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Thirty years of Doi Moi in the museum: Changing representations of development in late-socialist Vietnam

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Exhibition wall case displaying three entrepreneurs. (c) Author

1625x1083mm (72 x 72 DPI)

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Memory wall at the opening of the Doi Moi exhibition, 22 September 2016. (c) Author

1625x1083mm (72 x 72 DPI)

Thirty years of Doi Moi in the museum: Changing representations of development in late-socialist Vietnam

On 22 September 2016, a temporary exhibition at the National Museum of History opened in the Vietnamese capital of Hanoi marking thirty years since the implementation of the Doi Moi reforms. The exhibition *Đổi mới: Hành trình của những ước mơ* (Doi Moi: Journey of Dreams) celebrated the success of the reform period (Doi Moi, literally: renovation) that officially began after the 6th Party Congress in 1986 – a process which was widely recognised as a watershed moment in the country's recovery from economic crisis and which helped shape the economic conditions which exist in Vietnamese society today.

The exhibition focused on national development and was significant for its integration of a memory approach alongside historical narrative. In one area of the exhibition, visitors were asked 'what is your memory of Doi Moi?' and invited to write their recollections on a piece of paper and post these in a letter box at the far end of the exhibition space. In another, photographs of political leaders and government policy documents were displayed alongside images of agricultural and industrial productivity. This mixing of history and memory led one journalist from the state newspaper *Nhân Dân* (The People) to observe how 'there is a curious mix of old and new in the exhibition.'

I begin this article by drawing attention to the journalist's reaction because it typifies how exhibitions in Vietnamese national museums are met with certain expectations about what story is told and whose voice is heard. The comments remind us, as Hodgkin and Radstone (2006: 1) have discussed, how contests over history and memory are usually over how truth can be best conveyed, rather than what actually happened. On the one hand, the display of policy documents and photographs fall into what Hall (1999) terms a 'selective canonisation' of history; which for the Vietnamese state is an officially recognised Marxist-Leninist chronology of national achievements (*thành tựu*) and revolutionary events. Such a classification involves placing historical events within a linear timeframe, thus presenting a story of social progression framed within epochal time periods. As such, visitors generally encounter Doi Moi as one of the last epochal events in the history of the development of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) – the reform process as an open-ended and incomplete project which started in 1986 and commences to the present day. On the other hand, however, the fact that visitors were invited to respond with their own personal memories was met

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3 with surprise by the journalist, as it was something quite novel for Vietnamese museums. While
4 public responses in the exhibition did not reveal explosive histories in the same sense as the Chinese
5 cultural revolution did, in which Anagnost (1997) writes about the airing of grievances and
6 denouncing of 'class enemies', the inclusion of a memory wall did raise the threat of personal
7 memory transmitting the past in an altogether different way.
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12 Henceforth, I am interested in exploring current curatorial practices in Vietnam and how these
13 recent memory approaches reveal the tensions that exist about representing narratives of
14 development and progress in a national museum. Specifically, I examine how national development
15 undergoes a process of heritagisation within in a state institution. As I show, there are many reasons
16 for assuming that any changes in methods of representation in Vietnam could be politically fraught.
17 Writing in the 1990s, Tai (1998) claims that state museums exert a rigid control over official
18 government histories and present the past exclusively from a Hanoi point of view. This stewardship
19 of the historical past, according to Pelley (2002), derives from the post-revolutionary period in
20 Vietnam which witnessed an intense production of nationalist discourse and imagery. Nationalist
21 fervour created visually moving images of heroic resistance and national unity using colour and black
22 and white photography, an assortment of military weaponry, and dioramas of battles, which visitors
23 find in Vietnamese museum today. More recently, there is now a realisation amongst some
24 Vietnamese senior government ministers that museums need to change to make them more
25 appealing. Some are directly advocating museums to modernise and update their displays. However,
26 this is not necessarily straightforward. As Sutherland (2005) reveals in her analysis of some state-run
27 museums in Hanoi, constraints that exist for Vietnamese museum workers mean that they have to
28 balance between adhering to a nationalist message of resistance to French colonialism, and
29 pandering to the international tourist market (many of whom are French visitors) by toning down
30 any anti-French sentiment displayed in exhibitions. Schwenkel (2009) has demonstrated a similar
31 dynamic in the War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, where exhibition displays are changed
32 according to foreign policy and relations with the United States.
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47 Coupled with this urge to innovate, Vietnamese curators too are connected to global museum
48 networks and influenced by international standards and training programmes run by UNESCO and
49 ICOM that impacts on policies and practices in Vietnam (Prosler, 1996). The Vietnam Women's
50 Museum and Vietnam Museum of Ethnology are often cited by ministers as benchmarks for other
51 museums to follow. For instance, since its opening in 1997, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology has
52 worked with international collaborators and involved minority communities in projects to sustain
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3 their intangible heritage by adopting UNESCO frameworks on cultural preservation (Nguyen 2008).
4 This is not without its problems because museum workers must navigate state policies. As
5 Bodemer's behind-the-scenes analysis of the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology points out (Bodemer
6 2010), by inviting communities into the museum to recall their memories of the recent past,
7 museums participate in the expansion of historical consciousness and so transform national
8 narratives in the process. Pressure to innovate, I show, has been met by resistance in some quarters
9 that seek to maintain the Marxist-Leninist approaches to history.
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15 **Museums, heritage and development**

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18 One of the most useful contributions of relevance to this discussion of development is an edited
19 collection by Basu and Modest (2015) which explores the relation between museums, heritage and
20 development. Derived from a seminar focusing on culture and development, the collection explores
21 how international development organisations and agencies such as the Aga Khan Development
22 Network, the Ford Foundation, the World Bank or UNESCO deliver cultural projects under the
23 auspices of heritage and development. Their approach sets out to bring together two spheres of
24 research that Basu and Modest (2015) claim had existed separately: the body of work focused on
25 exploring the relation between museums, heritage and community, which includes debates about
26 social inclusion, community empowerment; together with an emerging body of research that
27 focuses on cultural heritage in post-conflict societies, human rights struggles, and tourism
28 development. Their aim is to 'to look beyond both the economic and instrumental value of cultural
29 heritage *for* development, and to explore its intrinsic value in reimagining development *as* a cultural
30 project, and particularly as a culturally context-specific project.' (Basu and Modest, 2015: 26)
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41 Understanding how exhibitions as projects reimagine or re-work official histories is a useful
42 framework from which to explore how development is represented. An anthropological study may
43 reveal how representations of national development take shape in a state institution, and the
44 opportunities and constraints such a project offers in transforming existing discourse. The literature
45 in this field is, however, quite narrow: most scholarly work examining heritage and development in
46 the Vietnamese context almost exclusively deals with the role of cultural heritage for development
47 and often with a strong focus on tourism development. Typically, scholars have explored the
48 conditions for the development of tourism infrastructure and requirements for policy development
49 to expand tourism resources in the country around heritage sites, particularly in relation to war
50 heritage in the post-reform era (Jansen-Verbeke and Go, 1995; Henderson, 2000). Others have
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3 investigated the impacts of tourism on UNESCO World Heritage sites, setting out models for the
4 conservation of key sites and attractions (Lloyd and Morgan, 2008). The former link development to
5 economic growth – framing heritage as a commodity or resource to be used – while the latter
6 situates development as a threat to the cultural heritage of Vietnam and addresses the various
7 means by which stakeholders have either aimed to conserve heritage for future generations or
8 commodify heritage for the benefit of tourist markets.
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14 Aside from tourist development as a dominant discourse, a more critically engaged body of
15 anthropological literature has recently emerged that addresses the relation between heritage and
16 community politics, focusing on the politics of UNESCO designations both in terms of World Heritage
17 sites and Intangible Cultural Heritage. Such scholars are concerned with the political dimensions of
18 the designation process and the local, national and international politics of national and world
19 heritage status. Saleminck's research, for example, highlights the interaction between local, national
20 and international agencies in the production of heritage within Vietnam, revealing the tensions that
21 exist over ownership and control of performances and rituals by local and national governmental
22 organisations (Saleminck, 2012).
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30 Logan (2009) explores the politics that underpin the designation process of the gong-playing culture
31 of Tay Nguyen province as UNESCO Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005. Unravelling
32 the complex relation of the Tay Nguyen minority and their relation to the Vietnamese state as well
33 as evangelical movements and Vietnamese expatriates living in the United States, Logan speculates
34 how the designation process could be seen as an opportunity for the state to draw much-needed
35 resources into the highlands region, countering political unrest and raising living standards through
36 tourist development.
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42 While these latter studies reveal the complex interplay between heritage, tourism development and
43 state processes, development remains at the periphery of their focus of analysis, situated as a
44 political resource over which contestations and debates take place in anticipation of economic
45 growth. In this article, I take national development and its representation as the focus of my
46 analysis. My method is to explore how an exhibition project on post-1986 Doi Moi economic reform
47 attempted to transform narratives of development through portraying an inclusive experience of the
48 past with Vietnamese audiences. I show how exhibitions have become a kind of technology for the
49 governance of transformation by legitimising the state, which no longer places exclusive value on
50 the revolutionary past but instead celebrates the spread of neoliberalism and the rise of capitalism.
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3 As I demonstrate, exhibitions do not follow a script but are sites where new methods of display are
4 integrated into existing practices to moderate collective and personal memory.
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7 To research and curate an exhibition on national development in a Vietnamese national museum
8 raises certain challenges because state institutions tend to adopt a narrow perspective on what is
9 regarded as development. In general, development is represented as a measurable sign of
10 progression, such as statistics on the growth of agricultural or industrial production, which are then
11 directly linked to the policies of the VCP. I demonstrate how the post-1986 Doi Moi reforms situated
12 the notion of development within broader, more widely accepted ideas about development that
13 embraced not simply VCP achievements expressed through increases in wealth and economic value,
14 but also the personal freedoms and choices that reform brought to the country. This article explores
15 how a new expansive form of development emerged within a conventional Vietnamese framework
16 of achievement (*thành tựu*), utilising personal narratives of travel, well-being, and entrepreneurial
17 success alongside more conventional elements such as photographs of political leaders and party
18 congresses mounted on the red colour of the revolution. As I argue, what emerges is an
19 understanding of the exhibition as a project for transforming narratives of national development,
20 one which communicates the values of the modern state with Vietnamese characteristics.
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31 **Doi Moi at the Vietnam National Museum of History**

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34 The Vietnam National Museum of History (*Bảo tàng Lịch sử Quốc gia*) is in the nation's capital at two
35 adjacent sites in the Hoan Kiem district of Hanoi. The main site at Trang Tien has two floors of
36 exhibitions displaying archaeological and dynastic artefacts setting out Vietnamese heritage over the
37 centuries including the Dong Son, Oc Eo, and Sa Huynh cultures as well as Champa material culture
38 (see Nguyen, 2012). Across the road in Tong Dan Street stands the sister site, formerly the
39 Vietnamese Museum of Revolution (*Bảo tàng Cách mạng*), housed inside the former Vietnam
40 department of trade building built by the French in 1917 and first opened as the museum in 1959.
41 The museum has two floors exhibiting the struggle for national liberation against the French and
42 Americans as well as further galleries dedicated to independence and more recent events that
43 highlight the achievements of the Communist Party after reunification in 1975. In 2011, the Vietnam
44 National Museum of History and Vietnam Museum of Revolution were merged into one institution
45 and took on the name of Vietnam National Museum of History.
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3 Most of the exhibition space in the Vietnam National Museum of History is dedicated to permanent
4 displays. The exhibitions are organised over two floors according to a Marxist-Leninist schema in
5 which a message of social progression and national achievement is communicated. Exhibitions
6 generally order time chronologically but also through the epochal periods defined by historical
7 struggles towards national liberation and independence. For instance, the exhibition rooms examine
8 the struggle for independence of the Vietnamese people (1858 to 1945); the fight against
9 colonialism, and political struggle for national independence and unification (1945-1975) and the
10 development of Vietnam post-1975. These frame the success of the country through a logic of
11 achievement (*thành tựu*) and presents a powerful story of how Vietnam triumphed over foreign
12 aggressors.
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20 At the end of the museum's north wing lies the temporary exhibition room – a 200 metre squared
21 space used to host exhibitions to celebrate milestones in Vietnamese history – and selected for the
22 Doi Moi exhibition. Recent exhibitions include *Sưu tập Báo chí Cách mạng Việt Nam 1925 – 1945*
23 (Vietnamese Revolutionary Newspapers 1925-1945) and *Cải cách ruộng đất 1946- 1957* (Land
24 Reform 1946-1957). The themes of the exhibitions, based on the achievements of the VCP make
25 visible the close associations between the museum and the state.
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31 The exhibition *Doi Moi: Journey of Dreams* aimed to celebrate the 30th anniversary since the official
32 beginning of the reform period which began in 1986 when Vietnam embarked on a liberalisation of
33 the state economy. This involved telling the story of how new laws were introduced that permitted
34 private ownership of property and land; and how these changes transformed the economy by
35 allowing households to cultivate land which they could lease from the state. The exhibition aimed to
36 share stories of Vietnam's entry into the international community, the ending of embargoes on
37 foreign trade, and the beginning of a period of economic growth in the country as a means to
38 communicate the shared experience of economic development in the country. My role in the project
39 was to work alongside curatorial staff to help deliver the exhibition, giving me the opportunity to
40 participate in the curatorium and to work as an anthropologist and see behind-the-scenes, a
41 privileged space where few in late-socialist countries get to glimpse (Denton, 2014).
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50 **Museum culture**

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53 Kratz and Karp (2006) describe how museums are complex organisations which are often faced with
54 conflicting and contradictory demands, and shaped by a multitude of stakeholders and connected
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3 through internal and external relationships. These 'museum frictions' applied also to the exhibition
4 at the Vietnam National Museum of History, as the exhibition process involved approvals from the
5 museum director and a panel of external experts at various stages. Watson (1994) points out how
6 socialist states were not necessarily omnipotent in controlling history, and this appeared to be the
7 case in the Doi Moi exhibition: the project attempted to depart from conventional chronological
8 approaches and adopt a conceptual approach to the Doi Moi period which combined history and
9 memory in order to project a shared experience of the reform period to visitors. The aspiration
10 amongst the curatorium to innovate the existing practices by employing a multi-vocal approach was
11 met by the expression *Đổi mới bảo tàng* (renovation of the museum) and was contrasted with *bảo*
12 *thủ* (conservative) – referring to the conservative influences within the museum which some of the
13 exhibition team believed held them back and limited the ways exhibitions could be produced. Using
14 a multi-vocal approach meant that curators could ask visitors to identify with the visionary ideas of
15 the key thinkers, businessmen and women, farmers and factory workers as they set out to transform
16 the country into what it is today. Hence the subtitle 'Journey of dreams' signified a better future for
17 all and was represented by a poster at the beginning of the exhibition of an angel reading a book on
18 Doi Moi and a hammer and sickle symbol above her. The curators wanted the exhibition to
19 represent an inclusive history of what drove renovation, incorporating the stories of not just
20 politicians and prominent reformers, but also ordinary people, who all had been motivated to create
21 a better future. In this way, the personal recollections and testimonies of diverse individuals were
22 displayed publicly, contributing to the overall narrative of national development and progress.
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36 Instead of using time to structure the narrative, the curators employed a number of themes
37 including political slogans to represent reform and development. Slogans such as '*Đổi Mới hay là*
38 *chết*' (Doi Moi or die) served to emphasise the urgent need to reform the economic system that had
39 led to the hardships of the rationing system (*bao cấp*) from 1975 to 1986. '*Đổi Mới để tiến lên*' (Doi
40 Moi to advance) characterised another popular slogan that urged people to reform and adopt an
41 entrepreneurial spirit. This meant that conventional modes of representation such as timelines,
42 historical facts, images of progression gave way to individual quotes and stories as well as everyday
43 objects and possessions which produced a broader and more expansive understanding of
44 development. For example, one case displayed a family photo album opened to display a woman
45 sitting inside Manchester United's Old Trafford football stadium. It included a story of how Doi Moi
46 had opened borders to the outside world. Another displayed mother goddess costumes with text
47 explaining how prohibitions on ritual performances had been relaxed after Doi Moi.
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3 The exhibition project attempted to move beyond instrumental approaches of economic value by
4 exploring how quality of life had changed for the better. One challenge, however, was that curatorial
5 staff relied on government history books and this meant there was a tendency to extract sets of
6 facts and figures in order to write exhibition content. For example, after the implementation of
7 economic reforms in the late 1980s, rice, textile and oil production began to increase significantly.
8 Figures indicating growth in these industries were commonly used to denote success of the
9 economic reforms and this was something that some members of the exhibition team were keen to
10 display. International relations with other countries in Asia and the neighbouring region had also
11 flourished and some of the exhibition team wanted to list figures and country names as indicative of
12 success. Transforming the way national development was represented involved innovating existing
13 curatorial methods and generating new content by conducting interviews with key people. This
14 involved travelling to the provinces and meeting farmers, industrials and political reformers,
15 gathering data for use in the exhibition.
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25 **Transforming history**

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28 Crane (1997) discusses how recent controversies in museums have resulted from the expectations of
29 visitors: a 'distortion' that occurs when personal memory and experience do not tally with
30 institutional representations of the past. At stake is the trust of the museum to educate the public
31 about past events, not just about historical facts and interpretation, but also what Crane claims is a
32 distortion of expectation, where visitors possess an excess of personal memory which shapes their
33 experience of exhibitions. In the case of the Vietnam National Museum of History, I would argue that
34 visitors expected to see a familiar narrative based on a Marxist-Leninist chronology of historical
35 development because of the museum's institution reputation as a VCP stalwart. However, unlike
36 other museums where a shift towards visitor-centred approaches has guided exhibition projects
37 (Black, 2011), the concern amongst the curatorium was focused on how the museum senior
38 management and their leaders in the VCP would respond to the new approach (rather than the
39 public). How were expectations to be managed, especially as the exhibition team wanted to tell the
40 unofficial stories of Doi Moi and in particular, those stories that countered the official 'success'
41 stories of the VCP?
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51 The debates amongst the curators about including the story of early reformer Kim Ngoc highlight
52 internal tensions and anxieties and reveal the frictions within about managing expectations. Kim
53 Ngoc was the leader of Vinh Phuc province and in the 1960s, he embarked on a series of agricultural
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3 reforms (dubbed 'sneaky contracts') which enabled local people to cultivate their own food crops.
4 These unofficial reforms were responses to the need for food in rural provinces and drove local
5 leaders to instigate household agricultural production schemes in order to prevent local populations
6 from starving. After several years the central government clamped down on these reforms and
7 punished Kim Ngoc for deviating from central government policy.
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12 MacLean (2008) describes how the exhibition 'Life in Hanoi in the Subsidy Period, 1975-1986' which
13 opened in 2006 in the Vietnam Museum of Ethnology in Hanoi prompted national discussion over a
14 period of history that the state wanted to forget. The exhibition helped establish the period, which
15 until then had no name. Indeed, amongst the curatorium of the Doi Moi project, curators were
16 acutely aware that to include Kim Ngoc's story in the public space of the national museum meant
17 making this history visible and thereby open to public scrutiny even though Kim Ngoc had been
18 posthumously awarded the Ho Chi Minh Order in 2009 (see MacLean, 2013 for further discussion).
19 The inclusion of this story could be understood as a critique of VCP achievements, and at the same
20 time pose risks to the staff themselves. If the exhibition was not a success, then the exhibition team
21 might be sanctioned politically. This, I heard, could mean missing out on promotion or facing
22 restrictions on access to state resources. After much debate, the curatorium decided to include the
23 story (although in the smaller front text panels of the wall cases) positioned alongside personal
24 narratives of prominent politicians who had supported Doi Moi prior to its inception (and had been
25 sceptical of conservative elements in the VCP). Displaying the dissenting voices of senior party
26 officials was a strategy to endorse their decision to include the Kim Ngoc story and so persuaded
27 them to air this narrative.
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39 Another debate that surfaced within the curatorium was the inclusion of education in the post-Doi
40 Moi era. Curators organised an interview with a local school principal who had ran a private school
41 since the reform process began and had established a national reputation for academic excellence
42 amongst its pupils. However, once it was pointed out that the school no doubt attained success on
43 the basis that it was privately funded, and that state-run schools do not perform as well as state-
44 funded ones, the theme of education was withdrawn on the basis that this may be read as a criticism
45 of the state education system.
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51 Madsen (2014) writes how national heritage has played a central role in legitimising the Chinese
52 state: whereas the state was once portrayed by Marxist ideology and revolutionary martyrs who
53 fought for the Communist Party, the state now fashions itself as defender of 5000 years of heritage.
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3 Similarly, in the Vietnam National Museum of History, the Doi Moi exhibition also played a
4 prominent role in legitimising state transformation, a role that became evident in the selection of
5 leading entrepreneurs and their prominent display as the heroes of national development in one
6 display cabinet titled 'Opportunity' (*Cơ Hội*). In departing from chronological approaches that
7 celebrated political figures and milestones, the curatorium created a new image of development
8 history that expanded beyond the exclusive achievements of the VCP, juxtaposing national heroes of
9 reform alongside business men and women who had benefited from the global market economy.
10 This new history consigned the revolution to the historical past by placing value on the
11 entrepreneurial successes of three privately-run companies. The display case featured a business
12 man who ran the Bat Trang ceramics factory in the outskirts of Hanoi; a chemist who established her
13 own biotech company which makes specialist nano-paints based in Ho Chi Minh City (and also
14 represented the South); and Tam Binh Pharmaceutical company based in a suburb of Hanoi which
15 told the story of Ms Le Thi Binh, the company founder, who had a passion for pharmacy. These shifts
16 in ideology inside the exhibition stand for larger constituencies in which the exhibition is situated. In
17 2011, the Vietnam Museum of Revolution was absorbed into the Vietnam National Museum of
18 History, consigning the revolution to an historical artefact. Thus, it becomes evident how the
19 endorsement of the new visionaries and the inclusion of the voices of business women and men
20 signal a shift in national ideology focused on the global market economy and individual success. The
21 exhibition, in effect, operates as a technology for governing the way new narratives of the past are
22 created and mythologised.

33 34 35 36 **Audience and development**

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39 One of the key innovations within the exhibition was the memory wall, which intended to encourage
40 public participation in the production of Doi Moi memories. This process of airing personal memory
41 runs counter to public expectations of exhibitions in state institutions in Vietnam. According to
42 Watson (1994), socialist states attempt to eradicate personal memory as it can be at odds with
43 official narratives and so poses a risk (noting how the former may be more reliable). Rather than
44 censor personal stories in the exhibition, the curatorium – in consultation with the director – asked
45 visitors to place their memories into a box for curators to read and pin appropriate responses to a
46 blackboard placed in the exhibition space.

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49 While hampered by a lack of participation (most likely due to low visitor numbers), the responses
50 nevertheless fall into the categories which MacDonald (2005) delineates for visitor responses in her
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3 analysis of the visitor books of the Documentation Centre of the Former Nazi Party Rally Grounds in
4 Nuremberg, Germany. These included short evaluation comments and longer reflective comments
5 that related to the period of history and its present orientation. Of the eight responses from
6 Vietnamese visitors, two of these reminisced about how Doi Moi had given Vietnamese people the
7 opportunity to travel overseas or travel easily to their hometown for Tet holidays. The other
8 memories explicitly dealt with the development of the country and the opportunities afforded to
9 individuals with the liberal reform of the economy. In particular, the visitors stated how the reforms
10 gave rank and file officials the opportunity to develop the nation through their own self-
11 determination.

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19 Doi Moi gave normal state officials like me a chance to express our spirit and aspirations
20 about the future development of our country. To continue to make progress, we hope the
21 younger generations will have more opportunities to play their part in strengthening our
22 country.

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26 One visitor recalled how Doi Moi had been the catalyst for their own success.

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Nowadays, I have developed my career successfully. I run my companies in six different
countries with ten factories, 3000 workers. Looking back to my memories and looking back
to what I have done, I am deeply touched...I am so touched.

Another stated:

Doi Moi is about progress and development. The country innovates in order to follow China.
The people innovate for social development. The museum should innovate like Doi Moi in
order to communicate to visitors more easily. I hope we always innovate for development.

Others looked at the historical transition from the subsidy period to post-1986 reform period:

People lived in poor living conditions where there was a lack of food, commodities,
household appliances... How hard that past was! This history is far different from nowadays
when Vietnam is a rice exporting country and commodities flood the domestic market.

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3 These comments demonstrate how some visitors actively participated in the process of memory, a
4 process of recollection that endorsed the collective rather than necessarily personal memory. This
5 would explain why several of the visitors posting the comments had included their name and
6 hometown, and even their phone number. These comments, in this way, could be understood as a
7 form of personal testimony in which personal recollections become or endorse official narratives. It
8 also endorses the way the exhibition governs transformation by accepting testimony that legitimises
9 the state using a modern museum method of inviting public participation, albeit through stringent
10 selection.
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17 **Conclusion: Vietnamese pasts and futures**

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20 In this article, I have used the Doi Moi exhibition as an example to show how memory approaches
21 have expanded narratives of national development that had, until then, operated through a
22 chronological logic. The ethnography of the exhibition process has highlighted the various ways
23 expectations are managed towards inward political relations by balancing policy criticism with
24 personal narratives from prominent politicians while at the same time side-lining Marxist-Leninist
25 approaches. In essence, the exhibition acts as a space where narratives of national development
26 were governed and re-worked, to include quality of life, human welfare and social well-being, and
27 respond to changing political ideologies.
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34 **For those interested in the broader relations between museums and development in Asia, the new**
35 **economic climate in Vietnam has meant that even history museums devoted to the revolutionary**
36 **past are responding to new market conditions (which are fundamentally at odds with the ideology of**
37 **the Ho Chi Minh era). On analysing social and political transformation in Vietnam, Giebel (2000: 170)**
38 **observes how exhibitions act as windows into changing climates. Writing on the commemoration of**
39 **Vietnamese revolutionary hero Ton Duc Thang, Giebel is interested to know why a secular state now**
40 **endorses openly religious forms of commemoration, using his analysis of the museum to reveal**
41 **various shifts within Vietnamese society that have accommodated such transformations. What is**
42 **important to Giebel's hypothesis, is how the museum functions as a shrine, a syncretic ritual space**
43 **for acts of commemoration that embrace both ancestor worship and the revolutionary spirit, where**
44 **shared Vietnamese values coalesce and are made visible.**
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53 In the case of the Doi Moi exhibition, the museum space operates as an active, transformative space,
54 rather like Ton Duc Thang's museum (Giebel, 2000), in which the public play an active role in
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3 participating in internalising what it means to be Vietnamese (Duncan, 1991). Indeed, as visitors
4 queued to photograph their friends and themselves standing under a period Hanoi street sign placed
5 in the exhibition space, together with a cluster of collected objects from the late 1980s, these
6 everyday icons from the onset of the reform period added a nostalgic element to the exhibition.
7 Unlike the former German Democratic Republic (GDR), in which Arnold-de Simine (2013) describes
8 how museums and memory institutions have either focused on state oppression and suffering or
9 consumer culture and everyday life (the latter of which is safe and popular), in the case of the Doi
10 Moi exhibition, the nostalgic did not attempt to detract from the historical events that defined
11 reform. Rather, as a kind of technology, the exhibition employed memory to anaesthetise the
12 historical past, appearing to appease policy decisions that defined the Doi Moi era and at the same
13 time introduce a more expansive and acceptable idea of development which could focus on the
14 future wealth and well-being without having to air grievances and placing blame on the state for
15 past failures. In this way, the Vietnam National Museum of History is responding to changing
16 contexts by governing public participation in a shared narrative of Doi Moi as one that looks to the
17 future, and not necessarily dwelling on the past.
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28 **As East and Southeast Asia undergo rapid economic and social development, I have demonstrated**
29 **how the museum continues to provide state legitimacy even after attempting to reflect the voices of**
30 **ordinary people often alienated from the museum itself. These transformations reveal** how an
31 emerging cultural heritage of national development is dynamic and changing, expansive and yet
32 resilient, as it incorporates and responds to new challenges and possible futures in the neoliberal
33 economy.
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