

THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM IN VIETNAM  
AS REFLECTED IN LITERATURE DURING 1900-1954



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สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

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ลัทธิชาตินิยมเป็นประเด็นที่ถกเถียงกันและได้รับการศึกษาจากแนวคิดที่หลากหลายตั้งแต่ปลายคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 19 ลัทธิชาตินิยมถูกกำหนดขึ้นโดยความรู้สึกของกลุ่มคนที่มีภาษาและวัฒนธรรมร่วมกัน แนวคิดนี้มีองค์ประกอบสำคัญหลายประการด้วยกัน เช่น รัฐ ชาติ รััฐชาติ และกระบวนการกู้ชาติ นอกจากนี้แล้ว ลัทธิชาตินิยมสามารถศึกษาได้จากหลายมุมมองที่แตกต่างกัน แนวคิดนี้ได้เริ่มและปรากฏให้เห็นในประเทศอาณานิคมในช่วงต้นคริสต์ศตวรรษที่ 20

สำหรับประเทศอาณานิคมในเอเชียและแอฟริกา ลัทธิชาตินิยมเป็นผลผลิตของการผสมผสานกันระหว่างสองวัฒนธรรม คือ วัฒนธรรมของประเทศเจ้าอาณานิคมและวัฒนธรรมท้องถิ่น แม้ว่าลักษณะพื้นฐานของลัทธิชาตินิยมในประเทศอาณานิคมเหมือนกัน แต่กระบวนการก่อตัวของแนวคิดนี้แตกต่างกันในแต่ละประเทศ รูปแบบของลัทธิชาตินิยมที่แตกต่างกันในแต่ละประเทศล้วนเป็นผลของการต่อสู้ทางการเมืองเพื่ออิสรภาพ ดังนั้น การศึกษาลัทธิชาตินิยมในประเทศอาณานิคมต่างๆ ซึ่งรวมถึงประเทศเวียดนามด้วย จึงเป็นการศึกษากระบวนการกู้ชาติ

การศึกษานี้เสนอว่าการก่อตัวและพัฒนาการของแนวคิดเรื่องลัทธิชาตินิยมในเวียดนามคือการเปลี่ยนแปลงของค่านิยมทางวัฒนธรรมแบบดั้งเดิมในกระบวนการรับและการสังเคราะห์แนวคิดแบบตะวันตก การวิเคราะห์นี้พิสูจน์ว่าลัทธิชาตินิยมแบบเวียดนามในช่วงปี ค.ศ. 1900 – 1945 เป็นรูปแบบใหม่ของความรักชาติแบบดั้งเดิม นอกจากนี้แล้ว งานศึกษาชิ้นนี้เน้นงานวรรณกรรมที่แสดงให้เห็นว่ากระบวนการก่อตัวและพัฒนาการของลัทธิชาตินิยมในเวียดนามนั้นมีความสัมพันธ์อย่างใกล้ชิดกับการต่อสู้เพื่ออิสรภาพในขณะที่ปัญญาชนรุ่นเก่าและปัญญาชนรุ่นใหม่ซึ่งอยู่ในเมืองมีบทบาทสำคัญในการสร้างและปรับแต่งแนวคิดลัทธิชาตินิยม

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Nationalism is a controversial issue and it has been viewed from different schools of thought since the late nineteenth century. Nationalism is characterized by the feeling of a people, based on common language, and culture. This concept embraces a number of key elements, such as state, nation, nation-state, and nationalist movement. In addition, nationalism can be viewed from various perspectives. This concept began to appear in colonial countries in the early twentieth century.

In many colonies in Asia and Africa, nationalism is the product of the combination between two cultures, the culture of the colonizer and the indigenous one. Although the basic features of nationalism in colonial countries are the same, the process of forming this concept is different in each country. The various versions of nationalism in colonial states are the result of political struggles for independence. Therefore, the study of nationalism in colonial countries, Vietnam included, is the exploration of its nature in the process of national revolution.

This study argues that the formation and development of nationalism in Vietnam is the transformation of traditional value in the process of assimilation and synthesis to the western ideas. This examination will prove that Vietnamese nationalism during 1900-1945 is a revised version of traditional patriotism. Besides, this study will focus on literary works illustrating that the process of formation and development of Vietnamese nationalism are closely related to the struggles for independence whereas scholar-patriots and urban-based intellectuals played a vital role in shaping and refining the concept of nationalism.

Field of Studies Southeast Asian Studies

Student's signature .....

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### **The Concept of Nationalism**

Nationalism has been the study of many scholars on political science in the early twentieth century. This term first appeared in Europe around the nineteenth century, and then the formation and development of nationalist movements in Europe and colonized countries in the early twentieth century became a focus of study among scholars. The theory of nationalism has been explored and tackled by scholars in various disciplines, and this concept has been viewed from different perspectives, namely historical, political, economic, anthropological, and sociological standpoints.

Generally, “nationalism is characterized principally by a feeling of community among a people, based on common descent, language, and religion.”<sup>1</sup> However, theorists from different schools of thought believe that nationalism is the product of imagination, of the printing industry, or it is the ideology of nationalists in nationalist movements. Although nationalism is defined differently, it consists of some key elements such as nation, nation-state, language, history, culture, race, etc. In addition, the concept of nationalism has been employed in literature as a main theme to support the revolutions in many colonized states and as a part of propaganda in pursuing national independence. Therefore, it becomes the main focus of nationalists in calling for political consciousness among people in the struggle for national independence.

In many colonized countries in Asia and Africa, the concept of nationalism was a product of their contact with the ‘civilized’ culture of ‘mother country’ through education or through printing media. It can be said that the colonizers’ needs of personnel and office workers created a ground for seeding nationalist movements. The

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<sup>1</sup> Encyclopedia Encarta 2004, Microsoft Cooperation 1983- 2003.

intelligentsia and the bourgeoisies became nationalists due to the new education system from the ‘mother country’. As they understood and realized the main characteristics of the colonizers, these intellectuals asked for autonomy and national independence. However, their initial step was to spread out the idea of national consciousness to the people, the main force that could help to change the situation of their country. The means to transfer this nationalist notion to the masses was through printing media such as newspapers, books, and leaflets, and it was sometimes disguised in literatures. Practically, the formation of nationalism in each country was not the same due to different political and historical situations.

The process of forming the concept of nationalism in Vietnam is closely related to her history. The basic feature of Vietnamese history is the struggles for independence. Vietnam was liberated from China in the tenth century, but she had experienced thousands of battles to preserve an independent state. As a result, solidarity was the key factor that linked all groups of people in fighting against foreign invaders. This historical circumstance created general ethical value among people, known as “*chủ nghĩa yêu nước*” or ‘patriotism’. However, the traditional patriotism was influenced mostly by the Chinese philosophy, dominated by Confucianism. Thus, Vietnamese nationalism is the combination and the assimilation of the traditional heritage and the modern features in the early twentieth century.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main argument of the study is that literature reflects the changing of political ideology or perception of nationalists in the process of forming and developing of the concept “nationalism”. This leads to the second argument. That is Vietnamese nationalism is a new version of traditional patriotism which contains the traditional values and western features. Therefore, in this study, the transformation of Vietnamese patriotism, from traditional to modern form, will be highlighted through literary works. In addition, the development of this notion through nationalist movements will also be discussed.

Due to these arguments, this study has two main objectives. The first one is to find out the characteristics of nationalism in Vietnam under different historical conditions. The second objective is to find out the perception and the shaping of nationalism among the intellectuals through literary works. These objectives will be analyzed through literary works in related to historical contexts.

### **The Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on the examination of Vietnamese political struggles, which displays the transitional process from the traditional patriotism to the modern nationalism. In this transformation, nationalists who contributed a great deal in awakening the national conscience of the masses played a key role in assimilating and synthesizing the traditional and the modern concepts.

As a French colony in the second half of the nineteenth century, Vietnam had launched a long series of struggles for independence in the traditional method the same way it tried to use against the Chinese. However, Confucian scholars or mandarins' patriotism could not defeat the new intruders from the west. Therefore, all the insurgencies or rebellions resulted in failure. This is due to the out-of-date of traditional ways of thinking of the leaders. Besides, the revolutions, in the first hand, are localized in manner, which limits the potential power of people in the resistance for independence. Influenced by the reformist movement in China in late nineteenth century, many Vietnamese scholar-patriots realized that the major weakness of the Vietnamese in colonized situation was the low level of education, which led to the limitation of their perception and worldview. The patriots formed main organizations, namely Duy Tan Hoi (Restoration Society) and Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Hanoi Free School) movements, trying to stimulate the better understanding of people through education and to increase economic status through trade and commercial clubs.

A new generation with both traditional inheritance and the western ideas became the leading group in asking the colonizers for autonomy and self-control. The first intellectual generation of the twentieth century continued linking and altering the

concept of patriotism and the love of nation from the generation of Confucian scholars. However, these intelligentsias focused much on culture and they supported for the peaceful reformation. As a result, many political organizations emerged but had not much impact on the economic and social situations. This is because the intelligentsias were the modernists in ideas but they did not have a clear strategy for gaining national independence.

World War I and the victory of Russian Revolution in 1917 inspired radical intellectuals to search for a guiding ideal in their nationalist movements. In addition to the Chinese Revolution, communism found its way to Vietnam and was welcomed by radical intelligentsias who became the volunteers in leading the anti-French resistances. The zenith point of communist ideology was the formation of Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930. This ideology gradually over-passed previous traditional patriotism and became the guiding ideals in the struggle for national independence. Therefore, the emergence of traditional patriotism and the modern political ideology created in a new form of nationalism in Vietnam.

The scholar-gentry in the late nineteenth century were the pioneers in adding of new concept to the old term, patriotism, and giving a new perception to this notion. The next generation, born in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, continued to synthesize and assimilate this notion with the western ideas. In this period, the concept of nationalism was seen from different viewpoints. This caused contradiction in political ideals among nationalists and reformists. In addition, the world politics (i.e. World Wars, Russian Revolution) altered and affected strongly the formation of nationalism in Vietnam. Through nationalist movements, communist ideology gained the mass support and became the leading ideology. This formed a new version of nationalism.

## **Nationalism in Literature**

In the nationalist movements, the political ideology is very vital. Nevertheless, this ideology can only reach the masses through propaganda. Literature is employed for that purpose. Thus, the examination of nationalists' ideology and perception in

writings is the means to explore the true characteristics of Vietnamese nationalism. Moreover, in the historical context, it is easy to realize the ideals of nationalists in perceiving and adapting nationalism in each nationalist movement. Normally, nationalist movements are studied through historical archives which reveal facts and figures about these events. However, not many historical books are about the perception or feelings of nationalists. This can be fulfilled by literary works. Therefore, literature is means to convey nationalists' ideas and perceptions about revolutionary strategy. In addition, through literature, it is shown how Vietnamese nationalism is related to historical situation in Vietnam.

### **Limitation of literary genre**

The term “literature” used in this thesis contains a broad meaning. Because there is no limitation in genres or styles of creation, it is supposed that all pieces of writings, from letters to newspaper articles, can be treated as literature. As a result, there is no limitation of literary genres in this study. The selection of works is based on the content of the writing that can highlight the main discussion.

In addition, the selection of the writers discussed in the study is based on two criteria. On one hand, the writers are the representatives of their generation. For example, Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh are the outstanding scholars of the patriot-scholar gentry in the early twentieth century. Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh are the outstanding culturalists in preserving and developing national language. On the other hand, they were involved directly or indirectly in the nationalist movements and their writings reflect or promote the patriotism in the nationalist movements. For instance, Nguyen Ai Quoc is a nationalist and his writings promote the patriotism among the masses.

## **Limitation of Time**

The title of this study shows the scope of the study with the period of 45 years, during 1900 – 1945. The year 1900 is chosen because it marks the beginning of the twentieth century. Historically, the year 1900 is not persuasive because many significant revolutions for independence occurred continuously since the time French invaded Vietnam in 1858. Each revolution occurred in different time and there was always a particular guideline or slogan for the struggle. As a result, it is assumed that the concept ‘nationalism’ has been modified through the liberal movements. In fact, the revolutions for independence in Vietnam has a long-lasting tradition since ancient time and the ones in the twentieth century are the connection of what has been originated in the previous time. The characteristic of each revolution which is not always the same is realized through the ideologies, purposes, and strategies of each movement. These revolutions are the result of ideological transition – from tradition to modern.

Moreover, the period 1900 – 1945 witnessed many nationalist movements with the formation and development of many political parties in Vietnam. Each party had a special role in articulating and shaping the ideology of anti-foreign resistance. The collaboration and cooperation or opposition between political parties had positive effects that refined and selected the suitable ideals for nationalist movements. This selection caused a shift of political ideology, from tradition to modern, which was performed by scholar-patriots. This transition was stabilized by the generation born in early 1900s who got the benefits of western education. They were nationalists and radicalists who developed and created good ground for nationalism to grow in Vietnam.

The year 1945 is the turning point in Vietnamese history. In 1945, the national revolution in Vietnam led by the communist party succeeded; Vietnam gained her independence from the colonizers. The year 1945 is the victorious time of nationalist movements in Vietnamese history. Also, this time-point is used as a mark for division of time-frame in sociological studies, i.e. literature, history. Therefore, the period

1900 – 1945 does not only include nationalist movements, but it also contains all the literary works about the formation and development of nationalism in Vietnam.

## Structure of the Thesis

Through literary works, the formation and development of nationalism in Vietnam can be studied in three main stages: the transitional stage of traditional patriotism; the process of modernizing this notion through the assimilating and synthesizing traditional patriotism with western influence; and the developing stage of this notion along with the Vietnamese Communist Party. Therefore, the outline of this study will be classified in accordance to this analysis. However, the basic concept, ‘nationalism’, will be the first item in the list. Thus, with the introduction chapter, there are six chapters in this study.

Chapter one is the introduction, which focuses on the main arguments and the scope of the study. This chapter also gives the explanation about the basic concept of nationalism, and the term literature. It also tells about the limitation of time and literary genres.

Chapter two will be about the concept of nationalism, which is drawn from different perspectives to elaborate in detail each constructed factors of this notion. The Vietnamese nationalism is also analyzed in this chapter. Besides, Vietnamese history is reviewed in this part to serve as the background for the arguments of other chapters. The historical events listed in this study mainly come from the works *Đại Cương Lịch Sử Việt Nam – Toàn tập* (Overview of Vietnamese History – Complete Work), a complete outline of Vietnamese history, by Pro. Dinh Xuan Lam, Pro. Truong Huu Quynh, and Asst. Pro. Le Mau Han.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> To make it brief, I use only the name of Pro. Dinh Xuan Lam in the footnote.

The third chapter focuses on the transitional stage of traditional patriotism, which will examine the process of understanding and adopting the new ideas from the west, and scholar-patriots in their political activities. In this chapter, Hanoi Free School movement and the role of Phan Boi Chau will be the main focus.

The fourth chapter aims at examining the synthesis and assimilation of two cultures, traditional and modern, in Vietnamese context. This chapter will be about the role of Pham Quynh and Nguyen Van Vinh in contributing to the formation of national identity and national consciousness.

Chapter five is about the advent and influence of communist ideology in the nationalist movements during the anti-French resistance. In addition, this section will focus on the contribution of Nguyen Ai Quoc or Ho Chi Minh and his writings, which helps develop the concept “nationalism”.

The final chapter will be the summary of the findings, which crystallizes the concept of nationalism in Vietnamese. In addition, it will explain the reason why communist ideology surpasses the traditionalist and modernist groups in the struggle for independence. This conclusion also reveals the uniqueness of the Vietnamese nationalism through historical and political struggles.

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## CHAPTER II

### NATIONALISM AND THE VIETNAMESE VERSION

This chapter will focus on the basic concept of nationalism in different schools of thought. Besides the general ideas about nationalism, the elements of nationalism, i.e. nation, nation-state, will be discussed. First, the definition of nationalism will be considered from various disciplines. Then, the concept of nationalism is also discussed in Vietnamese viewpoint, in which the Vietnamese historical context is mentioned to provide the background of the study. Finally, the chapter will examine how nationalism is formed in Vietnamese society.

#### Introduction

One of the most popular terms often mentioned in the early twentieth century is “nationalism”. ‘In English, its first use, in 1836, appeared to be theological, meaning the doctrine that designated certain nations as divinely elected’<sup>3</sup>. Thereafter, this term became the core concept for many other terms, such as “nation” and “nationality”. This concept of nationalism as we understand it now originated in Europe with the starting point of the French Revolution and the industrial revolution, and from then on the nationalist movement spread out.

The idea of nationalism came to the East due to the expansion of the western culture through its colonization. Many countries in the East or in Asia started forming their own concepts and ideas about “nationalism” in colonial time depending on many factors; two of which are education and industrialism. The development of nationalism in each Asian country is not the same because each nation has its own

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<sup>3</sup> Anthony D, Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (polity Press in association with Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 2001), p. 5.

particular historical settings. Therefore, when looking at the construction of “nationalism” in Asian countries, historical contexts should be considered in connection with the theory of ‘nationalism’ from the West. The differences in history, economics, politics and culture account for the formation of ‘nationalism’. That is to say, the development of nationalism varied in accordance to the geopolitical and historical conditions of each country.

The concept of ‘nationalism’ embraces some other terms that are parts of the concept and also the forming elements of this notion. The term *nationalism* acquires a wide range of meanings that many theorists explain and analyze in many different ways. Elie Kedourie believes that nationalism consist of ‘nationalist doctrine, language, patriotism, and sovereign state’. He offers many examples and explains the historical origin of the term from Europe, and emphasizes the ‘state’ - the core concept of nationalism<sup>4</sup>. However, Ernest Gellner says that nationalism is ‘the natural form of political loyalty’. Tom Nairn believes that it is a “generally necessary stage of development for all societies common to both materialist and idealist philosophies.”<sup>5</sup> Benedict Anderson thinks that nationalism is the products of ideology which can form the nation<sup>6</sup>.

However, Anthony D. Smith summarizes and concludes that:

*“Nationalism consists of many parts such as: (1) a process of formation, or growth, of nation; (2) a sentiment or consciousness of belonging to the nation; (3) a language and symbolism of the nation; (4) a social and political movement on behalf of the nation;”*

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<sup>4</sup> Elie Kedourie, “Nationalism and Self-Determination” in John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (Oxford University press, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (Oxford University press, 1994), pp. 56 - 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

*and (5) a doctrine and/ or ideology of the nation, both general and specific.”<sup>7</sup>*

Smith’s summary offers a reasonable combination of many different ideas about ‘nationalism’. Therefore, before talking about nationalism, the formation of a nation should be discussed. This will lead to the sentiment or consciousness of many ethnic groups of a particular area in which we have to discuss the language or the symbolism of the nation including the culture and tradition. Some special features are concerned with the sociological movements and ideology of the nation in order to form nationalism of a certain state. However, various ideas about the core concepts of nationalism depend mostly on the viewpoint of many theorists. As a result, different definitions or explanations for each part will be considered in term of social advancement, among which, nation can be treated as a key factor of nationalism.

### **State, Nation and Nation - State**

State is the first notion that acts as the core for the development of the concept of nation. A state is defined as a legal supremacy, mostly backed up by coercion, over a specific territory and population. State is also considered as a political territory which consists of the population with its representative authority or government. Besides, to be a state, this organization must have its own sovereignty. Therefore, a state exists whenever there are territory, people, government and sovereignty. As Smith defines:

*“A state can be defined as sets of autonomous, public institutions with a legitimate monopoly of coercion and extraction in a given territory, and sovereignty in relation to those outside its border.”<sup>8</sup>*

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 5 - 6.

<sup>8</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “Theories of Nationalism: Alternative Models of Nation Formation”, in *Asian Nationalism*, edited by Michael Leifer (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 1.

Smith stresses the difference between state and nation, in which the latter contains more features than the territory, population and sovereignty. According to Smith's ideas, when the population of a state share a common history, myths and historical memories, a public culture, a single economy, etc., then that state can be called a nation.

The formation of nation is the controversial topic among scholars in the early twentieth century. The theory of *Old and New Nation* of Hugh-Seton Watson is the one that links between the old concept and the new one. Watson mentions two categories of nations, old and new, as follow:

*“The old are those which had acquired national identity or national consciousness before the formulation of the doctrine of nationalism. The new are those for whom two processes developed simultaneously: the formation of national consciousness and the creation of nationalist movements.”*<sup>9</sup>

Watson argues that the old nations, for example some countries in Europe, existed long before the concept of nationalism appeared. Because these states were ruled by persons with same identities as peoples, so the national identity was attached to the peoples. However, this could be problematic because the identity might encompass more states or straddle states and this could result in war among states, and among peoples. This resulted in forming new identity or consciousness, which was not clear either.

Joseph Stalin proposed a concept of nation which made the ‘national identity’ or ‘national consciousness’ no longer unambiguous. As Stalin states that:

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<sup>9</sup> John Hutchinson and Anthony Smith, *Nationalism* (Oxford University press, 1994), p. 134.

*“A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture.”<sup>10</sup>*

Therefore, three important elements which can be considered as main cores of a nation are history, culture, and language. A state or a nation can have many groups of people and they are linked together because they share a common culture and the same history. When this happens, a state becomes a nation and the economic system can be developed. Besides, language plays an important role in forming a nation; when people use the same language, it is easy for them to communicate and understand each others better. All these factors create the uniqueness of the community and form their own identity.

The process of forming national identity and national consciousness among the old nations was slow and obscure. It was a spontaneous process, not willed by any one. On the other hand, the formation of new nations was clear with acceleration because this process happened in a short time and was well-documented. According to Watson’s argument, the leaders of nationalist movements propagated, designed and implanted a national consciousness and a desire for political action among their populations. Language was exploited to propagate the idea of national consciousness, from which the nationalist movements originated. The fundamental feature of these movements is that the nationalist elites were able to mobilize support from peasants, merchants, artisans or factory workers because these people were discontented with political, economic, and social conditions.

On the other hand, Susan Reynolds argues that people’s feelings of loyalty to the kingdom in the medieval time were a result of thinking about themselves, not because of their kingdom. That helped develop a nation-state. Reynolds points out that *‘the fundamental premise of nationalist ideas is that nations are objective realities, existing through history’*, and she also refers to the nation –state:

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

*“The nation-states of today are the true nations of history and that only they can ever have inspired loyalties which deserve to be called nationalists.”<sup>11</sup>*

Therefore, the loyalty to the king or the monarchy was an inspiration of nationalist ideas or nationalist movements in certain period of history. Besides, the national kingdom or pre-existing nation contributes much to the ‘solidarity’ and the process of ‘national-consciousness’ among its people (though not all of them).

The well-known classic definition of ‘nation’ may be the one proposed by Weber as Smith extracts:

*“A nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own; hence, a nation is a community which normally tends to produce a state of its own.”<sup>12</sup>*

Weber’s definition seems to include the ideas of the previous definitions in classic school of thoughts. All definitions show that nation and nationalism shares many similar features such as language, history and culture.

However, Benedict Anderson thinks that “nation is an *imagined* political community”. He believes that a modern nation is a product of imagination; that is what people think about their nation is just their imagination. As he writes:

*“Nation is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the images of their communion.”<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (Routledge, 1998), p. 14.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised and extended edition published by Verso, 1991, p. 6.

Anderson argues that the ‘nation’ is imagined as ‘limited’ because of finite numbers of people and the space limit of territory. It is imagined as ‘sovereign’ and a ‘community’ due to the comradeship and unity of people in the age of ‘revolution’ and ‘enlightenment’.

The elements of constructing ‘nation’ are summarized by Eugene Kamenka. Based on historical approach, Kamenka explains the elements constructing ‘nation’ as follow:

*“Nations have arisen most commonly around the result of various and often unrelated factors. Language, territory, religion, economic ties, political authority and racial origin have all done their work and left their mark; but none of these can be treated as decisive.”<sup>14</sup>*

Kamenka’s idea about nation formation clarifies some overlapping definitions in this matter; however, he constructs the concept of nationalism from historical approach and his explanation sticks to the formation of nation-states in Europe.

Other modern theorists all share the same idea: a nation should have the common language, culture, history or shared sentiment, and even sometimes economic factor. In order to understand the formation of nation, we need to make use of the concept of culture in every aspect of the community that we are involved and we can see that ‘nation is a specific cultural object’. ‘It exists in and through the language we speak, the public symbols we acknowledge, the history and literature we were taught in school, the music we listen to, the currency we use, the sporting activities we enjoy, and the news bulletins on the television.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Eugene Kamenka, “Political Nationalism – the Evolution of the Idea”, in Eugene Kamenka, *Nationalism: The Nature and Evolution of an Idea* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), p.12.

<sup>15</sup> Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 13.

Another similar term related to ‘nationalism’ is the ‘nation-state’, which is defined and explained in parallel with ‘nation’. Hobsbawm argues that ‘nations do not make states and nationalisms but the other way round’<sup>16</sup>. This argument is confirmed by Adrian Hasting, who compares the relation between ‘nation’ and ‘nation-state’:

*“A nation may precede or follow a state of its own but it is certainly assisted by it to a greater self-consciousness”.*

Hasting adds that:

*“A nation-state is a state which identifies itself in terms of one specific nation whose people are not seen simply as ‘subjects’ of the sovereign but as a horizontally bonded society to whom the state in a sense belongs.”*<sup>17</sup>

Hasting’s argument has clarified the distinction between nation and nation – state, in which the former is the result of the latter but they are complementary with each other in term of forming a modern state or nation.

This ‘nation-building’ is constructed by Smith in his explanation on ‘nation-building’. As Smith states:

*“Nations are based on vernacular ‘print-communities’, that is, reading publics of vernacular print-languages and literatures – mainly novels and newspapers, which portrayed the imagined political community in sociologically vivid and easily identifiable ways.”*<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Arian Hastings, *The Constructon of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism*, (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 1997. pp. 2 – 3.

<sup>18</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Polity Press, 2001), p. 79.



His argument stresses the formation of nation in the modern school of thoughts, which contains similar features with that of classic school of thoughts.

The idea of nation and nation-state or nation-building was transferred to the East during the period of Western colonialism. Before that many states and kingdoms in the East had enough conditions to form a nation, such as 'a common language', the same 'territory', and the same 'culture'. But according to the western definition, these kingdoms need something more than these features. They need what is called "nationalism", the ideology of the nation which can be revised and developed with the formation of the nation.

## **Nationalism**

The term nationalism itself is controversial among theorists. This notion is discussed by the classic school of thought and the modern one, in which the latter offers strong arguments than the former. "Nationalism is characterized principally by a feeling of community among a people, based on common descent, language, and religion"<sup>19</sup>. Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when nationalism emerged as a distinctive movement, states usually were based on religious or dynamic ties; citizens owed loyalty to their church or ruling family. Therefore, the classic theorists just stopped at defining the concept nation and nation-state, which are the key elements in nationalism, and the modernists continue to complete this concept.

Historically, nationalism was created through the struggle for independence and sovereignty of the nation. Many explanations are used to clarify the formation of the concept *nationalism*. Ernest Gellner argues that nationalism is the effect of industrialism. He explains that when the industry develops, the ability of reading and using language becomes important and necessary to human life. As a result, education plays the key role in upgrading the understanding and the awareness about people

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<sup>19</sup> Encyclopedia Encarta 2004, Microsoft Cooperation 1983- 2003.

sharing the same identity. In the process of education, the culture of the nation is implied and that makes people aware of their identity. Therefore, these lead to their attachment to nation, and later to the preservation of their country independence and sovereignty. In addition, industrialism also increases changes in economic, politic, and social stratification in which the elite or the intellectual will keep the role of leadership as well as they can dominate and implant their ideas, their ideologies on their people.

Conversely, according to Benedict Anderson, nationalism is the products of “*imagined community*” that is formed with the development of printing industry. This kind of media spreads out the concept of nation to the people and creates their imagination about a “nation” that could exist. He also adds that because of this imagination, people are willing to die or sacrifice themselves for something they consider their nation. This creates ‘a great strength’, that is ‘the strength of the hold of the nationalist imagination’<sup>20</sup>. Anderson writes:

*“No more arresting emblems of the modern culture of nationalism exist than cenotaphs and tombs of Unknown Soldiers. ... Void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly national imaginings.”*<sup>21</sup>

Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign”. The term “*imagined*” is used not only to falsify the entity as fabrication, but to express the link of each member, who will never know most of other members, yet they are related through a shared culture, history, and kinship, and the combination of these creates a community<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>20</sup> Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, revised and extended edition published by Verso, 1991, p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6

In Anderson's development of the stages of the nation, the focus on social change and the basic fluidity of identities are based on factors which drive that change, the situational precipitates, products of particular events, relationships and processes that are themselves subject to change. Thus, constructivism can be used to explain social change and the power and political force of nationalism because it incorporates the dynamic nature, the fluidity of identity, but not denying its origins and real existence. This advantage of constructive assumption is to explain historical evolution and changing identities.

Adrian Hasting gives the definition of nationalism as follow: "*Nationalism means two things: a theory and a practice*". In theory, often political one, 'each 'nation' should have its own state' and in practice, 'nationalism is strong only in particularist terms, deriving from the belief that one's own ethnic or national tradition is especially valuable and needs to be defined at almost any cost through creation or extension of its own nation-state.'<sup>23</sup> His arguments are based on the analysis of European countries; however, the main focus is the combination of political ideology (theory) and the nationalist movement (practice). Hasting stresses only theory and practice of nationalism whereas James G. Kellas puts this concept in term of relations with other factors. As Kellas writes:

*"Nationalism is both an ideology and a form of behaviour. The ideology of nationalism builds on people's awareness of a nation (national self-consciousness) to give a set of attitudes and a program of action. These may be cultural, economic or political. Since 'nation' can be defined in 'ethnic, social, or official' sense, so nationalism can take these forms also."*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Arian Hastings, *The Constructon of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationalism* (Cambridge and New York:Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> James G. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, second edition: revised and updated (MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 4.

Kellas emphasizes on the demand of nationalism for ‘self-determination or home rule’, which can be seen in many nationalist movements in colonized states in Africa and Asia in the twentieth century. The significance in Kellas’s argument is the ‘official nationalism’ which means ‘patriotism and the defence of ‘national sovereignty’ in international relation, most strongly in independent statehood’<sup>25</sup>. Kellas mentions that the notion ‘nationalism’ has various versions based on what aspect it is defined. Nevertheless, nationalism can be viewed as the fundamental factor of all the nationalist movements because it is the national ideology of a nation-state.

As Smith states:

*“The ideology of nationalism has been defined in many ways, and most of the definitions overlap and reveal common concept: nationalism is an ideology that places the nation as the centre of its concerns and seeks to promote its well-being.”*<sup>26</sup>

Smith analyses this concept in relation to different school of thoughts and offers some critical arguments on each viewpoint. Smith introduces the term nationalism as follow:

*“Nationalism was an inclusive and liberating force. It broke down the various localism of region, dialect, custom and clan, and helped to create large and powerful nation-states. Its appeal was popular and democratic. It attacked feudal practices and oppressive imperial tyrannies and proclaimed the sovereignty of the people and*

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<sup>25</sup> James G. Kellas, *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, second edition: revised and updated (MacMillan Press Ltd., 1998), p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Polity Press – Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 2001), p. 9.

*the right of all the peoples to determine their own destinies, in states of their own, if that was what they desired.”<sup>27</sup>*

It seems that Smith’s analysis of ‘nationalism’ is the combination of other theories about ‘nations’ and ‘nation-states’ mentioned above. He also offers a definition of this concept as follow:

*“Nationalism may be defined in various ways, mainly with the ideological movement for the maintenance of autonomy, cohesion and individuality for a social group, some of whose members conceive it to be an actual or potential nation.”<sup>28</sup>*

Therefore, Smith’s definition of nationalism repeats the idea of Gellner: *“it is not nations that engender nationalism; rather, it is nationalism that invents nations where they do not exist”<sup>29</sup>*. Smith also shares this view and adds that ‘nationalism invents nations with some pre-existing cultural markers’. He also stresses the ‘demand for a culturally homogenous nation’, in which the need for a ‘high culture’ as a result of ‘growth-oriented industrial society.’<sup>30</sup> Smith asserts that much of the current conflict and turbulence in the world has to do with the fact that the state, nation, and nationalism do not coincide.

By examining through the ‘primordial’, ‘perennial’, ‘socio-economist’, and ‘cultural constructionist’ theories of nationalism, Smith elaborates his own ‘historical ethno-symbolist’ approach. Particularly, Smith’s model stresses the “importance of

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<sup>27</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism* (Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism in the Twentieth Century* (Martin Robertson & Co. Ltd., 1979), p. 87.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “Theories of nationalism: alternative models of nation formation”, in *Asian Nationalism*, edited by Michael Leifer, London, Routledge, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

historical clusters, or heritages, of myths, memories, values and symbols for cultural community formation and the vital role of ethnic ties and ethnic communities (or *ethnies*) in providing a basis for the emergence and persistence of nations”<sup>31</sup>. Thus, according to this analysis, it is obvious that modernists focus on three main issues which have dominated the theory of nation and nationalism. They are (1) “ethical and philosophical, (2) anthropological and political and (3) historical and sociological.”<sup>32</sup>

Although there are many theories about ‘nationalism’, the definition defined by Smith can be considered as the generally-accepted definition. According to Smith, the working definition of nationalism can be stated as:

*“Nationalism is an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential “nation”.”*<sup>33</sup>

So this definition mentions three main ideas that are concerned with the concept of ‘nationalism’: national autonomy, national unity, and national identity. This definition includes a wide range of concepts (even though not all of them): ‘from those that stress objective factors, such as language, culture, customs, territory and institutions, to those that emphasize on subjective factors such as attitude, perception, and sentiments.’<sup>34</sup>

This working definition can help to solve some counter-arguments among theorists of nationalism. It seems that the best way to define this concept is to base it

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<sup>31</sup> Anthony D. Smith, “Theories of Nationalism: Alternative Models of Nation Formation”, in *Asian Nationalism*, edited by Michael Leifer, London: Routledge, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism*, Routledge, 1998, p. 8.

<sup>33</sup> Anthony D, Smith, *Nationalism: Theory, Ideology, History* (Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publisher Ltd., 2001), p. 9.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

on its components – nation, national ideal, nation-state, ethnicity, religion, language, history, etc – to build a good ground for arguments on this notion. However, the working definition includes all the aspects defined in western viewpoint. Therefore, if this notion is used and applied to the colonized states in Asia or Africa, parts of each definition can be seen. The only way to avoid the bias of this concept between Eastern and Western viewpoints is to examine the basic constructed elements of this concept. In the scope of this study, the perception of nationalism in Vietnam is used as a case study, which will be examined through the reflection of literature and the revolution for independence.

### **Vietnamese Viewpoints on Nationalism: An Eastern Case**

In Vietnam the nationalism concept is a new term which appeared in politics in the early twentieth century. In order to see Vietnamese viewpoints on nationalism, it is vital to examine the meanings of the elements in forming the concept of nationalism; namely, nation, state, nation-state. The word “nation” means “*quốc gia*” or “*tổ quốc*” (the fatherland); the historical territory of the country. The word “state”, in Vietnamese, means “*nhà nước*” (government) or “*quốc gia*” (nation); that means a country with organized political structure, the government. The term “nation-state” contains the same meaning as “nation”, which means “*quốc gia*” (nation). However, in Vietnamese meaning, the term “nation-state” is only used when the country is independent. For other situations, only “nation” (*tổ quốc* or fatherland) is used. In most of Vietnamese historical texts, the term “*tổ quốc*” (fatherland) is often employed in discussing about the “nation”. In addition, in talking about the race or the ethnicity, the term “nation” means “*dân tộc*” (race), the historical inheritance of a race through history. Therefore, in Vietnamese, the term “nationalism” means “*chủ nghĩa dân tộc*” (doctrine of a race of a country throughout its national history). In its definition, nationalism or “*chủ nghĩa dân tộc*” contains the doctrine or theory of a race on a territory (or nation) in the development of its history. Thus, in Vietnamese, the term “nationalism” (“*chủ nghĩa dân tộc*”), to some extent, includes the concept of national identity, national unity and national autonomy.

Before the invasion of the French in the late nineteenth century, Vietnam already experienced the process of nation-building, from state to nation and to nation-state. In accordance to Vietnamese history, Vietnam originated from an ancient polity, known as Van Lang. This polity was formed based on the unification of fifteen tribes along the Red River delta. As a result, this cooperation and consolidation formed an independent polity with its border and territory. With Dong Son drum as a cultural symbol, Van Lang developed and expanded for a long time. Then, Van Lang was replaced by Au Lac, a kingdom constructed based on the re-organization of administration of Van Lang polity. Au Lac was well-being for a long time before falling under the domination of the Chao dynasty of China in 179 B.C.

Since the first century (A.D), there were many resistances against the domination of the Chinese. The insurrection of Trung sisters in 40 A.D was an outstanding event in Vietnamese history in fighting for independence. In fact, Vietnamese history is an epic of struggles for freedom and independence over foreign invaders (most of all were the Chinese dynasties). Resistances for independence occurred continuously until the 905 A.D, when Khuc Thua Du won a great victory over the Tang dynasty and restored national independence and sovereignty, putting a complete end to the northern domination<sup>35</sup>. Since the tenth century onwards, the name Au Lac was replaced by Dai Viet or Dai Co Viet (means Great Viet).

Dai Viet kingdom was developed and expanded both in population and in territory. The Dinh dynasty (968- 1009) preserved and established a stable territory of the independent kingdom. Then, this dynasty was replaced by Ly dynasty, from the eleventh to twelfth century. In Ly dynasty, Dai Viet kingdom defeated the invasion of Song dynasty of China. Then, Tran dynasty took control of the country from the thirteenth to fourteenth century. During this period, Dai Viet three times defeated the invasion of Yuan dynasty of China. However, when the Ho dynasty replaced Tran

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<sup>35</sup> Đinh Xuân Lâm, *Đại Cương Lịch Sử Việt Nam – Toàn tập*, Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục, Hà Nội, 2001. (*Overview of Vietnamese History – Complete Work*, Education Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001), pp. 78 – 80.



dynasty in the end of the fourteenth century, Dai Viet became weak because of the decrease of economy and of conflicts among social classes. As a result, the country fell into the domination of Ming dynasty of China. In the early fifteenth century, a resistance for independence, led by Le Loi, gained the country's independence after twenty years of fighting (1418 – 1427), and set up Le dynasty. This dynasty lasted for a long time, from the fifteenth to eighteenth century.

However, in the middle of the sixteenth century, civil war happened which resulted in the division of the country into two parts; the North with Trinh dynasty, the South with Nguyen dynasty. This division caused civil wars for nearly two centuries and many rebellions in both parts of the country. In 1771, the revolution of Nguyen brothers, known as Tay Son revolution, occurred in the South and took the control of the South in 1783. In 1785, Tay Son army defeated Siam force that aided King Nguyen Anh in an attempt of taking back the lost territory in the South. In 1787, Tay Son gained control of the North and united the country after two century of division. This new dynasty faced the invasion of the Qing dynasty of China. However, the Qing troop was defeated in 1789. This victory marked a victorious note in the revolutionary history of Vietnam. Nevertheless, the death of King Nguyen Hue and the conflicts among Nguyen brothers led to the weakness of the dynasty in early nineteenth century. In 1792, with the help of the west (especially from France), King Nguyen Anh attacked the new dynasty and gradually regained his lost territory in the South. In 1802, King Nguyen Anh took control over the country and established new Nguyen dynasty, the last dynasty in Vietnamese history.<sup>36</sup> Although the political situations of Dai Viet changed so often, this kingdom was well-organized and became a state politically with different levels of administration since the Ly dynasty.

The struggles for independence nearly a thousand years had prepared the ground for the patriotic characteristics to be seeded and grown. This feature appeared and developed along with the resistances of the nation, and it was constructed as a

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<sup>36</sup> For detail information, see the section four in Dinh Xuan Lam, *Overview of Vietnamese History – Complete Work* (Education Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001).

traditional value of the Vietnamese. This feature was then theorized as a theory and it became a common ethical value, known as patriotism, in the feudal period Vietnam. Since independence, the traditional patriotism kept an important position in judging the moral or ethical values of people in political viewpoints. A person was thought to be a patriot when he or she obeyed and was loyal to the king; thus, the term “*trung quan ai quoc*” (loyalty to the king is loving the country) dominated the belief of people in (feudal) traditional education.

Under the Chinese domination for over a thousand years, Confucianism was the norm of ethics in Vietnam feudal society. In Confucianism, ‘loyalty to the king’ (*trung quan*) is the most important quality of a ‘hero’ (*quan tu*), and the ‘love of country’ (*ai quoc*) is the obedience to the order of the sovereign. Therefore, when the country was in danger, men were sent to the front or they volunteered to fight for independence to show their loyalty, which contributed to the construction of ‘patriotism’ from generation to generation. However, with the appearance and invasion of the French in the second half of the nineteenth century, patriotism partly lost its socio-political meanings. This could be explained by a series of failure of many anti-foreign resistances, which caused the scholar-patriots to think about the out-of-date patriotism concept that they were applying.

Politically speaking, Vietnam was a nation before the coming of French. However, this type of nation falls into the category of “old and new nation” of Hugh-Seton Watson. In fact, Vietnam already had an identity (the Dong Son culture) and national consciousness (independence and self-determination) before it was invaded by the west. With the presence of the French, traditional education was gradually assimilated by the novel ideas. Thanks to the ideas from western books, many patriot-scholars realized that the ‘the love of country’ (*ai quoc*) was to pursue independence, equality and liberation for the peoples, and it was stronger than ‘the loyalty to the king’ (*trung quan*). The traditional scholars made the first step in the transitional stage of patriotism and laid the base for the formation of a new concept in Vietnamese revolution, nationalism.

In addition to the new perception of the traditional value, patriotism, the concept of nation was also understood in western viewpoint; that means, it is not a

nation based on historical structure consisting of stable community, common language, territory, and culture but also a nation having national consciousness and a theory or ideology in its self-determination. This concept of nation in Vietnam was formed in the adaptation process of political perception, which enabled Vietnam to go through the nation-building under the new concept, nation-state, to form a new political ideology, known as nationalism. Actually, this process could be completed by the continuation of many patriot-generations, from scholar-patriots to modern nationalists, in the course of history from the late nineteenth century to first half of the twentieth century. It is vital to view briefly the course of contemporary Vietnamese history in order to see the basic features of the nationalism concept in Vietnam.

### **The Colonial Period**

Since the time French fired the first cannon at Da Nang port in 1858, starting the invasion of Vietnam, anti-foreign resistances occurred everywhere from the South to the North. Consequently, Vietnam at last became French colony in 1884 when the last treaty was signed which allowed the French to set up *résident supérieur* on top of regional authority to supervise all the administrative work. However, a big revolt led by Ton That Thuyet in 1885 created a new wave of resistance - Can Vuong or Aid the King - with the call of King Ham Nghi. Many revolts and insurgencies burst out all over the central and the north Vietnam. This movement inflamed the patriotism of the people in responding to the King's decree. Two significant resistances, one led by Phan Dinh Phung and the other by Hoang Hoa Tham (or De Tham), could be counted as the major and extensive ones. Unfortunately, the death of Phung led to the end of the movement (in 1896), which ended the Can Vuong movement in Vietnam. Even though De Tham could manage to control a large area for nearly 30 years, his revolution finally ended in brutal repression.

Besides these two major revolutions, there were many revolts of ethnic groups or of peasants in the center in responding to Can Vuong movement. Nevertheless, all the revolutions failed. This is because these movements were local in manner; they had no connection or cooperation with other movements throughout the region or the

country. The leadership of these revolutions relied mostly on the scholars or mandarins who belonged to traditional education, so the traditional ideology was applied in fighting against the new enemy. This concept is out-of-date in comparison to the western invaders, as Le Van Son notes about these revolutions: “*the invaders are new but the patriotism is old, which inhibits the revolutionary of the scholars.*”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, the scholar-patriots started to search for new concept that could be suitable to the conditions of Vietnam in the anti-foreign resistances.

The victory of Japan over Russia in 1905 created a motive for many Vietnamese patriots who would like to learn the Japanese experiences in reforming the country in order to attain national self-determination. With the Duy Tan Hoi (New Society Organization) of Phan Boi Chau, more than two hundred young men traveled to Japan to study through Dong Du (Exodus to the East) movement, which lasted only two years. After the failure of Dong Du movement, another movement in North Vietnam aimed at promoting public education, known as Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Hanoi Free School) in 1908, organized by Duy Tan Hoi. Hanoi Free School movement was the first movement to propagandize the use of ‘*quốc ngữ*’ (Romanized-Vietnamese script), which partly increased the percentage of literate in the masses. Although this movement lasted only for one year, its influence created a need of study and boosted the popular use of ‘*quốc ngữ*’ among the masses. This movement also prepared a ground for the new perception of the nationalism concept in the patriotic generation.

Thanks to French education policy, a generation with western education became a major intellectual force in Vietnam in early 1920s. These intelligentsias support for the new educational system which utilized ‘*quốc ngữ*’ (Romanized-Vietnamese script) instead of ‘*nôm*’ or ‘Sino-Vietnamese script’ (in traditional teaching). This reformation in education enabled the emerging of French culture and

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<sup>37</sup> Lê Văn Sơn, “Đặc Điểm Tư Tưởng Thẩm Mỹ Của Thơ Ca Yêu Nước và Cách Mạng từ 1858 đến 1945”, *Tạp chí văn học*, No. 9 – 1999. (“Some Characters in Artistic Ideal of Revolutionary and Patriotic Poems from 1858 to 1945”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 9, 1999), p. 74.

customs to Vietnam. As a result, the combination of two cultures inspired the intelligentsias with national identity and national self-determination, which were the roots for many nationalist movements led by radical intellectuals in later periods. In addition, the World War I made French economy in difficulties, so the French tried to fulfill the country's wealth by increasing exploitative policy in her colonies. By applying many new administration policies in Vietnam, replacing the traditional mandarins by the western educated officials, French authority altered the traditional lifestyles of Vietnamese people.

In economy, French increased mining industry and expanded plantations all over Vietnam. The need of administrative staff forced French to build more schools and improve the educational system. The increasing number of factories, mining industries, and plantations affected so much on Vietnamese social strata; the appearance of landlords, bourgeoisies, petty bourgeoisies, workers, students, and peasants grouped people into classes with different living conditions. The most significant group was bourgeoisie intellectuals, known as urban bourgeoisies, who were minor officials, clerks, writers, students or journalists. These people were the radical generation who questions the colonizers about 'equality', 'freedom', and 'humanity'. This force of intellectuals creates a movement in cultural life and improves social conscience of the public. With the coming of modern printing technology, newspapers and books became popular, which was the main channel of communication of the radical ideas to the masses calling for public awareness in the struggles for social reformation.

In the 1920s, Vietnamese society witnessed many changes in socio-politics; the influence of Russian Revolution (in 1917) and the Chinese Revolution had a great impact on the nationalist movements in Vietnam. With the outburst of printing media, books about novel reformative ideas became widespread among Vietnamese intellectuals, which blew a new inspiration to many radical groups inside and outside Vietnam. As a result, many political groups were formed under different covers because they had to operate clandestinely. Also in this period, communist ideology was introduced to Vietnam, firstly through a radical group in China, by Nguyen Ai Quoc. With the mobilization of Nguyen Ai Quoc, Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang

Dong Chi Hoi (Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam) was formed, which acted as the core organization for the formation of Communist party in Vietnam in 1930.

In late 1920s, most of the political groups in Vietnam turned to be parties under different ideals. The Nationalist Party (known as Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang or VNQDD) led by Nguyen Thai Hoc in the North, which aimed at national liberation through terrorist activities and arm-struggles. The Constitutionalist Party of Bui Quang Chieu and Nguyen Pham Long in the South, a pro-French organization, which wished to gain autonomy and independence through political administrative reform and by cooperation with French. Tan Viet Cach Mang Dang (New Vietnam Revolution Party) in the Central Vietnam pursued its target through mass education and mobilization. The Nationalist Party (VNQDD) and the Revolutionary Youth League were the two radical groups that tried to recruit new members and mobilize their ideals to the masses. However, the Revolutionary Youth League's ideals were based on regulations and communist ideology while the Nationalist Party had no regulations or strategy. The contradiction of ideologies among many political organizations caused socio-political crisis among the radical groups, which was the process of refining and adaptation of national ideology in the nationalist movements.

The formation of Indochinese Communist Party in 1930 was the turning point in the revolutionary history of Vietnam in the early twentieth century, because this marked the proper adaptation of nationalist ideology in the struggle for independence. In 1936, the Popular Front in France won the election and set up the New Government, which supported for the release in political control in its colonies. Due to this event, the Indochinese Communist Party mobilized the masses and cooperated with other groups to form the Popular Front (1936 – 1939). The period of Popular Front was the time political groups in Vietnam were legally formed and operated publicly through newspapers and public demonstrations. However, before World War II in 1939, the Popular Front in France lost its power and was replaced by Vichy government which applied oppressive policies in colonies. Therefore, after 1939, many political parties in Vietnam went underground but still gained support from the masses.

The time of World War II (1939 – 1945) was the climax of political struggles in Vietnam. Many political parties were either anti- or pro-colonizers; some political parties in the South cooperated with French such as the Constitutionalist Party, while others followed national revolutions. The Communist Party was the only party calling for the unification of all social classes in the resistance against the colonizers (French) and fascists (Japanese). Also in this period, many religious groups in the South (such as Cao Daist and Hoa Hao sects) played an active role in the political arena. These religious groups were large in numbers and supported for the “Quo-Asian Theory” of the Japanese, which were opposite to the unification policy of the communists.

The coming of the Japanese put Vietnam in the situation of “two-joke” colony (two layers of exploitation). Under the pressure of Japanese rule, the life of people became so miserable and there was famine nearly all over the country, which led to the death of two million people in the North. The hardship of life and the exploitation of the invaders boosted the mobilization of the Communist Party in calling for the cooperation of all political groups and social classes to form a revolutionary force known as Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Vietnam Independence League) or Viet Minh in short. With the slogan fighting against the old colonizers and new invaders (the fascists), Viet Minh got the support of the masses and operates all over the country in local and regional levels. However, political clashes between Viet Minh and other pro-Japanese groups in the South showed the contradiction of revolution ideology in Vietnam; as a result, the communist ideal took the leading position in the national revolution for independence. With the failure of the fascist at the end of World War II, Viet Minh took the chance to overthrow the Japanese and the French and declared the formation of Independent Vietnam in September 1945. This event marked the victory of communist ideology in the national struggle for national independence.

The struggle for independence was the process of forming and developing of nationalism concept in Vietnam. Besides, the special historical context in Vietnam offers unique situations for national awareness to be built and developed among the masses. As Tran Van Giau mentions in his talk about the elements of forming nationalism in Vietnam, he writes:

*“Vietnamese history through several thousand years is mainly the history of struggle for independence. Vietnam was in a special geopolitics so the national ideology of Vietnamese peoples is the patriotism through the course of its history. The formation and development of patriotism comes along with the formation and development of nationalism.”<sup>38</sup>*

Giau gives more explanation and evidence to show the heritage of patriotism in Vietnamese history as a result of resistances against invaders. In his analysis, he also stresses the understanding of history in the course of development:

*“In order to find out the origin of the formation, development of the Vietnamese traditional ethical values, it is priority to understand Vietnamese history. The historical conditions decide the characteristics of all the traditional ethical values which are formed and developed along with the national history.”<sup>39</sup>*

This idea confirms for the narration and analysis of historical events listed above. Giau’s idea is reaffirmed by Stanley with an agreement about the heritage of Vietnamese values and the influence of historical conditions. Stanley believes that Vietnamese nationalism originated from the long resistance of Vietnam since its foundation. The nineteenth century saw the transformation of this value due to the new intruders. The ‘nationalism’ quality contained traditional value – Confucianism or loyalty to the monarchy – in the first phase of French resistance, and then developed itself to another level which contained the western influence through education and democracy. As Stanley writes:

*“A sense of Vietnamese national identity nevertheless grew in reaction to foreign intervention – crystallizing during the long*

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<sup>38</sup> *Trần Văn Giàu Tuyển Tập*, Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục, 2000. (*Selected Works of Tran Van Giau*, Education Publishing House, 2000), p. 283.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 307.



*resistance against the Chinese. It confronted the French from their first intrusions into Vietnam.”*<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, Vietnamese nationalism originated from the long traditional values; in its formation and development, historical conditions were exploited to spread out the national consciousness and national identity so that this concept was constructed and adjusted suitably to Vietnamese contexts. Thanks to the popular usage of ‘*quốc ngữ*’ (Romanized-Vietnamese scripts), printing industry was developed along with the widespread of printing media - newspapers, books - which provoked the national consciousness in the public. The outburst of print medium, the new system of education, and the propaganda of many patriots, especially the intelligentsia and bourgeoisie, created a new concept among the masses and radical groups. In the process of the national revolution, the concepts nation and nation-state were constructed as the foundation for the nationalism notion to be formed, which is not different from the theory of nationalism in manner but in the process. Nevertheless, Vietnamese nationalism is the new version of traditional patriotism in combination with western viewpoints, which is the special feature of this study. The progress of changing and adapting the traditional patriotism in the course of history will be discussed in the following sections.

### **Should There Be a Working Definition on Nationalism?**

The concept of nationalism in western perspective and in Vietnamese understanding has just been presented. The differences between western and eastern perspectives in judging or defining the concept is historical settings, just like John Plamentaz mentions in his ‘Two Types of Nationalism’. Plamentaz explains the concept of nationalism as follow:

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<sup>40</sup> Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History*, Revised and updated edition (Viking Penguin, 1991), p. 118.

*“Nationalism is primarily a cultural phenomenon, though it can, and often does, take a political form. It is related to, but different from, both patriotism and national consciousness.”<sup>41</sup>*

He also adds that:

*“Nationalism, as distinct from mere national consciousness, arises when peoples are aware, not only of cultural diversity, but of cultural change and share some idea of progress which moves them to compare their own achievements and capacities with those of others.”<sup>42</sup>*

Plamentaz’s idea seems to be suitable to the course of forming the nationalism concept in Vietnam because the changes in Vietnamese society and culture in the first three decades of the twentieth century was the key factor for the transformation of traditional patriotism.

In addition, the differences in economy, science and technology in colonized countries produced a varied process and a diverse progress of constructing nationalism in its struggle for independence. Like other colonized states, Vietnam became a French colony in the situation of far more backwards in term of modern education; therefore, the ‘mission of civilization’ from ‘mother country’ was very important to the development of Vietnam. Thanks to the support for the usage of ‘*quốc ngữ*’ and the expansion of mass education (by using French and ‘*quốc ngữ*’), Vietnamese people were able to access to the knowledge of science and technology, also the ideology of many western reformists. So, there is a connection between western ideas and eastern concept in the formation of Vietnamese nationalism. This is vital to put the perception of the East and the theory of the West in the working definition of nationalism.

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<sup>41</sup> John Plamenatz, “Two Types of Nationalism”, in Eugene Kamenka, *Nationalism: The Nature and Evolution of an Idea* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1975), p. 24.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

Nevertheless, the basic elements in forming the concept of nationalism (in the West) can be applied in Eastern situations to see the version of its nationalism (or its variation) in different historical settings. This could be true to all the definition of nationalism of Eastern or Western viewpoints; however, not all elements came at the same time in the Eastern states (for being imported from west) in the process of assimilation and synthesis. The focus of this study, the case study of Vietnamese nationalism, will be analyzed and studied within the historical context under the light of literature. Therefore, the version of nationalism in Vietnam will be specific to its own situation with western features and eastern characteristics.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the process of transforming traditional value, patriotism, to the modern concept depended on the scholar-patriots who act as the go-between of the shift of this meaning and concept. The following chapter will discuss more about the contribution of the scholar-gentry to the formation of nationalism concept in Vietnam.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## CHAPTER III

### THE TRANSITIONAL STAGE OF TRADITIONAL PATRIOTISM

The transitional stage of traditional patriotism can be seen through the life and works of Phan Boi Chau, a representative of scholar-patriots. The coming of *quốc ngữ* (Romanized-Vietnamese script) and Hanoi Free School movement will be discussed as the fundamental conditions for this shifting. Besides, Phan Chu Trinh, a reformist-scholar, will be included in the discussion to highlight for this transition.

The transitional process of traditional patriotism to modern nationalism in Vietnam took place for a long time. The meaning of the traditional value was understood and perceived with a new meaning by scholar-patriots in early twentieth century. The transformation stage of traditional patriotism to modern patriotism - the old and new meanings of patriotism, was carried out by the scholar-patriots in the early twentieth century. Having witnessed the failure of many anti-foreign resistances in the late nineteenth century, these scholar-patriots realized that the traditional concept, patriotism, was not suitable for Vietnamese situations at that time. So, they started to look for new ideals or concepts for the national revolution. Many scholar-patriots went abroad to search for radical ideals. That is why many political groups were formed in exile.

In addition, with the arrival of the French, printing technology was improved and developed. This was accompanied by the introduction of many foreign books about philosophy and social theories (which were translated into Sino-Vietnamese by Chinese scholars). Consequently, the patriotic scholars with traditional education were exposed to new ideas from western books and found that the weakness of Vietnamese people was the low level of education, which led to the limitation in their national awareness and strategy for the resistance. As a result, the scholar-gentry's attention was to increase the education level of the masses together with organizing and grouping the radical patriots both inside and outside Vietnam.

Among these scholar-patriots, Phan Boi Chau was the outstanding figure in the political activities which aimed at increasing social education and forming a political force for the national revolution. Before discussing about the contribution of Phan Boi Chau in the transformation of traditional patriotism, it is vital to briefly review his biography.

### **Phan Boi Chau's biography**

Born in a poor family of scholar in Nam Dan (now Nghe An province) and son of a school master, Phan Boi Chau (also known under the names of Phan Van San, Sao Nam, Thi Han) was enthusiastic for the anti-French resistance led by the scholars of the Can Vuong movement. At the age of 19, he gathered about sixty students in an insurrectional unit which soon broke up. However, with his traditional education, Phan spent years taking care of his sick father without involving in any public politics. In 1900 he won the title of First Laureate at the Regional examination, his father died the same year; he from then on threw himself into political action<sup>43</sup>. Phan's first plan was to link all the resistance forces in the country, so he traveled throughout the country to agitate his plan and to form a nationwide organization. In 1904, Phan Boi Chau invited prince Cuong De to be one of the founders of Duy Tan Hoi (Modernization Society), an organization that focused on the reformation of Vietnamese economy and on arm-struggle.

In 1905, the news of Japan's victory over Russia urged Chau go to Japan in searching for help. In Japan, Phan met K'ang Yu-wei and Liang Ch'i-ch'ao, Chinese reformists, who offered good advice on his revolutionary strategy. With the help of some Japanese high-ranking officers, Phan formed a new movement called Dong Du (Exodus to the East), which sent students to Japan to study in some universities in Tokyo in preparation for the revolutions in later period. With Dong Du, 'Phan

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<sup>43</sup> Nguyen Khac Vien, Huu Ngoc, *Vietnamese Literature* (The Foreign Language Publishing House, Hanoi, 1986), p. 461.

nourished the idea of counting on foreign (Japan) assistance to overthrow the colonial administration and install an enlightened monarchy<sup>44</sup>. However, Dong Du movement lost its momentum in 1908 – 1909 when the Japanese government cooperated with the French and expelled all the Vietnamese students. During the time staying in Japan, Phan changed his mind and plan of action: from violent movement to preparation for a wide range of revolution. Phan proposed his new plan by increasing education and economy in creating a common ideology in the people. It was his idea that the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Hanoi Free School) movement started in Hanoi in 1907<sup>45</sup>.

When Dong Du movement failed in 1908, Phan Boi Chau went to Siam (now Thailand) to reorganize Duy Tan Hoi. With the victory of Chinese Revolution in 1911, Chau went to China and turned Duy Tan Hoi (Modernization Society) into Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi (Restoration Society of Vietnam) in 1912. Having been arrested and imprisoned in China for some years, Phan began to support Republican (instead of pro-monarchy) when he was released from prison. In 1925, after being exposed to the communist ideas, Phan intended to found a new party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang or People of Vietnam Party) but he was arrested and deported to Vietnam. Chau spent the rest of his life under house-arrest in Hue until 1940.

Phan's great moments in Vietnamese political history were the Duy Tan Hoi (Modernization Society) and the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc movement (Hanoi Free School) in the first decade of the twentieth century. Hanoi Free School movement was the intensive movement of learning *quốc ngữ* (Romanized-Vietnamese script) in the public with the purpose of increasing the literate ration among the masses, which could serve as a means of propaganda and propagate the radical ideas to the public. This movement, in Ma Giang Lan's opinion, had the influence of the Renovation movement in China, in which Chinese reformists launched a program of reforming the script in 1906 with two main targets: unified the national language and change the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 462.

<sup>45</sup> Đinh Xuân Lâm, *Đại Cương Lịch Sử Việt Nam*, Nhà xuất bản Giáo Dục, 2001 (*Overview of Vietnamese History – Complete Work*, Education Publishing House, 2001), pp. 605 -611.

scripts in accordance to its phonetics. In Vietnam, the use of Chinese script (or Sino-Vietnamese script) known as *Nôm* was a strong barrier to the renovation of the nation because the difficulties in learning and the non-unification in the writing system (because each region had a different way of writing). Therefore, the founders of Hanoi Free School called for the use of *quốc ngữ* (or Romanized-Vietnamese script), which had been used in the south (or Cochinchina) since 1865<sup>46</sup>, due to its simplicity and easiness.

### **Quốc Ngữ and Hanoi Free School movement** <sup>47</sup>

In order to explain for the reason why Hanoi Free School movement supports for the learning of *quốc ngữ*, it is worth looking back to the origin of this script. *Quốc ngữ* was an invented script made by Catholic priest in the seventeenth century (in 1651). Until 1862 when the French controlled three provinces in the South Vietnam (or Cochinchina), *quốc ngữ* was used limitedly in the Catholic churches for the purpose of religion. Soon after that, it became the official language of authority and military administration of this colony. “*Quốc ngữ*” became the medium of newspapers quite early in the Cochinchina, such as *Gia Định báo – News of Gia Dinh* (in 1865), *Nông Cổ Mìn Đàm – News about rural life* (in 1901), and *Lục Tỉnh Tân văn - News of the six provinces* (1907)<sup>48</sup>. With the convenience of using and spreading this script

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<sup>46</sup> Mã Giang Lân, “Chữ Quốc Ngữ và Sự Phát Triển Thơ Ca Đầu Thế Kỷ XX”, in *Tạp Chí Văn Học*, No. 8, 1998 (“Quoc Ngu and the Development of Poems in the Beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> Century”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 8, 1998), pp. 45-50.

<sup>47</sup> Hanoi Free School was a movement of free education founded by patriotic scholars in 1907. It first started in Hanoi and then spread out throughout the North and Central Vietnam. The school fund was donated by its founders or from donors (i.e. businessmen, enterprises, etc.). Teachers were the volunteer scholars and the learners paid no fee, i.e. books, notebooks, school fee. On the contrary, learners from remote places could have accommodation for free in the school campus.

<sup>48</sup> Phong Lê, “Phác thảo buổi đầu văn xuôi quốc ngữ”, *Tạp chí Văn Học*, No. 11 – 2001 (“The Outline of the First Quoc Ngu Literature”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 11, 2001), p. 16.

and the need to civilize the colony according to the standard of ‘mother country’, on the Decree signed on 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1869, the Governor of Cochinchina declared that: “Since 1<sup>st</sup> April 1869, all official documents should be written in European alphabet”. This marked the official use of *quốc ngữ* in the South Vietnam. However, *quốc ngữ* became official and national language in 1919 due to the banning of using Sino-Vietnamese script (or *Nôm*) in traditional examination system, and the acceptance and support of using *quốc ngữ* of patriot scholar-gentry.<sup>49</sup>

In fact, *quốc ngữ* became popular in the South and North Vietnam since the first decade of the twentieth century. The outburst of *quốc ngữ* could be counted with Hanoi Free School movement in the North, which enabled the widespread of newspapers and books throughout the country. The aim of Hanoi Free School was to increase the literacy in the public; through education the national awareness will be taught by the writings of scholar-patriots along with western scientific knowledge. It could be said that Hanoi Free School movement was the preparation for a nation-wide revolution and a plan to take action of Phan Boi Chau. Actually, the content of books and lectures taught in many free schools were written by many patriots in exile, including many works by Phan Boi Chau, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The purpose of Hanoi Free School movement was to call for the learning of *quốc ngữ*, so in the first series of writings in *quốc ngữ*, its founders encouraged the public to use *quốc ngữ* in their study because it was the simple way to broaden one’s knowledge in the country new situation. Tran Quy Cap and Nguyen Phan Lang were examples of patriots whose efforts in promoting the level of education of the masses and the self-strengthening the nation. In the poem *Khuyến Người Học Chữ Quốc Ngữ* (Advise People to Learn Quốc Ngữ), a short poem of twenty-four line, Tran Quy Cap

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<sup>49</sup> Nguyễn Văn Hoàn, “Chữ quốc ngữ và sự phát triển của văn hoá Việt Nam trong thế kỷ XX”, *Tạp chí Văn Học*, No. 9 – 2000, (“Quoc Ngu Script and the Development of Vietnamese Culture in the Twentieth Century”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 9, 2000) pp. 43 – 48.



stated that *quốc ngữ* was a proper choice<sup>50</sup>. Cap stressed that the proper choice of education since the early time of learning would turn a person into someone:

*“Kìa kìa những mặt anh hùng  
Cũng vì buổi nhỏ học không sai đường”  
(There are the heroes  
who had the proper learning in their early age)<sup>51</sup>*

Cap also mentioned about the importance of learning *quốc ngữ* that it is the soul of the nation. This is because its meanings and sounds are the same as spoken language.

*“Chữ quốc ngữ là hồn trong nước  
Phải đem ra tính trước dân ta  
Sách Âu, Mỹ, sách China  
Chữ kia chữ nọ dịch ra tỏ tường”<sup>52</sup>  
(Quốc ngữ is the soul of the nation  
So let it be discussed among our people  
Books from Europe, America, and China  
Can be translated clearly and closely in our language)*

The stimulation of learning *quốc ngữ* was also seen in a poem by Nguyen Phan Lang:

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<sup>50</sup> Before 1919, the education system in Vietnam was different in three regions. In the north, both French and Quốc ngữ (even Nôm) were used in schools. Therefore, Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc advised people to choose Quốc ngữ instead of Nôm because French was a compulsory language.

<sup>51</sup> Because these verse of poems are translated by myself, so I keep the Vietnamese in original form while the English in brackets.

<sup>52</sup> Trần Quý Cáp, “Khuyến người học chữ Quốc ngữ”, in *Hợp Tuyển Thơ Văn Việt Nam (1858 – 1920)*, quyển II, Nhà xuất bản Văn học, 1985 (“Advise People to Learn Quốc Ngữ”, in *Vietnamese Prose and Poem Anthology (1858-1920)*, Vol. II, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 1985), pp. 255-56.

“Từ đây phải nhận cho tinh  
 Học Tây học Hán cho rành mới hay  
 Trước hết phải học ngay Quốc ngữ  
 Khỏi đôi đường tiếng chữ khác nhau”<sup>53</sup>

(From now on we must choose  
 To learn French or Chinese fluently  
 But first of all we need to learn quốc ngữ  
 In order to avoid the difference in sound and form)

The radical scholars in Hanoi Free School movement realized the benefits of *quốc ngữ* not only because it is simple to learn, but also it is a good means of propaganda. In the preface of *Văn Minh Tân Đọc Sách* (Reading Books to Be Civilized), a text book used in the program of Hanoi Free School, there was a message about the purpose of this movement:

“Vietnamese should learn ‘quốc ngữ’ as the first task so that in a short time, about three months, children and women can read, write and use ‘quốc ngữ’ to keep notes about the history or about the events of today ... This is the first step to widen everyone’s knowledge.”<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the purpose of this movement did not stop at increasing literacy level in the masses but also enriching the perception of the people about the social and scientific knowledge. Beside the encouragement of popular education, Hanoi Free School also advocated and mobilized for democratic movement by campaigns of changing the old habits, for example, the custom of having long hair among men. The poems *Húi Hề*<sup>55</sup>, a short poem of twenty lines, shows the definitive attitude of

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<sup>53</sup> Phong Lê, “Phác thảo buổi đầu văn xuôi quốc ngữ”, in *Tạp chí văn học*, No. 11 – 2001, (“The Outline of the First Quoc Ngu Literature”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 11, 2001) pp. 15 – 24.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>55</sup> “Húi hề” is the exclamatory word used to stimulate the spirit of group-work, i.e., the sounds of fishermen when they pull the fishing net out of the water.

partisans in wearing short hair; cutting the long hair also meant saying good-bye to the backwardness to catch up with the novel knowledge.

*“Tay trái cầm lược  
Tay phải cầm kéo  
Húi hê! Húi hê!  
Thùng thẳng cho khéo  
Bỏ cái ngu này ...  
Bỏ cái dại này ...  
Ngày nay ta cúp  
Ngày mai ta cạo !...”<sup>56</sup>*

*(The comb on the left hand  
The scissors on the right hand  
Slowly and carefully we cut  
To leave the stupidity ...  
To leave the ignorance ...  
Today we cut  
Tomorrow we shave!...)*

Another example can be seen in the Nguyen Quyen’s poem, *Phen Này Cắt Tóc Đi Tu* (This Time I Will Shave My Head to Become a Monk), a short poem of ten lines:

*“Phen này cắt tóc đi tu,  
Tụng kinh Độc lập ở chùa Duy Tân.  
Đêm ngày khẩn vái chuyên cần,  
Cầu cho ích nước lợi dân mới là.  
Quyết tu sao cho mở trí dân nhà,  
Tu sao độ được nước ta phú cường.”<sup>57</sup>*

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<sup>56</sup> Bùi Duy Tân, “Tân Thư và phong trào Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục”, in *Tạp Chí Văn Học*, số 2 – 1997 (“New Books and Hanoi Free School Movement”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 2, 1997), p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Nguyễn Quyền, “Phen này cắt tóc đi tu”, in *Hợp Tuyển Thơ Văn Việt Nam (1858 – 1920)*, quyển II, Nhà xuất bản Văn học, 1985 (“This Time I Will Shave My Head to Become a Monk”, in

*(This time I will shave my head to become a monk,  
To chant the Liberation Book in Duy Tan pagoda.  
Day and night I continuously pray,  
Pray for the benefits of the people and the nation.  
Determine to reform for the better intellectual standards of the  
people  
Reforming in order to make the nation prosperous and powerful)*

By using *quốc ngữ* as a medium and learning as the environment for the spreading of the patriotic ideas, Hanoi Free School was the center of propagandizing the patriotism to the masses. It could be said that the significant contribution of this movement was the modernization of Vietnamese society in the early twentieth century. By using literature as a medium of transferring new ideas, this movement kept alive the tradition of resistance to foreign rule and laid the base (patriotism) for the foundation for a younger generation of nationalists in Vietnam. Among the literary works of Hanoi Free School, the writings of Phan Boi Chau can be seen as the soul of the movement.

### **The Works of Phan Boi Chau**

It is worth mentioning the poems of Phan Boi Chau, especially those were composed when he left Vietnam for Japan in searching for help in the Duy Tan movement (Modernization Society). In *Lưu Biệt Khi Xuất Dương* (Farewell Before Going Abroad), a short poem of eight lines, Phan expressed his great will in national salvation and his strong enthusiasm in looking for the proper ways for the national resistance, which was stated in the first verse of the poem:

*“Làm trai phải lạ ở trên đời,*

*Há để càn khôn tự chuyển dời.  
 Trong khoảng trăm năm, càn có tở,  
 Sau này muôn thuở, há không ai?  
 Non sông đã chết, sống thêm nhục,  
 Hiền thánh còn đâu, học cũng hoài!  
 Muốn vượt bể Đông theo cánh gió  
 Muôn trùng sóng bạc tiễn ra khơi.”<sup>58</sup>*

*(Born a man, I must be different from others  
 Never wait for the fate to come.  
 In a hundred year time, there I am to carry out the task  
 In the next thousand years, there will be next generations  
 Our nation was lost, our living is so shameful  
 Ancient books are so tedious; reading them only makes us stupid!  
 I want to cross the East Sea with the wind,  
 To surf on thousands of silver waves).*

Not only showing his patriotism and strong purpose for the national salvation, Phan also propagated his revolutionary idea to the people. This can be seen in *Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư* (Letters from Abroad Written in Blood), a 748-line poem in traditional style of creation, written in 1906, when he was in Japan. In his first year in Japan, Phan Boi Chau got a new perception about his revolution; he realized that his pro-monarchy strategy was not practical. *Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư* tells the weakness of the people and denounces the guilt of the monarchy for controlling the fate of nation. Later, in his diary, Phan Boi Chau confirmed that while staying in Japan he had the idea of putting the monarchy to one side; however, he could not let it out because of having no other plans<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup> Phan Bội Châu, “Lưu biệt khi xuất dương”, in *Hợp Tuyển Thơ Văn Việt Nam (1858 – 1920)*, quyển II, Nhà xuất bản Văn học, 1985 (“Farewell Before Going Abroad”, in *Vietnamese Prose and Poem Anthology (1858-1920)*, Vol. II, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 1985), p. 14.

<sup>59</sup> Trương Chính, “Tân Thư Và Dòng Văn Học Yêu Nước và Cách Mạng Việt Nam Trong Những Năm Đầu Thế Kỷ”, in *Tap chí văn học*, No. 2 – 1997 (“New Books and Patriotic and

According to Phan's analysis, a nation is the inheritance from the ancestors, so the owner of the nation is the people, including the king, the mandarins and the masses. However, when the country fell into the French control, who was responsible for this? Phan denounced the exploitation and repression of the ruling class over the masses. While the citizens were in poverty, the ruling class was in luxury, comfortable life. As shown in the following poem:

“Nước ta mất bởi đâu?  
 Tôi xin kể hết mấy điều tệ nhân:  
 Một là vua sự dân chẳng biết,  
 Hai là quan chẳng thiết gì dân.  
 Ba là dân chỉ biết dân,  
 Mặc quân với quốc, mặc thần với ai.  
 Nghìn muôn ức triệu người chung góp,  
 Gây dựng nên cơ nghiệp nước nhà  
 .....  
 Cơm ngự thiện bữa nghìn quan  
 Ngoài ra dân đói dân tàn mặc dân.  
 .....  
 Dân mặc dân, chẳng dân thì chớ;  
 Cứ của mình; mình giữ khư khư.”<sup>60</sup>

(What causes the loss of our country?  
 Let me give you some reasons:  
 First, the sovereign does not care for the subjects' life  
 Second, the mandarins do not need the masses  
 Third, the masses just know themselves  
 Let alone the sovereign with the nation, the mandarins with  
 themselves

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Revolutionary Streams of Literature in the Beginning of the Century”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 2, 1997), p. 34.

<sup>60</sup> Phan Bội Châu, “Hải ngoại Huyết Thư”, *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, tập 2, Nhà xuất bản Thuận Hoá, 2001, (“Letters from Abroad Written in Blood”, in *A Complete Collection of Phan Boi Chau's Works*, Vol. 2, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2001), pp. 152-57.

*Thousand, million, billion people together  
Can build the nation as it used to be*

.....

*Every day meals cost thousands of 'quan' (money unit)  
No matter how poverty the masses are*

.....

*Let alone the people, none of their matters affect (the mandarins)  
What joyful we (the mandarins) have, we should persistently keep  
them.”*

The loss of the nation was not the fault of the ruling class but also of the masses due to their ignorance and conflicts among social groups. Besides criticizing the mistakes of both the ruling class and the masses, Phan reminded that the responsibility of the citizens was to restore the national independence.

*“Nghìn, muôn, ức, triệu người trong nước,  
Xây dựng nên cơ nghiệp nước nhà,  
Người, dân ta; của, dân ta,  
Dân là dân nước, nước là nước dân.  
... Sông phía Bắc, bể phương Đông,  
Nếu không dân cũng là không có gì.”<sup>61</sup>*

*(Thousand, million, billion people in the country  
Has built the nation as it used to be  
People, our citizens; nation, belong to our people  
The people are the nation citizens, the nation is for the people  
.... Rivers in the north, sea in the east  
Without the people, there is nothing.)*

With this idea, Phan subtly pointed out that the traditional value- ‘loyalty to the king’ - does not relate to the ‘patriotism’. In addition, Phan encouraged the solidarity of all the social classes in the national resistance. Phan calls for the consensus of all strata in the society: bourgeoisie, officials, landlords, scholars,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 152 – 54.

soldiers, hooligans, of all Vietnamese brothers and sisters to rise against the common enemies.

*“Người trong cho đến người ngoài,  
Chữ ‘tâm’ cốt phải ai ai cũng ‘đồng’”<sup>62</sup>  
(All people in and outside the country  
Should have the same “heart” and the same “will”)*

Phan put the task on the scholar-gentry because it was believed that the intellectuals could propagate the patriotism to the masses, an immense force to liberate the country.

*“Xin những bậc sĩ phu trong nước,  
Có chữ rằng: “đạo giác tư dân”  
Đem lòng nghĩ đến quốc dân,  
Lựa dần khuyên nhủ nhau dần từ đây.  
Miệng diễn thuyết, dao này chém quỷ,  
Lưỡi hung đâm, gương ấy soi yêu  
.... Đem những chuyện nhiệt thành ái quốc,  
Bảo một người, tỉnh được một người.  
Dần dần tụ một đến mười,  
Trăm, ngàn, vạn, ức ai ai tỉnh dần.  
.... Gió nhanh thì sóng cũng mau,  
Chữ tâm một phút, đâu đâu cũng đồng.”<sup>63</sup>*

*(All the scholars in the country  
Let use ethics and moral to teach the public  
Let think of the people  
And find ways to enlighten them.  
Using oration as a knife beheading the evils  
Using theory as a mirror to reveal the evils*

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 165-66.



... *Tell the stories of enthusiastic patriots*  
*Talk to one person, awaken one person*  
*Gradually there would be ten persons*  
*Thousand, million, billion people are awaken*  
 ... *The strong wind causing great waves*  
*If the heart is the same, all share the similar will.)*

Through *Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư*, it can be inferred that in the early years of political activities Phan had not only expressed his patriotic but also propagandized that idea to the masses. He showed them the cause of their sufferings and mobilized them in gaining their own independence. Phan's letter also revealed his intention and strategy in the revolutionary movement; Phan used the monarchy as a symbol to gather forces and then mobilized the masses to perform arm-struggle against the foreign troop whenever there was a chance. Although Phan Boi Chau was still influenced by traditional education (Confucianism), his contact to western ideas and his stay in Japan helped to widen his perception about democracy and the revolutionary strategy.

If the appeal of *Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư* is national unity and the solidarity of all strata in the society for a patriotic spirit, then the purpose of *Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao* (An Outline History of Vietnam), a near 200-page novel, is a discussion about nationhood and the role of man in society. This work unveils Chau's perception about the concept of "nation" and "nationhood". In *Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao* (1908), Phan Boi Chau rewrote the history of Vietnam with elements that could form a nation. With ten chapters (about the nation, race, population, geography, natural resource, different period of struggles for independence, national heroes, etc.), Phan told readers about the main stages of forming the nation and the traditional patriotism of Vietnamese ancestors in preserving and keeping national independence. However, the main purpose of this writing is to stimulate the patriotism of the masses as well as to remind them about the victorious history of the nation. This is why the chapters about the national heroes and struggles for independence are emphasized while others are not discussed intensively.

Phan opened his discussion by quoting the western theory of nation and wrote that:

*“There are three requirements for nationhood: people, territory, and a sovereign government. Without these factors, no human community can be considered as a nation. And of these three, people are the most important, for a nation must begin with the people.”*<sup>64</sup>

Phan also mentioned that the sovereignty of the nation was one of the key factors to build a strong nation. He put it clearly:

*“The vital part of a nation is sovereignty. It is guaranteed by independence; that means the nation is free from any foreign invasion and repression. All the national matters are decided by its government.”*<sup>65</sup>

Phan added that the basis of a strong and independent nation was a free education, independent and educated citizen. National wealth and power were virtually synonymous with a democratic system of government, which was based on the ‘civil rights’. As he wrote:

*“When civil rights exist, people are respected, and the nation is also strong. When civil rights are disregarded, people are condemned, and the nation will be weak. If there is no civil rights, people and the nation will disappear.”*<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> “Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao” in *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, tập 7, Nhà xuất bản Thuận Hoá, 2001 (“An Outline History of Vietnam”, in *A Complete Collection of Phan Bội Châu’s Works*, Vol. 7, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2001), p. 68.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

Phan added that what Vietnam needed was a reformation in education, a unification of the masses in the process of civilization for the benefits of the nation. As he asserted:

*“When our people have a good level of education, public organizations will be consolidated. Now what we need to do is to contribute our wealth, our strength, and to combine all of our wills into one great will for a civilized nation.”*<sup>67</sup>

*Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao* is the evidence about the new ideas that Phan Boi Chau perceived while staying in Japan. Phan began to abandon traditional viewpoint of pro-monarchy and called for democracy. In fact, in his political life, Phan changed his viewpoints voluntarily under the influence of revolutionary movements. Being influenced by the Chinese Revolution in 1912, Phan dissolved Duy Tan Hoi (Modernization Society) and founded Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi (Restoration Society of Vietnam), which operated in democratic tendency. Unfortunately, Phan was arrested and imprisoned for three years (1914 – 1917), so he could not carry out his intention. While being in prison, Phan thought that his political life would end soon, so he wrote *Ngục Trung Thư* (Letter From Prison) to send his last words to his comrades and to the patriots. In it, Phan also expressed his incomplete desire for the national independence and hoped that the next generation could continue his wish to liberate the country. In this letter, Phan revealed his intention, shown repeatedly in previous writings, which was ‘to arouse the national conscience’ and to make alive the patriotism among the people.

*“... my book “New Book of Blood and Tears” told of the miseries that had befallen our country and described the intolerable humiliation of a people forced into slavery in their own land. The book openly exhorted its readers to go to work without hesitation to arouse the national conscience, to fuel the flame of patriotism*

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

*among the people in order to be able to rely upon their readiness when the moment came to strike.”*<sup>68</sup>

When Phan was released from prison, there were many political changes in the world history including the victory of October Revolution in Russia, the end of World War I, and the new phase of National Revolution in China. Under these circumstances, Phan realized that the new situation was not convenient for arm-struggle. Rather, it would be safe to use non-violent strategy because he could have time to re-arrange his organization (Restoration Society of Vietnam). Thus, *Pháp-Việt Đề Huề Chính Kiến Thư* (A Letter of Opinion on Franco-Vietnamese Harmony), was one of the methods that Phan utilized in this period. In this letter, Phan gave some requests to the French administration and asked for an appropriate form of ruling the colony. Also, Phan suggested the cooperation and harmony between France and Vietnam in order to prevent the Japanese invasion. As Phan wrote:

*“The French should not consider the Vietnamese as ‘slaves and buffalos’; the Vietnamese should not look the French with hatred, but as teachers and able friends. They should join together against the Japanese. Without such cooperation, the Japanese would have no difficulty in conquering Indochina, to the detriment of both France and Vietnam.”*<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, this letter caused misunderstanding among his comrades who think that Phan’s nationalist movement so ‘naïve and clumsy’. Actually, Phan’s intention was to exploit public arena to gain public attention for his organization and for the nationalist movement in general. In addition, Phan was practical and did not

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<sup>68</sup> Phan Boi Chau, “Letter from Prison”, in Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnamese Literature* (The Foreign Language Publishing House, Ha Noi), pp. 466 -67.

<sup>69</sup> “Pháp Việt Đề Huề Chính Kiến Thư”, *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, tập 5, Nhà xuất bản Thuận Hoá, 2001, (“A Letter of Opinion on Franco-Vietnamese Harmony”, in *A Complete Collection of Phan Boi Chau’s Works*, Vol. 5, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2001), pp. 204 – 06.

believe much in social reformation through laws and policies by cooperating with the French.

The Chinese revolution had a strong impact on Phan's idea about revolutionary strategy, and made him turn his organization into Restoration Society of Vietnam. In *Trung Quan Tam Su* (A Touching History of Trung Quan), a historical novel, Phan Boi Chau revealed his idea about the revolutionary strategy of his organization. By using an example from the sixteenth century, when Vietnam was under Chinese invaders, Phan told a story about a group of patriots who gathered together to fight against the foreign invaders, and they formed an organization with the purpose of liberating the nation. In the story, Phan depicted the life of each main character that came from different backgrounds but all had something in common – anger towards the invader and love the country. Although this organization, known as Trung Quan in accordance to its base, could not carry out its main target, the will and the spirit of this movement inspired other struggles for independence in later periods. The story *Trung Quan Tam Su* happened in the sixteenth century but Phan skillfully compared it with the social situations in the nineteenth and early twentieth century; for instance, the exploitation of foreign invaders and the hardship of the people with hundred kinds of taxes. Phan depicted Trung Quan organization as the description of Duy Tan Hoi. Both shared the same principles:

*“... Thời kỳ đầu sẽ là thời kỳ vận động, sau đó là thời kỳ tiến hành, cuối cùng là thời kỳ kiến thiết. Thời kỳ cuối này là sau khi quang phục thành công. Khi đó sẽ có người kể chúng ta lo liệu.”*<sup>70</sup>

*(The first stage is the mobilization, then the stage of launching the plan, and the last stage is to build the nation. The last stage marks the success of national restoration, which will be continued by our next generation)*

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<sup>70</sup> “Trùng Quan Tâm Sử”, Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập, tập 4, Nhà xuất bản Thuận Hoá, 2001 (“A Touching Story of Trung Quan”, in *A Complete Collection of Phan Boi Chau's Works*, Vol. 4, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2001), p. 48.

The whole story stressed heroism and patriotism of many unknown figures in history who were really heroes. By narrating the process of the story, Phan added in some comments with the aim to awaken the patriotism of the readers. The main focus of the story was to ask the people to unite and to join the national revolution. The end of the story was to call for the rising up of the masses:

*“... Vĩ đại thật, xã hội đức nên anh hùng, anh hùng tạo nên thời thế. Vì có nhân mà được quả. Rồi do quả lại sinh ra nhân. Chúng ta đọc sử đến đoạn vua Lê dẹp quân Ngô lấy lại nước Việt Nam, không ai là không đồng dạ ngợi ca. Non sông như cũ, thành quách y nguyên!... Chủ nhân là ai? Quốc dân ta ơi! Đồng bào ta ơi! Dậy! Dậy! Dậy!”*<sup>71</sup>

*(... So great, the society created the heroes, the heroes create the moment. That is because of good seed, so there will be good will. When the will is good, it will bear good seed. We read history when King Le defeated Ngo invaders and restored Vietnam, no one could stop praising. The nation has been restored, the castle welcomes its owners! ... Who are the owners? Our citizens! Our people! Get up! Get up! Stand up!)*

Through the story *Trung Quan Tam Su*, it is obvious that Phan shifted his republic ideal to socialist ideology; the masses became the main force in his revolution strategy although the intellectuals still kept the leading position. In addition, the shifting of Phan's ideology could be easily recognized in his writing *Truyen Pham Hong Thai* (The Story of Pham Hong Thai), a short historical novel. This story was the result of Phan's exchange with Nguyen Ai Quoc in discussing about revolutionary strategy, apart from the influence of the success of Socialist Revolution in Russia. Therefore, from the moderate republic, Phan turned to violent form of social revolution in which the radical forces should be the working class and the peasants. Unfortunately, Phan had no chance to adjust and improve his

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

Restoration Society of Vietnam. He was arrested and his enthusiasm about the new ideology was put in *Truyen Pham Hong Thai* (The Story of Pham Hong Thai).

In short, the Story of Pham Hong Thai is about a communist soldier, who witnessed many unhappy social events in his childhood. When growing up, Thai took part in many patriotic activities that led him to the communist ideology. After becoming a party member, Thai was given an important mission; that was to assassinate the Governor General of Indochina at that time. The focus of the story is Thai's preparation and decision about time, place, and the method of carrying out his mission. The author lighted his patriotism and his care about the future of the revolution. Through the description of Thai's thinking, Phan praised the heroic feature of this communist soldier and admired the communist method. This detail revealed the change of Phan's political ideology: from socialist to communist. Besides, this story also expressed Phan's attitude towards the revolutionary type and force:

*“... người nước ta không nói cách mạng thì thôi, chứ nói cách mạng, thì phải bắt tay vào làm cách mạng xã hội. Hơn nữa, việc huấn luyện cách mạng xã hội không thể thành công, nếu không dựa vào số đông người thuộc giai cấp dưới. Số đông của giai cấp dưới chính là công nhân và nông dân .... Ngọn lửa đó mà bốc cháy lên thì cung đình của bọn đế quốc sẽ phải cháy trụi.”<sup>72</sup>*

*(... If the revolution is discussed, it should be the social revolution. In addition, the preparation of social revolution cannot succeed if it does not rely upon a great number of the lower classes. The majority of them are workers and peasants .... Once the revolutionary flame blows up, the castle of the imperialists will be destroyed.)*

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<sup>72</sup> “Truyện Phạm Hồng Thái”, *Phan Bội Châu Toàn Tập*, tập 5, Nhà xuất bản Thuận Hoá, 2001 (“The Story of Pham Hong Thai”, in *A Complete Collection of Phan Boi Chau's Works*, Vol. 1-7, Thuan Hoa Publishing House, 2001), p. 354.

The Story of Pham Hong Thai is a real historical event in Vietnamese political struggles. Nevertheless, this event was employed by Phan to promote the patriotism as well as to form an ideology for the national revolution. It could be inferred that in the process of political life, Phan shaped his perception and gradually enlarged his understanding about the revolution strategies and forces. Each time he was introduced to a new idea, he adjusted his methods and his viewpoints. That also means he got closer to the radical idea towards the revolution.

At this stage, the perception of nationalist ideology of Phan Boi Chau would be highlighted if Phan Chu Trinh, who pursued only one ideology during his political activities, is included in this discussion.

### **Phan Chu Trinh**

Trinh was a son of a minor military official and became a mandarin in the Ministry of Rites in 1903. Influenced by Chinese and French progressive thinkers, Trinh quit his post and traveled throughout the country with an attempt to form a group of patriotic intellectuals to work for national salvation. Trinh was a forerunner of the bourgeoisie reformist movement; he objected the existence of the monarchy and supported the development of economy, industry, the living standard and education of the people. However, Trinh believed in social reform by negotiation or by policies. This is drawn from the fact that he wrote petition to the Governor General to ask for reformation of the colonial administration.

As a reformist, Trinh objected the monarchy and pursued republic. Most of Trinh's writings revealed his moderate strategy in pursuing national independence. One of the examples is *Thư Gửi Chính Phủ Pháp* (Letter to the Government of Indochina), in which Trinh revealed that the Protectorate authority repressed and degenerated the Vietnamese:

*“Mandarins aside, all Vietnamese, even the most ignorant, are in agreement that the Protectorate oppresses them and does not act towards them in a human manner. Seeing the mandarin*



*uninterested in public affairs and committing scandalous abuses, they say that the Protectorate pursues its colonial aims and tolerates the reciprocal annihilation of the Vietnamese to the sole end of making our race degenerate.”*<sup>73</sup>

Trinh went further that bad situations in Vietnam were due to the policies of the Protectorate. As Trinh clearly explained:

*“There are three reasons causing the misery of the Vietnamese; (1) the Protectorate tolerate the Vietnamese mandarins who do not actually have enough ability to manage the local administration, (2) the Protectorate despises the scholars, which isolates these intellectuals from administrative system, and (3) the Vietnamese mandarins rely on the influence of the Protectorate to repress people, causing anger and hatred among the masses.”*<sup>74</sup>

In addition, Trinh suggested a policy that would benefit both the colonizers and the colonized. Here is what he proposed:

*“Nếu chính phủ thật sẵn lòng đổi hết chính sách đi, kén chọn người hiền tài, trao quyền binh cho, lấy lễ mà tiếp, lấy thành mà đãi, cùng nhau lo toan việc đặng lợi trừ hại ở trong nước, mở đường sinh nhai cho dân nghèo, rộng quyền ăn nói cho thân sĩ, báo quán cho mở rộng để thông đạt tình dân, thưởng phạt cho nghiêm minh để khuyên răn quan lại, còn đến những việc đổi pháp luật, bỏ khoa cử, mở trường học, đặt toà tu thư, dạy lớp sư phạm, cho đến học công thương, học mỹ nghệ, và các ngạch sưu thuế, đều cải lương dần dần, thế thì dân được yên nghiệp làm ăn, sĩ thì vui lòng giúp việc*

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<sup>73</sup> Phan Chu Trinh, “Letter to the Government of Indochina”, in Nguyen Khac Vien, *Vietnamese Literature* (The Foreign Language Publishing House, Ha Noi), pp. 470 – 471.

<sup>74</sup> Phan Chu Trinh, “Letter to the Government of Indochina”, in Hoang Tien, *Quoc Ngu and the Script Revolution in the Twentieth Century* (Youth Publishing House, 2003), pp. 211-16.

*cho chính phủ, chỉ sợ người Pháp bỏ nước Nam mà đi, còn ai toan mưu việc chống cự nữa?”<sup>75</sup>*

*(If the Protectorate changes all the policies by using responsible and talented intellectuals, using politeness and reason to treat the mandarins, and working together with those intellectuals and mandarins for the benefits of the masses, by giving people the freedom of speech, supporting the development of newspapers to communicate to the public, applying laws strictly to all the mandarins to keep refining the administrative system, adjusting laws, banning traditional examination, building more schools, libraries, colleges, vocational training schools, and reducing taxes; everything will be gradually reformed, then people can focus on their work and intellectuals can be happy to aid the government. In that case, only one fear is the French will leave Vietnam and who else can think of resistance?).*

Even though Trinh was a reformist and believed in social reformation through policies and negotiations, his letter was an inspiration for the public struggles all over the country.

## Summary

At the beginning of twentieth century, there were many changes in Vietnamese society, such as the colonial policy of the French over the whole country, the coming of *quốc ngữ* (Romanized-Vietnamese script) with Hanoi Free School movement, and the influence of World War I and the political reform in China. Under these situations, patriot-scholars were the pioneers in searching for ideologies, strategies and methods for the national revolution and they contributed so much in shaping the ideals of nationalist movements. Reformists, like Phan Chu Trinh, encouraged mass education in order to increase national conscience among the

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

people. The spreading of *quốc ngữ* through newspapers and Hanoi Free School and the writings of scholar-patriots created the link between the intellectual and the masses.

The works of Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh can be examples to show that the historical contexts altered the political viewpoint of the traditional nationalist. Beginning his political life with the traditional patriotism, Phan Boi Chau later moved towards democratic, to republic, to socialist and finally to communist patriotism. His alternation of resistance orientation reflects that he was aware of the historical situation and the future of the movement. Like Phan Boi Chau, the scholars in the traditional stage of national ideal in the anti-French resistance were searching for the proper ideology or the national consciousness in the struggle for national independence. As for the traditional concept of patriotism, Phan Boi Chau realized that the ‘loyalty to the king’ (*trung quân*) did not necessarily mean ‘to love the nation’ (*ái quốc*). Instead, he discovered that ‘patriotism’ meant to bring freedom for the people. This is the first sign for the transformation of traditional patriotism to modern nationalism of the next generation. This is the topic to be discussed in the following chapter.



สถาบันวิทยบริการ  
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

## CHAPTER IV

### THE FORMATION OF MODERN NATIONALISM

The transitional stage of the traditional patriotism with the generation of scholar-patriots (in which Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh are representatives) laid a foundation for the new perception about the national consciousness among the new generation of intellectuals. If the first two decades of the twentieth century was the transitional period of the traditional concept of patriotism, then the next two decades was the period of forming of the modern form of patriotism; that was nationalism. Since the 1920s, there were many changes in the socio-political life of Vietnamese people. The reformation in education, the improvement of printing technology and the popular use of *quốc ngữ* were three main factors that directly or indirectly had a great impact on shaping the worldview of the Vietnamese. This chapter will focus on the perception of intellectuals through the works of Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh, who played a vital role in forming a national identity, in particular cultural aspect. Besides, the Self-Reliance Literature group and nationalist movements are also discussed in order to understand how Vietnamese nationalism was related to the process of modernization.

#### Nguyen Van Vinh and the Language Revolution

As the language of newspapers in the South in the late nineteenth century, *quốc ngữ* became popular throughout the country due to the promotion of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc (Hanoi Free School) movement. This movement supported the learning of the national language and of broadening knowledge of the people. In the success of Hanoi Free School movement, it is necessary to mention the contribution of newspapers in promoting the need of learning *quốc ngữ*. One example is *Đảng Cổ Tùng Báo* (Dang Co Newspaper) founded by Nguyen Van Vinh in March 1907. With the aim of mobilizing the public use of *quốc ngữ*, Dang Co newspaper was the first

newspaper that contained many stories and grammar lessons so that readers could increase their ability in using this new script.

Being one of the founders of Hanoi Free School, Nguyen Van Vinh (1882 – 1936) played an important role in promoting the learning of *quốc ngữ*. Nguyen spent most of his life for newspaper industry, for the development of printing technology. In his short but active life, Nguyen owned a newspaper and a printing house, in which he first launched Dang Co newspaper, then *Dong Duong Tap Chi* (Indochina Magazine), and *Trung Bac Tan Van* (News of the North and Central), besides some other French newspapers. Born in a peasant family, Nguyen Van Vinh had a hard time to gain his education despite being studious and intelligent. His first career was as an interpreter in Lao Cai province, but after the trip Marseille to study printing technology, Nguyen quit his job to be a journalist and an editor. Later on, he spent most of his time writing articles for newspapers or translating French and Chinese books into *quốc ngữ*.

Under the rapid changes of Vietnam society, Nguyen and other intellectuals realized that the weakness of the Vietnamese is the level of education. Therefore, Nguyen took part in the Hanoi Free School to help increase mass education, and to spread scientific and social knowledge to the people. Nguyen's enthusiasm was revealed in his newspaper, Dang Co newspaper. The slogan appearing on the first page was “the fact that our nation, Vietnam, becomes better or worse depends mostly on *Quốc ngữ*”<sup>76</sup>. In fact, on the first issue of Dang Co newspaper on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1907, there was an article written by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, “*Người Annam Nên Viết Chữ Annam*” (Annamite Should Write the Annam Script), which showed how fast and easy to learn and to use the mother tongue, *quốc ngữ*, because the way of speaking and writing was the same. In this article, Nguyen also compared the learning of the new script and Chinese or Sino-Vietnamese script (*nôm*). As Nguyen commented:

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<sup>76</sup> Phong Lê, “Phác thảo buổi đầu văn xuôi quốc ngữ”, in *Tap chí Văn Học*, No. 11 – 2001(Phong Le, “The Outline of the First Quoc Ngu Literature”, from *Literature Journal*, No. 11, 2001), p. 20.

“... Học được thông chữ nho thì khó lắm, mà từ xưa nay Annam bao nhiêu người học chữ nho, để họ đã mấy người, bụng nghĩ thế nào lại viết ra ngay được thành chữ như thế? ... Bây giờ có người phương Tây đến, bày ra chữ quốc ngữ, chấp vắn theo như chữ các nước phương Tây; có mẹo mực, ba là ba, bốn là bốn không thể sai được mà học dễ biết là bao nhiêu! Sáng ý thì chỉ vài ngày, ngu dân thì trong một tháng cũng phải thông. ... Chữ nho hay, cũng nên học, nhưng trước hết phải thông chữ nhà đã.”<sup>77</sup>

*(Studying Chinese is so hard. For a long time how many Annamites master Chinese, and how many of them can use Chinese to express exactly what they are thinking. ... Now, the westerners had created quốc ngữ by putting the alphabets and sounds together like western language with clear rules and structures so that it will be the same everywhere. Besides, this script is easy to learn; for an intelligent person it takes about some days, or about one month for a slow-minded person. ... Chinese is meaningful and we must learn; however, we should master quốc ngữ first).*

In spite of promoting the use of quốc ngữ as a means to broaden knowledge and to increase their social consciousness, Nguyen Van Vinh also expressed his pride when quốc ngữ became the official medium. In his article in Nam Phong (Southern Wind) magazine (No. 87, September 1924), *Mấy Sự Cải Cách Trong Học Giới* (Some Reforms in Education), Nguyen showed his appreciation to the Protectorate government for reviving the national script as one more feature was added to the national identity, language. As Nguyen commented:

“Tiếng Annam sẽ được một cái địa vị hẳn hoi trong quốc dân giáo dục, không đến nỗi phải cái thân phận ăn ghé nằm nhờ như trước nữa, thật cổ kim, không những từ khi có Tây học đến giờ, mà kể cả trong mấy nghìn năm Hán học, chưa bao giờ được như thế. Không

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<sup>77</sup> Hoàng Tiên, *Chữ Quốc Ngữ và cuộc cách mạng chữ viết đầu thế kỷ 20*, Nhà xuất bản Thanh niên, 2003, (Hoang Tien, *Quoc Ngu and The Script Revolution in the Twentieth Century*, The Youth Publishing House, 2003), pp. 84 – 86.

*bao giờ người Annam được học tiếng Annam, bây giờ mới bắt đầu đây. Than ôi! Tiếng quốc âm bao nhiêu lâu bị khinh rẻ, bị vùi dập, nay mới được mở mắt với thế gian.”<sup>78</sup>*

*(Our Annamite script will have a respectful position in national education. This will end its inferiority to the Chinese script. It is so great because this never happens before, not only in French education time but also under Chinese model of education. The Annamites have never learnt Annamite language, but now we have started. Alas! Our national language has been ignored and looked down for a long time; but now it can be compared with other languages in the world)*

Nguyen Van Vinh did not stop at mobilizing the public to learn the national language. He also pointed out that the long-term advantages of the new education system would help improve the social life. In his article “*Chữ Nho Nên Để Hay Là Nên Bỏ*” (Should or Should Not Chinese Script Be Taught in School?) in *Indochina* magazine (No. 31), Nguyen discussed both the learning and the application of Chinese script and French at that time, from which he analyzed the advantage of *quốc ngữ* and also suggested what should be learned. In this article, there was one paragraph that expressed Nguyen’s reformist ideal:

*“Nhà nước Đại Pháp đặt thêm ra lối học ta ấy, thực đã tỏ ra lòng ngay thực với ta, muốn cho ta giữ được mãi quốc thúy, vì nếu nhà nước cứ bắt ta học chữ Đại Pháp mới được làm quan làm việc, thì chắc ta cũng phải vì lợi mà theo học cả, như là ông cha ta ngày xưa vì lợi mà theo nho học”<sup>79</sup>.*

*(The French government has put French and quốc ngữ in school curriculum, which shows their kindness to us because we can preserve our national language. If the French government forces us*

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

*to learn French in order to get a job, we would have to learn French for our own benefits, which will be the same as our ancestors in the past had to learn Chinese).*

Like Phan Chu Trinh, Nguyen was a reformist in cultural field. He was enthusiastic in innovating the educational system because he realized the needs of increasing the literacy level of the masses before any social reformation. This idea appeared so often in his newspapers for nearly twenty years. In addition, Nguyen formed Hoi Dich Sach (Book Translating Club) because he would like to preserve the national heritage (quốc túy) in the process of innovation. With the aids of Book Translating Club, many works of great scholars were translated into *quốc ngữ* and reprinted or published in series on newspapers. This club also translated the writings of nationalists (such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chu Trinh) into *quốc ngữ*, and used them as lessons in Hanoi Free School movement or as articles on newspapers.

In the movement of promoting public education and increasing social awareness, Nguyen Van Vinh had a great contribution to the expanding the use of *quốc ngữ* through his articles on newspapers, which enriched the national language and created the habit of reading for the public. Generally speaking, Nguyen was a cultural reformist who initiated national conscience to the masses, which was a base for a further step in forming nationalism.

### **Pham Quynh and the Promotion of National Heritage**

If Nguyen Van Vinh contributed to the popular use of *quốc ngữ*, Pham Quynh was the person who perfected and contributed national heritage to this script. Pham Quynh was one of the founders of *Nam Phong* (Southern Wind) magazine, first appeared in 1917, when the usage of *quốc ngữ* was not completely perfect. In spite of having French education, Pham was not westernized in thoughts, unlike many other intellectuals in the movement of westernization in the 1920s. Pham learnt Western ideas and culture in order to improve the shortcoming of the national culture. He denied cultural assimilation and stressed that complement was necessary in preserving and developing national heritage; that meant, to select the best features of foreign



culture and values and to make them parts of our culture. As a culturalist, Pham always cared about the authentic culture of Vietnam and its progress. In most of his writings on Nam Phong magazine, Pham expressed his concern about the national language through education and literary creation.

Pham Quynh was the key writer of Nam Phong magazine, and he made it a famous magazine in the North and kept its influence for nearly 20 years (until 1932). Like Nguyen Van Vinh, Pham encouraged the usage of *quốc ngữ* and the increase of mass education. However, Pham did not stop at the proper use of *quốc ngữ* and the benefits of having a good education, but he also focused on the national heritage of this script. In his article about *quốc ngữ* literature, *Vấn Đề Văn Quốc Ngữ* (About the Issue of *Quốc Ngữ* Literature), Pham emphasized the necessity of improving *quốc ngữ* and making it national literature. As Pham wrote:

*“Vấn đề quan trọng nhất trong nước ta ngày nay là vấn đề văn quốc ngữ. .. Đến ngày chữ quốc ngữ dùng làm quốc văn được thì người nước Nam mới có thể thu hái các khoa học mới mà gây thành một nền học thích hợp với trình độ, với tính cách dân ta.”*<sup>80</sup>

*(The vital issue of our country at the present is quốc ngữ literature.... When quốc ngữ is used in literature, Vietnamese people can perceive new scientific knowledge to build a system national education, which is suitable to the culture and characteristics of our people.)*

Pham also stressed the importance of literature in *quốc ngữ* as follow:

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<sup>80</sup> “Văn Quốc Ngữ”, in Trinh Ba Dinh, *Pham Quynh - Luận Giải Văn Học và Triết Học*, Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa Thông tin, Trung tâm Ngôn Ngữ Văn Hoá Đông Tây, 2003. (“Quoc Ngu Literature”, in Trinh Ba Dinh, *Pham Quynh – Interpretation on Literature and Philosophy*, The Culture-Information, Center of Eastern Orientation, 2003), p. 44.

“Xin đồng bào ta chớ lãng bỏ, chớ khinh rẻ văn quốc ngữ. Tương lai nước nhà chính ở đó.”<sup>81</sup>

*(Our compatriots, please do not ignore, despise quoc ngu literature. It is the future of our nation.)*

In the conclusion of his article, Pham wrote:

“Văn quốc ngữ có phát đạt thì nền quốc học mới gây dựng được, quốc dân ta mới không đến nỗi chung kiếp đi học mượn viết như từ xưa đến nay” ... “Hiện nay ai cũng rõ rằng chữ quốc ngữ là tiện lợi so với chữ Tây chữ Nho, .... chữ quốc ngữ ấy chính là cái bè để cứu vớt bọn ta vậy.”<sup>82</sup>

*(If quốc ngữ literature develops, our national education will be set up, our citizens will overcome the situation of learning a foreign language as before .... At the present, it is thought that quốc ngữ is more convenient than French and Chinese, ... Quốc ngữ is the buoy to rescue us.)*

Moreover, Pham pointed out the relationship between national education and the national literature. In fact, Pham wrote a series of articles relating to national education and national literature, each of which was discussed and analyzed critically in order to highlight the need of having a Vietnamese national education and a national literature. On the article about national education, *Bàn Về Quốc Học* (Talking Over National Education), Pham argued that the influence of Chinese culture had turned the Vietnamese perpetual students because they used Chinese script in examination and in official documents for a long time. This was a major problem of the Vietnamese in forming a national education. As Pham wrote:

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 44 – 45.

*“Nước Nam ta mấy mươi thế kỷ theo học nước Tàu, chỉ mới là một người học trò khá, chưa hề thấy thoát cửa thầy mà lập nên môn hộ riêng. Không những thế, lại cũng thường không lọt được ngoài vòng “giáo khoa” mà bước lên tới cõi “học thuật” nữa.”<sup>83</sup>*

*(Our Vietnamese nation has learnt from China for tens of century, but showing as a good student because Vietnam cannot escape from the Chinese text to form our own. In addition, we cannot develop something new out of the textbooks and move to the stage of learning by ourselves.)*

Pham put the emphasis on the preservation of national identity in history:

*“Có giữ được độc lập về thể võ, mới giữ được độc lập về tinh thần”<sup>84</sup>.*

*(If we keep the nation independent, then we can free our spirit.)*

Therefore, Pham’s major argument was to gain independence in term of culture and worldview, which could be seen more clearly in *Quốc Học Với Quốc Văn* (National Education and National Literature). In this writing, Pham confirmed that national literature and national education were closely related; the former was the base for the latter to be formed and developed. In his argument, Pham analyzed the complement of these two factors, considering them as national soul (quốc hồn) – the authentic Vietnamese cultural characteristics. Also in this article, it was obvious that Pham was a cultural reformist whose enthusiasm in creating and improving national language was very strong. As Pham wrote:

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<sup>83</sup> “Bàn về Quốc Học”, in Trinh Ba Dinh, *Pham Quynh - Luận Giải Văn Học và Triết Học*, Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa Thông tin, Trung tâm Ngôn Ngữ Văn Hoá Đông Tây, 2003. (“Talking Over National Education”, in Trinh Ba Dinh, *Pham Quynh – Interpretation on Literature and Philosophy*, The Culture-Information, Center of Eastern Orientation, 2003), pp. 78.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

“Quốc văn đã thành lập, nhiên hậu mới có quốc học được. Có quốc văn, có quốc học mới thật là được độc lập về đường tinh thần. .... Nói tóm lại thì quốc học không thể rời quốc văn được. Không có quốc văn không thể sao có quốc học.”<sup>85</sup>

*(If national literature has been constructed, national education will be soon formed. With national literature and national education, we are spiritually independent. .... In summary, national education cannot separate from national literature. Without national literature, there is no national education).*

Pham’s intention for cultural reform could be shown through his statement about the targets of Nam Phong magazine. As he revealed:

“Báo Nam Phong từ khi mới ra đời đến giờ vẫn theo đuổi một mục đích đó: gây lấy một tảng văn An Nam để vừa làm cơ quan, vừa làm cơ sở cho quốc học sau này; vì chúng tôi vẫn đinh ninh từ xưa đến nay rằng không có quốc văn thì không sao có quốc học được; không có quốc học thì không sao có độc lập về tinh thần được; không có độc lập về tinh thần thì không sao có độc lập về chính trị.”<sup>86</sup>

*(Up until now, Nam Phong magazine has only one purpose: to create Annamite literature so that this magazine can be the organ and the foundation for the national literature in the future. We always believe that if national literature does not exist, there will be no national education; if there is no national education, spiritual independence will not exist; and without spiritual independence, there is no political independence.)*

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<sup>85</sup> Pham Quynh, “Quốc Học Với Quốc Văn”, in Nguyen Ngoc Thien, *Tranh Luận Văn Nghệ Thế Kỷ XX*, Nhà xuất bản Lao Động, Hà Nội, 2003. (Pham Quynh, “National Education and National Literature”, in Nguyen Ngoc Thien, *Letter Debates in the Twentieth Century*, Labour Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003), pp. 156 – 161.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 165.

This statement showed that he was a cultural nationalist. In fact, the new educational system in the early twentieth century Vietnam was the product of colonial policy, in which there was an invasion of French values over the indigenous culture. In the process of synthesis and assimilation between French and Vietnamese cultures, many western-educated intellectuals found this tendency favorable while some radical intelligentsias were against this movement. In this trend, Pham Quynh gave his opinion about the cultural assimilation as follow:

*“Ta nên đồng hoá có ý thức, có nghĩa lý, nên kén chọn lấy những cái hay của người mà bắt chước, nên xem xét mình thiếu những gì mà học tập lấy của người ta để bồi bổ cho mình.”<sup>87</sup>*

*(We should assimilate with the other selectively; this means that we only imitate the good things of the others, learning from the others to wipe out our shortcomings.)*

However, Pham strongly objected the synthesis of two cultures because he thought that language or the national heritage (quốc túy) was the soul of the nation (quốc hồn), and it was very important to preserve it. Pham argued that “the major concern for Vietnam was less political than it was cultural, for it is many times more dangerous to lose the soul of the nation (*quốc hồn*) than merely to lose independence. And the foremost danger to Vietnam society was that the cultural essence of the Vietnamese nation would be submerged in a sea of Western ideas and technology. Independence can be lost and the national soul retained, but without a soul there can be no nation at all to revive.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “Bàn về Quốc Học”, in Trinh Ba Dinh, *Pham Quynh - Luận Giải Văn Học và Triết Học*, Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa Thông tin, Trung tâm Ngôn Ngữ Văn Hoá Đông Tây, 2003. (“Talking Over National Education” in Trinh Ba Dinh, *Pham Quynh – Interpretation on Literature and Philosophy*, The Culture-Information, Center of Eastern Orientation, 2003), p. 87.

<sup>88</sup> William Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam: 1900 – 1941* (Cornell University Press, 1976), p. 120.

Under this ideal, Pham devoted his time in writing articles and criticism, translating foreign books, and analyzing literature in order to improve and popularize the use of *quốc ngữ*. During his sixteen years of writing for Nam Phong magazine, Pham formed the ideas of national conscience and created a foundation for modern nationalism, in term of culture. Actually, Pham had the idea of preserving the national heritage (*quốc túy*) early in his writing career. In 1918, when someone suggested using French instead of *quốc ngữ*, Quynh stated, in his article *Chữ Pháp Có Dùng Làm Quốc Văn Được Không?* (Can French Be Used As Our National Language?), that no language could replace *quốc ngữ* because “to maintain the national language (*quốc ngữ*) was to maintain the *quốc hồn* (the soul of the nation), the metaphysical spirit of the nation, to nourish a hope for tomorrow”<sup>89</sup>.

Pham’s confirmation on the preserving of national heritage and national language was repeated in his speech on the death anniversary of Nguyen Du, a great poet in the nineteenth century. Pham commented and praised Nguyen Du’s talents in using national language to tell *Truyện Kiều* (the Story of Kieu). In the speech, Pham stated that *Truyện Kiều* was not only a great literary work of Vietnam but also a symbol of national heritage, of national culture. So, in the conclusion, Pham again stressed the value of national language and the nation: “*Truyện Kiều còn, tiếng ta còn; tiếng ta còn, nước ta còn.*”<sup>90</sup> (If the Story of Kieu exists, our language still exists; when our language exists, we still have our nation).

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p.126.

<sup>90</sup> Phạm Quỳnh, “Bài diễn Thuyết Bằng Quốc Văn”, in Nguyen Ngoc Thien, *Tranh Luận Văn Nghệ Thế Kỷ XX*, Nhà xuất bản Lao Động, Hà Nội, 2003 (“A Talk in National Literature”, in Nguyen Ngoc Thien, *Letter Debates in the Twentieth Century*, Labour Publishing House, Hanoi, 2003), p. 390.

## **Tự Lực Văn Đoàn and Other Nationalist Movements**

In the second and third decades of the twentieth century, the reformation of education system basically changed the social strata in Vietnamese society. The coming of French culture through education and through printings was the cause of this change. In education, respectively, the intellectuals with western ideas and lifestyle played a vital role in stirring up the reformatory programs, which could be seen clearly in the activities of Tu Luc Van Doan (Self-Reliance Literature Group) in the 1930s.

In the tendency of moderate social reform, a group of writers also shared Pham's ideas in preserving the national language and enhancing national literature. In the ten-point principles of its operation, Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (The Self-Reliance Literature Group) – founded by four leading writers, such as Nhat Linh, Hoang Dao, Thach Lam and other writers in 1932 – also focused on preserving and enriching national language. Their agency was the newspaper *Phong Hoa* (Manners), which was then replaced by *Ngày Nay* (Today). In its ideal of creation, the Self-Reliance Literature group focused on the usage of authentic Vietnamese style of simple writing, which was easy to understand with the purpose of increasing the popularity of the national literature. Besides, they translated or composed books about social ideals to change the perception of the masses about social reform.

By using *quốc ngữ* for their literary production, the writers of the Self-Reliance Literature Group would like to make a social reform, which focused on increasing the level of literacy of the masses. During the Popular Front movement, in 1936, Hoang Dao, one of the main figures of this group, declared the reformatory principles of his group:

*“Chúng tôi có tư tưởng cải cách xã hội một cách êm thấm trong phạm vi luật pháp. Chúng tôi tin rằng công việc tối quan trọng của ta, của thanh niên trí thức là nâng cao trình độ của bình dân.”<sup>91</sup>*

*(We believe that social reform can be done peacefully in accordance to the laws. We believe that the most important thing for us, for the young intellectuals, is to increase the level of education of the masses).*

This viewpoint dominated all the creative ideals of many writers in the Self-Reliance Group. In *Con Đường Sáng* (The Lighted Road), a romantic novel, Hoang Dao focused on improving the living standard in the countryside through the activities of Duy and Tho (the main characters in the story). In this story, Hoang Dao pointed out that only the youth with an ideology were happy and the one with no will, but enjoy themselves, would destroy their own lives.

Duy, the main character, is the son of a rich family with good education. While he spends time enjoying luxury life, Duy sometimes feels emptiness and meaningless in his life. However, his love for Tho and his contact to the peasant laborers enable him to realize that he can find his real happiness. Living among the working people, Duy finds his new place is like a cozy nest for a bird traveling to other forests to find happiness which is already there, at home. Duy also looks for the ways to reduce the hardship of the peasants and to make their lives better.

However, when Duy and Tho start working out their program for helping the farmers, Duy sees that the problem stems from the stupidity which is the result of illiteracy. As the narrator describes:

*“Duy thinks of the countryside folks, of his study room and understands the very simple stupidity which presses down heavily on*

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<sup>91</sup> Phan Cự Đệ, *Văn học Lãng Mạn Việt Nam 1930 - 1945*, Nhà xuất bản Văn học, Hà Nội, 2002 (*Vietnamese Romantic Literature 1930 – 1945*, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002), p. 262.



*the life of these poor folks.” For Duy, “the miseries of the poor folks like a big, unmovable mountain, and their stupidity like the dark cloud (as dark as midnight) covering that mountain.”<sup>92</sup>*

The barrier is so big, so strong, and so robust that Duy finds it impossible to carry out his program. This is viewed by some critics as the limitation of the urban intelligent class.

If Pham Quynh and Nguyen Van Vinh focused on the reformation in cultural aspect in order to preserve national heritage, Hoang Dao took another step in changing the rural life and the habits of working people. They all showed their reformist ideals in changing society in a peaceful way (like the principle of the Self-Reliance Literature Group). However, many intellectuals who were the products of French education asked the colonizers for more than national identity, that was self-determination and autonomy. These bourgeoisie intellectuals formed their organizations with different ideologies. Many pursued reformative policy and cooperate with the colonizers while some chose to carry out social reforms with arm-struggle. Another example is a political party with cultural nationalism, Thanh Niên Cao Vọng (The Hope of Youth). It was led by Nguyen An Ninh, a significant figure in Vietnamese nationalist movements in 1920s. Ninh was convinced that Vietnamese society had to borrow from the west – particular in the area of science and democracy – in order to survive, and it was the intellectuals who had to put this theory into practice. Nguyen shared Pham’s strong sense of concern for the national culture and felt that people could not achieve true independence without possessing an intellectual culture of their own.

Nevertheless, Nguyen did not advocate the cooperation with the colonizers, but he preferred social revolution. On one of his speech in 1926, Ninh criticized the policy of the French administrative system in the South Vietnam. As he said:

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<sup>92</sup> Extracted from “*Vietnamese Literature 1930 – 1945*”, a course-book of Department of Letter, Cantho University.

*“Do not place too much hope in the socialist Governor General that has been sent you; he comes to cheat you, he has much to say, but he will give you nothing. There is no collaboration possible between French and Annamites. The French have nothing more to do here. Let them give us back the land of our ancestors, let them give us the floor and let us control ourselves. ... Our country has given birth to innumerable heroes, of men who knew how to die for their land. Our race is not yet extinguished”*<sup>93</sup>

Nguyen’s viewpoint showed that national identity and national self-determination were the concretization of national ideals in nationalist movements.

Culturally speaking, Nguyen Van Vinh was a pioneer in mobilizing the mass education by using national script (*quốc ngữ*). Then, Pham Quynh continued to polish the meanings and to perfect the applications of this script. Both of them had great contribution to the formation and development of national literature and to the awakening of national conscience among the public. Nguyen and Pham might not be political nationalists but they were cultural nationalists who played the key role in stirring the national consciousness among intellectual patriots.

In summary, under the new system of education with the usage of *quốc ngữ* and French, the intelligentsia generation of the 1920s and 1930s were the products of the assimilation between the culture of the colonizer and the colonized. These intellectuals were at the crossroad of this cultural interference. There is no doubt that their confusion in choosing the right way is obvious. Nevertheless, radical intelligentsias soon realized that the only way to gain independence politically was first to gain national identity in its full meaning. Then national independence through education with national literature might be achieved. These two stages helped to form the national ideals which became the main target for many nationalist movements. The ideal in this period can be known as modern nationalism in Vietnam. In fact, under this ideal, many political parties were formed in the 1920s. No matter what

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<sup>93</sup> William Duiker, *The Rise of Nationalism in Vietnam: 1900 – 1941* (Cornell University Press, 1976), pp. 140, 148.

form and what movements they involved, the main theme of nationalist movements in this period was the struggle for national identity and national independence.



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## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM**

As shown in the process of forming the concept of nationalism as discussed in the previous chapters, it is very important to change the perception of the masses and to create a ground for many nationalists from a younger generation to expand and propagate this new concept. The transitional stage of scholar-patriots turned the traditional value into a new one; that means the term remains the same but the meaning and understanding has been changed. The next stage of this development was the emergence of intellectuals with western education, who realized that political struggle could be successful only when there was national identity – including national literature and education. As a result, these intelligentsias were cultural nationalists because they provoked the national conscience and built up the national literature, two of which were the elements of forming national identity. Once the nation had its own education, national history and national heritage would inspire the public in supporting the resistance for independence.

The communist ideal is also included in the process of transforming nationalism. In the communist stream of nationalism, it is often thought about the role of Nguyen Ai Quoc and the Communist Party. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the contribution of Nguyen Ai Quoc in introducing and mobilizing the communist ideas to the radical intelligentsias in Vietnam during early 1920s. Besides, the revolutionary ideas of the urban intellectuals as implied through romantic and realistic literature will be discussed in order to highlight the communist ideas in its calling for mass support.

#### **The Revolutionary Ideas in Romantic and Realistic Works**

In the 1920s, there were many political organizations in Vietnam led by radical intellectuals who were inspired by the patriotism of previous nationalists.

Some political parties adopted violent strategies in their operation whereas others pursued reformation through social policies. In addition, this decade was the outburst of printing materials; newspapers and books became part of public life. With the victory Popular Front in France in 1936, the Communist party also called for the cooperation of all other parties in order to form Popular Front in Vietnam (1936 – 1939), which enabled the growth of newspapers and books to respond to social ideology. In this period, books on communism were sold publicly and communist ideology was discussed openly on the pages of newspapers and in the public arena.

However, when the Japanese came to Vietnam and replaced the French, all the political activities were suppressed and many parties had to operate clandestinely. At the beginning of World War II, there were many political movements and the coming of Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh (Vietnam Independence Leagues) or Việt Minh turned the nationalist movements of many political parties into a more united national resistance for independence. During the political turmoil in this period, intellectuals, with different viewpoints, contributed to the revolution by their writings to support the movements. In literary aspect, there were three main streams of literature that could be classified in accordance to its ideal of creation: romantic, realistic, and communist one.<sup>94</sup> Although they were different in the creative ideals, these writers conveyed the same message; that was the concept of patriotism and nationalism in their works.

In the romantic stream of literature consisted of many literary groups, the outstanding was Tự Lực Văn Đoàn (The Self-Reliance Literature Group) with its agency, *Phong Hoa* (Manners) newspaper. The Self-Reliance Literature group focused on ten points, two of which showed the nationalist ideas of these intellectual-writers: to praise the colloquial specialties and beauties of the nation to stimulate the

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<sup>94</sup> The term “romantic” and “realistic” are used to refer to the ideal of literary creation, which refers to political viewpoints of the writers. I take this classification after the agreed-upon idea in most books on contemporary Vietnamese literature.

love of nation among the masses, and to follow populism, write books to mobilize the masses in supporting for populism.<sup>95</sup>

By using *quốc ngữ* in their creative works, the Self-Reliance Literature Group pursued social reform in moderate policy. However, the revolutionary ideas were still shown in their creative works. In the story *Đoạn Tuyệt* (Breaking the Tie), a long novel, Nhất Linh, the founder and the leader of this group, revealed the radical idea through the protagonist, Dung, who would like to change the life of people in the countryside. Dung in *Doan Tuyet* is a young man with good mood and reformative ideas. After the conflict with his father, a land-owner, who treats the poor peasants unfairly, Dung separates from his family and involves in an active life – to join in revolutionary activities. Dung has a sense of nationalism and would like to improve the life of the masses.

As shown in the story, in one winter afternoon, sitting in a brick-house on the hill,

*“Dũng vẫn thấy mình là một người dân và càng cảm thấy cái thú man mác được hoà vào đám đông không tên tuổi, sống cái đời sống của họ, mong ước như họ mong ước, khác nào như một cây cỏ lẫn trong muôn ngàn cây cỏ ngoài nội.”*<sup>96</sup>

*(Dung feels that he is a citizen and he feels immense when integrating himself into the unknown masses to share their lives, their desire, just like a grass in the meadow.)*

Also in that afternoon,

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<sup>95</sup> Mai Hương, *Tự Lực Văn Đoàn Trong Tiến Trình Văn Học Dân Tộc*, Nhà xuất bản Văn hóa Thông tin, Hà Nội, 2000. (Mai Huong, *The Self-Reliance Group in the Development of National Literature*, The Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000), p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> Nhất Linh, “Đoạn Tuyệt”, extracted from Phan Cự Đệ, *Văn học Lãng Mạn Việt Nam (1930 – 1945)* (Nhat Linh, “Break the Tie”, in Phan Cu De, *Vietnamese Romantic Literature 1930 – 1945*, Literature Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002), pp. 257 -8.

*“Dũng như cảm thấy tâm hồn của đất nước, mà biểu hiện cho đất nước ấy không phải là những bậc vua chúa danh nhân, chính là đám dân hèn không tên tuổi. Dân là nước. Yêu nước chính là yêu chung đám thường dân, nghĩ đến sự đau khổ của đám thường dân.”<sup>97</sup>*

*(Dung realizes the soul of the nation; however, the representative of the nation is not the king or the monarchy but the unknown masses. People are the nation. Loving the nation means loving the masses and thinking about their miserable life.)*

Through the character Dung, Nhat Linh expressed his perception about the love of nation, which was the love of the people and the sympathy for the masses. However, Nhat Linh did not let his character to be involved in nationalist movements. This is probably because of his moderate reformative ideal. Under the influence of socio-political situations in Vietnam, many radical intellectuals chose the moderate method to reform the nation both in cultural and political aspects. The Self-Reliance Literature Group is a good example of cultural reformists.

Unlike the romantic stream, the realistic stream of literature did not show out any reformative or revolutionary ideas, but it uncovered the social conflicts between the rich and the poor, and between the colonizers and the colonized. Through social differentiation, the writers of the realistic movement tried to tell the readers who caused the miseries for working class people. Through the description of the life of peasants in the countryside or the working people in the cities, the miseries of the oppressed people were vividly depicted in many works of the realistic literature.

One of the works that describe the oppression that peasants have to suffer is *Tắt Đèn* (When the Light is Out), a report-like novel, by Ngo Tat To. Being a scholar with traditional education but influenced by western style of writing, Ngo Tat To was one of the great writers in the realistic movement. He is good at report-like novel. Countryside, peasants, and life in the countryside are the common themes in Ngo's

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., pp. 257 - 8.

works. *Tat Den* is a short novel, in which Ngo described the tax-collecting campaign in Doai village. The main focus of *Tat Den* is a poor family of Nguyen Van Dau and his wife, known as Chi Dau. Because they do not have enough money to pay for the tax, the husband, Nguyen Van Dau, is arrested and tied up at the communal house, while his wife, Chi Dau, tries her best to find money to pay for the tax but she cannot. At the end, she is compelled to sell her eldest daughter, who is still a little girl, along with a dog and its pups.

However, after paying the tax for her husband, Chi Dau is asked to pay the tax for her brother who died for one year with the simple reason: the number of people paying tax of Doai village was reported before his death, so his name is still in the list. This unreasonable reason pushes her family into the corner. Mr. Dau is tied up and dragged to the communal house again while he is seriously ill. Loving her husband so much, Chi Dau fights against the village-head servants when they come to arrest Mr. Dau for the second time. Then she is also arrested. Then, Chi Dau is sent to the province chief's house, where Chi Dau is nearly raped by a mandarin; however, she defends strongly and luckily escapes just in time. Right after that event, Chi Dau is employed by a lady who lends her money to pay for the tax. Chi Dau thinks that her miseries are over; nevertheless, she is nearly raped one more time by her boss. Ngo ended the story by describing that Chi Dau runs out of the house in the dark night, not knowing her future.

Besides the narration of Chi Dau's family in the tax-collecting campaign, Ngo gave a vivid description about many characters; from the village mayor and his servants to the rich land-owners and even the money-bags. They take the advantage of the poor peasants to exploit them and to oppress them cruelly. In addition, the village-outdated customs are depicted, which results in the miseries of the peasants because they have to pay for all the fees requested by the oppressors. This novel is a short-snap of Vietnamese village in the early twentieth century. Through the story, Ngo clearly expressed his sympathy and understanding for the poor peasants, but Ngo did not show them what to do to overcome their dark days. Nevertheless, Ngo described the peasants could fight back, like Chi Dau, when being pushed to the corner.



When the servants of the village mayor come to her house to arrest Mr. Dau for the second time while Mr. Dau is seriously sick, Chi Dau begs for their pity. She receives scolds and swears. So angry about the inhumane actions of those men, Chi Dau fights with them to protect her sick husband from being insulted.

*“... Then the chief of village guard order the servant of the village mayor:*

*- No need to talk to her, tie her husband and pull him to the commune house*

*The servant of the village head hesitate to insult a sick person, afraid of causing some bad ends, he is standing still, intends to say something but dare not. Angrily, the chief guard snacks the rope on the servant's hand and rushes to Mr. Dau. Chi Dau worries, hurriedly puts the baby down, rushes to him and grasps his hand:*

*- I beg your pity, my husband has just regained consciousness, please spare him.*

*- Spare you, spare you!*

*The chief guard talks, hitting her chest many times, then rushes onward to tie Mr. Dau. It seems that she cannot control her anger, Chi Dau riskily resists:*

*- My husband is sick, you cannot insult him.*

*The chief guard slaps her face causing a loud noise, then jumps to Mr. Dau. Chi Dau grinds her teeth:*

*- Tie my husband, I let you see!*

*Then she grabs his neck, push down to the doorway. The strength of this drug-addicted man cannot stand the force of the peasant woman; he falls down and kisses the ground, but still shouting others to arrest the unpaid-tax couple. .... Mr. Dau is so frightened and would like to stop his wife; however, he is so tired so he lies down and shiveringly moans:*

*- You should not do that! They can beat us but if we beat them, we have to be imprisoned.*

*Chi Dau, still angry, says:*

*- Would rather be in prison. They oppress and insult us like this, I can't stand anymore<sup>98</sup> ...”*

Chi Dau's fight against the chief guard is the reaction of a person who is forced to the impasse. This scene shows the possibility that peasants can fight against their oppressors. However, Ngo Tat To did not mention directly the crimes of the oppressors, but his narration disclosed who are the exploiters and the rulers making these poor peasants miserable. Besides the artistic success and the realistic style of the novel, Ngo was also successful in denouncing the crimes of the invaders, the landlords, the mandarins who pushed the poor people to the ended road. Like Ngo Tat To, Nguyen Cong Hoan also wrote about the miseries of poor peasants under the colonial rules.

In *Bước Đường Cùng* (Impasse), a long novel, Nguyen Cong Hoan told the story of Pha and his family and what happened in An Dao village. The focus of this story is to accuse the landlord and the ruling authorities (from village to district levels) of exploiting and oppressing the poor, illiterate peasants. Pha, an honest peasant, lives with his wife, a small wares vendor, in An Dao village. Pha has a rice field and his family has a stable life although they have to work hard everyday. Because of having some conflicts with Thi, his neighbor, Pha is nearly arrested because the chief police discovers illegal wine in his land. This is plotted by his jealous neighbor, Pha is angry and he is urged by Nghi Lai, a rich landlord and cunning money-lender, to sue Thi. Believing in Nghi Lai's words, Pha has to borrow Nghi Lai's money to pay for the case. However, when coming to the district chief's office, Pha realizes that Thi and him are the victims of Nghi Lai because two of them all borrow Lai's money.

When discovering Nghi Lai's trick, Pha and his wife try their best to return the borrowed money. Otherwise, Nghi Lai will take their land. Pha is surprised because Lai does not take the money when Pha returns it to him. In the tax-collecting

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<sup>98</sup> Ngo Tat To, *Tắt Đèn* (*When the Light is Out*), from Vietnam Library Online, available at <http://vnthuquan.net/truyen/truyen.aspx?tid=2qtqv3m3237nvnmntnmn31n343tq83a3q3m3237nvn>.

campaign, the village mayor, knowing about that Pha has money, forces him to pay tax for his two brothers. This makes him to spend nearly half of his saving. Because Mrs. Pha sold all her small wares, they have no way to earn money for daily expense. They finally become Lai's servant to earn living. Since Mrs. Pha just gave birth for nearly two months and has to do heavy work under the sun, she is seriously ill. This makes Pha worry so much and then he has to borrow some rice from Nghi Lai. Unfortunately, an epidemic disease occurred in the village. Many people in An Dao village, including Mrs. Pha, die. One day, on washing his wife clothes in the village pond, Pha is scolded by others for his wife has died because of epidemic disease. Coincidentally, the disease spreads out again and kills so many people. The village mayor and village notables force Pha to spend money for the worship of the village God and explain that the disease occurs that Pha makes the God angry. The worship takes place with the money that Pha borrows from Nghi Lai. The author describes that the village notables enjoy the food while Pha is tied at the communal house. Even worse, he learns that his son dies just before his release.

While staying home for some days, Pha is called to the annual service to maintain the flood control dike. After working so hard for nearly ten days, Pha comes back home to work for his rice field. Pha waits for the harvest time and hopes that his labor will be paid. However, Pha's happiness does not last long because Nghi Lai asks him to pay for the loans with high interests. Actually, Nghi Lai wants to take Pha's rice field. Being so oppressed, Pha and some neighbors who share the same destiny agree to help each other to harvest their crops. Knowing that those men peasants react against him, Nghi Lai sends his men to beat them. However, Du, Pha's wife's brother, advises those men not to fight against each other because they are all poor and have to work for Nghi Lai for living. As a result, there is no fighting. By chance, Pha goes to his farmland some days later and sees Nghi Lai watching his servants reaping the rice. Being so angry, Pha uses a long stick and throws it to Nghi Lai's head. He intends to beat Nghi Lai but is arrested by the soldiers. Pha is ended up being tied and carried to the district chief.

Besides describing the poverty of Pha's family, Nguyen also showed that other families in An Dao village are not better off. They are the victims of village backward customs and of the landlords. As Nguyen pointed out, the reason why the peasants are

poor and so sufferings is their own ignorance. Through the joke made by Tan, Pha's brother-in-law, Nguyen criticized the poor peasants:

*"The country people will also die from the scourges of unhygienic conditions, stupidity, high taxes, floods, drought, backwardness, in brief, all the scourges born of ignorance."*<sup>99</sup>

This idea is repeated in Du's word when he makes a comment that the mandarin can oppress the peasants because the peasants are ignorant and backward:

*"Everywhere, we peasant folks are victims of mandarins' and village official's exactions. Why? Because we are too poor to go to school."*<sup>100</sup>

Also through Du's idea about building village school, Nguyen Cong Hoan condemned the landlord and the ruling class that they want peasants to be ignorance, to be stupid so that they can control them easily. As Du says:

*"Don't mention that wealthy man. He is only the robber. He just wants us to be ignorant and stupid for a long time so that he can exploit us easily."*<sup>101</sup>

It is Nghi Lai who confirms Du's idea when being suggested to donate for the village school, Nghi shares the village nobles' opinion:

*"I think so. That's why I hate the idea of a school. I believe there is enough money in this village's funds to buy school furniture. As for the ground, there is the outbuilding of the commune house."*

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<sup>99</sup> Nguyen Cong Hoan, *Impasse* (Foreign Languages Publishing House, Hanoi, 1963), p. 105.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

*Otherwise I would give the money to build a three-class school all furnished. But I won't supply the rope to hang myself.”<sup>102</sup>*

However, when Pha and other four men would like to sue the village mayor for his corruption, Du explains to Pha that learning is important because it helps them overcome oppression:

*“You should learn to read and write. That's indispensable, especially for peasants like us. If we can read and write, nobody can bully us. We can work in peace to improve our living conditions.”<sup>103</sup>*

In addition to the criticism of the peasants' ignorance, Nguyen Cong Hoan uncovered the nature of the landlord and the ruling class. For him, they are the opportunists who take any chance to squeeze money from the poor peasants. Like Ngo Tat To, Nguyen displays a picture of tax-collecting campaign in a small village with all the evil-doings of the ruling class. After all, only the poor peasants have to suffer and endure. However, Nguyen was more radical than Ngo in showing the strength of cooperation among the oppressed people. Throughout the story, the author highlights the consolidation of the peasants, which will increase their courage to fight against the oppressors. The saying of Hoa, Pha's brother, is an example:

*“The trouble is that our peasants live dispersed and so easily become prey to oppression. Our hands are indeed priceless: they bring wealth to those who have impoverished us. If we join our hands they will have strength and will command respect.”<sup>104</sup>*

As suggestion for cooperation among the poor can be seen in the words of Pha when he and other two neighbors agree to help each other in harvesting the crop. As Pha says:

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

*“We have nothing to fear about that. They only take advantage of our disunity to bully us. But if we stand together they will flinch. If you push one man, he may fall, but it is quite difficult to push three men holding fast together.”<sup>105</sup>*

Not only mentioning the cooperation, but Nguyen also pointed out who are the common enemies of these poor peasants. When the servants of Nghi Lai intend to stop Pha and his friends from harvesting rice, Du talks to them and reminds them about the exploitation of Nghi Lai:

*“These fields of golden rice belong mostly to Mr. Nghi. But had it not been for our work, how much would they be worth? If we let it to him, these four hundred mau (arces) would lie fallow and wouldn't be worth a cent. We make him rich, and what does he give us? Nothing. On the contrary, he ill-treats us and robs us of our land. Three of us have had our fields seized by him. Is there anyone among you who has received any generosity from him, or like us, have you only grudges to bear against him?”<sup>106</sup>*

When Nghi Lai's servants listen to Du's words, they understand and go back. The cooperation of the peasant is the radical point that Nguyen tried to convey. However, Nguyen ended the story with the arrest of Pha and the complaint of Du:

*“What do we live for? We don't live to eat good things, to wear good clothes, to dwell in good houses, but to endure the exploitation of cruel landlords, the oppression of corrupt officials, the injustice of the rotten system in our villages, and thus in the last resort we have nothing more to face but our utter ruin.”<sup>107</sup>*

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 226.

Although Nguyen showed that the cooperation of the poor peasants was important for the fighting against the exploitation of the ruling class or the landlord, the cooperation was limited at the village level. In *Impasse*, Nguyen Cong Hoan revealed the miseries and the hardship of poor peasants, ploughmen under the colonial authority, and he also denounced the inhuman actions of the ruling class in oppressing and squeezing the money of the working people. Similar to some of his contemporaries, Nguyen focused on denouncing the evil-doings of the ruling class or the upper class and sympathizing with the oppressed and exploited people. While Ngo Tat To showed Chi Dau's ability of fighting against the oppressors as the nature instinct of a person who is forced to the corner, Nguyen Cong Hoan underlined the power of their cooperation in fighting against the exploitative class. Although Nguyen Cong Hoan had a radical ideal of class struggles; his enthusiasm was only limited at the village level, with a small group of oppressed peasants. Nevertheless, the revolutionary idea of class struggle is clearly shown in his work.

Seen through the literary works in romantic and realistic streams, the concept of loving nation is quite clear but the revolution ideal is still vague. This is because the limitation of the writers' perception about social revolution. Besides, these writers published their works publicly, so the censorship of the colonial government could inhibit their ideas of social revolution. That why they just stopped at describing the reality in Vietnamese society. However, the revolutionary ideas were hinted through the reaction of some characters in the works. Moreover, their viewpoints were the result of western education and socio-political influence, so they just pursued the moderate reform. On the contrary, the communist stream of literature expresses the revolutionary ideal publicly. It could be said that writers of communist literature are the radical intellectuals who witness the oppressed life of the people and who are inspired by the communist ideology introduced by Nguyen Ai Quoc, a communist writer, in 1920s.

## Nguyen Ai Quoc and his Works

Nguyen Ai Quoc (1890 – 1969), widely known as Ho Chi Minh, is a great man in Vietnamese history. Born in a scholar family in Nghe An province, Nguyen spent his early years studying Chinese, then studied French and *quốc ngữ*. Influenced by many nationalist movements in the early decades of the twentieth century, Nguyen left Vietnam to search for the proper ideology to liberate the nation. He spent years in Paris and involved in many political activities. Nguyen was one of the founders of the French Communist Party. Nguyen was then exposed to the communist theory, especially the thesis on colony by Lenin. Since then, Nguyen became the Vietnamese communist who devoted all his life to the revolution for national independence. Nguyen is a patriotic writer - from newspaper articles to booklets or appeals- to introduce and mobilize communist ideology. His writings inspired and guided the radical thinkers in Vietnam to the communist ideology in the nationalist movements.

Through his writings, Nguyen expressed himself a patriot, then a communist with Leninist ideology. In addition, Nguyen revealed the crimes of the colonizers in the colonized states in order to inspire the patriotism of the public. Then, Nguyen introduced communist ideology to the patriotic intellectuals, training them to be the leading force in the national revolution. After training and propagating Leninism to his comrades, Nguyen also mobilized the masses to join and to support the revolution led by the communists.

First of all, Nguyen's will and ideal in the struggle for national independence can be seen in his early writings in exile. In the "*Claims of the Vietnamese People*" at Versailles Conference in 1919, Nguyen considered himself a patriot and a revolutionist. In this request, Nguyen mentioned eight points that any independent nation should have, which included the freedom of speech, of association, of assembly, of building national education. In addition, Nguyen asked for the equality in laws and social status between the colonizers and the colonized. During his political activities, Nguyen contacted with Marxism and the philosophy of Friedrich Engels. However, the thesis of Lenin on colonies had a strong impact on Nguyen's ideal that he turned to be a communist. Nguyen's sentiment of communism was



expressed in the story *Nhật Ký Chìm Tàu* (Diary about the Shipwreck), a short diary-like novel.

In *Nhật Ký Chìm Tàu*, Nguyen depicted a story of three people who are workers on a French ship and lucky to survive after the shipwreck. These three men come from three continents- Vietnam, Africa, and Europe – but share the same status; they are all workers. After being rescued by a Russian ship, three men are taken to Moscow, where they are treated kindly and allowed to travel to many places in an independent country under the leadership of the proletariat government. These men learn a lot about Russia, such as its social structure, education, agriculture, industry, etc. What they really admire is the social strata; there is no discrimination among the people. Everyone is equal. Then, they are arranged to study in special schools for people from colonies, which enables their perception about the imperialists and the colonizers.

In chapter twelve of the story, Nguyen compared the relationship between colonial revolution and international revolution is like two wings of a bird; without one side, the bird cannot fly. The collaboration of the two will increase the ability and power of the proletariats in ceasing the expansion of imperialism. As Nguyen wrote:

*“Chủ nghĩa tư bản chẳng khác gì một con đũa đôi có một cái vòì bám vào giai cấp vô sản trong nước và một cái vòì bám vào giai cấp vô sản các nước thuộc địa và phụ thuộc. Nếu người ta muốn giết con vật đó thì phải đồng thời cắt cả hai vòì: nếu chỉ cắt một cái vòì thôi thì cái vòì kia sẽ tiếp tục sống và cái vòì bị cắt sẽ lại mọc ra.”<sup>108</sup>*

*(Capitalism is like a hungry beast with its two long arms. Its one arm tightly ties the proletariat in its country; the other arm strongly ties the proletariat in colonial countries. If we want to kill that*

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<sup>108</sup> “*Nhật Ký Chìm Tàu*”, in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyễn Ái Quốc- Hồ Chí Minh: Những Tác Phẩm Tiêu Biểu từ 1919 đến 1945*, Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục, 2003, (“*Diary about the Shipwreck*, in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945*, Education Publishing House, 2003), pp. 233 – 234.

*beast, we should cut its two arms at the same time. If one of its arms is cut, the other arm still functions and reproduces the cut one.)*

Learning about the characteristics of the imperialism, these men also study about Marxism – Leninism, which is the necessary theory to carry out the revolution, social reform, and the liberation of slavery situation of colonies. Towards the end of the story, Nguyen emphasized the possibility of carrying out revolutions in colonies through the saying of a Russian:

*“If you want to do the same as in our country, it is not difficult. Russia has succeeded in her revolution, so your countries can also succeed.”<sup>109</sup>*

Thus, through *Nhật Ký Chìm Tàu*, Nguyen stressed that the revolution ideology that he had chosen for the national revolution was Leninism. In fact, Nguyen believed in Leninism because it provided a solution for the colonies. In the article written right after the death of Lenin, Nguyen showed his admiration towards Lenin:

*“Khi còn sống, Người là người cha, thầy học, đồng chí và cố vấn của chúng ta. Ngày nay, Người là ngôi sao sáng chỉ đường cho chúng ta đi tới cuộc cách mạng xã hội. Lênin bất diệt sẽ sống mãi trong sự nghiệp của chúng ta.”<sup>110</sup>*

*(When alive, He was our father, teacher, comrade and advisor. Now, He is the guiding star for us in our social revolution. Immortal Lenin is always in our revolution.)*

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>110</sup> “Lenin và Các dân tộc thuộc địa” (“Lenin and the Colonial Peoples”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945*, Education Publishing House, 2003, p. 63

Actually, the work of Lenin, “Thesis on the Colonies and Colonized Questions”, has turned Nguyen from a patriot and nationalist to a communist. As SarDesai refers to this transition in Nguyen’s perception about national revolution:

*“It was after reading Lenin’s Theses on the National and Colonial Questions that Ho felt drawn to communism. To quote Ho: ‘At first, patriotism, not yet Communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin and in the Third International’.”<sup>111</sup>*

As a communist, Nguyen soon became a soldier who devoted all his ability to national cause. Nguyen’s revolutionary strategy was implied in the letter sent to his comrades in the newspaper “*Le Paria*” entitled ‘*Người Cùng Khổ*’, before he left Paris for Moscow:

*“Chúng ta cùng chịu chung một nỗi đau khổ: sự bạo ngược của chế độ thực dân. Chúng ta đấu tranh vì một lý tưởng chung: giải phóng đồng bào chúng ta và giành độc lập cho Tổ quốc chúng ta..*

*...Đối với tôi, câu trả lời đã rõ ràng: trở về nước, đi vào quần chúng, thức tỉnh họ, tổ chức họ, đoàn kết họ, huấn luyện họ, đưa họ ra đấu tranh giành tự do, độc lập.”<sup>112</sup>*

*(We all share the same misery: the cruelty of the colonization. We fight for the common ideology: to liberate our citizens and to gain independence for our nations.*

*To me, the answer is clear: return to my country, go into the masses, awaken them, organize them, unite them, train them, and encourage them to fight for freedom and independence)*

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<sup>111</sup> D.R. SarDesai, *Vietnam: The Struggle for National Identity*, Westview Press, 1992, p. 50.

<sup>112</sup> Thư gửi lại đồng nghiệp báo “*Người cùng Khổ*” (“Letter to Comrades of the ‘*Le Paria*’”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945*, Education Publishing House, 2003, p. 57

Unlike the scholar-patriots, Nguyen Ai Quoc was exposed to the revolutionary ideals of the oppressed peoples and to the exploitative society of the imperialists. Nguyen, therefore, had found the suitable ideal for the national revolution. Then, Nguyen returned to Vietnam to introduce this ideology to the radical nationalists and to mobilize the oppressed people to take part in revolutionary movement.

At this point, it is clear that Nguyen inspired the patriotism of the public by denouncing the crimes of the French colonizers. In a series of articles describing the crimes of the colonizers, *Bản Án Chế Độ Thực Dân Pháp* (The Indictment of French Colonization), a collection of Nguyen's articles and writings, was to uncover the real face of colonial government. The article *Thuế Máu* (Blood Taxes) is another example about the military service that the colonized have to do to fulfill the duty to the 'mother country'. Through *Thue Mau*, Nguyen depicted the number of people who died for the freedom of the mother country. As Nguyen wrote:

*“Tổng cộng có bảy mươi vạn người bán xứ đã đặt chân lên đất Pháp, và trong số ấy, tám vạn người không bao giờ còn trông thấy mặt trời trên quê hương đất nước mình nữa.”*<sup>113</sup>

*(Totally, there are seven hundred thousand indigenous coming to France, among them eighty thousand can never see the sun in their homeland again.)*

Nguyen also uncovered the method of forcing people into military service, the conscript system, and the result of military service of the colonized people, which depicted the reality of these veterans who return home with nothing except the sufferings.

*“Thế là những ‘cựu binh’- đúng hơn là cái xác còn lại – sau khi đã ‘dùng cảm bảo vệ chính nghĩa vì công lý’ nay tay không trở về với*

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<sup>113</sup> “Bản Án Chế Độ Thực Dân Pháp” (“The Indictment of French Colonization”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945*, Education Publishing House, 2003, p. 84.

*chế độ bản xứ của họ, một chế độ không biết gì đến chính nghĩa và công lý cả.”<sup>114</sup>*

*(So the ‘veterans’ - exactly the remaining bodies- after ‘bravely protecting for the justice and equality’ now with their empty hands return to their colonial regime, a regime without any justice and equality.)*

Moreover, Nguyen denounced the oppression of the French who claimed to be the civilizers. In the article *Những Nhà Khai Hoá* (the Civilizers), the crimes of the civilizers are listed. The French also brutally oppress the colonized people. Nguyen gave a series of examples about the cruelty of these civilizers. As he ironically commented:

*“Khi người ta có màu da trắng thì hiển nhiên người ta là một nhà khai hoá. Mà khi người ta đã là một nhà khai hoá thì người ta có thể làm những việc dã man mà vẫn cứ là người văn minh nhất.”<sup>115</sup>*

*(When a person is white, that person is certainly a civilized. Even when a civilized has unrefined manners, he or she is still regarded of the most civilized).*

The ruling system that the French colonizers applied in the colony was oppressive. The freedom of speech and the freedom of travel were not allowed. In the article about the censorship, Nguyen talked about the closing of all Vietnamese newspapers which were against the policy of the rulers. Nguyen did not fail to show the pictures of the corrupted authorities who always make people’s life miserable. He discussed further that the colonial government’s policy of education only serves the colonial administration by making people more stupid. As he stated:

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

“*Làm cho ngu dân để dễ trị*’, đó là chính sách mà các nhà cầm quyền ở thuộc địa của chúng ta ưa dùng nhất.”<sup>116</sup>

*(‘Make people stupid in order that the French can rule easily’. This is the policy that the colonial authority prefers the most.)*

In the writing *Bản Án Chế Độ Thực Dân Pháp* (The Indictment of French Colonization), with explanation and detailed examples, Nguyen revealed and uncovered all the cruel policies of the French and the sufferings of the colonized. With his humorous style of writing, Nguyen described the “justice” image that the French use in Vietnam:

“*Công lý được tượng trưng bằng một bà đầm, một tay cầm cân, một tay cầm kiếm. Vì đường từ Pháp đến Đông Dương xa quá, xa đến nỗi sang được đến đó thì cán cân đã mất thăng bằng, đĩa cân đã chảy nóng ra và biến thành những tẩu thuốc phiện, hoặc những chai rượu ty, nên “bà đầm công lý” tội nghiệp chỉ còn lại độc cái kiếm để chém giết. Bà chém giết cả người vô tội, và nhất là người vô tội.*”<sup>117</sup>

*(“Justice” is represented by a (French) lady, holding a scale of justice on one hand, and a sword on the other hand. Because the long distance from France to Indochina; so far when she arrives, the scale loses its balance: two scales melt into opium pipes or bottles of alcohol; therefore, the poor “lady of justice” has only the sword left to kill. She kills all the guilty and the innocent, especially the innocent.)*

Even though the French often declared that the purpose of their invasion was to bring civilization to Vietnam (or Indochina), what really happened in this colony was totally opposite. In the indictment of the colonization, Nguyen did not hesitate to

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

disclose that people from all social classes in colonial society, especially children, women and the elderly were treated cruelly and unfairly. Nguyen not only denounced the crimes of the invaders, but also brought the liberation ideology that he learned throughout his activities in exile years to the radical intellectuals in Vietnam. He intended to build up a nation-wide revolution.

The third point in Nguyen's writings was to introduce and equip Leninist ideology to the radical intellectuals in Vietnam. In fact, Nguyen Ai Quoc was the first person to set up the revolutionary bases in Vietnam. In 1927, Nguyen came to China and gathered a group of radical youths from Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi (Restoration Society of Vietnam) and founded the Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi (Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam). To equip this organization with the revolutionary ideology, Nguyen opened a training course on politics and revolution strategy for the members of his Revolutionary Youth League, in which Nguyen explained and introduced Leninism to his comrades. *Duong Kach Menh* (The Road to Revolution) was one of his well-known works. *Duong Kach Menh*, a political document, was based on the combination of the theories and experiences that Nguyen gained during his years in Europe. This booklet contained the ideology, strategies, and methods of carrying out the resistance for independence. In the introduction, Nguyen urged the masses to join the national revolution:

*“Sách này chỉ ước sao đồng bào xem rồi thì nghĩ lại, nghĩ rồi thì tỉnh dậy, tỉnh rồi thì đứng lên đoàn kết nhau mà làm cách mệnh. Văn chương và hy vọng sách này chỉ trong hai chữ: Cách mệnh! Cách mệnh! Cách mệnh!!”*<sup>118</sup>

*(I wish my country fellow can read this book, and then they think. Think and after that, they awake and stand up to unite for the*

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<sup>118</sup> “Đường Cách Mệnh” (“The Road to Revolution”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945* (Education Publishing House, 2003), p. 166.

*revolution. All the text and hopes of this book can be summarized in two words: Kach menh! (Revolution)*

In the first section, Nguyen explained the term “*Kach menh*” (Revolution) and also demonstrated that there were many kinds of revolutions and how to carry out each of them. In his analysis, Nguyen stressed on national revolution:

*“...Bọn cường quyền này bắt dân tộc kia làm nô lệ như Pháp với Việt Nam. Đến khi dân nô lệ ấy chịu không nổi nữa, tỉnh ngộ lên, đoàn kết lại, biết rằng thà chết được tự do hơn sống làm nô lệ, đồng tâm hiệp lực đánh đuổi bọn áp bức mình đi, ấy là dân tộc kách mệnh.”<sup>119</sup>*

*(... The powerful oppressors force people to be their slaves, like the way the French treat the Vietnamese. When the slaves cannot stand any more, they awake, unite, and realize that to die for independence is still better than to endure slavery. They together fight against and overthrow the oppressors. This is called national revolution.)*

And he also pointed out who would be the revolutionists:

*“Vì bị áp bức mà sinh ra kách mệnh, cho nên ai mà bị áp bức càng nặng thì lòng kách mệnh càng bền, chí kách mệnh càng quyết.... Bây giờ tư bản đi áp bức công nông, cho nên công nông là người chủ kách mệnh.”<sup>120</sup>*

*(Oppression causes revolution, so the one who is severely oppressed will have strong will of revolution and firm revolutionary ideals.... Now the imperialists oppress workers and peasants, so workers and peasants are the masters of the revolution.)*

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., p. 170.



On revolutionary strategy section, Nguyen stressed on the need of having a leading party to plan and to lead the revolution. Therefore, in showing the long-term struggle for independence, Nguyen emphasized the leadership of a party under Leninist ideology.

*“Trước hết phải có Đảng cách mệnh để trong thì vận động và tổ chức dân chúng, ngoài thì liên lạc với dân tộc bị áp bức và vô sản giai cấp mọi nơi. Đảng có vững, cách mệnh mới thành công .... Đảng muốn vững thì phải có chủ nghĩa làm cốt, trong Đảng ai cũng phải hiểu, ai cũng phải làm theo chủ nghĩa ấy. Đảng mà không có chủ nghĩa cũng như người không có trí khôn, tàu không có cái bàn chỉ nam. Bây giờ học thuyết nhiều, chủ nghĩa nhiều, nhưng chủ nghĩa chân chính nhất, chắc chắn nhất, cách mệnh nhất là chủ nghĩa Lênin.”<sup>121</sup>*

*(First of all, there should be a revolutionary party in order to mobilize and organize the masses and contact with oppressed peoples and proletariats from all over the world. Only when the Party is strong, the revolution will be successful.... If the Party wants to be strong, it should have an ideology as a guideline. All members of the party should know, understand and follow this guideline. The party without ideology is like a person without brain, a ship with no compass. At the present, there are so many theories and ideologies; but, the true and the truest and surest revolutionary ideology is Leninism.)*

However, Nguyen thought that having a leading party with Leninist ideology was not enough for the national revolution. As a result, the military arts should be considered and the force-building should be the priority of the resistance. In his writing about guerilla warfare techniques, *Đánh Du Kích Như Đánh Cờ* (Guerilla Warfare is Like Playing Chess), Nguyen told story about many patriots, the old and the young, who applied guerilla tactics in ambushing or attacking the enemies. In it,

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 171-72.

Nguyen also made clear that this strategy was useful during the preparation of the revolution because it was a means to practice martial arts, to train the military skills, and to allow the masses to gain confidence. In the conclusion, Nguyen wrote:

*“... Hễ có lòng yêu nước, ghét địch, hễ có một chút mưu trí, thì bất kỳ đàn ông, đàn bà, người già trẻ con, ai cũng có thể đánh du kích. Thiếu súng thì cướp của địch mà dùng ... Không trực tiếp đánh du kích được, thì cũng có thể giúp nhiều công việc cho đội du kích, như do thám quân địch, đưa tin tức, giúp lương thực, áo quần, phá hoại đường xá, cầu cống, giúp đỡ những bộ đội bị thương...”<sup>122</sup>*

*(With patriotism, hatred for the enemies, and with little tricks, any men, women, the old or children can perform guerilla warfare. If we have no gun, then take from the enemy ... If we cannot involve in the fight, we can do other things to help the guerilla force, such as spying, informing news, sending aids (food and clothes), destroying roads, bridges, or helping the wounded soldiers ...)*

In addition to his preparation for the communist organization, Nguyen did not forget to mobilize the masses, the main force of the revolution. Many of Nguyen's works about the revolution movements in the country and poems about the history of the nation had reminded and inspired the patriotism among the people. Moreover, Nguyen urged his comrades to help teaching *quốc ngữ* to people because literacy would help the masses understand the communist ideology and to realize who are their enemies. In *Phong Trào Cách Mạng ở Đông Dương* (Revolutionary Movements in Indo-China), Nguyen briefly presented the socio-economic, politic situations in Vietnam under the French rule. Facts and numbers showed the exploitative policy and the corruption of the ruling class. Apart from illustrating the crimes of the colonizers, Nguyen reported the main activities of nationalist movements in the 1920s and introduced radical ideologies to other political parties.

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<sup>122</sup> “Đánh Du Kích Như Đánh Cờ” (“Guerilla Warfare is Like Playing Chess”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945* (Education Publishing House, 2003), p. 245.

In the national revolution for independence in Vietnam, Nguyen Ai Quoc played an important position and no one could replace him. In 1930, as a moderator, Nguyen settled down the political crisis in Vietnam which resulted in the formation of Indo-Chinese Communist Party. In the Popular Front period (1936- 1939), under the mobilization of the communist party, many popular movements united with the support from a wide range of social strata to ask the authority for freedom of speech, freedom to activate freely, and equality. Then, in the beginning of World War II, fighting against the fascist and giving land to farmers became the slogan of Viet Minh, a unification of all radical and political parties or organizations in Vietnam under the leadership of the communist party.

During the Viet Minh campaigns, Nguyen used poems in traditional style to spread out Viet Minh policies to the masses. In these poems, Nguyen told the masses how to liberate themselves and how to carry out these policies. *Mười Chính Sách Của Việt Minh* (Ten-point Policy of Viet Minh) is good example:

*“... Muốn làm đạt mục đích này,  
Chúng ta trước phải ra tay kết đoàn.  
Sao cho từ Bắc chí Nam,  
Việt Minh hội có muôn vàn hội viên.  
Người có sức, đem sức quyên,  
Ta có tiền của, quyên tiền của ta.  
Trên vì nước, dưới vì nhà,  
Ấy là sự nghiệp, ấy là công danh”<sup>123</sup>*

*(... To achieve this target,  
First of all, we need to cooperation.  
From the North to the South,  
Members of Viet Minh would be outnumber  
Who is strong, contribute strength*

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<sup>123</sup> “Mười Chính Sách Của Việt Minh” (Ten-Point Policy of Viet Minh”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945*, Education Publishing House, 2003, p. 260.

*Who is rich, contribute wealth  
For the country, for our families  
That is our achievement, our fame)*

This idea was also repeated in Nguyen's poem about history, *Lịch Sử Nước Ta* (Our National History). The purpose of this poem was to stimulate the people to study history so that they could learn about the traditional patriotism and national heroes. However, towards the end of the poem, Nguyen reminded people of the unification which was in fact the traditional heritage of the Vietnamese culture. The whole country is united whenever it is invaded. As Nguyen wrote:

*“Dân ta xin nhớ chữ đồng,  
Đồng tình, đồng sức, đồng lòng, đồng minh!”<sup>124</sup>  
(Compatriot, please remember the word “đồng” – all together  
Concurrence, consolidation, consensus, allies!)*

As a great leader in the national revolution, Nguyen Ai Quoc was inspired by Leninism and became a communist. He also supported the colonial liberation movement around the world. Nguyen was not only a communist himself but also a propagandist of communist ideology to the colonies to mobilize the progressive force, which later developed into the revolutionary force. Nguyen was the person who laid the foundation for communism in Vietnam through Revolutionary Youth League. Moreover, he introduced them communist ideology and Leninism, and teach them the way of building and expanding organization and military tactics. Nguyen's efforts in the revolution did not have a great influence among the intellectuals but also the masses that were the main force of the movement. Under Nguyen's guidance, the communist party gained support from the masses, took the leading role during the Popular Front and in the Viet Minh campaign. The success of August Revolution in 1945 was a great achievement of the Communist Party.

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<sup>124</sup> “Lịch Sử Nước Ta” (“Our National History”), in Phong Le & Tran Huu Ta, *Nguyen Ai Quoc – Ho Chi Minh: Representative Works from 1919 to 1945* (Education Publishing House, 2003), p. 276.

It can be said that Nguyen was a patriot who left Vietnam to search for revolution ideal. However, the long period of political struggle turned him into a nationalist, and later a communist. Thanks to Nguyen's determination and efforts that the young generation of intellectual nationalists came closer to the communist ideology and built up a strong and vast force for national revolution, which finally brought independence back to Vietnam.



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## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

The process of forming the concept of nationalism in Vietnam has just been presented in previous chapter. In the discussion, the nationalist movements are employed as the examples to highlight the development of nationalism. The study suggests that nationalism is the continuation of Vietnamese traditional value; that is patriotism. In fact, patriotism is the ethnical and moral norms of Vietnamese people. It is, through the long history, patriotism that linked all people together whenever the country was under foreign invasion. This solidarity creates a powerful force that can defeat all enemies and restore the national independence. There are so many historical victories in Vietnam made by the consolidation of patriotic people. Therefore, it is very necessary to understand Vietnamese patriotism before discussing Vietnamese nationalism. Tran Van Giau, a famous scholar in Vietnam, made an analysis of the nature of Vietnamese patriotism in relating to some other cultural aspects. Religion is one of them. As Giau states:

*“Religions which used to play an important role in the development of culture, ideology, and politics in Vietnam – Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism – all come from abroad. However, patriotism is the product of Vietnamese history, originating from the natural bond between a person and his or her homeland; gradually, it becomes a concept and a system of ideology, which becomes the standard to judge what is right or wrong; what should be done or what should not – and to guide the self-improvement and other strategies for national defense and protection.”<sup>125</sup>*

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<sup>125</sup> Trần Văn Giàu *Tuyển Tập*, Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục, 2000. (*Selected Works of Tran Van Giau*, Education Publishing House, 2000), p. 334.

Giàu argues that patriotism is the main thread throughout Vietnamese history and this can be viewed in literary works and historical texts. Therefore, patriotism is the key element in the process of the formation and development of Vietnamese nationalism. The transformation of patriotism, from traditional to modern, was firstly done by the scholar-gentry in the early twentieth century. This transitional stage resulted in the altering the deep meaning of traditional patriotism. This process can be seen in the works by Phan Boi Chau. Through *Hai Ngoai Huyet Thu* (Letters From Abroad Written in Blood), *Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao* (An Outline History of Vietnam), and *Trung Quan Tam Su* (A Touching History of Trung Quan), Phan Boi Chau stimulated the patriotism of the masses for the national revolution. In addition, Phan made a radical change. That is the traditional concept of patriotism: the ‘loyalty to the king’ (trung quân) does not relate to ‘the love of nation’ (ái quốc). On the contrary, ‘the love of nation’ or ‘patriotism’ (in Vietnamese meaning) is ‘the love of people’. That is to bring freedom, independence, and happiness to the people. With this new concept of patriotism, the scholar-patriots devoted their lives to the nationalist movements for the national independence.

The scholar-patriots in the early twentieth century Vietnam innovated the meaning of traditional patriotism by adding new value to it. This process was continued by the intellectuals with western education in the first three decades of the twentieth century. As a result, patriotism has been altered both in form and meaning. However, patriotism is the prior standard in Vietnamese ethics, so it blended well with the national culture and heritage, when the patriotic intellectuals tried to reform the national culture under the domination of foreign influence. As a result, most patriots with western education in this period were cultural reformists. Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh were the outstanding figures in spreading the usage of ‘*quốc ngữ*’ (Romanized-Vietnamese script) and developing this national language. Thanks to Hanoi Free School movement, ‘*quốc ngữ*’ was introduced to the new educational system, which was also approved by the colonial authority.

‘*Quốc ngữ*’ is both the means and the aim of Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh in showing their love of the nation. As a journalist, Nguyen Van Vinh involved in Hanoi Free School movement to promote the learning of ‘*quốc ngữ*’

among the masses. In addition, Nguyen devoted all his life for the literacy of the people in using national language. In fact, Nguyen's enthusiasm can be seen by the slogan on his newspaper, Dang Co Newspaper, which states that the future of Vietnam, good or bad, depends mostly on '*quốc ngữ*'. In a series of articles discussing about the benefits of learning and using '*quốc ngữ*', Nguyen concluded that learning Chinese script was out-of-date. Besides, Nguyen encouraged people to keep and develop the national heritage (*quốc túy*); that is Vietnamese language and its script, '*quốc ngữ*'. Nguyen did not stop at calling for the learning of '*quốc ngữ*', but he also translated foreign books into '*quốc ngữ*' so that Vietnamese people could broaden their worldview in scientific knowledge and social matters. Many of Nguyen translation books are about revolutionary ideas of scholar-patriots and patriotism.

If Nguyen Van Vinh aimed at promoting the learning of '*quốc ngữ*', Pham Quynh focused more on the refining and enriching both the usage and the meaning of it. Pham's intention was to construct a national literature in '*quốc ngữ*'. Pham argued that having national literature was the only way to preserve national heritage (*quốc hồn*). He added that national education could be built if national literature existed. The reason why Pham Quynh paid much attention to the preserving national heritage was the arrival of French culture. Pham was worried about the assimilation of national culture that it might be sub-merged under western influence. Pham expressed his preference about the assimilation and synthesis of two cultures, French and Vietnamese, through a selective process. That means to choose the best features of foreign culture to enrich Vietnamese culture. Moreover, Pham stressed the importance of preserving and developing national heritage. Pham argued that national heritage or the soul of the nation, national language, was more important than the nation itself. As he explained when the nation was lost, it could be restored, but when the soul of the nation lost, the nation would be lost forever. With this idea, Pham spent nearly twenty years writing and translating books with the hope that his efforts could increase the national consciousness among the masses in forming national heritage.

Although Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh did not involve directly to any nationalist movements, they contributed a great deal in upgrading national consciousness among the masses. Thanks to their works, the radical intellectuals had a



better ideal in their nationalist movements. Actually, many political parties were formed in Vietnam during the 1920s. This resulted in the influence of western books and ideas, from which the radical nationalists gathered forces and constructed their revolutionary ideals. Among these radical organizations, the Viet Nam Thanh Nien Cach Mang Dong Chi Hoi (Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam) was the first group having the radical ideology, influenced by communism, in their operation.

The introduction and mobilization of communist ideology to radical nationalists were carried out by Nguyen Ai Quoc, also known as Ho Chi Minh. As a patriot, Nguyen spent most of his youth abroad searching for the right revolutionary path. The process of finding out the guiding ideology turned Nguyen into a nationalist and then a communist. As a patriot, Nguyen would like to organize a nation-wide revolution so that national independence could be gained. Therefore, Nguyen formed the Revolutionary Youth League, and introduced communist ideology to his members. Nguyen also taught his comrades methods of mobilizing the masses in gaining their support for the national revolution. Besides, Nguyen used his writings to propagate the revolutionary ideas to the masses. Through his writings, Nguyen did not only introduce about the communist ideology, but he also revealed the sufferings of the people by denouncing the crimes of the colonial authority. Moreover, Nguyen formed the revolutionary organization and equipped the members with military strategies.

Nguyen's contribution and mobilization inspired patriotic people with new ways of looking at the national revolution. As a result, during the Popular Front in France (1936-1939), the Communist Party got support from other organizations in forming the Popular Front in Vietnam to propagate the radical ideas to the public. Actually, the achievement of this communist ideology over other ideologies in the national revolution was the formation of Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh (Vietnam Independence League) or Viet Minh in 1941. It could be said that, Viet Minh was the revolutionary front of the nation during World War II. That why the communist ideology was accepted and supported by the masses. Therefore, through the national revolution, communism gained its position and gradually merged with the national patriotism, which created nationalism.

At this point, it is necessary to explain why communist ideology took the leading role in the revolutionary ideal. As discussed earlier in this study, the transitional stage of traditional patriotism by scholar-patriots resulted in forming a new version of traditional patriotism. This version was supported by the following intellectual generation, who continued to develop and transform this patriotism into nationalism. Nevertheless, the scholar-patriots' mobilization stopped at reminding and stimulating the patriotism among the masses. These scholar-gentry did not have a clear strategy or ideology for the long-term revolution. In addition, the intelligentsia nationalists focused so much on social reforms. They believed that independence could be restored through negotiations and through mass education. Many nationalists cooperated with the colonizers in carrying out social reforms (i.e. Bui Quang Chieu), or they suggested renovation in colonial policy (i.e. Phan Chu Trinh). At the same time, there were also nationalists who pursued violent-strategy in the nationalist movement (i.e. Nguyen Thai Hoc).

Although the scholar-gentry and the intellectual nationalists contributed greatly in mobilizing the masses and spreading the ideas of the national consciousness and traditional patriotism, they failed to see the necessity that the masses had to form the revolutionary force. The scholar-gentry and the intellectual nationalists considered their class, the bourgeoisie class, as the leaders of the national revolution whereas workers and peasants were regarded as partisans or supporters to the revolution. As a result, most of the revolutionaries led by scholar-patriots or bourgeois nationalists did not gain independence. However, communist nationalists could avoid that weakness in their campaign for national revolution. Nguyen Ai Quoc clearly showed in *Duong Kach Menh* (The Road to Revolution) that the oppressed people would be the best revolutionary force. For the Communist Party, workers and peasants were the main element of the revolution because they were the majority of the population. The communists also launched education program to teach peasants and workers '*quốc ngữ*' so that they could understand the policy and strategy of the Communist Party.

In short, Vietnamese nationalism is the new and revised version of the traditional patriotism. In the article, *Nationalism and the Patriotism of City-State*, Minogue states:

*“Nationalism is merely the modern version of the patriotism of the ancient world, and such a view is in very important respects fatal to an understanding of their true relationship.”<sup>126</sup>*

This statement can be applied to the case of Vietnamese Revolution. That is to say, the concept of patriotism in Vietnam was formed as a result of the struggle for survival and for national independence. For the national cause, the idea of patriotism transferred. Its original form was rejected because it was no longer suitable for the development of history. The decade of 1930s in Vietnam was the turning point in Vietnamese history. The new form of patriotism, nationalism, began to establish itself in the public sphere. At the same time, the ideas about communism also appreciated in the public discussion. The blending between communism and nationalism occurred in 1940s, when the Communist Party kept the leading role in the Vietnam Independence League. Thus, Vietnamese nationalism is the combination and the mixture between traditional patriotism, its new version, and communism. The harmony of these theories has created some special features that cannot be found in other countries. Vietnamese nationalism can also be seen as an adaptation of traditional value with the western ideas penetrated to Vietnam during colonial period.

The study of Vietnamese nationalism through literary texts shows the continuation of the traditional idea of patriotism. It is difficult to construct a complete picture of the formation and development of nationalism in Vietnam by looking at historical documents alone. Nevertheless, through literary works, the perception of national ideology is clearly revealed; the changing and shaping the concept of nationalism from traditional patriotism to modern form of nationalism can be observed. In addition, the concept of nationalism is a complex unit. It contains some basic elements, such as nation, nation-state, and it has been studied by many theorists from various disciplines. In short, Vietnamese nationalism was formed and developed under the colonial situation in the early twentieth century. The study of Vietnamese

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<sup>126</sup> K.R. Minogue, “Nationalism and the Patriotism of City-State”, in *Nationalist Movements*, edited by Anthony D. Smith (The MacMillan Press Ltd., 1976), p. 57.

nationalism should be done from different perspectives to understand its true characteristics holistically.



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