

# UC Berkeley

## UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

Beloved City, Depraved City: Communist Takeovers and Socialist Transformations in North Vietnam's Cities (1950–1958)

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0d4257rf>

### Author

Nguyen, Uyen Thi Thu

### Publication Date

2021

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

Beloved City, Depraved City:  
Communist Takeovers and Socialist Transformations in North Vietnam's Cities (1950–1958)

By

Uyen Thi Thu Nguyen

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Peter Zinoman, Chair

Professor Wen-Hsin Yeh

Professor Karl A. Britto

Summer 2021



Abstract

Beloved City, Depraved City:  
Communist Takeovers and Socialist Transformations in North Vietnam's Cities (1950–1958)

by

Uyen Thi Thu Nguyen

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Peter Zinoman, Chair

This dissertation examines the communist takeover of cities in North Vietnam and some of the most important socio-political transformations that took place in these cities in the 1950s. It aims to do three things. First, it puts into perspective the intricate but understudied relationship between the communist revolution and the city. Second, it aims to critically complicate the way urban takeovers in Vietnam are portrayed in the existing literature and to demonstrate how an understanding of communist takeovers in the 1950s can enrich the larger historiography on modern state formation in general, and communist state formation in particular, in Vietnam. Finally, this dissertation aims to contribute to the growing literature on state-society relations in the early DRV.

The dissertation starts with the first takeovers by DRV forces of cities along the Sino-Vietnamese frontier in 1949–1950 and ends in 1958, on the eve of nationalization and agricultural collectivization. Drawing on archival documents, newspapers, literary works, memoirs, and oral histories, this work reconstructs the perspectives and actions of both the communist “liberators” and members of the society “liberated” by Ho Chi Minh’s forces. The general picture that this dissertation paints is that: Vietnamese communists met various difficulties and forms of resistance after taking over urban areas - it took Ho Chi Minh’s government several years to turn North Vietnamese cities into the socialist symbols that they became by the 1960s - but in the process of attempting to reorganize the cities and its population, communist bureaucrats, cadres, and soldiers were also transformed by urban life and culture.

*For  
my family  
and the elderlies of Hanoi  
who adopted me as their grandchild and shared with me their life stories*

## Table of Contents

Abbreviations .....	iii
List of Figures & List of Tables.....	iv
Acknowledgements .....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1: Unplanned takeovers.....	13
Chapter 2: The problems of an industrial center.....	29
Chapter 3: Revolutionary government in the metropolis: The first year .....	56
Chapter 4: The Making of the DRV <i>công chức</i> .....	75
Chapter 5: Reforming life on the streets: The struggles with prostitutes.....	96
Chapter 6: Policing the city: Surveillance-de-près aesthetics in Trần Dần's <i>Crossroads and Lampposts</i> .....	126
Epilogue .....	148
Bibliography .....	150

## Abbreviations

ASV	Associated State of Vietnam
BLD	Phòng Bộ Lao Động [Ministry of Labor]
BNV	Phòng Bộ Nội Vụ [Ministry of Home Affairs]
BYT	Phòng Bộ Y tế [Ministry of Health]
CTXH	Phòng Bộ Cứu tế Xã hội [Ministry of Social Welfare]
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam; North Vietnam
PTT	Phòng Phủ Thủ tướng [Prime Minister's Office]
RVN	Republic of Vietnam; South Vietnam
SHD	Service Historique de la Défense (Vincennes)
TTLTQG-III	Trung tâm Lưu trữ Quốc gia III [Vietnam National Archives Center III, Hà Nội]
UBKCHC-LKIII	Phòng Ủy ban Kháng chiến Hành chính Liên khu III [Interzone III Resistance Administrative Committee]
VKDTT	Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập [The Complete Collection of Party Documents]
VNDQCB	Việt Nam Dân Quốc Công Báo

## **List of Figures**

Figure 1: DRV soldiers marching .....	6
Figure 2: A reenactment of the takeover of Hanoi (1954) organized by the Management Board of Hanoi Old Quarter in 2019 to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the takeover .....	7
Figure 3: De Lattre Line .....	30
Figure 4: A propaganda flyer titled “Opposing the robbing of women” distributed in Hanoi in the night of 25-26 April 1954 .....	105
Figure 5: Brothels and cô đầu singing houses (1896–1954) .....	109

## **List of Tables**

Table 1: Timeline of French withdrawal and communist takeover in North Vietnam .....	31
Table 2: Proposals for the minimum salary for DRV cadres and officials in Hanoi (Oct–Nov 1954) .....	82
Table 3: Statistics of centers run by the Ministry of Social Welfare (Jan 1956–Jan 1957) .....	116



## Acknowledgements

This dissertation would have never come into being without the help and support of many people and institutions.

At Berkeley, I would first like to thank my advisor, Peter Zinoman, and dissertation committee members Wen-hsin Yeh and Karl Britto. I would also like to thank Nicolas Tackett and Penny Edwards who served on my qualifying exam committee; Tom Lacqueur and Istvan Rev (Central European University) whose graduate seminar in Spring 2017 inspired a part of this dissertation; Jeff Hadler who was gone too soon and who will always be missed; former and current staffs of the History Department, especially Mabel Lee, Todd Kuebler, Ken Mahru, Erin Leigh Inama, Marianne Bartholomew-Couts; Virginia Shih at the South and Southeast Asia Library. Finally, I am thankful for the financial support from many institutions at Berkeley: the History Department, the Institute of International Studies, the Graduate Division, the Center for Chinese Studies, and the International House at Berkeley.

Many scholars, colleagues, and friends have helped me greatly during the process of researching and writing this dissertation, and beyond. I wish to thank Christopher Goscha, Keith Taylor, Olga Dror, Haydon Cherry, Charles Keith, Đoàn Cẩm Thi, Nguyễn Nguyệt Cẩm, Alec Holcombe, Alex-Thai Vo, and Jason Picard, who offered helpful advice and suggestions, shared resources, and connected me to the larger network of researchers and scholars. I am deeply thankful for the company of friends in the graduate program: Shoufu Yin, Anthony Morreale, Cindy Nguyen, Ryan Nelson, Jeremy Chiang, Vincent Trần; Chelsea Ward and Melissa Van Wyk from the EALC program accompanied me (via Zoom) every weekday during the last two months of working on this dissertation. I also appreciate times spent with colleagues in other institutions: Tram Luong, Hoang Minh Vu, Huy Anh Le, Emily Nguyen, Yen Vu, Kevin Pham, Vinh Pham. Chad Denton, John Delury, Jesse Sloane, and Michael Ratnaplan at the Underwood International College, Yonsei University (Korea) sparked my interests in history and encouraged me to pursue graduate studies.

Friends from the International House at Berkeley – Martin Valuet, Makoto Fukumoto, Ian Gleason, Ezra Toback, Nina Pak, Crispin Barker, Morgan Randall, Jonathan Kao, Rahul Jain, Darren Lu, Melvyn Sng Guo Jie – helped me through the ups and downs of graduate student life. A special thank-you must go to Đan Erdmann-Pham and Jonathan Baldoza, whose intelligence, humor, and warm hearts have never ceased to amaze and comfort me.

In Vietnam, I would like to thank staffs at the National Archives no.3, especially chú Tiển and chị Mai, who welcomed me and did their best to help me access as many documents as possible. I am indebted to Phan Hoàng Việt, chị Phạm Thanh Trà, Dr. Trần Hải Yến, cô Lưu Bích Thanh, chị Giang Lương Hà, and anh Nguyễn Minh for connecting me, directly or indirectly, to the elderlies whom I interviewed for this project. My research life in Hanoi has been kept balance by my passion for table tennis. A thank-you is due to my coaches, anh Lâm and Hiễn, and my friends at various table tennis clubs in Hanoi.

The love and support of my family allowed me to be here today. My husband, Emmanuel, was always eager to listen to my ideas and discoveries, and ever ready to distract me from disappointment and despair. I thank him for his love and patience. Several octogenarians and nonagenarians in Hanoi let me record and share their life stories with the world through this work. I thank them for their trust and courage and wish them health.

## Introduction

Whether viewed as a “conquest” or a “liberation,” Saigon’s fall to communist forces in April 1975 appears in most scholarly accounts as an unprecedented, singular event in the history of the Vietnam War. However, the takeover of cities by communist forces occurred repeatedly during the course of the conflict. Moreover, the takeovers that occurred during the Vietnam War were not the first time that communist forces took over cities in Vietnamese history. In August 1945, after declaring the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the Viet Minh assumed authority in Hanoi (and many other cities throughout the country), eliminated its political competitors, purged from its ranks non-communist members, and started building a centralized government in which Hanoi directed a hierarchy of regional and local revolutionary committees.<sup>1</sup> The construction of this political apparatus and the pursuit of this larger social re-engineering projects were interrupted in December 1946 when French forces retook Hanoi after a brutal urban battle.

Remarkably, from the moment Viet Minh forces withdrew from Hanoi at the end of 1946 until the conclusion of the Geneva conference in July 1954, they never succeeded in retaking important cities such as Hanoi and Haiphong nor in inciting uprisings in smaller cities. This still-unexplained unresponsiveness of the cities to the communist cause was an essential reason why Ho Chi Minh’s Democratic Republic had to shift its strategy in 1950 to focus on mobilizing peasants in the countryside.<sup>2</sup> Regardless, as the war progressed, French and Associated State of Vietnam (ASV) forces started to withdraw from certain urban areas to reinforce more strategic points, and eventually through diplomatic negotiations at Geneva, the cities that had not responded to the Viet Minh’s call fell one by one under communist control. By October 1954, DRV forces had taken control of thirteen provincial capitals and mid-size towns and two of the three largest cities in North Vietnam - Nam Định and Hanoi. Finally, on 13 May 1955, just before the 300 days of open borders under the Geneva Accords came to an end, Ho Chi Minh’s government took over the city of Haiphong.

Our understanding of the 20 years between the takeover of Haiphong in 1955 and the takeover of Saigon in 1975 has been overshadowed by narratives of the ideological and military conflicts between the DRV and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN; South Vietnam). Nonetheless more and more scholars, through identifying and analyzing important social, political, and economic developments in both North and South Vietnam during the latter half of the 1950s and early 1960s, have questioned and revised the assumption that the period 1954 – 1958 was simply part of the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War). For the North, Alec Holcombe, building on earlier works by Gareth Porter, Edwin Moise, and Andrew Vickerman, and listening more closely to the Party’s “official internal voices,” has analyzed the land reform between 1953 and 1955 in rural North Vietnam as a tool of mass mobilization that helped Ho Chi Minh’s government consolidate its control over the territory and prepared the rural population for

---

<sup>1</sup> David Marr, *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); David Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945-1946)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Christopher E. Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at War: Social Dynamics of the Viet Minh’s ‘Underground City’, 1945–1954,” *War in History* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 249.

agricultural collectivization in the late 1950s.<sup>3</sup> For the intellectual sphere, several authors have shown how the DRV state let flourish a movement of political protest from artists and intellectuals (the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm movement; NVGP) during the early years of its rule (1954-1956) before decisively clamping down on dissenting voices.<sup>4</sup> For the South, Ngo Dinh Diem's ascent to power and early state-building projects have been studied in book-length works by Philip Catton, Jessica Chapman, and Edward Miller.<sup>5</sup> In addition, Peter Hansen and Jason Picard have described and analyzed the demographic, cultural, and economic impacts of the migration of more than 800,000 people to South Vietnam in 1954-1955.<sup>6</sup> Last but not least,

---

<sup>3</sup> Gareth Porter, "The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered," International Relations of East Asia Project, Cornell University, Interim Report no. 2, 1972; Edwin Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Local Level* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983); Andrew Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry: Premature "Transition to Socialism" in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam* (New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, Monograph Series 28, Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1986); Olivier Tessier, 'Le "grand bouleversement" (*long trois lo dat*): Regards croisés sur la réforme agraire en République démocratique du Viet Nam', *Bulletin de l'Ecole française d'Extrême-Orient*, nos. 95-96 (2008-2009), 73-134; Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam, un état né de la guerre* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011); Alex Thai Vo, "Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953," *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 31, no. 3 (November 2016), 983-1018; Alex Thai Vo, "Nguyễn Thị Năm and the Land Reform in North Vietnam." *The Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 10, no. 1 (2015), 1-62; Alec Holcombe, "The Complete Collection of Party Documents: Listening to the Party's Official Internal Voice," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5, no. 2 (June 2010): 225-42; Alec Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945-1960* (University of Hawaii Press, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> In chronological order: Georges Boudarel, *Cent fleurs écloses dans la nuit du Vietnam: Communisme et dissidence 1954-1956* (Paris: Editions Jacques Bertoin, 1991); Georges Boudarel, "Intellectual Dissidence in the 1950s: The Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm Affair," trans. and ed. by Phi-Linh Baneth, in *The Vietnam Forum*, No. 13 (1990), 154-174; Hirohide Kurihara, "Changes in the Literary Policy of the Vietnamese Worker's Party, 1956-1958," in Takashi Shiraishi and Motoo Furata, eds., *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s* (Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1992), 165-196; Kim Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), ch. 4; Shawn McHale, "Vietnamese Marxism, Dissent, and the Politics of Postcolonial Memory: Trần Đức Thảo, 1946-1993," *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 1 (February 2002), 7-31; Heinz Schütte, *Hundred Flowers in Vietnam, 1955-1957*, Südostasien Working Papers, no. 22 (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, 2003); Nguyễn Ngọc Tuấn, "Socialist Realism in Vietnamese Literature: An Analysis of the Relationship between Literature and Politics," Ph.D. Diss., Victoria University, 2004, ch. 6; Peter Zinoman, "Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm and Vietnamese "Reform Communism" in the 1950s: A revisionist interpretation," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 60-100; Peter Zinoman, "Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm on Trial: The Prosecution of Nguyễn Hữu Đăng and Thụy An," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3-4 (2016): 1-28.

<sup>5</sup> Philip E. Catton, *Diem's Final Failure: Prelude to America's War in Vietnam*, Illustrated edition (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2003); Jessica Chapman, *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013); Edward Miller, *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013); Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016): Chapter 10: A Tale of Two Republics.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Hansen, "Bac Di Cu: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954-1959," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009): 173-211; Peter Hansen, "The Virgin Mary Heads South: Northern Catholic Refugees in South Vietnam, 1954-1964," Doctoral

aspects of the intellectual and cultural life of the early RVN have been analyzed in two important works by Tuan Hoang and Duy Lap Nguyen.<sup>7</sup>

Political, economic, and socio-cultural patterns formed in these early years of the DRV and the RVN set the two countries on separate paths that only became more divergent with the outbreak of the Vietnam War. In April 1975, however, these divergent paths were forcefully joined as more than a decade of fratricidal war between North and South Vietnam ended after Saigon fell to North Vietnamese forces. DRV leaders once again found themselves facing a population that for years did not respond enthusiastically to their call to overthrow the “puppet” government and reunify the nation. Existing literature suggests that the socialization of South Vietnam followed the path of socialization established in the North after 1954.<sup>8</sup> Yet surprisingly the communist takeovers and many aspects of the socialization of North Vietnam in the 1950s have not been systemically studied.

This dissertation examines the communist takeover of cities in North Vietnam and some of the most important socio-political transformations that took place in these cities in the 1950s. It aims to do three things. First, it puts into perspective the intricate but understudied relationship

---

dissertation, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009; Jason Picard, “Fragmented Loyalties: The Great Migration’s Impact on South Vietnam, 1954–1963,” Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2004; Jason Picard, “Fertile Lands Await: The Promises and Pitfalls of Directed Resettlement, 1954–1958,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 58–102.

<sup>7</sup> Tuan Hoang, “Ideology in Urban South Vietnam, 1950-1975,” PhD diss. (University Of Notre Dame, 2013); Duy Lap Nguyen, *The Unimagined Community: Imperialism and Culture in South Vietnam* (Manchester University Press, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Memoirs by Vietnamese witnesses to the event and its aftermath: Van Tien Dung, *Our Great Spring Victory: An Account of the Liberation of South Vietnam* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977); Truong Nhu Tang, with David Chanoff and Doan Van Toai, *A Viet Cong Memoir* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986); Mai Thu Van, *Vietnam: Un peuple, des voix* (Paris: Pierre Horay, 1982); Doan Van Toai, *The Vietnamese Gulag* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1986); Mai Elliott, *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). Vietnamese-language works: Huy Đức, *Bên Thắng cuộc I – Giải Phóng* (Los Angeles, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); Huy Đức, *Bên Thắng cuộc II – Quyền Bình* (LA, California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013); Đặng Phong. *Lịch sử kinh tế Việt Nam, 1945-2000* [Economic history of Vietnam, 1945–2000]. Vol. 2, 1955–1975 (Hanoi: Khoa học Xã hội, 2005). English- and French-language scholarship: William Turley, “Urban Transformation in South Vietnam” in *Pacific Affairs* 49, no.4 (1976): 607–24; William J. Duiker, *Vietnam Since the Fall of Saigon* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1985); Nguyen Van Canh (with Earle Cooper), *Vietnam under Communism, 1975–1982* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983); Stéphane Dovert and Philippe Lambert, ‘La Relation Nord-Sud’, in Stéphane Dovert and Benoit de Tréglodé, eds., *Viet Nam contemporain* (Paris: IRASEC/Les Indes savantes, 2009), 90–114; George Veith, *Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam 1973–1975* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012); François Guillemot, ‘Saigon 1975: La mise au pas’, *L’Histoire*, no. 62 (2014), 72–4; Ngo Vinh Long, ‘The Socialization of South Vietnam’, in Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, eds., *The Third Indochina War* (London: Routledge, 2006), 127–35; Đặng Đình Trung, “Post-1975 Land Reform in South Vietnam: How Local Actions and Responses Affected National Policy,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 5: 3 (October 2010), 72–105; Christopher E. Goscha, *Vietnam: A New History* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 372-403.

between the communist revolution and the city. Just as Christopher Goscha has highlighted that the cities were “unresponsive” to the Viet Minh’s call for uprising and revolution throughout the First Indochina War, Tuan Hoang has argued that most urban South Vietnamese were not persuaded by the communist revolutionaries’ vision of postcolonial Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> This was not exclusively a Vietnamese problem however. Lenin, drawing on Marx, saw urbanization (the rapid increase in urban population) as the result of the diversion of agricultural population to commercial and industrial activities. He pointed out in *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1908) that non-agricultural migration – migration to the city has a liberating effect on the peasant: “[it] elevates the peasant as a citizen, releasing him from the host of patriarchal and personal relationships of dependence and social-estate divisions so strongly entrenched in the rural districts.”<sup>10</sup> But the city does not represent only freedom. In 1939, Mao stated that the final goal of the Chinese revolution was to capture the cities, which he saw as Chinese spaces “long occupied by powerful imperialists and their reactionary Chinese allies,” in other words, “the enemy’s main bases.” These captured cities represent not “capitalist China” but symbols of colonialism and imperialism.<sup>11</sup>

Contemporary Marxist thinkers Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey remind us that cities were and continue to be sites of revolutionary change. Both Lefebvre and Harvey argue against the current in the Marxist tradition that tends to either ignore or disregard the revolutionary potential and significance of urban struggles. Harvey demonstrates that ever since the revolutionary movements in Paris in 1789, the history of urban-based class struggles has been remarkable and consequential. He argues that the city provides revolutionaries with a site for mobilization and therefore, to the authorities, a source of dangers coming from a restive population.<sup>12</sup> In *Marxist Thought and the City*, first published in French in 1972, Henri Lefebvre rereads the works of Marx and Engels and provides us with a thematic analysis of what the city and the “urban problematic” meant for these two thinkers. Lefebvre emphasizes the importance of the idea of the “urban” in the Marxist vision: the “town” was perceived as both an obstacle to the new society and its prototype. This is because the separation between the town and the country must be overcome, but the “urban,” characterized by the use of productive forces toward communal organization (water, lighting, steam heat systems, etc.) shall be “promoted, or established or restored on a worldwide scale.”<sup>13</sup> In brief, there exists in Communist ideology a complex and ambivalent idea of the city: a space of freedom but also corruption, radical but also indifferent, ideal but also something that needs to be destroyed.

Unsurprisingly, such complexity was also present in the Vietnamese communists’ relation with the cities in the 1950s. However, much more attention has been given to the role of

---

<sup>9</sup> Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at war,” 249; Tuan Hoang, “Ideology in Urban South Vietnam,” Chapters 1-3.

<sup>10</sup> V. I. Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1899-1908): Chapter VIII. II, accessed at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/dcr8viii/viii8ii.htm>

<sup>11</sup> Mao Zedong, *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party* (1939): Chapter I & II, accessed at: [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_23.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm)

<sup>12</sup> David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Marxist Thought and the City*, trans. Robert Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 50.

the countryside and rural mobilization in the Vietnamese revolution.<sup>14</sup> Studying the revolution in the cities will therefore allow for a fresh perspective and enrich our understanding of the history of the revolution in Vietnam.

The second aim of this dissertation is to critically complicate the way urban takeovers in Vietnam are portrayed in the existing literature and to demonstrate how an understanding of communist takeovers in the 1950s can enrich the larger historiography on modern state formation in general, and communist state formation in particular, in Vietnam. A state-sanctioned, standard Vietnamese narrative of the “liberation” of a city promotes the images of disciplined communist soldiers marching into central streets while local inhabitants happily welcome them (Figures 1&2). The end of such a narrative usually suggests speedy reestablishment of order and productive life after a long period of French “occupation.”

However, this official format obscures other aspects of the moments of transition and generalizes every takeover in Vietnamese history. English- and French- language scholarship in general has paid little attention to urban areas other than metropolises like Hanoi and Saigon - and even less attention to the communist takeovers of or socialist transformations in smaller and poorer towns and cities.<sup>15</sup> In addition, previous scholarship has established the importance of the interconnectedness between French-controlled cities and the DRV-controlled countryside for the DRV’s war and state-building efforts.<sup>16</sup> Yet besides a few high quality works that focus on the Vietnamese Catholic population and therefore pay more attention to Catholic areas such as Nam Định, Bùi Chu, and Phát Diêm, no research has been done on smaller cities that could have served as important nodes in the wider system of urban-rural interconnection in the North.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> See Note 3 for studies that focus exclusively on the land reform and rural mobilization. See also: Bernard Fall, *Le Viet- Minh 1945-1960* (Librairie Armand Colin, 1960); Georges Boudarel, ‘L’Idéocratie importée au Vietnam avec le maoïsme’, in Daniel Hémerly et al., *La Bureaucratie au Vietnam* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1983) ; Christian Lentz, ‘Making the Northwest Vietnamese’, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2011), 68–105; Christian Lentz, ‘Mobilization and State Formation on a Frontier of Vietnam’, *Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3 (2011), 559–86; Philippe Devillers, *Histoire du Vietnam de 1940 à 1952* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952); Hoàng Văn Chí, *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam* (London: Pall Mall Press, 1964); Jean Chesneaux, *Tradition et Révolution au Vietnam* (Editions anthropos, 1971); Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Tuong Vu, *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology* (New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> Few scholars have studied Vietnamese cities other than Hanoi and Saigon, notable works include: Eric T. Jennings, *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2011); Kirsten W. Endres, *Market Frictions: Trade and Urbanization at the Vietnam-China Border* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2019); and Christina Schwenkel, *Building Socialism: The Afterlife of East German Architecture in Urban Vietnam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre 1945–1954* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2011); Christopher Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at war”; Philippe Papin, *Histoire de Hanoi* (Paris: Fayard, 2001); William S. Turley, “Urbanization at War: Hanoi 1946–1973,” *Pacific Affairs* 48, no. 3 (1975): 370–97.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Claire Tran Thi Lien, “Les Catholiques Vietnamiens pendant la guerre d’indépendance (1945–1954): Entre la reconquête coloniale et la résistance Communiste” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Institut d’études politiques, 1996).



*Figure 1: DRV soldiers marching on Đinh Tiên Hoàng street of Hanoi on 10 October 1954*<sup>18</sup>

Because the revolutionary government maintained close contact with colonial metropolises like Hanoi and Saigon, takeover processes in these cities were well prepared—that is, when the People’s Army of Vietnam (PAVN) troops marched into Hanoi in October 1954, a network of underground communists had already laid out an organized structure for a swift and peaceful takeover.<sup>19</sup> A focus on the takeover of metropolises, which were much more carefully prepared and performative, therefore has resulted in a narrative in which a skewed sense of coherence and orderliness marks the establishment of the DRV administrative apparatus.

---

<sup>18</sup> (Source: Quang Phong, “Hình ảnh đoàn quân chiến thắng trở về tiếp quản thủ đô 65 năm trước,” *Dân Trí*, 10 Oct 2019, <https://dantri.com.vn/xa-hoi/hinh-anh-doan-quan-chien-thang-tro-ve-tiep-quan-thu-do-65-nam-truoc-20191007124823865.htm> )

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*; Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at war”; Philippe Papin, *Histoire de Hanoi* (Paris: Fayard, 2001); For a first-hand account of how underground Viet Minh activities were carried out in Hanoi during the First Indochina War, see: Nguyễn Bắc, *Giữa thành phố bị chiếm* (Hanoi: Ha Noi, 1994), translated into French by Philippe Papin, *Au cœur de la ville captive: souvenirs d’un agent viet-minh infiltré à Hanoi* (Paris: Arléa, 2004).



Figure 2: A reenactment of the takeover of Hanoi (1954) organized by the Management Board of Hanoi Old Quarter in 2019 to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the takeover<sup>20</sup>

In this dissertation, I examine different types of urban areas taken over by communist forces at different moments. More specifically, Chapter 1 focuses on the communist takeover of two provincial towns [*thị xã*], Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn, in 1949 and 1950 respectively. Chapter 2 focuses on Nam Định city which came under DRV control in early July 1954 and examines the particular post-takeover problems of industrial centers. Finally, because state-led transformations in Hanoi and Haiphong became the models for other cities in the DRV from mid-1955 on, the takeovers of Hanoi and Haiphong and post-takeover transformations in these two metropolises are examined more in-depth throughout the rest of the dissertation. This organization serves two purposes related to existing problems in the historiography: first, it allows me to identify the characteristics of each city (duration of French occupation, peripheral or central location, level of industrialization, commercialization, presence of foreigners, presence of Catholic population) and the challenges that Ho Chi Minh's forces met in each type of urban condition; second, it permits me to look at the chronology of takeovers as a process which reflects the maturity of the DRV state.

My approach to studying communist takeovers of North Vietnamese cities in the 1950s is informed by the body of scholarship on communist takeovers in China, which has grown since the early 1950s and been improved by generations of scholars.<sup>21</sup> Of particular importance is a

<sup>20</sup> Source: Đặng Khoa, Vũ Mai, Ngọc Trâm, "Tái hiện hình ảnh lịch sử đoàn quân giải phóng tiếp quản Thủ đô 65 năm trước," *VTC News*, 10 Oct 2019, <https://vtc.vn/tai-hien-hinh-anh-lich-su-doan-quan-giai-phong-tiep-quan-thu-do-65-nam-truoc-ar503490.html>

<sup>21</sup> In chronological order: Ezra F. Vogel, *Canton under Communism: Programs and Politics in a Provincial Capital, 1949–1968* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Dorothy J. Solinger, *Regional Government and Political Integration in Southwest China, 1949–1954: A Case Study* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Kenneth Lieberthal, *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949–1952* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980); James Z. Gao, *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou:*



volume edited by Jeremy Brown and Paul Pickowicz titled *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Harvard University Press, 2010). The editors and authors of the volume review the literature and provide up-to-date research on the communist takeovers of China, focusing on the transition period 1949–1953. The works in the volume provide variations and exceptions to the previously established general outline of the era, highlighting the argument that the transition was experienced differently by people in different places.<sup>22</sup>

Brown and Pickowicz show that an effective way to challenge and complicate the general pattern is to study not only centrally located cities such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Canton but also those in the peripheries of Guizhou, Tibet, and Xinjiang. In addition, diverse experiences could be reconstructed by changing the level of interactions that the scholar studies. The works in *Dilemmas of Victory* focus on the grassroots interactions between communist representatives and the local population, consequently raising questions such as: Who were the “Communists”? And who were the “masses” to be transformed? Brown and Pickowicz suggest that patterns continued or created during the takeover period played a defining role in the transition to socialism and the subsequent turbulent 1960s in China. Such questions and topics are equally relevant to the Vietnamese case.

The final aim of this dissertation is to contribute to the growing literature on state-society relations in the early DRV. Recent studies, using sources unavailable or underused before such as Vietnamese communist party's documents, Vietnamese archival documents, and Hungarian archival documents, have shown how a wide range of social groups in North Vietnam - from peasants to workers, to intellectuals, and entrepreneurs – harbored grievances against the DRV's post-takeover policies.<sup>23</sup> In my dissertation, I examine the state's relation with two other groups of people whose lives totally changed after the communist takeover yet their stories have not been adequately studied. The first group is post-1954 state employees which comprised of both DRV-trained cadres and “retained” ASV state employees. My analysis of this group complicates the simple dichotomy between the communist “liberators” and the population

---

*The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949–1954* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Yomi Braester, “‘A Big Dying Vat’: The Villifying of Shanghai during the Good Eighth Company Campaign,” *Modern China* 31, no. 4 (2005): 411–47; Jeremy Brown, ed. *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jeremy Brown, *City Versus Countryside in Mao's China: Negotiating the Divide*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> The general outline is as follows: “a relatively swift military takeover in 1949, the party's initially inclusive approach to urban social groups, tightening and repression after the outbreak of the Korean war, movements such as land reform and the Three- and Five-Anti campaigns that consolidated party control in villages and cities, and finally the move toward socialist transformation in 1953.” Jeremy Brown and Paul G. Pickowicz, “The Early Years of the People's Republic of China: An Introduction” in *Dilemmas of Victory*, ed. Jeremy Brown, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*; Zinoman, “Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm;” Zinoman, “Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm on trial;” Balazs Szalontai, “Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955–56,” *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 1, 2005): 395–426; Tuong Vu, “Workers and Socialist State: North Vietnam's State-Labor Relation, 1945–1970,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 329–56; Bertrand de Hartingh, *Entre le peuple et la nation: La République démocratique du Viet Nam de 1953 à 1957* (Paris: École française d'Extrême-Orient, 2003).

“liberated” by Ho Chi Minh’s forces. I argue that without the assistance of and cooperation from retained ASV state employees, Ho Chi Minh’s government would not have been able to establish and maintain their administrative control in the first post-takeover years. Second, I examine the DRV’s approach to the group that Marx and Engels defined as urban *lumpenproletariat* or the “dangerous class”: prostitutes, petty criminals, homeless people, invalids, and orphans.<sup>24</sup> In particular, I compare Vietnamese and Chinese programs for the reformation of prostitutes and show that while the Chinese campaign against prostitutes and prostitution has been regarded as a successful demonstration of a “totalistic system of social control,<sup>25</sup>” in the DRV, there existed an unbridgeable gap between the ideal socialist model of “moral reformation through productive labor” and the actual capacity of the state to implement the model on a large scale. The DRV state’s totalistic control over the urban society was built, I argue, on the foundation of an expanded system of policing and surveillance.

The above portrayal of state-society relations in the early DRV should not obscure the fact that society did not always conform to the will and authority of the state. The studies mentioned above also highlight how grievances against state policies triggered popular resistance. Alec Holcombe has argued that the authoritarian DRV state was shaped as the state responded to peasants’ resistance against the state’s call for sacrifice for “freedom and independence.”<sup>26</sup> Tuong Vu has demonstrated that, similar to peasants, workers in the DRV devised different forms of resistance to evade state demands and control.<sup>27</sup> Finally, scholars who have studied the NVGP, though still disagreeing on the political nature of the movement, would all agree that it was an open protest against the party-state’s dogmatic control over the artistic and intellectual sphere.<sup>28</sup> My study shows that other groups in North Vietnamese urban society, from DRV state employees to the population considered “problematic” or “dangerous,” such as prostitutes or former ASV soldiers, also found their “everyday forms of resistance” against unfavorable state policies.<sup>29</sup> The general picture that my dissertation paints is that: Vietnamese communists met various difficulties and forms of resistance after taking over urban areas - it took Ho Chi Minh’s government several years to turn North Vietnamese cities into the socialist symbols that they became by the 1960s - but in the process of attempting to reorganize the cities and its population, communist bureaucrats, cadres, and soldiers were also transformed by urban life and culture.

---

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/>. Written between November 1845 and August 1846. First published in full in 1932 by the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the C.P.S.U; Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, accessed at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> Christian Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’: The Abolition of Prostitution in Shanghai, 1949-58,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 142 (1995): 467-486; Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1997); Qinghua Ruan, “Reexamining the Abolitionist Movement against Prostitution in Shanghai after 1949,” *Frontiers of History in China* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 2010): 471–90.

<sup>26</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist state.”

<sup>28</sup> See Note 3.

<sup>29</sup> James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985); Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist state.”

In pursuing the three aims above, my dissertation makes the following contributions to the literature. First, I argue that the orderly takeovers of Hanoi and Haiphong were outliers among all other communist takeovers in Vietnam. Up until the official ceasefire on 21 July 1954, the “liberation” of towns and cities by DRV forces was most often the result of French-ASV abandonment of these towns and cities to reinforce more strategic positions. Unlike current scholarly and popular depictions of the victorious march of DRV cadres and soldiers into the welcoming arms of local inhabitants, not only did DRV cadres and soldiers encounter doubt, fear, mistrust, and even hostility from the inhabitants whom they had come to “liberate,” they were also met with administrative and logistical difficulties of a kind and magnitude that they had not foreseen, some of which came from their very own comrades.

Second, though I support the argument that DRV administrative and military apparatuses matured through, or according to Christopher Goscha, “born” from, the First Indochina War,<sup>30</sup> my dissertation highlights the central importance of the urban postwar in accelerating the maturing process of the party-state. Firstly, my research shows that during the urban takeovers that took place in July 1954, DRV forces repeated, even aggravated, the mistakes they had committed during earlier takeovers. This, I would suggest, reflects either a weak system of communication, a bureaucracy and army developing beyond its ability to contain and control itself, or a mass population whose complexity was not foreseen by the “liberating” force. Secondly, I argue that through “grafting” on to the pre-existing French-ASV structure after taking over Hanoi, the DRV bureaucracy gained both the time and technology to transform from a guerilla, rural-based government to a centralized, urban-based one. Finally, I argue that resolving problems that arose in urban areas challenged and helped strengthen the organizational capacity of the DRV state - dealing with rampant urban unemployment, reforming prostitutes, registering and classifying urban residents, and policing bourgeois urbanites (which ranged from merchants to engineers and intellectuals) shaped the party-state as much as rural mobilization campaigns.

Besides building upon relevant secondary scholarship, this dissertation introduces a rich collection of Vietnamese-language primary sources so far unused or underused in existing literature. There are two groups of primary sources that I would like to highlight: archival documents and personal accounts. Though the state archives in Vietnam have been opening their doors more widely to researchers (both Vietnamese and foreign), few researchers have been able to make use of the vast resources stored in these archives to write a Vietnam-centric history of Vietnam.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the archival materials presented in this study came from the National Archives no.3 in Hanoi, which holds records of the DRV government from 1945 to the present. However, as valuable as these records are, a historical narrative built entirely from archival documents would be a problematic one as it would be heavily dominated by the state’s prescriptive presentation of the situation. In this study, I attempt to provide a balanced narrative by presenting both the view of the state and the voices of common Vietnamese. These voices came from memoirs, personal diaries, and most significantly, oral histories. Between 2019 and

---

<sup>30</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*.

<sup>31</sup> On the “Vietnam-centric” turn in the field of Vietnamese studies, see: Peter Zinoman, “Vietnam-Centrism, the ‘Orthodox School’ and Mark Bradley’s *Vietnam at War*,” *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* XII, no. 22 (2011); Tuong Vu and Edward Miller, “The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2009).

2020, I conducted oral history interviews with elderly Vietnamese individuals who had first-hand experiences of the communist takeover of Hanoi and Haiphong. These personal accounts are far from a perfect representation of the urban society. It will be remarked that this study lacks the voices of women; when their voices do show up – in Chapter 5, for example – they have already been filtered through many administrative levels. Nonetheless the oral histories utilized in this study allow us, for the first time in the historiography, to perceive not only the diversity within the urban population taken over by communist forces, but also the kinds of internal conflicts and competitions that existed among the communist “liberators” themselves.

A note on the periodization of the narrative must be made before I present the overall structure of my dissertation. My dissertation starts with the communist takeover of the first urban areas in the Sino-Vietnamese frontiers in 1949-1951 and ends in 1958, on the eve of nationalization and agricultural collectivization. The year 1958, with the ascent to power of Lê Duẩn, also marked the decisive turn in the DRV’s official attitude toward the Republic of Vietnam (RVN or South Vietnam).<sup>32</sup> This periodization enables us to examine not only the military and bureaucratic process of taking over previously French-controlled cities, which concluded with the “liberation” of Haiphong in May 1955, but also to understand what happened in the cities during the early years of the DRV when the vision of socialist transformation in the North was prioritized over winning the Resistance War against the Americans to Save the Nation [*Kháng chiến chống Mỹ cứu nước*] in the South.

Those familiar with Vietnamese history would find it intuitive to divide the dissertation’s timeline into pre- and post-1954 periods, broadly put, cities in wartime and peace time. However I want to highlight another date that, I argue, is more consequential to the fate of North Vietnamese urban population during the 1949-1958 period. That date is 18 May 1955 - the last of the 300 days of free movement as provided under the Geneva Accords. I try to emphasize in various points in my dissertation that many policies changed after the closure of the port of Haiphong, as the whole territory north of the seventeenth parallel came under the control of Ho Chi Minh’s government. Balazs Szalontai, studying reports from Hungarian diplomats in 1955 and 1956, has suggested that the “moderate” policies announced in the autumn of 1954 were replaced by “ultra-leftist repressive measures” in 1955-1956 because the DRV’s evaluation of the prospect of national unification changed some time around mid-1955.<sup>33</sup> I would suggest an alternative way to see this total change in state policies: party and state leaders understood that overtly “red” policies during the period of free movement would lead to more departures from the North of the population among people who held technical and capital capacities crucial to postwar reconstruction. Thus the moderate policies of this period was imposed to help limit as much as possible the outflow of human and capital resources from the North. I argue that the “ultra-leftist repressive measures” put into place right after the end of the 300 days of free movement were less meant to mobilize the population for war with the South, instead, they were

---

<sup>32</sup> On Lê Duẩn and his role in advancing North Vietnam’s war against South Vietnam and its American ally, see: Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi’s War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012); Zachary Shore, “Provoking America: Le Duan and the Origins of the Vietnam War” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, no. 4 (October 1, 2015): 86–108.

<sup>33</sup> Szalontai, “Political and Economic Crisis,” 398-400.

meant to build the foundation for the “socialist” stage of revolution according to the Lenin’s two-stage strategy.<sup>34</sup> DRV policies shifted direction again in the latter half of 1956 after Khrushchev delivered his secret speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). But the shift was ephemeral and the DRV party-state soon returned to the previous track of building an authoritarian socialist state and society - a process that Alec Holcombe has aptly termed “re-Stalinization.”<sup>35</sup> The de-Stalinization and re-Stalinization of the DRV and their influences on DRV policies have already been highlighted and analyzed in previous works.<sup>36</sup>

My dissertation is structured both chronologically and thematically. The first half of my dissertation follows a simple chronological structure. Chapter 1 narrates and compares the first urban takeovers by DRV forces: the takeover of Bắc Kạn in August 1949 and that of Lạng Sơn in October 1950. It then highlights how the gap between central and local governments resulted in DRV forces repeating the mistakes committed in 1949–1950 in latter urban takeovers in 1952 and 1954. Chapter 2 analyzes the takeover of Nam Định, an industrial and commercial center in the Red River Delta. The chapter focuses on the crisis of unemployment in Nam Định as it unfolded immediately after the takeover in July 1954 and how it was ameliorated and resolved throughout the three years after. Chapter 3 discusses the takeover of Hanoi in October 1954 and describes how the DRV government established itself in the capital city. This chapter argues that the DRV state, despite its striking transformations throughout the First Indochina War, applied the same method of “grafting” onto the existing colonial apparatus, like every other government that came before it, to build its administration.

As mentioned earlier, starting in early 1955, state-led transformations in Hanoi and Haiphong became the models for other cities in the DRV. The remaining three chapters are drawn from events that took place in these two metropolises and aim to give the reader a sense of the transformations that started first within the closed doors of administrative bureaus before spreading out in the cities, and finally seeping into the private life of individuals. Drawing from archival records, memoirs, and oral histories, chapter 4 tells the story of three DRV functionaries: a Post Office engineer, a doctor, and a music teacher. These three lives exemplify the transformations of the DRV urban-based administration: from grafting onto the colonial system in the early years as described in Chapter 3, to purging reemployed functionaries from the system after the birth of a new generation of “red experts” in the latter half of the 1950s. Chapter 5 discusses the DRV’s approach to re-educate and reform prostitutes and how the targeted population reacted to the state’s efforts. The chapter situates the state’s dealing with prostitutes and prostitution within the wider framework of its dealing with the urban *lumpenproletariat* which included prostitutes, petty criminals, homeless people, invalids, and orphans. Colonial-era institutions related to social relief collapsed with the departure of private and religious funders and were replaced by the socialist model of “reeducation camps.” The final chapter, chapter 6, adopts Cristina Vatulescu’s analysis of “police aesthetics” in the Soviet Union and uses Trần Dần’s novel *Crossroads and Lampposts* as a framework to analyze the expansion of the police, the rise of auto-censorship, and the emergence of a society of surveillance de près in North Vietnamese cities.

---

<sup>34</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 11; William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life* (New York: Hyperion, 2000), 344.

<sup>35</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, ch. 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, ch. 12-13; Zinoman, “Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm;” Zinoman, “Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm on trial.”

## Chapter 1: Unplanned takeovers

A consensus in the literature on the Indochina Wars is that the year 1949 marked the point where the tide turned in favor of Ho Chi Minh's government. The Communist victory in China in late 1949 led to not only the first international recognitions of the DRV - first by the People's Republic of China (PRC) and soon after, by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and other East European countries - but also to the flow of crucial technical and military assistance and aid to the Vietnamese Communist state. As Ho Chi Minh's government moved sharply into the socialist camp, its anticolonial war turned to a bigger, goal of political-military revolution; and on the State of Vietnam's side, following its recognition by the United States, Britain, and Thailand and depending more and more American support, the anticommunist mission of its patriotic war intensified and become the primary goal. English- and French-language scholarship has marked the year 1950 as a turning point of heightened "internationalization" of the conflict in Indochina, when Vietnam rapidly became a "hot front in the cold war."<sup>37</sup>

While the "liberation" of Bắc Kạn in September 1949 was a surprise to the still-struggling DRV forces, the success of the Border Campaign of Fall - Winter 1950 [*Chiến dịch biên giới thu-đông 1950*], code name the Lê Hồng Phong II Campaign [*Chiến dịch Lê Hồng Phong II*], which took place from September to October 1950, marked the ascent in military power of the Ho Chi Minh-led DRV. Together with the assistance of Chinese forces and aid from China and the USSR, a series of victorious "liberations" of military posts and urban areas in Cao Bằng, Lào Cai, and Lạng Sơn following the Border Campaign gave the DRV full control of the Sino-Vietnamese frontier and greatly encouraged the People's Army. In late 1950 and early 1951, in the Việt Bắc liberated zone, Ho Chi Minh's government discussed the possibility of retaking Hanoi by force, envisioned different takeover scenarios, and proposed detailed plans for the three-phase takeover: before the takeover battle [*trước khi đánh chiếm*], the takeover battle [*đánh chiếm*], and the seizure [*thu hồi*] of Hanoi.<sup>38</sup> In Hanoi, the Administrative Committee of the Resistance of Hanoi [*Ủy ban Kháng chiến Hành chính Hà Nội*; UBKCHCHN] set the guiding slogan: "Rapidly prepare the battleground, moving forward to liberate the Capital" [*Gấp rút chuẩn bị chiến trường, tiến lên giải phóng Thủ đô*].<sup>39</sup>

Of course, plans to takeover Hanoi did not arise merely from the imagination of the DRV leadership. Five years earlier, in August 1945, in a rather peaceful but euphoric general uprising, the Viet Minh had seized power in Hanoi.<sup>40</sup> But five years later, in 1950, the times had changed and the military-political situation was radically different from 1945; furthermore, the events of 19 August 1945 were planned hastily - just two days before - in order to profit from the momentum of support from the masses.<sup>41</sup> A more immediate source of reference for the DRV

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, 34-42. For a detailed bibliography see *Ibid.*, n.32-33, 497; François Guillemot, *Viet-Nam, fractures d'une nation: Une histoire contemporaine de 1858 à nos jours* (Paris : La Découverte, 2018), 139.

<sup>38</sup> "Địa vị và nhiệm vụ của chiến trường Hà Nội trong cuộc tổng phản công (1950)", PTT 355, TTTLQG-III; "Hồ sơ về công tác tiếp quản TP Hà Nội và chủ trương chính sách của Đảng đối với nhân dân Hà Nội trong và sau tiếp quản năm 1954," BNV 3627, TTTLQG-III.

<sup>39</sup> "Chương trình công tác 6 tháng (10-11-12/50 và 1-2-3/51) - UBKCHC HN," PTT 374, TTTLQG-III.

<sup>40</sup> David G. Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 382.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, "Takeover in Hanoi," 382-401.

government were the takeovers in 1949 of Bắc Kạn and in 1950 of the urban centers of Cao Bằng, Lào Cai, and Lạng Sơn. During the period covered in this chapter (August 1949 - July 1951), the DRV forces took over five provincial capitals (Bắc Kạn, Cao Bằng, Lạng Sơn, Lào Cai, Hòa Bình) and various smaller towns in these provinces. This chapter focuses on two takeovers: the very first takeover of a provincial capital in the First Indochina War - the town of Bắc Kạn in August 1949, and the takeover of the capital of the *Zône Frontière* - the town of Lạng Sơn in October 1950.

DRV official documents concerning takeovers of urban spaces may be categorized into three groups: planning, post-operation reviews, propaganda reviews. The narrative and analysis in this chapter are based on the second group of documents since they were the least edited – they include hand-written reports – and since the purpose of these reports was to extract “experience” (*kinh nghiệm*) for later campaigns. Their presentations are less glossed over and more direct. The picture that emerges at the end of this chapter is the reverse of current scholarly and popular depictions of the victorious march of DRV cadres and soldiers into urban spaces, into the welcoming arms of the inhabitants of these towns and cities: not only did these cadres and soldiers encounter doubt, fear, mistrust, and even hostility from the inhabitants whom they had come to “liberate,” they were also met with administrative and logistic difficulties – of a kind and magnitude that they had not foreseen, some of which came from their very own comrades.

#### *A Surprise Withdrawal: Bắc Kạn, August 1949*

Bắc Kạn, a mountainous province 180km north of Hanoi, was the “Safe Zone” [*An toàn Khu*] for the DRV leaders between their withdrawal from Hanoi in December 1946 and the French raid in November 1947 that forced the DRV central government to abandon Bắc Kạn and move to Thái Nguyên province. The French then took control of important areas in Bắc Kạn province: the towns of Bắc Kạn, Phủ Thông, and Nà Phặc. The town of Bắc Kạn [*thị xã Bắc Kạn*] was the provincial capital and the administrative-economic-military center of the province. A small town with under one thousand habitants, Bắc Kạn was a town of merchants with a significant number of overseas Chinese [*Hoa kiều*]; among the population were also Man and Thổ minorities, and Catholics; and a high presence of French troops in and around town.

On 9 August 1949, without prior notice and carefully camouflaged, French forces abandoned Bắc Kạn and moved to reinforce Cao Bằng. Taken over by DRV forces on the same day, the town of Bắc Kạn was the first urban area to be “liberated” by the DRV forces since the breakout of the First Indochina War. Two weeks later, in late August 1949, the Public Security Department of Interzone I [*Sở Công An Liên khu I*] sent to the Central Public Security Department a report on the takeover of the town of Bắc Kạn. Forwarding this report to the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Prime Minister’s Office, the Head of Political Affairs of the Public Security Services Nguyễn Văn Ngọc attached a note:

In order for your Ministry to have immediately documents about BAC-KAN, we are forwarding the original report from the PUBLIC SECURITY DEPARTMENT OF INTERZONE I, even though there are many professional mistakes in this report, and, there are many ridiculous points [*nhiều điều ngớ ngẩn*] in their commentary. We are inquiring after our agents who participated in the work at Bac-Kan together with the

PUBLIC SECURITY DEPARTMENT OF INTERZONE I about what happened. We will send your Ministry the results later.

After summarizing important points from the report, Ngọc ended his brief note exclaiming: “Fortunately there are only a few hundred people in Bac-Kan; if Bac-Kan were as big as HANOI or HAI-PHONG, the situation would have been extremely chaotic.”<sup>42</sup>

Contrary to Ngọc, the Public Security Department of Interzone 1 was rather satisfied with the achievements of subordinates in Bắc Kạn: “On the Public Security Services, in general, [they] arrived promptly [*kịp thời*] for necessary tasks in town. Even though [they] still lack professional competence, their positive spirit were clearly shown.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, stated the Interzone 1 chef in the final line of the report, the agents of the Public Security of Bắc Kạn were keen on improving themselves: “In front of representatives from the Central and Interzone 1’s Public Security Departments, the agents showed their determination to fulfill their responsibilities through emulation campaigns [*thi đua*] in political as well as professional studies.” For the Interzone 1 chef, competence could be improved and mistakes serve as lessons for the future, the most important indication of success was demonstration of “positive spirit” among those in charge of the mission. But for Nguyễn Văn Ngọc, a seasoned communist, soldier, and scouting intelligence [*trình sát*] agent, it was no occasion for praise. He criticized the incompetence of the local intelligence services, the lack of coordination between the military and the public security services, the armed forces’ lack of respect for local administration, the general inattention to the feelings of the local population but over-attention to “purging traitors” [*trừ gian*] and collecting Indochinese *piastres* and imported goods.<sup>44</sup> Ngọc’s attitude indicates a gap between the central and local leaderships. What really happened in Bắc Kạn in the last three weeks of August 1949?

On 8 August 1949, the military intelligence services [*quân báo*] of Bắc Kạn reported to the Commanding Committee of the Fatherland Front [*Ban chỉ huy Mặt trận*] in Bắc Kạn that they had collected highly reliable information suggesting that French forces were to withdraw from the town of Bắc Kạn around mid-August.<sup>45</sup> It was suggested that forces be organized for ambushing withdrawing French forces along Route no.5 [*Đường 5*]. Just a day earlier, 500 Moroccan soldiers were deployed in town. A rumor was spread that the stationing 300 French soldiers would go to another post, while the Moroccans would stay to guard the province of Bắc Kạn. Yet at 5am of the 9th, both French and the Moroccans started leaving town, and all forces were gone by 3pm. Later, in reviewing the French withdrawal, DRV intelligence agents concluded that the French had tricked Vietnamese observers into believing that the town of Bắc Kạn was being reinforced and things would continue as normal: besides deploying 500 Moroccan soldiers just a day before, on 9 August during the ten hours during which they were withdrawing group by group, French soldiers drove their vehicles back and forth in town and “performed their daily tasks.”<sup>46</sup> The vice-head of the Public Security Department of Interzone 1 lamented: “The enemy withdrew almost intact. They diverted our attention and very skillfully

---

<sup>42</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình Bắc Kạn sau khi quân Pháp rút lui,” BNV 706, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>43</sup> “Báo cáo về việc giải phóng Bắc Kạn (Công An),” BNV 706, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>44</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình Bắc Kạn sau khi quân Pháp rút lui,” BNV 706, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>45</sup> “Báo cáo Quân báo 8/8/49,” BNV 706, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>46</sup> “Báo cáo về việc giải phóng Bắc Kạn (Công An),” BNV 706, TTLTQG-III.



kept their secrets so that our intelligence services could not comprehend their strategy,” “our intelligence services were really incompetent, the enemy had prepared to withdraw since the beginning of August, there were reliable Public Security secret agents in town, yet only on 8 August 1949 did we have confirmed news, by then it was already too late,” “the lack of military preparation [for ambushing withdrawing French forces] on the Cao Bằng-Bắc Kạn route resulted in the successful withdrawal of the enemy, we could call this a failure on our side.”<sup>47</sup>

Having missed the chance for a military victory or at least to inflict some casualties on the French forces, the nearest DRV forces tried to enter the town as early as possible. Battalion no.81 headed into town at 4pm - an hour after the last French troops had left, the guerrilla unit of Ba Bể and Public Security intelligence agents arrived at 5pm, Company no.100 at 6pm; at 1am the day after, the Commanding Committee of the Front of Bắc Kạn arrived, and finally, Public Security pioneers [*Công an xung phong*] arrived at 6am.

Upon entering the town, soldiers spread around to search for mines and traps that the French could have left behind. After detecting no danger, they organized guard positions and assignments. That evening, representatives of the 508 local habitants (around 300 of which were Vietnamese and around 200 of overseas Chinese [*Hoa kiều*]) offered the *bộ đội* and the *công an* a welcoming dinner, during which Public Security agents told locals about the dangers of future air attacks from the French. At 1am of 10 August, ten hours after the French withdrawal, staffs from the Bắc Kạn chapter of the Commanding Committee of the Front of Interzone I - the highest authority in the province - arrived. A provisional Administrative Committee of the Bắc Kạn town [*Ủy ban thị xã lâm thời*] was established in the afternoon of the 10th, comprising four members: Tông, Tư, Trọng from the DRV-controlled zone, and Biền, a local. Despite the arrival of DRV authority, the town was in disorder for the following 24 hours, until the Administrative Committee’s curfew orders.

The morning of 10 August 1949, order was not yet established: Locals ran back and forth, moving their possessions. People living around town, such as from Huyen Tung, sneaked in to collect stuffs especially tin cans [*ống bơ*]. Guerillas, soldiers walked around flinging their rifles, military inspectors bustled around in the streets. It was impossible to distinguish, to recognize who had the authority to control and who did not.<sup>48</sup>

The Administrative Committee’s curfew order was announced through loudspeakers and was to be effective from 5pm 10 August until 13 August, but only locals followed the orders, whereas soldiers and staffs from different governmental departments continued to move about as they wanted. The situation became more chaotic when representatives from the Administrative Committee of the Resistance in Bạch Thông - the neighboring district [*huyện*] - and staffs of the Communication Services [*Thông tin*] arrived without prior notice. The *công an* and *bộ đội* previously charged with guarding and maintaining the security of the town “being not yet familiar with their assignments and eager to ask for news of their families,” “failed to perform their duty to control entrance to and exit from town.” Disorder and disregard of local authority’s orders continued until noon the 14th when the Commanding Committee of the Front imposed martial law [*thiết quân luật*]. Only then did unauthorized staffs, guerrillas, and soldiers

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

stop moving around, and strictly those authorized - the *công an* and *bộ đội* with a band around their arm - could be out on the streets. As more *công an* were sent to Bắc Kạn to take over the duty of the *bộ đội* and a Committee of Order [*Ban Trật tự*] was well established, martial law was lifted on 19 August.<sup>49</sup>

During the three days under curfew orders and especially the five days under martial law, authorized *công an* and *bộ đội* carried out a population survey with the aims of “purging traitors,” collecting imported goods and Indochinese *piastres* for a currency change in town. Their first impressions of the physical town were not positive:

With their withdrawal, the French left behind a horribly filthy, disgusting town. The ruthless nature of despicable colonizers is shown more clearly through [the images of] sewage channels along the main road filled with mortal pieces of broken glass and worn out clothes and gunny sacks, flies and insects gathered into black heaps, on the banks of local streams were intestines of pigs and chicken, on the front porch of their lodgings or of locals’ homes, they had thrown broken furniture, torn clothes, on their working desks, in their closets were feces. These bastards even used the people’s kitchen. Their fortress also became a toilet.

They broke the arms and legs of [statues of] saints in the church, smashed worshipping objects to pieces, no one is more cruel than the French enemy, nothing is more disgusting than French soldiers.

[..] After almost two years of occupation, they turned the town of Bac Kan into a prison (see map) where they locked up vicious beasts.<sup>50</sup>

The Administrative Committee and the *công an*, together with local people mobilized by this new authority, spent two days cleaning the town, “but there remained dirty spots that could not yet be erased.” But if physical filth could be cleaned, the stains on the local population were more difficult to deal with. The DRV authority believed that the people in Bắc Kạn “did not know anything about what was happening outside [of their town].” This was because there were only two schools in town: one opened and managed by overseas Chinese for Chinese children, the other opened by the French and managed by the son-in-law of Nhất Thơ, who, according to DRV sources, was “the most counter-revolutionary Catholic.” Locals’ ignorance was also the result of lack of information: “The enemy opened an information center with some counter-revolutionary books and newspapers such as: *Dân Mới*, *Thời sự*, but very few people read.” Misinformed and oppressed under the French and ASV, the people of Bắc Kạn town were not an ideal population to takeover. Indeed, under the eyes of at least the *công an*, all locals were “stained” to different degrees. Local population was profiled and put into three categories, according to the report from the Public Security Services of Interzone I:

Type I are those on whom we have gathered enough evidences to put to trial. Type II are either suspicious, or evidences are still few, not enough to put to trial and more data are

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

needed. Type III are people from which we need to acquire data or to inquire about suspects.<sup>51</sup>

Among the 311 Vietnamese (from 114 families) present in town after the takeover, 4 were categorized as Type I, 59 Type II, and 248 Type III. Among the 197 overseas Chinese (from 48 families), 12 were categorized as Type I, 33 Type II, and 152 Type III. No one was innocent, everyone was implicated in the “traitors purge” operation. During the first search for “traitors” and “counterrevolutionaries” that started on 13 August, 17 locals were arrested, 5 were tried by the Military Court [*Tòa án binh*]; 3 were executed. A second search was initiated on 25 August with the goal of creating “an extensive campaign of persecution of the *Việt gian*” [*một cuộc trừng trị VG rộng rãi*]. The Public Security Services of Interzone I found the period of “purging traitors” also a good occasion to solve the “overseas Chinese problem”: “In Bac-Kan the overseas Chinese problem is relatively more serious than other problems so [we] need to take advantage of this occasion to disperse and send them away so [the town] is easier to control.”<sup>52</sup>

The new authority noticed a marked change in the attitude of the local masses after the start of the “traitors search”:

The total number of locals staying behind is 508 including both overseas Chinese and Vietnamese. When the *bộ đội* entered the town, the majority of the population seemed happy. But when the search for *Việt gian* started and there was news that they might have to move from town, they seemed worried and scared. Their spirit turned so feeble that even [getting them to] welcome newly arrival *bộ đội*, the Communication services had to push them, and they went reluctantly.<sup>53</sup>

But instead of calming local anxiety, the DRV authority added oil to the fire by announcing the plan - devised to avoid air raids - to force local inhabitants to abandon the old town and go live in three separate militarized zones. Already, a day after the arrival of the first DRV troops, the Commanding Committee of the Front ordered the troops to destroy houses on the hill previously belonging to the French. Locals witnessed the rapid destruction of the most solid structures in town - “our troops worked with zeal, the destruction was fast,” described the Public Security Services of Interzone I. Soon local inhabitants received news that their houses in town were to be destroyed as well.

Locals’ confidence in the new authority was further weakened by ambiguous handling of French and Indochinese *piastres*. Locals had about a week - until 16 August - to report and submit all their *piastres* and “luxury goods” [*xa xỉ phẩm*] that they had bought from the French. By 29 August, the authority had collected 380,000 *piastres*, mostly from the overseas Chinese population whom was considered much wealthier than their Vietnamese neighbors, but exchange into DRV *đồng* (commonly called “uncle Hồ money” [*tiền cụ Hồ*]) was delayed because the Administrative Committee of the Resistance was still “waiting for orders from higher authority.”

Toward the end of August, more troops and military musical bands arrived in Bắc Kạn to celebrate the “victory,” their number “two, three times more than local population.” Under the

---

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

eyes of the new authority, the success of the “traitors purges,” their newly acquired understanding of local population through profiling and categorizing, and the arrival *en masse* of their comrades seemed encouraging: “The city has turned into a military town. Bắc Kạn is joyful, the joy of victory, the joy of the army.” But the locals became more and more reluctant, they were “concerned” [*băn khoăn*] and “worried for their houses soon to be destroyed, uncertain what they would do to earn a living;” they had submitted all their money and did not know how, when, and whether they would get their money back. Little did they know, some of them might not be able to even stay around, the new authority had a plan proposed: “We must select and filter local inhabitants, letting only good people stay, suspicious ones should be sent to places with strong [patriotic] movements so they would be better controlled.”<sup>54</sup>

The central leadership was persuaded that the mistakes and errors in Bắc Kạn were “mainly because [they] lacked experience”: “the takeover was so sudden, so the *bộ đội* and *công an* had no preparation,” “taking over a whole town previously occupied by the enemy was such a novel work, that the cadres still lacked necessary experiences.”<sup>55</sup> The DRV leadership seemed keen on establishing clear guidelines and preparing seriously for a series of liberations as the result of the upcoming *general strike* [*tổng phản công*]. In mid-September, the Supreme Council for National Defense [*Hội đồng Quốc phòng tối cao*] sent the report written by the Public Security Department of Interzone I to the leadership of Interzones 1, 3, 4, 10, of Southern Central Vietnam [*Nam Trung bộ*], Southern Vietnam [*Nam bộ*], and Hanoi, and asked the responsible organs and personnel to study the experiences noted in the report in order to start preparing for future takeovers of urban areas still under French and ASV occupation.<sup>56</sup> One week later, on 21 September, a conference focusing on “learning from the experiences of Bắc Kạn” was convened.

The “learning from the experiences of Bắc Kạn” conference issued a five-part resolution [*ng nghị quyết*] on how the next takeovers were to be organized. Part one focused on how to deal with a withdrawing enemy so that military forces could inflict the most casualties on the enemy troops. Part two explained how to prepare and manage a takeover apparatus. Each city was to establish a “Commanding Committee of the front” [*Ủy ban Chỉ huy mặt trận*] comprising representatives from the military, the Administrative Committee of the Resistance [*Ủy ban Kháng chiến Hành chính*; UBKCHC], local military, administrative and civil groups, public security services, and communication services. The Commanding Committee of the front was to be in charge of the first stage of the takeover, later on - it is not clear how long - the UBKCHC was to take over the responsibilities of the Commanding Committee. If a takeover took place where there was no Commanding Committee of the Front, the UBKCHC was to take over directly. There were five aspects of a takeover that the authority (the Commanding committee or the UBKCHC) must prepare for: (1) military: the *bộ đội* should behave correctly and perform their military duties; (2) establishing order [*trị an*]: curfew or martial law orders must be clear, population control must be considerate, and categorization and persecution of counter-revolutionaries, collaborators, and suspects must be done systematically and carefully not to create a “terrorizing atmosphere” [*không khí khủng bố*]; (3) politics: the goal was to “change the atmosphere” from colonial repression to liberation - incoming *bộ đội* and cadres must retain their discipline, communication services were to propagate positive news and correct discourses, local

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> “Kinh nghiệm về việc giải phóng Bắc Kạn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.; “Nghị quyết của Hội nghị “Rút kinh nghiệm Bắc Kạn” (21-23/9/49), BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III

partisan activities must be closely watched, and normal administrative functions must be continued; (4) economy-finance: food supply for DRV forces and locals should be secured, collection and exchange of the *piastres* and luxury goods must be clearly and strictly processed, and local properties must be protected, categorized, and processed according to their category (national-historical property, foreigners' property, enemy's property); (5) society (sanitary, health, social relief): the city must be cleansed immediately after the takeover, diseased population, prostitutes, and orphans should be identified and taken care of, and finally, enemy property could be used for social relief which should focus on aiding those who had been supportive of the resistance and were in a difficult financial situation. The last part of the resolution was a document titled "Chinese experiences in liberating cities in China" which listed seven chronological steps in a takeover.<sup>57</sup>

In late 1950, less than a year after the takeover of Bắc Kạn, the liberations of the towns of Cao Bằng, Lào Cai, and Lạng Sơn (after the successful Border Campaign) tested the military-public security-civil leadership of Interzone 1 on how well they had learned their lessons.

#### *Lạng Sơn after Border Campaign of 1950*

After the Vietnamese victory at Đông Khê, French forces withdrew from Cao Bằng (3 October), Lạng Sơn (18 October), and Lào Cai (1 November), leaving a large swathe of Sino-Vietnamese frontier to DRV control. Among the towns taken over by the DRV in late 1950, the biggest was the town of Lạng Sơn [*thị xã Lạng Sơn*], an important point in the railway that connected South China to Hanoi since 1902. The DRV considered it the "capital of the Northeastern frontier zone (*Zône Frontière*)."<sup>58</sup> Similar to what happened in Bắc Kạn, French withdrawal from the town of Lạng Sơn was a surprise. But Lạng Sơn was a much more complex place: "Lạng Sơn is a capital of the Northeastern frontier zone (*Zône Frontière*) therefore militarily, politically, economically, socially, it has a special status in the North. The seizure of the town of Lạng Sơn was thus very complicated and difficult. Working experiences are therefore very diverse."<sup>59</sup> For effective comparison between the two takeovers, this chapter narrates the takeover of Lạng Sơn in relation to the six points listed in the resolution of the conference "Learning from the experiences of Bắc Kạn" summarized in the last section: (1) establishment of local authority, (2) military, (3) establishing order, (4) politics, (5) economy-finance, and (6) society.

The resolution in September 1949 suggested a Commanding Committee of the Front to be established prior to the takeover or if it was not possible, the UBKCHC of the town should be in charge of takeover. On 14 October 1950, the public security department of Lạng Sơn province assessed the military situation and suggested to the UBKCHC of Lạng Sơn province that French forces could withdraw from town.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, French troops left at 2 in the morning of the 18th. But the provincial UBKCHC, whose main staff members were still engaged in the takeover of Thất Khê, a small town about 60km north of Lạng Sơn, only established a "Takeover

---

<sup>57</sup> "Nghị quyết của Hội nghị "Rút kinh nghiệm Bắc Kạn" (21-23/9/49)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>58</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

Committee” [*Ban chiếm lĩnh*] almost a day later, on the 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>61</sup> Later on, the secretary-general of the provincial UBKCHC explained why the UBKCHC did not take charge of the takeover immediately: “when the French withdrew from town, the provincial Commanding Committee of the Front was far away, the provincial authority had not prepared for the takeover of the town, the town’s Committee of Junior staff-member [*Ban cán sự*] and UBKCHC were incompetent and did not have enough authority to decide on takeover affairs. Therefore the provincial UBKCHC decided to establish a Takeover Committee who would coordinate the activities of entering military, civil, and administrative organs.”<sup>62</sup>

This Takeover Committee arrived in the town of Lạng Sơn three days after the French withdrawal, on 21 October. This belated arrival engendered a chaotic situation. First, locals who previously had some links to the Việt Minh assumed authority and created “neighborhood militia” [*dân khu phố*] who guarded and maintained order in the neighborhood, confiscated arms and arrested those they considered *Việt gian*. Soon after, some military staff and *công an* from the neighboring district [*huyện*] of Cao Lộc arrived and assumed control, however, “because they were few and had not received orders on how to takeover,” these *cán bộ* took control only of the town’s center, the neighborhood Kỳ Lừa, where these DRV staffs assigned their accompanying *bộ đội* to “maintain order, control movements, guard depots and residences of the *Việt gian*, and sealed vacant residences.”<sup>63</sup> When more *bộ đội* arrived from Cao Lộc, they went directly to depots being guarded by neighborhood militia, discharged these militia and “rummaged about to acquire military supplies for themselves.” Not only military supplies, these *bộ đội* also appropriated other tools and goods that they found, “drank alcohol till they were badly drunken,” “went out on the streets and shot randomly with their rifles,” “there were even some who made a pass at local women.”<sup>64</sup> Worse, the *bộ đội* publicly tied up and beat up a local cadre, who was leading local inhabitants away to shelter from air attacks, because the cadre mistook them for *ngụy binh* (soldiers of the ASV’s army) (“because [the *bộ đội*] used the military uniforms they just took from depots.”) In their report, the Public Security Department of Lạng Sơn claimed that their secret agents [*điệp báo*] had entered the town at 8:30 the morning of the 18th - only a couple of hours after the French withdrawal - and “were in charge of general maintenance of order until 21 October.”<sup>65</sup> This claim however was not supported in reports from other departments (Department of Finance, UBKCHC Lạng Sơn, Ministry of Home Affairs, Special envoys to Route no.4).

After hearing news that the provincial UBKCHC had established a Takeover Committee, the Committee of Junior staff-member of the town of Lạng Sơn decided to create a provisional Takeover Committee comprising three junior staff-members [*cán sự*] who would “manage all affairs while waiting for the arrival of the official Takeover Committee.”<sup>66</sup> By the time that the official Takeover Committee arrived, the provisional committee had established a Neighborhood Committee [*Ủy ban Khu phố*] in each of the eight neighborhoods in town and sent cadres to

---

<sup>61</sup> “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” “Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW),” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III; “Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn,” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>62</sup> “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> “Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW),” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>66</sup> “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

announce takeover policies to the local population. Arriving with the official Takeover Committee (four members) were two battalions (no.426 and no.428) and cadres from different departments who were supposed to assist the Committee in political affairs, military affairs, and booty management. However, because the provincial UBKCHC considered that the principal responsibility of the Takeover Committee was as a coordinator of military, civil, and administrative activities, the Takeover Committee lacked the authority to command soldiers, furthermore there existed already a UBKCHC of the town who according to the resolution from the “Learning from Bắc Kạn” conference a year earlier, should be the one in total charge of the takeover. The creation of a Takeover Committee therefore was an unnecessary step that brought about more confusion and incoherence to the takeover apparatus. Special envoys to Route no.4 commented: “Besides the UBKCHC of the town, there were the takeover committee and the UBKCHC of the province, all were watching and managing affairs in the town, so there were laughable [*buồn cười*] situations where [these committees] stepped on each other’s foot. Also because of this incoherent leadership, there were incidents of breach of order by the *bộ đội*, *cán bộ*, and the people.”<sup>67</sup>

One of the biggest lessons from Bắc Kạn was in “ideological preparation” [*chuẩn bị tư tưởng*] for the *bộ đội* and *cán bộ* before and during the takeover. In Bắc Kạn, DRV cadres “did not follow the Government’s regulations, did not pay attention to ensuring the people’s rights and interests nor to mobilizing the mass, the result was that the people had bad impressions of our liberation.”<sup>68</sup> Besides the *cán bộ*, the conducts and attitude of the *bộ đội* were also essential to creating a good impression of the DRV government, thus stressed the September 1949 resolution: “We should pay attention to the conduct and attitude of the *bộ đội*,” “the *bộ đội* entering to takeover must keep a dignified attitude, gentle but not overfamiliar [*suông sã*],” they “must not violate the people’s properties, not accept personal material gifts from the people.”<sup>69</sup> The impulsive and indisciplined conduct of the *bộ đội* from Cao Lộc had already created a bad impression, yet the situation was not ameliorated after the arrival of the official Takeover Committee. Upon entering a town where equipment and goods, rare and expensive in the free zone, were readily available - DRV forces found 37 depots filled with “military goods and equipment, arms, rice, canned foods” (an estimate of 5,000 tons of goods), vacant residences where “furniture remained intact,” big stores where “goods were in full stock,” an airport where “many bicycles, properties were left behind because their owners, who left with the French, could not carry them onto the airplane” - and in front of a population fearing for their lives and businesses, many *cán bộ* and *bộ đội* entering Lạng Sơn after 21 October - those who were supposed to be more competent in takeover affairs - violated all the standards highlighted in the 1949 resolution.<sup>70</sup> In their own words, a report commented: “facing the luxurious life in town, cheap prices in a newly liberated area, our cadres and civil servants all became corrupted.”<sup>71</sup> Looting, illegal appropriation of public and private goods, illegal trade, repressive attitudes, breaches of discipline by *cán bộ* and *bộ đội* were rampant.

---

<sup>67</sup> “Báo cáo công tác thị xã Lạng Sơn,” PTT 1093, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>68</sup> “Nghị quyết của Hội nghị “Rút kinh nghiệm Bắc Kạn” (21-23/9/49),” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> “Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW),” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>71</sup> “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

In Lạng Sơn after the French withdrawal, takeover cadres from different administrative departments all went around to collect booty [*chiến lợi phẩm*]. Even though it was clearly divided that things left behind by the French army would be collected by the Committee of Provision [*Ban cung cấp*], and properties, possessions of *Việt gian*, public properties, vacant residences would be inspected, sealed, and guarded by the Committee of Attachment [*Ban tịch biên*] but there was rampant looting. Local soldiers entered depots and took military equipment without permission, Communication cadres searched around for printers and printing papers, *công an* entered *maison d'habillement* [military clothing depot] to collect clothing for their own depot. This situation created dispersion of booties, each department built their own depot, it was impossible to control the use of booties and many cases of embezzlement happened.<sup>72</sup>

As more time passed, it seemed that even the lifestyle and working style of the *cán bộ* changed: “Booty has motivated the *cán bộ*’s sense of self-interest, indulgence, and distracted them from their assignments. With the booty ready, they started feasting. A small official meeting needed an aperitif, fragrant cigarettes. Once the supply of these goods decreased, they must search, rummaging about to have more to use.”<sup>73</sup> All that was in the minds of these “liberators” seemed to have been “self-equipping” and gaining extras, a Communication cadre recounted: “At those moments, even comrade Head of the Communication Department concentrated only on buying and selling goods and appropriating booty.” When orders became stricter and punishments were put in place for these behaviors, carrying out punishments was met with difficulties because “on the problem of booty, almost all departments and staff of all levels were implicated,” and higher-level staffs were not punished: “In small cases, lower-level staffs caught embezzling were punished (for example: one caught stealing a pair of bicycle tires was sentenced to 1 year in prison). Now there are still many cases where higher-level staffs (Head of department, etc.) clearly embezzled national properties but received no punishment.”<sup>74</sup> This situation created not only tensions between lower- and higher-level cadres but also further eroded locals’ confidence.

Not under the direct authority of the local UBKCHC, the *bộ đội* from Battalions 426 and 428 seemed even more “corrupted.” Both the *cán bộ* and local inhabitants found “entering-town discipline [*kỷ luật nhập thị*] of these *bộ đội* very loose.”

Upon entering town, except a small group of air defenders who went up the mountain to shoot enemy airplanes, all the *bộ đội* stayed in town, indulged themselves days and nights, wandered into depots to search for goods, entered local homes to feast all day. They did not have a station, neither organized themselves into camps.

A lot of incidents affected the prestige of the *bộ đội*. There were those who entered local homes and seeing some alcohol, not waiting for the host’s invitation, drank from the bottle. At local homes and stores, they bought goods in a coercive manner [*lôi cuỡng bức*], when locals disagreed, [the *bộ đội*] threatened them. The *bộ đội* searched most intensely to buy gold, fountain pens, watches. Taking advantage of their status, the

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.



*bộ đội* randomly expropriated locals' bicycles. Seeing someone with a good bicycle, they would ask the person to stop, then take the bicycle and give [the owner] a valueless receipt. They even entered people's homes, bicycle stores, and took away new and good bicycles. Local inhabitants were still worried and scared then, when the *bộ đội* demanded something, they complied and did not dare ask anything. On the day of general inspection [*tổng kiểm soát*] in the neighborhoods to collect radio emitters (émetteur), the *bộ đội* took advantage of the occasion to take away portable radios (porte récepteur), bicycles, watches. According to a member of the Committee of Junior staff-member, a soldier, after taking a watch from an overseas Chinese man, threatened him: "Do you want to take some money or do you want to die?"

In more than 10 days when the *bộ đội* were in town, the town's UBKCHC received more than 70 letters of complaint from locals recounting bad deeds [*làm bậy*] done by the *bộ đội*. When they withdrew from town, it was estimated that the *bộ đội* took away about 400 bicycles.<sup>75</sup>

The *công an* in particular had many reasons to complain about the *bộ đội*. They complained that they could not maintain security in town even with curfew orders because: "there were many *bộ đội*, while there were very few *công an*" and "*bộ đội* often violated order, from expropriating bicycles, breaking into sealed residences, to buy-robbing [*mua cướp*] locals' possessions."<sup>76</sup> Some *bộ đội* even sought out "reformed" prostitutes and "encouraged them to secretly take up their old profession." This countered the efforts by the *công an* who had sought out prostitutes who stayed behind after the French withdrawal (about 10 women) and had persuaded them to abandon their way and take up new professions to earn a living.<sup>77</sup>

At the same time, the *công an* was not performing as suggested in the 1949 resolution which called for moderation in dealing with the local population and not creating a "terrorizing atmosphere."<sup>78</sup> In fact, it was a dark, terrorizing atmosphere that the *công an* created in pursuing their "General inspection" [*Tổng kiểm soát*], which was "essentially an organized search and arrest [*cuộc lùng bắt*] of *Việt gian*."<sup>79</sup> The first inspection was directed and carried out by the *công an* during the *công an*-ordered curfew hours on 21 October:

The plan was that, during the curfew, local people must turn off their lights but let the door open, and wait for the *công an* to come and search in each house and arrest any stranger they find. During these visits, local confidants [*cơ sở*] confirmed people's identity, representatives from the neighborhood committee acted as witnesses, and neighborhood *công an* and *công an* cadres performed the arrests. During the search, [the *công an*] went first to the residences of the *Việt gian*, then to normal people's residences. There was no arrest record [*biên bản*], but the family received some explanations.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup> "Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>76</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>77</sup> "Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>78</sup> "Nghị quyết của Hội nghị "Rút kinh nghiệm Bắc Kạn" (21-23/9/49)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>79</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>80</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

The *công an* realized that they did not have enough personnel to inspect 20,000 locals in one night and locals were becoming anxious, so the general inspection was stopped after the Kỳ Lừa neighborhood was inspected. Four arrests were made.

The second inspection took place from 7pm to 1am (October 25-26) and it was the Committee of Order that was in charge. Other neighborhoods beside Kỳ Lừa were inspected. But there was no arrest during this inspection because they “could not recognize any *Việt gian*,” nonetheless five radios and five bicycles were taken from local homes. The morning after, the radios were given to the Takeover Committee and the bicycles returned to the owners.

Unsatisfied with the results (or lack thereof) from the first two inspections and hearing rumors that there were three radios in the local catholic church, the Takeover Committee asked the *công an* to collaborate with Battalion 428 to operate a third inspection between 5pm and midnight 27 October.<sup>81</sup> Inspectors were to re-inspect all neighborhoods and the church. There was no representatives from the neighborhood authority acting as witnesses, and the *bộ đội* completely overwhelmed the *công an*. Inspectors “did not address a word to the locals, searched randomly everywhere, threatened to shoot, did not ask the neighborhood committee to accompany, did not give any explanation, so the people were scared and complained a lot.” At the end of this second inspection, 42 bicycles (two from the church), 12 cameras, 10 radios (3 from the church) were confiscated. Ironically, the head of the *công an*-founded Committee of Order [*Ban Trật tự*] was arrested by the *bộ đội* during the inspection because they found radio antennas in his home.<sup>82</sup>

Local inhabitants of Lạng Sơn witnessed and suffered from the incompetence and corruption of the DRV *cán bộ* and *bộ đội*. After abandoning the town on the 18th, the French army sent aircrafts to bombard the town in order to destroy the supplies and equipment that they had left behind. Terrified locals ran from their homes to search shelters but the *công an* decided to declare a curfew order, commanding inhabitants not to leave their homes. (Fortunately, there were not enough *công an* agents and arms to force the people in and stop them from seeking shelter.)<sup>83</sup> The days and weeks after, under badly organized and indisciplined “liberating” forces, the local population lived in fear for their properties, possessions, and livelihood. A year before in Bắc Kạn, the population was low and properties at risk were few, but Lạng Sơn was a much larger town with high standards of living and a good economy:

Under French occupation, people’s life was easy and their standards of living were much higher than in the free zone. On average, a porter [*phu vận tải*] earned 1,500 Indochinese *piastres* a month. The French brought rice from the South and sold at 500 *piastres* a *tạ*. Therefore one working person could feed both his wife and children. Civil servants earn more money. Merchants bought and sold busily and earned money easily.<sup>84</sup>

Another post-takeover report highlighted local wealth:

---

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.; “Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn,” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>82</sup> “Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW),” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III; “Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn,” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>83</sup> “Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW),” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>84</sup> “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

A sweeper at the market was killed by bombardment, in his clothes were gold and ten thousands of *piastres*, in every local homes there were bourbon and wine, the market Kỳ Lừa was filled with snack bars, restaurants were filled.<sup>85</sup>

The majority of the population in Lạng Sơn were merchants, between one fifth and two thirds were overseas Chinese, the other majority in town was the Kinh, the rest were a few Thổ and Nùng minorities who farmed and did labor works.<sup>86</sup> DRV authorities' impressions of the population in Lạng Sơn were perfectly captured in a letter to Phạm Văn Đồng from Trần Đăng Ninh, Chair of the Committee of Logistics for the Border Campaign [*Trưởng ban Cung cấp Chiến dịch Biên giới*]:

[...] in Lạng Sơn, the people only heard of Uncle Ho (*Cu Ho*) without having ever seen his image, nor knowing the policies of the people's government, nor the revolutionary spirit of soldiers and people in the liberated zones, they do not know how to increase production for self-sufficiency, nor what competing for patriotism means, all in all the people in Lạng Sơn are retarded [*ngớ ngẩn*] in every aspect, not unlike foreigners who just immigrated; if the people in Lạng Sơn are like that, then the people in Lao Kay and other places would not be better or even worse.<sup>87</sup>

As in Bắc Kạn, DRV authority in Lạng Sơn believed that locals were at least ignorant of the resistance movement, some were suspicious, and some even were dangerous. Besides a few hoodlums, opium addicts, gamblers, and prostitutes, the new authority, the *công an* were greatly concerned with overseas Chinese and Catholic priests who could be spying for the French and sabotaging the new society.<sup>88</sup> While they were less worried about overseas Chinese because "important counterrevolutionaries had already left with the French" and "there left only those less wealthy and relatively good [*tương đối tốt*]," the 2,000 catholics under the control of five "counterrevolutionary" priests (two French and three Vietnamese) were more worrisome. DRV *công an* believed that these catholics were "poisoned" [*đầu độc*] into believing that the "V.M.C.S" [Việt Minh Cộng sản; Communist Việt Minh] would collaborate with "Communists from the exterior" [*Cộng sản bên ngoài*] to kill their religion, therefore "the liberating atmosphere" was actually "fearful" for them.<sup>89</sup> In June 1951, the two French priests were sent to

---

<sup>85</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>86</sup> The first reports from Lạng Sơn were sent from the UBKCHC of the province of Lạng Sơn between 25 and 26 October 1950. The report on 25 October told that two thirds of the 20,000 inhabitants in the town were overseas Chinese. ("Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn," BNV 708, TTLTQG-III) The Public Security Services' report on 15 January 1951 also agreed that "the majority of the population were overseas Chinese." ("Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.) However, the report by the Department of Economy in Lạng Sơn dated 18 November 1950 estimated that about one third of the population (now at "more than 10,000") were overseas Chinese. ("Báo cáo số 01 (Bộ Kinh tế)," BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.) Finally, a general report (author unknown) and dated March 1951 and the report by special envoys to Route no.4 sent between June and July 1951 claimed that overseas Chinese made up 18%-20% of the population (which fell to 8,000). ("Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.; "Báo cáo công tác thị xã Lạng Sơn," PTT 1093, TTLTQG-III.)

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Trần Đăng Ninh to Phạm Văn Đồng (17 November 1950), PTT 1650, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>88</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III; "Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn," BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>89</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi Lạng Sơn (Nha Công an TW)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

Thất Khê, but the Vietnamese priests remained “vague” [*lùng khùng*] and “cunning” [*xảo quyết*].<sup>90</sup> Unable to control and convert the catholic population, DRV authority continued to suspect and surveil them. By July 1951, almost half of the catholic population (980 people) had left their hometown Lạng Sơn. But not only Catholics left town a few months after the DRV takeover. Recorded but not accounted for in different DRV reports was a massive drop in the total population of the town of Lạng Sơn. The UBKCHC of Lạng Sơn reported on 25 October 1950 that there were 20,000 inhabitants, the Department of Economy of Lạng Sơn’s report on 16 November 1950 and a general report dated March 1951 counted 12,000 inhabitants, finally a special envoy sent for “reinforcement assignment” [*công tác củng cố*] along the Route no.4 reported in June–July 1951 that there were over 8,000 inhabitants in the town of Lạng Sơn.<sup>91</sup> After eight months under DRV control, 60 percent of the population (12,000 people) left.

The causes of this drop were political and economic. The performance of the DRV administration and army in the first weeks after takeover, as shown earlier in this section, was catastrophic. There is no doubt that locals very rapidly lost all their political confidence (if they had had any) in the new regime. At the same time, the new regime did not do much to ensure local people of their economic prospects. In the first report from Lạng Sơn to the central government dated 25 October 1950, the UBKCHC of the province highlighted the urgency of establishing clear regulations on currency and commercial goods because the majority of the population depended on commercial activities.<sup>92</sup> But a month later, the situation had not changed. The Department of Economy of Lạng Sơn reported on 16 November that on top of the negative impressions of the DRV forces that French propaganda had already implanted in their mind, locals were anxious and lacked confidence in the new authority because after the takeover, living costs rose sharply and regulations on currency and commerce were changing too often.<sup>93</sup> Regulations on currency exchange changed three times: exchange rate changed from 1 *piastre* = 1 DRV *đồng* (25 October) to 1 *piastre* = 3 DRV *đồng* (30 October) and back to 1 *piastre* = 1 DRV *đồng* (9 November). This created great disadvantages to those who had exchanged their *piastres* early and gave rise to a black market on currency where people from other free zones, cadres, and soldiers all participated illegally. Regulations on commercial goods and import-export also changed three times (23 October, 7 November, and 19 November), further confusing local merchants. In locals’ impressions, the post-takeover economy did not promise a bright future:

Local inhabitants earned their living through commerce in imported and luxury goods. Now that the link to Hanoi-Haiphong is cut, they consider their supply depleted, commerce along the frontier has not been allowed yet, so they seem really afraid for their future. On the other hand, changing from a system of free market and unregulated economy under the French to a planned market, from not having enough buyers to having people from everywhere fighting each other to buy and paying with a currency that is losing more and more its value, [locals] start to practice speculative accumulation, hiding

---

<sup>90</sup> “Báo cáo công tác thị xã Lạng Sơn,” PTT 1093, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>91</sup> “Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn,” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III; “Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn,” BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo công tác thị xã Lạng Sơn,” PTT 1093, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>92</sup> “Tình hình chiếm lĩnh Lạng Sơn,” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>93</sup> “Báo cáo số 01 (Bộ Kinh tế),” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

their goods. Because goods are not taxed, declaration is not a priority and not controlled well, speculative accumulation is becoming more and more popular.

Additionally, foods have not been supplied, locals are living on only what has been left from before, which is depleting. Yet, there are so many restaurants, each evening, soldiers, cadres, local inhabitants all go to restaurants, eating away what should be in reserve. Therefore, there might be hunger in town, if the issue of food supply is not resolved rapidly.<sup>94</sup>

No hunger in Lạng Sơn was reported in 1951. Most likely because the majority of inhabitants had already left before it could happen.

One year and three takeovers of provincial capitals after Bắc Kạn, the DRV government was still facing the problem of undisciplined soldiers and personnel who stole and cheated for personal or departmental gains, who were “domineering” [*hống hách*], “intimidating” [*dọa nạt*] and “created popular resentment” [*làm cho dân oán*].<sup>95</sup> They were still looking for ways to establish order and security effectively, and still perceiving threats from within the community that they came to “liberate.” An important question arises: Why did the DRV *cán bộ* and *bộ đội* behave so badly in 1951, after all the “lessons,” “experiences,” and guidance that the central government had provided to interzone and provincial leaderships since September 1949? Was it because their life in the *free zone* had been too difficult and deprived of material comforts? Was it because they lacked formal training and disciplining? Or were these bad attitudes and conducts the manifestations of a distorted “victor” mentality? Parts of the answers to these questions lie in the next chapter where we follow the footsteps of DRV cadres and soldiers into provincial capitals and major towns in the Red River Delta immediately after their victory at Điện Biên Phủ.

---

<sup>94</sup> “Báo cáo số 01 (Bộ Kinh tế),” BNV 708, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>95</sup> “Tóm tắt bản báo cáo những kinh nghiệm về các vùng mới được giải phóng thuộc các tỉnh Lạng Sơn, Lào Kay và Hòa Bình (do Ông Trần Duy Hưng, Thứ trưởng Bộ Nội vụ trình bày) tại Hội nghị cán bộ chính quyền 12/1950,” PTT 1605, TTLTQG-III.

## Chapter 2: The problems of an industrial center

In February 1952, DRV forces succeeded in recapturing the province of Hoà Bình - an important transitional point between the Northern mountains and the Red River delta. Between 1950 and 1952, multiple reports, resolutions from conferences, and directives with the goal of “gaining experiences” from the most recent urban takeovers were issued.<sup>96</sup> These documents highlighted a common group of problems in the takeover process: passiveness, lack of experience in taking over urban areas, lack of a clear guidelines for military and administrative procedures, lack of personnel and means of transport, lack of ideological preparations and discipline, and lack of familiarity and sensitivity in dealing with a diverse local population.

These experiences and guidelines remained on paper for the next two years, however. The DRV leadership’s plan to retake by force the cities in the Red River delta was (passive) halted as the French and their Vietnamese ally reinforced defense along the De Lattre line. Between mid-1952 and mid-1954, DRV efforts (passive) focused on a general offensive against French-ASV military forces, “rectification” campaigns [*chỉnh huấn*] within the Party [*chỉnh đảng*], the army [*chỉnh quân*], and DRV mass organizations [*chỉnh đốn tổ chức*], and land reforms in DRV-controlled rural zones.<sup>97</sup>

It was only after the DRV victory at Điện Biên Phủ, two years after the last urban takeover in Hoà Bình, that the task of taking over urban areas returned to the attention of the DRV leadership (Table 1). Between the victory at Điện Biên Phủ and the signing of the Geneva Accords that provided the official framework for the ceasefire in Vietnam, French-ASV and DRV forces in Vietnam continued to employ different tactics and strategies to gain the upper hand in the negotiations at Geneva. On 30 June 1954, French-ASV forces withdrew from Thái Bình and Ninh Bình provinces, on 1 July, they withdrew from Nam Định city and three towns: Phủ Lý, Bùi Chu, and Phát Diệm. The rest of towns and cities in the Red River delta were taken over by DRV forces after the announcement of ceasefire following the ratification of the Geneva Accords on 21 July 1954 (Map 1 & Table 1).

---

<sup>96</sup> “Tóm tắt bản báo cáo những kinh nghiệm về các vùng mới được giải phóng thuộc các tỉnh Lạng Sơn, Lào Kay và Hòa Bình (do Ông Trần Duy Hưng, Thứ trưởng Bộ Nội vụ trình bày) tại Hội nghị cán bộ chính quyền 12/1950,” PTT 1605, TTTLQG-III; “Địa vị và nhiệm vụ của chiến trường Hà Nội trong cuộc tổng phản công (1950),” PTT 355, TTTLQG-III; “Biên bản Nghị quyết của Hội nghị Xã, Huyện” (13/7/1951), PTT 1093, TTTLQG-III; “Biên bản hội nghị sơ kết của Đoàn cán bộ củng cố đường số 4 (từ ngày 26 đến ngày 31 tháng 7/1951), BNV 1092, TTTLQG-III; “Quyết nghị án chiếm lĩnh đô thị và xây dựng vùng mới được giải phóng được thông qua tại Hội nghị cán bộ chính quyền LK Việt Bắc năm 1951”, BNV 3628, TTTLQG-III; “Nhiệm vụ công tác vận động công nhân để chuẩn bị giải phóng một thành phố (18/09/51),” PTT 1013, TTTLQG-III; “Chỉ thị của Liên khu Ủy Việt Bắc về việc sửa chữa những khuyết điểm trong thi hành chính sách đại đoàn kết của Đảng trong những vùng mới giải phóng (16/9/1951),” VKD vol.12 (1951), 676-682; “Dự thảo tình hình nhiệm vụ về chính sách thu hồi đô thị và vùng mới giải phóng năm 1952”, UBKCHCLKIII 909, TTTLQG-III.

<sup>97</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, Chapter 10.



Figure 3: De Lattre Line <sup>98</sup>

Major town/City	Date of French-ASV withdrawal	Official date of VM takeover
	<b>Pre-1954</b>	
Bac Kan	17 August 1949	24 August 1949
Lang Son	17/18 October 1950	17 October 1950
Lao Cai		1 November 1950
Hoa Binh	1st: Nov 1950 2nd: 23 Feb 1952	1st: Nov 1950 2nd: 23 Feb 1952
	<b>1954/Pre-Geneva Accords</b>	
Ninh Binh	30 June	30 June
Thái Bình	30 June	30 June
Nam Định	1 July	1 July
Phủ Lý	1 July	3 July

<sup>98</sup> Source: *Global Security*, July 2011, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/europe/fr-forts-de-lattre-line.htm>

Bùi Chu, Phát Diệm	1 July	3 July [TTLT3 UBKCHCLKIII no.2811]
<b>1954/Post-Geneva Accords (21 July)</b>		
Vĩnh Yên, Phúc Yên [current day Vĩnh Phúc]	31 July	
Móng Cái	3 August	2 August [first contacts; BNV 3693]
Sơn Tây	3 August	3 August
Phủ Lạng thương [current day Bắc Giang]	4 August	
Tiên Yên, Bắc Ninh, Đáp Cầu	8 August	8 August
Ninh Giang	8 August	
Hà Đông, Bắc Giang	6 October	6 October
Đồng Hới (Lk.4)	6 October	18 August
Hà Nội	10 October	10 October
Hải Dương, Đông Triều	30 October	30 October
<b>1955</b>		
Quảng Yên, Hòn Gai, Cẩm Phả, miền Mỏ	22 April	22 April
Kiến An, Đồ Sơn [current day districts of Hải Phòng]	25 April	15 May
Hải Phòng	13 May	13 May
Cát Bà [current day district of Hải Phòng]	16 May	16 May

*Table 1: Timeline of French withdrawal and communist takeover in North Vietnam before and after the signing of the Geneva Accords*

This chapter opens with an analysis of how and why in mid-1954, DRV forces still repeated the same mistakes as during the takeovers of Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn in 1949-1950. As DRV forces descended deeper into the delta, they had to face other, greater, problems as they



encountered urban spaces and populations with more challenging socio-economic and cultural-political characteristics. The core of the chapter discusses labor issues in industrial cities, more specifically postwar unemployment, and the government's responses. After reviewing existing scholarship on state-workers relation in the DRV, the chapter first calls attention to a group of workers whose stories have not been explored in the scholarship on 1945-1975's DRV: hundreds of thousands of workers in foreign and private industrial enterprises after their employees either left the North or went broke after the communist takeover, as well as a large number of uncontracted, menial labors. It then focuses on the story of Nam Định, the first sizable industrial and commercial city to be taken over by the DRV. Widespread unemployment and a stagnated economy in Nam Định must have foretold the DRV leadership about the problems to be expected in Hanoi and Haiphong, similar to how experiences in Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn should have informed DRV soldiers and cadres in charge of the takeovers of Nam Định, Bùi Chu, and Phát Diệm. But if the mistakes committed during the first months and year in these cities could have been avoided if local authority had learned their "lessons" better, problems of a broken economy and stalling industries could not be solved on a local level.

The next two sections of the chapter present the government's search for solutions to lower unemployment rate and keep workers less unhappy, as well as the kinds of difficulties and resistance that DRV cadres met in trying to resolve the problem. Finally, drawing from recent scholarship which examines the Republic of Vietnam (RVN)'s way of dealing with pressures on southern cities brought by the arrival of over 800,000 Northern migrants in 1955-1957, the chapter offers a comparison between the RVN's migrant resettlement initiatives and the DRV's ultimate solutions to the crisis of urban unemployment.

#### *Four years later: The same mistakes*

By July 1954, DRV military and political forces had progressed greatly in organization and capacity, thanks to a sustained flow of Chinese aids in materials, expertise, and mass mobilization methods.<sup>99</sup> Yet the government's internal documents reviewing the takeovers that took place in July 1954 show that, compared to their performance in Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn four years earlier (Chapter 1), DRV forces did not progress much in terms of strategy and ability to handle an urban takeover smoothly and without creating grave troubles.

Similar to what took place in Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn, French-ASV withdrawal from the southern region of the Red River delta took DRV forces by surprise. In Nam Định, even though DRV agents had been in contact with factory workers in the city to organize their political mobilization, French-ASV state employees, troops, and factory owners withdrew from the city successfully after destroying their paper trails and removing important machine parts from the textile factory, the silk factory, and the electric plant.<sup>100</sup> The main reason for the DRV's "mistake" was the disagreement between the provincial party committee [*tỉnh ủy*] and the lower-level committee and local cadres: "On 20 June 1954, Labor mobilization cadres [*cán bộ Công vận*] and municipal party committee [*thị ủy*] recognized the signs of the enemy's withdrawal.

---

<sup>99</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, Chapter 3 & Chapter 10; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), Chapters 1-2.

<sup>100</sup> Bộ Lao Động, "Báo cáo giải phóng thành phố Nam Định" (27/07/54), BLD 59, 38.

They reported to the Provincial party committee, but the provincial party committee did not agree with their assessment and asserted that the enemy was only preparing to deal with our plans, not withdrawing.<sup>101</sup>”

The seven lessons from the takeovers in June-July 1954, drawn largely from the takeover of Nam Định, listed in the review report prepared by the Prime Minister’s office in late July echo the “lessons” listed in the various reports on the urban takeovers in 1949-1950.

1, When we marched in to take over, we did not declare clearly to civilians [*dân*] that: in the new conditions, we will be sustaining and strengthening the city in order to develop industries and commerce, not evacuating, destroying [infrastructure] like before [in 1945-1946], therefore civilians were insecure, hesitating between staying or evacuating. This greatly affected the revival of normal daily activities in the city in the first few days (especially in Thái Bình, Nam Định)

2, In some places such as Phát Diệm, Bù Chu, commanders of the takeover did not understand correctly the spirit of the takeover policy of the Central authority [*trung ương*] which was that: we have to firstly stabilize the spirit, stabilize the daily activities of the people, revive the normal activities in the city, therefore gain people’s heart, then basing on that, rebuild the bureaucracy, strengthen and develop political organizations, proceeding to put down the reactionaries, revive and strengthen the revolutionary order [*trật tự cách mạng*][...]

In Nam Định, the marketplace only resumed after one week. The period of imposing martial law in most places was in general longer than necessary, hampering people’s movement and activities, increasing tensions in the atmosphere. The first orders announced by the “Military” Committee [*Ủy ban “Quân quản”*] of Phát Diệm and Bù Chu emphasized the rules and discipline that the people had to abide by without mentioning adequately that the army and the regime would be resolved to protect people’s lives and properties. The use of the terms “Military” [*quân quản*] and “take over” [*chiếm lĩnh*] the city is also incorrect.

3, The promotion and explanation of the policies of the Party and the government regarding the liberated urban spaces were slow. Before liberating [towns and cities] we could not predict the enemy’s withdrawal to propagandize [*tuyên truyền*] our arrival, then when we entered the towns and the cities [propaganda activities] were very late, for example, in Nam Định it was not until the fourth day after the city’s liberation that we organized a meeting to announce and explain our policies. During the first days we only propagandized military victories, the victory at Điện Biên Phủ, and the Geneva Accords, not using the occasion to announce and explain policies, and to address the people’s concerns, therefore an air of uncertainty [*hoang mang*] among different classes of people lingered for days. This was clearly demonstrated through the shops in Nam Định and in Thái Bình: the first three days, they were closed, or half open half close (meaning half certain and half not, traders were still looking to gauge our position). Looking at how not all of the remainders of the puppet army [*tàn binh nguy*] did not present themselves, and

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

some presented without their weapons, it proves that our dissemination of policies regarding the puppet troops had not been effective [...]

4, Because our soldiers before the takeover were not trained about our policies and 10 rules of discipline, a small number committed looting, shooting randomly which frightened the civilians, some comrades even showed contempt toward the urban inhabitants, saying things such as “Why did you not remain with the enemy, not following the enemy away?” which put the people at shame and fear. A number went around and traded in a disorderly way [*mua bán lung tung*] which harmed our credit among the people. Some abused their authority and borrowed civilians’ bicycles for personal use, not returning them for days.

5, Before the enemy withdrew, provincial authorities did not pay attention to the task of mobilizing workers, state employees to organize committees to protect factories (such as electricity plant, water plant, textile factory, etc.), and offices, so the enemy had the opportunity to sabotage parts of the infrastructure (such as removing and taking away the main machine in the electricity plant of Nam Định, planting their lackeys behind to burn the headquarters of the puppet Public Security, etc.)[...]

6, Regarding the revival of commercial activities in the city, we have not provided detailed directions to rich merchants [*phù thương*], petty traders [*tiểu thương*], and overseas Chinese, so they are still worried about where to find supply if all their goods are sold; there appears the situation where overseas Chinese and rich merchants hold their goods and not selling, some say when they sell all their goods they will go back to their native place [*về quê*] or go open another business in Zone 4. We haven’t been able to make use of the force of State-owned Commerces [*Mậu dịch Quốc doanh*] to help petty traders secure their supply, through which accelerates the revival of normal commercial activities. Also we have not resolved the problem of state-owned commerce so stabilizing the value of the DRV *đồng* is not effective. The rate of exchange from the DRV *đồng* and Indochinese currency is changing slowly, moderately, to our advantage. But it is only the rate of exchange. The real value of both currencies is falling because prices spiked as a result of hoarding and speculation.

7, Regarding the apparatus for takeover, in general, we do not have enough cadres. Regarding commanding orders, we have yet clearly distinguished the responsibility and authority of the Provincial Party committee [*Tỉnh ủy*], Provincial committee [*Ủy ban tỉnh*], and Military-Administrative committee [*Ủy ban quân chính*] in the task of protecting the city, as well as their responsibility in carrying out orders from the Central authority (such as the situation in Nam Định).

These listed experiences require special attention as we will take over towns from which the enemy are about to withdraw and return to us soon (Sơn Tây, Bắc Ninh, etc.)<sup>102</sup>

---

<sup>102</sup> “Báo cáo về tình hình và công tác tiếp thu ở các thành thị mới giải phóng ở miền Nam Đồng bằng Bắc bộ” (Report on the situation and takeover activities in newly liberated urban areas in the southern region of the Red River Delta) (31 Jul 1954), PTT 1420, TTLTQG-III.

Combining such report with reports from earlier campaigns, two points could be argued about the significance of urban takeovers during the 1949-1954 period. Firstly, the demand for reviews and reports from the central authority shows not only their efforts in “gaining experience” for future operations, but also their desire to maintain a grasp on the happenings on the local level in order to strengthen the national administrative system meant to be centralized but had been much weakened by disrupted communication during wartime.<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, the lack of a definite, officially-sanctioned blueprint for urban takeovers even after the victory at Điện Biên Phủ and the fact that the takeover of urban centers in the delta was a surprise to DRV authorities suggest the relative unimportance of these issues in the general strategy of DRV leadership. Secondly, repeated problems in assessment of the situation, planning, task division, discipline, and attitude suggest that at least until July 1954, local authorities (at the zonal and provincial levels), especially those in charge of urban areas, still held a high level of executive, administrative, and “quasi-legislative” power, with which “lessons” learned in other zones, provinces, and cities, and guidelines circulated from the central government were of secondary importance compared to local initiatives.<sup>104</sup>

The DRV’s approach to the problems that arose during pre-takeover, takeover, and post-takeover periods could be described, as George Ginsburg has argued about the way the DRV’s local administrative system was structured, especially in the areas newly under DRV control since 1954, as “a succession of short-range, flexible, *ad hoc*, responses to immediate problems.<sup>105</sup>” The problematic way in which cities and towns were taken over in June-July 1954 thus reflects a distinctive character of the DRV administrative system, that was, again, to use Ginsburg’s words: “the regime’s own long-standing addiction to reliance on piecemeal and haphazard solutions [...] in the sphere of local government.<sup>106</sup>”

It might be argued that despite multiple reports and experience-driven guidelines issued between 1950 and 1952, the lack of a definite blueprint for urban takeover in July 1954 was an important reason why DRV forces stepped into the old path of mistakes. But it is doubtful whether such a blueprint could have helped bring about a flawless transition of power. In fact, the DRV leadership had soon recognized (in 1951) that, like battles in different terrains, towns and cities had “diverse political, economical, and military characteristics” and that “the strength level of [DRV] political and military establishments differed from city to city.<sup>107</sup>” To prepare a detailed plan for each town, each city, was impossible, and the best approach would be to provide general principles so that local DRV authority could revise and readjust according to their situation when a takeover was close.<sup>108</sup> The problem was that in all the urban areas

---

<sup>103</sup> George Ginsburgs, “Local Government and Administration in North Vietnam, 1945–1954,” *The China Quarterly* 10 (April 1962): 174–204; George Ginsburgs, “Local Government and Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam since 1954 (Part I),” *The China Quarterly* 12 (December 1962): 211–30.

<sup>104</sup> Ginsburgs, “Local Government, 1945–1954,” 192.

<sup>105</sup> Ginsburgs, “Local Government (Part I),” 230.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> “Nhiệm vụ công tác vận động công nhân để chuẩn bị giải phóng một thành phố (18/09/51),” PTT 1013, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

“liberated” before 21 July 1954, local DRV leadership was always caught by surprise by their enemy’s withdrawal.

### *Nam Định’s special status*

Different from earlier takeovers where the central government relied on reports from the local government and special envoys (such as the unit of inspectors sent to evaluate the situation along the Route no.4 - a national way connecting Cao Bằng and Lạng Sơn - after the takeover Lạng Sơn), in Nam Định, the central government wanted to gain direct control of the takeover process and transition of power as soon as possible. Not waiting for a local report briefing them on the situation in Nam Định, the Politburo sent a short directive [*chi thị*], immediately on 1 July, to the Party committee of Interzone III highlighting three “preliminary ideas” [*ý kiến bước đầu*] in reaction to the news of the takeover of Nam Định: firstly, towns and cities should be protected, not evacuated and destroyed “like before”; secondly, more towns and cities would go under the DRV’s control and the Interzonal leadership should start preparing for the next urban takeovers in the delta; and finally, the document listed four general principles to be applied immediately: (1) Protection of public and private properties and protection of civilian lives; (2) Stabilization of production, commercial activities, and currency; (3) Reception of French-ASV state employees and troops, avoid random arrest and detention; and (4) Protection of religious freedom and protection of foreigners.<sup>109</sup>

Such particular attention to Nam Định is understandable. The city, situated at the crossing point of the Red River and the Vị River (current-day Nam Định River, had been a commercial center in northern Vietnam since the 13th century.<sup>110</sup> During the colonial period, Nam Định grew to be a major industrial center. Besides its own “old quarter” [*phố cổ*] - a manufacturing and commercial core with 38 “guild streets” [*phố Hàng*] and four “dock streets” [*phố Bến*] - the city housed hundreds of factories and businesses of diverse sizes and trades. Before the communist takeover in 1954, the city had an estimate population of 100,000. By August 1955, however, the population had dropped to 60,000. One third of the post-takeover population - around 20,000 people - were workers working in state and private enterprises (over 7,000) and uncontracted labors (over 13,000).<sup>111</sup> An important body of workers in Nam Định were those employed at the once-largest textile factory in Indochina and a silk factory, which together employed nearly 4,500 workers and for which the city earned the nickname “City of Textile.”<sup>112</sup> What made Nam Định a particularly important city to the DRV was not only its economic prosperity, so much needed for a war-wearied state, but also its status as a city of workers, the “vanguard” of the revolution as declared by the Party since 1949.<sup>113</sup> (The communist party itself, after its symbolic dissolution, reemerged with the name “Vietnamese Workers’ Party” (*Đảng Lao động Việt Nam*); VWP) in 1951.)

---

<sup>109</sup> “Chỉ thị của Ban Bí thư, ngày 1 tháng 7 năm 1954, về công tác tiếp thu và quản lý các thành phố và thị trấn mới được giải phóng,” VKDĐT vol. 15 (1954), 141-143.

<sup>110</sup> UN-Habitat Vietnam, *Hồ sơ các thành phố Việt Nam* (Hanoi : UN Habitat Vietnam, 2014), 134.

<sup>111</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (23/09/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III; “Số liệu Nam Định”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist State,” 333.

*Urban workers: from vanguards to burdens*

Before taking over urban and industrial areas in the North, DRV state enterprises had employed around 60,000 workers in manufacturing “houses” [*xưởng*] that produced weapons, machine parts, clothes, paper, radios, medicines, and printed newspapers and propaganda leaflets.<sup>114</sup> Nonetheless, throughout the First Indochina War, DRV’s industries remained underdeveloped, small in number (20 national state-owned industrial enterprises by 1954) and in scale (textile factories producing military clothes employed a couple hundreds workers, while other types of factory employed between 50-100 workers in each factory).<sup>115</sup> Necessities and consumer goods in the DRV-controlled zones depended greatly on underground links with French-ASV-controlled urban centers.<sup>116</sup>

The most informative work in English on state-labor relations in pre-1975 DRV is an article by Tuong Vu which analyzes different labor policies and workers’ “survival strategies” in North Vietnam between 1945 and 1970.<sup>117</sup> Vu argues that after taking over the North, in an effort to boost economic growth and to cope with workers’ demands, the Party switched its wartime focus on labor mobilization to labor control, and that Chinese and Soviet models influenced North Vietnamese labor policies up until the late 1950s. Vu characterizes DRV labor policies between 1954 and 1956 as “labor demobilization” and identifies three main post-takeover issues as the driving forces behind labor policies during this period. The first two issues are related to newly nationalized enterprises, factories and enterprises whose owners (often French) had left before the DRV takeover: 1) dealing with “retained” workers and 2) improving the living conditions of workers affected by rising prices and falling real wages. The third critical issue was the explosion of labor disputes in the private sector as employers made use of widespread unemployment to abuse workers and workers tried to utilize DRV labor policies to protect themselves and to struggle against their employers.

Vu argues that the reason for the substantial drop in living standards of workers in previously French-owned factories was the DRV’s currency exchange policy which set the state’s rate (1 *piastre* : 30 DRV *đồng*) at half that of the market (1 *piastre* : 60 DRV *đồng*).<sup>118</sup> But Vu is only discussing the fortunate few who continued to have a job and who benefited from the “Eight policies of the government of the DRV towards cities taken over in 1954” which came into effect only on 17 September - two months and a half after the takeover of Nam Định (Chapter 3). In short, one of these eight policies specified that former state employees of the French-ASV government would receive the same salary as before the takeover. But employees of private enterprises and uncontracted workers were not entitled to benefit from this policy.<sup>119</sup> This points to the limit in Vu’s analysis: while he focuses mostly on labor policies in nationalized and state

---

<sup>114</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, Chapter 4, Chapter 4, and Chapter 8; Nguyễn Đình Lê, “Biến đổi cơ cấu kinh tế-xã hội miền Bắc trong giai đoạn lịch sử 1954-1975,” *Tạp chí Khoa học* (ĐHQGHN) (Jan 1995); Ministry of Industry and Trade of the SRV, “Giai đoạn 1945-1954: Công nghiệp và thương mại Việt Nam trong sự nghiệp kháng chiến và kiến quốc,” accessed at: <https://moit.gov.vn/> .

<sup>115</sup> Ministry of Industry and Trade of the SRV, “Giai đoạn 1945-1954.”

<sup>116</sup> Christopher Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon,” 222-250.

<sup>117</sup> Vu, “Workers and the Socialist State,” 329-356.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 337.

<sup>119</sup> “Đề nghị về sinh hoạt phí đặc biệt và tạm thời cho công nhân thường ở các Thị xã mới giải phóng (17/09/54),” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

enterprises, during 1954-1956 the majority of workers in the North were working in private enterprises or as uncontracted labor. In Hanoi, a survey in July 1954 showed that there were about 156,300 workers, among which: 18,100 worked in state-owned enterprises, 50,000 in artisan studios, 2,500 were cyclo riders, 10,000 worked in private, family-owned businesses, and 75,700 did miscellaneous jobs.<sup>120</sup> This means that about 11% of workers in Hanoi, at most, benefited from the “same job, same salary” policy. In Nam Định, after the nationalization of the Textile and silk factories, in principle, the total number of state workers was around 5,000 (out of 20,000 workers and menial laborers in the city). But these two factories had been out of operation for more than a year and all of these workers became jobless. Though they received priority to be employed elsewhere (when posts became available), these workers were not subjects of the “same job, same salary” policies. The number of state-employed workers in Haiphong are not available, but it may safely be assumed that in all three urban and industrial centers of North Vietnam, the number of workers who benefited from the “same job, same salary” policy was much smaller than the number of those who didn’t. What exactly were the policies concerning these workers?

A related topic, unexplored in Vu’s article (or any other academic work), is the crisis of mass unemployment in the North after 1954. Archival documents reveal that the problem of unemployment in the North after the DRV takeover was a central issue for the Ministry of Labor up until early 1957. In July 1954, the total population of North Vietnam was around 13.5 million, around 1 million of which lived in urban areas.<sup>121</sup> Reports from Nam Định and surveys carried out in Hanoi and Haiphong in July 1954 suggested that there were about 206,000 workers in the three largest cities in the North (about 156,000 in Hanoi, 30,000 in Haiphong, and 20,000 in Nam Định).<sup>122</sup> After the DRV took over the North, at least half of these people, mostly uncontracted workers and those working in private enterprises, became unemployed.<sup>123</sup> Loss of

---

<sup>120</sup> “Tài liệu về tình hình các xí nghiệp, cơ quan, và công nhân ở một số đô thị sắp được giải phóng (07/54),” BNV 3684, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>121</sup> Nguyễn Đình Lê, “Biến đổi cơ cấu kinh tế-xã hội.”

<sup>122</sup> “Tài liệu về tình hình các xí nghiệp, cơ quan, và công nhân ở một số đô thị sắp được giải phóng (07/54),” BNV 3684, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (09/08/55),” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>123</sup> Different sources cite different numbers: In late 1955, the DRV government reported that the “enemy” “left behind” 84,400 workers and labors unemployed. (“Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III) Independent journalist and writer Vũ Ngọc Tiến estimates that in 1954-1955, only in Hanoi and Haiphong, there were about 130,000 jobless people (about 100,000 in Hanoi and 30,000 in Haiphong) (Vũ Ngọc Tiến, “Điều tra đời sống cư dân đô thị Bắc Việt Nam, giai đoạn 1954-1975”, *talawas* (June 2005), accessed at:

<http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=4896&rb=0302>). The official History of the Ministry of Industry and Trade estimates over 100,000 unemployed labor in 1955. (Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, “Giai đoạn 1955-1965: Công nghiệp, thương mại miền Bắc thời kỳ khôi phục kinh tế, xây dựng cơ sở vật chất ban đầu cho CNXH và đấu tranh thống nhất nước nhà”, accessed at: <https://www.moit.gov.vn/> . Historian Nguyễn Đình Lê cites 100,000 as the number of workers in French factories, independent from the number of workers in private enterprises and factories. These numbers do not include about 7,000 workers from the South who regrouped in the North between July 1954 and May 1955 (“Dự thảo báo cáo về tình hình đón tiếp cán bộ, chiến sĩ thương binh, học sinh miền Nam”, PTT 96, TTLTQG-III). My calculation from a report titled “The result of solutions to unemployment from takeover til now” by the Ministry of Labor dated July 1955 suggests that the total number of unemployed workers after takeover was around 117,000. (“Kết quả giải quyết thất nghiệp từ

important machineries, lack of technical expertise, difficulty in securing materials for production made many large-scale factories go out of business. In Nam Định, as mentioned earlier, the textile factory and silk factory stopped all production activities after the DRV took over and remained in limbo for more than a year.<sup>124</sup> This indirectly affected industries related to textile production in Nam Định and elsewhere. Furthermore, DRV authority pointed out that many industries and professions plummeted because they were not “suitable” [*phù hợp*] for the new politico-economic situation.<sup>125</sup> Among the cottage industries [*tiểu công nghệ*] in Nam Định, leather manufacturing, leatherworking, cordwaineries, woodworking, commercial laundering, and tailoring - those producing nonessential goods - suffered from not only a lack of demand but also lack of official support. Between 50 and 80 per cent of enterprises in these industries had stopped operating three months after the takeover of the city.<sup>126</sup>

In mid-October 1954, while Hanoi was still experiencing “liberation” bliss, the Department of Labor reported that thousands of families in Nam Định had to skip meals, not eat for days, sell their furniture and clothes, send their children to relatives or put them up for adoption; at least 1,000 families could not pay rent during the three months after the takeover and were being forced out by their landlords; unemployed workers were wandering the streets, digging up landfill to find metal scraps, wood scraps, coal slag to sell<sup>127</sup>. Unemployment spread each time a new city came under the DRV’s control: in Phát Diệm, Hà Đông, then Hanoi, and finally Haiphong. In late 1955, the government reported that in cities liberated after the Geneva Accords, 84,400 workers and labors became unemployed (my own calculations basing on internal DRV document suggests over 100,000.)<sup>128</sup>

These statistics bring us to an important question: How did the DRV government overcome mass unemployment and rebuild their economy? Or, did they ever?

### *Nam Định in limbo*

After the takeover by DRV forces, all production and commercial activities in Nam Định were put on hold for the first three days for fear of French air raids. Many inhabitants evacuated their families and properties from the city. During these three days, life in the city was “stagnant” [*ngừng trệ*]:

When we entered the City, all activities in the city were stopped, no electricity, not enough water, the City was overwhelmed with garbage and dirt, night soil buckets in

---

khi tiếp quản đến nay”, BLD 58, TTLTQG-III.) Therefore, I am using “over 100,000” here, as a median number.

<sup>124</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.; “Dự thảo Nghị quyết của Hội đồng chính phủ về nhân định tình hình kinh tế hiện tại và nhiệm vụ phương châm công tác kinh tế văn hóa năm 1957”, PTT 129, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>125</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>126</sup> “Báo cáo công tác từ 15 tháng 8 đến 15 tháng 9 năm 1954 của Ty Lao-Động Thành-Phố NAM ĐỊNH (15/10/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III.



private households were not collected, the people were stirred up [*nhao lên*] because of the problems of electricity, water, woods, garbage, rocketed price of kerosene.<sup>129</sup>

All movement of people and goods into the city was prohibited for security reasons. The “urban-rural economic links” were “interrupted” and those who chose to stay in the city had no access to rice, food, and water supplies.<sup>130</sup>

After receiving the directive from the central government, local authorities allowed commercial activities to be reactivated, but only at night, for fear of air raids was still present. Highly skilled workers were mobilized to fix the electricity plant which had stopped functioning because important parts were removed and carried away by the French. For one week after the takeover, the city had no electricity; public hygiene services (privies and garbage collection, street sweeping) were stopped. When electricity returned, the quantity that the plant could generate was not enough to sustain all administrative, productive, and commercial activities. Citing the lack of electricity large factories stopped operating, and mid-size shops and large stores did not open. The situation lasted for three weeks until news of ceasefire reached the city<sup>131</sup> and all activities could be carried out during daytime again (24 July).

During the first month after the takeover, some hundreds of workers were mobilized to guard factories, offices, and abandoned residences, together with local DRV soldiers.<sup>132</sup> Another group was mobilized to evacuate war trophies and military and industrial inventories out of the city, and transport necessary supplies into the city. Workers with properties in the countryside were encouraged to return to their native place. Those who stayed in the city were encouraged to participate in public rallies [*mít tinh*] where the new authorities “provided an education on the policies of the Party and the Government, and exposed the enemy’s reactionary and deceiving plots.<sup>133</sup>” The majority of workers were hopeful that production and consumption would rapidly return to normal. They stayed in the city and waited to be employed in their original workplaces while eagerly participating in rallies and public events. However, as weeks and months passed without employment, workers started to lose their fervor. Previously enthusiastic participants of political rallies, the majority of workers stopped attending these events. A report on the situation of unemployment in Nam Định dated 23 September lamented that worsening unemployment gravely affected “activities in the city,” citing that only 70 workers attended the rally to celebrate the DRV’s Independence Day (2 September).<sup>134</sup> Labor authority in Nam Định called out: “Our basic force [*lực lượng cơ bản*], our firm mainstay [*chỗ dựa vững chắc*] in the City is facing a livelihood crisis.”<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>129</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> “Báo cáo giải phóng thành phố Nam Định (27/07/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> “Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>135</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

### *Searching for solutions*

Despite pressing labor problems in the city, the establishment of a Department of Labor in Nam Định was slow and inefficient. Though the official report on the takeover of Nam Định recounts that DRV labor mobilization agents were in close contact with workers in the city, it is questionable how much these agents knew of the actual working and living situation of workers. As French-ASV forces had successfully left the city with important administrative documents, the two cadres sent by the Department of Labor of Interzone 3 to Nam Định a day after the DRV takeover to manage labor affairs were at a loss. A few days later, on 24 July, the central government sent a team of labor cadres to the city. Reporting directly to the Minister of Labor, this team highlighted that the takeover process so far carried out by local forces had multiple shortcomings which revolved around two core issues: local forces' inability to assume authority and take control of French-ASV offices, and their hostile attitude and terrorizing treatment towards French-ASV state employees.<sup>136</sup> The team proposed that they would next focus on gauging the situation of factory workers, work with different departments to arrange employment for the unemployed, establish a Department of Labor in the city, and carry out research to propose a temporary scale of salary for workers in newly liberated cities.<sup>137</sup> It took the mixed team of local and central-level cadres three weeks to establish the Department of Labor of Nam Định, and two more weeks to find enough personnel and to establish a stable working order.<sup>138</sup>

The first task of the Department was to find out the number and situation of workers, employed and unemployed. But two obstacles hindered the effort: firstly, the number of workers in Nam Định was shifting rapidly workers moved to other cities (most often Hanoi and Haiphong) to find employment and peasants from surrounding villages went to Nam Định to seek seasonal employment; secondly, in the Department's own words, "cadres were inexperienced [*non*] and confused [*lúng túng*], furthermore, there were too few cadres, not enough to carry out the tasks."<sup>139</sup> Not being able to rely on ward-level and district-level authority either - because lower level administrative cadres were themselves struggling to get a grasp of the inhabitants under their control - labor cadres in Nam Định thus decided to stay in their office and gather statistics through the workers who submitted requests for employment at the office. This led to a situation where literate and less needy workers found employment long before those in destitution. It was only in early 1955 when the number of workers started stabilizing and the central government sent to Nam Định several experts to assist in surveying the situation that numbers and categorization of workers could be determined in a more systematic and efficient manner.<sup>140</sup>

Without a firm grasp of the situation, from July 1954 to the end of 1954, solutions carried out by labor cadres in Nam Định were temporary, ad-hoc and aimed at immediate relief rather than treating unemployment at its roots. Such an approach is understandable. Even if the Department had managed to know the exact numbers and condition of workers, without the resumption of

---

<sup>136</sup> "Báo cáo tiếp quản Nam Định (28/07/54)", BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, "Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)", BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

industrial and commercial activities, no sustainable solution could be found on the local level. For months, several thousand workers were employed on short-term jobs such as guarding factories, cleaning unused machines, and reconstruction of the city's infrastructures, which paid them the equivalent of 3kg of rice per day, but their jobs could last for three days at a time.<sup>141</sup> For families of workers or those who could not be employed, the Department requested the Ministry of Social Welfare to distribute temporary relief in rice, clothes, and money.<sup>142</sup> More than a year after the takeover, there was no sign that the two biggest factories in the city were to recover activities;<sup>143</sup> local economy "appeared busy and bustling on the surface, but basically remained in a deadlock with problems of currency, consumption capacity, employment, production materials, etc."<sup>144</sup> It was clear that a large number of workers would have to leave the city if they wanted to find a job.

The government tried to persuade workers to turn to agriculture. Those with links to the countryside were encouraged to go back to their native places. Those interested in agricultural production outside of the city would be assigned a patch of land in suburbs. The government provided those who volunteered to leave with a small pool of capital, farming equipment, and beasts of burden (buffaloes, cows) to work for their own livelihood.<sup>145</sup> Not many people accepted the offer, however. The majority were still hoping that factories would resume production soon or that the government would find them suitable alternative employment. Furthermore, agricultural areas in central and northern Vietnam had been suffering from bad harvests since mid-1954, and extreme weather struck the territory until late 1955. In February 1955, the DRV government estimated a shortage of at least 123,500 tons of rice in supply for consumption and agricultural production in the North.<sup>146</sup> The number of people suffering from serious hunger rose from 801,700 in January to 971,300 in February 1955, concentrated mostly in Nghệ An, Thanh Hóa, Hà Tĩnh, Hà Nam, Hưng Yên, Ninh Bình, Vĩnh Phúc, and Bắc Giang.<sup>147</sup> In mid-May 1955, despite relief efforts directed from the central government, the number of people suffering from hunger was still high, an estimate of 938,381, while diseases spread: "Compared to last month, the number does not rise much but the situation is more serious: those once suffering from light hunger are now suffering from grave hunger, the number of deaths continues to rise from edema, dysentery, etc..in certain places in Zone 4 cholera flares up more."<sup>148</sup> Writing from Hanoi in late April 1955, Nguyễn Huy Tường expressed worries: "The situation is tense [*gay go*]. Famine [*nạn đói*]. Beggars [*ăn mày*] start to appear in Hanoi."<sup>149</sup> By the end of 1955, it was estimated that more than one million people suffered from hunger and

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.; "Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (23/09/54)", BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.; "Kết quả giải quyết thất nghiệp từ khi tiếp quản đến nay", BLD 58, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>143</sup> "Báo cáo tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị tổng kết 18/8/55)", BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>144</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, "Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)", BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> "Báo cáo về tình hình lương thực và nạn đói", PTT 101, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> "Báo cáo về tình hình chính trị, thi hành Hiệp định đình chiến, củng cố miền Bắc (trong phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ ngày 11, 12, tháng 5 năm 1955)", PTT 104, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>149</sup> Huy Tường Nguyễn, *Nhật Ký Nguyễn Huy Tường T.3: Nghệ Sĩ và Công Dân*, ed. Huy Thắng Nguyễn (Hanoi: Kim Đồng, 2016), 23.

6,000 died from it. Worse, three typhoons hit the Northern coast in the latter half of the year, one of which killed 1,000 people in the greater area of Haiphong.<sup>150</sup> In such situation, it would not be surprising that workers did not want to go to the countryside for agricultural work.

In addition, many urban workers had been industrial workers for their whole life and had no other economically useful skill. A special report dated 23 September 1954 by the General Confederation of Labor [*Tổng Liên đoàn Lao động*] on the situation of unemployment in Nam Định described factory workers in Nam Định as too accustomed to the factory life: “for 19, 20 years [they] had worked for the factory and familiarized with small tasks in the production line, therefore the majority are not used agricultural cultivation [*ruộng đồng*], not used to hard labor [*lao động nặng nhọc*], nor buying and selling [*buôn bán*].”<sup>151</sup> Such early impressions seemed to have spread among a large number of DRV officials who came to believe that “workers in newly liberated cities were complicated [*phức tạp*], difficult to lead [*khó lãnh đạo*], had lower productivity than peasants, and would only create deficits to public funds [*công quỹ*].”<sup>152</sup> The Ministry of Labor later explained that cadres (in fields other than labor) developed this impression of urban workers because they did not “deeply understand” the importance of the working class in urban administration.<sup>153</sup> Such explanations were crafted to draw attention away from the Ministry of Labor’s own shortcomings and had the effect of attacking on the whole system, questioning how well the Party promoted its line - and how well everyone in the system understood and believed - that the working class was the “leader” of the Party-state and that in urban areas, the government must “resolutely rely on” [*kiên quyết dựa vào*] the working class.<sup>154</sup> Indeed, as Tuong Vu points out, a little more than a year after taking over the North, in late 1955, the government recognized that they also needed to rely on national capitalists, and issued new labor policies that rolled back the benefits and protection previously given to workers : employers could hire and fire workers as they deemed necessary, and a 10-hour workday was legalized.<sup>155</sup>

Before this blow to workers’ struggles and official promotion of worker’s welfare, the state-workers relation was already tense. As DRV cadres came to believe that urban workers were more of a problem to solve rather than a force to rely on, more and more workers found reasons to believe that the new authority was not practicing what they preached in their pro-working-class propaganda. Firstly, the government’s policies towards former French-ASV state employees created confusion and a sense of injustice among workers. In Nam Định, the 461 former French-ASV state employees who stayed after the takeover experienced harsh treatments: they were asked by the new government to “turn themselves in” [*đầu thú*], and were

---

<sup>150</sup> “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955”, PTT 119, TTLTQG-III, 11.

<sup>151</sup> “Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (23/09/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>152</sup> “Báo cáo tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị tổng kết 18/8/55)”, BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về tình hình mới, nhiệm vụ mới, chính sách mới của Đảng”, VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 288, 299.

<sup>155</sup> Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist State,” 338.

received with the same attitude and procedures reserved for suspected “spies” [*do thám*], “whistle-blowers” [*chỉ điểm*], and ASV soldiers.<sup>156</sup> Only a small number with specialized knowledge and skills necessary to revive the public services sector (public administration, health care, postal services, etc.) were allowed to continue their jobs, though without a clear policy on salary. By late July, however, nearly 400 out of 461 former French-ASV state employees in Nam Định benefited from the newly promulgated “Eight policies” (19 July 1954) which stipulated that former French-ASV state employees were to retain their pre-takeover rank and title and to continue their employment under the DRV.<sup>157</sup> Before the September version of the “Eight policies” specified that these former French-ASV state employees were to receive the same salary as before the takeover, the central government had already directed municipal authorities in Nam Định to apply the policy to French-ASV state employees under their control.<sup>158</sup> Pre-takeover salaries of these state employees could be as high as the equivalent of hundreds of kilograms of rice (Chapter 3) with family allowances: an extra 40kg of rice per month if married, and 30kg of rice for each child.<sup>159</sup> Reporting on the state of mind of former French-ASV state employees, the Department of Labor of Nam Định remarked: “Former [French-ASV] state employees are elated [*phấn khởi*], they trust the government’s policies and wish to atone for their sins [*lập công chuộc tội*].”<sup>160</sup>

The government’s solutions to curb unemployment during the first year after takeover brought other disappointment to workers. In an effort to quickly lower the number of unemployed people, besides persuading workers to go back to their native places in the countryside and to pick up agricultural work, local and regional authorities demanded offices and bureaus in and around Nam Định to absorb as many workers as possible. By September 1954, the Bureau of Commerce [*Mậu dịch*] employed 234 people to mill rice for sale, the Office of Public Works [*Công Chính*] of Nam Định employed 206 people to clean and reconstruct the city, and the Office of Public Works of Interzone 3 employed 300 people for the reparation and construction of roads and bridges in the nearby provinces of Ninh Bình and Hà Nam.<sup>161</sup> The Textile factory became nationalized but did not resume production; 603 workers were employed part-time (each half of the workers worked for 15 days per month) to clean the unused machines. Those employed by the state in the city were paid a daily wage equivalent to 3 kg of rice, while those employed on projects out of Nam Định received a monthly wage in cash and in kind

---

<sup>156</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55),” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 56; “Báo cáo giải phóng thành phố Nam Định (27/07/54),” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 37-38.

<sup>157</sup> “Chính sách đối với các thành thị mới giải phóng,” *Nhân Dân* no.206 (19 July 1954): 1; “Chính sách đối với thành thị mới giải phóng,” BNV 3660, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>158</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55),” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 56.

<sup>159</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55),” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 56.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác từ 15 tháng 8 đến 15 tháng 9 năm 1954 của Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định,” BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

totaling between 38 and 45kg of rice.<sup>162</sup> The majority of workers preferred working in the city as the daily wage was higher and they could stay close to their families. Soon the number jobs that could be created without industrial activities in Nam Định reached the limit, workers were encouraged to take up construction jobs in other provinces. (As more urban areas were “liberated,” more roads, bridges and other public infrastructures needed to be repaired. In mid-September 1954, for example, the Office of Public Works of Interzone 3 created 940 new jobs on the reparation and construction of roads and bridges in the nearby provinces of Ninh Bình and Hà Nam.<sup>163</sup>) But the salary was so low (equivalent of 1.1 to 2.7 kg of rice per day, while the minimum cost of living was estimated at 1.7 kg per day per adult) that many workers refused to take the job, choosing rather to wait around for employment in the city and continue picking up metal scraps and burnt charcoal, selling snacks for a living.<sup>164</sup>

In labor mobilization events, workers complained that the government was only paying attention to state employees not taking care of the working class. They utilized the state’s own discourses to complain and criticize the situation: “state employees (of the Bao Dai government) had been fawned upon [*bợ đỡ*] by the French, received high salaries, and lived in prosperity, now they are re-employed by the Government, are receiving favorable treatment [*khoản đãi*], and continue to live in prosperity; whereas workers had been exploited and oppressed by the French, after being liberated [*giải phóng*] they became jobless.”<sup>165</sup> Workers also voiced disappointment with wages and salaries proposed by the state, lamenting that the working conditions of the employments offered by the government were no different from when they were “working with the French.”<sup>166</sup>

*“Workers are left-deviationist”, “Capitalists are dissatisfied”*

Both state-owned and private enterprises made use of the unemployment situation to gain more profit by cutting down wages when possible. The Bureau of Commerce of Nam Định, for example, did not follow the Military-Administration Committee’s order to pay workers by the market price of rice (320 *đồng* per kilo in November 1954, 310 *đồng* in December) but paid by the price listed in their stores - a subsidized price (260 *đồng* in November and 280 *đồng* in

---

<sup>162</sup> Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác từ 15 tháng 8 đến 15 tháng 9 năm 1954 của Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III; “Đề nghị về sinh hoạt phí đặc biệt và tạm thời cho công nhân thường ở các Thị xã mới giải phóng (17/09/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>163</sup> “Đề nghị về sinh hoạt phí đặc biệt và tạm thời cho công nhân thường ở các Thị xã mới giải phóng (17/09/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>164</sup> “Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (23/09/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 11; Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo tình hình công nhân lao động và các xí nghiệp trong thành phố (28/08/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 33; Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác từ 15 tháng 8 đến 15 tháng 9 năm 1954 của Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>165</sup> Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác từ 15 tháng 8 đến 15 tháng 9 năm 1954 của Ty Lao động Thành phố Nam Định”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.; “Báo cáo đặc biệt về tình hình công nhân thất nghiệp ở thị xã Nam Định (23/09/54)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

December).<sup>167</sup> Meanwhile private enterprises made use of the chaos caused by currency change and widespread unemployment to lower salaries. A number of large printing houses in Nam Định, due to a sharp increase in prices of necessary goods (rice, for instance, increased from 340 *đồng* per kilo in September to 450 *đồng* in October 1954) responded to pressures from workers by raising cost-of-living allowances but cutting down family allowances, so that eventually the total amount of salary was lowered.<sup>168</sup>

In both of these cases, the workers themselves, not DRV labor cadres, fought to gain their rightful benefits. A group of 40 workers at the Bureau of Commerce went directly to the Department of Labor of Nam Định to complain about the mishandling of their salaries and asked the Department to intervene. Reporting on the incident, the Department commented that the salary policies at the Bureau of Commerce were “complicating” and needed to be “studied” more closely. At the same time, the Department suggested, workers were not really performing well at work and were only after gaining benefits for themselves:

In general workers are encouraged [*phấn khởi*] by the Government’s way of resolving unemployment in such a difficult situation, and are thankful towards the salary policies, so they seem to be making efforts [*tổ ra cố gắng*] at work. However a small number of workers are still not paying full attention to their responsibilities [*lơ là với nhiệm vụ*]: arriving late at work, leaving early; those with technical competence are still anxious [*thắc mắc*] about salaries, about working equipments’ wear and tear [*hao mòn dụng cụ*], so they are not fully assured at work, and the thought of waiting on superiors’ actions to get what they want is growing.

On the other hand, their spirit of struggle [ *tinh thần đấu tranh*] is still immature and weak, [they] only focus on gaining benefits, for example: when the state’s price of rice is high but the market price drops, [they] ask to be paid in cash; when the state’s price of rice drops but the market price rises, they ask to be paid partly in cash, partly in rice.<sup>169</sup>

In the end, the Department of Labor of Nam Định “sent a report” to their superiors and was directed to intervene so that workers could claim the price differences.<sup>170</sup> This example is nonetheless another demonstration of DRV cadres’ negative biases towards urban workers as “difficult to lead” and benefit-driven.

Tuong Vu suggests that DRV cadres had already met a similar situation with workers in state enterprises in the DRV zone in the early 1950s. Vu cites the case of workers at the state-owned Hong Phong Factory where workers were at first only attentive to issues directly related to wages and welfare.<sup>171</sup> But after the factory participated in the Democratic Management

---

<sup>167</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo tình hình đi thăm công nhân viên Mậu dịch thành phố Nam Định (14/01/55)”, BLD 60, TTLTQG-III, 87.

<sup>168</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Tình hình ngành In trong Thành phố Nam Định (05/01/55)”, BLD 60, TTLTQG-III, 69.

<sup>169</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo tình hình đi thăm công nhân viên Mậu dịch thành phố Nam Định (14/01/55)”, BLD 60, TTLTQG-III, 87.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>171</sup> Tuong Vu, “Workers and the Socialist State,” 335-336.

campaign (1952-1954), it was reported that workers' political awareness was improved, a conclusion evidenced by workers' "enthusiastic" participation in mass meetings, their participation in the factory's management, and their monitoring their own behaviors.<sup>172</sup> Vu nonetheless questions the wider implications of this campaign and adds that after the communist takeover in 1954, no labor report nor Party resolution mentioned the existence of the campaign. One could wonder, however, if the case of the Hong Phong Factory served as a model for DRV labor cadres to assess urban workers' spirit and political awareness. An enlightened worker, according to campaign documents cited by Tuong Vu, must: (1) recognize the superiority of the "people's democratic government" over the colonial regime, and (2) recognize himself as the true master of his factory and his nation, rather than a hired labor.<sup>173</sup> This would explain the basis on which the Nam Định's Department of Labor assessed workers' political spirit as "immature and weak" - because they were concerned with wages and welfare, rather than recognizing the superiority of the new regime and their new political status. good

Nam Định's labor cadres found more reasons to believe in the "immaturity" of urban workers with the case of wage dispute at Nam Định's private printing houses. A couple of months after the dispute had started, the Department of Labor called a meeting with enterprise owners and workers' representatives to "explain" official policies which prioritized economic recovery and promoted "both workers' and capitalists' benefit" [*lao tư lưỡng lợi*].<sup>174</sup> Citing that it was important to "assure" hearts and minds of industrialists and merchants and to promote collective bargaining between employers and employees, the Department "did not plan to lead the workers' struggle for wage increase."<sup>175</sup> The Department also complained that a few days after a printing house (Chấn Hưng) and their workers signed a new contract under the Department's "instructions," prices continued to rise sharply and the workers, "not seeing that the printing house's business was being reduced, not growing," planned a new struggle for wage increase. The situation, the Department reported, caused Chấn Hưng's owner to "lose confidence" in the authority and created even more tensions between employer and employees.<sup>176</sup>

The central government had a different take on the failure of the Department of Labor at Nam Định, however. In a brief hand-written comment on the last page of the report on Nam Định, a chef in the Ministry of Labor who was assigned to review the case pointed out that the Department likely prepared a very ambiguous contract that did not resolve any of the key tensions.<sup>177</sup> He also questioned whether the Nam Định's labor cadres understood the key principle in resolving labor disputes, namely: "Utmost flexibility [*Mềm dẻo cao độ*]." It is likely that labor cadres in Nam Định were only following an official formula of resolving labor disputes: calling a meeting, explaining related policies, drafting a new contract. But every step was done superficially with the goal of ticking off the to-do list rather than finding a sustainable solution. The Ministry of Labor chef concluded his comment by asking the Department of Labor

---

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 336.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 335.

<sup>174</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, "Tình hình ngành In trong Thành phố Nam Định (05/01/55)", BLD 60, TTLTQG-III, 70.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 71.



of Interzone 3 to “re-examine” the case, “draw experiences” [*rút kinh nghiệm*], and “re-instruct” the Department of Nam Định which had clearly “violated the key principle.”<sup>178</sup>

Between July and December 1954, there were 35 labor disputes related to wages in Nam Định.<sup>179</sup> Half of these cases (17) were about workers demanding a wage increase to keep up with rising living costs. In August 1955, seven months after receiving critique from the central government, the Department of Labor of Nam Định reported that they had “so far resolved all [cases] fairly” and that they had been “assuring the rights and benefits of workers.”<sup>180</sup> Nonetheless, the Department admitted that in general, cadres held “right-deviationist [*hữu khuynh*] attitude toward capitalists,” did not “rely on the working class, [were] afraid that workers’ struggles were too left-deviationist [*tả*], afraid that capitalist were dissatisfied [*bất mãn*].” The Department realized then - more than a year after takeover - that the higher goal of their activities was to “elevate the position of workers vis-a-vis capitalist employers,”<sup>181</sup> but their problematic ideological tendencies, lack of understanding of official policies, and lack of experiences led cadres to behave in a manner that was “oppressive towards workers’ spirit of struggle.”<sup>182</sup>

To defend the Nam Định’s Department of Labor, they were caught in a difficult dilemma during the first year after takeover. In a series of Party’s resolutions issued between July and October 1954, the Party denounced “left-deviationism,” highlighted that the “new situation” demanded strategic reunion among all classes, and prioritized the resumption and development of industrial and commercial activities.<sup>183</sup> According to the Party’s postwar strategy, “relying on workers” did not mean giving the lead to workers nor did it mean promoting the rights and benefits of workers, rather it meant mobilization of workers to the tasks of economic revival and national reconstruction. The approach that the Department of Labor of Nam Định took towards labor disputes during the first year after takeover reflected not only their own biases against urban workers but also the Party’s emphasis on prioritizing the goal of “development of production and reconstruction of national economy” [*nâng cao sản xuất và phục hồi kinh tế quốc dân*] over assuring the welfare of the working class. With this order of priority, it was understandable that facing workers’ struggles, labor cadres in Nam Định were more prone to assess that “workers’ struggles were too left-deviationist” and hesitated to “dissatisfy” capitalists, thus moved to discourage workers’ struggles.

All in all, the DRV’s absorption of urban areas with a large number of workers did not strengthen their revolutionary force but was actually an enormous challenge to the state: workers, instead of faithfully cooperating with the state and enthusiastically conforming to all orders,

---

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ty Lao Động Thành phố Nam Định, “Báo cáo công tác tiếp quản ngành Lao động Thành phố Nam Định (09/08/55)”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III, 61.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> VKDĐT vol. 15 (1954)

pushed back on unfavorable policies, struggled for proper employments, wage increases, and welfare benefits.

### *The ultimate solution to unemployment*

Southward migration of businesses was a decisive factor that created mass unemployment in the North. At the same time, with more than 850,000 people migrating South by May 1955, a number of jobs must have become available after the takeover. But little is known about the professional, class, or urban-rural distribution among Northern migrants to the South. The most recent scholarship on these migrants has focused on the relation between Catholic migrants and the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam; RVN)'s state and society.<sup>184</sup> In other words, it is difficult to assess whether mass departure to the South reduced or increased unemployment in Northern cities in 1954-1955.

Interestingly, a parallel could be drawn here between the RVN's resettlement programs for Northern migrants and the DRV's initiatives to deal with urban unemployment. Both Peter Hansen and Jason Picard identify state-directed resettlement of Northern migrants in the RVN as a three-phase process<sup>185</sup> where the RVN government tried, geographically, to move migrants further and further away from urban areas, and strategically, to "localize" migrant populations and develop their capacity for "self-reliance." The immediate goals behind these initiatives, according to Hansen and Picard, were, first, to alleviate the socio-economic pressures brought about by nearly a million Northern migrants on urban infrastructures in and around Saigon and second, to use of the force of the migrant population to fulfill long-term economic, security, and political goals.<sup>186</sup>

During the same time (late July 1954 - December 1957) in the North, the DRV state was trying to "revive the national economy" [*khôi phục kinh tế quốc dân*]. After the DRV takeover, Northern urban infrastructures, especially large cities such as Hanoi, Haiphong, and Nam Định, struggled to cope with the effects of a malfunctioning economic system, one of which was mass unemployment. The Ministry of Labor complaint in August 1955: "The enemy has left behind a too large number of factory workers, unemployed labors, and soldiers, so the work of turning the city from one of consumption to one of production meets many difficulties."<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, unemployment in the city and hunger in the countryside lowered the population's buying capacity, which in turn negatively affected industries and commerce. This led to a large number of small merchants and menial laborers crowding local Departments of Labor to ask for work. In addition, unemployed Southern regroupees, families of cadres and officials, injured veterans

---

<sup>184</sup> Hansen, "The Virgin Mary Heads South;" Hansen, "Bắc Di Cư;" Picard, "Fragmented Loyalties;" Jason Picard, "Fertile Lands Await."

<sup>185</sup> Hansen, "Bắc Di Cư;" Picard, "Fertile Lands Await."

<sup>186</sup> Hansen, "Bắc di cư," 193-194; Picard, "Fertile Lands Await," 67-68.

<sup>187</sup> "Báo cáo tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị tổng kết 18/8/55)", BLD 54, TTLTQG-III, 35.

[*thương binh*], demobilized soldiers [*bộ đội giải ngũ*] and poor peasants also flocked to the cities to ask for jobs.<sup>188</sup>

Like their Southern counterpart, the DRV government alleviated the pressures on urban infrastructures and limited state funding by sending people away from the cities. Between July 1954 and June 1955, nearly 18,000 people (7,000 in Hanoi and 11,120 in Nam Định) classified as “peasants” who came the city to search for employment [*nông dân xin việc*] were sent back to their rural native places.<sup>189</sup> Demobilized soldiers and Southern regroupées, if not received by government bureaus, were either sent to their native places (if they had one in the North) or mobilized to work on public projects.<sup>190</sup> The creation of public construction projects and working sites [*công trường*] was a remarkably effective, though rather short-term, solution to urban unemployment. The projects not only demonstrated the government’s will to industrialize and advance towards a modern, socialist state, but also practically employed untrained labors and unemployed workers crowding big cities to ask “their” government to take care of their welfare.

The types of projects that employed the largest number of people were: (1) fortification and construction of irrigation canals, river and sea dikes, (2) constructions of transportation infrastructures (railroad, provincial and national routes, waterways), and (3) construction of factories and reparations of urban infrastructures (schools, hospitals, government bureaus). Between 1955 and 1957, 11 projects to fortify major irrigation systems were initiated and completed, eight new irrigation systems were constructed, and two hydroelectric plants, Tà Sa and Nà Ngàn, in Cao Bằng province, were repaired.<sup>191</sup> The number of people employed on these projects were significant. The project to repair the Bái Thượng Dike along the Chu river, for instance, took place in the last four months of 1954 and employed 270 cadres, more than 7,000 “civil workers” [*dân công*], and three local battalions.<sup>192</sup>

By the beginning of 1957, the majority of important highways [*đường ô tô*] were repaired and 173km of new roads were built; several waterways were dredged, sea ports, especially the port of Haiphong, were repaired; airports were also repaired and became ready to receive international flights from China.<sup>193</sup> An important postwar reconstruction achievement of the DRV was the reparation and expansion of the railroad system. From late 1954 to 1957, 605km of rail line was repaired and newly constructed.<sup>194</sup> The most significant project was the construction of the 156-km rail line connecting Hanoi and China’s Munaguan [*Mục Nam Quan*](Guangxi province). The

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> “Kết quả giải quyết thất nghiệp từ khi tiếp quân đến nay”, BLD 58, TTLTQG-III, 39; “Số liệu Nam Định”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>190</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình đón tiếp quân đội, cán bộ đồng bào miền Nam cuối tháng 11 năm 1954”, PTT 100, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>191</sup> Directorate of Water Resources [Tổng cục Thủy lợi], “Ngành Thủy lợi trong kế hoạch ba năm khôi phục kinh tế 1955-1957,” accessed at: <http://www.tongcucthuyloi.gov.vn/Gioi-thieu/Lich-su-truyen-thong/catid/73/item/2596/nganh-thuy-loi-trong-ke-hoach-ba-nam-khoi-phuc-kin> .

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> “Dự thảo Nghị quyết của Hội đồng chính phủ về nhân định tình hình kinh tế hiện tại và nhiệm vụ phương châm công tác kinh tế văn hóa năm 1957 (20/02/57),” PTT 129, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

project lasted over six months (October 1954-February 1955) and employed in total 60,000 people.<sup>195</sup> The state's newspapers *Nhân dân* and *Lao động* promoted widely the project since its beginning. An article on *Nhân dân* dated 22 October 1954 and titled "The people nation-wide are eagerly participating in the construction of Hanoi-Nam Quan rail line" [*Toàn dân nô nức tham gia xây dựng đường xe lửa Hà Nội-Nam Quan*] portrayed the project as attracting volunteer participation from people of all class, age, and location.<sup>196</sup> *Lao động*'s column "The Capital's Workers" and *Sông Hồng*'s column "The Capital 24h" reported throughout December 1954 and early January 1955 the participation of hundreds of "unemployed youths and laborers" in Hanoi in the project.<sup>197</sup> Two months later, in April 1955, the state commenced an ever larger project to repair and expand the 285-km-long rail line that connected Hanoi and Lào Cai. The project took seven months to complete.<sup>198</sup>

If the RVN government managed to "farm out" its resettlement tasks to foreign governments (most significantly the United States) and non-governmental organizations (most importantly northern Catholic clergy), the DRV depended on aids from the socialist bloc and reorganized their own mass organizations to alleviate pressures on the Ministry of Labor and Ministry of Social Welfare [*Bộ Cứu tế Xã hội*].<sup>199</sup> While rice and consumption goods provided by other socialist states helped reduce inflation and provide non-wage benefits to DRV workers, machineries, tools, and raw materials helped revive industrial factories that became inoperable because of lack of machineries and materials, and build new factories.<sup>200</sup> By early 1957, 18 new

---

<sup>195</sup> "Tàu hỏa chờ tàu và vật liệu đã chạy suốt Hà-nội—Mục Nam-quan," *Sông Hồng* no.169 (12 Feb 1955); Thái Lộc, Quốc Minh, "Ga Đồng Đăng: Chứng nhân một thời máu lửa," *Thanh Nien Online* (05 Mar 2019), accessed at: <https://tuoitre.vn/ga-dong-dang-chung-nhan-mot-thoi-mau-lua-20190305100842826.htm> .

<sup>196</sup> "Xây dựng hòa bình: Toàn dân nô nức tham gia xây dựng đường xe lửa Hà Nội-Nam quan," *Nhân dân* no.243 (22 Oct 1954).

<sup>197</sup> "Lao động Thủ đô: Xung phong đi kiến thiết đường sắt Hà-nội—Nam-quan," *Lao động* no.284 (25 Dec 1954); "Lao động Thủ đô: Thêm 779 anh em được chính phủ gọi đi làm," *Lao động* no.287 (15 Jan 1955); "Thủ đô 24h: Lốp nghiên cứu của công nhân đi phục vụ đường sắt Hà-nội—Mục Nam-Quan đã bể mạt," *Sông Hồng* no.130 (27 Dec 1954); "Thủ đô 24h: Ngót 400 thành niên Lao động bị thất nghiệp đã có công ăn việc làm," *Sông Hồng* no.134 (31 Dec 1954); "Thủ đô 24h: Trước khi lên đường đi phục vụ đường sắt Hà-nội—Mục Nam Quan and em đã tập hợp để nghe cán bộ dặn dò," *Sông Hồng* vol.147 (14 Jan 1955)

<sup>198</sup> "Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955," PTT 119, TTLTQG-III; "Chương trình công tác kinh tế tài chính năm 1955," PTT 101, TTLTQG-III; Official website of the Youth Shock Brigades, "Thanh niên xung phong khôi phục và xây dựng CNXH ở miền Bắc", accessed at <http://thanhnienxungphong.vn/nhung-moc-son-lich-su-tnxp-viet-nam/thanh-nien-xung-phong-khoi-phuc-va-xay-dung-cnxxh-o-mien-bac-/106574> .

<sup>199</sup> Picard, "Fertile Lands Await," 70-72.

<sup>200</sup> Vu, "Workers and the Socialist State", 337-338; "Chương trình khôi phục kinh tế trong năm 1955," PTT 101, TTLTQG-III; "Dự thảo lần thứ hai Chương trình công tác từng ngành năm 1955," PTT 129, TTLTQG-III.

Tuong Vu focuses on how socialist bloc's aids were used to provide egalitarian non-wage benefits to workers in enterprises nationalized after the communist takeover of cities. Nonetheless it is not unreasonable to expand his narrative - that rice and consumption goods from other socialist countries were used for relief for not only state-employed workers, but also unemployed workers and other needy

industrial sites [*cơ sở công nghiệp*] were constructed and in construction.<sup>201</sup> A year and a half after the takeover of Nam Định, in on 25 December 1955, the Textile factory in Nam Định officially revived its operation. This was the result of technical aid from “friendly countries” [*nước bạn*] and six months of work (1 July - 25 December 1955) of foreign experts and Vietnamese engineers and workers.<sup>202</sup>

Besides demanding government bureaus and state enterprises to absorb as many as possible unemployed people in urban areas, the central government decided to re-initiate and reorganize the Youth Shock Brigades [*Thanh niên xung phong*], originally created in 1950 as one of the DRV’s war mobilization efforts and disbanded at the end of the First Indochina War, to serve the state’s reconstruction projects.<sup>203</sup> The organization effectively helped absorb and organize workers, demobilized soldiers, and Southern regroupes, and send them to construction projects all over the North. Brigade no.38, for example, absorbed over 2,000 Southern regroupes into their rank, and participated in the reparation and construction of the Hanoi-Lạng Sơn, Hanoi-Lào Cai rail lines, industrial factories and industrial zones in Haiphong, Việt Trì, Lâm Thao, Phú Thọ, and Quảng Ninh.<sup>204</sup>

At the end of 1955, the DRV government had managed to employ nearly 75,000 workers and laborers through “the reconstruction of industries, minor industries, manual industries, and the reconstruction of transportation and irrigation systems.”<sup>205</sup> These construction projects only worked as a short-term solution, however. After a few months of employment on a project, workers once again became unemployed and needed to look for other projects. According to reports from Hanoi and Nam Định in August 1955, a number of people worked on 2-6 different projects, most likely to sustain an income.<sup>206</sup>

Furthermore, despite the state’s propaganda on the benefits that participation in these construction projects would bring to workers and the whole nation, many workers were reluctant to leave the city and were unhappy with the working conditions in rural and remote areas. The

---

populations in the cities. The classified document from the State Cereal Corporation that Vu cites as evidence in this section reports the reaction of “the people of Hai Phong and Hong Quang” in general and not limited to that of “urban workers.”

<sup>201</sup> “Dự thảo Nghị quyết của Hội đồng chính phủ về nhân định tình hình kinh tế hiện tại và nhiệm vụ phương châm công tác kinh tế văn hóa năm 1957”, PTT 129, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>202</sup> “Khôi phục sản xuất, tiến hành cải cách ruộng đất (1955-1957) - Kỳ 1,” *Lịch sử Đảng bộ tỉnh Nam Định*, accessed at: <http://baonamdinh.com.vn/channel/5093/201507/lich-su-dang-bo-tinh-nam-dinh-khoi-phuc-san-xuat-tien-hanh-cai-cach-ruong-dat-1955-1957-ky-1-2430081/>.

<sup>203</sup> François Guillemot, “Death and Suffering at First Hand: Youth Shock Brigades during the Vietnam War (1950–1975),” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (2009), 22.

<sup>204</sup> Official website of the Youth Shock Brigades, “Thanh niên xung phong khôi phục và xây dựng CNXH ở miền Bắc”, accessed at <http://thanhniensexungphong.vn/nhung-moc-son-lich-su-tnxp-viet-nam/thanh-nien-xung-phong-khoi-phuc-va-xay-dung-cnxxh-o-mien-bac-/106574>.

<sup>205</sup> “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III, 14.

<sup>206</sup> “Kết quả giải quyết thất nghiệp từ khi tiếp quản đến nay”, BLD 58, TTLTQG-III; “Số liệu Nam Định”, BLD 59, TTLTQG-III.

Ministry of Labor, for example, hailed the promising effects of sending urban workers to participate in these projects:

- Cadres, workers, and the working class would gain more confidence in, and respect to Uncle Ho, to the Party and the Government; they would appreciate deeply [the state's] considerations [*sự quan tâm*] to workers' and laborers' livelihood
- Mobilization of workers to serve [on public projects] [*đi phục vụ*] offers them an opportunity to participate directly in national construction [*kiến thiết quốc gia*], it is also an opportunity for the workers' class to be united so that they are not dispersed [*tán mát*], that they could preserve their productive force to supply for the demands of reconstruction in the future; it also teaches them awareness of the collective [*ý thức tập thể*], raises their class consciousness [*giác ngộ giai cấp*], and teaches them the new concept of labor [*ý thức lao động mới*], contributing to strengthening the working class.
- The participation of workers and the working class [in public projects] not only shows them the value of their labor but also helps solidifying the political stance of cadres who will see clearly workers' capacity, creativity; [cadres] will have more confidence [in workers], and will genuinely rely on workers for the management of cities
- Employment of workers contributed to stabilizing the people's heart, stabilizing life and order in the city, and reducing the range of population that needed social relief fundings<sup>207</sup>

Workers, on the other hand, had their reservations: “When workers left for construction sites, before leaving they were often anxious [*thắc mắc*] that after their departure, the job that fit their profile and skill at home would be taken by another.”<sup>208</sup> Those still hesitating to take up the employment were further distressed by cases where a number of workers quit after only a few days of working and returned to the cities with stories about how “serving” on public construction sites was actually *corvée* labor [*đi phu*], the sites were faraway, and the environment “unhealthy” [*nuớc độc*]. The state discarded these accounts by branding them the “enemy’s scheme to create panic and sabotage national reconstruction.”<sup>209</sup> The state also blamed the lack of an established channel for communication between the construction sites and workers’ home cities as the reason why urban population “did not understand the workers’ condition in the construction sites,” and because of “counterrevolutionaries” activities, the people “only knew of workers’ concerns [*thắc mắc*] and complaints [*khiếu nại*].”<sup>210</sup>

In 1957, the RVN government proceeded with the phase of “Localization” and dissolved the General Commission for Migrants and Refugees [*Phủ Tổng ủy Di cư và Tị nạn*] - a move that, according to Jason Picard, resembled the state’s resolution to sweep under the rug Northern

---

<sup>207</sup> “Báo cáo tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị tổng kết 18/8/55)”, BLD 54, TTLTQG-III, 39.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 41.

migrants' issues rather than the closure of a successful campaign.<sup>211</sup> In the North, Ho Chi Minh's government was emerging from the land reforms (to be discussed in a latter chapter) and the initial phase of industrial and economic reconstruction. The public construction projects pursued since late 1954 not only solved urban unemployment in the short-term but also laid the foundation for the state's long-term control on the question of employment. The Youth Shock Brigades that were needed to absorb tens of thousand of workers between 1955 and 1957 were once again disbanded in 1957 (the organization was re-initiated only in 1960 for the First Five-year Plan).<sup>212</sup> By then the state had gained the capacity to provide long-term jobs to urban workers. The number of state-owned industrial facilities (enterprises, factories) rose from 41 in 1954 to 151 in 1957. With these facilities, the number of workers the state could employ long-term rose from nearly 21,000 in 1954 to over 48,500 in 1957. It was also in 1957 that the state initiated the military conscription program [*nghĩa vụ quân sự*] to replace volunteer enlistment [*tình nguyện tòng quân*], keeping a large number of youth occupied.<sup>213</sup>

In Nam Định, with the socialist bloc's technical aid, the Textile factory was restored and expanded. In 1956, the factory employed 10,094 workers, more than double the number of workers in the factory before takeover.<sup>214</sup> Peasants no longer flooded the city to find employment since the famine that ravaged rural areas were alleviated with good harvests throughout 1956 and foreign aids. (By the end of 1956, the government announced that the situation of famine in the countryside was over, though agricultural production was still "backward" [*lạc hậu*] and "determined by natural disasters" [*phụ thuộc thiên tai*].<sup>215</sup>)

Two points need to be made before this chapter concludes. Firstly, the chapter has presented the crisis of unemployment in Nam Định as it unfolded immediately after the takeover in July 1954 and how it was ameliorated and resolved throughout the three years after. It is important to keep in mind that, though the "liberation" of other cities between 1954 and 1955 exacerbated the situation of urban unemployment, amelioration of unemployment in Nam Định (and in other

---

<sup>211</sup> Picard, "Fertile Lands Await," 83-86.

<sup>212</sup> Official website of the Youth Shock Brigades, "Thanh niên xung phong khôi phục và xây dựng CNXH ở miền Bắc."

<sup>213</sup> "Đề nghị của Bộ Quốc Phòng về một số vấn đề cụ thể trong phiên họp của HĐCP ngày 7 tháng 6 năm 1956", PTT 123, TTLTQG-III; "Dự thảo Những vấn đề sẽ đưa ra thảo luận tại HĐCP trong năm 1957", PTT 129, TTLTQG-III.

Though the Law of Military Conscription [*Luật Nghĩa vụ quân sự*] was passed only in 1959, the Ministry of Defense was authorised to start military conscription program in certain chosen areas since 1954.

(LtCol. Nguyễn Thị Kim Quy, "Hợp mặt những người lính nghĩa vụ đầu tiên cả nước năm 1957," 07 Jul 2018, *Vietnamese Association of Truong Son - Ho Chi Minh Route* [Hội Truyền thống Trường Sơn-Đường Hồ Chí Minh], accessed at: [http://hoitruongsong.vn/tin-tuc/2121\\_52416/hop-mat-nhung-nguoi-linh-nghia-vu-dau-tien-ca-nuoc-nam-1957.htm](http://hoitruongsong.vn/tin-tuc/2121_52416/hop-mat-nhung-nguoi-linh-nghia-vu-dau-tien-ca-nuoc-nam-1957.htm) .

<sup>214</sup> "Khôi phục sản xuất, tiến hành cải cách ruộng đất (1955-1957) - Kỳ 1," *Lịch sử Đảng bộ tỉnh Nam Định*, accessed at: <http://baonamdinh.com.vn/channel/5093/201507/lich-su-dang-bo-tinh-nam-dinh-khoi-phuc-san-xuat-tien-hanh-cai-cach-ruong-dat-1955-1957-ky-1-2430081/> .

<sup>215</sup> "Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955", PTT 119, TTLTQG-III, 12.

cities) could not take place without the DRV's total control of Northern territory. This is because it was only with total sovereignty over the North that the DRV state could mobilize and move around human and material resources in a way that pressures and tensions in one location could be strategically dispersed throughout the territory.

The second point brings us back to the chronology of the book's narrative. In August and September 1954, workers in Nam Định were still suffering from unemployment, and the city's industrial and commercial activities were still facing an unclear future. Yet not a word of uncertainty was written on state-sanctioned newspapers. In the 37 issues of *Nhân dân* between the takeover of Nam Định and the takeover of Hanoi, articles on Nam Định highlighted how electricity, water, postal services were immediately resumed, how commercial and industrial activities were also reviving, and how former French-ASV state employees were well taken care of. Ho Chi Minh's government needed to assure the capital's population, among which were former French-ASV state employees and workers who held the keys to the maintenance of order and stability - the necessary condition for the establishment of the DRV central government in the symbolic heart of the country. The following two chapters will tell this story of the revolutionary government in the metropolis and capital Hanoi.



### Chapter 3: Revolutionary government in the metropolis: The first year

For several days before the official takeover of Hanoi, as the DRV government and army were preparing to make their grand entrance on 10 October 1954, heavy rain hindered the path of cadres and soldiers heading toward the capital for their new assignments.<sup>216</sup> But on the ninth of October, one day before the takeover, the rain stopped, replaced by pleasant breezes and light sunshine.<sup>217</sup> For those who had witnessed the Việt Minh takeover on 19 August 1945, the October 1954 takeover must have brought back memories of the autumn of nine years before. In August 1945, two months of heavy rain resulted in a breach in the Red River dike system north of Hanoi just one day before the date chosen to be the General uprising day.<sup>218</sup> In Hanoi and the surrounding suburbs, the weather had been highly unpleasant with “heavy clouds and torpid humidity.” But on the morning of 19 August 1945, it was “auspiciously sunny and breezy.”<sup>219</sup> At 11:00 A.M. as many as two hundred thousand people - workers, intellectuals, students, shopkeepers, peasants, villagers from the suburbs – had gathered at the Opera House to support the Việt Minh-organized rally and participate in the march to occupy important administrative buildings in Hanoi. While members of the Đại Việt Party and the Vietnam Nationalist Party [*Việt Nam Quốc dân Đảng*] met to discuss their “somber” position and future, out on the streets, the atmosphere was euphoric:

Revolutionary change was symbolized that evening by people removing the black air-raid blinkers on all streets lamps, giving a bright glow to the city for the first time in years. Viet Minh flags hung from hundreds of buildings. Thousands of citizens promenaded the sidewalks downtown, enjoying the new sense of freedom. People stopped to admire the new armed guards in front of public buildings, especially one proud sentinel in front of the Kham Sai’s Palace who sported a belt of ammunition strung across his chest. They also marveled at the huge flag fluttering from the tall lighting rod on the Palace. According to French sources, this makeshift flagpole collapsed at some point, provoking much superstitious comment. If so, it was only a shadow amid general cheerfulness. As one young participant ruminated, not in his wildest imagination could he have expected such a transformation in one day.<sup>220</sup>

Nine years later, the DRV government called the takeover of the capital a “return,” though the nature of the government that “returned” to Hanoi in October 1954 was undoubtedly different from that of 1945–1946. During the years after the outbreak of war in Hanoi in December 1946, Hồ Chí Minh’s government had hoped for another general insurrection like that of August 1945, but the city did not respond enthusiastically. Instead, control of Hanoi and Haiphong was negotiated at the Geneva Conference.<sup>221</sup> Nonetheless, 10 October 1954 was a day of celebration for all who were present in the capital. The writer Nguyễn Huy Tưởng had arrived in Hanoi a day before and described the morning of the 10th:

---

<sup>216</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, *Nhật ký Nguyễn Huy Tưởng*, 9-10; Phan Quang, *Từ nguồn Thạch Hãn đến Bờ hồ Gươm: Bút ký* (HCMC: Trẻ, 2016), 417.

<sup>217</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, *Nhật ký*, 9-10; Phan Quang, *Từ nguồn Thạch Hãn*, 420.

<sup>218</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 384, 393.

<sup>219</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 395.

<sup>220</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 401.

<sup>221</sup> Christopher Goscha, “Colonial Hanoi and Saigon.”

Soldiers march, amid cheers. People are packed. Soldiers carried flowers on their shoulders, their physiques small. Uniforms. [Shout] Long live President Hồ, v.v.. The infantries are at the back, anti-aircraft divisions, artillery divisions. Resonating cheers. Houses still have their doors closed. Today there appear Hanoi women, white trousers, *friser* hair. Hanoi is elegant, *frivole*. An old woman [commented]: How soothingly smooth.<sup>222</sup>

Like the 1945 takeover, the communist takeover of Hanoi in 1954 was observed closely and recorded extensively. For Hồ Chí Minh's government, the demonstration on the "liberation" day was a political message to all domestic and international observers that the DRV government was competent and confident, its army was professional but modest, and both were well loved by the people. Unlike the takeovers of cities in the frontiers in 1949–1950 and in the delta earlier in 1954, there was no disorder, no looting, little confusion, absolutely no public executions, and a lot of joy.

The smooth liberation day in Hanoi drew from the lessons of earlier takeovers in the frontiers and in the delta. But once Hanoi again became the capital of the DRV, policies, programs, and campaigns in Hanoi became the model for other cities. In other words, what happened in Hanoi foretold what would happen in the rest of the urban centers in the North. This is why this chapter and all the chapters that follow focus on the transition and transformations that took place in Hanoi.

This chapter takes us behind the closed doors of administrative offices and public institutions in Hanoi where the transfer of power took place and makes two arguments. First, it argues that the DRV state, despite its remarkable transformations throughout the First Indochina War, applied the same method of "grafting" onto the existing colonial apparatus, like every other government that came before it, to build its administration. Second, the chapter highlights the importance of "reemployed functionaries" [*công chức lưu dụng*] as the foundation for DRV state building upon efforts during the first years after the government expanded their control to the cities.

#### *A brief literature review*

Discussing nationalism in revolutionary states, Benedict Anderson argued in *Imagined Communities* that "even the most determinedly radical revolutionaries always, to some degree, inherit the state from the fallen regime."<sup>223</sup> He cited the examples of Soviet and Chinese revolutionaries:

Despite Trotsky's unease, the capital of the USSR was moved back to the old Czarist capital of Moscow; and for over 65 years CPSU leaders have made policy in the Kremlin, ancient citadel of Czarist power - out of all possible sites in the socialist state's vast territories. Similarly, the PRC capital is that of the Manchus (while Chiang Kai-shek had moved it to Nanjing), and the CCP leaders congregate in the Forbidden City of the Sons of Heaven. In fact, there are very few, if any, socialist leaderships which have *not*

---

<sup>222</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, *Nhật ký*, 11.

<sup>223</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), 159.

clambered up into such worn, warm seats. At a less obvious level, successful revolutionaries also inherit the wiring of the old state: sometimes functionaries and informers, but always files, dossiers, archives, laws, financial records, censuses, maps, treaties, correspondence, memoranda, and so on. Like the complex electrical system in any large mansion when the owner has fled, the state awaits the new owner's hand at the switch to be very much its old brilliant self again.<sup>224</sup>

In August 1945, Hồ Chí Minh's government took over the "worn, warm seat" in Hanoi, switching back on the "electrical wiring" of the "mansion" of the state. The communist Việt Minh eliminated its political competitors, purged from its ranks non-communist members, and started building a centralized government with Hanoi directing a hierarchy of regional and local committees.<sup>225</sup> But Hồ Chí Minh could not build an apparatus with communists alone. Like all those who had taken the seat of power in Hanoi before - the Japanese, the Chinese, and Vietnamese like Trần Đại Kim-Hồ Chí Minh's government made use of and depended on pre-existing institutions, elites, and personnel. David Marr asserts that in 1945, "administrative and technical systems remained largely intact-to be used by whichever leaders, political or military, domestic or foreign, happened to occupy the policy-making positions."<sup>226</sup> Tuong Vu notes the central role of colonial elites who had worked under Trần Trọng Kim in Hồ Chí Minh's government.<sup>227</sup> And Christopher Goscha highlights how in 1945-1946 Hồ Chí Minh and his allies appropriated the colonial state, retained thousands of French-trained functionaries, transformed the *Journal officiel de l'Indochine* into the official gazette of the DRV [*Công báo Dân quốc Việt Nam*], and made good use of the colonial policing system.<sup>228</sup>

Existing scholarship on state formation in the DRV, , suggests that the government that took over Hanoi in 1954 was different from that of 1945: more organized, more effective, more radical.<sup>229</sup> In *Vietnam: Un État né de la guerre 1945-1954*, the most comprehensive work to date on the formation of the DRV Party-state, Christopher Goscha describes how the First Indochina War shaped the construction of the DRV Party-state. Goscha's general narrative is this: In 1945, the newly established DRV state "grafted" itself onto existing colonial structures. At this point, the communist party's grip on the state remained weak. In 1946, with the outbreak of conflict in northern Vietnam, the state-in-construction [*État en construction*] transformed into the state-in-war [*État en guerre*]. The city played a decisive role in this transformation, because the materials, equipment, and personnel that the state-in-construction had come to control during its brief period of power in Hanoi were smuggled away before the war broke out and helped the DRV state survive and rebuild itself in rural areas. In 1949-1950, the DRV decisively aligned itself with the communist camp. With Sino-Soviet technical aid and ideological guidance, the guerrilla war became a modern, conventional war, while the communist party, through "totalizing" war efforts, strengthened its control on the state, the army, and the society. At the end of the conflict in 1954, the state-in-war had successfully transformed into a Party-state.

---

<sup>224</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 160.

<sup>225</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*; Marr, *Vietnam (1945-1946)*.

<sup>226</sup> Marr, *Vietnam 1945*, 351-352.

<sup>227</sup> Tuong Vu, "The Revolutionary Path to State Formation in Vietnam: Opportunities, Conundrums, and Legacies," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol.11, Issue 3-4 (2016): 267-297.

<sup>228</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*.

<sup>229</sup> Tuong Vu, "The Revolutionary Path"; Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*.

The subordination of the state to the structures and leadership of the communist party” is clearly shown in archival and party’s documents, but Goscha’s narrative of a bureaucracy that, by the end of the war, had succeeded in “creating a new pool of functionaries,” “transformed from top to bottom” is only partly true.<sup>230</sup> Before the victory at Điện Biên Phủ, Hồ Chí Minh’s government only had control over rural areas and a few towns along the Sino-Vietnamese frontiers, while important cities and urban centers in the delta were controlled by the French-backed ASV government. This rural-based government was, furthermore, “scattered” [*phân tán*] with “limited capacities” [*trình độ nhất định*].<sup>231</sup> And while both Goscha and Tuong Vu suggest that the purge that took place during land reform (also known as the “readjustment of the organization” [*chỉnh đốn tổ chức*]) “destroyed much of what remained of the colonial state” and created a state that was “fully under party control and committed to radical revolution,” it is important to point out, as will be argued in latter chapters, that before the end of the 300 days of open borders (22 July 1954–17 July 1955), important cities were sheltered from the effects of the land reform happening in the countryside, and functionaries who had worked under the ASV government played an essential role in establishing and stabilizing the authority of the DRV state in Hanoi.<sup>232</sup>

### *Preparations*

As mentioned in chapter 1, the success of the Border Campaign in the latter half of 1950 encouraged Hồ Chí Minh’s government and army to start preparing for a takeover of Hanoi by force. Documents prepared in late 1950 were included in the dossier of the takeover in 1954 for reference.<sup>233</sup> In a document titled “Plan for retrieving the enemy’s administrative office,” it was suggested that two things must be done before the “capture” [*đánh chiếm*] of Hanoi: investigate the situation (“administrative and technical apparatus, personnel, important operations”) and establish confidential contacts [*gây cơ sở*] in administrative offices, and fix and report plans for the capture of each office. It was predicted that powerful attacks from the PAVN would force offices of the central government and of the Northern territory [*Bắc phần*] to evacuate before Hanoi would be abandoned. From the experience of Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn, Viet Minh officials know that to hide their withdrawal, French and ASV officers and forces would not be able to destroy or evacuate large material and machinery, and hence their last-minute sabotage would not bring grave damages to existing infrastructure. Loss of and damage to public properties could happen, however, “partly because of lack of discipline on the battlefield, partly because of greedy people [*nhân dân tham lam*] with the intention of looting, partly because some functionaries may take advantage of the initial situation of disorder.” It was also predicted that high-ranking functionaries would flee, leaving only mid- and low-ranking officials behind. Toward these functionaries who would stay behind, the document stated:

---

<sup>230</sup> Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, Chapter 1.

<sup>231</sup> “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về tình hình mới, nhiệm vụ mới, chính sách mới của Đảng”, VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 283-315.

<sup>232</sup> Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path,” 282.

<sup>233</sup> “Hồ sơ về công tác tiếp quản TP Hà Nội và chủ trương chính sách của Đảng đối với nhân dân Hà Nội trong và sau tiếp quản năm 1954”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

- Our general policy is to re-employ [*thu dụng*] the enemy's functionaries, at first keeping intact the apparatus so that normal operations continue. Transferring and rearranging the system would be done gradually later.
- We only punish [*trừng trị*] immediately dangerous ones about whom we possess clear evidence, those not dangerous or suspicious, we will secretly investigate and show our attitude gradually later.
- We must pay particular attention to the issue of educating functionaries in order to gradually reform their thinking.<sup>234</sup>

In 1950 when this document was drafted, only three DRV bureaus had the organization and capacity to integrate functionaries of the ASV government into their system: municipal administration [*thị chính*], public security services, and communication services. Other branches of the administrative system were either “very weak” or “not yet organized.”<sup>235</sup> For the latter offices, a takeover would mean first placing DRV cadres in the highest position (of existing ASV offices) – a process which could be termed “grafting” – then a gradual change in personnel when the condition would allow:

In specialized offices [*cơ quan chuyên môn*] whose apparatus has not been organized yet [*chưa có tổ chức*] such as Finance, Agriculture, Law... or had been organized but were still very weak such as Health, Post Office, at first we will only send a high-ranking cadre to lead and direct the enemy's apparatus. Except functionaries guilty of grave crimes that must be punished according to the policies, we keep intact the old apparatus: every functionary remains at his position and rank. Gradually, we will integrate our people into the system.<sup>236</sup>

The DRV government planned to pay the equivalent of 35kg of rice per month to all functionaries from the Bảo Đại's government, stressing that it was a temporary regulation and adjustments would be made later. This was the minimum basic salary for DRV functionaries from 1950 to 1955.<sup>237</sup>

Soon after the victory at Điện Biên Phủ and the commencement of the Geneva conference, the DRV government started planning for their return to Hanoi. The DRV authority understood that the takeover of Hanoi would not simply be a takeover of a city like those that took place earlier. Indeed, it marked an important transition in DRV history. DRV agents in Hanoi, who had been sending monthly reports to the central government in Việt Bắc, started paying more attention to gauging the urban population's expectations of a future change of regime. The April–May 1954 report assessed that members of the working class were concerned about rising living costs and negative impacts on their employment. At the same time, tenants and landlords expected that

---

<sup>234</sup> “Kế hoạch thu hồi công sở của địch,” BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid.

<sup>237</sup> Hồ Chí Minh, “Sắc lệnh của Chủ tịch nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa số 81-SL ngày 22 tháng 5 năm 1950”; Phủ Thủ Tướng, Nghị định số 650-TTg (30 Dec 1955).

once Ho Chi Minh returned to Hanoi, rents would decrease, thus aiding the weak and weakening the rich. Civil servants feared for their future employment. The report zeroed in on the group that could be the most resistant to a successful takeover: “the biggest fears are of those who deserted from our army or collaborated with the army, they are afraid that once we come back we would persecute them, some among the civil servants worry the same thing,” “some capitalists, some high ranking civil servants are afraid of unwanted entanglements when we counter-strike so they have planned to sell their houses to buy gold or have thought of stockpiling dry provisions [*lương khô*], rice, and salt.”<sup>238</sup>

A month before the takeover of Hanoi, in early September 1954, the Politburo convened a meeting to discuss the “new situation, new responsibilities, and new policies” of the Party.<sup>239</sup> There were five great changes to the situation of the “people’s struggle” [*đấu tranh nhân dân*], the resolution of the meeting declared: (1) transition from war to peace, (2) temporary separation between the North and the South, (3) control of the DRV expanded from the countryside to the cities, (4) the scattered leadership during wartime could be concentrated and centralized, and (5) the relation among three countries Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia had changed. On the task of taking over cities, the resolution stressed the importance of maintaining order and normalcy:

The *most important* thing is “to prevent a state of chaos” [*phòng ngừa tình trạng hỗn loạn*]: prevent reactionaries, hoodlums, thugs hiding in the city from making use of the occasion to sabotage, prevent unorganized, undisciplined, disorderly activities that might occur among soldiers and units, among rural guerrilla militias and rural masses entering the city.

The first thing to do during the first period after entering the city is not to carry out social reforms but to protect public and private property, to prevent sabotage, to maintain social order and normal life in the city, to restore employment, restore the activities of markets, restart schools, to maintain the supply of foods and necessary goods, to maintain public services operations such as electricity, water, post, transportation, hospital, etc..o that all activities in the city could continue normally.<sup>240</sup>

On 17–18 September 1954, the DRV Government Council [*Hội đồng Chính phủ*], comprising Ho Chi Minh (President and Prime Minister of the DRV), the Vice-president Phạm Văn Đồng, and sixteen ministers and equivalents to the rank of minister, met to discuss policies regarding the upcoming takeover and programs for newly liberated urban areas. The meeting’s resolution announced the “Eight policies of the government of the DRV towards cities taken over in 1954,” which provided the framework on which order and normalcy were to be restored and maintained in a city after takeover. Four out of eight policies addressed sensitive groups and their concerns as reported since May 1954.

---

<sup>238</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình Hà Nội tháng 4 và tháng 5”, PTT 531, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>239</sup> “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về tình hình mới, nhiệm vụ mới, chính sách mới của Đảng”, VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 283-315.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 291-292.

## **Eight Policies of the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam towards cities newly liberated in 1954**

(Passed by the Government Council on 17 September 1954)

### **1. Protection of life and property of all people in the city**

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam Government is determined to protect life and property of all people in the city. The people, please maintain order. Please continue your life and work in peace.

Those who breach order, damage public goods, steal and rob, violate others' life and property will be severely punished.

### **2. Protection of industry and commerce**

All private factories, stores, banks, storehouses are protected, no one can violate [these properties].

Private production and commercial activities continue as usual.

### **3. Takeover and Management of state-owned enterprises and administrative offices of the French-Bao Dai regime**

All state-owned enterprises (factories, transportation companies, commercial offices, etc.), administrative offices, treasuries formerly belonged to the French-Bao Dai regime are now taken over and managed by the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

If there exist private properties in state-owned enterprises and treasuries, after thorough investigation, the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam will recognize the legal titles of ownership.

All those who are working in state-owned enterprises, administrative offices, treasuries are allowed to continue to work and are responsible for preserving machines, materials, and files and documents until the Government of the DRV assigns persons to take over. Those who contribute well to maintaining enterprises, administrative offices, treasuries will be credited and rewarded. Those who sabotage will be punished.

### **4. Protection of schools, hospitals, cultural and educational institutions, etc.**

Schools, hospitals, cultural and education institutions, stadiums, theaters, cinemas and other public infrastructures will be protected and allowed to continue their activities.

All those who are working in these places are allowed to continue to work.

### **5. Civil servants in administrative offices of the French-Bao Dai regime will be recruited according to merit**

All civil servants in administrative offices of the French-Bao Dai regime including gendarmes and former functionaries in civil districts are recruited according to merit; those kept in office receive the same salary as before.

Everyone must respect and practice the orders of the Government of the DRV, must preserve their office's properties and documents until the Government assigns persons to take over.

Those who intentionally damage [or] steal public goods, resist against the orders of the Government of the DRV will be severely punished.

### **6. Soldiers and officers in the French-Bao Dai army who remained in newly liberated zone, after presenting themselves to the authority, will be helped to return to their native place or be recruited according to their capacity.**

To maintain the security and order in the city and stabilize the society, all soldiers and officers in French-Bao Dai army who remain in newly liberated zone must present

themselves at the local Military-Administrative Committee and turn in all of their weapons. Those who present themselves, depending on the capacity [of the government] might be helped to return to live and work in their native place. Those who want to work for the government will be considered and recruited.

#### 7. Protection of life and property of Foreigners

Life and property of all foreigners (including French) are protected.

Within the limits of the DRV's law, foreigners are allowed to live and work freely.

All foreigners must respect the orders of the municipal Military-Administrative Committee and the law of the DRV.

#### 8. Exercise of liberal democracy, protection of religious freedom

The Government of the DRV guarantees liberal democratic rights for all Vietnamese citizens.

The Government also guarantees religious freedom for religious practitioners; it is forbidden to violate churches, temples, pagodas, shrines, and religious properties, or to violate the safety of religion followers.

All citizens of the DRV, including religious practitioners and followers, must abide by the law of the Government, must fulfill their civil responsibilities.

\*

All the people have the responsibility to follow correctly these 8 policies, to contribute to the maintenance of order in the city, to prevent and resist all sabotaging actions.

Those who make remarkable contributions to the maintenance of order will be rewarded.

Those who carry out sabotaging act will be strictly punished.

Cadres, employees of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Vietnamese people's military must maintain strict discipline, correct attitude, must buy and sell fairly, and not violate even the smallest property of the people.

We wish the people live and work in peace, wholeheartedly support and submit to the Government.

(This version replaces the previous version)<sup>241</sup>

It is important to note that another version of this document was announced in July 1954 on the Party's newspaper *Nhân dân* under the title "Policies towards newly liberated cities," and served as official guidelines in the takeovers between July and August 1954.<sup>242</sup> Compared to the previous version, this new version, published on *Nhân dân* twice, once on 25 September and on October 9, the eve of the takeover of Hanoi, under the title "Eight policies of the government of the DRV towards cities taken over in 1954," changed substantially in wording, as well as in the content of certain policies.<sup>243</sup> Firstly, there is a marked change in the way the announcement identified the official bodies involved in the takeover process. The term "the Government"

---

<sup>241</sup> "Tám chính sách của CP nước VNDCCH đối với các TP mới giải phóng năm 1954", BNV 3690, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>242</sup> "Chính sách đối với các thành thị mới giải phóng," *Nhân Dân* no.206 (19 July 1954): 1; "Chính sách đối với thành thị mới giải phóng", BNV 3660, TTLTQG-III;

<sup>243</sup> "Tám chính sách của CP nước VNDCCH đối với các TP mới giải phóng năm 1954", BNV 3690, TTLTQG-III; "Tám chính sách của CP nước VNDCCH đối với các TP mới giải phóng năm 1954," *Nhân dân* no. 231 (25 Sep 1954): 1; "Tám chính sách của CP nước VNDCCH đối với các TP mới giải phóng năm 1954," *Nhân dân* no. 236 (9 Oct 1954): 3.



[*Chính Phủ*] in the old version, as indicator of the policy enforcer, became “the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam” [*Chính phủ nước Việt Nam dân chủ cộng hòa*] in the new version. This specification could have several meanings. Before the takeover, the use of “The Government” meant to assert the unique authority of the DRV government as the only valid, recognized government of Vietnam. This authority was enhanced by calling the other government “the colonial and puppet regime” [*chính quyền thực dân và bù nhìn*] or “the enemy, collaborationist regime” [*chính quyền địch, nguy*], as was the case in pre-1954 public documents, including the previous version of the “8 policies.” Approaching Hanoi and being acutely aware of possible panic among those who could be considered as related to the French-ASV government, the DRV authority understood that a softer, more sensitive, more formal and orderly approach was needed. In the September 1954 version of the “8 policies,” which was publicized on DRV newspapers and disseminated among the DRV ranks and files in charge of the takeover of Hanoi, charged terms such as “colonial and puppet regime” in article no.3, “enemy, collaborationist regime” in article 5, and “remainders of the enemy and collaborators” [*tàn tích địch nguy*] in article no.6, were replaced by “the French-Bảo Đại regime” and “officers and soldiers in the French-Bảo Đại army.” A change in tone, starting from recognizing that a formal transfer of control between the ASV and the DRV was taking place, could go a long way in assuaging the fears of an anxious population in important cities. It is worth remarking here that internal documents of the DRV government were nonetheless still employing the same charged terms when mentioning the French-ASV government.

Secondly, certain important content related to post-takeover management of pre-takeover personnel was either modified or erased altogether. For instance, in article 3 on “Taking over and managing state enterprises and administrative offices of the French-Bảo Đại regime,” a whole paragraph in the older version was erased. This erased paragraph read: “After the Government has taken over, all those who want to continue to work in order to serve the people will be recruited by merit.” Another post-takeover recruitment-related paragraph in article 5 was also reworded. The original paragraph read:

All civil servants in administrative offices of the enemy-collaborationist regime, including guards and former neighborhood functionaries retain their position and rank and continue to work, but they must abide by and carry out the command of the the Democratic republic government, must protect properties and documents of their offices while waiting for the arrival of and takeover by assigned staff from the Government.

In the new version, recruitment process and standards were modified:

All civil servants in administrative offices of the French-Bao Dai regime including gendarmes and former functionaries in civil districts are recruited according to merit; those kept in office receive the same salary as before.

Everyone must respect and practice the orders of the Government of the DRV, must preserve their office’s properties and documents until the Government assigns persons to take over.

Changes in article 6 were even more remarkable. The original article read:

## 6. Toward remainders of the enemy-collaborationist regime

In order to ensure security in the city and reestablish social order, all remainders of the enemy-collaborationist regime still hiding must go and present themselves to the Military and Administrative Committee (of the town's Resistance Committee). Those who present themselves and turn in all weapons will not be prosecuted. Those intentionally hide themselves and their weapons, are not willing to present themselves will be persecuted [*trùng trị*].

Reviewers of the original version must have recognized the panic article no.6 would have caused among the myriad families whose sons had been drafted, by voluntary cooperation or by force, by the ASV, and thus decided to change to a much softer tone and to replace the threatening treatments by a lenient attitude:

6. Soldiers and officers in the French-Bao Dai army who remained in newly liberated zone, after presenting themselves to the authority, will be helped to return to their native place or be recruited according to their capacity.

To maintain the security and order in the city and stabilize the society, all soldiers and officers in French-Bao Dai army who remain in newly liberated zone must present themselves at the local Military-Administrative Committee and turn in all of their weapons. Those who present themselves, depending on the capacity [of the government] might be helped to return to live and work in their native place. Those who want to work for the government will be considered and recruited.

The “8 policies” created a guideline for interaction with the local population and employees of the former regime. For the technical aspects of the administrative takeover, the DRV authority demanded the establishment of a Military and Administrative Committee [*Ủy ban Quân chính*; UBQC] to supervise military and administrative operations during the first weeks or months of the takeover of a city with more than 30,000 inhabitants. A standard UBQC comprised regiment-level military chiefs, provincial-level administrative chiefs, chairs and vice chairs of provincial and municipal UBKCHC.<sup>244</sup> The UBQC of Hanoi (UBQCHN) was established following Government Council [*Hội đồng Chính phủ*]'s meeting on 17 September 1954; the Committee's members included: Major-General Vương Thừa Vũ (chair), doctor Trần Duy Hưng (vice-chair), and three committee members [*ủy viên*]: Lê Trung Toàn (first political commissar [*Chính ủy*] of the Regiment of the Capital [*Trung đoàn Thủ đô*]), Lê Quốc Thân (Director of the Interzone III's Department of Public Security), and Trần Minh Việt. Different from the standard UBQC which took over municipal governments, the UBQCHN took over the apparatus of both the municipal (Hanoi) and regional (Northern territory [*Bắc phần*]) governments. Its responsibility was not only to assure a smooth transition of municipal power in Hanoi but also to prepare for the installation of the DRV central government there. The UBQCHN was the highest authority in Hanoi until it was dismissed and turned its authority, on 17 November 1954, to the Administrative Committee [*Ủy ban Hành chính*; UBHC] of Hanoi comprising Trần Duy Hưng (chair), Trần Danh Tuyên (vice chair), Trần Văn Lai (head of literature-culture [*văn xã*]), Lê

---

<sup>244</sup> “Chỉ thị của Ban Bí thư ngày 3 tháng 7 năm 1954 về việc bảo hộ các thành phố mới giải phóng”, VKDĐT, vol.15 (1954), 151.

Quốc Thân (head of internal affairs [*nội chính*]), Hà Kế Tấn (head of municipal defense and security [*bảo vệ thành phố*]), and Khuất Duy Tiến (head of economics [*kinh tế*]).

### *Integration or Grafting?*

Basing on Christopher Goscha's arguments, in 1954, DRV governmental branches should have developed an organized apparatus and a pool of functionaries ready to take over the ASV government in Hanoi under the command of the UBQCHN. But governmental exchanges recorded in the archives show that there existed both a lack of qualified personnel and a lack of understanding of the urban condition (from unfamiliarity with the city's map to lack of expertise in technology and finance), so serious that the DRV apparatus needed re-organization and had to depend on the pool of ASV civil servants to achieve what they considered the most important task in an urban takeover - the maintaining of order and normalcy. In 1954, returning to the "warm, worn" seat of power in the former colonial capital when peace was restored, the DRV state that had matured in the countryside and through "totalizing" efforts during wartime seemed rather disoriented.

On 24 August 1954, almost a month before the first team of DRV officials entered Hanoi for organizing the takeover of state offices and factories, the UBKCHC of Hanoi (the UBQC was not yet established) sent an emergency dispatch to the Prime Minister's Office and ten different ministries to ask for more specialized cadres to assist their understaffed research team in researching and planning the takeover of "nearly 100 offices belonging to the enemy's central government, Northern territory government, and municipal government."<sup>245</sup> Whether the research and planning were done effectively afterward was questionable, as Thanh Chương [or Chung], a member of the UBQCHN commented in a report sent to the central government still in Việt Bắc that the UBQCHN lacked understanding of the situation of the "enemy-puppet" [*địch ngụy*]'s apparatus. Chương pointed out that there were many offices for which only their names were known, "but their function, the number of departments, the number of organs, officials, the number and identity of their workers before and now, [DRV cadres] don't know clearly." He pointed to the example of the finance sector where two cadres were assigned to take over each and every department, regardless of the size or importance of the departments, commenting: "this shows that [our] understanding of the enemy-puppet's finance offices is also weak [*kém*]." <sup>246</sup>

On 18 September, a team of six DRV cadres, two from the Prime Minister's Office, three from the Ministry of Home Affairs, and one from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, entered Hanoi to establish contact with the City Hall [*Tòa Thị chính*], High Commissioner's Office [*Cao Ủy phủ*], offices of the Palace [*Biệt điện*], and Northern Vietnam Chief Minister's Office [*Thủ hiến Bắc Việt*]. Five days later, on 23 September, seven more, including Nguyễn Văn Chi - Director of the Department of Personnel and Organization [*Vụ Tổ chức và Cán bộ*] of the Ministry of

---

<sup>245</sup> UBKCHCHN, No.04-VP/HC-HN, "V/v cử cán bộ nghiên cứu kế hoạch tiếp quản Hà Nội", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III; Nguyễn Văn Chi, "Báo cáo của Đoàn tiếp quản của Thủ tướng phủ, Bộ Nội vụ, và Bộ Ngoại giao (26/09/54)", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>246</sup> Thanh Chương, "Báo cáo tổng quát về việc chuẩn bị bộ máy và cán bộ tiếp quản", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

Home Affairs and the team's supervisor [*phụ trách đoàn*] - arrived in the city.<sup>247</sup> In a handwritten report on the activities of this team of 13 cadres dated 26 September, Chi wrote that he had lost contact with the six who had arrived before him so he couldn't tell how they were doing with their assignments. (Ending this sentence with suspension points, perhaps Chi himself could not explain how they had forgotten to make a plan for communication after entering the city.) Chi and the others were working on three tasks: researching the situation of offices to be taken over, adjusting the general takeover plan and preparing necessary documents and tools (flags, photos, banners, etc.), and studying policies and regulations. He asked the headquarters to send them a typewriter to type their reports and 200,000 *đồng* (on top of the 200,000 *đồng* already received before entering the city) with a promise that he would later send back a budget plan and a report on their spending.<sup>248</sup> A day later, Chi wrote an informal letter addressing "the Old mister" [*Cụ*] and "Brothers" [*các Anh*] - most likely members of the Politburo - and commented on how to organize the governing system in a changed situation:

The apparatus of Ministries, Committees must be reconsidered. The apparatus in peacetime [must be] strongly centralized, sophisticated [*tin h vi*].

We should make use of experiences from prior adjustments of the system [*chinh đon b máy*], our existing network of confidants, and refer to the experiences and documents of the adversary [*đoi phuong*], so that we can pre-arrange the apparatus and assist correctly the leadership.<sup>249</sup>

Chi was suggesting that in order for the DRV apparatus to be effective in peacetime, it should be one designed basing on not only the DRV's network and experiences but also on existing French-ASV system.

Chi's suggestion seems to have been born more out of necessity than simple practicality. In the same report by Thanh Chương cited earlier, which pointed out the lack of understanding of existing governmental apparatus, Chương also highlighted the shortage in number of DRV cadres. Communications between the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Central Bureau of Commerce [*Sở Mậu dịch Trung ương*] in mid-September regarding the allocation of new clothes and apparels to cadres "returning to the city" revealed that there would be around 3,700 DRV cadres taking part in the takeover of Hanoi in early October.<sup>250</sup> With this number of cadres to assign to different offices and bureaus, Chương reported that the UBQC had prepared "rather well" to fill in positions of director and vice-director [*chánh phó giám đốc*], but few of the positions of chief of department [*trưởng phó phòng*] were filled.

---

<sup>247</sup> "Kế hoạch tiếp quản các cơ quan của chính quyền Pháp và Bảo Đại thực Thủ tướng Phủ, Bộ Ngoại giao, Bộ Nội vụ (1954)", BNV 3691, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>248</sup> "Báo cáo của Đoàn tiếp quản của Thủ tướng phủ, Bộ Nội vụ, và Bộ Ngoại giao (26/09/54)", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>249</sup> Nguyễn Văn Chi to unspecified recipients, September 27, 1954, in BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>250</sup> The Ministry of Finance asked the Central Bureau of Commerce to provide "21,000 meters of khaki fabric in cement color, 10,000 meters of demi-fil fabric in white, 3,700 pairs of canvas shoes, 3,700 pairs of socks" for cadres entering Hanoi. (Ministry of Finance, "V/v trang phục cho cán bộ tiếp thu Hà Nội (17/09/54)", BNV 806, TTLTQG-III.)

Between the 2nd and the 5th of October, 246 cadres, divided into two administrative teams [*Đội Hành chính*], entered the city to negotiate and prepare for the official administrative takeover on the 10th. Among these cadres, 4 were French-Vietnamese interpreters, 21 were catering staff [*cấp dưỡng*], 12 guards, and 12 drivers, leaving 197 cadres whose assignment was taking over ASV offices.<sup>251</sup> Even if all 246 cadres were considered, taking into account the UBKCHC's report that there were nearly 100 offices to take over, on average each office was taken over by 2.5 cadres. There were cases where one DRV cadre was in charge of taking over multiple offices, Thanh Chương recounted, "such as comrade Bắc in Department of Propaganda [*Tuyên huấn*] who took over the puppet government's Ministry of Information, Bureau of Information, Bureau of Information of Northern Vietnam; comrade Cần in Department of Health also took over several offices by himself."<sup>252</sup> At the moment of the takeover in fall 1954, these 100 offices were staffed by about 12,000 ASV bureaucrats – this is only the number of ASV state employees who reported and presented themselves in order to keep their jobs, excluding those already left Hanoi or those did not want to present themselves.<sup>253</sup> By 11 October, 4,132 DRV cadres had arrived in the capital (these included both administrative cadres, and "order" [*trật tự*] staff such as public security agents and guards<sup>254</sup>) - a much larger number of cadres, but still rather small to dominate the existing administrative structure in Hanoi. Integration of the ASV apparatus in Hanoi was not yet possible - the DRV takeover apparatus lacked in both number of personnel and working capacity. (The task was not made easier by the fact that since May 1954 the DRV government had ordered the streamlining of their own administrative system and cut the number of cadres down by 10%.)<sup>255</sup> In February 1955, the DRV government evaluated the condition of their administrative system in the changed situation:

Our governing apparatus has not really been strengthened, not yet adapted to the change from war to peace, from the countryside to the cities, from dispersion to centralization. Our cadres are lacking in quantity, weak in quality. If we do not have an aggressive plan to amend the situation [*bổ cứu*], it will be difficult for our government to fulfill all the onerous tasks given by the new situation.<sup>256</sup>

The presence of a large number of *công chức lưu dụng* (*lưu dụng*) in Hanoi (to be discussed more in the next section) was an important, if not decisive, help to the goal of maintaining order and normalcy set by the DRV authority before the takeover. The first test to the new master in the old mansion - to use Benedict Anderson's metaphor - was to be able to turn on the electricity switchboard. This was literal in the case of the DRV. A symbol of colonial modernity, the two power plants in Hanoi had been lighting up the capital for more than 60 years, and supplied electricity for not only Hanoi but also Hà Đông, Hải Dương, and Hải Phòng. In 1954, eight DRV

<sup>251</sup> Thanh Chương, "Tình hình của đoàn cán bộ tiếp quản vào trước (9/10/54)", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>252</sup> Thanh Chương, "Báo cáo tổng quát về việc chuẩn bị bộ máy và cán bộ tiếp quản", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>253</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, "Chương III: Bộ Nội vụ trong giai đoạn của cuộc kháng chiến chống thực dân Pháp (từ cuối năm 1950 đến cuối năm 1954)" in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ* (Hanoi: NXB Chính trị quốc gia, 2005), accessed on 29 August 2020,

<https://www.moha.gov.vn/DATA/Uploads/image/admin/vanban/chuongIII.pdf>

<sup>254</sup> Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ Hà Nội, "Báo cáo công tác tổ chức từ khi chuẩn bị tiếp quản cho đến khi vào tiếp quản (11/10/54)", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>255</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, "Chương III".

<sup>256</sup> "Chương trình công tác nội chính 1955", PTT 101, TTLTQG-III.

cadres - two electrical engineers, one cadre “specialized in electricity” [*cán bộ chuyên môn điện*], two mobilization cadres [*cán bộ công vận*], and three cadres from the Ministry of Labor - were assigned to take over the power plants, but they “knew nothing about the condition of the plants, [and] had no plan.<sup>257</sup>” The normal functions of the plants were assured through the period of transfer of power (8 to 10 October) by 743 existing employees (both workers [*công nhân*] and functionaries) including five French technical experts. After the takeover, administrative and financial transactions posed a grave problem for these cadres: “financial works were done directly by French [employees], looking [into the process] would take a lot of time and require competence from the cadres, but our cadres had little experience, were technically weak, and knew nothing about finance.<sup>258</sup>” This lack of competence led to lack of confidence. The UBQCHN commented: “our cadres are still weak [*còn non*] in policy comprehension and political stance, they took over a factory but still have not correctly identified their position as masters [*vai trò chủ nhân*].” The report listed an example: the cadres did not know how to order the French experts to work; furthermore, “their working is sloppy, their manner defensive [*bao biện*], they don’t know how to properly use existing instruments in the factory.<sup>259</sup>” On 21 December 1954, Hồ Chí Minh paid a visit to the power plant in the city center. He made sure to raise the confidence of his cadres: “This factory now belongs to the people, to the Government, to you. You are the master [*làm chủ*] so you must tend to the factory and make it grow.<sup>260</sup>”

The takeover of administrative offices was not easier than that of factories where a large number of workers assured the newcomers, to some extent, of their base of support. At the former Department of Labor of Northern Vietnam [*Sở Lao động Bắc Việt*] - a government institution in charge of workers’ affairs - a team of 13 DRV cadres took over an office previously staffed by 27 employees.<sup>261</sup> Fifteen among the *lưu dung* had stayed behind, hoping to continue their work under the new government.<sup>262</sup> The department was renamed Labor Zone of Hanoi [*Khu Lao động Hà Nội*], though its organization and functions remained the same as before. The DRV team considered their takeover well-prepared and “rather neat,” but soon encountered difficulties: “our leadership still meets some difficulties and confusion in assigning works to [other employees], this is because assignments in the field of Labor relate very much to economic and financial policies, which employees have not been taught.<sup>263</sup>” But the *lưu dung* were not the only ones who lacked understanding of DRV policies related to their field: until

<sup>257</sup> UBQCHN-Ban Tiếp quản Nhà máy Điện Hà Nội, “Báo cáo về tình hình nhà máy điện Hà Nội”, BLD 60, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> “Bài nói chuyện của chủ tịch Hồ Chí Minh với cán bộ, công nhân Nhà máy điện Yên Phụ và Nhà máy đèn Bờ Hồ”, accessed on 31 August 2020, Official website of Vietnam Electricity: <https://www.evn.com.vn/d6/news/Bai-noi-chuyen-cua-Chu-tich-Ho-Chi-Minh-voi-can-bo-cong-nhan-Nha-may-Dien-Yen-Phu-va-Nha-may-Den-Bo-Ho-6-12-13840.aspx>

<sup>261</sup> These 13 DRV cadres took the following positions in the department: 1 director, 1 vice director, 1 chief of bureau of legislation [*pháp chế*], two alimentary staff, one typist, and 7 inspectors and researchers. These are inferred from “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>262</sup> UBQCHN-Ngành Lao động, “Báo cáo sơ kết công tác tiếp thu của Ngành Lao động (15/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III; UBQCHN-Sở Lao động, “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>263</sup> UBQCHN-Ngành Lao động, “Báo cáo sơ kết công tác tiếp thu của Ngành Lao động (15/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

August 1955, there was no official document with labor regulations, not to mention economic and financial policies related to labor; in other words, even the DRV cadres were not aware of these policies.<sup>264</sup> In fact, “lack of understanding of the policies” (either on the part of policy implementers or those subjected to the policies) was often cited in official DRV documents as the chief reason for unsatisfactory results, hiding more systematic problems.

A look at the relation between the “old” and “new” employees in this department could bring us closer to the reasons behind this complaint of “difficulties” and “confusion.” On 12 October, the department of labor of the UBQCHN reported that among 15 employees of the previous regime who stayed behind, 10 held important technical responsibilities: 1 chief of inspection bureau, 1 chief of technical [*chuyên môn*] bureau, 1 accountant, and 7 inspectors. The other five employees included 2 drivers, 1 typist, 1 telephone operator, and 1 errand-runner [*tùy phái*].<sup>265</sup> Ten days after the takeover, the new leaders of the department commented on the attitude of the old employees: “In general they were given assignments so they feel positive, there is a development in their thoughts: [they think] that they are all adept and all want to receive a worthy position.<sup>266</sup>” On 30 October 1954, a little more than two weeks after their first report, there were remarkable changes in the way the department listed the existing personnel: the chief of technical bureau and three inspectors disappeared from the list, in their places were a janitor, a secretary of correspondence, and two functionaries in charge of labor unions.<sup>267</sup> There are two possible explanation for the changes in the second report: either it was negligence on the part of the takeover cadres during the first days, or that the chief and inspectors were demoted or fired. In August 1955, the new leaders of the department of labor were still uneasy with certain old employees, they reported: “the majority have progressed,” but “a few of them are restless at work, arrogant [*tự kiêu tự phụ*] with their outdated knowledge.<sup>268</sup>”

DRV cadres at the department of labor were required to “follow closely to investigate the (family background) profile [*lý lịch*]” of the *lưu dung* in order to gauge their competence and assist them<sup>269</sup> in ideological matters. Each cadre who was not in the position of department or bureau chef was assigned to accompany at least one *lưu dung* in their daily tasks, to “talk to them to find out their concern [*thắc mắc*],” and to report these *thắc mắc* to higher-level chiefs so that the chiefs could “make them talk and explain to them.<sup>270</sup>” Accompanying the *lưu dung* could have also served as a way to tap into the experiences and networks that DRV cadres lacked as newcomers in the field. This would have been a great help to the DRV cadres because, like their comrades who took over the power plants of Hanoi, cadres who took over the department of labor, though more in number and seemed better trained for their assignments, also lacked

---

<sup>264</sup> Bộ Lao động, “Báo cáo Tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị Tổng kết 18/8/55), BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>265</sup> UBQCHN-Ngành Lao động, “Báo cáo công việc của cơ quan lao động ngày 12 tháng 10 năm 1954”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>266</sup> UBQCHN-Sở Lao động, “Báo cáo công tác của cơ quan lao động ngày 19, 20, 21 tháng 10-1954”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>267</sup> “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>268</sup> Bộ Lao động, “Báo cáo Tổng kết công tác tiếp quản các đô thị miền Bắc giải phóng của ngành Lao động (Báo cáo tại Hội nghị Tổng kết 18/8/55), BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>269</sup> “Tổng kết kinh nghiệm tiếp quản các thành phố mới giải phóng ở Liên khu 3, Tả Ngạn, Hà Nội”, BLD 54, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>270</sup> “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

confidence at the beginning. Reporting at the end of October 1954, the leadership of the department pointed out existing problems among their cadres:

- [The cadres are] anxious, worry, lost, confused with new assignments, unfamiliar with the city so each time [they] had to go out to do a task, [they] only want to go in pairs

[...]

- Meeting with [ASV] functionaries and seeing them dressing luxuriously and elegantly [*sang trọng*], [they] develop the thought that they must order new clothes right away to appear serious.<sup>271</sup>

Tensions from differences in professional competence, familiarity with the urban setting, and lifestyle, all contributed to the “difficulties” and “confusion” that DRV cadres felt in relation with employees of the previous regime.

Less than a month after the takeover of Hanoi, most likely taking into account the situation of the administrative takeover in Hanoi, the Government Council released a resolution with detailed policies regarding *công chức lưu dụng*. The resolution suggested maintaining the existing apparatus while DRV cadres study the system and gain professional knowledge.

In general:

- In workshops, factories (of such as electricity, water, railroad, public services, v.v..) [we] should maintain the old apparatus and not change the positions and ranks of functionaries and staff. Our cadres should only offer guidance, leadership so they work [accordingly], at the same time investigate the situation, look into professional knowledge

- In cultural and educational institutions, such as hospitals, schools, if it is evaluated that change is not necessary, [we] should maintain the positions and ranks of functionaries, even positions of chief should also be maintained. If [we] see a need to change, but not an urgent need, the best is to wait for a while and then change. It will create some obstacles in our works, but it is politically advantageous. Meanwhile our cadres could always be added into different organs for reinforcement and investigate the situation

- Toward functionaries whose job has a nature of repression such as in public security, prison, in important organs such as intelligence, propaganda, v.v..the general rule is that they need to be changed, sent to other types of work, and be replaced by our cadres. [We] still need to investigate carefully each job and each person to organize and use them fairly, at the same time not creating negative political effects in areas where the opponent’s army is still occupying<sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>271</sup> “Báo cáo Về công tác tiếp thu (30/10/54)”, BLD 40, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>272</sup> “Quyết nghị của Hội nghị HĐCP về chính sách cụ thể đối với công chức mới (Phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ ngày 3-4 tháng 11 năm 1954)”, PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.



Besides being compatible with the general line of “winning the favor of all class” and “unifying with all those unifiable” declared in party’s documents between September 1954 and March 1955, the “grafting” approach was essential to the establishment of the DRV apparatus in urban areas in general and in the capital in particular.<sup>273</sup>

### *Strength in numbers*

The takeover of important cities and the goal of reviving the national economy meant that the DRV government assumed novel responsibilities: maintaining and utilizing modern transportation infrastructures (such as national routes, railroad, sea and river ports), and managing and developing industrial and commercial activities in urban centers previously under French-ASV control. These new responsibilities in a “new condition” demanded an expansion of the DRV apparatus.<sup>274</sup> After the takeover of Hanoi, all ministries were expanded and by September 1955, four new ministries were established: Ministry of Industry [*Bộ Công nghiệp*], Ministry of Commerce [*Bộ Thương nghiệp*], Ministry of Water Resources and Construction [*Bộ Thủy lợi và Kiến trúc*], and Ministry of Social Welfare [*Bộ Cứu tế*]. By the end of 1955, the number of offices and departments under DRV ministries rose from 58 to 121 units “to undertake new assignments.”<sup>275</sup> The number of personnel in the administration rocketed: the total number of cadres and regular staff (those became “*biên chế*”) doubled from 1954 to 1955; in the first nine months of 1956, each month there were on average 1,100 more cadres added into the administration, totaling 135,000 in September 1956.<sup>276</sup> The biggest increase in personnel was in the central apparatus: from over 5,300 in 1954, the number increased ninefold, to over 48,300 at the end of 1955.<sup>277</sup> Remarkably, in June 1955, in a resolution by the Party’s secretariat, the Party was still calling for efforts to “overcome the situation of lack of cadre.”<sup>278</sup> The resolution set a motto regarding recruitment: “Weak cadres are better than no cadre” [“*thà yếu còn hơn thiếu*”] and “Lacking is better than rushing” [“*thà thiếu còn hơn ẩu*”].<sup>279</sup> Looking at the spike in the number of DRV personnel at the end of the same year and in later years, it seems that the first motto was preferred and much better applied.

Though it is clear that the new ministries and the added personnel were to cater to the new responsibilities of the government after the takeover of industrial and commercial centers previously not under DRV control, the rapid expansion could have also been a reaction to the presence of a large number of former ASV functionaries that the DRV government (still) had to

---

<sup>273</sup> “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về tình hình mới, nhiệm vụ mới, chính sách mới của Đảng”, VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 288; “Tình hình hiện tại và nhiệm vụ trước mắt (Báo cáo của Đồng chí Trường Chinh ở Hội nghị Trung ương lần thứ 7 mở rộng (từ 3 đến 12-3-1955)”, VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1955), 111.

<sup>274</sup> “Nghị quyết của Bộ Chính trị về tình hình mới, nhiệm vụ mới, chính sách mới của Đảng”, VKDĐT, vol. 15 (1954), 291-292.

<sup>275</sup> “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955”, PTT 119, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>276</sup> The number continued to rise until put under control in 1959. See: Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương IV” in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ*.

<sup>277</sup> “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955”, PTT 119, TTLTQG-III; Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương IV” in *Lịch sử Bộ Nội vụ*.

<sup>278</sup> “Nghị quyết của Ban Bí thư số 17-NQ/TW Ngày 3 tháng 6 năm 1955 ‘Về ông tác tổ chức năm 1955’”, VKDĐT, vol.16 (1955), 320.

<sup>279</sup> “Nghị quyết của Ban Bí thư số 17-NQ/TW Ngày 3 tháng 6 năm 1955 ‘Về ông tác tổ chức năm 1955’”, VKDĐT, vol.16 (1955), 321.

depend on. The number of ASV functionaries who stayed in Hanoi after October 1954 appears inconsistently in different sources. The first number was in Thanh Chương's report dated 9 October 1954: 3,027 staff were present in 22 ASV regional and municipal offices and departments.<sup>280</sup> Two days later, on the 11th, Ngô Quang Đạo reported on behalf of the Party committee of Hanoi [*Đảng bộ Hà Nội*] that 721 functionaries of the former government were "reemployed" [*lưu dụng*].<sup>281</sup> In November 1954, it was reported in an official document that 13,000 ASV civil functionaries became *công chức lưu dụng*, and 5,000 others (mostly functionaries in the ASV army) would soon be reemployed. On 3 November 1954, the Party committee of Hanoi reported to the Government Council that 6,977 ASV civil functionaries presented themselves to DRV representatives to be considered as *công chức lưu dụng* (out of 10,931 civil functionaries presented in Hanoi before 23 July 1954.) An addition of 3,596 military functionaries also presented themselves, raising the number of ASV functionaries in Hanoi to 10,573.<sup>282</sup> The Ministry of Home Affairs reported that 9,610 *công chức lưu dụng* (all civil functionaries) were employed in the central administration and in Hanoi municipal government<sup>283</sup> in 1954. In 1955, this number was 11,569.<sup>284</sup> In 1955, it was reported that nearly 20,000 former ASV functionaries were identified and were looking to find a position in the new system.<sup>285</sup> The lack in quantity and in quality of DRV cadres and the urgent need to maintain normalcy and revive industrial and commercial activities in big cities like Nam Dinh, Hanoi, and Haiphong pressured the new authority to keep the former system running, assuming symbolic leadership through grafting onto the existing system and placing their few cadres at the positions of chiefs and directors.

In 1954, it would have been impossible for the 5,000 cadres in the central DRV government to "integrate" the 16,899 former ASV functionaries, out of which 11,569 were in Hanoi, into their system. Their first effort in retelling the story of the administrative takeover was in early November 1954, when the Government Council announced that functionaries who had worked for the French-ASV government and were reemployed by the DRV government would be referred to as "new functionaries" [*công chức mới*] "to distinguish them from old functionaries [*công chức cũ*]" who had been working in the DRV government since before the takeover in 1954.<sup>286</sup> Nonetheless, it was these "new functionaries" who had a larger presence and importance to the life of the new centers of the DRV. But at the end of 1955, with more than 90,000 cadres-functionaries in the national system, more than 48,300 of which employed in the central apparatus, integration of the French-ASV system into the DRV structure seemed more plausible.

This chapter has shown the big picture of master plans and policies concerning the establishment of the DRV bureaucracy during their first year in Hanoi. It has argued that: despite

---

<sup>280</sup> Thanh Chương, "Tình hình của đoàn cán bộ tiếp quản vào trước (9/10/54)", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>281</sup> Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ Hà Nội, "Báo cáo tổng quan về công tác tiếp quản thủ đô Hà Nội ngày 09-10 đến ngày 31-10-1954", PTT 99.

<sup>282</sup> Ban Chấp hành Đảng bộ Hà Nội, "Báo cáo tổng quan về công tác tiếp quản thủ đô Hà Nội ngày 09-10 đến ngày 31-10-1954", PTT 99.

<sup>283</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, "Chương III."

<sup>284</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, "Chương IV."

<sup>285</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, "Chương IV."

<sup>286</sup> "Quyết nghị của Hội nghị HĐCP về chính sách cụ thể đối với công chức mới (Phiên họp Hội đồng Chính phủ ngày 3-4 tháng 11 năm 1954)", PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

having developed an apparatus fitting for the wartime and rural condition, Ho Chi Minh's government lacked the capacity to ensure order and normal functioning in the urban setting, which led to their "grafting" on pre-existing colonial structure and their dependence on former employees of the Bảo Đại's government. In the next chapter, we will study the DRV government from the inside: as we follow three personal stories of three DRV state employees in Hanoi, we will examine the three groups of urban DRV state employees - *cán bộ*, *công chức*, and *công chức lưu dụng* - and get a sense of how master plans affected individuals and how individuals themselves found their ways to exploit the weaknesses in the system to their benefits.

## Chapter 4: The Making of the DRV công chức

The morning of 10 October 1954, as the People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) soldiers marched into the Old Quarter, a young musician with his guitar was waiting among the crowd at the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục square to sing his welcoming songs. He had prepared for three months and had secretly taught the song to a few people who went on to teach other people, so that on 10 October, a couple hundred people could sing along while the PAVN soldiers were marching by. Not too far away, at a corner of Hàng Đào street, a young, French-trained doctor of the Yersin Hospital found a place among the crowd. He played the accordion to his own music of celebration, failing for a moment to consider what the future of someone who had worked for the previous regime might look like. As the soldiers followed the route along the Hoàn Kiếm lake, they passed in front of the Post Office of Hanoi. Inside this symbol of colonial modernity, a young engineering student was diligently learning from a senior French-trained engineer how to operate technical machines - he had heard their names during his classes in the jungle but had never seen them nor had any idea how to make them work.<sup>287</sup> All three young men would become DRV state employees and spend the rest of their life in the capital: Nguyễn Văn, the musician, became a teacher, Nguyễn Hiếu, the doctor, continued to work in the hospital, and Phan Việt, the engineer, passed his days in the technical room at the post office before moving up to higher positions in the Ministry of Posts & Telecommunications during the 1960s and 1970s.

Chapter 3 has presented the master plan where the DRV state grafted its cadres onto the colonial apparatus and its personnel systems. In this chapter, the stories of Nguyễn Văn, Nguyễn Hiếu, and Phan Việt will guide our explorations into the lives of the individuals who made up the urban DRV bureaucracy, answering questions such as: Who were DRV state employees? Where were they from? What kind of trainings did they receive? What did the city mean for them? We will explore how individuals experienced different stages of the construction of the DRV administration in the capital: from colonial grafting and technological transfer in the early years, purging “colonial residues,” to building a new generation of “red experts” in the latter half of the 1950s.

### *Revolutionaries in the city: Dressing like “Hanoians”*

Phan Việt was born and grew up in the city of Thái Nguyên, a medium sized city about 75km north of Hanoi. He attended *franco-indigène* school for six years and high school in the DRV zone for three years. In 1953 he was admitted to the DRV's jungle-based College of Transportation and Public Works [*Cao đẳng Giao thông Công chính*] and was trained in telecommunication. In early 1954, in preparation for the battle at Điện Biên Phủ, he was mobilized to build a communication line from Thái Nguyên to Lạng Sơn, then from Lạng Sơn to China. After the DRV victory in Điện Biên Phủ, Việt was ordered to stop working on the line and to become a member of the takeover team of the Hanoi Post Office. At 19 years old, Việt was one of the 246 DRV cadres who entered the city between 2 and 5 October 1954 to prepare

---

<sup>287</sup> Nguyễn Văn, interview by Uyen Nguyen, March 18, 2019 in Hanoi; Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by Uyen Nguyen, May 22, 2019 in Hanoi; Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi. Names and identifying details have been changed to protect the rights and privacy of interviewees.

for the official takeover.<sup>288</sup> He recounts his participation in the operation of Điện Biên Phủ and his journey until his arrival in Hanoi:

It should have taken us six more months of study to be able to graduate. But six months before graduation, they asked us to stop and go through political training. Ideological work was very important for them. Even though they were materialists [*duy vật*], they cared a lot about ideals [*tu tưởng*]. They wanted to resolve all our ideological problems: how to hate the enemy, how to not be afraid of the Americans, how to love our class, how to serve the Party. They gave us ample time to study. After that we went back to our school and prepared to go to work.

We went to build a long telephone line from Thái Nguyên – because [the DRV] headquarters was in Thái Nguyên at the time – to Lạng Sơn in order to build a direct contact line to China. While we were in the middle of the project, the battle of Điện Biên Phủ was won, and so we were allowed to return to school. After a couple of months of hasty trainings, they let us graduate. Our exam was very casual, not as formal and strict as normal.

After our graduation, I set out to the meeting point, then I walked day and night [toward Hanoi]. But before entering the city, I got to change into new clothes, put on a new pith helmet, and was even given a new pair of shoes. Our costume then would seem funny nowadays. Then we entered the city for the takeover.

The fact that Việt was allocated new clothes and ordered to change before entering the city is more than an indication of the formality of the occasion. A change of clothes also signaled to the DRV cadres - who had been living and working in the rural areas - that they were entering a new space with different standards of behavior and personal presentation than the “free zone.” . During the war, when the territory was divided into DRV zones and French-ASV zones, outer appearance was a clear pointer to one’s affiliation. The stories of Nguyễn Bắc, an undercover Việt Minh agent in Hanoi between 1951 and 1954, demonstrate vividly the different approaches to dressing between the two zones: A short time after his entrance into Hanoi in 1951, Nguyễn Bắc went out for a haircut. Listening to the way Bắc talked, observing his behavior, and recognizing the bad quality of the fabric and the buttons on his clothes, the hairdresser casually asked Bắc if he was from the “free zone.”<sup>289</sup> A terrified Bắc paid the hairdresser, thanked him, and rushed out of the door. He never again returned to that hair salon.

In 1953, the writer and journalist Vũ Bằng, who had lived in both DRV zone and in Hanoi, summarized the differences between the two zones regarding the question of outer appearance:

In the liberated zone, everybody wears *áo cánh* [formal button-up shirt with two pockets in upper front], *quần nâu* [brown long pants with bottom hems fastened with a button]: that is normal, and everybody looks like each other so nobody pays attention to outer appearance. But it is different in the city: clothings represent the value [*giá trị*] of the

---

<sup>288</sup> Thanh Chương, “Tình hình của đoàn cán bộ tiếp quản vào trước (9/10/54)”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>289</sup> Nguyễn Bắc, *Giữa thành phố bị chiếm*.

wearer, those who dress cheap are despised [*khinh*], those who wear luxurious clothes receive special treatments [*biệt đãi*], and so we don't find it strange to see people pay much attention to their attire, we even find it reasonable.<sup>290</sup>

By supplying new clothes to cadres and soldiers entering Hanoi, the DRV authority conformed partly to the urban standards. But it is important to highlight that the question of new clothes for cadres entering the city only arose during preparation for the takeovers of Hanoi and Haiphong. Only two months before the takeover of Hanoi, from Nam Định - the third largest city in the North, the Military Command of Nam Định [*Thị Đội Nam Định*], which was in charge of military and administrative affairs of the city during the first month after the takeover (1 July), complained to the Military Command of Interzone III [*Bộ Tư lệnh Liên khu III*] about their lack of basic needs, including clothes:

About spring-summer military clothes: it is the end of July yet cadres and soldiers [*anh em*] have not received any clothes, so in general both cadres and soldiers don't have enough clothes, a number of cadres and soldiers even have to borrow clothes to wear and when it is not possible to borrow they have to stay half-naked, wearing only shorts when their clothes are being washed.<sup>291</sup>

It seems that the symbolic importance of and international attentions to the takeover of Hanoi and Haiphong pushed the DRV leadership to concentrate their limited physical and human resources on the takeovers of these two metropolises. The closer DRV cadres and soldiers got to the capital, the more significance the question of outer appearance became. As mentioned in chapter 3, in mid-September, involved ministries (Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Finance, and Central Bureau of Commerce) were in communication to prepare new clothes for cadres entering Hanoi in October. The Ministry of Home Affairs wrote to the Ministry of Finance:

To Anh Do with respect:

Today I am sending you an express communication (by official dispatch) a plan and standards on allocating clothes to cadres and officials returning to Hanoi.

This plan has been approved by the Prime Minister's Office and is being carried out. This task is necessary. Our cadres and staff have been living in the jungle for a long time, they don't have enough clothes and dress without care, in the near future after returning to the city we will need to provide so that their living standards are at approximately the same level with the everyday standards of the urban population.

On the other hand, a few cadres with titles [*có cương vị*] have to meet with foreign guests or have direct contact with various classes among the people, and they need to dress

---

<sup>290</sup> Vũ Bằng, “Hà Nội trong cơn lốc (1953)” [Hanoi in the whirlwinds (1953)] in *Hà Nội trong cơn lốc*, ed. Võ Văn Nhơn (Hà Nội: Phụ nữ, 2010), 28.

<sup>291</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình hoạt động của đơn vị trong tháng 7 (10/08/54)”, UBKCHC-LKIII, TTLTQG-III.

properly. This is not only a matter of granting privileges [*chiếu cố*] to these cadres, but also a matter of keeping face [*thể thống*]. We should not be too strict [on provisions].<sup>292</sup>

The Ministry of Finance responded promptly by sending, on 17 September, a dispatch to the Director of the Central Bureau of Commerce [*Sở Mậu dịch Trung ương*] requesting materials to prepare formal uniforms for officials participating in the takeover of Hanoi: 21,000 meters of khaki fabric in cement color, 10,000 meters of demi-fil fabric in white, 3,700 pairs of canvas shoes, 3,700 pairs of socks. The Bureau of Commerce was also asked to quote the price of a set of formal apparel including a pith helmet [*“mũ bọc vải (casque)”*], a formal shirt [*áo sơ mi*], a set of khaki clothes, a leather bag, and a pair of leather shoes - most likely intended for “cadres with titles.”<sup>293</sup>

The chief of the Central Bureau of Commerce responded two days later, in a hand-written letter, apologizing that they would not be able to fulfill the requests because official communications were slow and more importantly, they did not have any of the requested materials ready except 25,000 meters of lower quality khaki fabric in Thái Nguyên and Cao Bằng. The letter suggested that the requested standards were not “overwhelming” [*quá đáng*] but “far from reality” [*không sát với thực tế*], which, together with the shortness of notice, put involved bureaus into a shameful state [*lúng túng*].<sup>294</sup> The letter suggested allocating ready-made apparel to officials entering Hanoi on October 10, and those who would need new clothes earlier to take over Hà Đông on October 6 should be given money to order their clothes at local tailors. This matter of “proper dressing” continued to be raised during the preparation for the last takeover in the North in early 1955 - the takeover of Haiphong. A dispatch from the Minister of Finance to the Minister of Home Affairs highlighted the fact that in the zones around Haiphong, which would be taken over at the same time as the city, many foreigners could be found and thus officials in charge of the takeover must dress “rather correctly” [*tương đối chỉnh tề*].<sup>295</sup>

Among the DRV cadres and officials who arrived in Hanoi around 10 October 1954, those who were of urban background, such as the writer Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, felt early on the effects of the city on the revolutionaries. The moment that Tưởng, who was educated in Haiphong and had spent a long period of his adult life in Hanoi and Haiphong, saw the streets of Hanoi again after nine years in Việt Bắc, he felt overcome by a desire for a comfortable life, then startled at how poorly he was dressed:

In my mind: pride. I dream [*mơ mộng*] of a leisured life [*cuộc đời an nhàn*], in a house with my own bedroom. My own space for working. My children go to school. Our truck passes the streets of Hanoi. It hasn't changed from the past. I feel that I dress in a rustic manner [*quê mùa*], a shirt made from raw cotton [*áo phin*], a pair of trousers tightly hemmed [*quần hẹp ống*], the sewing is bad. But I have the value of a resistance-war person [*người kháng chiến*].<sup>296</sup>

<sup>292</sup> Phòng cán bộ Bộ Nội vụ, “Về việc sắm trang phục cho cán bộ, nhân viên về thành (14/09/54)”, BNV 806, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>293</sup> Ministry of Finance, “V/v trang phục cho cán bộ tiếp thu Hà Nội (17/09/54)”, BNV 806, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>294</sup> “Letter to Mr. Đắc (19/09/54)”, BNV 806, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>295</sup> Ministry of Finance, “Trang phục cho cán bộ tiếp quản khu 300 ngày (28/02/55)”, BNV 806, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>296</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, *Nhật ký*, 10.

A well-known writer and a high-ranking cadre in the cultural apparatus of the DRV, Tưởng could assert that his “value of a resistance-war person” was more important than the quality of his clothes. But for his comrades who had known neither Hanoi nor the way of life in the city, the encounter with the capital city was disorienting. Phan Việt, our young engineer student who participated in the takeover of the Post Office of Hanoi, had never been to Hanoi before October 1954. He was also filled with thoughts and anticipations upon arriving in the capital:

Before entering Hanoi, they have already taught us, very carefully: that when we go into the city there will be many temptations [*cám dỗ*], so we must keep our discipline, and that each time we go out, we must go in pairs and not wander around alone. Discipline was very strict.

Actually, Hanoi had been a lifelong dream for me, ever since I was little, I had wished to be able to go to Hanoi one day, to study at the *École Pratique* [*Trường Kỹ nghệ*], or maybe to pass the baccalaureate exam and become a state official [*làm quan*] - when I was little I could only think that far - or else become a doctor.

When I went to Hanoi, I saw that it really was a capital! But I had lived in the city of Thái Nguyên, which was also a very beautiful city, so I was accustomed to living in the city. In Hanoi, it was only a magnification [of Thái Nguyên]. In general I knew how to live in the city [*sinh hoạt ở thành phố*], how to obey traffic rules and preserve public hygiene [*vệ sinh công cộng*]. All that I had known already.<sup>297</sup>

Two discourses stand out from Việt’s reflections: first, the city was a place with its own code of conduct, its own living style and manners, that new arrivals needed to learn; second, the city was a place of temptations for revolutionaries. During the first month after arriving in Hanoi, like other cadres and officials from the “free zone,” Việt stayed at the Đồn Thủy hospital (current-day 108 Hospital). Cadres ate, cleansed, slept, and studied their assignments at the hospital. Before the official takeover date, they were not allowed to venture out by themselves and could only be delivered to their respective offices by military trucks.<sup>298</sup> After the takeover, those who had families in Hanoi needed to receive permission before they could visit their families. Discipline was strict, as Việt recounts. These measures were most likely aimed at restricting the “free zone” cadres’ contact with the city and its inhabitants so that breaching of the urban code of conduct could be avoided and a positive image of DRV cadres and officials could be maintained.

The Ministry of Home Affairs recorded that the majority of cadres were curious about the city and wanted more freedom to go sightseeing, trying out Hanoi delicacies, and buying goods. Despite strict surveillance, curious cadres, older and more experienced than Việt, found ways to see the city: “there were cadres whose turn to get a haircut has not come yet, but they asked to go get a haircut anyway so that they could see the city (Department of Films); some others were assigned to go to a certain street but wandered around [*đi chơi*] in other streets as well (Public Security)<sup>299</sup>”; “Comrade Vinh (Post Office) went out on an assignment but could not find the

---

<sup>297</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ tiếp quản và viên chức địch hôm 12/10/54”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.



address, so he coasted on the bicycle [*rong chôi*] for an hour and a half before returning to report [that he couldn't find the address.]”<sup>300</sup>

Controlling revolutionaries' contacts with the city could also “protect” them from possible “temptations”. The leadership, with access to the documents related to earlier takeovers, would still have remembered how the urban condition “corrupted” DRV cadres and soldiers during the takeover of Lạng Sơn four years earlier (Chapter 1). Recorded talks by Ho Chi Minh between early September and early October 1954 with cadres and soldiers before their entrance to Hanoi highlighted the dangers lurking in the city and stressed the importance of discipline in retaining revolutionary spirit. On September 5, Ho Chi Minh advised soldiers and cadres gathering in the suburb of Hanoi:

There might be some people who were brave and heroic [*anh dũng*] during the resistance war, were not daunted by enemy bombs and bullets, but when they arrive in the city, they are seduced by riches [*tiền bạc*], by beautiful girls [*gái đẹp*], then lose their political stance [*lập trường*], and sink into sin. Therefore the enemy's firepower are not as dangerous as “sugar-coated bullets” [*đạn bọc đường*], because they harm us without us perceiving them. In order to preserve morality [*nhân cách*], cadres and soldiers must always be the role model in every aspect, must keep practicing the four words: “diligence [*cần*], frugality [*kiệm*], uprightness [*liêm*], integrity [*chính*].”<sup>301</sup>

A month later, in a meeting at the Đồn Thủy hospital, where the DRV government stationed while preparing to take over Hanoi, Ho repeated:

In the city, the situation is complicated [*phức tạp*], there are many temptations [*sự quyến rũ*] that could make people dull-witted [*mê muội*], morally corrupt [*hủ hóa*], depraved [*trụy lạc*]. In order to avoid dangerous traps, in order to fulfill the noble responsibility as the people's army, the people's public security, all cadres and soldiers must remember and follow Uncle's advices: Do not be arrogant and complacent. Do not indulge in drinking and feasting [*ruộng chè*], flirtatious relationships [*traí gái*], opium smoking. Do not breach confidentiality. Avoid extravagance [*xa xỉ*], embezzlement [*tham ô*], squander [*lãng phí*]. Respect the people, assist the people, unite with the people. Be humble [*khiêm tốn*], correct [*nghiêm chỉnh*]. Preserve the pure [*trong sạch*] and rustic [*chất phác*] quality of revolutionary fighters. Abide by the 10 rules of discipline. Always be vigilant and practice criticism and self-criticism for continuous improvements.<sup>302</sup>

Those who served the DRV had internalized an image of Hanoi, in Nguyễn Huy Tường's words, as “a city of indulgence and debauchery.”<sup>303</sup> But exposure to different standards of living undoubtedly resulted in changes in the lifestyle of DRV revolutionaries. The new arrivals in the city rushed to appear on par with the “Hanoi people” whom they saw “dressing colorfully and

---

<sup>300</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ, nhân viên tiếp quản và công nhân viên chức lưu dung ngày 16, 17, 18/10/54”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>301</sup> “Bài nói chuyện với bộ đội, công an và cán bộ trước khi vào tiếp quản Thủ đô (05/09/54)”, *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập Vol.7* (Hanoi: Sự thật, 1987), 38.

<sup>302</sup> “Lời căn dặn các đơn vị bộ đội, công an trước khi vào thành”, *Ibid.*, 44-45.

<sup>303</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*,

changing their clothes everyday.<sup>304</sup>” In chapter 3, we have seen how, after seeing former ASV employees dressed elegantly [*sang trọng*], DRV cadres at the Department of Labor immediately wanted to order new clothes to “appear serious.” Perhaps “free zone” cadres came to adopt the belief highlighted in Vũ Bằng’s writing that nice clothes would heighten the chance of social and professional success. An urge to have new clothes was common among DRV cadres who came from the “free zone.” Daily reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs on the state of mind [*tu tưởng*] of state employees in Hanoi during the first month in the city suggest that because “the physical condition influences the mind [*vật chất ảnh hưởng đến tinh thần*],” cadres from the “free zone” were “filled with concerns [*thắc mắc*] with provisions and are more anxious [*băn khoăn*] about forms [*hình thức*] and outer appearances [*bề ngoài*].”<sup>305</sup> In the first report dated 13 October 1954, the Standing Committee of the Party in Hanoi highlighted “clothes” as one of the most pressing concerns [*thắc mắc*] among DRV officials arriving from the “free zone”:

[Cadres] want the problems concerning clothes solved: those who have not received their allocated fabrics want to receive, those already received fabrics want authorization to make clothes, those who have just bought their own shoes and hats want to receive money to buy other things such as winter coat, belt, foulard, beret, etc. [popular among cadres]

Another report dated 24 October listed common complaints:

- Each cadre has only one set of clothes which is not enough, the clothes all become wrinkled [*nhàu nát*]
- High-level cadres also lack [formal] clothes, shoes, bags to wear during official meetings [*giao thiệp*]
- “Hanoians” [*Người Hà Nội*] dress colorfully and change their clothes daily. Our cadres wear the same set of clothes during one, two weeks
- Pre-made clothes are not pretty and often too large <sup>306</sup>

Besides new clothes, DRV cadres from the “free zone” demanded a raise in salary to accommodate new needs brought about by the new situation. Between January 1950 and December 1955, the minimum salary for DRV cadres and officials was the equivalent of the

---

<sup>304</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ về tiếp quản thủ đô (24/10/54)”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>305</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ tiếp quản về thủ đô (24/10/54), BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

A note on these reports is needed here. The Ministry of Home Affairs was charged with both assigning personnels to take over different governmental branches and establishing the condition for the smooth functioning of the new urban apparatus. For accomplishing the latter assignment, during the first month after the takeover of Hanoi, the Ministry received daily reports on the *état d’esprit* [*tu tưởng*] of state employees in Hanoi. Both employees who came from the former “free zone” and re-employed ASV functionaries were under surveillance in their activities at the office and their concerns [*thắc mắc*] which could bring about “erroneous thinkings” [*tu tưởng sai lầm*] were reported. The fact that these reports were sent from the Standing Committee of the Communist Party in Hanoi [Ban chấp hành Đảng bộ Hà Nội] suggests that reporters could have been Party members or would-be members presented in each office.

<sup>306</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ về tiếp quản thủ đô (24/10/54)”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

price of 35kg of rice (kilograms of rice remained an official financial unit of the DRV government until the end of 1955),<sup>307</sup> paid partly in money, mostly in kind (rice, fabric). During the first month after the takeover in 1954, on average, DRV cadres in Hanoi received a temporary salary equaling 45kg of rice, which according to the UBQC of Hanoi “was not enough for food.”<sup>308</sup> The Prime Minister’s Office thus asked relevant ministries to submit a reasonable estimate of the minimum salary for cadres and officials in Hanoi. The requests were put together and discussed during the Government Council’s meeting in early November 1954.<sup>309</sup>

	Ministry of Home Affairs	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Labor	UBQC Hanoi
Rice	18kg	21kg	18kg	21kg
Foods	28kg	21kg	22kg650	24kg
Burning wood	6kg	6kg	5kg	6kg
Green tea	2kg	-	-	-
Personal equipments [ <i>Trang bị</i> ]		5kg	4kg900	
Pocket money [ <i>Tiền vặt</i> ]	12kg	4kg	6kg100	10kg
Electricity, Water, Hygiene	-	-	4kg250	-
Total	66kg	57kg	60kg910	61kg

Table 2: Proposals for the minimum salary for DRV cadres and officials in Hanoi (Oct-Nov 1954)

The ministries also requested a cost-of-living allowance [*phụ cấp đắt đỏ*] between 50 and 75% of the original salary. This means that with the cost-of-living allowance, a cadre or official with minimum salary in Hanoi could be paid more than the maximum salary in the existing salary scale of the DRV (level 25, 72kg per month) and almost as much as a “free zone” deputy-minister<sup>310</sup> (95kg per month). The ministries recognized new expenses in the city: green tea (which was free in the “free zone”), “needles and thread, postal stamps, tram tickets, cinema

<sup>307</sup> “Sắc lệnh của Chủ tịch nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa số 81-SL ngày 22 tháng 5 năm 1950;” “Nghị định 650-TTg ngày 30 tháng 12 năm 1955 về việc: Đặt các thang lương để sắp xếp cán bộ, nhân viên, và công nhân các cơ quan, xí nghiệp nhà nước và doanh nghiệp quốc gia.”

<sup>308</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ về tiếp quản thủ đô (24/10/54)”, BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>309</sup> “Tờ trình về vấn đề phụ cấp đắt đỏ cho các bộ nhân viên công tác ở Hà Nội”, PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>310</sup> “Sắc lệnh của Chủ tịch nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa số 81-SL ngày 22 tháng 5 năm 1950;” “Sắc lệnh của Chủ tịch phủ nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa số 82-SL ngày 22 tháng 5 năm 1950”.

tickets, newspapers and books [*sách báo*], etc.” Because of the differences in the calculations by different ministries, the central government asked the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to work out their differences, meanwhile a temporary cost-of-living allowance at 50% of existing salary (45kg) was provided.<sup>311</sup>

Being a young bachelor, the engineer Việt did not have much concern about salary, though he recalled being “poor” and “discouraged” from indulging in urban delicacies (coffee, for example, was “out of [the cadres’] grasp” [*không có khái niệm*], and considered reserved for “a separate class” [*một giới riêng*]). The “signature” drink of cadres like Việt was green tea.<sup>312</sup> If at his return to Hanoi, Nguyễn Huy Tường was proud of his “value of a resistance-war person” despite being “badly dressed,” only two months later he lamented that “resistance-war people” had forgotten their revolutionary values “which could not be bought even with thousands of pieces of gold”, instead, they “pitied themselves [*túi*] because they were deprived [*túng thiếu*], in a worse condition than people in the city [*người trong thành*].”<sup>313</sup>

Changes in the lifestyle of “free zone” cadres were not limited to curiosity about the urban surroundings and efforts to dress and eat so as not to feel insecure among the “Hanoi people.” Soon enough, personal issues with appearing “proper” for the urban setting turned into a collective problem manifested in public offices. Ho Chi Minh’s advice to avoid “extravagance, embezzlement, and waste” was to no avail. In December 1954, only two months after the arrival of the revolutionary cadres and staff in Hanoi, the central government addressed the problem of “waste [*nạn lãng phí*] (especially for ostentatious [*phô trương*], luxurious [*xa xỉ*] display)” in a Decision sent to all ministries, offices, and committees.<sup>314</sup> The Decision began with the remark that since the installation of the government in the city, the problem of lavish spending “started budding” and in certain offices the problem had become “grave.”<sup>315</sup> Without mentioning the names of the offices, some “typical examples” were listed:

- Some office bought a set of lounge suite [*bộ sa-lông*] that cost 1,000,000đ
- Some office requested to commission a lounge suite that cost 2,000,000đ and 10 sets of formal attires for each staff; some office asked to build a house that would cost 63 million to lodge 4 professors, a house at 234 million to lodge 500 students, an auditorium at 92 million đồng.
- Different offices requested too many cars, bicycles, radios, too much gasoline, and haphazard use of cars, bicycles, electricity, water is a common phenomenon.<sup>316</sup>

The Standing Committee of the Party [*Ban Bí thư*] also released Circular no.3/TT-TW criticizing how central governmental bureaus in Hanoi were holding “too many” and “too luxurious” [*quá*

<sup>311</sup> “Tờ trình về vấn đề phụ cấp đắt đỏ cho các bộ nhân viên công tác ở Hà Nội”, PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>312</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>313</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*, 14.

<sup>314</sup> “Quyết định của HĐCP phiên họp tháng 12.1954 v/v chống lãng phí”, PTT 100, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>315</sup> “Quyết định của HĐCP phiên họp tháng 12.1954 v/v chống lãng phí”, PTT 100, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>316</sup> According to contemporary newspapers, the price of rice sold by the Bureau of Commerce in Hanoi in late 1954 was between 280 and 350 đồng per kilo (“Thủ-đô 24 giờ,” *Sông Hồng* no.66, 23 Oct 1954; “Tình hình thị trường tại Hà Nội trong ngày 28-12-54,” *Sông Hồng* no.134, 21 Dec 1954.)

*sang trọng xa xỉ*] banquets, offering to their guests “expensive alcohol” [*rượu đắt tiền*], “premium cigarettes” [*thuốc lá thơm hảo hạng*], “foreign fruits” [*hoa quả của nước ngoài*], and furnishing their offices with imported goods, leading to “rather severe waste” [*tình trạng lãng phí khá nặng*].<sup>317</sup> Embezzlement [*tham ô*] also started budding in some offices,” it added, though no example was provided.

While the charges were exact and detailed, the solutions to the problem of waste and embezzlement proposed were vague: (1) “Practice frugality, frequently and permanently strengthen the anti-squandering movement [*phong trào chống lãng phí*] (together with anti-embezzlement [*chống tham ô*] and anti-bureaucratism [*chống quan liêu*]); (2) Review expenditures to reduce them only to necessity; (3) “Completely abide by financial regulations and disciplines.” In August 1955, Trường Chinh highlighted “embezzlement” and “waste” as among the clearest demonstrations of the “petty bourgeois mentality” [*tu tưởng tư sản*] in cadres and Party officials:

Several demonstrations of the petty bourgeois mentality:

- Embezzlement [*tham ô*], moral corruption [*hủ hóa*], being corrupted [*bị mua chuộc*] by the petty bourgeois
- Pomposity [*phô trương*], squandering [*lãng phí*], lack of responsibility towards the properties of the state and the people
- Complaining on behalf of the petty bourgeois class, criticizing policies of the Government and the Party that are correct [*đúng đắn*]
- Individualism [*cá nhân chủ nghĩa*], status-seeking [*địa vị*] (This is a common demonstration of the petty bourgeois mentality and the feudal mentality.)<sup>318</sup>

It is not clear whether anyone or any office was punished nor how they were punished for their wastefulness and embezzlements. It seems that whatever the Party and the central government were trying to do to counter the problem of lavishness was not very effective. Until April 1957, complaints about wasteful use of public facility and calls for economization remained ever present:

We are still wasting much electricity, under the French the use of electricity was only 100 million kw/hour and mostly for production, we use 140 million kw/hour. We use much electricity but little is used for production, which means that a lot is wasted.<sup>319</sup>

If lavish spending seemed to be a problem that arose strictly in and because of the urban setting – electricity needed to be available in order to be able to waste it - the problem of

---

<sup>317</sup> “Thông tri của Ban Bí thư số 03/TT-TW ngày 12/1/1955 về việc tiết kiệm chi tiêu, chống lãng phí”, VKDĐT, vol.16 (1955), 12-14.

<sup>318</sup> “Báo cáo của đồng chí Trường Chinh tại Hội nghị Trung ương lần thứ 8 họp từ ngày 13 đến 20-8-1955: Đoàn kết nhân dân toàn quốc đấu tranh để thực hiện thống nhất Việt Nam trên cơ sở độc lập và dân chủ”, VKDĐT, vol. 16 (1955), 525.

<sup>319</sup> “Những ý kiến của Các tổ về bản báo cáo kế hoạch năm 1957”, PTT 131, TTLTQG-III.

embezzlement had long been seeping into the whole system. In late 1954, far away from the capital, in the coastal towns of Sầm Sơn and Cửa Hội where Southern regroupées were gathered before being dispersed to different locations throughout the North, embezzlement was rampant:

In Interzone 4 we made 6,312 sets of clothes to provide for [Southern] cadres and civilians. But because we made too many at the same time [*làm ồ ạt*] and quality control was not strict, many sets were badly made [*may dối*], tailors stole fabrics and made smaller clothes. Cotton-stuffed blankets [*chăn bông*] are too thin, [because] cotton was removed; there are also cases where cotton was soaked in water to increase their weight. Those in charge of buying fabrics did not pay attention to the quality of cotton fabric to make children clothes, after the first wash, it looks like fabric for mosquito net [*vải màn*]. Several employees in charge of buying fabric took advantage of their assignments to embezzle, we have not really inquired into their activities and carried out punishments yet.

In Sầm Sơn, vegetables and food are often spoiled, there are cases of embezzlement by falsely increasing the recorded weights of skinny cattle, the butchering of one cattle recorded twice.<sup>320</sup>

In December 1955, it was reported that 24 bureaus [*cơ quan*] and working sites [*công trường*] embezzled 134 million đồng, 40 institutions [*đơn vị*] “wasted” [*lãng phí*] 6,600 million đồng.<sup>321</sup> In Hanoi, Nguyễn Huy Tường recorded in his diary in late June 1956 the Bureau of Commerce [*Mậu dịch*]'s negligence:

The Bureau of Commerce embezzles [*tham ô*] and wastes [*lãng phí*] [provisions]. Milk was stored with salt: all went spoiled. Butter became moldy. Machines were sold with parts missing. Penicillin: series of them got spoiled, millions of pills. Cadres' benefits are reduced [*bị thiệt*], friend-nations' [*nước bạn*] efforts to help us are wasted. The people [*nhân dân*] are harmed [*làm hại*].<sup>322</sup>

### *The world of the DRV công chức*

In everyday life, DRV cadres and officials wanted to feel on par with the urban population who seemed to wear better clothes and eat better food than them. In professional life, they needed to take control of what the Party and the central government called “the new situation” - the move of the DRV apparatus from the rural to the urban areas. As highlighted in Chapter 3, the DRV leadership recognized that after expanding their control to the urban areas, their personnel apparatus faced a problem of quantity (a lacking in number of cadres and regular staff [*công chức biên chế*]) and quality (cadres' lack of professional and technical capacity). Under the motto “A shortage of cadres is better than weak cadres” [*thà thiếu còn hơn yếu*], the problem of quantity was quickly solved by a rapid increase in number of cadres and regular staff. The last two sections of this chapter are organized in a way that reflects the order of the strategies that the DRV leadership employed to solve the problem of quality, namely direct technical and

<sup>320</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình đón tiếp quân đội, cán bộ đồng bào miền Nam cuối tháng 11 năm 1954”, PTT 100, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>321</sup> “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>322</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*, 86-7.

knowledge transfer, ideological reforms, and development of an “ideal” vocational education. In describing the application of each strategy, these sections will also reveal the complex world of human relations among DRV state employees during the first years after takeover. Good

The first year after Việt’s arrival in Hanoi, the number of DRV cadres at the Post Office of Hanoi was much smaller than the number of former French-ASV employees.<sup>323</sup> DRV cadres were not only the minority in number but also lacked technical competency. For the first couple of years, though the number of DRV cadres at the Post Office increased, those who could read and speak French and had received some formal training in a relevant professional school like Việt remained in the minority. A large number of cadres who came to the post office after him had no professional background, some were even illiterate. Việt entered into frequent contact with former French-ASV employees at the Post Office, of whom he had mixed impressions and perceptions. His education led him to harbor hostility towards those who had served the “enemy” regime:

[...] when I was in the jungle, I was trained to always hate [*căm thù*], then [when I arrived in the city] I was always on guard [*cảnh giác*], I despised [*coi thường*] [the reemployed functionaries].<sup>324</sup>

Việt and other newly arrivals in the city saw themselves as “victors” [*người thắng; kẻ chiến thắng*] while “the others” [*những người khác*] - the *lưu dung* - were the “defeated” [*người thất bại; kẻ bại*]. Interactions between the two groups in the workplace seemed “normal” [*bình thường*] and “polite” [*lễ phép*] but Việt remarked that each side reserved their own feelings and agendas:

The *lưu dung*, they always behaved very modestly [*khiêm tốn*], because they had a complex [*mặc cảm*], that they were defeated and became reemployed. So they never reacted too intensely [*làm quá*]. But the victors, in their mind there was always a bit of contempt [*khinh thường*], of despidement [*coi thường*] toward [the *lưu dung*]. [The victors] appreciated [*coi trọng*] [the *lưu dung*] only because [the *lưu dung*] had technical competence [*có nghề*], when [the victors] succeeded in stealing [*ăn cắp*] their technical knowledge, when [the victors] had mastered the profession, [the victors] discarded [the *lưu dung*].<sup>325</sup> Very illuminating quote. Translation is a little clunky

On a personal level, Việt found the *lưu dung* at the Post Office of Hanoi “properly trained” [*được đào tạo nghiêm túc*] and their “integrity” [*phẩm cách*] and “morality” [*đạo đức*] was “wonderful” [*tuyệt vời*]. For months after the takeover, Việt and other DRV cadres would learn technical knowledge from these employees. Việt’s training in telecommunication in the DRV jungle school was inadequate:

After the takeover, when I followed the *lưu dung* employees around, they taught me how the telephone worked. When I was studying in the jungle, I did not know how a telephone

---

<sup>323</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Mar 6, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>324</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>325</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Mar 6, 2019 in Hanoi.

was like, even how a microphone looked like, what an *écouter* was, I had no idea, because I was not taught when I was in the jungle.<sup>326</sup>

Việt attributes his professional competence to these French-ASV trained experts:

In general, I see that when I came in to take over [the city], and until now [...] I realize that we had to be thankful towards the *lưu dụng*. Without the *lưu dụng*, we would not have had a vocation [*nghề*]. Faraway in Việt Bắc, you tell me, what kind of vocation could we have had? All the most modern technologies, when we were in the jungle, we had no idea. After entering [Hanoi], there were telephones, telecommunication centers, everything, compared to the standard of those days, compared to what we had had in the jungle, those were very advanced. Without those people, how could we have had learned the profession?

Technological and knowledge transfer, which Việt described as “stealing the profession,” began the day of the takeover and proceeded in a cascade (snowball model) model. First, former ASV employees were assigned a number of DRV cadres to whom they taught how to operate a certain technical function at the post office. Then, these DRV cadres trained other cadres before moving to another department:

It was like this, after you finished learning, after you gained a firm grasp of the operation, you would have to teach other people. Only when these new people mastered the operation could you move to another department. That means that while we learned from them [*người ta* - former ASV employees], we also had our people [*người của mình*] ready so that we could train our people later on. When we see that these new people could replace us, we would move to another department to learn other things.<sup>327</sup>

While DRV cadres were familiarizing themselves with the city and building professional competence, a program to rehabilitate former French-ASV functionaries and experts, most of whom were considered “petit bourgeois” [*tiểu tư sản*] by the communist authority, was being prepared.<sup>328</sup> In November 1954, the Ministry of Home Affairs proposed a plan to “educate” and “reform” reemployed functionaries and experts:

Step one: Approach them, find out and resolve their concerns [*thắc mắc*], explain to them official policies and the current situation [*thời sự*]. When integrating old and new employees in a department, a meeting should be held to announce the integration, introduce people of the two groups, encourage solidarity [*đoàn kết*], and announce clearly the working objectives of the department. If their official positions are re-arranged, explanations should be provided so they understand and rest assured [*yên tâm*].

Step two: Slowly and steadily integrate them into the organization of the institution [through] easy [*nhẹ nhàng*] but well-regulated collective activities [*sinh hoạt tập thể*], studying the current situation [*thời sự*] and government’s policies related to the profession.

---

<sup>326</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>327</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Mar 6, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>328</sup> “Quy định về vấn đề thử dùng công chức mới ở TP Hà Nội”, PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.



Step three: When the time is appropriate, [we] will organize more in-depth study sessions. Staff who had already been reformed [*chỉnh huấn*] in classes for notables [*nhân sĩ*] should study for another session then take charge of reform education for new employees in each field.<sup>329</sup>

Step One was crucial to the DRV's goal of maintaining post-takeover order and security. Daily reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs during the first month after the takeover of Hanoi, cited in the previous section, included observations on the state of mind of the *công chức lưu dung*. Opinions and accounts listed in the reports are in accordance with Việt's impression that the *lưu dung* were modest and highly aware of their changed situation under the new government. While Việt did not register DRV cadres' open hostility toward the *lưu dung*, accounts of discrimination and hostility in the Post Office of Hanoi as well as other departments were recorded. On October 12, for example:

Staff in catering [*cấp dưỡng*](post office, labor union) do not want to serve functionaries and workers we have reemployed [*thu dụng*]. For example: two catering staff members (Post office) were concerned [*thắc mắc*] and did not want to serve a Post office inspector and a manager, another catering staff (Labor union) became ashamed [*xấu hổ*] then cried because they had to serve foods to several drivers that we reemployed.<sup>330</sup>

DRV cadres and officials were also discontented by the policy that allowed the *công chức lưu dung* to be paid the same salary as before the takeover (Article no.5 in the "Eight policies of the government of the DRV towards cities taken over in 1954"). As the last section has shown, in late 1954, the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Ministry of Finance proposed that a DRV state employee from the "free zone" received around 90kg of rice (salary and cost-of-living allowance). But before a final proposal was accepted, DRV cadres and officials had to be content with 67.5kg of rice per month. It is not clear whether any substantial adjustment in salary and allowance was made between November 1954 and December 1955, when the government released Decree 650-TTg, setting a new salary scale for state employees (the minimum salary on the new scale was 26,000 *đồng*, an equivalent of 65kg of rice (May 1955's price); DRV staff in Hanoi received a cost-of-living allowance of 5.8% of the original salary.)<sup>331</sup> Meanwhile life did not get easier for DRV cadres from the free zone. Between 15 October 1954 and May 1955, the price of rice (as sold by the Bureau of Commerce) rose steadily: from 280 *đồng* per kilo in October 1954, to 350 *đồng* in December 1954, 380 *đồng* in January 1955, and to 400 *đồng*<sup>332</sup> in May 1955.

While DRV employees from the "free zone" were struggling to make ends meet, former French-ASV state employees retained their income since before the takeover. Statistics from Hanoi are not available but statistics from the third biggest city in the North, Nam Định, show a

---

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> "Tình hình tư tưởng cán bộ tiếp quản và công chức lưu dung (11-12/10/54)", BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>331</sup> "Nghị định 650-TTg ngày 30 tháng 12 năm 1955 về việc: Đặt các thang lương để sắp xếp cán bộ, nhân viên, và công nhân các cơ quan, xí nghiệp nhà nước và doanh nghiệp quốc gia."

<sup>332</sup> "Thủ-đô 24 giờ," *Sông Hồng* no.66, 23 Oct 1954; "Tình hình thị trường tại Hà Nội trong ngày 28-12-54," *Sông Hồng* no.134, 21 Dec 1954; "Thủ-đô 24 giờ," *Sông Hồng* no. 147, 14 Jan 1955; "Sin hoạt đô thị," *Độc Lập* no.84, 29 Jan 1955; "Dự thảo bản đề cương nghiên cứu đề tiến tới một chế độ tiền lương hợp lý và thống nhất", BLD 1360, TTLTQG-III.

shocking difference in salaries of the two groups. The main salary (without allowances) of a DRV state employee from the “free zone” was the equivalent of between 37kg and 46kg of rice per month. Even if they received a 50% cost-of-living allowance (which was unlikely because Nam Định was considered less expensive than Hanoi), the maximum sum that a cadre could receive was 69kg of rice. Former French-ASV state employees in Nam Định were divided into three groups for assessment of income: (1) contract-based monthly salary; (2) permanent contract [*chính ngạch*] salary (for example, a head of a governmental department [*Trưởng Ty*]); (3) daily salary (26 days per month; without any allowance). A former French-ASV state employee in group (1), without wife and children, received a minimum salary of 48,100 *đồng*, equaling 150kg of rice per month (320 *đồng*/kilo). Another one in group (1), married and had 5 children, received 112,500 *đồng* (355kg of rice) a month. A head of a governmental department, in group (2), married and had 6 children, received 342,834 *đồng* (1,068kg of rice) per month. Employees in group (3) received the lowest rate, but their monthly salary stayed between 58kg (untrained, female manual laborers) and 212kg (trained workers).<sup>333</sup> A DRV state employee in Hanoi exclaimed mockingly after finding out the difference in income between “free zone” cadres and officials and a certain “reemployed functionary” in the same department: “His talent must be 27 times greater than ours.”<sup>334</sup> In mid-1956, Nguyễn Huy Tường recorded the divisions caused by this difference in income:

21 May 1956

The feelings [*tâm trạng*] of those returned from the resistance zone. Many of their problems are not yet solved. They are state employees [*viên chức*] without any special title [*địa vị*], during the resistance war they left to the free zone and did not receive much professional training. In the resistance zone, life was harsh, their wives and children were destitute [*cơ cực*]. The days right after the takeover, they still had the halo [*hào quang*] of a resistance-war person. But that halo slowly disappeared. They are still doing works too trivial [*tầm thường*]. Party members, those in high positions, at least they still have their ideology for which to fight, they have a reason to live, to sacrifice. But what about the other people? They only find life tough [*kham khổ*]. Two doctors, yet the one who stayed in the city receive *công chức lưu dụng*’s salary, the other get a lamentable sum [*một số tiền chó chết*]. Their wives and children are uncared for [*nheo nhóc*]; comparing to others, they pity themselves. No honor and glory [*vinh dự*]. This problem must be resolved.<sup>335</sup>

DRV cadres and officials like Việt, like Nguyễn Huy Tường, and like the unnamed employees in the reports to the Ministry of Home Affairs and in Tường’s diary entry would had many reasons to think that the *công chức lưu dụng* had an easier life. But the *công chức lưu dụng* also had their difficulties and suffered through trials and reforms. Nguyễn Hiếu, the doctor that we have met in this chapter’s introduction, became a *công chức lưu dụng* after the communist takeover. Hiếu was born in 1928 in Hanoi to a well-off family where both parents were doctors. He was their only son. Hiếu had just finished high school at the time of the August Revolution in

<sup>333</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình công nhân viên và lương bổng, các khoản phụ cấp của công nhân viên Ty Công chính Thành phố Nam-Định”, BLD 60, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>334</sup> “Tình hình cán bộ tiếp quản và về thủ đô (24/10/54), BNV 3627, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>335</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tường, *Nhật ký*, 77-78.

1945. He studied for a year at the *École Pratique d'Industrie* in Hanoi – a hot spot of revolutionary activities because the school trained future industrial workers. There, he was “awakened” [*giác ngộ*] and became a Việt Minh sympathizer. Hiếu participated in the battle of Hanoi in 1946, then moved to the DRV “free zone” with other Việt Minh fighters. He was captured and was sent to Hoà Lò prison in Hanoi, but received preferential treatment because he spoke French and could play the accordion to amuse the French staff. When he was released, his mom and he decided that he would attend the University of Medicine to become a doctor. After finishing the degree, he became a doctor at the Yersin hospital (renamed Phủ Doãn hospital in 1954). He had a peaceful life of a state employee.<sup>336</sup>

In 1954, Ho Chi Minh’s government took over Hanoi, Hiếu became a *công chức lưu dung*. He was aware of the official gaze on him: “Before I was a follower of revolution, when I came back to Hanoi, I became a collaborator [*ngụy*].” During the 300 days of free migration across the 17th parallel (21 July 1954 – 13 May 1955), everyone in his extended family and a lot of his friends left Hanoi to go South. He had also prepared for his family go to Saigon, but at the last minute, his mother did not want to go, fearing she would lose the two villas in the city-center that she had worked her whole life to earn. Not wanting to leave his mother by herself, Hiếu and his wife decided to stay in Hanoi. Hiếu became a *công chức lưu dung* at the Phủ Doãn hospital.

Before the end of the 300-day period, everything went on as normal for those who chose to stay: the *lưu dung* received the same level of salary as under the previous regime, demonstrations of extravagance – living in a villa, dressing in expensive Western clothes, going to work on a Vespa, as in the case of Hiếu – did not pose a problem. A few months after the takeover of Hanoi, Hiếu, like other former ASV state employees, was sent to a special school in Thái Hà áp to be re-educated. Steps two and three in the plan to reeducate and reform former French-ASV state employees were in place.<sup>337</sup> This re-education lasted one year. During the first six months, former French-ASV state employees received theoretical trainings through courses taught by high-level party leaders.

[..] around 1956, in the countryside, there was land reform. At the time, I was a state employee who stayed behind [*ở lại*], those like me, which were called “*lưu dung*,” were sent to school for a year, they called it “go get brainwashed” [*đi tẩy não*]. We studied the revolution [*học cách mạng*]. We studied in Thái Hà áp, at the School of Labor Union [*trường Công đoàn*]. In that year we studied historical materialism, history of the Vietnamese revolution, economics. Teachers were Trường Chinh, and many more, that man from the South who was pretty good [*giỏi giỏi*], really good [*giỏi lắm*] [..]

They sent us to go study, it was obligatory, so that we could get brainwashed and return to work. Each period five people from a hospital were sent to study, the period after, five other people, divided up like that. It was a whole year of study.<sup>338</sup>

---

<sup>336</sup> Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by Uyen Nguyen, May 22, 2019 in Hanoi

<sup>337</sup> “Quy định về vấn đề thủ dưng công chức mới ở TP Hà Nội”, PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>338</sup> Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by Uyen Nguyen, May 22, 2019 in Hanoi.

The last six months of re-education took place after the 300-day period was over. Hiếu was sent to the countryside as a land reform cadre during the fifth land reform campaign (25 December 1955 – 30 July 1956), a climax in the communist party’s use of coercion and terror.<sup>339</sup>

I was sent to Phú Lý. It was horrifying. Land reform was horrifying. For a while I was still not aware [*chưa tỉnh ngộ*], still did not see clearly, but afterward when I had to go more deeply into the land reform, I was horrified, I started questioning why it was carried out like that, why they killed people in such unreasonable way [*vô lý*]. Those who were classified as “landlords” were called as such but they had only a few acres of rice field, what kind of landlords would not have meat to eat, not have any servant? Their only sin was that they had some acres of land and not having any one to help out, they had to pay some people to work [on the land]. Those who paid someone to work the rice field were reconsidered a landlord. They were dragged out for public denunciation [*đấu tố*].

At that time, there were only youngsters [*bọn trẻ*], they were called the Land reform Team [*Đội Cải cách ruộng đất*], only youngsters led the process [*hướng dẫn*], established the people’s courts [*Toà án nhân dân*], put up “misters and misses peasant” [*Ông, Bà nông dân*] as judges. Judges and vice-judges were all peasants, but [the youngsters] sat on the ground, the judge sat up above, [the youngsters] prompted the words, what to say, who to call, what to ask, then it was over. Execution by shooting, execution on the spot.

[...] There were so many deaths. After land reform, I had many reflections [*suy nghĩ*]. Then a lot of people started to realize. But you know, our regime is a proletarian regime. The dictatorship of the proletariat is very dangerous, there is no limit to it, you could live, you could die any moment.

Alec Holcombe, in his study of the land reform in North Vietnam as a tool of mass mobilization, comments that the land reform was “a type of terrifying ‘shock’ treatment aimed at the rural society in general,” but it is clear that the urban population, especially those exposed to land reform as a “thought reform” treatment like Hiếu, underwent enormous shock as well.<sup>340</sup> Hiếu learned, as other members in the Northern Vietnamese society learned, that he had no choice but to submit to the communist party’s agenda.

Nonetheless the party-state did not trust people “stained” with “petit-bourgeois” background, especially those who had worked under the French and ASV government. The DRV moved rapidly to build up their own pool of experts with proper political trainings. After the suppression of the *Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm* movement (to be discussed further in latter chapters), the party moved to tighten its ideological trainings in university, introducing into the core curriculum Marxist-Leninist teachings.<sup>341</sup> With Sino-Soviet aid, the DRV higher education’s training capacity rapidly expanded. In the 1955–1956 school year, there were 40 university instructors in four universities with 1,837 students. By the 1959–1960 school year, there were 917 instructors

---

<sup>339</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 299.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

<sup>341</sup> Ngô Văn Hà, *Giáo dục đại học ở miền Bắc thời kỳ 1954–1975* [Higher education in North Vietnam during the 1954–1975 period] (Hanoi: Chính trị quốc gia, 2010), 56-57. On the *Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm* movement, see Note 4.

at nine universities with 12,997 students.<sup>342</sup> In 1960, the Bureau of Universities and Vocational Schools [*Vụ Đại học và trung học chuyên nghiệp*] reported that educational infrastructure and personnel could finally “guarantee the execution of [the government’s] goals in education” that aimed at the eradication of “bourgeois mentality” [*tu tưởng tiểu tư sản*] and “confirmation of the leadership of the Party.”<sup>343</sup>

When the DRV could assure an input of technically and politically qualified personnel, many *công chức lưu dụng* like Hiếu were demoted, moved to be an instructor at a vocational school, or forced to retire early. In the Post Office where Việt was working, many former French-ASV employees were forced out of their offices, made to retire early and replaced by DRV-trained personnel.<sup>344</sup> Between 1959 and 1960, the DRV government “encouraged” the *công chức lưu dụng* to write a petition letter and volunteer to give up their old salary and integrate themselves into the same salary system as other DRV state employees.<sup>345</sup> Hiếu lost his high salary, was demoted from an internist doctor to an x-ray machine operator, and spent the rest of his career in the x-ray room.<sup>346</sup>

### *Brothers in war, class enemies in peace*

Not every DRV cadres and regular staff in Hanoi after October 1954 were new arrivals. A number of them had been active as underground agents in Hanoi, and a number of local Việt Minh enthusiasts in Hanoi were also offered positions in the new government in Hanoi.

Nguyễn Văn was born in the Old Quarter of Hanoi in 1925 to a Catholic family. His father was a state employee in the colonial government so Văn had an easy childhood, but his father passed away suddenly when he was 13. Still, his father left him enough money, and together with salary from private tutoring in Hanoi, he managed to finish the baccalaureate in the *franco-indigène* system, learn classical music through a correspondence course with the *École universelle par correspondance (Paris)* [Trường Cao đẳng Hàm thụ Paris], and buy a villa in the city center. He was an active Việt Minh sympathizer since before 1945.

When I was about sixteen, seventeen years old, I rolled up [Việt Minh] propaganda and put them under my bicycle’s seat. The Japanese had no doubt, they did not think that anyone would put propaganda under the bicycle’s seat. Among these propaganda documents there was a song that I wrote [...] when I was in high school, each sheet of music could be sold for three Indochinese *piastres*. Once I arrived at the destination, I would take out a piece of metal wire, curve an end up like this, then I would pull out the document. When I was active [in the Việt Minh], I was young, but I found a way to carry propaganda documents.<sup>347</sup>

During a brief period after the outbreak of the war in 1946, Văn joined the DRV government in the “free zone”: he first performed for the People’s Army troops in Thanh Hoá province, then

---

<sup>342</sup> Ngô Văn Hà, *Giáo dục đại học ở miền Bắc*, 61.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-61.

<sup>344</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Mar 6, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>345</sup> Vũ Ngọc Tiên, “Điều tra đời sống cư dân đô thị.”

<sup>346</sup> Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by Uyen Nguyen, May 22, 2019 in Hanoi

<sup>347</sup> Nguyễn Văn, interview by Uyen Nguyen, March 18, 2019 in Hanoi.

attended the College of Public Administration [*Đại học Công chính*] in Yên Mô, Ninh Bình for a few months before dropping out to teach music at the School of Revolutionary Literature and Arts of Interzone 3 [*Trường Văn nghệ kháng chiến Liên khu 3*] in rural Nam Định. He was captured by French troops and sent back to Hanoi in early 1950s. Afterward, Văn acted as a DRV agent in the city, being in charge of spreading propaganda fliers and booklets, and in preparation of the takeover of Hanoi in October 1954, he also approached and persuaded workers and state employees to stay behind.

As the takeover of Hanoi approached, Văn took part in the preparation of local artists to welcome the DRV troops to Hanoi.

Mr. Sinh, Mr. Thanh and me, three people gathered to discuss. Mr. Sinh told me: “You should write a song, write one, because if we use a song written during the resistance war, it would only portray the heroism of the resistance and not the feelings of the people when they are liberated.” And how did the people feel? It meant to write about the feelings of Hanoi people. So I wrote a number of songs [...]

The day that I finished writing a couple of songs, I showed [Mr. Sinh and Mr. Thanh]. Then I taught the song to others. I taught groups of four, five local resistance students. The local resistance force comprised students and youths in the city but whose hearts were with the resistance [...]

After I had taught four, five people, each of them would be responsible for teaching the songs to 4, 5 other people. Then the day that we organized the welcoming celebration – we had known in advance the arrival time of the army – stronger guys carried flags from here to the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục square. That day I brought a guitar.<sup>348</sup>

In the morning of 10 October, there were (according to Văn’s estimation) 200 people gathering around the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục square singing his song and waving flags to welcome the DRV soldiers into the city.

Văn felt himself to be on the side of the “victors” during this brief period of joy. But he also noticed that a lot of his friends and rich professionals (doctors, lawyers) who lived in his neighborhood disappeared within a year after the takeover – they either moved South or abroad. Văn also stopped going to church. He started working as a DRV state employee, first as a music teacher at Chu Văn An high school, and then as an instructor at the Hanoi Teachers training College [*Cao đẳng sư phạm Hà Nội*], training music teachers for schools around Hanoi. But political indoctrination was prioritized in all curriculum, according to Văn, the curriculum “was all about the Party, the Party only.”<sup>349</sup>

In 1955–1956, Văn and all DRV cadres who stayed in Hanoi during the war (1946–1954) were sent on “educational” trips [*đi học tập*] to the countryside all over the North to observe how the land reform was being carried out. What he witnessed scarred him for life and changed his opinions of the party:

---

<sup>348</sup> Nguyễn Văn, interview by Uyen Nguyen, March 18, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

I saw them execute an old man, he was over sixty already, they shot him at the jaw, a whole jaw flew out, they shot him in the face, at his jaw [...] There were people who had helped the Việt Minh a lot during the war. Even those people were killed.<sup>350</sup>

Like Hiếu the *lưu dung* doctor, the violence of the land reform “revealed” to Văn “the cruelty [*tàn ác*] and errors [*lỗi*] of the communist party.<sup>351</sup>”

The fourth and fifth land reform campaigns which people like Văn and Hiếu witnessed were accompanied by an active purge within the ranks of the communist party from provincial to village level (also known as the “readjustment of the organization” [*chỉnh đốn tổ chức*]) with the goal of creating a loyal bureaucracy overwhelmed by “reds” over “experts”).<sup>352</sup> This campaign soon made itself felt in the city, as Văn and others who acted as Việt Minh agents in the city during the war were mocked by the DRV cadres who came from the “free zone” as “revolutionaries by the Sword Lake” [*cách mạng Hồ Gươm*] – those who had an easy life in the city while “true” revolutionaries suffered in the liberated zones and the jungles.

When Hanoi was liberated, then Haiphong, before that, smaller provinces had already been liberated, it was joyful everywhere. But when the reform started, the way that resistance-war cadres [*cán bộ kháng chiến*] treated people in [the city], in general, many had bad attitudes, they seemed to have despised us [*khinh miệt*]. For example, they said: “They are only revolutionaries by the Sword Lake!” [*Bọn cách mạng hồ Gươm ấy mà!*] That was contempt. Were they the only ones who made the revolution? They did not know if the Japanese had caught me trafficking and selling documents, propaganda, newspapers, songs to earn money for the activities of the Hoàng Diệu Youth [*Thanh niên thành Hoàng Diệu*], they would have put my arm against the lamppost, taken out their sword, and cut off my hand. Was that not dangerous, was that not scary? But there were those who thought of themselves as more heroic, looked at others with contempt, and said things like: “They are only revolutionaries by the Sword Lake.”<sup>353</sup>

Scarred by what he saw during the land reform and disappointed by the treatment of his war-time comrade, Văn abandoned the preparatory course to become a communist party member. He continued his job at the Hanoi Teachers training College, but never joined the communist party.

Tensions among the “victors” only intensified as time went by. Việt, the engineer at the Post Office, was himself affected by rising hostility against the “*tạch tạch sê*” (short for “*tiểu tư sản*” [petty bourgeois]) because he could read and write, could speak French, and read books during his pastime.<sup>354</sup>

Christopher Goscha has argued that the success of the DRV war efforts in the cities during the First Indochina War depended on the social network formed by its underground agents through kinship, friendship, camaraderie developed since school days, mutual bonding born at

---

<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Tuong Vu, “The Revolutionary Path,” 283; Goscha, *Vietnam: Un État*, Chapter 1.

<sup>353</sup> Nguyễn Văn, interview by Uyen Nguyen, March 18, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>354</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi.

work.<sup>355</sup> But as soon as peace was announced in Geneva, the Party-state got ready for another war, a fact highlighted in a Government Council's meeting in early September 1954: "As the sounds of gunshot become more distant, the political content of the struggle become more intense."<sup>356</sup> A little more than a year and a half after the takeover of Hanoi, in mid-1956, Nguyễn Huy Tưởng lamented the collapse of old social links and values and saw the turmoil of a society in transition:

Old souvenirs [*kỷ niệm xưa*] are no longer poetic [*thi vị*]. The new way of life [*sinh hoạt mới*] has not yet eased in. Revolution has arrived too early for a society still too primitive [*thô sơ*]. People are confused trying to adapt to the new life, while many old values are cleared up. A new drama of the era [*Tán kịch mới của thời đại*].

[..] In the city, the new life has something artificial [*giả tạo*]. Friendship and love are no longer passionate [*thắm thiết*]. The old system of values has been changed. Everything is temporary [*tạm bợ*]. Not many people can establish a *foyer* [household], they dare not to because the condition does not allow. There is no foundation to build upon, because life is unstable [*bấp bênh*].<sup>357</sup>

If the Việt Minh of the 1945–1954 period welcomed everyone and tried to profit from any kind of sympathy from the urban population, Ho Chi Minh's government after the closure of the port of Hải Phòng, with the re-education camps, the land reform, the Nhân Văn-Giai Phẩm affair, and the purge of "petty bourgeois" culture made it public who were "good" and "bad" citizens basing on an individual's class background. Whether someone contributed to the revolution or patriotic or not completely gave way to their class, their education, their attitude, and devotion to the Party. The urban afterwar became an ideological battleground.

This chapter has presented stories of individuals who made up the DRV bureaucracy during the first few years after the takeover of Hanoi. It shows that a body of revolutionaries, especially DRV cadres and officials who had built their career in the mountains and rural area during wartime, were transformed more rapidly than the colonial system they were trying to master. Like in the earlier takeovers analyzed in chapters 1 and 2, the encounter with the capital city was a difficult trial to DRV revolutionaries: it offered them opportunities to learn but also to self-indulge, it humiliated them but also facilitated their taste for pomp and manipulation. The chapter has demonstrated that there were tensions not only between the *công chức lưu dụng* and DRV cadres and officials, but also among DRV cadres themselves whose revolutionary credentials were compared and hierarchized.

---

<sup>355</sup> Goscha, "La ville en guerre" in *Vietnam: Un État*.

<sup>356</sup> "Báo cáo công tác thực hiện đình chiến", PTT 96, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>357</sup> Nguyễn Huy Tưởng, *Nhật ký*, 95.



## Chapter 5: Reforming life on the streets: The struggles with prostitutes

In 1968, American intellectual and icon Susan Sontag was invited for a two-week visit to the capital of the DRV, Hanoi. During the sojourn, a story told to Sontag by one of her guides, a man named Phan, astonished her:

One of the more astonishing instances of Vietnamese concern for the heart, related to me by Phan, is the treatment accorded the thousands of prostitutes rounded up after the liberation of Hanoi from the French in 1954. They were put in charge of the Women's Union, which set up rehabilitation centers for them in the countryside, where they first passed months being elaborately pampered. Fairy tales were read to them; they were taught children's games and sent out to play. "That," Phan explained, "was to restore their innocence and give them faith again in man. You see, they had seen such a terrible side of human nature. The only way for them to forget that was to become little children again." Only after this period of mothering were they taught to read and write, instructed in a trade by which they could support themselves, and given dowries to improve their chances of eventual marrying.<sup>358</sup>

Sontag concluded from this account that the Vietnamese "really [had] a different moral imagination" than the Americans. Sontag's account of discovering the Vietnamese *dao* [way of being] after five days in Hanoi was nothing short of magic. But Phan's account of the DRV treatment of prostitutes, if Sontag truly believed in it, was nothing short of a fairy tale.

This chapter tells the story of what really happened to prostitutes after the communist takeover of Hanoi in 1954. It starts with a brief review of two relevant bodies of scholarship: works that have engaged with the question of prostitution in modern Vietnam and works on the approaches taken by Chinese communists toward prostitutes in China in general and in Shanghai in particular. The chapter situates the DRV's approach to prostitutes within a larger conceptual frame of *lumpenproletariat* as well as within the longer history of the DRV's attitude toward this population that Marx called the "dangerous class." The rest of the chapter traces the chronology of the DRV state's different approaches toward prostitutes, paying particular attention to the camps for prostitutes in Hanoi and Haiphong operated by the Ministry of Social Welfare between late 1955 and 1958. The final section of the chapter provides several reasons for why efforts to control and reform prostitutes during the period of this study (1954-1958) could be considered a failure, leading to its replacement by a more effective system of expanded Public Security's authority and mass surveillance.

### *A Brief Literature Review*

The question of prostitution in Vietnam has attracted much attention of scholars from various academic fields. Our understanding of the colonial-era sex industry and various parties involved in this industry - sex workers, pimps, clients, relevant government departments, observers such as journalists and writers - has been both widened and deepened by a series of studies by Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, Christina Firpo, Marie-Corinne Rodriguez, and Haydon

---

<sup>358</sup> Susan Sontag, *Trip to Hanoi* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1968), 70-71.

Cherry, among others.<sup>359</sup> Works on the post-*Đổi Mới* period by Kimberly Hoang and Thu-huong Nguyen-vo have provided us with both a rare look into the world of sex workers as well as important critiques on contemporary Vietnamese society, economy, and governance.<sup>360</sup> A few scholars have started to examine prostitutes and prostitution in the Republic of Vietnam, focusing on the Vietnam War period - and these remain the only works on prostitution in Vietnam during the 32-year period between the partition of Vietnam (1954) and *Đổi Mới* (1986).<sup>361</sup>

Existing scholarship on prostitutes and prostitution in colonial Vietnam share several important themes that this chapter will also discuss. The first theme is the institutionalization of prostitution, through health and police regulations under the colonial regime. Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, Christina Firpo, and Haydon Cherry have highlighted the difficulties that the colonial state faced when trying to define and regulate “prostitutes” and “prostitution” activities, especially clandestine or “black market” prostitution.<sup>362</sup> All of them argue that the principal motivation behind the state’s efforts was concerns for public health, especially that of the colonizers and their army. Second, all of these scholars, to different extents, examine prostitution as inseparable from social, economic, and cultural changes in colonial Vietnam. Motivations and consequences of prostitution are explored as part of a wider network of issues such as

---

<sup>359</sup> Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, “The Shadow Theater of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 10–51; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, “Between Stigmatisation and Regulation: Prostitution in Colonial Northern Vietnam,” *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, no. sup1 (August 1, 2010): 73–87; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, “Prostitution in Colonial Hanoi (1885–1954)” in *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s*, eds. Magary Rodriguez Garcia, Lex Heerma van Voss, and Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 538–566; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, “Encadrer La Sexualité Au Viêt-Nam Colonial: Police Des Mœurs et Réglementation de La Prostitution (Des Années 1870 à La Fin Des Années 1930),” *Genèses*, no. 86 (2012): 55–77; Isabelle Tracol-Huynh, “La prostitution au Tonkin colonial, entre races et genres,” *Genre, sexualité & société*, no. 2 (November 26, 2009); Ben Tran, *Post-Mandarin: Masculinity and Aesthetic Modernity in Colonial Vietnam* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Christina Firpo, “Sex and Song: Clandestine Prostitution in Tonkin’s A Dao Music Houses, 1920s–1940s,” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11 (August 1, 2016): 1–36; Christina Firpo, *Black Market Business: Selling Sex in Northern Vietnam, 1920–1945* (Cornell University Press, 2020); Marie-Corinne Rodriguez, “Insights into Prostitution in Vietnam During the Colonial Era from the Late 19th Century to the Early 1930s,” in *The Trade in Human Beings for Sex in Southeast Asia*, eds. Pierre Le Roux, Jean Baffie, and Gilles Beullier (Bankok: White Lotus Press, 2010), 31–46; Haydon Cherry, *Down and Out in Saigon: Stories of the Poor in a Colonial City*, Illustrated edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

<sup>360</sup> Kimberly Kay Hoang, *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work* (CA: University of California Press, 2015); Thu-huong Nguyen-vo, *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008)

<sup>361</sup> Heather Marie Stur, *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Sue Sun, “Where the Girls Are: The Management of Venereal Disease by United States Military Forces in Vietnam,” *Literature in Medicine* (Spring 2004) 23, no 1: 66–87; Bao Trang Nguyen, “*Wartime prostitution in urban environment: the case of Saigon (1954-1975)*,” Paper presented at the 13<sup>th</sup> Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, July 2018.

<sup>362</sup> Tracol-Huynh, “The Shadow Theater”; Tracol-Huynh, “Encadrer La Sexualité”; Firpo, “Sex and Song”; Firpo, *Black Market Business*; Cherry, *Down and Out in Saigon*, 32–53.

urbanization and migration, the urban-rural divide and economic disparity, the expansion of the Vietnamese middle-class and the “explosion of pleasure seeking” culture, and changes in (and resistance to) discourses on gender roles and attitudes to sexuality. Finally, all of these scholars call attention to the physical and mental violence suffered by prostitutes from various parties involved in the sex industry: the state, the clients, the proprietors/proprietresses. This chapter engages with this rich scholarship and shows changes and continuities regarding the challenges and solutions of the state, the network of wider problems to which prostitution belonged, and the fates of prostitutes in the early years of the DRV.

Very little is known about what happened to prostitutes in North Vietnam’s cities after the communists took over the whole territory in 1955. The most recent works that have briefly touched upon this topic are Ashley Pettus’s work on the role of women in Vietnam’s socialist modernization and capitalist transition in the latter half of the twentieth century and Thu-huong Nguyen-vo’s monograph which analyzes official approaches to prostitution as guideposts of changes in governance style in Vietnam.<sup>363</sup> Ashley Pettus, in tracing the DRV state’s changing discourses on femininity throughout the twentieth century and their consequences for Vietnamese women, sees the state’s approach to prostitutes in the early DRV (1954-1964) as a part of a larger movement to define the “new Vietnamese woman” in the period of socialist industrialization.<sup>364</sup> Starting in the late 1950s, Pettus points out, the DRV state set out to identify and convert “backward” urban women which included “‘bourgeois’ housewives, ‘exploitative’ business women, petty traders, poor laborers”, and all those “living outside of the fold of village society” such as prostitutes.<sup>365</sup> Pettus argues that prostitutes made up a convenient population on which the state could project the ideal of moral conversion through collective labor: prostitutes were victims of the old society, and since the new system was a charitable one, these corrupted women received the chance to remake their life in the new socialist society through constructive labor (such as working on state construction and mining projects).<sup>366</sup> Because the center of Pettus’s analysis was women engaging in commercial activities, her engagement with the state’s approach to prostitutes is rather brief and vague. Nonetheless my research confirms two of Pettus’s impressions: firstly, in the state’s eyes, prostitutes belonged to a different category than women who engaged in commercial activities and poor urban laborers; secondly, the prostitute was indeed a powerful ideal type through which the state communicated its official discourses and strategy.

Analyzing the Vietnamese government’s different approaches to prostitution before and after economic liberalization (*Đổi Mới*), Thu-huong Nguyen-vo argues that marketization triggered a process where the socialist state, which had so far been rejecting “an imagined social realm separate from the state,” re-imagined and re-invented its relation to the society.<sup>367</sup> Nguyen-vo argues that the state’s approach to prostitution is the domain where one could clearly see this change in the mode of governance before and after *Đổi Mới*. She further argues that the DRV state’s approach to prostitutes and prostitution between the 1950s and the 1980s had two

---

<sup>363</sup> Ashley Pettus, *Between Sacrifice and Desire: National Identity and the Governing of Femininity in Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 2015); Nguyen-vo, *The Ironies of Freedom*.

<sup>364</sup> Pettus, 32.

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid.*, 32, 35.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibi.*, 35.

<sup>367</sup> Nguyen-vo, *The Ironies of Freedom*, 65.

important characteristics. First, Nguyen-vo argues that, since the Leninist mode of governance did not see “society” as a realm separated from the political state, the “social problem” as such did not exist in the Leninist mentality of governance.<sup>368</sup> Instead of seeing prostitution as a social problem - which only came to be constituted as such after economic liberalization - Nguyen-vo argues that the DRV state saw prostitution as “merely a vestige of past political regimes, soon to disappear in the socialist state.”<sup>369</sup> Second, such Leninist mentality explains the way the socialist state saw prostitutes as sick in body and in spirit, needing to be “cured” through the administration of medicines for sexually transmitted diseases and through forced labor in rehabilitation camps.<sup>370</sup> Since prostitutes were only products of the old regimes, successful reform of existing prostitutes would end the problem of prostitution.<sup>371</sup> Nguyen-vo’s description of the DRV state’s official perspectives and treatments toward prostitutes in the pre-*Đổi Mới* period is critically intriguing but lacks empirical evidence. My research shows that “social problems” as such did exist in the mentality of the socialist state. In fact, a whole ministry, the Ministry of Social Welfare [*Bộ Cứu tế xã hội*], was established to deal with social problems as defined in the work of Nguyen-vo. Combining Marxist writings and evidence from archival documents and the press, this chapter proposes a different way to explain and understand the DRV’s approach to prostitutes under state socialism.

### *The Chinese model: Dealing with prostitution in Shanghai*

It was not clear whether Chinese advisers were involved in the DRV’s dealing with prostitution, but China undoubtedly provided the DRV’s leadership with a model on how to deal with “evils of the old society” in general and prostitution in particular. Several scholars, especially Christian Henriot, Gail Hershatter, and most recently, Qinghua Ruan, have laid a strong foundation for the understanding of the PRC’s approach to prostitution, especially in Shanghai.<sup>372</sup> All of these scholars agree that the abolition of prostitution demonstrated not only the communist government’s will to transform Chinese social habits and mentality but also its capacity to establish “a totalistic system of social control.”<sup>373</sup> Though the communist government in China declared from the start of their rule their intention to fight prostitution, the battle was not carried out synchronously nationwide.<sup>374</sup> In fact, similar measures were taken on different timelines in different cities: in Beijing and Nanjing, for example, the government took

---

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 67, 88.

To support the claim that the “social problem as such did not exist in the Leninist mentality of governance,” Nguyen-vo cites a comment by Trần Đô, a high-ranking Party official at the start of *Đổi Mới*. Trần Đô’s comment on pre-*Đổi Mới* policies is this: “pertaining to society, I counted a few meager lines. It was not until the Sixth Party Congress [in December 1986, when economic liberalization was officially adopted] that this problem became fully conceptualized, posed as an area for policy next to economic policy.” This seems too vague to support Nguyen-vo’s claim about the nature of the Leninist mentality of governance.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>372</sup> Christian Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’;” Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures*; Ruan, “Reexamining the Abolitionist Movement.”

<sup>373</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 469; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 305-6; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 471-72.

<sup>374</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 468-469.

immediate actions, while in other cities, such as Shanghai and Wuhan, aggressive measures were delayed for a few years.<sup>375</sup>

According to Christian Henriot, the campaigns in Shanghai could be divided into three phases<sup>376</sup>: 1949-1951, 1951-1958, and after 1958. In the first two years after the takeover of Shanghai, instead of outlawing prostitution, the communist government implemented “a policy of control and progressive reduction through persuasion.”<sup>377</sup> Both Christian Henriot and Qinghua Ruan argue that the “laissez-faire” attitude of the first two years reflects two strategic goals: first, the communist government had more pressing problems immediately after takeover - one of which was dealing with the secret societies in Shanghai, especially the Qing Bang; second, the government was waiting for the moment when prostitution fell to the lowest level so that aggressive campaigns would be most effective.<sup>378</sup>

In late 1951, the second, decisive phase started. In November 1951, the Bureau of Public Security ordered the closing of all brothels in Shanghai, a re-education center (formally the Women’s Labor Training Center; *funü laodong jiaoyangshuo*) was built, and staffs were trained to receive and rehabilitate prostitutes and brothel madams.<sup>379</sup> Within two years from the official ban of prostitution, three large-scale sweeps were organized in November 1951, September 1952, and August 1953, arresting 501 prostitutes and 320 madams and pimps in the first one, 940 prostitutes in the second, and 554 in the last one.<sup>380</sup> Between late 1953 and 1958, small-scale sweeps took place at certain periods during the year (before May 1, October 1, and New Year, for example), taking in more than 5,600 prostitutes.<sup>381</sup> After being taken into the re-education center, prostitutes received medical treatment and went through a reform program which combined literacy education, criticism and self-criticism, discipline and manual labor.<sup>382</sup>

Henriot and Hershtatter both point out the stark contrast between the state’s propagandistic portrayal of the life-remaking process of former prostitutes and the difficulties that these women had to face during and after their forced reformation in the center.<sup>383</sup> Ruan points out, in addition, that the living and rehabilitating situation in the center became even worse as more and more prostitutes arrived but the facilities were not expanded nor did the number of staff increase.<sup>384</sup> To be released from the center, former prostitutes had to fulfill three conditions: that they were fully cured of venereal disease, that they had acquired sufficient ideological knowledge and consciousness to not return to their old trade, and that they were prepared enough to make a living through productive work.<sup>385</sup> Most women spent more than one year in the re-

---

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’.”

<sup>377</sup> Ibid., 472.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid., 473; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 474.

<sup>379</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 474; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 475-76; Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 2010.

<sup>380</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 474-75; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 476.

<sup>381</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 475; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 476-77.

<sup>382</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 479; Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 313-18.

<sup>383</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 478-80; Hershtatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 310-13.

<sup>384</sup> Ruan, “Reexamining,” 477-78.

<sup>385</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 482.

education center before being sent far away from Shanghai upon release.<sup>386</sup> Between 1953 - the year the first group of reformed prostitutes were released - and 1955, most reformed prostitutes were sent back to their families, entered a marriage, or put in an institution where they could be surveilled.<sup>387</sup> From 1956 on, former prostitutes were sent, with other vagrants, to settle in labor reform camps, collective state-run farms, or sent to remote provinces like Xinjiang and Gansu.<sup>388</sup> My research shows that the measures taken and the timeline of actions against prostitution in North Vietnamese cities were similar to those taken in Shanghai, but it is difficult to assert that it was a successful demonstration of a “totalistic system of social control.”

In 1958, the Chinese government declared that the eradication of prostitution and reform of prostitutes were complete.<sup>389</sup> Henriot argues that such a declaration was possible because the tight network of street and neighborhood committees set up throughout the city in the 1950s made it impossible for a prostitute to escape notice.<sup>390</sup> On the other hand, both Hershatter and Ruan point out that clandestine prostitution still existed in Shanghai after 1958; and Ruan, in particular, argues that the government’s declaration of “victory” was the result of a shift in official terminology: “prostitutes” as victims of the old society no longer existed, having been replaced by female “hooligans and yahoos” who defied socialist reform and disturbed social order, and who had to be tightly controlled and reformed in forced labor camps.<sup>391</sup>

#### *The Lumpenproletariat problem & Wartime discourse on Prostitutes*

I argue that directly related to the attitudes of the Việt Minh, and later, of the DRV leadership, towards prostitutes and prostitution is the concept of *lumpenproletariat* [*vô sản lưu manh*] elaborated by Marx and Engels in *The German Ideology*, *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-1850* (1850), and *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852).<sup>392</sup> The *lumpenproletariat* according to Marx and Engels, had their origins in the proletariat but had been ruined and depraved by pauperism. This “dangerous class,” which included “rogues, prostitutes, thieves, robbers and murderers, gamblers, property-less people with no occupation and frivolous individuals,” was “the social scum,” a “passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of the old society.”<sup>393</sup> Because of their links to the proletariat, the *lumpenproletariat* could be stirred up by a revolution but tended more likely to be “a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue.”<sup>394</sup>

Marx continued to elaborate on the “dangerous class” in his discussion of the “relative surplus population” in Volume I of *Capital*. He argued that one of the byproducts of capitalistic accumulation was the creation of a “relative surplus population” or “disposable reserve industrial army” - a laboring population rendered superfluous to production because of capital expansion

---

<sup>386</sup> Ibid., 483.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid., 484-85; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 479-80.

<sup>388</sup> Ruan, “Reexamining,” 480.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 484; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 320.

<sup>390</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 475.

<sup>391</sup> Ruan, “Reexamining,” 483-84.

<sup>392</sup> Clyde Barrow, *The Dangerous Class: The Concept of the Lumpenproletariat* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020), 22.

<sup>393</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*.

<sup>394</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*.

and technological development, but which remained “always ready for exploitation.”<sup>395</sup> The “dangerous class,” “the lowest sediment of the relative surplus population” belonged to the “sphere of pauperism” which included “vagabonds, criminals, prostitutes”<sup>396</sup> and three groups of nonworkers: “those physically able to work but unable to find work,” “orphans and pauper children,” and finally, those that political theorist Clyde W. Barrow has termed the “dispossessed”<sup>397</sup> - “a heterogeneous category of people who from an economic standpoint are considered ‘useless’ to capitalist society because they are unable to work and contribute to the production of surplus value.”<sup>398</sup> All in all, Marxist ideology, as elaborated in the writings of Marx and Engels, considers the majority of the urban “marginalized” population - owing to their poverty and “supposed immorality” - as victimized by the old society, yet at the same time, suspicious and dangerous to the proletariat’s struggles.<sup>399</sup> Later generations of Marxist theorists like Karl Kaustsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, and Mao largely accepted this view of the *lumpenproletariat*, though differing politico-economic conditions inspired these thinkers to propose different ways to deal with the “dangerous” class during the transformation of the capitalist society into a socialist, and eventually a communist society.<sup>400</sup>

Taking into consideration the accepted Marxist thoughts on the *lumpenproletariat*, it is not surprising that when categorizing governmental tasks, the DRV government often group together prostitutes, orphans, petty criminals, opium addicts, and gamblers under the banner of “social evils” inherited from the “old” society [*tệ nạn xã hội cũ*]. These troubling citizens were a part of a larger population that posed “social problems,” which also included the homeless, the jobless, and from time to time, famished peasants; governmental programs addressing such populations were labeled “social works” [*công tác xã hội*] or “social welfare” [*cứu tế xã hội*].<sup>401</sup> As will be shown later in the chapter, the DRV’s conceptualization of “social welfare” changed a few times between 1945 and 1955. Remaining constant was the state’s understanding that dealing with “social problems” was a domain where the authorities of the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Social Welfare (which was dissolved and absorbed into the Ministry of Labor in 1959),<sup>402</sup> and the Ministry of Public Security all intersected (Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo has

---

<sup>395</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital* vol.1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, edited by Frederick Engels, Chapter 25: Section 3, 443, accessed at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> ,

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter 25: Section 4, 450.

<sup>397</sup> Barrow, *The Dangerous Class*, 42.

<sup>398</sup> Marx, *Capital* vol. I, 450; Barrow, *The Dangerous Class*, 42-43.

In Marx’s own words: “the demoralized and ragged, and those unable to work, chiefly people who succumb to their incapacity for adaptation, due to the division of labor; people who have passed the normal age of the laborer; the victims of industry, whose number increases with the increase of dangerous machinery, of mines, chemical works, etc., the mutilated, the sickly, the widows, etc.”

<sup>399</sup> Shane Ewen, *What is Urban History?* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 97, 101.

<sup>400</sup> Barrow, *The Dangerous Class*, 3-4.

<sup>401</sup> These terms were used across a series of reports dated between 1954 and 1962 from the collections of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labor, and especially, Ministry of Social Welfare at the National Archives no.3 in Hanoi. For example, the documents related to this chapter: BYT 532, BLD 1746, CTXH 77, 229, 236, 239, 241, 248, 435.

<sup>402</sup> Decision 43/ND-LD (6 June 1959).

demonstrated how this inter-ministerial collaboration-competition remains the case in present-day Vietnam<sup>403</sup>).

VCP's internal documents between 1950 and 1958 do not demonstrate a systematic engagement with the question of the "lumpenproletariat" in general nor the subject of prostitutes and prostitution in particular. But the Party's official newspapers, *Nhân Dân* and *Cứu Quốc*, as well as the DRV government's reports during the period demonstrate a general agreement to the discourses of Marx and Engels on the subject: that prostitutes were both victims of capitalism and agents of counter-revolutionary forces. Articles on *Nhân Dân* and *Cứu Quốc* that described urban life under Franco-ASV's control almost always included the image of poor women pushed into prostitution.<sup>404</sup> The victory of the Việt Minh would thus mean liberation for these women. An article on *Nhân dân* in January 1953 tells the story of a certain "Bát-đạo Alley" in Beijing: formerly known as a prostitutes' quarter, four years after the communist takeover, the quarter no longer existed because "all of its residence had become industrial workers [*công nhân*]"; the transformation was so rapid and complete that youngsters in the Chinese capital, when asked about the alley in 1953, had no idea where it was or what it had been affiliated with.<sup>405</sup> When Ho Chi Minh's forces started taking over urban areas in the latter half of 1954, other articles on *Nhân Dân* and *Cứu Quốc* reminded their readers that this promise of liberation was delivered to prostitutes in previously "occupied" towns and cities. An article on *Nhân Dân* highlights how after the liberation of the town of Bắc Ninh, more than 200 women previously forced into prostitution because of difficult living situations were employed by DRV authorities or "left the town and returned to their native places to earn a living in bliss [*làm ăn sung sướng*]." <sup>406</sup>

Nonetheless, in accordance with Marx's ambivalence toward the *lumpenproletariat*, DRV propaganda related to prostitution was not only about victimhood. Echoing the *Communist Manifesto* where Marx and Engels denounced imperialism as "the most prostitute and the ultimate form of the state power" formed by the bourgeois society<sup>407</sup>, DRV propaganda compared the ASV government to an avaricious prostitute: "the puppet [government] sees that the Americans have more money than the French, so they prefer to ally themselves with the Americans rather than with the French, just like a prostitute [*con gái điếm*] serving whoever has more money. [The puppet government] has allied themselves with the Japanese, the French, the Americans - an eel doesn't mind getting itself dirty [*thân lươn bao quản lấm đầu*]!"<sup>408</sup> The leaders of the ASV state, the former emperor Bảo Đại and his uncle Bửu Lộc (who served as the ASV's Prime Minister between January and June 1954), did not escape the DRV's attacks either. The Party's newspaper *Nhân Dân* characterized Bảo Đại as the "Brothel King" [*Vua nhà thổ*] and criticized his morals: he was not only the "standard puppet" [*điển hình bù nhìn*], but also a bribe-taker, a gambler, a player who frequented brothels in different continents and who stole his

<sup>403</sup> Nguyen-vo, *The Ironies of Freedom*, 153.

<sup>404</sup> See for example: Văn Thành, "Đồng bào Hà Nội chống giặc bắt người, vét của," *Nhân Dân* no.135 (11 Sep 1953), 3; Lê Tạo, "Cuộc sống tối tăm trong các thành phố tạm bị chiếm," *Nhân Dân* vol.200 (1 Jul 1954), 4

<sup>405</sup> "Nước Trung Hoa đổi mới: Thủ đô Bắc Kinh," *Cứu Quốc* no.90 (20 Jan 1953), 3.

<sup>406</sup> Hồng Hà, "Những ngày mới giải phóng ở thị xã Bắc-Ninh," *Nhân Dân* no.217 (24 Aug 1954), 4.

<sup>407</sup> Marx and Engels, *Manifesto*, 59.

<sup>408</sup> T.B., "Lại độc lập 'giả hiệu' một lần nữa," *Nhân Dân* no.193 (12 Jun 1954), 3.



subordinates' mistresses and wives.<sup>409</sup> Meanwhile Bửu Lộc was characterized as a traitor who, together with Bảo Đại, profited from selling the nation and splurged on extravagant and lecherous habits [*ăn chơi đàng điếm*].<sup>410</sup>

The ASV government was not only a “prostitute” government but also one that forced its women into prostitution, DRV propaganda highlighted. An article in *Cứu Quốc* in February 1954 and on flyers (Figure 3) distributed by DRV agents in French-ASV zones denounce the ASV’s mobilization of women into its army and warns the population in French-ASV zones of the schemes used to lure women into supporting the ASV’s warring efforts.<sup>411</sup> These schemes, “both luring [*lừa phỉnh*] and terrorizing [*khủng bố*],” included making prostitutes put on ASV military uniforms to disguise themselves as female soldiers to persuade naive women, organizing official women’s organizations and associations to “bind [*trói buộc*] and closely control women” then “corrupt” [*truy lạc hóa*] them by “pushing them into indulgence [*ăn chơi*] and lechery [*đàng điếm*].” Women who join these organizations, the article warns, “easily become prostitutes.” The article further claims that in the countryside, ASV forces “bombarded the rice fields, so women cannot work” and as a consequence, would fall into poverty and eventually be forced to enlist themselves in the ASV army or become prostitutes to feed themselves and their families. The article encourages the population to stand up to these pressures and provides a list of derogatory vocabulary to be used on female ASV soldiers and ASV women’s organizations: “brothel army” [*đội quân nhà thổ*], “association of prostitutes” [*hội gái đĩ*], “association of female pimps selling women into Westerners’ brothel” [*hội mẹ mìn bán phụ nữ vào nhà thổ Tây*]. The article concludes by warning women in French-ASV zones that “standing up and struggling against [the French-ASV government] is the only way to escape from being mobilized into the puppet army [*ngụy binh*], into the brothels serving the enemy.”<sup>412</sup> The DRV’s government and army mobilized women extensively during and after the First Indochina War - a tradition continued in the Vietnam War when female soldiers were hailed as the “long-haired army” [*đội quân tóc dài*].<sup>413</sup> Yet women who participated in the forces of the DRV’s adversaries, as shown in the article mentioned above, were considered prostitutes or women corrupted by imperialist lures.

---

<sup>409</sup> M.M., “Bảo Đại: Tên vua nhà thổ,” *Nhân Dân* no. 192 (9 Jun 1954), 2.

<sup>410</sup> M.M., “Bửu Lộc: Tên gác công của pháp gian Pê-tanh,” *Nhân Dân* no. 193 (12 Jun 1954), 2.

<sup>411</sup> “Chị em phụ nữ trong vùng sau lưng địch đấu tranh chống giặc bắt lính,” *Cứu Quốc* no.2529 (8 Feb 1954), 2.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Pettus, *Between Sacrifice and Desire*, 27.

For women’s participation in the Vietnam War, see: Karen Turner-Gottschang and Phan Thanh Hao, *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam* (New York: Wiley, 1998); Sandra C. Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Guillemot, “Death and Suffering at First Hand.”

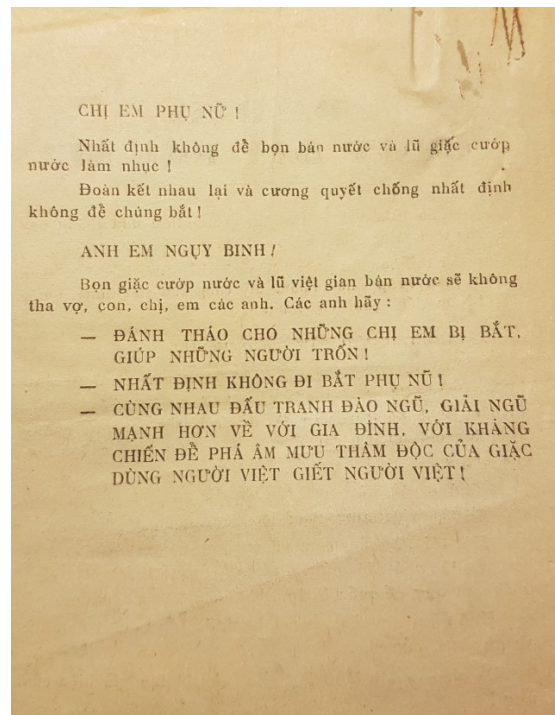
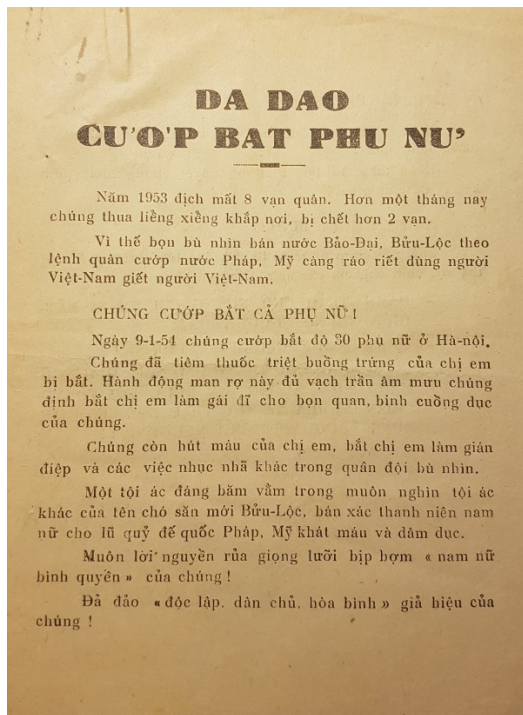


Figure 4: A propaganda flyer titled “Opposing the robbing of women” distributed in Hanoi in the night of 25-26 April 1954 <sup>414</sup>

#### Regulated sex (1945-1954)

Most scholars are under the impression that the Viet Minh was anti-prostitution but none has been able to provide concrete evidence that the Viet Minh’s approach to prostitutes and prostitution during their sixteen-month rule (1945-1946) was any different from the colonial state. For example, both David Marr and Christina Firpo have suggested that for ideological and moral reasons, the Viet Minh was against the selling of sex.<sup>415</sup> Yet there is no evidence that Ho Chi Minh’s government in 1945-1946 sought to ban prostitution. Marr points out that the New Life Campaign - the Viet Minh’s program for social transformation through elimination of “backward,” “uncivilized,” and “feudal” characteristics among the masses - denounced men who frequented prostitutes; he also indicates that female writers participating in the Vietnamese press during the sixteen months of Viet Minh rule called for a ban on prostitution among other gender-related policies.<sup>416</sup> Christina Firpo claims that the Viet Minh sought to eradicate the selling of sex and provides two pieces of evidence: an anachronistic claim that the Viet Minh in 1946 must have done the same thing as post-1949 Chinese communists in Shanghai and Marr’s finding that the DRV introduced a new tax on dance halls and *ả đào* singing houses in early 1946.<sup>417</sup> Firpo also cites the testimony of a former *ả đào* singer who recounts that high tax and policing

<sup>414</sup> GR 10R 149, SHD

<sup>415</sup> Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*, 540; Firpo, *Black Market Business*, 191.

<sup>416</sup> Marr, *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*, 540, 553.

<sup>417</sup> Firpo, *Black Market Business*, 191; Marr, *Vietnam*, 353n211. See also: VNDQCB no.3 (19 Jan 1946); “Chúng tôi mong chính phủ thẳng tay hơn nữa,” *Cứu Quốc* no.147 (21 Jan 1946).

activities forced *ả đào* singing houses in Hanoi to close down one by one. Higher taxes on *ả đào* singing houses and dance halls did not amount to an effort to eradicate prostitution, however. As Firpo repeatedly argues in the same monograph, the majority of prostitution activities in Tonkin were clandestine, so taxing policies would not have any remarkable disrupting effect on this black market business. It is thus more reasonable to assume that Ho Chi Minh's government in the period of 1945-1946 criticized prostitution but left the business undisrupted (or did not have enough time to implement more aggressive policies.)

During the First Indochina War, in urban areas under French-ASV control, the system of regulated sex trade established during the colonial period was continued.<sup>418</sup> Isabelle Tracol-Huynh has shown that the ASV's 1951 decree on regulations of prostitution was actually a Vietnamese translation of a 1915 decree promulgated by the French.<sup>419</sup> In DRV zones, the question of what to do with prostitutes started appearing in internal documents after the takeovers of urban areas along the Sino-Vietnamese frontiers in 1949-1950 (Chapter 1). In Lạng Sơn, for example, DRV public security forces reported that many prostitutes had left before the arrival of DRV forces to accompany French-ASV troops - a pattern that would be repeated in later urban takeovers.<sup>420</sup> It was also reported that public security agents managed to "persuade" the remaining prostitutes (about 10 women) to take up another profession, but medical treatment could not be done because there were neither medicines nor doctors for treating venereal diseases.<sup>421</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 1, the presence of prostitutes was one of the urban temptations that a number of DRV soldiers could not overcome: some tracked down the former prostitutes and "encouraged" them to return to selling sex, and as a result, contracted venereal disease.<sup>422</sup> It was not clear what happened to the soldiers after their activities and disease were known; but the department of public security of Lạng Sơn opened an investigation and arrested the recidivist prostitutes.<sup>423</sup>

Before the takeover of Hanoi, internal DRV documents reflect a simplistic approach to the question of prostitutes and prostitution. On paper, the formula is rather similar to Thu-huong Nguyen-vo's impression of the pre-*Đổi Mới* approach to prostitution: prostitutes were to be tracked down and gathered together, then they would be educated [*giáo dục*], cured of venereal disease, and given new employment; finally, reformed prostitutes were to be spread out to different corners of the territory to remake their lives.<sup>424</sup>

In an undated plan for the takeover of Hanoi by force - most likely drafted long before the ceasefire in mid-1954 - several steps were proposed regarding prostitution and prostitutes in the city:

---

<sup>418</sup> Tracol-Huynh, "Prostitution in colonial Hanoi," 544.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> "Kinh nghiệm thu hồi đô thị thị xã Lạng Sơn (18/10/1950)," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>421</sup> Ibid.; "Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>422</sup> "Thu hồi thị xã Lạng Sơn," BNV 3606, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid.

<sup>424</sup> Nguyen-vo, *The Ironies of Freedom*, 81, 88; "Quyết nghị án Chiếm lĩnh đô thị và Xây dựng vùng mới được giải phóng (1951) - Hội nghị chính quyền Liên khu Việt Bắc," BNV 3628, TTLTQG-III.

After the capital is liberated, the Committee will order the closure of nightclubs [*hộp đêm*], opium dens, *ả đào* singing houses. Tea houses [*phòng trà*] will also be closed temporarily.

The Department of Public Security will investigate and create a record of all prostitutes in the city.

The Bureau of Health will organize medical treatment for those with venereal disease.

Street and neighborhood committees will summon prostitutes [then] explain and persuade them to return to the honest life [*đời sống lương thiện*].

Those with a vocation will be helped: the Division of Social Welfare [and] charity organizations will find employment for them.

Those with a native place will be persuaded and helped to return to their native place.<sup>425</sup>

The neat plan could not be followed immediately after the actual takeover of Hanoi, but it demonstrates a number of points on pre-takeover DRV's mentality of governance. Looking at the larger picture of proposed treatment of the *lumpenproletariat* - in this case, prostitutes were put in the same category as petty criminals, vagrants, and orphans - the DRV government was still figuring out a new way to deal with prostitutes and distinguishing itself from previous regimes. The proposed treatment of petty criminals, vagrants, and orphans was in accord with the system put in place under the colonial regime: criminals should be arrested, tried, and if applicable, return to their native places; vagrants and orphans should be sent to poorhouses [*viện tế bần*] and if conditions allow, those eligible would receive education and vocational training.<sup>426</sup>

Regulated prostitution as under the colonial regime, however, could not be continued. It should be remarked here that this document does not mention re-education centers, and there might be two reasons for this: first, it is possible that at the time this document was drafted, the prostitutes reform program in communist China had not fully been developed, and thus the DRV government did not yet have a Chinese model to refer to; second, working from the remote mountains, the DRV might have underestimated the scale and complexity of the problem of prostitution in the cities. Nonetheless it was clear to the DRV government that dealing with prostitution required the collaboration of multiple governmental departments (Public Security, Health, Social Welfare).

Here I would return to Thu-huong Nguyen-vo's analysis and argue that Nguyen-vo's characterization of the pre-Đổi Mới approach to prostitution - that prostitution was not a phenomenon continually arising from the society, but simply a vestige of the old regime to be wiped away - is more apt as a description of the DRV leadership's mentality toward social problems in the pre-takeover period.<sup>427</sup> In fact, during the war, urban society and especially its

---

<sup>425</sup> "Tình hình, nhiệm vụ, và các chính sách thi hành vùng mới giải phóng (dự thảo)," BNV 3627.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid. On the colonial system, see: Haydon Cherry, *Down and Out in Saigon* and Van Nguyen-Marshall, *In Search of Moral Authority: The Discourse on Poverty, Poor Relief, and Charity in French Colonial Vietnam*, 2008.

<sup>427</sup> Nguyen-vo, *The Ironies of Freedom*, 88.

problems were removed from the control of the DRV state which had been pushed into distant Việt Bắc and scattered throughout the rural and mountainous areas. All characterizations of urban society and its problems in DRV propaganda only served as an *ideal type* of an oppressed and depraved space and population, a critique of the DRV's enemies, and a justification of its armed struggle. It was only after the communist takeover of urban areas that "social problems" fell under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the DRV state. As in other domains, the DRV government found out that the situation on the ground was very different from what they had envisioned on paper, and their course of action eventually had to be changed and adjusted according to the situation.

### *Post-takeover Ambiguities: 1954-1955*

DRV intelligence estimated that before the takeover there were at least 11,800 prostitutes in Hanoi: about 6,000 licensed prostitutes (who worked in registered brothels and military camps), and 5,800 clandestine prostitutes.<sup>428</sup> Two months after the takeover of Hanoi, it was estimated that the number of licensed prostitutes in the capital city dropped to about 100.<sup>429</sup> The number of clandestine prostitutes could not be verified however - it was clear that clandestine prostitution did not stop completely but only went "underground" [*chìm đi*].<sup>430</sup> Remaining active were 12 brothels and 39 *cô đầu* singing houses near the western and southern limits of the city.<sup>431</sup> Prostitution activities were also detected at a number of small restaurants [*quán cơm*] and opium dens [*tiệm hút*].<sup>432</sup>

DRV authorities believed that most prostitutes had left for Haiphong, accompanying their madams or the French troops.<sup>433</sup> Indeed, the dramatic drop in number in Hanoi was simultaneous with a dramatic increase in Haiphong. The sudden increase in number of prostitutes in Haiphong after the takeover of Hanoi raised local concerns and motivated some intriguing journalistic investigation. In October 1954, the Haiphong-based daily newspaper *Fire of life* [*Lửa sống*] (in print between September 1954 and May 1955) ran a 15-part reportage series [*phóng sự*] called "Withered flowers in the Port city" [*Những cánh hoa tàn trên đất Cảng*] by Bảo Hưng, investigating the origins, motivations, and the working and living conditions of prostitutes in Haiphong.<sup>434</sup> The first-page column "Smokes" [*Có Khói*] on the same newspaper, which printed correspondence from the public, often featured calls for more official attention to the increased public presence of prostitutes and brothels (both legal and illegal), citing concerns for social order and public health and morale.<sup>435</sup> By May 1955, the majority of these women had once again migrated, this time southward to Saigon. After the DRV took over Haiphong, it was

---

<sup>428</sup> "Báo cáo về tình hình gái điếm Hà Nội," PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>429</sup> Ibid.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.,; "Báo cáo tổng quan về công tác tiếp quản thủ đô Hà Nội ngày 09-10 đến ngày 31-10-1954," PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>431</sup> "Báo cáo về tình hình gái điếm Hà Nội," PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

"Cô đầu" and "À đào" - the term used by Christina Firpo in her works - both refer to the singers of *ca trù*, a form of traditional music. Firpo, "Sex and Song;" Firpo, *Black Market Business*.

<sup>432</sup> "Báo cáo về tình hình gái điếm Hà Nội," PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>433</sup> "Báo cáo về tình hình gái điếm Hà Nội," PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>434</sup> Bảo Hưng, "Những cánh hoa tàn trên đất Cảng (phóng sự điều tra)," *Lửa sống* no.6-21 (3-18 Oct 1954)

<sup>435</sup> "Có Khói," *Lửa sống* no. 6-7, 12-15, 20 (Oct 1954).

estimated that there remained in the city and its outskirts more than 1,200 prostitutes and 127 brothel owners.<sup>436</sup>

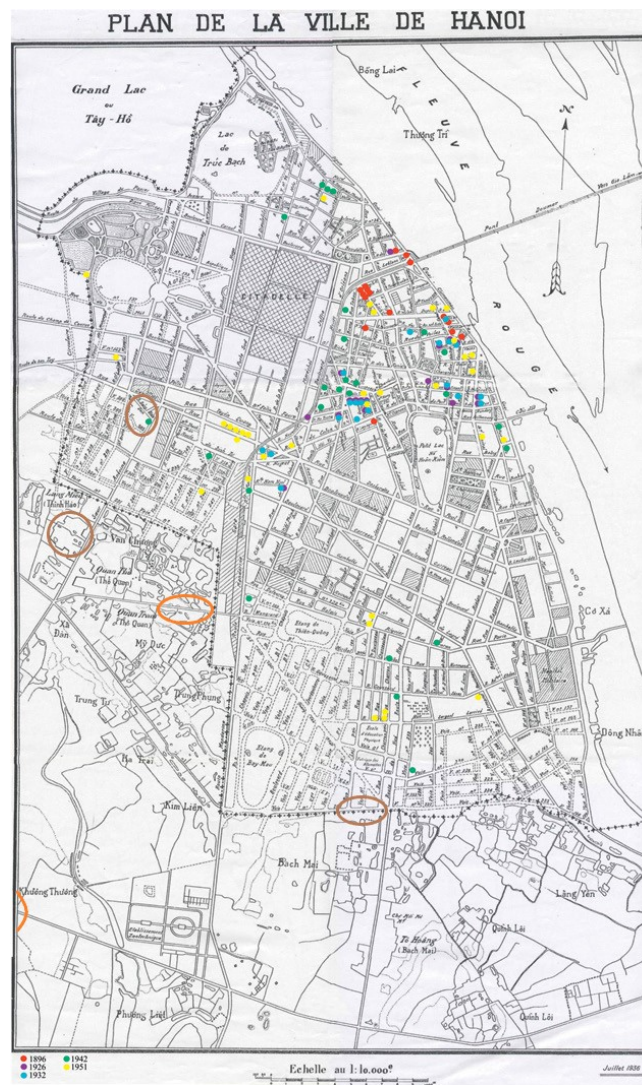


Figure 5: Brothels and cô đầu singing houses (1896–1954)<sup>437</sup>

Prostitutes in Hanoi in late 1954 were divided into two types:

- Clandestine prostitutes [*gái điếm kín*] include wives of low-ranking civil servants, female vendors [*tiểu thương*] (selling vegetables, beer, juice in the area of Thụy Khuê, grocery store owners) and a number of female students. These [clandestine prostitutes] are only known to rickshaw pullers. Their number has decreased by a lot, especially the number of female students has deeply decreased.

<sup>436</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại (12/1957),” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>437</sup> Source: Map of Official brothels in Hanoi (1896-1951) in Tracol-Huynh, “Prostitution in Hanoi” & “Báo cáo về tình hình gái điếm Hà Nội,” PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

- The majority of public prostitutes [*gái điếm công khai*] are peasants and a number of corrupted vendors. At the moment, these women are still selling sex furtively, some of them are opium addicts, some are living independently - when there is a client, the madam would send for them, some live together with 2, 3 other women and use their house to both receive clients and host other prostitutes, some live alone and scout clients by strolling around the lake Hoàn Kiếm.<sup>438</sup>

The same report comments that after the takeover the number of prostitutes decreased but “the spread of venereal disease [was] more destructive because they [the prostitutes] worked clandestinely and did not dare to go to the doctor’s.” Furthermore, the majority of the prostitutes were addicted to opium.<sup>439</sup>

Such categorization of prostitutes and descriptions of their activities show that the municipal government and central government were aware of and concerned about the prostitution situation. But instead of taking immediate actions, like the communist government in Shanghai, the DRV government adopted an almost *laissez-faire* attitude. This is first shown in the tax policy during the first months after takeover. A day after the takeover of Hanoi, the DRV government announced that it would abolish four types of tax that existed under the previous regime and keep, until later notice, four other types of tax.<sup>440</sup> In fact as early as 18 September, the government had decided that another type of tax would be abolished but did not announce this widely. An internal document of the National Bank of Vietnam noted: “About taxes that target *cô đầu* singers, dancing girls, spirit mediums: we turn a blind eye and do not collect them (but we do not announce their elimination either).”<sup>441</sup>

As Christina Firpo has pointed out, by the 1930s, *ả đào* or *cô đầu* singing houses and dance halls had become popular venues for organized clandestine sex work.<sup>442</sup> Until 1954, the DRV government had never outlawed prostitution and had, in fact, continued to recognize *cô đầu* singing houses and dance halls (as well as those employed in these venues) as licensed businesses for taxing purposes. The collection of a new “special” tax on singing houses and dance halls (by revenue and by number of singers/dancers employed)<sup>443</sup> from January 1946 has been cited in both the works of David Marr and Christina Firpo (though they differ on the motivation of this tax: Marr argues that it was a part of the DRV state’s wider efforts to raise revenue, while Firpo argues that it was to pressure these sites of “decadence and debauchery”

---

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> “Vấn đề thuế tại Hà Nội thay đổi hoàn toàn: Bãi thuế an ninh, đảm phụ quốc phòng, thuế hàng rong, thuế căn cước Hoa kiều,” *Sông Hồng* no.55 (12 Oct 1954).

In late December, the government announced the replacement of “40 types of exploitative tax” by 12 new types of tax that were “just [*công bằng*] and reasonable [*hợp lý*].” “Thông cáo của Hội đồng Chính phủ,” *Cửu Quốc* no. 2690 (29 Dec 1954).

The 12 types of tax were: thuế nông nghiệp, thuế doanh nghiệp, thuế thực lãi (replaced by thuế lợi tức doanh nghiệp in 1956), thuế buôn chuyên, thuế hàng hóa, thuế sát sinh, thuế xuất nhập khẩu, thuế thổ trạch, thuế kinh doanh nghệ thuật, thuế môn bài, thuế muối, thuế rượu.

<sup>441</sup> “Chính sách thuế áp dụng trong thành phố Hà Nội,” PTT 97, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>442</sup> Firpo, *Black Market Business*.

<sup>443</sup> VNDQCB no.3 (19 Jan 1946).

into voluntary closure.)<sup>444</sup> In March 1947, the DRV state-in-war announced Decree 29/SL on employer-employee relations in private businesses. *Á dào* singers and dancing girls were declared a profession [*nghe*], and employers in this profession were prohibited from employing children under 15 years old.<sup>445</sup> In June 1949, another decree, Decree 49/SL on direct tax [*thuế trực thu*] to be effective from January 1950, recognized *cô đầu* singing as a licensed business for tax purpose.<sup>446</sup> The DRV state's undeclared move to "turn a blind eye" on *cô đầu* singers and dance girls after the takeover of Hanoi in 1954 signifies therefore an important turn. From the latter half of 1954 on, *cô đầu* singers and dancing girls as well as their working venues (singing houses, dance halls) vanished from laws and policies on business licenses, labor relations, and taxation. With their relation to the state no longer specified in any legal framework, *cô đầu* singers, dancing girls, and owners of singing houses and dance halls had become the targets of an undeclared and undocumented anti-prostitution war.

In the ambiguous atmosphere between October 1954 and May 1955, the DRV government pushed forward the discourse that some prostitutes could be undermining efforts to establish order and social security, or worse, acting as the enemies' agents. In Hanoi, during the first month after takeover, the Party Committee of Hanoi reported incidents where some "women" [*bọn phụ nữ*] tried to "seduce" [*du dỗ*] DRV soldiers.<sup>447</sup> An article published in December 1954 in *Quân Đội Nhân Dân*, the official newspaper of the People's Army, warned:

The French [...] had planted a number of spies and agents to derange the population, [and] to corrupt cadres and soldiers. Recently they used a number of prostitutes [*gái đĩ*] disguised as local inhabitants paying visits to soldiers. These women [*bọn này*] usually act [*lả lợt*] to raise intimacy, give [soldiers] fragrant soaps and cigarettes, and write letters to suggest later meetings.<sup>448</sup>

Even internal reports also adopted this trope of prostitutes as the enemy's agents. Two reports from Hai Phong in April and May 1955 - the end of the 300-day period of free movement - list, among the "enemy's plots," the use of prostitutes to both lure young men to go South and to seduce DRV cadres.<sup>449</sup>

In the Party's discourses during and after the takeover of urban areas, women were among the "sugarcoated bullets" - an expression first used by Mao Zedong in 1949 [*tangyi guozhe de paodan*] and re-utilized by Ho Chi Minh in September 1954 to warn his cadres and soldiers of

---

<sup>444</sup> Marr, *Vietnam*, 353; Firpo, *Black Market Business*, 191.

<sup>445</sup> "Sắc lệnh 19/SL về việc làm công, giữa các chủ nhân, người Việt Nam hay người ngoại quốc và các công nhân Việt Nam làm tại các xưởng kỹ nghệ, hầm mỏ, thương điểm và các nhà làm nghề tự do (12/03/1947)" accessed at <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/lao-dong-tien-luong/sac-lenh-29-sl-quy-dinh-giao-dich-lam-cong-chu-nhan-nguoi-viet-nam-ngoai-quoc-cong-nhan-xuong-ky-nghe-ham-mo-thuong-diem-nghe-tu-do-36185.aspx?v=d>.

<sup>446</sup> "Sắc lệnh 49/SL quy định luật thuế trực thu (18/06/1949)" accessed at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Doanh-nghiep/Sac-lenh-49-SL-Chu-tich-nuoc-quy-dinh-Luat-Thue-truc-thu-36426.aspx>.

<sup>447</sup> "Báo cáo tổng quan về công tác tiếp quản thủ đô Hà Nội ngày 09-10 đến ngày 31-10-1954," PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>448</sup> H. Khê, "Lại một bài học cảnh giác ở Lục Nam," *Quân Đội Nhân Dân* no.151 (5 Dec 1954), 2.

<sup>449</sup> "Tình hình Hải Phòng (21-29/04/1955)," BNV 3776, TTLTQG-III; "Tình hình Hải Phòng (06/05/1955)," BNV 3776, TTLTQG-III.



the dangers lurking in the cities.<sup>450</sup> In Ho's discourse, "riches" and "beautiful girls" were the two most dangerous threats to revolutionaries' integrity and morale.<sup>451</sup> These represented not only a depraved urban culture but could also be the traps that the "enemy" laid in order to corrupt revolutionaries unfamiliar with the urban space.

All in all, the approach that the DRV state held toward prostitution and prostitutes during the first year after the takeover of Hanoi could be characterized as active inaction: it did not announce any official policy or program but did not announce the abolishment of the status quo either; at the same time, it quietly kept track of the situation and developments. Given that the state was still trying to establish itself in the urban area (Chapters 3) and that changes in the population were highly fast-paced due to the 300-day free movement provision from the Geneva Accords, such active inaction seems logical and strategic.

### *Social Welfare in Urban DRV: 1945-1955*

After the takeover of Haiphong in May 1955, the DRV state started stepping up its social reform programs. In rural areas, the fourth and fifth land reform campaigns were in full force.<sup>452</sup> In the city, as mentioned in Chapter 4, retained employees and urban-based DRV cadres started being sent to the countryside to observe and participate in these campaigns as the final course in their political and ideological re-education. Another program that took place in the cities and would be highly consequential to the goal of curbing prostitution was a large-scale campaign that targeted the floating population in the cities: vagrants, petty criminals, orphans, and prostitutes - in other words, the urban *lumpenproletariat*. The campaign was an inter-ministerial effort that involved the Ministry of Public Security, the Ministry of Health, and most importantly the Ministry of Social Welfare which was officially established in September 1955. With this campaign launched in late 1955, these floating populations were to be swept up from the streets, go through a brief categorization process, then either be imprisoned, sent back to their families, or sent to a newly established system of camps ran by the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Before going into the stories of these camps, a brief analysis that situates the organization of these camps in late 1955 in a longer history of social welfare in the DRV is necessary. 1955 was actually the second time that a Ministry of Social Welfare was established within the DRV apparatus. After the August Revolution (1945), the Provisional Government of the DRV headed by Ho Chi Minh established a Ministry of Social Welfare whose function was to provide aid and assistance, in cash and in kind, to the population in need such as those suffering from natural disasters.<sup>453</sup> In addition, it was to collaborate with the Ministry of Health on maintaining liaisons with private foundations and public charities, carrying out famine relief, promoting public hygiene, and educating the masses through propaganda campaigns to eradicate venereal

---

<sup>450</sup> Benjamin Kindler, "Sugarcoated Bullets" in Christian Sorace, Ivan Franceschini, Nicholas Loubere, eds. *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao to Xi* (Australia: ANU Press and Verso Books, 2019), 263-268; "Bài nói chuyện với bộ đội, công an và cán bộ trước khi vào tiếp quản Thủ đô (05/09/54)", *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập Vol.7* (Hanoi: Sự thật, 1987), 38.

<sup>451</sup> "Bài nói chuyện với bộ đội, công an và cán bộ trước khi vào tiếp quản Thủ đô (05/09/54)", *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập Vol.7* (Hanoi: Sự thật, 1987), 38.

<sup>452</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 239-59.

<sup>453</sup> Bộ Cứu tế xã hội, "Nghị định của Bộ trưởng bộ Cứu tế Xã hội đặt nguyên tắc về sự cứu tế xã hội và lập một cơ quan cứu tế tại các sở y tế địa phương (10/09/1945)," VNDQCB no.2 (6 Oct 1945), 27.

diseases. However the Ministry was dissolved as soon as Ho Chi Minh's government was pushed away from the cities by the French at the end of 1946. During the First Indochina War, as mentioned earlier in the chapter, urban social problems were not a concern for the DRV's governance and discourses on social problems served as a tool for DRV propaganda.

After the takeover of Hanoi, the question of social welfare became a concrete concern for the DRV's government. On top of rampant unemployment, it was estimated that after the takeover, in Hanoi, Haiphong, and Nam Dinh, there were about 2,000 vagrant paupers.<sup>454</sup> These paupers were "poor people with no job, [who] had no one to rely on, and thus had to wander from place to place to beg."<sup>455</sup> In a few cases, there were "professional beggars" - those who did not know how to earn a living except by begging which had become "a habit transferred from generation to generation" [*cha truyền con nói*].<sup>456</sup> In addition, it was estimated that there were 400 homeless children and teenagers in Hanoi in December 1954.<sup>457</sup> They were earning their living by selling newspapers, selling ice cream, shining shoes, or getting by without any fixed means of income. The authority perceived these children and teenagers as both vulnerable and problematic: "These children wander around, hungry and cold, either they have become rogues or the reactionaries are using them and paying them to sabotage the city."<sup>458</sup> Most of these children and teens would later be categorized as "young rogues" [*trẻ em lưu manh*] - homeless children and orphans who became criminalized after crossing paths with "gang bosses" [*trùm lưu manh*].<sup>459</sup>

During the first year after the takeover of Hanoi in 1954, local committees of social welfare [*Ban Cứu tế*] under provincial and municipal Administrative Committees [*Ủy ban Hành chính*; UBHC] were established to deal with pressing social problems in an *ad hoc* manner characteristic of local governance immediately after takeover (Chapter 2).<sup>460</sup> These committees of social welfare were in charge of investigating and providing aid to three groups: unemployed workers, vagrant paupers, and criminalized children and teens or "young rogues" [*trẻ em lưu manh*] in the cities. The local committees of social welfare were to cooperate with the Ministry of Labor to identify and provide aid for pauperized unemployed workers in newly taken over urban areas.<sup>461</sup> Workers clustered around their factories and in ghetto neighborhoods (such as the Phúc Xá area in Hanoi, and the Cầu Tre area in Haiphong) so it was relatively easy for social welfare cadres to track them down.<sup>462</sup> But pinning down the floating population of vagrants and figuring out what to do with them was a highly challenging task.

---

<sup>454</sup> "Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại," CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

<sup>457</sup> "Biên bản cuộc họp Ủy ban Hành chính TP Hà Nội ngày 14/12/1954," PTT 531, TTLTQG-III

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> "Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại," CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>460</sup> Ginsburg, "Local Government and Administration (Part I)," 230.

<sup>461</sup> "Biên bản cuộc họp Ủy ban Hành chính TP Hà Nội ngày 14/12/1954," PTT 531, TTLTQG-III;"Quy định về vấn đề thu dụng công chức mới ở TP Hà Nội," PTT 99, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>462</sup> "Biên bản cuộc họp Ủy ban Hành chính TP Hà Nội ngày 14/12/1954," PTT 531, TTLTQG-III; Báo cáo tình hình công tác xã hội tháng 7/1956," CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

In a report on the situation of social problems during the three years after takeover (1957), the Ministry of Social Welfare blamed the corrupted and exploitative culture under the French and Bao Dai and on their scheme to sabotage the DRV's economy - moving important companies and factories away, leaving hundreds thousands of people unemployed - as the main culprits for the high number of paupers and young rogues in big cities. In December 1954, however, authorities in Hanoi recognized that the disruption in the preexisting system of orphanages, almshouses, and charity centers since the takeover was one of the biggest reasons why there were wandering orphans and beggars on the streets of the capital. Hanoi authorities estimated that part of the 400 wandering children in Hanoi were orphans sent away by Catholic orphanages [*cô nhi viện*] that no longer had enough resources to care for them; 182 invalids in Hanoi, almost all blind, crippled, handicapped were sent away from the privately-funded almshouse [*Trại tế bần*] which went into limbo after the takeover.<sup>463</sup> Authorities in Hanoi also understood that these organizations had been in limbo because their organizers, managers, and donors - closely linked to the class of bourgeois and capitalists and religious groups - had also been in limbo, watching the new government's attitude. The Administrative Committee of Hanoi decided in late 1954: "In order to solve the problem of orphans and beggars, [we] must reactivate these organizations."<sup>464</sup> Local committees of social welfare were to be in charge of contacting and working things out with these private organizations.

It is unclear what happened to the plan to cooperate with private social welfare organizations outlined in the meeting of the Administrative Committee of Hanoi in December 1954. By late 1955, this solution was no longer considered, and no trace of private charities and social welfare institutions was found. In late 1955 to early 1956, a Ministry of Social Welfare was established. Its functions, compared to its predecessor 10 years earlier as well as the local committees of social welfare of the 1954-1955 period, were both further specified and expanded. Instead of being defined by types of activity as in 1945, the new Ministry's responsibilities were defined in terms of social groups to whom they were to "help and support":

THE GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES of the Ministry of Social Welfare are:

1) To aid and mobilize aid from the masses to help and support laborers in poverty and hunger [*người lao động đói rách*] because of natural disasters and pestilences which they could not overcome themselves, such as:

- Those suffering from drought, flood, continual loss of harvest, lack of crops for their own consumption and continuing cultivation

- Unemployed industrial workers in poverty and hunger still in search of employment

2) To aid and mobilize aid from the masses to help and support completely disabled workers [*người mất sức lao động*] without any refuge

3) To aid and mobilize aid from the masses to help and support those unable to work and without refuge such as: orphans, homeless children, invalids, visually impaired people,

---

<sup>463</sup> "Biên bản cuộc họp Ủy ban Hành chính TP Hà Nội ngày 14/12/1954," PTT 531, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid.

etc. To gradually create the conditions allowing them to live a fully independent or partially independent life

4) To help and reform [*cải tạo*] those who, because of the old society, don't know how to labor, such as prostitutes, vagrants, etc. To create the conditions allowing them to [find other means to] earn a living

It is perhaps not a coincidence that the populations that the Ministry of Social Welfare was responsible for correspond perfectly with the category of *lumpenproletariat* analyzed earlier in this chapter. The potential harm that the “dangerous class” could pose to the revolution and the new society justified removing them from the society for surveillance and reform until the state could be sure that they would no longer pose any risk to the process of social reconstruction. With its official establishment, the Ministry of Social Welfare was to be in total charge of vagrant populations in the cities. While the approach to this population during the first year after the takeover of Hanoi had focused on providing relief, from late 1955, the approach shifted to confinement and reform through forced labor in state-run camps.

In late 1955, Public Security forces carried out large-scale sweeps in Hanoi and Haiphong, removing from the streets those they considered as needing a centralized program for reform: “young rogues,” vagrants, prostitutes and brothel owners.<sup>465</sup> Those arrested by the police were classified according to the level of “danger” that they posed for the society and received one of three treatments [perhaps: “faced one of three consequences”], in the order of lowest to highest level of “danger”: sent back to their families, sent to the appropriate camp [*trại*] run by the Ministry of Social Welfare, or detained in police-run workhouses [*trại cải tạo*]. The Ministry of Social Welfare ran three types of camps: camps for youth [*Trại trẻ em*], camps for paupers and invalids [*Trại đồng bào cơ nhỡ*], and camps for prostitutes [*Trại gái điếm*]. During the first months after the sweeps commenced, reformees were housed at existing facilities (preexisting almshouses and orphanages) and abandoned residences in Hanoi and Haiphong. In Haiphong, for example, detained prostitutes shared an almshouse with paupers and invalids, while vagrant youths were housed in abandoned villas.<sup>466</sup>

Throughout the year in 1956, seven different camps [*trại*] were established in newly built or expanded facilities: 3 camps for youth [*Trại trẻ em*], 2 camps for vagrants and invalids [*Trại đồng bào cơ nhỡ*], 2 camps for prostitutes [*Trại gái điếm*]. According to official rules, each city and province could establish their own camp if there were over 50 reformees (of the same type - for example, if 50 prostitutes were rounded up in a city, a camp for prostitutes could be established in that city); if there were under 50 reformees, these detainees would be sent to the closest camp, or an inter-provincial camp could be established.<sup>467</sup> There were plans to build a camp for youths and a camp for paupers (each housing up to 300 people) in Nam Định, but in the

---

<sup>465</sup> “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay (06/1962),” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>466</sup> Bộ Cứu Tế Xã Hội, “Báo cáo Tình hình và công tác xã hội trong tháng 3-1956 (31/03/1956),” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; Bộ Cứu tế Xã hội, “Xin cấp kinh phí xây dựng trại mô côi và Trại gái điếm (20/06/1956),” CTXH 435, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>467</sup> Bộ Nội Vụ - Bộ Tài Chính - Bộ Cứu tế xã hội, “Thông tư số 01-CT: Tạm thời quy định tổ chức và biên chế ngành cứu tế xã hội tại các khu, tỉnh và thành phố (10/05/1956).”

end, all resources were concentrated on building camps in the Hanoi and Haiphong areas and one inter-provincial camp for youths in Hải Dương province.<sup>468</sup>

Except for the camp for paupers in An Đà area in the city of Haiphong, all other camps were built in suburban areas that met certain qualities: spacious with good air circulation, close enough to a waterway and main roads for ease of transportation, but far enough from residential areas so that “not yet reformed” detainees would not be able to cause disturbance [*phá phách*].<sup>469</sup> Reformees, except invalids, participated in the construction of their own camp - a mandatory activity conformed with the general philosophy of moral reform through physical labor.<sup>470</sup>

Type of Camp	Number in camp (Jan 1956)	Total number (1956)	Returned to families	Sent to schools & employed	Death	Run-aways	Number in camp (Jan 1957)
<b>Camp for Youths</b>							
Hanoi	485	591	72	3	2	29	485
Haiphong	100	429	97	3	1	127	201
Hai Dương	261	261	28			64	179
Total	846	1281	197			220	865
<b>Camp for paupers &amp; invalids</b>							
Hanoi	386	424	119		27	25	280
Haiphong	119	307	156		18	13	120
Total	505	731	275		45	38	400
<b>Camp for prostitutes</b>							
Hanoi	42	42	5	1		15	21
Haiphong	42	129	6			48	75
Total	84	171	11			63	96
<b>Total</b>	<b>1435</b>	<b>2183</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>321</b>	<b>1361</b>

Table 3: Statistics of centers run by the Ministry of Social Welfare (Jan 1956 - Jan 1957)<sup>471</sup>

<sup>468</sup> “Xây dựng 1 trại hành khất và 1 trại trẻ mồ côi tại khu 3,” CTXH 435, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>469</sup> “Xây dựng 1 trại hành khất và 1 trại trẻ mồ côi tại khu 3 (04/07/1956),” CTXH 435, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>470</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 3/1956,” “Báo cáo tháng 7/1956,” “Báo cáo tháng 11/1956,” “Báo cáo tháng 12/1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; “Phòng Xã hội Báo cáo 3 tháng 7, 8, 9 (1956),” CTXH 236, “V/v đề nghị xin thêm tiền làm nhà và sắm dụng cụ nông nghiệp cũng như thủ công cho trại,” CTXH 241, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>471</sup> “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình tệ nạn xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956 (15/01/1957),” “Báo cáo tháng 10-56,” “Báo cáo công tác tháng 11-1956,” “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải Phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; UBHC Hai Phong, “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay (06/1962),” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

### *Building the camps for prostitutes*

In January 1956, public security forces in Hanoi swept up 106 prostitutes and brothel owners: 50 of them were detained by the police in a reform camp, 30 were sent to work on state construction projects, and 26 sent to the camp for prostitutes in Hanoi.<sup>472</sup> In Haiphong, 38 prostitutes and 6 brothel owners were sent to the camp run by the Ministry of Social Welfare.

The general philosophy behind the establishment of the camps was to “gather [prostitutes] together [and] reform them” so that they would become “good people who would contribute to the society.”<sup>473</sup> But before the first national assembly of the Ministry of Social Welfare in March 1956, it was not clear what “reform” really meant and how it was going to be achieved.<sup>474</sup> Thus during the first few months, prostitutes were gathered without any clear agenda, and managing cadres spent most of their time resolving fights and disputes among detainees, recapturing fugitives, and punishing the recaptured.<sup>475</sup> In March 1956, it was finally decided that the camps were to “combine productive labor with political education to educate reformees” and guidelines were distributed to camp managing cadres.<sup>476</sup>

The Ministry of Social Welfare also decided that prostitutes would be moved away from the city (in existing facilities or abandoned residences) to create a better environment for productive labor. Both new camps for prostitutes were built in the suburban areas, around 10km west of the cities: in Phú Mỹ (Hanoi) and in Mỹ Tranh (Haiphong). The Haiphong camp was built on properties confiscated from landlords and could accommodate up to 200 prostitutes.<sup>477</sup> Each camp included a patch of land for agricultural cultivation and built areas separated by functions: sleep and rest, cooking and storage, eating, medical treatment (quarantine and dispensary), toilet and bathroom, community space, an area for manual labor (yarn bleaching, weaving, milling), and an area for raising cattle. Each camp also had a well and a reservoir for drinking water.<sup>478</sup>

In general, like their Chinese counterparts, prostitutes in North Vietnamese camps received medical treatment and went through a reform program that combined literacy education, discipline, criticism and self-criticism, and manual labor.<sup>479</sup> Vietnamese camp managing cadres were to adopt a two-pronged strategy in their dealing with the prostitutes: persuasion on one

---

<sup>472</sup> “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình tệ nạn xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956 (15/01/1957),” “Báo cáo Tình hình và công tác xã hội trong tháng 1-1956 (31/01/1956),” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>473</sup> “Báo cáo tổ chức xây dựng trại gái điếm,” CTXH 241, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>474</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 3/56,” “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>475</sup> “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>476</sup> Ibid.; “Báo cáo tháng 3/56,” “Chương trình công tác 3 tháng cuối năm 10,11,12,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>477</sup> Bộ Cứu tế Xã hội, “Xin cấp kinh phí xây dựng trại mồ côi và Trại gái điếm (20/06/1956),” CTXH 435, TTLTQG-III; Sở Cứu tế Xã hội Thành Hải Phòng, “Báo cáo Tổ chức xây dựng trại Cải tạo gái điếm (16/10/1956),” CTXH 241, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>478</sup> “Xây dựng 1 trại hành khất và 1 trại trẻ mồ côi tại khu 3,” CTXH 435, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>479</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture’,” 479; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 313-18; “Báo cáo tháng 9/56,” “Chương trình công tác 3 tháng cuối năm 10,11,12,” “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo từ 20-8 đến 20-9 của Trại Hoàn Mỹ,” CTXH 239, TTLTQG-III.

hand, and severe punishment for those who refused to cooperate or rebelled.<sup>480</sup> Reports from the camps show a contradictory picture. On one hand, it was reported that productive labor had a positive effect on detainees: they were “cheerful” [*phấn khởi*], and they became more aware of the value of labor [*ý thức lao động tiến bộ*]<sup>481</sup> - monthly reports did not portray literacy rates but focused mostly on the output of labor activities such as the area of land tilled, the amount of yarn bleached, or the amount of fabric woven by reformees.<sup>482</sup> On the other hand, a large number of prostitutes were described as indolent, not collaborating, aggressive, and cunning. The Haiphong camp reported that out of 52 prostitutes present in the camp in November 1956, 21 were “lazy” and did not want to work: “even when the bell rings they continue to sleep until cadres come to unveil their mosquito net, some would cover themselves up again and return to sleep, complaining that they are sick.”<sup>483</sup> Prostitutes in the Hanoi camp were characterized as being too used to an uninhibited lifestyle [*lối sống phóng khoáng*] and lavish spending, so they resisted the regulated lifestyle in the camp and felt frustrated without money to spend.<sup>484</sup> Until early 1957, rather than the advised method of persuasion, it was reported that managing cadres in both camps tended to overutilize punitive measures: scolding, addressing detainees with derogatory terms, beating;<sup>485</sup> the Hanoi camp, collaborating with the bureau and public security, indiscriminately punished those they considered to be “sabotaging” the institution by sending them to court on criminal charges.<sup>486</sup>

Such a picture reflects the mixture of hopefulness, frustration, and anxiety felt by the small number of cadres who had to oversee these camps. Before September 1956, most camps operated by the Ministry of Social Welfare had only 1 to 3 overseeing cadres.<sup>487</sup> It was only in the last three months of 1956 that more cadres were sent to reinforce the management of these camps.<sup>488</sup> Yet even after reinforcement, the Haiphong camp, which detained between 40 and 80 prostitutes from 1956 to 1958, was run by only 5 cadres (a general manager, an accountant, a food manager, and two instructors in general education and in labor).<sup>489</sup> Not only did most of these cadres have little to no experience in managing re-education institutions, they were often in disagreement with each other.<sup>490</sup> Cadres in the Haiphong camp “fought each other for status,” all “wanted to be the head manager, but nobody wanted to assume any responsibility.”<sup>491</sup> The same situation

---

<sup>480</sup> “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>481</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 3/56,” “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>482</sup> “Tập báo cáo tình hình công tác xã hội từ tháng 1 - 12/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>483</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>484</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>485</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 10/56,” “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>486</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại,” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>487</sup> In fact, the situation was relatively better in the camps for prostitutes because there were much less detainees than in the camps for youths (over 500 in Hanoi and 100-200 in Haiphong) and in the camps for paupers and invalids (around 300 in Hanoi and over 100 in Haiphong). “Báo cáo tháng 3/56,” “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid.

<sup>489</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>490</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 3/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>491</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 10/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

happened in the Hanoi camp where until December 1956 cadres were still disagreeing, scoffing at each other, and there was no clear organization of official functions.<sup>492</sup>

Perhaps dealing with internal politics and figuring out how to run a camp was already too much; cadres had a hard time just keeping track of the number of reformees. In a rather surprisingly frustrated tone, a cadre from the Haiphong camp admitted in November 1956: “because of the constant escaping and recapturing [of prostitutes] we’re not really sure how many people there are [in the camp].”<sup>493</sup> The same report recounts that detainees always looked for occasions to escape: when cadres were eating or sleeping, during a check up at the local hospital, during a group outing for shopping. Even though the camps were guarded by public security agents, prostitutes were separated from the outside world only by bamboo picket fences, and determined ones easily escaped - though many were recaptured right away.<sup>494</sup> The cycle of arrest-escape-arrest never ceased: a certain Miss Bàng in the Hanoi camp escaped 10 times and was recaptured 10 times in a month;<sup>495</sup> in December 1956, 22 prostitutes escorted by public security forces to the Haiphong camp and 10 to the Hanoi camp all escaped after a day or two.<sup>496</sup> All in all, it was recorded that 171 prostitutes arrived in the two camps during 1956, but by January 1957, more than one third (63) had escaped. In 1957, the Haiphong camp recorded 80 arrivals but there were moments when the number present was only 30.<sup>497</sup>

### *Living In and Leaving the Camp*

The problem of escaping prostitutes, which was never fully resolved (at least until 1958), shows that the model of concentrating “problematic” population in labor camps for moral reform was not a success in the DRV. But the important questions are: Why did prostitutes continue to escape, only to risk being recaptured and receiving more severe punishment?? Why did the model of moral reform through productive labor fail? And how did the DRV state explain, or reformulate, this failure?

Those in charge of running and evaluating the activities of the camps were aware early on that the key factor in keeping the prostitutes from resisting reform was their sense of assurance [*yên tâm*]. Yet internal conditions of the camps were hardly assuring. All necessities were rationed at subsistence level: in the Hanoi camp, for example, reformees had to work 8 hours a day but their alimentary provisions were “lacking” [*thiếu thốn*] (“they rarely got to eat meat,” a report admitted);<sup>498</sup> upon arrival at the camp, each prostitute were provided two sets of clothes but these were often old clothes which “became torn after wearing for a short time” [*mặc được*

---

<sup>492</sup> [missing reference]

<sup>493</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải Phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>494</sup> Escapes from both camps were reported every month of 1956. The situation lasted throughout 1957 and 1958. “Tập báo cáo tình hình công tác xã hội từ tháng 1 - 12/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại,” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III; UBHC Hai Phong, “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay,” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>495</sup> “Báo cáo 3 tháng 7, 8 và 9,” CTXH 239, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>496</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 12/1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>497</sup> UBHC Hai Phong, “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay,” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>498</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 10/56,” “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.



vài hôm thì rách];<sup>499</sup> in both camps, feminine hygiene products were not included in necessary rations, so detainees had to purchase them out of pocket.<sup>500</sup> Prostitutes were to be cured of venereal disease, but a number of them caught new diseases in the camp, such as ringworm.<sup>501</sup>

The official approach of the camps was moral reform through productive labor and political education. But “political education” seems to have been limited to disciplining undesirable behaviors, criticism, and self-criticism. Reportedly, there was no educational activity (general education and political) in the Haiphong camp and in both camps, recreational activities were virtually nonexistent.<sup>502</sup> In the Hanoi camp, cadres provided detainees with a ball and a deck of cards, but the detainees “did not know how to play, [then] got bored and threw [the ball and the cards] in a corner.”<sup>503</sup>

Conditions in these camps were so bad that prostitutes who were briefly sent to the police-run reform camp as a more severe method of discipline told others that life was “better” [*swóng hon*] in the police-run reform camp.<sup>504</sup> These seasoned reformees advised others: “Escape and make some money for your own spending! If you are caught by the police, they will send you to the reform camp. [There] each day you get 1kg of rice, here you also get 1kg of rice, but in the [police-run] camp you don’t have to labor! What’s the reason to stay here? After all, it’s reform and re-education everywhere, there’s no beating nor imprisoning [there], so don’t be afraid!”<sup>505</sup>

It’s possible however that if hardships were offset by the assurance of a brighter post-reform future, not so many of these women would have tried to escape so many times at the risk of more severe punishments and longer detention. Prostitutes sent to the Hanoi and Haiphong camps must have been told that medical treatment and productive labor combining with political education would deliver them from the physical and spiritual sickness that they had had to endure in the old society. They were probably also promised a total remaking of life afterward: a stable job, a marriage arrangement. But cadres in charge of the camps soon came to understand that the situation was in fact “not as simple” as outlined the Ministry of Social Welfare - “using productive labor to reform [prostitutes], and when they are good [*tốt*], return them to their families or send them to working sites or factories, etc.”<sup>506</sup> All of these, a rather straightforward report writer commented, were “mere words without any concrete guidelines and without any guarantee.”<sup>507</sup> The prostitutes would soon realize this sad reality, too.

Like their Chinese counterparts, a reformed prostitute in North Vietnam must fulfill three conditions before release: (1) having gained the consciousness that their old trade was “evil” [*xấu xa*] and “despicable” [*hèn hạ*]; (2) having gone through general literacy/vocational

---

<sup>499</sup> “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> “Báo cáo từ 20-8 đến 20-9 của Trại Hoàn Mỹ,” CTXH 239, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>502</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 10/56,” “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>503</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>504</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>507</sup> Ibid.

education; (3) being fully cured of venereal disease.<sup>508</sup> While in Shanghai, China, it took two years (1951-1953) for the first group of prostitutes to be released from the reform center, in North Vietnam, less than a year after the camps were established, in September 1956, the first two prostitutes were released from the Hanoi camp.<sup>509</sup> Details of their release are not available, but we know that they were returned to their families in their native place, Hà Đông province.<sup>510</sup> This caused a stir among the remaining prostitutes: those with existing familial ties spent time writing letters with the hope that they could also be released if their families came for them, those without family (but who had learned a vocation and had been working at the camp - yarn bleaching, weaving, cooking) started to petition for release to find manual jobs, while the rest continued trying to escape.<sup>511</sup> These events were considered by camp managers as creating a period of “distraction” from reformatory labor.<sup>512</sup> Until the end of 1956 only two more prostitutes were released from the Hanoi camp. It is likely that camp managers tightened the conditions to release prostitutes due to complicating developments in the cities (which will be analyzed in the next section). The four women released in 1956 returned to their native places only briefly and all of them left again for Hanoi: 2 got married, 1 found job as a domestic helper, 1 returned to prostitution.<sup>513</sup> Many prostitutes who had remained in the camps started feeling, as did the camp managing cadres, that the brighter future promised to them existed only on paper: “[The prostitutes] think that there is no future in staying in the camp, that staying for longer would not give them a job nor any future happiness; some of them collaborated pretty well with re-education efforts for a while but [we] haven’t resolved their wishes such as having a job, arranging a husband, being released, so they become negative [*tiêu cực*] and try to escape from the camp to return to their old trade.”<sup>514</sup>

In general, the DRV’s approach to prostitutes was similar to what took place in China, but the Vietnamese seemed eager to hasten to process. DRV’s treatment of reformed prostitutes in 1956-1957 is similar to what took place in China in 1953-1955: most of them were sent back to their families, entered a marriage, or put in an institution where they could be surveilled.<sup>515</sup> In the two years when the Haiphong camp was active (1956-1957), at least 129 prostitutes arrived at the camp, and only 26 were officially released: 20 were sent home to their families, while 6

---

<sup>508</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại,” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III

<sup>509</sup> “Báo cáo từ 20-8 đến 20-9 của Trại Hoàn Mỹ,” CTXH 239, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

<sup>511</sup> “Báo cáo từ 20-8 đến 20-9 của Trại Hoàn Mỹ,” CTXH 239, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo tháng 9/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

<sup>513</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

One prostitute escaped from the camp and was captured by the police. The police decided however to return the woman to her family and not to the camp. This explains why the number of prostitutes returned to family in Table 1 for the Hanoi camp is 5. It seems that the camp only followed up with those released from the camp, and not from police detention, so we do not have any information on what happened to this one woman released by the police.

<sup>514</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>515</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại,” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III; Henriot, “‘La Fermeture,’” 484-85; Ruan, “Reexamining,” 479-80.

got married.<sup>516</sup> In early 1958, the same year that China declared “victory” over prostitution, DRV authorities - perhaps in a rush to signal the success of their own program - decided to close down the camp for prostitutes in Haiphong though there were more than 70 prostitutes in the camp at that moment.<sup>517</sup> In haste, 25 women considered “qualified for release” were sent home, and 48 not-yet-reformed ones were transferred to the Public Security’s reform camp.<sup>518</sup> Some of these 48 prostitutes, those without family or for whom the police could not find an institution to receive them, would be sent to the infamous Ba Sao prison in Hà Nam province - a prison that would serve as the reeducation camp for former South Vietnamese bureaucrats and militaries after 1975.<sup>519</sup> After all the prostitutes were sent away, reformees in the camp for paupers and invalids (which had remained in the city of Haiphong) were moved in, and the camp for prostitutes became the camp for paupers and invalids of Haiphong.<sup>520</sup> Documents on what happened to the Hanoi camp are not accessible, but it could be assumed that prostitutes in the Hanoi camp were also transferred to the police-run labor camp, since the prostitutes in the Haiphong camp were transferred to be under police custody rather than being sent to the camp of Hanoi (by contrast, the camps for youths of Hanoi and Haiphong did merge: the Haiphong camp was also closed in 1958 and the 33 “not yet reformed” youths were sent to the camp for youths in Hanoi).<sup>521</sup> A year later, in 1959, the Ministry of Social Welfare itself was dissolved; a small number of staff from this Ministry were absorbed into the Ministry of Labor which established its own Department of Social Welfare to occupy the tasks previously handled by the Ministry of Social Welfare.<sup>522</sup>

The shortcomings of the reform model in the short-lived camps for prostitutes reflect above all the DRV authorities’ distrust of women with a past they considered corrupted (as members of the “dangerous class,” the *lumpenproletariat*) as well as an undeclared belief, rooted in Confucian traditions, that women’s proper place is within the familial order, that a woman on the loose is a threat to social order.<sup>523</sup> As Christian Henriot has pointed out with regard to the PRC, personal files of former prostitutes were retained and continually updated in the DRV- these women would always be in the position of possible indictment in the “new society.”<sup>524</sup>

#### *1956-1958: A Surge and Eventual elimination*

Social Welfare authorities commented that the flaws and weaknesses in the reform program rendered impossible a complete transformation of the prostitutes’ mindset: being too used to an unruly life, prostitutes felt the regulated life in the camps stifling; they could not resist their “biological urge” [*đòi hỏi sinh lý*]; they remained seduced by the old lifestyle - “during the

---

<sup>516</sup> UBHC Hai Phong, “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay,” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.; Ruan, 484; Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 320.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid. Ba Sao remains an active prison until the present day.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid.

<sup>521</sup> UBHC Hai Phong, “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay,” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>522</sup> “Nghị định 43/NĐ-LĐ (06/06/1959)”

<sup>523</sup> Hershatter and Henriot argue that a similar line of thinking was behind the PRC’s approach to prostitutes. Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasure*, 304-5; Henriot, “‘La Fermature’,” 485-86.

<sup>524</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermature’,” 486.

educational session, [the prostitutes] felt shameful and cried, but thinking about luxuries and depravities, they escaped.”<sup>525</sup>

Furthermore, Social Welfare authorities suggested that external factors - social events and trends - were even more decisive as reasons for the high rate of escape and the lack of efficiency in the general anti-prostitution campaign in the cities. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the more aggressive phase of action against prostitution coincided with the last land reform campaign in the countryside and the launch of systemic household registration in the cities. But because of the unexpected democratic turn in the party’s line in both the USSR (with Khrushchev’s secret speech) and in the PRC (Mao’s Hundred Flowers Campaign), communist leaders in the DRV found themselves in an awkward situation in the latter half of 1956, midway through various social reform campaigns in the cities. Paralleling the “correction of errors” campaign that addressed victims of the land reform were the Party’s call for promoting “democratic freedoms” and the “self-examination” [*kiểm điểm*] campaign in which public security forces and ward leaders in the cities were to hold public self-criticism sessions and address complaints from those unhappy with the way the household registration process had been carried out.<sup>526</sup> Social Welfare authorities characterized this period as a step backward in the war against social evils. They believed that too much democratic power allowed suppressed social evils to return: prostitutes, gamblers, opium smokers, and petty criminals thought “democratic freedom” meant “freedom to do anything they wanted,” while public security agents became hesitant to punish during the “self-examination” period.<sup>527</sup> Camp managers cited how escaped and recaptured prostitutes during this period acted as agents transferring information from the outside world to those inside, persuading those remaining in the camp to escape.<sup>528</sup>

From October 1956, the Ministry of Social Welfare reported a surge in prostitution activities in the cities: around 200 active prostitutes were noticed in Hanoi, nearly 90 in Haiphong, and more than 40 in Nam Định.<sup>529</sup> Nearly half of the active prostitutes in Haiphong in late 1956 were those escaped from the camp for prostitutes.<sup>530</sup> Furthermore, prostitutes devised more cunning ways to practice their trade:

- Making use of relaxed policies in household registration, [prostitutes] change their venues from time to time, sometimes [sex buyers and sellers] would report to Public Security that they were acquaintances or siblings then buy and sell sex sneakily (this format is popular)

---

<sup>525</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình trại gái điếm HN 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo tình hình các trại ở Hải phòng tháng 11/56,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>526</sup> Bộ Công An, “Báo cáo về việc sửa đổi điều lệ tam thời khai báo hộ khẩu (27/10/1956),” PTT 127, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III; On the “damage control” program in the countryside, see: Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 259-80.

<sup>527</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 11/56,” Báo cáo tháng 12/56,” “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” “Báo cáo tình hình xã hội ngoài,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III

<sup>528</sup> Ibid.

<sup>529</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 10/56,” “Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>530</sup> “Báo cáo tháng 12/1956,” CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

- Some others opened a restaurant or a café, buyers use a secret code to find out whether there are prostitutes or a room for prostitution service inside; after the meal and drink, buyers pretend to ask for the toilet, then go to get their service (in Haiphong there are currently 10 places organizing and renting rooms)

- Those without a place would take each other out on quiet streets, boats, sometimes even in public toilets to buy and sell sex. Prostitutes like this usually work in different areas, sometimes they even dress up as a cadre to camouflage, when seeing a cadre or a soldier they would lie that they were visiting their husband, then start flirting and make sexual advances, and then sell sex<sup>531</sup>

Prostitutes would not be able to practice their trade if there were no buyer, however. Social Welfare authorities explained that there was a surge in clientele as well. Thanks to rapid economic recovery, a report on social issues in December 1956 claims, romantic players [*người chơi bồi lãng mạn*], traveling merchants, and manual laborers started having money to spend on prostitutes again.<sup>532</sup> More worryingly to the authorities was that communist cadres, soldiers, Southern regroupes were among the growing new clientele of the sex trade.

These cadres, state employees, [Southern regroupes] students, soldiers took prostitutes to their homes, to hotels, or to their offices to have sexual relation [*hủ hóa*]. They lied to their institution that it was an acquaintance, a relative, or their wife visiting. Some even forged official documents to facilitate bringing [prostitutes] to the office and finding a residence [for the prostitutes].<sup>533</sup>

These cadres and soldiers even degenerated to the point of becoming violent both towards the prostitutes and towards their own comrades:

Among these people who frequented prostitutes, a number of them are very impudent and violent [...] sometimes they gang raped the prostitutes, not only they did not pay, they even hit the girls. When public security forces came to investigate, they quarreled with the police and sheltered the prostitutes. One person even went to the quarter's police station to claim back [*đòi*] a prostitute while breaking things and threatening public security staff.<sup>534</sup>

In December 1956, some veterans with permanent injuries [*thương binh*] forced their way into a camp for prostitutes to demand the release of arrested prostitutes.<sup>535</sup> In mid-1957, several cases were reported where soldiers took off their uniforms to go find prostitutes and when alerted by civilians, these soldiers chased and beat up these curious civilians.<sup>536</sup> The Ministry of Social Welfare admitted: "We could not foresee that evils of the old society still existed in the minds of

---

<sup>531</sup> "Báo cáo 1 năm tình hình xã hội bên ngoài năm 1956," CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>532</sup> "Báo cáo tháng 12/1956," CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>533</sup> "Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại," CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

<sup>535</sup> "Báo cáo tháng 12/1956," CTXH 229, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>536</sup> "Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại," CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

cadres and state employees, so we did not ask official institutions and offices to find ways to educate and prevent lustful, depraved thoughts among cadres, employees, and Southern regrouped students.”<sup>537</sup> But light punishments might have also been a contributing factor in the growth of this particular clientele: in most of the cases mentioned, it was requested that involved cadres, state employees, and soldiers be disciplined internally by their own institutions; only cases “too impudent” were sent to tribunals for more serious punishment.<sup>538</sup>

Starting in the latter half of 1957, the DRV state again picked up the pace in its agenda of social reconstruction in the cities. Citing the goal of controlling the flow of migration from the countryside to the city, the state tightened its household registration system.<sup>539</sup> This indeed cut off the flow of rural women - an important source of prostitutes in the cities. The state also stepped up mass campaign such as “Three For, Two Against” [*Ba Nên Hai Chống*] to promote new cultural values and encourage mass participation in the purge of “old social evils.” A sense of conspiracy pervaded the urban society where every woman must watch their back: “We have discovered evils living next door or working in our own organizations: a head of the women’s association was a madam [*chủ chửa*], a member of the women’s association was a prostitute.”<sup>540</sup> The state also started pursuing heavier punishment to madams, pimps, and prostitutes caught in the act as well as making sure that the personal files of these people were well kept and updated for continual surveillance.<sup>541</sup> In late 1957 to early 1958, as mentioned earlier, the camps for prostitutes were closed down and dealing with prostitutes became the domain of the Ministry of Public Security. Prostitutes were no longer considered objects of help and reform - by then, women who continued to refuse the message that prostitutes and prostitution should not be a part of the new society would go directly under police custody, to be treated like other types of criminals. By early 1958, the DRV state had decided that the key to eradicate prostitution was not moral reform through productive labor but tightening social organization and social surveillance, letting the masses themselves hunt for prostitutes, all the while expanding the authority and capacity of the Public Security forces.

---

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

<sup>539</sup> “Thông tư của Thủ tướng Chính phủ số 495-TTg về việc hạn chế đồng bào ở nông thôn ra thành phố (23/10/1957)”

<sup>540</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại,” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid.; UBHC Hai Phong, “Báo cáo Tình hình cứu tế xã hội thành phố Hải Phòng từ tiếp quản đến nay,” BLD 1746, TTLTQG-III.

## Chapter 6: Policing the city: *Surveillance-de-près* aesthetics in Trần Dần's *Crossroads and Lampposts*

In his diary entry for 12–14 September 1954, while anticipating the takeover of Hanoi, the writer Trần Dần (1926–1997) noted a point of interest:

One issue to study:

The patterns of life as War transitions to Peace

Yesterday to today has been a complete turn from the word War into the word Peace. These hours carry with them special values. Gradually people will come to appreciate the values of those hours. The fates and responsibilities of millions of people have completely changed. But...change is gradual, winds are gathering, I wait for a Storm yet to form.<sup>542</sup>

This real diary entry would turn up again in a novel titled *Crossroads and Lampposts* that Trần Dần wrote ten years after the takeover of Hanoi:

Dưỡng's entry for "the third day of the takeover":

I think, yesterday and today, has been war turning into peace. Only a few hours, yet the fate and responsibilities of millions of people have completely changed. I think of a war, maybe beginning, within the 3-day-old peace, in noises, of a normal afternoon like this. War and peace lie right next to each other as night and day. During the day, the neighborhood is peaceful. But during the night, houses are on fire, rocks are thrown everywhere, and slogans are scribbled all over public toilets. Peace and war are like that, nonetheless both have just begun. I wait, for a storm yet to form.<sup>543</sup>

With *Crossroads and Lampposts*, Trần Dần pursued his interest in studying the war-to-peace transition and its influence on the fates and responsibilities of his compatriots. Assembled from first-person accounts and following two different timelines (1954-1955 and 1965-1966) the novel mirrors the vertiginous state that both DRV forces and the pre-existing urban population found themselves in after the takeover of Hanoi.

Since its publication, the novel has attracted mostly literary scholars who explore and attempt to explain Trần Dần's literary genius as well as his philosophical engagements. In this chapter, I present a new reading of *Crossroads and Lampposts* by Trần Dần and argue that an analysis of the novel against its historical, political, and intellectual background could provide us with a deeper understanding of the DRV's apparatus for policing the urban population and its influence on social and intellectual life in the first years of the DRV under communist rule.

*Crossroads and Lampposts: The "dark side" of literature in the early DRV*

In 2011, the posthumous publication of *Crossroads and Lampposts* ("*Những ngã tư và những cột đèn*"), a novel by the renowned poet Trần Dần, shook the Vietnamese literary world. The curious fate of both the author and his work renders this event particularly meaningful to the history of Vietnamese modern literature.

---

<sup>542</sup> Trần Dần, *Ghi 1954-1960*, edited by Phạm Thị Hoài, 1<sup>st</sup> Reprint (Paris & California: td mémoire & Văn Nghệ, 2019), 33.

All translations of Vietnamese sources to English in this paper are my own.

<sup>543</sup> Trần Dần, *Những ngã tư và những cột đèn* (*Crossroads and Lampposts*) (Hanoi: Nhã Nam, 2011), 49-50.

Trần Dần (1926–1997) is most well-known by scholars of Vietnamese history for his central role in the “Nhân Văn - Giai Phẩm” (NVGP) movement, a political protest led by a diverse group of intellectuals, artists, and lawyers in the early years (1954–1956) of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).<sup>544</sup> Trần Dần was suspended by the Writers Association until 1987. From 1956 to 1990, none of his original works were published.

The novel *Crossroads and Lampposts* started as a project requested by the Police Department in 1964, the handwritten manuscript was finished in 1965, then submitted to the Police Department for review. The manuscript however was not returned to Trần Dần until 23 years later, in 1988. Trần Dần revised the novel in 1989, but the novel remained unpublished until 2011. Trần Dần himself died in 1997.<sup>545</sup>

The novel revolves around a former ASV soldier [*lính ngụy*] named Dưỡng and his life after the communist takeover of Hanoi in 1954.<sup>546</sup> The whole narrative is assembled from first-person accounts: the diary of Dưỡng between 1954 and 1955, the diary of the unnamed writer (henceforth Writer) who in 1966 was working on a book based on Dưỡng’s diary, the Writer’s interviews in 1966 with witnesses both civilian and official, and finally, excerpts from the confession of Pointed-chin [*Cằm nhọn*], the archenemy of Dưỡng and the supreme villain of the story.

The intense reactions by Vietnamese literary scholars to Trần Dần’s novel in 2011 attest not only to Trần Dần’s literary genius but also to the fact that this novel casts a rare beam of light into the “dark side” of the early DRV’s literature. Utilizing Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “field” as well as Phạm Thị Hoài’s characterization of Trần Dần as a “leader from the dark” Phùng Ngọc Kiên compares the fates of two literary works written around the same time (1955–1957), both on the Battle of Dien Bien Phu, by Tố Hữu and Trần Dần as representatives of what he characterizes as the two sides of North Vietnamese literature in the second half of the twentieth century: “a well-lit side and a shadowed side, the ration store and the black market, artists who could write and publish officially and those silenced after the incidents during the first couple years of liberation.”<sup>547</sup> Kiên argues that even though before 1954 Trần Dần tried to harmonize his political commitments with his passion for literary reform, after the political incidents in the latter half of the 1950s, Trần Dần increasingly chose to focus on the “symbolic value” (*giá trị tượng trưng*) rather than “popular value” (*giá trị quần chúng*) in his works, which resulted in poetry that was increasingly challenging for common readers. Similarly, Phạm Thị Hoài suggests

---

<sup>544</sup> For a literature review and the most recent scholarship on the movement, as well as more information on Trần Dần and the “Trần Dần Affair,” see Zinoman, “Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm” and Zinoman, “Nhân Văn – Giai Phẩm on Trial.”

<sup>545</sup> “Foreword” by Vũ Văn Kha in Trần Dần, *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 5-8.

<sup>546</sup> I translate “ngụy quân,” the term Dưỡng and his friends used to identify themselves as well as are identified by the authority, as “former ASV (Associated State of Vietnam) soldiers.”

<sup>547</sup> Phạm Thị Hoài, “Thủ lĩnh trong bóng tối” (Leader from the dark) in *Tạp chí Văn học* (Journal of Literature), 1997; republished by Phạm Thị Hoài on talawas, <http://www.talawas.org/taIaDB/showFile.php?res=900&rb=0202>; Phùng Ngọc Kiên, “Nghiên cứu xã hội học về trường hợp Trần Dần” (A socio-literary study on Trần Dần), in Lê Hồng Lý and Trần Hải Yến (eds.), *Nghiên cứu văn học Việt Nam – Những khả năng và thách thức* (Literary Study in Vietnam – Possibilities and Challenges) (The Social Science Series supported by the Harvard-Yenching Institute & Nhà xuất bản Thế giới, 2009), 337-378.



that being “in the dark,” not having a wide readership, allowed Trần Dần to constantly experiment with his literary creations.

#### A case of *surveillance-de-près*

Many critics view the novel as consistent with Trần Dần’s avant-garde and experimental style. But reading it together with Trần Dần’s diary from 1954 to 1960, I suggest that in this period Trần Dần had not fully transformed into the leading figure of the dark side. Instead the novel represents his effort to introduce experimental elements into a social realist work, as Trần Dần juggled between his identity as a writer with a passion for artistic experiments with that of a soldier-writer committed to the political leadership that he himself helped put into power.

Inspired by Cristina Vatulescu’s analysis of the “police aesthetics” in Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* and her argument that the secret police file stands as a peculiar but powerful literary genre whose “shadow” could be directly extracted from a close reading of Bulgakov’s novel in its historical, political, and intellectual context, I argue that, *Crossroads and Lampposts* is Trần Dần’s experiment with a genre that I would term “records of *surveillance de près*.”<sup>548</sup> Admittedly, the peculiarity of Trần Dần’s life and of the novel *Crossroads and Lampposts* makes it difficult to argue that “records of *surveillance de près*” was indeed a real, established genre – it serves more as a heuristic category to understand the novel as a historical document. But what makes the argument remain meaningful is the fact that a sense of *surveillance de près* shadows Trần Dần’s own diary from 1954 to 1960, the period during which Trần Dần himself was subjected to surveillance, accused and detained, forced to perform self-criticism and to write confession. Furthermore, archival documents from my own research confirm the novel’s portrayal of the security concerns surrounding the communist takeover of Hanoi in 1954.

In the next sections, I present the three major components of *surveillance-de-près* literature: particular subjects of surveillance, particular surveilling agents, and a distinct discourse of security and a rhetoric of suppression. Following the model of Vatulescu’s work on *The Master and Margarita*, I track the shadow of *surveillance-de-près* through situating the forementioned three components in *Crossroads and Lampposts* and analyze them in relation to the historical, political, and intellectual context of the novel’s creation.

#### *The Surveilled Subjects* Postwar Discourse on the “Enemies”

The concept of the “enemies” had been present in the DRV’s official discourses since the DRV state came into power in 1945. In DRV propaganda, “enemies” were all those, domestic and foreign, whose actions and interests were considered running counter to the will and interest of the people, the nation, and the revolution. Domestic enemies were further identified by terms such as “puppets” [*bù nhìn*], “collaborators” [*tay sai*], “traitors” [*Việt gian*], “reactionaries” [*phản động*].

---

<sup>548</sup> Cristina Vatulescu, “The Devil’s Secret Police file” in *Police Aesthetics*, Stanford: 2010, 55-76. The term “surveiller/surveillance de près” is inspired by one diary entry by Trần Dần in 1959 where he recorded his conversation with his peers concerning the government’s decision to stop sending the writers involved with NVGP to the agricultural and industrial sites for re-education, instead to allow them to stay in Hanoi and write about the suburb, under surveillance, during which Hoàng Cầm exclaimed: “This is formidable, this is *surveiller de près*!” (Trần Dần, *Ghi*, 373).

Most often, the concept of the domestic “enemy” was used as a tool for mass mobilization and consolidation of political domination. David Marr has shown that in 1945-1946, domestic opposition to the ICP-dominated Việt Minh and political deviants from the ICP line, such as Đại Việt party affiliates, Trotskyists, and Nationalist Party members, were portrayed by Việt Minh propaganda as collaborators, reactionaries, and traitors.<sup>549</sup> Justified on the grounds of national unity and security, ICP-led *Công An* and Việt Minh militia pursued members of these groups, and DRV military courts sentenced them to detention, deportation, or death.<sup>550</sup> Non-partisans were not safe from accusations: those who did not join the Việt Minh were deemed “unpatriotic” while those whose lifestyles, manners, and behaviors did not conform to the new standards (for example: gamblers, usurers, superstitious individuals, people with extramarital affairs) were considered “reactionaries.”<sup>551</sup>

The outbreak of the First Indochina War disrupted the momentum of this pursuit of domestic “enemies,” but DRV intelligence services continued to keep track of the activities of “collaborators” and “traitors” in zones under French control.<sup>552</sup> In 1949-1950, as shown in Chapter 1, the physical takeovers of Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn were swiftly followed by the “purge of traitors” which included a population survey, multiple “search and arrest of traitors,” and finally, delivery of punishment (property confiscation, imprisonment, deportation, or execution). During the land reform and the accompanying organizational rectification campaigns [*chỉnh đốn tổ chức*] between 1953 and 1956, the communist party advocated the narrative that “enemies” - “feudal landlords,” “traitors,” “reactionaries” - were lurking in the countryside, even in areas considered under firm DRV control.<sup>553</sup>

After the ceasefire in July 1954 and the division of the Vietnamese territory, the idea of the “enemy” intensified with the emergence of an American-backed, anti-communist country south of the seventeenth parallel. An additional narrative was advocated about the cities that had recently come under DRV control in the North: the “enemy” had left behind many agents; reactionaries were lurking around; all of them were waiting for the opportunities to sabotage the revolution. Previous chapters have shown how such official discourse affected different groups in the urban society. Bound by the provisions of the Geneva Accords to ensure democratic freedoms for all Vietnamese and with a strategic view for postwar reconstruction, Ho Chi Minh’s government called for national reconciliation and promulgated policies such as the “8 policies” which stressed its mercy toward bureaucrats, experts, and soldiers who had worked for the “enemy” regime (Chapter 3). Nonetheless postwar tensions between the “winners” and “losers” of the First Indochina War were unavoidable; furthermore, internal documents show that DRV cadres were advised to be vigilant and to keep an eye on their *lưu dung* colleagues (Chapter 4). The floating population in the cities, the *lumpenproletariat* were portrayed both as victims of the old regime and as potential (or actual) agents of reactionary forces (Chapter 5).

---

<sup>549</sup> Marr, *Vietnam*, 383-441; François Guillemot, “Au Coeur de La Fracture Vietnamienne : L’élimination de l’opposition Nationaliste et Anticolonialiste Dans Le Nord Du Vietnam (1945-1946),” in *Naissance d’un Etat-Parti : Le Viêt Nam Depuis 1945 = The Birth of a Party-State. Vietnam since 1945*, edS. Christopher E. Goscha & Benoît de Tréglodé (Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 175–216.

<sup>550</sup> Marr, *Vietnam*, 383-441.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid.

<sup>552</sup> “Báo cáo: Tình hình văn hóa & Xã hội trong nội thành Hà Nội từ 1947 đến nay (ngày 8 tháng 11 năm 1949, Tổng giám đốc Việt Nam Công An Vụ),” PTT 2805, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>553</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, 142, 153.

After the 300 days of free movement ended, the hunt for spies, saboteurs, and reactionaries in the cities became more public through the official launch of the household registration system [*hộ khẩu*], proclaimed to be a tool to “reinforce public order and security in the city.”<sup>554</sup> The growing violence of the land reform and the purge of “bourgeois” influences among the state and party’s rank and file during organizational rectification campaigns further intensified the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in the cities. Less than a year after the communist takeover of Hanoi, a population giddy with liberation turned into a “nervous society, constantly looking over its shoulder for signs of “the enemy” and discounting the smallest joys in the act of living.”<sup>555</sup> Heading the brief democratic turn in 1956, intellectuals and writers in the NVGP publicly criticized the prevalent “us versus them” mindset and how “fake” revolutionaries capitalized on “enemy” discourse to upset the party apparatus and the society.<sup>556</sup> I argue that *Crossroads and Lampposts* is a continuation of these earlier engagements. More specifically, it is an exploration and implicit critique of the “us versus them” mindset as experienced by those considered as “enemies” and “reactionaries”: former ASV soldiers, prostitutes and secret agents planted behind by a Franco-Vietnamese intelligence (Deuxième Bureau) chief.

#### Former ASV soldiers in the DRV

The National Vietnamese Army [*Quân đội quốc gia Việt Nam; Armée Nationale Vietnamienne*; henceforth ASV army] was the regular army of the Bảo Đại-headed Associated State of Vietnam, created in 1950 in collaboration with French Expeditionary Corps to fight against the DRV’s army (PAVN). In 1954, the ASV army consisted of around 167,000 troops, but fighting morale was questionable - during and after the battle of Dien Bien Phu, thousands of them deserted - either fleeing to the DRV zone or hiding in their native places waiting for the war to end.<sup>557</sup> Ho Chi Minh’s government capitalized on this low morale and further propagandized that all ASV soldiers and bureaucrats were welcomed to return to the real “fatherland” [*Tổ quốc*]. The DRV’s “Policies toward puppet troops [*ngụy binh*] and staff of the puppet government [*nhân viên ngụy quyền*] who abandon the enemy and return to the fatherland” emphasize that all those deserting from the ASV would “receive clemency, freedom, and rights as DRV citizens.”<sup>558</sup> This line was continued in the “8 policies” officially promulgated on the

<sup>554</sup> UBQC Thành phố Hà Nội, “Thông cáo về việc kê khai hộ khẩu (18/09/1955),” *Nhân Dân*

<sup>555</sup> Kim Ngoc Bao Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965*, Southeast Asia (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 146.

<sup>556</sup> See for example: Trần Lê Văn, “Bức thư gửi một người bạn cũ,” *Giai Phẩm Mùa Thu, Tập I*, 40-47; Hữu Loan, “Cũng những thằng nịnh hót,” *Giai Phẩm Mùa Thu, Tập II*, 59-62; Nguyễn Mạnh Tường, “Vừa khóc vừa cười,” *Giai Phẩm Mùa Thu, Tập III*, 22-25; Hữu Loan, “Lộn Sông,” *Giai Phẩm Mùa Đông, Tập I*, 36-44.

<sup>557</sup> Christopher Goscha, *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945–1954): An International and Interdisciplinary Approach* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), s.v. “Army, Associated State of Vietnam (*Vệ Binh Quốc Gia*).”

It must be noted also here that desertion of DRV soldiers and cadres to the ASV also took place. The 10R collection at the SHD, Vincennes includes many scripts of interviews with deserted DRV soldiers and cadres - a sort of precursor to the RAND interviews during the Vietnam War.

<sup>558</sup> “Chính sách đối với ngụy binh, nhân viên ngụy quyền bộ hàng ngũ địch trở về Tổ quốc (Đã được Hội đồng Chính phủ thông qua trong phiên họp ngày 15/03/1954,” PTT 93, TTLTQG-III.

eve of the takeover of Hanoi with further details on the DRV's expectations of and the benefits promised to former ASV soldiers:

6. Soldiers and officers in the French-Bao Dai army who remained in newly liberated zones, after presenting themselves to the authority, will be helped to return to their native place or be recruited according to their capacity.

To maintain the security and order in the city and stabilize the society, all soldiers and officers in the French-Bao Dai army who remain in newly liberated zone must present themselves at the local Military-Administrative Committees and turn in all of their weapons. Those who present themselves, depending on the capacity [of the government], might be helped to return to live and work in their native place. Those who want to work for the government will be considered and recruited.<sup>559</sup>

In late 1955, the total number of former ASV soldiers reporting to local authorities was 21,180 (12,494 in Hanoi, 5,686 in Haiphong, and 3,000 in Nam Định).<sup>560</sup> It was estimated that more than 2,000 former ASV soldiers did not report themselves for fear of punishment.<sup>561</sup> However, with the rolling out of the household registration system in late 1955 and the issuance of universal personal identity cards in late 1957, these remaining former ASV soldiers would not have been able to hide their past for long.<sup>562</sup>

22-year-old Hanoi-born Dưỡng, the main character in *Crossroads and Lampposts*, was enlisted in the ASV army in 1953. He was trained for 10 months and officially served for four months as a driver of military trucks and armed vehicles. Dưỡng had deserted before Hanoi was taken over by DRV forces. All of Dưỡng's closest friends ("Ngõi 34. Tình Bóp 24. Chắt 25. Đoàn 21.")<sup>563</sup> also served in the ASV army, deserted, then stayed in Hanoi after the takeover. Despite having done all that was required of them (reporting themselves to the local authority and turning in weapons; Chắt and Ngõi even stole and turned in military supplies and arms as proof of their commitment to the new regime), Dưỡng's group was aware of their precarious situation in the new society: "The North is communist. The South is puppet. Two sides fight each other. The five of us are five flies caught in the middle. But we must not die."<sup>564</sup>

It was clear to Dưỡng and his friends that former ASV soldiers were considered potential threats to post-takeover security and order. With this, the novel confirms existing discourses on establishing urban order and security. In all DRV official reports of communist takeovers of cities in Northern Vietnam from as early as December 1950 to late 1954, *trộm cắp* (thieves), *lưu manh* (thugs), *gián điệp* (spies) and *Việt gian* (traitors), are the top three security concerns.<sup>565</sup>

---

<sup>559</sup> "Tám chính sách của CP nước VNDCCH đối với các TP mới giải phóng năm 1954", BNV 3690, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>560</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, "Chương IV".

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

<sup>562</sup> Ibid.; Nguyễn Thanh Bình, "Hải Phòng's Urban Change: 1955–1986," *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 138.

<sup>563</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 26.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>565</sup> Tran Dang Ninh, "Thu gui Anh To" (Letter to Anh To) (17/11/1950; "Tóm tắt bản báo cáo những kinh nghiệm về các vùng mới được giải phóng thuộc các tỉnh Lạng Sơn, Lào Kay và Hòa Bình (do Ông Trần Duy Hưng, Thứ trưởng Bộ Nội vụ trình bày) tại Hội nghị cán bộ chính quyền 12/1950" (Summary of reports on experiences in newly liberated zones in the provinces of Lang Son, Lao Kay and Hoa Binh (presented by Mr. Tran Duy Hung, Vice-minister of the Ministry of Home Affairs)); Bui Quang Tao, "Kinh nghiệm chiếm lĩnh thị xã Lạng Sơn và các thị trấn khác trong tỉnh" (Experiences on taking over the town of Lang Son and other smaller towns in the province) (04/05/1951), PTT 1605, TTLTQG-III; "Bao

Former ASV soldiers with an urban background and who deserted only briefly before the communist took over the cities were destined to be included in the “must-watch” list; as commented a friend of Dưỡng during their first gathering after the takeover: “In the current situation, thugs, thieves and former ASV soldiers, like us, all are suspected.”<sup>566</sup>

Dưỡng and his friends were suspicious not only because they served in the ASV army. Their lifestyle was frowned upon in the new society that stressed the value of labor, commitment to the revolution and to the building of socialism. To a certain extent, Dưỡng as a character embodies all the traces of a petit bourgeois urbanite: he came from a well-to-do family with an enterprising mother who provided him with housing and stipends even after he got married; he is well-read and has a passion for detective novels; his lifestyle of casual strolls, morning coffee, eating out, and feasting with friends, is far removed from that of an ideal “new” socialist person. While the majority of Vietnamese literary critics agree and disagree in their reviews on whether *Crossroads and Lampposts* has a central plot or not, and whether it is a detective novel or not, I argue that at the core of the novel is the official quest of establishing a *particular* social and political order in the war-to-peace transition. The patched-together narrative and the mixed timeline not only provide the reader with a sense of the quest from the perspectives of both the suspecting authority and the suspected but also leads to more consequential questions: What is the real meaning of “order and security” in the new society? How is it achieved? And what are the social costs, or consequences, of such pursuit of “order and security”?

### *The Surveilling Agents*

DRV internal documents in late 1954 show that there was a strong link between the establishment of local administration and the expansion of the Public Security Services.<sup>567</sup> Assuring security in the cities, one document stated, required a two-pronged approach: first, grassroots mass organizations must be firmly established so they could become a “steady link between the state and the people” basing on their “cooperation with diverse official organs in the neighborhoods;” second, policing must be recognized as a “major duty in the [DRV state]’s governance” and Public Security Services must grow to be an “efficient tool of the people’s regime.”<sup>568</sup> This section examines these two apparatuses and their roles in

---

cao ve tinh hình va công tác tiếp thu ở các thành thị mới giải phóng ở miền Nam Đông bang Bắc bộ” (Report on the situation and takeover activities in newly liberated urban areas in the southern region of the Red River Delta) (31/07/1954), PTT 1420, TTLTQG-III; “Báo cáo tình hình Hà Nội tháng 4 và tháng 5-54” (Report on Hanoi in April and May 1954); “Biên bản cuộc họp Ủy ban hành chính TP Hà Nội ngày 14/12/1954” (Minutes from the Meeting of Hanoi’s Administrative Committee on 14 December 14 1954, PTT 531, TTLTQG-III; Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam & Ban chấp hành ĐB Hà Nội (Vietnam Workers’ Party & Executive Party Committee of Hanoi), “Nhiệm vụ công tác tháng 11.1954” (Official duties in November 1954), PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>566</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 43.

<sup>567</sup> “Báo cáo tổng quan về công tác tiếp quản thủ đô Hà Nội ngày 09-10 đến ngày 31-10-1954,” PTT 99, TTLTQG-III; Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam & Ban chấp hành ĐB Hà Nội (Vietnam Workers’ Party & Executive Party Committee of Hanoi), “Nhiệm vụ công tác tháng 11.1954” (Official duties in November 1954), PTT 532, TTLTQG-III;

<sup>568</sup> Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam & Ban chấp hành ĐB Hà Nội (Vietnam Workers’ Party & Executive Party Committee of Hanoi), “Nhiệm vụ công tác tháng 11.1954” (Official duties in November 1954), PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

## Resident groups [*Tổ dân phố*]: The informal face of the state

Under the French-ASV government, the city of Hanoi was divided into 36 administrative “neighborhoods” [*khu phố*] and each neighborhood was headed by a neighborhood chief [*khu trưởng*]. By October 1954, 20 neighborhood chiefs had abandoned their position and left the city for Haiphong or abroad.<sup>569</sup> During the first weeks after takeover, the remaining 16 neighborhood chiefs were mobilized by the DRV government to continue their jobs, some headed two neighborhoods at the same time.<sup>570</sup> In late October 1954, the DRV government divided the 36 old neighborhoods into four inter-neighborhood units [*Liên khu phố*] and established its own “committees of affairs” [*tổ công tác*] to take charge from the old neighborhood chiefs who were demoted and put in charge of administrative procedures such as registration of birth, death, marriage and assisting in social welfare surveys.<sup>571</sup> Between 1955 and 1958, the organization of administrative units in Hanoi changed three times (in April 1955, September 1955, and January 1958), swinging back and forth between a two-level or a three-level administrative system.<sup>572</sup>

Despite the debates around the appropriate administrative design for the cities, a unit of population monitoring has remained constant since its establishment in September 1955: the resident groups [*tổ dân phố*]. “Resident group” was and remains the smallest formal grouping of households in urban Vietnam.<sup>573</sup> Established at the same time as the official launch of the household registration system in Hanoi, each resident groups comprised of 30-40 households.<sup>574</sup> By 1958, there were 331 resident groups in Hanoi.<sup>575</sup> Each resident group was managed by a Committee of Residents’ Representatives [*Ban đại biểu dân phố*] and a Committee of Security [*Ban Bảo vệ*]. Unlike the Administrative Committee (“People’s Committee” from 1980) and the People’s Council (of a neighborhood or a district) which are official organs of the DRV government [*tổ chức chính quyền*], the Committee of Residents’ Representatives and the Committee of Security are mass organizations [*tổ chức nhân dân*] whose members are elected by households in each resident group.<sup>576</sup>

---

<sup>569</sup> Lê Thị Quỳnh Nga, “Hình thái hai chính quyền ở Hà Nội trong những năm đầu giải phóng (1954-1960)” (paper presented at the Conference for the 60th anniversary of the capital city’s liberation - Achievements, Opportunities, Challenges and Developments [*Hội thảo 60 năm giải phóng thủ đô - Thành tựu, Thời cơ, Thách thức và Phát triển*] Thành ủy-UBND-UBMTTQ Thành phố Hà Nội, Hanoi, Oct 2014), 155.

<sup>570</sup> Ibid.

<sup>571</sup> Ibid.; Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam & Ban chấp hành ĐB Hà Nội (Vietnam Workers’ Party & Executive Party Committee of Hanoi), “Nhiệm vụ công tác tháng 11.1954” (Official duties in November 1954), PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>572</sup> Lê Thị Quỳnh Nga, “Hình thái hai chính quyền,” 156. The center of debate was the necessity of the mid-level unit - the district [*quận*]. In May 1959, the state would settle on a two-level system with a municipal administration and 8 neighborhoods.

David Koh has shown that another debate took place in the late 1970s on whether or not a smaller unit of administration, the ward [*phường*] was necessary. In 1980, the ward level of administration was established. (David Koh, “Urban Government: Ward-level administration in Hanoi” in Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet and David G. Marr, eds. *Beyond Hanoi: Local Government in Vietnam* (Singapore: ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute, 2004), 206-7.) In current-day Hanoi, there are three levels of administration: municipal, district, and ward.

<sup>573</sup> Lê Thị Quỳnh Nga, “Hình thái hai chính quyền,” 156, 158; Koh, “Urban Government,” 203-4.

<sup>574</sup> Lê Thị Quỳnh Nga, “Hình thái hai chính quyền,” 156.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid., 156, 158.

The general role of the resident group committees is “to manage affairs related to the common good [*lợi ích công cộng*] of the people (under the direction of the Administrative Committee of the Neighborhood [*Ủy ban Hành chính khu phố*].”<sup>577</sup> More specifically, the types of affairs that these committees manage range from providing relevant certifications of birth, death, marriage, to providing social relief, maintaining public hygiene, propagandizing the ideal lifestyle, and controlling public security [*trị an*].<sup>578</sup> In other words, these committees ensure the reach of the state into each household. As David Koh has aptly put: with the presence and activities of the resident group administrative leaders, the state is no longer “faceless” but rather “usually an amiable elderly neighbor who already has some authority” in the local community.<sup>579</sup>

This informal apparatus entered the world of *Crossroads and Lampposts* in the form of Mr. Gawking-Trung [*Ông Trung trố*], Uncle Mẫn, and Ms. Hoà, who made up the Committee of Security in Dưỡng’s neighborhood. Uncle Mẫn is the committee’s chair and in the words of Dưỡng:

Uncle Mẫn is very poor, one wife four children. His house is like a rathole, just enough to place a bed. Pots and pans, plates and bowls, baskets and strainers, all shoved under the bed. At night the whole family divides up, some sleep on the bed, some sleep on the ground. Uncle Mẫn is honest [*thật thà*], simple [*chất phác*], he works all day trying to make ends meet<sup>580</sup>.

Ms. Hoà or Elder-sister Hoà [*Chị Hoà*] is the wife of an injured soldier who refuses to return home and who wants his wife to marry another man for his injury has rendered him impotent. . In Dưỡng’s view, Ms. Hoà is rather rustic and shy, but an honest and reliable person. Mr. Gawking-Trung, vice-chair of the Committee of Security, is however, in Dưỡng’s words, a “big fake” [*đại giả tạo*]<sup>581</sup> (“He *loves* the North, in the manner as if nobody *loves* it as much as he does.”)<sup>582</sup> A watch and clock seller with his own shop, Mr. Gawking-Trung is domineering and aggressive.

The most common platform for the Committee of Security to disseminate the official lines and programs to the resident group is the general meetings to which each household must send at least a representative. Unsurprisingly, discourses related to “dangerous” prostitutes mentioned in Chapter 5 and the concerns surrounding “enemy”’s plots in post-takeover Hanoi seeped into the novel, in the form of the discourses of Mr. Gawking-Trung and the suspicions that neighborhood residents harbored towards Dưỡng during these public meetings.

Mr. Gawking-Trung, in every neighborhood meetings, would say look, military-truck heads are perking up again, butterflies are flapping their wings around the warehouses, but whoring is only the outer appearance, the internal content is the Deuxième Bureau. He says those are political activities camouflaged by lecherous activities. He makes many allusions, everybody understands which part is about [Dưỡng], which part is about the

---

<sup>577</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, “Thông tư số 79-TC-CQTT về Tổ chức chính quyền ở các thị xã (10/01/1958), accessed at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Bo-may-hanh-chinh/Thong-tu-79-TC-CQTT-to-chuc-chinh-quyen-thi-xa-22360.aspx>.

<sup>578</sup> Ibid.; Bộ Công An, “Nghị định 35-NĐ/CA của Bộ trưởng Bộ Công An Quy định thể lệ quản lý khách sạn, quán trọ (14/02/1959),” accessed at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Doanh-nghiep/Nghi-dinh-35-ND-CA-Quy-dinh-the-le-quan-ly-khach-san-quan-tro-43814.aspx>; Koh, “Urban government,” 203.

<sup>579</sup> Koh, “Urban government,” 204.

<sup>580</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 184.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., 151.

clique of Hoóng and Ngọc the former Bảo Đại's soldiers, which part is about Lily and her brother [Tĩnh Bóp].<sup>583</sup>

Committee members, especially Ms. Hoà, also tried to influence residents through personal relations. Dưõng's young wife, Trinh (but nicknamed Cỏm), relied on Ms. Hoà for advice and consolation, at the same time, Ms. Hoà tried to learn more about and influence Dưõng through talks with Cỏm. Confiding to Ms. Hoà after Dưõng was confronted by Mr. Gawking-Trung, Cỏm exclaimed: "For me you are the neighborhood, you are the government."<sup>584</sup> For Cỏm, Ms. Hoà was the face of the state.

Mr. Gawking-Trung, Uncle Mẫn, and Ms. Hoà considered themselves effective patrols of the neighborhood, even adopting the rights normally assumed by criminal investigators such as searching houses and interrogating those they find suspicious. This was what happened after a gunshot was fired at a soldier from the garden of Dưõng – it was neither the police nor the military who made a prompt appearance but these three figures of informal authority who searched the house and the garden for criminal evidence (not without destroying the actual crime scene, according to Dưõng who was an avid fan of detective novels,) interrogated Dưõng and his wife, confiscated Dưõng's books and photos.<sup>585</sup> Speaking about his role, Mr. gawking-Trung declared to Dưõng: "I represent one thousand six hundred people, adults, children, elders, youths, in this neighborhood," "Let me tell you, the neighborhood, and the government, and communism, we are one."<sup>586</sup> In 1965, eleven years after the incident, Ms. Hoà who had been in charge of surveilling and mobilizing the former ASV soldiers and officials, was still acting as the neighborhood's patrol.

The Committee of Security in Dưõng's neighborhood had a direct working relation with the neighborhood's Public Security Services. The representative of the local Public Security, Mr. Thái, attended all of the Committee's meetings. Furthermore, Ms. Hoà told the Writer that she was in constant contact with the police, preparing reports per requested. To prove to the Writer that she had an exceptional memory, Ms. Hoà recounted during a conversation with the Writer that one morning of 1954, she had prepared for officer Thái 36 documents about the activities of former ASV soldiers in her neighborhood.<sup>587</sup> In the end, the fate of Dưõng was not decided by the neighborhood's Committee of Security but by the Department of Security, an official organ of the state. In the next section, we turn our attention to this "efficient tool of the people's regime."<sup>588</sup>

### The Public Security Services

Established as early as the DRV state came into being in August 1945, the DRV's Public Security Services [*Công An*] were initially modeled on the French *Sûreté*<sup>589</sup>. The apparatus was

---

<sup>583</sup> Ibid., 72-3.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>585</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, p51-58.

<sup>586</sup> Ibid., 139, 141.

<sup>587</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>588</sup> Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam & Ban chấp hành ĐB Hà Nội (Vietnam Workers' Party & Executive Party Committee of Hanoi), "Nhiệm vụ công tác tháng 11.1954" (Official duties in November 1954), PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>589</sup> Goscha, *Historical Dictionary*, s.v. "Public Security Services, Democratic Republic of Vietnam (*Công An*);" Christopher E. Goscha, "Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at War (1945–50)," *Intelligence and National Security* 22, no. 1 (February 1, 2007): 100–138.



developed and became more interwoven with ICP missions throughout the sixteen months of DRV's rule before the outbreak of the war in December 1946; its scope and functions were greatly reduced during the first half of the conflict.<sup>590</sup> A serious revamp of the Services was carried out in early 1950 - immediately after the takeover of the first urban area - the town of Bắc Kạn (Chapter 1) - as a part of larger preparations for the general counter-offensive.<sup>591</sup> In 1953, the Ministry Public Security was established with the following declared missions:

- Carry out domestic counter-espionage, counter-revolutionary activities to protect the democratic republic government, protect the people's army, [and] protect the nation's economy; protect the border; [and] counter the activities of foreign agents and spies.
- Eliminate petty crimes, thefts and robberies; eliminate social evils and maintain security and order of the mass.
- Administer prisons, reform and re-educate prisoners.<sup>592</sup>

The DRV's Public Security was charged with regular policing activities: "surveillance, investigation, arrest, detention" - but like the policing apparatus in other communist states, the *Công An*'s goals and means indicate that they were policing the population rather than assuring its security.<sup>593</sup> The structure of the DRV's Public Security Services in 1945-1946 and 1946-1953 has been described in a pathbreaking study by Christopher Goscha, but available details on the structure and activities of Ministry of Public Security in the latter half of the 1950s and during the Vietnam War do not yet allow us to build a comprehensive picture of this Ministry.<sup>594</sup> What could be known so far is that the Ministry of Public Security is divided into three sections: People's Security Services [*An ninh nhân dân*], People's Policing Services [*Cảnh sát nhân dân*],

---

<sup>590</sup> Ibid.; Marr, *Vietnam*, 390-91, 402-3.

<sup>591</sup> Goscha, *Historical Dictionary*, 395.

<sup>592</sup> Sắc lệnh của Chủ tịch nước Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa số 141-SL ngày 16 tháng 2 năm 1953.

<sup>593</sup> Cristina Vatulescu, *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>594</sup> Goscha, "Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization."

The number of existing works on the DRV's Public Security Services after 1954 is small, but all are pathbreaking and important. See for example: Guillemot, François. "De l'invention et de l'usage de 'l'ennemi intérieur': Vraie et fausse contre-révolution au Nord-Vietnam 1945–1967." [The Invention and Use of the 'Enemy Within': True and False Counterrevolution in North Vietnam, 1945– 1967] in Christopher Goscha, ed. *Communisme 2013. Vietnam de l'insurrection à la dictature, 1920–2012*, 259–302; Shawn McHale, "Freedom, Violence, and the Struggle over the Public Arena in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945–1958" in Christopher E. Goscha and Benoît de Tréglodé, eds. *Naissance d'un État-Parti. Le Việt Nam depuis 1945 [The Birth of a Party-State. Vietnam Since 1945]* (Paris: Les Indes Savantes, 2004), 81–99; Merle L., Pribbenow, "The Man in the Snow White Cell," *Studies in Intelligence* 48, no. 1 (2004). <https://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/vol48nol/article06.html>; Merle L., Pribbenow, "The Soviet-Vietnamese Intelligence Relationship during the Vietnam War: Cooperation and Conflict," CWIHP Working Paper (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014): <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/thesoviet-vietnamese-intelligence-relationship-during-the-vietnam-war>; Martin Grossheim, "Fraternal Support: The East German 'Stasi' and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War," CWIHP Working Paper #71 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014): [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP\\_Working\\_Paper\\_71\\_East\\_German\\_Stasi\\_Vietnam\\_War.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP_Working_Paper_71_East_German_Stasi_Vietnam_War.pdf); Martin Grossheim, "The East German 'Stasi' and the Modernization of the Vietnamese Security Apparatus, 1965–1989," CWIHP e-Dossier No. 51 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2014): <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-eastgerman-%E2%80%9Cstasi%E2%80%9D-and-the-modernization-the-vietnamese-security-apparatus-1965>.

and “other services.”<sup>595</sup> This section and the next focus on two known functions of the *Công An* during the period of this study, which are highly relevant to analyzing *surveillance de près*: management of the household registration system [*quản lý hộ khẩu*] and counterespionage services [*phản gián*].

### The Household Registration System

The most efficient means for policing urban populations after takeover were different registration systems, all of which were managed by the People’s Policing Services: travel passes [*giấy thông hành*] for inter-provincial movements, temporary stay reporting [*khai báo tạm trú*] and temporary absence reporting [*khai báo tạm vắng*] for overnight stays out of registered location, and most importantly, the household registration system [*hộ khẩu*], an equivalent of the Chinese *hukou* system.<sup>596</sup> Though the household registration system and its consequences were not reflected in *Crossroads and Lampposts*, it is highly relevant to our analysis of the Public Security as a surveilling agent, therefore a brief note on the household registration system is necessary here.

The Chinese *hukou* (household registration) served as a model for the DRV’s *hộ khẩu* system. In China, during the first years of communist rule in Chinese cities, the system of *hukou* primarily served as a means to ensure public security. Gradually<sup>597</sup> throughout the 1950s, as the CCP became more concerned with regulating food in times of shortage, *hukou* also became a tool to determine people’s urban or rural identity, deepening the urban-rural alienation until the present day.<sup>598</sup> Archival documents show that, following the Chinese model, as soon as the DRV government took over Hanoi, it planned to start registering residents and households in various parts of the city (prioritizing hotels, hostels, and “densely populated areas”), but it was not clear whether the program was put into place or how effective it was.<sup>599</sup> In fact, the first city where systematic household registration was carried out city-wide was Nam Định in mid-1955.<sup>600</sup> Hanoi officially launched its program on 18 September, 1955.<sup>601</sup> Household registration in cities like Hanoi, Haiphong, and Nam Định were promoted as an effective and necessary tool to

<sup>595</sup> Wall text, *Các lực lượng Công An (1945-2015)*, Hanoi Police Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>596</sup> Nguyễn Thanh Bình, “Hải Phòng,” 137.

On the Chinese *hukou* system: Tiejun Cheng, “Dialectics of Control – The Household Registration (*Hukou*) System in Contemporary China” (PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991); Tiejun Cheng and Mark Selden, “The Origins and Consequences of China’s Hukou System,” *China Quarterly* 139 (1994): 644–68; Kam Wing Chan, *Cities with Invisible Walls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Fei-Ling Wang, *Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China’s Hukou System* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Martin King Whyte, ed., *One Country, Two Societies: Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jeremy Brown, *City Versus Countryside*, 1-15.

<sup>597</sup> Ibid.

<sup>598</sup> Cheng and Selden, “The Origins and Social Consequences”; Brown, *City Versus Countryside*.

<sup>599</sup> “Báo cáo tổng quan về công tác tiếp quản thủ đô Hà Nội ngày 09-10 đến ngày 31-10-1954 (Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, BCH Đảng bộ Hà Nội),” PTT 99, TTLTQG-III; “Nhiệm vụ công tác tháng 11/1954 (Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, BCH Đảng bộ Hà Nội),” PTT 532, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>600</sup> “Báo cáo của đồng chí Trường Chinh tại Hội nghị Trung Ương lần thứ tám (họp từ ngày 13 đến 20-8-1955): Đoàn kết nhân dân toàn quốc đấu tranh để thực hiện thống nhất Việt Nam trên cơ sở độc lập và dân chủ,” VKDĐT vol.16 (1955), 521; “Báo cáo trước Hội đồng Chính phủ về tình hình năm 1955,” PTT 119, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>601</sup> UBQC Thành phố Hà Nội, “Thông cáo về việc kê khai hộ khẩu (18/09/1955),” *Nhân Dân*

prevent criminal and reactionaries activities.<sup>602</sup> Furthermore, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the first years after the DRV took over the cities coincided with a long period of natural disasters and bad harvests in the rural areas. *Hộ khẩu* in North Vietnamese cities, therefore, soon served the dual goals of protecting the revolution in the city (by identifying suspicious, problematic elements) and restricting mobility between the urban and rural areas.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, as in China, the system of *hộ khẩu*, together with tightening social organization (especially with the system of resident groups), became an effective tool in minimizing prostitution in the cities in North Vietnam over the long term.<sup>603</sup> Through household registration, the public security and local authorities knew the exact number of people living in a household. During the registration process, each adult resident had to submit a political biography [*lý lịch*]. Police agents in charge of household registration depended on various sources to record and verify information: inputs from the residents in question, inputs from other residents, inputs from resident groups' committees, and independent investigations.<sup>604</sup>

The process caused many problems and much uneasiness among the publics. In Haiphong, urban residents complained about members of the Committee of Security abusing their authority and about the attitude and actions of police cadres. According to these complaints, the cadres “did not respond when greeted,” “entered private homes without greeting the homeowner,” “refused when residents offer them a cup of water or a cigarette,” and often “entered private homes by the back door, peeking around;” others “acted [as if] irritated by the mass,” or acted in a domineering and threatening manner, using phrases such as “I will tie you up or put you in prison.”<sup>605</sup> Some did follow up with threats to detain civilians after putting them in the category of “sabotage suspects” [*tình nghi phá hoại*].<sup>606</sup> Police suspicion during household investigation was enough for resident group's committee members to be suspended, workers to lose their jobs, and bureaucrats and experts to be imprisoned.<sup>607</sup> In Hanoi, Trần Dần recorded four incidents from household registration campaigns in October 1955. All of them were recorded in the form of an exchange between a civilian and a household registration cadres. The content of the exchange gives us a sense of the information that household registration cadres collected: education level, occupation (past and current), possible links with the “enemies.” It also shows disparities between the perception of the police and that of the civilians. A person could be accused for any dubious detail informed by anyone:

- So you collude [*cấu kết*] with the imperialists.
- Sir, that is only a cousin of mine who worked there, I have done nothing, and he's a distant cousin. I cannot accept the word “collude”..

---

<sup>602</sup> Nguyễn Thanh Bình, “Hải Phòng,” 137-8.

<sup>603</sup> Henriot, “‘La Fermeture,’” 475; “Báo cáo tình hình tệ nạn xã hội ở các TP lớn về hành khất, lưu manh, gái điếm qua 3 năm hòa bình trở lại,” CTXH 248, TTLTQG-III; International Labour Organization (ILO)/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC), *Viet Nam – Children in Prostitution in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho: A Rapid Assessment* (Bangkok: International Labour Office, 2002), 12.

<sup>604</sup> Bộ Nội vụ, “Chương IV;” Lê Thị Quỳnh Nga, “Hình thái hai chính quyền,” 155; Bộ Nội vụ, “Thông tư số 79-TC-CQTT về Tổ chức chính quyền ở các thị xã (10/01/1958); “Báo cáo tình hình sau Hội nghị Đại biểu Nhân dân Thành và các Khu phố Hải Phòng của UBHC TP Hải Phòng năm 1956 (13/11/1956),” BYT 352, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>605</sup> “Báo cáo tình hình sau Hội nghị Đại biểu Nhân dân Thành và các Khu phố Hải Phòng của UBHC TP Hải Phòng năm 1956 (13/11/1956),” BYT 352, TTLTQG-III.

<sup>606</sup> Ibid.

<sup>607</sup> Ibid.

- You keep arguing for what. The people [*nhân dân*] have given me their comments.
- But to “collude”..
- Do you accept it or not? If you accept then it’s okay, if not we will report to higher authority. Come on. You’re wasting our precious time.
- But that is too much, it’s an injustice [*oan*]..
- So you don’t accept it?
- Sir, it’s an injustice..
- Okay, we pass. You will go to the police station later..<sup>608</sup>

In another instance, a woman had her past questioned:

This certain woman in Hàng Bài area. There are dubious things surrounding the issue of her virginity in the past, roughly put, that was the sorrowful way through she earned a living.

During the verification process, and even before, cadres and the resident group’s leader, as well as everybody around were having scruples about the section on marital relation. That day there was a verification meeting. The discussion on this section kept dragging on, so much and so long that her face reddened, her tears were swelling up. And even more.

During the break she climbed to the third floor, was about to plunge herself. A cadre was vigilant enough to have been following her so she was stopped. Of course [the cadre’s] clothes were torn. The cadre said:- That shows obstinacy, a sabotaging act. Compatriots [*đồng bào*] you tell me if she should be escorted to the police?

- Yes! Agreed!

She was detained at the police station for a day, [the police] explained things then released her. That sorrowful section was also resolved.<sup>609</sup>

Though the DRV government propagandized that their post-takeover policies prioritized clemency and national reconciliation, campaigns like the household registration process created more tensions and pitted cadres against civilians and civilians against civilians. It is apt to conclude this section with a comment made by Dưỡng to his wife when she told him that she was abused in the market for being the wife of a former ASV soldier and that she was ashamed: “So much for their clemency!”<sup>610</sup>

### The Counterespionage War: Psychological Warfare and “Relying on the People”

Intelligence services in the DRV, as Christopher Goscha has shown, have a long history that dated from before 1945.<sup>611</sup> Before and after the takeover of cities in 1954-1955, intelligence works by the then modernized-and-professionalized People’s Security Services became even more crucial.<sup>612</sup> The resolution from the Ministry of Public Security’s Conference on Political Security in April 1955 stated that the central task of Public Security Services in North Vietnam was to discover and destroy espionage activities organized and directed by foreign enemies (“American, French, English imperialists and their lackey Chiang [Kai-shek]’s agents”) and to

<sup>608</sup> Trần Dân, *Ghi*, 99.

<sup>609</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>610</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 40.

<sup>611</sup> Goscha, “Intelligence in a time of decolonization.”

<sup>612</sup> *Ibid.*

discover and purge reactionary organizations and individuals still hiding in the society and in the government's and party's institutions.<sup>613</sup>

According to official records, between 1954 and 1965, the Hanoi's Department of Public Security uncovered more than 40 reactionary and enemy organizations with tens of thousands members.<sup>614</sup> In 1958, the public was made aware of two significant counterespionage successes. In January 1958, leaders and agents of a network of spies trained and directed by a Deuxième Bureau chief, Camille Gouvernec, were tried and charged by the People's Court Hanoi.<sup>615</sup> Ten months later, in November 1958, the Ministry of Public Security announced the uncovering and destruction of the CIA-backed, Đại Việt party-organized network of spies and saboteurs in Hanoi, Haiphong, and Nam Định aiming at subverting the DRV state.<sup>616</sup> In late 1964, around the time that Trần Dần started working on the manuscript of *Crossroads and Lampposts*, another major counterespionage case was announced to the public. This time it was a subversive Catholic trained abroad and sent to Hanoi from Saigon in 1955. Nguyễn Văn Thông, the curate of the St. Joseph's Cathedral in Hanoi, was charged with illegally training and ordaining priests, inciting the masses, and sending intelligence information to Saigon, all of which "posed direct threats to the security of the capital city."<sup>617</sup>

All of these cases must have justified and increased a general phobia of the "internal enemies" which is also the general atmosphere presented in *Crossroads and Lampposts*. Furthermore, it is difficult not to see the shadow of these cases in Trần Dần's novel: from the spy network of Macxen, to the various communication methods of agents in this network with Pointed-chin (camouflaged letterboxes scattered around the city, invisible ink on paper and fabric, radio transmitters), and little but curious and repetitive details such as the cross necklace dangling on Lily's chest and Dưỡng's references to a mysterious "holy bible" [*thánh kinh*].

I argue that two inter-related elements of the counterespionage war in the early years of the DRV casted its shadow on Trần Dần's novel: psychological warfare and the police's system of *surveillance de près*. First, the process of abandoning physical torture and adopting psychological warfare in military intelligence services in the 1950s, as suggested by Christopher Goscha, also took place in the Public Security's intelligence services, at least in the services' public discourse.<sup>618</sup> The way that the three counterespionage campaigns mentioned earlier were recounted seems similar to the methods of "proselytizing the enemy" [*địch vận*] as applied by the military intelligence services: Public Security agents all managed to "penetrate, win over and

---

<sup>613</sup> Cổng thông tin điện tử Học viện Cảnh sát Nhân dân, "Lực lượng Công an bảo vệ miền Bắc, đấu tranh giải phóng miền Nam (Phần 4)," <http://hvcsnd.edu.vn/tin-tuc-su-kien/tieu-diem/luc-luong-cong-an-bao-ve-mien-bac-dau-tranh-giai-phong-mien-nam-bai-4-6341> .

<sup>614</sup> Wall text, *1954-1965: Giữ gìn an ninh trật tự*, Hanoi Police Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>615</sup> Vũ Mạnh Hà, "Chuyên án TN25 và cuộc đấu trí hơn 2,000 ngày," *Công An Nhân Dân Online* (13 Apr 2014), accessed at: <http://cand.com.vn/Cong-an/Nghe-thuat-tro-choi-nghiep-vu-256775/> .

<sup>616</sup> François Guillemot, "Penser le nationalisme révolutionnaire au Việt Nam : Identités politiques et itinéraires singuliers à la recherche d'une hypothétique « Troisième voie », " *Moussons. Recherche en sciences humaines sur l'Asie du Sud-Est*, no. 13–14 (December 1, 2009): 174–84; Wall text, *Triệt phá gián điệp CIA*, Hanoi Police Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam; Xuân Ngọc, "Chuyên án C30-một chiến dịch phản gián hoàn hảo," *An ninh Hải Phòng* (27 Jul 2020), accessed at: <http://anhph.vn/chuyen-an-c30-mot-chien-dich-phan-gian-hoan-hao-d37254.html> .

<sup>617</sup> Wall text, *Vụ án Nguyễn Văn Thông*, Hanoi Police Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam.

<sup>618</sup> Goscha, "Intelligence in a time of decolonization," 131-2.

change the entire way of thinking of their adversaries.”<sup>619</sup> In the novel, dealing with the espionage and sabotaging network headed by Pointed-chin and under the direction of Macxen was the Bureau of Counterespionage [*Cục Phấn gián*]. Several characters represented the Bureau: 26-years-old officer Thái - a seasoned intelligence agent since before the takeover, Trần B - the direct chief of Thái, and Mr. White-Haired - general director of counterespionage activities. Through the voice of officer Thái as well as through Dưỡng’s observations, the reader understands that police agents were very successful in choosing their targets of influence - Đoàn, Dưỡng, and Chắt, compared to Tình Bốp, seemed more persuadable and indeed all of them cooperated with the police; Đoàn most likely became an informant reporting to the police on the activities of his friends, while Dưỡng came to share with the police the most important piece of evidence to uncover Pointed-chin’s network - the handkerchief that Lily had left behind in Dưỡng’s hand. In dealing with more dangerous suspects, such as Mr. Khang whose bookstore turned out to be Pointed-Chin’s main letterbox, officer Thái and Trần B applied various discourses, from threatening imprisonment to promising clemency and protection. Throughout the novel, the chiefs and agents in the Bureau of Counterespionage achieved their goals mostly through talking with different suspects and informants. Only in two moments does the reader see police agents in action: the first time when officer Thái climbed the wall to enter Tình Bốp’s house then moving around in pointing his gun and flashlight before finding the dead body of Tình Bốp; the second time was the car chase to capture Pointed-chin who, at the final moment of confrontation, offered no resistance.

The capture of Pointed-chin and the uncovering of his network was owing to two elements, according to officer Thái: first, the experiences and effective strategy of the Bureau’s chiefs and second, the cooperation of the mass. Officer Thái confidently told the Writer about the police’s system of *surveillance de près*:

February 1966. Officer Thai: [...] the network of people cooperating with the police is very wide. They are women who do knitwork, on the pavements, under the lampposts, at the entrance of little lanes, in front of houses. They are children playing on the streets. They are housewives, female street vendors, hairdressers on the pavements, rickshaw pullers. They are everywhere. Oftentimes I think, we should give entry permission to experienced American spies, to tour around the North, and our network of all-people-in-vigilance, so that they will become jealous, and quit their job. Jokes asides, it doesn’t mean that we could solve all cases effectively and timely. But I am ready to stay quiet, to follow a suspect, for 10 years, 20 year, to prove our hypothesis.<sup>620</sup>

Indeed, toward the public, the DRV state called for vigilance and praised collaboration with the police. An article on *Nhân Dân* in August 1955 titled “Public Security Services and the People” [*Công An và Nhân Dân*] emphasizes that in order for Public Security forces to carry out the “heavy and glorious” task of “protecting the people, maintaining order and security, and pursuing wrongdoers,” Public Security forces must “unite with the people, organize and educate the people, and rely on the great force of the people.”<sup>621</sup> The article provides two examples of the people’s aid to the police. The first story took place in Shanghai: One night, on a deserted road, a

<sup>619</sup> Ibid.; Wall text, *Triệt phá gián điệp CIA*, Hanoi Police Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam; Xuân Ngọc, “Chuyên án C30-một chiến dịch phản gián hoàn hảo;” Vũ Mạnh Hà, “Chuyên án TN25 và cuộc đấu trí hơn 2,000 ngày.”

<sup>620</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 247.

<sup>621</sup> “Công An và Nhân Dân,” *Nhân Dân* (18 Aug 1955), 2 in GR 10R 178, SHD.

taxi driver picked up a client dressing elegantly and carrying many goods. Without hesitation, the taxi driver drove the client straight to the police station where, after an investigation, the police concluded that the well-dressed client was a burglar. The second story has a similar plot but took place in Hanoi:

In Hanoi, a young man calls a rickshaw to transport a brand new bicycle. Comrade rickshaw puller thinks to himself: “It’s strange! This guy has a brand new bicycle, why would he use a rickshaw? Like his Shanghai colleague, he rides his rickshaw, with the bicycle and the thief straight to the police station, after which an investigation shows that the young guy had just stolen a bicycle, but because the bicycle was locked, he had to call a rickshaw.”<sup>622</sup>

The article concludes: “These two stories demonstrate that when they people understand perfectly their responsibilities as citizens, and when the Public Security could rely on the mass, wrongdoers cannot escape from the police’s nets.”<sup>623</sup>

Another article on *Nhân Dân* presents the experiences from North Korea in the fight against the enemy’s Special Services and stresses the importance of informing the authority about suspicious individuals. Because the people “ardently take part in the fight against the special services,” the article praises, “the packs of saboteurs could hardly escape surveillance.”<sup>624</sup> Providing two examples where civilians in Cao Thành (Kaesong) and Trường Phở (Changpo) reported the presence of suspicious individuals (who turned out to be American-trained secret agents), the article further praises the fact that “the inquisitive eyes of the people” could not be deceived by secret agents’ disguise and false papers. Finally, the article suggests a promise of reward for vigilant acts and helpful denunciations: between 1951 and 1955, the North Korean government awarded 3,913 medals of honor and the North Korean Ministry of Internal Affairs awarded 14,602 certificates of merit [*giấy khen*] to civilians who contributed to capturing agents sent by the Americans and Syngman Rhee (then-President of South Korea).

Such official discourses demonstrate that the DRV state was encouraging a particular environment where reporting and informing on a neighbor, a friend, or an acquaintance became not only normal but even desirable under the banner of “all-people-in-vigilance” against internal and external enemies and their sabotaging plots. Every character who represented authority in *Crossroads and Lampposts* encouraged others to watch and report on the actions and speeches of individuals considered suspicious. Officer Thái asked Dưỡng to inform the police on his circle of friends and his suspicious employer Mr. Phúc. Ms. Hoà advised Cóm to keep track of and report Dưỡng’s daily activities or any unusual events.

By the time that Trần Dần wrote *Crossroads and Lampposts*, between 1965 and 1966, the adoption of the *surveillance de près* policies - population control at the grassroots level with resident groups and their committees, household registration management, and the expansion of population surveilling apparatus (both professional and mass-based) - seems to have made enough impressions on Trần Dần, so that neighborhood management and policing activities entered the world of the novel as an indefatigable apparatus of surveillance. But Trần Dần went a step further and demonstrated that *surveiller de près* becomes effective when not only there was a network of watchers but also, and more importantly, when individuals started policing and censoring themselves. After Mr- gawking Trung summoned Dưỡng to his office and demanded a

---

<sup>622</sup> Ibid.

<sup>623</sup> Ibid.

<sup>624</sup> “Tổ giác (Kinh nghiệm từ cuộc đấu tranh chống đặc vụ ở Triều Tiên,” *Nhân Dân* (6 Sep 1955) in GR 10R 178, SHD.

written confession, Dũng set out to write, but not without taking into consideration the possible expectations of Mr. gawking-Trung:

10pm I read the confession again: I placed myself, in the position of Mr. gawking-Trung. Mr. gawking-Trung was not pleased. Mr. gawking-Trung was not satisfied. Mr. gawking-Trung said: ah here, in this part you doubt the policy of mercy, in this part you want to become a monk, this is your double-game. You accused your wife of babbling to the police, this is criticizing the cadres. You hit your wife, you used politics as an excuse. You are stubborn. Your confession, it is also your double-game. I listened to Mr. gawking-Trung, took out my pen, crossed everywhere. The confession appeared torn. I crossed out, I crossed out sentences, events and truth. I threw away 2/3 of the truth. I read again, it still felt incomplete, Mr. gawking-Trung was again not satisfied. 1/3 of truth was still too much, so Mr. gawking-Trung still found reasons to accuse me. I crossed out more. Even so, Mr. gawking-Trung was still not pleased. Because, without the confession, Mr. gawking-Trung still knew everything, every detail of what I had done, long before. Because, he wanted me to confess, that I was anti-communist, then he would be pleased. I was the contrary, if I were a cadre, I would only like that people confess they really love communism, really support communism.<sup>625</sup>

In the diary entry of January 5, 1958, Trần Dần reflected on the shadow of this system on his own thinking and behavior:

[...]

I said: - “In every period, the artistic field has always had dregs! We must not work according to them! We must not consider them! We must not...”

I silenced myself abruptly. Because I suddenly felt that I was stupid! Maybe unfortunately, somebody has recorded my slip of the tongue, perhaps!<sup>626</sup>

### *The Rhetoric of surveiller de près*

If the section above attests to the existence of an effective apparatus of *surveillance de près*, this section will explore peculiar features of this structure by looking at the treatment of criminal investigation and verbal confrontations in Trần Dần’s diary and in the novel. I argue that a system of *surveillance de près* produces its own discourse of justice and security and its own rhetoric of suppression.

Concerns with the way criminal investigations were carried out after regime change were present in Trần Dần’s diary during his stay in Bac Ninh province to observe the Land Reform from 1955 to 1956. A great number of murder, poison, arson cases were recorded by Trần Dần, the most elaborately recorded was the “Case of Son killing Father” in which the old Tuấn was found hung from the ceiling of the house, yet his feet were touching the ground, and there was a big cut across his ear:

There were the head of the police committee Tuế, and vice-president Hoàn establishing the criminal records. There were Thụ, his wife and mother (old Tuấn’s wife). There were also the land reform cadre who had just arrived at the province.

Tuế kept asking:

---

<sup>625</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts.*, 149.

<sup>626</sup> *Ghi 1954–1960*, 193-4.



- You killed your father, did you?  
Thụ turned all pale, agreeing to everything.
- You and your mother planned with each other to kill Tuân to avoid public trial, did you? Your father was an evil landlord about to be tried, you killed him to avoid facing class struggle from the people, did you? You were afraid that your cattle and land would be confiscated, afraid to be imprisoned?  
Thụ and his mother admitted all.<sup>627</sup>

The police stopped their investigation there, but a land reform cadre noted several discrepancies between the confessions and the criminal evidence from the scene. Afterward, while talking to a former NVA soldier in the village the cadre discovered curious details about old Tuân's history, and decided to carry out his own investigations. The police were out of the entry at this point, and the cadre was the one who talked to witnesses and proposed imprisonment of other suspects for interrogation. In the end, it turned out the Thụ did not kill his father.

Attentive readers would not have to read until the last pages of *Crossroads and Lampposts* to recognize the slip ups in the working of the police. Answering the Writer's question about the case of Dưõng eleven years before, the police officer Thái offers ambiguous details:

February 1966. Officer Thái recounts: at the moment I am an official in the department of anti-espionage [...] all the documents related to Dưõng, are still intact as you see here: I took them from the archives [...] When the book is published, I will take two copies, one for me as a souvenir, one to put into the file of Dưõng, because there remain some small questionable details, we have not been able to verify.<sup>628</sup>

February 1966. Officer Thái: [...] I am ready to stay quiet, to follow a suspect, for 10 years, 20 year, to prove our hypothesis. Who is the pointed-chin guy? Where is he? We still do not have an answer.

[...]

I was in charge of the area where he lived, but I never knew of these documents, and I do not know either how our agents took photos of them, since when. In general, departments on our side operate independently.<sup>629</sup>

Before meeting Thái, Dưõng confused Pointed-chin for a secret police at the beginning of their encounters. But this should not be surprising since, as Thái's testimony indicates, even the police officer in charge of the case was in the dark about other happenings on his own "side." The dark and the bright side of the surveillance were perhaps as confusing to the observer as to the observed.

In the end, the biggest detective challenge in the story was never solved: Who was Pointed-chin? Who killed Tình Bốp? Officer Thái's testimony to the Writer in 1966, quoted above, suggest uncertainty. And even though the police "caught" Pointed-chin who turned out to be Dưõng's employer Mr. Phúc, and that parts of his confession were provided to the Writer by the police officer Thái, these questions were raised again by Dưõng near the end of the story:

From Dưõng's entry for "a day out of time":

Mr. Phúc no.1 was then sitting in front of me. When he was about to be led away, he suddenly looked at me as if he wanted to say something. Then he said, as if

<sup>627</sup> *Ghi 1954–1960*, p108-9.

<sup>628</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 203.

<sup>629</sup> *Ibid.*, 247-9.

only for me to hear. He said: “In what I confessed to, there are many parts that are not the truth. I was forced so I had to admit to those crimes. I did not kill Tình Bóp. I never killed anyone. I am sorry.”<sup>630</sup>

From the Writer’s diary for June 1966:

Dưỡng says: “[...] There is something that has been bugging me, I never saw Mr. Phúc again, I don’t know if he admitted to murder because he was forced. I would also want to you review, a slipped detail. It is the part where, police officer Thái caught Pointed-chin. Officer Thái told me: his face turned all pale and green. But I know detective stories well, I know, on the face of Pointed-chin, it was all wax and color powder, how could it have turned pale and green.”<sup>631</sup>

This open ending in fact would reinforce my prior argument that the concerns for political security was the driving force of the plot, since by 1965 when Trần Dần wrote the novel, the escalations in the Second Indochina War must have increased rather than decreased the DRV’s concern for political stability. More importantly, the lack of closure even after the case had officially closed questions the effectiveness of the police in delivering legal justice. The working of the police in a system of *surveiller de près* thus prioritizes maintaining an order of political security rather than delivering justice.

In the same series of notes about Land Reform trials in Bac Ninh, Trần Dần paid special attention to the public trial of Nguyễn Văn Nga, a former landlord. He recorded seventeen sessions of verbal confrontation between the people, the authority, and the accused. One session could represent the way the other 16 sessions proceeded:

Brother Tung came up

- You lost some grain, your brother stole it, but you accused me, you hit me.
- Nga, did you hit brother Tụng?
- No.  
Down with him...
- Did you hit him?
- Yes.  
Down with the stubborn compartment...
- Turn your face to over here. Fold your arms. Now that you have admitted, say what happened.
- Your Honor I lost my grain and was questioning it, it was at my home, who else was there, but brother Tụng...
- Who is your “brother”?
- Mr. Tụng, I asked Mr. Tụng, then I did hit him.
- Nga! How did you hit him? Question! I allow you to turn to misters and misses people to recount your hitting brother Tụng. You must call them mister and miss.
- Misters and misses people, I lost my grain I hit brother Tụng oh mister Tụng. I tied him to a pillar.
- Did you hang him up by a rope?
- I did hang him up by a rope...  
Down with him...
- Nga! Question! In the end who stole the grain?
- I do not know...

---

<sup>630</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, 334.

<sup>631</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

Conclusion: - We the people see the stubborn nature of the landlord. He admitted that his relatives stole the grain yet he accused brother Tụng, and hit him.<sup>632</sup>

In *Crossroads and Lampposts*, one of the most intense verbal confrontations among characters were that between Duỡng and Mr. gawking-Trung, which took place at the headquarters of the neighborhood's official authority:

“Do you know why I summoned you here?” Mr. gawking-Trung scolded, like that. I said: “I don’t know.” Mr. gawking-Trung said: “Your comportment. Don’t you pretend.” I stayed silent. I pretended to be thinking, and to be unable to figure it out, so that he would not get angry. Mr. gawking-Trung said: “To suppress you. Do you get it now?” [...] “Your imperial French empire, with a band of flyers, drivers, all high-and-mighty. In the end, did the people win, or the imperialist French win?” I said: “The people won.” Mr. gawking-Trung said: “Who allows you to speak?” I said: “I thought you asked me.” Mr. gawking-Trung slammed on the table. He screamed: “Silencee! None of the I-thought-that! This is not the issue of I-thought-that! This is the issue of I-suppress-you! Got it?” [...] “I won’t let you speak any more. I give you three days to think. Now you go home, find a piece of paper, make a confession.” I said: “A confession?” Mr. gawking-Trung said: “Silencee. Who permits you to speak? A written confession, on the upper part you confess your crimes. Since peace was reestablished until now, what sabotaging actions, and sabotaging speeches have you committed? What does the enemy incite you to do? Was it you who shot the gun or who was it? What did the slut Lily leave behind, to you? How do you play your double-game, against the communists? Which scums and sluts are in your reactionary clique? Confess it all. If you confess your punishment will be lightened. The more stubborn you are, the more fatal your punishment will be. Don’t you dare playing on words. We know everything already, the people’s eyes and ears, are omnipresent. We only want to see how sincere you are. Your written confession will decide everything. That is the upper half, the lower half of the paper, you propose your punishment. Ask for clemency. I give you 3 days. Exactly at 10am the day after tomorrow, you hand in your confession, directly to me. Understood? If you’re not sincere, I will take my measures. You scums are forbidden from gathering, plotting together. I do not permit you to speak. Go home!”<sup>633</sup>

It is not difficult to discern the parallels between this fictional exchange and the verbal confrontations (or suppressions) that Trần Dần witnessed and recorded in Bac Ninh during the Land Reform movement in 1955–1956. Reading the novel and Trần Dần’s diaries together, the rhetoric of *surveiller de près* emerged, which could be characterized as a rhetoric of suppression: the accused is silenced, while the authority interrogates and condemns on behalf of “the people.”

In a brief yet intriguing review, literary critic Nguyễn Chí Hoan suggests that *Crossroads and Lampposts*, written in the 1960s, provides the “missing link” in the history of Vietnamese literature – its existence proves the continuity from the colonial-period writings of Vũ Trọng Phụng and Nguyễn Công Hoan to modern Vietnamese writings of the past 20 years. Hoan argues that the language used by Trần Dần in this novel represents a crossing in urban language, the

---

<sup>632</sup> *Ghi 1954–1960*, 135-6.

<sup>633</sup> *Crossroads and Lampposts*, p139-144.

point where the “old” Hanoi’s speech crossed with the vocabulary and discourse brought about by the revolution and the new political system since 1954.<sup>634</sup> Unfortunately, Hoan does not provide any textual evidence to support his claim. While the topic of the old urban speech and its transformations after the revolution deserves and requires its own study, establishing a rhetoric of *surveillance de près* could lead us to further investigate the larger pattern of change in the speech and discourse of the new society in not only the novel of Trần Dần but also in other contemporary literary works that feature speech and public discourses.

This chapter has argued that a productive way for a historian to read Trần Dần’s *Crossroads and Lampposts* is through the heuristic literary category called “records of *surveiller de près*,” supplemented by Trần Dần’s published diary from 1954 to 1960 as well as archival documents concerning the background period of the novel. This category consists of particular subjects of surveillance, particular agents of surveillance, and a distinct discourse of justice and rhetoric of suppression.

---

<sup>634</sup> Nguyễn Chí Hoan, “Tiểu thuyết của một nhà thơ” (Novel of a poet), 2011, accessed at <http://www.sachhay.org/sach/ChiTiet/5428/nhung-nga-tu-va-nhung-cot-den>.

## Epilogue

In 1975, the doctor in our story - Nguyễn Hiếu - received a letter from his cousin from Saigon: she was leaving the country for the United States and had prepared the paperwork to transfer the ownership of her properties in Saigon to Hiếu. By this time, Hiếu's family had lost both of their villas: one appropriated by the state under the housing policy launched in 1960 that allowed municipal authorities to "manage the renting and usage of private houses" belonging to the wealthier and non-worker population;<sup>635</sup> the other was sold slowly, bit by bit, to feed his family during the war that reduced state subsidies and forced urban residents to evacuate to the countryside. Hiếu rushed to Saigon with the hope of changing his fortune. With the help of a friend, he received a travel pass as a regroupee (DRV cadres and soldiers who originally came from the South) and arrived in Saigon on 10 May 1975, only 10 days after the communist takeover. But after two months, he returned to Hanoi, empty-handed. Hiếu explains:

When I arrived [in Saigon] I was so afraid that I did not dare claim my cousin's properties, I did not dare to show my face. At that time, there was a clique called the clique of "April 30" [*bọn "30 tháng 4"*]. They were youngsters, who reminded me of the junior generals [*tiểu tướng*] in the Republic of China's army, and who were controlling everything.<sup>636</sup> At that time it was lawless, they could arrest whoever they wanted, they could kill anyone. It was terrifying, so I didn't dare to show up [to claim the properties.]<sup>637</sup>

According to Hiếu, for weeks after the communist takeover, Saigon was in a "topsy-turvy," "lawless" state, while the takeover of Hanoi in 1954 was well-organized and disciplined.<sup>638</sup> This observation reinforces my suggestion that the orderly takeovers of Hanoi and Haiphong in 1954 and 1955 were outliers among all other communist takeovers in Vietnam. Though the fall of Saigon was undoubtedly more spectacular than the takeovers of Bắc Kạn and Lạng Sơn in 1949–1950, the situation in Saigon in April 1975 resembles the disorder of towns and cities taken over by communist forces before the ceasefire in July 1954.

Phan Việt, the post office engineer, became a VWP member and was chosen for further training in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) in the 1960s, and had a long, successful career before retiring in Hanoi in the late 1990s.<sup>639</sup> Nguyễn Văn, the musician, had a more difficult time. Scarred by the violence of the land reform and subsequent repression of intellectual dissents, Văn never joined the Party, though he continued to teach at the Hanoi Teachers Training College. In late 1950s, he started composing "non-verbal" music - classical music - as a way of expressing what he could not openly express.<sup>640</sup> In 1995, his artistic career in the dark was recognized as he received an award for classical music from the Vietnam Musician Association.<sup>641</sup> Hiếu never recovered the villa appropriated by the state in the 1960. Worse, his children were barred from going to university because their personal biographies [*lý lịch*] were

---

<sup>635</sup> Nguyễn Thanh Bình, "Hải Phòng's Urban Changes," 143.

<sup>636</sup> Here it is likely that Hiếu is comparing

<sup>637</sup> Nguyễn Hiếu, interview by Uyen Nguyen, May 22, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid.

<sup>639</sup> Phan Việt, interview by Uyen Nguyen, Jan 24, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>640</sup> Nguyễn Văn, interview by Uyen Nguyen, March 18, 2019 in Hanoi.

<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

tainted by the bourgeois origin of their parents and grandparents. He also retired in Hanoi and is living in a tiny house right next to one of his old villas which has become part of the Hanoi Heart Hospital.

With the findings in this dissertation, I hope to contribute to building the foundation for further explorations into state-people interactions between 1958 and 1975. In late 1958, the Three-Year Plan (1958–1960) for socialist transformation was launched. Agricultural collectivization in the countryside and “commercial and industrial reform” [*cải tạo công thương*] in the cities transformed the DRV’s national economy. Scholars who have studied the 1953–1956 land reform have also studied the operation and effects of agricultural collectivization in North Vietnam.<sup>642</sup> However the commercial and industrial reform and its effects on cities have never been systemically studied. Furthermore, with the outbreak of the war with South Vietnam, the already-complex relation between the communist revolution and the city only became more complicated. Recent scholarship has suggested the continued pattern of urban-rural divergence on the question of war and revolution among Northerners during the Vietnam War: while “peasant soldiers” offer accounts that justify and glorify Northern participation, “city soldiers” provide competing narratives condemning the war and criticizing the Northern leadership.<sup>643</sup>

Finally, as suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, an understanding of the construction of the DRV administration in Hanoi and the state’s approaches to different social-political groups of the urban society in the DRV during the 1950s will pave the way for further studies on the takeover of South Vietnam in 1975 and its aftermath. Though beyond the scope of this project, I would argue that the body of knowledge and experiences in urban takeover formed primarily in the 1950s informed the strategies of the communist leadership toward Southern cities throughout the Vietnam War. For a long time a fascinating topic to both the general public and scholars, the takeover of Saigon needs to be reevaluated in light of the longer history of Communist urban takeovers.

---

<sup>642</sup> Holcombe, *Mass Mobilization*, ch. 14; Moise, *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam*; Vickerman, *The Fate of the Peasantry*.

<sup>643</sup> Hai Nguyen, “Hidden Memory during the Vietnam Conflict: Revealing the Actual Motivations of Soldiers on the Battlefield” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas Tech University, 2017).

## Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict R. O’G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 2006.
- Asselin, Pierre. *Hanoi’s Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965*. From Indochina to Vietnam 7. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- Barrow, Clyde. *The Dangerous Class: The Concept of the Lumpenproletariat*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020.
- Bình, Nguyễn Thanh. “Hải Phòng’s Urban Change 1955–1986.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8, no. 1 (February 1, 2013): 130–75.
- Bộ Nội vụ. *Lịch Sử Bộ Nội Vụ*. NXB Chính trị quốc gia, 2005.  
<https://www.moha.gov.vn/DATA/Uploads/image/admin/vanban/chuongIII.pdf>.
- Boudarel, Georges. *Cent fleurs écloses dans la nuit du Vietnam: Communisme et dissidence, 1954-1956*. Paris: Editions Jacques Bertoin, 1991.
- . “Intellectual Dissidence in the 1950s: The Nhân Văn–Giai Phạm Affair.” Translated by Phi-Linh Baneth. *The Vietnam Forum*, no. 13 (1990): 154–74.
- . “L’Idéocratie Importée Au Vietnam Avec Le Maoïsme.” In *La Bureaucratie Au Vietnam*, edited by Daniel Hémery. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1983.
- Braester, Yomi. “‘A Big Dying Vat’: The Vilifying of Shanghai during the Good Eight-Company Campaign.” *Modern China* 31, no. 4 (2005): 411-.
- Brocheux, Pierre, Daniel Hémery, Ly Lan Dill-Klein, Eric Thomas Jennings, Nora A. Taylor, and Noémi Tousignant. *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization: 1858 - 1954*. From Indochina to Vietnam 2. Berkeley, Calif.: Univ. of California Press, 2009.
- Brown, Jeremy. *City versus Countryside in Mao’s China Negotiating the Divide*. Cambridge ; Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- , ed. *Dilemmas of Victory: The Early Years of the People’s Republic of China*. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 2010.
- Catton, Philip E. *Diem’s Final Failure: Prelude to America’s War in Vietnam*. Illustrated edition. Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 2003.
- Chan, Kam Wing. *Cities with Invisible Walls: Reinterpreting Urbanization in Post-1949 China*. Hong Kong ; Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Chapman, Jessica M. *Cauldron of Resistance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and 1950s Southern Vietnam*. United States in the World. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013.
- Cheng, Tiejun. “Dialectics of Control – The Household Registration (Hukou) System in Contemporary China.” PhD diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 1991.

- Cheng, Tiejun, and Mark Selden. "The Origins and Social Consequences of China's Hukou System." *The China Quarterly (London)* 139, no. 139 (1994): 644–68.
- . "The Origins and Social Consequences of China's Hukou System." *The China Quarterly* 139 (September 1994): 644–68.
- Cherry, Haydon. *Down and Out in Saigon: Stories of the Poor in a Colonial City*. Illustrated edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019.
- Chesneaux, Jean. *Tradition et Revolution au Vietnam*. editions anthropos, 1971.
- Đặng, Phong. *Lịch sử kinh tế Việt Nam, 1945-2000*. Hà Nội: Khoa học xã hội, 2002.
- Dang, Trung Dinh. "Post-1975 Land Reform in Southern Vietnam: How Local Actions and Responses Affected National Land Policy." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies (Berkeley, Calif.)* 5, no. 3 (2010): 72–105.
- Devillers, Philippe. *Histoire Du Vietnam de 1940 à 1952*. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1952.
- Doan, Van Toai. *The Vietnamese Gulag*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986.
- Dover, Stéphane, and Philippe Lambert. "La Relation Nord-Sud." In *Viet Nam Contemporain*, edited by Stéphane Dover and Ben de Tréglodé, 90–114. Paris: IRASEC/Les Indes savantes, 2009.
- Duc, Huy. *Ben Thang Cuoc I - Giai Phong*. 1st edition. Los Angeles, California: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2013.
- . *Ben Thang Cuoc: II Quyen Binh*. 1 edition. San Bernadino, Calif.: NGUOI VIET, 2012.
- Duiker, William J. *Ho Chi Minh*. First edition. New York: Hyperion, 2000.
- . *Vietnam since the Fall of Saigon*. Papers in International Studies. Southeast Asia Series No. 56. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University, Center for International Studies, 1980.
- Elliott, Duong Van Mai. *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family*. OUP E-Books. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Endres, Kirsten W. *Market Frictions: Trade and Urbanization at the Vietnam-China Border*. Max Planck Studies in Anthropology and Economy; Volume 5. New York: Berghahn Books, 2019.
- Ewen, Shane. *What is Urban History?* Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015.
- Fall, Bernard. *Le Viet- Minh 1945-1960*. Librairie Armand Colin, 1960.
- . *Le Viet-Minh: La Ré Publique Démocratique Du Viet-Nam, 1945-1960*. Cahiers de La Fondation Nationale Des Sciences Politiques, 106. Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1960.
- Firpo, Christina. "Sex and Song: Clandestine Prostitution in Tonkins A Ao Music Houses, 1920s-1940s1:" *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 11 (August 1, 2016): 1–36..



- Firpo, Christina Elizabeth. *Black Market Business: Selling Sex in Northern Vietnam, 1920–1945*. Cornell University Press, 2020.
- Gao, James Z. *The Communist Takeover of Hangzhou: The Transformation of City and Cadre, 1949–1954*. A Study of the Weatherhead East Asian Institute. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004.
- Ginsburgs, George. "Local Government and Administration in North Vietnam, 1945–1954." *The China Quarterly* 10 (April 1962): 174–204.
- . "Local Government and Administration in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam since 1954 (Part I)." *The China Quarterly* 12 (December 1962): 211–30.
- Goscha, Christopher E. "Colonial Hanoi and Saigon at War: Social Dynamics of the Viet Minh's 'Underground City', 1945–1954." *War in History* 20, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 222–50.
- . *Historical Dictionary of the Indochina War (1945–1954): An International and Interdisciplinary Approach*. Illustrated edition. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012.
- . "Intelligence in a Time of Decolonization: The Case of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at War (1945–50)." *Intelligence and National Security* 22, no. 1 (February 1, 2007): 100–138.
- . *Vietnam: A New History*. New York: Basic Books, 2016.
- . *Vietnam: un État né de la guerre, 1945–1954*. Paris: Armand Colin, 2011.
- Goscha, Christopher E., and Benoît de Tréglodé, eds. *Naissance d'un Etat-parti: le Viêt Nam depuis 1945 = The birth of a party-state : Vietnam since 1945*. Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2004.
- Grossheim, Martin. "Fraternal Support: The East German 'Stasi' and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War." CWIHP Working Paper #71. Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center. [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP\\_Working\\_Paper\\_71\\_East\\_German\\_Stasi\\_Vietnam\\_War.pdf](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/CWIHP_Working_Paper_71_East_German_Stasi_Vietnam_War.pdf).
- . "The East German 'Stasi' and the Modernization of the Vietnamese Security Apparatus, 1965–1989." CWIHP e-Dossier No. 51. Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center. 2014. <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-eastgerman-%E2%80%9Cstasi%E2%80%9D-and-the-modernization-the-vietnamese-security-apparatus-1965>.
- . "The 'Sword and Shield of the Party': How the Vietnamese People's Public Security Forces Portray Themselves." *Intelligence & National Security* 33, no. 3 (April 2018): 439–58.
- Guillemot, François. "Death and Suffering at First Hand: Youth Shock Brigades during the Vietnam War (1950–1975)." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies (Berkeley, Calif.)* 4, no. 3 (2009): 17–60.

- Guillemot, François. “De l’invention et de l’usage de ‘l’Ennemi Intérieur’: Vraie et Fausse Contre-Révolution Au Nord-Vietnam 1945–1967.” [The Invention and Use of the ‘Enemy Within’: True and False Counterrevolution in North Vietnam, 1945– 1967].” In *Communisme 2013. Vietnam de l’insurrection à La Dictature, 1920–2012*, edited by Christopher Goscha, 259–302, n.d.
- . “Penser Le Nationalisme Révolutionnaire Au Việt Nam : Identités Politiques et Itinéraires Singuliers à La Recherche d’une Hypothétique « Troisième Voie».” *Moussons. Recherche En Sciences Humaines Sur l’Asie Du Sud-Est*, no. 13–14 (December 1, 2009): 174–84.
- . “Saigon 1975: la mise au pas.” *L’Histoire*, 2014.
- . *Việt-Nam, fractures d’une nation: une histoire contemporaine de 1858 à nos jours*. La Découverte-poche. Sciences humaines et sociales 476. Paris: La Découverte, 2018.
- Hansen, Peter. “Bắc Di Cư: Catholic Refugees from the North of Vietnam, and Their Role in the Southern Republic, 1954—1959.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (October 2009): 173–211.
- . “The Virgin Mary Heads South: Northern Catholic Refugees in South Vietnam, 1954–1964.” Doctoral dissertation, Melbourne College of Divinity, 2009.
- Hartingh, Bertrand de. *Entre le peuple et la Nation: la République démocratique du Việt Nam de 1953 à 1957*. Monographies, no 189. Paris: Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient, 2003.
- Harvey, David. *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. New York: Verso, 2012.
- Henriot, Christian. “‘La Fermeture’: The Abolition of Prostitution in Shanghai, 1949–58.” *The China Quarterly (London)* 142, no. 142 (1995): 467–86.
- Hershatter, Gail. *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Hồ Chí Minh Toàn Tập Vol.7*. Hanoi: Sự thật, 1987.
- Hoang, Kimberly Kay. *Dealing in Desire: Asian Ascendancy, Western Decline, and the Hidden Currencies of Global Sex Work*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015.
- Hoang, Tuan. “Ideology in Urban South Vietnam, 1950-1975.” PhD diss., University Of Notre Dame, 2013.
- Hoang, Van Chi. *From Colonialism to Communism: A Case History of North Vietnam*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1964.
- Holcombe, Alec. *Mass Mobilization in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, 1945–1960*. University of Hawai’i Press, 2020.

- . “The Complete Collection of Party Documents: Listening to the Party’s Official Internal Voice.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Berkeley, Calif.) 5, no. 2 (2010): 225–42.
- International Labour Organization (ILO)/International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). “Viet Nam – Children in Prostitution in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City and Can Tho: A Rapid Assessment.” Bangkok: International Labour Office, 2002.
- Jennings, Eric T. *Imperial Heights: Dalat and the Making and Undoing of French Indochina. From Indochina to Vietnam: Revolution and War in a Global Perspective 4*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- Keith, Charles. *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.
- Kerkvliet, Benedict J., and David G. Marr, eds. *Beyond Hanoi: Local Government in Vietnam*. Vietnam Update Series. Singapore, Copenhagen S, Denmark: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2004.
- Khanh, Huynh Kim. *Vietnamese Communism, 1925–1945*. 0 edition. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Koh, David W. H. *Wards of Hanoi*. Vietnam, Politics, Social Issues. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006.
- Kurihara, Hirohide. “Changes in the Literary Policy of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party, 1956–1958.” In *Indochina in the 1940s and 1950s*, edited by Motoo Furuta and Takashi Shiraishi, 165–96. Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1992.
- Lê, Thị Quỳnh Nga. “Hình Thái Hai Chính Quyền ở Hà Nội Trong Những Năm Đầu Giải Phóng (1954-1960).” Paper presented at the the Conference for the 60th anniversary of the capital city’s liberation - Achievements, Opportunities, Challenges and Developments [Hội thảo 60 năm giải phóng thủ đô - Thành tựu, Thời cơ, Thách thức và Phát triển] Thành ủy-UBND-UBMTTQ Thành phố Hà Nội, Hanoi, October 2014.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *Marxist Thought and the City*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016.
- Lenin, Vladimir Il’ich. *The Development of Capitalism in Russia (1899-1908)*. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/dcr8viii/viii8ii.htm>.
- Lentz, Christian C. “Making the Northwest Vietnamese.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 6, no. 2 (June 1, 2011): 68–105.
- . “Mobilization and State Formation on a Frontier of Vietnam.” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, no. 3 (2011): 559–86.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth. *Revolution and Tradition in Tientsin, 1949-1952*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1980.

- Mao, Zedong. *The Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party (1939)*.  
[https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2\\_23.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-2/mswv2_23.htm).
- Marr, David G. *Vietnam 1945: The Quest for Power*. 1st Edition. University of California Press, 1997.
- . *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution*. First edition. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital Vol. I*. Edited by Frederick Engels. Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>.
- Marx, Karl, and Frederick Engels. *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf>.
- . *The German Ideology*, 1932.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/>.
- McHale, Shawn. “Vietnamese Marxism, Dissent, and the Politics of Postcolonial Memory: Tran Duc Thao, 1946–1993.” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 61, no. 1 (2002): 7–31.
- Miller, Edward. *Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Miller, Edward, and Tuong Vu. “The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies (Berkeley, Calif.)* 4, no. 3 (2009): 1–16.
- Moise, Edwin E. *Land Reform in China and North Vietnam: Consolidating the Revolution at the Village Level*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983.
- Ngô, Văn Hà. *Giáo Dục Đại Học ở Miền Bắc Thời Kỳ 1954–1975 [Higher Education in North Vietnam during the 1954–1975 Period]*. Hanoi: Chính trị quốc gia, 2010.
- Ngo, Vinh Long. “The Socialization of South Vietnam The Third Indochina War.” edited by Odd Arne Westad and Sophie Quinn-Judge, 127–35. London: Routledge, 2006.
- Nguyễn, Bắc. *Au cœur de la ville captive: souvenirs d'un agent du Viêt-Minh infiltré à Hanoi*. Paris: Arléa, 2004.
- Nguyễn, Bắc. *Giữa Thành Phố Bị Chiếm*. Hanoi: Hanoi, 1994.
- Nguyen, Bao Trang. “Wartime Prostitution in Urban Environment: The Case of Saigon (1954–1975).” Paper presented at the the 13th Singapore Graduate Forum on Southeast Asian Studies, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, July 2018.
- Nguyễn, Đình Lê. “Biến Đổi Cơ Cấu Kinh Tế-Xã Hội Miền Bắc Trong Giai Đoạn Lịch Sử 1954–1975.” *Tạp Chí Khoa Học (ĐHQGHN)*, January 1995.

- Nguyen, Duy Lap. *The Unimagined Community: Imperialism and Culture in South Vietnam*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020.
- Nguyen, Hai. "Hidden Memory during the Vietnam Conflict: Revealing the Actual Motivations of Soldiers on the Battlefield." Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas Tech University, 2017.
- Nguyễn, Huy Tường. *Nhật Ký Nguyễn Huy Tường T.3: Nghệ Sĩ và Công Dân*. Edited by Huy Thắng Nguyễn. Hanoi: Kim Đồng, 2016.
- Nguyen, Lien-Hang T. *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam. The New Cold War History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.
- Nguyen, Tuan Ngoc. *Socialist Realism in Vietnamese Literature: An Analysis of the Relationship Between Literature and Politics*. Place of publication not identified: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2008.
- Nguyen-Marshall, Van. *In Search of Moral Authority: The Discourse on Poverty, Poor Relief, and Charity in French Colonial Vietnam*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Ninh, Kim Ngoc Bao. *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965*. Southeast Asia. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Papin, Philippe. *Histoire de Hanoi*. Histoire des grandes villes du monde. Paris: Fayard, 2001.
- Pettus, Ashley. *Between Sacrifice and Desire: National Identity and the Governing of Femininity in Vietnam*. 1st Edition. London: Routledge, 2015.
- Phạm, Thị Hoài. "Thủ Lĩnh Trong Bóng Tối [Leader from the Dark] in Tạp Chí Văn Học (Journal of Literature), 1997; Republished by Phạm Thị Hoài." talawas, 2003. <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=900&rb=0202>.
- Phan, Quang. *Từ Nguồn Thạch Hãn Đến Bờ Hồ Gươm: Bút Ký*. HCMC: Trẻ, 2016.
- Phùng, Ngọc Kiên. "Nghiên Cứu Xã Hội Học về Trường Hợp Trần Dần [A Socio-Literary Study on Trần Dần]." In *Nghiên Cứu Văn Học Việt Nam – Những Khả Năng và Thách Thức [Literary Study in Vietnam – Possibilities and Challenges]*, edited by Hồng Lý Lê and Hải Yến Trần, 337–38. The Social Science Series supported by the Harvard-Yenching Institute & Nhà xuất bản Thế giới, 2009.
- Picard, Jason. "Fertile Lands Await: The Promise and Pitfalls of Directed Resettlement, 1954–1958." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies (Berkeley, Calif.)* 11, no. 3/4 (2016): 58–102.
- . "Fragmented Loyalties: The Great Migration's Impact on South Vietnam, 1954–1963." Doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2004.
- Porter, D. Gareth. *The Myth of the Bloodbath; North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered*. Cornell University. International Relations of East Asia Project. Interim Report; No. 2. Ithaca, N.Y: Ithaca, NY, 1972.

- Pribbenow, Merle L. "The Man in the Snow White Cell." *Studies in Intelligence* 48, no. 1 (2004). <https://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/vol48nol/article06.html>.
- . "The Soviet-Vietnamese Intelligence Relationship during the Vietnam War: Cooperation and Conflict." CWIHP Working Paper. Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center. 2014. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/thesoviet-vietnamese-intelligence-relationship-during-the-vietnam-war>.
- Ruan, Qinghua. "Reexamining the Abolitionist Movement against Prostitution in Shanghai after 1949." *Frontiers of History in China* 5, no. 3 (2010): 471–90.
- Schütte, Heinz. *Hundred Flowers in Vietnam, 1955-1957*. Südostasien Working Papers, no. 22. Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, 2003.
- Shore, Zachary. "Provoking America: Le Duan and the Origins of the Vietnam War." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, no. 4 (2015): 86–108.
- Smith, R. B. "Andrew Vickerman: The Fate of the Peasantry: Premature 'Transition to Socialism' in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. (Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Monograph Series, No. 28.) Xvi, 372 Pp. New Haven: Yale Center for International Area Studies, 1986." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51, no. 3 (1988): 607–8.
- Solinger, Dorothy J. *Regional Government and Political Integration in Southwest China, 1949-1954: A Case Study*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
- Sontag, Susan. *Trip to Hanoi*. Noonday 368. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.
- Sorace, Christian P., Ivan Franceschini, and Nicholas Loubere. *Afterlives of Chinese Communism: Political Concepts from Mao To Xi*. Acton Australian Capital Territory, Australia: ANU Press, 2019.
- Stur, Heather Marie. *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Sun, Sue. "Where the Girls Are: The Management of Venereal Disease by United States Military Forces in Vietnam." *Literature in Medicine* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 66–87.
- Szalontai, Balazs. "Political and Economic Crisis in North Vietnam, 1955–56." *Cold War History* 5, no. 4 (November 1, 2005): 395–426.
- Taylor, Sandra C. *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution*. Modern War Studies. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999.
- Tessier, Olivier. "Le « grand bouleversement » (long trời lở đất): regards croisés sur la réforme agraire en République démocratique du Việt Nam." *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 95/96, no. 1 (2008): 73–134.

- Thu-huong, Nguyen-vo. *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008.
- Tracol-Huynh, Isabelle. "Between Stigmatisation and Regulation: Prostitution in Colonial Northern Vietnam." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 12, no. sup1 (August 1, 2010): S73–87.
- . "Encadrer La Sexualité Au Viêt-Nam Colonial: Police Des Mœurs et Réglementation de La Prostitution (Des Années 1870 à La Fin Des Années 1930)." *Genèses*, no. 86 (2012): 55–77.
- . "La prostitution au Tonkin colonial, entre races et genres." *Genre, sexualité & société*, no. 2 (November 26, 2009).
- . "Prostitution in Colonial Hanoi (1885–1954)." In *Selling Sex in the City: A Global History of Prostitution, 1600s–2000s*, edited by Magary Rodriguez Garcia, Lex Heerma van Voss, and Elise van Nederveen Meerker, 538–66. Leiden: Brill, 2017.
- . "The Shadow Theater of Prostitution in French Colonial Tonkin: Faceless Prostitutes under the Colonial Gaze." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 10–51.
- Tran, Claire Thi Lien. "Les Catholiques Vietnamiens Pendant La Guerre d'indépendance (1945–1954): Entre La Reconquête Coloniale et La Résistance Communiste." Doctoral dissertation, Institut d'études politiques, 1996.
- Trần, Dân. *1954-1960*. Edited by Thị Hoài Phạm. Reprint. Paris & California: td mémoire & Văn Nghệ, 2019.
- . *Những Ngã Tư và Những Cột Đèn [Crossroads and Lampposts]*. Hanoi: Nhã Nam, 2011.
- Truong, Như Tảng. *A Vietcong Memoir*. 1st Vintage books ed. New York: Vintage Books, 1986.
- Turley, William S. "Urban Transformation in South Vietnam." *Pacific Affairs* 49, no. 4 (1976): 607–24.
- . "Urbanization in War: Hanoi, 1946-1973." *Pacific Affairs* 48, no. 3 (1975): 370–97.
- Turner, Karen G. *Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam*. New York: Wiley, 1998.
- UN-Habitat Vietnam. "Hồ Sơ Các Thành Phố Việt Nam." Hanoi: UN Habitat Vietnam, 2014.
- Van, Chi Hoang. *From Colonialism to Communism; A Case History of North Vietnam*. 3rd Printing edition. Pall Mall Press, 1964.
- Van, Tien Dung. *Our Great Spring Victory: An Account of the Liberation of South Vietnam*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1977.
- Vatulescu, Cristina. *Police Aesthetics: Literature, Film, and the Secret Police in Soviet Times*. 1 edition. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2012.

- Vietnam under Communism, 1975-1982* / Nguyen Van Canh, with Earle Cooper ; Foreword by Robert A. Scalapino. 1st pbk. ed. Hoover Press Publication. Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 1983.
- Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* / Huỳnh Kim Khánh. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Vo, Alex-Thai D. “Nguyễn Thị Năm and the Land Reform in North Vietnam, 1953.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Berkeley, Calif.) 10, no. 1 (2015): 1–62.
- . “Preliminary Comments on Mobilizing the Masses, 1953.” *Sojourn* (Singapore) 31, no. 3 (2016): 983–1018.
- Vogel, Ezra F. *Canton under Communism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Vũ, Bằng, and Văn Nhơn Võ. “Hà Nội Trong Con Lốc (1953) [Hanoi in the Whirlwinds (1953)].” Hanoi: Phụ Nữ, 2010.
- Vũ, Ngọc Tiên. “Điều Tra Đời Sống Cư Dân Đô Thị Bắc Việt Nam, Giai Đoạn 1954-1975.” talawas, June 2005. <http://www.talawas.org/talaDB/showFile.php?res=4896&rb=0302>.
- Vu, Tuong. “The Revolutionary Path to State Formation in Vietnam.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Berkeley, Calif.) 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 267–97.
- . *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- . *Vietnam’s Communist Revolution: The Power and Limits of Ideology*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- . “Workers and the Socialist State: North Vietnam’s State–Labor Relations, 1945–1970.” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 38, no. 3 (2005): 329–56.
- Vu, Tuong, and Edward Miller. “The Vietnam War as a Vietnamese War: Agency and Society in the Study of the Second Indochina War.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 4, no. 3 (Fall 2009).
- Wang, Fei-Ling. *Organizing through Division and Exclusion: China’s Hukou System*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* / James C. Scott. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985.
- Whyte, Martin Kim, ed. *One Country, Two Societies: Rural-Urban Inequality in Contemporary China*. Harvard Contemporary China Series 16. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2010.
- Zhai, Qiang. *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*. New Cold War History. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.



- Zinoman, Peter. “Nhân Văn Giai Phẩm on Trial.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (Berkeley, Calif.) 11, no. 3–4 (2016): 188–215.
- . “Nhân Văn–Giai Phẩm and Vietnamese ‘Reform Communism’ in the 1950s: A Revisionist Interpretation.” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 13, no. 1 (2011): 60–100.
- . “Vietnam-Centrism, the ‘Orthodox School’ and Mark Bradley’s Vietnam at War.” *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* XII, no. 22 (2011).
- . “Vietnam-Centrism, the ‘Orthodox School’ and Mark Bradley’s Vietnam at War.” *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* XII, no. 22 (2011).