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Worlds United and Apart Bridging Divergence in Hanoi and Beyond

Susan Bayly

Introduction

Intellectual exchange is a bridging of worlds, not necessarily successfully or completely, but with at least the possibility of boundaries crossed and the generation of ties. When I was planning my article on moral cartography, my hope was that it would communicate something of the excitement I had experienced from learning about the many forms of world bridging I had encountered in the course of fieldwork in Hanoi. I decided to focus on the connections and crossings I had heard about in discussions with my interlocutors about the importance of geospatial knowledge in their daily lives. This includes the contemplation of national maps and other indicators of Vietnam's positioning in a world of interacting national geo-bodies, and what it is that gives people such a strong sense of gratification when they do so. It also includes the care they take in recounting family narratives of their elders' traversing of near and distant topographical frontiers.¹

I was much intrigued by these responses to maps and their producers, so strikingly at odds with our widely held view of maps as instruments of subjugating power knowledge (Winichakul 1994; Ramaswamy 2002). I therefore came up with the notion of moral cartography as the article's framing idea, using it to explore both the anxieties and satisfactions my friends experience when they engage with the expertise of such people as map-makers, geomancers and psychic grave-finders, all of whom can be of great importance in the pursuit of a morally agentive life.

These observations were a spur to several of my subsequent research concerns, including an interest in notions of achievement in Vietnamese educational contexts (Bayly 2014), and an attempt to understand more about what Hanoians do to achieve a sense of themselves as ethically refined moral agents

(Bayly 2020). What I explore in this new chapter is how my moral cartography material relates to the volume's framing theme of intellectual exchange. In doing so, I present ethnography I have not used elsewhere, focusing on the ways my interlocutors have engaged with divergent traditions of knowledge in a variety of personal and familial contexts. My particular concern is with the experiences of those whose traversings of frontiers both tangible and intangible have taken place at points of interface between the domains of science and the supramortal, noting both the challenges and the gratifications that these encounters can entail.

Exchanging and Border Crossing

The processes of mapping and spatial positioning I explored in my moral cartography paper involve physical as well as intellectual border crossing, sometimes with pleasing outcomes, but often at considerable cost. These were dynamics I first began to recognize during my earliest research in Vietnam, when I was conducting fieldwork with interlocutors sharing a distinctive family heritage, that of *gia đình trí thức*: intelligentsia/intellectual families. I found that younger members of these lineages were keen to share family accounts of the life and times of their elders, taking particular note of the immense changes these older kin had learned to navigate in the years of their homeland's remarkable transition from the life of war and grim postwar high socialist austerity to the marketization era known as *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) that began in the early 1990s.

These family elders included both men and women who had amassed a sometimes dangerously diverse stock of cultural and linguistic capital from having been educated in early youth in francophone colonial *lycées*, and subsequently in universities and research institutes spanning the old East-West divide, such that a single lifetime could encompass training and work stints in Moscow, Warsaw or Beijing, as well as Harvard or the Sorbonne. Such traversings of national and supra-national space have been both celebrated and disparaged in Vietnam. To some, those participating in these perilous forms of globe-trotting were users of skill and learning for ignoble gain. Their detractors also tend to see the sciences as taught by foreigners as cold and mechanistic, hence destructive of the moral groundings of a Vietnamese sensibility. But engagement with other lands and knowledge systems has equally vehement defenders who see such borrowings as confidently dialogic, arguing that an outward-looking cosmopolitanism is the defining essence of Vietnamese-ness, and that one can learn what the wider world has to teach without any surrender of national values and identity.

Only in Vietnam, I was told, as I travelled with members of a lively Hanoi *trí thức*/intelligentsia family to the site of one of the psychic grave searches (*đi tìm mộ*) described in my moral cartography article, would I find someone like the eminent retired geologist with a PhD from a prestigious USSR university who had organized this occasion for his kin, and had kindly invited me to attend.

His post-retirement glissade from teaching science at a top Hanoi university to his more recently achieved local eminence as a master of the art of geomantic spatial reckoning (*phong thủy*: feng shui in Western parlance) was emphatically not seen by his relations as a repudiation of his earlier training in positivistic hard science, but as its fulfilment and ultimate realization.

It is a kind of life trajectory that is very familiar to my intelligentsia friends. They say that with dedication and loving care, a man or woman of rigorous mind can find points of synergistic interplay between seemingly incompatible domains, advantaging their loved ones and the world at large by melding the principles of the material and the auratic in the pursuit of virtuous goals. Doing so is especially commendable in cases like this one, where the goal is provision of care and comfort to the ancestral dead.²

Other Hanoians I know have also been dynamic participants in a world of bridging and exchange, including the people of far more modest backgrounds with whom I have worked in the inner-city neighbourhood I call West Lake, now my principal fieldsite. For many West Lakers, there were long periods of childhood relocation during the 1946–54 anti-French liberation war, followed by further dislocations and border crossings in the course of overseas work stints in the years during and after the 1962–73 US-Vietnam War. This entailed officially sanctioned sojourns in almost every region of what I have called the global socialist ecumene, including work stints in the Soviet Union and its so-called satellites, as well as aid work in Algeria, Guinée and the other decolonized lands that were also important participants in this world-spanning web of socialist and quasi-socialist ‘friendship’ ties.

There were some surprising exchanges in these far-flung settings. Our theories of ethically meaningful gifting are particularly relevant to the translocal bridgings they produced.³ Beginning in the 1970s, medical aid workers from Hanoi introduced their Algerian counterparts to electric acupuncture (*châm cứu điện*), a home-grown fusion of ‘Eastern’ (*Đông y*) and international therapeutic practice that was also enthusiastically received in the Soviet Union, and is still hailed in Vietnam as one of the nation’s great contributions to world science.⁴

This is a key instance of what the former aid workers like to say about their activities, which is that the aid providers’ gifts of skill and expertise were a product of home-grown Vietnamese genius enriched through selective engagements with the wider world’s sciences and knowledge systems. The picture painted here in regard to the Soviet Union is comparable to what my travelling companions said of their geologist kinsman Professor Đức: that there was mutual respect and benefits received on both sides, with the image of socialist ‘elder siblings’ enthusiastically learning from Vietnam providing a welcome counterweight to the knowledge of how dependent the country had been on Soviet and Chinese aid and tutelage in the 1946–54 and 1962–73 war years, and the straitened 1973–90 ‘subsidy’ era (*thời kỳ bao cấp*) that preceded the onset of marketization. The welcome implication of this is that Vietnam has been as much a giver as a receiver of these frontier-crossing boons and benefits, rather

than a perpetual junior in relations with its far richer socialist 'friends' and exchange partners (Bayly 2009). The former aid workers also like to stress that the care provided to the African countries they call 'undeveloped' was given freely and without expectation of return, thus not to be thought of as coldly instrumental, i.e. an exchange of conscripted intellectual labour power for monetary return.

In addition to these cases of Vietnamese gift-giving in faraway places, there were notable instances of intellectual gift-taking, as in the case of the pioneering Hanoi anthropologist Nguyễn Đức Từ Chi who first encountered the writings of Lévi-Strauss on the shelves of Guinée's National University library in Conakry, during his four-year posting as a pedagogy teacher in the early 1960s. Từ Chi's discovery of Lévi-Strauss was of course a matter of serendipity. But I suggest that we can also see it as a matter of gift-giving, though the question that then arises is which of our varied models of gifting this might entail. At first glance, it may appear that it fits the model of the boon-like gift made by superiors to humbly deferential juniors in a scheme of top-down, asymmetrical gift provision. This would mean seeing the ideas Từ Chi found so exciting and revelatory as yet another instance of what I noted above in relation to the gifting of development aid, thus assigning Từ Chi to the unhappy role of humble junior receiving a top-down gift of enlightenment as an unreciprocating taker of intellectual largesse emanating from the 'developed' world.

But in fact I think something richer and more interesting can be made of this. On his return to Hanoi, Từ Chi held unofficial seminars in which he introduced students to the hitherto unknown methodologies of structuralism. These were tantalising novelties to a generation taught the social sciences from translated Soviet textbooks, and his young listeners debated what they heard in still-remembered exchanges around the café tables of the old student quarter in central Hanoi.⁵

Từ Chi also sought to build on Lévi-Strauss in his ground-breaking wartime fieldwork in the country's northern uplands, treading a dangerously fine line between the permissible and the transgressive in his daringly sympathetic accounts of ritual and spirituality among his ethnic minority Mường interlocutors (published under his pseudonym Trần Từ, 1996). In doing so he made his own reflective sense of structuralism, treating it as a source of insights to be made dialogically interactive with Vietnamese modes of thought, rather than a doctrine to be imbibed one-sidedly, without question or critical engagement. This too makes Hanoians who know about him think of the process as one in which Từ Chi was initially in the position of gift-receiver taking tutelage from a world of wider intellectual horizons than his own, but then rapidly proceeding to the status of provider and benefactor in his own right, as he shared his highly personalized version of this new learning with receptive juniors of his own.

For other Hanoians too, there were liminalities and exchanges to be navigated on home soil, most notably through experience of Vietnam's colliding and interpenetrating worlds of city and countryside, together with the giant revolutionary transformations of the pre- and post-Independence periods that

brought the teachings of Vietnamized Marxism, Buddhism and Confucianism into furiously contentious conversation with the multi-stranded legacies of French colonial thought, and the output of Vietnam's own distinguished array of home-grown social theorists and moralists (McHale 2004). And both in the past and today, there is the mix of contrasts and intertwinings between the ancestral traditions that citizens are taught to revere, and the equally strong call to embrace high-tech ultramodernity as the nation's key ideal.

Bridging Science and the Supramundane

The form of bridging that is particularly relevant to my moral cartography concerns is that experienced in my friends' traversing between the domains of the scientific and the supramundane. It is their engagements with those seemingly disparate moral orders that the paper seeks to highlight. I learned a great deal about such fluidity from Professor Đức and his family, and much too from Mrs Lý, a redoubtable octogenarian whose grandson Binh is one of my principal West Lake interlocutors. There are features of Mrs Lý's life story that are notably similar to Professor Đức's, despite the very considerable differences in their backgrounds and career trajectories.⁶ What they have in common are their confident traversings of knowledge realms that an outsider might think of as mutually antagonistic because they would seem to be based on radically conflicting views of human and cosmic nature. But in fact neither they nor my other friends regard the truths of science and the supramundane as incompatible or in rivalry as claims on the moral self. Both Professor Đức and Mrs Lý are longstanding Party members, and both evince wholehearted commitment to the principles of scientific materialism they were taught to embrace as the source of authoritative knowledge about the human and natural order. But as I noted in regard to Professor Đức and his family, there are challenges but not insuperable difficulties in aligning the insights of the scientist's reasoning intellect with those of the 'heart-mind' (*ruột* or *lòng*: literally 'gut') that provides access to the auratic and supramortal and is thus the seat of moral sensibility (Marr 2000).

In Professor Đức's case, we remain very much in the realm of science, *khoa học*, when we note his use of the knowledge practices of *phong thủy* (geomantic earth science). He regards his mastery of *phong thủy* as a further and higher level of the geology he learned from his Soviet professors and faithfully imparted to his students on his return to Hanoi, keen to inspire them with his own enthusiasm for the discipline's revelatory rigour.⁷ Mrs Lý is equally passionate about the empowering truths of science, but her introduction to all she associates with the scientific cast of mind was very different from what Professor Đức experienced in the high-socialist 1960s. In his case this meant his life as a high-achieving pupil in the best of post-Independence Hanoi's selective 'gifted student' schools, followed by a long study stint in Moscow. This was a true glittering prize at the time, attainable by only a tiny minority of the country's ablest students, not least

because of the need for an unimpeachably clean *lý lịch* (personal record), i.e. no suspect political ties or 'bad class' family background.

Professor Đức's parents were themselves Hanoi academics: committed revolutionaries of distinguished intelligentsia/*trí thức* ancestry. Mrs Lý's background is that of a very different Vietnam. Born into rural poverty in 1930, fifteen years before President Hồ Chí Minh's declaration of national independence and the launch of Vietnam's nine-year anticolonial resistance war, Mrs Lý was the first literate woman in her village, as well as its first female Communist Party member, and first entrant into the world of urban waged employment. Her husband Manh was one of the locality's earliest recruits to the Communist-led liberation force known as the Việt Minh. Following her husband's battlefield death in 1953, she was left to raise their daughter Huynh on her own, though of course with such help as her nine very poor siblings could provide, and with the benefit of the modest perks and entitlements allocated to the widows and children of officially designated *liệt sỹ* (war martyrs). 'Always hungry' is her terse comment on those years.

Today, although long retired from the last of her increasingly senior state service posts, she is still a dynamic presence in her daughter and son-in-law's household in the big port city where her grandson Binh was born. Mrs Lý's daughter is a late-career biology teacher at a top-ranked city secondary school; she is married to Cường, who also comes from a poor peasant family. Like Mrs Lý, Cường made a dramatic transition to a life of science and urban modernity, which in his case entailed selection for training as a practitioner of *Đông y*/'Eastern' medicine.⁸ They live in modest comfort: good-quality motor-bikes but as yet no car; a well-furnished house in a comparatively quiet inner-city neighbourhood.

The notion of life lived to a plan and of the sciences as the empowering source on which to draw in the forging of that plan is what Mrs Lý learned to embrace at the critical point in her life that I discuss below, and it has remained central to the conceptions of health and wellbeing that she still takes pains to instil in her younger kin. Her own day begins with the quiet chanting of Buddhist *sutras*. She does this in the early morning, seated before a cherished photo of her soldier-martyr husband. Like many other women of similar age and background, she embraced the daily disciplines of an active lay Buddhist devotee following her retirement from state service. She enjoys her role as informal advisor to family and neighbours on the correct placing of the food offerings and other items that belong on a properly tended household ancestor altar, so that its arrangement is effective in bringing the ancestral dead under the Buddha's compassionate care.⁹

For Mrs Lý and her family there is no conflict between her lay Buddhist lifestyle and her continued reverence for the Party and the humane scientism she regards as its moral core; the one has definitely not been a replacement for the other. She does make distinctions: she is not keen on the widely publicized occasions when officials forge partnerships with monks from regional pagodas for initiatives such as the provision of relief aid to flood victims. She has made

it clear that she prefers relations with monks to be on a personal basis, by which she means teaching the Dhamma and performing life cycle rites in a family's home. Having been an official herself, Binh has told me, she believes it is for Party organizations such as the Vietnam Youth Union to define and meet citizens' material needs.

Mrs Lý's morning regimen continues with a brief but vigorous session of the balletic fitness exercises that are another widespread practice of the elderly in Vietnam; then a brisk reading from state media to her breakfasting kin. She always chooses the items for discussion and comment, favouring the venerable state daily *Lao Động* (Labour) because she likes its tips on health and bodily care, as well as its reports on developments in *khoa học*/science fields she considers good for human flourishing, such as advances in infertility treatments and neonatal care.¹⁰

That notion of a day mapped out in clock-time with regular intervals allocated to sleep, meals, work and recreation is one of the novelties she learned to embrace when she was in her early twenties, in the very different world she entered after her husband's death. There was a small quasi-industrial work unit in a locality several kilometres from her rural home, and she and one of her sisters took the bold step of saying yes when its recruitment team arrived in her village seeking young female volunteers to join its workforce.

This was the first of the great moments of transformation in Mrs Lý's remarkable life. The work was gruelling – the women's task was to tend the blazing outdoor vats in which old tyres and other rubber waste items were melted down for purposes that were never explained to her. With hindsight, her grandson thinks they were reusing the salvaged rubber to make new tyres for army portage bikes, and probably soldiers' sandals as well. The unit's interior was where the male labour force worked, but at what exactly Mrs Lý says she never knew. 'For the army' is what she says she heard, which meant it was definitely not something to ask about.

All this may seem grim and dehumanizing, a kind of sub-industrial hell, yet Mrs Lý's accounts of her life at the site are strikingly elegiac. She speaks of her time there as a learning experience full of wonderful new inputs to her sense of the world and her place in it. Of course, I am bearing in mind that as she rose to senior service rank she would certainly have become well versed in the Party's narratives of empowering enlightenment conferred on an ever-grateful citizenry, its mass literacy campaigns and schooling in the ways of the modern industrial workplace to be applauded as triumphs of revolutionary developmentalism warmly welcomed by all (Malarney 2002).

But her grandson Binh, very much a cynic and quick to debunk everything he considers 'fake' in his highly formulaic Party history and ideology classes, says he has no doubt about the sincerity with which she speaks of her abiding gratitude towards those who shaped her new life at the site. The key figure in her stories is not another workmate or a work supervisor, but the youthful Party education officer she came to regard as a mentor, conforming to the time-honoured ideal of the caring village teacher selflessly nurturing the talents of

the young, but in his case a revolutionary modern and thus eager to impart his learning to both male and female recipients of his care.

It was in the young officer's classes that Mrs Lý learned to read, filling her makeshift slate with the words and phrases of the day. And then came the revelatory new knowledge that she learned to call science, *khoa học*. What *khoa học* means to her is something she speaks of in wholly positive terms, and she too makes it clear that what she learned about its truths and principles was in no sense a refutation of the values and sensibilities she grew up with. Her notion of science is moral order, a vision of the world governed by the beauty of the truths and regularities of a benign and principled nature, with no call for the learner to renounce warmth and personal attachment, or to see the path of science as service to an abstract and depersonalized understanding of humanity or the nation.

The stories Mrs Lý tells of those times are thus of a very immediate and personal experience of her homeland's giant post-Independence leap from the immiseration of colonial rule to the wonders of revolutionary modernity that she narrativizes as the fruit of its citizens' hard work and sacrifice, given shape and momentum by the Party, with President Hồ Chí Minh as its guiding light and moral exemplar. And without directly disparaging the life of toil she had led on her family's tiny plot of unproductive farmland, she does make it clear that she feels her traversing of those few kilometres separating her natal village from her new life at the production site to have been an act of life-changing will and purpose, hence a move comparable to those I sought to relate to my notion of moral cartography.

What I think we can also see in Mrs Lý's life story is the way the idea of a morally cartographic dynamic in human life can be further enriched by relating it to a dynamic of intellectual exchange. Binh grew up on Mrs Lý's stories of how her teacher at the production site made science a realm of graspable truths to cherish and profit from. The teacher comes across in these accounts as the antithesis of the stereotypical Party modernizer hellbent on imposing a socialist version of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* on his rustic charges.¹¹ In Mrs Lý's accounts there is no suggestion that she was made to feel ashamed of her village ways, or that there could be any problem in finding points of interface between the truths of science and the knowledge of the 'heart-mind' she had brought with her into her teacher's open-air classroom. He showed the class the first bar of soap they had ever seen; she remembers her delight when he lathered his hands and made the bubbles float above their heads. It was a lesson on hygiene and orderly comportment, but there is nothing in the way she tells the story suggesting that the idea of regulating one's day by the principles of clock time and a formalized activity plan felt alien or dehumanizing to her, or that the lesson was delivered as a corrective to what a townsman might think of as a villager's backward ways. What Binh notes about her stories is that she speaks of the teacher's lessons as being angled towards what she cared about as the mother of a young child: the safeguarding of bodily health and the wellbeing of those in her care. This is what she still tells Binh

about science: its truths are personal, resources to embrace in the pursuit of human flourishing.

She was certainly acquiring a new grounding and vision of the world and her place in it. 'He always explained,' she says of the young teacher, and it clearly means much to her to be able to say that he took pains to provide a rationale for his lessons, rather than expecting mute compliance and regurgitation on command. When she speaks of the young education officer at her factory, she refers to him with respect and affection as 'my *thầy*', using the possessive pronoun to convey the notion of a warm bond between them, so the sense is something like 'my dear mentor/preceptor'.¹² Of course this is very much an idealized portrayal of the revolutionary enlightenment process, but even allowing for its likely elisions and omissions it is still very striking as a representation of intellectual exchange. She clearly wants her grandson and other young kin to see it as she does, a relation that was hierarchical, a male senior imparting revelatory truths to a female junior, but to be seen in terms of the naturalness and inherent virtue of such relations.

'Water flows downhill,' people say. Binh uses this familiar proverb when we talk about these relationship issues. What it conveys to him and other Hanoians I know is that what is in nature, like the elements and their life-giving flows and energies, is morally sound. This includes the elemental truth that in human life, as in nature, it is right and proper for seniors to develop the minds and moral attunements of their juniors. And it is wholly unproblematic for those junior-senior relations to be those of a virtuously caring senior male and cheerfully deferential junior female.

What I am often told about these norms of everyday relational life is that their basis is the distinctiveness of the Vietnamese self, this being a nature that is predisposed to balance and harmony in dealings with mortal and non-mortal others because it is a form of selfhood innately rich in qualities of warmth and sensibility (*tinh cảm*), hence distinctively equipped to constitute authority relations, including those that place men above women in orders of relational structure and status, as mutualities of love and exemplarship, not submission or subjugation. 'Up and down,' people say, not 'top-down'. Indeed, the models most often called to mind are of planetary orbits, or a lodestone's magnetic pull; nothing rigid or ladder-like. So, while males and seniors are situated above women and juniors in relational contexts, as in the arrangement of photos on a household ancestor altar, the notions articulated are those of motility and the circuits of the heavens. The senior is thus the orbital heart and centre to which the junior's quickened sensibility will naturally orient itself.¹³

Again, there may well be much that is selective and idealized in Mrs Lý's account of her factory classroom experiences, intended to convey a moralizing message to Binh and her other kin about the virtues they should strive to uphold even though their circumstances and prospects are so very different from those of her own younger days. And there can be no doubt that in her later years Mrs Lý was well aware that there were Party ideologues who took a harsh and dismissive view of rustic conventions and mores. But when Party

members speak or act in ways she finds problematic, her view is that although in her youth men and women of the Party were typically more virtuous than in today's Vietnam, it is the individuals who stray from its ideals and values who are deficient, not the Party itself as an enduring force for good.

I do not mean to suggest that these experiences of world-bridging were effortless or unproblematic for Mrs Lý. She makes it clear in looking back at her earlier life that there were many challenges to be faced as she sought to navigate between the truths of science and those of the auratic and the heart-mind. The first of these was the moment when she was told in her second year at the rubber melting site that her exemplary work and study performance had qualified her for a posting to one of Vietnam's few fully mechanized production units, a newly inaugurated Soviet-built canning plant in the big city I will not name in order to preserve her anonymity, where she would learn the skills of factory labour in its most excitingly modern form, as well as pursuing her classroom studies at a more advanced level. It was clear to her that this was a rare and wonderful opportunity that would vastly better her own prospects and those of her small daughter, for whom access to the high-quality schooling available only in the country's big cities would mean a future of career possibilities far better even than those for which Mrs Lý herself was clearly being groomed.

But there was still a difficulty to be faced. Mrs Lý was in no doubt that a life change of this magnitude required consultation with her departed husband. Without his knowledge and approval, she could not proceed. The post was a plum, but Binh says she could have turned it down; even in those far stricter times, a soldier martyr's widow of good repute could have said no to such a move. She would not have needed to say why, he assured me; it would have been assumed that she was reluctant to move too far from her husband's gravesite to be able to see to its care, and no official would challenge this virtuous expression of a wife's devotion and sensibility (*tình cảm*).

But in fact Mrs Lý did want the post, so long as she could be confident that her husband approved. So she returned quietly to the village to set the process in train. In the past as today, children learn from an early age that the ancestral dead are an aware and active presence in the affairs of the living (Jellema 2007; Endres 2018). It is a fundamental duty of the living to sustain and care for their departed kin, showing their loving remembrance (*biết ơn*) and respect (*kính trọng*) with gifts and offerings. This includes ensuring that the dead partake of the good things families share on key occasions such as their lunar New Year (*Tết*) gatherings; and communicating with them on a regular basis so they are informed about the doings of their loved ones and can provide what my interlocutors call 'support' (*phù hộ*) should they choose to intervene in times of need.

Today's practices allow for much more elaborate forms of provision and communication with the deceased than was possible in Mrs Lý's youth when, for example, there were no ancestor altars in people's homes of the kind Mrs Lý now warmly approves. But there is much about contemporary practices that

she finds crass and unseemly. People today think they are entitled to make demands of the dead, she complains. This is ugly and unfeeling. No child should be brought up thinking it right to treat the ancestors as if they need to be cajoled and prodded into showing care for their kin. When performing incense lighting (*thắp hương*) at the family altar, one should say only 'my son has an exam tomorrow', or 'we hope to build our new house soon', and never turn such a report into an importuning; or, even more disgustingly, a transaction, as in 'I give you this offering, so please help me in return'.

Mrs Lý also disapproves of the staging of elaborate soul-calls (*gọi hồn*) of the kind that so often feature in the moral cartographies described in my paper. She sympathizes with those who arrange such occasions in order to facilitate grave searches, their aim being to end the pain of soldier-martyrs and other departed kin whose remains have been lost and therefore suffer because they have not been properly entombed. But she regards the process itself as invasive and hurtful, especially when performed by one of the many paid psychics (*nhà ngoại cảm*) who now offer their services as expert providers of contact with the non-mortal realm (the otherworld: *thế giới khác*). She thinks the *ngoại cảm* psychics use their 'special capacities' in a heartless manner that is disturbing and painful for the dead, and that the psychics are motivated by personal profit and fame rather than loving care for the departed (see Schlecker and Endres 2011; Fjelstad and Hien 2018).

Yet Mrs Lý has never concealed from her kin that she organized a *gọi hồn* calling of her own on that key occasion when she was offered the posting to the big port town. It is clear to her family, however, that it was a soul-calling quite unlike the *gọi hồn* procedures of today. She did arrange for an intermediary to make the necessary contact with her husband. But no money changed hands, merely the gift of a chicken as a gracious thank-you when the calling was done. And the soul-caller was a fellow villager, a woman who knew the family, not a hired practitioner like the unfeeling psychics of today. She uses the old-fashioned village term *bà đồng* (seer) for the provider, regarding *ngoại cảm* as a coldly scientized neologism used only by those who have professionalized and commodified their 'special capacities'.

Bình says he is sure that Mrs Lý would not have told her factory workmates or even her kindly teacher about the event. But she would not have considered it shameful or at odds with her commitment to the new socialist world she had so enthusiastically embraced. The outcome of the calling was favourable, and Mrs Lý did indeed take the new post, confident that her husband was supportive and at ease. And while she never again staged a soul-calling, she has never ceased to connect with her husband, doing so by means of the gentle communion that is set in train by the performance of *thắp hương*/incense lighting at one's household altar.

No one in the family would think of these engagements with the non-mortal realm as anything other than the normal acts of conscience (*tâm*) and moral sensibility (*tình cảm*) that are the essential underpinnings of a properly conducted Vietnamese life. They are certainly not thought to be in conflict

with Mrs Lý's firm commitment to the Party and all she associates with its principles and values. When Mrs Lý speaks to her husband of family matters, she knows he listens with compassionate care. And he communicates with her, though not often, and not in words. There is a particular twinge of mild discomfort in her gut that she recognizes as an expression of his concern. And she knows there is something more seriously amiss when he appears to her in a dream, his face glimpsed in shadow but his expression recognizably one of warning and unease. When these contacts take place, she tells the rest of the family about them so they can discuss a likely cause and potential remedy. Perhaps there is an impending road journey for someone in the household and he foresees a danger and the need for extra care. Or he himself may be in distress, and they may need to check on his gravesite in the ancestral village in case it has been damaged in a recent storm.

Of course, Mrs Lý has known since those early years in her factory classrooms that the Party state is fiercely hostile to practices it defines as *mê tín dị đoan*, superstition (Malarney 2002; Schwenkel 2018; Endres 2020). It is a word she often uses, much as my other interlocutors do; always disparagingly, but referring to practices both she and they consider very different from their own. Officialdom says it is *mê tín* to traffic with seers and fortune tellers, but to my interlocutors this means practitioners of the malign black arts, not the reputable geomancers and other providers they and their families make use of for virtuous ends. The realm of *mê tín*/superstition also includes activities that Mrs Lý and my Hanoi friends regard as vulgar and excessive. So the burning of very large quantities of replica paper votive offerings (*vàng mã*) for the dead is *mê tín*/superstition. But the making of modest *vàng mã* gifts of a kind suited to the needs and tastes of departed kin is a loving act of care and reverence, thus wholly in keeping with the spirit of *tình cảm* (sensitive feeling for others), which is the bedrock of Vietnamese-ness (Rydstrom 2003).

The final stages of Mrs Lý's remarkable life trajectory began in the ten years that followed her move to the canning factory job. She was selected for Party membership, in those days an honour bestowed on those deemed outstanding contributors to national need. And she was once again recognized as a model worker and diligent learner, so was singled out for yet another plum: in this case a transfer to the city's Department of Education where she remained in post for the rest of her working life. Her duties were in the field of what the Party state calls ideology (*tư tưởng*), which was work assigned to particularly able and trusted Party members.

'Intellectuals', her grandson Binh told me, are of course the people qualified for actual teaching. Or if they work in administration, they are the right people to deal with the academic side of schooling and educational policy. But the head of the 'intellectual' is said to be filled with things like the chemistry or maths they had to master so as to qualify in their fields. Less so today, but certainly at the time when Mrs Lý was in post, the logic of this is that there must be reliable people like Binh's grandmother to complement the work of the academic specialists when key decisions must be made, such as which of a

given cohort of the able young should be sent abroad for training in a field deemed important for the national interest.

'Reliability' in such cases meant someone coming to the work of educational decision-making from the factory floor, rather than the rarefied world of the scholar or 'brain worker'. And it was indeed one of Mrs Lý's key responsibilities to take part in the vetting of school leavers given provisional nomination for the joy of overseas study in the USSR or other Eastern bloc states. Of course, Binh explained, it was important for teachers and subject specialists to identify those pupils with the best academic qualifications for such placings. But vetting of the candidate's *lý lịch* ('background'/personal history dossier) by Mrs Lý's office was the crucial next stage in the approval process. The decisions could be harsh: a single 'bad class' grandparent could derail a brilliant student's otherwise unstoppable path to a university in the wider socialist world.

Even today, although such antecedents are no longer treated as a lifelong stigma, no one I know is puzzled about why such concerns were dealt with as matters of 'ideology'. Friends made clear to me that in official thought and language 'ideology' *tư tưởng* is a capacious term. Of course, it is used in the familiar sense of a body of organized knowledge, and more specifically the ordering principles of the Party state, which the young are formally taught in their compulsory school and university classes on Marxism-Leninism and the thought of President Hồ Chí Minh. But it also denotes the work done by offices like Mrs Lý's, meaning the body of acquired insights and understandings that such units' staff would be assumed to have mastered through long years of work experience and Party training. So it was by virtue of rigorous 'ideology' training that someone like Mrs Lý would know that possession of a bright mind and disciplined study habits could not wipe away the stain of a youngster's 'bad class' antecedents.

Yet Binh speaks proudly of the instances Mrs Lý has told him about when her heart or 'gut' told her to 'do something' when such judgements were made.¹⁴ What this meant was quietly finding a way to salvage a candidate's hopes by finding them a place in what was regarded as a second- or third-tier site of study: mechanical engineering or mining technology in a Polish or Romanian university, for someone ruled out on 'ideology' grounds for physics or maths in Moscow.

These were far from risk-free exercises in workplace moral cartography, but Mrs Lý clearly knew how to manage these delicate manoeuvres. It is clear that she too takes pride in what she did, feeling that she was serving the Party and her adopted city by ensuring that young people with talent were as well equipped as possible to contribute to its developmental needs. And while the life she knows her grandson leads as a rising star in his prestigious white-collar state service post is so very different from her own challenging life trajectory, there is no doubt that she rejoices in the material comforts as well as the job satisfaction that his achievements have brought him, while at the same time feeling in no doubt about the strength of the moral bonds that tie her life and values to his own.

Final Thoughts

I am profoundly grateful to the Editors for offering me this opportunity to revisit my moral cartography article, and to reflect on the ways its concerns connect with the notion of intellectual exchange as the framing theme for this volume. In doing so, I have found it intriguing to explore aspects of my interlocutors' experiences involving both literal and metaphorical acts of traversing and border crossing. What I wanted to highlight in this chapter is the remarkable mobility and translocality we can see in my interlocutors' life trajectories, both before and since the onset of the turbulent marketization processes known as Renovation/*Đổi Mới* in Vietnam, especially those involving their encounters with new and unfamiliar knowledge systems.

Although I believe my work with Hanoians from the city's distinctive intelligentsia/*trí thức* family networks to be of much interest for our topic, I did not want to confine my discussion to the case of multilingual globe-trotters like Professor Đức, who had to learn from early youth how to navigate the sometimes perilous intellectual and physical landscapes of what I have called the global socialist ecumene, often in situations where exchanges of skill and knowledge were represented in terms that were highly critical of those involved, despite attempts by their defenders to portray such relations as expressions of beneficence and dialogic gift exchange. But in order to extend my concerns beyond the world of the intelligentsias, I wanted to include something of the very different but equally challenging diversities of landscape traversed and made sense of by interlocutors from far less advantaged backgrounds, as exemplified by the redoubtable Mrs Lý. Yet my primary interest in both cases has been the mix of challenges and gratifications to be experienced at points of interface between the domains of science and the supramundane, especially as reflected on by my interlocutors from the vantage point of post-retirement, and in the presence of younger kin; and most particularly in situations where the truths of science/*khoa học* merge and interpenetrate with those experienced as truths of sensibility and a loving heart.

I know I still have much to learn about these and the many other processes of world-bridging and dynamic exchange that can generate both fulfilment and anxiety in today's Vietnam. As soon as the pandemic situation permits, I hope to return to Hanoi and am keenly looking forward to further fieldwork with my boundlessly patient interlocutors, whose friendship and willingness to share so much with me have been true highlights of my research career. For now, I hope that the material presented here provides a helpful grounding for my moral cartography paper, and that its reflections serve as an effective bridge to the theme my friends and colleagues have selected as the focus for this volume. I am deeply touched by their wish to mark my retirement in this enormously generous way, and I offer them my heartfelt thanks for doing so, and for the countless other kindnesses that have so wonderfully underpinned our many years of stimulating interactions across so many diverse areas of mutual interest and enthusiasm.

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Susan Bayly is Professor of Historical Anthropology (Emerita) in the Cambridge University Department of Social Anthropology, and a Life Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge. Her publications include *Asian Voices in a Postcolonial Age: Vietnam, India and Beyond*; and *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the 18th Century to the Modern Age* (both with Cambridge University Press). She has conducted extensive on-site fieldwork in both India and Vietnam, focusing most recently on projects aimed at bringing the insights of visual anthropology into conversation with the anthropology of morality and ethics. Her research interests also include Asian post-socialism; theories of historical change; the interface between history and anthropology; and colonialism and its cultural afterlife in South and Southeast Asia.

Notes

1. This chapter is intended as a companion piece to my article 'Mapping Time, Living Space: The Moral Cartography of Renovation in Late-Socialist Vietnam' published in *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* in 2013 (31[2]: 60–84). My thanks to the journal's Editor and to the publishers Berghahn Books for permission to republish it here, and to the Editors of this volume for inviting me to do so.
2. Also the relief of living kin who suffer because the loved one's remains have been lost or improperly interred, but the emphasis is always on the relief of the dead kinsman's suffering, not that of the mortals who seek to comfort them (Jellema 2007; Schlecker and Endres 2011).
3. I have in mind here the literature on the ethics of gift exchange that I engaged with in my work on the provision of development aid to African 'friendship' partners, for example when I sought to show that when official Vietnamese accounts represent these initiatives as acts of gift-giving, to be understood as cooperative interactions animated by feelings of selfless warmth, they are being portrayed as something akin to the 'empathetic dialogues' which Fennell (2002) says are generated out of the giving of 'illiquid', disinterested gifts between individual partners in exchange. See also Yan 1996; Laidlaw 2000, Venkatesen 2007; but also Copeman and Banerjee 2020. The language of the gift is widely used in official accounts of Vietnam's African aid schemes, and by the former aid workers themselves (Bayly 2009).
4. For more on these Vietnamese 'friendship' schemes that sent providers of development aid to socialist and quasi-socialist countries in north and sub-Saharan Africa from the 1970s to the early 1990s, see Bayly 2008 and 2009.

5. But as Dr L.M. Chau has been finding in his research on anthropology in mid-twentieth-century Vietnam, the university-based Hanoi anthropologists of this generation should not be seen as slavishly doctrinaire in the application of their textbook Marxist paradigms, and were far more intellectually adventurous and creative in the fieldwork they conducted in the 1970s and 1980s than has been assumed in the dismissive accounts provided by some scholars (Dr Chau, personal communication; Evans 1992; see also Truong Huyen Chi 2014).
6. Including the differences in their linguistic knowledge. Mrs Lý never learned a foreign language but is immensely proud of her grandson Binh's excellent English. Like his Soviet-educated contemporaries, Professor Đức learned Russian and Chinese at school, and gained working knowledge of German and Romanian during overseas postings in the 1980s. He taught himself basic English in the early Renovation years.
7. It is well known that the Party state was hostile to *phong thủy* (geomantic reckoning) in the decades before Renovation, but what I have been repeatedly told in discussions of these matters is that geomantic services were deemed 'feudal' (*phong kiến*) because they were costly and inaccessible to the 'masses', rather than because they belonged to the realm of *mê tín dị đoan*, superstition. This is a term still widely used in everyday speech (discussed later), and deployed in official contexts to identify such people as fortune tellers and spirit mediums (Endres 2011; Leshkovich 2014). For the Hanoians I know, *phong thủy* is definitely a science (*khoa học*). This is not the way they refer to knowledge of the supramortal and cosmological, and not a term they use loosely or for mere semantic effect. They define *phong thủy* as science/*khoa học* because, like physics and geology, it is systematic, ordered and textually based, employing procedures of calculation and measurement that they consider to be validated by the experimental hard sciences. Thus, I have been told that what physicists have determined about the harmful effects of electromagnetic waves on human tissue is precisely what the *phong thủy* expert makes known when employing the discipline's distinctive diagnostic techniques to detect an unfavourable flow of environmental energy (*qi*) impacting a home or business premises: 'same principle', one friend said; just a different application. Another friend told me what her secondary school history teacher had said during a classroom lesson in the late 1980s about one of the landmark events that is still central to the official narrative of Vietnamese revolutionary nationhood. This is the climactic moment in April 1975 that is celebrated every year as Liberation of the South Day (*Ngày Giải phóng miền Nam*), when the Communist North Viet Nam army's tanks smashed open the gates of the Presidential Palace in Saigon, formerly the capital of the US-backed South Viet Nam client regime. Of course, my friend said, the teacher told the class that the North's triumph was a product of 'our people's' valour and military skill, under the all-wise leadership of the Party. But the teacher also told the class something that is still widely recounted in Hanoi, which is that the strongman presidents who resided in the palace had failed to obtain proper geomantic expertise for its planning and layout, and in particular that the site's massive entry gates had been fatally misaligned in geomantic/*phong thủy* terms. My friend said the class had no trouble understanding why this was such a failure on the part of the Saigon leaders to those they claimed to hold in their care, hence so catastrophic for the regime. Even teenagers, she said, knew how much attention their elders paid to geomantic principles in the siting of a home's front door, or any other point of access to a space where there is a collective's wellbeing to care for, such as the gateway to a factory complex, or the gated entrance to a village or peri-urban residential neighbourhood (compare Harms 2012).
8. The Hanoi medical university where Cường trained also teaches Western-style medicine (*Thuốc Tây*), but towards the end of the 1962–73 anti-US War there was a major policy commitment to professionalize the traditional healing arts, and he was assigned to the university's *Đông y* teaching programme on his admission in 1970 (see Monnais et al. 2011; Wahlberg 2014).

9. There are many forms of Buddhism currently practised in Vietnam; so long as their adherents do nothing that appears challenging to the authority of the Party state, they are treated as valued partners in the national project (Soucy 2012).
10. This seems to me quite an agentive form of engagement with the government's didactic media organs, rather than a mere parroting of the Party state's official voice (Pettus 2004: 17).
11. Accounts of such figures in Vietnamese and other socialist contexts include Kipnis 1995; Fitzpatrick 1996; Donham 1999; Malarney 2002; Stone 2008.
12. Referring to someone as 'my *thầy*' signals a bond of reverence and warmth with the man who has taught them. Its use can also point to a real or quasi-parental tie, but more commonly denotes the status of a man who has acquired either traditional or modern disciplinary expertise through dedicated study.
13. Vietnam boasts impressive female educational performance and high levels of labour force participation, but also highly gendered divisions of labour and status in the home and workplace (see, e.g., Leshkovich 2006, 2014; Werner 2009; Bergstedt 2015; Rydstrom 2003, 2020). My friends of both sexes say they recognize how often their experience of the real world fails to live up to the vision of harmony and complementarity they see in the water proverb. But they also say it is still right to teach the young what the saying means: that there is righteous moral principle as well as a spirit of warmth and 'heart' underpinning the norms they grow up with. These include the modes of proper speech known as *xưng hô*, meaning use of the many familial-based me-you or 'person-reference' dyad idioms to be deployed in all conversational exchanges. The nuances of *xưng hô* are learned from early childhood, and its terminology is both gendered and hierarchical (Chew 2011; Hy Van Luong 1990; Sidnell and Shohet 2013). A sister is never a status-neutral 'I' to her elder brother's 'you'. Even in adulthood she must call herself *em* when speaking to him; this is the person-reference for a younger sibling, and its connotations are often warm, something like 'little one'. An elder brother He is always *anh*/senior male to her *em*. So too for husband and wife, regardless of their actual ages: she is *em*; he is *anh*. My friends insist that this is not 'etiquette' in the sense of the formalities foreigners learn by rote, but rather a bringing to verbal life of natural perceptions and sensitivities that are innate to the Vietnamese heart and spirit. They are therefore morally sound, as conveyed by the flowing water proverb. In the modern classroom the language of relational dyads is also differentially gendered: the pupil is *em*: his or her male teacher is *thầy*, while his female counterpart is *cô*. There is a gender-neutral word for teacher: *giáo viên*, a composite formed from *giáo*, which is the realm of teaching/education, and *viên*, a classifier term for the holder of a post or office. The way to specify male and female teacher is *thầy giáo* and *cô giáo*. *Thầy* is thus a term for males only and denotes someone with mastery of a specific field or discipline. In the case of *thầy giáo*, the master's field is that of teaching; the title is also used for premodern arts and skills, as in the case of *thầy số* (astrologer) and *thầy cúng* (spirit priest), fields in which expertise is achieved under the tutelage of an established master. In contrast, the title for a woman teacher, *cô*, is specifically familial. It is used as the equivalent of Miss or Madam, but also has a definite kinship meaning: it is the *xưng hô* pronoun to use for a father's younger sister. And a woman who teaches is associated with one of the Party state's enduring iconographic traditions, still a feature of school textbooks and public message posters: a conventionalized representation of the female teacher gently guiding the hand of a young pupil as she takes her first steps towards the attainment of literacy. This is teaching as 'feeding' (*nuôi dưỡng*), people say, a word suggestive of the nurturing mother tenderly coaxing morsels of rice into the mouth of her infant child. Even in the case of a modern science teacher at secondary school level like Mrs Lý's daughter, much that is said about the *cô giáo*'s duties and ethos evokes this model of the womanly nurturer guiding her charges along the path of diligence and docile compliance. Something more inspiring and assertive is to be expected of her male counterpart, the *thầy*.

14. My interlocutors speak of compassionate feeling as profundity of heart (*tâm*), and also as being sensitive to the promptings of *lòng*: lit. 'guts', the seat of true and heartfelt sensibility.

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