

Self-Reliance: Ethnography of Literature Outside Viet Nam

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### **ABSTRACT**

DANIEL EDWARD DUFFY: Self Reliance: Ethnography of Literature Outside Viet Nam

(Under the direction of James Peacock, Carole Crumley, Patricia Sawin, Eric Henry, and John McGowan)

Self-Reliance: Ethnography of Literature Outside Viet Nam calls for literary activity that recognizes the emergence of the nation of Viet Nam in the modern world order. First, an introduction summarizes the work. Then, the first chapter introduces the figure of Nhat Linh, a founder of modern literature in Viet Nam during the colonial period, who as the nationalist revolutionary Nguyen Tuong Tam later committed suicide in dissent to the Saigon government of Ngo Dinh Diem. The second chapter introduces the broad sweep of Vietnamese history since the founding of the Nguyen dynasty in 1801, in terms of what can be seen walking the streets of Paris visiting Vietnamese bookstores. The third chapter concludes the dissertation by returning to the figure of Nhat Linh and discussing what the author of the dissertation is doing with Vietnamese literature in Orange County, North Carolina.

## **DEDICATION**

To my senior uncles, James Duffy, Ph.D. (Modern Languages, Harvard, 1952), abolitionist, and Robert C. DeVries, Ph.D. (Mineralogy and Geochemistry, Pennsylvania State University, 1953), who made gems for use, and to Huu Ngoc, patriotic scholar.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### **I. Overview**

The dissertation encourages self-reliance by using the resources of ethnography to place the reader in the contemporary world, characterized by the entry into the world order of the nation of Viet Nam and its people, whose reality may be engaged by reading its dispersed literature.

Readers are encouraged to consult a better-documented, more thoroughly fact-checked, and improved version of this dissertation, with an extended conclusion, produced to publishing standards.

### **II. Chapter 1: Follow Me**

“Follow Me” introduces a doctoral dissertation, an original contribution to knowledge within the tradition of a discipline. One of three chapters that make up the dissertation, it introduces the discipline of anthropology, and the background of Vietnamese studies against which the research findings reported in the second chapter are new and the conclusions drawn in the third chapter are compelling.

“Follow Me” introduces the substance of a discipline and area study almost entirely unknown to almost all readers. “Follow Me” uses two strategies towards this goal. One is indirection, narrative with implication, scattering details in a way that adds up to a gestalt. The journalist and prose stylist Ernest Hemingway famously used this method in his story

of the civil war in Spain for English-speaking Americans, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. He described the method, in practical suggestions to the writer, as imagining everything and then leaving it all out.

It is the method of magazines as well, enlisting the reader in social assumptions by refusing to spell everything out, a strategy you can see at work in the pages of the *New Yorker*, especially in their “Talk of the Town” pieces and cartoons. I can’t introduce anthropology and Vietnamese studies, let alone modern world history with special reference to the separate unifications of France, the United States and Viet Nam, and their interventions upon one another, all in one chapter or in all three, so I rattle on as if the reader knows it already.

However, it is a shortfall of Hemingway’s procedure in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* that it reduces the great rehearsal for World War II and the Cold War, the civil war for Spain, into atmospherics and attitude. Part of the success of his book is that fascists have no problem identifying with Hemingway’s guerilla waiting to die at his bridge. That would be great art if they recognized that he was an anti-fascist, but they usually don’t.

To assume that you understand other people was the great failing of the US in Viet Nam, and it is the bete noir of anthropology. Speaking in the publicly engaged, anti-racist spirit of American anthropology, about the development and reception of Vietnamese literature, I must explain some big ideas, and fill them in with orderly details.

The second method I use is another approach to social realism, Hemingway’s own first model, that of Tolstoi in his *War and Peace*, to alternate personal drama with social scientific exposition. This is Tolstoi, but it is also John Dos Passos and James Michener, and a host of forgotten authors of unreadable manuscripts and books and everyday



magazine profiles. The strategy succeeds to the extent that the author speaks from a social position that gives him his own micro and macro view of the world, rather than from an assumed urbanity or vulgarity, that of a reporter's unspecified voyeur.

Tolstoi was a count who conducted personal life at the levels of power he wrote about; Dos Passos a man who grew up and lived in hotels, an authentic tourist in the 20<sup>th</sup> century; Michener an industry in himself, received with honor by the notables of the places he chose to set a novel in. I am an editor and an anthropologist.

"Follow Me" follows me to explain the social roles of a writer about society. I introduce a barrage of friends who write from similar positions, especially Alan Farrell, a career non-commissioned officer in the US Army as well as an academic. In the course of explaining the explainer, I introduce the idea of the dialectic, in terms of yin and yang and of the social science distinction between agency and structure, the individual and community. Alan is one of several intellectuals in the dissertation whose daily life brings out these issues in sharp relief.

Referring to an image that Max Weber used to explain the difference between science and politics, I place Alan and myself on the platform of a lecture hall, as visible, dramatized human beings trying to explain society in general terms. The lecture hall is my own, where I am teaching a course in general anthropology. Following this image, I explain the course I am teaching, which introduces the tradition of anthropology in the US after Franz Boas, and I explain myself and my trajectory through our educational system and into this discipline.

The introduction ends with a return to its beginning, quoting the first paragraphs of the chapter. I first saw the technique in theoretical works by the sociologist Bourdieu,

citing his own earlier ethnography at length without attribution. Bourdieu is a kindred spirit, an author who can't proceed except on both the small and large scale at once. I like the technique because it recalls the theatrical approach of Bert Brecht, another hero, also obsessed with dramatizing both the life of society and the life of an individual, whose avant-gardism was aggressively normal. All I am doing is quoting myself but the act remains strange.

The rhetorical point of the strangeness is to ask the reader to bear in mind all that I have just told him, while I start again the story of Nhat Linh, a founder of modern Viet Nam and of modern Vietnamese literature. The dissertation isn't about Nhat Linh, he is just one of the stray details I scatter about for the reader to pick up and assemble as he wishes. If it were told, his story would be one of alienation, failure, isolation, frustration, ending in a futile gesture. One of my best friends began such a dissertation on the similar figure of Ezra Pound, only to abandon not only the project but scholarship. The dissertation as a whole is in flight from this fate, through the understanding gained in the second chapter and the connections drawn in the third.

"Follow Me" is about entering the social world we live in by noticing that Viet Nam is a nation and Vietnamese are human beings. "Self-Reliance: Ethnography of Literature Outside Viet Nam" as a whole tells how to become an authentic person by recognizing Viet Nam. Because modern Viet Nam came into existence and then to the attention of the United States through great-power struggles that ignored the place, our world is littered with distractions from the truth of the humanity of Vietnamese. "Follow Me" is a harangue, the speech a military commander gives on the field of battle, a rhetorical display meant to wake the men up to the fact that they are surrounded and have only each other.

### III. Chapter 2: The Vietnamese and Orientalist Bookstores of Paris, France

“The Viet Nam History Project and the Vietnamese and Orientalist Bookstores of Paris, France” is the second chapter of a dissertation in three chapters. The first chapter introduces the topic, method, field and discipline of the dissertation. The third chapter draws conclusions.

The second chapter, the length of the other two combined, reports what I learned by doing the dissertation research. Over a year in Paris I tracked down the bookstores in the city that deal with Viet Nam. In explaining that research, I draw on Davis library as well as my field notes to show how Vietnamese people have written their history on the streets of the capital of France.

I attempted to write subtitles to make the logical structure of the chapter easy to follow. They did not help, but simply cycled through Vietnamese history, Southeast Asian area studies, French history, and my field experience. The logical structure of the chapter is to shuttle between drama and social science.

To help the eye, I followed the practice of the other surviving national magazine, *The Atlantic*, setting the initial sentence of a paragraph every page or so in large bold type. When convenient, the bold sentences mark the beginning of a narrative passage, but most don't. However, these helpful subtitles invite obstruction from the Graduate School format inspectors, so I have elided them from this version of the dissertation.

There are only three main narrative passages: the introduction to Paris; the walk through the city and the history of France and Viet Nam; and dwelling on the Vietnamese retail neighborhood and French Orientalism.

The exposition begins in the restaurant where I would take out-of-town guests and use the decorations to explain Vietnamese history. As well as giving that talk, I tell of my interactions with Vietnamese guests and the owners of the restaurant, to show me and the Vietnamese as current actors as well as narrator and subjects of history.

Then I tell about the work of my research, finding the Vietnamese bookstores of the city. I am not reporting my findings but following myself around the city to show the involvement of France and Viet Nam, which is written on the street signs and names of shops.

I begin where I lived, at the southern edge of the city in the utopian campus for international students, and proceed through the Parc Montsouris. The park's history allows me to make reference to reaction and revolution in France since 1870, and the general sense of the great capital as a rag-and-bone-shop of social experimentation.

We proceed north, toward Les Olympiades, the Vietnamese retail district on the southern edge of the Seine, noting street names as we go. We linger for many pages on the street named for Jules Bobillot, a sergeant "dead in Tonkin in 1885", because he allows me to explain how France came to Viet Nam.

The point of this lengthy and circumstantial narrative is to undermine any sense the reader may have of the inevitability and reason of a given of our modern world, that Europe conquered Asia. I introduce the idea that France and Viet Nam were very alike when they first made contact, that the most enthusiastic adventurers from Europe were not particularly modern Christians, and all in all that it is not clear that the state of "France" conquered "Viet Nam."

The Bobillot passage culminates at the battle of Tuyen Quang, where he fell, fighting alongside Vietnamese against Chinese bandits at a meaningless siege which nonetheless by an accident of geopolitics came to mark the conquest of Viet Nam by France. That Bobillot was a sergeant, fighting alongside Legionnaires, and a writer published posthumously by his Paris friends, moreover allows me to return to the theme of the non-commissioned officer as social observer.

His status as a rate, a popular author who did not enter the well-organized canon of French literature by accident of history as well as his class position, backgrounds my documentary approach to literary canons in the Viet Nam Literature Project described in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Our long walk up Rue Bobillot ends back at Les Olympiades, the Vietnamese retail district where my trips to Vietnamese and Orientalist bookstores would often begin and end. In passing I mention how politics affect the Vietnamese settlement in Paris, and their bookstores. But the presentation is by indirection, once more, as I focus the discussion on Orientalism and Vietnamese Studies, the traditions of scholarship on Viet Nam in France and the United States respectively.

I have already introduced in the first chapter the criticism made of Orientalism by Edward Said, and the customary reply of Orientalists in the field: look, these people objectify themselves to become a nation and we are lending a hand as fellow anti-colonialists. I sketch out the specific case in Vietnamese Studies, David Marr and the other Committee of Concerned Asian Scholars who objectified the nation of Viet Nam to resist the United States.

I move on quickly from this sandbox debate to touch briefly on the strain of thought and practice in American anthropology after Boas most important to me, represented by the linguist Dell Hymes. I follow Hymes in emphasizing the value of description and documentation, which persist, alongside interpretation and debate, analysis and prediction, which pass. I also follow Hymes in emphasizing dialogue with the subjects of our research, but emphasize more than he the difficulty of attracting their attention.

Our walk, and my review of approaches to it, land us at a café at the Place de la Sorbonne, by the famous university. It was a staging area for my walks through the city in search of Vietnamese books and now I use it as a place to review the work so far. I talk about my methods of documentation, my index cards and maps, and the psychic needs they address.

I end the chapter like the first, by quoting myself, the walking tour I wrote for the Vietnamese Studies Group listserv that documents the Vietnamese bookstores of Les Olympiades, and those that link them to the scholarly Left Bank, where I sit in my café. The chapter has achieved its purpose, to run the reader through the sheer facticity, the Jamesian buzz and whirr and historical one-thing-after-another of Viet Nam and its books.

Installed at the café with our index cards and maps, we move on to the analytic and programmatic conclusion to the dissertation in Orange County, North Carolina.

#### **IV. Chapter 3: The Viet Nam Literature Project in Orange County, North Carolina**

“The Viet Nam Literature Project in Orange County, North Carolina” is the conclusion of a doctoral dissertation. It follows on the ideas introduced in the first chapter, about American anthropology, with reference to the facts of the second chapter about the

development of France and Viet Nam together, to lay out my plans for supporting Vietnamese literature in the United States from my barn in Hillsborough.

The idea of anthropology introduced in the first chapter and sustained through the second is that of the researcher as a participant in the lives of those he researches, while also retreating to overview. Two figures from outside anthropology, a failed revolutionary and a career non-commissioned officer, serve to illustrate this double role.

The facts of the modern world brought out in the second chapter, drawn from France's entry to Viet Nam and Viet Nam's entry to France, follow me walking on streets of Paris that take the reader out of Orientalism, the sense of Vietnamese as unknowable others, into a sense of all humanity caught up in a long-standing process of globalization which none of us understand.

The conclusion begins with my arrival in Chapel Hill in 1997, and reviews the geography and history of northern Orange County, where I am finishing the dissertation. It places the work in the broad drama of the promise of the United States and its redemption.

The conclusion carries on with my launch of the Viet Nam Literature Project. It details my efforts to make a living as I publish, and as I write the dissertation. It is interrupted by work for hire and by exhausted illness.

The conclusion ends with the revival of my energies, giving my plans for carrying on the Viet Nam Literature Project and finally leaving the reader to his or her own devices, satisfied that the dissertation has at least placed the reader in a world that includes Viet Nam.

After filing the dissertation I will proceed to make revisions suggested by readers, to the first two chapters. The most noticeable effect will be helpful documentation, and to reduce the longueurs and the excesses of the second chapter.

As I make those revisions I will make this third chapter relate more plainly to the themes of the previous two, and respond to issues raised by readers from the committee. My sense of symmetry suggests that the conclusion should be the same length as the introduction.



## **CHAPTER 1**

### **FOLLOW ME**

Forty years ago a man I admire took poison. He left a letter to his fellow citizens. The suicide and the letter were gestures against the president of his republic, whose agents were on their way to arrest my hero. His plot against the president had been discovered. Soon afterwards that president and his brother fell victim to another plot. Not long after that, the president of my country was murdered.<sup>1</sup>

I was three years old. My country is the United States of America and the dead president was John F. Kennedy, Jr., called Jack or JFK or simply Kennedy. The foreign country was the Republic of Viet Nam, the one with its capital in Saigon. On the news in my country at the time they called it South Vietnam, but in fact that government lay claim to the entire country.

My country is now laying claim to the whole world. We fought in Viet Nam and Laos and Cambodia against the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China. China has never been a real threat to our power and now the Soviet Union is gone. We have invaded Iraq and seem likely to stay there in the same way we stay in the middle of Korea. Whether we go on to invade Syria and Iran in any event we have an army in the Persian Gulf, on the world's supply of oil.

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<sup>1</sup> There are three footnotes to the dissertation to meet Graduate School format requirements.

The ill accomplished in Viet Nam by the United States lay in that we invaded that country to fight Russia and China. We disregarded our allies, for example watching President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Nhu go to their deaths. We thought of our allies and enemies alike as points on a map to be bombed, agents to be bribed, opponents to be gamed, rather than as men and women who wanted to have a country.

Nevertheless they succeeded in that purpose. My hero was one of the leaders responsible for this great historical achievement of the century I was born in, the establishment of an independent nation of Viet Nam. As an author he is known by his pen name Nhat Linh, which means first in spirit. As a politician he is also known by his given name Nguyen Tuong Tam.

Often I have a conversation with some other man where I am talking about Nhat Linh and he is talking about Nguyen Tuong Tam. His literary and his political achievements are linked. He was born outside Ha Noi, in Tonkin, one of three colonies and two protectorates that jostled with the kingdom of Siam and the British colony of Burma across mainland Southeast Asia. He died outside Saigon, in one of two republics with a claim to govern Viet Nam, one or the other recognized by every sovereign nation.

His work as a writer and a publisher, as an activist and a politician, played a major role in this transformation. I don't enjoy most of Nhat Linh's writing and I disagree with much of Nguyen Tuong Tam's politics but I admire him for the actions he took to make what for me is a great moral point of our time: that Viet Nam is a nation and Vietnamese are people who have the right to speak and act for themselves.

The death by poison of Nhat Linh Nguyen Tuong Tam, lost in the world he summoned into being, in opposition to a government whose conditions of possibility he

brought about, is the starting point of my doctoral dissertation on the ethnography of literature outside of Viet Nam because suicide was his step out of Viet Nam itself. The police arrived and he was gone.

The dissertation is an ethnography of literature outside of Viet Nam. Within Viet Nam, national literature makes common sense. There is fiction and poetry in the newspapers, and many weekly and monthly literary magazines. You can get them downtown in any city.

In the publishing offices, also in the writers' association headquarters, in literary institutes and literature departments, editors and critics build canons and teachers introduce works to students. There are almost no doctoral students within the nation, but many bachelor's and master's candidates writing theses, and primary and secondary students learning the tradition.

There is a discourse within that tradition about what literature is, and what its role in society should be. All the discussion has taken place in the process of building a modern nation, but the spark of the debate has been over the place of the individual, of aesthetics, of the demands of art over the demands of life. You can place this debate within similar discourses from other places, if you write like you don't actually live anywhere in particular.

But the people who built the Vietnamese discourse were in fact talking about what to do in Viet Nam. This dissertation takes part in a related conversation about what to do with Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam. A Vietnamese speaker, a French speaker, a Vietnamese nationalist and an American citizen, I am writing this so that others may step in and out of my countries.

The suicide of my hero merely pointed to the fact that he and his literature had been stepping outside of Viet Nam all his life. He left Tonkin for Paris as a young man, returning to write his first work of note about that trip. He lent a hand in the creation of a publishing industry, and a reading public in Tonkin, took part in the first coalition government of Ho Chi Minh, then fled to Shanghai. He returned to Ha Noi while the French war raged and republished his books.

Surfacing in the south, he set up in a hermit's shack in the woods near Da Lat well away from the Ngo Dinh Diem government in Saigon. He once more published the books of his first flowering, from Tonkin days, in nostalgic reprints in Saigon. When that city fell to the People's Army ten years later many books fled overseas with the people, who photographed the Saigon reprints for offset editions in Houston and Sydney.

I have found them when I go looking for Vietnamese books in France and the United States. Not everywhere, not all the time. The first one I found in North Carolina was taped shut in a plastic sleeve and sitting on top of a book display case full of music videos. Between my first and second visit to one store in Paris the tattered sign above a shelf giving the name of Nhat Linh's literary movement was taken down.

Things change. When I was first visiting bookstores in Ha Noi of course no books of this collaborationist reactionary were sold. Since then the complete works of the great early nationalist are widely distributed in handsome new editions, scholarly and popular. I am not allowed to visit bookstores in Viet Nam, but I have found the new editions in the Vietnamese government bookstores in France.

Critical and popular reputations, the creation and destruction of canons are grist for my mill. I often don't take part in them, I always read the books they issue. I am a

creature of second-hand shops and archives, a man with a wallet full of library cards and an extensive acquaintance among publishers and booksellers. I live my life so I can read what I want and I write to help you do the same.

How can you read Vietnamese literature? How can you step into Viet Nam? Nhat Linh is famous because he addressed this question with practical solutions. After coming back to Ha Noi from Paris, Nhat Linh and a brother took over a dying magazine and made it a popular success, one that scholars still read. Remember, there was no Viet Nam at that time.

There was a Vietnamese language, and a Vietnamese script, and a tradition of Vietnamese literature. He published the new writers and called on his readers to become new writers too, running literary contests and recruiting the winners as contributors and then publishing and promoting collections of their work as authors.

He was calling on the public to write as well as read within Viet Nam. Secretly he worked with the nationalist party, almost a fraternity, shattered after an open revolt against the French in 1930. Openly he engaged in public works for the poor.

When the new nation was declared at Ha Noi in 1945 he surfaced as part of Ho Chi Minh's government, then fled them to Shanghai. His great predecessor, the man he had succeeded as the exciting new Ha Noi editor, had already been murdered and his own brother, a beloved novelist, vanished in the escape.

He came back to another Viet Nam, the one declared in Saigon, and started another magazine. It had some popular following but has not yet received much scholarly attention. I photocopied several issues of it from an archive in Paris.

I had heard about it already from one of the men who refers to Nhat Linh as Nguyen Tuong Tam. He lives in South Carolina now. He talked about seeing the man's shack on the way from Saigon to Da Lat, in woods where the editor gathered orchids. A photograph of an orchid appears on the cover of each issue.

Orchids are an international symbol of art for art's sake as well being apparently beautiful, fragile, and rare. The content of the magazine was popular. The overall impression is something like that of Elle or some other American fashion magazine, with a lovely cover and chatty, informed, useful and entertaining editorial content.

Nhat Linh, the editor and publisher, was having his joke about art and life, a debate that won't go away. It had most recently flared in Ha Noi, under the Stalinists and Maoists. Recently in my life it flared among Vietnamese around the world on the occasion of a music video.

The debate is about whether art is for the sake of beauty, or for the sake of the community. It begs the question of who knows what is best for either goal. In the Ha Noi flare-up, artists who had rallied to the Viet Minh demanded their right to return to their own ateliers, so to speak, once the revolution had succeeded.

In the recent, diasporic, fracas the producers of a popular music video were criticized for using too much red in a lavish production of an old pop song associated with the Saigon anti-war movement, something like Blowing in the Wind. Red is the bunting at every East Asian celebration of prosperity, happiness, and good luck and it is also the banner color of international socialism.

Nhat Linh's little joke was to put a new orchid each month on the cover of his popular magazine. The orchids, moreover, were gathered from a Confucian scholar's

humble retreat. Each one was carefully photographed and colored by a named artist, the editor himself.

Inside there was a whole jumble of stuff. Letters to the editor, horoscopes, this and that. One great reply to the art versus life debate is that art can do nothing if it isn't art, if it isn't beautiful, if it doesn't entertain. You can't really debate art versus life, it is a practical matter, unless the artists are in charge there will be no art.

The practical response of the Communist party in Ha Noi to those who made this answer in the 1950s was to shut them all down, to rusticate and imprison and re-educate. The practical response of anti-communists to the red in the music video a few years ago has been to boycott this most popular series, and to refuse to sell the novels of its emcee in the stores of their diasporic Viet Nam.

Nhat Linh's strategy all his life had been to separate life and art, to carry out social reform projects, to work secretly for revolution, while publicly offering entertainment and education to readers and inviting them to take part. The scholar in retreat threw an orchid on the cover of his magazine, while caucusing with visitors in the plots that later would bring the police to his dead body.

A commitment to beauty can embrace many agendas. Inside the magazine, the editor addressed his public one last time, in what was gathered after his death as his last book. But there are also the regular features, the personals and the advertisements. I take Nhat Linh's editorial policy as an embrace of what scholars of government in the United States have called polyarchy.

There are the checks and balances written into our Constitution, branches and levels of government minding each other, but there is also the tacit acceptance of the fact that

there is more going on than can be controlled or anticipated. Parties, corporations, unions, universities, and environmental groups have all arisen since our Constitution was written, worlds of power at cross purposes.

A magazine is a place where you store things, as a journal records what happens daily, chaque jour, as a newspaper prints what is new. It is not a review, where an editorial eye surveys a field. A review is a matter of authority. You submit a manuscript to a review, full of citations to articles in reviews, to be reviewed by your peers. A magazine is something you buy because you might find something new.

Americans who publish a magazine without advertisements often call it a 'zine, the studied informality to signal that the editorial policy of a newstand magazine, which must plan and sell a consistent product to readers and advertisers, is entirely absent and instead you might find anything in there. A proper magazine with a paid staff will offer some order to navigate the wild, anarchic quality that is its attraction.

Make no mistake, polyarchy includes anarchy, as destructive as it is free. The men who theorized it in my childhood were working in my native city of New Haven. They were writing in a positive spirit about the city bosses I heard about at the kitchen table. When I went to their university in town, Yale, I was walking the streets laid waste by innovation from powers located around the city.

They bulldozed the ethnic neighborhoods, dropped a mall downtown, ran highways between the city and the sea, and almost built a parking lot on the green. The poor became abject and those who could fled to small towns around the city which are run like country clubs, by the membership. My intellectual friends in Viet Nam go into transports when I tell them about my small town.



In his last magazine Nhat Linh was addressing, from his exurban retreat, fellow Vietnamese who had left their small towns. Later, in the 1980s, an exile scholar in the United States explicitly compared the Vietnamese village to the New England small town, pointing to the extreme level of self-governance. But the magazine was for people in Saigon, in the 1960s a city like New Haven with its many office jobs and turbulent politics.

Nhat Linh offered beauty, an orchid on the cover. He offered departments, regular features a person could turn to, with random elements such as advertisements for new products and letters from readers rocketing through. Most of all he offered his personality, a self fashioned in the struggle for a nation in a world of nations, a novelist and friend of poets, reformist do-gooder and revolutionary plotter, speaking to readers.

He was calling on them as writers as well. He had built his public and his stable in Tonkin by running contests which recruited readers as authors. This remains standard practice in his native city, with contests a lively part of the weekly newspaper of the national Writers' Association. The present head of the Ha Noi writer's association, novelist Ho Anh Thai, got his start that way.

Speaking to the readership as writers, Nhat Linh titled his last book *Write and Read the Novel*. It is not well known. I first saw it in the Vietnamese bookcase by the chair for students in the office of Eric Henry at Asian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Eric bought it at Khai Tri, the famous bookseller, when he was a soldier for the United States on leave in Saigon for a day.

Eric worked at a camp in the countryside reading captured documents. Through the hot nights he read the novels of Khai Hung, Nhat Linh's partner in his literary movement of

the 1930s, the one who was lined up on a riverbank and shot while fleeing the revolution. When Eric came home he became a scholar of Chinese language and literature.

He earned his degree at Yale in New Haven where the former Vietnamese language instructor, Huynh Sanh Thong, published a review of Vietnamese culture from editorial offices at his home in Hamden, the small town next to mine, Woodbridge. He called it a review but it was famously a magazine, stuffed with articles on many topics. Thong, to use his given name, included Eric's articles on what has become the Vietnamese national poem, and the verse novels which are its original milieu.

Ten years later Thong recruited me to run his magazine. He had won a MacArthur prize for translating the Tale of Kieu, the national poem, and devoted himself to a more universal topic, the origin of language. I started publishing contemporary literature and he decided to get rid of me. I decided that I needed a doctorate, to defend myself against this kind of resentment from without, and from within against the insecurity Thong was showing.

Looking around for a university with a Vietnamese literature expert I found Eric. I knew about his articles on Kieu, and I had met him when escorting a great living Vietnamese writer around North Carolina. Eric's program doesn't offer graduate study. What I wanted, actually, was somebody who could review my expertise but not supervise me.

Academic authority on a field of Vietnamese literature remains to be built in the university in the United States. I will see it happen, by my growth and that of my colleagues. I have trained as anthropologist, with a general interest in how to write ethnography on what people do with books. I get to sit in Eric's office as visitor.

He had told me about his trips in to visit Khai Tri and about the box of books he had shipped home. I sat in the office and read the bookcase when he took phone calls. Write and Read the Novel stood out with the distinctive look of a book from Saigon in the 1960s sitting thirty years later in an office in North Carolina.

Eric's copy has the stamp of Khai Tri on it. It's a famous name because there are now Khai Tri bookstores on three continents, borrowing the prestige of the great original. The one I visit in Paris, where the name of Nhat Linh's movement vanished from the shelf, also sells sandwiches.

It's fragile. The paper has some acid in it. Not like books from the 1980s in Ha Noi when they were rolling paper with old mills hardly washing or straining the wood pulp. Already in the 1990s a page would dissolve into crumbs of bark when you opened it. I did need a photocopy for heavy use, but I was able to make one without hurting the original much.

The original has the dignity of an imprint, an issue from a series. That survives in my photocopy because it is a matter of text layout rather than graphic design. The covers of books from Ha Noi have clever, lovely designs from a subsidized world of culture, of schools and competitions for book designers. The covers of books from Saigon in the 1960s often have the exuberance of commerce and the mass market, just like soft porn and sf and mysteries from New York at that time.

Write and Read the Novel has instead the look of a French book from Gallimard, a classic you will use in student days and have bound in boards later on when you have money. Those books are sewn in signatures and only loosely covered with a square paper

binding. Write and Read the Novel is folded and glued like a perfect-bound book of poems in the US today, but the binder can trim that edge easily enough.

The dignity, the standard, classic, textbook quality of Write and Read the Novel survives in my photocopy as it survives in other books by Khai Hung and Nhat Linh that printers trimmed open and photo-offset to sell to the people who fled Saigon overseas in 1975. When it appeared as a new book it was already in exile from the past.

Across the top, on front and back, it says, “Nhat Linh, from the Self-Reliance Literary Movement.” What it actually reads of course is “Nhat Linh trong Tu-Luc Van Doan.” Nhat Linh as I said means first in spirit.

Nhat is both the cardinal and the ordinal one in the old, dignified, counting-game run of numbers from one to ten in Vietnamese. Linh is a kind of ghost, but a located, respected, one like that of an ancestor near a well-tended grave. Trong means in, used here as we would say “from.”

That name and that first word come into English easily enough. The rest don’t. They need explanation, they have histories of past translations, they map onto received ideas about books almost but not quite, metric bolts in English holes. Let’s start from the back with “doan”, what I have translated as “movement.”

Doan means band, like a band of thieves. It could be a small gang, well-disciplined, or a rabble moving through a town. I prefer it to movement, or school, for gesturing at what we mean when we say that a discernible group of more than one or two people have changed the course of literature.

In a survey course, in a narrative history, in a library catalogue, a movement becomes a developmental stage and a category of person, both misleading. What it is in

life is a network, with people inside, people outside, and most passing through, playing a brief role, getting tagged by association when actually they had little or nothing to do with any of it.

That is like a band of thieves. In Vietnamese there is also the sense that a band might play a role in larger society, like a political party or a professional association. That is appropriate because they are a “Van Doan”, a literary band. “Literature band” would be more punchy, and just as accurate.

“Van” is a noun. Joined before the verb for study it means literature. Joined after the word person it means both the humanities in the sense of classical learning and humanity in the sense of compassion and understanding, altogether what we may mean by humanism.

A truism, a lecturer’s chestnut, something you have to learn and forget about Viet Nam is that it has often been in the Chinese sphere, where there is an idea that an administrator must gain his position by competitive examination in the written classics. In this context, where literature means what you study for the exams, there is the clear sense that a literature band is cut-throat serious about literature and concerned for their role in society.

In the middle is another compound, that translates easily, inaccurately, with an eerily appropriate English calque. “Tu” is a reflexive particle, like the French “se”, but closer to the English “self-“. “Luc” is a word not otherwise used commonly, suggesting strength or efforts. One of my colleagues, a historian of the 1930s trying to hew close to the Vietnamese context and make it strange, says “self-strength.”

That brings to mind what it no doubt was meant to in Vietnamese in the 1930s, the sense in many parts of the colonized world that each people must look to its own resources to stand up on its own feet. But previous scholars have resorted to a more familiar phrase. We say, “Self-Reliance.”

One influence of American Studies in our university, of Unitarianism in many of our Protestant churches, of public libraries and popular publishing series is that a lot of people have read Ralph Waldo Emerson, or seen or heard of his essay of that name. “Self-Reliance” among English-speaking Americans conjures our national religion, our pragmatism, our individualism and self-improvement.

Maybe that would be wildly out of line to translate the self-conception of a literary and social movement headed by a young mandarin recently returned from France to its protectorate Tonkin in the 1930s, intent on building a nation through the popular press. But it is a good translation of what another publisher laid out in Saigon thirty years later, and others shot again in their new homes overseas.

Write and Read the Novel, by Nhat Linh from the Self-Reliance Literary Movement is something a person might pick up to improve himself, to get some straight talk about what literature is and what you might do with it. I picked my copy off Eric’s shelf and here I am telling you what Vietnamese literature can be in my country.

It is already here. Thong, one of the original Vietnamese migrants to the US, has translated a pile of it and so have a couple of the others. The people who came in the 70s and 80s and 90s have established their own presses and magazines in Vietnamese. Eric and the other soldiers and diplomats and activists from the 60s have done philology, writing

translations and criticism and history and preparing texts, as have social workers who worked with the refugees later.

Young Vietnamese here are publishing in English, and a new generation of scholars, both traditional and returning students like myself, are moving through the university. When Thong was at work he was almost the only American who could write an evaluation on university letterhead to the tenure committee of someone who had published on Vietnamese literature.

When I was looking for a graduate school the University of North Carolina was almost the only one with a Vietnamese literature specialist on salary who could tell people I wasn't making things up. Soon there will be several, some already have tenure already and more are on the track. We won't be a discipline, or a department, but we will have a field of scholars and an object of study.

We will make the point that Vietnamese people have a Vietnamese nation and speak for themselves in the affairs of the world. We will make that point in polyarchy, speaking from unexpected points of view and engaging with the rest of the educational system in ways too complicated and alive to anticipate. We will be motivated by beauty, an admiration for particular books and authors, and we will succeed or fail as students and readers are entertained.

I am the only one of us who would put it that way, though many would agree with parts of what I have to say. My point of view is self-reliant, that of an author and publisher, developed in attracting readers. When I speak on Vietnamese literature in public there are always a few who are rapt, one or two walking out the door, and a broad majority who find their own value in some part of what I have to say.

I know this because I watch faces and then go out in the house and shake hands. I answer letters to the editor and take phone calls from journalists and concerned mothers. It is a special kind of knowledge I get this way. I don't supervise any of these people, and no single one of them supervises me. Like a shopkeeper, I am courteous and attentive, but I don't have to do business with anyone.

To write a doctoral dissertation from this point of view is a deliberate act of dissent to an educational system I adore. The doctorate is a license to conduct original research. You need no other to hold any position in our system, but it is only the first hurdle of a lifetime of review, sitting and being sat upon by the dissertation committee, the hiring committee, the tenure committee, the prize committee.

We mobilize astonishing resources this way. No other country has so many doctorates, and none other has anything like our libraries, our colleges and universities. None other has brought so many women, minorities, foreigners and people with poor parents into positions of power.

The French used to say the same thing about their colonies of Indochine. Indeed, the bridges, the public buildings, the railroads they built endure as the sinews of Viet Nam. The talented families they recruited into the colonial schools remain the backbone both of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the diaspora. French scholarship on Viet Nam underlies the modern country's knowledge of itself.

But when the people rose up they tore down all the monuments the French built, except one, and they have never had much regard for Vietnamese literature in the colonial language. Likewise, our university practice of literature in general earns little respect and enjoys much contempt among our fellow citizens who read and write books.



I am writing this dissertation in dissent as I prepare a career in leadership towards a field of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam, in the United States, that is democratic and deliberative, that is used by the people who read and write the books. As a boy I trained to be a leader in our democracy.

You hear a lot about leadership from people who want you to get other people to do what they say. Leadership is like goodness, like being a philanthropist. If somebody is talking about it, it likely isn't going on. The kind of leader I trained to be leads from the front.

You show people your back as you go forward. "Follow me!" This was the cry, for example, of the young graduates of Britain who vanished in machine gun fire in 1914, and the class after class who did that through 1918. It is the lieutenant, the place holder, waving a sidearm at the sky and stepping over the top.

There is another man behind the men behind the lieutenant, with a sidearm leveled he will use to shoot anyone who doesn't follow the leader. This is the sergeant, same word as the man who gives speeding tickets and keeps order in court. The great theorist of leadership, of the lived experience of power, whom I know personally retired from the United States Army as a sergeant major.

Alan Farrell is also an academic, with a doctorate in French and a career at two colleges. He did most of his military career in the Reserves, after active duty in the two Viet Nams and in Laos. He was dean of faculty when he wrote one of my letters of recommendation for graduate school.

"If I jumped out of an airplane he would follow me," Alan wrote. He was paying an insider's compliment to an outsider in front of outsiders, speaking as a professional

soldier about a pacifist to some civilians who likely aren't militarists. But his letterhead announced that he was dean of faculty at one of our nation's oldest colleges, and he was recommending me to join the company of academics.

Alan is a beautifully mixed-up guy, a polyarchy of a personality you might say, or a suspension bridge in dynamic tension, always being painted, linking the metropolis and the headlands, spanning the bay and marking the edge of the wild sea. I once invited him to address my college lecture course in the same spirit that I might troop elementary students over the Golden Gate, to see what a great country we live in.

Alan writes about leadership from the perspective of the sergeant, whose position is to mediate between the officer and the men, between goal and means, between the map the lieutenant is holding in his hand and the terrain they both are standing on. Alan's complex nature has elaborated in a lifetime of always being between.

He is a man, one of the men as the officers call them, the terrifying strong capable fellows with guns, who must do what they are told. He jumped out of airplanes when he was told to and walked into danger when he was told to do that. "Pas de vaseline," as he puts it. But he became a sergeant major, outranked by most officers only on paper.

When he retired from the Army he moved from Hampden-Sydney, where he had been chair of several departments, to become a dean at Virginia Military Institute, where deans hold the rank of general in the state militia. The generals of the United States Army who sit on the school's board joke about that when they visit, and there Alan is in the middle again.

I think that Alan likes the middle because its confusion is close to the contradictions of truth, of the dialectic nature of reality. I have grown as an adult intellectual in a

conversation with Alan conducted in a manner that engages and negates the terms he uses. I heard him speak at an academic conference in the 1980s and wrote to invite him to contribute a column to the academic newsletter I was expanding into a magazine.

“Follow me!” You could say that when he did he was acting as one of my men. When he later wrote that letter about me following him out of the airplane, he was figuring me as one of his men. He gives me a hard time for taking so long to finish my dissertation, a sergeant giving practical advice to the young officer.

Why did he drive five hours to talk to my class? He has a passage in one of his essays on war about why one of the men will walk toward a machine gun for another: because they have shared a cigarette. I certainly would follow Alan out of an airplane. The real power of the lieutenant and the sergeant over their men, who all have rifles, and over each other comes from small recognitions and reciprocities.

To approach the reality of human life, the large effects of such micro interactions between individuals, Alan shuttles between the institutions that have formed him, the military and the college, speaking in terms of his feelings in his rank and position. His essays are perhaps the best things I have published, poetry really, about what it is like to be a man and to be alive.

I have never been any kind of a soldier. I know war, and Viet Nam, as a publisher. My dialogue with the university comes from my life as a person who sees books made and sold. I speak of leadership in the university field of Vietnamese literature, outside Viet Nam, in terms from outside the university.

There is, by contrast, a recognized leader in the United States university on the history of Viet Nam, Hue Tam Ho-Tai. Her students and colleagues call her Tam-Tai and

those who knew her when she was a student call her Ho Hue Tam, or Hue Tam. Ho is the family name of her father. She married a Chinese man whose family name is Tai.

Professionally she is the John Fairbank Professor of Sino-Vietnamese History at Harvard. Harvard is our oldest university, in a country where we seat university representatives to a ceremony by the founding date of the institution. John Fairbank was the man who established scholarship on East Asia at Harvard after World War II.

I cannot tell you how important it is to me that the senior academic on Vietnamese history at the first university in my country is a Vietnamese woman who writes good books. For her part, Tam-Tai has gone out of her way on several occasions over many years to help my work. But we cannot begin to get along.

At the last meetings the Association for Asian Studies I just avoided her. On line, in discussions among the Vietnamese Studies Group, I stopped reading her posts for half a year, especially those that reply to me. She is a legitimate authority, and she makes authoritative remarks on what is scholarship and what is not.

Who cares. I do not want to become the Paul Mus or Huynh Sanh Thong Professor of Vietnamese Literature at Yale, for instance. Something like that is not out of the question. I think that there should be a Huynh Sanh Thong chair at Yale. I would help raise money even for a Paul Mus or a Frances Fitzgerald chair.

More practically, Keith Taylor, the Viet Nam historian at Cornell, has told me that when he retires from Asian Studies he will do it on condition that they replace him with a Vietnamese literature specialist. He told me that after my AAS presentation at the beginning of my fieldwork. Since then I tried to address his interests directly in an AAS presentation about my Paris fieldwork, and got nowhere.

Keith frankly told the crowd that he didn't see how my work engaged with his ideas. I think that any honest hiring committee would come to the same, accurate, conclusion about my relationship with the university in general. I am dealing from a different deck.

The deck I am dealing from is that of an author and publisher. The author Herbert Yardley, who wrote *Education of a Poker Player*, also had a vexed relationship with institutional knowledge, cracking the Japanese code for the State Department and getting his shop shut down by the career men. A poker player, an author, a publisher, all are types of what we in the university call the liberal subject.

The liberal subject has vexed relations with institutions, clearly instanced by our university's widespread critique of this way of being human. The relation of the community and the individual is a principal focus of work in the social sciences and the humanities. I think it is also the basis of the Vietnamese debate of art and life.

I can theorize my subject position in a way that makes sense to hiring committees and the rest, and introduces Vietnamese literature to people like that, by speaking to issues of the liberal subject. My intervention, as they say, is to point out that the idea of the liberal subject, someone thinking and acting autonomously in a world where people understand what he or she is doing, makes reference to certain specific modern roles, such as the publisher and the author.

I can go on, as an anthropologist and an ethnographer, to say that in general these roles vary across modernity by time and place. Each instance can be approached in specific through observation of actual persons by participating in their activities. I can continue with reference to current scholarship to say that we emphasize the importance of

understanding and theorizing one's own subject position, grounded in actual social conditions, when we observe.

I am an author who has developed in difficult relation with the university and the publishing industry of my country, as my friend Alan has developed between the university and the military. When I plan to lead in the growth of a field of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam, when I say,

I am writing this dissertation in dissent as I prepare a career in leadership towards a field of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam, in the United States, that is democratic and deliberative, that is used by the people who read and write the books. As a boy I trained to be a leader in our democracy.

I am not asking for a grant or applying for a position, or even explaining my research project to peers. I am telling you what I am going to do. I am a liberal subject, trained and practiced in developing a purpose and taking it to whatever public I can find. If I am not talking to you I am talking to the man or woman next to you, or one behind you or at the end of the row.

Misunderstanding between this position and that of an authority in an institution is widespread in the field of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam. Many of the people who write and translate and publish the literature are in large part, whether or not they are also academics, acting as my kind of liberal subject. They arouse suspicion.

My university colleagues who use Vietnamese literature to teach in the university often express interest when I say I am working on how translations get published. A researcher will add darkly, always, as if from a script, "I would really like to know how those decisions are made." The idea is that there is a committee somewhere deciding what is translated and who translates, or that there should be.

Lately the National Endowment for the Arts does have a committee that requests proposals for translation projects. I expect that they would receive well proposals for translations from Vietnamese. But for almost twenty years now by far the most widely published contemporary Vietnamese author has been brought to her publics by people like me.

Two of them, the English-language translator and the publisher, went to Yale with me at the same time. I knew the publisher to speak to, and he knew the translator the same way. She lives in Paris now, where she became friends with the author's French translator and worldwide literary agent.

I reviewed the first novel they brought out by Duong Thu Huong in the Nation, our nation's oldest liberal magazine. It was the first novel by a living Vietnamese citizen to appear in English in the United States. When I arrived to work in Ha Noi she befriended me.

She is a dissident, the real thing, a gallant woman who campaigned for democracy in a police state, giving speeches to writers and students. They picked her up on the street one day and took her to an unmarked prison outside of Ha Noi. She attributes her release months later only to the intervention of Danielle Mitterand, wife of the socialist president of France.

Her cause has since been taken up by the international human rights establishment and she has stayed out of jail. Beside the professionals at Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, I am just one of many friends who will write letters and make phone calls if anything happens to her. She is also protected by the interest of those in the United

States who will take advantage of any occasion for embarrassing the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam.

So she is out on the streets of Ha Noi. She walks everywhere because the secret police are known for running a truck over the car or motorcycle of a person they don't like. Ha Noi traffic is dangerous in any case. She charges along the sidewalk, the very picture of autonomy, for example meeting me in a restaurant and walking me around town from treat to treat.

When those of us who have had dinner with her go to an editor to pitch a story about her we call her a dissident because an editor knows what that means and has a personal, institutional interest in supporting such a person. For a man my age in the 1980s and 1990s, speaking to older editors who were born in 1940 or 1950, the implicit reference was to Alexander Solzhenitzyn, the internationally celebrated literary dissident to the Soviet Union.

That was sleight of hand. Solzhenitzyn formed himself, as a writer anyone outside of Russia would read, in long years in the gulag archipelago. His mature literary oeuvre is a mirror to the Soviet Union and proved to be one of the knives that bled that nation to death, as was his intention. No liberal at all, Solzhenitzyn condemned socialism from a Christian, Russian nationalist perspective that is not the most conspicuously humane current in the especially anarchic polyarchy which now rules his country.

Duong Thu Huong grew up as a soldier in her country's war for freedom, independence, and unity. She worked as an entertainer for the troops, living in bunkers under the bombs, where she delivered her two children. After the war she trained to be a



writer and earned the love of her public with short stories, a book for children, and popular novels.

The political activism that landed her in jail was actual politics. She gave a speech to her professional organization, the one for writers. She visited colleges and spoke to students, calling on them to form clubs to exercise democratic rights. In a few months she did much more political work than Solzhenitzyn.

Of course, he was in jail for decades, where he wrote a series of novels that are themselves political. They circulated in typescript through his country, and out to a waiting world. They shed light on the hidden world of the Soviet Union, its prisons, and made the implicit claim that the entire national federation, indeed all of socialism, was just such a prison.

Duong Thu Huong has been at large doing as she pleased much of her life, within constraints of the strength that every woman faces. She volunteered for the war of national liberation, one of an idealistic generation of city people who joined the largely rural People's Army out of patriotism and common decency. She later made her way through school and into her profession with the willfulness of a war veteran.

Since her months of incarceration she has devoted her public-spiritedness to such projects as getting children out of prison. If she worked here in Orange County, North Carolina, opponents would call Duong Thu Huong a socialist. She takes public health and public education for granted. Certainly, she is an activist. I call her a liberal, something no informed person has ever honestly called Alexander Solzhenitzyn.

When his admirers got that man out of the Soviet Union he built a house on a large spread in remote Vermont with a tall fence around it and no one really minded. Everyone

respected him, but few journalists liked the man up close. He ventured out once when the Cold War was still on to scold the graduates of Harvard and their parents at commencement for being socialists, for example for dissenting from the bombing of Viet Nam, Laos, and Cambodia.

Duong Thu Huong has some of that prophetic rancor, but the foreigners who deal with her love her company as well as her work. Her reputation outside her country has a lot to do with the personal devotion of her translators as well as the natural interest of editors in protecting a free-speech dissident. Her English and French translators in particular dismiss this observation when I make it, emphasizing the universally attractive intrinsic quality of her fiction and giving for proof her popularity among readers around the world.

It is a difficulty that I cannot praise the actions of my colleagues, Duong Thu Huong's principal translators, without insulting the core values that motivate them. I have tried, only to hear from them that the real reason that Huong is the novelist best-known outside of Vietnamese is that she is a wonderful writer. I think it is because she is a liberal subject, who wins liberals for allies, and inspires readers with a realistic dream of individual freedom.

The novel they first translated and published in English gives the dreams of a young girl as she is kicked around by life. It begins on a train in the Soviet Union, where an exhausted young guest worker has a fever dream of the shack in Ha Noi she shared with her mother. The novel explains their hard times in context of the land-reform movement that raged when her parents were courting in the countryside in the early 1950s.

That land-reform, in life, was a pretext for ridding the Party of the public-spirited sons and daughters of landed families who had joined the revolution. They had seen the Communists as the best bet against the French and all the other foreign invaders. The core of the Party came to see them as necessary allies in wartime, but a weak reed in socialist revolution.

Tam's father was one of these men. In the United States he would be the hard-working son of a farm family who went to college and got into politics, but in his village at that time he was hounded as tricky creature of the cruel ruling class. He proved a weak reed for his family, and killed himself, condemning his daughter to be raised by a wife and sister driven mad by his death.

In life, the land reform in the countryside came with the commotion in the city about life versus art I mentioned earlier, where some trained artists and intellectuals who had joined and led the revolution demanded autonomy, while the Party jerked them into line. The novelist does not mention this.

It is the kind of thing I would have to tell students. I would also tell them that she published her novel thirty years later around the time a call came from the Party for intellectuals to practice social critique in order to bring new life to the country. The appeal came from the Prime Minister and was backed by one of Ho Chi Minh's old generals.

The novel was a huge success in her country when it came out and has sold well in every one of the many countries it has been translated into. The fragile strength of a young woman growing up, the demented love of her mother and aunt, the cruel petty blood-sucking stupidity of the Party uncle who oppresses her, all speak to the highly individual sense of being alive, of becoming a person.

Readers always speak of the subjective impressions of the book, the taste of food, the look of the countryside, the filmic way consciousness cuts from moment to moment. The novel was also seen within Viet Nam as a political intervention, a deliberate response to the Prime Minister's call. The novel actually came out before the appeal but the portrait of the grasping uncle in the Party was just what Nguyen Van Linh was asking for, critique.

When Linh lost his position and Huong was snatched from the streets of Ha Noi, the world paid attention to this moment that had come and gone in the intellectual life of Viet Nam. Danielle Mitterand, for example, asked the Vietnamese please to let Huong out. She had spent her days in prison learning French.

Her contact to France was a Vietnamese patriot there, now a French citizen, one of the liberal subjects of her story. I met Phan Huy Duong after I had become friendly with Huong in Ha Noi. Before that I had played my small part in his campaign to bring the novelist to the West, reviewing her first novel in English in the United States. I had also published a translation of one of his French essays.

I was an editor on holiday in Paris when I met Phan. I returned there as a student years later and wrote about his latest book. He wrote me a nice note about it and we haven't discussed it since. Liberal subjects often don't understand each other any better than authorities understand them. We really do have distinct points of view. Phan and I have been at cross-purposes for years now.

The title of his book, *Penser Librement*, uses the infinitive of the verb to think and the adverb of the word for liberty. It has the force of the title of a self-help book – Think Freely – with the dignity of a work of philosophy – To Think Freely. Liberty, in both French and English, is the individualist aspect of freedom, the part that fiddles between a

person doing as he or she pleases and each person becoming as powerful as possible, which would involve telling others what to do.

In the drafting of our Declaration of Independence, “life, liberty and the pursuit of property” was euphemized as “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” but liberty remained in between. In France they put it first and the cry became “liberty, equality, and brotherhood.” That gave fits to leaders across the Channel and the Atlantic.

We are still running eighteenth-century institutions and in our present day liberty is a code-word for the voice of property in the United States, in the names of foundations and political action committees. To be at liberty, in English, means to have a brief, limited vacation from control. A sailor on liberty has eight hours under the eye of the shore patrol.

A lawyer who tells you he is at liberty to disclose something is following instructions. In France liberty has a lot more to do with being at large on the streets, in the extreme case charging over a barricade with your shirt off and waving a flag. “Follow me!” Phan’s book is about how to be at liberty in today’s world, a liberal subject.

He addresses himself to the most present-day of our contemporaries, the people he makes his living among. Phan is a computer programmer. He joined that profession after long student years in Paris in defense of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam and the Front for the Liberation of the Southern part of Viet Nam. It is a career trajectory familiar to the generation of 1968 around the world.

He and his activist wife have raised a family outside Paris. I would like to call it the suburbs, but the suburbs in French are the projects. In Vietnamese they are the farmland, like where I live outside Durham, North Carolina. To be specific, Phan’s house is in a neighborhood of homeowners a short walk from the commuter train.

I would like to say that he has sold his books through a chain store, but in France the only chain bookstore is an old cooperative that has gone corporate but is still shot through with sixty-eighters who know what a man like Phan is about. It is different from Barnes & Noble in that they have no competition and individuals make the buying decisions.

Computers were a practical career decision for Phan but he also has a lived, reasoned, principled commitment to the language of science, of positivism, of rational, empirical, intervention in reality through prediction and observation to build systematic knowledge. He insisted, for example, that all his children take degrees in the sciences.

Phan addresses himself in his book to the younger programmers and engineers, those who turn the bolts of society. He marketed the book to them through direct mail. In the book he doesn't mention his years in politics. He does introduce them to a tradition of Western philosophy, in the tone of adult education or programmed self-study.

He is not writing for me, a bookworm with a lifetime of reading on my own around research libraries, the vendors who sell to them, and the lecturers and monograph authors who draw from them. He introduces Kant and Hegel and the rest as he introduced programming ideas in his first book, sold for years through the same chain.

He wants readers to put these ideas to use, not the ideas of the philosophers so much as Phan's procedure for dealing with their ideas. His procedure is dialectics, the practice of thinking as if you were on a couch at a symposium not only with Socrates but eight others with their own points of view.

Think with categories, rather than in one, Phan puts it. Don't follow the instructions in the manual. Gaze at the shelf full of manuals and set their different protocols into dialogue with one another about how to solve the problem at hand.

This is the man principally responsible for the literary career of the living Vietnamese most read outside Viet Nam. I should say that that he is responsible only for her career outside of Viet Nam, but since her arrest that is the only public she enjoys for her new books.

Her old books bat around the second-hand shops of Viet Nam, and they are pirated in Vietnamese all over the world. Some of her old stories remained in school anthologies for years after her arrest, and since then one or two will appear in a collection on the bookstalls.

But the new manuscripts pass to Phan Huy Duong and to one French-language publisher and another in France, then to Nina McPherson and to Will Schwalbe her publisher English-language publisher in the United States. Phan controls translations into other languages, while Will licenses use of the English translations elsewhere, I think.

I have never had good reason to nail down the details of these business relationships. In the course of revising this dissertation I will ask the principals to tell me as much as is proper for me to tell you about their business. The important point here is that Duong Thu Huong has been brought outside of her country by persons doing business together, individualists.

There was no committee involved, even in socialist Viet Nam, in the planned economy, in the growth of Duong Thu Huong's career before the call for renovation. She was recruited as an author by Hoang Ngoc Hien of the Nguyen Du school in Ha Noi.

Nguyen Du is named for the author of the Tale of Kieu, and the school was modeled after the Gorky school in the Soviet Union, where Hien studied.

The point was to develop socialist writers for socialist Viet Nam but in the event its most famous graduates are two of the three great successes of renovation critique. Huong has told me it was Huong who brought herself there, and Hien has told me that it was Hien who brought her there. Sounds like business deal between individuals.

Later her great publisher was the director of the Women's Union Publishing House. All publishing houses in Viet Nam are fully owned by the government. Moreover, the Womens Union is perhaps the mass association closest to the Party, and mobilizes a collective spirit of self-abnegation and public service with the force of the daughters, nieces, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, mothers, and wives of a nation acting together.

However, each house publishes on the authority of an individual, the director. Each member of the Women's Union can act on her own with astonishing conviction and dispatch, authority born of a lifetime of service. One particular woman stood up and brought out Huong's books.

Years later she asked me to help her get foreign copyrights for good foreign books for woman, novels with strong characters. Hien introduced us. Danielle Steele was already very popular in pirated editions, but recently the government had demanded that publishers start respecting international copyright. The directors had no way to comply.

I saw no way to make a living doing that. I had gone to the meeting to meet Duong Thu Huong's publisher and we all ended wasting each other's time. Hien, I think, was trying to do me a favor because Thong, back in the US, was trying to ruin my business.



Have I got across my vision of how Duong Thu Huong's novels have come? There must have been committees involved somewhere, but not in my view. I see a network of individuals. My view is that of a man with a living to make, and a cause.

The liberal subjects we call investors would take one look at me and tell you that I am an entrepreneur. Many of the liberal subjects we call academics would think the same thing but not say it because in our university system that is a way of saying someone can't research and write. Our greatest prestige goes to people who turn out books with their names on them.

Our highest pay goes to administrators who manage the affairs of the institution. Entrepreneurs in that world are people with doctorates who aren't writing books but are vending services as flexible labor to administrators. Someone doing that as a teacher in a department is an adjunct, the rank of no rank.

Less formally, someone selling other services is an entrepreneur. This is the world of councils and institutes, foundations and commissions, think tanks and centers. The John Hope Franklin Center nearby at Duke is a shell for institutes for as long as they can keep bringing in foundation money. When I was working in Viet Nam I was working out of a building like that at Yale, named after Henry Luce, Jr.

I left that behind when I came to graduate school and have returned to it this summer, at arm's length, out of my barn. This is the first of the books I will write each year to publish my research under my name, after a lifetime of making books for other people. I will make my living as I do this by doing what I have done most of my adult life, bringing Vietnamese books to their public in the United States.

This is where investors start glancing at each other in front of the entrepreneur as he waves his arms. An investor is someone out to make money, often acting also on behalf of others, perhaps even the public market, maybe representing the pension funds for hundreds of thousands of workers. It is a grave trust, and unfortunately the investors often have to deal with an entrepreneur, someone who sees money as a way to get something in particular done.

This is also where the academics start wondering who is making all these decisions, asking why this entrepreneur is attracting resources that could be rationally administered. An entrepreneur, somebody who can make things happen because he wants to make something in particular happen, poses problems. My friend Hien hasn't had an easy time of it with the socialists either, and of course his student Huong is in exile from her country as an author.

We are back at the individual and the community again, at life and art, at the two kinds of liberty. One of the generation of American scholars who learned their Vietnamese in the war has written a book to address this problem within Viet Nam at the most general level. Neil Jamieson called his book *Understanding Viet Nam*.

Neil interprets Vietnamese history, society and culture in terms of yin and yang, the familiar terms of female and male, wet and dry, cold and hot, and in this case chaotic and organized, individualist and socialist. The useful aspect of yin and yang is that they are not two polarities but a single dialectic. One calls the other into being. An excess of one just means that an excess of the other is on its way.

These ideas are not widely understood as such in Viet Nam. Chinese-style medical doctors would use them in diagnosis and therapy and patients employ a crude version. But

the dialectic which all educated people there know about is Marx's version of Hegel in dialectical materialism, learned by rote. You certainly were not supposed to argue with it.

So Hien introduced Neil's thought with an article titled "Understanding Neil Jamieson." I think that the first thing you have to know about Neil is that he is an American anthropologist. We are accustomed to doing something else for a living. Very often we come to graduate training after another career, and go back out to something else, while remaining in the profession. We are different from professors of literature and history and philosophy in this regard.

Sociologists and economists and political scientists do it, but they start in school and join the institutions they have studied. Neil came to graduate training after years of work in the war, meeting with Vietnamese administrators and writing reports about how things were going. One of the high officials of the former Vietnamese government blurbed his book years after the defeat, to say that if there were more Americans like Neil then Saigon would not have fallen.

Neil stood out in the 1960s, one of the first of us bitten by the bug to insist, to document, to introduce, to explain that Vietnamese are people and Viet Nam is a nation. After graduate training Neil went back out to work as a field ecologist, employed by the Rockefellers through their foundations to address deforestation in the Vietnamese highlands. When I gave Hien his phone number Neil was working out of an office in Ha Noi not far from my rooms. Deforestation in the highlands is a result of the difficulty Vietnamese authorities have in treating those who live there as people who know what they are doing.

The highland minorities had been practicing swidden agriculture for a long time, and the government had relocated intensive agriculturalists from the lowlands onto their slash-and-burn forest fields. As an ecologist, Neil is a systems theorist, drawing on the work of men like Gregory Bateson. He analyzed his very grounded, detailed research, based on frequent and lengthy visits in the highlands, in terms of feedback and control, loops and short-circuits.

American anthropologists often speak in the largest terms conceivable about the limited, fragmentary evidence of our individual experience. We spend a large fraction of our own lives taking part in a tiny fraction of some other people's collective experience and then generalize wildly about it. Any general assertion we propose will be unwarranted, so we say to hell with it and push the pedal to the floor. Tell me another way to do science on human life in the wild and I will change my ways.

For Neil to speak of Vietnamese life in terms of yin and yang was pure American anthropology. At the time I was in Ha Noi some people I knew there were rather taken with the whole thing, as you might be enthusiastic about the insights of an African black man, visibly not an American, who spoke English like he was born in St. Louis and had some arresting insight about our lives here. On the contrary, American historians of Viet Nam spoke slightly of the book.

Historians don't generalize in our manner. Socially there is the difficulty that a group of historians will have a great many facts in common, enough to trip up any theory. An anthropologist however is often in the role of the broker, speaking to people who know much less than he does about the other side. Logically there is the difference that historians speak diachronically, about sequence, about one thing happening after another.

The idea of yin and yang looks like a synchronic idea, one that is true everywhere all the time, like a natural law. Historians don't admit any of those about human affairs, and the point of natural science is to have as few as possible. In the heyday of social science in the United States we had a great many, what Manhattan Project physicist Richard Feynmann called cargo-cult science.

He was deriding the experimentalism of research psychologists, but there is a stronger objection to make. A natural law, a synchronic explanation, is a conversation-stopper that directs attention away from the matter at hand. Nobody really knows what gravity is, we just know how it behaves, and once you have pushed an explanation down to "gravity" you aren't going any further. It becomes a non-explanation.

You might as well reply to every question, "The Big Bang." That is not how you apply yin and yang. It is a synchronic idea that tells you what will happen next. Yin calls yang into being and yang calls in yin. It is as well an analytic idea that leads to further observation, because it asserts that everything you identify as yin or yang will in its turn have both a yin and a yang aspect and so on as far down as you can go.

Over time, in the ten years since Neil's book came out and I went to Viet Nam and came back and started graduate training and worked in France and came back and taught at Carolina, all the while conferring on line with my Vietnamese studies colleagues, reviewing manuscripts and reading publications, watching presentations and going to seminars, the resistance to Neil's ideas has provoked acceptance in turn. Nobody has come up with an obviously better way to talk about modern Viet Nam in general.

It certainly works in modern literature, with repression and expression trading blows. This close fit is no accident, since Neil's book is in a way a history of what

happened after Nhat Linh and the Self-Reliance Literary Movement. Neil himself is a man of Saigon in the 1960s when most Vietnamese intellectuals were sons and daughters of Nhat Linh and the 1930s.

Anyone familiar with the modern history of Viet Nam would say that is a distortion on my part, a quasi-dynastic view, tracing the buzzing reality of a nation back to a single founder. Nhat Linh and his band were just one of several literary groups with magazines and publishing houses. The contemporary socialist movement of the 1930s has proved to be more influential, and the activist women of Saigon and their magazine of that time seemed at least as important at the time.

But I am speaking of the personal style of Neil and other men I know, as I will speak of the personal style of my friend Peter Zinoman and say that he is a Ha Noi intellectual, a younger brother of the renovation authors of the 1980s and a son of the 1950s struggle against repression that inspired them. I am an anthropologist and my people are those who hang around Vietnamese books. I generalize about my friends and colleagues.

A Self-Reliance man is first of all someone in love with the poetry of that time. Nhat Linh was no poet, but he was a publisher of poets. Neil published the same poets in his book, in English translation. Once in Ha Noi in the 1990s he told me that he in fact had translated three or four times as many hundreds of pages of Vietnamese literature as the University of Berkeley press would publish in his book.

The way Neil speaks Vietnamese makes a native speaker of a literary bent fall a little bit in love with him. Eric is the same way. I stand there and watch an intellectual just light up as one or the other of these men speaks. They use the *mot juste*, they speak in allusion to literature, they address urgent matters with indirection but sometimes greet the

obvious with the Asian bluntness, innocent of the repression of the European middle class in the home countries, that a more timid foreigner is reluctant to use.

Neil would be really good at translating poetry into Vietnamese. His written English is about like my Vietnamese and French, that of a social scientist, someone who sounds like he is translating even when he speaks his mother tongue. We use generalizations where it would be normal to use a specific, and vice-versa, in our endless quest to make the strange familiar and the other way around. I think it's poetry but an English major often thinks we can't write.

The poetry Neil translates is love poetry that expresses the desire and fascination for another expanding within the speaker's being. It called itself the New Poetry when it came out, appearing in Nhat Linh's magazine and in the others as well. In the 1970s rummaging in second-hand shops around my native New Haven I collected a whole series of yellowing anthologies of the New American Poetry, from the 1960s "war of the anthologies" for the mainstream of poetry in our universities.

The people who called their anthology the New American Poetry, tout court, were deliberately assuming the mantle of Ezra Pound, the poet who selflessly promoted the careers of many of the British and American authors we now call the moderns, such as Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot and H.D. and James Joyce and Ford Madox Ford. Pound's great slogan was "Make it new." Poetry was "the news that stays new."

Nhat Linh was no poet but he was in love with the new poetry. Its form and the sense of self it encouraged spoke to the themes of his own novels. I can barely read the things, but you have to know about at least one. We refer to it by the title in Vietnamese,

“Doan Tuyet” because “Rupture” would be ambiguous. It is the famous novel, the survey-course one, whose title has made Nhat Linh’s point since it came out.

The rupture he spoke of was not that of the large intestine poking out through a hernia in the abdominal wall, which the Vietnamese term does not suggest as the English does, but the painful and crippling break with the past, with family, and with tradition that each modern must make. That particular novel was about a young woman who attempts to rebel against an arranged marriage.

She resists her parent’s choice and once married resists the rule of her mother-in-law. The conceit would be, in Nhat Linh’s heyday and in the lecture hall, that this represents the break into modernity from traditional life, into individuality from family and community rule, from shame to guilt and so on. The New Poetry enacts this break both in what it says and how it says it.

Seventy years after these poets started to work I was told in my first Vietnamese language classes that to speak directly of oneself and one’s feelings was difficult in Vietnamese. My first daily teacher was a young refugee woman from Saigon and our supervising linguist was a born Midwesterner, retirement age, who had worked with refugees for years in the countryside during the war. They were trying to teach us the Vietnamese system of personal reference.

To use “I” in this system can be a little bit rude, to use the words for “he” and “she” and “them” can be dismissive, and for a foreigner to use one of the words for “you” is usually rude or forward. The usual way to refer to another person, and to one’s self, in a conversation would be to use words from the family: son and daughter, mother and father, grandmother and grandfather, great-grandparent, junior and senior uncle and aunt.



The point was that to speak Vietnamese to another person is to place yourself in a fictive family relationship to them. You have to do what the Vietnamese do, which is to make a judgement about relative age, about social distance, about respect and familiarity. It can be difficult for native speakers who have lived all their lives in Viet Nam.

For instance a young student might flirt with a man who could be her grandfather by addressing him as junior uncle, only to be stymied when his strait-laced younger brother the famous professor walks in the room. She can't call him junior uncle, and she can't keep calling his older brother that. In that case my friend excused herself and left.

Hy Van Luong, a man my age who fled Viet Nam and became a university scholar in the United States, formerly the head of our Vietnamese Studies Group at the Association for Asian Studies, wrote his dissertation at Harvard about the pragmatics, the actual use and intentions, of the system of personal reference. Comparing evidence from the field in northern Viet Nam and in California, he showed people using the words to create intimacy and social distance as expedient.

Over the course of the twentieth century one of the expedients which Vietnamese have adopted is to use word for "I" normally. "Toi" was deliberately borrowed and promoted by modernizing intellectuals from a vocabulary hardly anyone ever used, meant for addressing the monarch directly. It meant something like slave, the abject individual totally possessed by the king in abrogation of all other family and social affiliations.

My second daily teacher at Cornell, a linguist my age from Ha Noi, told us to go ahead and say "I" like everyone else, not to fuss too much with the family terms. He is a scientist and a pragmatist, where our first daily teacher was a romantic young woman,

longing for Saigon, and her life of community there in her home nation. She would quote to us from the Tale of Kieu and speak the very names of the New Poets with passion.

When the New Poets wrote they were expanding on the “toi”, the individual self, its feelings, and they were published by a man whose most famous novel suggested that defining your life in terms of the wishes of your family was no longer a good idea. In a scheme of modernization we would say that they were promoting the modern, isolated, self in a break from the ties of tradition.

The form of the poetry itself suggests such a break, in comparison with the Vietnamese verse which the poets and their readers would be accustomed to. Thong nailed this down in an essay about the 1930s in literature in a discussion of the break with the luc-bat couplet. Luc and bat are the words for six and eight in the counting sequence that starts with *nhat*.

A luc-bat couplet starts with a line of six syllables and ends with a line of eight. If you go through a dictionary you will find many Vietnamese words with two or three and even four syllables but there is a sense, as with the punchy, pithy Anglo-Saxon register of English, that Vietnamese words have one syllable. If you go through a collection of Vietnamese poetry you mostly will find words of one and two syllables.

In another essay Thong had already explained the rules that luc-bat couplets observe and break. You can learn some of them intuitively by memorizing passages from the Tale of Kieu, which is written in luc-bat couplets. It is a safe bet that in any roomful of Vietnamese someone will have done this, perhaps having learned the entire poem.

English doesn't have such a couplet, though poets have often longed for one, like the iambic pentameter of Virgil or the Homeric line. When Nguyen Du wrote the Tale of

Kieu he made his formalizing gesture by looking to the verse of the people. If our classicists, in the eighteenth-century battle of the ancients and the moderns, had looked to the verse of their people rather than to Periclean Athens and Augustan Rome perhaps I wouldn't have to tell you who they were.

When Nguyen Du wrote *luc-bat* was already the form of many of the *ca dao*, the songs sung in the rice fields and sung as lullabies. There was another loose, capacious, easily memorized and improvised form for the *ke*, the ballads of current events and great moments from history that were sung in the marketplace. The New Poets stepped away from all this, from the whole range of diction that the traditional form gave them access to, so they could talk about the self.

If you wrote like you didn't live anywhere in particular you could speak of the spread of modern Romanticism to the French colonies. In fact the New Poets went to French schools and some of them wrote in French as they developed, reading the Romantics. A Vietnamese man I know from Paris has examined all this in detail.

But I am an anthropologist, struck by the way my first Vietnamese language teacher's face lit up with love as she spoke the names of the New Poets, as she taught us to address one another as family and we sensed her yearning for the nation she lost in Saigon. This sweet young person, with her little-girl voice and little-girl hair, got on an overloaded boat alone as a teenager because her aunt told her to, and made her way through a camp in Malaysia to life in Seattle where she got a job and bought a house for her mom and dad to share with her when he got out of prison.

There is yin and there is yang, and each contains the other. When Nhat Linh published the New Poets writing for the individual against the ties of tradition and the birth

family, they were also arguing for romantic love, and the family that starts, and the country whose language the lovers use to speak to one another, and to their own children.

The only chestnut of Nhat Linh I really like, of the works that are often translated and commented upon, is Anh Phai Song, where a waterman's wife deliberately drops away from him after they lose their boat in a flood. "You must live," she says, using as lovers do "Anh" the word for elder brother and "Phai" the word for moral obligation. You must live for the sake of the children.

Freedom brings ties, and romantic love for another individual in defiance of your parents can bring about another family. The break with tradition was a step towards a new national order. The greatest of the New Poets, Xuan Dieu, rebelled against Nhat Linh and the other reformers, to become one of the poets of the revolution, living openly as a gay man and writing rapturously of love in odes men would recite in the barracks while holding hands, fighting for the country they would build together.

As a lover of the New Poetry Neil is as traditional a Vietnamese nationalist as you are likely to find. He would have been already a little old-fashioned as a young man working out of Saigon in the 1960s, if he was reading Nhat Linh reprints then. Nhat Linh and Ngo Dinh Diem were dead, their texts already in language primers for foreigners.

Time goes by and books and magazines pile up. Whether and how you engage with them depends on who you are, and the circumstances of your life. The three writers Hoang Ngoc Hien promoted who became famous in the renovation period read the literature of Ha Noi in the 1930s and Saigon in the 1960s in piles of old books out on the sidewalk when they entered Saigon after 1975, in re-unification.

Bao Ninh entered with the People's Army as a rifleman on April 30 and found one of the war novels that later shaped his *Sorrow of War* out on the street. Duong Thu Huong visited later, as did the avant-gardist Nguyen Huy Thiep, on visits to see the other great city of their new nation. Huong found the abundant versions of world literature in translation and Thiep found gems of his national literary tradition.

The books were out on the street, piled on sidewalks and then circulating through vendors because as the People's Army approached a rumor spread through the town that they would burn all the books in their buildings. Crowds fearing a bloodbath were already rioting to get on helicopters and ships out of the city. What the People's Army did in fact was to secure the city.

They established authority. There was plenty of cops-and-robbers going on, with gangsters and the new police slugging it out, intelligence and counter-intelligence settling old scores and Western men slipping back into town to spirit out a girlfriend and children. But foreign aid workers, famously the Mennonites, quietly kept on with their work with the blessing of the local Viet Cong, and many patriotic officials and citizens of the Saigon government stayed on in dignity and hope to rebuild their unified nation.

It wasn't Phnom Penh. Nobody went around looking for private libraries and shooting anyone who wore glasses. The books lay in the streets and were eventually picked up by opportunists and re-sold. Slowly, over the course of months and year, the police did call in the employees of the old regime and held some of them indefinitely. Quite a few were taken out and shot. But these were tough guys, men of rank in a hard war. There was a deliberate round-up of Saigon writers and artists in 1976 but none of them were disappeared.

This was all deeply wrong, an insult to the humanity of any patriotic Vietnamese. An American thinks of Lincoln, and the Second Inaugural, and shakes his head at what could have been. He might also think of Reconstruction and Jim Crow and eighty-nine years for Marian Anderson to stand and sing on the steps of Memorial where that great address is carved and shake his head even harder at what actually has happened. People can be such beasts.

Innocent sons and daughters of those who had worked for the old government were barred from education. Worse, there was widespread poverty and frequent shortages. The first wave of those who had fled for their lives was followed by a steady seep of refugees drawn by the welcome offered by the other side and the appalled bystanders in the Cold War their nation had stumbled into.

Many took books with them, as Huong and Bao Ninh and Thiep took books back from Saigon to Ha Noi. I have found American reprints of Saigon reprints of the Ha Noi editions, as I told you. I found the books and magazines from Saigon in the 1960s in Paris, in the collections of friends and libraries. I heard from Huong and Thiep in Ha Noi about the books they found in Saigon, and two colleagues in France told me what Bao Ninh told him and her.

Reading Vietnamese literature you are going to go through something like this process, even if you just order one or two of my friends' translations from Amazon, or get some of the novels and poems coming out in English. My purpose in doing scholarship on this literature is to help you do what Phan urges his engineers to do with philosophy, to think with categories rather than in one.

What do you want to read from Viet Nam? You are reading me in English so you might be an American who knows only this one language or you might from anywhere else using the widespread second language. You might be Vietnamese, and know Vietnamese or English or French, or Russian or German or Chinese, only one or two or all of these.

In any case if you can read this I can equip you to read the literature of this nation I love in dialogue with its authors and your fellow readers as you learn to imagine this real nation by hearing what certain of its individuals have to say. You do have to go looking for them in categories.

For instance any chain bookstore in the United States likely has a bookshelf marked “Viet Nam” which is about a war. In France the situation is more complex, since France itself grew up in involvement with its colonies, and there have been many people from what is now modern Viet Nam in France for a long time. I spent a year just in Paris tracking down Vietnamese books in shops there.

When I tell you about that I will tell you why I didn’t spend so much time in French libraries. Libraries here in the United States are more open and better-funded, so I habitually stop in to see where in the Dewey Decimal or Library of Congress cataloguing system a particular one sticks its Vietnamese books. I have been especially interested in what Vietnamese books they have in Vietnamese, and where.

When I was working in France, I attended year-long seminars at two of the nation’s oldest institutions on Vietnamese literature. One of them was part of a program offering courses building toward undergraduate and graduate degrees on Viet Nam. I also attended lectures at another such program, altogether viewing three places where a student can get a degree in Vietnamese history or literature.

At an American university, the catalogue may offer an English course on post-colonial literature, or a French course on Francophone literature. If there is a Vietnamese language course the advanced course will offer some short stories or poems or maybe even a novel. The American historians of the country of Viet Nam use literature to teach Vietnamese history, and the diplomatic and political and social historians who teach the war use it to teach history of the United States.

I did fieldwork in Paris classrooms and bookstores, habitually visit United States libraries and correspond with American teachers to fish for things I can tell you about to use to teach yourself, to learn to think of Viet Nam as a nation and Vietnamese as a people. They are very much involved in these categories we find them in, they built some of them, so I direct your attention to them.

I am introducing you to the guests at the symposium. You must note who is older than you and who is younger, whether he or she has children or not, what his or her profession is, if want to address any one of them properly. But you are a guest and you can drink the fish sauce if you want, or eat the rice with your hands.

The longer your stay, the more new guests arrive, the more mixed up your life gets with that of the others, your bad manners may become rude rather than naïve. But what are they going to do, as the United States draftees used to say in the field, send you to Viet Nam? I have already started talking you into the reality of my life and yours, of eighty million Vietnamese and five billion brothers and sisters on this planet, of a waking world where the dream of an independent, unified Viet Nam has come to pass.

Follow me. I will walk you through the Vietnamese and Orientalist bookstores of Paris as I found them in student life there. Finally we will tour the Vietnamese books of



North Carolina, taking in the view from the back porch of my barn in Orange County as I work with those here interested in Vietnamese literature and history to reach a wider public.

Who is this lieutenant? Think of yourself with my sophomores in my lecture hall where Doctor Sergeant Farrell is strutting with his funny haircut and his Phi Beta Kappa key hanging from the waistcoat on his barrel chest, trying to tell the officer class of the civilians how to behave. Who is that guy?

He is one of my alter egos, *mon semblable*, *mon frere*, like you another expression of mind in dialogue with me at the moment. This is raving egoism or a really advanced view of interpersonal relations I am expressing. I can tell you what Alan thinks. He read the conference paper which Keith didn't know what to do with and said it sounded like the dissertation of Celine.

Celine is one of the minor devils of the twentieth century, an actual fascist, deliberate anti-Semite, and French collaborator with the Nazis. Still his very manuscripts were magnified to billboard size and hanging in the great windows of the National Library in Paris when I was working there. Although memorials to resistants are nailed on the walls in and around Paris and that library is the monument to a socialist head of state, the French love Celine because he wrote like a slumming angel.

Alan is a stylist too but he takes Celine as an alter ego because he was an infantryman too, one of those don't-give-a-damn moralists who walked out of the firestorm of European modernity, the savage return of colonial wars to the metropole, World War I. Alan walked out of one of the brush fires of American post-modernity, back from the edge

of empire. I have him on my stage because I want the very young men and women in my class to see what a real soldier looks like before they march off to what happens next.

So Alan thinks I write like Celine, an egoist, a man whose prose announces at every choice of word that he cares only for his own opinion. I already knew he thought I was vain, Alan thinks that leaders are like that. But in specific he wrote that my conference paper sounds like Celine's dissertation, his these de doctorat. That actually is a restrained and touching portrait of a doctor, a Jew in fact, Ignaz Semmelweiss who spent his life in service to the poor.

Yin and yang all the way down. The stage is going to fill up with people as complex as Alan and I, in as dialectic relation to one another. I have written about him early and often because of them all he actually is my friend. The rest are my teachers, colleagues, condisciples, allies and antagonists, heroes and cautionary figures: Eric and Phan and Keith and Huong and Thiep and Thong and Tam-Tai and Nhat Linh and dozens more. Some of them are friends, sure. But remember, it is Alan I am jumping after out of this airplane we are all on. Follow me.

I am writing this dissertation in dissent as I prepare a career in leadership towards a field of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam, in the United States, that is democratic and deliberative, that is used by the people who read and write the books. As a boy I trained to be a leader in our democracy.

Specifically, I am a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy. It was founded by a merchant in the first years of our republic, Samuel Phillips. He had taken active part in the revolution and was concerned at the lack of able men, those able to carry out objectives on the ground. American history is full of such initiatives by public-spirited men of business.

There are also religious schools, military schools, and schools frankly founded to strengthen solidarity among the owning class.

I went on to Yale College. Yale was founded as a religious school, a home for Calvinist orthodoxy against Unitarianism at Harvard. With the industrial revolution it became a school for building solidarity among the mill owners of Boston and the bankers of New York. During the Triangle Trade it had already done that for the Northern merchants and slavers and the planters of the Southern colonies. After World War Two it became more like a national research university.

But within Yale College there is a strong strain of the Boy Scout mentality of Exeter, of the individual addressing the needs of the nation out at the frontiers of civilization. Kingman Brewster, Jr., for example, one of the first few secular presidents of the school, co-educated the college by executive decision over the summer of 1969. He just did it.

A representative Yale of my time, a product of that decision, is Maya Lin who designed the Vietnam Veterans memorial in Washington, DC. When the university gave her an honorary doctorate for that they noted in her success a core value of the institution, that of seeing what needs to be done and doing it. That whole wall is strongly marked by Yale. Jack Wheeler, for instance, a Yale Law graduate, initiated the drive for the memorial.

When the Reagan administration tried to kill Maya's design, Jack was one of those who stood up and defied them and lobbied and pulled strings and made sure it got built. He did this in spite of the fact that he detested the design and has grown to loathe Maya. It was

the right thing, the woman had won a competition. Jack is not only Yale Law but West Point, and a Viet Nam veteran.

The individualist righteousness for the common cause that Kingman Brewster got from being one of the active members of the owning class, that Maya Lin got from a loving education by creative, academic parents, that Jack Wheeler got as an officer of the court and of the United States Army, was drilled into my head while Saigon was falling, by dedicated professionals who knew exactly what they were doing.

Phillips Exeter uses dialectic for its purpose. Phillips Andover, Kingman's school, has slid over since the early Republic towards the robber-baron end of things, but in our time Exeter has become ever more what it was founded to be. One of the robber barons, a Rockefeller partner at Standard Oil, accomplished this.

Edward Harkness rebuilt Yale in the 1930s into a Disneyland of Oxford and Cambridge, a stage set for the public life of the salad days of an owning class. He built a library like a cathedral, classroom buildings like churches, and pleasant stone walks. He replaced Colonial brick dormitories with medieval colleges, whose great halls are emptied out each weekend night in the semester for actual stage plays by the many drama societies.

He approached Exeter with something different, a stage within each classroom, to get inside each head. He bought or actually had built on site a table in each classroom to physically limit the size of the class and determine the means of instruction. All classes are by discussion. Since my day they have actually rebuilt the laboratory building so the natural sciences are also conducted around a table.

I learned math and languages and even chemistry, sitting in rows for that one, from men and women who never told me what to think. I was expected to work up the material

and come to class and defend my views. One extremist, who would deliberately offer us one wrong answer after another and never say what was right, asked us with a sneer if we thought he was our dad.

My father was appalled when he visited. He had seen something like this in the monastic galleries of Yale Law School, in debate between professors, but he was already my dad then, already an officer of the United States Marine Corps. He had found this education invaluable as he went out to practice law on his own, representing clients in a system that openly acknowledges that truth is what happens after an argument among peers, on your feet after a lot of homework.

He had sent me to Exeter, as Abraham Lincoln sent his son, as Thurgood Marshall sent his son after desegregating the public schools, because the born members of the establishment whom he met in his work who seemed to exercise legitimate authority, who showed up on-time and prepared and understood that we all enjoy privilege at the consent of the governed who work like dogs, went there. When he visited he saw how we get that way.

So that is who is addressing you about Vietnamese literature, a trained and certified member of a national cadre of self-directed managers for the United States of America. Why are you hearing about this? Why am I not telling you how Nhat Linh invented modern literature as part of the nationalist movement in Viet Nam and explicating a few key texts for you?

One reason is that I am not your dad. If you want to read this stuff, go read it. I will tell you where the books are. I will even tell you how to learn Vietnamese and French. If you want literary history or literary criticism I will tell you where they are. If instead

you want to learn to think with Vietnamese books for your own purposes outside of Viet Nam, you can have this private chat with me.

Offering such a conversation is my profession. I have spoken to you in terms of my lecture hall. I am not lecturing you now, this is a book, you can put it down and think or talk it over with a friend. You can write me a letter and mail that or not. But I am writing like a conscientious teacher setting about to explain a body of knowledge and a set of skills in a certain number of meetings.

In my actual lecture hall I taught general anthropology. It is the service course of my profession, the one that junior teachers must teach and some others love to. A few seniors, like Napoleon Chagnon and Carole Crumley, not only teach general anthropology but teach others how to. Teaching general anthropology is one of the occasions upon which an American anthropologist actually exists.

As a profession we address the whole of the human past, generalizing from evidence of three million years over the whole planet. We introduce several specific techniques and traditions of knowledge that our profession has played a role in developing: linguistics, archaeology, human evolution, ethnography, and science studies, especially the study of medicine.

Carole, who trained me as a teacher, is one of the almost none of us who has contributed to even half of these fields. Most of us, unlike Carole, are so specialized as to be unique. No wonder she likes to teach our whole profession. By contrast I am a Vietnamese literature specialist, a man of one note. I came to anthropology by sounding that one note.

I had first called departments of comparative literature. I was already contributing an article on Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam to a collection on American literature in languages other than English, edited by Marc Schell, a comparatist at Harvard. So I looked at the Harvard catalogue, and called some other departments.

I wasn't yet working on Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam. I had a few ideas I wanted to work with at the master's level, to see which I would write the dissertation on. There was funding coming up from the Social Science Research Council for United States graduate students to work with Vietnamese academics inside Viet Nam. I would be a good candidate, since I had already shown that I could work in Viet Nam.

One idea was about the life of an intelligence archive in Saigon; another was about the career of *Gone with the Wind* in Viet Nam; a third was about Vietnamese literature outside Viet Nam. So when I called up departments I said I was interested in working on Vietnamese literature and asked for the name of the right person to speak to.

After a lifetime around universities, an adult career of speaking with researchers about their writing and teaching, I caught the first whiff of the professionalism of research academics among themselves. They don't pick up the phone from nine to five as people in business do, for example, and they don't return calls from people seeking their business.

But if you call during office hours they pick up the phone and give you their undivided attention for the moment, beat, and one more moment it takes a trained mind to give an authoritative reply. Anne McClintock, the post-colonialist at Columbia, for example, told me immediately that no one at Columbia could work with me on Viet Nam.

Susanne Wofford at the University of Wisconsin thought about it longer because she was my teacher and I was her husband's best man. Jacques Lezra and I were

classmates at Exeter and Yale, and students in Susanne's comparatist courses on the Renaissance. After college she called me and my friend Peter Childers the Marlboro men of letters, to joke at our independence.

When I would later make a brief trip to Jacques' fortieth birthday party, as I prepared for fieldwork in Paris, Susanne narrated my entire career to me in the way that first made academic sense. But about Madison for graduate school she had told me that her department would have no reason to fund me, that perhaps if I brought my own funding and worked under their Asian-Americanist something could be worked out.

At Harvard, Marc suggested I would have to work on Vietnamese literature as French, or Chinese, or American literature. Marc and Susanne's extensive comments were borne out by the informed, principled, candid, exact and brief replies I was getting from literature researchers like McClintock picking up the phone at their office hours around the country.

I was not about to establish my expertise in Vietnamese literature in terms of one of three foreign invaders of Viet Nam. One way to write Vietnamese literature about in terms of Viet Nam itself would have been to work with one of the historians of Viet Nam. But I was angry with Keith and Tam Tai for staying out of Thong's attack on me, and knew that in any event I prefer to deal with one historian at a time as an outsider.

They work from documents, and so much of what I know to be true is not documented. They always talk about what is important and what I enjoy is not important at all. I called the department of comparative literature at Chapel Hill because I knew Eric worked at the university.



I got an English professor, John McGowan, who said in his bright tone, “We wouldn’t know what to do with you. But why don’t you call up Judith Farquhar in Anthropology.” I sat in my office in the Henry Luce, Jr. center at Yale, in the chair for visitors, with my hand on the phone. “Anthropology?”

I picked up the phone and dialed. Judy listened to me, said, “You are talking about the social life of texts. Nobody does that. We could teach you how. You could take a look and see if the university has the other resources you need.” I already knew that they did have the resources.

I called Eric just to make sure and heard about his box of books from Khai Tri. I was already talking with the Literature department at Duke University, twenty minutes away from Chapel Hill, where Janice Radway teaches. Jan is one of the few who have written ethnography of books.

Fredric Jameson, who founded the program, has an interest in third-world literature. He had already flown me down with Nguyen Huy Thiep, one of the renovation writers from Ha Noi, when I had arranged for Thiep to visit the States. When Fred visited Ha Noi in turn, my friend Huong the other renovation writer had bent his ear about admitting me to his program.

I was eager to go there, since they pay well. I wasn’t eager enough to apply to their English department, which admitted more people and paid just as well and would also be close to Eric. But “Literature” seemed general enough to admit Vietnamese books on my terms. I didn’t think it would happen, though.

When I visited Duke Fred had handed me off to his sergeant, the director of graduate studies, Ken Surin. Ken is a theorist, like Fred and like Judy. I told him about

my interest in books and authors and he told me about how in graduate school they study authors like Michel Foucault who questioned whether books and authors exist at all.

I had read that particular essay in French when it came out, in the library at Exeter. I had first read Foucault in the Whole Earth Catalogue as a kid. His ideas made sense to me but I went on to work with books and authors as he had also done. I just goggled at Ken, in his role as administrative officer, alluding to twenty-year old avant-gardism as a novel challenge to my life project.

Fred later called me on the phone I had called Judy on, to let me know like a man that the admissions committee had decided not to make me an offer. Ken had pointed out that no one in the university had any expertise on Viet Nam. He was making sense.

Judy pushed me for at Chapel Hill, as did a Southeast Asianist on the admissions committee, Margaret Wiener. Another member of that committee was Cathy Lutz, who works on militarism in the United States, as I had done. When I got in, Judy asked her chair for an extra thousand dollars to add to my offer.

So I had a solution. An entrepreneur, I jumped at it. An investor would have surveyed the field, would have analyzed why Chapel Hill made an offer and asked if perhaps another Anthropology department might make a better one. It is a difference of intellectual style, empiricism and intuition and pragmatism versus survey and analysis and deliberation.

It is also a matter of social class, of the relative security of the sense of entitlement. The striving son of strivers, I was anxious to take the best offer for graduate school I could find for the next year. A well-to-do person might have looked around to try again. A

worker might have got a service job near some possible programs, even at a university, and tried again.

Driven to it, I thought rationally as Judy had suggested about what I could do at Chapel Hill. I was surprised to conclude that to become a social scientist at this state university was an opportunity I did not want to miss. So I came here and became an American anthropologist.

That was not exactly what Judy had in mind. She was off in China during my first year. I did my basic training with Paul Leslie, an evolutionary ecologist, and Margaret Scarry, a paleo-ethnobotanist, and a political economist, Don Nonini.

I took Margaret Wiener's course on Southeast Asia to get to know her. I started working with Eric on the Tu Luc Van Doan to check that out as a possible dissertation topic. In a research methods course from a military historian, Richard Kohn, I looked into my intelligence archives project.

Pushing for Vietnamese literature and nothing but Vietnamese literature I had arrived in the most general of the modern disciplines, a polyarchy of a profession. If you think we are muddle-headed, just try standing up to make sense about the humanities in a room of natural scientists and social scientists, including yourself. Try evaluating their research in a job search.

Even talking to outsiders, as in my lecture hall, I had three advanced graduate students from other sub-disciplines working as teaching assistants, listening to me. It was my job to introduce all of their fields as well as my own while narrating the human past from the emergence of primates forward and surveying the human present around the world in fifteen weeks, two lectures each week.

We joke that if you can do this with a straight face you really are an anthropologist. One of the textbooks available comes from an unsmiling project near Yale, an old piece of 1950s social science, which digests and codes all the ethnographic research it can find. You can consult the Human Relations Area Files, for example, to survey the variety of marriage customs attested.

Their textbook stresses the diversity of human life. I use a textbook that takes a more generalizing approach based on human evolution, strong on archaeology as well ethnography. Marvin Harris is one of the people like Carole who have actually contributed to most of our fields. When he died he was still pushing for a general theory of human life, a predictive, testable proposition that would square with the material evidence produced by anthropology's different methods.

His textbook reads like 1950s science fiction, an utterly sober, wisecracking, hilariously debunking crackerbarrel rant. I am a science fiction fan since my childhood in the 1960s. When I say that Marvin Harris reads like 1950s science fiction I mean specifically that he sounds just like his contemporary Isaac Asimov, the champion writer who helped found the first fan's club, the first convention, and the first author's association for American science fiction.

It is not to say that there is anything shaky about Harris' science. Isaac Asimov for that matter was a doctorate and professor of biochemistry and author of a great many more textbooks and popular science than of fiction. It is to say that Harris writes with a smart-ass, materialist, tone that students can relate to.

One of the things I teach in my lecture hall is that you do not have to agree with the textbook or like its author. I use my training in linguistics and science studies to challenge

the ideas of Harris, who is hilariously weak on these fields. I engage with him directly by teaching my own method in anthropology. I have been calling it ethnography.

Another professional, stressing the subject matter, might call himself a cultural anthropologist. I am not a cultural anthropologist. I am a Vietnamese literature specialist trained in American anthropology, doing ethnography. I stress the method to say that it is not instrumental, as many social scientists speak of ethnography as one of several qualitative methods they might employ.

Ethnography is one of these words scientists make up from Greek to stress that we know what we are doing and you don't. It means writing about people, in the sense of a people. An ethnos in Athens was actually one of what Romans called a tribe within the urbs, for Greeks the polis, the city-state. The individuals of the ethnos actually were related, what we might call a clan.

We often use ethnography in the sense of studying a people outside the city walls and the state's frontiers, like the German tribes the Romans encountered in their conquests. Cultural anthropologists around the world look back to the work of Bronislaw Malinowski who set up camp in a town on an island in the Pacific and wrote a book about the entire way of life of the Trobriand people.

He established his discipline in Britain where they continue very strong on socio-cultural anthropology. On the continent they are ethnologists, for example the big museum of the profession in Paris is an ethnological museum. The Greek suffix in "ethnology" suggests a systematic body of knowledge, as in theology or geology, rather than the method or product of writing suggested by "ethnography."

You go off somewhere and come back with a systematic knowledge, often a collection, of a people. Cultural anthropologists everywhere do this, or carry out their own small project with the sense that a field of colleagues is doing it overall. Unsurprisingly, the European nations remain strong on doing this in their former colonies. It may surprise you that the former colonies maintain an active interest in doing this on themselves.

Vietnamese anthropologists, for example, work hard on developing systematic understanding of the different peoples of Viet Nam, especially the highland peoples. It is very like the work of our Smithsonian Institution, which grew in study of the native peoples of the Americas. As a matter of fact, my friend Frank Proschan does his linguistic research on the peoples of mainland Southeast Asia out of an office in the Smithsonian.

What I admire about Frank, and the Vietnamese ethnologists I meet when he shows them around our country, and many of the cultural anthropologists I know, is the way they relate to people: with warmth and integrity and respect and reciprocity. In Viet Nam the behavior of visiting, of paying a call on a village or a household, or sojourning among another people, digs deep into traditions of daily life and of modern history.

Vietnamese people are accustomed to thinking of others in fictive family relationships, of working to flesh out these fictions. They take gifts along on casual visits in their own neighborhood. A field trip is just more of the same, and moreover is a skill that played a role in the creation of the modern nation.

The revolutionary Ho Chi Minh himself was a sojourner all his adult life, his last field trip being among the highland peoples north of Ha Noi who sheltered him and worked with him to fight the French. Ho Chi Minh died in a traditional house-on-stilts which highlanders built for him in Ha Noi. The present head of the Vietnamese state is widely

held to be Ho Chi Minh's natural son by a highlander who washed his clothes in the mountain days.

I foreground the method, the way Frank and his colleagues behave, in front of the body of knowledge they seek to create. My people are those of the Vietnamese book outside of Viet Nam. They don't live in the same place, they are not related, and they do not speak the same language. I do not work in the hope of creating a coherent body of knowledge about them.

I place emphasis on method, the ethnography itself. Anthropologists like me look back to the writing Malinowski did in the field while he was gathering the materials for his ethnology of the Trobriands. He squatted in a hole in the ground, a true savage among decent citizens, and took down a diary of his subjective impressions of life.

He was having a hard time and what he wrote is as hateful as anything in Celine, using words I won't quote. But he was there and he was writing. He put his body out in harm's way and wrote about what happened to him. I admire his courage and honesty and regard his insane racist scribbles as a caution, an example of what happens if you try to do ethnography all by yourself.

"Ethnography" suggests meanings to me that have taken a long walk away from the Greek roots my predecessors cobbled it from. Often the people who hammer these words together are overly impressed by people like me who use Greek and Latin and French. The main point of an education in classical and modern languages is not to be impressed by hocus pocus and legerdemain.

A bit of swank to impress the civilians when they raise their heads from the trough, that's fine, if you want to be a snob. The right word to lend grace, the fine distinction to

help thinking along. But a proper definition suggests something about roots and then draws meanings from practice. For example, "ethnography" lately is used among us in exchange with the word "fieldwork."

Fieldwork is what Alan would call a scare badge, something a soldier wears on his chest which shows that his body has been in harm's way. Who knows why you might have a silver star or campaign ribbon. Lyndon Baines Johnson won those as a congressman.

But a Purple Heart means that you were wounded and the Combat Infantryman's Badge means that you have walked with a rifle, a mortar, or a machine gun towards men walking towards you with a rifle. When an anthropologist asks about another, "Where did she do fieldwork?" the question is not where but did she put herself in jeopardy.

What has she done that was inconvenient, subject to the command and pleasure of others, in order to learn? Scare badges scare other professionals because they show that you have been scared. Soldiers get one for jumping out of an airplane, for example. Ethnography takes place in the field, not in the lecture hall, the seminar, the laboratory or the library. It is research done where the researcher is not in charge.

Bronislaw Malinowski scribbled his hateful diaries while detained by the British as an enemy alien during World War I. He took the opportunity to isolate himself among people whose language he didn't speak very well and whose community he had no intention of joining. He surrendered his humanity to gather the notes that he would use to fashion himself as the kind of liberal subject we call a British socio-cultural anthropologist.

Where did you do your fieldwork, we now ask, and what we mean is tell me how you are one of us, how have you abandoned the rights and privileges of a human being to assert yourself as one of our kind of individual? Of course, not everyone does fieldwork



that way. Many people do like the Vietnamese ethnologists, paying calls, sojourning among their informants like visiting relatives.

They are some of the most kind and responsible people I know, splendid human beings. Their informants light up around them. Many anthropologists who work in this manner lead our profession in the United States. Some of them are so conscientious as to have carried out a debate about the ethnographer, the fieldworker, as a person in power over the informants, rather than a lost soul.

I resemble the Malinowski of the field much more than the more human kind of fieldworker, for example my friend Nora Taylor who works in the art worlds of Viet Nam. Nora trained and works in art history but she is one of the ethnographers I know personally whom I most admire. While Nora was hanging shows and writing catalogues, visiting and hosting among the painters and art dealers of Ha Noi and beyond, I went barking mad in my hotel room.

My publishing business fell apart in business disagreements with colleagues in and out of the country. I was bundled out of Ha Noi and I later found that I am "banned for life" from the country. Those are in fact two of my scare badges among Viet Nam country experts, that my work has been thwarted by Thong, one of the most accomplished exile intellectuals, and by the secret police of Viet Nam. These were rough experiences and I would not demand an equivalent from anyone I would train.

In graduate training I have arrived at a method of ethnography that brings me out of Malinowski's hole in the ground without sending me off as an honored guest to the homes of my research subjects. It leads me back to the church, or the trading post, or the

headquarters where the missionaries and merchants and military men stayed as they dealt with the Trobrianders, to set up my own shop.

I do ethnography in public places, on public people doing public things. If some Vietnamese show up and want to do business, fine. I don't want to get inside anyone's head, or in their home, or to represent their community. I carry out my role as an author and publisher among the people I find around Vietnamese books.

To deal with authors as a publisher, with publishers as an author, is to engage in personal relationships with public creatures. I do in fact have lifetime relations of friendship and family and community as well as business with many of the people of the Vietnamese book. What's it to you? You are not going to hear about them from me.

I write about people and things that are already in the public record, much as an historian does. This scandalizes some of my colleagues, and many of the people who look to anthropology for the inside story. Malinowski called on us to shun the trading post, the church, the military barracks, to squat among the villagers. Why is what I do anthropology?

For one thing, I am definitely a fieldworker, just look at my scare badges. I have also earned a master's degree. This dissertation by explaining my work will become my doctorate. There are plenty of anthropologists who are much more far out. How to do ethnography is a matter of ethics, one of those concerns they taught me to deal with at Exeter and Yale where there are no answers that are right or even satisfactory and you have to decide.

In ethics a great deal depends on who you are and what the others are doing. One reason I dissent from much of ethnography in dealing with the people of the Vietnamese

book is that I see no call to represent Vietnamese culture. Malinowski by contrast was doing what we call salvage ethnography. When World War I started to break up the imperial order he was out taking notes on one of the peoples whose way of life would vanish in the next spasm of the world system.

The idea was to document people who had no history and whom history would soon annihilate. But at that very moment the people of the Vietnamese book were lending a hand in making history, in making Viet Nam a part of world history. Their contribution has been to make Vietnamese books that speak for themselves.

I wouldn't care if all of my area studies colleagues from outside Viet Nam just called it a day and went home simply to translate highlights from the last century of books in Vietnamese. But their Vietnamese colleagues don't want them to leave, and they are all doing good work that I will use. Remember, my position is always in dissent in polyarchy, speaking out for myself without any expectation that everyone else is going to do things my way all the time.

I do seek to persuade and I certainly resent any interference with my work. But I am not in charge and don't want to be. I recognize that someone or other is going to be in charge. I am a tradesman on the square, taking things as they come and trying to get my work done. Part of this work has been to explain to you who I am.

"Enough about you, let's talk about me," says the post-modern anthropologist to his informant, "Enough about me, let's talk about what you think about me." That joke betrays the anxiety we feel about being ridiculous, about showing up in the field or the lecture hall and talking about ourselves rather than our people. I can ward off that anxiety in many ways.

I know, for one, that the bulk of my work has been anonymous. I arrange visits for Vietnamese writers, drive them to and from the airport and so on. I prepare manuscripts. I raise money. I have done a lot of warehouse work with Vietnamese books. I answer questions from the public and provide introductions and make suggestions to non-specialists starting Vietnamese studies, or specialists who need some literature.

Often when I am doing this people ask me, “Why are you involved in Viet Nam?” and I brush them off. They are asking about me, why I am not Vietnamese or a Viet Nam veteran. I imagine they would like to hear about some family connection. At those times I don’t want to tell the public about myself.

Indeed, when I asked Diane Fox, one of the other anthropologists who does a lot of this work to write me a letter of recommendation she had to ask me what my own work is anyway. I was asking her to comment as an individualist scholar on me as an individualist researcher, when both of us know each other through selfless, collectivist work.

So when I talk about myself now I can tell myself that most of the time I don’t. I am doing it now because that is the kind of story this is, one where you hear from the projectionist instead of just looking at the movie, a magic lantern show where the missionary talks. It is that kind of story because it is ethnography of books and book people.

Books have jackets and booksellers wear clothes and put cartoons on the cash register. I am inviting you into my shop, where you will get a good idea of who is introducing you to Vietnamese books outside of Viet Nam. In person people simply scream out to you who they are even without saying a word.

The dimmest student knows things about the most reticent lecturer, at the end of the course, that neither will ever learn about himself. When Max Weber tried to distinguish science from politics he spoke of the lecturer ascending his platform to speak, to make it plain that a man was trying to tell the truth.

I am stepping onto my platform and letting you take a look at me as I introduce the topic of the day. Present your characters, present the play, Bertolt Brecht told his actors as they fought Hitler together in Weimar, but remain yourself, a person of your times speaking to the others. If they demand illusion and say you are no artist, he told them, reply that they then are not human beings, “a worse reproach by far.”

But indeed writing this feels like too much already about myself, about my profession and my method. It has been about seven pages, about a quarter of this whole introduction so far. Shall I add that I am about six feet tall, about two hundred pounds, and wear a crew cut? Like many Asianists I favor short-sleeved shirts.

“They told me to look for the guy who looks like a vet,” an author told me when she found my book table at a conference once. I was born in 1960, one of a cohort of American men who did not even have to register for the Cold War draft. As a child I was aware of the bombings of Ha Noi and the killings at My Lai and would not have joined the United States Air Force or the United States Army with a gun to my head.

It pained me that I wasn’t any more willing to join the United States Marine Corps as my father had. I was not thinking clearly enough to join the Coast Guard, even though I worked on boats. I took pains as I went through Yale and got into area studies to have nothing to do with the Central Intelligence Agency. But most of the adult men I grew up

around and came to work with have had something to do with one or another of these outfits.

Their ways surely have rubbed off on me as much as Vietnamese language has, and French, and virtuoso English, as much as Exeter and Yale and publishing and anthropology and fieldwork have formed me. Do you have the picture of this projectionist, your bookseller, the man on the platform? Let us return to the feature presentation:

Forty years ago a man I admire took poison. He left a letter to his fellow citizens. The suicide and the letter were gestures against the president of his republic, whose agents were on their way to arrest my hero. His plot against the president had been discovered. Soon afterwards that president and his brother fell victim to another plot. Not long after that, the president of my country was murdered.

The ill accomplished in Viet Nam by the United States lay in that we invaded that country to fight Russia and China. We disregarded our allies, for example watching President Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Nhu go to their deaths. We thought of our allies and enemies alike as points on a map to be bombed, agents to be bribed, opponents to be gamed, rather than as men and women who wanted to have a country.

Nevertheless they succeeded in that purpose. My hero was one of the leaders responsible for this great historical achievement of the century I was born in, the establishment of an independent nation of Viet Nam. As an author he is known by his pen name Nhat Linh, which means first in spirit. As a politician he is also known by his given name Nguyen Tuong Tam.

Often I have a conversation with some other man where I am talking about Nhat Linh and he is talking about Nguyen Tuong Tam. His literary and his political achievements are linked. He was born outside Ha Noi, in Tonkin, one of three colonies and two protectorates that jostled with the kingdom of Siam and the British colony of Burma across mainland Southeast Asia. He died outside Saigon, in one of two republics with a claim to govern Viet Nam, one or the other recognized by every sovereign nation.

His work as a writer and a publisher, as an activist and a politician, played a major role in this transformation. I don't enjoy most of Nhat Linh's writing and I disagree with much of Nguyen Tuong Tam's politics but I admire him for the actions he took to make what for me is a great moral point of our time: that Viet Nam is a nation and Vietnamese are people who have the right to speak and act for themselves.

The death by poison of Nhat Linh Nguyen Tuong Tam, lost in the world he summoned into being, in opposition to a government whose conditions of possibility he brought about, is the starting point of my doctoral dissertation on the ethnography of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam because suicide was his step out of Viet Nam itself. The police arrived and he was gone.

The suicide of my hero merely pointed to the fact that he and his literature had been stepping outside of Viet Nam all his life. He left Tonkin for Paris as a young man, returning to write his first work of note about that trip. He lent a hand in the creation of a publishing industry, and a reading public in Tonkin, took part in the first coalition government of Ho Chi Minh, then fled to Shanghai. He returned to Ha Noi while the French war raged and republished his books.

Surfacing in the south, he set up in a hermit's shack in the woods near Da Lat well away from the Ngo Dinh Diem government in Saigon. The books of his first flowering, from Tonkin days, were already in nostalgic reprints in Saigon. When that city fell to the People's Army ten years later many books fled overseas with the people, who shot the Saigon reprints for photo offset editions in Houston and Sydney.

I have found them when I go looking for Vietnamese books in France and the United States. Not everywhere, not all the time. The first one I found in North Carolina was taped shut in a plastic sleeve and sitting on top of a book display case full of music videos. Between my first and second visit to one store in Paris the tattered sign above a shelf giving the name of Nhat Linh's literary movement was taken down.

Things change. When I was first visiting bookstores in Ha Noi of course no books of this collaborationist reactionary were sold. Since then the complete works of the great early nationalist are widely distributed in handsome new editions, scholarly and popular. I am not allowed to visit bookstores in Viet Nam, but I have found the new editions in the Vietnamese government bookstores in France.

Critical and popular reputations, the creation and destruction of canons are grist for my mill. I often don't take part in them, I always read the books they issue. I am a creature of second-hand shops and archives, a man with a wallet full of library cards and an extensive acquaintance among publishers and booksellers. I live my life so I can read what I want and I write to help you do the same.

How can you read Vietnamese literature? How can you step into Viet Nam? Nhat Linh is famous because he addressed this question with practical solutions. After coming back to Ha Noi from Paris, Nhat Linh and a brother took over a dying magazine and made it a popular success, one that scholars still read. Remember, there was no Viet Nam at that time.

There was a Vietnamese language, and a Vietnamese script, and a tradition of Vietnamese literature. He published the new writers and called on his readers to become new writers too, running literary contests and recruiting the winners as contributors and then publishing and promoting collections of their work as authors.

Speaking to the (later Saigon) readership as writers, Nhat Linh titled his last book *Write and Read the Novel*. It is not well known. I first saw it in the Vietnamese bookcase by the chair for students in the office of Eric Henry at Asian Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Eric bought it at Khai Tri, the famous bookseller, when he was a soldier for the United States on leave in Saigon for a day.

He had told me about his trips in to visit Khai Tri and about the box of books he had shipped home. I sat in the office and read the bookcase when he took phone calls. *Write and Read the Novel* stood



out with the distinctive look of a book from Saigon in the 1960s sitting thirty years later in an office in North Carolina.

Eric's copy has the stamp of Khai Tri on it. It's a famous name because there are now Khai Tri bookstores on three continents, borrowing the prestige of the great original. The one I visit in Paris, where the name of Nhat Linh's movement vanished from the shelf, also sells sandwiches.

Write and Read the Novel, by Nhat Linh from the Self-Reliance Literary Movement is something a person might pick up to improve himself, to get some straight talk about what literature is and what you might do with it. I picked my copy off Eric's shelf and here I am telling you what Vietnamese literature can be in my country.

It is already here. (Several) of the original Vietnamese migrants to the US (after World War II have) translated a pile of it and so have a couple of the others. The people who came in the 70s and 80s and 90s have established their own presses and magazines in Vietnamese. Eric and the other soldiers and diplomats and activists from the 60s have done philology, writing translations and criticism and history and preparing texts, as have social workers who worked with the refugees later.

Young Vietnamese here are publishing in English, and a new generation of scholars, both traditional and returning students like myself, are moving through the university. When Thong was at work he was almost the only American who could write an evaluation on university letterhead to the tenure committee of someone who had published on Vietnamese literature.

When I was looking for a graduate school the University of North Carolina was almost the only one with a Vietnamese literature specialist on salary who could tell people I wasn't making things up. Soon there will be several, some already have tenure already and more are on the track. We won't be a discipline, or a department, but we will have a field of scholars and an object of study.

We will make the point that Vietnamese people have a Vietnamese nation and speak for themselves in the affairs of the world. We will

make that point in polyarchy, speaking from unexpected points of view and engaging with the rest of the educational system in ways too complicated and alive to anticipate. We will be motivated by beauty, an admiration for particular books and authors, and we will succeed or fail as students and readers are entertained.

Follow me. Let's jump out of the airplane. Are we over Saigon and the Republic of Viet Nam or Ha Noi and the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, or over the unified Socialist Republic? Are we Legionnaire paratroopers jumping a hundred feet over Tonkin to die with our comrades from many nations in the trenches at Dien Bien Phu? Are we doing a demonstration jump into a parking lot in Little Saigon in Westminster, California for a Veterans' Day celebration?

It will be a flight of fancy. I have never jumped out of any airplane, would not lead you toward a machine gun, have no military experience whatsoever. I am talking about reading and writing books outside of Viet Nam, in a world where Viet Nam is a nation and Vietnamese are people. I am telling you one way to become alive and think of other people as human beings.

In a book read around the world among Vietnamese long before it evangelized North Carolina, whose readers developed the modern Vietnamese script, which is now by far the most widely read Vietnamese and Spanish and English book in North Carolina, Jesus says, "Follow me." When I spoke at the Columbia, South Carolina, book fair last winter the man who followed me on the panel remarked that I was a Baptist preacher.

When I described this dissertation to a Saigon author working near here in Chapel Hill, Ly Lan, I told her it was a tuy but, a kind of Vietnamese travel essay where you follow, tuy, the pen, but, going from one thing to another to show the countryside and to

make a point. That is the spirit of the thing, evangelist, associative, using down-home examples to talk you into the kingdom. I am going to tell you about literature outside of Viet Nam.

I will walk you through the Vietnamese and Orientalist bookstores of Paris as I found them in student life there. Finally we will tour the Vietnamese books of North Carolina, taking in the view from the back porch of my barn in Orange County as I work with those here interested in Vietnamese literature and history to reach a wider public.

Do you follow me?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE VIETNAMESE AND ORIENTALIST BOOKS OF PARIS, FRANCE**

Two hundred years ago a man marched north from Saigon to Ha Noi and established an empire with a capital at Hue. When the last of his dynasty handed over the empire to Ho Chi Minh in 1945, he did it in Ha Noi. Though the Vietnamese tourist brochures refer to Hue as the ancient capital, they are translating the French *ancien*, and mean “former.”

Hue as a national capital is as old as Washington, DC. Viet Nam remains still what the United States was in 1804, a strip of coastline with some river navigation into the hinterlands from a few cities. Washington remains what Hue was, a place where people could agree to have a capital. Hue is still situated in the middle of the realm.

When Nguyen Anh marched north with his army he took advantage of a rebellion against his rivals to settle a division between Ha Noi and Saigon, to establish what have become the modern boundaries of Viet Nam. Vietnamese language teachers will explain to foreign students that Viet Nam is like two rice baskets balanced on a pole, referring to Ha Noi and Saigon.

They are rice baskets because Ha Noi is on the delta of the Red River and Saigon is on the delta of the Mekong. Wet rice, rice that matures transplanted into standing water, is the great crop of mainland Southeast Asia. The nations in that part of the world are named after the peoples who control the places with standing fresh water.

The Khmer rule Cambodia, the Lao rule Laos, the Thai rule Thailand, and the Viet people rule Viet Nam. The rice is in baskets because women in Viet Nam carry loads on two baskets balanced over one shoulder. The load can total two hundred pounds.

That would be rocks and earth, carried from one place to another to make bricks, or a road, or a berm for a rice field. Women plant and transplant the rice plants, and carry the processed rice to market in their baskets. When a Vietnamese speaker tells you that Viet Nam is like two rice baskets, he or she will likely know all this but you might not.

The simple representation is that of the outline of the borders of the modern nation of Viet Nam. Saigon, on the fertile Mekong delta, is one rice basket and Ha Noi on the fertile Red River delta is the other. Hue is on the long thin strip of land that connects them.

Just like two baskets on a pole, which the speaker has seen every day of his or her life but you haven't. So the image must be explained and all this stuff about rice and women comes out. In Paris I would meet out-of-town visitors at my regular place for dinner and tell them things like this using the restaurant decorations as a prop.

There is the outline of the country, for instance. They cut wood with a jigsaw or mold plastic and mount clockwork in it. It is Viet Nam abstracted from the world any nation's boundaries define themselves against. I would say, well, at six to eleven o'clock it bounds the South China Sea.

It's actually illegal to call it that in print in Vietnamese in Viet Nam, it is the Eastern Sea. From eleven to one o'clock is China itself. The People's Republic claims islands offshore of Viet Nam which the Ha Noi government also claims.

Ha Noi doesn't want people naming the sea for China, or even suggesting that the sea is south of China, when it is also east of Viet Nam. It is west of the Philippines and north of Malaysia and Indonesia for that matter, and all of these governments lay claim to islands in the sea because there is oil under the bed.

From one o'clock down to four or so the border is with Laos, a mountain country where most people can't grow wet rice. The Vietnamese army operates freely within Laos. They picked up an invading army of exiles there after unification, for instance. Alan fought the Ha Noi army there during his war, on their supply route to southern Viet Nam.

In the French days the protectorate of Tonkin actually included the capital of Laos. I've met Vietnamese in Paris and the United States who worked there as administrators. Today the Ha Noi government tends to look straight through the country at the next one, Thailand. Laos itself is like the Eastern Sea, a big thick border.

People fleeing Viet Nam from Saigon would head east or south to the island nations of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. People heading out from Ha Noi might go overland into China, by road over the sharply-defined border, or more likely walk through Laos to the refugee camps in Thailand.

The most desperate may have headed south from Saigon, where from four o'clock to six off the edge of the clock on the restaurant wall is Cambodia. If Laos is a thick border between Viet Nam and Thailand, Cambodia is a battleground between Viet Nam and invaders. In the old days the invaders were from the court at Siam, before they established Thailand.

Most recently it was China and the United States, backing the Cambodian Communists, famous as the Khmer Rouge. They had been a sister party to the one in Ha

Noi but after seizing Cambodia in 1975 they came after Viet Nam. Their country already had been devastated by the United States.

Before 1975 our Air Force dropped a two-thousand pound bomb in every square acre of the eastern provinces of Cambodia to attack the southern end of the supply route from Ha Noi to the revolution in the South. They had been doing something like that over Laos for years. The bombing was so illegal that there weren't even written orders for the missions.

One pilot has remarked that he could just as legally have dropped his load on Paris. Actually, for the missions over Cambodia they were getting specific instructions from one of President Richard Nixon's men in Phnom Penh, Thomas Enders. Nixon himself was sending congratulations specifically to Alan on his missions in Laos. The White House and Ha Noi disregarded national boundaries in their focus on each other.

Beijing and Ha Noi do the same, but their two countries actually touch at a clearly marked line on the road. When China sent her allies, the Khmer Rouge, over the southern borders of Viet Nam, they sent their own People's Army over the northern border in 1979. My friend the novelist Duong Thu Huong was one of many patriotic veterans to drop everything and head north.

This was a fight for the nation, something that has happened before and everyone expects to happen again. When delegations from the United States started visiting Ha Noi again in the 1980s they were struck to see that the wars represented in the military museum were almost all those with China. The curators' view was that the wars with France and the United States were accidents, incidents really, a matter of tourists misbehaving.

China never goes away. One way to translate the name of Viet Nam itself is that it is where the Viet people live here in the South, Nam. South of China, that is. It translates into Chinese as South of Yueh, a region of the Central Kingdom. Viet Nam is a southern realm, one of those places like Korea and Burma and Tibet that can't ignore China. Beijing used to maintain a special court for them to come offer tribute.

None of this is on the mirrored wall of the restaurant. You move your gaze over my shoulder off the border of the clock and you are looking at the reflections of the other guests. Some individual workers and merchants and fisher families leave Viet Nam quietly to settle in one neighboring country or another, but when the refugees left en masse they found themselves in the great world, plucked out of the sea or flying directly to camps and then off to some place far away from Southeast Asia.

We are in a restaurant in Paris and I am talking you through the decorations. I come here for the beef noodle soup. I found the place by walking this street and smelling for the soup I liked best. Theirs is special, *dac biet*, and I assumed it was the owner's family recipe and that he or she had named the restaurant, Ben Thanh, after the home village.

It was my first trip to Paris as an anthropologist and I thought the retail strip on Avenue de Choisy south of Place D'Italie was the Vietnamese section of town. Phan had brought me to a place on a side street off the avenue for dinner on my holiday trip. Three years later I came back for a week to check out possibilities for research.

I liked the soup and ate there night after night, and came back at least once a week when later I worked in Paris for a year. Pho is like a hamburger de luxe, an ordinary dish



that is better eaten out. It can be cheap and greasy or kind of wonderful. The best stuff is middle-priced and expensive pho is nothing special.

The best places make only pho, but some places that also offer other dishes can be okay. You definitely want a place that makes either chicken or beef pho, not both. The broth has certain spices you can buy mixed in a bag in a market.

Ben Thanh's pho is *dac biet* because it isn't from a mix, it's special, I haven't had pho exactly like it anywhere else. That's just the spice – the rest of a bowl of soup is the same everywhere, flat rice noodles and meat, with sprouts and leaves and peppers and lime you mix in to taste.

When you get the noodles dry at the market you ask for pho. Flat wheat noodles by contrast are called *wheat, mi*. Wheat bread, *banh mi*, is instantly recognizable as a short French baguette. “*Banh*” is obviously French “*pain*.” A Paris baker I met on his holiday in Ha Noi was in ecstasy that the Vietnamese were still using an earlier, superior, method of baking the bread.

Some say that pho noodles are called after the soup, rather than the other way around, and that pho is obviously from *pot au feu*, the French beef and chicken and what have you soup of the countryside. That's not obvious to everyone, for example immigrant children in the United States often speak of noodle, as in *mom give me five dollars so I can get a bowl of noodle*.

That's a straight translation, after all, and it sounds like the familiar Ramen instant noodle meal. Who knows? The origins of noodle soup are like the origins of baseball or cricket, something hotly discussed from the moment the issue became important to people who document life. Before that it is undocumented.

You can't demonstrate anything conclusive from the evidence available but your own position and desires. The people who first wrote about pho were French-educated Vietnamese nationalists, very interested in local color and the characteristics of their people. They also wrote about the cyclo, the pedicab, and their drivers who lived on pho when they could get it.

They published these things in the first magazines. They also cooked up a national costume. Here in Ben Thanh, for example, you can see the lacquer paintings of four women in Vietnamese dress, ao dai. In some restaurants they are dolls.

Lacquer painting is something that Vietnamese are proud of inventing. They won't give you an argument about it, as they imply that people have been eating pho and wearing ao dai forever. Specific students developed lacquer painting at the Ecole de Beaux Arts d'Indochine at Ha Noi in the last days of French rule. It approaches easel painting on a flat surface with the materials used to protect wooden temple gods from the weather.<sup>1</sup>

The lacquer painting at Ben Thanh is a vertical plank. The Ha Noi woman is at the top, Hue in the center, and the one from Saigon at the bottom. Each one is wearing a different cut of a chemise, ao, cut long, dai, over loose pants.

I can never remember which style represents which region, and I am not certain that everyone else does. The point is that there are three regions to Viet Nam, the north, middle, and the south. The Vietnamese bookstore in Charlotte, North Carolina, for example, is called Southern Region, Mien Nam, where Saigon is.

When I first stopped by and ate soup with him the bookstore owner remarked that I use the accent of the northern region, where Ha Noi is. It's the easy one for a bookish

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<sup>1</sup> Taylor, Nora. *Painters in Ha Noi: An Ethnography of Vietnamese Art*. Honolulu: University Hawaii Press, 2004.

person to learn, clearly distinguishing all the written tones of the language. My first teacher from Ha Noi was an extremist, one of those people who hyper-correctly pronounces archaisms in orthography, as some Americans say the-ater for theater.

Saigon people often pronounce as the same words that aren't spelled the same at all, as everyone must do in English, but which is not necessary in Vietnamese. Around Hue they characteristically swallow the words, as if you were conversing with a frog. Linguists have shown that these habits intensify back into the hinterlands of Hue to shade into the language of the Muong.

The fourth woman on the lacquered board is some kind of national minority. She is perhaps a Muong since she is placed near Hue, below Ha Noi and above Hue. She wears the everyday dress of many rural Vietnamese all over the nation. The GIs called them black pajamas, and that is what they look like.

In the cities, retired men will shuffle around the park in actual pajamas, in subdued patterns with pressed lapels, to signal that they are not to be bothered. The ao ba ba, the "black pajamas", is a work outfit worn by men and women in the rice fields. Revolutionaries in the south wore them to fit in with the farmers, or because they were farmers.

Nowadays farmers as often wear army fatigues and a pith helmet, or shorts and a t-shirt. The woman on the plank is also wearing a backpack, woven of something like wicker. That is, it is a representation on a lacquered wood surface of an artifact of flexible wood made waterproof with lacquer.

The Muong woman wears a pack on her back to represent the work of the minorities in making handicrafts, and also in trade. The Viet people, the rice farmers from

the Red River delta, are very much involved in their nation with other peoples. Both the Ha Noi and the Saigon republic took this very seriously, setting up offices to deal with them.

Ha Noi was in line with the People's Republic of China in this policy, miraculously discerning about the same number of "national minorities" in Viet Nam as in China.

Saigon was in line with the interest of the United States in recruiting highland minorities to fight Ha Noi. Alan led highland people into Laos to fight the Vietnamese.

The French had already done quite a bit of this, some say actually inventing the idea of the "montagnard", mountain person, now a common name in English as well for these peoples. It certainly sounds better than "hillbilly." That is what it means in French, when one French person calls another one that.

But neither the French nor the Americans, nor Saigon or Ha Noi or Beijing or Josef Stalin and his doctrine of nationalities are responsible for the fact that there are highlanders and lowlanders in mainland Southeast Asia. That lady on the plank is wearing wicker because it's quaint, but the wicker is a pack because trade brings the different peoples in Viet Nam together.

She's between Ha Noi and Hue because the hinterland people there, the Muong, might as well be Vietnamese. Linguists outside Viet Nam say that they speak the same language. Vietnamese anthropologists are more likely to say that Muong are the ancestors of the Vietnamese.

We shun that line of thinking in the United States. The Muong, obviously, have been the contemporaries of the Viets for some time. In Britain, the principal academic who

developed socio-cultural anthropology after Malinowsky wrote about his own work in what is now Myanmar to generalize about situations like that of the Viets and the Muong.

Sir Edmund Leach had to rewrite his book several times because the Japanese army chased him from place to place when he was in the field and he lost his materials. His big idea is poetic, widely applicable. He observed that in mainland Southeast Asia the difference between highland and lowland is political, rather than a matter of race or lineage.

People live in the lowlands to control the rice paddies, and people live in the highlands to avoid the control of those in the lowlands. An individual might drift down from the highlands and blend in perfectly well, and even arrive at a position of influence. An individual from the lowlands might do the same.

Certainly Viet anthropologists sojourn among the Muong, and Vietnamese government is peppered with Muong politicians. In Huong's novel about the land reform, Tam's father runs off to the highlands and settles and raises kids there. His suicide comes when he cannot reconcile that life with that of the wife and daughter in his home village.

My friend the avant-gardist Nguyen Huy Thiep was running a restaurant in a highland house on stilts just at the edge of Ha Noi when I got to know him. It was in memory of his war years as an instructor in the highlands, teaching the government officials who had joined the Vietnamese revolution straight from the forest, with no prior schooling.

Men loved to come to Thiep's restaurant and eat the game dishes prepared there. More than once some really tough guy got drunk and cried on my arm over the restaurant table about how much he loved Thiep's writing, because it is the soul of Viet Nam.

This would happen in a house on stilts, remember, like the one Ho Chi Minh died in. Thiep's first stories, the ones that gestated for a decade and took his country by storm, are set among the Black Thai of the Son La he taught in. If I wasn't at Thiep's restaurant I might be out at a fashion show, where there would always be a dance number with generic highlanders dressed up for all the world like Red Indians, with feathers.

The relationship between highland and lowland that Sir Edmund Leach discerned in mainland Southeast Asia is political. It involves many strictly individual stories, and involves cultural representations, but there is a business end to it. Neil, for example, works with the consequences of the forcible settlement of lowland Vietnamese in the highlands, and the rape of the highland forest for export by the Vietnamese.

The Black Thai who Thiep lived among are in the highlands because they are not in charge in Thailand or Laos or in Viet Nam. When Viet Nam apes China and celebrates its national minorities it is keeping everyone in line. Besides the colorful Muong, living ancestors of the Vietnamese, the smiling lady on the board with her wicker basket, there are many peoples who would much rather not be in Viet Nam.

The Cham, for instance, are the survivors of a civilization that flourished throughout the central part of Viet Nam, extending as well into what are now the northern and southern regions. When Vietnamese think of the expansion of Viet Nam they don't refer to Nguyen Anh marching north two hundred years ago but instead speak of the "march south" of the Viet people from the Red River delta over the last thousand years.

The Cham who are left in Viet Nam are so deeply alienated as to be Muslim, among the very few people on the mainland to have hearkened to the conversion of peninsular

Southeast Asia to Islam. My friend from language school who went off to study the Cham lived under constant harassment by the Vietnamese regional officials.

Are you confused enough yet? I am doing my best. This is an initiation. There is a Viet Nam that is a clock on a wall, dolls, regional specialties and a national dish. Look, there they are on the walls. Then there is a Viet Nam that is something people do, like putting a clock on a wall and eating soup. It is a freemasonry, a not especially secret society. Howdy.

I get initiated all the time. I first came to Ben Thanh restaurant on my first trip to Paris as a graduate student, eight years after I had started working with Viet Nam. I was looking around to see if I could study and do some fieldwork there. I had won a grant from my university especially for such a trip. I met with Michel Fournie, one of the two or three full-time professors of Vietnamese literature outside of Viet Nam. I walked around and looked at libraries and bookstores and neighborhoods.

At night I would come for pho at Ben Thanh. The first time I came it was too early, five o'clock, and the owner was just setting up. The second time I came about seven, right on time. One of their ten tables was empty. I had a nice dinner and sat relaxing until a man started shouting at me.

He half turned from his seat with the owners, man and wife, at the big table by the kitchen where they did the accounts when there wasn't a large party. He was drinking and expansive and I was ignoring him. He had caught my eye once before with a smile, and I recognized him and moved my gaze away. I kept that up, looking around at the nationalist tchatkes I've been telling you about, until he moved his chair around and yelled at me.

“CIA!” Oh, Jesus. Once when I was complaining about this work hazard one of my Western colleagues remarked that they all think we all are with the Central Intelligence Agency. Maybe so, but I’m the one who gets it shouted in my face. I’m a large man with a lifetime of practice in conveying the impression that I am not dangerous if not actually attacked. It is a way of dealing with cops, who scare me, and of walking through the projects. It also invites drunks and loudmouths to vent in my direction.

This time this one kept shouting, like a car alarm, “CIA!” He looked to be about my age. There may conceivably have been a fifteen year-old Marine guard at the US Embassy in Saigon in 1975, who had lied about his age. I have never met or heard about such a person. Although we didn’t know it until we were twelve, my age cohort in the United States was clearly at this side of the edge of serving in Viet Nam.

But in Viet Nam they remained full members of the war generation. Plenty of them were soldiers, especially on the other side and at any rate the war interrupted their primary and secondary education. Then in 1979 everyone had to go fight the Chinese and occupy Cambodia. So this man might have had something to shout about, but still it made me angry.

He was violating hospitality, for one thing. Every American who goes to Viet Nam comes back exclaiming how nobody said anything about the war. I assure you that three of the five nations of mainland Southeast Asia are densely populated with men and women who will never forgive the United States for dropping a bomb on grandma, but they would rather die than express that sentiment to an individual guest.

There is an entire city, Westminster, in California populated by Vietnamese adults who think that the United States sold them down the river to the Communists when the



United States Air Force allowed the People's Army to mass for its march on Saigon. But an outsider does not normally hear about it when buying a bowl of soup.

Throughout Southeast Asia and for that matter in most of the traditional world, hospitality is a bedrock value of humanity. You can see this in English language, where "host" and "hostile" share the same Greek root. Even an enemy, especially an enemy, can claim hospitality.

So this man was being drunk and disorderly. The rest of us did what Vietnamese do when someone acts out. We maintained harmony, *hoa hop*, every other table going on with dinner and me sitting there and taking it. Then I am afraid that I lost my composure as well.

I don't know what that man's beef with the CIA was. A couple years later we spent a moment in a drunken evening talking, and it seems he was some kind of paratrooper with the Saigon army. He had an American jump tattoo he said he got in Fayetteville outside Ft. Bragg near where I live in North Carolina. He liked American paratroopers and that evening I couldn't persuade him I wasn't one.

Many American paratroopers, Alan for example, disdain the CIA more forcefully than they disdain Marines and sailors, because Army paratroopers sometimes work with CIA field operatives and think they're incompetent, opportunist wash-outs from the armed services. My disgust with the agency is a matter of history and responsibility and identity.

The Central Intelligence Agency testified proudly to Congress in 1970 that over the course of years they deliberately had assassinated much of the political class of the Vietnamese countryside, dozens and dozens of thousands of men and women. When the Agency ran from the People's Army in April 1975, not only had they failed to see the

defeat coming but they left their computer system up and running with the names and addresses of all their clandestine agents on the screens.

A single office worker could have saved the lives of their people in the field with a hand grenade or a hand-held magnet or a hammer or a pair of scissors for that matter, but no one bothered. Those are just two examples of the bloodymindedness and goofy disregard for the lives of our allies that characterize the history of our secret army.

Being called a CIA agent for being apparently American is a confusing experience, like being called a Nazi for being German. To use some German philosophy, it mixes categorical and individual responsibility. It is patently unfair to the person involved and has a ring of truth nonetheless. It can scramble my mind.

So I told the man in Vietnamese language that I am not with the CIA but he undoubtedly was working for the secret police of Viet Nam. I elaborated upon that theme and he lost it entirely. Hoa hop well and truly shattered, the group had to do something. His friends descended on him and the owner came over and said his friend was drunk.

Would I have another beer? Of course I would. A table of women invited me to join them. What was I doing in Paris? I was thinking about studying Vietnamese literature here. Oh, what Vietnamese books did I like? Really, my favorite author is Duong Thu Huong. One lady liked her very much as well. I asked her if she might know the coordinates of Phan Huy Duong, Huong's translator.

My old number for him wasn't working. The lady took my number and indeed called my hotel the next day with another number for Phan that also didn't work. The evening had ended happily. On my way out I noticed a vast watercolor of the Ben Thanh market in Saigon papering the wall by door.

I would have recognized correctly the source of the name of the restaurant from the street if I had ever visited Saigon in my years in Viet Nam. Ben Thanh is an elegant modern mall which people have been proud of for fifty years. The watercolor had the manner of an architect's drawing, with clean lines on the buildings and attractive human figures going about their business.

It is a contemporary drawing of a classic modern landmark. It's a vision of Viet Nam, like all this stuff I've been telling you about. I walked into Ben Thanh thinking it was named for a home village and left knowing it was named after a mall. When one of my contemporaries in ethnography, Philip Taylor, arrived in Viet Nam he got in a cyclo and asked the driver to take him to what he was proud of and the man took him to a big new international style office building.

I don't like those buildings in downtown Ha Noi and think the Vietnamese will regret the one just built on the classic modern department store by the central lake as we do the glass box on the ruins of Pennsylvania Station, as Paris regrets Les Halles. But a new drawing of an old modern market is okay by me. The public goes there as I do to the restaurant, for basic needs, and the people who hung its picture on the wall had named their place after it.

When I returned to Paris I met my girlfriend two or three nights a week at Ben Thanh, and hosted guests from out of town there. I never asked the couple who owned the place what their story was and they never asked mine. The last time I visited the business we ended up in their apartment upstairs across the street singing karaoke. Going to Ben Thanh had become part of my private life. Now I am going to tell you about what I did for work in Paris.

I mapped the Vietnamese and Orientalist bookstores of the city. I began on my exploratory visit and mapped my last one the morning before I boarded a plane to fly to New York after a year in Paris. I published part of my findings during that year as a guide for fellow scholars. The rest of my notes have sat in boxes since I got back.

They have followed me from New York, where I flew in, to my native city of New Haven, where my car sat on my friend Michele Thompson's front lawn. Michele teaches at Southern Connecticut State University. We met at Cornell in the summer of 1991 when I started Vietnamese language. Then we worked in Ha Noi over the same few years.

I drove my notes down to Carrboro, a former mill town just west of Chapel Hill. I lived in a rooming house there while I taught social theory and general anthropology at the university. I would drive to Hillsborough, the next town north, to pick up boxes of more notes and materials I had mailed from Paris to my brother and sister-in-law.

Two years ago, in October 2002, I moved everything to a barn apartment on a farm in Hillsborough six miles from their place. I have got the space I need here, a whole room for my library stacks and another whole room for my files and boxes. I have got the time I need away from the university to think, since I earn much of my expenses working here on the farm, walking the miles of fences cutting brush and banging boards.

Public transportation will get you from any point in Paris to any other point, but you have to walk. There are stairs between train lines, streets to cross between metro and bus stops. Once on a Paris subway I overheard a Vietnamese family from Charlotte, North Carolina and introduced myself in Vietnamese as a researcher from Chapel Hill. I asked them how they were liking their visit and they complained that you have to do so much walking. In North Carolina you can drive from door to door.

I wore out one pair of shoes tracking down the Vietnamese books in Paris and put holes through the soles of two others at the end when I ran out of money for repairs. The uppers I wore out were low boots from my swim coach's store in New Haven, my motorcycle boots in Ha Noi. Finally my Paris cobbler, ingenious craftsman, critic of the consumer society, advised me to give up on them.

His shop was ten minutes' walk north of Ben Thanh, halfway to the river. It was thirty minutes' walk north from my dormitory room in the Cite Universitaire, at the dead southern boundary of the city. Here in North Carolina I must go a lot farther, half an hour by car, to get my shoes fixed.

In Paris, though, there is one cobbler at least every other residential block, as there is a book store. There is a bakery, for bread, cafes, a cheese store and a butcher and a deli and a greengrocer and another bakery, for pastry. Nearby there will be an open market on stated days.

I walked my boots half an hour north because my girlfriend lived there, around the corner from Les Olympiades, the mall that houses the Vietnamese retail cluster. She liked the quartier because it is just southwest of the national library, the Bibliotheque Nationale Francaise (BNF), where she does her research. You walk or take the bus up rue de Tolbiac, cross the river, and there it is on your left.

We both frequented the local public library, Melville, a block or two south on Tolbiac towards Place d'Italie. The cobbler was around the corner from her place, and across the street in the other direction is the local market. Down a block on that side of Tolbiac is a cheap hotel where our visitors would stay.

I just now suggested to my friend Dana Sachs, Nguyen Huy Thiep's translator, that she stay at the Hotel Sthrau. She is on her way to Paris in October from Wilmington here in North Carolina to talk about her work. I also sent her a copy of my walking guide, what I sent out three years ago to Viet Nam scholars.

I rushed it out with what I had in time for a conference my friend Chris Goscha organized. I thought that people arriving in France for a few days might run over to the BNF and have a moment to look at some Vietnamese bookstores. The ones I wrote about are hard to find.

That is unusual in Paris, a city that is well mapped. All the streets and alleys have names, all clearly marked with train and bus lines on grid maps. This is the city where people spun lines of latitude and longitude around the globe as a first order of business after their revolution. A whole wall of a building on the way to the market from the Melville library is a mosaic of the quartier from a grid map.

It's a reasonable grid, made for looking through not for living in. Manhattan above 14<sup>th</sup> street actually is a grid, avenues running north and south and streets running east and west. Paris streets instead go where they go. The scheme that has administrative reality is an intuitive spiral of arrondissements, beginning with the 1<sup>e</sup> around such palaces as the Louvre and tracing around and around to the 18<sup>e</sup> around the edge of the city.

Les Olympiades is in the 13<sup>e</sup>, actually near the center, as the spiral curls on itself, but far out in the order of arrondissements. It was a sector of light industry and depots on the river, without good public transportation, well after World War Two. Now it is on a bus line and has two stops on the city's newest metro.

My girlfriend's apartment was the former gatekeeper's office in six stories of small apartments that gate off a row of old laborers' cottages and small industrial shops from the street. At the end of the row now is a tiny, expansive villa made from a few of the cottages by the architect who lives there, who came in the 1970s from Chile. The first or second cottage in the row, coming from the street, is a drafting office, and a workshop for his wife in the atelier. She is a Paris nurse and seamstress, now in her retirement a sculptor.

My old girlfriend's landlords are an engineer who came to Paris for his education and met his wife, now a bank executive, who had come from her home on Reunion, an island off Africa. Once a colony, it is now one of France's départements overseas. Paris subsidizes travel and communications so that it is as if Reunion were on the mainland, not of Africa but of France, the Hexagon itself.

Paris has been gathering its nation in upon itself for a long time. The national passion for hypercorrect grammar, for instance, is part of Paris asserting its dialect over the people of the whole country. French varies over France as much as any language does over distance but every school on the mainland and the overseas departments turns out several dozen enthusiasts for Paris administrative dialect every year.

That dialect is a game with imperious rules and endless exceptions, fun to play. Our friend the landlord, the engineer, shared with me his collection of specialized dictionaries and his love for *Le Chat*, a cartoon with wordplay by a humorist from Belgium, where they love French language with the joy and contempt of outsiders. In France, proper French language is also a key to success.

You can come from anywhere and thrive in French society if you speak and write Paris administrative dialect in the correct manner. When I was doing research in Paris

among the most prestigious academics in all France were the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, son of a peasant, the linguist Julia Kristeva, a refugee from Eastern Europe, and the philosopher Jacques Derrida, an Algerian Jew.

They all used gorgeous French. Bourdieu died the year after I left, but you can listen to him on the documentary film *La Sociologie est un Sport de Combat*. You can also see him wince as he recalls the language of his birth. Anybody can join France, the nation of Paris, if he or she will embrace this pain.

My friend Chris Goscha, from Kansas, is now a professor in the French system, and my friend Nina McPherson from Yale, Duong Thu Huong's translator, will soon have her doctorate there. Phan is as French as they come, a politically active family man with a profession and a rack of books in the national chain store, although he wouldn't accept actual citizenship until recently. It's not as if anyone was in a hurry to deport someone who speaks and writes French so well.

Bourdieu worked in the 5e arrondissement, in the College de France. I attended Chris' seminars a short walk from there in the 9e, at the Ecole des Houtes Etudes en Sciences Sociales. I first met up with Nina at a teahouse in the xe, and later visited her at her place in the 3e, around the corner from a grand statue of Marie, the bare-chested symbol of France, in a building actually designed by Georges-Eugene, Baron Haussmann, who built bourgeois Paris for the last Napoleon.

Chris was living that year in a commuting suburb just outside Paris, a little further out than one where I visited Phan. Paris has become that expensive, that many professionals now live outside it. For a long time, though, the periphery was known as the *bande ouvriere*, the worker's strip around Paris.



You can tell when you're in the red band by the streets signs about the Second World War. Downtown, in the low-numbered arrondissements, there are signs on the walls where this one or that one fell in the battle of Paris, skirmishing gallantly while the Allies approached. On the outskirts of town where the workers live and the Communist Party is strong, metal signs banged into the wall record that the Germans, seldom mentioned by name downtown, shot the following people and burned their houses down.

More recently, the bande ouvriere is where migrant workers have settled outside Paris, where the projects are. Americans laugh at these clean, safe, subsidized neighborhoods with city services and good public transportation, but the poor there have their own problems. They have to assimilate, for example, in a country that is so egalitarian as not to recognize difference.

When France recently produced its plan for secular dress in the public schools, for instance, after monumental labors, a reporter startled an Education official by asking whether Sikh men would have to take off their turbans and go topless. The official replied, "Do we have Sikhs in France?" No one knew, at least, the government didn't know how many and where.

That is the whole point, the government really is secular, doesn't ask these questions, and doesn't want to start. The problem, of course, is that raised by opponents of the move in California to stop asking people whether they are black or white. If we don't ask, how are we going to notice facts like that of the enduring proportion of black children living in poverty, high in comparison to whites?

Paris doesn't have a persistent disparity of minority children living in poverty as we understand it in the US because the nation has dealt politically with its band of Communists

around the capital. But the city has difficulty recognizing the Arabs and Muslims and Hindus and Sikhs who live in the projects there. The city integrates outsiders beautifully, in fact there is housing for the poor, even hotels for migrant workers, dispersed throughout the quartiers and the arrondissements.

This is politically impossible in the United States where the promise of liberty, of private property, is that you don't have to live with people who are visibly different. The good side of that is that our continent as a whole has become an attic of difference, making tolerance a national manner. Our provision for conscientious objection to military service is just one legacy earned by the sturdy persistence of minorities, in that case Protestants who fled German militarism.

The government of France by contrast has difficulty to tolerate officially the people who live together in the suburbs and want to cover their heads in school. They can be treated like everyone else if they consent to act like everyone else.

Les Olympiades, the Vietnamese retail plaza, sits on this situation like a space ship hovering just above street level. There is a brasserie named after it, Les Olympiades, on Tolbiac but the mall itself is built over the streets. The grid maps still show the old streets the mall covered up more thirty years ago.

On the Web, where Paris yellow pages show a photo of every numbered building, I now punch in the mailing address of the shops I found and get a photograph of the facade of all of Les Olympiades. Paris can't see these bookstores. That is why I wrote a walking tour for visiting scholars.

Les Olympiades lies over the streets between rue de Tolbiac on the west and Avenue d'Ivry on the east. The old streets du Javelot and du Disque are the ways you drive

to the loading docks and parking lots underneath the plaza. I walked through once at dawn as the clochards of the quartier walked out from a night in their nests of cardboard.

There is a grand stair with up and down escalators to the plaza from the rue de Tolbiac. At street level is a post with a plaque that explains the whole thing. The plaza was developed in the early 1970s, part of making the industrial arrondissement part of residential Paris. When it was finished in 1975 the whole city was overbuilt, at a moment in the real estate cycle when supply exceeded demand.

Then Saigon fell. The empty residential towers over the plaza filled up with refugees from Saigon. Ha Noi persecuted the ethnic Chinese and they came. Cambodians made it out through Thailand and came here. The covered mall filled with shops to serve them and Asian retailers spilled over to line Avenue d'Ivry, the eastern boundary of Les Olympiades.

Now the immigrants are dispersed around the city and in the periphery, not just in the projects but in the bedroom communities. At street level on the Avenue d'Ivry side, down a back stair and escalator from the plaza and mall, Les Olympiades houses Freres Tang, the flagship of a chain of markets belonging to Chinese brothers from Cambodia.

Their plastic bags map the location of the store, not in terms of streets or arrondissements, but with highway exits and train stops, giving all the routes from the suburbs. It is as much a suburbanite store as an Asian one. For example, you can buy family packs with a week's worth of the breakfast croissants a household in Paris can buy fresh every day.

The Asian neighborhood of the 13e arrondissement has never been an ethnic ghetto like San Francisco's Chinatown, once very like Europe's ghettos for the Jews, where they

had to live and where they could defend themselves. It is like what Paris' medieval ghetto, the Marais, is now as a gay neighborhood. Sure, some gay people live there but the main thing is that the Marais is a place where it is safe and convenient and public to be gay.

Les Olympiades was for less than one generation for Southeast Asians what Wooster Street in New Haven was for the Italians, or more properly the migrants from two Neapolitan villages. They clubbed together for two or three generations while in what urbanists call an ethnic enclave, pooling resources before shooting out as individual families to the towns surrounding the city.

Now Wooster Street is where Italians in Connecticut come to shop and eat, along with tourists from New Jersey, New York, and New England. The only success of the urban renewal programs of the 1960s is one short block of Court Street on Wooster Park, around the corner from Pepe's, the famous birthplace of pizza. Such prominent Yankees as the cartoonist Garry Trudeau lived there and so did my friends Jacques and Susanne, not at all Italian, when they taught at Yale.

Eden Center at Seven Corners in Falls Church, Virginia is like that for Vietnamese and people who like Vietnamese food in the Washington, DC, area, a mall where people scattered through all the Beltway suburbs can come eat and buy food, music, books and newspapers. At the other side of the continent, Westminster in Orange County, California is the opposite, a place Vietnamese people migrate to because you don't have to speak English there.

Of course, that brings shoppers and visitors from all over. I fly across the country to visit Westminster, as I also drive up to Eden Center from Hillsborough. Let's walk up the steps from Tolbiac, as if we just took the bus from Place d'Italie and got off at Melville.

This is the route from the city. People who come from the periphery drive in to the deck below the plaza, or take a train that stops on Ivry, or come around on the periphery bus and walk up.

Coming from the city you can notice that Viet Nam was writing itself on Paris long before les Olympiades settled down like a space ship with aliens on board. The anti-colonialists liked to point out that all of Paris, the Haussmann buildings like Nina lives in, and indeed all the solid bourgeois homes and administrative buildings throughout France, were built with the wealth of the empires, extracted from the land of the colonies and the sweat of their peoples.

But somebody needs to tell you that. Let me start at the edge of the city and walk in to the bus at Tolbiac to show you things that are written on the streets and nailed on the buildings in plain French. When I would come down the steps of the Maison des Etudiants Armeniens on the Cite Internationale Universitaire de Paris I was facing the side of the College Neerlandais, the Dutch house.

The Cite was built after World War I to house students from all Europe to foster friendship between nations. The stateless Armenian exiles of Paris shoe-horned themselves wishfully into this idealist vision of a federated Europe. They got their wish, and the other students in the Armenian house kept me up all night through the year preparing for demonstrations about their grievance with the Turks, to keep Turkey out of Europe.

When I walked out I would gaze wistfully at the Maison de l'Indochine, the first to my left behind the Netherlands house from the street. Nothing seemed to happen at the Indochina House. No one came or went. It is a stolid old establishment in the Cite, built in the French colonial style.

Just now consulting the web page of the Cite Universitaire, I find that the name changed to Maison des étudiants de l'Asie du Sud-Est, house of students from Southeast Asia. This happened in 1972, when Le Duc Tho and his delegation were in Paris signing the peace accords with Henry Kissinger.

The name had last changed in June 1970 to the house of students of Laos, Viet Nam and Southeast Asia, le Maison des étudiants du Laos, du Vietnam et de l'Asie du Sud-Est. Maybe they didn't specify Cambodia because the United States had just invaded that May. The name had first been changed, to Maison des étudiants du Laos, du Vietnam, in 1968.

That was the year the revolutionaries rose up across the cities of the Republic of Viet Nam and startled the world, perishing to great effect. It was the year the students of France took to the streets shut the country down. It was also fourteen years after the French finally had abandoned Indochine to the Vietnamese, Lao, and Cambodians in 1954. The house was built in 1930, just fifteen years before they first lost Indochine, to the Japanese, in 1945.

Everyone I know calls it Maison de l'Indochine. The website also calls its style "Asiatique", I suppose because of its dragon roofs. But its proportions and windows and walls, its substance, are squarely in the style of a French building in the old colonies.

Indochine was part of France, as Reunion remains. Cochinchine, what is now the Saigon area and much of Cambodia, was a colony. What was left of Cambodia was a colony, Cambodge, as was Laos. Tonkin, comprising the Hanoi area and much of Laos, and Annam, including Hue and its hinterlands into Laos, were protectorates and their dependent residents were entitled to some of the privileges that Reunion, as a full departement of France, enjoys.

There was a continuum of citizenship between France and its colonies that is key to understanding how people actually lived in empire. After Nhat Linh got back to Tonkin from Paris he wrote a short book about his trip there, *Di Tay*. That title translates directly *Go West*, echoing nicely on the editor Horace Greeley's pronouncement to Americans of his time. Before the war, United States citizens had invaded the West for gold in the territories and California, and to expand slavery southwest.

After the war, Greeley urged young men of good family out to expand the nation itself. The more close analogue to Greeley's advice in Indochine came at the turn into the twentieth century when the anti-colonialist Phan Boi Chau sent young idealists east to Japan to learn how it had resisted the West. He said *Go East*, but he said it in Chinese, *Dong Du*. One generation after the young people whom old Phan Boi Chau had sent overseas to no apparent effect, Nhat Linh flipped the direction and put it in the vernacular: *Di Tay*.

A better translation of *Di Tay* is "Going to France." Nhat Linh writes how he went West on boat full of French citizens. The most famous passage of the narrative tells how they treated him better and better as they approached France. Leaving the harbor in Indochine, he was a native, unworthy of notice. By the time the boat docked in Marseilles he was a fellow human being, a liberal equal, entitled to brotherhood, even feared.

I am sure the students at the *Maison de l'Indochine* in the old days at the Cite got treated just fine. In the 1930s they would have openly revolutionary meetings there, the kind of thing that would get everyone guillotined back home. I'm not sure who stays there now.

There was a student who would sit on the staircase in the Maison des Etudiants Armeniens shouting at a cellphone in Vietnamese to a woman who loved him. I would say that you have to be a Vietnamese man to treat a woman that way but I have done it myself. I don't know where he was from.

Once, I was walking home from the other direction than the Netherlands house and saw two small women with an enormous hard suitcase fully the size of one of them stalled in front of a steep, high stone stair. I walked up and said hi in Vietnamese. The two young ladies were standing in front of the Maison des Provinces de France, where the provincial students were offered lodging while studying in the capital, along with all the foreigners.

It is where my friend from Reunion, for example, could have stayed. One of the young ladies was a Parisian, who had just met her cousin from Viet Nam at the airport with her suitcase full of gifts. The cousin was going to stay in Provinces de France. As we chatted I got their suitcase upstairs and into an elevator, then took a connecting passage to my dormitory.

Now we go straight out the door of the Armenians together for a walk up to Les Olympiades. We turn right onto the path out the wrought-iron gate to the street and we're treading in the steps of Phan and his friends, and the older Vietnamese who greeted him when he came to Paris to study, who were students in the Cite. One of them gave me a lift back from an art show in the suburbs my first month in Paris, waving my directions away to say, "We all lived there."

The Cite backs on the Boulevard Peripherique, the elevated beltway that runs around Paris. It fronts on a ground-level boulevard that does the same thing. In front of



the Cite, for a few blocks, it is Boulevard Jourdan. In the United States there would be only the beltway superhighway.

Jourdan is a true boulevard, a surface street with lights and bike lanes. I learned to take the bus to any location on the edge of the city. For instance, a quick route to Les Olympiades is on an eastbound bus over to Port D'Ivry, where Avenue d'Ivry starts just a few blocks south of the mall.

But on foot the way is to plunge straight into the city. Let's turn right out of the Cite, head east toward Porte d'Ivry and walk back to the ceremonial gate to the campus, right by the American dorms. Directly across the Boulevard Jourdan from the Cite is a station for the metro, and behind that the Parc Montsouris.

The Cite we just left, compared to the campus of Yale or Carolina, is empty and lifeless. It is a bedroom community for foreign students and its lawns are as dead as the streets of an American suburb when everyone's at work. Students and everyone else in Paris hit the streets and the parks during the day. Students in Paris are cadet citizens, as much a part of things as workers or soldiers.

Paris is such an old university town as itself to be a university. Lecture halls, laboratories, seminar rooms and libraries are scattered through the town. To be a student is to go on foot from place to place with everyone else, on the subways and buses. When students march in demonstrations here, they do it with everyone else.

Demonstrating is something everyone does in school and keeps doing. People of Paris who would be Republican suburbanites in the United States have marched in the streets for a common cause several times in their lives. The radio stations announce the

strikes and manifestations right after the weather, just to let everyone else know how to get to work that day.

Let's cut out of the crowd of students entering the metro station and walk on by from Jourdan through the Parc Montsouris. We have to enjoy the park. There is no clear route straight across it. We have to take the broad paved running track around, or follow small trails from one meadow to another, cross the bridge over the metro line and round the pond on paths to switchback from the southern to the eastern gate.

Baron Haussmann built Montsouris, like the boulevards, like Nina's apartment building, fashioning the wealth of the capital into a bourgeois vision. His emperor fell and the construction site became an artillery camp for the siege of the 1871 Commune. Prussia had conquered France and the workers in the city of Paris revolted against the emperor and his failed government at Versailles.

But the site finished as a park, and Lenin walked here for hours and hours in all weathers. He did a lot of walking in exile before returning to found his Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. The poet Wallace Stevens, in my home climate of Connecticut, later imagined him as "the idiot of one idea" walking around a lake in Geneva, dreaming up world socialism. He did that here in Montsouris, too.

The name of the park and its lake evokes Aesop's fable about a mountain, mont, laboring to produce a souris, a mouse. Lenin shook the world and what have we got now. More than dreaming, the revolutionary was doing communications and control, dead drops and handoffs, with his clandestine world. He lived and banked nearby, depositing large sums.

Wallace Stevens walked to work at the insurance company and back to his Hartford home with one gorgeous line in his head at a time, striding with an odd, irregular, hop as he composed. Lenin instead made a good stab at ending capitalism. For one thing, he started a school for world revolutionaries where the man we know as Ho Chi Minh got an education and became an instructor, before helping to establish communist parties all over colonized Asia.

Before he went to school in the Soviet Union, he was in Paris. They say that Lenin sold shoestrings from an umbrella to get by, and we know that years later the man who became Ho took a newspaper ad to offer his services retouching photos. He called himself Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Nguyen is the dynasty founded in 1802 by Gia Long, the royal name of the man who marched north from Saigon, whose seal Ho Chi Minh accepted from his last heir in Ha Noi in 1945. Well, he accepted something or other: the French had melted the actual seal Beijing had sent Gia Long, when they took over. The French melted Gia Long's seal did before the mandarins of the court, but Ho accepted whatever it was that Bao Dai gave him in front of a crowd of the people of Viet Nam.

Ai Quoc means love the country, patriot. That man arrived in the Soviet Union the week Lenin died but he was an idiot of one idea, too, and so was Wallace Stevens. In his great short poem of the imaginative act he speaks of setting a jar on a mountain in wild Tennessee. The wilderness transforms into the world around the jar, becoming the ordered and civilized setting of the poem.

Nguyen Ai Quoc walked this city thinking of Viet Nam, a country that didn't exist, and now we all live somewhere inside or out of it. He walked up the stairs to the

conference at Versailles when Woodrow Wilson proclaimed the right of self-determination for all peoples, to claim that right for Vietnamese. He already had joined world socialism, helping to found the Communist Party in France. Wilson didn't receive him and the young man moved on to school in Moscow.

He weathered Stalin's terror there and worked his way through the Far East, making revolution, until finally he returned to Ha Noi, where he never had been before, to proclaim Viet Nam, a country that had ceased to exist before he was born. He was fifty-five, about ten years older than me now. This is the great story of Nguyen Ai Quoc and Ho Chi Minh and the establishment of Viet Nam.

It is all in my head as I walk this park. It is not written here on our shortcut to the eastern gate. Baron Haussmann wrote Montsouris onto Paris with bourgeois delight. Even with Communists and Socialists sharing power off and on for fifty years now there are no plaques to the founding myth of the rebel colony and its hand-to-mouth dreamer.

Paris has a lot of other things going on and always has had. Parc Montsouris is built over a rock quarry, underground mines where they got stone for the old city. As the city filled with stone buildings they sent the bones from the old cemeteries downtown here to make catacombs in the shafts and galleries below. Before the quarry, "Mocquesouris" was a wind-driven grain mill. The name of an ancient street nearby, rue de la Tombe Issoire, hearkens to even older times, the trace of a giant slain at the city walls.

So they built a park over all this mess and Lenin came to walk in the new world. Maybe Nguyen Ai Quoc did, too. For me the Parc Montsouris will always be where I heard on my radio that Trinh Cong Son had died. He was a great musician of the 1960s in

Saigon. He remained in the city with his people on April 30, 1975, standing in the radio station all day playing, “Brothers, let us put down our weapons and have peace.”

Meanwhile, the singer who made his songs hits, Khanh Ly, fled with her people overseas to California. If as the reporters said, Trinh Cong Son was the Bob Dylan of Viet Nam, then Khanh Ly was his Joan Baez. She brought him the fame his art deserved. The love of Khanh Ly and Trinh Cong Son after April 30 is like Eloise and Abelard of old Paris, soul mates sundered from each other by fate.

In the stores now all you can find are Khanh Ly’s nostalgic versions of the Saigon songs, but the afternoon he died the Viet Nam program of Radio France Internationale played the old, happy, upbeat and prospective recordings that made stars of the teenage Khanh Ly and Trinh Cong Son. Speaking from California, Khanh Ly spoke of the man she could only ever have addressed as “anh”, older brother, referring to him now to her public as “ong”, grandfather.

Son had become our ancestor. When I visited a friend of his outside Washington, DC a year later I found a home transformed into a shrine to the dead singer. The shrine in a Vietnamese home usually fills an altar the size of a bureau or mantelpiece, but this one starts in the basement and takes up the whole house.

When I last saw Son’s friend he was sitting in the garage painting a portrait of the singer on his death anniversary. He had been painting a portrait a day all year to commemorate his friend’s spirit. That man and some friends have now mounted a website to the same purpose.

But all this about Son, and about Ho and Lenin and Wallace Stevens and Haussmann is jumbled in my head like the bones beneath our feet under the park and the

tomb of the giant Issoire. I got it all out of books and the friends they led me to. Some things instead are written plain on the street.

The wide paved path we are on here in the park, among the joggers, is the Avenue de la Tunisie. It plainly is named after Tunisia, a protectorate taken at the same time as Indochine. As we bear right toward the eastern exit, Tunisie becomes the Allee de la Mire, alley of the sighting-point. On it we walk by an old stone sighting-point for the meridian of Paris which runs around the world.

You don't have to consult a dictionary of the streets of Paris to know that you are in the ancient imperial capital. Down the stairs, out of the park, across and through some streets you would need a dictionary for, Gazan, Liard, Amiral Mouchez, up the rue de Rungis to the place de Rungis, where the aquaduct used to come from Rungis.

We will take the third right out of the place, onto Bobillot. The first right we pass on Bobillot is the rue de la Colonie. I always wondered which colony that was. Now the dictionaries tell me the street hosted a colony of specialist weavers who moved to Paris from the provinces. But there is no mistaking the meaning of Bobillot.

"Rue Bobillot" it says on the signs, "sergent mort au Tonkin." Three years later I have looked up the street in the dictionaries and found that Jules Bobillot was a novelist and playwright as well as a sergeant of engineers. Born in 1860 in humble circumstances, he died at Ha Noi after taking a wound at Tuyen Quang in 1885.

His ashes rest in Grenoble, home of his unit, but Bobillot was a child of Paris and three years later a committee led by the parliamentary representatives of the city erected his statue on the avenue Voltaire. On the Web now I find his bust at eye level on a pedestal off

the Butte aux Cailles. That street is a rare vestige of the warrens of the poor which Haussmann paved over.

The bust is in the square Henri Rousselle, named for a nearly exact contemporary of Bobillot. The square is at one end of a street first named for his dad, Ernest, president of the Paris council, and now named for father and son. Henri became president of the council for the departement that includes Paris. The city didn't open the street until 1910. I don't yet know when they cleared the square and put the bust there.

Already in 1893 the city had opened a street through that area from Place de Rungis and named it after Bobillot. They pushed rue Bobillot through to Place d'Italie in 1896. I have found that there are Bobillot streets in towns all around Paris, in Touraine, Tourcoing, Neuilly-Plaisance, Creteil, Montreuil-sous-bois, St. Denis, and in cities all over France, in Nancy, Grenoble, Montreuil, Cannes, Nantes, Nanterre, Tours, and La Seyne-sur-Mer.

Even thirty years later, in 1929, Paris named another street after Bobillot's commandant, Major Edmond Domine, who had survived to 1921. It runs for one block by the river, and I haven't found another in any other city, but Colonel Domine is a street of Paris nonetheless.

Bobillot's sudden widespread commemoration, and the persistent memory of Domine, are evidence of the importance of the siege of Tuyen Quang. The fact that sources I use, from 1885 to the present, spell the name in several ways suggests that there is no common sense of what that importance was, that indeed at the time people had various ideas.

Tuyen Quang is a place rather than a city, although it has a town, now the capital of Tuyen Quang province in the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. The place is halfway from

Ha Noi to Lao Cai by the frontier with China, up the Red River from the city, onto the Clear, at a bend north of some rapids.

Ho Chi Minh stopped to rest at Tan Trao, not far away, for a month or so on his way down from the frontier before entering Ha Noi to declare the independence of Viet Nam in August, 1945. He already had met with American soldiers there, who armed his men.

Military order number one, the first document of General Vo Nguyen Giap's People's Army of Viet Nam, was issued there on August 13, 1945, using American weapons to liberate some French from the Japanese. In the war with the French at Ha Noi after 1946 the area around Tan Trao became a base for the resistance.

For three months in 1885, several hundred troops of France blocking an invasion from China were trapped at Tuyen Quang by an army of more than ten thousand fighting for the court at Hue. Most of Domine's command was Foreign Legion, with some Marines and local Tonkin troops. Bobillot led a squad of engineers.

The French were part of an expedition that finally would bring all of Indochine under French sway. French traders had been there for a while along with Chinese and Indians and Arabs, people from the islands we call Malaysia and Java and the Philippines, and Americans, British, Dutch, Portuguese and Greeks.

Exactly when the West came to Viet Nam is a question like that of the origins of baseball or pho. The answer has to do with what you mean by the West and by Viet Nam and what the archaeologists have dug up in the last field season. They've got Roman coins.

If by the West we mean France and by France we mean the modern nation, one early document with a date is a letter in 1744 which Pierre Poivre carried from Vo Vuong



at Phu Xuan to Louis XIV at Versailles. Poivre, from Lyon, had been fired from his missionary order in Viet Nam and become a trader. Phu Xuan was where Nguyen Anh established Hue sixty years later, after defeating the other Nguyen lords like Vo Vuong.

Charles Chapman, a British commercial representative, arrived from Calcutta in 1778. Chapman couldn't find anyone in charge, but suggested backing Nguyen Anh. Nothing came of it, as had nothing of English merchants who had stopped by earlier. Chapman was one of many representatives from the British and French empires in India and China who stopped by the South and Center, trying to make a deal.

In the North it was the Dutch coming from their empire in the islands of what is now Indonesia, as well as French hopping up from the South and Portuguese from their Philippines. American captains and their rabble of sailors came and went. Those are official, bureaucratic, recorded arrivals of the West.

Each account I have found of them differs. The most inclusive I have used is in English, by some Saigon newspapermen drawing in the 1950s on recent Vietnamese-language histories. Nguyen Van Thai and Nguyen Van Mung tell the story of the Western arrivals along with official Vietnamese missions to France, Spain and the United States.

The family name of both these men, by the way, is Nguyen, like the dynasty. We refer to Vietnamese by their given names because the family names of nearly all Vietnamese are Ly or Le or Nguyen, after dynasties, or Huynh or Trinh or Tran, after lords. When we refer to a personage like Ho Chi Minh as Ho rather than Minh we are recognizing his eminence, and the fact that he didn't really have a family.

It's a reign name, really, as Nguyen Anh styled himself as Gia Long. His kids were named Nguyen, and the one who followed him took his own reign name. "Gia Long" fiddles between being the name of a Vietnamese lord and a Chinese viceroy.

Some say Nguyen Anh chose the name in 1801 to refer to the first word of Gia Dinh, near Saigon, and the last word in Thanh Long, the old name of Ha Noi, put together to unify the country. The Chinese court that confirmed Gia Long a few years later said the reign name meant "Praiseworthy Excellence."

Ho Chi Minh can mean "Ho who brings enlightenment" to someone who knows Chinese, although you would have to have the characters and he never wrote it that way. What it meant mouth to ear, to people in Viet Nam around 1945, was that Nguyen Ai Quoc, the patriot, had come back from around the world to save the country.

Working among the people who fled Ho, Thai and Mung gather stray facts, from popularizations of annals the Vietnamese court compiled beginning under Gia Long, about modern history. Some dates and sequences are wrong, reflecting an orderly, correct sense that all these foreigners washing up on the beach were random events, without reason or consequence or frame of reference.

If when we ask when the West came to Viet Nam we are talking about the modern nation, we can't be talking before 1804 when Nguyen Anh first unified the country in its present boundaries. Before him, the Trinh lords who ruled the North had tried to concentrate all these foreign traders in a special city north of Ha Noi, Pho Hien, and deal with them there. The Nguyen lords in the Center and South had tried the same thing, with centers at Hoi An and Thuan Quang.

The successors of Gia Long in his Nguyen dynasty tried to shut all this down. The Saigon newspapermen point out that the Nguyen tried to exclude and ignore, rather than adapt to, the West at a time when most of the world had been colonized and Spain and Portugal and France and Britain and the Dutch were fighting for the last scraps of new markets.

You can say in defense of the Nguyen that they were doing just what every European country was trying to do for itself, to set up a nation with a well-defined territories and a certain government in charge. The rulers of Viet Nam tried to control foreign trade like anyone else would. When the actual French state arrived, sending envoys, the court received them on its own terms just like immigration and customs do at the airport everywhere nowadays.

However, the ancient Kingdom of Lord Jesus and his Church already were inside. Exactly when Christianity arrived in that part of the world is more clear-cut than the origins of trade. Of course, no one knows what happened when those Roman coins arrived, but we haven't seen any consequences.

One story with consequences is that Gaspard de Santa Cruz came to Ha Tien, now the southern tip of Viet Nam, then firmly part of Chon-Lap, which is now Cambodia, in 1550. Judging by his name and his landfall, I guess he came from the Portuguese at Malacca to the south. His Dominicans sent missions north.

One of those nineteenth-century compilations of events by the Vietnamese court speaks of a lone preacher already in Nam Dinh, on the Red River delta, in 1533. A Catholic history explains that sometimes a merchant's chaplain would jump ship to preach.

More consequentially, the Saigon newspapermen say that two Jesuit and Dominican missions, including Japanese priests, sailed into Da Nang in 1615.

The port of Da Nang is halfway up Viet Nam, of course on the long coast on the east facing toward Macao. The Portuguese there had given refuge to the Jesuits when Japan kicked them out. The Jesuits sent Father Giuliano Baldinotti, as the Nguyen and at least one French authority spell it, further north to scout conditions there.

The Jesuit Alexandre de Rhodes stepped off a boat in Cochinchine from Macao in 1624 and by 1627 he was working in Tonkin as well as the center of the country. De Rhodes came from Christendom rather than the West or from France.

As a group his companions were not French or even European. They included Jesuits of Portuguese and Spanish and Japanese birth. De Rhodes himself was born in Avignon, now in France, when it was a territory of Rome. He was a subject of the vicar of Christ.

De Rhodes stands now for the arrival of Christianity in Viet Nam because he compiled and printed a dictionary and a catechism in the Vietnamese script everyone uses now. We credit him as an individual author with the fruit of the work of a complex community, whose common language after Vietnamese was Portuguese.

The Dominicans preceded De Rhodes in Viet Nam and Franciscans worked the edges of his territory. Augustinians were in there somewhere. All the different missionaries took in local people from all around Asia as fellow Christians.

Fathers and brothers and communicants wrote Vietnamese language to each other in Roman characters back and forth on paths crisscrossing the globe to Rome from Macao, Ha Noi, Lisbon and Marseilles, and ports in China and Japan, the Philippines and what are

now Malaysia and Indonesia. One hundred years after De Rhodes, an Augustinian convert from Tonkin was translating for a Chinese inmate at the Paris lunatic asylum.

Two hundred and fifty years after De Rhodes, Ho Chi Minh was in the last generation of Vietnamese patriotic leaders of the poor to grow up reading and writing literary Chinese, and Vietnamese using Chinese-style characters. For two centuries already, many among the poor themselves had chosen instead to embrace Christianity and write Vietnamese in Roman characters.

One hundred and seventy-five years after de Rhodes arrived another missionary, Pierre Joseph Georges Pigneau de Behaine, Bishop of Bernan, had led a company of adventurers on the march north with Nguyen Anh to establish Viet Nam under one rule. They disembarked at Saigon from the French imperial base in Pondicherry, India, but without assistance from the governor there.

An improvised rabble, the Bishop's men melted away. Some stayed: one drowned sailor is memorialized in a temple near Hue. A few French commanders remained even long after victory and lent their skills to the unification of Viet Nam. One of their sons, Michel Chaigneux, born of a local wife, raised at the court, left a memoir.

Nguyen Anh's conquering troops built forts in the manner of Sebastien le Prestre de Vauban, the marshal of the Sun King. A defeated soldier of a rebel region, over the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Vauban had established the unified Hexagon of metropolitan France for Louis XIV at Versailles by building forts around its frontiers, at points of invasion and rebellion.

The new Nguyen dynasty sought to establish itself in a similar manner, as a centralized state truly in charge of its realm. France conquered this Nguyen dynasty, its territories and its sphere of influence, in the span of Bobillot's life.

The French won their battles as battles usually are won, by small but decisive advantages in arms and terrain, tactics and discipline, visible only in retrospect. No commander joins battle to lose. You might think that the French conquered Viet Nam with distinctly modern weapons and politics against bows and arrows and tribal chieftains, but you would be wrong.

Jean de la Croix, a Portuguese, had built an arsenal for the Nguyen lords already in 1614, one firm date in a fog of cultural diffusion. People fighting one another around Viet Nam before any French army even arrived had the benefit not only of Vauban forts, but cannon and eventually repeating Remington rifles from Ilion, New York, Winchesters from New Haven, Connecticut and Spencers from Boston, Massachusetts, all almost semi-automatic weapons, as well as the Martini-Henrys of the British Army.

In the event, those who opposed the French had some good rifles but not always enough of them, and often their artillery was out of date, perhaps indeed because the Nguyen had tried to isolate the country. On the other hand, the Legionnaires fighting for France with Riviere had only the Gras rifle against all those repeaters. The Gras, like the Martini-Henry, is a modern breech-loader with cartridges, but you had to load each one by hand.

Some observers on the ground explain, well, the enemy troops didn't know how to use their back sights to aim a rifle, while others say the enemy commanders didn't know how to use troops and place artillery. But still others say that the local riflemen,

artillerymen and commanders were outstanding and that they had European advisers to boot.

I have never seen a good general explanation of European military success in Asia. I think maybe it didn't happen. Perhaps we are just looking back through a lot of battles and focusing on the ones that seem to explain the success of colonialism.

Some of the French victories in Viet Nam were indeed spectacular feats, strange colonial events with thousands of natives running before a few marauding white men. But none of them were ritual suicide, as when out in the archipelago an entire Balinese court would dress up and take women and children and the elders along to march into Dutch fire.

Those defending Viet Nam fought to win. Most of the battles, the siege of Tuyen Quang among them, were huge grinding affairs where any victory was Pyrrhic to an expeditionary force. The French finally won by diplomacy.

It didn't have to happen. Burma fell to the British by 1886, but the court at Siam used diplomacy to fend off all the colonial powers to become Thailand. Japan modernized to beat Russia in war at land and sea in 1905, then in 1941 conquered half the world for four years. The French and British did sack Beijing in 1860 and China did descend into chaos for one hundred years.

But no one foreign power has conquered all of China since the Manchus took over in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Manchus, riding in from Central Asia, just happened to win that one against the previous Chinese regime. The people of what we call Viet Nam beat back both the Mongols and the Ming dynasty they later defeated. The outcome of battle, the issue of a war, is always up for grabs.

The French conquest was like the march of Viet Nam south from Ha Noi, something that seems inevitable but wasn't, and in fact happened only in retrospect. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the French ruled something they called Indochine, comprising not only Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchine but all Laos and Cambodge and a spot on the China coast, with a formal capital at Ha Noi.

Most steps along the way did not aim at that goal. Traders and Christians had tried to involve France in the region since they arrived, but the state was busy with other matters. Pierre Poivre arrived with his letter of friendship from Vo Vuong when Louis XIV was busy consolidating France under royal rule. His successor, his great-grandson Louis XV busied himself with wars about the succession in Poland and Austria.

Then he started a world war and lost most of the French empire in the New World in 1763. His successor and grandson Louis XVI gave fair words to Pigneau de Behaine and Nguyen Anh, and his court even received Nguyen Anh's young son in 1787. But then Louis XVI lost France to the Revolution in 1789, which distracted everyone.

Napoleon took charge of the situation and crowned himself the first emperor of France in 1804, about the same time as Beijing confirmed Nguyen Anh in his reign name, Gia Long. Napoleon did express an interest in Viet Nam. But then he got busy conquering Europe and Egypt, and then Europe conquered France.

The conquerors set up a lurching monarchy. First in 1814 came Louis XVIII, brother of the Louis XVI who had lost his head to the revolution, uncle of the child Louis XVII who died of neglect in a revolutionary prison. Louis sought reconciliation. Then in 1824 came another brother, Charles X, a harder case.



Charles cleaned house, stepped on toes, and in 1830 lost his reign to Louis Philippe, patron of the haute bourgeoisie. While Charles was on his way out, in 1827, Hussein the Dey of Algiers dismissed the French consul of his city, Jean Deval, with a fly whisk.

Deval had informed the Dey that France had no intention of paying its debts for the wheat that had fed Paris through the Revolution. Then he stood there and insulted the man, viceroy of the sovereign Ottoman empire.

The Dey's gesture provoked Jules Armand, Prince de Polignac, Minister of Foreign Affairs and head of government, to blockade the port of Algiers. Meant to distract everyone from domestic affairs, the blockade proved one of the high-handed gestures that brought Charles X down.

After he dismissed the national assembly and abolished freedom of the press as well they put Polignac in jail for life. But empire, initiated for whatever reason, seldom rolled back for republican reforms at home. France soon declared Algeria not just a colony, but part of the mainland, ruled by the Ministry of the Interior.

Over Louis Philippe's reign the French army conquered the city of Algiers and ravaged its hinterlands. Open war on the countryside lasted until the 1890s, about the same time Indochine was pacified. The French army, their Foreign Legion, and the European settlers they protected ruled the place with everyday violence until 1962, eight years after their kind had been chased out of Indochine.

We will get back to Algeria. But domestic affairs, and those of Europe, preoccupied Paris under Louis Philippe. In the liberal revolution of 1848 he lost France in turn to Louis Napoleon in the founding of the Second Republic.

Nephew of the man who hijacked the first Republic, this president of the second one announced himself Napoleon III, emperor of France, when they wouldn't let him change the constitution to run for a second term. Serious about running an empire, he extended French rule in North Africa, joined with Britain against Russia in the Crimea, and even sent a random European aristocrat with the Foreign Legion to rule Mexico.

French expeditions conquered what are now Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia beginning in the reign of this last Bonaparte of France, stalling around the war with Prussia which brought him down, and ending in the first few administrations of the republics which have governed the country almost ever since. The French navy took command of the issues raised first by missionaries.

The Jesuit De Rhodes had arrived in Viet Nam when the souls of all the East were still the care of Portugal, under a papal bull dating from the first voyages to the New World. In the time of De Rhodes, Rome set up a Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to oversee the heretics and the heathen. A bishop of these Vicars Apostolic would take on the title the seat of a vanished diocese from Asia Minor, where the Church first had evangelized, to roam in the new lands.

Pigneau de Behaine who marched with Nguyen Anh, for example, was Bishop of Bernan, some defunct place around where Turkey is now. Then in 1839 Rome gave France the chief responsibility for the Far East. The Christians of Cochinchine in particular became the special care of the Missions Etrangeres, the Foreign Missions, of Paris.

Much of Tonkin, from the sea over to the Clear River where Tuyen Quang is, remained to Dominicans under Manila. Most of that is mountain and forest without many

converts. But no matter where they were, all the Catholics in Viet Nam had needed protection for a long time.

Some of them royal hangers-on and most of them dispossessed peasants already a problem to the authorities, they had been persecuted since the days of De Rhodes. Nguyen Anh had eased up, in deference to his ally Behaine. In Saigon and around the delta that protection persisted into the rein of his successor Ming Manh until the death of Gia Long's comrade in arms, viceroy in the south, Le Van Duyet.

His son Le Van Khoi led the region in revolt in 1833. When Minh Mang took the rebels he found a French priest among them, Marchand, and began persecuting Christians in earnest. There weren't actually that many Christians in Cochinchine, since it was rich open arable country without many poor peasants. In the Mekong delta at least, Minh Mang was persecuting many more Cambodian Buddhists than Christians.

But he shut all Vietnamese ports but one to Europeans in 1836, and condemned all foreign missionaries to death. In 1839 he sent a mission of his own, diplomats, to Paris, where the Missions Etrangeres saw to it that they would not be received. Minh Mang died in 1842 and his successor Thieu Tri continued his policies.

A French squadron was hanging around the East looking for opportunity in and around China. In 1843 a few of their ships dropped anchor off the nearest port to Hue to demand the liberation of five missionaries at the capital. In 1845 they came back to liberate a French ecclesiastic. He ran right back to Viet Nam, and in March, 1847 the Navy returned.

The authorities at Hue had packed off Monseigneur Lefebvre to the British in Singapore in February, but since they were there anyways the two French ships destroyed

five Vietnamese warships. One captain, Rigault de Genouilly, sent Thieu Tri a letter that the Emperor of China had granted freedom to Christians throughout his realm, and his vassal Viet Nam should do the same.

Two of the historians who have told this story in English are British diplomats retired in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who tend to think that France, and especially her navy, had the whole thing planned from Paris from the start. But Milton Osborne and Donald Lancaster have a hard time saying who exactly decided what, and when. Everyone who tries to tell this story throws up his or her hands at the confusing details.

Everyone agrees that French naval officers overseas carried on with an expansive spirit, an inner sense of imperial policy. Soldiers had done it for centuries through France itself with the wars of religion and the consolidation of the state, then in Canada, New York and New England, down the Mississippi through the Gulf and around the Caribbean, across France again with the Revolution, then over Europe to Egypt and into Russia, to the African shores of the Mediterranean, back to Italy, to Russia again at Sebastapol, to Mexico, down Africa and off to China.

That is my outsider's perspective. None of the French soldiers I've read from the expeditions to Cochinchine and Tonkin mention the great tradition of French conquest. Canada was long lost, Louisiana sold, Haiti had revolted and won, and Mexico was a glorious embarrassment. Egypt was a place France did business. Although they still had the Hexagon and Algiers, the defeats of the Empire first by Russia and then England were not long before the conquest of Cochinchine and Cambodge, and the defeat by Prussia just before the conquest of Tonkin.

The living man who tells the story with most verve and detail is Philippe Heduy, a writer who shares my fascination with the French conquest as a boys' adventure story. I noticed him because he is one of the few of our contemporaries who mentions Jules Bobillot.

Heduy has got a jaunty photograph of the man in uniform, from the archives of the colonial wars, Centre Militaire d'Information et de Documentation sur Outre-Mer et l'Etranger. He also quotes Claude Bourrin, a literary customs officer, on Bobillot. The photo and the quotation are in two albums of extracts Heduy made from the vast colonial literature that starts while Bobillot is still alive. Writers were nostalgic for the conquest of Indochine before it was over.

The conquistadors themselves were looking forward, not back. They were naval officers, the people who ride the waves and think expansively, where army officers often get bogged down in the details of marching and digging in, killing and dying. Here in the United States the saints of our Army are U.S. Grant and William Tecumseh Sherman, apostles of the grinding, punishing total modern war that won our continent for the federal government.

The saints of our navy are men of a different spirit, Dewey who acquired the Philippines with a handful of ships and Nimitz who swept the Pacific clean of the Japanese with a fleet or two. That is how the French conquered Cochinchine, by shelling and sending in Marines. It didn't work right away.

Local Catholics learned to dread these raids, when local authorities would take vengeance on them, while French sat offshore and wondered why the Christians didn't revolt. A former confessor of Napoleon III's wife Eugenie, Monseigneur Jose Maria Diaz

Sanjurjo, second Vicar Apostolic of Tonkino Centrale, Bishop of Plataea, was martyred in 1857. She became upset.

More to the point, her husband had settled into power at home and concluded a treaty with China. The Far East squadron arrived in earnest late in 1858, two years before Bobillot was born. Francois-Marie-Henri-Agathon Pellerin, first Vicar Apostolic of Cocincina Settentrionale, Bishop of Byblis, was with them, and one thousand Filipino troops with Spanish officers, but Admiral Rigault de Genouilly was in charge.

They took the port they called Tourane and we have called China Beach at Da Nang, in the middle of the country, where they had visited before to harass Hue. The next year they went down and took Saigon. They left a garrison and withdrew, then even withdrew from Tourane for a possible attack on China.

But that conflict was settled by treaty and they took Saigon again in 1861 and spread out through the delta and up along the coast. In 1862 Hue sent a delegation to Saigon who ceded three provinces of Cochinchine by treaty, opened ports to trade with France and Spain, and all the country to the Church.

The one clear military advantage the French enjoyed, the number and the guns of their modern ships, had proved decisive. These would not have had much effect before Nguyen Anh marched north, when everyone was fighting each other in the hills. Even so, the court at Hue still could have retreated inland and roused the country to take the foreign armies apart as they walked in.

That worked against a richer and more modern army one hundred years later. It could have worked earlier. Scattered local forces and tropical disease did give the French a

hard time when they got off their boats. In the face of resistance, France, even the Navy, was not united in what it wanted.

When the new emperor, reigning as Tu Duc, sent a delegation to France in 1863 to renegotiate, it was a naval officer still occupying his country who suggested that France withdraw to Saigon and a Da Nang port. The administration authorized the officer to negotiate a treaty which he concluded with the court at Hue.

But the French National Assembly declined to ratify it, Osborne says, due to the influence of shipping and commercial interests. If indeed there was a lobby they would not have met organized resistance.

Nobody in Paris was paying a lot of attention to Cochinchine. The show was at home. Napoleon III pulled troops from Algiers and withdrew entirely from Mexico in 1867 for the big one with Prussia coming up where France would rule all Europe.

The navy found themselves on their own, governing Cochinchine and even expanding south to create Cambodge. The court at Siam withdrew, a step in their dance of playing Britain against France, which created Thailand and kept the Westerners from ever actually running the place.

Meanwhile, the mandarins who had run Cochinchine for Hue refused to work under the French, and withdrew North or simply retired in place. One mandarin would make his life a poem of resistance, refusing so much as to walk on a French road.

The wild elements in the West, whom the mandarins themselves had struggled against, continued to assert themselves against French rule. The naval governors of Cochinchine called them bandits as Hue had, and accused the court of quietly supporting them.

Aside from the mandarins with their passive resistance, and the free men of the woods, many locals took what opportunity the French occupation offered. You could call them collaborators, as we do those who worked with the Nazi occupiers of Europe. A more accurate anachronism would be to call them “new men”, as Russians of Chekhov’s day called the sons of peasants who rose in the world, like the man who cuts down the cherry orchard in the play.

There really had been a march south to the Mekong delta, not by a single Vietnamese state, but by Viet people looking for opportunity. Land was always tight on the Red River delta where a few enrolled members of old families ran each village, distributing the common lands for each planting. Cochinchine was full of Vietnamese looking for the main chance.

The Navy and the new Customs service extended a net of forts and outposts against the bandits. A whole corps of junior officers took the place of the mandarins, administering education and law and agricultural development as well as taxation. One exemplary naval officer, Pierre-Louis-Felix Philastre, set himself to translating the Nguyen legal code and debating the wisdom of substituting that of Napoleon.

Another heroic officer explored the geography, rather than the institutions, of the new realm. Marie Joseph Francois Garnier, known as Francis, was a naval lieutenant on an expedition that set out from Saigon in 1863 and headed up the Mekong through Cambodia and Laos to show there was a grand route to China. They persisted even though falls just two weeks’ out ruled out any chance of river trade.

The expedition was not interested in present reality. Pasteur was still convincing the French of the germ theory of disease, so the expedition drank the water, and colonial



doctors in Algiers and India had not yet demonstrated the role of mosquitoes and humans in the life cycle of the malaria parasite, so they all got fevers.

Colonial armies did already have quinine from the Indians, but did not regularly take it. The expedition commander, Ernest Marc Louis de Gonzague Doudart de Lagree, dropped by the wayside to die of what we look back and call amoebic dysentery, but Garnier toughed it out and indeed followed the Mekong to China.

He returned to Paris to write a book about the exploration, and the great opportunities of Cochinchine. He ran back East to take part in the sack of the Summer Palace at Beijing, honeymooned there with his wife, and then had run back for the war with Prussia.

Then he returned to China to send dispatches home about his explorations for the illustrated newspapers. Dedicated to Empire, he wasn't a man who had to work for a living.

Less learned than Philastre, less glorious than Garnier, perhaps most important in the substance of French rule were the customs officers, perhaps because they weren't visionary at all. They just showed up and collected duty on goods entering and leaving French territory.

One of my colleagues in Paris, a man I went to Chris Goscha's seminars with, is a customs officer who had just published a book about the history of his branch of service in Indochine. There is no pun in French like the one we have built into "customs", meaning also "moeurs", what we call "mores".

But there might as well be. The taxmen, with their expatriate salaries and servants and their hardheaded exploitation of the local people, would set the tone for the French

presence, stepping beyond the missionaries and the traders and the officers and their romance, scholarship and derring-do.

Chris' friend Dominique Niollet calls the whole colonial period the epoch of the excise officials, in the title of his book *L'Epopée des Douaniers en Indochine*. The colonial douaniers themselves looked back at the early years in Tonkin as "l'épopée héroïque."

The man who drew the French navy and its taxmen north again, past Tourane and to Tonkin, to finally conquer all of Indochine despite the protests of the bishops in Ha Noi and the delta, was a smuggler who wanted the customs on his side. He wanted some colonial power, he didn't care which, to protect his interests against Vietnamese officials.

The gun-runner, salt smuggler Jean Dupuis had noticed a real route to China. Part of the rice harvest from the delta had been going up the Red River to Yunnan for a good long time. Fortunately for Dupuis, a gentleman had witnessed the truth of this reality.

When Garnier passed through Yunnan after long travails up the Mekong he had met local traders matter-of-factly arriving on the Red River. So when in 1872 Dupuis set out to run some guns up the Red River to the local Chinese commander in Yunnan, just north of Viet Nam, he had tacit French support.

That is, Paris didn't put anything in writing but ships of the Cochinchine command watched from sea as he bulled his way past Ha Noi. The mandarins of the city did not recognize his written authority from the Yunnan commander. Even the local Monseigneur Paul-Francois Puginier of the Missions Etrangères, sixth Vicar Apostolic of Tonkino Occidentale, Bishop of Mauricastro, remonstrated with him.

But the ball had passed from missionaries to trade in the opening up of Viet Nam. One of my boyish heroes from another empire, Sir Richard Francis Burton, explains in a

footnote to his translation of the Arabian Nights how a Bedouin would open up a missionary with a tent peg, to sodomize.

It is apparent to all now that Burton and Dupuis were harder, more forward men than any native. Dupuis pushed through in January 1873 with his load of guns and in three months' time arrived to a warm welcome in Yunnan. He came back to Ha Noi to get a load of salt.

Hue stepped in at this point and appealed to Cochinchine to enforce the law in Tonkin. Saigon sent Francis Garnier with written instructions to rein in Dupuis and verbal directions to open up the Red River. He had to run back from China first, where he had been posting dispatches to the Paris newspapers.

He sailed north with about sixty men, only twenty of them marines. When he stopped at Cua Nam, on his way up the estuary to Ha Noi from the sea, the delegation of mandarins he had picked up in Hue vanished ashore.

Antonio Colomer, ninth Vicar Apostolic of Tonkino Orientale, Bishop of Temiscira did not receive him at his mission at Cua Nam. Colomer's Augustinians, most of them Spanish and Portuguese, as well as the mostly French priests of the Missions Etrangeres shared a dislike of Dupuis and his enterprise.

But Garnier pressed on. He sent a steam launch ahead to Dupuis, who sent back maps of the channel up the river. Dupuis himself came downstream in his junk to meet the expedition.

When Garnier arrived Ha Noi on November 5, 1873 he refused as unsuitable the modest lodgings the mandarins offered his party. They instead camped out in the Temple of Literature where mandarin candidates would sit for their examinations. Garnier posted a

notice throughout the city on November 15 announcing that French authorities would be collecting duties now.

Civil authorities engaged with this issue seriously. But the commander in the Ha Noi citadel, one of the Vauban forts, took one look at Garnier and prepared his defense. On November 20 Garnier bombarded the interior of the citadel with explosive shells and attacked with his sailors and marines, reinforcements from Saigon, and Dupuis' men.

It was one of those loony colonial things. Many of the garrison of the Ha Noi citadel fled the shells from the French ship, not knowing that all you have to do is get under cover and wait for it to stop. Those who remained defended the bridges over the moat to the gates of the citadel with old guns, badly placed and aimed.

The French got through two gates under cover of direct cannon fire. Francis Garnier and several dozen troops took the citadel and Ha Noi from thousands of defenders. He was such an unspeakable, condescending, courtly jerk to the defeated commander, Nguyen Tri Phuong, that the wounded man ripped off his own bandages to bleed to death.

Phuong was shot in the ass, which suggests that the old man had stood up and tried to command while the French shells were bursting around him and then the grapeshot came in. He was a fighter, one of the commanders who had gone after the French when they got off their boats in Cochinchine.

His son died earlier that day in the citadel, perhaps also standing up. That is the role of the leader in modern combat. If their men had the sense to get down and stay put while they were being inspired, I wouldn't be telling you this story.

Garnier is the very model of a junior unit commander in this regard. Alan once directed me to *La 317e Section*, a 1965 film by Pierre Schoendoerffer, about a French

platoon getting the hell out of Tonkin after the defeat further north at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. It is a portrait of leadership, the lieutenant in charge carrying out a mission in the face of confusion.

The sergeant is an Alsatian, from the province long disputed by France and Germany, who had been forced into the German army and now is serving with the French one in Indochine. A man of nuance, subtlety, and shocking brutal realism, we last see him leading the survivors off into the forest.

The lieutenant has died, but he wasn't supposed to be practical. You can see the apotheosis of a lieutenant in Garnier's monument in Paris. It is just his head and bust in robes, on a pedestal with deep Khmer bas-reliefs, and three women atop the massive base it rests on. One lies on a cannon admiring him, one sits by a globe with a geometer's compass in one hand offering up his garland by the other, and another seems to be waving a rudder or perhaps an Oriental halberd.

They are all naked and curvey, enmeshed in fish and debris, the earthly chaos Garnier rises vertically above. It's a gruesome joke that the monument shows his head because that is what he lost. On December 21 the great lieutenant made a sortie out from the citadel and ran ahead of his men and his sergeant, where the enemy killed and decapitated him.

Garnier had been raising hell through the delta for months at this point, exceeding not just his written orders but going well beyond his verbal directions, to open the Red River, beyond that to subjugate the towns and forts that governed the lowlands so he could send out excisemen. The government down in Saigon sent another officer up to calm him down and straighten things out.

The good cop was Philastre. When Garnier had run off exploring and sacking and honeymooning and going home to fight the Prussians, Philastre had stuck to his books, and to the work of local administration where his scholarship made sense. He had already sent his brother lieutenant a nasty letter.

Philastre arrived at Ha Noi the day after Garnier made his last sortie. Horrified, not by his death but his acts, Philastre negotiated the French out of Tonkin, rolling back the military accomplishments of Garnier's adventure. The Philastre treaty of 1874 did reserve trading rights for French in the Ha Noi area and left the customs men in place.

One clause later provided the hinge for the final conquest of the court at Hue, its territory and sphere of influence. Tu Duc agreed to remove Viet Nam from the vassalage of China. This point, in the eyes of Paris, made the rest of the struggle for Viet Nam a shoving match with Beijing.

After Garnier, the impulse of the French conquest of Indochine passes from traders and the navy, as it already had passed from missionaries and the navy, to great power politics calling a tune danced on the ground by the army as well as at sea. Finally, the diplomats playing empire from Paris had to dance with the deputies of the National Assembly and their constituents.

Philastre, shunned in Saigon, returned to France and devoted himself to scholarship. Garnier's gunboat was given to the court at Hue. Some French forces remained in Tonkin to carry out the articles of the treaty. One expedition even suppressed a rebellion for the Hue court, at Hai Duong, in favor of a pretender to the previous Le dynasty, supported by some Tonkin soldiers who had rallied to Garnier.

But Hue asked China to help with that one as well, and it was a Chinese army who captured the Le pretender, Ly Yang-ts'ai, and cut off his head. Moreover, Hue was constantly asking Saigon and France to return their provinces in Cochinchine. As French leadership took the matter, Hue was not grateful and obliging.

They didn't comply with diligence and transparency to their agreements. They were unresponsive to French offers of help with unruly Tonkin, where mandarins merely coped with Chinese and bandits and migrating hill people carrying on without regard for the interests of merchants from overseas.

At Hue, Tu Duc insisted on his vassalage to the Middle Kingdom, openly preparing a tribute to send to his protector at Beijing. The court there was concerned about the French taking Tonkin and coming up the Red River. French officials in Beijing noticed memorials going back and forth to Yunnan and the southern provinces, while Tseng Chitse, the Chinese representative in Paris and London, made his views known.

Eight years after the Prussian invasion, when Bobillot was a ten years old in 1870, and eight years after the Garnier adventure and Philastre's treaty, in 1874 when Bobillot was fourteen, France came to Tonkin to settle matters for good and all. The year was 1882 and Bobillot was twenty-two.

The man in charge at first was Admiral Jean-Bernard Jaureguiberry. In a database of English-language historical journals I found only one mention of half his first name, perhaps because his last name is a byword for French empire.

That is all over the journals, and the Web says there is quai Amiral Jaureguiberry in Bayonne, a series of naval ships with his name, and recently a stadium and a swimming pool in Toulon, the naval port, where he commanded the fleet. Once governor of Senegal,

an old China fighter, Jaureguiberry was a career civil servant intent on expansion in Africa and Asia.

Minister of the Navy and the Colonies in the cabinet of William Waddington, the Admiral had planned to send an army to invade Tonkin. When he came back to power in the cabinet of Louis-Charles de Saulces de Freycinet, known in French as Charles to distinguish him from his uncle Claude the great explorer, the Admiral inherited a more modest effort, a police action to bulk up the garrisons which the Philastre treaty had left in Tonkin.

Jaureguiberry sent a full naval captain from Paris in 1881 to command the naval station of Saigon, to sail for Ha Noi in 1882 with clear written instructions to enforce all agreements. Henri Riviere arrived in Haiphong on April 1 and on April 25, 1882 took the citadel at Ha Noi, as Garnier had. On March 27, 1883, Riviere took Nam Dinh, down the river, as Garnier had. Riviere returned to Ha Noi and rolled out of the citadel one day in May and lost his head near where Garnier had lost his.

In retrospect Riviere's progress seems like Garnier's but it wasn't. Riviere called up men and boats from Hai Phong before taking the citadel with a reasonable force, while Garnier had charged in with the men on hand. Garnier conquered the Red River delta in a month for France and glory, while Riviere waited in Ha Noi one year before taking Nam Dinh. The one sortie he sent that year was north to Hon Gai to take a coal mine, at the request of a Saigon businessman.

Garnier rushed out of the citadel with a squad against an army, and charged ahead of his squad with no weapon to speak of. Riviere accompanied a column out against the same army, riding in a coach because he was sick but thought he should accompany his



men. The commander of the march, Berthe de Vilers, fell in the first shots of an ambush and Riviere dutifully took his place.

There is no monument to Riviere's head on the streets of Paris. However, no one rolled his conquest back. With Riviere's death, expansionists got what Admiral Jaureguiberry had wanted in the first place, a proper invasion of Tonkin, and beyond that war with China. The National Assembly in Paris voted more money, sent more troops to Tonkin, shelled Hue, and sent ships to attack China at Formosa.

This moment begins sustained commitment by France to dominate Viet Nam. Some of the politicians in the governments in Paris backed the expeditions because, following Dupuis, they saw Tonkin as a place from where to sell goods to the markets of Yunnan, southern China. In the event, the British closed Yunnan to them.

Others looked at Hon Gai and its coal, at Yunnan as a source of raw materials, metals especially, rather than as a market. That never worked out either. For fifty years after Riviere arrived, the French would go up the Red River only to fight bandits and then smugglers. Some individuals and families and companies made out, but overall Indochine for France was a notion, the kind of thing Garnier fought for.

The prime minister who kept pushing for the colonies right after Jaureguiberry was Jules Francois Camille Ferry, who recognized every possible motive for colonization in his speeches and soared over their practicalities. Overall, he saw French conquest in the most general terms as a way to gain wealth and prestige to uplift the people at home.

As mayor of Paris, Ferry had defended the common people against Haussmann and the Empire. As prime minister, Jules Ferry was the great founder of compulsory free secular primary education in France, and of secondary education for young women. My

grandmother, an orphan Jew raised by Catholic peasants in central France, would go to school because of Jules Ferry.

He took the children away from the church in the great law of March 28, 1882, had to pay for it, and needed to teach them about the glory of the nation. Grandmere would have heard all about Bobillot in her village schoolhouse, on maps that showed where Ferry sent troops to occupy Tunis and Madagascar, to explore the Congo and the Niger.

Real imperialists often talk straight: in Jules Ferry's soaring idealism he spoke of dumping excess capital in the colonies, a motive that Marxists later discerned in the spirit of critique, as something hidden. Ferry's speeches for money to invade Tonkin also included the mission civilisatrice, the civilizing mission, what Britons spoke of as the white man's burden to spread civilization. After the heroic days, when placid colonists had replaced fire-breathing imperialists, the mission civilisatrice became the official line.

There developed a vocal minority of colonists in Indochine and Algiers who would write angry letters to the editor about the civilizing mission, to point out that they were there to get rich and kill any natives who got in the way, period. I agree with these bloody realists that the apologists for empire among the intellectuals spoke in bad faith, but in fact the mission civilisatrice is the one that got accomplished.

The government of France lost money on its colonies all along and eventually lost all imperial prestige. The Vietnamese eventually got it together, kicked out the foreigners, and joined the modern world as a sovereign state. Whatever else Viet Nam does now, it always acts as a nation.

When Bobillot was alive they had difficulty doing that, if only because the enemy diplomats and admirals did not take Hue seriously. From Paris and Saigon, the French

conquest of Tonkin was a war with China. Even that hardly shows up in the standard English-language history of modern France I have been using.

For the Briton who wrote it, Alfred Cobban, all the French colonies, even Canada, are minor details out beyond the edges of the Hexagon. The standard French source on the conquest of Tonkin was published in 1934 when it was still a colony, by a retired sea-captain who had known the old dogs who ran with Granier.

August Thomazi doesn't call it a war with China. He characterizes the whole conquest of Indochine as something that just kind of happened, in small steps with many reverses, by a military in conflict with an administration in conflict with the national assembly. He neglects the diplomatic point of view entirely.

When I was in Paris scholars there were putting together a new standard account on "la colonisation ambigu", the ambiguous colonization. Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hemery are Parisian leftists, critical comrades of the Vietnamese anti-colonialists, heirs to Philastre, working in the capital, and they still can't spell out plainly how Indochine came to be.

Distance doesn't help much. Looking back from afar with all the sources available in the astonishing library of the University of North Carolina and my collections from New Haven and Ha Noi and Paris here in my barn, and an internet link to hundreds of Viet Nam scholars all over the world, I can't tell what was going on.

Were the people who cut off the head of Garnier and Riviere, for instance, Vietnamese or Chinese? They were an army formerly in rebellion with Taiping against Beijing, named the Black Flags for the ensign of their commander. Every squad would carry one, decorating the hills facing the French in the newspaper illustrations.

Witnesses say they kept the flags down in their forward trenches, though, so the enemy would stumble into them. I have always wanted to know who were the Black Flags, I told my Dutch colleague John Kleinen. He had told me about Thomazi when I asked the listserv about Bobillot. Oh, Thomazi won't help you with that, John wrote back.

Indeed, when French colonial sources don't call the Black Flags pirates they call them Chinese. That is, the French attribute those troops to the rule of the nation they actually started in revolt against. That is not strictly right or wrong. At the time, Beijing did not regard itself as a nation but as the world's only legitimate government.

It is an attitude any Roman Catholic should be able to understand, that recently has become familiar to Americans both from the speeches of our President and the videotapes of our enemies. It flies in the face of international law, of modernity, where each nation is a sovereign among equals. The war between Paris and Beijing for the right to push Hue around was over this issue, with the Black Flags confounding the clarity of the problem at every turn.

The Black Flags had escaped south from China to the hills of Tonkin in 1864, where they fought the armies of the highlanders in the name of Hue and recruited highlanders to their side. Around 1869, they fought another outlaw Chinese army, the Yellow Flags, for possession of Lao Cai, the trading town on the Red River at the frontier with China.

The Yellow Flags had been on the Clear River, the less advantageous tributary to the West. Luu Vinh Phuoc chased them back, and into the mountains. There they would fight the Nguyen for Ly Yang Ts'ai, the pretender to the throne of the Le, the previous Vietnamese dynasty.

Jean Dupuis dealt with both Black and Yellow Flags on his trips up to Yunnan and down. Both armies charged a tariff on rice coming up from the delta to China. He was friendly with the Yellow Flags and the Chinese commander at Yunnan, while the Black Flags aligned with Hue and Beijing.

One reason we know all this is that Dupuis published several books about his time in Tonkin, while he was in Paris lobbying for compensation after the Black Flags sent him packing, after killing Garnier. Another reason is that Luu Vinh Phuoc lived to a ripe old age and dictated his memoirs in the 1930s in China, where he is recognized as a hero of struggle against the West.

During the later trouble with the Americans, the retired British intelligence man Henry McAleavy published a study of the Black Flags here following the recollections of Dupuis and Luu Vinh Phuoc. Writing from 1965, he thought Luu Vinh Phuoc's point of view was apropos and when he published in 1968 so did many of the reading public.

John F. Cady, at that time America's leading university historian of France in East Asia, dismissed the work as insufficiently respectful of the professional, English-language literature. Cady thought that McAleavy should have paid more attention to a colleague's study on Britain in China, rather than piffing about with the testimony of stateless actors, and writing for the public.

The students of their students still cite Cady and his colleague V.G. Kiernan, but I had to order Kiernan's book out of off-site storage, while well-read copies of McAleavy and his Black Flags are abundant. Everyone who gets near the French in Viet Nam wants to know who the Black Flags were.

When Garnier came, and when Riviere came back, the rebel general Luu Vinh Phuoc and his men were working again with commissions from Hue as well as Beijing. The court in Annam, at Hue, considered that it was fighting off a French invasion. The Middle Kingdom considered that France was usurping China's role in its southern realm, and sent imperial troops who fought alongside Phuoc's men.

The view from Paris was that the Riviere expedition should enforce obligations in a reply by Beijing to the treaty Tu Duc signed at Hue, the one negotiated by Philastre after the Garnier expedition. The way the French read it, Beijing had recognized the end of its dominion over Annam, in a diplomatic agreement.

But the language was proper Chinese, without tense, which Beijing read to mean that its sway continued. In English we would say, "China rules Annam." However, Paris rendered the verb in the French pluperfect, which refers to an action that has ended already. "China had ruled over Annam."

Meanwhile, the mandarins at Hue had been signing anything at any moment that would get the French out of their hair until they could fight again. That is the way the French saw the situation at the court at the time, and subsequent Vietnamese perspectives are not much more supportive and understanding.

No one was in charge, looking ahead and acting with force and discretion to finesse or expel the invaders. Tu Duc, the last strong Nguyen ruler, died in July, 1883 and his mandarins deliberately put an anti-French relative on the throne.

Then they killed him, killed his replacement, and then dragged a frightened child from under a bed and put him on the throne. That is an account from dismissive French sources. Later Vietnamese accounts don't treat the mandarins much better.

Their disdain for ancestors who lost the country is as unsatisfactory as that of the French. It was a confused situation, one that resists any partisan account. Out in the field there were enthusiastic Vietnamese auxiliaries on the French side as well as with Luu Vinh Phuoc. There were mandarins who joined the French side.

Out in the rice fields, watching armies come and go, the Vietnamese people like to say that the loser gets called a pirate and the winner is a king. Certainly, nobody was being very modern here, each lining up with his proper nation. The Legionnaires themselves were largely German, even Protestant. According to French accounts, Luu Vinh Phuoc's army across Tonkin included German and British and American and even French officers, adventurers.

Sometime in here a group of Yellow Flags joined the French, under the Greek adventurer Georges Vlavianos who was still a local character in Ha Noi in the 1930s. None of us has ever been modern, says my French colleague Bruno Latour, by which he means that this kind of mess has been and remains the norm, in an epoch characterized by everyone pretending that universal reason and the order of nations reign.

The French expedition and the newspapers back home loved to call the army of Luu Vinh Phuoc the Black Flags because the name suggests pirates. Indeed one French illustrator of the time puts the Jolly Roger, skull and crossbones of Blackbeard and the other buccaneers of the Caribbean, on the black pennants of Luu Vinh Phuoc.

The word they used for flag, "pavillon", is that used for the pennant identifying a warship. In French at the time the Pavillons Noirs represented the defiance of Hue, the suzerainty of Beijing, and sheer unruliness of highland Southeast Asia. One hundred years

later, I find Cobban casually attributing the entire campaign to “pirates”. It’s what we in the United States call the government our Marines attacked on the shores of Tripoli.

Sergeant Bobillot directed a group of engineers of the Marine Infantry in the defense against this horde, alongside Foreign Legionnaires and the local Tonkinese troops called tirailleurs. The Marines and the Legionnaires fought inside the walls and one group of tirailleurs had their own position outside. Luu Vinh Phuoc offered them amnesty if they would kill their officers, but the locals maintained a withering, aimed rifle fire on his troops.

There was no overall good reason for the siege at Tuyen Quang. The French already commanded the Red River delta. They had cowed Hue and intimidated Beijing by naval action. The concluding of the war with China was now in the hands of diplomats.

But an army had already left France for China through Viet Nam. Army, not navy, not terribly interested in diplomacy. There had been a treaty actually signed already when they ran into Chinese forces at Bac Le, pushed the wrong people, and suffered losses. War ratcheted up again.

The siege of Tuyen Quang began on January 20, 1885. The men held out until help arrived from Lang Son on March 3. The grand strategic position of Tuyen Quang, the reason there was a fort there to defend, is that the location blocks a route to Tonkin from China. For the men actually there, Tuyen Quang was a fort by the river where a French gunship sat at anchor.

Commandant Domine had sent Bobillot more than 300 meters outside the walls to build a blockhouse on a high point, entrench and fortify it. Domine sent out daily attacks from the main fort to harass and engage the Black Flags. Luu Vinh Phuoc met his sorties



in the daylight, and each night brought his artillery closer and dug his trenches nearer to the fort.

The French lost the blockhouse and eventually the besiegers were under the walls of the main fort. Bobillot played a game of mine and countermine with the Black Flag engineers within the fortress itself, where Bobillot's sappers and the Legionnaires had dug a trench for more than 1000 meters around the inside of the fort, properly the work of a company of engineers.

The fort at Tuyen Quang wasn't built in the true Vauban style. The outline on maps meanders in a square, rather than spiking out in the points of a star. It was just as well, since Vauban designed walls to defend against cannonballs, not the modern explosive shells both sides had. Still both sides fought as Vauban did in the old days, digging holes and laying charges, eventually just blowing them up in each other's face.

The French language of the time uses a word for this kind of explosive mine, petard, that English speakers know only from Shakespeare, and by which French now usually mean a firecracker, or a pistol, anything you hold in your hand that explodes. Once when the Black Flags breached the wall with a huge mine Bobillot ran up with his own petard, set it, and detonated it in the face of the enemy attack.

When I was in Ha Noi in the 1990s there was a war memorial by the lake in Ha Noi, from the last French war in the 1950s and already inscrutable, with a man holding what looks like a broom. The guy with the broom is a suicide sapper holding the stick-mounted mine a man would walk up and detonate against a French tank. He would lodge the stick in the ground so the mine's blast would penetrate the tank or at least blow off a tread.

In the French army of the nineteenth century there were platoons of such soldiers, called torpilleurs, for attacking defenses. As late as the Pacific War the American infantry squads would regularly use satchel charges and bangalore torpedoes to breach barbed wire or a concrete bunker.

But already right after that, when the Vietnamese fought the French, the petard was a third-world thing to do, an improvised weapon. I think the Ha Noi memorial was meant to represent pluck and ingenuity, but fighting with hand-held mines no longer inspires respect among citizens. Nowadays mines and bombs are a weapon of stealth, used by the stateless.

Not three weeks after a relief column lifted the siege at Tuyen Quang, a strategically trivial retreat by the Legion at Lang Son on March 28, 1885 caused a scandal in Paris. Two hundred wounded and dead brought down the government of Jules Ferry on March 30. His enemies said he was wasting money on failed enterprises. But his schools and his colonies had become common sense and they remained.

Eventually he got his own avenue in Paris, in the modest 11e where Bobillot grew up, and a monument in the 1e, where they run France. There are Jules Ferry schools and streets in towns around Paris and all over France, metropolitan and colonial. There used to be an avenue in Ha Noi and Nam Dinh, and in Tunisia and Madagascar.

Meanwhile, Paris confirmed clear dominion over Annam, Cochinchine, Cambodge and Laos, and to extend that dominion to Tonkin, all by treaty with China. They had sent a fleet after the shooting at Bac Le. France established Indochine by naval power against China and big-power diplomacy.

The best histories of the Sino-French War don't even mention Tuyen Quang because it was inconsequential. One I like came out in 1967, apparently written at the same time as McAleavy's study of the Black Flags, with similar intentions. Lloyd Eastman says straight out in his introduction that he thinks a treatment of Chinese views of interference in Viet Nam is apropos.

But the focus of his book lies on the influence of learned opinion among the Chinese mandarins on imperial foreign policy. Eastman's study was published by Harvard, whose graduates and professors had advised our presidents how to involve the United States in Viet Nam. Another graduate, David Halberstam, wrote a book about that when I was a kid.

Another book I like about the Sino-French war is by a Catholic historian in the United States, oriented toward Rome and world history rather than Harvard and the United States, or even France and China, writing twenty-five years after Eastman and fifteen after Halberstam. Lewis Chere takes an interest, as I do, in the fact that these events don't make sense. He proposes several distinct, unsatisfactory, ways of seeing the war. Nobody at Tuyen Quang would have had any of them.

Shot in the neck in the last days of the siege, Jules Bobillot suffered with two broken vertebrae through the last wild breaches and desperate counterattacks. A sergeant to the last, he refused the commission Domine offered him. Dead in the hospital at Ha Noi a month later, Bobillot was a martyr and hero of the conquest. He had streets named after him around the empire as well as in the metropole.

As I read through web pages from my barn here in North Carolina, I find his name again on a page about the defense of Ha Noi against the Japanese in 1945, in fighting over

the quartier Bobillot. I had never heard of any quartier there at all. A Vietnamese man's biography mentions duong Bobillot, Bobillot Street, in downtown Ha Noi.

I know that isn't there any more. A colleague looked at some old maps and found that it was avenue Bobillot, a grand boulevard at the edge of the original French concession in Ha Noi, running by the Opera House and the expanse in front. That is Le Thang Thong, named for the great king of the Le dynasty, the last legitimate king of the Viets before Gia Long. I used to buy pastries there.

If there ever was a rue Bobillot in Tunisia and all the other colonies I bet they aren't there any more either. I have found a reference to one in Algiers that is gone. I also have found a reference to his tomb in Ha Noi in a graveyard that has been built over.

Moreover, I find on the Web a recent walking tour by a French man who is consulting the same dictionary as me to find out who Bobillot was. John tipped me off to a column about the sergeant, in the national Catholic newspaper of France, by an accomplished cultural journalist who has no idea who Bobillot was and what he did.

It's an evocative, sentimental piece by Michel Crepu in his "On Foot in Paris" column, "Un Pieton a Paris." It is in *La Croix*, August 2, 1995. He follows the rue Bobillot from Rungis, and seems to have found the full statue of Bobillot in the Place Paul Verlaine.

Crepu doesn't describe the statue, except to mention the "gilded epaulets of a lead soldier." I am not certain that he has seen it. In his column, Crepu fixes his gaze upon an Arab, a Tunisian exile, doing business near the statue.

Then he asks if the sergeant died of yellow fever, or was betrayed by a comrade in a love triangle, and concludes that it probably was in battle. Where was he buried and does

anyone put flowers on his grave? His are like my first questions, drafted for a query I never sent to my colleagues, before I buckled down to find my own answers.

Why did a sergeant get a street? Was he a gentleman adventurer or a man of the people who did his job well? My concerns focus on class and character. Crepu's disposition is towards the lost cause. He laments the sad fate of "the last defenders of our colonies."

He does this even after copying Bobillot's dates, 1860-1885, and perhaps after seeing the statue of a soldier in antique dress. Crepu is an accomplished author in middle age, fond of tradition and lore, who mistakes one of the founders of Indochine for one of its last defenders of 1954. Touched by sadness for the men forgotten in the last French war in Viet Nam, he neglects plain evidence of the triumph of one from the first.

Apparently, children haven't sung Bobillot's name and deeds in French schools for some generations. What would the teacher say? What do you teach children in a mandatory national secular school about a man who dies without purpose or issue building an empire that is lost?

Barnett Singer, an American historian of France, showed in 1972 that Bobillot and other colonial heroes were in the textbooks up to World War I. French schoolteachers, who played a part in that disaster as the platoon leaders of younger people such as they had instructed in nationalism, chucked all that after the war. Pacifists, they took Bobillot out of the textbooks.

But who is going to tell me why the statue of Bobillot the soldier is sighted in a place named for Verlaine the poet, and the bust of Bobillot the writer is in a square named

for a soldier? Where did the bust come from? Does in fact his statue still stand or not on the avenue Voltaire, between Liberty and the Republic, where it was erected?

Where are those who know about Bobillot? Out in the countryside, I think, or among the people who fight wars. I found a letter back to Crepu from Albert Millour, in the departement of the Meuse, out in Lorraine. I had to borrow microfilm from another library to find Crepu's column, but I can search *La Croix* on-line from the month afterwards.

In September 1995 Millour wrote to *La Croix* to set Crepu straight. His "precisions" are: first, Bobillot's exact regiment, then that he was born in Paris in 1860 and dead in Ha Noi in 1885 where he was transported with the other survivors after "s'etre heroiquement conduite" in the defense of Tuyen Quang. Millour lumps the Tonkinese tirailleurs in with the Army and Marines and Legion to give a "garnison Francais" of 600 under Colonel Domine against 15,000 Black Flags.

Millour has some connection to these events which comes through when he says that the Black Flags were supported by the Chinese. He doesn't say they were with Hue and he doesn't simply call them Chinese. He also has been looking at some sources, and gives an alternate spelling to Tuyen Quang I had not yet seen, "Tuyen Ouan."

He nails down the coordinates of the siege. French habitually call phone number, address and email "coordonnees", but Millour isn't fooling around. He gives 21'48" N and 105'18"E, names the tributary nearby and its source and gives the population of the town at 7,900. I haven't consulted the work yet myself, but that sounds like something from the official armed forces chronicle of the siege.

Ten years later I can't find Albert Millour in Meuse to talk to, but I do find his family name on a Web page about colonial ancestors in Tonkin. Where he's writing from, Lorraine, is the land of war where France first lost to Prussia, and where dozens of villages simply vanished in 1914-1918. He notes in his letter that if encyclopedias no longer mention Tonkin, the city of Nancy nearby still has a rue Bobillot.

Millour launched a fact into the world. I find his account echoed two years later in a brief piece in the conservative national daily, *Figaro*. The title mentions a writer dead in Tonkin, "Un ecrivain mort au Tonkin" and gives the bare details, without Millour's military, geographical slant. He thinks that Bobillot was fighting the Chinese.

Where Millour had mentioned, in passing, at the last, that Bobillot had written a novel and a play, Bernard Stephane goes him better to say that Bobillot had left several novels and plays, and mentions two by title. This comes from the books of Claude Bourrin, the sentimental customs man, about old Tonkin, excerpted in one of Heduy's albums. Neither man has gone out and looked at the street to tell me about the statue.

Stephane devotes two out of four paragraphs in his article to an early movie studio that was on the street. He takes a fact from Millour, that Bobillot's statue went up in his native city in 1888, and writes it wrong, that rue Bobillot was so named that year.

The statue went up July 15, 1888, but the street was not opened and named until 1893. Eleven years after the siege Bobillot was still a big deal. But in 1995 neither the cultural journalist Crepu, nor Millour the letter-writer from the provinces, nor the space-filling cineaste Stephane can help me with the material memory of an actual soldier.

The adults of the Foreign Legion, who adore courage and enterprise in obscure, futile circumstances, do remember Bobillot. After World War I, when Singer says the

schoolteachers turned pacifist, the Legion elaborated their history of martial heroes, drawing heavily on such ordeals as Tuyen Quang. Douglas Porch, an American historian of the Foreign Legion makes this point, borne out by the Legion's own books published at the time which stand around his new one on three shelves in my university library.

Bobillot wasn't a Legionnaire, but he had commanded them in work crews at Tuyen Quang. He took his wound not long after the death of Streibler, a Legionnaire who threw himself in front of his captain, Borelli, and died at his feet. Borelli wrote a poem on the field of battle which I now find from Legionnaires all over the Web, one in a chat room selecting some stanzas with a line about "anonymous heroes, careless of hope."

Captain Borelli's poem, "A mes Legionnaires qui sont morts" is an exhaustive rejection not only of the values of civilian society but of all other militaries except that of the man gesturing from the site of Tuyen Quang, "voici le fleuve Rouge et la riviere Claire." The Legion, and infantrymen around the world, embrace it as expressing their point of view.

Another one of the men at Tuyen Quang was Minnaert, another hero of the legion, who had scrambled ahead of the rest to plant the flag in the conquest of Nam Dinh not long before. Negrier, the general who sent the column from Lang Son to relieve Tuyen Quang, wrote the lines over the gate at the Legion's training camp: Legionnaires you have come here to die and I will send you to your deaths.

One of the few heroes of the Legion who was not at Tuyen Quang was Danjou, the commander with the wooden hand they still carry around. The Legion remembers an inconsequential siege at Camerone, in the silly expedition to Mexico, where the last three



men alive surrendered at gunpoint only on the condition that they be allowed to bring the body of Danjou home.

Sergent Bobillot is a name like Danjou and Streibler, passed around among these connoisseurs of sacrifice for its own sake, a noun in a ditty of deeds. The legends consolidated under General Paul Rollet, commander of the Legion after World War I. That is when Legion became legendary, with novels and movies like *Beau Geste*.

As to Jules Bobillot's own works, the web page of the chain store that carries Phan and Huong offers none in print. There is a Jean-Pierre Bobillot, of the university at Grenoble where Jules' ashes are, a man of '68, a poet who writes literary essays.

One of my dictionaries of Paris streets calls Jules Bobillot a writer first, but uses "ecrivain" rather than the more formal "auteur" and explains that he is better known as Sergent Bobillot. A biographical dictionary to Indochine adds that he wrote fiction for the newspapers under the name Jules Ferlay. Hedy's collection of documents excerpts a passage about Bobillot from Bourrin, the customs man, memoirist of old Tonkin, supplying the subtitle, "feuilletoniste et dramaturge."

A feuilletonist, across Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was an author who wrote novels that appeared in episodes in the newspaper. A feuillet is a piece of paper printed on both sides, a page of a newspaper or leaf of a book. Figuratively, "feuilleton" still suggests in French a story that is trivial or fantastic, much as we might say "science fiction." It also means sitcom or soap opera, a story that never stops.

A dramaturge is a playwright in the sense of one who writes for the theater, for the hungry maw of the daily stage which television has replaced. According to Bourrin the literary customs man, Bobillot wrote a play, *Barnave*, that was mounted at Grenoble when

he was in the city's garrison. He had other work mounted at the Theatre de Cluny, in Paris, and left several plays behind and some poems as well.

The great novelist Emile Zola may have published fiction in the newspapers but you wouldn't call him a feuilletonist. You might call the classic French dramatist Moliere a dramaturge that but you would also call him an auteur dramatique, or simply an author. Had Bobillot survived his wound he too might have become an author, a novelist and a playwright.

His exact contemporary, Lucien Descaves, also a sergeant, did it. His novel *Sous-offs*, in English "Sergeants", is still read. Alan recommended it to me along with Zola's *Debacle* as the classic representations of Bobillot's army.

Neither Descaves' nor Zola's novel makes the point which I notice immediately, digging for Bobillot, that the French military at the time was full of authors. Descaves like Zola was a gritty realist, a poet who didn't write about poetry. But from my point of view, looking for his army in the library, I find writers.

A. Brebion's biographical dictionary of Indochine is full of army writers. It is actually titled *Dictionnaire de Bio-Bibliographie Generale, Ancienne et Moderne de l'Indochine Francaise*, with a life and list of titles for each personage. Brebion spent his life as a schoolmaster in Indochine, quietly accumulating this invaluable account of all the others, only published after he was dead and no longer writing himself.

Both Granier and Riviere published many books before their untimely deaths. It is Garnier's expeditionary accounts that go in and out of print but Riviere, like Bobillot, published novels and died with a workshop full of plays and poems.

The one novel I have found among the booksellers and librarians of the world came out the year he died, 1885, by Sergent Bobillot in collaboration with Albin Valabregue. Seven years older, Valabregue was an established author who went on to enjoy a long career writing comedy, librettos and popular fiction.

The one copy of Bobillot's one printed and bound novel I have found in the libraries of the world is at Vanderbilt university, in Nashville, Tennessee. They won't lend it to my university library because theirs is one of an edition of ten. I hope that was a collector's edition, run off from plates then used to make a popular edition.

But I haven't found a copy of that yet. Vanderbilt acquired their first edition in the personal collection of Pascal Pia, a Paris literary man. Pia is known for his work in pornography, and in publishing for the freedom of Algiers and against the Nazis.

The family name of his father, Durand, is found in Brebion among the French military and colonists of Ha Noi, and the dates are right. But I have looked through the catalogue of the huge collection on-line and found no other connection of Pia to Indochine. I must drive to Tennessee to handle the novel and look for an inscription.

The novel is called *Une de ces Dames*. The one feuilleton I have found specific reference to, which seems also to have appeared posthumously, is called *Julia*. So there is a connection of Bobillot's fiction to women. I won't know about his poetry without finding his papers or his journalism without combing through old periodicals. I don't know the names of the pieces he presented at the Cluny.

The single Bobillot play I have found a copy of is named for a man, *Jacques Fayan*. His collaborator on that, Emile Max, seems to have a French lycee in Belgium named after him, and an avenue in Brussels. The play is a melodrama, something amateur and

professional alike can perform to the satisfaction of the public. It is a one-act, with three characters.

My copy is a second edition dated 1911, from a playscript company such as licenses a theater group to put on a show. Perhaps the first came out in a more literary edition, as the novel did, closer to the date of the original professional performance in 1889 at Ha Noi. That was a great success, proudly reported in Ha Noi.

I have bought a copy of the second edition, and while I wait for it to arrive from France I have got a photocopy enlargement the University of Maryland sent me from a copy they didn't want to lend. Just inside the second edition the publisher lists thirty-five other "one-act plays, easy to play and requiring few props". They are all described as vaudevilles or comedies.

There is also a "folie-vaudeville", a "pantomime-vaudeville" and a "vaud.-pantomime", and one each of a "comédie-bouffe", a "japonoiserie", a "fantaisie moyen age," a "charentonnade", a "pochade", and one straight play, a "piece." A comédie bouffe is a light comedy, a dozen specialist dictionaries cannot confirm my guess that charentonnade refers to the madhouse at Charenton, and a pochade is a sketch. This is the lively milieu in which the publisher sold Bobillot's play.

But the publisher calls *Jacques Fayan* a drama. That is what we would call it, now that melodrama is pejorative. *Barnave*, the one Bobillot wrote by himself and produced when he was twenty, is also named for a man. Antoine Pierre Joseph Marie Barnave was a liberal orator of the Revolution, from Grenoble, who died on the guillotine for his sympathies to the old court, especially Marie Antoinette whom he personally had arrested at the Swiss border.

We would call that history, but the French call it local color. No one would call it a drama. I think that it would require more than a few props and would not be easy to play. It would be a good show for a garrison to meet girls in a provincial town. But *Jacques Fayan*, although it premiered at the Theatre des Fantaisies Parissienes, is what we would call ashcan, walk-up, kitchen-sink realism.

In the first scene, Fayan already has lost his work and taken to drink while his wife goes hungry. Then their troubles begin. Jules Bobillot could have made a career of this kind of thing. The other sergeant-writer, Lucien Descaves, did. He has two plays listed at the back of the 1911 edition, with the other drama the publisher offers.

Jacques Fayan is listed with three others by Bobillot's collaborator, Emile Max. Descaves and Max and the other playwrights on the list at the back are all from "le theatre de contestation sociale", as a recent historian calls them in the title of his book. They wrote seriously for a popular audience, as advocates of working people.

Had he lived, Bobillot could have enjoyed fame in his own day and also been resurrected one hundred years later, with his socially-engaged friends. More common on the used book market now than Bobillot's own works was a commemorative portrait of him from 1888. There were three of them to one copy of the play.

I bought them all and now nothing from Bobilot is for sale anywhere I look on the Web. The prints came in the mail right away. They are all carefully mounted with adhesive on card stock with the names and date of the newspaper cut out.

French archivists delight in doing this, preserving the facts. Why would you need to know what paper they came from and what date? Why would you want to look at the back of the page?

Two of the prints are identical copies of a newspaper illustration. Titled “the true portrait of sergeant Bobillot, drawing of M. Vuillier after the photography of M. Blanc”, they show him from shoulders up, in civilian jacket, shirt collar and flowing artist’s tie. The photography session that led to the woodcut that the newspaper reproduced may also lie behind the bust I found on the Web at square Henri Rousselle.

In three dimensions, his head is turned halfway to his left shoulder. In the newspaper he is looking straight ahead at the reader. However, the story that accompanies the image is about a full-scale statue, not a bust. It seems already to be up on the avenue Voltaire but the story discusses an inauguration that will take place on July 15.

So the paper is from 1888. In one copy the matting crops out the story, nicely framing the bust on the vertical. The other one crops the image on the horizontal with the story, as if to accompany the other print I got from the same bookseller.

There is no way to tell if it came from the same newspaper, though. It is a vertical woodcut of a full statue of Bobillot in uniform and helmet, rifle at port in his left hand, right hand pointing toward the ground in a gesture of command. It shows an enlisted man taking charge and becoming classic, striding over broken cannon, a ball, and an axe.

I never saw this statue in Paris and I cannot find it now on the Web. You can find a photograph of every street address in Paris at one site on the Web, but not every statue. It may be in the city somewhere, maybe still on Voltaire or in Place Paul Verlaine where Crepu puts it. I have written to an association of military engineers, who honor Bobillot on their website.

Their website shows a flat round image of what might be a commemorative dinner plate, showing an engineer in a colonial army helmet, jumping toward us into a breach in a

wall and pointing at the ground just as Bobillot does in the picture of the statue. There is no caption to the image.

The market also offered one copy of a 1947 novel about Bobillot at Tuyen Quang, which I snapped up too as well. A novel of mystery and adventure, the way it refers to Bobillot and Tuyen Quang suggests that the story was still known among boys.

Indeed, there was a comic book in 1937, *Sergent Bobillot* by Robert Lortac. A founder of French animation, he sold his movie equipment in 1936 and turned to comic books and detective novels. *Sergent Bobillot* is one of five titles I find by him in a catalogue of research libraries, all from 1937. Bobillot is in some other editor's series, 'Lived History', produced before Lortac launched a few of his own.

The BNF has dozens of Lortac's titles, all set in the kind of world the Belgian comics hero Tintin lives in, with pirates and colonies, savage women and reporters and fast cars. Lortac was born Robert Collard, the year before Bobillot died, into a military family, but first he failed out of military school and then got his shoulder blown off in 1915. He threw himself with joy into the possibilities of cartoons to entertain and instruct.

Then the Depression killed the movie business. He turned to print and one of his first projects was Bobillot. Enthusiasts on the Web told me all about Lortac in two minutes. He is like Bobillot, a guy with a popular following who hasn't made it into histories yet. I want that comic book. If I can't get to it here, I will read it at the BNF, if the French national library happens to be open the month I manage to get there.

Maybe there was a movie? Bobillot has become a hobby of mine. I want to find his papers, track down all the books about him, read what kids read in school, walk all the streets that have been named for him, talk to people who mean something when they say,

“Bobillot.” I want to write a book about what he did, the people who honored him, and how he has become forgotten.

For Legionnaires he still means something. Searching for him has led me through the history of the French conquest of Indochine. But all I read on metal signs banged onto two or four or eight walls at every block of Bobillot nearly every day of my school year in Paris was that a sergeant died at Tonkin.

I never noticed his bust because I would take the bus east, to the right, at Tolbiac well before Butte aux Cailles. The Tolbiac line runs by les Olympiades, across the river, and by the National Library. There would always be at least one pair of women on the bus chatting in Vietnamese. On foot I would notice a Vietnamese name banged into the wall here and there, announcing professional offices.

On foot we could also look in the windows of a patisserie, a charcuterie, a traiterie or a brasserie with signage from the 1930s or the 1950s, indeed selling pastry or meats, prepared foods or lunch, but the man behind the counter and the calendar on the wall and the foods in the case might be visibly Vietnamese. My favorite one of these is on Patay, off Tolbiac not far from the bus stop for Les Olympiades.

The store faces the square of the church of Jean d’Arc where the neighborhood market sets up on Wednesday and Saturday. Farmers and fishers, cheese and sausage makers drive in from hours around Paris to sell food. One of them is a Vietnamese man making nem, the Ha Noi rolled speciality with pork and cilantro.

The store I like facing this market offers a full range of Chinese prepared foods, behind a façade that reads “Mom’s” over the door in colloquial Southern Vietnamese. On the column at the outside edge of each display window with the Asian food in it is the



painting of a farm girl in Alsatian costume. It used to be a store that sold regional delicacies of the province Alsace.

One reason Jules Ferry's government fell after the minor defeat at Lang Son in 1865 was that Alsace was still lost to the Germans, along with Lorraine. After the Prussians had conquered France in 1871, at Metz in Lorraine, they took the border provinces in the peace agreement. The Emperor's wife tried to ransom her captured husband from his captors at Metz, with an offer of Cochinchine and Cambode.

Central Paris then rose up in revolt against the government that had lost, which retreated to Versailles and put artillery on Montsouris to contain the rebels. Fourteen years later in 1885 people still wanted to know why France was fooling around overseas when they still hadn't got Alsace and Lorraine back from Germany.

Ferry, from a Lorraine family, had been mayor of Paris during the Prussian invasion. The subsequent German empire had encouraged his adventures overseas. Ferry's enemies said that Bismarck took advantage of his relationship with Ferry to distract the French government from German aggression.

Otto Eduard Leopold von Bismarck-Schonhausen, duke of Lauenburg, had been declared a Prince and the Chancellor of the new German Empire when it was announced at Versailles under German occupation in 1871. Versailles is the palace outside of Paris where the Sun King had centralized France and used his power to push around the small and disorganized German-speaking countries.

When the Germans announced their new empire at the capital of the ancien regime, Jules Ferry was dealing with insurrection in Paris itself while negotiating with the Chancellor at the quaint royal suburb. Bismarck was an intelligent and far-sighted Junker

diplomat whose career had become that of the unification of the German states into an empire in Europe that had a place in the world.

Domestically, he and Ferry each originated the modern social welfare state in his own country. Each did it as a junior minister, against the Church on the right and the Socialists on the left, to secure rule at home while pushing outside for influence.

With Germany and Italy organized, France looked overseas. Germany played France off Britain and Russia in the push into Africa and Asia. Empire was part and parcel of these nations, a province the same as a colony. Later in Ferry's career opposition pamphleteers actually proposed trading Indochine or Madagascar to Germany for the two provinces.

France only really got Alsace and Lorraine back after the treaty at Versailles in 1918, the one where President Wilson's men turned young Nguyen Ai Quoc and his demands for a nation away as irrelevant. Then of course France lost Alsace, Lorraine and half the country when a hungrier German empire invaded in 1939.

They lost all of Indochine to the Japanese empire and then to their old Chinese and British enemies by 1945. Then DeGaulle and the Free French came back with the Allies, and they haven't seen Britain as the enemy for fifty years now because they both have been losing their empires. At some point in this ebb and flow somebody opened a shop in Paris, facing the square of the church of Jean d'Arc, selling Alsatian food.

It is something else now. Indochine and the Chinese merchants who worked there are now shot through Paris. While I was working there an ad campaign plastered billboard-sized trompe l'oeil photographs on the walls by the metro tracks showing women in cone

hats planting rice in the Seine by the Louvre. To me it was a slight manipulation to dramatize daily reality.

Whenever I saw the ad I was on my way or coming from some Vietnamese event. Usually I would be waiting for a train to take me some place I might find Vietnamese books for sale. That search took me to places all over the city two or three times a week for nine months.

Let's start at Les Olympiades, getting off the Tolbiac bus and walking up the stairs to the mall. In the right of way like a rock in a channel there is the Mercure, a French papeterie, a place where you buy paper stuff, a news-stand and bookstall. They carry a limited stock of student books and bestsellers but pride themselves on getting any book distributed in Paris by the next day.

I asked them one day where else I could look for Vietnamese books. It's not a Vietnamese business but they consulted a book and gave me some suggestions. I ordered that book from them, a guide to the specialist booksellers of the city. Published outside the city, it took a nearly week to get and I had to stop by two or three times.

I was there anyways, visiting the Olympiades bookstores and reading the posters on the walls. I would start reading them one or two or more blocks away, depending where I walked in from. They start on Tolbiac across from the stairs, but on the other side they run up Choisy beyond Ben Thanh and down Ivry to the boulevard that runs around the city.

One thing an anthropologist will do in the field is to attend the events of the community through the cycle of the year and through the life cycle. Seasonal celebrations on the one hand, and weddings and funerals on the other. I wasn't studying the Vietnamese community in Paris but I went to their events to buy books.

Generally there would be a room where people would be selling things. Many of those tables would be books and newspapers and magazines. I would get stuff to read and note booksellers and organizations that were there, from around Paris and often from around Europe. I would find the events on the walls at and around les Olympiades.

The life cycle events I attended were in my girlfriend's apartment building, birthdays of the family of her landlord and the neighbors. None of them were Vietnamese or Asian or colonials. I also took part in defenses of theses on Viet Nam at different university buildings around Paris. Colleagues would invite me, but I could go to any I heard about.

Defenses in France are public events. The thesis is posted somewhere and anyone can show up to attack its author personally in front of everyone. At the ones I went to the most common and hotly debated topic, from professionals and amateurs alike, was grammar and choice of word.

On any given day I might be on my way to a new place that might sell Vietnamese books, stop at a seminar or a defense, and then out to a community event looking for more booksellers setting up at tables in the sales room. I would find the events on the walls here in Les Olympiades. There were more than I could go to and I started getting interested in the posters for their own sake.

I started taking pictures of them and people noticed and pictures like mine started showing up in community newsletters, and a picture of me with everyone else looking at the books at a New Year's party. The posters for celebrations of New Year, Tet, are easy to tell you about in general. I won't tell you much specific about them.

Back in the Red River delta where Vietnamese people come from, the lunar new year starts about a time when one harvest is over and planting hasn't started yet. People who have done well have little to do but slaughter their pig and eat it. People who have not done well have nothing to do but starve.

No rice farmer on the delta is ever that far away from starving because there are a lot of people and not that much land. Moreover, not long after new year the monsoons start sweeping in and floods threaten the fields and even the villages. The very individualist households of the village have to stick together. Nobody actually starves to death unless nearly everyone does, which has happened.

So they have big parties around the lunar new year and everyone eats himself or herself sick for two weeks or two months, if there is enough to go around. When I was living in Ha Noi foreigners dreaded new year, Tet, because we each had to visit all our friends and eat there, paying many visits a day. The preferred dish is made of sticky rice, beans, and pork, sometimes refried in fat.

Overseas Vietnamese carry on like that in their homes, too, but they also throw big parties. There is no call for it in Viet Nam, the entire country is one big party for the month of February, but in Paris for example an association will rent a hall and have a dinner, a fashion show, a dance, making a Vietnamese world. Posters go up weeks in advance advertising the event.

The posters for competing events fight each other on Les Olympiades, and on its approaches and exits. They fight because there was a civil war in Viet Nam. During the fight against the French that came beforehand, Vietnamese in France were organized by the Vietnamese Communist Party on the side of the homeland.

That organization persisted in France through the civil war, throwing the weight of the Vietnamese in France behind Ha Noi. It is more complicated than that because Vietnamese have been in France for hundreds of years. But, broadly speaking, when Saigon fell and refugees fled to France the poor ones were greeted by French social workers who were Vietnamese Communists.

In the United States there were only a couple hundred Vietnamese total already in the country before 1975, and the Communists among them were located and neutralized. The whole community now suffers under uncontested right-wing domination. But in France the refugees had to take what they were offered from the people giving it to them.

They didn't like it, and now that many immigrants are doing well there is a healthy tussle between the old Communist front organizations and the new rightist ones. I like this situation because it is polyarchy. In the struggle between the two big blocs there is room for many others to flourish.

Paris, for example, is a place where I quickly can convey to someone I meet that I am glad that Viet Nam unified against the will of France and the United States but I deplore the dominance of its Communist Party, particularly over intellectual life. I am a partisan of *Nhan Van* and *Giai Pham*, two famous literary magazines that were oppressed by the Party in the 1950s when Ha Noi aligned with China against Russia within the communist bloc, and against the West, for unity in the coming struggle with Saigon.

There is a whole bookstore here on Les Olympiades for people like me. The librarians at the public library nearby would agree with me too, although they have their differences with the people at the bookstore. That is about as much as I am going to tell you about who thinks what.

I am not a spy. The very reason I worked in France was that an individual police officer in Viet Nam thinks I am a spy and will not allow me to enter the country. That knocked me out of research there, of course, and more seriously knocked me out of competition for most American research funding for Vietnamese studies.

As Stalinism goes, it was a light tap on the nose but it changed my life course in a direction I did not choose and caused me expense and sorrow. In general, the dangers involved in Vietnamese literature are minor unless you happen to be the person suffering one of them. How would you like to be barred from your profession by secret decision without chance of appeal?

That's what happened to me. How would you like to live under house arrest in your native village for fifteen years? That's what happened to the leader of the literary movement in Ha Noi which I admire. How would you like to have your books defaced or looted from public libraries and get beaten when you go out in public? That's what happened to one of my favorite exile authors, in Paris and in California.

I don't go around talking about other people of the Vietnamese book except in ways they are already doing deliberately in public. Other university researchers often deal with the ethical problems of representation by asking their informants for permission. You ask the informant to sign a consent like drug companies use to try not to get sued. I instead make the decision by myself because I am best informed of the situation.

The Vietnamese book people of the world often do not apprehend how much information I get out of their appearance, workplace, and idle confidences. I don't speak Vietnamese or French very well, for one thing. Often I am awkward in English as well, and my general knowledge in every tradition and situation gapes with holes. Most people

don't credit how clearly I hear what they tell me and how much context I have to place it in.

They don't know that the books I read even exist, that I can sit in my barn with my library card and order the world. Once in Paris a friend urged me to write up his or her story, and I did it just to show him or her that there was no way that he or she would consent to its publication.

He or she took one look at my write-up and agreed instantly. I had explained that he or she was an operative of a Communist Party front organization supplying Vietnamese literature to rightist immigrants in a much-needed project of support for cultural diversity in France. On the plane in I had re-read my friend Giselle Bousquet's book about political struggle among the Vietnamese communities of Paris.

When I told this fascinating story to an adviser back home he or she urged me use a pseudonym, or make a composite character. A pseudonym would not protect my informant from exposure and harassment. We live in the small world of the Vietnamese book, where people already use pseudonyms as a matter of course and nobody is fooled. Composite characters, well, it is hard for me to believe that a colleague suggested that.

I am trying to tell the truth. Remember Max Weber, the man doing science on the platform, like me lecturing on general anthropology? Weber told young Franz Boas the home truth that no Jew would ever be a professor in Germany, so Boas came here and transformed American anthropology from the kind of thing Europeans and Vietnamese do on natives, to a science of the history of humanity.

History rests upon details. Any detail I directly attest to in these pages is as close to true as I can manage. You will have noticed that I have told you stories about my life that



you have interpreted differently from how I apparently do. In literature this is dramatic irony; in ethnography it is a best practice, the way the story should be told.

For example, when in our basic training my entering class discussed *The Political Systems of Highland Burma*, Sir Edmund Leach's book, many of us disagreed with its author but most of us drew a common conclusion from our variant readings: a good ethnography should provide enough detail to support its critics. That can't happen if I make up characters to illustrate my point.

The details in this chapter are about places in the Paris I investigated. It is a great city for an intellectual to become an individual and discover a world, finding a point of view by pulling the cover off some truths in plain sight. The men who became Nhat Linh, and Ho Chi Minh, and Phan Huy Duong, and Alan Farrell all did it. You come, too.

On from the papeterie where I picked up my directory of specialist bookstores, on through the plaza past the soup shop and the billiard parlor just like the pair of them in the old strip mall in Greensboro, North Carolina, and into the covered mall. Down the hall on your left as you walk in is another, huge, soup place and on the right is a Vietnamese music store where I buy one of my Vietnamese magazines.

There is one of those in the mall in Greensboro, too. I think of all of Les Olympiades as the Vietnamese mall but in fact the first business you meet from Tolbiac is that French newsstand. Over the entrance to the inside mall is a Chinese sign.

At the corner, a good fifty yards to the left, is the Buddhist temple of an association from a particular village in China. There is another one to the right, one story down at ground level near Ivry, the avenue at the back of Les Olympiades. This area is dominated by Chinese.

Just like home, but more so. The New Year's parade down Ivry is led by lion and dragon dancers, the traditional performance of a Chinese community. Their drummers practice in the underground temples by the garages, booming up for weeks beforehand. For some reason the dragon dancers rehearse in front of the entrance we're at, on the Tolbiac side, or just inside in bad weather.

I have to get through them on my way to my Vietnamese bookstores. This would not happen in Viet Nam. In Viet Nam those Chinese who do not assimilate to Vietnamese ways are contained in a Chinatown of Saigon, called Big Market, Cho Lon.

One reason there are so many Chinese merchants in Paris is that after 1975 the Vietnamese government persecuted Chinese because they were merchants, and tacitly allowed them to flee. Once out of Viet Nam these merchants enjoy the opportunity to present themselves as Chinese or Vietnamese, to affiliate with Vietnamese or wider Chinese organizations.

In the United States you can find their shops scattered in the old Chinatowns. They also play a role, even dominate, the newer malls that put Viet Nam first. But at Eden Plaza in Falls Church and around Westminster the flagpoles fly the old Republic of Viet Nam flag. Here at Les Olympiades they put Chinese characters over the door and two Chinese temples around it.

I scarcely noticed. Reading Chinese signs is no more than a hobby for me and I don't go to temples. My regular route plunges me straight into the mall. You can read what I wrote for my colleagues in my Paris field notes, an appendix to this dissertation.

A dissertation, by the way, in French is what kids write in school. When I say "my dissertation" in English to a French person I feel like I am wearing a smock and presenting

something in crayon to my mother for the refrigerator door. Each doctoral defense I went to in France was the presentation of a these [use grave], a thesis, an idea with evidence.

Orally we called the occasion a defense, with an accent aigu on the first syllable. It usually was a defense, against the grammarians among us. The experience has left me skeptical about the authority of French language, after several occasions watching a room full of educated professional native speakers disagree profoundly about the spelling of a doctoral candidate.

That surprised me because when I walked into my first university classroom in Paris I found an undergraduate student tearing into the ideas themselves of the professor with a sustained ferocity I had not seen since Exeter, loud and fast. The professor was hitting back, too, as hard and accurately as he could. It went on for more than ten minutes by the clock.

When they finished Michel Fournie turned and greeted me without apology or embarrassment, as the next order of business. We later sat together at my first academic conference in Paris, the one Chris Goscha organized, where in the next row the distinguished historian Philip Devillers heckled an eminent colleague like a schoolboy, throughout his whole paper.

You just don't get this in a classroom or at a history conference in the United States. But I also didn't see such behavior at the doctoral defenses I saw in Paris. Maybe that is because a French these is such a ponderous document.

Here, you strain the good wishes of the committee when you go over two hundred pages. There, a candidate might proudly submit to the jury multiple volumes with

separately bound appendices. Here, the dissertation is a hurdle to jump before applying for funding to write it again as a book, for tenure, and then abandon for the next project.

There it is a finished product that you carry around and lecture from for the rest of your life. Professor Fournie would regularly bring his these from the 1970s to the lecture platform in the year 2000. Covered with subsequent notes the doctoral thesis itself was the physical basis for a day's work.

They call the defense a defense [use *égu*], and they were shocked to hear that in the United States the occasion is run by the candidate's adviser, rather than by a third party from another institution, that it is a private event in a seminar room rather than a public one in a lecture hall. But despite all the fuss over grammar it is a cosy occasion.

The formal written announcement calls each defense a "soutenance", from the verb "soutenir", to hold up from below. The French mean by it to affirm with reason, to profess, as well as to take a shock, and also it means to take someone's side and to comfort. In English you could call a soutenance the support and sustenance of the thesis.

You uphold it and the community attends to sustain it. As in the United States, by the time you get up to defend your dissertation you are the world expert on your topic and no one can dismiss your work. They are there to recognize you, whether by critique or applause.

In the United States it happens in a small room with the door shut but in France it is a public occasion. I am writing an American dissertation in the French style. All through my research in Paris I posted my fieldnotes to a public, to my anthropology classmates and to Viet Nam scholars around the world.

We have a listserv. When the time comes I will let everyone know that they can go to my website and read this dissertation before I defend it. Anyone with an objection can write to my chair, or to the ethics committee at Carolina, or most likely work it out directly with me.

I expect to hear a lot about my French and my Vietnamese. The larger issues of my work are harder to talk about in professional terms. I read history but I don't write it. I live by fiction and poetry but I am no literary critic or theorist. I am an ethnographer to my toes but I won't write about most of the people I observe.

I have already got the most satisfactory reaction I expect to get from a fellow Vietnamese studies professional. At Chris Goscha's conference in December that year in Paris the historian David Marr told me that my guide to the Vietnamese and Orientalist bookstores of the 13e was helpful. He had run out and used them at a free moment.

That is exactly what I had wrote them for. The bookstores in Les Olympiades are difficult for a Parisian to find, let alone a foreign scholar on lunch break from a conference. Nina, Duong Thu Huong's translator, who has lived in Paris since not long after we graduated from Yale, was the other person to thank me for the work and say she would use it for telling guests where to go.

The mall is a warren like Haussmann paved over, with given addresses on streets that in fact run through the parking garage below. There is a list posted on the wall by the stair up from the Ivry side, but walking in from Tolbiac you are entirely on your own.

Five years ago when I first walked in from the plaza I had no idea where I was although I had been there before. The week before, a classmate from the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales had driven up to the front entrance on Ivry, parked

in the garage deck below and walked us up to the most famous bookstore in the mall, Nam A, and on out towards Tolbiac to eat soup at the place on the left next to the billiard hall on the plaza.

It was the rentree, October, when all of Paris and France come back to school. Right now in the United States I am starting to draft the second half of this dissertation the day after Labor Day, when school would start in the United States when I was a kid. Individual states and school boards have been pushing that date further and further back into summer, but this year the people of North Carolina pushed back and they started at the end of August.

Paris has stuck to its guns and it will be another month before I can reach any scholar there to discuss details of this account, when and where things happened that aren't in my diary and notebooks and fieldnotes, maps and photographs. They will want to talk about the hurricane in New Orleans last week, which spared the Viet Nam specialists of that city.

Randy Fertel, of a merchant family there, was out of town teaching in New York and the water never touched his house. Sara Colm, a human rights researcher, was at meetings in Washington and her husband evacuated safely. By contrast dozens, maybe hundreds, of Vietnamese were trapped in Our Lady of Viet Nam church in Versailles just outside New Orleans for a week and all thirty thousand or so Vietnamese of the area are now homeless.

That is to say, the well-to-do escaped and the poor are hip-deep in sewage and baking in the sun if they are lucky. France and the world are appalled and wondering what to say about us. Stuff happens to everyone but neither rich countries nor socialist ones

leave the poor out in the elements. Four years ago when I came back from Paris the fall disaster was the attack on New York and Washington, and France and the world simply rushed to our support.

They really are our friends, but no one knows what to say. The present is a buzz and confusion. Walking in on my own from Tolbiac in October 2000, passing the soup place on my right, on in to look for bookstores, I had no idea even that I was walking into the recent past, where my friend had taken me. I went back and back, finding new places that sold books, making index cards, for months even after I wrote the walking tour David used on lunch break from Chris' conference in December.

I sat at that conference with Michel Fournie and Stephen O'Harrow, the men who hold the two full-time jobs outside Viet Nam teaching Vietnamese literature. Stephen is at the University of Hawaii. There might be one more in Korea. Stephen counsels students that there aren't likely to be other jobs, and that he doesn't expect to be replaced.

The rest of us in the United States have day jobs as historians, or teach writing or French or Chinese or Vietnamese, or don't work in research or education at all. Even in France, my other two university seminar leaders in Vietnamese literature, distinguished scholars and critics, were a faculty wife and a moonlighting high school teacher.

However, there has been someone like Michel Fournie at the institution now known as the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales since before Philastre came back from the debacle at Tonkin. INALCO is the unlovely acronym from the democratization of the university system after 1968. In an old movie, the rich guy's young wife Jane Fonda picks up his Orientalist dilettante son in front of the old location at Rue de Lille after class, in a convertible, just before they fall in love.

They would have called it Langues O'. It's a romantic place, tolerant of idealists and enthusiasts like Garnier, which also turns out workaday Philistines who really know what they are doing. One classmate from my seminar at another university, the Sorbonne, stopped me on the street one day to vent about Michel's Vietnamese, outraged that the one university professor of Vietnamese literature in all France could not even speak the language properly.

The man was a chemical engineer, a retired citizen of Vietnamese origin with some opinions about Vietnamese language. They are the kind of thing you hear about French at thesis defenses, heartfelt expressions of it is hard to say what. Pierre Bourdieu, whose study of the French school system before 1968 was my field guide in 2000, would say it was a matter of class, or of the show of distinction that justifies inequality.

Michel's Vietnamese is entirely competent. His early research was on linguistics, and for his teaching he prepares philological dossiers on Vietnamese authors from the last one hundred years. If he doesn't show the literary flair in conversation that Eric and Stephen do, well neither do most Vietnamese writers I know, or most of the book people of any kind I have worked among. Plenty of sword fighters are not also fencing masters.

Michel's French itself is bluff and direct, not always with the upright neck and free throat of the comfortable, those in command and their dependents, who warble reason without passionate emphasis. He has family in the East, near Germany, and his father was captured by the Viet Minh, as was my cousin the career sergeant from central France. Gaston ran off from his captors when they ducked from an American napalm strike, but Fournie pere walked through the awful grinding march and camps when most of the prisoners died.



It wasn't a deliberate death march, really, like the conquering Japanese poked my uncle Ray through from Bataan, but like the Japanese later in that war the Vietnamese revolutionaries just after it were not prepared or disposed to nurture their prisoners. It's the fecklessness that makes survivors crazy about the whole thing, as it makes crazy the Vietnamese allies of the United States who later survived the re-education camps after 1975.

It can be hard to accept that you have suffered and watched your comrades die because your captors are rude, badly educated, and unprepared. Michel believes in education and he stands ready to dress down any Vietnamese on matters of Vietnamese language and literature, no matter what a chemical engineer of good family from Ha Noi in the old days thinks about his accent.

I bring all this up because INALCO, still called Langues O' for "langues Orientales", Eastern languages, is the historic and continuing home of Orientalism in France. I call myself an Orientalist now for the same reason I use the Southern "you all" in lectures up North, just to see who in the audience jumps.

"Orientalist" has been a solecism or more often a pejorative in the United States since Edward Said, a professor of English at Columbia University who somehow had sat out the movement there for democracy in the university and against the war in Viet Nam, stepped forward as an advocate for his people of Palestine in their struggle for justice from Israel.

Just after the war he wrote a book called Orientalism, about the development of modern French scholarship in the study of what they called the Orient, the East, what we call the Middle East. His point is that the basis of the Western intellect is looking at others

as if they are not human. In my callow youth, after a childhood watching the war in Viet Nam on television, I honestly had no idea that anyone didn't already know that, that there was any need for an argument with authorities and footnotes.

Said was a visiting professor at Yale when I was an undergraduate. He was another preppy from a rival school and college, an Episcopalian from Columbia, the university that owns Harlem in the city of Wall Street. I sat through some meetings of his seminar and went on my way. We couldn't begin to talk to each other. But for years it was my fate to have his work called to my attention every time I tell an American academic what I do.

I took a French class at UNC the year before I went to Paris, just to get ready to speak French, and found to my alarm that Sahar Amer, the French-educated teacher of Arabic, expected us all to study Edward's book all semester and prove that we understood its arguments. This is exactly what drove me out of the man's classroom when I was twenty, intellect as prestige and authority when there is so much work to be done, but at least among the cadre in New Haven no one had expected me to parrot anyone's ideas.

I had moved down the line from another Wall Street university, Yale, to a state school, and out of my research department at the University of North Carolina to Sahar's classroom where she was doing her job teaching undergraduate majors and master's degree candidates what to teach when they became schoolteachers. Embarrassed to explain my disgust, I vanished from the course.

In Ha Noi I had shown around town the man who would have had Said's job in a better world, the one where I am as workaday and middle-brow as I feel. Jonah Raskin wrote the first university dissertation directly proposing a post-colonial approach to British literature, in 1967. He was a Jew, and his adviser was the first Jew tenured in the

humanities at Columbia, and the most influential professor of English in the United States during the Cold War, Lionel Trilling.

I like Jonah's dissertation because it speaks directly of the imperialism that the British Empire and the United States took part in, in terms of books that were taught in every English department in the United States in Jonah's day, as the better-known *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett addressed the issue of gender.

Edward's book by contrast is about the French and their view of Arabs. It may be more profound in terms of historic depth and the present economic imperative of oil, but it offers no direct applications to the study of English literature or to research on Asia in the United States in our time.

I think that's why Edward got tenure at a major research university in our big city. Jonah's views by contrast were so applicable in 1970 that he was the Minister of Education in the Youth International Party, known as the Yippies. Under the revolutionary name Jomo he incited the mob that occupied Columbia that year. He would run in on weekends and evenings from his day job as a young star at the State University of New York, at Stonybrook.

But his adviser, Lionel Trilling, caught on and blackballed Jonah on his tenure review. Trilling – you have to use the last name, he's like Ho that way, and oh I suppose Said is now too - was the liberal ideologist of American anti-communism, ears up at any whiff of Stalinism and barking at any intruder to the university. So Jonah went off to a job in Communications at a California state university, a department without prestige in the second rung of the system, and quietly has accomplished a mountain of immediately useful research and has published several solid-selling studies of our times.

Jonah and I had our first meeting at the café where middle-aged Catherine Deneuve, when young the avatar of Marian, emblem of France, had eaten while shooting *Indochine*. The movie is about Deneuve's plantation and her Vietnamese daughter who joins the revolution. The cafe is run by a Ha Noi family who returned from the French plantations at New Caledonia after the revolution, who hang photos of Deneuve everywhere.

Vietnamese audiences everywhere love Deneuve on her plantation and its coolies. They lined up around the block for that movie. Asianist ethnographers from the United States my age and younger all trade stories like this, about the avid Orientalism of the people we can't call Orientals any more because of Said, whose plummy diction about social justice and worse, his humorless disciples, have made it difficult to speak with candor in the American university about life as we have found it.

Jonah and I got together in Ha Noi because he was looking for a publisher for his scholarly life of his good friend Abbie Hoffman. I was an editor at Viet Nam Generation, Inc., devoted to authors like Jonah. I told him he could do better. He may have been driven from a research career, but New York is full of editors with distribution muscle who will consider publishing a book about Abbie by a Yippie. Viet Nam Generation, Inc. was a publisher of last resort, for people who had authored themselves entirely out of history.

Abbie Hoffman, the great American revolutionary, couldn't stay away from history. Even underground, fleeing a drugs charge under a fake name and a nose job, he became the media spokesman for a landmark environmentalist movement. Stephen O'Harrow already had his own publishers before Viet Nam Generation, Inc. came along, but he was more in our line, a serious-minded fugitive from our times.

Stephen ran out on the whole Viet Nam war thing, to live down and out overseas. In Paris he wrote a thesis on Nhat Linh, at Langues O', and again in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies. At Hawaii he has devoted his research to much older work just about nobody is interested in, from well before Gia Long, while quietly rebuilding the Vietnamese-teaching capacity of the United States. He's a very traditional scholar of a topic traditional scholars of the United States have no interest in.

He's the last person who would have stepped forward to point out that post-colonialists in the United States might reasonably take an interest in the Viet Nam war and learn Vietnamese language. The last few times I have seen him his joke was "Francophony", shorthand for the scholarly study of the literatures of the former French colonies. An elegant tall man who speaks vernacular and university French, Stephen pronounced the word as an American unfamiliar with the field would, so it obviously means something French and phony, pretentious and false.

David Marr, who took my walking tour out from Chris' conference, while I had lunch with Stephen, has no such crotchets or classroom airs, even ironical ones. He won't sit in the catbird seat. He stands in front of you like he has come to fix the pipes or revise Bretton Woods. He is the American who established Vietnamese studies as a normal field of study, in Australia.

Before that he was at the Southeast Asianist heart of the anti-war movement in my country. Before that he was an analyst with the United States Marine Corps in Viet Nam, when he noticed while analysing after-action reports that the enemy was going to win. He went home and did his duty as a citizen. After that, rather than work in a marginal position in the United States, he went to the other side of the world.

David's duty was to document, to alert, and inform the American people that the Vietnamese people of the Southern countryside had united to defeat them. As Wilfred Burchett, an Australian communist newspaperman who worked in the liberated zones put it, "Viet Nam Will Win!" David had noticed this coming eventuality in 1961, well before the United States' Military Assistance and Advisory Group Vietnam, MAAG, became MACV, the Military Assistance Command Vietnam, and metastatized to half a million boots on the ground by 1966.

By that time David was home telling people what he had learned. Those after-action reports had shown that Vietnamese revolutionaries, uneducated farmers working within walking distance from their homes, consistently regrouped after being shattered by superior force. Not only that, but tactically during the shattering battles, and strategically over the course of months and years, they worked as a team and in line with the overall revolutionary path even without command communication from outside.

That is to say, the rural South concealed a nation, a place where people know where they are and what to do to keep the enemy out. David not only thought that the people of the United States should know about this, he also thought that it was an historical puzzle. Nothing like that had happened when the Vietnamese last had their own boundaries, when the French pushed in.

He went to the University of California at Berkeley and wrote a dissertation about how this turned around. His substantial career as an author begins with the book that became, about the 1880s, continues with another one about the 1920s, and concludes with a single volume as long as the first two combined, about 1945, the year the Vietnamese

people declared their nation in Ha Noi. You can read them to learn the history of Viet Nam from the death of Bobillot to the emergence of Ho Chi Minh.

That's what we all do. Reading David is the *gradus ad Parnassum* of most students of modern Viet Nam outside that country, and his overall view is not that different from the story they tell in schools and colleges across Viet Nam. Even those of us who cannot abide this triumphalist narration of the rise of the Communist Party of Viet Nam swim in David's footnotes, a buzzing hive of books and authors.

David reads Vietnamese extensively and intensively as few who have learned the language as adults do, and has handled a greater variety of Vietnamese books than most inside the shabby libraries of that impoverished, police-ridden country. His footnotes are a sea of books and authors and publishing houses swimming an inch or two or three thick beneath the march of history in the narrative above.

I first offered this observation in a talk I gave at Asian Studies the spring before I was to go back to Viet Nam. That was when Keith came up and told me that he would only resign his job at Cornell in favor of a Vietnamese literature specialist. A couple months later, when I found I was barred from the country, Peter Zinoman called to offer sympathy and we chatted about my dissertation and David's work. "Use the footnotes," Peter said he tells his students.

Keith and Peter and I all dissent from David's view of modern history in Viet Nam. Keith fought in the war six years after David, when we were losing like David had been saying we would, and came back to bury himself in Vietnamese history even older than what Stephen studies. Peter is younger than me, grew up around Southeast Asia with a dad in our Foreign Service, learned Vietnamese translating an avant-gardist fictioneer in Ha

Noi, and lately works on a bitter satirist, a contemporary to Nhat Linh who mocked his do-gooding.

We're all basically interested in literature, although none of us can read like David does, and all advocate for the study of the Republic of Viet Nam in Saigon, 1954-1975, a wild society under a weak government which is the modern Viet Nam which developed after David's story ends, in opposition to the history that marches through his books. The joke of it is that this authority we rebel against is an exile from our country, one where Keith and Peter hold very good jobs.

Keith is at Cornell, where David left the country from, and Peter is at Berkeley, where David trained. David is at Australia National University. Looking back, it is easy to say that of course he couldn't have a job in the American ideological establishment after devoting ten years to struggle against it, and winning. Despite what you may think, there are almost no student leaders from the anti-war movement, or the civil rights struggle for that matter, working as research professors in the American university system.

But the story David tells is even more disheartening. He fled to Australia when he learned that he had antagonized a senior professor, George McTurnan Kahin, who was on David's side against the war. The last time I visited Cornell was for a Viet Nam conference at the center named for Kahin. He was a great man of the World War Two generation, when we poured buckets of money into Asian Studies.

There are dozens of men recently dead or just retiring who went straight from the Army into a lavishly funded career studying Japan or Korea or China or Indonesia. Kahin, an Indonesianist among them, lobbied for a lot of that money to go into Southeast Asia



Studies. Keith and David as young men their sons' age had every reason to think they would have jobs like his, establishing Vietnamese studies.

The war came, and the anti-war movement. To his great credit Kahin turned from his own research to lobby and teach and publish about Viet Nam and against intervention. One of his students, Frances Fitzgerald, daughter of one of founding operations chiefs at the Central Intelligence Agency, studied with Kahin at Yale and turned her notes into the first best-selling book here about Vietnamese history, on the bedside stand of all the respectable citizens, the silent majority who turned against the war.

After his doctorate, after the war, David was junior to George at Cornell. He antagonized the older man in some trivial way and decided that George would thwart the progress of his research career in the United States. This can happen: look at Trilling and Jonah. Jonah has carried on, writing books, as one of the anti-war leaders among the faculty of the United States, H. Bruce Franklin, has carried on since being fired from a tenured position at Stanford at the initiative of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Jonah and Bruce have each had the privilege to write and publish a stack of good books. What they haven't had is prestige and resources to attract and train generation after generation of bachelor's and master's and doctoral students in their field of research, to see their students' books published by university presses and acquired by the research libraries along with the manuscripts and archives used in them.

George did David a favor. Had David stayed at Cornell and in the United States, had there been no rift between them, George still would have been an Indonesianist and David would have been struggling against him and the preponderance of funding for that huge country, an American ally in the Cold War. Even in the 1990s there were faculty at

Cornell reluctant to tenure Keith in a spot that could go to a specialist on some other country in Southeast Asia.

Funding for Vietnamese studies had vanished with Vietnamization in Viet Nam, when US land troops withdrew and finally left our Saigon allies to their own devices. My old friend Huynh Sanh Thong was the Vietnamese language teacher at Yale, first hired as a lecturer when the great Orientalist Paul Mus was brought to Yale fresh from negotiating for France with Ho Chi Minh. Thong was fired without ceremony when the Paris agreement ending US involvement was signed in 1972.

Keith defended his dissertation not long after that and found himself living at home and writing a history of the church he grew up in before working a series of teaching jobs around Asia. Stephen was quietly going about his business in Hawaii. At Harvard the historian Ngo Vinh Long, formerly of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, exhausted by his work with the anti-war movement, was attacked, even fire-bombed by the new Vietnamese immigrants, and moved on to a quiet university in Maine.

His successor, the John Fairbank Professor of Sino-Vietnamese Studies, Hue Tam Ho-Tai, has kept to her own work. She trains students and argues for resources as does Stephen, but neither of them works in the expansive public spirit David does. William Turley, who worked as a civilian doing analysis like David did and as a political scientist wrote the best short history of the war as a Vietnamese political event, has that same public spirit.

He did stay in the United States, while the younger political scientist Benedict Kierklieviet went South like David. Bill stayed at Ohio State University, where vast resources poured through from early in the war to train Vietnamese and send consultants to

the Republic of Viet Nam. Ohio was going to be as well the center for the study of Viet Nam in the United States.

The whole plan depended on huge continued Federal spending on Vietnamese studies. I found minutes of meetings about that once when I dashed into the Cornell stacks from a conference on Viet Nam at the Kahin Center a year or two ago. At first they didn't know what to do with all that money. At the end they didn't where to put all the Viet Nam books they had left over.

There are stories like that all over the country. Nguyen Dinh Hoa was hired during the war to establish a doctoral program in Vietnamese literature at the University of Washington. This was after Johnson gave up in 1968, but well before the Paris agreement in 1972. He instead took up a call to do cultural work for the Vietnamese embassy in Washington, DC. It had dawned on the Republic of Viet Nam that they should do some outreach in the United States.

When their government fell, the position was no longer available at Seattle. Nguyen Dinh Hoa taught linguistics, his discipline, and worked with refugees in the same rung of the California system as Jonah. One of his students from early days at Ohio, James Banerian, has published privately several fine translations of Nhat Linh. Another, John C. Schafer, has steadily published research on the literature of southern Viet Nam while teaching a heavy load in English at a liberal arts college.

Nobody has had the position and resources to do like David at the Australia National University, pounding out his oeuvre, holding conferences, writing informative papers on current events, sending class after class of students into Viet Nam and back out

to write books. He corresponded with us here in the United States, sending cheerful letters of encouragement and critique to me and Michele Thompson and other young historians.

Chris Goscha from Kansas even thought of going to Australia to study, and so did I. I couldn't see a way to pay for it. Chris instead went through the system in France, where they have never stopped teaching Viet Nam. They have never put the kind of resources into the topic that we did during our war, but they have never stopped.

If you haven't noticed, I have a lot of respect for Orientalism. Area studies in the United States has flowed and ebbed during my lifetime, but *Langues O* just sits there in Paris. Seated at a conference in the Latin Quarter with Michel and Stephen, watching old and young talk about Viet Nam, felt right to me. I am glad they do this thing.

It's deep Frenchness, even more exaggerated than what Said discerned. They have a map at INALCO showing in red all the "other" languages they teach, which basically renders the world in scarlet. Africa and Asia of course, but even within France there are the Basque and other dialect regions and, within the United Kingdom, Wales and the Channel islands.

The old "Orient" in our Middle East, of course, but all of Europe east of Germany is red as well. The Southeast Asian archipelago includes the English-speaking settler nation of Australia. Running up and down the spine of the New World on the *Langues O*' map are the regions of the Mixtec and Algonquin languages.

There is honesty in that. Said, like the best scholars, was merely pointing out the obvious. Western scholarship is a minority enterprise, looking at the world like the outsiders we are. There is also convenience and populism in offering all those languages and doing it in one place where people can find them.

What do you do, they ask in the United States. “I am a Viet Nam country specialist.” What’s that? Southeast Asianist, Americanist, anthropologist, ethnographer don’t serve either, and just the mention of Viet Nam makes anybody my age or older nervous. In France they don’t often ask “Qu’est ce qu’on fait?” but when they do, “Orientaliste” works just as well as saying I sell car parts.

Langues O’ is by no means the only place to study Vietnamese in Paris or France, or the most highly regarded. Pierre Bourdieu placed it in his scheme WHERE? In the United States we might even call it a trade school, rather than a liberal arts college or research university. That doesn’t convey the situation, because in France the trades are respected, everyone has already got a liberal arts education in high school, even at the vocational ones, and no university researchers teach in any sense that would be tolerated in the United States.

They do give seminars. A favorite method for a leading scholar is to show up and read what you wrote that morning. If you are really famous, like my girlfriend’s advisor Julia Kristeva, some freak will come and tape record the proceedings, transcribe them, and publish that alongside the book whose manuscript you were reading from.

Chris ran a wonderful series with our friend Benoit de Treglode at the School of Higher Studies in Social Sciences, the striking modern box on the site where the Nazis held and killed the French student resistants, where any Viet Nam expert visiting town would come gabble at the rest. Then we would go for a beer next door where signs hang from the ceiling with a picture of a pipe, to say “This is not a smoking section.”

Chris’ seminar was an intellectual’s dream, what we come to Paris for. All the courses I attended in Vietnamese literature around the ancient university town, by contrast,

were taught by serious-minded pedagogues, like Sahar back at Chapel Hill. They weren't about sharing ideas. They were about learning a subject.

None of the instructors had anything to do with one another, so far as I noticed, in life or footnotes. They were busy people. Michel bustled around the two campuses of his institute, running his program, teaching five or six courses and supervising the rest.

Madame Langlet, at the Sorbonne, addressed our group with lectures she had written and rewritten each year while raising a family and authoring bibliographies and translations with her husband Philippe. I was lucky to catch the last year of the seminar's run: she had commenced in an apartment in wartime in her native Saigon.

Dang Tien taught several classes, as Michel does, but in the library of the rival Paris VII university, in the Viet Nam program Philippe runs. Dang Tien maintained these responsibilities while commuting by train from Orleans where he is a professeur at the lycee, a respected and demanding position.

When Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were high school teachers in the 1940s they were not also teaching several college courses. Those two were active in magazines, as Dang Tien also is, a presence in *Doi Den*, the magazine for leftists in France who have broken with the Vietnamese Communist Party.

I did meet high school teachers at meetings of most of the seminars and defenses I went to. One grade school teacher in my girlfriend's seminars is now on the literature faculty of Paris VII. In my country you cannot teach children, get your doctorate on the side, and land a job teaching English at New York University. Here in the United States researchers and college teachers form a group bounded since college.

There are indeed the grandes ecoles around France, elite institutions where a cadre of select young people are trained briskly to step forward into leadership, without distraction by outsiders with opinions. Sartre, a star product of the one for teachers, Ecole Normale Superior, devotes a passage in his *Nausee* to a meal he had with what he calls a self-taught man. No doubt Paris is still full of sheltered and cosseted snobs.

But outside of the grandes ecoles, and especially in Paris, the whole university enterprise has a flavor of night school in a community college where anyone might show up after work, or of self-help in a camp full of wildly cultivated refugees teaching each other their skills.

You could say this was because I studied a marginal subject, Vietnamese literature, but you wouldn't be entirely correct. It's Orientalism, remember, the heart of French scholarship in the humanities and social sciences. I met Michel at his offices at rue de Lille, and Dang Tien at Paris VII, one of the great new universities after 1968, and Madame Langlet at the ancient Sorbonne.

Of course, Dang Tien was moonlighting and he taught his courses in the middle of the cramped library of the Vietnamese studies section. Mme. Langlet's group met after hours in the Egyptologie seminar room. Michel and I shuttled from the rue de Lille out to the edge of the city, at Porte Dauphine, where he met most of his classes.

I started out with Michel at the rentree, watching him greet the new students at an assembly of Langues O' and tagging along to the different classes he taught or supervised in his program: different levels and applications of Vietnamese language training, and different periods of Vietnamese literature. I settled down in a couple of the advanced courses and took part in the seminar for his thesis students.

When Madame's seminar started in November I joined in its weekly meetings, when there wasn't a holiday or a strike. Chris' monthly meetings started about the same time. In January or so Nina introduced me to Dang Tien and his back-to-back courses once a week in the Viet Nam library at Paris VII, and to two others also teaching in the program.

All the while I was dropping in on seminars, going to hear speakers on book history and literary history at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, visiting Viet Nam specialists and ethnographers of Paris in their offices. I met Nina for tea and went to Phan's for dinner, and had an outing with Chris to see Georges Boudarel, a retired scholar of the Nhan Van and Giai Pham magazines, at his rest home in the red zone.

All these weekly and monthly classes and occasional excursions were stops on my daily rounds to find the Vietnamese and Orientalist books of the city, their booksellers and libraries. They were ways to talk about what I was seeing.

Michel teaches literature as periods and authors, controversies and affairs. I have three thick boxes, what the French use instead of filing cabinets, full of the marvelous dossiers with reproductions and translations he makes for his students. He copies the documents on a broadsheet, creases that in half and hands it out like a newspaper with no horizontal fold.

Dang Tien teaches particular works of art, poems especially, which lend themselves to this approach. He would copy a poem on a blackboard and show us how it worked, using translation only to suggest the different meanings of words. Where Michel's students received his life's work with duty and skepticism, sitting at their rows of desks, Dang Tien's were lively as a box of puppies around the table in the library, playing the game of reading a poem.



The Paris VII classes were mostly young college students, although I wasn't the only odd duck there. I ran into another American from Ha Noi, a friend of a friend, and met stray scholars from Paris and Saigon while I browsed the stacks waiting for class to meet. Madame's students were retired men, a young woman high school teacher, and some monks from one of the temples outside the city.

Her class was a series of lectures with discussion, on the flow of the river of modern Vietnamese literature, giving history and stopping to explicate key works. She started her story in the lifetime of the parents of the oldest man there, born in 1914, and continued through the life of the seminar itself, to end on our last day, its final meeting. As I said, she had begun telling her story in old Saigon and stopped at the end of our last class.

I wrote it all down in field notebooks here on the shelf beside my keyboard, what Madame said and where people sat and what went on in all the meetings. But I wasn't really there to observe people, and didn't note stuff I would now like to be able to tell, like who there thought they were Vietnamese and exactly what stage of life everyone was in.

I was there to learn how to present Vietnamese literature. Outside, in the shops and at the community events, I was documenting the life of Vietnamese books, my defense against the authority of classroom views of literature. I was determined to come out of this with a way to talk about books and reading that was authoritative, about a subject, but liberating for my students, a door into reality.

Reality is one of those words whose use tells what social structure you speak from. My approach to the Vietnamese and Orientalist books and literature of Paris, France was pure Yale. Most undergraduates at my college were high school or class president, captain

of a sports team, some position where you get around and see that many men have many minds.

I was an editor of the weekly newspaper, as goaltender ran the defense on the waterpolo team, anchored the swim relays, on and on. Like most Yalies, I came to college determined to avoid any further such responsibilities but eager still to get around and meet people and see how things are done, this time in a great university. The terrific lecture courses, the ones that fill their halls at a college where the undergraduates deliberately “shop” around the first two weeks of the semester, review whole fields of knowledge with much the same attitude.

In the literature major, Peter Demetz taught the course that reviewed European and New World approaches to the study of texts since medieval times. In the final lecture he would address the skepticism he had taught us, the detachment from any particular way of doing things. He attributed his own position to that of a Jewish childhood as a Czech under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hitler and Stalin.

He wasn't about to believe in anything. He was alienated in the grand manner of Europe. But yin and yang had kicked in long ago and there Peter was indoctrinating a national cadre of general managers for the United States of America. His own work, off the lecture platform, was a matter of nuts and bolts, steadily introducing post-war German literature to the English-speaking world with anthologies, prefaces and overviews.

It's the very least alienated kind of criticism to do, engaging with the purpose of the authors and the desire of readers. As a lecturer, Peter's alienation meshed with the manager's, politician's, officer's, diplomat's perspective of his students. At Yale I visited lectures by the previous, present and future leaders of literary studies in my country. Rene

Wellek, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks and Maynard Mack; Jacques Derrida, Harold Bloom, Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller; Fredric Jameson, Edward Said, Henry-Louis Gates Jr., and Katherine McKinnon.

Many others, too, scholars of particular authors and works as well as fields and literature in general and criticism itself, and leaders in many other disciplines as well. Some I just went to listen to and look at, others I hung out with or worked for. My roommate Peter Childers studied seriously with them all in literary theory, and followed Fredric Jameson when Fred set up a literature program near here in Durham at Duke University.

Now Peter is a vice-president of Red Hat nearby, in charge of the training division that earns the revenue in one of the only profitable companies to emerge from the dot-com bubble. I am running a company from a barn in the countryside publishing nuts and bolts philology like Peter Demetz did, to introduce Vietnamese literature to English-speaking readers. My friend Pete is a captain of industry and I am doing scholarship in a barn because of the alienated nature of our engagement, our manager's perspective.

We don't believe in anything but the mission. I sit with boxes of books I got in the stores of Paris, materials I picked up on tables in the display rooms of Vietnamese community events, and notebooks on the class meetings I took part in. I'm using the things to make public the cause of Viet Nam in my country. I am not trying to become Michel, or Madame, or Dang Tien.

It's an important distinction. My girlfriend followed one program at one university in Paris, with her supervisor the famous psycho-therapist Kristeva, and soon will be a professor there and in the United States. Back in college, my room-mate Jacques followed one track through his doctorate at Yale, deconstruction under his adviser Paul De Man with

some background in Spanish, just as his wife, our teacher Susanne Wofford, had followed English since entering with Yale's first freshman class with women.

Now they are professors in the disciplines they engaged in, well-connected Yale generalists of versatility and scope to be sure, but each a disciplinarian in a field that I can engage with only as an ethnographer. Hey, we say in effect, get a load of these people! While taking courses at Chapel Hill I did much the same with our new program in Cultural Studies, earning a certificate going around watching leaders in the field.

One was Janice Radway, a professor in Fred's program at Duke. She is one of the few other people who do ethnography on literature, a resource I noted in my application to the anthropology department at Carolina. I took her seminars on the history of Cultural Studies. The origin of the field is usually attributed to Marxists teaching night school outside the walls of the University of Manchester, the United Kingdom birthplace of the industrial revolution where Friedrich Engels ran a mill.

The Marxist who leads Cultural Studies from the Communications department at Carolina, Lawrence Grossberg, studied at the source in the 1960s. President of the American Studies Association the year I took the first class with her, Jan thinks it is important to trace other genealogies for Cultural Studies, more inclusive of our country. I've got notes and syllabi somewhere in storage about what she thinks.

What I took away in my head is that Jan and Larry, whom I only had to meet once, think that it is really important what they think about stuff in general, and I don't. I respect Jan because on her first time out as a field researcher she studied a group of women who sell and read and write romance novels. I carried *Reading the Romance* around on my fieldwork, starting before I was an anthropologist, working as a publisher in Viet Nam.

A fellow ethnographer might point out that in my study of Jan and Larry I don't do what Jan did with her romantics, to present their ideas and take them seriously. One fellow ethnographer, my first adviser Judith Farquhar, read a field note I wrote about Phan Huy Duong's book of philosophy and made exactly that point.

Jan studied readers who don't write or teach, where I am studying writers and teachers and publishers, for heavens' sake. You can go read their books if you are so damned interested. Jan was a revolutionary in the great social movement of our times. Her job in feminism was to call attention to the literary activity of women which had been discounted by her profession throughout the twentieth century.

I am writing about people who declared their own nation at least twice in the fifteen years before I was born and secured one of them before I entered high school. They don't need my help. I'm doing what Judy did with her Chinese doctors, getting involved with fellow professionals and telling you what I learned from what they do, for purposes of my own.

What Judy did with Chinese doctors after their revolution and after ours in feminism was to observe their practice and read their texts, both the prescriptions they wrote and the treatises they read, and transport the whole load into our university system. What I am doing with my books and authors is to point out that they already are here and have been for a long time.

Pierre Bourdieu has little to say about any such operations, on either approach to assimilating or facing up to the other. As a young man on leave from the Army he had gone out and looked at the Kabyl of Algiers in the best ethnological style, but as the professor, that is, the department, of sociology at the College de France in the 1e

arrondissement of Paris he confined himself largely to his own country and its institutions of power.

The Orientalists of France keep to themselves and the mainstream of the nation's scholars in the human sciences approach everything that is not apparently Paris, or France, or Europe, with laughable maladresse. Their deep channel is a tradition of philosophy that bats between the university towns of France and Germany, a tradition that Phan's book tries to teach outsiders to use without getting too involved in.

Julia Kristeva, herself a refugee from the scarlet regions of the Langues O' map, came to Paris and assimilated so hard and so fast to this Paris tradition, under her mentor the linguist Roland Barthes, that she found herself flying out to China in 1970 with her boyfriend, a philosopher and heir to France's greatest fortune, to advise Mao Tse Tung on revolution. You can read her book about it, *Les Chinoises*.

The theorist of these matters who has most influenced me is himself a linguist in the Continental tradition, with a raft of carefully-argued books I haven't read. I know that the basic conclusion he arrived at is that you should listen to people, to the point of not having a lot of your own to say about them. He was Dell Hymes, a colleague of Jan at Pennsylvania when she wrote her good book, and the teacher of my ethnography methods professor at Carolina.

I took Glenn Hinson's course at Carolina because he was the man who got my younger brother Tim through graduate school. I am the square and the conformist in my family, the one who can suffer fools and salute the flag. The others can't even begin to, don't know how, can't fathom why they should take tests and read books and write papers when there is so much work to be done.

Glenn coaxed Tim through and signed off on requirements for his master's degree because Tim is the living embodiment of what, according to Glenn, Dell Hymes said we should all do. This has to be embodied and it cannot be explained. Telling people to listen is like saying, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." Go, and sin no more. Sure.

How? How do I represent another as he or she represents himself or herself? How do I even represent them as I would be represented? Who represents me, who puts food in my mouth while I am doing all this work? I can't tell you how to finish, but you start by listening to people.

Dell Hymes, a linguist and anthropologist, always began by taking pains to notice exactly what was said. Transcription of audio recordings of speech, something most researchers hand off to the cheapest and fastest assistant, would transfix him, taking hours to write down minutes. He also noted the setting, who was addressed, and who else attended.

His work is a deliberate contradiction to the main strain of linguistics in my nation in our time. Noam Chomsky has sought for fifty years to explain language by isolating it within a region of the brain within the individual. Dell has worked to describe language flitting between us all throughout the human world.

Noam is a scientist, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, while Dell links to the traditions of philosophy in Europe. Julia, who started as a linguist, would find Dell sympathetic if she read Americans, while she finds Noam the most repellent reductive authoritarian imaginable, actually unimaginable either as a research professor or in his other role as a critic of power.

Yin and yang all over: there is no question that Noam is in fact a tireless advocate of people's rule and poor countries, speaking in church basements and union halls after work every night over decades starting with the war in Viet Nam, while Julia married the heir and is a rich lady with opinions, a psychotherapist for the worried well-to-do, reading what she wrote that morning to students who write it all down.

I am often told that I don't listen by someone who thinks I should be writing it all down. What concerned Dell, what keeps me from laying out for you or for myself how to listen, is that we listen in a position of inequality, in an unjust world. A student learning ethnography takes notes from a teacher who has power over his or her fate, then goes to the field and takes notes about what a poor person says, to present to rich funders in hopes of securing a middle-class job.

Would you rather we didn't do it at all? The consolation of philosophy, from Boethius in his prison cell to Darwin and Marx at the height of empire and industry is that we do live in a world like that, but not always, not everywhere, not all the time and forever. The challenge my brother Tim faced up to after studying folklore with Glenn was how to make a just living out of poverty-stricken musicians in the South.

He wrote his master's thesis for Glenn listening to Guitar Slim of Winston-Salem, North Carolina, who told him from his deathbed, "Go and find Guitar Gabriel." Tim taught as a substitute in the local schools, asking the children from the projects if they knew about this man, a former rounder, a musician who had followed the carnivals, now singing on the streets.



Some said he had burned in a house fire, but one girl said sure you can find him on my street. Tim found Gabe sitting in a gutter, sat down, and listened when the great man said: Son, I know where you want to go. I have been there. I can take you there.

They began to tour together and indeed my brother now runs a half-million dollar business from his home six miles from here, booking tours and making records and raising money for the impoverished musicians of the South. He and his wife can pay their own bills, plan to care for their parents, educate their children and hope to retire in dignity. His brother thinks he is the great ethnographer of our times.

Listen up. Listen. That is the reality of my life, the inside and the outside and the door itself I try to open for you. But to speak of reality is like speaking of goodness, or leadership. Pierre called this the paradox of doxa, that to notice basic assumptions was to question them, or to transport yourself out of their realm. He wrote that from Paris, about the Kabyl houses he had studied as a soldier on leave from the army in Algeria.

In the last year of his life I was in Paris too running around finding the Vietnamese and Orientalist books of the city. I thought I might never get there again and indeed I have not, since I spent my afternoons doing research instead of writing grant applications. Eric says he can do his work or he can write grants, and that seems to be the case for me.

There was no point in competing for money that would send me to Viet Nam, with maybe a stop back in Paris. The grant I had won to go to Viet Nam in 1999 impoverished me, since I spent precious time writing it, won it, then found two weeks before that the police would not let me in. I had to give the money back, already a month into the summer it was to support.

There was money to compete for to study the Vietnamese in Europe, principally Marshall grants named for the great Army general and Secretary of State who rebuilt the continent. There was all kinds of money for studying the Vietnamese immigrants to the United States. I sat down to write these grants and decided that I don't want to serve the European Community, or serve the social workers of the United States.

Not right now, not right away, not in my professional formation and so for the rest of my career. I had written my master's thesis about a United States intelligence project during the war, because it had gathered books and papers into a library and published directories to them. But I had dropped that as I moved on to the doctorate because I didn't want to serve the community of spies.

I wanted to represent Vietnamese books, to serve their people. That is what I had told the French embassy in so many French words, in an application for their Chateaubriand fellowship. They bought it. Jan remarked to me that I was a lucky man, that is, I hadn't earned that award by intelligence and effort. She told me she would have rejected my proposal on the first cut for the Fulbright fellowship.

She would have been doing her job. You volunteer to fly to Washington, DC and the government buys you a hotel room for the weekend where you work through a stack of applications, applying high and fair standards. The Fulbright fellowship is named for the Senator who initiated them, to send promising young American scholars to rebuilt Europe.

I bet the French academics who read the Chateaubriand applications at least got a good dinner out of it. James William Fulbright was a corn-fed idealist, while François-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand was a cynic with faith, a Celine with money, a noble on the wrong side of the Revolution whose Republic nonetheless remembers him for his prose.

I think they settled on his name to make a gesture of reciprocity with the United States for the Fulbright because the man had run back to fight for Louis XVI from seeking a northwest passage through North America. He was an idealist after all, as so many of us are.

But Jan's idealism, the idealism of the Fulbright committee and the American university system, is German idealism, Kant and Hegel imported with our doctoral system. You have to engage with the spirit of the times through the discourse of reason, citing authorities and current debates. The idealism of the French school system by contrast is positivism.

Positivism is the common sense about science in modern times, what the man in the street thinks researchers do. You establish facts, things you are positive about. You do this to improve the life of humanity, to make a positive contribution. There are plaques all over Paris to the apostle of positivism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Auguste Comte.

The one I have a photo of is carved in stone. Phan cites Comte's values without attribution, as common sense, when challenged about his own method of studying largely German philosophy.

University researchers in France may now distance themselves from Comte's do-good rhetoric, from his simple-minded ideas of truth. Snob discourse in the French academy is German philosophy, as here it is French versions of German, or blunt British snorts dismissing the entire Continent. But Comte's spirit informs the French academy.

University presses, for example, which in the United States serve the profession of scholarship, in France serve the public, dishing out facts in textbooks. Bill Turley actually drafted his outstanding history of the wars for Viet Nam for the French series "What Do I

Know” whose slim, cheap, authoritative and brilliant volumes on topics fill the bookstores near any campus.

Pierre Bourdieu was often on the front page of the national newspaper because he had things to say that were true and useful. Editors admired his grasp of social thought through Heidegger and since, no doubt, but that’s just a union card over there. He was in the news and he was the professor of sociology at the College of France because he had particular and helpful things to say about life.

So when I told the French embassy that I thought it would be a good idea to document the Vietnamese books of Paris, they bought what Jan would have discarded in her race to the bottom of the pile of applications at the Hilton. I will never forget that. I wore out my shoes and tramped a map of the city onto my brain doing what I had proposed.

The Vietnamese and Orientalist books of Paris, France live in libraries and sojourn in bookstores concentrated in the Latin Quarter and the Choisy Triangle next door to my girlfriend’s place. Outliers like the Vietnamese government’s own bookstore link these concentrations, and others like the library in the Vietnamese Catholic mission to the poor Vietnamese ring the city.

There are independent outposts at temples in the suburbs and down the river valley. Vietnamese books appear again at a Buddhist retreat two hour’s north by train where go pilgrims from around the world. I didn’t get there. I don’t yet know what the Vietnamese workers three hours south in Marseilles do for books, either.

I do know that Orientalist and colonialist books are sold in the one chain bookstore in the major cities, at many of the independents on every other block in Paris, and at a shop at every market town I visited in the countryside. If I had a squad of police to roust any

household I pleased, I bet I would find some in nearly every block or country mile I would sample in the Hexagon.

History suggests that Vietnamese and Orientalist books have been part and parcel of France at least since Christians wrote home from there in the script Alexandre de Rhodes used, since Granier promoted his schemes and adventures here, since Philastre came home to translate Gia Long's code. Detritus from the missionary days, the heroic age of conquest, the everyday world of functionaries and the people they ruled is lodged around the city.

Students and workers who sojourned from the colonies, exiles and immigrants who fled here, the customs officials and soldiers who went overseas to empire, debris from them all and the products of their descendants litter the capital. Think about the past as it happened and ask where else would they be, how could I walk Paris and not trip over Vietnamese books?

Still I will tell you what I saw with my own eyes in the public places of Paris in academic year 2000-2001. We already have walked through the plaza and the mall at Les Olympiades at the heart of the Vietnamese retail district in the 13e, the Choisy Triangle. Sit with me at another public place, in the heart of the Latin Quarter, the old university district in the 5e, where we do Orientalism.

The café on the Place de la Sorbonne is a student and professor place, with men and women working over coffee or beer in the large front room all glassed in where you can spot the person coming to meet you. I would sit with my map and my index cards, reviewing where I had been and where next I would go.

Across the place is the J. Vrin bookstore, where I would swing by every time to see if they had another used copy of a book by Tran Duc Thao, “Viet Nam’s great philosopher.” Next door to the café on my right, looking out, is Maisonneuve et Larose bookstore, where they sell Gestes, the great compendium of French conquest of Viet Nam.

Further on to the right, across the street at the back of the place and through a façade is the courtyard of the Sorbonne. At the wall to the right as you enter are Louis Pasteur and Victor Hugo, the great useful and compassionate French intellectuals of the nineteenth century. Each in a massive statue the two sit at the near and far corners of a platform raised in stone.

I would think of them at my seat in the café, as I think of them now in my barn. There are Vietnamese noodle soup shops all over the world named for Pasteur, or for the street named for him in Saigon. The spirit of his student Yersin, who isolated the plague bacillus, is venerated at his tomb by neighbors in central Viet Nam.

The poet and novelist and playwright and pamphleteer Hugo is himself a god in the pantheon of the Cao Dai, a new religion of the Mekong delta that now is as far-flung as pho. Some have reported seeing Mark Twain as well in a Cao Dai temple, I expect more for Samuel Clemens’ work against imperialism than for Twain’s novels. But you never know.

Cao Dai, and its sister religion Hoa Hao, and their coeval the Communist Party of Viet Nam, all started among people like me, people with leisure to read books and affiliations with the masses who don’t. There are always lots of us around, more than enough to turn the world upside down. We can’t all demonstrate the germ theory of disease and discover the virus.

Some of us dream of justice. Out from the café, left across the avenue bounding the place on the west and up a side street you are walking in the footsteps of Richard Wright, the black American novelist who broke with the Communist Party and fled Jim Crow. Past the plaque on his old building, on the left, is the used bookstore Samuellan.

I stopped there habitually, after one good score, on my way someplace else. The Place de la Sorbonne and the café there were for me a staging area, a place to get ready to venture out, a place to review my findings. I would get there from my girlfriend's apartment, the staging area for work around Les Olympiades.

In my canvas bag or in the nylon portfolio the Chateaubriand people gave me I hauled a stack of index cards, my paperback guide to specialist bookstores, a spiral-bound map of Paris by arrondissement that would lay flat, a saddle-stitched one that doesn't but is better for paths across the gutter between pages, and a German one for tourists that folds out cleverly as you follow your route.

It is not so good for the big picture. I carried a spiral-bound Maxi-Paris that shows the twenty arrondissements and all the suburbs in two pages each, A4 pages, each a shade larger than our 8 ½ by 11. In the clear plastic back of my metro pass I had a wallet card that unfolds to show an abstract of the subway stations, bus lines, and commuter trains.

I had two brochures listing the municipal libraries of Paris, one locating them with yellow arrows on a bird's eye view of the city. I had the "Pariscope" booklet issued each Wednesday at every kiosk that tells every public entertainment of the city for a week, impossible in London or New York, unnecessary anywhere else. The things I carried!

Back in my room, for sentiment, I had a "Plan de Paris", like a pocket dictionary with alphabetic and numerical tabs, pressed on me by an older friend from her student days.

I had the one-sheet map of downtown Ha Noi I carried in my pocket through fourteen months over two years. They all sit next to me now, the accumulation of Pariscopes in bundles of twine.

Next to them stand my field notebooks, composition notebooks like kids use in school, because you can get them anywhere and they are cheap. Spies use Colt automatic pistols and Thompson submachine guns for the same reason, but you can in fact buy or steal .45 caliber ammunition anywhere in the world day or night.

I had to haul a supply of cheap notebooks from the US to Paris, and then ask friends to send me one or two at a time or carry them in. Students in Paris use grid paper for notes, looseleaf or on tablets, with colored inks and underscores to analyze what is recorded. Bound notebooks in stores there are expensive, for special purposes.

I filled my dime-store journals up with recitals of my travels, much like the epic verse my friend Frank records from the Khmu, a list of every successive destination in each day's trek. How I got there, where I went, with lines between left blank to fill in details and wide margins for later comments.

I hand-number each page when I start a fresh book, marking the cover with where I am and what is going on right then, leaving the first and last two pages blank for a later table of contents and an index. I write only on the recto, the right-hand page, leaving the verso for maps and sketches and seating charts.

I would pause at the café and start a new book if I needed to, write up the morning's adventures, or go there first and shuffle my index cards to lay out an outing. The proper way to use an index card is to write one piece of information on each, with full citation.



Each bookstore, for example, got name and address and phone number, with the number of the arrondissement in the top right hand corner before I went out.

You write on one side only, so you can lay the card down to read or flip through them. Mine are oriented vertical, like a deck of cards. After making a round I would add the hours I found stated on the shop door, the name of the cross street, and the side of the street the shop was on by compass direction.

Back at my room I would staple any business card to the store's index card with a stapler my mother gave me in grade school. The basics of scholarship are indeed elementary. I arrange my cards like my granny taught me, pulling out the jokers to play poker, the face cards to play pinochle.

I just now pulled the deck from the handsome wood case I bought at my first visit to L'Harmattan, the grand department store on the Seine where you could gaze at the city from the rooftop for the price of a cup of coffee. The case holds them short side up, vertical like I use them, like the French do, where our cases lie horizontal with the long side up.

My deck is stacked by arrondissement, stores and libraries attested in nineteen out of twenty. I could stack them in straight alphabetical order, or by attributes like Orientalist or Vietnamese, then pull out the Vietnamese and stack them by what nation of Viet Nam they adhere to, the one in Ha Noi or some dissident version. There would be an excess, neither Vietnamese nor Orientalist.

I could play with those forever. One day I will type all this data into a database which is easier to manipulate, to update, simply to hold. I've got an inch and a half of

cards in the main deck on bookstores, with six and half inches more on libraries, authors and books I followed around.

If I had put it all straight in a database when I was in Paris, lugging a machine around town or running back to my room to type up on my laptop, I would likely have lost all the data by now. My master's thesis was about an intelligence archive in wartime Saigon which is now unreadable, because the hardware lay broken and the software lost not five years after the United States left Viet Nam.

Indeed since I have returned from Paris I have lost all my correspondence on the shift back to my Carolina email account from my French one, and then lost all my follow-up correspondence out in the failure of one whole computer and two more hard drives. Backing up the email you send is not automatic or even easy on Microsoft's program. Why would you want to do that?

If I had not posted my field notes, what I did write up when I got back to the room, sending them to the worldwide community of Viet Nam scholars of whom many kept a file of my reports, I would have lost those too. My cards persist, posted from my past, which I don't know very well.

I suffered from a depressive illness since childhood until recently which affected my memory and my life itself, my sense of myself as a character, a person with origins and experiences and relationships. The musician David McGrew sings of it well: there are holes in my mind just like craters, holes in my life I can't explain.

Sometimes I was on fire with activity which has burned out leaving no coal or ash and other weeks and months and years I could not get out of bed and there is nothing to remember. I know that David and I picked fruit together in the Yakima valley of eastern

Washington state in 1979 just four years after the fall of Saigon but I couldn't have told you how I got from there to here until I sat down with Dave to write his first album cover.

This is a problem in academic life, where you apply for grants and positions with a resume and a story about who you are, where you came from and where you are going. I love Dave like a brother, and I really do love my brothers, but it remains still hard for me to remember that we are the same age when he looks sixty while I look thirty, why he is a fruit tramp and I am a Viet Nam specialist.

It has been difficult for me. I was astounded when Susanne narrated to me at Jacques' 40<sup>th</sup> birthday party my scholarly life since sophomore year. Apparently I do have a story. I just can't remember it. I make these index cards like the robots in Phil Dick's great *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* take snapshots of one another.

The detective tracking them looks for the polaroids the runaway androids accumulate as they desperately build a past for themselves before they are found and turned off or simply run out of power. They leave the snapshots behind in desk drawers only when they flee for their lives. Science fiction is satire, Orientalist fable in fact, that imagines an exotic future to talk frankly about the familiar present.

Why did you think people take snapshots and can't throw them away? I did have a life, and work, and connections to people, look at this box of cards and shelf of notebooks. There is a row of compact disks with photos on them, still readable, from the rolls I shot on my rounds and the friends I had dinner with.

I don't have photos like I do of the Vietnamese books on their shelves and stacks in public libraries around the United States. You can't take pictures in libraries over there.

The law is you're not supposed to take a photo in public place that can identify an individual. In libraries further you aren't supposed to know librarians by name.

After an especially helpful interview with a lady librarian in her office at the former National Library at Richelieu, my girlfriend and I asked for her card. Why ever would we want that? Because she was the first person to answer any of our questions, although my old girlfriend speaks the French of Paris in such a vernacular manner that people think she is a curiously naïve native.

The librarian really had to take that in, the idea that she was special and we would want to stay in touch. No, she told us, she represents the state, universal and uniform. Any librarian could help us. She was in fact the state, quite lost when I had asked her about Vietnamese-language collections in the public libraries.

My friend had to repeat that question in flowing language when the librarian guessed that my odd question was simply a grammatical mistake. Then she was intrigued and did give us her card so I could tell her what I found.

I found the books on my own in the public library down Tolbiac towards Place d'Italie from my girlfriend's place, right next to the big stairway up to Les Olympiades, the Vietnamese retail plaza and mall. It is called Melville, not for the American author Herman. His family were Huguenots, Calvinists exiled by Richelieu from France.

They settled all over the world, and there have been Melvilles well-established in business, government, religion and the arts all over Scotland and the Netherlands as well as the United States for centuries now. There are still Melvilles like that in France too.

Melville is a public library which will issue a card to anyone with an address in the arrondissement and loan books to anyone with a card from any other arrondissement's

library. You don't need a card to walk in. Five years ago the Vietnamese books were straight back past the stairway.

The stairway led up to a second floor where my girlfriend worked on materials from a collection on women. It took a while to sink in that this was the collection on women in Paris, maybe in France, and the public library collection of Vietnamese-language books.

When I go to a new American city, for a conference or a business trip, I used to budget time to hunt up as many public libraries as possible to see what their foreign-language offerings for immigrants were like. Now I can do that on the Internet, although it is still best to walk in, and to keep checking.

The Free Library of Philadelphia, for example, America's oldest, shifts Vietnamese books around to branch locations to follow the immigrant families as they chase cheap rents. Individual branches in every city system are always improvising, and not always updating the catalogue.

South Carolina carries books on the catalogue that they bought for the Vietnamese who came in 1975 and moved on as soon as they could. The books are in storage now. North Carolina started out with a collection sent out on request from a depot, but that funding ended and each book remains at whatever branch they were sent to last.

Melville is more like the Boston Public Library, which maintains one large reading collection in all immigrant languages. BPL didn't catalogue any of this reading collection when I first went in 1996. Melville does, or they did in 2000.

They collected foreign-language materials for all immigrants, but their location was central only for the Vietnamese and Chinese and so on, the people who would come from around the city and suburbs on the weekends to the retail mall, plaza and quartier. The

books did not follow the new concentration of Chinese and Vietnamese near the black Africans of the 9<sup>th</sup> arrondissement.

What sub-Saharan African books there were, were at Melville. As Langues O' carries the weight of studying what is not France, Asian immigrants who had got into the national library system and were working at Melville were buying the books for all of the other immigrants of Paris.

Similarly, the collection on women up on the second floor was a volunteer effort, assembled back when it seemed like the women's movement was going to do something in France, and lodged at the latest library to be built when the movement had fizzled out. In the 1970s at Exeter my French teacher was a Husserl, same family as the philosopher, Edmund.

Susan Husserl-Kapit taught us as normal French the nonsense slogan of feminism in Paris: a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle. That used to be on signs in their manifestations, and became a picture in a news magazine. Then it was a poster in our classroom.

Now it is common sense, and there are no demonstrations for women's rights. Des Femmes, Women, the bookstore and publishing house which brought out Phan's first translation of one of our friend Huong's novels, is out of business. The first weeks I was there their sign was still up on the old storefront, like the tag on the old Tu Luc Van Doan shelf in Khai Tri bookstore. Things pass, and things remain the same.

Up north on Tolbiac from Melville, across the Seine, and into the new National Library, the books and papers of Simone de Beauvoir's boyfriend Jean Paul Sartre are catalogued to a fare thee well, and you can find editions of his works and remains in all the

neighborhood bookstores you will pass on the way there. Simone herself thought that Sartre was a great man, which goes to show what I have been saying about taste: there is no arguing with it.

All you can do is argue with it. Jean-Paul was an interesting man with things to say, one of which is that each of us has the power to interest himself or herself in life and say things in it. Yup. Simone, on the other hand, had something new to say, that remains new: one learns to be a woman, and society in general is male and ignores that knowledge.

She wouldn't have said male, as she never said female about human beings. In French those are words for animals. There is a sensibility in the language consonant with her point of view, and in her lifetime readers responded to her works with passionate recognition. But now she is dead, not long after she tried to throw herself into Jean-Paul's grave.

My girlfriend found that Simone's papers were only recently acquired, and not yet even accessioned, put into folders and catalogued, by the National Library. It has become more important in France that she came in second to her guy in the national exam for Ecole Normale graduates, than that she initiated feminism, the truly new world philosophy that replaces the tradition of Germany and France he played in. Feminism is noticing that women exist.

That tradition doesn't, and my women feminist contemporaries in universities are tying themselves in knots making it work. The Simone I really like, Simone Weil, actually starved herself to death in the disconnect between life and ideas, discourse and practice. A philosopher in Hitler days, a Jew who became a Catholic, a saintly activist spirited out of occupied France only at the insistence of her allies, she fell ill and died.

She would not eat better in London than her brothers and sisters trapped by the Nazis, bless her heart. In the band around Paris where they also went hungry there are places and streets and housing projects named after her fond memory. In the United States the anti-war Quakers sell a pamphlet with her great essay about how violence turns its victims into mere mass. At the point of a gun you lose your mobility, your autonomy, your humanity.

Sure, if you follow Hegel, his dialectic of master and slave, as a Communist or a Fascist or a liberal humanist educated in philosophy in the universities of Paris. Thankfully, this is an incomplete view, promulgated by people who didn't notice how women do or really what anyone does outside of school.

Stick a gun to my head and your troubles begin. I learned to fight from an Oriental, squatting on my knees, and to suffer from women. I was born in 1960 and I learned triumph from the poor and downtrodden. My dialectic is yin and yang.

France, where the women's movement has died, provides day care and health care and education which our country's sophisticated feminism can't begin to do. There isn't a single feminist bookstore in the national capital but the state pays for abortion and crèche from three years old while women professors, let alone feminists, struggle for any toehold in the university system.

This is my father's world, Philip Berrigan replied to the men with guns when they asked how his crew of nuns and seminarians had captured the fire control deck of a Trident submarine to spatter the weapons console with blood. Philip had been a soldier himself and then a Father until he married a Sister. The tide comes in and goes out, back and forth. There is nothing you can do about it.



What are you going to do? You seem to have some time. Walk with me. Out the glass doors of Melville, turn right up Tolbiac towards the National Library and immediately right again up the stairs, past the plaque on a stick explaining how the Asians came to Les Olympiades and up onto the plaza.

Past the French newsstand, past the pho shop and billiard parlor just like the ones in Greensboro, through the doors of Great China between the temple on the left and the other on the right below in the parking garage where the surface streets still run on my maps. Past the lion dancers rehearsing in the vestibule and the line Saturday morning for the pho shops down the hall to the left.

Stop for a moment at the racks by the door of the first shop on the right, where inside they sell electronics and so music, to buy the latest issue of Y, a fashion and music magazine. Trung Tam Ban Nhac Digital Stereo is the first store on the guide I wrote for my colleagues at Chris' conference:

Trung Tam Bac (sic) Nhac Digital Stereo

44, ave. d'Ivry

75013 Paris

France

tel 01 53 79 18 88

FAX 01 53 79 08 80

[dtai@freesurf.net](mailto:dtai@freesurf.net)

Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2

Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

To reach the bookstore Nam A keep going straight as you enter the mall. Continue on the corridor which heads off to the right. Look for the Nam A shop window and display on your right. They publish fiction and scholarship in Vietnamese and import Vietnamese and Chinese books and magazines from France, China, Viet Nam, Australia, Germany and the United States.

Nam A

44, ave d'Ivry  
10AM-7PM Tuesday thorough (sic) Sunday  
Monday 2PM-6PM  
Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2  
Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

To leave the mall, exit Nam A and turn left and return in the direction you came. Take your first left. This is the corridor which you passed on the way from the entrance to Nam A.

As the corridor bends to the left, look for the Diem Phuong Music Center to your left. They sell literary journals as well as music and culture magazines and books from the US and France.

Diem Phuong Music Center  
Trung Tam Phat Hanh  
44, ave d'Ivry  
Paris 13, France  
tel 01 45 82 66 60  
FAX 01 45 85 46 91  
Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2  
Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

As you exit Diem Phuong turn left to proceed in the same direction as when you came to the shop. Across the corridor is a branch of Thuy Nga, the publisher of Paris By Night. They sell audio books by the novelist Nguyen Ngoc Ngan as well as the trademark music video.

Thuy Nga  
44, ave D'Ivry  
75013 Paris  
tel. 01 45 83 23 41  
FAX 01 45 85 14 23  
Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2  
Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

As you exit Thuy Nga turn right to proceed in the same direction as when you came to the store. On you right you will find an escalator down to the north side of Avenue d'Ivry. Alternatively you can enter the supermarket "Paris Store" next to the top of the escalators, pass through a floor of Asian

objets and descend to the street level where they sell many prepared foods, to exit on on the north side of Avenue d'Ivry.

Walking north you will pass the entrance to Freres Tang on the east side of the street. They have a good sandwich stand as well as another Asian supermarket. Still heading north, cross rue Baudricort and find Khai Tri bookstore on the west side of the street near the corner. A publisher, they sell sandwiches and rent as well as sell general interest and self-help books and magazines.

Khai Tri

93, ave d'Ivry

75013 Paris

Tel 01 45 82 95 81 (boutique), 01 45 82 12 40 (bureau)

Tuesday through Sunday 9:00-18:30

Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2

Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

You can go back south two steps on Avenue d'Ivry to turn west on rue Baudricort to Dao Vien Restaurant, an outlet for the Khoi Hanh literary magazine from California.

Dao Vien Restaurant

82, rue Baudricort

Paris 75013

tel 01 45 85 20 70

Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2

Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

You can head east on rue Baudricort across Avenue d'Ivry to the new branch of Librairie You-Feng on the west side of the street. Librairie You-Feng sells Asian (China) books in original and translation. They sell traditional medical books and supplies as well as scholarly, educational and literary books. They select thoughtfully from French-language scholarship and translation on Viet Nam, and carry a few Vietnamese-language authors.

Librairie You-Feng

66, rue Baudricort

75013 Paris, France

Metro: Maison Blanche

tel. 01 53 82 16 68

FAX 01 53 82 12 68

Tuesday through Sunday 9:30-19:00

Bus lines: 62, 27 and PC2

Metro: Tolbiac or Maison Blanche or Porte d'Ivry all on line 7

Walk north on rue Baudricort to rue de Tolbiac and get back on the 62 bus east to Cours de Vincennes (NOT Porte de St. Cloud), heading east on rue de Tolbiac. Get off at rue de Patay and cross rue de Tolbiac to the north side. Find the 27 bus stop on the east side of Patay where it has just become rue Jeanne D'Arc.

Take the 27 north toward Gare St.-Lazare (NOT Porte de Vitry/Claude Regaud) on rue Jeanne D'Arc then west on bd Vincent Auriol. Get off at the Nationale stop by the elevated train tracks.

Look for the sign "Viet Nam" on the north side of Bd. Vincent Auriol. People call the store "Viet Nam Diffusion" and their card says "VINA." They sell import goods as well as books. I get the Cong An, Nguoi Ha Noi and Van Nghe newspapers here, sets of Nam Cao and Vu Trong Phung, Tu Luc Van Doan reprints, and recent collections from Nguyen Huy Thiep and Phan thi Vang Anh. There is a full range of trade books from SRVN.

The associated grocery store, a couple numbers west, sells takeaway plates. On the same block to the east is a shoe repair shop and then a convenient brasserie at a taxi stand at the corner. Around that corner are the service shops and grocery store of the Place Pinel. Across the street from the corner brasserie is the Metro station "Nationale".

VINA

Produits du Viet Nam

146, bd Vincent-Auriol

75013 Paris

tel. 01 45 85 28 76

FAX 01 45 85 23 13

Seven days a week, 10:00-13:00 and 14:00-19:00

or Monday through Sunday 10:00-18:00

Bus lines: 27 and 83

Metro: Nationale on line 6

Get back on the #27 Bus on the north side of bd Vincent Auriol going toward Gare St.-Lazare (NOT Porte d'Ivry/Claude Regaud). The bus will head north on bd. Vincent Auriol to Place d'Italie then north on ave des Gobelins. Get off at Boulevard Arago/Boulevard St. Marcel. Boulevard St. Marcel is to the east and Boulevard Arago to the west. Oriens is in the middle of the first block to the west on the north side of Arago. They sell used scholarly work, such as old EFEO pamphlets.

Oriens

19, bd Arago

75013 Paris

tel 01 45 35 80 28

Tuesday through Friday 14:00 -18:00

Bus lines: 27 and 91

Metro: Gobelins on line 7

Get back on the #27 bus heading north toward Gare St.-Lazare on Avenue des Gobelins then west on rue Claude Bernard then north on rue Gay Lussac. Get off at the "Feuillantines" stop. The shop "Fenêtres sur l'Asie" is directly behind the stop. They sell general French-language Asia (China and India) books.

Fenêtres sur L'Asie

49, rue Gay Lussac

75005 Paris

tel 01 43 29 44 74

Monday through Saturday except holidays, 11:00-19:00

Bus line: 27 and 21

Metro: Luxembourg on RER B

That is the end of this tour. You could get back on the 27 bus heading north toward Gare St.-Lazare up rue Gay Lussac and get off at rue des Ecoles. The 21 bus north to Gare St. Lazare (NOT Porte de Gentilly) would also take you there. You would be on Boulevard St. Michel, in the northwestern quadrant of the 5th arrondissement near the eastern edge of the 6th arrondissement. You would be close to the Luxembourg gardens for a rest before plunging into the shops of the university district.

### **CHAPTER 3**

#### **THE VIET NAM LITERATURE PROJECT IN ORANGE COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA**

Eight years ago a man drove south from New Haven, Connecticut to go to school in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. That was me. My brother Paul and his son Abraham drove East to help us move. I remember my wife sitting on the steps of the one-story brick apartment after we unloaded, wishing she could stay, more vivid than any photo.

The next day I drove her North to start her school, then back to Carolina alone. The marriage broke up as we lived apart. Another memory is the divorce decree coming in the mail at the Armenian house in Paris three years later. After we had decided to separate, one year before, I woke up every morning in Chapel Hill with the sincere intention to kill myself that day.

But I had to get other things done first. Each day I promised I would get to the suicide when I got through my day's list. I knew this was mad, but I didn't go for help because they would lock me up and then I wouldn't be able to kill myself.

That fire passed and by the time I opened that letter on my bed in the room full of files and books I dragged back from my rounds in Paris I was reading through water, so

cold it dragged my muscles and felt like jello when I walked. It was hard to hear underwater, let alone understand French or Vietnamese or one of them speaking English.

I hardly cracked a notebook or read my cards in drafting what you have read so far. All that research is a baggage of pain and worse, the drag and burden of shutting down, moving slow, can't think feel gratitude hope plan or judge. But that is passing now as well.

I spend my days mining those boxes for a project I started in January 2005 to publish Vietnamese literature in English on the Web. That is my day job. I roll out of bed long before dawn to tell you about it, a paragraph or two or maybe a page a day.

We will sit together here in the barn from now until May and unpack what Vietnamese literature can be in North Carolina. You have got baggage now too, all that stuff, one thing after another I told you about area studies and how France came to Viet Nam and the bookstores of the city of light.

The barn is near the corner of St. Mary's Road and Pleasant Green in Hillsborough, just north of Chapel Hill the town of the University of North Carolina since our revolution, and Durham the town of tobacco for one hundred years after our civil war. The industry attracted black workers, whose insurance payments built a black Wall Street there in Jim Crow.

Men playing music in the street on market day built a music, the Piedmont blues, that I grew up to in Connecticut: Sonny Terry, Brownie McGhee, and the Reverend Gary Davis. John Coltrane and Nina Simone were born in the hinterlands of Durham, and the black state college there now offers an excellent jazz program. I listen to its radio station all day long.

There are plenty of very poor black people in Durham but it stands out among American cities in having a strong black middle class. I go to public events at the insurance company where I am the only white and the poorest man in the room. People work at the insurance company, the bank, at the university one of the tobacco families endowed recently, and the medical schools around it.

Chapel Hill was the school of the planters, the farmers who owned their land and their labor. Teaching those people to read and write was a progressive act and some visionaries right after the war even hired an integrated faculty to lead the state into a new world.

But the Klan rode from here in the north of Orange County to shut the place down and the university was not integrated until I was a boy. They would ride west on St. Mary's from here to the old road south from Hillsborough to Chapel Hill. St. Mary's follows an ancient Indian trace to the mountains.<sup>1</sup>

Pleasant Green, the road I take south to Chapel Hill, is a newer road, driven since the war between two large farms. The property owners on either side only recently came to a quit-claim agreement to cede to one another the small lots orphaned by the road.

But it has run through long enough now that there is a Pleasant Green Methodist Church and a Pleasant Green Community Center which seem old-time compared to the bustling Ebenezer Baptist Church not far down the road. Ebenezer has put in a bid on St. Mary's, the Catholic school that just failed at the site of the colonial Episcopal chapel and burying ground, at the northwest corner of my intersection.

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<sup>1</sup> Chapman, John K. Black Freedom and the University of North Carolina, 1793-1960. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2006.



Many families have stayed in place through all this change. Our drive out to Pleasant Green is new, but it goes by a cemetery of enslaved people whose relatives live up the hill. Three sons from the farm now across Pleasant Green went off to the war with their horses and came back to marry three daughters from the farm just north of St. Mary's.

Their descendants own many of the farms near here, in and among the descendants of their slaves. There is a Rosenberg school preserved nearby by the black people, an honored memorial to the community of freedmen and women who matched a Chicago philanthropist's donation to build a school.

My barn is on a tract that was small lots until recently. Cabins and foundations of white people who likely didn't own slaves, the vast majority in North Carolina, dot the woods.

I stepped out for a year and more after writing that last paragraph. I threw myself into the launch of my Viet Nam Literature Project and got tired and broke. I started working on another farm, driving out past the slave graves before dawn.

We rehabilitated a former cattle operation that had failed as a housing development. We improved the dams around the ponds, cleared the neglected cattle barn, one thing after another. In the woods on the river bottom beyond the draw the cattle used to walk from pond to barn are the remains of a dam slaves built.

At least, no one could have afforded to pay anyone to do that work: one thin rock laid on another in a great mass that once flooded the neighboring farm to the county road and drove a mill. The great twisted gears lie beneath the mounds of toppled rock.

We worked until it got hot. I would run back home, shower off the red clay and blood and work on my project, and run out of town to promote it. I went back to Yale

twice to launch the project, the first time with our first poet, and then again on my own to talk about what we're doing overall.

I've gone to the annual Asian Studies meetings twice to report to the Viet Nam Studies Group and to the teaching magazine Education About Asia. I've staged events to build an audience and a network of supporters in our national capitals, New York and Washington, and here in North Carolina.

Call me Nhat Linh, in retreat at a shack on the way to Da Lat, running into Saigon to publish his last magazine. He was a success in his youth, where I met with failure and defeat and disappointment. He found those in middle age.

His suicide was an affirmative public gesture, followed by demonstrations against the Diem regime. World press noted it, but world opinion did not seize upon the suicide as it focused on the burning monks.

I don't know whether he reached the masses in Viet Nam. Where the writing and editing life of Nhat Linh was out in public view, the politics of Nguyen Tuong Tam were a matter of secret societies, midnight flights, and conspiracies.

He was the heir to a nationalist party smashed by the French after an uprising in 1930 that neglected to involve the people. He joined the scattered remains to the Communists when they declared a free Viet Nam in 1945. The Party turned on all independent intellectuals eventually and when Nhat Linh Nguyen Tuong Tam's time came he fled to China.

He slipped back into Ha Noi before 1954, while the French were still in charge, and began reprinting his books and those of his friends from the days of great success in

colonial times. People liked them, as they had, as they still do. He wrote a long novel of political intrigue which has never really found its public.

A man wrote me from San Francisco the other day looking for a copy. I referred him to the Web catalogues of our nation's public libraries, which have bought a great many Vietnamese books for the immigrants. The gesture of my middle age is to make a public in English for these refugees from the nation of Viet Nam, the scattered books of two centuries of struggle.

The Communists aren't going to. They could do it in a heartbeat. Throughout the American bombing of Ha Noi two of my heroes were scurrying around between the shelters putting out a glorious series of anthologies and books and magazines in translation to explain their nation to the world.

While I was there a friend my age, lately the president of the Writers Association of Ha Noi, then the editor of a foreign-affairs magazine, sounded me out about working for a project to bring out Vietnamese literature in English. I deflected and demurred, certain that it would go nowhere but into frustration and mediocrity as the leadership obsessed about what works and authors to permit.

One of my two hero publishers, Huu Ngoc, was my sponsor in Ha Noi, the retired director of the Foreign Languages Publishing House. His chief during the war, the physician Nguyen Khac Vien, had died between one of my visits to Ha Noi and one afternoon Ngoc reminisced how Vien's father had perished of starvation and thirst and neglect during the French war or just after.

He was an official of the former regime and a small landowner and no one dared touch him, literally. His son was working for the revolution as its spymaster in Paris and

could not get home to feed his father. I think of this when I read Vien's history of Viet Nam for foreigners, and the literature anthologies he edited with Ngoc, which slander or elide contemporaries I know they admired.

One reason I love Ngoc is he never intimated to me that he was a secret friend of liberty, as intellectuals would do as a matter of course while speaking with Westerners. He had fought for the freedom and independence of his people and had made his choices. He is one of the few people who read and write with distinction who are trusted by the rulers of his country.

All he wanted me to do was to run around and get to know the place. While I was there he was preparing for publication the first book for Vietnamese about the US published in the country since 1975. It had hundreds of pieces by dozens of authors from countries around the world, an internationalist version of the classic Works Project Administration guides to the states produced by our Popular Front authors in the 1930s.

I was one of Ngoc's native informants, telling him that the words to Yankee Doodle Dandy may or may not make sense but no one really knows, certainly not the kids who sing it, and such arcana. That was in his courtyard office, where he would summon me downstairs from the big editing room where I sat at the English desk copyediting a memoir of the Paris Peace Talks.

I would go out sometimes to meet with the author, a tall, blue-eyed man who had been an interpreter on the mission. In my favorite passage he recalls how Le Duc Tho, leader of the Ha Noi delegation, had braced Henry Kissinger after the Secretary of State had made some collegial remark.

Look, Henry, Tho said, I spent fifteen years in bourgeois jails and so did him and him and him: we are not your friends. Tho's great luxury after a life of self-denial was to turn down the Nobel Peace Prize when they also awarded it to Kissinger, for the agreement they had made to end the war.

How can you not like that? People stand up when Muhammed Ali enters, in recognition of the righteous defiance he showed to the government of the United States. Ngoc, half-blind since birth, used to re-educate French colonial prisoners of war and return them to their units through the lines at night, one of the most dangerous things a soldier can do.

He used to charge across Ha Noi traffic on foot the same way, holding my hand as if I was leading, while my heart about stopped in front of the old Soviet ten-ton trucks and motorcycles full of screaming pigs. The non-stop gallantry of the Communists is actually a theme of dissident literature.

When I was getting to know Michel Fournie, the Vietnamese literature professor at Langues O, he sent me his English translation of a story from Ha Noi just after the French defeat, about deities rather like the Titans in their struggle with Saturn. As in the Greek story, the rebels win but their struggle, hurling mountaintops at the sun, rains destruction on the common people below.

Enough of heroes, the dissident author was saying, advancing liberal arguments like those of Madison in our revolution, we need a society of men not angels. The Party shut him down as they prepared for the coming struggle against the United States, which they won by losing ten heroes to each enemy, stacking burials six or seven deep so the village cemeteries would not spread out over the fields.

The age of heroes had passed by the time I got to Ha Noi. My friend Ngoc was retired, working in a small office off the courtyard of the publishing company, putting out his great book on the US as an old man's hobby.

His old deputy, retired in a plain chair by the door, would offer me a moon pie when I came into the unheated office. Not a round bean cake like they make in Saigon for Tet, but marshmallow in graham cracker and chocolate, all in cellophane, from China.

It was the only luxury good either of them saw any good in. That year Ha Noi was mad for Honda Dream motorcycles, milk in boxes, heat pumps and gas ranges. My two friends sat without air conditioning or heat, handing out grants of fifty or a hundred dollars from a Swedish fund to buy a bicycle or a typewriter for a cultural journalist in the countryside, maybe a thousand to put a roof on a temple.

Then there would have to be a banquet and Ngoc would appear by my side at the English desk and take me off to some village in the Delta, to watch a procession, eat sticky rice cakes, and turn down offers of betel to chew with lime. I loved being with Ngoc but I hated leaving town.

I was upstairs trying to do a good job for my official hosts, who I wanted to work with in the future. I had a small publishing company in Connecticut and I thought we could collaborate. I was dating my wife, tim hieu nhau, seeking an understanding, and in our spare time she wanted to go play, di chôi, running around Ha Noi on a motorcycle doing all the new things.

She had been to a dozen too many village festivals as an interpreter for foreign journalists and wouldn't go to another. I felt the same way before I went to one. They were a revival of custom and religion after war and revolution: nobody really knew what to

do, improvising processions in funny hats and gowns, as convincing as a graduation ceremony.

The good part was to spend time with Ngoc and the other revolutionaries and foreign friends he brought along. My publishing company is long gone, my marriage is over, and the enduring value of those years in Ha Noi are the hours in the back of a car with my colleague, the patriotic scholar, the other man who has tried systematically, institutionally, to publish Vietnamese literature in English.

It made sense to nearly everyone that I was at the Foreign Languages Publishing House, now called the World, working with Ngoc. At a death anniversary once I was seated next to the chief of security for Ha Noi, who knew all about what I was doing and approved. The celebration was a reunion of writers from a movement bitterly repressed by the Party in the 1950s.

The security man and his deputy had arrested the ringleader when they were young policemen, and now everyone was getting together in remembrance of the old days. I had no idea what to make of this, but the cop understood entirely what I was doing with Ngoc at the World.

Some people didn't get it. Every time I went over again, for the three and six month stays that made up my two years going there, I would pay my respects to the chiefs of the national Writers Union. They were two talented poets, one from the Army and the war, the other from the police academy, who put out a fabulous national arts newspaper.

Bao Van Nghe, Fine Arts News, is something Nhat Linh might have run if he'd had a proper nation. It runs writing contests for children and soldiers, many of whom become

the leading professionals who publish their best work in the paper. It is a heart of Viet Nam.

Where my friend Ngoc had suspect class background because he could already read and write when the revolution came, the men at Bao Van Nghe were of the people, peasants who might not have risen at all in another regime. Where Ngoc was one of those few literary intellectuals trusted to deal with the West, these men led a core national institution.

They would have been better able to hook me up in Vietnamese society and defend me from suspicion. If I had finished one of my visas with the publishing house and come back as an English teacher and translator for the Writers Union, I might still be working in Viet Nam.

The exchanges which the Writers Union had been doing with the University of Massachusetts, Boston, had probably led to my invitation to the publishing house, through the American writer and aid worker, Lady Borton, who did the visa work on the ground in Ha Noi for both. My sponsor, the Ford Foundation, also sponsored the trips back and forth between the Union and the William Joiner Center at Boston.

It would have been great to work with Nguyen Huu Dang and Nguyen Quang Thieu, as it would have been to stay with the World publishing house and pump out books about Viet Nam for foreigners and books about foreign lands for Vietnamese. I never would have come back, with a whole organization to work with towards my purpose.

I stepped out again for a few months after the last paragraph. Late in March 2007 I agreed to work ten or twenty hours each week for a friend's high-tech company, managing



an educational project. Soon it was sixty or eighty, and now I am running all operations, chiefly audits of intellectual property in mergers and acquisitions.

That is why I had avoided white-collar jobs. Exeter and Yale, even the summer camp I went to, are all about running things. All I am good for is being responsible, and with my graduate training I can supervise any rational activity. I was willing to chance it because I needed the dough, and I have something to work for now.

I still work on the horse farm where I live, but the other one, the cattle operation that was keeping me going, fell apart over last winter.

When I wrote that last sentence I was sick and didn't know it. I stepped out again. It is February, 2008, after months of recovery from a liver inflammation, I suppose from overwork. I still have my management job.

I am just starting again to finish this dissertation. This conclusion will be the plan I make now to grow my Viet Nam Literature Project when my strength returns to work another twenty hours a week, with all the resources my new day job gives me.

It must be a plan to promote Vietnamese literature in the United States that is practical because it is faithful to what is true, what I have told you about my countries. I started with what I could do without funding.

That is still a consideration. It is April now. I keep overestimating my strength, as in all my past publishing projects I overestimated my ability to lead and organize and raise money. I have dropped out of touch with most of my contacts while I put health and finances first, then finishing this dissertation.

We have slowed down at work as well. I expect it to pick up slowly over the next year, and to build a business there my boss can sell off in about five. If it doesn't pick up in six months we'll go do something else.

There is a confidence in business that comes from the fact that you can stop when you're not making money. Not everyone does, it isn't so easy when you are publicly traded or you have debt. One of our clients is a multinational famous for its cash reserves, which are emptying at a rate of a billion dollars each year.

Think, if France had just wiped its hands of the colonies after the German defeat, if Ha Noi had thrown in the towel after the US entered the war, if we had allowed the Saigon government to admit the impossibility of winning rule of Viet Nam, if Washington had declined to escalate commitment to Saigon, how much more prosperous the world would be now, how many more intelligent and courageous and public-spirited men and women from all sides would be enjoying retirement after productive careers.

But, on our side at least, people were thinking of Winston Churchill and what would have happened had he thrown in the towel to Hitler. That was the common metaphor among the Americans responsible for the conduct of the Cold War. No accommodation and no surrender: never ever give up.

We all would be better off had they been thinking instead of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who took each crisis as it came and used it to make his case to the people and to his allies, trending step by step toward the reality that the US will defend the Pacific and the Atlantic. But of course that ended with the use of two atom bombs, which the next generation did manage to avoid.

Thankfully, if I fail the adult male population of Britain will not be exported to labor camps, and my success will not depend on the Eastern Front, Marines dying on beaches and the incineration of cities. As in business, if I walk away from my scholarship because I can't make a go of it, not even many of my friends will notice.

The fact is that my career has been one of failure, disappointment, and defeat but in the context of a reality that is going my way. FDR and Ho Chi Minh were so intelligently engaged with reality that it is hard to imagine what inner life each had. I'm a Nhat Linh man, isolated, conspiring, really not much but inner life.

He killed himself, but the modern literature he helped found in Ha Noi has spread all over the world, read by people who know themselves as his nation of Viet Nam. I have decided definitely not to kill myself and have lived to see my basic insight, that it would be good for more people to read Vietnamese literature, affirmed by many people who have little to do with me.

Nina and Phan have made Duong Thu Huong a global author, with novels translated in half a dozen languages. There is an entire department of Vietnamese Studies at San Francisco State University that uses literature extensively to teach language and social work. Colleagues like Peter Zinoman and Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo have tenure track jobs at research universities where they are already training graduate students.

Just here in North Carolina, Eric Henry has recently translated the memoirs of Pham Duy, whose life in the arts is a history of modern Viet Nam, while John Balaban at State has embarked on his own translation of Kieu, the Vietnamese national poem, while promoting the study of nom, the previous national script, within Viet Nam. Dana Sachs in

Wilmington has moved from translations of contemporary fiction, to a novel about our two countries, to a study of adoption.

I am staying home from the Asian Studies meetings for the first time in years, and there are multiple sessions on Vietnamese books and authors. Last year I went and there were even more, and I was just a spectator, as I have been since I decided to stop putting my friends and colleagues in the embarrassing position of commenting on my work. We all know it's good, but for what?

I am good for presenting and commenting on them. That's why I didn't stay in Viet Nam to become the foreign Huu Ngoc, the importer and exporter of culture. I just can't help having opinions, and expressing them to see what everybody else thinks, trying them out to see if they lead to action. I can't stop just because my opinions are mistaken, or outrageous, or don't work.

Most creative people have many more observations and ideas than they have good ones, and I am very ordinary that way. It's why I adore the Vietnamese Communist Party, when faced with a crisis they try anything, and why I hate their rule of Viet Nam, because they don't let everyone have a whack.

This dissertation really began in my student room in the Armenian house, when I wrote that first sentence about Nhat Linh and set it aside, to walk the streets of the city in search of Vietnamese books and write to the listservs of the Vietnamese Studies Group and the other graduate students at Carolina and Langues O about them.

It really ended one day on my friend Nick's place, heaving and pushing and gripping farm equipment in the red clay, when my mind composed the last paragraph about my determination to carry out my life's work. Now, perched on the couch where I have

been resting through a fall and winter after knocking myself out becoming a business executive, let me tell you what I am going to do.

I am going to stay healthy and solvent. I never ever want to be sick or broke again and I won't exhaust myself in a venture that always demands more work, more money, before falling apart. I have always aimed at success but I've always worked too hard.

I've got to have a middle-aged, middle manager's job that pays a middle income for about forty hours of work each week. No more teaching more than half-time for less than half of what it costs to live, and halt the series of marginal service projects, each conceived to pay the deficit of the one before.

I actually tried to fund the dissertation, which was to fund the Viet Nam work, by leading students in a research and publication project about Asians in our state. That fell short and I started working one up about the Indians here, Nations in North Carolina, and another about Jim Crow in Orange County. That was the last time I got exhausted and broke, and turned to farm work.

.Still, I had deliberately come to Carolina to do social science rather than humanities at Harvard, a gateway to funding from national institutions, and I want to stay here rather than search for a post-doc or a teaching job in California, where eventually the Vietnamese community could back my work in the state system.

It has something to do with being a white man in the South, a role which sustains me, and with dealing with literature and research as leadership training for broad-based social activity rather than a school for snobs. In any case it seems that I want to have a hobby.

It's got to be something I can do in twenty hours a week, with the money I can give from my job and raise from my true believers or the work itself. I won't have time to travel to meet funders or write grants. I do need paid assistance to pump out routine matters and maintain relations with volunteers and authors when I do get sick or tired.

So it won't be a student service project, to my regret. I had thought of enlisting the Viet Nam veterans working in educational administration around North Carolina, and the Vietnamese immigrants, to serve the public with materials developed by college students in a course I led. That is a sound idea that would require a full-time job with staff just to secure the funding to write a proposal.

The remains of such programs are scattered around the state, like the wonderful initiative of librarians to buy Vietnamese language books for the immigrants in 1975. They addressed the need, with the abundant funding of the time, and moved on in their careers as librarians.

It won't be a research project because I can't hack a career as a tenure-track faculty member at a research university that would provide time and support for my publishing work: my colleagues love, hate, or dismiss what I write exactly because it's not what they do. A full-time teaching job instead would leave no time for writing or publishing.

I could sell a part-time course in Vietnamese literature to some institution near here and have my students work on the project, but that would take more than my twenty hours in itself. I could turn author in my spare time and crank out studies of Vietnamese writers but that begs the question of how to reach the English-speaking public.

Literary friends among the Vietnamese exiles recognize my situation because their entire literary world works on an amateur basis. The people who arrived from Saigon to a

camp in Arkansas stepped off-base and set up a company, New Life, to publish their reprints of Nhat Linh with the money from their entry-level jobs.

The couple who ran the Vietnamese bookshop in Charlotte were doing that as a hobby, and likewise their magazine. The editors who broke from the Communist-backed journal in Paris to publish a forum for reform all had day jobs, the two I know personally working in science and technology.

My friend Huynh Sanh Thong, who recruited me for the Yale job, began his great project of translating a Vietnamese canon of poetry when he lost his job at teaching Vietnamese language after the Paris agreement was signed in 1972. When Saigon fell, a political scientist helped him get funding for an oral history project, and Thong took the money instead to print a journal publishing the refugee authors instead, with his work funded by his wife's job at the library.

The best Vietnamese poetry website, *tienvi* in Australia, is updated continually by a man who comes home from work each day and sits down to it. The central website for politically engaged literateurs, *talawas*, is run by a Vietnamese woman exactly my age in Berlin who lives on air and the remains of social democracy. There are Vietnamese community newspapers and video companies around the world making money, but only a handful of bookstores outside Viet Nam that are truly profitable businesses.

All the strictly literary magazines are run by people with other jobs. That is the realistic path for me. I knew all this the first time I thought about it, decades ago. My former wife remarked, when she called on Thanksgiving to ask how my studies are going and heard all this, that I am exactly where I was when she met me in Ha Noi.

I'm still a marginal businessman trying to promote Vietnamese literature, and unlike my mostly male colleagues I haven't secured a Vietnamese wife as a partner in the enterprise. I am not in a position to marry a white man with a good job, as some of the women do. I instead came to Carolina to be something I don't seem to want to be and there isn't actually a position for.

I was gambling on funding available from Ford and the Social Science Research Council for what I had shown I was good at, building relations with Viet Nam. My police troubles cut off that path, and forced me to acknowledge that I just don't care enough about the few authorities who take an interest in my activity, to work with them as I would like to.

I have advanced by graduate study in that I now know the roots and implications of this particular subject position, historically and analytically as well as by intuition and experience. I even command theory that points out that literature is a way of coining distinction, so of course it costs the world.

"What would you give to know the song that the Sirens sang to Jason?" asked my hero the book packager Samuel Johnson of the boy poling his boat across the Thames, to settle an argument with the young law student James Boswell about the value of polite learning. Sam was on the wrong side for once, and the boy bowled him over by saying, "Sir, I would give all that I have."

My grandfather, an orphan child, poled gentlemen from Baltimore shooting the Eastern Shore. One offered to educate him but died suddenly and Pop spent the rest of his life on the water. All of us know the cold wind off the marshes, that just don't care, and the warm glow of our own effort exploring what we care about.



The education has been worth every penny. I have gained a head and address book in three languages stuffed with a sense of Viet Nam and its literature that is truly academic, that no government or business or even a literary enterprise or author would conceive of.

I am an anthropologist like Malinowski, in a hole on the beach in a world at war, paying attention to what people actually do when they try to make sense, dreaming of a way to present their efforts.

Let me tell you about what I want to do. I won't tell it to you, as I have made everything so far a story. Here is a bald statement for analytic purposes, in conclusion to this dissertation.

I am working with my colleagues to represent to readers of the world in English the modern nation of Viet Nam as its writers have presented their imaginations in the modern, individualist institutions of fiction and poetry and drama through newspapers and magazines and publishing houses.

I plan to pay attention to previous literary institutions, the classics and religious texts, and to the works of national minorities, only to the same extent that the modern authors do.

We launched Viet Nam Literature Project with Nguyen Chi Thien, a poet who formed himself as an anti-communist in Ha Noi's prisons, and the short stories of Tran Dieu Hang, a woman whose literary career was interrupted by the flight from Saigon.

I depart from the common sense of literary people now working in the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, or those in exile at any point around the globe, in that I serve the various senses of the Vietnamese nation, including those once and still written in French, as

well as those from the colonial period, the defunct Saigon republic, and the growing traditions in English.

At some point my historic sense of the Viet Nam as something that has come into history will lead me to include texts from soldiers and missionaries and scholars from other nations. You have met my Sergeant Bobillot, and Alan Farrell. While recovering from hepatitis I have got back in touch with other Viet Nam veteran authors from the United States whom I used to publish.

My plan is to represent this Vietnamese literature as I conceive it, by reference to the community of those already working to represent its parts, as I have met them plodding around cities and making all my false starts to publish. I am already behind on a post-doctoral grant from the William Joiner Center to write up my world of foreign scholars of Vietnamese literature.

I will proceed on two routes, one of supporting the work of my colleagues, providing public reference materials and supplementary translations for translations and editions they are publishing elsewhere. Wikivietlit is a public, interactive Web-based reference work to hundreds of books and authors in Vietnamese literature.

The second route will be present authors who are not otherwise served, because their work does not fit into commercial or university press business models, or they come from the vanished nations of Viet Nam I am interested in. Our Viet Nam Literature Project author pages offer translations and supporting materials that document the works of authors and the translators, critics and teachers who value them.

We will focus on making original texts available and supporting them with reference texts. We will focus on making texts.

At some point we must also address readers and teachers in person, providing programs to create and support an audience for our texts. This is what funders with a social service or commercial orientation towards literature will support.

Viet Nam Literature Project started with parties in New York and Washington, DC, presenting VNLP authors to our national capitals. We reported on the events in the newsletter, *Literature News*, illustrated by Jon Hill's comics based on VNLP works. Jon's first comics for the newsletter became our first comic book, *Blood Seeds Become Poetry*, by Nguyen Chi Thien. We can publish more, and offer podcasts of our events and audio books

But each such project will take as much time and staff and money as we will pour into it, and none of them can happen without texts. The Web communities are hungry to chew up and use any real work you put on it, but won't make scholarship on their own.

But money for the fundamental work, the texts, is the hardest to raise. I ran out of money and started farmwork. I set up Wikivietlit when the money from the William Joiner Center arrived last year, and my friend the poet Linh Dinh immediately wrote hundreds of articles about Vietnamese authors for it.

When I finish this dissertation I will write up for Wikivietlit articles on the authors I know about, focusing on the Western scholars of Vietnamese literature. I will revive the series of web pages on different author's work on the website, and begin again some modest schedule of events and mailings to promote the work in a modest way, and sell another comic book, and make podcasts.

That will be good enough, but I want more. I propose to get out of my hole on the beach and into an institution where Vietnamese literature can be academic, where it can spread out like anthropology has to support the understanding of human life.,

My boss and I go about our audit business in such a way that we may sell it. We make our original ideas routine, common sense, documented by forms we can transfer as intellectual property to some larger business when we want to go do something else.

Funders push this approach in the non-profit world. Program officers are uncomfortable with the fact that they are paying for the work of a single talented entrepreneur who could be hit by a truck.

If you want their money you have to tell them in writing how in the special thing you do isn't that special, that it is scalable, and reproducible, that in effect you could be fired tomorrow and your work would carry on if indeed it hasn't already spread like a virus around the world. I like the concept.

But it shipwrecks on the fact that the very same funding officers will also acknowledge in person that people give money to people, for personal reasons. In scholarship and art and science and also in business, great and worthy projects of substantial import come to an end every day, when an individual loses interest or energy or dies.

Indeed, it would be wonderful to move away from reliance on talented individuals. If someone was willing to pay for them, I could run good studies showing the actual effects of all the different approaches to promoting Vietnamese literature, and literature in general, that I have observed, so the community could proceed by the best methods to the preferred results.

Nobody is willing to pay for that, or at least I'm not willing to put out scarce time and money to find out. Actual cultural transmission is diffuse and open-ended, hard to predict or even observe. That is what I like about it. The only outcome I am looking for is a reader reading a Vietnamese author.

Why? I tend to think that this will make another American war in Viet Nam less likely, but the one we had was unique anyways. And, actually, the Americans most literate in Vietnamese were essential to extending the war far beyond what the Vietnamese could have done on their own.

I like to think that better understanding among nations, achieved one person at a time by his or her encounter with another human voice and initiation into its community of reception, will make American wars of any kind less likely, but just now our leadership carried us all into the disaster in Iraq without effective citizen resistance. My particular students are comporting themselves beautifully in the new mess, but in ways I can relate only weakly to their time with me and the texts I like.

Oh, well. The very fact that quality in literature is a free-for-all, that its demonstrable value is best left vague so as not actually to make false claims, is all the more reason for me to place my project at some institution where individuals will more easily find it, to do whatever it is that people do with books.

I should not remain a hobbyist, or at least the Viet Nam Literature Project should not remain in my barn. A frank conception of the modern literature of that nation should have an office at a university with a secretary, to run summer-residency and online institutes for teachers, and work with librarians to establish archives.

Students should be able to present themselves there and take something away. I want an orderly presentation for the chaos I have introduced you to. I want some institution to commit its own resources to all this, not just give me office space to raise money.

I want them to be delighted to pound their money down my particular rat hole. That is the hard part, the equivalent of taking a business public or private. Even a great many profitable businesses cannot be sold.

It is hard to sell an investor an enterprise that doesn't have value yet, but it can be harder to sell something that no one else has invested in. Should I focus only on bootstrapping myself, as I will have to do since I can't work as a research scholar, I may never get any institutional support.

Since I can't work as a professor, perhaps I should work as an administrator, responsible for programs opening up the school to the world, by assisting students to work with amateur researchers in serving the public. Next week I'm writing the Dean of Faculty at Exeter about taking over the Anthropology program there to run it along these lines.

But I would rather not leave Orange County, and we do have institutions here. I will make my living and grow my project and keep looking for an opportunity to do my work at some institution.

Here we are at the same conundrum where we started out, with the society and the individual, not even sure which is which. There is no rational solution. But Viet Nam has worked it out, and definitely has come into the world.

One consequence is that I may never be allowed to set foot there again, as I may never work at a college. I know what I am going to do about it nonetheless: make my

enterprise in Vietnamese literature work on its own terms, and still try to give it to the world through the fellowship of learning I have joined.

I have no idea how, or rather I have a barrow full of ideas from my researches to push. When there are many cures, the medical dictum goes, there is no cure. I am beaten down, skeptical of my chance to succeed, and certain I will continue to try. This is modernism and, if you haven't noticed, Christianity, both familiar to us all.

You don't need to hear any more. We have gone down the road a piece together, you and I. Nous avons fait un bout de chemin ensemble. Thoi nhe! Enough already! Arrete!

I put one foot in front of the other here on out. Where do you get off? Where are you at? I leave you to your reading and your writing outside Viet Nam.

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