

# An imperialistic love triangle in the quiet american

[Life](#), [Love](#)



The Orient is traditionally viewed as separate, backward, erotic, exotic, and passive. It mirrors a past of unscrupulous tyrannical power involving carnal pleasures and deviating from the restrictive morals of the “occidental.” The Orient displays feminine vulnerability with its progress and value judged as inferior to the West. Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* presents the treatment of Phuong as a metaphor for how foreign occupying forces treat her native country of Vietnam, and her depiction as having no control in matters of her love life is a motif of the Orient being a feminized other.

Hegemonic masculinity is a sociological term referring to the socialization of men producing normative perceptions of masculinity to be correlated in being unemotional and dominating others, especially women. Hegemonic masculinity brings an interesting pairing to the ideals of post-colonial imperialism in Vietnam. The French, British, and American all have aimed to elevate the people out of ignorance and savagery, and lead them to a more sophisticated social and political livelihood. They engaged in a gendered polarity with themselves and the effeminate other, Vietnam.

<https://phdessay.com/love-poem/>

In *The Quiet American*, the French, British and Americans viewed Vietnam as a feminized entity. It is non-threatening and an outlet for the carnal pleasures and delights of all things exotic: women, opium and trade. As such with the context of this paper, Pyle and Fowler's battle over Phuong is a clash of male dominance. Phuong is the most interesting character in Greene’s novel. She is depicted as a voiceless beauty without any power or opinions of her own. As her sister Hei affirms in Chapter 3 of part 1, “[s]he is

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the most beautiful girl in Saigon. [...] She is delicate, [...] She needs care. She deserves care.

She is very, very loyal" (Greene, 46). At this part of the novel, Hei meets Pyle and instantly wants to set her sister up in a marriage with him. Hei sees him as a better match than Fowler because he is younger, single and wants children. The underlining stereotype that is reinforced through the Phuong character is a feminine and weak Oriental awaiting the dominance of the West. She is a defenseless woman that exists for, and in terms of, her Caucasian male lovers. Her role in the love triangle is reminiscent of her homeland's colonial restraints. She is only presented in terms of what the two men want from her.

Pyle wants her to become a typical American housewife with children. Fowler wants her to remain just as she is: his servant and lover. This love triangle and the emotions that the male characters feel towards Phuong correlate to deep personal sentiments of the way they feel about the country of Vietnam itself. Vietnam becomes feminized, taboo, and sexualized just as Phuong does in Pyle and Fowler's eyes. The novel's rendering of the central plot involving Fowler and Pyle struggle over Phuong represents the approach that Britain and America engaged in their fight to "save" Vietnam from communism.

Pyle's' intentions toward Phuong, although similar in some cases to Fowler's, harbors fundamental differences. Both men view Phuong as a sort of object that needs to be saved or require some sort of assistance in order to endure life. When Pyle falls in love with Phuong upon their first encounter, he decides that he must do whatever he can or whatever he deems necessary

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in order to " save" Phuong from a deprived existence. This is the exact same way that Pyle views Vietnam and its present condition. In Chapter 1 part 2, Pyle suggests that Vietnam is in need of a Third Force to combat the Communists.

In response, Fowler states: " He would have to learn for himself the real background that held you as a smell does: the gold of the rice fields under a flat late sun: the fisher's fragile cranes hovering over the fields like mosquitoes: the cups of tea on an old abbot's platform, with his bed and his commercial calendars, his buckets and broken cups and the junk of a lifetime washed up around his chair: the mollusk hats of the girls repairing the road where a mine had burst..." (23) Pyle spoke about how a Third Force is needed in Vietnam, yet he does not have a clue about the workings of the country.

He is so absorbed in trying to spread the ideal of freedom of democracy that he neglects the significance of applying culturally appropriate approaches in relations to Indo-China. The Vietnamese government can make their own choices concerning political rule, however America's anti- Communist agenda thwarts their ability to do so. This reflects the American stereotype of being overly idealistic, naive, and arrogant as they feel the need to meddle in issues of other nations in hopes to enlighten them to become more progressive. On the other hand, Fowler has learned to appreciate Phuong and Vietnam.

The " gold of the rice fields, the fishers' fragile cranes," and other beautiful aspects of this country have made him adopt it as his own. Fowler understands Vietnam and is fond of it; Pyle does not understand Vietnam

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and wants to improve it. Consequently, Fowler does not want to become concerned with the circumstances occurring in Vietnam and does not become involved in the situation between Pyle and Phuong until he is forced to do so. He prides himself on having no opinions and not taking sides, but instead he believes himself to be a true reporter who only observes.

The British act in a similar fashion. The great imperial power of Great Britain historically is known to have a hands-off approach with their colonies and commonwealth. They embrace some of the traditional and ethnic practices and social structures of the region; yet require both financial and political loyalty of their Oriental provinces. He essentially permits Phuong to decide whom she wants to be with until he is compelled to leave his state of neutrality when it no longer benefits him.

In a similar way, Fowler believed that Vietnam should be able to choose what would occur in its own future although he worries that they would make the wrong decision and elect a Communist leader. Fowler is not in love with Phuong but he wants her. He wants things between them to remain the way they are. He does not want her to marry Pyle. In this sense his motive to murder Pyle is partly personal as well as political. He spends a lot of time justifying his involvement with Pyle's murder as the only way of stopping him from doing further damage to the Vietnamese people, yet his true motives are more complex.

In Chapter 2 of part 2, Fowler's discourse on Phuong reads very sexist and racist in his conversation with Pyle. " But she loves you, doesn't she? " " Not like that. It isn't in their nature. You'll find that out. It's a cliché to call them children--but there's one thing which is childish. They love you in return for

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kind-ness, security, the presents you give them-they hate you for a blow or an injustice. They don't know what it's like -just walking into a room and loving a stranger. For an aging man, Pyle, it's very secure-she won't run away from home so long as the home is happy. I hadn't meant to hurt him. I only realized I had done it when he said with muffled anger, " She might prefer a greater security or more kindness" (125). In the quote above, Fowler believes that Phuong and other Vietnamese women only " love" men based on what they give them and how secure the men make them feel. For Fowler, this notion is ideal for he believes that Phuong's proclivity for loyalty will prevent her from leaving him as she is like a child who loves in return for kindness, gifts, and security. Both Fowler and Pyle objectify Phuong in different ways, but with the same result.

In Chapter 3 of part 2, Fowler praises Phuong for her readiness to comply with his sexual demands: " Kiss me, Phuong. " She had no coquetry. (...) she would have made love if I had asked her to, straight away, peeling off her trousers without question... (143). She services Fowler by preparing his opium pipes and providing him with sex any time he wants it. When Pyle shows an interest in her, Phuong abandons Fowler to live with Pyle. She shows little reaction to Pyle's death but readily moves back in with Fowler. In addition to Phuong's depiction as a sexual object, opium is in its own right serves as a thematic object in *The Quiet American*.

The heavy use of opium by Thomas Fowler portrays the lack of moral dexterity of the colonial powers. It is associated with indolence and vice for the Fowler character. He is mostly concerned with his ability to live as comfortable a life as possible in Vietnam. He writes the occasional news

article for the British newspaper he is employed by, but prefers to spend his timesmokingopium and enjoying the company of Phuong. He smokes opium, which enhances his sense of total detachment, even from his own death. Nothing matters to him and he has no real ambitions except to avoid being sent back to England and to the an estranged wife.

Opium is a highly addicted recreational drug used in Indo-China. The fact that Fowler smokes opium so frequently highlights his link to Vietnam and the moral conflicts revolved around the pleasure he takes in his Vietnamese life such as his lover, the people, and theculture. In sum, Phuong's role in The Quiet America's main plot reflects the dichotomy of imperialism in Indo-China and an ongoing love triangle. When Pyle discusses Phuong with Fowler, he starts talking about love, but Fowler replies: " Love's a Western word...we use it for sentimental reasons or to cover up an obsession with one woman.

These people don't suffer from obsessions. " Phuong exists for the benefit of her lovers and even for her own sister to ensure her own security. Vietnam provided its colonizers what they wanted. Its people didn't care who ruled them, they gave loyalty to any who could preserve a livelihood with the necessities such asfood, jobs, and national defense. Likewise, Phuong's decision to remain with Fowler wasn't a consequence of her being a victim of circumstance, but of her playing an active role in maintaining survival through the protection of marriage.