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[ti]Two deaths and a funeral:

Ritual inscriptions' affordances for mourning and moral personhood in Vietnam

[ab]Mortuary rituals constitute the social nature of death and mourning, often working to ease painful transitions for the deceased and bereaved. In Vietnam, such rituals involve objects, including commodified yet personalized text-artifacts like banners and placards bearing inscriptions in various scripts that are associated with various affects and different political-economic regimes. The material, orthographic, semantic, spatial, and temporal organization of these text-artifacts mobilize sentiments and structure ethical relations at a funeral. Together, they act as prescriptive affordances intended to discipline mourners' grief. Yet while these objects reflect how subjects valorize "tradition," their affective force exceeds the bounded subjunctive world fostered by ritual, and it may retrospectively limit possibilities for moral personhood. [*death*, *mourning*, *affect/emotion*, *literacy*, *ritual*, *late socialism*, *Vietnam*]

[dc]Ten days before the Vietnamese Lunar New Year (*Tết*), Bà Nội died in a freak accident in front of her home in Nha Trang.[1] An errant motorcyclist knocked her and her daughter off the sidewalk, leaving the daughter unscathed but killing Bà. Over 500 kilometers away in Đà Nẵng, where I was conducting research, Bà's daughter-in-law Hà had to drop everything and rush to her burial.

Hà's siblings quickly mobilized to support her. They rented a van and traveled with her the long distance south to participate in the funeral. Yet they were not entirely surprised by this untimely death and were even a bit resentful. Ever since Bà's middle-aged son Long died earlier that year, they reasoned, Bà had lost the will to live. The accident now interrupted their busy preparations for the *Tết* festivities and cast a dark shadow on this usually happiest of times. Quietly, in the privacy of their homes, these distant, affinal relatives in Đà Nẵng grumbled that the death was a form of retribution for Bà's faltering virtue, for she had failed to contain her grief after losing her son.

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In Vietnam, as elsewhere, grief is socially managed through rituals of mourning. These rituals typically involve objects, including commodified funerary text-artifacts such as banners and placards. These are mass-produced, sold, and gifted, and they bear generic yet personalized

inscriptions concerning the identities and feelings of the bereaved and deceased.[2] Their placement (indoor or outdoor), materiality (cloth or paper), scripts (traditional Chinese or romanized Vietnamese), and semantic content index and collectively prescribe appropriate forms of grieving that delimit affective expression to specific spaces and their associated temporal scales. When mourners fail to abide by these prescriptions, as Bà allegedly did at her son's funeral and later, the complex meanings and practices associated with *tình cảm*, or the moral sentiment-affect of care and concern for the Other that develops out of mutual affection and attachment, come into relief and expose Vietnamese cultural understandings of ethics.

Tình cảm refers to sentiments, affects, or emotions that people understand as not only arising "naturally" between kin and others but also as driving and motivating material relations of support between them.[3] It is rooted in a local model of the self as interdependent rather than independent of others, and it encompasses other forms of love, care, and concern (Gammeltoft 2014; Leshkowich 2014a; Rydstrom 2004; Shohet 2013; Tran 2015). My interlocutors describe *tình cảm* as a felt ethical imperative that spontaneously arises within their heart/guts (*lòng*) and that spurs them to display their care for social intimates through material and affective support.

The banners and placards bear inscriptions written in different scripts. These scripts call forth different temporalities and forms of historical consciousness, which can intensify or disperse feelings of loss for the

bereaved while also displaying mourners' status as moral beings who can attend lavishly to the deceased. The banners and placards thus index mourners' *tình cảm* for one another by emphasizing how mourning well implies being well: by appropriately tending to the deceased, mourners also take care of themselves and one another.

Yet efforts to contain grief can also fall short, and inappropriate (e.g., underritualized or overly prolonged) mourning can be dangerous. In practice, the boundary between public and private displays of grief is blurred, as the bereaved and their guests traverse the indoor and outdoor spaces demarcated for grieving, and as they voice affects that are normally disfavored but are now temporarily sanctioned. Here, moral conduct is a way of interacting that is not governed by a universal code but rather is context dependent; the good person is someone who has a lot of feelings but does not necessarily express them except in delimited times and spaces. Ritual inscriptions' relation to *tình cảm*, then, questions a number of binaries, including those of personal grief and communal mourning, affect and emotion, cultural formulas and deeply felt experience, and tradition and modernity.

For over a century, anthropologists have emphasized the social nature of mourning and how funerary rituals—as rites of separation, liminality, and reintegration—are supposed to work to ease the deceased's and bereaved's transitions from ordinary life to extraordinary loss and back again to the

realm of the mundane (e.g., Durkheim 1995; Hertz 1960; Van Gennep 1960). As Émile Durkheim notes, “Mourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions . . . not the natural response of a private sensibility hurt by a cruel loss. It is an obligation imposed by the group” (1995, 401) through ritual.

Of course, mourning rituals can become sites of contestation that crystallize political divisions rather than reinforce social cohesion, as Clifford Geertz (1957) shows in his memorable analysis of a funeral gone awry in Java, where rival factions accentuate their differences by refusing to carry out expected funerary rites. Ritual, then, is a locus of social drama. Unequal distributions of power and social divisions are negotiated and sometimes subverted through mourning rituals, while loss is managed by performed laments and ritual wails: these serve as conventionalized idioms for voicing grief that instantiate and reinforce gender roles and divisions while also signaling a desire for social bonds with those most aggrieved (cf. Abu-Lughod 1993; McIntosh 2005; Urban 1988; Wilce 2009).

A common assumption here is that culturally meaningful rites not only teach people how to suffer (Geertz 1957) but also ritually create new memories and forge meaningful relationships that bridge a painful past and present to engender a more hopeful future. This is because rites help mourners set aside grief and recover from loss by “creat[ing] an ideal version of what they wish the world were like” (Cole 2004, 98; see also

Desjarlais 2016; Englund 1998). And yet, as other anthropologists show (e.g., Rosaldo 1989; Wikan 1990; Garcia 2010), grief at times exceeds its ritual management, leaving some mourners in the grip of melancholia that overtakes their body and, sometimes, life.

Practices of inscription play an important role in ritually confronting loss by mediating affects. Affects are intersubjective; they do not reside in individuals but gain their force through circulation and distribution across social and psychic fields, and they are always about human and nonhuman objects to which we are attached (Ahmed 2010; Wilce 2009). Yet a strict division between affects and emotions—on the basis of Brian Massumi's claim that, unlike emotions, affects are "presubjective" (2002, 28), if not presocial—is untenable. This is because both are simultaneously embodied (viscerally felt) and mediated by multiple discursive practices and cultural ideologies. Neither can be understood as a "pure" intensity or potentiality whose origin "lies deep in the brain" (Martin 2013, S149; see also Leys 2011; Lutz and White 1986; Mazzarella 2008; Lutz 2017).

Rather than being the properties of individual persons, emotions, like affects, are cultural: they are not internal, pregiven, and objectified but rather produced communicatively and thus socially (Besnier 1990; Boellstorff and Lindquist 2004; Ochs 2012). Communicative practices like gestures, utterances, and inscriptions, then, can channel and so structure affects/emotions, serving as affordances often found in morally laden social

interactions (Keane 2014). Such affordances do not *determine* what is emoted but help articulate feelings in conventional and normative ways. Different artifacts and acts thus set the conditions of possibility and plausibility for how one ought to feel, and the sorts of sentiments or affects one might share, perform, and condone in specific settings.

In short, wherever ritual is mobilized through multisensory modalities to confront death and bereavement, mourners may use inscription, and literacy more broadly, as a technology that constitutes and helps institutionalize particular epistemologies and modes of thinking, as well as *feeling* (Ahearn 2001; Besnier 1995; Collins 1995; Ochs and Schieffelin 1989). In Vietnam such literacy objects and inscription practices index and prescribe affects that help channel participants' moral conduct in the course of a ritual process intended to transform the deceased into a benevolent ancestor. Consequential, then, are the placement of these text-artifacts, the scripts of the inscriptions, and the materials on which they are printed or embroidered. Together, they can mobilize inchoate feelings of loss and grief by providing templates for mourners to frame, manage, and possibly contain their *tình cảm*. Funerary text-artifacts thus are not mere props. Like all linguistic acts, they serve as affordances that help constitute the worlds of those who produce, view, and display them. And in Bà's case, they retrospectively serve as disciplinary objects that limit her possibilities for moral mourning.

As Analiese Richard and Daromir Rudnyckyj (2009) suggest, the affects sanctioned in different spaces often index the broader political economy of subjects' respective nations (see also Schwenkel 2013). A key backdrop here, then, is the Vietnamese socialist state's transition to a market-based economy after reforms were introduced in 1986 as part the *Đổi Mới* (Renovation) project, and how these transformations are made manifest in specific inscribed objects. To what extent do conventional, ritual objects help discipline and govern affect, and when do they reach their limits?

David Eng and David Kazanjian celebrate the productive potential of "mourning remains," or affects that exceed ritual closure and that can render a "creative process" (2003, 3) out of loss in its continued repetition. But we might instead ask, as does Angela Garcia (2010, 74), "What if the structure of [ritual] repetition creates not the working through of grief but [its] intensification? How might [it] become a constitutive force for a kind of mourning that does not end?" In Bà's case, these remains—or her "unsuccessful," endless grief—led to death. To make sense of it, I now turn not to Bà's funeral but to the event that later was narrated as having precipitated her downfall: the elaborate funerary preparations that immediately followed her son Long's unexpected death six months earlier.

Long's funeral was somewhat exceptional, since he was a privileged man belonging to a high-status family that was well-positioned to deploy

material resources and display their affiliation with the state. They accomplished this by announcing his death as a “public” loss, not just a “private” one. But other people used similar ritual practices, including inscriptions, to manage death and bereavement by broadcasting certain affects and backgrounding others. This allows the present case study to serve as an exemplar of contemporary funerals in Đà Nẵng more generally (Højer and Bandak 2015). At Long’s funeral (but also at others), mourners displayed and later destroyed certain commodified yet personalized text-artifacts as part of their effort to discipline grief and enact moral personhood. Their lavish rites using richly inscribed objects not only reinforced this mourning family’s class distinction and status but also created tensions, particularly at this time when market, state, and home could be understood as tropes or terrains that were both congruent and set in opposition.

[h1]Caring for the dead

[ni]The phone call came early on a swelteringly hot Sunday morning in July 2007: Uncle Long had suffered a fatal stroke. Barely an hour later, I followed my host sister Hồng into Hà’s living room. Long’s corpse lay flat on a bamboo cot, naked and covered only with a white sheet, an oil candle burning next to his head. Just the day before, his mother, Bà, had come to Đa Nẵng to spend the summer with her grandchildren. But now here she

was, kneeling on the floor near her son, moaning and crying inconsolably. As we made our way upstairs, I glimpsed Long's adolescent daughter sobbing quietly in her room, her head cradled in her cousin's lap. Hà, his new widow, was sprawled on the floor in another room, at times silent and still, at times weeping, drowning in tears as she recounted how she had been with her husband but he could speak, could not say a thing, he had no parting words.

Like other Vietnamese, Long's mourners considered death a dangerous time-space for both the deceased and themselves, since those not properly buried and worshipped can turn into malevolent, angry ghosts.[4] Because Long died close to home and had surviving children, his death was not as morally dangerous as others'. Still, the family did not want to risk (as they told me while carrying out other worship rites) making the ancestors "sad" (*buồn*) by skimping on their spiritual obligations and failing to display *tình cảm*. Even Long's brother-in-law, a seasoned navy veteran who usually scoffed at "superstitious" rites, agreed that they now were required to properly display piety and familial loyalty and to guarantee Long's soul a safe passage to the otherworld, in case it existed. As he explained, Long's death was "bad" (*xấu*) because he was still in the prime of life when he died suddenly and unexpectedly. For these reasons, there was no time for family members to wallow in grief. To ensure that Long could become a venerated ancestor and benevolent spirit to guard their home, they needed to fashion a

cohesive narrative, they needed to fashion a cohesive narrative about the righteous life Long had lived and the "good death" he had suffered.

[h2]*Outdoor inscriptions of Long's public persona*

[ni]This embodied narrative process began as soon as Long's corpse arrived from the hospital. The family immediately converted the living room into a sacred space for the dead and assembled an initial sum of 5 million Vietnamese đồng to carry out necessary rites (this equaled about US$300, far exceeding many people's monthly income, but it here represented only about a third of the household's combined monthly income). Within minutes after we arrived at Long's house, my host mother commanded one daughter to fetch the cash while Hồng procured a notebook with preprinted ledger columns in which she recorded all contributions to the funeral, as is customary on such occasions. As they liked to tell me, such contributions would demonstrate their *tình cảm*, since material support signifies that they care in ways that reinforce these "natural" sentiments. The process of inscribing a moral response to Long's death had thus begun.

Enacting a common gendered division of labor, women cooked and consoled those most bereaved while men hung a large black-and-white banner announcing the event above the front threshold of Long's house (see Figure 1). Printed in giant capital letters in the romanized *quốc ngữ* script—which 90 percent of the population can read thanks to widespread literacy

campaigns in 20th-century Vietnam (Nguyen and Dao 2008)—the banner read, "Condolences Ritual and Memorial Service" for "Comrade Lê Hiếu Long" (*LỄ VIẾNG VÀ TRUY ĐIỆU / Đ/C: LÊ HIẾU LONG*). The abbreviation *Đ/C*, widely used for *đồng chí* (comrade), was the first in a series of inscriptions outside the home fixing Long's sociopolitical identity within terms set by the one-party state. Beyond announcing to passersby that the household was bereaved, it also signified Long's and his family's status.[5]

[Please insert Figure 1 here]

Below this banner, on the front wall, men then hung a death notice (*cáo phó*; see Figure 2). Also addressed to the general public, this poster-sized informational placard was likewise printed in the *quốc ngữ* script. The notice's wordy, formal register and blank spaces left for dates to be filled in by hand added to the bureaucratic (mass-produced, generic) genre of the form. It implicitly located Long within this bureaucracy of relatively depersonalized, uniform feelings of regret.

[Please insert Figure 2 here]

At the entrance to the house, Long's relatives and associates hung yet another placard inscribed in the same bureaucratic genre. The placard was titled, in preprinted romanized script, "List of the Funeral Committee

Members" (*Danh Sách Ban Lễ Tang*; see Figure 3). Long's brother-in-law, known for his penmanship, had minutes earlier filled in the members' names in black ink. The funeral committee consisted of community and family members who would officiate the funeral and ensure that it proceeded smoothly. By appending each name with the person's official high-ranking work title and the letters *UV* for *ủy viên* (committee member), this placard textually anchored Long among national and entrepreneurial dignitaries, so that through his affiliates, Long was easily recognized as an important public figure and virtuous citizen. The inscribed placard thus reflected the family's conscious effort to publicly announce their status by textually linking Long to other high-status figures, who in this time of mourning and grief demonstrated their *tình cảm*. The placard effectively affirmed Long's well-being before and in death, since to be well connected in Vietnam is to enjoy many privileges and rights (Harms 2013).

[Please insert Figure 3]

Unlike spoken discourse, which is described as "a fleeting event" (Ricoeur 1971, 531), inscription (written discourse) is understood to fix events (and the affects associated with them). The banner and placards were literal inscriptions in this sense. They functioned as public texts that were repeatedly seen and read by multiple audiences, marking Long's revered public identity as an upstanding citizen of the modern, literate state.

In addition, the death notice (Figure 2) linked the past and future to the present, serving as a fixed announcement of what *was happening* (*Gia đình chúng tôi vô cùng thương tiếc báo tin*, “Our family extremely regretfully announces”); a fixed story of what had happened (*Ông Lê Hiếu Long sinh năm 1960, đã tử trần vào lúc: 7 giờ 30 ngày 15 tháng 7 năm 2007 [nhằm ngày 02 tháng 6 năm đinh hợi ÂL] hưởng dương: 48 tuổi*, “Mr. Lê Hiếu Long, born in 1960, died at 7:30 a.m. on 15 July 2007 [2nd day of the 6th month, year of the Pig], having reached age 48”); and a fixed plan for what *would happen*, as enumerated on the placard’s “Funeral Program” (*Chương Trình Lễ Tang*). This consisted of a preprinted schedule in list form that outlined a series of ceremonial events that would culminate in the interment of Long’s body three days later. The public and family repeatedly consulted this placard, which they followed precisely and even punctually.

The death notice schedule further worked as an affectively prescriptive future-oriented subjunctive *story* (Bruner 1986; Good and Good 1994; Samuels, forthcoming). The coda at the bottom is especially telling. It stipulated in italics: “During the funeral period, in the bereaved family’s confusion, if mistakes occur, please kindly forgive” (*Trong lúc tang gia bối rối, nếu có điều gì sai sót xin niệm tình tha thứ*). This plea anticipates possible trouble and postulates a desired solution. It appeals to others’ indulgence and so provides a “model of the world” (Bruner 2002, 34) not only as it could and should be but also as it might not be. The simple

insertion of the conditional *nếu* (if), authorizes and justifies the possibility of transgressing norms: confusion due to the overflowing of emotion that is usually unsanctioned but now warranted. Compassion is the appropriate response to those who fail to act properly at a time of overwhelming grief, although, as we shall see, kind forbearance was restricted to the space and time of funerary mourning.

The plea for forbearance can also be read as a general attempt to forestall open and emotionally wrought contestation over how to carry out the ritual actions, since it is not uncommon for painful arguments to erupt among the bereaved over what constitutes "proper" action. When different parties claim that their way is the correct and "traditional" way to organize the funerary proceedings (cf. Geertz 1957), they engender rupture rather than the desired harmonious mutual support (*tình cảm*). Acting as a public plea, the banner thus worked to ratify and forestall normally disfavored emotional expressions.

[h2]*Indoor inscriptions of Long's familial persona*

[ni]In contrast to these text-artifacts posted outside the house, which used the national romanized script, inside the house the text-artifacts and the story they told were more hybrid. So were the more personalized affects they conjured, as evidenced by many mourners' bouts of overwhelming tearful sobs when they entered Long's home. The coffin in the living room

was surrounded by both standard inscriptions printed with the same uniform message, *VÔ CÙNG THƯƠNG TIẾC* ("Endless loving regrets/grief"; see Figures 1 and 4), addressed to the late Long and admired by his survivors, and yellow calligraphic inscriptions embroidered on red cloth (see Figure 1) intended to mark his coming ascent to the status of ancestor.

[Please insert Figure 4 here]

The embroidered objects were distributed across three adjoining panels flanking Long's altar, where his portrait, incense, and other ritual implements underscored their sacred and affective quality. Using a highly poetic formal register (like Shakespearean English for today's readers), they bore the inscription "A farewell send-off ceremony to commemorate [your] early departure from earth, to grieve [your] passing away and being gone for eternity" (*Ngàn thu khuất bong đời thường tiếc, thiên thu vĩnh biệt, một sớm lìa trần hội tiễn đữa*).

This altar banner (see Figure 1) sported a new script that had only just appeared in the last decade in Vietnam. It was designed to resemble the now-defunct *chữ Nôm*, or Sino-Vietnamese script developed by literati 13 centuries ago to transcribe Vietnam's folk poetry, which was inadequately represented by traditional Chinese characters alone (Nguyễn 1959). This script is addressed to ancestors who long predate French colonialism, Communism, and market socialism. The script recalls Vietnam's thousand-

year Chinese occupiers (111 BCE–938 CE), who brought literacy in *chữ Hán*, along with Confucianism and Mahayana Buddhism. Although today's literate public can read it, this *new*, calligraphic Sino-romanized script evoked for my mourning friends a sense of an expansive temporal horizon that extends both far into the past and into the endless future of Long as an ancestor—a temporality that for Hà induced both despair and reassurance in its depth and longevity.

Reinforcing their association of Vietnamese ancestry with the country's Chinese-influenced past while affirming its present "modern" orientation, the family also commissioned a ritual specialist. His actions underscored the syncretic nature of the proceedings: expertly and on time (as marked in the death notice schedule; see Figure 2), he dressed Long's smiling corpse in a Western suit and then wrapped him in a yellow silk cloth that was inscribed in red traditional Chinese script with a *zhou*, or incantation. This is a prayer genre typically performed to drive out bad spirits and other evils and thus to offer the deceased protection so that he can leave the earth peacefully (see Figure 5).

[Please insert Figure 5 here]

Together, these Vietnamese and Chinese inscriptions used multiple registers with overlapping historical resonances to encode and license feelings of intense, eternal sorrow. Embroidered in scripts that most people

could barely decipher, these indoor inscriptions worked to textually frame and affirm Long's enduring role as a family man who would be endlessly cared for and revered. Like Biblical Hebrew for many Diaspora Jews, traditional Chinese (*chữ Hán*) for contemporary Vietnamese functions as a sacred code in its illegibility, acquiring from its opacity its mana and authority of timeless tradition.[6]

The polyphonic mélange of calligraphic and block-letter romanized text-artifacts served as a material means to evoke the sacred, precisely in being a marked form of language use with specific indexical and iconic entailments associated with funerals, pagodas, and temples that family members typically frequented. Additionally, these objects alluded to the family's long history of distinction and rank, for as Hà's mother and sisters liked to tell me, their parents' families had belonged to the region's enlightened intelligentsia long before the Communist revolution. They had owned lands that during Vietnam's 1954 partition some relatives stayed to guard while others made their way north to join the patriotic revolution. Now mourners purchased or received as gifts intricately detailed text-artifacts that implicitly referred to the family's distinguished literate history.[7]

The orthographic objects did not have autonomous power to induce or prescribe mourners' affects, nor did they definitively fix such binaries as inside/outside, private/public, or family/state, despite alluding to them in their placement, materiality, and semantic content. Just as personal friends

were also political or business allies of the bereaved and deceased, so the juxtaposition of different scripts inside the home indexed and blurred distinctions between oppositional sets. Further, while not all mourners equally engaged with the texts, the written objects were not just pro forma. They were repeatedly (if differentially) consulted and admired by family members and guests, who gazed at and silently read their contents.[8]

Through their medium, color, script, register, and semantic content (what Chumley and Harkness 2013 term *qualia*), the banners and placards collectively became material-semiotic affordances that helped inscribe mourners' social position and the affects associated with specific roles and identities. In defining and keying the various relations and attitudes that mourners should display toward Long's body and each other, the inscribed objects thus helped define the spatial and temporal scope for mourning and grieving. Working with other embodied (oral, aural, and kinesthetic) rituals that reinforced the written messages (see below), the text-artifacts demarcated a space in which to voice normally suppressed stories and memories. As such, orthographic artifacts are not unlike photographs, which act not just as visual semiotic representations but as irreducibly sensory objects whose placement, material, and subject matter are all profoundly social (Edwards 2012).

As family members and friends genuflected in front of Long's casket, sobbing and murmuring prayers, I quietly listened, often unable to suppress

my own tears as I saw them weep. Long's mother and sisters, who were not from the region, expressed surprise and gratitude that a foreigner wanted to participate in their grief (*chia buồn*) by reading the placards, altar banners, and wreaths and by lighting incense alongside them. They claimed it was evidence of my *tình cảm* with the family.

Meanwhile, at meals, Hà's siblings, who had until then been disinclined to talk about their wartime childhood loss of their father, now recounted to their children their feelings of grief and confusion four decades earlier. They explicitly compared present conditions of relative security, when a premature death is *not* expected, to the pervasiveness of absence and death in their own childhood. With Long's burial and the paper objects' immolation at his grave, however, these stories disappeared. Attesting to the fact that they could express affect only in a limited space and time, family members now chided Long's best friend (and brother-in-law), who in the privacy of his own home had wept loudly and uncontrollably on the first night following Long's death.

Both in Hanoi and later, in North America, Vietnamese-born friends whom I consulted explained that the inscribed objects evoked memories of their own losses, on which they preferred not to dwell or elaborate. I thus came to view the romanized and Chinese inscriptions not as mere formulaic pronouncements of family loyalty and love for a deceased member. I regard them, rather, as material representations with affective connotations that

transcend their context of occurrence by rendering the sentiment of bereavement more broadly significant and by sharing it more widely among mourners. In addition to the *quốc ngữ* and *chữ Hán* inscriptions, Long's family deployed the above-mentioned third type of calligraphic Sino-romanized inscriptions. In mirroring yet differing from the other two, this script further reinforced their affective force and lent the family yet another means of expressing *tình cảm* and displaying their prestige.

[h2]*Nonwritten ritual modes of managing death and bereavement*

[ni]The ritual aspects involved in attending to the dead and attenuating mourners' pain are not limited to text-artifacts. As is common at Vietnamese funerals, these ministrations involved ritually garbing not only the deceased but also the mourners. Long's children, widow, mother, and sisters all donned white shrouds and wrapped white bands around their heads; Long's paternal uncle, a seasoned Communist Việt Minh fighter who made sure to tell me how much he still hates presidents Johnson and Nixon, further distinguished himself by donning black mandarin robes reminiscent of Chinese imperial times. His clothes—like Chinese-language inscriptions—index both present-day prestige and prestige in terms of the spirit world. Despite the Communist Party's attempts to limit excessive ritual elaborations in earlier decades (Malarney 2002), such robes remain widespread in the region, especially among senior clan men at rituals in which people

collectively worship the ancestors. Together, these sartorial and inscriptive practices confirm that market-socialist Vietnam is not an entirely secular state (Kwon 2007; Taylor 2007).

The pomp and circumstance that indexed *tình cảm* among Long, his family, and community was further reinforced by the presence of two photographers hired to document and assemble an album of the ceremonies. The family also bought and guests brought incense to light in front of Long's new altar, and musicians played traditional Vietnamese instruments outside the house, all in an effort to affirm their *tình cảm*. And in accordance with the death notice schedule posted on the door of Long's house (see Figure 2), guests gathered along the pavement in time to attend the ceremonies for dressing and transferring the corpse to his coffin, after which funeral committee designees delivered speeches about Long's patriotic achievements and prayed for his welfare in the otherworld. Three days into the funeral, a hired, richly costumed ritual specialist (*ông công*) led a team of uniformed men in performing elaborate rites in front of the coffin and along the route to the grave.

On the burial day, musicians playing traditional instruments alternated with a live band playing "modern" music, including a vigorous rendition of Trịnh Công Sơn's song "Cát bụi." I was struck by the ironic melding of "tradition" and (post)modernity in the costumes and music, since Sơn's 1960s antiwar lyrics had been banned in Vietnam as emblematic of the

South’s American-colluding bourgeois culture; yet I detected no hint of irony among the mourners. In the present late-socialist context, their status as model party members allowed mourners to use genres of “superstition” (signified by the *ông công*) and play “nostalgic music” that was popular before (and for some, during) Vietnam’s wars. Together, these multisensory forms evoked and reinforced an ordered, melancholic sense of sacred veneration for both the deceased and for tradition. All came together in the spirit of shared *tình cảm*, to affirm a good death.

By the end of that Sunday afternoon, tears that had been flowing abundantly during the first mo(u)rning hours were largely drying up. Long’s mother, widow, daughter, son, sisters, and friends now all came together to greet their guests and accept their condolences with relative composure. They expressed any turmoil and anguish they felt only later at night, after the guests had left. Through these various ritual actions, including the assembling and reading of funerary text-artifacts, they now appeared able to rechannel their feelings of loss and master their grief.

By Wednesday evening, after Long’s burial, his close relatives were even joking and bantering, enacting the cultural mandate to keep a “bright face” (Wikan 1990, 43), for as the saying goes, *Trời gọi, ai nấy dạ* (Whoever the heavens call upon should respond). Hà’s sister explained that this expression teaches that people should accept their fate with equanimity and cheerfulness, at least outwardly, as norms of *tình cảm* required that Long be

released from earth. Wails and tears would only delay his successful ascension to, and well-being in, the afterworld.

[h1]Caring for the living

[ni]Seconds before hired ritual men carried the coffin out of the house, Long's funeral committeemen deliberately ripped down the paper placards adorning the door. Their action signaled the end of the first phase of official mourning, when the possible "mistakes" (e.g., emotional outbursts) referenced in the death notice (see Figure 2) were excusable. As texts emphasizing his professional and political contributions were disappearing, Long's role as a virtuous citizen was ending.

By destroying the iconic texts that indexed Long as a state member, his funeral committee members relegated this part of his identity to the background in favor of his identity as a family man. This process of transformation was further facilitated by the nesting and telescoping of contrasting pairs (which Judith Irvine and Susan Gal call "fractal recursivity" [2000, 38]), as oppositions between private-familial and public-state domains were reified through oppositions in the objects' placement and meaning-laden orthographic materialities (qualia). These oppositions in turn index different periods associated with features of Vietnamese "tradition" or "modernity" through the iconic qualities of the text-artifacts' different qualia.[9] Specifically, the horizontal, block black-and-white romanized

inscriptions posted outside the home (see Figures 1–3) emphasized state memory. In contrast, the inscriptions inside the home emphasized familial ties. These included both inscriptions featuring horizontal, block black-and-white romanized text, paralleling the placards outside (compare Figures 1 and 4), *and* the vertical, colorful traditional Chinese (see Figure 5) and calligraphic Sino-romanized inscriptions (see Figure 1). Together, the text-artifacts broadcast affects and sentiments of reverence, sadness, and regret to help distribute the grief among the funeral's participants. Framing Long's death as a loss to the state, his associates, and his kin, they directed everyone to share in these feelings.

By the time mourners returned home from the burial on Wednesday afternoon, the process of enshrining Long as an eternal ancestor and relinquishing his state-affiliated transitory socialist identity was underway. At the altar, relatives had hung new cloth banners (see Figure 6) with new sets of written texts (the red panels appeared two days later, on Friday). They used all three types of scripts, which again acted as fractals of "tradition" and "modernity," to inscribe mourners' affects in relation to the deceased.

[Please insert Figure 6 here]

Now foregrounding Long's "private" (ideally loving) relationships over "public" (bureaucratic) ones, the cloth, like its focal message emphasizing kinship, was more enduring than the paper and its indexed content

emphasizing citizenship. Like the embroidered red cloth described earlier (see Figure 1), these new altar objects (Figure 6) were of the same material and genre, and polyphonic in their use of traditional Chinese alongside the poetic calligraphic Sino-romanized script that imitated the *chữ Nôm* script of old. They used well-known Confucian idioms to affirm Long's role as beloved flesh-and-blood kin, while another embroidered artifact, hung behind his framed photograph, displayed more multilingual inscriptions that underscored Confucian virtues of spousal loyalty and filial piety. Echoing and modeling the words spoken by mourners, these texts worked to avow relatives' and friends' affection for the deceased.

Using these contrastive orthographies and lexicons, the altar cloths indexed oppositions in roles and relationships that can be characterized as ephemeral or new versus eternal and durative; public institutional versus private familial; modern bureaucratic versus traditional spiritual. All of them were ascribed to Long and assigned to his mourners, who, like him, were affiliated with and representative of state institutions and familial identities that they expected to embody and enact morally. The speed with which these banners were produced attests both to their importance to family members and to the new relations of production and consumption in Vietnam that afforded a high-status family the means to speedily purchase or commission these objects.

In my experience, families of lesser means also acquired such funerary objects without delay. Like Long's family, they relied on monetary and material gifts to cover the costs, and then carefully noted in a ledger the identity of the donors and the nature of the gifts, so that they could reciprocate in kind on similar life-course occasions. The point, then, is not just that it was possible for this family to spend quickly and lavishly—all the while relying on networks of friendship and obligation that they had cultivated through relations of *tình cảm*—but that they deemed it important to do so.

It is notable that the mourning family rejected austerity guidelines that the Communist regime had formerly promoted to combat what it considered to be feudalistic, wasteful rituals. This reflects the resurgence of ritual and memorialization in Vietnam (Malarney 2002; Schwenkel 2009), whereby people mobilize market forces that intertwine with (invented) traditions to redefine state interdictions. Thus a model Communist family justified conspicuous spending on a Confucian-inflected ritual indexing and embodying *tình cảm*.

[h1]Funerary artifacts, political economy, and orthographic history

[ni]At first glance, these proceedings seem to signal the decline of socialist sensibilities in Vietnam, as neoliberal and globalizing forces over the preceding two decades of *Đởi Mới* policies have opened up markets. But the

situation is more complex. The text-artifacts assembled outside and inside Long's home allude to Vietnam's layered history, which my interlocutors liked to tell me has been punctuated by periods of foreign occupation, native resistance, and, historians add, the corresponding development and disappearance of particular scripts.

Hanging on the outside of Long's home were text-artifacts that exhibited horizontal, *quốc ngữ* inscriptions that framed mourning and loss as bounded sentiments with a clear beginning and end. Inscriptively iconic of the deceased's public persona, these objects are associated with Vietnam's modern bureaucracy and attest to Long's and his mourners' standing in the (currently marketizing) socialist state.

Earlier in the 20th century, the Communist Party promoted the alphabetic *quốc ngữ* script to facilitate the young state's nationalist modernization (Marr 1981). State leaders spread enlightened propaganda in mass literacy campaigns using a simpler, easier script than the older *chữ Hán* and *chữ Nôm* scripts favored by the elite (Bianco 2001). They did this as they sought to mobilize the population to fight for independence and eradicate the "superstitions" and "feudal bonds" that they claimed oppressed both the Vietnamese peasantry and educated urbanites. To help their case, Hồ Chí Minh and other (non-Communist) nationalists downplayed *quốc ngữ*'s historical association with European imperialism (it had been developed and codified in a 1651 Vietnamese-Portuguese-Latin dictionary to spread

Catholicism in Vietnam). They now framed the script, as a romanized form of Vietnamese that is not identical to the Latin script, in opposition to *French*, which the colonists promoted and sought to spread (Marr 1981).

While *quốc ngữ* banners outside and inside Long's home may fit a socialist discourse of progress and democratization through literacy, this narrative is at best incomplete, given that capitalist South Vietnam had also adopted the script long before the nation's unification in 1975. Moreover, this narrative is further complicated by mourners' creative deployment of *quốc ngữ*. Inside Long's home, it appears in both block-letter inscriptions and in the colorful vertical calligraphic Sino-romanized inscriptions that sit alongside the Chinese script, which in fact was never defunct. Instead, these usages highlight both more personalized sentiments and relations, and the nation's oft-revered syncretic traditions, to reveal the inherently incomplete process of transforming society's cultural practices.

Vietnam's scripts and their political associations changed over time: *chữ Hán*, for example, moved from the script of the oppressor to that of the government, while *quốc ngữ* moved from the script of the marginalized Catholics to that of the modern, patriotic state. In light of this history, Long's funeral contradicts Weberian accounts that insist on coupling secularization and modernization. Rather, we see that multiple scripts remain and indeed seem to be invented anew to evoke both the sacred and the bureaucratic. They hint at historical continuities between market-oriented and

prerevolutionary funerary practices and ongoing relations of *tình cảm* that continue to motivate, as well as reflect, the circulation of good subjects (or bad, depending on how they perform *tình cảm*) within the affective milieu fostered by the ritual. The text-artifacts' different orthographies and geographies contribute to the force of the ritual and reveal its complex history.

As in the present case, mourners at prerevolutionary funerals hired a ritual specialist, pallbearers, and musicians; they donned special clothing and built special altars for worshipping the dead; and community members presented gifts to help the deceased person's soul travel to the otherworld while they shared mourners' sadness (Malarney 2002). These practices continue to be understood today as material affirmations of *tình cảm*. Like the material ruins described by Yael Navarro-Yashin (2009), the objects (re)animate sentiments and memories evoked by their materialities.

Yet we cannot view the present funeral as an exact replica of prerevolutionary practice, as though Communist Party efforts to simplify ritual and emphasize patriotism had been ineffective *tout court*. Rather, both discourses sit comfortably side by side. Patriotic, citizen-oriented identities and affects are elaborated outside the home, while inside the home, the text-artifacts emphasize both citizenship (in black-and-white) and its syncretic fractal, kinship and the continuity of the generations. Moreover, while preprinted funerary placards, whose details were to be filled in by

hand, may index a market of mass production, they also both evoke Vietnam's bureaucratic culture, in which forms have to be constantly filled out and filed, and former Confucian and colonial regimes, whose practices of written genealogies—carefully maintained by clan groups—were part of people's habitus long before literacy became widespread in the latter part of the 20th century (Leshkowich 2014b).

The inscriptions used during Long's funeral, then, suggest that by dint of official and historiographic processes of erasure, Vietnam's Communist Revolution may not represent so much a break with "tradition" as its reformulation and redirection. Moreover, contemporary liberalization efforts under *Đởi Mới*, whereby the state has opened Vietnam's economy to global capitalist markets while officially retaining socialism, effectively facilitate the hybridity and polyphony prevalent at the funeral. Hence a model Communist family freely deploys its abundant financial resources to conspicuously display the deceased's multiple roles as comrade, entrepreneur, revered father, husband, son, and kinsman. As Christina Schwenkel and Ann Marie Leshkowich (2012) suggest, forms of social action in the context of market reforms in late- or postsocialist nations make visible the multiple, partial ways in which we might understand "neoliberal" transformations in these locales, whereby neither selves nor states are ever divorced from the multiple historical contexts that constitute them.

Thus in the funeral we do not witness polarized oppositions of "tradition and modernity," "socialism and capitalism," or "ostentation and restraint," as if these indexed absolute affect-laden moral values. Instead, values are densely layered. So Long is clothed in both a business suit, evoking "modernity" or the "public sphere," and a traditional Chinese *zhou*. Here, the ancient script evoking spirit-related concerns with the ancestors embraces his body, emphasizing "tradition" and the "private sphere" (see Figure 5). Seeming contradictions are likewise laminated in the invocation of eternal sorrow and love on the altar's banners and wreaths, alongside practical adages prescribing that once the body is buried, the bereaved should accept their misery with a cheerful smile. We also see this layering in the death notice's elaborate plan of rituals to be performed before the burial, followed by an inscribed plea for forbearance toward the family should it make mistakes during its period of grief (Figure 2). In each of these cases, *tình cảm* is displayed through the prescribed engagement with commoditized objects that mediate (and discipline) people's relationships with one another.

[h1]Exceeding affective genres and the limits of inscription

[ni]Unlike the public inscriptions hung outdoors, the indoor inscriptions, which emphasized emotional bonds with the deceased and encoded eternal regret, did not completely succeed in ending grief. So, contrary to social conventions, long after the official mourning had ended, Bà and Hà at times

sobbed uncontrollably, confirming the perduring sorrow that the inscriptions affirmed.[10] The elaborate production, posting, and eventual destruction of inscribed objects evidently failed to comfort Long's widow and mother. To overcome his death, they needed to rework the relation of *tình cảm* with their living son/husband and replace them with new, apparently incommensurate *tình cảm* relations with him as a no-longer-living personage, to ensure his and their different forms of well-being. In the face of a premature, unexpected death, they struggled. Ritual mourning had not sufficed to dissipate their loss.

As the days passed and I continued to sit with the grieving family, it struck me that despite Hà's best efforts to suppress her sadness, still, night after night, in the privacy of her bedroom, she wept in despair. While by day she returned to work, in the evenings she and her mother-in-law would stare for hours at the colorfully inscribed altar, bitter with sorrow. Week after week, Hà found it difficult to eat, clean her house, drive to work, or drive to the grave. Her family acknowledged that sorrow would last for a long time, since the altar's text was a constant reminder of "endless loving regret" (Figure 6), but they also insisted that the time for expressing grief had passed. The mourning space had disappeared with the burial and ripping down of the outside banners, relegating the space for transgressing norms of composure into the isolating interior of the house. Here, sorrow was affirmed (inscribed on durative cloth), but its expression in public was denied. In their

typical elliptical manner of speaking, Hà's relatives gently repeated the refrain, "It's done" (*Xong rồi*).

Increasingly, and in the same spirit of *tình cảm* as their earlier solicitation for her during the funeral week, Hà's relatives grew worried, admonishing her for the tears that were making her *mệt* (tired). They suggested that her *tình cảm* was now getting in the way of her functioning as a good, strong parent. As though in sympathy, they invoked the saying "To go on grieving is just self-tormenting because the dead cannot rise again" (*Buồn rầu mãi chỉ khổ thân mà người chết cũng không sống lại được*). Thus they signaled a local understanding of ethics as contingent, since there are at least two different, incommensurate ways of showing *tình cảm* that depend on the timing and participants involved (e.g., dead or alive).

When Bà later died in the fluke traffic accident, some whispered that her inability to rejoin the living did not simply endanger Long's successful passage to the world of the ancestors. It was also the cause of her own death. For a person to become an ancestor, they explained, the living must suspend their *tình cảm*, or else another life could become endangered. So, despite their initial empathy for Bà, her affines now blamed her for having given up on life after her son's death.[11] They used her death to warn those who break down and upset others who labor equally hard to maintain a culturally desired equanimity following loss. A mother's *tình cảm* can become problematic, and what constitutes virtue in one place and time can be coded

as a vice in another.[12] If ritual had helped distribute Bà's grief and excuse its dramatic expression, ritual's ending implied an analogous affective reserve that she now failed to abide.

It is possible to speculate that the concern with Bà's and Hà's prolonged mourning is related to new market dynamics that require citizens to return to work quickly, since good neoliberal subjects should not wallow in sorrow and despondency. But I view it differently. It is rather the intertwining and lamination of one market logic with another, whereby neoliberal, socialist, colonial, and Confucian moral codes all value similar affects. After all, the moral mandate to display stoicism (combined with filial, spousal, and parental piety) was no less compelling during the war and pre- and postwar years when continual material deprivation required people to go on uncomplaining rather than give in to loss. Likewise, the pressure on both widow and mother to shoulder the burden of caring for the family is consistent with gender norms that have changed, but not radically: women are still idealized as sacrificial caregivers (Gammeltoft 2014; Pashigian 2009; Rydstrom 2004; Shohet 2017).

The people I knew conceptualized virtue (literally, *đạo đức*, but what they usually equated with *tình cảm*) as contingent, emergent, and context-dependent—what scholars interpret as Aristotelian rather than universal ethics (Lambek 2010; Mattingly 2014). Morality, then, does not require mechanical adherence to a static code; rather, it requires dynamic

judgments on the part of practitioners, who must adapt potentially competing and incommensurate norms to the demands of particular situations. The virtues and duties of devotion and love for one's children or spouse are not governed by fixed rules or written codes, helpful though these usually are in mobilizing them. Rather, embodying moral personhood involves dynamic interaction and the judgments of others as well as oneself. Affects exceed codified or ritualized contexts, not because they are prior to or outside of discourse but because they are entwined (and in the case of mourning, inscribed) within moral precepts that traverse several political-economic regimes. Thus, the polyphony of inscriptions inside and outside the home during the ritual metonymically (and materially) index Vietnamese understandings of personhood and ethics as multiply textured and contingent.

[h1]Conclusion: Reinscribing moral mourning and grief

[ni]The tensions between personal grief and communalized mourning evinced at and beyond Long's funeral are not simply the products of Vietnam's new economy and people's attendant freedom to engage in high ritual. As Thu-hương Nguyễn-võ (2008) shows, "freedom" can also work to marginalize and discipline purportedly beneficiary citizens. Like the Chinese scripts that never really disappeared, they are enduring and disturbing themes that reappear in new variations, here metonymized by the

calligraphic Sino-romanized Vietnamese inscriptions that now stand astride the ancient and bureaucratic texts of old and new. They speak to new concerns in Vietnam to represent "tradition" as a consumable, potentially profit-generating project. Paradoxically, this commodification of "tradition" may guard against the corrupting influence of new market relations and the disruptions they may engender in the social order, by effectively (re)binding people—again, hence the lavish funeral financed thanks to networks of reciprocity based on cultivating *tình cảm*.

The text-artifacts at Long's funeral illustrate how commodified literacy objects set the conditions of possibility for some mourners' feelings. They organize and modify their experience of bereavement by broadcasting certain affects and excluding others, and serve as what Webb Keane (2014) calls material-linguistic ethical affordances that reinforce the subjunctive world fostered by ritual (Seligman et al. 2008). Neither emotions nor affects are simply internalized, objectified properties of individual persons; they are, rather, dynamic forces that arise in the flux of interaction with others. This is why funerary text objects inscribe and prescribe sentiments that alleviate and partially contain grief. By articulating and spelling out norms of conduct, these objects reify certain cultural beliefs regarding appropriate mourning. The good person in Vietnam thus is someone who acts as a good mourner: someone who can ensure the well-being of the dead and strive to guarantee the well-being of those who must cope with the loss.

But as Renato Rosaldo (1989) reminds us, there is a limit to the structuring power of ritual. And so it became more problematic for the text objects to channel *tình cảm* efficaciously and definitively over a longer temporal frame than the funerary proceeding itself. In contrast with a paper placard that is easily destroyed, marking the end of its message, the feelings and actions that it had sanctioned remain in circulation and do not so easily disappear—as neither did the discursive (mis)deeds of Long's mother. A volatile excess of mourning (Eng and Kazanjian 2003) remained, as *tình cảm* for the living did not translate smoothly into *tình cảm* for the dead. Whereas Hà gradually became able to contain her affects, Bà could not, and this was renarrated as resulting in her untimely, "bad" death.

The "failure" of ritual in Bà's case raises questions about the scope of ritual's success in effecting a moral response in the face of death, including whether ritual can ever definitively discipline all mourners' grief, and what happens when it does not. In ritual and beyond it, morality is enacted in terms of shifting (and potentially competing) concerns with the well-being of bereaved and deceased people. In Vietnam, these are crystallized and circulated through exchanges of *tình cảm*. It remains an open question, however, as to which idioms materialize in other parts of the world and how and why they become emotively meaningful through funerary inscriptions.

[h1]Notes

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FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1. Mourners stand at an altar inside the home of the newly deceased Lê Hiếu Long in Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam, July 15, 2007. The black-and-white banner hanging atop the house's entrance announces, in romanized Vietnamese (*quốc ngữ*) script, a "Condolences Ritual and Memorial Ceremony" for "Comrade" (real name obscured to protect anonymity). The red-and-yellow altar banner embroidered in a Sino-romanized script—together with flower wreaths that, like the outdoor banner, bear printed *quốc ngữ* inscriptions—emphasizes the high status of the deceased and his family, as well as their relations as virtuous citizens and loving kin.

Figure 2. A death notice (*cáo phó*) hangs outside the home of the newly deceased Lê Hiếu Long (real name obscured to protect anonymity) in Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam, July 15, 2007. The notice details in a highly formal register the location, time, and date of his death; announces the schedule of ritual events to precede his burial; and requests and thanks guests for their forbearance should the grieving family make mistakes during this emotionally wrought period.

Figure 3. A "List of the Funeral Committee Members" (*Danh Sách Ban Lễ Tang*) hangs outside the home of the newly deceasedLê Hiếu Long in Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam, July 15, 2007. The list announces each member's name

(obscured to protect anonymity), professional title, and relation to the deceased. The committee members' high status affirms by association Long's identity as a public figure and virtuous citizen.

Figure 4. Inside the home of the newly deceased Lê Hiếu Long, a mourner lights candles in front of the casket in Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam, July 15, 2007. The banner above reads, "Endless loving regret" for the deceased "Comrade" (*Đ/C*) (real name obscured to protect anonymity). The banner, like the flower wreaths and altar banner in Figure 1, emphasizes feelings.

Figure 5. The open casket displays the corpse of Lê Hiếu Long in Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam, July 15, 2007. Decked with flowers, his Western-dressed, smiling corpse is wrapped in a yellow cloth inscribed in red traditional Chinese characters with a *zhou* (incantation), highlighting the syncretic, elaborate, and costly nature of this funeral.

Figure 6. Multicolored postburial altar banners commemorate and honor the recently departed Lê Hiếu Long in Đà Nẵng, Việt Nam, July 20, 2007. These banners are embroidered with romanized Vietnamese, traditional Chinese, and Sino-romanized Vietnamese inscriptions that emphasize long-lasting, Confucian kinship ties and affects between the deceased and his survivors.

[1] All personal names, including those appearing in images, are altered to protect confidentiality. I lived with relatives of the family featured in this case study from February 2007 to February 2008, frequently visiting their friends and kin. See Shohet 2013, 213, n.1, for a discussion of the larger study's research methods and sample.

[2] Because objects have "social lives," that is, they are not wholly depersonalized and alienable (Appadurai 1986), the distinction between gifts and commodities is fuzzy, reaffirming Marcel Mauss's (2016) insight that gifts are never "pure": they entail a mixture of instrumentality and obligation, in addition to the "altruistic" motives typically associated with them. Further, objects' semiotic and material qualities are inseparable from one another (Nakassis 2013), and they in turn also involve the mediation of affects.

[3] I use the terms *sentiment*, *affect*, and *emotion* relatively interchangeably to signal an ethnographic context that precludes understanding *tình cảm* as anything but social, mediated, and embodied (e.g., through communicative displays of respect and the sharing of food, money, or tears), and as full of productive potential irreducible to a strictly bounded social or psychological domain.

[4] See Kwon 2008 and Ninh 1994. In light of families' struggles to reckon with the many never-recovered bodies left in the wake of its wars, Vietnam is a landscape "teeming with wandering ghosts, spirits of the dead whose lack of filial descendants leaves them suspended between this world and the next" (Leshkowich 2014a, 127). While Vietnamese cosmology is highly syncretic, and worship practices (including in this family) vary greatly, all families whom I encountered, regardless of religion,

practiced ancestor worship and had an altar set up at home to feed and care for the spirits of their deceased parents, grandparents, and sometimes unmarried siblings who had died young, with some also sporting a portrait of Hồ Chí Minh, while others displayed Buddhist figures behind their ancestors.

[5] *Truy điệu* ceremonies are sponsored by state officials (here coterminous with his family and friends) to recognize the deceased's heroic contributions, which included, in this instance, Long's service in Vietnam's border dispute with China.

[6] As Webb Keane (1997) suggests, people often use highly marked forms of language when interacting with the otherworld. I regularly observed *chữ Hán* and the new calligraphic Sino-romanized Vietnamese (similar to *chữ Nôm*) only at temples and ancestral worship locations; in daily use, only the ordinary (nonsacred) form of *quốc ngữ* was used.

[7] This funeral ultimately cost several thousand dollars, in part funded by guests' contributions to the ritual, as is customary in Vietnam to show *tình cảm* between donor and recipient families. The text-artifacts of course were not the only expense and means by which to display *tình cảm*.

[8] Although people use the semiotic-material content they encounter in different ways, this hardly negates the objects' relevance as affordances for structuring mourners' sentiments. Having never witnessed a Vietnamese funeral lacking text-artifacts like those described above, I expect that their complete absence would have generated more explicit moralizing than I heard in their taken-for-granted presence.

[9] "Modernity" here refers to the socialist-era emphasis on public roles and identities over private-familial "feudal" ones.

[10] Angela Garcia (2010, 73) similarly notes that commemorative roadside shrines for the deceased in New Mexico continually remind mourners of their losses and do *not* lead them to see "mourning as repair" as possible or even desirable. Long's was the only fieldwork funeral I observed that was not preceded by old age or severe illness, which may account for the ritual's diminished efficaciousness; a widow's prolonged grief following her husband's unexpected death in 2002 similarly provoked her affines (whom I also followed in 2007) to critique her, particularly for "bad" mothering.

[11] Traditional injunctions prohibit parents' participation in their child's funeral, since the death subverts the "natural" order of things, but these were not raised as objections against Bà's conduct.

[12] Other glosses for love, including *tình yêu* and *thương*, were used relatively interchangeably in this and other contexts; while a mother's or wife's love for her child or husband, respectively, often are stronger than the sentiments of *tình cảm* between other intimates, *tình cảm* was regularly used for all three forms of "love," and in practice encompassed the other two (Shohet 2017).