

The Seeds of Turmoil

Huế's "People of the Pagoda" and the Buddhist Mobilization of 1963

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This presentation reconstructs the historical atmosphere of the Summer 1963 Buddhist mobilization in central Viet Nam's royal city of Huế through close-up descriptions of those events based on what was considered significant by its participants and supporters. Glancing through the lens of "social movement theory" I assert that this short-lived mass movement created collective identities for ordinary lay Buddhists – "People of the Pagoda", they styled themselves – and had strong and persistent impacts on their individual lives. By emphasizing the personal, human experience of local residents using their eyewitness accounts, I attempt to illuminate how such momentous happenings affected Huế's social and cultural life as the mobilization spread turmoil through the city. This bottom-up, grassroots approach seeks to remedy the twin imbalances of Western-centered and Vietnamese government-issued narratives in the Viet Nam War's historiography.



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