

# Evolution of Viet Identity



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**T**WELVE HISTORICAL and geopolitical factors played crucial roles in the development of Vietnamese identity. Recent contentious issues of culture, politics and race may shape its future evolution.

## Resurgence of Vietnamese Nationalism

Staggering from two centuries of vicious battles between Trịnh–Nguyễn Lords and Kings Nguyễn Huệ – Nguyễn Ánh, Vietnamese identity was further fragmented by French colonization and the “Ten-thousand-day War” (1945-1975).<sup>1</sup>

In preparation for a major escalation of the Vietnam War in 1958, North Vietnam’s Prime Minister Pham Van Dong conceded, although with ambiguity, the sovereignty of the Hoàng Sa (Paracel) and Trường Sa (Spratly) Islands to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), hoping for increased military support.<sup>2</sup> At the time, potentially vast undersea oil and natural gas fields were unknown, and PRC forces did not physically claim the islands, some already occupied by South Vietnamese, Filipinos and other South-East Asian fishermen and soldiers. Ultimately, the PRC took by force some Hoàng Sa islands in a naval battle with the South Vietnamese Navy in 1974.<sup>3</sup> Despite the loss, South Vietnam during its short existence, continued to assert claim to the islands, as did the Socialist Republic of Vietnam afterwards.

Since 2007, empowered by the strength of its booming economy and its modernized armed forces, China became more aggressive in its policies toward the Paracel and Spratly archipelagos and toward America.<sup>4</sup> To counterbalance the growing Chinese threat, despite lingering human rights and democracy issues, the US has increased its support of Vietnam in a wide range of activities, from the organization of Miss Universe pageant in Nha Trang in 2008 to the 2010 Memorandum of Understanding to build nuclear reactors,<sup>5</sup> signed as a bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement and transmitted to the US Congress for review in May 2014.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “The Ten Thousand Day War” 1980 mini TV series written by Peter Arnett.

<sup>2</sup> North Vietnam Prime Minister [Phạm Văn Đồng](#)’s formal letter to Chinese Premier Chu An Lai (Zhou Enlai) dated September 14, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> The actual shooting lasted about 40 minutes.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.americanchronicle.com/articles/viewArticle.asp?articleID=4077> accessed 1-11-2008.

<sup>5</sup> <http://the-diplomat.com/2010/09/15/why-a-us-vietnam-nuclear-deal/> accessed July 11, 2011.

<sup>6</sup> US-Vietnam Nuclear Cooperation Agreement: Issues for Congress. <http://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43433.pdf> accessed August 18, 2014.

## The First Emperor, the First Factor

Until Qin Shi Huang (Tần Thủy Hoàng) unified ancient China by military conquest of six feudal kingdoms, the territory north of the Yangtze River was politically fragmented and the land south of the river considered wild and unclaimed, occupied by “barbarians.” Tần Thủy Hoàng, calling himself Shi Huang Di or First Emperor (b. 259, r. 221-210 BCE), had *unknowingly started the process that would lead to the creation of Nam Việt* (Nanyue) when he sent five legions south to conquer territories with no defined borders. Indeed, his general Triệu Đà (Zhao Tuo) took advantage of the weakened central authority after the death of the First Emperor to proclaim himself Emperor of Nanyue (r. 207-136 BCE). The establishment of a new, unified China by Qin Shi Huang and the actions of Zhao Tuo might have been the first catalysts in making the indigenous Lạc Việt people aware of their “non-Chineseness,” therefore of their own identity as a separate ethnic, cultural and political entity. The initial absence of a national perception explains why local inhabitants did not oppose An Dương Vương and Triệu Đà after they conquered the Red River Basin. Việt national consciousness would reveal itself for the first time in 40 CE with the Trưng Sisters’ uprising.

## Nam Việt State, the Second Factor

Nam Việt territory corresponded to Guangxi (Quảng Tây), Guangdong (Quảng Đông), *Âu Lạc* (North Vietnam and northern Central Vietnam), and part of Hunan (Hô Nam) and Yunnan (Vân Nam). The Ngũ Lĩnh (Wuling, Five Peaks) Mountains,<sup>7</sup> south of Dongting Lake (Đông Đình Hồ) in Hunan, China, served as its northern boundaries. Also called Nanling Mountains, they separate central China from southern China (known as Lingnan–Lĩnh Nam–in ancient times), providing a natural barrier against the Han army.

Originally, indigenous Austronesians with a darker skin and a matriarchal society inhabited *Âu Lạc*. They lived in tribal villages and had no written language. They could not form a true state as there were no power structures higher than the village level, no written laws and no bureaucratic organization. At the dawn of history when national identity was a vague notion, local inhabitants might have called the place they lived on *Đất* (land) and *Nước* (water) which, according to Chinese Vietnamese historian Trương Thái Du, transliterated in Chinese as Ou Luo, *Âu Lạc*.<sup>8</sup> In contemporary Vietnamese, *đất nước* is “nation,” and *nước Việt Nam* is the state (country) of Vietnam.

Classically, An Dương Vương ruled *Âu Lạc* till 207 BCE when Triệu Đà absorbed it into his state of Nam Việt. However historian Sima Qian wrote that *Âu Lạc* was conquered later in 179 BCE, the year after the death of Empress Lü Zhi (*Lã Hậu* or *Lữ Hậu*, wife of founding Emperor Gaozu of Han). Triệu Đà rebelled against the Han Empire and administered Nam Việt as an autonomous kingdom, in effect *creating for the first time the notion of a country for the indigenous inhabitants*. Triệu Đà adopted the local customs and was reported with disdain by Han ambassador Lu Jia (Lục Giả) in 196 BCE to be squatting in court, wearing his hair in a bun, and dressing like the Việt people. Loosely governing *Âu Lạc* from Panyu (Canton), he left the sociocultural structures of the Lạc Việt tribes intact, and was recognized as the first Vietnamese king in *Đại Việt Sử Lược*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.chinahistoryforum.com/lofiversion/index.php/t5367.html> accessed 1-02-2008.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.viethoc.org/phorum/read.php?10,7679> accessed 12-03-2007.

(1377–1388), the oldest Vietnamese history book to (partially) survive to the present<sup>9</sup> though other historians, particularly anti-Chinese ones, considered him a foreign invader.

## Chinese Colonial Abuses, the Third Factor

The country of Nam Việt was short-lived. Taken over in 111 BCE by Emperor Han Wudi (Hán Vũ Đế), it was divided into 9 commanderies, the 3 southernmost being Giao Chỉ (Red River basin), Cửu Chân (Jiuzhen), and Nhật Nam (Rinan). Had Chinese governors (*thái thú quận Giao Chỉ*) been principled and compassionate administrators truly concerned for the wellbeing of the Việt people, *there would have been no Vietnam!* Had they been respected and effective leaders like Governors Tích Quang (3-29 CE?),<sup>10</sup> Nhâm Diên (30-34 CE) still honored in a Vietnamese temple,<sup>11,12</sup> and Sĩ Nhiếp (Shi Xie, 187-226) popularly hailed as Sĩ Vương,<sup>13</sup> the Lạc Việt land would have been absorbed into the Middle Empire!

But, the majority of Chinese administrators were misguided by the mentality of superiority typical of colonists and conquerors. Accounts of human rights abuses, taxation abuses, and forced Sinicization abound, resulting in a strong undercurrent of anti-Chinese feelings. This fueled multiple revolts, starting with the Heroines of Mê Linh Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị (Trung Sisters, 40-43 CE), followed by Lady Triệu (248), Lý Bôn and his general Triệu Quang Phục (Anterior /Early Lý Dynasty 544-602), Mai Thúc Loan (Mai Hắc Đế, 722), Bô Cái Đại Vương Phùng Hưng (791-798), and Ngô Quyền who decisively defeated the Southern Han (*Nam Hán*) armada at the Battle of Bạch Đằng River in 938.

## Nam Quan Pass, the Fourth Factor



**A Qing delegation is coming out of the Vietnam side of Nam Quan Pass. The larger Chinese gate is seen in the background (circa 1900).**

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.viethoc.org/eholdings/sach/dvsl.pdf> accessed 1-08-2008.

<sup>10</sup> [http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%ADch\\_Quang](http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%ADch_Quang) accessed 1-08-2008.

<sup>11</sup> <http://vnthuquan.net/diendan/tm.aspx?m=266827> accessed 1-08-2008.

<sup>12</sup> [http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nh%C3%A2m\\_Di%C3%A2n](http://vi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nh%C3%A2m_Di%C3%A2n) accessed 1-08-2008.

<sup>13</sup> *Việt Nam Sử Lược* by Trần Trọng Kim; <http://www.vietlibrary.com/VNSL7.htm> accessed 1-08-2008.

With the advent of the Ngô Dynasty in 939 CE, the era of true independence and national identity for Vietnam had begun. The country extended north up to the Lào Kay (Cai) - Cao Bằng - Lạng Sơn mountains where the Nam Quan–South Gate– Pass is located. In 1076, Đại Việt (Great Viet, ancient name of Vietnam) was invaded by troops of the Song dynasty (*nhà Tống*), but General Lý Thường Kiệt stopped them<sup>14</sup> by rallying his troops with the famous quatrain viewed as the first declaration of independence of Vietnam:

*Over mountains and rivers of the South nation reigns the South king;  
This is clearly determined in the Book of Heaven.  
How dare you aggressors invade our land?  
Proceed and you will reap defeat and destruction.*

The mountains form a *natural barrier against invasions from the north*, allowing for progress and maturity of the young Vietnamese nation. By contrast, the destiny of the Zhuang (Choang, Tráng) people illustrates the importance of this geographical factor. Closely related to the Luoyue (Lạc Việt) of the Hồng Hà or Red River, the Zhuang of Guangxi were a major tribe of Triệu Đà's Nam Việt, and had supported the Trưng Sisters' uprising. Rock pictograms in red paint, left by the Luoyue, cover an 8000 square meter cliff surface of Huashan Mountain in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. China submitted the landmark to UNESCO for recognition as a World Heritage Site in 2008.<sup>15</sup>

Over the centuries, large numbers of Han Chinese moved into the region, and the Zhuang were subjected to tremendous assimilation pressure. However, they are able to retain their identity and culture, still speaking their language and playing bronze drums at cultural festivals. They forced Communist China to create the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in 1958.<sup>16</sup> Still, the Zhuang could not establish their own country. With a population of 15 million, they constitute the largest minority ethnic group in China, but only account for 32% of the Guangxi population, while Han Chinese make up 62%.<sup>17</sup>



**1800 to 2500 years old red rock paintings by the Luoyue on Huashan Mountain in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. The site was submitted to UNESCO for recognition as a World Heritage. (Courtesy of Dr Nguyễn Xuân Quang – [www.bacsinguyenxuanquang.wordpress.com](http://www.bacsinguyenxuanquang.wordpress.com))**

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.vps.org/article.php3?id\\_article=203](http://www.vps.org/article.php3?id_article=203) accessed January 15, 2008.

<sup>15</sup> <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/5340> accessed March 12, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangxi\\_Zhuang\\_Autonomous\\_Region](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangxi_Zhuang_Autonomous_Region) accessed January 5, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guangxi> accessed January 8, 2013.



## Descendants of a Dragon and a Fairy, the Fifth Factor

The exalted origins of the Vietnamese, especially the legends associated with the mythical Hồng Bàng Dynasty,<sup>18</sup> might have been oral tales for years. They were given legitimacy by *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, a history book written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Lê Văn Hưu<sup>19</sup> and edited by Ngô Sĩ Liên in the 15<sup>th</sup> century with the clear goal of promoting Vietnamese pride and patriotism. Prior to *Toàn Thư*, there was no written mention anywhere of the God of Agriculture Thần Nông (Shennong), the dragon prince Lạc Long Quân and the fairy Âu Cơ as progenitors of the Vietnamese. When did the story originate will remain unresolved. The Lạc Việt could not have considered themselves descendants of the legendary first Three Rulers and Five Emperors of China, as they spoke a different language, stained their teeth black, chewed betel leaves and areca nuts, and practiced totemism. Nonetheless, modern Vietnamese are quite *proud of being the descendants of the Lạc Dragon Lord and the Fairy Âu Cơ*. According to tradition, the beautiful Âu Cơ gave birth to a pouch<sup>20</sup> with 100 eggs that hatched 100 sons, the ancestors of the Bách Việt or 100 Việt tribes described by China historians.

## Chinese Ambition, the Sixth Factor

China leaders somehow have always wanted to take over Vietnam, most likely because it was and still is a major rice producer. Indeed, the Chinese population has chronically been under the threat of famine until the advent of modern high-yield agriculture. Hampered by mountains around the Nam Quan Pass, Chinese troops frequently resorted to sailing down the coast. However, the Đại Việt people were water-oriented and the Chinese fleet was crushed twice at Bạch Đằng River.

The history of independent Vietnam is dotted by periodic Chinese occupations leading to the revolt of Lê Lợi, the hero of Lam Sơn (Thanh Hóa Province, 1428), and the epic Tết victory of Emperor Nguyễn Huệ over Emperor Qianlong's expeditionary army in 1789.

Four years after the end of the Vietnam War, in 1979 Communist China attacked its former ally, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, to punish its invasion of Kampuchea still quivering from the Khmer Rouge's "killing fields."<sup>21</sup> China occupied Nam Quan (South Gate) Pass<sup>22</sup> and acquired more frontier land in a 1999 border treaty kept secret until 2001 when it caused indignant protests from overseas Việt Kiều.<sup>23</sup> Predictably, *Chinese aggression always draws together the Vietnamese people*, especially after China Navy harassed Vietnamese fishermen and conducted live ammunition drills as intimidation gestures in 2010 and 2011, and a Chinese oil rig was moved into Vietnam's territorial waters /continental shelf in May 2014.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://vnthuquan.net/truyen/truyen.aspx?tid=2qtqv3m3237ntn3n1n2n31n343tq83a3q3m3237nvn> accessed 1-04-2008.

<sup>19</sup> The original *Đại Việt Sử Ký* completed in 1272 by Lê Văn Hưu is lost to posterity, but was frequently quoted verbatim in the *ĐVSK Toàn Thư* expanded edition of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>20</sup> *Đồng bào* (compatriots) literally means "[from the] same pouch."

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.historyplace.com/worldhistory/genocide/pol-pot.htm> accessed 1-11-2008.

<sup>22</sup> <http://hqvnch.net/default.asp?id=632&lstd=178> accessed 1-07-2008.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ptndt.org/movement/Khang%20thu%20PTClaim%20.htm> accessed 1-06-2008.

## France Colonialism, the Seventh Factor

From the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, European nations, with their superior industrial and military technology, transformed “underdeveloped” countries into their colonies. Indonesia became a colony of the Dutch, The Philippines of the Spaniards, and Vietnam (Indochina) of the French. Even gigantic India fell under British rule. Due to inhuman labor exploitation (e.g. in rubber tree plantations<sup>24</sup> or coal mines), *European colonialism ironically became the driving force behind the emergence of nationalism* as oppressed entities from tribes to nations quickly learned to fight on a united front.

Buoyed by Western ideals of freedom and democracy, toughened by a tradition of fighting invaders, and benefiting from the ease of communication afforded by its romanized national script *quốc ngữ*, the Vietnamese organized themselves to fight French colonialism. Their struggle for independence fueled a newly rediscovered sense of patriotism until the Vietnamese Communists, following original Comintern goals, eliminated their Nationalist allies to seize power.<sup>25</sup> In May 1954, the French were defeated at Dien Bien Phu but Vietnamese identity and unity were further damaged when Vietnam was divided by the Geneva Conference into two states. One million people left the communist North to resettle in the newly created Republic of [South] Vietnam. The ensuing 20-year Vietnam War was a dark period which saw again Vietnamese fighting Vietnamese.

## Japan Successes, the Eighth Factor

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, while the Chinese Qing Empire was humiliated by occidental powers including the United States, Emperor Mutsuhito (reign 1867-1912)<sup>26</sup> embarked on an ambitious transformation of Japan known as the Meiji Restoration. With the Meiji (Enlightened Rule or *Minh Tri*) era, Japan adopted Western educational, economic, military, political and industrial systems, and became a World power within a generation. This was reflected by the stunning victory of the Japanese Navy in May 1905<sup>27</sup> at the Tsushima Straits. The Russian Second Pacific Squadron with 38 ships was annihilated after it had made an exhausting 18,000-mile journey around the Eurasian continent.

Historically, Japan played an active role in ending French colonialism in Vietnam. As World War II started, Japanese forces easily swept through Indochina in 1940-41. With France defeated by Nazi Germany in 1940, its Axis-collaborationist Vichy government politically was allied to Japan. Despite full military control of Vietnam, Japan conveniently allowed Vichy France to continue administering it. But wary of the French loyal to Charles de Gaulle’s Free France, Japan actively recruited and protected anti-French, nationalist Vietnamese, among them Ngô Đình Diệm, Huỳnh Phú Sổ, founder of the Hòa Hảo Buddhist sect, Cao Đài leaders, and historian Trần Trọng Kim. With the liberation of Paris by the Allies in August 1944, Japan could no longer depend on the cooperation of the French colonial government for its war effort. In this ambience of distrust, both Japanese and French forces in Indochina hoarded rice, so contributed (with a poor crop) to the famine that killed a million people in Tonkin in the winter of 1944-45. On March 9, 1945, in a

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<sup>24</sup> Gibiat, Balthazar. *La sève amère de l'hévéa*. in L'Indochine. Géo-Histoire No 14. Avril-Mai 2014. pp. 58-67.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.vietquoc.com/history.htm> accessed 1-08-2008.

<sup>26</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor\\_Meiji](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_Meiji) accessed 1-08-2008.

<sup>27</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Japanese\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russo-Japanese_War) accessed 1-08-2008.

bloodless coup, Japan deposed the French and pronounced Vietnam independent as the new Empire of Vietnam. Under Japan's auspices, Emperor Bảo Đại voided the 1884 Patenôtre Treaty, and declared Vietnam Independence on March 11, 1945. Scholar Trần Trọng Kim was appointed prime minister. After Japan surrendered on August 15, 1945, while still confining French officials, its troops ceased to maintain local order as they prepared to move to city ports for repatriation. Without foreign restraints, a jubilant semi-chaos ensued, especially in Hanoi, which was later called the August Revolution by the Indochinese Communist Party, as a parallel to the Russian Bolshevik Red October Revolution of 1917.

The aura of invincibility of the Empire of the Rising Sun at the beginning of World War II and the remarkable manufacturing, electronic and automotive successes of modern Japan constitute a source of Asian pride and a riveting inspiration for the Vietnamese. Tragically on March 11, 2011, a massive, up to 133-foot-high tsunami triggered by a 9.0 offshore earthquake destroyed most of Japan's northeast coast of Tōhoku. The loss of cooling capacity crippled several nuclear reactors in Fukushima, resulting in a partial meltdown and release of radioactive material. The discipline demonstrated by the Japanese people after the double natural disaster only adds to the admiration the world and the Vietnamese already had for them.

## Vietnam Unification, the Ninth Factor

Vietnam was unified under communist rule with the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975. The initial years were a true occupation and exploitation of the former South Vietnam, resulting in the 2-million people Vietnamese diaspora. In the late 1980s, the pace of education and knowledge quickened worldwide thanks to the openness of the Internet. However the quality of life of the people failed to improve under communism which disappeared in Eastern Europe and in Russia by the early 1990s. In Asia, China and Vietnam struggled against democratic aspirations, but successfully instituted free market economy and individual ownership reforms.

Two decades after changing course with its “*Đổi Mới* –Renovation” strategy in 1986, Vietnam became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2006. In 2011, Vietnam's nominal GDP reached \$121.6 billion, with a GDP per capita of \$1328.6.<sup>28</sup> However the year before, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH, *Fédération internationale des ligues des Droits de l'Homme*) reported that “the opulent lifestyle of many Communist Party cadres and government officials contrast starkly with the poverty of ordinary people in Vietnam, where 77 percent of the workforce is employed in agriculture and the unofficial economy.”

In 2011, autocratic governments around the world felt the pressure of the “Arab Spring revolution,” a grass root movement demanding freedom and democracy that rapidly succeeded in Tunisia and Egypt, then spread to other North African and Arab countries such as Libya and Syria. Libya's dictator Gaddafi was killed in October 2011. By July 2013, bloody clashes continued in Syria with a death toll of more than 100,000 according to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Though Vietnam is still a police state, the Viet nation is strong as its people, in the homeland<sup>29</sup> or overseas,<sup>30</sup> remain determined to preserve their cultural and geographical patrimony in the face of China as a threatening, even “bullying” superpower.

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<sup>28</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy\\_of\\_Vietnam#cite\\_note-vnexpress.net-6](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Vietnam#cite_note-vnexpress.net-6) accessed March 22, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> 87 million <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam> accessed 1-31-2008.

<sup>30</sup> About 3 million [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas\\_Vietnamese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseas_Vietnamese) accessed 1-31-2008.

*What the future holds will soon depend on a new generation of Vietnamese leaders who watched the “War on Terror” against Al Qaeda but did not experience the emotions of the Cold War or the “American War.” Hopefully, in a process akin to the smooth democratization of Burma in early 2012, from within Vietnam, communist totalitarianism will be replaced in a democratic, non-violent way, or will be transformed by wise and forward thinking leaders to accept political pluralism and more freedom for the people.*

## **American Partnership, the Tenth Factor**

Since normalization of relations with the US and full ASEAN membership in 1995, Vietnam’s image has improved. Vietnam was visited by Presidents Bill Clinton in 2000 and George Bush in 2006. In 2009, the US ranked first among investors in Vietnam with \$9.8 billion pledged. Two-way trade between the US and Vietnam reached \$18.3 billion in 2010<sup>31</sup> and \$21.826 billion in 2011 (US Census Bureau). *Vietnam was a larger trading partner with the US than some NATO members* such as Sweden, Turkey, Norway, Denmark, Greece and Portugal.<sup>32</sup> Unconceivable a decade earlier, the former enemies conducted joint military exercises in the South China Sea –East Sea for Vietnam– in August 2010.<sup>33</sup> In October 2012, Vietnamese officials were flown aboard the USS George Washington nuclear aircraft carrier cruising with its battle group the disputed waters of the South China Sea in a show of US Navy might.<sup>34</sup>

## **Việt Kiều, the Eleventh Factor**

Vietnamese living overseas stay fiercely “nationalist” but their political actions have remained ineffective in liberalizing the regime “at home.” Since the end of the Vietnam War, more than two thirds of Vietnamese have been born.<sup>35</sup> A young generation of Vietnamese expatriates raised and educated outside of Vietnam, is emerging, who knows about the War only through harrowing personal accounts from former refugees, or by learning contemporary history in books or on television screens.<sup>36</sup> More than ever, this generation is eager to learn about its roots and to participate in volunteer work or economic and technical ventures in Vietnam. While doing so, they cooperated with local authorities using some form of bribes, raising thorny issues with their elders who had experienced indescribable misery. As political change in Vietnam remains elusive, the question becomes to “pay and play” or to “say nay and pray.”<sup>37</sup> Constituting 3.3 % of the total Vietnamese population, Việt Kiều contributed in cash \$8.26 billion<sup>38</sup> or 8% of Vietnam GDP estimated by the World Bank at \$103.6 billion in 2010.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2011/06/MONTHEARD/20703> accessed July 18, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign\\_trade\\_of\\_the\\_United\\_States](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foreign_trade_of_the_United_States) accessed July 6, 2011.

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2010/0812/US-Vietnam-ties-strengthen-with-military-exercises-to-China-s-chagrin> accessed July 7, 2011.

<sup>34</sup> <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-aircraft-carrier-cruises-disputed-seas-17522938> accessed 10-20-2012.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/2007/12/POMONTI/15424> Accessed 2-12-2008.

<sup>36</sup> “The Ten Thousand Day War” 1980 mini TV series written by Peter Arnett.

<sup>37</sup> For changes.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.voanews.com/vietnamese/news/vietnam/vietnam-oversea-remittances-01-02-2012-136524808.html/> accessed 3-22-2012.

<sup>39</sup> Accessed 3-22-2012 <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/DATASTATISTICS/Resources/GDP.pdf>



In a 2008 Tết article, Andrew Lam wrote<sup>40</sup> “Vietnam has reached an ideological dead end – but in the private sphere, new political thoughts are being formed.”<sup>41</sup> He concluded “The Vietnamese living abroad is no longer exiled from his homeland, but he risks being sidelined if he doesn’t adapt to the new realities of 21st-century Vietnam.” Lam’s article was addressing the Vietnamese émigrés, yet the key to economic and political development should remain in Vietnam. Maybe the hope is for the Việt Kiều to help uncover that key or to play a major role in the next Sino-Vietnamese confrontation.

Certainly, expatriates do not feel sidelined. Indeed, they have been active in promoting Vietnamese art, music and culture, in teaching the *quốc ngữ* written script, in improving health in their community, in enhancing freedom of religion and human rights through articles<sup>42</sup> and appeals.<sup>43</sup> They continue to cook typical Vietnamese meals and to organize frequent class reunions to reminisce and preserve their bond to the motherland. They could have actively participated in political demonstrations. In 2008 in Paris, France, they joined to oppose China’s Tibet policy during the Olympic torch relay and to commemorate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Flag of the State of Vietnam (yellow with 3 horizontal red stripes). In Westminster, California, they protested an art work figuring three foot-spa tubs (used in nail salons) painted in yellow with three red stripes.<sup>44</sup> They had also been competing in scientific, academic, financial, industrial, technological, political, military, public service or health arenas, becoming leading scientists, able CEOs, executive bankers, successful entrepreneurs,<sup>45</sup> full professors, consul general, US Navy ship commander, US Army general, city mayor, state representative, county supervisor, US Congress representative...

## Melting Pot, the Twelfth Factor

The US Census 2000 registered an interesting finding among Asian Americans: 30.7% of Japanese Americans reported mixed racial ancestry while “Vietnamese were least likely to be in combination with one or more other races or Asian groups. Of all respondents who reported Vietnamese, only 8.3% reported one or more other races or Asian groups.”<sup>46</sup> In 2010, their number went up to 10.9%.<sup>47</sup>

Despite hiccups (Ferguson riots, Missouri, Aug 2014), American society has progressed to a post-racism era. On America’s affluent playgrounds, Caucasian, Asian and African American girls and boys happily play with each other. They instinctively behave as belonging to only one race, the human race. The political ascension of Senator Barack Obama during the 2008 Democratic Party nomination campaign is further evidence. An African American, Senator Obama was endorsed by

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<sup>40</sup> [http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view\\_article.html?article\\_id=28266d2b2849b31420bbdadf451717dc](http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=28266d2b2849b31420bbdadf451717dc)  
accessed 2-07-2008 (Tết Mậu Tý).

<sup>41</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/forum/story/2008/02/080213\\_tregiamangmoc.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/vietnamese/forum/story/2008/02/080213_tregiamangmoc.shtml) accessed 2-15-2008.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.montagnard-foundation.org/opinion.html> accessed 2-14-2008.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.geocities.com/xuannhi2003/> accessed 2-11-2008.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/news/local/orange/la-me-protest12feb12.1.7444911.story?ctrack=4&csset=true> accessed 2-12-2008.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/07/05/BUEU11HJ4L.DTL> accessed 7-06-2008.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf> accessed 1-30-2008.

<sup>47</sup> <http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-11.pdf> accessed 6-19-2012.

The San Francisco Chronicle,<sup>48</sup> New York Post<sup>49</sup> and Los Angeles Times.<sup>50</sup> The 2008 global economic woes catapulted Senator Obama over Senator John McCain in opinion polls across the nation the week before the first presidential campaign debate. Senator Obama kept his lead and on November 4, 2008, history was made as the first Black American was decisively voted as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, demonstrating to the world the genuine strength of American Democracy. This was again confirmed on November 6, 2012 when President Obama was reelected, and April 29, 2014 when Donald Sterling, owner of the Los Angeles Clippers, was banned for life from the National Basketball Association (NBA) after a secret recording of racist remarks on Black people—perhaps in a private moment of irate jealousy—was widely broadcasted.

It would be most interesting to follow the lives of Việt Kiều in Europe (300 000 in France, 106 000 in Germany), Australia (226 000), and America (185 000 in Canada).<sup>51</sup> In December 2008, Louisiana voted Joseph Ánh Cao as the first Vietnamese American US Representative. The Two or More Races Asian population is one of the fastest-growing groups in the US, increasing percentage wise by 50% between 2000 and 2010 (by 31% for Vietnamese Americans). In comparison with the US population, the US Census data, a decade apart, show:<sup>52</sup>

<b>US Census 2000</b>		<b>US Census 2010</b>
Asian total: % US population	4.2 (11.9 million)	5.6 (17.3 million)
Alone %	3.6	4.8 (14.7 million)
Mixed race %	0.6 (14% of Asian Am)	0.9 (16% Asian Americans)
Vietnamese		1,737,433
Alone: 1,122,528 (0.4% of US population)		1,548,449 (0.5% of US or 38% increase)
Mixed race: 8.3% of Vietnamese Americans		10.9% of Vietnamese Americans

## Conclusion

The evolution of Vietnamese identity closely mirrors the country's 4000 years history, from the legendary Lạc Long Quân - Âu Cơ to the historical Trưng Sisters heroines, thousand years of Chinese domination, and modern era of true independence inaugurated by King Ngô Quyền. Almost 40 years after the end of the Vietnam War and the unification of Vietnam under communism, that evolution still continues both in Southeast Asia and across the world.

Jan 2, 2008, Jul 12, 2011, Jul 25, 2013, Oct 7, 2014  
**Chat V. Dang, MD**

<sup>48</sup> <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2008/01/14/EDendorsements14.DTL&hw=endorses+obama&sn=086&sc=066> accessed 2-03-2008.

<sup>49</sup> <http://thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/30/new-york-post-endorses-obama/> accessed 2-2-2008.

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-endorse2feb02,1,4682123.story?ctrack=1&csset=true> accessed 2-2-2008.

<sup>51</sup> <http://migrationpolicy.org/article/vietnamese-immigrants-united-states> accessed October 5, 2014

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.uscensus2010data.com/57-census-2010-data> accessed July 6, 2011.