

The College of Wooster

At the Intersection of Commemoration, Satire, and the Aesthetics of Nostalgia:  
Dissecting the Memory of the Subsidy Period in Vietnam (2005 – Present)

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## ABSTRACT

The decade following unification is remembered as the subsidy period. In Vietnam, it was a time of economic crisis and political turbulence. For the next 20 years, public discussions on the subsidy period remained minimal. It was only until the mid 2000s that Vietnamese historians and the public started to take up discussions on the postwar events. This study explores the recent resurgence of subsidy period discussions through an exploration of museum exhibits, official publications, graphic satire, and cafés from 2006 to present. Analysis reveals three different modes of remembrance: commemoration, satire, and the aesthetics of nostalgia. Each mode draws upon cultural substances and recapitulates the virtue of a Vietnamese national identity. Remembrance is never abstract. It exists to serve a purpose. For the government, it was to reintegrate the subsidy period into the official history. Critics of the subsidy regime navigated the satirical framework to criticize its failure. Meanwhile, profit was the main incentive for subsidy service providers. These motivations drive the framing and circulation of different modes of remembrance for the subsidy period.

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## INTRODUCTION

Peacetime. Celebrations had yet to cease but people on both sides of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel North were already facing insurmountable challenges ahead. The entire nation scrambled to put enough rice on the table for every meal. Many still hold onto the food stamps, the rice coupons that have turned yellow over time, reminding them of a different way of life known as the subsidy period.<sup>1</sup>

—*Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp (Subsidy Stories)*

In 1982, Mr. Trạng and his family of ten shared a state-subsidized 300 ft<sup>2</sup> apartment. This extended family included 4 generations: Mrs. Trạng’s mother, Mr. & Mrs. Trạng, their 4 children, and the spouses and kids of two of Mr. Trạng’s offspring. In addition to the people, the family also raised a variety of animals, including a dozen of pigs, illegally because unsupervised husbandry was not allowed in postwar Vietnam. Referring to her pigs as the “commanders”, Mrs. Trạng recalls: “One morning, I didn’t close the pigs’ gate properly. When I came home from work, they were everywhere, urine and feces all over our beds. We were mad, but we didn’t dare hurt the ‘commanders’. Husband and kids could be sick all they want but the ‘commanders’ mustn’t fall ill otherwise we’ll all starve.”<sup>2</sup>

The subsidy period was a funny time. Today, people struggle to pin down exactly what the subsidy period was. The subsidy period refers to the post-American war years of high socialism in Vietnam, from Liberation in 1975 to Renovation in 1986, during which

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<sup>1</sup> “*Đêm trước” đổi mới* [The "Night" Before Renovation], ed. Tuổi Trẻ Publishing Office and Hoàng Anh (Ho Chi Minh: Tre Publishing House, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Võ Văn Thành, “Màu Thời Gian Xám Ngất” [A Grey Time], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* [Subsidy Stories], ed. Thu Hà, vol. 1 (Hanoi: Vietnam News Agency Publishing House, 2014), 33–34.

time Vietnam experienced some major economic and political crises, on top of postwar rehabilitation. Stories like the pig “commanders” above are one way to describe this chaotic time. Its reverberations were so traumatic that for a long time, Vietnamese people could not find a unified explanation to what happened during the postwar tumult. Memories were too fresh, too painful, or too incredulous to unpack. People were not telling the funny pig stories just yet. They were still preoccupied with the stresses of having to share a 300 ft<sup>2</sup> home with a bunch of animals. For at least twenty years after Renovation, records of the subsidy period remained minimal, and offered little analysis of what happened in this sensitive period.

The government offered their own paradigm for deconstructing the post-unification events. The official history of Vietnam combined the subsidy period with any history that happened after the war, including the post Renovation events. The division not only suffers from the issues of temporality, but it also fails to account for the changes after 1975. By treating the post-reunification era as a homogeneous and continuous concept, any history of the immediate postwar rebuilding is lost within the glorified national reconstruction that brought about enormous economic rewards in the early 2000s.

The reason behind the lack of official scholarship on the years between 1976 and 1986 is because it cannot fit neatly into the predetermined progression of a socialist history. In the immediate aftermath of the American war, Vietnam started the rebuilding process on the economic basis of a centralized market, a continuity from the wartime Northern system. Peacetime proved to be as challenging as the war years. The entire country was plagued by serious shortages of food and other necessities due to low productivity. The failure of the command economy continued to haunt postwar reconstruction until 1986 when the Sixth

Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) adopted a series of economic renovation policies, commonly known as *đổi mới* (Renovation).<sup>3</sup>

Both within the official scholarship and in public discussions, the subsidy period remained a myth in the 1990s and the first few years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A difficult history to understand and an even more difficult one to write, the history of the subsidy period remains largely uncharted waters for scholars and an even more obscure topic in popular culture until its recent resurgence in mid 2000s. This lapse raises the question about how this complicated and sensitive history is understood and remembered, and, considering its recent revival in public discussion, how to tell the story of the subsidy period. What are the implications of these histories? Why has this period entered back into national discussions after 20 years of amnesia? What modes of remembrance does present-day Vietnamese society use to remember the subsidy period, and what are the politics that govern these representations? No single answer could satisfactorily explain what happened, but different aspects of subsidy period remembrance are indicative of the larger patterns of memory and history in the late socialist Vietnam.

## **Background**

In a span of a hundred and twenty years, Vietnam had undergone tremendous changes and instabilities in the form of two military conflicts (excluding a brief spell against the Japanese) and a complete transformation in system from feudalism to socialism in 1945. These changes were even more profound in the south, which became a constitutional republic after the French colonization and remained one until the fall of Saigon. Under these extreme circumstances, the rebuilding process was not straightforward. In the immediate aftermath of

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<sup>3</sup> Hy V. Luong, introduction to *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*, ed. Hy V. Luong (Singapore: Lanham, Md: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies; Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 10.

the wars, repercussions of a troubled past coupled with the impractical vision imposed by the VCP continued to haunt Vietnam for an entire decade.

Peacetime did not turn out as peaceful as many would have expected. Vietnam lunged into one of the darkest periods of its history. After the war, the state nationalized most private enterprises and pushed for agricultural collectivization. The government controlled wages and prices using a two-price system, which established a state price and a market price for all standard commodities.<sup>4</sup> Food procurement was overseen by the government, which bought all products from both private and public producers at a lower price and sold them to people. The state established standards of classification that determined the buying portion of each family, depending on their title and position in the postwar society. Food and other goods could only be obtained using coupons and tickets. Production without the endorsement and supervision of the state was illegal. The command economy was in full blow towards the end of the 1970s and continued well into the first half of the 1980s.<sup>5</sup>

Five years into the process of rebuilding, Vietnam was facing chronic famines and prolonged periods of extreme deprivation. The economy failed to meet demands for most basic necessities. On top of financial problems, military involvement did not stop in 1975 for the Vietnamese army. When the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, took control of Cambodia and turned against the VCP, thousands of Vietnamese troops were sent overseas to clamp down the resistance and reestablish a Vietnam-backed government in Cambodia.<sup>6</sup> Many were kept there until 1989. Relations also deteriorated between Vietnam and one of its main communist

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<sup>4</sup> Luong, 2–8.

<sup>5</sup> Luong, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Luong, 2–3.



allies, China, resulting in the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979.<sup>7</sup> China stopped its ongoing aid for Vietnam since the American war. Waning financial support from the Soviet Union, as well as the United States' embargo, seriously damaged the postwar economy. Internal production remained low because the government's two-price system could not incentivize producers to increase their output. State procurement prices were so low that a great portion of the goods produced ended up on the black market at considerably higher prices. The central economy decreased purchasing power, leading to high inflation and state cutbacks, and consequently salary cuts. Economic reforms were crucial as resistance grew stronger and the debilitating market could no longer support producers and consumers.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Subsidy Period in Public Memory**

When it comes to the subsidy period, the relationship between memory and history is an intriguing question. Prior to 2006, the subsidy period mostly existed only in the memories of those who lived through the seventies and the eighties. Little discussion took place in either the academic or public sphere regarding this history. The suffering was too fresh for open discussion and too controversial for research. Most stories were only passed on at a personal level without any frameworks for collective remembrance. The 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Renovation (2006) marked a change in the subsidy period discourse when a major museum in Hanoi launched an exhibit on the life of Hanoians under the subsidy period, which attracted record attendance.<sup>9</sup> Following this state-led initiative, many other works on the

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<sup>7</sup> Edward C. O'Dowd, *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Luong, *Postwar Vietnam*, 3–8.

<sup>9</sup> Nguyen Van Huy, "Life in Hanoi in the State Subsidy Period: Questions Raised in Social Criticism and Social Reminiscences," in *Historicizing Theories, Identities, and Nations* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 219–52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkjsq.14>.

subsidy period have started to emerge in great numbers. The new body of literature results in an unprecedented surge in public interest in the post-Renovation history which continues to today.

Today, collective remembrance of the subsidy period exists in mediated frameworks through official and popular channels. Personal memory of the subsidy period may differ from person to person, but they are all influenced by other representations of the postwar history promoted by official publications and the media. To understand how the period from 1976 to 1986 is remembered, it is important to investigate the recent construction of a new history for the subsidy period. This effort involves identifying the narratives being built and the architects behind their production.

Recent years have seen an increase in domestic sources on the postwar period as its history is gradually injected into public discussion. However, the subsidy period remains a topic with a highly controversial and politicized history. In order to understand the different ways to tell this story, it is important to consider the medium through which the subsidy period is represented, as well as the tools used in each representation. This paper considers a wide range of platforms deployed to construct the subsidy period's histories, including state-commissioned publications, visual arts, and the service sector. By examining some examples from each channel, this research analyzes contemporary representations of the subsidy period using the methods for studying memory and collective remembrance.

Memory of the subsidy period has changed considerably since the passing of the 1986 economic reforms. For some, the subsidy period involves great suffering and sacrifice while for others, it is an obscure and forgotten part of history. Close reading of representations that emerged in the last decade reveals three main modes of remembrance: commemoration, satire, and nostalgia. The 2006 state-commissioned exhibit framed the subsidy period

through commemoration, setting off a series of books and other publications which adopt the exhibit's commemorative framework to discuss subsidy memories. The second mode of remembrance is through satire, often used in graphic arts, poetry, and anecdotes about the postwar issues. Satire offers an alternative for Vietnamese to reflect more critically on the past while remaining within the state censorship parameters. In more recent years, a new platform for remembrance has emerged in the form of nostalgia and obsession with its aesthetics. The commodification of this narrative appears in 1980s-themed coffee shops, diners, and photoshoots and has developed into a robust form of memory that detaches the subsidy period from its unpleasant history while sentimentalizing this complicated past for commercial and aesthetic purposes. Each of these narratives has their own political assumptions and implications regarding how the history of the subsidy period is constructed from 2006 to the present.

This paper explores the subsidy period remembrance in Vietnam through three dominant narratives: commemorative, satirical, and aesthetic. The first chapter includes a brief historiography of the study of memory and the state of historical research on the subsidy period as well as how it is remembered. Each of the following chapter positions subsidy period representations in the commemorative, satirical, and aesthetic frameworks to analyze the symbols and tools used to consolidate each approach. The chapters will also discuss the politics of each narrative and its implications in Vietnam's history and society and how they interact with one another to shape the memories of the subsidy period.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Historiography

“The past is a foreign country,” writes L. P. Hartley in his reflection on the 1950s’ memory of 1900. The foreignness of the past makes remembering a unique and even exciting experience. The process of sustaining and reconstructing the past results in the creation of memory. In recent years, historians have noted the distinction between the refined product of a trip down memory lane and what constitutes as historical truths. This misalignment has crucial implications for history as the study of changes over time. In this chapter, I will outline some important concepts in memory studies, including different modes of remembrance. In the second part, I examine postwar Vietnam scholarship and document the memory landscape in Vietnam, specifically in terms of the subsidy period.

### **Memory Studies**

In the last few decades, memory studies have emerged as a new and different way to think about the past. Historians chart the evolution of historical memory as a contemporary phenomenon. Memory is no longer a set of historical facts but an evolving product of the present and its conception of what was and what should have been. As the human brain recollects a past event, the memory is subject to alteration with each iteration. As American psychologist Daniel Schacter puts it, “sometimes in the process of reconstructing we add feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we obtained after the experience ... we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them the emotions or knowledge we acquired after the event.”<sup>1</sup> On this premise, the field of memory studies is the study of memory formation and

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel L. Schacter, *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).

the external influences to which memory is subject and how it in turn shapes societies. To study memory is to analyze the different practices and means of representations devised to perpetuate and/or form a specific version of the past.<sup>2</sup> This model allows historians to understand past events in terms of their enduring impacts on societies through existing means of remembrance.

Whether memory is social or individual differs across various memory definitions. Maurice Halbwachs, a twentieth-century French sociologist, laid the ground for memory work by defining what it means to remember as a society. A Halbwachsian interpretation stresses on the influence of social milieu on individual memory, constituting a “collective memory.”<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, Jay Winter, a historian of the Great War, defines memory through acts of “collective remembrance.”<sup>4</sup> He rejects the notion of “collective memory” as a collective sharing of the same memory, but as public practice to conjure up or represent the past. Each person has their unique individual memory, but society as a collective determines how they want to reconstruct the past. On this notion, Michael Schudson offers another view. He believes “there is no such thing as individual memory,” because people only learn about the past from cultural artifacts and practices of memory by social institutions.<sup>5</sup> The varying definitions of “collective” demonstrate the dynamics of individual and social memory and the extent to which they can be treated as homogeneous or separate entities.

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<sup>2</sup> Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Gensburger, “Halbwachs’ Studies in Collective Memory: A Founding Text for Contemporary ‘Memory Studies’?”, *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16, no. 4 (2016): 397–99, accessed November 20, 2018, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1468795X16656268?utm\\_source=summon&utm\\_medium=discovery-provider&](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1468795X16656268?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider&).

<sup>4</sup> J. M. Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 4–5.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Schudson, ‘Dynamics of distortion in collective memory’, in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel Schacter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995), 346-7.

Memory studies generally follow a pattern to identify the grand narratives of collective memory and analyze their implications. Halbwachs explains how individual remembrances are structured by surrounding social milieus and operate under external frameworks that are collective memories.<sup>6</sup> Historians study these frameworks using what French historian Pierre Nora coined as *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory.<sup>7</sup> Based on the notion that collective memory is created and sustained by deliberate acts of resuscitation and maintenance, these sites of memory are symbolic and functional materials that anchor and orient collective remembrance. Using these building blocks, historians ask questions about the relationship between memory and history, about the politics of memory, and how it helps explain other aspects of the past and the present. Historical research contextualizes memory and considers its agency in identity formation, politics, and cultural expressions.<sup>8</sup>

Approaches for studying memory vary depending on the different “sites of memory,” using Nora’s terminology.<sup>9</sup> A common mode for public memory is commemoration.<sup>10</sup> Memory scholars also consider the absence of remembrance as an approach in studying the politics of collective memory.<sup>11</sup> Communities defined by language, religion, geography, and culture form separate landscapes of memory.<sup>12</sup> Ranging from memoirs, oral history,

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<sup>6</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, 1st ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 50–87.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 5.

<sup>9</sup> Nora, “Between Memory and History.”

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method* (University of Chicago Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226386522.001.0001>; J. M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Canto Classics edition, Canto Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Alexandre Dessingué and J. M. Winter, eds., *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, Routledge Approaches to History 13 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Basu, “Memoryscapes and Multi-Sited Methods,” in *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, ed. Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering (Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 115, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b78k.10>.

testimonies to photographs, different means of representation determine the narrative of each memory source.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, the contextual classification of memory, like war or tragedy memory, is useful for recognizing the patterns in the use of memory to represent various histories. These different sites of memory, or the lack thereof, provide a variety of perspectives into what, how, and why different societies and communities remember.

Although definitions of memory differ across the board, all recognize the presence of agency in collective remembrance. Governments build memorials to commemorate the past and legitimize their position of power. Official narratives supplant uncomfortable experiences with more alternative perspectives more acceptable or favorable for their agenda. History, Winter argues, is not “an objective story which exists outside of the people whose lives it describes.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, memory is not independent from the context of its recollection. This enables studies of historical memory to uncover the use and possible misuse of memory construction for agendas other than preserving the past.

### **Modes of Remembrance**

Commemoration is one of the most common modes of remembrance, especially with official memory. In his work on mourning as a case study of the Great War and its memory, Winter argues for Europeans’ use of commemorative means to make sense of the 1914-18 war and its catastrophes. This mechanism involves the patriotic sentimentality, glorification and romanticization of the past.<sup>15</sup> People find comfort in commemoration and celebration as an attempt to face the past and make sense of it. Winter finds in the process of mourning the “sites of memory” that enabled endeavors to comprehend and make peace with the events of

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<sup>13</sup> Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering, eds., *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 282–84.

<sup>15</sup> Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 5–6.

1914-18 through cultural codes and languages that echoed the glory and romance of the prewar period. Memories of wars and other traumas often fall under this category. It both consolidates the reigning regime's legitimacy and give sufferers a lifeline of hope and joy even in their mournful period. Other memory studies have also identified commemoration as the main mode in collective remembrance.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, other historians set out to study historical amnesia as another mode of remembering.<sup>17</sup> The notion of silence emerges as a strategy to suppress the past, consigning it to oblivion.<sup>18</sup> The collective repression of memory is a form of remembering, just as commemoration can be a way to forget. The memorialization of the heroics and triumphs glosses over more problematic pasts.<sup>19</sup> These are two sides of the same coin and must be understood with the consideration of the other's presence.

In his work on French memory of the postwar period, Henry Rousso proposes a four-stage life cycle for the Vichy memory. The first part is the "mourning phase," referring to the immediate response to the aftermath of the war. This period is followed by a spell of "resistancialism," which propagated a myth that minimized the regime's significance and repercussions on the nation's rehabilitation.<sup>20</sup> This virtual mirror would be shattered during what Rousso calls the "return of the repressed," the reemergence of countermyths and

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<sup>16</sup> See Hue-Tam Ho Tai and John Bodnar, *Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wooster/detail.action?docID=223584>; Olick, *The Sins of the Fathers*.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandre Dessingué and J. M. Winter, eds., *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, Routledge Approaches to History 13 (New York: Routledge, 2015); Long T. Bui, "The Debts of Memory: Historical Amnesia and Refugee Knowledge in The Reeducation of Cherry Truong," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 18, no. 1 (February 25, 2015): 73–97, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2015.0007>.

<sup>18</sup> Dessingué and Winter, *Beyond Memory*.

<sup>19</sup> Dessingué and Winter, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991), 10–11.



challenges to the dominant narrative.<sup>21</sup> The life cycle of the historical event in memoriam culminates in its immortalization, from which point onwards it continues to obsess generations to come through literature, media, and other means of representation. Mourning, resistance, and immortalization, these are some of the alternative modes of remembrance to commemoration and amnesia.

Not all pasts are created equal. Some are more reflective of the time in which they are created than the time they describe. Contemporary imprints on the past are evident in the collective memory orchestrated through premeditated acts of remembrance. The kind of memory that a society perpetuates, albeit through commemoration, silence, or condemnation, speaks volumes about the society and its perception of both the past and the present. For a space of contesting memories like Vietnam and a history as sensitive as the subsidy period, its memory processes are reflective of the opportunities and boundaries in a late socialist society.

### **Memory of Postwar Vietnam**

Much as the memory boom has infiltrated many aspects of twentieth-century history, Vietnam remains largely uncharted and highly divided waters.<sup>22</sup> Memory studies on Vietnam and in Vietnam are limited and mostly concentrate on the American war. Even within the war discourse, topics are restricted and polarized. Vietnam War literature comes in the form of expatriates' antagonistic memories against the communist dictatorship from which they had to flee.<sup>23</sup> Domestic publication, under close state supervision, rarely diverges from the pre-

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<sup>21</sup> Rousso, 10–11.

<sup>22</sup> Geoffrey Cubitt, *History and Memory*, Historical Approaches (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 1–2; Winter, *Remembering War*, 1–2.

<sup>23</sup> For examples, see Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, Massachusetts ; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016); Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *South Vietnamese Soldiers: Memories of the Vietnam War and After* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2016); Huy Duc, *Ben Thang Cuoc: II Quyen Binh*, 1 edition (Nguoi Viet, 2012).

defined mold of commemoration and glorification. These trajectories apply to other aspects of Vietnam's history. Middle ground is hard to find when it comes to Vietnamese history.

The editorial series *Country of Memory* by Hue-Tam Ho Tai, an important writer on Vietnamese history, is a flagship piece on remembrance and commemoration in contemporary Vietnam. The collection remains among the few that traverse the grey area between outright criticism and celebration to explore the memory landscape of present-day Vietnam. Unlike most memory studies which dwell on 20<sup>th</sup> century observations, Tai's research takes into account various aspects of modern life like tradition, culture, and developments in contemporary life styles.

In the book, Tai identifies the sites of memory in Vietnam and the agents of their construction. The commemorative fever, observes Tai, is a dominant feature in most memory projects. She goes beyond the triumphant façade into the delicate nuance between various actors and their attempts for a stake in the history making process.<sup>24</sup> Tai outlines several landmarks in historical remembrance in Vietnam. Renovation was the game changer when the government lifted previous unreasonable restrictions on cultural production and sparked a change on tone in the literary and artistic spheres. Whereas the state had complete monopoly over history before, the economic reforms have created new opportunities for other agents who also want a piece of their own history.

These changing dynamics in Vietnam are still not enough to strip the government of their ownership of the official past; however, it does loosen their grip over censorship in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>25</sup> What was once taboo now becomes trendy. The unspeakable details of the subsidy period can now be expressed with relief and even

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<sup>24</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, introduction to *Country of Memory*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Tai, introduction to *Country of Memory*, 4–5.

bitterness. As revisiting history becomes the norm, it is inevitable that these revisionist efforts clash with the official narrative of the government. More gloomy views on the past finally have a place beside the heroics and sacrifices. Rivka Syd Eisner's prospective memory project conducted on cô Nhựt (miss Nhựt) is an example of these alternative voices, navigating various layers of bureaucracy and censorship to inject revolutionary beliefs into the collective, state-sanctioned public memory.<sup>26</sup>

Renovation lifted political constraints on previously taboo subjects. Prior to that, research was limited domestically and internationally due to strict censorship regulations and restricted foreign entry, and mainly focused on the economic system and the repressive control of the VCP.<sup>27</sup> After 1986, the state eased its control over cultural production and approved research on sensitive histories as long as they complied to the state paradigm.<sup>28</sup> Following the normalization of U.S.-Vietnam diplomatic relations in 1995, access opened up for foreign scholars.<sup>29</sup> Dialogues began to form around key historical matters as Vietnam continued on an extended period of peace and prosperity and distanced itself from the problematic past. Commemoration was in full swing with memorials and museums growing in size and number all over the country.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Rivka Syd Eisner, "Performing Prospective Memory," *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 6 (November 2011): 892, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2010.537061>.

<sup>27</sup> Huong T. D. Nguyen, "Voices in the Shadow of Independence: Vietnamese Opinion on Some National Issues in the Period of 1979–1986" (Ohio University, 2010), 15–16, [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg\\_10?0::NO:10:P10\\_ACCESSION\\_NUM:ohiou1275682901#abstract-files](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg_10?0::NO:10:P10_ACCESSION_NUM:ohiou1275682901#abstract-files); Long Nguyễn and Harry H. Kendall, *After Saigon Fell: Daily Life under the Vietnamese Communists*, Research Papers and Policy Studies 4 (Berkeley, California: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1981); Văn Canh Nguyễn and Earle Cooper, *Vietnam under Communism, 1975-1982*, Hoover Press Publication 285 (Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 1983).

<sup>28</sup> Tai, introduction to *Country of Memory*, 4–5.

<sup>29</sup> Nguyen, "Voices in the Shadow of Independence," 16.

<sup>30</sup> MacLean; Nguyen Van Huy, "Life in Hanoi in the State Subsidy Period: Questions Raised in Social Criticism and Social Reminiscences," in *Historicizing Theories, Identities, and Nations* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 219–52, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkjsq.14>.

Despite growing research on the commemorative framework for injecting the subsidy period into official history, current studies do not reflect more recent shifts in remembrance. Alternative methods of representation have come to replace traditional exhibits, in the forms of visual media and other creative arts. Today, more than a third of the population never have to use a coupon to buy food. Representations have changed to cater to a new audience with different perception and knowledge of the past. This creates a pressing need for reconsidering how history construction and remembrance have operated in the last decade. In addition to updating the Vietnam's memory project, it is also important to bridge the two extremes of the postwar history.

This research builds on the existing models for memory studies. I will consider the commemorative approach in remembering, as well as expand on the notion of silence in commemoration. This study will compare the four-stage process of Rousso to perception of the subsidy period while also showing how such linearity is counter-intuitive in this particular discussion. Its classification of different modes of remembrance still offers a solid platform for understanding how such a troubled past has evolved in public memory. Vietnam still has not distanced itself enough from the past to take a complete and objective look at it, as memory is still fresh and has yet to go the full cycle. However, as it is perhaps nearing the turn to a new stage, it is still beneficial to take a step back and consider how perception and representation of the subsidy period has shifted in response to the changing landscape of today's society.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *Subsidy Stories* (2007) and the Commemorative Reconstruction of the Subsidy Period

In 2006, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology launched the first exhibit on the subsidy period in Vietnam, titled ‘Life in Hanoi in the State Subsidy Period’. As part of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *đổi mới* (Renovation), the exhibit generated unprecedented public interest in the pre-1986 events. The event was the first foray into cultural production by government institutions to integrate the subsidy period into the national history. The 2006 exhibit provides an example of the official memory projects that celebrate the experience of the people and the role of the Communist Party of Vietnam (VCP) in inspiring Renovation. This commemorative approach is signature for other scholarship on the subsidy period and offers a dominant and compelling view of the postwar period that integrates celebration of both the government and the people in its history.

One of the successful products of this commemorative revival is the four-volume series *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (*Subsidy Stories*) by the Vietnam News Agency Publishing House. Published by the State press, the work demonstrates the Party’s agenda and its methods to reconstruct an official narrative for the subsidy period through its use of characters, subject matters, and narrative tone. The book evokes a sense of nostalgia through its depiction of the past and glorifies the people’s sacrifices to overcome tremendous hardships after the war. Interwoven within these central themes is the Party’s attempt to reconnect with the public by emphasizing the Vietnamese values that the postwar period embodied. The framing of postwar memory based on the national identity reasserts the Party’s role in Renovation and downplays their complicity in the subsidy system while sustaining their present cultural influence.

## The 2006 Resurgence of the Subsidy Period

Compared to the current commemorative effort, literature of the Renovation period carried the revolutionary spirit of the economic reforms. The enthusiasm from the economic changes that befell the nation during this time transcended the material world and spread into the cultural and artistic sphere.<sup>1</sup> In March 1986, a few months before the government signed the Renovation bills, *Tien Phong* magazine published a controversial poem by a university undergraduate, which caused a stir in national public opinion and unsettled many at the top of the political hierarchy. *Remembering Uncle Ho in the Spring* represented late 20<sup>th</sup>-century literature in the way it addressed negative facets in the society while treading the fine line between an act of bravery and one of subversion.<sup>2</sup> In her tribute to Ho Chi Minh, the late leader of Vietnam, Pham Thi Xuan Khai lamented the challenges that emerged after his death, and expressed a sense of helplessness in the face of tremendous adversity as some corrupted governmental figures continued to abuse their power.

However, towards the turn of the century, the revolutionary spirit of the Renovation aftermath was gradually replaced by more tempered forms of expression. New representational strategies leaned more towards nostalgia and commemoration than condemning the past. This change began with the unveiling of the 2006 exhibit ‘Life in Hanoi under the Subsidy Period’. The event attracted more than 300,000 visitors, a

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<sup>1</sup> Hue-Tam Ho Tai, Introduction to *Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*, ed. Hue-Tam Ho Tai and John Bodnar (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ngọc Tiên Nguyễn and Quốc Khánh Vũ, *Memories of the Subsidy Period* (Hanoi: Vietnam News Agency Publishing House, 2017), 139.

remarkable number for Vietnamese museums.<sup>3</sup> Since then, the State has been active in the subsidy period cultural production.

The resurgence of discussion on the subsidy period stemmed partly from the *Project Support of the Review of 20 Years of Renovation*, organized and funded by the United Nations Development Program. The exhibit was intended to provide the context of postwar issues that led to Renovation. Placing the exhibit within the celebratory nature of the 20-year review was one of the first steps to create a commemorative official narrative. In a reflection of the 2006 exhibit, Dr. Nguyen Van Huy, director of the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology and conceiver of the exhibit's concept, explains that "the purpose of reminiscences in Vietnam in the first decade of the twenty-first century is not only to remember and reassert things as a way to be critical and self-critical of the past but also to view the present with a vision full of hope for the future".<sup>4</sup> The commemorative and celebratory tone echoes the general approach by the state to depict the subsidy period and reiterate their role in the extensive successes of Renovation. Constructing an official narrative for the subsidy period was a paramount task for the State before other parties of interest could attempt to do so.

This memory project was not a new one and was certainly not unique to the history of the subsidy period. In fact, the Party's use of culture as a tool for cultivating its ownership and legitimacy has previously been studied by other scholars. Jamie Gillen, an authority on political geography, wrote a piece on the "service of culture to the Communist Party of Vietnam" in 2011, in which he discusses the Party's investment in culture control and

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<sup>3</sup> Ken MacLean, "The Rehabilitation of an Uncomfortable Past: Everyday Life in Vietnam during the Subsidy Period (1975–1986)," *History and Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (September 2008): 283, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757200802449915>.

<sup>4</sup> Nguyen Van Huy, "Life in Hanoi in the State Subsidy Period: Questions Raised in Social Criticism and Social Reminiscences," in *Historicizing Theories, Identities, and Nations* (University of Nebraska Press, 2017), 249, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkjsq.14>.

curation as part of their political-economic framework.<sup>5</sup> He argues that the VCP authors the creation of a “Vietnamese national culture” as a leverage to maintain its political domain.<sup>6</sup> The encroachment of Western values, Gillen suggests, threatens to undermine the position of the government as the sole monitor of Vietnamese ideologies and cultural values. *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (*Subsidy Stories*) use a similar approach to frame the subsidy period, with themes and narrative tones that embody the ongoing commemoration effort of the government.

### **Đỗ Phương & The Official Narrative of the Subsidy Period**

*Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (*Subsidy Stories*) (2007) opens with “Wrestling the Mechanism of Subsidization” by Đỗ Phương, a former committee member of the VCP and former director of the Vietnam News Agency. Out of the various accounts, Đỗ’s chapter offers the most direct discussion of the book’s purpose. It takes Đỗ little time to divulge the true intention of this opening chapter, which has little in common with the rest of the book, but it sets the tone for the narrative. While the accounts mostly deal with daily stories of ordinary people under the subsidy period, the first essay is among the few written by a government official about the Party’s role in the subsidy period, and, as Đỗ adamantly makes a case for, in the termination of the subsidy period. In the opening paragraph of his article, Đỗ writes:

A couple hundred pages could only depict to an extent the hardships of the subsidy period. These articles, these stories could not do justice to the

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<sup>5</sup> Jamie Gillen, “A Battle Worth Winning: The Service of Culture to the Communist Party of Vietnam in the Contemporary Era,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 5 (June 2011): 272–81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.05.001>.

<sup>6</sup> Gillen, 272.



immense burdens that were weighing down the society during those years. But some people seem to hold the idea that there was a class of privileged people under standards A1, A, B, C who had defended and perpetuated the “subsidy mechanism” for a long time.<sup>7</sup>

During the subsidy period, the government implemented a tier-based system for distributing food and other commodities.<sup>8</sup> Falling under a tier in itself was a privilege, because ordinary people, without any governmental affiliation, could not qualify for any category with their meagre allotment. The different tiers represent the power dynamics in the postwar Vietnam society, with which a selected few prospered and the rest suffered collectively and supposedly equitably.

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<sup>7</sup> Phụng Đỗ, “Vật Lộn Gian Khô Để Chiến Thắng Cơ Chế Bao Cấp” [Wrestling the Mechanism of Subsidization], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* [Subsidy Stories], vol. 1 (Hanoi: Vietnam News Agency Publishing House, 2014), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Each category had their own standards of procurement for all commodities ranging from food to radio batteries. A1, A, B, C are some of the tiers in this system, each tier reflecting the person’s socioeconomic background and political affiliation during this period. A1 is the highest one, followed by A, B, and C. Only government officials of the highest levels were under A1 standards.



instead of working towards a solution, or about Truong Chinh, his successor, asking an employer to raise the salary of a rice specialist because of his excellent service, these anecdotes all attempt to bridge the gap between the state and the people by demonstrating that they were also fighting the same battles as the ordinary people.

Đỗ's opening chapter sets up the necessary backdrop for the rest of *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (*Subsidy Stories*). Regardless of its conversational tone, the essay presents an argument about the significant role of the state in revitalizing Vietnam's economy from the postwar slump. The essay justifies the reasoning behind the command economy and explains the events that led to its failures. But most importantly, it depicts the state as being on the same side as the people. Government officials were also troubled by the price system, the tier-based subsidy, and the prolonged famines. It was the A1 elite club that spearheaded the revolution that made critical reforms to the economic and social landscapes. Đỗ Phương takes no credit away from the hard work and perseverance of millions of Vietnamese under the subsidy period, but he also underlines the vision of the VCP to open up the market and steer Vietnam's economy back on the right track.

The last part of the book exemplifies how the accounts balance commemoration and criticism to build the official narrative of the subsidy period. As a continuation of the first chapter of the book, the last part of *Subsidy Stories* discusses the role of several important figures in tearing down the barriers and opening the way to Renovation. Criticism is an important aspect of these accounts, but at no point do they lay the blame on any individuals or organizations for the failures of the central economy. It all boils down to the upholding of core socialist values. However, as a continued feature of post-1986 discourse, discussions on the ineffective system do not shy away from critiquing its inefficiency and impracticality.

Words like ‘mechanical’, ‘negligent’, ‘naïve’, and ‘foolish’ are constantly used to capture the frustration when dealing with layers of unreasonable red tape and injustice.<sup>11</sup>

This method may come across as the Party’s admission of its failure, but close reading of the text reveals a concerted effort at intentional obfuscation. For example, the authors make a clear distinction between their use of the word ‘State’ and ‘Party’. Whenever the accounts talk about the inefficiency in governance, it was always the State’s doing. Meanwhile, it was the Party that played the instrumental role in launching the reforms. The intended differentiation between the Party’s responsibility in the planning process and the State’s in the execution deflects the blame from the brains behind the subsidy system and towards those responsible for its implementation. In theory, the central economy still embodies the ideal socialist society, but the contemporary conditions did not allow for such idealism. And when the plan failed, it was the Party that revived the country from a major economic crisis.<sup>12</sup> By shielding the leaders of the subsidy period from this liability, the narrative restores their legitimacy as heads of state and consolidates their position of power.

### **Subsidy Memory & the Vietnamese National Identity**

The first part of *Subsidy Stories* features a rich collection of personal anecdotes by eyewitnesses of the subsidy period, depicting the postwar daily life and other cultural norms. These involve stories about food stamps, grocery lines, illegal in-house animal husbandry, and many other common practices that defined the postwar period. Many of the accounts are community-oriented, placing special focus on specific issues of everyday life from a human aspect. These stories paint the subsidy period in a more redolent light than its adversity would suggest.

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<sup>11</sup> Võ Văn Thành, “Mâu Thời Gian Xám Ngắt” [A Grey Time], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp*, 35.

<sup>12</sup> Võ Tòng Xuân, “Tôi ‘Trắng Án’” [I Was “Acquitted”], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp*, 186.

The day-to-day events in *Subsidy Stories* creates a sense of nostalgia for the past. The authors of *Subsidy Stories* regularly refer to the twenty years after Liberation as a simpler time, when materialism was never a concern. People harbored the purest of dreams, in which a bowl of white rice, a Chinese bike, an electric fan, and good-smelling soap would have sufficed.<sup>13</sup> Those who experienced it first-hand indulge in nostalgic memories when pondering over these funny sayings:

One, my love has an undershirt

Two, my love has dried fish in stock

Three, my love has a facecloth

Four, my love has floral print shorts<sup>14</sup>

By drawing the connections between a frugal material world and a wholesome culture, the book appeals to important moral and social values in the Vietnamese society, especially those considered to have been deprecated by encroaching Western influence.<sup>15</sup> Reminders of the corrosion of traditional values in the modern society call for the self-examination and reevaluation of one's beliefs. The subsidy period along with its values becomes more relevant and creditable in the present society. As Jamie Gillen suggests, this discursive construction of national culture has far-reaching implications.<sup>16</sup> The use of evocative symbols like the brick used to mark one's place in line, and the food stamps, also serve as sites of collective memory. These sites of memory participate in the conditioning of the official

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<sup>13</sup> Võ Văn Thành, 41.

<sup>14</sup> Dương Phương Vinh, “Đẹp Trai Đi Bộ Không Bằng Mặt Rỗ Đi Lơ” [“A Guy Walking Is Not As Handsome As A Guy On A Peugeot”], in *Chuyện Thời Báo Cấp*, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Hương Nguyễn, “Globalization, Consumerism, and the Emergence of Teens in Contemporary Vietnam,” *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (September 30, 2015): 4–19.

<sup>16</sup> Jamie Gillen, “A Battle Worth Winning: The Service of Culture to the Communist Party of Vietnam in the Contemporary Era,” *Political Geography* 30, no. 5 (June 2011): 272–81, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.05.001>.

image of the subsidy period, where each symbol is attached to greater traditional values and social implications.

In addition to frugality and simplicity, the commemorative narrative is also built around perseverance and sacrifice, two other aspects of the Vietnamese identity.<sup>17</sup> Many of the accounts would reassert their appreciation for the subsidy period despite the adversity.<sup>18</sup> Many acknowledge that it was a necessary step in the social evolution, an interim period vital to the later stability and development. The editor of the series, Thu Hà, writes: “When Renovation arrived, while everybody recognized the imprudence of the past, they acknowledged the lessons about determination and strength it brought”.<sup>19</sup> These sentiments appear constantly throughout the book. It propagates a general consensus that the subsidy period was a momentous part of Vietnam’s history, and must be remembered for its importance<sup>20</sup>. The tone of commemoration and appreciation echoes through the entire 270 pages. Criticism is a major part of the book, but the government’s responsibility is justified by their good intention despite the poor execution, which they eventually made amends for with Renovation. Acknowledging the postwar issues while still upholding its position in history and celebrating the hard work and resourcefulness of ordinary people are the main purposes of *Subsidy Stories*.

The commemorative model offers significant values for the State in its construction of an official narrative. Firstly, it ensures a continuity with the revolutionary past. Vietnam’s

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<sup>17</sup> Matthieu Salomon and Vu Doan Kêt, “Đổi mới, Education and Identity Formation in Contemporary Vietnam,” *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education* 37, no. 3 (June 2007): 345–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920701330222>.

<sup>18</sup> Thu Hà, “Nỗi Ám Ảnh” [The Obsession], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> Thu Hà, 28.

<sup>20</sup> Uyên Ly, “Không Gì Lo Bằng Mất Sẻ Gạo” [No Fear like the Fear of Losing Rice Coupons], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp*, 112.

national identity is connected to their history of continuous battles against foreign invaders.<sup>21</sup> Collective struggle is a distinctive trait of being Vietnamese and remains a value from which Vietnamese people still derive great pride. Associated with collective struggle is a series of other prized Vietnamese characteristics, like determination, creativity, and complete dedication to the State and the Party. The commemorative mode creates room for displaying these values, especially against the backdrop of the austere subsidy period. Under the motto “Necessity is the mother of invention,” people participated in a wide range of activities to improve their living standards, from animal husbandry to farming and craftwork.<sup>22</sup> By praising the resilience people expressed in the postwar period, these accounts were a continued effort by the State to foster a national identity characterized by hard work, creativity, frugality, and dedication.

*Subsidy Stories* is a classic example of the role of commemoration in Vietnam’s official history. As part of the resurgence in postwar remembrance in the late 2000s, the book offers a glimpse of the overarching themes around which official revisionist efforts are organized, particularly to celebrate and elicit nostalgic responses. How the accounts address topics of social criticism, remembrance, and celebration of past events reveals the complicated politics of memory in Vietnam. They exemplify how the authority navigates the social psychology of cultural production to exhibit its understanding of the people and use this bond as political leverage, which in this case is reaffirming their contribution in tearing down the subsidy barriers. Understanding the government’s stakes in the memory project

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<sup>21</sup> Salomon and Vu, 359.

<sup>22</sup> Ngô Gia Sơn, “Xuất Dương Giúp Nước, Cứu Nhà” [Exporting Labor to Save the Motherland], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp*, 98.

helps deconstruct the connections between a Vietnamese national identity and the formation of a collective memory together with the specific methods and rhetoric that it encompasses. The state's participation in the revival of postwar memories is representative of a larger pattern in identity formation, remembrance, and history construction in contemporary Vietnam.



## CHAPTER THREE

### The Satirical Narrative - Satire as a Site of Subsidy Period Remembrance

Sources on the subsidy period are not confined to only glorifying how Vietnam as a nation had overcome the subsidy crisis. They are also replete with criticisms for the downsides of the subsidy system and its society. Acknowledging the problems with this period is an essential aspect of reconstructing the postwar memories. When writing about the subsidy period, Vietnamese authors frame their criticism in a way that bypasses the strict censorship parameters of Vietnam's publication rules, but still resonates with the audience. Satire, one of the oldest and most established forms of social critique in the culture of Vietnam, offers a more critical window into the past. This creates a platform for processing difficult memories and expressing ideas and opinions about more complicated historical issues, like the subsidy period.

Satire exists in most representations of the subsidy period, even in state-commissioned publications like *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (Subsidy Stories). The most recent and successful installment of the satirical narrative is *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* (In Loving Remembrance of the Subsidy Period), a collection of popular sayings in the postwar society illustrated by Nguyễn Hữu Khoa and Nguyễn Thành Phong. In this series, the authors complement the traditional Vietnamese culture of literary satire with graphic satire. The artbook illustrates the critical side of the satirical narrative and the light-heartedness that ensures its cultural and political appropriateness. The satirical narrative employs specific symbols and artistic and literary styles that are the main modes for expressing dissident opinions in a strictly regulated public domain.

## Satire in History

Satire has long been employed as a tool for challenging social and political boundaries across different historical contexts.<sup>1</sup> In their research on laughter and satire in early Britain, Mark Knights and Adam Morton describe the ability of satire to define communal boundaries by condemning breaches of social norms, create common identities and also divide and attack them at the same time.<sup>2</sup> Vietnamese satire has long been a medium for expressing opinions, especially unorthodox and controversial ones.<sup>3</sup> Satirical folk poems are an important part of the official literature coursework.<sup>4</sup> Satire holds an esteemed position in Vietnamese literature for its role in confronting social and political issues that would otherwise be suppressed in other means of communication.

Scholars have recorded some common uses of satire in history. Knights and Morton identify two types of satire, reforming and destructive, and explore their characteristics in terms of content and material. Posin exemplifies the two use cases in Russian history. During its beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Russian satire was the embodiment of progress. However, towards the 19<sup>th</sup> century, although still a “weapon of progress,” destructive satire turned towards the throne for its new target.<sup>5</sup> The two modes have been present as an agent in political processes and social practices throughout the course of history. Vietnam’s literary

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Knights and Adam Morton, *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain, 1500-1820* (Boydell and Brewer, 2017); David Francis Taylor, *The Politics of Parody, A Literary History of Caricature, 1760-1830* (Yale University Press, 2018); J. A. Posin, “Soviet Satire,” *The Russian Review* 9, no. 4 (1950): 296–302, <https://doi.org/10.2307/125988>.

<sup>2</sup> Knights and Morton, “Introduction: Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain 1500-1800,” 1.

<sup>3</sup> Hằng Phạm, “Cái Cười Trong Ca Dao Người Việt” [Laughter in Vietnamese Folk Poetry] (University of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2003), 9–11, <http://luanan.nlv.gov.vn/luanan?a=d&d=TTbFqWqvDvbu2003.1.1&e=-----vi-20-TTbFqWqvDvbu-1--img-txIN-ca+dao+châm+biếm----->.

<sup>4</sup> Khắc Phi Nguyễn, *Ngữ Văn 7* [Literature Grade 7], 5th ed., vol. 1 (Hanoi: Viet Nam Education Publishing House, 2011), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Posin, “Soviet Satire,” 296.

culture of satire exemplifies the thin line between reforming and destructive satire.

Vietnamese satire does not align strictly with either end of the spectrum. Phạm Thị Hằng's thesis on Vietnamese folk poetry identifies two types of satire: critical and educational versus accusatory and confrontational.<sup>6</sup> The governing body of Vietnam's literature tempers the use of satire as a weapon to attack the Party / State. Satire never arose to inspire actual reform or revolution. However, the satirical narrative of the subsidy period exemplifies traces of the old literary modes and retains its main features as a tool for targeting corruption, power abuse, ignorance, and other negative social practices.

### **Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp (In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period): A Satirical Reconstruction of Subsidy Period Memories**

An important example of satire in representations of the subsidy period can be found in *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* (In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period) (2017). The book is an illustrated collection of sayings describing the subsidy period. Most of these are satirical proverbs or poems that expose the characteristics of the period of high socialism and criticize the ineffective system and its damaging consequences. The artbook was published in 2017 by the Vietnam Writers' Association Publisher, an organization that represents Vietnamese writers and a member of the Alliance of Arts and Literature Associations of Vietnam.<sup>7</sup> Its illustration was done by two major Vietnamese artists, Nguyễn Thành Phong and Nguyễn Hữu Khoa.<sup>8</sup> Each page features a proverb, an idiom, or a popular phrase used in postwar Vietnam, accompanied by a full page of illustration. The format resembles a series

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<sup>6</sup> Phạm, "Cái Cười Trong Ca Dao Người Việt" [Laughter in Vietnamese Folk Poetry], 9–11.

<sup>7</sup> "Hội Nhà Văn Việt Nam" [Vietnam Writers' Association], Vietnam Writers' Association, accessed October 18, 2018, <http://vanvn.net/>.

<sup>8</sup> Thành Phong Nguyễn and Hữu Khoa Nguyễn, *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* [In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period] (Vietnam: Writers Association Publisher, 2018).

of posters, with annotations to explain and contextualize the sayings. The quotes revolve around themes like daily life, funny phenomena, social issues, concerns, and interests. The series provides a snapshot into the way of life and the minds of people living under the subsidy system.

The illustrators, Nguyễn Thành Phong and Nguyễn Hữu Khoa, exist as two household names in the Vietnamese art community. Phong is one of the pioneers of Vietnamese comics.<sup>9</sup> Many regard his work as distinctively Vietnamese, with little influence from Japanese manga art style.<sup>10</sup> Phong does not shy away from sensitive political and social issues. Some of his comics were even discontinued by the Department of Publishing, Printing and Issuing for censorship reasons.<sup>11</sup> Art serves as a platform for Phong to voice his concerns regarding important national matters, but his opinions rarely overstepped the legal boundary.<sup>12</sup> *In Loving Reminiscence* is the epitome of this mindset. The work preserves Phong's distinctive features like the use of powerful and expressive artwork and strong language regarding sensitive topics.

Compared to Phong, Khoa is a more conservative artist. His work usually deals with more serious topic matters like nature and important figures, but he is also widely known for his witty caricatures.<sup>13</sup> His pieces are funny but not offensive, and are admired by many for

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<sup>9</sup> Khánh Trịnh, “Hoạ Sĩ Truyện Tranh: Đặt Hy Vọng Vào Người Trẻ” [Comic Artist: Placing Hope in the Young Generation], *Vietnamnet.vn*, March 24, 2006, <http://vietnamnet.vn/giaoduc/tuyensinh/huongnghiep/2006/03/553455/>.

<sup>10</sup> Khánh Trịnh.

<sup>11</sup> Thoại Hà, “‘Sát Thủ Đầu Mung Mù’ Bị Tạm Ngưng Phát Hành” [‘The Modern Dictionary of Proverbs’ discontinued], *VnExpress*, Oct. 26, 2011, <https://giaitri.vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/gioi-sao/trong-nuoc/sat-thu-dau-mung-mu-bi-tam-ngung-phat-hanh-1915616.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Hạ Huyền, “Hoạ Sĩ Nguyễn Thành Phong: ‘Nếu Là Số 2 Thì Không Có Ai Số 1’” [Artist Nguyễn Thành Phong: ‘If I am second then no one is first’], *Thể Thao & Văn Hóa* [Sports & Culture], Feb. 23, 2015, <https://thethaovanhoa.vn/van-hoa-giai-tri/hoa-si-nguyen-thanh-phong-neu-la-so-2-thi-khong-co-ai-so-1-n20150210142029382.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Thu Hằng, “Hoạ sĩ ‘Còm’ Nguyễn Hữu Khoa vẽ ‘Chân dung Xuân’” [‘Scrawny’ Artist Nguyễn Hữu Khoa’s ‘Portrait of the Spring’], *VOV.vn*, January 30, 2017, <https://vov.vn/content/NDc5MDc1.vov>.

their sense of humor and clever satire.<sup>14</sup> Both artists express the desire for art to become a channel through which serious matters could be addressed in an expressive manner. When it comes to *In Loving Reminiscence*, Phong acknowledged that the book had undergone a rigorous censoring process and might not reflect the original perceptions of the authors. However, they both represent a special group who do not hesitate to express their opinions but these views do not always align with the Party's agenda.

Like most other accounts about the subsidy period, the main purpose of *In Loving Reminiscence* is to provide a general description of life under the subsidy period.<sup>15</sup> For people who lived through the postwar chaos, the subsidy period is a time to both love and hate, says literary critic Pham Xuan Nguyen in his review of the book.<sup>16</sup> This book aims to serve as a coping mechanism for eyewitnesses of the period to process the past. For readers who were born after Renovation, the book is a window into a completely foreign world, allowing one to reflect on the now distant past, and recognize how some of its legacies are still present in the modern society.<sup>17</sup> Even alternative representations like this collection still cannot escape the typical commemorative tone, albeit in a less formal and political way. However, along with commemoration, satire and mockery is another way to remember the subsidy period.

One of the main features of the book is its use of comical satire. Most of the sayings featured in the collection are lampoons of problems with the subsidy period. Each phrase is

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<sup>14</sup> Nhật Huy, “Hoạ Sĩ Hữu Khoa: Phải Làm Cho Nhân Vật Đáng Yêu Hơn Đáng Sợ” [Artist Hữu Khoa: “Characters Must Be Lovable Rather Than Fearsome”], *Công An Nhân Dân Online*, Nov. 24, 2011, <http://vnca.cand.com.vn/doi-song-van-hoa/Hoa-si-Huu-khoa-Phai-lam-cho-nhan-vat-dang-yeu-hon-dang-so-329441/>.

<sup>15</sup> Thu Hiền, “Thành Phong: ‘Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp’ Mang Tính Tự Trào” [Thành Phong: *In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period* is a Self-Parody], *Zing.vn*, Feb. 13, 2018, <https://news.zing.vn/thanh-phong-thuong-nho-thoi-bao-cap-mang-tinh-tu-trao-post819088.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* [In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period], 3.

<sup>17</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 2–7.

accompanied by an illustrative caricature and annotation which further highlight the situation's absurdity and hilarity. An example of this mockery is the quote, "I don't care who goes to space, I'll stay here to sign up for noodles."<sup>18</sup> This saying is in the form of the traditional "six eight" verse, and makes fun of the difficult postwar living conditions in the context of the cold war.<sup>19</sup> Much like *Subsidy Stories*, *In Loving Reminiscence* induces laughter rather than laments. The way the collection embraces political and social satire is emphatic in its choice of imagery and material. Many of its readers welcome this light and flippant tone as a meaningful way to make sense of a difficult past. This representational strategy takes the focal point off the suffering and instead places it on how people overcame adversity with their humor. The strategy is welcomed by senior readers, who comment on how the authors have painted a realistic picture of the subsidy period which addresses the negative facets without being heavy and grim.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 12.

<sup>19</sup> Six-eight poems are a special genre in poetry. A six-eight poem is composed of pairs of six-syllable and eight-syllable lines. The last two sentences of this poem use the traditional six-eight syllable rules, common in Vietnamese literature, popular for its colloquial tone and smart wordplays.

<sup>20</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 3.

## Self-parody

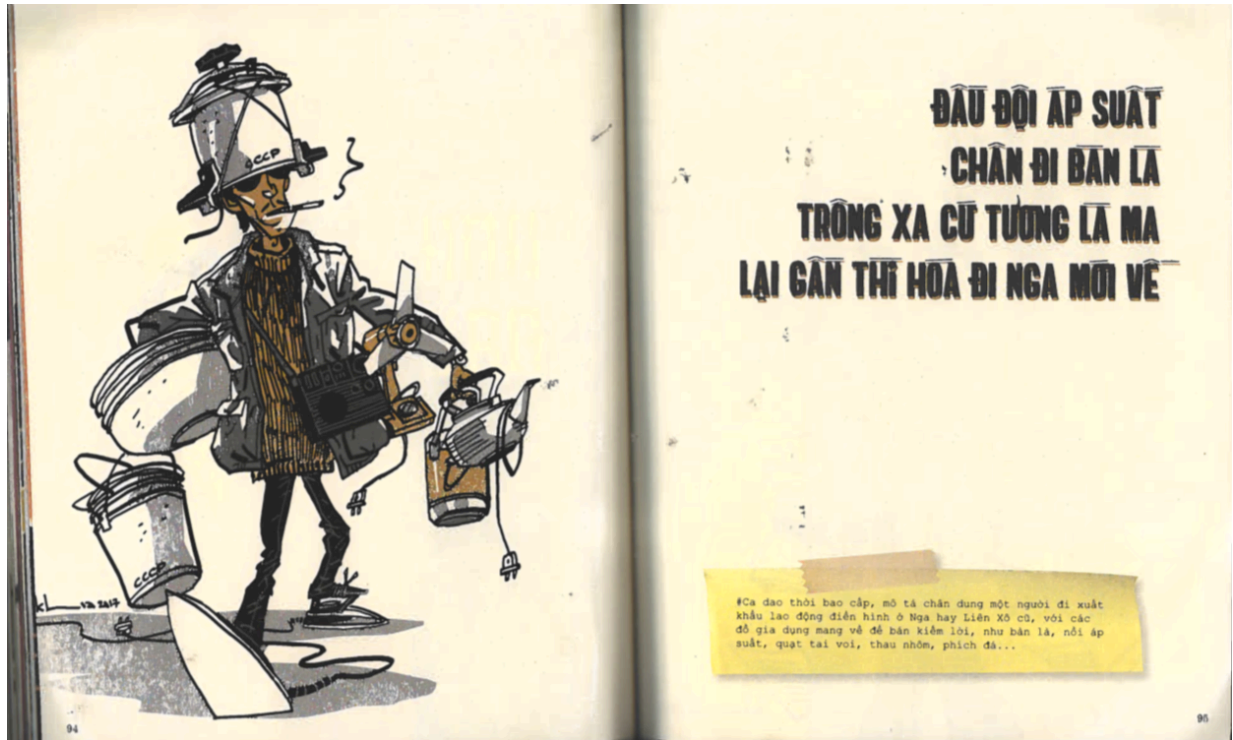


Figure 2. A page from *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp*  
(In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period)

Against the minimal background, the pathetic figure of a bony man weighed down by the countless goods hanging all over his body perfectly embodies the art of self-parody (figure 1).<sup>21</sup> On top of the man's head sits a pressure cooker labeled CCCP, the Russian abbreviation for the Soviet Union. His feet are strapped with electric irons, kettles, radios, fans, and other household appliances dangling from both arms. Figure 1 is an image of a Vietnamese laborer back from work in the Soviet Union. Labor export was a major aspect of the subsidy period experience. Workers went away on mass labor contracts to the USSR and Czechoslovakia. One of the perks of working abroad was access to quality goods that were extremely rare with the chronic low output rates back at home. Workers would usually amass

<sup>21</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 94.

stashes of household appliances and either ship them overseas or carried them back when they went on leave. These were extremely prized commodities on the black market, and many profited from this practice, hence the mockery of the figure in the illustration.

On the next page, the poem reads:

Đầu đội áp suất  
Chân đi bàn là  
Trông xa cứ tưởng là ma  
Lại gần thì hóa đi Nga mới về<sup>22</sup>

Literal translation:

Head wearing a pressure cooker  
Feet strapped to irons  
Looks like a ghost from afar

From up close it's just another export laborer back from the Soviet Union

Such a laughable image demonstrates how the subsidy period is painted by the satirical narrative. The man's absurd demeanor eclipses his desperation and opportunism. During the economic crisis, people went to extreme lengths to make ends meet. These extremities are rendered in an exaggerated way that makes them easier to mock than to sympathize. The stark contrast between these absurd images and the modern society not only elicits a sense of nostalgia from those whose childhood's dreams involved Russian commodities, but also it creates some distance with post-Renovation generations. Such distance makes it safe to discuss a foreign past that has little connection to present society.

Despite the clear distinction between the past and the present, writers and readers describe such satire as self-parody, or laughing at themselves. Self-parody is a common

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<sup>22</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 95.



Vietnamese literary strategy for depicting issues with societies. On the topic of self-parody, Bảo Ninh, author of *Nỗi Buồn Chiến Tranh* (The Sorrow of War), a 1990 award-winning novel, explains:

[There is] a lot of suffering and unhappiness, but above all is the ludicrousness... Back then, people became immune to misery, not because they lamented, groaned, or complained, but because of the self-parody. Self-parody was part of the strength that helped us survive the long dark days of subsidies before Renovation came.<sup>23</sup>

As Bảo Ninh describes, to take pride in being able to laugh at the wrongs in life as a way to confront them is a Vietnamese tradition. The values of masking problems with clever mockery and metaphors play into this attitude and create a shield that diverts discussion on the history itself. This approach aligns better with the alleged Vietnamese value of humor and creativity, and avoids directly confronting difficult experiences.

The act of remembrance is in itself a way to forget.<sup>24</sup> History is of secondary importance to how it is portrayed and retold. Vietnamese history textbooks never discuss losses in nearly as much depths as they do victories.<sup>25</sup> It is actually through literary works that students learn more about sensitive historical topics, which are often represented satirically by writers. This model allows the government to shift the focus from the actual history to the literary techniques used in depicting that past. Even when it comes to critical pieces, their literary values ultimately overshadow the historical ones. Where the

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<sup>23</sup> Bảo Ninh, cover page of *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* [In Loving Remembrance of the Subsidy Period].

<sup>24</sup> Alexandre Dessingué and J. M. Winter, eds., *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*, Routledge Approaches to History 13 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Martin Großheim, “Đôi Mối in the Classroom? The Portrayal of National and World History in Vietnamese Textbooks,” *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 33, no. 1 (March 2018): 147–80, <https://doi.org/10.1355/sj33-1e>.

commemorative approach is not applicable, Vietnamese scholars find other ways to glorify the past by celebrating its representations, and in this case through self-parody.

### Political Satire



Figure 3. An example of criticism against corruption from *Thương Nhớ*  
(In Loving Reminiscence)

The second dominant theme of the book is the criticism and mockery levelled at the authority and the command economy. These sayings grapple with problems such as corruption, bureaucracy, and impractical policy making. An example of such criticism can be observed in the following poem (figure 2):

Một người làm việc bằng hai  
Để cho chủ nhiệm mua đài mua xe  
Một người làm việc bằng ba  
Để cho chủ nhiệm xây nhà xây sân<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 160.

Literal translation:

One person works like two  
For manager to buy radios and cars  
One person works like three  
For manager to build houses and lawns

Similar to the previous example, the six-eight verse form is a popular choice for satirical poems. The structure of this verse makes use of the parallelism between the lines to exaggerate issues with corruption in the cooperative system.<sup>27</sup> The system was founded on the basis that each organization is co-owned, voluntary, and democratic.<sup>28</sup> However, the central economy created many loopholes in this idealistic model. Unrealistic quotas coupled with nominal buy-out rates forced farmers to produce with little real incentive. Meanwhile, corrupt cooperative supervisors constantly dipped into the profits of the collective to line their own pockets. Despite their hard work, farmers were impoverished and starved in growing numbers, while some powerful figures turned the collective's work into their personal property.

The saying is direct in its criticism, which is uncommon in Vietnam considering the strict censorship regulations. A usual technique in Vietnamese political satire is to use metaphors and innuendos to mask criticisms. However, most of the sayings in the collection are relatively straightforward and descriptive in their critique of the government, which is unusual considering such remarks would have resulted in severe legal consequences during the postwar period. In fact, even state commissioned publications are critical in their

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<sup>27</sup> A cooperative is an economic collective of farmers / producers working together to meet an assigned quota.

<sup>28</sup> Nguyễn and Nguyễn, 160.

evaluation of the subsidy regime.<sup>29</sup> This unprecedented level of tolerance for criticisms by the State is indicative of how the government wants to portray its history. However, such critiques still have to be masked by a layer of satire.

Within the parameters set by supervising government agencies, works like *Thương Nhớ* (In Loving Reminiscence) not only offer a different way to remember the subsidy period but also to reflect critically upon the present. Today, the word ‘subsidy’ still implies bureaucratic behaviors in the system. *Thương Nhớ* (In Loving Reminiscence) includes proverbs that condemn problems that still exist, like corruption, bribery, and power abuse. Issues addressed in the book still have direct relevance to the present. As observed in figure 2, the subtext indicates an indirect criticism levelled at the current government, who claims to have overturned the outdated postwar system but continues to perpetuate behaviors that were at the core of the problems with the subsidy period.

### **Art as a Site for Satire**

*Thương Nhớ* (In Loving Reminiscence) would not retain the same effects with its lampoons without the aid of the creative artwork. In fact, it can be argued that the main component of the book is actually the illustrations, as the two artists are often referred to as the authors. What makes the illustrative works so special is that they draw the inspiration from established traditional and contemporary styles that already have a position of prominence among the art audience. In fact, many of these illustrations are done in the style of propaganda posters popular during the wars and the immediate postwar settings, where total mobilization was necessary for sustaining the war effort and speeding up the postwar rebuild. These include “bold primary colours, uncomplicated forms, familiar symbols,”

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<sup>29</sup> See *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* [Subsidy Stories], vol. 1, 4 vols. (Hanoi: Vietnam News Agency Publishing House, 2014).

which, according to propaganda artist Pham Thanh Liem, are the distinguishing features of the propaganda-poster style.<sup>30</sup> Many of *Thuong Nhớ*'s artworks retain these characteristics. Even the font is similar to those used for the 1970s' war slogans. However, they were created with an added twist of sarcasm and comedy, containing messages that mock rather than promote the old mottos. The artists use the state's original material to poke fun at their policies. *Thuong Nhớ*'s illustrations are artistic version of self-parody and political satire.

Despite having the old-style propagandist vibe, the artbook feels modern with its minimalist use of colors and textures. The entire collection uses a limited palette that works better to capture viewers' attention than the flashy tones of traditional propaganda posters. This more refined approach to poster design has gained growing popularity in recent years, along with the trend towards more retro designs.<sup>31</sup> More discussion on the recent craze for everything “bao cấp” (subsidy) and its aesthetics continues in the following chapter.

### **Satire in the Official Narrative**

Criticism of the subsidy period is not exclusive to popular sources. Even state commissioned publications are critical of the failures of the old regime. The tone of these critiques is very similar to those in *Thuong Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* (In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period). *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (2007) (Subsidy Stories) includes many accounts of this nature. Some of them are so absurd that they seem incomprehensible. The “dumped coal” quota is one such tragicomedy. It is a true story about a coal mining company during the subsidy period, which received an annual quota of 150,000 tons of coal. However, as

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<sup>30</sup> Seth Mydans, “Arts Abroad: Vietnam Hangs Onto a Relic: The Propaganda Poster,” *New York Times*, 2000, sec. Arts & Leisure.

<sup>31</sup> Ah Gil, “Nói Không Ngoa, 2017 Chính Là Năm Phong Cách Retro Lên Ngôi ở Cả MV lẫn Phim Việt” [2017 is the Year of Retro in Vietnam's Cinema and Music Video Production], *Kênh 14*, Dec. 27, 2017, <http://kênh14.vn/loi-khong-ngo-2017-chinh-la-nam-phong-cach-retro-len-ngo-i-o-ca-mv-lan-phin-viet-20171226172708169.chn>.

demand dropped, the company continued to stockpile the coal in their warehouse until they were out of storage. However, with only two months left to fulfil the quota, unable to let their reputation and decorum go down the drain, the company's board of directors along with all its employees decided to camp out in the mines and worked until they produced the amount required. But because they had run out of space to stash the coal, everything that was dug up ended back in the dump.<sup>32</sup>

This example goes to show how adversity is sugarcoated by these hilarious and ridiculous stories. Readers learn about the unreasonable regulations, but not about how this mismanagement affected people's lives on an individual scale. The entire society is viewed comically while nameless individuals and their personal suffering slip under the radar. The satire glosses over the pain, grievance, and bitterness of those who were starved, stripped of any valuable personal property, and forced to sell their goods at low state prices. These light-hearted anecdotes divert attention from the physical and emotional struggle of ordinary people towards the overall state of absurdity. Masked behind this ludicrousness is the untold daily battle against starvation, privation, and extreme ideological and cultural constraints.

Criticism, specifically in the form of satire, is the second site for the recent resurgence of the subsidy period history. Satire provides a safe middle ground for critics of the postwar period to express their opinions on issues as sensitive as the 1970s and 1980s. Although the late socialist regime has been much more open to criticisms against their policy and government, strict measures are still enacted to prevent the undermining of their political legitimacy. The satirical narrative of the subsidy period offers the appropriate means for both

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<sup>32</sup> Tre Publishing House, "Vòng 'Kim Cô'" [Sun Wukong's Magical Circlet], in *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp*, 57–59.

the public and the government to critically reflect on the subsidy period's ruling class without undermining the Party's role as the instigators of the 1986s changes.

Despite these implications, the satirical narrative has its shortcomings. The politics of satirical criticism, while supposedly providing a more objective perspective of the past, also create a sense of distance and superiority. As Vietnamese people laugh off a difficult past, they become detached from its memories. The history of the subsidy period, although not forgotten, now exists as a separate entity from the present. The authority was not just given a clean slate. The government now has the ability to criticize the subsidy regime as if its beliefs and ideologies were any different back then from what they are today. Post-Renovation generations do not get to learn from the mechanism of the subsidy period when all they do is mock the negative facets and celebrate the preservation of traditional values. The pitfalls of the satirical narrative result from the Vietnamese politics of criticism and the culture of satirizing to paper over real issues. These observations not only apply to the past but also to existing problems in the Vietnamese society.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Selling an Alternative Past:

#### The Business of Nostalgia and the Aesthetic Narrative of Subsidy Period Memories

In recent years, a new craze for everything *bao cấp* (subsidy) emerged among the urban youth. Subsidy-themed coffee shops and diners became a huge hit. Photoshoots with 1980s settings gained increasing publicity on social media sites, attracting a large audience and many positive reactions. Artworks modelled after the wartime and postwar style used in propaganda posters started to appear in abundance. The new fad immediately caught on with millennial audiences in Vietnam, who were looking for new alternatives to the usual places and forms of entertainment. Young people lamented the passing of traditional culture and values as they sought a getaway to an imagined past filled with peace and nostalgia and in turn increased the popularity of subsidy period styled businesses.

The resurgence in interest in the subsidy period raises important questions about the postwar history's implications and legacy in Vietnam today, especially when the stake is not limited to historians and anthropologists, but business owners, artists, and service providers. This reimagination of the subsidy period history reveals how past memories are processed and digested in a digital age dominated by consumerism and technology. The industry of subsidy period services leveraged newfound public interest to circulate a narrative that strips the subsidy period of all historical context and politics and dwells solely on its culture and aesthetics. Subsidy period café owners and artists framed these whitewashed memories around artifacts and decorative styles. The roots of this phenomenon are both cultural and political. The reverence of postwar aesthetics demonstrates the youth's craving for originality in a saturated cultural sphere. Young people's obsession with this depoliticized past also



aligns with the national phenomenon of political detachment, even in the relishing of a highly politicized past. How businesses reimagine the subsidy period represents the way history is remembered, commercialized, and disseminated through decentralized channels in Vietnamese popular culture.

### **The Business of Nostalgia**

The past has a special position in present-day societies. On the preoccupation with history, David Lowenthal discusses contemporary treatment of the past and how its foreignness can become a source for present obsession.<sup>1</sup> People are attracted to newness and exoticism. The past is not always new and exotic. However, societies continue to celebrate these differences because what they venerate from the past is not a set of historical facts. Instead, present societies craft a tailored version of history that is predisposed to their obsession with the unknown and the misconception about a “different” time. An uninformed appreciation for the past creates incentives for the industry of nostalgia to perpetuate incorrect or irrelevant interpretations of past events to meet their customers’ expectations.

Consumable pasts are not a foreign concept. The commercial dimension of history has been exhibited in a number of different ways, through the sale of historical souvenirs, historical movie production, or themed cafés. Take the example of *Ostalgie*, nostalgia for East Germany. In Germany, in the aftermath of unification, German businesses started to cater to the nostalgia for life under the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with East German food brands, movies, and other cultural products of the bygone era. Jonathan Bach describes this phenomenon as “capable of transmitting cultural knowledge” for its spread and

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<sup>1</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), xvi–xvii.

influence on German society post-Unification.<sup>2</sup> The commodification of history reveals the impact of certain histories on present societies and, in turn, how present-day perception of the past continues to shape history.

The Vietnamese government promotes the use of specific symbols as staples of culture and history. Tourism has long utilized history and heritage for commercial purposes with an emphasis on war sites and cultural art forms. Tourism rejuvenated water puppetry as an ancient cultural form in the Red River Delta. The marketing of such symbols as tradition, however, begs the question about the notion of cultural authenticity.<sup>3</sup> Similar questions can be asked about the commercialization of subsidy period memories and symbols and the kind of narrative shaped by commercial practices.

### **Subsidy-themed coffee shops**

Cộng Cà Phê's transformation from its origin as a small simple café in 2007 Hanoi into a major subsidy themed café chain is exemplary of the trends that have taken the coffee shop business by storm in the last few years.<sup>4</sup> In major cities, a host of 1980s-themed cafés started to emerge as the retro trend gained popularity among adolescents and young adults.<sup>5</sup> These “sites of nostalgia” are often tucked away in the busiest corners of Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh City, covered by moldy brick walls and lit by small dim kerosene lamps. Services offered include food and beverages such as rice mixed with potatoes, state-issued minced

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<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Bach, “Consuming Communism: Material Cultures of Nostalgia in Former East Germany,” in *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 2015), 124, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd2bp.10>.

<sup>3</sup> Sam Pack, Michael Eblin, and Carrie Walther, “Water Puppetry in the Red River Delta and Beyond: Tourism and the Commodification of an Ancient Tradition,” *The ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 19, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 23–31.

<sup>4</sup> Hoàng Anh, “Cộng: Cà Phê ‘Đồng Nát’ Giá Sang Chảnh” [Cộng: Steep Price Tag for “Junk” Coffee], *Zing.vn*, Mar. 17, 2014, <https://news.zing.vn/cong-ca-phe-dong-nat-gia-sang-chanh-post398170.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Anh Ninh, “5 Quán Cà Phê Đậm Nét Bao Cấp ở Hà Nội” ๘, *Kênh 14*, Jul. 24, 2018, <http://kenh14.vn/5-quan-ca-phe-dam-chat-ha-noi-xua-than-thuoc-voi-tuoi-tho-cua-8x-9x-20180724174044257.chn>; Má Lúm, “Trào Lưu Quán Cà Phê Bao Cấp Khắp Ba Miền” [Subsidy Period Café Theme Sweeps the Nation], *VnExpress*, April 10, 2017, <https://dulich.vnexpress.net/photo/am-thuc/trao-luu-quan-ca-phe-bao-cap-khaph-ba-mien-3568152.html>.

pork, and other frugal dishes that were the trademark of a deprived past. The commercialization of subsidy period symbols has grown rapidly as the business of nostalgia blossomed at the crossover of a complicated history and the obsession for all things past.



Figure 4. A corner of the Subsidy Period Café in Hanoi. Label reads “State-Owned Store.”  
Source: kenh14.vn

The 2010s remake of the subsidy period boasted by these services is a mix of old and new symbols arranged to illicit nostalgic responses. Captured in figure 1 is a glimpse of the Subsidy Period Café in Hanoi. In the corner hangs a sign labeled “State-Owned Store.” During the postwar period, state-owned stores were the only place to acquire food and other commodities. Lines of people filled the front of these stores as they waited for their turn to trade in food stamps and tickets for their monthly portion. Jam-packed in the coffee shop’s rendition is a wide array of government-issued goods. Each corner of the shop boasts a

funny-sounding street name, ranging from “Happy Street” to “Waving Street.” The entire space is a hodgepodge of unnamed artifacts without any annotation or label, packed together to create a semi-authentic experience. Like most other themed cafés, the owner of this subsidy-styled business did not design their decorations with a narrative in mind. The choice of furniture and other decorative objects is done from an artistic viewpoint, rather than a historical one. The dirty and tarry streets of 1980s Hanoi were definitely not paved in pastel-colored tar and did not bear funny-sounding names. These projects represent a reimagined version of the postwar history, in which memory fragments are arranged in a fashion that suits the taste of the modern audience rather than projecting a true image of the past.

### **The Attractiveness of Nostalgia**

The business of subsidy period nostalgia thrived on the notion of a trip back in time inspired by objects and concepts closely connected to the childhood of many.<sup>6</sup> When interviewed, Thanh Vũ, owner of the Subsidy Period Café in Da Nang, opened up about his passion for collecting items from the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Most of his senior clientele would come simply to check out the cassette player on display, which was similar to the one they once owned, or the old bike they could only afford to marvel at from afar during the earlier times. Vũ recalled an old customer who just sat for hours and cried because the interior of the place was too similar to the home he left behind years ago. Those who lived through the subsidy period saw such settings as a stimulus for nostalgia, an opportunity to relive a curtailed version of the subsidy period, specifically targeted at rekindling favorable remembrance of the past.

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<sup>6</sup> Anh Ninh.

<sup>7</sup> Tâm An, “Uống Cà Phê, Nhớ Những Tháng Ngày Xưa Cũ ở Đà Nẵng” [Drinking Coffee, Reminiscing about the Old Days in Đà Nẵng], *Dân Trí*, Nov. 3, 2017, <https://dantri.com.vn/doi-song/uong-ca-phe-nho-nhung-thang-ngay-xua-cu-o-da-nang-20171103065604954.htm>.

With the force of time and other external agents, current perceptions of the subsidy period are no longer accurate representations of the past. More than thirty years have passed since Renovation. The subsidy period is still relatively fresh in the living memory of many; enough time has gone by for the pains and the suffering to heal or fade. Whatever recollections Vietnamese society might have today of the subsidy period have been shaped and reshaped by the forces of change that characterized the development of Vietnam in the past few decades. Critics of the “modern” culture, who claim that it is dominated by consumerism and materialism, reminisce about the alleged simplicity and wholesomeness of the past, where communal values rose above all as the quintessence of a Vietnamese identity.<sup>8</sup> Such perspectives paint the subsidy period in a romanticized light. Each of those who took this trip down the memory lane already had their own preconceived image of the subsidy period history, completed with their personal emotions and perceptions. The cafés only served as a backdrop, or a site of collective remembrance.

Unlike the elderly, younger generations are less attracted to the idea of a glorified history so much as the aesthetic side of it. The concept of a central economy, under which people traded stamps for food and other necessities, is completely foreign to those who came of age after 1986. Discussion of the subsidy period in the public sphere is still relatively limited. Exposure to postwar history mostly comes through official channels like textbooks or personal ones like stories passed down orally from older family members. Apart from the occasional exhibits, these restaurants or cafés are the only other opportunities for them to interact with a distant and elusive past. Compared to actual witnesses of the subsidy period, for young people, the focus on its aesthetics dissociates this rose-tinted memory package

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<sup>8</sup> Thi Ngõn, “Quán ‘Đêm Trước Đổi Mới’” [“Night Before Renovation” Shop], in “*Đêm trước” đổi mới* [The “Night” Before Renovation] (Ho Chi Minh: Tre Publishing House, 2006), 131.

even more from its historical and political context. The radio on display means little more to them than a prop to an Instagram picture. A radio was an extremely rare item back in those days. Possession of one indicated that its owners had close ties with those in power or were influential themselves. Yet none of the objects for show suggested anything about their origins and historical significance. They are simply arranged to form an aesthetically pleasing setting that simulates how people today think of the subsidy period.

Domestic newspapers have documented the rise of trademarked postwar beverage and food services and described these locations as a tribute to the past, a quiet and peaceful zone to unwind and be relieved of the burdens of modern life. The slogan of a subsidy period themed coffee shop in Hoi An reads: “This store sells a moment of leisure amidst of the crowded and busy daily life.”<sup>9</sup> Young customers seek from these spaces a respite from their daily drill of school or office work. The attractiveness of the 1980s lies in implicit assumptions about a simpler past, unburdened by materialism and other complications of modernity. What subsidy period themed cafés offer through the use of artifacts and decorative styles is a slice of the past, a taste of an idealistic lifestyle and society where social values take precedence over materialistic gains. This elusive concept proves to be an attractive force that captures the attention of many curious customers.

The employment of particular symbols and concepts is central to the reconstruction of a space from the past. Certain images are more recognizable than others, however tenuous their link to the subsidy period might be. Some familiar concepts include wooden furniture, brick walls, propaganda posters, Chinese bikes, etc. These are symbols that have been well established as the staples of a bygone era, and are automatically associated with the postwar

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<sup>9</sup> Hồng Quân, “Chàng Trai 9X ‘Đi Bụi’ và Tiệm Cà Phê Thời Bao Cấp Độc Đáo” [The Nomadic Millennial and His Unique Subsidy Period Café], *Lao Động*, April 18, 2018, <https://laodong.vn/du-lich/chang-trai-9x-di-bui-va-tiem-ca-phe-thoi-bao-cap-doc-dao-602197.ldo>.

period, despite the debatable historical accuracy of these connections. Many businesses use suggestive names like “Cooperative,” “State-run,” or “Canteen.” In one specific example, “Cộng”, the name of the most successful subsidy period themed café chain in Vietnam, is the first word in the official name of Vietnam, “Cộng Hòa Xã Hội Chủ Nghĩa Việt Nam,” or the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.<sup>10</sup> The business of nostalgia plays off of the cultural implications of these symbols, and their connections to the alleged characteristics of the previous era, treasured for its emphasis on simplicity and anti-materialism. The attention to interior design, including the choice of color, furniture, and their arrangement, triggers nostalgic responses and facilitates an association with the supposed past.

### **The Pitfalls of the Aesthetic Narrative**

The spread of postwar trends through online platforms continues to even further whitewash the commercialized and beautified version of the subsidy period. If curiosity is what attracts young people to subsidy period themed coffee shops initially, their online popularity keeps blowing up the industry. With the boom of social media in Vietnam, people began to share their experiences of such services online with increasing frequency. Many of those who visited history-themed cafés only came for the sake of a good photo.<sup>11</sup> These places are often thought of as photogenic backgrounds rather than sites of historical or cultural value. The nostalgic narrative, under these circumstances, is devoid of any narrative at all, except for its romanticized aesthetics. Business owners are happy with customers associating their products with art, beauty, fashion, etc. over history or culture.

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<sup>10</sup> “Cộng Cà Phê” [Cộng Coffee], accessed November 8, 2018, <http://congcaphe.com/>.

<sup>11</sup> Phước Bình, “10 Quán Cà Phê Kiểu Bao Cấp Hút Giới Trẻ ở Hà Nội” [10 Subsidy Period Cafés Attracting Young Hanoians], *Zing.vn*, May 27, 2015, <https://news.zing.vn/10-quan-ca-phe-kieu-bao-cap-hut-gioi-tre-o-ha-noi-post659243.html>.

The romanticization of the past leads to a warped and oversimplified perception. Anyone who paints their wall yellow and displays subsidy period signs like “state-owned store” can claim a piece of the industry of nostalgia business. This manufactured narrative of the subsidy period dwells on the aesthetics of the 1980s and its alleged cultural legacies, which are widely celebrated and missed in the age of materialism and technology. Such a sentimentalized image is stripped of any history and politics that were a major part of the postwar period, marked by major economic and political crises. Unbeknownst to many of their customers, items that can be found in a subsidy period diner were the hard-fought portions of people who spent hours in line to buy their standardized share. They were not the embodiment of simplicity and frugality, but rather the opposite, for material was the top priority during this era of deprivation. By decontextualizing these artifacts, business owners have created an alternative narrative that caters to millennials’ obsession with retro designs while conveniently filtering out any details that might hinder their businesses.

### **The Politics of the Apolitical**

This decontextualized history raises the question as to why the subsidy period is stripped of all history and politics. One of the most obvious answers would be to avoid confronting a complicated history that might conflict with the official narrative. There is also the argument that Vietnamese people, especially the youth, are becoming more and more apolitical.<sup>12</sup> History and politics have never been the strong suits of young Vietnamese adults. The ignorance towards these matters boils down to the discontent with the official history and politics in Vietnam, and it trickles down to how these subjects are taught at

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<sup>12</sup> Huy Thiện, “Xu Thế Thờ ơ Chính Trị Trong Lớp Trẻ Rất Đáng Báo Động” [“Young People are Growing Alarmingly Apolitical”], Báo Pháp luật Việt Nam, October 31, 2017, <http://baophapluat.vn/thoi-su/xu-the-tho-o-chinh-tri-trong-lop-tre-rat-dang-bao-dong-363653.html>.



school. Vietnamese students are preprogrammed to prioritize subjects like Math, Literature, and other natural science disciplines. Social sciences are secondary to these main focuses. The official history taught at school is a highly streamlined version that provides little room for different perspectives and alternative discussions and avoids sensitive matters, such as the subsidy period.<sup>13</sup> It provides no platform to engage discussion on such matters, leaving students to educate themselves on such topics through other channels. Therefore, the disinterest in the history behind these cafés and restaurants is neither unexpected nor incomprehensible.

However, there are further implications as to why these services exist in the first place and gain such traction. Recently, there has been a social movement towards awareness of and appreciation for the past. Young people have actively attempted to engage in historical as well as political dialogues.<sup>14</sup> However, the official education system does not provide any solid platform to prepare them to engage in these disciplines. They have to turn to the only means in which they are eloquent, the cultural aspect. Because history does not provide enough context for topics such as the subsidy period, students' exposure to and discussion of such topics are consequently decontextualized and depoliticized. Since the government would suppress any versions other than the official history, and its narrative is not a satisfactory alternative, people start to look for other ways to interact with history. This is the reason why many of these coffee shops' owners started the businesses in the first place, and how they attracted their first customers. Many who come to learn more about the subsidy period are content with the narrative offered, which is certainly more engaging and functional

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<sup>13</sup> Matthieu Salomon and Vu Doan Kêt, "Education and Identity Formation in Contemporary Vietnam," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education* 37, no. 3 (June 2007): 345–63, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920701330222>.

<sup>14</sup> K. Anh and Nguyễn D., "Bầu cử Quốc hội trong mắt giới trẻ" [National Assembly Election from the Perspective of Young People], *Tuổi Trẻ*, February 19, 2016, <https://tuoitre.vn/bau-cu-quoc-hoi-trong-mat-gioi-tre-1053736.htm>.

that the state sanctioned one. These practices demonstrate the values and impacts of alternative platforms to revise and learn about history for Vietnamese people.

The aesthetic narrative of the subsidy period, although devoid of any historical or political significance, is still heavily implicated in today's society. Those who started the trend did it out of an effort to practice history from the bottom up. Their efforts exemplify the kind of history that resonates with Vietnamese people, one that is decentralized, depoliticized, and community-centered. The cultural politics of these trends are hidden in the subtext of a popular commercial product. Nostalgic commodities are also representative of how collective remembrance works in present-day Vietnam. It might start with a genuine effort to revisit a history, but as the notion gains popularity, these memories soon become commodified and turn into products that can be consumed, photographed, and flaunted. Although many still believe in the presumed cultural values of these products, their historical context soon fades into oblivion.

Subsidy themed cafés, as an idealized image of the past, illustrated how memory could be shaped to correspond to what societies want to remember. The reimagination of the postwar era as an ideal society that embodies the wholesomeness of a Vietnamese identity epitomizes the sentimentalization of a problematic past. Meanwhile, the image portrayed by subsidy period themed coffee shops continues to reinforce this romanticized and misleading rendition. The problems with an inaccurate subsidy period history include the risk of further detaching postwar memories from any meaningful and historically sound narrative. The wider it spreads, the greater the risk that the postwar history would become completely decontextualized. Spontaneous, unorganized, and under-researched representations of the

subsidy period would only continue to distort future perception of a complicated and sensitive, but essential period of history.

## CONCLUSION

The last decade—from 2006 to the present—offers three different modes for remembering the subsidy period, through the commemorative, satirical, or nostalgic / aesthetic lenses. Historians and curators molded the state-approved commemorative narrative as an extension of the official history of Vietnam. The framing of this history involves the hammering of the same traditional values over different periods, under different circumstances like wartime, colonization, or crises like the subsidy period. Meanwhile, writers and artists employ the satirical framework as an alternative to the celebratory narrative, using approved means of criticism to negotiate strict censorship parameters. More recently, a new mode of remembrance has emerged in the form of cafés and other products of subsidy period nostalgia. The commodification of the postwar history became successful as a result of public obsession with the subsidy period's aesthetics and nostalgia for an idealized past. All three narratives share similar characteristics: they are uncontroversial and insistent on the national essence of a Vietnamese identity. Drawing on society's preconceptions and using existing modes, the architects of these narratives shape the subsidy period in the light of the official treatment of other histories while catering to present political and cultural demands.

Contemporary representations reveal the limits of existing frameworks for studying memories in Vietnam. Most studies only focus on commemoration as the umbrella for historical remembrance. Studying the subsidy period's remembrance uncovers larger patterns in the Vietnamese society in terms of history and memory construction. Commemoration, satire, aesthetic / nostalgia narratives are not mutually exclusive. The presence of one does not invalidate the others; they work in tandem. Popular literature on the subsidy period incorporates aspects of both commemoration and satire. The business of nostalgia thrives on

values celebrated by the commemorative narrative. Together, the three narratives provide the main themes around which memories are framed in a way that eases their integration into public discussion.

Compared to other memory models like Henry Rousso's, which suggests a four-stage cycle for collective remembrance (mourning, resistance, realization, immortalization), subsidy period memory demonstrates both similarities and differences. Mourning is similar to the 20-year silence after Renovation, while resistance and immortalization correspond to the satirical and nostalgia narratives. However, these stages are less clear-cut and linear as they are interconnected and simultaneous processes. The politics and culture of Vietnam constitute a complicated landscape for the co-existence of multiple modes of remembrance.

The subsidy period is revelatory of the process of remembrance for other histories. In a highly censored world where every printed word is the product of rigorous filtering and editing, what gets published does not always reflect what members of society think or say. Therefore, it is crucial that memory studies read between the lines and beyond the traditional printed sources, into the cultural and commercial world. These alternative representations extend the memory landscape in Vietnam beyond the commemorative framework to other powerful ways to represent the past.

Oral history is an important aspect of the subsidy period history that is not covered by the scope of this project. Before their reemergence in national discussions in 2005, the history of the subsidy period only circulated mainly in the stories passed down from one generation to another. Personal memory is another inroad into understanding the way societies perceive the past and its impact on the present. By studying the influence of surrounding milieus created by collective acts of remembrance on individual memory, one

can get at the effectiveness of these collective modes of remembrance and in turn investigate how individual memory shapes the collective's.

Focusing on the subsidy period also allows memory studies about Vietnam to expand beyond the scope of the American war to other parts of history that are just as relevant, if not more, to today's society. Remembering peacetime can be more problematic than remembering wartime without the convenient enemy to scapegoat and justify any mistakes or failures. The subsidy period is a fascinating example, because its process of remembrance has changed over time into a more resistant form that is slowly immortalized by its commodification, if not commemoration. The cultural and commercial aspects of the subsidy period make it a unique case. Its remembrance does not comply with the commemorative guidelines for remembering wars. However, this deviance speaks volumes about the hidden war histories that are not conducive to the state's agenda.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

Thu Hà, *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* [Subsidy Stories]. 6th ed. Vol. 1. 4 vols. Hà Nội: Vietnam News Publishing House, 2016.

This is a collection of short stories by multiple authors about the 1975 - 1986 period, published by the Vietnamese Government News Agency. The book was well-received and prompted the publication of three other installments. Its stories revolve around the daily practices under the old system and depict in detail the everyday hardships of making ends meet and securing basic necessities. There is no mention of issues outside the common themes of central planning, price controls, cultural and ideological curation. Matters such as the mass migration and the purge of people affiliated with the old regime are noticeably absent. This study uses this source primarily for studying the commemoration narrative.

Nguyễn, Khắc Phi. *Ngữ Văn 7* [Literature Grade 7]. 5th ed. Vol. 1. 2 vols. Hanoi: Viet Nam Education Publishing House, 2011.

This is the official Vietnamese literature textbook for seventh grade. One of the required texts is a series of satirical folk poetry. Satire is a compulsory component of the official literature education of Vietnamese students.

Nguyễn, Ngọc Tiên, and Quốc Khánh Vũ. *Memories of the Subsidy Period*. Hanoi: Vietnam News Agency Publishing House, 2017.

This source is a series of photographs of life in Vietnam from 19745 - 1986, published by the Vietnam News Agency Publishing House, the same publisher as *Chuyện Thời Bao Cấp* (Subsidy Stories). The photographs featured in the collection are categorized into 3 time periods, pre Unification, post Unification, and the night before Renovation. Each time period is further divided into smaller sections with annotations contextualizing the images and the topics they feature. It provides the background for understanding the mechanism of the subsidy system, as well as an overview from the official narrative of the subsidy period history.

Nguyễn, Thành Phong, and Hữu Khoa Nguyễn. *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* [In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period]. Vietnam: Writers Association Publisher, 2018.

*In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period* is a collection of sayings that became popular between 1975 and 1986. Each page is designed like a poster, with a illustrative caricature and annotation to contextualize the quote. The illustration is

done by Thành Phong and Hữu Khoa. Compilation and research behind the sayings started in 2011, but the book only came out in 2017. This is a very recent work. Its art style resembles that of *Tuổi Trẻ Cười*, a major satirical periodical from the largest newspaper in Vietnam. This work represents some of the latest takes on the subsidy period. The development of creative representations allows for more expressive narratives of history. Contextualizing this source in the recent political climate reveals the dissident subtext of such artistic attempts to address pressing social matters.

Tuổi Trẻ Publishing Office and Hoàng Anh, eds. “*Đêm trước” đổi mới*. Ho Chi City: Tre Publishing House, 2006.

Originally published in 2005 in Tuổi Trẻ, the largest newspaper in Vietnam, this book is a compilation of all Tuổi Trẻ articles on the subsidy period. The book also includes responses from readers. This is among some of the first sources on the subsidy period and contributed to the commemorative effort pushed by the 2006 exhibit in Hanoi.

### Secondary Sources

Bach, Jonathan. “Consuming Communism: Material Cultures of Nostalgia in Former East Germany.” In *Anthropology and Nostalgia*, 1st ed., 123–38. Berghahn Books, 2015. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt9qd2bp.10>.

Jonathan Bach describes how consumerism affected "Ostalgie" in West Germany. The longing for the former East Germany spurred the blossoming of services simulating East German culture and materials. The business of nostalgia in post Unification Germany shares some parallels with subsidy period nostalgia in the café business in Vietnam.

Basu, Paul. “Memoryscapes and Multi-Sited Methods.” In *Research Methods for Memory Studies*, 115–31. Edinburgh University Press, 2013. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g0b78k.10>.

In this chapter, Paul Basu stresses on the importance of location in the formation of collective memory. He argues that memory frameworks are bound by a shared "community of memory", where each individual bears certain similarities with the larger group. Basu calls these mnemonic terrains "cultural memoryscapes". The shared social context of these landscapes of memory is the basis for collective remembrance.

Bui, Long T. “The Debts of Memory: Historical Amnesia and Refugee Knowledge in The Reeducation of Cherry Truong.” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 18, no. 1 (February 25, 2015): 73–97. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jaas.2015.0007>.



This article studies Cherry Truong's experience in the subsidy period, specifically with the reeducation camp, and later as a refugee. It considers the notion of silence and historical amnesia in refugee's memory of the postwar time.

Cubitt, Geoffrey. *History and Memory*. Historical Approaches. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Dr. Geoffrey Cubitt, Reader in Modern History at the University of York, focuses on the methodology of memory studies and provides a systematic overview of the way memory is used in historical research. It discusses the memory boom of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the legacy that this scholarship leaves on the field of historical memory.

Dessingué, Alexandre, and J. M. Winter, eds. *Beyond Memory: Silence and the Aesthetics of Remembrance*. Routledge Approaches to History 13. New York: Routledge, 2015.

Alexandre Dessingué, a professor at the University of Stavanger, and Jay Winter, Professor of History at Yale University, co-edit the series. This is a collection of articles on the politics of silence in remembering and how it has been used in various memory project to repress discussion about the topic until it is truly forgotten. They also suggest that silence is part of the process of commemoration. As we celebrate certain aspects, others get brushed under the carpet and glossed over by a false sense of commemoration. The construction of memory often goes with the deliberate repression of matters that do not align well with the agenda of parties of interests, or groups whose such memories are too painful and uncomfortable to handle.

Duc, Huy. *Ben Thang Cuoc: II Quyen Binh*. 1 edition. Nguoi Viet, 2012.

Huy Duc is a Vietnamese journalist during the postwar period. His opinions usually clash with the guidelines set by the Communist Party of Vietnam. His two-volume series, *Ben Thang Cuoc*, was published in the United States. This volume discusses life after the American war and criticizes the oppression of the communist government against Southern Vietnamese.

Eisner, Rivka Syd. "Performing Prospective Memory." *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 6 (November 2011): 892–916. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2010.537061>.

This is a study conducted on cô Nhựt (miss Nhựt), a former communist guerilla fighter and current social activist in Vietnam. The research is based on a concept called prospective memory, "a form of collective remembering that propels and compels the past into the present and future". By performing prospective memory, miss Nhut is seeking to influence the future with small acts of collective remembering, particularly sharing her life narratives with others. This highlights the contribution of ordinary people in the politically charged memory landscapes of

Vietnam, not only to protect or contest the past, but as a shared effort to create socially equitable futures.

Gensburger, Sarah. “Halbwachs’ Studies in Collective Memory: A Founding Text for Contemporary ‘Memory Studies’?” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16, no. 4 (October 24, 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X16656268>.

This article gives a brief overview of Halbwachs' influence in the field of collective memory and explains how a Halbwachsian interpretation could be useful for contemporary memory research. It describes Halbwachs's approach for studying collective memory. Memory scholarship has changed over the last century but Gensburger argues that Halbwachs's definition of collective memory still applies for research today.

Gillen, Jamie. “A Battle Worth Winning: The Service of Culture to the Communist Party of Vietnam in the Contemporary Era.” *Political Geography* 30, no. 5 (June 2011): 272–81. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2011.05.001>.

Dr. Jamie Gillen, Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography at the National University of Singapore, studies the Communist Party of Vietnam and their stake in the construction of national culture as a tool to protect their ownership over the Vietnamese political economy. After Doi moi, the landscape for cultural cultivation opens up to foreign influence from both Western and non-Western sources. This threatens the monopoly of the VCP over cultural and ideological control. The VCP in turn authors the so-called “Vietnamese national culture” as a means of culture expediency and curation of the values and traditions that are more favorable for their political agendas. Official publications about the subsidy period could also be seen as part of this attempt to regulate culture and establish a version of memory that fits in with the ongoing project to consolidate their stake.

Großheim, Martin. “Đổi Mới in the Classroom? The Portrayal of National and World History in Vietnamese Textbooks.” *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia* 33, no. 1 (March 2018): 147–80. <https://doi.org/10.1355/sj33-1e>.

Dr. Martin Großheim, Adjunct Professor of History at the Passau University, Germany, discusses the effects of Renovation on the construction of an official narrative in Vietnam's history textbooks. The article considers Vietnam's position in the world and its international relationship with other world powers to analyze the portrayal of world history in Vietnamese textbooks. He identifies the paradigm used by Vietnamese textbook writers and the government to promote national pride while maintaining international relations with other nations.

Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*. 1st ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1980.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, French philosopher and socialist Maurice Halbwachs lay the groundwork for many memory studies. His definition of "collective memory" and its relationship with individual remembrance is used as the foundation for works that analyze the formation of collective memories for certain histories. Individual remembrance is framed by social milieus, creating a collection of memories shaped by the same environments and frameworks. This notion is important for examining social influence on society's memory.

Hartley, L. P. *The Go-Between*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958.

This fictional work describes the process of memory in L. P. Hartley through his reflection on the 1900s. He conveys the "illusion of stability ... the confidence in life, the belief that all's well with the world" (cite 7-15). The famous quote at the beginning of *The Go-Between*, "The past is a foreign country. They do things differently there," became a point of reference for memory studies on the notion of past foreignness. David Lowenthal's book on contemporary perception of the past, *The Past is a Foreign Country*, is titled after this quote.

Keightley, Emily, and Michael Pickering, eds. *Research Methods for Memory Studies*. Research Methods for the Arts and Humanities. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013.

Dr. Emily Keightley, professor of Media and Memory Studies, and Dr. Michael Pickering, Emeritus Professor of Media and Cultural Analysis at the Loughborough University, co-edit the series. Each chapter of this book describes the methods used for analyzing a specific kind of memory. These genres include memories of war & tragedies, visual mnemonics like photographs, videos, movies, biographies, eyewitness accounts, and oral histories. The categorization of different means of representations is implicated in the kinds of collective memory these sites create.

Knights, Mark, and Adam Morton. "Introduction: Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain 1500-1800." In *The Power of Laughter and Satire in Early Modern Britain*, NED-New edition., 1–26. Political and Religious Culture, 1500-1820. Boydell and Brewer, 2017. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1t6p528.7>.

In this volume, Dr. Mark Knights, Professor of History at the University of Warwick, and Adam Morton, Visiting Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of British Columbia, argue that laughter and satire play a significant role in early modern Britain. The use of satire in political process is categorized into two different modes: reforming and destructive. Reforming satire calls for social changes while destructive satire only serves the purpose of criticism. They also explore the interplay of laughter and satire in early modern Britain.

Lowenthal, David. *The Past Is a Foreign Country - Revisited*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

In *The Past is a Foreign Country*, Dr. David Lowenthal, Professor Emeritus of Geography, explains how the foreignness and exoticism of the past become a point of obsession for contemporary societies. Lowenthal argues that present perceptions of past events are not based on a set of facts, but are molded by current perspectives and world views. Present societies project their understanding on the past and revere a version that caters to their interest and purpose for studying history. Lowenthal also discusses the nostalgic dimension of the past and how history can be commercialized to provide nostalgic services.

Luong, Hy V., ed. *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*. Asian Voices. Singapore : Lanham, Md: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies ; Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.

Dr. Hy Van Luong, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, gives a good concise overview of the historical context of postwar Vietnam and the transition to today's society. The broad sketch of the economic landscape from 1975 to 1986 provides a solid foundation for understanding the economic structures of this period. Luong does a great job of highlighting the systematic issues with the command economy as well as analyzing the effects of continued military endeavors on the already debilitating financial health of the country.

MacLean, Ken. "The Rehabilitation of an Uncomfortable Past: Everyday Life in Vietnam during the Subsidy Period (1975-1986)." *History & Anthropology* 19, no. 3 (September 2008): 281–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757200802449915>.

This is an article by Ken Maclean, Associate Professor of International Development and Social Change at Clark University, about an special exhibit by the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology on everyday life in Hanoi during the "subsidy period". Through analysis of the exhibit's means of representation and use of items, Maclean argues that it prompted the long overdue discussion of the significance of the "subsidy period" in Vietnam's history and ethnography. The use and placement of several objects elicited positive response from the audience while reinforcing the state-approved national narrative. It served as a transition from the collectivism of the past towards the individualism of the present. Prior to the introduction of this exhibit, little effort was made to connect the disjointed periods of the Second Indochina War and post-Renovation.

Nguyen, Huong. "Globalization, Consumerism, and the Emergence of Teens in Contemporary Vietnam." *Journal of Social History* 49, no. 1 (September 30, 2015): 4–19.

Dr. Huong Nguyen, Professor at the University of South Carolina, offers a formal categorization for the notion of "Teen" in contemporary Vietnam and explains how globalization and consumerism affect the emergence of this group. Nguyen also suggests that Vietnam society considers the domination of Western values, especially among "teens", is depreciating the traditional and cultural values of a Vietnamese identity.

Nguyen, Huong T. D. "Voices in the Shadow of Independence: Vietnamese Opinion on Some National Issues in the Period of 1979–1986." Ohio University, 2010.  
[https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg\\_10?0::NO:10:P10\\_ACCESSION\\_NUM:ohiou1275682901#abstract-files](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/pg_10?0::NO:10:P10_ACCESSION_NUM:ohiou1275682901#abstract-files).

Huong Nguyen, Ph.D graduate student at the University of Washington, writes about Vietnamese opinions some national issues from 1979 to 1986. In the chapter, Nguyen contextualizes the "subsidy period" and highlights some of the major issues of the period. She also documents the social and cultural transition from the total war period to post-unification. In the latter part of the chapter, Nguyen highlights the historical importance of the postwar pre-Renovation period in Vietnam, often obscured by the communism pretext and the exhaustive censorship effort by the Vietnamese government.

Nguyễn, Long, and Harry H. Kendall. *After Saigon Fell: Daily Life under the Vietnamese Communists*. Research Papers and Policy Studies 4. Berkeley, California: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1981.

This series was done in the midst of the subsidy period. The authors give a brief overview of the postwar Vietnamese society and how the economic system worked.

Nguyen, Nathalie Huynh Chau. *South Vietnamese Soldiers: Memories of the Vietnam War and After*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2016.

Researcher Nathalie Nguyen, Associate Professor at the Monash University, provides a description of the memories of Southern Vietnamese soldiers during and after the American war. These include reeducation camp experiences during the subsidy period.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War*. Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press, 2016.

Viet Thanh Nguyen is a bestselling Vietnamese-American novelist who fled to the United States after the fall of Saigon. This work on the Vietnam war focuses on its memory from an expatriate's perspective.

Nguyễn, Văn Canh, and Earle Cooper. *Vietnam under Communism, 1975-1982*. Hoover Press Publication 285. Stanford, Calif: Hoover Institution Press, 1983.

The series, done in 1983, describes the conditions of life in Vietnam in the early stage of the subsidy period. It evaluates Vietnam under the governance of the Communist Party and the effects of communism on the political and social aspects of postwar life.

Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire." *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

French historian Pierre Nora was one of the pioneers in the study of "sites of memory" and their influences on collective remembrance. Nora defines the concept *lieux de mémoire* as the symbolic and functional tools in the construction of certain kinds of memory. Practices of remembering draw from these concrete sites of memory to frame narratives around them.

O'Dowd, Edward C. *Chinese Military Strategy in the Third Indochina War: The Last Maoist War*. Asian Security Studies. London; New York: Routledge, 2007.

This source provides the military background for the subsidy period. After the American War, Vietnam was still involved with Cambodia over the Pol Pot regime and in border conflicts with China for the most part of the postwar years. This mobilization took a toll on Vietnam's rebuilding process, especially when production was not enough for civilian use, let alone for the army. Military conflicts during this period were mostly suppressed in national discussions.

Olick, Jeffrey K. *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Using postwar Germany as a case study, Jeffrey Olick, Professor of Sociology and History at the University of Virginia, explores the relationship between memory and politics. He explains the politics of regret and demonstrates the attempts by the postwar German society to escape this regret to legitimize the modern state nation. The book studies the intersectionality of memory, identity formation, politics, and culture in the context of postwar Germany.

Olick, Jeffrey K. *The Sins of the Fathers: Germany, Memory, Method*. University of Chicago Press, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226386522.001.0001>.

This book by Jeffrey Olick studies the official memory of Germany and the use of commemoration in collective remembrance. Olick introduces the concept of collective guilt as another branch of social memory. In his argument, he clearly defines the concept of collective memory as well as identifies the pitfalls of the idea of having a single overarching narrative.

Pack, Sam, Michael Eblin, and Carrie Walther. "Water Puppetry in the Red River Delta and Beyond: Tourism and the Commodification of an Ancient Tradition." *The ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts* 19, no. 2 (May 1, 2012): 23–31.

Sam Pack, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Kenyon College, and students consider the development of water puppetry as a cultural art form in the Red River Delta under the influence of tourism. Tourism has incentivized the revitalization of this traditional art and maintained its progress over time. This suggests that the commodification of several cultural symbols and practices could help motivate their preservation and the creation of related services to help promote their cultural significance.

Phạm, Thị Hằng. "Cái Cười Trong Ca Dao Người Việt" [Laughter in Vietnamese Folk Poetry], University of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2003.  
<http://luanan.nlv.gov.vn/luanan?a=d&d=TTbFqWqvDvbu2003.1.1&e=-----vi-20-TTbFqWqvDvbu-1--img-txIN-ca+dao+châm+biêm----->.

Phạm Thị Hằng, graduate student at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam, provides an official classification of the different kinds of laughter in Vietnamese folk poetry. The use of satire in poetry to mock and criticize social and political issues forms a separate category. This group features a large body of poems which use parody to lampoon problems with corruption and dishonesty in authoritative forces.

Posin, J. A. "Soviet Satire." *The Russian Review* 9, no. 4 (1950): 296–302.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/125988>.

In this article, Posin documents the changes in the use of Soviet Satire in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century to encourage progress. It later turned satire against the throne when progressive ideas of the 19<sup>th</sup> century conflicted with the throne's vision.

Rousso, Henry. *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.

In this book, French historian Henry Rousso talks about the four stage process of remembering the Vichy regime in postwar France. The French elites constructed a myth about the Vichyites, depicting them as well-meaning but unfortunate scapegoats for France's problems after the war. The French welcomingly embraced the myth for a few decades before resistance started to swarm the official narrative. This countermyth also did not last, as France transitioned into the next period of "breaking the mirror". The French were neither heroes or cowards. It would be easy to point the finger at a frantic postwar French society for falling prey to all the wrongdoings of the Vichy, just as it is to sing their praises as well-intentioned but unfortunate blokes.

In the end, the common ground lies where the dust has settled, on neither side of the myth, but in a gray area that is not as easily swallowed in the French consciousness.

Salomon, Matthieu, and Vu Doan Kêt. "Education and Identity Formation in Contemporary Vietnam." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative Education* 37, no. 3 (June 2007): 345–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057920701330222>.

Matthieu Salomon, member of the Research Group on Contemporary Vietnam at the Center for International Studies and Research (Sciences-Po), and Vu Doan Kêt, professor at the Inq analyzes the content of official history textbooks used in Vietnam after Renovation and identifies the central historical themes featured in Vietnam's official education. It describes the official narrative pushed by these lessons and its connection with the Vietnamese national identity. It also discusses the role of historical education in justifying the communist rule, and the recent challenges to this narrative by alternative voices calling for the "de-nationalization" of official history.

Schacter, Daniel L. *The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Daniel Schacter, Professor of Psychology at Harvard University, gives a nice introduction to the science of memory and how recollection works in different conditions. It explains the mechanics of remembering with an emphasis on its susceptibility to past knowledge / experiences as well as their emotions and the surrounding environment. *The Seven Sins* offers a psychological view to the process of remembrance, which builds a solid scientific basis for the framework of the field of memory history. The work done on remembering uses this foundation to understand how people remember the past, and how others might find memory influence a lucrative business.

Schudson, Michael, "Dynamics of distortion in collective memory." In *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, edited by Schacter, Daniel L. and Joseph T. Coyle. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

In this essay, Michael Schudson rejects the ambiguity between the two concepts, social memory and individual memory. He examines how present representations of the past is distorted in collective memories, through the use of cultural artifacts. Individual memory, he argues, is completely derived from the narratives established by social institutions, rather than something a person develops of their own. The individual "piggybacks on the social and cultural practices of memory" developed by their society (page 346 – 347).



Tai, Hue-Tam Ho, and John Bodnar. *Country of Memory: Remaking the Past in Late Socialist Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.  
<http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/wooster/detail.action?docID=223584>.

This is an excellent volume on memory projects studying postwar Vietnam. Tai gives solid background on how memory construction has been at work in Vietnam, and highlights the impact of *doi moi* (Renovation) on the state's monopoly over history creation. She gives a thorough discussion of the commemorative methods and how these have gradually been replaced by alternative modes of representation, including new arts. The examination of cultural values and traditions after the reforms reveals some interesting inroads into the symbiotic relationship between these representational modes and how they can challenge one another.

Taylor, David Francis. "The Literariness of Graphic Satire." In *The Politics of Parody, 3–39*. A Literary History of Caricature, 1760-1830. Yale University Press, 2018.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2867ht.4>.

In this book, Taylor illustrates the relationship between visual satire and explore the impact of parody on British politics in the eighteenth century. The relationship demonstrates how satirical graphics can impact contemporary interpretations of earlier texts and current perception of the political world.

Van Huy, Nguyen. "Life in Hanoi in the State Subsidy Period: Questions Raised in Social Criticism and Social Reminiscences." In *Historicizing Theories, Identities, and Nations*, 219–52. University of Nebraska Press, 2017.  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1trkjsq.14>.

Nguyen Van Huy was the director of the 2006 exhibit. His reflection on the exhibit illustrates how the government was involved in its conception and execution. In this source, Nguyen Van Huy explains the process of gathering artifacts, the choice of artifacts, and the message behind these decisions. This is an official source that highlights the commemorative effort that started the resurgence of subsidy period remembrance on a national scale.

Winter, J. M. *Remembering War: The Great War between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006.

In this book, Winter discusses the act of remembrance as well as the actors behind it. He argues for the presence of agencies in constructing collective memory, "the process through which different collectives ... engage in acts of remembrance together". Collective memory is the product of a conditioned process, charged with conscious intentions and biases. The book uses the Great War as a case study of how acts of commemoration have served to create an official narrative, another form of what we like to call "collective memory". He contests the use of memory and

suggests that it be replaced by remembrance, as a reminder of the pitfall of memories and how they do not exist above the influence of any other interactions.

Winter, J. M. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Canto Classics edition. Canto Classics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.

*Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* provides a fascinating read on commemoration and history. Using the Great War as the main subject matter, Winter dissects the different means used by Europeans to remember and make sense of the past. He identifies two different modes of interpretation: the “modernist” and the “traditional” one. The “modernist” method, or the “modern memory”, is the embrace of a new language in telling war stories, which promotes iconoclasm, revolution, and harsher “aesthetics of direct experience”. This mode rejects the patriotic sentimentality and the glorification and romanticization of the past, which Winter classifies as the “traditional approach”. The conventional approach to understanding Europe during the war and its aftermath aligns with the “modernist” perspective, wherein the 1914-18 war created a gulf between the old modes and facilitated the switch to new modernist values. The Great War had created a new world whose chaotic and destructive characteristics could only be captured by modernism. Winter, however, rejects the bifurcation of “traditional” and “modernist”. He traverses the grey area between the two modes of interpretation to explore how “Europeans imagined the war and its terrible consequences” through the examination of mourning and its expression. The commemorative approach is a necessary part of the history of the subsidy period, and understanding how Vietnam commemorates this past could shed light on how the society perceives it today.

### News Sources

Ah Gil. “Nói không ngoa, 2017 chính là năm phong cách Retro lên ngôi ở cả MV lẫn phim Việt” [2017 is the Year of Retro in Vietnam’s Cinema and Music Video Production]. *Kênh 14*, December 27, 2017. <http://kenh14.vn/noi-khong-ngo-a-2017-chinh-la-nam-phong-cach-retro-len-ngo-i-o-ca-mv-lan-phim-viet-20171226172708169.chn>.

This article describes the rise of the retro trend in 2017's cinematography and music video production in Vietnam.

Anh Ninh. “5 quán cà phê đậm nét bao cấp ở Hà Nội” [5 Subsidy-Period Themed Cafés in Hanoi]. *Kênh 14*, July 24, 2018. <http://kenh14.vn/5-quan-ca-phe-dam-chat-ha-noi-xua-than-thuoc-voi-tuoi-tho-cua-8x-9x-20180724174044257.chn>.

This article features descriptions and images of 5 popular subsidy period themed cafés in Hanoi.

“Cộng Cà Phê” [Cộng Coffee]. Accessed November 8, 2018. <http://congcaphe.com/>.

The official website of Cộng subsidy café chain describes its origin and motivation for creating Cộng. It also explains the meaning of the name Cộng, which stems from the official name of Vietnam.

Hạ Huyền. “Họa Sĩ Nguyễn Thành Phong: ‘Nếu Là Số 2 Thì Không Có Ai Số 1’” [Artist Nguyễn Thành Phong: 'If I am second then no one is first']. *Thể Thao & Văn Hóa* [Sports & Culture], February 23, 2015. <https://thethaovanhoa.vn/van-hoa-giai-tri/hoa-si-nguyen-thanh-phong-neu-la-so-2-thi-khong-co-ai-so-1-n20150210142029382.htm>.

In this article, Nguyễn Thành Phong talks about the way artists in Vietnam negotiate political boundaries to address controversial matters in their work. He discusses the discontinuation of his previous work, *The Modern Dictionary of Proverbs*, and his takeaway from the incident. It provides the background of Phong and his artwork.

Hoàng Anh. “Cộng: Cà phê ‘đồng nát’ giá sang chảnh” [Cộng: Steep Price Tag for "Junk" Coffee]. *Zing.vn*, March 17, 2014. <https://news.zing.vn/cong-ca-phe-dong-nat-gia-sang-chanh-post398170.html>.

This article documents the rise of Cộng as a major subsidy café chain in Vietnam.

“Hội Nhà Văn Việt Nam” [Homepage]. Vietnam Writers’ Association. Accessed October 18, 2018. <http://vanvn.net/>.

The homepage of the Vietnam Writers' Association website includes description about its origin and development over the years and its affiliation with the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Hồng Quân. “Chàng trai 9X ‘đi bụi’ và tiệm cà phê thời bao cấp độc đáo” [The Nomadic Millennial and His Unique Subsidy Period Café]. *Lao Động*, April 18, 2018. <https://laodong.vn/du-lich/chang-trai-9x-di-bui-va-tiem-ca-phe-thoi-bao-cap-doc-dao-602197.ldo>.

The article talks about Bắc Cù, a young owner of a subsidy café in Nghệ An. His shop's emphasis on boasting a space of peace and calm is typical of many other subsidy period themed spaces.

Huy Thiện. “‘Xu Thế Thờ ơ Chính Trị Trong Lớp Trẻ Rất Đáng Báo Động’” [“Young People are Growing Alarmingly Apolitical”]. *Báo Pháp Luật Việt Nam*, October 31, 2017. <http://baophapluat.vn/thoi-su/xu-the-tho-o-chinh-tri-trong-lop-tre-rat-dang-bao-dong-363653.html>.

The title of the article is a comment made by the committee member of Bến Tre, Đặng Thuần Phong, in a National Assembly meeting. Mr. Đặng described the apolitical trend among young people, as well as historical ignorance, erosion of moral values. The trend is observable in the Vietnamese society, and has been raised before the National Assembly as a problem that needs addressing.

K. Anh, and Nguyễn D. “Bầu cử Quốc hội trong mắt giới trẻ” [National Assembly Election from the Perspective of Young People]. *Tuổi Trẻ*, February 19, 2016. <https://tuoitre.vn/bau-cu-quoc-hoi-trong-mat-gioi-tre-1053736.htm>.

The article includes the opinions of Vietnamese people on young people nominated as committee members. It reports the recent cases of young leaders nominating themselves for elections and participating in political dialogues. All interviewed point all the need for more forums and platforms for young people to express their ideas and suggestions, before political ignorance could be addressed.

Má Lúm. “Trào Lưu Quán Cà Phê Bao Cấp Khắp Ba Miền” [Subsidy Period Café Theme Sweeps the Nation]. *VnExpress*, April 10, 2017. <https://dulich.vnexpress.net/photo/am-thuc/trao-luu-quan-ca-phe-bao-cap-khaph-ba-mien-3568152.html>.

This article is a series of images from subsidy period themed cafés all around the countries. It describes the spread of the trend to all major cities of Vietnam.

Mydans, Seth. “Arts Abroad: Vietnam Hangs Onto a Relic: The Propaganda Poster.” *New York Times*. 2000, sec. Arts & Leisure.

The newspaper article describes the use of propaganda posters in contemporary Vietnam. It outlines some of the main styles of propaganda art and its impact on the 2000s Vietnamese society.

Nhật Huy. “Hoạ sĩ Hữu khoa: Phải làm cho nhân vật đáng yêu hơn đáng sợ” [Artist Hữu Khoa: “Characters Must Be Lovable Rather Than Fearsome”]. *Công An Nhân Dân Online*, November 24, 2011. <http://vnca.cand.com.vn/doi-song-van-hoa/Hoa-si-Huu-khoa-Phai-lam-cho-nhan-vat-dang-yeu-hon-dang-so-329441/>.

Artist Nguyễn Hữu Khoa describes his caricature drawing style and the message behind his art parody. Khoa says that his art is more comical than critical. Most of his subjects are prominent figure in creative fields like literature, theater, and film production. This source demonstrates how these artists usually shy away from politically controversial topic matters.

Phước Bình. “10 quán cà phê kiểu bao cấp hút giới trẻ ở Hà Nội” [10 Subsidy Period Cafés Attracting Young Hanoians]. *Zing.vn*, May 27, 2015. <https://news.zing.vn/10-quan-ca-phe-kieu-bao-cap-hut-gioi-tre-o-ha-noi-post659243.html>.

The article describes ten popular subsidy cafés in Hanoi. The reviews praise the coffee shops for having photogenic views because the owner was an architect.

Tâm An. “Uống cà phê, nhớ những tháng ngày xưa cũ ở Đà Nẵng” [Drinking Coffee, Reminiscing about the Old Days in Đà Nẵng]. *Dân Trí*, November 3, 2017. <https://dantri.com.vn/doi-song/uong-ca-phe-nho-nhung-thang-ngay-xua-cu-o-da-nang-20171103065604954.htm>.

In this article, Thanh Vũ, the owner of a subsidy coffee shop in Da Nang, shares about his passion for the subsidy period artifacts as well as stories about his customers.

Thoại Hà. “‘Sát thủ đầu mung mủ’ bị tạm ngưng phát hành” [‘The Modern Dictionary of Proverbs’ discontinued]. *VnExpress*, October 26, 2011. <https://giaitri.vnexpress.net/tin-tuc/gioi-sao/trong-nuoc/sat-thu-dau-mung-mu-bi-tam-ngung-phat-hanh-1915616.html>.

The article reports the discontinuation of the series *Sát thủ đầu mung mủ* (The Modern Dictionary of Proverbs), illustrated by Nguyễn Thành Phong. It ran into problem with the Department of Publishing, Printing and issuing because of the inclusion of offensive and inappropriate content for teenagers.

Thu Hằng. “Họa sĩ ‘Còm’ Nguyễn Hữu Khoa vẽ ‘Chân dung Xuân’” [‘Scrawny’ Artist Nguyễn Hữu Khoa’s ‘Portrait of the Spring’]. *VOV.vn*, January 30, 2017. <https://vov.vn/content/NDc5MDc1.vov>.

In this article, Nguyễn Hữu Khoa describes his passion for nature and discusses his latest exhibit on cherry blossom.

Thu Hiền. “Thành Phong: ‘Thương nhớ thời bao cấp’ mang tính tự trào” [Thành Phong: *In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period* is a Self-Parody]. *Zing.vn*, February 13, 2018. <https://news.zing.vn/thanh-phong-thuong-nho-thoi-bao-cap-mang-tinh-tu-trao-post819088.html>.

In this interview, Thành Phong shares his thought on *Thương Nhớ Thời Bao Cấp* (In Loving Reminiscence of the Subsidy Period). He denies the satirical aspect of the book, attributing it to self-parody. He explains the style book, including the use of the colors black, white, and brick yellow, and the propaganda poster style to trigger memories of the subsidy period. He also discusses the censorship process and how that might have affected the intention of the illustrators. This interview highlights the

thin line that these artists tread to enable the publication of such a sensitive book. Their denial of the satirical component of the book is understandable considering the political climate of Vietnam.

Trịnh, Khánh. “Hoạ sĩ truyện tranh: Đặt hy vọng vào người trẻ” [Comic Artist: Placing Hope in the Young Generation]. *Vietnamnet.vn*, March 24, 2006.  
<http://vietnamnet.vn/giaoduc/tuyensinh/huongnghiep/2006/03/553455/>.

This article is an interview with Nguyễn Thành Phong about his art career, motivation and ambition as a comic artist. In the interview, Phong describes his drawing style as traditionally Vietnamese, with minimal influence by foreign art styles.