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The Politics of Nationalism in the Vietnamese Communist Discourse

Thuy Thu Mai

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirement for
award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Faculty of Social Science and Law,
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Abstract

The Vietnamese communists have always defined their revolution in national terms, telling the story of how the communists led the Vietnamese people to rescue and rebuild the nation from the plight of French colonisation and American aggression. This research problematises this national frame. Using post-structuralist discourse theory, it studies the process whereby the nation was imagined and became 'real' in the Vietnamese communist discourse and how this national imagining contributed to the legitimization of the socialist state in Vietnam. It argues that the Vietnamese nation is a discursive construct which legitimises the rule of the communist party and the socialist state in Vietnam. This argument is developed on three central findings. Firstly, the Vietnamese nation was constructed in the communist discourse in the very representation of French colonists, American interventionists and their sponsored governments as enemies of the nation. Secondly, the nation was able to be imagined to be more real among the mass in the discursive fixing of national independence as the indispensable condition for the survival of the Vietnamese people, which occurred around the 1945 August Revolution. Last, this national imagination enabled the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and its socialist state to legalize its rule in Vietnam. Socialism and the leadership of the VCP are articulated as the indispensable condition to maintain national independence and to ensure that the national construction succeeds in Vietnam. The socialist regime, which includes the VCP and the socialist state, is equated with the nation in the communist discourse.

The nation-making project of the Vietnamese communists is essentially a political project. It makes possible the establishment of socialism and allows the VCP to attain a monopolistic rule in Vietnam. It rules out other possibilities in Vietnamese politics, for example the possibility of having a non-communist government. It involves the destruction of enemies outside and inside the national self, whether they are foreign or Vietnamese, and the sacrifice of its own subjects to protect this national self. Moreover, the national identities of the Vietnamese communists and the boundaries of their national project are not objective but politically decided. The Vietnamese communists previously claimed to represent only the working class and made an enemy of other classes within the Vietnamese population. The boundaries of the nation used to be articulated to be close with the limits of the peasantry. This is in stark contrast with the VCP's present claim to represent the whole nation.

Author's declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practices for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: THUY THU MAI

DATE: 30th January 2019

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Chapter 1: Introduction

‘Since World War II every successful revolution has defined itself in *national* terms’ (Anderson, 1983: 2) (*italics in original*). The communist-led revolution in Vietnam, which saw the declaration of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945, the reunification of the whole country under the name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in 1976 and the post-independence national construction toward socialism, is one such ‘national’ revolution. The official communist-sponsored narrative in the country tells a story of an age-old nation torn apart and destroyed in the colonisation of France and the invasion of the United States. The communists had successfully led the Vietnamese people in the struggle to fight against foreign aggression for national salvation and independence and are now leading the people in the course of national construction. The Vietnamese Communist Party casts its image as a nation party which represents and exists for the interest of the whole nation. This study begins as a reaction to this narrative from an ex-insider who had taken this narrative for granted as a truthful story.

A few months after studying in a foreign country for the first time, as an MA student at the University of Birmingham, I was struck by a fellow student who stated that Ho Chi Minh was a dictator and the war in Vietnam, in which the United States were involved, was a civil war. I was shocked not only by the nature of the statement which went against my long-held images, which I had learnt about throughout my life in Vietnam, of Uncle Ho as the old respectful father of the Vietnamese nation and of a unified harmonious nation. I was also shocked in the very recognition that different interpretation and perspectives existed about the history of modern Vietnam.

Coming to this research, one of my initial purposes was to provide an interpretation of how the Vietnamese understand the recent history of their nation and view those actors, both domestic and international, that were involved. However, as the research went on, during which I familiarised myself with the general field of nationalism, the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism and, especially, with post-structuralism and discourse analysis, I became more critical and realized that there are elements of construction in all stories and interpretations of the nation. I no longer take the story of an age-old nation that was exploited in French colonialization and invaded by the United States, with which I grew up, for granted. This Vietnamese national narrative itself became a puzzle that needed to be investigated. The

principal question of this research is, therefore, ‘how is the revolution led by the communists in Vietnam constructed in national terms?’

The communist-led revolution in Vietnam is understood in this research as the entire lifespan of communism in Vietnam, which began in the mid-1920s when communism appeared until the present. This understanding is close to the official understanding of revolution in Vietnam, which defines the Vietnamese revolution as the period during which Vietnam has had the leadership of the VCP from 1930 until now (Nguyen Viet Thao, 2015). Given this long timescale of the revolution, I divided the principal questions into two sub-questions: (1) how were the communist-led struggles against the French colonization, the U.S. intervention and their sponsored governments constituted as the wars for national independence and unification? and (2) how are the VCP’s rule and adoption of socialism in post-war Vietnam constructed in national terms? In order to answer these research questions, I use post-structuralist discourse analysis to study those articulations that make up the constitution and significance of the nation in the Vietnamese communist discourse.

The debate on Vietnamese nationalism has moved beyond the traditional view that nationalism is historically given in Vietnam and the Vietnamese communists had been able to draw on the nationalist sentiment of the Vietnamese people in their call to fight against the French colonisation and the U.S. intervention. The new focus of the debate is to account for the process whereby the communists construct the national idea. Existing literature has dismantled ‘the national scaffolding of Vietnamese history’ (Bradley and Young, 2008: 11) and exposed the Vietnamese nation as ‘a modern social construct’ (Vu, 2007: 177). However, the bulk of the new scholarship was laid on the recent processes of writing history and forging a particular memory (interpretation) of the past which glory the national origins and the leadership of the Party in after-war Vietnam. ‘[T]he wartime period remained largely untouched’ by the constructivist approach (Bradley and Young, 2008: 12). This project aims to remedy this limitation in the existing literature on Vietnamese nationalism by exploring the process of national construction in the pre-unification Vietnam. It studies how the revolution led by the communists in Vietnam is constructed in national terms throughout the lifespan of Vietnamese communism, covering the colonial and war-time Vietnams and how this national construction contributed to the legitimation of the socialist state. Using post-structuralal discourse analysis, this research studies the constitution of meanings and significance of the nation in the discursive practices of the Vietnamese communists throughout the history of

communism in Vietnam. Before the nation can be constituted for the mass to identify with, it has to be produced, first and foremost, for the Vietnamese communists. The Vietnamese communists are the first subjects of the identities, including the national identity, constituted in the communist discourse.

This research contributes a novel interpretation from a post-structural discursive approach to the existing literature on the constructed nature of the Vietnamese nation and its role in legitimizing the socialist state. This is the first study that apply post-structuralist discourse theory in the case of Vietnamese nationalism. It is also a first historical analysis of the construction of the nation in the Vietnamese communist discourse throughout the lifespan of communism in Vietnam.

The theoretical framework of this research is premised on a theory of post-structuralist discourse, which is drawn heavily from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe and the genealogical approach of Michel Foucault, both of which inform my understanding of discourse and the deployment of discourse analysis. Discourse is conceptualized as ‘the systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects’ (Howard and Yannis, 2000: 3-4) and ‘a particular way of talking about and understanding the world’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 1). It is also approached here as ‘the means to organize a society into a structured totality, in order to give it stability and meaning’ (Sutherland, 2005: 191). From a post-structural discursive approach, everything is assumed to be constituted as an object of discourse. This theoretical framework allows a novel conceptualisation of Vietnamese communism as a discourse and of the Vietnamese nation as one of the key constructs in this discourse. With this hypothesis, I set out to study those articulations that constitute the seeming reality and significance of the nation in the Vietnamese communist discourse (or the discourse of Vietnamese communists) with the aim to answer the research questions defined above.

The primary data I used to study the Vietnamese communist discourse are the documents written by the Vietnamese communists throughout the history of the VCP since the mid-1920s until the present time. These documents are now available online in the e-newspaper of the VCP at the link <http://www.dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/van-kien-dang.html>. In this vast archive, important documents of key events and meetings of the Communist Party are selected and put into a dataset. Methods of data analysis are chosen from various existing works and research programs of post-structuralism and discourse analysis.

By the Vietnamese Communists, I mean the members of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) (Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 1976 to present) and its preceding organizations: the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Việt Nam Thanh Niên Cách Mệnh Đồng Chí Hội, 1925 – 1930), the Vietnamese Communist Party (Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 1930), the Indochinese Communist Party (Đảng Cộng sản Đông Dương, 1930 – 1945), the Vietnamese Labour Party (Đảng Lao Động Việt Nam, 1951 – 1975). Other people or organizations in Vietnam in the past and in the present may also associate themselves with Communism without being members of the VCP. However, within the scope of this research, Vietnamese Communists only refer to members of the official VCP, the only ruling and only legal political party in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Although subsuming these Vietnamese Communists into a group, I do not see this group as a unanimous, homogenous collective of actors sharing the same interests and intentions. My concern is not about these people as rational actors nor their agency, but about their discourse, which is the sense of reality and the world of meanings constructed in their signifying practices. The Vietnamese Communists are not treated as the originators of these meanings but as part of the communist discourse itself. In participating in this discourse, they are at the same time being constituted as social actors, as subjects of the communist discourse and as the Vietnamese communists.

This research is as a historical study of the Vietnamese communist discourse in order to trace out continuities and changes in discursive practices. The communist discourse appeared around the time when communism entered Vietnamese politics in the mid-1920s when the country was in an acute identity crisis after nearly seven decades of French colonization. The Vietnamese communist discourse is rooted itself not only in the international ideology of communism but also in the specific cultural and political context of colonial Vietnam. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the Vietnamese identified themselves and the world in their encounter with the modern West under French colonialization before communism appeared in Vietnam in order to bring out such a context. This research goes beyond the timescale of the history of communism in Vietnam and covers a longer period starting from the beginning of French colonisation in 1858 up to the present.

There are two important caveats about the temporal dimension of this research. First of all, although I structure these chapters in a sequential time order, there are no clear-cut timeline between them and the order here does not follow the orthodox timeline of Vietnam's history. This is because these chapters are discourse-driven and the changes in discourse do not

necessarily occur at the same time as key historical turning points. Second, although this research covers the whole length of the history of modern Vietnam, which start since the beginning of French colonisation in 1858 up until the present time, it is not a study on Vietnam's history. It does not aim to recover facts about the past or to show what had 'really' happened. It is a 'history of the present' to show that the present is the result of contingent processes, not the result of a liner progressive development.

There is also a caveat about the Vietnameseness of the Vietnamese nation and Vietnamese people discussed in this research. The people living in the country are heterogeneous and multi-ethnic (Taylor, 2013; Goscha, 2016). Some ethnic groups may not want to identify themselves as Vietnamese or the state and nation making process of the Kinh majority may not resonate with other ethnic groups. As Taylor (2013: 625) put it, 'the search for the 'real' Vietnam or for the 'cultural core' of being Vietnamese is bound to fail' (emphasis in original). After all, the making of the Vietnamese people and of the Vietnamese nation has always been dominated by the Kinh ethnic group, which makes up the majority of the country's population. This research is about the nation-making and the state-making within the discourse of the Vietnamese communists, a sub-group within the Kinh ethnic group. Therefore, although this research uses the word 'the Vietnamese', it may literally be true to only a segment of the population living in Vietnam. It can be the Kinh ethnic majority or only a part of this ethnic group.

The use of the seemingly homogenous words such as the Vietnamese or the Vietnamese nation is unavoidable as this research studies what it means to be Vietnamese and the ethnical boundaries of the Vietnamese nation within the communist discourse. However, it is still able to engage critically with the idea of the one Vietnamese people and the one Vietnamese nation. Other scholars have done this by revealing different national narratives, displaying the plurality of the people living in the country or redeeming non-national actors and movements from obscurity. In these cases, the Vietnamese nation is attacked from the outside, from the perspective of those people living outside the nation-making project of the communists. This research attacks the Vietnamese nation sponsored by the communists from inside their world of meanings and subjectivities by revealing the discursive constructions and the shifts in their process of constituting the nation.

The Vietnamese communists have always defined their revolution in national terms, telling the story of how the communists led the Vietnamese people to rescue and rebuild the

nation from the plight of French colonisation and American aggression. This research problematises this national frame. Using post-structuralist discourse theory, it studies the process whereby the nation was imagined and became 'real' in the Vietnamese communist discourse and how this national imagining contributed to the legitimization of the socialist state in Vietnam. It argues that the Vietnamese nation is a discursive construct in the communist discourse, which enables the communist party and the socialist to attain legitimacy in the country. This argument is developed with three main findings of the research. Firstly, the Vietnamese nation was constructed in the communist discourse in the very representation of French colonists, American interventionists and their sponsored governments as enemies of the nation. Secondly, the nation was able to be imagined to be more real among the mass in the discursive fixing of national independence as the indispensable condition for the survival of the Vietnamese people, which occurred around the 1945 August Revolution. Last, this national imagination enabled the VCP and its socialist state to legalize its rule in Vietnam. Socialism and the leadership of the VCP are articulated as the indispensable condition to maintain national independence and to ensure that the national construction succeeds in Vietnam. The socialist regime, which includes the VCP and the socialist state, is equated with the nation in the communist discourse.

The Vietnamese communist discourse is essentially a political project. It makes possible the establishment of socialism and allows the VCP to attain a monopolistic rule in Vietnam. It rules out other possibilities in Vietnamese politics, for example the possibility of having a non-communist government. It involves the destruction of enemies outside and inside the national self, whether they are foreign or Vietnamese, and the sacrifice of its own subjects to protect this national self. Moreover, the national identities of the Vietnamese communists and the boundaries of their national project are not objective but politically decided. The Vietnamese communists previously claimed to represent only the working class and made an enemy of other classes within the Vietnamese population, such as the landlords. The boundaries of the nation used to be articulated to be close with the limits of the peasantry. This is in stark contrast with the VCP's present claim to represent the whole nation.

This research exposes not only the constructed nature of the Vietnamese nation but also the embedded power relationship between statehood and nationhood in the country. The central arguments of the research are that the Vietnamese nation is a construct in the Communist discourse and this national construction has enabled the socialist state to pursuit

its legitimacy. Throughout the thesis, I aim to study the process whereby the nation was imagined and became real in the Vietnamese communist discourse and how this national imagining contributed to the legitimation of the socialist state. While chapter 4 and chapter 5 contextualise the social and political ferment of colonial Vietnam before communism entered the country and condition the communist-sponsored national narrative in the multi-ethnic and diverse social milieu of the population living inside Vietnam's borders, the four empirical chapters from chapter 6 to chapter 9 show the crucial points or moments in the process whereby the nation was taken for granted and whereby the state is inserted into this national imaginary. It brings one established argument in the existing post-structuralist literature on nationalism that 'nationalism is a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy' (Campbell, 1992: 11) in the Vietnamese case.

The whole thesis is made up of 10 chapters, including the Introduction and Conclusion as the first and the last chapters.

The second chapter, '*Literature Review*', situates the research in the broad scholarship of nationalism and in the area literature of Vietnamese nationalism. It introduces the core debate and notable works in the general field of nationalism before reviewing the existing works on Vietnamese nationalism, setting the academic stage for this research. This research is an add-on to the existing literature which exposes the constructed nature of the Vietnamese nation. Its originality is in the methodological approach. It is the first research which applies post-structuralist discourse theory to study Vietnamese nationalism. By analysing the Vietnamese communist discourse through documents in the VCP's archive, this research studies how the communist-led revolution was constructed in the national frame. It examines the processes whereby the Vietnamese nation has come into being in the language of the Vietnamese Communists and how this construction of the nation contributed to the legitimization of the socialist state in the country.

The third chapter, '*Theoretical Framework and Methodology*', elaborates on the theory of discourse I deploy, which is drawn from post-structuralist discourse analysis, especially the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe and the genealogical approach of Foucault. This understanding of discourse enables me to delimit the research (within the Vietnamese communist discourse), to define my objects of investigation (the nation as an empty signifier, nationalism as articulations that attach meanings onto the nation) and to locate my data (the writings of the Vietnamese communists, which are treated as a discourse). Together with other

methods that are available from existing works of post-structuralist discourse analysis, the theoretical concepts of Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory are also used here as methodological tools to read and interpret the data.

The fourth chapter, *French Colonialization and the Identity Crisis in Vietnam*, contextualizes Vietnam around the time French colonisation began and introduces the identity crisis induced by colonialism among the Vietnamese elite. It sets out the scene of a multi-ethnic, fractious, disunited and young Vietnam or even of multiple Vietnams and the heterogeneity of the people living here. The making of the Vietnamese nation was shown to be dominated by the Kinh ethnic majority and this nation-making project may have less or no resonance with many other ethnic groups. In the recognition of the multiple ways of being Vietnamese and the multiple experiences that French colonisation might have generated on different segments or ethnic groups in Vietnam, this chapter capitalizes on the identity crisis among the ethnic Kinh majority or the elite within the Kinh majority to be more exact because their discourse enabled the later emergence of the communist discourse which is the focus of research in this study. According to discourse theory, the identity crisis, which in this case occurred among the elite Vietnamese Kinh, who were deeply governed by Confucianism, entails structural dislocations which reveal the contingency of the existing elite discourse and gives rise to new myths to re-structure the society in crisis.

The fifth chapter, *Numerous Projects of Identification with the Nation*, follows up the identity crisis among the elite within the Kinh majority discussed in the previous chapter. It accounts for the different ways that the Vietnamese elite were trying to organise their society, to conceptualize their selves and the collective identity that they belonged to as the old discourse governed by Confucianism was disintegrated under colonisation. As in Huynh's words, Vietnam in the 1920s was 'the testing ground for all manners of ideas and movements' (Huynh, 1982: 36). This is the time when it 'becomes clear that different actors are trying to promote different ways of organising society' as 'struggle takes places between particular discourses' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2012: 36). Although nuances existed, various identification projects of the Vietnamese elite in this time responded to the societal dislocations with the myth of a Vietnamese nation. However, the nature of that nation remained in dispute. Should it be a nation under the French tutelage or free from French colonial yoke? Should the struggle involve the means of violence or peaceful reforms? While the projects of the scholarly gentry and the northern literati remained an elitist top-down approach, the southern bourgeoisie

and the new radical intellectuals contemplated the national problem from their individual interest and personal dilemma. Revolutionaries made the first attempt to involve the mass in the nation-making project.

Chapter sixth, *The Vietnamese Communist Discourse and the Dominance of the Socialist Myth*, explores the communist discourse in its early period from the mid-1920s to the early 1940s. In the revolutionary upsurge of Vietnamese politics towards the end of the 1920s, the communist discourse appeared alongside the proliferation of communist organisations, bringing a new pool of linguistic resources and meanings into the discursive space in Vietnam. The Vietnamese communist discourse was essentially a project of structuring the dislocated society in a unity. At the centre of the communist discourse was the nodal point ‘revolution’, which was articulated as the change from the bad to the good. The Vietnamese communists’ political project was presented as a revolution which was not only a struggle for national independence but also for social betterment. The two myths were introduced for the Vietnamese to read their current situation under the colonial rule. The national myth, which articulated a Vietnamese nation being exploited by the French colonists to the verge of extinction, was activated in the same tradition of previous anti-colonial generations. The socialist myth introduced the problem of class exploitation and invited people to become subject in the building of socialism, which was articulated as the end of class exploitation. While the national myth defined only the French as the enemies, the socialist myth added the Vietnamese feudal court, landlords and native bourgeoisie onto the list of others to be excluded. The socialist myth conceptualized the nation as composed of various classes, whose interests were different from those of the nation. The Vietnamese communists claimed to represent the interest of the working class. Although it constructed antagonism among different groups within the Vietnamese, the socialist myth brought the constructed social antagonism against the French closer to the Vietnamese mass. The myth of the nation was brought closer to the Vietnamese mass through the articulation of the French as class enemy in the socialist myth. Within the Vietnamese communist discourse, the French became a double enemy of the Vietnamese peasants and workers: a national enemy and a class enemy. The Vietnamese mass were discursively taken into the political realm in the communist discourse. The socialist myth functioned as a bridge to bring the political project of the Vietnamese communists closer to the mass.

Chapter seventh, *The Nation: From Myth to Social Imaginary*, accounts for the transformation of the national myth into a social imaginary in the communist discourse from the early 1940s when Japan marched into Indochina, through the August Revolution, until the early 1950s when the war against the French's return was deepening. During this time, the national myth became increasingly dominant while the socialist myth was silenced. The ICP created an anti-colonial united front for national independence entitled the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội - Viet Minh) in the 8th plenum of the Party's central committee in 1941 and operated under its auspice¹. The bourgeoisie, the landlords and other political groups, which used to be seen as enemies in the early 1930s, were now redrawn into the collective revolutionary identity constructed in the communist-led revolution. The proletariat was told to leave aside their class interest for the benefit of the nation. The nation and the proletariat were still seen as separate entities with different interest that might conflict with each other.

A series of dislocations occurring in Vietnam under the Japanese occupation, especially the devastating hunger in 1944 and 1945, rendered the discursive equalisation between the struggle for national independence and the struggle to survive in the national myth more natural. After the August revolution when Ho Chi Minh declared independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) on September 2nd 1945, the nation had already figured largely as a social imaginary in Vietnam's discursive space. An independent nation free from foreign rule had been taken for granted as the condition of possibility for the survival of the Vietnamese people. The young national imaginary grew more viable as the French returned. The presence of the French inside the country provided the continuation of the other against which the national imaginary was consolidated.

Chapter eighth, *The Hegemony of the Communist Discourse*, studies the process when the communist discourse attained its hegemony by grafting socialist elements to the national imaginary, which occurred from the early 1950s when the installation of socialism was officially announced in Vietnam, starting with a radical land reform. With the national imaginary being constituted and consolidated in the war against the French return, the nation had become a nodal point in the communist discourse. An independent Vietnam free from foreign rule had been taken for granted as the condition of possibility for the survival of the

¹ In this study, Viet Minh and their writings are seen as part of the communist discourse.

Vietnamese people. Having had the national imaginary in place, the communist discourse started its hegemonic project to build a socialist society in the DRV by linking socialist elements to the nodal point 'nation'. A system of hegemonic relations, 'by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: xiii), were established between the party, the state, the peasants and the nation. While classes' interests were differentiated with the nation's in previous periods, the interests of peasants were now seen as congruent with those of the nation and, hence, the land issue was equalized with national independence. The communists also claimed to represent the whole nation, not only the working class as before. The communist party addressed itself as the party of the nation. With these new articulations, the socialist myth was being grafted into the national imaginary and became a social imaginary itself. With both the national imaginary and socialist imaginary in place, the Vietnamese communist discourse had achieved its hegemony. A Vietnamese nation had now been formed with a name, other national symbols like flags and anthems and a government for its people to be identified with. That means it had successfully constructed a 'discursive formation that provides a surface of inscription of a wider range of demands, views and attitudes' (Torfing, 1999: 101). This chapter studies this process where the socialist elements were grafted into the national imaginary, enabling the communist discourse to attain hegemony, which occurred since the early 1950s and during the communist-led war against the American intervention and the Southern government.

Chapter ninth, *The Continued Hegemony of the Communist Discourse*, examines the Vietnamese communist discourse from the communists' victory against the Southern government in 1975, through the Reform Congress and up to the present. It argues that the hegemony of the communist discourse, which was attained during the communist-led war against the U.S. intervention and the southern government, has been maintained since reunification. The significance of national independence and the existence nation have been taken for granted as common sense. The symbiosis between nationalism and socialism, which was established in the war time, is becoming even more stronger. Socialism and the leadership of the VCP are articulated as the only condition to maintain national independence and to ensure that the national construction succeeds. The socialist regime and the nation are fused with each other in the language of national security and national defence, which made possible the protection of the party and the socialist state in the name of the nation. In return, the language and application of the law on national security and national defence contributes to

further blurring the distinction between the socialist regime and the nation. Although the economy is now geared towards a capitalist market mechanism, socialism never ceases to function as a social imaginary in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Since unification, the knowledge claim about the ‘scientific’ Marxist-Leninist law on human development has been increasingly circulated in the communist discourse, consolidating the war-time socialist imaginary, which justified the adoption of socialism and legitimated the continuation of socialism in Vietnam. The continued hegemony of the communist discourse has enabled the VCP to maintain its hegemonic position in Vietnam despite economic reforms and the collapse of the socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

In what follows in the rest of this thesis, I provide how I arrive at the arguments about the constructed nature of the national frame of the communist-led revolution in Vietnam.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter introduces briefly the general literature on nationalism and reviews the existing literature on Vietnamese nationalism where this research is situated in. In the first section, I will introduce core debates and main approaches in the broad field of nations and nationalism. The bulk of this section is dedicated to constructivist and post-structuralist approaches because they inform the theoretical foundation of this research. The second section presents the official historical narrative in Vietnam, which portrays an ancient nation with a continuous history and a homogenous people possessing passionate patriotism. The communist-led wars against the French and the United States were cast as just another episode in Vietnam's timeless tradition of rising up against foreign aggression. Proceeding to socialism under the sole leadership of the Vietnamese Communist Party is presented as a necessary, inevitable and natural path of the Vietnamese nation. While this master historical narrative of Vietnam has stayed almost the same, the international literature on the Vietnamese nation has undergone significant transformations. The third section reviews the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism, which consists of four main stages with distinctive approaches and arguments in each period. Scholars had gone from an early ambivalence in the existence of an ethnic Vietnamese nation, to a naïve belief in an age-old country with enduring traditions, to revisions and total disbelief. Although I present the developments of these arguments in a chronological order, it does not mean that one argument disappears totally when a new one arrives. New scholars still adopt old views and old scholars can change their mind. This is especially true in the literature of Vietnamese nationalism. This is to say although I focus on the recent new scholarship of the literature, previous arguments in earlier stages are still embraced by current Vietnam scholars. This chapter ends with a conclusion that identifies the area of literature where this project can fit in.

2.1. The Nationalism Studies

Although intellectual discussion about nations and nationalism began much earlier, it only became a subject of academic inquiry around the First World War (Ozkirimli, 2010). 'The main axes of debate have been whether the nation is essential or constructed, ancient or modern, political or cultural' (Penrose and Mole, 2008: 271). Three conventional theoretical approaches are primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism (Smith, 1998; Ozkirimli, 2010).

Primordialists believe in the naturalness and/or antiquity of the nation. People naturally gather as groups out of biological factors like common descent and kinship (Shils, 1957) and these early nations existed in the ancient world (Roshwald, 2006). This view is popularly held among historians, nationalists and politicians, who believe in the aged-old origin of their nations. Modernists see nations as the product of the modern area, when objective conditions arise for the homogenization of the population. Scholars of this approach argue that nations are not antique, but only come into being in the age of industrialisation. Despite being unanimous about the modern origin of the nation, modernists vary in their analysis of the nature of modernity (Breuilly, 2006: xxxi) and in identifying those processes in the transition to modernity which are central to the birth of nations. While neo-Marxist scholars such as Hechter (1975) and Nairn (1977) stress on the conditions of economic inequality, Breuilly (1982) and Brass (1985) focus on political factors like the state and mass politics. Other prominent modernists like Gellner (1983) emphasizes the role of social and cultural elements of the modern area in bringing about nationalism and nations. His view is that nationalism and nations arise only in the industrialization stage of social organization. The modern economy has ‘an objective need for homogeneity’ because it requires labourers to move between specialities. Nationalism is about the coming together of state and culture in response to this imperative of homogenisation. ‘It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way round’ (Gellner, 1983: 55).

Criticizing modernists for ignoring the continuity between the past and present, ethno-symbolism emphasizes the ancient ethnic origin of the nation and the role of symbols, myths, memories and traditions in the transition from ethnies into nations. The nation is a modern phenomenon, but have roots in pre-modern area (Smith, 1996). ‘Nationalists cannot, and do not, create nation ex nihilo’ (Smith, 1996: 108). Existing ethnic communities provide the essential ingredients such as myths, memories, traditions, symbols and culture, based on which those symbolic features of the nation are built up later. For ethno-symbolists, ‘national symbols, customs and ceremonies are the most potent and durable aspects of nationalism’ (Smith, 1991: 77). They make the abstract of the national ideology visible and tangible, evolve feelings and aspirations, help to assure the continuity of an abstract community of history and destiny (ibid: 77-78). Therefore, accounts of ethno-symbolic components are essential to understand nations under the approach of ethno-symbolism.

While primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism quarrel about the age of the nation, they have no doubt on the genuine, physical existence of ‘true communities that can be advantageously juxtaposed to nations’ (Anderson, 1983: 6). Constructivism takes issue with the ontology of the nation. While re-asserting the modernist thesis about its recent origin, constructivists argue for the constructed, imaginative or symbolic nature of the nation (Anderson, 1983; Hobsbawm, 1983). In the words of Benedict Anderson (1983: 6), a nation is ‘a subjective idea’, ‘an imagined political community’.

It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, met them, or even heard of them, yet in the mind of each lives the image of their communion. (ibid)

This imagination of the community that can be juxtaposed as nations became necessary in the modern time as a new route of identification when older identities lost their credibility. Towards the end of the 18th century, when the sacred language, the dynastic realm and the cosmological sense of the past, which used to provide meanings to every incident of human existence began to lose their grips on human belief, the idea of nationalism took their place. The physical conditions that gave rise to those cultural changes are capitalism and, especially, the printing industry. Capitalism and the invention of printing together created the modern vernaculars through which nations are imagined. The readership of the modern vernaculars often helped to define the limit of the nation. These modern vernaculars and the printing industry laid the base for national consciousness in three ways. First, they enabled an unprecedented exchange of information and communication of ideas. This helped people to become aware of the existence of other country fellows and to be confident that they were receiving the same information. Second, apart from spreading, the printed books also preserved ideas and information. This consequently helped to ‘build the image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of nation’ (ibid, 46). Third, they facilitated the process of homogenization by creating the language of power. With the print industry, some language increased their popularity while others withered away. In short, capitalism and the print industry made the imagination of a national community necessary and possible. ‘Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined’ (ibid: 6).

Similar to Anderson’s proposal that nations are imagined, Hobsbawm (1983) suggests their existence is mostly symbolic. His thesis is that nations are made up of recently ‘invented

traditions', which are ritual and symbolic complexes. For example, a country cannot proclaim its sovereignty and identity without national flags, anthems and emblems. 'Indeed most of the occasions when people become conscious of citizenship as such remain associated with symbols and semi-ritual practices..., most of which are historically novel and largely invented' (Hobsbawm, 1983, 12). Inventing traditions is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past. The continuity with a historic past that invented traditions aim to establish is largely factitious. The invention of traditions occurs more frequently at times of rapid social changes when old traditions became incompatible. Traditions may be invented in different forms: the adaption of old traditions, the use of ancient materials to construct novel traditions for novel purpose, or the innovation of entirely new symbols and devices. Since the industrial revolution, human society is awash with invented traditions including three main innovations: primary education, public ceremonies and public monuments.

Although Anderson and Hobsbawm put an emphasis on the subjective existence of nations, they converge with traditional approaches on the pursuit of a grand narrative or a meta-theory to explain nationalism in general. Their accounts are still reductionist and essentialist because they attempt to relate the national construction process to some specific underlying material conditions of modernity. They aim to look for the exact social or material processes that make the subjective existence of the nation necessary and possible. Moreover, Anderson and Hobsbawm both attempt to explain the process of inventing and imagining the nation in one causal master account, which is to be true in all cases or almost cases. Recently, insights from new social theories, especially post-structuralism, have transcended the debate on nation. Scholars coming from new approaches are against any attempt to explain the nation in terms of a single, master variable, but content with an interpretation of the national constitution in a specific locale. They refrain from giving an objective definition of the nation as 'Nothing [purely] materials suffice for it' (Renan, 1990:18) (bracket in original). They embrace the view that the nation is subjectively constructed but instead of relating the construction process to a material condition, they locate the construction sites in every practices and objects that signify the nation, that means giving the nation meanings. They are against any attempt to explain the nation in terms of a single, master variable is doomed to fail, but content with an interpretation of the national constitution in a specific locale.

Going beyond defining the nation as a social construct, post-structuralists conceptualize the nation as a form. The substance, the content or the meaning of the nation is to be found in the context and the set of practices that signify it. In a post-structuralist approach, the nation, like all other political concepts like democracy and modernity, does not have an existence or meaning inherent in itself. National identities, and other forms of collective identities, 'are not things we think about but things we think with. As such they have no existence beyond our politics, our social relations, and our histories' (Gillis quoted in Ozkirimli, 2010: 206). It is constituted in and through humans' interactions. However, the construction is not once and for all, but is ceaselessly ongoing. Otherwise, it will cease to exist. Post-structuralists treat the nation as a perspective (Brubaker, 2004: 77), a claim (Calhoun, 1997) or a symbol (Ozkirimli, 2010), which is brought into our consciousness, reproduced and naturalized as a thing of this world in every time we speak, write, act toward or signify it.

Nations are constituted largely by the claims themselves, by the way of talking and thinking and acting that relies on these sorts of claims to produce collective identity, to mobilise people for collective projects, to evaluate people and practices (Calhoun, 1997: 5).

By invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them and call them into being (Brubaker: 2004, 10).

The processes of investing meanings into the category of nations are not founded on any material conditions but are self-fashioning under no universal law. This ubiquitous and contingent existence of the nation opens up a wide range of materials and sites for researching the nation and requires multiple theories. Culture and language become legitimate sites. In Bhabha's words (1990: 1) the idea of the nation emerges not in any material conditions but in those traditions of political thoughts and literary language, and that the nation comes into being 'as a system of cultural signification as the representation of social life'. Therefore, it is necessary to encounter nation as 'it is written', 'to study the nation through its narrative address' (ibid: 3). Similarly, Billig (2000) insisted on a study of the nation through widespread and common everyday ideological habits, especially familiar linguistic acts. According to Billig, politicians, newspapers and social scientists are playing a significant role in the daily reproduction of the nation. Therefore, their discursive practices offer fruitful places to research nationalism.

Besides displaying the ubiquitous and continuous constitution of the nation, post-structuralism is also tuned towards exploring the destructive effects and limits of our long

taken-for-granted understanding of nations and nationality. effects of our conventional assumption of nationality.

In his seminal book *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, David Campbell (1992: 11) argues against the conventional literature on the nation and the state, which ‘implies the essence of the former precedes the reality of the latter: that the identity of a people is the basis for the legitimacy of that state and its subsequent practices’, that ‘nationalism is a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy’. National identity, like all other identities, is to understand as having no essence, ‘no ontological status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality’ (ibid: 9). A such ‘America is the imagined community par excellence’ and it is ‘dependent on representation practices for its being’ (ibid: 91). In the 1998 book *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia*, Campbell goes beyond the construction of the nation to account for the destruction and violence that the conventional assumption of ethnicity and nationality has caused in Bosnia in the early 1990s. This seminal book ‘aims to demonstrate that the settled norms of international society – in particular, the idea the national community requires the nexus of demarcated territory and fixed identity – were not only in sufficient to enable a response to the Bosnian war, they were complicit in and necessary for the conduct of the war itself’ (Campbell, 1998: 13). ‘This is because inscribing the boundaries that make the installation of the national imaginary possible requires the expulsion from the resultant ‘domestic’ space of all that comes to be regarded as alien, foreign, and dangerous’ (ibid). In studying the ontology of Bosnia in ‘the array of practices through which Bosnia comes to be’ (ix-x), Campbell shows that the Bosnian war is in essence the war between two different projects of self-identification to fill in the land deemed in need of the nation with fixed identities and territories. The ethnicity-based understanding of national identity conventionally held by the whole international community is the root cause of the ongoing violence in Bosnia, and at the same time pre-excludes the co-existence of heterogeneous ethnic groups from the political imagination. One way towards a peaceful solution to the Bosnia situation is to deconstruct the self-contained notion of national identity, offering at least the necessary condition for thinking in a less violent, less exclusive manner about the existence of others.

As we have seen, since the 1990s the field of national studies has been broadened both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, constructivism and post-structuralism have joined the existing theoretical arsenal of primordialism, modernism and ethnosymbolism to research

the nation. The conceptualisation of the nation has travelled from being an inherent entity (primordialism), a necessary modern phenomenon (modernism), a social construct (constructivism) and to an empty form (post-structuralism) that is filled with substance in human interactions. Empirically, the radical re-conceptualisation of the nation under the post-structuralist approach has enabled scholars to shed light on the power behind and destructive violence involved in nation-making projects. Nationalism has been found to be, more often than not, ‘a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy’ (Campbell, 1992: 11). This research sets out to apply these ideas of the post-structuralist literature on nationalism in the case of Vietnamese nationalism in order to expose not only the constructed nature of the nation but also the embedded power relationship between statehood and nationhood.

With insights from the general discussion about the nation, I will now bring in the debate in the literature on Vietnamese nationalism. Before discussing the international literature written in English language, I introduce Vietnam’s official historical narrative about its nation and history. The knowledge about what is told in Vietnamese historical books about the origin and history of the country is essential to grasp the debate in the international literature. This is because many of the arguments of foreign scholars emerge in dialogue with the story told inside the country.

2.2. The Official Narrative in Vietnam

Vietnamese historians and politicians offer a primordialist view of the nation. In the official historical narrative, Vietnam is an aged-old ethnic nation with thousand years of history and long-established cultural customs (Vietnam’s Government Web Portal - VGWPa). The Vietnamese people are traditionally patriotic and is composes of a homogeneous unity. The VCP has successfully leading the people in liberating and then unifying the Vietnamese nation. These are the main components of the regime of truth and knowledge in Vietnam. In what follows I present in more details the history of Vietnam as told in the country’s state-sponsored books and textbooks on history. Given the state’s tight censorship in publications of books and textbooks in Vietnam, this story is the one knowledge and one truth that contemporary Vietnamese people, including me, are growing in. Although some of the details of the narrative are presented as facts, it does not mean that I believe so. I only want to present the story as told in the Vietnamese books without disrupting the flow with grammatical words of reported speech.

Vietnam is mythically told as an extension of a family which started to settle in the land more than 4000 years ago. A popular myth tells the story that the dragon-fairy couple Lac Long Quan and Au Co are the ancestors of all 54 ethnic communities in Vietnam. The 100 brothers and sisters born out of a 100-fetus womb of Au Co are the first Vietnamese people habiting in this land. The first kingdom which was established in the territory of current Vietnam was headed by King Hung I, the first son of this dragon-fairy couple. Archaeological evidences speak to the existence of human beings in the land from the Old Stone Age (VGWPb). The first established civilization in the current land called Vietnam appeared at the time of Hung Kings, which last about more than two thousand years from 2879 to 258 BC (Dang, 2016). From the 2nd century B.C. to the 10th century A. D., Vietnam was repeatedly invaded and ruled by Chinese emperors from the North. In the 10th century, Dinh Bo Linh (924 – 979) was declared Emperor, who named the country Dai Co Viet, the first independent state of Vietnam after 10 centuries under Chinese control. Vietnam then remained an independent country, which defeated numerous invasions attempts from the Chinese and the Mongolians. Since the 10th century, Vietnam's territory was expanded southward. Nguyen lords' policies of land reclaim (khai hoang) enabled the Vietnamese to move to what is now the centre and the south of Vietnam (MOET, 2007). The Champa kingdom was annexed into the country and the Vietnamese people settled in with Chinese immigrants and local people in what used to be part of the Khmer land, the Mekong delta.

On the arrival of the French in 1858, Vietnam was a long-established independent country with certain economic achievements and rich cultural traditions of patriotism, consolidation, humanity and heroism, which were forged and formed along the length of its history. However, the Nguyen dynasty in Hue, the ruling feudal court of Vietnam at the time, was unable to protect the sovereignty of the country and conceded the country to the colonizers. Several patriots had organized anti-colonial movements against the French authority. Ton That Thuyet (1839 – 1913) instigated the Can Vuong movement in the late 1880s to call for the support for the feudal court to fight against the colonial occupation. Phan Boi Chau (1867 – 1940) set up the Dong Du movement (Travel to the East) early in the 20th century to organize young Vietnamese to travel to Japan to study new ideas and methods to help the country regain independence. Vietnam in the end of the 19th century and early 20th century was full of such anticolonial patriotic movements. Among those young Vietnamese in the fierce search for a way to re-establish independence for Vietnam, Nguyen Ai Quoc (1889 – 1969), more commonly known as Ho Chi Minh, had found the only right way in the Marxist-Leninist

ideology. He established the first unified Communist Party, the Vietnamese Communist Party, in February 1930. The VCP was later changed into the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) until its dissolution in disguise November 1945. Under the leadership of this Communist Party, Vietnam successfully out-threw the colonial government in 1945, establishing a modern independent country to be named the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). September 2nd 1945 is today regarded as the birthday of the present Socialist Republic of Vietnam. However, the French came back so the Communist Party resurfaced under the name Vietnam's Labour Party (VLP) leading 'the resistance against the invasion of French colonists' (the First Indochina War) (Le et al, 2014: 7). Once more time, the Vietnamese Communists succeeded. The resounding Dien Bien Phu battle in 1954 put a definite stop to the French colonialism in Vietnam. However, out the French went, in the imperialist United States came. The U.S. established another state in south Vietnam to be named the Republic of Vietnam (RV). Once more time, the VLP led Vietnamese people in a war, this time it is 'the anti-U.S. resistance for national unification' (the Second Indochina War or the Vietnam War) (Le et al, 2014). With support from the Soviet Union and China, the VLP finally defeated the Americans to unify the country in 1975. The VLP changed its named into the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and established one party state in the whole Vietnam. The country is named the Socialist Republic of Vietnam since 1976.

In the official historical narrative of Vietnam, the Vietnamese people possess traditions of solidarity, passionate patriotism and nationalism (Le et al, 2014: 131, 274). 'Nationalism, a traditional spiritual value, is a great momentum of the country, is the durable leaning point for Vietnam to make resonating victories in the history, the defence and construction of an independent nation' (ibid). Throughout its long history, big empires of China and Mongol had made numerous attempts to conquer the country. China had once established its rule for nearly 1000 years. However, the Vietnamese always rose up and successfully drove them out of the territory. In the 13th century, Vietnam was recorded to even defeat the powerful Mongolians in all their three attempts. French colonisation and American intervention are presented as just another episode of foreign invasion in the long history of the country. The Communist Party followed the steps of national heroes in the fight against Chinese and Mongolian invaders like Ba Trung, Ba Trieu, Tran Hung Dao (1228 – 1300) in leading the Vietnamese people against these modern invaders. Ho Chi Minh is considered to be another national guardian who are worshiped and venerated for their sacrifice in the construction and safeguarding of the nation. The leadership of the Party is assessed to be the first and foremost factor in bringing about

national independence (Le et al, 2014: 273; MEOT, 2006: 143). Although Vietnamese people are patriotic and nationalist, it was Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party that brought and enhanced Vietnam's traditional strength of solidarity, patriotism and nationalism to a higher level in the struggle against the French and the Americans (ibid).

In the tradition of Marxist-Leninism, Vietnamese historians and educators state that socialism and the Communist Party's leadership are inevitable in Vietnam. Adopting socialism is presented as the inevitable, certain and natural continuity of the country's history and as the choice of Vietnamese people (MOET, 2009: 97; Le et al, 2014: 345)

Proceeding to socialism after the country gained independence, freedom and unification is an inevitable development route of the nation, decided by President Ho Chi Minh and selected by the national history (Le et al, 2014: 345).

Marxism conceptualizes human society as a total structure and develops in a liner procession from low to high. According to Vietnamese Marxists, socialism is the beginning period of communism, which is the highest stage of human development occurring after the collapse of capitalism (MOET, 2013). Having successfully leading Vietnam to national independence, the VCP is now leading the country to proceed toward the highest stage in the history of human developments: socialism.

The establishment of a Communist Party in leading the workers' class in the revolution to transfer a society from capitalism to socialism is also an inevitability in Marxism (MOET, 2013: 371 – 373). Therefore, the leadership of the Communist Party in Vietnam is 'an objective matter sprung from the position of workers' class in history' (MOET, 2006: 378).

As we have seen, in the official historical narrative, the Vietnamese nation is ancient and unified. The Vietnamese people are traditionally patriotic and nationalism. Ho Chi Minh and the VCP are heroic forces that lead these nationalist people in the struggle against foreign invaders in the same tradition that other heroes had done in past struggles against the Chinese and Mongolians. The Vietnamese revolution is a harmonious combination of socialism and nationalism in Vietnam. The relationship between nationalism and socialism is a central topic in the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism. The core debate is whether it is nationalism or socialism that appealed to the Vietnamese people in their war against the French and the U.S.. While the official line in Vietnam has always been maintained that nationalism brought socialism to Vietnam, the international literature has much more diverse and dynamic

views on this matter. The international literature also stocks multiple views on the ontology of the Vietnamese nation.

2.3. International Literature on Vietnamese Nationalism

The international literature in the English language on Vietnamese nationalism is considerably established with contributions from all the approaches in the general study on nations and nationalism. Its development has gone through four main stages. The ‘infancy’ started at the middle of the First Indochina War around the 1950s, when the prospect of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam was looming (Vu, 2007). Scholars held ambivalent views about Vietnam’s national identity. Although the existence of a primordial group was confirmed, the overall sense was a negative and doubtful view whether this group could become a modern nation and whether Vietnamese communists was nationalist. Academic interest on Vietnamese nationalism grew significantly in the mid-1960s when the United States were deepening its involvement. This ‘adolescence’ period (Vu, 2007) saw the popularity of the ‘continuity thesis’ (Marr, 1981: x), which portrayed an ancient monolithic Vietnamese nation possessing strong and persistent customs and cultural traditions. The continuity thesis echoed the official historical narrative in Hanoi, presenting the communist government as the legitimate inheritor of a unified, homogenous and continuous Vietnam’s patriotic traditions. By early 1980s, this view was challenged in the revisionist wave. Attempts emerged to show (many of) past happenings were different or even contrary to the story told in Vietnam’s official history. Revisionism was the first step toward dispelling ‘the myth of a unified Vietnamese nation represented by a single group or monopolized by a single narrative’ (Vu, 2007: 206). To the beginning of the 20th century, new scholarship went beyond revisionism to re-conceptualize the Vietnamese nation as a social construct and a cultural artefact. Researches now include a wide variety of actors, of sites and of data sources to expose the construction process and the power struggle embedded.

Infancy Stage

English literature on Vietnamese nationalism began with journalistic works and colonial officials’ accounts around the 1950s with scant interest in theory. Being the first writings in the English language on Vietnam, the early texts functioned to ‘discover’ Vietnam and the Vietnamese, to explain the most typical features of the country and its people to the Americans. The dominant view was that the Vietnamese were a primordial group but

disagreements existed about whether this primordial group should be conceptualized as a modern ethnic nation. To Mus (1949) and Buttinger (1968), what was essentially Vietnamese was in the peasants' way of life behind the villages' bamboo. However, while Buttinger (1968: 172) was content with the common peasants' way of life as enough to qualify Vietnam as a nation, Mus required the participations of the elite in leading national consciousness. In Fall's 1963 study, the Vietnamese elite was full of rivalry, intense unity and internal conflicts. This fractious elite politics and their doubtful territorial claims led Fall to suspect the existence of a Vietnamese ethnic identity and the prospect for a modern nation. This ambivalence about the Vietnamese nation went hand in hand with a suspicion on the nationalist nature of the north Vietnam's government. Fall (1963) argued that Vietnamese Communists were driven by power and ideology, hence not legitimate governors of the country.

A different view was held by two Western-educated Vietnamese scholars. To Hoang Van Chi and Truong Buu Lam, the existence of the Vietnamese nation as an unquestionable fact (Hoang, 1964; Truong, 1967). Both presented repeated episodes of Vietnam's resistance against foreign aggression as evidences of its national identity and consciousness. Hoang focused on anti-colonial efforts such as the Can Vuong, Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc, Dong Du movements and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng - VNQDD) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Truong provided translations of Vietnamese heroic documents in the spirit of resisting foreign aggression from China, Mongol and France in order to prove Vietnamese nationalism. In these two works, nationalism meant anti-foreigners and Vietnam's history was reduced to patterns of resistance against foreign invasion. This conceptualization of an ancient Vietnamese nation with a common history and strong national awareness was the new consensus of the international scholarship in the next stage.

Adolescence Period

Studies on Vietnamese nationalism since the deepening of the U.S. intervention in mid-1960s started to converge on the view of Vietnam as a primordial ethnic nation, who possessed timeless common qualities. However, scholars diverged in regard to the specific manifestations that can be read as essence of Vietnamese traits. For Marr (1971) and Duiker (1976), it was the traditions of revolts against foreign invasions as previously argued by Hoang (1964) and Truong (1967). SarDesai (1992) and Hy Van Luong (1992) embraced the thesis of Mus (1949) and Buttinger (1968) that the Vietnamese nation existed in the peasants' life behind village bamboos. FitzGerald (1972) combined both elements of village life and ancestor worshipping

to be the essence of the Vietnamese nation. While Huynh (1982) pointed out the traditional customs to worship ancestors and the communal cults, Jamieson (1995) highlighted the endurance of a cosmological perspective about the balance between yin and yang. These timeless qualities of the Vietnamese were used as evidences in explaining Vietnam's success in driving out the French and the Americans. Marr called this tendency 'the continuity thesis.

There has been a tendency to argue that Vietnamese success in defeating first the French and then the Americans was due primarily to traditional strengths, for example, relative ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, ancient civilization, and a proud record of struggle against northern invaders. (Marr, 1981: x)

However, there were different ways to attribute the continuity of Vietnamese traditions and customs to recent successes in the war against modern Western powers. Jamieson (1995) skipped at the agency of the communists, associating Vietnamese' indomitable fights against foreigners to the nostalgic cosmological fight to re-establish the 'now-impossible' balance of yin and yang in the Vietnamese society. Jamieson's account was an exception rather than the norm. Most works in the continuity thesis reserved a central place for the Vietnamese Communists, who were the essential bridge between traditions and a modern nation. While patriotism was the traditions of the Vietnamese mass, nationalism was equated with anti-colonialism or xenophobia and belonged to the realm of elite's expressions. Communists only succeeded when they were able to touch on the Vietnamese tradition of patriotism and, hence, to be supported by the mass (Vu, 2007: 191).

Duiker (1976) offered a typical account of this continuity thesis. He stated that Vietnamese people possessed 'a strong sense of ethnic awareness tempered by thousand years of resistance against northern conquests' (Duiker, 1976: 287). The arrival of the French challenged this proud identity, causing a sense of 'losing country' among the scholar-gentry and disturbance among all other strata. Revolts and resistances were abundant in Vietnam almost immediately after the civilization mission of French colonialism just began. Communists, like other national groups, 'wanted to establish Vietnam as a proud nation of the modern family of nations' (ibid:15). What made them stand out was that they recognized the need to transform nationalism into a mass phenomenon and 'Marxism was a tool in this process' (ibid).

In order to highlight the continuity of the Vietnamese traditions, scholars of this period gave a great deal of attention to the history of the country. All major works in this period spared

one or two chapters on the pre-colonial Vietnam mentioning the legendary kingdom of ‘Van Lang’ ruled by the 19 generations of Hung kings around the 2000 B.C. and 1000 BC, and a series of mythic heroes and heroines in the Vietnamese efforts to drive out the Chinese invaders. Taylor (1983) devoted a whole book ‘The Birth of Vietnam’ elaborating the origins of this ancient nation. Woodside (1976: 2) states that ‘no amount of statistics, rhetoric, or social science theory can explain the Vietnamese revolution adequately if its properties of acute historical consciousness and cultural pride are insufficiently considered’. The shocks of French colonialism did not destroy these properties, but psychologically enlarged the Vietnamese’ awareness of self- identity in the modern area. In the language of Smith’s ethno-symbolic approach, Sutherland (2006) explained the success of the Vietnamese Communist as the combination of the existence of the pre-existing myths, symbols, customs and memories and the Communists’ agency in articulating a modern sense of nationhood out of these ethnic elements amid an identity crisis in the Vietnamese society in the aftermath of French colonisation.

The continuity thesis in the adolescent stage of the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism possessed a ‘new faith in the Vietnamese nation’ (Vu, 2007: 187) and a positive view on the legitimacy of the Communist government. Instead of the previous doubt on the nationalism of Vietnamese Communists, the new scholarship now portrayed them as the bearers of nationalism and true representations of the nation. Towards the 1980s, critique of the continuity thesis was voiced and the optimistic faith in the Vietnamese nation was giving way to more sophisticated accounts. Marr (1981: x) criticized the continuity thesis for stressing the power of tradition at the expense of downgrading historical transformations in Vietnam during the colonial period. The endurance of Vietnam’s cultural traditions was achieved at the expense of ignoring changes and transformation and simplifying the particularities of regions and ethnic communities in the Vietnamese society in its encounter with Western culture. In addition, these themes of continuity and unity ‘coincided with Vietnamese communists’ efforts to construct a natural teleology of Vietnamese anti-colonialism and nationalism in which communism was the logical end’ (Kim, 2002: 4). The debate now moved the focus to elements of contingency and spontaneity of past events in Vietnam’s history. The story of a historical unified nation, in which all people possess common traditions and share the same consciousness of their collective identity, was no longer taken for granted. Revisions to the winner’s official historiography and the parallel continuity thesis in the international literature started to emerge both from inside and outside Vietnam.

The Revisionist Wave

Revisionist history means ‘a challenge to whatever is the current orthodoxy in the interpretation of historical eras and events’ (Elliott, 2008: 278). The last three decades have witnessed a reaction against the Vietnamese state’s grand narrative of the nation (Tran and Reid, 2006: 15). The revisionist literature aims to undermine the idea of a Vietnamese past as ‘the single, linear progression of a homogenous whole’ (Sutherland, 2010: 2). The ‘natural’ combination between communism and nationalism in the state-sponsored history is also put under closer scrutiny.

Interestingly, the revisionist wave in the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism coincided with attempts by some Vietnamese veterans to tell stories different from official narratives in their autobiographies and novels. Bao Ninh’s *Sorrow of the War* (2011) (Nỗi buồn chiến tranh) portrayed not heroic and defiant soldiers in a well-justified war but frightened and fragile soldiers in a bloody and ill-defined war. The state’s rhetoric of national ideals and heroism in the war against the Americans was absent in the experiences of these soldiers who had lived and fought in the battle field. The author commented that the ones who loved war were not the young men but the others like the politicians, middle-aged men with fat bellies. While Bao Ninh features a contrasting past, Duong Thu Huong’s 1988 novel ‘Paradise of the Blind’ (Những Thiên Đường Mù) refuses to buy in the official interpretation of the past. Her novel paints a young northerner who regards the inheritance of the country’s revolution as the legacy of past crimes rather than victorious achievements. In refusing to stay in her lineage’s house she rejects the revolutionary past and saw it as unfortunate happenings which foreclose a different possible future that she and her generation are yearning for.

Just like Vietnamese war veterans, pioneers of the revisionist wave in the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism came from a background which participated in the continuity thesis. Scholars like David Marr and Keith Taylor changed from seeing Vietnam’s history as continuous and its people as homogenous to one ridden with fractions, contingencies and fictions. Dissatisfied with reductionist explanations offered in the continuity thesis, Marr (1981) steered the focus on fundamental changes in political and social consciousness among the Vietnamese intellectuals of in the two decades preceding the August Revolution. The Vietnamese were no longer pictured to be stable and static as in the continuity thesis, of which Marr himself used to be a proponent. Instead, we saw here a society in the midst of its search for a new identity in its encounter with a very much different way of living. Vietnamese

intellectuals took the lead in this painful search for a modern Vietnamese self and in bringing the revolutionary consciousness to the mass. The ICP's success was due largely to its convergence with the intellectuals. Except for HCM, all ranking ICP leaders of the early 40s had been members of the new intelligentsia. However, while portraying a contentious society in an identity crisis instead of a homogeneous Vietnamese with common traits, Marr ended up with another homogeneous groups within the national self, the intelligentsia and the ICP. They shared such a significant amount of ideological consensus that they naturally converged during the time of Viet Minh's Popular Front. Marr (1981: vii) had found what he wanted to find as he said in the beginning of the book 'I suspect there was enough ideological consensus among NLF members to enable local cadres to function for weeks and months without specific orders from higher echelons'. This ideological consensus among Vietnamese intellectuals and ICP members was then refused by Marr himself in his 1995 book, which conveyed more elements of contingency and spontaneity to the ICP's success in August 1945. Marr (1995: 6) argued that 'no one was in control', the Vietminh were successful because of their quick reaction to sudden and spontaneous changes rather than of any adherence to a master plan (Marr, 1995: 6). Members of the Vietminh and its Popular Front did not share the same ideology, they participated and acted for various purposes, in different interests and by diverse manners. The ICP were neither a homogeneous group nor share the same level of revolutionary consciousness. The story of the August Revolution emerged in a much wider context, ridden with unexpected accidents, spontaneous actions and unpredictable results. Similarly, Quinn-Judge (2008) highlights the deep ideological and regional cleavages among the top members of Vietnam's communist party from 1940 and 1960.

While Marr and Quinn-Judge attack the dominant themes of unity and coherence in the Vietnamese state's historical narrative in the recent 'revolutionary' times, a number of scholars attempt to raid this narrative far back in the pre-colonial periods. This academic rescuing history from the nation conveys three main arguments. Firstly, the notion of an ancient and homogeneous Vietnam is disputed. Vietnam is not an age-old entity but has its existence dated very recently (Taylor, 2013; Goscha, 2016). The country as it is today was not put under the same rule until 1802 when Gia Long, the founder of the Nguyen dynasty, defeated other political Vietnamese fractions with the French's help. Even then the country's name was changed into Dai Viet only 13 years later. The name Vietnam did not become popular until 1945. In addition, French colonial rule soon divided the country into three different administration under the colony of Indochina. Before 1802 and even after that there are always

more than one way of being Vietnamese and multiple claims exist to define themselves against other Vietnamese places (Li, 1998; Taylor, 1998 and 2013; Goscha, 2016). For example, there were two Vietnamese states each with special and distinctive characteristics in Vietnam in the 17th and 18th centuries. The same can be said with Vietnam in the three decades before the 1975 unification, which saw the operations of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the North and the Republic of Vietnam in the South. Moreover, even in the early 20th century, the Vietnamese nation had been pursued at different levels other than Vietnam (Goscha, 1995). Most Vietnamese used to define themselves as the Annamese and some Annamese used to imagine an Indochinese nation, rather than a Vietnamese nation.

Secondly, instead of seeing Vietnam as a victim of external domination and colonisation, Vietnam is depicted as ‘the product of its own colonial history’ (Goscha, 2016: 9) or ‘a creature of conquest’ (Sutherland, 2010: 63). Vietnam’s history is not only full of rivalries and battles among different Vietnamese groups, but also of attempts to conquest foreign lands and colonize non-Vietnam people. The once mighty Champa kingdom had disappeared to become part of central Vietnam. Part of the Mekong delta in what is not South Vietnam used to be land of the Khmer people. The current border between Vietnam and Cambodia was not settled until 1845. Tuong Vu (2009b) argued that Vietnam was not a victim of the Cold war politics, but the Vietnamese communist intentionally volunteered to fight on the side of communism.

Thirdly, Vietnam, as any country, is far from a homogeneous unity. There are not only multiple ways of being Vietnamese, but also there are also non-Vietnamese people, who may not want to be Vietnamese, living inside the territory of Vietnam. An ethnic Vietnamese nation is not coterminous with state borders (Sutherland, 2014: 61). Vietnam is reported to be composed of 54 ethnic groups, out of which the Vietnamese or Kinh is composed of 86%. Other 53 ethnic groups do not become ethnic minorities until they are included into the nation state of Vietnam. In fact, well into the 20th century, the non-Viet people out-numbered the Kinh in the mountainous areas and highlands which accounts for over half of the country (Goscha, 2016: 4). Although official history claims a brotherhood relationship between Kinh and other ethnic groups and since Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese state has always tried to include other ethnic people in their state-making process, tensions between Kinh and other ethnic groups in Vietnam are often reported. For example, indigenous minorities in the central highlands staged wide-scale riots in 2001 and 2004 to ask for their land back from Vietnamese control. This is

to say that the making of nation state in Vietnam is very much the project of the ethnic Kinh group, not necessarily the common project of all the people living inside the territory. ‘A common history’ of the Vietnamese nation ‘lies in the realm of mythology and indoctrination’ (Taylor, 1998: 971).

Commenting on the making of the nation in Asia, Tagliacozzo, Siu and Perdue (2015: 2) asserted ‘none of the above-mentioned regions or nation-states is homogeneous by any criterion, whether linguistic, cultural, religious, economic or historical’. In fact, ‘the boundaries of these nation-states and empires have shifted over time with various historical articulations of power and control, and they have always included diverse and mobile peoples within them’ (ibid). This comment captures very well the main themes of the new histories of Vietnam.

In addition to perpetuating a nuanced view of one homogeneous and continuous Vietnamese nation, the revisionist wave also questioned the juxtaposition between Vietnamese communism and nationalism in the continuity thesis. Scholars attempted to show the internationalism of Vietnamese communism or its non-nationalist manifestation. Woodside (1976) pointed out the Ho Chi Minh’s great enthusiasm for internationalism but ambivalence about Vietnamese culture in his early writings. White (1974) and Porter (1972) insisted that Vietnamese communists were true revolutionaries, not simply nationalists. Vietnam struggle after 1945 was primarily a class struggle for social justice. Turley (1972), Popkin (1979) and Race (1972) offered brilliant accounts of the non-nationalist dimensions of Vietnamese communism. Their point was that the appeal of Viet Minh and the National Liberation Front was based more on communal (village security and welfare) and individual (land) interests than on national loyalty (Vu, 2007: 198 – 199). Communists succeeded because they hid their class ambition under the talk of nationalism and acted in regard to communal and individual interests. Vietnamese communists were not less international revolutionaries than nationalists (Vu, 2009b). They have always been deeply committed to a proletariat ideology and world view, which makes them voluntarily participate into the Cold war and loyal to communism despite pressures for changes after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Vu, 2017). Similarly, Kim (2002) provided a different meaning of revolutionary politics from the official narrative. (2002: 240) argued that ‘the powerful moment of unity between the communists and many within the intellectual community was... not in the preservation of the nation’s past and cultural achievements but in their very destruction in order for a new Vietnam to emerge into the modern world’. Vietnamese politics since the decades preceding the August revolution was

characterized by ‘the profound ambivalence and the extreme hostility towards history and past intellectual achievements’ (ibid: 7). The sentiments that drew Vietnamese people to the national cause in this period of time was a desire for a radical change and for the establishment of a new social order. This was, to Kim, the enduring meaning of revolutionary politics for many Vietnamese.

Besides questioning the national credentials of Vietnamese communists, scholars also established the national credentials of the non-communist government of the Republic of Vietnam, who were pictured as lackeys and puppets in the communist-sponsored history. Ngo Dinh Diem, the RV’s president from 1955 to 1963, was found to be a legitimate leader of the Vietnamese nation, whose moral and political authority was widely recognized by many Vietnamese (Shaw, 2013). Instead of being a traitor to the nation and the people as claimed by Hanoi or a corrupt and tyrannical leader as viewed by many American historians, Diem was portrayed to be strongly nationalist and independent (Catton, 2002; Edward, 2008 and 2013). He embraced his own vision for a developed and unified non-communist Vietnam and was keen to establish the connection between his nation state with an ancient Red river civilisation. Race (1972) even argued that it was nationalism that caused Sai Gon government to lose the war.

The revisionist wave contradicted the grand historical narrative in Vietnam. Works told many histories of Vietnam, which are either different or lacking in the story told by Vietnamese communist historians. Revisionists scholars eschewed the teleology of the continuity thesis and unfolded the plural and contentious dimension in Vietnam’s past and its nationalism. In the revisionist wave, the myth of a unified Vietnamese nation represented by a single group or monopolized by a single narrative had been dispelled (Vu, 2004: 206). To the 20th century, Vietnam scholars went beyond the dispute on the past to address the deliberate attempts of the governments to construct a homogenous nation and to promote Vietnam’s national identity.

The New Scholarship

By the turn of the 20th century, a new scholarship emerged in the international literature on Vietnamese nationalism, which saw insights informed from new theories like constructivism, post-colonialism and post-structuralism. The new scholarship views the Vietnamese nation ‘as a modern social construct or cultural artefact’ (Vu, 2007: 177) and studied it in ‘the process of identity formation at various sites’ (ibid: 207), such as official

historiography, public culture and private settings of individuals' daily life. In studies of the new scholarship, 'the nation appears as a modern social construct with state playing a central role in building it' (ibid: 210). Vietnam's official narrative on the nation and the Party's role were broken into parts and their production and maintenance were put under scrutiny. Scholars are now attentive to how diverse elements are put together in the construction of the nation, whereby the seemingly continuity and homogeneity are forged, traditions are invented and the past is made and remade to maintain the grips of the nation and the appeal of socialism and the legitimacy of the Party.

Going beyond revisionist attempts to present a different past to the one told in Vietnam's official historical narrative, scholars now aim to show the deliberate hands of the state in making this narrative. Pelly (2002) follows the efforts of Vietnamese communist historians in writing the country's official historical narrative since the time of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) to serve their political purposes. Responding to the colonial scholarship which views the Vietnamese as primitive and having no culture of their own, the DRV's historians made every effort to establish national origins and national essence that are non-Chinese and pre-Chinese. In addition, Vietnam is posed as a family state in order to include the variety of ethnic minorities into the Vietnamese nations. The national past is plotted according to Marxist-Leninist paradigms in order to highlight the universal regularities of human development with socialism at the highest level. In a similar manner, Salomon and Vu (2007) unpacks the production of the national narrative in educational textbooks. The image of a unified Vietnam and its continuous history was done through series of silencing alternative voices, omitting certain elements and excluding contributions of other actors. To begin with, the origins of the nation are found in legends and myths and no attempt is made to separate these from more factual accounts (ibid: 352). The tradition of fierce patriotism is forged against the Other China at the expense of downplaying the absorption of Chinese elements. The tradition of opposing against exploitation is made by the portrayal of an oppressing and coward Nguyen dynasty and at the exclusion of their considerable reforms. The picture of a national Communist Party was painted in the act of omitting patriotic elements of Ngo Dinh Diem and the Southern government in the Republic of Vietnam. The validity of socialism was made by attributing the fall of USSR to the imagining threats of 'peaceful evolutions' of the capitalist camp and by presenting Reforms not as a rupture but a continuity of socialism. This historical narrative that Vietnamese youngsters are educated in serves the purpose of justifying the communist rule and the leading role of the VCP. In these works, Vietnam's official

historiography is far from being transparent in conveying past happenings but is intentionally made in service of political purposes.

The nation is not only produced in the official state-sponsored knowledge about the past, but also in the cultural realm where the memory of the nation's past is maintained. Unfortunately, public culture in Vietnam is also dominantly sponsored by the state. Therefore, in many sites of Vietnamese public culture, scholars come across the similar plot told in historical books. Prison memoirs (Zinoman, 2001a and 2001b), many shrines and museums (Giebel, 2001) and biographies of state figures (Giebel, 2004) are also shown to be the places where memory and history are constructed to serve the legitimacy of the present.

However, in Bradley's 2001 study of revisionist films about wars produced in the 1980s in Vietnam, the state's project of war memories is shown not to resonate with the memories of the people. 'What joins these works most fully is a common insistence that the ideological base of state constructions of war conceals more than it reveals' (ibid: 222). Some Vietnamese people are now too busy calculating their gains in the new market to bother to care about any form of war legacies. Some are remembering war dead as their husband, their lovers, their sons, not as national heroes. Moreover, despite great efforts to commemorate the heroic dead, the state is also criticized for not doing enough for its veterans. Many of them are unemployed in the post-war era, or have to live a hard life as a bicycle fixer or trishaw rider.

National identification also occurs in the more local and private memories. Malarney (2001) went to a Vietnamese home to explore the ritual commemoration of a dead family member, who was also a war dead. While official rituals function to venerate the exemplary life and sacrifice of the dead, the family's rituals are to attend to the after-life of the dead soul. Rozsko (2010) found local contestations over memories in order to be included in the national commemoration project. New scholarship in Vietnamese nationalism has brought new insights into the politics (the power behind) of memory making and of knowledge (of the past) imbedded in the construction of the nation in Vietnam.

[I]f a community creates and sustains memory, the reverse is also true: memory creates and sustains the community... The creation of a common past is a means of defining what and who belong, and what and who deserve to be consigned to oblivion' (Ho, 2001: 228).

Memory is socially constructed and 'the past is an eternally unfinished project' (ibid: 2). This point resonates in Vietnam's case. Even though the state aims to tell one story and one

truth of its national past, its narrative inevitably encounters local and individual accounts. Moreover, even official representations of the past don't stay the same, they are subject to shifts and changes in command of the present's politics. Works of McHale (2002), Schwenkel (2008) and Sutherland (2014) have shown the shifting frame in representing Vietnam's past.

With the contribution of the new scholarship, 'the national scaffolding of Vietnamese history began to fully collapse' (Bradley and Young, 2008: 11). At the same time, the Vietnamese nation is reconceptualised as a social construct, 'the hands of state agents in fabricating national myths' are exposed (Vu, 2007: 210). The construction of the nation is not fixed once and for all, but are in a flux with forces at different levels. What is the nation is shown to be plural, fragile and contentious?

Conclusion

Up until the close of the 20th century, the international debate echoed the grand historical narrative of the official discourse in Vietnam. The common plot is that the Vietnamese Communists are nationalists before being communists. They found in communism the key to consolidate the national strength to drive out all capitalist aggressors. Vietnam as a nation has existed since the dawn of history with myths of Lac Long Quan and Au Co and myths of Hung Kings. Vietnamese people are highly conscious of their national identity as they always fight against foreign invasion. The Vietnamese Communists were able to appeal to Vietnamese masses because they are nationalists at heart. The claim to the existence of a Vietnamese nation with fully-formed traditions and self-aware people is the basis on which the Vietnamese Communists build their legitimacy in calling for rescuing, liberating the country and making the people the owners of their country.

By the turn of the 20th century towards the beginning of the 21st century, the international literature started to problematize the conceptualization of the Vietnamese nation as an inherent and homogeneous entity and the nationalist credentials of the Vietnamese communists. Revisionist studies showed that the Vietnamese nation as it is today was only established under one rule in the early 19th century (Taylor, 2013; Goscha, 2016). There has been always more than one way of being Vietnamese and multiple claims exist to define themselves against other Vietnamese places (Li, 1998; Taylor, 1998 and 2013; Goscha, 2016). Moreover, Vietnam has always been home to multi ethnic groups, many of which may never want to be included in the nation-making project of the Kinh majority. Vietnamese

communists' nationalist credentials were questioned and their rivals were given a space to display their nationalism.

Insights from new social theories have focussed more on the ontology of the Vietnamese nation. Researches no longer claim to a master narrative of a nation, but keep their goal modest as the interpretation of the construction of the nation in specific contexts and locations. The national past, myths, traditions and memories are now cracked out of its face value to reveal their constructed nature. The new consensus is that the Vietnam nation is a social construct and its construction occurs in various places: the acts of writing history (historiography), cultural sites like commemoration practices, museum, shrines and war memoirs and in people's daily life practices. The deliberate hands of the state in making this nation was also exposed.

This research is going to contribute the new scholarship in exposing the constructed nature of the Vietnamese nation and its role in legitimatizing the socialist state. As seen above, this is something already done by quite a few international scholars on Vietnamese nationalism in the 21st century. National heroes, the national past and national history have shown to be constantly being constructed and renegotiated to maintain and promote the legitimacy of the socialist state in present Vietnam. However, this research will approach the construction of the Vietnamese nation from a different theory, a post-structuralist discourse theory. Discourse theory have been long applied to nationalism, but never to Vietnamese nationalism. This study is the first which uses discourse theory to analyse Vietnamese nationalism. By analysing the Vietnamese communist discourse through documents in the VCP's archive, this research studies how the communist-led revolution was constructed in the national frame. It examines the processes whereby the Vietnamese nation has come into being in the language of the Vietnamese Communists and how this construction of the nation contributed to the legitimization of the socialist state in the country.

With this research, I aim to point out a vital place whereby the identification of the Vietnamese nation occurs: the writings of the Vietnamese Communist Party and its sponsored state. This is where the national and socialist narratives are produced, where the national and socialist subjects marry. These writings are produced by and for the consumption of the state-makers of SRV. They are the world of subjectivities and currencies of thoughts embraced by the Vietnamese Communists. Through analysing these documents, my research aims to study processes of making meanings of nationalism and socialism among the Vietnamese Communists. Adopting the post-structuralist approach, this research refuses to adopt pre-

existing meanings of the nation and socialism. The nation, like socialism and any other political concepts, does not possess an inherent meaning but is an empty signifier the meanings of which depends on the system of relations and difference with other signs in a particular discourse. By analysing the language in its documents since the Party's first predecessor appeared in Vietnam in 1925, I examine the long process of national identification and imagination in the VCP's discourse. It is a historical analysis of the constitution of the nation and the socialist state in the communist discourse throughout the long history of the communism in Vietnam.

Some scholars have studied the official documents of the Vietnamese Communists. However, they either rested on a pre-existent national idea of the Vietnamese in order to measure the success of the constructed nationalist discourse of the Communists (Nguyen, 2002) or depicted the Vietnamese Communists as rational actors with full agency who are in control of meaning and ideology (Vu, 2009a, 2009b). These are also common features of the new scholarship in Vietnam studies. However, in the thoughts of post-structuralism, both agents and structures are socially constructed. '[A]gents and systems are social constructs that undergo constant historical and social changes as a result of political practices' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 6). This research will use post-structuralist ideas to refuse to see actors as rational and conscious agents with full agency. Vietnamese communists, like other actors, are not seen as rational actors who possess or control meaning but are themselves governed and controlled by the web of meanings in which they partly contribute to. They are the subjects of their own discourse, the Vietnamese communist discourse, the first and key victims of its productive power.

In addition, the bulk of the new scholarship was laid on the recent processes of writing history and forging a particular memory (interpretation) of the past which glory the national origins and the leadership of the Party in after-war Vietnam. '[T]he wartime period remained largely untouched' (Bradley and Young, 2008: 12). Although the name 'the Socialist Republic of Vietnam' did not appear until 1976, one year after the second Indochina war terminated, the construction of socialism began long before peace and the national construction of the Vietnamese communists was initiated much earlier in the anti-colonial struggle. A very limited number of works have explored the constructing process in pre-unification Vietnam. Kim (2002) analyses the making of cultural policies and Pelly (2002) studies the process of writing the country's history. This is to say that pre-unification Vietnam is under-explored in the new scholarship. This research aims to remedy this limitation in the existing literature on Vietnamese nationalism by exploring the process of national construction in the pre-unification

Vietnam. It studies how the revolution led by the communists in Vietnam is constructed in national terms throughout the lifespan of Vietnamese communism, covering the colonial and war-time Vietnams. In the next chapter, I introduce the theoretical framework and methodological strategies of this research.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Introduction

This thesis sets out to study how the revolution led by the communists in Vietnam is constructed in national terms. It examines the constitution of nationalism in the Vietnamese communist discourse by using the theory of a post-structuralist discourse analysis. In this chapter, I present the theoretical and methodological framework of my research. I first introduce the set of theories on which this research is premised. In the second section, I elaborate on the formulation of my research objects when applying the theoretical framework to the case of Vietnamese nationalism. Here I also state the time frame and the objectives of the research. In discourse analysis, theory does not only orient the formulation of objects for investigation but also informs the selection of research methods. Methods of collecting and analysing data are presented in the third section. In the final section, I self-reflect on my role as a researcher and on the truth value of the interpretation offered in this project.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

Amid the proliferation of ‘discourse about discourse’ in the social sciences (Howard, 2000: 2), there are several conceptualizations of discourse and various ways to do discourse analysis. ‘The meaning, scope and application of discourse is relative to the different theoretical systems in which it is embedded’ (Connolly, quoted in Howard, 2000: 3). My approach to discourse stands post-structuralist and is heavily drawn from the discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and the genealogical approach of Michel Foucault. While the former provides conceptual tools to theorize how discourse is constituted and operates in making a society, the latter equips me with a radical understanding of discourse in relation to power, knowledge and history. In what follows, I introduce the basic assumptions of post-structuralism and my understanding of discourse, before elaborating on Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory and Foucault’s genealogy.

Post-structuralism

Post-structuralism is a theory that is concerned with the process and practice of making and reproducing meanings. ‘Meanings control us, inculcate obedience to the discipline inscribed in them’ (Belsey, 2002: 4). Many other social theories including hermeneutics and

constructivism also have their focus on meanings. However, instead of reading meanings from observations, in the author's interpretations and in the actors' mind, post-structuralism locates meaning in 'what goes on language' (ibid: 70). This is because actors do not exist independently of systems of meaning but their identities are constituted as such within the web of meanings (Finlayson and Martin, 2006: 159). Language is no longer seen as detached transmitters of meanings, but 'the origin of ideas' (Belsey, 2002: 7). Therefore, language itself becomes a legitimate site to do social research. However, language, in post-structuralist sense, is to be 'understood in the broad sense of the term to include all signifying systems, including images and symbols' which give us access to information (Belsey, 2002: 3).

This focus on meaning is developed from structuralism, which argues for the relational and differential nature of meaning. The meaning of a sign does not reside in itself, but in the relation to and difference from other signs. The relationship between signifier and signified is not natural as 'the value of a word is not determined merely by the idea that it represents, but by the contrasts inherent in the system of elements that constitute language' (Howard, 2000: 21). This is the core argument of structuralism inaugurated by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1974: 68) and developed further by Claude Levi-Strauss (1968: 87), who argues for an analogy between language and society. Accordingly, the meaning of any social phenomena is decided by the relations with other social phenomenon in the social structure. Post-structuralism inherits this relational and differential theory of meaning, but criticizes the fixing of meaning and structure in structuralism. Although 'a sign gets its meanings from its relationships with other signs in a particular context, every sign can break with that context and function differently in new situations' (Howard, 2000: 39). To post-structuralism, the meaning of a sign is not permanently, but only temporarily, fixed in a context, but it can potentially acquire new meanings when positioned in different relations.

Discourse in the post-structuralist sense is the analytical concept to denote the system of relations and differences which produce meaning. This study embraces this post-structuralist understanding of discourse.

Discourse

In the absence of a centre or origin, everything becomes discourse (Derrida, 1978: 280).

At the less abstract level, the concept of discourse refers to ‘the systems of meaningful practices that form the identities of subjects and objects’ (Howard and Yannis, 2000: 3-4). At a higher level of abstraction, discourse is understood in this study to be ‘a particular way of talking about and understanding the world’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 1). In a bit more detail, it is ‘the means to organize a society into a structured totality, in order to give it stability and meaning’ (Sutherland, 2005: 191). The concept of discourse embraced in this study has five characteristics.

First, everything in this world, from physical objects to social identities, is constituted as objects of discourse because it all requires a discursive construction to render it meaningful. The meaning and identities of objects, actors, social phenomena and society are to be located a system of relations and difference found in discourse. Meaning and identities are discursive in the sense that their production are always within discourse. This understanding of discourse does not deny the physical existence of an object, but any extra-discursive meaning outside discourse. To make this point clear, it is worth quoting Laclau and Mouffe at length.

The fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with realism/idealism opposition. An earthquake or the falling of a brick is an event that certainly exists, in the sense that it occurs there and now, independently of my will. But whether their specificity as objects is constructed in terms of ‘natural phenomena’ or ‘expressions of the wrath of God’, depends upon the structuring of a discursive field. What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 108)

The concept of discourse in this study does not only recognizes the physical existence of objects or social phenomena but also affirms that this physical existence is part of the discourse itself. However, instead of viewing meaning of objects or social phenomena as causally governed by the material conditions as in realist accounts, the post-structuralist theory of discourse applied here proposes that the constraint the reality imposes on the construction of meaning is quite loose (Weldes, 1996: 286). The reality of objects and events might give rise to the construction of meaning, however, how the meaning is constructed is to be located in the systems of relations and differences in a particular discourse.

Second, this research embraces a broad concept of discourse which ‘includes all social institutions, customs, practices and language’ (Sutherland, 2005: 191). In other words,

discourse includes everything that signifies. Things which signify, in post-structuralism, are not only language, but also physical objects, social behaviors, practices, institutions and social events. This broad concept of discourse opens up various sites and places as legitimate sources of data for social research. Everything can be 'read' as 'texts' where meaning production takes place.

Third, a discourse is a temporary fixing of meaning in the undecidable discursive field. It is an attempt to construct a totality of an identity or a social formation, to construct a center, to create its limits. The totality of a society, for example, is produced primarily through the construction of an enemy or an Other who is threatening the existence and purity of the society being constituted. Finding that Western thinking is always based on binary distinctions, Derrida (1976: 313-16) argues that because the outside is required for the definition of the inside, it is constitutive of the inside rather than separately detached from the inside. Thus, any society and social identity constituted in a discourse involves the construction of a constitutive Other.

The notion of a constitutive Other lead us to the fourth characteristic of a discourse: it is contingent, temporary and precarious. A discourse is a temporary totality and, at the same time, 'a reduction of possibilities (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 27). The temporarily fixed meaning and identity established in a discourse is the result of the exclusion of all other possible meanings that signs could have had and the exclusion of all other possible identities that subjects could have had. The outside is both constitutive and potentially destructive of a discourse. The excluded possibilities constitute the limits of a discourse, or the boundaries of the frontiers of a social formation. It is this very existence of the frontiers, the others and the excluded possibilities that reveal the contingency, the precariousness, the non-necessary character of a discourse. However dominant a discourse appears to be, it is only a temporary closure that is subject to pulling and pushing forces in various directions. To say that a discourse is contingent does not mean that it is completely arbitrary or could be changed easily. Every articulation has a new element but also carries with it some traces of the existing structure. In those cases where a discourse has sedimented as naturalized knowledge and attained the status of common senses, it is by no means easy for a new articulation which establishes a new relationship between elements to be accepted.

Fifth, it is in discourse that the relationship between power and knowledge is imbedded. Discourse produces knowledge and subjects of its knowledge and in doing so it tacitly allows certain course of action and excludes others. Therefore it has real social effect in the sense that

it orients social actions and policies. Campbell (1998: 13) points out that the national commonsense in the international society, ‘the idea the national community requires the nexus of demarcated territory and fixed identity’, is complicit in enabling the conduct of the war and the horrendous violence involved in the Bosnian war.

These five characteristics are the underlying philosophical assumptions of discourse applied in this research. My understanding of how discourse is constituted and how it strives to construct a society in a structured totality is drawn from the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe.

Discourse Theory of Laclau and Mouffe

Laclau and Mouffe have constructed their theory by combining and modifying two major theoretical traditions: post-structuralist and post-Marxism. From post-structuralism, Laclau and Mouffe inherit the theorization of the contingency of meaning and the de-centredness of structure. These analytical tools, when utilized to supplement the theorization of the society, identification and subjectivization of post-Marxism, open the way for a radical discursive conceptualization of the society and politics. While developing their theory, Laclau and Mouffe manage to eliminate the last remnant of economic reductionism and determinism of post-Marxism, to go beyond Derrida's obsessive focus on linguistic texts and blur Foucault's distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices (Howard, 2000). The result is a full-blown discursive research program which theorizes the entire social world as engaged in a constant struggle to fix meaning and subject all social phenomena to the analysis of discourse.

Central to the constitution of discourse in Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory is the concepts of articulation and nodal points. ‘Articulation is every signifying practice that establishes a relation between elements such that an element can be identified’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 105). Elements are empty signs floating in the discursive field. An articulatory practice turns an element into a concrete moment in discourse by linking it with nodal points, which are ‘the privileged discursive points’ or points of crystallization around which signs are ordered (ibid:112). The function of nodal points is to arrest the meaning of a sign by stopping its sliding signification, or to turn elements into concrete moments of a particular discourse in articulations. A discourse is the structured totality resulting from articulatory practices. It is ‘an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to constitute a centre’ (ibid). In the Vietnamese communist discourse, one of the foundational nodal point is ‘revolution’. Within this discourse,

the struggle led by the Vietnamese communists against the colonial government became a revolution, not acts of rebellion. Farmers and workers became potential revolutionaries while the feudal court were anti-revolutionary.

In opposition to the positivist view that social actors have given interests and identities and society has a given structure, discourse theory insists that social actors are constituted as subjects and society is constituted as a total structure in discourse.

Political identities are not pre-given but constituted and reconstituted through debate in the public sphere. Politics doesn't consist in simply registering already existing interests, but plays a crucial role in shaping political subjects. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: xvii)

According to Laclau and Mouffe, human beings has no 'status of essence' and 'subjects cannot... be the origin of social relations... as all experience depends on the precise discursive condition of possibility' (ibid: 115-116). Discourse makes available subject positions by which individuals are produced as social actors (Howard, 2000: 108). Any individual can have multiple different subjection positions, for example, a man can be a father, a son, a husband, a worker and a member of a nation. How these subject positions are ordered, what subject position is to be embraced and act accordingly is a matter to be interpreted in a particular discourse.

The discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe conceives of society as 'a symbolic order' (Howard and Starvrakakis, 2000: 5) and discourse as 'the means to organize a society into a structured totality' (Sutherland, 2005: 191). However, they prefer to speak of 'social formation' as an empirical referent' to study society (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 143).

... (A) formation manages to *signify itself* (that is, to constitute itself as such) only be transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a chain of equivalence which construct what is beyond the limits as that which is *not*. (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 193-194) (italics in original)

A logic of equivalence is the condition of possibility for the existence of every social formation (ibid). Social actors are all particularities with multiple different identities and interests. When a set of particularities establish a relation of equivalence by creating purely oppressive forces to represent the totality of a chain, a social formation is being constituted. The logic of equivalence establishes a purely negative identity so that by negating the same

force, multiple subjects which are otherwise plural and different can take on the same identity. 'The different characters of social identities collapse as they become inscribed in chains of equivalence that construct them in terms of certain sameness' (Torfing, 1999: 125). If a, b, c are all – d, they are equal in relation to d. The negative force (-d) is the limit of that social formation, constituting its political frontiers. The logic of difference, in contrast, attempts to reduce negation and to expand the discursive order by breaking the existing chain of equivalence. While a popular project employs the logic of equivalence, seeking to divide the discursive space into two opposite, clear-cut camps, a democratic project employs a logic of difference weakening social antagonism, implying a plurality of political space (Torfing, 1999; Howard and Stavrakakis, 2000). The Vietnamese communist discourse in the 1920s and the 1930s shows a strong operation of the logic of equivalence, which attempted to split the Vietnamese population along the line separating between 'the oppressed' and 'the oppressors'. By investing on the construction of a common negative force, the communist discourse tried to weaken the internal differences of farmers and workers and organize them into a new social formation of 'the working people'.

A hegemonic formation is a social formation, the order and unity of which have been naturalized and taken for granted. The systems of meanings which enables the construction of a hegemonic formation has been stabilized as common senses. A hegemonic discourse is a discourse, in which the system of meanings it proposes has been widely received and relatively fixed. It has 'brought about and institutionalized a certain vision of the world, of social and political reality' (Norval, 1996:4).

The concept of hegemony in discourse theory is built upon and at the same time a break with the Marxist tradition. Classical Marxists defines hegemony as a temporary alliance of differences and social groups with pre-determined identities and interests. Post-Marxists, like Gramsci, use hegemony to refer to the process of production of a new collective identity (Torfing, 1999: 108), or the transformation of a particular interest and demand into those of a collective or a universal (Howard, 2000: 109). In Gramsci's theory, 'the hegemonic processes take place in the superstructure and are part of a political field' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 32). However, 'it is still the economic conditions which control the result of this hegemonic process in the last instance because it is the economy that determines people's true interests and the division of society into classes', which are 'objective groups to which people belong whether they know it or not' (ibid). To Laclau and Mouffe (1983: 139), 'hegemony is, quite

simply, a political *type of relation, a form*, if one so wishes, of politics' (italics in original). A hegemonic relation is a relation 'by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it' (ibid: xiii). In discourse theory, hegemony does not only denote leadership, authority and influence but also include a constructivist aspect. 'That is to say, the political as well as moral-intellectual leadership of a hegemonic force (state, class, movement, or other) hinges on the construction of discursive formation that provides a surface of inscription for a wider range of demands, views and attitudes' (Torfing, 1999: 101).

As with any discourse, a hegemonic project also requires the institution of nodal points 'that partially fix the meaning of the social in an organized system of differences' (Torfing, 1999: 109). For example, a nationalist discourse will certainly involve putting forward the concept of the nation as the nodal point to structure the symbolic order of a national formation.

The condition for the emergence of a hegemonic formation is structural dislocation. Dislocation involves 'the disruption of the structures by forces operating outside it' (Laclau, 1990: 17). They are 'events that cannot be symbolized by an existent discursive order' (Howard, 2000: 111). Dislocations reveal the contingency of the existing discourse, shatter existing interests and identities and induce a situation of crisis or identity crisis for subjects of the existing discursive structure. Social antagonism is a discursive response to the structural dislocation of the social order (Torfing, 1999: 131). The transformation from 'myth' to 'social imaginary' captures the formation process of a hegemonic discourse.

The construction of social antagonism is essentially the process 'detecting a cause of the dislocation that can serve as an enemy' (Torfing, 1999: 131). Social antagonism plays an important role in the construction of mythical spaces and social imaginaries, both of which aim to reconcile the society in the face of structural dislocations. 'Myth is a principle of reading of a given situation. The objective condition for the emergence of myth is structural dislocation. The work of myth is to suture that dislocated space through the constitution of a new space of representation' (Laclau, 1990: 61-64). Myth functions to offer solutions to the crisis by introducing a new symbolic order for people to identify with, a surface on which unsatisfied demands and aspirations are inscribed as satisfied. 'The concrete or literal content of myth might include some vision of a promised land or ideal society... myth is a metaphor for an absent fullness – that is, a fullness which cannot be realized at present (Torfing, 1999: 115).' If myth continues to dominate, the fullness it creates becomes the unlimited horizon of inscription of any social demand and any possible dislocation. That is when myth is

transformed into a social imaginary. ‘A social imaginary is a horizon in the sense that it is not one object among other objects, but rather the condition of possibility for the emergence of any object’ (Torfing, 1999: 115). A myth becomes a social imaginary when it successfully puts forward itself as a horizon of intelligibility ‘delineating what is possible, what can be said and done, what positions may legitimately be taken, what actions may be engaged in’ (Norval, 1996: 4). Laclau (1990: 64) names the Christian millennium, the Enlightenment and positivism’s conception of progress, the classless communist society as examples of social imaginaries. Not any discourse putting itself forward as the embodiment of fullness will be accepted. Its acceptance depends on its credibility and the compatibility between its proposals and the basic principles informing the organization of a group.

The Vietnamese communist discourse appeared in Vietnam in the 1920s when the country was in a structural dislocation after decades of French colonization. Anti-colonial discourses had introduced the national myth, which constructed French colonialists as the social antagonism, who were destroying and killing the Vietnamese people. The communist discourse inherited this myth and articulated a socialist myth to introduce another level of social antagonism, which was class exploitation. The story of how the Vietnamese communists rose to power is the story of how these two myths transformed into social imaginaries in Vietnam.

While discourse theory offers a detailed theorization of how discourse is constituted and constitutes a structured society, Foucault’s genealogical approach provides a critical view of power, knowledge and history in relation to discourse.

Foucault’s Genealogical Approach

Foucault’s genealogical approach is ‘a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects’ (Foucault, quoted in Howard, 2000: 72). It is the historical study that ‘examines the historical emergence of discursive formations with a view to exploring possibilities that are excluded by the exercise of power and systems of domination’ (Howard, 2000: 49). Foucault’s genealogy entails a radical view of power, knowledge and history.

Power in the Foucauldian sense is a productive force that produces and ‘provides the conditions of possibility for the social’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 13). Foucault’s productive power stands in contrast with the conventional concept of power as an oppressive force owned by a materialist force like the state, the army or the police. ‘What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it does not only weigh on us as a

force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produce discourse' (ibid). In *The History of Sexuality* (1990), he argues that the 'juridico-discursive' conception of power in Western societies fails to examine what he calls the 'normalizing functions' and 'disciplinary technologies' of power, which has prevailed from the 17th century onwards. As productive power is embedded in knowledge and discourse, the study of discourse or the knowledge constituted in discourse are also the study of the operation of this new form of power.

Foucault's genealogy holds a critical view of knowledge and truth. The knowledge and the regime of truth constituted in discourse are not neutral and apolitical. They govern what is normal and accepted, therefore limiting the possibilities of actions within the accepted regime of knowledge and truth. The constitution of knowledge and of truth is at the same time the constitution of relations of power embedded in discourse.

Power and knowledge directly imply one another... there is no power relations without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1990: 27).

In addition, Foucault's genealogy views history as 'effective' as opposed to the traditional concept of history as a linear and continuous development (Foucault, 1984b: 88). 'The development of humanity is a series of interpretations', composing of both continuities and discontinuities (ibid: 85). In the genealogical approach, Foucault sets out to study 'the history of the present', which is not a search for origins of the present-day phenomenon, but to reveal 'the power relations upon which it depends and the contingent processes that have brought it into being' (Garland, 2014: 372). It is because things and events 'have no essence and that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms' (Foucault, 1984b: 78) and 'nothing in man – not even his body – is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men (ibid: 87-88). Genealogy proposes to study the historical formations of discourse in order to account for the constitution of subjects, knowledge and power embedded in discourse.

One has to dispense with the constituent subject, to get rid of the subject itself, to arrive at an analysis which can account for the constitution of the subject within a historical framework. And this is what I would call genealogy, that is, a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make references to a subject which is either

transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history. (Foucault, 1984a: 59)

The theoretical insights of post-structuralism, in particular the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe and the genealogical approach of Foucault's genealogy, inform my understanding of discourse and how it operates. This theoretical framework, when applied to study the case of Vietnamese nationalism, orients the formulation of objects of investigation for this research.

3.2. The Case of Vietnamese Nationalism

Research Objects

[F]or discourse theorists..., objects of investigation are not given in experience, but constructed within particular theoretical frameworks. (Howard, 2000: 136)

Applying the theoretical framework of discourse discussed above to study how the communist-led revolution in Vietnam is constituted in national terms, this research approached the nation as 'an empty signifier' and nationalism as certain articulations of the empty signifier of the nation as Torfing (1999: 192) proposed. Conventional thinking tends to 'treat ethnic groups, nations and races as substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed', and take these bounded groups as 'the basic constituents of social life' and 'fundamental units of social analysis' (Brubaker, 2004: 8). On the contrary, my standpoint is that these groups are not given and that social life is not naturally organized into these seemingly discrete, bounded groups. Instead, people are made into these groups through a variety of discursive practices or articulations of nationalism that enable them to identify with these groups. This conceptualization of the nation as an empty signifier is not to dispute its reality or discount their significance but to construe their existence in a different way. Just as Brubaker (ibid) does with ethnic common sense, nationalist common sense in Vietnam is what I want to explain, not what I want to explain with. I want to investigate how that the communist-led revolution is a national cause has been taken for granted as common sense, as a historical natural fact in Vietnam.

As discursive practices, nationalism strives to provide the 'nation' with 'a particular, substantial embodiment' (Torfing, 1999: 193). 'Nationalism tends to construct the nation-as-this and the people-as-one' (Torfing, 1999: 193) in the form of predicative statements.

However, ‘in the final instance the homogenization and substantialization of the nation can only be obtained through the discursive construction of ‘enemies of the nation’, which are simultaneously outside and inside the nation’ (ibid, 193).

It is necessary to emphasize that, as with all nationalism, national identification with the nation is based on the fantasy of the enemy: an alien which has insinuated itself into our society and constantly threatens us with habits, rituals – indeed, discourses – that are not of our kind. (Laclau, 1994: 211)

As a sign and articulatory practice, nation and nationalism are to be located in a particular discourse. Nationalism tends to construct the nation as a symbolic order of a society or a social formation². It often begins a myth to introduce the nation as a new space of representation, a principle to read a particular situation. When a nationalist myth has become a social imaginary, the nation has become as a nodal point in that particular discourse. The social reality of the nation has been accepted as natural.

The study of the construction of the Vietnamese nation in this research is delineated in the communist discourse. Instead of seeing the growth of communism in Vietnam as inevitable in the emergence of the proletariat or as a political movement governed by rational actors, this research accesses Vietnamese communism as a discourse, which is the world of meanings and the sense of reality accompanying the appearance and expansion of communism in the country.

Appearing in Vietnam in the turbulent years of the 1920s, the communist discourse was one out of several attempts to restructure a society dislocated in the process of colonialization. As a discourse, the communist discourse attempted to confer certain subject positions to the Vietnamese in their identity crisis, to convey a certain sense of identities to the Vietnamese, a particular understanding of the world and of their place in this international system. Out of many signs which were given meaning in this discourse, the nation was the focus of this study.

² A social formation is understood in the way proposed by Laclau and Mouffe (1983: 193-194). ‘... (A) formation manages to *signify itself* (that is, to constitute itself as such) only be transforming the limits into frontiers, by constituting a chain of equivalence which construct what is beyond the limits as that which is *not*’ (italics in original).

It aims to find out how the nation is constructed as a social reality in the communist discourse and how the communist-led political project was constituted as a national revolution.

To sum up, applying the theoretical framework of discourse theory discussed above into the Vietnamese case, two objects of analysis are formulated for this research: the communist discourse and the Vietnamese nation. The study of the Vietnamese nation is delimited within an examination of the Vietnamese communist discourse. At the same time, the examination of the Vietnamese communist discourse is focused on those articulations which produce meaning and significance to the nation, which are approached as nationalism as explained above.

Temporal Dimension

In temporal terms, this study is a historical analysis of nationalist discursive practices in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Although the problem of the research (that the communist-led revolution in Vietnam is a national cause) is posed as a present one, it solves the problem not by examining the current manifestation of the communist-sponsored nationalism (several existing studies have done so), but by going into the historical context of the problem. Applying Foucault's genealogical approach, this research offers a 'history of the present', which is not a search for origins of the present-day phenomenon, but to reveal 'the power relations upon which it depends and the contingent processes that have brought it into being' (Garland, 2014: 372).

This study analyses the communist discourse in Vietnam since communism first appeared in Vietnam in the mid-1920s until the present. During this time frame, communism grew to be a leading force in the country, successfully driving out the French and the United States, maintain its monopolistic rule in independent Vietnam. This study also goes beyond the timeline of the history of communism in Vietnam, to look at nationalism in pre-communist colonial Vietnam³. The Vietnamese communist discourse is rooted itself not only in the international ideology of communism but also in the specific cultural and political context of colonial Vietnam. Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the Vietnamese identified themselves and the world in their encounter with the modern West under French colonialization

³ French colonisation began in Vietnam in 1858 and ended in 1954. Colonial Vietnam here refers to Vietnam during this time period.

before communism appeared in Vietnam in order to bring out such a context. This makes the time scale covered in this research is the entire recent history of Vietnam, which starts from the beginning of French colonialism in 1858 until the present time. The beginning of French colonialism is regarded here as the first encounter of Vietnam with the modern West⁴.

Within the limited scope of a PhD thesis, this study is able to cover such a long time scale because it is not a historical research to recover historical details, but a historical study of the present in the Foucault's genealogical sense. Under the genealogical approach, I aims to show those possibilities which were excluded in the communists' project of national construction, the continuities and discontinuities in this project, the power and the regime of knowledge embedded in it. In studying nationalism in colonial Vietnam before the appearance of communism, I will be able to reveal the numerous attempts of identification amid social dislocations occurring in the process of colonization, some of which survived a short life while others were carried on a bit longer or inherited by the communists. Within the communist discourse, I will pay attention to the redefinition of the national space and the displacements of the limits of social division. I will study the knowledge that made possible the construction of the nation in this communist discourse and its political implications. Moreover, because this is a historical study of the present, it is also vital to examine the discourse in its present tense to show how the discursive formations in the past are brought up in the current era and participate in the present power/knowledge nexus.

Research Objectives

As a study of nationalism in Vietnam since its encounter with the modern West, this research aims to expose the constructed nature of the modern Vietnamese nation and display the political characters of this national construction. In conceptualizing Vietnamese communism as a discourse and Vietnamese nation as an empty sign, this study accounts for the process whereby the meaning and significance of the nation come about and what role this nation imaginary plays in relation to the rise to power of the communists in Vietnam. It argues

⁴ Although Vietnam's contacts with European trade and missionaries dated much earlier, the violent enter of French colonists in 1858 marked the beginning of a serious and forceful encounter.

that that the communist-led revolution in Vietnam is a national cause is a constructed story, not an objective, historical fact as told in the country. It also argues that this national construction has contributed to making the hegemonic rule of the communists in Vietnam possible and durable.

In addition, it shows that at the core of the VCP's rule is the struggle to create meanings, to generate knowledge, to produce common senses and to make truths. These seemingly naturalized objectivities, once constituted, work to discipline individuals, to channel their thoughts and behaviors, to turn them into the kind of subjects required for the monopolist rule of the VCP. The communist discourse has acted as a structure that limits actions and imagination in Vietnam for decades.

This research is critical in revealing the contingent nature of the communist discourse and, therefore, the VCP's monopolist rule. Analyzing the construction of the Vietnamese nation is a strategy to reveal this contingency. By showing that the nation has no center, that it is made of something outside itself, that its boundaries can be and have been shifted, the view of an essential and inherent nation is deconstructed. As the core nodal point 'nation' of the communist discourse is attacked, its regime of truth is made manifest as a political project rather than an objective unchangeable fact.

As stated earlier, this study shares the Foucauldian genealogical view of history, which acknowledges that the present is the result of contingent political decisions and processes, not the inherent law of history or development. Taken into this case, the monopolistic rule of the VCP is not an inevitable certainty of history, but just a contingent phenomenon. Vietnamese politics could have been different and still can be different. However, it should be noted that this study stops at the recognition of the contingency of the VCP's hegemony and the existence of other possibilities for political organization and imagination. It does not provide comments on the quality of the current political organization, on whether the current state of affairs is bad, or not so good, or should be changed for the better. The formulation of a recipe or procedure for an alternative is not among the purposes of this research.

3.3. Methodology

Data and Data Collection

As this research studies nationalism in the Vietnamese communist discourse, the possible data sources are all those sites which make up and relate to the communist discourse. Data for this research are written documents and books, which are composed of three types. The main source is primary texts written by the Vietnamese Communists in the Vietnamese language. The secondary materials are the academic books in English language that contains translations of related writings or linguistic practices of the Vietnamese and Vietnamese communists. The last data source is general materials on Vietnam's politics and history, which provide knowledge about Vietnamese communism and nationalism and Vietnam's history and politics.

The main source for the primary data of the first type is the archive of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which is available online at <http://www.dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/van-kien-dang.html>, under the section entitled *The Party's documents* (Văn kiện Đảng) in the e-newspaper of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Báo điện tử Đảng Cộng Sản Việt nam). Within this section, the data is collected from three subsections: *The Complete Collection of the Party's Documents* (Văn kiện Đảng toàn tập), *The Documents of the Party's Congress* (Văn kiện Đại hội) and *The Resolutions of the Party's Central Committee's Plenums* (Nghị quyết Hội nghị Ban chấp hành trung ương). This archive is the collection of the written documents, speeches and letters of the VCP throughout its history since the Youth League in the later half of the 1920s. Documents of this type were first made public in the forms of printed volumes in 1995. Before 1995, many of these documents were classified as secret and access was limited to inside the circle of the Party's members (Vu, 2000). Until now, the whole collection of the VCP's documents is consisted of 59 printed volumes, all of which are available online under the sub-section entitled *The Complete Collection of the Party's Documents* in the link addressed above.

During the course of this research, there is a change in the way documents in *The complete Collection of the Party Documents* are presented in the Party's e-newspaper, making the access much more difficult than it used to be. When I collected the documents in 2013 and 2014, all the documents are available at a separate link and I could just copy and pasted the documents directly from the website. However, since 2015 the documents are no longer available on its own but are available only together with the whole volume it belongs to. All documents of one same volume were collapsed into one word file, which now has to be downloaded and technically dealt with before it becomes readable.

This archive is vast and it is impossible to read and analyze all documents in it within the framework of a PhD project. I therefore selected documents that are produced in the key meetings of the Vietnamese Communists, which are the National Congress and the Plenums, both of which are organized and run by the Party's Central Committee, the highest authority within the VCP. The National Congress is the most important meeting of the VCP, when a large number of high-ranking members meet to assess past events, make guidelines for the future and vote for a new Central Committee. Up to the present, the VCP has held 12 National Congresses, three in the war-time and the rest in the post-independence period. Plenums, or plenary meetings or plenary sessions, are held between National Congresses and involve fewer Party members. During the war time, when the VCP did not hold the National Congress regularly, plenums were when important decisions and policies were made. Therefore, for the post-independence period, I choose only documents of National Congresses because they are held regularly every five years. For the pre-1975 period, I choose documents from both the Party's Plenums and the National Congresses. However, Plenums were only held regularly since the late 1930s, so for the period before Plenums' documents were written I skimmed through the volumes of Party's documents and selected important documents based on my knowledge about the history of the VCP. These documents of the VCP in its online archive make up the main part of my data corpus. Besides the online archive in the VCP's e-newspaper, the corpus of primary data for this research also includes documents from some other websites of the Vietnamese government on law and history, which are also seen as part of the communist discourse. These primary documents are listed in the Appendix at the end of this thesis.

Written documents of the Vietnamese communists are the perfect data to study the communist discourse because they are 'the official internal voice' of the VCP (Holcombe, 2010). These writings are the first and key place where Vietnamese communists absorb and produce linguistic elements to conceptualize themselves, the nation and the outside world, where the communist subjectivities are produced and communist subjects are hailed. They are produced for the consumption of the Vietnamese Communists before reaching the Vietnamese mass. These writings are an important place where the Vietnamese communist discourse is constituted.

Although there is concern over the accuracy of these documents, they remain legitimate data for the purpose of this research. It has been pointed out that many of the published documents had been edited in different ways before being brought to public (Vu, 2000).

However, this study is not a historical analysis aiming to recover what ‘really’ happened in the past, but a genealogical study into the worldview, the pool of meanings circulating among the Vietnamese communists. Therefore, the VCP’s archive suits the purpose of this research.

Besides these primary data, this study also uses secondary data from the existing literature on Vietnam. Several works in English have studied Vietnam’s culture and worldview, and thus contain important writings and linguistic practices of the Vietnamese people and Vietnamese communists. These works form the secondary materials for this research. The data of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 in this thesis, which study the identity crisis and different identification projects in pre-communist Vietnam respectively, mainly comes from secondary materials of this type. They also use materials that are important historical writings of dominant figures in Vietnam in this period, which can be assessed online in various websites. They are Phan Boi Chau’s *History of the Loss of Vietnam* (Việt Nam Vọng Quốc Sử) (1905), Phan Chu Trinh’s speech *Morality and Ethics of East and West* (Đạo đức và Luân Lý Đông Tây) (1925) and Nguyen Ai Quoc’s *The Indictment of the French* (Bản án chế độ thực dân Pháp) (1925).

Good discourse analysis requires good knowledge of the case in research (Hansen, 2006). Discourse is not a stand-alone phenomenon but is rooted in the historical and social context where it arises. Moreover, the theory of discourse in this study assumes that physical objects and events are part of the discourse itself. Therefore, in order to be able to understand the historicity of discourse, it is essential to have a good grasp of the historical events and developments which had occurred. Given the strict control of the Vietnamese state on historiography, Vietnamese historical books only provide a partial knowledge and are treated here as part of the communist discourse itself. Therefore, throughout the time of this research, I tried to read standard works in the English language on Vietnam’s history and politics in order to equip myself with a more informed knowledge of the history of modern Vietnam.

Methods of Analysis

Out of the three types of data discussed above, the first type, the archive of the VCP is subject to the analysis. While the third type is read for a better grasp of historical events, the second type is to supplement the primary data in the archive.

When sorting out documents as described above, I at the same time ordered them in chronological order and put them into sets which correspond to different historical periods in Vietnam’s history. I then had five sets of documents in hand, which are documents from 1925

to 1945, 1945 to 1954, 1954 to 1975, 1975 to 1986 and from 1986 to present. In doing this, I understand that changes in discourse do not always correspond to key historical turning points and this is reflected in the findings of this research. However, grouping documents is inevitable in order to be able to handle and analyze such a vast corpus. In this case, I chose to put them in a temporal order as I only have one topic 'nationalism' to look for.

After having the documents in groups, I began the meticulous process of reading and analysis using the methods of predicate analysis, metaphorical analysis, deconstruction, juxtaposition and genealogy. Besides, Althusser's notion of interpellation (to be explained below) and those concepts of discourse theory discussed in the theoretical framework are also applied in analyzing and interpreting the data.

As discourse is '*a particular way of talking about and understanding the world*' (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 1) (italics in original), the first step to analyze a discourse is to find out what knowledge is constituted in it. This establishes the key subjects and objects in the discourse, how they are presented and what characteristics they are attributed to. Predicate analysis and metaphor analysis are applied to do this first step. 'Predicate analysis focuses on the language practices of predication – the verbs, adverbs and adjectives that attach to the nouns' (Milliken, 1999: 232). By analysing predicates, we come to know the attributes or qualities of subjects and objects. Metaphor analysis is to find out the list of those 'metaphors which are used regularly in the language practice of a group of society' (ibid). The assumption under this method is that metaphors are not adornments to a description, they are partly constitutive of the object itself. They construct the meaning of objects, elicit our feelings and, at the same time, order the trajectory of our action or behaviors towards these objects.

How people come to identify with the subject positions produced in discourse is the second issue of discourse analysis. The concepts of interpellation and hailing refer to this identification process. 'Interpellation refers to the dual process whereby identities or subject-positions are created and concrete individuals are 'hailed' into or interpellated by them' (Weldes, 1996: 287). For example, in the case of a national discourse, words such as the nation, the country, or the people should be looked at to draw out the 'nationalist assumptions within their own conventional usage' (Billig, 1995: 94) as they evoke the existence of the communities in the imagination of the audience and makes available the subject position as a member of that community. Word such as 'we', 'us' and 'our' evoke the sense of belonging to that community and silently insert the audience as a national subject.

Discourse is only a temporary fixing of meanings. The order and the structure of the seeming society that a discourse strives to constitute are contingent. Deconstruction,

juxtaposition and genealogy are the methods to reveal this contingency. Deconstruction is to undermine the philosophy the discourse assists and the hierarchical opposition on which it relies (Butler, 2002: 25). Juxtaposition method is to point out events and issues that the truth in discourse fails to address or to show accounts which do not share the same definition. Genealogical method is based on Foucault's genealogical approach, which involves historical study of discursive practices in order to show that things have had different meanings in different times. These approaches do not only show that the world could in principle be interpreted differently but also point out that the world has been and is being interpreted in different ways (Milliken, 1999).

In addition, Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory provides central tools to read and interpret data in this research. The theoretical concepts, which account for the process whereby a discourse strives to create a society in a structured totality, which are 'dislocation', 'hegemony', 'social antagonism', 'myth' and 'social imaginary', are of particular importance in this research. (Discourse theory and its theoretical concepts have been introduced in the section 'Theoretical Framework' in this chapter).

Translation

This research studies a discourse produced in the Vietnamese language and presents the analysis in the English language. Most of the data is in a language different from the language of research, so there is a lot of translation involved. As a study of discourse requires a careful handling of the meanings of words and their possible connotations, I did all the translation of the primary data involved myself. Although there are existing translations to many documents in the data set, I do not take them for granted or rely on them. While doing translation, I referred and cross-checked with existing translations, however, the final translations are mine. Translation is not an objective, value-free or clear-cut process. In many cases, there may be many equivalent terms in the target language to one term in the source language. In other cases, exactly equivalent words may not be available. Within my translations, I try the best to preserve the original meaning and connotation of the original word in the translated version.

Regarding secondary data, which I use as data mostly for chapters 4 and 5, I used a lot of existing translations. This is because either I did not have access to the original documents or the original documents are in Chinese characters or in French. In these cases, the available English translated documents became the data of the research. In all cases that I had access to the documents in the Vietnamese version, I did the translation myself.

3.4. Self-Reflection

As a reflexive researcher, I recognize that my background, personal interests and political preferences will inevitably leave their footprints in this project throughout different stages of the research. My background earns me some advantages in this project. With my general education in Vietnam and tertiary education specialized in Vietnamese politics, I am quite familiar with the language of the Vietnamese Communist Party and the official narrative of the country's history. I know in advance what kind of documents are crucial in the Party's archive and I am in control of the language of the data. However, this background is also a disadvantage because I am part of the culture where the communist discourse occurs. As I am very familiar with this discourse through my education, it is more difficult for me to take issue with the common sense and taken-for-granted knowledge to be investigated in discourse analysis. In order to solve this problem, I tried to read as much as possible about post-structuralism and discourse in order to be more theoretical in reading the data.

It is by seeing the world through a particular theory that we can distance ourselves from some of our taken-for-granted understandings and subject our material to other questions than we would be able to do from everyday perspective. (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 22-23)

I also tried to read international literature in the English language about Vietnam and its history to enhance my knowledge about various narratives, views and perspectives, which are different from the official narrative that I grew up with in Vietnam.

In addition, my philosophical and theoretical assumptions have let me to frame the research question and choose the methods in this particular way. As 'no social scientist can ever represent a political event or issue independently of the form chosen for the task' (Bleiker, 2001: 532), I acknowledge that my research is just one representation of Vietnamese politics deeply influenced by post-structuralist thought and my understanding of discourse. I do not claim to conduct a value-free or objective investigation. However, this study provides a novel interpretation of nationalism and communism in Vietnam through a vigorous application of a post-structuralist theory of discourse.

CHAPTER 4: FRENCH COLONISATION AND THE IDENTITY CRISIS IN VIETNAM

Introduction

French missionaries and trade appeared in Vietnam in the 17th century. By the time the Nguyen dynasty was founded in 1802, the French had become prominent in the country's politics. However, the colonisation did not begin until August 1858 when a Franco-Spanish squadron launched an attack in Da Nang, then a substantial commercial port in the centre of Vietnam. By 1884, Vietnam had fully become a colony of France under the Patenotre treaty. In this treaty, Vietnam officially recognised France as its protector, who would represent Vietnam in its relations with other countries and in dealing with the Vietnamese living overseas. This treaty divided the country into three regions: Cochinchina as France's colony in the South, Tonkin in the North and Annam in the Centre as France's protectorates. The French Indochinese Union, which included Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, was established in 1897 with Cochinchina as its capital. By the turn of the century the French colonial government considered the pacification of Indochina accomplished (Marr, 1971: 76). A colonial administration had been in place to prepare for programs of colonisation.

This chapter introduces Vietnam at the time of the arrival of the French and the identity crisis that French colonialism induced among the Vietnamese elite and intellectuals in order to, together with chapter 5, contextualize the background where the communist discourse arrived and thrived in the country. In contrast to the official historical narrative in Vietnam which tells a continuous and unified country disrupted by French colonisation, this chapter sets the scene of a multi-ethnic, fractious, disunited and young Vietnam or even of multiple Vietnams before and during the colonial period. By demonstrating the heterogeneity in the land presently called Vietnam, it shows that both the nation-making and the state-making were the projects of particular groups among the various people living in the country. After all, the making of a nation in Vietnam was dominated by the Kinh ethnic majority and this nation-making project may have less or no resonance with many ethnic minorities. However, as this research is about the process of nation and state making in the discourse of the Vietnamese communists, this chapter and the next one are dedicated to tell the discourse of the Kinh Vietnamese elite and intellectuals, through whom communism penetrated and nested in Vietnam. Therefore, although the terms 'the Vietnamese' or 'the Vietnamese identity' are used, they are used under the recognition they refer to only a part of the people living inside the

Vietnamese territory. In the recognition of the multiple ways of being Vietnamese and the multiple experiences that French colonisation might have generated on different segments or ethnic groups in Vietnam, this chapter capitalizes on the identity crisis among the ethnic Kinh majority or the elite within the Kinh majority to be more exact because their discourse enabled the later emergence of the communist discourse which is the focus of research in this study. According to discourse theory, the identity crisis, which in this case occurred among the elite Vietnamese Kinh, who were deeply governed by Confucianism, entails structural dislocations which reveal the contingency of the existing elite discourse and gives rise to new myths to re-structure the society in crisis.

This chapter consists of two main parts. The first one introduces the land which is presently called Vietnam and the heterogeneous people inhabiting that land around the time French colonisation began in order to contextualize the nation and state making in Vietnam as the projects of the elite and intellectuals of the Kinh ethnic major group. The next one introduces the identity crisis generated by French colonisation among the Kinh elite and intellectuals, who then initiated different ways to identify with a nation, which will be discussed in chapter five.

4.1. Vietnam at the Time of the French Arrival

The country called Vietnam ‘that appeared at the beginning of the 19th century stretching from the southern border of China to the eastern border of Cambodia had never existed before’ (Taylor, 2013: 398). When the French missionaries and tradesmen first came to Vietnam in the 17th century, they found not a unified, clearly-bounded country but a fractious and multi-ethnic land called Dai Viet with territories in making. Although the Le dynasty was in authority in title at the time, the real power was wrested between the northern Trinh lords and the southern Nguyen lords. The more than century-long division, during which the Nguyen marched further southward, annexing the Central Highlands and into the Mekong Delta, was temporarily ended with the establishment of the Tayson dynasty (1770 – 1802). With the French’s help, the remnants of the Nguyen Lords, led by Nguyen Anh (king Gia Long reigned 1804 – 1820), defeated the Tay Son and unified the country under the name Vietnam for the first time in 1802 and established his court at Hue where his ancestors had ruled in the 17th century.

Although Gia Long had unified the country under the reign of one ruler, it was until the reign of his son, Minh Mang (1820 - 1841), that attempts were made to centralize governance in Hue over the whole country. The viceroalties at both Hanoi and Saigon were abolished and the administration in provinces were reorganised to be more directly under the authority of the royal court. It was until the year 1832 that the last Cham tributary kingdom to the north of the Mekong river was officially dissolved, marking the total annexation of Champa⁵ into Vietnamese rule which began since the 15th century. The Vietnamese also only withdraw from Cambodia, terminating its conquest of the Khmer⁶ land at the Vinh Te Cannals, which is now the current border between Vietnam and Cambodia, in 1847 under the reign of Thieu Tri, Ming Mang's son and successor. During the 18th century, when the Mekong Delta came under Nguyen's control on paper, there were still at least four forces competing for dominance in the region (Tana, 2006: 151).

The new country of Vietnam not only had just appeared at the beginning of the 19th century during the rule of the Nguyen dynasty, its politics was also full of internal discord and greatly subject to foreign influence. After all, the French, especially the young missionary Pigneau de Behaine (1740 – 1799), played a key role in bringing about the consolidation of Nguyen Anh in the Nguyen's struggle against the Tay Son. Membership in the early court of Gia Long was reportedly not only multi-ethnic but also multi-national and full of factionalism (Wilcox, 2006). In Gia Long's court in his later reign of the whole Vietnam, there was ongoing tensions between the northern men with their classical educations and pragmatic southerners (Taylor, 2013: 402). However, Gia Long's talented manner in dealing with court politics was able to keep both sides at bay. By contrast, Minh Mang's centralisation policies and his more authoritarian manner provoked a serious of rebellions from various sections including northern ex-followers of the Le, Chinese merchants, Christians, ethnic minorities in the south and even ex-supporters of Gia Long's court. Since Minh Mang's reign, the Nguyen dynasty was wrecked with unrest and rebellions in many parts of the country. The court was also divided as different factions within the Nguyen family supported different claims to the throne. In the 1840s and

⁵ Champa refers to the once thrived kingdom made up of various independent principalities of Cham people in central and southern Vietnam from the 2nd century to the mid 15th century.

⁶ The Khmer Empire was a powerful Hindu-Buddhist empire in Southeast Asia from the 9th century to the 15th centry. Its greatest capital city, Angkor, is in present-day Cambodia.

1850s as European powers gained momentum, ‘Vietnam slipped into a ferment of insubordination without effective leadership’ (Taylor, 2013: 445).

This is to say that in contrast to the state-sponsored national narrative which viewed French colonisation as an interruption into an age-old unified Vietnam, Vietnam as it is today was recently established with the help of the French in 1802. While this narrative is premised on unity, disunity is a strong feature throughout the history of Vietnam. Before 1802 and even after that there are always more than one way of being Vietnamese and multiple claims exist to define themselves against other Vietnamese places (Li, 1998; Taylor, 1998 and 2013; Goscha, 2016). Contemporary Vietnam is the creature of Dai Viet conquest of Champa and Khmer land to the south, which was not finished until the 19th century. Not long after the establishment of the whole Vietnam under one rule, the country was soon divided by the French into three regions under different administrations in the Indochinese Union, which also covered Cambodia and Laos. This colonial geographical designation left a lasting effect on the national imagination of a number of Vietnamese anti-colonial activists. The communists had originally pursued an expansionist vision of an Indochinese Federation not a Vietnamese nation (Goscha, 1995). Not long after the Vietnamese communists declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Hanoi in 1946, the State of Vietnam headed by the former Emperor Bao Dai was created in Saigon in 1949 and was later renamed as the Republic of Vietnam in 1955.

Moreover, the land which covers the territory of Vietnam today has been inhabited by a wide variety of different ethnicities. Therefore, there were not only various competing claims to be Vietnamese within the Kinh ethnic majority, these national narratives may not resonate with Vietnam’s other ethnic minorities. An ethnic Vietnamese nation is not coterminous with state borders (Sutherland, 2014: 61). Vietnam is reported to be composed of 54 ethnic groups, out of which the Vietnamese or Kinh is composed of 86%. Other 53 ethnic groups do not become ethnic minorities until they are included into the nation state of Vietnam. In fact, well into the 20th century, the non-Viet people out-numbered the Kinh in the mountainous areas and highlands which accounts for over half of the country (Goscha, 2016: 4). These ethnic minorities’ experience of French colonisation might be very different from the experience of the Kinh. And indeed, as the next section will tell, the experiences of French colonisation were multiple among the Kinh Vietnamese themselves.

Heterogeneous and fractious as Vietnam might be at the time of the French arrival, colonisation induced an acute identity crisis among the Vietnamese elite, which includes

members of the royal court, Confucian scholars and local leaders. This identity crisis among the dominant Vietnamese Kinh might not occur among all the people living in the Vietnamese land at the time, an account of it is crucial for an insight into the anti-colonial milieu based on which the communist discourse and the embedded national narrative latter emerged and thrived. The next section introduces the beginning of French colonialism in Vietnam and the identity crisis it entailed. As mentioned in the introduction, despite the acknowledgement that this identity crisis occurred only among a particular group within the Vietnamese population, an account of this identity crisis is crucial as it was the condition of possibility for the arrival of communism into the country and its subjects started the discourse of anti-colonialism based on which Vietnamese communism was built up. Although it is acknowledged here that the various identities which might exist in Vietnam at the time, the identities in focus are those of the elite within the Kinh majority, who were dominant in the country politically and culturally when the French arrived.

4.2. The Identity Crisis of the Vietnamese Elite

Marr (1971, 1981) had given a brilliant account on the challenges that the Vietnamese identity came under in the colonisation process as opposed to the common causal interpretation which ‘emphasizes economic or material aspects’ (Marr, 1971: 4). Although this research conquers with Marr’s focus to talk about ‘man’s eternal need to formulate potent reasons for this existence’ (Marr, 1971: 3), the two diverge on the conceptualization of identity and how to account for identification. While Marr studied the identity on ‘spiritual and psychological grounds’ (1971:5) or ‘political and social consciousness’ (1981: 3) to be located in human minds, this research locates the constitution of identities in discourse. Economic and material events and processes of colonisation are part of discourse, in the sense that they gave rise to articulations of meaning. However, ‘[N]one of them were other than brute facts, awaiting interpretation (Norval,1996: 51). This section will analyse how the ‘brute facts’ of French colonization were articulated in the discursive space of Vietnam.

Upon the violent encounter with the French, the Vietnamese inevitably had to engage in a process of contemplation over the identity of the invaders in order to work out appropriate actions to deal with them. In defining the other, the Vietnamese were also pondering upon the definition of their own self. In the discursive space in Vietnam in this early colonial period, a sense of the Vietnamese identity was noticeable among the Kinh elite and intellectuals in the representation of the French as different and exclusive. However, the traditional elite discourse,

which was informed greatly by Confucianism, was still able to order the field of intelligibility in the country until the end of the 19th century. The Vietnamese, both those resisted against and collaborated with the French, were still guided by the Confucian concepts of Heaven and Righteousness. Collaborators justified their actions with Righteousness in avoiding the sufferings of the people ‘who were put under their care by Heaven’ and resistant leaders claimed be righteous in protecting the country ‘endowed by Heaven’. However, by the turn of the century, this collective identity was subject to self-appraisal. For the first time, the Confucian knowledge and education were articulated to be useless and the traditional way of living to be backward. The old Vietnamese identity or the traditional elite discourse were being dislocated. Colonisation and all the changes that came with it rendered the concept of Heaven and Righteousness obsolete. By the turn of the 20th century, the Confucian discourse was no longer able to structure the field of intelligibility in colonial Vietnam. While contributing to the dislocation of the Vietnamese elite discourse, the colonial discourse with the myth of ‘mission civilisatrice’ ‘failed to exercise a hegemonic grip over the minds of the Vietnamese’ (McHale, 2010: 63).

French Arrival and the Vietnamese Identity

The relationship with the other is the very site where its (the self’s) original identity takes shape (Epstein, 2010: 337).

The role of the self/other dichotomy in the production of social identities, especially collective identities, has been considerably established in the IR literature since Edward Said’s Orientalism (1978). The other has been asserted to have ‘the status of an ontological necessity’ (Baktin quoted in Neumann, 1999: 13) or a constitutive lack. In colonial Vietnam, the French colonists was found to play the role of the other against which the modern Vietnamese identity defined itself. Upon the violent appearance of the French, the Vietnamese were forced to contemplate the identity of the foreigners. As Marr (1971: 7) remarks ‘... groups seldom ponder their commonality actively until faced with internal cleavages or the menace... of outside intervention’. In the attempts to contemplate these strange people, the Vietnamese were at the same time pondering on their own identity.

Foreign intervention provoked diverse reactions among the Vietnamese (Truong, 1967: 2). There were numerous recorded resistance attempts, headed by either the court’s generals or partisans. The strongest resistance movement in this early colonial period was ‘Serve the King’ movement (Can Vuong). It was sparked by the Royal Edict on Resistance of the 12-year-old

king Ham Nghi (reigned 1884 – 1885) and his Regent Ton That Thuyet (1839 – 1913). After the death of Tu Duc (reigned 1847 – 1883), the internal division within the Vietnamese feudal court reached its peak. Ton That Thuyet struck the French troops in July 1883. The coup failed. He then fled with Ham Nghi and issued the Royal Edict on Resistance. The king was arrested in 1888 and Ton fled to China, but the movements still went on well into the next century. However, many members of the feudal court chose to actively cooperate or just go with the wind. It is not an exaggeration to state that without the cooperation of a significant segment within the Vietnamese population, the French would not possible to establish their colonialization.

There was a popular tendency in the existing literature to divide the Vietnamese population along two lines of collaboration and resistance in reaction to foreign intrusion (Truong, 1967). Nevertheless, there was no clear-cut line to separate between collaboration and resistance. Although one side might choose to cede to some French demands, while the other denied any compromise, they all went through a painful process of defining the invaders, reassessing the identity of their country and themselves in relation to this collective idea.

A sense of a Vietnamese identity was denotable in the Vietnamese writings in this first episode of the encounter. This identity was consolidated through the constitution of the French as difference and otherness. While defining the difference helps the identity to take shape, turning the difference into otherness, which poses the greatest threat to the integrity and certainty of that identity work to secure that identity (Connolly, 1991). In the Vietnamese discourse in this early colonial period, the French were represented as both different and with elements of otherness. The dominant representation of the French was to be racially and culturally different and militarily superior. Racially, the French had different appearance. Culturally they had a different way of living.

Your eyes are blue, marine blue. Your nose pointed up, up to the sky. Your buttocks were comfortably lodged against the ass's back. Your mouth whistled noisily to the dogs. Your house was full of bottles and bottle fragments. Your garden had nothing but grass (Nguyen Khuyen, 1874 in Truong, 1967:107).

What is the meaning of life when you live with heretics who throw away the incense pot and thrust off the altar? This thought enhanced the sadness.

What is the meaning of life when you live with the enemy militia, sharing favourless wine and nibbling bread? This sound worsens the shame.

You preferred to die fighting the enemy and return to our ancestor in glory rather than survive in submission to the Occidentals and live with barbarians in misery (Nguyen Dinh Chieu, 1861).

The first quotation is an excerpt from a mock oration at the funeral of the French general, Francis Garnier, who launched the first attack at Hanoi and was killed by Chinese and Vietnamese rebels in 1874. In this oration, Garnier was described to have different appearance and different lifestyle from the Vietnamese. The second quotation is taken from ‘the Elegy for Righteous Fighters in Can Giuoc’⁷, which was written to commemorate those who died fighting the colonizers in Can Giuoc, a rural district in South Vietnam, in 1861. In this verse, the French were pictured as a different type of humans, who ate bread and drank favourless wine, which were not the type of food and wine the Vietnamese had. What made the French even more different from the Vietnamese was the action of throwing away the incense pot and thrusting off the altar. Having an altar at the centre of the house, lighting incense and worshipping in front of the altar were then (and are still now) principal Vietnamese practices in the tradition of filial piety. Filial piety is one of the four core virtues of Confucianism, which had been the official ideology of feudal Vietnam for hundreds of years. The virtue of filial piety asks people to obey, to be grateful to and be responsible for their parents and ancestors. In this tradition, the altar and the incense signify the gratitude and the connection to the ancestors. Not lighting incense and not having altar at home was deemed unacceptable as it meant deviation from the tradition of filial piety. This explains why Christianity was seen then as threatening to Vietnam’s spiritual life and moral order and why the Vietnamese feudal court was hostile towards Western missionaries since the 16th century (Truong, 1967). In fact, the French defended their intervention in Vietnam with the rhetoric of stopping religious harassment and protecting Catholics (ibid). In the 19th century Vietnam’s discourse, the French were very often associated with Christian missionaries and, therefore, were likened to ‘heretics’ because of not practicing the worship of ancestors.

In this elegy, those Vietnamese people, who drank Western wine, ate bread and did not worship ancestors, was articulated as sad and ashamed. Sharing life with the Occidentals were associated with misery. What in these practices made life meaningless? There is nothing essentially bad in and of themselves. These practices only acquire the meaning of sadness and shame when positioned in the relation of difference to the way of life that Vietnamese people

⁷ This elegy is included as a representing literary piece of Vietnamese literature in this early period of colonisation in the grade-11 national textbook on literature.

had long embraced. There is no reason why people who drink ‘favourless wine’ and eat bread cannot be happy. Why is it not possible for people to respect their parents and ancestors without having an altar and lighting incense? What made the French unbearable to live with was the obsession or the will to preserve our way of life, rather than something intrinsic to the nature of the French.

Besides the discussion of their racial and cultural differences, the French were represented consistently with superior wealth and military power in the language of both collaborators and outright opponents. After his trip to France in 1863 to negotiate the return of the three southern provinces which were ceded to the French in 1862, the Grand Counsellor Phan Thanh Gian (1796–1867) reported to King Tu Duc that ‘their wealth and strength are beyond description’ (Tran My Van cited in Jamieson, 1995: 46). Upon his return from France he was assigned the post of governor-general of the remaining southern provinces. In 1867, when the French were enlarging their southern possession, Phan ordered his troops not to resist but to lay arms. This is part of what Phan wrote in his surrender letter before taking his own life:

The French have huge battleships, full of soldiers and armed with powerful cannons. Nobody can resist them. They go where they choose; the strongest fortifications collapse under their attack. (Phan Thanh Gian, 1867 in Truong, 1967: 88)

The relationship between Vietnam and the French was said to be between the fawn and the tiger in this letter. The analogy of France with fierce animals like tigers and dragons was very popularly used in the Vietnamese discourse in this period. Ton Tho Thuong (1822-1877), one of the first and highest Vietnamese participators in the French administration in Vietnam of his time, wrote:

It is indeed not easy to play with the mouth of the tiger or the jaws of the dragon. The dragonfly is not aware of the power of the spider’s web until it is caught in it. (Ton Tho Thuong, 1866 in Truong, 1967: 85)

Phan Thanh Gian and Ton Tho Thuong were well aware of the superiority of France over their country and perceived that there was no point in fighting against these foreigners. All they would get in return would be the unnecessary suffering of the people and their forces. In his surrender letter, Phan Thanh Gian (1867) pondered:

And I said to myself: I would be senseless for you to assail your enemy as for the fawn to attack the tiger. You would only draw suffering upon the people whom Heaven has entrusted to your care.

Not only those who approved collaboration perceived the French as materially superior, proponents of the resistant side also did. Nguyen Dinh Chieu (1861), besides calling the foreigners Occidentals, barbarians and heretics, made the same analogy of the French to tigers and big sea fish. Hoang Dieu (1882 in Truong, 1967: 111), the viceroy of northern Vietnam and commander of Hanoi citadel when the French launched their second incursion into North Vietnam in 1882, said before he died:

The enemy troops surrounded us, numerous as ants. The Western cannon exploded, deafening as thunder... We were weak while they were strong.

The analogy between the colonisers and predators turned the French's difference from the Vietnamese into the relation of exclusion. The French were turned from a difference to an otherness. The French emerged as a totally different race but higher in the food chain, who was capable of swallowing up the Vietnamese. The existence of these foreigners was presented as threatening the very existence of the Vietnamese.

In this first episode of Vietnam's encounter with the French, the colonisers were represented with elements of both difference and otherness. They not only looked and lived differently. What was particularly worrying is that their existence was threatening the very existence of the Vietnamese. Metaphors such as 'Occidentals', 'barbarians' and 'heretics' were in place to describe the French. The relationship between the Vietnamese and the colonizers was juxtaposed with that between the fawn and the tiger, or between the dragonfly and the spiders' web. In this very attempt to contemplate these Westerners that they were encountering, the Vietnamese were, at the same time, contemplating their own identity. The unfolding of a different way of existence in front of their eyes functioned as a reflection for the Vietnamese to read and/or reassert their identity into being.

However, recognising the role of the French in enabling the sense of a Vietnamese identity take shape still owns the answer to a question. What that constituted the French as Occidentals, heretics, barbarians and miserable to live with? Was it the skin and eye colour, or the modern weapons of the French? An answer from the theoretical framework of the post-structuralist discourse analysis would require more than the description of the physical and material conditions into the realm of meaning of the Vietnamese people before and at the time

the French came. It is to the traditional Vietnamese discourse, the one that functioned as the organising ideational structure governing the discursive field in Vietnam at the time of the French's arrival, that I will now turn to. This pre-colonial discourse will also help to settle a relating puzzle as to understand how some Vietnamese still fought the Westerners despite of the knowledge about the enemy's thunder-like might and a guaranteed death.

Confucianism as the Traditional Vietnamese Elite Discourse

Vietnam has always been a country of multi religions and various indigenous beliefs besides of being multi-ethnic. At present, there are six popular religions, three of which, Cao Dai and Hoa Hoa and Protestantism, were founded recently early in the 20th century when French colonisation was on. Other three, Buddhism, Christianity and Muslim exerted their influence in the country much earlier. Other religions exist here as well. In addition, each in the 54 ethnic groups has their own indigenous beliefs and traditional customs. Around the time the French arrived in Vietnamese politics in the 18th century, as noted before, there existed different ways to be Vietnamese and many regional differences. Even during the period when Vietnam was unified by king Gia Long after 1802, pluralism was a strong feature of the country (Wilcox, 2006). 'The search for the 'real' Vietnam or for the 'cultural core' of being Vietnamese is bound to fail' (Taylor, 2013: 625). This is in tune with the comment of Tagliacozzo, Siu and Perdue (2015: 2) that none of the regions or nation-states within Asia 'is homogeneous by any criterion, whether linguistic, cultural, religious, economic or historical'. Therefore, it is not possible to account for a traditional Vietnamese culture which can resonate with all the people living inside the state border of Vietnam at any time. However, it is possible, and this case necessary, to talk about a dominant feature of the high culture within the elite Vietnamese Kinh or at least a group within the Kinh elite around the start of French colonisation in the country. This section gives an account of this elite Vietnamese discourse, Confucianism, which governed the subjectivities and worldviews of the Kinh elite during their first encounter with the modern West.

While Buddhism was more popular in the Vietnamese royal court during dynasty of Ly (1009-1225) and Tran (1225-1400), Confucianism exerted an increasing influence since the late 15th century and became dominating since 1802 when the Nguyen dynasty acquired power. Perceiving recent Vietnamese history as decadent and disorganized, Nguyen rulers 'sought to make Neo-Confucianism the foundation of the national culture' (Jamieson, 1995: 11). Confucianism, with its hierarchical system of values and education, was the most popular

organising philosophy of the Vietnamese royal court during the Le dynasty (1428 – 1788) and the later Nguyen dynasty. Examinations in Confucian classics were used to fill bureaucratic positions at all levels of the administration. Chinese characters were the administrative and literary written language of the elite. ‘Confucianism was the ideology of the rulers’ (Taylor, 2013: 9) However, the assimilation of this Chinese cultural import remained the asset of the Vietnamese elite ‘because only the elite could afford the luxury of a long-term education in the Confucian classics, the bulk of the people remained outside the pale of sinicization’ (SarDesai, 2008: 17). ‘The mass retained the Vietnamese language, customs and religious beliefs rooted in animism and ancestor worship’ (ibid). This is to say Confucianism functioned as a popular elite discourse at the time the French arrived.

However, the influence of Confucianism indeed varied across regions in Vietnam and among regional members of the Nguyen court. While the north was the cradle of Confucianism, its popularity decreased towards the far south. During the reign of the Nguyen dynasty, the bulk of Confucianists in the country came from the North. Graduates from the central provinces adjacent to Hue started to appear in the 1830s, but ‘graduates from further south were extremely rare’ (ibid: 417). In Gia Long’s court, the first court of a Vietnam which possessed the territory pretty much like present Vietnam, there were tension between Confucian northerners and pragmatist southerners who bore different perspectives on education (ibid: 398-403). During Tu Duc’s reign (1847 – 1883) when French colonisation officially started, Confucian men, especially from Nghe An and Ha Tinh, were more prominent (ibid: 438). Even though Tu Duc was himself a devoted Confucianist and Confucianism was more popular in north Vietnam, unrest and rebellion were more endemic in the north than other parts of the country. It is because, as mentioned above, Confucianism had always remained the ideology of the rulers. It did not help the elite to develop a common touch but, on the contrary, enabled the elite to remain isolated from the mass.

Although recognizing the diversity of cultural streams and the varying influence of different religions or ideologies over different regions and among different factions in the royal court in pre-colonial Vietnam, in this research I laid the focus on Confucianism and viewed it as the traditional Vietnamese elite discourse because of its domination and popularity in the ruling court at the time of the French arrival.

Originated in China before Christ, Confucianism is one of the central ideologies to conceptualize, to organise and to govern society in many Asian countries including China,

Japan, South Korea and Vietnam. Confucianism revolves around an orderly and unified structure of society and the unity of the self. This structured society is centred upon the concept of Heaven (Tian) and is composed of five sets of patterned relationships: king – subject, father – child, wife – husband, brothers, friends. Heaven refers to the transcendental divine force, which creates, watches and judges society and its populace. In order for a society and for each individual to thrive, human beings have to behave in line with the moral standards according to the wish of Heaven. Human beings are rational actors, who are able to and have to perfect their morality in line with each set of social relationships. Five moral constants of a proper person (người quân tử) are Humanness, Righteousness, Proper Rite, Knowledge and Integrity (Nhân, Nghĩa, Lễ, Trí, Tín). Confucianism proposes to govern society with morality and the perfection of morality of human beings is the way to build an ideal society. Family is the nuclear of this society, the key place to nurture the morality of individuals.

Confucian concepts of Heaven and Righteous had long acted the role of nodal points in the elite discourse in Vietnam. In the past, the existence of Vietnam was justified by referring to these truisms (Vuving, 2001: 63).

In the mountains and rivers of the southern empire, the Southern Emperor dwells.

Its sovereignty is of nature's will and is allotted in the Book of Heaven.
What gives the invaders the right to trespass?
They shall, in doing that, see themselves in total failure!

(Ly Thuong Kiet, 1077)

Under the mandate of heaven, the emperor state,

...Righteousness brings in peace

The army's task is to fight cruelty

Our ancient Dai Viet

Has long had a civilisation

Territories with rivers and mountains has been demarcated

The North's traditions are different from the South's

Since the dynasties of Trieu, Dinh, Ly, Tran established an independence

Together with the Han, the T'ang, the Sung and Yuan, each side reigns a domain

Strong and weak it may vary

Heroes always exist.

(Nguyen Trai, 1428)

The first poem is recorded in the Vietnamese history as written by Ly Thuong Kiet (1019 – 1105), the general and admiral of the Ly Dynasty, in 1077 in order to boost his soldiers'

morale in the fight against the Song invaders. The second one is written by Nguyen Trai (1380-1442), the chief minister of King Le Loi (ruled 1428 – 1433), to proclaim the pacification after the withdrawal of the Chinese Ming. These pieces are now considered as the two early declarations of independence of Vietnam in its official historiography and made compulsory literary pieces in high school. In both of these verses, a sense of sovereignty was detected that a southern emperor and a southern civilisation reigned the southern territory. The right to sovereignty and existence of the southern empire is taken as a matter of course or a matter of nature. These matters of course are justified in relation to transcendental concepts or truism. In the first poem, the truism, ‘the supreme source of authority’ (Vuving, 2001: 65), is Heaven. In Nguyen Trai’s verse, the source of strength is not only the cosmological force of Heaven, but also the essence of an ancient civilisation which crystalizes in the moral constant of Righteousness.

These two concepts of Heaven and Righteousness were found to be in their usual operation as the discursive centres of the Vietnamese in their early encounter with the French. Faced with the coming threats from the French, these two concepts were articulated to be not only the ultimate centre to justify the existence of the Vietnamese but also the ultimate protector of its destiny.

As for us, we are loyal and grateful subjects of Vietnam. We are intimately bound to the customs and habits of our country, and we are determined not to give up these customs and habits though we encounter death. We trust fully in Heaven, Earth, and the Spirits of our country, who well understand our destiny in this world and who will grant us their protection. (Hoang Hoa Tham, 1890 in Truong, 1967:138)

...China... is a thousand times more powerful than Vietnam, could not rely upon her strength to swallow us, it was surely because of the destiny of our country had been willed by Heaven...’ (Phan Dinh Phung, 1886 in Truong, 1967: 125)

The authors of these lines were popular resistance leaders in the Can Vuong movement. Both these resistance fighters conceptualized the political entity where they belonged to as Vietnam⁸. In the tradition of Ly Thuong Kiet and Nguyen Trai, they referred to Heaven as the guardian of their country. The French were juxtaposed with China and its future was linked

⁸ Although the quotations contain the concept of the country, it is a translated word, not an original usage. Given that I don’t have the original versions of the documents and don’t have knowledge of the original language, the country here should be understood as a general political entity, not as a country per se.

with failure as Heaven was in Vietnam's side. Even if the resistance fighters died, they would 'become powerful spirits who have fought the enemy' and they would not be 'at fault with a thousand generations to come' (Nguyen Quang Bich, 1888 in Truong, 1967: 129-130) because their action was deemed in line with the Confucian moral constant of Righteousness.

Righteousness denotes that in all circumstances a person should act properly in the interest of the people and the country. In the Royal Edict on Resistance (Chiêu Cần Vương), King Ham Nghi reminded his mandarins and the Vietnamese people of the moral obligations to their king.

The officials of the court should abide only by righteousness. Knowing righteousness, they should live and die by it (King Ham Nghi, 1885 in Truong, 1967: 116 – 120).

In response to his edict, Can Vuong movement was organized throughout the country and lasted for a few decades. Participants of this movements were not blind to the power and strength of the French troops. On the contrary, they were well aware of the discrepancies between their force and the enemies'. Nguyen Quang Bich, in his 1888 'Reply to a French Summon to Surrender', commented that 'our effort to oppose your country with a resistant movement was composed of a few partisans and a thousand or so exhausted troops' (in Truong, 1967: 129-130). Phan Dinh Phung (1886 in Truong, 1967: 125) frankly assessed his situation to be worse than the situation described in an old Vietnamese saying 'take the arm of the locust to halt the carriage'.

However, the material characters of the French weapons did not constraint the actions of resistant fighters, but the Confucian concepts of Heaven and Righteousness did. Despite being aware of the power imbalance between the French and themselves, the resistant fighters still fought against these militarily superior invaders because this course of action was deemed morally accepted or righteous in the Confucian discourse. The idea of constructivism rings its bell in this point. People act towards objects on the basis of the meanings that objects have for them, rather than being governed directly by them (Fay quoted in Weldes, 1996: 279 – 281).

The language of Righteousness and Heaven were also spoken by people who supported peaceful compromise with the French. After spending several years in France and Europe, Nguyen Truong To (1827-1871) advised the king to compromise to the French and presented his plans for reforms. While advocating changes and adaptation to the French's influence, he noted:

Our country has the protection of Heaven above it, the support of the Earth under it. These are astronomical and geographical foundations. In this world our country is, after all, an independent country. (Nguyen Truong To, 1866 -1868 in Truong, 1967: 93)

Nguyen Truong To supported reforms and temporal accession to French demands with the aim to ‘accumulate our strength, waiting for the day when we shall go into action... Nothing is too late...’ (ibid: 91).

Perceiving the French’s power as tiger-like, Phan Thanh Gian miserably surrendered and self-declared to be a traitor to his king. He then chose to take his own life as the French flag ‘should not fly over a fortress when Phan Thanh Gian still lives’. His reason to surrender was that if not ‘you would only draw suffering upon the people whom Heaven has entrusted you to your care’ (in Truong Buu Lam, 1967: 73-74). So not fighting the French was articulated to be in line with the relationship of a subject to Heaven, who ordered the care of the people. Twenty years after the death of Phan Thanh Gian, Hoang Cao Khai also spoke the language of Heaven and Righteousness in advising Phan Dinh Phung to stop fighting against the colonial government. In the letter to request Phan Dinh Phung to surrender, he spoke highly of Phan’s loyalty to the Kinh and blamed Phan for the hardship of hundreds of families in their province. Hoang (1886 in Truong, 1967: 121-127) predicted that if Phan pursued the struggle, ‘not only will the population of our village be destroyed but our entire country will be transformed into a sea of blood and a mountain of bones’. So not resisting the French was associated here with the survival of the people and the country, which was in line with the virtue of righteousness. In this letter, the current status of Vietnam as the colony and protectorate of France was also associated with the will of Heaven.

Concepts of Heaven and Righteousness were the discursive nodal points that governed the Vietnamese in their first period of encounter with the French. The Confucian discourse still managed to structure the society and govern its subjectivities in Vietnam in the early period of colonialization. However, it is in this very moment of dominance of the Confucian discourse, its contingency and its lack of a centre are already revealed. The fact that two opposite courses of action (resistance and collaboration) were referred to the same Confucian concepts showed that these Confucian concepts do not have an inherent fixed meaning, but its meanings are constructed in the relation with other elements and are open for interpretations. When ‘Righteousness’ and Heaven’ are juxtaposed with the king and the country, resisting the French

becomes a desirable course of action. When these words are put alongside the people, collaborating with the French to avoid the people's suffering becomes a legitimate choice.

Three decades after the French's arrival, the Confucian discourse was still in business in the Vietnam's discursive space. Nodal points 'Heaven' and 'Righteousness' were still able to play their roles in structuring the societal order. Anti-French Vietnamese converged on the preservation of the Vietnamese way of life. Phan Dinh Phung and other patriots of this generation 'sought only to restore the old order by clinging to traditional values' (Ho, 1992: 20). 'The partisans fought to recover the independence of their country, to avenge their king and to safeguard their traditional pattern of life' (Truong, 1967: 29). Even collaborators with the colonizers were not questioning the value of the country's Confucian identity. However, 'by the turn of the century, the authority of Confucian ideology and social institutions and of the scholar-gentry class... was beginning to erode' (Duiker, 1981: 8).

Dislocations of the Confucian Discourse

... Our rivers and mountains have died, living only increases the humiliation, Confucian guardians have disappeared, learning is a waste! ... (Phan Boi Chau, 1905)

As the 19th century drew to a close, the Confucian discourse was disintegrating as the colonisation process got underway. France's military power and its numerous social and economic changes worked to dislocate the Confucian order, shattering the Vietnamese existing identity as subjects of Heaven's protection and governed by Righteousness. The two concepts were no longer served as the points of identification that had held the Vietnamese together for hundreds of years. By the first decade of the new century, 'the traditional Vietnamese scholars realized full well that their accustomed world was gone forever' (Jameison, 1995: 52). A sense of losing the country, losing the soul and identity was pervasive among the new generation of scholar-gentry after the turn of the century (Marr, 1971: 96). Different from the previous scholars like Nguyen Dinh Chieu and Phan Dinh Phung, who aimed to preserve the traditional Vietnamese way, the new generation admitted the loss and articulated the need for reforms, for changes to the Vietnamese traditional way of living. Many social movements were launched to campaign the Vietnamese about the backwardness of old customs and the redundancy of old knowledge, which used to be regarded as elements of a proud civilisation in Vietnam's second declaration of independence written by Nguyen Trai in 1428. People were now asked to self-renovate and study modern subjects.

The nodal points of the traditional elite discourse, Heaven and Righteousness, the supreme source of authority or the ultimate guarantee of Vietnam's strength, collapsed in Vietnam's encounter with French military power. 'Both armed resistance and righteous abstention had become meaningless' (Jamieson, 1995: 55). The loss of Can Vuong movement put a stop to the outright resistance against the colonizers led by 'soldiers of Righteousness'. Those who wanted to live with the old ways had no choice but seek refuge in the countryside and found themselves increasingly lonely. A popular mandarin of his time, Nguyen Khuyen (1835-1909), tried to forget the country's matter by immersing himself in the beauty of nature and the simplicity of village life. Those mandarins like Nguyen had come to recognise their inability toward the loss of their country into the hand of the French. Working for the French was considered outrageous, fighting certainly led to death, the only acceptable behaviour was what they had done. Together with the feeling of losing the country, they felt that the righteous mandarins of their generation were outgoing. In his poem, Nguyen Khuyen (1902) complained about the lack of friends to drink with: 'I have nice wine, but no good friends'. In the same poem, he moaned: 'You are old, I have turned old too'. Vietnamese Confucian-trained scholars in the first decade of the 20th century were like 'ducks out of water', who were pushed out of their usual habitat. Nguyen Khuyen's cry for his friends was the cry for his generations and the age-old ideology of Confucianism. Traditionally, the Vietnamese highly appreciated Confucian scholars. Mastering Confucianism was the only way to earn respect and employment in the administration of the feudal court. The colonial rule rendered the old education and these Confucian learners less desirable and even redundant. It was no longer regarded as an adequate means of living, neither the means of social upgrading. Western education and the ability to speak French was getting more valuable.

What good are these Chinese characters?

All those Ph.D.'s are out of work.

Much better to be a clerk for the French:

You get milk in the morning and champagne at night.

(Tran Te Xuong quoted in Jamieson, 1995: 55)

Besides eroding the old Confucian learnings, grand constructions of modern infrastructures under French colonisation also symbolically dislocated the traditional Vietnamese discourse. Under the frenzied program of building a modern transport system during the reign of the infamous governor Paul Doumer (governed 1897 – 1902), the first iron bridge was built over the Red river, where in legend resided a dragon symbolizing one of the

guardians of Vietnam. This French bridge plunged into the very heart of the symbolic dragon (Jameison, 1995: 56) as if the age-old identity of the Vietnamese were dislocated at its very centre.

By the first decade of the 20th century, movements for modernisation were gaining momentum in Vietnam. For the first time, the old way of life was condemned publicly and bluntly by Confucian scholars. The call for renovation by respected paragons of Neo-Confucian virtues must have struck more Vietnamese people than by French collaborators. The most prominent voices were Phan Boi Chau (1867-1940) and Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926). Phan Boi Chau founded an Association for the Modernisation of Vietnam (Duy Tan Hoi) in 1904 and launched the Eastern Travel Movement (Dong Du) a year later. His aim was to encourage young Vietnamese to study modern ideas instead of the Confucian classics in order to liberate Vietnam from the French colonial rule. The Dong Du movement had enabled thousands of young Vietnamese to Japan to observe and learn from ‘the miracle of the rising sun’. As a Confucian scholar, Phan Boi Chau looked to establish an independent monarchy with a monarch that he already had in mind, Prince Cuong De (1882-1951), a direct descendant of the maker of the Nguyen dynasty – King Gia Long (ruled 1904 – 1820). Besides urging Vietnamese people to acquire greater knowledge, Chau insisted on throwing out the French rule by the means of armed rebellion. His inclination to violence separated him from his close friend Phan Chu Trinh.

Phan Chu Trinh held a peaceful approach, which emphasized self-renovation instead of direct armed struggle. He launched a campaign for modernisation by setting up schools teaching modern subjects such as Maths, Science, Geo-History, Business and Physical Exercise in central provinces. Trinh wrote boldly ‘... not omitting Chinese character, it is impossible to rescue the country’ (quoted in Dinh Xuan Lam et al, 2014: 162-164). The degree of the old examination was also said to be valued at one cent (ibid). Traditional customs like drinking rice wine and superstition were heavily criticized.

While three decades earlier Nguyen Dinh Chieu resolutely refused to cut his hair, this neo-Confucian figure eagerly urged people to ‘go out and cut your hair’ (quoted in Jamieson, 1995: 60).

We have awakened, and the entire country is modernizing. So go out and cut your hair! Don’t leave and more land for that stupid gang of parasites to colonize on top of your heads, from which they can suck your blood! Wouldn’t it feel wonderful to be rid of them? (ibid).

Hair is traditionally regarded as a gift from the parents and ancestors and leaving hair grow long is to show the moral debt and filial piety to them. Against this background, the haircut movement became a potent symbol of the renovation movements.

The misery and hardship which Vietnamese people were enduring were attributed to the illiteracy of the people, not to the exploitative policies of the colonial government. Although Trinh sometimes called the Westerners ‘licensed robbers’, he appeared to be optimistic about the humanity of the French. He once said Vietnam would be France’s friend and ally if the latter helped his people with literacy, freedom and sovereignty and protected his people’s right (Dinh Xuan Lam et al, 2014: 162-164).

Under the influence of the renovation trend, a movement for mass education, called Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc in Vietnamese, was set up by a group of neo-Confucian scholars led by Luong Van Can (1854-1927) in Hanoi in 1907. Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc started as a private school which offered free education to all students, male or female, rich or poor, in a variety of subjects from Confucianism to modern subjects like History and Law. Diverse scholars from different background and viewpoints, including Nguyen Van Vinh (1882-1936) and Phan Chu Trinh, were invited to give public speeches and numerous publications were produced and circulated. It soon developed beyond the frame of a private school to the scale of a national movement for mass education. Classes were delivered in several provinces in the North and in the Centre of the country.

However, these self-renovation movements did not last long before the French carried out brutal suppression actions. In face with peasant uprisings against heavy tax and forced labour in the central region and attempted poisoning of French soldiers in Hanoi in 1908, the colonial government closed all classes, forbade publications and violently retaliated alleged agitators and modernisers. Phan Boi Chau was sentenced to death in absentia while he was in Japan. Under French pressure, the Vietnamese were deported from Japan, ending the Travel East movement. Phan Chu Trinh and leaders of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc were arrested. In September 1907, Kinh Thanh Thai (reigned 1898 – 1907), the first monarch to cut his hair in the French style and to learn to drive a car, was declared insane and later exiled to Reunion Island in 1916. These brutal crackdowns ended the Vietnamese intellectuals’ naïve hope to self-renovate under the French rule. French repression played a part in the failure of the colonial discourse and the failure of its ‘mission civilisatrice’.

France’s ‘Mission Civilisatrice’ and Its Failure

One of the bywords of the French colonial discourse in late 19th century and early 20th century was ‘mission civilisatrice’. Similar to the U.S. phrase ‘the white man’s burden’, the French term ‘mission civilisatrice’ justified colonisation as a mission to civilize the native in the colonies. With this principle, colonisation did not just mean a mere governing of colonial people, but as the completion of a humanistic duty to bring Western civilisation to those who were perceived as backward and inferior natives. In Vietnam, by the last decade of the 19th century, the French had established a complete direct colonial administration to begin its mythological civilising mission. They made profound changes in Vietnam in all aspects. The Confucian exam systems was replaced with a Western education teaching French and romanized script (chu quoc ngu) and populating Western culture. Modern transport systems of road and railways were built connecting provinces throughout the country. Electricity was brought in. Cities were re-designed with parks, boulevards, hotels and grand buildings.

Toward the end of the 20th century, the French rhetoric of ‘mission civilisatrice’ was taken by a number of the Vietnamese population. Imitating the French was perceived as a way forward to modernise the outdated Vietnamese way of life. As early as 1876, Truong Vinh Ky (1837-1898) commented that the Hue court was incapable of carrying out reforms to help people out of their misery (Jamieson, 1995: 70-71). In his eyes, only the French were capable of implementing the enormous task of lifting up a weak nation. As a first and most dedicated advocate of modernization in his time, through the Gia Dinh journal, the first newspaper in Vietnam, Truong laid the first foundation for the spread of ‘quoc ngu’, a writing system with romanised alphabet created by a French missionary in the 17th century. Nguyen Van Vinh was his immediate inheritor, who contributed greatly to the popularization of ‘quoc ngu’ to the mass with the Indochina journal. Vinh attributed the country’s misery to the ignorance of the people and asserted ‘although the colonial government has not taken us to the apex, still, compared with the past, it has been 100 times better in giving us a breath of freedom and a taste of democracy’ (quoted in Jamieson, 1995: 74). He preferred the French rule over the traditional elite rule and the Japanese and Chinese models. In his series of articles ‘Examining Our Defects’ (ibid: 75), he attacked Vietnamese traditional practices like particular modes of conversation, superstition, gambling hobbies as ‘faults’ and encouraged people to change and modernise their lives.

However, France’s repression and economic policies went against the rhetoric of civilisation and progress. The infamous governor-general Paul Doumer was reported to have written: ‘When France arrived in Indochina, the Annamites were ripe for servitude’ (Karnow,

1997: 127). His governorship laid down the foundation for an Indochina's economy relied heavily on monopolies and taxation. He created official monopolies on alcohol and salt, encouraged the usage of opium and assumed total control of all the finances (ibid). While banned in France, opium accounted for one third of the income of Indochina (Jamieson, 1995: 62). A quota system was established to compel the purchase of alcohol in every village. A salt worker had to rebuy salt at 6 to 8 times higher than his selling price. The dispossession of land from Vietnamese peasants for plantations was accelerated. Under Doumer's governorship, while Indochina was transformed from a financial loss to a profitable enterprise (Karnow, 1997: 127), large numbers of Vietnamese were driven to unendurable depths of poverty (Jamieson, 1995: 62-66). Provoked primarily by economic and social conditions, the first series of peasant rebellion broke out in 1908 in Southern Central provinces from Quang Nam to Phu Yen.

In the first decade of the 20th century, there appeared links between French colonisation with exploitation and slavery in the discursive space in Vietnam.

[The French] treat our people like garbage, in the beginning using terror to chase them, in the end pushing them into the trap like cattle. The meek are made into slaves, the strong-minded are thrown into jail. The physically powerful are forced into the army, while the old and weak are left to die! Externally the French speak of their 'protectorate' in order to deceive the world powers. The common people see the blade and block before them and are paralyzed with fear. The land is splashed with blood. The whole country has a tragic hue. (Phan quoted in Marr, 1971: 108)

Besides destroying the Vietnamese materially and physically, the French were also articulated to destroy the Vietnamese's soul and their status as a normal human being.

In your eyes, we are savages, dumb brutes, incapable of distinguishing between good and evil (Phan Chu Trinh, quoted in Karnow, 1997: 122).

While early French commanders showed some respect, the French of the new century saw the Vietnamese inferior and childlike (Marr, 1971: 96). The colonial language was dominated with juxtaposition of the Vietnamese alongside animal or savage images (ibid). By the second decade of the 20th century, the dissatisfaction and hatred towards the supposed French 'mother' had become entrenched among the Vietnamese. The French colonial presence insidiously undermined the feelings of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-satisfaction (Jamieson, 1995: 97). Even men of high education and working in the colonial administration remained resentful as whatever their position was, the natives' salary would always be lower than a

lowest ranking French (ibid). ‘... [A]mong the comfortable upper-middle-class elements in Saigon’, even ‘men who had long advocated moderation and Franco-Vietnamese cooperation began to confront the colonial government with increasingly insistent demands for concrete political reforms’ (Jamieson, 1995: 97).

The myth of ‘mission civilisatrice’ was not able to restructure the Vietnamese society after the dislocation of the Confucian order. Economic and social problems under the French colonisation were represented in a way that put the blame on the colonists, disrupting the French rhetoric of its civilising mission. While in the first decade, the Vietnamese intellectuals realized the redundancy of their traditional Confucian ideology, in the next two decades, they became convinced that France’s mission civilisatrice was ‘a cruel hoax’ and that ‘France wanted to keep the Vietnamese people ignorant and weak’ (Marr, 1971: 62). From naïve movements for self-learning and self-renovations, political activities of the Vietnamese had become more sophisticated and varied. They realized more realistically ‘how difficult it would be for Vietnam to become a modern, prosperous and independent nation’ (Jameison, 1995: 65).

Conclusion

During the 17th and 18th centuries, when the West came to trade and spread Christianity, there were multiple Vietnams and the south was still an open land with numerous power centres. With the help of the French, Gia Long unified for the first time the land of present Vietnam under one rule in 1802, establishing the Nguyen dynasty. The making of the Vietnamese nation was a project dominated and controlled by the Kinh majority. Confucianism remained the organising ideology of the Nguyen court and the Vietnamese elite although its influence shrank towards the south.

After four decades in operation, French colonisation had induced an acute identity crisis among the elite and intellectuals of the Vietnamese Kinh majority in colonial Vietnam. While the Confucian discourse in Vietnam was disintegrating, France’s colonial discourse was struggling to structure the dislocated Vietnamese society. Amid this identity crisis, a sense of modern Vietnam among Vietnamese elite was emerging via-a-vis the French colonists and the old backward self. The struggle between these discursive processes was the principle struggle in colonial Vietnam until the 1920s. At the core of this identity crisis in colonial Vietnam was a struggle to define a collective identity and individual identity in relation to this collective. In the elite discourse of the Vietnamese Kinh elite and intellectuals, a sense of sovereignty and a

sense of a collective identity had already existed. Vietnam had been referred to as a political identity with distinct culture and inherent rights of existence. The Confucian discourse conceptualized the Vietnamese as a group of people whose existence and order was given and at the same time protected by Heaven and Righteousness. Colonisation revealed the emptiness of these nodal points, dislocating the old organizing discourse and disrupting the identities of those Heaven subjects. The civilizing myth in the colonial discourse was attempting to symbolically tie Vietnam with the civilized France. However, colonial abuses and repressions blocked the Vietnamese' identification within the colonial system. The search for a new collective identity moved beyond the French model and resulted in a number of identification projects competing with each other by the 1920s.

Chapter 5: Identification Projects with the Nation

Introduction

Vietnam in the 1920s was ‘the testing ground for all manners of ideas and movements’ (Huynh, 1982: 36). This is the time when it ‘becomes clear that different actors are trying to promote different ways of organising society’ as ‘struggle takes places between particular discourses’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2012: 36). By the 1920s, the traditional discourse informed by Confucianism appeared to have lost its salience. A number of identification projects emerged, attempting to conceptualize a modern Vietnamese nation. Old sacred concepts of Heaven and Righteousness were no longer able to structure the society in Vietnam. Even the monarch king has lost its symbolic significance. The search which went on in Vietnam from the 1920s is the search for a new way to organise the society in the modern world that the Vietnamese had encountered. It is the search to define identities at both the collective and individual levels.

This chapter aims to account for the different ways that the Vietnamese were trying to organise their society, to conceptualize their selves and the collective identity that they belonged to. The four sections correspond to the five main identification projects going in Vietnam around the 1920s. The last generation of Confucian scholars of Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh was the first ones who introduced a modern conceptualization of the nation as an extension of a family and as being threatened by the French. The king no longer occupied the locus of symbolic power and in its place the concept of the people, which was articulated to be a Vietnamese biological breed, was erected. While Phan Boi Chau articulated the French as an absolute Other whose existence meant the termination of the Vietnamese nation, collaborators and reformers put forward a vision of a Vietnam under the French tutelage. The French were described as the only force that could lift up the country to modernity. While the scholar gentry approached the national problem from the above, from the duty of the righteous man towards their country, the new generation of intellectuals contemplated the problem from below, from their personal dilemma of not being able to find a decent job matching their education and level of intelligence, of being refused the human dignity they learned about in Western literature, and of seeing the injustice in the everyday occurrences. The new intellectuals started to suspect and question the values and reality of French colonisation, which was seen as the cause of their personal dilemma and blocking their identity. This was how radicalism came about. Radicalism approached the national myth at the individual level and

exhorted the Vietnamese youth to leave traditions and families behind to go in an intense search of a novel ways to solve the perceived problem. The revolutionary wave came to Vietnam's politics in this radical anti-colonial atmosphere. While all revolutionary organisations converged on the need to fight with the French and on the means of violence to achieve this end, the Youth League stood out as the only revolutionary group that went beyond the national myth. Besides constructing antagonism between the Vietnamese and the French colonists, the Youth League articulated a new antagonism between different social classes inside the Vietnamese population.

5.1. The Last Scholar Gentry: A Family Nation

The last scholar gentry was the generation of Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh, who symbolized the bridge between Confucian and modern Vietnam. This generation grew up in Confucian texts and matured with Western philosophy through Chinese translations around the first and second decades of the 20th century. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they are the first classically-trained scholar generation that called for self-appraisal of the old Vietnamese self. They urged the Vietnamese people to leave behind backward customs and behaviours, to drop Confucian education for new ways of life and modern knowledge. They were the first intellectual generation that looked beyond the Confucian ideology for new ways to define the Vietnamese identity in the ongoing encounter with the French. As the traditional Vietnamese discourse was disintegrating, together with the Confucian concepts of Heaven and Righteousness, the relationship between the Vietnamese and the king, one of the five central social relationships in the Confucianism, was broken down to give rise to the link between the country and its people. It was in the writings of these last classical scholars that the King was displaced from the centre of a Vietnamese collective identity. In place of the King, the concept of the people was erected as the central point of identification. The country's existence was no longer justified in the natural way governed by Heaven or the timeless morality principle of Righteousness. The right of existence of Vietnam was now justified by reference to the existence of a people, who belonged to an extended family living in the same territory. The making of the people was the key discursive articulation of the discourse of the generation of Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chu Trinh preparing the foundations for the making of a modern nation in later periods.

The first step towards imagining a modern nation is to 'cut off the king's head' (Foucault, 1984a). In the discourse of these last Confucian scholars, the king stopped being

symbolically at the centre of a collective identity. The king was now presented to be an authoritarian force, misusing public power into private hands. Being loyal to the king was no longer a desirable course of action.

What is a king? King is the main ruler of a country, the leader of a tribe or a hero who had drove out invasion and self-claimed to be the lord; or a rebel who killed a lineage of an existing king in a chaotic time and self-put himself/herself into that role; or a person fighting with other fellow countrymen to hold power; or a foreigner invading for benefits. To sum up, a king is a person who uses the rights of other people as his own, public power as private power, taking other people's land or public land as his own, private land...

There is no ethical tie between the King and the people. The fact is that the king and his aides are cooperating to oppress the people. (Phan Chu Trinh, 1925)

This is a quote from a famous speech of Phan Chu Trinh *Eastern, Western Morality and Ethics (Đạo đức và luân lý Đông Tây)* in Sai Gon in 1925. In this quote, not only the king but his aids, which means members of the feudal administration, were articulated to be antagonistic forces of the Vietnamese people. The association between officials of the feudal court with oppression had been present in the Vietnamese popular culture for hundreds of years. A popular saying, which was also a traditional lullaby, goes:

Kids, bear in mind this sentence

Night-time robbers are foreign invaders, day-time robbers are the court's officials.

This existing articulation was used, reproduced and widely circulated in the discourse of the last scholar gentry to the detriment of the legitimacy of the feudal court. To replace the symbolic centre of the king in the feudal societal structure, the concept of the people was 'invented' to be the ultimate source of legitimacy of the existence of the Vietnamese as a collective entity.

In the discourse of these last scholar gentry, ancient myths were commonly enacted to construct the common origin of the Vietnamese. People were reminded that they were descendants of Lac Long and Hong Bang. In Vietnam's history, Hong Bang refers to the ancient Vietnam in the time of seventeen Hung kings spanning from around 2879 to 258 BC (Dang, 2016).

Our soul is descended from the lineage of Lac Long. We are children of the Vietnamese house, member of the same yellow race (Nguyen Quyen, quoted in Marr, 1971: 98)

The land of Hong Lac must be renewed, awoken, to be again truly a thing of beauty (Phan Boi Chau, quoted in Marr, 1971: 149)

Lac Long or Lac Long Quan, a descendant of the dragon race, and his fairy wife, Au Co, are reportedly the primitive ancestors of the Vietnamese people. The eldest son of this couple, out of their 100 children born from Au Co's 100-fetus womb, is the first Hung King⁹. Although these stories were in Vietnam's historical records since as early as the 15th century (ibid), several details are not factual but mythical, such as the 'dragon' Lac Long Quan, the 'fairy' Au Co, the 100-fetus womb and the 2621-year longevity of only 18 kings¹⁰. However mythical these stories are, they were used as evidence of the common roots and the family ties among the Vietnamese. These mythical stories about the origins of the Vietnamese people started to be popularized in Vietnam in the early 1900s when printed materials, especially historical books, were on the rise. They were later and are now still being commonly used by the Vietnamese communists and historians as evidence of the ancient origin and family tie of the Vietnamese people.

The Vietnamese people were to be understood as a human breed or a race, an extension of a family. The country was said to have been constructed from blood, sweat and tears by ancestors of 'a human breed who shared the same blood, spoke the same language and lived in the same territory' throughout the last 4000 years (Phan Chu Trinh, 1925). The concept of the country (nuoc) was articulated to be something related to each and every individual but, at the same time, something more valuable and more eternal than individuals' life. It was equated with the families, with children, with their labour, with the future and with the race.

As individuals, we may die but our country will not be lost. If we die our country remains, then the product of our labours, our children and grandchildren, our relatives, our reputations will remain and never be lost... On the other hand, suppose that our country is lost and we remain... Then we will be forced to endure the destinies of servile buffalo and horses. The product of our labours will be seized, our children and grandchildren will be despised by foreigners, our lineages, our beloved race will gradually be wiped out.... (Phan Boi Chau quoted in Marr, 1971: 228)

The conceptualisation of the country in this way made it normal and even desirable to sacrifice one's life for the existence of his/her country if the latter was endangered. And the country that

⁹ There is disagreement on who is the first Hung King, whether it is the first son of Lac Long Quan or his father, king Duong Vuong.

¹⁰ New arguments have emerged, saying that it is not 18 generations of Hung kings, but 18 sub-lineages of Hung kings.

was defined as an extension of a family, a collective of related lives and efforts was ‘indeed’ in danger. That danger reportedly came from the French.

The French, who was deemed different and unbearable to live with in the 19th century, was becoming a totally other that was killing the Vietnamese to the verge of extinction. *The History of the Loss of Vietnam* written by Phan Boi Chau in 1905 was the first document that displayed the brutal and exploitative practices of the French colonial government in Vietnam systematically. Such a content would never be received with harsh punishment from the colonial government in Vietnam. This book was written in Chinese and printed in Japan.

France is a powerful civilized country but it has invaded and exploited such a small and poor country like Vietnam. The French self-declared to be a civilized race, but they have come and killed the much weaker Vietnamese people. What a shame to the national pride and politics of France! I am afraid that people will not believe in what I am going to say. (Phan Boi Chau, 1905: 49)

Contrary to the rhetoric of protection and civilisation, French policies were said to make the Vietnamese miserable, dumb, weak and blind (Làm cho khốn khổ, làm cho ngu dốt, làm cho hèn yếu, làm cho đui mù). Chau’s book elaborated on French tax policies, which were reportedly robbing the Vietnamese to complete destitution. From the only two kinds of taxes before the French came, 14 types of taxes were levied targeting almost every activity of the Vietnamese. The feudal court was described without agency and its sovereignty had been lost to the colonial government as Vietnamese kings were either deposed and exile abroad or tightly controlled inside his own place. French presence was associated with destitution, ill justice and illiteracy for the Vietnamese.

The idea that the French were driving the Vietnamese to the verge of extinction made its first appearance in this document. This discursive articulation reflected the influence of Social Darwinism, which emphasizes struggle and competitions, rather than the static moral ideology of Confucianism. The Vietnamese country was juxtaposed with the Vietnamese race, which can exist and go extinct as a living species. ‘Will Vietnam lose its life? The Vietnamese species will turn into the micro-organisms in water, like the ants in fire...’ (ibid: 71). France’s successful conquer of Vietnam and hence this current miserable situation of the Vietnamese people was blamed on the feudal court. The Nguyen dynasty was reported to be incapable as the rulers and coward in facing with the invaders. They were quoted to have stated: ‘Vietnam’s

feudal court agree to pledge for France's protectorate...' after the invaders launched the first few attacks.

In the similar vein that the feudal court was criticised, the traditional family ethics of Vietnamese culture were also being criticised in Phan Chu Trinh's 1925 speech. The authoritarian atmosphere of Vietnamese families, where children were asked to do at their parents' wishes, were deemed responsible for the servitude tendency of the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese were asked to think beyond and go outside these backward chains of family and the king-subject relationship to discuss the country's business (*ban viec nuoc*). Both Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Boi Chau tried to shame people to think and act for the country, and in doing that to imagine about the nation.

Although both Phan Chu Trinh and Phan Boi Chau contributed to a new conceptualisation of the Vietnamese country as a timeless collective composed of a common human breed, the later embraced self-renovations under the French rule and the former articulated the vision of a country free of the French colonists. Phan Boi Chau made the first attempt to form political groups to drive out the French. The League for the Restoration of Vietnam (*Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi*) was founded in 1912 from members of his old organisation 'the Association for the Modernisation of Vietnam – *Duy Tan Hoi*) and followers of his Eastern Travel. Its mottos were 'driving out the French, restoring Vietnam and setting up the Vietnamese Republic'. Just like before, Chau still preferred violence though his goal was now the establishment of republic, rather than a monarchy. A number of attempted assassinations, killings and bombings aimed at the French in 1912 and 1913 were alleged to be carried out by the League. Phan Boi Chau was soon arrested in 1913. By 1917, the Vietnam Restoration Association had disintegrated without achieving any significant political successes. Phan's followers and old members of the Vietnam Restoration Association regrouped into the Society of Like Hearts (*Tam Tam Xa*) in Canton, China in 1923. Its moto was to 'restore the Vietnamese to their dignity as human being' (Ho, 1997: 64). This Society was the foundational base of the Youth League that Nguyen Ai Quoc later erected in 1925 in terms of both membership and symbolic devotion. Ho Tung Mau and Le Hong Son became central figures of the Youth League and later the Indochinese Communist Party. New members of the League had to take an oath of loyalty in front of the grave of a devoted member of the Society of Like Hearts, Pham Hong Thai, who had carried out a failed attempt to assassinate the Governor-General of Indochina, Merlin.

The discourse of these last scholar gentry laid the discursive foundations for the conceptualisation of a modern Vietnamese nation as a family nation free of a monarch but full of the Vietnamese people. At the centre of the new national structure was the Vietnamese people, who were articulated to be one same human breed with a common origin. The scholar discourse marked the beginning of the imagination of a national community with fellow countrymen living and sharing the same experience. However, by the 1920s this modern way of articulating the nation still had not a long way before reaching the Vietnamese mass. The *History of the Lost Vietnam*, like most of Phan Boi Chau's writings, was in Chinese and published overseas. Phan Chu Trinh's speech 'Eastern, Western Morality and Ethics' was spoke in front of students and intellectuals. Given the strict regulations on speech and journalism and the illiteracy of the Vietnamese at the time, the novel conceptualisation of the nation was only an elite phenomenon among young intellectuals. Political activities in this period were also still limited inside the circle of scholars, whether of classical and modern training. Marr (1971) reserved that until the end of the 1920s, the French regime remained a fact of life in Vietnam: powerful, grim and seemingly eternal. The master-slave mentality between the colonisers and the indigenous had become entrenched. The French were able to crack down all attempts to rebel, none of which amounted to a major challenge. Anti-French activists more than often ended up in Conlon island, 'the deadly symbol of anticolonial resistance for three generations' (Marr: 1971, 234). Until the third decade of the 20th century, the dominant theme inside the country was still collaboration rather than resistance.

5.2. Reformers and/or Collaborators: A Nation under French Tutelage

Accounts of colonial Vietnam in the beginning of the 20th century more than often feature anti-French sentiments and activists; however, these men were in fact a few tilting at windmills. Without its native supporters, the colonial system could not have survived for long (Marr, 1971: 274). The colonizers must have enjoyed the collaboration of a significant number of the Vietnamese in order to consolidate their position and rule Vietnam for nearly a century. The institution and power of the monarchy was becoming hollow after the transfer of sovereignty from the court to the colonizers marked by King Ham Nghi's flee from the Hue in 1885, which then sparked a country-wide Can Vuong movement. Three out of the five kings reigning between 1885 to 1926 were deposed and exiled overseas by the French. This is to say those mandarins who stayed in the court must have accepted and adhered to the colonial rule. By the 1920s, the court's mandarins were no longer the traditional elite selected by rigorous

Confucian examinations, they were now more like government employees loyal to the French master. Collaborations with the colonial administration also included ‘scholars of New Learning’ (Tai: 24-25) in the Tonkin and the emerging native wealthy bourgeoisies in the Cochinchina. Scholars of New Learning were those French-educated interpreters or civil servants who acted as cultural brokers between Vietnam and France. In the Cochinchina colony, France’s economic policies gave rise to a new class of wealthy bourgeoisie including businessmen, landowners and civil servants. A common thread underlining all these groups of Vietnamese collaborators was the vision of a Vietnamese nation under French tutelage although the content of their program may vary. They all despised the backwardness of their own culture, recognised French superiority and accepted the colonial presence in Vietnam. For these men, the French protectorate was beneficial and even gracious.

Although the colonial government has not taken us to the apex, still, compared with the past, it has been 100 times better in giving us a breath of freedom and a taste of democracy. (Nguyen Van Vinh, quoted in Jamieson, 1995: 74).

... [I]t can be satisfied with the present regime which suits our collective aspirations much better than the ancient regime could have... we come to respectfully but firmly ask of the protector nation: “Educated us, as you educated your own children...” (Bui Quang Chieu, quoted in Tai, 1992: 44)

Although many of them advocated reforms, the collaborators did not envision a Vietnam free from colonial rule. These men sought to struggle in the cultural realm rather than in political sphere. Nguyen Van Vinh (1882 – 1936) and Pham Quynh (1892 – 1945), two prominent scholars of New Learning in Tonkin, were true reformers before collaborators. The two men were both devoted to modernising the Vietnamese society and their fellow Annamites. They played vital roles in promoting the vernacular romanized script as the common writing medium (quoc ngu) of the Vietnamese language replacing the Chinese characters and the French writings. Nguyen Van Vinh was also among the key sponsors of the Tonkin Free School and the self-renovation movements in the first decade of the new century. In 1913, he launched the first journal in quoc ngu in Vietnam, the Indochina Review, in which he translated French literature and Vietnamese classics into the vernacular script. With a series of articles entitled ‘Examining Our Defects’ (Jamieson, 1995: 75), he attacked nearly everything Vietnamese from the practice of betel-chewing to the long-hair style. Pham Quynh was not a mere assimilationist either. While Phan Boi Chau vowed to work for the survival of the nation, Pham Quynh opted for the survival of the national culture (Tai, 1992: 48). He sought to promote and preserve Vietnamese literature and its language as the national essence of Vietnam.

Unlike the Northern literati who sought to lift up the morality and culture of the Vietnamese mass along Western standards, the Southern bourgeoisie were more concerned with engaging the authorities in dialogue for the promotion of their class interests. They did not demand for outright national independence, but aimed to increase Vietnamese autonomy within the framework of continued French rule. In 1917 they formed the Constitutionalist party (Đảng Lập Hiến) in order to protect and maximize their hard-won economic and political rights. However, while activating for their bourgeois rights, they also contributed to deepening the identity crisis among Vietnamese youths. The voices of the native bourgeoisie, the two journals: *La Tribune Indigene* (*Dien dan ban xu*) edited by Bui Quang Chieu and *La Echo Annamite* by Nguyen Phan Long, brought to public the brutality and corruption of the colonial government. While Phan Boi Chau wrote ‘the History of the Loss of Vietnam’ as a book in Chinese characters and in Japan, the native bourgeoisie criticised the French via newspapers in French language inside the country. This new coverage was able to reach more Vietnamese, many of which were now literate in French. One example was the Truong Cao Dong affair (Tai, 1992: 150). It was triggered by the publication of Truong Cao Dong’s letters in *La Echo Annamite* in 1926 denouncing the appalling working and living conditions of coolie labourers sent to Cochinchina from Tonkin and Annam. This led to the deportation of the author, Truong Cao Dong, back to Annam. The event underlined the lack of political freedoms under the colonial rule, in this case, the freedom of speech and freedom of travel. The Vietnamese ‘could be treated like lukewarm aliens on their own soil’ (Tai, 1992: 150). The incident invoked widespread protests among students and workers.

Advocating or criticising the French, reforming or assimilating, these men might be, they contributed significantly to the process of widening a sense of the Vietnamese identity among the Vietnamese people, especially the French-educated youth of the 1920s. The proliferation of the printing industry and the vernacular *quoc ngu* in Vietnam owed dearly to these collaborators. While criticising the French to lobby for their groups’ interests, the constitutionalists’ publications that displayed French corruption and brutality inflamed a sense of comradeship among the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese, especially the literate youths, did not only become aware of the experiences of their fellow men around the country but also saw themselves in the pictures of victims of French abuses and enabled them to imagine themselves as future victims. In fact, the Truong Cao Dong affair was one of many events that radicalized the Vietnamese youth. In return, the radicalism and the violence that resulted from

it, which occurred at the end of the decade, sent these reformers and/or collaborators into final dependent alliance with the French (Marr, 1971: 275).

5.3. Radicalism: Individual Freedom and the Nation

Radicalism is the word that was used by Tai (1992) to describe the political trend among Vietnamese youth in the 1920s. It describes their dissatisfaction with traditional and colonial authorities and their yearning for individual freedom and self-realisation. The youth in the 1920s were the first products of French education, the first generation of modern Vietnamese intellectuals. While Phan Boi Chau and Chan Chu Trinh read Western philosophical texts through Chinese translation, the 1920s Vietnamese youth enjoyed direct access. Absorbing Western values and ideals in the original writings throughout their education, they were in the position to contemplate the hollowness of France's mission civilisatrice and the constraining manner of traditional values. The identity crisis that began in Vietnam around the turn of the century as described in the previous chapter became deeply entrenched and acute among this generation. However, while the scholar gentry approached the issue of national independence at the collective level, the radical youth saw in the national problem the means to emancipate themselves from social constraints. It was personal concerns that led the radicals to fight against the colonial system. The symmetry between the national struggle for independence and the individual struggle for emancipation was first articulated by radical youths (Tai, 1992: 3).

In the wake of the WWI, financial burdens darkened the already bleak economic situation of Indochina, which had been always heavily dependent on monopolies. From the pre-war focus on transport and infrastructures, the colonial economic policies moved to investment on agriculture. The establishment of rice, rubber and coffee plantations was accelerated, with recruitments of workers to follow suit. Peasants were increasingly losing lands to giant consortiums. The working conditions in rubber plantations were especially appalling. In addition, Annamites were recruited as coolies for labour work and as volunteers serving in Western battles. The new recruitment was added to the already long list of hatred policies of the colonial government. Justice was widely miscarried towards the natives. To make the matter worse, students and civil servants suffered daily ill-treatment and petty humiliations by their Western teachers and superiors (Tai, 1992: 114). The humiliation that some Vietnamese felt at the turn of the 20th century was magnified in the 1920s as the new generation of young intellectuals now judged the situation with Western values and ideas. The young 'yellow gentlemen' hurt even more at the manner of servitude of their fathers, their

teachers and even the mandarins of the court displayed towards the French. Another catalyst that amplified the antagonism was the development of a print industry. The second and the third decade of the 20th century was the beginning of a print industry in Vietnam with newspapers and journals appearing in all three regions with a much more lively scene in the colony of Cochinchina than in the protectorates of Tonkin and Annam. The growing of newspapers and journals brought cases of the colonial authority's corruption, ill justice and ill treatments of Annamites to public. With journalistic value, stories of what had happened for years now acquired the power to galvanise the public into action (Tai, 1992: 114).

Although most of the printing was in French, the Vietnamese youth of the 1920s was literate in this language through their French education. Aware of the Western principles of the rights of Man, the young generation saw both the colonial and traditional authorities unacceptable. The corporal punishment by their parents and teachers which were deemed normal in the past now became unbearable. They went on strikes against their teachers and the colonial government for their ill-treatment of themselves and of their fellow men. What hurt these proud young intellectuals even more was to witness the humiliation and servility of their parents and the Vietnamese mandarins towards the French. The identity crisis turned acute when they were unable to find a job equal to their ability despite possessing a Western education. Young men of the 1920s contemplated profoundly and painfully the discrepancy between the ideals they studied and the rights they should have enjoyed with the realities they were being through. They perceived the current colonial status quo as repressing their own individual freedom and self-realisation. They were ready to diverge from the path that their parents had arranged for them to fulfil their aspirations.

The man who played a central role in the outburst of radicalism among the Vietnamese youth in the 1920s was Nguyen An Ninh (1900 – 1943), 'the most European man' in Indochina (Tai, 1992: 72). Educated entirely in French schools, having studied a law degree in France from 1920 and 1923, Nguyen An Ninh had read Western philosophers extensively and experienced principles of humanity and equality in France. Ninh's politics brought a rupture to Vietnam's reactions to colonialism in the early 1920s, the dominant tone of which was moderation and compromise since the turn of the century. He protested loudly against both French colonialism and Confucianism and called for violence. Ninh attacked French rhetoric on its civilising mission with French weapons. In the pamphlet entitled *France en Indochine* written in French, he elaborated on the absence of those rights that were proclaimed in the 1789 Rights of Men in France in Indochina. In the tradition of Phan Boi Chau's *History of the Loss*

of Vietnam, Ninh displayed the oppression and exploitation of the Vietnamese by the colonists and pointed to the hollowness of ‘the European prestige’.

The European prestige is based neither on the moral nor the intellectual superiority of the European over the Asians. It is based on the colour of the skin... It is the European prestige that proposed that a European, as idiotic as he can be, could be a boss over a Vietnamese... It is the European prestige that added to the prestige of the conqueror that explains the advantages and privileges granted to Frenchmen: high salaries, innumerable scholarships...; the right to monstrously immense concessions of land, a thousand acres for a European and forty for a Vietnamese, etc., etc. (Nguyen An Ninh, 1925)

The French were presented not as superior but as a bunch of greedy and violent bandits. The pamphlet told a story that while Darles, ‘the butcher of Thai Nguyen’, who killed hundreds of the Vietnamese, was fined one hundred franc, Luong Ngoc Quyen, the organisers of the revolt against Darles’ monstrosities had his limbs rotten in chains in a one-meter-high cell. French men in the colonial government were said to enjoy extravagant expenses and have the right to put the indigenous people in jail without trial. In sum, ‘France cannot take care of her colonies’ (Nguyen An Ninh, 1925).

In his famous speech *The Aspiration of Annamite Youth* on 15 October 1923, Ninh denounced the idea of France’s mission civilisatrice and criticised the Vietnamese Confucianism as ‘an article of exportation’ composed of a narrow morality and stifling ideas (Tai, 1992: 78).

...[T]he so-called elite trained in the Chinese classics has been forced to cling to Confucian ideas like shipwrecked people to a raft. (Nguyen An Ninh, 1923 quoted in Tai, 1992: 78)

He called his contemporaries to ‘flee from their fathers’ house’, to escape from society and even to leave the country to discover liberating means (ibid). He asked his generation to go into action and to be ready for sacrifice. To Ninh, violence was the only recourse. Ninh had gone out of the hesitance between reformism or resistance to arrive at the collusion that taking arms was the only way forward for the Vietnamese to get out of the existing crisis. ‘In order to eliminate the regime of slavery imposed by France on Indochina there is only one way, that is to combat violence with violence as in a bull’s fight...’ (Nguyen An Ninh, 1925).

However, Ninh’s politics was short of an agenda for how to do violence and short of a program for post-independence. It had neither an ideology to analyse the current society and to organise actions nor a vision for the future. Although Ninh had established a symmetry

between the national struggle for independence and the youth's own efforts to emancipate, his politics still retained the elite tendencies of Vietnamese traditional politics, which glorified idealistic heroism. Politics in this elite sense was understood as something to be done for the mass not by the mass. 'It is then the duty of the more courageous and the more devoted Vietnamese to think of methods of struggle that fit the time and to devise a form of resistance that is capable of fighting oppression' (Tai, 1992: 191). While Ninh recognised the inevitability of violence and sacrifice, he pondered at the thought of human loss of a Bolshevik-style revolution. He called people into action, but 'was uncomfortable with the inherently authoritarian nature of political parties' (Tai, 1992: 188).

In the radical trend embodied by Ninh politics, the conceptualisation of a nation free from the colonial yoke, which was articulated in Phan Boi Chau's writings, was reaffirmed. While Phan Boi Chau approached the concept of the nation at the collective level of the people, Nguyen An Ninh came from personal concerns for freedom and self-achievements. Although Ninh's politics still remained essentially an elite phenomenon like, radicalism was successful in articulating the traditional family and the colonial government as repressing chains to the self-emancipation of the Youth. Thousands of students went on strikes against their teachers against their parents' wish. They were now ready to leave the family and the education their parents had arranged for them behind to search for ways to liberate themselves. It was in this situation that the Vietnamese Youth turned themselves in revolutionary organisations which appeared in the second half of the 1920s.

5.4. The Revolutionaries: Violence and the Nation

Vietnamese politics got revolutionized in the second half of the 1920s. Under the influence of communism, Sun Yat Sen's Three Peoples' Principle and the French Revolution's ideals, revolutionary groups appeared in Vietnamese politics. Three dominant revolutionary organisations at the time were the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League (Hội Việt Nam Thanh niên Cách mạng – Thanh Nien), the Revolutionary Party of the New Vietnam (Tân Việt Cách mạng Đảng – Tan Viet) and the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng - VNQDD). They were the first generation of revolutionaries in Vietnamese politics, who put an end to the radical period. These revolutionaries had settled unanimously on the means of outright violence and on the need for organisations. They had been aware of the weakness of the elite tendencies of previous anti-colonial movements and showed attempts to involve the

mass. Although they bore different conceptions of the nation and revolution, they converged on a symmetry between national and social issues.

The Youth League was the pioneer organisation of revolutionaries in Vietnamese politics. It was founded by Nguyen Ai Quoc (1890 – 1969) from old members of Tam Tam Xa in 1925 in Canton, China. New recruits had to go through a training course which last somewhere between three weeks to four months, in which they studied about revolutionary theories, Chinese and Russian revolutions, about capitalism and the stages of human evolution, about national liberations movements in other countries and about world situations. Nguyen Ai Quoc prepared training materials himself and was the main lecturer. Le Hong Son and Ho Tung Mau, previous members of Tam Tam Xa, were teaching assistants. After the course, new members had to take an oath of loyalty in front of the tomb of Pham Hong Thai, also a member of Tam Tam Xa, who had carried out a failed attempt to assassinate the Governor-General of Indochina, Merlin. The most promising were sent to either Whampoa Military Academy or the Workers' University of the East in Moscow, while the rest were sent back to Vietnam. The League published periodicals to promote its ideals and recruitments. Its weekly journal, the Youth, published in quoc ngu, was the League's public platform and was circulated clandestinely inside Vietnam. In 1927, Nguyen Ai Quoc collected his lectures into a handbook entitled 'The Road to Revolution' (Đường Cách mệnh) in quoc ngu. It was then served as the key training documents of the League. Under the leadership of its headquarter in exile the League expanded rapidly. As early as the beginning of 1926, it began to form cells inside the country. By 1929, it had bases in almost all provinces of Vietnam with the membership totalling 1,700. Its training materials and periodicals were widely circulated in Vietnam. At the same time, existing anticolonial organisations inside the Vietnam were changing their orientation toward the revolutionary tide.

In Annam, the Revolutionary Party of the New Vietnam (Tan Viet) was reformed in 1928 from the existing political group named Phuc Viet. Phuc Viet was established in Annam in the early 1920s from ex political prisoners and students. Tan Viet recruited among intellectuals, civil servants and petty bourgeoisie. In the beginning, Tan Viet was indecisive in terms of ideology, judging communism too high the Kuomintang's Principle of Three Peoples too low (Dinh et al, 2014: 271). Its agenda was to 'lead workers, peasants, soldiers and the mass inside the country and liaise with oppressed nations outside the country in order to uproot the imperialism towards the establishment of an equal and loving society' (Dinh et al, 2014:

271; MOET, 2014c: 120). ‘Unable to choose among different options, the Phuc Viet thus tried to be everything at once, nodding in the direction of Marxism for the sake of appearing in tune with the times, but also espousing essentially neo-traditionalist ideas of progress’ (Tai, 1992: 148). In Tonkin, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNQDD) was established in 1927 among urban petty bourgeoisie and intellectuals from the Nam Dong publishing society. Its ideology was a combination of Sun Yat Sen’s Three Peoples’ Principle and the French Revolution’s ideals. It was definite on the goal of a national revolution, but not resolute on a post-independence program and on whether to participate into the world revolution (Dinh et al, 2014: 275).

This first generations of revolutionaries in Vietnam shared a common orientation to overthrow the French colonial government by means of violence. All were conscious of the need for organisation and mass participation. All competed for the same membership among intellectuals and petty urban bourgeoisie inside Vietnam (Tai, 1992: 185). The rhetoric of these three organisations inherited many discursive strategies of previous anti-colonial generations of Phan Boi Chau and Nguyen An Ninh. The nation was conceptualized as a family nation, which was being endangered by the French colonialism. In the tradition of ‘the History of the Loss of Vietnam’ and ‘France en Indochine’, the French played the role of the Other in the identification of a Vietnamese national identity.

The French imperial in the masks of ‘civilization’, ‘enlightenment’ used warships, cannons to conquer our nation brutally and violently. They fired our cities. They burned our home countryside. They raped our compatriots. They robbed our wealth. They grabbed our country to make their colony. They enslaved our 20 million people in the fate of horses and buffalos. Imperialism robbed our country with the sole purpose of enriching themselves. They sneaked all our farm land. They controlled our forest and mines. They kept all sea ports. They took all rivers. They had all commercial rights. They owned all production modes. They inflict increasingly higher taxes... All our country’s wealth, all our peoples’ sweat and tears are all drawing into their hands (Youth League, 1929a).

The French, although they are of a different race from ours, came to conquer our country. Under the pretext of protecting us, they made a colony of our country. They have at their service corrupt mandarins and civil servants who behave like hunting dogs towards the people. They tried to destroy us with drugs and alcohol. Their cruelties equal only those of snakes and wild beasts. They steal all our possessions, including our real estate... (Vietnamese Nationalist Party: 1927).

All tried to shame the Vietnamese into action as previous anti-colonial activists did.

... And yet the twenty-five millions of Hong Lac's children are as intelligent as anyone else. What a shame that they have accepted for more than seventy years the role of beasts of burden. To live in these conditions is a shame. It is better to die rather than to lead such a life. (Vietnamese Nationalist Party, 1927)

Annamites are not very resourceful. They are easily satisfied. They always put the blame on the fate or wait for the heaven and the Buddha. They don't know that if they don't help themselves, the heaven and the Buddha will never come to their help. There are people who shiver at the sight of the French. They do not think that these people are also the human beings like themselves. Why do we have to think low of ourselves? (Youth Journal, 1925, online)

However, there were differences among these revolutionary organisations in their view on the nation and post-independence programs. While VNQDD viewed the conflict in Vietnam in pure national term between the Vietnamese nation and the French colonists as previous anti-colonial generations did, the Youth league adopted a much more sophisticated conceptualisation of the Vietnamese nation. According to Huynh (1982: 85), 'the general, naïve assumption of the anticolonial literati had been that whoever was Vietnamese was *ipso facto* anticolonial, including those who were actively collaborating with the French'. This assumption could be read from Phan Boi Chau's History of the Loss of Vietnam, in which he included all Vietnamese including Christians and French interpreters in the list the possible segments of the Vietnamese population that could rise against the colonial yoke. To the Youth League, for the first time, the Vietnamese 'we' was categorized into the revolutionary forces (workers and peasants), their friends, allies and their enemies (Huynh, 1982: 85). While Nguyen Thai Hoc, the leader of VNQDD was reported to abhor the idea of setting class against class (Tai, 1992: 218), the Youth League spoke the language of class and categorized the Vietnamese based on the concept of oppression.

In the Vietnamese language, the Marxist term 'proletariat' was translated as 'vo san', which literally meant 'properly-less'. As this research is the study of the creation of meaning, I decide to use the literal version of the word, rather than the official translation, in the attempt to preserve the precise connotation that the word might incur to a Vietnamese. This is to say that the word 'property-less' in this research is the translation of the English word 'proletariat'. It was also the first revolutionary group that introduced the Marxist concepts of revolution, class and capitalism into the Vietnamese language to conceptualize the ongoing situation in Vietnam.

In the world there are two classes:

A. The capitalists (not working but benefited).

B. Workers and peasants (working hard but receiving nothing)

An Annam worker, working in Hon Gay cold mine for 11 hours a day, from the beginning of the year and the end, he earns only 3 cents a day, does not have enough food and clothes, has no medicines at pain, no coffin at death.

By contrast, the owner of the mine never touches his hand in any work, however, he has plenty of food and clothes, travels by horse and cars, earns tens of millions of dong in profit (in 1925 he gained 17000000 dong). Let's ask who generated this 17 million dong, the Western owner or the Annam worker? While our peasants do not have field to farm, Western plantations takes up 122000 acres of fertile fields in the Central Region and 150000 acres in the South.

Our people do not have enough to eat, many starve to death in some places while plantation owners sell rice for nearly 1000 million francs (in 1925 they sold rice for 911,477,000 franc). (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online)

The Youth League was the first and the only organisation at the time that emphasized the importance of an ideology and was able to articulate a common one. It also made it clear the indispensability of a Leninist Party.

Nowadays, there are many ideologies and isms, but the most genuine is Leninism.

The lessons from Russian Revolution are: If a revolution is to succeed, there must be a mass base (workers and peasants), a unified, scarifying and durable party. It is essential to adopt Marxism and Leninism. (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online)

The Youth League was the only organisation at the time that possessed a clear post-independence program. Its motto was to sacrifice lives, interests and minds to do a national revolution (crushing the French and wresting independence for the land), then to do an international revolution (ousting imperialism and implementing communism) (Dinh et al, 2014: 266).

The Youth League is a revolutionary group representing working Annamite people, leading those people to fight with the ruling class... in order to destroy the present unequal society and to build a society, in which every has to work, has their basic needs met, have freedom and equality, which is communism (Youth League, 1929b: online).

Toward the end of the decade, while VNQDD stayed as a group of revolutionary patriots, the Youth League and Tan Viet became communist and ended up merging into a unified Vietnamese Communist Party in 1930. Under the influence of the Comintern's new line of proletarianization set out in the 6th World Congress in September 1928, members of the League became dissatisfied with the nationalist and patriotic tone of the organisation and attempted to break with the League to form communist parties. The Indochinese Communist

Party and the Annam Communist Party were formed from the League's regional branches in 1929. Tan Viet also became communist and reformed as the Indochinese Communist League in the same year. Facing the fractioning of the Communist movement, in February 1930, Nguyen Ai Quoc held a unification conference in Hong Kong with delegations from newly-established regional communist parties. A common communist Party was formed to be named the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP). The Indochinese Communist League was also later admitted. While the Youth League and Tan Viet were reforming themselves into the communist shell, a different fate was awaiting the Nationalist Party.

In February 1929, VNQDD carried out the assassination of Bazin, the director of the General Office of Indochinese Manpower specializing in recruiting coolies for rubber plantations. After Bazin's assassination, the colonial government carried out a brutal crackdown, resulting in the arrest of a great number of the Party members and followers. Faced with this destructive blow, the leadership resolved to wage a general insurrection as a last resort with the idea: 'Even if we do not become victors, we still become true Human' (MOET, 2014c: 122). All the remaining forces of the party was called to revolt in Yen Bai, Phu Tho, Son Tay and some other northern provinces in February 1930. This revolt amounted to the biggest challenge to the colonial authority since the pacification of Indochina was considered completed in the 1890s. However, the French swiftly suppressed the revolt within matters of days, most of the top leaders were imprisoned and executed, including the leader Nguyen Thai Hoc. This blow brought the Party to the brink of extinction, marking a defeat for Vietnamese revolutionary patriots. 'From this point on, there was no ideological alternative to international communism as the leading force in the Vietnamese revolution' (Huynh, 1982: 98). In 1925, Marx-Leninism was only one of many political theories introduced to Vietnam; by the end of the decade it had become a leading ideology with an organisational home. Since then, 'communism remained an integral part of Vietnamese nationalism' (ibid: 89)

Conclusion

The identity crisis induced by the French colonisation was essentially the emptiness of a symbolic power to hold the society together as the traditional ideology and its concepts of the heaven and the king lost the grips on the mind of the Vietnamese people. The first few decades of the 20th century saw a number of attempts to reorganise the society in its unity, all converged on the idea of a people nation. The concept of the nation functioned as the symbolic collective entity, to which the Vietnamese were articulated as belonging to. Instead of

conceptualised the legitimacy and power of the nation as endowed by immortal universal forces of the Heaven and the King, the right to existence of the country was now reasoned on the concept of the people. The Vietnamese people were articulated to be a human breed or a family in extension. While the Confucian scholar Phan Boi Chau put forward a vision of an independent Vietnam without the French, reformers and collaborators imagined a country under the French tutelage. Young Vietnamese of French education converged with Phan Boi Chau's vision but came from their individual concerns for freedom and self-achievements. However, these identification projects were more like a combo of elitist articulations and short of a coherent background of meanings to conceptualize other related social phenomena and the situation as whole. The mythical national space in these elitist identification projects, which were incapable of thinking in terms other than that of the Vietnamese and the French, failed to recognise and articulate the deep sense of dislocation experienced by the bulk of the Vietnamese mass, the peasants behind 'the village bamboo hedges'. Revolutionary groups, which appeared in Vietnam's politics in the late 1920s, converged on the national myth of previous anti-colonial politics, which told a story of a nation being threatened by the French and of an ethical need to drive this enemy out of the country by the means of violence. Revolutionaries were also more aware of the need to appeal to the mass in their national construction projects. Among these revolutionary organisations, the Youth League brought about a new approach to conceptualizing the ongoing identity crisis beyond national terms. By introducing a new category of class to provide new forms of identification and construct antagonism, the Youth League was on the way to reach the Vietnamese peasants and newly urbanized workers in its political project. The Youth League was the beginning of the Vietnamese communist discourse, which was becoming dominant in the Vietnamese discursive space since the end of the 1920s.

Chapter 6: The Vietnamese Communist Discourse: Bring the Mass In

Introduction

Communism entered Vietnam in the revolutionary upsurge of the anti-colonial politics in the second half of the 1920s. The communist movement initiated by the Youth League was among various identification projects going on in Vietnam amid the identity crisis. By the time the communist organisations appeared in Vietnam, as discussed in the previous chapter, the nation had become a dominant term in the political discourse of Vietnam. However, the communists went beyond the national myth to circulate a socialist myth to ‘read’ societal dislocations and construct antagonism. With the Vietnamese communist discourse, a whole new world of linguistic resources and meanings were brought into the discursive space of Vietnam for people to conceptualize the world around them and their position in it.

The communist discourse was essentially a political project to restructure the unity of the society which was being dislocated in the process of colonisation. The nodal point that tied the communist discourse together in its early existence in Vietnam was the signifier ‘revolution’ with its meaning articulated as ‘the change from the bad to the good’ (Youth Newspaper, 1925: online). The political project of the Vietnamese communists was hailed as a revolution which was not only a struggle for national independence but also for social betterment. This revolution was necessary as the current situation was read as miserable and this revolution was destined to succeed as the Marxist law on the development of human society had pointed out. The construction of social antagonism based on oppression was widened to the Vietnamese mass, particularly peasants and workers. Two myths were introduced in the communist discourse for the Vietnamese to read their situation and also to guide actions. The national myth, which articulated a Vietnamese nation being exploited by the French colonists to the verge of extinction, was activated in the same tradition of previous anti-colonist projects. The socialist myth introduced the problem of class exploitation and invited people to become subject in the building of socialism which was said to bring an end to class exploitation. While the national myth defined only the French as the enemies, the socialist myth added the Vietnamese feudal landlords and native bourgeoisie as internal others to be excluded. The socialist myth conceptualized the nation as composed of various classes, whose interests were different from those of the nation. The Vietnamese communists claimed to represent the interest of the working class. Although it constructed antagonism among different groups within the Vietnamese, the socialist myth brought the constructed social antagonism against

the French closer to the Vietnamese mass. The myth of the nation was brought closer to the Vietnamese mass through the articulation of the French as class enemy in the socialist myth. Within the Vietnamese communist discourse, the French became a double enemy of the Vietnamese peasants and workers: a national enemy and a class enemy. The Vietnamese mass was discursively taken into the political realm in the communist discourse. The socialist myth functioned as a bridge to bring the political project of the Vietnamese communists closer to the mass.

This chapter analyses the communist discourse in its infancy period in Vietnam from the mid-1925s to the early 1940s. The first section of the chapter introduced the early writings of the mastermind of Vietnamese communism, Nguyen Ai Quoc or Ho Chi Minh, before he formed the Youth League in 1925. It is in these writings that saw the first association between Vietnam's existing anti-colonial tropes and Marxist-Leninist terminology. The second section analysed the communist discourse which elaborated further on the socialist myth alongside the national myth in reading the situation in colonial Vietnam. From 1925 to around 1940, while the socialist myth was dominant in the communist discourse, both the national cause and the socialist revolution were in a stalemate. The last section discusses the political implications of the dominance of the socialist myth in the communist discourse in this early period.

6.1. Nguyen Ai Quoc and His Early Writings

In this section, I introduced the early writings of Nguyen Ai Quoc while he was in France before coming to China for the formation of the Youth League in 1925. It is because Nguyen Ai Quoc was behind many key documents and developments of Vietnamese Communism, his early writings could be seen as one of the primary sources of the Vietnamese communist discourse. I view these writings as the link between Vietnam's traditional anti-colonial discourse and the Vietnamese Communist discourse. Therefore, a brief discussion of these document is necessary to see both the continuation of the anti-colonial discursive strategies and the new articulations in the later Vietnamese communist discourse.

From 1925, the Youth League based in Canton, China was the main channel which brought communism into Vietnamese politics. In 1930, the VCP was established and later to be renamed as the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP). In 1945, Vietnamese communists acquired power in Hanoi with the mass organisation 'the League for the Independence of Vietnam' (Việt Nam độc lập đồng minh hội– Viet Minh). Under all these key events of Vietnamese communism was one man, named Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen the Patriot) at the

time of the Youth League and as Ho Chi Minh (Ho Who Aspires to Enlightenment) at the time of Viet Minh. Nguyen Ai Quoc was the architect of the Youth League and its documents that introduced the Marxist-Leninism into Vietnam's anti-colonial politics. He was also the key figure in the unification of the three communist parties into the Vietnamese Communist Party in February 1930. Although he was physically absent from Vietnam's politics throughout the 1930s, he was behind all the turning points of Vietnamese Communism in its infantile period from the mid-1920s to the 1940s. It was Nguyen Ai Quoc, more popularly later known as Ho Chi Minh, who declared the independence of Vietnam and the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in August 1945. It was not an exaggeration to say that Nguyen Ai Quoc was the mastermind of Vietnamese Communism at least in its infantile period.

Born in 1890 in a scholar family in Nghe An province in Annam, Nguyen left Vietnam in 1911 and travelled widely to America, England, France and Russia before arriving in China in 1924 for the promotion of communism in Indochina. Nguyen made his name in politics while in Paris, where he joined the French Socialist Party and the 'Annamite Patriots' group, whose members included Phan Chu Trinh. The group presented the Demands of Annamite People signed under the pseudonym Nguyen the Patriot at the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919. The demands comprised of democratic rights and reforms for Vietnam with no reference to national independence. The appeal was blatantly ignored, ripping Nguyen's hope in Western democratic principles, which 'presumably applied only to Europe' (Karnow, 1997: 133). The ignorance of the Western power at Versailles was said to be the moment that radicalized Nguyen, pushing him to the path of Communism (Huynh, 1982: 60). In 1920 Nguyen voted for the Third International and was among the founding members of the French Communist Party. In 1923, he left Paris for Moscow to study at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East before coming to Canton, China in 1925.

The writings of Nguyen Ai Quoc before the Youth League saw the same focuses with Vietnam's previous and existing anti-colonial discourse: the brutality and oppression of the colonists and the failure of the feudal court in protecting its governed. However, while Phan Boi Chau and Nguyen An Ninh were only concerned with Vietnam's struggle with the French, Nguyen looked beyond this national scale and analysed the Franco-Annamite relation in the international scenario under Marxist-Leninist lenses. The language of Marxist-Leninism was used to analyse the political situation of Vietnam. In addition, Nguyen Ai Quoc's writings before the Youth League contributed greatly to the wider circulation of Vietnam's existing anti-colonial tropes. Although written abroad in a foreign language like other Vietnamese anti-colonial pieces at the time, most of Nguyen's works were published in French newspapers or

performed in theatre while *The History of the Loss of Vietnam* was published as a book aimed mostly at Chinese readers and *The France en Indochine* was only a pamphlet which was confiscated when Nguyen An Ninh was on route to Vietnam. This is to say that Nguyen Ai Quoc's writings must have reached a much wider audience than those of Phan Boi Chau and Nguyen An Ninh.

The most famous document of Nguyen's writings in this early period of his political career was *The Indictment of French colonialism (Bản Án Chế Độ Thực Dân Pháp)* published in a French newspaper around 1925. It was the collection and reassessment of his previous articles and knowledge about the situation in Indochina and other French colonies. The indictment detailed exploitative policies and inhumane behaviours of French colonial governments in their colonies backed up with specific figures and real-life stories. The twelve chapters of the 'Indictment of French colonialism' vividly pictured the brutality, corruption and greed of the civilizers and the miseries and destitution of the colonized natives. The French in Vietnam were reportedly enriching on the sweat and blood of the native people. The native people were working hard in order to 'raise the parasites, the civilizers and others' (Nguyen, 1925: online). 'Annamite people were executed by both the crescent of the capitalist civilization and the cross of the deteriorating Catholic church...' (ibid). While native people were suffering increasing hunger, poverty and hardship, every French individual coming to colonies became a small king with servants and abundant of property and wealth. Taxes surged sharply and labours were paid cheaply or for nothing at all. People were forced to buy state-produced alcohol and the use of opium was encouraged while banned in the motherland.

At the time, there were 1,500 businesses trading in alcohol and opium, but only 10 schools in every one thousand villages... [E]very year, 23 to 24 million litres of alcohol was pressed down into the throats of 12 million native people, including women and children (ibid).

According to the Indictment, colonial officials were free to rob and torture and kill Annamites, be they farmers, workers or civil servants. Not greeting or going faster than the French could result in the natives' being bitten violently. 'When they have white skin, they are certainly civilizers. As civilizers, they can commit brutal actions and still being the most civilized.' One French was quoted as saying 'the life of an Annamite is worth less than one cent' while a small scratch of the civilizer was compensated a large amount of money. In the chapter 'Blood Tax', Nguyen showed how the native people were forced to fight in the French army against the

French rhetoric about the voluntary recruitment to become ‘soldiers serving justice and freedom’.

... [I]n order to safeguard the justice and freedom that they themselves do not enjoy, they have to suddenly separate from wives and children, leaving their field and sheep behind to cross the ocean and dry their bodies in European battles... [S]ome native people are even allowed to descend to the bottom of the sea to protect the land of sea monsters... Some others... used their blood to water the laurel wreath of commanders and use their bones to sculpt the sticks of governors (ibid)

In return for these sacrifice, those survived the battles received nothing when they came back home except for the chemical numbers that were drilled into their backs or wrists when enlist. They even did not enjoy the privileged right to trade in opium as French veterans and their wives did.

The last chapter of *The Indictment* introduced Marxist-Leninist concepts including capitalism and proletariat in analysing the contradiction between the colonized and the colonists.

Capitalism is a leech that has one trunk sticking to the proletariat in mainland country and another to the proletariat in colonies. If that animal is to be killed, it is a must to remove both trunks at the same time. If only one trunk is cut, the other trunk will continue sucking blood of the proletariat, the animal will still be alive and the cut trunk will regrow (ibid).

The situation that the Vietnamese and other colonized natives were suffering were articulated to be part of a universal struggle between capitalism and the proletariat. The French were portrayed not only as the colonisers, which literally means cannibals in Vietnamese, but also the capitalists whose nature is to exploit the working class. The conflict between Vietnam and France was no longer the national problem but also the class problem on an international scale, and a universal problem on the capital stage of human development as portrayed in Marxism. That the struggle of the colonized people was an important part of the universal struggle of the international proletariat against capitalism was the point that Nguyen Ai Quoc had been trying to make to the Comintern. At the Fifth Comintern Congress in 1924, quoting Lenin’s *Thesis on National and Colonial Questions*, he delivered a speech reasoning why the Comintern should pay more attention to the struggle in the colonies.

Possessing both the traditional Vietnamese anti-colonist tropes and Marxist-Leninist terminology, Nguyen Ai Quoc began the promotion of communism in Vietnam with the establishment of the Youth League in 1925. The Youth League was transformed into the Vietnamese Communist Party in February 1930, which was later renamed as the Indochinese

Communist Party in October the same year. In 1941, after the Japanese came to share the colony of Indochina with the French, the ICP established the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh), which was a popular front liaising all strata of the Vietnamese to fight against the colonial government. In August 1945, five months after the Japanese's coup to take control of France's colonial government, Viet Minh carried a successful out-throwing of the colonial government, who were shaking at the news of Japan's surrender to the Allies. On September 2nd 1945, Nguyen Ai Quoc, then known as Ho Chi Minh, declared the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. From an exile cell in 1925 to a newly born state, Communism had transformed into a dominant political force in Vietnam. The infiltration of Communism into Vietnam's politics in this infantile period was not only the growth of a political party but also the popularisation of a new world view, a new pool of linguistic resources and meanings in order to solve the identity crisis that arose with colonisation in Vietnam. The communist discourse was introduced into the discursive space of Vietnam.

6.2. The Vietnamese Communist Discourse

It was in the establishment and growth of Communist organisations in Vietnam from 1925 that the Vietnamese communist discourse appeared. As a discourse, it strived to structure the dislocated society in a unity and to provide the Vietnamese with subject positions in their identity crisis. The Communist discourse was organised through the erection of the nodal point 'revolution', the construction of social antagonism as the French colonialism and capitalist classes. Besides the national myth which has been articulated in previous anti-colonial discourses, the communist discourse added the myth of socialism as principles to 'read' the current situation of the Vietnamese as class exploitation.

The socialist myth supplemented the national myth in bring the social antagonism against the French to the Vietnamese peasants and workers. The French were articulated not only to be the national enemy that was plotting to kill the Vietnamese people in general, but also to be the capitalist enemy whose nature was to exploit the working class in particular. Although the socialist myth installed internal boundary within the Vietnamese nation as Vietnamese bourgeoisie and landowners were also seen as enemies of the peasants and workers, it demarcated a stronger boundary between a Vietnamese nation and the French colonists. The socialist myth functioned to represent the totality of a complete and happy society that the revolution would lead to in Vietnam if the people took up their identification routes provided in the Vietnamese Communists' political project. The entire political project of the Vietnamese

communists was defined as a revolution (kách mệnh or cách mạng in Vietnamese), which meant the process of building a better life. The Vietnamese people were invited to read their existing experiences as being oppressed and miserable and identify the French colonialism and other capitalist classes within the Vietnamese population as the cause of these problems.

The Nodal Point: Revolution

‘Revolution’ functioned as the nodal point of the communist discourse in this infancy period of communism in Vietnam. Nodal points are ‘the privileged discursive points’ or ‘privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain’ (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 112). The entire political project of the Youth League and the ICP was not an act of rebellion against the existing government but defined as a revolution. Participants in the political project of the Vietnamese communists were termed revolutionaries, rather than nationalist nor communists nor Vietnamese.

In the first half of the 1920s, the Vietnamese people were left to their own device to define what the word ‘revolution’ meant (Ho, 1992: 171). However, Nguyen Ai Quoc had successfully filled this concept with the meaning which later became the dominant understanding in Vietnam. In *The Road to Revolution* (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online), he defines: ‘revolution means to destroy the old for the new, to demolish the bad for the good’. For this man, the fight against the French was more than just a struggle to liberate the nation, but a revolution to build a new Vietnam. ‘A revolutionary is not only a rebel who destroys, but also a builder who constructs a new society’ (Huynh, 1982: 82-83). Since *The Road to Revolution*, there was no more debate on the meaning of revolution. Nguyen Ai Quoc’s definition had been naturalized as taken-for-granted conceptualisation of revolution. This definition articulated the word ‘revolution’ with progress and improvement although its literal meaning in Vietnamese is only to change the fate. Revolution (cách mạng) and revolutionaries (chiến sỹ cách mạng) were fixed with the positive progressive connotations in the communist discourse. In this discourse, attacking the colonial government was no longer an act of a rebel or a patriotic but of a revolutionary.

Revolution was translated into Vietnamese as ‘kách mệnh’ at the time (as used in Nguyen Ai Quoc’s *The Road to Revolution*), which was later and still now popularly used as ‘cách mạng’. The popular interpretation of ‘kách mệnh’ or ‘cách mạng’ in the existing literature on Vietnam is changing the Mandate of Heaven (Ho, 1992: 171). Here, I offer a different

interpretation. In Vietnamese cosmology, people are born to have a fate dictated by supernatural forces and this fate can be told from some intrinsic details such as the date and time of the birth of yourself or your parents, or your appearance. However, if you know the fate and the corresponding cosmological details that govern it, you can change the fate. Going to fortune tellers to find out your fate and to avoid bad luck is still a popular custom of the Vietnamese. ‘Cách mạng’ or ‘kách mệnh’ literally means changing fate, the future that you are destined to have because ‘mạnh’ or ‘mệnh’ literally means fate and ‘kách’ or ‘cách’ means ‘to change’.

However, in *The Road to Revolution*, ‘cách mạng’ was not simply to change the destined future, but to change a future which is destined to be bad for a much better future. The necessity and significance of revolution was produced on the reading principle that the existing situation was bad and the post-revolution society would be a much improved one. Therefore, the first step toward a revolution was to ‘let the people know’ that their existing life was miserable and needed to be changed. In the words of Nguyen Ai Quoc (1927: online), the purpose of his pamphlet was to ‘awaken the people, making them stand up and join forces in doing revolution’. Both the national myth and the socialist myth in the communist discourse were doing this task.

The ‘road’ to revolution in the Vietnamese communist discourse was introduced through the concept of oppression. Its meaning is constructed in its relation to oppression. In the tradition of Lenin’s *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *The Road to Revolution* constructed the existing situation of the Vietnamese workers and farmers as being oppressed.

Oppression breeds Revolution, thus the more oppressed one person is the more revolutionary and the more determined one is. Before the capitalists were oppressed, so they did Revolution. Nowadays, the capitalists are oppressing workers and farmers, therefore workers and farmers are the owners of the Revolutionary:

1. Because workers and farmers are more heavily oppressed,
2. Because workers and farmers are the majority so their power is highest,

Because workers and farmers have nothing, if they lose they only lose a miserable fate, if they win, they have the whole world, so they are brave. Because of these reasons, workers and farmers are the roots of the Revolution; students, small businessmen and small landowners, though also being oppressed, are not as deprived as workers and farmers; these three groups are only revolutionary friends of workers and farmers. (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online)

In the Vietnamese communist discourse, social antagonism was constructed in the reading of the Vietnamese's ongoing experiences as being oppressed. The Vietnamese mass were invited to read their existing life as miserable and oppressed. The communist discourse articulated oppression at two levels: the nation and class. At the level of the nation, the Vietnamese people were pictured as oppressed by the French as a whole. At the level of class, the Vietnamese working people, especially the peasants and workers were portrayed as exploited by not only the French but also some components within the Vietnamese people. The construction of the oppression at these two levels corresponds to two myths which were articulated in the communist discourse in this early period: the national myth and the socialist myth. The myth of the nation identified the French colonisers as the enemy and introduced the national/Vietnamese subject position to act for national independence from the French rule. The myth of socialism provided the class/socialist subject position, inviting people to act towards building a socialist society.

The Myth of the Nation

The first myth in the communist discourse was the national myth, which invited the Vietnamese people to identify with the nation which was being threatened by the French colonialism. This myth strived to represent a seemingly unity of the Vietnamese people and the totality of Vietnam as a country in the very construction of the French colonialism as social antagonism and national enemies. French colonialism was constructed as 'a conspiracy' (Torfing, 1999: 193) against the Vietnamese nation and its people. Driving out the French for national independence was articulated to be the only way for the survival of the Vietnamese people. People were invited to read the French colonialism as blocking the collective identity of themselves as the Vietnamese people.

The national myth told the story of a country that was being destroyed by the French, its people were being exploited and oppressed. Vietnamese people were invited to read their existing life under the colonial rule as miserable as the fate of animals. French colonialism was read as a vicious plan of the French to kill the Vietnamese people and rob their belongings.

The French imperial in the masks of 'civilization', 'enlightenment' used warships, cannons to conquer our country brutally and violently. They fired our cities. They burned our home countryside. They raped our compatriots. They robbed our wealth. They grabbed our country to make their colony. They enslaved our 20 million people in the fate of horses and buffalos. Imperialism robbed our country with the sole purpose of enriching themselves. They sneaked

all our farm land. They controlled our forest and mines. They kept all sea ports. They took all rivers. They had all commercial rights. They owned all production modes. They inflict increasingly higher taxes... All our country's wealth, all our peoples' sweat and tears are all drawing into their hands (The Youth League, 1929a: online).

The French were presented as a negative force that was threatening the Vietnamese identity. The chain of equivalence was established among the Vietnamese people via-a-vis this negative force. All their particularities and differences were cancelled out in the construction of the French as the common enemy. The Vietnamese people were constituted as a group of unified people because they all shared the same experience of being exploited and robbed by the French. In the very representation that the Vietnamese country and its belonging were robbed, the Vietnamese country came to be constituted with its belongings in the imagination of the readers. As most of the readers have never seen other national fellows and never known what their country has or is, so things that 'belong' to the nation in constitution and the 'existence' of other fellows had to be 'talked' or 'written' into existence. The above quotation is doing exactly this task, which is to tell the audience about all the national things and national fellows that they had never seen.

Moreover, the seeming unity of the nation was also facilitated by the use of deixis words like 'our' and 'they' (Billig, 1995: 94). While 'our' involved the sense of belonging to this imagined national unity, 'they' (chúng in Vietnamese) invoked the imagination of the enemies and the separation and hatred against them.

The French were represented to be the enemy whose presence in Vietnam meant the extinction of the Vietnamese people. Fighting the French was reasoned to be the only way for the Vietnamese to survive. The French were fixed to be an absolute other to the Vietnamese self, to be a public enemy to be exterminated. Schmitt (2007: 67) identifies these moments in which the enemy is recognized as the enemy 'the high points of politics'. This is because by facing the friend-enemy extinction, we will be able to be clear about what we and what is rational for us to do (ibid).

France grabbed all our properties, prevented us from doing this and that, they forced our people to use heroin and drink wine. England was only greedy of American money, France

was not greedy, but also wanted to erase the Annam¹¹ breed. (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online).

The rational thing to do is to kill the French or drive them out of the country as not doing this is the end of the Vietnamese people. In this creation of the French enemy, overthrowing the colonial government meant the patriotic act of liberating the nation and the Vietnamese people. Liberating the nation from colonial rule was presented as the only way to solve the ongoing problem of oppression and national independence was the end to all the hardships that the Vietnamese people were enduring. In telling the story of a country being raped by the national enemy, the national myth recruits national subject into the political project of overthrowing the colonial government.

The only way to survival of Indochinese nations is to overthrow French imperialism, fighting all foreign invasion regardless of white or yellow races to gain national independence. If the French are still here, Indochinese people will die. If the French imperialism collapses, Indochinese people will survive (ICP, 1939a: online).

The association between the French colonialism and the oppression of the Vietnamese, the loss of the country was an existing discursive strategy of previous Vietnamese anti-colonial generations. Phan Boi Chau and Nguyen An Ninh had long constructed the French as the public enemy of the Vietnamese as a whole. However, it was in the Communist discourse that another level of oppression was introduced: class oppression. It was in the communist discourse that the Vietnamese mass, especially peasants and workers as sub-groups in the Vietnamese population, were specifically invited to read their ongoing experiences as being oppressed. The socialist myth was introduced to solve the problem of oppression at the class level.

The Myth of Socialism: Bring the Mass In.

This myth of socialism was created in the construction of social antagonism as class oppression: working class versus capitalist class or the proletariat versus the bourgeoisie. Class exploitation was presented as the cause of societal dislocation alongside national exploitation. In locating social antagonism at the level of class, class was constituted as a natural subgroup. Capitalist classes or the bourgeoisie became the enemies of the working class. As belonging to the capitalist world, the French colonisers became the class enemy of the Vietnamese working

¹¹ French colonisation divided Vietnam into three parts: Tonkin for the North, Annam the Central and Cochinchina the South. However, in the Youth League's documents, Annam indicates the whole Vietnam, not a specific part of the country.

class. While the national myth constructed the French as a general national enemy of the Vietnamese people, the socialist myth constructed the French as the enemy of the working class. Social antagonism against the French was brought closer to the Vietnamese peasants and workers. The Vietnamese mass were constructed as the cause, the main actors and the primary beneficiaries of the communists' political struggle. The socialist myth made the discursive grounds for the peasants and workers to enter the political realm and made the national identification more accessible.

The socialist myth strived to create class identities and recruited subject for a socialist revolution to erase all forms of class exploitation. This socialist myth was backed up with representations of a two-pole world divided along the line separating between capitalism and socialism, and of the socialist Soviet Union as the ideal complete society where there is no class exploitation.

The class identity and the concept of class itself were constructed in the construction of the social antagonism of class exploitation. In the reading of the ongoing experience of workers and peasants as exploited by the capitalist, peasants and workers were constituted as one unified group of working class people. The common character among them was being oppressed by the capitalists. In the communist discourse, Vietnamese peasants and workers were constructed as a unified class, the working class, in the very construction of their experience as being exploited by the capitalists.

With the socialist myth, Vietnamese communists strived to go beyond the elitist tendency of previous anti-colonial projects to involve the mass in their revolution. It is not only the Vietnamese in general which are being oppressed but also the Vietnamese peasants and workers in particular who are being exploited and being the most exploited within the Vietnamese population. Although the socialist myth constructed internal antagonism among the Vietnamese, it supplemented the national myth in bringing the antagonism against the French closer to the Vietnamese mass. As the capitalists, the French colonisers were not only the national enemy but also the class enemy of the Vietnamese peasants and workers.

In was in the communist discourse that the first discursive link between the existing life of Vietnamese workers and peasants, which was otherwise normal everyday occurrence, with oppression was made. Marr (1981: 27) commented that before the 1930s, the majority of poor peasants were happy with the patron-client relationship with landlords, who lent money out

and let peasants till their land. It was under the influence of Communism that the idea that ‘the landlord might have stolen the land and money from the tillers’ took hold (ibid). In Marxist terms, the being oppressed of the workers and peasants needed to be explained, otherwise they would not be conscious of. Workers and peasants were oppressed because they worked hard but received nothing, the capitalists did not work but earned lots. These statements were presented as facts with specific figures and real-life evidence. With these arguments, the communist discourse introduced the reading of the experience of workers and peasants as being oppressed.

In the world, there are two classes:

A. The capitalists (not working but benefited).

B. Workers and peasants (working hard but receiving nothing)

An Annam worker, working in Hon Gay cold mine for 11 hours a day, from the beginning of the year and the end, he earns only 3 cents a day, does not have enough food and clothes, has no medicines at pain, no coffin at death.

By contrast, the owner of the mine never touches his hand in any work, however, he has plenty of food and clothes, travels by horse and cars, earns tens of millions of dongs in profit (in 1925 he gained 17000000 dong). Let’s ask who generated this 17 million dongs, the Western owner or the Annam worker? While our peasants do not have field to farm, Western plantations takes up 122000 acres of fertile fields in the Central Region and 150000 acres in the South.

Our people do not have enough to eat, many starve to death in some places while plantation owners sell rice for nearly 1000 million francs (in 1925 they sold rice for 911,477,000 franc). (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online)

Interestingly, the oppressors of the Vietnamese mass were not only the French colonisers and the feudal court but also their fellow Vietnamese, who had lived with them in the same rural village for generations - the landlords.

Annamite people are exploited and oppressed by the French imperialism, and by Annamite capitalist landowners and feudal court... The class of capitalists and landowners is the class oppressing workers and peasants... The Feudal court and its mandarins are only the French imperialism’ tools in oppressing and exploiting Annamite people. (Youth League, 1929b: online)

The division between capitalism and the working class were articulated to be growing at an international level. The view of a world with two opposing camps is ubiquitous in the discourse of the Vietnamese Communists in this period. Thorough the period, capitalism was depicted as falling deeper into crisis and impending war, while socialism was increasingly successful in Soviet Union. Capitalism was linked with economic crisis, violent war and

fascism. Socialism was embodied in the image of Soviet Union, which was associated with peace, wealth and happiness.

In the imperial world, the biggest ones are America and England. America is the strongest but only has one colony, the Philippines. America is embracing the plan to sell the whole globe, to rob other countries' colonies. England has the most colonies and was the previous world owner. England hates America because of being bullied by the latter. They are competing to own the world... Japan, being powerful with a large population, wants to rob colonies. But wherever it goes, it was fiercely competed by England and America, so Japan wants to fight America... All imperialists want to divide China as China has a lot of resources and a big population... When the world's strongest imperialists are at war, all other countries will be drawn in, one country can stand neutral. The whole globe will turn into a war battle. (VCP, 1930g: online)

In the Soviet Union, there is no economic crisis, no unemployment. In capital countries, the current technological production decreased by 25% in 1929, while Soviet's is developing incredibly, in 1934 it is four times higher than in 1913, twice in 1930... All farmers have enough to eat and to dress, people's literacy soars up, there is nobody illiterate. Tsar's Russia used to be a cell imprisoning over 180 weak ethnicities, the success of the October revolution freed them from the fate of horses and buffalos, they are consolidating socialism with the Russian proletariat to overcome difficulty periods in the development of capitalism. (ICP, 1935: online)

While 'in the capitalist society, war is inevitable' (VCP, 1930f: online), the Soviet Union was described as 'the heaven of working people and the fortress of world peace' (ICP, 1939b: online). In the mid1930s, capitalism was even linked with fascism and fascism was explained to be an extreme stage of capitalism in time of crisis. Fascism was the more authoritarian and stronger rule in order to restore collapsing capitalism in some countries. 'Fascism is the violent ruling form... of the most reactionary, national and imperial elements of financial capitalists' (ICP, 1935: online). The French fight against Germany, which was interpreted as supporting democracy in the popular front period, was now explained as to target the Soviet Union.

... the imperial France did not rush into the war with the purpose of fighting Hitler and eradicating 'German quoc xa', nor with the goal of 'supporting democracy and small European in the struggle against Hitler's invasion'. On the contrary, it stormed into the war in order to turn the war among imperial countries into the war against Soviet Union, to demolish French democracy ..., to dissolve the French Communist Party, to crack down revolutionary propaganda of French proletariat and to turn small European countries into semi-colonies of England and France, and after all to preserve its market by violence. (ICP, 1940a: online)

As part of this capitalist system, the French government in Vietnam was not only colonial, but also capitalist. As capitalists, they were war-like in nature and deemed to be

worsening. The improvement from its economic crisis in the mid-1930s was said to be only temporary and it would never lead to prosperity. Reform policies like amnesty migration, loan, relief organisations of the colonial government were termed bogus, serving the only goal of softening the anger of people and building more allies and supporters. After capitalism was linked with fascism in the mid-1930s, the French were directly juxtaposed with fascism toward the end of the decade.

At present, the situation has grown completely different, the French imperialist is the instigator of the imperial international war. The rule of Daldie's government has turned totally reactionary. The control of colonies, especially Indochina, is a clear fascist military regime and the plot to surrender Japanese fascists has put Indochinese nations in face with matters of life and death. (ICP, 1935: online)

Other nationalist groups, even including the communist groups of trotskyites were said to be part of fascism. 'Supporters of democratic society and trotskyites are loyal servants of imperialism, clearing the way for fascists to power, helping fascism and are themselves becoming fascist' (ibid).

By depicting the reality in this way, Vietnamese people were forcefully drawn into the socialist camp and the political project of the ICP because this was the only way they could survive. Having the French stay in Vietnam or building a capitalist country in the model of the French would mean turn Vietnam into a slaughterhouse and war battle. By introducing a happy, equal and wealthy Soviet Union, the audience was introduced to the spectacle of the idealized fullness that they will achieve if they support the political project of the Vietnamese Communists. The image of the Soviet Union worked to increase the reality and feasibility of their political project as it had been actualized somewhere else even though the reference was only one in words. Not only was the Soviet Union on the side of the Vietnamese revolution, but also the proletariat in other countries all over the world including France. The imagination of international support and solidarity made the communist-led revolution in Vietnam appear universal and more rational.

There are two identification projects or myths going on the communist discourse in this early period: the national myth and the socialist myth. The Vietnamese people as a nation were constructed in opposition to the French colonists and the peasants and workers were constituted as a unified working class in opposition to the French capitalists and other native oppressing capitalist classes. At the same time, people of different backgrounds and interests were made

to appear in a unity with the shared experiences as being oppressed and having the same enemy. All the differences in terms of jobs, backgrounds, regions, ethnicities and religions were cancelled out to forge the image of a unified group of the oppressed people. The battle to define who were the oppressed and who was not was essentially the battle to shape the kind of the Vietnamese identity that Vietnamese Communists were constructing. It is because the separating line between the oppressed and the oppressors was not essential but constituted in discourse. The communist discourse was confusing itself between the national myth and social myth in demarcating the frontiers or boundaries of the collective identity it was constructing. However, in the early period, the socialist myth appeared to be dominant over the national myth.

6.3. The Dominance of the Socialist Myth

In the Vietnamese Communist discourse in this early period, there were two myths in operation at the same time. While the national myth invested in national identities to liberate the country, the socialist myths invested in class identities to do a land revolution or a social revolution. These were two identification projects which demarcated the collective identity along different lines. While the national myth excluded only the French outside its ethnical boundary, the socialist myth made a proportion inside the Vietnamese people, the capitalist class and the feudal landlords, enemies. In the period from 1925 to the early 1940s, the socialist myth was more dominant in the Vietnamese communist discourse. The ICP claimed to represent the oppressed working people, not the whole Vietnamese people. The oppressed working people, especially the peasants and workers, were conceptualised as specific subgroups within the Vietnamese nation. The revolutionary force was conceptualized as only of the oppressed working people. Although the communists made the effort to involve the mass into its political project, this very effort alienated them from other segments of the Vietnamese population, preventing the communists from achieving any considerable results throughout the 1930s. While the socialist myth was in dominance in this early period of the communist discourse, the national cause to overthrow the yoke of French colonialism was in a stalemate. Except for the Soviet Nghe Tinh movements in 1930 and 1931, there was no major challenge to the colonial authority in the 1930s.

From 1925 to 1941, the Vietnamese Communists consistently claimed to represent the working people or the property-less class, not the Vietnamese people in general. The VCP was self-proclaimed to be ‘the party of the property-less class’ (VCP, 1930e: online) and ‘the

vanguard of the property-less force' (VCP, 1930b: online). Although the aim of the revolution was defined as two tasks: anti-imperialism and land revolution (1930a: online). Anti-imperialism meant the fight against the French for national liberation. Land revolution involved the fight against landowners and the relocation of land to peasants to build socialism or communism. However, the ultimate goal of the Vietnamese Communists was to emancipate these oppressed people by building a communist society. Fighting the French for national liberation was mentioned as one of the tasks of the revolution, but was never prioritized over the socialist revolution.

The Youth League is a revolutionary group representing working Annamite people, leading those people to fight with the ruling class... in order to destroy the present unequal society and to build a society, in which every has to work, has their basic needs met, have freedom and equality, which is communism (Youth League, 1929b: online).

The Vietnamese Communist Party is organized to lead the miserable working people in a class struggle to eradicate imperialist capitalism and implement communism. (VCP, 1930c: online)

The Party is the vanguard of the worker's class... The Party is an organised group of the property-less class. The purpose of Communists is to build a new society to replace capitalism, which is the source of hunger, oppression and war, in order to have peace and freedom. (ICP, 1939c: online)

The communist discourse brought the working class or the property-less class to the core of revolution and pushed the bourgeoisie and some other classes to the margin. Their fate was subject to discursive forces. Although the Youth League and the Vietnamese Communist Party represented other classes as potential friends of the revolution, the ICP articulated them as being enemies. The Youth League list students, small businessmen and small landowners as revolutionary friends. In the unification conference in March 1930, which led to the foundation of the Vietnamese Communist Party, landowners and bourgeoisie were divided into subgroups which could be neutralized or drawn into the revolutionary side.

Because workers and farmers have nothing, if they lose they only lose a miserable fate, if they win, they have the whole world, so they are brave. Because of these reasons, workers and farmers are the roots of the Revolution; students, small businessmen and small landowners, though also being oppressed, are not as deprived as workers and farmers; these three groups are only revolutionary friends of workers and farmers. (Nguyen Ai Quoc, 1927: online)

The Party has to make its best to liaise with petty bourgeoisie, intelligentsia, middle peasants, the Youth, Tan Viet, etc... in order to draw them into the side of the proletariat class. Regarding the upper peasants, middle and small landowners and Annam bourgeoisie who we

are not sure of their anti-revolutionary face, we need to exploit and then make them neutral. (VCP, 1930d: online)

In October the same year, at the first formal Congress of the Central Committee, when the Party was renamed to the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), all landowners and bourgeoisie were articulated to be oppressing people, to be anti-revolutionary. They now became enemies to be destroyed.

Regarding landowners, it is unclear and is not right in some points, like the division of landowners into big, middle and small groups. With the big, it is to confiscate their land, with the other two, the strategy is to take advantage, or make them neutral. This is wrong and dangerous. Landowners is a class who don't participate in farming, don't live the way of farmers, but only use land to collect rents, which means oppressing and exploiting the latter. Despite having hundreds of acres of lands or 5 to 7 thousands, they all belong to the class of the landowners, meaning enemies of farmers, which necessitates the need to uproot and confiscate all their land. You, comrades, often don't understand the meaning of landowners, resulting in mistakes in dealing with farmers...

Regarding the bourgeoisie, the strategy asks to take advantage of those bourgeoisie who are not clear about their anti-revolutionary face. The existence of this group is acknowledged, however, it is not possible to take advantage of them. They all side with (cai luong) nationalists, of whose influence over people the party has to destroy (using their unclear attitudes towards imperialists and landowners and peasant-worker alliance to unveil their face). Saying it is to neutralise them means telling the Party not to make workers fight with native bourgeoisie. Our Party cannot have that strategy. (ICP, 1930b: online)

In this discursive move, peasants' struggle for land became an indispensable component of the revolution. Both French imperialists and native landowners reportedly joined force in oppressing the Vietnamese peasants (ICP, 1931: online). Adding land struggle to the revolution would reportedly enhance the scope and scale of the mass movements.

The revolutionary movement in our country has always emphasized primarily on the fight against the French imperialism, against heavy taxes and rural oppression. The land struggle, especially the fight against the native landowners has just begun. However, there are now signs to link the two movements together. This will widen the scale and enhance the power of the mass movement a thousand time. Moreover, it has now come to the point that without igniting peasants' struggle for land, the whole revolution, including the anti-imperialist struggle, would risk ceasing or even deteriorating. (ICP, 1931: online)

As land struggle is considered part of the socialist revolution to eradicate class operation, at the same time the bourgeoisie and the landlord were being excluded, the socialist myth was becoming increasingly dominant. This corresponded to a nation-wide peasant-worker

movement called ‘Soviet Nghe Tinh movement’ which persisted for more than a year and involved twenty-four provinces (Huynh, 1982: 151). The revolutionary upsurge started with large-scale workers’ strikes in all three regions in the beginning of 1930 and reached its apex when red villages, or soviets, were set up in several rural districts of Nghe An and Ha Tinh provinces in Annam in September the same year. Led by communist carders, life in the soviets was reorganised economically, politically and socially (ibid, 155-159). A number of pro-poor policies like land reallocation, tax reduction and rice distribution were carried out. By mid-1931, the movement was getting increasingly revolutionized and violent. Pagodas were burned and houses of reactionary landlords were sacked. The slogan of the day was: ‘Those intellectuals, rich people, landlords, and notables; Let us dig them out at the stump, pull them out at the root’ (Trí, phú, địa, hào: đào tận gốc, trốc tận rễ) (ibid: 158). This was the largest-scale and the second riot openly against the French rule since the turn of the century after the uprisings in Quang Nam and Phu Yen in 1908. However, the Soviet movement did not result in a nationwide rebellion and brutal French response quickly cracked it down. 90% of the Communist leadership ended in prison and it was not until 1933 that it was able to revive (Duiker, 1981: 41).

Nghe Tinh Soviet movement did not only lead to the ICP’s nearly collapse after the colonial government’s brutal crackdowns but also resulted in a long-lasting disaffection of urban petty-bourgeoisie with communism (Huynh, 1982: 161). Until the end of the decade, the ICP did not achieve much success in increasing its popularity among urban intellectuals despite its changed policy towards a popular front in the second half of the 1930s. In spring 1936, a government of the Popular Front assumed power in France, who adopted a much more open attitude towards political activities in colonial countries. The ICP moved to operate in the open and openly asked for cooperation with all other parties and political groups. The Indochinese anti-imperial unified popular Front (Mặt trận thống nhất Đông dương chống đế quốc) was set up in the 1936 Conference to include a broad base of the people in demanding for democratic rights.

The anti-imperial nationalist Front is to become the most open organisation of the broad mass. The front is to include all parties (like nationalist revolutionary parties and other parties), theatrical nationalist parties like the Constitutionlists and other groups, mass organisations, associations of sportsmen, students, journalists, lawyers and writers, etc. In summary, the anti-imperial nationalist Front is made up of all parties and strata of the peoples, regardless of their nationalities, French or Vietnamese or Laotian or members of ethnic minorities, as long

as they agree to fight for those demands raised above.
(ICP, 1936c: online)

In line with this move to a more popular front, the ICP wrote a series of propaganda letters to other political parties and the people asking for cooperation. The receivers were addressed as comrades, brothers and sisters and fellow countrymen. ‘The ICP request all parties to leave behind misunderstandings in the past to concentrate your every force in the anti-imperial movement’ (ICP, 1936d: online). Under the changed guidelines of the Comitern set out in the VII Congress, a milder tone was noted against the French colonial government and the focus of the ICP’s struggle was changed to the promotion of democratic rights. Although no major achievement was gained in terms of the confrontation with the colonial government, this period was the vital time when the ICP made itself known and popular among the people’s mass. Moving to operate in public, calling to unite with other political groups, carrying banners closer to the people’s basic needs had ‘brought the ICP into the mainstream of Vietnamese politics’ (Duiker, 1981: 55). In late August 1939, Russia signed a peace pact with Germany while France and England declared war with Hitler on September 3rd the same year. The Nazi-Soviet pact lead to immediate repressing actions by Governor-general Catroux towards the Communist Party. The ICP was declared illegal and its newspapers were closed down. The Party retreated to the countryside.

Conclusion

The Vietnamese communist discourse was an attempt to organize the dislocated society into a structured totality. The national myth continued in the steps of previous anti-colonial discourses to constitute French colonialism as a national plot to kill the Vietnamese people and to destroy the Vietnamese nation. Ongoing experiences of the Vietnamese were read as being oppressed by the French colonists. However, the communist discourse ‘detected’ another cause of the reported miseries of the Vietnamese people: class exploitation which occurred not only between the French and the Vietnamese but also within the Vietnamese population. In the communist discourse, the French became a double enemy of the Vietnamese working class: the national enemy and the class enemy. In return, the social antagonism of the Vietnamese mass was constructed not only against the French but also against other segments within the Vietnamese population. ‘Annamites were oppressed and exploited not only by the French imperialism, but also Annamite landlords, capitalists and other feudal forces at another level’ (Youth League, 1929b: online). While the communist discourse put the workers and farmers

at the core of the revolution, other classes within the Vietnamese population were subjected to the shifting of the boundary of the collective identity that the communists were forging. While the bourgeoisie and the landlords, were considered possible allies of the revolution in the period of the Youth League and the Vietnamese Communists Party, they were defined as enemies in the period of the ICP. The enemies of the revolution were identified as not only the French colonists, but also the Vietnamese feudal court and capitalist classes. This means the feudal court and the capitalist class, regardless of whether they were Vietnamese or not, were to be pushed outside the collective identity being forged in the communist-led revolution.

With the socialist myth, Vietnamese communists went beyond the elitist tendency of previous anti-colonial projects to involve the mass in their revolution. It is not only the Vietnamese in general which are being oppressed but also the Vietnamese peasants and workers in particular who are being exploited and being the most exploited within the Vietnamese population. Although the socialist myth constructed internal antagonism among the Vietnamese, it supplemented the national myth in bringing the antagonism against the French closer to the Vietnamese mass. As the capitalists, the French colonisers were not only the national enemy but also the class enemy of the Vietnamese peasants and workers.

Although both the national myth and the socialist myth were in operation in the communist discourse, the myth of socialism occupied a dominant role until the first years of the 1940s. The World War II and the march of the Japanese into Indochina in 1940 saw a discursive shift in the Vietnamese communist towards the proliferation of the national myth. In the 8th plenum of the Central Committee in May 1941, the ICP asserted that the immediate task of the revolution was to liberate the nation and called to temporarily drop land slogans in exchange for more modest slogans of reducing interest and rent, and reallocating farming land (ICP, 1941: online). From this point on, class struggle in socialist myth was gradually muted to serve the transformation of the national myth into a social imaginary.

Chapter 7: The Nation: From Myth to a Social Imaginary

Introduction

France's surrender to Japan in Indochina attacked France's civilizing discourse to its core, further disrupting the discursive articulation of France as Vietnam's protector and civiliser. Since Japan marched into Indochina in 1940, an important discursive change occurred in the Vietnamese communist discourse. The socialist myth was no longer prioritized as in the 1930s and the national myth was becoming dominant. The ICP created an anti-colonial united front for national independence entitled the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Việt Nam Độc Lập Đồng Minh Hội - Viet Minh) in the 8th plenum of the Party's central committee in 1941 and operated under its auspice¹². The bourgeoisie, the landlords and other political groups, which used to be seen as enemies in the early 1930s, were now redrawn into the collective revolutionary identity constructed in the communist-led revolution. The proletariat was told to leave aside their class interest for the benefit of the nation. The nation and the proletariat were still seen as separate entities with different interest that might conflict with each other.

A series of dislocations occurring in Vietnam during the Japanese occupation, especially the devastating hunger in 1944 and 1945, gave rise to the conditions for a successful association between national independence and individual survival, enabling the transfer the national myth into a social imaginary. While the colonial authority, the Nguyen dynasty and other political groups stayed ignorant, the ICP and its Viet Minh recognized the political implications of the famine. The famine rendered the discursive equalisation between the struggle for national independence and the struggle to survive in the national myth more persuasive and natural. In leading the people to fight the colonial authority for hunger relief, the popularity of Viet Minh was significantly increased in the aftermath of the famine.

By August 1945, in the political vacuum left by the disarrayed Japanese in Indochina at Japan's surrender to the Allies, the ICP-led Viet Minh waged an insurrection and took power from the colonial government. On September 2nd when Ho Chi Minh, the name that Nguyen Ai Quoc was known then, proclaimed the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and read the independence declaration in front of tens of thousands of Vietnamese people in

¹² In this study, Viet Minh and their writings are seen as part of the communist discourse.

Ba Dinh square in Hanoi, the national myth was widely circulated among the Vietnamese people, marking its ongoing transfer into a social imaginary whereby national independence was taken for granted as the indispensable conditions for the survival of the Vietnamese people. A Vietnamese nation had now been formed with a name, other national symbols like flags and anthems and a government for its people to be identified with. Another element contributed to this transfer was the discursive frame that the communist discourse used to interpret Vietnamese's actions in joining Viet Minh. Despite of various motives the Vietnamese might have had in fighting the colonial government in mind, their actions were interpreted and cast firmly as national acts of fighting the national enemy for Vietnam's independence. Actions of hunger relief, such as storming the rice granaries of the colonial government, were framed into a national struggle in the communist discourse. After the August revolution, the nation had already figured largely as a social imaginary in Vietnam's discursive space. The young national imaginary was further consolidated by the return of the French. The presence of the French inside the country provided the continuation of the others against which the national imaginary became more viable.

This chapter analyses this process whereby the national myth was transformed into a national imaginary in Vietnam. It is consisted of four sections. The first one set the scene of the dislocated Vietnam during the Japanese occupation in the early 1940s when the national myth was becoming dominant over the socialist myth in the communist discourse. As the class struggle was muted, the bourgeoisie and the landowners were brought back in the communist-led revolution in this national stage. The second section provided the analysis of the process that the national myth became a social imaginary in which national independence was taken for granted as the indispensable condition for the Vietnamese people to survive. As the national imaginary took hold, Viet Minh increased its popularity as a united front which strived for a common national cause. The third section discussed how the young national imaginary was further strengthened as the French returned, providing the continuation of others against which the national imaginary became more viable. Although the class struggle was muted in the 1940s, the Vietnamese communist discourse well preserved the binary worldview which demarcated between a democratic and peaceful socialist front and a greedy and warlike capital front. The communist-led struggle for national independence in Vietnam was located in the universal struggle of the socialist front led by the Soviet Union for peace and democracy. The last section in this chapter discussed this binary worldview of the Vietnamese communists.

7.1. The Dominance of the National Myth

The Japanese occupation deteriorated the already bleak economic and social situation in colonial Vietnam. Further dislocations occurred, deepening the Vietnamese's feeling against the colonial government. Since the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee in May 1941, the ICP defined national liberation as the main task of its revolution at the time. The Plenum called to temporarily leave classes' interests and the land revolution aside to concentrate on the national cause. The frontiers of the revolutionary forces were shifted to include the bourgeoisie and landowners. The national myth was becoming dominant over the socialist myth in the communist discourse.

Japanese Occupation and Further Dislocations of the Vietnamese Society

In May/June 1940, Paris fell into the control of Nazi Germany and in September Japan started their occupation of France's Indochina. On the surface, French sovereignty in Indochina appeared not threatened as the Japanese left the colonial administration intact. However, beneath was a rapid decline of French power as the occupiers increased their demands for supplies and occupation costs. A large quantity of food stuff, natural resources and materials were to be supplied to Japan by the French. While French colonialism rendered Confucianism irrelevant and undermined the legitimacy of the monarchy, the Japanese occupation 'obliterated image of European colonial invincibility' (SarDesai, 2008: 56), lowering French power in the eyes of the Vietnamese. No longer would the Vietnamese look to the colonists with awe and as a desirable future model of their country.

The arrival of the Japanese into Vietnam contributed to strengthening the national myth in the communist discourse. While some political groups like Cao Dai and Hoa Hao in the South showed support to the new master, the communist discourse portrayed them as just another national enemy like the French colonists. The Japanese were represented as another exploitative Other in the same manner as the French were. The ICP described these Asians as robbers, who came only to have its share of the Indochinese market. Japan's banners of 'a prosperous great Asia' or 'Asia for Asians' was disrupted by the articulation of Japan as another exploiting colonial imperialist.

Japanese or Thai imperialism waged war in Indochina to divide Indochina and put it under an outrageous exploitation. Their plan, in this side or the other, is to turn the people into animals. Therefore, Japan's activities were not based on the racial spirits as Japanese robbers and the treasonable Cuong De noisily lectured. (ICP, 1940a: online)

Conquering Indochina, Japan has become the owner of the economy and the army, the master in politics and gradually longing to become the owner of the mental sphere as well... They destroyed shops, murdered people and raped women and girls. (ICP, 1941: online)

In the material sphere, Japanese occupation deteriorated the already depressing social and economic problem in colonial Vietnam. Peasants in some areas in the North were forced to stop cultivating rice but to plant industrial crops like peanuts and cotton. Instead of being exported, rice was confiscated and stored in granaries for Japanese troops. To make the matter worse, bad weather in 1944 had reduced significantly agricultural production in the North and the Centre. By the winter 1944 – 1945, famine struck rural areas in the North, resulting in the estimated 2 million deaths. In every ten Vietnamese, nearly one was suffering from hunger (Duiker, 1981: 83). For many people in early 1945, the immediate inconvenience became genuine hunger and their sense of survival. While both the French, the Japanese and the colonial government turned a blind eye on hunger and famine and other political parties did not view these social problems as political, the ICP behind its united front Viet Minh was the only force that demonstrated care and took concrete actions. They saw in the alleviation of hunger and famine the bridge to their national cause.

The Dominance of the National Myth

As the Japanese occupation of Indochina took place, a discursive shift occurred in the Vietnamese communist discourse which saw the temporary mutation of class struggle and an increasing dominance of the national cause. The task of national liberation was increasingly prioritized over the socialist revolution. In the call for national liberation, the communist discourse widened the political frontiers of the revolution to be the national boundaries. Landowners and the bourgeoisie were now included in the communist-led revolution. The national myth was taking over the socialist myth in the communist discourse.

In May 1941 the ICP's Central Committee convened the 8th plenum to put forward the prioritized agenda of a national liberation revolution. This was the first time since the unification conference in February 1930 that Nguyen Ai Quoc played an active role in an ICP's meeting after more than ten years of absence. In this 8th plenum, it was also the first time the Party defined national liberation as its number one priority. Only one year earlier, in the 7th Plenum the ICP still planned to implement two main tasks of the revolution, which were anti-imperialism and land issue, alongside with each other.

The anti-imperial revolution and the land revolution must be implemented at the same time, it is impossible to do one task first and the other after. Indochinese proletariat cannot crush imperialism without getting rid of native feudalism and landowners, without seizing land of imperialists, feudalists and reactionary landowners to give to peasants in order to draw peasants in participating in the anti-imperial revolution. On the other hand, it is impossible to defeat native feudalists, colonists, reactionary landowners without fighting simultaneously their guardians, without the cooperation of peasants in the anti-imperialist struggle of the proletariat. (ICP, 1940b: online)

However, the 8th plenum defined: ‘At the moment, our priority is national liberation, not land revolution’ (ICP, 1941: online). This move was tactical, rather than permanent. Land revolution is not to be deleted but only to be temporarily postponed. National liberation was articulated to be the necessary condition for the realization of class interests. Without national independence, the land issue would not be solved. At this stage, the nation was still conceptualized to be distinct from the proletariat and the interests of these two categories were viewed differently.

This does not mean that Indochinese property-less class forget their task about land, or step backwards, this only means that we are making a shorter step in order to have the energy for a longer move. At the moment, everyone should bear in mind that: if France and Japan are not to be driven away, our nation will bear the eternal fate of buffalos and horses and the land issue will not be able to resolved.... At the moment, the rights of groups and classes must be put under the right of the whole nation. (ICP, 1941: online)

In the move to prioritize national liberation, the ICP called for the cooperation of people from all different classes and political background into their struggle. While landlords and the bourgeoisie were not included in the revolutionary forces in the 1930 – 1935 period, they were now said to have changed attitudes and were eager to participate in the revolution. Classes of landowners and bourgeoisie were now said to possess revolutionary spirits, which meant they could now fight along the proletariat and peasants against colonialism. Other parties are also noted to have changed their attitude towards the revolution.

Petty bourgeoisie especially civil servants, small business owners and small landowners, as a result of the imperial exploitation and life hardships, are now enthusiastic to participate in and develop sharper sentiments to the revolution...

The class of landlords – rich peasants, and some part of the native bourgeois have greatly changed their attitude. Before they had an antipathy to revolution and wanted to destroy it, or were indifferent. Now it is different, except for a small number who serve the French, or flatter and fawn on the Japanese, the majority have now developed sympathy to the revolution or stay neutral. (ICP, 1941: online)

The social frontier of the collective identity constructed in the communist-led revolution was redrawn to include the bourgeoisie, the landlords, and other groups that used to be seen as enemies in the early 1930s. This was in sharp contrast with the discourse of the October 1930 1st Plenum of the temporal central committee, in which all landowners and bourgeoisie were not considered as friends, but enemies of the revolution. How did this happen in the matter of 11 years? The ICP used Marxist language that the material foundations caused by the double exploitation of the French and the Japanese had changed their ideologies or attitude towards the revolution. However, under the lenses of discourse, this move to include the petty bourgeoisie and the landlords into the revolutionary forces was the expansion of the logic of difference. The logic was that the bourgeoisie and the landlords were also exploited by the French and the Japanese so they shared the same antagonism so they could be in the same side with all the other exploited Vietnamese. It followed that if different groups shared the same enemy, they should all join the common revolution.

They are the people of the Indochina, regardless of their ethnicity and class. The task of fighting against the French and driving away the Japanese is not the private task of the proletariat and peasants alone, but a common task of the whole Indochinese people. (ICP, 1941: online).

The Political Resolution of the 8th plenum advised the dropping of Marxist terms to adopt the language that signified the nation.

We should not say opposing imperialism, but fighting France – Japan. We should not say opposing imperial wars but fighting invasion. We should say eradicating treasonable Vietnamese instead of Vietnamese feudal court and confiscating landowners' land, ... say unanimous cooperation to set up a democratic republic, not peasant-worker alliance to set up Soviets. (ICP, 1941: online).

In line with this political line, Nguyen Ai Quoc created the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh) with the agenda 'to associate all strata of the people regardless of their religion, party, political ideology, class in a cooperated fight to drive away the French and the Japanese to endow our land with the right to independence' (Viet Minh, 1941: online). Its post-independence program was to build a democratic republic, ensuring the benefits of all classes. Ideological concepts of capitalism, socialism, imperialism and class were absent in the language of Viet Minh. It was with Viet Minh that the national myth was transformed into a social imaginary in Vietnam's discursive space.

7.2. The Nation: From Myth to Social Imaginary

The national myth had long been articulated in previous anti-colonial generations in Vietnam and was reactivated in the communist discourse. As the Japanese occupation took place, the Vietnamese communists invested more on the national myth and founded the Viet Minh as a national united front dedicated solely to the task of national liberation. However, even with Viet Minh the national cause did not gain much support. It was until the widespread famine starting in October 1944 that the national myth began to take wider hold among the Vietnamese mass. Social and economic deteriorations under the Japanese occupation, especially this severe hunger and famine, provided ‘a relation of contiguity’ (Torfing, 1999: 112) between national survival and individual survival long articulated in the national myth. Rising against the colonists and looting their food banks brought survival to millions of Vietnamese being on the verge of starvation. The idea that national independence was a necessary precondition for the survival of the Vietnamese people began to take hold among the mass. Moreover, Viet Minh’s actions of hunger eradication, which showed their care about social problems and human suffering and the capacity to run society, ‘gave rise to a metonymical sliding’ (ibid), providing ‘the condition of possibility’ (ibid) for the discursive association between Viet Minh and the national cause. Although economic condition and physical events were part of the communist discourse, in the final instance it was in Viet Minh’s discursive acts of framing their organisations and actions in national terms that the national imaginary was constituted. Throughout 1944 and 1945, the Vietnamese people may have joined Viet Minh with different motives in fighting the colonist government. However, all such actions were cast in national terms, joining Viet Minh was interpreted as participating in the struggle for national independence. By August 1945, support for Viet Minh was widespread throughout the country and Viet Minh had successfully ousted the disarrayed Japanese in the political vacuum created by Japan’s defeat in the international fronts. By the time Ho Chi Minh read the Independence Declaration on September 2nd, the transformation from the national myth into a social imaginary had been in gear.

Famine, Viet Minh and the Beginning of the National Imaginary

The Popular Front Period in the second half of the 1930s had significantly spread the influence of communism in Vietnam but the ICP’s efforts to establish a united front with other political groups had gained no achievements. In early 1940s, the revolutionary feelings of the intellectuals and students were being inflamed, ‘but their passion was in general amorphous, unfocused and uncommitted to any particular party or program’ (Jamieson, 1995: 185). The

formation of Viet Minh was another attempt of the ICP in uniting Vietnamese people of all classes and social strata in overthrowing the colonial government. The ICP cast Viet Minh's calls in pure national terms, dropping all socialist ambitions. However, Vietminh did not achieve mass appeal until the eventful years of 1944 and 1945 when profound dislocations occurred as the result of the Japanese occupation. Faced with a severe famine that was reported to kill nearly 2 million people, Viet Minh led the hungry people to raid Japanese rice granaries and stop their rice transports from the South. Viet Minh's actions in famine alleviation significantly increased its popularity while the feeling against the Japanese, the French and Bao Dai's government was inflamed. Equalising the fight against the colonial government with hunger alleviation, the Vietnamese people were led into Viet Minh's national salvation associations. It was in Viet Minh's concrete actions to alleviate hunger that the national myth began to be transferred into a social imaginary.

The creation of Viet Minh was the ICP's attempt to unite all Vietnamese mass regardless of political views and social background in the fight against the two enemies: the French and the Japanese. A series of national salvation associations (*hội cứu quốc*) representing various groups in society, such as workers, peasants, students, women and writers, were created to enlist popular support and to channel directives to the mass. Viet Minh had its base in the north-western mountainous terrain of Viet Bac along the Chinese border. The local population of Viet Bac was mainly composed of ethnic minorities, who were promised with self-determination and affected by communist cadres who showed respect to and understanding of local customs. During the first years of its establishment, Viet Minh tide began to flood Viet Bac and turned the north-western highlands into a solid Communist revolutionary base. However, beyond Viet Bac, until late 1943 and early 1944, Viet Minh did not achieve much influence elsewhere (Duiker, 1981: 76). Many groups were still competing with each other in striving for a free and independent Vietnam (Jamieson, 1995: 180). Mobilisation among workers was not very successful. The colonial government's new labour policies of 8 hours a day and fair dismissal might have contributed to undercutting the Communist appeal among its supposed-to-be-the-core elements (*ibid*, 247). The urban petite-bourgeoisie or the urban intellectuals also appeared uninterested in Viet Minh's appeal.

In 1944, new situations moved to the favour of Vietminh's propaganda. The Second World War and double colonialism started to manifest their tolls upon the Vietnamese population. Commerce was badly hurt, taxes and war requisitions were high, unemployment

was widespread in the northern cities. Farming areas saw serious unrest as the result of government seizure of paddy rice fields. A devastating famine struck Northern villages, severe hunger hovered the Central region. Deaths were piled along the streets next to Japan's rice-full granaries. Peasants in their skeleton-like shape flocked to the cities to beg for food, selling or abandoning their children. People had to eat anything edible like tree roots and barks, to fill their empty stomachs. While the government and all other political groups took no action, Viet Minh was the only political group at the time which attempted to solve the problems of famine and hunger and had a concrete plan to alleviate the suffering. Viet Minh cadres mobilized people to store agricultural products against colonial orders, to storm Japanese rice granaries and French plantations. People were encouraged to join in Vietminh's national salvation associations to rise up for food. Joining Viet Minh's national salvation associations to fight the Japanese was articulated as the only solution to starvation. Viet Minh's 1945 call to stop famine read:

In order to stop the famine, everybody needs to join Vietminh's national associations, preparing swiftly for the coming chance to get rid of the Japanese invaders. Only when there are no Japanese soldiers left, can our people live a happy life. (Viet Minh, 1945a: online)

In an historic directive in March 1945, the ICP also underlined the strategy of linking demands for food and famine alleviation with their revolutionary cause.

Slogans for the struggle: link the slogans demanding food, opposing paddy and tax collection with the slogan of 'people's revolutionary authority'.

Methods of mobilization: make use of the famine to mobilize the masses and lead them to struggle (organise demonstrations to demand rice and food and to destroy the imperialists' granaries'. (ICP, 1945: online)

In the communist discourse, the national struggle was equalised first and foremost with the want for enough food to eat, enough clothes to wear (Viet Minh, 1945b: online). The Vietnamese were led into the so-called national salvation associations in the name of famine eradication before in national terms.

The communist discourse had long circulated this articulation, linking the fight against colonialism with the chance of survival. However, it was until this widespread famine that this articulation could have hailed the bulk of the Vietnamese mass, that national independence was fixed as the only way to survive and to have a better life. This marked the transfer of the nation from myth to a social imaginary. From this point on, national independence started to be taken for granted as the necessary condition for the survival and prosperity of the Vietnamese. In rising up to take the food from the colonial authority, people were being hailed by the discursive link between the issue of food and survival and the issue of national independence at the same

time. Any foreign government, whether it was the Western French or Asian Japanese, was fixed as an absolute other, as a non-inclusive enemy of the Vietnamese nation.

Ever since its early days, the ICP had been aware of the political significance of daily demands in its propaganda activities. ‘Our Party has to use everyday demand as the first step to lead the property-less class and peasants to the revolutionary battle’ (ICP, 1930a: online). ‘Our Party have to understand the material and daily needs of the mass, exploiting every opportunity to take them to the front’ (ICP, 1935: online). However, the Party had always been facing the risk of alienating other social classes while upholding the interest of workers and peasants. The Nghe Tinh Soviet movement in 1930 – 1931 was an example. After the Communist local administration ‘soviets’ were setting up the peasant movement took a violent turn under increasing government repression. The slogan of the day was: ‘Those intellectuals, rich people, landlords and notables; Let us dig them out at the stump, pull them out at the roots’ (Trí, phú, địa, hào; đào tận gốc, tróc tận rễ). This movement led the disaffection with communism among other social classes and political groups, who referred to the Communist menace (hoạ cộng sản). The unpopularity of the ICP remained throughout the 1930s despite attempts to create a united front in the Popular Front period.

The 1944 – 1945 famine presented the ICP with the opportunity to skip this chronic dilemma. This was when Viet Minh could materialize their care about the interests of the peasant mass without violating the interests of landlords and bourgeoisie. The famine brought Viet Minh a win-win situation, in which they managed to appeal to the peasant mass by taking concrete actions to alleviate hunger while still being able to improve its prestige among other social groups. By mid-spring 1945, all provinces in the North had had a Viet Minh organisation. In some areas, the actions did not just stop at breaking into the granaries for food stuff, but amounted to the establishment of ‘the people’s committees’ and ‘liberation committees’ to govern the local affairs before the August Revolution. ‘It is not an exaggeration to say that the campaign against the famine was largely possible for the Viet Minh to rise to power in Bac Ky and northern Trung Ky’ (Huynh, 1982: 314). By early 1944, Viet Minh’s appeal was still limited to its revolutionary base of Viet Bac. It was only in late 1944 and early 1945 when the famine reigned did Viet Minh’s influence begin to take hold among the peasants in other areas in the North and the Centre. Moreover, its influence was the most extensive in those places where the famine hid the hardest (ibid). In Cochin China, where famine did not occur, Viet Minh’s movement was relatively weak in rural areas.

During 1944, Viet Minh also achieved significant improvements in appealing to the urban intellectuals. The new generation of Vietnamese intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s

recognized the constraints of traditional Vietnamese customs, but at the same time felt inferior and humiliated by French colonialism. The association between national independence and the chance to regain their dignity was articulated in the discourse of radicalism in the 1920s (discussed in Chapter 5). The Second World War and the Japanese occupation since 1940 worsened their existing social and economic problems, deepening their dissatisfaction with colonial government, making the task of national independence more appealing. While in the 1920s and early 1930s, writers and poets experienced an upsurge in interest in the newly found Western values of individualism, they gradually developed the sense of disillusion and alienation with romanticism and individualism towards the end of the 1930s. The devastating situation unfolding in front of their eyes and the own worsening circumstance in first half of the 1940s added the sense of guilt with romanticism and individualism. ‘Having lost breath, we seek depth. But the deeper we go, the colder it gets...’ (Hoai Thanh cited in Jamieson, 1995: 185). Amid this bewilderment, intellectuals were drawn to Viet Minh’s cause of national independence and doctrine of sacrifice and devotion. Stripping off the communist language of class and social revolution, Viet Minh was able to forge the representation of a unified attempt of all Vietnamese people in fighting against foreign rulers, be they the French or the Japanese. Intellectuals found in Viet Minh the chance to contribute to getting rid of the colonial administration without being discriminated against or alienated as in previous Communist programs. Writers and poets found in the Communist’s new conceptualisation of culture and literature as closely related to politics a new value for their writings, a new role for themselves in society. To the Communists, there must be fire in poem, the pen must serve as a weapon for political purposes (Jamieson, 1995). By late 1944 and 1945, thousands of young urban intellectuals made their trek to the liberated zones to contribute to Viet Minh’s national cause.

Viet Minh’s presence and popularity were not equal in different regions and among different social classes. The Front’s influence was stronger in the countryside in the North and the Centre, while in Saigon its appeal grew higher among workers and intellectuals in urban cities than among peasants in rural areas. However, by 1945 Viet Minh was the most popular political organisation that was able to launch a nation-wide uprising to oust the colonial government in the power vacuum created in the victory of the Allies.

The Independence Declaration and the National Frame

Together with the increasing popularity of Viet Minh was the increasing popularity of the national imaginary. Although people might join Viet Minh with different interests in minds,

their act of joining and fighting the current colonial authority were cast in national terms. By 1945 after the Japan's coup in March, in the power vacuum created by Japanese surrender to the Allies, Viet Minh successfully launched a nation-wide uprising to seize control of Vietnam in August. This event was cast in the Vietnamese narrative as the August revolution. On September 2nd, Ho Chi Minh declared the birth of an independent country entitled the Democratic Republic Vietnam (DRV). The Declaration of Independence of the DRV firmly put the communist-led struggle in the national frame.

On March 9th 1945, the Japanese staged a coup against the French, taking direct control of the colonial administration. Vietnam was declared independence under Japanese tutelage. At the order of the new master, Bao Dai revoked the 1884 Protectorate Treaty with France and formed a government with Tran Trong Kim as Prime Minister. The ICP's Central Committee wasted no time before convening a conference to adjust its strategy with the new developments. The historic directive entitled 'The France-Japanese Conflict and Our Action' (Chỉ thị Nhật Pháp bắn nhau và hành động của chúng ta) was issued, clarifying the anti-Japanese policy and identifying the Japanese as the direct enemy (ICP, 1945: online). The directive defined the current situation as 'pre-insurrectionary period', calling for enhanced military preparations for a final insurrection. Although favourable situations were present for the revolution, the current situation had not yet been ripe for a final insurrection, which was to be reserved for the opportune moment.

Such opportune moment had come in August 1945 when the Japanese forces were squeezed in all international fronts and finally surrendered, creating a political vacuum for Viet Minh to fill in. On the 13th August, ICP's Central Committee and Viet Minh's headquarter set up the National Strike Committee and issued the No.1 Order for a nationwide general strike. The strike began in local provinces before gaining control in Hanoi in the 19th. It continued throughout the country and ended on the 28th with almost all provinces under the control of Vietminh. On August 30th, Emperor Bao Dai read his abdication and on September 2nd Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of National Independence in Ba Dinh square in front of half of million Vietnamese.

We, the temporary government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, solemnly declared to the world that: Vietnam has the right to freedom and independence, and the truth is it has become a free and independent country. The whole Vietnamese nation are determined to sacrifice all its spirits and forces, lives and wealth to preserve its freedom and independence (Ho Chi Minh, 1945: online).

In the solemn ceremony to celebrate the independence of the nation, other symbols of the Vietnamese nation also figured largely. The red background flag with a yellow star in the middle, the national flag of Vietnam until now, was proudly raised while the national anthem was sung loudly:

Our Vietnamese soldiers, we all share the same determination to save our country. Our hurried steps are sounding on the long and arduous road. Our flag, red with the blood of victory, bears the spirit of our country. The distant rumbling of the guns mingles with our marching song. The path to glory passes over the bodies of our foes. Overcoming all hardships, together we build our resistance bases. Ceaselessly for the people's cause we struggle, hastening to the battle field! Forward! All together advancing! Our Vietnam is eternally strong. (Van Cao, 1944)

The ceremony was broadcast throughout the country, enabling the imagination of the nation widely among the Vietnamese people. The Declaration of Independence invited people to identify with a Vietnamese nation based on the reading of the French as the enemy that were exploiting and threatening the existence of the Vietnamese people in the tradition of previous anti-colonial pieces including Phan Boi Chau's *The Loss of Vietnam*, Nguyen An Ninh's *France in Indochina* and Nguyen Ai Quoc's *The Indictment of the French colonialism*.

Over the past 80 years, the French colonists used the flag of freedom, equality and friendship to rob our country, oppress our people. Their actions went against humanity and righteousness.

Politically, there was no democracy and freedom. They applied brutal law. They established three different systems in the Centre, the South and the North to stop our national unification, to hinder our nation from consolidation. They built more prisons than schools. They blatantly killed our patriots. They bathed our insurrection in blood pools. They controlled press and applied policies to make the people become stupid. They used heroin and alcohol to weaken our race.

Economically, they exploited our people to the bone, driving our people into poverty and destitution, dilapidating our country. They robbed our field, mines and resources. They monopolized on printing money, exports and imports. They levied hundreds of unfair taxes, making our people especially peasants and tradespeople become penniless. They did allow our bourgeoisie to thrive. They exploited our workers extremely ruthlessly. (Ho Chi Minh, 1945: online)

In sharing the same experience of being exploited by the same enemy, the Vietnamese people were made into a seeming homogeneous group. All the other differences and particularities were cancelled out to forge the image of a unified nation. The national myth had long been circulated in Vietnamese anti-colonial discourse and in the communist discourse, however,

September the 2nd 1945 was the first time it was published and broadcast publicly in the way that was accessible to even the non-illiterate audience.

Moreover, by September 2nd, the existence of the Vietnamese nation had also become more real as there were now concrete symbols for the people to identify with. There were not only the flag and the anthems, but more importantly a concrete government who claimed to represent the whole Vietnamese nation.

..., we, the temporary government of the new Vietnam, representing all Vietnamese people, declared the removal of all colonial relations with France, deleting all treaties France has signed on Vietnam, eradicating all France's interest in Vietnamese territory.

All Vietnamese people, sharing the same will, are determined to fight against French colonists' plot. (ibid)

On the basis of the homogenous group of the Vietnamese people produced in the national imaginary, the communist-sponsored government were claiming the legitimate right to represent and to act. At the same time, the nation and the people were represented, their existence was constituted, consolidated and naturalized.

In speaking in the name of the nation and whole Vietnamese people, the temporary government, like Viet Minh, cast their own actions and the actions of those Vietnamese people who cooperated with them in the national frame.

When Japan surrendered to the Allies, the people throughout the whole country raised up to control power, founding the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. (ibid)

The way that the communist discourse used the reference of the nation to interpret the uprisings leading to the August revolution significantly contributed to the imagination of the nation. In the similar way that people joined Viet Minh's national salvation associations to settle their hunger in time of widespread famine, many people might have participated in the Vietminh-led uprising against the local authority for food or other reasons. However, all these actions were post-framed in the communist discourse as nationalist as if the participants were all conscious of their national motives. Those acts of framing and narratives like the reading of the Declaration of National Independence on September 2nd 1945 in Ba Dinh square did not simply interpret the uprisings, but partly constituted them as national. 'Although such perceived groupness does not necessarily reflect what is felt and experienced by participants

in an event, a compelling ex post framing can exercise a powerful feedback effect, shaping subsequent experience and increasing level of groupness' (Brubaker, 2004: 16).

7.3. The French Return and the Consolidation of National Imaginary

The turbulent years of 1944 and 1945 was the time when the national myth in the Communist discourse started to be transferred into a social imaginary in Vietnam. By the time Ho Chi Minh read the Declaration of Independence, the nation imaginary had been significantly established among the Vietnamese people. The French colonialists had been taken for granted as the enemy that was plotting to exploit and kill the Vietnamese. National independence had been taken for granted as the only way to solve all the ongoing problems and difficulties that the Vietnamese people were enduring. The French return in the end of 1945 further consolidated the transfer of the national myth into a social imaginary. The communist discourse continued to approach the French as the public enemy of the Vietnamese nation. They were represented in the old motif as the exploiting human-eating colonists. The war with the French was waged in the name of the nation's resistance for independence. In depicting the French colonialism as threatening the survival of the Vietnamese people and their country, the communist discourse forced the Vietnamese to fight against the French as the only available and possible course of action.

After Vietminh's victory in August 1945, a temporary government presided by Ho Chi Minh was established to govern the newly born Democratic Republic of Vietnam. In November 1945, the ICP made an announcement to dissolve itself but in fact still operated under the auspice of a Marxist research group. A general election was held in January 1946, resulting in a 97% vote for the communists and their allies in the National Assembly. In March, a permanent government was formed. Although the government consisted of members of different political parties, key posts were held by Vietminh members: Ho Chi Minh as the president and the minister of foreign affairs, Vo Nguyen Giap and Pham Van Dong as ministers of interior affairs and finance. The government of the DRV was essentially that of Vietminh, and by extension, that of the ICP. The new government immediately carried out a series of programmes to solve two problems that they deemed the most urgent: hunger and illiteracy. Rent and taxes were reduced and literacy classes were opened. The hated monopolies on alcohol, salt and opium were abolished. These policies significantly increased the support for the new government as it established the conditions to associate the new government with social caring and the capacity to act in the interest of the mass. This is similar to the manner in

which Viet Minh's actions of hunger relief contributed to the popularity of Viet Minh and its national discourse.

Immediately towards the end of the 1945, the French came back to reassert their colonial rule. They first took over the South and gradually moved to the North. Peace negotiations failed and in December 1946 Ho Chi Minh pronounced war against the French. In the words of the Vietnamese communists, the 'national resistance' had begun (Ho Chi Minh, 1946b). The fight against the French was cast in the name of the people and the nation, rather than a specific group of people. The call to fight the French was always in the name of the nation, not of any specific government.

To all the people in the nation! The nation is calling us. Please be determined to proceed! (Ho Chi Minh, 1946a: online)

We would rather sacrifice everything, but we would never have the country lost, would never stand being slaves...

Any one men or women, regardless of their religion, party or ethnicities, old or young. If you are Vietnamese, you have to fight the French to rescue the nation...

The time to rescue the country has come. We have to sacrifice our last drop of blood to preserve the country. (Ho Chi Minh, 1946b: online)

In these calls of the nation, the Vietnamese were interpellated as national subjects and forced to act as national subjects at the same time. 'If you are Vietnamese, you have to fight the French to rescue the nation'. There were no other alternatives to rescuing the nation because if the French colonialism persisted in the country, the Vietnamese people would become slaves and the country would be lost.

The truth is clear, French colonists want to rob our country once more time.

At present, Vietnam has only two options: either to tie its hands at the loss of the country and bow down as slaves, or to determine to preserve independence and freedom. (Ho Chi Minh, 1946a: online)

The continuation of French colonialism provided the continuation of threats against which the imagination of the nation could be constituted. After the August Revolution, in the Vietnamese communist discourse the French continued to play the role of the national Others who reportedly robbed and exploited the Vietnamese nation. The national frame was consistently used in interpreting the struggle between the DRV-led war against the French. The violence involved in this fight reinforced the sense of groupness among the Vietnamese, not the result of the existing sense of national belongings. This national imaginary was also

strengthened in the knowledge claim about a binary world which described the French colonialism as part of the collapsing capitalism and the DRV-led struggle as part of the international socialist movement for peace and democracy.

7.4. The Knowledge Claim about a Binary World.

The knowledge claim about a binary world divided by capitalism and socialism that was present in the Vietnamese communist discourse from the time of the Youth League was well preserved and further strengthened in the war with the France. The antagonistic relations between capitalism and socialism, and the articulations linking capitalism with war and crises, linking socialism with peace and democracy helped to increase the support for the communist-led struggle in safeguarding the newly won national independence. The communist block was framed as the anti-imperial democratic front led by Soviet Union, which represented all the best things in this world and was reportedly thriving. The other side made up of capitalist countries was termed the anti-democratic imperial front led by the U.S., which was weakening and descending into chaotic wars. With this background understanding of the world scenario, the communist-led wars in Vietnam was interpreted as being part of the world movements for socialism, peace and democracy: the war for peace.

As in the communist discourse, socialism was made equal to democracy, peace, wealth, freedom, justice, the most advanced stage of human development and the most popular world trend of the time.

The socialist system led by Soviet Union is “the system representing democratic trends, working classes’ interest, oppressed nations’ wills, and the majority of the human race (ICP, 1946: online).

The trend towards socialism was reportedly becoming popular and on the winning side. The Soviet Union’s victory over Hitler and the foundation of communist governments in Eastern European and Far Eastern countries including China and Vietnam in the late 1940s were interpreted as eloquent evidences for the winning emergence of the communist front (Truong Chinh, 1951: online). To the contrary, the capitalist system is weakening.

Facing a severe total crisis, imperialists headed by the U.S. fascists are making every effort to prepare for the third war, wishing to realize the dream of becoming the globe owner. They are busily increasing weapons, making nuclear bombs, directly interfering into many countries’ internal affairs, in order to turn these countries into their military bases, to continue invasion

wars, to oppress movements of peace, democracy and national liberation, to accelerate intelligence units, to encourage and support fascist organizations, etc... Imperialists want to get out of crises by means of war as they have done before. (Ton Duc Thang, 1951: online).

The U.S. was represented as greedy and aggressive exploiters in the same manner as the French colonists were used to and being depicted. The familiar story was that as the nature of capitalism required the expansion of market, capitalist countries especially the U.S., England and France planned to make war to meet this demand. Although the U.S. had long been recognised as part of the capitalist system in the Vietnamese communists' discourse, the antagonism only started to be focused on the U.S. since 1950. While the U.S. had always been categorised in the imperial side, it was only placed in a direct relationship with Vietnam's revolution as the most dangerous enemy since 1950. As soon as the U.S. started their intervention in Indochina by granting support to the French, they were defined as the most dangerous enemy while France was the direct enemy and feudal elements as supplementary (Truong Chinh, 1950 and 1951: online). The U.S. were presented as a greedy capitalist regime, like the French, who craved for the abundant national resources of Vietnam and plotted to turn the country into a market and a military base for a third world war (Truong Chinh, 1951; Ho Chi Minh, 1953a). The French's presence and the U.S. on the back stage meant the continuation of the Others that had been fixed as the national enemies. The U.S. was represented as another Other in the same interpretative frame that used to portray the French and the Japanese. These discursive representations of the U.S. rendered the latter war against the U.S. intervention in the 1960s and the 1970s possible. As Tuong Vu (2009) argued, the collision between Vietnam and the United States appeared conceivable from the vantage point of the 1945- 1954 period.

The Communist-led war was interpreted as the struggle for not only peace and democracy inside the country, but also on the international scale. The Vietnamese Communists and its followers were invited to identify themselves as international peace keepers and on the world's democratic side.

The Vietnamese nation's struggle against French imperialists and interventionist Americans is a part of the movement fighting for international peace, democracy and socialism. Vietnamese nation is fighting for its own freedom and democracy and for world peace at the same time. Every victory of the Vietnamese resistance is a brick contributing to the construction of the peace castle. Vietnam is one of the fortresses in the peace and democracy front against

imperialism, however, it is also considered by the imperialists as a strategic position in their anti-democratic front. (Truong Chinh, 1951: online)

The invisible but imaginable link with the outside world could have brought a great sense of justice, solidarity and confidence to its participants and helped to draw potential followers. The Communist-led revolution in Vietnam was also associated with a timeless force ‘the history’ and a transnational force ‘the world people’: ‘History has given Vietnamese workers and people the task to protecting this front. Vietnamese people and workers are determined not to hurt the confidence of the world people’ (Truong Chinh, 1951: online).

Conclusion

It was during the Japanese occupation and in the events leading up to the August Revolution that the national myth was transferred in a national imaginary in the discursive space of Vietnam. National independence was taken for granted as the condition of possibility for the survival of the Vietnamese people. Any foreign rulers, be they the French or the Japanese, was fixed as the public enemy who plotted to kill the Vietnamese people and destroy the Vietnamese nation. The national imaginary was further consolidated in the way the DRV’s government claimed to wage the war against the French return in the name of the nation and the people.

As the national myth took dominance over the socialist myth in the Vietnamese communist discourse in the time of Viet Minh, the bourgeoisie, the landlords and other political groups, which used to be seen as enemies in the early 1930s, were now redrawn into the collective revolutionary identity constructed in the communist-led revolution. The proletariat was told to leave aside their class interest for the benefit of the nation. The nation and the proletariat were still seen as separate entities with different interest that might conflict with each other.

It is not an exaggeration to state that the national common-sense was formed in events leading up the August Revolution and crystalized in this event and in the Communist-led war against the French return. Having established the national common-sense or the national imaginary, the communist discourse started to graft the socialist myth into this national imaginary in preparation for its hegemonic project to build a socialist society in Vietnam.

Chapter 8: The Hegemony of the Communist Discourse

Introduction

With the national imaginary being constituted and consolidated in the war against the French return, the nation had become a nodal point in the communist discourse. An independent Vietnam free from foreign rule had been taken for granted as the condition of possibility for the survival of the Vietnamese people. Having had the national imaginary in place, the communist discourse started its hegemonic project to build a socialist society in the DRV by linking socialist elements to the nodal point 'nation'. A system of hegemonic relations, 'by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: xiii), were established between the party, the state, the peasants and the nation. While classes' interests were differentiated with the nation's in previous periods, the interests of peasants were now seen as congruent with those of the nation and, hence, the land issue was equalized with national independence. The communists also claimed to represent the whole nation, not only the working class as before. The communist party addressed itself as the party of the nation. With these new articulations, the socialist myth was being grafted into the national imaginary and became a social imaginary itself. With both the national imaginary and socialist imaginary in place, the Vietnamese communist discourse had achieved its hegemony. A Vietnamese nation had now been formed with a name, other national symbols like flags and anthems and a government for its people to be identified with. That means it had successfully constructed a 'discursive formation that provides a surface of inscription of a wider range of demands, views and attitudes' (Torfing, 1999: 101). This chapter studies this process where the socialist elements were grafted into the national imaginary, enabling the communist discourse to attain hegemony, which occurred since the early 1950s and during the communist-led war against the American intervention and the Southern government.

This chapter is consisted of four sessions. The first one studies the articulations that linked the communist Party and its sponsored state with the nation. The communist-led government of the DRV was presented as the only legal government of Vietnam which represented the interest of the whole nation. The Vietnamese Labour Party¹³ (Dang Lao Dong

¹³ The normal translation is the Vietnamese Workers' Party. However, I understand 'lao dong' in the original Vietnamese name as 'labour' not 'worker' so I made my translation as the Vietnamese Labour Party.

Viet Nam), the name of the ICP since 1951, also claimed to be the party of the nation. Bao Dai's government of the State of Vietnam was constituted as the anti-national illegitimate political group, the French's puppet lacking ability to run the country. The second session examines the discursive associations between class struggle and national independence. Previously, all classes were viewed as different and distinct from the nation. People were told to put their class interest under the national interests. However, in the early 1950s, the concept of the nation was reduced to include only the peasants. National liberation was equalized with the liberation of the peasants from exploitation of landlords, making land reform necessary as a course of action in the war for national independence. This discursive move made possible a radical land reform beginning in early 1953, in which landlords had their land, livestock and other property confiscated and were violently punished for their long 'exploitative practices' like renting out land and hiring labour. Amid the land reform, after the DRV's victory at Dien Bien Phu, the French withdraw their troop from Vietnam, terminating their nearly-a-century colonialisation in Vietnam. The success of the communist-led force over the French in Dien Bien Phu provided a metonymical relation between socialism and national independence, enabling the discursive equation between the two in the communist discourse, which was articulated in the communist discourse during the later war against the southern government and the American intervention. The third session analyses how the war against the U.S. and the southern government was presented in the national frame. With the foreign policy of communism containment already in place by the mid 1950s, the United States supported the establishment of an anti-communist government on the basis of Bao Dai's government in South Vietnam. The U.S. intervention was immediately presented in the communist discourse as another invasion in the national frame. The presence of the U.S. troops and their supported southern government were cast as enemies of the nation, consolidating the already existing national imaginary in Vietnam's discursive space. They replaced the French and the feudal court as the others who threatened the survival of the nation and who were the culprits of all ongoing miseries. As the national imaginary was consolidated in the presence of the American Other, the Vietnamese Communist discourse grafted the socialist myth into this national imaginary. In the same way that the class struggle was reasoned as the only means to national independence in the war with the French, socialism was now articulated as the only means to the national cause in the American era. The socialist project, which was publicly announced and implemented in North Vietnam in the early 1950s, continued to be embraced during the war with the United States. The last chapter examines how this grafting took place.

8.1. Hegemonic Claims to Represent the Nation

The battle for nationhood is a battle for hegemony, by which a part claims to speak for the whole nation and to represent the nation's essence (Billig, 1995: 27).

At the same time the nation is constituted, it needs to be represented. As the communist discourse started to prioritize the national myth over the socialist myth since 1941, Viet Minh was organized to speak and act in the interest of the people and the nation. A provisional government was set up by Viet Minh even before the August Revolution was successful. When the independence of Vietnam was declared in Ho Chi Minh's writing, there was already a temporary government who claimed to represent all Vietnamese people in declaring this independence. This is to say that even though the state claims its legitimacy on the basis of the people or the nation, the political significance of a nation or the people cannot be materialized without a force that claims to represent and act in their names. There cannot be an act which is agreed on and accomplished by all the people inside any national territory. The act that a state or an organisation is doing in the name of the nation is essentially the act of that particular organisation, not the whole nation.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the Vietnamese communists claimed to represent the exploited working class within the Vietnamese nation. However, at the same time that the national imaginary was constituted, the communists started their hegemonic claims to represent the whole Vietnamese nation, equating their party with the nation. The Viet Minh, the communist-led state of the DRV and the Vietnamese Labour Party (the name of the ICP since 1951) all articulated their legitimacy as the legal representatives of the Vietnamese people. These articulations contributed to the constitution of the national imaginary and functioned to justify the existence of these communist organisations at the same time. They were also the first discursive moves to ground the inscription of the socialist myth into the national imaginary and to prepare hegemonic relation for Vietnamese communists' hegemonic project of building a socialist society under its rule in Vietnam.

In the 1920s and 1930s, when the socialist myth was dominant, the communists in Vietnam claimed to represent the working people or the property-less class, not the whole Vietnamese nation.

The Youth League is a revolutionary group representing working Annamite people, leading those people to fight with the ruling class... (Youth League, 1929b: online).

The Vietnamese Communist Party is organized to lead the miserable working people in a class struggle to eradicate imperialist capitalism and implement communism. (VCP, 1930c: online)

The Party is the vanguard of the worker's class... The Party is an organised group of the property-less class (ICP, 1939c: online).

Hover, in 1945 after overthrowing the colonial government, the state of the newly-born Democratic Republic of Vietnam consistently represented themselves as the national government and the communist Party as the nation's party. Ever since its establishment, the DRV had been busy explaining the legitimacy of its government and the illegitimacy of the French-sponsored government.

Ho Chi Minh's government is the only legal government of Vietnam, established in line with the Constitution, approved by Vietnam's National Assembly. This government has the right to engage in diplomatic relations with France and other countries. Those who claim to represent the people to negotiate with France will be seen by national citizens as reactionary Vietnamese, will be convicted by the government of treason, of plotting with the enemy and will be punished according to the law.

If France recognizes the unification and independence with the puppets, that unification and independence will be bogus and of no value...

The only way France can solve the Vietnamese issue is to open frank negotiations with Ho Chi Minh's government and recognise a true unified and independent Vietnam within the French union. (ICP's Central Committee, 1947: online)

This reasoning was reiterated again and again in many other documents of the party in these years. The French-sponsored government of Bao Dai was described as the puppet without a capacity to run the country. Bao Dai's government was made the enemy of the nation and the Vietnamese people in the communist discourse.

Imperialism and feudalism are the most reactionary forces plotting with each other to rule Vietnam over the last 80 years. It was the feudal Nguyen dynasty who sold our country to France, and after France's conquest, they turned into handy men and puppet administration of the imperialists. Imperialism used feudalism as a leaning base to invade Vietnam. Vietnamese feudalists held imperialists' legs to preserve their selfish benefits. Bao Dai's government and other puppet groups, representatives of feudal landowners and capitalists, are acting against the resistance, betraying the country, harming the breed. Imperialism and feudalism are the main objects of the Vietnamese revolution, two primary enemies of Vietnamese people (Truong Chinh, 1953b: online).

The message was clear that the government presided by Ho Chi Minh would not let another political groups, even Emperor Bao Dai, to decide on the fate of Vietnam or to rule Vietnam. 'To be sure, ICP leaders wanted Vietnam to be independent; however, it was not just any

independence, but had to be independence with their party in charge' (Vu, 2009a: 191). The construction that the Bao Dai's government were representing capitalism and betraying the nation worked to delegitimize their authority among the subjects of the communist discourse.

In 1951, the ICP changed its name into the Vietnam's Labour Party (VLP) and began their hegemonic claims as the nation's party. In his thesis on Vietnam's Revolution read at the 1951 Second Congress, the Secretary General Truong Chinh stated: 'It is because Vietnam's Labour Party is the Party of workers and working people, it must be the Party of the Vietnamese nation'.

The statements that the DRV's government or the VLP were national are essentially hegemonic claims. Both of them were essentially organisations made up by a certain group of people. As Brubaker (2004: 15) argued 'organisations cannot be equated with ethnic groups', in this case DRV's state and the VWP cannot be equated with the Vietnamese nation. In effect, the chief protagonist of the 1945-1954 conflict with the French, which was called the first Indochina war in the international circle but the anti-French resistance for national independence in the Communist discourse, was not the Vietnamese nation, but the DRV's government and the Vietnamese communists behind it. In Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, the relation between the Vietnamese communists, or their parties, with the Vietnamese nation is essentially a hegemonic relation, 'by which a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it, is a hegemonic relation' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xiii).

8.2. Associating Class Struggle with National Independence

At the same time that the VLP claimed to represent the whole Vietnamese nation, the discursive link between the national independence and class struggle started to be linked. This association was accomplished by another articulation which saw the shrinking of the boundaries of the nation to that of the peasants. It was in the 4th Plenum of the Party's Standing Central Committee in January 1953 that the interests of the peasants were articulated to be the same as the interest of the nation. These hegemonic articulations which equalized the peasants with the nation, class struggle with national liberation made possible a radical land policy which was carried out in North Vietnam from 1953 to 1956, resulting in the wiping out of all potential local rural opposition leadership (Gittinger, 1959: 127)

In previous periods, the communist discourse presented class and nation as two separate entities, whose interests might be conflicting with each other. Class struggle and the national issue were separated as two tasks of the communist-led revolution in Vietnam. In the early 1940s when the national liberation was prioritized, the ICP called the workers to set aside their interests, asked the peasants to temporarily drop their struggle for land against the landlords in order to unite all forces in the national struggle.

In the current situation, the interests of the part, of the class have to be put below the nation's right to liberation. The interests of peasants and workers have to rank after the right to liberation and independence of the whole people. If we now raise the slogan of ousting landowners, allocating land to peasants, we will not only lose an ally or a supporting force in the fight against France and Japan but also drive that force into the enemy side....

The plan is to do the national liberation instead of the people's democratic revolution (Cách mạng tư sản dân quyền). This does not mean that the Indochinese proletariat forget the land task or step backward, it only means a shorter step in preparation for a longer stride. At present, everyone should know that: if we can drive out the French and the Japanese, the fate of our nation will be forever like that of buffalos and horses and the land issue will never be solved... (ICP, 1941: online)

In the move to appeal to all Vietnamese people, the class struggle was removed from the program of the ICP. In the words of Post (1989: 169) since the establishment of Viet Minh 'class struggle had in practice been totally subordinated to the anti-imperialist one'. However, it should be noted while Vietminh called for the cooperation of all classes and social groups in the national struggle for independence in its propaganda documents, in its internal documents the ICP never ignored the issue of class and social revolution. The land issue was not to be omitted, but just to be carried out after the anti-imperialist mission. The class struggle was temporarily postponed only because realising the interest of class at the time was said to do harm to the mobilisation of the whole nation.

This line of argument was also reasoned for the ICP's dissolution on November 11th 1945. In the public notice about its dissolution, the ICP's Central Committee stated the decision was taken under the consideration that:

in order to fulfil the great task of national liberation, the unanimous cooperation of the whole people regardless of classes and parties is the vital requirement,

and with the aim

to prove that: communists are the nation's forwarders, always wholeheartedly sacrifice for the cause of liberating the whole people, are willing to place the nation's interests over classes', sacrifice the party's specific rights for the sake of the common right of the nation. (ICP's Central Committee, 1945a: online)

Two months after declaring the birth of the DRV in August 1945, facing the return of the French, the Indochinese revolution was defined as a revolution for national liberation (ICP's Central Committee, 1945b). 'The task of rescuing the proletariat has not been completed... The slogan is still: 'The nation is above all. The fatherland is above all' (ICP's Central Committee, 1945b). Until 1950, the ICP still focused on the task of national independence and viewed the interest of the peasants and other strata separately from the interest of the whole nation. The attitude toward the landlord is neutral as the strategy is to draw them into the resistant side.

At present, the primary contradiction required urgent settlement in Vietnam is the contradiction between the whole nation and imperialism (the French colonists and U.S. interventionists) together with their handy Vietnamese man in order to achieve independence for all the nation. At the moment, the interest of each and every stratum must serve the interest of the whole resistant nation. Between the two tasks of anti-imperialism and anti-feudalism, the anti-imperialist task is the main one... The Party's policy in rural areas is: leaning on poor peasants, tying closely with middle peasants, cooperating with rich peasants and drawing landlords into the resistant side. (ICP's Central Committee, 1950c: online)

However, in 1953 the concepts of the nation, peasants and their respective interests were converged in the Communist discourse. At the 4th Plenum of the Standing Central Committee held in January 1953, the meaning of the nation was fused with that of the peasants.

The foundation of the national issue is the peasant issue because peasants make up the majority in the nation. (Ho Chi Minh, 1953a: online)

The democratic national revolution is the peasant revolution. The war for national liberation is in essence the peasants' war. (Truong Chinh, 1953a: online)

The essence of the national issue is the peasant issue. (Stalin quoted in Ho Chi Minh, 1953b)

At the same time the peasants were taken to the core of the nation, the war for national liberation became the peasants' struggle for land. While in 1950 the landlords were seen as possible participants of the revolution, in 1953 they became the enemy of the nation and the peasants. The landlords were now defined to be a feudal force, traditional practices of land rent

and labour hire were now theorised as exploitative. This exploitation was presented as the cause of the poverty of the peasants and the underdevelopment of the country.

Landlords, accounting for less than 5% of the population, are exploiting rest 90%, who are peasants, with high rent and interests...With this feudal exploitation form, the landowners have been sitting in the cool places and eating with gold bowls without upgrading agricultural techniques. They even go against technical advance and impede productivity. Framers are so heavily exploited that they are not enthusiastic in working and they do not want and do not have the tools to upgrade techniques. Peasants make up the majority of consumers in the country, but they are poor and destitute with low buying power. This is the reason why our country's market is tightened, our commerce and industry did not develop, which in turn leave negative influence on agriculture (Truong Chinh, 1953b: online).

Feudalism in the Vietnamese communists' discourse meant not only the king, the feudal court and their administration, but also landlords and their existing practices of renting out land and hiring labour. The interest and the rent that farmers were paying to landlords were considered part of the exploitation of the feudal system. This existing exploitation of the feudal class were regarded as an impediment not only to the development of the country, but also to the national resistance for independence. Bringing material stakes, giving land to peasants was articulated to be vital to the success of the national cause.

Our peasants take up 95% of the population, but have only 3/10 land, work hard all year round but are still poor for the whole life.

Landowning class comprise of less than 5% of the population, but own 7/10 of the farming land, 'sit in cool places and eat with gold bowls'. This situation is extremely unfair. Our country was invaded, our people were backward and desperate because of this situation. In the past resistance years, although the Party and Government have reduced land rent in free zones, the vital issue of land has not been resolved. This has influenced on the forces participating the resistance and the peasants' productivity (Ho Chi Minh, 1953b: online).

In order for the resistance to succeed and the true implementation of the people's democracy, it is necessary to improve the economic and political rights of the peasants, to allocate land to them (Ho Chi Minh, 1953a: online).

The argument is that in order for the national resistance to succeed, the peasants must have their interests and other rights increased. In the interest of the peasants, their exploiters, which were presented as landlords who 'sit in cool places and eat with gold bowls', needed to have their land and possessions expropriated. With these discursive changes, the Party moved beyond rent and interest reduction to a more radical rural policy of land redistribution, which involved the reapportioning of properties of not only anti-Communist factions like colonists, traitors and

reactionaries, but also that of landlords. The key element of this new land policy was to define and identify landlords and to show peasants that they had been and were being oppressed by landlords.

However, it is because the landlord class, or any other social class, is not a natural inherent group and their rent and credit practice are not by nature exploitative, the VLP were at pains to present the reality of landlord exploitation and to categorise landlords and peasants into rich and middle and small groups. Both the theoretical documents and practices of their new agrarian policies largely involved the creation of anti-landlord attitude and the classification of the village population into different groups. Criteria for classification kept changing. The application of these criteria was wrested with conflicts and corruption. All of these reportedly caused widespread bewilderment not only among the implementing cadres but also among the mass. These problems of anti-landlord propaganda and population classification went on to haunt the Vietnamese Communists in their policies of agriculture socialisation in later periods. During the trial period in 1953, the land reform was carried out in 836 villages with a population of 3.5 million (Gittinger, 1959: 116). 14,000 hectares of rice fields and 2,650 buffaloes were confiscated. Out of 10,015 landowners, whose crimes were exposed by the peasants, 135 were condemned to death and about 1,200 imprisoned for re-education. Towards the end of the year, the VLP (1953) accelerated the 'Land to the Tiller' program, vowing to erase completely the feudal exploitation regime.

Existing literature conventionally explained the land reform policy as a tactical move of the Party to appeal to the peasants in order to meet its soaring demand for soldiers and porters in preparation for the general counter-offensive phase while the urban recruitment was weak (Duiker, 1981: 152- 154; Post, 1989:194). This move may be tactical or not is not in debate here. The focus that I want to draw on is the discursive move of the Communist discourse in inflating the meaning of the peasants to that of the nation and the significance of the land revolution to that of national independence. These discursive mechanisms functioned to make the radical land policy, which ran against the interest of a part of the nation, appear acceptable and even necessary in the national cause. In the communist discourse in this period, an equation was established between the peasants and the nation, and between social revolution and national independence. The tasks of fighting against imperialism and feudalism were presented to be closely linked and had to be realized simultaneously. The order of the revolutionary tasks of the 1940s was broken down, making social revolution as importantly as fighting the French.

The radical land reform stopped in the end of 1957 when disillusion and disaffection was widespread, even among the peasants. Although the DRV openly admitted land reforms errors and called for corrections, they laid the blame on the implementing carders, not the content of the land reform itself. The communist-led revolution in Vietnam was still firmly on route to socialism, which was reported as the international rising trend towards peace and democracy.

8.3. The U.S. Intervention and the Consolidation of the National Imaginary

Our people's resistance against the United States for national salvation is the greatest struggle against foreign invasion in the history, is the biggest war in the world after the second world war. (VLP, 1970: online)

Since its inception, the Vietnamese communist discourse had articulated French colonialism in Vietnam as a problem and as a national problem of the Vietnamese people. Solving this problem, that is driving out the French for national independence, was articulated as the only way that the Vietnamese people can survive. Independence was declared in 1945. However, French return meant the continuation of the national problem. It would have been interesting to see how life became full and complete and Vietnam became an ideal nation free of foreign interference after the French departed in 1954. However, the existence of an U.S.-sponsored government and American presence in the South meant the continuation of the national problem or of the existence of national enemies in the discourse of Vietnamese communists. The United States was articulated as just another capitalist colonisers in the same lenses through which France and Japan used to be presented. This enemy was reportedly planning to take over the North and then the whole Southeast Asia and China. The southern government was pictured as a puppet handy feudal organ of the American colonialism like the Nguyen feudal court and Bao Dai government, lacking autonomous agency and power. The existence of the southern government in the South were interpreted as a new form of colonial and capitalist invasion of Vietnam waken by the United States. With these background meanings in place, the communist-led struggle against the southern government and the U.S presence in the South became the national cause. The call to fight the RV's government was framed in national terms in the same way that the fight against the French was cast: 'the struggle against the United States for national salvation' (Ho Chi Minh, 1966). National independence was further inscribed as the only condition for a happy life free of miseries and hardships, consolidating the young national imaginary in the Vietnamese discursive space.

As the land reform was implemented, the DRV achieved a historic victory in Dien Bien Phu battle in May 1954, which brought relevant parties to the conference table in Geneva. The agreement ordered the withdrawal of all French troops from Vietnam and the temporal partition of the country at the 17th parallel during the 300-day moratorium to prepare for a nation-wide general election scheduled for July 1956. This political settlement, however, was not signed by the Bao Dai government and the United States (Duiker, 1981: 171-172). Far from complying with a national general election, the Eisenhower administration, already caught in its Cold War formulation, was still committed to having a non-Communist state in South Vietnam. While the Geneva Conference was still in place, with support from the United States and Bao Dai, Ngo Dinh Diem arrived in Saigon in June 1954 to embark on his mission as the Prime Minister of Bao Dai's Associated State of Vietnam. With a referendum in October 1955, he proclaimed the formation of the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) over the South territory and became its president. Diem's government publicly refused to comply with the Geneva accord on holding a general election in the whole Vietnam. Eisenhower was quoted as commenting that such an election, if it had been implemented, would have resulted in an 80% vote for Ho Chi Minh (SarDesai, 2005: 75).

Very soon violence escalated in South Vietnam, spreading sporadically into the North and neighbouring countries. While the RVN and the U.S. justified the war as prevention against communist aggression, the DRV termed the war as national resistance against U.S. invasion. The National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam or the National Liberation Front (NLF) (Mặt trận Dân tộc Giải phóng miền Nam) was established from secret members of Viet Minh operating in the region. The NLF functioned as the old Viet Minh in attracting all elements in the South to fight against the RVN's government. Although the DRV claimed that the insurgence against RVN's government and U.S. presence was indigenous and autonomous within the southern population, many studies have shown that not only were the bulk of the insurgent force and weapons supplied from the North, but the leadership and instruction for the insurgent movements were also made from the communist headquarter in Hanoi (Karnow, 1997: 417; Duiker, 1981, 1995). Official historical textbooks in Vietnam have also publicized the role of the VLP and the DRV in channelling human forces, weapons and logistics into the South to liberate the southern people from the invasion of the U.S. (Le, 2014; MOET, 2014). In January 1973, a peace accord was signed in Paris, prescribing the withdrawal of the U.S. troops and a peaceful unification negotiated between Vietnamese parties. In April 1975, Saigon

fell to the North Vietnamese Army supported by the NLF. In 1976, Vietnam was unified under the common rule of the communist party with a new name: 'the Socialist Republic of Vietnam'.

While the United States justified their intervention in Vietnam as to stop the spread of communism into the South, the communist discourse presented their intervention as an imperialist intervention. The United States were described as just another imperialist invader, just like the French and the Japanese, who aimed to turn South Vietnam into its new colony and then to conquer the whole country. The Party identified the tasks of the Vietnamese revolution in the South as liberating southern Vietnamese from the rule of imperialism and feudalism and fighting against the U.S. invasion. In the Communist discourse, the United States and their sponsored government in the south inherited the role of the French and the feudal court as the others in the constitutional of the Vietnamese nation. They were presented as plotting to block the survival and development of the Vietnamese people and the nation in the same manner that the French colonists were described in previous periods.

The U.S. had previously been present in the communist discourse as a leader of the capitalist world. During the war with the French in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the Vietnamese Communists had criticized the U.S. support toward the French in the latter's effort to re-control Indochina. In July 1954, the VLP stated: 'The U.S. is not only the enemy of the world people, but is turning into the main and direct enemy of the people of Viet, Mien¹⁴ and Lao'. The presence of the U.S. in South Vietnam was described in the same manner as that of the French with links to imperialism, colonialism, invasion, exploitation and killing. In the documents of the VLP during this period, the Americans were interchangeably termed as imperialists, capitalists, colonists, invaders and robbers. The Americans and their sponsored government were described to have waged a cruel war in the South.

They fired villages, killed, imprisoned, raped, beheaded and ripped the belly of civilians including both children and elderly people (Ho Chi Minh, 1964: online).

In the last few years, the U.S. imperialist and its handy men led by Ngo Dinh Diem have drawn Southern people into fire and boiling water. They go to any length to oppress our compatriots in the South, to arrest, imprison and murder tens of thousands of patriots. (VLP, 1960: online)

¹⁴ 'Mien' is Cambodia.

The U.S. presence was said to have destroyed South Vietnam not only in terms of politics and economy but also in terms of culture.

The United States has controlled the South in every front. In politics, the government of the South was totally in the hand of the U.S.; national policies of this government were decided by the U.S.. In military terms, the U.S. directly built, trained and equipped the South's army and directly manage this army. In economic terms, the South has turned into a market to consume the U.S. wasted goods and their allies'; economic benefits in the South were gradually fallen into their hands. In terms of culture, the U.S. has brought into the South the extremely degenerating 'the U.S. lifestyle', seedling the poison of 'the U.S. culture' in the youth and the people. (VLP, 1960: online)

The U.S. were even compared to fascism as they reportedly dreamt to be the world's owner and had become the most aggressive, the most reactionary force and 'the number one enemy of human race' (VLP, 1973). Their plot was reportedly to oust the French in order to separate the country, to control South Vietnam as their new colony and as its military base for further expansion over North Vietnam. Therefore, the U.S and its sponsored southern government were considered not only the enemy of southern people but also the enemy of the whole Vietnamese nation. The presence of the U.S. and its sponsored government was articulated to be threatening to the security of not only South Vietnam but also the whole Vietnam.

The U.S. imperialism and its handy men are not only invading the South, hindering the social development there, but also preparing a war to invade our whole country, destroying the revolutionary cause of our people. Therefore, the Americans and Diem are not only the enemy of the Southern people currently under their direct rule, but also the enemy of the whole Vietnamese nation, of the liberated Northern people. There is profound antagonism between the American-Diem government and southerners, but also between the former and nation-wide people and northerners. Solving this contradiction is not only the task and the interest of southern people, but also the common task and benefit of all people throughout the country. (VLP, 1959: online)

One goal of the U.S. intervention was reportedly to build a strategic base, in order to conquer the North Vietnam, China and other Southeast countries. We see in here what is similar to the so-called domino theory about communist expansion embraced by the U.S. state leaders. If the U.S. successfully controlled the South, other neighbouring regions and countries would fall under the grip of the U.S. capitalism. In the communist discourse, this was taken to mean war because capitalism had long been understood as full of violence and inequalities. It was the nature of capitalism that brought war as capitalist countries competed for international markets. Therefore, in order to attain peace, the Vietnamese people had no other way out rather than to wake war against the Americans, to pursue national unification. However, the

articulation that unification means peace did not help peace as it appeared but functioned to authorize the deferment of peace. The imagination of peace in a utopia future legitimized the operation of violence against the America-backed southern regime. This violence was invited to be read only as a temporal situation, in the preparation for a long-term peace. Temporal as the violence might be, but it was actually materialized into fires and bombs, injuries and deaths at this present of time. Peace might be long term, but it was only a possibility of the future and might never been actualized. We find here the performative power of knowledge and discourse: the discursive use of peace to justify and normalize war.

The government of the RVN was consistently pictured as the puppet of the U.S., just as the way Bao Dai's government was articulated as the puppet of the French colonialism. Diem and his men were portrayed as a group of handy men obeying the American master's order. His rule was said to be authoritarian, exploitative, violent and go against national interests.

Ngo Dinh Diem's government is a handy body of the U.S. imperialism, a colonial and semi-feudal reign in the South, a reactionary, violent and illegitimate... The southern government at present works against national interests, embodies the interests of the U.S. imperialists, of pro-U.S. feudalists and capitalists in the South... The main components of this government are the most reactionary feudal and capitalist elements, hooligans, gangster and treasonable elements, who determine to work for the US., led by Ngo's family and circles. (VLP, 1959: online)

After the assassination of Diem and his brother Nhu in November 1963, Nguyen Van Thieu became the new president of the Republic of Vietnam a year and half later. The new president made no difference to the way the North viewed the RVN. In the Communist discourse, the government of the RV was eternally linked to capitalism, fascism, feudalism and therefore exploitation and oppression no matter who was in charge. These representations of the RV government functioned to delegitimize their authority, justifying war and actions of killing and violence against these Vietnamese fellows. Their inhumane and unjust rule reportedly drove Southern people to hatred and revolts, making the fight against the Southern government appear necessary and legitimate. The narrative was that it was the nature of the RV government that caused resistance and fighting against them and that it was the desire of the Southern people to get rid of this capitalist and feudal government, not the ambition of the Northern government to unify the country under one communist rule. The National Liberation Front (NLF), the Provisional Revolutionary Government and by far the DRV in the North were

all represented to be innocent actors, who acted out of responsibility and justice and in the names of the people and the nation. The same act of the Vietnamese killing each other was heralded as victorious and heroic if done by the revolutionary forces, but was criticised as dirty U.S. plots of ‘Vietnamization’.

These discursive mechanisms which pictured the Americans and the southern government as national enemies worked to further consolidate the national imaginary, which was circulated in the discursive space of Vietnam since the August Revolution. The national imaginary continued to be looked after and invested in the communist discourse. While before national independence was presented as the condition for the survival of the Vietnamese people, in this period, it was articulated to be the horizon whereby people would enjoy a happy and prosperous life.

Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom. After the day of victory, our people will reconstruct our country into a much bigger, more beautiful and wealthy one. (Ho Chi Minh, 1966: online)

When mountain is still there, there is water, there is people. After beating American, we will build a society ten times better than present. (Ho Chi Minh, 1969: online)

Internally, the Vietnamese nation was portrayed as a solid and unified block. ‘Vietnam is a unified block which cannot be broken into parts’ (NA, 1959: online). Vietnamese people were articulated to belong to a common body, sharing the same blood and intestines (Ho Chi Minh, 1964: online). Therefore, the pain and miseries that the Southern people were suffering were also those of Northern people. ‘As long as the South has not been liberated, our Vietnamese nation has not been reunited, our people will not be able to eat and sleep well’ (VLP, 1960: online). Moreover, the struggle for national unification was also portrayed as part of the universal struggle for world peace.

The unification of Vietnam is not only a national issue of the Vietnamese people, but also the issue of peace and security protection of Indochina, Southeast Asia and the world. (VLP, 1955: online)

The struggle for peace and unification of our people is part of the struggle for world peace (VLP, 1956: online)

In the communist discourse, national unification was linked to peace. As early as 1955, Truong Chinh affirmed ‘peace and unification are intimately associated’.

The national imaginary was also strengthened in the long-held binary world view of the Vietnamese communists, which linked the United States to the decaying capitalism. In line with Marxist theory about gradual stages of social formations, socialism was described as the highest stage of the history of human development and capitalism was an outdated and outgoing stage.

Capitalism is exploitation, oppression, hunger, freeze and misery... The present time is no longer the era of capitalism. Imperialism is the highest evolution stage of capitalism and is making its last convulsion before death with no possible treatment. The present era is the era of the winning socialism. (VLP, 1960: online)

Socialism was mythicized as a utopia heaven of total and complete happiness and prosperity. The socialist side was associated with peace and democracy and socialism presented as the world trend to replace the outmoded exploiting and unequal capitalist system. Portraying the world in this way, readers were invited to identify with the socialist side, and by short extension with the Vietnamese communists. The very act of presenting this world scenario as facts is the act of productive power. Once you accept capitalism as bad and deteriorating and the U.S. as a capitalist country, any force that is articulated to be related to capitalism and the U.S. logically becomes the enemy. Enemies of the nation are not necessary foreign countries and people of different race. Territorial boundaries and racial distinction ceased to function in this project of national identification to give place to discursive boundaries. Groups of the Vietnamese, who belonged to the same ethnic group and spoke the same language with the Vietnamese Communists, in this case the RVN government, its army and supporters, were being made to become the other within their own country of origin.

Interestingly, the United States also justified their involvement in Vietnam as part of the 'struggle for the world' (Appy, 2000: 4). In sharp contrast to the communists' narrative of a prosperous and happy socialist camp, in the American discourse the Communist world was associated with tyranny, a slave world and imperialism (ibid: 3). 'Freedom was everywhere endangered by a red imperialism of unprecedented power and ambition that was headquartered in Moscow' (ibid; 3). American venture into South Vietnam was part of its endeavour to construct a land of freedom free from foreign tyrants. 'The U.S. role there was nothing less than a holy mission to rescue poor and tortured Christians from godless Communists' (ibid: 3-4). Instead of a greedy and violent imperialist United States in the Vietnamese Communist discourse, the U.S. political culture always depicts the U.S. as the land of freedom, civilisation and humanity (Campbell, 1992). As the leader of a free world, the U.S. was perceived to bear

the responsibility and commitment to promote freedom and protect the world from any threats to freedom. It was this sense of obligations that drew the U.S. to Vietnam (Klein, 2000) and in doing that they wanted nothing for themselves (Appy, 2000: 3). In the U.S. foreign policy documents, the Soviet Union was described as imperialist and aggressive (Doty, 1993: 311). Alternative representations of socialism, the communist model and Russia were also found in the state discourse in Europe. During the Cold War, Russia were described as authoritarian and the communist model as totalitarian in Europe's discourse (Neumann, 1999: 103). Soviet soldiers were portrayed with drunkenness and laziness: 'Drunk they beat Hitler' (ibid: 104).

8.4. Grafting the Socialist Myth into the National Imaginary

At the same time that hegemonic relations were established between the party and the nation, and between the land revolution with the national cause, socialism was announced in 1951 as the future of Vietnam by the communists. The knowledge claim long constructed in the communist discourse about the binary world helped to render necessary and possible this nation-building project in the socialist direction to be carried out in the country. As the U.S. intervention escalated in South Vietnam, the national issue once more time became on the top of the Party's agenda. Having successfully projecting a national imaginary whereby national independence meant the vital condition for people's survival, the Vietnamese communist discourse started to present socialism as the only way to national independence. Moreover, the communist-led success against the French in 1954 created 'a relation of contiguity' between socialism and nationalism, making the discursive link between socialism and national independence appear more natural and more real. With this link established, the socialist myth was firmly grafted into the national imaginary and became a social imaginary itself.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the Vietnamese communist discourse stated its post-independence program in Vietnam as socialism. However, since the foundation of Viet Minh in 1941, all socialist terms were muted in the focus on liberating the nation from colonial rule. After Viet Minh's success in August 1945, the ICP even declared self-dissolution to invest on the national outlook of the new government. The 1946 constitution declared Vietnam as a democratic republic (NA, 1946: online). However, in the Party's 2nd National Congress in February 1951, when the Communist Party resurfaced and changed its name to the VLP, socialism was announced as the future of Vietnam. This was the first time since Vietminh, the Party officially announced its plan to build socialism in Vietnam.

Vietnamese people's national, democratic revolution certainly will bring Viet Nam toward socialism. Lead by workers, closely united with peasants and intellectual workers (lao dong tri oc), supported by the Soviet Union and other peoples' democratic countries, especially China, Vietnamese revolution cannot tread on any path other than a socialist route. (VLP, 1951a: online)

The Vietnamese Labour Party is the party of the worker class and the Vietnamese working people. The objective of the Party is to develop a people's democracy, advancing to socialism in Vietnam, in order to implement freedom, happiness for the worker class, the working people and all ethnic majorities and minorities in Vietnam. (VLP, 1951b: online)

This public move to announce the adoption of socialism in Vietnam happened after the communists' victory in China. In the fall of 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, who then provided crucial support to their communist counterpart in Vietnam. The PRC was the first country that granted diplomatic recognition to the DRV. In the same year, the French sponsored the establishment of the Associated State of Vietnam headed by the ex-Emperor Bao Dai. Until 1950, Bao Dai's Vietnamese state had been recognised by 35 countries while the DRV was recognized by the Soviet Union, China and other socialist countries.

While the 1946 Constitution stated that the political system of Vietnam was a Democratic Republic, in which the private ownership of Vietnamese people was ensured, the 1959 Constitution affirmed that:

The Democratic Republic of Vietnam proceeds from the people's democracy toward socialism by developing and the national economy under socialism, transforming an outdated economy into a socialist economy with modern industry and agriculture, advanced science and technology. (NA, 1959: online)

A number of ownership forms were acknowledged to be in existence in this period of transit to socialism, however 'the state economy with the people ownership holds the leading role in the national economy and is prioritized by the state' (ibid).

The socialist project of the Vietnamese communists was made discursively possible in the very knowledge claim about the binary world divided between socialism and capitalism and about the nature of these two systems. The binary world view already existed in the communist discourse since its inception as part of the socialist myth. In the war against the United States, socialism was offered as a mythical space whereby all demands and interests of Vietnamese people would be met as in the communist discourse in the 1920s and the 1930s.

While the basic economic law of capitalism was reported to ‘maximise capital interests by exploiting and depriving the majority of the people in a country, by slaving and ruthlessly exploiting people of other countries’, the basic feature of a socialist economy was ‘to stratify to the fullness increasing material and spiritual demands of the whole society’ (Truong Chinh, 1953a: online). Stripping out all the technical and scientific terminologies of a socialist economy, the primary purpose of the RPV’s socialist economic policy was stated as ‘to ever accelerate production in order to lift up the material and cultural lives of the people’ (NA, 1959: online). Ho Chi Minh (1958: online) reminded that ‘socialist revolution is to eradicate the exploitation among human beings in our country, bringing a life absent of cold and hunger (doi song am no) to our whole population’. When the socialist system was installed in North Vietnam, the goal was presented as to establish such a wealthy and happy society in the country. In the communist discourse, socialism was then firmly fixed as a prosperous and happy society in which people have enough to eat, to wear and are free of oppression and discrimination.

Besides re-circulating the mythical space of socialism, the communist discourse established a symbiosis between socialism and national independence, enabling the transfer of the socialist myth into a social imaginary. If national independence had been taken for granted as the indispensable condition for the survival and betterment of the Vietnamese people and socialism was projected to be the only way to achieve this precious national independence, socialism itself became the indispensable condition for the survival and betterment of the Vietnamese people. The land reform, the first step of implementing socialism, was already possible on its discursive hinge on the nation as discussed above. The same association was forged between the unification and independence of the whole nation and socialism in North Vietnam.

If we didn’t consolidate and advance the North to socialism, we would not have a firm leaning base for the struggle to unify the country for democracy and independence. (VLP, 1959: online)

Building socialism in the North was articulated as the necessary means to achieve the national aims of unification of unification. The North’s socialist construction was presented as part of the national struggle.

The North had to build socialism, consolidating a firm back-up base, assisting the South and working with Southern compatriots to defeat the U.S. imperialists and their handy men. The North has to fulfil its sacred task as a big back-up base to the frontline. (VLP, 1969: online)

As the construction of socialism in the DRV went on, it was reported that the socialist North had achieved considerable successes, which contributed greatly to the South's struggle for national independence.

The North's great achievements increasingly proves that socialism is very good and is strongly encouraging the national struggle of the southern compatriots. (Ho Chi Minh, 1964: online)

During the war against the United States and the DR's government, the socialist myth had been grafted into the national imaginary. The implementation of socialism in the DRV was fixed as the only condition that national independence and unification could be achieved.

Conclusion

During the communist-led wars against the French (1945 – 1954) and against the United States and their sponsored southern government (1954 – 1975), the communist discourse attained its hegemony as both the national myth and the socialist myth had become social imaginaries. With the national imaginary, the existence of the nation was taken for granted and national independence was fixed as the indispensable condition for the Vietnamese people to survive. As socialism was articulated to be the only viable route to achieve national independence and save and unify the nation, it became a social imaginary itself. Hegemonic relations were established between socialist elements and the nation. As soon as the communist party resurfaced in 1951 as the VLP, it claimed to be the nation party that acted on behalf of and in the interest of the nation. The United States were constituted as just another plot to invade the Vietnamese nation in the same discursive construction that French colonialism was articulated. The non-communist southern government were constituted as the puppet agent of the U.S. imperialists betraying the interest of the Vietnamese population in the same way that Bao Dai's government and the Nguyen dynasty were pictured in the communist discourse. A discursive equalization between the peasant and the nation, and between the land revolution and the national independence was established. This hegemonic communist discourse made the radical land reform and the adoption of socialism in North Vietnam appear possible and necessary.

It was in this discourse that the existence and the rule of the communist party was legitimised in Vietnam. If the Vietnamese nation is real and French colonisation and American intervention are to kill and exploit the national people, then fighting for national independence is the only viable course of action. If only socialism and land revolution can bring about

national independence, then it follows that a communist party must rule as it is the only political force that is ready to take these steps.

By the mid-1960s, the war was in full gear in South Vietnam. In 1965, it spread to the North. After the Tonkin Gulf incident, the Johnson administration carried out an air bombing of North Vietnam in order to stop northern infiltration into the South. In 1968, the VLP decided to bring the revolution to the highest level of general offensive and uprising (VLP, 1968: online). As a result, a general offensive was launched in 1968 in almost all the provinces in the South starting with the Tet offensive in January. A series of battles and another U.S. bombing of North Vietnam occurred. By 1972, the United States had lost its momentum for the Vietnam war. The long-lasting war had exerted a huge toll on the U.S. economy (Karnow, 1997: 31). Hundreds of billions of dollars spent on the war had resulted in budget deficit and debt. Furthermore, the war had a political and cultural impact as the reputation of the U.S. army disintegrated. The war in Vietnam had lost its meaning and become a moral crisis in the eyes of the U.S. and international public. In January 1973 all parties were once again brought to a peace table in Paris.

The Paris conference agreed on the withdrawal of the U.S. troops and a peaceful political settlement between Vietnamese parties. A year later, North Vietnam launched a general offensive against Nguyen Van Thieu's government starting with provinces in the Central Highlands. On April 30th 1975, the North-backed army stormed into Sai Gon and raised the DRV's flag at the Independence Place, the headquarter of the RV, marking the success of the communist-led force over the southern government. The victory of the socialist side once again gave rise to the condition of possibility for metonymical sliding for a stronger articulation between national independence and socialism, between the party and the nation.

Chapter 9: The Continued Hegemony of the Communist Discourse

Introduction

One year after the war ended, in the Party's IV Congress in December 1976, Vietnamese communists announced the installation of socialism in the whole Vietnam. The first move to socialism was to change the name of the party and the country to reflect a socialist character. The Vietnamese Labour Party was renamed the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and the reunified country was named the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) with Hanoi as the capital. The Party officially declared that it would expand the socialist project from the North to the South and proceed swiftly into socialism. Giant agro-farm collectives and the economic management of central planning were implemented across Vietnam. However, this socialist project soon encountered economic problems and was slowed down by the end of the decade. Adjustments were adopted in the early 1980s but reformed policies were not officially declared and legalized until the VCP's VI Congress in 1986. In this Reform (Đổi Mới) Congress, the centrally-planned management of the economy and giant agricultural collectives were officially abolished, private ownership and private trade were allowed. Despite initial setbacks, considerable improvements took place in the country's economy and people's living standard. The inflation rate went down from 700% in mid-1980s to 13% in 1995 and 6% in 2000. In 1999, instead of importing rice in late 1970s, Vietnam became the second largest rice exporter in the world. Although the economic policies have been reformed towards capitalism, the social imaginary is in normal operation in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Since the Reform Congress and well into the twenty first century, Vietnam has consistently embraced, what it called, a 'socialist-oriented multi-sectoral commodity economy'. As the words in this phrase indicate, Vietnam's economy may be market-oriented, but is also socialist-oriented. Vietnam's economy may be open, but its political system remains essentially socialist, a system which positions the Communist Party as the only ruling party. The fact that Vietnam remains socialist while its economy is liberalized along market lines in the Reform process has become a topic of academic interest. This chapter studies how it is possible for Vietnam to maintain this socialist identity throughout the Reform Process. That Vietnam became a socialist country is not taken here as an inevitable or natural historical development as told in the Vietnamese official historical narrative, but as a process of power struggle in the realm of discourse over 'who we are and the state we are in'.

This chapter examines the Vietnamese communist discourse from the DRV's victory against the RV in 1975, through the Reform Congress and up to the present. It argues that the hegemony of the communist discourse, which was attained during the communist-led war against the U.S. intervention and the DR government, has been maintained since reunification. The significance of national independence and the existence of the nation have been taken for granted as common sense. The symbiosis between nationalism and socialism, which was established in the war time, is becoming even more stronger. Socialism and the leadership of the VCP are articulated as the only condition to maintain national independence and to ensure that the national construction succeeds. The socialist regime and the nation are fused with each other in the language of national security and national defence, which made possible the protection of the party and the socialist state in the name of the nation. In return, the language and application of the law on national security and national defence contributes to further blurring the distinction between the socialist regime and the nation. Although the economy is now geared towards a capitalist market mechanism, socialism never ceases to function as a social imaginary in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Since unification, the knowledge claim about the 'scientific' Marxist-Leninist law on human development has been increasingly circulated in the communist discourse, consolidating the war-time socialist imaginary, which justified the adoption of socialism and legitimated the continuation of socialism in Vietnam. The continued hegemony of the communist discourse has enabled the VCP to maintain its hegemonic position in Vietnam despite economic reforms and the collapse of the socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

This chapter is composed of three parts. The first one analyses the communist discourse after the war ended in 1975. The success of the communist-led force against the U.S. and its supported southern government had consolidated the symbiosis between socialism and nationalism, enabling the communist discourse to achieve a stronger hegemony. Both national independence and socialism have been taken for granted as the necessary condition for the Vietnamese people to survive and to thrive. The second part studies the communist discourse around the Reform Congress in 1986. Reference to the Marxist-Leninist objective law on the development of human society was found to be the dominant discursive mechanism in justifying reformed policies. However, although the economy was geared towards capitalism, the communist discourse has never let go the grip on the socialist imaginary. The Reform was seen as a continuity of the construction of socialism in Vietnam, not a rupture nor a termination

of this process. The last part of this chapter analyses how the socialist imaginary is maintained in present Vietnam.

9.1. The Hegemony of the Communist Discourse

The Vietnamese communists' victory against the southern government and the U.S. intervention provided the condition of possibility for a stronger hegemony of the communist discourse. Socialism and the leadership of the VCP were articulated as the only condition that can ensure national independence in Vietnam. The socialist imaginary that was formed during the war against the U.S. intervention and the southern government was further consolidated as socialism was increasingly enmeshed with nationalism. After independence was achieved, socialism functioned as the social imaginary whereby all social demands and interests in post-independence Vietnam could be inscribed. With both the national and the socialist imaginaries being consolidated, the communist discourse had attained a stronger hegemony in the discursive space of Vietnam. The revolution in Vietnam was articulated to be both national and socialist at the same time.

During the wars against the French, the United States and their supported southern governments, as discussed in the previous chapters, we have seen that a symbiosis was established between socialism and nationalism in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Adopting a social revolution by implementing a land reform and setting up agricultural collectives was reasoned to be an indispensable means for the struggle for national independence and unification to succeed. After 1975, when the country was reunified and became independent from foreign intervention, socialism is firmly fixed as nationalism. Socialism and nationalism became two sides of the same coin in the Communist discourse. The means (socialism) and the end (national independence) were so intricately fused that distinctions could no longer be made to separate means from end. Socialism was articulated to be the indispensable condition that had enabled Vietnam as a nation to achieve independence and to maintain this independence in the future. Besides socialism, the leadership of the Communist Party was also articulated to be the vital element for any success of Vietnam in both national safeguarding and construction. These articulations helped to create the possible and legitimate foundations for the establishment of socialism and the Party's leadership in the whole Vietnam after unification. Given that national independence had been taken for granted as the only condition whereby ongoing problems were solved and all social demands were met

(see chapters 7 and 8), when socialism is articulated to be the only way to bring about and maintain national independence, its significance will be logically taken for granted in the same manner as national independence was. The symbiosis between nationalism and socialism is omnipresent in all documents of the VCP since 1975. The combination of national independence and socialism were said to be ‘a universal truth of the era’ (VCP, 1976: online). In addition, as in the war period, socialism continued to be presented as the only way that Vietnamese people can enjoy a happy and prosperous life, perpetuating the socialist imaginary in the Vietnam.

In the political report of the IV Congress in 1976, the first Congress after independence and unification, it was assessed that the theoretical value of Marx-Leninism and the North’s socialist economy were decisive factors of victory of the anti-America resistance for unification. Socialism was made equal with national independence: independence would not have been achieved and would not be maintained without socialism. ‘The truth is that the struggle against the American for national salvation would not have succeeded without the socialist North’ (VCP, 1976: online). The means (socialism) was then articulated to be the end of Vietnam’s revolution. The means and end had been so mixed up that they became inseparable.

At present, when our nation has become completely independent, nation and socialism become one... In this present era, when national independence and socialism are inseparable, when workers hold the leading role in the revolution, the success of national revolution is the beginning of a socialist revolution. (VCP, 1976: online)

Socialism was the goal of our whole cause because socialism ensures independence and freedom for our country. (VCP, 1982: online)

Socialism was articulated as not only the key element to realize and maintain national independence but also the only way for the country to develop and the people to enjoy a prosperous life.

Only socialism can realize the long-held dream of the working people for an eternal escape from oppression, exploitation, poverty, backwardness to live a life with enough food to eat and enough clothes to wear, to have a secure future of happiness of civilization. Only socialism can give working people the full ownership right, can return the true value to human beings, enabling human beings to become the true owner of society, nature and their selves. Only with socialism, our country can achieve a modern economy, advanced culture and science and strong national defence so that our country

can be eternally independent, free and ever developing. Only socialism can enable our country to be unified at the highest and fullest level in terms of territory, politics and spirits, economy, culture and society, in terms of rights and responsibility, in which everybody unites and loves each other in the most sincere and affectionate manner. (VCP, 1976: online)

Besides supporting the South, the socialist North was depicted to have transferred into a new land of prosperity and equality. ‘At present in the North, working people were no longer exploited and looked down upon... Everybody has enough to eat, to wear and enjoy access to education’ (ibid). The South, pictured as being infested with eco-social evils under the U.S. influence, was said to be in dire need of such socialist improvements.

The knowledge claim about a binary world, in which there was an ongoing struggle between backward capitalism and thriving socialism, was well preserved in the communist discourse in post-independence Vietnam. The victories against the French and the United States appear to further consolidate this knowledge, strengthening the claim that socialism was winning over capitalism.

Socialism has spread beyond the scale of one country to become a world system. Soviet Union and China are thriving. Life is proving the champion of socialism and the international socialist system is playing its role as the determining factor to human development. (VCP, 1976: online)

On the contrary, the capitalism system was said ‘to be collapsing in a general crisis’ and ‘to have gone deeper into its last stage, becoming an obstacle and a reactionary force in the development of human society’ (ibid). The issue over who would win between socialism and capitalism was seen as the issue of the era with socialism as a progressive and more advanced force. As in the war time when Vietnam’s fight for independence was seen as part of the world struggle on the side of the socialist front, the building of socialism in post-independent Vietnam was presented as the continuation of the country’s participation in this world struggle. Having successfully unified and liberated the country was seen as the completion of not only a national task but also an international task (VCP, 1976: online). With the establishment of socialism in the whole country, the SRV was proclaimed ‘to be an invincible fortress of socialism, an important factor in the promotion of peace, national independence and social progress in the Southeast Asia and in the world’ (ibid). The cause of building socialism was understood to be not only for the benefit of the country, but for the sake of the advance of the whole human race. The route to socialism was also presented as backed up by ‘science’:

the objective law of human development. Socialism was considered to be the inevitable evolution of the Vietnam, ‘in line with the law on the development of human society, which is in the transition from capitalism to socialism in the scale of the whole wide world’ (VCP, 1976: online). The political decision to build socialism was made on the foundation of the ‘scientific’ knowledge that the human society evolved through orderly steps under a universal law discovered by Marxism’s evolution theory.

The IV Congress (VCP, 1976: online) proclaimed that ‘Vietnam’s revolution had gone into a new stage: the stage of independence and unification with the only strategic goal of implementing socialist revolution, proceeding swiftly, vigorously and firmly into socialism’. Vietnam’s revolution did not stop when the war ended, building a socialist system was also seen as a revolution. This socialist revolution had already been on in the North since the 1950s. What was different in this period was that the socialist revolution was about to happen in the whole Vietnam and in the absence of war. Twenty years of socialist revolution was said to have brought North Vietnam with considerable progresses, the greatest of which was the eradication of human exploitation and the establishment of socialist ownership. ‘At present in the North, working people were no longer exploited and looked down upon’ (ibid). The South, seen as being infested with eco-social evils under the U.S. influence, was said to be in dire need of such improvements. Socialist revolution was not only about economy, but about culture and ideology. The central task of the transition to socialism in economy was defined to be the implementation of socialist industrialization, prioritizing the development of heavy industry. The cultural task was to build a new culture and new people in line with the new society. It would not be any kind of culture and people, it had to be a socialist culture and socialist people. ‘The new culture is built on the bases of Marxist-Leninism and socialist collective ownership’ (ibid). New people had to be working people, to love labour and to love their socialist country. These people were said to be new, but at the same time the crystallization of all the best characters of Vietnamese people nurtured along the long history of four thousand years. The building of socialism was not about making policies that suited the conditions of Vietnam, but a revolution to change Vietnam, including its people, its culture and economic system to match the Party’s idealized socialist model.

However, by the 1980s the socialist country was deteriorated rather than being ‘then times better’ as Ho Chi Minh envisioned (Ho Chi Minh, 1969), in spite of substantial assistance from the socialist block and China. From a rice exporter in the 1930s, Vietnam had to import

three million tons of rice annually in the three years preceding 1980. The same period saw the rice ration fall to the lowest point of supply in North Vietnam during the war. National income and per capital income did not increase but declined towards the end of the Second Five Year Plan. Vietnam's exports were only about 15% of its imports in 1980. The post-war economy was also plagued by problems of inflation and corruption.

Although changes to the socialist economy had been reported to be underway since as early as 1979 (Quinn-Judge, 2006) and was signalled in the V Congress in 1982, it was until the VI congress in 1986 that the Party officially and publicly announced a program of economic reforms. Reformed policies were further elaborated in consequent Congresses and is still embraced in Vietnam at the present.

9.2. Reform and the Objective Law

The VI Party Congress in December 1986 was commonly known as the Congress of Reform, marking the official initiation of economic renovations in Vietnam. In this occasion, the Party declared the existence of multiple sectors in Vietnam's current economy and the eradication of the centrally planned economy. In the VII Congress in 1991, the VCP called Vietnam's reformed economy as the socialist-orientated multi-sector economy (VCP, 1991a: online). Although under reformed policies, the socialist economy was dismantled and Vietnam's economy was geared towards capitalism, the Reform was represented as a continuity, rather than a rupture of the nation's path to socialism in the communist discourse. It was articulated as a necessary step in the transitional period, through which Vietnam's backward economy could advance directly into socialism, skipping the capital stage (VCP, 1986: online). Socialism still maintained its role as a social imaginary in the communist discourse. What enabled the grip of the socialist imaginary in the communist discourse despite this market-oriented economy was the knowledge claim about the objective law of Marxist-Leninism, which governed the transition to socialism. The Marxist-Leninist law was indeed a panacea discursive weapon in the Vietnamese Communists' discourse. As we have seen in the previous section, in the first post-war National Congress in 1976, it was used to back up the establishment of socialism in the whole Vietnam in the first place. In this section, we are going to see how it was referred to justify the implementation of a capitalist economy while the country remained socialist under the sole leadership of the Communist Party. Under this putative law, the transformation from a backward economy like Vietnam's into socialism was said to require a pro-longed transitional period, which was consisted of several small

transitional stages. During some first initial small transitional stages, some capitalist elements like individual ownership and private sectors should be allowed to exist and develop in order for the infrastructure or production forces to improve before the adoption of socialist production relations was applied in later stages. This is required by the objective law in Marxist-Leninism about the compatibility between production forces and production relations. Conceptualizing the transition as a multi-stage process was hailed as important contribution of this Congress of Reform in both theory and reality of building socialism in Vietnam's official historical narrative (Le, 2014: online).

As mention in the previous session, reference to the objective law on the development of human development was made in the 1976 Congress to back up the installation of socialism in the whole Vietnam. It is also this objective law which was referred to make possible the reformed policies in the communist discourse. While the IV Congress advocated a swift and direct step to socialism, the V Congress in 1982 envisioned a prolonged transition into socialism. The target of the economic policies was changed from industrialization into simply meeting the basic demands of the people. The view that Vietnam's transition into socialism would go through different stage first appeared in this 1982 Congress. The period that Vietnam was going though then was called the first stage of this transition. In this first stage, instead of concentrating in industry as specified in the IV Congress, the focus was now agriculture and to meet the everyday basic and urgent demands of the people, stabilizing material and cultural lives (VCP, 1982: online). The problems that Vietnam's post-war economy had encountered were not the problems of the socialist system itself, but were caused by the lack of knowledge in the transition to socialism. The Party self-criticized that they 'had not mastered the objective law of the development process from a small production to a big one', therefore they 'had been subjective and hasty in setting some over-ambitious targets on the scale and speed of basic construction and productive development' (ibid).

Despite economic problems were declared and assessed, the celebration of socialism as a thriving international trend world was ubiquitous in the documents of the V Congress. Familiar plot was on: the Soviet Union had passed the socialist stage and proceeded to the higher phase of communism, more and more countries were building socialism. The United States was struggling to survive, allegedly finding a way to fight the Soviet Union and distort Vietnam's image in the international front. Enemies were reported to be both domestic and outside the countries, plotting to destroy the Party. The late 1970s was recorded in the

documents of the V Congress with great victories in national defence. The military interventions into Cambodia and Lao was referred to as the international responsibility towards peoples of these two countries, contributing to the safeguard of peace and national independence in Indochina and Southeast Asia. These actions were seen as part of the world struggle against capitalism.

In the Reform Congress, the objective law that governed the transition to socialism was elaborated in detail.

In line with the law on the compatibility between production relations with the nature and development level of production forces, the consolidation of socialism needs to have suitable steps and forms. Practical experiences make it clear that: production forces are hindered not only in case of outdated production relations, but only in case when production relations grow ahead of the development level of production forces. Our country's situation requires the appreciation of the existence of middle-ground economic forms between low and small scale to big and high scale. In each step of the consolidation of socialism, it is necessary to build up technical-material foundations, and create new production forces. Only on this basis, can production relations be advanced to new forms and scale to encourage the development of production forces. (VCP, 1986: online)

Under Vietnam's Marxist lenses, ownership is part of production relations and state and collective ownership are the high-level forms of production relations. Seeing in this way, the failure of the country's post-unification socialist economic policies was explained to be the incompatibility between production relations and production forces. By creating state and collective ownerships, the production relations were led to develop too far ahead of the existing production forces, which hindered the growth of the latter. In Marxism and Leninism, the economy only develops when production relations are compatible with production forces under objective law. Therefore, the centrally planned economy had to be abandoned to build a new management which was in line with the existing development level of the economy as required by this putative law. The socialist economy characterized by collective and state ownership and state management applied in post-war Vietnam was not wrong in itself, what was wrong was that the existing level of production forces in the country had not developed high enough for the production relations of a socialist economy. What was wrong was the failure to respect the law on the compatibility between production relations with production forces.

The VI Congress theorized about a transitional period between capitalism and socialism. Building a socialist system in Vietnam was still the ultimate goal of the VCP, but the process was articulated to be a long and difficult multi-step transition.

That the evolution from capitalism to socialism goes through a transitional period is an objective necessity, and the length of this period depends on the economic, political and social conditions of each country. The transitional period in our country, which is advancing straight towards socialism from a small-scale production bypassing the stage of capitalist development, naturally must be very long and full of difficulties. (VCP, 1986: online)

Instead of proceeding swiftly and strongly to socialism as declared in the IV Congress in 1976, the VI Congress proclaimed that they were only on the first step of this process, which is only ‘a small transitional step in the big transitional step’. Lenin was quoted as saying that ‘the transitional period, in our policy, is to be divided into multiple smaller transitional steps’, each of which bore their own tasks (ibid). The Reform Congress defined ‘the general task of the first step is to stabilize social-economic conditions, consolidate necessary foundations for the enhanced socialist industrialisation in the next step’. Industrialization, which was underlined in the IV Congress, was now considered the target of the next step, giving priority to improving people’s living standards. This Congress stated that the transitional period required a multi-sector economy and the removal of the bureaucratically centralized management based on State subsidies

Policies of economic reforms continued to be embraced and further clarified by the SRV until the present day. The 6th Plenum of the Central Committee in March 1989 stated that one of the guidelines in reform is the consistent implementation of the policy of a multi-sector economy in order to free all productive forces (VCP, 1989: online). At the VII Congress in 1991, the VCP reaffirmed that they would stand for ‘the consistent implementation of the policy on a socialist-oriented multi-sector economy’ and strive for a new management mechanism – a market mechanism under the management of a socialist state (VCP, 1991a: online). This economic hybrid was institutionalised in the two most recent constitutions of the SRV.

The state promotes a multi-sector goods economy following market mechanism under state management with socialist orientation. The multi-sector economy has a variety of ways in organizing production and business based on the ownership of the people, the

collectives and the individuals, of which the people's and collective ownership is the foundation. (National Assembly, 1992: online).

Vietnam's economy is a socialist-oriented market economy with a variety of ownership forms and economic sectors; state sector plays a key role (National Assembly, 2013: online).

While permitting multiple sectors and various ownership forms in the reformed economy, the vital role of the state sector and the management role of the state in the national economy were consistently stressed in the discourse of the reform process. The Reform Congress's political report asserted that one of the tasks of the first stage of socialist consolidation was to 'turn the state sector into the core, making it play the decisive role in the national economy' (VCP, 1986: online). The central role the state sector played in the economy was regulated in the most recent constitution of the Vietnam in article 51 (National Assembly, 2013: online). Article 15 of the 1992 Constitution states that the people and collective ownerships were the foundation of the multi-sector economy. What is the people ownership remains unclear and receive no specific explanation, except for another general reference in article 16, which regulates that all natural resources and important infrastructures belong to the State, under the people's ownership. The 2013 constitution preserves the same content with slightly different word order in article 53: all natural resources and important infrastructures are public property under the people ownership, of which the State represent to own and manage. In the discourse of the VCP, Vietnam's current economy is that of multi-sector economy with socialist orientations under the State leadership, in which the state sector takes the central place.

The type of economy that Vietnam is embracing in the Reform Process is a market economy with multi-sectors and multi forms of ownership, which is essentially a capitalist economy. However, Vietnam remains a socialist country under a monopolistic rule of the Communist Party and the state still plays a decisive role in the national economy. This peculiar combination of socialism and capitalism was made possible in the discursive reference to the objective law 'discovered' in Marxist – Leninism, which not only describes history as inevitable passages from one economic stage to the next with socialism as the final outcome but also preordains a prolonged transition period from a backward economy like Vietnam's to socialism. The existence of multiple sectors and various forms of ownerships in this transition period is articulated to be a natural requirement regulated by the objective law governing the compatibility between production forces and relations. Commenting on the SRV's excessive

reference to putative law, Kolko (1994: 40) stated that the Party, ‘rather than coming to grips with Vietnam’s complexities as specific, historically caused events – some of which were avoidable and others not – justified its essentially capitalist program in terms of ostensible Marxist global laws’. He criticised these putative laws to ‘be intellectually disgraceful, simplify the world as badly as its mechanistic Marxist-Leninist strictures of the past, and only obfuscate issue and make positions dogmatic’ (ibid).

The objective law about human evolution in Marxist-Leninism was the transcendental force that hailed the VCP into its socialist project and kept alive its grip onto socialism. The articulation of socialism as the advanced stage of human development in the Vietnamese discourse is rooted in the knowledge claim of Marxist-Leninism. When someone accepts Marxist-Leninism as science and its knowledge claims about the existence of the objective law that governs human development, he/she is buying in and the inevitability and the installation of socialism at the same time.

9.3. The Continuity of the Socialist Imaginary after Reform

After the Reform Congress, the Party has never ceased to identify Vietnam in socialist terms. The socialist imaginary is kept well alive in the communist discourse until the present time. Despite adversary developments of the communist system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which may give rise to different reading of socialism, socialism in the Vietnamese communist discourse preserves its fine signification as in the war time. It is still presented as the final inevitable glory stage of human development. The association between national independence and socialism is further consolidated. The leadership is popularly circulated as the indispensable condition to maintain national independence and to ensure the national construction succeeds. The hegemonic relation by which the VCP claims to represent the whole Vietnamese nation is preserved. The socialist regime and the nation have been fused with each other, making it possible for the legal protection of the socialist state and the party in the name of the protection of the nation in Vietnam.

The Ongoing Grip of Socialism

When the socialist system in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was collapsing in the late 1980s and in the early 1990s, the Party made it clear in the 6th Plenum of the Central

Committee that reform was not about the change of the socialist end, but only the change of the means to achieve the same end.

Proceeding to Socialism is the inevitable path of our country... Reform is not a change in the goal of socialism, but is the effective realization of that goal by better thoughts, more compatible forms, steps and methods (VCP, 1989: online).

During the reform process, while promoting an open foreign policy to make friends with all countries including ex-enemies, the VCP stated its preference for enhancing relations with Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Vietnam's socialist project is still seen as a contribution to the evolution of progressed human race against capitalism. The VCP proclaim to be a firm base of the socialist front and declared their loyalty to Marxist-Leninism. The building of socialism is articulated to be part of the universal struggle for peace.

The Marxist-Leninist law, which pre-ordains socialism as the final and highest stage in the development of human society, is still omnipresent in the discourse of the Vietnamese Communist in the present time. In the two political blueprints of post-reform Vietnam, *The Agenda on National Construction in the Transition into Socialism* passed in 1991 and 2011, the VCP confirmed that the human race will definitely advance to socialism according to the evolution law of history.

The struggle between socialism and capitalism is still going on intensely... Capitalism is still an oppressing, exploiting and unjust system. Socialism are facing a great deal of difficulties and challenges... Human race will finally advance to socialism because it is an objective law. (VCP, 1991: online)

At the moment, capitalism still has the potential to grow, however, in nature it is an oppressing, exploiting and unjust system... The intrinsic contradictions within capitalism, especially the contradiction between the increasing socialization of production forces and the capitalist individual ownership, will not be able to be solved but will become more and more intense. Economic, political and social crises are still occurring. The motion of these intrinsic contradictions and the struggle of working people will decide the destiny of capitalism... According to the evolution law of history, human race will certainly advance to socialism. (VCP, 2011a: online)

Both the 2011 Agenda and the resolution of the XI National Congress affirmed:

Advancing to socialism is the aspiration of our people, the rightful choice of the VCP and President Ho Chi Minh, in line with the evolving trend of history (VCP, 2011a and 2011b: online).

Socialism was regulated in all the constitutions of the country after independence (National Assembly, 1980, 1992, 2013). Socialism was regulated clearly in Vietnam's first post-war constitution passed in 1980. While the 1959 constitution referred to socialism in a very general and subtle manner, the 1980 document asserted the socialist character of the country and specified elements and steps of building socialism. The latter stated that 'the SRV advances directly from a small economy into socialism, skipping the stage of capitalism'. The 1950 document did not put the connotation 'socialist' next to the state and affirmed the existence of a variety of ownership forms in the transition. In the 1980 constitution, the state was definitely confirmed as the socialist state, which were consolidating socialist ownership system composing of two parts: the state economy under the people ownership and the cooperative economy under the collective ownership of working people. Both the 1992 and 2013 constitutions affirmed that Vietnam was in the transition to socialism and the state in the country is a socialist state 'of the people, by the people, for the people' (cua nhan dan, do nhan dan, vi nhan dan) (National Assembly, 1992 and 2013)

The symbiosis between socialism and national independence is increasingly popular in the communist discourse. National independence and socialism are represented as two sides of the same coin: Vietnam could not have become and could not remain independent if it does not adopt and follow socialism. This pre-reform articulation is preserved, brought forward and widely circulated in the communist discourse in the present time. The symbiosis between national independence and socialism is ubiquitous in the party documents.

National independence is directly tied to socialism (VCP, 1991: online).

National independence is the first condition to implement socialism and socialism is the firm foundation of national independence. Building socialism and protecting the socialist country are two strategic tasks that are closely related (VCP, 2011a: online).

The term 'determination in the goals of national independence and socialism' (kiên định mục tiêu độc lập dân tộc và chủ nghĩa xã hội) is popularly circulated in both writings and speeches of the VCP.

We have to be determined in Marxist-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's ideology and the goals of national independence and socialism (VCP, 2006: online).

Under any condition and situation, it is vital to... be determined in the goals of national independence and socialism (VCP, 2011b: online).

The symbiosis between national independence and socialism is articulated to be a core lesson of Vietnam's revolution. The combination between national independence and socialism has been taught as a political idea in Ho Chi Minh's ideology to undergraduates in Vietnam. Since the establishment of the SRV in 1976, Marxist-Leninism has been the only foreign ideology in Vietnam's political education. At the present, it is compulsory for all undergraduates to study three political subjects in the country. One of them is Marxist-Leninism, the other two are Ho Chi Minh's ideology and the VCP's revolutionary guideline. Ho Chi Minh's ideology appeared as a political subject in 1991, 5 years after the launch of Reform and just after the falling of Berlin wall. The VCP's revolutionary guideline is more like a historical autobiography of the VCP.

Socialism does not only signify national independence but also a happy and fulfilled life. It signifies a utopia where the communists are leading the people into.

The socialist society that our people are building is a society: which is composed of wealthy people, strong country, democracy, equality and civilisation; being owned by the people, possessing a highly-developed economy based on modern productive forces and compatible advanced productive relations; having a progressive culture but full of nationalist characteristics; where the people have enough to eat and to wear, have freedom and happiness, have the condition to fully ; where all ethnic communities are equal and united, respect and support each other to co-develop; having a law-ruled socialist State of the people, by the people and for the people led by the Communist Party; having a friendship and cooperative relationship with other countries in the world. (VCP, 2011a: online)

The XI National Congress in 2011 proclaimed that 'only socialism can ensure our nation to have true independence and freedom, our country to develop prosperously and our people to enjoy happy lives' (VCP, 2011b: online). As the central element that defines socialism in Vietnam, the leadership of the communist Party is put forward in the communist discourse as the indispensable condition for Vietnam to succeed in its national safeguarding and national construction.

The Association between the Party and the Nation

The leadership of the VCP in post-independence Vietnam is cast in the national terms. It is presented as the only condition that ensures the success of Vietnam's national defence and construction both in the past and in the future. In the IV Congress in 1976, the Party's leadership was assessed to be the source element of the victory over the French and

the United States to liberate and unify the country (VCP, 1976). However, the articulation that the leadership of the Party is the necessary condition to enable Vietnam's national defence and construction in the future to succeed is a new intervention of the post-reform period. Not only past achievements but also all possible achievements in the future are pre-determined to be attributed to the rightful leadership of the Party. The Party's leadership was hailed as 'the indispensable condition for the success of the national safeguarding and construction' (VCP, 1989: online) and as 'the vital factor determining the success of the renovation process' (VCP, 1991a: online). The metaphor that the Party's flag was 'always winning' (bách chiến, bách thắng) is very common in the present discourse of the Vietnamese Communists.

The association between the communist Party's leadership and the success of Vietnam's revolution is reasserted in the two 'Agenda on National Construction in the Transition to Socialism' as one of the five crucial lessons of Vietnam's revolution.

The Party's rightful leadership is the primary factor ensuring the victories of Vietnam's revolution. The Party does not have any other interest other than the interest of serving the nation and the people (VCP, 1991b and 2011b: online).

This lesson is said to be withdrawn from experiences in reality: 'The reality of our country's revolution has proved that in Vietnam, except of the Communist Party, there is no other political force that is able to handle the leading role assigned by the history' (VCP, 1991b: online). The statement that only the communist Party can lead Vietnam to success is an un-foundational claim. It may be true that the VCP had lead Vietnam to victory in the fight against the French and in national unification, the articulation that history has assigned the VCP with the task of leading the country and that only the VCP can bring Vietnam to victory is no more than a fairy tale.

The leading role of the VCP in Vietnam has been constitutionalised in all the constitutions of the SRV.

The VCP, the pioneers and think tank of Vietnam's working class, is armed with Marxist-Leninism, is the sole leader of the state and society; is the primary factor deciding every victory of Vietnam's revolution. The Party exists and make effort for the benefit of the working class and Vietnamese people. Party's organisations operate under the framework of the Constitution (National Assembly, 1980: online).

The VCP, the vanguard of the Vietnamese working class, the loyal representative of the interest of the workers' class, the working class and of the whole nation, adhering to Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thoughts, is the leading force of the State and society (National Assembly, 1992: online).

The VCP – the vanguard of the workers' class, of Vietnamese working people and the whole nation, the loyal representative of the interest of workers' class, working people and the whole nation, adopting Marxist-Lennism as the ideological foundation – is the leading force of the State and society (National Assemble, 2013: online).

The SRV's constitutions do not only regulate the sole leadership of the VCP in Vietnam but also the hegemonic relation between the Party and the nation. In the VCP's claims to represent the nation and its interests, the nation is constituted as such. The relation that the Party represents the interest of the whole nation is not an objective relationship, but a discursive one. The nation or the Vietnamese people that the Party claims to represents is a political or contaminated universality, a constructed totality (Laclau and Mouffe, 1980: xiii).

The Legalization of the Protection of the Socialist Regime

After with the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and, the socialist regime, which is understood here as the VCP, its leadership and the socialist state, has become a subject of protection under the law in Vietnam. What makes the legalization of the protection of the socialist regime possible is the discursive equation between the communist party, and the socialist state with the nation. The existence and application of these legal documents contributes to produce and perpetuate the understanding the socialist regime is part of the nation.

References to stability and security emerged and became more popular in the Vietnamese communist discourse around the early 1990s, when the socialist system was collapsing in the Soviet Union and Eastern European. 'Only with political stability can social and economic conditions be stable and developed' (VCP, 1990). This statement was a stark contrast to the war time motto, which emphasized the only way to survive and to improve living condition was to fight against the France and the American-backed South government, which meant causing political instability. Taylor (2001: 198) remarks that while the leadership's buzzwords were openness and renovation in the early 1990s, its prominent concern was security and stability by the end of the century. In this concern with security and stability, the socialist regime made itself become a subject of legal protection.

The protection of the socialist regime is regulated in the Criminal Code, the law on National Security passed in 2014 and the White Papers on National Defence. All versions of the Criminal Codes of post-war Vietnam (1985, 1999 and 2015) contain one whole chapter dedicated to crimes violating national security. Article 108 entitled ‘Treason’ of the 2015 Criminal Code, the first article of the chapter of crimes violating national security, reads:

Any Vietnamese citizen, who cooperate with foreign elements to do harm to the independence, sovereignty, unification and territory of the country, socialism and the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, national defence and security, is sentenced to from 12 years’ to 20 years’ imprisonment, life imprisonment or death penalty. (National Assembly, 2015: online)

In this article, socialism and the socialist state are put alongside the national independence and unification. The violation of socialism is considered the same as the violation of the nation. In the Law on National Security passed in 2004, national security is defined to be ‘the stability and sustainable development of the socialist regime and the State of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the inalienability of the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of the Fatherland’ (National Assembly, 2014: online). All the White Papers on National Defence of Vietnam define one of the tasks of national defence as to ensure Vietnam’s socialist regime (MOD, 1998, 2004, 2009). The introduction of concepts of ‘national security’ and ‘national defence’ and the laws and legal documents that accompany them contributes to produce and perpetuate the equation between the socialist regime and the nation in the communist discourse. The legalization of the protection of the socialist regime and the socialist state has been achieved at the expense of erasing the distinction between concepts of the nation and the state and the party. The effect of this meaning fusion is the protection of the socialist regime, including the communist Party and the socialist state, by the force of law, criminalizing all actions against socialism and the VCP’s leadership in present Vietnam.

Conclusion

Since reunification in 1976, throughout the Reform process until present, the communist discourse has been able to maintain its hegemony in Vietnam. The meanings of socialism, the party’s representation of the nation and its leading role were found with more continuities than changes in the communist discourse. The Reform is represented as a continuity, rather than a rupture in the socialist imaginary. Socialism still holds powerful grips in this discourse. In a

very recent state ceremony to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the October Russian Revolution, General Secretary of the VCP, Nguyen Phu Trong, asserted that Vietnam would be determined in following Marxist-Leninism and was firmly stepping towards socialism (VCP, 2017: online).

The continuity of the socialist imaginary in the communist discourse is founded first and foremost on the symbiosis between socialism and nationalism. As national independence has been naturalised as the indispensable condition for the Vietnamese people to survive and to thrive in the national imaginary, socialism is articulated as the only means to ensure national independence. Firm determination with the combination of national independence and socialism is one of the core value in Ho Chi Minh's ideology, a compulsory political subject for Vietnamese undergraduates. '[O]nly socialism can ensure our nation to have true independence and freedom, our country to develop prosperously and our people to enjoy happy lives' (VCP, 2011b: online).

The continuity of the socialist imaginary in post-independence Vietnam is consolidated in the Vietnamese communists' knowledge claim that Marxist-Leninism is scientific and reflects true objective conditions of human society. Whenever Marxist-Leninism and the law on the development of human society are still recognised as 'the scientific truth', the socialist imaginary will be still able to exert its power. Although dissidents in Vietnam have never been absent, the vast majorities of their activities are anti-party and anti-government. The foundation claim to power of the VCP, which is Marxist-Leninism, has not been subjects to much criticism. Given that Marxist-Leninism is the only international political thought taught in the country, Vietnam's political imagination is far from being diverse enough to give rise to any serious disruptions to the VCP's political ideology and its sole leadership in Vietnam.

The equation between the socialist regime and the nation in the communist discourse is also another discursive mechanism that enables the continuity of socialism in present Vietnam. This equation was established during the war and was further consolidated in the post-war period. During the Reform process, it has been brought into the legal field. The socialist regime, which includes the VCP and the Vietnamese socialist state, is articulated as an element of national security, which is protected by law. The legalization of the protection of the socialist regime is made on the premise of the protection of the nation. However, as the law exists and continues to be interpreted and applied as such, the equation between the nation and the socialist regime is legalized and is, at the same time, produced and taken for granted.

The distinction between the party and the nation is becoming blurred in the communist discourse. The discursive fusion between the nation and the socialist regime has made possible the making of these laws on national security, producing material forces in blocking alternative routes of political practices, enabling the continuity of the sole leadership of the VCP in present Vietnam.

However, Vietnam is not yet a socialist country as its name suggests. While ensuring socialism in the Reform process, the establishment of socialism was obviously deferred. By conceptualizing the transition into socialism as a series of steps, the actual realization of socialism was temporarily deferred while still functioning as a social imaginary. This linguistic articulation also worked to break the link between socialism and economic failures as the conditions in Vietnam around 1980 could have possibly amounted to. As long as the Reform is in place, socialist economic policies are not to be implemented in Vietnam. The only element that renders Vietnam appear a socialist country at present is the monopolistic leadership of the Party that bears the connotation 'Communist'.

The meaning of socialism in the VCP's discourse can never be fixed once and for all. The reason is, as I have attempted to show, there is no such things as the inherent central meaning of this concept. The meaning of socialism has been established on the relations with other concepts including national independence, peace and prosperity, which are also empty in themselves except for all the linguistic articulation that made up their existence. The very meaning of socialism is only constructed on its own deferment, always delaying the actual realization of something called socialism. Present Vietnam in the Reform process is exactly the deferment of socialism. Existing capitalist economic policies are justified as necessary in order to achieve the actual realisation of socialism in the future. Socialism in Vietnam is always in the process of becoming.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

10.1. Core Findings

This research critically studies the national frame in which the communist-led revolution in Vietnam has always been cast. Using post-structuralist discourse theory, it studies the process whereby the nation was imagined and became 'real' in the Vietnamese communist discourse and how this national imagining contributed to the legitimization of the socialist state in Vietnam. Its central argument is that the Vietnamese nation is a discursive construct which enabled the communist party and the socialist state to acquire legitimacy in Vietnam. This argument is arrived based on three findings of the research. Firstly, the Vietnamese nation was constructed in the communist discourse in the very representation of French colonists, American interventionists and their sponsored governments as enemies of the nation. French colonialization, the U.S. intervention and their sponsored governments were constructed as the social antagonisms that were to blame for all the problems and miseries ongoing in Vietnam. They were read as foreign plots to kill the Vietnamese people and to destroy the Vietnamese nation. The French and the Americans were cast foreign invaders who only came to rob and exploit the Vietnamese. The Bao Dai government of the Associate State of Vietnam and the southern government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were both presented as the puppets of the invaders and the enemies of the nation.

Secondly, the nation was able to be imagined to be more real among the mass in the discursive fixing of national independence as the indispensable condition for the survival of the Vietnamese people, which occurred around the 1945 August Revolution. The myth that a Vietnamese nation was exploited and brought to the verge of extinction by the French colonists was circulated in the pre-communist colonial Vietnam and brought into the communist discourse since its inception in the middle of the 1920s. However, it was until the 1940s and 1950s that this myth was able to take hold among the Vietnamese mass and transferred into a social imaginary whereby the significance of national independence had been taken for granted. A number of contingent events during the Japanese occupation made possible the fixing of the equation between national independence and the survival of the Vietnamese people. Many Vietnamese had become a national subject in the communist discourse as they joined the Viet Minh-led struggle for national liberation. The national imaginary was further consolidated during the war against the Americans as they were presented as yet another

national enemy just like the French and the Japanese before them. The significance of national independence as the condition of survival had become the national common sense in Vietnam.

Last, this national imagination enabled the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and its socialist state to legalize its rule in Vietnam through the establishment of a symbiosis between nationalism and socialism in the Vietnamese communist discourse. While the existence of nation was being naturalized and the significance of national independence was being taken for granted, a hegemonic articulation occurred in the communist discourse from the early 1950s to discursively link socialism with nationalism. The Communist Party started to claim to represent the whole nation and socialism was presented as the only way to achieve national unification and independence. After the unification of Vietnam under the communist rule in 1976, socialism was increasingly enmeshed with national independence, the Party's leadership articulated as the indispensable condition for Vietnam's national construction and development. The Reform, in which the economy was geared towards capitalism, was represented as a continuity, rather than a rupture in the socialist imaginary. The installation of socialism in Vietnam was also founded in the knowledge claims about the scientific Marxist-Leninist law on the evolution of human society, according to which human race will certainly advance to socialism (VCP, 1991 and 2011a). Moreover, the socialist regime and the nation are fused with each other in the language of national security and national defence, which made possible the protection of the party and the socialist state in the name of the nation. In return, the language and application of the law on national security and national defence contributes to further blurring the distinction between the socialist regime and the nation, producing material forces in blocking alternative routes of political practices, enabling the continuity of the sole leadership of the VCP and socialism in present Vietnam.

These findings correspond to three main discursive constructions in the Vietnamese communist discourse, which are now very much taken for granted as the national common sense in the country. The first is the constitution of the nation as a 'real' existence through the construction of foreign intervention as the cause of all ongoing problems and miseries inside the nation. The second is the equation between national independence with the survival of the Vietnamese people. The third is the associations between the national elements with socialist elements (national independence with socialism and the socialist regime with the nation). Although I present these processes in this research in a temporal order, I do not mean that they occur in a neat time-ordered fashion where one process finishes completely before the other

starts. As discursive processes to fix meanings in a particular way, they require continuous circulation and repetition of articulations. These processes are still going on as, otherwise, the entity or the meanings they constitute will cease to exist. Moreover, these discursive processes do not happen separately but are mutually dependent on each other and reinforce each other.

The nation-making project of the Vietnamese communists is essentially a political project. It makes possible the establishment of socialism and allows the VCP to attain a monopolistic rule in Vietnam. It rules out other possibilities in Vietnamese politics, for example the possibility of having a non-communist government. It involves the destruction of enemies outside and inside the national self, whether they are foreign or Vietnamese, and the sacrifice of its own subjects to protect this national self. Moreover, the national identities of the Vietnamese communists and the boundaries of their national project are not objective but politically decided. The Vietnamese communists previously claimed to represent only the working class and made an enemy of other classes within the Vietnamese population. The boundaries of the nation used to be articulated to be close with the limits of the peasantry. This is in stark contrast with the VCP's present claim to represent the whole nation.

Moreover, the constitution of the nation in the communist discourse is not finished when the national myth was transferred into a social imaginary or when the state was formed or when the war ended. As the nation has 'no ontologically status apart from the various acts that constitute its reality' (Campbell, 1998: 9), these various acts have to constantly in operation in order for to reproduce the existence of the nation. The violence involved in the communist-led struggles against the French colonialism, the U.S. intervention and the southern government, together with the national frame that these struggles were cast, 'reinforce the sense of groupness, not its result' (Brubaker, 2004: 19). As Renan (1990: 19) has observed 'suffering in common unifies more than joy does', the suffering that the Vietnamese had endured during these wars helps to unify the Vietnamese more. After independence, the Vietnamese people are still constantly reminded that they are rooted in a same family, that they share the same heroic past and a distinct culture.

The equation between national independence and the survival of the Vietnamese people and the symbiosis between nationalism and socialism also need to be unceasingly reproduced. In all kinds of documents produced by the entire administrative system of the state in Vietnam, from the police to schools, and in all correspondence of citizens to all state organs, there must be a header, which states:

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam Independence – Freedom - Happiness

These seemingly benign wordings also play a part in constituting and, at the same time, reminding about the association between the socialist regime, independence, freedom and happiness. The existence and application of the legal regulations on national security play a role in naturalizing the equivalence between the socialist regime, whether it is the Communist Party or the Socialist state, with the nation. The communist movement in Vietnam have become ‘national not only in form but in substance, i.e., nationalist’ as Hobsbawm (1977: 13) observed about Marxist movements. ‘There is nothing to suggest that this trend will not continue’ (ibid). The nationalist elements have been intimately imbedded in the Vietnamese communist discourse. The discursive formation that it constructs, which is erected on the three nodal points ‘revolution’, ‘nation’ and ‘socialism’, still functions as ‘a surface of inscription of a wider range of demands, views and attitudes’ (Torfing, 1999: 101). Revolution is fixed as the need to change Vietnam for the better. A nation independent from foreign rule is fixed as the condition to ensure the survival and existence of the Vietnamese people. Socialism is fixed as the indispensable condition for the preservation of national independence and for the country to develop and modernise. Hegemony requires the construction of a universality or a seemingly total structure so that a particularity can speak in the name of this universality. The universality in the Vietnamese communist discourse is not the working class or the proletariat but the nation. The nation is put out as the universality to be protected so that the communists can speak and act in the name of this constructed nation.

The knowledge regime that is embedded in the Vietnamese communist discourse is composed of a system of inter-related knowledge claims. Firstly, the existence of the Vietnamese nation is an unquestionable fact. Secondly, any foreign intervention, whether it is the Chinese occupation, French colonisation and American intervention, was only a vicious plot to kill and exploit the people and to destroy the country. National independence is the first and foremost condition for the Vietnamese people to survive and to thrive. Thirdly, the law of the development of human society in Marxist-Leninism, which foresees the collapse of capitalism and the appearance of socialism as the highest stage in the development of human society, is taken as the scientific truth in the political imagination in Vietnam. Fourthly, the equivalence between socialism and national independence is also taken as the political truth. The socialist system and the leadership of the Communist Party are constructed as the indispensable conditions for Vietnam to attain and maintain national independence. The

adoption of socialism in Vietnam does not only help Vietnam to carry out the national cause, but also is in line with the science of Marxist-Leninism.

The Vietnamese communist discourse has been playing the role of ideology in Marxist sense in justifying the rule of the ruling class. It invests in the character of inevitability and validity to the political and historical view of the Vietnamese communists. In order to represent its own interests as the shared values of all members of the society in question, 'the ruling class has to invest its views with the character of inevitability and convince everyone that these ideas are the only serious option', the one way of understanding the world that is genuinely sensible and valid (Marx and Engels quoted in Belsey, 2002: 32).

The establishment of socialism and the leadership of the Communist Party are articulated as inevitable in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Although since the launch of Reform in 1986, Vietnam has embraced a capitalist economy and socialism is being deferred in the country, the vision towards socialism has never been silent in this discourse. 'If history refused to conform to the theory, that did not validate the theory for the Marxist faithful, but merely delayed its eventual, inevitable success' (Sim, 2002: 81). The Vietnamese Communists are exactly those Marxist faithful, who embraces wholeheartedly the grand narrative of Marxism, which claim that its theories are based on the principles of modern science (Butler, 2002: 14). The Vietnamese discourse is itself part of this Marxist grand narrative, basing its legitimation on the claim to science. Science is conceptualized in Marxism as an objective, value-free discovery of reality and/or the law of reality as in the discourse of modernity.

The Vietnamese communism appears immune to the leftist critique of science (as in post-modernism, post-structuralism and feminism). In this critique, science is less a means of revealing reality than a technique of constructing particular realities and truths. Accordingly, scientist have no such privilege of knowing the nature of nature, 'they promote just 'one story among many', their pretensions are unjustified' (Butler, 2002: 38). Such a critique will be able to deconstruct the claim to truth and the inevitable narrative of the Vietnamese communists.

10.2. Contribution to the Existing Literature

This research extends the existing literature on exposing the constructed nature of the Vietnamese nation with a novel approach. Although the application of Laclau and Mouffe's

discourse theory to nationalism is not new¹⁵, this is the first study that use discourse theory in the case of Vietnamese nationalism. This approach has enabled the conceptualization of the Vietnamese communism as a discourse in the post-structuralist sense, which is the world of meanings and subjectivities embraced by the Vietnamese communists. By following the communist discourse throughout the history of communism in Vietnam, this research is able to trace how the national common senses have taken shape and to reveal the central role of these commons senses in legitimatizing the socialist state. This is also the first work that studies the relationship between nationalism and socialism in Vietnam in discursive terms.

In conceptualizing communism in Vietnam as a discourse, this research provides a new way of understanding Vietnamese politics, which is a struggle to fix meanings. The communist movement in Vietnam is to be approached not as driven by ideology, whether it is nationalism or communism, neither as driven by the thirst for power, but as a particular discourse emerging in colonial Vietnam as the intellectuals were contemplating their selves and their collective identity in the encounter with the modern West under the French colonisation. This discourse did not arrive in Vietnam with fixed set of meanings and stable identities. The production of meanings and the constitution of subjects were subject to contingent events and developments occurring along the course of history. The successes of the communist-led movements to fight against French colonists and the U.S. interventionists were made possible by the subjectivities and meanings produced in the communist discourse. The ongoing socialism and the monopolistic leadership of the Communists Party in Vietnam are also made possible by the constitution of meanings in this discourse.

Existing literature on Vietnamese politics are mostly premised on pre-defined categories of the state, civil society and political legitimacy or dissent to explain the endurance of the monopolistic rule of the CPV. Forde (2009: 9) has criticised that analyses that assume a stable ontology of those political concepts and impose ready-made categories 'will read meanings into the situation that reflects observers' varying prior assumptions and beliefs'. This research approaches Vietnamese politics at the ontological level, to examine how a political concept (the nation) is constituted as such and the political implications of its constitution. Instead of taking the boundaries between human groups for granted, this research has focused on how social boundaries between human collectives are erected and maintained. Instead of

¹⁵ There have been a few studies that apply discourse theory to nationalism including the works of Sutherland (2002), Al-Azmed (1993), Mastnak (1989, 1991).

explaining Vietnamese politics by its present manifestations, this research provides a historical analysis of how the present came to be constituted through past discursive practices. It offers a historical and contextual account of Vietnamese politics, conveying contingencies and ambiguities. This research exposes not only the constructed nature of the Vietnamese nation but also the embedded power relationship between statehood and nationhood in the country. It brings one established argument in the existing post-structuralist literature on nationalism that ‘nationalism is a construct of the state in pursuit of its legitimacy’ (Campbell, 1992: 11) to the Vietnamese case.

Besides contributing to the literature on nationalism and politics of Vietnam, this research has also enriched the growing literature on the political culture of the Cold war, which argues that ‘the Cold war was a competition over discourse’ and seeks to break the ‘constraints in the poverty of our political imagination’ (Appy, 2000: 6-8). It has revealed one Cold War script, a Vietnamese Communist way to perceive and engage in the struggle for the world. This way of imagination runs opposed to the narrative of different U.S. actors, but no less authentic and ‘real’ in its own right. After all, this research presents one interpretation of the Cold war, which was embraced by millions of Vietnamese with their own life and blood.

10.3. Evaluation

This research is one of the first attempts to bring the leftist critique into the case of Vietnam. It is a critical project in the sense that it aims to unmask ‘the taken-for-granted, naturalized knowledge’ (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2012: 1985) constituted in the communist discourse and to critique the scientific truth that the Vietnamese communists claim to possess. This research is not only a study of Vietnamese nationalism per se but also a study of the foundational claims to power of the Vietnamese communists.

However, this study does not claim to have produced a knowledge closer to the truth, either. Adhering to the anti-foundational premise that ‘all knowledge is discursively produced and therefore contingent’, including scientific knowledge (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2012: 175), this research rejects ‘the possibility of absolute knowledge’. Although the knowledge produced in this research is scientific because it applies a specific theory which enables the researcher to distance himself/herself from everyday understanding and it uses specific rules to produce a knowledge which is not normally available within the everyday context (ibid: 207), I only

claim to have provided a different knowledge about Vietnamese nationalism and communism for a wider democratic discussion.

The version of reality which one puts forward in research is not better than any other at the level of principle, and it can always be cast aside through discursive struggles both within the scientific field and in the public sphere as a whole. But by representing a qualified (that is, scientific) and different account of reality from those which are otherwise available, research knowledge can hopefully contribute to the addition of new perspectives to public debate. (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2012: 210)

The communist-led struggle against colonisation and foreign intervention less a war for national independence than a project of self-identification, a project of restructuring the dislocated society in its totality. Conceptualizing Vietnamese communism as a discourse has allowed this research to examine the operation of this identification project in organising and restructuring meanings and identities. When a discourse has attained hegemony, it has successfully naturalized its constructed system of meanings and identities as common sense. Real effects have been produced at the level of social actions. Millions of Vietnamese have lost their lives and or had their lives profoundly altered in supporting or opposing to this hegemonic project. The possibility of having a non-communist government in Vietnam has been ruled out. The hegemony of the Vietnamese communist discourse has enabled the Communist Party to attain a hegemonic position and maintain their sole leadership in the whole Vietnam for more than 30 years since the war ended. In explaining the appeal of the communist-led struggle against the American intervention in Vietnam, Kolko (1997) also observed an equivalence between the nationalist and social causes as the core causal factor. ‘The masses had confidence that the nationalist and social causes were identical and the latter was in their objective interest’ (Kolko, 1997:19 – 20). However, this research does not see the relationship between discourse and reality in a causal relation. Nor does it wish to comment of the rationality of the knowledge produced in discourse. Social action and behaviour is part of the discourse itself. Social action is made possible in discourse, but in return it is also an articulation of discourse. ‘The order with which we identity is accepted not because of its rationality, but because it brings about the possibility of an order, of a certain regularity’ (Laclau, 1994: 3). The order put out in discourse is only a possibility of an order, its realisation is accomplished at the expense of other possible orders. The materialisation of the possibility that Vietnamese Communists became the ruling group in Vietnam when the communist discourse is accepted is attained on the cancellation of other possibilities. The vision of a Vietnamese nation under the tutelage of France was ruled

out. The possibility of having a non-communist government in the South and in the whole Vietnam was violently eradicated.

Laclau's comment (1994: 1) that 'the end of the Cold War has also been the end of the globalizing ideologies that had dominated the political arena since 1945' appears invalid in the case of Vietnam. The Cold War discourse, 'the attempt to legitimate one's own ideology by presenting it as a fulfilment of a universal task' (ibid) and as the only valid truth, is still omnipresent in the discourse of the Vietnamese communists. The suspicion that 'any kind of universal grounding' is supposed to be contemplated with in Laclau's judgement (1994) has not arrived in the academic discussion about the rule of the communists in Vietnam. This research may be a late attempt in criticizing the globalizing ideologies of the Cold War on an international scale, but is by no means late in the case of the Vietnamese communist discourse. It is the first attempt to deconstruct the universalizing ideology of the Vietnamese communists in its particularities and in its specific historical context. It will be especially a novel interpretation to the Vietnamese audience.

As a 'history of the present', this research has been trying to show that the present is the result of contingent processes. The August Revolution in 1945, which saw the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, was the result of an ensemble of contingent events including the World War II, the Japanese occupation, the severe famine in 1944 and 1945, and most of all the French colonialization. The existence of socialism and the leadership of the communist party in Vietnam was the result of a bundle of discursive articulations and processes which make up the knowledge claim about the nature and significance of the nation, national independence, socialism and the world. These knowledges are not necessarily true. Some are even obviously false, for example the claim about the dying capitalism taken from Marxism, which has been on in the Vietnamese communist discourse since its early days until the present time. However, they have significantly contributed to and are still playing a part in enabling the Communist Party to attain and maintain its hegemonic rule in Vietnam.

There may be arguments that Vietnam is now only socialist in rhetoric as its current economy and mass consumption are similar to those in a capitalist country. However, even if the Vietnamese do not believe in Marxism-Leninism and socialism any more, they still act as if Marxism-Leninism is the only valid political ideology and socialism is the political system of the country. After all, Marxism-Leninism is the only international political ideology

embraced in Vietnam. All students in Vietnam have to learn Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's ideology during their first years in universities. After all, the Communist Party is still the only ruling party in Vietnam. Not only the number of Party members is growing rapidly, but also the percentage of the Party's members in the whole population is also on the rise, especially after the Reform was launched.

Year	Number of the CPV's members ¹⁶	Vietnamese population ¹⁷	Percentage of Party's members in the Population
1960	500,000	32,670,623	1.5 %
1975-1976	1,550,000	48,729,397	3.2%
1990-1991	2,155,022	68,209,604	3.2%
2015-2016	4,500,000 ¹⁸	93,447,601	4.8%

Even if many people may join the Party not for ideological reasons, but for pragmatic purposes, in what they do (by joining the Communist Party), they act as if they support and believe in the Communist Party, Marxist-Leninism and Socialism. To post-structuralist discourse analysts, it is what people are actually doing that count, not the intentions and feelings of the actors. The hegemony of the Vietnamese communist contains elements of the 'ideological fantasy' of Zizek (quoted in Torfing, 1999: 116). Zizek's ideology fantasy is reserved for the illusion which is structuring the real social activity, not on the level of knowledge. It accounts for those phenomena in which even though people 'know very well how things really are, but they still they doing it as if they did not know' (ibid). An example of ideological fantasy is commodity fetishism, in which people act as if money is the real wealth even though they may well know that money functions as the universal embodiment of commodities, not the commodities themselves. Ideological fantasy in this case compensates for the fact that some people, at the level of knowledge, may be not convinced by the totalizing propositions of the Vietnamese communist discourse, they still act in the support of the reality constructed in this discourse.

¹⁶ Source: <http://www.bacgiang.gov.vn/ves-portal/29500/Dang-Cong-san-Viet-Nam-qua-cac-ky-Dai-hoi.html> [accessed on December 4th 2017].

¹⁷ Source: <https://danso.org/viet-nam/> [accessed on December 4th 2017].

¹⁸Source:<http://www.chinhphu.vn/portal/page/portal/chinhphu/NuocCHXHCNVietNam/ThongTinTongHop/hethongchinhtri> [accessed on December 4th 2017].

10.4. Limitations and Recommendation for Future Research

This research has provided an analysis of the constitution of nationalism in the communist discourse in Vietnam from the mid-1920s until the present time. According to the research design of Hansen (2006: 74), this is the study of one single Self, the Vietnamese communists, with the analytical focus as the official discourse. Although I have tried to include the stories as told from different actors involved, the inclusion is sketchy and is based on the existing literature. If this research could include an analysis of competing discourses, such as that of Bao Dai's government (the Vietnamese monarchy 1926 – 1945), the State of Vietnam (1949 – 1955) and the Republic of Vietnam (1955 – 1975), or an analysis of popular culture, it would have stronger foundations for assessing the hegemony of the communist discourse and the degree of stability this discourse enjoys within the wider political and public sphere. However, within the framework of the PhD project and given the long historical development covered, the focus on one Self is justifiable. Moreover, as a historical genealogy, this research has been able to cover the transformations and contestations within the Self of the Vietnamese Communists. The boundaries of the revolutionary identity forged in the communist discourse haven been shown to be negotiable and contestable. The national identities of the Vietnamese Communists are not objective but political decided.

In conceptualising the Vietnamese communism as a discourse competing in the struggle to make meaning and produce identities as Vietnam encountered the modern world, this research provides a new way of researching the politics of Vietnam. This study has shown how the meaning and significance of the nation has been articulated and stabilized as a nodal point in the communist discourse. The communist discourse in Vietnam has been able to incorporate national elements into its discursive system, turning them into its internal moments. Concepts of the nation as well as national independence have contributed to the promotion of socialism and to the leadership of the Communist Party rather than doing the opposite. It would be interesting to see how other key concepts of modernity such as development, democracy and human rights are articulated in the Vietnamese communist discourse. Such studies would be able to supplement this study in giving a fuller view of the politics of meaning-production of the communist discourse and in deconstructing the foundational claims to knowledge, that is to power, of the Vietnamese Communists.

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Appendix I: List of Abbreviations

DRV:	The Democratic Republic of Vietnam
ICP:	The Indochinese Communist Party
MOD:	Ministry of Defence
MOET:	Ministry of Education and Training
NA:	The National Assembly
NLF:	The National Liberation Front or the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam
RVN:	The Republic of Vietnam
SRV:	The Socialist Republic of Vietnam
U.S.:	The United States of America
VCP:	The Vietnamese Communist Party
VLP:	The Vietnamese Labour Party
VNQDD:	The Vietnamese Nationalist Party

Appendix II: Chronology

2524 – 258 BC	Van Lang ruled by Hung kings of the Hong Bang dynasty with the capital in the present-day Phu Tho province.
257 – 179 BC	The kingdom of Au Lac ruled by King An Duong Vuong.
204 – 111 BC	Nam Viet ruled by Trieu Da
111 BC – 939 AD	Nam Viet ruled by China as the province of Jiaozhou (Giao Chi)
939 - 968	Ngo Quyen overthrows the Chinese, establishes the Ngo dynasty.
968 – 980	Dinh Bo Linh establishes Dinh dynasty, names his state Dai Co Viet with the capital in Ninh Binh province
980 – 1010	Le dynasty
1010 – 1225	Ly dynasty Capital in Hanoi, the country renamed as Dai Viet in 1054
1225 – 1400	Tran dynasty
1400 – 1407	Ho dynasty
1428 – 1788	Le dynasty
1471	Vietnamese conquest of Champa
1527	The Le emperor is killed by Mac Dang Dung, who proclaimed himself emperor.

- Nguyen Kim, a former official in the Le court, revolt against the Mac and restore the Le in a southern court in Thanh Hoa area.
- 1545 Nguyen Kim is assassinated and the military power fall into the hands of his son-in-law, Trinh Kiem.
- 1558 Nguyen Hoang, Nguyen Kim's son, move to the far south provinces of present-day Quang Binh to Binh Dinh to be the governor while Trinh lords continue the war against the Mac.
- 1592 The Mac fell. The Le kings act as figureheads. The real power of the north belong to Trinh lords.
- 1600 Nguyen Hoang declare himself Lord and establish the capital in Phu Xuan, modern-day Hue.
- 1627 – 1672 Trinh-Nguyen war
- 1627 - 1775 While the Trinh lords rule the North, the Nguyen lords rule the South and continue the southward expansion into present-day Sai Gon and the Mekong delta.
- 1771 The Tay Son revolution led by three brothers Nguyen Nhac, Nguyen Lu and Nguyen Hue breaks out in Qui Nhon, which is under the control of Nguyen lords. By 1776, the Tay Son has occupied all the Nguyen's land and kill almost the entire royal family. The surviving prince Nguyen Anh flee Vietnam.
- 1786 The Tay Son march North and defeat the Trinh lords. The last Le emperor, Le Chieu Thong, flee to China.
- 1788 - 1802 The Tay Son dynasty.
- 1802 – 1820 Nguyen Anh defeats the Tay Son with the help of the French missionary Pigneau de Behaine (1740 – 1799) , unifies the country,

	becomes Emperor Gia Long (reigned 1802-1820), starts the Nguyen dynasty in 1802. Capital moves to Hue
1820 – 1841	Reign of Minh Mang
1841 – 1847	Reign of Thieu Tri
1847 – 1883	Reign of Tu Duc
1858	Franco-Spanish expedition attacked Tourane (Da Nang city) Vietnam signs the Patenotre treaty with France, recognise France as its protector. Vietnam is divided into three regions: Tonkin in the North and Annam in the Centre as France’s protectorates and Cochinchina in the South as France’s colony.
1883	Kinh Ham Nghi issue the Royal Edict on Resistance, starting the ‘Serve the King’ movement (phong trào Cần Vương)
1887	The French Indochinese Union is created, including Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia with Cochinchina as the capital.
1905	Phan Boi Chau’s <i>The History of the Loss of Vietnam</i> written in Chinese is published in Japan. The book lists France’s exploitative policies and cruelty in the country.
1911	Nguyen Ai Quoc or Ho Chi Minh leave Vietnam and travel to America and Europe.
1924	Nguyen Ai Quoc attend the Fifth Comintern Congress, delivering a speech on why the Comintern should pay more attention to the natives’ struggle in the colonies.
1925	Nguyen Ai Quoc forms the Youth League in Canton, China.

- Nguyen Ai Quoc's *The Indictment of French Colonialism* was published in France.
- Phan Chu Trinh deliver the speech *Easter, Western Morality and Ethics (Đạo đức và luân lý Đông Tây)* in Sai Gon.
- Nguyen An Ninh deliver the speech *The Aspiration of Annamite Youth* calling Vietnamese Youth to take action against French colonisation.
- 1927 The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng – VNQDD) is established by Nguyen Thai Hoc (1904 – 1930).
Nguyen Ai Quoc completes 'The Road to Revolution' (Đường cách mệnh) as a training document for Youth League's new members.
- 1928 The Revolutionary Party of the New Vietnam (Tan Viet) is formed in Annam.
- 1930 VNQDD launch a general revolt, which is suppressed swiftly.
Nguyen Thai Hoc, VNQDD's leader, is executed.
- Feb 1930 A communist Party is formed from members of the Youth League and Tan Viet, naming 'the Vietnamese Communist Party'.
- Oct 1930 The Vietnamese Communist Party renamed as 'the Indochinese Communist Party' (ICP).
- March 1935 The First National Congress of the ICP is held in Macao, China. Le Hong Phong is appointed the General Secretary.
- September 1939 The ICP is declared illegal and has to retreated to the countryside.
The 6th plenum of the ICP's central committee set the task of national liberation as the first priority.

Sep 1940	Japanese troops march into Vietnam.
May 1941	<p>The 8th plenum of the ICP's central committee define national liberation as the immediate task of the revolution.</p> <p>A new central committee is selected, Truong Chinh as the new General Secretary</p> <p>The League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Minh) is formed to bring all Vietnamese into a common front to fight for independence</p>
1944 – 1945	A terrible famine stalk north Vietnam, killing 2 million out of an 8 million population.
March 1945	<p>The Japanese take over the direct control of the colonial administration.</p> <p>ICP's central committee issue the directive 'The French-Japanese conflict and our action', pointing the Japanese as the main enemy. Japan surrenders to the Allies.</p>
July 1945	The general revolt is launched and won by Viet Minh.
August 1945	Bao Dai abdicates, handing over the sword and seal of the feudal court..
Sep 1945	<p>Ho Chi Minh read the declaration of independence in Ba Dinh square, proclaimed the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).</p> <p>China occupies Vietnam north of the 16th parallel; British troops occupy south of the 16th parallel.</p>
November 1945	ICP dissolves and is replaced by the Association of Marxist Studies.
December 1946	<p>The French come back to reassert their colonial rule.</p> <p>Ho Chi Minh proclaims war against the French.</p>

- 1949 The State of Vietnam was declared with Nguyen Van Xuan as Prime Minister and Bao Dai as head of state.
- October 1949 Communists win in China, the People's Republic of China (PRC) is established.
- 1951 The communist party resurfaces as the Vietnam's Labour Party (VLP) at the 2nd National Congress. Truong Chinh remains as the Secretary General.
- 1953 At the 4th Plenum, the Party's Central Committee announce a comprehensive land reform.
- 1954 Viet Minh defeat the French the battle of Dien Bien Phu
France agreed to grant total independence to all of Vietnam under the Geneva Accords.
Ngo Dinh Diem appointed premier of the state of Vietnam.
- 1955 President Eisenhower offers Diem unconditional support.
Diem proclaimed the formation of the Republic of Vietnam over the south territory of Vietnam.
- 1960 The 3rd National Congress of the VLP was held, affirming the plan to install socialism in north Vietnam
- 1963 Diem and his brother, also his advisor, Ngo Dinh Nhu were assassinated.
- 1971 Withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam begins.
- 1973 Paris peace accords were signed.
- 1975 Communists take over South Vietnam

- December 1976 In the Party's IV Congress, the VLP is renamed into the Vietnamese Communist Party. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam was established. The VCP declare it will expand the socialist project from the North to the South, leading the country to proceed swiftly to socialism.
- 1982 The V National Congress state that the establishment of socialism is the first priority of the Party and the people.
- 1986 The VCP's VI National Congress is held, marking formal reforms. the centrally-planned management of the economy and giant agricultural collectives are officially abolished, private ownership and private trade are allowed. The Reform Congress first defines the transition to socialism is a prolonged period composed of several stages. Vietnam is reported to be in the first stage, whose economy is a multi-sector market economy under state management.
- 1991 The VCP's VII National Congress affirm the determination toward socialism.
The Agenda on National Construction in the Transition into Socialism declares that the human race will finally advance to socialism because it is an objective law.
- 1996 The VIII Congress state that the road to socialism in Vietnam was more clearly identified.
- 2011 The XI Congress's Agenda and the new 2011 *Agenda on National Construction in the Transition into Socialism* affirm that the advance to socialism in Vietnam is in line with the evolving trend of history and the aspiration of the Vietnamese people.

2013

The new constitution preserves the wordings of the 1992 constitution that Vietnam was in the transition to socialism and the Vietnamese state is the socialist state of the people, by the people and for the people.

Appendix III: Data Documents

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ⁱ All documents in this Appendix are available online. Those documents that do not have the available link in this appendix can be accessed at the link <http://dangcongsan.vn/tu-lieu-van-kien/van-kien-dang/van-kien-dang-toan-tap.html> in the e-newspaper of the Vietnamese Communist Party. This link provides access to all 59 volumes in the Complete Collection of the Party Documents.