



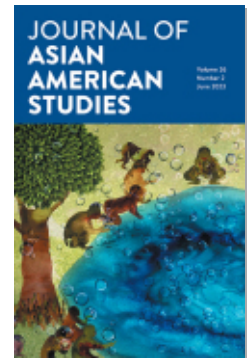
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Warring Visions: Photography and Vietnam by Thy Phu (review)

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Journal of Asian American Studies, Volume 26, Number 2, June 2023,
pp. 287-289 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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identities that reclaim Korean heritage and Zainichi communities” through acts of heroism (77). This chapter persuasively engages rhetoric around systemic, racist disadvantages against working-class whites as well as model minority discourses about Japanese assimilation into dominant cultures. University courses which teach either film would benefit from assigning these chapters for discussion.

Indeed, *Whitewashing the Movies* has powerful and memorable arguments in the final chapters, such as when Oh states that “White-dominated media culture has asserted that not only do White lives matter but that White lives are all that matter” (110). Chapter 6’s focus on Yellow Peril filmmaking and the white savior trope in *Dragonball Evolution* (2009) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017), combined with Oh’s breaking down of the unidirectionality of cross-racial casting and the power of fan backlash and box-office flops in the conclusion, is engaging and important. Oh’s work is fearless and mostly hopeful, but sometimes feels tragic as he concedes that structural racism and postracial color blindness are powerful trends in Hollywood that make this dream of race-conscious casting and the deconstruction of racial essentialism hard to see as viable futures. However, that doesn’t stop Oh as he offers strategies for better understanding whitewashing so that we have a “better chance of dismantling it” (159). Ultimately, Oh’s imaginative scholarship is provocative, optimistic, and generous in its willingness to rethink theory and practice for a new era of Hollywood.

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***Warring Visions: Photography and Vietnam*, by Thy Phu. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022. viii + 237 pp. \$102.95 cloth. ISBN 978-1-4780-1036-4; \$26.95 paper. ISBN 978-1-4780-1075-3.**

In 2014, the International Festival of Photojournalism (*Visa pour l’image*) held in Perpignan, France, displayed an exhibition of wartime pictures taken by North Vietnamese photographers. Among other eye-catching images, the cocurator Patrick Chauvel featured Đoàn Công Tính’s 1966 piece capturing Vietnamese soldiers’ black silhouettes climbing a steep cliff with a rope on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. A scandal erupted the next year, when the Danish photojournalist Jørn Stjerneklar revealed that the picture had been “photoshopped” with a picturesque waterfall as the background. The photographer as well as the organizers were accused of compromising journalistic ethics, and Tính’s name and work were deleted from the festival’s official website. But “what might such manipulation

mean for the historical record and for the politics of memory?" (79), Thy Phu's *Warring Visions* provocatively asks. American audiences learn about the Vietnam War through certain images like the naked girl (Kim Phuc) running from a napalm explosion and the Viet Cong officer (Bay Lop) being shot in the head, but such iconic photos of spectacular violence tell the story of the "Vietnam War," not the "American War" that the Vietnamese lived through. Audiences today would no longer see the camera as a transparent representational apparatus, but Phu urges her readers to go one step further in looking at war photography. "For a broader perspective on war," she writes, "we need to expand 'war photography' beyond the narrow parameters defined by the Western press" (11). By zooming in on photographic practices of retouching, staging, imperfection, and ordinariness, Thy Phu's *Warring Visions* offers a visual counterarchive of the war in Vietnam.

The book's titular concept, warring visions, denotes Phu's endeavor to shed light on the political and performative angle of the deployment of photography. With this concept, she explores "how Vietnamese communities actively enlisted images to project aesthetic and ideological positions, the stakes of which were nothing less than legitimizing competing claims to the nation" (15). Phu's perspective goes beyond the spatially and temporally restricted concept of the "Vietnam War." The war in Vietnam constitutes "a watershed in visual history," she argues, "because it shaped the ways that spectators, located mainly in the global North, look at and think about images" (8). Building on the works of Sylvia Chong, Nina Hien, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Christina Schwenkel, among others, the critical lens of *Warring Visions* challenges our apertures that continue to be reduced by Cold War optics.

The book contains two parts that respectively focus on communist North Vietnam and diasporic Vietnam primarily from the South. Chapter 1 questions the relationship between photography and revolution by scrutinizing The Democratic Republic of Vietnam's representational practices. Drawing on Chinese art historian Xiaobing Tang's work, Phu shows how "socialist ways of seeing" emerged in local Vietnam within an international network of visual exchange. For revolutionary artists, imperfection due to short supply was sublimated into a part of their style. Phu traces the rise and fall of the revolutionary power of North Vietnamese visual politics, from overtly fictional utopian images printed in the magazine *Vietnam Pictorial* to the post-Đổi Mới late socialists' inclination to prefer more tamed images. Chapter 2 documents how Vietnamese, both socialist and republican, strove to control the symbolic meaning of the figure of revolutionary women, and links these wartime representational strategies in Vietnam to a critique of US feminism. Though North American women's antiwar activists showed a willingness to form solidarity with North Vietnamese, the latter's strategy to aggressively represent and disseminate the image of a "girl with a gun" did not conform to the former's mild taste and gender code. "The

fact that Vietnamese women went to war unsettled liberal beliefs about women's ostensibly 'natural' pacifism" (105), Phu observes. The transpacific circulation of militarized Vietnamese women foregrounds the spectrum from liberal to radical feminism, which invites questions about the relationality between women and warfare and the cultural politics thereof.

Part two focuses on the South Vietnamese who, after the war, were compelled to destroy or abandon their wartime photographs because they "fought for the wrong side." For the diasporic Vietnamese who had to flee their home country, memory, reenactment, and archiving became crucial political issues. Chapter 3 briefly revisits the issue of staging in Nguyễn Ngọc Hạnh's photo book *Vietnam in Flames* (1968) and analyzes An-My Lê's acclaimed *Small Wars* (1999–2002), a photo series that captures Vietnam War reenactors in Virginia. By situating her own female Vietnamese body as an enemy within compositions, Lê creates a disturbing tension between sympathetic collaboration with and critical betrayal of white male American reenactors. Her work provides "a cultural form for the transmission of postmemory," Phu argues, "in a process that unfolds privately and publicly, with personal and interpersonal resonances" (145). Chapter 4 analyzes orphaned, "unhomed" family photos—ones sold in vintage shops in Vietnam, refugee ID photos, military academy photo albums, and so on—of the Vietnamese diaspora, including Phu's own. Against the North-South bifurcation of country and its families, diasporic Vietnamese assemble dispersed photographs and thereby redefine, broaden, and sometimes queer the definition of family. As Dinh Q. Lê's works and Phu's own co-project Family Camera Network demonstrate, the act of collecting itself is a cultural and political action for diasporic Vietnamese.

Though Phu repeatedly emphasizes how personal and limited her perspective is, the scope of *Warring Visions* reaches far beyond Vietnam. The American War has not ended for the Vietnamese, nor for other fractured nations that were forced to serve as a proxy battlefield of the global Cold War. But the framework of "warring visions" empowers us not only to historicize enduring hostility but also to imagine and discuss the end of it by scrutinizing photography. In the epilogue, Phu features a picture of Vietnamese women embracing at the news of the end of the war in 1975. "Warring visions persist even when the war has ended," she writes, "and do so alongside attempts at reconciliation" (188). When it comes to critiquing the long Cold War, evoking images of peace can become a radical gesture. Through expanding our visual horizons, Phu's book critically updates the ways we look at photography, war, and history.

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