

## Celebrating the Socialist Past: The Vietnamese ‘Memory Machine’ at Work

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### [ABSTRACT]

In this article I claim that history is still an important source of legitimacy for the Communist Party of Vietnam. The ‘correct view’ of history is propagated and defended by a ‘memory machine’.

To illustrate the inner workings of the Vietnamese I present two case-studies: the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Russian October Revolution in 2017 in Vietnam and the representation of the history of socialism in Vietnamese history textbooks.

I show that by celebrating anniversaries such as the 100th anniversary of the Russian October Revolution in orthodox ways and by preserving the monopoly of the propagation of history via textbooks used at schools and university Vietnam’s history in the twentieth century is still presented as part of the world history of socialism and as being deeply inspired by the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union.

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## 1. Introduction

More than thirty years ago, Vietnam embarked on a program of economic reform or *đổi mới*. The shift from a central planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy was successful in reducing poverty and turning Vietnam to a middle-income country. After the collapse of socialism in Central and Eastern Europe Vietnam's communist leadership launched an 'open-door policy' (*chính sách mở cửa*) which resulted in Vietnam's reintegration into the Southeast Asian region and the world community after the country's long-term isolation in the 1980s. Vietnam's one-Party system, however, remains basically unchanged; the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) clings to its monopoly of political power and its identity as a Marxist-Leninist party. Thus, courses in Marxism-Leninism are still obligatory for students at Vietnam's state universities and to build a socialist society remains the ultimate aim of the party.

And — while the CPV basically switched to performance-based legitimacy (Le Hong Hiep 2012) and earns the support of the Vietnamese people due to its successful economic policy, the Party still derives its legitimacy from its historical role in the struggle against French colonialism and for the country's independence in the twentieth century. This struggle is presented by Vietnamese historiography as a teleological and triumphalist narrative with the CPV as its dominant actor (Grossheim 2018). Historical events that do not completely fit into this version of Vietnamese history are either co-opted or ignored (Dutton 2013).

This master narrative of Vietnam's national history and world history is propagated by the "memory machine" of the Vietnamese Party-state by "churning out an impressive array of texts, such as communist memoirs,

novels, and histories, that re-present the past in approved ways.” (McHale 2002, p. 26).

In this article I analyze the inner workings of the ‘memory machine’ by taking the example of the commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution in 2017 in Vietnam and of the representation of the history of socialism in Vietnamese history textbooks.

I show that by celebrating anniversaries such as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution in orthodox ways and by preserving the monopoly of the propagation of history via textbooks used at schools and university the Vietnamese ‘memory machine’ still presents Vietnam’s history in the twentieth century as part of the world history of socialism and as being deeply inspired by the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union.<sup>1)</sup> I claim that both the celebration of anniversaries and textbooks are part of a ‘memory project’ that is launched, carried out and defended by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) and its chief ideologues – with the Department of Propaganda and Education (*Ban Tuyên Giáo*) at the forefront. Within this project the celebration of official anniversaries and history textbooks play an important role in propagating the ‘correct’ course of historical events and enforcing historical orthodoxy. Textbooks in Vietnam are even more important since the Vietnamese education system is still determined by rote learning, a prevalence of top-down pedagogy and mandatory classes in Marxist-Leninism (St George 2011).

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## 2. The celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution in 2017

In precolonial Vietnam, the Ministry of Rites (*Bộ Lễ*) used to “prescribe ritual activities and endorse hagiographies.” (DiGregorio and Salemink 2007, p. 436) Whereas in some fields nowadays the Ministry of Culture and Information acts as the Ministry of Rites successor (*ibid.*), it is the Department of Propaganda and Education (*Ban Tuyên giáo*) of the CPV that annually issues detailed guidelines on the performance of specific ritual activities that reinforce Communist orthodoxy (instead of Confucian orthodoxy).<sup>2)</sup> Thus, state and CPV institutions at different administrative levels and state mass media such as the Vietnamese state television (VTV) are entrusted with implementing these guidelines. The Department of Propaganda and Education has the overall authority to prescribe how to celebrate official socialist anniversaries.

In its annual guidelines for 2017 the Department already announced that huge ceremonies should to be organized in commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution (*Ban Tuyên giáo Trung ương 2017b*). In a separate decree the Department issued detailed guidelines on how to organize ceremonies on that occasion (*Ban Chấp Hành Trung ương, Ban Tuyên giáo 2017*). At the same time, it issued an historical assessment of the Russian October Revolution that reiterated the official master narrative linking that event to the Vietnamese revolution (*Ban Tuyên giáo 2017a*).

As the first institution to implement the guidelines the Department of

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2) For a short discussion of the precolonial Ministry of Rites see DiGregorio and Salemink 2007, p. 436.

Propaganda and Education lists up itself with the task of organizing a national conference in cooperation with the Hồ Chí Minh National Academy of Politics (*Học viện Chính trị quốc gia Hồ Chí Minh*) and the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (*Viện Hàn lâm Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam*), the two leading think tanks in Vietnam. Accordingly, in October 2017 in Hanoi a conference on the significance of the Russian October Revolution was organized with Võ Văn Thương, Politburo member and chairman of the Department of Propaganda and Education as keynote speaker (Nhật Minh 2017).<sup>3)</sup>

The second task — to organize a ceremony in Hanoi — was carried out on November 4, 2017 in the National Convention Center in Hanoi. The complete Party and government leadership attended the ceremony together with domestic and foreign guests (VTV1 2017c). The whole ceremony was broadcast by the Vietnamese television (VTV1 2017d). At the beginning of the program, revolutionary songs and famous Russian songs were performed. As prescribed in the guidelines the ceremony in Hanoi emphasized the close connection of the Russian October Revolution and the Vietnamese revolution — an aspect that Party chairman Nguyễn Phú Trọng also dwelt on in a long speech.

The Party Chairman once more emphasized the significance of the Russian October Revolution for the Vietnamese revolution — against all attempts to ‘distort’ its achievements and “to negate Marxism-Leninism and the path to socialism in our country.” (VTV1 2017c)<sup>4)</sup>

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3) The Departments of Propaganda and Education at the provincial level were also instructed to organize ceremonies in commemoration of the Russian October Revolution. For an example in the southern province of An Giang see Phước Hòa (2017).

4) For a detailed presentation of this argument see, for example, Lê Hữu Nghĩa (2016)

His adherence to socialism against all odds must be understood in connection to his attempt in the last few years to increasingly reinforce socialist orthodoxy in the Party. Thus, the important Resolution 4 issued by the Central Committee of the CPV in October 2016 (Ban Chấp Hành Trung ương. Đảng Công Sản Việt Nam. 2016) explicitly warns against ‘tendencies of self-evolution’ (*tự diễn biến*) of Party members as reflected in the rejection of the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism, the demand for pluralism and the separation of powers, ‘the negation of the achievements of revolution’, and “the distortion of history, making fabrications, and slandering [...] of the leaders of Party and state.” (ibid.).

In this context, the celebrations on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution served to reaffirm the CPV’s view of its own role as the dominant force in the modern history of Vietnam and of the ever-lasting significance of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>5)</sup>

Also closely following the instructions of the Department of Propaganda and Education in 2017, Party newspapers and journals such as *Tạp chí Cộng sản* (Communist Journal) published a whole series of articles that highlighted the legacy of the Russian October Revolution (Anon. 2017a, Anon. 2017b, Đinh Ngọc Hoa 2017, Lê Việt Duyên 2020, Tô Đình Kháng 2017). Others specifically highlights Stalin’s achievements in building socialism in the Soviet Union. Thus, one article (Nguyễn Bá Dương 2017)

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and Anon (2010).

5) Also in conformity with the guidelines and the sanitized version of the Russian October Revolution propagated by the Department of Propaganda and Education Party theorists claimed that the collapse of the Soviet Union had also been due to the ‘self-evolution’ of leading members Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Đinh Ngọc Hoa 2017, Tạ Ngọc Tấn 2018). The CPV therefore, they concluded, had to resolutely fight against similar tendencies.

explicitly refers to a positive assessment of Stalin by the late President Hồ Chí Minh.<sup>6)</sup> According to Hồ Chí Minh, Stalin had managed to transform the Soviet Union into a “firm stronghold of the working-class and oppressed, of the democratic and peace faction of the whole world” (ibid.). In sum, the article praises the economic progress that the Soviet Union achieved under Stalin’s rule while completely disregarding the dark sides of the Stalin era such as the collectivization period, the great purge and the Gulag.

The Department of Propaganda and Education also entrusted state media such as the Vietnamese state television with spreading the Party’s celebratory version of the Russian October Revolution: The Vietnamese State Television (VTV) had to broadcast the official ceremony in commemoration of the Russian October Revolution (VTV1 2017d) and to produce a documentary. The documentary entitled ‘*Anh sáng tháng Mười*’ (The Light of October) (VTV1 2017b) was shot at authentic locations in Finland and Russia. Its political tenor was described in an accompanying article on the VTV website (VTV1 2017a). The documentary highlights the significance of that historical event for world history and the Vietnamese revolution and at the same time tries to explain why the Soviet Union collapsed after only 70 years of existence which is characterized as the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” (ibid.).<sup>7)</sup>

In addition to a lavish documentary the Vietnamese State Television also produced a special program entitled “10 Days that Shook the World” — a quote from the title of John Reed’s famous account of the Russian

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6) The author is member of the important ‘Central Theoretical Council’ of the CPV (*Hội đồng Lý luận Trung ương Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam*).

7) This is a quote from the famous assessment that President Putin made in 2005.

October Revolution (see VTV1 2017e and 2017f).

In the first part the program depicts the achievements of the Russian October Revolution, the second focusses on the patriotic war against Germany, and the third represents the spread of the internationalist communist movement including the Vietnamese and the Cuban Revolution.

Like a similar program (HTV 2017) it also caters for nostalgic feelings among older Vietnamese for the former Soviet Union, especially for its music and literature. Therefore, it includes well-known Russian songs such as Katyusha, scenes of restaged documentaries on the Russian October Revolution and interviews with Vietnamese who studied in the former Soviet Union a long time ago.<sup>8)</sup>

The way the official commemoration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution was organized reflects the important role of the CPV's Department of Propaganda and Education in directing the Vietnamese 'memory machine'.

### 3. The history of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in Vietnamese textbooks

The historiographical stagnation and rigidity in Vietnamese textbooks on the history of socialism and modern world history in general is inscribed in clear from the beginning: the foreword in one of the world history textbooks analysed in this article bluntly states that its proclaimed aim is to foster the readers' confidence in the CPV and the right path to socialism

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8) For this Soviet nostalgia among Vietnamese see Lê Thành 2020.



that the party has taken — in particular the confidence of future history teachers currently studying at Vietnamese universities (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, p. 10). That is why sensitive issues in the history of Vietnamese communism and the world's socialist movements still tend to be ignored, played down or distorted in textbooks.

Characteristically, both Vietnamese-language world history textbooks that are currently available and used at Vietnamese universities and teacher training colleges start their narrative with the year 1917 and 'the glorious Russian October Revolution' (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, and Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012).<sup>9)</sup> Both books depict the October Revolution as a major turning point in the history of mankind and basically portray the socialist period in the Soviet Union as a glorious past. According to this triumphalist account, all measures taken by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union after the seizure of power were aimed at transforming the country rapidly from an agrarian, feudal society into a modern, industrial country. Controversial aspects of the early history of the Soviet Union, however, are usually played down or avoided altogether. This is especially true of the human cost of forced industrialization; the forced collectivization of agriculture, for example, led to a terrible famine in Ukraine, Kazakhstan, the Northern Caucasus and other regions of the Soviet Union (Snyder 2010, p. 53). Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of peasants who offered active or passive resistance were shot dead or perished in the Gulag.

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9) The textbook by Nguyễn Anh Thái was published by the Vietnam Education Publication House (*Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục Việt Nam*) that belongs to the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (*Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo*) and is the main publishing house for school and university textbooks. The second world history by Đỗ Thanh Bình was published by the University of Education Publishing House (*Nhà xuất bản Đại học Sư phạm*), the second main publisher of textbooks in Vietnam.

Both accounts in the Vietnamese modern world histories, however, depict agricultural collectivization in the Soviet Union as a successful and necessary step on the way to creating a modern, industrial society. The older monograph admits that the Soviet authorities made some serious mistakes such as forcing peasants into co-operatives. According to the distorted narrative, the main problem, however, was that the kulaks, more affluent peasants and ‘reactionaries’ made use of the peasantry’s general resentment about state policy to sabotage the whole project of collectivization and instigate villagers to slaughter millions of cattle, which led to a massive famine. Nevertheless, the Communist Party and the Soviet state recognized and corrected the mistakes in time to accomplish agricultural collectivization in a ‘healthy’ and correct manner, it says (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 59).

In fact, this account repeats official views expressed by Stalin and others who scented saboteurs of collectivization everywhere in the 1930s, dubbed all peasants who did not wholeheartedly welcome the project ‘kulaks’ and ‘class enemies’, and resorted to harsh measures to break their resistance to it (a policy known as ‘dekulakization’) (Baberowski 2007).

Instead of describing the great famine of 1932 and 1933 as the partial result of an intended starvation policy, the Vietnamese textbook portrays the collectivization campaign as a success story and blames whatever problems arose during the movement on the ‘kulaks’ (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 59-60).

The second world history currently in use at Vietnamese universities and teacher training colleges basically repeats the twisted account mentioned above, but completely omits any mention of the fact that millions of people died during the great famine (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, pp. 51-53).

The first account at least mentions this fact, although the food shortage is presented as a result of the acts of sabotage perpetrated by the ‘kulaks’ (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 59).

In the same vein, albeit even more euphemistically, the two textbooks address one of the other dark periods in the history of the Soviet Union and Stalinism — the Great Terror that reigned there from 1936 to 1938. Thus, the chapter in the older modern world history is entitled ‘Building socialism in the Soviet Union (1921–1941)’, but in fact it only offers two cryptic and grossly distorted paragraphs about developments in the second half of the 1930s: besides bringing about some impressive achievements, the new socialist system also led to ‘stagnation’ and ‘passiveness’ — imperfections that became more pronounced from the beginning of the 1930s and further resulted in a ‘lack of democracy’ and repressive measures against dissidents. ‘The losses were not small’, it says (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 65). However, instead of further elaborating on the scope of political repressions in the Stalinist Soviet Union and the number of victims of the Great Purge, the account ends on a positive note, once again praising the successful rise of the Soviet Union to become a modern, industrialized nation with a highly-developed war industry which produced the material and technological basis for the Soviet people to beat off the ‘violent forces of international fascism’ (ibid., 65).

What is absent from this triumphalist account is the fact that the general staff of the Red Army were one of the main victims of the terror and lost many of their best and brightest officers, which partly explains the poor performance of the Soviet forces in the face of the German aggressors in 1941 (Baberowski 2003, pp. 168-172).

Again, the second modern history textbook basically presents a similar

account, it, only addresses the Great Purge in the second half of the 1930s in a very indirect and cursory manner. It does not even mention that there were ‘losses’ due to mistakes made in the Soviet Union during the building of socialism (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, p. 55).

The version taught in history textbooks for use at schools in Vietnam is similar. Thus, the account in both 11th-grade textbooks from the pre- and the post-reform period on the development of the Soviet Union in the first two decades is a short one and retells the success story of the rise of a powerful, modern, industrialized country. There is no mention whatsoever of the human cost that the Soviet people had to pay for this modernization project, forced agricultural collectivization and during the Great Terror (Lịch sử 11, 1988, pp. 33-40; Phan Ngọc Liên 2014a, pp. 53-58).<sup>10</sup> The chapters on the Second World War in the modern world history monographs and school textbooks follows a Manichean world view of good and evil, a continuous class struggle between the socialist, progressive camp and the capitalist, reactionary camp since the Russian October Revolution (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 220; Phan Ngọc Liên 2014b, p. 13). In this narrative, the Soviet Union bears the brunt of the struggle against Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Whereas the new 11<sup>th</sup>-grade textbook also gives the other allied powers — Britain and the United States — credit for the victory against the Third Reich (Phan Ngọc Liên 2014a, pp.

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10) Both textbooks were published by the main publishing house for textbooks in Vietnam, the Vietnam Education Publication House (*Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục Việt Nam*). The author of the second textbook, the late Phan Ngọc Liên, used to work as professor of history and was head of the Department of History at the Hanoi University of Education (*Đại học Sư phạm*), one of the main teachers’ colleges in Vietnam. He also served as president of the Association for History Education (*Hội Giáo dục Lịch sử*).

90-101), the older 11<sup>th</sup> grade textbook and the modern world history textbook depicts the Second World War as an epic struggle between Nazi Germany and what seems to have been its only enemy, the glorious Soviet Union (Lịch sử 11, 1988, pp. 73-96; Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 166-218).<sup>11)</sup> In this distorted account, all attempts by the Soviet Union to establish a united front against the threat of fascism were thwarted by the United States and other capitalist countries that wanted to drive Moscow into a war against Nazi Germany in order to continue their own struggle against communism, which had started right after the Russian October Revolution. Similarly, the textbooks hail the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from August 1939 as a clever ploy of Soviet diplomacy to win time (see Lịch sử 11, 1988, p. 73; Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 184-186). The Katyn massacre, i.e. the mass execution of Polish military officers and intellectuals by the Soviet secret police in Katyn, is not mentioned, although this issue has been addressed in Vietnamese newspapers recently (see, for example, Hải Minh 2010; Khắc Nam 2013; Nguyễn Thị Mai Hoa 2014).

The opening of the second front by the United States and Britain in Normandy, France in June 1944 is depicted as a belated measure that had to be forced upon the Allies by the Soviet Union. According to this account, which portrays the Soviet Union as the main victim and enemy of Nazi Germany until 1944, neither the United States nor Britain had “seriously participated in the war” (Lịch sử 11, 1988, p. 84; Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 210). This ignores the fact that Britain — the only country

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11) See the account by writer Đoàn Trang, who remembered from her history lessons at school that the Second World War was primarily depicted as a struggle between Nazi Germany and the glorious Soviet Union and that he hardly learnt anything about the other Allies. See Kinh Hòa 2015.

in war-torn Western Europe to remain unoccupied — had resisted the Third Reich since 1940 and that the United States had entered the Second World War in December 1941 after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. It went on to fight a fierce battle against Japan in the Pacific War and provided the Soviet Union with an enormous amount of military aid from 1941 onwards, commonly known as *lend-lease aid*, which had proved to be essential for the war on the Eastern Front.

The world history argues that since the Soviet Union participated in the Second World War, it became a ‘war for a just cause’ (*chiến tranh mang tính chất chính nghĩa*). The victory of the Soviet Union therefore had a major positive impact on the struggle for peace, national independence, democracy and social progress (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 220).

This central idea and the intrinsic binary opposition of the socialist, progressive camp led by the Soviet Union and the capital, imperialist, reactionary camp under the leadership of the United States are the dominant notions underlying the account on the developments in the post-war world and the Cold War in particular.<sup>12)</sup> Thus, according to the latest Vietnamese modern world history, in the Eastern European countries occupied by Nazi Germany, the entire bourgeoisie and their political parties surrendered, sided with the German occupiers or chose to go into exile in Britain. Only the communist parties offered steadfast resistance to fascist rule, it continues, and when the Red Army started to drive back the occupying forces in 1944, the communist resistance movements organized successful uprisings. The establishment of ‘people’s democracies’ in almost every country in Eastern Europe was therefore the ‘objective result’ of the existing con-

12) For whatever reasons, the second modern world history does not provide a detailed account of the Second World War (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012).

ditions during and after the Second World War and of the support provided by the Soviet Union (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, pp. 93-94). In line with this narrative, the Soviet Union always sided with progressive forces, whereas the former Western allies systematically colluded with reactionary and fascist elements.

It suffices to analyze how the intervention of the United States in West German politics is depicted in this account: here, in open defiance of the Potsdam Treaty, the US, Britain and France actively supported the restoration of militaristic and fascist circles. So in the end, the parties of the bourgeoisie, militaristic and fascist forces gradually came to dominate politics in West Germany, whereas the activities of truly democratic parties were restricted (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 231, pp. 307-308) — a distorted portrait of the beginnings of West Germany that seems to come straight from history textbooks from the former GDR.

In contrast, in all those Eastern European states that were supported by the Soviet Union, the ‘working class’ really did take over power. According to the narrative, however, during the Cold War the progressive socialist bloc constantly had to deal with anti-socialist conspiracies created by capitalist Western countries that colluded with hostile domestic reactionary elements. Popular uprisings and movements against socialist regimes in Eastern Europe that became more and more repressive from the beginning of the 1950s, such as those in the GDR in 1953, in Hungary in 1956, in Poland in 1956 and 1980 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968, are thus presented as anti-socialist plots that were mainly instigated by anti-revolutionary forces from the outside and were only supported by reactionary elements inside the country who lacked any substantial following by ‘the masses’ (see Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 260-261, pp. 266-267, pp.

274-277; Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, pp. 96-112).

In this account, which still follows stereotypes of socialist historiography during the Cold War period, the People's Uprising in the GDR in June 1953, for example, is merely portrayed as an act by provocateurs who entered East German territory from West Berlin to sabotage the building of socialism in the East and reunify both parts of Germany. In the end, the conspiracy was crushed with the help of the Soviet Union, the author claims (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, p. 277; Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, p. 112).

This version of the events in the GDR in 1953 completely withholds the fact that the uprising started as a strike by construction workers protesting against the increase in work quotas — in other words, the revolt against the Socialist Unity Party was led by the very working class that the ruling party was supposed to represent. Furthermore, the uprising soon turned into a nationwide phenomenon and was not just a single event in East Berlin stirred up by provocateurs from West Berlin.

The analysis of the further struggle of the GDR against hostile anti-socialist elements follows the well-known master narrative: accordingly, once the uprising of 1953 was crushed, reactionary West German elements continued to make use of the open border with East Germany to destroy socialism in the GDR, to spy and to hoard rare goods. In August 1961, the East German leadership reacted by taking appropriate measures to gain full control of the border and by building the Berlin Wall (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, p. 112; Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 277-278). This account rehashes the official explanation propagated by the East German leadership that they had to build a 'protective wall against fascism' (*antifaschistische Schutzmauer* in German), but it does not mention one of the main factors



that led to the fateful decision to close the inner German border: the migration of more than two million East Germans to West Germany up to the beginning of the 1960s.

The flight of such a huge number of East Germans from a country that allegedly had become more and more democratic under communist rule and whose economic and social achievements had guaranteed the people a happy and prosperous life does not fit into the socialist master narrative presented in the two modern world history textbooks.

The Soviet Union is portrayed as ‘the fortress of peace’ in the post-Second World War period on which the world’s democratic and progressive forces could rely (Đỗ Thanh Bình 2012, p. 73). Thus, when the socialist system in the GDR came under threat in 1953 and that in Hungary was endangered in 1956, the Soviet Union always came to the aid of its ‘brothers’. As for the domestic development of the Soviet Union, the account is also predominantly positive, but at the same time it stresses some negative phenomena that became more and more pronounced and also sowed the seeds of the later collapse of socialism, at least according to the analysis in the two world history textbooks.

Interestingly, the narrative in the first monograph seems to more straightforward and bolder than the second one: it devotes almost two pages to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1956 and its impact on the communist movement. For example, it mentions Khrushchev’s secret report, his criticism of the cult of personality and the suppression and terror during the Stalin era. However, the account does not go into any further detail and offers no reappraisal of Stalinism, the collectivization campaign or the Great Terror of the 1930s. Instead, it states that the congress led to the schism of the socialist world

and that Khrushchev's views were criticized by certain other communist parties as being 'revisionist' (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 256-257).

In the chapter on the history of socialism, the second textbook provides general information on the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, but does not cover Khrushchev's report or the beginnings of de-Stalinization at all. It only vaguely mentions that the Party had started to re-examine the case of those who had been wrongly convicted in the 1930s after 1953 (Đỗ Thanh Binh 2012, p. 70). In a different chapter on the history of the communist movement and international labor movement, however, the textbook states that while in power Khrushchev criticized mistakes made during the period of building socialism in the Soviet Union, the lack of democracy and the cult of personality that existed (ibid., 370). According to the narrative, in the 1960s the Soviet Union continued to defend the other socialist states against hostile Western conspiracies. Thus, when 'reactionary, anti-socialist' Western forces supported the plot 'to turn back the hands of time' in 1968, the Soviet Union thwarted it in time by sending troops in together with other states in the Warsaw Pact (ibid., 102).

However, the hitherto triumphalist account of the development of the Soviet Union starts to get tainted: while the West under the leadership of the United States actively tried to undermine socialism by promoting the scheme of 'peaceful evolution' and threatened to invade Cuba and Vietnam at the beginning of the 1960s, 'revisionist and opportunist elements' in some communist parties propagated the policy of 'peaceful co-existence' and a policy of unconditional compromise with the West. In addition, dogmatic tendencies started to appear in the communist world (ibid., 372). This is, of course, an intrinsic criticism of Khrushchev, who originally devised the policy of 'peaceful co-existence' (Grossheim 2013).

According to the account in the older modern history monograph, the aforementioned ‘dogmatism’ and ‘obstinate conservative thinking’ became dominant features in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries in Eastern Europe from the 1970s onwards. This led to the rise of a bureaucratic state in the Soviet Union and a fateful stagnation of socialism. The crisis of socialism also originated from mistakes made in the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, in particular the ‘monopolization of truth’ (*độc quyền chân lý*) and the monopoly of power in the hands of one party (Nguyễn Anh Thái 2014, pp. 487-488). Whether or not this is meant to be an encoded criticism of Stalinism is unclear.

In any case, due to their dogmatic and inflexible attitude, the leaderships in many socialist countries such as Romania, Albania, North Korea, Cuba and the GDR had rejected any reform, whereas Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia had promised to undertake reforms, but did not actually implement them. In contrast, the Soviet Union had carried out reforms, but done so in a hasty and inappropriate manner. The mistakes the Soviet leadership made led to a crisis and finally to the collapse of socialism at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. This is analyzed at length in the Vietnamese history textbooks and is directly linked to the fate of communism.

#### 4. Conclusion

While back in 1987 Kurt Hager, the GDR’s ideological chief, rejected any notion of reforms by stating ‘You don’t need to change the wallpaper in your flat just because your neighbor is redecorating his place’ (Anon

1987), the Vietnamese leadership reacted in time by launching reforms in 1986. In the official textbook on the history of the Vietnamese Communist Party used at universities the adoption of the reform policy (*đổi mới*) is presented as a major achievement by the CPV. At the same time, the textbook emphasizes that the ultimate triumph of the Vietnamese revolution depends on the ‘correct leadership by the CPV’ (Lê Mậu Hãn *et al.* 2006, p. 155, pp. 179-180, pp. 181-191). That the leadership of the CPV is absolutely necessary and that it is contingent on monopolizing power is repeated in a mantra-like manner — this is actually the main lesson that students are expected to learn in history classes or classes on Marxism-Leninism.

Thus, the emphasis of the history textbooks is on continuity — they still serve as a tool to legitimize the CPV’s monopoly of power. The same is true for official anniversaries such as the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian October Revolution that are commemorated according to the modern Ministry of Rites, the CPV’s Department of Propaganda and Education. Both textbooks and the commemoration of socialist anniversaries try to obscure the basic contradiction of the Vietnamese revolution: for the party building socialism and achieving independence had always been two aims that were inextricably linked with each other.<sup>13)</sup> In fact, however, in the mid-1980s the CPV had to realize that building socialism had been a massive failure and adopted a reform policy that contradicted its long-time socialist tenets (Goscha 2016). To renounce socialism as the ultimate aim, however, would make the sacrifices that hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese made since the foundation of the party and especially during the second Vietnam War (1964-1975) not only for achieving independence,

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13) Tuong Vu emphasizes the commitment of Vietnamese revolutionaries to communism (see Tuong Vu 2017, 2019).

but also for building socialism in the south of the country useless, and thus shake the foundation of the CPV's legitimacy of power. Therefore, in history textbooks and on the occasion of anniversaries the history of the CPV and Vietnam's national history is presented as part of a basically triumphalist history of world socialism. They propagate a linear narrative of the history of socialism that obliterates dark spots such as the Stalinist terror or the crushing of uprisings in East Germany, Hungary or Czechoslovakia in 1953, 1956 and 1968 respectively. Those episodes in the history of socialism in the twentieth century that would constitute 'threatening histories'<sup>14)</sup> to the basically positive account are reconfigured. The role of 'the masses' or 'the workers', for example, is only celebrated in the narrative as long as they follow the line of the communist party.

Thus, history textbooks and the commemoration of socialist anniversaries in Vietnam serve to uphold ideological orthodoxy and curb the spread of deviationist ideas — a phenomenon that the CPV's Central Committee has called 'self-evolution' (*tự diễn biến*) (Ban Chấp Hành Trung ương. Đảng Cộng Sản Việt Nam 2016) This 'self-evolution' also includes challenging the orthodox historical narrative propagated in textbooks, i.e. questioning and misrepresenting the 'achievements of socialism' and defaming party leaders such as Ho Chi Minh (Lê Hữu Nghĩa 2016, Bắc Hà 2015) and of socialist leaders such as Lenin who are still celebrated in Vietnam.<sup>15)</sup> Thus, Lenin's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2020 will be one of the most important anniversaries celebrated by the CPV's well-maintained 'memory machine' (Ban Chấp Hành Trung ương. Ban Tuyên giáo. 2020).

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14) I borrow the term from the title of George Dutton's insightful article (Dutton 2013).

15) See the discussion about the erection of a Lenin statue in Nghệ An province in 2020 (Anon. 2020b, Đảng Trường 2020).

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초 록

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사회주의 역사에 대한 현창(顯彰)

— 베트남의 ‘기억 공작’은 어떻게 가동되는가

마틴 그로스하임\*

베트남에서 ‘역사’는 여전히 공산당의 집권을 정당화하기 위한 중요한 수단으로 활용되고 있다. 소위 역사에 대한 ‘올바른 이해’가 ‘기억 공작’(memory machine)을 통해서 만들어지고 선전된다.

본 논문에서는 베트남에서 이루어지고 있는 이와 같은 ‘기억 공작’의 양상을 두 가지 사례 연구를 통해서 제시하고자 한다. 첫 번째 사례는 2017년에 베트남에서 거행된 러시아 10월 혁명 100주년 기념식이며, 두 번째 사례는 베트남 역사 교과서 속 사회주의 역사에 대한 묘사 방식이다.

베트남에서는 지난 2017년, 러시아의 10월 혁명 100주년 기념식을 장중 하면서 정통성을 강조하는 방식으로 진행했다. 이와 동시에 사실상 베트남 공산당의 역사적 관점과 해석을 선전하는 독점 매체라고 할 수 있는 고등학교와 대학의 역사 교과서를 통해서, 20세기의 베트남 역사를 소비에트 사회주의 공화국 연방의 수립과 밀접한 연관을 가지는 세계 사회주의 역사의 한 부분으로 위치시키는 작업을 진행하고 있다.

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