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Abstract

The Hanoi Chinese Middle School was the only secondary school for ethnic Chinese students in Hanoi, North Vietnam. Its vicissitude from 1954 to 1968 coincided with the relationship between the Beijing and Hanoi governments and the escalation of the Vietnam War. Based on the recollections of 19 alumni, it is possible to trace the gradual Vietnamisation of the school and the personal conflict and upheaval that resulted from the process of trying to make the ethnic Chinese students more ‘Vietnamese’ and how this process was affected by war with the Americans.
Table of Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................ ii

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................ iv

Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 1

Sources ............................................................................................................................. 3

The Chinese Period ......................................................................................................... 6

The Division of Vietnam .................................................................................................. 10

Vietnamisation – 1958-1968 ......................................................................................... 18

Evacuation ....................................................................................................................... 24

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 37

Appendix A ....................................................................................................................... 40

Bibliography .................................................................................................................... 42
Acknowledgements

This paper is the culmination of years of dinner parties where as a kid I would listen
enraptured by the stories, jokes and endless laughter of my parents and their friends. I
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who shared their memories and of my mom and dad, without whose participation and
inspirational experience this paper would not be possible. Thank you Professor Diana
Lary for looking after me, my friends at Green College for the laughter and support and
Jeff, whom the Pacific Ocean did not prevent from always being there to listen,
encourage and comfort.
Recalling the bitterness,
Remembering the sweetness,
Fills the heart with joy, for this happiness was hard fought.

Luo Jinzhang, at the Hanoi Chinese Middle School reunion, Nanning, China, Sept. 1998

The length of the Red and Yuan Rivers cannot with the extent of our gratitude to our Alma Mater compare.

Chen Huaquan & Fan Baolian, at the Third Meeting of the Alumni Association of the HCMS, Wuming, China, Apr. 1998

Introduction

The Hanoi Chinese Middle School (HCMS), true to its name, was the only Chinese middle school in the city which became the capital of North Vietnam and served a small, select minority of the ethnic Chinese population. Despite its size and exclusiveness however, the school existed as an important part of the Chinese community, representing a microcosm of the experience of the Chinese in North Vietnam. The oral histories of some of its alumni, which constitute the backbone of this project, poignantly capture the chaos and contradiction inherent in the lives of the Chinese in Hanoi from the postcolonial period through to the Vietnam War. The fighting is over, the school has ceased to exist and the once teenage students of this period are now in their forties and fifties. Although today these former students are thousands of kilometres away, theirs is a story worth recounting: for embedded in the memories of these students are universal themes of allegiance, loyalty and identity which give fascinating insight on how war brought them closer to each other and their country.
The Chinese have been in Vietnam for centuries, trading, working, settling down and many intermarrying. Yet, they maintained a separate identity from the locals through creating their own exclusive society. By living in close proximity to one another, socialising with 'their own people' and choosing to educate their children by enrolling them in schools with a Chinese curriculum (including Chinese as the medium of instruction) the Chinese in Vietnam did not assimilate but retained their own distinct existence.

All this began to change in the late 1950's and 60's when three forces coalesced to make the 1958-1968 period significant for the Chinese in North Vietnam: the North Vietnamese government actively pursued a policy of 'Vietnamisation',\(^1\) to assimilate the Chinese; the Beijing government changed its attitude toward Overseas Chinese and endorsed assimilation; and the ethnic Chinese and the local Vietnamese encountered a common enemy that brought them together during the war against the Americans - three distinct forces that simultaneously pulled, pushed and forced ethnic Chinese assimilation into North Vietnamese society.

The story of the HCMS is one perspective of this transition. This paper will examine the transformation of the school from its initial period under Chinese government rule to the period surrounding the American War and analyse the effect of North Vietnamese wartime discourse, policy and propaganda on the allegiances and identities of those who attended the school. During the period of Vietnamisation (1958-

\(^1\)This term should not be confused with the one used by the US during the Vietnam War to denote "de-Americanization" of the South Vietnamese military. Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam A History*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1997) 611. Where the American coinage implies increased South Vietnamese military independence, the word employed in this paper implies increasing North Vietnamese cultural and linguistic content.
1964), the HCMS, originally a product of the Chinese enclave, was assimilated alongside the students' changing perceptions of their own allegiance and identity. The students of the HCMS were, for a brief period of time, brought closer to the Vietnamese cause and people by being included in the nation building and protecting process. The students' involvement during this period can be thought of as a high point of assimilation for the Chinese in North Vietnam: prior to the mid-1950s, the Chinese were considered Chinese Nationals by China and Vietnam – their integration both politically and personally had been kept at a minimum. Shortly after 1968 this new Sino-Vietnamese identity abruptly disintegrated as political relations between the two countries deteriorated and the Chinese were expelled from Vietnam.

Sources

Information on the school was gathered from Chinese written sources and the memoirs of Guan Huaiyan, a former vice-principal at the HCMS now retired and living in Wuming, China. They were an informative source of descriptive history about the school and its character during the period under Chinese management. However, to get the clearest sense of the impact, contradictions and multiple pulls and demands on the hearts and minds of the students through the two and a half decades of tumultuous change, the best source was the alumni themselves. Primary research for this paper comes from two distinct periods of HCMS alumni oral history. Nine former students from the 1950s were contacted and interviewed, as were ten students who attended the school during the 1960s, (see Appendix A for the list of participants). The conversations were taped, translated and transcribed.
The age of the participants makes them ideal subjects since teenage memories are often deeply felt and vividly remembered under normal circumstances and even more so under the extraordinary conditions of war. Their memories are vivid because these events occurred during a crucial period in their life. The quotations at the start of the paper are not unique sentiments but the norm among HCMS alumni in their enthusiasm for their alma mater.

Two caveats must be included; the first that their age may idealise their experience. Their recollections verge on the nostalgic, perhaps marring objectivity and distorting facts. The second, that age, interpretation and the very act of remembering many times alter the past. In light of these caveats, however, the integrity of their stories is intact when viewed as a vital collective memory. As Maurice Halbwachs points out in *The Collective Memory*, history may be interested in factual details but keeping alive important events relies on the collective memory. Halbwachs argues, “It [collective memory] is a current of continuous thought whose continuity is not at all artificial, for it retains from the past only what still lives or is capable of living in the consciousness of the groups keeping the memory alive.” The experience of the HCMS is an important group memory that at the same time can serve to highlight an unexplored perspective of North Vietnam during the war.

Secondary sources in both English and Chinese, as well as North Vietnamese publications were employed to corroborate many of the alumni’s statements, but there are no sources that deal specifically with the school during the war. The most detailed accounts of schools in general during the Vietnam War appear in North Vietnamese
journals, but even then the HCMS is absent. This paper intends to fill the void and support with secondary evidence the alumni's recollection of the HCMS and its experience and transformation during this period in North Vietnam.

A sample of the literature will demonstrate where this paper can make a contribution to existing knowledge. Information on the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam is most readily available in general surveys of Southeast Asia and usually concerns the period prior to the War. For example, Victor Purcell's *The Chinese in Southeast Asia*, William G. Skinner's *Report on the Chinese in Southeast Asia*, Lea E. Williams' *The Future of the Overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia*, Robert Elegant's *The Dragon Seed* and more recently Lynn Pan's *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas*, all include a section on the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam. Monographs on the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam are less common. Three that comes to mind, Ky Luong Nhi's *The Chinese in Vietnam* and two in Chinese, Zhang Wenhe's *Yuenan huaqiao shihua* and Li Baiyin's *Yuenan Huaqiao yu Huaren*.

During the Vietnam War, North American literature on North Vietnam tended to leave out the ethnic Chinese. Whether the works were journalistic, academic or political, they generally did not mention the Chinese minority. Journalistic works like Thomas Hayden and Staughton Lynd's *The Otherside*, Herbert Aptheker's *Mission to Hanoi*, Harrison Salisbury's *Behind the Lines- Hanoi*, James Cameron's *Here Is Your Enemy* or Wilfred Burchett's *Vietnam North*, and political analyse, exemplified by works such as Bernard Fall's *The Two Vietnams: A Political and Military Analysis*; Hoang Van Chi’s *From Colonialism to Communism*; John Gerassi’s *North Vietnam A Documentary*; Jon

Van Dyke's *North Vietnam's Strategy for Survival* or P.J.Honey's *Communism in North Vietnam* and *North Vietnam Today*, provided a solid foundation of the situation as perceived from the outside looking in, but offer little information on the Chinese living in North Vietnam at the time.

The North Vietnamese throughout this period continued to publish *Vietnamese Studies*, an English language and government issued periodical detailing North Vietnamese society. This journal provides valuable insight from the Hanoi point of view, but it, too, fails to mention the Chinese population. Chinese materials that concern the Overseas Chinese in North Vietnam like the journal *Huaqiao Huaren Yanjiu* from Jinan University and the Li Baiyin's monograph *Yuenan Huaqiao yu Huaren* mention the school, but only during the 1954-1957 period when the Chinese government was involved.

What is missing in all these accounts is a Chinese minority perspective, a civilian dimension of the War. This is provided by recollections of HCMS students who were there, who lived through the bombings and the evacuation of the school. The interviewees were questioned with the following themes in mind: How the HCMS was Vietnamised; their feelings towards Vietnamisation; and their school, life and outlook during the war.

**The Chinese Period**

Before the significance of the 1958-1968 period can be understood and in order to appreciate the drastic changes that took place, it is necessary to know a little of the history of the Chinese in Vietnam and the Chinese roots of the school. Significant increase of the Chinese population took place under French colonial rule when the Chinese became
indispensable as commercial middlemen and mine and plantation labourers. Most of the Chinese immigrants originated from Southern China and were categorised into five groups according to their dialects. There was the Cantonese group, the Fukien group, the Hainan group, Teochiu group and the Hakka group.

Below is a table charting the Chinese population from the end of French colonial rule to the partition of Vietnam.³

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Chinese 1921</th>
<th>Number of Chinese 1931</th>
<th>Number of Chinese 1960</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam)</td>
<td>156,000</td>
<td>205,000</td>
<td>600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonking (Northern Vietnam)</td>
<td>32,000</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>55,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annam (Central Vietnam)</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>10,000</td>
<td>After 1954, North Vietnam included Annam.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that despite the population fluctuation, the ratio of ethnic Chinese to Vietnamese remained consistent. In each of the three years in the table, the percentage of Chinese to total population remained 3.7 per cent in the South, 0.19 per cent in the central region and 0.4 per cent in the North.⁴

The Chinese constituted a small percentage of the population, but they were highly organised. They had their own community temples, native-place associations, hospitals and schools. Chinese schools in Vietnam numbered in the hundreds, but they were usually small, set up informally and students were taught in their native dialect. In his article on Chinese education in Southeast Asia, Douglas Murray defines a “Chinese school” as a school in which Chinese language was used either as the main medium of

³ Purcell 172-5.
⁴ Purcell 173.
instruction or was taught as a secondary language to all students.\(^5\) Since the end of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), there have been reported accounts of private primary schools in Vietnam teaching traditional Chinese canons like the Four Books and Five Classics.\(^6\) Much of the growth spurt of private Chinese schools was due to the nationalism inspired by Sun Yat-sen from 1900 to 1910, a trend that was tolerated by the Southeast Asian European colonial governments at the time. By the 1930’s, the Nationalist government, linking Overseas Chinese education with foreign policy, formalised education of the Overseas Chinese. The schools were placed under the direct jurisdiction of the Education Ministry in China, who supplied all textbooks and teachers. School Inspectors from China regularly paid visits to British and Dutch Colonies in Southeast Asia. *Guo yu* (national language) became the standard language of instruction and educational conferences held in China, ensured a high degree of pedagogical consistency.\(^7\) Under the Kuomingtang (KMT), Chinese schools were responsible for promoting patriotism and enhancing a nationalist consciousness,\(^8\) prompting some writers to criticise its policy for contributing to Chinese cultural chauvinism, aloofness, segregation and lack of acculturation in local societies.\(^9\)

Up until the 1930’s, there were no formal Chinese schools at the secondary level in Southeast Asia and Vietnam was not an exception.\(^10\) Vietnam’s first middle Chinese school was established in 1931 in the Saigon-Cholon area and the first secondary school

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\(^6\) Murray 70.
\(^7\) Murray 71.
\(^9\) Fitzgerald, 6.
\(^10\) Murray 71.
in the northern part of Vietnam was the Hanoi Chinese Middle School (HCMS), opened in 1935.\textsuperscript{11} The northern part of Vietnam, at the time, was home to 52,540 Overseas Chinese, a substantial number being school-aged.\textsuperscript{12} The HCMS flourished along with Chinese secondary education in Vietnam as waves of refugees from South China arrived after the Japanese invasion. At that time, there were 24 Chinese schools in North Vietnam catering to 2917 students, while in all of Vietnam the total was 191 schools, with 417 teachers and 12,128 students. By 1943, that total number had increased to 349 schools with 32,000 students in attendance,\textsuperscript{13} about 10 per cent of the Chinese population. By comparison, in the period before 1945, a 95 per cent illiteracy rate for the Vietnamese people and a 20 per cent school attendance rate for children\textsuperscript{14} illustrate, that the local Vietnamese received less formal schooling.

Along with other Chinese schools, the HCMS suffered its first setback when the Japanese invaded Vietnam in 1940 and commandeered most schools. They banned anti-Japanese literature and introduced the use of Japanese in the curriculum. Many Chinese schools stopped operating, forcing students to terminate their studies.\textsuperscript{15} After the War, the French colonial government returned to Vietnam and continued its pre-war policy of tolerance toward Chinese schools. The Sino-French Treaty was signed in February 1946, establishing cordial relations between the Nationalist government in China and the French government. One of its articles stipulated the French were responsible for the

\textsuperscript{11} Yiping Yu, "Yuenan Huaqiao Huaren Jiaoyu de Xingshuai Jiqi Qianjing," \textit{Hua Qiao Huaren Yanjiu} vol. 2 (1991): 192. This first HCMS was shut down and subsequently rebuilt; I am looking at its second manifestation.

\textsuperscript{12} Yu 190.


\textsuperscript{14} True Ho, "Thirty Years' Building up Education in Viet Nam," \textit{Vietnamese Studies} vol. 49 (1975): 71.

\textsuperscript{15} Yu 193.
maintenance and administration of Overseas Chinese schools. Sometime during the struggle for independence between the Viet Minh and the French forces, the fortunes of the HCMS reached its nadir, when the school was shut down by the French and transformed into an armoury and then a printing shop. The French defeat and the subsequent division of Vietnam in 1954 triggered a large movement of ethnic Chinese to the South, people who feared the communist advance; among these migrants the majority of Chinese schoolteachers.

**The Division of Vietnam**

Despite the Chinese migration southward, Victor Purcell estimates the ethnic Chinese population to be around 55,000 in North Vietnam after 1954, maintaining a percentage of approximately 0.4 per cent of the overall North Vietnamese population. P.J. Honey, citing press references of that era, insists that approximately 22,000 Chinese were concentrated in the Hanoi area alone. After the liberation of North Vietnam by the communists and the 1949 victory of the CCP in China, there was a demand for Chinese secondary education by those remaining Chinese families, but the North Vietnamese government had few resources to meet its own national reconstruction much less to fund a Chinese school. China’s offer to restore the school was welcomed and the property, seized from the French by the North Vietnamese, was now rented to the Chinese embassy. Alumni and teachers recall the initial period between 1954-1957 as a time when

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16 Yu 193.
17 Purcell 173.
18 P.J. Honey quoted in Purcell 172.
"a Chinese school on Vietnamese soil"\textsuperscript{19} took root as the school was placed under the direct charge of the Chinese Education Ministry and controlled by the Chinese embassy in Hanoi.\textsuperscript{20} It is clear from these recollections that the school was being primed as a showpiece for Sino-North Vietnamese relations and as the testimonies of the alumni will attest, the school was to be outstanding in every way – a testament to the fraternal bond between China and Vietnam.

While the school building was being renovated, a provisional school was established in December 1954 and students were admitted at the start of 1955. The communists did not 'liberate' Haiphong, the next biggest city in North Vietnam, until May of that year, forcing some of the students there to come to the Hanoi school. The provisional school was set up with classes held at 19 Hang Bong Street, and some classes spilt over to Luong Ngoc Mai Street primary school. Like the KMT before them, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) sent well-trained teachers to staff the middle school, along with the latest school supplies and equipment from China. Zheng Qingtan remembers the Chinese even brought the blackboards from China adding, "...at that time we were the best equipped middle school in Hanoi."\textsuperscript{21} With funding from Beijing and contributions from the Hanoi Chinese community (at the behest of the Chinese ambassador to North Vietnam), Hanoi’s only Chinese secondary school was completed in 1956. The school moved to the red brick building on 67 Pho Duc Chinh Street and remained there until the 1970’s. Covering almost 10,000 square metres on a piece of land

\textsuperscript{19} Huaiyan Guan, personal interview, 16 Feb. 2000.
\textsuperscript{20} Huaiyan Guan, \textit{Yuenan Henei Zhonghua Zhongxue Jiankuang}, (Wuming, Guangxi, 2000) 1. Guan’s memoirs are as yet unpublished.
\textsuperscript{21} Qingtan Zheng, personal interview, 16 Feb. 2000.
shaped like a “blunted triangle,” the HCMS was one of the biggest middle schools in Hanoi at the time and accommodated approximately 700 students. Recalls Chen Zongxian, “The school was great and very beautiful. Everyone in Hanoi knew where it was and many dignitaries visited.”

Divided into junior middle and senior middle, the HCMS was home to grades 7 to 12. Most students entered the middle school directly from a Chinese primary school around 12 years of age and would graduate at 18 if they completed the whole curriculum. The twelve-year program differed from the Vietnamese program of only ten years since the latter required only four years of primary education. According to P.J. Honey’s estimate of 20,000 Chinese in Hanoi, approximately 3.5 per cent of the overall population attended the HCMS. Given that 40 per cent of the population were school age, only a small portion of middle school age Chinese children enrolled in the school.

The small percentage resulted from various causes, one of which was financial. Although less than what they had to pay under the Nationalist government, the annual 20 dong fee was enough to weed out many students. For those who stayed in the residences because their homes were far away, there was an additional fee for food that was around 15 dong. In spite of this, the Chinese government was eager to enrol the best students and made exception for students of “good” class background, such as the poor and those with the ‘proper’ (revolutionary) politics. Provisions were made for orphans

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22 Guan 2.
23 Yu 196.
25 Ho 71.
26 Quoted in Purcell 172.
27 Vietnamese dollar – 100 dong was approximately $1.40 US. Elegant 263.
28 The alumni agree on this estimate but does not recall the exact amount.
whose parent(s) had died fighting in the War or were left behind when his/her parent(s) fled to South Vietnam in 1954. Their fees were waived and living expenses provided. For those who could not afford the fees but wished to go to school, there were many scholarships and fee waivers available. Zheng Qingtan recalls that he did not have to pay a cent for school because his family was destitute. The school waived his fee and the local street committee of his home area gave him 13.50 dong for living expenses.29

The Chinese period of the school was noted for its Sinocentrism, which played an important role in the decision of like-minded students to attend the HCMS. Aside from the “special cases” that were looked after, the other students who qualified academically attended the school out of a sense of cultural superiority and allegiance to China. Larry Tran recalls how a sense of loyalty made him choose the HCMS, “I had had three years of French primary school and after the French left when they rebuilt the school, I felt I should go the HCMS.”30 Thanh Lai’s parents sold their prosperous noodle shop in Danang, central Vietnam, to move North to be “closer to China,”31 so naturally they chose the HCMS as the ideal school due to its links to China.

Another reason to attend the HCMS was the political uncertainty that plagued Vietnam during the 1954-1957 period. Many families were willing to part ways in 1954 because they thought the separation merely temporary. No one suspected, that the general election as stipulated by the Geneva Accords would fail to take place nor could they have foreseen that two years would turn into twenty. Chen Zongxian recalls one particular group of students who parted from their families, “There was another group of huaqiao,

29 Zheng, personal interview.
what we called “advanced students”. They were a group that was very political. Even though they were born into wealthy families, their thoughts tended toward revolution. Their mothers and fathers migrated to the South, but the sons and daughters refused to follow.32 These students chose to stay with the school instead of migrating to the South with their families. This was not to be the last time the school took precedence over family in the lives of its students.

In the recollections of the HCMS students, teachers often took precedence; their influence and devotion endeared them to the students and greatly enhanced China’s prestige. Due to the importance of their position, the Chinese government carefully selected teachers and administered their salaries through the Chinese embassy in Hanoi.33 With the exception of the two administrators, the 22 teachers sent from China were all in their 20’s and recent graduates. Guan Huaiyan recalls being impressed with his math teacher when he re-enrolled at the school after dropping out during the war against the French. “I discovered he [the teacher] was actually younger than me. He had just arrived from China and was so young and energetic!”34 Rounding out the faculty were seven teachers transferred from Chinese primary schools in Hanoi. Even the non-teaching staff at the school was chosen with care. Help needed to run the student hostels, health clinic, cafeteria and kitchen was hired from the ethnic Chinese community.

The young and energetic teachers from China, in combination with the splendid new building and the wholesale transfer of the PRC curriculum had a profound effect on the students. The alumni present during this period recall it as one of high achievement,

32 Chen, personal interview.
33 Chen, personal interview.
34 Guan, personal interview.
energy, spirit and unabashed admiration and loyalty toward the “motherland,” China. “In every way this was a Chinese school, except it was on Vietnamese soil.” Under the guidance of the Chinese teachers, athletics made huge strides, enhancing the prestige of the school and its students. Zheng Qingtan recalls the HCMS basketball team being top ranked, winning the North Vietnam championship in 1957 and having the distinction of practising with the official basketball team of Vietnam. The Chinese students were also renowned for their gymnastics team, volleyball team and track and field team, the latter attaining records that were not broken for many years. Politically, the arts and literature of Communist China influenced the school. Students were taught 'revolutionary' Chinese music, dance and crafts popular in China at the time. The political happenings of China were readily disseminated through the Chinese embassy, print and radio. When *White Haired Girl* was popular in China, it found its way into a production at the HCMS. The play even went on tour of the Hanoi countryside.

From the Chinese perspective the first three years were exceptional years for the school because it was completely under the tutelage and control of China. This is reflected in writings about the Chinese in Vietnam and Overseas Chinese education. Yu Yiping, writing in *Overseas Chinese Studies* (Huaqiao Huaren Yenjiu) and Li Baiyin, author of the monograph *Overseas Chinese Vietnamese are Chinese* (Yuenan Huaqiao Yu Huaren) concur in their account of Overseas Chinese education in North Vietnam, calling the period from 1957 onwards *shuailuo shiqi* “the period of decline.” Here the authors

35 Guan, personal interview.
36 Zheng, personal interview.
37 Yu 199 and Baiyin Li, *Yuenan Huaqiao yu Huaren*, (Guangxi: Teachers’ University Publication, 1990) 41.
used 'decline' to describe both the achievement level and perhaps unwittingly to indicate their own displeasure at the school's movement away from the Chinese orbit.

In addition to administering the salaries and periodically visiting the school, the Chinese embassy often used the school for political purposes. China as the true homeland was a staunchly held notion by the students, but the significance of the 1954 to 1957 period was the remoulding of allegiance not only to China but to the Chinese Communist Party. The HCMS was carefully primed and tailored ideologically to receive PRC dignitaries who always included the school on their itinerary, making the school a prominent symbol of diplomacy. The highlights from that period were the visits of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in the winter of 1956 and the visit of Vietnamese president Ho Chi Minh a month later.

These visits left a memorable impression on the young minds of the students. In the tenth anniversary special issue of *Vietnam Hanoi Chinese Middle School and Haiphong Chinese Middle School Wuming Alumni Report*, Guan Huaiyan wrote that Premier Zhou's visit was one of the most memorable events of his life, the life of the school and of the Overseas Chinese in Hanoi.\(^{38}\) Guan recalls the day of Zhou's visit, when students lined both sides of the street leading up to the school, dressed in their best clothes, waving flowers and the flags of both countries, and shouting "Long live the Chinese Communist Party! Long live the Vietnamese Workers' Party! Long live Chairman Mao! Long live Chairman Ho! Long live the friendship between the Chinese and the Vietnamese People!"\(^{39}\) Zhou's visit culminated with the inscription that remained

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\(^{39}\) Guan, *ZhongQiao Xiaoyouhui* 18.
etched onto the main entrance to the school, “Overseas Chinese children should love
every mountain, every stone, every grass, every tree of Vietnam and be good friends with
Vietnamese children.” Zhou encouraged Chinese students to diligently study Vietnamese
and to get involved in Vietnamese society. This message was consistent with the joint
statement issued by Zhou on November 22, 1956 with Vietnam Premier Pham Van Dong,
noting with satisfaction the good relations between the Democratic Republic of Vietnam
and the People’s Republic of China and “the continued close ties of culture, technology
and economy and their common quest for peace in Asia against colonialism.”

Zhou’s statement reflected PRC policy changes that were beginning to take place.
These changes, which will be discussed in detail later, sought to disassociate the Beijing
government from Overseas Chinese and to withdraw Chinese support from the school.
The change in policy was manifested in the goodwill expressed by the two governments
and found its way into the HCMS curriculum. Immediately following Premier Zhou’s
visit, the school substituted their Russian foreign language course for a Vietnamese
course. As a result of the policy change, Vietnamese finally became a subject that could
be taken as an elective. The Vietnamese education ministry welcomed the change by
sending four Vietnamese language teachers.

On January 26, 1957, Ho Chi Minh visited the HCMS for the first time. His
comments were indicative of stable relations between Hanoi and Beijing. He implored the
students to focus on their studies, to contribute to the socialist construction of China and
Vietnam. If after their studies they wished to return to China, the Vietnamese government
would not stand in their way. Ho went on to say: “There are many Vietnamese students

40 G.V. Ambekar and V.D. Divekar, Documents on China’s Relations with South and Southeast Asia
who are studying in China and have received the attention of Chairman Mao, you are studying in Vietnam and you will receive the same attention from Uncle Ho. I will treat you the same as I treat Vietnamese youths and hope that you will study well and that socialist construction will benefit from your talents."  

July 1957 saw the first graduating class of the HCMS. Of the 26 graduates, 15 were selected by the Chinese government for teachers' college in Guilin, Guangxi. Among those selected was Guan Huaiyan who trained to be a chemistry teacher. Along with the other 14, he was issued a visa to study in China and told to return to Vietnam after completing his training to work at the HCMS. The other 11 graduates were sent to various other parts of China to continue their studies. After this graduating class, China started to cut back on visas, eventually stopping altogether.

Vietnamisation – 1958-1968

The Chinese era of the HCMS came to an end when control was relinquished in 1958. Before the “prosperity period” of Overseas Chinese education under the Chinese government came to a close, even as the Chinese teachers were recalled home to China, PRC politics continued to affect the vicissitudes of the HCMS. The Great Leap Forward of 1958 was translated at the HCMS into a “part work – part study” program where small work groups of students were organised to make paper and chalk and the senior classes started a small iron-smelting group. The last of the Chinese teachers were not recalled until 1959. After their departure, much of the faculty consisted of ethnic Chinese either

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41 Yu 197.
42 Yu 191.
returned from teachers’ college in China, like Guan or trained locally in Vietnam. The school officially passed under Vietnamese management in 1958.

The fraternal bond between China and North Vietnam could have been expressed in any number of ways, but the fact that the “Chineseness” of the school was taken as a barometer of good relations indicates the high value each side placed on the allegiance of the younger generation. By tightly controlling education, the sluice through which “Chineseness” entered Vietnam, the Hanoi government ensured a grip on what they considered most vital to the Beijing government, loyalty of the ethnic Chinese. North Vietnam could not control how the Chinese perceived themselves, but they could control what they deemed as the most important source of their perception, culture and education.

The transfer of the HCMS into Vietnamese hands cut any straightforward sense of allegiance to China on the part of its students; a new era began that would see the end of isolationism of the HCMS and its incorporation into North Vietnamese society. The students were left stranded and saddened by the departure of their teachers and the change in administration. The Chinese school they had known was being transformed into a Vietnamese one, a transition jolted, sped up and distorted by the urgency of war.

“Vietnamisation” or yuenan hua, was the most often repeated word during the interviews with the participants. For the alumni this one word represented the long and extensive process of change, who’s main objective was to make them more Vietnamese through the increase of Vietnamese cultural, linguistic and historical content – a process that coincided with the Chinese government’s change in attitude towards the Overseas Chinese. Lin Liying metaphorically describes the situation by comparing it to a family:
“Vietnamisation is the result of two parents negotiating. The HCMS, as the child, is only the catalyst and the recipient but to get a better understanding you must look at the adults.”43 International socialism and Ho Chi Minh’s intimate connection to the Chinese communists brought the two countries closer together after the success of both revolutions. As early as 1939, Ho acknowledged the similarity of experience of the Overseas Chinese in Vietnam:

> Although they are foreigners, they [Chinese] because they are sons and daughters of a semi-colonial country, do not receive the same treatment as other foreigners; on the contrary, they are oppressed by the imperialists in all respects. There are millions of Chinese in Vietnam, a small number among them are bourgeoisie, a great number of them are working people. Therefore, the Chinese working people are friends and allies of the Indochinese revolution. Surmounting racial prejudices fostered by the imperialists, Chinese workers have at many times struggle side by side with the Vietnamese workers.44

The Chinese Communists reciprocated in the form of financial and arms assistance to the Viet Minh against the French and after the victory helped in the socialist reconstruction of North Vietnam through monetary and technical aid.45 One project brought to fruition was the rebuilding of the HCMS. In 1954, the CCP funded the renovation of the school, supplied the materials and equipment for the running of the school and brought in the teachers and administrators. One year later in 1955, Mao Zedong and Ho reportedly agreed that the ethnic Chinese in Vietnam should be persuaded to become Vietnamese citizens on a voluntary basis. This agreement was never written down; however, Leo Suryadinata does not doubt that the agreement was made since relations between Hanoi and Beijing were stable and amicable enough during the

45 Purcell 172. Purcell estimates that there were approx. 2000 Chinese technicians in North Vietnam after the separation.
period. Since the Overseas Chinese were always a contentious issue between China and its Southeast Asian neighbours, the discussion of the ethnic Chinese in North Vietnam, plus the technical and financial aid from China, were indications of the amity between Beijing and Hanoi.

Vietnamisation of the HCMS was contemporaneous with changes to PRC foreign policy. Behind these changes also lies the reason for China’s willingness to lessen control over the HCMS. For domestic and foreign policy reasons which are beyond the scope of this paper, China during the mid to late 50’s pursued a path of co-operation with its Southeast Asian neighbours. As part of the strategy for Peaceful Co-existence China pledged to not interfere in the internal affairs of Southeast Asian countries, especially where the Overseas Chinese were concerned. To demonstrate the sincerity of the PRC to live in harmony with its southern neighbours, Zhou Enlai ended the Bandung Conference by signing an unprecedented treaty on citizenship with Indonesia. This treaty marked a milestone since never before was bilateral discussion of Overseas Chinese citizenship possible. Under the Qing dynasty and the Nationalist government, Overseas Chinese were automatically considered Chinese nationals, but with the Indonesian treaty, ethnic Chinese were allowed to choose their nationality. In the same spirit, Zhou Enlai’s 1956 visit to the HCMS was capped by the announcement encouraging students to be good citizens of Vietnam. In 1957, the PRC stopped issuing visas to Chinese students to return to China. Vietnamisation was officially underway in 1958 when the Chinese

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48 For a more comprehensive study on the PRC perspective of the Overseas Chinese see, Fitzgerald.
government passed management of the school over to the Hanoi Education Ministry, but the slow push and pull of the Chinese students toward the Vietnamisation had already commenced.

Vietnamisation was a two-pronged strategy; one aimed at instilling socialism and the other nationalism. On the socialist front, the North Vietnamese government had less convincing to do since for many of the Chinese who remained in North Vietnam after the partition, there was already a predilection to be sympathetic to the socialist government. In 1954, thousands of Chinese fled to the South during the five months of cease-fire sanctioned by the Geneva Conference in which people were allowed to choose their residence. In fact, the number [of Chinese fleeing south during this grace period] was substantial enough to warrant a moniker of its own, “the ‘54’ers”. 50 Those who stayed in the North either could not afford to leave, or had less to lose from the Communists taking over and or remained out of loyalty and trust. The last category included people like Thanh Lai’s parents who trusted the northern government more since the government was aligned with China.

On the nationalist front, the five years after the Chinese government handed over control of the HCMS to the start of full-scale war with the Americans in 1964, witnessed a small but perceptible move toward incorporation of the Chinese school into the Vietnamese system. The most observable changes were the replacement of Russian with Vietnamese as the foreign language elective and the introduction of Vietnamese history. Yet, in spite of these changes the school remained a Chinese school. Escalation of war

50 Nhut Thap Trieu, personal interview, 6 Jan. 1996.
with the US intensified and gave an inadvertent boost to the Vietnamisation process. The state of emergency influenced people into feeling and doing things that were not possible outside a war situation. Under attack by the US, there came a heightened awareness of one's identity. American planes could not differentiate between ethnic Chinese businesses and homes and those which belonged to the Vietnamese – to the pilot they were all North Vietnamese and communists. For the students at the HCMS, this state of emergency changed their whole reality.

The North Vietnamese wartime discourse expedited the process of Vietnamisation of the HCMS by downplaying their uniqueness and isolationist thinking and treating them like any other school. As someone who had had first hand knowledge of the CCP and its history, Ho Chi Minh could not have failed to see the potential of wartime to mobilize and rally students. The North Vietnamese leadership envisioned a similar opportunity to inculcate the Chinese youths. The Chinese students were made to feel a part of the Vietnamese cause when their status was elevated from mere school children to active participants in the anti-American war effort. Wartime education policy aimed at the protection and training of the “sprouts,” as the school children were called, became key to survival and the future. Students and teachers were led to believe that by merely continuing school, they ensured the nation its protection and survival. The evacuation plan of 1964 to 1968 under the duress of war, dwarfed all prior efforts to Vietnamise Chinese students and was more effective at bringing HCMS Chinese students closer to their Vietnamese counterparts than ever before.
Evacuation

War, ironically, is the great unifier since nothing galvanises people like a common threat – even people who traditionally see themselves as dissimilar, as in the case of the ethnic Chinese who lived in North Vietnam. War is especially effective in nation building, since the sacrifices and mutual effort demanded by suffering produces more cohesion among people than happiness.51 During the Vietnam War, the ethnic Chinese were obliged to suffer the same fate as the Vietnamese people and forced to take part in the common effort for survival – a common effort that facilitated a sense of belonging. Survival, for students of the HCMS, meant evacuation, a fate they shared with all North Vietnamese students.

The North Vietnamese credit a substantial part of the victory over the Americans to the nature of their education.

This vanguard character of our education was moulded during the first five-year plan (1961-1965) and constituted the best guarantee of our overcoming the great trials of the US war of destruction (1964-1968). Further tempered in the crucible of the patriotic struggle as it was, we owe our victory over US imperialism on the cultural front to this vanguard character of our education.52

The “vanguard character” refers to the directives set out at the Third National Congress of the Vietnamese Labour Party in 1960, when education was defined under the precepts of Marxist-Leninist ideology:

Education must always closely follow the line and orientation of the Party’s political tasks, and endeavour to train new men able to meet the requirements of each revolutionary stage; education has become the revolutionary undertaking of the masses, the principles of socialist education, the combination of education at school and education by

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52 Ho 75.
society, the preoccupation with linking school to life, and production to fighting have been strictly observed in all school activities.

Outlined in the quote above are the main influences of Marxism on North Vietnamese education. In Marxism, politics and education are intimately connected, with the latter serving to reinforce the former. In order to achieve the Communist goal of the 'classless society,' the North Vietnamese government set out to remould, re-educate and brainwash those with traditional ways of thinking. They deprived the educated and the privileged of their special status and purged "undesirable elements" considered counterrevolutionary.

Education was made available to the masses with work and practical knowledge placed above theory and books. The "bourgeois tendency" to value book learning was rectified by the denigration of intellectualism and the emphasis on practical knowledge and the linking of school to society and home.

The Hanoi government put the theory of combining life skills, production and education to work during the peak years of the War when they launched the mass movement of schools to the suburbs and mountainside. In response to Operation Rolling Thunder, the American strategy of carpet-bombing North Vietnam, the Hanoi government boasted, "Hanoi and Haiphong can be destroyed, but we will fight on." One of their main strategies to fight on was evacuation. By relocating the most essential industries, services and personnel to the periphery of Hanoi and Haiphong, they could continue to combat the US even if the two main cities were destroyed.

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53 Ho 75.
In addition to defence, the evacuation plan also facilitated indoctrination and control of students. In strategic terms, the evacuation may have been part of what the North Vietnamese referred to as “passive anti-aircraft measure,” but it was also ideal for carrying out the “vanguard character” of their education policy. Before the Vietnam War, education in North Vietnam was part book learning and part indoctrination; with the war, the latter took precedence. What the Vietnamese government hoped to do was inculcate students with a sense of purpose and the grander view of helping out with the War. To accomplish this, they had to emphasise the work and ideological aspect. The protection of the students was most important, followed by work, and last in the priority of things was book learning. Premier Pham Van Dong instructed teachers,

...place the air defense problem above and before everything. Above and before everything means that if necessary because of air defense, however great or small the effect of teaching, disregard the teaching, not the air defense. If the children lose a little study and their safety is assured, that is better than to run the risk of useless losses.56

Ease of control was the rationale behind the division of students into small groups, their dispersal into different villages and the long distance separating schools.

The first US bombs fell on Hanoi in August 5, 1964 in retaliation for the Tonking Gulf Incident, when the destroyer U.S.S. Maddox was allegedly attacked by North Vietnamese torpedo boats. The full evacuation order came in February 1965, shortly after American planes began regular bombing runs that occurred almost every other day.57 Along with military industries, schools topped the priority list for evacuations. By August, the majority of downtown schools were abandoned and the students dispersed to the mountainside.

56 Van Dyke 136.
57 Van Dyke 127.
The importance of education to the North Vietnamese can be estimated by the extent of the evacuations. Students from the HCMS were among the 300,000 students relocated by the North Vietnamese government.\textsuperscript{58} There were two types of evacuated schools, the suburban ones that housed the students for the week and the countryside or mountainside ones that housed them all school year. The HCMS was of the latter type. Recollection of the evacuation by HCMS alumni resonate with the experiences recounted in \textit{Vietnamese Studies} about Vietnamese middle schools during the period of 1964-1968. The congruity indicates two things: one, the HCMS was by then treated like any other school in North Vietnam; and two, their evacuation experience was not unique and therefore can generally reflect the situation of the time.

The HCMS was relocated to a safety zone in the hills during the years 1964 to 1968. The participants were all in their mid-teens and the experience defined their teenage years. In their recollections, school became synonymous with the evacuation, which became indelibly linked with youth and the triumph over hardship. Nga Tuyet Dam, Thanh Lai, Nhat Gia Ly, Fonz Yuan, Rosa Trieu, Long Trieu, Peter Quan, Lu Yu Mei, Cheng Xiaoying, Dan Tai Hong and Cheng Suling were all around 14-15 years old and in their second year at the HCMS when the evacuation order sent them and approximately 400 of their classmates to a remote region of Hoa Binh province. The government closed the HCMS and dispersed the students and teachers to two villages, Luong Son village and Lam Son village where they regrouped, rebuilt and continued schooling.

\textsuperscript{58} Van Dyke 135.
Contact between students was made even more difficult by the separation of Luong Son village and Lam Son village by about two hours walk; the two groups were further broken down into teams of 6 or 7 people. Nga Tuyet Dam recalls that the trip to Luong Son village took three hours by long distance mini bus even though it was only about 40-50 km distance from Hanoi. Once dropped off at the base of the hill area, students still had a two-hour walk to get to the designated area. They had with them one bag, containing 3-4 sets of clothes, a jacket, blanket and pillow and their only pair of shoes made of recycled tire-rubber.

Work and study were to be students’ way of contributing to the salvation of the nation. In a *Vietnamese Studies* interview, Minister of Education Nguyen Van Huyen revealed that the curriculum during the evacuation was based on three criteria: it must be fundamental, modern and adapted to the conditions of Vietnam.\(^{59}\) Nguyen went on to explain that the educational value of production is extremely high and that it was not advisable “to let young people engage in purely bookish studies up to an advanced age without ever using their hands.”\(^{60}\) Statistics for one Vietnamese school, also relocated in Hoa Binh, suggests that work was very productive. Between 1963 and 1968, teachers and students at the School of Young Socialist Workers produced over 2,470,500 *dong* of industrial and agricultural products.\(^{61}\)

At the evacuated HCMS, alumni recall that book learning was secondary to physical work. A typical day was divided into two parts, half school and half work.

\(^{60}\) Nguyen 19.
However, given the primitive conditions of the schools, the lack of school supplies and amenities, work was often easier to accomplish than study. The alumni were slow to recall details of their study but remembered vividly the work portion of their day, which were euphemistically known as “patriotic tasks.” Those who had class first would commence at 7:30am and those with chores to do proceeded to either chop and collect wood, fetch water, feed animals, tend the garden, clean, or repair whatever was necessary.

There was no school fee at this time, but students were still required to pay 10.50 dong for food and supplies. How much and what they were allowed to purchase, however, depended on an individual's rank and type of work. The communist emphasis on manual labour rewarded more labour intensive work with a greater amount of food. Lu Yumei remembers that with the food money from her parents she was able to purchase her share of rice, kerosene oil for the lamps, 1-2 jin of pork, sugar, and fish sauce, but that the boys who performed heavier tasks were given a little bit more food.

Conditions at the villages were abysmal, but to the students it was all a part of growing up. They accepted the fact that there was only one water supply, a stream, which they had to share with the local hill minorities. Food shortages were a given so they came up with ingenuous ways to stretch their supplies and ways to add to their diets. The rice was made into congee, which yielded more in volume and required less rice to make. The pork was prepared so that the meat and oil was separated. The pork oil was then stewed with pumpkin, papaya or yams and the vegetables were boiled and the water used for soup. Peter Quan remembers venturing out into a neighbouring farm and stealing chilli.

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62 Van Dyke 139.
peppers that were preserved, watered down, then added to the rice for flavour.\textsuperscript{64} They caught fish using firecrackers, recalls Nga Dam.\textsuperscript{65} The situation was not something they questioned but rather just accepted.

For students at the HCMS, the evacuated school was important in three ways. First, it evoked a feeling of being connected to the War. Propaganda aside, the very existence of a fully functioning school, created from scratch, hidden from American bomber planes zooming overhead brought out an incredible sense of accomplishment. Since the HCMS was not alone in its struggle, hardship and dislocation, the common experience bonded the Chinese students with the over 300,000 Vietnamese students who made similar treks. Second, the experience matured them and taught them invaluable life skills. For the alumni who endured those arduous years in the hills, the experience had a sobering and maturing effect. Dan Tai Hong remembers the hardship of those years and thinks that it helped him through much tougher times later in life.\textsuperscript{66} Nga Dam was inspired by her teachers and wanted to follow their example. For her, the experience was a break from the confined world of Hanoi city life. Dam proudly asserts, “my three sisters stayed on with my parents and they received no schooling in all those years. I didn’t want to be like them.”\textsuperscript{67} Third and most important of all, the evacuation brought the students closer to each other.

The evacuation of the HCMS is a good case study of the negative and positive aspects of youth experience. On the positive side, the evacuation experience of the HCMS can be compared to summer camp in that the freedom of being away from home

\textsuperscript{64} Peter Quan, personal interview, 2 Apr. 2000.
\textsuperscript{65} Dam, personal interview.
\textsuperscript{66} Dan Tai Hong, personal interview, 9 Apr. 2000.
and parents made all difficulties seem surmountable and even enjoyable. Like all evacuted secondary school children, the students of the HCMS were only allowed to visit their families twice a year, once during the Lunar New Year and once during the summer months. As a result, the school became home, teachers became surrogate parents and classmates took the place of siblings. The friendship between classmates was deepened and reinforced by a shared existence that required them to spend every moment together, to look out for each other, and to be responsible for each other's livelihood. Cheng Xiaoying recalls missing her mother, "...but I would never trade those years for anything. Those were the best friends I ever made."\(^6\) Rosa Trieu agrees, "We were very happy – nothing to eat – but happy. It was fun because we were away from home. We had never worked before. We had nothing to worry about. In the morning there was school and in the afternoon we did work. We had good friends."\(^6\)

Conversely, it also shares some similarities with the Red Guard movement of the Cultural Revolution in that peer pressure and the ebullience of youth swept away any sense of the individual and critical thought. For Dan Tai Hong, though the evacuation experience was a memorable one, he admits when questioned about his feelings of the experience, that he can recall very little. "It was something we had to do and we never questioned it," says Hong.\(^7\) This was a common response from the alumni, many of whom found answering for the group much easier than answering for themselves.

To Gerard Tongas, a professor of French at the Lycee Chu-Van-An in Hanoi, who stayed on after the French defeat, the evacuation was no more than propaganda and pure

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67 Dam, personal interview.
69 Rosa Trieu, personal interview, 1 Apr. 2000.
brainwashing of the young. Education in North Vietnam, he writes, was substituted by indoctrination.

For the Vietnamese Communists the words *culture, education* and *teaching* have only one meaning, namely indoctrination in Marxist-Leninist ideology (or what passes for it), one who no longer thinks for himself but accepts in their entirety as Gospel truth, all the concepts systematically inculcated by carefully graded propaganda. From now on such indoctrination will be the lot of the elite and the youth.\(^{71}\)

His criticism applies to the evacuated schools since aside from protection and study, the third task of the evacuated schools according to Ton Duc Thang, vice-chairman of the Vietnamese Worker Party, was to induce children to “use their small strength to participate in the right kind of work and help their fathers and brothers produce and fight…and to join the various Party youth groups so they can learn the Party programs.”\(^{72}\)

The ideological aspect was most prevalent to teachers Wei Rundi and Bang Mang Liu, who taught history and biology respectively in Luong Son village. They recall almost daily political meetings convened by the education bureau and “we were warned to keep a sharp eye on students in case they made trouble.”\(^{73}\) Interestingly, in Wei’s and Liu’s recollection they overlooked the indoctrination and control the Chinese government no doubt imposed on the school and recalled only the displeasure of having Vietnamese government propaganda forced on them.

During the evacuation, Vietnamisation of the teaching staff, the curriculum and the students continued. Nhat Gia Ly remembers that during his first year at the school in 1964, the teachers were still using some Chinese texts but the year after at Lam Son and

\(^{70}\) Hong, personal interview.


\(^{72}\) Van Dyke 133.

\(^{73}\) Bang Ming Liu and Rundi Wei, personal interviews, 10 Apr. 2000.
Luong Son, the first Vietnamese textbooks appeared. Chinese, which had been the language of instruction since the school began, was designated a “foreign language” in 1966. After six years of primary school in Chinese, the students of the HCMS were now told to switch to another language for instruction and exams. Ethnic Chinese teachers were also phased out. Wei Rundi was dismissed from her teaching position in 1968 and sent to a desk job. For Fonz Yuan, the shift was evident when Nguyen Da Song, a Vietnamese, was posted to the highest position in the school. Many Chinese features were diluted but the alumni did not recount any resistance. Chen Zongyao recalls nonchalantly, “What were we to do? It is their country after all, they can run it anyway they like.”

Wartime heroism can bring a minority closer to the mainstream society. The War inspired many minority students in North Vietnam to sacrifice their lives in the name of nationalism and showed the effectiveness of wartime propaganda to mobilise students. Minorities who fought and died for North Vietnam were glorified and made into examples of outstanding citizenry. *Vietnamese Studies* applauds the courage of a Muong minority student who wrote, “To my school, I am leaving you to go and defend the country and also to defend you, my sweet mother, to defend the cosy nest of my brothers and sisters,” before heading off into battle. A student of the Tay minority was reported to have uttered, “Report to my school that I have done my duty,” before breathing his last.

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75 Wei, personal interview.
78 Minh and Tu 59.
Motivated by such stories, some HCMS students joined the military. Guan Huaiyan remembers a couple of students who joined the resistance and fought in the South. The students died but their bravery became examples of Chinese minority involvement during the war.

Another measure of the high degree of Vietnamisation during the evacuation period was student response to events in China, specifically their reception of the Cultural Revolution. The evacuation coincided with the Cultural Revolution in China, a catastrophic event that moved the Hanoi Chinese students further away from Beijing’s embrace. Although the Chinese government had given up control of the HCMS, they were eager to vie for the allegiance and young minds of the students during the Cultural Revolution. The communication of China’s revolutionary ideals came in the form of proselytising People's Liberation Army soldiers stationed in North Vietnam. There to keep the railroad line between North Vietnam and China in operation, these soldiers helped lay airstrips and to take control of anti-aircraft installations along the rail routes.

There were approximately 40,000 uniformed troops in North Vietnam and they were regularly seen by HCMS students. Dan Tai Hong remembers clearly PLA soldiers passing around and reading from Chairman Mao’s Little Red Book. He also recalls their criticism of the Vietnamese communists in the epigram “oppose imperialism, oppose revisionism” (fan di, fan xiu). The PLA were not the only source of the Little Red Book and Maoist

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79 Minh and Tu 59.
80 Guan, personal interview.
81 Van Dyke 219.
82 Van Dyke 219.
83 Hong, personal interview.
propaganda, however; the Chinese embassy in Hanoi continued to function during the war, passing out free copies to anyone interested. Fonz Yuan remembers picking up copies to bring back to the school during one of his supply trips to the city, but the reception to the propaganda was cool.\textsuperscript{84}

With the start of the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese communist propaganda seeping into the HCMS also increased. Excited by the political uprising in China, two factions were formed at the HCMS during the years 1966-67. One was a radical group who wanted to learn Mao's quotations and be more politically active and the other was a conservative faction who did not want any trouble from the Vietnamese authorities and just wanted to get on with school. The latter was by the far the more popular group and as a result the only manifestations of the Cultural Revolution at the HCMS were verbal confrontations – mere whispers compared to the vociferousness of their Chinese counterparts. One incident in particular highlighted the change that had taken place over the Chinese students. Fonz Yuan recalls the visit of Diep Bao Xuong, an ethnic Chinese who worked for the Vietnamese government. Peter Quan confirms, "Diep Bao Xuong was at the school on personal business but took the opportunity to express concern about HCMS students getting too involved with the Cultural Revolution in China."\textsuperscript{85} The radical faction shouted him down and called him a traitor, but most students did not pay much attention to him as they considered school more important than the politics in China. Compared with the enthusiasm to imitate the Great Leap Forward ten years earlier,

\textsuperscript{84} Yuan, personal interview.
\textsuperscript{85} Quan, personal interview.
the students’ response to the Cultural Revolution was a clear decline of interest in Chinese politics.

The Cultural Revolution was destructive in many ways but none more so than in tarnishing the hopes and optimism of the Chinese in Vietnam who thought China was a better and safer place to be during the war years. Thanh Lai’s parents thought they were sending their only son to safety and a good education when they withdrew him from the HCMS and sent him to stay with relatives for schooling in Guangxi, China in 1966. Just as he arrived in China, the Cultural Revolution broke out and school became an unattainable goal. The War in Hanoi could not compare with the internal destructiveness of the Cultural Revolution that wreaked havoc all over China, and especially in Guangxi where many ethnic Chinese in Vietnam sent their children. Lai’s parents were mortified that they allowed him to go to China and wished they had left him with the HCMS. At least then, they reasoned, he could have had a more complete education. Lai was accompanied by three friends who suffered the same denial of education.

The lowering of opinion of China in North Vietnam kept pace with China’s precipitous decline into chaos as the Cultural Revolution raged on. All this had a profound effect on the sense of identity of the Chinese students. The evacuation took on a special significance; it gave them a sense of being involved in the Vietnam War and also, by comparison to what was going on in the “motherland,” sense of relief that at least they were still in school. The stark juxtaposition of the two situations, highlighted by the growing sense of distance from China, could be gauged from the lukewarm response to

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86 Lai, personal interview.
the Cultural Revolution. Despite the fact that Mao’s Little Red Books were handed out free from the Chinese embassy, and PLA soldiers quietly attempted to instil 'revolutionary spirit' in the Hanoi Chinese students the response was indifferent – only events such as minor shouting matches between students ensued. By conveying a sense of urgency and the need to have everyone working together for the good of the nation, students were made to feel a part of the war. The chaos and school disruptions in China, allowed the North Vietnamese to project a much better image of themselves. The students were too busy surviving to care about politics across the border. A conscious step away from China was taken when the staff and students of the HCMS poured their energy into carrying out the Vietnamese government’s imperative to continue schooling and turned their backs on Chinese politics.

Conclusion

The 1958-1968 period was the height of assimilation for the students of the HCMS in North Vietnam. First, their school was under the tutelage of the Vietnamese government for the first time in its history, their curriculum underwent drastic changes and their teachers were being replaced by Vietnamese instructors. Second, the Chinese government, to whom HCMS students traditionally looked to for guidance, supported this process of Vietnamisation both verbally and through their foreign policy of disengagement in Southeast Asia. Third, the Vietnam War mobilised the students through the process of evacuation and indoctrination while the Cultural Revolution encouraged more distance from China. As a result, the period signified the closest proximity in mind

87 Lai, personal interview.
and spirit between the ethnic Chinese students and North Vietnamese society – a proximity that makes the experience of the HCMS students outstanding in the long and varied history of the Chinese in Vietnam.

The HCMS moved back to Hanoi when signs of the de-escalation started to appear in late 1968. Although the students were back in familiar surroundings, everything had changed. The school had begun to admit Vietnamese students and in a few years time would be transformed completely into a regular Vietnamese school. Little did HCMS students know then that within less than ten years they would be forced to leave Hanoi again; this time, however, there was no returning.

After almost three decades of camaraderie, relations between Hanoi and Beijing began to deteriorate markedly in the early 1970s. Tensions increased as a result of China’s normalisation of relations with the U.S., the PRC’s backing of Pol Pot in Cambodia and Vietnam’s support of the Soviet Union after the Sino-Soviet split. Hanoi interpreted the first two moves as China’s attempt to contain Vietnam’s power in mainland Southeast Asia, while Beijing viewed Vietnam’s Soviet stance as a betrayal of friendship. According to Beijing, China and Vietnam were allies as close as lips and teeth until the early 1970s.

The Overseas Chinese were mere pawns in the political game, manipulated by both sides. After the Communist victory in South Vietnam, the Chinese there were given special treatment because the Vietnamese needed their help to keep the economy in the South running. Once the Communists had settled into power and cooperation was no

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88 Wei, personal interview.
89 SarDesai 145.
longer as urgently needed, the Overseas Chinese were forcibly Vietnamised like their Northern brothers, grouped as 'potential opposition to the spread of capitalism' and relocated to the New Economic Zones in the countryside.\(^{91}\) In 1978, China's sudden change in policy and attitude to win Overseas Chinese loyalty and support proved disastrous for ethnic Chinese everywhere in Vietnam. Mandatory Vietnamese citizenship thrust on all Overseas Chinese and the confiscation of their possessions forced the Chinese government to act. Their main goal was to teach Vietnam a lesson and not to help out the beleaguered Vietnamese Chinese.\(^{92}\) War erupted between China and Vietnam in 1979, triggering the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of Chinese refugees\(^{93}\) - among them the 19 alumni of the HCMS.

The HCMS alumni call the exodus 'the second evacuation' since they had to endure much of the same hardship as they had at Luong Son and Lam Son in the scattered refugees camps all over Southeast Asia. After permanently resettling in Western nations like Canada and the US their emotional attachment to the school has deepened. In Canada, the HCMS Alumni Association has become a social focus for the alumni, attracting people from the Sino-Vietnamese community in general. Like a well-earned badge of courage, the students' memory of the school provides solace and pride as they recall those bittersweet years at the HCMS and enjoy their hard fought happiness.

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\(^{91}\) SarDesai 148.
\(^{92}\) SarDesai 149.
Appendix A - Interview Participants


Dam, Tuyet Nga. Personal Interview. 26 Mar. 2000. Student in the 1960s – Luong Son village

Guan Huaiyan. Personal Interview. 16 Feb. 2000. Student in 1950s, teacher and vice principal in the 1960s,

Hong, Dan Tai. Personal Interview. 9 Apr. 2000. Student in the 1960s – Luong Son village


Liu, Bang Ming. Personal Interview. 6 Apr. 2000. Student in the 1950s and teacher in the 1960s – Luong Sam


Student in the 1960s – Lam Son village
Trieu, Rosa. Personal Interview. 1 Apr. 2000.
Student in the 1960s – Lam Son village

Wei, Rundi. Personal Interview. 6 Apr. 2000.
Student in the 1950s and teacher in 1960s – Luong Son village

Student in the 1960s – Lam Son village

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