

# Academic Dependency Theory and the Politics of Agency in Area Studies: The Case of Anglophone Vietnamese Studies from the 1960s to the 2010s

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## Abstract

Academic dependency theory argues that scholars of developing countries uncritically imitate Western academia. Anglophone Vietnamese studies presents a puzzle: many scholars, particularly historians, follow the research frameworks developed in Vietnam and emphasize Vietnam's agency since the field emerged in the 1960s. To explain, this essay conducts content and citation analyses of 25 key texts on history of Vietnam. The findings show that they are influenced by Vietnamese official historiography in the following ways. First, they adopt Vietnam's "nation to nation" framework and essentialize China into a Confucian Other in dealing with the asymmetrical dimension between the two societies. Second, while their works utilize sources in Literary Sinitic, they seem to rely on modern Vietnamese translations and reinterpretations rather than on original primary sources. Third, the scholars are more attentive to Chinese authors' ethnocentrism than to their Vietnamese counterparts, even though ethnocentrism is inherent in both. By following Vietnam's nationalistic historiography and emphasizing Vietnam's agency, Anglophone scholars are wittingly or unwittingly involved in the power struggles between the United States and China, a current hegemon and a historical one that has been rising rapidly in the twenty-first century.

## INTRODUCTION: ANGLOPHONE VIETNAMESE STUDIES AS A PUZZLE

For the theory of academic dependency, the development of Vietnamese studies in Anglophone world presents a puzzle. Theorists of academic dependency argue that through the mechanism of the "captivated mind," scholars in the developing countries tend to uncritically accept Western representation of their own societies and imitate the scientific activities of their Western counterparts, who are seen as more "prestigious" and "credible" (Alatas, 1977, 2004). Yet, Vietnamese studies in Anglophone academia seem to have evolved in a way that contradicts what the theory of academic dependency may expect: rather than theorizing Vietnam's "raw materials"

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without adopting local perspectives, Anglophone scholars in the United States, the United Kingdoms, Canada, and Australia not only emphasized local agency, but also drew on the ideas, problem setting, and research agendas supplied by their Vietnamese peers. Only in the twenty-first century is there a revisionist scholar who challenges Vietnam's claims to agency manifested in the supposed persistent resistance against China (Kelley, 2005), thanks to the influence of modernist theorists of nationalism such as Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 2006) and Eric Hobsbawm (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983). It seems that the field of Anglophone Vietnamese studies as a whole has grown from emphasizing to contesting local agency, a direction opposite to what academic dependency theory predicts. Does Anglophone Vietnamese studies really depart from the pattern of academic dependency? If so, how can we account for this deviance?

This essay argues that the deviance is a result of the complex interactions of three factors. The first is the American War (also known as the Vietnam War, 1955–1975). The war gave birth to Vietnamese studies in the 1960s as a subfield of area studies programs, a Cold War product founded in the 1950s to fortify America's global hegemonic position as the defender of freedom, democracy, and human rights against the Communist enemies of Russia and China. The field of Vietnamese studies was born amid the widespread anti-war protests, and this led to both a shared guilt feeling toward Vietnam among Western scholars and a paradigm shift in area studies programs from the Eurocentric “western impact-local response” model to a postcolonial emphasis on local agency and perspectives (Cohen, 1984, 2003; Dirlik, 2005; Harootunian, 2000; Miyoshi & Harootunian, 2002; Said, 1978). Academic dependency theory, too, emerged out of this context, even though no scholars have yet to apply the theory to the study of Vietnam. The “impact-local” model was popular prior to the Cold War era, and it was commonly found in French colonial scholarship of Vietnam.

The second factor is Vietnam's being the only modern country that used to be one of China's administrative units from the first to the tenth century AD. I will provide historical overview later; here I would like to point to a conflict between two different research frameworks in narrating Vietnam's millennium-long history under the rule of China from 101 BCE to 978 AD: while China adopts a “center-region” framework that treats modern Vietnam—or more specifically, the Red River Delta, the heartland of Vietnam—as one of China's administrative units and tends to situate it in the context of Chinese history, Vietnam subscribes to a “nation-to-nation” framework and refuses to be reduced to a part of China (Chang, 2021). With the “nation-to-nation” framework, Vietnam insists that there is an independent nation in the Red River Delta since time immemorial, describing China as a tenacious imperialist that fails to colonize its neighbor despite its repeated attempts. The pioneers of Anglophone Vietnamese studies sympathized with Vietnam's nationalist cause and were unaware of China's stance. Even if they were, they would have sided with their Vietnamese peers and vehemently rejected China's framework. The contention about China's and Vietnam's frameworks is further compounded by the asymmetrical nature of the Sino-Vietnamese relationship, in which Vietnam tends to perceive every move China makes to be directed at Vietnam, as the latter is exposed to both more opportunities and greater risks than the former in this relationship (Womack, 2006).

Finally, the third factor is a lack of motivation to consult materials written by Chinese and Vietnamese authors in Sinitic script,<sup>1</sup> a written *lingua franca* in historical East Asia. Reading Sinitic script requires knowledge in Chinese history, and it is especially true for Literary Sinitic, a script full of historical allusions. This lack of motivation can be attributed to two interrelated reasons. One is the fact that Anglophone Vietnamese studies has been institutionalized as part of Southeast Asian program in area studies since the 1970s, and most scholarly attention has been dedicated to the American War and French colonialism, the two areas where the need for Sinitic materials seems negligible. Institutionalizing Vietnamese studies as Southeast Asian program is suitable for modern Vietnam's desire to distance itself from China, yet it renders the training in Sinitic script and Chinese history dispensable. Moreover, as part of the “New History” campaign beginning in the 1950s, Vietnam has translated many—but not all—original Sinitic materials into Romanized *quốc ngữ*. It provides an incentive to substitute Sinitic materials with the *quốc ngữ* translation. As our later discussion will demonstrate, the translation is far from being ideologically neutral, and it is possible that scholars would inherit Vietnam's perspectives when they rely on Vietnamese sources without cross-checking them with the Chinese ones.

The interaction of these three factors generates some unintended but real consequences. While many Anglophone scholars are quite alert to the ethnocentric bias in primary data produced by Chinese authors, they are not as sensitive to the very same bias exhibited by the Vietnamese ones. With some exceptions (Anderson & Whitmore, 2015; Cooke et al., 2011; Mair & Kelley, 2015), many Anglophone scholars follow Vietnam's "nation-to-nation" framework and fail to assess the effectiveness of this framework by comparing it with the Chinese "center-region" one. Furthermore, by following Vietnam's "nation-to-nation" framework for the purpose of emphasizing local agency, Anglophone scholars wittingly or unwittingly become involved in the power struggles between the United States and China, the current hegemon and a historical one that has been striving to restore its place in the world since the twenty-first century.

## A HISTORICAL REVIEW OF SINO-VIETNAMESE RELATIONSHIPS AND MODERN VIETNAMESE HISTORIOGRAPHY

Before I make arguments, it is necessary to offer a review of the long and complex Sino-Vietnamese relationships. As many Anglophone scholars have acknowledged, for Vietnam, China is not just another country; it is a crucial point of reference to define what Vietnam is, and Vietnam has been and still is deeply impacted by China in almost every aspect of its culture and society (Monnais et al., 2012; Taylor, 2013). The earliest written records about ancient Vietnam were produced in the fifth century BCE by historians and officials from the Central Plain in the Yellow River Basin, the heartland of Chinese civilization. Vietnam as a society was born out of the millennia-long, multi-faceted interactions with its northern neighbor. It first appeared in human history as a remote and "uncivilized" land before becoming China's southernmost administrative unit from the first century BCE to the tenth century AD. Due to limited administrative capacity and geographical distance that was common in pre-modern empires (Mann, 1984), China exercised a policy of "loose control" in Vietnam through the local Sino-Vietnamese elite stratum. Tensions between the local elite and the Central Plain and insurgencies led by self-proclaimed kings broke out from time to time, but not until the tenth century did the local elite join the multiple competing warlords that controlled different parts of China to gain autonomy. China initiated several military campaigns in 980–81, 1075–76, 1257–58, 1284–85, and 1287–88, and a brief occupation between 1407 and 1427 to bring the breakaway region back into the fold. After the occupation was terminated by local strongmen in the early fifteenth century, China finally accepted that Vietnam was an autonomous kingdom. Thus far, Vietnam is still the only former Chinese territory that has become an independent country.

As the Sino-Vietnamese diplomatic relationship stabilized, the ruling elite in the Red River Delta introduced the Chinese model of governance and expanded southwardly first by extinguishing the Champa kingdom in modern central Vietnam and then by colonizing the area of modern Ho Chi Minh City (i.e., Saigon) with the assistance of southern Chinese migrants. China's suzerainty lasted until France colonized Vietnam in the late nineteenth century. During the American War, China invested in its "communist comrade" with personnel and weapons despite being snared in the tragedies of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution (Li, 2019, 2020), and Vietnam at the same time sided with Russia in the Sino-Russia conflicts over the interpretations of Marxism and attitudes toward the West. In 1979, shortly after the formal end of the American War, Vietnam invaded Cambodia to remove the deeply unpopular Pol Pot regime, which was backed by China. To retaliate, China initiated the Sino-Vietnamese War at the borderlands, and ethnic Chinese in Vietnam were expelled by the Vietnamese government as a result. A year before the border war, China began its capitalist reform to create "socialism with Chinese characters," and Vietnam followed suit in 1986. In the twenty-first century, a growing China with its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative puts ASEAN countries in a simultaneously advantageous and awkward position, as they have become increasingly economically dependent on China while being sandwiched between the two global superpowers of America and China. With Vietnam, things are far more complex: Vietnam's economic growth has relied on China to

a significant extent, yet both countries have been the most adamant in their claims to sovereignty over the disputed Paracel Islands and Spratly Islands in the South China Sea.

Understandably, how to remember China and its long period of rule is a highly politically charged question in the modern era of nationalism, which demands the protection of a unique nation by a sovereign state (Gellner, 1983) where the ruler and the ruled must hail from the same ethnic background (Wimmer, 2013). To deal with this thorny issue, as well as to mobilize people for the war, historians in Hanoi started a "New History" campaign in the 1950s to create a glorious past for Vietnam that is longer than that of China (Pelley, 2002). Out of this campaign emerged the "nation-to-nation" framework and Vietnam's official historiography that features a resistance narrative, in which China's rule is defined as an equivalent to modern imperialist colonization, and Chinese influence as forced assimilation, that is, Sinicization.

For the New History campaign, in addition to the question of how to remember the long history of Chinese rule, the biggest challenge that Vietnamese historians faced was the quality and quantity of available historical materials. As a Southeast Asian country, Vietnam possesses abundant textual materials; compared to East Asian societies such as China, Japan, and Korea, however, Vietnamese materials are comparatively scarce in quantity and archaic in quality. For instance, Vietnam began to imitate China in producing dynastic chronicles in the thirteenth century,<sup>2</sup> more than a millennium after China's foundational text, *Records of the Grand Historian* (Shi Ji) that dates to around 94 BCE. These historical materials are often products of Vietnamese Confucian rewriting and embellishment of the records about Vietnam that scattered in Chinese primary sources, with the addition of local legends and myths. As such, these materials are layered with Chinese allusions and history, Vietnamese history, Confucian ideology, information about the local power struggles, and sprinkled with many fictional elements. To accomplish the task of creating a new and glorious history, Hanoi-based historians translated the primary materials in Literary Sinitic into the Romanized *quốc ngữ* script and added folk stories and folk sayings that historians collected/created in the twentieth century.

As the above review indicates, the relationship between China and Vietnam is enormously complex, and defining the nature of the interactions is highly contentious, so much so that some Western scholars insist that China's occupation of Vietnam amounted to no less than modern imperialism (Wade, 2005, 2015), and this insistence certainly would be welcomed by modern Vietnamese people. Debating the nature of Chinese occupation is beyond the scope of this essay, but the emergence of this line of argument to some extent serves to illustrate why evaluating the roles China plays in the shaping of Vietnam is so critical in emphasizing Vietnam's agency for Anglophone Vietnamese studies.

## DATA AND METHOD

To make the arguments, I collect scholarly works on Vietnam to examine two things: the depiction of China's roles vis-à-vis Vietnam in Anglophone scholars' arguments; the materials the scholars drew on to construct their narratives and arguments, especially the languages in which the materials were written. Generally, scholarly works appear in the forms of book chapters in edited volumes, monographs, and journal articles. Journal articles would make the most ideal samples, as they not only provide the most updated findings in the field, but they also enable the use of the now very popular VOS viewer software tool to produce bibliometrics, which shows the interrelationships of the publications in the field. Unfortunately, the field is relatively peripheral, and before *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* (JVS) began to publish in 2006 by University of California, Berkeley, articles on Vietnam scattered in edited volumes and area studies journals about either Southeast Asia or Asia.<sup>3</sup> As such, the articles published by JVS would not be enough for VOS viewer software to produce visualized data, and to collect those that scattered in the venues other than JVS would be too time-consuming. Therefore, for citation analysis, I skip essays on Vietnam in Southeast Asian studies works and instead choose monographs and edited volumes that are dedicated to one of the following three topics. The first is pre-modern Vietnamese culture and history, where the

primary materials are mostly in Literary Sinitic with occasional appearance of *Nôm*, a demotic script using Sinitic to represent Vietnamese sounds. The second is Sino-Vietnamese relationships, and the third is traditional elites such as Confucian scholars and monarchs, who wrote and read in Literary Sinitic. These works include general history and studies on events, figures, areas, peoples during some particular time periods.

I choose 25 scholarly books as the sample, and they include monographs and edited volumes. The Table 1 below lists chronologically the information of the name of the authors/editors, titles, years of publication, and publishers of these 25 books. Of these books, 22 are monographs, and three edited volumes are marked with “\*” before their titles. The ethnicity of the authors/editors does not influence my selection, but it turns out that with one exception (Choi Byung Wook from South Korea), all the other scholars are based in the Anglophone world. It should be noted that *Sources to Vietnamese Tradition* (2012) edited by George E. Dutton, Jayne S. Werner, and John K. Whitmore and Christopher Goscha's acclaimed *The Penguin History of Modern Vietnam* (2016) are not included, as the former is an encyclopedia and pre-modern era is not the major concern of the latter.

I conduct both qualitative and quantitative analysis with these books. Qualitatively, I survey the main arguments of these books to see how the authors define and depict China's roles in the formation of Vietnam. This information can be gathered from the preface, introduction, and conclusion sections. Quantitatively, I create a dataset of the materials the scholars used to construct their arguments. I convert bibliographic information into excel files, and I code the citations according to language differences. I have six different language categories: English (E), French (F), Vietnamese (V), Sinitic (S), Japanese (J), and others (O). Sources in English, Vietnamese, and Sinitic are self-explanatory; for French, France has produced rich scholarship on Vietnam since the colonial era. Japanese scholars began to research Vietnam in the first half of the twentieth century when Japan was promoting its “Great East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.” As the American War erupted, they looked at Vietnam as an “ideal social model” and their research on Vietnam took off (Shimōjō, 2021). Languages other than these five languages are all grouped in the category of “others.”

The challenge of building a bibliographic dataset lies in style difference. The Table 2 below lists five different styles that are found among the samples. The most common style is a combination of notes to pages and bibliography (12/25). Except the last format, the rest four styles show both the works the scholars used and how many times a particular work was cited. Due to resource constraints, I use only the information recorded in the bibliography section whenever possible, that is, the 19 works listed in the first, third, and fifth columns in the Table 2. As a result, the dataset contains both repeated citations from the six works listed in the second and fourth columns in the table and those that only appear once.

I am fully aware of the methodological problems of my citation analysis, but as I have a large number of citations, patterns still can be detected. To mitigate the shortcomings, I provide two different citation counts with and without repeated citations of two famous general history works: Keith W. Taylor's (1946–) *A History of the Vietnamese* (2013) and Ben Kiernan's (1953–) *Việt Nam: From Earliest Times to the Present* (2017). The general history works that tailor to classroom usage represent the consensus of the field, and the bibliographic data with repeated citations would make clear the different degrees of influences the materials exerted on the building of the two works' narratives.

In addition, I also take a close look at the works by Keith W. Taylor to see how he utilized materials and how his arguments evolved over time. An American veteran of the war and a leading scholar in Anglophone academic community of Vietnamese studies, Taylor is one of the few scholars who specializes in Vietnam's pre-modern history and a prolific writer.<sup>4</sup> Thus far, he has published two single-authored monographs, five edited volumes, and more than 50 articles that include research essays, pop science, and reference works, and some of his works have been translated into Vietnamese. His most notable works are two monographs: *The Birth of Vietnam* (1983), Taylor's signature work that defines Anglophone studies on Vietnamese history; *A History of the Vietnamese* (2013), an epitome of Taylor's career. Google Scholar shows that as of July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2021, these two works have been cited 555 times and 224 times, respectively. His works are not only representative but also influential in the Anglophone studies of Vietnam, and an examination of his works could provide a deeper understanding of the nature and origins of the puzzle Anglophone Vietnamese studies presents to academic dependency theory.

TABLE 1 The sample

Author/editor	Title	Year	Publisher
Joseph Buttinger	Vietnam: A Political History	1968	Frederick A. Praeger
Alexander Woodside	Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century	1971	Harvard University
David G. Marr	Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885–1925	1971	University of California
William J. Duiker	The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900–1941	1976	Cornell University
Jennifer Holmgren	Chinese Colonisation of Norther Vietnam: Administrative Geography and Political Development in the Tongking Delta, First to Six Centuries A.D.	1980	The Australian National University
Keith W. Taylor	The Birth of Vietnam	1983	University of California
John K. Whitmore	Vietnam, Hồ Quý Ly, and the Ming (1371–1421)	1985	Yale University
William J. Duiker	China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict	1986	University of California, Berkeley
Neil L. Jamieson	Understanding Vietnam	1993	University of California
Keith W. Taylor, John K. Whitmore	*Essays into Vietnamese Pasts	1995	Cornell University
Li Tana	Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries	1998	Cornell University
Choi Byung Wook	Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820–1841)	2004	Cornell University
Liam Kelley	Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship	2005	University of Hawaii
Nhung Tuyet Tran, Anthony Reid	*Viet Nam: Borderless Histories	2006	University of Wisconsin
George E. Dutton	The Tây Sơn Rebellion: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth Century	2006	University of Hawaii
Catherine Churchman	The People Between the Rivers: The Rise and Fall of a Bronze Drum Culture, 200–750 CE	2006	Rowman & Littlefield
James A. Anderson	The Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and Identity Along the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier	2007	University of Washington
Olga Dror	Cult, Culture, and Authority: Princess Liễu Hạnh in Vietnamese History	2007	University of Hawaii
Nola Cooke, Tana Li, James A. Anderson	*The Tongking Gulf through History	2011	University of Pennsylvania
Keith W. Taylor	A History of the Vietnamese	2013	Cambridge University
Erica Fox Brindley	Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400BCE–50CE	2015	Cambridge University
Nam C. Kim	The Origins of Ancient Vietnam	2015	Oxford University

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Author/editor	Title	Year	Publisher
Kathlene Baldanza	Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia	2016	Cambridge University
Ben Kiernan	Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present	2017	Oxford University
Bradley C. Davis	Imperial Bandits: Outlaw and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands	2017	University of Washington

TABLE 2 The citation styles of the sample

Style	Authors/editors	Count
Notes to pages and bibliography	Anderson; Baldanza; Buttinger; Choi; Churchman; Dror; Duiker (1976, 1986); Dutton; Kelley; Tran and Reid; Woodside	12
Notes to pages; notes to chapters	Cooke, Li and Anderson; Jamieson; Kiernan; Whitmore	4
Footnotes and bibliography	Brindley; Holmgren; Li; Marr; Taylor (1983); Taylor and Whitmore	6
Bibliography to chapters; bibliographical essays to chapters	Davis; Taylor (2013)	2
Bibliography	Kim	1

## AN OVERALL ANALYSIS

Quantitatively, with the six books where we count repeated citations, I obtain 8,339 citations, ranging from Buttinger's (1968) 84 citations to Kiernan's (2016) 1,691 ones. Nevertheless, Kiernan's citation counts are inflated by his 1,324 repeated citations, and Taylor's *A History of the Vietnamese* has 53 repeated ones. If I delete these repeated citations, I have 6,962 citations in total. The Table 3 below shows the citation counts of the 25 books. In the "repeated citation" column, I put "N" for those works without repeated citations, "Y" for those with them, except for Taylor's 2013 book and Kiernan's 2017 one, where I put the counts after deleting repeated citations. It appears that there emerge more historical works in Anglophone Vietnamese studies since the twenty-first century.

What does the linguistic distribution of the citations of these books look like? I break down the citations according to languages, and the Table 4 lists the count and the rounded percentage of the citation languages of the sample minus Taylor's in 2013 and Kiernan's in 2017, both are listed in the Table 5. It appears that two Chinese historians, Holmgren and Brindley, cite no Vietnamese materials in their *Chinese Colonisation of Northern Vietnam* in 1980 and *Ancient China and the Yue* in 2015, respectively. Holmgren draws on both Chinese primary sources and colonial French Sinologists' scholarship in her narration; Brindley's interest lies in understanding "Chinese perceptions" of the "Yue/Việt" peoples who inhabited in the areas that include modern northern Vietnam and therefore also relies on English and Chinese sources to build her arguments.

Kiernan's work has 1,324 repeated citations, and the Table 6 below lists his 20 most cited authors, with Christopher Goscha who specializes in cold war (Goscha, 2016) and Pierre Broucheux who works on Colonial Vietnam outnumbering the rest of the cited authors. Of these twenty most-cited authors, only four of them produced works on historical Vietnam (Li, Taylor, Whitmore, and Woodside), the rest deal with the issues of French colonialism and the American War. Even though Kiernan's work covers Vietnam's history from the earliest time to the present, he allocates a large portion of his discussion to modern history.

To understand the scholars' linguistic preferences, I use 50% as a threshold. If more than or nearly half of the citations of a work are in one language, for instance, English, I consider this work as "English-dominated." If a work's citations are not dominated by a single language, it is considered linguistically evenly distributed. The Table 7 below shows that 12 works rely on English, five on Vietnamese, seven are linguistically evenly distributed.

TABLE 3 The citation count of the 25 books

Author/editor	Title	Year	Count	Repeated citation
Joseph Buttinger	Vietnam: A Political History	1968	84	N
Alexander Woodside	Vietnam and the Chinese Model: A Comparative Study of Nguyen and Ch'ing Civil Government in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century	1971	154	N
David G. Marr	Vietnamese Anticolonialism, 1885–1925	1971	344	N
William J. Duiker	The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam, 1900–1941	1976	210	N
Jennifer Holmgren	Chinese Colonisation of Northern Vietnam	1980	100	N
Keith W. Taylor	The Birth of Vietnam	1983	226	N
John K. Whitmore	Vietnam, Hồ Quý Ly, and the Ming (1371–1421)	1985	150	N
William J. Duiker	China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict	1986	93	N
Neil L. Jamieson	Understanding Vietnam	1993	255	Y
Keith W. Taylor, John K. Whitmore	*Essays into Vietnamese Pasts	1995	241	N
Li Tana	Nguyễn Cochinchina: Southern Vietnam in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries	1998	341	N
Choi Byung Wook	Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng (1820–1841)	2004	144	N
Liam Kelley	Beyond the Bronze Pillars: Envoy Poetry and the Sino-Vietnamese Relationship	2005	199	Y
Nhyng Tuet Tran, Anthony Reid	*Viet Nam: Borderless Histories	2006	738	N
George E. Dutton	The Tây Sơn Rebellion: Society and Rebellion in Eighteenth Century	2006	211	N
Catherine Churchman	The People Between the Rivers: The Rise and Fall of a Bronze Drum Culture, 200–750 CE	2006	302	N
James A. Anderson	The Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao: Loyalty and Identity Along the Sino-Vietnamese Frontier	2007	290	N
Olga Dror	Cult, Culture, and Authority: Princess Liễu Hạnh in Vietnamese History	2007	387	N
Nola Cooke, Tana Li, James A. Anderson	*The Tongking Gulf through History	2011	401	Y
Keith W. Taylor	A History of the Vietnamese	2013	384	331
Erica Fox Brindley	Ancient China and the Yue: Perceptions and Identities on the Southern Frontier, c. 400 BCE–50CE	2015	379	N
Nam C. Kim	The Origins of Ancient Vietnam	2015	773	N
Kathlene Baldanza	Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia	2016	188	N
Ben Kiernan	Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present	2017	1,691	367

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Author/editor	Title	Year	Count	Repeated citation
Bradley C. Davis	Imperial Bandits: Outlaw and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands	2017	337	Y
<b>Total</b>			<b>8,339</b>	<b>6,962</b>

TABLE 4 The linguistic distribution of the citations

Title	Year	Count	E	F	V	S	J	O
A Political History	1968	84	64, 76%	19, 23%	1, 1%	0	0	0
Vietnam and the Chinese Model	1971	154	14, 9%	22, 14%	75, 49%	26, 17%	17, 11%	0
Vietnamese Anticolonialism	1971	344	54, 16%	36, 10%	242, 70%	3, 1%	9, 3%	0
The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam	1976	210	35, 17%	44, 21%	123, 59%	0	0	8, 4%
Chinese Colonisation of Northern Vietnam	1980	99	34, 34%	36, 36%	0	29, 29%	0	0
The Birth of Vietnam	1983	226	65, 29%	38, 17%	72, 32%	31, 14%	20, 9%	0
Vietnam, Hồ Quý Ly, and the Ming	1985	150	84, 56%	33, 22%	27, 18%	4, 3%	1, 1%	1, 1%
China and Vietnam: The Roots of Conflict	1986	93	77, 83%	8, 9%	7, 8%	1, 1%	0	0
Understanding Vietnam	1993	255	191, 75%	6, 2%	58, 23%	0	0	0
Essays into Vietnamese Pasts	1995	241	37, 15%	29, 12%	132, 54%	28, 11%	15, 6%	0
Nguyễn Cochinchina	1998	341	185, 54%	40, 12%	76, 22%	20, 6%	17, 5%	0
Southern Vietnam under the Reign of Minh Mạng	2004	144	24, 17%	8, 6%	101, 70%	1, 1%	0	6, 4%
Beyond the Bronze Pillars	2005	199	88, 44%	5, 3%	65, 33%	38, 19%	3, 2%	0
Viet Nam: Borderless Histories	2006	738	278, 38%	160, 22%	214, 29%	70, 9%	8, 1%	8, 1%
The Tây Sơn Uprising	2006	211	74, 35%	24, 11%	113, 54%	0	0	0
The People Between the Rivers	2006	302	134, 44%	0, ≈0%	17, 6%	141, 47%	9, 3%	0
The Rebel Den of Nùng Trí Cao	2007	290	155, 53%	10, 3%	34, 12%	88, 30%	3, 1%	0
Princess Liễu Hạnh in Vietnamese History	2007	387	170, 44%	61, 16%	150, 39%	2, 1%	0	4, 1%
The Tongking Gulf through History	2011	401	225, 56%	24, 6%	30, 7%	93, 23%	20, 5%	9, 2%
Ancient China and the Yue	2015	379	311, 82%	2, 1%	0	61, 16%	1, ≈0%	0
The Origins of Ancient Vietnam	2015	773	742, 96%	3, ≈0%	25, 3%	1, ≈0%	2, ≈0%	0
Ming China and Vietnam	2016	188	122, 65%	3, 2%	18, 10%	44, 23%	1, 1%	0
Imperial Bandits	2017	337	150, 45%	64, 19%	75, 22%	48, 14%	0	0

A closer look shows that both Kiernan's and Taylor's cited Sinitic materials are all the historical Chinese records about Vietnam where modern *quốc ngữ* translation was made available during the New History Campaign in the 1950s. Also, many scholars, including Kiernan and Taylor and the two Chinese historians Holmgren and Brindley, cite little modern Chinese works despite both China's long tradition of studies on Vietnam (Chang, 2021) and Vietnamese scholars' recognition of the depth and meticulousity of the research on Vietnam done by their Chinese peers.<sup>5</sup>

TABLE 5 The linguistic distribution of Taylor's 2013 book and Kiernan's 2017 one

		E	F	V	S	J	O	Total
Taylor (2013)	With repeated citations	286, 74%	70, 18%	28, 7%	0	1, ≈0%	0	357
	Without repeated citations	248, 75%	55, 17%	28, 8%	0	0	0	304
Kiernan (2017)	With repeated citations	1,326, 78%	162, 10%	115, 7%	87, 5%	0	1, ≈0%	1,691
	Without repeated citations	286, 78%	36, 10%	29, 8%	15, 4%	0	1, ≈0%	367

TABLE 6 Kiernan's most cited authors

Frequency	Cited authors
82	Goscha
26	P. Broucheux
18	G. Hickey
16	Whitmore; Taylor
14	Woodside; D. Chanoff; F. Guillemot; Tai; Li; O. A. Westad
13	B. Fall; P. Devillers
12	E. Miller; W. S. Turley
11	D. Hémerly; Jamieson; P. Catton
10	J. Ramsay

Note: I provide the abbreviated first times for the authors who do not appear in the above tables.

TABLE 7 The linguistic preference

Language	Scholars	Count
English-dominated	Buttinger; Whitmore; Duiker 1976; Jamieson; Li; Anderson; Cooke and Li; Brindley; Kim; Baldanza; Kiernan; Taylor 2013	12
Vietnamese-dominated	Woodside (49%); Marr; Duiker 1986; Taylor and Whitmore; Choi	5
Linguistically evenly distributed	Holmgren; Taylor 1983; Kelley; Tran and Reid; Dutton; Churchman; Dror; Davis	8

In terms of arguments, the field began by advocating Vietnam's agency and supporting Vietnamese cause in the 1960s. Gradually, the research questions and sources the scholars used diversified, and at the same time scholarly emphases also moved from nationalist claim to stress Vietnam's plurality and diversity. I divide these 25 works into three groups. The first is not involved in the advocacy for Vietnam's agency (Anderson, 2007; Anderson and Whitmore, 2015; Choi, 2004; Churchman, 2016; Dror, 2007; Dutton, 2006; Li, 1998; Woodside, 1971). The second group, which is the largest in our sample, explicitly promotes local agency and favors the "nation-to-nation" framework in different ways. The earliest theme is a nationalist one: the scholars who were amazed by Vietnam's consecutive triumphs over France and America suggested that this remarkable feat was a modern manifestation of Vietnam's long history of resisting the pressure of assimilation from its aggressive northern neighbor (Buttinger, 1968; Duiker, 1976, 1986; Jamieson, 1993; Marr, 1971; Taylor, 1983). A slightly different one is asserting that a unique Vietnamese civilization would have thrived in the Red River Delta should China not have coveted its prosperity and imposed its foreign rule on it under the pretext of civilizing mission (Holmgren, 1980; Kim, 2015; Taylor, 1983). The third is subverting the general held "Chinese impact" model by exposing how the supposedly

“uncivilized” and peripheral Yue/Viêt peoples came to be a cultural and political threat to China (Baldanza, 2016; Brindley, 2015). The fourth one emphasizes Vietnam's plurality and connections with Southeast Asia, hinting at Vietnam's agency by arguing Vietnam's ability and intention to preserve its uniqueness despite China's influence (Kiernan, 2017; Taylor, 2013). Finally, the third group consists of a lone revisionist scholar Liam Kelley, who has been challenging Vietnam's claim to uniqueness and resistance by either showing Vietnamese literati's appreciation for Sinitic culture (Kelley, 2005) or exposing the constructiveness of Vietnamese tradition (Kelley, 2012, 2013, 2015).

## ANALYSIS OF KEITH W. TAYLOR'S WORKS

What kinds of images that the scholars who promote local agency painted for China? In this section, I further delve into Keith W. Taylor's work and argue that this promotion necessitates both an essentialized Confucian China as Vietnam's ultimate Other and a misreading and neglect of Sinitic sources. More specifically, I scrutinize Keith W. Taylor's *The Birth of Vietnam* in 1983 and *A History of the Vietnamese* in 2013 along with his other works to understand the change and continuity of the tradition of Anglophone Vietnamese studies. I also cite other scholars who share Taylor's viewpoints.

To begin with, Taylor's 1983 monograph *The Birth of Vietnam* narrated the history of how Vietnam transformed from China's southernmost administrative unit to an autonomous polity. He stated that the writing of this book originated from his twofold desire to know “where did these people (i.e., Vietnamese) come from” (Taylor, 1983: Preface) and to unlock the secret of Vietnam's consecutive triumphs over France and America, two Western countries that were and still are so much more powerful than Vietnam. Taylor believed that the answer was in Vietnam's history, which, as I demonstrated above, was a history arranged and presented by modern Vietnam's official historiography. According to this historiography, there is an unmistakable existence of a unique Vietnamese national identity since time immemorial, and that this identity is primevally Southeast Asian. Taylor followed this historiography and asserted that Vietnamese “were not, and did not want to be, Chinese” (Taylor, 1983: xviii). With this assertion, Taylor related how the Vietnamese identity gradually grew despite (or because of) tremendous pressure and military aggressions from China, and that Vietnam eventually matured into an independent kingdom in the tenth century AD. Taylor presented China as an invader who coveted Vietnam's rich resources and who justified its imperialist intrusions under the pretext of a “civilizing mission,” and as a result Vietnam came to know China as intimately as a slave could know his master. Here, Taylor rejected French colonial version of “impact-response” model, which justified its colonization of Vietnam by claiming that Vietnam in the past could have not initiated any meaningful transformations without China's presence. Taylor believed that Vietnam must have been a sophisticated culture, and therefore could have evolved into a great civilization if not for the intervention of Chinese culture. Furthermore, Vietnam could have avoided French colonization had its elites not relied so heavily on the Chinese model of governance, which alienated them from their fellow commoners in the late nineteenth century. He also asserted that Vietnam intentionally employed Indian Buddhism to counter the influence of Confucianism (Taylor, 1983: xvii–xxi), even though some scholars pointed out that Vietnamese Buddhism was in fact profoundly influenced by its Chinese counterpart (Nguyen, 1995). He concluded his book by stating that “the birth of Vietnam was the birth of a spirit of resistance to the universal claims of Chinese power (Taylor, 1983: 301).

Taylor's conception of the Vietnamese national identity is a classic example of the “Sleeping Beauty theory,” in which a people with a distinctive collective consciousness are awakened by the unfolding of historical events (Anderson, 2006). The application of the thesis to Vietnam is shared by other scholars in Vietnam (Duiker, 1976; Marr, 1971, 1981; Neilson, 1993; Vella, 1973; see Kelley's review in 2003). In this version of the Sleeping Beauty thesis, China was conceptualized as a Confucian Other eager to impose Confucian order on its “barbaric” and “backward” neighbors, and Sino-Vietnamese contacts were reduced into repeated invasion-resistance cycles. As such, the term “Sinicization” became interchangeable with Confucianization, and to what extent historical Vietnam could be called a Confucian culture became controversial (see Kelley's review in 2006). Taylor argued that, unlike

Buddhism, Confucianism in historical Vietnam was shallow, fragmented, and limited only to the elites; by implication, China's influence on Vietnam was also superficial and dubious (Taylor, 1995, 2002). Skepticism about the nature, scope, and extent of the influence of Confucianism on Vietnam is still shared by many scholars in the Anglophone Vietnamese studies (Cooke, 1994, 1997; McHale, 2002, 2004; Monnais et al., 2012; Wolters, 1979, 1980; Yu, 2005).

On what basis did Taylor construct the Vietnamese version of the Sleeping Beauty Theory? Our count above shows that he consulted materials in Vietnamese (32%), English (28%), French (17%), Sinitic (14%), and Japanese (9%). Taylor certainly possessed knowledge in the Vietnamese language (Taylor, 2004), and he made it clear that the Japanese materials were translated by his then-wife, who is a Japanese (Taylor, 1983: xvi). Judging from the fact that Taylor consulted a *Vietnamese-French Dictionary* (Từ điển tiếng Việt/Dictionnaire vietnamien français) (Taylor, 1983: 383), it should be safe to infer that Taylor was fluent in French. As for Sinitic, I suspect that Taylor consulted modern *quốc ngữ* translations rather than the original ones for the following reasons. First, Taylor did not provide the authors' names for the primary sources written by Chinese official historians and literati, and as a result of the omission of these Chinese authors' names, the final author count is 199. Second, the historical Chinese documents that Taylor listed (Taylor, 1983: 373–374) are historical records where texts relating to modern Vietnam appear, all of which were already made available in *quốc ngữ* translations during the “New History” campaign in Vietnam.

Table 8 lists the five most cited individual authors in *The Birth of Vietnam*, which comprise of two Vietnamese, one Japanese, one French and one English. Yamamoto Tatsuro (1910–2001) is Japan's leading scholar on Vietnam, whose massive monograph *A Study of Annam History* (Annanshi kenkyu) won him a position in the prestigious Japan Academy. Probably because of the massiveness of this monograph, Taylor does not cite it in 1983, and the Chinese translation only appeared in 2021 (Tatsuro [1950] 2021). É. Gaspardone (1895–1982) was a French Sinologist and philologist who produced first bibliography for Sino-Vietnamese materials. E. H. Schafer is a Sinologist who published several key texts on Chinese history. The most cited author, Cao Huy Đình, was the editor of a volume titled *Hùng Kings Building Our Nation* (Hùng Vương dựng nước) (Cao, 1973). Hùng Kings are legendary figures and mystical rulers who, in the campaign of inventing Vietnam's tradition, were turned into the progenitor of the Vietnamese nation (Kelley, 2012), and from 1968 to 1974 Hanoi held four conferences to commemorate the purported accomplishments of Hùng Kings, and the published edited volumes are still housed in Vietnam's National Library.<sup>6</sup> Both Cao Huy Đình and Đình Văn Nhật are cited for their nationalist essays. By simply looking at the titles of the Vietnamese citations, we find that 31 out of 72 Vietnamese citations (43%) are nationalistic works dedicated to promoting the leaders of local uprisings to anti-China national heroes and heroines.

In Taylor's subsequent works, he gradually shifted away from Vietnam's homogeneity to its regional differences (Taylor, 1998), multi-ethnic culture (Taylor, 2001), as well as the Republican South that is silenced in modern Vietnam's historiography (Taylor, 2015). While Taylor's nationalist tone has been softened, his 2013 monograph *A History of the Vietnamese* still used the “nation-to-nation” framework by considering a comparison between historical Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (Taylor, 2013: 4). Even though they might not be completely comparable if we consider the fact that northern Vietnam spent more than a thousand year as one of China's administrative units, Taylor still perceived China as a Confucianizing force. He also seemed to consult modern *quốc ngữ* translations when it comes to

TABLE 8 The most cited authors in *The Birth of Vietnam*

Name	Language	Count	Percentage
Cao Huy Đình	Vietnamese	10	5.0%
Yamamoto Tatsuro	Japanese	5	2.5%
Đình Văn Nhật	Vietnamese	4	2.0%
É. Gaspardone	French	4	2.0%
E. H. Schafer	English	4	2.0%

primary data in Literary Sinitic. In fact, Taylor and some other scholars seemed to find primary sources written in Literary Sinitic by Chinese authors untrustworthy, as these authors supposedly were prone to commit the crime of Sinocentrism (Kim, 2015; Tai, 1995; Taylor, 1995). This distrust can be found in Taylor's study of some *Nôm* works, where he emphasized Vietnam's agency by asserting that Vietnamese used the vernacular *Nôm* to penetrate the Chinese language barrier and "call 'Shit!'" to the imposed Chinese order (Taylor, 1995: 73, 2005, 2020).

An illustrative example is Taylor's elaboration of a widely circulated Vietnamese folk story, *The Tale of the Turtle Claw*. It relates the emergence and collapse of the Nanyue kingdom, which was founded during the first century CE in the area encompassing the Red River Delta and adjacent Guangdong province by a Chinese general Zhou Tuo, who was sent by the First Emperor of Qin to patrol the southern frontiers. The story first appears in Literary Sinitic in the non-extant *Records of Jiaozhou the Outer Realm* (*Jiaozhou waiyu ji*). "Jiaozhou," "Jiaozhi," and "Jiao" are all historical terms referring to the Red River Delta. This story was preserved because it was quoted by an influential geography book, *Commentary on the Water Classic* (Shueijing zhu), between the fourth and sixth centuries CE. This story subsequently appeared in some other Chinese texts with slight difference before it morphed into Vietnamese fiction in the eleventh century. It finally was incorporated into Vietnam's first official historiography in the *Complete Annals of the Great Việt* (*Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư*), compiled in the style of China's *Records of the Grand Historian* by court historian Ngô Sĩ Liên in 1479, 52 years after China terminated its two-decade long occupation (1407–27). Ngô Sĩ Liên's job was to create a dynastic record in the Sinitic style to argue that the Việt kingdom was as civilized as China and therefore deserved to be treated as such. Below is my translation of the first part of the original text from *Commentary on the Water Classic*:

During the time when the Jiaozhi area was yet to be a commandery, there were Lạc lands. These were tidelands by the seashores. People farmed the lands and were called the Lạc people. The Lạc kings and Lạc lords were installed to reign over the lands, and Lạc generals were granted with bronze seals. Later, Prince Shu led a troop of 30 thousand to conquer the Lạc king, the Lạc lords, and the Lạc generals. Prince Shu thus became King An Dương. Then, Zhao Tuo the Nanyue King came to attack King An Dương. A holy man named Gao Tong came down [from heaven and] assisted King An Dương. Gao Tong gave him a divine crossbow that could kill three hundred people with a single shot. It was clear to King Nanyue that [Jiaozhi was] unbeatable, so he ordered his troops to stay in Wuning, a county that according to the *Records of Talking* from the Jin Dynasty [266–420 century CE] was part of Jiaozhi. He then sent his son Shi to serve [and spy on] King An Dương, who offended Gao Tong because he was unaware of the identity of his adviser. Gao Tong therefore left the king, and before he departed, he informed him that whoever owned the crossbow would control All-Under-Heaven; likewise, whoever lost it would lose All-Under-heaven. King An Dương had a daughter named Mị Châu. She saw that Shi was a good looking man, and she had an affair with him. Shi asked Châu about the crossbow, so she ordered the crossbow to be brought out for Shi to take a look. Shi stole the crossbow and had it saw, and after he destroyed the crossbow he fled to inform King Nanyue [about the crossbow]. Nanyue troops hence marched [toward the Lạc lands]. King An Dương tried to use the crossbow to fight back, but it was already useless, so he was defeated.

Taylor examined this tale in both of his monographs. In the 1983 book, he did a textual comparison among various sources relating to the story and concluded that it was preserved possibly for propaganda purpose (Taylor, 1983: 319). In 2013, he argued that the story exists today because Chinese court compilers found it "interesting" in three aspects: the theme of romantic love leading to tragic death was in literary fashion at the time; the story explained to Chinese people how the remote Jiaozhi area was incorporated into China; and finally, as the matrilocal practice in the story was very different from the patrilocal rule that was popular among educated people in China, it therefore caught the compilers' attention. He also asserted that this story might have been invented by the Chinese themselves, and that the holy man Cao Tong is named as such to indicate that he is a Chinese (Taylor, 2013: 15).

Taylor's elaboration of the original version of *The Tale of the Turtle Claw* does not seem to corroborate the historical evidence. By suggesting that this story "explained to the Chinese how Jiaozhi was incorporated," Taylor assumed that the Chinese were aware that Jiaozhi had been recently incorporated when the tale was recorded. This assumption, however, is difficult to test. It is also unclear how Taylor determined Cao Tong's ethnicity, and how he was able to determine the story was a Chinese invention. What Taylor called "the theme of romantic love leading to tragic death" did not appear in the original version recorded in the *Commentary on the Water Classic*, but rather in Vietnamese fictional versions and in the *Complete Annal of the Great Việt*. In Vietnamese versions, Shi and Mị Châu were married, but Mị Châu was eventually killed by her father, King An Dương, for giving away the secret of the crossbow. As a result, Shi committed suicide out of grief for his murdered wife.

Likewise, Taylor's interpretation of the issue of matrilocal residence seems to come from modern Vietnamese historiography where China is depicted as a Confucian Other. While it is true that as early as the first century CE matrilocal residence was considered a disgrace for men in China, neither the *Commentary of Water Classic* nor Ngô Sĩ Liên in the *Complete Annals of the Great Việt* claim that Shi was "married into" Mị Châu's family: the former states that Shi and Mị Châu "had an affair" (通tong), and a thousand years later, Ngô Sĩ Liên wrote that King Nanyue asked King An Dương for his daughter's hand in marriage on behalf of his son (招婚 C: zhaohun; V: chiêu hôn). No evidence points to matrilocal residence in the original texts. Taylor's interpretation is likely informed by modern Vietnam's historiography. In Vietnam's tenth grade linguistic textbook, Volume I, there is a text titled "The Story of King An Dương and Mị Châu-Trọng Thủy," which states that Zhao Tuo sent Shi ("Trọng Thủy" in Vietnamese) to marry into Mị Châu's family (cho con sang làm con rể). This twist serves Vietnam's nationalistic purpose, as it symbolically demotes China's position vis-à-vis Vietnam. Given its place in the education system, the majority of Vietnamese people who have received primary education assume that Shi "married down into" Mị Châu's family.<sup>7</sup>

Bibliographically, *A History of the Vietnamese* has 394 citations and 387 authors. Compared to his 1983 book, for this updated comprehensive history Taylor relied mostly on English works (72%), followed by French (19%), Sinitic (5%), Vietnamese (8%), and three Japanese works (less than 1%). He provided a review for materials in Asian languages, nevertheless his review was not updated with Chinese scholarship. Among his most cited authors, Alexander Woodside is famous for his comparative study of the Confucian governance in Qing China (1644–1912) and Nguyễn Vietnam (1802–1945) (Woodside, 1971), a monograph that drew on Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese materials.<sup>8</sup> O. W. Wolters (1915–2000), the second most cited author (14 times), was a leading historian on early Southeast Asian in the Anglophone academic community. His *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asia Perspectives* has been cited 1,208 times as of July 29, 2021. Wolters produced two essays on fourteenth century Vietnam that sympathize with Vietnam's nationalist cause (Wolters, 1979, 1980). A citation analysis of Taylor's bibliographical data shows that he relied on modern *quốc ngữ* translations for Chinese materials (Table 9).

## CONCLUSION: ACADEMIC DEPENDENCY THEORY AND THE POLITICS OF AGENCY

This essay considers the puzzle of Vietnamese studies in the English-speaking academia, which, unlike what academic dependency theory expects, emphasizes local agency and subjectivity from the very beginning, and only in the twenty-first century is there a revisionist trend that calls this emphasis into question. I show that the timing of the birth of the field amidst the American War and the resulting anti-war protest and postcolonial critiques of the then dominant "impact-response" model steers the first generation of English-speaking scholars to sympathize with modern Vietnam's nationalist effort. Vietnamese historians based in Hanoi have endeavored to de-Sinicize Vietnam's pasts in order both to emphasize its agency and uniqueness from China and to create a glorious history for Vietnam. To do so, they translated and rewrote the primary historical documents in **Literary Sinitic** by both Chinese and Vietnamese authors into Romanized *quốc ngữ* script. Western scholars' sympathy for Vietnam leads them to adopt the "nation-to-nation" framework that has been promoted by Vietnamese historians since the 1950s as opposed to the "center-region" framework that Chinese scholars use in discussing the

TABLE 9 The most cited authors in *A History of the Vietnamese*

Author	Language	Count	Percentage
K. W. Taylor	English	29	7.5%
O. W. Wolters	English	14	3.6%
John K. Whitmore	English	11	2.8%
Alexander Woodside	English	8	2.1%
David Marr	English	6	1.6%
Li Tana	English	6	1.6%
Truong Buu Lam	English	6	1.6%
É. Gaspardone	French	6	1.6%
Christopher Goscha	5 in English, 1 in French	6	1.6%
E. Miller	English	5	1.3%

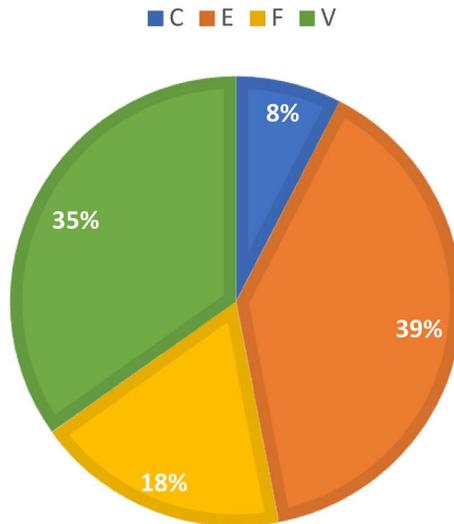


Chart 1: Language distribution of Wolters' "Assertion of Vietnam's Cultural Well-Being in the Fourteenth Century" [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

millennium-long time period in which the Red River Delta, the heartland of modern Vietnam, was one of China's administrative units. The ideological contentions generated by the difference between these two research frameworks only exists in the studies of Vietnam, as it is the only country that used to be part of China's territory for more than a thousand years. It becomes more politically charged, as the language barrier of Literary Sinitic (and to some extent, the *Nôm* script) prevents English-speaking scholars from cross-checking the Vietnamese translations with the primary sources. As a result, it is difficult to separate historical facts from myths and nationalist ideologies, and Anglophone scholars intentionally or unintentionally become involved in the power struggle between the US and China.

This essay is not aimed to discredit Anglophone scholars' contribution to the understanding of Vietnam. Nor do I intend to deny the diverse research topics that younger generation of scholars have experimented in the field. My goal is to provide different perspectives and urge scholars to rethink the issue of agency in the era of nationalism. While promoting agency for developing countries is noble, it can also be tricky and even contentious, with

unintended consequences of denying agency for some other countries. There is an unspoken hierarchy between those who have the power to assign and encourage agency and subjectivity and those who are on the receiving end. This hierarchy is not stable and subject to constant change, especially the actors that struggle for agency and subjectivity include not only vulnerable minorities but also the modern state that, according to Max Weber's definition, is the only human community that legitimately monopolizes physical violence (Weber, 1918). It is especially true in the case of Vietnam, where the promoting of Vietnamese agency does not seem to be able to accommodate the agency of China.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Here I use the term “Sinitic” instead of “Chinese” to avoid confusion.
- <sup>2</sup> The first dynastic record is Lê Văn Hưu's non-existent *The History of Great Việt* (Đại Việt sử ký) in 1279.
- <sup>3</sup> Compared to *Journal of Korean Studies*, which first appeared in 1969, and *Journal of Siam Society* in 1904, the fact that *JVS* only began being published in 2006 is evidence of the field's peripheral status in America's area studies programs.
- <sup>4</sup> See <https://cornell.academia.edu/KeithWTaylor/CurriculumVitae>, <https://history.cornell.edu/keith-weller-taylor>, and <https://cornell.academia.edu/KeithWTaylor>.
- <sup>5</sup> Phạm Hoàng Quân, “Học giới Trung Quốc nghiên cứu Việt Nam rất kỹ”(Chinese Scholarship on Vietnam is Very Meticulous), May 1<sup>st</sup> 2021, <https://cuoituan.tuoitre.vn/van-de-su-kien/hoc-gioi-trung-quoc-nghien-cuu-viet-nam-rat-ky-1581782.html> (last accessed on July 29, 2021).
- <sup>6</sup> <http://opac.nlv.gov.vn/pages/opac/wpid-search-stype-form-quick-sfield-all-keyword-H%C3%B9ng%20V%C6%B0%C6%A1ng%20d%C3%B9ng%20n%C6%B0%E1%BB%9Bc.html>.
- <sup>7</sup> Personal communication with Vu Duong Luon, March 2021. For the modern Vietnamese text, see [https://sachgiaibaitap.com/sach\\_giao\\_khoa/truyen-duong-vuong-va-mi-chau-trong-thuy/#gsc.tab=0](https://sachgiaibaitap.com/sach_giao_khoa/truyen-duong-vuong-va-mi-chau-trong-thuy/#gsc.tab=0).
- <sup>8</sup> I, however, stumbled upon Woodside's misunderstanding of a common Chinese and Vietnamese idiom 經世濟民 (C: jingshi jimin; V: kinh thế tế dân), from which the translation for “economy” 經濟 (C: jingji; V: kinh tế) derived. Literally, this idiom means “governing the world and assisting the people.” Woodside, however, translated the word “the world” (世 C: shi; V: thế) into “the age” (Woodside, 1995: 165).

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