

Trần Việt Nghĩa

Part Three: Economic and Cultural Issues

The *Thanh Nghị* Group from the Japanese *Coup de Force* in March to the August Revolution in 1945

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1. The *Thanh Nghị* Group before the *Coup de Force*

The *Thanh Nghị* group was born during a time of complex political changes in Vietnam. After the start of the Second World War (1939), the French colonial rulers launched a series of repression against the Vietnamese fighting for freedom, democracy and patriotism. On September 22, 1940, the Japanese fascists invaded Vietnam. The French quickly surrendered to the Japanese. Right after that, the French colonial rulers and the Japanese fascists cooperated to dominate and exploit the Vietnamese people. The tragedy of the Vietnamese people, who bore “two yokes of domination and exploitation” at the hands of the French and the Japanese, divided the Vietnamese intellectuals into four groups with different political agendas: pro-French, pro-Japanese, anti-French and anti-Japanese, and neutral.

In June 1941, the first issue of *Thanh Nghị* magazine was published. This marked the birth of the *Thanh Nghị* group in Hanoi. According to Vũ Đình Hòe, editor of the magazine, the group was not a tightly knit organization like other political and social organizations with established rules and regulations, but was only a group of classmates and schoolmates. After graduation, they all worked in different occupations, but no-one had a professional career in journalism. However, they all wanted to do something for the benefit of their enslaved nation. Thus, they decided to write magazine articles to reflect the realities of the country. The success of the initial issues encouraged the group to participate more actively in journalism. Initially, the *Thanh Nghị* group considered politics to be a “forbidden ground,” a taboo topic to be avoided. However, they became increasingly interested in urgent political matters. Vũ Đình Hòe affirmed that the *Thanh Nghị* magazine and *Thanh Nghị* group were “TWO parts of a unified WHOLE.”¹

The five founders of the *Thanh Nghị* magazine were Vũ Đình Hòe, Vũ Văn Hiến, Phan Anh, Hoàng Thúc Tấn and Lê Huy Vân. They were all well-known Western-educated intellectuals who graduated from universities in France and Vietnam. Apart from the founders, other famous writers also joined the magazine, notably Đinh Gia Trinh, Nguyễn Tuân, Nguyễn Như Kon Tum, Phạm Gia Kính, Trần Văn

¹ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Hồi ký Thanh Nghị* (Hà Nội: NXB Văn học, 2000), pp. 16-7.

Giáp, Tô Ngọc Vân, Xuân Diệu, Huy Cận, Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Đoàn Phú Tứ, Nguyễn Xuân Khoát, Nguyễn Xuân Sanh, Đỗ Đức Dục, Đặng Thai Mai, Phan Mỹ, Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Nguyễn Văn Tố, Ngô Đình Nhu, Nguyễn Bội Liêu, Đào Duy Anh, Lê Huy Văn, Nguyễn Thiệu Lâu, Hồ Dzếnh, Thế Lữ, Nghiêm Xuân Yêm, Vũ Công Hòe, Hoài Thanh, Nguyễn Xiển, Vũ Hoàng Chương, Tôn Quang Phiệt, Nguyễn Mạnh Tường, and Bùi Tường Chiêu.

Thanh Nghị was a weekly magazine. From the first issue (June 1941) to the last (August 11, 1945), a total of 120 issues were published. A total of 130 contributors wrote for the magazine (144 contributors if we count by pen name). Most *Thanh Nghị* members originated from Confucian intellectual families in Tonkin and Annam, yet they were educated in French schools in Hanoi or France. Some achieved high degrees (master or doctorate), such as Ngụy Như Kon Tum, Hoàng Xuân Hãn and Nguyễn Văn Huyền. Most lived in Hanoi and pursued different occupations. Out of 130 authors, some contributed many articles, some only a few, and some even wrote only a single article. Editor Vũ Đình Hòe contributed the largest number of articles (78), followed by Đỗ Đức Dục (55) and Đinh Gia Trinh (43). 115 authors contributed from one to ten articles, accounting for 79.8 percent. 15 authors contributed from 10 to 20 articles (10.4 percent). Eight authors contributed from 20 to 30 articles (5.6 percent); six contributed more than 30 articles (4.2 percent).

Many *Thanh Nghị* members had a successful career, not only in culture, arts, thought, education and social affairs, but also in politics. Hoàng Xuân Hãn, Vũ Văn Hiến and Phan Anh were Ministers in the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet before the 1945 August Revolution. Vũ Đình Hòe, Vũ Văn Hiến and Phan Anh became Ministers in the Provisional Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam after the victory of the August Revolution.

Before the Japanese overthrew the French in Indochina, the *Thanh Nghị* group rarely got involved in political debates. When they did so, they cautiously maintained a moderate stand. However, during the period just before the Japanese coup, being motivated by the new political atmosphere, some *Thanh Nghị* intellectuals, notably Phan Anh, became much more politically active. Phan Anh wrote some articles on political matters, using framework of legal studies, which he had majored in at school. He demonstrated his potential capacity as a politician when he argued that a leader must gain credibility amongst the people. To gain this credibility, a leader must possess not only intellectual capacity, but also a firm political stand, tricks, dedication, determination and a long-term vision. When the country was in a fluid situation, leaders of these kinds would be vital for the survival of the masses.²

2. The *Thanh Nghị* Group after the *Coup de Force*

On March 9, 1945, the Japanese staged a coup and overthrew the French throughout Indochina. The French domination, which had existed for more than 80 years, immediately collapsed. The coup was a big shock to Vietnamese intellectuals. Those who were pro-French became anxious as they had lost

² Phan Anh, *Thanh Nghị*, 106 (10.03.1945), p. 3.

their patrons. Those who were pro-Japanese celebrated the coup and began strengthening their activities in journalism and on the political stage. Those who opposed the Japanese and their henchmen began busy in the preparation for the forthcoming uprising to seize power.

The *Thanh Nghị* group, taking advantage of this opportunity, openly announced their political stand to the public. Phan Anh and Vũ Trọng Hiên left Hanoi for Huế to join the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet. The *Thanh Nghị* group supported the Kim Cabinet, which was established on April 17, 1945. This support was clearly demonstrated in a Special Supplement on Politics of *Thanh Nghị* (Issue 107, May 5, 1945). In the article “The conditions for independence,” the *Thanh Nghị* group argued about the coup of March 9: while it rescued Vietnam from French domination, the coup was not the “result” of “an uprising” by the Vietnamese, but only an unexpected windfall. “Independence fell from the sky, it was not regained by us!”³ According to them, independence was not a gift given by a philanthropist, but a treasure that one had to pay a high price to obtain. The Vietnamese had to promote their mental strength to supplement physical strength, had to be active and determined to get rid of the old regime and destroy all reactionary conspiracies. For achieving independence, however, such activities were not enough; actions were needed like meetings to celebrate liberation, demonstrations to erase traces of slavery and to deny cooperation with the enemies, and ceremonies to commemorate war martyrs and national heroes, even though they could promote patriotism amongst the masses in the short term. The first prerequisite to achieving independence was the unity of all the social classes in the revolutionary parties and trade unions. The second was an independent government.

Regarding the problem of political parties and trade unions, Vũ Đình Hòe argued that political parties ought to play the key role in uniting the masses to fight for power and to control the government. Meanwhile, in Vietnam there was no individual or group that could represent the entire nation to mobilize and unify the whole people. There must be a revolutionary party to lead the nation that was based on the principle of national unity (i.e. unifying people of all social groups and political stands). The existing political parties had to align with the government of Vietnam (the Cabinet of Trần Trọng Kim) to strive for a real and strong independence.⁴

According to Vũ Đình Hòe, the establishment of many political parties after March 9 was not a sign of factionalism, but rather was the result of the circumstances. What mattered most to the nation at the time was the unification of all revolutionary parties. Forming alliances was the best way to unify parties. Each party should send their representatives to meet together to discuss a common political agenda, then each party could pursue this agenda in its own way. “This method of unification was not aimed at merging all parties into a single party, but was aimed at unifying many parties under a common goal, in a specific period of time, in pursuit of a specific political agenda.”⁵ Hòe noted that right after the coup, trade unions had met to express their support for national independence. However, true unity could not

³ *Thanh Nghị*, 107 (05.05.1945), p. 34.

⁴ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Thanh Nghị*, 107, pp. 7, 8, 27.

⁵ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Thanh Nghị*, 109 (19.05.1945), p. 4.

be achieved simply by the gathering together of trade unions to shout out slogans of unity. He pointed out the true principles for unity, including discipline, supporting professional benefits and clarifying the requirements of a profession that all practitioners should uphold. A trade union was not involved in politics for politics *per se*, but for the benefit of those practicing a particular profession. If trade unions could unite and form a federation, their capacity of struggle would become much stronger.⁶

Regarding the issue of an independent government, the *Thanh Nghi* group held that Vietnam would need an independent government to get rid of the old regime, make a complete break with the colonial policies of the French rulers, and carry out diplomatic policies at international conferences to protect national interests. This government needed the support of the masses to solve the challenges that the country faced. The group called for political parties and trade unions to unite under the leadership of the Kim government to build Vietnam's independence:

All parties should unite in a single front; all trade unions should operate under the guidance of only one government to develop a unified force from the masses. Then this force under the command of the government will strive for building the foundation of independence. That should be the right path forward for Vietnam at this time.⁷

Bùi Tường Chiêu praised the first edict by Emperor Bảo Đại issued on March 17, 1945. In this edict Bảo Đại announced that he had declared independence and assumed leadership of the nation; that the new political regime was built on the slogan, "The People First" and that he would gather talented people to rebuild the nation into one that deserved true independence. Bảo Đại affirmed the plan of cooperating with the Japanese Empire in the cause of building a Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere.

According to Bùi Tường Chiêu, by highlighting the principle of "the people first," Bảo Đại had put the benefit of the masses above that of the emperor and the royal family. The Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet included individuals with dignity, patriotism and talent. An unusual feature of the Kim Cabinet was that it included no former mandarins. The Cabinet included four lawyers, four medical doctors, two professors and one engineer. This Cabinet showed that Bảo Đại was determined to use "new persons" to build his new regime. The Cabinet had representatives in Tonkin, Annam and Cochinchina, which indicated that Bảo Đại wanted to establish a unified government for the entire nation. The masses whole-heartedly trusted this new Cabinet.⁸

Vũ Đình Hòe pointed out three progressive features of the new Cabinet: all its members were not former mandarins, but were chosen from the masses; before the Cabinet was established, the Emperor had surveyed the wishes and preferences of people from South to North and from different walks of life; and government and its administration were established on the principles of Western democracy.

⁶ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Thanh Nghi*, 107, pp. 9, 10, 27.

⁷ *Thanh Nghi*, 107, p. 6.

⁸ Bùi Tường Chiêu, *Thanh Nghi*, 107, p. 13.

Hòe defended members of the Kim Cabinet against criticisms from the public. He argued that a minister was not a mandarin, but took a temporary political post. The new Cabinet undertook a heavy responsibility. It would be wrong to assume that these Ministers took up their position in pursuit of political reputation and profit; their choice to take up these positions was a brave, praise-worthy action. Hòe reckoned that public suspicion about the new Cabinet was inappropriate in this particular context. The masses should unite themselves to support the government, should welcome and support the government and fight side by side.⁹

Hòe emphasized the necessity of a constitution as a political foundation for national development in Vietnam. The constitution would identify the regime, the responsibilities and power of state agencies, the political interests of citizens and their right to monitor the government. The constitution was a symbol of democracy. The constitution of Vietnam should be flexible to promote the nation's progress. As Vietnam had no parliament, it had no constitution. Therefore, the Emperor had to issue a decree to define some key principles of the new regime, as the foundation for the promulgation of a constitution in the future. The principles in the decree should include freedom of trade union, political freedom, and national construction guided by the principles of democracy and socialism.¹⁰

Thanh Nghị group considered youth to be a key force of the government in Vietnam. Đinh Gia Trinh noted that after Vietnam declared independence, although its youth had done many things to demonstrate their patriotism, they had to be more active in helping the needy and impoverished, and to become warriors willing to dedicate themselves to the nation when necessary. He called for the youth to gather under the leadership of the Ministry of Youth led by Phan Anh. "Thus we have high hope for the Ministry of Youth in the new Cabinet. It is a single organization that will unite the youth across the country. Genuine leaders will be chosen to lead the youth and guide their actions under principles suitable to the new demands of new Vietnam. Schools for the youth, *de facto* military in nature, should be established to train soldiers. Youth unions will operate with discipline, and will participate for causes of building a new society. Without a doubt, one of the missions of the government is to utilize the youth as a key force."¹¹ Trinh called for the youth to free themselves from their situation of slavery and sever any sentimental attachment to the colonial regime, to demonstrate their strength, and to contribute to building the independence of Vietnam, not just by beautiful words but also by practical actions.¹²

The *Thanh Nghị* group demonstrated a strong anti-French spirit. Trọng Đức vehemently criticized the French colonial rulers who had used the slogan "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" of the French capitalist revolution in 1789 as an excuse to invade colonies. He argued that the crimes that the French had committed against the Vietnamese had to be revealed. He strongly condemned the Vietnamese who still blindly believed in the French colonial rulers and defended them. He advocated the compilation of

⁹ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Thanh Nghị*, 107, p. 29.

¹⁰ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Thanh Nghị*, 108 (12.05.1945), p. 4.

¹¹ Đinh Gia Trinh, *Thanh Nghị*, 107, p. 17.

¹² Đinh Gia Trinh, *Thanh Nghị*, 108, p. 20.

a Black Book to expose the crimes of the French in Vietnam.¹³ Thê Thụy (the pen name of Đinh Gia Trinh) criticized French education for nurturing slavery and suppressing the growth of Vietnamese talents.¹⁴ Nghiêm Xuân Yêm blamed the French colonial rulers for the terrible famine in Tonkin.¹⁵

3. The Establishment of the New Vietnam Association and the *Thanh Nghị* Group

The “Special Supplement on Politics” of the *Thanh Nghị* (Issue 107, May 5, 1945) announced the establishment of the New Vietnam Association. The Association’s headquarters was located at No 24, Hàng Da Street, Hanoi. The founders and Central Committee members were: Đào Duy Anh, Phan Anh, Phạm Đỗ Bình (Nhật Trường), Đỗ Đức Dục, Ngô Thúc Địch, Trần Khánh Giư (Khái Hưng), Ngô Tử Hạ, Vũ Văn Hiến, Vũ Đình Hòe, Nguyễn Văn Huyền, Trần Duy Hưng, Ngụy Như Kon Tum, Nguyễn Lân, Vũ Đình Liên, Phạm Lợi, Nguyễn Ngọc Minh, Nguyễn Quang Oánh, Tôn Quang Phiệt, Phạm Khắc Quảng, Phan Huy Quát, Ngô Bích San, Nguyễn Hữu Tào, Hoàng Thúc Tấn, Vũ Đình Tụng, Lê Quốc Túy, Nghiêm Xuân Thiện, Nguyễn Đình Thụ, Hoàng Phạm Trân (Nhượng Tống), Bùi Như Uyên, Lê Huy Vân, Nguyễn Xiển and Nghiêm Xuân Yêm. The Association’s members were intellectuals working in different professions, including medical doctors, lawyers, professors, writers, actors and so on. Despite their differences in profession and political stand, they all shared the spirit of patriotism and the desire to contribute to the protection of national independence in the challenging time. Many of them were also *Thanh Nghị* group members.

The New Vietnam Association was established in a special situation: Japan had overthrown the French, the Kim Cabinet had just been established, and the number of political parties and associations was growing rapidly. The Association believed that Vietnam had been rescued from French domination. They found two important factors to guarantee Vietnamese independence: one was that the Japanese did not demonstrate any ambition for territorial expansion in Indochina, and another was that the Huế Court had declared Vietnam’s independence. Thus, the new task for Vietnam was to achieve and maintain independence. The Vietnamese themselves had to assume this responsibility. Apart from the government, private organizations would be necessary to unite individuals from all strata and with different political stances. Thus, the New Vietnam Association wished to become an organization that could unite the entire people in Vietnam. This idea of national solidarity expressed by the New Vietnam Association clearly reflected that of the *Thanh Nghị* group.

The objectives of the New Vietnam Association were: to protect the national independence and unity of Vietnam in the framework of Greater East Asia; unite all social strata and political groups; and prepare for the construction and development of Vietnam.¹⁶ According to its Committee of Communication and Mass Mobilization, the Association was established to meet the righteous demand of the

¹³ Trọng Đức, *Thanh Nghị*, 107, p. 12.

¹⁴ Thê Thụy, *Thanh Nghị*, 107, pp. 24–5.

¹⁵ Nghiêm Xuân Yêm, *Thanh Nghị*, 107, pp. 18–22.

¹⁶ *Thanh Nghị*, 107, pp. 2–3.

people when the country was in chaos. The Association believed that *national interests* should be placed above any political stance and the interests of any particular political parties. Vietnam needed an official, independent government established by the wishes of the entire people. The government would represent the entire Vietnamese people to implement the most radical emergency measures to protect independence in all circumstances. However, in order for the government of Vietnam to have the authority and determination to implement emergency measures, the support of the people would be vital. The responsibility of the Vietnamese people should be to organize and unify themselves in a unified front that could lend strength and support to the government of Vietnam, and to assure the government to be sustained by a powerful, unwavering strength. The New Vietnam Association would contribute to mobilize the strength of the people to support the government of Vietnam to protect national independence.¹⁷

The New Vietnam Association identified some urgent tasks to implement immediately. First, eliminate all obstacles on the path of building an independent Vietnam, and implement all necessary measures to materialize the national independence of Vietnam. Second, conduct studies and experiments in all fields such as politics, economics, social affairs and culture to develop fundamental programs of development for the construction of a new Vietnam. Third, unify all walks of life in the society to create a unified force of the masses. The New Vietnam Association promised to give special attention to the interests of the masses. They highlighted a slogan: "Achieve independence and develop the nation by the force of the masses, for the interest of the masses."¹⁸ With the birth of the New Vietnam Association, the *Thanh Nghị* group wanted to become a politically independent organization that could unify the entire Vietnamese nation. The group expected the New Vietnam Association to become a political foundation for the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet.

4. The *Thanh Nghị* Group in a Political Impasse

Though they continued to support the Cabinet of Trần Trọng Kim, the *Thanh Nghị* group gradually lost their trust in it. Vũ Đình Hòe observed that due to the constraints of its circumstances, the Kim government often had to act in ways contradictory with its intention and incompatible with national traditions. The many shortcomings of the Cabinet originated from the fact that the Vietnamese had not gained independence by defeating the enemies by themselves. Independence only existed on paper rather than on a firm foundation. The government of Vietnam had been unable to begin the tasks of national construction because it still lacked a critical and single most important prerequisite: the right of self-determination. Hòe believed that the government of Vietnam could only establish independence after all political principles were really founded. Diplomacy could be flexible, yet political principles could not.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Thanh Nghị*, 107, p. 30.

¹⁸ *Thanh Nghị*, 107, p. 35.

¹⁹ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Thanh Nghị*, 113 (16.06.1945), pp. 3–4.

Đình Gia Trinh still supported Phan Anh. According to him, in a meeting with the youth at Hanoi Opera House on June 1, 1945, Phan Anh said that the country was now in danger, and that all the youth would stand up and use force to deal with the situation, and would be determined to protect the treasure of independence that Vietnam had gained thanks to the Japanese army. Trinh criticized the former principles that had held that youth should not be involved in politics. He also criticized the idea that youth represented an incredible force, free to act without any legal constraints. This idea was shared by the Ministry of Youth led by Phan Anh.

Đình Gia Trinh also supported Bảo Đại's idea of 'The People First,' yet he also believed that this idea should be adjusted to the universally accepted beliefs. The interests of the people should be respected. No one could protect the interests of the people better than the people themselves. Monarchical power should be restricted. The emperor would no longer be a monarch with limitless power, but only a part of the political system. The interests of the people would no longer depend on the good or bad conducts of an emperor, but would depend on the political regime was built on rules and laws clearly set out in the constitution.²⁰ Trinh wanted to put the power of the masses above monarchical power.

Bùi Tường Chiêu praised the government policy of eliminating corrupted officials; however, he thought that even after the imperial representative in Tonkin had dismissed some corrupt mandarins, the practice of corruption was still rooted firmly in the feudal mandarin system and could not be totally eradicated. Corruption was not the fault of any particular mandarin, but a systematic disease of the old regime. Since the old regime no longer existed, its remnants should be eradicated. The government of Vietnam had to strictly punish those who illegally manipulated the situation to make selfish gain and harass the masses.²¹

Mai Anh described the active political atmosphere throughout Vietnam, particularly in Huế. When he praised the political atmosphere in the royal capital, his real intention was to praise the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet: "The Vietnamese in the capital feel that they are completely Vietnamese, and have more freedom to be Vietnamese than the peoples elsewhere. Thus we understand why the Cabinet with ten Ministers can work with confidence, enthusiasm and joy."²² *Thanh Nghi* magazine praised some edicts by Emperor Bảo Đại, such as Edict 73 on July 5 on the freedom to establish trade unions; Edict 78 on July 9 on the freedom to establish associations, and Edict 79 on July 9 on freedom of assembly. According to the magazine, these edicts gave the Vietnamese people almost the same level of freedom as what was enjoyed by people in democratic countries; legalized the rapidly growing number of associations and societies, and public gatherings in Tonkin after March 9, 1945. The magazine expected that these edicts on freedom should be institutionalized to ensure real freedom for the people.²³

After the Japanese overthrow of the French, Đỗ Đức Dục did not express support of the Kim govern-

²⁰ Đình Gia Trinh, *Thanh Nghi*, 115 (07.07.1945), p. 5.

²¹ Bùi Tường Chiêu, *Thanh Nghi*, 116 (14.07.1945), pp. 3-4.

²² Mai Anh, *Thanh Nghi*, 117 (21.07.1945), p. 8.

²³ *Thanh Nghi*, 117, pp. 24-5.

ment. He instead criticized capitalism, considering the greed of capitalism to be the cause of the two world wars. He believed that France's defeat by Germany in 1940 showed that France only appeared to be strong in the outside, yet in fact was rotten from the inside. At the time France was just like an idle child, obediently standing behind somebody's back, waiting for somebody to throw a bone to him. Britain and France had arranged with each other to prepare for a return to their former colonies. France was hungry for their share at conferences of peace. However, eventually, the policies of the French colonial rulers would fail.²⁴

By the end of July and early August 1945, the *Thanh Nghị* group's faith in the Kim Cabinet had declined. A key question for the group was whether they should continue to support the government. The Việt Minh representatives advised that Phan Anh and Vũ Văn Hiến should resign from the pro-Japanese government. Their resignations would benefit not only themselves, but also the reputation of the *Thanh Nghị* group and the revolutionary movement. Vũ Đình Hòe had previously refused to join the Việt Minh or Vietnam Democratic Party and wanted to maintain the independent political status of the group to support the Kim government. However, he now changed his political attitude. In a meeting with Dương Đức Hiền, he learned about the situations in the world and in Vietnam, about the Việt Minh zones, Hồ Chí Minh and Võ Nguyên Giáp, the Vietnam Democratic Party, and the magazine *Độc Lập (Independence)*. Hòe thus decided to join the Vietnam Democratic Party, which meant joining the Việt Minh.²⁵ Thus, the *Thanh Nghị* group began to walk a new path to become part of the General Uprising.

Conclusion

Thanh Nghị was a group of patriotic intellectuals, established in a period of profound and complex political changes in Vietnam. After the Japanese overthrow of the French on March 9, 1945, the political stance of *Thanh Nghị* group became clear to the public. Some members responded positively to the request by Emperor Bảo Đại and left Hanoi for Huế to join the Cabinet of Trần Trọng Kim, namely Phan Anh, Vũ Văn Hiến and Hoàng Xuân Hãn. The remaining members strongly supported the Trần Trọng Kim government. This support continued until the days immediately before the 1945 August Revolution.

The *Thanh Nghị* group's recognition and support of the Bảo Đại regime was probably just a temporary policy. It seems that their ultimate goal was to establish a republic. In actuality, the group always upheld the ideals of democracy, namely that power should belong to the masses, and the monarchical power should be contained. In this context, the group judged the Trần Trọng Kim Cabinet as progressive and appreciated the idea of "The People First" and the edicts on freedom by Emperor Bảo Đại as good signs of new steps toward democracy.

The *Thanh Nghị* group had well anticipated the forthcoming defeat of the Japanese fascists. Their

²⁴ Đỗ Đức Dục, *Thanh Nghị*, 111 (02.06.1945), p. 4.

²⁵ Vũ Đình Hòe, *Hồi ký*, pp. 200–201.

magazine articles openly praised the Japanese support for Vietnam's regaining independence and advocated cooperation with the Japanese, but their words were camouflage to hide their underground activities, waiting for the moment of true independence. The group had no illusion of the fake independence that the Japanese claimed to have taken from the French and returned to the Vietnamese.

The *Thanh Nghi* group initially supported the Trần Trọng Kim government in the hope of establishing trust among the masses and prepare for the future realization of genuine independence. However, the group's political support of the Kim government turned out to be a political failure. The Kim Cabinet was established by the Japanese and the Nguyễn Court, two reactionary forces (an invader and a rotten feudal regime). Naturally, the new government could not win the popular support as the *Thanh Nghi* group expected. The government's incompetence became increasingly visible. Thus, by the end of July and early of August 1945, the *Thanh Nghi* group disintegrated as its members pursued different political agendas.

In the initial stage, the *Thanh Nghi* group did not agree with the particularly strategy for national salvation adopted by the Indochinese Communist Party and Việt Minh Front. The meeting between Dương Đức Hiền (Việt Minh) and Vũ Đình Hòe, Đỗ Đức Dục and Nghiêm Xuân Yêm (*Thanh Nghi*) in March 1944 ended without any result, as the two sides could not reach an agreement on organisation and methods of operation. Later Dương Đức Hiền proposed that *Thanh Nghi* group would join Vietnam Democratic Party, yet the group still maintained its independent status.²⁶ However, after the group's disintegration, the majority of the members decided to align themselves with the cause of national salvation led by the Việt Minh Front. For example, Đỗ Đức Dục and Vũ Đình Hòe became representatives of the Vietnam Democratic Party and attended the meeting of the National Assembly organized by the Việt Minh Central Committee in Tân Trào, Tuyên Quang (August 6, 1945) to decide on a general uprising to seize power across the country.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 137–40.