

***PROPAGANDIST REPRESENTATION OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN:
A COMPARATIVE STUDY***

**By Christine M. Pothier
Dept. of History
University of Ottawa**

Review of Vietnamese Studies, 2003, Volume 3, No. 1, 20 Pages

Copyright 2003 by the Author and the Review of Vietnamese Studies

ABSTRACT AND INTRODUCTION

Propaganda is the making of deliberately one-sided statements to a mass audience.¹ Communist officials have been notorious for using propaganda to encourage the participation of specific groups. In fact, women were often the targets of communist propaganda. In Vietnam, communist leader Ho Chi Minh argued: “Women make up half of society. If women are not liberated then society is not free.”² During the Vietnam War, communist officials used propaganda to convince women to join their movement. They spread propagandist representations through communication channels such as print media to communicate the desired role of women.

According to Harold Lasswell, “propaganda in newspapers can be appraised either by discovering the intentions of one of the individuals responsible for its appearance or by considering probable or possible effects on the reader.”³ In this study, we will use both methods to appraise communist propaganda in the *Vietnam Courier*. We will address the question: Who says what through what channel of communication to

¹ Harold D. Lasswell, “A Definition of Propaganda” in *Voice of the People: readings in Public Opinion and Propaganda*, Toronto: McGraw –Hill Book Company, 1967, p.320.

² Arlene Eisen, *Women and Revolution*, London: Zed Books, 1984, p.85.

³ Harold Lasswell, “A Definition of Propaganda” in *Voice of the People*, p.320.

whom, why and with what results. This paper attempts to show how representations of women communicated by the *Vietnam Courier* were desired by and beneficial to both communist officials and by women.⁴

In this study, we will compare propagandist representations of women in 1968 and 1972. This paper is divided into two parts. In the first, we will discuss propaganda in 1968 issues of the *Vietnam Courier*. In the second, we will investigate representations of women printed in 1972 issues. In both parts, we will examine what was communicated, for what reason and what were the results.

Methodology

This study is based on the *Vietnam Courier*, a newspaper founded in 1964 and supported by the Communist party. While researching issues printed in 1968 and 1972, I focused on representations of women. I looked for captions related to women and its accompanying article. While reading articles, I took note of the language used to describe women. I also examined photographs of women. While examining pictures, I took note not only of women's characteristics but also of the scene in which they were photographed. By analysing both language and visual representations, I constructed the role of women as represented by journalists and editors of the *Vietnam Courier*.

Journalists portrayed women in a way that would answer the needs of the Viet Cong. In order to determine the reasons behind such needs, I referred to secondary literature. The work of William Duiker and Karen Gottschang Turner provided the necessary information to understand the situation in Vietnam during 1968 and 1972.

⁴ This study discusses women who joined women's organisations and who were concerned with the women's question. Women who joined the resistance movement came from the South as well as the North. The author of this study does not assume that all women sought emancipation. Not all women were

Thus, by following this methodology, I was able to construct the role of women and to demonstrate how these representations suited the needs of both the Viet Cong and women. I was also able to present the motives behind these representations.

Part A: Communist Propaganda in 1968

First, it is important to note that the content printed in the *Vietnam Courier* reflected communist ideology towards women. Engels presented this opinion by stating the following: “A woman cannot be equal if she is shut out from social productive labor and restricted to private domestic labor.”⁵ According to him, if a woman is excluded from political life, she cannot develop a social and political conscience.⁶ He explained that it was to the advantage not only of communists, but also of society to engage women in political life.⁷ Downtrodden and backward women would only ruin the common cause.⁸

Lenin also presented communist opinion towards women when he argued:

“If we do not draw women into public activity, into the militia, into political life, if we do not tear women away from the deadening atmosphere of household and kitchen then it is impossible to secure real freedom. By drawing women into process of production, it prepares their way for emancipation”⁹

Lenin concluded “Not a single great movement of the oppressed in the history of mankind has been able to do without the participation of working women.”¹⁰

concerned with the women’s cause. Thus, they did not all desire or benefit from propagandist representations.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.12.

⁶ Denis Roch, *Les Marxistes et l’émancipation de la femme*, Montréal :PSI, 1976, p.11.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.26.

⁸ *Women and Communism: Selections from the Writing of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin*, p.64.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.27.

¹⁰ *Women and Communism: Selections from the Writing of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin*, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973, p.44

Vietnamese communists certainly agreed with this point of view. They recognized women's ability to actively participate in the resistance movement and to protect the nation. In a poem written for the journal *Viet Nam Doc Lap*, Ho Chi Minh stated:

“Vietnamese women forever have sacrificed themselves for our country and our race (...) Many times struggled courageously, hearts of gold, courage of iron, who could do less? (...) Defeat the French, defeat the Japanese, save people and homes, women from young to old.”¹¹

Ho Chi Minh targeted specific social groups and represented their interests because he believed in recruiting members at the base level.¹² In the case of women, he addressed the issue of emancipation and spoke out on the status of Vietnamese women. In doing so, he convinced many to join his movement. It must be understood that he did this to benefit the communist cause rather than to address women's issues.

In order to incite women to join the resistance movement, Vietnamese communists used the press as a channel for propaganda. Editors and journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* offered representations of communist officials' dream girl. By doing so, the newspaper communicated the desired role of women. In 1968, journalists and editors of the *Vietnam Courier* represented women as warriors by printing photographs of military women. For example, a June 1968 issue included a picture of “young girl militia unit shooting at US plane.”¹³ In this photo, four young girls stood smiling behind weapons.¹⁴ An August 1968 issue included a photo with the caption “PLAF all women mortar unit”.¹⁵ In this picture, three young women, dressed in military clothes, stood

¹¹ William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, p.259.

¹² *Ibid.* Lenin devised this technique.

¹³ *Vietnam Courier*, June 3rd, 1968, no.167, p.5.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Vietnam Courier*, August 12, 1968, no.177, p.7.

gazing into the distance.¹⁶ Editors wanted the viewer of these images to perceive military women as young, strong and brave.

“The official stories (of South Vietnamese women) were produced after 1966 to show the world and other Vietnamese women that a total people’s war meant women should fight.”¹⁷ In 1968, journalists printed more stories than photographs of women. In these, journalists cast women in the role of superpatriotic warriors. For example, in “A Girl with a Rifle”, journalists reported that Viet Cong officials had selected a seventeen-year-old militia girl and sent her to the front as a sniper.¹⁸ This girl had dreamt her whole life of one-day holding a rifle and joining the others in battle.¹⁹ When the Viet Cong gave her a rifle, it “filled her with the same joy as singing and skipping used to in her childhood.”²⁰ Journalists also portrayed young girls as the protectors of women and children. In “A Young Woman Worker’s Dream”, journalists presented a young woman who kept watch during the night so that the innocent could sleep in peace.²¹ Journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* also wrote stories about women who accomplished incredible feats. The seventeen-year-old sniper killed nineteen enemy troops in three days.²² Nineteen-year-old Nguyen Thi Xuan shot down a jet with twenty bullets.²³ A group of women, in one day, shot down twelve jets.²⁴ By printing such stories, journalists presented young women as accomplished and efficient warriors. Journalists also wanted readers of these articles to get the sense that the Viet Cong were moving closer to victory due to women’s

¹⁶ *Vietnam Courier*, August 12, 1968, no.177, p.7.

¹⁷ Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam*, Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Inc., 1998, p.35.

¹⁸ “A Girl with a Rifle” in *Vietnam Courier*, May 6th 1968, no.163, p.8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ “A Young Woman Worker’s Dream” in *Vietnam Courier*, August 19, no.178, p.3.

²² “A Girl with a Rifle” in *Vietnam Courier*, May 6th 1968, no.163, p.8.

²³ “Vietnamese Women in the Face of Aggression” in *Vietnam Courier*, March 4th, 1968, no 154, p.6.

efforts. In sum, they wrote stories to inspire women to emulate the female soldier's courage in battle.²⁵

In 1968, journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* illustrated the saying “a hammer in one hand, a rifle in the other”.²⁶ They represented women not only as warriors but also as workers who, through employment, contributed directly to the war effort. In “A Young Woman Worker's Dream”, journalists described a young country girl who grew up seeing the “joy of workers who lived a collective life, the spectacle full of vigorous beauty of young girls manning machines.”²⁷ In her late teens, she became an apprentice in an engineer plant. Her employer advised her: “You can do nothing good without high class consciousness and adequate knowledge backed by practice”.²⁸ Taking his advice, she worked hard and soon became a cadre as well as an engineer.²⁹ Journalists reported that this skilled worker never missed a drill or a patrol.³⁰ In “An Arsenal Girl Mechanic”, journalists described a young girl who had dreamt of becoming a mechanic.³¹ At the age of seventeen, she became an engineer and designed weapons. Believing in the importance of her work, she asked resistance soldiers to “Write to (her) whenever (they) brought down an enemy aircraft.”³² According to journalists, she had, before long, a thick file of letters.³³ Finally, journalists explained that these young women worked hard, forgot to eat and rest and were quickly promoted in their military and professional ranks.³⁴ Again,

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women Must Fight*, p.21.

²⁶ “Mother Nhat's Three-Hundred Anti-US Dongs” in *Vietnam Courier*, August 19, no.178, p.3.

²⁷ “A Young Woman Worker's Dream” in *Vietnam Courier*, August 19, 1968, no.178, p.3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ “An Arsenal Girl Mechanic” *Vietnam Courier*, April 29th, 1968, no.162, p.5.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

journalists wanted the reader to believe that women, in light of their accomplishments, were essential to the success of the resistance movement.

The resistance movement relied on the participation of all, regardless of age. For instance, journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* targeted children. In May 1968, they reported on little Sau, who decided to save a woman agitator because her mother had told her that all resistance cadres must be protected.³⁵ She thought up a deceitful plan to free the agitator from the American soldiers. Journalists also wrote stories of elderly women who contributed to the Viet Cong's efforts. In "Mother Muc", a seventy-year-old woman plaited straw hats and breastplates to provide shelter to soldiers from bomb splinters. In two years, she made fifteen hundred hats and breastplates.³⁶ According to journalists, her hats protected gunners from fatal wounds. In March 1968, journalists reported on an elderly woman who guided the soldiers to an American colonel.³⁷ According to the story, she bravely yelled to him: "Get out or I'll bash your head".³⁸ She then assisted the soldiers in dragging him out of his hiding place.³⁹ Finally, in "Mother Nhat's Three-Hundred Anti-US Dongs", journalists wrote about a woman who deposited ten cents into a "Defeat the Yanks" box every time resistance soldiers shot down a plane.⁴⁰ They reported that this woman sheltered resistance cadres. Furthermore, she anxiously awaited her son's admission in the Viet Cong forces, despite having already lost a son.⁴¹ Thus, journalists conveyed the message that women of all ages should participate in the resistance movement.

³⁵ "A Mother and her Chance Daughter" in *Vietnam Courier*, May 27th 1968, no.166, p.5.

³⁶ "Mother Muc" in *Vietnam Courier*, April 22, 1968, no.161, p.3.

³⁷ "Brave Mother of Hue" in *Vietnam Courier*, March 4th 1968, no.X, p.6.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Vietnam Courier*, August 19, 1968, no.178, p.3.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* printed propaganda aimed at mothers. In “A Combatant Mother”, journalists wrote about a young woman who, a few days after giving birth, could not lie idle while her neighbors helped resistance soldiers. She stated: “I can’t hold a rifle but there are other ways to fight them.”⁴² Despite her fatigue, she led the soldiers to the enemy’s hiding place. Thanks to her, resistance cadres either killed or captured fifty of them.⁴³ Journalists conveyed the message that, despite family responsibilities, women had the duty of helping the Viet Cong.

In sum, journalists wrote stories about women who wanted to fight side by side with their husbands, brothers and sons.⁴⁴ They wrote to encourage women, young and old, to join the resistance movement if not as soldiers, then as workers. Through the use of propaganda, journalists cast women in the role desired by communist officials.

Due to circumstances in Vietnam, communists were in need of soldiers and relied on the participation of both sexes. In 1968, Ho Chi Minh had planned the Tet Offensive. He intended to have the PLAF units attack the countryside while people organized general uprisings in major cities. He hoped this offensive would destabilize the South, force the United States to negotiate and ultimately cause the collapse of the Saigon regime.⁴⁵ Unfortunately, the Tet Offensive was costly. Though the Viet Cong were highly effective, they suffered horrendous casualties, sometimes amounting to total destruction.⁴⁶ According to William Duiker, the Viet Cong suffered an estimated amount of thirty thousand casualties.⁴⁷ Moreover, the Vietnamese people saw President Johnson’s unwillingness to negotiate and thus lost hope in a victory. Consequently, both morale and

⁴² “A Combatant Mother” in *Vietnam Courier*, April 8th, 1968, n.159, p.5.

⁴³ *Vietnam Courier*, April 8th 1968, no.159, p.5.

⁴⁴ “Vietnamese Women in Face of American Aggression” in *Vietnam Courier*, March 4, 1968, no.154, p.6.

⁴⁵ William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, p.557

recruitment were down while deserters were on the rise.⁴⁸ Ho Chi Minh tried to convince his people that “They (could not) weaken the heroic Vietnamese people’s iron will and determination to oppose the United States for national salvation.”⁴⁹ Clearly, the resistance movement needed soldiers. Viet Cong officials fully realized that “Without the participation of the masses of women in the revolutionary struggle, the revolution (would) never succeed.”⁵⁰ They needed women to emulate those included in the *Vietnam Courier*. They needed them to adopt the role represented in the paper. Thus, Viet Cong forces benefited from propaganda spread by the journalists and editors of the *Vietnam Courier*.

The goal of this paper is to show that propaganda included in the *Vietnam Courier* not only suited the needs of communists but also those of women. In 1968, women took advantage of two opportunities to step up and prove themselves to society. Until then, women were too often brushed aside and pushed into the background. Their tasks consisted of preparing food for soldiers, taking care of the family and awaiting their men’s return. Vietnam’s traditional society prevented them from stepping to the forefront and adopting an active role. In 1968, communist officials offered them opportunities to step up and become active participants. Women took the opportunities fully realizing that if they could prove they were accomplished soldiers, they could improve their status in society. They could gain recognition and secure a better future.

⁴⁶ Sandra C. Taylor. *Vietnamese Women at War*. P.84

⁴⁷ William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, New York: Hyperion, 2000, p.558.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.557.

⁴⁹ Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women must Fight*, p.34.

⁵⁰ Susan Allen, *Women in Vietnam*, p.50.

“A rosy-cheeked woman, here I am fighting side by side with you men. The prison is my school, the sword is my child, the gun is my husband.”⁵¹ Propaganda in the *Vietnam Courier* certainly had an effect on female readers. Many women responded to the propaganda and joined the resistance movement. More importantly, they accomplished great deeds. First, their achievements during the Tet offensive were numerous.⁵² According to Karen Gottschang Turner, women smuggled arms into the city and recruited people to support the revolution.⁵³ They helped construct underground chambers, which provided effective hiding places for the Viet Cong.⁵⁴ They nursed the injured and buried the dead.⁵⁵ They fought the enemy by firing small arms, throwing grenades as well as by wiring and detonating mines.⁵⁶ Women were also effective in organizing spy rings.⁵⁷ According to certain accounts, women were responsible for killing “hundreds of American aggressors.”⁵⁸ Clearly, their participation during the Tet Offensive was invaluable and many gained recognition for their activities.⁵⁹

Secondly, in 1968, the United States concentrated their efforts on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Given the strategic use of this route, the Viet Cong needed volunteers to protect it. Through the use of propaganda, communists managed to recruit members. According to Karen Gottschang Turner, young volunteers kept open 2 195km of strategic roads and guarded 2 500 key points.⁶⁰ They built six airstrips, neutralized tens of thousands of bombs, transported tens of thousands of kilograms of cargo, weapons and

⁵¹ Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women Must Fight*, p.19.

⁵² Sandra C. Taylor. *Vietnamese Women at War*, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999, p.84.

⁵³ Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women must Fight*, p.84.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p.87.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.86.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

food and shot down fifteen planes.⁶¹ According to her research, of the 170 000 youth who worked on the trail between 1965 and 1975, seventy to eighty percent were women.⁶² Between 1965 and 1968, seventy thousand women worked on the trail.⁶³ In sum, women responded to propaganda and took advantage of certain opportunities. By protecting the Ho Chi Minh Trail, women gained recognition not only as accomplished soldiers, but also as protectors of their nation.

Thus, journalists and editors of the *Vietnam Courier* represented women not only as warriors, but also as workers who, through employment, contributed directly to the war effort. Through the use of propagandist stories, the journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* cast women in the role sought by Viet Cong officials. Vietnamese communists agreed with Ho Chi Minh that the success of their movement relied on the participation of both sexes. These stories motivated women to answer to the call for soldiers. While some participated in the Tet Offensive, others served to replenish communist forces after the event. As for the Ho Chi Minh Trail, women were largely responsible for its protection. Clearly, propaganda encouraged women to join the resistance movement. As a result, they worked in first aid and undertook order-keeping tasks. They helped engineer units build combat positions. They carried ammunition and learnt to handle guns so that they could replace gunners.⁶⁴ They obviously became highly involved in the defence of their country and gained a certain amount of recognition. Their activities helped improve the status of women in Vietnamese society.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.35.

⁶¹ *Ibid*.

⁶² *Ibid*, p.21.

⁶³ *Ibid*, p.34. Military historian Dung claimed that the total amount of women in the regular army, the militia, the local force and the professional teams was 1.5 million.

Part B: Communist Propaganda in 1972.

By 1972, editors and journalists of the *Vietnam Courier* altered the form and content of propaganda aimed at women. Journalists and editors communicated a different role for women to adopt through the use of visual representations. They undoubtedly believed that “A pictured page in a newspaper will be read by a third more adults than anything on the front page.”⁶⁵ After all, “It is easier for most people to catch the point of a photograph and hence visual media are understood by and can be employed for the benefit of those whose educational level or reading ability is low.”⁶⁶

First, editors included photographs of women working in agricultural cooperatives, factories and production units. For example, accompanying the article, “A Supply and marketing Shop in Mountainous Area”, was a photograph of three young girls preparing food.⁶⁷ The article “Progress in Animal Husbandry” included a picture of two young girls feeding a pig.⁶⁸ Rather than including photographs of women building weapons or loading guns, editors presented them as employees of factories and cooperatives. The *Vietnam Courier* put forth the image of women helping to reconstruct the country’s economy. Rather than contributing directly to the war effort, they were shown as participants of Vietnam’s economic life.

Editors also presented women as soldiers. 1972 issues of the *Vietnam Courier* included photographs with captions such as “South Vietnamese PLAF women Fighters”⁶⁹, “PLAF artillery women attacking Hiep Due Post”⁷⁰ and “A self-defense Unit

⁶⁴ *Vietnam Courier*, March 4, 1968, n.154, , p.6.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Leonard W. Doob. *Public Opinion and Propaganda*. p.446.

⁶⁷ *Vietnam Courier*, March 13 1972, no.367, p.2.

⁶⁸ *Vietnam Courier*, January 24th, 1972, no.357, p3.

⁶⁹ *Vietnam Courier*, March 27th 1972, no.366, p.1.

⁷⁰ *Vietnam Courier*, October 1972, n.5, p.5.

of Hanoian Militiamen”.⁷¹ In these, young girls, dressed in military clothes, were photographed loading guns and examining charts. Photos were often situated on the front page and stood alone. If an article did accompany a photo, it was gender neutral. Journalists used terms such as “soldiers” and “workers” without specifying the sex to describe military activities. Thus, journalists conveyed the message that soldiers accomplish great deeds, regardless of their gender.

Moreover, editors included pictures in which both military men and women were photographed. For example, in “Guerrillas at Village Quang Tri Province countering a Sweep”, five men and a woman were holding weapons.⁷² In “On Patrol”, men and women, dressed in military clothes, were walking on the beach.⁷³ The photo “A Patrol Unit of Thanh Hoa People’s Armed Forces” presented a similar scene. Men and women were walking on a beach while a group of men were examining a plane in the background.⁷⁴ Though editors of the *Vietnam Courier* represented women as soldiers, they showed them working alongside men.

Not only did men and women contribute to the war effort, but they also participated in demonstrations against the puppet regime. Photographs with captions such as “Small Traders at Phu Cuong Market Demonstrating Against Thieu’s Hampering their activities”⁷⁵ and “Sit-in Staged by Saigonese Students Against Thieu’s Repression”⁷⁶ presented men and women protesting in the streets. Through the use of such images, editors showed women had developed a political consciousness. They constructed the image of women as active participants in political life.

⁷¹ *Vietnam Courier*, January 3, 1972, no.354, p.1.

⁷² *Vietnam Courier*, February 21, 1972, no.361, p.1.

⁷³ *Vietnam Courier*, June 1972, no.1, p.21.

⁷⁴ *Vietnam Courier*, February 28th, 1972, no.362, p.1.

In sum, since 1968, journalists and editors of the *Vietnam Courier* altered the form and content of propaganda to expand women's role beyond direct participation in the war effort. The spread of propaganda influenced women to become employees, soldiers and political activists. In 1972, editors presented a different role for women, one that suited the changing needs of the Viet Cong.

By 1972, peace talks were underway and the end of the war was in sight.⁷⁷ Thus, it was time for leaders to begin planning the reconstruction of the country. Evidently, these plans included economic restructuring. As a result, workers were needed in factories and cooperatives. By representing women as workers, the editors of the *Vietnam Courier* helped communists build a solid workforce and move ahead with their plans.

In 1972, while world leaders were negotiating peace, Nixon was re-elected as president.⁷⁸ The Vietnamese people realized peace was not within arms reach. Their assessment and response to the Paris Peace Talks was as follows: "At the Paris meeting, the United States side was very obstinate. In America, the race for presidential election was in full swing. Nixon, the aggressive imperialist who replaced Johnson, again won the election."⁷⁹ Moreover, the United States ordered another bombing campaign in the North again, which forced the Viet Cong to recruit volunteers.⁸⁰ Thus, the image of female warriors remained useful to communists. It motivated women to join the communists' fight against the Americans and assure victory.

As in 1968, propaganda put forth by the *Vietnam Courier* helped women address their cause. Journalists and editors made a critical point in photographing men and

⁷⁵ *Vietnam Courier*, April 3rd, 1972, np.367, p.5.

⁷⁶ *Vietnam Courier*, January 24th, 1972, n.357, p.8.

⁷⁷ Karen Gottschang Turner, *Even the Women Must Fight*, p.X

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

women and in writing gender-neutral articles. By targeting both sexes with their propaganda, they sent the message that all must participate in the emancipation of women. They made sure both sexes were exposed to the photos' underlying message: Women were useful participants not only in the nation's economic and political life, but also in the nation's defense. Obviously, contempt for women was deep-rooted. However, propaganda printed in the *Vietnam Courier* served to improve the status of women.

“Women (...) who went into battle in 1970s admired the pioneering women who went out in 1966 through 1968, into the fiercest fighting.”⁸¹ The experiences of all women involved in the resistance movement showed that “these were no Rosie the Riveter who stayed home, hoped for peace and gained new skills doing men's work while the men went off to take care of the dirty business of war.”⁸² The representation of women as workers in factories and cooperatives helped them secure a future. Once the fighting had ceased, most had no intention of returning to the confines of their home. Realizing the end of the war was in sight, they wanted to secure their position in the working world. Moreover, photos of women protesting in the streets sent the message that women were participants in political life. Once leaders declared peace, many intended to continue actively participating in the nation's political affairs.

In sum, photographs printed in 1972 motivated women to become participants in the country's political and economic life. They also encouraged women to continue fighting because victory was in sight. Women responded to propagandist images with the goal of securing a position in social and economic life. They felt that doing so would

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.34.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p.XI.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.122

⁸² *Ibid*, p.21

prevent them from having to return to the confines of their homes once peace was declared.⁸³ In sum, women had proved their worth throughout past decades. They had no intention of backtracking and reducing their status once Americans left Vietnam's soil.

Propaganda spread by journalists and editors of the *Vietnam Courier* differed in form and content between 1968 and 1972. In 1968, journalists and editors wrote stories which presented women as superpatriotic warriors and workers. They did so because communist officials needed women to adopt this role. Due to high casualty rates suffered during the Tet Offensive and the increased American bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail, Viet Cong forces were in dire need of soldiers. Women took advantage of these two opportunities to prove their worth as participants in the resistance movement. In 1972, journalists and editors printed photographs of female employees in factories and cooperatives. They were also presented as soldiers and political activists. These depictions suited the needs of communist leaders. In 1972, peace talks were underway and Vietnamese leaders were preparing for victory. In order to reconstruct the country, they needed workers to promote the economy. At the same time, Nixon began bombing campaigns in the North, which led to a call for soldiers. Women again responded to this call. Evidently, propagandist representations of women served both communists and women concerned with the issue of emancipation. In sum, in defending their fatherland, women defend their right to a fully developed life.⁸⁴

⁸³ I must stress that not all women felt this way. Many looked forward to resuming their old life once the war stopped.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

“One must intend to use one’s words to change the world. Otherwise, why utter them?”⁸⁵ Propaganda is a powerful tool that has been used time and time again to control public opinion. The *Vietnam Courier* is a perfect example of a communication channel for communist propaganda. In this case, journalists and editors indirectly helped improve the status of Vietnamese women. This said, women did not reach equality or gain sufficient recognition. Ho Chi Minh was right when he stated that contempt for women was deep-rooted.⁸⁶ Propaganda undoubtedly helped women gain ground during the Vietnam War, as it had during the anti-colonial movement. However, women were far from standing on equal footing with men.

⁸⁵ Quote by Liang Qichao. Christina Gilmartin, *Engendering the Chinese Revolution*, p.37

⁸⁶ William Duiker, *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, p.557.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

- “A Combatant Mother” in *Vietnam Courier*, April 8, 1968, no.159, p.5.
- “A Girl with a Rifle” in *Vietnam Courier*, May 6 1968, no.163, p.8.
- “A Mother and her Chance Daughter” in *Vietnam Courier*, May 27 1968, no.166, p.5.
- “A Woman Pioneer of North Western Land” in *Vietnam Courier*, June 17 1968, no.169, p.3.
- “A Young Woman Worker’s Dream” in *Vietnam Courier*, August 19 1968, no.178, p.3.
- “An Arsenal Girl Mechanic” in *Vietnam Courier*, April 29 1968, no.162, p.5.
- “Brave Mother of Hue” in *Vietnam Courier*, March 4, 1968, no.154, p.6.
- “Mother Muc” in *Vietnam Courier*, April 22, 1968, no.161, p.3.
- “Mother Nhat’s 300 Anti-US Dongs” in *Vietnam Courier*, August 19 1968, no.178, p.3.
- “Rice for the Front” in *Vietnam Courier*, April 17 1972, no.369, p.7.
- “Son My Mother’s Call for Vengeance” in *Vietnam Courier*, May 27 1968, no.166, p.4.
- “South Vietnam Woman Leader Awarded Lenin Peace Prize” in *Vietnam Courier*, May 13 1968, no.164, p.4.
- Vietnam Courier*, April 3 1972, no.367, p.5.
- Vietnam Courier*, August 12 1968, no.177, p.7.
- Vietnam Courier*, February 21 1972, no.361, p.1.
- Vietnam Courier*, February 28 1972, no.362, p.1.
- Vietnam Courier*, January 3 1972, no.354, p.1.
- Vietnam Courier*, January 24 1972, no.357, pp.3-7.
- Vietnam Courier*, June 3 1968, no.167, p.5.
- Vietnam Courier*, June 1972, no.1, p.21.
- Vietnam Courier*, March 6 1972, no.363, pp.4-5.
- Vietnam Courier*, March 20 1972, no.365, p.3.

Vietnam Courier, March 27 1972, no.366, pp.1-3.

Vietnam Courier, March 13 1972, no.367, pp.1-2.

Vietnam Courier, October 1972, no.5, p.5.

“Vietnamese Women in the Face of American Aggression” in *Vietnam Courier*, March 4, 1968, no.154, p.6.

“Young Girl from Saigon” in *Vietnam Courier*, July 29 1968, no.175, p.5.

Secondary Sources

Allen, Susan. *Women in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Swedish Institute of Development Authority, 1996.

Christenson, Reo Millard. *Voice of the People: Readings in Public Opinion and Propaganda*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1967, 632p.

Doob, Leonard William. *Public Opinion and Propaganda*. New York: H. Holt, 1956, 600p.

Duiker, William J. *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*. New York: Hyperion, 2000, p.695.

Elliott, Duong Van Mai. *The Sacred Willow: Four Generations in the Life of a Vietnamese Family*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 506p.

Eisen, Arlene. *Women and Revolution in Vietnam*. London: Zed Books, 1984, 294p.

Gilmartin, Christina Kelly. *Engendering the Chinese Revolution: Radical Women Communist Politics and Mass Movements in 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, 303p.

Lasswell, Harold. “A Definition of Propaganda” in *Voice of the People: Readings in Public Opinion and Propaganda*, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Books Company, 1967, pp.320-321.

Le Thi Nham Tuyet. “Images of Vietnam in Mass Media” in *Some Research on Gender in Development II*, Hanoi: CGFED, 1996.

McHale, Shawn. “Printing and Power: Vietnamese Debates over Women’s Place in Society 1918-1934” in *Essays into Vietnamese Past*. Cornell, 1995.

Nguyen Huu Tan. *La femme vietnamienne d’autrefois à travers les chansons populaires*, Bruxelles : Thanh-Long, 1979, 118p.

- Roch, Denis. *Les Marxistes and l'émancipation de la femme*, Montréal : PSI, 1976, 47p.
- Women and Communism: Selections from the Writing of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973, 104p.
- Taylor, Sandra C. *Vietnamese Women at War*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999, 170p.
- Truong Buu Lam. *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention*. Yale University Southeast Asian Studies, 1967, 151p.
- Turner, Karen Gottschang and Phan Thanh Hao. *Even the Women must Fight: Memories of War from North Vietnam*. Toronto: John Wiley and Sons Inc. 1998, 224p.