

Tình gia thất nào ai chẳng có
Kià lão thân khuê phụ nhớ thương
Mẹ già phơ phất mái sương
Con thơ nhỏ dại còn dương phù trì

Familial sentiments, who does not feel them?
Your old parents, your young wife remember you with love
Your mother, under the weight of age, sees her white hair floating like the rime
Your young baby in his tender innocence, needs your protection.

Chinh Phụ Ngâm

Speaking of Vietnam, people will not stop thinking of the war, its wounds and its boat people. No one could be indifferent when it is known that 13 million tons of bombs (300 pounds per person) and 45 million gallons of defoliant were dumped over during the war. There were about 4 million Vietnamese civilians killed or injured, 450,000 Vietnamese combatants dead, 800,000 combatants wounded not included 58,183 Americans dead or missing in action and 313,613 wounded on the American side. That war divided at that time not only world opinion but also that of the Vietnamese. It continued to engrave on the mind of Americans up until now. On the other hand, it is hard for a Vietnamese to justify that war when one is in love with justice, freedom and independence. There is in each one of us full of regrets, contradictions and embarrassment because we know quite well the causes of that war and its consequences.



Nỗi buồn chiến tranh

Independence and freedom never come together on the road of peace. We continue to dream of having them together some day on that such an arduous land that we never stop shaping it with sweat and tears for so many generations. We keep on imploring God, attribute fault to foreigners without wanting to recognize our own errors, without daring to look to ourselves in the mirror and without wanting to nurture the whole people's hope. We have lost too many occasions in the past to be reconciled with each other, to bring Vietnam out of poverty and to bring it back to the road of prosperity at the dawn of the 21st century. It is time not to start over the same mistakes that our elders have made for so many years, to bury our personal hard feelings for the national interest and to magnanimously treat all those who do not share our political convictions. To do it is evidently not easy but it is less painful than what so may Vietnamese families have suffered during that war, which we often called " the griefs of war".

Griefs of War

In 1945, in the Mekong delta, a young man named **Hoàng**, issue of a landed family, lived in hiding with his young lover **Hương** at a suburb not far from Cần Thơ. They had two children, a boy named **Thành**, 3 years old and a girl named **Mai**, one year old. Unfortunately, this conjugal union was short lived because it was uncovered by their kins.

They strongly condemned it because it was a shame to the family when it was known that the young woman was no other than Hoàng's niece. Caught by shame and taken by remorse, Hoàng decided to abandon his family and enrolled in the Việt-Minh army hoping to find relief on the battle fields against the French army. Thanks to his courage and military exploits, he became a few years later an important person in charge in the Vietnamese communist party in the Minh Hải region (Cà Mau) in South Vietnam.

In 1954, after the Geneva Accord, he was repatriated to North Vietnam waiting for the new democratic election in South Vietnam. Unfortunately, because of the cold war and the East-West confrontation, the election never took place. Vietnam then became the place of confrontation and was divided in two republics, one close to the Soviet bloc and the other the Republic of Vietnam. After a few years of higher education in Moscow, Hoàng returned to Ha Noi and a few years later became the engineer in charge, specialized in the field of making heavy artillery and maintaining anti-aircraft battery DCA during the American Vietnamese war. In the meantime, he remarried and was killed in a beautiful morning in his bunker during a bombardment by South Vietnamese and American aircraft in the region of Vinh in 1964. He was posthumously decorated and considered national hero (*liệt-sĩ*) since then.

As for his young wife, she continued to raise her two children in South Vietnam waiting for the return of her husband. Her son Thành became some twenty years later one of the brilliant aviators of South Vietnam after having spent three years training in the United States (Houston,

Texas). He flew several missions over North Vietnam and participated in several rounds of bombardment of Thanh Hóa and Vinh regions. Could one of the bombs he dropped have by accident killed his father, a person he would always like to see again some day when peace would return in this country?

Two months before the fall of Sài Gòn in 1975, in the course of the month of February, Thành received the order to discreetly leave the country with his family to resettle in the United States. He finally preferred to stay in Vietnam because his mother always fostered the hope of finding his father alive in North Vietnam and seeing again a reunified family after so many years of sufferings and separation. Unfortunately, she never found her husband alive. She knew he was killed by American bombs and as a reward, she received the title of "spouse of a hero" (or *vợ của liệt sỹ*). On the other hand, because of his three years of training in the United States and his military activities, Thành, her son, was sent to a reeducation camp located at Lạng Sơn in North Vietnam. He had to spend eight years of reeducation. During his confinement, his mother had to take a long trip every six months to see him and did not stop crying during these reunions. On his release, he only found her to be in a lamentable state with her eyes almost blind. But he never had the chance to serve her any longer because he had to leave Vietnam to resettle in the United States in 1994. Probably he would never see his mother again who is now 75 years old because returning to Vietnam would have been for the moment, an utopia.

The story of this family torn and ruined by that war is not only the story lived by the vast majority of Vietnamese but also that of a people continuing to heal its deep wounds, as the years go by, for the price of independence and freedom.