

Summer Screenshots:
Hot Nights+Cold War

Historical Context for

*Journey from the
Fall*

August 12, 2020



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FOR AN ONLINE FILM AND DISCUSSION SERIES
EXPLORING THE COLD WAR IN ASIA

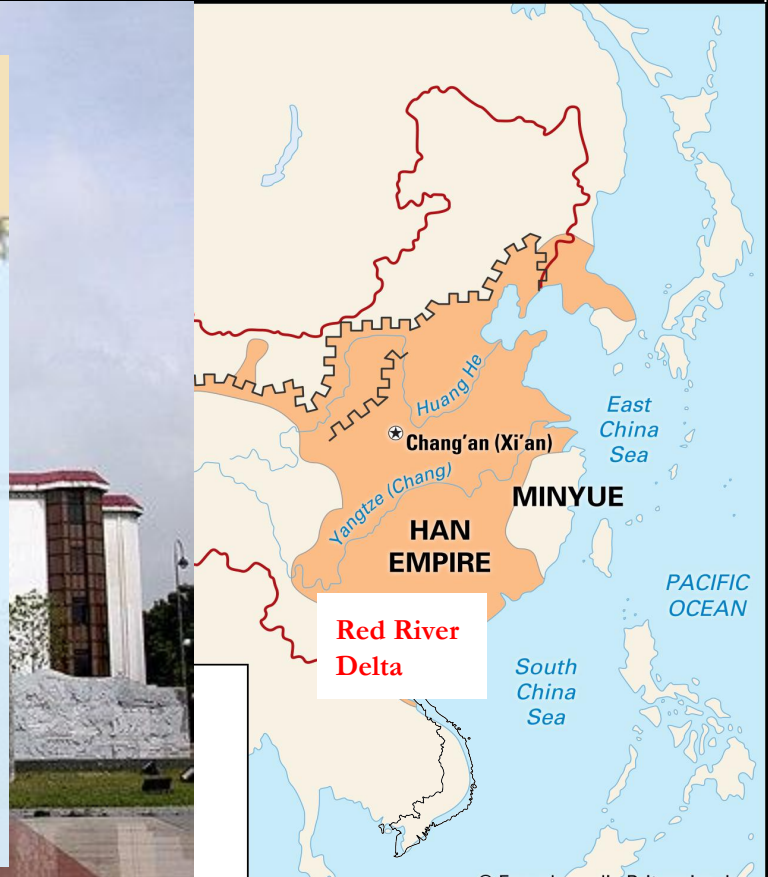
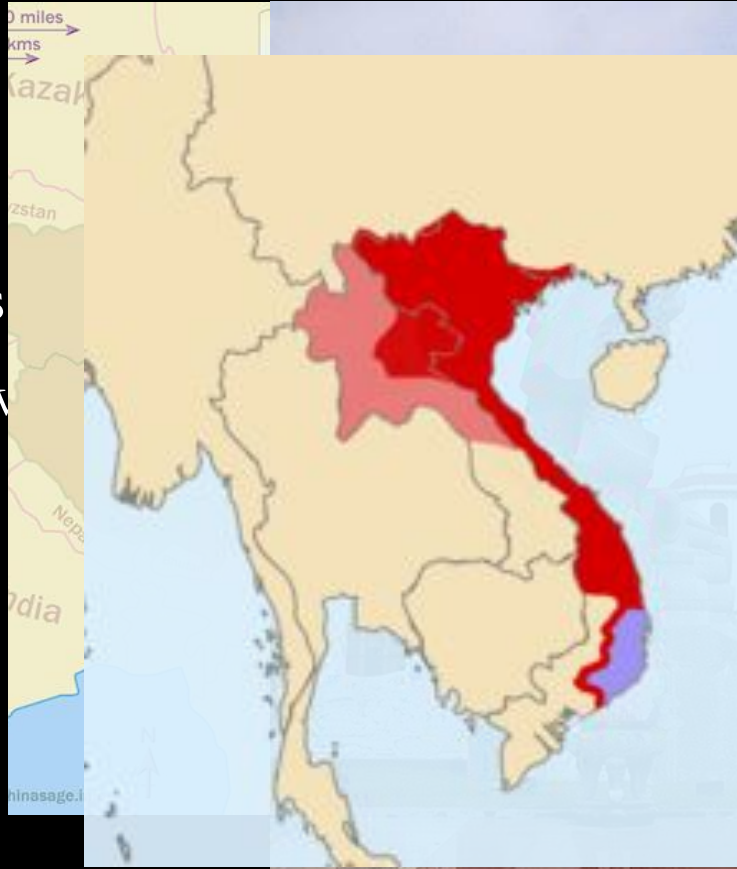
WEDNESDAY AUGUST 12

JOURNEY FROM THE FALL

(VIETNAM, HAM TRAN, 2006)

SCREENING @ 5:30 PM | DISCUSSION @ 8 PM EDT
WITH FILMMAKER HAM TRAN

China's
Red River
Le Loi





Red River
Delta



- Indochina
- French
- Mekong
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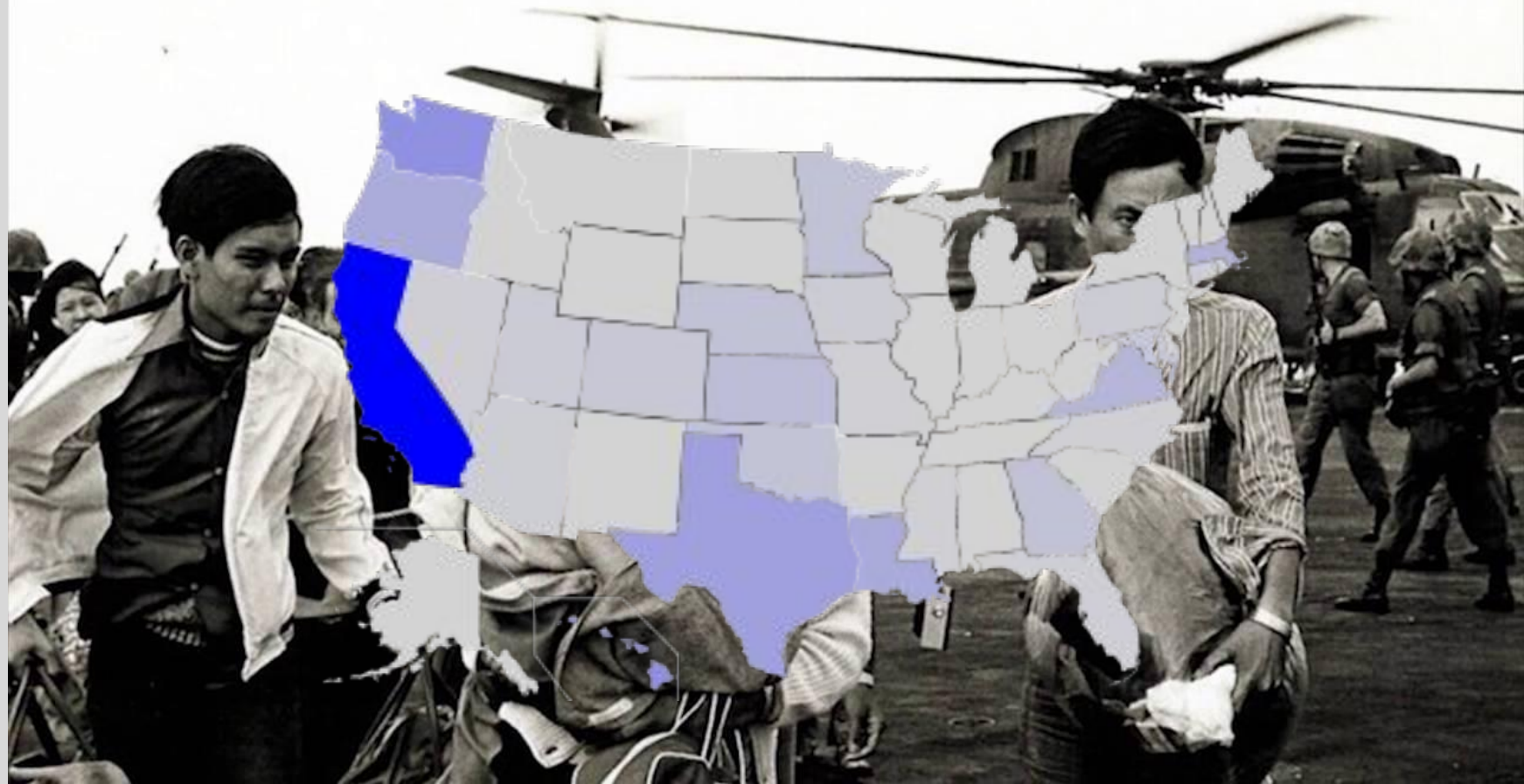
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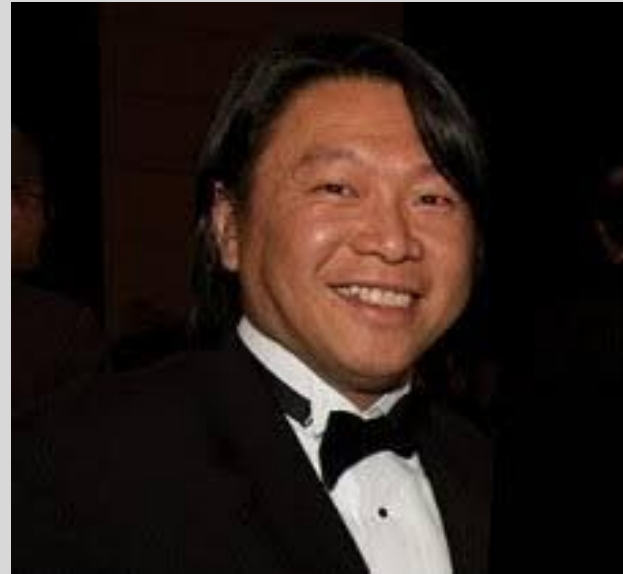


About the director, Ham Tran

Profiled recently in the PBS series, “Asian Americans,” part 4 “Generation Rising.”

Tran cast non-actors from the Vietnamese community in supporting roles in *Journey from the Fall*.

Tran and his team interviewed about 400 people to tell their story of Vietnam and their lives after the war.



Curriculum Ideas:

1. Vietnamese Communist Re-education Camps (grades 9-12)

2. The “Fall” in *Journey from the Fall* (grades 7-12)

3. The Legend of Le Loi and kite-flying as representations of Vietnamese history and culture (grades K-5)

Historical Timeline of Vietnam

2nd c. BCE

Invasion of Red River delta by China's Han dynasty

15th c. CE

Expansionist Ming dynasty defeated by Le Loi; Le dynasty ushered in.

1955

After defeating France in Indochina War, Vietnam divided at the 17th parallel at Geneva Convention

1975

Saigon falls to Vietminh & Vietcong. US troops leave Vietnam.

1975-1993

More than 1 million Vietnamese are sent to re-education camps.

10th c. CE

Vietnamese rebel against waning T'ang dynasty; win independence

Late 19th c.

French colonize Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, naming it Indochina

1950s-60s

US Cold War foreign policy sends US troops to Vietnam; shooting war begins.

1975-1995,

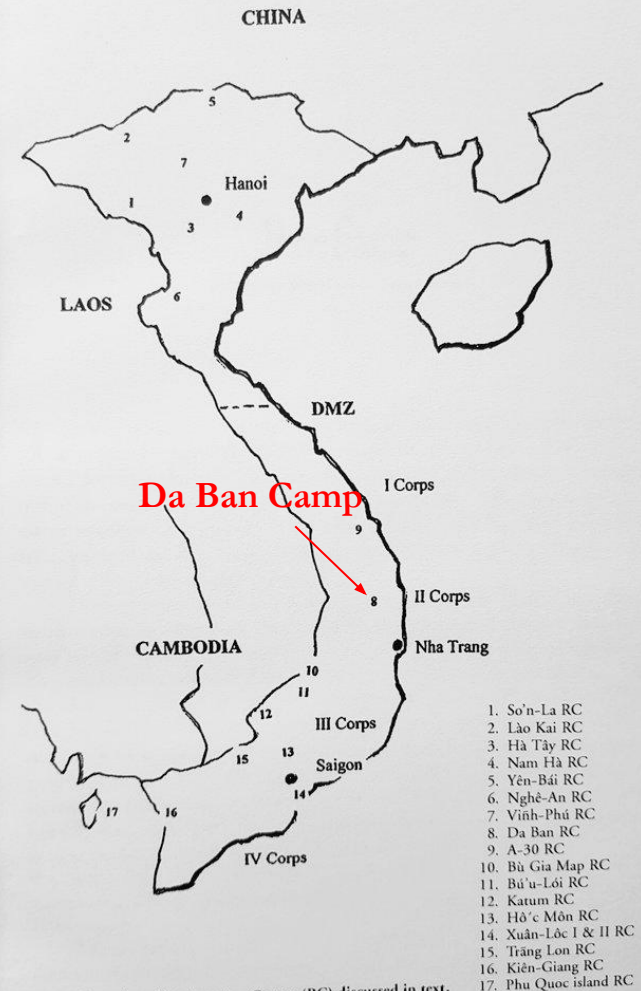
Vietnamese refugees flee Vietnam, with nearly 1 million ultimately arriving in U.S.

Inside the Da Ban re-education camp, *Journey from the Fall*

(6:53) “We know you were a high-ranking officer. You don’t have to write anymore self evaluations. We already know about all your crimes. You sided with the American imperialists, waged war against the revolutionaries. You’re a traitor to your country, to your own people.” --Communist officer at Da Ban re-education camp

“Death is nothing. The day Saigon fell is my memorial.” --Long, during interrogation.

Map Source: “The Bamboo Gulag,” by Nghia M. Vo.



Map 1. Location of Reeducation Camps (RC) discussed in text.

Classroom Activity for Re-Education Camps

- Consider assigning your class in groups or individually to read each of the following sub-sections, “Registration and Arrest,” “Camp Conditions,” “Camp Routine,” “Labor is Glory,” “Rules and Punishment,” “The Prisoners and their Families,” and “Release Policy,” on the website: <https://indomemoires.hypotheses.org/2388>
- Ask students to present or write a summary of their assigned reading in a paragraph, and then have them do research about other human detainment camps throughout history, from the concentration camps of the Holocaust to the Japanese internment camps in the United States, to the detention of the Uyghurs in China today. Have students compare and contrast the conditions in Vietnam’s re-education camps with these camps in an essay or class discussion.

Vietnamese Communist Re-education Camps

The Choices Program, Brown University

“After the Fall of Saigon on April 30th, 1975, every South Vietnamese man, from former officers in the armed forces, to religious leaders, to employees of the Americans or the old government, were told to report to a re-education camp to “learn about the ways of the new government.” Many South Vietnamese men chose to flee on boats, but others had established lives and loved ones in Vietnam, so they willingly entered these camps in hopes of quickly reconciling with the new government and continuing their lives peacefully. According to my father, the government said re-education would only last for ten days, and at most two weeks. However, once there, the men were detained for many years in grueling labor camps.” --Quyen Truong

<https://www.choices.edu/curriculum-catalog/vietnamese-re-education-camps-brief-history/>

(Consider using The Choices Program as a resource for your class instruction, as well.)

The “Fall in *Journey from the Fall*”

Consider the varied possible meanings of “the Fall.”

- The actual waterfall that Long and his comrade tried to reach to demarcate their freedom.
- The fall of Vietnam, and the journey taken by Long’s family beyond that harrowing moment.
- The emotional and physical toll taken on Long and his family. Long endures torture and ultimately death at the hands of his “re-educators” in the labor camps of Vietnam. After a harrowing escape by sea, Mai, her mother-in-law, Ba Noi, and son, Lai, attempt to begin life anew in southern California without Long, and are left to mourn their separation from him.

The “Fall” in *Journey from the Fall*

Go over the following three slides (starting after this slide) with quotes from each of the movie scenes below and then answer the questions in a class discussion or writing assignment.

Scene	Long at waterfall	Boat Scene	Orange County, CA
Questions	How has Long arrived at this moment? Reading the accompanying quotes, how has Long set himself apart from his captors? Why do you think the director chose to show a kite-flying scene and Long’s son, Lai’s, drawings floating away at the moment Long dies?	What challenges has Mai and her family faced to come to this point in the boat? What is meant by Mai’s conversation about the Moon Festival? Discuss the pirate attack scene--what would you do?	What challenges have Mai, her son, Lai, and mother-in-law faced in their new lives in America? What successes have they achieved? Discuss the principal’s quote? Do you think he truly understands? Why or why not?

Long's attempted escape from the re-education camp



(1:05)“If you had killed her, you would be just like them.”--Long to his comrade during their escape from the camps after they make contact with a village woman by accident.

“No matter what happens, I have to get this book back to my son.”--Long speaking of his son, Lai's, book of drawings.

When Long dies at the waterfall (1:13), the film cuts to scenes of kite-flying and then scenes of Lai's drawings floating away.

Those Who Left: Escape by boat

It is estimated that up to 1.5 million refugees escaped Vietnam, but that about 10 percent died from drowning, piracy, dehydration, or otherwise never made landfall.

By 1979, over 350,000 boat people sought refuge throughout Southeast Asia, with another 200,000 receiving permanent residency in other countries. The United States accepted roughly 1 million Vietnamese refugees overall from 1975-2000.

Source: United Nations Human Rights Commission

(1:07)“Today is the Moon Festival. I wonder if the young ones will miss Vietnam the way we do.” --Mai, on boat.

(1:10) No! I beg of you! Oh God, no! Please, God! Don't let them take my daughter! Don't take her away! My baby! Take me, not her.”--Phuong's mother, as pirates attack boat.

Those Who Left: Orange County, California, 1981

(1:16:45) “We feel your grandson has an emotional problem. He hasn’t made any effort to make friends and he doesn’t take his classes seriously. Today he drew this as his Father’s Day present. And after school he was caught fighting with three Mexican boys. You know, Mrs. Nguyen, I know what you must have gone through to come to this country. My own grandparents were Irish immigrants.”

In the aftermath of the war, Vietnamese refugees arrived to the United States in three distinct waves:

- The first wave was comprised of military and government employees who were middle class, urban residents of Vietnam, and were more educated and proficient in English than those who left Vietnam later.
- The second wave of Vietnamese refugees came from rural areas, were comparably less educated, did not speak English or were less proficient in English than the first wave. This is the group that mostly settled in California.
- The third wave was comprised of political prisoners, ethnic Chinese, Vietnamese, and others.

Source: https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAILEFILES_FINAL.pdf

Extended meaning questions

1. What is the meaning of “Fall” in each particular scene?
2. How has your study of the Vietnam War impacted your understanding of each scene?
(assuming you are studying the Vietnam War)

The Legend of Le Loi

- Le Loi was a real king and revolutionary, whose 15th century reign in Annam (later Vietnam) began a 360 year long dynasty.
- Le Loi was 20 years old when the Chinese Ming dynasty invaded Annam in 1406. He began a 10 year campaign to defeat a much larger and better equipped Chinese army.
- Le Loi's comrade, Le Lai, sacrificed his life to the Chinese forces so that Le Loi could escape. Le Loi ordered that Le Lai be memorialized for his loyalty and friendship.
- Eventually, Le Loi's revolt was successful, and the Chinese were vanquished from Amman, gaining Vietnam its independence until French rule in the 19th century.

The Legend of the Golden Turtle God

- “The legend has many versions. According to one, a fisherman caught a sword blade and sold it to Le Loi. The sword was inscribed with the words "Thuan Thien," meaning "according to heaven's will." Le Loi later found a handle that fit the blade perfectly. The discovery inspired Le Loi to gather up men to fight the Chinese. When the country was liberated, Le Loi crowned himself king and settled in what is now the capitol of Vietnam, Ha Noi.
- One day, as King Le Loi was taking a leisure boat trip on a lake in the capital, the Golden Turtle God appeared from the lake. Le Loi drew his sword, but it magically slipped out of his grip, flew to the Golden Turtle God who caught it, nodded to the king, and dove away.
- After that, King Le Loi ordered the lake renamed Hoan Kiem, or "Returned Sword." The lake is still in the center of Ha Noi, and ancient turtles estimated to be hundreds of years old still live in it.”

Source:

<http://www.journeyfromthefall.com/Legend.aspx#:~:text=Le%20Loi%20is%20a%20real.rule%20over%20the%20Annamese%20people.>

Classroom Applications for the Legend of Le Loi

Discuss with students the topic of legends. Why are they written? What purpose do they serve? Have students talk about other legends they know about and what meaning or purpose they serve.

Read some versions of the legend of Le Loi (see two below) and discuss its meaning and purpose, especially as it relates to the film, *Journey from the Fall*.

<https://www.vietvisiontravel.com/post/the-lake-of-the-restored-sword/>

<http://www.travelingthruhistory.com/turtle-tower/>

Compare and contrast it with other legends, such as King Arthur and Excalibur.

<https://www.storiestogrowby.org/story/king-arthur-and-the-legend-of-the-sword-in-the-stone-stories-for-kids/>

Ask students to share their comparisons and contrasts and discuss as a class.

The Vietnamese tradition of kite-flying

Kite-flying is a Vietnamese tradition that dates back to the 10th century. According to the Voice of Vietnam

(<https://vovworld.vn/en-US/sunday-show/vietnams-thousandyearold-kitemaking-village-366485.vov>),

“The elderly say once upon a time when heaven and earth were close, heaven’s fairies often came down to attend earth’s festivals. But one day, the heaven rose higher and higher. The fairies couldn’t come down. People on earth made kites as a way to restore contact with the heaven. People attached bamboo flutes to the kites to call the fairies to the earth’s festivals.”

Kites are said to be a symbol of yin-yang, connecting heaven and earth. Yin-yang represents the ancient Chinese belief in dualism or the harmony that opposing forces can create when combined together.

Kite-flying has also traditionally been a way for the Vietnamese to send their prayers for good weather and abundant crops to the sky.

Classroom Applications for Kite-flying

- 1.) Watch the very beginning and very end of *Journey from the Fall*, which both show kite-flying. Discuss as a class who is flying the kites in the beginning of the film and who is flying them at the end. What does flying the kites symbolize? What message might the director be conveying through the use of kite-flying in these opening and closing scenes of the film.
- 2.) When Long dies, the scene switches to kites flying in the sky (1:13). Discuss with students why those images are included in the scene. What do the kites represent?
- 3.) Have students make their own kites and write messages (wishes, hopes) to attach on to them. Fly the kites and share pictures and stories of the experience. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0FeNdB2GDY>

Sources

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<https://www.choices.edu/curriculum-catalog/vietnamese-re-education-camps-brief-history/>

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