

THE ROLE OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN DURING THE VIETNAM WAR

Miss Phatsurang Dechabuddharungsi

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts Program in Southeast Asian Studies  
(Interdisciplinary Program)  
Graduate School  
Chulalongkorn University  
Academic Year 2010  
Copyright of Chulalongkorn University

บทบาทของผู้หญิงเวียดนามในช่วงสงครามเวียดนาม

นางสาว พัชรสุรางค์ เศษาทุทธรังษี

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา (สหสาขาวิชา)

บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

ปีการศึกษา 2553

ลิขสิทธิ์ของจุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

Thesis Title            THE ROLE OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN DURING THE  
VIETNAM WAR  
By                        Miss Phatsurang Dechabuddharungsi  
Field of Study        Southeast Asian Studies  
Thesis Advisor        Assistant Professor Theera Nuchpiam, Ph.D.  
Thesis Co-advisor    Assistant Professor Montira Rato, Ph.D.

---

Accepted by the Graduate School, Chulalongkorn University in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree

..... Dean of the Graduate School  
(Associate Professor Pornpote Piumsomboon, Ph.D.)

#### THESIS COMMITTEE

..... Chairman  
(Klairung Amratisha, Ph.D.)

..... Thesis Advisor  
(Assistant Professor Theera Nuchpiam, Ph.D.)

..... Thesis Co-advisor  
(Assistant Professor Montira Rato, Ph.D.)

..... External Examiner  
(Associate Professor Sophana Srichampa, Ph.D.)

พัชรสุรศักดิ์ เคาพทุทธิรังษี: บทบาทและหน้าที่ของผู้หญิงชาวเวียดนามที่มีผลต่อสงครามเวียดนาม (THE ROLE OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN DURING THE VIETNAM WAR) อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก: ผศ.ดร.ธีระนุชเปี่ยม, อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ร่วม: ผศ.ดร.มนธิรา ราโท, 130 หน้า

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้จะเน้นในเรื่องของบทบาทและความสำคัญของผู้หญิงในสงครามเวียดนามโดยดูจากบันทึกทางประวัติศาสตร์ที่ถูกเขียนขึ้น โดยผู้หญิงชาวเวียดนามเจ้าของเรื่องหรือเป็นการร่วมมือการของนักเขียนเจ้าของเรื่องและนักเขียนร่วม วิทยานิพนธ์เล่มนี้จะพูดถึงประเด็นเกี่ยวกับผลกระทบของสงครามเวียดนามต่อผู้หญิงทั้งระหว่างสงครามเองและผลกระทบที่เกิดขึ้นหลังจากสงครามสิ้นสุดลง การวิจัย ณ จุดนี้ มีเป้าหมายที่จะศึกษาค้นคว้าแง่มุมต่างๆของบทบาทและหน้าที่ของผู้หญิงชาวเวียดนามอย่างละเอียด และในเรื่องของผลกระทบทั้งทางตรงและทางอ้อมของสงครามเวียดนามที่มีต่อผู้หญิง และในขณะเดียวกันผลกระทบของการที่ประเทศเวียดนามถูกแบ่งแยกออกเป็นสองภาค ภาคเหนือและภาคใต้ ความแตกต่างทางสังคมและอุดมการณ์ได้นำไปสู่ความแตกต่างทางสภาพความเป็นอยู่ ระบบการคิด และสุดท้ายคือ บทบาทและสถานะของผู้หญิงเวียดนามทั้งสองภาคอีกด้วย การวิจัยนี้เป็นการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพมุ่งเน้นเรื่องการวิเคราะห์เชิงลึกกับบันทึกทางประวัติศาสตร์และข้อมูลทางประวัติศาสตร์ต่างๆที่เกี่ยวกับหัวข้อดังกล่าว และได้มีการทำวิจัยลงพื้นที่ซึ่งตัวผู้เขียนได้มีโอกาสไปเยี่ยมชมและศึกษาจากพิพิธภัณฑ์ประวัติศาสตร์ผู้หญิง ณ เมืองฮานอย ประเทศเวียดนาม ตัวผู้เขียนมีความคาดหวังว่าการวิจัยครั้งนี้จะนำพามาซึ่งคำตอบของคำถามที่ว่าผู้หญิงชาวเวียดนามนั้น ได้มีบทบาททัศนคติเพื่อชาติเวียดนามอย่างไรและตัวสงครามเวียดนามเองมีผลกระทบใดใดกับชีวิตของพวกเขาเหล่านั้นบ้าง

สาขาวิชา: เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

ปีการศึกษา: 2553

ลายมือชื่อนิติ.....

ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์หลัก.....

ลายมือชื่อ อ.ที่ปรึกษาวิทยานิพนธ์ร่วม.....

# # 5287664720: MAJOR: SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES

KEY WORDS: VIETNAM WAR/ MARXIST-LENINIST/ HO CHI MINH/  
VIETNAMESE WOMEN/ THE VIETNAMESE COMMUNIST PARTY

PHATSURANG DECHABUDDHARUNGSI: THE ROLE OF VIETNAMESE  
WOMEN DURING THE VIETNAM WAR. ADVISOR: ASST. PROF.  
THEERA NUCHPIAM, Ph.D., CO-ADVISOR: ASST. PROF. MONTIRA  
RATO, Ph.D., 130 pp.

This thesis will emphasize on the contributions of the Vietnamese women towards the Vietnam War as represented in selected texts authored or co-authored by the Vietnamese women. Initially, it is found that women's contributions in the Vietnam War do not showcase only what happened 'during' the war, but also how the war is affected by the aftermath of the contributions themselves. Moreover, the contributions of the Vietnamese Women are categorized by the socio-ideological differences between the North and the South. The materials chosen will determine the actuality of these distinguished contributions. It will also discuss how they are affected by the war, both during the wartime and in the postwar period. The objectives of the research are to examine the different aspects of Vietnamese women's social roles and obligations during the Vietnam War and to investigate the influence of the Vietnam War on Vietnamese women. This research is qualitative in approach and employs the analysis of memoirs, literary texts, and historical data. A fieldwork observation was conducted at the Museum of Women in Hanoi, Vietnam. It is hoped that the findings of the research can give an answer to what extent the Vietnamese women have contributed to as well as their lives have affected by the Vietnam War.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies

Academic Year: 2010

Student's Signature.....

Advisor's Signature.....

Co- advisor's Signature.....

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely show my grateful gratitude and respect to Dr. Sunait Chutintaranont, the Director of Southeast Asian studies Master's degree program, who has academically given me a historical inspiration to look up to. My admiration also goes to the administrative officers at the Southeast Asians Studies office who have kindly facilitated my academic effort since the first day of school

This acknowledgement cannot be completed without a loving gratefulness to both of my advisors; Assistant Professor Dr. Theera Nuchpiam and Assistant Professor Dr. Montira Rato who have set many remembering examples of how an academic writer should write and have assured my determination to proceed further study on the Vietnamese history.

My appreciation of encouragement also rests with my beloved parents and closed friends who have been there throughout this journey.

Lastly, I would like to remind myself this thesis of not only being a token of partial success in my academic career but also a memory of caring, support and fun me and my classmates shared since the beginning of this program.

# CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
Abstract (in Thai).....	iv
Abstract (in English).....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Contents.....	vii
List of Figures.....	x
Abbreviations.....	xi
Chapter I Introduction.....	1
Background of study.....	3
Literature review.....	9
Social roles and obligations.....	12
Impact of war on women’s roles.....	13
Introductory analysis of the Vietnamese women’s contributions...	
Major arguments/Hypothesis.....	15
Objectives.....	16
Research questions.....	16
Research methodology.....	16
Conceptual framework.....	16
Scope of Research.....	19
Significance of research.....	20

## Chapter II **War and women in Vietnamese history**

Traditional war during the Chinese occupation.....21

### Chinese cultural heritage on the role of the Vietnamese women

Vietnamese women vs. Patriarchy.....25

Vietnamese women vs. Hierarchy.....26

### Women Society and The French Indochina War

Vietnamese society: The French Authority and The Vietnamese Women.....27

Vietnam Women's Union.....33

The August Revolution 1945.....35

Dien Bien Phu.....38

### Vietnamese Women under The Communist-influenced Regime and The American War

Women Emancipation.....43

Marxist-influenced Ideologies and Organizations.....44

Women's War as People's War.....45

Women's Liberated Zone.....47

Women of Victory.....48

## Chapter III **Vietnamese women on the front line and their lives after war**

Vietnamese Women at the Frontline.....51

War Child.....60

Last night I dreamed of peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram...64

A Buddhist Nun and Social Change amidst War.....77



When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Child of War, A Woman of Peace.....	84
<b>Women in the Aftermath of War</b>	
The story <i>The Girl in the Picture</i> (Kim Phuc story).....	90
The Novel <i>Women on the Island</i> by Ho Anh Thai.....	95
Chapter IV Conclusion.....	100
Suggestions of further research.....	101
References.....	103
Appendices.....	108
Biography.....	130

## LIST OF FIGURES

	<b>Page</b>
Figure 1. Illustration of The Trung Sisters.....	23
Figure 2. Illustration of Nguyen Thi Minh Khai.....	33
Figure 3. Illustration of The Hoa Lo Prison.....	36
Figure 4. Illustration of Ba Bang Tam.....	37
Figure 5. Illustration of Ha Thi Que.....	38
Figure 6. Illustration of My Lai Massacre.....	56
Figure 7. Illustration of My Lai Massacre.....	59
Figure 8. Illustration of War Child.....	61
Figure 9. Illustration of Dung Nguyen or Juliet Lac.....	62
Figure 10. Illustration of Last Night I Dreamed of Peace.....	64
Figure 11. Illustration of Dang Thuy Tram.....	76
Figure 12. Illustration of Learning True Love: How I learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam.....	78
Figure 13. Illustration of Sister Phuong’s social work.....	83
Figure 14. Illustration of When Heaven and Earth Changed Places.....	85
Figure 15. Illustration of Le Ly Hayslip.....	87
Figure 16. Illustration of the famous ‘The Girl in The Picture’.....	90
Figure 17. Illustration of Kim Phuc holding her first-born baby son.....	94
Figure 18. Illustration of The Women on Island.....	96

## ABBREVIATIONS

DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
PLAF	People's Liberation Armed Forces
VNQDD	Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang
ICP	International Communist Party
USSR	The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VCP	Vietnam Communist Party
VC	Viet Cong
NLF	National Liberation Front

# CHAPTER I

## Introduction

### 1. Background of study

The history of Vietnam War could not be told without recognizing that it was just the latest episode of the country's struggle against invaders which had been going on almost countless times in the past. A number of well-known studies have produced a lot of works since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. Knowledge has been accumulated and distributed in response to the curious world what witnessed one of the most important wars in the history of mankind. Thousands of accounts--whether written by American, French, or Asian authors--have detailed an immensely extensive story of the war. These accounts covered numerous issues ranging from political manipulation and military strategy to social adjustability and adaptability of the Vietnamese as well as the Americans towards the war. All in all, the most significant aspect of all these accounts was how the local people had fought the invaders. The masculinity of the battlefield has been very much often portrayed by most academic accounts with references emphasizing how army men and supporters risked their lives for their nation. The interesting question is how much women were involved in the scene? On historical grounds, I strongly believe that women studies at the Vietnam War have not been widely done. Up until now, my academic experiences have pointed out some important issues arising from different types of research on women and their contributions whether in political, economic or social realms. Most important studies have usually focused on gender relationship between women and society, women having an equal status quo to men or even a theory of feminism. Usually, almost every kind of research has elevated the status of women making them fit into the society which was once unfit to them. They have focused on how women's contributions in modern age have impacted modern society. This is also very much appealing in today's educational institutions mostly with the tertiary level. In the modern era, colleges and universities around the world which offer various courses on gender studies and society, gender relationships or gender equality apparently call attention to the impact of women's contributions. Nevertheless, not many of them have given importance to the history of 'women's contributions to war'.

In fact, can there be a just war? Often when discussing about wars, women have been left out of the scene. The reason can be that no one has dared to take femininity into the insane world

of wars in which actually women have been involved as much as men have. The Vietnam War has overwhelmingly given rise to a lot of stories of how women blended perfectly in the war. The US involvement in Indochina particularly in Vietnam generated a deep interest in how women had done for their country along with their male counterparts. Behind every battlefield, every village and every household, there were women who stood behind men's back (some in front) using every bit of their capacity in maintaining national independence for their country.

The history of Vietnamese women's contributions certainly did not have its starting and ending points in the US-Vietnam War only, but it had begun long time ago. Prior to the beginning of the American epoch in Vietnam, many Vietnamese women had emerged as leaders of the fight against invaders, starting from an era of the Trung sisters, Lady Trieu Thi Trinh, or the Queen Mother Linh Nhan. Although their natural roles were to give birth to both men and women, the complexity of national misfortunes had inevitably made us reconsider what were actually the 'roles' of these women. According to the historical evidence, their roles were often considered as fighters, supporters as well as advocates. For instance, the contributions of the Trung sisters go historically back to the period of Chinese domination when the sisters led a revolt against the Chinese and set up an independent court. This was no different than what Lady Trieu Thi Trinh did for her fellow countrymen. In her husband's absence, Trieu Thi Trinh used her power to advocate better treatment for slave girls in 1117. And prior to the advent of the French, there was a woman general named Bui Thi Xuan who commanded a unit of the famous Tay Son rebellion against the ruling Vietnamese Nguyen lords in Southern Vietnam. Apparently, in contributing to preventing their nation from collapsing in the face of the intruders like the Chinese or maintaining the national order during the chaotic Tay Son period, those women have left stories of bravery and dedication that no one in Vietnam would forget.

For Vietnamese authorities, cadres, army men and civilians, Vietnam's victory in the First Indochina War was an overwhelming combination of happiness and sorrow and no one would want to be involved in such belligerency anymore. Only a decade later, however, Southeast Asia was to face a new violent conflict in Vietnam – this time it was the Americans who were involved in the new belligerence. Behind all realities and perceptions portrayed in thousands of accounts about American involvement in Vietnam which resulted in the most brutal bloodshed on both sides, the Vietnamese women had never left the battle scene and abandoned their roles in

supporting war effects. Given the reality of women's involvement in wars, one cannot deny that women had been carrying on the ascribed roles from the tiniest part within individual households to a dangerous front-line position on the battlefield. Hence, it is significant to bear in mind a question of whether a war makes history or history makes such a war. The question is that how women's war stories are different from those of the men – and especially how the women's stories remake the history of war. In whatever ways, the historical trauma being retold by the women is all stunning. All in all, two questions must be raised before literatures could be reviewed.

- What were the different aspects of social roles and obligation of women in the Vietnam War?
- How much had the impact of the Vietnam War had on women's roles?

## 2. Literature Review

Basically, it is importantly relevant to this research to review what previous authors have written so far about the Vietnam War which is the background setting throughout this thesis. It is to show how different authors have put Vietnam War in a slightly different frame, in which the history of women springs from.

Some of well-known accounts on the Vietnam War are *Vietnam A History* by Stanley Karnow (1997), *Understanding Vietnam* by Neil L. Jamieson (1993), and *Vietnam A Long History* by Nguyen Khac Vien (2009). There has never been any issue in the Vietnamese historiography that would have been globally renowned and consistently studied over decades by western and eastern scholars as much as the Vietnam War has. That is why among the key accounts of the history of the Vietnam War I chose to review are those three books; two are from a western scholar point of view and the other is from a Vietnamese one. They are all written by male authors that seem to best represent the actuality of war. Behind the truth, of course, lie the stories of women. The Vietnam War caused large numbers of casualties, leaving a torturing memory to those who lost their loved ones and those who might have been separated from their families by the impact of the war. Realistically, these occurred to both nations - the winner and the loser alike. A very interesting number of academic accounts on the Vietnam War have

actually come from the US side. These started pouring in right after the War had ended, when friendship was also beginning to be revived.

The United States had actually been responsible for not less than 75 per cent of the expenses of the First Indochina War, which amounted to about US\$2.5 billion. The reason for this support was the concern that the communist victory might result in the expansion of communism in Asia. The First Indochina War ended with the Geneva Accords in 1954 that temporarily divided Vietnam into two parts at the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel. The second cause that had attracted the US government's interest in Vietnam was the Geneva agreement whose official accord approved by the great powers stated that Vietnam was to be temporarily divided at the 17<sup>th</sup> Parallel. French troops and the Viet Minh army were to be withdrawn and a nationwide election for the reunification was to be taken place. The troops and bases were withdrawn, but the election never took place. The problematic thing in 1956 was that all great powers ranging from France, China, Soviet Union, and Great Britain were affirmative on their consent but only the US decided only to 'take note' but never committed itself to it. The US did refuse to join other countries in officially committing itself to the Accords but declared that it would refrain from the use of force to disrupt the Agreements (Karnow, 1997; 233). It was a miserable sign for Vietnam. In the period after the Geneva Conference, the US begun sending aid directly to the South Vietnam regime which was governed by Ngo Dinh Diem, supported by the US. To signal the growing American commitment to Diem, President Eisenhower dispatched a new special envoy, his World War II colleague General J. Lawton Collins. Collins, instructed to help train an army for Diem, recommended \$100 million in aid for the new government.

In the year 1956, Vietnam was supposed to have an election which would bring about a reunification of North and South. Diem could not let that happen because he was anxious that the Northern Communist Party led by Ho Chi Minh would undoubtedly win the election. Still, his prediction was to come true 21 years later. Instead, Ngo Dinh Diem set up a concentration camp and began a campaign of terror against all those who demanded enforcement of the Accords (Karnow, 1997; 222). And that was when the US had continuously been sending troops and military aid into South Vietnam for the purpose of preventing the Communist bloc in the North from spreading into the South and later all Southeast Asian countries. Before the period of the

war of attrition which would be escalated from 1965 onwards, the Americans had one such solid mind-set that democracy and capitalism could be imported to Vietnam. That was technically the ideology President Eisenhower had at that time. Extremely unfortunate, democracy cannot be imported or exported as this ideology did not physically exist. It was not some commodity or asset that a group of people can teach the others how to shape it up or formalize it. The Americans simply did not understand what was really the war they were fighting and what was the purpose of it. The result was not only the amount of casualties on both sides, but it was also a global lesson learned by every generation ever since.

The Vietnam War, in this respect, the story of the Second Indochina War, is one of the best masterpieces in the historiography of Vietnam according to what Nguyen Khac Vien said in his book. The reason is that each account, among thousands of them, has offered a variety of channels where such knowledge is disseminated. For example, the Vietnam War by Karnow offers an extremely careful and factual history free of both anti-Communist and antiwar mythologies, whereas Nguyen Khac Vien has built a one-of-a-kind localization of history without prejudices as many would have expected it. Behind this brutal setting of war, the aspect of women's contribution is being picked up. In several other books and articles, it is the thesis question in which how exactly did the Vietnamese women contribute to the cause and effect of the Vietnam War?

In fact, there is another interesting book by an American author *Christian G. Appy* called *Vietnam: The Definitive Oral History Told From All Sides* which was one of so many books I began reading and started to rethink about the thesis question. The book has included hundreds of critical, bitter or even emotional interviews and remarks from vivid memories of people who lived, fought, suffered from and survived it. Absolutely some women took a part in reviewing their history within this book. A woman named Tran Thi Gung escaped the American bombings by hiding herself in a tunnel like the famous Cu Chi tunnel for seven days (Appy, 2008; 15). Then she used this as a strategic camouflage to attack the American soldiers one by one and even shoot some airplanes day by day. She gave the reason for joining the guerilla army that her father had been killed by the puppet soldiers of the Southern regime and also her neighborhood suffered from poverty and deprivation from freedom and unfair and brutal treatment. Another historical record in the book was a woman who was a South Vietnamese soldier. The wife waited



for several decades for her husband, Luyen Nguyen, to return home from prison. The main saying is when the husband, Luyen Nguyen, told the author that 'she divorced her second husband and waited for me'. From this account onwards, women's history in Vietnam during the war has gradually become a completing jigsaw. It was actually half of the picture of the overall situation since women are all that men got at that time. Without one another, it could not have been a complete picture of what and how was the Vietnam War like.

Aforementioned, there are a number of accounts on the War and particularly on the Vietnamese women at war but those that suitably reveal a background and analysis supporting this thesis are handful. This thus should begin with the work of David G. Marr who wrote a well-argued chapter on women in Vietnam, yet inconclusive, in his *Tradition on Trial 1920-1945*. His work on Vietnamese anti-colonialism is well renowned including the one on the Vietnamese women. The book has chronicled an intellectually impressive detail of the period when Vietnam encountered social upheaval as well as a certain degree of economic development. All this was prior to the outbreak of hostilities caused by wars. A chapter called 'The Question of Women' is also included in the book which interestingly portrays how such a question should be answered. Truthfully, Marr has never written anything concerning the history of Vietnamese women before, but this chapter carefully depicts the condition of Vietnamese women in the traditional society of Vietnam from the earliest period until the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter has revealed the truth about how a Western male writer reflects the women society of Far East like Vietnam from a number of strong documents written by others in a very 'feminine' way. The reason is that the work has mostly been supported by a number of powerful documents written by Vietnamese scholars who, in the past, had been moved by the stories and spirits of Vietnamese women. Some of them, of course, were the Vietnamese women whose courage and endeavor in reviving the spirits of Vietnamese women society have continued to be very influential to the present day.

David G. Marr reviewed important texts, pamphlets, and books in the early traditional society and illustrated the development of perspectives towards women that had changed gradually from time to time. On the background of this was how Confucianism had inevitably been conceptualized as the main Vietnamese cultural influence on which such development was based. However, the roles of Vietnamese women being discussed in it, was hardly the main argument in the chapter at all. Instead, it was rather smoothly and understandably crystallized

through lively documents by famous Vietnamese thinkers, advocates and revolutionists. Surprisingly, some important male intellectual figures took a part in it.

The works and contributions that the author chose to represent his 'answer' to the question of women are from Dang Van Bay, Nguyen Trai, Nguyen Dinh Chieu, Phan Boi Chau, Pham Quynh, Suong Nguyet Anh, Trinh Dinh Ru, Dam Phuong, Mme Nguyen Duc Nhuan, Tran Thi Nhu Man, Cuu Kim Son, and Van Hue, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai and Nguyen Thi Dinh. Marr managed to put a rhythm on these significant numbers of work and shed bright light on the other truth about Vietnamese women in a society that had waited long to be freed. Being free from a Confucian society was almost impossible but being free from oppression in such society is a different story. The sharp beginning of the chapter says it all. It tells me, from a Dang Van Bay point of view, about how a woman, during the time of social hardships and suppressions, had been ill-treated not by an outsider, but her own family member, her husband. From this point onwards, The author pinpointed the essence of Dang Van Bay's writing that the society put too much pressure upon the women especially when they became conscious of what kind of conditions they lived in but still lacked enough 'incentives' to stand against. The colonial setting even complicated the issue.

Vietnamese society as a whole was gradually wedded with the new exploitative aspects of Neo-Confucianism. It was that the women's backs had to shoulder the feudal yoke that combined the 'three submissions and the three virtues' and that later combined with colonialism to suppress women even more. Nguyen Trai and Nguyen Dinh Chieu are among writers of traditional society that the author chose to represent the 'traditional attitudes' towards women with. The message that could be acquired through this is pretty strong because they both highlight the key character of what a 'righteous' woman is like through a concept of chastity and female subservience. Apparently in the chapter, it has been exemplified with a couple of translated poems stressing how important it was for a female person to retain her precious virginity and how worthless a life could turn out when it was lost.

Another main facet in this chapter is about the educational opportunity for women. The author picked up the work of one of the most famous thinkers and revolutionists 'Phan Boi Chau' who wrote a fascinating drama concerning the Trung sisters and a primary school text

which placed emphasis on women being ‘mothers of the nation’. Definitely the two pieces of writings did fit perfectly together as well as along with the writing of Pham Quynh whose main focus was also on giving education to women. Phan Boi Chau, by the perspective of Marr concerning women story, did not just keep seeking a way, although traditional, out of French colonial sphere, but also a way for women to take a role in forthcoming anti-colonial struggles.

Emerging out of traditionalism, according to Marr, Phan Boi Chau’s sentiments were to be shared by the most famous female activist Dam Phuong who initially founded the Women’s Labor-Study Association. It can be said that the association was a mother of The Vietnamese Women’s Union which would be established not so many years later. Basically, the Women’s Labor-Study Association’s focus was on women’s opportunity in receiving adequate education particularly in occupational skills. This was to enhance a self-development of a woman in the face of and preparation for colonial advancement. Dam Phuong was among the first women who challenged the Confucian society by rejecting the three submissions and virtues, still a woman must be a good mother or a ‘citizen mother’. The educated mothers of the nation were all these thinkers would expect the Vietnamese women to be. Through Marr’s own analysis, education seems to be one crucial aspect that would finally ‘liberate’ the oppressive regime Vietnam was also struggling to get through. Moreover there were school texts invented by Trinh Dinh Ru which was represented the initial stage of patriotic implications being potentially presented.

‘Phu Nu Tan Van’ was the name of the famous women’s newspaper that signaled a new phase in discussing women’s roles which was founded by Mme Nguyen Duc Nhuan. Mme Nguyen Duc Nhuan and Tran Thi Nhu Man were among the traditional mothers of ‘Vietnamese women journalism’ whose message on equality spread through a new means of printing and knowledge about ‘women for society’ disseminated. When it comes to a new concept of Marxism, it was explained through the political participations of the two female cadres Nguyen Thi Minh Khai and Nguyen Thi Dinh. By socializing with the nation as they should, these women as well as the rest of the population finally partook in the process of national salvation where most of them were more than willing, but some of them might be obliged to join by an irresistible wave of patriotism.

David G. Marr's book chapter "The question of women" is seemingly trying to put the status of Vietnamese women on trial. Perspectives being shown through the smart selected studies of those Vietnamese thinkers are very tangible to some extent, but they are still what most people 'expect' out of the core reality. The educated mothers of the nation could be those fortunate women who had been given chances in participating in whatever activities which the 'ordinary women' might not have. The women who joined or being forced into the actual war, not just battles and those who were massively mobilized for the war are still left behind. The gap to fill in is still there.

The emphasis of my research is the contributions of the Vietnamese women during the Vietnam War. However the contributions laid out in this thesis imply to certain situations in which women 'did' contribute or 'were indirectly' put into the condition causing a certain kind of contribution. Thus the contributions of women had been given to the nation on the ground of several reasons whether by participation or victimization. Nevertheless from the literature point of view, Vietnam could emerge out of war ruins as a victorious nation at the end overcoming all obstacles because of such contributions. Arlene Eisen put a theoretical frame to shape up another method of what are women's contributions during the Vietnam War.

For *Women and Revolution in Viet Nam* by Arlene Eisen, the research turns out to be practically theoretical in which the author has pointed out a number of theories that represent how the women's roles were placed in the setting of war. When everything comes down as one, it is still the half of the jigsaw in which the other half I intend to fill them in.

The Great Father of independence of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh, once gave a speech in a meeting abroad regarding women and society. According to a women newspaper published in Vietnam in 1930, he said "women make up half of society If women are not liberated, the society is not free" (Eisen, 1984; 110). This has raised another issue prior to discussing about the contribution of women at war. It was how women had lived their lives throughout the war period and what had been the conditions of the Vietnamese Women since the arrival of foreign troops namely the French and the Americans. It was to be solid evidence about how women used to be suffered by such arduous life imposed upon by the social norms and foreign rules. The implication is that to liberate women is to yield them the power they need in order to stand-up

fighting for their rights of living and of protecting their national identity. This would bring about how the emancipation of women emerged which led to their full stream of contributions towards the war. As Arlene Eisen, the author of *'Women and Revolution in Viet Nam'* (1984) discussed about roots of women's oppression, the conditions of women and their livelihood in the country of a century of war continuity were difficult and laborious comparing to a condition of women in other Southeast Asian countries. The roots would explain the different aspects of social roles and obligations both prior to and during the Vietnam War. As Eisen stated in the book that,

*Women's Liberation is Giai Phong Phu Nu that focuses on economic security, the right to work at a job that won't break your back, health, education, the opportunity to rest, equal rights and freedom from polygamy and other patriarchal traditions. Their concept of women's emancipation also incorporates a struggle to end the ideological and psychological subordination of women, which they usually identify as holding women in contempt. The obstacles, the author as well as me believe, faced by the Vietnamese women have much more to do with living in a country ravaged by colonialism and war than with women's status relative to men (Eisen, 1984; 56).*

Before the process of liberating women which led to their contributions towards the war, there was actually none of these pointed out by the author. Economic security was a back-burden of women doing an unpaid job for a landlord who turned out to be French collaborator or a factory job with grueling condition owned by a French officer. For the patriarchal traditions, women were most likely obliged to follow what the social norms had placed upon their status. Basically, it was all about how women would have to obey and do the tasks men were 'expected' not to do. Patriarchy was actually the least influential aspect in accordance with the social roles and obligations of women because the ideology involved with a long sinicization of culture in which obligation turned to be responsibility that no women would refuse on. However, placing importance on the women's contributions, for Arlene Eisen, patriarchal feudalism prevented women from making a contribution to the nation's social and political life commensurate with their potential, in addition to locking women into a cycle of submission and servitude (Eisen, 1984; 198).

On the other hand, the most influential aspect was the ideology created by the intensity of colonialism that started off during the French period. It had changed everything again. The liberation of women became the almost impossible task ever during the time when Vietnam was dominated by the French. The roles and obligations became the hardest tasks to comply or even a fatal responsibility. As once Nyugen Thi Dinh stated 'Women have always been the most oppressed, not because of 'male power' (Eisen, 1984; 111). Rather, they identified their oppressors as feudalists, colonialists and imperialists. Under the French as well as the American society in Vietnam, the Vietnamese people had to face with the society they never expected to live up before. The society became feudal which had driven the roles of women in particular to be of suppressive. This left the women no choice and space of living a secure life under the conditions of the initial state of war. Most young women left an oppressive countryside to work as prostitutes in a city that positioned them as only an object of society's contempt.

The country's independence had gradually been faded away bit by bit not just because of the war generated through political denouncement by the US government, a loosening South Vietnamese regime and a hard-pressed Communism in the North. It was also due to an individual freedom of a woman was being deprived of. According to Arlene Eisen, the most famous female activist Nguyen Thi Dinh who founded the Vietnam Women's Union and later became the President, was the first capable female general who worked her way up to possess the important negotiable characteristic in order to revitalize the 'rights' of the women. The Union was established in the 1930s but most active during the Vietnam War from 1950s onwards. It was initiated due to the intensification of war with the French in which the very first new ideology set forth. The war had created a new set of ideologies that had been influenced by Marxism and Leninism highlighting the rights of individuality of a person. Female representatives, advocates and activists along with ordinary Vietnamese women all over the country had strongly been moved by this phenomenon. As a result, the most significant agenda of the Union was to propagate the mobilization of society especially the women's one into liberating once and for all the nation and its people. Intrinsicly, the mobilization did not entail only the volunteered recruitment of 'hairnet warriors'.

When regarding to the role of women, Karen Gottschang Turner with Phan Thanh Hao who wrote a book called *Even the Women Must Fight* (1998), has passed on the events at war in which the women were taking part of. Their roles were complicated especially when the book focuses on the battlefield of war with the Americans. According to one of the best Vietnamese history books by an American writer, Karen G. Turner, co-authored with a famous Vietnamese woman 'Phan Thanh Hao', *'Even the Women Must Fight'* (1998), it signified in Vietnam that being a mother was being a warrior in order to fight for her children, her family, her house, her village, her district, her province and her country. Once when women were emancipated, they walked to the enemy, some armed but some with bare hands, and fight. The enemy was not only the foreigners, but also the societal oppression and feudal submission that waited to be subverted once the new ideology disseminated. 'Fighting' was meaningful. To fight was not only to point gun at a huge American aircraft, shot down, held a big American pilot in hostage who walked with bowed head along with a tiny but armed Vietnamese girl. To fight was actually to allow the opportunity in every channel to fuel the patriotic Vietnamese troops in every way; from holding shovels and hoes at opening the Ho Chi Minh Trail, placing traps along the road, feeding the guerilla soldiers in the village, supporting the mobility of armaments, or singing songs and prose to mentally support the soldiers.

According to Turner and Hao, women working on the Ho Chi Minh Trail were the biggest contribution in the war ever. In my opinion, it was limitless to what the women had contributed to the war and finally to the final 1975 national reunification. To conclude the Vietnam War is easy, but to build up the running path of women contributions towards the victory is another challenging chapter ahead on this thesis. All in all, the impact of the war definitely revolutionized the environment and society where Vietnamese women belonged handing them the opportunity in saving the nation. Therefore, regarding to what 'kind' of war women had to stand up for was actually the People's war. For example, General Nguyen Thi Dinh, the woman who was Vice-Commander of the PLAF had been arrested several times during the US occupation of Vietnam (Turner and Hao, 1998; 43). She had the evidence portrayed that sometimes after 1965 when she was arrested by the Southern government's soldiers without knowing her identity; many villagers who were aware of her real identity went to jail insisting that she was their relative. When they had convinced her captors of her loyalty to the Saigon

regime, she was released. This incident illustrates the fact that a small, poor country can defeat a large, technologically advanced country if it educates, mobilizes and arms the whole population to resist (Turner and Hao, 1998; 43). This was how people's war originated. Another notion on people's war is that it was not militarily fought, but realistically, there had been a certain war where women had contributed their capability and genuine local wisdom in overcoming all obstacles to win the war. In fact, the Vietnamese cadres might win a battle, but the Vietnamese women and men won almost every battle and the final war.

Women's lives in any other nations have never been retold with so much of desperation and emotion like the Vietnamese women. The introductory literature review is intended to secure another 'liberated zone' based on the mentioned ideologies for the women who had steadfastly and indefatigably fought for the reunification of Vietnam in 1975. Surprisingly, such liberated zone was intrinsically not limited only in one particular area or a group, but it was the national effort contributed by the women militia and supporters from all over Vietnam. These women had eventually re-defined what was the life of war-struggle was and there were several 'lives' of women who were actually living through the cruelty of war, thus giving the new definition of how the war had complicated them. Basically, nearly all the women in the North were part of the militia and formed self-defense teams in factories, fields, schools, and villages against the US air war. On the other hand the Vietnam's Women Union had to carry out quite intensive reforms and activities through what was called 'the National Liberation Front' in the South. The National Liberation Front was deliberated to become as a tool in securing the 'position' of Vietnamese women in the South in participating in the battlefield with the men. There was one particular example in the South. "As human beings, we are not inferior to other people. We're members of the Youth Union. We want to know if you really have the bias against us." Most of the women veterans believed their war service entitled them to full rights as citizen patriots. This was one of a great number of women stories occurring in the south. To overcome layers of feudalism, women especially in the south were applying war service in revealing themselves the potential identity in the Vietnamese society. Colonial culture had deepened the gap created by already-existing feudal society separating the Vietnamese, especially women, from their own society.



For the Southern part of Vietnam, Lenin theory had explained it all. ‘According to Lenin, the oppression of women was rooted in colonial and capitalist exploitation, feudal relations and women’s slave position in the family (Lenin and the issue of liberating women, 1970) (Turner and Hao, 1998; 123). Based on this perception, the party developed numerous slogans strongly agitating for women’s interests and after achieving independence, developed policies to involve women in social activities and create conditions for them to use their competence in the construction of socialism and defense of the country. Responding to the encouragement of the party, generations of Vietnamese women have maintained the active roles in the nation’s history, working shoulder to shoulder with men in every field and making extremely significant contributions to the achievement of national independence and the construction of a new society’ (Turner and Hao, 1998; 121). Leninist theory had always had a strong influence on the Vietnam’s liberating movement since the era of Ho Chi Minh whom the theory had psychologically moved. It was considerably surprising that such moving theory was to also embrace the women’s participation which seemed to have the goal in itself. The ultimate objective was to achieve national independence and the unification of the country to create peace, prosperity and happiness for everyone.

Most histories about Vietnamese women during the war focus on the political context, casualties or theoretical images. Not yet have been those that put emphasis on the retelling moments of the women who had been through the actual incidence of war. This thesis will pick that element up and convey the messages of what are the contributions of Vietnamese women and how they come about. This thesis will be a continuity following what have been done regarding the history of Vietnamese women in the Vietnam War.

### **Major arguments/ hypotheses**

From the legend of Lady Trieu, the Trung sisters fighting under the Chinese domination, women facing the heavy burdens under French colonialism, and those suffering the impacts of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese women have never failed to put up their indefatigable effort in defending the nation. The story of women especially during the Vietnam War strongly suggested that the victory could not have been achieved without their efforts. The effort involved mobilizing troops and village assistance in the north, clearing the Ho Chi Minh Trail and fighting

a guerilla war in the south. Through historical evidence based on literature review, this research aims to testify that duties, rights and responsibilities of Vietnamese women during the Vietnam War 1954-1975 have proved to be significant for the victory over American troops on their soil.

### **Objectives**

- To examine the different aspects of Vietnamese women's social roles and obligations during the Vietnam War.
- To investigate the influence of the Vietnam War on Vietnamese women.

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative method is a major background to which the research methodology in this thesis is based on. According to the revised chart below, the main tool in seeking for accurate answers in order to meet the objectives is textual analysis based on true events and autobiographical accounts and books. On the ground of selecting the texts, it cannot be done randomly. The selected literatures that will meet the objectives have to be a non-fiction genre written according to the real-life experiences of the local Vietnamese women whose 'war lives' are to reveal the truth about their roles, obligations indicating the actuality of hardships both in physical and mental terms. Those literatures are primary sources to be used in my thesis. Additionally, by following the objectives of the research, a supplement of secondary sources from history books from renowned authors, auto-biography of the Vietnamese key person, booklets written and published in Vietnam, treatises of pictures and articles shall all be taken into closed consideration. In other words, this research will be about extracting one of the key aspects leading to the women's contributions towards war and the methodology will bring about the factual events of the Vietnamese women who lived up the war time and survived with deep consciousness of what exactly was the war. A textual analysis based on selected literature is the key to the findings.

To be able to grasp the distinguished reality of wartime incident, the data will be categorized into two groups. The differences are that the first category is by the literature that was exactly written under the midst of war while the second one is the literature written after the time of war.

The publishing date and address are also concerned. The literature that is written during the war is published (or allowed to publish) in Vietnam and circulated throughout the country whereas the stories that belong to the second group are written and published outside of Vietnam. Texts to be discussed in this thesis are divided into 2 main categories according to date and place of publication.

1. The first group is about the literature that had been directly written during the time of war (between 1965-1975) or written to retell the story of the woman who had gone through the actual war.

2 The second group of literatures is written 'after' the war but still recalling the exact picture of the war and how much the affect has had upon the Vietnamese women in both traditional and modern society.

Moreover, academic materials comprising of relevant data to the study will be closely looked and they can be both in English, Thai or even Vietnamese languages. A visit to Vietnam in late December 2010 is a surplus on observing at the real site in order to gain more access to materials and historical memoirs particularly at the national library and museums.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Considering status and roles of Vietnamese women, there are certain kinds of concepts to explain about the background and how they could give rise to the contributions of the Vietnam War. In general, it is important to consider the aspects that got involved in shaping up the structure of Vietnamese society. According to the historical chronology, Vietnam as a country has been withstanding foreign invasion from Chinese domination, French colonialism and American intervention. It can be said that Vietnamese society had to go through three stages of socio-cultural development with each left a heritage on the historical print of Vietnam. The terms feudalism, colonialism and neocolonialism will be used throughout this research and which frame up what is exactly the Vietnamese society are.

According to Oxford dictionaries online, 'feudalism is the dominant and political system in which the nobility held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service. Vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants were obliged to live on their lord's land and give

him homage, labor, and a share of the produce, notionally in exchange for military protection' (Oxford dictionaries online website, 1999; online). Basically, feudalism is about how lands could be shared among people at the top down to the bottom of the society and in exchanged for those lands, what was the price to pay. Feudalism is one debatable term but is among the practices derived from Chinese cultural heritage which also served as social bottom line where Vietnamese women are. Hierarchy and patriarchy are the sub aspects and practices branched out from the feudal yoke. To have a hierarchical society with male dominance, feudalism explained the ideology.

In Chinese-influenced Vietnamese society, Arlene Eisen regarded feudalism as how the agricultural system is controlled by landlords particularly how 'lands', the only means of survival, are in the hands of the authorities (1984; 13). Eisen adds, 'during the Chinese reign, and for much of Vietnam's later history, all land officially belonged to the king, who made grants to nobles and favorites. The only way for the landless peasants to survive was to work for these aristocrats – more or less as slaves' (Eisen, 1984; 13). Men had a hard time struggling through it but the women were doubled the task. When half of the society is women, it implies to an interesting question of what is the condition of those women under the feudal yoke? This thesis had an answer when the page turns on to chapter 2.

The westerners arrived Vietnam with different purposes from the Chinese. When the colonial interlude introduced itself, the Vietnamese society began a new phase. Colonialism started during the French advent. Vietnam was brought under the French colony politically, economically and socially. It is not surprised to find out how the French remnants had found their new settlement in this foreign land of Vietnam. However, within the context of French society, women firstly faced their new 'authority' apart from the feudal practices like hierarchy or patriarchy. The French as being the landlord or factory-lord put a double burden on women's tasks already difficult. Extreme exploitation was common and it led to the first anti-colonial movement when the majority of women participated.

While the French had what much to offer to their Vietnamese colony, when the Americans landed, they wanted nothing but an army base. The term neocolonialism is to explain how the American elements shaped up society in Vietnam and finally drew an ideological line

splitting up two regions. According to the [postcolonialweb.org](http://postcolonialweb.org), 'Neo-colonialism is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. In the days of old-fashioned colonialism, the imperial power had at least to explain and justify at home the actions it was taking abroad. In the colony those who served the ruling imperial power could at least look to its protection against any violent move by their opponents. With neo-colonialism neither is the case' (postcolonial website, 2002; online). Neo means new. Colonialism has already been meaningful.

However, the 'new' form of colonialism is worth explaining particularly during the American intervention in Vietnam. It can be said that the American way of 'coming to Vietnam' was neither like the Chinese nor the French. Politics behind that will be explained also in chapter two but basically the elements stemmed from the American-in-Vietnam episode built up a new kind of society, thus a war, in Vietnam. Socially, the demarcated line on the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel also became an ideological line separating the north from the south. While the society in the north was predominantly enveloped with strong communist ideology, the southern one had gradually faded out and become a capitalist-influenced society. This was one major ideology differentiating the mind-set of women coming from the North and the South.

Militarily, the Americans had nothing reasonable to justify the actions and the responsibility they came out taking was too late. It is believed that the Vietnamese took actions in defending their nation or at least their own family and home. The Vietnamese women in particular have fought, side by side with men, thousands of battles and already won two wars from the Chinese and the French. Therefore, when the Americans proclaimed a war, the Vietnamese had nothing loose. For the Vietnamese coming from the North, to defend the nation in accordance with the communist ideology was a life-and-death responsibility as well as a lifetime rewards. Millions of people in the region 'participated' in fighting for a revolution after revolution contributing to what they had aimed to meet the national expectation of dispelling the Americans and gaining country's independence. Despite the fact that a lot of Vietnamese were induced by mobilizing tactics to join the revolution, the overwhelming influence of communism over the north is somehow irresistible. On the other hand, the Vietnamese women who came from the South expected differently. The war had not yet reached their lands and homes until the time came. They had been enjoying, to a certain degree, an accommodating life facilitated by

American capitalist society. Their lives moved on without having a thought of being a traitor to the nation supporting the 'enemy' like the North had claimed. The course of all these had been shifted when the war finally reached their home. Even the women must fight during war time. For the South Vietnamese women, it was neither the fight to play along with the communist regime nor the fight to oust the Americans. It was the fight for survival of themselves, their loved ones and others. These 'fighting acts' were 'direct contributions' towards the Vietnam War. Interestingly, there is also indirect contribution when women in the notorious My Lai Massacre explained better.

Regarding the status of Vietnamese women, it had through times been influenced by Chinese, French and the American societal elements. This status then acted out roles and obligations of women leading to what have these done to contribute to Vietnam as a nation. Simply when war came, the majority of Vietnamese women took (or be taken) part in it. In Chapter two and three, more details will be elaborated to address the concepts the author has just written so far.

### **Scope of the Research**

The scope of research is limited within a frame of choosing published literatures like mentioned in the methodology with an adequate amount of primary resources acquired through a field trip to Hanoi December 2010. Another criterion to indicate the scope of this research is that the literatures are chosen based on the publishing date/time and place. It is interesting to say that the number of literatures written by South Vietnamese women exceeded that of the Northern ones. With four literatures from the South and only one but a unique one from the North, it tells that communism has somehow prevailed over 'the rights to expression' because partly I deem that there must have been a number of Northern literatures written and recorded but not widely published. However, the literatures coming from the Southern side are all published abroad mostly in America, yet simultaneously banned in Vietnam. The point is most information gathered through the south side would be experienced with a little bit more opened and multi-sided rather than communist-influenced one-sided ideology. All in all, Vietnamese women did learn how to survive amidst physical atrocity and mental trauma.

### **Significance of research**

This research on Vietnamese women during wartime will present a new light on the women's contribution to the victory of the Communists and final reunification of Vietnam. It will also provide a better understanding of women's role in the history of Vietnam and raise another sense of awareness for women of today.

Although there have been a number of historical accounts written and published regarding the narratives of women which are based on true story, this thesis will be of significance in terms of testimonial account based on women's true stories of war experiences. To place the story of the women in a new context by observing what the women 'wrote' is rather new. The war story of unrelenting and assiduous womanhood who had utterly dedicated their lives, along with their brave men, in drawing up a new well-built foundation of national solidarity while proving to the world their intrinsic capability of uniting the country, once ripped into two pieces, back as one again.

## CHAPTER II

### WAR AND WOMEN IN VIETNAMESE SOCIETY

Prior to the beginning of the American epoch in Vietnam, the stories of women inaugurated long time ago just like in the histories of other nations. This chapter will be discussing about key aspects of Vietnamese women in the society primarily torn-up by the ferocity of wars. As historically researched, the First Indochina War with the French and the Second one with the Americans were apparently not the only two conflicts in Vietnamese history. Vietnamese society had since ancient times had to endure foreign invasions. And behind every battle of every war, Vietnamese women never failed to take part in the struggle. Some women actually emerged as the remarkable foremothers and are still remembered both in fiction and non-fiction literatures. The Vietnamese literatures, that would rather reflect the attainable truth of the relationship between war and women especially their roles, usually started with a legend of a mother. Although the mother's natural role were to give birth to both men and women, the complexity of national misfortunes had inevitably made most people reconsider what was it like for Vietnamese women to be a mother in a context of war. Some authors also paid a considerable attention to the aftermath of all the war.

#### **Traditional War during the Chinese Occupation**

From this point onwards, this chapter will try to explore how Vietnamese women dealt with traditional society strongly influenced by Chinese cultural heritage. It was also how this heritage shaped up the status of women in the society. The status would consequently lead to how the women act out roles and obligations to at least be in harmony with 'Chinese traditionalism'.

The women's engagement during war struggles with the Chinese troops was initially portrayed through legends. In the very early period, Vietnamese legend seemed to point out that women played a dominant role. Some portrayed the image of women as strong and big as giant who were capable of dictating the nature. Alessandra Chiricosta stated in her article 'Following the trail of the fair bird: the search for a uniquely Vietnamese women's movement' (2010; 58) that Au Co was the Mother of the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese nation who set the first legendary pace in the history of literary chronology whose 'uniqueness' in the notion of female power inspired the work of Vietnamese women until today. Au Co was the daughter of the King of the North who later disobeyed her father



to marry the Dragon King's son, Lac Long Quan. However, Au Co was a mountain woman but her husband had always been wanting to live on the coastal plains. As the legend goes, they both agreed to part by bringing each of them 50 kids up to the North following the mother and down the South following the father. The legend is important in a sense that it was valued as a first national integration of how the country was built by a couple, a man contributing as much as a woman did. They both secured the land of Vietnam which later would be 'protected' by their own children who were born of future centuries so long after their parents' departure to heaven. But Au Co represents the will of a woman taking her life on her own path and being able to make a certain decision on a particular circumstance. The legend agrees that a woman once contributed to building a vivid matriarchal foundation within the society of Vietnam. According to Alessandra, some Vietnamese scholars such as Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet use this matriarchal aspect of the myth to differentiate Vietnamese society from the pervasive spread of Chinese Confucian patriarchy (2010; 89). The legend actually conjoined with some actual past incident as well as proved that the future generations of Vietnamese women would once hold up similar strong position. The position once said by Ho Chi Minh that 'Women take up half of the sky'. So far as I have put down legends as such, metaphorically it can be said that a woman was legendarily engaged with hinterlands like mountains indicating how women of future generations to come were to also face the heaviest burden of their lives.

As a matter of fact, the real historical event of great women is recorded in the Vietnamese historiography which happened during the Chinese domination. It began right after the birth of Vietnam until the 10<sup>th</sup> century. From the period of cultural sinicization and the love-hate relationship between China and Vietnam ending in the 10<sup>th</sup> century war, the Vietnamese people had been governed under the dynastic period that had also gone through almost-endless battles and wars naturally stemmed from court intrigues. Among battles fought, there were first two great women 'the Trung sisters' whose story is still the most important war account regarding women figure fighting bravely on an elephant. Moreover, it was in this period when the ruling Chinese were dominant, but the Trung sisters were brave enough to cease such period of alien domination at least temporarily. Trung Trac and her sister, according to the Chinese records, were of a brave and fearless disposition who talked their husbands and other local notables into rebellion (Turner and Hao, 1998; 211). They could carry out such rebellious plan against the Chinese lords and suspended the Chinese laws for the next two years. Some records claim that if the women gracefully rode horses to

fight against the French centuries later, then the Trung sisters must have been elegant behind the elephant's back. The Trung sisters were succeeded by the generation of the first 18<sup>th</sup> century militia women during the Tay Son social uprising.

Figure 1 Illustration of The Trung Sisters.



Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): [http://www.cpamedia.com/history/old\\_thang\\_long/](http://www.cpamedia.com/history/old_thang_long/)

The Tay Son social uprising in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the renowned militant movement led by the three brothers from the Tay Son clan of central Vietnam. The Tay Son declared they would 'steal the rich to help the poor', was simply outstanding for those who were being stolen as the country went through famine that no one knew how it was going to end. Their 'bandit-like' belligerency was partially acclaimed by the Vietnamese who were facing the unjust rule under the Trinh ruling lineage in the North and the Nguyen lords in the South. The uprising thus turned into a civil war where peasants mostly participated and they did succeed in bringing the nation back to peace and a moment of 'just' rule was created by the brothers. According to George Dutton, as shown in his work *The Tay Son Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteen-Century Vietnam*, one of the battles was also led by a female army general Bui Thị Xuan following the brave example of the Trung sisters leading the army against the Chinese a century ago.

“General Xuan was born in Bình Khê District (now Tay Son District), Binh Dinh Province. She learned martial arts as a child, and was reputedly a strong woman. Legend has it that she once rescued Tran Quang Dieu, who later became her husband, from a tiger. She and Tran Quang Dieu joined the Tay Son Rebellion early, and won many battles. She helped the Tay Son army train elephants, which participated in many battles. She became known as one of the five principal women in the Tay Son Dynasty. When Phu Xuan (Hue) fell to Nguyen Anh, she followed king Canh Thinh to Nghe An, commanded 5000 troops and

fought the Nguyen forces in Tran Ninh (Quang Binh Province). In the second month of 1802, the Nguyen forces became victorious. She joined her husband in Nghe An and they were captured together by the Nguyen forces. Both of them were executed; her husband was either beheaded or skinned, while she was crushed to death by an elephant. Today, she is celebrated as a Vietnamese hero. Many major cities have schools and streets named after her” (Dutton, 2006; 120).

While the Trung sisters and General Xuan are portrayed as elegant on an elephant’s and horse’s back, Lady Trieu is represented as huge, physically and mentally. According to the 18<sup>th</sup> century account by Alessandra Chiricosta (2010), Lady Trieu was nine feet tall with breasts three feet long who rode into battle against the Chinese. When she perched on an elephant, her huge breasts slung over the enemies. However, it was her statement that still brings her image alive even these days. Lady Trieu said

“I want only to ride the waves, slay the big whale of the Eastern Sea<sup>1</sup>, clean up our frontiers and save the people from drowning, why should I imitate others, bow my head, stoop over, and be a slave? Why resign myself to menial housework?” (as quoted in Tuner and Hao, 1998; 119).

Obviously, she refused to be bounded by traditional custom a woman should do. Even though Lady Trieu’s strong sentiment and will to protect Vietnam from alien intruders, but the condition for Vietnamese women was to be overwhelmingly influenced by Confucius teachings when women are regarded as inferior. As Chiricosta stated, Confucian values persisted in Vietnam long after the withdrawal of Chinese forces and legendary figures of fighting heroines have progressively been replaced by more compliant and submissive female images as ideals of Vietnamese femininity (2010). Moreover, women were inevitably to be burdened with housework as well as dangerous risks in the battle front line. It was not yet until centuries later like I stated earlier that women would gain their social recognition of being patriotic fighters who participated in and fought for their national salvation as well as their rights.

---

<sup>1</sup> Or it is generally known as the South China Sea.

## **Chinese cultural heritage on the role of the Vietnamese women**

### Vietnamese women vs. Patriarchy

Culturally speaking during this traditional period, a certain persisting customs and norms had been shaping up the roles of women from this time onwards, more or less up until nowadays. Although the independence gained from the Chinese in the 10<sup>th</sup> century was about driving away the overlords, troops and a cut-off of strings from puppet government in Vietnam, but in a notion of cultural influence, the culture itself was not something tangible that could be cut off. The aspects of Chinese cultural heritage pierced through every sector of Vietnamese society influencing the living conditions of the emperor, the royal court down to the peasants. One of the aspects which strongly had an effect on gender relations stemmed from Confucianism; that was patriarchy. It was of how patriarchal society, where male person politically and socially dominated female one, had swayed over the Vietnamese women in the traditional period. Still, the fact that women were also warriors alongside with men was very much a real situation. Considering this point, there is a say. “There has often been a grating disjuncture between ideals and reality” (Jamieson, 1995; 67). The ideology is that the social status of womanhood is positioned and defined accordingly to the patriarchy and women would always be inferior and suppressive before men.

But in reality, historical evidence has proved otherwise. Vietnamese myth, legend and history are filled with stories of strong, intelligent and decisive women who performed many arduous physical tasks, ran small business, and were skilled artisans. It is not to mention yet the roles in the battlefield during wars. Nevertheless, Vietnamese society up to the modern war period, and to some extent to the present time, was a patriarchal society in which mother, wife, sister or daughter were burdened to do the work of taking care of or feeding the family. The father, husband or son, of course, does not spend much time and energy on this work.

### Vietnamese women vs. Hierarchy

Vietnamese women were obliged in another social aspect that sprang from the Chinese heritage: hierarchy. A hierarchical society in Vietnam absolutely placed women status under the men's. According to the book *Understanding Vietnam*, understanding gender relations as one type of social relations in traditional hierarchical Vietnamese society, women have been taught to serve men and believe that they could only be ‘real’ women if they do this job well (Jamieson, 1995; 103). The job includes the role in providing sustenance for the

family members and obedience towards the male family members. In a traditional society of Vietnam, a woman was supposed to be submissive to her father when young, to her husband when married and to her oldest son when widowed. Girls were usually kept at home helping the mothers in chores and taking care of her younger brothers. While the boys went to school, the girls stayed home learning whatever household tasks provided.

Ideologically, hierarchical society had reinforced the intrinsic roles of both men and women in which the men became the *yang* force and women became the *yin*. Being Yang is being dominant while the Yin is the inner power that somehow balances the Yang but still submissive to it. This structure has persisted through Vietnamese history without any recorded incident of women broke into revolt urging for their 'individual rights' just yet. It was not until the advent of westerners made their full appearance in this isolated country and the whole system of hierarchy was disrupted. When the westerners became *Yang*, it turned out to be another side of the coin. Yet the Vietnamese, especially women, had got the advantages over that disruption, over the new *Yang*. The discourse on the 'positive disruption' of the hierarchical society will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **Women Society and The French Indochina War**

Beginning right after the Nguyen dynasty was officially proclaimed, the French would claim their righteousness in many 'activities' that were being undergone within the country. It was evident that the interest of the French had gradually changed from a small commercial port and religious sect to gaining their own prestige by building credibility and prestige through religion. In fact, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, commercial, military and particularly religious circles in France had attempted to goad the French government into adopting a more active policy toward Vietnam (Duiker, 1995; 66).

Due to political and negotiable inability of Emperor Tu Duc, the French had managed to colonize since then. The colonial legacy and ferocity was to be started from the French period onwards. Speaking of what would be the result, the emergence of nationalism or, to say it traditionally, patriotism was doomed to occur. Anti-colonialism developed and this was actually one of the influential aspects that drove another kind of movement among the Vietnamese women. The movement was ideologically provoked by the great anti-colonial leader at that time, Phan Boi Chau who carried out a significant thought towards 'women's involvement' in the anti-colonial movements. Phan Boi Chau came to believe so radically that it was not because of the French cultural impact that had oppressed the Vietnamese

society, but within the deep rooted culture of one-dimensional and rigid Confucian ethics that had put the Vietnamese in a backward position to the eyes of ‘the others’. From this aspect, it was extremely vivid in the work of Chau contributed to building a mundane realm of Vietnamese women during the coming-of-age war with the French. By respecting only the Confucius dogma, the society would go in pointlessly no direction especially when women were prohibited from the struggles of the nation. Thus, ‘education’, introduced by Phan Boi Chau, in any field was the key aspect regarding the highlighted importance of the status of women. Definitely his work passed on to the next generation to come.

#### Vietnamese society: The French Authority and The Vietnamese Women

Aforementioned, colonialism had since started to shape up a new kind of society with its new cultural inputs and code of law. It determined the course in which the women had to go through. Under colonial expansion and concentration, it was the women who had to endure the hardships under a new scope of colonial society.

It is generally said that women were the most oppressed of all by the act of colonial aggression and hostility. Vietnamese society had been well built up on foundations of Confucianism where the place for women was limited only within the household and only to obey ‘male orders’. The Vietnamese women did not feel contempt because of this status; instead, they were naturally willing to do according to their rights and righteousness. The French advent and its gradually brutal treatment disrupted the whole system of womanhood making them even harder on living and adjusting to the new foreign environment especially at workplace. French civilization for women meant additional suffering because the French used the feudal patriarchy as a foundation for their colonial regime. For women as ‘Following the trail of the fairy bird’ supplemented, they were doubly dominated: by Vietnamese male patriarchy and by the arrogant leadership of a colonial regime (Chiricosta, 2010; 231). Before the regime was brought to a total war, the French ‘culture’ became a burden. As a result, Vietnamese women had to carry the burden of French Legionnaires ranging from forced labor, distant family members, starvation, torture and rape in addition to her patriarchal load.

In terms of commerce, women’s decision in taking on working ‘outside’ their households was based on the impoverishment of economy. Firstly, it was how women valued their economic roles on the basis of their household financial situation. Women worked as part-timer in the rice production or factory, but sometimes they had to do it full-time since the

family could not rely on the husband's salary any longer. From the article 'Vietnamese Women: Their Roles and Their Options', economic downturn causing inflation and a rapid urbanization in Vietnam especially in the South due to the pressures of war had all effected the livelihood of women in terms of getting a job to fulfill the financial need of the family and also retain the happiness of all family members (Hoskins, 1971; 342). Situations of women working in the French industry, however, were of one worth discussing the hidden ambivalence in the Hoskins article. Working outside did not eradicate the patriarchal burden being perpetuated upon the Vietnamese women, nor did it improve the conditions while being used within the French surroundings. They were mostly being taken advantage of instead of gaining the benefit they were supposed to have. By working outside, it did not always imply to sexual equality between men and women. For instance, a coal mine male worker in a French factory earned only 490 Franc a year whereas women's earning was lower; that was 250 Franc a year (Eisen, 1984; 55).

Furthermore, the working condition for women was never guaranteed and they were even assigned a risky task. A woman named Nguyen Thi Dam had been working for the French in the fields like a slave hoping one day she could free herself and her children out of living hardships but she never did. She her and children wore rice sacks to work and would get no pay but fed with rat-amount of rice. Another brutal case in the French industry occurred in Nam Dinh province. A Frenchman named Dupre owned a huge textile mill and by 1973, he had an approximate amount of 10,000 women working for him with terrible conditions (Eisen, 1984; *ibid*). A woman named Hoang Thi Yen told her story that she had to face with contempt treatment by the overseers plus the beatings. She once gave birth to her fourth child at the foot of the machines. They received lower wage than men, of course. In terms of social conditions, the worst case scenario, the French brutal colonial rule had a mark on, was colonial racism that turned Vietnamese against their own fellow kind. Before the birth of a systematic revolutionary movement like the Viet Minh, French collaborators had enjoyed a spoon of French soup in exchange for a traitorous disdain over their own countrymen. As one scholar stated 'racism not only legitimized this super-exploitation and oppression, it also undermined the people's sense of dignity and alienated them from each other (Eisen, 1984; *ibid*). The evidence was confessed by a young man. He said 'the more deeply I entered the French world, the more frustrated I became at the Vietnamese world in which I was forced to participate. The woman was often called 'con di' (prostitute) or buzu

(monkey) by the French and later also insulted by the Americans. These conditions in a very critical sense were already 'wars' in which the women were facing.

As a result, it was also not surprising that Women's Union was established in the year 1930, a few decades before the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. The Union was rather a summary of a how-to agenda for Vietnamese women in jail-breaking themselves from the pressures they were being imposed upon. This was the evidence which instigated the first sentimental patriotism that took shape physically through women liberation which erupted in 1945. This broke out in the August Revolution in 1945 when a lot of women even joined the Viet Minh cadre fighting off the French and emancipated their rights claimed in their own society. There was a statement by one woman who decided to join the Viet Minh because she could not even try to express herself through writing, so she joined the revolution.

As a matter of fact, there were several occasions when the situations of women before liberation were being observed. It was prophesized that women who run social affairs will neglect those of their families and will lose their gentleness and femininity. This is one of the more subtle feudalist reactions to women's 'social breakthrough'. And the result as mentioned above, one of the breakthroughs, a woman's new workplace, was not so impressive particularly under the French colonial society. Basically, the gentleness and femininity that the women were expected to portray fell under the frame of patriarchy and its traditional advocates. The mindsets were naturally defined by patriarchy. Truthfully, according to Do Quyen, the gentleness and femininity referred to have been, in the past, expressions of submissiveness and passivity (Eisen, 1984; 87). This comment entails the fact that being a grandmother, a mother, a wife, a sister, a daughter or a girl in traditional Vietnamese society had considerably been a carrying obstacle already for those who were born female. As already proved and will further prove that this 'obstacle' was originated in the concept of patriarchy imbued through Chinese cultural heritage for generations. It means that women had been targeted to endure the pain of hardships, inequality and losses.

An 80-year-old grandmother in Bac Ho (Eisen, 1984; 98) lost her sons and in-laws during the French war and had to undergo the ruthless forever departure of her grandsons to heaven during the American war. Motherhood has been difficult throughout the history of Vietnam. As I mentioned earlier about how women as mothers had been treated with contempt and immorality. Some of them were still working with the machines even during



the time of delivering babies. A mother whose back bended against the sun in the field received a penny per hour to feed her family while her son went to school passing along the road filled with bomb minds and her daughter stayed home being a watchdog for the Viet-cong army and such.

Furthermore, a status of wife had also been undervalued within the family. The traditional Confucius hierarchy had also undermined the woman status of being the only wife of her husband meaning a practice of polygamy was still pretty much embraced. In North Vietnam, the 1946 Constitution and later decrees laid the foundation for outlawing polygamy and forced marriage (Eisen, 1984; 181). It was meant to provide women with choices in choosing their own spouse. Between 1951 and 1958, the percentage of childhood marriages fell from 25% to 63% (Eisen, 1984; *ibid*). Unfortunately, the decree was not yet affective in terms of mass population. The law on Marriage and the Family, which explicitly outlaws polygamy, was not passed in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam until 1960. Furthermore, the most famous Women Union will be discussed of how they had struggled to overcome such hurdle in this matter. Nevertheless, to prove the conditions of women in Vietnam, it is worthwhile to acknowledge the following words of the narrative of Bang, a school teacher.

*“My family members did contribute their labor. My elder sister, my older female cousin, my wife, and the wives of my two brothers Tang and Gia all worked and worked very hard. Waking up before dawn, they divided the various tasks among themselves, including pounding the rice paddy, boiling water, cooking rice, and feeding the pigs and chickens. During the peak agricultural seasons, not only did they cook for a lot of day laborers, but they also had to help with transplanting and harvesting. In the evening, they had the same tasks to perform. They could not go to bed until midnight. In the early morning, my elder sisters and female cousins had to cook for every member of the family. During other seasons, the young female members of my family grew vegetables and melons. My wife, cousin, and sister-in-law had to retail the secondary crops in periodic rural markets. They occupationally had to walk sixteen kilometers each way to the Phu-Tho province market. The market in Son-Duong was held only six times a month. So was the only other market in the neighboring villages, located in Ngu-Xa, held on alternate days. During my school days in the provincial capital of Phu-Tho, the women from my native village, including my family, would already have arrived there on foot when I was responding to nature’s call in the yard early in the morning”.* (Luong, 2003; 69).

When national reforms were introduced because of the war, women had been greatly involved. The reform was meant to nationalize all the commercial aspects in order to serve and support the country in every way against the ongoing war. If women had been driven out of their domestic territory due to pressures from colonialism and a societal shift in order to support their family and show 'respect' to the patriarchy, it was better off to position them in the right workplace for the right job. Working 'outside' under the cooperatives was the most significant national policy intended to nationalize the 'Vietnamese-ness' within their political, economic and social realms.

On the other hand, it was one of the most important political agendas that stepped towards women's liberation. The nationalization process stimulated the gradual shift of opportunities from being a housewife working only under the roof or in the field but with unfair paid under the French custom or not at all to becoming engaged with 'outside jobs' that were fair paid. It was actually the first break-away strategy from being tied up under the feudal society strongly influenced by Confucius hierarchy. It all began when the women were given rights to own a plot of land or at least went to sell something that they produced by themselves and earned on behalf of themselves. In 1945, 62% of the women peasants in all of Vietnam owned no land. As a result, they had no choice but to do the work they were ascribed by their male relatives at home. During the 1950s, the land reform system was actually the first political reform of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government in the postwar period after the first Indochina War. It was based on collective mastery when peasants and people collectivized the crops out of the lands they all cooperatively owned. In the Bui co-operative, Ha Nam province, for example, after 1954, every landless peasant mostly women received a plot of land and then decided to join together to work cooperatively. In the Yen So cooperative south of Hanoi, female participation in the agricultural labor force rose to 80% of the work force during the war. By breaking out of their traditional isolation, they were also able to repair dikes and save the crops from floods. Surprisingly, women were not only confined only at the bottom rung of society, but also at the top leader of women organization that promoted and encouraged the women at war. Women leaders had responsibility for the co-op's seed selection, storehouse, animal breeding and technical innovations as well as for finances. Actually, the chairperson and 11 of the 15 members of the co-op's managing committee were women (Eisen, 1984; 213). This shows that women had responsibilities that they could be able to manage on their own. It can be said

that the co-operative relatively freed the women from the patriarchal family and challenged centuries of sex-defined roles.

The ‘collective’ effort was the very first long-established common ideology that massively incorporated the Vietnamese women in fighting against and withstanding the war of the Americans. Collective mastery of social relations includes promoting ‘socialist democracy’ within the family and within the community. Starting at home, the aim is to allow every female individual to develop to her fullest potential; and for each person to become conscious and confident that she can make history and what she did made a difference to the society. People’s war can also be seen as women’s war, because most women had been poor peasants and were more than ready to get rid of feudal injustices. In the next section, several significant ideologies for the mass mobilization of women in Vietnam will pinpoint one of the most crucial roles of them during war, the role in the battlefield.

Political tension in Vietnam was inevitably arisen by revolutionary movements starting from the VNQDD<sup>2</sup>. But any evidence found scarcely the participation of women in this political party. However, Ho Chi Minh’s hard work and world tour had conceived already the possibility of even greater mobilization among the women in contributing to the fight against the French. After conferences, meet-ups and diplomatic visits with The Soviet Union and China, the offspring was an initial but important step in the politics of Vietnam; the establishment of International Communist Party. The Party was to also strategically imply the Marxist-Leninist ideologies in mobilizing techniques but the implication was pretty much ‘ripe’ during the American war. Based on Marxism, liberation was redefined. It was because of him who put a crucial remark on the complicated status of Vietnamese women involving ‘liberation’ during war time. Uncle Ho, strongly influenced by Marxist-Leninism and Chinese Maoism, said “women make up half of the sky, if the women are not liberated, the country will not be fully liberated”. The expression had a very deep impact on the movement of women in the revolutionary battle against the French. One of the top officials in the ICP was a woman. A famous activist named Nguyen Thi Minh Khai worked from 1930 to 1935 in the Oriental sector of the International Communist Party and attended the 7<sup>th</sup> Convention of the ICP in the USSR. In 1940, she was arrested during a planning meeting for the

---

<sup>2</sup> The Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (VNQDD), the Vietnamese Nationalist Party, a political party that sought independence from French colonial rule in Vietnam during the early 20th century.

Cochinchina uprising. She received the death penalty and was shot in Hoc Mon on 26 August, 1941 at the age of 31 (as shown at Women's Museum, Hanoi). However, the ICP was short-lived since the French had repressed the activists, communist leaders and other insurgents. The ICP, though, had a political descendant, a woman based organization; the Vietnam's Women Union.

### Vietnam Women's Union

Beginning in the 1930s, the women's movement in Vietnam became closely linked to the country's liberation movement. Due to the inspired western ideology, that had resulted in the formation of Vietnam Women's Union. In 1929, it was Minh Khai who finally left home because she had been sneaking out at night for several months in which she was afraid she might get caught by her parents. Her parents feared their daughter would bring scandal to the family. Repression made it too risky for Minh Khai to explain to them that she spent her evenings doing political work, organizing people to challenge feudal patriarchy and colonialism (Eisen, 1984; 122.) She was actually a member of one of the revolutionary groups that, following the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, united to form the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1930.

Figure 2 Illustration of Nguyen Thi Minh Khai



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): <http://congty-tudo.blogspot.com/2008/10/anh-dtm-japan-nha-van-tk-thanh-thuy-vn.html>*

The ICP set two basic goals which were to fight for national independence and against feudalism to gain land for the peasants (Eisen, 1984; 85.) They also incorporated the struggle for women's emancipation into the fights against colonialism and feudalism and finally

pledged to struggle for equality between women and men. Consequently, Vietnam Women's Union was formed with its early main purpose to abolish women's oppression. This had confirmed that the Marxist ideology had been put together and politicized making it the 'policy' of a certain organization supported by the government. Some female founding members of the Union were also former ICP's cadres highlighting a flourishing beginning of women's ability to be seated in the position of policy-making. The founder herself was Secretary of the Union. ICP policy and guidance were to be applied within the Women's Union. According to the political evidence, ICP policy assumed that women needed their own separate organization in order to concentrate their energy on the struggle for women's rights and to mobilize women for national struggle.

Collective rights, as mentioned earlier, were to be the women's right in emancipating from the oppressive back-door of the traditional household. And one way to accomplish this was to revolutionize for the sake of the country. Based on this, they could not be further attacked from the ancient practitioners of patriarchal feudalism as their excuse was 'to save the motherland'. That was reality. From 1930 until reunification in 1975, the Vietnam Women's Union would perform a dual function which was to mobilize women for the tasks which society needs them to perform and to defend and expand women's rights. The main task was on the battlefield which was to begin firstly along side by side with the Viet Minh in fighting off the French during the first Indochina War. There was a woman named Duc Hoan who joined Union when she was ten whose childhood experience exemplifies best what I have mentioned. Her life was filled with misery but courageous. As it is revealed:

*"I left my home to join the anti-French resistance when I was ten. Bigger than other girls of my age, I was able to convince the authorities for a time that I was old enough. Why did I, a sheltered, bourgeois girl, take such a chance with my life? Because I hated the way that my French Catholic school teachers looked down on the Vietnamese students. Because when the French took over Hanoi in 1946, my family had to leave our home to hide in the countryside. Because after my mother died, home had no meaning for me anymore. You see, I was the youngest of six daughters and my father was a traditional Confucian man. In 1948, at age 60, he remarried and had a son, and after that, my sisters and I were pretty much on our own. After all, as the saying goes, "A hundred girls aren't worth a single testicle." Besides, I knew that my sisters would eventually marry and that If I stayed I would just be a burden to them.*

*And the times were exciting. For all of these reasons, it was easy for me to follow Ho Chi Minh.* (Turner with Hao, 1998; 42.)

More than a million women and girls would be walking in the same path like Duc Hoan and saying with courage almost exactly similar to Hoan's words during the war escalation from 1965-1975. Even though she was just a little girl, but she was being taken care by the government who saw her potential of contributing something that would definitely benefit the nation. Her own preference in joining the revolutionary was indisputably deep rooted in the hatred among the French which could stem from the oppression of colonial society. Another important reason was about how she had lived a feudal society and later walked away from it for the sake of her beloved ones as she did not want to end up being her family's burden. She chose to collectively follow what Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese greatest father of independence, had stated about how women were significant for the revolutionary movements. From a series of subsequent political upheavals intermingled by global powerful players like France, Japan and of course the USA, it all came down to the 'The August Revolution' in 1945.

#### The August Revolution 1945

The period between 1940 – 1945 had been marked with a shifting global political atmosphere with the Fall of France in June 1940 to the Nazi government in Germany, the Pearl Harbor attack in December 1941 and the interregnum of the Japanese power into Southeast Asia. Due to the Fall of Paris, the French governor-general of Indochina signed a general accord with Japan, which allowed the French administration to continue in Indochina in return for placing the military facilities and economic resources (rice, coal, rubber, and other raw materials) at Japan's disposal (SarDesai, 1998; 53.) In response to this, the Vietnamese government saw it as a ripe opportunity to drive both the Japanese and the French out once and for all. As SarDesai noted that the subservience of the French and their humiliation at the hands of an Asian nation completely obliterated the image of European colonial invincibility and never again were the Vietnamese to regard the French with awe (1998; 53.) With this advancement in the colonial perception, the strength in the anti-colonial movement accelerated to the point that Ho Chi Minh leadership reaching its organized preparation for a big confrontation. The time had come. Ho told Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap in a cave of Pac Bo, to form a broad front of "patriots of all ages and all types, peasants, workers, merchants and soldiers," to fight both the Japanese and the French. The

new organization, led by Communists, appealed to Vietnamese nationalist sentiment. They called it the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, the Vietnam Independence League – soon to be simply the Vietminh. In 1945, Ho Chi Minh, his key comrades, army generals and the Viet Minh forces took the instant opportunity when Japan granted them ‘independence’ allowing nationalist groups to take over public buildings in the major cities. Soon after that, The August Revolution in 1945 broke out.

The August Revolution also pinpointed the era when the majority of women joined the revolution. Even before the revolution burst out, there was evidence proving that a clandestine happening in the prison of Hoa Lo<sup>3</sup> was to maneuver some aid to contribute to the August Revolution. There were lots of prisoners plotting against the authority to jailbreak the Hoa Lo prison. A woman named Ba Bang Tam contributed to this secret mission. Mrs. Bang Tam brought Hoa Lo political prisoners a saw blade and some acid to saw the railings of the underground sewer to escape on the night of 24 December 1951 (Women’s Museum, Hanoi, 2010.) Moreover, militia women participated in the August Revolution also under the leadership of a female leader. “Born in 1931, Ha Thi Que was the military leader for the Yen The and Viet Yen Districts in Bac Giang. She was renowned for her leadership in attacks against rebels and Japanese garrisons. The enemy called her ‘Woman Viet Minh General’. As a provincial Committee member she organized military training for civilians to create military troops. During the 1945 August Revolt, she was the military leader for the political take-over of Yen The (Women’s Museum, Hanoi, 2010.)

Figure 3 Illustration of The Hoa Lo Prison



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* <http://www.haivenu-vietnam.com/des-hanoi-museums.htm>

<sup>3</sup> One of the largest and most concrete prisons in Indochina constructed by the French colonialists in 1896 to detain political prisoners. The prison was also used by the Americans and given a famous nick name ‘Hanoi Hilton’.

After the declaration of the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed on September 2, 1945, the Vietnamese people had untiringly fought to protect and keep the revolutionary government. However, the French colonists were determined to invade Vietnam again. At 8 pm on 19 December 1946, the first shot was fired to start the Vietnamese legendary eight-year resistance against the colonists. Therefore, the August Revolution was considerably the starting point of the First Indochina War especially when The Party and President Ho Chi Minh announced:

“We could lose everything, even sacrifice ourselves, but we swear not to let our country be invaded, we will never be slaves. All people, no matter who you are, men or women, the old or children, and no matter what religion, party and ethnic origin you belong to, as long as you are a Vietnamese person, you must stand up to protect the country. If you have a gun, use it. If you possess a sword, use it. And even if you do not have any of the two above, you can use farming devices and sticks to fight against the enemy. All of us have to try our best to fight against the colonists, to save our country.” (Tuyet, 2008; 10.)

Figure 4 Illustration of Ba Bang Tam



Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): Women’s Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam (date taken 27/12/2010)



Figure 5 Illustration of Ha Thi Que



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam (date taken 27/12/2010)

When the justification of the US policy turned out to be aiding the French at war, Ho Chi Minh felt like to have been betrayed because he was expecting the American government to recognize at least the independence declared on September 1945. The intensity of war even loomed in quickly. Yet the social roles and obligations of the Vietnamese women in the realm of militia and its supporters grew even tensely.

### **Dien Bien Phu: The Final Episode of The French and The Beginning of Full-fledged Women War**

General Leclerc and Navarre, who were assigned to battle out in this war, strongly believed that they would find 'the light at the end of the tunnel' before the Vietnamese did. In exchange for that, in 1946, as Ho Chi Minh braced for a clash, he offered the French generals an equation that proved to be remarkably accurate 'we will lose ten men for every one you lose, but in the end we will win'. The strategic military scheme brought about by Ho Chi Minh's right-handed comrade, General Vo Nguyen Giap was to shape up the core of the Viet Minh forces in putting the fight up with the French war at Dien Bien Phu as well as in the

American war. The best known strategy which was to be effectively sorted out and mobilized throughout the war until reunification was the guerrilla warfare. His military success was not about winning at Dien Bien Phu, but it was the method and tactic he applied in building and transforming the guerilla armies. He was to transform his ragged ranks into real soldiers (Karnow, 1997; 289.) My personal travel to the Women Museum in Hanoi has found on the basis of how a guerilla force was originated. From the perspective of women members who joined the force, the guerrilla forces were a popular army founded in villages to fight against enemy raids and to destroy enemy posts. Nationally 980,000 Vietnamese women participated as guerilla forces. Hoang Ngan in Hung Yen province hosted the largest group with 7,365 women members. This group fought 680 battles, destroyed 13 enemy posts, 16km of telephone lines and killed or arrested 383 enemy soldiers. During the resistance war 12 guerilla women were awarded the ‘Heroine’ title including Ho Thi Bi, Nguyen Thi Chien, Mac Thi Buoï and Vo Thi Sau (Women Museum, Hanoi, 28 Dec 2011).

The warrior women role such as the ‘tiger-general who fought with courage’ (Dutton, 2006; 68) began to take its full practical shape. In fact, during this time, there were a significant number of women participating in the Viet Minh guerrilla forces in plotting and fighting against the invaders. During the battle for independence, the revolutionary female force matured as a military organization. Vietnamese women played an essential role in the founding of revolutionary bases, the development of a female military force and the organization of not just the Women’s Union but also other youths and peasant organizations. Women were arrested, imprisoned and killed for defying the enemy and fighting for revolutionary blocs and the Party. During the First Indochina War (1946-1954) women led movements against local authorities which led to their takeover in strategic villages and provinces. For example, in the village of Phung Thuong, twenty miles east of Hanoi, the Viet Minh recruited women who served as a courier. According to Stanley Karnow, they would collect intelligence from Vietminh spies inside French installations. Every action taken could be a little bit of underhanded as the following statement made by a woman in the particular village.

*I would resort to all kinds of tricks to get near the posts. I would pretend to cut grass around the post, and our man inside would come out shouting for me to go away. He would push and shove me, passing me a message with information on the number of French troops in the post and how many guns they had. Or I would make believe he owed me money. I would cry insults at him, and he would finally give me a ten-piaster*

*note. I would return him a five-piaster note in change with a message folded into it, warning him, say, that we were planning an attack. Sometimes, when I had to deliver bundles of documents, I would put them in my shoulder baskets and cover them with manure (1997; 312).*

Such position of a messenger was actually a challenging responsibility during the war since the French network of communication was boundlessly inspective. Consequently, those events had paved the way towards the epic battle at Dien Bien Phu. It was a valley chosen by General Navarre and his point of view believing that the place was the rare area far away from the strategic Red River delta in which the French battalions could gain strength and at least hold on to the post. Ridiculously I found, the French were even in a hope of help from the border people such as Thai and Hmong tribe. Yet the French garrisons and the Frenchmen were being left alone in the middle of low-lying ground geographically surrounded by a high terrain of mountain and thick forest. It was basically a basin trap, the worst military blunder ever. Bernard B. Fall reviewed in his article, “Indochina, The Last Year of the War: The Navarre Plan,” that the attack at Dien Bien Phu was never conceived as a “large-scale airborne raid” (Clemson edu). Its entire mission from the outset was to become a “meat-grinder” for the bulk of the Communist battle force far from the vital Red River Delta. Vo Nguyen Giap realized this and began to take a full advantage out of this ‘blunder’.

‘The Seat of the Border Prefecture’, or in Vietnamese Dien Bien Phu, turned out to be the most flexible battle site ever since the French were completely isolated. According to Vo Nguyen Giap, “within the valley, the French were only dependent on airlifted supplies, which meant that they could be strangled. By contrast, their domination of the surrounding mountains gave the Vietminh forces both the advantage of height for their cannon and a way to bring food and equipment in from the rear.” (Karnow, 1997; p. 206). The flow of China’s military aid was even made easy since the Dien Bien Phu valley situated closed to the Northern Border. The amazing point here was how much tremendous supplies had been carried through the complicated terrain as it needed a huge number of men and of course women. Karen Turner put it that “the hard labor of ordinary women contributed to the demised of French military control of Vietnam at the final battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Of the more than 260,000 laborers – some sources call them conscripts, others volunteers – who hauled supplies, half were women. Like mentioned before, the method of hauling supplies up to the mountains was a simply a hand-made bicycle. The journey was described as follow:

*From North to South, from the plains to the mountain regions, from the enemy-occupied zones to the free zones, as soon as night fell, line upon line of dan cong resumed their long march, which they interrupted during the day, following a labyrinth of invisible roads leading to the front. For nine years, goods and munitions were transported continuously to the front, to the hot spots of the resistance. They brought the wounded back to the rear, and removed the war booty. They took part in a series of offensives (Turner, 1998; p. 31-32).*

Definitely women formed a big part in this so called ‘civil resistance’ of the overall revolutionary movement. During resistance mobilization women undertook many key roles including care of wounded soldiers, supply of troops and financial and food requisitioning. In northern and central Vietnam 1,575,000 tons of rice was collected and 35,730,000 meters of fabric was made for the cause between 1951 and 1954. In the occupied zones women hid revolutionaries and maintained liaison with revolutionaries. From 1950 to 1954 in the partly liberated zones, women donated 9,578,000 work days to the transportation of food and arms, 2,381,000 days of which was just for the Dien Bien Phu Campaign (Women Museum, Hanoi, 28 Dec 2011). The ending stage of the Dien Bien Phu battle and the French Indochina War was approaching as well as the coming of the American involvement. It was the Vietminh led by Giap who adopted a different and more cautious strategy. The victory was clear since the enemy was right under their feet while the Vietminh troops were overlooking them from the high terrain. The decisive May 1954 victory of the Vietminh here is credited to the patience and tactical acumen of General Vo Nguyen Giap, whose troops lugged heavy weapons like a howitzer piece by piece through the jungle to sites high above the French garrison. As Giap’s artillery rained mortar on the French positions, his infantry dug several hundred of miles of tunnels around the French base, gradually eliminating all possible avenues of retreat. The entire effort required months of labor, but Giap could not afford to lose. According to Stanley Karnow, Giap ordered his cannon hauled higher into the hills so that the artillery could pound the French posts as the infantry crawled slowly toward them through a maze of tunnels. Colonel Bui Tin retold the story from his experience.

*Now the shovel became our most important weapon. Everyone dug tunnels and trenches under fire, sometimes hitting hard soil and only advancing five or six yards a day. But we gradually surrounded Dien Bien Phu with an underground network several hundred miles long, and we could tighten the noose around the French” (1997; p. 212).*

Despite the entire effort put, the victory at Dien Bien Phu was not yet finalized, simultaneously as the women's social roles and obligations continued to be persisted, both within the militia and household. All in all, the Dien Bien Phu battle ended with the Geneva Accord agreeing to temporarily partition the country based on the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. The temporary division resulted in the ceasefire ending the hostilities in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos, but it did not bear any practical implication of political settlement. It promised only the withdrawal of the French forces from the North and the Vietminh ones from the South and a pending of a nationwide election in 1965. The election was neither perceived nor put into action. It never happened. While the Geneva table was to turn its back on Vietnam, the US government and its policy of 'containment of communism' were inevitably finalized and Ngo Dinh Diem was sent to govern 'South Vietnam'.

### **Vietnamese Women under the Communist-influenced Regime and The American War**

The image of Vietnamese women on the Southern Vietnamese society was the continuity of the period that had been started in the beginning of Western influence since the French arrived. The colonial interlude introduced by the French had passed onto a new stage called 'neocolonialism'. It was conceptualized as a practice of post-colonial era in which a developed country is involved in the developing world in a manner that was distinguished from the pattern of colonial rule. The U.S. came in with such rule. The rule was mainly determined by military and political manipulation. Prior to the escalation of the war in 1965, the Vietnamese society and its anti-colonial thinking were to be ideologically effected. Henceforth, the ideally western social perspective had upheld a new but challenging path for the Vietnamese women especially in the South in this lasting moment of Cold War's colonialism. The South Vietnamese women had been gradually influenced by the western aspects of capitalism that combined freedom, rights and individuality. However, much of Vietnamese culture retained, but did not resemble that of the North. The American era had temporarily backed up the South Vietnamese regime and acted as their protector while the people were mostly kept out of war. The war took place in rather mid-region of Vietnam. And while there was 'short-lived' peace in the south, the north was another side of story. In the Northern regime, the most remarkable point was the method in which the communist regime in the north had used to impose upon its technique of mobilization other than roaming the country with guerrilla units. The first thing they introduced an idea of a 'collective liberation'

## Women Emancipation

Actually the land reform during collectivization period<sup>4</sup> was the basis for the socialist ideological transformation of the DRV government. The transformation that was strongly influenced by a development of Marxist-Leninist ideologies was to become one of the most compelling mass mobilization tactics applicable to any sort of mass organizations when the war broke out. Within the maze of chaos, the Vietnamese were expected to become a member of at least one organization whose vision could guide them towards solutions of all the problems happening. Some rather entered with strong will. Some could be pushed into it but later with an insight of why they were there. The most important Marxist ideology was socialism which had been propagated widespread relying on the ‘top-down’ governmental strategy. Apparently, the government had the legitimacy in securing their own mindset and spreading them in a very natural way. It all started with an ideal ‘collective effort brings collective action that would result in the independence of the nation’. That was the very first ideology that brought people especially the women at equal level with men. It means that the gap between social hierarchy and classes was intended to narrow down and to be abolished. Aforementioned, Vietnamese women had to endure with suppressive conditions exploited by colonialism during the French and the consequence of the American period was also expected similarly. The previous colonial condition had made the existing practice of feudalism in society become like an inescapable prison locking up the freedom of women. In short, patriarchal feudalism used to prevent women from making a contribution to the nation’s social and political life commensurate with their potential, in addition to locking women into a cycle of submission and servitude (Eisen, 1984; 20.)

Therefore, to emancipate women amidst colonial brutality was to close the gap putting an end to the hierarchical oppression upon women. That was one aim. The American war that inflicted Vietnam was to bring about the new image of women with a new social role and self-obligation which previously confined within militia and guerrilla units. They became not just soldiers, but fighters. Gaining independence and peace for the nation was prioritized in everyday’s lives of the women. To be working as a collective farmer became more or less just a political propaganda comparing to the ‘true’ national obligation of being free and peaceful unquestionably in need. The women were aware of this. Nevertheless, the fighting of the women was partially attributed to social oppression experienced directly or seen

---

<sup>4</sup> The collectivization period was between 1950-1970 with the new land reform and collective farming.

through the suffering of others. Therefore, the answer of freeing women collectively lay with what Marxism<sup>5</sup> had to offer. The collective liberation was indeed an act of Vietnamese women themselves in standing up for their own rights to fight and the right to free the nation.

### Marxist-influenced Ideologies and Organizations

Vietnam Women's Union was not the first organization focusing on mass mobilization in Vietnam. There had been several organizations founded in accordance to the will of socialism and engaged by women participation. There were Fatherland Front, Veteran's Association, Women's Association, Peasant's Association and Youth League Association. By the names of these associations, the hidden agenda was to mobilize troops consisting of women and men, girls and boys and even old people in fighting against the colonizers. Certainly the credit of creating a wining-mass-support government went doubtlessly to the communist politburo. That was simply because the objective of the whole war for the Vietnamese was crystal-clear although the anti-communists would think otherwise. But each of the organizations propagated had collectively shared similar goal; that was an independent state of Vietnam at last. The anti-communist would also not want any foreign power politically dominating and economically domesticating their own soil, wouldn't they?

Apart from the aim of true independence, the Vietnamese women began to seek for a solid explanation of the reason for participating in the wide process of mass mobilization. Firstly, it rested upon the notion of equality between men and women. Equality had always been there but unfortunately suppressive in an extreme way by the subtle practice of feudalism and the covert advent of colonialism. To achieve a national goal, there must be equality between men and women. Becoming equal to men, women must not only acquire a sufficient political level and cultural knowledge, also have a legitimate occupation to sustain themselves without relying on others (Eisen, 1984; 141). One of the occupations was obviously involved duties and responsibilities both in the battlefield and those backing their men counterparts in the front line.

It is also explained by Marxist ideology. Marxism offered an ideological framework linking all types of exploitation to the existing mode of production, and suggested ways by

---

<sup>5</sup> Marxism was what Ho Chi Minh was truly inspired, then spread on to his comrades and down to the society with the ideal of 'being a communist' and communism would finally liberate the country.

which the oppressed might vanquish their oppressors and establish a system of true equality (Marr, 1984; 236.) To engage in the revolutionary movement was another kind of being productively involved in the way towards becoming equal with the men. This was also how collective rights were being acted out. When the realization of seeking for equality within the society oppressed by both colonialism and feudalism had been met, it was also the period when ‘collective rights’ of women emerged.

### Women’s War as People’s War

It all came down to ‘war’. The Cold War between The Soviet Union and The USA erupted in a genuinely ‘hot war’ with Vietnam chosen as a venue. It was also ready signaled in the Geneva conference in 1955 when the US delegates sabotaged the agreement and supported Ngo Dinh Diem’s democratic regime in the south. The American war in Vietnam had the overall of three stages; the Kennedy’s, the Johnson’s and the Nixon/Ford’s. John F. Kennedy took the oath in January 1961 and talked about resisting global communism against the face of the powerful Soviet Union. By making an inaugural speech, “America was ready to pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship to assure the survival and success of liberty.” America thus felt obliged to take responsibility in protecting at least the liberty of south of Vietnam from being swept over by communism. Although Kennedy was hesitant in sending ground troops into Vietnam, there were American military men already doing a small combat fighting in the country.

In response to this, Ho Chi Minh and his comrades were militarily well-prepared. Not until 1961 that the National Liberation Front’s offspring was born, the People’s Liberation Armed Force was founded under the basic objective in unifying those communist armed units in the south, well-trained military infiltrators and other guerrillas. The burden fell on catholic Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother, also chief advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu that they had to cope with the insurgent turmoil. Moreover, their discriminating treatment towards the Buddhists had put the overall South Vietnam-US political relationship in a critical stage. There were widespread Buddhist demonstrations, both clandestine and covert. During this time as will be portrayed in the fourth chapter, female Buddhist activist had also been acting out in the struggling against this basic infringement of human rights. It will show that the violation of rights to religious belief was off-limits. The finding will articulate how a woman can be indeed very dedicating to willingly try to shape up a new society amidst the ongoing war. It is to further testify the US and Ngo Dinh Diem’s underestimation towards the will of the Vietnamese was



totally a blunder. The role and obligations of the Vietnamese women were actively very outstanding from this period onwards.

The biggest shift was a burden of Lyndon B. Johnson 'The War Escalator'. His top executives and key policy makers such as Maxwell Taylor and Robert McNamara were backing up the decision of escalating the war by an initial bombing in the north after the Tonkin Gulf incidence in 1964. During the time, almost every corner of Vietnamese society concerning military units mobilized by the DRV government through sub-organizations mentioned above was escalated. Apart from that, another defensive measure was taken into action. Propagandistic approached, it was done from the central authority to promulgate a decree statement of equal rights.

A number of official decrees was rectified in the Constitution of 1946 and reinforced again in the Constitution of 1959 (Karnow, 1997; 364.) Mainly the decrees raised the status of women to be equal to men which had been already embraced in the ICP program years earlier. "In the DRV, the woman is the equal of man in rights, from political, economic, cultural, social and family points of view. For equal work, she is entitled to equal pay. The state guarantees women workers and functionaries the right to get paid during maternity leave before and after childbirth. The state protects the rights of mother and children, and sees to the development of maternity clinics, crèches and kindergartens. Further development of women's role as socialist collective masters of society by training women cadres with the proper qualifications in respect of cultural, scientific, and technical standards, professional skills and political rights.'" (Eisen, 1984; 120.)

From this time onwards, woman's status was incontestably elevated to the position that was conveniently mobilized especially those who joined the military units within their hometowns. This happened in the North where they often called 'people's war' which had since been instigated throughout the Johnson's years of American war in Vietnam. Members of The Vietnamese Women's Union who took a 'part-time' job as a militia were regarded as the 'Long-Haired Army'. As they contributed their harvests and fought in the ranks of the 'Hairnet Army' or the Long-Haired Army, they also began to free themselves from their societal oppression and to see the truth about how their roles could function effectively parallel along with their responsibility to the nation.

Prior to 1965 almost 20 million women participated in military and political battles with a major support from the Vietnamese Women Union with the leadership of the major

female general Nguyen Thi Dinh who led the insurrection 'Dong Khoi' movement. The Tet offensive in 1968, although a failure measured in terms of casualty, succeeded in a way that proved American determination in Vietnam a total wrongness and the strategic Viet Cong an absolute indefatigability. A Vietnamese labyrinth of counterattack had articulated how people's war originated.

### Women's Liberated Zone

The successful mass mobilizing organization like PLAF was attributed to the construction of revolutionary bases which were capable of sustaining women fighters over generations. These bases were called 'liberated zones' which were considerably free from feudal or colonial domination (Eisen, 1984; 200.) An armed woman from Nga Trung lived in the zones where she and the forces could reorganize, train and rest. The zones not only satisfy the material requirements of the front, but are also the source of revolutionary enthusiasm for our armed forces and population. As long as they continued to meet the population's needs, it was not surprised why women had collectively succeeded in contributing the early sign of victory particularly in the risky areas in the south. Women in the zones were also ascribed the work of persuading people to join the struggle, organizing protest demonstrations, planning rallies to raise people's spirits and persuading soldiers in the enemy army to desert. Some of these women were members of the Vietnamese Women's Union but some were not.

In fact the Union had launched one key strategy called 'Three Responsibilities Movement' firstly organized in the North in 1965 (Nguyen Khac Vien, 2009; 105). The 'Three Responsibilities' were for production, the family and fighting. This had actually coincided with the practice of 'Three Togethers' which are eating with the people, living with the people and working with the people. Firstly, woman had to be productive in the way of 'feeding' her family, her friends and of course the nation meaning 'eating with the people'. It is a sense of collective cooperatives shared between people under the same roof of the nation. Secondly, when the woman produced, she had to sustain her family first and this was how the women acquired the sense of belonging and caring which would result in the instilled idea of living with people as if they were their family. Lastly, fighting seems to be the key aspect of this paper, yet it has its origin in the women's labor facing hardships whether in the colonial oppression or from the 'work' she provided for her family. Fighting means working, vice versa, and in order to fight for the victory, they work together. In chapter three, several cases on Vietnamese women will elaborate this theory and will show how Vietnamese women's

politically, economically and socially intertwined contributions had led to the final but victorious end of the war tunnel.

### Women of Victory

This chapter also aims at revealing another 'liberated zone' based on the mentioned ideologies for the women who had steadfastly and indefatigably fought for the reunification of Vietnam in 1975. Surprisingly, such liberated zone was intrinsically not limited only in one particular area or a group, but it was the national effort contributed by the women militia and supporters from all over Vietnam. These women had eventually re-defined what was the life of war-struggle was. Thus, this chapter will exemplify with several 'lives' of women who were actually living through the cruelty of war, thus giving the new definition of how the war had complicated them. Basically, nearly all the women in the North were part of the militia and formed self-defense teams in factories, fields, schools, and villages against the US air war especially during the Nixon's major bombings in 1970s. There was one particular example in the South. It was often heard: "As human beings, we are not inferior to other people. We're members of the Youth Union. We want to know if you really have the bias against us." Women at Ho Lap who voiced anger at being sent back to safer place after having proved their mettle, however, should not be considered unusual case (Eisen, 1984; 114.).

Moreover, most of the women veterans believed their war service entitled them to full rights as citizen patriots. This was one of a great number of women stories occurring in the south. Responding to the encouragement of the 'working together towards reunification', generations of Vietnamese women have maintained the active roles in the nation's history, working shoulder to shoulder with men in every field and making extremely significant contributions to the achievement of national independence and the construction of a new society. Although the Vietnamese women had taken different roles and responsibilities but their ultimate objective was to achieve national independence and the unification of the country to create peace, prosperity and happiness for everyone.

Vietnamese women have experienced one-of-a-kind conditions during their past lives and it is not an easy task to cover the whole range of stories. Historically, Vietnamese women realize that Lady Au Co was a legend of strong-will woman but how many of them would know that such legend would later inspire so many legends of women to come. But each of the legend throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century of Vietnam was to be of hardships, arduousness but

with full pride. It was all because of wars. The history of Vietnam is distinctive in terms of the struggle towards subsequent war times. People of Vietnam used to have every bit of their endeavor contributed towards the victory of each war the country had gone through. From the historic war with China, the French and lastly the neo-imperialist Americans, the Vietnamese had fought side by side leaving no one behind and aiming only for the pure fruit of independence. The status of women and the conditions of women as well as their contributions when regarding struggles against the war, all have been complicated by the calamities of such war as mentioned in the study. Women of Vietnam had been taking a very important but complicated step on the path along with the men in overthrowing the power of foreigners since the period of Chinese occupation until the end of the Vietnam War on the 30<sup>th</sup> April, 1975 when the country was reunified.

This chapter has shown that the Vietnamese women had lived under the condition that they never had a chance to avoid. However, the process of mobilization had pushed further steps into an effective revolutionary movement that embraced the collective effort of the women in liberating the country as well as freeing themselves. The following chapter will illustrate women's roles and obligations during the wartime by discussing selected literary texts. It will cover the testimonial and writing directly expressed in the midst of warfare atmosphere present how the influence of war had affected women both during the wartime and also in its aftermath.

## CHAPTER III

### **Vietnamese women on the front line and their lives after war**

It is mentioned in Karen Gottshang's account on *Even the Women Must Fight*, recollecting the memories of the Vietnamese women who had gone through war that Vietnamese women should be seen "a fighter, not just soldier". She explained further that soldier is a masculine term when picturing it, not just giving its definition. The connotation of being a fighter is considerably different. A person who fights does not always mean he/she is a soldier although an undeniable fact that the women had been brought both willingly and forcedly to become a militia woman is true. Throughout this research, so far, it has been attempted to depict in the most comprehensive way of firstly how the Vietnamese women took and upheld their roles in the society the war inevitably took place. For the Vietnamese, the country was split apart with one side attempting to unite it whereas the other resisted. However, Ho Chi Minh's goal for national independence and unification was accomplished in 1975.

The previous chapter portrays the warfare in Vietnamese society and harsh circumstances in which women had encountered throughout the long period of wartime struggle. Vietnamese women had gradually been influenced by mobilization process that step-by-step stimulated their emancipation out of the oppressed society. This chapter will offer a detailed picture of roles women shared during wartime and in the aftermath of the war. It will be divided into two main parts. First, it will show how a situation of war looked like through the writing of women who were caught up in the middle bombs and fires. The contribution of some women was not about killing the enemy or repaying revenge, but also about the sacrifice and the dedication towards other human beings and the appreciation of being alive. Secondly, it will study war imprints reflected in literary texts written after the war. The story *The Girl in the Picture* (Kim Phuc story) by Denise Chong and *Women on the Island* by Ho Anh Thai will be chosen for an analysis to investigate how women are affected by war even in the postwar period or even in the aftermath of the war. These two books reveal that the impact of war on women is life-long. The conflict ended in 1975, but for some women, their trauma and war memories still continue.

War stories will unfold the complexity of warfare that imposed upon the lives and roles of the Vietnamese women. They were determined to survive and the Vietnam War had necessitated prompt and alert contributions by the Vietnamese women towards achieving the goal. As will be revealed, such goal was not only attaining national independence but each path that was paved towards the goal has what it is called 'self-goal' that was attributed from a personal mission aiming to sustain the value of 'her' life and of others around her. This chapter will discuss the writings of Dung Nguyen's *War Child*, Dang Thuy Tram's diary, Cao Ngoc Phoung's *Sister Chan Khong*, Le Ly Hayslip's *The Journey Maker*. The strength and determination were desperately in need during such a hard time the women endured. This does not mean that they were forced to be a good person but because of their intrinsic goodness that inspired the others. The war could have turned a good person into an evil but the war had, in other ways, cultivated the heart and mind of millions of Vietnamese, half were women, to stand up and fight for their rights, and to live for the others. For instance, Tran Thi Gung or the Tunnel Lady recounted her 'tunnel' experience. It was her reason and her conclusion for the war with the Americans that mattered.

*When the revolution broke out I was just a kid. In 1962, the puppet soldiers came to my house and said, "Your father was a Viet Cong so we killed him. Go fetch his body." He had gone to a meeting with his comrades. The southern soldiers surrounded the building and killed everyone. From then on, I decided to take revenge for my father's death. Also, the people in my neighborhood suffered from poverty and deprivation and were brutalized by the police and puppet soldiers. I wanted to do something to liberate my country and help people get enough food and clothing. I believed my mission in life was to continue my father's cause, so in 1963, when I was seventeen, I joined the guerrillas.*

*By the time of fighting, I think the Americans lost many people because they were applying conventional tactics against our ambushes and tunnels. Their shells and bombs were extremely powerful and sometimes they killed people in the tunnel, but it didn't happen as often as you might think. The Cu Chi tunnels had such small openings it was very rare for a shell or bomb to land right in a tunnel. As Uncle Ho said, "A stork can't shit into a bottle, so with our tunnels we should not be scared of American bombers."*

*Whenever anyone asks me about the suffering of the war, I have a terrible nightmare that very night in which I relive these experiences. I miss my comrades very much and often see them again in my dreams. But I never felt guilty about the killing I did. It was war. Would not you shoot me if you saw me holding a weapon and pointing it at you? I think it was justified. But if I went to America and killed people there, I would feel very sorry and guilty. Since the Americans came to my country, I don't feel guilty. (Cited in Vietnam, *The Definitive Oral History Told from All Sides*; 16)*

Her aim was initially to avenge her father's death, and to follow his cause to liberate the country from the enemy. Her first intention originated from a devastating loss then came a distinction in the actions taken after partaking the guerrilla unit. The maze of the tunnels had also nourished her will into an unyielding effort in overthrowing hardships caused by war and also those foreigners who stirred the war itself. The understanding of the reality of the war was from her experience.

Selected works discussed in this chapter are intended to show the main contributions of the Vietnamese women during wartime. They are meant to define, based on the writing, women's roles and their responsibility towards the war. Vice versa, they are to say how the atrocities of war had shaped up their attitudes towards life. However, prior to getting to the writings, one must be reminded that, in reality, these five women were courageous enough to tell their stories behind the picture, but there were millions of women whose lives and contributions were left scattered such as one by the tunnel lady. A paragraph or a short confession of women could be of immensely important in indicating how much they had done for their country. Some stories of the dead were also told by those who survived.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Vietnamese women at the Ho Chi Minh Trail and My Lai village are forerunning principal contributors during wartime. Ho Chi Minh Trail was originally a hilly trace called the Truong Son Range starting from the area called Quy Dat in Quang Binh province passing through Laos, down to the very south of Vietnam and close to Saigon. The trail was approximately 1,000 kilometer long and of major bombing target by the Americans when it was found after the Tet Offensive in 1968. However, the trail could not have been succeeded in being the major transportation route from north to south (since the demilitarized zone in central Vietnam was very dangerous) without the work of the women. The

development of the trail was strategically important regarding to the opening and the clearing of roads after roads to facilitate the transportation; trucks, bicycles and porters. Those works were mainly contributed by women's labor and their effort was the main factors for the success of the trail. It was lengthened; widened and provided with bridges and culverts as well as shelters to become the supply line existing during the resistance against the French and US invaders (Khoi, 2008; p. 46). The strategic communication line of the trail, thus, was collectively aimed for national liberation. It is once said that the Ho Chi Minh Trail was the most significant strategy in reuniting North and South Vietnam. It would be proven as confessed by a woman named Vo Thi Vinh. She was aged fifteen when she first joined the Volunteer Youth Corps. Her main task was to expand and build the transportation network of the Ho Chi Minh Trail. To her, 'The Truong Son jungle gave us life'. As it is described:

*We were so young, we didn't know anything, but our patriotism was very high. We went to war willingly.*

*At first there were no trails, just mountains. Cutting the roads was a superhuman task. Our only tools were picks, shovels, and saws. We also had to dam up streams with rocks to keep them from swamping the trails. Most of the time we worked only at night because that's when the trucks and soldiers came, and we needed to be ready to help if they got stuck. Anytime bombs hit the trail, we had to rush out and fill in the craters immediately.*

*Needless to say, life in the jungle was extremely hard. When we were not supplied with rich, we ate whatever we could find. We often searched for crabs and cassava and sometimes we had to scrape fungus and moss off rocks. We were so hungry, everything tasted good, sweet and nutritious. The Truong Son jungle gave us life.*

*After our exhausting labor we'd go back to our camps and sing songs or perform play. We sang all the time to keep our spirits up. We used to joke that you could not hear the bombs over our singing. (Cited in Vietnam, *The Definitive Oral History Told from All Sides*; 104)*

Ms. Vo Thi Vinh's dedication and contribution was intrinsically valuable many lives of the others. Her life is similar to what is narrated in the story of *Dang Thuy Tram's Diary* when



every bit of lives solely depended on her. They represented courageous femininity and the spirit of living for the others. The Ho Chi Minh Trail can be regarded as a forever all-time victory of the war because it never lost despite continuous carpet bombing by the Americans. Each crater of a bombing was abruptly fulfilled by these patriotic hole fillers as well as each bridge and road damaged by the bombs were brought back to function again by the same female volunteers. Interestingly, the responsibility assigned as bomb-crater filler seemed to go along very well with their roles as an entertainer as well. It required a strong psychological endeavor to work under a lethal condition, and then finish up a day with singing a song or performing a play. Psychologically, any war would need R&R (rest and restoration). This also applied to the trail workers. However, sometimes the condition was not as easy as it seemed. Under an arduous circumstance, it is unforgettable for those women taking part in the war. As it is clearly shown in Nguyen Thi Kim Chuy's short story:

*I was sent to the Truong Son to help make three new trails – Number Fifteen, Number Twenty-one, and Number Twenty-Two. We worked in Quang Binh province, the gateway to the Truong Son where it was regarded as the 'bombing capital'.*

*One day we had to withstand seven bombing attacks while working day and night to fill the craters. At one point my commander asked me to go check on a group of girls about a hundred meters away. As I was walking in their direction, I saw with my own eyes a bomb drop into a shelter hole. There were five people in that shelter. Four of them just turned to porridge. We could not tell them apart. We just divided the parts arbitrarily into four small mounds, gave each one a name, and buried them. Only one body was recognizable – an official of the Communist Party who gave us visit. She had her two-year-old child with her. That woman was holding her child so tightly we could not separate them. We buried them together.*

*Almost everyone got malaria and quite a few died from it. Many of us temporarily lost our hair from malaria and living in the jungle for so many years made us look terrible. After the war we came home hairless with ghostly white eyes, pale skin and purple lips. Some girls lost their ability to have children. I developed terrible arthritis. When my old boyfriend came back from the war, I didn't think my health was good enough to have a family so I said good-bye to him. It was a very painful parting. Though*

*I never married, I did adopt my older sister's daughter. (Cited in Vietnam, The Definitive Oral History Told from All Sides; 104)*

The Ho Chi Minh Trail could not have been possible without the contributed spirit of the women. Her contribution to the building of the trail had put her womanhood at risk. The courage to work there was the courage to suppress the mental fear as well as sustain the physical strength. Although the reason that she developed a disease after spending years working at the trail was merely caused by hardship, but the reason that she refused to maintain womanhood in terms of relationships was actually caused by the loss of self-confidence acquired through war experience. Motherhood thus was rebuffed and adoption was chosen. Her contribution was actually her own deprivation of a life as an ordinary woman and as a mother although she lived a heroine life. Nevertheless, adoption was to compensate this loss since being a mother was not always a physical matter. The story comes closer to what the women in Brigade Five in Ho Anh Thai's short novel, *The Women On the Island* are facing. In it, *The Women on the Island* portrays how such deprivation reoccurs over again to the women of wars. The same stories are retold in the stories of the Ho Chi Minh Trail women and those written in the literatures. Critically said, the Vietnamese women endured the similar destitution, struggled towards their own different paths with courage and finally aimed at achieving the same goal of happiness.

If the magnitude of women contributions was indefeasibly manifested on the Ho Chi Minh Trail, and of course on other venues during the war, the gravity of the occurrence at My Lai village on morning of March 16, 1968 was all about women caught up in the adversary at its peak of the history of the Vietnam War. My Lai was a village near Danang along the coast. After a patrol of GIs had reconnoitered the area, it was firstly named 'Pinkville'. But after that particular day, it has since notoriously been known across the globe as My Lai The Massacre. It happened on an ordinary morning day when the villagers were shopping in the market. They did not know what would come next as a company of soldiers in helicopters was about to land. It was a Calley company that assigned the task of finding any suspects of Viet Cong around the village. When the soldiers, people they found were women, elderly people, and children. Psychologically frustrated with the war and for whatever mysterious reason beyond all logical possibility, the reckless killing began. Almost 109 innocent civilians were killed, tortured, raped

and mutilated (Appy, 2008; p. 343). They were all unarmed civilians. This occurred during the peak of the war and not until years later that the real war atrocity unfolded to the world.

To speak of the contribution, it literally was how the women as well as others in this cruel incident were the inescapable war sacrifice, yet its mourning and immorality explicitly contributed to the new re-justification of the war. To the Americans and their public front, the Vietnam War had lost its justified reason completely. To the communists, the revenge could never be stopped until their aim was met. Since then, the war became the war of attrition and the loss was invaluable. Amazingly, there were survivors, mostly women, who could maintain life through hard time and still keep memories with them. For those who did not live to witness how their sacrifice would have affected and finally 'peace' was achieved in the 1975 reunification, they are remembered by later generations.

Figure 6 Illustration of My Lai Massacre.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Lai\\_Massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Lai_Massacre)

From the documentary *Four Hours in My Lai*, the author of the book, Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, gathered this unsettling account through witnesses particularly those women who survived the massacre. There were Pham Thi Tuan, Sa Thi Qui, Pham Thi Trinh, Truong Thi Le and Vo Thi Cu's niece (Bilton and Sim, 1989). They were not related to each other but all were residents of the My Lai village. Their confessions reflected an unknown atrocious incident that happened in 1968. Some confessions are short but direct; some are long, but meaningful, and

some are revengeful and grieving. It is worth quoting what these women told about the incident at length here. As shown in the following excerpts:

Pham Thi Tuan

*I was getting ready to work in the fields, when the copters flew in and started firing. People didn't know where to hide. They shot some people and rounded up others. They told us to sit down – we sat down. They told us to stand up – we stood up. We thought they would let us go but they pushed us into the ditch and shot everybody dead. My children and I were in with the dead people. Their dead bodies weighed down on me.*

Sa Thi Qui

*The first time the Americans came, the children followed them. They gave the sweets to them to eat. Then they smiled and left. We don't know their language, they smiled and said OK and so we learned the word OK. The second time they came, we poured them water to drink. They didn't say anything. The third time they killed everyone. Killed everybody, destroyed everything. Nothing was left. The people were chased into the ditch like ducks, they fell head first. They were crying, oh god, have pity please, let me up, we are innocent, have pity. They shot all the people dead, then silence. Tiny children crawling along the edge of the ditch, it broke your heart. I thought I was going to die I could not breathe, I was injured, so I crawled here back home. Over there, there was a naked woman who had been raped and a virgin girl with her vagina slit open. We don't know why they behaved like that. They should not shoot the innocent. Don't shoot innocent people. Let them kill their enemies, but here we were killed, in the middle of a meal. Just chewing food and we were killed. Rapists who could cut open a vagina inspired an unfading hatred. Those innocent people did nothing wrong. Those Americans so strong and valiant, yet they raped, killed and destroyed everything and we just had to accept it. Now my people hate the Americans. We'll hate them as long as we live. What cruelty.*

Pham Thi Trinh

*Here the Americans killed Mrs. Lieu's family – 11 people. I looked out of the house and saw my sister, Mui, she was 14 that year. An American was pressing on top of her she had no clothing on her. At the time I didn't understand what that meant. My sister was trying to resist him. Afterwards the American got up he put his clothes on and then he shot her. Never oh Americans Americans. I decided to leave my hiding place. I say my house had burned completely. And in the yard, my loved ones were burned to death. My mom and my little bro still in my mom's arms, my seven month old baby whose body was half burned. I didn't know anything anymore. I stood by my mom's body and cried. When I'm very sad, I often think of starting a new life somewhere else but it would be just the same anywhere in my country. Here is where I belong; the grave of my mom and loved ones is my consolation. That's why I can never leave.*

*Now the US wants to establish relations with Vietnam and many Americans will come. It's very painful, I don't ever want to talk about the tragedy. But I believe I must recount the story and work to tell the world about the massacre. I hope this never happens again. (Why can't you look at me in the eye, is it because I'm from America?) Before, when I told you the story in front of my eyes, I see no one.*

Truong Thi Le

*Nothing was happening here. It was a very normal life. When the copters came and the troops surrounded us. They were firing their guns over there. They blasted away and people were dying. Oh, it's so horrible. I pushed my son into the paddy field and lay on top of him. I told him 'don't cry, the Americans have shot everyone. Don't cry – and see if we can survive. For a while I didn't hear any noise. I was alive because there were corpses on top of me. I lifted my head and saw Americans pointing here and there incessantly. Those who were still alive were shot again and again. Then there was no more. It makes me so unhappy. It's so hard. I miss my mom and my children. I think of them lying there dead and my heart is cut to pieces. The more I think about it the more I want to cry. It's why I'm old before my time. I remember it all the time. I'm all alone and life is hard. Thinking about it has made me old. I won't forgive. I hate them very much. I won't forgive as long as I live. Think of the babies being killed, then ask me why I hate them. My old mother lying dead over there. I hate them.*

### Vo Thi Cu's niece

*My aunt Vo Thi Cu, had a nine month baby. After they had raped her, she lay naked. The baby, unaware, climbed on her breast for milk. An American soldier plunged his bayonet through the baby and into her mother. No matter where you went, there were dead bodies. Do you know what the Americans came for? They wanted to make Vietnam their colony. It was clear. In the beginning, they gave candy to the kids. (Bilton and Sim, 1989; online).*

Figure 7 Illustration of My Lai Massacre.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My\\_Lai\\_Massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Lai_Massacre)*

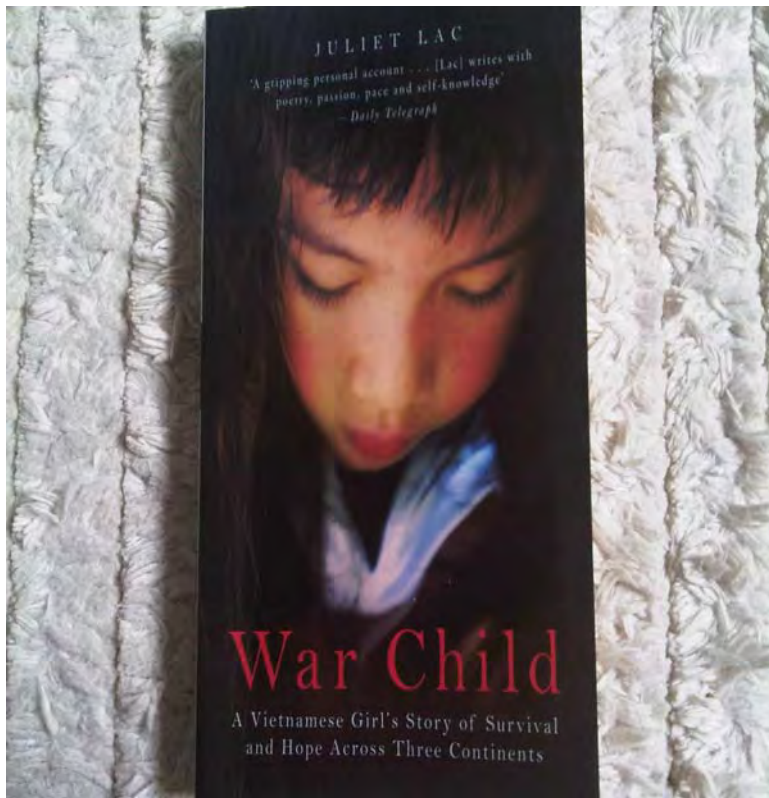
The situation was clearly beholding upon these women and is supposedly still haunting their lives. The war unavoidably intruded their homes. In the common situation elsewhere, the Vietnamese people would fight back, but in this village, it was never a battlefield at all, nor were they prepared to fight back. My Lai village has been a living witness as well as strong evidence testifying the American conviction towards civilians. The sacrifice of women, children and the elders that day was simply a flesh-and-blood evidence underlying the most undeniably ugly aspect of the Vietnam War. Psychologically, it was a shock to the world and clearly revealed dark facets of the war. From this point onwards, four written accounts of four Vietnamese

women will be taken into closed considerations based on the history of war as the setting. All books will finally portray what were the roles and obligations of the women during wartime and how exactly had the war influenced them as human beings.

### 1. War Child

The first chosen literature is only a small book titled ‘War Child: A Vietnamese Girl’s Story of Survival and Hope Across Three Continents.’ It was just recently written and published in 2008. The newest account on a Vietnamese woman story of war comes from Dung Nguyen or Juliet Lac. I had the first opportunity to read her book first and it did bring me up to her predecessor ‘Kim Phuc’ whose story recollected almost similar life-changing and heart-rending experiences of war. The difference did stand out. Dung Nguyen was a woman of ‘boat people’ who fled Vietnam for the freedom she’d been searching for and hoping to gain it in the land of her country’s enemy; America.

Figure 8 Illustration of War Child.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): Phatsurang's own book.*

Dung Nguyen was born in 1968, five years after Kim Phuc but the path they were both walking onto resembled the unimaginable pains any war victim could suffer. During the war, Dung Nguyen or Juliet Lac's life had also been constrained under the oppressive society of the South experiencing the remnants of feudalism and the extremely ongoing American conflict with its propagandistic indignation over 'Northern Communism'. Being a girl who was born during the peak era of the Vietnam War was not an exceptional point since there were millions of women who had been through 'lives' during the wartime. Being an oldest daughter of an ARVN<sup>1</sup> soldier and a seamstress already put her in a role of 'full southern anti-communist' before any picture was imagined. However, the prominent thing about this woman was her 'southern' attitude and actions during her childhood which had shaped up the way she was and could best represent other female southerners whose words of wisdom were never spoken. The

---

<sup>1</sup>The Army of The Republic of Viet Nam was a southern force unit founded by the government of Ngo Din Diem and militarily supported by the US.



reciprocal bond between Dung Nguyen and the southern government portrayed another interesting dimension that proved about the female southerner's contributions towards the survival and triumph not just over the war, but also her own self. Interestingly, Dung was born two years right after the war was escalated, 1967 and it was amazing how she had been 'moved' instinctively since the day she could recall her own past. It is also interesting to know that she firstly addressed how she felt with having born in a family which was never completed. She even perceived her own father's job as a soldier as 'the job of soldiers is to destroy', whereas she regarded her mom's career as 'always sew things back together'. The notion is here. When she recognized the Americans as destroyers and intruders, she always defended her country and mobilized such move against 'them' by picking broken pieces of the broken country and 'sewing' them back together.

Figure 9 Illustration of Dung Nguyen or Juliet Lac.



Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): War Child the book, 2009; 96.

The 'socialist strategy' of communism, nevertheless, made its ideological way permeating through the southern society. Although she was not mature enough to realize what was the strategy of 'three responsibilities' and 'three togethers', she still recalled how her mother had passed on such memories instilling upon her. By teachings and lessons passed on by the

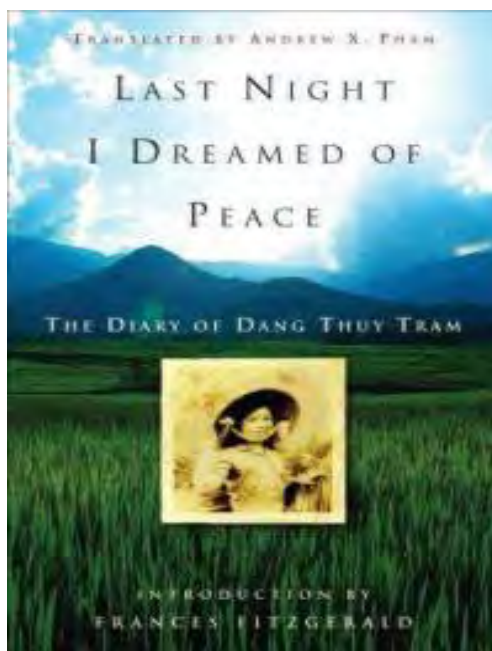
mother, she became no longer neither 'Southern Traitor' nor 'Communist', but the role she would be taking was a war child. Dung Nguyen and her mother were encouraged by the Viet Cong army to join the group of 'women supporters' in reducing chances of getting hit by American bombs. Dung, as a kid, remembered how she had been mobilized around in order to carry out such project her mother was into. She thought of how busy her mother was, let alone her father who was a soldier. Her account also proved that "many young girl women were fighting alongside with men too" whereas her attitude towards 'American women' was something of a national pride. She regarded "in America, women were marching for equal rights, but in Vietnam they already had them – at least when it came to fighting and dying in the field. Few Vietnamese people had access to television then, but still, I wonder what the women of my country would have thought if they could have seen the women of America up in arms over things like birth control and unfair pay, when their own biggest worry was how to survive". This sense of the struggle towards living a life was somehow shared by all Vietnamese women. The same patriotic common sense, that appeared in whether communists or anti-communists, was actually the spirit of patriotism to sustain her life as well as saving others. However, Dung's account represents another area of idealistic differences from the northerners. Dung, as a war child, saw war as an insane stage where destroyers (soldiers) fought each other trembling those ordinary people under their feet. She said that the effect of war was that it took the most energetic and productive of a nation's people, and it destroys them. However, in the harshness of war time, she agreed on following the Viet Cong and the Communist government's path rather than letting the foreigners intrude and take what belonged to them in the first place. She also recalled how the Viet Cong flag was also influential in terms of security. "At the time, the Republic of South Vietnam's national flag had a yellow background with three red stripes in the middle that, to Duong, represented a sense of security from American intrusion". The fear was generated from the fatal condition caused by either side, the Vietnamese or the Americans. As a war child, she was 'obliged' to obey and play along the game. Besides that, it was inevitable for Duong not to mention how her childhood had also been influenced by the work of Ho Chi Minh and how she was willing to follow his footsteps towards a path of independence. She remembered how she and her sister along with her classmates at school were constantly being told how young students should behave and obey 'Uncle Ho' whose struggle for Vietnam's independence was never a work of vain. She said "no one who believes in freedom and equality

can argue that this struggle in itself was a bad thing. After all, it was a nearly identical philosophy that led to America declaring its independence from Great Britain nearly two centuries later. It was evident how the Southern women were already born with a sentiment against any sort of war. This had combined with grown-up life and the definition of 'independence' and how it had meant so immensely to them.

Another example of this topic is war diary by a female doctor and Vietnam's bestseller book called,

2. Last night I dreamed of peace: The Diary of Dang Thuy Tram.

Figure 10 Illustration of Last Night I Dreamed of Peace.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): <http://www.tower.com/last-night-i-dreamed-peace-diary-dang-thuy-tram-paperback/wapi/111922539>*

### 2.1 Dang Thuy Tram's background and her Memoir

An interesting subject about women contribution to the war is their self-expectation of the roles and responsibility towards the war and the roles and actions the society expected of them. As depicted in the previous chapters, there were personal and social expectations in every

Vietnamese woman during wartime. There is no exception for the case of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram. This part of the chapter will mainly focus on the memoir of Dang Thuy Tram which was written from 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1968 to 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1970. Dang Thuy Tram was a field doctor whose mission was to follow along the path of communism and her goal to liberate the nation. Her main duty was to heal the wounded and save lives. The memoir outlived its owner. It conveys the most unexpected message even more startling than any history of the Vietnam War accounts ever have written so far. According to the preface, it states how the memoir survived the fire of the war. Frederic Whitehurst was a 22-year-old American infantry when he found Dang Thuy Tram's memoir probably at the time the war had already ended in 1975. He was actually ordered to burn all documents of the communists found but Nguyen Trung Hieu, the southerner translator, suggested otherwise. He told his American fellow that the burning of this memoir would be useless, for it had its flame burning within already. The flame of war in the most positive sense and the worse negative side of it was delivered clearly and intensely throughout the memoir by a woman. Before the memoir was published, Fred had been attempting to return it to the owner's family for 30 years after the reunification. He succeeded in 2005, just recently. The memoir was returned to Dang Thuy Tram's family and later published. Then, the world acknowledged that the memoir's flame has since been on fire and never quenched.

Dang Thuy Tram was born on 26 November, 1942 to a middle class literate family with a father being a doctor and a mother a pharmacist and a professor at the University of Hanoi. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram graduated from the same university in medicine in 1966 and had since joined the revolutionary movement just like many others. She joined voluntarily and started working in Duc Pho, Quang Ngai province in Central Vietnam where the war had violently been concentrated. This is also the place where the memoir took its first page. A northern doctor went down to the south and began her job as a doctor and a revolutionary cadre. In the beginning, she was a doctor healing patients mostly soldiers.

She was also a party member, officially assigned by the communist party on 22 September, 1968. However, her memoir confessed that along the path to becoming a 'fully communist revolutionist' was as harsh for her as the path to liberating the nation. But once she succeeded of joining the party, it was preceded by the success of the others. It was only that she did not live to witness. The writing reveals that Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was what every former revolutionist, from Phan Boi Chau, Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, had ideally expecting of

someone to be. For Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, she was both literately educated with a degree in medicine and also a self-educator. From the starting date of the memoir, 8<sup>th</sup> April, 1968, she had been teaching a number of precious lessons to herself, people around her. The most important lesson beyond every page of every day in the memoir was the invaluable of staying alive. Her life was for the sake of herself, her family, her patients, her colleagues, her brothers and sisters and her country. The same lesson learned by a lot of others.

Nevertheless, she was not just an educator, but also a good daughter and a devoted doctor. She did not only give treatment for the wounded, but also rescued them from weakness and discouragement afflicting the society at the time. Although the memoir comprised of only 264 days of written confession, but the less-than-a-year diary said how the society of war had really been connected from the previous days of years before to foregone conclusion of the fate of Vietnam. There might have been a number of ‘Dan Thuy Tram’ in the past as well as the living ‘Dang Thuy Tram’ who survived and finished their journey at the end of the tunnel; the end of Vietnam War. Similar to what Dr. Dang Thuy Tram had encountered day after day, the influence of the war became a vigilant force driving her obligation as a woman of war forward to at least thrive for a happy and loving moment amidst the ongoing war. Along with her goal to liberate the nation, as shown in her memoir, there were several obstacles to overcome. The enemy was not only the Americans and their bombing, but also her fear of not being able to convert all the roles and obligations into power towards the liberation.

## 2.2 War from a Woman’s Perspective

The 264-day diary travelled through three consecutive years from 1968-1970. The year 1969 was rather special when the diary had been written throughout the whole year. When the first day of the memoir began in 1968, it gave the first picture of what was a physician like during the fighting the war. The journey took off by telling that a physician like her could have provided better healings if the lack of equipment would not be too scarce. All she did was to lessen the soldier’s pain by painkiller. The same situation was to occur again and again almost every time the patients were in her caring hands. It sounded painful in a way that she did not accomplish her job as a doctor due to lack of medical equipments. But it ended up that the doctor and the patient healed each other’s heart by an act of talking, touching or even waving to say

goodbye when they had to departed. The healing was actually full of messages in which they kept the power of revolution going.

The first picture of the departure Dr. Dang Thuy Tram experienced was how she saw a group of soldiers walking in the opposite direction of where she was standing, but they always thought of the same direction, the north. The North, she kept saying in her diary, was the communist Hanoi, the dearly city of freedom. The city she left and hopefully she would return. The same city many others had left, returned or dreamed of the return. The exactly city where all the sources of power lied down and the million attempts were carried out in the hope that one day the south would return to the north. The starting month, April 1968, has already been fulfilled with big hope and courage, but one significant aspect has been drawn into attention. It was love. It can be said that love and compassion were the most important aspects beyond expectation of a woman's roles and obligations.

For Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, love is the last piece of the jigsaw puzzle of liberation. The diary initially revealed this when she was hoping for a quick health recovery of her patient so that he could have gone back to fight; the fight for the nation and for the return to his mother. The mother who was waiting for the return of her son with all her loving heart and hope was what Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was willing to do anything to have this hope come real. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram's mother was also waiting for the same return, but Doan Ngoc Tram and millions of mothers had to wake up and find out it was just a dream. There were three million sons and daughters who had never had a chance to come back home. Those lives were dedicated to the liberation of the nation but to the mothers, it was a life-time sorrow. The tone of 'mother of the nation' has since been consistently heard in almost every month within the memoir.

However, the love of life could sometimes take shape in hatred. Abhorrence and vengeance were also distinguished aspects partially giving the foundation of such mentioned roles and obligations of the women. For Dang Thuy Tram, the American planes were flying over her every single day and their bombs were pouring down. Although a say 'loving the enemy' was the most positive side of thought, but Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was a human being, she could not stand loving those who were destroying her country. 'The army of blood suckers' or 'the devil bandit' was what she often used to refer to the American soldiers. Their bombardment and bullets sometimes sucked her tears and eventually turned it into fire of hatred burning within her. She often jotted it down after an incident broke out with some of her friends, brothers or sisters

might get injured. It was truly inevitable for her, living in the middle of such war, to not have hated the enemy.

Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was also very detailed in remembering the past, recalling it to compensate for her difficult condition making her day a little cheerful as well as learning the lessons of life. Amidst the war, her dream of peace was still vivid. The dream of Hanoi, her hometown, her school and definitely her family can be shared by several northerners. The writing of these sentimental remembrances was really outstanding in a way that represented how peace had been twisted by war and the women feeling obliged to mend it back to its origin. Her memoir also showed how her personal love relationship did not worth the love she should be giving to her revolutionary friends and their goal. The goal of winning was sometimes accompanied by a song usually entertained through an army choir consisting of female militia and supporters which was common during wartime such as the women on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. The lyrics kept on “move forward, no matter how many lives wasted, we were willing to die for the independence of all.” This was just one among her difficult situations she had encountered. But the most difficult thing she had to deal with was her effort in applying for the communist party membership. The tone of despair, mistrust and lack of confidence occasionally inflicted and disrupted her day but she still recovered well by repeating that ‘life must never succumbed to obstacles’.

By that meaning, her role as a doctor had never been affected by personal sadness of disappointment. Although her revolutionary obligation was not yet official, but she never gave up the will to accomplish the revolutionary goal. The will was also meant to regain back the true happiness after a quagmire of sorrow caused by the American war. Being able to contribute to this, a sacrifice is not uncommon because at the time of war, death was omnipresent. At a minute, the brother she had been nurturing with love could have gone dead, as well as her life. Whereas her social role as a doctor was mainly about physical treatment, another key aspect adding to that role was how she treated her patients like they were part of her family. During hardships and escapes in the shelter, the wounded soldiers were all Dr. Dang Thuy Tram had got and she was all they had too. It was very obvious during the time of evacuation in which her focus of concern was all on her patients, colleagues and students. It was to be very obvious during 1969. But in this year, the diary began its ‘ideological journey’ with a sense of pride and confidence of an eventual success.

Although most of the time Dr. Dang Thuy Tram used the word ‘dream’ to accentuate the emancipation of peace, liberty and independence, but she deemed a deep certainty and confidence in her brothers and sisters who were fighting against the enemy out there. To her and probably millions, war was (is) still a waste. But when the assault of war reached their home, everyone must believe in something or someone in order to move on and reach the goal. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram believed in the atrocity of war that brought nothing but death to her but she also believed in herself and others that death was worth sacrificed for a national liberation. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram also believed in the power of youth since she had witnessed many young Vietnamese aged around 12-18 years old fighting for their country with courage and bravery. When those youngsters came to her for an injury treatment, she did not just treat them with medicine, but she kept encouraging them for the fight. What she got in return was the same encouragement, the one to keep her alive.

The ideological belief was really strong especially when it came to an accomplishment of a mission of the communists. This was why Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was a little bit dissatisfied with the authority that had not yet accepted her into the communist party. Once she became the member in 27<sup>th</sup> September 1968, her willingness towards the war was being stressed out. Meanwhile her social roles as a doctor is still reflected so clearly in the way she compared ‘staunching/bleed stopping’ with how the nation is bleeding. ‘The army of blood suckers’ was the cause making the nation bleeds; therefore in order to stop the bleeding forever, ‘they’ must be driven out of the country. She alone could not stop the bleeding, but with cooperation of the communists as she believed, it would soon stop. By saying ‘I have to act as I deserved of this, of being a fully communist’, the mission of ‘avenging’ and the ideology of ‘love among communists’ had since become highlighted almost every day of the memoir. To her, a sublime ideology of communism would lead to an official revolutionist. At last, one of her dreams did come true, to be part of the revolutionary movement.

However, there was one big incident happened during this year when one of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram’s close friends (whom she always referred to as ‘brother’) was killed (shot and stabbed to death). From the starting date of the diary, it was her annual big loss. Since then, she became determined of taking avenge on the American soldiers who had invaded and killed lots of Vietnamese civilians and soldiers. She instilled within herself a fire of resentfulness that would not be put out until the invaders left. As revealed in her writing, she chose to take a role of



a loving sister, more than a doctor, among her brothers as well as sisters. She was emotionally angry and the diary notes it all. Yet she fed her hunger for revenge with love and everyone around her realized it. Love was truthfully the foundation of this diary, the sublime bedding of the ideology she had been talking about.

Basically, Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, the diary evidently says, understood how the wheel of revolution was moving. To her, revolution was the most beautiful and precious prototype of living a life. And to live a life in the big family of the revolutionists was an honor. As a result, she was celebrating her birthday, although in the middle of live fire, with the same wishes she would give to her comrades and country. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram redefined in a perfection the way people would tie to each other with love in a revolution. The love she felt it was pure and honest. It was actually the same kind of love she gave to her family back in Hanoi, to her picturesque home of origin.

The year 1969 of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram's life was exactly similar to the year 1965 when the war was escalated. The circumstances got to the extreme level when the bombardment was ceaselessly pouring down and disrupting almost everywhere her infirmary went. The relocation took place almost every week and sometimes every single day throughout the year. Until this page, there was one single aspect that seemed to be missing but it came up on the first day of the year 1969. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram mentioned Ho Chi Minh and his New Year wishes which unfortunately did not move her with excitement but rather a short comment. She doubted about the last year winning because she felt people, especially those in the battle, were being deteriorated by the exhaustion from fighting. She doubted about this year. Ho Chi Minh's new year wish is shown below:

*We won last year*

*We will win greater things year*

*For liberty and independence*

*We will fight until the Americans run away, and the puppet government surrendered.*

Still it was not just Ho Chi Minh's message alone that gave her a kind of courage, but the inspiration she felt was also from her own patients. The lessons were what she had already mentioned in the previous year; courage, sacrifice, responsibility, unselfishness, strength and the

honesty towards the revolution. She often told in the diary how hard it was she had to deal with the situations, and how much revenge it had to take in order to compensate with the loss of her friends. The consequence of war was even greater than the number of casualty. It took life and happiness of even the strongest person like Dr. Dang Thuy Tram. For her, the Americans were the murderers. If there were still North and South Vietnam, the Vietnamese would inevitably suffer from family separation. But while her happiness was fading away, she often used love as a remedy. This was obvious in the memoir as one day she was sad, but the next day she talked about love as if was the greatest thing the revolutionists could give to one another. During the time of hardship, only love sustained their power of revolution. It was the love of brotherhood and the compassion given and received among people surrounding Dr. Dang Thuy Tram.

When she got a patient at hands, she treated him not just with medicine but with love. When she talked to them, she comforted them with love. When a soldier said farewell, she prays with love to meet them again. When death took her brothers, it was like a sacrifice for love. Love transcended almost every single line in the diary. That was one of the most significant aspects shaping up what it was like to be a doctor of revolution. Thus, a hard-working communist was also what she was thriving to prove. A lot of work had been assigned to her and it seemed like she delivered it all quite well because she kept receiving a positive work assessment. But the outstanding job she did besides being a doctor and a party member was how she kept her dream and hope alive all the way through difficulties.

According to the diary, the year 1969 was the hardest year because of the assault of the war that had aggravated the evacuation. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram and her infirmary had to move place after place and built in everywhere they went a new health care facility. They were to witness again the viciousness of the war chasing them and ruining their place. For her, the patients were always her first priority to look after because if anything happened to them, it was herself to be blamed. But, the war had also indirectly destroyed other lives and made them suffer from losses. The diary had witnessed them all especially the sacrifices of lives. Like death, sacrifice is common in this war crisis. But when one sacrificed his/her life in the revolution, Dr. Dang Thuy Tram recollected the memory of him being alive hoping one day she would pass this on to his family. As she described 'the heart of a communist is not only rational and responsible but it has to be loving and full of hope'. Love and hope were really the major aspects that had never disappeared from the obligations of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram in this war. She stressed them

out almost every day she wrote the diary. It was to keep the motivation of fighting with big courage going. Taking avengence on the enemy was a duty committed by almost every revolutionist, but to possess a strong belief on the ideology of love and hope was a unique issue. It needs from a person, an absolutely positive insight amidst the worse negative situation. The memoir of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram speaks of how her roles and obligation were a combination of such thoughtful fortitude. These were the subsequent situations happening during the evacuation. As depicted in the diary, through the long period of war, her dream had never ceased to exist.

The dream of reuniting with the family was to be followed by the dream of national liberation. For Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, to make the dream come true, there were many challenging missions to achieve and lessons to learn. The diary had shown some important perspectives of a woman at war towards striving for such missions, but one day in April, one thought stood out. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram mentioned in the diary there was Vietnamese saying that the true happiness was possible only if we, the Vietnamese, fought for it and until when there was no any single American left in our land. Apparently, this was to prove how a woman like Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was very deeply contemplative over the tough conditions and being able to ‘treat’ them with encouragement and fighting spirit. The power of each fight also stemmed from her brothers’ sacrifices and the love among the living. But realistically, she was among those who gave away every single thing even life to the national revolution for liberation, peace and independence.

Her love and support for the brothers who had gone out to fight were the tools like the shovels, the bicycles and the wooden poles used by the women during the Dien Bien Phu battle. Only the written evidence of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram made these great contributions so clearly visible. When the women of Dien Bien Phu suffered, this memoir spoke their suffering on behalf of them. Such sacrifices, the feeling of a must-be-taken revenge, pain and misery became among the most pellucid confessions of the memoir. Interestingly, the memoir was agonizing and simultaneously heartening. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram understood in her thought well and in others’ too. She knew perfectly well how war did to people who had devoted too much in protecting their nation. All she wanted was to be a remedy of war restoring the wounded back to health, invigorating the fighting revolutionists and uplifting those who remained home waiting for their loved ones to come home.

There was a story of a mother whose son was also one of Dr. Dang Thuy Tram’s revolutionist brothers. The mother and the son loved each other very much but one day the son

told her that he would participate in the revolutionary movement. The mother never wanted him to go because she doubted that her son would not stand living in the difficulties. She was rather misunderstood. Her son grew up to be a strong-will revolutionist and determined soldier who feared nothing but the loss of country's independence. Unfortunately, they were separated for three years without seeing or writing a letter to each other. The mother was expecting her son's return so she kept seeking for chances. Once they met, she resolutely demanded her son not to go out there fighting anymore. The mother said the revolutionary mission can be achieved elsewhere not just in the battlefield.

For Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, the love of any mothers was too precious to question. However, she believed the role model of Vietnamese mothers was to be capable of loving their children in the way the country should be loved. One could not lose a child but they all could not lose the country too. It was the main point in which Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was trying to deliver about the perception of how a mother could contribute to the war by giving confidence to herself as well as her children to go fighting in this sacred war for the sake of the national liberation. Every single life in Vietnam then was indefatigably meant to stand fighting for this goal. The mother fought for the nation hoping one day their children would return home as the country would also be reunified.

The memoir also witnessed the death of Ho Chi Minh. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram mourned over his death but she promised to continue his mission on gaining independence for the nation. It was the same promise any Vietnamese revolutionists would give to their leader. On the journey of revolution, they shared happiness and love among each other. For Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, she felt responsible for keeping the journey alive with a fire of strong ideology that kept the power of fighting spirit moving. Those who died for the country with an unfinished business will be remembered by those who lived. And the business will be finished at least in the way Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was longing for. During the last half year of her diary and her life, she had delicately experienced another apprehension over the most disorientated position of her career as a doctor of war she was forced to be.

For readers, a diary of someone seems to be like a short story of 300 pages that can be finished within 2 days. Yet for the one who wrote it, it seemed like forever especially in the crisis of war. Right in the beginning, Dr. Dang Thuy Tram mentioned about how youth life has been robbed by the mission of war. The childhood sacrifice was actually another consequence of war

and Vietnam was no different. Every Vietnamese who went to carry out the mission of Ho Chi Minh had lost their formative years in the middle of battlefield. For Dr. Dang Thuy Tram, her childhood memory had been peacefully set up in Hanoi before she went to medical school and became a field doctor in Duc Pho. Since then, her only mission was similar to other million Vietnamese people and the only thing that kept her heart close to home and family was her childhood memory. The image of her hometown and family had always been recalled in the time when she just encountered the most dangerous moment of war.

Her self-motivated role as a moral supporter was reflected very clearly in a poem she wrote. It was the first time of the diary to have been written a poem. The poem illustrated how Dr. Dang Thuy Tram comprehended a beauty of lives comparing its essence with the meaning of liberating the country. The sound and the feeling of winter breeze was simply like a sadden heart strolling aimlessly in the middle of the country. A coconut tree resembled people of the South and represented 'her' shadow that was actually heading towards the North, Hanoi. Spring season of love and the hail of a winning were waiting for those who made the return. Truly for tomorrow, the heart was full of dream, honesty and love. For her and the others, the love is a tool for seeing the future. This poem delivers a message revealing how people of Vietnam had been longing for the country's independence. Although the poem ended on the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 1970, the hope and dream still remained. Dr. Dang Thuy Tram had always reminded her brothers not to give up their love, hopes and dreams on this perilous path of revolution.

In this very last year, 1970, Dr. Dang Thuy Tram wrote more about the meaning of life. This can be noticed from the ways she comforted her brothers and emphasized that every minute is an honor to be part of the revolution. To serve the revolution was to make every minute worthwhile and to deserve of having born as a Vietnamese. There was a kind of appreciation of dignity as a Vietnamese revolutionist that Dr. Dang Thuy Tram had always underlined. For her, as long as the revolution had not yet succeeded in carrying out the mission of Uncle Ho, Hanoi would not be satisfied. Up to this point, it is true that her role taken in the field including other women had extremely been influenced by Ho Chi Minh and his goal of liberation. The death of the great leader had further emphasized that his determination lived in almost Vietnamese women's will in pursuing the same matter.

Interestingly, once Dr. Dang Thuy Tram quoted the work of Nikolai Alexeyevich Ostrovsky who was a socialist writer during Stalin's era (1904–1936) (Wiki, 2011; online).

'How the Steel Was Tempered' was the famous work of N. Ostrovsky with one meaningful sentence 'the steel that has been tempered with fire will be even stronger than before and will win over any challenges and difficulties' (ibid, 2011; 25). As she redefined the meaning of the steel, it was the goodness and value in every revolutionist whose steadiness of love, hope and dream to complete the revolutionary task. The steadiness was to exterminate those Americans who were committing on their war in a foreign country. Also, the bitterness lasted until her very last month of life. By calling Nixon 'the crazy hound' or America 'the imperialists' 'the army of blood suckers', they might sound notoriously biased to the modern historians, but at the actual time when one had to face with countless losses and separations, the relief of pressures had been managed to blow off the steam.

Figure 11 Illustration of Dang Thuy Tram.



Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): Vietnam's Women Museum, Hanoi (date taken 27/12/10 at the museum)

Dr. Dang Thuy Tram began her diary with a story of her job as a doctor. She and other young Vietnamese people left their homes to seek for a peaceful place in home country. Happiness did await both at the beginning of the tunnel and also the end of it. There were many who made the return but millions including Dr. Dang Thuy Tram did not. Despite that, her roles and obligations had proved to achieve the goal of sending those Vietnamese people with strong heart and soul back to where they came from. With her contribution, medical treatment and moral support she gave her fellow soldiers, she helped return daughters and sons back to their homes and awaiting mothers.

Dr. Dang Thuy Tram's diary is the only chosen literature which was written by herself exactly at the time of the war; therefore the message being delivered was indeed fresh and living. It thoroughly described how a woman and their contribution towards the war were of a great matter. It also showed how the devotion of one human being can be so invaluable towards others. On the ground of this discussion, a Vietnamese woman could complete her duty as a medical doctor for wounded soldiers and civilians, party member undertaking revolutionary tasks, fighter to protect herself and the wounded under her care, and even teacher of basic nursing course to villagers. At the same time, she also played a vital role in providing moral support to other

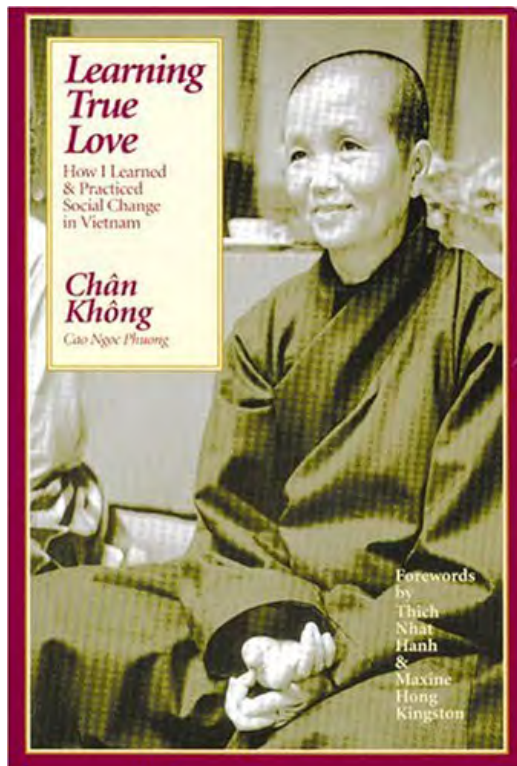
people. Apart from being a daughter to her family and Vietnamese society, she was also a sister to the young soldiers and villagers who equally endured hardship during the conflict. As clearly shown in her memoir, the sense of sisterhood and platonic love were overwhelmed. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to conclude that it was also feminine quality like loving and caring, along with masculine characters like courageous and heroic that moved the war forward.

### 3. A Buddhist Nun and Social Change amidst War

The story of Cao Ngoc Phuong is special not only because she was a Buddhist nun but because she has got a unique method of building peace. She can be described as a peacemaker. The main reason she decided to write and publish this book was her determination to create and retain peace among people, and save other lives without abandoning her self-virtue. The book was published in 1993. The English title of the book is *Learning True Love: How I learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam*. This book was a compilation of memories of peaceful social project during war with a Buddhist nun playing the role of a peacemaker. Several aspects that built up such role were compassion, calmness, true love and sympathy for the war itself. The roles of a benevolent daughter to the family, caring friend to others and thoughtful social worker to other human beings were clearly taken. By reading through the book, one could barely feel the sense of desperation and trauma. As a considerate person, she hardly let those feelings of despair even touched her and pulled her down. As an example social worker many people looked up to, she acted as if there was no such as war and be more focused on the ascribed tasks which were all about 'helping' people to live their lives. When she decided to shave her head and formally become a nun, it was because she was strongly obliged to devoting to the society and people around her. It was the wish to transform the preaching into actions that actually contributed to building a new society without war elements left. Her roles and obligations as a benefactor of peace during war proved that the influence of the war was never the harmful power.

Figure 12 Illustration of Learning True Love: How I learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam.





*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): <http://www.shelfari.com/books/319333/Learning-True-Love-How-I-Learned-to-Practice-Social-Change-in-Vi/tags>*

The title of the book clearly reveals its main theme. The political turmoil and conflict between North and South followed by the killings had agitated Cao Ngoc Phuong and reminded her of an unsecured and unfair society in which she was living. She realized that there were numerous Vietnamese civilians inevitably victimized by the actions of all parties involving in the war, namely the Vietnamese, the French and the American. She felt how the wartime situations affected people from social groups, including those who claimed that they fought for liberty or those who just struggled to survive. For her, fighting or winning the war did not truly bring what people really wanted in life. She decided to find another solution to the problem.

Cao Ngoc Phuong grew up in a quite well-off extended family with parents being the most charitable people in the village. What had instilled upon her through lessons given by parents were generosity and compassion for other disadvantaged people. She was taught to share, to give much more than to take, and this mentally shaped up Cao Ngoc Phuong during her

childhood. Moreover, the virtue of Buddhism was truthfully the main aspect in forming her role and obligation in Vietnamese society. She believed in the Buddhist teaching and the power of Buddha's virtue to finally generate peace through the actions of giving. Her Buddhist experience started off with a myth about how Buddha's rope extended so miraculously to protect the whole country from the evil doings of Mara. Since then it became tradition. Buddha's rope has since to be hung with a bamboo tree to actually protect the house or farm from harms. The rope was actually to be used meaningfully during the protest against the Ngo Dinh Diem's government policy discriminating Buddhism and promoting Catholicism. By growing up in the Buddhist community, Cao Ngoc Phuong had also learned that to be benevolent towards others was the easiest task. When she was fifteen, she gave the money she earned from tutoring job to some high school students who needed financial support. The explanation she gave was "giving to those who needed it came quite naturally to me from the seeds of sharing that my parents and grandparents had sown in me." Since then, the appearance of her role as a giver took off clearly.

However, under the French colonialism and the establishment of 'communism' in the north, she had come to confront with the matter that later stimulated her justification over the unjust society of Vietnam. At first she experienced the teaching of Marxism and doubted whether or not its ideology could have really overcome the suffering and injustice she saw elsewhere. By witnessing the French arrested her father and the communists killing those innocent civilians who were monks and nuns, she realized then that both the French colonialists and communists did not really respect human life. The influence of war had built upon her the detestation of 'liberty by killing'. For her, peace had to be generated from a peaceful society. In Buddhism, to give is a charity, so she complied with it by initially helping the poor people in the slums near her university. This occurred prior to the escalation of war in 1965. She began what it would be regarded as a social work, though at the time, she did not even realize it was a work. To her, to help poor people in the slums and bring them happiness were prioritized apart from her study of science at the University of Saigon.

The social change project gradually progressed when she started working as a head of the social welfare branch of the Buddhist Student Union. Her social work included helping the poor, setting up Buddhist schools for adults and children, forming evening classes on science. She believed that Buddhist teachings and practice would bring happiness to everybody in society and

give people a better future. At that time, there were anti-government Buddhist demonstrations taking place firstly in Hue and then spreading down to south. The cause for this widespread religious uprising was the political suppression from the government on Buddhists. But sister Phuong regarded this issue as an example of the human rights violation. There were many monks and nuns arrested but the most depressed scene was some of their immolation. It was literally a sacrifice of life to the unjust society at that time with a hope that this non-violent act would truly illuminate the way the government discriminated the Buddhists. A number of monks and nuns set themselves on fire on the street. It finally had a deep impact on sister Phuong.

*To move the hearts of the hardest men and women, you have to give a gift of great value – even your own life. These people did not die when their bodies turned to ash. When I looked deeply at Thay Quang Duc’s sacrifice, I could see his love and deep commitment to human rights born again in me and in thousands of Vietnamese and others all over the world. We received the fire of love and commitment to act from his great sacrifice (Phuong, 1993; 40)*

She revived human rights in the South by helping the poor people to be able to meet their basic needs in the society. The government suppression on Buddhism and the engulfing scene of immolation drove her towards a new direction. To carry a bigger project in the future, she decided to continue her study in France. She left the country in October 1963. And she did complete her thesis a year later and came back to Vietnam immediately for Buddhist social projects that awaited her contribution. By the time she returned, her social projects had already grown stronger. Since then she had helped slum people in Cau Kinh<sup>2</sup> built a new three-room schoolhouse and a medical center. With donated tables, benches and medical supplies, the slum was transformed into a proper village. On top of that, education also cultivated people’s knowledge to the point that they could do a real living instead of begging or stealing. The quality of health care also improved. The new techniques of farming, the vaccination of animals and horticulture were also introduced.

---

<sup>2</sup> A small suburb near Ho Chi Minh city.

The escalation of war in 1965 had not just disrupted the ongoing village development but also made the living of sister Phuong more difficult. Apparently by helping villagers and doing social work, they were considered as ‘communist act’. Chances of getting arrested and thrown into jail were high, let alone the omnipresence of death. Bombing came without warning from both the guerillas from the north and the ‘nationalists’ troop<sup>3</sup>. However, she only wanted to help wounded soldiers by bringing them to the health care unit. During this hard condition, a poem was composed. This was the poem that inspired many young Buddhists to join the project of helping the victims of war.

*The villager looks me over. Agonized yet fearless, he answers, “I hate both sides I follow neither. I only want to go where they will let me live and help me live.” O life! What misery!*

After that, she decided to go to the United States to organize a small conference on war. She went there in order to explain the suffering of the Vietnamese people and to plead for peace in Vietnam. She wanted people in other countries to learn the actual events of the war and how brutality it brought to those innocent people living in the villages. The most important question was raised “these people were human beings like me; why did they have to suffer so?” Hence, the determination to address the question came out extremely quite often during the following years.

The reputation of this social development work project attracted a large number of Saigon intellectuals and professors. These people encouraged sister Phuong and other leaders to start a bigger project and launch a nationwide appeal for rural development and social change. As a result, the establishment of a School of Youth for Social Service (SYSS) was announced. Young people could train to be social workers, and when they graduated, they would be sent to remote areas to serve poor people. There were 1,000 people applied to this project (Phuong, 1993; 71.) From this time onwards, sister Phuong’s main job was about the promotion for support of the organization. Amidst the war, the Buddhist teachings were also escalated with the essence of tranquility through helping each other, being mindfulness and a compassionate human

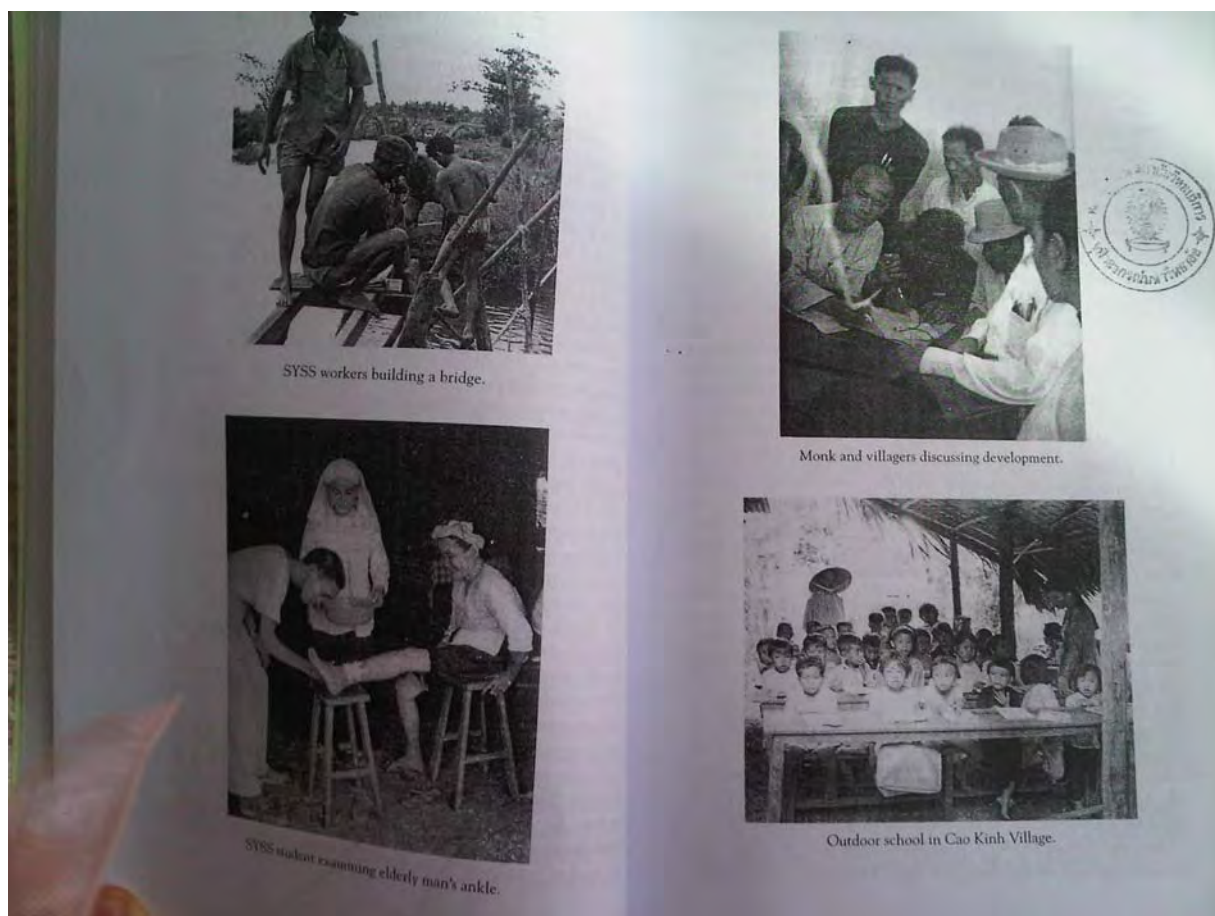
---

<sup>3</sup> The Southern forces backed up by the US.

being. No matter how harsh the war went, the importance for her and the SYSS crews was the practice of the Buddhist precepts. These guidelines lighted up their path of service and helped eliminate negative tendencies, like fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, anger and hatred.

Nevertheless, the situation of war was severe especially during the intensity of the Tet holidays 1968. On the street of Saigon after the Tet offensives, there were hundreds of dead people lying. The stench of corpses was horrible and the organization felt obliged to help put these dead bodies into a proper ceremony and prevent the spread of diseases in the city. Still the act caused suspicion to both communists and Southern government. The organization had been visited many times by the Pro-communists who scorned “You should cry out against the Americans! It was CIA agents who killed your friends.” (Phuong, 1993; 107) Then the next day came Pro-American Vietnamese who screamed “You should speak out against the communists. It was they who killed your friends.” (Ibid, 1993; 107)

Figure 13 Illustration of Sister Phuong’s social work



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* Phatsurang's own book, *Learning True Love: How I learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam*, 1993; 54-55.

Sister Phuong found the solution from Buddhist teaching. The commitment to compassion made the resolution 'Man Is Not Our Enemy' possible. Most people avenged on the enemies or the oppressors by force. But in sister Phuong's way, enemies were the misunderstanding, hatred, jealousy, and ignorance that led to such acts of violence. The remedy for these was to make a change and uplift the well-being of society beginning with our will to transform egotism, greed, and lust into understanding, love, and sharing responsibility for the poverty and injustice in the country.

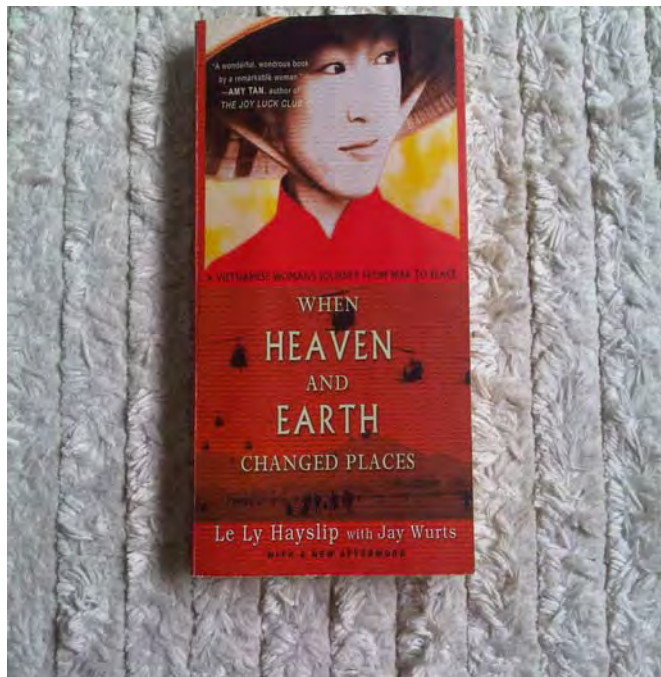
A case of Cao Ngoc Phuong reveals a life of a Buddhist nun taking a role of social worker and peacemaker during the Vietnam War. With her faith in Buddhist teaching, she compassionately determined to continue her work and devoted her life for the poor. It is also

noticeable that she attempted to stay neutral and did not take side with the Communists or the South Vietnam regime. As for her, violence and force applied by both powers did not truly bring any benefit to the people whose lives torn apart by their confrontation.

4. When Heaven and Earth Changed Places: A Child of War, A Woman of Peace.

Whereas the situation in the South was represented sister Phuong's story discussed earlier in this chapter, the Central Vietnam was also portrayed through the perspective of a woman whose life was affected by war. Based on her sons' suggestions, Le Ly Hayslip decided to tell her unforgettable story of war. Basically, her story was what her mother would call 'the completion of growth cycle' by living through periods of peace, hardship, post-war transformation and finally getting back to peace again. For Le Ly, heaven represents a peaceful peasant life she came from whereas earth is a life-threatening circumstance she had been living under. But no matter how often heaven and earth changed places, she will always be standing right in the middle. The book was firstly published in 1989, three years after her 'return' to her homeland.

Figure 14 Illustration of When Heaven and Earth Changed Places



Source (retrieved on 30/03/11): Phatsurang's own book.

Le Ly Hayslip was born as Phung Thi Le Ly in 1949 in an ordinary peasant family that earned a living by farming and harvesting. She was the youngest of seven children in the family that lived in the village called Ky La in central Vietnam near the city of Danang. From her memoir, women's contribution to the Vietnam War was more than just a contribution but it was a courageous heart that could not be destroyed by the war. As born in a typical Vietnamese family, she was carefully raised up by parents. It can be said that the strength in her was passed on by her family's teaching. "Freedom is never a gift, it must be won and won in order to get it" was the very first lesson learned and she was moved by it. By this, she came to experience when her village was invaded by the French troops and some of her neighbors were arrested. The freedom of living as a peasant life had gradually been ripped off after there were a number of 'visits' to the village. It was also the first time she realized that the mother of every house had the duty of 'sending their sons to war'. Her village was finally visited by a flock of Viet Cong guerrillas who provoked the villagers to join the fight or be alert on the American intrusion. The next day was the Southern government officials who came to 'protect' the villagers from the communist threat. It was during the early stage of the Vietnam War. She soon witnessed her



mother unwillingly obliged to send two of her brothers away to accompany the Viet Cong in fighting off the Americans. From that moment onwards, her life had changed.

There were a number of incidences happened in the village which became one of her life turning points. Prior to the war escalation, she helped her mom working in the field during the collectivization. It was from her mother whom she had learned humility and the strength of virtue from. She said it was no disgrace to work like an animal on the farm or contribute to the nation at war. Her mother once told her “Would you be less than our ox”, “who works to feed us without grumbling?”, and as through this, she had to be ready to fight against all hardships.

One day she faced the advent of the American soldiers in her village while she was farming. And another lesson she learned from her family was that “Just see this land, Vietnam is yours now, if the enemy comes back, you must be both a daughter and a son.” To be a daughter meant to be able to deal with difficulty with thoughtfulness, sympathy and love while being a son was being able to stand up against hardship with endurance and bravery. These qualifications combined with personal conscience compelled Le Ly to search for a chance of survival in every minute of life. Even stupidity could also be one of the aspects she had to apply in order to survive.

Ky La village had gradually become one of the strategic areas where the ‘competition’ between the guerrillas and the Southern military soldiers became intense. The day usually came by the regular forces of the South while the night belonged to the Viet Cong. Forced to comply with both to survive; playing a role of a stupid child whenever being asked questions was another way. When the war was intensified, the Viet Cong ordered the villagers to dig trenches and psychologically stirred up the hatred on the ‘traitors’ among them. The ‘ant model’ became Ky La’s villagers’ model. “You never ‘move up’ in the ant society accordingly, you only ‘move further in’ if the Viet Cong won the peasants over, it’s because they lived their lives with us.” (Hayslip, 2003; 89.) The guerrillas attempted to win over the villagers’ but its force also guaranteed no lives.

Figure 15 Illustration of Le Ly Hayslip



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* <http://globalvillagefoundation.wordpress.com/our-founder/>

Trenches could not hide Le Ly forever from the other enemy. The Southern forces, too, raided in with their American advisors with an ‘examination’ purpose to clear the village out of Viet Cong traces. In order to survive, the situation had driven her to confront with no options but to obey ‘the south’ or whatever both sides told her to do. The Southern regular armies taught the villagers how to use powerful American-branded arms and condemned the communist acts. Moreover, she later became one of the Viet Cong’s village decoys who facilitated the guerrillas to bomb the Southern troops and tanks where they were spotted. This turned out that she was the only one arrested by the Southern soldiers. Her ‘stupid role’ did not work this time. As a result, many types of torture were used but the physical suffering could not match the mental one. After she was released from ‘the south’, she had to face what ‘the north’ would do to her, raping. With deep fear and humiliation, she and her mother fled to Saigon where she would be exposed to another life in a new environment.

Living in the city was never an easy task for a country girl and things could be lurking at any moment. Although the ‘war’ had not touched the city life yet, but her complicated condition set off when she was pregnant with the master of the house where she and her mother worked as

housekeepers. She was expelled from the house and fled again back to Danang. By the age of 16, she was working alone in the black market to support her mother and her baby 'Hung'. In fact, she was one of the luckiest women of war to be able to bear a child and become a mother. It was a dream, to have a child, shared by many women who survived the war. Her motherhood had actually driven her to break through all obstacles she faced. She had since earned a living not just for herself anymore, but for her child. The survival of her child would be the most important thing in her life whenever the heaven and earth changed places. The sacrifice of a mother made her become a prostitute just to feed her child a bowl of rice. From what had happened, Le Ly's mother gave her a remindful moment. "You were born to be a wonderful wife and a mother, not a killer. Don't ask what is right or wrong. Go back to your son, make him the best one you can, that is the war you must fight, the victory you must win." (Hayslip, 2003; 120)

Although Le Ly had no chance to go to school, she had been educated by her mother and her mother's teachings penetrated her soul. She was fighting the war not for the North or the South. It was the peace she was struggling to meet and the middle path of life she had always longed for. All she needed was a peaceful life like what a peasant from a small village should ordinarily deserve. The peasants in My Lai village did not even come close to this opportunity but Le Ly was already there. Her first son 'Hung' was the symbol of peace and the war her mother meant was the fight for a mother to win the peace for her child. That was the most significant obligation for Le Ly as a mother to accomplish. The influence of war did no harm to her, instead; it enhanced her courage to hold motherhood with pride.

War seems unavoidable, but the war women fought was not always about being armed, marching into a battlefield, and killing the enemy. For Le Ly Hayslip, the war was the will to maintain her motherhood and bring peace back to her son. From the selected Vietnamese women in this research, Le Ly was the only woman who became a mother in the midst of the Vietnam War. Like many other Vietnamese women, she played a role of a daughter and a sister when war required their moral support for those fighting in the front. These women could also take a role of a son when the war required them to be brave. The heaven and earth seemed to change their places upon her again when she gave birth to a child of her own. Being a mother during war time was unimaginable especially for those women who were directly affected by the war. Despite many difficulties, she was obliged to overcome hindrances in life and become a mother. From the

roles she played, housekeeper, black market seller, garbage picker and a prostitute, she had never succumbed to despair or give up. It was because she believed that she was a good mother. Finally, she could manage to find peace in her motherhood. For those who fought in war, they would dream of the moment of peace that mothers and sons could be reunited. Le Ly Hayslip was the woman who witnessed this cycle of growth, amidst war. Life grew even in the middle of war. She survived and completed the cycle of growing peace.

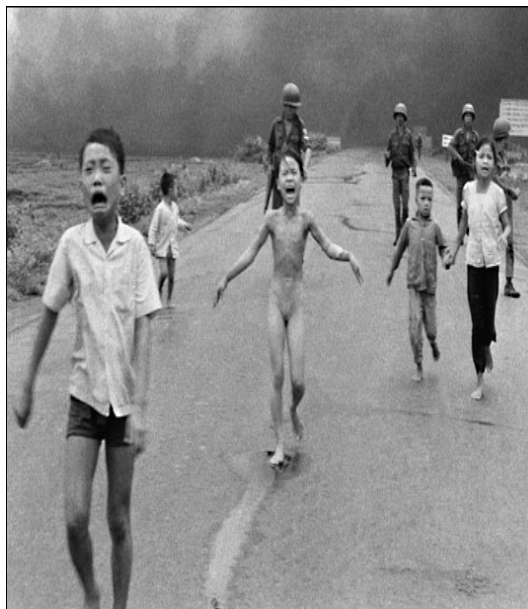
From the cases of Vietnamese women shown above, it is revealed that there were many social obligations and expectations weighed on women during the wartime. Women were expected to be a heroic mother encouraging her son to fight in battlefield and supporting the war. Women could also hold a professional duty like the case of Dang Thuy Tram or get involved in social work as illustrated in the case of Cao Ngoc Phuong. It is also depicted in writings that female qualities such as loving and caring were required during the wartime. This is to boost up the moral support for soldiers as often seen in the terms of ‘mother of revolution’ or ‘daughter of the nation’. However, whatever role they took, Vietnamese women shared a common dream and hope of peace. That is to say, they wanted to resume their duty as a daughter, a sister and a mother in a happy family of a peaceful society as shown in the diary of Dang Thuy Tram. Some of them were even ready to sacrifice everything in life in order to protect their motherhood and to be a good mother. The story of Le Ly Hayslip can be a good example.

### **Women in the Aftermath of War**

This part of the chapter will reveal how Vietnamese women cope with life in the postwar period and whether or not their dreams are fulfilled. The discussion will be based on Ho Anh Thai’s short novel, *Women on The Island*, Denish Chong’s story and Kim Phuc’s memoir. In her writing, Denish Chong shares insight and understanding towards the war whereas the aftermath of war is vividly reflected by Kim Phuc, a survivor of war known as “the girl in the picture”.

#### 1. The story *The Girl in the Picture* (Kim Phuc story)

Figure 16 Illustration of the famous ‘The Girl in The Picture’.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* <http://blindfleur.com/?p=533>

The reunification in 1975 was what the majority of the Vietnamese people had celebrated. For the communists, it meant their mission succeeded but for the nationalists in the south, some were disappointed but some were pleased to see the war came to an end. For Kim Phuc, however, it was neither a successful mission nor a disappointment although she was a southerner who survived the war. *The Girl in the Picture*, according to the author Denish Chong, was the remarkable story of Vietnam’s most famous casualty. One capture of a 9-year-old girl running in terror with limbs opening wide towards the cameraman still strikes the world. The story of the girl in the picture or the Kim Phuc’s revelation began right after the war ended in 1975.

Kim Phuc, a fifth child, was born on April 6, 1963 into a middle-class family in Trang Bang town, south of Saigon. She was given a name ‘Phuc’ which means happiness. Phuc’s birth year was during the establishment of the Southern government led by Ngo Din Diem. Like any other Vietnamese families, Phuc had lived with a well-settled family with parents having a stable

job. Later it was developed into a business when they have a noodle shop of their own. She was happy like her name. To feed and nurture children were not really a difficult task. Partly this was the war had never touched the ground yet. Before the picture was taken and the beginning of Kim Phuc story, there was nothing come close to be called a 'war'. Apparently, the war reached the far south of Mekong river delta and central highlands. In Trang Bang, like Saigon and America, "the public impression of the distant war was not of gore but of monotony and repetition." (Chong, 1999; 12). Firepower was never heard or seen among the people of Trang Bang before. It was almost out of their reach.

It seemed like any other day on June 8, 1972 until an air squadron of South Vietnamese flown over the area in search of the communist insurgencies. The truth was revealed later that the bomb was a friendly fire. The planes dropped a napalm bomb on the town causing fire and air-overheat all over place. Phuc joined a group of civilians and South Vietnamese soldiers who were fleeing from the Cao Dai Temple to the safety of South Vietnamese-held positions. They all could not hide from the napalm attack pouring over the town. The war had finally reached the place where it used to be unreachable. With other children, kim Phuc ran out of the 'safty shelter' with arms outstretched and the face looking horrific. The moment was professionally captured by a Vietnamese cameraman Nick Ut. Minutes after that, Kim Phuc told the author she was unconscious and gained her memory back once again during her treatment at the hospital.

Kim Phuc was in a hospital for 14 months under an intense care unit where her burns were treated but later on she moved to Germany for treatment. It can be said that one reason Phuc survived the crucial first days was that she came from the better-off south, where food was plentiful and children were well-fed, so that she was healthy at the time she injured (Chong, 1999; 109). After years in the hospital, she came to Vietnam again and began her school. As a young adult, she decided to study medicine at the University of Saigon but the problem came when she was removed from the institution. The communist government started to use her as propaganda to tell the world how cruel the former capitalist government of South Vietnam was. A number of foreign journalists focused on her story and attempted to revitalize the history of war through her perspective. As a result, her schooling became impossible and the situation was too overwhelmed as she was not ready to reveal her thoughts to public. Thus she moved to Cuba and began her study in English major at the University of Havana where she also found her

future husband. They both soon relocated to Canada and pleaded for asylum. Her story was back on the publicity after three years living in hiding. This time she was willing to tell the story herself.

The story of Kim Phuc emerged, but not as a representation of a woman living the war, but as a victim of the war. From the book retold by Denise Chong, the story began with Kim Phuc being already a mother of two sons and a good wife to her Vietnamese husband living in Toronto, Canada. The book gives a brief account about how Kim Phuc survived the stage of pain until the war ended in 1975 and the country reunified. The national reunification did not affect Kim Phuc's life. However, she was more affected by the fact that her life had been exposed to public since the world acknowledged that she was a girl in the picture. A role of a 'war presenter' was beyond her expectation. She had not felt ready to take that obligation and reveal her story just yet. The education was her first priority. The reason was because all those years of painful memories. She had endured with inhumane pain in which she felt she wanted to study and become a doctor so that she could heal those who were in the same position.

According to Denise Chong, the napalm bomb was physically flown over the Trang Bang town by a South Vietnamese plane but it was under the command of American military advisors. Kim realized this fact as so much of those who saw the picture. However, it turned out that the communists insisted on 'using' this fact for political reason when there were foreign journalists asking for the girl in the picture. Kim Phuc, as a student, was unwillingly to talk about what she had been through. Moreover, a limited freedom of speech during the critical 'rehabilitation' after the war; it was hard to speak out the truth. The communist government expected the explicit expression of the cruelty of American capitalism. Yet Kim Phuc had on her second thought about that. Her stay in Vietnam had somehow pressured her condition and still trauma was not put aside. She was obviously not ready for any confession yet. Apparently, the decision to relocate to Cuba was partially because of the pressure by government.

Her dream of becoming a doctor came to an end. This also reveals how Kim Phuc, as a woman now, was not able to retain her right for education in her own country as. Her role as a university student interrupted, but then continued as an exile abroad. This time she decided to change her major into English. If she studied English, she could understand better her own story

that had been mostly referred to in the west. Her life turning point took off when the role changed from a Cuban student to a Canadian political asylum. She moved to Canada with her husband and settled in Toronto where her two sons were born and raised. Nevertheless, the two-time relocation did not erase the pain and hatred in her heart. There were always people who recognized her. The war memories hunted her as well as her physical pain could not tolerate extremely hot or cold weather. At this starting period, her experiences under painful circumstance taught her to accept the fact that her role as the girl in the picture would never go away.

With no turning back, she made the final decision to let her life go public. When the Canadian documentary crew came for a story, Kim Phuc decided to give an interview. The world came to acknowledge her again after years of napalm bomb. When Denise Chong's book was published, her role as the girl in the picture was revived again. She had gradually been dealing with her pain and taking happiness in retelling what exactly happened to the girl in the picture. Without propagandistic pressure and fear of political harassment, Kim Phuc was willingly to take a full obligation of being the girl in the picture. She began to realize that the only way to cure her pain was the love from God and the gift of forgiveness. She started to give information about the war from her point of view first in Canada, and then came the United States.

Her life was officially made into a documentary film called *Kim's story: The Road from Vietnam*. Later then in 1997, she was brought to the Vietnam Veteran Wall on Veterans Day in the face of previous American servicemen. Nobody knew why she was there until she was introduced and stepped on the podium to give her speech.

*“Dear friends. I am very happy to be with you today. As you know, I am the little girl who was running to escape from the napalm fire. I do not want to talk about the war because I cannot change history. I only want you to remember the tragedy of war in order to do things to stop fighting and killing around the world. I have suffered a lot from both physical and emotional pain. Sometimes I thought I could not live, but God saved me and gave faith and hope. Even if I could talk face to face with the pilot who dropped the bombs, I would tell him we cannot change history but we should try to do good things for the present and for the future to promote peace.”* (Chong; 1999; 362)



According to Chong, a former veteran John Plummer emerged because he had seen and heard about the story of the girl in the picture. Plummer knew it was under his command that the napalm bomb was dropped on Trang Bang so he made presence at the Wall. Kim Phuc and John Plummer met, reconciled, cried and hugged. ‘I forgive, I forgive’ was the only word Kim kept telling Plummer while he was crying. For Kim Phuc, this was the end of the painful memory. A peaceful journey of a goodwill ambassador started right after the old pain was abolished. The UNESCO gave her the name. Thus, she took a new role as an ambassador promoting ‘goodwill’ and ‘road to forgiveness and peace’. The war trauma had faded and was replaced with a good cooperation between like-minded people to establish a foundation in order to help children who are war victims all over the world.

Figure 17 Illustration of Kim Phuc holding her first-born baby son.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):*

<http://www.oknation.net/blog/philharmonics/2009/03/12/entry-1>

Her role as an ambassador of peace was officially evident during the establishment of The Kim Foundation International which was officially introduced in 1997, in Chicago, and was incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization in the United States. Fundraising, donation

and charity would be opened to anyone or organizations that seek to support the Foundation. Kim Phuc then established the Canadian partner, the Kim Foundation International. A small group of enthusiastic supporters assisted her in registering the Foundation as a Canadian charity in 2000.” (Geurts, 2011; online). The purpose of these organizations was a dedication to providing funds to support the work of international organizations that provide free medical assistance to children who are victims of war and terrorism. Such organizations might manufacture prosthetic and orthopedic devices for children; fit children with those devices; provide therapy, medication, wheelchairs, and rehabilitative services; or help families, schools, and other institutions find ways to support the efforts of disabled children to become full members of their communities. The Foundation was to intrinsically disseminate the impact of war on children, help them regain better lives and to overall prevent wars from happening. By taking this obligation as a goal to fulfill, there have been already hopes and dreams that are accomplished. Projects that have been done are, for example, Tajikistan’s Refugee Camps, Save the Children, Doctors of the World, Kampala Uganda, Bethany Kids Project etc. (Geurts, 2011; online).

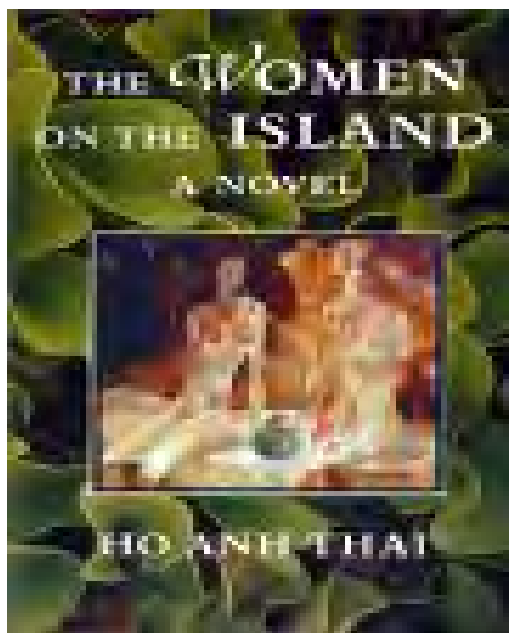
However, there has also been a consistent follow-ups in every project founded. These projects have also inspired Kim Phuc to take a role of an educator. She travelled to different parts of the world to educate children as well as adults on how the war could be replaced by forgiveness and peace and how the peace itself is reverted back to how it came about. For example, in 2004, Kim Phuc spoke at the University of Connecticut about her life and experience, learning how to be "strong in the face of pain" and how compassion and love helped her heal (Chong, 1999; 231.) Kim Phuc’s childhood before the war attack was of happiness that she now tries to pass on to the children. It can be said that Kim Phuc is actually a child of war growing up to be a mother of peace. The war was already ended, but the journey of peace started since then and Kim Phuc will always be the girl in the picture.

## 2. The Novel *Women on the Island* by Ho Anh Thai

The issue of motherhood has been highlighted throughout this research and it is certainly the influential aspect in the aftermath of the war. Le Ly Hayslip and Kim Phuc finished their journey successfully in becoming a mother. They have been both a mother of their own children and also

a mother of children through their social work that contributed to nurturing the lives affected by the violent acts of war. Kim Phuc used to mourn over her physical trauma and think she could never have a child of her own. She did overcome that obstacle. However, there are lots of Vietnamese women of war who have not succeeded in becoming a mother. According to the work of Ho Anh Thai, the story mirrors how the women in Brigade Five representing former female militias serving the country until its reunification have lost their ‘womanhood’ to the war which gave them in return nothing but a lonely life with no husband and children.

Figure 18 Illustration of The Women on Island.



*Source (retrieved on 30/03/11):* <http://www.davifo.dk/?p=66>

Many women in the postwar generation endured disappointment in their lives. During the Vietnam War, millions of women joined the revolutionary movement in the hope of gaining independence for the country which in turn promised them the bright future and happiness. It ended up that after the reunification was completed, but the dreams of these women were not yet fulfilled. The struggle for motherhood was invaluable for them as it completed their lives for having born as a woman. As Ho Anh Thai stated in his novel, “Part of the motivation to be a mother sure stems from cultural pressures: For a woman, to be single and childless in traditional Vietnamese society is to be a non-person.” (Thai, 2000; xiv).

In the postwar rehabilitation program, those women who remained in Vietnam had been mobilized to enter labor force for another era of contribution towards revitalizing the country. It was the time when the fighting and killing ended and the time Kim Phuc left the country. But the Brigade Five women at Cat Ba island, Hai Phong region had another 'fighting' to win. It was a fight for the right to be happy and gain a peaceful life as a mother or a wife. For Kim Phuc, the girl in the picture did stop at the war and later bring back peace. But in this novel the hope of these women had not yet been achieved. In the story told by Ho Anh Thai, the desperation of the women through a confession made by a woman named Mien:

*"We were all young girls, but we were virtually without individual desires. At that the time of war, we were absolutely dedicated to only one goal – defeating the enemy and obtaining peace. Once we had peace, we thought, then we'd have everything else, a husband and children. But the men we were waiting for never returned"* (Thai, 2000; 94).

During the war, these women took the role with full willingness to achieve what Vietnam desperately needed. They dedicated part of their lives in gaining peace for the country with a strong hope that one day peace would reward them. However, when the war ended, some women realized that they lost a chance to get married and become a mother. During the war, Vietnamese women were praised by their sacrifice for the national struggle. But, in peacetime, they are evaluated by their being a good wife and mother. However, when the war is over, most of them are too old to get married. Also, in the post-war Vietnam, there are fewer men than women. For them, if they do not have a husband, then at least they should have a child. As expressed by a female veteran:

During the American War, we lived at the edge of death, and we were able to control our instinctual desires. But now such a control is impossible. I know I lost my opportunity to get married. But if at least I had a child, I would be consoled in many ways. If I hadn't been so concerned with 'preserving' myself all those years ago, I wouldn't have to suffer like I do now. But he's dead, with all the rest, and whom did I keep myself for? What do I need with my virginity, when all it does is bringing me loneliness? The collective can help me strengthen my willpower, it can console me a bit. But the collective can't bring me private happiness.' (Thai, 2000; 94-95)

The following poem can represent despair, but a strong hope of female veterans. As it is shown in the poem, if river was Vietnam and the enemy was the war, once the river was blocked by the enemy, later the blockage were destroyed by the contribution of the Vietnamese from both upstream and downstream of the river. They would hope for something in return at least to compensate their long indefatigability and determination during the fight. It is worth quoting the poem here:

*You live upstream on the Tuong river,  
Downstream on the Tuong river live I,  
Each of us longs for, but cannot see the other  
Though we drink the same Tuong river water.*

The Brigade Five women, like the downstream people mentioned in the poem, are still hoping to fulfill their dreams as a wife and a mother. It is love and happy family that can complete their lives, not as a war veteran, but as a woman.

In this chapter, women's contributions have been illustrated according to the methodology previously mentioned; that is to evaluate the chosen literatures. Apparently, contributions can also be both direct and indirect. The sacrifice of women's lives in My Lai village are the main example in showing that women's contributions are indirectly the showcase of inhumanity and the atrocity of war. For those who had survived, they could never forget the trauma and this outlives the war or any written documents concerning the war. And for the direct contributions, the diary of Juliet Lac, Dang Thuy Tram, Le Ly Hayslip, Sister Phuong, and the Brigade Five women represent their mindful participations or the force that drove them to participate. The participations include joining the revolutionary movement and follow the path of communism like what Dr. Dang Thuy Tram and other North Vietnamese women did. On the other hand, the force that drove those South Vietnamese women to 'be' and finally 'fight' for survival was the consciousness of being a mother and the mindfulness of peace seeker. Interestingly, the literatures also represent how ideological differences are very clear from the woman who came from the North and those from the South. Simply, Dr. Dang Thuy Tram was

the only female fighter from the North whose communist mindset was very strong. From her writing, it portrays how she was 'willingly' joining the revolution. While the North Vietnamese women 'went' to war, the war itself went to the homes of those South Vietnamese women. And in the postwar period, women like Hayslip and Phuc has still never stopped searching for peace. Peace for these women is infinite. They could find peace anywhere and most people whom they have encountered realize and feel the same way. Although war reached their homes, they found a way to survive and stand among those who won the war with peace. If the North Vietnamese women sacrificed their lives to war, the South Vietnamese sisters continue their work of propagating the war in a rather peaceful way.

## CHAPTER IV

### Conclusions

As discussed in the previous chapters, for those who directly and indirectly encountered and affected by the war, it is a life-time and never-ending memory. Through the long period of war, we witness Vietnamese women's contributions towards the war they fought shoulder to shoulder to their men. Some Vietnamese women's contributions are also retold by those who survived. It can be noticed from different periods that Vietnamese women share a common similarity. That is they play a role of daughter of a Vietnamese family and nation. Although there are not many written evidence about the family background of the Trung sisters, but the braveness and strong determination of the two ladies riding on elephant backs and driving out the Chinese overlords has inspired generations of the Vietnamese women until today. This legend reinforced traditional concept of Vietnam women, to be obedient at home but courageous at the battlefield. Value of the audacious daughter has been instilled in the female militias and supporters during the war against the French and American troops. As shown in the case of women from the chosen writings, they all performed perfectly in the role of a daughter and finally mother.

However, the difference can be seen in terms of social roles they each took during the war. Apparently women warriors have been omnipresent throughout the recorded history of wars in Vietnam. Almost every woman in this study is a warrior of war fighting for national reunification. As a doctor, Dang Thuy Tram took part in the war with passion and healed the wounded. As for the case of the sister Cao Ngoc Phuong, she has adopted the role of a Buddhist nun and attempted to change the arena of war into a society of love and compassion towards one another. Likewise, Kim Phuc, known as the girl in the picture, succeeded in overcoming trauma of war and promoting peace. Kim Phuc managed to get over the war and told the world how the war can be easily turned into peace by forgiving the enemy and loving each other. Le Ly Hayslip strongly emerged out of the war atrocity and turned it into a stage of peaceful reconciliation. Part of Hayslip's success in completing her cycle of growth, from war to peace, was because of her motherhood. To be a mother has been considered the most culturally valuable dignity by Vietnamese women. During the post-war period, some women were struggling to fulfill their dreams as a mother as shown in Ho Anh Thai's novel. Unfortunately, the disappointment was

not impossible. Some of the women lost their womanhood in the war due to hardship and poor conditions during the wartime, and could not be able to regain it back.

From the examination of statuses acting out roles and obligations of the Vietnamese women at war and the investigation of how the war influenced their lives, it can be said that the endeavor of those women was interestingly distinguished from what the hypothesis has first set out. This is because they played many roles and bore many obligations apart from fighting in the war. It is found that women were able to mobilize troops and villagers throughout the country, not just in the north. The women lives at the Ho Chi Minh Trail counted as one of the biggest parts in their contribution towards the Vietnam's reunification. Most importantly, the guerrilla's war success could have made possible only because of the participation of women. However, the result from textual analysis reveals that Vietnamese women; both North and South, in spite of taking different roles and obligations, shared a common aspect; the spirit of devotion for the others, including their family and compatriots. The Vietnamese women have intrinsically portrayed a picture of war that, instead of building on killing and bombing, filled with love, forgiveness and peace.

### **Suggestions of further research**

In my opinion, the Vietnam War will always be a focal point of historical research for scholars and those who are interested in the Vietnamese history. Particularly the field research of women's history within the war, there will also be a gap to fulfill. Besides the women's contributions towards the war, there are areas like feminism, education, gender alienation, economics, ethnicity, architecture or prostitution. We cannot deny the fact that the labyrinth of cultural sinicization and colonial impact in the Vietnamese society had created a huge diversity in the everyday lives of the Vietnamese people especially the women. In the modern period, the emergence of the Vietnamese women has distinctively fulfilled those societal realms and thus produced an interesting aspect for a prospective research. For example, in the area of ethnicity, the colonial societal impact has left an offspring of ethnic race; the Amerasians. The Amerasians are the half Vietnamese half American or French descendants who are facing a social discrimination in the range of social acceptance, education and jobs. The Amerasian women, again, are the most affected group of all. Nevertheless, in the face of modernization and



globalization, these half-breeds are beginning to distinctively emerge to the new society of Vietnam without. I deeply hope that I will have a chance to further commit in such research, probably in PhD, once when the opportunity granted.

## References

- Article by UNESCO on Status of Women: Vietnam. Unesco Principal Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand, 1989.
- Anh, T. T. V, and Hung, L. N. Women and Doi Moi in Vietnam. Hanoi, Vietnam, Women Publishing, 2000.
- Appy, G. Christian. Vietnam The Definite Oral History Told From All Sides. USA, Penguin Books, 2006.
- Beresford, M. Vietnam Politics, Economics and Society. Londond and New York, Pinter Publishers, 1988.
- Bilton, M. Documentary Film. Four Hours in My Lai. [Online]. 1993. Available from : <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FYzb9DH7YAE>. [1993, May]
- Chiricosta, A. Following the trail of the fair bird: the search for a uniquely Vietnamese women's movement. UK, SOAS Press, 2010.
- Chong, D. The Girl in The Picture. London, UK, Simon&Schuster, 1999.
- Dutton, G. The Tay Son Uprising: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth-Century Vietnam. Honolulu, Hawaii, University of Hawaii Press, 2006.
- Duiker, J. W. The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam. Colorado USA, Westview Special Studies on South and Southeast Asia, 1981.
- Bogen, M. Dansk Vietnamesisk Forening. [Online]. 2010. Available from : <http://www.davifo.dk/?p=66>. [2010, June]
- Erwitt, J. and Smolan, R. Passage to Vietnam: Through the Eyes of Seventy. USA, Against All Odds Productions & Melcher Media, 1994.
- Eisen, A. Women and Revolution in Viet Nam. London, England, Zed Books, 1984.
- Edwards, L. and Roces, M (eds.). "Following the trail of the fair bird: the search for a uniquely Vietnamese women's movement" Women's Movements in Asia Feminisms and Transnational Activism. USA, Routledge, 2010.

Forbes, A. CPA Media The Asia Experts. Old Thang Long. [Online]. 2007. Available from :  
[http://www.cpamedia.com/history/old\\_thang\\_long/](http://www.cpamedia.com/history/old_thang_long/). [2007, December]

Fall B. B. Indochina--The Last Year of the War: Communist Organization and Tactics.  
 [Online]. 1998. Available from :  
<http://www.clemson.edu/caah/history/FacultyPages/EdMoise/Fall1954.html>. [2010,  
 June]

Singkamanan, S. Global Village Foundation. Interview with Le Ly Hayslip. [Online]. 2009.  
 Available from : <http://globalvillagefoundation.wordpress.com/our-founder/>. [2009, May]

Haviland, JR F. H. Vietnam after the War: Peacekeeping and Rehabilitation. Washington  
 D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1968.

Hayslip, L. L, and Wurts, J. When Heaven and Earth Changed Places. New York, USA,  
 Penguin Books, 2003.

Hoskins, W. M. Vietnamese Women: Their Roles and Their Options. USA, Mouton  
 Publishers, 1987.

Bich, V. Vietnam Haivenu. [Online]. 2008. Available from : <http://www.haivenu-vietnam.com/des-hanoi-museums.html>. [2008, October]

Jamieson L. N. Understanding Vietnam. Berkeley, USA, University of California Press, 1993.

Karnow, S. Vietnam A History. New York, USA, Penguin Group, 1997.

Lac, J. War Child. Edinburgh, Great Britain, Mainstream Publishing company, 2009.

Langer, J. H. The Vietnam War: An Encyclopedia of Quotations. USA, Greenwood, 2005.

Luong, V. H. Postwar Vietnam Dynamics of a Transforming Society. Singapore, Institute of  
 Southeast Asian Studies, 2003.

Marr, G. David. "The Question of Women." Vietnamese Tradition on Trial, 1920-1945.  
 California, University of California Press, 1984.

Ta, C. Cap Cuu Tuyen Xa. [Online]. 2008. Available from :  
<http://my.opera.com/tomcanghp/blog/index.dml/tag/photo>. [2008, September]

Sing, S. War and Forgiveness. [Online]. 2009. Available from :

- <http://www.oknation.net/blog/philharmonics/2009/03/12/entry-1>. [2009, March]
- Ngoc H. Wandering Through Vietnamese Culture. Hanoi, Vietnam, The Gioi Publisher, 2010.
- Phuong, N. C. Learning True Love: How I Learned and Practiced Social Change in Vietnam. Berkeley, USA, Parallax Press, 1993.
- Spender, D. Men's Studies Modified: The Impact of Feminism on Academic Disciplines. Amsterdam, Netherlands, Elsevier, 1981.
- Sách, T. G. Women and Their Sacrifices. [Online]. 2008. Available from : <http://conglytudo.blogspot.com/2008/10/anh-dtm-japan-nha-van-tk-thanh-thuy-vn/>. [2008, April]
- SarDesai, R. D. Vietnam: Past and Present. USA, Westview Press, 1998.
- Thai, A. H. Women on The Island. Chiangmai, Thailand, Silkworm Books, 2002
- Tram, T.D. Last Night I Dreamed of Peace. New York, USA, harmony books, the crown publishing group, 2007.
- Turner, G. K, and Hao, T. P. Even the Women Must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam. Canada, John Wiley & Sons, 1998.
- Tuyet, L. T. Nham. Images of Vietnamese Woman in the New Millennium. Hanoi, Vietnam, Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development, The Goi Publishers, 2002.
- Tuyet, T. N. Everlasting Memories. Hanoi, Vietnam, Women's Publishing House, 2008.
- Willis, M. After Napalm The Long Road to Forgiveness. [Online]. 2008. Available from : <http://blindflaneur.com/?p=533>. [2008, June]
- Vien, K. N. Vietnam A Long History, translated version by Petcharee Sumitra, Bangkok, Thailand, Toyota Foundation, 2009.

Manan, B. Oxford Dictionaries. [Online]. 2009. Available from :

<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/feudalism?view=uk> [2009,

November

Nkrumah, K. Neo-Colonialism The Last Stage of imperialism. [Online]. 2009.

Available from : <http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/nkrumah/neo-colonialism/> [2009, July]

Yew, L. Neocolonialism. Political Discourse: Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism.

[Online]. 2002. Available from :

<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/neocolonialism1.html>. [2002, May]

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX A

### Chronology of the Vietnamese History

#### Year

- 40 Trung Sisters raise a revolt against the Chinese and set up an independent court.
- 43 Chinese general Ma Yuan subjugates the rebellion and the Trung Sisters die. Chinese domination of North Vietnam consolidated.
- 248 Ba Trieu (Lady Trieu Thi Trinh) rallies Vietnamese rebels against the Chinese.
- 939 Chinese driven out and an era of Vietnamese independence begins.
- 1117 Queen Mother Linh Nhan manages the realm in her husband's absence and advocates better treatment for slave girls.
- 1765-1820 Life of Nguyen Du, author of the *Tale of Kieu*.
- 1802 Woman general, Bui Thi Xuan, commands a unit of Tay-son rebels against the ruling Vietnamese Nguyen dynasty.
- 1858 French attack Vietnam at Danang.
- 1873 French attack Hanoi.
- 1884 French colonial era begins.
- 1926 Mme. Nguyen Khoa Tung and other women form a Women's Labor Study Association near Hue. Influential male writer Phan Boi Chau takes up women's issues.
- 1930 Ho Chi Minh establishes Indochinese Communist Party; Vietnam Women's Union Founded. Women participate in uprisings against the French in Nghe An and Ha Tinh Provinces.
- 1935 A woman, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, represents the Indochinese Communist Party at the Seventh International Congress in Moscow.
- 1938 Women organize and speak out at a May Day rally in Hanoi.
- 1940 Uprisings against the French in the South spearheaded by women resistance fighters.
- 1941 Viet Minh Nationalist Front – a coalition of nationalistic Vietnamese forces – created; Nguyen Thi Minh Khai captured and executed by the French.
- 1945 Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnam an independent nation, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV); French troops return to Vietnam; Madam Nguyen Thi Dinh leads uprising against the French in Ben Tre Province.

- 1946 Constitution of North Vietnam proclaims economic and political equality for women and women suffrage. Women vote for first time and send ten women to the new Chamber of Deputies; war of resistance against the French begins.
- 1950 United States gives military and economic assistance to French in Indochina.
- 1954 French defeated at the battle of Dienbienphu. Thousands of women transport material to support the Vietnamese armies at Dienbienphu. Geneva Accords divide Vietnam at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel with elections to be held in two years. North Vietnam independent under a socialist government. South Vietnam governed as a Republic (RVN) under Ngo Dinh Diem, supported by U.S. aid. Viet Minh resistance forces in the South regroup to the North, where radical socialist land reform begins.
- 1955 RVN president Diem announces elections will not take place; United States begins program of direct aid to South Vietnamese government.
- 1957 Uprising in Nghe An Province to protest harsh land reform policies of the socialist government.
- 1959 Line 559 set up a military unit by DRV to handle logistics for the Ho Chi Minh Trail; "trail" to the sea established.
- 1960 Uprising in South against Diem regime, led by Nguyen Thi Dinh. National Liberation Front (NLF) established; Law on Marriage and Family promulgated in DRV.
- 1963 Diem and brother killed in a military coup. U.S. military personnel in Vietnam numbers 16,300.
- 1964 military coup puts Major general Nguyen Khanh at head of RVN in the South; first air strikes against targets in the North; U.S. embargo against Vietnam.
- 1965 NLF attacks military base at Pleiku. United States steps up bombing of North. April 3-4, United States begins bombing of the Thanh Hoa (Dragon's Jaw) Bridge where Ngo Thi Tuyen performs heroic actions. U.S. military personnel now at 385,000; Nguyen Thi Dinh appointed Deputy Commander of NLF; "Three Responsibilities Movement" to mobilize women announced by DRV.
- 1966 B-52s bomb North. Ho Chi Minh calls for all-out people's support. Women enter volunteer corps.
- 1967 Bombing of Hanoi area.
- 1968 January 30, TET offensives by NVA and PLAF armies begin against major targets in the South; November, United States halts bombing of North, but concentrates on Ho Chi Minh Trail.
- 1969 September 3, Ho Chi Minh dies.



- 1971 February, ARVN launches attacks on the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos; United States resumes bombing of DRV.
- 1972 Peace talks continue. April 15, bombing of Haiphong; December 18-30, bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong areas; second wave of volunteer youth called up.
- 1973 January 27, peace agreement signed; U.S. ground troops withdraw from Vietnam. Bombing of Indochina halted by order of United States; war between North and South continues.
- 1974 People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) begins all-out offensive against the South.
- 1975 April 30, PAVN troops enter Saigon; Americans leave; civil war ends and Vietnam is unified. Re-education campaigns begin in the South.

## APPENDIX B

Kim Phuc's global projects

- Project:** *The Kim Foundation International in Tajikistan's Refugee Camps*
- Country:** Tajikistan
- Purpose:** To provide relief to refugees fleeing war in Afghanistan. To establish means for individuals to access health care and education.
- Context:** Civil war has plagued the region for decades. Constant disruption of government functions has left people struggling to survive. The need for assistance in Afghanistan keeps increasing. People have left their home hoping to save their lives.
- Assistance:** The Kim Foundation International sent over \$200,000 USD in aid to refugee camps in Tajikistan. Some of what was sent includes:
- baby hygiene products
  - blankets and knit clothing
  - baby food and juice
  - pediatric electrolytes
  - school kits

- Project:** *The Kim Foundation International and Save the Children*
- Country:** East Timor
- Purpose:** To develop child protection and psycho-social programs in East Timor. To rebuild the education system, to promote healing, and to increase social integration.
- Context:** When East Timor voted for independence from Indonesia in 1999, violence and destruction besieged this small territory. Up to 60% of the country's population fled their homes. More than 100,000 children and their families were in desperate need of safe shelter to escape violence.
- Assistance:** The Kim Foundation International and Save the Children have developed a program to reach the 100,000 children in their communities. The program helps children recover from conflict, provides structure and positive activities for children and youth, and establishes community

centers to provide safe spaces where parents can support each other and participate in planning measures to meet their children's needs.

***Project: The Kim Foundation International (Quebec) and Doctors of the World***

Country: Romania

Purpose: To provide children with medical, psychological, and social assistance. To work in the community among Romanian institutions to increase awareness of their responsibility toward children.

Context: In Romania many children suffer from "institutional abuse" resulting from widespread neglect by certain authorities. A team of Romanian health care and social service professions requested training in 1996. The team supported between 150 and 200 victims of child abuse in 2001 which entailed approximately 900 consultations.

Assistance: The Kim Foundation International purchased training material, supplies and medication, and paid for transportation and communication expenses for health care and social services professionals. Approximately \$30,000 CDN was sent in aid

***Project: Prayer Palace Christian Education Center - Kampala Uganda***

Country: Uganda

Purpose: Build safe secure facilities for dormitories, classrooms and shops. Develop mentoring relationships and provide counseling in a stable environment.

Context: Uganda currently has over 2 million orphans, expected to have 3.5 million in 2010. Unless cared for or mentored, they are in danger medically (malnutrition, malaria, tuberculoses), physically (abductions, child fighters, sex-slaves, rape), socially (generational behavior, no-education or vocational skills, and spiritually (living in darkness).

Assistance: Build a Central Orphanage to house 150 girls, 150 boys. Education and Food Services for 640 students. Food and Vocational programs. Establish local business.

- Project:** *Bethany Kids Project (Kijabe Hospital)*
- Country:** Kenya
- Purpose:** Clinic & camp visits, surgery, teaching & training (local and off-site).
- Context:** Kakuma refugee camp, 120 km from Sudan border, consists of 70% Sudanese and 20% Somali refugees (89.000 people in 2003), of which 50% are aged between 0 and 17 years.
- Assistance:** The Kim Foundation International purchased training material, supplies and medication, and paid for transportation and communication expenses for health care and social services professionals.

## APPENDIX C

### War Remnants

Nguyen Thi Dinh



Nguyễn Thị Định

Bà sinh năm 1920, là người lãnh đạo cuộc khởi  
nghĩa ở Mỏ Cày, Bến Tre, 17/01/1960 mở đầu

*Born in 1920 she led the Mo Cay Uprising in Ben Tre Provin  
January, 1960 which triggered the major uprising in the South  
she became President of the Women's Union for the Liber*

Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX D

Ho Thi Bi; A communist guerrilla chief.

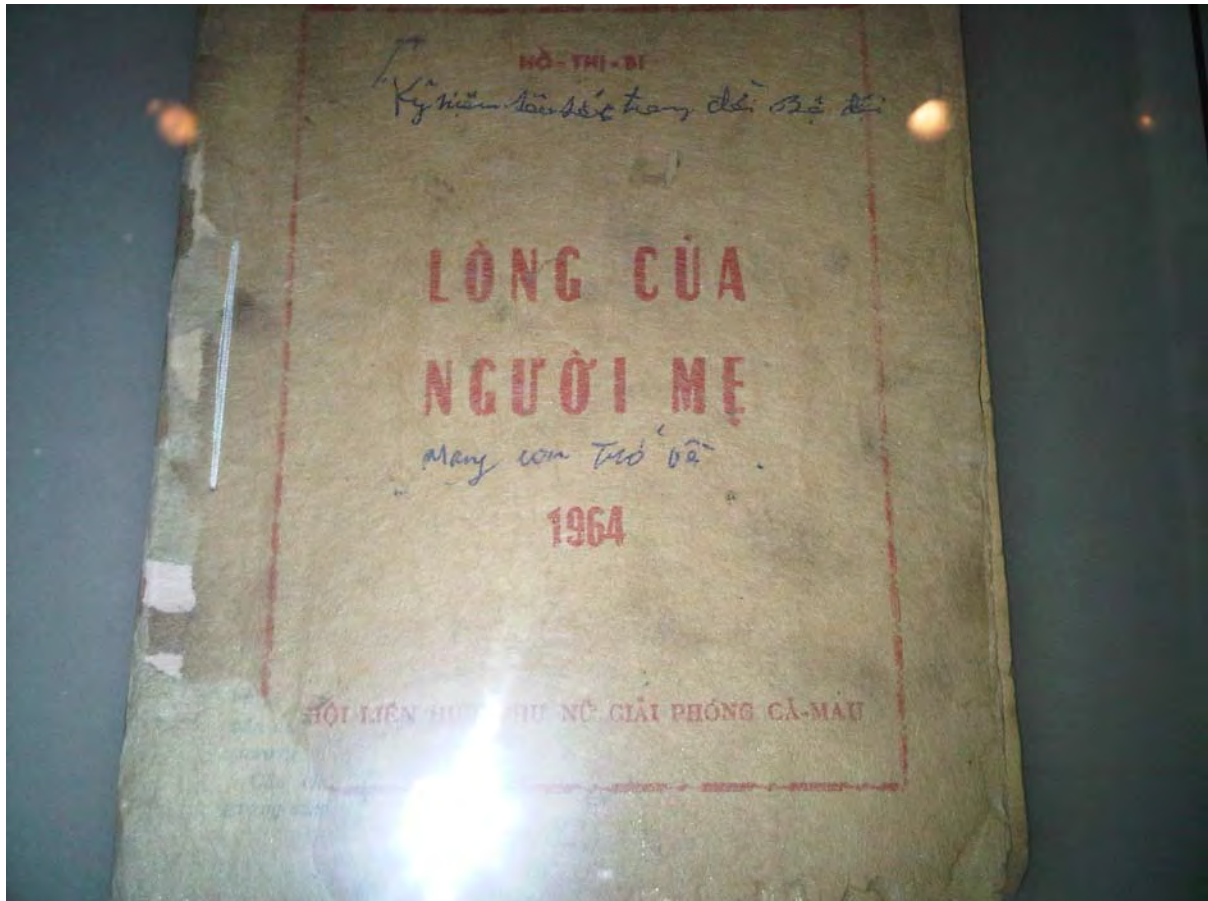


*Sources:* Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX E

Long Cua Nguoi Me; Feelings and concerns of a mother

Published by the Women's Union of Ca Mau. HO Thi Bi records how much she missed her children during the resistance war.



Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.



## APPENDIX F

### Women's guerrillas 1



Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.



## APPENDIX G

### Women's guerrillas 2



*Source:* Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX H

### Logistics support by women 1



Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX I

### Logistics support by women 2



Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.



## APPENDIX J

‘8 March’ women artillery group.

“The group was established December, 1968 with 42 members. The majority were from the Ma and Coho ethnic minority groups in Lam Dong. They participated in 50 battles and killed or wounded nearly 300 enemy soldiers, destroyed 4 enemy planes, and 50 American vehicles. Many members in the group received awards including the title ‘Brave Anti-American Soldiers’, ‘Brave Soldiers for a Determined Nation’, 60 ‘Liberation Soldier’, and six military success medals”



Source: Women’s Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX K

Work and be ready for combat



Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX L

Women's contributions on field work



*Source:* Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.



## APPENDIX M

### Women's contributions on field work 2



Source: Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## APPENDIX N

The Young Female Volunteers on Dong Loc T-junction, Ho Chi Minh Trail.



*Source:* Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.



## APPENDIX O

Le Van Thuc, one of the 36 persons condemned to death at Can Dao, meeting his mother again on 5 May 1975 after 7 years of separation.



*Source:* Women's Museum, Hanoi, Vietnam, 2010.

## BIOGRAPHY

Phatsurang Dechabuddharungsi (Candy), descendant of a Filipino mother and a Thai father, was born in Bangkok, Thailand in 1984. She obtained her Bachelor's degree with Second Class Honor in Social Science majoring in Southeast Asian Studies in 2007 from Mahidol University International College. From 2007 – 2009, Candy had worked in several positions in both Thai and foreign organizations mostly in the business and education areas. Despite work experiences learned, she decided to continue her study at Chulalongkorn University, Southeast Asian Studies Master's degree program in the research interest; the Vietnamese history, she always has passion about.