs? And to what extent do they differ from the previous generations of evacuees, refugees, and immigrants? In short, this chapter investigates the socioeconomic shifts and changes in the lives of Vietnamese middle-class entrepreneurs in both Vietnam and the United States to elucidate the making of a significant and distinctive contemporary Vietnamese immigrant genealogy to the U.S.

Đổi mới and the Rise of the Entrepreneurial and White-Collar Classes in Vietnam

The Postwar Dilemma

What seriously tarnished the communist victory in 1975 may not only have been the sociopolitical purge that targeted former military personnel and employees of the South Vietnamese government, but also the failure of the central government to facilitate postwar reconstruction and economic stabilization. In the wake of the Reunification, a series of economic reforms and social transformations were introduced to the South. Based on a Marxist economic
framework, it included deurbanization through population relocation, agricultural
collectivization, and private trade elimination. As a result, millions of people were both
couraged and forced to leave the cities and move to frontier camps in mountainous areas.²
Rich farms of the Mekong Delta and elsewhere were collectivized and farmers were coercively
aggregated in thousands of collectives. Finally, all private businesses were forbidden, and private
plants were either incorporated into state-owned companies or closed down. Four years after the
war ended, in 1979, Vietnam’s per capita Gross National Product (GNP) was calculated to be at
US$170, deeming the country among the poorest countries in Southeast Asia.³ Even though the
1982 economic restoration generated a small growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), “per
capita income appears to have continued its downward trend.”⁴

The economic program failed miserably nationwide. Most urbanites, who had been
mobilized to the New Economic Zone (NEZ), quickly abandoned resettlements and returned to
urban areas. They would rather live “illegally” and “undocumented” in their own cities, living
from day to day than suffer in the remote malaria-infested and hunger-stricken mountains.
During the decades of implementation, the project saw little agricultural success. Meanwhile,
massive social chaos wrought havoc in southern cities.⁵ The elimination and collectivization of
private trades negatively impacted the urban population. Having once enjoyed a relatively
comfortable life, thanks to artificial wartime prosperity, and now being disaffected and alienated
by the newly-imposed Marxist economic policies, entrepreneurial Southerners fled Vietnam in
the millions.

In rural areas, the official pricing system, enforced by the government to lower the
procurement price of agricultural production, in order to “maintain low wages in the urban sector
and boost industrial profits of state-owned enterprises,” often met with resistance from
peasantry. Farmers in the South usually defied the government’s demand with “deliberate hoarding or wastage.” Similarly, farmers in the North practiced “sneaky contracts” (khoán chui) and disobeyed state procurement by selling only a portion of their products to the state or simply ignored the mandate. Of the 1,286 cooperatives and 15,309 labor exchange teams formed by the government in 1979 in the South, by the end of 1980, only 137 cooperatives and 3,739 teams survived.

Thus, ironically, Vietnam, an agrarian country with more than 85 percent of its population of fifty million involved in rice production, faced a serious food shortage right after the war. In 1976, while the South, with a shortage of farm equipment and fertilizer, barely managed to be self-sufficient, the North continued to be in a rice deficit where “some 900,000 tons of rice [about 10 percent of the rice consumed] must be imported.” In 1977, the shortage was estimated to be “from one to two million metric tons,” and the country had to endure a reduced-ration policy similar to the hardest wartime policy in North Vietnam. Not until 1983 did Vietnam’s rice production reach 16.3 million tons and remarkably reduce the demand of food importation.

One of the economic policies that was widely criticized was the state-controlled model of food production and distribution. Whereas the concept of food being rationed and essential commodities being raffled had been common in the North, it was foreign to most people living in the South. Although pre-1975 South Vietnam was never an exporter of rice production, and this fundamental staple was partially imported from California, crises of rice deficit had never occurred. My Southern informants often recalled the immense shock of being introduced to the rationing system. Once the comfortable lifestyle of urbanites and the freedom of operating private business in the prewar South had been replaced by the hardship of a strict command
economy, the shortage of food immediately became a crisis in urban life. Even those who worked for the government also found themselves hungry, with little rice and other foodstuffs rationed according to their work and position. More often than not, rice was so scarce that it was usually replaced by other imported cereals, such as low-quality Soviet wheat flour and crude wheat grains or local animal-feeding cereals, along with farm produce, including dried corn, dried sweet potatoes, and dried cassava.

The control of food distribution included other basic nutrition necessities. “Cơm độn” (a cooked mixture of rice and other grain stuff) became common for meals, and animal protein disappeared from everyday dishes. One Saigonese told me that in the late 1970s, for months she hardly had any meat or fish. Being a government employee, her rationed food stamps only gave her several kilograms of stringy pork and cheap fish, which she usually saved for the ancestral offering in the Tết festival (Vietnamese traditional Lunar New Year). She recalled using lines from a revolutionary song that criticized the French exploitation to illustrate the harsh reality of postwar Vietnam, “biển lắm cá nhưng ăn cơm với cà” (fish is plentiful in the sea, but we have to eat rice with pickled eggplants). Sixty miles away from one of the richest fisheries of the southern coast, and twenty miles away from the nation’s biggest and most productive rice paddy area of Mekong Delta, the food shortage seriously questioned the managerial capability of the communists.

The endeavor to rapidly industrialize the country also ended in disaster. In fact, Vietnam’s industry faced even more difficulties than agriculture did, due to mismanagement, the lack of technological know-how, plus shortages of raw materials, fuel, and modern machinery. Several years after 1980, although there was a slight development in gross industrial production, with a 12.5 percent increase by 1981 and 13.9 percent by 1982, the functioning percentage of the
industrial sector, especially in heavy industry, reached only 50 percent of the full capacity. In comparison to the incompetent heavy industry, light industry and handicrafts seemed to be relatively better. For example, in 1978 the initiative percentage changes of light industry were only 2.1 percent compared to 11.5 percent of heavy industry. However, in 1982, the percentage changes became 15.0 percent compared to only 12.3 percent of heavy industry. Nonetheless, both industrial sectors failed miserably to satisfy the national demand for consumer necessities. Before the eradication of state subsidies and the rationing system, it was common for an average Vietnamese household to lack even the most basic commodities.

The shortages of commodities and the ineffectiveness of distribution became a part of urban legend in Vietnamese urban society. Funny but true stories are still circulated among “old-timers” even today, telling about the terrible quality of Vietnamese-made commodities, how scarce they were, and how ridiculous the distribution network was. One informant said it took him four years to collect enough parts for his bicycle. Another informant humorously summarized the living conditions in postwar Vietnam and the state’s assertion of economic power by modifying some verses of the famous *The Tale of Kieu*, from:

*Bắt phong trần phải phong trần*

*Cho phong lưu mới được phần phong lưu.*

*[If God] mandates you suffer, you must suffer*[Only when God] grants you prosperity, you can prosper.

to:

*Bắt cởi trần phải cởi trần*

*Cho may-ô mới được phần may-ô.*

*[If the state] mandates you bare to the waist, you must be bare to the waist*
Another informant described a hectic annual raffle for consumer necessities in his state-owned company in 1983:

Every year we would have one or two raffles for essential goods. Because there was never enough supply, they had to be raffled to keep the fairness. So, funny things always happened. One time I wanted some razors and my co-worker, a woman, wanted some pants. I mean, we were needing those items badly. When we drew the tickets, it turned out that I won a pair of pants and she won a pack of razors. We had to find each other to exchange the goods because what should I do with silk pants and what should she use the razors for? …I remember one friend of mine running around with three bars of Russian soap, trying to trade for other goods. What a poor soul! Three times he drew his tickets, three times they were written: “soap.” Unfortunately, that day it seemed like nobody needed soaps so he had to bring them home. His wife was mad because she wanted a pair of tubes for her bicycle, not the damn soap.

Critically negative international relations also coupled with bureaucratic rigidity, mismanagement, and poor organization to cripple Vietnam’s economy. The Sino-Vietnamese conflict in the 1970s led to a total curtailment of Chinese material support—an extremely important foreign aid for Vietnam at the time, especially the rice shipments. The controversial occupation of Khmer-Rouge’s Kampuchea in 1979 increased not only political challenges but also economic difficulties. After that incident, aid for Vietnam was cut off by most Western countries, with some exceptions such as France, Sweden, and Japan who continued to send assistance in the form of humanitarian aid and loans in limited quantities. The nation relied
almost entirely on help and loans from the socialist bloc. With heavy foreign loans, its economy was on the brink of bankruptcy. Edmund McWilliams reports:

External indebtedness doubled in the 1980-82 period and now stands at approximately $3.5 billion. Debt payments to convertible currency debtors stood at $238 million per annum in 1982 […] The debt payment level stood at over 200 percent of Vietnam’s total annual hard currency export earnings and remained beyond Vietnam’s ability to pay.20

With an international diplomatic isolation, a trade embargo, hundreds of thousands of troops occupying an increasingly troublesome Cambodia (in early 1982, Vietnam had 180,000 soldiers deployed in Cambodia), and tens of thousands more busily fended off the Chinese invasion in the Northern border, Vietnam was a quagmire of impoverishment and social turbulence. Only in the late 1980s, with the launching of postsocialist economic reforms, did the country begin to escape this tragic situation.

**Pre-Đổi mới and the Foundations of Vietnamese Entrepreneurship**

To understand the success of Vietnamese economic reforms in the late 1980s, it is important to know that the country’s transformation had been paved and rendered possible by several attempts at reform before Đổi mới. Melanie Beresford argues that while the “Big Bang” or “shock therapy” arguments centered on Đổi mới were overemphasized, most Vietnamese-studies scholarship has overlooked the systematic transformations in pre-Đổi mới Vietnam. She asserts that “the market economy had been in the process of forming in Vietnam since the late 1970s” and “to all intents and purposes the Vietnamese economy by the late 1980s was already a market economy.”21
In fact, because the command economy created such a tremendous economic downswing, political chaos, and social unrest, the Vietnamese government soon realized that it had to loosen its grip on the economy in order to survive. While the country was engaging in protracted wars with both the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and its Chinese ally on the northern border provinces, a series of decisive changes were made to ensure a quick economic recovery. On January 13, 1981 the Party issued Directive Number 10, allowing individuals and households to enter a contractual system and eradicating the state control of product sale. On January 21, 1981, the government promulgated Decision 25CP, entitling state-owned enterprise to engage “active production and business and auto-finance.” In the following year, private economic sectors, including farming, household enterprises, trading and retailing businesses, were officially legalized. And finally, on June 17, 1985, the Central Executive Committee ratified a "price-salary-money" solution, virtually terminating the rationing system and state subsidies. Illegal private businesses, such as guerilla markets, backyard cottage industry, and small businesses now became socially acceptable. Even though not all private trades were legalized and encouraged, local authorities often turned a blind eye to these businesses.

In reality, private businesses had been pivotal to the country’s economy for a long time, despite the government’s efforts to restrict this sector. In the South, the most significant contribution was made by the Chinese community in Chợ Lớn (Chinatown of District 5 and District 8, Hồ Chí Minh City). As Kai Schellhorn asserts, one of the fundamental mistakes of the communist government in postwar Vietnam was its failure to “make use of the economic expertise and practical experience of the people of the south, particularly the Hoa people (Chinese descendants).” Regardless of the ethnic discrimination and government’s perpetual vigilance of the Chinese community in Vietnam, it was evident that Chinese Vietnamese
underground trades and cottage industries had helped a large segment of the Vietnamese population to survive economic hardship. From light industry and handicraft production, plus food processing, to the distribution network, “made-in-Cho Lon” commodities reached almost every Vietnamese household, both in the North and the South. Although Chinese sweatshop products often had low quality, in such a difficult time, they were highly appreciated.

Many respondents informed me that their families either opened or reopened their private business right after the Reunification, despite state restrictions. Private businesses ranged from underground sweatshops and mechanic shops to restaurants and street vendors. Many joined the black market at all levels, from distributing wholesale commodities of consumer necessities, such as clothing, foodstuffs, domestic equipment, and luxury goods, including motorcycle spare parts, electronic appliances, and beauty industry supplies, to retailing cigarettes, snacks, and gasoline. Hoàng’s family’s cottage shop had been manufacturing rubber goods since 1977 and continued the operation until 1990 when most family members left Vietnam. Na’s parents opened a TV/radio repair shop in 1976, and quickly upgraded their trade to a well-known home appliance shop in the 1980s. In Nha Trang, she told me, there were two big electronic stores at the time and one of them, the “Tứ Hải Electronic Shop,” belonged to her parents. Until their emigration in 1995, their brand name still dominated the local electronic goods market. Ms. Thanh, the owner of a beauty salon in Garden Grove, California, also recalled her childhood of helping her family run a chain of small beauty shops in Hồ Chí Minh City:

I was about eight or nine at the end of the 1970s but already I helped my parents run some errands. Mostly I brought chemical stuff and equipment from one shop to another. I was sometimes sent to collect or deliver money. I usually did those jobs after school. We
had three small shops in different places in the district so we made enough money.

Everyone in my family was working for the beauty joints that we owned.

Thanh’s father, an ARVN paratrooper captain, was summoned for reeducation in a remote camp in the thick mangrove swamps of the U Minh Forest but was released after one-and-a-half years, due to his poor health and his “progressiveness” in reeducation. He set up the first beauty salon in 1977 and successfully extended his business before his escape in 1979. His wife and daughters stayed in Vietnam and continued the family occupation until they began to emigrate in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. One of my former students, Nam, from Tân Bình District, who now lives in Highland, San Bernardino County, California, said that his family had been in brick and tile manufacturing since 1980. Until the day they left Vietnam in 2009, they owned a brick factory in Bình Dương Province. Another former student of mine, who comes from Rạch Giá, Kiên Giang Province and has been living in Westminster, California since 2007, also confirmed that both his father and mother had their own businesses before they got married in 1980. Tam, the student, said, “At that time, my father had a workshop manufacturing plastic kitchen products and my mother had her sweatshop making purses and bags. Businesses were up and down but they managed to make a relatively good life.” Most informants admitted that the local authorities often turned a blind eye on their trade if they paid monthly “dues” and would not expose the trade too publicly. Because these trades were not legal, they were not registered and therefore were tax-free. The small amount of bribery, thus, was quite reasonable compared to the profit earned from their private business.

Many white-collar informants, who were lucky enough to find jobs in the government’s economic and social apparatus, and thus enjoyed some privileges and benefits from the state subsidy system, also secretly “tore the fence” (xé rào) to enter private business. While working
for the government in 1984 as a technician at the Tân Sơn Airport, Phan Rang, Mr. Hồng was also doing business with his friends to improve his family’s livelihood. The extra income, he said, was actually threefold of his official pay. Mr. Trần Văn Lê, the former student of Minh Đức University whom I mentioned in chapter one, also managed to have “one foot in, one foot out” (chân trong chân ngoài). Between 1979 and 1994, he worked for a state-owned fishing company but also had a book/newspaper stand at home.

People like Hồng, Lê and Hoàng usually had a more tolerant perspective towards pre-Đổi Mới Vietnam. For example, Lê remembered:

During the time of “blocking rivers, prohibiting market,” even a prawn needed permission to be sold and bought, so product flow from one area to another was very limited. It tremendously affected producers and traders. You produced commodities but you couldn’t sell them, and the consumers couldn’t buy from you, either. Goods distribution was restricted so it made the lives of the businesspeople very difficult.

However, he added, “But I worked for the government so it was fine. State subsidy and rationing system had its own advantages. The salary was low but we were able to purchase goods of necessities with very cheap price. Later, the salary was improved but the subsidy system had been abolished so it was very much the same.” Hoàng also shared that thought. He said that although his business during that time was not as good as it later became, the competition was much less fierce, and they enjoyed a fairly comfortable life. Even though Hoàng did not participate in private business until 1990, his wife had her own shop in Phan Thiết. Their later business in Hồ Chí Minh City was prosperous, mostly due to her expertise in their home decoration business and his managerial skills learned during the pre-Đổi mới period. These
informants admitted that those experiences gave them an upper hand in business preparation and capital pooling at the threshold of the “open door” era.

As such, the rise of Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the years after Đổi mới, which owed much to the “open door” policy, should not be understood as an overnight miracle or a rebirth of a poor, devastated, and unskilled group of Vietnamese. Rather, it was a capitalist continuum maintained by a group of entrepreneurs and skilled manufacturers, who constantly and successfully negotiated with the state’s economic controls and restrictions and improvised their entrepreneurialism through all the sociopolitical hardships. Although not all of my informants were born into families with a long tradition of doing business, the social skills learned, the capital accumulated, and the networks created before and after 1975 obviously fostered the establishment and expansion of their postwar private trades in the onset of the postsocialist market economy. The dynamic Southern society with a heritage of hundreds of years of cultural/ethnic diversity and decades of capitalism, therefore, had facilitated the success of an entrepreneurial generation.

Post-Đổi mới and the Remaking of an Entrepreneurial Generation

It was no coincidence that among the main architects of Đổi mới were Prime Minister Võ Văn Kiệt and Secretary General Nguyễn Văn Linh. Being veteran communist leaders in the South during the war, both reformists had experienced the capitalist South and were enthusiastic advocates of social transformation. Võ Văn Kiệt was elected Chairman of the People’s Committee of Hồ Chí Minh City in 1976, Chairman of the State Planning Commission in 1982, and finally, Prime Minister in 1991. Despite the fierce rejections of the old guard in the Politburo, Kiệt had initiated a struggle for economic reform since his appointment in the 1970s.
Likewise, Nguyễn Văn Linh had also long favored economic reform, which often brought him into disagreement with the conservatives. Kiệt, Linh, and their reformist comrades’ attempts finally bore fruit when Linh was elected to the top post in the Party in 1986.

![Modernized locomotive](image)

**Figure 6.** Vietnamese government’s investment in a socioeconomic revolution is symbolized by this modernized locomotive, which, since the early days of the movement, has been named *Đổi mới*.

As a nation whose economy relied mainly on agricultural production, Resolution 10 in 1988 was a landmark in Vietnam’s reformation. The resolution permanently abolished collective farms and other rural cooperatives and allocated agrarian production to individual households. From a country facing a serious rice deficit, Vietnam quickly rose to the world’s third largest rice exporter in the 1990s and the second in the 2000s. In 1992, for example, 37.6 percent of Vietnam’s total exports came from agricultural products with a total value of US$2.475 million. With a national GDP per capita of US$144 in 1990 and of US$397 in 2000, Vietnam was still far from prosperity. Yet, World Bank analysis showed that in the 1990s food was no longer a crisis in Vietnam, and the poverty rate dropped to 37 percent in 1997-1998. And with
the development of agriculture and a population of 80 percent peasantry, private businesses—
now being legalized and encouraged—greatly expanded to meet the overgrowing demand for
consumer goods in rural areas.

Among many economic reform policies introduced and implemented during the 1980s,
the one that significantly influenced the lives and social status of the Vietnamese middle class
and urbanites was the opening up of the country to foreign investments. A long-secluded country
with an abundance of both natural resources and cheap labor, Vietnam offered great
opportunities for Western investors to explore its economic potential. Since the promulgation of
the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) law in 1987, the country witnessed a tremendous increase in
Western capital flow. Within a decade, from a modest capital investment in 1986 of US$366
million, which came mostly from CMEA contracts, it jumped to US$5,548 million in 1997.27
Repeatedly, in 1990, in 1992, and in 1996, the law was greatly amended to best suit the
continuously-shifting economic environment.28 In 1998, the Statistical Yearbook of Vietnam
reported 275 new FDI projects and the total registered capital of US$3897.4 million from some
seventy foreign countries.29 By the late 1990s, Vietnam’s economy was exalted as one of the
“ascending dragons” or “new tigers” in Southeast Asia. Clearly, the opening up to globalization
had given Vietnam a momentum to excel economically, despite Vietnamese laborers being
massively exploited and the country’s resources largely looted.

The first foreign countries to invest in Vietnam in the Đổi mới were not from Europe and
North America. Rather, most of them were East Asian and Southeast Asian economic powers.
Years before the U.S. finally lifted its embargo on Vietnam, Southeast Asian countries such as
Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia had invested heavily in the country. The political
normalization between Vietnam and China in 1992 also paved the way for Chinese entrepreneurs
to enter the neighboring market. Other East Asian economic superpowers, such as Japan and South Korea, also had good relationships with Vietnam and were quick to follow their Southeast Asian neighbors. According to the 1998 Statistical Yearbook, Singaporean companies led the top five foreign investors in Vietnam with 221 projects and a total investment of US$5713.1 million. They were followed by Taiwan, with 427 projects and US$4415.9 million; Hong Kong, with 289 projects and US$3570.9 million; Japan, with 256 projects and US$3299.1 million; and Korea, with 236 projects and US$2973.7 million. Most FDI focused on sectors of manufacturing industry, construction, hotel-restaurant, transportation and communication.

The U.S-Vietnam rapprochement in 1995 opened up the way for American companies to flock to Vietnam. The late 1990s saw a contingent of U.S. global corporations, such as Pepsi, Kodak, IBM, Ford, P&G, Compaq, and AT&T taking their share in this potential market. Some others had long joined the FDI flow through other franchise channels. For example, the Coca Cola Corporation had already invested heavily in Vietnam through its Singapore channel before the rapprochement. By 1998, it was the biggest Singaporean-shared project with US$182.5 million. By the end of 1998, the U.S. ranked eighth in FDI; outranked by only two other Western countries, France, sixth, and British Virgin Island, seventh.

The arrival of foreign companies created immense social changes in Vietnamese society, particularly in urban areas. Because most early FDI projects were located either inside or close to metropolitan areas, it fostered an increase in the number of both white-collar employees and private businesspeople. The lives of my urbanite informants, who comprised the majority of the project’s participants, usually were interwoven with the development of FDI industry and economic services.
Nowhere else in Vietnam was the visible transformation of an unchained economy as robust as in Hồ Chí Minh City. Right at the beginning of the 1990s, the city marked itself as the quintessential economic hub of Vietnam with a GDP growth of 79.9 percent during the course of five years, from 1993 to 1998. With the biggest population of Sino-Vietnamese, who were well connected with Chinese elsewhere, the city attracted a significant amount of investment capital from ethnic Chinese outside Vietnam. As a result, many of the first modern skyscrapers, high-end residential complexes, and state-of-the-art shopping centers in Hồ Chí Minh City often belonged to Hong Kong, Malaysian, or Singaporean Chinese conglomerates. Successful world-class Vietnamese private corporations, such as the Binh Tien Consumption Merchandizes (Biti’s), were established and developed by Sino-Vietnamese and their ethnic Chinese partners. Many small guerilla manufacturers in Hồ Chí Minh City also transformed into more global-standard businesses. Mr. Hoàng, for example, decided to discontinue the family’s backyard workshop in District 5 and pooled enough capital to switch to a service business. He became a distribution agency for a Taiwanese electrical decoration goods company. He explained:

Guerilla manufacturing was no longer able to compete with original and hi-tech productions. State-of-the-art merchandizes then had become plentiful on the market with affordable prices and varieties of functions, models, makes, and styles. I knew I wouldn’t be able to compete [in rubber goods] with giant guys like the Vietnamese Casumina or the Taiwanese Kenda so I decided I would be better off with service supply.

In other Vietnamese urban centers as well, my informants found their changing lives integrated with the “wind of renovation” and the foreign investors coming in flocks. In Nha Trang City, Mr. Hồng quit his job at the airport and joined his friend’s company, working as a sub-contractor for the Hyundai/Vinashin joint-venture in shipyard industry. His annual salary in
1990 was roughly US$3,000—a considerable pay compared to the GDP per capita of US$114 in the same year. In Rạch Giá, Tam’s father also suspended his plastic goods manufacturing and became one of the main agencies for the Malaysian-based Singer Sewing Company, supplying sewing machines and accessories for the booming garment and textual industry in the Mekong Delta’s newly-established industrial zones. Tam told me that during the 1990s, his father’s monthly income was about 50 million đồng (approximately US$5,000). His mother still maintained her handbag sweatshop. Yet, she also switched production output from the local market to the international market. Tam recalled:

I was very young that time, but I saw clearly the switch in economy and social status of my family. My father had dozens of employees working for him. So did my mother. My house was like a small market. People were everywhere. Even as a small kid, I was given a monthly allowance of roughly a million Vietnamese đồng. That’s more than the monthly income of some guys in my neighborhood.

Thus, within a decade of Đổi mới, the strength of private and household sectors in industrial production in Vietnam increased significantly. Vietnamese government’s statistics show that whereas in 1988 there were only 318 private domestic enterprises and 318,557 handicraft households, in 1998 the numbers increased to 5,714 private domestic enterprises and 553,043 handicraft households. Similarly, in 1988 the total number of workers in private/household enterprises was 923,000, whereas 1998 saw a total number of 1,847,777 workers.37 Simultaneously, state-owned industrial enterprises declined from 3,092 in 1988 to 1,821 in 1998.38 These contrary changes were largely made by the sanctioning of both foreign-owned and Vietnamese private businesses.
Certainly, not every private business was directly involved in FDI law or depended on foreign-owned companies and joint-venture corporations. Na’s electronic goods business, for example, developed well without any ties to foreign investment. Even before she inherited the electronic appliance shop from her father in 1995, Na was acquiring a remarkable monthly income of around US$400 from her own shop. Ms. Linh from Tuy Hòa City, Phú Yên Province, who now lives in Garden Grove, California, told me that her family never had any financial problems, thanks to her lucrative media shop that sold both wholesale and retail, as well as rented movie/music tapes, CDs, and DVDs. Her husband began the business in the 1980s as a small electronic appliance and device repair shop and expanded to a big audio/visual media business in the early 1990s.

Surely we were well-to-do. And we were never poor, even right after the Reunification. The audio/visual media industry in Vietnam became very big during the 1990s. Every family in town had either a VCR, a DVD player or a cassette/CD player. Vietnamese were addicted to music and Chinese and Korean soap-opera movies. At the end of the 1990s, my shop usually brought us a net amount of some million đồng (roughly US$150) per day.

As such, among the five economic sectors comprising the Vietnamese economy, including state, cooperative, household, private, and joint state-private, small family-owned trading played a large role in reshaping middle-class entrepreneurs. The significant difference between the slightly changed number of workers in private/household enterprises and the enormous development of the trades themselves within a decade proves that among the most successful businesses were small, family-run, and self-employed businesses.
In the beginning of the new millennium, the rapid development of Vietnam-U.S. relations fostered a greater pace in Vietnam’s socioeconomic transformation. After much deliberation, in March 2000, the Party agreed to submit the finalized ten-point draft of a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) to the U.S. This act was delayed by the conservatives in the Politburo who had opposed the agreement for fear that a full exposition to globalization forces may jeopardize Vietnam’s political stability.\textsuperscript{40} After many negotiations, the agreement was signed in 2001. Even before the BTA was ratified, Vietnam’s trade with the U.S. had reached US$470 million.\textsuperscript{41} In November 2000, Bill Clinton marked another milestone in U.S.-Vietnamese reconciliation by being the first U.S. president to visit Vietnam since 1969. Five years after the rapprochement, the U.S. became one of the top strategic partners of Vietnam.

Despite the increasing conflicts between the binaries of politics/economy and governance/social development in the 2000s,\textsuperscript{42} Vietnam’s economy maintained a rapid and steady development through the first half of the decade. Between 2000 and 2011, GDP per capita increased from US$397 to US$414,\textsuperscript{43} which was an impressive achievement considering the devastating effects of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 and 1998. The economic boom in the last decade, thus, kept a good momentum, regardless of harsh criticism and the pessimism of social scientists.\textsuperscript{44}

The rapid urbanization and advancement of the urban living standard were two particular examples of Vietnamese globalization. In 2000, there were 185,000 new jobs created in cities.\textsuperscript{45} By 2003, 1.5 million jobs were created\textsuperscript{46} with a concentration on urban centers and industrial zones. In 2003, GDP growth was estimated to be from 7 to 7.5 percent, which was made up of 15 percent in industrial output and 7 percent in services.\textsuperscript{47} The pace was well-kept in the next
several years. In 2005, economic growth was 8.4 percent, and in 2006, the rate was over 8 percent. Besides exports, the momentum, according to Hy V. Luong, was fueled by a “significant growth in […] consumer and investment spending.” The economic growth facilitated the growth of the middle class and the birth of many *nouveau riche*. Luxury commodities, such as high-end television sets and air-conditioners, became readily available in the houses of most middle-class urbanites. Being a nation whose transportation runs mainly on two-wheeled vehicles, economic strength was primarily projected through people’s private transportation means. Whereas in 1995 the Thai-made *Dream II* motorbike was a symbol of personal wealth, ten years later, it became a mere farmer’s workhorse. City streets in Vietnam were now clogged with expensive hi-tech twist-and-go scooters imported from Japan and Europe. In the second half of the 2000s, the latest models of Mercedes Benz and BMW appeared increasingly in big cities. A person could sometimes spot Ferrari and Lamborghini automobiles on the scooter-clogged streets of Hồ Chí Minh City and Hanoi. Metaphorically, the *Dream* was no longer a dream of most Vietnamese people in a rapidly globalizing Vietnam.

Informants, whose business was in the export sector, often testified that their time of prosperity was the first few years of the twenty-first century. By 2003, exports grew to 17 percent with US$16.5 billion within the first ten months of the year. Exports thus had become one of the dominant forces in the nation’s economy. With the United States becoming the top market, garments and aqua-products dominated Vietnam’s exports. Na’s investment on lobster farming for the foreign market is a good example. Starting as an experiment in 2000, she subleased a small allotment of aqua-farm from a farmer who had decided to switch to another trade after several failures in fishery. The sudden increase of lobster’s price that year gave her a bountiful catch of approximately 200 percent in revenue. Na quickly pooled capital resources
from her own reserved capital, the bank, and her relatives and friends to invest more in lobster farming. Na bought more farms and sharecropped them with the 40/60 profit share, of which she took the larger portion. Within the next five years, she profited nearly US$150,000 from her farms. According to Na, the production was easy because she contracted everything, except the investment capital, to sharecroppers. Even her husband, who was the director of the company, did not have to do much, except for a weekly boat trip to the farms for supervision.

Other informants, such as Tam, also affirmed their economic success at the beginning of the new millennium. In 2000, Tam’s father opened a new sewing machine supply company in Hồ Chí Minh City and assigned the business to him. Tam ran the business well and earned an average profit of 10 million ₫ (approximately US$800) per month. Nam’s family shifted from manufacturing construction materials exclusively for the local market to a more diverse export market of ceramic and pottery production. He revealed, “I remember my mother returning from Bình Dương office every day, bringing with her a sack of cash. We had customers from many foreign countries.” For private businesses, the momentum which kept going and the capital accumulated after the economic boom in the second half of the 1990s proved crucial to their economic advancement in the early half of the 2000s. Mr. Hồng admitted, “If only things kept going that well, I might not have allowed my family to migrate.”

The second half of the first decade of the new millennium brought more opportunities as well as more challenges to Vietnam’s economy. In May 2006, after much delay, the U.S. and Vietnam finally reached an agreement that rendered Vietnam access to the World Trade Organization (WTO). The agreement was quickly followed by the Trade and Investment Framework (TIF), signed in the same month by the two governments, and the Permanent Normal Trade Relations (PNTR) for Vietnam, approved in December 2006 by the U.S. Congress.52 The
United States became the leading import market for Vietnamese productions, followed by Japan and China. A prosperous future rendered possible by the WTO membership became the topic of everyday conversation among Vietnamese of all social strata.

However, late in the first decade of the new millennium, although Vietnam became “even stronger in global integration” and strived even harder to thrive, it increasingly showed a serious weakness in management, prematurity in economic performance in the WTO, and confusion in governance. In fiscal years 2008-2009, annual growth dropped from 6.2 percent to 5.3 percent, which was serious compared to the annual growth of 8 percent in the early 2000s. The economic recession of 2008 and 2009 shook Vietnam’s young economy violently. If, in 1997, Vietnam’s economy was largely intact thanks to a relatively weak connection to the area’s crisis, the recession hit hard a now heavily-globalized Vietnam. New export markets also meant stricter quality controls, pickier consumers, and sometimes unfair competitions. Seafood and other aqua-products—some of Vietnam’s strategic export productions—suffered tremendously from new tariffs and discrimination from Western markets. In the U.S., for example, the court cases brought against catfish and shrimp imports from Vietnam were always ruled in favor of American aqua-farmers. Similarly, in other leading industries of garments, textiles, and electronic goods, although Vietnam continued to be a promising land for foreign manufacturers, some scholars believed that “a return to earlier levels of sales to Vietnam’s main export markets in North America and Europe seems unlikely in the short term.”

The economic recession impacted many middle-class Vietnamese, particularly entrepreneurs. Yet, before their emigration, many informants managed their businesses quite well, although it sometimes meant they had to struggle to improvise. Nam’s family returned to brick manufacturing and maintained a good income from the ever-growing construction business.
in Vietnam. Tam’s father terminated his contract with Singer and switched to the restaurant and hotel sector. Every year, he spends only six months in the U.S. to maintain his residency status and spends the rest of the time running his million-dollar business in Vietnam. While trying to maintain their home appliance business, Hồng and Na ceased their seafood production and rechanneled their investment into the real estate market. Although the crisis of real estate and the development of the corporate retail department negatively affected their business, they claimed that their financial situation was not too bad and believed they would have overcome it in a couple of years had they not emigrated. In 2010, Na was able to sell most of her properties in Vietnam, except for the two houses she intends to keep for her future return.

Certainly, not all of my informants were metropolitan entrepreneurs, nor did they all possess heavily-invested businesses that turned in thousands of dollars in monthly profit. Small household businesses, such as coffee shops and mom-and-pop corner stores, are very prevalent in Vietnam and thus are very common occupations among Vietnamese immigrants. During the exodus of boatpeople, the majority of refugees would describe their occupations in Vietnam as “buôn bán,” which usually means small family shops or street peddling, although sometimes it also connotes large-scale wholesale or retail business. In the case of the Sino-Vietnamese refugees—who comprised roughly 60 percent of the boatpeople—Rubén G. Rumbaut notes that the majority of them were shopkeepers and production workers. Given the historical context of the refugee movement, wherein most refugees were the urbanites who lost their livelihood because of economic hardship, the segment of petty bourgeoisie of shopkeepers and vendors was primary among other professions.

Even though small household businesses did not bring in high revenue, my informants from smaller cities and towns were also able to maintain a middle-class lifestyle through their
occupations. The mid-fifties generation often testified that their living standard from the 1990s onwards was much superior to what it used to be before the Reunification. Among those was Ms. Nguyễn Thị Lâm from Biên Hòa. Before her emigration, she owned a small coffee shop in a college area of the city. “Life was quite good,” she told me, because even though she was not rich, she did not have to “think too much about finance” and was “always debt-free.” Ms. Lâm was a daughter of a family of ten children. Her father, an ARVN officer and a Buddhist, was arrested and incarcerated in the notorious Côn Đảo prison for two years because of his objection to Ngô Đình Diệm’s religious repression. Unable to take care of the big family, her mother had to demand the children provide for themselves. Lâm dropped out of school at the fifth grade, five years before Reunification, and worked hard to support the family. After she got married, she and her husband worked as woodcutters for a state-owned logging company in Đồng Nai. Although life was hard before Đổi mới, Lâm hardly complained. During our interview in a coffee shop, next to the nail shop where she worked in uptown Boston, she often mentioned those “golden days” of independent “work-for-nobody-and-work-as-much-as-you-want” lifestyle with deep nostalgia.

The market opening also critically fostered the development of a white-collar social stratum in postsocialist Vietnamese society. As I have discussed extensively in the two previous chapters, the early 1990s signaled the implementation of a new western-oriented education. Hundreds of foreign companies flocking to Vietnam every year required not only a multitude of manual workers but also a contingent of white-collar workforce to serve the globalizing economy. New internationalized institutions with “trendy” programs were established rapidly, trying to meet the urgent demand for skilled technicians and a junior/middle managerial class. Because a globally skilled workforce usually involves English proficiency and computer skills,
from the mid-1990s onward, certificates of English and Applied Informatics proficiency became mandatory in any job posting, regardless of it being state employment or in private business.

Both affluent and lower middle-class families invested heavily in their children’s education to ensure a place in the globalized mechanism. Sanh’s decisions to major in International Economics and later, in a Public Policy program, were born out of that socioeconomic context. Sanh wanted to work for either a joint-venture company or a government company that closely dealt with foreign investment. Forty-year-old Ms. Diệm, whom I met at Golden West Community College, also had the same narrative. The last child of a wealthy family in Cần Thơ City, her parents wanted her to major in Economics. Upon her graduation in 1996, Diệm began working for a joint-ventured insurance company in her hometown until she emigrated to America to reunite with her husband in 2005. Sanh and Diệm were typical examples of a new white-collar generation being forged by Vietnam’s international integration and globalization.

For better or worse, the reforms of the 1980s decisively shifted Vietnam’s economy and politics. They also significantly changed the nature of Vietnamese emigration. The world no longer sees thousands of raggedly-poor Vietnamese flocking to the West through refugee camps, nor does it see a multitude of politically-oppressed Vietnamese condemning the communist government all the way to their host countries. A great number of contemporary Vietnamese immigrants had actually benefited immensely from the country from which they emigrated. In 2013, World Bank reports a dramatic reduction of poverty headcount rate in Vietnam from 60 percent to 20.7 percent within the course of twenty years. However, socioeconomic stratifications also increase sharply. In 2012, although Vietnam’s GPA per capita was only US$1,300, the extreme social gap between the urban ruling class and its associates, and the rural
poor, channeled most social wealth to the elite strata of communist cadres and entrepreneurial urbanites, creating a *nouveau riche* group in Vietnam. The term *đại gia*—which literally means “big family,” and figuratively means “powerful and super rich men”—has been widely used for the last several decades, implying both corrupt communist officials and entrepreneurial elites. Between the small upper-class and the poor is a growing population of middle-class Vietnamese. Although none of them claimed the title *đại gia*, many of my informants had, in fact, achieved the contemporary “Vietnamese dream” of “2 children, 3 storied [house], and 4 wheeled [automobile]” (*2 con, 3 tầng, 4 bánh*) before their emigration. The socioeconomic achievements of the last 30 years of *Đổi mới*, hence, have created a new generation of émigrés who brought with them both social capital (liquid asset) and human capital (business experience) to host countries.

**“New Worlds for All” 59—Entrepreneurial Vietnamese in the United States**

**Urban Ethnic Concentrations**

In collecting data for this project, I was challenged by the geographic distribution and accessibility of my informants. Whereas the uneven dispersal across the country of the professional informants in primarily white suburbia took me three years to recruit twenty informants, with some interviews being conducted over the phone, the concentrations of Vietnamese in metropolitan sites permitted me to recruit and interview thirty nine entrepreneurial respondents face-to-face within a couple of weeks of field research. Clearly, such differences in the collection of data suggest not only a greater number of family-based immigration in comparison to the employment-based immigration but also how entrepreneurial immigrants are drawn to the metropolises.
Of the forty non-intellectual immigrants I interviewed for this project, twenty-nine are from Greater Boston, Massachusetts and Little Saigon in Orange Country, California. In other cities where the Vietnamese immigrant populations are less dense, such as Michigan City (pseudonym) and Ohio City (pseudonym), although I visited more than once, I interviewed fewer people. My success in exploring informant resources varied between states and cities and the numbers of participants recruited—ten in Boston and nineteen in Little Saigon—indicate the special significance of these metropolises in Vietnamese immigrant demography. According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau statistics, of the total 1,548,449 Americans who claimed Vietnamese descent, 518,946 (one third) lived in California, making it the most Vietnamese-concentrated state, and 42,915 lived in Massachusetts, making it the seventh in rank. The cluster of Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Anna in California claimed the highest Vietnamese population of 271,234. Boston and its adjacent cities of Cambridge and Quincy harbored the tenth biggest Vietnamese concentration of 32,353. By comparison, Ohio was twentieth in rank with only 13,121 Vietnamese residents. Michigan ranked nineteenth with a Vietnamese population of 16,787. And there were only 937 Vietnamese in the Ohio City area and 393 in Michigan City. The smaller number of Vietnamese settlements in the two latter Midwest cities suggests that they attract fewer immigrants because of the lack of pre-existing social networks, such as Vietnamese families and ethnic resources.

The correlation between demography and the accessibility of informant sources is pivotal in research that seeks to study new immigrants. Immigrant economic sociology points out that immigrants tend to migrate first to large cities where their compatriots have established enclaves. This assertion is particularly accurate in the case of family-based immigrants. Whereas professional informants go to wherever their profession locates them and are thus dispersed into
different communities, middle-class immigrants usually move to some specific metropolitan areas where their relatives have been living for decades. Most of my informants in this group lived with their family members, who were old residents in a big city, for a period of time upon their immigration. Few informants left their chosen destination for another metropolitan area. Those who did, however, usually had stayed in the place of arrival for at least several years.

The concentration of Vietnamese in U.S. metropolises had been initiated by the first-wave Vietnamese evacuees and continued by the later waves. In 1977, Gail Kelly reported that Vietnamese refugees were forming large enclaves in New York, Dallas, New Orleans, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. In early 1979, Darrel Montero also spotted a significant movement of first-wave Vietnamese leaving the small cities where they had been relocated for metropolitan areas. He “suspected” that “many Vietnamese refugees will form ethnic enclaves in large cities across America.” For the later immigrants, metropolitan areas became even more desirable since ethnic networks and occupational niches had been created by their compatriots. Rumbault asserts that such ethnic concentrations attract new immigrants who seek to quickly stabilize their settlement because they “serve to provide newcomers with manifold sources of moral, social, cultural, and economic support that are unavailable to immigrants who are more dispersed.” He also adds that for immigrant entrepreneurs seeking to establish their businesses, large cities with preexisting ethnic enclaves provide them with “access to sources of cheap labor, working capital and credit, and dependable markets.” In the case of Vietnamese migrants, cosmopolitanism is one cultural component that may also be a factor in favoring big cities over small towns. Giàu nhà quê không bằng ngồi lê thành phố (the rich countryside is not comparable to the city homeless) is a well-circulated saying in Vietnam, connoting not only the economic opportunities, but also social accessibility and the quality of life that cities have to offer, in
contrast with the boredom and “unsophisticated” culture of rural areas. Thus, by living in metropolitan areas, Vietnamese urbanite immigrants may continue their cosmopolitanism, while immigrants from rural areas also embrace the opportunity of becoming urbanites in America. Such cultural elements and economic conveniences have resulted in an overwhelming majority of 97.9 percent of Vietnamese Americans living in urban areas. Most informants in my study were also drawn to Orange County and Boston by similar motivations.

Undoubtedly, California is the most promising and famous of US places to Vietnamese inside and outside the U.S. In the first wave of Vietnamese evacuees who came in 1975, California attracted 24,550 Vietnamese; a fivefold number compared to that of the second largest receiving state of Florida with 5,629 Vietnamese. In the second wave of boatpeople refugees in 1980, the state received 29,630 Vietnamese; roughly nine times more than the number of 3,328 Vietnamese going to New York. In the years which followed, California continued to be the beacon for many more Vietnamese refugees to come. It also drew Vietnamese who had been dispersed throughout the country; a U.S. government effort to lessen the refugee socioeconomic “burden” on some particular immigrant vortexes. With Vietnamese beachheads having been firmly established by these first- and second-wave Vietnamese in cities in California, every year tens of thousands of emigrants from Vietnam also come to the “promised land,” creating a 60-percent increase in the Vietnamese population in the state between 1990 and 2000.

The reasons Vietnamese are particularly drawn to California may vary. Among those are the warm weather, which is close to Vietnam’s average climate; more generous state support; and a sociocultural environment that is relatively successful in mimicking their homeland’s. Most importantly, a dense Vietnamese population with bustling Vietnamese-run businesses and social networks of kinship offers generous emotional, physical, and economic support. Despite
the state’s economic crisis in the late 1990s and the bankruptcy of many social welfare policies, California is still the locus of U.S.-Vietnamese ethnic commerce and culture. In fact, to Vietnamese, the state is so popular that it is literally associated with the Vietnamese American.

Although the city of San Jose in Northern California has the biggest concentration of 100,486 Vietnamese Americans, it is Southern California’s city of Westminster with 36,058 Vietnamese American residents that represents the term Việt kiều Mỹ (Vietnamese American) to America and the world. The reason Westminster is so famous is not only because it lies within Orange County—the country with the biggest Vietnamese population of 183,766—but also because it harbors the famous Little Saigon. Although Garden Grove, which has even a bigger Vietnamese population of 47,331, was later adjoined to Little Saigon, this adjacent city is considered by many local Vietnamese to be a Korean town, not an authentic Vietnamese one. There may be Vietnamese enclaves elsewhere in the U.S. or in other countries which also claim the name Little Saigon, but only the Little Saigon of Westminster is globally recognized.

Westminster’s Little Saigon and Orange County (quận Cam) are known even to the Vietnamese who might not be able to name more than two states in the U.S. Some Việt kiều I met in Hồ Chí Minh City would tell me they were from Orange County, California when we first talked. Later, when we were better acquainted, they corrected their home addresses in America, which were places other than Orange County or California. This evasion is quite understandable because most informants felt it was easier to avoid having to answer a flurry of questions about different states in the U.S. and why they did not come to California instead of somewhere else.

Although its Vietnamese enclaves are not compatible in size with those in California, Massachusetts is no strange land to Vietnamese Americans either. In 2010, of the fifty counties with the highest Vietnamese concentrations across the U.S., four were located in Massachusetts.
They were Suffolk County (12,109 Vietnamese, ranked twenty first), Middlesex County (8,361 Vietnamese, ranked thirtieth), Norfolk County (7,108 Vietnamese, ranked thirty eighth) and Worcester County (6,892 Vietnamese, ranked thirty ninth). The four adjacent counties made Boston the seventh-ranking Vietnamese population in the whole country. In Boston, Fields Corner—the southern section of Dorchester—has long been recognized to be the Vietnamese center of Boston and of Massachusetts. In fact, Karin Aguilar San Juan, in her ethnography on Vietnamese Americans in Orange County’s Little Saigon and Dorchester’s Fields Corner, finds so many sociocultural and political similarities and connections between the two that she names them “little Saigons.”

Similar to the history of many American urban sites, Fields Corner was occupied primarily by a white middle class in the 1960s. In the wake of the infamous Boston court-ordered bussing crisis of 1974, in which white Bostonians protested against the 1965 Racial Imbalance Act that aimed to desegregate the state’s public schools, Fields Corner’s black population increased numerically when many white residents left for other settlements. In the 1980s, Vietnamese refugees began to enter Dorchester, seeking resettlement. Many Vietnamese saw potential in Fields Corner and began setting up businesses in the area. The deteriorated neighborhood was immensely revitalized by Vietnamese businesses and quickly became a busy ethnic commercial district in Boston with hundreds of Vietnamese shops and offices along the street arteries. Most Vietnamese I met referred to Fields Corner as Dot (Dorch-the abbreviation of Dorchester), although the business center is only a part of the city. With several ethnic-based business associations and supports, such as the Vietnamese Merchants Association (VMA) and the Vietnamese American Initiative for Development (Viet-AID), the number of Vietnamese-owned businesses, including retail trades and services of all sorts, is estimated to be 126 out of
the total 225 businesses in the area.\textsuperscript{74} In Dorchester, the presence of Vietnamese is so dense that it is estimated that “over nine out of every ten Asians in Dorchester are Vietnamese.”\textsuperscript{75}

**Vietnamese Immigrants and the “Bootstrap Model”**

Immigration scholars, such as Barry N. Stein, Alejandro Portes, and J. Ex, tend to agree that occupational adjustment is pivotal in facilitating newly-arrived immigrants’ acculturation and assimilation into the host society.\textsuperscript{76} In the case of Vietnamese evacuees, theoretical frameworks that propose interracial employment as a prominent means of assimilating the Vietnamese was well-received when the Saigon elites showed an impressive potential for adaptation. In 1979, Darrel Montero optimistically suggested that there would be “relatively rapid assimilation” among the Vietnamese evacuees due to their “high levels of employment” and “increasing language proficiency.”\textsuperscript{77} In the same vein, in his study of the occupational resettlement of the Indochinese evacuees, Stein asserts:

> Employment seems to be the critical factor in moving the refugee into the mainstream of society. Besides restoring the refugee’s sense of “self-regard”, employment provides contacts with colleagues, the boss, and the company. It also offers opportunities to learn and practice the language, discover and conform to group norms, and develop social involvement and acceptance. It provides, in addition, the income needed to participate in social and cultural activities.\textsuperscript{78}

Such research, however, shows several weaknesses. First, it focuses heavily on the first-wave Saigon elites, who had been trained by, and worked for, American military or civil services during the war. Such immigrants possessed an adequate amount of human capital, a relative exposure and familiarity with the host culture (including the English language), and even some
personal relationships with their former American colleagues and superiors. Besides, many evacuees, who often claimed to have lost everything during their flight from the communists, were able to bring with them material assets, such as gold or strong foreign currency, to the U.S. Second, because of the dominant white-collar occupation of these refugees, the research only refers to professions in American firms or the U.S. government as the solution for Vietnamese “occupational resettlement.”

In the 1980s, the mass exodus of Vietnamese boatpeople arriving in the U.S. in hundreds of thousands—many of whom were poor and lesser-educated—challenged these early theoretical frameworks. Their arrival demanded both policy makers and immigrant scholars to reconsider their modes of occupational adjustment to deal with the insufficiency of both human and social capital of this second-wave group.

In 1980, President Jimmy Carter signed the Refugee Act, promoting “refugee economic self-sufficiency” as the principal goal of the Indochinese resettlement policy. Tacitly, this policy encouraged the refugees to be economically self-sustaining by embarking upon self-employment and by developing an “immigrant niche” to unload the burden of welfare dependency. In fact, the policy attempted to forge the Vietnamese into the preexisting economic mode of other Asian American groups, such as Asian Indians, Filipinos, Koreans, and Chinese, who had long been treading the path of small business self-employment. Traditionally, such immigrant groups committed to self-employment for several reasons: to avoid harassment and discrimination at work, to combat limited hiring opportunities and facilitate economic upward mobility, and to foster a “bounded solidarity” not only of nationhood but also of co-ethnics in an alienating culture and a racialized society.
Upon their migration, many Vietnamese refugees first entered the lowest level of the job market by accepting low-paying positions in other ethnic small businesses. After accumulating enough capital and learning the skills, they would open their own small business. Many professionals, such as teachers, lawyers, and business managers, whose training and skills were not readily transferable to the host country, also switched to self-employment. Such flexibility and self-sufficiency reinforced the problematic ethnic paradigm of the “Bootstraps Model,” which tends to see the success of Asian immigrant groups as indication of their capability and the intent to acquire mainstream American values. Their capability, the ethnic-based theory argues, is decisively fostered by ethnic “norms” and “values.”

The success in social upward mobility of some Vietnamese individuals and communities incorporate Vietnamese Americans into the body of the “model minority.” Since 1980, Vietnamese Americans have become one of the “fabulous six” Asian American groups that include Chinese, Asian Indian, Japanese, Korean, and Filipino Americans. This privileged grouping encompasses not only population strength but also economic power. Home ownership rate, which is an indicator of the economic stability and development of a community or an ethnic group, is very high in the Vietnamese community. The 2007-2009 U.S. Census Bureau statistics point out that of the nine Asian groups coexisting in the U.S., the Vietnamese homeownership rate was 64.6, second only to the Filipino rate (64.8 percent) and above all others’ rates, including Japanese (64.1 percent), Laotian (63.1 percent), Chinese (62.6 percent), Asian Indian (55.5 percent), Cambodian (50.4 percent), Korean (48.9 percent), and Hmong (48.2 percent).

The Vietnamese American workforce also plays an important part in Asian American entrepreneurship and professions. Although Vietnamese immigration is quite recent compared to
other Asian ethnic groups, its entrepreneurship shows a robust and rapid growth. The 2007 Survey of Business Owners (SOB), conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau, indicates that the number of Vietnamese-owned firms was 229,149, constituting 14.8 percent of all Asian-owned firms, with $28.8 billion in receipts. These revenues only yielded to the Chinese (423,609 firms/ 27.3 percent/ $142.8 billion in receipts), Asian Indians (308,514 firms/ 19.9 percent/ $152.5 billion in receipts), and Koreans (192,465 firms/ 12.4 percent/ $78.6 billion in receipts). They surpassed all other Asian American entrepreneurial groups, including the Filipino (163,217 firms/ 10.5 percent/ $20.2 billion in receipts) and the Japanese (108,361 firms/ 7.0 percent/ $39.6 billion in receipts).

The 2007 SOB also showed that the majority of Vietnamese-owned firms, which accounts for 66.9 percent, were in the sectors of retail trade, repair, maintenance, personal and laundry services. More than 10 percent of total 29,782 Vietnamese-owned firms were employer firms that employed 166,425 persons. Among Vietnamese-owned businesses, small businesses attracted more new immigrants. From 2002 to 2007, Vietnamese small business ownership increased by 55.8 percent, compared to 40.4 percent among all Asian ownership. Small businesses also account for the largest number of no-paid-employee Vietnamese-owned firms. From 2002 to 2007, the number of Vietnamese firms with no paid employees grew by 64.2 percent for a total of 199,367 firms, comprising 87.0 percent of all Vietnamese-owned firms and generating $7.8 billion in receipts.87

The above statistics also suggest some contributions made by newer immigrants to the community economic growth. Rumbaut observes that after the termination of the embargo on Vietnam in 1994, “already Vietnamese developers and realtors in California report a growing flow of capital from Vietnam as entrepreneurs there seek safe havens for their excess cash.” 88
He optimistically prophesied that Vietnam’s economic growth “stimulate[s] Vietnamese businesses throughout California, and Orange County’s ‘Little Saigon’ may come to rival the economic dynamism of “Koreatown” just to the north.” With liquid asset accumulated and business experience gained in Vietnam during the last several successful decades, many immigrant entrepreneurs believed that upon their arrival in the U.S., they could quickly enter the market and expand their business in such an economically-fertile environment.

A Day at the “Work Center”

In April 2012, on my third day in Boston, Mr. San—a friend of Huy’s—granted me a trip to a benchwork plant in Greater Boston. Huy also accompanied me to the workshop although he no longer worked at such places. We left Huy’s house at 5.30 AM and after several bus and subway switches, we made it to the gathering point in Dorchester just five minutes before being picked up by a white Lincoln van. Ten people, five women and five men, were packed in the van, including Mr. San—the driver—and his “wingman” older brother. Another old man who was an off-duty driver also joined the workforce that day. Huy and I were sandwiched between two women, Madame Lan and Madame Kiều, at the rear seats of the van. Except for Huy and me, everyone was over fifty years old. Madame Lan, who was fifty-eight-years old, came to America in 2002, first to New Orleans, Louisiana then to Fort Worth, Texas before joining her daughter in Boston. She testified she never had a stable job and lived mostly on the “charity” of her children and cousins. Madame Kiều, sixty years old, also told the similar story. She arrived in Boston in 2005 and since then has only taken up odd jobs such as baby-sitting or seasonal cleaning. I tried, unsuccessfully, to secure an interview with them. In the workplace setting, the presence of their vigilant employers and curious colleagues, and the time-consuming formality of
the pre-interviewing process, including explaining in detail the Human Subject Research Board conditions and terms, and obtaining participants’ signatures, curtailed my recruitment. On being asked whether I could visit their homes, they both responded that because they were living with their children or relatives, it was inconvenient for them to be interviewed there. I tried to solicit an interview in a café or by phone, but again I was not successful. They however granted me permission to mention them in my work with the aforesaid information.

We arrived at the workshop, which was located on the southern skirt of Boston metropolis, at 7:40 AM—twenty minutes before the working time. It was a bulky, gray-painted, industrial building complex. We left the van, walked across a large and deserted parking lot, and marched through a small, curving corridor to a mess hall. It was a big room filled with the odor of fried food and fresh coffee. There were two lines of stainless-steel tables and collapsible iron chairs arranged in the middle of the room. Two steaming beverage pots that served fresh coffee and hot tea sat next to the door. Huy warmed up his breakfast in one of the six microwaves placed next to four big refrigerators at the end of the mess hall. Those who did not have breakfast before going to work lined up to share the microwaves. There had been already around ten to twelve people of other groups in the room. They were either drinking tea or coffee or hurriedly having breakfast from their canteens and lunchboxes. The majority of the workers were women and all of them spoke Vietnamese with a Southern accent.

The workshop is located in a big storage facility with many boxes of print materials lying on long tables. About thirty workers sat along the benches and began their jobs at 8:00AM. There were three sections specializing in three tasks. One group folded, glued, and stuck labels on envelopes. The second group sorted print materials into different piles. And the third group picked up materials from each pile and inserted them into envelopes and sealed them. The jobs
looked repetitive, intensive, and monotonous. Workers seemed to focus on their jobs, and few conversations were exchanged. No means of safety protection, including uniforms, aprons, gloves, or masks, were available. I sat on a vacant seat near the door and observed the workers for twenty minutes until I caught some skeptical eyes looking at me. Feeling awkward and wanting to avoid being a distraction to the workers, I withdrew to the mess hall, sitting on a chair and jotting down my observation notes. From time to time, however, I leaned toward the door to peek at the working group. I stayed there without drawing much attention to myself until the end of the work day at 4.00 PM.

At 4.00 PM, when we were entering the van, the workers seemed tense and anxious. Some kept looking around and chatting quietly with each other. But on our way out of the plant’s gate, we saw a truck entering the back of the workshop, and people suddenly became excited. I then learned that before seeing the truck, they were worried because there were no guarantees that they would be hired the next day. The arrival of the truck promised that more materials were being brought in and that there would be more work.

The “work center,” as I was told, was founded by a Vietnamese woman and her American husband sometime in 2005. However, nobody I talked with had ever met this couple. The jobs are simple. The “boss” has contacts with companies who outsource labor-intensive and simple tasks such as putting in envelopes advertisement materials or folding and gluing paper bags. Those who seek such works need to register beforehand on a waiting list. Whenever a contract arrives, the center may call them to work. Because the jobs require few skills and no English communication, and pay only a meager wage (the wage might vary and was kept confidential, but Huy received six dollars and twenty-five cents per hour), they attract mostly new and unemployed immigrants, of whom the majority are women. The trade also attracts some
immigrant seniors who want to make some extra cash apart from their modest welfare pay or Social Security check. Workers are picked up and dropped off at a collecting point, which is usually in Dorchester, because a large population of new Vietnamese immigrants is concentrated there. For each day of work, each worker is charged two dollars for a transportation fee. Thus, after eight hours of labor intensity, an average worker brings home forty-eight dollars ($6.25 \times 8 \text{ hours} - $2 = $48). Workers usually are called to go to some places at the end of the week to pick up their pay from the drivers. The wage might increase slightly if the labor supply is smaller than the demand; yet, the raise is insignificant and one-time-only. For example, Huy told me that in 2010 during the three days of the Tết holiday he and his mother were paid a bonus of fifty-five cents per hour because many Vietnamese workers stayed home for the festival. Depending on the types of products, the “center” sometimes pays these seasonal workers incentive wages, but mostly they receive an hourly-rate of pay.

Compared to the common workers, transporters like Mr. San make more money and have more privileges. Apart from their pay for work like anybody else, for each worker they offer a transportation service, they receive a two-dollar fee from the worker and two dollars more from the “center.” Thanks to their dual role as middleman and private transporter (most workers neither owned a car nor held a driver license), drivers are privileged over other workers if they wish to work in the station. As middlemen, van drivers also receive a commission for the workers they recruit. The “center” has no office, nor does it have a sign or advertisement. The business, instead, runs through a network of word-of-mouth, and workers are always paid in cash. Van drivers are the only link between workers and the “boss.” Despite its invisibility and secrecy, all new—that is, from 2003 to 2011—Vietnamese immigrants I met knew the service and often testified that they had participated in the benchwork activities when they first arrived
in Boston. Although people like Huy, who had then advanced to more stable and better paying jobs after years of living in the city, usually despised the job for its long working hours, low wages, and labor intensity, they all agreed that had it not for the “work center,” they would have been definitely unemployed in their first months in Boston.

In other cities, although I did not have any chances to explore similar benchwork occupations, I was assured by my informants that working in underpaid sweatshops was popular among newly-arrived Vietnamese immigrants and such work was usually run by a semi-legal system similar to the “work center” in Boston. Downgraded manufacturing firms, outsourcing family-run workshops, and underground garment sweatshops are some of the most common forms of business that cluster around big cities to offer an “off-the-books” type of work to “fresh-off-the-boat” immigrants. In Immigrant Acts, Lisa Lowe also frames such notorious sites of Asian immigrants’ exploitation in “the Silicon Valley, California, electronics industry, in the Los Angeles manufacturing district, and in the San Francisco Bay Area garment industry.”90 In New York City, Min Zhou and Regina Nordquist point out that “three out of five women [in Chinatown] work in the garment industry” and that most of them are “new immigrants, married, and with school-aged and younger children” from China.91 According to research conducted in 1992, of 120,000 workers working for garment sweatshops and factories in Los Angeles, Asian workers comprised 10 percent.92 Among these, many were Vietnamese women who recently came to America and “faced difficulties in finding work” because they had “little language skills in English.”93 The researchers also found out that these women usually “found work in the garment industry through friends who were already working for Vietnamese contractors” and that they “tried to get out of garment work as soon as they obtained proper documentation and improved their English skills.”94
Professional Displacement and the Proletarianization of Entrepreneurial Immigrants

Although such underpaid, labor-intensive, and dead-end jobs like Boston’s “work center” or Los Angeles’ garment sweatshops were considered temporary and a starting point for early resettlement, most informants showed no sign of an upturn in their careers. After a considerable amount of time—from three to ten years—of living in America, few of them succeeded in self-employed small businesses, let alone continuing and expanding their former successful entrepreneurship. The conditions of the informants whose stories I recount in the beginning of the chapter illustrate the new immigrants’ propensity toward downward social mobility. Ms. Na was running between two beauty salons, working seventy-five hours and making $700 per week. Her husband went through a multitude of seasonal jobs, working as a flooring-man, a construction worker, a shipyard worker, a scavenger, and a recycle-center worker before finding employment in a book-binding company that offered him $250 and a day off per week. In fall 2012, however, he was fired for reasons that were unclear. Ms. Ly was making $400 a week, working approximately sixty hours a week as a manicurist for a Vietnamese nail shop in Little Saigon. Mr. Hoàng’s weekly income from the Vietnamese bakery, where he worked as a janitor, was similar to his wife’s. He bitterly and angrily commented, “For every menial job I have applied, they requested working experience and English skills. Why on earth does a guy who is assigned only to wash dirty dishes and mop the floor in a kitchen need experience and English?” Sang was working as a part-time cashier for a Vietnamese shop in a local Vietnamese market for a weekly wage of $125. The only exceptional case was Mr. Lê. Thanks to a personal connection, he landed a more stable job in an A380 airplane assembly plant, from which he earned $800 per week with some additional benefits included. Lê was the only immigrant in my family-based informants who had a decent health insurance plan.
Lisa Lowe describes the negative socioeconomic shifts in the status of Asian immigrants in the United States as the process of immigrant “proletarianization.”95 My research suggests that although recent middle-class Vietnamese immigrants are not yet pauperized, proletarianization has been a common phenomenon among members of this group. Several theoretical arguments have attempted to address the socioeconomic decline among new immigrants in the United States. Based on the socioeconomic theories of Milton Gordon, Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole, Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou use the term “culture of poverty” to point to the ways in which immigrants’ efforts to climb the socioeconomic ladder are impeded by their stigmatization in the U.S. as racially and culturally inferior immigrants/citizens.96 Eric Tang argues that federal policies, such as the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which aimed to “destroy the means of subsistence of millions of [Black] working and jobless poor,” deemed green-card-holding Southeast Asian immigrants to be “collateral damage” and the “deserving poor.”97 Using the example of a female sweatshop laborer in Oakland, California, who recently emigrated from China, Lowe condemns globalization and neocapitalism for exploiting Asian immigrants “precisely through the selection and reproduction of racial, cultural, and gender-specific labor power.”98 The possibility of Asian immigrants’ upward mobility thus is restrained in all racial, ethnic, and class paradigms.

In fact, sociologists and economists have long reported the prevalence of poverty and unemployment in Southeast Asian communities in the U.S. In the late 1990s in New York City, 65 percent of the residents of the Northwest Bronx, the place 85 percent of the city’s Southeast Asians called home, were unemployed.99 In California—the heartland of Southeast Asian immigrants—80 percent of the Southeast Asian community was reported living in poverty and on welfare.100 The economic downturn and the failing of Vietnamese American businesses have
also been discussed. Timothy Bates argues that the growth of self-employment—the most significant and influential form of Vietnamese economy—is, in fact, equivalent to an increasing failure to secure “opportunities for salaried employment.” Bates claims that Vietnamese rank at the bottom of the five dominant Asian groups (Asian Indian, Filipino, Korean, Chinese, and Vietnamese) in every section of the self-employment industry, including educational attainment, capital investment, and earnings. Yen Le Espiritu observes that the rate of Vietnamese-run business failure is highest among Southeast Asian entrepreneurship. Studies by other immigration scholars such as Steven J. Gold and Franklin D. Wilson also concur that Southeast Asian Americans, including Vietnamese Americans, composed the largest percentage of occupants in the category of low-paying and mediocre jobs. Hence, although many bring with them the human capital of rich business experience in Vietnam and a considerable amount of social capital, the newer Vietnamese entrepreneurial immigrants face numerous challenges in both setting up businesses and entering the salaried-job market. In fact, these occupational challenges facilitate a growing propensity for proletarianization and unemployment among the new comers.

By comparing the old middle-class entrepreneurs of early capitalism to their counterparts of late capitalism, Wright Mills contends that whereas “in the world of small entrepreneurs,” success was granted to those who were “stubborn, or courageous, had common sense and worked hard” because “little or no educational preparation was needed […] much less to get along,” in the new form of capitalism, “the educational segment of the individual’s career becomes a key to his entire occupational fate.” In this argument, Mills not only emphasizes the role of the “educational elevator” in supplying professional knowledge needed in the entrepreneur’s much evolved trade, he also refers to the social networks and merits required for a successful future
businessman as “a man popular with everyone and well-known on the campus, with many memberships in social clubs--a man who can be imagined in twenty years as a subject for a Calvert advertisement.”\textsuperscript{106} The dramatic switch from a small entrepreneur of early capitalism to a modern businessman, therefore, is decisively marked by education and the social network built through a long process of learning and profession.

Although Mills’ work deals exclusively with the 1950s American middle-class evolution, several features in the lives of junior entrepreneurial emigrants from developing countries in global capitalism affirm his argument. First, the rudimentary form of capitalism in home countries requires little college education of small entrepreneurs to be successful. Business experience is, more often than not, either transferred from parents to their children with the hands-on model of apprenticeship or acquired through the self-taught model. Second, in many developing countries, businesspeople, from conglomerates to petty vendors, have to support and rely on a corrupt social system in order for their business to survive. This experience does not apply well in Western host countries, thanks to a more complex, more sophisticated, and less corrupt system of law and state employees. Because of these disadvantages, an immigrant entrepreneur from a developing country who is proletarianized in a developed country is comparable to an early-capitalist entrepreneur being outdated in late capitalism.

In many ways, this notion usually coincides with entrepreneurial Vietnamese. As I have mentioned, few of my entrepreneurial informants had formal training in business. Those who had a tertiary education, such as Ly, Hoàng, and Hồng, did not go to business school. Instead, they obtained some other professional training before switching to entrepreneurship. Ly was a former school teacher, Hoàng earned a degree in electronics, and Hồng went to an engineering college. Like many other informants, their business was either inherited from their parents or built by
their own efforts. Yet, their education was still a privilege. The disadvantage of growing up in the postwar era hindered the educational advancement of many businesspeople of this generation, particularly those with a “tainted” family background. Because of the lack of professional training, some of them were reluctant to advance their business and opted to maintain only a petty business instead. Lê never had a chance to continue his education after Minh Đức University was closed in 1975. He admitted, “I never had the guts to invest in something big or to expand my business. You might say that I am a coward but I had never found I had enough knowledge to risk developing my business. Had I had a university degree [in business], it would have been different.”

The younger generation who received formal training in business and economics such as Sanh and Diễm were more interested in white-collar jobs. They preferred being salaried employees for either state or private companies rather than own their businesses. However, upon their emigration to the U.S., their non-U.S. degrees did not qualify them for professional jobs. The lack of formal training and the different practices of American trade thus curtailed these immigrant entrepreneurs from entering the same level of entrepreneurship in the U.S.

But even if they had had an appropriate education, the new immigrants would have not been well-connected enough to continue their businesses. Another challenge that Vietnamese immigrants faced was their lack of social connections or “network.” Although the term “social network” may refer to the relationships between firms and individuals, a group of organizations and firms, or even between members of a family or between friends, in this part of the discussion, I allude to the connections between entrepreneurs and political power and local authority. Taking into consideration Mills’ suggestion of how education helps build social networks, this disadvantage is evident. First, because the English language handicap hinders new
immigrants from entering the mainstream job market, it slows their opportunity to create the required social networks and learn the culture of doing business in the U.S. Research on newly-arrived Vietnamese entrepreneurs in the late 1990s points out that whereas 70 percent of Asian Indian immigrants were highly English proficient, only slightly more than 20 percent of recent Vietnamese immigrants were at that level. In my study, the few informants who could speak English had a limited vocabulary, bad grammar, and a very strong accent. Because of their lack of English language proficiency, even the most dynamic immigrants are unable to expand their social connections outside their small Vietnamese community.

Second, in a politically fast-changing country such as Vietnam, where capitalism and communism are often mixed to produce a culture of corruption and bribery, which some scholars call “a capitalism of factions, highly segmented,” successful entrepreneurs rely heavily on building intimate relationships with communist officials and knowing how to “lubricate” the complex mechanisms of the state or local authority. In his essay probing the connection between Vietnamese economy and politics, Southeast Asian economist Adam Fforde uses the term “a renting-economy” to argue effectively that in Vietnam, “the value of political relationships to businesses had more to do with how one acquired assets than how one then made money from them,” and therefore it “created a capitalist class with good political connections.” Because of the critical role that political corruption plays in doing business, entrepreneurs of all levels treasure and prioritize their links with their political “partners” over other business skills. Upon their emigration, such business fundamentals usually do not function well in the host country. And even if they do, the corrupt apparatus is more tacit and more sophisticated. One nouveau riche immigrant, who owned a chain of hotels and resorts in Hồ Chí Minh City and Bình Thuận and was preparing to go back to Vietnam after three years living in California, reasoned, “The
system here is very easy yet very difficult. The system in Vietnam is very difficult yet very easy. I didn’t know how to run a business here because I couldn’t establish a network like I had done in Vietnam.”

An immigrant entrepreneur of traditional immigrant business sections in the U.S., such as a shopkeeper, a restaurateur, or a provider of personal services in a well-established ethnic enclave, requires certain experience that can only be accumulated after a considerable amount of time living and working in the community. In one study of the immigrant small business in the U.S., Bates concludes that to ensure success, immigrants must possess a quality of human capital that, apart from a certain “level of formal education,” also includes a “presence of managerial experience,” before entering the trade.111 In ethnic small businesses, such experience may differ depending on ethnic group and location.

In the case of Vietnamese Americans, Vietnamese communities across the country create their own business culture, which sometimes neither complies with state law nor accommodates the business experience of the new immigrants. In many Vietnamese-owned coffee shops I visited in Little Saigon, for example, patrons, both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese, puffed cigarettes freely in a closed, air-conditioned room right under the posted “No Smoking” signs. When asked, the owner, a middle-aged Vietnamese man, looked at me and answered coolly, “Here is a Vietnamese terrain. America is out there.” In the same coffee shop, young Vietnamese girls in tiny bikinis or lingerie-like outfits walked around and waited on customers. The coffee shop clientele was dominated by Vietnamese men in their forties, fifties, and sixties. In a Vietnamese cultural context, the presence of both the waitresses and those who enjoyed their services would be deemed inappropriate, if not illegal. Yet, in the U.S., the “bikini coffeehouse” model was so famous that it attracts the attention of not only Vietnamese, but also the
mainstream media, making a unique California Vietnamese coffee-shop culture. Of the many Vietnamese-operated coffeehouses in California (in 2003 alone, a study of Vietnamese-style café/karaoke bars reported the presence of about thirty coffeehouses in the Bay Area and about fifty others in Westminster), not every shop adheres to the “Vietnamese style” of being a smoke-filled and male-dominant business milieu. Besides, the sexually-provocative propensity of such Vietnamese coffeehouses only appeared recently in Garden Grove and Westminster with curious names such as Café Lú and Cafés Dĩ Vãng 1 and 2. However, as I was informed, in such locales, the attempt to establish either an American-style coffeehouse or a more authentic Vietnamese-style one (for example, a café in Vietnam is often a social sphere for both genders and all ages) usually meets with little success.

Similarly, there are seemingly specific Vietnamese American ways of doing business in all sectors. Most informants I talked with in Boston and California complained about the way Vietnamese American businesses were run in their cities. According to them, the business culture was so “half west half east” (nửa tây nửa ta) that it frustrated even the most experienced businessmen with decades of experience running a business in Vietnam. Mr. Hoàng narrated what hindered his intent to run a business in Little Saigon:

There are so many [Vietnamese] customers in Vietnam but so few [Vietnamese] in here and most of them try to open a business. They usually humorously concluded that new business in Little Saigon usually “jubilantly open and silently close” (tưng bừng khai trương, âm thầm đóng cửa). Many people saw other people’s business prospered and decided to “get out there” (chui ra). Getting out for business ensures a definite failure. The lease, the wage for employees, etc., everything is expensive. But more importantly,
you can’t understand the way they [the preexisting Vietnamese community] do business in here.

Mr. Tuấn, a former successful owner of a motorcycle shop in Bình Dương City, whose several attempts to open his own business in Boston met with failure remarked:

My mood before emigrating was fine. I thought it would be normal to live here [in Boston]. I thought it would be fairly easy to make a living in here, not that tough. But when I came I found out it was totally mistaken. I met difficulties in every aspect of life. Especially the language. I don’t even want to go anywhere because of that. In Vietnam everything was easy. Here whatever I want to do, I just can’t do it. I wanted to ask for a permit from the local authority to do some business but there are so many impediments.

Some others who concurred with such observations, argued differently. They often found out the identical nature of the “bad business management” of businessmen in the U.S. and their counterparts in Vietnam. Based on his experience of working in several Vietnamese businesses in town, Trung, one of my former students in Garden Grove, who introduced many informants to me, including his father, Mr. Lê, opined:

Businesses are different here [in Little Saigon] but bad management is exactly the same as bad management in Vietnam. Even worse. They treat their employees the same way in Vietnam, only worse. Oppressing them, exploiting them in any way they could. The hourly rate [payment] in California is eight dollars. But if a Vietnamese hires another Vietnamese, they only pay five or six dollars. Take it or leave it, they don’t care. There is no contract. Pay per day. That’s it.
Not only employees but also employers experienced difficulties in operating small business. Ms. Thanh, one of the “old-timers,” also struggled with her beauty salon. She started the salon with another friend in 2011:

When I opened this joint, many people said it was risky. It was not a good time to “get out there.” But I thought it’s OK because the salon was not big and I didn’t have to borrow money from the bank. Plus, there were opportunities because customers knew I had experience of this trade from Vietnam. I couldn’t go to work in other area because I needed to stay near my home to take care of my kids. So it’s also a reason. But too many joints. Too much competition. And the way they do business here is so different from how we did in Vietnam. It is really difficult to pay the bills.

Such observations also draw on the bad economy of recent years, especially in California. As informants often lamented, they came to the U.S. “several decades too late” when the U.S. economic recession hindered them from thriving in the local business. For the few who committed to self-employed business, they usually struggled with business longevity because of limited capital investment and insufficient business experience. And because the thriving and the longevity of small business depend on these factors, most recent entrepreneur immigrants choose not to risk their hard-earned social capital by hastily entering local business. Instead, they survive by accepting low-paying seasonal jobs in either benchwork occupations or other local menial jobs. Many others, especially women, are drawn to the most dominant Vietnamese ethic niche of the manicure industry.

Clipping, Filing, Sculpturing, and Polishing: The Nail-Care Niche

Newcomers to America should learn nail-care
It is both easy and inexpensive
Some hundred bucks would give you a nail-technician certificate
After that, life goes unhurriedly and smoothly from dusk to dawn

xxx

Doctors and engineers are no match for nail [workers]

Tuition is expensive and it takes too long to graduate
Some hundred hours of training would render a nail-technician certificate

Keep filing and polishing and money will come

The above excerpt is translated from “Nail Nail Nail,” a song by Phạm Hoàng Dũng that depicts humorously the nail-care industry in the U.S. and the Vietnamese technicians who provide the services. The manicure sector has become such a Vietnamese-dominant area that in many cities in America, the trademark “nail-care” is synonymous with “Vietnamese.” The Vietnamese ethnic-monopolization of the industry has assured that entrance into the occupation is readily available to Vietnamese immigrants without discrimination of gender, age, sexuality, and class. Half of my middle-class informants were involved in manicure services in one way or another. Most had been attending the trade since their arrival. Some acquired the training and were awarded the certificate but then decided to switch to another job. Some others, after several years and many failed attempts to pursue other jobs, reluctantly joined their compatriots in the trade. Even two female informants from the professional group, Ms. Vân and Ms. Giang, also took part-time jobs at their local nail shops.

In the U.S., beauty care is a lucrative industry. In the early 2000s, the industry provided jobs for 1.6 million people and generated $60 billion in revenue. At the same time, of all the beauty-care sectors, manicure is the fastest growing sector. Although Korean immigrants in
the 1960s were the first to transform the nail-care industry in the U.S., it was the Vietnamese who renovated the trade to the level it is nowadays. Similar to the middle-class-turned-manicurist Koreans, whose English language handicap and U.S. credentialing requirements hindered their entrance into professions, the first Vietnamese nail technicians were the Saigon elites, who lost their former social statuses and were taught the trade by some American celebrities in 1975 in California. Nonetheless, not until the 1990s did manicure become such a robust industry. The decade saw a doubling of the nail technician population (343,294) and a tripling of nail salons (49,476). In California, between 1987 and 2002, the number of registered Vietnamese nail technicians jumped from 3,900 to 39,600, making it a tenfold increase in Vietnamese manicurists and constituting 80 percent of nail workers in the state.

The explanation for the rapid growth of the manicure business in the last two decades lies in the arrival of recent Vietnamese immigrants. Indeed, researchers of Vietnamese nail care suggest that thanks to the recent “immigrant Vietnamese,” not the refugees, the industry has been transformed, spread, monopolized, and even transnationalized in the Vietnamese diasporic economy. A survey of Vietnamese technicians in 2008 points out that of more than 200 participant nail techs in Alameda County, California, 99 percent were born and raised in Vietnam and 49 percent had resided in the U.S. for less than ten years. The immigrants have revolutionized manicure from an upper class’s privilege to affordable and convenient services for the masses. In the same vein, the immigrants have transnationalized the trade, extending it beyond the U.S. border. In many other countries where Vietnamese reside and where there is an increase in recent Vietnamese immigrant population, both documented and undocumented, the services have also become Vietnamese-dominated. In the United Kingdom, for example, where the Vietnamese community “have only been establishing businesses in significant numbers
During the last five or so years,” in 2005 it was reported that the trade “has been growing at a phenomenal rate” and was generating a “significant growth in sales.” New immigrants also foster the transnationalization of nail-care by creating networks of training, finance, and supplies between the U.S., Vietnam, and other countries.125

Hence, nail care has obviously become an ethnic niche for Vietnamese living in the West.126 Roger Waldinger asserts that an ethnic niche is comprised of certain groups of immigrants “clustered in a limited number of occupations or industries.”127 In white-dominant societies, where immigrants are usually excluded from white-collar professions, ethnic niches have long become phenomenally stereotypical. Like the motels run by Asian Indians, grocery shops owned by Koreans, donut shops operated by Cambodians, and gas stations attended by Arabs, nail care is associated with the Vietnamese.

Certainly, such stereotyping of ethnic enterprises is misleading to say the least. The Vietnamese, for instance, only constitute of 20 percent of U.S. nail techs. In New York City, 80 percent of nail shops are run by Koreans.128 The “they-all-look-alike” narrative blurs the diverse ethnic identities of Asian immigrants and also fails to recognize the Vietnamese identity of workers in nail care. For instance, African American clienteles—the prominent group patronizing nail salons—often misname Vietnamese nail-care salons as “the Chinese shops.” Similarly, the people who join the niche are not always the poor, the uneducated, or the disqualified professionals as they are often assumed. Instead, many of them are well-to-do entrepreneurial immigrants who cling to the trade to survive the test of occupational adaptation.

As the song “Nail Nail Nail” suggests, a cheap training fee, a short training duration, and lax requirements for certificate granting are some of the main reasons why Vietnamese immigrants choose the nail-care industry. Willett notes that one of her informants, who was “an
African American nail specialist who has worked in the industry since 1963,” stated that the establishment of an Asian manicure shop required only “one hundred hours of training, five-thousand dollars and fifty words of English.”\(^{131}\) The cost for training varies in different regions, but generally, a learner can obtain a certificate within the range of 1,000 dollars. In Boston, Ms. Lâm paid $700 for one hundred hours of training, which lasted one month and a half at a training center in downtown Dorchester. In California, the training cost Ms. Ly $500. While nail schools in California have been offering lessons and exams in Vietnamese since 1996,\(^{132}\) in 2010, Ms. Lâm and others who lived in Boston had to study and take the exam in English. Because most of my middle-aged informants in Boston could barely speak a proper English sentence, both the training and the testing system are dubious. In fact, some informants admitted that they would not be able to pass without the help of their cohorts during the exam.

There is also a significant gap between the average income of nail technicians in California and other states. Since 2000, many technicians have been leaving California for other states, creating a decline in nail techs in California.\(^{133}\) This is a result of a dense concentration of nail techs as well as increasing competition between nail shops in the state, which tend to practice the promotion strategy of significant price reduction and extra free services. On the contrary, the number of nail shops and nail techs increases dramatically in other states. In 2007, for example, research of the Vietnamese workforce in Massachusetts showed that 25 percent of Vietnamese were involved in nail care.\(^{134}\) In East Coast and Midwest cities such as Boston, Akron, Athens, and Toledo, my informants reported an average income of between $3,000 to $5,000 per month in the warm season and a fixed salary of $2,000 with tips in the winter months. Meanwhile, in Little Saigon, Ms. Thanh, who co-owned a manicure and facial care salon, struggled to make $1,500 to $2000 per month, “In the wedding season, I would be lucky to make
$3,000. The money is just enough to cover daily expense.” Other workers who did not own a shop, such as Ms. Ly, worked longer hours and made less.

**Figure 7.** Inside a Vietnamese nail school. The young students were newly-arrived immigrants from Vietnam.

The manicure school in Dorchester where all my Boston manicurist informants trained also moved to Boston from California. The school was successful thanks to the reputation of California manicure training. In fact, California nail care offers such “superior quality”\(^{135}\) that even U.K. manicurists, for example, go to learn the trade in California. However, the reputation is also ambiguous. According to Huy and three other nail techs trained at the school in downtown Dorchester, it had only two instructors, one Vietnamese man, who is also the owner of the school, and an old white woman. The informants often complained how the school tried to rip them off in all possible ways, including selling overpriced textbooks and leasing tool kits for six or ten dollars per student when they took the exam. Some even suspected that the American woman was hired for her legal status rather than her teaching because she “rarely taught anything.”
Huy took me to visit the school after his morning class. When we climbed up the squeaky stairway of the two-storied building wherein the school was housed, we saw the owner, a mid-aged Vietnamese man with a mustache, sitting behind his desk. After greeting his former instructor, Huy led me to the training facility, which was comprised of two sections, a small room for lecturing and a bigger room for practical training. When we entered the training room, there were several young Vietnamese men and women sitting and practicing along two long benches. For every workstation along the two benches, there was a folding lamp bolted to the table and a trash bin next to the seat. A shopping plastic bag was hung next to each workstation. In the small classroom next door, a dozen rusty chairs were arranged randomly in front of a white board and a small desk. Huy laughed and pointed to a Vietnamese sentence scrawled on the top of the white board that read “NÍN LẠNG VÀ HỌC ĐI!” (Shut up and study!) The order, he said, was asked by the American instructor to be written as a reminder for students during class time. When I turned to the practical training room to take some photographs, some students had already gone and some others had just entered.

Evidently, few of my informants embraced the nail-care industry happily. However, depending on the scope of their former business and their social status in Vietnam, their distaste of the nail care business varied. Nail technicians who had a more affluent background and higher social status in Vietnam, like Ms. Ly and Ms. Na, strongly resented nail care, calling the job “inferior” and “depraved” and the workplace “hotbeds” of the “lowlife,” and “money-chasers.” Several women, whom I interviewed at Golden West Community College, including Diễm and Linh, preferred staying unemployed to working at nail shops. Others who have a more modest socioeconomic background, like Thanh and Lâm, accepted the job with a more tolerant attitude. Thanh commented that manicure was an honest trade and manicurists deserved some respect
because “many Vietnamese American doctors and lawyers were brought up by nail-worker parents.” Lâm revealed that she taught her daughter, who was also a nail technician, that “as long as you have a job to take care of yourself, that’s good enough. Any job which can give you honest earnings and nobody laughed at you, that’s good enough.” She, however, discouraged her son to follow the trade because “it was no job for men.”

Although manicure services are notorious for serious health problems caused by the toxic chemicals used in the trade, few informants were concerned about health issues. The social prejudice that profiles manicure as a job for “the lazy” and “the incompetent,” and asserts that decent people only do it temporarily while striving for a more noble occupation, however, was a prominent sentiment among the newly-emigrated Vietnamese. This opinion was voiced by both those who were not in the trade and the manicurists themselves. Intriguingly enough, the two informants of the professional group, Vân and Giang were the only ones who found the job “very interesting” and the nail shop “a wonderful social sphere” where they “learned so many things about American society” and “hung out with many good American women.”

Because nail services do not discriminate on the basis of gender, the number of Vietnamese male technicians is estimated to be 28 percent of the total nail workforce. In fact, most nail techs I talked to admitted that nail-shop patrons usually preferred male technicians. In my study, however, only a few male informants, including Tam, Sang, and Huy, were ever involved in nail-care services. Tam, however, was not a manicurist; rather, he ran a very lucrative nail-care supply business in Los Angeles. Sang worked only six months as a manicurist. Similarly, Huy learned the trade when he first came to America but only worked for one day. He told me that he knew immediately that “the nail care was not a decent job and there was no future in it.” His mother also contended, “I would not migrate to this country so that my sons
have to hold the feet of American women. I’m a mother and I took this degenerate job so that my sons will have a future.” The effeminacy associated with beauty-care sectors and the image of a man holding and caring for the feet of a woman are defined by the Vietnamese as being degenerate, disgusting, and dishonorable. The fast money made at a nail shop is also thought to be evil since it was presumed to gradually erode the will to educational success—the pivotal impetus for their emigration. For those reasons, it is common for newly-arrived male immigrants to eschew nail-care services. And if they have to take up the trade, they always try to get out of it as soon as possible.

However, regardless of the widespread resentment towards the nail-care industry, Vietnamese immigrants are still drawn to the trade in large numbers for the flexibility of the working schedule, a variety of payment methods, and job availability. Nail shops often open from 9 AM to 8 PM. Many shops accept part-time technicians who might want to work several hours between other appointments. Hence, almost anyone can find a working time that fits their daily agenda. Vân taught at a university as a math instructor, leased several apartments, and worked for a nail shop whenever she was not occupied. Giang worked part-time at the local manicure shop for only two reasons. She did not want to stay home alone and it was the only job which gave her the flexibility to go back to Vietnam three months a year. Na traversed between two shops everyday; one was a manicure shop where she worked on nail care and the other was a beauty salon where she worked on facial care.

Nail shops apply a variety of paying methods. In the warm season, when nail-care business is most bustling and lucrative, nail techs and shop owners divide the pay of each customer in an agreement, which ranges from the fifty/fifty to the sixty/forty ratios (technicians often get the bigger share). Technicians work in a rotating order but clients reserve the right to
have their nails cared for by their favorite techs. In the winter, when the number of clients
declines dramatically, nail techs can work for wages. My informants in Boston and Ohio claimed
the price to have a full set of liquid-painted nails (or “real nail”) done was between thirty-five
and forty-six dollars. The whole process may take up to one hour to complete, and the client
usually gave a tip of ten dollars. A set of gel-painted nails was cheaper and less time-consuming;
it would take only thirty-five minutes to be completed and the price ranged from twenty to
ten dollars with a smaller tip of three to five dollars. In California, my informants
reported a 20 percent cheaper price, smaller tips, and more demanding customers.

Nail-care jobs are readily available in every state, and entrants can be accepted relatively
easily in most cities without a background check or strict experience demands. Many nail-shop
owners risk facing fines for noncompliance with immigrant labor laws by accepting Vietnamese
exchange students to work illegally for a cheaper pay. In Greater Los Angeles and Boston, where
Vietnamese student concentrations are among the highest in the country, this underground hire is
phenomenal. International students sometimes cheat the local authority by “renting” the
certificate to work for nail shops. Huy told me that he was offered to lease his certificate for fifty
dollars per day by Vietnamese students at Bunker Hill Community College and several other
universities in Boston.

Conclusion

In April 2012, I sat with Mr. Hồng in his father-in-law’s apartment. Hồng, who had
worked at the Boston Bottle & Can Return in Dorchester for several months, pointed to a pile of
used cans and bottles in a corner of the kitchen and told me that they were the primary earnings
of his father-in-law. Since his arrival in Boston 1995, Hong’s father-in-law had been living on
welfare and scrapping was an important source for his remittances and savings. Generally, a plastic bottle of any size or a standard twelve-ounce beer can is paid five cents and a super-sized twenty-four-ounce can is paid ten cents. At that flat price, a semi-professional scavenger may earn $100 to $150 in a lucky week. Hồng also knew several recent Vietnamese immigrants who were canvassing the city’s dumpsters for a living. He laughed bitterly and sang a folksong, mocking a Chinese Vietnamese who:

Qua Mỹ rồi tưởng là mình ngon
Ai có dè cũng đi lượm lon

(Thinking he was cool going to America
Yet unexpectedly ended up scavenging for used cans)

The narrative of that Chinese Vietnamese, Hồng said, illustrated precisely the lives of many new immigrants, including him. He concluded that to most people he knew, the consequence of emigration was dreadful.

In short, the economic upswing in Vietnam during the last several decades clearly has fostered the development of a new entrepreneurial class and provided them with a different social status prior to their emigration. Supposedly, with their social and human capital, this newer generation of immigrants would quickly adapt to and advance in the host country. However, the success of their resettlement seems to be controversial. Lacking social and governmental supports and facing difficulties in the work environment, recent immigrants tend to preserve their social capital and take up unskilled, underpaid, overworked, unsecured, and under-protected jobs to survive. Only some lucky families were able to acquire temporary accommodation, guidance, and mental support from their relatives. Most others had to rely on their own wits and means to resettle in the new land—particularly in job hunting—and their
journey proved to be no less challenging and compelling than those of previous Vietnamese migrants. Some of them have chosen to return to Vietnam. Some walk the transnational tightrope of traveling between the two countries in order to maintain both nationalities for an easy access to their children in the U.S. and a better business in Vietnam. For the majority who stay in the U.S., their struggle for occupational adaptation continues and their future remains uncertain.
CHAPTER IV

STRANGERS IN ETHNIC ENCLAVES: EDUCATION, KINSHIP, AND COMMUNITY

This study has delineated several important dimensions of the pre-migrant and post-migrant life of nascent Vietnamese intellectual and entrepreneurial immigrants in the U.S. Central to this work is the significant distinction between the old and the new genealogies of Vietnamese emigration. Differing from previous waves of refugees whose endeavors aimed at “moving out of economic dependency, finding jobs, and climbing out of poverty,” new immigrants expect to continue their middle-class social status in the U.S. Whereas professional immigrants are able to achieve this goal, entrepreneurial immigrants usually find themselves in a quagmire of endless socioeconomic struggles. To many, the struggles relating to social adaptation and career advancement lie not only “out there” in mainstream society but also “in here” within their own kin circle and community.
Drawing on studies of push and pull factors of both Vietnamese intellectual and entrepreneurial migrations, this chapter will examine three pivotal components of immigrant life, including individual success through education, mental and economical supports of kinship, and community ties. This chapter engages several dominant conversations in Asian-American studies in general, and Vietnamese-American studies in particular, including discussions of the “model minority,” family kinship, and the making of ethnic communities. Although this chapter continues to focus on the lives of employment-based and family-sponsored immigrants, in an effort to provide a more nuanced analysis, I include voices of Vietnamese Americans who arrived in the U.S. as evacuees and refugees.

**Individual Success? The “Refugees of Education” and the Academic “Model Minority”**

“We Come for an Education”

So far, I haven’t seen anything valuable about America except for its university degree. Probably there are other good things in here too but I haven’t seen yet [laughter]. Because of my college-aged children so we had to emigrate. If we didn’t come [to America] and they had to come here as international students, it would be very expensive. We can’t afford both sons studying in America. We came here so they would get a U.S. university degree. Then, our dream comes true. Then we may age, get sick, or die. It doesn’t matter. Thinking so help us cope with the hardship in America and our [the parents’] dismal future. We accept this in exchange for their educational success in college. “Sacrificing father’s life to foster children’s lives” (hi sinh đời bố củng cố đời con) [laughter]… Our biggest dream is the two sons obtain a university degree, then my wife and I would go back to rest in Vietnam. Last years of our lives should be spent in Vietnam. (Mr. Lê)
It’s unimaginable that our lives have turned into this tragic situation. If it was not for the two children, we have gone back to Vietnam long ago. It is not too difficult for us to restart our business. (Ms. Ly)

Yes, yes, we’ve been thinking, “let’s get the citizenship then we can travel back and forth. Better yet, we will go back to Vietnam for good.” We will wait until the children graduate from university and we will decide because their education is the most important to us. Everything else can wait. (Mr. Hoàng)

Above are several typical testimonies of entrepreneurial parents who, regardless of their social status and the economic conditions in Vietnam and the U.S., all agree that 1) their decision to migrate was primarily made for their children’s education and future in the U.S., 2) their children’s academic success and a sustainable future are worth their parents’ losses in emigration, and 3) they have planned, or at least desired, to return to Vietnam upon the completion of their children’s academic pursuit (a university degree from a U.S. institute) and their securing careers. Similarly, many young immigrants show a great desire for an American college degree although a great number of them also express their intention to return to Vietnam to work and live upon completion of their programs. The testimonies also suggest reciprocal relations and a strong connection between Confucian values and transnational ties in the lives of the new émigrés, wherein U.S. education plays a dual role of both push and pull factors. Whereas the U.S. draws immigrants to America for a decent education, the fulfilling of this academic goal also enables many young immigrants and their parents, to return to Vietnam where the job market is less competitive and the culture is more familiar. Simultaneously, the significance of a U.S. education is also recognized by intellectual immigrants who hope their academic careers will set an example for their children’s educational success.
While focusing greatly on social, economic, and political reasons, research on Third World emigration often overlooks the role of education in fueling migration from less educationally-advanced countries to the First World. Migrant theoretical frameworks tend to concentrate more on economic necessities than on children’s education. Scholars often argue that U.S. education provides the “reception context” for immigrants and their children who, on their arrival in the host country, seek an education in order to achieve upward social mobility.  

Among the limited scholarship that mentions the significant role of children’s education in émigrés’ decision to leave is sociological research conducted by Krista Perreira et al on recent Latino immigrants whose emigration motivations “included helping their children to obtain a better education.” Yet, Perreira et al fail to elaborate or explore this further. This shortcoming is also found in studies of Vietnamese immigrants. Even in the most relevant scholarly works, very little information on the educational impetus is discussed. For example, in her study of Vietnamese youth in U.S. schools, Lynne Tsuboi Saito alludes only once that, “[S]everal parents mentioned their children as the main reason for leaving Vietnam: ‘I look for the future of my children.’” In the same vein, Kibria, in her well-cited work on Vietnamese boatpeople, cursorily mentions that many parents opined that their being in America is “for the sake of providing education for their children” and some independent young Vietnamese refugees confirmed their emigration being allowed by their parents who expected they would have “greater opportunities for education abroad.”

The fact that few studies of Vietnamese evacuees and refugees have adequately addressed the educational opportunities in the West as one of the motivations for post-1975 genealogies of migration may be attributed to the invisibility or lack of transparency of education seeking goals. Facing the anti-Vietnam strife of the postwar-U.S. political agenda and the rigorous background
scrutiny of the 1989 “Comprehensive Plan of Action,” émigrés who declared any reasons for their escape other than anti-communism might risk provoking the Vietnamese refugee community as well as be disqualified by UNHCR scanning agents.

Since they are not escapees of either political strife or economic hardship, entrepreneurial immigrants often testify that the respect for learning and the expectation of their children’s success in education primarily initiated their decision to leave. In a Vietnamese cultural context, examples of parents embracing austerity and hard work in order to provide an education for their children are common. Vietnamese mass media often cover compelling and poignant stories of parents’ arduous efforts and enormous sacrifices, such as: A father who carried his paralyzed daughter on his back to class everyday for seven years hoping she would attend college one day; a cancer patient who lived on two bowls of rice porridge a day to save money so that her daughter could attend a university in Hanoi; a single mother who could not visit her hometown in Quảng Ngãi for three consecutive years because she was too busy selling porridge on the streets of Saigon to take care of her two children in college; or another single mother peddling snack food on the streets of Hue for eighteen years so that her four children, two of whom were in college, would have the education she and her deceased husband did not have. Since such sacrifices represent a valorized parenthood in Vietnamese culture, the motivation for parents to risk their own future in the new land is understandable.

Confucian Values and the “Model Minority”

For decades, scholars have been debating the success of Asian students in U.S. schools. Some scholars support the notion of a distinctive Asian academic superiority. For example, in his study of Korean immigrants in the U.S., Won Moo Hurh concludes that “children of […] Asian-
American groups (including Korean) have indeed become ‘a model minority.’ Some others are ambiguous about this notion and propose a concept of “dualism” in portraying Asian Americans. For instance, looking at the number of Asian American/immigrant students admitted to the nation’s top universities and other socioeconomic achievements, Arthur Hu argues that “both viewpoints [on the “model minority”] are wrong and perhaps also a bit right” and suggests that Asian Americans should be perceived as a “double minority.” In the same vein, Bic Ngo and Stacey J. Lee propose that to decipher the myth of Asian students’ outstanding academic ability, researchers of interest should “examine the ways identities and experiences are being transformed—shaped, contested, and reconstructed—in U.S. schools and society and the role(s) of teachers, peers, and schools.” The majority of scholars, however, believe that it is a pervasive perception. Keith Osajima argues that “the portrayal of Asian Americans [in academic achievement] continues to be largely stereotypic” due to mass media projection. Ronald Takaki criticizes the celebration of the “model minority” by the “pundits and the politicians” who “have exaggerated Asian-American ‘success’ and have created a myth.” Thus the debate over Asian American “whiz kids” who have the highest GPAs in grade schools to their significant representation in prestigious U.S. institutions, encompasses different viewpoints is inconclusive.

Arriving in the mid-1970s as evacuees and in the 1980s as refugees—a time when the model minority myth was ubiquitous—Indochinese immigrants diversified this “quota of excellence” debate. As early as 1975, the outstanding academic performance of young Vietnamese evacuees began drawing the attention of the American public. Being well prepared in Vietnam, the children of Saigon elites often enrolled in top-ranking U.S. universities. At the University of California, Berkeley, right after the fall of Saigon, Sucheng Chan recognized many elite Saigon students in her classes, whose stories later were compiled in one of her books.
signature institutions of U.S. educational elitism, such as MIT, Harvard, and Stanford, Vietnamese refugee students were spotted competing with other “model minority” Asian groups, who at the time were being compared to Jewish students of the 1920s and 1930s,\(^1\) for competitive scholarships and prestigious awards. Many of these students, in fact, had graduated from or were studying at the top universities in Vietnam or in other allied countries before the Reunification of Vietnam. Mr. Hiền from Whitehouse, Ohio, is one example. One month after his return from Taiwan’s elite National Changchi University, Saigon was under siege. Hiền took the first chance he had to get on a military vessel heading to the U.S. Seventh Fleet offshore in the South China Sea. Although he had already attained a degree in agricultural engineering, he reinvented his career by pursuing a degree in petroleum engineering at Virginia Tech.

The comparison of academically high-achieving Vietnamese and other Indochinese students to the “bootstrap model” students stemmed from Cold War political propaganda. Educational scientists often choose to “focus […] attention on scholastic achievement” of these refugee children whose “pursuit of education” was “extraordinarily successful” because “education is of such paramount importance as a public issue and is at the very core of long-term material and social well-being of our society.”\(^2\) Those who dared to escape communism, therefore, were identified as sharing the ethical and cultural values of U.S. society. The educational success of Southeast Asian refugees was also highly politicized in states’ political agenda as well as in popular culture’s arena. For instance, in 1983, Linn Ann, “a twelve-year-old fifth grader from Cambodia who had been in the United States for four years” was commended for “doing so well after such a short time in the United States” by President Ronald Reagan. Disney Productions also made a movie about her that was entitled “The Girl Who Spelled Freedom.” Linn Ann’s achievement? She attended the National Spelling Bee and would have
won the championship had she not been “unfairly eliminated” by the misspelling of the “Mexican food” enchilada.20 The refugee teenager was exalted for being victimized by the Khmer Rouge and the Vietnamese occupying forces, braving the deadly escape trails of the Cambodian-Thai border for the “free world,” and most importantly, assimilating well into American mainstream culture. Her failure in the contest, thus, was “unfair” because she was culturally “tripped” by a foreign element of Mexican heritage.21

Yet, the mass arrival of boatpeople refugees also seriously tarnished the reputation of the Asian academic model. Composed of many poor, semi-illiterate, rural migrants whose educational backgrounds were extremely limited, these Indochinese youth in general, and Vietnamese youth in particular, did not perform as successfully as their prior compatriots in American schools. In fact, according to an educational survey in 1990, Vietnamese not only ranked at the lowest educational level of whites and all Asian American groups but also were deemed as being “similar to or lower than those of U.S.-born blacks and Hispanics.”22 To many fearful Americans, the massive arrivals of malnourished and poorly-educated Indochinese refugees in the 1980s recalled the image of hordes of Chinese “coolies” in the second half of the nineteenth century more than it did a “model minority.”

Despite the low rate of formal education and literacy in comparison to the privileged evacuees, Vietnamese boatpeople still academically outperformed their contemporaries of Laotians, Cambodians, and Sino-Vietnamese.23 Based on a multi-sited, multi-participant research of U.S.-Vietnamese boatpeople in 1981, Caplan et al contends that of the 200 interviewees, “14 percent of the Vietnamese, 4 percent of the Chinese, and 5 percent of the Lao had gone to college.”24 The study also emphasizes that “the Vietnamese had a much greater interest in higher education than did the Chinese or the Lao.”25 In her study on Cambodian
refugees, Chan observes that Cambodians fall far behind Vietnamese (and also Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans) in academic accomplishment. While other groups aimed for selective schools, advanced degrees, and prestigious programs, a young Cambodian American with a senior high school or even junior high school diploma was considered “well-educated” by their parents. Similarly, a comparative study of the academic achievements of “364 Vietnamese and 95 1.5 and second-generation Cambodian children” in San Diego, California shows that the Cambodian students trailed behind the Vietnamese students by a great distance.

According to many sociological analyses, the success of Vietnamese youth resembles that of other Asian groups and is attributed to three aspects of “Asian” heritage: family, community, and social values. For instance, drawing on a case study of a California urban public high school, Gilberto Q. Conchas argues that Vietnamese students with exceptional academic performance always attribute their success to their “home environment” and credit their parents as being “instrumental in motivating them toward academic success.” Carl L. Bankston III also suggests that the outstanding achievement of Vietnamese American students is rooted in the efforts of Vietnamese communities—one of which is Versailles Village in New Orleans East, Louisiana where his research was conducted—that “provide networks of supports and constraints to their young.” In her analysis of a Vietnamese-dominated high school in Orange Country, Saito asserts that their success is constructed upon a consciousness of ethnic identity and that the “intercorrelations” of Vietnamese socio-cultural values “predict achievement” for Vietnamese students.

Despite different geographical origins in Asia, young Vietnamese high-achievers share with Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Americans the commonality of Confucian values. In fact, researchers have found, with the exception of South Asians (most particularly, Asian Indians),
Asian countries without a strong Confucian background tend to lag behind those countries with a Confucian culture in educational achievement. In researching four groups of Asian Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino Americans, Barbara M. Posadas points out that Filipino Americans are critically outperformed in U.S. schools. She notes that Filipino educational attainment is inferior in most aspects, including grade school performance, college admission, college drop-out ratio, and percentage of degree holders. Hence, Posadas concludes that “the myth of the model minority with regard to educational attainment is hardly an appropriate depiction of the situation of Filipino Americans in general, but especially not of American-born Filipino Americans.” Other Southeast Asian Americans who do not come from societies adhering to Confucian cultural values such as Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmong are also not as well-credited in academic achievement as are their Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese American/immigrant peers.

Consequently, scholarly works on East Asian youths often emphasize the correlations between a Confucian heritage and educational success in the U.S.: Cheng and Yang assert that a pertinent explanation for the root of Asian academic success is the Confucian cultural heritage adopted from their home countries; Hurh contends that the “passion for education” as a way to achieve “wisdom and virtue” and the “historical legacy of attaining social mobility through education” are pivotal in fostering the academic success of Korean Americans; Franklin Ng elucidates how Taiwanese educational methodologies and values shape the life and academic endeavors of Taiwanese living in the U.S. He notes that in the private “Chinese School system” in the U.S. (to which many Taiwanese send their children to study), not only is Confucian ideology celebrated in curriculums and textbooks, Confucius’ birthday on September 28 (which also is Teacher’s Day in Taiwan) is also solemnly commemorated.
This emphasis on cultural values is also found in other research on Vietnamese Americans. For instance, in their frequently cited work on Vietnamese youth in the U.S., Zhou and Bankston claim that for “many Asian Americans, particularly Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese Americans,” their high-achieving performance in schools is indebted to their cultural backgrounds, which are “heavily influenced by Confucianism.” Some early studies on Vietnamese refugees even extend to religion to corroborate the role of Confucianism in schooling. A 1981 study, for example, claims that students of a Confucian belief background achieved the highest GPA mean of 3.37 in U.S. schools, surpassing, in a descending order, children of Mahayana Buddhist, non-religious and Roman Catholic, Protestant and Theravada Buddhist cultural/religious backgrounds. In contrast, Khmer studies scholar Nancy Smith-Hefner contends that schooling did not appeal to Cambodian students because they were not compelled to do so. Unlike other educationally-focused Asian groups, their parents’ Theravada Buddhism and belief in karma did not center education as a central factor in achieving success and thus lowered their educational expectations.

Such perceptions of Confucianism not only marked ethnocultural differences, separating Vietnamese from other Southeast Asians (with the exception of the culturally-Chinese dominated Singapore), but also distinguished people according to their religious adherences. Because Confucian doctrine is only one component of the “three doctrines” belief in Vietnam, using Confucianism as a religion to justify Vietnamese students’ endeavors in education is problematic. Portes and Zhou, for example, have suggested that using religion to associate a “particular ethic” with social successes is “a very messy theory”:

In terms of professed religions alone, we would have to identify those unique values leading Confucianists and Buddhists, Greek Orthodox and Catholics into successful
business ventures [...] Such explanations are tautological: if a certain minority is successful, it must be because it originally had or later acquired the right values.\textsuperscript{40}

However, although the suggestion that Confucianism engenders academic superiority is inconclusive, my research has shown that this tradition does factor into the desire for education. As I discussed extensively in chapters one and two, Vietnamese academic success is strongly driven by a heritage of academic ambition and intellectual veneration. Yet, despite the considerable number of successful Vietnamese students in the U.S. and other foreign countries, the struggles of many other young Vietnamese, especially new immigrants in the U.S., seriously challenge the assumption that the Vietnamese are a “model minority.”

A Street Too Far

When his family left Vietnam for the United States in 2011, Quang was eighteen and already a freshman at the Hồ Chí Minh City’s University of Technology. Like most Vietnamese young of his generation, he spent his childhood in “cram schools,”\textsuperscript{41} focusing on gaining admission to a university. I met Quang at Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) in Boston where I also conducted several other interviews of young Vietnamese immigrants on the same day. After a year studying at this college, he showed some disappointment and concern about his education in the U.S.

In Vietnam I took English courses from fifth grade to twelfth grade in school but I didn’t learn much because English was not important and I had to focus on natural science for my university admission test. I only learned English when I came here. To me, mathematics, physics, and chemistry here are at a low level but social studies and the humanities are challenging. I got As for all science classes, Bs for social sciences and the
humanities, and always failed English Writing. I spent one hour trying to figure out the questions and had only thirty minutes to write the essay. I am still stuck in the Incomplete Process group.… When I just arrived, my aunts advised me to apply for MIT. After a while, they said I should consider Northeastern University. Now I am just hoping that after this school I can go to UMass-Boston or some similar schools. Northeastern University does not have much financial aid. If I am admitted there I will have to take a student loan and I am terrified to think about borrowing money. If I am not successful I would be in huge debt. I think I only enroll in those schools if I have enough scholarships. But even with scholarships I must be very careful because I may lose the scholarships if I don’t perform well. Then I again will be in huge debt. Oh well, I’d better go to UMass or some schools of a lower level. Sometimes I really regret that I emigrated before completing my university in Vietnam. I should have waited.

Like most other informants in my project, Quang’s parents are not poor. His father was a freelance artist in Hồ Chí Minh City who had his own gallery and made decent money from copying artworks for local art contractors. His mother owned a tailoring shop that specialized in áo dài (the traditional Vietnamese women’s attire). In America, they lived in their own $250,000 house in Dorchester for which they had already paid in full. However, with their current unstable and low-paying jobs, the couple could not risk paying too much for their son’s education.

Quang’s story resonates with the reality of many recent young immigrants from Vietnam whose dreams of American education seemingly end at vocational schools.

To argue against the “model minority” theory and to explain the struggles of Vietnamese immigrant students at U.S. schools, I suggest a reexamination of the model of a “pan-Asian identity,” and a collective identity of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants. Because each nation in
Asia is distinctive in culture and politics, and each Vietnamese immigrant trajectory possesses a different socioeconomic background, my research reveals that such distinctions lead to different results in the educational achievement of each group of Asian Americans in general and each group of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants in particular.

First, the argument of Asian American panethnicity is controversial. Espiritu, for example, notes that an Asian American panethnic identity is a political and social identity born out of Asian American resistance to U.S. racism and oppression. To her, a collective identity is key to “bridg[ing] organizations and solidarities among ethnic and immigrant groups of Asian ancestry,” and one that will be a significant and robust social force and identity. While Espiritu and other scholars embrace a shared identity among different groups of Asian Americans, some others resist this idea. Rick Bonus and Linda Trinh Vo, for example, argue that Southeast Asian immigrants share more things in common with refugees from Central America, Africa, and Europe than they do with other Asian Americans, with whom they have always been aggregated. This fit, they observe, “has not always been comfortable for them.”

Second, each wave of Vietnamese immigrants may have a different approach to education, and immigrants of different social backgrounds may have different definitions for “educational success.” Generally, Vietnamese Americans living outside of ethnic enclaves and possessing a professional career tend to enroll their children into better schools, attain a more advanced education, and develop more lucrative professions than their compatriots who live in densely populated ethnic enclaves. As mentioned earlier, children of evacuees tend to be more successful in school than the children of boatpeople. And even though Vietnamese parents in general may share the Confucian value of respecting intellectualism and yearning for education, the levels of encouragement and pressure on their children’s educational effort vary between
different social strata. My research of the two Vietnamese Christian communities in Michigan City and in Ohio City provide excellent examples of how modes of entry and social segregation shape different perspectives of educational opportunities in the U.S. among people of similar religious culture.

In the church in Ohio City, I met many affluent families of evacuee background whose determination that their children achieve scholastic excellence is stronger than that of their brethren in Michigan City. Reverend Đặng Khang’s family is a powerful statement of how pre-1975 elite Vietnamese channeled their descendants toward respectable professions in the U.S. Of the twelve children they raised, all of their daughters were coached to pursue a career in education, and most of them are working at schools and on district educational boards. Of their six sons, except for the oldest one who continued in his father’s footsteps to become a pastor, the remaining five entered medical schools and became doctors, pharmacists, and dentists. The couple has thirty-four grandchildren, and so far most of their college-aged grandchildren are either in pre-medical programs or already in medical schools. Such examples are also prevalent in close-knit Vietnamese communities or professionals who live in non-Vietnamese middle-class neighborhoods. These families are wealthy, well-educated, hold prestigious and high-paying professions, have only several children, and have little cultural and socioeconomic connection to dominant Vietnamese American communities.

Conversely, members of the Vietnamese church in Michigan City are primarily boatpeople and their sponsored family members who have been arriving in the U.S. since the 1990s. The Vietnamese community in the area comprises a large portion of immigrants who work in traditionally “Vietnamese” niche occupations, including personal care services, such as nail-shops, and small businesses, such as grocery shops, landscape care and mechanic shops.
Some were not able to communicate in English, and many others spoke little English with a very limited vocabulary and extremely strong accent. One man joked that his and his friends’ English was “Nailish”; a form of mixed English-Vietnamese language made famous by nail salon technicians. Most people I talked to did not have a formal education, either in Vietnam or the U.S. Compared to members of the Ohio City church, they were less privileged and less affluent in both the home and the host countries. The importance of refugees’ children’s education is not as critically stressed in Michigan City as it is in Ohio City. Mr. Đức, a forty-six-year-old man who arrived in the U.S. in 1990, said none of his sons was interested in a college education, “I suggested they earn a university degree and work in professions. After high school, they both decided to take up nail-care training and became nail technicians. They said that in America money was the most important thing.” Laughing, he added, “Not sure they were right but they are doing okay.”

There are also significant differences between the two recent immigrant groups of intellectuals and entrepreneurs in how their educational roads are mapped and how they define “academic success.” The testimonies of the high school and college students I interviewed show distinctly different expectations on desired programs, types of schools, and levels of education. Children of intellectual immigrants usually aim for Ivy League universities, or at least the top fifty universities, and often express their determination in pursuing an advanced degree in the natural sciences or social sciences. Meanwhile, children of entrepreneurial immigrants target only a bachelor degree in certain fields that promise easier access to the job market. They also frame their education in medium-ranked public universities with tuition affordability, scholarship availability, and easy admission. An exception was the few students who also aim at getting into one of the large public universities with a more selective admission, such as the University of
California. However, these students often lacked a clear plan and a commitment to enter such schools.

Echoing the sentiments of Taiwanese professional immigrant parents whose “primary concern” is their children’s education, Vietnamese intellectual immigrants affirmed that a top U.S. education for their children was important to them. Unlike the entrepreneurial immigrants, no one mentioned his or her residency in the U.S. as a sacrifice for their children’s education and future. However, while Taiwanese parents tend to educate children from a very young age in prestigious U.S. private schools or Japanese-style cram schools, Vietnamese professional parents simply send their children to public schools. Most parents believe that the U.S. public educational system is satisfactory and, with consistent surveillance and pertinent home tutoring, their children will gain admission to, and perform well in, U.S. top-ranked universities. Vietnamese intellectual families spend enormous amount of time tutoring their children at home, particularly in the natural sciences. Thương said that she expected of her children to “at least be admitted to UCLA” and, better yet, obtain an “advanced degree in science.” Nonetheless, she was willing to allow her children to choose the subject they would study, as long as they were committed to having “a highly respected position in U.S. society.”

Of the eleven young Vietnamese American and immigrant participants of this project, whose ages ranged from sixteen to twenty-five, three are children of intellectual immigrants. Unlike the Vietnamese-born children of entrepreneurial immigrants, they were either born in the U.S. or in a country other than Vietnam. Because the intellectuals only immigrated recently, most of their American-born children were under fifteen years of age. All three expected to attend Ivy League schools and pursue advanced degrees. Although these informants have been guided, encouraged, and mentored by their parents from a very young age to continue the family
tradition of intellectualism, they have the freedom of pursuing a major of their choice. And although such liberty makes them more “Americanized” in the eyes of some Vietnamese, it differentiates them from even the privileged children of the previous waves who were often intended to pursue more “practical” professions such as medicine, dentistry, or pharmacy. In the same vein, their class privilege significantly separates them from the majority of Vietnamese middle-class immigrants.

Even though entrepreneurial immigrant parents emphasized their desire for their children’s education, the educational goals they set for them is more compatible with those of the refugees, but also lower than those of both the elite evacuees and the intellectual immigrants. Ms. Na stated, “I don’t expect my sons to be scientists or scholars although I would kill for them to be so. I know their caliber. I just hope they will succeed in college and at least bring me a college degree.” Such lowered expectations take root in four common issues: 1) most entrepreneurial parents do not have either proficient English capability or sufficient academic knowledge to tutor and mentor their children; 2) coming from an entrepreneurial family background, many believe that intellectualism is genetically a scholar-gentry family’s privilege; 3) they often work around the clock for a living and thus do not have enough time to monitor their children; and 4) unlike children of affluent or intellectual families, all entrepreneurial immigrant students have to take jobs to support their family and their own education. Lacking an understanding of the U.S. educational system also leads to confusion and prevents parents from either charting a roadmap for their children or supporting them to achieve high academic credentials. This weakness sometimes negatively influences the career choices of their children. Young immigrants may take up a major based on parental and peer suggestions rather than in what they are really interested. Because the parents are also new to America and do not possess pertinent knowledge
of education and career choices and prospects, they tend to rely on their relatives to make choices for their children. And since the relatives also rely on the community’s conversations to give advice, young students are sometimes victims of misinformation and misguidance.

In an English class I attended at Golden West Community College (GWC), of the twenty-two students in the class that day, the majority spoke Vietnamese. These students included young teenagers and non-traditional Vietnamese in their forties and fifties. The class was at an intermediate speaking level; one of the many introductory English classes that most Vietnamese students at GWC have to take. The teacher, a white, middle-aged American, spent time writing new words on the board and asked students to repeat after her. She then divided the class into groups of four and requested them to practice some sentence structures. Many young students did not bother to follow the instructions; instead, they focused on the games on their laptop computer, texted on their cell phones, and chatted in Vietnamese with each others. Senior students seemed to be more attentive. They focused on the assignment, struggling strenuously to practice pronunciation and recite sample sentences. When they had to sit in groups and practice the sentences with each other, they often burst out in laughter whenever someone failed miserably at the task. Ms. Hương, a forty-six-year-old woman from Hóc Môn District, Hồ Chí Minh City, who sat next to me, laughed and whispered in Vietnamese, “I have been taking English at this school for more than one year and still am sitting at the same class, the same English level.”

GWC is known among the Vietnamese community in the Little Saigon area as a “Vietnamese college.” Admitting the first Vietnamese evacuee students in 1976, the school has always been a mecca for Vietnamese refugees, immigrants, and their children in the local community. With Vietnamese students comprising nearly thirty percent of the total student body
and overwhelmingly dominating its English as a Second Language program, the GWC campus obviously provides the feeling of a Vietnamese institution. In my observations that day, the most common language spoken on campus was Vietnamese instead of English or Spanish. According to the statistics provided by a 2007 GWC’s sabbatical report, for 1994 to 2006, the number of Vietnamese students enrolling in ESL programs was always more than 3,000 students, accounting for 80 to 90 percent of the total ESL enrollment.48 The majority of Vietnamese students at GWC are under twenty-five years of age. In 2006, for example, of the total enrollment of 3,185 Vietnamese students, the number of students under twenty was 1,033, and the number of students between twenty-one and twenty-five was 1,064.49 The academic performance of Vietnamese students at GWC, however, is not very encouraging. Immigrant students often struggle with their English programs for years in order to successfully engage their major. Many drop out after several failed attempts. In fact, the success rates of Vietnamese students in ESL programs were so low that in 1996 the school decided to restructure its English language curriculum. It broke the curriculum down to twenty smaller levels of ESL courses for students to complete before taking other English writing levels to meet the prerequisites to transfer to a four-year university.50

Most young immigrants of entrepreneurial families are the 1.5 generation immigrants who emigrated in their teenage years, and who have been characterized as immigrants of “adolescent immigration, bilingualism, biculturalism, and existential ambivalence.”51 Because of their age, they tend to suffer most in the educational transition. They usually have to wait for a certain period of time to acquire their settlement status before enrolling in a community college. This transitional time varies between six and nine months, depending on the state in which they reside. This duration classifies their status as immigrant students and qualifies them for a tuition
waiver in a two-year college. In addition to the financial aid, unfamiliarity with U.S. schooling, and lack of proficiency in English are also important reasons for the majority of immigrants to enroll in such institutions. Although young immigrants like my informants often intend to move up to a four-year university upon the completion of an associate degree, after years of living in the U.S., it has usually proven to be a daunting task.

For immigrants who already attained a university degree in Vietnam, like Sanh and Diễm, English proficiency, the need for economic self-reliance, and family duty are the three common impediments to their advancement in education. Since her immigration in 2005, Diễm has not worked a day in the U.S. Her husband is not rich. He is a seasonal mechanic who struggles everyday to make ends meet. Like many university-educated unemployed women, Diễm opts to stay home to take care of their children instead of working in the nail industry and paying daycare fees. Although she wants to obtain an associate degree in accounting in order to find a job, her limited English and the strenuous house chores hinder her education at GWC. She can only attend college part-time and struggles tremendously in her English preparatory courses. Similarly, Sanh is also affected by the non-transferability of his educational credentials. And although he is single, he has to work to support his jobless aging mother and can only study part-time. Sanh explained his situation:

I knew before coming to America that they would not accept my training experience in Vietnam. Also, my Vietnamese degrees would be useless. Plus, my English was not good. So I would have to start everything from scratch. I enrolled in a community college because my English was not good. I was not confident in my English. I didn’t have money to enroll in a university. I also heard that there was no financial aid for immigrants in university undergraduate and graduate program.
Young immigrants who had passed selective university entrance exams and were enrolling in a university in Vietnam before emigrating also face the same problems. Because their transcripts and credits are nontransferable and their English proficiency is limited, most of them start again at the community college level. Like Quang, they had to wait from six to twelve months to be eligible for tuition waivers before enrolling in English preparatory classes. At their new school, their year-long tertiary education in Vietnam often does not count. Ms. Linh’s son, who was a sophomore in a prestigious Vietnamese university, terminated his study and came to the U.S. where he waited for one year to become eligible for financial aid at GWC. Ms. Hương’s two children, one son and one daughter, were also studying at Hồ Chí Minh City’s University of Industry before they left for the U.S. in 2006. Her son also spent three years of college in Vietnam and one year for status clarification in the U.S. before spending three years at GWC for a degree in computer science. His sister has only begun taking part-time classes in floral design while working in the nail industry since 2011.

My former students who are already fluent in English and were attending affiliates of American colleges, or had obtained an American degree in Vietnam before their emigration, also find themselves stranded in vocational schools. In California, Trung and Nam have been switching majors and changing colleges several times since 2010. Although both of them planned to transfer to a four-year university, by the end of 2012 none of them showed any signs of graduating from a community college. Notably, both of them had already graduated with an associate degree from the Houston Community College affiliate in Hồ Chí Minh City in 2009. Because they graduated from a Texas community college, in most cases, the California higher educational system did not recognize the school and thus hindered their endeavor to transfer to a California university. Thi and Dũng were also in the second year at Saigon Tech before leaving
for the U.S., and both of them were taking courses at GWC at the time I interviewed them. Thi wanted to major in marketing, in which she had both experience and interest. She, however, chose technology instead due to her weak English language skills. When we met in Garden Grove, Tam told me about his younger brother who had just been expelled again from a local community college for extremely poor academic performance and truancy. Since he himself also failed to obtain a degree after two years of studying business management at a community college in Los Angeles, Tam confessed that he was “in no position” to give his brother advice. In Boston, Huy also faced confusing choices. His original intention to enroll in UMass, Boston went bankrupt when he found out that he would not be able to receive financial aid from the university. Since then, he has changed his study plan three times. First, he wanted to transfer to Ohio State University for an engineering program after one year studying in BHCC. Then, he wanted to join the Air Force to secure a G.I. bill for his college upon discharge. Being disqualified on the basis of his non-U.S. citizenship, he shared with me a new plan of pursuing an associate degree in aircraft mechanic at South Seattle Community College after the completion of his program at BHCC. In December 2012, he informed me that that program no longer accepted students for the 2013 academic year. Having quit his job at the Dunkin Donut shop in Boston, Huy is now working for the Charlie Produce Company in Seattle to survive and to provide for his brother while waiting for next year’s admission.

Obviously, the representation of Asian students in general, and Vietnamese students in particular, as the academic “model minority” is problematic. Being preoccupied with gathering and analyzing data of scholastic testing percentiles and Ivy League admission rates, many scholars neglect a great number of Asian Americans and immigrants whose formal education in
the U.S. is limited to academically low-ranking vocational schools and to whom American “educational opportunity” is never secure.

To be sure, not all graduates from Vietnam are disqualified by the U.S. job market and not all young immigrants want to further their education. Two of my former students from Saigon Tech, a female who emigrated in 2010 and now lives in San Diego, California and a male who emigrated in 2012 and settled down in Louisville, Colorado started working for local companies several months after their arrival. Both of them had job offers, which are pertinent to their training, through some personal connections. However, what differentiates them from their parents are their American degrees in computer science and their excellent English skills. Neither of them plans to go back to college.

But such cases are only exceptions. For the majority of newly-immigrated Vietnamese students, their educational attainment after years living in the U.S. might simply be an associate degree in the applied sciences or service businesses instead of the elite education they once dreamed of and for which they migrated. Unlike the successful image of an Ivy League graduate stereotyped by the media, the road to a U.S. university for most of my informants is an arduous and endless struggle. In an afternoon in Cambridge, Boston, Huy and I mingled with the crowd opposite to one of the Harvard University’s gates. Under us was the Dunkin Donut shop at the Harvard Square subway stop where he worked. Huy pointed to the gate and mocked, “It takes only forty steps from here to there but that is a street I know I will never be able to cross.” Indeed, for Huy, Tam, and many other immigrants, it is a street too far.
There are several differences between intellectual and entrepreneurial immigrants. The family relations and kinship ties play a significant role in their lives. Intellectual immigrants usually come to the U.S. on a student visa and begin their resettlement on their own or their spouse’s working visa. On the other hand, entrepreneurial immigrants obtain an exit visa through a family sponsor. Moreover, intellectual immigrants rarely have any relatives living in the U.S., particularly those from the North, whereas recent “tied movers” often have many family members in America. Although in interviews I rarely initiated inquiries of family and kinship relations, I noticed how important the subjects were to most of my interviewees. Testimonies such as the above were very common in our conversations of “being Vietnamese,” “becoming American,” and “belonging” to either one.
or both countries. As such, two other important accounts were identified in my study of entrepreneurial immigrants: 1) kinship ties as the secondary impetus for their emigration, 2) family conflicts were common whereas family supports were insignificant.

Migration as a means to reunite with family members both domestically and internationally is perhaps the most common migratory path. In the U.S., besides the contingent of immigrants seeking refuge for political reasons or searching for economic opportunities, every year tens of thousands of others also leave their homeland to reunite with their family in this country. Historically, Asian immigration to the U.S. is among the most recognized group in “tied moving.” From the 1906 Sans Francisco earthquake that rendered possible U.S. entry for tens of thousands of Chinese women and children in the next two decades to thousands of Filipinos who wait patiently for decades to reunite with their brothers and sisters who worked for the U.S. Navy, non-sojourners from Asia always try to pave the road for more of their family members to come. The 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act widened the gate for more Asian professionals to come to the U.S., and thus, later enabled the family reunion passage for hundreds of thousands of Asians. One significant example of this genealogy is Asian Indian immigrants. Accounting for the highest professional immigrants from Asia during this period, the population of Asian Indians in the U.S. jumped from 172,132 in 1970 to 815,447 in 1990. Obviously, besides a contingent of professional immigrants, the fivefold increase in immigrants from India within the course of twenty years is attributed to the significant number of family-based immigrants.

Vietnamese immigration scholars often emphasize how the Confucian code of ethical and moral behavior compels individuals toward their duties for family and society. Thus, Vietnamese family-based immigration is commonly understood as a commitment to the
Confucian value of family. The three Confucian ties of filial piety (hiếu), moral duty (lễ), and continuity of family lineage (tộc) largely encompass the pull factors in family-based immigration. Because the Confucian code of conduct places individuals in a web of dependency and interdependency on family members and clan and demands care for elders, it is very common for recent Vietnamese immigrants to state that their migration was also largely fueled by such Confucian social commitments.

Figure 8. The family tree as a signifier of family reunion in the United States. The grandparents are in the center of the central photo frame, surrounded by pictures of five parents (in wedding dresses) and pictures of grand children.

Many entrepreneurial informants were the last members of one extended family (either on the husband’s side or the wife’s side) to stay in Vietnam. The concession to Confucian family values required them to emigrate in various ways. Families such as Hoàng’s and Na’s were all under the pressure of their aging parents who often expressed their dear wish of having their children living closely to them and to each other. For not-so-well-to-do seniors such as Na’s parents, their financial difficulty made it harder for them to go back to Vietnam every year. For some others, such as Hoàng’s mother, her ability to travel long distances became impossible due
to her old age. Sanh’s case is even more intriguing: his mother emigrated in 2000 to take care of his grandmother, and because he is the only son, ten years later he took his turn by emigrating to the U.S to take care of his mother. Quang is the only son of his father who is the patriarch of the clan. Because of the importance of continuing the family lineage, his grandparents, aunts and uncles in the U.S. pressured his father to migrate although he was very reluctant to do so. In fact, he had turned down the first approval of immigrant application in 1995 and only reapplied in 2000 when his family in the U.S. tremendously increased their pressure on him.

Nonetheless, upon their arrival in the U.S, the family-oriented values of Vietnamese immigrants are strongly contested. As Na cited the Vietnamese precept of “Xa thương gần thường” (Love is in long distance and indifference is in close proximity), the serious problems immigrant families sometimes face in the U.S. come not only from the society outside but also from inside their immediate and extended family. In many cases, it is the conflictual relationships with other members of their extended family rather than job discrimination or the loss of social privileges that bring forth mental breakdowns. Of all the households I interviewed, more than half admitted to observing damages and unrest in kinship relationships. Even though they sometimes expressed gratitude for the help they received from their relatives upon their arrival, and stressed the importance of keeping harmony among families, many expressed their anger and frustration towards relatives. Some, such as Ms. Lâm in the above quote, cherish their relatives’ kindness. Yet, they always emphasized the importance of being independent, which literally means moving out of the relative’s house as soon as possible, in order for such familial relationships to flourish.

Unlike their refugee predecessors who had no familial network in America, most middle-class immigrants were provided with accommodation by their immediate family, who often were
their sponsor, in the first months in the new land. Periods of “home-stay” range from several months to several years. In my study, the family with the shortest “home-stay” is Hoàng’s. They bought their own house in Westminster after living for two months with Hoàng’s mother in Anaheim. The families with the longest “home-stay” are Mr. Lê’s, Nam’s, Huy’s cousins’ family, and Sanh. All of them are still either living with their relatives in the same homes or living in one of their relatives’ second homes.

Based on analyses of Confucian moral duty and ethical commitment, Vietnamese immigration scholarship tends to overestimate the solidarity and mutual supports of family and kinship among Vietnamese communities. Few studies investigate family conflicts that arise once immigrants arrive in America and live in close proximity with their families. Kibria notes one instance in which a young female refugee left Hawaii for Philadelphia to live with her brother only to be beaten by him on a daily basis. In reality, a happy extended family living in close physical proximity is becoming very rare in Vietnamese immigrant communities. The traditional Vietnamese family, which is “patriarchal, patrilineal, and patrilocal” with multi-generational cohabitation, is quickly perishing both in and outside Vietnam. In Vietnam, although some scholars affirm that “to a considerable extent the traditional values of Vietnamese family life remain valid and still have positive effects on the society,” the tradition of three or four generations living under the same roof has largely disappeared in a rapidly modernized society. In the U.S., the majority of Vietnamese Americans, especially the younger generation, have been much assimilated into an American culture where privacy and individualism are highly prioritized. Cultural differences between new immigrants and their kin, which used to be compromised due to long geographic distances and the rarity of physical contact, rapidly become intensified. When push comes to shove and differences become conflicts, kinship ties—which,
ironically enough, were one of the emigration impetuses—are potentially destroyed. The following selected excerpts illustrate how living proximity and material dependency have negatively affected the relationships between some immigrants and their immediate and extended families.

When we first arrived, we lived with Aunt Nguyệt, the second oldest child of my grandparents. I slept in a balcony where they put up glass windows for a makeshift “bedroom.” In the winter the wind blew through the gaps and made my “room” terribly freezing. I didn’t dare to turn up the heat because they didn’t want to “waste” money on too much heat. My parents slept in the basement. It was even much colder down there. The basement was parted by a thin curtain and there were two mattresses. My younger brother lived down there too. They always went to bed with five or six layers of clothes. They lived there for months during the winter. After a while, things got worse between my aunt, my uncle and my family. My uncle always kept a “heavy” face. He showed it clearly that he didn’t want to see us in his house anymore. We moved out of his house after nearly one year….We then moved in Aunt Hiền’s house. She was mad at the way Aunt Nguyệt treated us and invited us there. We also paid rent, $700 a month, just like when we were living with Aunt Nguyệt. The first several months were OK. They were nice to us. Then things again became bad. They looked for every reason to make troubles. We turned on the faucet a little bit too much, they grumbled. We took a shower a little bit too long, they complained. We splashed some water on the bathroom floor during our shower, they became mad. I forgot to put my toothbrush into the holder after brushing my teeth in the morning, that evening I found it being thrown into the trash bin. Their kid messed up the house, the husband got mad at us. We bought equal amount of food but if
it was his [the uncle] turn to cook, he would find something to rail at us. The rent was even more expensive than the average rate outside but they always felt we were extremely indebted to them. We only started feeling that we really lived when we rented our own place outside. (Huy)

When we arrived we were invited to live with my aunt and my grandmother in Anaheim. It was first OK; then there came the dispute over the selling of our house in Saigon[…]

Things got real ugly in the family. They didn’t want to go shopping and pay for food because they said it should be my Mum’s duty since they let us stay with them. We paid $1000 per month for the rent and shared the food money equally but they said it was not enough. They constantly alluded that we were a burden and that we owed them a lot. When I heard so, I immediately told my Mum to buy a house in Little Saigon. Mum was tired of them too but she didn’t want to hurt Dad. Dad loved Grandma a lot. (Thi)

Family conflicts even extend beyond the private sphere of the home to encompass the public space of the workplace. Because “tied moving” is an important motivation for many to migrate, family networks supposedly play a vital role in facilitating their occupational adaptation. Immigration theorists have coined the term “embeddedness” to describe the ethnic solidarity that helps secure newcomers’ employment in the community.62 In such solidarity, kinship and personal network provide new immigrants with advice, financial support (in the form of either an informal rotating credit association or low-to-no-interest loans), information, and training in exchange for a source of cheap and trusted labor.63 In researching the second-wave Vietnamese community in Philadelphia, Kibria also proposes the term “patchworking” to replace the term “pooling” used by many social scientists because she believes that it better conveys “the merging of many different kinds of resources” and “the often uneven and unplanned quality of
members’ contributions to the household economy.”64 The Vietnamese American “ideology of family collectivism,” she argues, not only “helps to mitigate the instability and scarcity of available resources” but also fosters “the unity of household interests and the economic significance of kinship ties.”65 In this fashion, kinship supports in a household economy are crucial to Vietnamese immigrant life.

In my research on both new immigrant groups, this is rarely the case. Few professionals have close relatives in America. Those who have do not need material support from their relatives. I also found little evidence of entrepreneurial immigrants receiving strong support of occupational resettlement from their family in the U.S. Nor did I find many examples of capital sharing and pooling among the old-timers and the newcomers of the same family. Contributions made to occupational establishment, if any, was at best an introduction to a blue-collar job or an induction into the nail trade. Examples of failed cooperation or abusive business management among kinship make many immigrants vigilant of their own relatives. One woman in California stated:

In the future I will buy my own shop. My sisters have offered a joint-venture plan but I don’t want to work with them. I am afraid of losing more family harmony. I am not yet good at running business here so maybe she will have to work more than I do. In that case, it is very inconvenient because I work less but get an equal share. There will never be any satisfaction. I’d rather own a small shop and work with some technicians or I will work as a worker for other nail shops. I will definitely never co-own with my sisters.

There were several attempts, as some of my informants admitted, to either pool capital or join a family business. However, none of them was successful and most resulted in even more family conflicts. After the first several months in Boston, Ms. Na and Mr. Hồng moved down to
Columbus, Ohio, to work for one of Na’s brothers who owned a nail salon there. However, their intent to settle down in Columbus was quickly shattered because they could not come to an agreement in a shared business with him. In Boston, Na often found her own sister, one of her co-workers in a nail shop, unsupportive and conflictual in everyday business:

My sister has done this job for years before I came. She didn’t want me to work with her in the same shop. Her skill is only about 50 percent while mine is 70-80 percent. She was so mean to me. For example, one customer wanted me to do her nails because my sister was busy with another customer. My sister then didn’t want me to take that task. She looked very unhappy. But when I rejected the task and another co-worker took it, she was very happy. I just didn’t understand why.

One notable reason that ignited and increased the enmity between his family and his sister’s, according to Huy, was his father’s rejection of a job offer from his uncle. Right at the time they moved into his house, his uncle suggested his father work at his small seasonal hotel in Cape Cod. However, Hồng refused because, while the job demanded tremendous time and effort, no payment was mentioned. Later, one of Huy’s immigrant cousins took the job for one season before giving up due to harsh labor, a meager wage, and the long distance from his family in Boston. His younger brother took up the job after him. In November 2012 when he visited me, he told me that he, too, finally surrendered. “For half a year, he paid me less than $7,000 and the whole fifteen-roomed hotel was taken care of by only me and another guy.” When I asked about his relationship with his uncle, the young man shook his head and smiled. Until that day, his mother and sister were still living in his uncle’s house.
Yet, the Confucian value of family harmony requires most informants to maintain the relationships and reconcile with their relatives in any possible way. Na explained why she always endeavored to keep the harmony between herself and her sisters:

I have to keep a good relationship because she is my sister. Wherever we go people would always point at us and say, “Those are sisters. Those are family.” So I must forgive because we need to be in harmony. Even I always get the unfair treatment, I swallow the tear so that my mother would not be sad because sisters fighting each other.

Similarly, many immigrants tried to overlook or only mention lightly the problems which occurred between members of the family. Ms. Linh’s family lived in her second sister’s house in San Jose for one year, then moved south to live with her fifth sister for one more year in Santa Anna before buying a mobile home in Huntington Beach. She reasoned that she “didn’t want to take away the freedom” of her sisters’ families by living in their home. When the conversation advanced further, she revealed that the pressure of being looked at as “lodging parasites” by her sisters’ families encouraged her and her husband to buy a home. Contradicting his daughter’s testimony, Mr. Hoàng said that although tensions usually occurred among many immigrant families and their kinship, his family did not share that experience because they “moved out before anything could happen.”

Sites of Ideological Resistance and Cultural Differences

The Divergences of Immigrant Communities

In their anthology of contemporary Asian American communities, Bonus and Vô emphasize the nuances of Asian enclaves in the U.S. by contending, “The shifts in ethnic, racial, gender, class, and generational composition of the Asian American population since 1965 have
created new internal tensions and fissures in Asian American communities. As a result, they are realigning and rearranging themselves, a dialectic process that is determined largely by interactions among individuals and groups." As the title suggests, the essays scrutinize the rapid transformations of Asian American communities in multifaceted perspectives such as youth, co-ethnic and interracial enclaves, sexual orientations, urban ethnic concentrations, virtual communities, and occupational sectors. Their work asks several important questions, “How do we think about Asian American communities in their generalities and particularities? How do we understand the ways in which cultures are created, changed, sustained, and reformulated?”

Although such questions are well addressed by a wide array of the selected essays, the volume fails to deal with three significant aspects of contemporary Asian American experience: (1) communities of professional immigrants, (2) communities outside the dominant Asian immigrant/American communities, and (3) the self-isolated lives of new immigrants in such dominant communities. The most relevant to the first topic is Pensri Ho’s work about the Asian American Professional Network (AAPN), a community of young professional Asian Americans in Los Angeles. However, even this essay has little to do with immigrant professionals.

Despite a considerable amount of scholarship on Vietnamese American identity formation and community making, the fissures in the community are yet to be explored. A glimpse of Vietnamese American communities might reveal these gaps. None of the four community-centered studies of Vietnamese Americans in the U.S.—Winston Tseng’s work on the San Francisco Bay area, San Juan’s book of Fields Conner and Little Saigon, Charles C. Muzny’s ethnography in Oklahoma City, and Jae-Hyup Lee’s research in Philadelphia—touches on the three abovementioned themes. Tseng’s work examines how grassroots community-based organizations (CBOs) impact Vietnamese and Chinese communities in San Francisco. Drawing
on the fervent anticommunism of Vietnamese American political dissidents, San Juan’s ethnography explores dimensions of ethnic culture embedded in the two prominent Vietnamese enclaves. Muzny investigates individuals’ behavioral changes and the development of group organizations in a newly-formed Vietnamese community in Oklahoma City. And finally, Lee’s work concerns the cultural boundaries of the three co-existing ethnic groups in Philadelphia: the Chinese, the Vietnamese, and the Koreans. While it is obvious that no scholarly work can cover every facet of immigrant lives, such neglect in extant scholarship demands a reexamination of Vietnamese communities in the United States.

Because of the nuances of ideology, culture, and migratory genealogies, my study suggests that contemporary Vietnamese American studies necessitate an examination of the layers of identities and conflicts within and without its traditional communities. By within I allude to new Vietnamese entrepreneurial immigrants living inside traditional Vietnamese enclaves such as Dorchester, Boston and Little Saigon, Orange Country. And by without I refer to tens of thousands of Vietnamese living in smaller enclaves outside the orbit of such dominant communities and thousands of newly-immigrated Vietnamese intellectuals and professionals dispersing in non-Vietnamese neighborhoods across the country.

The Anticommunist Signature

The significant focus of research on Vietnamese American anticommunism fosters the notion that every diasporic Vietnamese community in the U.S. is a site of anti-Vietnam and anticommunist ideology. This “grand narrative” is a result of a concentration of studies on well-known and visibly prominent Vietnamese communities, particularly in California. Because California constitutes only one-third (581,946) of the Vietnamese population in the U.S.
the focus on California-Vietnameseness—which is generalized as anticommunist—might have been overrepresented, and hence, elided the voices of smaller Vietnamese communities.

Some scholarly works of this genre can provide vivid examples of how studies of Vietnamese [California] anticommunism project a Vietnamese American identity. In her work, San Juan conceptualizes the diasporic identity of Vietnamese Americans, which she defines as “staying Vietnamese,” through collective acts of “community-building and place-making” rather than individual issues of cultural adaptation. The “communities” her work explored are located in cities with the largest concentrations of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants—Fields Conner, Boston and Little Saigon, Orange County—and the people she interviewed were fervent anticommunists who “would rather die than help Vietnam.” Unsurprisingly, therefore, the “community” in San Juan’s study comes to represent a center of anticommunist activism and sentiment, suggesting that anticommunism is inherently the ideological and political position of those who wish to “stay Vietnamese” in America.

Thuy Vo Dang, an “insider” of the San Diego Vietnamese community, also focuses on anticommunism “as a discourse that has worked to shape community and identity in everyday practices and through not only political but cultural and personal spaces.” In her article published in 2005, Vo identifies anticommunism as being “in the San Diego Vietnamese community” and the interview subjects were members of the Vietnamese Foundation of San Diego whose priority and agenda were to “deploy anticommunism as a political and cultural discourse for community building.” Several years later (2008) she completed her doctoral thesis in which she claimed that “anticommunism” was the “cultural praxis” of the Vietnamese
American community. Similar to San Juan, her claim of a Vietnamese collective identity of anticomunism derived from California-based research.

Another scholar of the “California school,” Kieu-linh Caroline Valverde, who is also an “insider,” published an article on the staunch anticomunist dilemma in Orange County. In this insightful study of California’s Vietnamese political complexity, she examines how the triangularity of homeland, host country, and community shape the diasporic [anticommunist] culture of Vietnamese Americans. And although she acknowledges, after studying local anticomunist activism between 1994 and 2008 that she “now realize[s] that the community is truly diverse” and that it “thus seems important to redefine what constitutes the ‘community,’ she continues to corroborate the “one-ness” of an anticomunist Vietnamese American community as being manipulated and dominated by anticomunist members by concluding, “Today, ‘community’ still means the staunch anti-communist minority.”

The above literature is centered around cultural and political generalizations of Vietnamese Americans. My study resists this abstraction of Vietnamese Americans under the umbrella of an anticomunist culture, as seen in the uncritical assumption of a singular “Vietnamese community” in Asian American scholarship. Vietnamese living in different locations create different communities. Each community, while sharing many commonalities with other Vietnamese communities, may possess a dominant political viewpoint that is anticomunist, procommunist, or apolitical. My study of three different sites of Vietnamese American resettlement indicates that (1) the so-called “Vietnamese community” in the United States is, in fact, comprised of many distinctive communities that are geographically dispersed and culturally multifaceted, and (2) even in traditionally Vietnamese American enclaves where
presumably harmonious relations between old-timers and newcomers shape social relations, dimensions of cultural resistance and political disidentification may be identified.

Three Vietnamese Diasporic Sites

*Site One - Evacuees, Refugees, and Immigrants in Small and Separated Enclaves*

Reverend Khang lives with his wife, eldest son, and several grandchildren in a big house in a quiet historic street in Ohio City, Ohio. During my second visit, I was invited for a Thanksgiving dinner with his extended family of approximately thirty people. Before the dinner, Reverend Khang took me on a tour of “the relics of the old days.” He proudly showed me framed pictures of his former evangelical missionary infrastructures and facilities in Quảng Nam. He also showed me three certificates of congressional and missionary medals (*bội tinh*) that hung on the living room wall. One of them was presented to him by President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu for his significant contribution to the “development of Central Highland’s Montagnard tribes.” As proud as he was of his work and the recognition, during our conversation the reverend showed no nostalgia for a bygone past, nor did his gesture or words suggest any criticism toward the communist regime. And although the house was replete with old and new furniture, souvenirs, relics, and decorative objects from Vietnam, no anticommunist-themed objects, including the South Vietnamese “heritage flag,” were seen.

Although its membership does not exceed a hundred, the Vietnamese Protestant community is a dominant cultural force among some hundred Vietnamese living in the Ohio City area. The church often organizes elaborate celebrations and festivals for the community, including Christmas and the Vietnamese traditional Tết. Church members are active, outspoken, and have very important voices in the community of not only Ohio City but also other towns in
its vicinity. My fieldwork suggests that the church in Michigan City is similar. When attending the Vietnamese Protestant churches in Ohio City and Michigan City, I paid particular attention to signifiers of a refugee identity in the public sphere and among hundreds of church attendees such as the display of the yellow flag or other relics of South Vietnamese regimes. I spotted none. During the one and a half hour sermons, the only times people mentioned Vietnam were the prayers for “our beloved Vietnam to prosper and the Gospel will continue to spread to all our people” and announcements of the church’s missionary activities in Vietnam. In both churches, displayed on the stage were the U.S. flag and the flag of the church’s Christian affiliation. Such flags show no political association. Instead, they signify the affiliations to U.S. citizenship and the faith of Christianity. If the American flag were taken out of the picture, the churches and the people would not reflect anything pertaining to the Việt kiều. They, in fact, were outwardly identical to all Protestant churches I had visited in Vietnam.

**Figure 9.** The celebration of Tết holiday in a Vietnamese community’s Protestant church. In the vase on the right front are peach blossoms (*hoa đào*), the Tết flower of Northern Vietnam. In the vase at the back of the stage are apricot blossoms (*hoa mai*), the Tết flower of Southern Vietnam. Children are waiting to receive Tết lucky money (*lì xì*).
In opposition to the “California school” studies, my research on small Vietnamese communities in the Midwest, such as the Ohio City and the Michigan City Christian communities, suggest that despite a diversity of migratory paths, homeland politics are not a source of great interest in the communities. This somewhat apolitical lifestyle begins with the South Vietnamese elite of the 1975 evacuation of which Reverend Khang’s family is representative. One of the eminent evangelists in the RVN, the reverend was in charge of an evangelical complex that included a school, an orphanage, and a church in the hostile area of Quảng Nam. Several months before Saigon fell, Reverend Khang, his wife, and twelve children were among the first Vietnamese to be brought to refugee camps in Guam when the fierce closing battles of the war brought an abrupt halt to his mission. In 1975, they were sponsored by a Protestant church and settled down in Ohio City where he regrouped Vietnamese Christian refugees and opened their own Vietnamese church. Khang shared the reason he left Vietnam:

I never had any problems with the communists. I served the mission in the First Corps Tactical Zone\textsuperscript{82} for twenty something years and they bothered me none. The fighting was always fiercest there and there were so many NVA and Viet Cong soldiers there but they never harmed us. In the missionary compound, however, there were many foreign religious workers from the UK, France, Australia, and the U.S. doing their services. Some local people did not like that. So when the war intensified and my American colleagues offered to take my whole family with them, I accepted. There were local people who did not like Protestants and it may be dangerous if they later label us as traitors or CIA.

Most interesting was Mr. Tùng’s story. Tùng came to America in 1973 to study physics at UCLA. When the war ended in 1975, he became stateless and opted to stay in the U.S. Being a
young boy living in a village in the outskirts of Đà Nẵng in the 1960s, he recalled vividly the positive images of communist soldiers:

One day, the North Vietnamese soldiers marched to our village and occupied it for several weeks. I remember a platoon of men sitting along the village road. Two of them, an officer and a soldier, walked through our bamboo gate and asked politely for a permission to pick up some of our dead bamboo branches from the hedge for firewood. All the time they lived there on the field, they didn’t touch a thing of the villagers. My mother sometimes gave them some homegrown vegetable and they showed a great appreciation for that. But that’s the only thing they accepted. I saw what they ate. They ate rice with salt and some sort of military ration! I’ve seen the Saigon soldiers in my village many times. The first thing they did was shoot as many chicken and pigs as they liked then they would kick down villager’s bamboo house for firewood and made us cook for them.

More impressively, Mr. Tùng dictated the full name and address of the hometown of one of the young soldiers who often taught him and his friends Northern songs, “Nguyễn Văn A, group B, hamlet C, village D, district E, province F.” “He told me when the war ended he would take me to his village in North Vietnam,” Tùng said, “I have been living in the U.S. for forty years and I have heard and forgot so many things in my life. But I don’t know why his name and his address stuck with me.”

In these small Vietnamese American communities, although many had relatives and siblings living in California, most people I talked with felt detached or even resentment toward the Vietnamese communities in that state. Many expressed cultural and political disidentification with the “problematic enclaves.” When I asked Reverend Khang why neither he nor any of his
children joined the 1980s westward movement of dispersed Vietnamese refugees to California, he answered:

I did not particularly like California. I visited California on business but I had no intention to live there. The communities there are complicated. They don’t really live the Vietnamese way there. You know, we Vietnamese love to invite people to our home and we enjoy stopping by other’s home whenever we can. There, people always look busy and are not very courteous. In a Midwestern town like Ohio City, when I take a walk on the side walk, people always stop and yield and greet me with “Hi” and a smile although they sometimes don’t know me. Not in the community there.

There were also people who lived in California before deciding to leave the communities there. Mr. Tùng left California immediately after his graduation in 1977. Although had he already received several job offers in the Los Angeles area, he decided to move to Ohio to work for a NASA office:

I volunteered to help the refugees to settle down: teaching English, helping with paperwork, translating, working with government agents and social workers and the refugees. One day I walked to a house to work with some guys, I saw a huge banner hung outside the balcony that read, “WE WILL GO BACK TO TAKE BACK THE COUNTRY FROM THE INVADING COMMUNIST CLIQUE!” I came into the house and only saw a dozen drunks lying around on the floor sleeping and snoring. Empty bottles everywhere! At that time, I knew that these guys were hopeless and not victims of anything.

Everyone from the two Midwestern communities with whom I spoke was very open in their interview. This drew a clear distinction between them and large Vietnamese communities
where anticommunist extremism may dominate. Valverde draws on her observations in California and contends that because of the local anticommunist activists, “the Vietnamese American community lives in a state of fear.” In both Michigan City and Ohio City, no one expressed such fear. One reason was that the political backlash related to homeland politics and the pre-1975 past rarely emerged in community lives. And even though there were political dissidents living in the communities, their political voice did not pose a threat to the political unanimity of the majority. One man from Ohio City told me, “I once invited some people in a neighboring city to join our church activities but they refused because they said we were pro-communist. I told them that we were neither pro-communist nor anticommunist. But if they only care about politics they don’t need to come.” Another outspoken member of the community also opined:

I told someone who mentioned the “they versus us” dilemma to quit the topic. We don’t have time for such nonsense. This is the twenty-first century. When I go back to Vietnam, I ask the people who are represented by the red flag to grant me a visa. I never ask anyone with a yellow flag. So don’t you dare ask me to call the yellow flag “heritage” and ask me to salute it. It’s just outright ridiculous.

It is necessary to point out that despite my intensive participant observations in both public and private spheres, my research in Michigan City and Ohio City was conducted primarily among the Christian communities. And because most of my informants are Christian pietists, their political involvement may be constrained by their Christian code of conduct. However, given their transnational ties with Vietnam, their sympathy with the government and people in their homeland, and their public denouncement of anticommunist doctrine, my research suggests
that such Vietnamese communities disrupt the idea of the “one-ness” of the anticommunist
Vietnamese American community.

*Site Two - Enclaves inside an Enclave: New Immigrants in Preexisting Communities*

During my field research in Boston, I lived in Huy’s grandfather’s apartment in
Germantown, Quincy. Before his grandparents went back to Vietnam for a three-week vacation,
they generously let me stay in their place. The apartment was located on the second floor of a
run-down, seven-story housing project for welfare dependent seniors. It was a small size, with
one bedroom, a kitchen, a living room, one restroom, and a balcony. Except for a small brand
new LCD television set, according to Huy, all valuable assets in the house, including the
furniture, an old Sony VCR player, and an old Panasonic cassette player, were picked up from
dumpsters. The majority of the residents of the project were senior Chinese Americans.

Huy’s family lived in a rented house within walking distance to the grandparents. Yet, a
busy working schedule only permitted them to visit the elders once in awhile. On my third day in
Boston, Mr. Hồng and his two sons brought some food over for supper. It was a delicious
seafood meal made into many dishes typical of the local cuisine of coastal provinces in Central
Vietnam. Like at any other men’s gathering in Vietnam, Hông and Huy consumed a lot of beer.
When I asked if he could invite some other friends over for drinking, Hông shook his head sadly
and replied that after two years, he had no friends in this country. “But it is better that way,” he
reasoned, “because I don’t like them anyway. I prefer not to hang out with those people up there
[Dorchester] because they only give you headache. They are not us and we are not them. So just
keep it that way.” Like all the recent immigrants I interviewed, Hông’s family maintains
connection with only their extended family members and somewhat tentative links with a few
other immigrants of the same migrant genealogy.
Living in a big Vietnamese community, the main reason people like Hồng restrict their contact to one community is the difference in ideology. Informants in Dorchester and Orange County reported that they encountered discrimination based on their migratory genealogy. Because of their recent immigration, it is common for them to be suspected of being “Hanoi spies,” even if they disclose no political viewpoint. Non-immigrant Vietnamese students studying and living in Orange County also suffer from political discrimination based on their nationality. In 2012, a former student of mine who was studying at California State University at Fullerton informed me that a Vietnamese landlady denied her accommodation on the basis of her being a “student from the communist Vietnam.” Because of their working and living proximity with such anticommunist communities, the labeling of some informants as “communists” occurs more often to new immigrants. Anyone with a slightly different perspective on homeland social and political conditions or who does not show enthusiasm in accusing and denouncing “communists” may face verbal attacks from political extremists. During our interview, Mr. Hoàng often shrugged and shook his head with disgust and tiredness when the topic shifted to the local anticommunist radicals, about whom he commented that “if we make a slip of the tongue saying something good about Vietnam, they look like they want to ‘eat us raw’ (ăn tươi nuốt sống) right away.” He narrated the first time he experienced hostility from one of his Vietnamese partners at his workplace in Little Saigon.

Vietnamese TV channels in California always make things up. One time they showed a clip of some community watchmen shooing the street peddlers in a street in Hồ Chí Minh City. They said that those were communist police officers beating up and arresting the protestors of Chinese invasion of the Spratly islands. I told my partner that those were not communist public security (công an cộng sản) but community watchmen (dân phòng)
and that had nothing to do with the political unrest in Vietnam. In Vietnam watchmen are common working-class people. In the daytime they ride motorcycle taxi, sell food in open markets, cleaning the streets and so on and so forth for a living. They also volunteer to watch their own neighborhood to help with the local security. That’s all I said but then my partner immediately began assaulting me: “I didn’t know that is your true color. You are a true communist, aren’t you? I’m so disappointed about you. You are the son of a ARVN colonel, how could you say such horrible things?” This guy was only a baker. And yet he could be so vague and aggressive. From then on, I just kept silence.

His wife, Ms. Ly, corroborated the theme with much stronger frustration and bitter mockery:

*We* have just immigrated. We are not allowed to show that we know this or know that. *They* are [Vietnamese] American, they have all the rights to tell right from wrong. Being recent immigrants means shut up and listen. We are considered stupid and brainwashed. We are not permitted to speak. We speak we get into deep trouble. If we meet these people we have to keep silence. If we say one sentence they will slap our mouth. If we keep silence, they still bully us. If we make a slip of the tongue we may lose our livelihood.

Keeping silence is usually the most common defense mechanism new immigrants develop and use in the workplace and other public spheres to cope with social harassment by the anticommunist hardliners in the community. Yet, while being silenced by political hotheads, recent immigrants are not influenced by such political views. One informant commented:

*Every time I hear them talk about Vietnam, I have to try very hard not to laugh to death. They lament it is horribly poor in Vietnam, don’t go home or you will get sick because it’s so dirty there, the communists will take you to jail because you are *Việt kiều*. Don’t
buy cars or motorcycles in Vietnam because the communists will confiscate them. These folks are the most stupid and the craziest people I ever met. Seriously, what are they thinking? Who is going to believe that sort of crazy stuff anymore?

Young immigrants also strongly resented the anticommunist activists. They described the burning and mockery of Hồ Chí Minh’s effigy as being “disrespectful,” “low-life,” “vile,” and “not the way of the Vietnamese culture” and thought the protestors were “crappy” and “fossils of time.” In our conversations, young informants usually expressed resentment whenever they mentioned what they called “anticommunist festivals,” especially the “Black April Day.” Some people, like Tam, who were invited to join the anniversary of the annual April 30th event openly refused on the basis of “inexperience of the historical event” and “lack of understanding of the ‘struggle for freedom’ of the community.” Trung remembered:

I was having my car fixed nearby Phước Lộc Thọ Mall on the “Black April Day.” I stepped out to see out of curiosity. Man, those old folks were busting their vocal chords cursing and name calling the communists. The flag was everywhere. They hung an effigy of Hồ Chí Minh and shot arrows through it, spat at it and stained it with dirt. They screamed out of their lungs: “You are the communist boss! Die! Die!” It’s just bizarre. These people…[laughed nervously]… What can I say? They should have looked at themselves in the mirror…[shook his head] I wish I could tell them how ridiculous and degrading they were.

Traditionally, progressive Vietnamese Americans living in California, especially the young generation and the Việt kiều professionals, have strongly voiced their opinion, opposing the intimidation and labeling tactics of the “elders.” As early as 1996, in a regionwide election for the presidency of the Vietnamese Community of Southern California, angry youngsters
protested against anticommunist activists who self-proclaimed their leading role in the communities: “How can a group really do that? ….It’s great that there are organizations to work with the needs of refugees, but to say they represent anyone is ridiculous.”85 A study conducted in the Bay Area Vietnamese community found out that few young Vietnamese were interested in the activities of local anticommunist forces, and the gap between generations was increasingly widening as “a higher proportion of young adults indicat[ed] support for democratic liberties such as freedom of speech and tolerance of dissent.”86 Professionals in Little Saigon, such as Phùng Tuệ Châu, a lawyer, and Vũ Quí Haọ Nhiên, a columnist, have openly challenged the local staunch anticommunists without fear of retaliation. Vũ Quí Haọ Nhiên, who lost his job as a managing editor of the Nguoi Viet Daily newspaper under the pressure of a Little Saigon anticommunist mob over the cover of an artwork controversy in 2008, publically criticizes the extremists on his well-read blog.87 In her poem, Việtnamerican Reprisals, activist artist Ly-Huong protests:

What do we do when our elders rove in lynch mobs, burn effigies, behead water puppets of Hai Bà Trưng88 and Lê Lợi89 axe artwork, attack a man like a VC like a mari-elito show the world their scars and thank Amerikans for bringing the war home?90
The voices of those who decided that they finally had enough with the old guard reveals, as Valverde points out, that diversities, including that of political perspectives, are growing in the community.  

Yet, such counter-anticommunist voices are by no means necessarily pro-communist. In fact, many old-timer Việt kiều, while challenging and protesting again the political fundamentalists in Vietnamese communities, also defy the government of Vietnam. Vũ, for example, sees the anticommmunists (whom he accuses of being “a clique of extremists without power”) identical with the communists (whom he labels “extremists with power”) exhibiting same manner of oppressiveness and self-righteousness. In 2008, Khánh Ly, a well-known senior artist, angrily asked the protestors who had associated her career with the famous Vietnamese composer Trịnh Công Sơn in a ceremony of the Mậu Thân massacre, in the Viet Bao Weekly, “Who are you? In the name of whom you protest this, protest that?” She contended, “What you guys are doing only communists could do the same.”

Thus, although they both object to and turn away from the anticommmunist dogma, the newer immigrants and the older Vietnamese Americans are sharply differentiated by the immigrants’ strong loyalty to the country and sympathy towards the communist state. Their loyalty is spurred by several reasons: their reaction to the oppressive and hostile anticommmunist environment; their experiences of living under a reformed communist regime; and their involvement in Vietnam’s social and political apparatuses. Half of my informants had no family relationships with state employees or military personnel of the South Vietnamese government. Their sponsors were mostly boatpeople without any political affiliation. Even more interesting, prior to their emigration, many of them had served in communist state institutions. Nam’s family background is one typical example. On his father’s side, his grandfather was a chauffeur for
several important figures of the Vietnamese government, and on his mother’s side, his
grandfather was a NLF veteran. His two uncles also followed his grandfather’s footsteps to
become officers in the PAVN. Huy’s deceased uncle and a cousin, whom I have mentioned in
chapter three, had also served in the PAVN. In Boston, among many old pictures Huy showed
me, was an article from one of the 2005 issues of the Quân đội Nhân dân (People’s Army)
Newspaper commending a platoon of Vietnam’s Naval Force on one of the Spratly Islands. In
the center of the article was the picture of a young sergeant—Huy’s cousin—in full combat gear
manning an AA gun. The young man served for eighteen months on the frontier island before he
emigrated to the U.S. Although no immigrant admitted to being a “hardcore communist,” it was
evident how the discrimination and harassment they faced in the Vietnamese American
communities, combined with their political backgrounds in Vietnam, inspired sympathy, if not
loyalty, toward the Vietnamese communist government.

But it is hasty to surmise that only those who had a procommunist political background,
and who had directly benefited from the communist state, would defend Vietnam’s status quo.
Interestingly, the common people who had never been on the government’s payroll were the
most protective towards the country and the state. Ms. Lâm, a small businesswoman and a
former volunteer chair of the local Women’s Union (Hội Phụ nữ) in her small town, expressed
her viewpoint:

The Vietnamese here [in Dorchester] are very diverse in political perspectives. Those
refugees of the 1975 wave have a very different ideology; one that I understand but don’t
share. The boatpeople have a more tolerant perspective although many of them had to
sacrifice many things for their new life here. But some of the people who emigrated in
1990s and even in the early 2000s…they migrated freely and easily but they have a very
different thinking about our country and that hurts me a lot. They are much ungrateful and loveless. Their lack of love is when they talk terribly about the country. That makes me so sad [cries].

Ideological conflict, however, only plays one part in the segregation between the old-timers and the newcomers. According to most informants, the main tensions and hostility are caused by the “arrogance” and the “ignorance” of the old-timers who often treat new immigrants with not only distrust but also little respect. As Ms. Ly’s above comment suggests, the old-timers’ pretentiousness comes from the feeling of being superior in living longer in the U.S., coupled with the chauvinism of being “real” [Vietnamese] Americans instead of being Vietnamese [immigrants]. Evidence of the existence of a contingent of media-fed, repressive, and anti-Vietnam Việt kiều were prevalent in my official interviews and informal conversations with new immigrants, both intellectuals and entrepreneurs. All informants concurred that “old-timers” often wrongfully thought of new immigrants as lesser citizens who came from an oppressive and isolated third-world country with very little education and were victims of communist brainwashing.

The reactions from immigrants are nuanced. Many blame such Việt kiều of being misinformed, misled, or simply cocky and hateful. Some conclude that their misbehavior mostly derived from jealousy because “we didn’t have to risk swimming the sea or lived in terrible refugee camps for years but boarded the Boeing 777 straightly to America.” Some informants believed that such arrogance also resulted from years of remitting money home to poor and demanding relatives of many Việt kiều. One man reasoned:

In the past, many families in Vietnam had to rely on their relatives’ remittance for a long time. Many of them worked hard but were still poor and they needed help. But many of
them were lazy and didn’t want to work and always wrote to their Việt kiều to ask for help. That’s why some Việt kiều got mad and tired of them. So when that mentality became widespread, they think we are like their relatives.

New immigrants, especially those with an independent and strong economic base, react bitterly to such discriminations. Many looked at the unsuccessful stories of other old-timer Việt kiều to highlight their own superiority in education, finance, and social status. Mr. Hồng criticized, “In Dorchester, there were a lot of refugees who have been living here for thirty something years and always relying on social welfare. None of them had a college education. Neither did their children.” Some criticized the “low-class” yet “ignorant” Việt kiều; many of whom were their own “bullying” relatives. One middle-aged immigrant woman from Hồ Chí Minh City compared:

They always tell you that the life in Vietnam is so poor, so miserable and Vietnamese are all uneducated, stupid, eat junk food, and dress terribly. In fact, I don’t know about Vietnamese rural women but the people here [in Little Saigon] are no match to Saigonese women in Vietnam. They are way too inferior in everything. Unlike the women in Vietnamese cities, in their thirties and forties, Vietnamese women here look old and dress poorly and unfashionably. But they won’t take it nicely if you say women in Vietnam are elegantly dressed and great at beauty-care skills. Look at them [the women in Little Saigon], how messy and careless their outfits are. In Vietnam, we are very self-esteemed. We never go out without a well-ironed, well-washed outfit. In here, they dress like bums without feeling embarrassed; yet they try to tarnish us as being poor and dirty.

Many informants looked at cultural aspects and criticized old-timers of being corrupted by an American lifestyle of consumption. Consumerism, they argued, was the reason for an “eroding
culture” being rampant amongst Vietnamese American communities. When we were cruising around Little Saigon, my former students often pointed to rows of Mercedes and BMW cars in the parking lots of Vietnamese businesses, laughing, “Believe it or not, many of the owners of those cars are welfare dependents. Many of those probably will be repossessed next month.” The culture of materialistic competition among Vietnamese Americans was often a topic of criticism of my informants of different migratory genealogies, including the evacuees and the refugees. For the new immigrants, these criticisms became the central response to my question: “Do you find anything that makes you significantly different from the Vietnamese Americans who came to the US as refugees?” Mentioning the differences between “new folks” and “old folks” in Orange County, one middle-aged woman opined:

I really don’t want to judge anybody but there are so many criticisms about Vietnamese American communities. The worst thing about Vietnamese American is the competition to consume. One person has one thing, another person immediately wants a better thing. You just bought a new Mercedes? Next month I will try to buy a later model Mercedes or BMW. You just bought a house with a swimming pool? Heck, next year I will try to buy a bigger one with a pool and a Jacuzzi. I don’t care how much I owe the bank. I just “feel uncomfortable being inferior” (kém miếng khó chịu). That culture of consumption on credit only puts you under tons of debts. And because you are in debt, you will be a bad person. You will try to compete unhealthily at work to make more money to pay debt and to satisfy your own competition with your Vietnamese neighbors.

In the same vein, another woman explained why in Orange County, according to her, the Vietnamese community was the worst of all ethnic minorities.
I think their thirst for money urges them to make as much as possible without any regard of dignity. I am so embarrassed watching them being such lowlife. Many times I couldn’t believe my eyes. In Vietnam nobody would do such things. In here, they are very comfortable with them. I don’t know how educated they are but even the uneducated living in the slums in Saigon wouldn’t do such things. I was a businesswomen and I hired a lot of workers who didn’t have a formal education. Yet, nobody acted like that. In here, I know someone with a good social status but they dare to do such vile things.

She concluded, “That’s why the Vietnamese here are losing face with the Americans. Many times white Americans ‘look at Vietnamese with half an eye’ [Nhìn bằng nửa con mắt, meaning disdaining or disgusting someone]. They respect the Mexican much more than they do to the Vietnamese.”

Such differences in cultures and ideologies clearly distance the newcomers from the preexisting community in many ways. As I have discussed earlier, a considerable number of recent immigrants intentionally disrupt relationships with their relatives by moving to a different neighborhood. Many chose to live in a less Vietnamese-concentrated neighborhood if they could afford it. Even though they have to depend on the Vietnamese ethnic enclave for access to jobs and other everyday needs, many immigrants expressed the desire to move into a white neighborhood. Ms. Na’s family’s moving to Quincy is one example. Huy told me that his mother “forbade” his father to hang out in Dorchester out of the fear that he might be influenced by the anticommunist community there. Mr. Hồng laughed and explained that he also had no intention of hanging out with “those guys up there,” whom he thought to be “too politically problematic.” Apart from the political issue, his wife added:
I didn’t want to live in the Vietnamese community. When I first came I didn’t know. But luckily I didn’t have to stay there for too long. After awhile, I recognized that the Vietnamese community is very messy and complicated. There is nothing good for me or my children to learn from. The neighborhood is dirty, people smoke everywhere, spit everywhere. They use a lot of foul language. Their children didn’t care for an education. For those who lived inside the community, they tend to limit contacts with other Vietnamese neighbors as little as possible. One informant shared:

I lived in a neighborhood where many Vietnamese, especially those from Đồng Nai, call home. However, I just heard about them from some of my relatives but I never want to talk to them. I always told my children not to socialize too much with the Vietnamese. If I saw them and I knew they were Vietnamese, I just nod my head and walk away. I don’t want to talk because once you have a conversation with them, it may lead to many other topics I don’t like.

Certainly, the conclusion that all new immigrants living in big Vietnamese enclaves are immune from anticommunist dogma and pro-communist can be hasty. While the parents are consistent in their political and cultural viewpoints, some young informants tend to be ambivalent. Thi’s story points to how the political environment might impact the young generation. During our conversations wherein she strongly criticized the Orange County culture and protested against anticommunist dogma, Thi also mentioned stories of her maternal grandfather who was oppressed and vilified by the communists, whom she addressed by the derogatory second-person pronoun of bọn nó (the clique). In such examples, she clearly expressed a sense of hatred and frustration toward the communists. Given the fact that Thi was a very active vice president of the Communist Youth Association chapter at Saigon Institute of
Technology for two years, it was quite intriguing to listen to such criticisms. I later learned that anticommmunist dogma is an important part of the working agenda at the Buddhist temple in Little Saigon which she attended regularly. She also participated enthusiastically in the temple’s activities such as raising funds for campaigns to “democratize” Vietnam or to disseminate Vietnamese culture, including anticommmunist teaching, to the youth. In another instance, Tam was also very critical of the communist government and expressed support for Vietnamese democratic activists both in Vietnam and the U.S. The reason? He believes that the current Vietnamese government is oppressive and exploitative. “The regime grants no freedom to its people. People have to keep their thinking to themselves instead of expressing them freely. Now I can say that in Vietnam it doesn’t matter right or wrong, whatever stands against the government would bring death to the dissidents. That’s why nobody dares to say anything.”

Nonetheless, such examples are the exception even in young Vietnamese immigrants. In my interviews, most informants were firm in their political stance of being opposed to the anticommmunist members of the community. The dominant Vietnamese communities, such as those in Boston and California, therefore, are increasingly divided, not only between old-timer members but also between old-timers and newcomers. New immigrants often find themselves caught in the tangled web of the alien politics and culture of the ethnic enclaves. To avoid ideological harassment and discrimination in the workplace and public spheres, they tend to minimize their contacts with the community and choose to withdraw into their nuclear families. The resistance is tacit yet strong. Most new immigrants politically and culturally disidentify with the community where they reside and maintain a strong connection to their home country.

*Site Three - “Imagined” Communities*
On a chilly evening in 2010, my family was invited for Christmas dinner at Dr. Bác’s new home. Bác and Hà recently built their house in a newly-established white suburb. Previously, they had lived for ten years in another white neighborhood within the city limits. With their children growing up fast and the desire to live in an even “more upper class” neighborhood, they spent nearly half a million dollars on the new project. Their new neighborhood was isolated from even the nearby less affluent middle-class neighborhood. On the other side of the city, their only close Vietnamese friends of the same class — Thương and Dương — also lived in a similar neighborhood.

There were seventeen people at the dinner that night. Apart from Bác’s, Thương’s, and Hưng’s families, there were Vân and her two teenage sons, William and Andy, and my family. Two other non-Vietnamese guests also attended — Mrs. Berry, a retired music instructor from Ohio University, who had accommodated Bác’s family for the years they lived in Athens, and Lai, Mrs. Berry’s Cambodian tenant. After a sumptuous Vietnamese dinner, we moved down to the basement. The teenagers and the children withdrew to their favorite game room, and the adults sat around a big party table next to the basement bar. Dessert was served: apart from the traditional assorted fruits, Hà brought out her homemade peanut candy, Vietnamese style, and Dung invited people to try a variety of confections she had bought in Hanoi during her last trip home. The men enjoyed German-imported black beer while the women sipped ice tea from Vietnamese porcelain cups. The conversation lasted from 8.00 PM to 10:30 PM, and topics shifted from everyday gossip to the “good old days.” The main topic centered on the 1980s in Eastern Europe and in Vietnam. The conversation was noisy and often punctuated with loud laughter. Everyone seemed to ignore the two non-Vietnamese guests and all spoke in Vietnamese. At one time Vân asked Hà if it was okay to speak Vietnamese while the
“foreigners” were there. Hà just shrugged and answered, “Oh, let them be. They wouldn’t understand our sense of humor anyway. This is our night.”

All guests drove in from different states and stayed in Bâc’s house for several days to spend the Christmas Eve together. Except for Berry, who was Bâc’s godmother, and her tenant, Lai, other visitors were professionally connected to Bâc and each other and were of the socialist-trained or Vietnamese professional immigration. Although none of them was Christian, such holidays provide them opportunities to foster their relationships in a professional community; often across the state and nation.

Demographically, there is no specific ethnic enclave of newer Vietnamese professional immigrants in the U.S. Neither do these immigrants tend to migrate to major cities. In his discussion of immigrant resettlement, Rumbault has pointed out, “the likelihood of dispersal is greatest among immigrant professionals, who tend to rely more on their qualifications and job offers than on preexisting ethnic communities.”94 The majority of my informants lived in small or mid-sized cities, and they were scattered throughout middle-class American white suburbs. Settling down in a college town near Atlanta, Mrs. Giang said that during the naturalization process in 2010, the local INS officer told her that they were the first family from Hanoi he had ever met in his thirty-two years working for the agency. Other professional informants also confirmed there were few Vietnamese in town. Being immigrant professionals, their residence is decided by the locations of their jobs. And with human capital and sufficient social capital, they did not need to rely on their compatriots for any sort of support. Because the majority of them were college professors, many settled down in small quiet college towns instead of bustling cities. Also, because of their recent immigration, they usually have no kinship ties in the cities with high Vietnamese concentrations.
However, despite the dispersal of resettlement and the relatively small number of this group, the existence of intellectual communities of recent professional immigrants across the country is strongly evident. Even though they usually are isolated from the dominant Vietnamese communities in the U.S., intellectual immigrants are closely connected to their peers of the same educational and political backgrounds. Intellectual immigrant communities are constructed through intercity and interstate linkages such as visits, remittances, phone calls, regular gatherings during national holidays of both Vietnam and the U.S., and especially, a sense of belonging to a certain community in the host country. In proposing his concept of “imagined communities,” Benedict Anderson contends that with the help of modern printing technology, nationalism and communities are fostered by language and culture. The cultural connections via the educational foundation shaped by Vietnamese intellectual immigrants, I argue, forge such an “imagined community.”

What makes this community “imagined” is a shared sense of loyalty to not only their home country but also the countries that nurtured them. Although such countries no longer politically exist, their nostalgia and indebtedness to them bind them together. In my study, informants who were trained in Eastern Europe often expressed their love and loyalty to the bygone socialist empire. They held on to their memories of the good old days by passionately retelling stories of the past in the Eastern bloc. They praised the Soviet Union as a “great land” of “great peoples” and that hardly any other country could replace the love they had for it. Despite the negative sides of the new capitalist Russia, they preserved the memory of a failed empire by remembering the best it had offered them. When I asked Dr. Hưng, who was trained both in Belarus and Germany, if he felt indebted to the countries where he used to live and study, he told me with a deep sense of appreciation and nostalgia:
Very much. Very deep. Whenever I am in Vietnam, November 7th is a day of big celebration. My friends and I usually get together in a Russian restaurant, eating, drinking, and singing Russian songs. Two years ago our families who used to study in Russia went on a tour to Russia. Last year, we gathered about a couple of dozens of alumni [of the Belarusian State University at Minsk, Belarus Republic] and went back to visit the school and the country. I love that country very much because the [Russian] culture has already become a part of me.

His wife explained:

Certainly, now when we go there we see many unacceptable things. For example, if we go there and we compare their way of thinking which our way of thinking in America or elsewhere, there are so many flaws in theirs. But it is all about the sentiment and love. It is like a rich person should never disdain their poor parents.

The younger generation of Russian-educated intellectuals is also appreciative. Dr. Ngọc affirmed that he had wonderful Russian friends and he “couldn’t find such wonderful and sincere friends in Vietnam.” When I insisted on Ngọc’s recounting the Russian gang attacks he had experienced, for the first time he became cautious about the purpose of my project. He said: “I am not sure if those stories are helpful for your research. I don’t want to emphasize the bad side of Russia. Although those problems are real and it did happen to me, I don’t want people to think bad about Russia.”

For the majority of younger professionals who did not experience socialist education and thus had no sentimental attachment to that community, other similar communities of culture and identity are also constructed. Young professionals who shared the same background of education both in Vietnam and in the U.S. keep track of each other and maintain close relationships.
through phone calls, visits, and other social networks, such as a group email list and websites.

Years after his graduation, Dr. Ngọc is still a very influential figure among the community of Vietnamese students in Boston, thanks to his role at the Open Association of Vietnamese Students at Boston. Many of my professional informants were introduced by Mỹ, who affirmed that because she did not have relatives in America, the network of former students in the Boston area was equally important to her as her own family. Although they do not meet very often, the alienation from mainstream American society and their disidentification with Vietnamese American communities foster the unity of this contingent of immigrants. Despite the geographic dispersal of its members, such “imagined communities” play a pivotal role in the immigrant life of the professionals.

Although there are increasingly political confrontations between university students from Vietnam and local anticommunist Vietnamese American communities, professional immigrants seldom clash with anticommunist activists. Because they often take residency in non-Vietnamese neighborhoods and are scattered in small cities, they avoid making frequent contact with Vietnamese American political dissidents. Furthermore, their occupations also provide them the privilege of escaping blatant acts of political harassment and discrimination. This is especially true of Vietnamese immigrant professors working at universities outside the orbit of anticommunist activism. Although their political and immigrant backgrounds make them distinctive from other faculty members, no immigrant professor reported being harassed at the workplace on account of her or his ideological leanings.

For those who live near a Vietnamese community where anticommunist dogma or cultural relics of the Saigon regime are strong, they tend to keep a low profile and minimize socialization with the local Vietnamese. Although most intellectual immigrants claimed to have
good contacts in the Vietnamese community near or in their city, the differences in ideologies and political backgrounds obviously put a crimp in their relations with their compatriots. Whereas my informants did not report any dangerous political confrontations with anticommunist Vietnamese Americans, some encountered more or less political-based discrimination and harassment either in their local Vietnamese American communities or in other places where the Vietnamese populations are significant. For example, since 2006, Dr. Hưng has stopped going to his favorite Vietnamese barbershop in Atlanta, Georgia, after receiving some harsh rhetoric from some South Vietnamese refugees who knew his background. His wife told me the story:

My husband had been to that barbershop for awhile. The barber was a polite and good young man. He [her husband] would stop by his shop whenever he was in Atlanta and needed a new haircut. One time the barber asked him where he was from and he told him he was from Hanoi. The story kept going and they shared lots of things. The next time he stopped by the shop there were some old men sitting around, waiting for their turn. My husband left because he was in a hurry. Then the next time he came, several men looked at him unfriendly and began implicitly mentioning a “Hanoi commie” and things like that. My husband didn’t want anything to do with such people. He left and never returned to that shop.

More importantly, even though it does not necessarily mean political confrontation or hostility, exile rituals and ideological differences can also heighten public sphere segregation between intellectual immigrants and local Vietnamese Americans. Thương and Dương avoid the annual celebration of Tết by the Vietnamese community in their city in Kentucky because of the ritualistic salutation of the deceased South Vietnamese “heritage” flag in the opening session.
I am one of the only two Vietnamese professors at the local university so my family and I were invited to the Tết. When we arrived we saw the yellow flag hung on the stage. At that time we already had entered the auditorium and were being welcome by the host. We couldn’t retreat. Then suddenly the opening session began and the chairman requested everyone to stand up for the flag salutation and to pay homage to the memory of the lost South Vietnam. We decided to be seated. It was very awkward. These Vietnamese were good to us and we didn’t want to hurt their feeling. I mean, they respect us because of our education and our occupation and have never troubled us. But we couldn’t join those rituals either. It’s Ok for them but it’s wrong for us. We skipped the ceremony and have never attended again since then.

Their friends, Hà and Bắc, also felt awkward about the same issue. However, because they have lived in the area longer than Thương and Dương, the relationships between them and the community are stronger. Because of their occupations, Hà often helps the Vietnamese in the area with the tax returns and other legal paperwork, and Bắc is usually the person from whom local Vietnamese seek any advice related to education. Such connections would not allow them to always refuse to attend the festival. However, they always intentionally arrive one hour late to avoid the rituals.

Regardless of political backgrounds, professional immigrants tend to express understanding and sympathy for refugee communities. Most informants agree that although they do not share the political points-of-view of many evacuees and refugees, their enormous losses and suffering during their escape and their lives in exile justify their dissent. However, they also state that such perceptions are derived from their contacts with their local smaller Vietnamese communities, which is far less radical than the major Vietnamese communities. Instead of the
refugees, their target of criticism is more the new immigrants who “turned their color” to gain a foot in the Vietnamese American communities. They often disdain such disloyalties and deem them intolerable. Thương, for example, expressed her opinion:

Of course I don’t feel comfortable when they talk bad about Vietnam. Every government has its own problems and every country has its own issues. Even here in the States we can see a million people living in poor conditions and violence stalks poor neighborhood. So why do they love focusing only on the bad sides of Vietnamese society and conclude that it is all because of the communists? I understand those who lost their property and social status because of the new [communist] regime. But those sycophants? I can’t sympathize with them… [she cited a well-known singer from Hanoi whom she accused of pleasing the anticommmunist activists to carve a niche in the U.S. Vietnamese entertainment industry]. He was educated by the Vietnamese government and his family is a communist-based one. When he was at home, people loved him and he made a lot of money. How could he turn on his country and people and talk trash like that?

In general, professional immigrants agree that they would get along well with refugee communities regardless of differences in social statuses and migrant backgrounds if the anticommmunist topics are not mentioned. But on the other hand, they also contend that even without political confrontations, such relationships are sensitive and potentially expose them to certain kinds of danger, not only with the local anticommmunists, but also with the Vietnamese government. Most immigrants try not to be embroiled in local Vietnamese gatherings and festivals due to the vulnerability of being “tricked” into taking pictures with the yellow flag or with known anticommmunist activists. If posted on dissident websites, such pictures render possible punishments from the Vietnamese government, including a ban for entering Vietnam.
This is a risk none of them can afford. Thus, for their own security, new intellectual immigrants tend to situate their lives within their comfort zone of white neighborhoods and away from Vietnamese ethnic clusters.

Conclusion

In 1986, sociological research on Vietnamese refugees’ well-being proposed that “A happy Vietnamese refugee seems to be a person who has stronger social supports […] who has a relatively high family income, and who is married. To be happy in America, a Vietnamese person also needs good English communication ability, a high level of formal education, and a relatively long time of living in this country, and that person also needs to be in the younger age cohort.” Most studies of Vietnamese refugees prove that not many of the subjects studied satisfied such requirements. Nearly fifteen years later, another community mental health study of 184 Vietnamese also reached the conclusion that the Vietnamese immigrants in California “manifested troubling signs of significant depressive and anxious symptomatology.”

Regardless of the significant distinctions between refugees and immigrants (although the term “immigrants” in the second study encompasses both family-based immigrants and HO immigrants), these studies indicate profound psychological damage among members of both migrant genealogies. Although the focus of my research is not on immigrant community health, my study clearly points out that the mental health crisis of new Vietnamese immigrants—particularly the entrepreneurial immigrants—is significant. Apart from common social causes, such as educational level, cultural adaptation, and occupational adjustment, I argue that the two major pull elements of educational advancement and family/kinship ties, along with cultural
differences and ideological pressure from their ethnic enclaves, are very significant in immigrant lives.

Consequently, three important conclusions can be made in this chapter. First, I suggest and affirm that the Asian “model minority” is a myth, and that American educational opportunity is never guaranteed. In opposition to the popular presentation of Vietnamese as being academically successful, new Vietnamese immigrants, as well as their predecessors, face tremendous obstacles on their way to achieving their dream of an American education. Second, I contend that in the lives of contemporary Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S., family and kinship do not necessarily provide either material aid or mental support. In fact, although it had been one of the first considerations in making the decision to migrate, the disruption of kinship relationships is very common among many new immigrant families. Third, by probing the three sites of Vietnamese American communities, this chapter disrupts the extant characterizations of Vietnamese ethnic enclaves in the U.S. The divergence of Asian/Vietnamese American communities, I argue, is not only caused by the self-transformation of the communities after a process of adaptation and assimilation but also created by the segmentations of class, ideology, political background, and migratory genealogies right at the beginning of immigration.
CHAPTER V-CONCLUSION

“A REALM OF DEPARTURE AND RETURN”: CITIZENSHIP, HOME, AND TRANSNATIONALISM

Dr. Trần Thị Thanh lived with her Caucasian American husband, Mark, in a two-bedroom house in a small all-American town in Northwest Ohio. The richness of Vietnamese culture was well represented by a variety of typical Vietnamese tourist souvenirs on the walls of their living room. Painted bamboo scrolls and silk paintings depicted popular themes of Vietnamese landscapes: children playing flutes on the backs of water buffaloes; farmers wearing corn hats gathering rice from vast golden paddy fields under flocks of white egrets flying in V-formation in the blue sky; bamboo trees shading a beautiful girl dressed in a traditional outfit. Next to these depictions of the Vietnamese countryside were lacquered plates with Vietnamese calligraphy that expressed Buddhist philosophy and Confucian teachings. In the center of the
room was a picture of her mother, posing in a traditional áo dài. In March 2010, when my friend and I visited her for an interview, Thanh and Mark were preparing to leave the United States to resettle in Vietnam. One of Thanh’s daughters had also married a Caucasian American in 2006 and lived in another township in Ohio. During our conversation, they showed me pictures of a colorful small brick house they had built in Long An, Vietnam. I asked Thanh why she had decided to go back and she told me, “I am obligated to stay with my mother. She has sacrificed all her life for us. She is getting old, and I can’t live here. I never feel good staying away from her. She needs me.” Mark looked excited. He kept asking us numerous questions about the culture, politics, and lifestyles in Vietnam. He also took time to practice some Vietnamese words with my companion while I was conducting my interview with his wife in another room.

In December 2010, after Mark’s long-awaiting retirement from an amusement park in Ohio where he had worked for decades, the couple left the U.S. for Vietnam. They lived in their new house in Long An with Thanh’s aging mother. However, the hot and humid weather of the Mekong Delta tired Mark out, and they decided to move up to the more moderate highland city of Bảo Lộc, Lâm Đồng Province. In my phone interview with Dr. Thanh in early February 2013, she said that Mark seemed to like this highland city very much. Since their emigration from the U.S. in 2010, Mark has returned to the U.S. only once during the tax season of 2011. Thanh, on the other hand, never did. She claimed that she no longer had any reason to visit the country of her second citizenship.

Dr. Thanh’s story is significantly rich and unique. It touches on many aspects of postwar Vietnamese migration, including political changes, educational exchanges, interracial marriage, U.S. immigration, Vietnam’s return migration, Vietnamese cultural diaspora, nationalism, and transnationalism. Her life spans different national identities and charts an interesting migratory
trajectory, in which Vietnam is the place of both departure and return. Like many other contemporary Vietnamese émigrés, the fluidity and nuances of her identity demand an expansion of the conceptualization of home, citizenship, and transnationalism in the lives of contemporary Vietnamese Americans. In this chapter, I will discuss these key themes to conclude my study of a new genealogy of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States.

Transnationalism in the United States

Transnationalism is a particularly important theme in my study because it engages the articulations between migrants and their homelands and is a vital component of contemporary immigrant lives. According to cultural anthropologist Steven Vertovec, academic disciplines that draw on transnationalism include “sociology, anthropology, geography, political science, law, economics and history, as well as in interdisciplinary fields such as international relations, development studies, business studies, ethnic and racial studies, gender studies, religious studies, media and cultural studies.”¹ And, most significantly, it encompasses immigration studies.

There are many explanations for the robust development of transnational studies. Among them are the rapid increase of international migration and the significant transformation of migratory trajectories in the last several decades. Anthropologists have provided some astonishing data of contemporary migration tendencies. In the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century there were approximately 120 million people living outside their home countries. Ten years later, well into the twenty-first century, this number grew to 160 million.² Clearly, with nearly 2 percent of the world’s population living in diaspora in every single country and political territory of the world, it is not surprising that transnational studies provide productive lines of inquiry for researchers in so many intellectual disciplines.
As an emergent field of inquiry, transnationalism draws a diversity of theories from different academic arenas. Each discipline may provide a definition for transnationalism, which may be different from other fields, as well as distinct from scholars of the same field. For example, Rubin Patterson, a sociologist, defines transnational studies as “a focus on citizens who, though migrating from poor to rich countries, manage to construct and nurture social fields that intimately link their respective homelands and their new diasporic locations.”³ Vertovec, a cultural studies scholar, contends that the term “refers to multiple interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states.”⁴ From the perspective of diasporic studies, Kwok Bun Chan and Louis-Jacques Dorais see it “as a process through which immigrants contrive and maintain multiple social relations that link their countries of origin and of adoption together within a single social field.”⁵ Anthropologists Nina Glick-Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton-Blanc simply assert that being transmigrants means those immigrants who “maintain, build, and reinforce multiple linkages with their countries of origins.”⁶ Despite such a diverse and somewhat ambivalent array of conceptualizations, central to the studies of transnationalism is what Roger Waldinger and David Fitzgerald has termed: “the politics of here and there.”⁷

In the United States, Randolph Bourne is often credited with being the “founding father” of transnationalism. Bourne was among the first to oppose the “melting pot” theory of American assimilationism. During the 1920s, the end of U.S. isolationism, coupled with the beginning of the Red Scare, was fertile ground for sociologists such as Robert Park and Ernest Burgess to disseminate Chicago-school theories of ethnic acculturation and models of assimilations.⁸ Such efforts to foster a singular American identity intrigued Bourne and in 1916 he published his influential essay, “Trans-national America,” in The Atlantic Monthly.⁹ The essay criticizes the
imposition of Anglo-American culture on other ethnic immigrants, calls for the recognition of ethnic differences in the United States, and supports American isolationism and pluralistic citizenship. Bourne’s theory, according to Leslie J. Vaughan, is an *avant-garde* force that challenged American nationalism and opened up new linkages between U.S. cosmopolitanism, ethnicity and the American identity. A liberal intellectual who advocated cultural pluralism, Bourne also “forged forms of a new American identity by summoning intellectual insurgency and artistic rebellion against traditional values.”

However, transnationalism only emerged as an important field of scholarship in immigration studies in the early 1990s when Glick-Schiller, Basch, and Szanton-Blanc proposed the concepts of “immigrant transnationalism,” in which “transmigrants” are those who maintain close and equal relationships with both the sending and the receiving countries. These connections, according to Waldinger and Fitzgerald, crucially changed the definitions of transnationalism and migration because “contrary to historical patterns and received social science notions, neither settlement nor the severing of home country ties was inevitable.” As they contend:

Consequently, the standard depiction of assimilation and transnationalism as competing theoretical perspectives or analytic concepts is misleading. While the sociological dictionary defines “assimilation” as the decline of an ethnic difference …., assimilation is also the *making* of difference between national peoples…. Likewise, for transnationalism, the relevant forms of social action do not transcend difference but rather are directed entirely toward specific places or groups. In the end, assimilation and transnationalism are each as particularistic as the other. 
U.S. transnationalism in the late twentieth century has significantly shifted from being a study of American identity to a study of dualistic and/or multiple identities, and from migrant cultural uprootedness to interstate cultural fluidity. Clearly, this shift is made possible by the impact of rapid globalization. “[T]ransnational,” Sarah J. Mahler notes in her study of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States, “is often interpreted as a synonym for global.”16 Hence, the inter-correlations between globalization and transnationalism have been central to many scholarly works. For instance, between 2000 and 2001, Blackwell Publishing House alone published three books that deal directly and extensively with such correlations: Peter Marcuse and Ronald van Kempens’ *Globalizing Cities: A New Spatial Order*;17 Leslie Sklair’s *The Transnational Capitalist Class*;18 and Michael Peter Smith’s *Transnational Urbanism: Locating Globalization*.19 Despite nuanced lines of inquiry and different approaches, as John Binnie notes, “each of these books makes a distinctive contribution to theorizing the global and the transnational.”20 In fact, the marriage of globalization and transnationalism is best summarized by the American studies scholar Winfried Fluck who subtly asserts that “in an age of globalization, such a project [of going beyond the borders of the nation-state as an object of analyses] is obviously timely and the description of transnational studies as a bold step across borders is ideally suited to serve as a commonsense legitimation.”21

Scholars in the field of Asian American Studies have also engaged transnationalism in varied ways. For instance, the works of Aihwa Ong, Monisha Das Gupta, and Yen Le Espiritu on the three largest Asian American groups, Chinese, Asian Indian, and Filipino American point to the complex relations of transnationalism. In *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality*, Ong probes the ways in which globalizing Chinese trading and commercial communities render flexible border-crossing citizenship and how the “cultural logics” of
globalization reshape transmigration, diasporas, and nation-state relations. In *Unruly Immigrants: Rights, Activism, and Transnational South Asian Politics in the United States*, Gupta examines the strategies used by social activist groups of South Asian queers, feminists, and laborers to combat the injustice of U.S. immigration laws. Such strategies are born out of what she calls “the rise of transnational social change organizations and transnational conceptualizations of rights.” In *Homebound, Filipino American Lives Across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*, Espiritu draws on the concept of “mobile homes” to illustrate the transnational lives of Filipino transmigrants whose “identity is less about rootedness and more about routedness.” The richness of methodologies and theoretical frameworks as seen in these three scholarly works suggests that in Asian American Studies, in particular, and in American Studies, in general, transnationalism has shaped U.S. migrant lives and extended to every angle of U.S. migration scholarship.

**Citizenship, Home, and U.S. Vietnamese Transnationalism**

Vietnamese American Studies is inherently rooted in transnational studies. Scholars in the field have been exploring Vietnamese lives as they traverse the borders of homeland and adopted lands. They have focused variously on transnational economies and returnees, transnational occupations, transnational music production, gender and transnationalism in literature, transnational feminism in films, transnational marriage, and transnational politics. In *Transnationalizing Viet Nam: Community, Culture, and Politics*, Valverde addresses the transnationalization of homeland politics and culture and California’s Vietnamese community in popular music, virtual world, and artworks. Like Valverde, a great number of scholars who study Vietnamese-U.S. transnationalism are Vietnamese descendants. As
“insiders,” they themselves experience firsthand many aspects of transnational life and therefore channel such experiences and knowledge into their own works.

But the “insider” position of Vietnamese refugees or descendants of Vietnamese refugees in the U.S. also create a gap in their studies. Perhaps, since none of them holds dual Vietnamese and U.S. citizenship, the politics of dual citizenship in Vietnamese American transnationalism goes unnoticed. Despite a considerable amount of Vietnamese American transnational scholarship, not much research has touched on the quintessential concept of home and citizenship in Vietnamese immigrant lives. Among the very few scholars who are interested in the transnational life of Vietnamese non-refugee immigrants is Hung Cam Thai. However, his research tends to focus on remittances, gender revolt and class struggles of transnational immigrants, rather than citizenship. Other scholars who study Vietnamese refugees and their descendants in the United States also limit their work then. For example, Valverde points out how the return of renowned musician Phạm Duy to Vietnam for permanent resettlement, who “have brought Viet Nam closer to the diaspora in a monumental way, via culture making.” Nonetheless, she does not really explore the concept of dualistic citizenship nor does it document the lives of the returnees. The majority of literature on transnational experiences of overseas Vietnamese—be it Vietnamese women in Australia, second generation Vietnamese youth in Canada, or the modest population of Vietnamese refugees in Ireland—are thus about those Vietnamese who “lost their country” in April 1975 or abandoned it as they escaped from Vietnam. Because of their loyalty to their adopted countries, as well as alienation to the communist government, either covertly or overtly, few obtained dual citizenship. Those who do reclaim Vietnamese citizenship often consider it the secondary one and uphold the citizenship of the country of reception as the primary one.
The predicament of Vietnamese Americans/immigrants over their citizenship often takes root in Vietnamese contemporary history. Vietnamese [SRVN] citizenship was an equivocal concept to many Vietnamese who escaped the country after 1975. While it is clear that most evacuees and refugees were Vietnamese nationals, the collapse of the Republic of Vietnam immediately put many of these former South Vietnamese citizens in a state of being undocumented and near-stateless. During the 1970s and 1980s, in a newly-united country with a recent history of a century of colonization and thirty years of two punitive wars, citizenship documentation was not a first priority. Not until 2008 did the Socialist Republic of Vietnam revise and complete its nationality law (Luật quốc tịch Việt Nam). Article 11 of the law declares that in order to claim Vietnamese citizenship, a claimant must provide at least one of the following documents: (1) A Vietnamese birth certificate or legal documents of parents’ or a parent’s Vietnamese citizenship; (2) National Identification card (Giấy Chứng minh Nhân dân); (3) Vietnamese passport; (4) document of Vietnamese citizenship naturalization, document of a Vietnamese citizen’s adoption of a non-Vietnamese child, and document of a foreigner’s adoption of a Vietnamese child.\(^38\) Even today, such requirements are challenging for many. A great number of Vietnamese, especially the minority groups living in frontier and mountainous areas, do not bother to report their deliveries or register their children at the state bureaucracy. Many remain stateless and travel between Vietnam and the neighboring countries of Cambodia, Lao, or China.\(^39\) In the postwar chaos, the situation was much worse.

In the 1990s, in the wake of Đổi mới, significant numbers of overseas Vietnamese, many of whom came from Western countries and had not been home for decades, returned to Vietnam for a visit. Whereas in 1987 only 8,000 overseas Vietnamese visited their homeland, this number jumped to 87,000 in 1992; 160,000 in 1993, 300,000 in 1997; and over 380,000 in 2002.\(^40\) Ten
years later in 2012, within several weeks of the Tết event, there were already 372,810 overseas Vietnamese coming home to share traditional gatherings with their families. In the same year, remittances from overseas Vietnamese reached US$10 billion, topping the number of US$4 billion in 2007 and dramatically outdistancing the number of US$ 35 million in 1991. Such growth in Vietnamese transnational practices of returning and sending remittances to families in Vietnam has obviously been encouraged and, to some extent, steered by the government’s economic agenda.

Rapid globalization has spurred the government to encourage and attract overseas Vietnamese to “come home,” bringing with them both human and social capital. By 2007, overseas Vietnamese were permitted a five-year visa waiver for their entry to Vietnam. In 2009, the central government passed the nationality law that would allow Vietnamese to possess dual citizenship. This law is twofold. It invites overseas Vietnamese who have lost their Vietnamese nationality by anyway to regain citizenship and encourages Vietnamese emigrants to maintain their legal rights pertaining to Vietnamese citizens. Although in reality Vietnam has never strictly enforced singular citizenship on its people, such legalization emphasizes the role of transnational Vietnamese and enhances ties to Vietnam among overseas Vietnamese. The laxity of the Vietnamese nationality law also makes it possible for overseas Vietnamese to claim multiple national identities. Ms. Trần Thị Mỹ informed me that in 2012 she successfully obtained Vietnamese nationality for her three children, two of whom already had U.S. [born] citizenship and French citizenship and one had French citizenship.

When we went back to visit Vietnam in summer 2012, my kids and I were bringing a bunch of nearly ten different passports with us. I brought them all just in case. It was
funny because I had to memorize which one was which to show the proper ones to the
custom officers in Vietnamese and in U.S. airports. It was rather confusing and tiring.
A U.S. green-card bearer with both Vietnamese nationality and French nationality (her husband
is French), Mỹ hopes that she will finally be naturalized as a U.S. citizen without her other
nationalities being relinquished. Although she is the only one of my informants who reported
triple citizenship, such a curious case with great effort made to retain and obtain Vietnamese
nationality make her family significantly different from many overseas Vietnamese.

Figure 10. A returned émigré with multiple national identities. The left picture was taken
in 1973 when Dr. Trần Thị Thanh—second from the left in the standing row—was a
senior in college. Flying above these students of the Saigon Pedagogical University was
the South Vietnamese flag. On the right picture, which was taken in Ohio in a U.S.
naturalization ceremony in July 2009, Thanh posed next to the red flag of the SRVN (her
association with the first nationality) before accepting U.S. citizenship as the second
nationality. The next year, she returned to Vietnam for permanent settlement. Photo
courtesy of Dr. Thanh.
Whereas U.S. citizenship is important to Vietnamese immigrants to either enter or work in the country, Vietnamese citizenship is also very important, if not central, to their identity and transnational practices. In fact, as my research reveals, their perception of homeland and host land may seriously challenge both Bourne’s definition of a dualistic-citizenship American identity and the definition of transnationalism as the “politics of here and there.” Today, even though they live in the United States and hold either a U.S. passport or green-card, many Vietnamese reject both the assimilated identity of being “American” and the hyphenated ethnic “Vietnamese-American.” Similarly, many of them either traverse equally between the two countries or resettle (and plan to resettle) in Vietnam and flexibly switch between the two nationalities of Vietnamese and American depending on their circumstances. For many, here is no longer the U.S. and there is no longer Vietnam. Since it is becoming increasingly difficult for such transmigrants to decide on a final settlement, here and there are interchangeable and flexible. Vietnamese émigrés now often have stronger ties to their homeland than to the host country and possess the agency, both financially and politically, to return home freely. Many emigrate from Vietnam with an intention to return. Such mobility blurs the boundary between sojourner and immigrant and fosters the making of a distinctive state of migrancy which I term “the sojourn-immigrant model.”

Among the most significant examples of Vietnamese entrepreneurial sojourner-immigrants are people like Tam’s father who each year divide equally their stay in the U.S. and in Vietnam. U.S. immigration law requires a green-card holder to stay at least six months a year on U.S. soil in order to maintain their permanent residency. And because family-sponsored immigrants rank lower than professional immigrants and refugees in naturalization rate,\textsuperscript{46} a permanent residency may take more than the average of five years for them to be eligible for
naturalization. However, since these immigrants focus on their business in Vietnam rather than in the United States, the amount of time the naturalization process takes is not of concern to them. The time window of six months every year in the U.S. could be spent differently among immigrants. During this duration, some people do not work in the U.S. but still work from the U.S. When Tam’s parents commit to their stays in the U.S., they still directly run their hotel-restaurant business in Vietnam through a network of assistants. Some others invest in small businesses in America and authorize their children or relatives to manage such businesses during their absence. Some others, usually very affluent export/import businesspeople, build their bases and agencies in both countries and travel frequently between the two. Therefore, for this small number of elite business sojourner-immigrants, U.S. citizenship is regarded merely as a convenience, either to visit their children or to extend their transnational businesses, rather than a legal status for resettlement.

Dual citizenship duality is also used as a means of legal protection and financial security by entrepreneurial sojourn-immigrants. Since the 1990s, Rumbaut has noted a considerable cash flow from Vietnam to California as Vietnamese businessmen sought a “safe haven” for their “excess cash.” Similarly, in the early 2010s, Fforde also reported Vietnamese nouveau riche moving their liquid assets to Western countries. A notable number of such people would eventually migrate to the country where their assets have previously been transferred. Recently, cases of Vietnamese entrepreneurs—many of whom are multimillionaires—resettled in the United States to escape multimillion-dollar business failures in Vietnam have become increasingly common. The multimillionaire Lâm Ngọc Khuẩn, whom I mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, is a significant example for this group of entrepreneurs.
Because my informants do not fall into such a high-profile business category, and few of them would use dual citizenship as a means of financial gain or legal evasion, they tend to look at Vietnamese nationality as both tangible evidence of transnational ties and a reminder of a future return to Vietnam. Many confessed that the 2009 citizenship law granted them peace of mind of the possibility for their return. This guarantee of return greatly alleviates the quandary of the decision to leave and works as a mental support for their struggles in the new land.

In reality, cases of Vietnamese immigrants departing the U.S. permanently due to socioeconomic difficulties before even being naturalized are not rare. In 2012, I met two immigrants who were preparing to return to Vietnam after several years of trying unsuccessfully to establish businesses in California. I was also provided with stories of returnees, most of whom were middle-aged entrepreneurs or professionals with nontransferable skills and whose business attempts had failed, who took a one-way ticket back to Vietnam. Ms. Linh’s husband also returned to Vietnam in February 2011 due to unemployment. Being greatly depressed and frustrated with an endless job search and cultural conflicts, he swore not to return to the U.S. again. However, he eventually went back to California because his sons, who accompanied him, changed his mind and requested him to return to the U.S. Like some other immigrants, Ms. Linh’s family still hold U.S. permanent residency with Vietnamese passports. Nonetheless, she asserted that they, at least she and her husband, would not denounce their Vietnamese nationality because of the possibility of a final return. In the same vein, other immigrants are also firm about retaining Vietnamese citizenship.

But Vietnamese citizenship provides immigrants with more than merely mental support. In fact, citizenship enhances transnational businesses and nationality rights for its holders. Naturally, being a Vietnamese national, one may enjoy numerous privileges and avoid many
hassles in Vietnam. For instance, Vietnamese law forbids non-Vietnamese nationals from owning land or properties that connect to land ownership such as houses, plantation, or plants. Considering the heated and lucrative real estate business in Vietnam during the last several decades,\textsuperscript{49} such dispossession may cost emigrants without Vietnamese citizenship greatly. It is common for wealthy Vietnamese Americans to own real estate properties in both Vietnam and the U.S. Because the real estate market in Vietnam was more lucrative and convenient with low taxes, high profit, and lax paperwork procedures, such investments became popular even among the lower middleclass. Before the enactment of the nationality law in 2009, overseas Vietnamese had to rely on their relatives to help purchase houses and land and have them in their relatives’ names to evade the restrictive land law. Such measures harbor potential conflict within kinship relationships and pose great vulnerability to the real investors. If their relatives betray the trust, which is not too uncommon, overseas Vietnamese are unprotected by law and may lose their investments. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the damage of the relationships between Thi’s family and their relatives originated from a dispute over a house that their grandmother left behind when she escaped Vietnam. Now the citizenship duality allows emigrants to retain their property in Vietnam and continue to purchase more land if they wish to do so. Many of my informants still own houses, apartments, and land in Vietnam. Ms. Na keeps two houses in Nha Trang. She also told me that she still had an investment in some pieces of land in a newly-constructed suburb of Nha Trang City. Facing an uncertain future in the U.S., she clings to those properties as both a financial investment and a back-up plan.

For some other immigrants, the ability to own real estate as Vietnamese nationals not only preserves their investment capital but also generates important revenue. Those who run accommodation-for-lease businesses such as student hostels and cheap hotels, or rent out their
houses in Vietnam, can make a decent monthly income. Diễm admitted that due to her unemployment, without the share from her mother’s private student hostels in Cần Thơ, it would be difficult for her to supplement her cost of living in the U.S. Ms. Linh also revealed that the monthly US$2000 rent collected from her four-story-house on a busy street in her hometown of Tuy Hòa covered sufficiently her rent in California. The income was so important that when they bought their home in Huntington Beach, they decided to purchase a mobile home and keep the house in Vietnam instead of selling it for a better house in America.

Dual citizenship also plays an important part in the transnational lives of Vietnamese sojourner-immigrant intellectuals. Similar to entrepreneurial immigrants, the naturalized intellectuals still retain their Vietnamese nationality and green-card holders also plan to keep their Vietnamese passports after their future naturalization. In comparison to their entrepreneurial contemporaries, their elite backgrounds, social privileges, and family ties in Vietnam tend to foster a stronger connection between them and the country of origin. Some intellectuals who have strong political and intellectual ties to Vietnam declare national pride and their loyalty to Vietnam by asserting they would willingly rejecting U.S. naturalization should it comes as the cost of relinquishing their Vietnamese nationality. Although the United States so far has not imposed the renunciation of original nationality as a requirement for U.S. naturalization,50 Dr. Ngọc, for example, is very cautious about the possibility of being stripped of his Vietnamese nationality, a price he refuses to pay. He claimed, “I always want to go back to work for Vietnam so being a Vietnamese passport bearer obviously makes my job much easier.” His suggestion of the significance of a Vietnamese passport is affirmed by many overseas Vietnamese scholars and scientists who travel frequently to work in Vietnam. Although intellectual Vietnamese returning to the homeland is one of the four vital pillars of the state’s strategic goal in dealing with
Vietnamese diasporas, the state is more cautious and conditional about returned overseas Vietnamese intellectuals without Vietnamese nationality. Since citizenship signifies loyalty and guarantees the state’s control over the citizens, transnational intellectuals with Vietnamese nationality enjoy more privileges. Scientists who frequently go back to Vietnam for conferences, seminars, and graduate advising at universities and national science institutions such as Dr. Hưng, Dr. Phong, and Dr. Nam often travel with a Vietnamese passport and work as a Vietnamese citizen. The “insider” position, they admitted, not only renders their work more accessible but also makes them more comfortable working with other Vietnamese colleagues.

However, a Western passport also proves to be very helpful in fostering the mobility of such sojourner-immigrant intellectuals. For example, when asked why he accepted French citizenship, Ngô Bảo Châu reasoned that it helped him to travel easier. In our conversation, Dr. Hưng explained how and why he used the U.S. passport:

U.S. citizenship is only a convenient tool for me. We travel a lot on business and sometimes it is harder to get a visa with Vietnamese nationality. The same when we travel for pleasure. When I did not have a U.S. passport, I sometimes felt timid when applying for foreign visas. I wanted a more powerful and popular passport. But when I gained a U.S. passport, I felt it normal. Now I use both passports. In countries such as in the Southeast Asian bloc, I use Vietnamese passport. Now in the eyes of foreigners Vietnam is a respectable country and it is fairly easy to travel with its passport.

To some other informants, especially those without social privileges in Vietnam, U.S. citizenship provides them some sense of better security when they travel back to the country. This is particularly true of those who live in politically sensitive communities, such as those in California. On the one hand, they are afraid that if noticed by the local anticommunist radicals,
the possession and the use of a passport issued by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam might bring them some trouble. On the other hand, they are also afraid of being vulnerable to Vietnamese public security enforcers and unprotected by the U.S. embassy should they get involved in some political disputes. Tam shared:

I still keep Vietnamese nationality. But when I travel back to Vietnam, I don’t really want to use it. Because if I enter Vietnamese soil on a Vietnamese passport, I am a Vietnamese national. If unluckily something happens to me, for example the public security officers suspect me of some political problems, they can arrest me immediately and the U.S. embassy can’t intervene. But if I am arrested as an American, which means I enter Vietnam on a U.S. passport, and I am innocent, the U.S. embassy will interfere. Because I live in a notoriously anticommunist community, it is safer for me to use my American passport.

Although the communist state is equally skeptical about overseas Vietnamese returnees regardless of differences in class and social status, professional returnees still seem to enjoy the state’s tolerance more than other returnees of different occupations. Hence, the disparity in nationality rights between returnees of different social statues is subtle, yet present, and how being American and being Vietnamese may either offer security or pose risks to immigrants depends largely on their social status and political connections to the homeland.

In her study of South Asian transnational immigrants, Gupta contends that “to say that identities are transnational does not necessarily mean that they escape bounded notions of identity and territory.”52 These “notions” included a sense of belonging to the geographic boundary of an immigrant’s country of origin and the preservation and enhancement of the cultural identity immigrants brought with them to the new land. One of the common practices of
U.S. transnational cultures, therefore, is the promotion of “national identifications.” Regardless of the differences in social statuses and migratory paths, such promotion and emphasis on a [postwar] Vietnamese identity is significant among my research participants. When I asked Dr. Ngọc to explain his strong objection to the denunciation of Vietnamese nationality apart from the convenience of his returns, he replied:

I would not relinquish my Vietnamese nationality for other reasons, too. It is the pride of being Vietnamese. I like America very much but the act of rejecting my own nationality offends terribly the national pride in me. Not only national pride but also self-esteem too. We are Vietnamese. We are well-educated. Although our country is far from perfect, it didn’t do something terrible to us. Besides, who wouldn’t have problems with their own government? But that doesn’t mean that an American guy who does not like his government will go out and say that he is not American. So, that [Vietnamese citizenship denial] obviously doesn’t make any sense to me.

In the same vein, a green-card-holding informant who worked at a Boston nail shop described how she often coupled national identity with citizenship in the public sphere of the workplace:

I always say to Americans my country is small but peaceful and we are studious and smart. […] I told everyone that my country was very peaceful and secured. It is mono-party but there is no harsh competition, no terrorism, no bombing. I told them no matter how long I stay in their country, I still remain a Vietnamese. My Vietnamese passport is my name. Here in America they can twist my name, first name becomes last name and vice versa, but it is still my name. Same is my identity. You can add the word “American” after the word “Vietnamese,” yet, it is still me: a Vietnamese.
However, transnational immigration does not confine migrant subjects to solely one home; instead, it opens up the possibility of having a second home or even more. Regardless of migrants’ rejection of either their homeland or host land and their loyalty to either one, the existence of a sense of dual homes is inevitable. Andrew Hardy, in his study of Vietnamese domestic migration, uses the Vietnamese precept “one destination, two homes” (một chốn đôi quê) to describe how Vietnamese migrants to frontier areas “maintain a mental link with their native place” through material and immaterial cultural presentations and preservations. Similarly, the transnational home, according to Espiritu in her work on Filipino immigrants in the United States, can be “both an imagined and an actual geography.” The imagined home, she explains, is constructed when one “physically lived in one place but built their lives around the material resources, and also the dreams and expectations, of another.” The way Dr. Trần Thị Thanh decorated her home in Ohio was not simply the “immigrants use memory of their homeland to construct their new lives in the country to which they have migrated;” rather, it was the way she lived daily in her Vietnamese home in her American home. And when she finally returns to her homeland, her house in Vietnam will be, in turn, replete with materials that allow her to live in the American home which she has left behind.

To immigrants, a transnational home in a foreign country is constructed with various objects, including landscape, language, images of relatives, and even food. Such cultural values not only constantly remind immigrants of their home country but also allow them to culturally simulate the lives they left behind. To an experienced person, a Vietnamese home in a foreign country is easily spotted by looking at the backyard garden in the summer time. No matter how big or small, elaborate or simple, upper-class or lower-class, there is often a small piece of land in the garden where familiar Vietnamese herbs and vegetables, such as sweet basil (húng quế),
kaw thong (rau dấp cà), perilla (lá tía tô), betel leaf (lá lốt), pac peo /persicaria (rau răm), culantro (ngò gai), taro (mùng/bạc hà), and ong choy (rau muông) are grown. By studying how the Vietnamese culture of food plants is maintained and developed in Hawai‘i’s Vietnamese community, cultural botanist My Lien T. Nguyen has concluded that the “persistence of traditional food is a powerful symbol in the maintenance of ethnic identity and cultures.”\(^5\) In a transnational sense, food plants are more than part of a culture of consumption. It is, to many, a symbol of being in Vietnam while living in a foreign country. In California, an aging Vietnamese man insisted on showing me a lime tree growing in the corner of his garden. Although the tree was laden with ripe fruit, he said he rarely used the fruit for anything, “I don’t eat that much lime but this is what I treasure most. I had some lime trees at my home in Vĩnh Long. This makes me feel just like Vĩnh Long.” In 2010 when Thương’s mother visited Bác’s family in Kentucky, she was invited to dinner. In Vietnamese tradition, host families always treat their guests with the best food they can afford. To Thương’s mother’s surprise, the meal was full of dishes made from ong choy grown in Bác’s backyard garden. She was puzzled because she thought the meal was cheap since ong choy is a very cheap and common vegetable in Vietnam. Little did she know that Hà had sacrificed her treasured ong choy to offer her something truly Vietnamese: a Vietnamese vegetable grown in a Vietnamese home by a Vietnamese woman. Clearly, such emotional value invested in a vegetable is hardly understood by a visitor who does not experience immigrant life.

Although the idea of being a citizen of the United States does not appeal as much to many new immigrants as it may have to the refugees, it clearly marks an important shift in their thinking of the home. While the majority of new immigrants whom I interviewed declared their attachment to the home country, the “one destination, two homes” concept resonates with them. Some informants told me that such attachment to a second home was born out of the time they
were granted U.S. permanent residency. Thương described a moment of home at U.S. customs after her trip to Vietnam in the summer of 2011:

At customs, arrivers were divided into two different lines: one was non-immigrant students and visitors and the other was U.S. “green-card” holders and citizens. It was very convenient because we did not have to wait too long in line. My feeling at that moment? I looked at the endless line of students on the other side of the lounge and thought: “Hmm, I once used to be there with them.” When I stepped up to the custom booth, the officer looked at my visa, looked up at me, smiled, and then greeted:

“Welcome home!” That was another thing that struck me. He obviously knew I was a foreigner with a newly-issued “green-card,” yet he willingly accepted me “home.” Or at least the “second home.” The feeling was a little bit touching. High and different.

In a slightly different scenario, Dr. Thanh, a naturalized citizen, also concurred with the idea of having a second home. In our interview in 2010, she observed:

Being a U.S. citizen was just a normal process. I had a little more happiness because this became officially another “homeland” (quê hương) of mine. So, when I came back to Vietnam I still missed it and when I returned to the U.S. I felt that I came back to a familiar place. The change in feeling after being a citizen was not significant because I already had the feeling of home in this small home [pointed at her house]. The naturalization gave me some sense of an official residency in this country, which I didn’t have before. That’s perhaps the most important change.

What separates sojourner-immigrants like Thanh from other Vietnamese Americans, chiefly those of the evacuee and refugee generations, is that they do not struggle emotionally to return to Vietnam like the others. While it is becoming more common to see first generation Việt
Vietnamese returning to either permanently resettle or establish businesses in Vietnam, and second generation Việt kiều coming back to explore their roots in the ancestral land, many others still refuse to return because of ideological differences or living conditions in Vietnam. A 2008 study of a group of Vietnamese Australian women found that “while these women’s narratives illustrate their continued attachment to relatives in Vietnam, they also demonstrate that their lives are now based overseas. Even if women had been unsure of where “home” truly was before their return journeys, the trip to their former homeland was to affirm their place in the diaspora, and their adopted land as ‘home.’” These narratives often contain anxiety, suspicion, fear, and hatred toward a now unfamiliar homeland controlled by communists and express a sense of nostalgia and love for the bygone [South] Vietnam. Similarly, Valverde also claims that her trip to Vietnam was the journey of a Vietnamese American who “lost [her] country, the former South Vietnam, to North Vietnam.” The prejudice generated from traumatic experiences of evacuees and refugees often makes them angry, frustrated, and scared strangers in their ancestral land. Understandably enough, to some, their abhorrence of the Vietnamese state and the memories of the past, rather than the country of Vietnam, foster their feeling of belonging to the country of reception.

In contrast, new immigrants are much more closely tied to the homeland country. Regardless of their lengthy stay in the receiving countries, their frequent visits to relatives and business trips increasingly foster their sociocultural ties with Vietnam. This connection is particularly true among the intellectuals, many of whom have at least a house and almost their entire extended family in Vietnam. Families of the middle-aged, socialist-trained intellectuals like Dr. Hưng’s and Dr. Phong’s usually have their own children living and working in Vietnam. Dr. Hưng’s family comes home every year to spend three months of summer at their home in
Hanoi. Ms. Vân’s husband spends more time in Vietnam, lecturing and doing research at universities and academic institutes in Hanoi, than he does at his home university in Ohio. Thanh has not returned to the U.S., and has no intention to do so, since her departure in 2010. To many of them, apart from their connection to their children in the United States, very few obstacles stand between them and their immigration back to Vietnam upon their retirement.

**Figure 11.** Transnational homes. A young immigrant sitting in his “room” in Boston (left) in April 2012 and standing in front of one of his family’s houses in Vietnam (right) in August 2012. In Boston, his family rented and shared a 450 square-foot room up the attic. In Vietnam, both of their houses are three-story townhouses. Photo courtesy of the immigrant in both pictures.

Such connections to the homeland also affirm the notion of the sojourner-immigrant model among young immigrants. Unlike American-born youths, the 1.5 generation finds itself more anchored to the homeland than the host land. As I have mentioned in Chapter 4, the intention to return to Vietnam with U.S. citizenship and a U.S. university degree was common
among Vietnamese immigrant teenagers and college students. Whereas U.S. citizenship renders them a convenient access to the host country where their relatives and possibly their nuclear family reside, and an American university degree usually provides them better job opportunities in Vietnam than a Vietnamese degree would, they also prefer to live and work in a familiar culture in Vietnam where they blend in comfortably. Generational gaps and cultural conflicts are often the major components that increase the alienation between Vietnamese youths and Vietnamese communities. To many youngsters, their emotional life and romantic relationships are more Vietnam-oriented due to the fact that they either already have a girlfriend/boyfriend in Vietnam or have a hard time accepting a new dating culture in the U.S. Given the reality that even American-born youths have to face many difficulties in making a decision to build a relationship with their contemporaries, dating becomes even more challenging to the few new immigrant youths. Most young informants admitted that they were not able to find a soulmate in America with whom they could have mutual understandings and feelings. Huy claimed that his relationship with his girlfriend in Vietnam was one of the most poignant situations with which he had to deal. For nearly four years living in the United States, young informants like Trung held on resiliently to their loved ones in Vietnam through phone calls, internet chats, and actual visits to Vietnam.

Thus, transnational romance obviously factors into their ties to the homeland. Sometimes, such feelings become so overwhelming that the host country is considered an adversary rather than a promised land. In summer 2012, Trung returned to Vietnam for a visit to his hometown and his girlfriend. Two posts on Trung’s Facebook wall illustrate this interesting sense of belonging. At 11.PM, June 8, 2012, as soon as he arrived at Tân Sơn Nhất Airport, Vietnam, he posted: “The moment when I step on my motherland, the whole and entire American memories
are just gone, disappeared totally and completely. **Việt Nam muốn năm!** [Long live Vietnam!]

At 7 PM, July 21, 2012, one week before his return to the U.S., he posted:

> Dear God, xin cho ngày dài thêm 1 chút để con có thêm thời gian ở lại cái xứ thiên đường là Rạch Giá này. Xin cất chén đắng nước Mỹ khỏi miệng con 1 thời gian nữa. Xin cho những con người tội nghiệp đang thương đằng trăm luận ở cái xứ tội lỗi đó mau tìm đường về dc Việt Nam, và xin cho những con người hiền lành chất phác ở Việt Nam đừng sa chước cám dỗ nước Mỹ. Amen.

[Dear God, please make the day longer so that I may have some more time staying in this paradise of Rạch Giá City. Please keep the cup of bitterness named America off my mouth for some more time. Please allow those poor people who are suffering in that sinful land to quickly find their way to Vietnam and please save the naïve and kind people in Vietnam from falling into the deadly lure of the U.S. Amen].

Although Trung’s expression provoked some of his Vietnamese American friends, who mockingly accused him of exaggerating his love for Vietnam and falsely condemning the United States, the majority of overseas Vietnamese, chiefly young Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. who followed the posts, supported him with their sympathies and concurred with such thoughts.

At the end of the twentieth century, Linda Trinh Võ asserted, “It is unlikely that normalizing political and economic relations between Vietnam and the United States will drastically affect the ethnic communities in America […] In many ways, Americans of Vietnamese ancestry may visit their homeland, but there is no returning home.”⁶³ Võ’s assertion is both subjective and premature. The rapprochement did bring tremendous change to Vietnamese communities in the U.S. in many ways. Not only did Vo overlook the return of many first generation refugee Vietnamese Americans, she also, perhaps unintentionally, excluded tens
of thousands of recent Vietnamese immigrants from the pool of Vietnamese Americans, of whom many have returned home and many others will return home once their goals are achieved. The idea of being a “temporary American” in order to return to a “permanent Vietnamese” enhanced by strong ties to the homeland, therefore, underscore a new transnational identity of Vietnamese immigrants. Such flexibility of citizenship has powerfully enabled the making of a new sojourner-immigrant generation whose transnational practices contribute tremendously in the reshaping of the Vietnamese American discourse.

CONCLUSION

In early February 2013, I attended a session of the Ray Browne Conference on Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. I was drawn to the conference by the presence of a Vietnamese American presenter and his paper that involved theorizing Vietnamese popular music and its audience. Although I had interviewed sixty Vietnamese Americans/immigrants and met with many other nonparticipant Vietnamese Americans, thus far, I had not talked to any young, scholar-aspiring Vietnamese American graduate student in the same field of study. Being the only Vietnamese graduate who studied Vietnamese American culture at BGSU at the time, I was intrigued by the possibility of learning from a fellow graduate student who shares my Vietnamese roots (at least we bear the same last name Nguyễn) but may have a different perspective on the subject matter. Besides, after researching numerous theses and dissertations done by Vietnamese American graduates of the “California school,” I found the opportunity of listening to the voice of a Vietnamese American student from a Midwestern university unique and invaluable.
Nguyễn’s presentation was intriguing and intellectually rich. Although I am not an expert on either musicology or Vietnamese American popular music, the talk and the Q&A session that followed examined Vietnamese [American] popular music in ways that I did not find in extant scholarship of the same subject. After the session, we went to a lunch so that we could further our discussion on our shared interest: being Vietnamese American. Nguyễn was born and raised in a small Vietnamese community in North Carolina. His parents are evacuees who originally left the North for the South during the 1954 partition. A second-generation Vietnamese American whose family has been living in the United States for nearly forty years, Nguyễn was very fluent in Vietnamese, and had a depth of understanding of Vietnamese language, culture, and social knowledge that other American-born youths I have met did not. Derived from his own experience of being raised and educated differently from many other Vietnamese youths in the U.S., we came to a conclusion that the use of the term Việt kiều in the United States has become controversial. Nguyễn said that he never used that term in his academic writing and rarely mentioned it in daily conversations. Agreeing to disagree, I pointed out that with some rigorous clarifications and extension, the term is valid and it powerfully connotes the unity within the nuances and diversity of all Vietnamese living overseas.

Because of the dominance of Vietnamese Americans and other overseas Vietnamese living in Western countries, not all Vietnamese Americans are fully aware of the diversity of Việt kiều. Apart from 1.7 million Vietnamese Americans and a total number of 800,000 Vietnamese Canadians, Vietnamese Australians and Vietnamese French, the term also equally encompasses 1.5 million Vietnamese who live in 104 other foreign countries and territories, including 180,000 Vietnamese Chinese and 100,000 Vietnamese Russians. Even fewer acknowledge the existence of 130,000 Việt kiều in Cambodia, many of whom are descendants of those who fled Vietnam.
during the time it was still a part of French Indochina, and nearly 200,000 Vietnamese in
Taiwan, most of whom are recent emigrants from the newly-globalized Vietnam. These overseas
Vietnamese—both immigrants and sojourners and both legal and illegal—represent several
important accounts which are often underestimated and misled by the contemporary
appropriation of the term Việt kiều. Overseas Vietnamese, such as Vietnamese Russian and
Vietnamese Chinese, left Vietnam for reasons different from the popular anticommunist
sentiment. Similarly, the majority of Vietnamese living in Cambodia are the legacy of
colonialism and American-fueled conflicts (during the Vietnam War)\(^{65}\) and most Vietnamese
living in Taiwan are driven by transnational marriages or transnational labor of recent global
capitalism, not the 1975 incident or post-1975 social upheavals.\(^ {66}\)

\textit{Việt kiều} in Western countries, and chiefly \textit{Việt kiều} in the United States, have been
dubbed with different names by different parties in different historical periods. In the eyes of the
communist government of Vietnam, they were once \textit{bọn ngụy} (American puppets), \textit{bọn phản bội}
(traitors), and \textit{lũ đào tẩu} (escapees). Now, those who bring home social and human capital are
\textit{đồng bào ta ở nước ngoài} (our people of the same womb who live abroad), \textit{kiều bào yêu nước}
(patriotic overseas Vietnamese) and have become \textit{một bộ phận không tách rời của cộng đồng dân tộc Việt Nam} (an unseparatable component of the Vietnamese nation), whereas those with
dissident ideology remain \textit{phản động} (reactionaries) and \textit{chống phá tổ quốc} (counter-homeland).
Under the gaze of American mainstream society, they are both “disdained” as the discarded, the
desperados, the burden, the ragged poor, and the uneducated and “hailed” as the oppressed by
communism, freedom-seekers, and the model minority. In U.S. scholarship, they usually are ex-
military personnel, former political prisoners, and political dissidents or the descendants of such.
Whatever the labeling is, the backdrop of the Vietnam War is always focal in the way their lives
are portrayed. Therefore, the Vietnamese in the U.S. are usually understood as refugees, not immigrants. Similarly, although the term “post-refugee [Vietnamese] communities” has been proposed, Vietnamese ethnic enclaves are still referred to as exilic communities.

This project cannot refute the argument that before 1975, Vietnam had never seen such a great exodus of Vietnamese leaving the country. Nor can it deny the ironic fact that without the communist takeover of the South, Vietnamese culture would not be as diasporic as it is today. In researching and writing this project, I have no intention of overlooking the indescribable sufferings and losses of many Vietnamese whose lives were uprooted by both U.S. imperialism and Vietnamese communism. The war has been over for nearly forty years, but the sorrows it forged still linger. Perhaps, a hundred years from now, similar to today’s Irish Americans being reminded how English oppressors and the 1845-1854 potato famine shaped their existence in the U.S., some Americans of Vietnamese descent will be told the tales of their ancestors, which may begin with: “One upon a time, our forefathers escaped a small country in Southeast Asia named Vietnam…” Like most great exoduses in human history, Vietnamese diasporas were prompted by the people who were uprooted by violence and injustice, be it French colonialism, U.S. capitalist imperialism, Chinese and Soviet communist dominance, or Vietnamese radicalism.

However, I strongly argue that Vietnamese emigration is not all about the war and conflicts, and Việt kiều are not all victims of communists. By tracing the nation’s history, it suggests that not all Vietnamese people are battle-hardened warriors and uneducated farmers; rather, they are also people who have a great veneration for education and a tremendous respect for intellectualism. Education and intellectualism, therefore, have been the core strands that weave together the history of the nation and the lives of the Vietnamese, including those who no longer live in Vietnam, and critically shape a Vietnamese identity. For Vietnamese, education
has always been a means of mobility and transnationalism. Today, it plays a decisive role in fostering Vietnamese emigration to the West. In the United States, well-educated Vietnamese have joined Asian Indians, Chinese, Korean, and other professionals from many other Asian, European, and African countries in enriching the nation’s human capital resources. Every year, thousands of families emigrate from Vietnam to the U.S. hoping to secure an education that may change their children’s futures. New Vietnamese immigrants thus are no longer victims of poverty and political oppression but those with agency and choices.

Also central to the making of new Vietnamese immigrants is Đổi mới. Without this political and socioeconomic reform, there would have not been the dramatic rise of the entrepreneurial class in Vietnam and thus, the nature of Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. would have not been significantly changed. From a political standpoint, U.S. immigration scholarship tends to compare Vietnamese Americans with Cuban Americans; either the Vietnamese evacuees after the fall of Saigon in April 1975 with the Cuban evacuees after the collapse of Batista regime in January 1959, or the Vietnamese boatpeople in 1979 and the Cuban Marielito in 1980. Thanks to Đổi mới, since the 1990s, many Vietnamese have been entering the U.S. as middle-class entrepreneurs who bring with them social/human capital and who have the agency to make the decision to depart from and return to their homeland freely and frequently. This important social status, which is largely rendered by Đổi mới, disrupts the political and social references between them and Cuban Americans as well as the Vietnamese refugees. Globalization, hence, has helped to dramatically shift êmigrés from Vietnam from being economical/political refugees to being free immigrants.

New Vietnamese êmigrés strongly challenge the ways in which Vietnamese emigration has been depicted in the past. Long gone is the antagonistic image of Vietnamese evacuees who
wrapped themselves in donated military jackets waiting in line for rationed meals in U.S.
military makeshift camps in Guam; Camp Pendleton, California; Fort Chaffee, Arkansas; or
Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania. The world no longer witnesses thousands of hungry Vietnamese
crammed in rodent-infested, rubbish-strewn, barbed-wired shantytowns in the Philippines, Hong
Kong, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. The aspiring Việt kiều are now flying to the United
States on a Boeing 777 and on a Vietnamese passport. Many bring with them both human and
social capital. Their lives in the U.S., thus, do not belong to the traditional genre of exilic
narratives; rather, they are stories of those who have the agency to freely decide their home
country(ies).

In the United States, such migrancy significantly shifted the Việt kiều status quo. In his
collection of Việt kiều narratives, Nghia M. Vo nervously asks, “How about children of
communist officials—plenty of them around today—who came to western countries to study, did
not experience the ordeals other Viet Kieu went through, but in the end decided to remain
abroad?” Restrained by an anticommunist viewpoint ubiquitous in Vietnamese American oral
history, Vo questions migration theories and Vietnamese migration itself. Tens of thousands of
family-sponsored Vietnamese immigrants who did not experience the refugee odyssey (a great
number of whom had worked for the communist government for decades before their
emigration) are being naturalized as U.S citizens and made Việt kiều every year. And so do the
smaller numbers of the communist elite and their privileged children. In a similar effort to define
Việt kiều, Karin Aguilar San Juan asserts that “staying Vietnamese [in America] could simply
entail working or living in a place that is identifiable to outsiders as Viet kieu ‘Vietnamese.’” Framing her work in the traditional Vietnamese ethnic communities of Dorchester and Little
Saigon, San Juan inadvertently excludes a considerable population of Vietnamese Americans,
including the older refugee generation and the newer immigrants of both entrepreneurial and intellectual classes, who also “stay Vietnamese” in their own communities, be it small and separated communities, enclaves inside an enclave, or imagined communities, without their political “Vietnameseness” necessarily being publically recognizable.

I do believe that in the near future, the arrival and the presence of new Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. may bring Vietnamese American studies politically and culturally closer to studies of Vietnamese communities in many other Western countries. Historically, different diplomatic relations and migratory paths render different Vietnamese communities in different host countries. In Canada, Australia, and the U.S., where few Vietnamese resided before 1975 and where the majority of refugees were relocated, the community is often more anticommunist. In Eastern Europe, where the community is exclusively comprised of former contract workers, socialist educated professionals, and recent entrepreneurial immigrants from the SRVN, the Vietnamese are naturally supportive of the Vietnamese government. France and Germany have a more diverse and politically-divided body of Vietnamese residents. In France, the pre-1975 Vietnamese French are pro-Hanoi while the post-1975 refugees are primarily anticommunist. Germany also harbors two different Vietnamese groups: the anticommunist boatpeople refugees, mostly Southerners, who arrived in West Germany in the 1980s, and the pro-Hanoi former contract workers and professionals, mostly Northerners, who came to East Germany before the fall of the Berlin Wall. The situation in the U.K is also the same. Besides tens of thousands of refugees who have been settled down for thirty years in the country, tens of thousands of new Vietnamese immigrants, both legal and illegal, have also recently chosen it as their home. In countries where such ideologically oppositional camps co-exist, the community is usually divided on most fronts. In the U.S., researchers such as Trinh Vô and Valverde have published
works on the cultural divergences and political confrontations in the most traditional Vietnamese American communities. With tens of thousands of Vietnamese immigrants and thousands of Vietnamese students (of whom many will stay) arriving every year, the U.S. (as well as Canada and Australia) is getting closer to having a Vietnamese community as politically diverse as those in Germany and France.

For so long, the slogan “Vietnam is a nation, not a war” has been repeatedly voiced in both U.S. society and academia. However, little research on Vietnamese American studies has really been able to examine Vietnamese emigration and overseas Vietnamese in ways that move away from the haunting past of the Vietnam War. My research has pointed out the ways in which new immigrants increasingly and dramatically reshape the face of Vietnamese America. It provides a more complete genealogy of Vietnamese professional and entrepreneurial immigrants to the United States. It also renders visible the political and social contexts in which the American-bound migration of the more privileged and wealthier Vietnamese middle class is articulated with a revitalized Vietnamese-U.S. discourse of nation and empire. My informants’ social backgrounds, political associations, immigrant trajectories, and immigrant lives illustrate an urgent need for Vietnamese American studies and Asian immigrant studies to permit a greater degree of conceptual flexibility for Vietnamese diasporic identity.
NOTES

Notes to Introduction


5 See, for example, Lê Minh Quốc, Môt Ngày Ở Mỹ (A Day in America) (TpHCM: NXB Trẻ, 2007), 31-33.


7 Ibid., 9.

8 Ibid., 23.


10 Đào D.A., Viêt Nam, 225.


15 The Cold War anticommunist doctrine insisted that a failure of the Free World in Vietnam would signal the wildfire of communism in Asia which in turn would reach the U.S.


One good example is the folksong “Chim xa rừng thương cây nhớ cô. Người xa người tôi làm người ơi” [The bird that leaves the jungle misses the trees and the stumps. The man who leaves his people suffers terribly]

By using the term “Vietnamese” here, I am fully aware that Vietnamese nationality includes fifty-four different ethnicities of which, despite its dominance of culture and population, the Kinh (the Viêt) is only one. In this historical context, Vietnamese is used for the Kinh.


Skilled-workers were a part of annual tributes from ancient Vietnam to China. In early fifteenth century, for example, a Vietnamese architect named Nguyễn An was captured as a war trophy by the Ming dynasty and appointed chief project manager for the construction of the Forbidden City in Peking. Like all other Vietnamese being taken to China, he was never allowed to return home.

For example, in 1226, Prince Lý Long Tương of the Lý escaped to Korea to avoid a large-scale clan cleansing after the Lý was overthrown by the Trần. His descendants, such as the businessman Lee Sang Joon, recently claimed their Vietnamese descent and visit frequently their hometown in Bắc Ninh Province.

Ibid., 29.

Beginning in 1698, Southern Vietnam, including Sài Gòn-Gia Định, the “Eastern” provinces (Dông Nai, Bình Dương...), and the “Western” provinces (the Mekong Delta region), was annexed into Vietnamese territory. General Nguyễn Hữu Cảnh was the first mandarin dispatched to the South by Lord Minh Vương Nguyễn Phúc Chu. Shortly before his death, he completed building the administrative areas of Dông Nai and Gia Định with military garrisons, market systems, roads, canals, and attracted people from the Middle and the North to migrate South. See Trần Trong Kim, *Việt Nam Sử Lược* (Brief History of Vietnam), (Hanoi: NXB Văn hóa Thông tin, 2006), 80-87; Sơn Nam, *Biên khảo Sơn Nam: Nơi về miền Nam-Cả tỉnh miền Nam-Thuận Phong mỹ tục miền Nam* (Compiled collection of Sơn Nam: About the South- Southerner Characteristics- Southern Habits and Customs), (Tp.Ho Chí Minh: Tre Publishing House, 2006), 33-37; Vương Hồng Sển, *Sài Gòn Năm Xưa* (Saigon in the Old Days), (Tp Ho Chi Minh: NXB Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2004), 16-33.


See, for example, Andrew Hardy, *Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).
30 So far, the Vietnamese government has not been able to conduct and update a thorough census on the overseas Vietnamese population. Apart from the U.S. Vietnamese population, these data are taken from a 2005 study on the official Homeland online magazine (Tạp chí Quê hương) of the State Committee for Overseas Vietnamese Affairs (Ủy ban Nhà nước về người Việt Nam ở nước ngoài). Trần Trọng Đăng Đàn, “Cộng đồng người Việt Nam ở nước ngoài đầu thế kỷ XXI: Số liệu và Bình luận” [Overseas Vietnamese Communities in the Beginning of the 21st Century: Data and Discussion], Homeland Online Magazine [Tạp chí Quê hương], March 23, 2006, http://quehuongonline.vn/VietNam/Home/Uy-ban-Nha-nuoc-ve-nguoi-Viet-Nam-o-nuoc-ngoai/Gioi-thieu-chung-2006/03/23F125BB/.

31 Ibid. (Note: these statistics and census figures were gathered and publicized in the 1990s and are outdated. India, for instance, has a population over one billion today while Vietnam has over 80 million people).


36 Trần T.D.D., “Cộng đồng,”


41 Michelle E. Houle, The Vietnamese (Thomson Gale: Greenhaven Press, 2006).

42 Lori Coleman, Vietnamese in America (Lerner Publications, 2005).

43 Alan Wachtel, Southeast Asian Americans (Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2010)

44 Hien Duc Do, The Vietnamese Americans (Greenwood Press, 1999).


48 Chan, *The Vietnamese*.


59 Ibid.


61 Valverde, “Creating,” 49.

62 Ibid., 50. Here Valverde’s use and explanation of the terms are sloppy. My Nguy, or Mị, nguy, for more precise, is not “American puppets” but “Americans and their puppets.” Republic of Vietnam’s government employees and military personnel once were called nguy quân, ngụy quân, which literally means “puppet army and puppet government workers.” In the same fashion, Kieu Bao, or kiều bào is “people of the same womb who live abroad.” “People coming from the same womb” is đồ bào; a term to connote Vietnamese in general without any geographic emphasis.

63 Freeman, *Hearts*, 11.

See, for example, Johanna Shapiro and others, “Generation Differences and Psychosocial Adaptation and Predictors of Psychological Distress in a Population of Recent Vietnamese Immigrants,” *Journal of Community Health*, vol.24, no.2 (April 1999). This study only focuses on the psychological health of Vietnamese Americans although it also briefly mentions that “the vast majority of the study subjects are recent immigrants, coming to the U.S. long after the brunt of punitive retaliatory measures taken by the victorious North Vietnamese.”


See Chapter 4, section “Vietnamese American Communities: Sites of Ideological Resistance and Cultural Differences.”


San Juan, *Little Saigon*, 158.


See chapter 3 for a full discussion on this class.


The term Văn Hiến was first used in Nguyễn Trần’s *Bình Ngo Đại Cáo* (Great Proclamation of Pacifying the [Chinese] Ngo) written in 1428. The original Sinicized Vietnamese sentence is "Duy ngã Đại Việt chi quốc, thực vi văn hiến chi bang." Trương Bửu Lâm translated the term as “culture and institutions” (Our state of Dai Viet is indeed a country wherein culture and institutions have flourished). Stephen O’Harrow translated this as “cultured” (Now think upon this Dai Viet land of ours; Truly is it a cultured nation). I choose to borrow Trương’s translation. See Trương Bửu Lâm, “Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention, 1858-1900,” Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, *Monograph Series*, no. II (1967): 55-62; Stephen O’Harrow, "Nguyen Trai’s Binh Ngo Dai Cao of 1428: The Development of Vietnamese National Identity," *Journal of Southeast Asian History*, vol.10, no.1 (March 1979):168.
Notes to Chapter I

1 These include the costly Vietnam-Khmer Rouge war and the Sino-Vietnam border clash; both lasted from 1979 to 1989.


3 Major universities in Vietnam sometimes sponsor a high school for gifted students. Such high school is usually located inside the sponsoring university.


7 The word “giáo” serves several meanings. It could be “religion” (as in belief and worship) or “doctrine” (as in philosophy and methodology). In an educational context, I choose to use the word “doctrine.”

8 McHale, Print and Power; Phan Đại Đôn, Một số vấn đề về nho giáo Việt Nam (Some Topics in Vietnamese Confucianism) (Hanoi: NXB Chính Trị Quốc Gia, 1998); Lê Anh Dũng, Con đường Tam giáo Việt Nam (The Road of Vietnamese Three Religions) (Thành phố HCM: NHX TpHCM, 1990).

9 Nguyễn M.C. and Nguyễn H.H., Nho Giáo, 56.

10 Ibib., 57.


12 Nguyễn K.V., Vietnam, 56.


15 Lê Thị Thanh Hà, Viết Đào tạo và Sử dụng Quan lại của Triệu Nguyễn (The Mandarins Training and Appointment under Nguyen Dynasty) (Hanoi: NXB Khoa học xã hội, 1998), 78.


18 Nguyễn K.V., Vietnam, 130.


20 Vũ Khieux, Nho Giáo và Phát triển ở Việt Nam (Confucianism and Development in Vietnam) (Hanoi: NXB Khoa học xã hội, 1997), 42.

21 McHale, Print and Power, 72.


23 Nguyễn Q. Thặng, Khoa Cử Và Giáo Dục Việt Nam (Vietnamese Examinations and Education) (Hanoi: NXB Văn hóa—Thông tin, 1994), 102-03.


25 Alexander B. Woodside, Community and Revolution in Modern Vietnam (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 220. Arguably, the more appropriate term in Vietnamese should be “đỗ thể” (to aid the era) as it usually goes with “cứu nhân” (to save the people).


31 Alan B. Henkin and Nguyen T. Liem, Between Two Cultures: The Vietnamese in America (Saratora: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1981), 16.

Lessard, “We Know...,” 221.


Ibid.

There are several different ideas among historians and Vietnamese studies scholars about the founding dates of Hanoi Medical School and Indochinese University. Nguyen Khac Vien, for example, asserts that the medical school was founded in 1901 and the university was founded in 1908 (See Nguyen K.V., *Vietnam*, 169). Here I choose to use archives kept at French Centre des Archives d’Outre-Mer à Aix-en Provence (CAOM) and Trung Tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia Hà Nội (Hanoi Centre of National Archives) published by Hanoi National University, http://100years.vnu.edu.vn/BTDHQGHN/Vietnamese/C1787/2006/03/N7403.

Nguyen Ha, *Trường học Hà Nội Xưa* (Schools in Ancient Hanoi) (Hanoi: Information and Communications Publishing House, 2010), 87.


Born Phan Văn San, Phan Bộ Châu passed the regional examination of 1900 but did not want to join the mandarin bureaucracy. He was one of the most respected scholars of the early 20th century for his literature excellence as well as his patriotism. A nationalist and anti-colonist, Châu was one of the founders of Duy Tân (Reform) Movement, the leader of the Đông Du (Go East) movement, and the Việt Nam Quang Phúc Hội (Vietnam Restoration Society). His political creed aimed at decolonizing and modernizing Vietnam.

Also known as Phan Chu Trinh, he was a contemporary of Phan Bộ Châu. Trinh passed the examination of 1901 and was assigned to a post in mandarin bureaucracy which he resigned five years later. Trinh advocated non-violent struggle and he was a dissident of the Nguyễn monarchic rule and the mandarin bureaucracy.


McHale, *Print and Power*, 77-83.


51 After the end of the Indochina War, between 1954 and 1956, approximately 1,000,000 Vietnamese fled the North to the South. Many of them were either pro-French Catholics or former bourgeoisie class. Most refugees were brought South by Western bloc navies. Such propaganda tried to explain this exodus in favor of the American-backed South Vietnam.


54 Phan Kế Toại, Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 1086/TTG về Biện pháp Pháp lý Áp dụng trong việc trả lại Tự do cho những người bị oan về tội Phản động và Phá hoại trong Giám tô, cải cách Ruộng đất, Chính dönem Tố chức (“On the application of Legal Procedure to release victims of the slander of treason and sabotage in the Land Reform movement,” Circular of the Prime Minister of DRV, no. 1086/TTG, October 18, 1956).


57 Phan Kế Toại, Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 01/TTG “Về việc Tiến hành Công tác xét trả lại Tự do cho những người bị oan trong bước 3” (Circular No. 01/TTG of the prime Minister “on the Implementation of the Third Step to Release the Slandered Victims,” January 1, 1957).

58 Phan Kế Toại, Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 12/TTG về một số điểm trong Chính sách cụ thể, cần nắm vững khi tiến hành sửa chữa sai lầm về cải cách ruộng đất (Circular no. 12/TTG on “Several Points in the Specific Policy that Need to be mastered while Correcting the Wrongdoings of the Land Reform,” January 12, 1957).


61 The veneration for “village gods” is rooted in Vietnam’s medieval past. Almost every ancient village in North Vietnam had a thành hoàng. Even though in many villages famous scholars and patriots were worshiped at village shrines, it did not necessarily mean that all thành hoàng were scholars or military leaders. In some villages,
it could simply be a beggar or a poor stranger who happened to die at the village’s gate in a “good time” according to the Chinese Zodiac.


64 Hy V. Luong, “The Restructuring,” 439.


67 Ibid., 7.

68 His capitalized phrase.

69 Ibid., 8.

70 Established in 1938 in Tonkin, the association was comprised of a group of prominent intellectuals who strived to combat illiteracy in rural Vietnam with the permission of the French colonial government. The movement was able to help tens of thousands of poor Vietnamese to read and write. See Vương Kiệm Toàn and Vũ Lan, *Hội Truyền Bá Chữ Quốc Ngữ* (the Association of Dissemination of Quốc ngữ Studies) (Hanoi: NXB Giáo Dục, 1980) and David G. Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial: 1920-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

71 Ibid., 184.

72 Ibid., 187.

73 Professor Hồ Đắc Di was trained in the medical profession in France and became the first Vietnamese medical doctor eligible to practice surgery in Indochina during colonial rule. After 1945, he was the architect of new Vietnam’s medical studies and the Medical University. He is often praised as the “doctor of doctors.”

74 Professor Tôn ThưTùng was a former student of Professor Di at Medical College of Indochina University. He aided his teacher to reconstruct the Medical University during the early years of independence. He was also the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Healthcare from 1947 to 1961.

75 Professor Đặng Thai Mai was trained in Hanoi Teacher College. He was the second Minister of National Education in 1946. Đặng Thai Mai was best known for his brilliant literary critiques.

76 Professor Vũ Đình Hòe studied laws at Indochinese University. He was one of the founders and also the deputy-chair of the Association of Dissemination of Quốc ngữ Studies. He was assigned to be the first Minister of National Education in 1945 and later became the head of the Ministry of Judiciary for 15 years.

77 With the birth of the communist People’s Republic of China in 1949, DRV quickly gravitated toward China to gain support for its causes. Official diplomacy was set up in 1950 and thus Mao’s China became the first country to recognize DRV.

80 Nguyễn K.V., Vietnam, 357.


84 Các Tổ chức Tiền thân của Đảng (The Party’s Forerunners) (Hanoi: NXB Sự Thật, 1977), 146.


86 The U.S. claimed that the destroyer USS Maddox was attacked by North Vietnamese Navy torpedo boats on August 2 and August 4, 1964. This was controversial even among the U.S. public and military since no accurate proof was submitted for the attack, especially the second one. It was largely believed to be an incident fabricated by President Lyndon B. Johnson’s cabinet to persuade U.S. Congress to give him more power to dive deeper into the war in Vietnam.


93 Some critics recently go too far by considering the movement at the high level of an anti (Vietnamese) communist movement. Peter Zinoman, for example, points out several crucial weaknesses of the movement such as it “did not express strong views about another important agenda item for Eastern European reform Communism—peaceful coexistence with the capitalist world” and “painted a bleak picture of the RVN as a feudal and neo-imperial society marked by high rates of illiteracy, bad schools, cruel orphanages, “Chicago-style” crime waves, and decadent American cowboy films.” First, it was 1950s and [North] Vietnam had just learnt well the lessons of trying to live peacefully with the West through the Indochina War and the coercive partition of the country. These bitter foreign betrayals and oppressions were not experienced by the Eastern bloc. Second, much
of the movement’s criticism to the South (as quoted in Zinoman’s above lines) is true. Thus, Zinoman’s criticisms are obviously ahistoricizing and with little regard to the situation in Vietnam and Vietnamese culture at the time. See Peter Zinoman, “Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm and Vietnamese “Reform Communism” in the 1950s—A Revisionist Interpretation,” *Journal of Cold War*, vol.13, no 1 (Winter 2011): 96.


96 Đảng Dân chủ Việt Nam. The party was founded in 1944 and functioned as an associate—or a puppet party—to the Lao Động [Labor] party, which later changed its name to the Vietnamese Communist Party, in the Vietnam’s Fatherland Front. It was disbanded in 1988.


99 Other authors have slightly different translations of these names. For instance, Honey: “Humanism [or the Humanities]- Masterpieces,” Gibbs: “Humanities and Letters,” or Nhu Phong: “Humanities-Literary Masterpieces.” I choose to use McHale’s version because I personally find it closest to its Vietnamese meaning.

100 The exact number of these publications is ambiguous and I have not been able to locate a reliable source for it. It is also extremely difficult to lay hands on the print versions of these works either in Vietnam or abroad. Honey also admits that he “has not been able to obtain copies…” and relied most of his criticism on Nhân văn. For me, the only access to Giai Phẩm so far is through the German-based website Talawas at: http://www.talawas.org.


102 Honey, “Revolt,” 252.

103 Nhu Phong, “Intellectuals,” 60.

104 Honey, “Revolt,” 256.


107 Ibid., 17.


Pham Lan Huong and Gerald W. Fry assert that the University of Saigon was “established by the French during the colonial period.” This statement, I argue, is neither clear nor well-founded. First, it is not clear what they mean by the term “colonial period.” In Vietnamese scholarship, “colonial period” (*thời thuộc Pháp*) firmly refers to the time span from 1858 to 1945 to identify itself with the temporary re-occupation after WWII from 1946 to 1954 (*thời Pháp tạm chiếm*), as I have discussed extensively in the early section of this chapter. Second, the information is self-claimed without any scholarly citation and I have not been able to locate any other scholarship that affirms this assertion. The top school in pre-1945 Saigon was perhaps the French high-school *Collège Chasseloup Laubat* founded in 1874 (now Lê Hồng Phong High School). Pham Lan Huong and Gerald W. Fry, “Universities in Vietnam: Legacies, Challenges, and Prospects,” in *Asian Universities: Historical Perspectives and Contemporary Challenges*, eds. Phillip G. Altbach and Toru Umakoshi (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2004), 308.


Ibid.

Ibid.


Ibid.


130 The name was officially adopted at the VI National Assembly meeting in July 2, 1976.

131 In 2007 a public university named Saigon University was introduced in Hồ Chí Minh City. This small school (trường Đại học Sài Gòn) however has nothing to do with the previous institution (Viện Đại học Sài Gòn).


136 The founder of the school, Professor Hoàng Xuân Sinh, descends from an old elite family from Hanoi. She went to France for education and was the first female Vietnamese to receive a doctoral degree in Mathematics.


138 Ibid., 201.


Việt Anh, “Gần 2.500 Tiến sĩ Có Trình độ Yếu” (Nearly 2.500 PhDs are of Poor Quality), VNExpress-Tin Nhanh Việt Nam, June 1, 2006, http://vnexpress.net/gl/xa-hoi/2006/01/3b9e5be5.


Ibid., 26.


Notes to Chapter II

1 Văn Minh Tàn Học Sách, (Tonkin Free School Text-1907), Mark Bradley translated from Đăng Thái Mai, Văn Thơ cách Mạng Việt Nam Đầu Thế Kỷ XX (Vietnamese Revolutionary Poetry and Prose in the Early Twentieth Century), (Hanoi: NXB Văn Học, 1974), 76.

2 The exact term some of my informants used was “less hostile.” The term reflexes a more sympathetic perspective from the two countries during and after the Vietnam War. Both France and Canada had their delegations stationed in Hanoi after 1954. In 1973, France reopened an embassy in Hanoi which led to Canada’s diplomatic relations with Vietnam in 1973 and then established her embassy in Vietnam in 1994. They were among the first Western nations to normalize diplomacy with Vietnam.

3 Vương Hồng Sển notes that at the early days of colonization, French in Cochinchina had to utilize Catholic students trained in Penang as interpreters due to the exigency of linguistic communication although they were not taught French in Penang monasteries. Vương Hồng Sển, Sài Gòn Năm Xưa (Saigon in the Old Days), 3rd ed. (Tp Hồ Chí Minh: NXB Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2004), 258.


5 Trương Vĩnh Kỳ was sent to study in Penang from 1851-1858. In 1859 he was assigned by the Nguyễn dynasty to accompany Phan Thanh Gián’s delegation to France to redeem the three Southern provinces taken by the French.


7 Sơn Nam, Biên khảo Sơn Nam, 44, 45.

8 Ibid., 173-94.


14 Ibid., 1159.


16 Ibid., 55.


20 Ibid., 149.

21 In the 1920s, Hồ Hữu Tưởng studied at both the Marseille University and Lyon University. First a Trotskyist, then a liberal nationalist, he was the editor of several political journals that opposed both French colonialism and the Stalinist Indochinese Communist Party. He was also a dissident to Ngô Đình Diệm’s nepotism. During his political life, Tưởng was arrested and imprisoned many times by almost all political forces and regimes, including the French, Ngô Đình Diệm, and the communists.

22 The son of a Tonkinese mandarin-gentry family, he was one of the few Northern intellectuals who were sent to study in France at his teenage in 1910. Nguyễn Thế Truyện joined the French Socialist Party and then the French Communist Party at their early establishments. He was said to introduce Hồ Chí Minh to Marxism and to those parties.

23 One of the pioneers of Vietnamese nationalists in France, Phan Văn Trưởng co-founded, with Phan Châu Trinh, the patriotic association *La Fraternité des Compatriotes* in France in 1912. He studied laws at Sorbonne University. Trưởng used to practice laws and taught at *Ecole des Langues Orientales* in Paris before he returned to Vietnam in 1923. He was the founder of the High Hope Party (*Đặng Cao Vọng*). Imbued with Marxist ideology, Phan Văn Trưởng was arrested and imprisoned by the French several times both in France and in Vietnam.

24 Believed to be the first Vietnamese Trotskyist, Tạ Thu Thâu succeeded Nguyễn Thế Truyện in leading the *Parti Annamite de l’Indépendance* after Truyện returned to Vietnam. He studied at Paris University and participated in many anti-colonialist movements in France before being deported. Thâu was arrested, tried, and imprisoned many times by the French authority.

25 Phan Văn Hùm received both a bachelor degree and a master degree in philosophy from Sorbonne University. He was arrested several times before and after he escaped French police’s hunt in France.

26 Perhaps the most influential Vietnamese anti-colonialist before the WWII, Ninh graduated with honor from the Law School of Sorbonne University in 1920 and married a French wife. He was the founder and chief editor of the well-known patriotic newspaper *La Cloche Fêlée* (the Broken Bell) and was also famous for his anti-
Confucian ideology. Nguyễn An Ninh was arrested and imprisoned by the colonial authority many times and he finally died in Con Dao island, where he was sentenced to five years.

27 Thompson, “The Vietnamese Community in France,” 51.

28 Ibid., 54.

29 Ibid., 56.


31 In 1946, pro-Republican organizations in France contributed a remittance of 1,500,000 francs to Hồ Chí Minh’s government. Thompson, “The Vietnamese Community in France,” 53.

32 Ibid., 52.


34 Blanc. “Vietnamese in France,” 1161.

35 Ibid., 1162.

36 During the First World War alone, 48,922 Indochinese were forced to serve France both in frontlines as tirailleurs (soldiers) and in military factories as workers. Eric Thomas Jennings, “Remembering ‘Other’ Losses: The Temple du Souvenir Indochinois of Nogent-sur-Marne,” History and Memory, vol. 15, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 10.

37 Thompson, “The Vietnamese Community in France,” 49.

38 Ibid.


40 In 1950, there were approximately 500 Vietnamese with French citizenship living in France and some 200 had French wives. Thompson, “The Vietnamese Community in France,” 55.

41 Ibid., 49.


43 It was also the colonial language that initiated the first group of Vietnamese students from South Vietnam to go to study in Canada in the early 1950s. Their French language proficiency enabled them to study in Quebec. After finishing their programs, many of them managed to stay there via employment visa or marriages with local women and thus became the first generation of Vietnamese Canadians. Kwok Bun Chan and Louis-Jacques Dorais, “Family, Identity, and the Vietnamese Diaspora: The Quebec Experience,” Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia, vol. 13, no. 2, Families in Southeast Asia: Facing Fundamental Changes (October 1998): 286.


52 A denim brand name of Thailand which was very popular in the 1980s in Vietnam.


63 Ibid.

64 Thompson, “The Vietnamese Community in France,” 50.


66 Ibid., 135.


68 Nguyễn Thế Long, Dời mới Tư duy, Phát triển Giáo dục Việt Nam trong Kinh tế Thị trường (Reforming the Thought, Developing Vietnam Education in the Market Economy) (Hanoi: NXB Giáo Dục, 2005), 162.


72 Huwelmeier, “Spirits in the Market Place,” 133-134.


74 Although Tây means “the West” or “Westerner” in Vietnamese, it does not exclusively represent this group. In fact, anywhere but Vietnam is Tây and any person with a foreign nationality is Tây. The term thus connotes a very broad scope of “foreign-ness” and “Non-Vietnamese-ness.”

75 Russian-made irons and Minsk motorcycles used to be among the most desirable commodities in Vietnam and thus they were on the top of the list of merchandise sent back to Vietnam.


77 Huwelmeier, “Spirits in the Market Place,” 236.

78 Ibid.


81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 237.


86 Ibid., 243.


93 The monthly allowance sponsored by the Vietnamese government budget for each Vietnamese student studying in Poland, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech, Slovakia, Rumania, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia, is US$480/month. The allowance is less than half the amount spent on a Vietnamese student in the U.S., Canada, Japan, and the U.K. (USD 1,200/month), in Western and Northern Europe (EU888/moth), in Australia and New Zealand (AU$1,032/month), and only slightly higher than in China, Taiwan, and India (US$420). See Ministry of Education and Training, Ministry of Foreign Relations, Ministry of Finance “Thông tư liên tịch Số 05/2007/TTLT-BTC-BGDĐT-BNG ngày 05 tháng 12 năm 2007 của Liên tịch Bộ Tài chính, Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo, Bộ Ngoại giao hướng dẫn chế độ, cấp phát và quản lý kinh phí đào tạo lưu học sinh Việt Nam ở nước ngoài bằng nguồn vốn Ngân sách nhà nước” [Inter-ministry Circular on correction and supplement of the former Inter-ministry Circular no. 144/2007/TTLT-BTC-BGDĐT-BNG of qualifying, issuing, and managing government’s budget for Vietnamese students studying abroad], no. 206/2010/TTLT-BTC-BGDĐT-BNG (12/15/2010).

94 I put these terminologies in quotes since these phrases are translations from Vietnamese.


Ibid., 449.


Phuc Hung, “Một sinh viên Việt Nam ở Hà Nội được trường đại học Mỹ cấp học bổng” (A Vietnamese student from Hanoi awarded a scholarship by an American university), July 16, 1949. I am indebted to Professor Shawn McHale of Southeast Asian Studies at the George Washington University who found this article at the General Sciences Library in Hồ Chí Minh City during his research in Vietnam and generously shared it with me.


Pham, “Antedating and Anchoring,” 141.


Pham, “Antedating and Anchoring,” 141.


Ibid.
The peace points were included in the NLF’s new political program issued in August 20th, 1967. They emphasized peace in Vietnam must be resolved by the Vietnamese and urged the withdrawal of U.S. armed force from Vietnam. It superseded the ten-point manifesto in 1960 and the brief five-point agenda in 1965 that was also delineated by the NLF. Justus M. van der Kroef, “What Are the Aims of the NLF?” Vietnam Perspectives, vol. 3, no. 2 (November 1967): 3.


Ibid., 288.

Ibid., 298-99.


Pham, “Antedating and Anchoring,” 144.


Pham, “Antedating and Anchoring,” 144.

Welles, “7 South Vietnamese Students.”


Ibid.


Pham, “Antedating and Anchoring,” 146-149.


134 Ibid., 131.


137 Ibid., 619-20.

138 Ibid., 623.

139 Ibid., 625.


144 Crossette, “Vietnamese to get Fulbright Awards,” ibid.


149 For example, of the eighteen Fulbright grantees of 1992, five of them went to Harvard, four to Tufts University, and one to Columbia. In 1994, of thirty-one grantees, four went to Harvard, two to Cornell, one to Princeton, one each to Stanford, Johns Hopkins, and New York University, two to Vanderbilt, one to Emory, and the others to the top fifty American universities.


152 Ibid., 27-29.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid., 34.

156 Interviewed in English.

157 Interviewed in English.

158 Interviewed in English.

159 Interviewed in English.

160 Interviewed in English.


164 Interviewed in English.


Notes to Chapter III


2 For details on Northerners’ migrations to the highlands during this period, see Andrew Hardy, Red Hills: Migrants and the State in the Highlands of Vietnam (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).


7 Ng, “Vietnam in 1983,” 344.


14 A common food of Vietnamese farmers, it is often associated with poverty and pauperism.


20 Ibid., 65.


23 Ibid., 235.


28 Ibid., 293-94.


30 Ibid., 296.


32 Ibid., 300.


38 Ibid.


Ibid., 186.


Ibid.


Ibid., 122.


Ibid.


Ibid., 197.


United States Census Bureau, Census 2010, Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) (Washington, DC, 2010).


Ibid., 600.


Ibid.


United States Census Bureau, Census 2010 (Washington, DC, 2010).

Ibid.

United States Census Bureau, Census 2010 (MSA).

San Juan, *Little Saigons*, 27-35.


Ibid., 784.


There are, however, arguments that many of the first-wave evacuees were of the “undesirable” social
groups in the South who made their way through evacuations. For example, in 1975, high-ranking officials in Guam
reported that “69,000 farmers, fishermen, students, street vendors, shopkeepers, local policemen, common
soldiers, and prostitutes” successfully arrived in reception centers in Guam in lieu of the intended elite refugees.
See Le Anh Tu, “The Vietnam Evacuees...What Now?” in Counterpoint: Perspectives on Asian America, eds. Emma

Rumbaut, “Portraits,” 160.

Timothy Bates, “Entrepreneur Human Capital Inputs and Small Business Longevity,” The Review of


Jimmy M. Sanders and Victor Nee, “Immigrant Self-Employment: The Family as Social Capital and the

Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou, “Gaining the Upper Hand: Economic Mobility among Immigrants and


Michael Omi and Howard Winant, Racial Formation in the United States-From the 1960s to the 1990s,


Ibid.


Workers in New York City’s Chinatown,” in Contemporary Asian America: A Multidisciplinary Reader, eds. Min Zhou

Richard Kim and others, “A Preliminary Investigation: Asian Immigrant Women Garment Workers in Los

Ibid., 78.

Ibid.


Portes and Zhou, “Gaining the Upper Hand,” 493.


99 Tang, “Collateral,” 64.


102 Ibid., 173


105 C. Wright Mills, *White Collar-The American Middle Classes* (Oxford University Press, 2002), 266.

106 Ibid., 267


110 Ibid., 182


112 See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7Frs4yo5N0&feature=related and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2129vEsUyrs&feature=share.


118 Julie A. Willett, “Hands Across the Table”: A Short History of the Manicurist in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Women’s History*, vol.17, no.3 (Fall 2005): 67.


120 Eckstein and Nguyen, “The Making,” 646. Eckstein italicized this word to emphasize the special significance of the recent immigrants in fostering the trade.


122 Quach Thu and others, “A Preliminary,” 339.

123 Willett, "Hands”; Eckstein and Nguyen, “The Making”


126 By using the phrase “Vietnamese living in the West,” I imply that many Vietnamese exchange students also attend the trade, mostly illegally, to support their educational pursuit in a foreign country.


129 Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, 22,23

130 Willett, "Hands,” 72.

131 Ibid., 69.


133 Ibid., 660.

134 Ibid., 650

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Notes to Chapter IV


7 Hoang Thuy, “Người Cha 7 năm cõng con đi học” [A Father Carrying His Daughter On His Back to School for Seven Years], VNExpress, August 20, 2012, http://vnexpress.net/giai-duc/2012/08/nguoi-cha-7-nam-cong-con-di-hoc/.


20 Ibid., 14

21 Ibid.


23 In Australia, for example, Viviani notes that of 120 heads of household in her study of Vietnamese - Australian boatpeople, “nearly half of all ethnic Vietnamese heads of household [of fifty-two participants] had some tertiary education,” whereas only “six ethnic Chinese [of sixty-eight] had begun tertiary education but none had completed it.” See Nancy Viviani, The Long Journey: Vietnamese Migration and Settlement in Australia (Melbourne, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1984): 143


25 Ibid. Caplan 47


32 Ibid., 104.


34 Hurh, The Korean, 94.


36 Ibid., 47.


39 Nancy Smith-Hefner, Khmer American: Identity and Moral Education in a Diasporic Community (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 64-84.


41 Children in cities in Vietnam are often forced to take extra classes after their school times. At these “classes” and “schools,” they are usually “crammed” to master the knowledge of many subjects, mostly natural sciences and English, which is usually more advanced than their lessons at school are. The purposes are for them to be better prepared for the future college admission. These cram schools may be private (if they are taught by their own school teachers at their homes) or “public” (if being organized by their own schools) and students are charged for each subject taken. Although they recently have been illegalized by the government, such schools live on. In fact, students sometimes have to spend more time on cram schools than they do on official curriculum.


44 Ng, The Taiwanese, 35.

45 Ibid., 37

46 I only recruited three young informants from this group because their age (less than fifteen years of age) excluded their recruitment in pursuant to my agreement with the HSRB. Several professionals have older children born in Vietnam but those children all stayed in Vietnam.

47 I tried unsuccessfully to obtain the attendance sheet to know the exact number of Vietnamese students in the course. I, however, listened to students conversing amongst themselves and asked several Vietnamese students I knew in the class to locate Vietnamese students. Because the students I asked were not sure about many “new faces,” I combined the number of those whom I spotted speaking Vietnamese and those who were pointed out to me. Therefore, the total of seventeen Vietnamese students that I counted might not be accurate.
Vietnamese culture focuses tremendously on the unity and harmony of family and kinsfolk. One of the often-cited proverbs “Một giọt máu đào hơn ao nước lã” (A drop of red blood is thicker than a pond of water) reflects this social value.


64 Kibria, *Family Tightrope*, 77.


Ibid., 15.


San Juan, *Little Saigons*.


United States Census Bureau, Census 2010, Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) (Washington, DC, 2010).

San Juan, “Staying Vietnamese,” xxviii.

Ibid., 158.


Dang, “The Cultural Work,”: 68.

Ibid., 65.


Ibid., 61.

During the Vietnam War, the South Vietnamese government divided the country into four Corps Tactical Zones which were identified as I-Corps, II-Corps, III-Corps and IV-Corps. The First Corps Tactical Zone (I-Corps) bordered North Vietnam in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) of Quảng Trị and covered five provinces of the South: Quảng Trị, Thừa Thiên, Quảng Nam, Quảng Tín, Quảng Ngãi. This zone often saw constant and the bloodiest battles between the communist forces of North Vietnamese Army and South Vietnamese Libration Army and the allied forces of South Vietnamese Army, U.S. Marine Corps, and South Korean Army.
83 Valverde, “Creating Identity,” 60.

84 My italics.


88 The Trưng sisters were Vietnamese heroines who led a rebellion against the Chinese Han invaders from AD 39 to AD 43.

89 Lê Lợi was a Vietnamese hero who defeated the Ming occupying force in 1428 and declared the Le Dynasty in independent Vietnam.


92 Vũ, “Cực đoan.”


96 The October Revolution occurred in October 26, 1917 when Lenin’s Bolshevik party seized power. It is November 7th in the Gregorian calendar.

97 The current website of the association is at http://www.sinhvienboston.org/.


Notes to Chapter V


4 Vertovec, *Transnationalism*, back cover.


15 Ibid., 1179.


34 Ibid., 62.


39 On 8/31/2012, for example, 1,066 people living in Kon Tum Province near the Vietnamese-Cambodian border were awarded Vietnamese nationality. According to the local officials, these people “have settled down in the area before 7/1/1989, always abided the laws, and expressed a desire to obtain Vietnamese citizenship.” Many of these in fact have been stateless in the area before 1975. See http://www.phununet.com/tin-tuc/hon-1000-nguoi-duoc-nhap-quoc-tich-viet-nam/5c-17925sc-444137n.html.


44 Thai, “The Dual,” 216.


46 Ibid., 189.


Although in the year 2012 Vietnam witnessed a tremendous downswing in real estate business due to an unrealistic inflation of land and real estate property within the last few years, the country still has one of the most prized land property markets in Asia.


Gupta, *Unruly*, 10

Ibid., 11.


Ibid., 78.

Ibid., 2.


A great number of Vietnamese have been living in Cambodia for decades in poverty and are stateless, especially the boat people (the fishermen) living on the Tonle Sap Lake and the Mekong River. Traditionally, they often are victimized by numerous ethnic-cleansings and discrimination by the Cambodians and neglected and

By 2010, 63.55% of the 131,000 (approximately 80,000) Southeast Asian women getting married to Taiwanese men and living in Taiwan were Vietnamese. See Yung-Mei Yang, Hsiu-Hung Wang, Debra Anderson, “Immigration Distress and Associated Factors Among Vietnamese Women in Transnational Marriages in Taiwan,” *Kaohsiung Journal of Medical Science*, vol. 26 (2010): 647. Currently, an equivalent number of Vietnamese migrant workers also reside in Taiwan. Many of them choose to live illegally in the country instead of returning to Vietnam.

Trinh Võ, “The Vietnamese.”


Lessard, Micheline R. “We Know . . . the Duties We Must Fulfill”: Modern 'Mothers and Fathers' of the Vietnamese Nation.” *French Colonial History*, vol. 3 (2003): 119-141.


Nguyen Tri Hung. “FDI, Economic Growth and Social Equality in Vietnam since the Late 1980s.” In *Globalisation and Social Development: European and Southeast Asian*


Phan Kế Toại, “Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 1086/TTG về Biện pháp Pháp lý Áp dụng trong việc trả lại Tự do cho những người bị oan về tội Phản động và Phá hoại trong Giảm tô, cải cách Ruộng đất, Chính dön Tổ chức” (“On the application of Legal Procedure to release victims of the slander of treason and sabotage in the Land Reform movement,” Circular of the Prime Minister of DRV, number 1086/TTG, October 18, 1956).
---, Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 12/TTG về một số điểm trong Chinh sách cụ thể, cần nắm vững khi tiến hành sửa chữa sai lầm về Cải cách ruộng đất (Circular No. 12/TTG on “Several Points in the Specific Policy that Need to Master while Correcting the Wrongdoings of the Land Reform,” January 12, 1957).

---, Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 01/TTG “Về việc Tiến hành Công tác xét trả lại Tự do cho những người bị oan trong bước 3” (Circular No. 01/TTG of the prime Minister “on the Implementation of the Third Step to Release the Slandered Victims,” January 1, 1957).


Rumbaut, Rubén G. “Portraits, Patterns, and Predictors of the Refugee Adaptation Process: Results and reflections from the IHARP Panel Study.” In Refugees as Immigrants:
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Tran Duc Thao. "Tran Duc Thao tu kiem thao" (Tran Duc Thao's self criticism). In So phan tri thuc o mien Bac (qua vu Tran Duc Thao). Saigon: NXB Van huu A Chau, 1959. Quoted


---. *For Christ and His Kingdom*. Vietnamese District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, 2011.


Map 1: Ethnographic sites in Vietnam (stars)
Map 2: Migratory trajectories with Vietnam as the country of original departure and the United States as the final destination (Note: In this study, Russia represents the republics of the former Soviet Union and countries of the former socialist bloc such as [East] Germany, Poland, or Czech Slovakia).
Map 3: Main ethnographic sites in the United States. Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, Census 2000
APPENDIX B. GLOSSARY

Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Vietnamese Terms

OSS: Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor of the CIA)

Việt Minh: Việt Nam Độc lập Đồng Minh Hội /League for the Independence of Vietnam

BTA: Bilateral Trade Agreement

Việt kiều: Overseas Vietnamese

Việt kiều Mỹ: Vietnamese Americans

Đổi mới: the 1986 Vietnamese Socioeconomic Reform

buôn bán: business people

Tam Giáo: the common Vietnamese faith and social practice of “three doctrines,” including Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism and some local customs

tiến sĩ: Doctor of Philosophy and the equivalent

Indochina: French colonized territory of the three neighboring Southeast Asian countries of Vietnam, Lao, and Cambodia.

quốc ngữ: the modern romanized Vietnamese writing system

DRV: the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

RVN: the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam)


The Party: The Vietnamese Communist Party

The Nhân văn-Giai phẩm affair: the Vietnamese communists’ crackdown campaign on artists and intellectuals who rail against the control of the central government over the arts and letters

MOET: the Ministry of Education and Training (of Vietnam)

Duy Tân: the social renewal movement founded by Vietnamese nationalists in the early XX century

CMEA (COMECON): Council for Mutual Economic Aid

NLF: the National Liberation Front (the communist resistance force in South Vietnam)

VEF: Vietnam Education Foundation

PAVN: the People’s Army of Vietnam

ARVN: Armed Forces of the Republic of Vietnam

NEZ: New Economic Zone

FDI: Foreign Direct Investment

đồng (VND): Vietnamese currency (1 U.S. dollar is equivalent to 20,000 đồng)

BTA: Bilateral Trade Agreement

dại gia: powerful and super rich Vietnamese

áo dài: a renowned Vietnamese traditional long-dress for female
Songs

Bài hát học Toán

Bạn bè tôi ơi, từ khi học toán đâm ra dở người
Ai có thằng con, chớ cho theo đường chúng tôi
Trông dáng thong manh nhưng nghèo kiết xác em ơi
Sống để làm gì, khi nào có ai mà yêu?

Hò là hò ơi, tung lưới ra mọi nơi.
Hò là hò ơi, tung lưới kiếm vợ thôi.
Ta bắt có biết nhảy
Hay kiếm nàng biết buôn?
Hò là hò ơi, ơi gió là gió ơi.

Chẳng còn bao lâu, là ta bỏ toán đi ra với đời.
Sung sướng nào hơn, mỗi khi nhìn thằng năm dưới
Yêu toán lắm cơ bây giờ nó mới biết thân
Thoát cảnh tù rồi nhưng mà có hơn gì đâu

Quần bò Kingjo, áo phông, kính Mỹ ta đem diện vào
Ai dám bảo ta, chú kia đã từng học toán?
Trông dáng cúng lở, nhưng mà cách tán khá khó
Ghét bỏ làm gì, trong trường có môn này đâu

Trở về quê hương, đầu tiên tìm đến thăm cô làng giềng
Khi bước vào sân, đã tuôn những hàng công thức
Tuy nói tiếng Nga, nhưng mà cô ấy hiểu ra
Hóa chẳng lạ gì cô nàng đã “Tây” từ lâu
Rồi cầm tay nhau, cùng nhau thế thốt dưới trăng lưỡi liềm
Tôi hứa từ nay, sẽ không bao giờ học toán
Vô tuyến, máy khâu bây giờ sẽ hóa của chung
Xe đạp phần nàng, nhưng mà nuôi lợn phần tôi.

Nail! Nail! Nail!
Mới đến nước Mỹ nên học nghề Nail
Vừa dễ vừa chẳng tốn hao gì đâu
Chỉ vài trăm đô bằng Nail ta có
tà ta sáng tô cuộc sống lại rai

Nếu muốn chắc cú kiếm thêm nghề Hair
Cắt tóc Mỹ trắng Mỹ đen đừng chê (hê)
Móng tay móng chân ta mài ta dũa
Chiều chuộng đủ cách bởi khách là vua

Nail nail nail
Bàn tay ta phải khéo
Nail nail nail
Nghề Nail đâu có bèo
Nail nail nail
Tiền dzô đầy ngăn kéo
Nail nail nail nail nail nail
Chắc chắn sẽ không nghèo

Bác Sĩ, Kỹ Sư cũng không bằng nail đâu
Học phí tốn kém ra trường lại lâu
Chỉ vài trăm giờ bằng Nail ta có
Mài mài dũa dũa cụ thể tiền dzô
APPENDIX C. CONSENTS

Recruitment Script

Traditionally, Vietnamese Americans are seen as war refugees who have had bitter experiences of the Vietnam War. Most scholarship on Vietnamese immigration focuses on either the first wave (right after April 1975) or the second wave refugees (circa 1979). Recently, there are scholars interested in American-born second generation Vietnamese. However, some other groups of Vietnamese immigrants are still missing in American scholarship. Among these are the newly arrived immigrants under the family reunion policy and the scholars/students who decide to immigrate or stay in the US. My research tries to explore the various lived experiences of these groups. It will contribute to the history of a significant and growing population of Vietnamese immigrants whose lives and experiences are distinctive and important, yet seldom studied in U.S. immigration scholarship. Therefore, regardless of your nature and time of immigration, your voice is very important in this research.

Each interview should take no more than 60 minutes. For the interview, you can choose the location that makes you feel most comfortable. We can arrange to meet face to face or you can choose a convenient time for you to have a phone interview with me. For those who would like a phone interview, I will send you documents, including this script, a questionnaire, a consent letter, and a stamped envelope so that you can return to me your signed consent letter. Before I receive your signed consent letter I will not start the interview. If you are an informant of 15 to 17 years of age, I will seek your parent’s signed permission letter first, then your signed assent document, then I will start a home interview with you.

There will be about 80 interviewees participating in this project. They are either Vietnamese refugees or Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S with different times and natures of
immigration. Each interview is conducted separately and I will not share your information with other informants. Again, your personal identity is strictly protected.

Nguyen Tuan An                      Date: 7/20/2012

Thông báo nhờ người tham gia đề tài


Mỗi cuộc phỏng vấn thường không kéo dài quá 60 phút. Để tiện lợi cho quý vị, địa điểm phỏng vấn sẽ do quý vị lựa chọn. Chúng ta có thể gặp mặt nói chuyện hoặc phỏng vấn qua điện thoại. Đối với những trường hợp phỏng vấn qua điện thoại, tôi sẽ gửi quý vị các giấy tờ cần thiết bao gồm tờ thông báo này, giấy chấp thuận, bảng câu hỏi và một phong bì có dán tem sẵn để quý vị có thể gửi trả cho tôi giấy chấp thuận đã ký. Tôi sẽ không tiến hành phỏng vấn cho đến khi tôi nhận được giấy chấp thuận do quý vị ký. Nếu người tham gia là thanh thiếu niên từ 15 đến 17 tuổi, tôi sẽ không phỏng vấn qua điện thoại. Tôi sẽ chỉ tiến hành phỏng vấn sau khi đã có được giấy chấp thuận của bố/mẹ các bạn kí cho phép tôi phỏng vấn các bạn và giấy chấp thuận tham gia của chính bạn.

Đề tài này sẽ có khoảng chừng 80 người tham gia. Các đối tượng tham gia sẽ là những người Việt Nam định cư tại Mỹ với thời gian và loại hình di dân khác nhau. Tuy nhiên, mỗi cuộc phỏng vấn đều được tiến hành riêng biệt và tôi sẽ không chia sẻ thông tin nhân dạng của quý vị với những người tham gia khác.

Nguyễn Tuấn An                      Ngày 7/20/2012
March 31, 2010

TO:       An Nguyen, Tan
           ACS

FROM:    Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
           HSRB Administrator

RE:      HSRB Project No.: H10C247GE7

TITLE:   *New Generation of Vietnamese Immigration to the US*

You have met the conditions for approval for your project involving human subjects. *As of March 29, 2010, your project has been granted final approval by the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB). This approval expires on March 14, 2011.* You may proceed with subject recruitment and data collection.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and you must use copies of the date-stamped document(s) in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB and to use only approved forms. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), please send a request for modifications immediately to the HSRB via this office. Please notify me, in writing (fax: 372-6916 or email: hsrb@bgsu.edu) upon completion of your project.

Good luck with your work. Let me know if this office or the HSRB can be of assistance as your project proceeds.

Comments/ Modifications:
Stamped original consent document is coming to you via campus mail.

- Dr. Menon

Research Category: EXPEDITED #7
Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 80 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on November 9, 2012. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsr@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

 Modifications Approved:

1. Extend the range of informants' statuses and periods of immigration. To enrich the study and to provide multiple perspectives on the lives of Vietnamese immigrants, the PI expects to include at least 5 and at most 10 informants whose dates of arrival (to the U.S.) are before 2000 and whose immigration statuses are refugees. PI will exclude children (under 18 years of age) of refugees, either American-born or foreign-born, in this project. Modified consent and assent documents.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 90 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on November 9, 2012. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsr@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.
This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.
Hello, I am An Tuan Nguyen, I am a doctoral student of American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University. I am conducting a project for my doctoral dissertation supervised by Professor Sridevi Menon. I am inviting you to participate in my research project.

In this research I want to study the lives of Vietnamese coming to the United States in the last 10 years. I focus on immigrants who did not come here because of political problems although I also interview those who came to America before 2000 as refugees. Recently, there is a growing number of immigrants from Vietnam like you and your family and their lives both in Vietnam and America are very different and interesting. However, few scholars have really studied this subject. For this reason, I am hoping that you will share with me your life story and your experience of immigration to the U.S. Even though you might not benefit directly from me, your story will be important to the history of American immigration. I am expecting you to help me with the project voluntarily. I will not have any personal award or compensation for you.

This project will include home interviews with older teenagers from 15 to 17 years old. First, I will request your parent’s permission to interview you and if they are OK with that I will ask your parent to physically sign an informed consent form allowing you to participate. Then you will have to sign this informed assent form saying that you will participate in my project. I will not start the interview with you before completing all of these steps.

Because interviews are a very important part of my project, I am hoping that you and your parent can find some times for me to talk with you at your home. The interview will be no more than 60 minutes. Your parent will attend our talk if s/he wants.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to leave at any time. You can skip questions or stop the interview at any time and don’t have to worry about anything. Such decisions will not affect you or our personal relationship or your relationship with Bowling Green State University.
If it is OK with you I will record our conversation and take notes while we talk. I will keep all information of your interview in my briefcase. I will always lock the briefcase with both code and locks. Only I have its keys and code. I will lock this briefcase in my apartment’s table cabinet and I will keep its key with me all the time. Whenever you think you don’t want me to keep the interview information you can tell me and I will delete it immediately. Your personal information such as places, schools, family relations will be changed. I will also use a fake name to protect your identity. Feel free to contact Human Subject Review Board at 419-372-7716, email: hsr@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about participant rights.

To my understanding, when you participate in this project, you will not face any risks more than what you may meet in your daily life.

If you have any questions comments, or concerns about this project, please contact me at: telephone: 419-494-1051, email: antn@bgsu.edu

You can also contact my advisor Dr. Sridevi Menon at 419-372-7119, email: smenon@bgsu.edu

or the Chair, Human Subject Review Board at 419-372-7716, email: hsr@bgsu.edu

Thank you very much for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, risks, benefits and how this study will be done. I have had the chance to ask and have all my questions answered and I understand clearly that my participation is completely voluntary. I also have had my parent/guardian sign an inform consent form permitting me to participate in this project. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature

Date
Chào các em! Tên tôi là Nguyễn Tuấn An, hiện đang làm tiến sĩ chuyên ngành Nghiên Cứu Văn Hóa Hoa Kỳ tại trường đại học Bowling Green thuộc tiểu bang Ohio Hoa Kỳ. Tôi đang tiến hành khảo sát và thu thập dữ liệu dùng cho luận án tốt nghiệp cùng với giáo sư hướng dẫn là tiến sĩ Srídevi Menon. Tôi mong các em sẽ giúp đỡ tôi hoàn thành luận văn này.


Mặc dù các em sẽ không nhận được những lợi ích trực tiếp nào từ tôi, nhưng chia sẻ của các em rất quan trọng với việc làm nghiên cứu này. Những trải nghiệm quý báu này chưa được viết nhiều trong giới học giả nghiên cứu về vấn đề di dân Hoa Kỳ. Tôi mong muốn các em giúp đỡ tôi hoàn thành đề tài này một cách tự nguyện và vô vụ lợi.

Nghiên cứu này có thể sẽ bao gồm các cuộc phỏng vấn tại gia với đối tượng học sinh phổ thông ở độ tuổi từ 15 đến 18. Đầu tiên tôi sẽ xin phép bố mẹ các bạn cho phép các bạn tham gia. Nếu họ đồng ý, họ sẽ ký vào giấy cho phép. Sau đó các em sẽ ký vào giấy chấp thuận tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu này. Việc phỏng vấn các em chỉ được bắt đầu sau khi ta đã hoàn thành các thủ tục trên.

Vì cuộc phỏng vấn này rộng quanh đối với đề tài của tôi, tôi mong bố mẹ và các em có thể sắp xếp thời gian để giúp tôi tiến hành cuộc phỏng vấn tại cơ. Thời gian phỏng vấn dự định sẽ không quá 60 phút. Bố mẹ các em có thể tham dự cuộc phỏng vấn của chúng ta nếu họ muốn.

Sự tham gia của các em là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Các em có thể rút lui khỏi đề tài bất cứ lúc nào. Các em có thể bỏ qua các câu hỏi, tránh các thông tin, hoặc chấm dứt phỏng vấn tùy thích mà không sợ ảnh hưởng đến mối quan hệ giữa tôi với quý vị hay giữa quý vị với trường đại học Bowling Green nếu có.


Theo tôi nhận biết, các em sẽ không gặp phải bất cứ rủi ro gì khác biệt trong cuộc sống hàng ngày của các em khi tham dự vào đề tài này.
Nếu các em có bất cứ câu hỏi, yêu cầu, hay mối quan tâm nào khác liên quan đến đề tài này, các em có thể liên lạc với tôi tại số điện thoại: 419-494-1051, địa chỉ thư điện tử: antn@bgsu.edu. Các em cũng có thể liên lạc giáo sư hướng dẫn của tôi là Tiến sĩ Sridevi Menon tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7119, địa chỉ thư điện tử: smenon@bgsu.edu; hoặc Chủ tịch Hội đồng Giám sát Các Dự án Liên quan đến Con người tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7716, địa chỉ thư điện tử: hasrb@bgsu.edu.

Rất cám ơn các em.

Tôi đã được thông báo về mục đích, quá trình, những rủi ro và lợi ích của dự án này. Tôi đã có cơ hội hỏi và được trả lời đầy đủ. Tôi cũng đã được thông báo rõ ràng rằng sự tham gia của tôi hoàn toàn mang tính tự nguyện. Tôi cũng đã nhận được sự đồng ý bằng văn bản của bố/mẹ tôi cho phép tham gia đề tài này. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này.

Kí tên

Ghi rõ ngày tháng
Informed Consent

Hello, I am An Tuan Nguyen, currently a PhD student of American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University. I am conducting a project for my doctoral dissertation supervised by Professor Sridevi Menon. For this purpose, I am writing to ask for your consent to participate in my research project.

This research aims at exploring the various lived experiences of Vietnamese coming to the United States in the last decade. Although the nature of my project focuses on those recent immigrants who are not political refugees, I also interview those who came to America before 2000 and/or refugees to diversify the voices of my project. This research helps to understand the circumstance that prompt a growing number of Vietnamese immigrants to the U.S. and whose life and experiences are unique and not widely known in immigration scholarship. I am therefore hoping that you will share with me your life story and your history of immigration to the U.S. Even though there might be no direct benefit to you, your story will help making an important missing part of US immigration become visible. I am expecting my informants to help me with the project voluntarily and without any personal award or compensation.

Because I choose to use oral history as the methodology to collect data and develop my project, I am hoping that you can either arrange an appointment to meet with me in person or make yourself available for a phone interview. The estimated time would be no more than 60 minutes.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at anytime. You can decide to skip questions or discontinue participation at any time without penalty and it will not affect either our personal relationship or your relationship with Bowling Green State University.

I will use a tape recorder to record the interview and I will also take notes during the interview if you allow me to do so. The information collected will be stored in my briefcase which is protected by both code and lock and only I have the access to it. This briefcase in turn will be kept in a locked table cabinet in my apartment and again, I will be the only one who has the keys.
to it. If you decide later that you no longer want me to use your interview you can tell me and I will immediately delete it. All personal information used in my project including names, locations, family relations will be treated as being confidential. I will also use pseudonyms to protect your identity. Feel free to contact Human Subject Review Board at 419-372-7716, email: hsrb@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about participant rights.

To my understanding, by participating in this project, the anticipated risks to you are no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

Should you have any questions, comments, or concerns related to this project, please contact me at: telephone: 419-494-1051, email: antn@bgsu.edu

You can also contact my advisor Dr. Sridevi Menon at 419-372-7119, email: smenon@bgsu.edu

or the Chair, Human Subject Review Board at 419-372-7716, email: hsrb@bgsu.edu

Thank you very much for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature       Date
Giấy Chấp Thuận

Tên tôi là Nguyễn Tuấn An, hiện đang làm tiến sĩ chuyên ngành Nhận Cứu Văn Hóa Hoa Kỳ tại trường đại học Bowling Green thuộc tiểu bang Ohio Hoa Kỳ. Tôi đang tiến hành khảo sát và thu thập dữ liệu dùng cho luận án tốt nghiệp cùng với giáo sư hướng dẫn là tiến sĩ Sridevi Menon. Với mục đích đó tôi mong muốn nhận được sự giúp đỡ và cung cấp của quý vị.


Do việc sử dụng phương pháp phỏng vấn để thu thập dữ liệu cho đề tài, tôi mong muốn quý vị có thể bố trí một quý thời gian nhất định để giúp tôi tiến hành việc phỏng vấn tại chỗ hay qua điện thoại. Thời gian phỏng vấn dự định sẽ không quá 60 phút.

Sự tham gia của quý vị là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Quý vị có thể rút lui khỏi đề tài bất cứ lúc nào. Quý vị có thể bỏ qua các câu hỏi, tránh các thông tin, hoặc chấm dứt phỏng vấn tùy thích mà không sợ ảnh hưởng đến mối quan hệ giữa tôi và quý vị hay giữa quý vị và trường đại học Bowling Green nếu có.

Trong quá trình tiến hành phỏng vấn, cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được ghi âm và ghi chép lại với sự cho phép của quý vị. Thông tin được thu thập sẽ được cất giữ trong một chiếc cặp số bảo gồm cả mã và khóa bảo vệ do quý vị chỉ định để giúp tôi tiến hành việc phỏng vấn tại chỗ hay qua điện thoại. Thời gian phỏng vấn dự định sẽ không quá 60 phút.

Theo nhận định của tôi, quý vị sẽ không gặp phải bất cứ rủi ro gì khi tham gia vào đề tài này.

Nếu quý vị có bất cứ câu hỏi, yêu cầu, hay mối quan tâm nào khác liên quan đến đề tài này, quý vị có thể liên lạc với tôi tại số điện thoại: 419-494-1051, địa chỉ thư điện tử: hsrb@bgsu.edu.
antn@bgsu.edu. Quý vị cũng có thể liên lạc giáo sư hướng dẫn của tôi là Tiến sĩ Sridevi Menon tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7119, địa chỉ thư điện tử: smenon@bgsu.edu; hoặc Chủ tịch Hội đồng Giám sát Các Dự án Liên quan đến Con người tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7716, địa chỉ thư điện tử: hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Rất cảm ơn sự chấp thuận giúp đỡ của quý vị.

Tôi đã được thông báo về mục đích, quá trình, những rủi ro và lợi ích của dự án này. Tôi đã có cơ hội hỏi và được trả lời đầy đủ. Tôi cũng đã được thông báo rõ ràng là sự tham gia của tôi hoàn toàn mang tính tự nguyện. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này.

Kí tên                                           Ghi rõ ngày tháng
Parental Permission

Hello, I am An Tuan Nguyen, currently a PhD student of American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University. I am conducting a project for my doctoral dissertation supervised by Professor Sridevi Menon. For this purpose, I am writing to ask for your permission allowing your child(ren) to participate in my research project.

This research aims at exploring the various lived experiences of Vietnamese coming to the United States in the last decade. Although the nature of my project focuses on those immigrants who are not political refugees, I also want interview those who came to America before 2000 and/or refugees to diversify the voices of my project. This research helps to understand the circumstance that prompt a growing number of Vietnamese immigrate to the U.S. and whose life and experiences are unique and not widely known in immigration scholarship. This number includes immigrants under 18 years of age but excludes refugees or children of refugees who are under 18 years of age. I am therefore hoping that your child(ren) will share with me her/his life story and her/his experience of immigration to the U.S. Even though there might be no direct benefit to either you or your child(ren), her/his story will help making an important missing part of US immigration become visible. I am expecting my informants to help me with the project voluntarily and without any personal award or compensation.

This project will include home interviews with informants at ages of high school level, from 15 to 17 years old. First, I will request your permission to interview the child(ren) and if the permission is granted I will ask you to physically sign an informed consent form allowing her/him to participate. Your child(ren) then will have to sign an informed assent form accepting to participate in this project. No interview with any under 18 years old participant will start before the completion of this procedure.

Because I choose to use oral history as the methodology to collect data and develop my project, I am hoping that you can arrange an appointment for me to meet at your home. The estimated time would be no more than 60 minutes.
Your child(ren’s) participation is completely voluntary. S/he is free to withdraw at any
time. S/he can decide to skip questions or any similar tasks or discontinue participation at any
time without penalty and it will not affect either our personal relationship or your/his/her
relationship with Bowling Green State University.

I will use a tape recorder to record the interview and I will also take notes during the interview if
you and your child(ren) allow me to do so. The information collected will be stored in my safe
briefcase which is protected by both code and lock and only I have the access to it. This briefcase
in turn will be kept in a locked table cabinet in my apartment and again, I will be the only one
who has the keys to it. If you decide later that you no longer want me to use the interview with
your child(ren) you can tell me and I will immediately delete it. All personal information used in
my project including names, locations, family relations will be treated as being confidential. I
will also use pseudonyms to protect your child (ren’s) identity. Feel free to contact Human
Subject Review Board at 419-372-7716, email: hsrb@bgsu.edu if you have any questions about
participant rights.

To my understanding, by participating in this project, the anticipated risks to your child(ren) are
no greater than those normally encountered in daily life.

Should you have any questions, comments, or concerns related to this project, please contact me
at: telephone: 419-494-1051, email: antn@bgsu.edu

You can also contact my advisor Dr. Sridevi Menon at 419-372-7119, email:
smenon@bgsu.edu
or the Chair, Human Subject Review Board at 419-372-7716, email: hsrb@bgsu.edu

Thank you very much for your time.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the
opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my child/children’s
participation is completely voluntary. I agree to have my child/children participate in this
research.

Parent/guardian’s signature       Date

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Giấy Chấp Thuận

Tên tôi là Nguyễn Tuấn An, hiện đang làm tiến sĩ chuyên ngành Nghiên Cứu Văn Hoá Hoa Kỳ tại trường đại học Bowling Green thuộc tiểu bang Ohio, Hoa Kỳ. Tôi đang tiến hành khảo sát và thu thập dữ liệu dùng cho luận án tốt nghiệp cùng với giáo sư hướng dẫn là tiến sĩ Sridevi Menon. Với mục đích đó tôi mong muốn nhận được sự giúp đỡ và cộng tác của con quý vị.


Nghiên cứu này sẽ bao gồm các cuộc phỏng vấn tại gia với đối tượng học sinh phổ thông ở độ tuổi từ 15 đến 17. Đầu tiên tôi sẽ xin phép quý vị phụ huynh cho phép các em tham gia. Nếu các bậc phụ huynh đồng ý, quý vị sẽ ký vào giấy cho phép. Sau đó các em sẽ ký vào giấy chấp thuận tham gia đề tài nghiên cứu này. Việc phỏng vấn đối tượng dưới 18 tuổi chỉ được bắt đầu sau khi các thủ tục nêu trên đã hoàn thành.

Đo việc sử dụng phương pháp phỏng vấn để thu thập dữ liệu về đối tượng, tôi mong muốn quý vị có thể bố trí một quý thời gian nhất định để giúp tôi tiến hành việc phỏng vấn các em. Thời gian phỏng vấn dự định sẽ không quá 60 phút.

Sự tham gia của con quý vị là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Các em có thể rút lui khỏi đề tài bất cứ lúc nào. Các em có thể bỏ qua các câu hỏi hoặc chấm dứt phỏng vấn tùy thích mà không sợ ảnh hưởng đến mối quan hệ giữa tôi và các em hay giữa các em và trường đại học Bowling Green nếu có.

Trong quá trình tiến hành phỏng vấn, cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được ghi âm và ghi chép lại với sự cho phép của quý vị và các em. Thông tin dữ liệu thu thập sẽ được cất giữ trong một chiếc cặp số bảo gồm cả mã và khóa bảo vệ do duy nhất bản thân tôi sở hữu và bảo vệ. Chiếc cặp số này được đặt trong một chiếc tư có khóa trong căn hộ của tôi và tôi là người duy nhất khóa chi chia khóa BGSU HSRB - APPROVED FOR USE
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này. Quý vị và các em có quyền yêu cầu tôi hủy thông tin của cuộc phỏng vấn bất cứ lúc nào. Tất cả thông tin cá nhân như tên thật, vị trí công việc, quan hệ gia đình ...v.v sẽ được giữ bí mật. Tôi sẽ dùng tên giả để bảo vệ nhân dạng các em. Mọi câu hỏi liên quan đến vấn đề quyền lợi của người tham gia xin liên hệ Hội đồng Giám sát Các Dự án Liên quan đến Con người tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7716, địa chỉ thư điện tử: hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Theo nhận định của tôi, con quý vị sẽ không gặp phải bất cứ rủi ro gì khác biệt trong cuộc sống hàng ngày của quý vị khi tham dự vào đề tài này.

Nếu quý vị có bất cứ câu hỏi, yêu cầu, hay mối quan tâm nào khác liên quan đến đề tài này, quý vị có thể liên lạc với tôi tại số điện thoại: 419-494-1051, địa chỉ thư điện tử: antn@bgsu.edu. Quý vị cũng có thể liên lạc giáo sư hướng dẫn của tôi là Tiến sĩ Sridevi Menon tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7119, địa chỉ thư điện tử: smenon@bgsu.edu; hoặc Chủ tịch Hội đồng Giám sát Các Dự án Liên quan đến Con người tại số điện thoại: 419-372-7716, địa chỉ thư điện tử: hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Rất cám ơn sự chấp thuận giúp đỡ của quý vị.

Tôi đã được thông báo về mục đích, quá trình, những rủi ro và lợi ích của dự án này. Tôi đã có cơ hội hỏi và được trả lời đầy đủ. Tôi cũng đã được thông báo rõ ràng là sự tham gia của con tôi hoàn toàn mang tính tự nguyện. Tôi đồng ý cho con tôi tham gia vào đề tài nghiên cứu này.

Kí tên
Ngày tháng năm:
Questionnaire for informant under 18 years of age

1. How old were you when you left Vietnam?
   Em rời Việt nam hồi bao nhiêu tuổi?

2. Were you excited to go to America? What did you think about America before coming here?
   Khi được qua Mỹ em có thích không? Khi chưa qua em nghĩ về nước Mỹ như thế nào?

3. What was your first impression of America when you first came?
   Khi mới qua em thấy nước Mỹ như thế nào?

4. Did you feel homesick after living here for a while? What did you miss most about Vietnam at that time?
   Ở Mỹ một thời gian em có nhớ quê không? Lúc đó em nhớ gì nhất?

5. How do you think about America now?
   Bây giờ em thấy nước Mỹ như thế nào?

6. Do you think you are different from other American kids, including American-born Vietnamese kids? If yes, what makes you think you are different?
   Em có nghĩ là em khác các bạn Mỹ khác, kể cả các bạn Việt Kiều sinh tại Mỹ không? Nếu có thì khác ở những điểm nào?

7. Do you enjoy your American school(s)? How is it different from the school(s) you have attended in Vietnam?
   Em có thích học ở trường Mỹ không? Em có thể so sánh trường Việt và trường Mỹ được không?

8. Have you ever gone back to visit Vietnam? If yes, then how many times? How much did you enjoy the trip(s)?
   Em đã về thăm lại Việt Nam chưa? Nếu là lần đầu tiên em đã tham gia chuyến đi?

9. What and who do you miss most in Vietnam now?
   Giờ em nhớ nhất ở Việt Nam là gì?

10. Do you want to go back to live in Vietnam someday? If no, why? If yes, when do you think that you are ready to go back?
    Em có nghĩ là một ngày nào đó em sẽ về hẳn lại Việt Nam không? Nếu không thì tại sao?
    Nếu có thì khi nào em nghĩ là em sẽ về hẳn?
1. Could you tell me about your family background, education level, social status when you were in Vietnam?
   Xin anh/chị cho tôi biết về hoàn cảnh gia đình, trình độ học vấn, vị thế xã hội của anh/chị ở Việt Nam?

2. How and when did you come to America?
   Anh/chị đến Mỹ làm sao và vào khi nào?

3. Why and when did you decide to immigrate to or settle down in the U.S.?
   Tại sao và vào thời điểm nào anh/chị quyết định sẽ đến tới Mỹ hoặc ở lại định cư tại Mỹ?

4. Did you attend any American colleges/universities? What is your level of education?
   Anh/chị có học cao đẳng, đại học, hay trường nghề nào tại Mỹ không? Trình độ học vấn của anh/chị hiện tại là gì?

5. How many sorts of job have you worked since your arrival to the U.S. and what is/are your occupation(s) now? Can you tell me about your experiences working in America?
   Anh/chị đã từng làm bao nhiêu loại công việc từ khi đến Mỹ và công việc hiện tại của anh/chị là gì? Anh/chị có thể kể cho tôi nghe về một số kinh nghiệm làm việc tại Mỹ được không?

6. Do you find anything that makes you significantly different from the Vietnamese Americans who came to the US as refugees? Or do you find anything that makes you significantly different from the Vietnamese Americans who came to the US not as refugees? If yes, what are they?
   Anh/chị có nhận thấy có sự khác biệt nào giữa những người định cư, di dân như anh/chị với những người Việt qua Mỹ trước đây dưới dạng tị nạn (dưới năm 75 hay năm 79)? Hoặc anh/chị có nhận thấy có sự khác biệt nào giữa những người định cư, di dân như anh/chị với những người Việt qua Mỹ gần đây với tư cách người định cư, di dân?

7. What social/cultural differences do you see between America and Vietnam?
   Những sự khác biệt về mặt xã hội, văn hóa nào giữa Việt Nam và Mỹ anh/chị cho là noticeable?

8. Living in the US, is it important to you to maintain cultural/social connections with Vietnam? If so, why and how do you maintain these ties with Vietnam?
   Sống ở Mỹ, anh/chị có nhận thấy mối ràng buộc về mặt văn hóa, xã hội với Việt Nam là quan trọng không? Tại sao? Và nếu có, anh/chị giữ những mối liên quan đó như thế nào?

9. What are your future plans?
   Kế hoạch trong tương lai của anh/chị là gì?
10. Do you think that you will go back to live in Vietnam someday? Why and why not?
Anh/chị có nghĩ một ngày nào đó sẽ về ở hẳn tại Việt Nam không? Tại sao có và tại sao không?