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Scott Laderman, Edwin A. Martini, eds. *Four Decades On: Vietnam, the United States, and the Legacies of the Second Indochina War.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2013. 334 pp. $24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-5474-1.

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As the title suggests, this anthology broadly treats the Second Indochina War through interdisciplinary methods originating in Vietnamese studies, transnational history, collective memory, and film studies. The âVietnam Warâ and âVietnamâ figure into the essays as cultural constructions advanced through music, film, literature, and tourism. Authors weave the theme of âreconciliationâ throughout, showing how Vietnamese have blurred distinctions between northern communists and southern capitalists after 1975, reunited with the United States, and facilitated communication between veterans of both countries. Also present are the significant cultural strategies employed by political pundits to divide Americans and Vietnamese, to strangle and ostracize the Vietnamese economy. Scholars of the Vietnam War, Vietnamese and Asian studies, the Cold War, and film will find cutting-edge analyses that are critical for staying abreast of historiographical and methodological developments in their respective fields. The eleven chapters adumbrate the themes of transnational analysis, cultural studies, and legacies of the Second Indochina War.

The editors intend for the volume to express the link between how nations use narration to create âofficialâ memories of war to justify a wide range of policies. The essays also demonstrate how official narratives contend with culturally produced counternarratives. Several essays demonstrate how cultural sites of subversion, contradiction, and change challenge state-sanctioned memories. The authors draw on âtransnationalismâ to write histories of the Second Indochina War–that is, the social fields, identities, and relationships constructed across geographic, cultural, and political borders. Although this volume deals specifically with legacies of the Second Indochina War, its methodologies and conclusions have important implications for how we might apply internationalism to recent conflicts in Afghanistan, 2003 Iraq, and the First Iraq War.

In the first chapter, historian Ngo Vinh Long argues that during the closing years of the Second Indochina War, the hope for a pluralistic coalition government in Vietnam (outlined in the Paris Peace Accords) was sacrificed to President Nguyen Van Thieuâs repressive political and economic policies, combined with a violent campaign against âThird Forceâ areas controlled by the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG). Between 1973 and 1975, the Thieu regime made life unbearable for urban and rural populations in the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam). Take, for instance, Thieuâs threat to âbeat to deathâ any dissent against his press-gang tactics during Vietnamization, or his draconian rice policies that institutionalized rural starvation (p. 21). The legacy of Thieuâs governmentâone rife with corruption, repression, and retributionâcontinues to shape the character of Vietnamâs government today, Long contends, where authoritarianism flourished in the void left by the âdislocations, the polarization, and the repression of social and political movementsâ between 1973 and 1975 (p. 39).

Historian Walter L. Hixson analyzes cultural legacies of the Vietnam War in the second chapter, âViet Nam and âVietnamâ in American History and Memory.â Despite scholarsâ extensive treatment of U.S. government and military records, these source materials elide Indochinese voices, Amerian culpability for atrocities, and diminish the warâs effect on Indochinese life. He connects the character of historical narratives to the deeper cultural production of historical memory through filmâa genre that obscures the reasons for American defeat by heaping blame on antiwar protestors and the liberal media. For example, Hixson refers to the plethora of Vietnam films that depict ruthless Indochinese âgooksâ torturing American POWs/MIAs (e.g., *Rambo,* Chuck Norrisâs *Missing in Action*). Other films construct American soldiers as victims (e.g., *Platoon*, *Full Metal Jacket*). While the conflict victimized American soldiers, Hixson reminds his audience that the Indochinese faced similar, and often far more dire privations from the war. He urges scholars to refocus their analyses on the effects of âthe American war on Indochinese societyâ (p. 55). Hixsonâs essay begs the question: how can scholars responsibly handle historical pain and suffering, and to whom should historians assign âvictimhoodâ status?

Historian Alexander Bloom describes how the âVietnam Syndromeâ emerged after the fall of Saigon in 1975 in chapter 3, âAmericaâs Battered Sense of Self and the Emergence of the Vietnam Syndrome.â Bloomâs rapid-fire assessment of how this syndrome plagued American foreign policy, fueled domestic dissent, and created a guilt-laden legacy for Vietnam veterans will provide undergraduates and graduate students with grounding in the historiographical debates and grand narrative. Defeat in Vietnam provoked collective self-criticism about American values and its mission in the worldâa crisis of identity that reached from the president of the United States down to the average citizen and military enlistee. Vietnam Veterans bore the syndrome like a scarlet letter in veterans groups, where collective memory had enshrined World War II participants with honor and sacrifice in the âgood war.â The new veteran hierarchy that Bloom identifies is a unique and fruitful consequence of the syndrome that warrants further research.

The three studies that follow examine how official, communal, and individual memories of the Vietnam War have ebbed and flowed since 1975. Anthropologist Hoenik Kwon, in âCold War in a Vietnamese Community,â provides emic and etic accounts of Vietnamese ancestor worship and commemoration practice after the Vietnam War. Kwonâs analytical tool is âparallax vision,â a term borrowed from early astronomical sciences and used by historian Bruce Cumings in his seminal work, *The Origins of the Korean War* (1981). Parallax vision signifies âthe apparent shift in an objectâs position when viewed alternatively from different vantage pointsâ (pp. 85-86). He uses community-level practices to illuminate how the Second Indochina War was paradoxically an international, bipolar conflict between the United States and communism, and a postcolonial peopleâs revolution from the Vietnamese perspective. He argues that Vietnamese reconcile these contradictions through communal interaction with the spirit world. In death, the Vietnamese believe that the spirits of Americans, ARVN, and NVA soldiers no longer remember the political ideologies that set them apart. Kwon quotes a popular Vietnamese proverb, âThere is no enmity in the cemetery,â to illustrate how the living interact with the nonliving. This political amnesia suggests that reconciliation between former enemies is possible in the afterworld.

In an essay entitled âThe Ambivalence of Reconciliation in Contemporary Vietnamese Memoryscapes,â anthropologist Christina Schwenkel broadly assesses how war memorials and official narratives of the past are constructed in transnational environments. Like Kwon, Schwenkel also found that postwar reconciliation occurred at memorial sites like museums, martyrâs temples, and cemeteries. She labels these spaces âmemoryscapesâ: zones of transnational memory interchange between âpeople, the built environment, and the spirit worldâ that produce empathic historical narratives to establish common ground between former political, military, and economic enemies (pp. 105-106). Vietnamâs growing role in the global economy has spurred the cosmopolitan nature of its memorial sites. While Khe Sanh Air Base/Ta Con Museum sported pro-PAVN rhetoric in the 1990s (e.g., celebrating the âliberationâ of Ta Con from Americans, or cheering the defeat of Americans), curators adopted muted tones and language for American tourists and veterans by the mid-2000s. American-friendly tours and historical sites invited lucrative tourism and investment. Her essay also describes how language (e.g., DMZ, Quang Tri Province) raises specific associations and memories for Americans and Vietnamese, the creation of war tours for specific nationalities, and how popular beliefs about the spirit world advance reconciliation. Her flexible concept of âmemoryscapesâ accounts for the changing nature of memorial sites, collective memory, and official histories of the past. Her case study of Khe Sanh sheds light on how Vietnam, ideologically divided against itself during the mid-twentieth century, has fostered political and social cohesion.

In chapter 6, âRemembering War, Dreaming Peace,â Viet Thanh Nguyen assesses how debates in Vietnamese popular culture created âofficialâ memories of the Second Indochina War and its legacy. Rather than perpetuating old animosities, writers from Asia and North American have wielded the literary tools of âcompassionâ and âcosmopolitanismâ to create empathy, peace, and understanding. In the same vein as Walter Hixsonâs study of American film, Nguyen argues that North American screenplays have used sympathy to portray American veterans as victims and erase, or vilify, their Asian counterparts in film. It is only through empathic literature that artists have achieved any measured success with reconciliation.

Mariam B. Lam takes the international cultural tourism of Vietnam to task in her essay, âViet Namâs Growing Pains: Postsocialist Cinema Development and Transnational Politics.â The Second Indochina War created a legacy of Vietnamese diaspora, with cultural enclaves forming throughout North America, Europe, and Africa. Using the international Vietnamese film industry as her case study, Lam argues that Vietnam (the nation-state) has lost influence on the creation of cinema as Korean and American competition strangled its indigenous film industry. Her essay holds important implications for how scholars approach film studies and Vietnamese studiesâshe urges future scholars to move toward an international perspective, to create a rich âfilm analysis that is anchored in, but not shackled to, national film histories and industry developmentsâ (p. 179). As the cinematic industries become transnational, so too should the academic disciplines devoted to its study.

Vietnam expanded its economic power during the late twentieth century through the *doi moi* program, and economic planners viewed the exportation of domestic catfish to North American markets as a primary route to prosperity. Historian Scott Ladermanâs essay, âA Fishy Affair: Vietnamese Seafood and the Confrontation with U.S. Neoliberalism,â analyzes the ongoing âcatfish warsâ between the United States and Vietnamâan economic conflict that began when southern states witnessed an atrophy in sales of North American catfish to its Vietnamese rival. Southern states and the seafood industry pressured elected officials in Washington, who tried to undermine Vietnamâs economic growth with laws that forbade or restricted the sale of Vietnamese catfish. Propagandists, the seafood industry, and politicians used legacies of the Second Indochina War (e.g., Agent Orange contaminated seafood products) to wage an anti-Vietnamese advertising campaign in the United States. Laderman contends that the âcatfish warsâ expose a contradiction in American foreign economic policy, because while Vietnam transitioned into a model capitalist, free-trade economy, its growth was limited by Washington politicians who constrained imports based on the health of domestic industries.

Raymond Burghardt, the former U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, commented in 2002 that Agent Orange was the âone significant ghostâ that remained from the Second Indochina War (p. 221). Historian Diane Niblack Foxâs essay, âAgent Orange: Coming to Terms with a Transnational Legacy,â assimilates data from history, science, law, politics, oral history, and human rights activism to illuminate the current understandings of the chemicalâs consequences for human life and its prohibition. American and Vietnamese oral histories, of both veterans and civilians, tap into the discourse of Agent Orange to substantiate claims of victimhood, exploitation, or unresolved injustices. As Fox indicates, the current discussions of Agent Orange occur in âseparate languages, overlapping and mutually intelligible to a degree, but not yet in full conversation with each otherâ (p. 208). The discourse of Agent Orange begins at the individual and communal level, but its implications for other disciplines in the academy transcends national boundaries as scientific research bolsters worldwide campaigns to provide reparations to victims and outlaw the use of similar defoliants. Fox calls for mutual conversation between the disciplines to further our understanding of Agent Orange and its historical, cultural, and social legacies.

Charles Waugh explores environmental themes in Vietnamese and Vietnamese American literature during and after the Second Indochina War. In his essay, âRefuge to Refuse: Seeking a Balance in the Vietnamese Environmental Imagination,â Waugh first describes the environmental motif in Vietnamese folklore, and delves into the significance of the environment for Viet Minh and Ho Chi Minhâs forces during the Second Indochina War: Vietnamese perceived the forests and jungles as beneficent forces that protected them and confounded Americans. As Waughâs narrative moves through *doi moi* (Viet Namâs economic revitalization after 1986), he finds that environment under attack by chemical industries like Dow and Monsanto. The Vietnamese government, in the name of economic expediency, has exacerbated environmental destruction. Whereas the Vietnamese grimaced under the United Statesâ defoliant programs in the 1960s and 1970s, they now face an internal threat to their cherished ecosystems.

The most enduring legacy of the âVietnam Warâ in American memory has been the black and white flag symbolizing the POW/MIA that allegedly remain in captivity. In the volumeâs final chapter, historian H. Bruce Franklin tackles the construction of the POW/MIA myth in his essay, âMissing in Action in the Twenty-First Century.â Although his essay borrows from his previous monograph, *Vietnam and Other Fantasies,* Franklin traces the rise of POW/MIA discourse during Senator John McCainâs presidential bid in 2000 and the 2003 Iraq War. The truth is that Viet Nam no longer, and has never, held American prisoners of war after the 1973 Paris Peace Accords. Franklin argues that presidents, political pundits, cultural elites, and everyday Americans perpetuated the POW/MIA myth, at first, because it derailed the antiwar movement and distracted mainstream America from horrific images of soldiersâ deaths, civilian casualties, and torture emanating from news correspondence in Viet Nam. Americans subsequently perpetuated the MIA/POW legacy because it fulfilled a deep psychocultural need to assign victimhood to Americansâvictims of the Vietnam War, the machinations of global economic and market forces, bureaucracy, feminism, or waning manhood (p. 289). Scholars of the Vietnam War will find Franklinâs narrative and argument familiar and convincing. His essay provides a useful tool for undergraduates and graduate students to understand the concept of mythmaking in American history, and the specific origins and continuance of the POW/MIA issue in American culture and politics.

On the whole, I have two minor critiques of *Four Decades On.* Several essays could benefit from a stronger editorial hand to clean up opaque language and jargon. Given the interdisciplinary intention of the authors and editors, the anthropological essays, in particular, will confound those outside the field. Second, while the essays collectively elucidate several themes (e.g., mythmaking, collective memory, internationalism), the editors and authors needed to place their arguments and findings in more direct conversation. I attribute this to how the volume concludes with H. Bruce Franklinâs chapter on the POW/MIA myth, rather than incorporating a formal conclusion. While Laderman and Martiniâs introduction provides helpful summaries of the chapters, themes, and arguments, the absent conclusion was a missed opportunity to offer the significance of the volume, its deeper findings, and expound on connections between the essays.

Given that this volume speaks to emerging trends in the historiography of the Vietnam War and Vietnamese studies, I would highly recommend *Four Decades On* to academics in these respective fields, graduate students, and advanced undergraduates. These authors demand that historians pay more attention to the long-term legacies of warfare in culture and society. Despite the cessation of hostilities in Viet Nam by 1973, Vietnamese and Americans have continued to fight the Second Indochina War in economic forums, literature, comic books, magazines, movies, video games, and museums. *Four Decades On* illuminates the plethora of avenues by which societies propagate and reinforce collective memories and myths. These scholars also remind us that past narratives of the Vietnam War have obscured or omitted the voices and actions of the Vietnamese. Future histories must place Vietnamese and American voices in meaningful conversation, and the international lens adopted in the essays outlined above can remedy that lacunae.

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