

SNUAC Asia Square Brown Bag Seminar Series, Fall 2025

Reading Vietnam from Pyongyang and Seoul: Translations and Circulation of Vietnamese Revolutionary Novels in North and South Korea

Do Dieu Khue

This research explores the translations and circulation of Vietnamese revolutionary novels in North and South Korea, focusing on the historical context and sociopolitical motivations that drove these processes. Specifically, the study will compare the translations of the novel *Sống như anh* (Trần Đình Vân, 1964) in North Korea (<그처럼살자>, 1965) and South Korea (<불멸의 불꽃으로 살아: 한 베트남 혁명전사의 삶과 죽음>, 1988), and examine the extraordinary popularity of the novel *Áo trắng* (Nguyễn Văn Bổng, 1972) in South Korea (<사이공의 흰옷>, 1986), which remains unknown in North Korea.

As the most dominant and beloved genre in North Vietnam during the Vietnam War, revolutionary literature was even popular after 1975 when the war ended and the country was reunified under Communist Party's rule. Also known in Vietnam as "resistance literature," they were the prose works that were produced between 1945 and 1975. Spanning the two Indochina Wars, they thus were divided into "anti-French" and "anti-American literature." Their topics mainly revolved around war and revolution, the soldiers and heroes, the thirst for peace and unification, and the socialist men/women and ideals, which all combined to construct the so-called "Vietnam's revolutionary heroism." The fact that these novels were immensely enjoyed by the people on both sides of the Korean peninsula for a long period of time surprises many.

Throughout the Cold War, a divided Korea and divided Vietnam stood on opposing sides of the battlefield, both physically and psychologically, between communist camp in the North and capitalist camp in the South. Whereas North Korea was a "blood comrade," an ideological ally of Hanoi, South Korea became Hanoi's enemy as a result of its active participation in the Vietnam War to support the U.S.-backed Saigon government.

The research seeks to answer: What historical events and sociopolitical conditions influenced these translating and circulating processes? How do the

translations of certain Vietnamese texts reflect the differing ideological perspectives of the divided Koreas? How and why do the reception and impact of Vietnamese revolutionary novels differ between North and South Korea? It hence offers a comparative perspective on how these novels were used to further different ideological agendas in the two Koreas. The research offers valuable perspectives on the interplay between literature and ideology, as well as the cultural dimensions of political history in East Asia.

Do Dieu Khue is a diplomatic historian with a Ph.D. in International Studies from Seoul National University (SNU). Her research mainly resolves around modern Korean history, U.S. relations with East and Southeast Asia throughout the Cold War, and the dynamics among Asian Socialist states. She previously served as an Assistant Professor of International Politics at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Ho Chi Minh; a Visiting Fellow at the Harvard-Yenching Institute; and a Visiting Researcher at the George Washington University, SNU Institute of International Studies, and SNU Institute of Humanities.

Date & Time: December 2nd, 2025. 12:00–13:00

Place: SNUAC Room 304 (3rd Floor)