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VOICES FROM THE GROUND: KOREAN AND VIETNAMESE WOMEN IN WARTIME ¹

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Abstract. *Introduction.* During the Cold War, Korea and Vietnam were considered “hot spots” of the confrontation between superpowers. Therefore, it is well known among academia that these clashes were fueled by military and political views. Moreover, the Korean and Vietnamese men’s military service for special operations is well known among academia, and the image of Korean and Vietnamese women appears indistinctly in historical sources. *Methods and materials.* While most histories of the Vietnam War and the Korean War have tended to describe Vietnamese and Korean women merely as tragic victims, prostitutes, or patriotic heroines, this article reveals far more complex and colourful accounts of why they joined the armed forces and what kinds of personal and emotional feelings they had during the wars. In the process of studying this issue, the author uses original historical records (writings, reports, correspondences, diaries, etc.) recorded by ordinary people who witnessed and experienced the Vietnam War and the Korean War. The author combines two main research methods of historical science (historical method and logical method) with other research methods (system, analysis, synthesis, comparison, etc.) to clarify the article’s contents. *Analysis and results.* This paper challenges the conventional understanding of the Cold War as a confrontation between the two superpowers. The article aims to decentralise perspectives on the Cold War by exploring the experiences and memories of ordinary people who witnessed and experienced various kinds of wars. The work revitalises the everyday lives of women in Korea and Vietnam – the potential flashpoints in the Cold War. Working for peace remained their primary motivation, but some women might believe that conducting female duties in wars was a way to get higher social status and equal gender. In doing so, the paper contributes to a reconsideration of the Cold War narratives through the experiences of many wartime participants.

Key words: Vietnam, Korea, Asia, women, Cold War, Korean War (1950–1953), Vietnam War (1954–1975).

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ГОЛОСА С ЗЕМЛИ: КОРЕЙЦЫ И ВЬЕТНАМСКИЕ ЖЕНЩИНЫ В ВОЕННОЕ ВРЕМЯ ¹

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Аннотация. Во времена холодной войны Южная Корея и Вьетнам являлись горячими точками противостояния сверхдержав. Исследователи в основном изучают эти столкновения с военной и политической точек зрения. Кроме того, в академических кругах широко известно о корейских и вьетнамских мужчинах,

проходивших специальную военную службу. Образы корейских и вьетнамских женщин в исторических источниках встречаются редко. В большинстве историй о войнах во Вьетнаме и Корее вьетнамские и корейские женщины изображены просто как трагические жертвы, женщины легкого поведения или патриотические героини. Статья раскрывает гораздо более сложные истории о том, почему они пошли в вооруженные силы, об их частной жизни, личных эмоциях, которые они испытывали во время войны. Данная статья бросает вызов общепринятому пониманию холодной войны как противостояния двух сверхдержав из двух блоков. Целью статьи является децентрализация взглядов на холодную войну путем изучения опыта и воспоминаний простых людей, которые были свидетелями и пережили войны всех видов. Работа возрождает повседневную жизнь корейских и вьетнамских женщин из горячих точек времен холодной войны. Работа ради мира остается их основной мотивацией, но некоторые женщины могут полагать, что выполнение женских обязанностей во время войны – это способ получить более высокий социальный статус и достичь экономического равенства. Тем самым статья способствует переосмыслению нарративов холодной войны на основе опыта ее участников.

Ключевые слова: Вьетнам, Корея, Азия, женщины, холодная война, Корейская война (1950–1953), Вьетнамская война (1954–1975).

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Introduction. The Second World War ended in 1945, leading to the establishment of a new world order in which the Cold War² played a crucial role in foreign affairs. During the Cold War, besides the East-West confrontation, there was also the North-South conflict and the development of civil wars. In this context, both Korea and Vietnam³ are Asian countries where the Cold War was indeed tragic and bloody, and both nations were situated at the core of the traumatic division of the twentieth century. The Korean peninsula was divided into two zones at the 38th parallel, and following that, the Korean War happened during 1950–1953. Meanwhile, French colonial rule conquered Vietnam until 1954, and then the Geneva Accords partitioned the country at the 17th parallel into two regions with a temporary military delimitation zone. The bloody Vietnam War⁴ lasted for over twenty years and ended in 1975.

There has been a large proportion of the scholarly literature that has focused on the connection between Korea and Vietnam in terms of military, political, and economic views or on comparing the Korean War (1950–1953) and the Vietnam War (1954–1975). *Korea: The War Before Vietnam* by MacDonald (1986) was written and published a decade after the end of the war in Vietnam. In this book, the author explains the implications of the Korean War on American policy in Vietnam and East Asia [14]. Kaufman (1999) pointed out the role of the Korean conflict in greatly expanding

Americans' commitments worldwide and contributed to the U.S. decision to engage in direct military action in Vietnam fifteen years later [8]. Nojeim (2006) analyses Korean War policy to argue that the war had repercussions far beyond the Korean battlefield, and its ramifications were felt in Taiwan, Vietnam, Europe and U.S. defence expenditures as well [17]. From a geopolitical perspective, Linantud (2008) clarifies the failures and successes of nation-building in South Korea, South Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand between 1954 and 1991 [13]. The paper focused on economic aspects rather than the daily lives of ordinary people. Hosch (2010) helps the reader understand the causes, the unfolding of events, the chemistry of various key figures, and the aftermath of the Korean War and the Vietnam War [5]. Through a comparison of South Korea, Vietnam, China and Indonesia, Tuong Vu (2010) demonstrates that state formation politics rather than colonial legacies have had decisive and lasting impacts on the structures of emerging states [23]. By focusing mainly on the U.S. side in the Korean War and the Vietnam War, Gurtov (2010) argues that the war in Korea drew Asia into the orbit of vital US interests, and the Korean and Vietnam wars went beyond their strategic connection and had a profound impact on U.S. policy in Asia [4].

It is clear that most of these works, taking Vietnam and Korea as common objects of comparison, focus on analysing in more detail

the United States's policy towards Vietnam and/or Korea during the Cold War. The connections and parallels at the individual level between the two countries' trajectories during this time were somewhat forgotten. Moreover, much literature on the Korean War and Vietnam War has been devoted to the images of young male soldiers. Both the Korean War and the Vietnam War required the total mobilisation of all segments of society beyond young men in the armed forces. Besides men's military service, both Korean and Vietnamese women were recruited for service in all branches of the army and participated in a large variety of military service and support. While the Korean and Vietnamese men's military service for special operations is well known in academia, the image of Korean and Vietnamese women appears indistinctly in historical sources [9].

Drawing on personal memoirs and other resources such as books, journals, and monographs, this paper aims to decentralise perspectives on the Cold War through exploring the experiences and memories of ordinary people who witnessed and experienced various kinds of real and imagined wars. Through both a *connected perspective* and a *comparative lens*, the proposal examines Koreans and Vietnamese by scrutinising the experiences of women in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia during the Cold War. The work revitalises the everyday lives of women in Korea and Vietnam – both potential flashpoints in the Cold War. It is of immense significance as the key to unearthing the trait of the war itself. It is more to be done, especially on the grounds that the war also had a bearing on a kind of civil war. The result of the project could paint a wide picture of the lives of ordinary people in Asia during the Cold War.

This approach might challenge the conventional understanding of the Cold War as a confrontation between the two superpowers. If the struggles of daily life marked the history of the 20th century, it is possible now to exploit such narratives to create a new Cold War history. In other words, it could reconceptualize the Cold War narrative and reconceive it as a story that moves beyond the concerns of political elites and state-to-state relations to one involving the everyday lives of people.

By exploring ordinary women's experiences, this paper not only argues that the young Korean and Vietnamese women were neither passive

nor victims of the war, but instead were active participants in the war as ways of achieving gender equality. The result of the proposal might be a great deal to show that the China-Soviet-U.S. rivalry, as well as the communism-capitalism confrontation, did not completely inform and shape the local concerns, local cultures, local family histories, and local gender interests of people in Korea and Vietnam. They had motivations other than communism and liberal capitalism when they acted in the way that they did. If we put people and everyday life at the centre of the narrative, that approach does relegate Cold War international politics to the ground and bring to the fore the larger concerns of the society being studied. In this regard, the article may contribute to a new perspective on the Cold War's impact by reimagining the conflict and understanding twentieth-century history through the lens of Asia.

A usual image of Korean and Vietnamese women at wartime. Both the Korean War and the Vietnam War were bloody hotspots of the Cold War in Asia. Therefore, it is not surprising that the most conventional narrative about Korean and Vietnamese women has often been described as that of tragic victims of the wars who suffered the consequences of these traumatic conflicts or patriotic heroines who struggled for their national unity.

During the Vietnam War, the young women who volunteered to serve in the regular army on the front lines had to face death and physical pain every day. Sometimes the boundary between death and life was exceedingly thin. In only one American raid, 60% of youth volunteers⁵ from 759 companies died or were injured [16, p. 247]. The living conditions of the young volunteer women along the Hồ Chí Minh Trail were extremely and excruciatingly difficult. They were struck down by fever, hunger, and death [3, p. 31]. The regular amount of rice supplied to each recruit was to receive twenty-one kilogrammes per month; however, because of the bombing and disruptions, the rations must dwindle to eighteen kilogrammes, then fifteen kilogrammes, twelve kilogrammes, and even only six kilogrammes per person per month [16, p. 121]. Even when the rice was out, they had to eat porridge and wild vegetables [24, p. 413]. In the moon season, it was raining all day, but the women only had two

sets of clothes to change into. In the evening, they burned the fire to dry clothes, and the next morning, they continually put them on. Medicine, salt, vegetables, food, and necessities were all lacking in seriousness, leading to the deaths of eleven members of the Cồ Tô team [16, p. 165]. There was a unit that had to be stationed in the middle of an abundance of water, without a dry mound, and had to soak in the water all day, including the women in the period. The youth women's work necessarily took them to some of the most dangerous sites, and "whatever there was danger and death, there was volunteer youth" [7, p. 74]. One of the famous places in Vietnam associated with the sacrifices and losses of young women volunteers is "Trông Bồn," where both sides were bound by high mountains and hills, and there was only one single road in the middle to transport supplies to the southern battlefield. During Operation Rolling Thunder (1965–1968), the U.S. Air Force flung 19,000 explosive bombs of all types and fired thousands of rockets into Trông Bồn to cut this primary transportation route, which became the phantom of the traffic route with graphic nicknames: "the Bomb Bag" and "the Gate of Death". During the raids, more than one thousand civilians, young women, volunteers and soldiers were killed, and hundreds of villages and communes were wiped out [22]. On October 31, 1968, an American raid bombed the squad, and all thirteen female youth volunteers died; both of them were in their teens and early twenties.

Meanwhile, the Korean War may be one of the bloodiest wars in modern history. Although the conflict lasted only three years, it resulted in several million deaths and several times the number of wounded and maimed [2, p. 524]. Therefore, similar to Vietnamese women, Korean women appeared to have been victims of human tragedy during the bloody conflict and the consequences that they had to suffer during the entire Korean War period. On July 11, 1950, the U.S. Air Force bombed an Iri railway station and killed about 300 civilians, including women and children. Along with that, roughly 50 to 400 civilians were killed, and several times that number were severely wounded in Masan, Haman, Sachon, Pohang, Andong, Yechon, Gumi, Danyang, and other regions because of U.S. warplanes [2, p. 530]. In the southeast seaside city

of Pohang in August of 1950, U.S. naval artillery bombarded the calm villages and killed more than 400 civilians. American air forces and naval bombardments also destroyed some North Korean cities and villages. B.29 Superfortresses flung thousands of tonnes of high-explosive bombs into towns, resulting in thousands of civilian casualties. Even so, U.S. air and ground forces shot at women, children, and elderly people [26, pp. 3-4]. Several thousand civilians, including babies, women, and the elderly, were killed during the operations named "Keeping the Position by Cleansing the Fields" by South Korean forces [2, p. 532]. In every aspect of the war, the Korean War preceded the Indochina War in many tragic ways.

The real tragedy of the Korean War was not only the brutal, bloody conflict but also the practice of U.S. military prostitution and the use of Korean sex workers, who became America's "comfort women." Throughout the Korean and Vietnam wars, the so-called relaxation and recreation business had been systematised around the U.S. military camps. More than a million Korean women have sexually catered to U.S. soldiers [15, pp. 24-32]. Besides that, Korean women were also victims of wartime sexual violence. When the U.S. soldiers entered villages, it was usual that old men hid their daughters and daughters-in-law to avoid them being raped. Some young women tried to disguise themselves to look like old, ugly women. Many Korean women in the villages were often raped in front of their husbands and parents. This has not been a secret among those who experienced the Korean War, even though several women were raped before being shot [15, pp. 24-32]. Both Korean and Vietnamese women were really victims of war.

Yet, the full story of young women who served in the army in some of the most dangerous spots is largely untold, even in both Korea and Vietnam. These were the women whose lives were deeply hidden in the seemingly male domain of violence and death. But they also had dreams of love, beauty, and a happy family with their children. How did they feel when they saw that their faces had become pale, thin, and weak in mirrors? What would their feelings be when they were still in their twenties with sexual urges while most men, including their loved ones, went to war? What would be their feelings after the war when they came back to their hometowns and

when they found themselves getting older while their health got worse? These were women who had to choose non-traditional lives in their early twenties. These were women who went through lives that were completely different from the conventional sort of happy life, which could be characterised by sweet families with lovely children – lives they might have dreamed of if there had been no war. Then, why did they enter into such strenuous lives and recruit as members of the armed forces? What were their motivations for involving themselves in duties that are often for men?

Breaking traditional norms. Wars are dead and bloody, so why did Korean and Vietnamese women actively participate in the war, which would have been merely a duty for men? The traditional gender ideology constructed men as protectors and family providers, while women were producers of children and daily life. Accordingly, men were called on to perform mandatory military service and encouraged to become the primary labour force in the economy. During the wars, women fought to liberate themselves and get equal rights to men by joining these conflicts. They believed that women's participation in wars as soldiers was a golden opportunity for women to attain the qualification of honourable people [11, p. 96].

The Korean women became involved in the war by being mobilised as soldiers in the Volunteer Troops of Women, and they took on various duties. Until the end of August 1950, the Volunteer Troops of Korean Women were established on a large scale, not only as nurses but also as soldiers during the Korean War [11, p. 91]. The Korean women were recruited and used as members of a pacification squad, then they had to nurse wounded soldiers, and finally they had to serve as comfort women while others worked to fill the absence of men in the rear [12, p. 18]. Most of the Korean Women Volunteer Troops “worked at TI&E, art squads, and key administrative personnel to the rear,” and “some of them were deployed in fighting units but actually did not join in battle” [11, p. 94]. The major duties of the Korean Volunteer Troops of Women deployed at fighting units were such simple administrative affairs as the transmission of documents and the writing of letters, or attending the interrogation of captured female North Korean and Chinese soldiers. The Volunteer Troops of Women were

organised as regular army personnel at the beginning of the Korean War and worked in such particular arms and services as information and education, general administration, accounting, and communication. Not only the volunteer troops of women as regular soldiers, but also many women as irregulars, joined directly in the war [11, p. 96]. Women established their positions as citizens by becoming soldiers during the Korean War. As a result, after the end of the war, women's rights changed when the Republic of Korea experienced very rapid industrial growth and economic modernization [18, p. 1136].

In Vietnam, the youth volunteers played an important role in the battles. Vietnamese revolutionaries did more than use gender as a code through which to discuss the penetration of their society by the French. They appealed directly to women to participate in the struggle to liberate their country, promising them, in return, equal political, social, and economic rights and status under a new regime. These appeals attracted women who felt oppressed by the old regime. Vietnamese women seeking equality found revolutionaries to be the only group in their society willing to commit themselves to achieving it. It is not surprising that so many responded by joining the movement [21, p. 39]. During the French-American War (1945–1954), women used Confucian subservience⁶, gender-determined dress, and traditional roles to supply local soldiers, gather intelligence, and resist the French army [1, p. 7]. And then, through the Vietnam War (1954–1975), Vietnamese women who actively participated in battle were known as the “long-haired warriors.” They asserted that “when war comes, even women must fight,” which was a phrase they carried with them throughout the war [19, p. 167]. The long-haired warriors tackled responsibilities for camouflaging anti-aircraft guns and supplying clothing, food, and drink to the battlefield. They were also prepared to defend villagers from the U.S. army. In addition, many women were directly involved in the war through their participation in the Youth Volunteer Units. They worked as female doctors and nurses along the Hồ Chí Minh Trail in South Vietnam, which was constructed largely by Vietnamese women from the North. Those women embraced their roles and felt liberated from their domesticated lives. Whereas they were brought up to be submissive

and take care of the home, their participation in battle allowed them to express themselves in ways they had never experienced [6, p. 114]. By joining the war, Vietnamese women proved that they could expand on their role in society and redefine traditional roles that were deeply ingrained.

The struggle would also include the diverse voices and motivations of the women who chose to participate directly in the war. The women also recognised that the war was also a chance for them to have more women's rights and improve their status in society. They argued that the men were allowed to go to the army, but the women had no right to register. Now, young volunteer teams were recruited, and it was considered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "They desired to show that they were worthy and able to do things like men" [16, p. 148]. It is clear that young women saw the war as a chance to improve their position in the family and society and implemented equal rights for men and women.

The fact that women joined in the wars as soldiers could be momentum to secure their positions as citizens, apart from the recognition that "women are beings protected by men" and that "the women's participation in the wars as soldiers was a golden opportunity for women to attain such qualification" [11, p. 96]. The military roles of women prompted them to embrace the ideal of serving their country and prove that they could perform themselves in a fierce and tireless manner by transforming into combative soldiers.

Making use of wars to promote social status. Involving the wars led to improved educational opportunities for many Korean and Vietnamese women. Accordingly, employment options have changed, and if women do not have the same job alternatives as men, they do have more workplace opportunities. The war requested the mass mobilisation of different social groups. During the wars, with the men going off to fight, the situation was different. In wartime, they were taking what had previously been considered "men's jobs." Many attained positions as doctors, lawyers, and college professors. The war gave women the opportunity to release all ties with society and family, but at the same time, it brought about things that teenage girls could not expect.

At the beginning of the Korean War, besides the Volunteer Troops of Women, the Army also

recruited women for administrative personnel. They worked as telephone operators, interpreters, typists, and clerks. When the conflict became more complex and males were mostly serving in the military, the demand for women's labour in factories and businesses soared. The number of women participating in "official and free business" suddenly jumped from 24,454 in 1949 to 182,048 in 1951 as a result of the recruitment of female labour in public fields [11, p. 104]. Korean women also made substantial progress in other sectors. Their participation in agriculture and fishing rose from 2,544,335 in 1949 to 4,967,733 in 1951 [11, p. 105]. Women worked more frequently in manufacturing and other fields of trade. The number of women labourers in the manufacturing sector climbed from 28,872 in 1949 to 84,892 in 1951, and in transportation, the number increased from 1,845 in 1949 to 30,490 in 1951. Particularly in the area of business, they noticeably increased from 81,204 in 1949 to 593,264 in 1951, an increase of around 7.3 times [11, p. 105]. There might be various reasons for Korean women to come out of their home boundaries and the main reason was to not only earn a livelihood for the family but also seek womanpower in a Confucian society.

In many cases, the large majority of the Vietnamese Women Youth Volunteer Forces were female volunteers between sixteen and twenty years old when they joined; some were even younger. Members had diverse backgrounds. Most were from agricultural communities, whether coming from farmers' families or former landlords' families. Also there were students from middle and vocational schools, children of cadres, women belonging to ethnic minorities, and youth from overseas Vietnamese families returning home, as well as Christians, nuns, and monks. Most came from poor families in rural areas of northern Vietnam. For instance, the youth volunteer force No. 51 of Hanoi Unit was established on February 12, 1967, and had over 400 members, of which 72 percent were female, over 80 percent were under twenty years old, and 78% came from rural or suburban regions [16, p. 131]. Another example is group No. 609 of the General Department of Railways Unit; this team consisted of 140 women and only three men, most of whom were farmers ageing from eighteen to twenty-two years old [10, p. 87].

These young women's motivations, regardless of class or ethnicity, seemed simple and clear, at least at a glance. Many women became involved in the war because of their desire to protect their families and communities. Besides these conventional narratives, there were more complex and diverse factors. For young women who belong to ethnic minorities, participation in the war also created a chance to get rid of the constraints of being backward and being forced to marry at an early age or marry the person with whom they did not fall in love. Nông Thị Mùn (Lào Cai), an 18-year-old illiterate youth bound by many backward practices, was determined to join the youth volunteers on May 19, 1966, belonging to the 991 company, the 99 Lao Cai team [16, p. 227]. Actually, similar dynamics can be found not just among ethnic minority women but among women in general. As in other societies during the Second World War, many Vietnamese women accidentally gained the chance to get more rights and opportunities and to improve their status in society. Thus, as in the case of ethnic minorities, for some women, joining volunteer forces was a chance to improve their position in their families, communities, and society.

There would be many young women who came from socially disrespectful backgrounds and devotedly registered to participate in the war to change society's view of who they were. In the past, young people who were children of landlord families, overseas Vietnamese, and religious communities did not have chances to be recruited into the army. When the war happened, they saw the opportunity to volunteer to contribute to their country, giving other people another view of themselves and gaining a higher position in society. Nguyễn Thị Liễu is an example. When she volunteered to join the volunteer force, she was turned down because she was the landlord's daughter. She insisted on devoting her life to the youth volunteers for serving soldiers, and only two months later, she was accepted because of her outstanding achievements [24, p. 336]. Another woman gave a similar reason for joining the war: Nguyễn Thị Nậy was the daughter of a soldier who had served in the French colonial army. Her childhood was bound by her father's records, and then she set the target of joining the military to erase her family's social component. She was recruited to Unit 76, belonging to Quảng

Binh youth volunteers, and then was awarded a certificate of merit for the third-class victory [16, p. 226].

In fact, quite a few women were able to find new lives after leaving their villages and joining the volunteer forces. For example, the Unit No. 551 volunteer force, which belonged to Hà Tĩnh Transport Company, was composed of 120 volunteers, with 82 women among them. When they joined, some were still illiterate and had to ask someone else to write their names on their applications. Yet, after joining the team, they were able to read and write and continue their education. In fact, after three terms of service, five members enrolled in universities, twelve went abroad for study, nine continued learning at secondary schools, and fifteen at elementary schools [16, p. 111]. According to Vietnamese statistics of the former Youth Volunteer Union, roughly a half of young volunteers in the period of 1965–1968 were illiterate, but just a few years later, the number of illiterate volunteers reduced to only two percent. By the same token, after completing their tasks, more than 11,000 members gained access to higher education; among those, 650 members studied overseas [25, p. 88]. Women also had the chance to perform more skilled and specialised work. They replaced men as physicians and public-health personnel, jobs that only a few women had held before the war. By 1969, women comprised 33 percent of skilled workers and scientific cadres. Altogether, women made up 60 to 80 percent of the working force in the North, labouring in the fields, factories, and offices. They also taught in universities and worked for the government [20, p. 117].

As such, it is reasonable to say that the war (and volunteer forces) created opportunities for young women to change their lives. If they stayed at home in their villages, it was hard for them to have access to higher education, and they were not able to transform their social positions from farmers to workers or intellectuals. The war liberated them from the bamboo gate of their village.

Conclusion. The topic of women and war is a tremendously complex and colourful one that depends on each nation and community. The war happened to create opportunities for a search for their positions in society beyond the household and beyond their traditional roles as mothers and

wives. All of these emotions, excitements, and fears offer a vivid picture of the fates of young Asian women during the cruel conflicts. In a conventional approach, Korean and Vietnamese women were often seen as “victims” or “heroines” of national liberation. However, by participating in the war, young women actively took these opportunities to find new social roles beyond traditional roles as mothers and wives, as well as new “selves” that could erase who they were. The work revitalises the everyday lives of women in Korea and Vietnam, both of which were potential flashpoints in the Cold War. It is of immense significance as the key to unearthing the traits of the war. There is more to be done, particularly because the wars also had a bearing on a kind of civil war. From these perspectives, the paper could draw a wide picture of the lives of ordinary people in Asia during the Cold War. It reveals accounts of why they joined the armed forces and what kinds of personal and emotional feelings they had during the wars. The paper devotes considerable space to Korean and Vietnamese women’s voices during the most turbulent period in Asian history. It also seeks to preserve the feelings and enthusiasm of a generation that has suffered through war. Naturally, wars at any time, in any territory or country, mean losses and sad stories. The conflicts in Vietnam and Korea are very different, but they have similar issues. In divided countries, ordinary citizens suffered losses and separation most of all. Please remember that in Korea nowadays, many relatives have no chance to visit each other before they die. Therefore, it is necessary to offer more valuable insights into the experiences of ordinary people during the Cold War and the division.

NOTES

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² The Cold War was defined in terms of the structure of international relations as the rivalry between the United States-led Western liberal democratic bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern communist bloc, which shaped the basic structure of international relations.

³ During the period from 1954 to 1975, Vietnam was divided into two parts: The North was under the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, supported by the Soviet Union. The South

was under the government of the Republic of Vietnam, backed by the United States. Similar to that, the Korean peninsula was divided into two zones at the 38th parallel and formed two states with opposed political, economic, and social systems: the Republic of Korea was backed by the United States, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was backed by the Soviet Union. Historical experiences between the various regions of Vietnam as well as Korea let women from different parts of the country have diverse experiences during the war. The experiences of women from the northern and central regions differ from those in the south. Even in each region, women who supported the government had different experiences from those who discouraged it.

⁴ The period from 1954 to 1975 in Vietnamese history has been described in various terms by scholars. In Vietnam, the war has been called the “Anti-American Resistance War,” the “Second Indochina War,” the “Vietnamese Civil War,” and “the Vietnam War.” For this paper, I will simply use the term “Vietnam War.”

⁵ During the Vietnam War, with the massive engagement of U.S. troops and the escalation of the war in 1965, the Central Committee of the Vietnam Youth Union launched campaigns that encouraged its members to take part in the national struggle for unification. Under full-scale war, transportation of food, weapons, and ammunition became some of the most dangerous duties that needed a significant amount of manpower. Furthermore, due to intensive U.S. bombardment, many roads, ferries, and bridges were destroyed and, thus, needed to be repaired. As such, in May 1965, the Ninth Conference of the Central Committee Executive Committee decided to organise the teams of volunteer forces. Following this, on June 21, 1965, the Youth Volunteer Forces were officially established under a directive issued by the Prime Minister.

⁶ In Confucian patriarchy, women must obey unconditionally her father’s decisions when she was young, her husband’s decisions when she married, and her eldest son’s decisions when her husband died.

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