

Vietnamese in the Cultural Nation Building of the First Republic of Vietnam (1955-1963)

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**Abstract**

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Once lacking a writing system, the Vietnamese language eventually eclipsed literary Chinese and French in official administrative capacities to become the official national language of modern Vietnam. By 1945, the linguistic imagination of Vietnam was not whether Vietnamese (tiếng Việt) and the Romanized “national language script” (chữ Quốc ngữ) should be cemented into the country’s national formation but rather how ideological concerns would shape the construction of Vietnamese language conventions. This thesis argues that language-making for the first administration of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, 1955-1975), commonly referred to as the First Republic of Vietnam (1955-1963), was explicitly part of a larger cultural nation-building agenda aimed at actualizing the regime’s ideological aspirations. I first examine how language was deployed in the making of an all-Vietnamese postcolonial state. Then, I turn to two RVN national universities (in Saigon and Hue) to examine the role of the Vietnamese in the

making of a Vietnamese national identity. Finally, I examine a RVN national archives source document that directly addresses how certain foreign loanwords should or should not be standardized in the Vietnamese vernacular, exposing deference to traditional culture and practices.

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## INTRODUCTION

In a May 1979 New Land (Đất Mới) Newspaper interview, after having given a talk at Vietnam Buddhist Temple (Chùa Việt Nam)<sup>1</sup> separate from sitting down with the interviewer, Nguyễn Đình Hoà (b.1924-2000) explains that his visit to Seattle was under the auspices of a National Endowment for Humanities grant awarded for lexicography. His work was twofold and required research materials from various universities, including those in Seattle, where he once taught at the University of Washington from 1965 until 1966. The first objective was to revise his 1971-1972 Vietnamese-to-English dictionary. Second, he wanted to create an entirely new English-to-Vietnamese dictionary altogether.<sup>2</sup> Through these dictionaries, Hoà was on a path to contributing to Vietnamese language standardization occurring both abroad and in Vietnam. The interviewer continues the

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<sup>1</sup> Chùa Việt Nam, Unified Business Identifier (UBI) number 601824817, is registered with the State of Washington's Office of the Secretary of State under the business name "Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Washington" and refers to itself as "Chùa Việt Nam" and "Vietnam Buddhist Temple." According to state public records, the religious charitable corporation filed its Articles of Incorporation with the state on May 13, 1976, registered with the Secretary since October 25, 1978, has an "active" business status, and is located in Seattle's Little Saigon neighborhood on South King Street. Chùa Việt Nam self-proclaims to be "The First Vietnamese Buddhist Temple in Washington," holding service every Saturday in Vietnamese. "Corporations and Charities Filing System" search, WA Secretary of State, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://ccfs.sos.wa.gov/#/BusinessSearch/BusinessInformation>. "Vietnamese Buddhist Association of Washington," OpenGovWA, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://opengovwa.com/corporation/601824817>. Chua Viet Nam, Facebook page, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.facebook.com/chuavietnam/>. It is of significance that Chùa Việt Nam was registered in the U.S. only a year after the fall of the RVN and where Nguyễn Đình Hoà would come to speak on diasporic community-related issues less than a year after it registered with the Secretary of State, showing that the Vietnamese people engaged in community building practices as soon refugees began arriving in Seattle.

<sup>2</sup> While publishing a comprehensive study of Hoà's lexicography works and publishing the results of my examination of the "Đình Hoà Nguyễn papers, 1949-2000" archival materials held at the University of Washington's Suzzallo and Allen Libraries Special Collections is reserved for future projects, initial perusal reveals that major barriers Hoà encountered during his dictionary-making ventures involved typesetting limitations and print technology that were unable to accommodate Vietnamese diacritics.

segment titled, “Half Hour with Professor Nguyễn Đình Hoà”<sup>3</sup> by eliciting Hoà’s opinions on various topics of prime concern for the burgeoning Seattle (and global) Vietnamese diasporic communities that materialized after the Second Indochina War. Vietnam had just emerged from a three-decade long multifaceted war; in part a civil war,<sup>4</sup> it has yet to reckon with the calamitous consequences of those divisions. Even so, the victorious Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRVN, 1976–present) was again engulfed in another war, the Third Indochina War, that encompassed a three-week border conflict with China ending just a couple of months before this interview. The Vietnamese people were engrossed in active armed conflicts in Southeast Asia while simultaneously engaging in national healing domestically and abroad.

When asked about social reconstruction,<sup>5</sup> Nguyễn Đình Hoà hoped (hy vọng) that national reconciliation (hòa giải dân tộc) could be achieved (thi hành), especially through actions that espouses the national unity often asserted before the end of the “Vietnam War.” The interviewer reports that since April 30, 1975, the Vietnamese communist state (nhà nước cộng sản Việt Nam) has imprisoned hundreds of thousands of “litterateurs and artists” (văn nghệ sĩ)<sup>6</sup> without regard to previously pontificated reconciliation aspirations, but rather maintains an emphasis on suppression (chỉ có đàn áp, không có hoà giải). Hoà

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<sup>3</sup> Nguyễn Đình Hoà, “Nửa giờ với giáo sư Nguyễn Đình Hoà (Half Hour with Professor Nguyễn Đình Hoà),” Interview. *Đất Mới*, tháng 5, kỳ 2, 1979, trang 7. Henceforth, “Nguyễn Đình Hoà, *Interview*” and will be frequently referenced in this thesis.

<sup>4</sup> For a recent publication discussing the civil war aspects of the “Vietnam War,” see: Pierre Asselin, “The Indochinese Communist Party’s Unfinished Revolution of 1945 and the Origins of Vietnam’s 30-Year Civil War,” (*Journal of Cold War Studies* 25, no. 1 (2023)), p 4-45.

<sup>5</sup> This thesis views the appeals for reconciliation by Nguyễn Đình Hoà in the interview as a form of social reconstruction. For an overview of post-conflict social reconstruction see: “Social Reconstruction,” The United States Institute of Peace, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/guiding-principles-stabilization-and-reconstruction-the-web-version/social-well-being/social-reconst>.

<sup>6</sup> Văn nghệ sĩ is a general term that broadly includes those involved in the literature (văn học) and arts (nghệ thuật). The english translations provided here is meant to approximately represent this group of people.

is nevertheless hopeful that pressure from international opinions on SRVN humanitarian violations will bring about change; he advises that the Vietnamese people must persevere. On the other hand, when asked about cultural concerns, Hoà's thoughts on the intellectual aspects of social reconstruction in this interview reveal active contestations that transcend the remedial powers of peace and reconciliation rhetoric. Social reconstruction necessarily calls for a social cohesion that may be almost nonexistent following violent conflict(s). And the Vietnamese people had yet to achieve political reconstruction, let alone social reconstruction. However, the social disruption was not only the result of direct violent conflicts, but also grounded in the historicity of cultural imaginings by the competing Vietnamese governments.

This thesis argues that language-making in postcolonial Vietnam was explicitly part of a larger cultural nation building agenda aimed at actualizing the regimes ideological aspirations. Both the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN, 1945-1976), the precursor government to the SRVN, and the Republic of Vietnam (RVN, 1955-1975) engaged in nation building programs which necessarily called for separate *cultural* formations of what the nation is to be. For the DRVN's part, culture encompassed the revolutionary construction of postcolonial Vietnam that took inspiration from Marxist-Leninist conceptions of social and cultural reform. These conceptions of culture solidified into discernable national agendas shortly after the establishment of the DRVN, while debates over the interpretation of this cultural reform and the emergence of "socialism realism" date to the 1930's. The DRVN led reforms were necessarily radical in nature involving policies that, according to Nguyễn Đình Hoà in the New Land interview, trended towards authoritarianism (khuyñh hướng quyền uy) and absolutist tendencies (khuyñh hướng có

tính chất định luật), which he opposed. Similarly, the first administration of the RVN, commonly referred to as the First Republic (1955-1963) enlisted culture in its attempt at envisioning an alternative nation-state to that of the DRVN. I argue in this thesis that through language the First Republic deployed culture to actualize the ideals of an open intellectual culture as a means of promoting national cohesion – in opposition to the restricted intellectual environment of the DRVN. However, in the political arena the First Republic failed to entirely attain legitimacy and paradoxically resorted to repression of ideological dissent.

Even as the realities of freedom were questionable, a culture of an open society was nonetheless mythologized<sup>7</sup> into the Vietnamese consciousness through various means of indoctrination. At the center of the First Republic's propaganda machine in which freedom and liberty was codified is its President, Ngô Đình Diệm, who according to historian Nguyen Thi Dieu, was projected to the world “as a liberally minded, culturally open, modernizing Asian leader, with his own Asian culture policy that supported the revival of Confucianism, Buddhism, and popular culture.”<sup>8</sup> All the while, a thorough examination of historical facts would disprove such politically minded assertions. Still, even as the ideological forces propelling cultural policies varied between the two governments, both

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<sup>7</sup> For an analysis of how social myths are constructed, how they can be debunked, and the way in which mythologies are invoked here, see: Roland Barthes, Richard Howard, and Annette Lavers. *Mythologies*. Translated by Richard Howard and Annette Lavers. First American paperback edition (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Nguyen Thi Dieu, “‘A Day in the Life’: Nation-Building the Republic of Ngô Đình Diệm, 26 October 1956, Symbolically,” *Modern Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2019), p 748–749.

the DRVN and RVN were equally consistent in forming their vision of a cultural collective through the application of an ethno-nationalist<sup>9</sup> view of language.

The Vietnamese language in postcolonial Vietnam emerged as the primary medium of linguistic expression for the Vietnamese people. The native vernacular, once lacking a writing system until the arrival of the Chinese logographic script and evolving to what is modern Vietnamese, eventually eclipsed literary Chinese and French in official administrative capacities to becoming the official national language.<sup>10</sup> By 1945, the linguistic question of Vietnam was not whether Vietnamese (tiếng Việt) and the Romanized “national language script” (chữ Quốc ngữ) should be cemented into the country’s national formation, but rather how ideological concerns would shape the construction of Vietnamese language conventions. Stated in terms more aligned with the linguistics discipline in a 1979 *Pacific Linguistics* publication, Nguyễn Đình Hoà noted that language planning in Vietnam moved beyond the stages of “policy formation” or “norm selection” and well into “codification and elaboration” and “implementation” phases.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, this thesis is concerned with how the First Republic codified,

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<sup>9</sup> I draw from Zlatko Skrbiš’s broad definition of ethno-nationalism as “a form of ascriptive affiliation which may be associated with phenomena such as patriotism, chauvinism, ethno-centrism, linguistic nationalism, religious nationalism and xenophobia.” See: Zlatko Skrbiš, *Long-Distance Nationalism: Diasporas, Homelands and Identities*, (Routledge: Taylor & Francis, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> For a materialist and linguistic account of the Sinosphere (“Chinese”) cultural influence on the various Vietnamese writing scripts in the context of linguistic properties and typological constraints, see: Zev J. Handel, *Sinography: The Borrowing and Adaptation of the Chinese Script* (Leiden: Brill, 2019). For a study of the linguistic evolution of the Vietnamese language, see: John Duong Phan, “Lacquered Words: The Evolution of Vietnamese Under Sinitic Influences from the 1st Century B.C.E. through the 17th Century C.E.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Cornell University, 2013). For an overview of Chinese imperial and French colonial language policies in Vietnam and the connections between Chinese, French, and Vietnamese, see: John DeFrancis, *Colonialism and Language Policy in Viet Nam* (The Hague: Mouton, 1977).

<sup>11</sup> Nguyen Dinh-Hoa, "Standardisation and Purification: a Look At Language Planning in Vietnam" in *South-east Asian Linguistic Studies* Vol. 4, edited by Nguyen Dang Liem (Pacific Linguistics, The Australian National University, 1979) 4: 179-204.

elaborated, and implemented the Vietnamese vernacular language and to what ideological ends.

Language in the First Republic was a site of assimilating the vernacular into a national meaning of Vietnamese identity. Often ascribed to the various forms of linguistic exchange, the Oxford English Dictionary predominantly defines vernacular as related to that is “native or indigenous” in both its adjective and noun parts of speech. Vernacular in this popular sense can mean the following, just to name a few: 1) “That writes, uses, or speaks the native or indigenous language of a country or district” 2) “Of a language or dialect: that is naturally spoken by the people of a particular country or district” 3) “Of literary works, etc.: Written or spoken in, translated into, the native language of a particular country or people.” 4) “Of words, etc.: Of or pertaining to, forming part of, the native language.” However, moving beyond its attachment to language, vernacular can also represent native or indigenous in other aspects of life. In these instances, the Oxford English Dictionary presents the following definitions: “Of arts, or features of these: Native or peculiar to a particular country or locality” such as “vernacular architecture” or “Personal, private” such as “vernacular property.”<sup>12</sup> The simultaneous detachment from language and yet still articulating indigeneity is similarly raised in Merriam-Webster’s definitions, that being: “adjective; of, relating to, or characteristic of a period, place or group” and “noun; the mode of express of a group of class.”<sup>13</sup> A semantic shift away from language is further made possible by the etymology of vernacular that being the Latin word

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<sup>12</sup> Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. “vernacular,” accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.oedcom.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/view/Entry/222608?redirectedFrom=vernacular>.

<sup>13</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, s.v. “vernacular,” accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vernacular>.

*vernaculus* meaning “domestic, native, indigenous.”<sup>14</sup> In the case of post-1945 Vietnam, the shaping of the vernacular language was part and parcel to how knowledge of what it means to be a national community is formed.

The construction of the Vietnamese vernacular language in postcolonial Vietnam was a process of domesticating and nativizing a linguistic form into a localized knowledge, referred to as vernacular knowledge. According to Juno Salazar Parreñas, knowledge conceived of as vernacular does not dismiss the “decolonial aspirations for relations beyond colonial and postcolonial exploitation” that leads to “decolonial Indigenous (or indigenous)<sup>15</sup> knowledges,” but rather makes possible the “translocal” with “[its] plurality of conditions [which] requires a plurality of vocabularies in order to articulate liberation, transformation, revolution, and experimentation.”<sup>16</sup> As both the DRVN and RVN activated language in the construction of its selfhoods, language making was decolonial in allowing for self-determination while vernacular in that it required a sense of identity that for the competing governments were a blending of multiple vantage (and nexus) points; resulting in the Vietnamization of Vietnamese itself. In effect, “the concept of vernacular knowledge conveys more accurately the multiple ways of knowing”<sup>17</sup> who the DRVN and RVN were and what they aspired to be. Parreñas contends that “Indigeneity is a position of power and a contentious category in Southeast Asia,” leaving a range of possibilities of “which

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<sup>14</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “vernacular,” accessed July 15, 2023, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=vernacular>.

<sup>15</sup> The distinction between Indigenous (that is with a capital “I”) and indigenous (with a lowercase “i”) is grounded in its reference to two distinct groups. Indigenous generally refers “sovereign communities who were living in specific regions when Europeans first attempted to name, categorize, and colonize them,” whereas indigenous can refer to anyone that is from an area. For a discussion on how one academic anthropology digital magazine distinguishes these two terms, see: Christine Weeber, “Why Capitalize ‘Indigenous’?,” SAPIENS, May 19, 2020, <https://www.sapiens.org/language/capitalize-indigenous/>

<sup>16</sup> Juno S. Parreñas, “From Decolonial Indigenous Knowledges to Vernacular Ideas in Southeast Asia,” *History and Theory: Studies in the Philosophy of History* 59, no. 3 (2020), p. 414.

<sup>17</sup> Juno S. Parreñas, “From Decolonial Indigenous,” p. 416.

indigenous group gets to identity as ‘indigenous,’ let alone ‘Indigenous.’”<sup>18</sup> This position of power is amplified when contesting “indigenous groups” are embroiled in the construction of the nation-state and its separate versions of linguistic national cultures from their own geographical, historical, and political specificities. Vernacular knowledge then is a relevant, significant, and powerful framework to analyze the institutionalization of the vernacular language showing that for the DRVN and RVN, language making was a process of vernacular knowledge making, that is the formation of Vietnamese identities.

This thesis first takes Nguyễn Đình Hoà’s New Land interview as its site of examining the contestations of cultural nation building. The New Land interview is discursively meaningful as it memorializes the cultural nation building efforts Nguyễn Đình Hoà himself participated in before and after 1975, the year which marked the fall of the RVN. At the time of the interview, Hoà was a linguistics faculty member at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and director of the University’s Center of Vietnam Studies. Hoà started his teaching and administrative responsibilities at SIU and the Vietnam center in September 1969 when he accepted “the first professorial appointment made in support of the center” and its Associate Director role after having been Counselor for Cultural Affairs and Education at the RVN Embassy in Washington D.C.<sup>19</sup> It wasn’t until 1972 when Hoà embarked on his role as the Center’s director<sup>20</sup> taking it through a period of tremendous political divide for both the United States and the Vietnamese people over anti-Vietnam war sentiments. New Land was a Seattle-based Vietnamese newspaper which

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<sup>18</sup> Juno S. Parreñas, “From Decolonial Indigenous,” p. 418.

<sup>19</sup> Larry Dwane Lagow, “A History of the Center for Vietnamese Studies at Southern Illinois University, 1969-1976.” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, 1978), p. 103.

<sup>20</sup> “Nguyễn Đình Hoà (quá vãng),” Viện Việt-Học Institute of Vietnamese Studies, accessed July 15, 2023., <http://www.viethoc.com/Ban-Ging-Hun/nguyen-dinh-hoa>

published its first issue in August 1975. Even though the publication ceased to exist in 1987, according to the Washington State Archives, New Land was nevertheless the first Vietnamese newspaper in the United States founded as part of Washington State's Vietnamese refugee resettlement program during the Daniel J. Evans administration.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, through language standardization, I examine how language was used by both the DRVN and the First Republic in the making of an all-Vietnamese state. To this end, language was a means to unite the Vietnamese people towards the competing versions of nationalism. For the DRVN, I discuss how language was defused through a revolutionary approach whereas for the RVN I consider an attempt at linguistic unity through a national academy that never came to fruition. I then turn to two RVN national universities (in Saigon and Hue) to examine the treatment of language diversity which reveal contingent positions on the cultural nation-building objectives of these universities. It is here that we can observe the series of negotiations that were enlisted to best situate Vietnamese into an RVN intellectual milieu. Finally, I examine a RVN national archives source document that directly addresses how certain foreign loanwords should or should not be standardized in the Vietnamese vernacular, exposing a deference for traditional culture. However, before I begin these topics, I will first explore the theoretical concept of cultural nation building as it relates to postcolonial Vietnam.

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<sup>21</sup> Washington State Archives (@WASStateArchives), Tweet, May 31, 2022, 12:45 PM

<https://twitter.com/WASStateArchives/status/1531723682350960640>.

Full Text: "Dat Moi, founded in 1975 as part of the Washington's Vietnamese refugee resettlement program during the Dan Evans administration, was the 1st Vietnamese newspaper in the U.S. The newspaper, whose name translates as "New Land," published from 1975 to 1987. #APAHM #AAPIHM." Evans would go on to become a senator (1983-1989) and three-term Washington state governor (1965-1977). "Biography, Daniel J. Evans," Evans School of Public Policy & Governance, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://evans.uw.edu/profile/daniel-evans/>. The University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy and Governance would eventually be renamed after Evans and his wife, Nancy Bell Evan. "About the Evans School," Evans School of Public Policy & Governance, accessed July 15, 2023, <https://evans.uw.edu/about/>.

## CULTURAL NATION BUILDING

The making of the *nation-state* is often a violent process involving different groups competing to seize power rather than an orderly series of design and negotiations. Historically, the rivaling factions vying for power engaged in warfare until one of the parties manages to establish its authority and power in the disputed territory. After which, the conditions of possibilities for organizing a state, building its institutions, and acquiring legitimacy emerge. Embedded within this nation-state building process, commonly conceived of as a singular concept, are in fact two distinct processes (albeit intertwined and often transposed): *nation building* and *state building*. In the case of Vietnam, both the DRVN and RVN were competing against one another in forming its vision of the “nation-state.” However, the situation was complicated by the simultaneous nature in which the constituent components of the nation-state, that is *the nation* and *the state*, developed.

The Geneva Accords of July 1954 provisionally partitioned Vietnam at the 17th parallel granting the DRVN and the RVN authority in the upper and lower halves, respectively. This temporary, regroupment, and transitional period of the country was meant to only exist until unifying national elections were to be held two years later. While the national elections never occurred, what held true was an active territorial dispute for the entirety of Vietnam up until the fall of the RVN in 1975.<sup>22</sup> Alongside the dispute for a “state” was the concerted formation of the “nation” which necessarily enlists identity and culture. This section seeks to delineate the components of the nation-state by first defining

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<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of the territorial and spatial aspects of “North” vs. “South” Vietnam, see: Christoph Giebel, “Terminology Matters: The Fiction of ‘South Việt Nam’ and Representations of the Republic of Việt Nam.” Paper presented at “Studying Republican Vietnam: Issues, Challenges, and Prospects” workshop, University of Oregon, 14 October 2019.

state building, then nation building, and finally layering a “cultural” aspect to nation building to show in subsequent sections how the vernacular language is deployed in shaping the Vietnamese imagination.

State building involves the construction of a governance apparatus aimed at the *objective* concerns of people, territory, and institutions. The international community often invokes the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States to define the concept “state.” Article 1 reads: “The state as a person of international law should possess the following qualifications: a) a permanent population; b) a defined territory; c) government; and d) capacity to enter into relations with other states.” Beyond these factual qualifications, the state functions to meet the “needs and aspirations” of its citizens by creating political and economic infrastructure, domestic and international security, and justice and social welfare.<sup>23</sup> For the RVN, building institutions of the state was complicated by both domestic and international factors in its quests to meet these specifiable objectives.

In his monograph, *To Build as Well as Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam*, Andrew Gawthorpe, U.S. foreign policy scholar and historian by training, argues since its conception the RVN was a “weak state,” that is “one unable to exercise administrative control over much of its own territory.” Failure to enforce territorial control was exacerbated by its inability to “mobilized the domestic resources to battle the National Liberation Front and the North Vietnamese Army.”<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the United States was “drawn into supporting [the RVN] as part of the broader policy of Cold War containment of communism” thereby shaping the weak state’s development of “its own domestic

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<sup>23</sup> René Grotenhuis, *Nation-Building As Necessary Effort in Fragile States*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p. 25-26.

<sup>24</sup> Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build as Well as Destroy: American Nation Building in South Vietnam* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 2-3.

institutions and based of popular support in rural South Vietnam.”<sup>25</sup> Coupled with these domestic limitations and foreign interferences, was the “imperial debris”—what Ann Stoler refers to as “‘the rot that remains’ from the political technologies of colonial rule”<sup>26</sup>—that plagued the creation of a political entity and its set of institutions. Gawthorpe reports that RVN colonial inheritance included “understaffed, illegitimate, and ineffective state institutions and the absence of a South Vietnamese national identity except among some of the educated and urban classes of the population.”<sup>27</sup> Yet, even as roadblocks ran rampant, there was still levels of success in RVN state building that gestured towards a collective objectivity, particularly through the work of individuals engaging in international affairs.

Nguyễn Đình Hoà, as a citizen and state-actor of the RVN, was himself entangled in this state-building process by assisting in the development of the country’s education and linguistics infrastructure used to codify, elaborate, and implement the state’s vernacular language which in turn was a populace training apparatus. One way in which Hoà facilitated RVN statehood was by making many trips aboard in his official capacity as a language scholar. According to administrative files of the RVN now held at Vietnam National Archives II, records indicate that Hoà attended conferences in Nigeria (1959), Rangoon (1959), Bangkok (1960) representing the RVN internationally. In a July 1960 letter to the Ministry of National Education (Bộ Quốc gia Giáo dục) written while in the United States, Hoà details his activities at the University of Michigan’s English Language

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<sup>25</sup> Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build as Well as Destroy*, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup> See Tania Murray Li and Pujo Semedi, *Plantation Life: Corporate Occupation in Indonesia's Oil Palm Zone*, (Duke University Press, 2021), for a discussion of what Ann Stoler calls the “imperial debris” as it is invoked here in the case of modern plantations in Indonesia, p 10.

<sup>27</sup> Andrew J. Gawthorpe, *To Build as Well as Destroy*, p. 10.

Institute included observing (dự thính) English and linguistics courses. Other plans for that trip involve visiting the Linguistic Society of American in Austin, TX and the Center for Applied Linguistics at American University in Washington D.C. Finally, the same national files archive an application for Hoà to leave the country on a 1962 “six-week observation-study tour” in the United States. Hoà was to attend the 9th International Congress of Linguists held at Harvard University presented by the Summer Institute of Linguistics, University of North Dakota.<sup>28</sup> These RVN’s engagements with other so-called democratically aligned countries during its statehood formation facilitated a sense of metropolitanism that permeated into nation-building efforts, national culture, and shaped the Vietnamization of the vernacular language, as will be discussed in the sections below.

Nation building is the *subjective* construction of a national community. While René Grotenhuis argues, “there is no international agreement that unambiguously defines the concept of the nation,”<sup>29</sup> Matthew Masur nonetheless describes nation building in the context of the RVN and the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War as aimed at shaping the “attitudes and beliefs” of the public and fostering their confidence in the government as they move towards a sense of national identity.<sup>30</sup> In this sense, nation building is for the purpose of establishing power relations between the governing and the governed aimed at mobilizing particular ideologies in the shaping of national identities. Building a national identity was particularly important in both DRVN and RVN postcolonial societies since not only were they healing from a “colonial wound,” that is the

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<sup>28</sup> Hồ sơ 7763 v/v Nguyễn Đình Hòa du học tại Hoa Kỳ. TTLTQDII, Phòng Nha Học bổng và Du học (1956-1974) [Scholarships and Study Abroad Files (1956-1974)].

<sup>29</sup> René Grotenhuis, *Nation-Building*, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew B. Masur, “Hearts and Minds: Cultural Nation-Building in South Vietnam, 1954–1963,” Ph.D. Dissertation, (Ohio State University, 2004), p. 5.

physical and metaphysical violence resulting from the racial hierarchies imbedded within the colonial order, but both were simultaneously consolidating the state vis-à-vis their own desired versions of the national identity itself. Unlike state building and its concerns with a political entity, nation building works toward the creation of a political community bonded by a constructed national identity. This national identity at times manifests into lived realities that can be independent of political realities or state practices precisely because of the intrinsic nature of the nation, specifically one that may traverse a realm beyond the state. The nation is concerned with the collective subjectivity of the community, that is the “identity, imagination, and culture” that forms the nation as Grotenhuis succinctly identifies,<sup>31</sup> which aims to build a relationship of power between the government and its people.

The three primary schools of thought used to describe nation building are: *primordial*, *materialist*, and *constructivist*. While the *primordial*<sup>32</sup> and *materialist*<sup>33</sup> positions may maintain valid observations of the nation-building process, it is the *constructivist* school that is most applicable to the DRVN and RVN’s own nation-building deeds. The constructivist position holds that:

“[...] The nation is a construct, built and altered by people to define the identity of a political community in ever-changing circumstances. This construct is a mixture of old and new, of traditional elements and new inventions necessary to build a contextual story of ‘we’. The constructivist approach is well aware of the historical components of national identity and the importance of historic and legendary myths and heroes serving as a

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<sup>31</sup> René Grotenhuis, *Nation-Building*, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> In defending a more primordial position to the identity of a nation, Anthony D. Smith describes a nation as “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, and common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members (p. 43).” See: Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> For examples of a materialist approach to defining nation and nationhood, see: Ernest Gellner and John Breuilly, “Nations and Nationalism,” (2nd ed. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2008) and Eric J. Hobsbawm, “Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality,” (2nd ed. Cambridge [England] Cambridge University Press, 1992).

foundation for that identity without taking these historical ingredients as the fixed and decisive elements of nationhood.”<sup>34</sup>

Examining nation building through the lens of this constructivist viewpoint reveals that the nation is not a historical artifact beckoning to be brought into light, but rather the result of construction and invention. The process involves deliberately and selectively including those elements in history, narratives, and culture that assist in the vision of what the national identity is to be, while excluding those elements that disturb this vision. Nationhood commands a “build up” by the community at each historical juncture through the shaping of culture and social practices towards a targeted national identity.

In the case of the DRVN and RVN, both contending states in their own vision of Vietnamese nationalism refer to a “Vietnam” conceived of in its modern perception with long antecedents even as history reveals this formulation of Vietnam itself is in fact “recent” existence. Nation building therefore makes possible this interpretative “national” past that commingles historical moments with present desires. Specifically, both Vietnamese governments engaged similar nation building tactics that calls for a national identity premised on an all-inclusive Vietnam. In effect, nation building for the DRVN and RVN then becomes the constant process of how the past at each historical juncture was to be *translated* into a comprehensible present. What arises from this process is the establishment of different power centers that define itself by demarcating the “other;” the self is now intrinsically flattened and thus maximizing conformity while minimizing dissent – making the identification of the other possible. For the RVN, the ideology of a free and open society was purposefully infused into its language-making practices of the

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<sup>34</sup> René Grotenhuis, *Nation-Building As Necessary Effort in Fragile States*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), p. 26-27.

First Republic by being tolerant of foreign linguistic borrowings. Rather than taking an overpoweringly ethno-nationalist stance in shaping the Vietnamese vernacular, the RVN absorbed certain foreign borrowings to construct a more linear path from the historical past to the present as opposed to engaging with a more radical rupture from that past and starting anew as required by DRVN revolutionaries.

At its core, nation building is concerned with constructing and maintaining what Benedict Anderson has termed an “imagined community,” referring to the nation as a community of people connected to each other but without necessarily knowing each other.<sup>35</sup> Like an imagined community, the formation of the “nation” is first and foremost an internal notion that requires as its “conditions of possibility” limited physical territory and sovereign authority. Again, the conjuring of territory and sovereignty as such are not necessarily bonded to political facts and state practices. Forming an imagined community on these premises (of limited territory and sovereign authority) while contradicting political and state realities was especially conspicuous for RVN as it grappled with guerrilla insurgency and political dissent. Rather, the community imagined as an internal matter is bounded by identity and culture, or broadly referred to as a sense of “self-identification,” that makes possible a realm of subjectivity that brings to the fore how the self is perceived by itself. On the other hand, the “state” as defined by the Montevideo Convention makes no reference to the internal doings of identity and culture, but rather is inclusive of the notion of international relations, that is the ability to enter relationships with other states, thereby exposes itself to an extraterritorial landscape.

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<sup>35</sup> Anderson, Benedict R. O’G. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition. London: Verso, 2006.

Cultural nation building, as it were, posits a customary and normative “way of life”, that is a *cultural*, realm to the imagination of the nation. However, this is not to say that “culture” as a concept is any more concrete or well defined as is “nation building.” In fact, although “the study of culture is burgeoning in virtually all fields of human sciences” and “remains as useful, indeed essential, as ever,” William H. Sewell, Jr. observes that the discipline that shaped its present form, if not outright invented the concept, anthropology, is plagued by a “particularly severe identity crisis” that renders the concept of culture as suspicious. Sewell first experienced cultural anthropology as a “turn from hard headed, utilitarian, and empiricist materialism—which had both liberal and marxisant faces—to a wider appreciation of the range of human possibilities, both in the past and in the present.” Sewell argues that anthropology’s virtual monopoly on the concept of culture eventually eased when the literary studies discipline pivoted away from a “fixation on canonical literary texts” and towards a “wider range of texts, quasi-texts, paratexts, and text analogs,” to seek out its “intertextualities,” making practically nothing “extratextual.” History for its part made possible the field of “new cultural history” and an emerging “sociology of culture” began by applying sociological methods to study the production and marketing of cultural artifacts.<sup>36</sup>

Tracing the full range of meanings of “culture” in contemporary academic discourse is beyond the scope and purpose of this section. Rather, I focus on those usages and meanings that make the term important in understanding the implication of codification, elaboration, and implementation of language in Vietnam. Scholarly accounts

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<sup>36</sup> William H. Sewell, “The Concept(s) of Culture.” In *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions In the Study of Society and Culture*, edited by Victoria E. Bonnell, Lynn Avery Hunt and Richard Biernacki, 34:35–61. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

of culture during this “Anglo-American institutionalization of ‘French theory’” tended to privilege “the fragment, the supplement, the remainder, the site, and the margins, over and against the totality.”<sup>37</sup> However, and to the contrary, the processes of state, nation, and national culture building by its nature compresses the diversity in peoples. To engage in cultural nation building is to shape society towards an envisioned totality dictated by the governing power – the DRVN and RVN, in the case of Vietnam.

## LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION

In the May 1979 interview, the interviewer inquiring on behalf of New Land observes that the communist government of Vietnam also aspires to preserve traditional Vietnamese culture, as does Nguyễn Đình Hoà, nevertheless, they ask if there is a difference between the two approaches. Hoà responds in the affirmative, “Yes, there is quite a difference.” A trained linguist, he continues answering the interview question by using language standardization as a representative example of how opinions differ on traditional cultural preservation thereby situating language under the immediate purview of culture. The Hanoi government desires to select and implement one standard language. However, that language considered standard, according to Hoà, is necessarily grounded in the standard Hanoian dialect. And through various bilingual dictionaries, monolingual Vietnamese dictionaries, and even those from technical Hanoi dictionaries, Hoà concludes that “his” standard language differs on many fronts from that of the Northern dialect.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Anderman, and Zachary Hicks, “The Pot Still Boils: Introducing Totality and Culture.” *Qui Parle* 32, no. 1 (2023): 1–39.

<sup>38</sup> Nguyễn Đình Hoà, *Interview*. Full question and response are as follow:

Representative of what Kim Ninh argues in her monograph on the politics of culture in revolutionary Vietnam from 1945-1965, “language became the battle ground on which ideas of nation and culture were contested,”<sup>39</sup> and those contestations continues even at the time of this interview in 1979.

Nguyễn Đình Hoà himself was born in 1924 on one of the oldest streets of Hanoi, Rue des Changeurs, as the French referred to it, or “Silver Street” (Phố Hàng Bạc) as the Vietnamese call it still to this day. And according to his own memoir, he did not leave Tonkin, the French protectorate in the North, until he left for his postsecondary studies in the United States in 1948.<sup>40</sup> While it would not be until 1957 that Hoà would return to the then RVN for various government posts, and again leaving for the United States in 1965,<sup>41</sup> does Hoà no longer speak the Hanoian “dialect” that he grew up with at the time of this interview? Is this not the same dialect for which the DRVN/SRVN was using as a basis for language standardization? In the introduction to his book on the Vietnamese language published 18 years after this interview, Hoà would go on to describe how greater linguistic uniformity was achieved since 1945 due to progress in Vietnam’s education system. Furthermore, dialectical variation has lessened resulting from increased mobility such as migration of rural people toward Hanoi and exodus of people from north to south following

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Hỏi: Cộng sản ở nhà cũng nói họ thiết tha muốn bảo vệ nền văn hoá cổ truyền của dân tộc. Có sự khác biệt không giữa bảo tồn văn hoá kiểu cộng sản với bảo tồn văn hoá của Nguyễn Đình Hoà?

[Đáp]: Rất khác biệt. Tôi lấy một thí dụ điển hình là vấn đề tiêu chuẩn hoá ngôn ngữ. Hà Nội muốn chọn một ngôn ngữ chuẩn để dùng. Ngôn ngữ chuẩn đó phải căn cứ vào phương ngữ chuẩn của Hà Nội. Qua những tự điển song ngữ, tự điển giải thích Việt Việt, tự điển chuyên môn của Hà Nội, Ngôn ngữ chuẩn của tôi có rất nhiều điểm khác biệt với phương ngữ miền Bắc.

<sup>39</sup> Kim Ngọc Bao Ninh, *A World Transformed: The Politics of Culture in Revolutionary Vietnam, 1945-1965*, (University of Michigan Press, 2002), p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Đình Hòa Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River: A Cultural Memoir of Mid-Century Vietnam* (Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 1999), pp. 4-5 and 12.

<sup>41</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, pp. 126 and 146.

the 1954 Geneva Accords.<sup>42</sup> If this was the case, the speech of Hanoi should closely match a national imagination of a national language. Or was Hoà referring to dialect not to represent the differences in spoken varieties based on geographical and social group particularities, but rather dialect is meant to refer to differences that are predicated on political choices?



Fig. 1: [Nguyễn Đình Hoà, in hat and tie] “with friends before departing for the United States on August 28, 1948, at the Air France office in downtown Hanoi.”<sup>43</sup>

This section seeks to posit that what Nguyễn Đình Hoà referred to as difference in dialectal standards are actually differences in ideological imaginations of the nation and the way in which language fits into that construction—not simply spoken and written language variations. An example of language usage in the construction of the Vietnamese nation in this sense is given by Hoà in his memoir when he attended the prestigious Burma Research Society from December 28, 1959 to January 2, 1960. Delegates from both DRVN

<sup>42</sup> Đình Hòa Nguyễn, *Vietnamese = Tiếng Việt không son phấn* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Pub. Co., 1997), p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 6.

and RVN governments were present since Burma had recognized both Vietnamese States. Being their junior, Hoà kept to traditional means of address such as “great-grandfather” (cụ) or “professor” (Giáo sư) to refer to the DRV delegates, to then question if these terms of address could have been considered as “feudalistic” by his counterparts.<sup>44</sup> The DRVN was undergoing a social revolution aimed at a classless society and would have probably preferred the more revolution-aligned term of comrade (đồng chí).<sup>45</sup> In order to explore the imagination and construction of a national vernacular language, I will first discuss how language was similarly used by both the RVN and DRV to form a sense of unification, then highlight how the RVN, particularly during the First Republic, engaged with language-making.

#### LANGUAGE IN THE MAKING OF AN ALL-VIETNAMESE STATE

Even as scholars have noted that there are three principal dialect areas in Vietnam (north, central, and south), mutual intelligibility across all regions, generations, and social classes immensely facilitated both the DRVN and RVN’s call for a united Vietnam. This strong, practically total, mutual intelligibility was so critical that it can be considered the single most important feature of modern Vietnamese in the construction of a national identity.<sup>46</sup> This Vietnamese linguistic landscape meant that language standardization attempts were for the purpose of shaping linguistic aesthetics and not for the sake of

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<sup>44</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 148. Translations of these terms are as published in the memoir.

<sup>45</sup> Patricia M. Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past* (Duke University Press, 2002). See pp. 157-161 for a discussion of communist attempts at transforming the family-centered habits of the Vietnamese, which included terms of address.

<sup>46</sup> Minh-Hang Le and Stephen O'Harrow, “Vietnam,” in *Language and National Identity in Asia* edited by Simpson, Andrew (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 pp. 415-442) pp. 417-418.

linguistic mutual intelligibility like in the case of modern China for example.<sup>47</sup> Simultaneous with broad mutual intelligibility were the early signs of coherent national education policies and a state commitment to Vietnamese, rather than French, for official government communication beginning in 1945. These engagements formally fixed Vietnamese language into a postcolonial, Vietnamese national identity.

Between March and August 1945, the short-lived “Empire of Vietnam” Trần Trọng Kim government released the emancipation potentials of linguistic entho-nationalism through education and official communication policies. For the first time in the country’s history, the Kim government declared vernacular Vietnamese and the Romanized script be the universal medium of instruction in education for all of Vietnam.<sup>48</sup> Whereas before this period, literary Chinese and French dominated the pedagogical landscape with Vietnamese was only taught tertiarily in formal settings. Additionally, the Kim government launched the vernacular spoken and written language into officialdom by replacing Vietnamese with French in official communication.<sup>49</sup> Even as Kim’s government was installed by Emperor Bảo Đại, who by then was a figurehead under the auspices of the Japanese Empire, it nonetheless initiated national programs gesturing towards a postcolonial identity that included Vietnamese as the national language for which both the DRVN and RVN would build upon in its post-1945 cultural nation building efforts. Strong mutual intelligibility

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<sup>47</sup> For a historical study of the Chinese nationhood and national identity as it relates to “dialects” (方言 Fāngyán), see: Gina Anne Tam, “Dialect and Nationalism in China, 1860–1960” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020). For a discussion on the ethnic implication of China’s modern state- and nation-building processes, see: Thomas S. Mullaney, “Coming to Terms with the Nation Ethnic Classification in Modern China,” (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Chieu Ngu Vu, “Political and Social Change in Viet-Nam Between 1940 and 1946 (Indochina, Japan, France, Viet Minh, World War II).” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1984, p. 366. Also see: Chieu Ngu Vu, “The Other Side of the 1945 Vietnamese Revolution: The Empire of Viet-Nam (March–August 1945),” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 45, no. 2 (1986): 293–328.

<sup>49</sup> Minh-Hang Le and Stephen O’Harrow, “Vietnam,” p. 430 and David G. Marr *Vietnam, 1945: The Quest for Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 122-123.

and the move towards acceptance of modern Vietnamese as the national language paved the way for the DRVN and the RVN (beginning in 1946 and 1955, respectively) to take similar measures to corral the national language under each side's banner in their quest for national legitimacy.

Language for the DRVN was a means to unify the people with the nation by addressing traditional concerns and socialist dynamics. Having declared national independence after the August Revolution in 1945, the revolutionary government needed to culturally sever the population from feudal and colonial ties. The Romanized script, therefore, was “[...] a way to break away from the past and establish something new but nevertheless Vietnamese” which made this script explicitly connected with the nation and the “indefinable national soul or spirit.”<sup>50</sup> Language became the medium to reach the masses. According to Shawn McHale, writing on the printing revolution and spreading of communism in early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam, post-1945 revolutionaries focused attention on catering their language and ideology to their audience, now being the general populace. McHale goes on to paraphrase Trường Chinh in 1950 saying that writers should avoid using foreign words, when possible, “not estrange themselves from the ‘precious traditions of the people,’” or hold popular writing in contempt. Furthermore, for writers to popularize their writings, they “should not write a sentence that the average reader cannot understand,” and are discouraged to write for the upper class or intellectuals.<sup>51</sup> For the DRV, national unification was articulated through language populism.

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<sup>50</sup> Ninh, *A World Transformed*, p. 19.

<sup>51</sup> Shawn Frederick McHale, *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), pp. 139-140.

Through the mid-1950's, the RVN government too enlisted language as a medium to unify the country, distance itself from French colonialism, and establish its legitimacy as the rightful inheritor of Vietnamese nationalism. As early as 1954 there were already calls by the Provisional National Council (Hội đồng Quốc gia Lâm thời) for the establishment of a national academy to serve as the highest authority on Vietnamese language and provide a unified direction for cultural development. The Council appealed to the government arguing that the Vietnamese Academy would be responsible for revising and unifying the Vietnamese language, whose tasks would include compiling an official dictionary and setting the official grammar of the Vietnamese language.<sup>52</sup> By 1956, the Ministry of Education called together the Conference on Linguistic Unity (Hội nghị Thống nhất Ngôn ngữ) where, by concentrating on three main issues: orthography, vocabulary, and scientific terminology, it was debated that linguistic unification referred to the language standardization throughout the country.<sup>53</sup>

Members of the conference argued that linguistic unity requires vernacular language streamlining to undo the linguistic heterogeneity resulting from French colonialism. Colonial division of Vietnam into three regions with separate legal systems resulted in a Vietnamese language that “seemed to stop and stagnate in each place with its local patois and distinct definitions” and thus causing a separation between the Vietnamese people that is “not just geographically, politically, or administratively, but also linguistically, intellectually, and emotionally.”<sup>54</sup> The effect of identifying and explaining linguistic discrepancies would be so that citizens, regardless of region, can better

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<sup>52</sup> Nu-Anh Tran, “Contested Identities: Nationalism in the Republic of Vietnam (1954-1963)” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2013), p. 139.

<sup>53</sup> Tran, “Contested Identities,” pp. 139-140.

<sup>54</sup> Tran, “Contested Identities,” as quoted on p. 141.

understand each other in “language and consciousness” and “grow in unity and mutual affection,”<sup>55</sup> particularly with the arrival of northern emigres just a couple of years before in 1954. While the national academy was never established for reasons that remain unclear according to research done by Nu-Anh Tran, a historian who researches the First Republic, for her dissertation published in 2013, what does become apparent is that the RVN continues to impose its legitimacy as rightful bearer of Vietnamese nationalism through language-making in its education policies. Matthew Masur would argue in his 2004 dissertation that during the First Republic (1955-1963) a central educational reform goal of the Ngô Đình Diệm presidency was “to standardize Vietnamese as the primary language of instruction at all South Vietnamese schools.”<sup>56</sup> In the sections below, I will examine the process of assimilating Vietnamese into the pedagogical and the linguistic environments of the RVN’s two national universities.

#### VERNACULARIZING THE FOREIGN

The process of phasing in Vietnamese as the language of instruction in primary education slowly continued from the Empire of Vietnam into the State of Vietnam (1949-1955); however, in 1955 the succeeding First Republic government under Ngô Đình Diệm accelerated this policy and endeavored to expand it into higher education in Republican territories. The RVN took “systematic efforts to expand Vietnamese in higher education” in order to “facilitate a larger diffusion of Vietnamese culture for the greater benefit of the nation as a whole.”<sup>57</sup> This expansion into higher education resulted from the official

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<sup>55</sup> Tran, “Contested Identities,” p.141

<sup>56</sup> Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” p. 60-61.

<sup>57</sup> The Department of National Education, “Education in Vietnam,” February 14, 1957, pp. 5-6. Folder 16342: Báo cáo hoạt động 3 năm của Bộ Quốc gia Giáo dục từ 1955-1957 [Report of three years of

recognition of the social, cultural, and economic value of the national language, and the need to use it in facilitating the Republic's intellectual milieu—the training grounds of leaders and citizen intellectuals of the Republic. Language, therefore, was deployed by the Diệm administration to fuse the process of state-building and nation-building.

Nguyễn Đình Hoà's contribution to the construction and development of a RVN intellectual milieu began as early as August 28, 1948, when he left for the United States. After being instructed by his father in a shaking voice to take care of his health, study hard to do their family and "country" honor, and write home often, Hoà, armed with the first student visa issued by the U.S. consulate in Hanoi embarked on a journey taking over fourteen days and a total of fifty-seven flying hours. With layovers in Saigon, Calcutta, Karachi, Athens, Paris, and Iceland, airplane trouble, and visits in between before arriving in New York, the excitement for the 24 year old was palpable as it would be his first time traveling outside Tonkin, the French protectorate in the North, let alone Vietnam.<sup>58</sup> From the time he arrived in New York after his solo journey until the time he answered questions for New Land, Hoà had completed his doctoral education at New York University in 1956, returned to Vietnam a year after graduation for various government posts, with the first and most relevant being that in the Faculty of Letters at the University of Saigon where university administrators promoted him to dean two days after landing at Tân Sơn Nhất airport.<sup>59</sup>

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activities of the Ministry of National Education, 1955-1957], PTTDICH NAI, as quoted in Masur, "Hearts and Minds," p. 61.

<sup>58</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, pp. 4-7.

<sup>59</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, Chapters 10 (particularly pp. 126-7) and 11.

According to the Ministry of National Education at the time, the Vietnamese language is intended to be used to express and develop the ideas of the people; language was a symbol of cultural independence of the nation. Ideas of the nation were discussed in coursework, and certain lessons reinforced the authority of the state with vocabulary lessons using words related to government administration and civic duties.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the intersection of language, cultural nation-building, and higher education manifested at both the University of Saigon and at the University of Hue; the latter which was established the same year Nguyễn Đình Hoà returned to Vietnam to take on the deanship of Faculty of Letters in Saigon.

#### *THE UNIVERSITY OF SAIGON*

The emergence of a university located in Saigon, the capital of the Republic, was not fortuitous but rather resulted from the cultural nation-building aspirations of the First Republic overlaid onto a history of higher education institutional development that predates the Republic itself. The University has its origins in the Université Indochinoise, a French colonial Indochina university established to displace the imperial civil service examination system, a dynastic bureaucratic selection institution that officially ended in 1918.<sup>61</sup> After an eight-year lapse in operation due to World War II, and restarting in 1949, the university became a smaller Saigon branch of the University of Hanoi when a cultural agreement was signed between Vietnamese and French-Vietnamese institutions.<sup>62</sup> This

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<sup>60</sup> Masur, "Hearts and Minds," p. 63.

<sup>61</sup> "[...] Candidates were still taking the civil examinations in Chinese until 1915-18," and it was in 1918 that "the Chinese-language civil examinations were abandoned in Annam, the last outpost." David Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945* (1981) pp. 89 and 148-9.

<sup>62</sup> Dinh Hoa Nguyen, "Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam," *The Times of Viet Nam Magazine* (March 11, 1961): 19, p. 17.

Saigon branch of the northern-based university then became the first university of the Republic of Vietnam in May of 1955 after the Geneva Accords of July 1954 partitioned Vietnam at the 17th parallel. During this intended transitional period of the country, the university became the National University of Vietnam.<sup>63</sup> In 1957, the Diệm administration established the University of Huế as its second "national university," and the first once again changed named, this time to the University of Saigon.<sup>64</sup>

The role of Vietnamese language at the University of Saigon was in a state of transition in the construction of a national sense of Vietnamese-ness. According to Nguyễn Đình Hoà, this former Franco-Vietnamese university now "assumed the role of a college responsible for the teaching of and research on Vietnamese civilization," and "thus becoming the veritable degree-granting academic center for studies in [Vietnamese] national culture."<sup>65</sup> The University of Saigon, among other agents, facilitated a path for the short-lived Republic to build an alternate national intellectual culture as the regime vied for domestic and international legitimacy alongside and against the northern-headquartered DRVN. However, although language of national cultural instruction rapidly changed from French to Vietnamese, it was a qualified (rather than an absolute) transformation in the Saigon university, especially in the Faculty of Letters. The department, which was more akin to a "College of the Arts" according to Hoà,<sup>66</sup> taught subjects that included Vietnamese, French, English and Chinese languages and literature. The majority of the

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<sup>63</sup> Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, "Universities and Intellectual Culture in the Republic of Vietnam" in *Toward a Framework for Vietnamese American Studies: History, Community, and Memory*, edited by Peché, Linda Ho, Vo, Alex-Thai Dinh, and Vu, Tuong, pp. 57 - 75. Lexington: Temple University Press, 2023, pp. 58-59. Also, Nguyen, "Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam," p. 10 and 17.

<sup>64</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 131. Also, Nguyen, "Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam," p. 17

<sup>65</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 131

<sup>66</sup> Nguyen, "Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam," p. 17

teaching staff at the University received their training in “French-oriented” institutions, that is French colonial institutions in what is now Vietnam, if not in France itself.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, unlike the University of Hue where Vietnamese was the medium of instruction among all faculties apart from foreign language courses, the University of Saigon had a mixture of language instruction.<sup>68</sup> An acceptance of multilingualism was not limited to the classrooms as shown by language usage in university publications. In addition to books, monographs, and scholarly journal articles, each University of Saigon department publishes its own “bulletin or annals” that were trilingually (Vietnamese, French, and English) published, unlike the University of Hue, where Vietnamese was the exclusive language used in publications.<sup>69</sup>

The intellectual culture of Saigon was forged from a bourgeois, heterogeneous, urban public intellectual sphere, whose existence with foreign cultures was embraced rather than unequivocally rejected. A complete rupture from the RVN cultural heterogeneity, desirability notwithstanding, was complicated by the demographic composition of the University and its commingling with the Republic’s intellectual milieu. According to an estimate in research on universities and the intellectual culture in the RVN by Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox, most of the faculty and about eighty-five percent of the students relocated from the University of Hanoi to the Saigon-branch turned national university during the 300-day free movement period between the northern and southern zones afforded by Article 14(d) of the Geneva Accord.<sup>70</sup> The influx of northern Vietnamese

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<sup>67</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19

<sup>69</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19

<sup>70</sup> Gadkar-Wilcox, “Universities,” pp. 58-59. Also see: Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 17

émigré meant that the corralling of cultural nation-building imaginaries through language was a large-scale effort that was gradual and necessitated negotiation. Furthermore, the diversity of people was part of a larger multifaceted RVN intellectual sphere in which University of Saigon traversed. Vernacularizing of the foreign at the Saigon university involved a greater foreign linguistic component than compared to the University of Hue, discussed next.

#### *THE UNIVERSITY OF HUE*

The University of Hue was established on March 1, 1957 by Presidential Decree under the Diệm administration to “answer,” what Nguyễn Đình Hoà observes as, “a true need for higher education in Central Vietnam.”<sup>71</sup> Traveling to the only other public university in the Republic located in Saigon was logistically challenging for those living in the Central region. The University in Hue, then, was part of the Diệm administration’s plan to make higher education more accessible to those in Vietnam.<sup>72</sup> However, convenience was not the only reason for locating the new university in the former imperial capital of the Nguyễn Dynasty (1802-1945). According to Matthew Masur, “Diệm initiated several important nation-building efforts in Hue [such as the University of Hue, radio broadcasting, art and architecture restoration, historical monument preservation, etc.],” and while the president’s family was known to exercise significant influence over the city, “these programs had little to do with expanding the family’s influence over central Vietnam.”<sup>73</sup> Rather, the symbolic importance of the Hue rested in its historical significance as the seat of learning and culture, magnified by its geographically proximity to the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. The

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<sup>71</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” p. 118

<sup>73</sup> Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” p. 117

development of Hue, as such, provided the Diệm administration with a “clearer link to Vietnam’s past”<sup>74</sup> making for better appeals towards its calls for legitimacy. The University of Hue positioned neatly into these larger nation building goals.

Locating the University of Hue near the southern edges of DRV controlled territory was a means for the RVN to highlight the progress it had made in three years since Geneva. Nguyễn Đình Hoà reports, the RVN government desired “to establish a center of learning and culture at the very beautiful former capital city of imperial Vietnam, close to the present demarcation line between ‘the Communist North’ and ‘the Free South.’”<sup>75</sup> For the RVN, and Hoà, the battle between the two factions represented a fight for ideological and political supremacy. The University had the “political impact of providing a showcase for what dynamic, humanistic democracy can do [...]”<sup>76</sup> Additionally, Masur argues that “by the Diem period, Hue seemed to have lost its earlier glory.”<sup>77</sup> However, with the founding of the University of Hue, the new national center of education contributed the most to turn the city into a cosmopolitan center that attracted hundreds then thousands of the “brightest and highest achieving students from the entire central region coming to Hue to study and work,”<sup>78</sup> according to historian Huong Thi Diu Nguyen. RVN investment in tourism, education and development sparked an increase in foreign assimilation but Hue society, a site of the extended royal family and clans, has been known to be rich in heritage and traditional customs.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” p. 115

<sup>75</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19

<sup>76</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19

<sup>77</sup> Masur, “Hearts and Minds,” p. 116.

<sup>78</sup> Huong Thi Diu Nguyen, “Eve of Destruction: a Social History of Vietnam’s Royal City, 1957-1967” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Washington, Seattle, 2017), p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> Nguyen, “Eve of Destruction,” p. 25.

Alongside fitting the University of Hue into a larger cultural nation building project was the placement of the Vietnamese language as the quintessential representation of Vietnamese-ness. Even as the University attracted teachers from abroad (that is, foreign trained Vietnamese nationals) — mainly from France and the United States — to develop its teaching staff, Vietnamese was the only language of instruction implemented but for foreign language classes according to Nguyễn Đình Hoà,<sup>80</sup> a pedagogical position different than that of the University of Saigon as mentioned above. The University also had regularly published scholarly publications, noteworthy of which was *Higher Studies* (Đại Học) published six times an academic year exclusively in Vietnamese;<sup>81</sup> not taking after the trilingual publications of the University of Saigon. According to Hoà, the object of Đại Học “contain[ing] only articles in the Vietnamese language” was to be “the ‘defense and illustration’ of the mother tongue.” In her 2017 dissertation, Huong Diu Thi Nguyen writes that the Đại Học (rendered as “*University Journal*”), existing from February 1958 until 1964, “was the most famous research journal of Huế” that “published various valuable scholarly articles on philosophy, history, literature, medicine, [and] national issues.”<sup>82</sup>

Even as the usage of Vietnamese language was more rigid at the University of Hue, compared to Saigon, an absolute abolishment of the Vietnamese linguistic past was not the goal. Rather, there was still an assimilation of the “foreign” at the University of Hue, making it similar to the University of Saigon on some level. Nguyễn Đình Hoà reports that the objective of the Hue university were two folds, “further developing Vietnam’s traditional values and at the same time welcoming ideas and concepts from abroad.”<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19.

<sup>81</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19.

<sup>82</sup> Nguyen, “Eve of Destruction,” p. 122.

<sup>83</sup> Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam,” p. 19.

Faculty were dispatched to Paris and the Vatican to gather documents written in Chinese or the demotic script (chữ Nôm) to be transcribed into the Romanized script, thus enabling research on early Vietnamese culture. Even as the RVN attempted to be dogmatic in its use of quốc ngữ, there still existed the need to translate Vietnamese culture from a script now foreign to modern Vietnamese people.

*RESPONSE LETTER FROM THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS COORDINATING MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENT*

Language making in postcolonial RVN was a process of negotiating traditional practices with state and nation building under the disruptive political conditions of the highly contested and short-lived First Republic. Unlike its take on political dissension, the First Republic embraced the diversity and translocality innate in language, particularly those actualized through foreign loanwords that entered the Vietnamese lexicon through direct and indirect language contact.<sup>84</sup> Historically, the more usual type of language contact occurs through direct contact. Not to simply mean the contact of languages themselves, this sort of linguist exchange involves the contact of people who speak the languages. This people-to-people contact is possible since languages and their speakers do not exist in isolation, but rather in social settings.<sup>85</sup> In the case of the RVN, in exchange for a lack of strong aversion to foreign linguistic influences was a prevailing need to nonetheless lessen linguistic variabilities through standardization to more uniformly account for lexical borrowings. The systematization of foreign borrowings effectively is a process of

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<sup>84</sup> Language contact is defined as “involving the contact of two or more distinct languages either indirectly through the written form and other media, or directly through social contact between speakers.” Hope Dawson and Michael Phelan, *Language Files: Materials for an Introduction to Language and Linguistics*, Edited by Hope Dawson and Michael Phelan, Twelfth edition (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2016), p. 494; see Chapter 12 Language Contact of this work for a detailed discussion.

<sup>85</sup> Dawson, *Language Files*, p. 494.

reconciling, through a series of negotiations, how Vietnam made contact with the world outside.

In this section, I examine a seemingly contradictory stance towards the Vietnamese language through the prism of a 1961 RVN “coordinating ministerial department” letter responding to a request to gain the government’s opinion on the treatment of two types of proper nouns that originate from foreign borrowings: *personal names* and *specific places*. In doing so, I aim to highlight the paradox of attempting to maintain an openness to foreign vocabulary while still needing to build infrastructures of the state which by its nature molds the common speech into the formal lingua franca. The First Republic’s approach to Vietnamese foreign personal name and specific place loanwords standardization reveals a construction of vernacular knowledge that embraces foreign linguistic origins while still mindful of its Vietnamese nexus.

In October 1956, Ngô Đình Diệm promulgated the first constitution of the RVN that, according to Nu-Anh Tran, “paid lip service to democracy while enshrining authoritarian power in the highest law of the republic.”<sup>86</sup> Even as a reading of The History and Philosophy of the Constitution section of *The Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam* reveals that just a year prior “the people voted by universal secret ballot in a Referendum” naming Diệm as the “Chief of State with the mission to build up democracy,”<sup>87</sup> infighting backed by hegemonic visions of the Republic, democracy, and representation were still nonetheless unresolved. The political instability sparked demands for reforms by local opposition and the United States who by this time has been increasingly involved with the

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<sup>86</sup> Nu-Anh Tran, *Disunion: Anticommunist Nationalism and the Making of the Republic of Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2022), p. 77.

<sup>87</sup> *The Constitution of the Republic of Vietnam*, (Saigon, Vietnam: Secretariat of State for Information, 1958), p. 3.

nation building-efforts in the Republic. Demands were answered in late May 1961, when according to Tran, Diệm reorganized the executive cabinet “ostensibly to increase efficiency.” While Diệm did appoint “some new faces,” Tran observes that “the changes reflected shifts in the composition of his inner circle rather than a broadening of the administration.”<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, one of the two new appointments that did take place was the selection of new cabinet minister Trương Công Cừ.<sup>89</sup> At that the time of cabinet ministerial appointment, Cừ was on the Faculty of Education at the newly established University of Hue where he was recently reassigned from the University of Saigon by the Education Minister, Nguyễn Dương Đôn.<sup>90</sup> In fact, before being transferred to the new university, Cừ served as Dean of the Faculty of Letters to then be replaced by Nguyễn Đình Hoà when Hoà arrived at the Saigon university in 1957. In his memoir, Hoà notes that he had no part in personnel change decision making and was looking forward to working and teaching under Cừ’s supervision, but Cừ was nonetheless suspicious of Hoà as one who wanted to usurp the deanship.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Tran, *Disunion*, p.159

<sup>89</sup> Tran, *Disunion*, p. 159 and Footnote 127, p. 213.

<sup>90</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 126.

<sup>91</sup> Nguyễn, *From the City Inside the Red River*, p. 126-7.



Fig. 2. “Encyclopedia Britannica gift of American Friends of Vietnam presented to the Faculty of Education, University of Saigon. Shown left to right examining the books are Mr. John S. Getchell, Cultural Affairs Officer, US Embassy; Mr. Truong Cong Cuu, Dean of the Faculty of Education, Mr. Bui Phong Chi, Director of Program; Mr. Phan The Roanh, Director of Program. The presentation was made on behalf of the American Friends of Vietnam by Mr. Getchell in a ceremony at the University on April 24, 1959.”<sup>92</sup>

Promulgated on May 28, 1961, along with establishing the composition of the new government, Decree No. 124-TTP appointed Trương Công Cừu as Coordinating Secretary of State for Social and Cultural Affairs Group.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, Decree No. 122-TTP established the Coordinating Secretary of State for Social and Cultural Affairs Group as

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<sup>92</sup> The description of this photo is quoted directly from the Texas Tech University Virtual Vietnam Archive (VVA) item general notes stating that this photo was taken in 1959 and Trương Công Cừu was a faculty of education from the University of Saigon rather than the University of Hue. Nguyễn Đình Hoà’s memoir account leads us to believe that Cừu was actually teaching at the University of Hue in some capacity, however faculty at both universities were known to teach between schools so it would be reasonable to suspect that both the photo general notes and Hoà’s accounts are accurate. VVA, Photograph, VA005574. No Date, Douglas Pike Collection: Other Manuscripts - American Friends of Vietnam, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, <https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=VA005574>, Accessed July 15, 2023. For Hoà’s description of the exchange in faculty between the two universities, see Nguyen, “Higher Education in the Republic of Viet Nam.”

<sup>93</sup> VVA, Reorganization of the Vietnamese Government, Specific Proposal for Reorganization of the Government of Viet-Nam, May 28, 1961, 6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5\_003575. 15 June 6 1961, Box 675, Folder 66; Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, Vietnam Project, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, [https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5\\_003575](https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5_003575), Accessed July 15, 2023, p. 2-3.

one of “three ‘coordinating’ ministerial departments.” These coordinating ministerial departments are “responsible for the coordination, supervision, and policy planning of those ministerial departments” under its jurisdiction. Each of the three are seated by a “coordinating secretary of state” that in turn report to the President of the Republic. For the part of the Social and Cultural Affairs coordinating ministerial department, the Departments of National Education, Civic Action, Public Health, and Labor would all report up to Cùu, the Coordinating Secretary of State for Social and Cultural Affairs Group.<sup>94</sup> Through the decrees promulgated in 1961, the Diệm administration essentially consolidated the state’s national cultural building activities under one arm of government. (See Fig. 3 for a visual representation of the government structure of Republic of Vietnam as of 1961.)

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<sup>94</sup> VVA, Reorganization of the Vietnamese Government, Specific Proposal for Reorganization of the Government of Viet-Nam, May 28, 1961, 6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5\_003575. 15 June 6 1961, Box 675, Folder 66; Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, Vietnam Project, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, [https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5\\_003575](https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5_003575), Accessed July 15, 2023, p. 1.

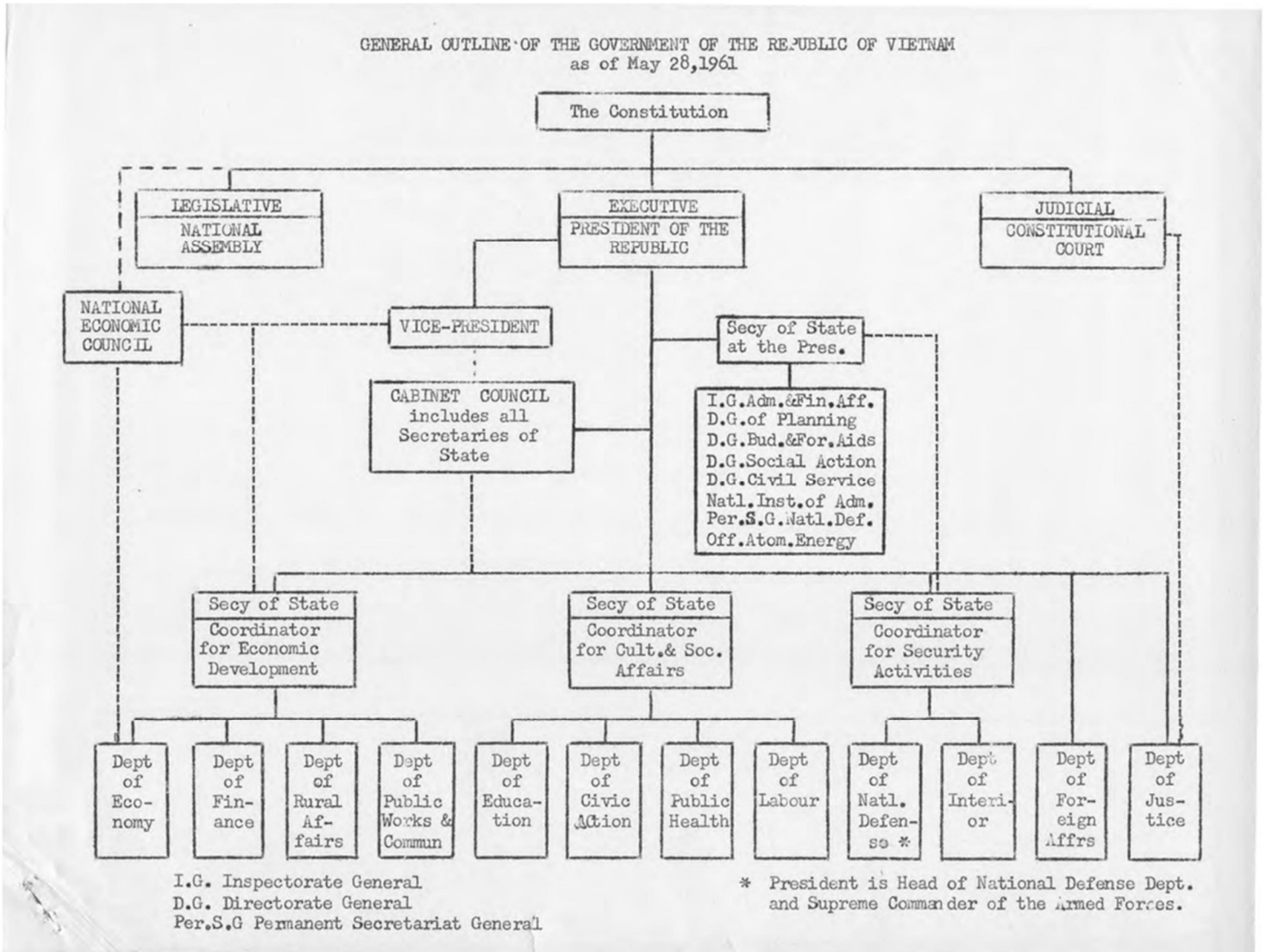


Fig. 3: Organization Chart, The Government of the Republic of Vietnam as of May 28, 1961.<sup>95</sup>

In 1961, representing the Social and Cultural Affairs Coordinating Ministerial Department (Bộ Đặc Nhiệm Văn Hoá Xã Hội) as its Coordinating Secretary of State (Bộ

<sup>95</sup> VVA, Reorganization of the Vietnamese Government, Specific Proposal for Reorganization of the Government of Viet-Nam, May 28, 1961, 6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5\_003575. 15 June 6 1961, Box 675, Folder 66; Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections, Vietnam Project, Vietnam Center and Sam Johnson Vietnam Archive, Texas Tech University, [https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5\\_003575](https://www.vietnam.ttu.edu/virtualarchive/items.php?item=6-20-1251-116-UA2-9-5-5_003575), accessed July 15, 2023, p. 4.

Trưởng), Trương Công Cừu responds to a request made by Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ<sup>96</sup> from the Cultural Association's (Câu Lạc Bộ Văn Hoá) History and Geography Research Committee (Nhóm Nghiên cứu Sử Địa) for official opinion on the issue of reading and writing proper nouns that are foreign personal names and foreign specific places (Vấn đề viết và đọc Nhân-Danh cùng Địa Danh ngoại quốc).<sup>97</sup> The work of the Cultural Association was to standardize these terms for general usage. The Coordinating Ministry begins the response by relaying its support of the meaningful (bổ ích) and highly encourageable (rất đáng khuyến khích) work the association was partaking in; ensuring the research committee that the Ministry will readily provide additional testimony on how to address foreign personal names and specific places. The Ministry agrees with the Association's proposition that the foreign proper nouns in question should be written in Vietnamese according to local articulation since this would be most rational (rất hợp lý), most convenient (thuận tiện hơn cả), and is appropriate with the demands of literature studies and the educational trajectory of the (RVN) government (rất thích hợp với nhu cầu hiện tại của nền văn học của nền giáo khoa nước nhà) that as discussed in the above sections pivoted towards the Vietnamese language as the primary national language. However, the Ministry expands on this scheme by further delineating these two types of foreign proper nouns

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<sup>96</sup> Examination of available resources lead me to reasonable conclude that Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ was a member of University of Saigon's Faculty of Education and would eventually resettle in Montreal, Canada. He was a prolific author publishing with Tủ sách nghiên cứu sử địa (Nhóm nghiên cứu sử địa Việt Nam) in Montreal. For examples, see: Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ, *Việt Messenger*, <https://vietmessenger.com/books/?author=nguyen%20khac%20ngu>, accessed July 15, 2023 and Nguyễn Khắc Ngữ, Vương Chiếu Luân Hoán, <https://www.luanhoan.net/tacgiavn/1htm/nguyenkhacngu.htm> accessed July 15, 2023.

<sup>97</sup> While the letter only references 1961 without a month and day, it can be reasonably deduced that since the letter was signed by Trương Công Cừu in his official capacity in the coordinating minister, it was issued *after* Cừu was appointed in late May. Hồ sơ 131 v/v Tài liệu của Bộ Đặc nhiệm VHXH VIV điều chế nhân danh và địa danh sử địa năm 1961. TTLTQDII, Bộ Đặc Nhiệm Văn Hóa và Xã Hội [Social and Cultural Affairs Coordinating Ministerial Department].

according commonly used (thông dụng) or not yet officially standardized (chưa qua luật điển chế) types. I will next address several items of interest raised in this opinion letter in the proceeding paragraphs. However, for a visual schematic of all possible treatment of foreign personal name and specific place proper nouns according to the ministry that I compiled, see Fig. 4 and 5 at the end of this section.

The Ministry addresses commonly used foreign personal name and specific place proper nouns by exhibiting the acceptance of multiculturalism and difference towards traditional practices. When it comes to the “realm of lexicons” (địa hạt từ ngữ), the Ministry declares in the opinion letter that only traditional practices (tập quán) and common usage (thông dụng) can establish rules (định luật mà thôi). The Ministry argues that those proper nouns that have long been established must be thoroughly honored (những danh từ dùng đã quen và đã lâu ngày phải được triệt để tôn trọng). Therefore, the issue of lexical reforms (canh tân từ ngữ) must be well researched to avoid exacerbating any linguistic problem, the Ministry warns. Of these commonly used foreign proper nouns in the Vietnamese lexicon that do not require changes are those from countries that have been culturally Sinicized. The Ministry notes that these nouns are typically borrowed from Chinese characters and read according to Vietnamese vernacular pronunciation. Chinese examples of these categories include: Emperor Gaozu of Han (b. 256-195 BC, Hán Cao Tổ Lưu Bang),<sup>98</sup> Empress Dowager Cixi (b. 1835-1908, Thanh Triêu Từ Hi Thái Hậu),<sup>99</sup> father of the nation Sun Yat-Sen (b. 1866-1925, Quốc phụ Tôn Văn),<sup>100</sup> and Generalissimo Chiang

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<sup>98</sup> 高皇帝 (Gāo huángdì), born 劉邦 (Liú Bāng), first emperor of Han dynasty.

<sup>99</sup> 慈禧太后 (Cǐxǐ tàihòu), born 葉赫那拉 杏貞 (Yè hè nà lā xìng zhēn), Qing dynasty empress.

<sup>100</sup> The opinion letter references Sun Yat Sen, 孫中山 (Sūnzhōngshān) by his birth name 孫文 (Sūn wén) with the added title of Father of the nation, Quốc Phụ or 國父 (Guófù), referring to his title in the Republic of China (Taiwan).

Kai-Shek (b. 1887-1975, Thống Chế Tưởng Giới Thạch).<sup>101</sup> Other examples from countries within the Sinosphere included those proper nouns from Japan, Korea, Manchu and Mongolia.<sup>102</sup> For the Ministry, proper nouns such as these should not be changed but rather incorporate into the vernacular knowledge of the people.

The same principles of linguistical borrowings are applied to countries that may have no apparent cultural connections with the Sinosphere, according to the Ministry, but nonetheless have had contacts with Vietnam or are from the same geographical region. In these cases, the foreign loanwords should be kept unchanged, under the auspices of traditional usage, if they have become common in vernacular language usage. The countries included under this category include Champa, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and India. The Ministry acknowledges that Vietnam has connections (liên hệ) with these neighboring countries that are other than China and are predicated on “binding relationships” (mối tương quan ràng buộc) based on geographical reasons. These countries have otherwise influence proper names in the Vietnamese language. By acknowledging and maintaining the foreign loanwords that are from outside of the East Asia Sinosphere, but rather are from the realm of Southeast Asia, the Ministry recognizes the translocal nature of Vietnamese vernacular knowledge, positioning Vietnam into the Southeast Asia sphere as well. However, ironically, it is only Champa that the Ministry argues has influenced Vietnamese proper names, such Po Binasuor (Chế Bồng Nga) and Jaya Simhavarman III (Chế Mân). The letter references that there are no cultural influences from

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<sup>101</sup> The opinion letter references Chiang Kai-shek, 蔣中正 (Jiǎng zhōngzhèng) with the title of Generalissimo, Thống Chế or Nguyên Soái Yuánshuài (元帥), referring to the title he held in the Republic of China (Taiwan) until his death in 1975.

<sup>102</sup> Japan: Vua Minh Trị (Meiji), Tướng Đông Hưng (Togo), Korea: Cựu Tổng Thống Lý Thừa Vãn (Rhee Shyngman), Manchu: Vua Phổ Nghi (Pou Yi), Mongolia: Thành Cát Tư Hãn (Genghis Khan), Hốt Tất Liệt (Kublai Khan)

surrounding countries of Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand onto Vietnam (không có ảnh hưởng văn hoá với ta), and therefore there are no proper names in Vietnamese with etymology from these countries. This official position is problematic when considering the linguistical and cultural influence of Cambodia onto the Mekong Delta and boarder regions of South Vietnam or the influences of Thailand onto the people of central Vietnam for example, revealing that the constructivist's making of a national identity is not a truth-seeking endeavor but rather involves selectively projecting certain historical circumstances while subverting others.

Similar historically problematic positions can also be found in the realm of religion. According to the Ministry, the one neighboring country that has religious influence on Vietnamese proper nouns is India through Buddhism. However, the Ministry reasons that since Buddhism entered Vietnam through China, most Buddhist proper nouns first have been mediated by the Chinese language, then pronounced according to Sino-Vietnamese principles. It was only later that some of these nouns were modified to match its Indian form more accurately. Take for instance the proper noun “Bouddha” (In French, or “Buddha” in conventional English orthography), an example given in the letter. “Bouddha” is the “Indian” word (according to the Ministry, even though Sanskrit is more etymologically precise) that when adopted by Chinese speakers became Phồ-Tà.<sup>103</sup> When Buddhism entered Vietnam, the once Indian loanword then became a Chinese loanword for Vietnamese speakers becoming Phật-Đà. Overtime, the loanword was shortened to the now commonly used word Phật to represent the proper noun that means “Bouddha.” However, the opinion details that after some time speakers realized that Phật does not

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<sup>103</sup> 佛陀 (Fótuó).

appropriately phonetically index to the Indo-Aryan word for “Bouddha” and thus some began to use the proper noun Bụt to express the word meaning “Bouddha.” The Ministry references that Phật was entered the lexicon through “formation savante” (sự cấu tạo bác học,) whereas Bụt was through “formation populaire” (sự cấu tạo quần chúng). While the opinion does not specify what to do in this specific case representing an appreciation for a non-prescriptive approach to language formation, it does state that commonly used foreign nouns that have entered Vietnam thus becoming common practice should not be extricated. In these cases, the Ministry only advises to add descriptions and clarify (chú thích và cắt nghĩa rõ ràng) that emphasizes linguistic fluidity and respect for common practices.

Credence to common practices is similarly given to certain proper nouns from Western countries. In particular, the Ministry notes those proper individual names that are commonly used and have practically Vietnamese characteristics (đã gần như có tính cách Việt Nam) such as Napoléon (Nã-phá-Luân), Washington (Hoa-thịnh-Đôn), and Louis XIV (Lộ Y Thập Tứ) would not benefit from changing transliteration employed in each of these examples to direct borrowing method. The Ministry continues with literary character examples to show that Vietnamese transliteration can be sufficient in providing the Vietnamese linguistic characteristic (tính cách Việt ngữ) to the proper noun unchanged.

According to the Ministry, commonly used individual name proper nouns does not necessarily equate to not needing modification since some commonly used names still require standardization. However, there are certain commonly used individual name proper nouns that are not convenient (không thuận tiện) or irrational (không hợp lý) that requires standardization regardless of common usage. In these cases, the ministry suggests that the Vietnamese transliteration be used to nativize these loanwords. The letter reveals that while

the First Republic may have been exclusionist in their handling of political descent, the goal of language standardization was not solely for the disruption of cultural practices in the interests of social cohesion, rather a system that absorbed traditional practices was to establish to handle foreign borrowings resulting in the Vietnamization vernacular knowledge on the Republic's own terms.

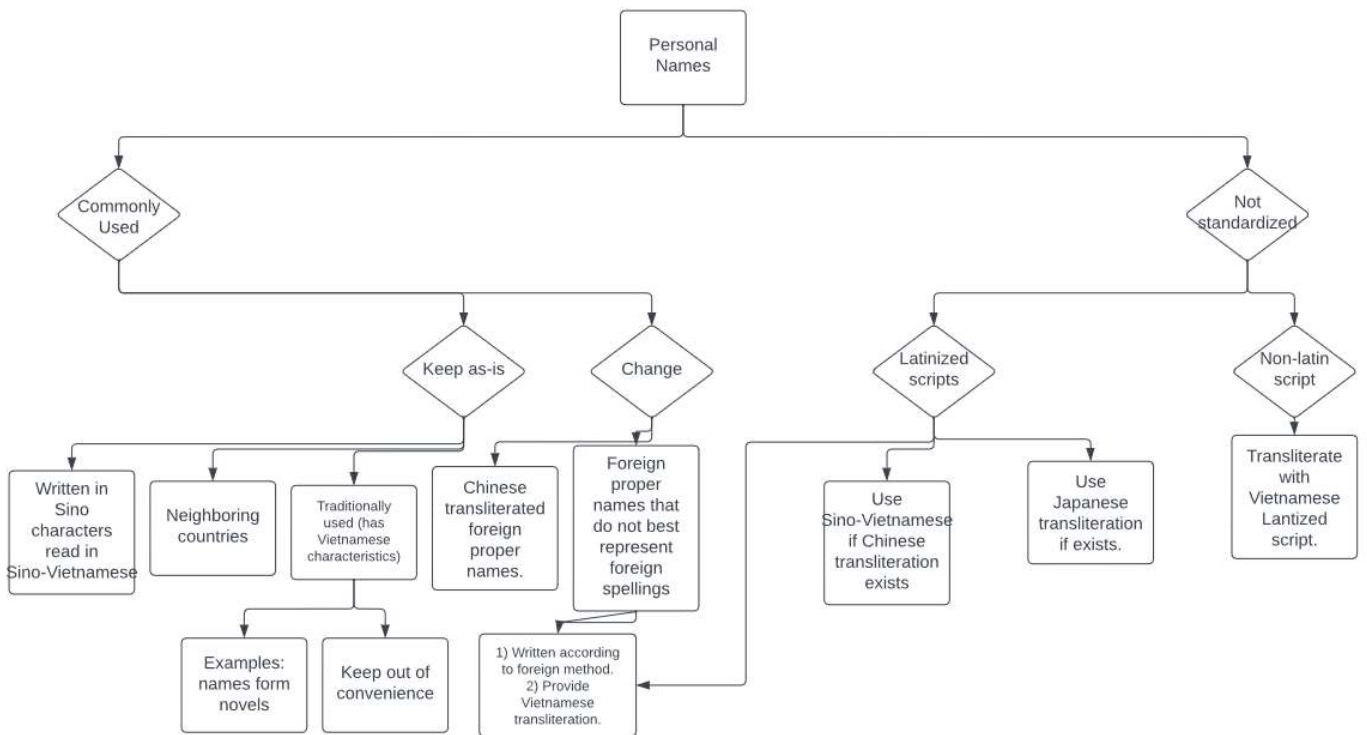
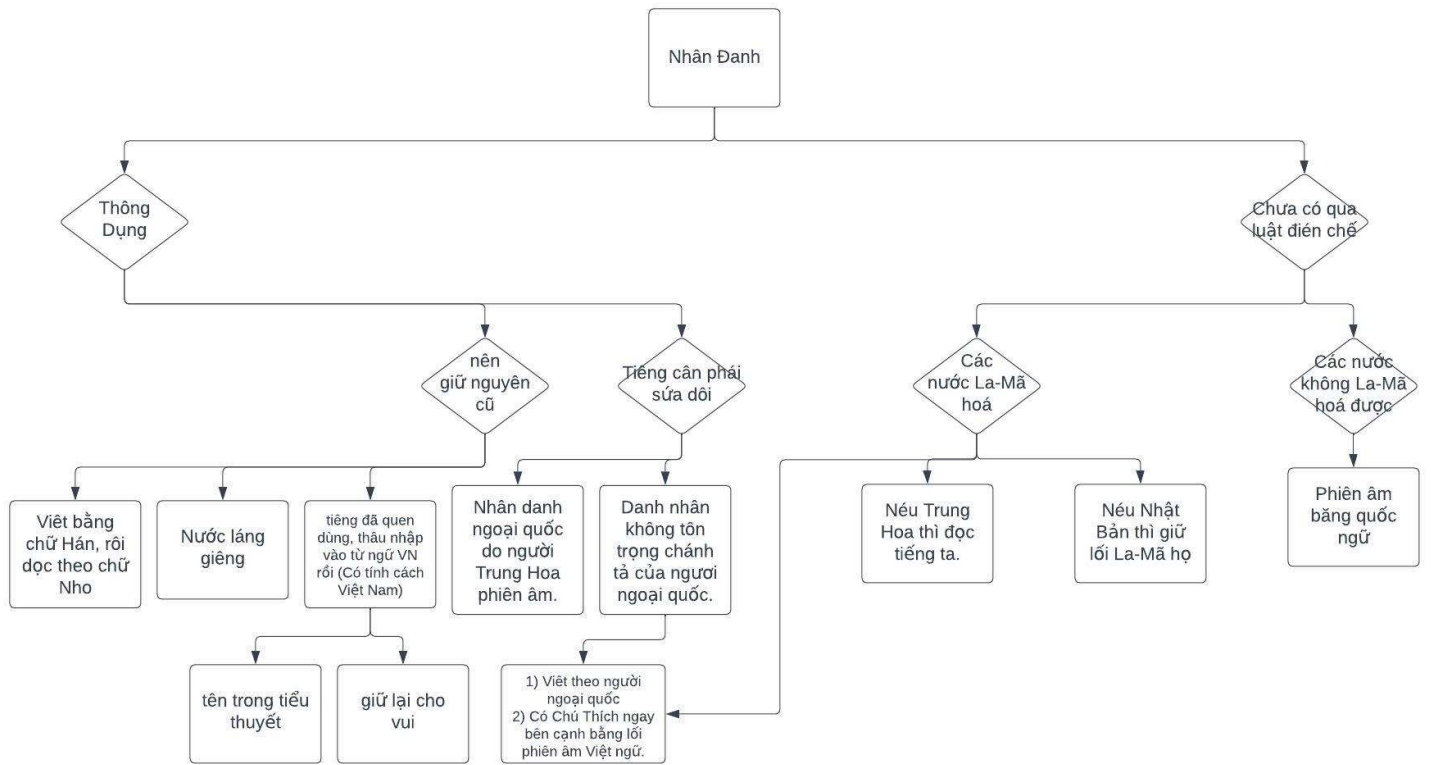


Fig. 4: Foreign personal name proper nouns

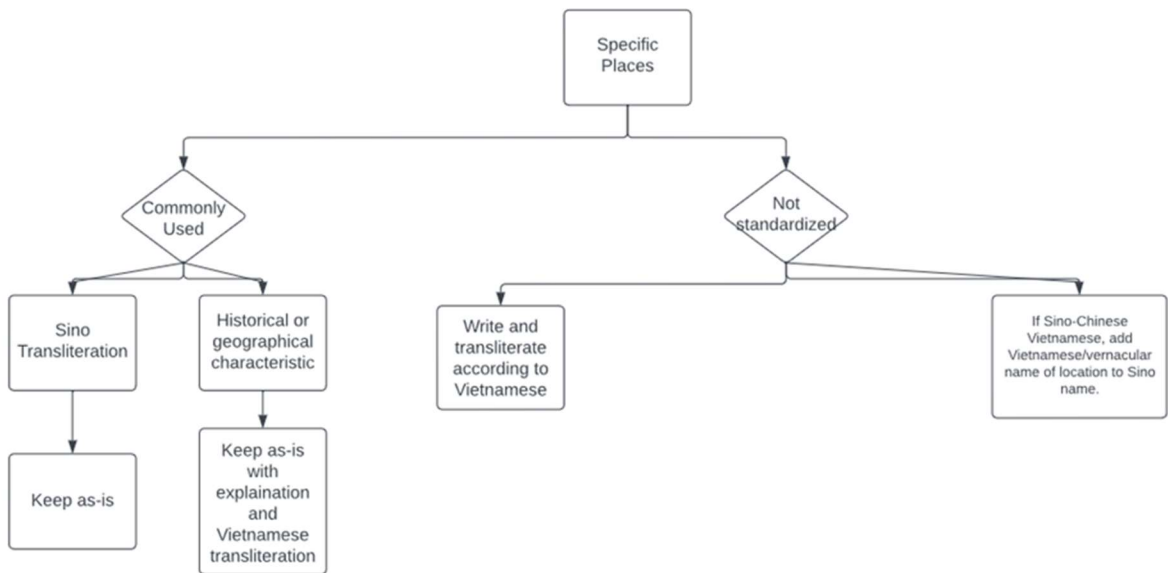
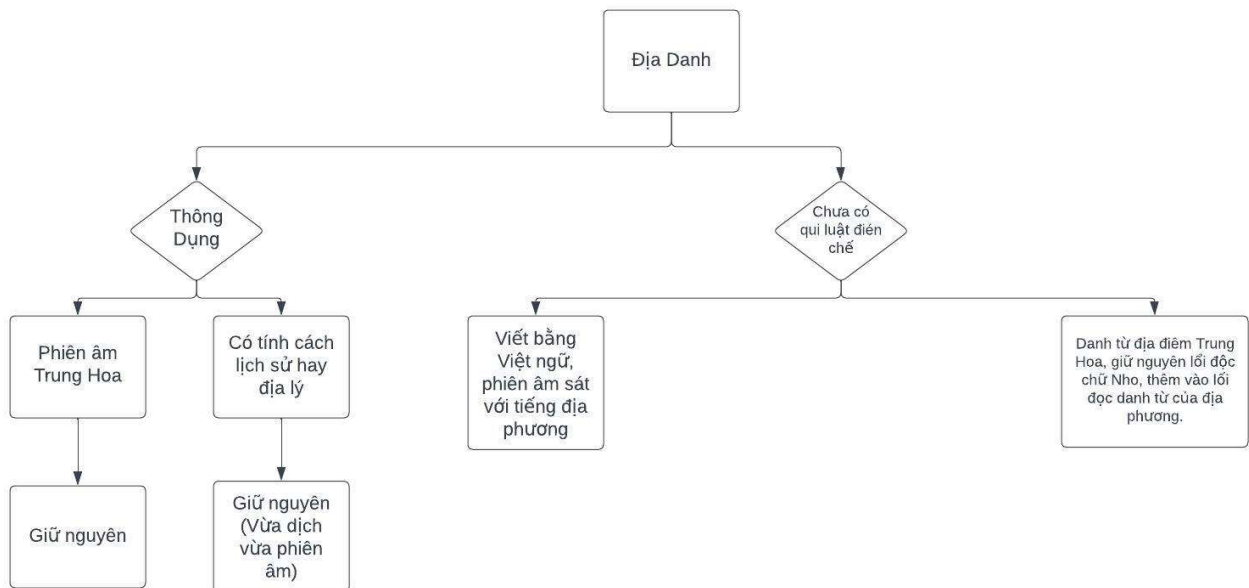


Fig. 5: Foreign specific place proper nouns

## CONCLUSION

In November of 1963, Ngô Đình Diệm, President of the First Republic, along with his brother Ngô Đình Nhu, were arrested and assassinated in a coup d'état that brought an end to close to a decade of rule. The so-called interregnum period (1963-1967) followed and eventually the Second Republic (1967-1975), a regime President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu primarily presided over. Nguyễn Đình Hoà, on the other hand, would not directly witness the rise of the Second Republic but rather as a stateside observer, in the United States where he permanently relocated to in 1965. Hoà took on cultural attaché roles at the Republic of Vietnam embassy in Washington D.C. before transitioning into academic roles at several higher education institutions, where he continued the project of shaping vernacular knowledge through his linguistic and community development workings.

As of 1979, Nguyễn Đình Hoà was the Vice President (Phó Hội trưởng) of the committee to establish a Vietnam cultural preservation society (Ban Văn Động Thành Lập Hội Bảo Vệ Văn Hóa Việt Nam). The interviewer in the New Land interview queries Hoà on the progress of the work this committee was engaging in. Hoà explains that not much had been accomplished because the United States is too large; there needs to be local representatives before there can be a larger society established showing that social reconstruction after a civil war was occurring as much abroad as it was domestically. Similarly, the cultural nation-building projects initiated during the era of the First Republic to unite the Vietnamese people did not simply vanish with the regime's fall. Rather, my initial examination of the Second Republic administrative documents held at Vietnam National Archives II reveals that there are evidence showing the Thiệu regime was just as vested in language-making in the RVN leading up to 1975. Subsequently through the

workings of RVN-affiliated intellectuals such as Hoà, the historicity of language-making became attached to a segment of the Vietnamese imaginary that found refuge in the diaspora.

This thesis sought to explore how the Vietnamese vernacular fits into the First Republic's construction of an all-inclusive national Vietnamese identity imbued with its own sets of ideologies and political ends. Nguyễn Đình Hoà's New Land interview was the gateway into linguistic contestations that fall under political and cultural realms that revealed language standardization processes grounded in historical roots. While the concern for this study was to trace those roots to the First Republic, with only some comparisons made to the DRVN, it is nevertheless clear that there were differences between the approaches of the two competing governments. The First Republic sought to implement a form of standardization that was less concerned with being prescriptive but accepting of traditional usages of foreign languages and foreign loanwords, as evidenced by my examination of Hoà's work under the First Republic (as a representative of the RVN), the position of language at the University of Saigon, and my analysis of the Ministerial letter. However, language was also meant to actualize a sense of legitimacy and had decolonial aspects meant to form Vietnamized vernacular knowledge. In this sense, the Vietnamese language embodied what Vietnamese-ness is and was to be. This position is best represented by the role of language at the University of Hue, where I referenced how Vietnamese was elemental to Ngô Đình Diệm's larger cultural nation-building project through my examination of various primary and secondary sources – for example, a Viet Nam Times article authored by Nguyễn Đình Hoà.

Nguyễn Đình Hoà's strong objections to the language standardization occurring in Vietnam as of 1979 in the New Land interview can be traced to the First Republic's stance on language standardization. For the First Republic, the codification of language was not to emphasize radical changes to linguistic traits but rather to be more accepting of vernacular culture for which foreign influences on language was a site of examination in this study. Such an inclusive and fluid stance on the Vietnamese language is also evident in Hoà's subsequent work completed during his career in the United States. However, my examination of language in the First Republic also exposes a paradox that exists in the First Republic. On the one hand, linguistic diversity was relatively accepted and even embraced, while political diversity (or dissent) was met with repression, showing that both were simultaneously true.

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