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## The voice of propaganda

Citizenship and moral silence in late-socialist Vietnam

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# The voice of propaganda

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## Introduction

Fig. 1. "Hail the renewal of [our] country, celebrate [our] glorious Party, happy new year of the Goat."  
A Lunar New Year message on a city-centre mobilisation poster, Hanoi, 2015



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 1 Vietnam's vibrant capital Hanoi is a city of spectacular public iconography. In today's age of rapid marketisation, known officially as Renovation/Renewal (*Đổi Mới*), the emblems of global consumerism are perpetually in view. The logos of Coke and KFC pervade the city's traffic-choked streets and public spaces. So too do expressions of enthusiastic state support for the country's 25-year process of world market "integration" (*hội nhập*), a term used particularly for investment and aid packages brokered with South Korea and the other big Asian powerhouse economies.
- 2 Yet the city's thoroughfares and building façades are also regularly festooned with giant message posters that are resolutely socialist in verbal and visual style. Their cartoon-like graphics still give prominence to the hammer and sickle, and to its personifications as a helmeted male worker and rice-bearing female tiller of the soil, often grouped with other producer-citizen archetypes. These commonly include a teacher, doctor, and soldier, plus Party members of the future in the guise of happy schoolchildren in the garb of the Hồ Chí Minh Young Pioneer Youth League (*Đội Thiếu niên Tiền phong Hồ Chí Minh*). Equally pervasive are the smiling features of President Hồ Chí Minh (1890–1969), the nation's revolutionary founding father. And during the

periodic mass mobilisations known as *phong trào* (“movements”) the streets are also adorned with gold-on-crimson slogan banners exalting the Communist Party-state and the everlasting truths of socialism.

- 3 The puzzle addressed in this article is why my attempts to use these seemingly anodyne tools of public moralising as talking points have so often made my voluble Hanoi friends fall unexpectedly silent, or at best uncharacteristically monosyllabic. What seek to show is that these occasions are moments of what I wish to call agentive silence. I am using this term to suggest that there can be more to a silent self than the effect of a censor’s power to control or extinguish speech. The claim proposed here is that what I have encountered in Hanoi are cases where the muting of a vocal self can be an act of moral will, not the crushing of agency and voice.
- 4 I should stress that the silences discussed here are much in contrast to what normally happens in conversations with my Hanoi friends, even when something I have expected to be tricky or sensitive comes up, as it often does in our chats about matters both state-related and personal. As I explain below, the exclamation “block!”, both in English and Vietnamese, is one of the more striking ways my interlocutors have responded to what I had thought of as unexceptionable queries about how a Hanoian might make sense of a poster’s text and images.

## Confronting the image

- 5 “Never,” my mid-career nurse friend Tuyét said tersely on one such occasion, following an abrupt halt to our flow of cheerful chat. I had suggested in the course of a city-centre stroll that taking stock of the latest state-issue graphic, newly mounted on the big hoarding outside her hospital’s main gate, was something she and her work colleagues might do as part of their routine at the start of the working day. We had just walked past one of the items I had in mind, the brightly hued “Happy Lunar New Year/ Hail the Party’ poster in Figure 1, featuring an image of a young woman with a celebratory bouquet. She wears a modestly unadorned white version of the national dress known as the *áo dài*, and is positioned against a stylised rendering of the Hanoi skyline, its high-rise structures of gleaming urban modernity paired with a representation the city’s 19th-century flag tower, a Hanoi landmark associated with love of country and defence of homeland. I had wondered what a Hanoi viewer might see in such an image, which to my mind seemed unproblematically upbeat and easy to sum up in everyday conversational terms.
- 6 But not so for Tuyét. “Nothing. We don’t look. Never,” she insisted. She found my idea of friends or colleagues discussing or reflecting on a poster like this one bizarre and laughable. Another friend from my inner-city fieldsite, Nhi, had said almost the same thing the day before when I aired this idea with her. The two women are neighbours; I have known them both for many years. Nhi is a middle-school teacher with two high-achieving school-age children. Her background is much like that of Tuyét, who is the first member of her extended family to gain professional qualifications, followed by the kind of employment in a big-name state institution that the Hanoians I know regard as highly desirable. This means a job both secure and prestigious, providing good opportunities for the perks and “gifts” that ensure a parent like Tuyét can provide well for those in her care.

- 7 Tuyết and Nhi are thus like most of the Hanoians I work with in belonging to families who have made the enormous upward leap in living standards that marketisation has set in train. The effects of the Renovation/Renewal process have been highly volatile for the people I know. But my friends still rejoice at the contrast between today's hard-won gains and the deprivation they endured in the grim austerity years that followed the 1962–73 anti-US War.

Fig. 2. Modest residential new-builds in my inner-city “West Lake” fieldsite, Hanoi, 2018



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 8 Since 2010, my main Hanoi fieldsite has been the residential area I call West Lake (Fig. 2). In the 30 years since market opening, West Lake has become a place of modest prosperity, where parents strive to equip both daughters and sons with the qualifications required for a life of global knowledge-economy “brain work”. It is this that has made the locality such a fruitful site for exploration of the ways Hanoians of decidedly unprivileged origins have negotiated the massive transformations of Vietnam’s massive shift to “market-oriented” socialism.
- 9 The multiple income streams of the households I work with provide for such things as high-end laptops and after-school “extra study” crammer classes (*học thêm*) for their school-age children, and in general a life they know to be worlds away from the penury and limited horizons they associate with the country’s stubbornly poor rural and highland regions.
- 10 Tuyết’s mother Hà, a West Lake war widow and the first literate member of her extended family, lives with Tuyết and her two children in the comfortable four-storey residence that Tuyết was able to build with her carefully husbanded work and business savings. Its ground floor is given over to a sports equipment and mobile phone franchise. The site is that of the tiny clay-walled house where her husband was born,

one of eight surviving children in a family of impoverished fresh-water fisherfolk. That was in 1974, a generation before the West Lake area began its fast transformation into today's thriving little hub of small-scale commerce and glossy residential new-builds in close proximity to one of the city's landmark freshwater lakes.

- 11 I was accustomed to Tuyết's frankness about all manner of issues. On the occasion described above, we had been talking about the close attention she pays to the headline items on state TV's flagship nightly news programme as a source of "hot topic" (*chủ đề nóng*) tidbits to summarise for her teenage daughter Hương, who was cramming for her all-important pre-university exams. Mothers do this to feed their sons and daughters with useful hints about the "today's life" questions they might be asked in what are called the creativity sections of their Vietnamese language and literature exams. These are the subjects that test the young on how accurately they can communicate the values and virtues of exemplary patriotism and Vietnamese-ness (Bayly 2014).
- 12 I had thought for some time that the messages in state posters and declamation banners might make for fruitful conversation topics as I sought to expand my understanding of how my interlocutors are experiencing the personal and familial challenges of what is officially called a "market-oriented socialist economy". So I had thought it a good idea to ask Tuyết whether she might use the text and images of a poster like the one in Figure 1 as a further clue to the things Hương might be expected to write in the exam room. Her amazement was very apparent. It was instantly clear that there was something odd and unexpected about my remark. And with the repeated drying up of conversations like these, I began to feel my way into the idea of what I am calling acts of agentive silence as a mode of response to the visual prods of a propagandising state.

## Visuality and moral life

- 13 The context for these concerns is a project in which I am seeking to combine the perspectives of visual anthropology and the anthropology of morality and ethics to explore the ways urban citizens reflect on and navigate the dilemmas of marketisation in today's Vietnam. Building on the insightful works of Pinney (2004; 2008), Stasch (2011), and Strassler (2010), I am particularly interested in the communicative qualities of images, and in the entwining of the personal and the official in their use. I believe these intersections provide persuasive evidence that there can be ethical will and agency in what are often referred to as scopic contexts, i.e. where there are technologies that command and tyrannise through surveillance and display. And I seek to show that attention to speech and voice can bring such instances to light.
- 14 What I focus on here are the ways both silences and speech are forged and contested through Hanoians' encounters with the state's moralising iconography. Although there have been tremendous changes in what citizens can read and say since the onset of marketisation in the late 1980s, Vietnam is still very much a land of visual propagandising. Every city and rural region still has a Grassroots Mass Culture Communications office, charged with the dissemination of posters and slogan banners to mark the launch of civic *phong trào* ("movement") campaigns, and national occasions like Independence Day. Localities report on their annual output of bannering and posterage as metrics of good governance, and in every urban ward and district there are designated public spaces used as display sites for these materialisations of the

Party-state's declamatory voice. So what we see in all the images reproduced in Figures 1 through 5 are typical examples of Vietnamese officialdom's enduring commitment to verbal and visual display.

Fig. 3. President Hồ Chí Minh addressing the new citizenry, a national Independence Day street poster, Hanoi, 2015



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 15 In contrast to Figure 1's Party birthday poster, the one shown in Figure 3 turned out to be far less of a conversation stopper, as I explain below. It is a commemoration of the twin 70th anniversaries of the events that gave birth to the revolutionary nation. The first is the August Revolution of 19 August 1945, which launched the nine-year Communist-led anti-French Resistance War. The second is 2 September 1945, national Independence Day. Their abbreviations 19-8 and 2-9 are instantly recognisable. Independence Day is also called to mind by the unmistakable image of Hồ Chí Minh. The photo is famous, reproduced in school textbooks and innumerable items of state iconography. It shows him as President of the new proto-Republic, standing at his microphone in Hanoi's city centre before the great crowd of liberation militia and other nation-makers assembled in ordered ranks beneath his rostrum to hear him proclaim independence for land and people, his declaration famously prefaced by the words "Compatriots, can you hear me clearly?"
- 16 But this is not what the slogan says. No-one young or old needs to be reminded of that key initial utterance of the word "compatriot"/*đồng bào*, a neologism with the sense of "of one womb" coined for the nation's new life, signalling an earthy intimacy between sharers of nationhood, not a coolly official notion of citizenship. In the poster, the caption beneath the national emblem and celebratory phrase "70th year" is in typical Party-state idiolect, its phrasing tediously familiar to the Hanoians I know, yet far from easy to translate.

- 17 The general idea is clear enough: once again that of the citizen of today doing honour to epic moments of national life through commitment to the goals and projects of the here and now. But my interlocutors say the actual words are yet more of the conventionalisms that everyone recognises but would never think of treating exegetically.
- 18 Yet over time, my friends found it possible and even mildly amusing to help with my attempts to crack their codes. My attempts at translations owe much to their thoughts and suggestions, odd as they always find it to try to explain poster words in terms appropriate to everyday speech. What our discussions led to as a literal rendering for the caption of Figure 3 is:
- Uphold/promote the spirit of the August Revolution; support/promote the [year's] patriotic emulation campaigns; [we are] determined to implement successfully the mission/goal/target of economic and social development [in this anniversary year of] 2015.
- 19 But this inelegant effort leaves out several of the nuances my interlocutors eventually pointed out to me. Vietnamese dictionaries translate both *phát huy* and *đẩy mạnh* as “promote”, but they are not synonyms. Nhi said that “*em nên phát huy*” (literally “you should promote”) is something a teacher says encouragingly to a child who shows good “spirit” in the classroom, i.e. a will to carry on trying to improve her work, but without specifying something concrete or numerical like “next time you must score 100%”. So in a slogan like Figure 3's, *phát huy* suggests the inspirational force of something great and meaningful, in this case the exalted spirit of the August Revolution, which one “promotes” by making it one's moral lodestar. Here too the reference is to something fine and intangible that would never be connected with the calculation of a concrete return.
- 20 Thus the teacher's comment “you should *phát huy*” is a recognition of the child's moral agency, her efforts worthwhile because they are the product of a developing will and spirit, not coercion or fear. The comment is not meant to convey, “you are not working hard enough; you must do better next time”. It means “you can feel confident that you can and will do better next time because you are working in the right spirit”. To tell the child “you must work harder because you are being lazy”, one uses words of command, *phải* rather than *nên* for must/should, together with the conventional phrase meaning “work diligently” (*làm việc chăm chỉ*), not *phát huy*. *Nên* as “should” coupled with *phát huy* implies “I [as teacher] am giving you a gentle urging to carry on because you are already on the right path, and I am just encouraging you, as you pilot your own way forward and upward”.
- 21 By way of contrast, the notion of material goals and outputs is precisely what the good citizen and her school class or work unit should aspire to, when acting as enthusiastic participants in the collective “promoting” of a *phong trào* /mobilisation. This is why instead of *phát huy*, the idiom also conventionally translated as “promote” in Figure 3's second phrase is *đẩy mạnh*, which has connotations of energetic physicality. This makes it the right term for what is supposed to happen when a national mobilisation is proclaimed, this being tangible outputs produced by practical hands-on activity, with targets to declare and results to report and tabulate. These could be something like so many more eager volunteers joining in the drive or awareness-raising convocation than last year. Or it could mean so much more output in terms of deeds done and labour expended on a socially beneficial task, such as refurbishing the home of an



indigent Heroine Mother of Vietnam (*Bà mẹ Việt Nam anh hùng*). This is the official designation for a woman whose deceased male kin have “sacrificed”/hy sinh in the nation’s service; there are several such widowed householders in my fieldsite.

- 22 So while no-one would ordinarily try to do such a thing in everyday life, my discussions of these nuances with friends led us to agree that a more idiomatic rendering of the text would equate in Vietnamese to:

We live actively in the inspirational spirit of the August Revolution; we [are committed] to advancing/pushing ever upward/forward successfully [lit. “victoriously”, as in a military triumph] the [nation’s] campaigns of patriotic emulation; we are determined to carry out the great mission [of national life, in the form of what has been declared for this 70th anniversary year 2015, the advancement of our] economic and social development.

Fig. 4. Official idiolect on display, Hanoi, 2016



The conventional phrase “[we] emulate the achievement” has the sense of “let’s strive to better our best!”

Photo: Susan Bayly

- 23 Though shorter, Figure 4’s text is no less difficult to translate. Beneath its classic images of worker and farmer, the slogan makes clear that it is a poster marking the 15th Congress session of the Communist Party Committee for the city of Hanoi. It, too, calls on the moral citizen to honour the occasion by undertaking suitably constructive acts of will. The first line, *thi đua lập thành tích*, translates literally as “emulate the achievement”, followed by “Hail the city of Hanoi’s 15th Party Committee Congress”. But the *thi đua* phrase is a formula that conveys something more like “let’s strive to better our best!”. So expressed more tangibly and concretely than in Figure 2, the idea is that of making productive efforts that do honour to a landmark event of collective

life, but in this case through the meeting of targets or the redoubling of one's commitment to good aims and development goals.

## Agentive silence

Fig. 5. Hanoi: still a city of well-bannered and -posted public space, 2016



Photo: Susan Bayly

Fig. 6. Street posters, Hanoi, 2018



The posters mark the 10th anniversary of the massive boundary expansion that tripled the capital's size in 2008.

Photo: Susan Bayly

Fig. 7. A city-centre freedom-fighter memorial and adjacent “drink Pepsi” advert, Hanoi, 2018



- 24 As I have suggested above, it is Hanoi's visual eclecticism that has particularly intrigued me. On the streets my interlocutors traverse on a daily basis, even the most solemn artefacts of state iconography intermingle with the trumpeting of mass market commerce (Fig. 7). The Hanoian's visual world is suffused with a truly remarkable mix of message genres (Figs 8, 9).

Fig. 8. Looming large in the city centre: another boundary expansion anniversary poster., Hanoi, 2018



Photo: Susan Bayly

Fig. 9. "All toward our goal of rich people, strong country, democratic, just, and civilized society," Hanoi, 2015



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 25 Posters produced by the state are known in Vietnamese as mobilisation pictures (*tranh cổ động*). When I began trying to understand how my interlocutors engage with their texts and images, I had naïvely imagined that my Hanoi friends might see them as I had; thinking them not only strikingly unlike their Soviet and Chinese equivalents, but strongly and even attractively imbued with distinctive qualities of Vietnamese-ness, their human forms represented as benignly smiling archetypes and their tone upbeat,

never shown in attitudes of straining toil or snarling class enmity. So I was surprised to find that once they began tentatively and then more volubly discussing them with me, it turned out that my interlocutors greatly dislike the *tranh cổ động*. And I was even more surprised about why this is so. Their cartoonish pictorial style and contents are a key part of the story. But it is the posters' imagistic use of the written word that irks even more.

- 26 My notion of the imagistic is intended to differentiate between the feeling of straightforwardly reading a text and, by way of contrast, having a viscerally potent, flashbulb-like experience of the written word. I believe it is a notion that works well as a way of capturing what my friends have conveyed to me about the capacity of slogan texts to impact the senses as a flash of penetration, rather than propositionally and semantically. So as I explain below, what I mean by this is that my interlocutors say they do not actually read a poster's slogan idioms. These chunks of Party-state idiolect are used in no other context than that of officialdom in full-throated mobilisation mode. And what I want to stress about them is that for my interlocutors, they are experienced somatically and viscerally, rather than propositionally:

*Tích cực hưởng ứng!* Actively/positively respond!

*Toàn dân!* All the people!

*Xây dựng!* Build up!

*Phát huy!* Promote!

*Nâng cao!* Advance! [or Lift up/Raise!]

*Thi đua lập thành tích!* Emulate the achievement! (Let's strive to better our best!)

- 27 My friends find it painful and unwelcome to experience the jab of involuntary response that the sight of these words produces. Its effect, as they have conveyed it to me, is a jolt of involuntary, unarticulated speech that is spoken of as "robotic" (*rô bô* in Vietnamese, also spelled *rô bốt*). I believe this vision of an autonomically verbal self to which the state has unwelcome access provides valuable food for thought about the power of states both to prompt and to censor citizens' speech. And it is this unwelcome "*rô bô*" effect that my interlocutors respond to with the moments of tight-lipped "block" or refusal for which I am using the term agentive silence.
- 28 I do not intend this idea as an attack on the notion of silence as subjugation. Spivak's account of the epistemic violence of colonialism as an effacing of voice is still a powerful formulation, even though it has been called into question by the discovery of the expressive life led by some of those once thought of as "historically muted" by the discursive hegemonies of empire (Ghosh 2006; Parry 2006: 44; Spivak 1985). But there are also studies of colonial and postcolonial selfhood that treat silence as a positive strategy rather than a deprivation of voice (Woodward et al. 2002). I hope to show that the notion of agentive silence applies to my fieldwork contexts as well, and, as I have suggested above, that it can enhance our understanding of what it means both to repress and to authorise a citizen's expressive voice.
- 29 My point, then, is that when my interlocutors choose not to verbalise in regard to official images, they are not engaging in self-censorship in the sense of seeking to protect themselves from the power of a repressive state. The silences of both men and women in my fieldsite should be understood as active though precarious assertions of what I am referring to here as moral agency, by which I mean their often fragile sense themselves as persons behaving ethically and creditably in an uncertain and challenging world.

- 30 In philosophy, moral agency can mean the capacity to question accepted social norms (MacIntyre 1999). But the term is also used for what I have in mind here: understanding and being inspired or moved by moral concerns (Kennett 2002). As I show below, my interlocutors fear being thought of as citizens of low moral “quality” doing what is right from inculcated habit. This has implications for the debates anthropologists have pursued through engagement with moral philosophy about whether the cultivation of a virtuous disposition should be seen as “reasoned practice” or non-deliberative habituation (Laidlaw 2014: 48–91). What I am calling moral agency in its West Lake manifestations entails both possibilities, but understood hierarchically. This means that the individual who performs moral acts discerningly and reflectively is thought superior to one who performs rightful action as a creature of mere habit or on command, as in the case of the child in the classroom scenario described above, who is praised for working diligently from the promptings of a good “heart” and spirit, not as a “robot” doing so from fear or duress.
- 31 My interlocutors’ silences can thus be seen as a form of free speech, though not in the sense of covert resistance to state power, or a denial of the state’s entitlement to speak in moralising terms to its citizenry. I propose instead that they are an assertive disengagement from what my friends experience in many posters. This is a visual language they think of as designed for “*rô bô*” persons, those of deficient quality and perceptive abilities, not for the refined and agentive citizen of moral worth and sensibility (*tình cảm*) they wish to be.

## The virtue of sight in West Lake

- 32 Refinement in matters of sight and appearance matters greatly to the West Lakers I work with. The exercise of a discerning eye is thought of as one of the cultivated virtues that makes today’s modest prosperity feel meritorious. It is a marker of care, rather than self-gratification or vulgar show. This is not inward-turning care of a privatised or “neoliberal” self, but rather the giving of care in ways my friends speak of as warm-hearted and moral, i.e. loving provision for living and ancestral kin.
- 33 Equipping one’s child to be a confident modern is thus a sign of this loving care. Parents are pleased that their trend-conscious sons and daughters are knowledgeable about global commodity brands and can navigate the cyber world with ease. They also want them to be competent in spoken and written English, universally seen as another essential for job market success, and elders like to hear their young using words like “block” and “robot” in everyday conversation.
- 34 West Lakers also see merit rather than self-regard in being attentive to the look of bodies and home spaces. This includes taking pains with one’s appearance and that of one’s children; rebuilding or “upgrading” one’s house; committing resources to the harmonious arrangement of an ancestor altar and the beautification of family tombs. Far from signalling vanity or a wish to impress, my friends speak of these as reflections of a caring heart and the will to develop one’s capacities and values as an achieving moral citizen.
- 35 The exercise of taste and sensitivity is also central to everyday image use, as can be seen in the mix of aesthetic and ritual considerations that come into play in relation to the arrangement of household ancestor altars, and the replica paper votives burned as

offerings for the ancestral dead (Jellema 2007). Such constructed images can be highly potent, their efficacy both moral and affective, as in the case of the altar photos used in homes and pagodas to instantiate the auratic presence of the dead (Bayly 2013; Kwon 2008: 57–75). The use of such images can go wrong in ways that can be painful and shaming, as in the unhappy story recounted to me by another of my West Lake friends, Quỳnh, a secondary school science teacher with a modest family background much like Nhi's and Tuyết's. Quỳnh has long had tense relations with her mother-in-law, Ly. These worsened when Quỳnh tried to avoid taking sides in a battle waged by her mother-in-law against other members of the patriline, occasioned by the attempt of the grandchildren of the co-wife of Ly's husband's father to enshrine a picture of this secondary spouse on the family's principal ancestor altar.

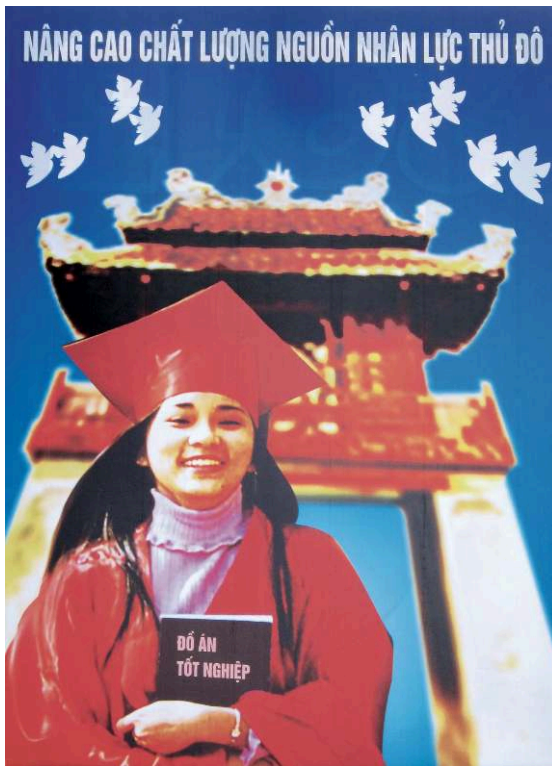
- 36 Quỳnh could not simply follow her husband's lead and back Ly in this stand-off. Her husband wanted her to play peacemaker to avoid disharmony among his kin, hence his wish for her to find a way to do this by resisting his mother's pressure for her to tell the other family members whose side she was on.
- 37 Both older and younger householders regularly tell me about such things. They clearly find pleasure in acting as articulating narrator, putting thoughtful shape around action and experience, and finding ways to verbalise for my benefit what it is that gives a particular dilemma its ethical grounding and complexity. Their widely shared sense that the ability to articulate thought and feeling is essential to ethical life and moral agency is something my interlocutors have often conveyed in our fieldwork encounters. Friends have made it clear that they enjoy discussing with me such things as the hard work mothers do to ensure that children learn the modes of speech that are correct and seemly for interactions with living and ancestral kin, and with other seniors and juniors beyond the home. This includes *xưng hô*, the use of the numerous self-other relational terms that register differences of rank, age, and gender through appropriate adjustments of pronouns and I/you usages (Hy Van Luong 1988; Marr 1997; Rydstrom 2003).
- 38 I have been told a great deal about these, and how warm and "natural" they are thought to be in contrast to the kind of speech my friends call "robotic". "Like bowing in Japan", said Duc, a young first-generation West Lake graduate, now working in IT. This is an action widely thought of as stiff and soulless, and its accompanying little bark of conventionalised utterance a "protocol" without the warmth of connectedness (*tình cảm*).
- 39 West Lakers say that children learn *xưng hô* through gentle teasing-out or "kindling" (*khơi dậy*) of the expressiveness that comes naturally to a feeling heart. So its use is the opposite of "robotic" speech, produced from a process of drummed-in habituation. This is a view in line with what is communicated in the teaching of Vietnamese language and literature as a "morals subject", i.e. that expressive linguistic facility is fundamental to Vietnameseness and is a critical materialisation of the feeling, moral self (Bayly 2014). Hence my puzzlement when friends who had always been so forthcoming and keen to demonstrate their verbal powers fell suddenly silent at the sight of smiling poster images that I had expected to be viewed in blandly neutral or even positive terms, their intended meanings easy and unproblematic to put into words.

## City walks

- 40 Yet again and again when I first tried to discuss a poster, the conversation went dead. “Block”, my late-career teacher friend Mai said at the idea of doing this. She made it clear that she meant “block” as an action; not being blocked, but an exercise of agentive will. She knows the word in English because her college-age nephew Hùng uses it in slang conversations with his friends. He is a typical West Laker of the younger generation in having quite a substantial English vocabulary for everyday use, most of it derived from online pop culture chatrooms and celebrity fan sites, rather than the formal teaching of his schooldays. But he explained the idea in Vietnamese as well.
- 41 In Vietnamese it is *dừng hình*, literally “stop the sight or picture”. Mai and Hùng agreed that what it suggests is an active move or response, like using the TV remote to freeze a scary film one is watching. Mai made it a one-word exclamation, though in jokey chat with friends Hùng would probably say, “*Lúc ấy dừng hình luôn*” (“this moment blocked/frozen suddenly”). This is recognisable as colloquial teen speech because it is stripped of grammatical niceties, including a subject for the verb. But the idea is the same: that of a trigger prompting a reactive move. One may be shut up or “blocked” by something felt or experienced, but there is at least the possibility, as with the TV remote, of doing the shutting up oneself, i.e. to some degree performing an act of agentive will.
- 42 Like other West Lakers I know well, Mai likes to take me out and about to places she thinks are good to visit in my company. Acting as guide-raconteur is something she clearly enjoys, taking pleasure in displaying her verbal skills, and her taste and knowledge as a discerning urban citizen. She particularly likes walking with me along the landscaped walkways encircling Hanoi’s most celebrated city-centre landmark, “Restored Sword” Lake (*Hồ Hoàn Kiếm*), a favourite site for family strolls on the morning of Lunar New Year.



[Image non convertie][Image non convertie]Fig. 10. “Raise/elevate/advance the quality of our capital’s human resources,” Hanoi, 2017



43 [Image non convertie]

44 [Image non convertie]

Photo: Susan Bayly

45 The poster in **Figure 10** was on display on the occasion of one such walk, and once again I failed to see a poster as my friends do. I thought Mai might take pleasure in its image of the joyful young woman posed against the instantly recognisable entrance gate of yet another Hanoi landmark, the *Văn Miếu* (Temple of Literature). The site contains a Confucius shrine, and famous steles listing the old imperial mandarin exam laureates who are hailed as embodiments of a key Vietnamese character trait, “love of learning”. As in China, Confucian ideals and teachings are now officially valorised in Vietnam, though often portrayed as a Vietnamised element in a distinctive tripartite synthesis with Buddhism and Daoism (Kelley 2006). And like other happy parents, Mai and her husband had gone there to take celebratory photos of her daughter in graduation garb.

46 The beaming graduate in the red robe that signifies a First Class degree result did not leap out at Mai as something happy to connect with. It evoked neither her pride in her daughter’s academic successes, nor the pleasure she takes in her students who have gone on to do well at university. Far from it. What hit her was the slogan about “quality” (*chất lượng*). “Quality” (*chất lượng*) is an unproblematic word in ordinary speech. But it instantly becomes a command and trigger word when made part of an old-style socialist exhortation to “raise the quality” of something, even though in this case the effort to be made is expressed in terms mixing the old high-socialist idioms with the notion of “human resources” (*nguồn nhân lực*), one of today’s many borrowings from the jargon of contemporary business and NGO developmentalism. For Mai, what it

thus delivered was one of those prodding jolts to the vitals I have in mind in describing the experience of poster text as imagistic rather than propositional.

- 47 Mai did not articulate any of this straightaway. Indeed this was yet another of the posters that had an immediate shutdown effect on what had hitherto been a cheerfully chatty conversation. It was some weeks later that she set me straight. We had been talking about what I had thought an unrelated matter: her struggles with the demands faced by teachers for ever more certificates and contest wins to add to their school's league table results and funding prospects. "Like that poster", she said. I realised which one she meant, and that she was now adding posters to our conversational talking points. Of that particular poster I said I had thought it might be signalling something like, "Oh we're proud of our bright young citizens; girls as well as boys do well at our universities today" And suddenly we were talking. Mai was able to do what she likes: taking charge, putting me right.
- 48 "It's just from the computer," she said of the image in the poster. Neither she nor anyone else I know would accept that a viewer is supposed to come up with a reading like the one I had concocted. "Logical!" she said ("*lô gíc*"), her word for when I am being "Western", thinking in terms far adrift from a Vietnamese feel for the matter at hand. They are not puzzles for a reflective intellect to decode by working out the logic of how images and text relate. The cartoonish pictures are thought of as random, assembled without thought or plan. And this is offensive. It is painful to be thought a citizen of inferior sensibilities, the intended recipient of communication aimed at the sub-rational viscera rather than the thinking, articulating mind.
- 49 So the "quality" poster in Figure 10 was certainly not telling Mai anything about gender equality. If it had meant that, it would have said so, she assured me. Posters are literal, "just what you see", people say, their aim as flat and one-dimensional as their words and images. No leaps of interpretation are expected or experienced; no free rein of an intelligent mind.
- 50 So it became clear that like my other interlocutors, what Mai saw in this seemingly upbeat poster were imagistic demand words, not a decodable idea composed as a thought-through schema of text planned to align with the pictures. And insofar as the words produced anything perceived as an actual message, they signalled the kick of demand that Mai is all too familiar with as a teacher in the state system: exceed the quota, meet the target; "better our best"; i.e. merit measured and monitored, not valorised as an exercise of agentive will.

## State and citizen

- 51 The problem with posters is therefore not that they are too "political" to discuss with a foreigner. Adjoining Sword Lake and its walkways is a much-derided work of 1980s socialist realism in the form of a monumental statue group memorialising the young freedom fighters who took part in a famous Hanoi resistance episode at the start of the 1946–54 anti-French liberation war. This is the sculpture group positioned next to an electronic hoarding which on one of our recent visits was displaying the brilliantly coloured Pepsi advert shown in Figure 7.
- 52 "Still beautiful", another friend says of the lake, even though like my other friends she is very vocal about her dislike of the freedom fighter monument because of its clumsy

design and inferior materials, and what is thought of as the un-Vietnamese look of the faces and bodies. “So Soviet”, this older West Lake friend said; too muscular and brutish, like the figures in the Russian posters she remembered from her labour stint years in the former Soviet Union. Like many West Lakers, she had been recruited for a four-year term of gruelling overseas factory work in the grim post-war austerity “subsidy” years. The conventions of present-day iconography are strikingly different: the archetypal figures of socialist citizenship always appear in Vietnamese posters with fair skin; mild, expressive faces without “Oriental” features; none of the grimaces and straining bodies of Soviet- or Mao-era state graphics.

- 53 Talking about public statuary is something my West Lake friends do not find problematic. Even when unpleasing to the eye, sculpted works are spoken of as “art” (*mỹ thuật*), unlike satirical newspaper cartoons and message posters. This makes them suitable for comment of a kind my friends enjoy. Like Tuyết, Mai was the first ever graduate in her extended family and is proud that both her daughter and son are graduates too, with good job prospects in the state sector. This is a common trajectory for West Lake families, hence the pleasure attached to those moments when householders like Mai can demonstrate the “level” (*trình độ*) they feel their hard work has achieved for themselves and their young.

Fig. 11. Kiddy rent-a-cars and the Picassoesque image of President Hồ Chí Minh cradling an infant citizen, above his call, “To build our country [with ever] more dignity, more beauty,” Hanoi, 2018



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 54 Mai’s neighbour Oanh is also vocal about her disapproval of the weekend pedestrianisation of the streets surrounding Sword Lake, because of their use as mini-racetracks for radio-operated kiddy cars hired out to parents by street touts as a treat for their toddlers. But she is unbothered by the Pepsi advert near the resistance memorial. And she does not dislike the gaudy façade of the newly opened McDonald’s, Vietnam’s first, on a major junction next to the lake, directly facing yet another famous

city-centre sight: the giant Picassoesque mural of President Hồ Chí Minh cradling a child (Fig. 11).

- 55 Like the brightly polished Coke and Pepsi tins that she uses as pagoda altar offerings, Mai thinks of the vivid red of the McDonald's motifs as agreeably auspicious. My friends speak of such brands as modern and global, never specifically American, and unafflicted by counterfeit and contamination scandals, hence trustworthy, like the supermarkets franchised by the South Korean mega-conglomerate Lotte. These are also thought of as purveyors of goods that are wholesome and "scientifically" produced. For my friends it is imports from China that are invasive and unsafe. Mai's dislike of the Sword Lake kiddy cars (garish pink ones for girls; miniaturised police cars and army tanks for boys) and the noisily unruly behaviour she thinks they engender is summed up in her dismissive comment, "They're Chinese, Susan—you can tell"; she meant the cars, of course, not the children.
- 56 The images of "Uncle" (*Bác*), the loving term for Hồ Chí Minh as elder kinsman to all the nation, are a special case, much in contrast to the other graphics I discuss. The poster in Figure 3 showing *Bác* as President of the new revolutionary proto-state addressing the great assembly of listeners on Independence Day 1945 was yet another logjam-breaker in my fieldwork. It was this image that ended those moments of what Mai calls "block", a willed turning from agentive silence to a sense of verbal power.
- 57 Every schoolchild learns to recognise the pictures of "Uncle" at the microphone in Hanoi's Ba Đình Square, now the site of Hồ Chí Minh's mausoleum, delivering the Independence Day speech. It is taught in the textbooks as a moment of communion; not just the first utterance by the nation's founding father of the word "compatriot" (*đồng bào*) to those who heard him, but a moment of warmth achieved through dialogue. The assembled multitude's joyful reply is an exultant "Yes!" (*Có ạ!*), but with the sense of "We hear!" The filler particle *ạ* following the affirmative utterance *có* is what the well-bred young should use when addressing their respected elders.
- 58 In many posters, these joyful sharers in the moment are depicted as well. Prominent among them, as youthful citizens in the making, are uniformed schoolchildren, both girls and boys. In the national narrative Hồ Chí Minh is widely credited as personally responsible for the revolution's great twin triumph: schooling for every child; and the annihilation of "word blindness" (illiteracy: *mù chữ*) for old as well as young.
- 59 No-one I know thinks of that great Independence Day cry of response as "robot" speech like the chanting of a slogan, or the shouting of "hail" to a leader. Indeed when represented in this and similar contexts as performing acts of warmly communicative interaction with cherished sharers in the national project, "Uncle" is a guide and exemplar, not a "leader" (*Lãnh đạo*) speaking from on high. What my friends say about the Independence Day images is suggestive of precisely this. They signal discreetly that as a moment of participatory life on the part of an articulating citizenry, it is wholly unlike the passions of a mob, or the whipped-up vengeful outcry of China's Cultural Revolution crowds.
- 60 My West Lake friends are discreetly barbed about other things too, notably the current state of another cherished Hanoi landmark. This is Lenin Park, now a site of theme-park-style commercialisation of a kind my friends find crass and distasteful. The park was constructed between 1958 and 1961 as a major project of the new nation's developmentalist civic planning agenda. Mai is proud that her war-widow mother, a

retired city administration worker, was one of the thousands of young citizens mobilised into the Volunteer Brigades that provided unpaid after-hours construction work on the site. “They should remember”, Mai said tersely of the officials planning the unwelcome user-pays revamp of the park.

- 61 Being forthcoming and articulate about such things certainly does not mean what the notion of “free speech” might imply in a Western context. No Hanoian I know would say aloud anything like, “I think the political system that allows such things is illegitimate and bad.” But there are modes of verbalisation that reflect well on a citizen of informed tastes and knowledge. This includes saying that a public monument like the Sword Lake resistance memorial is ugly and poorly executed.
- 62 So there is nothing inherently wrong or frightening in voicing, even to a foreign friend, a critical view of something done or said by officialdom, so long as the criticism is of the defective performance of duty by someone like a lowly local official and not a condemnation of the “system”. This is important to note, since my friends’ silences about message posters should not be thought of as fear of saying something state-related to a foreigner. What happens with posters is different. They are tools, not “art”. They demand the speech of involuntary “robot” utterance, not that of considered thought and aesthetic judgement. This is unwelcome, a denial my interlocutors were initially inclined to meet with a denial of their own, i.e. the acts of agentive silence which prompted those initial logjam moments in our conversations.

Fig. 12. A city-centre classic: “Party and people [are] firmly resolved ...,” Hanoi, 2017



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 63 It is true that not all posters are the same. When conversation did eventually begin to flow with friends like Mai, the big street-corner poster in **Figure 12** turned out to be one in which viewers said they spotted something new and different. Its stiffly wooden

text about “Party and people firmly resolved” to uphold the Party Congress resolutions is no different from all the other “robot” prods. Yet a few people did register something I had not seen in the seemingly standard set of citizen-archetypes in the picture. This was what they pointed out to me as the novelty of the man in the suit positioned above the classic images of toiler, tiller, soldier, and scientist/“brainworker” as makers of the perfected socialist order. The man in the suit, friends eventually said, is something new: “maybe an official, or a businessman, or in a modern job like IT”, Mai’s son told me. So it showed something new, clearly reflective of the new world of market entry and Renewal/Đổi Mới, though no-one would normally feel the need to say so. “Obvious”, my graduate friend Binh said; no need to spell it out; and certainly nothing to comment on to others.

- 64 My friends were amused by my idea that people might be accustomed to standing in a Hanoi street teasing out the meaning of such a poster, or speaking with others about its look or conceptual logic. No-one does these things; “not even in grandmother’s time!” Binh assured me. This is clearly at odds with what has been said in accounts of Soviet- and Mao-era poster designers taking pains to fuse text and images to make effective ideological points, and intending their works for didactic conversational use, with an expectation of citizens clustering around them to imbibe their lessons in socialist thought and values (Bonnell 1997; Kruk 2008; Lago 2009).

Fig. 13. A school with an image of President Hồ Chí Minh and extracts from his precepts above its entrance, Hanoi, 2018.



Photo: Susan Bayly

- 65 In Vietnam, all schools display instantly recognisable images of President Hồ Chí Minh above their entrances, together with extracts from his lapidary precepts to the young (Fig. 13). But cartoon-style mobilisation posters like Figure 1’s are never used for classroom teaching or media discussion. They speak, and prompt inward “robot” speech, but are not for speaking about. Nor are they used in children’s textbooks to illustrate lessons about nationhood or socialist virtue. And while widely reproduced on state websites, they are merely backdrops and never made actual reference points when a policy or campaign goal is proclaimed. Indeed it is because posters are not

thought to be addressed to a thinking and articulating mind that they were initially so hard to speak about with my West Lake friends.

## Blocking

- 66 As I noted above, the poster in Figure 1 is yet another of the ones that gave rise to those early logjam moments. I had thought it a blandly straightforward piece of iconography, so a good opener for discussion. State images often link the idea of springtime joy and renewal associated with the Vietnamese Lunar New Year (*Tết*) with representations of the Vietnam Communist Party's birthday as the dawn of new life for the revolutionary nation. I had thought friends like Tuyết might say, "Oh yes; it's a New Year poster. It shows the happy girl and the way the city is modern and fine. And it says we hail the renewal of the country and our Party, [the key words being *Mừng Đồi Mới*], and it shows how well the country is growing and advancing thanks to the Party."
- 67 Not so, of course. "Nothing. Nothing to see. Nothing to say about them," I kept hearing. And, from my teacher friend Nhi, after another protracted pause, "So ugly. Old [with the sense of old-fashioned]. We don't see them. We never look at them." When I tried this with other posters, again: long silences, and then "Ugly!" "So old!", friends said, with a sense of both visually unpleasant and unworthy, without value or virtue. "They didn't care", Mai's shop-owner neighbour Hồng said. This was a critical clue. It is a widely held view that there are no artists involved in the production of message posters. Their composition is thought slapdash and crude, the images assembled without thought or skill by low-level functionaries downloading at random from a database of computer-generated stock images, their capacity for refined perception and hence their quality and worth as moral agents contemptuously denied. My friends make it clear that there are certainly other citizens so limited in sensibility as to be fit only for a poster's verbal and visual prods, especially in the countryside, which is held to be a domain of virtue and simplicity but limited taste and knowledge. Certainly none of my interlocutors are happy to be thought of or addressed in such terms.
- 68 Even the simplistic reportage on public issues provided by the state broadcast media do better, people say, using smartly dressed young professionals to make a case and explain a point. "They give reasons", Tuyết said.
- 69 She had said this too about the provider of specialist geomantic services (*thầy phong thủy*) she and her husband had decided to opt for when the family needed an expert to provide the complex astrobiological reckoning required for the siting of a new family tomb. Like other West Lakers, Tuyết wants to be treated as a knowledgeable decision-maker in such matters. "Not like in the villages", she said, where she thinks householders take what the *thầy* "master" says on faith, without expecting or receiving an explanatory framing.
- 70 In theory at least, my West Lake friends do not despise the rural way of life. They like to pay tribute to the ideal of an idyllic Vietnamese countryside where rustic simplicity is held to endure in the spirit of a happy bond between the serene sociality of communal village life and the loving care of tilled soil and the natural environment. A key term for these qualities is "peacefulness", *thanh bình*. Yet my interlocutors would never wish to live as they feel today's real-life villagers do, toiling under a pitiless sun for meagre rewards, and denied the social and educational capital that makes a West Laker feel her

life and those of her children to be so rich in *đô thị văn minh*, the “civilisedness” of urban ways and livelihoods.

- 71 One might say that a West Laker’s idea of being informed and selective in such matters is a reflection of the new Vietnam of urbanised citizen-consumers and market-savvy choice-making. But from my friends’ perspective the key issue is that of wishing to feel engaged with as someone of superior perceptions and entitled to “reasons”. Hence Tuyết’s preference for what she is told by state TV. However tedious, the sermonising little television items about revolutionary virtues and the glories of nationhood still convey more recognition of agentive discernment on the part of the listener than what is thought of as the mindless churning out of computer-graphic message posters, both produced by and intended for minds of feeble power
- 72 The actual pictorial content of the posters rankles too. My friends view the modernity the posters celebrate as painfully out of date. “It’s what my grandmother wanted then”, my friend Chính said of the cityscape depicted in Figure 1’s poster. He meant it shows what his grandmother dreamed of when she was a young woman in the 1960s, proud of being recruited for gruelling “shock work” (*xung kích lao động*) in a wartime munitions workshop. Others, too, speak of the posters’ renderings of what Schwenkel (2014) calls “utopic infrastructuralism” as a representation of the nation’s future as they feel it looked to the serving soldiers and work-brigade members of the 1960s and 1970s.
- 73 Even in Figure 12’s poster, the man of the new high-tech Vietnam is still partnered by a helmeted industrial worker with a cable on his shoulder. For my friends, this is the wrong visual language for today, and it is the personal side of this that grates. No-one I know thinks it pleasantly nostalgic to see the posters’ images of helmeted heavy-industry workers and smokestack production sites. The high-rise cityscapes and smiling citizen-producers in these images are offensive to the eye. They are not pictures of “today’s life”, friends say. Today’s elders work hard to ensure their children’s future is not one of low-wage toil in a grim industrial workplace. The images are felt to be an affront to cherished elders and to the sacrifices of parents and grandparents whose hard work gave rise to today’s very different world of material comfort and attainment prospects for the achieving young. “They should show it,” Chính said, once our conversation started to flow. In everyday life there is no need to articulate such things. No need to say it; “everyone knows”, Chính said.

## Silence and moral agency

- 74 Yet it is even more the jolt of the slogan texts that makes posters problematic, and it is about this that I believe my friends’ silences have the most to tell us. I was surprised to learn that for my West Lake friends, the posters’ words hit the eye more powerfully than their unwelcome images of a crassly out-of-date modernity. My eye always goes straight to the colourful graphics, but not so for my interlocutors. They assure me that in the case of all but those few exceptional “Uncle” posters, their gaze never lingers on the over-familiar pictures. It is the words that have impact for them, their effect that verbal prod or triggering of a distinctly unwelcome kind.
- 75 Just the first word or two of the slogans, my friends say, plus a quick, unwilling glance at the stiff and stylised pictures, and the whole utterance comes flooding into the mind, an inner voice forming the whole of one of those endlessly reiterated declamations.

Eternal life to the glorious Party!



Party and people [are] firmly resolved!  
Promote the patriotic emulation campaign!

- 76 West Lakers say it is not necessary to speak the words aloud to feel that one is being prodded in this way, the declamatory words hitting the viewer irresistibly, as triggerings of a shamefully subliminal and involuntary response. They say these jolts of text awareness are nothing like the ordinary act of reading. And what they generate would appear to be at odds with what so much of our literature on visuality would lead one to expect about a poster's effect, by which I mean a sense of being forced into the role of mutely viewing observer. In fact I believe that what rankles for my interlocutors is something different: the feeling of being constituted as a speaking subject of a kind no-one wishes to be.
- 77 "I feel like I'm saying it and can't stop," my teacher friend Mai said. "Passive smoking" was the arresting phrase used by another West Laker, Cường, suggestive of something toxic irresistibly penetrating one's inner being. He said it in English, having encountered the phrase in state TV public health messages. Other friends have used that image of the robot as their evocation of triggered action at odds with the modes of speech and action that reflect a moral agent's exercise of conscience and sensibility (*tinh cảm*). A convocation of schoolchildren in Young Pioneer uniform will shout out in unison in the call-and-response format required for a "flag salute" assembly (*chào cờ*). This is an instance of "robot" speech, people say, not articulation from the site of moral being, the heart-mind (*ruột or lòng*). No-one I know has happy memories of these verbal rituals of a youthful citizen's life.
- 78 Thus the problems my interlocutors have with state message posters are very much to do with this key distinction between a merely visceral and a refined and warmly feeling and perceiving self, imbued from early childhood with the capacity for speech of the kind a caring parent and confident, achieving citizen can take pride and pleasure in producing and engaging with. There is clearly a view among West Lakers that the state can and should communicate its moralising messages in ways that properly acknowledge the moral agency of those to whom it speaks. And it is felt that in some cases the state's voice does make itself seen and felt in these more welcome and acceptable ways. Key instances of this are when its images convey the special warmth of feeling and pride in verbal agency evoked by the distinctive iconography of President Hồ Chí Minh as "Uncle" in lovingly dialogic interaction with the nation's young.
- 79 But this is not what most "mobilisation pictures" convey. And this is why I believe the act of silence or "block" provides my friends with such a welcome means of feeling actively agentive in the face of an experience of the propagandising state that makes them feel painfully prodded and roboticised by its imagistic verbal tools.

## Conclusion

- 80 What I have tried to demonstrate in this article is that the spectacular state iconography to be seen on the streets of Hanoi offers a source of informative insight into the complexities of moral life and selfhood among the West Lake people with whom I have worked. In my discussion of how the images and text of message posters impact my friends, I have sought to establish three key things about speech and silence in the settings where I have conducted my research. The first is that what my

interlocutors perceive in the state iconography they live with points to something other than straightforward transparency in what may be conveyed when the Party-state speaks to its citizens by means of the mix of text and images emblazoned on a “mobilisation picture”. The moralising may look simple and straightforward to a foreign eye, but to a Hanoi observer a poster’s import is often full of painful challenges to her sense of moral selfhood. This is particularly the case in regard to depictions of what is registered by my interlocutors as a painfully outdated rendering of the modernity that virtuously achieving citizens are both enjoined and motivated to aspire to for themselves and their young.

- 81 My second point is about what there is to be gained by an exploration of silence for citizens of a vigorously propagandising Party-state operating in a context of “market-oriented” late socialism. I have sought to show that my West Lake friends wish to feel themselves to be the authors and agents of their silences, rather than being on the receiving end of a muting process emanating from their powerfully didactic late-socialist state. It is this that I have in mind in my use of the notion of agentive silence for the moments of non-voicing that my friend Mai calls “block”. Both blocking and unblocking the act of speech are manifestations of what West Lakoers like to see in themselves and their children: expressiveness and command of the voice and its moral power. This does not mean an assertion of anything-goes “free speech”, but rather the willed and nuanced action of a feeling heart and conscience.
- 82 My third point is that this is a far from easy stance to maintain in a world of complex and uncertain relations with authority in its many forms. This is why I believe it matters to recognise what it is that the written and spoken word can do and achieve in the contexts of scopic life and visuality that I have explored here. The written words as they appear on message posters can be both exhilarating and disturbing for Hanoi viewers. The somatic verbal prods they receive from a slogan text’s imagistic power are unwelcome and even painful, a reduction of the will and sensibility to ventriloquisation of a demeaning and painful kind. To recover a sense of agentive moral life when these effects are felt is a challenging task. That this is achievable, however provisionally and uncertainly, through the exercise of both agentive silence and chosen moments of articulate speech is something I feel to be of significance for my interlocutors, and for our own understanding of how speech and non-speech can both animate and qualify the exercise of state power and political authority in a time of far-reaching economic and political change.

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## ABSTRACTS

Building on ethnographic fieldwork in Vietnam’s vibrant capital Hanoi, this article asks why attempts to use moralising public iconography as talking points with research collaborators can so often have a silencing effect on otherwise voluble interlocutors. It is proposed that these are moments of agentive silence, where the muting of a vocal self can be an act of moral will, not the crushing of agency and voice. It is therefore suggested that there can be more to a silent self than the effect of a censor’s power to control or extinguish speech, especially in contexts where state propaganda can work both visually and textually to repress as well as authorise a citizen’s expressive voice.

## INDEX

**Keywords:** agency, citizenship, iconography, propaganda, socialism, Vietnam

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