

POLITICAL, MILITARY, AND CULTURAL MEMOIRS IN VIETNAMESE

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Since the end of the Vietnam War, many former government officials, military officers, and prominent cultural figures from the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) have published memoirs. Researchers have exploited some of these memoirs, especially those in English such as *In the Jaws of History* by Bùi Diễm, the former ambassador to Washington. In the diaspora, and to a lesser extent, there have been many more Vietnamese-language memoirs targeted at Vietnamese readers. An example comes from a contributor to this collection: the two-volume memoir by Vũ Quốc Thúc. For linguistic and other reasons, however, only a small number of scholars and researchers have used these memoirs.

There are several problems among these memoirs, especially those written by political and military figures. They include the strong intention of the authors, stated or otherwise, to justify their action in the past. Rather common among people on the losing side after a long and complex armed conflict, the memoirists tend to absolve themselves from contributing to major problems during the war and the eventual demise of South Vietnam. They instead place the blame for those problems on the communists, the Americans, and other noncommunist South Vietnamese, including the RVN leadership at the top. Having Vietnamese readers in mind, the memoirists also tend to affirm and assert their personal virtues such as righteousness and

patriotism as another way to dislodge criticism of their actions and decisions in the past. Then there is the issue of selectivity, as the memoirists sometimes focus on certain periods and neglect others. This issue is related to the problem of reliability, particularly the trickiness of memory and the revision of one's original understanding or interpretation of events. There is also neglect of certain subjects. With rare exceptions, for example, the memoirists write little about their experiences of the peasantry and the conditions of rural South Vietnam. It might be the result of selective memory as much as a lack of depth and understanding about the countryside, whose fate was affected by communist control and U.S. bombing and search-and-destroy missions. Consequently, researchers should be very cautious when using these memoirs. At the least, they should compare the memoirs to information found in official records and other sources.

These limits notwithstanding, Vietnamese-language memoirs serve at least two purposes that are potentially helpful to researchers. First, they provide many details about personalities and events that may not show up in official records and other primary sources. Equally if not more significantly, they help to illustrate broader themes and patterns about the background, politics, and culture of South Vietnam. Below are several discernible themes that come from the list of selected Vietnamese-language memoirs at the end of this chapter. The first section focuses on memoirs by RVN officials and high-ranking officers of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces (ARVN), and the second section on memoirs from writers, artists, and other prominent figures in the realm of culture.

The first theme is the violence ascribed to the August Revolution. Only some of the memoirs discuss the period before 1954. Among those that do, they typically consider the revolution to be a period of enormous losses among nationalist groups at the hands of the Việt Minh. The encounters might have varied in kind and degree, depending on the age, political status, and area of residence of the memoirists. Nonetheless, sections on personal experiences and recollections of the revolution include many of the most graphic descriptions of violence, if not the most graphic, of the respective memoirs. One example comes from the memoir of Đỗ Mậu, who became a solid supporter of Ngô Đình Diệm when they first met in 1942. Mậu was captured by the Việt Minh in central Vietnam not long after he was out of French imprisonment. Although he was let go a few months later, many other noncommunist revolutionaries during this period were not so fortunate. In central Vietnam, Mậu's brother-in-law had helped to organize a local noncommunist group that enlisted officials, functionaries, officers, and soldiers from the colonial regime. They attempted to make contacts with nationalist groups in northern Vietnam, but the Việt Minh found out and executed or imprisoned some in the leadership. Many of those prisoners, including one of Mậu's brothers and another of his brothers-in-law, were executed during the early phase of the First Indochina War, as the Việt Minh ran away from the French advances and did not want to take along their prisoners.

Another supporter of Diệm, Nguyễn Trân, later the RVN's chief in two provinces, was arrested and nearly killed during the "white terror" in Quảng Ngãi. According to Trân, some eight thousand people were killed during this period of forty days before and after the August Revolution. A different example is Nguyễn Bá Cẩn, later a chairman of the lower house under the Second Republic. Although only a schoolboy at the time of the August Revolution, Cẩn witnessed in and around his native city of Cần Thơ public executions of Hòa Hảo officials, Vietnamese associates to the colonial regime, and other rivals of the communists. On one of the rivers, he also saw three bloated

and floating corpses tied together by barbed wire, clearly meant as warning to the local people not to support French collaborators or anticommunist groups.

Taken as a whole, recollections and reflections about this period suggest a relationship between revolutionary violence on the one hand and, on the other hand, the creation of and trajectory for the First Republic. It would be too far to say that the repression committed by Việt Minh forces under Võ Nguyên Giáp, Nguyễn Bình, and other leaders led to the ideologically anticommunist foundation of the State of Vietnam and the RVN. However, the ruthlessness experienced by Ngô Đình Diệm and other nationalists during 1945–46 might offer a partial explanation for his own government's ruthless if ultimately counterproductive Denounce Communists Campaign. Diệm's weaknesses and the well-known factionalism among the nationalists were among the major reasons for the difficulties of fighting communism in South Vietnam. Nonetheless, the memories found in these books confirm the genealogy of revolutionary violence described in many official histories of communist organizations published since the end of the Vietnam War. It is not to deny the complexity of this situation, for some of the anticommunist nationalists proactively engaged in violence and at times succeeded in attacking, kidnapping, and killing the communists. But the intra-Vietnamese violence during 1945–46 tipped the scale to the Việt Minh. It contributed to the organization's political successes in rallying more Vietnamese to its anticolonial cause, but also hardened the anticommunist position when Diệm began the task of nation building after the Geneva Conference.

Nation building is indeed related to the second theme, which is the continual polarization of opinions among Vietnamese regarding Diệm's government. In spite of hindsight, or possibly because of it, the memoirists remain divided over their assessment of Diệm and the demise of his regime. Not surprisingly, the most negative opinions come from former ARVN officers instrumental in the planning and execution of the coups in 1960 and 1963: Nguyễn Chánh Thi, Phạm Văn Liễu, Vương Văn Đông, and Trần Văn Đôn. (An exception is the memoir of Tôn Thất Đính, a generally pro-Diệm general who participated in the latter coup only after a skillful if deceptive effort by the coup leaders to get him to their side.) In addition to the usual charges of dictatorial rule and oppression against non-Cần Lao nationalists, they accused Diệm and the Ngô family of corruption, failure in the fight against the insurgents, and even negotiation with the National Liberation Front. This opinion is shared by some long-time supporters of Diệm, who thought that he and his brother Ngô Đình Nhu were corrupt and unacceptable for the cause of nationalism. This point is underscored in Đỗ Mậu's memoir, possibly the most controversial memoirist in the diaspora. Displaying an anti-Catholic line of argument, Mậu alleges an incompatibility between nationalism and Catholicism in Vietnamese history and contends that Diệm ultimately placed church over nation and favored Catholics over non-Catholics.

But Diệm still has his share of defenders, some of whom place some or most of the blame on Nhu for the failure of the First Republic. Among the latter is Huỳnh Văn Lang, a high-ranking member of the Cần Lao Party assigned by Nhu to be its chief fundraiser. Lang was eventually sidelined by Nhu, however, and even became a coconspirator in an unrealized coup before the successful coup in November 1963. Yet Lang's memoirs maintain his belief in the vision of the Ngô brothers. He praises Nhu for his philosophical vision, and even dedicates one of the volumes to both brothers. (Lang holds lower opinions about Archbishop Ngô Đình Thục and especially Madame Nhu.) Another defender, General Huỳnh Văn Cao, not only remained loyal to Diệm during the coup in 1963 but also professes this loyalty in both of his memoirs that

were published twenty-three years apart. In recent years, Diệm's standing in history has improved thanks to archival research led by Western-trained historians as well as a gradually shifting position of the official line in Vietnam. Nonetheless, these memoirs are a reminder of the contentious long-standing debates about his status among the Vietnamese.

In comparison to opinions on the First Republic, Vietnamese-language memoirs are more uniform in holding a mostly positive view about the politics under the Second Republic, which is the third discernible theme: that this period showed democratic progress and held out promise for a desirable political culture among the anticommunist Vietnamese. It is true that the sections in the political and military memoirs on the post-1965 period are usually shorter and less insightful than the sections about the period before 1965. It is true, too, that the memoirists are divided when evaluating Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, though to a lesser extent than they are about Diệm. Most criticism of Thiệu centers generally on his authoritarianism and particularly on his manipulation of two presidential elections. Nonetheless, the fact that many of the memoirists, including several former military officers, were serving in the legislature of the Second Republic led to a more positive appraisal of political life during 1967–75. Even the anti-Thiệu memoir by the opposition politician Lý Quý Chung portrays, perhaps inadvertently, a climate of genuine if sometimes chaotic debates among legislators about the present and future of the country. Because of the fall of Saigon, it is impossible to know whether this political climate would eventually translate into a full-fledged democracy as some other noncommunist countries in Asia. Yet scholars should at least consider that this period saw the largest democratic exercise in modern Vietnamese history up to today.

Related to democratic exercise was the relative freedom in the realm of arts and letters, especially under the Second Republic but also during 1954–67. This theme is prominent in memoirs written by noncommunist writers, artists, musicians, and other noncommunist participants in the public culture of the RVN. It is not to say that the memoirists were uncritical of the Saigon government. The popular fiction writer Madame Tùng Long thought Diệm to be under the control of other members of his family. She was especially displeased by the pressure from Madame Nhu to have various women's groups join the largest government-led organization for women. Another prolific writer, Nguyễn Hiến Lê, notes in his memoir "heavy censorship" during the Second Republic on the highly respected semimonthly *Bách Khoa* (Encyclopedic). Nguyễn Thụy Long, a younger novelist and military officer, could not help but mention corruption, including his own, in one of his memoirs. Such complaints, however, are small and few. The majority of recollections tend to emphasize individual achievements and describe the cultural environment conducive to intellectual, literary, and artistic pursuits among the authors.

The qualified freedom of this environment is most palpable on the pages written by noncommunist figures that had participated in the Việt Minh–led anticolonial war. Phạm Duy, who would become the most productive musician in South Vietnam, eagerly joined this movement as a cultural cadre that wrote and performed many nationalist songs. By 1951, however, he and his wife and her siblings, who formed a beloved vocal group, left the war zone due to rapidly restrictive policies regarding what they could or could not produce. So did Tạ Ty, a rising painter during the early 1950s who became one of the most important artists in the RVN. Unlike the communist revolutionaries, these memoirists believed that bourgeois values were compatible with, even necessary for, Vietnamese nationalism and Vietnamese modernity. Having

found the Việt Minh milieu antithetical to those values, they planned their escape from the communist zones and found their way to Saigon even before the signing of the Geneva Peace Accords.

There was a lot more besides ideology and belief. Collectively, the memoirs reveal, among other things, an active engagement of ideas, institutions, and travels between South Vietnam and other noncommunist parts of the world. Some of this engagement was possible due to funds and scholarships that brought young Vietnamese to Europe and the United States for studies: a point made in the contribution of Nguyễn Đức Cường, among others, in this book. But it was merely one among many examples of this global engagement, including the flow of books and magazines from western Europe, North America, and east Asia to Saigon, Huế, Cần Thơ, and other towns and cities. Many memoirists eagerly consumed those publications, then translated them into Vietnamese or made them the basis for their own books and magazine articles. Another means of this global exchange were Paris-based correspondence courses, at least for Nguyễn Hiến Lê in the 1940s and 1950s. (During the 1930s, Madame Tùng Long took a correspondence course that contributed directly to her writing career, albeit one run by Vietnamese in Indochina.) Like other urbanites, the memoirists watched movies from Hollywood and Bollywood, from Hong Kong and France and Britain and other countries. They listened to records of Western and Asian popular music played in cafés and private residences, and they created a vibrant if somewhat eclectic popular musical culture of their own. Studies and travels abroad provided another venue toward their making of Vietnamese modernity. The poet Nguyễn Sa came back to Vietnam at the start of national division and became an advocate for a postcolonial form of French existentialism. Around the same time, Phạm Duy saved enough money from his work in Saigon so he could go to Paris for a year and learn musicology to further his song-writing skills. During the 1960s, the ethnic Chinese museum director Vương Hồng Sển visited Taiwan, France, and other countries to collect antiques and meet with foreigners who shared the same interests. These and other examples from the memoirs illustrate the eager activities among the noncommunist elite in South Vietnam, who engaged the larger bourgeois and capitalist modernity in the wider noncommunist world to create their postcolonial and nationalist culture.

The growth of this culture was organic for the most part. The educational system provides an example. As shown in the memoir of the “youth music” (*nhạc trẻ*) organizer Trường Kỳ, many proponents of this music were students within the informal network of private schools started during colonialism and run by Catholic religious orders (but welcoming Catholic and non-Catholic students alike). Certainly, the educational system in the RVN saw many adaptations and changes reflecting a nationalist, republican, and postcolonial ideology. It did not mean, however, an uprooting of curriculum or even administration as was the case in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Similarly, the proliferation of journalism, where Nguyễn Thụy Long and many other fiction writers first made their names, grew out of the largely noncommunist press during colonialism. The contents of numerous dailies, weeklies, semimonthlies, and monthlies reflected new or evolving political, intellectual, and artistic sensibilities. But the structure, organization, and entrepreneurialism of this press were not dissimilar to those from late colonialism.

In recent years, the rise of social media has contributed to a strong nostalgia about the RVN in general and republican Saigon in particular among Vietnamese in the country and the diaspora. Much of this nostalgia derives from visual and audio forms—photographs, video clips, original recordings of popular music—but some also

from diasporic representations of South Vietnam. Historians and scholars must guard themselves against the temptations of nostalgia due to the possibility of exaggeration and even falsification of the historical records about South Vietnam. At the same time, the historical records should be examined or reexamined in the context of both dominant *and* alternative perspectives. For the reasons described above, Vietnamese-language memoirs by prominent figures in the RVN offer alternative perspectives to the dominant and orthodox interpretations in both Vietnam and the United States. They will help researchers to grasp better the complexity of the Vietnam Conflict, if not also to help explain some of the reasons behind the nostalgia for the republic lost to the communists in 1975.

SELECTED MEMOIRS

Đỗ Mậu, *Việt Nam Máu Lửa Quê Hương Tôi: Hồi Ký Chính Trị* [Vietnam, my warring country: political memoirs] (Mission Hills, CA: Hương Quê, 1986; Westminster, CA: Văn Nghệ, 1993). This is one of the first and longest memoirs to be published by a former general in the ARVN. It provides many details about his support for Diệm prior to 1954, his work in the Diệm government and the military, and his involvement in the 1963 coup. It is critical of the Catholic Church in general and the Ngô family in particular, and it interprets Diệm to have held a pro-Catholic position at the expense of non-Catholic nationalists. Although the book remains controversial among Vietnamese in the diaspora, it also offers an insider's look into Diệm's activities in building support for his movement during the 1940s.

Huỳnh Văn Cao, *Lòng Ái Quốc* [Patriotism] (Saigon: Fatima, 1970); and *Một Kiếp Người* [A lifetime] (Chantilly, VA: self-published, 1993). Out of about twenty generals during the rule of Ngô Đình Diệm, Cao was one of three Catholics. He remained loyal to Diệm during the 1963 coup, and these memoirs give his reasons for this loyalty. The first memoir was published in Republican Saigon, around the time that he was running for reelection in the upper house of the legislature. The second memoir recounts the same events and adds those that occurred after 1970.

Huỳnh Văn Lang, *Nhân Chứng Một Chế Độ* [Witness to a regime], 3 vols. (Westminster, CA: Văn Nghệ, 2000); and *Ký ức Huỳnh Văn Lang* [The memoir of Huỳnh Văn Lang], 2 vols. (Westminster, CA: self-published, 2011–12). The Southern-born Catholic Lang was still in his twenties when he was invited by Diệm to run the Office of Foreign Exchange. He became a member of the Cần Lao Party and led its successful fundraising. The three-volume memoir focuses on 1954–63; and the two-volume memoir covers his childhood, youth, student years, and the entire period of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN). (Of the latter memoir, a planned third volume on his exile after 1975 has yet to appear.) Given the secrecy surrounding the Cần Lao, these memoirs are especially valuable for the information on Ngô Đình Nhu's activities during the 1940s, including Nhu's initial development of personalism as a guiding philosophy.

Lý Quý Chung, *Hồi Ký Không Tên* [Memoir without a name] (Ho Chi Minh City: Trẻ, 2004). This memoir is the only political or military memoir on this list that was published in postwar Vietnam. The author began his adult life as a journalist. He was elected to the lower house in the Second Republic and became one of the opposition politicians to President Thiệu in the legislature. Due to self-censorship as well as official censorship,

the book is much more circumspect than most memoirs on this list when it comes to criticism of the postwar government. Most valuable to researchers are probably the sections on his activities against the Thiệu government during the 1970s.

Nguyễn Sa, *Hồi Ký* [Memoir] (Irvine, CA: Đời, 1998). The author of possibly the most famous poem published in South Vietnam, Nguyễn Sa studied in France during the First Indochina War and returned to Vietnam to teach philosophy and literature at a prominent high school in Saigon. This memoir is unconventional in that it is not chronological but jumpily topical. Nonetheless, it includes some interesting recollections on two prominent periodicals in the RVN, plus a long section on Trần Kim Tuyến, a central figure in the Personalist Party run by Ngô Đình Nhu. More indirectly, the memoir is a good example of Francophile influence on intellectual life in South Vietnam.

Nguyễn Bá Cẩn, *Đất Nước Tôi: Hồi Ký Chánh Trị* [My country: political memoirs] (Derwood, MD: Hoa Hao Press, 2003). Before becoming penultimate prime minister of the RVN in 1975, Cẩn was an official at the provincial level, then in the national legislature. He rose to be the chairman of the lower house, and this memoir is most detailed about this period of his life. It also describes the collaboration between the Confederation of Vietnamese Labor and smaller political groups toward the formation of a new political party.

Nguyễn Chánh Thi, *Việt Nam: Một Trời Tâm Sự* [Vietnam, a sky full of confidences] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuân Thu, 1987). Thi was not yet a general at the time of the 1960 failed coup against Diệm, but his role was important and became a subject of intense debate for many years. This memoir is his attempt to present his side of the story. For this reason, it covers the years 1955–66 but is most detailed on the coup and its aftermath. The book also gives his strong criticism against other military officers, especially Lieutenant Colonel Vương Văn Đông, one of the instigators of the failed coup, and General Nguyễn Cao Kỳ for his action during the Buddhist Struggle protests in central Vietnam. The second event made Thi a hero among the Buddhists but also led to his exile in the United States in 1966.

Nguyễn Hiến Lê, *Hồi Ký* [Memoir], 3 vols. (Westminster, CA, 1988–89). Lê was the most prolific author in South Vietnam, and his hundredth book was published five days before the fall of Saigon. A self-taught intellectual well respected by communist and anticommunist authorities alike, he is cool-headed and factual in describing his experience in teaching, writing, publishing, and private life. The first volume concerns his upbringing, education, and early career under colonialism and decolonization. The second is on his work and life in the RVN, and the third is about his experience in and observations of postwar Vietnam. The second volume is most direct and detailed about the RVN, and the last volume further shows his perspective on the differences between the Northern and Southern intellectual and publishing cultures during 1954–75.

Nguyễn Thụy Long, *Thưở Mơ Làm Văn Sĩ* [Dreams of becoming a fiction writer] (Irvine, CA: Tuổi Xanh, 2000). The author grew up in Hanoi and moved to Saigon in 1952, when he was still a teenager. The book recounts his life as a student in the North in 1950 to his employment at one of the best-known Saigon weeklies during the

mid-1960s. In between are recollections of his enrollment in a military school, his inadvertent involvement in the 1960 coup against Diệm that landed him in jail, and his relationships with budding and established writers alike.

Nguyễn Trần, *Công và Tội: Những Sự Thật Lịch Sử, Hồi Ký Lịch Sử Chính Trị Miền Nam 1945–1975* [Merits and guilt: truths about history, political memoirs about South Vietnam, 1945–1975] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuân Thu, 1992). One of the more effectual provincial chiefs during the First Republic, Trần was known for holding public debates with communist prisoners. This long book recalls those episodes and offers information not commonly found in other memoirs, probably because Trần's early roles were neither in the military nor the cabinet but at the provincial level. There is more about rural conditions than perhaps any other title on this list. Trần was also different from most other memoirists for being pro-Diệm and anti-Thiệu, having run unsuccessfully against the latter in the 1971 election. He was a leading organizer behind the anticorruption movement in 1974, and the book includes a long section about his activities in this movement.

Phạm Duy, *Hồi Ký* [Memoir], 3 vols. (Midway City, CA: PDC Musical Productions, 1989–91). The most important Vietnamese musician from the twentieth century also published one of the most informative memoirs about the urban culture of South Vietnam. These volumes cover his life from childhood in colonial Hanoi in the 1920s to the fall of Saigon. The third volume begins with his departure from the Việt Minh zone in the early 1950s and ends with his departure to the United States during the fall of Saigon. In between were his prolific production of song-writing, recording, performances, and travels, including trips to France and the United States. Along with the memoir by Trường Kỳ, this memoir is indispensable for understanding the growth of popular music in South Vietnam.

Phạm Văn Liễu, *Trả Ta Sông Núi: Hồi Ký* [Give back my country: memoir], 3 vols. (Houston: Văn Hóa, 2002–4). Colonel Liễu is best remembered for his involvement in two controversies: the failed coup of 1960 and the post-1975 diasporic anticommunist organization National United Front for the Liberation of Vietnam. Not surprisingly, the memoir is most detailed on these two subjects. The first two volumes cover his life until 1975 and the third volume thereafter. A member of the largest Đại Việt political party, Liễu also sprinkles this memoir with information and observations about its members as well as the evolution of the party in South Vietnam.

Tạ Ty, *Những Khuôn Mặt Văn Nghệ Đã Đi Qua Đời Tôi: Hồi Ký* [Past figures in arts and letters in my life: memoir] (San Jose, CA: Thăng Mỗ, 1990). Similar to Phạm Duy, this painter and military officer participated in the anticolonial struggle led by the Việt Minh but left it in the middle of the First Indochina War. Like the musician, he had very large circles of friends in arts and letters in Hanoi during the war and in South Vietnam afterward. This memoir is about them as much as it is about himself. Surprisingly, there is little on painting in South Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. On the other hand, there are some recollections about the art scene in Hanoi before 1954, plus the transition of the noncommunist press from Hanoi to Saigon after the Geneva Conference.

Thế Phong, *Hồi Ký Ngoài Văn Chương* [Memoir beyond literature] (Westminster, CA: Văn Nghệ, 1996). Because of warfare, a number of writers and artists enlisted or were drafted into the ARVN. Thế Phong was one, and his memoir traverses between the realms of military and arts and letters, illustrating some of the close relationships between them in South Vietnam. While it focuses on his life from the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, it also includes many citations and notes about publications and literary figures in South Vietnam.

Tôn Thất Đính, *20 Năm Bình Nghiệp* [Twenty years in the military] (San Jose: Chánh Đạo, 1998). General Đính is forever linked to the 1963 coup, and the book describes and discusses his role in the coup at length. Moreover, he is notable among the military memoirists for giving the least self-justifying and most self-critical reassessment of the past. Đính considers Diệm and Nhu capable if flawed, and he stresses their effort to keep South Vietnam from becoming an American colony. Stopping the memoir at the end of the coup, he voices criticism of ARVN's performance during the early 1960s and also the growing U.S. military influence in South Vietnam.

Trần Văn Đôn, *Việt Nam Nhân Chứng: Hồi Ký Chính Trị* [Vietnamese witness: political memoir] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuân Thu, 1989). Đôn was among the principal plotters of the coup in 1963. Having published a memoir in English in 1978, he wrote this one to give a longer and more elaborate explanation of his background, relationship with Diệm, involvement in the successful coup, and the aftermath. There are shorter sections about his time in the upper and lower houses during the Second Republic, the fall of Saigon, and a visit of Bảo Đại to the United States after the war was over. Similar to many military memoirists, there is surprisingly little about his experience with the U.S. military.

Trường Kỳ, *Một Thời Nhạc Trẻ: Bút Ký* [An era of youth music: recollections] (Montréal: self-published, 2002). This highly informative memoir comes from the most successful promoter of "youth music" in South Vietnam. The author knew virtually all figures of this movement in Saigon, and he provides many details about the background, origin, and developments of this music. The book illustrates the closeness of this movement to the broader noncommunist youth and student culture in urban South Vietnam. It also highlights the tension between its advocates and older and more traditional Vietnamese, and the impact that the Americanization of the war had on the movement. There is also a rich collection of photographs of "youth music" bands and people.

Tùng Long, *Hồi Ký Bà Tùng Long: Viết Là Niềm Vui Muôn Thưở của Tôi* [The memoir of Madame Tùng Long: writing is my lasting happiness] (Ho Chi Minh City: Trẻ, 2003). Tùng Long published about seventy novels and novellas of popular fiction, many of which were initially serialized, plus an influential newspaper advice column where readers sent her questions about work, romance, and family life. The memoir is unique for having come from a woman, and also for describing the upbringing, education, marriage, and work of someone from the central province Quảng Ngãi rather than Saigon or Huế. The memoir glosses over her life after 1963. It is most informative on her rise to fame during the 1940s and 1950s, showing a bustling market for readers as well as writers of popular fiction.

Võ Long Triều, *Hồi Ký* [Memoirs], 2 vols. (Fresno, CA: Người Việt, 2009–11). Triều had a diverse career in teaching, journalism, and politics. He served in Nguyễn Cao Kỳ's cabinet as head of the Department of Youths, then published a major newspaper and ran successfully for a seat in the lower house. This memoir was serialized in the largest diasporic Vietnamese newspaper over several years, and it is somewhat messy in organization and jumpy in chronology. Covering his life from childhood to postwar imprisonment and release, it is perhaps most useful to researchers on the fluidity between political life and civilian life under the Second Republic.

Vũ Quốc Thúc, *Thời Đại Của Tôi* [My era], 2 vols. (Westminster, CA: Người Việt, 2010). In his capacity as the RVN's director of postwar planning, Thúc was best-known to Americans as coauthor of the David Lilienthal-Vũ Quốc Thúc Report (1970) on postwar prospects for economic reconstruction. He also worked as director of the Vietnam National Bank and taught at the School of Law in Saigon. Of this two-volume work, the first volume presents Thúc's perspective on Vietnamese history, and only the second volume is a memoir of his life from childhood to exile in France after 1978. Many pieces of information presented in Thúc's contribution to this book come from this memoir, which is especially long and detailed about his family background and his education under the colonial system.

Vương Hồng Sển, *Hồi Ký 50 Năm Mê Hát* [Memoir of fifty years following musical theater] (Saigon: Phạm Quang Giai, 1968); and *Hơn Nửa Đời Hư* [More than half of a wasted life] (Ho Chi Minh City: Nhà Xuất Bản Thành Phố Hồ Chí Minh, 1992). Most cultural memoirists on this list came from Northern Vietnam. The author of these two memoirs, however, was an ethnic Chinese born and raised in the South. A well-known antique collector, he was director of the national museum in Saigon for over fifteen years. The first memoir was published four years after his retirement from the museum. It is a valuable source on the history of the genres of reformed musical theater (*cải lương*) and classical Vietnamese opera (*hát bội*) during colonialism, and also illustrates a more open cultural climate in Southern Vietnam that saw continuity in the RVN. The second memoir is longer, more comprehensive, and more informative about South Vietnam during the First Republic. It includes recollections of Sển's education and initial interest in antiques, his work at the national museum, his travels in Asia and Europe, and his meetings with Ngô Đình Diệm and other members of the Ngô family about collecting antiques.

Vương Văn Đông, *Bình Biến 11–11–1960: Khởi Điểm Một Hành Trình* [Coup attempt of November 11, 1960: starting point of a journey] (Westminster, CA: Văn Nghệ, 2000). The author was one of the primary planners and instigators of the failed coup against Ngô Đình Diệm. This memoir consists of two parts. Written in 1970 when he was living in France, the first part is about the background of the coup and the events of the coup itself. The second part was written thirty years later to tell about his life following the coup, which included exile in Cambodia. The memoirist argues forcefully that the 1960 coup was a completely Vietnamese affair and there was no American involvement or support.