

# Historical events and present contexts are interwoven for quite a bit of nostalgia

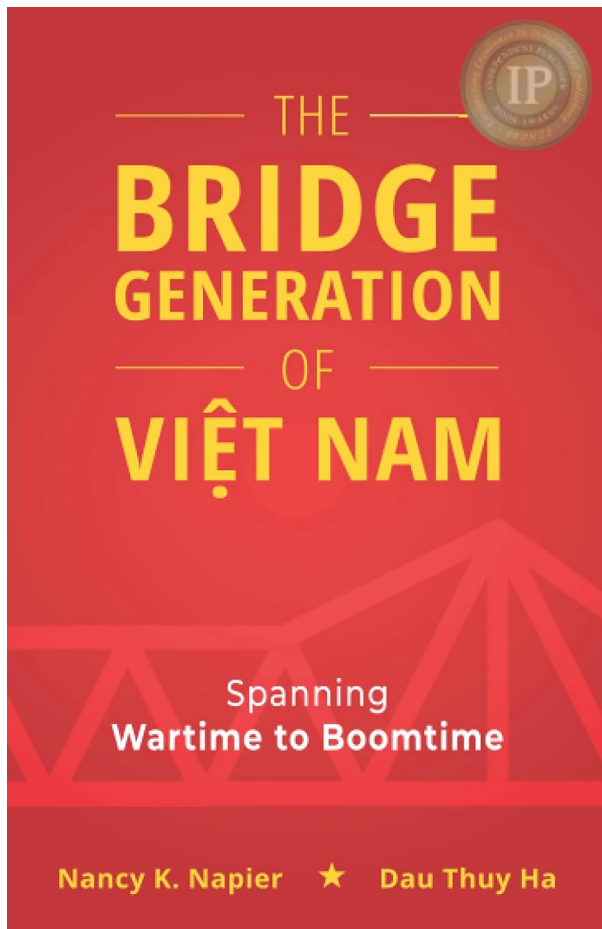
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*\*Editorial note: This piece is a book review for [The Bridge Generation of Viet Nam](#) by [N. K. Napier](#) and [D. T. Ha](#), published by CCI Press in 2020 [1].*

I am not 100% “objective” as a reviewer since I am Vietnamese and know many people profiled in the book. But my review is honest because it contains real thoughts, reflections, and emotions.

Having read the [profiles, stories, and thoughts](#) embedded in those pieces of text, I have appreciated much better how history and people’s lives have spanned my home country’s course of survival, changes, and developments. Writing the economic history of Vietnam has been an essential part of my profession for decades, but understanding the deeper causes of the present occurrences and its future requires much more than knowledge and data. Real-world experience, pain, sorrow, happiness, joys, imagination, and dreams all have their bits in a vivid picture of life (I mean conscious life, not a bunch of atoms and physical matters). The book provides me with the substance and emotions that even my top-cited publications have missed for some “objective” reasons.



The faces and their life stories have been reminiscent of my early days. They trigger my memory of standing in a long queue from 4:00 AM waiting for my turn to buy rice from our family's RICE BOOK (Americans, have you heard of this ever?). Then I, a boy with 25 kg weight, tried to pedal a bicycle packed with 50 kg of rice as the most glorious triumph back home. The book reminded me of the market power when no equivalent Vietnamese term was allowed for use since the market was only used to refer to the "social evil" of the black market, which means that with or without "black," the market was supposed to be perceived as black. My story runs like this. After waiting in a long queue for nearly two hours, it was my turn to buy fish. The rationing allowed a family like mine to buy 1.2 kg of meat or fish per month (we were a 4-person household). The seller was then considered a "government employee", realized that I was a young boy, and cheated me by putting the lowest-grade fish in my bag, which had a 60-70% bone content. Well, for those desperate for protein, I brought a disaster home due to my lack of transactional knowledge. Details like these have made our lives real and... live. The book has refreshed my memory, so it is like I live my past the second time, with every piece of those stories being a piece of my memory put in an orderly manner.

I sometimes ask myself if there is a good way to help my children learn about the past to be better prepared for their future, and I also give up. While I tried to imagine how “foreign people” lived at the age of 15, my children traveled to Brussels and Los Angeles at the age of 3. A staggering difference. Now I think books like Nancy and Ha’s can help. And I must thank the authors for their efforts in reviving my life passages and, more importantly, our collective memory as a nation. Unlike what most people think, human memories have not been very good, and collective memories can be even worse. I realize many Vietnamese adults now cleanly forget how frequent outage was in the past and what room temperature had been before the air-con arrived. A pitiful memory loss for social reasons, not neurological.

That’s why the book is important. That’s why I highly recommend it to prospective readers.

(Later, I will review Professor N. K. Napier’s other book, [\*Unfolding Curiosity: Wrinkles and Surprises from Business and Beyond.\*](#))

## References

[1] Napier NK, Ha DT. (2020). *The Bridge Generation of Viet Nam: Spanning Wartime to Boomtime*. CCI Press. <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08GWT3CBH>

[2] Napier NK. (2017). *Unfolding Curiosity: Wrinkles and Surprises from Business and Beyond.* <https://www.amazon.com/dp/1546339116>

