

# SPOILED GUESTS OR DEDICATED PATRIOTS? THE CHINESE IN NORTH VIETNAM, 1954–1978

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*This article examines the triangular relationship among the Chinese community of northern Vietnam, the North Vietnamese government, and China, focusing in particular on how the relationship affected the ethnic and national identities of Chinese residents in North Vietnam between 1954 and 1978. Scrutiny of the two important issues of citizenship and the Chinese school system reveals that North Vietnamese leaders adopted lenient policies toward Chinese residents mainly because they saw the relationship between the Vietnamese state and the Chinese community as part and parcel of North Vietnam's relationship with China. These policies ultimately contributed to a delay in the assimilation of Chinese residents, and by the end of the 1970s they still had not completed the transformation from well-treated sojourners into citizens of Vietnam. Though many Chinese residents embraced a status of privileged outsider, others willingly participated on Vietnam's behalf in the war against America. After reunification, the desire to clarify loyalty, i.e. to "purify" the nation-state, led the Vietnamese government to initiate an aggressive process of forced assimilation. This policy, and the deterioration of relations between Vietnam and China in the late 1970s, triggered an exodus of Chinese residents.*

## INTRODUCTION

In late 1977 and early 1978, many Chinese residents of southern Vietnam began to flee the country, becoming "boat people" on the high seas. Around that same time, Chinese residents of northern Vietnam started to cross Vietnam's northern border with China,

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becoming the land-based refugee counterpart to the boat people.<sup>1</sup> By early June of 1978, the number of refugees in China had reached 100,000. By mid-July, the total number had exceeded 160,000.<sup>2</sup> In the city of Hekou in China's Yunnan Province, the highest number of refugees accepted in one day was more than 1,900; in Dongxing, a border town in Guangxi, the record for one day was 4,000.<sup>3</sup> Adjacent to Dongxing is the Vietnamese city Mong Cai, of Quang Ninh Province, where Chinese once made up 80% of the population. By June 1978, 70% of the Chinese in that city and 60% of the Chinese in Quang Ninh had moved to China.<sup>4</sup> The earliest refugees were from provinces that abut China. Later, Chinese residents from other parts of northern Vietnam joined the flow.<sup>5</sup> The exodus began with Chinese residents of rural areas, but later on the composition of refugees changed to include urban Chinese.<sup>6</sup> In mid-July 1978, China closed its border with Vietnam to stop the influx of refugees, but small groups of people continued to enter.<sup>7</sup> By February 1979, when China launched a three-week war against Vietnam, 202,000 refugees had already arrived in China. For several months after the war, refugees continued to come at a rate of more than 10,000 per month. In 1994, it was estimated that the total number of Indochinese refugees and their children in China was 288,000, 99% of whom were from Vietnam.<sup>8</sup>

The exodus of the Chinese from northern Vietnam differs from that of the boat people of southern Vietnam in several respects. While the great majority of the boat people chose to flee to Western countries and pro-Western Asian countries, most Chinese residents of northern Vietnam relocated to China. Many boat people from southern Vietnam decided to leave the country mainly because they found it hard to adapt to the socialist system, characterized as it was by property-confiscation, re-education camps and new economic zones. In northern Vietnam, where a socialist system had existed for over two decades, the single most important factor causing the departure of the Chinese was the collapse of the Sino-Vietnamese alliance. Finally, in southern Vietnam, the exodus of boat people did not cause the Chinese community to disappear. Large numbers of ethnic Chinese still live there today. In northern Vietnam, however, large Chinese communities no longer exist.<sup>9</sup> The differences between their exoduses to some extent reflect the differences of experience between the Chinese community in northern Vietnam and its counterpart in the south. From 1954 to 1976, largely due to the division of Vietnam, the Chinese

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1 According to one 1978 estimate, ethnic Chinese formed 85% of the boat people from southern Vietnam and 95% of the refugees who moved to China from northern Vietnam. Chang P. M. 1982, pp. 212–13.

2 Amer 1991, p. 46.

3 *Beijing Review* 2 June 1978, p. 15.

4 Nguyễn V. 1978, pp. 43, 48.

5 *Beijing Review*, 16 June 1978, p. 15.

6 Godley 1980, p. 36.

7 Porter 1980, p. 57.

8 *People's Daily*, 25 August 1994.

9 It is estimated that in 1989, there were over 900,000 Chinese in southern Vietnam, but there were only two to three thousand Chinese in northern Vietnam. Guowuyuan qiaoban qiaowu ganbu xuexiao, 1993, p. 74. The Vietnamese official census reports 961,702 Vietnamese Chinese in Vietnam in 1989. Only a small portion of them lived in northern Vietnam, including 4,015 in Hanoi, 2,659 in Haiphong, 2,287 in Lang Son, and 2,276 in Quang Ninh. Châu 1992, pp. 44–45.

population in Vietnam was split into two communities that differed greatly in size, economic power, cultural, linguistic and occupational diversity, political orientation, and relations with their respective governments, as well as with China.

Such differences provide great incentive for study. Rather than taking up issues concerning the entire population of Chinese in Vietnam, this article concentrates on the Chinese community in North Vietnam during the period of national division. It will examine the unique features of this community, the triangular relationship among the Chinese community, the North Vietnamese government and China, as well as the impact such a configuration had on the ethnic and national identities of the Chinese in North Vietnam. Bearing these dynamics in mind, I pay particular attention to issues surrounding the citizenship of Chinese residents and the Chinese school system. I argue that North Vietnam's official policy toward the Chinese between 1954 and 1978 was much more lenient than those adopted by most other Southeast Asian governments, mainly because the North Vietnamese leaders saw the relationship between the Vietnamese state and the Chinese community as part and parcel of Vietnam's relationship with China. The special treatment offered by the North Vietnamese government to Chinese residents constituted part of their effort to maintain and solidify North Vietnam's alliance with China. A partial consequence of this special treatment was that the assimilation of Chinese residents into Vietnamese society was delayed. By the end of the 1970s the Chinese community in North Vietnam still had not completed the transformation from a sojourner community into a local ethnic group. Their delayed assimilation and the souring of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship in the late 1970s were the most important reasons for Chinese residents' flight from northern Vietnam.

## MIGRATIONS

Migration of people from various regions now known as China to the Red River Delta began in the pre-historical period. It is widely speculated that the ancient Lac Viet tribes settled in southern China before moving to the Red River Delta. The legendary King An Duong, who ended the dynasty of the Hung Kings, is believed to have come from south-western China. The conquest of the Red River Delta by the Qin Empire and the Nanyue (Nam Viet) Kingdom brought more people from the north to the land that later became known as northern Vietnam.<sup>10</sup>

During the long period of Chinese colonial rule (111 BC to 939 AD) there was a continuous flow of people from the north to the Red River Delta. These people can be divided into several categories, the first of which comprised civil officials, generals, soldiers and their families. Some members of this category stayed in Vietnam permanently, became mixed with the local people, and, after the Han dynasty general Ma Yuan (Ma Vien) brutally crushed the Trung Sisters rebellion in 42 AD, emerged as the powerful Han-Viet families.<sup>11</sup> Some assert that a number of Ma Yuan's soldiers settled in northern Vietnam and their descendants are still identifiable today.<sup>12</sup> After the collapse of the Han, many influential

10 Lü 1964, pp. 26, 39, 47.

11 See Taylor 1983, pp. 69–80 for a thorough treatment of the Han Viet families.

12 Zhang W. 1975, p. 5.

Chinese moved to the Red River Delta in order to avoid the chaos in China proper.<sup>13</sup> Chinese officials continued to arrive during the subsequent Sui and Tang dynasties. The second category consisted of merchants, artisans and other common people who moved to Vietnam on their own terms in order to seek opportunities. They included refugees who fled China to avoid political, social and economic disasters. The last category was criminals who were sent to frontier regions to serve their sentences.<sup>14</sup> It is estimated that the total population of northern Vietnam in the third and fourth centuries AD was about 500,000, and among them were 10,000 to 100,000 Chinese.<sup>15</sup> These early immigrants eventually assimilated; some of their descendants, it is argued, were active participants in the anti-Chinese independence movements of the sixth and tenth centuries.<sup>16</sup>

After Vietnam gained independence in the tenth century AD, China no longer sent officials, generals, soldiers and criminals to Vietnam, but political and economic immigrants and refugees continued to arrive. Generally speaking, Vietnamese rulers encouraged the Chinese to assimilate by offering equal or even favorable treatment to permanent residents, and by keeping a close eye on temporary visitors.<sup>17</sup> As Châu Hải points out, large-scale Chinese migrations into Vietnam often took place during periods of political change in China.<sup>18</sup> For instance, the Mongol invasion of China caused some Chinese to flee to northern Vietnam.<sup>19</sup> Due to the similarities of political and cultural milieu, Chinese immigrants were able to win bureaucratic positions in Vietnam rather easily. The lists of degree holders who passed the Vietnamese civil service examinations during the Ly and Tran dynasties reveal a large percentage of Chinese surnames.<sup>20</sup> Chinese officials and soldiers again went to Vietnam during the brief period of Ming occupation (1407–1427). After Vietnam regained independence, those Chinese who had remained in Vietnam were permitted to stay.<sup>21</sup> The Manchu conquest of China in the seventeenth century gave birth to a new wave of Chinese immigration, and these new immigrants became miners, merchants and farmers, as well as officials and soldiers in Vietnam.<sup>22</sup> In northern Vietnam, Chinese residents dominated the pottery-making and mining business.<sup>23</sup> They were also very active in Pho Hien, a thriving trading center in Hung Yen. It is estimated that there were about 56,000 Chinese living in Tonkin in the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> The large number of these new immigrants made it possible for some of them to form their own

13 Lü 1964, pp. 109–14; Taylor 1983, pp. 69–80; Zhang C. 25 May 1969.

14 Zhang C. 23 May 1969.

15 Zhang C. 25 May 1969; 27 May 1969.

16 Zhang C. 25 May 1969; Châu 1992, p. 98; Zhang W. 1975, p. 17.

17 For a succinct analysis of Vietnam's policies toward the Chinese from the tenth to the twentieth centuries, see Châu 2004, pp. 69–85.

18 Châu 1992, p. 17.

19 Zhang C. 23 May 1969; Châu 1992, p. 20.

20 Woodside 1971, p. 8.

21 Châu 1992, p. 23.

22 Li B. 1990, pp. 4–5.

23 Li B. 1990, pp. 68–72.

24 Zhang W. 1975, p. 36; Châu 1993, pp. 52–59.

communities, one of which became known as the Minh Huong.<sup>25</sup> As a result of Vietnam's conquest of Champa and the Mekong River Delta, more and more Chinese immigrants began to move to central and southern Vietnam. In fact, Vietnamese rulers used the Chinese who fled to Vietnam after the Manchu conquest as vanguards in the southward expansion.<sup>26</sup> Châu Hải argues that before the seventeenth century, Chinese immigrants in Vietnam were easily assimilated into the local society. After that, there were Chinese men and women in numbers sufficient to constitute their own communities. These social formations ultimately became an obstacle to assimilation.<sup>27</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, the Nguyen dynasty recognized a system in which the Chinese in Vietnam were divided into several congregations based on dialect. Each group had a leader whose duty it was to pass down official edicts, collect taxes, and mediate disputes.<sup>28</sup> Cai Tinglan, a Chinese scholar-official brought by a storm to Vietnam in 1835, reported that he met Chinese in all the places he visited in central and northern Vietnam. Most of those he met were from Guangdong, Fujian and Guangxi. Though they chiefly were businessmen, also among them were officials and fishermen. He confirmed that Chinese residents had their own organizations, settlements and leaders. Cai discovered that the government offered tax reduction and trading privileges to the Chinese, that intermarriage between Chinese men and Vietnamese women was frequent, and that in general the Chinese were wealthier than ordinary Vietnamese.<sup>29</sup>

During the period of the French colonial rule, Chinese continued to move to Vietnam, and the Chinese community in southern Vietnam grew much faster than that in the north. In northern Vietnam, Chinese rebels, bandits and troops were very active from the 1860s to the 1880s.<sup>30</sup> The well-known Liu Yongfu and his Black Flags vexed the French, killing such famous French colonialists as Francis Garnier and Henri Riviere.<sup>31</sup> Some of these rebels were members of non-Han groups from Guangxi. There are claims in Vietnam today that certain Tay are descendants of the Black Flags.<sup>32</sup> Some Chinese were involved even in kidnapping Vietnamese women and children and selling them in China.<sup>33</sup> The most important business for the Chinese in northern Vietnam seemed to be mining.<sup>34</sup> It is estimated that Chinese operated most of the 124 mines in northern Vietnam in the late nineteenth century.<sup>35</sup> In the early twentieth century, some Chinese in Vietnam participated in

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25 Li B. 1990, p. 6. For a brief introduction to the history of the Minh Huong and a detailed study of a Minh Huong family, see Chen C. 1964.

26 Châu 1992, pp. 25–26; Ly Singko 1978, pp. 32–41.

27 Châu 1992, p. 100.

28 Li B. 1990, p. 7. The French later inherited this system, and in 1885 reduced the number of congregations from seven to five, taking the five major Chinese dialects as basis. Marsot 1993, p. 85.

29 Dai 1997, pp. 40–50.

30 Châu 1992, pp. 28–29; Li B. 1990, pp. 8–9; Zheng 1976, pp. 33–34.

31 McAleavy 1968.

32 Fan H. 2004, p. 203; Fan H. 1999, p. 163.

33 Marsot 1993, p. 43; McAleavy 1968, p. 183.

34 Zheng 1976, pp. 85–86; Miller 1946, pp. 268–79.

35 Châu 1992, p. 121.

Sun Yat-sen's revolution against the Qing dynasty, and after the collapse of the Qing, the Nationalist government tried to offer protection to the Chinese in Vietnam.<sup>36</sup> The Nationalist government also set up two consulates in northern Vietnam. Chiang Kai-shek's government concluded two agreements with France in the 1930s that conferred upon the Chinese the status of "privileged aliens." In theory, they were treated like French and enjoyed more privileges than the Vietnamese themselves.<sup>37</sup> The attitude of the French toward the Chinese was ambivalent,<sup>38</sup> but as Alain Marsot persuasively argues, overall French colonialism was conducive to Chinese immigration because it provided security, commercial opportunities, and a demand for labor.<sup>39</sup>

After the Second World War, the Chinese Nationalist Army briefly occupied northern Vietnam. This period helped strengthen the relationship between China and Chinese residents and enhance the position of the Chinese residents in northern Vietnam. Through a Sino-French agreement reached in 1948, the Chinese consuls were granted the right to veto candidates for positions of leadership in local Chinese organizations. The agreement also stated that Chinese residents of Vietnam had the right to free movement and trade and to maintain their family and personal status according to Chinese custom.<sup>40</sup>

## FEATURES OF THE CHINESE COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN VIETNAM

The Chinese community that existed in northern Vietnam between 1954 and 1978 can be distinguished from the Chinese community in southern Vietnam in several respects. First, because Chinese have been present in northern Vietnam since ancient times, one can say that communities of Chinese residents in the northern areas have a much longer history than those of the south. Although after several generations Chinese immigrants normally assimilated, a continuous influx of new immigrants practically guaranteed a kind of distinctly Chinese presence from 1111 BC.

Yet the Chinese community in northern Vietnam was much smaller than that in the south, the south being the destination chosen by most Chinese who relocated to Vietnam during the French colonial period. Later social and political changes also contributed to size fluctuations between the two communities. When the First Indochina War erupted in 1946, some Chinese left northern Vietnam for the south,<sup>41</sup> and others for China.<sup>42</sup> When Vietnam was divided in 1954, nearly 60,000 Chinese moved from the

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36 Sun Yat-sen made six visits to Vietnam between 1900 and 1907. His followers launched five anti-Manchu rebellions from Vietnam. Zhang W. 1975, pp. 90–91. For an interesting account of Sun Yat-sen's relations with the French and Chinese in Vietnam during the years before the 1911 Revolution, see Barlow 1979.

37 Marsot 1993, pp. 44–51, 53, 116–17.

38 Purcell 1952, p. 209; pp. 227–29.

39 Marsot 1993, p. 84.

40 Purcell 1952, p. 230.

41 Thompson and Adloff 1955, p. 56.

42 Purcell 1952, p. 265.

north to the south.<sup>43</sup> During that time there also were Chinese Communists who moved from the south to the north,<sup>44</sup> but their number likely was small.

Different estimates exist about the number of Chinese in northern Vietnam. French colonial officials estimated that in 1886 there were 7,467 foreign Asians in Tonkin; Alain Marsot believes that they were all Chinese. In 1906 and 1907, there were about 30,000 Chinese in Tonkin. The number of Chinese in Tonkin increased to 32,000 in 1911; 41,800 in 1913; 46,000 in 1926; and 52,000 in 1931.<sup>45</sup> The North Vietnamese government reported that there were 1.5 million Chinese in Vietnam in 1951, including 1.4 million in southern Vietnam, 53,000 in central Vietnam and 90,000 in northern Vietnam.<sup>46</sup> Another estimate concluded that there were 170,000 Chinese in North Vietnam in 1955,<sup>47</sup> but Alain Marsot argues that there were only 50,000 Chinese in North Vietnam around 1957, constituting 0.4% of the local population. This percentage was much lower than that for Southeast Asia as a whole, which was about 5%. In fact, among all the regions and countries in Southeast Asia, North Vietnam had the lowest percentage of Chinese in its population.<sup>48</sup> According to Victor Purcell, the total population of the Chinese in North Vietnam was about 55,000 in 1960, but a Vietnamese official census conducted in the same year reported 174,644 Chinese there, a number comprising 1.1% of the total population.<sup>49</sup> Two other scholars reported 190,000 Chinese in North Vietnam in 1965.<sup>50</sup> The post-unification Vietnamese government put the number of Chinese in North Vietnam before their flight in the late 1970s at over 200,000,<sup>51</sup> and another scholar reported that in 1978 there were 300,000 Chinese in North Vietnam.<sup>52</sup>

The different estimates derive partially from scholarly disagreement about how to define Chineseness. Some of the estimates obviously did not include all the rural Chinese, whereas others included not only all rural Chinese, but also some non-Han Chinese groups. For example, according to one study, during the period between 1946 and 1954 Chinese made up 78% of Hai Ninh's population, because in this study Hai Ninh's 100,000 Nung people are counted as Chinese. The argument is that the Nung were originally Han Chinese farmers, but came to be called Nung after 1885 mainly because the French, for political reasons, did not want to recognize them as Chinese.<sup>53</sup> A similar problem arises with the identity of the Minh Huong.

43 Elegant 1959, p. 261; Mitchison 1961, p. 58; Zhang W. 1975, p. 43. For a detailed account of one Chinese family's experience in North Vietnam before and during the division, see Vuong-Riddick 2007.

44 Qi 16 February 1969; *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 24 August 1961; 28 July 1964; 31 August 1965.

45 Marsot 1993, pp. 92, 95–98.

46 Li B. 1990, p. 16.

47 Li B. 1990, p. 81.

48 Marsot 1993, p. 5.

49 Fu 2004, p. 295.

50 Fitzgerald 1972, p. 196.

51 Thanh Hoa Department of Culture and Information, 1978, p. 17.

52 Nguyen M. 1979, p. 1041.

53 Qing 1996. In 1954 about 5,000 of these Nung people in Hai Ninh moved to South Vietnam with Voong A Sang (黄亚生). There they created their own organizations and began calling themselves “Hoa Nung” or Chinese Nung. See Châu 2006, p. 112; Zhang W. 1975, p. 89. For other recent studies on the identity of the Nung, see Hutton 2000, pp. 254–76. Hutton points out (p. 263) that the Chinese Nung are different from the Thai Nung, which forms a much larger group.

The Nguyen dynasty classified them as a separate group but granted them almost all the rights enjoyed by Vietnamese citizens. During the colonial period, they were sometimes treated as Vietnamese, sometimes as Chinese. Complicating things further, even at the same historical juncture some of them were treated as Vietnamese, whereas others were considered Chinese.<sup>54</sup>

There also was a difference between the two communities in geographic distribution. Most Chinese in South Vietnam lived in urban areas, and Saigon had one of the largest concentrations of Chinese immigrants in Southeast Asia.<sup>55</sup> In the north, the number of Chinese living in large cities was rather small. There was no large urban concentration of Chinese. It is estimated that the number of Chinese living in Hanoi was 2,000 in 1913;<sup>56</sup> 4,200 in 1920;<sup>57</sup> 5,000 in 1931; 15,000 in 1948;<sup>58</sup> 10,000 in 1968;<sup>59</sup> and 13,000 in 1978.<sup>60</sup> Haiphong had 8,500 Chinese in 1913;<sup>61</sup> 10,250 in 1920;<sup>62</sup> 19,000 in 1931<sup>63</sup> and more than 30,000 in the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> Most Chinese lived in rural areas of the provinces adjacent to China, especially in the province of Quang Ninh.<sup>65</sup>

There are further differences between the two groups. Physically, the Chinese community in North Vietnam was much closer to China than that in South Vietnam, with many Chinese living along the Sino-Vietnamese border. Also, the economic power of the Chinese in northern Vietnam was rather insignificant compared to that of the Chinese community in the south. And, while businesspeople formed a disproportionate percentage of the Chinese population in the south, occupations held by the Chinese in North Vietnam were more diverse. Last, the Chinese residents of North Vietnam also had more varied origins. Most Chinese in the south came from Guangdong and Fujian. In North Vietnam, there were sizable groups from Guangxi and Yunnan in addition to those from Guangdong and Fujian.<sup>66</sup>

It should be noted that Han Chinese was not the only group of people that had migrated from China to Vietnam. Among the fifty-four officially identified ethnic groups of Vietnam, more than twenty are comprised of immigrants from China of recent centuries. Only two of these groups, Hoa and Ngai, fall into the category of Han Chinese according to the official Chinese identification system. This article treats only the Hoa and Ngai, and

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54 Châu 1992, pp. 58–60.

55 It is estimated that in 1955, there were 800,000 Chinese in South Vietnam and among them over 570,000 lived in the Saigon-Cholon area. Châu 1992, p. 38.

56 Marsot 1993, p. 95.

57 Châu 1992.

58 Purcell 1952, pp. 210, 214.

59 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 27 November 1968.

60 Kỳ 1978, p. 18.

61 Marsot 1993, p. 96.

62 Châu 1992, p. 35.

63 Purcell 1952, p. 214.

64 *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, 10 August 1974; Kỳ 1978, p. 18.

65 Nguyen M. 1979, p. 1041; Unger 1987, p. 598; Li B. 1990, p. 18.

66 Most of the Chinese residents of Quang Ninh, for example, had their ancestral land in Guangxi. See Zhao 1993, p. 11.



does not cover the non-Han groups.<sup>67</sup> Nor do I touch on the Chinese military and political personnel who were present in Vietnam from 1954 to 1978.

## CITIZENSHIP IN NORTH VIETNAM

The Vietnamese Communist Party began to pay attention to the Chinese in Vietnam immediately after its founding in 1930. The party's first political program argued that Chinese laborers were allies of the Vietnamese revolutionaries.<sup>68</sup> The party later explained that this alliance stemmed from the fact that the Chinese residents of Indochina belonged to a semi-colonial nation. They did not enjoy the privileges of Westerners, and in many aspects were exploited by the latter.<sup>69</sup> When the First Indochina War broke out in 1946, Ho Chi Minh promised that after the Communists defeated the French, the Vietnamese and Chinese would share happiness in Vietnam.<sup>70</sup> In 1951, the North Vietnamese government declared that the Chinese enjoyed the same rights as Vietnamese citizens.<sup>71</sup> When most other newly independent Southeast Asian countries decided to apply a policy of forced assimilation to the Chinese communities and cut off the connections between their Chinese communities and China, the North Vietnamese government chose to adopt the policy of equality and leniency toward Chinese residents, and to strengthen the ties between China and their domestic population of Chinese. In fact, in the late 1940s and 1950s, the Vietnamese Communists largely handed over the organizational responsibility for the Chinese community to the Chinese Communist Party because they believed that "the CCP could organize the Chinese more effectively." The local branch of the Chinese Communist Party in southern Guangdong sent both political and military cadres to North Vietnam in order to help create party branches and military units among the Chinese.<sup>72</sup>

The partition and independence of Vietnam in 1954 made it imperative for the two Vietnams to solve the problem of the citizenship of the Chinese living in the two countries, an issue, again, that existed in almost all the other newly independent nations of Southeast Asia. The problem was exacerbated by the various nationality laws adopted by the Manchu and Republican governments of China, which recognized dual citizenship and citizenship by bloodline.<sup>73</sup> The People's Republic of China followed the same policy when it took power in 1949. In 1952, the Chinese Communist Party passed a directive in which all overseas Chinese were classified as "Chinese sojourners."<sup>74</sup> However, in an effort to win the trust of Southeast Asian countries, in 1955 China's Premier Zhou Enlai announced at

67 For a complete list of the nineteen other ethnic groups that originally came from China, see Fan H. 1999, pp. 162–246.

68 Thanh Hoa Department of Culture and Information, 1978, p. 17; Kỳ 1978, p. 22.

69 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 6 November 1969.

70 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 30 October 1969.

71 *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, 7 November 1969.

72 Guo 2007.

73 Mitchison 1961, pp. 45–46; Evans 1990, p. 48.

74 Woodside 1979, p. 389.

the Bandung conference that China had changed its policy and would no longer support dual citizenship. This change meant that overseas Chinese who had adopted local citizenship ceased to be Chinese citizens. Those who did not adopt local citizenship were still considered Chinese nationals, but they were urged to respect the customs and abide by the laws of their countries of residence.

Shortly after China declared its policy change, South Vietnam started to force Chinese residents to naturalize. From December 1955 to September 1956, the government promulgated four decrees stipulating that all Chinese born in Vietnam automatically became Vietnamese citizens. Children born of mixed marriages between Chinese and Vietnamese also were considered Vietnamese citizens. Non-citizens were to be excluded from eleven occupations, and were given between six and twelve months to liquidate their businesses. Once naturalized, Chinese residents would have to serve in the military and to disband their associations. The South Vietnamese government also took measures to change the Chinese school system. It required that the Vietnamese language be used in all Chinese high schools and that Vietnamese be appointed principals of Chinese schools.<sup>75</sup>

China severely condemned South Vietnam's policy of forced naturalization, and North Vietnam actively joined the attack. On 23 May 1957, for example, *Nhan Dan* published an article entitled "The Ngo Dinh Diem Clique is the Common Enemy of the Vietnamese and Chinese Residents." The Communist-backed South Vietnam National Liberation Front repeatedly stated in its documents that "... all decrees and measures of the US-puppet regime regarding Chinese residents shall be abrogated," and that "Chinese residents have the freedom and right to choose their nationality."<sup>76</sup> North Vietnam also mobilized Chinese residents in the north to hold rallies and meetings meant to protest Ngo Dien Diem's policies.<sup>77</sup>

North Vietnam's approach toward the issue of citizenship differed from that of South Vietnam in two aspects. First, North Vietnam's policy toward the citizenship issue was more lenient than that of South Vietnam's; second, North Vietnam took the issue not as a domestic one but as a matter between Vietnam and China, and, with regard to the citizenship issue, would negotiate with China rather than the Chinese community. In 1955, immediately after China changed its policy toward dual citizenship, North Vietnam initiated talks with China about the Chinese in Vietnam, and the two governments came to an oral agreement about transforming the Chinese into Vietnamese citizens. In the following year, during a visit to North Vietnam, Zhou Enlai urged Chinese residents there to treat Vietnam as their home. This was followed in 1957 by a bilateral agreement affirming that the Chinese in North Vietnam would enjoy the same rights as North Vietnamese citizens and would be encouraged to adopt North Vietnamese citizenship voluntarily after "sustained and patient persuasion and ideological education."<sup>78</sup>

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75 Fitzgerald 1972, p. 114; Godley 1980, pp. 46–47; Minority Rights Group, 1992, pp. 26–27; Qiaowu weiyuanhui qiaowu yanjiusuo 1966, pp. 30–40.

76 *Beijing Review* 2 June 1978; 16 June 1978.

77 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 6 July 1960; 17 July 1960a; 17 July 1960b; 17 July 1960c.

78 Evans 1990, p. 49.

According to one Vietnamese source, this agreement led Luo Guibo, the Chinese ambassador to North Vietnam, to declare, “we must implement the changeover of all the Hoa into Vietnamese citizens within a period of 8 to 10 years, or a bit longer.”<sup>79</sup> In order to persuade the Chinese to assimilate, the North Vietnamese government created in 1956 the Commission for Chinese Affairs (Tiểu Ban công tác người Hoa), and in 1958 the Association of Chinese in Vietnam (Tổng hội Liên hiệp Hoa kiều Việt Nam).<sup>80</sup> The two governments jointly started a propaganda campaign to promote slogans such as “building Vietnam is the same as building China” and to criticize “great China” and “guest mentalities”.<sup>81</sup> The North Vietnamese government also initiated a literacy campaign designed to encourage Chinese residents to learn to read and write Vietnamese.<sup>82</sup>

The Chinese and North Vietnamese governments apparently agreed that they would adopt a gradual approach toward the issue of naturalization, and that within the Chinese community some subgroups would be naturalized before others. In general they desired rural Chinese to adopt Vietnamese citizenship before urban Chinese. This differentiation might have been related to the population size and geographic location of the rural Chinese. As mentioned above, the majority of Chinese in North Vietnam were living in rural areas. Moreover, they were living along the strategic Sino-Vietnamese border. One of the largest rural Chinese groups was the Ngai, which several generations before had migrated to Vietnam’s Quang Ninh Province from South China. This population seemed to have included Hakka speakers and some other Chinese from Yunnan.<sup>83</sup> Although the exact size of their population remains unclear, it is estimated that in 1978 there were 160,000 Chinese in Quang Ninh, a number that comprised 22% of the province’s total population. Such numbers made the Chinese community in Quang Ninh the second largest in unified Vietnam, next only to that of Cho Lon.<sup>84</sup> Within the province they congregated in four counties, where they made up between 50% and 60% of the population of each. They were involved in agriculture, fishing, mining, porcelain manufacturing, trade and services.<sup>85</sup>

Even as early as October 1945, the North Vietnamese government had decided that all minority peoples in Vietnam, except the urban capitalist “Chinese sojourners”, were Vietnamese citizens.<sup>86</sup> However, this policy was not successfully enforced. That is why in 1956 Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai had to urge Chinese residents of Quang Ninh to take Vietnamese citizenship, an exhortation that the Chinese residents protested. A Vietnamese source reported that in 1957, the Chinese embassy in Hanoi and the North Vietnamese government agreed that from that point on the Ngai people in Quang Ninh

79 Unger 1987, p. 602.

80 Châu 2006, p. 111.

81 Zhuang S. 6 March 1960; *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 30 March 1960.

82 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 19 April 1960; 12 May 1960; 22 May 1960; 19 April 1961.

83 Purcell 1952, p. 218; Unger 1987, p. 612; Fan H. 1999, p. 299.

84 Kỳ 1978, p. 18. According to Qing 1996, the total population of Quang Ninh was 664,000 in January 1976, including 142,000 Chinese, and the Chinese made up 21.4% of the total population.

85 Nguyễn V. 1978, pp. 41–42.

86 Woodside 1979, p. 389.

would be considered Vietnamese citizens, while the matter of citizenship for the Chinese living in other parts of North Vietnam was to be deferred.<sup>87</sup>

The policy of differentiating the Ngai from the urban Chinese probably contributed to their exclusion from the Association of Chinese in Vietnam, which consisted mainly of Chinese residents in large cities like Hanoi, Haiphong, and Nam Dinh.<sup>88</sup> This differentiation also led the Vietnamese government to use a separate term for the Chinese in Quang Ninh. In a 1965 article referring to the Chinese in Quang Ninh, the General Secretary of the provincial party committee of Quang Ninh used the term Hanzu (Han ethnic group) instead of Huaqiao (Overseas Chinese).<sup>89</sup> An article about the Chinese farmers and fishermen on the Co To Island also calls them Hanzu rather than Huaqiao,<sup>90</sup> whereas the Chinese farmers in other northern provinces continued to be called Huaqiao.<sup>91</sup> Overall the adoption of this differential policy did not have much immediate impact on the Ngai people and other rural Chinese – they still could cross the border easily without a passport. During the crisis in the late 1970s, Vietnam announced that the Chinese residents of northern Vietnam had become actual citizens of Vietnam voluntarily, but China argued that despite all the efforts at encouraging them to adopt Vietnamese citizenship, most had failed to do so.<sup>92</sup> In the late 1970s, many Ngai people moved to China or other countries along with other Chinese. In 1979, the Vietnamese government recognized those who stayed as a separate ethnic group independent of the Hoa.<sup>93</sup>

In 1961, North Vietnam and China reached another agreement, according to which the Chinese embassy in Hanoi would cease issuing Chinese passports to Chinese residents of Vietnam. Chinese who wished to visit China were to submit their applications to the Vietnamese government for approval. Once approved, the applications would then be presented to the Chinese embassy, which would issue the applicants tourist visas and passes. This was to be a very important step in the naturalization of Chinese residents, although Vietnam was still not authorized to issue to them regular passports. It essentially made the Chinese in North Vietnam “people without passports.”<sup>94</sup>

During China’s Cultural Revolution, which started in 1966, Chinese residents in North Vietnam caused a number of disturbances. They held demonstrations against “Soviet hegemonism” and conducted other “Pro-Maoist” rallies in Hanoi.<sup>95</sup> Vietnamese leaders later charged that during the Cultural Revolution, “reactionary Chinese nationals propagated ‘Mao Zedong thought’ and ‘the Cultural Revolution’, distorted the political line of

87 Unger 1987, p. 609. For a recent study of the Ngai, see Hutton 2000, pp. 254–76.

88 The Vietnamese government later argued that even those urban Chinese should be seen as Vietnamese citizens for three reasons: first, they were treated as Vietnamese citizens; second, their association was put under the control of the Vietnamese Workers’ Party; and third, they carried neither passports issued by China nor permanent resident cards issued by Vietnam. Kỳ 1978, p. 23.

89 Nguyễn T. 7 September 1965.

90 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 13 May 1961; Hồng 14 May 1964.

91 *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, 27 April 1963; 20 November 1963.

92 *Cankao Xiaoxi*, 18 June 1978; Xinhua News Agency, 15 June 1978.

93 Fan H. 1999, p. 73; pp. 219–20; Fan H. 2004, p. 264.

94 Hoàng 1978, p. 11; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam 1978.

95 Amer 1991, p. 17.

Vietnam and organized a network of intelligence.”<sup>96</sup> These were not baseless accusations. During this period, *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, the news organ of the Association of Chinese in Vietnam, was full of reports about how the Chinese in Vietnam shouted revolutionary slogans, sang revolutionary songs, criticized revisionism, studied the works of Chairman Mao and expressed their loyalty to him.<sup>97</sup> The party secretary of the Chinese primary school in Hanoi later recalled that during the Cultural Revolution, the school was in chaos because of the struggles between different political factions.<sup>98</sup>

If the Chinese in North Vietnam were already on their way to becoming Vietnamese citizens before the Cultural Revolution, then the Cultural Revolution caused a reversal of this trend, or at least its delay. Although China had agreed to hand over Chinese community affairs to the North Vietnamese government in 1957,<sup>99</sup> a declaration of the Association of the Chinese in Vietnam issued in 1967 remarked that the Chinese in North Vietnam should be directed by the “two governments and two parties.”<sup>100</sup> Officials from the Chinese embassy in Hanoi once again were involved deeply in local Chinese affairs. During a visit to several Chinese schools in Hanoi, a secretary from the Chinese embassy commented that the Chinese in North Vietnam had the right and duty to read Chinese newspapers and magazines, listen to Chinese radio programs and show the same loyalty to Chairman Mao as Chinese did in China, and that the Chinese community and the embassy of China were bound by a blood relationship.<sup>101</sup>

In response to these radical actions and comments, the Vietnamese government made specific efforts to prevent the Chinese from listening to Chinese radio programs and reading Chinese newspapers and magazines. Some Chinese residents who held positions in the party, army or government were demoted. As will be discussed in the next section, the government also took measures to Vietnamize Chinese schools.<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, in order to integrate Chinese and Vietnamese, the government launched a Three-Share and Two-Well Campaign (to share joys and sorrows, life and death, and duties with the Vietnamese, and to work and fight well).<sup>103</sup> Finally, North Vietnam began once again encouraging the Chinese to take Vietnamese citizenship, but Chinese residents again showed their reluctance.<sup>104</sup> It is reported that after March 1967, the local government in Lao Cay started to persecute the Chinese and force them to take Vietnamese citizenship. In protest, ten Chinese students from Lao Cay crossed the border during night and entered China. By December 1967, about 1,000 Chinese had moved to China. The Chinese government persuaded most of them to return to Vietnam, but 101 people were allowed to remain in China. Nearly 400 Chinese relocated to China from Vietnam in 1968

96 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1979, p. 38.

97 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 19 October 1966; 27 November 1966; 11 December 1966; 25 December 1966; 5 July 1967; 14 July 1967.

98 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 7 December 1973.

99 Porter 1980, p. 55.

100 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 21 September 1967.

101 *Ibid.*

102 Fu 2004, p. 305.

103 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 20 August 1966.

104 Benoit 1981, p. 148.

for similar reasons, and most of them were permitted to stay.<sup>105</sup> Many Chinese obviously ignored this new call to naturalization because in 1976, the Association of Chinese in Vietnam once again had to urge urban Chinese to adopt Vietnamese citizenship voluntarily.<sup>106</sup>

Compared with other Southeast Asian countries, up until the end of the 1970s North Vietnam was very unsuccessful in altering the national identity of its Chinese residents, a failure particularly acute given the small size of the Chinese community there. One of the most important reasons for this failure was the moderate nature of North Vietnam's policy toward the Chinese. In countries like Malaysia, South Vietnam, and Indonesia, the governments could coerce the Chinese into changing their nationality, but in North Vietnam, as agreed upon by the North Vietnamese and Chinese governments, the only methods available were persuasion and education, which, ultimately, were not very effective.

North Vietnam's policy toward the Chinese was not only moderate, but also self-contradictory. On one hand, the North Vietnamese government was eager to persuade the Chinese to become Vietnamese citizens; on the other, it not only granted the Chinese all the rights that Vietnamese citizens enjoyed before they adopted Vietnamese citizenship, but also offered the Chinese privileges if they chose to maintain their Chinese citizenship. Like Vietnamese citizens, the Chinese were permitted to participate in elections, to join the Workers' Party, and to serve as officials.<sup>107</sup> The most important privilege granted to the Chinese was draft exemption: during the long war with the United States and South Vietnam, the Chinese in North Vietnam were not obligated to join the army.<sup>108</sup> A Chinese refugee from Vietnam remarked in 1978 that many Chinese did not want to take Vietnamese citizenship because with that status would come obligations of military and other services. Some refugees admitted that one of the reasons for their flight to China in the late 1970s was that they did not want to be sent to fight the Cambodians.<sup>109</sup>

Chinese residents also enjoyed more trade freedom than Vietnamese citizens. The socialization of the Chinese in North Vietnam started in the late 1950s and it consisted of two policies: one was to encourage Chinese traders and artisans to organize themselves into cooperatives, and the other was to persuade some Chinese traders to become, in the rhetoric of communism, *producers*, i.e. factory workers or farmers.<sup>110</sup> That transformation was not completed until mid-1974.<sup>111</sup> To many Vietnamese, the fact that the Chinese could make trips to China was another special privilege, for the reason that these visits gave Chinese residents opportunities to smuggle in from China goods such as perfume, powder, liquor, and herbs. It was believed that the Chinese controlled a network of black market

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105 *He Kou Xian Zhi*, 1994, pp. 608–09.

106 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 1 September 1976.

107 *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, 20 March 1960.

108 Mai 1978, p. 56. Even before French colonization, Chinese residents of Vietnam enjoyed that privilege; Purcell 1952, p. 224.

109 *Cankao Xiaoxi* 13 May 1978; 1 June 1978.

110 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 16 January 1960; 20 January 1960; 23 January 1960; 25 January 1960; 27 January 1960; 1 February 1960; 13 June 1965; 13 August 1966; Zhuang Y. 1960.

111 *Stern* 1986, p. 284.

goods.<sup>112</sup> In 1974 and 1975, the Association of Chinese in Vietnam reported that there were too many Chinese retailers and that some of them were involved in illegal trade.<sup>113</sup> About Chinese residents, a Vietnamese refugee from North Vietnam recalled that:

They enjoyed many privileges which we Vietnamese did not have. As long as Vietnam and China enjoyed good relations, they were better off in all aspects than Vietnamese who were forced to participate in socialist labor. They had educational opportunities denied us and more freedom to buy and sell. The government wanted the Hoa to become citizens to join in socialist production just like the Vietnamese, but they refused in order to have more freedom to trade and avoid the draft.<sup>114</sup>

A Chinese refugee from North Vietnam agreed: “We had the best of both worlds. The Hoa in the north had all the rights and privileges of Vietnamese citizenship and none of its disadvantages.”<sup>115</sup> A Vietnamese Chinese doctor confirmed that Chinese patients were treated better than Vietnamese patients in the hospitals of North Vietnam.<sup>116</sup> Even in 1978, when China and Vietnam had started a bitter verbal war over the Chinese in Vietnam, the Chinese government still conceded that before 1975 Chinese residents of North Vietnam were treated well.<sup>117</sup> The Vietnamese government argued in 1978 that the Chinese were treated well because they were seen as Vietnamese citizens rather than foreigners, and that the Vietnamese government granted more rights to the Chinese in Vietnam than did China to the Vietnamese living in China.<sup>118</sup> But in offering various privileges to the Chinese, the Vietnamese government had preserved a tradition started by the Chinese colonial government and maintained by some Vietnamese dynasties as well as the French colonial government, in contradiction to its proclaimed intention of treating the Chinese as Vietnamese citizens.<sup>119</sup> The preferential treatment may very well have had the effect of reinforcing the perceived differences between the Vietnamese and Chinese, strengthening the sense of superiority of the Chinese and an imagined connection with China, all of which made them more reluctant to assimilate.

It should be noted that although many Chinese residents gladly accepted the privileges offered by the government, there also were many who voluntarily gave up their special rights and acted as dedicated citizens of Vietnam. For example, it is reported that from 1964 to 1975, about 1,800 Chinese from Quang Ninh joined the army each year. During the Vietnam War, in total 22,000 Chinese from that province joined the army.<sup>120</sup> Many Chinese from other

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112 Benoit 1981, p. 144.

113 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 10 August 1974; 29 March 1975.

114 Benoit 1981, p. 148.

115 Benoit 1981, p. 144.

116 Nguyễn V. 1978, p. 43.

117 Chang P. M. 1982, p. 197.

118 Hoàng 1978, p. 12; Thanh Hoa Department of Culture and Information, 1978, p. 17.

119 One such proclamation is made in Department of Culture and Information of Vietnam, 1978, p. 6.

120 Fu 2004, p. 296.

provinces and large cities such as Hanoi and Haiphong also volunteered to join the army.<sup>121</sup> Between 1969 and 1974 the North Vietnamese government recognized twenty-seven Chinese residents of Haiphong as martyrs who sacrificed their lives for “the Vietnamese revolution in protection of the heroic city of Haiphong.” From 1969 to 1972, over 100 Chinese residents of Haiphong were granted the title of “Model Worker” and over 1,000 were given the title of “Advanced Worker.” During the same period, individual Chinese residents of Haiphong received 24 Ho Chi Minh Medals, 11 Worker’s Medals, 5 Meritorious Military Service Medals, 2 Resistance War Medals from the government and 10 Certificates of Merit directly from the Office of the Prime Minister.<sup>122</sup> Various North Vietnamese leaders from Ho Chi Minh to Le Duan had repeatedly praised the Chinese residents for their contributions to the Vietnamese revolution before 1978<sup>123</sup> and the Vietnamese government continued to acknowledge such contributions thereafter.

The moderate and self-contradictory nature of North Vietnam’s policy toward the Chinese can only be explained by North Vietnamese leaders’ strong desire to maintain close relations with China, which they deemed conducive to their efforts of reunifying and reconstructing Vietnam. They treated the Chinese in North Vietnam as representatives of China, believing that granting them special rights would help galvanize the friendship and alliance between China and Vietnam.

## CHINESE SCHOOLS

Another key issue in the triangular relationship among the North Vietnamese government, the Chinese community and China was the Chinese school system. Unlike some other Southeast Asian governments, which chose to close down or put restrictions on Chinese schools or at least withdraw government support, the government of North Vietnam not only permitted Chinese schools to operate, but also offered them generous support and freedom. Furthermore, during much of the period, the North Vietnamese government allowed China to exert complete control over these schools.

Chinese schools appeared in North Vietnam in the early twentieth century, initially only at the elementary level. Some taught Confucian classics, whereas others adopted a modern curriculum. In 1935, two middle schools were founded in Hanoi and Haiphong, and in 1938 a third middle school was established in Nghe An. At the time these middle schools were probably illegal, because the French did not grant the Chinese the right to set up secondary schools until 1946.<sup>124</sup> It is estimated that in the early 1950s there were nearly fifty Chinese schools in northern Vietnam with a total of about 5,000 students. By 1960, the number of Chinese schools in North Vietnam had risen to over 100.

China’s control over the Chinese schools in North Vietnam started during the first Indochina War, when the North Vietnamese government decided to hand over Chinese community affairs to the Chinese Communist Party. In 1954, the Chinese embassy in

121 See *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 1 June 1965; 30 August 1966; 18 October 1966.

122 Li B. 1990, p. 143.

123 Li B. 1990, pp. 139–43.

124 Li B. 1990, pp. 37–41; Marsot 1993, p. 119.



Hanoi helped re-establish Chinese schools in North Vietnam, whose administration was entrusted to China's Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission. China provided the funds, directors, and all textbooks and teaching materials. A teacher-training program was established in Hanoi to train Chinese teachers from North Vietnam, and the directors of the program were from China.<sup>125</sup> Students who scored the highest in middle schools were sent to China for further study upon graduation, and after finishing their studies there most of them returned to Vietnam.<sup>126</sup>

In those Southeast Asian countries that adopted toward the Chinese a policy of forced assimilation, changes in citizenship usually were accompanied by various measures aimed at changing the cultural identity of the Chinese. These were deemed necessary because the leaders of these countries were aware that a change in citizenship did not mean much unless it also entailed a change in the factors that helped keep the Chinese loyal to China. Such measures usually included prohibiting the Chinese from visiting China, forcing the Chinese to give up Chinese names, and restricting Chinese newspapers and schools, etc. In some countries, such policies achieved a certain degree of success in changing the political loyalty and cultural identity of the Chinese over the course of two or three decades. As Wang Gungwu explained in 1985:

The major development of the past thirty years has been that, with the exception of Singapore, the ethnic Chinese of all Southeast Asian countries have become less obviously Chinese than they were. This is partly because for over thirty years there has been no new migration of Chinese into the region, and partly because of the determined efforts of all governments to integrate as many Chinese as they can into the national community. On the whole, the success of the latter was made easier by the fact that migration had come to an end. Today, most Southeast Asian Chinese no longer read and write the Chinese language, many can barely speak a dialect or two, some are barely recognizable as Chinese, and some may not even admit to being Chinese.<sup>127</sup>

According to the Sino-Vietnamese agreement reached in 1955, the Chinese in Vietnam would be encouraged to adopt Vietnamese citizenship through “education and persuasion”. But how was the Vietnamese government to educate the Chinese if it did not even have control over Chinese schools? It was inevitable that in North Vietnam, each effort of the government designed to instigate a change in the citizenship of Chinese residents was accompanied by attempts to establish control over the Chinese schools and to enact measures of educational reform. For example, in 1957, two years after China changed its policy toward dual citizenship, the North Vietnamese and Chinese governments concluded an agreement specifying that “all the work regulating the Hoa people from now on, including the problems of mass organizations, newspapers, schools, hospitals, and all other relief associations for unemployment and social welfare, will be done by the

125 In the 1960–1961 academic year the program was turned into the Overseas Chinese Normal School. *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 7 July 1960.

126 Unger 1987, pp. 598–601; Li B. 1990, pp. 42–43.

127 Wang 1985, pp. 37–38.

Vietnamese side.<sup>128</sup> The transfer started in 1958<sup>129</sup> and was completed in 1962,<sup>130</sup> and marked the beginning of a process of Vietnamization in the Chinese community, especially in the Chinese schools. Starting around 1960, the Chinese schools began to offer Vietnamese language classes and the textbooks were revised to include more materials about Vietnam.<sup>131</sup> At the same time, the number of Chinese language courses was reduced, imbalances in the student population of the Chinese schools were redressed, administrators and teachers from China gradually were withdrawn, and students from the Chinese schools ceased to go to China for further study.<sup>132</sup>

In 1970, in response to the radical actions of some Chinese residents, North Vietnam once again asked Chinese residents to take Vietnamese citizenship. A new wave of Vietnamization began, again focused on the Chinese schools.<sup>133</sup> The government's plan for new educational reform was proposed in early 1969 and implemented in the 1970–1971 academic year. Many changes ensued. In political education, the new plan emphasized the teaching of the policies of the Vietnamese government and party rather than those of China's, with the purpose of familiarizing students with “our motherland, our army, and our nation” and strengthening their allegiance toward Vietnam. Such indoctrination permeated the entire curriculum, especially such subjects as literature, history, and politics. It was reported that in the beginning, some Chinese teachers felt very uncomfortable when reading “our rich and beautiful motherland Vietnam,” but later managed to get rid of their “guest mentality”. Language courses also were reformed. Chinese language textbooks were rewritten for all grades to include more information about Vietnamese literature and history, and to eliminate any elements that might strengthen the Chinese identity, which the North Vietnamese government now termed “reactionary idealistic nationalism.” Vietnamese language courses were strengthened in order to enable students to participate more fully in Vietnamese society after graduation. All subjects except Chinese language were to be taught in Vietnamese. Previously, many Chinese students could not read Vietnamese and many of them could not continue their studies in Vietnamese universities even if they were able to gain admission (they were allowed to take the college entrance exam in Chinese). In order to conform to the Vietnamese school system, the duration of study in Chinese primary schools was reduced from six years to five years and finally to four years. The new plan also allocated more time to technical education.

The reform not only caused changes in the curriculum, but also called for reorganizing the schools and classes, with the purpose of eliminating the “walls” between Chinese and

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128 Porter 1980, p. 55.

129 Waijiaobu lingshisi 1978.

130 Li B. 1990, p. 43.

131 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 30 December 1961; Zhuang Y. 8 February 1961.

132 Unger 1987, pp. 598–604.

133 At that time, the Chinese Community in Haiphong had six primary schools, two junior middle schools, one senior middle school, and three teacher-training classes. The total number of Chinese students in Haiphong was about 2,000. In Hanoi, there was a Chinese middle school, a Chinese normal school and at least two Chinese primary schools. In Nam Dinh, there were two Chinese schools, both teaching a primary school as well as a middle-school curriculum. Huang She 9 February 1970; *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 21 September 1967; *Xin Yue hua Bao* 8 July 1970.

Vietnamese schools and bringing Chinese and Vietnamese students together. Chinese schools began to accept Vietnamese students, and Vietnamese schools also started to admit Chinese students. For example, in the 1973–1974 academic year, two Vietnamese primary schools in Haiphong began to enroll Chinese students. In the 1971–1972 academic year, 30% of the students in the Tuan Jie (Solidarity) Chinese Middle School in Haiphong were Vietnamese, a percentage that was increased to 50% the following year. In Hanoi, the Zhonghua Chinese Middle School was renamed Pham Hong Thai Level Three Middle School and in 1973 started to admit Vietnamese students. By 1976, only one of every six students in that school was Chinese. Chinese and Vietnamese students studied in the same school, but in segregated classes. Chinese students took one more subject than Vietnamese students, namely Chinese language and literature. It was reported that the mixture not only increased communications among Chinese and Vietnamese teachers and students, but also enhanced contacts and friendships among Chinese and Vietnamese parents.<sup>134</sup>

The North Vietnamese government argued that the legal basis for the educational reform was provided in a 1958 agreement between the Chinese and North Vietnamese governments, which stated that the education of the Chinese should be an integral part of the Vietnamese national education system; specifically, “Chinese schools should follow Vietnamese policies and use Vietnamese textbooks, so that students can continue their studies in more advanced Vietnamese schools or undertake various occupations after graduation.”<sup>135</sup> The agreement had not been fulfilled earlier because some Chinese residents were against it.<sup>136</sup> The North Vietnamese leaders believed that the educational reform was also politically correct. They repeatedly cited Lenin’s criticism of separate schools as justification,<sup>137</sup> and they obviously saw the measure as an important step toward the assimilation of Chinese residents. As Wang Gungwu has pointed out, in almost all the new nations of Southeast Asia, education was widely used as a means of creating and molding citizens, although with regard to Chinese communities the results were different in different countries depending on the size of its population, the attitude of the local government toward Chinese residents, and various religious and racial factors.<sup>138</sup> The North Vietnamese government clearly stated that the aim of the educational reform was to break down the barriers between the Chinese community and Vietnamese society and to make young Chinese residents good citizens, good revolutionaries, good fighters, and good cadres of Vietnam.<sup>139</sup>

The North Vietnamese government believed that citizenship education was important not only for young Chinese students, but also for Chinese adults. Whereas the reform of the Chinese school system would ensure that Chinese students receive proper citizenship

134 Huang She 9 February 1970; Fan Q. 1971; *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 24 July 1973; 25 July 1973a; 25 July 1973b; 26 July 1973; 28 July 1973; 31 July 1973b; 4 August 1973; 7 August 1973; 20 November 1973; 15 August 1974; 29 March 1975; 26 June 1975; Li B. 1990, p. 46.

135 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 24 July 1973.

136 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 4 August 1973; 20 November 1973; 7 December 1973.

137 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 24 July 1973; 31 July 1973b.

138 Wang 1991, p. 146.

139 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 24 July 1973; 28 July 1973; 4 August 1973; 7 August 1973.

education at school, the government relied on mass education to bring the political messages to adult Chinese. In addition to the “Three-Share and Two-Well Campaign” launched in the late 1960s, the government also stressed the close connections between Chinese and Vietnamese cultures. Those who emphasized differences between the two cultures were criticized.<sup>140</sup> In the early 1970s, there also was a subtle change in the vocabularies used in *Xin Yue Hua Bao* (the New Vietnamese Chinese News), the official news organ of the Association of Chinese in Vietnam. China was no longer referred to as “the great socialist motherland,” or “the great motherland,” but simply “China,” or “the People’s Republic of China.” Vietnam now became the “motherland.” The term “Hua Qiao”, which literally means the Chinese sojourners, was first replaced by *Hua Ren*, meaning ethnic Chinese, around 1973, and finally by *Hua Zu*, or Chinese nationality, in 1976. The term “Zhong Yue” (Sino-Vietnamese) was replaced by “Yue-Zhong” (Vietnamese-Chinese). In previous years, if the paper mentioned Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh at the same time, it always put Mao first; now the order was reversed.

## CHINA’S POSITION IN THE TRIANGLE

Ever complicating the relationship between the Chinese community and the North Vietnamese state was the presence of China. Other Southeast Asian governments could more or less ignore China when dealing with the Chinese communities within their boundaries. They could create and enforce their policies toward the Chinese communities without having to consult with China. North Vietnam was not afforded that luxury. Mainly because of its geographical and political proximity to China, North Vietnam saw China as a strong ally whose support was essential for the survival and growth of the North Vietnamese state. Since the Chinese in North Vietnam were seen, in a sense, as delegates of China, the North Vietnamese leaders believed that it was important that they dealt with the Chinese community in a way that would contribute to the Sino-Vietnamese friendship and alliance. As such, in North Vietnam the relations between the state and the Chinese community were taken to be a subordinate component of Sino-Vietnamese bilateral relations.

Like the leaders of other Southeast Asian nations, North Vietnamese leaders were interested in transforming Chinese residents from the status of foreign sojourners to Vietnamese citizens. However, their concerns about Sino-Vietnamese relations limited the methods they could adopt to foster such a transition. The policy of forced assimilation, which had been adopted in several Southeast Asian states, was not acceptable to China and therefore would not work in North Vietnam. As mentioned earlier, after consulting with China the North Vietnamese government decided to encourage the Chinese to naturalize by means of education and persuasion. These measures were not very successful, partly because of a fundamental contradiction in the official policy toward the Chinese – although the North Vietnamese government wanted Chinese residents to become Vietnamese citizens, it offered them special treatment if they chose to maintain their Chinese citizenship. This contradiction existed mainly because the leaders of North Vietnam believed that at that point in time it was more important to maintain and solidify

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140 Zhuang Y. 1970; *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 31 July 1973a; 20 November 1973.

the Sino-Vietnamese alliance than to transform the Chinese community. Because of the special care with which the North Vietnamese government conducted its relationship with China, Chinese residents of North Vietnam received the best official treatment among the Chinese in Southeast Asia. Consequently, their assimilation was delayed.

The North Vietnamese government made several important policy changes between the late 1940s and the late 1970s, with the purpose of gradually decreasing China's control over the Chinese in Vietnam, increasing Vietnamese control over the Chinese communities, and expediting a change of their sense of national identity. In the late 1940s, the Vietnamese Communists allowed the Chinese Communists to establish complete control over the Chinese community in North Vietnam.<sup>141</sup> Starting in the mid-1950s, the North Vietnamese government began to assume control over the Chinese community and initiate policies that would encourage the Chinese to assimilate, but China still maintained a great deal of influence. For example, the official Association of Chinese in Vietnam was under the control of the Chinese embassy in Hanoi. Its news organ, *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, was started in 1955 and was edited by people China appointed.<sup>142</sup> In the late 1960s and early 1970s, in response to the disturbances caused by China's Cultural Revolution, North Vietnam tried to accelerate the assimilation process by renewing the call to take Vietnamese citizenship and by drastically reforming the Chinese schools. Despite all the changes, mainly because of the China factor, the North Vietnamese government never adopted the policy of forced assimilation before the reunification of Vietnam in 1975.

Radical changes did not come about until 1976, following reunification, when the government of the newly proclaimed Socialist Republic of Vietnam issued another call for the Chinese to naturalize. This time the call was accompanied not by the usual means of education and persuasion but by much tougher measures. Those who refused to adopt Vietnamese citizenship would be denied food rations, rights to fishing, and government jobs.<sup>143</sup> In the final analysis, North Vietnam's policy toward the Chinese community was not fundamentally different from that adopted by other Southeast Asian governments. The only difference is that for political reasons North Vietnam had to wait till the late 1970s to start a process that had begun in the 1950s and 1960s in other Southeast Asian countries.

There were many factors behind the radical policy change begun in 1976. The reunification of Vietnam in 1975 greatly reduced China's importance to Vietnam; China's Cultural Revolution and the rapprochement between China and the United States had damaged the bilateral relations; the death of Ho Chi Minh and Mao Zedong ended the close bond that existed between the first generation revolutionary leaders. Also, by refusing to provide substantial aid to Vietnam Mao's successors contributed little to improving the

141 Châu 2006, p. 110.

142 The newspaper was founded by Wang Yafu (王亚夫), a senior Communist from Guangdong, who was in Vietnam from 1954 to 1956 (Chaoshan fengqing wang 2005). Wang's successor was Cheng Tianshui (程天水), who later returned to China and worked at the Beijing College of Foreign Languages (Lin 2005). Tang Shubei 唐树备, a Chinese journalist from Shanghai, served as a leading editor of the newspaper from 1955 to 1957. He later became a diplomat and was a leading official in charge of Taiwan and Macao affairs in the 1980s and 1990s (see China News Agency). The newspaper was taken over by the Vietnamese government in 1958 (Waijiaobu lingshisi 1978).

143 Chang C. Y. 1980, p. 294; Porter 1980, p. 56.

bilateral relations; Vietnamese leaders moved to support the Soviet Union in the Sino-Soviet dispute;<sup>144</sup> and in the Vietnamese-Cambodian conflict Chinese leaders sided with the Khmer Rouge. Finally, the reunification of Vietnam meant that Vietnamese leaders now had to deal with a much larger and much more powerful Chinese community, which made it all the more urgent to assimilate its members.<sup>145</sup> The North Vietnamese government had promised in the 1950s that after reunification the Chinese residents of southern Vietnam would be granted the freedom to choose their citizenship, but in the late 1970s the Vietnamese leaders seemed no longer interested in keeping this promise. In early 1976, the Vietnamese government confirmed that the great majority of the Chinese in southern Vietnam had already become Vietnamese citizens.<sup>146</sup> China reacted by insisting that the Chinese in the south be granted the freedom to choose their citizenship and by issuing Chinese passports to several thousand Chinese in northern Vietnam.<sup>147</sup>

Reunified Vietnam's new policy of forced assimilation was adopted at a moment when its relations with China were rapidly deteriorating. The animosity between the two countries made Vietnamese leaders suspicious of Chinese residents in Vietnam as a whole. They worried about what position Chinese residents would take in the Sino-Vietnamese dispute. Such concerns may have prompted Vietnam to seek a quick and tough solution to the Chinese problem.<sup>148</sup> The Chinese government viewed the policy change as an unreasonable act against a former benefactor. China reacted by accusing Vietnam of persecuting Chinese residents, and by portraying China as their protector. In despair, many Chinese naturally identified with China and went to China for help.

In northern Vietnam, the exodus of the Chinese began when Vietnam started to clear its border areas in early 1977. As discussed before, although the two governments viewed Chinese residents in the border areas as Vietnamese citizens, these people still maintained close relations with China. Thus the Vietnamese government felt that it had good reasons to suspect their loyalty. The Chinese and other minority groups living in the border areas were forced either to migrate to China or to move to the new economic zones.<sup>149</sup> It was reported that in some regions the government spared very few Chinese, not even a Vietnam War hero.<sup>150</sup> The Chinese preferred going back to China over moving to the

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144 A former Chinese official later recalled that as early as 1967 North Vietnam had started to “follow the line of the Soviet Union and persecute the Chinese in Vietnam,” and some Chinese had to move to China (Zhang L. 2006). It is also reported that in 1967, Soviet officials warned Vietnamese leaders that Chinese residents were a potential threat to Vietnam, and suggested driving them away (Ly 1978, p. 84). Starting in mid-1978, Chinese leaders such as Liao Chengzhi and Deng Xiaoping began to openly accuse the Soviet Union of being involved in Vietnam's persecution of the Chinese in Vietnam, but Vietnam denied the accusation (*Cankao Xiaoxi* 4 June 1978a; 4 June 1978b; 7 June 1978).

145 For an official Vietnamese account and perspective of the conflicts between Vietnam and China, see Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam 1979.

146 *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 3 February 1976.

147 *Cankao Xiaoxi* 17 May 1978.

148 In official documents issued in the late 1970s, the Vietnamese government frequently referred to the Chinese in Southeast Asia as China's Fifth Column. It also accused China of using Chinese residents as a tool for fomenting unrest in Vietnam. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam 1979, pp. 9, 57, 59, 60, 67.

149 Hood 1992, p. 141.

150 Chen K. 1987, p. 65.

new economic zones. This reaction simply confirmed the suspicions of the Vietnamese government about their loyalty. The Vietnamese government then declared, “if anyone wants to return to China, he need only to make an open request.”<sup>151</sup>

To provide legal justification for the new policy toward the Chinese, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong signed a fifteen-article ordinance in April 1977 specifying how foreign residents or non-naturalized Chinese should be treated in Vietnam. The ordinance stipulated that the Vietnamese government had the right to decide where the foreign residents should reside and to approve their movement. In addition to making it compulsory for foreign residents to register periodically with the government, the ordinance made it illegal for foreign residents to own real estate and to engage in fishing, forestry, radio repair, driving, and printing. Finally the ordinance denied foreign residents the right to elect and to be elected.<sup>152</sup> It is obvious that the ordinance was made not only to deprive the Chinese of the special privileges they had enjoyed thus far, but also to impose new restrictions. Chinese residents were presented with three options: adopt Vietnamese citizenship and avoid the restrictions; maintain their Chinese citizenship and live with the restrictions; or move to China and escape the restrictions.

During the crisis, there were rumors among the Chinese in northern Vietnam that there would be a war between China and Vietnam, and that, unless they returned to China immediately, the Chinese in Vietnam would be punished by Chinese troops as traitors. There also was talk that China was calling the overseas Chinese back to help with the modernization program, and that the Chinese who returned from Vietnam could obtain good jobs in China.<sup>153</sup> Some Chinese residents were told, harrowingly, that if they chose to stay in Vietnam, they surely would be killed by one of four armies: the Vietnamese, the Soviet, the Cambodian, or the Chinese.<sup>154</sup> The source of the rumors is unknown. The Vietnamese government accused the Chinese embassy in Hanoi and some “bad elements” among the Chinese residents of spreading the rumors with the intention of causing trouble for Vietnam.<sup>155</sup> China countered by saying that it was the Vietnamese government that spread the rumors in order to get rid of the Chinese. There is no evidence to prove either accusation. China may have wanted to cause trouble for Vietnam; it is also true that China had adopted a new policy toward the overseas Chinese with the aim of attracting their skills and investment, but there were also reasons for China not to take the refugees from Vietnam. Many refugees were people who possessed neither capital nor technical skills, and the memory of the difficulties caused by the Chinese refugees from Indonesia and Malaysia in the previous decades was still fresh in mind. China’s decision to close the Sino-Vietnamese border to stop the flow of refugees indicates that the Chinese leaders saw the refugees more as a burden than a potential asset.

The Vietnamese government did have a strong interest in seeing Chinese residents leave the sensitive border area, but at the same time it probably did not want to lose the skilled

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<sup>151</sup> Chen K. 1987, p. 64.

<sup>152</sup> Prime Minister of Vietnam 1978.

<sup>153</sup> Porter 1980, p. 56.

<sup>154</sup> Nguyễn Y. 1978, p. 29; Nguyễn V. 1978, p. 40.

<sup>155</sup> Nguyễn Y. 1978, pp. 28–37; Thanh Hoa Department of Culture and Information, 1978, p. 17.

workers and technicians, who played an important role in the economy.<sup>156</sup> The mixed feelings of the Vietnamese government are indicated in its ambivalent policies toward Chinese residents. On one hand, the Vietnamese government provided boats and vehicles to transport the Chinese to the border area.<sup>157</sup> In some cases it forced the Chinese to go to China. On the other hand, it also took measures to stop the exodus. Some Chinese refugees who were later interviewed recalled that Vietnamese authorities had tried to persuade them not to leave Vietnam.<sup>158</sup> A French reporter testified that after the departure of 5,000 Chinese from the Haiphong and Hon Gay area, the government set up restrictions on the movement of the Chinese because “they are considered people with good skills.”<sup>159</sup> This concern was confirmed by a Japanese reporter, and also by the Vietnamese government.<sup>160</sup> It is estimated that before 1977 the Chinese made up between 15% and 17% of the miners in Vietnam, many of them highly skilled. Most workers in the porcelain and pottery factories in Quang Ninh and the fishermen on the islands of Cat Ba, Co To, and Bach Long Vi were Chinese residents. In their respective fields, their production made up 50% of the national total.<sup>161</sup>

Certain Chinese residents were the likely perpetrators of various rumors. In the late 1970s, there existed a radical group among the Chinese in northern Vietnam opposed to the Vietnamese government’s policy of assimilation. The significance of this group is indicated by criticisms it received from the North Vietnamese government-controlled Association of Chinese in Vietnam.<sup>162</sup> Members may have included those who had been persecuted for actively participating in the Cultural Revolution. If we speculate about their sentiment, we might argue that as long as China continued to have a good relationship with Vietnam, these people would have no opportunity to express their resentment about the mandate to assimilate. But when relations between China and Vietnam began to get prickly, their chance had come. The Vietnamese government once asserted that the exodus of Chinese residents of Vietnam to China had been started “by certain Chinese residents, who are spreading rumors in an attempt to stir up discord between Vietnam and China.”<sup>163</sup> Another motivation for certain Chinese residents to spread rumors was profit, i.e. Chinese residents who could make money by organizing the flight of the Chinese from Vietnam.<sup>164</sup> Yet another possibility is that the rumors were created and perpetuated simply out of fear and worry, rather than any nefarious intentions. The rumors

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156 Hood 1992, p. 145. A Japanese reporter commented that the Vietnamese government would be happy to get rid of the Chinese in Cho Lon since they refused to move to the countryside despite not being able to find jobs. However, a wholesale departure of Chinese from northern Vietnam, many of whom were skilled workers in the ports, factories and mines, would have caused serious problems for Vietnam. *Cankao Xiaoxi* 7 May 1978.

157 Nguyễn V. 1978, p. 41.

158 Porter 1980, p. 56.

159 *Cankao Xiaoxi* 14 May 1978.

160 *Cankao Xiaoxi* 12 June 1978; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam 1979, p. 61.

161 Châu 1992, p. 125.

162 Zhuang Y. 4 February 1970; *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 4 August 1973; 7 December 1973.

163 Ray 1983, p. 80.

164 Nguyễn Y. 1978, pp. 34–37.



reflected the self-assessment of members of the Chinese community, and the awkward and dangerous position as pawns between two powerful governments.

No matter who spread the rumors, the fact that so many Chinese residents believed them clearly indicated that China remained in their hearts and minds, and that many considered relocating to China the better option than moving elsewhere in Vietnam. To the Vietnamese leaders, such a sentiment revealed that Chinese residents failed the test of loyalty. The two governments agreed in the mid-1950s that they would prefer Chinese residents to take the path of natural assimilation, but ultimately they were not given enough time to travel that path. For many Chinese residents of northern Vietnam, it would take a painful journey to China to find out how Chinese – or Vietnamese – they actually were.

## VIETNAMESE POLICIES OF ASSIMILATION IN THE LARGER SOUTHEAST ASIAN CONTEXT

Chinese communities in Southeast Asia expanded greatly during the colonial period, particularly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>165</sup> Chinese in the region served as an important link in the global colonial system before the Second World War and within that system they created a relatively comfortable niche for themselves. Economically, they were an integral and productive part of the colonial system, serving as intermediaries between China and Southeast Asia and between Southeast Asians and the colonialists. Politically, they were allowed to maintain their mixed, ambiguous and divided identity and loyalty. Some saw themselves as loyal citizens of China; some had been assimilated into the indigenous societies; some chose to identify with the colonialists; some moved from one identity to another or between and among different identities. The aftermath of the Second World War marked the beginning of the end of the global colonial system and, in Southeast Asia, the rise of a new nation-state system. These developments brought about drastic economic and political changes to Chinese communities. The leaders of the newly independent nation-states in the region saw the Chinese within their borders as secondary colonialists that needed to be eliminated by either assimilation or expulsion. These new nation-states demanded absolute, unambiguous loyalty from their citizens. They were not tolerant of non-citizens or divided loyalty. Under this variant of nationalism, restricting the rights of foreigners, forcing foreigners to adopt local citizenship, denying foreigners citizenship, or even expelling them, became justifiable policies. Compared with what happened to Chinese communities in some other Southeast Asian states such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar, where they formed powerful but “foreign” minority groups, what the post-reunification Vietnamese government did to the Chinese in the late 1970s was not terribly unusual.

In North Vietnam, this process of nation-state purification was delayed because the demise of the global colonial system there led to the rise of a new global Communist system, which emphasizes the unity of fellow socialist countries. The Vietnam War and North

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<sup>165</sup> It is estimated that there were about 3 million Chinese living outside of China around 1879. The number of overseas Chinese had increased to 4 million by 1899; over 7 million by 1903; and over 10 million by 1929. Most of the overseas Chinese lived in Southeast Asia. Li C. 1937, p. 10.

Vietnam's need for Chinese aid further contributed to the delay. Although the process was postponed, it could not be avoided. As a post-colonial nation-state, it was "wrong" for Vietnam to allow the existence of a large "foreign" community within its border. That is why North Vietnam and China decided in 1955 to encourage the Chinese to naturalize. However, for over two decades, Chinese residents were allowed to maintain a kind of vague or dual identity and loyalty since, in the sweet rhetoric of socialist internationalism and friendship, it was assumed that there is no real difference between loyalty to China and loyalty to Vietnam. The Chinese residents were taught that to love Vietnam is to love China, to work for Vietnam is to work for China, and to defend Vietnam is to defend China. A Chinese resident of Vietnam wrote in 1961: "The socialist revolution has made China and Vietnam complete equal and close like brothers. Living in Vietnam is just like living in China . . . in the minds of the Chinese compatriots, the Red River and the Cuu Long River are linked up with the Yangzi River and the Yellow River."<sup>166</sup> It did not become necessary for the Chinese to make a choice between Vietnam and China until the late 1970s, when the two countries suddenly became enemies. The collapse of the international Communist system prompted the Vietnamese government to complete the process of national purification.

China had gone through a similar process of national purification after 1949. Under Mao's leadership, foreign communities were expelled and foreign enterprises were nationalized. During the Cultural Revolution, many citizens with foreign connections were persecuted, and many Chinese who had returned from foreign countries were victims of discrimination. A shared view of how to deal with foreign communities in a nation-state made it easy for China and the Southeast Asian governments to reach an agreement on the issue of dual citizenship in the 1950s. China's renunciation of dual citizenship was welcomed widely by Southeast Asian governments, because divided and mixed loyalty was deemed incompatible with the newly emerged nationalistic states. China encouraged the Chinese residents of Southeast Asian countries to accept local citizenship, but at the same time asked the indigenous governments not to force the Chinese to give up their Chinese citizenship. China also pleaded with the Chinese who chose to maintain their Chinese citizenship to respect local laws and customs and stay away from politics.<sup>167</sup> The persecution of the Chinese carried out by various governments in the region put Chinese leaders in a dilemma: while, as leaders of new China, they felt it their responsibility to protect Chinese citizens overseas, they also came to realize that what the Southeast Asian governments did to the Chinese was not very different from what the Chinese government had done to foreigners in China. If they did not believe in double standards they would have to live with these measures of assimilation and discrimination implemented by Southeast Asian countries. It is mainly because of this dilemma that during the Mao years China's reactions to the persecution of the Chinese were rather moderate gestures that entailed condemning the indigenous governments of violating bilateral agreements, taking back those Chinese who were expelled or who desired to move to

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<sup>166</sup> *Xin Yue Hua Bao*, 2 September 1961.

<sup>167</sup> In Vietnam, however, Chinese residents were encouraged to participate in political movements even before they became formal citizens of Vietnam. For example, in 1965, a high-ranking Chinese official called on overseas Chinese to participate in struggles against imperialism. See *Xin Yue Hua Bao* 15 September 1965.

China, and providing limited financial assistance. The shared belief in a “purified” nation-state rendered many harsh policies taken by Southeast Asian governments toward their Chinese communities as understandable and even acceptable.

When Ngo Dien Diem adopted the policy of forced assimilation toward the Chinese in South Vietnam in the 1950s, China condemned the policy, donated \$10,000 to aid the Chinese in need and then did nothing more. China took similar measures in the 1960s in dealing with crises involving the Chinese in Malaysia, Indonesia, and Myanmar. Post-unification Vietnamese leaders had reasons to expect similar reactions from China when in the late 1970s they started forcing the Chinese to naturalize. However, this time China’s reactions were much more severe. Initially China staged an intense propaganda campaign against Vietnam, and eventually the persecution of the Chinese became one of China’s declared reasons for launching a brief war against Vietnam. One of the reasons for China’s more explosive reactions in the late 1970s might have been the reform program just begun by Deng Xiaoping. Deng was abandoning Mao’s policy of national purification and bringing China back into the global system by inviting foreigners to China. So while Vietnam was busy “purifying” its nation-state, China was bringing previously excluded elements back into the fold. It is therefore understandable that Deng Xiaoping would see Vietnam’s policies toward the Chinese as reactionary and unacceptable.

There were other reasons for China’s unyielding responses to Vietnam in the late 1970s. Measured by the number of refugees it engendered, the scale of the crisis was unprecedented. Chinese leaders also felt that the Vietnamese government was ungrateful for China’s support during the Vietnam Wars and for the contribution of the Chinese community to the war efforts. Moreover, the crisis over the Chinese residents happened at a time when the two governments were having conflicts over other issues such as territorial disputes, China’s support for Cambodia, and Vietnam’s close relationship with the Soviet Union. Each of these conflicts aggravated one another. In other words, taken together the conflict between the two governments, and that between the Vietnamese state and the Chinese community, generated all the more hostility. This international factor helps explain why the Chinese government did not react as harshly to the persecution of Chinese residents carried out by the Khmer Rouge during the same period. In fact, the Chinese government did little if anything to stop the persecution of the Chinese in Cambodia, and China’s official media was completely silent about the tragedy. The Vietnamese government thus made a persuasive point by accusing China of adopting double standards toward Vietnam and Cambodia.<sup>168</sup> The Vietnamese leaders argued that the issue regarding Chinese residents could actually be easily solved between the two governments, and it accused the Chinese government of refusing to discuss the issue out of a desire to use it as a grievance in a campaign against Vietnam.<sup>169</sup>

If the Sino-Vietnam alliance had not collapsed in the late 1970s, the Vietnamese government likely would have been able to achieve its goals of socializing and naturalizing the Chinese in Vietnam with the help of the Chinese government, and without undue trouble. The breakdown of the alliance between the two governments forced the Chinese to take a

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168 Department of Culture and Information of Vietnam 1978, p. 5.

169 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vietnam 1978.

loyalty test at a difficult time. In previous decades, the two governments had been trying to convince Chinese residents that to identify with Vietnam was to identify with China; suddenly, the Vietnamese government wanted Chinese residents to forget China and give their complete loyalty to Vietnam. For many Chinese, this change was too abrupt to accept. Their refusal to take Vietnamese citizenship, in turn, convinced Vietnamese leaders that the Chinese residents would rather remain privileged guests, a preference that made them unwelcome in Vietnam. In reality, however, at any given time, while there were some Chinese who chose to live like spoiled guests, there also were Chinese residents who voluntarily gave up their privileges and behaved like dedicated Vietnamese patriots. During the harsh years of the war, the ambiguous identity of Chinese residents did not prevent many of them from volunteering for the army and performing other services. They were willing to offer their service then because they believed they were fighting the common enemies of both Vietnam and China. When they were forced to choose between fighting China on behalf of Vietnam, or fighting Vietnam on behalf of China, they were baffled and reluctant, and were victimized because of their confusion.

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