

NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY IN TRADITIONAL VIETNAMESE POLITICAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT:

Political culture plays an important role in the composition of national culture. During the history of building and defending the country, Vietnamese generations have created a unique political culture in which national consciousness is both the convergence point and the most important determinant of other values. This article focuses on learning about national consciousness and national sovereignty – the core factors in the traditional Vietnamese political culture.

Key words: traditional Vietnamese political culture, national consciousness



Traditional Vietnamese political culture is an extremely valuable legacy in throughout the history of building and defending the country of the Vietnamese people. That is a tradition of promoting the great internal strength of the nation in combination with the Vietnamization of exogenous factors, always adapting to the circumstances, even the most dangerous circumstances to maintain the independence of the nation and move the country forward. The awareness of the country and nation is both the convergence point and the leading factor determining the movement trend of the history of Vietnamese political culture as well as the entire culture of the country through a featured value system, the following are some of the key expressions.

1. NATIONAL SOLIDARITY IS THE FOUNDATION FOR BUILDING NATIONAL STRENGTH

Nature does not give Vietnamese people a life as easy as many other nations on earth. Much of their territory is the result of the process of encroachment on the sea and the expansion of the border. Extreme climates and natural disasters happen frequently. The people's livelihood is mainly wet rice cultivation, a complicated profession with dozens of stages, requiring early knowledge of water treatment and battling with rivers. That is an important material constant that makes community cohesion in Vietnamese life, forming a kind of self-governing village culture heavy of emotion.

Vietnamese history is a long and persistent history of fighting against foreign invaders. The country has always been on the brick of catastrophe, with two-thirds of its history facing external forces who wanted to annex and assimilate it. Vietnamese people, their intelligence and creative power as well as personality were crystallized in the national liberation movements.

"In particular, the Chinese feudal dynasties had four times placed (Vietnam) under their yoke of domination: the first time was Western Han and Eastern Han dynasties, from 115 to 25, plus 246 years; the second time was Eastern Han, Wu, Wei, Qin, Liu, Song, Qi, Liang dynasties, from 43-544, plus 501 years; the third time was Sui, Tang, Later Liang, Later Tang, and Later Jin dynasties, from 603 - 939, plus 336 years; the fourth time, from 1414-1427, plus 14 years; by 1874, (Vietnam) was under French rule and 1939 was transferred to Japan until 1945, plus 71 years. In addition, there were repelled invasions: Ngo Quyen chased away the Southern Han army, Le Hoan chased away Song army, Ly Nhan Tong chased away Song and Chiem Thanh armies, Tran Thai Tong and Tran Nhan Tong chased away Yuan army, Nguyen Hue chased away Qing army. In total, from prehistoric times to modern time (democratic republic), (Vietnam) endured 1168 years of domination"¹.

Vietnamese people lived in small groups called villages, but the village could not handle big problems like fighting floods and fighting foreign aggression, so the villages had to merge into one country. Because they always had to sweat, shed tears and blood to create and protect their living space, so for the Vietnamese people, the country and the national boundary were something tremendously sacred. "It is no coincidence that when it comes to Vietnam and some Eastern nations, Westerners often immediately think of national consciousness and national spirit as the most prominent features"².

A particularly fundamental value for all national communities is the independence of their own community: independence in status, territory, and independence in mutual governance. When they were still a few swarms of people gathered within the clans, the trances of that value were totems. For Giao Chi (Jiaozhi) people, too, "Lac" bird and Vietnamese dragon were symbols of clan community.

Contents of stories such as Lac Long Quan and Au Co, Phu Dong Thien Vuong, An Duong Vuong built Co Loa Citadel, etc. all are not random legendary stories but a depth of consciousness in the process of national formation. "It exists as an enduring spirit that has the value of building and defending the country during the 4,000-year history of Vietnam. Politically, the sense of community cohesion, autonomy and self-rise has become the spiritual core to create national solidarity and national strength against natural disasters and enemy sabotage"³. Legendary stories, whether real or not, are still symbols of community. It aims to inscribe a vital thing in the traditional mind: if the community remains, we still remain, if the community loses, everything will be lost, even the most sacred things, as the affirmation of an idiom: "the country loses, the houses will be devastated".

Overcoming these big and continuous natural disasters and enemy sabotage as mentioned above is thanks to national solidarity and the creation of national strength. National solidarity and national strength continuously arose and developed in history, through the times of Van Lang, Au Lac, Van Xuan, Dai Co Viet, Dai Viet, Vietnam, and were all raised up with the new statures. It has been becoming a unique identity of Vietnam in human history.

2. Patriotism and the will to build national independence and national sovereignty are the values guiding all social activities in Vietnamese history

Vietnamese people have had to go through many life-and-death struggles to build and preserve the country. In human history, very few nations had to endure and overcome such challenges. The emotion and thought of patriotism are the greatest emotion and thought of Vietnamese people and nation. According to Professor Tran Van Giau: "Patriotism is the red thread throughout Vietnamese history which is most clearly, completely expressed and most concentrated, more than

¹ Doan Van Chuc, *Culture sociology*, Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 1997, page 116.

² Tran Ngoc Them, *Find out about the cultural identity of Vietnam*, Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House, 1996, p. 266.

³ Ho Van Thong, *Thinking about values in the history of political thought in Vietnam*, Political Information, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, No. 1, 1999, p. 20.

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anywhere else. Patriotism has become a social and human philosophy of the Vietnamese people and, if using the word “religion” with its original meaning of “road”, direction, then the authentic patriotism is the religion of Vietnam”.⁴

The outstanding feature in the Vietnamese people’s thought during the period of Chinese domination was awareness and thought of themselves and their position towards the territory that the ancestors left, i.e. the awareness of the Vietnamese community and the sovereignty of the country. That is the will to build up the personality of Vietnam: *the right to live with a particular spirit in a territory in which they have full rights*.

An Duong Vuong led Au Lac to wage a continuous war to keep the country for 10 years and defeated tens of thousands of Qin army that invaded the country (218); Hai Ba Trung revolted and was responded to by 65 districts and town and chased away To Dinh, regained and performed the career that Hung Kings had built up (40-43); Ba Trieu revolted in Cuu Chan and killed the Chinese mandarin that shocked Giao Chau (248); Ly Bi defeated Luong army, gained the independence and established the state of Van Xuan, proclaimed himself Nam De, placed himself on an equal footing with the Northern emperor, denied their global hegemony they claimed for themselves (544). The policy of independence and equality with the North had started successfully. Of course, it had to go through a long testing process to perfect. There must have been the successes and failures of Ly Bi, Mai Thuc Loan, Phung Hung, etc., to have the decisive victory of Ngo Quyen (938), creating the opportunity for a lasting era of independence of the state of Dai Viet later. Dinh Bo Linh pacified 12 warlords, crowned emperor, and named the country Dai Co Viet (968); Le Hoan defeated the Song army to establish the Early Le dynasty (981); Ly Cong Uan founded the Ly dynasty and moved the capital from Hoa Lu to Thang Long in 1010, etc. which were the result of striving in the direction of independence, self-governing and equality with the North, as the application of the social model of the North to the specific condition of the country at that time.

Ly Thai To built Thang Long capital (1010) not only to protect the country but also to build the country into a powerful and prosperous nation. In the reign of Ly Nhan Tong (1027), he mobilized the entire people to go to the front, defeating the Song army’s second invasion with a clear sense of independence and sovereignty of the country, reflected in the immortal poem *Mountains and Rivers of the Southern Country* of Ly Thuong Kiet. During the Tran dynasty (1225-1400), a powerful dynasty was built with three times defeating the Mongol army. The ideology and poetry of the Tran dynasty not only contained pride in the glorious victory in the war against Mongolia, but also demonstrated a new perception of the nation’s existence, future and eternal life. Tran Nhan Tong, a heroic king, philosopher, poet, wrote the lines full of emotions: “The country was twice trampled by horses’ hooves; The mountains and rivers were still as stable as a golden bowl for a thousand years”.

In *Great Proclamation upon the Pacification of the Wu (or Proclamation of Victory)*, from cultural, territorial, historical and custom factors, Nguyen Trai affirmed that Vietnam was a separate country, equal to the North in all aspects and Vietnam must be independent. Because of their sovereignty, the Vietnamese people were ready to sacrifice their lives to fight and any force that did not respect that sovereignty, it would meet resistance and pay the price.

Nguyen Hue and the Tay Son dynasty (1778-1802), in just 10 days, defeated twenty thousand invaders of the Qing dynasty, building a unified country without fear of the North, determining to protect their culture and customs. The *Proclamation against the Qing army* clearly stated that spirit: “Fight for hair to be long, fight for teeth to be black, fight for enemy not to have vehicles to return home, fight for enemy not to have a piece of armor to cover their bodies, fight for eternal history to know that the heroic country of the South has its owner”⁵.

That tradition of patriotism and upholding the spirit of national independence and national sovereignty is a source of thought flowing from the past to the present. “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom” of the nation is the soul of the country, and the reason of life of Vietnam from the Au Lac period to the Ho Chi Minh era.

3. PATRIOTISM CREATES A TENACIOUS FIGHTING WILL WITH HIGH INTELLIGENCE AND ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

In the process of exchanging with China (being forced and voluntary), traditional Vietnamese political culture had the parallel existence of the two opposing trends: Sinicization and De-Sinicization. Political trend appeared more and more clearly, that was: restoring independence and building the country according to the Han dynasty model. But the above trend had been split into two branches with different policies. The first was autonomous and relatively dependent on the North, and the second was independent and equal to the North. Being influenced by Han’s socio-political system of views is reasonable and objective law. The problem here is the user’s stance.

The policy of autonomy and relative dependence on the North was the point of view of Si Nhiep (late second century and early third century), Ly Phat Tu (sixth century), Phung An (eighth century), etc. And in the end, all of these legacies were collapsed after a while of construction. The basic limitation and the most serious mistake here is the mentality of submission to hegemony. The deeper cause is that the leader was not really attached to the people and was still value about the

⁴ Tran Van Giau, *Traditional spiritual values of the Vietnamese people*, Social Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1980, p. 115-116.

⁵ Truong Huu Quynh (Editor-in-chief) Phan Dai Doan, Nguyen Canh Minh, *General History of Vietnam*, Volume 1, (4th edition), Education Publishing House, Hanoi, 2001, p. 424.

nomination of the North. Later, the thoughts and conditions of characters like Tran Ich Tac, Le Chieu Thong proved that it was the path of destruction and loss of country.

Different from the policy of dependence was the policy of independence and equality with the North. This policy originated from the people, who never stopped the uprisings of different sizes. Each failure was a lesson forging the will for other uprisings. That tradition led to the uprising of Hai Ba Trung, Ba Trieu. That was also the policy of national heroes such as Ly Bi, Mai Thuc Loan, Phung Hung, Khuc Thua Du, etc., and in Ngo Quyen's time, there was no force that could abolish the independence of Vietnam anymore.

In Dai Viet culture during the period of recovery and construction of an independent country, that indomitable spirit was maintained and promoted to make resounding victories of the national's history. Ly Thuong Kiet led his army to the land of the Celestial Empire to destroy the bases that were preparing for invasion. Tran Quoc Tuan considered the enemy as our archenemy, "cut off my head first, then talk about surrender". Tran Binh Trong, when arrested and lured to surrender, bluntly declared: "It is better to be a ghost of the South than to be a king of the North", etc.

The malice to turn Vietnam into a foreign dependent country is very persistent, so this nation has only one choice, to be ready to confront and find a way to defeat enemies, and this is how the history of Vietnam has been made, from the time of the Hung Kings to nowadays. Moreover, the Vietnamese people kept their independence not only thanks to their tenacious fighting spirit, but also to a strategic and increasingly developed way of fighting, based on its consistent principles: Always resolutely fight against the enemy to save the country, against the idea of negligence, indifference, loss of vigilance, the idea of surrender and betrayal, the idea of local occupation; Mobilize the entire people and the creativity of the majority to organize the fight. Each village is a fortress, and every farmer is a soldier; Form military method and art that using less to win more, using softness to win hardness, taking short-term army to overcome long-term battle, using humanity to win ferocity, using morality instead of violence, etc.

Philip Davidson, a general who commanded US intelligence in the South Vietnam, summed up that the Vietnam Revolutionary War had six characteristics: i) It was an all-out war (all people mobilized). ii) Taking place with total unity of efforts. iii) Persevering and eroding the opponent's will. (iv) Focusing on gaining and keeping the initiative. (v) Always changing (mixing military and political forms of struggle). (vi) Multifold (interlaced stages in localities)⁶.

It can be said that the Vietnamese nation has gradually formed a theoretical system of organizing to fight foreign invaders – forming a unique people's war line in the war history of mankind from ancient times to nowadays – and it can be asserted: "Up to the present, it is really becoming a science originating from Vietnam, the science of defending the country of a small nation against powerful and brutal empires"⁷.

Thus, for Vietnamese people, the country is a very sacred symbol. Traditional Vietnamese political culture represents the mind of the Vietnamese people, taking the country as a reference point for all values. The beauty of human personality is all attributed to it. The homeland is not only a place to do business and earn a living, but also a place where people understand their responsibilities to each other and to the community. Vietnamese culture and political culture are from village to country. China often called itself Han, Tang, Song, Yuan, etc. that emphasized the name representing the family line, while Vietnam emphasized the name of the country, independent from the name of the dynasty. The Ly, Tran, Le dynasties all had the same country name as Dai Viet.

Because of such a long and consistent tradition, Vietnamese culture in general and political culture in particular is first and foremost a culture for the Fatherland, "Fatherlandism culture" (called by Assoc. Prof. Phan Ngoc). Being loyal to the interests of the Vietnamese fatherland is an all-encompassing thought. The fatherland is the basic value, the basis for integrating, continuing and restructuring all the values brought in from the outside. This characteristic is expressed specifically and vividly in other values of traditional Vietnamese political culture.

⁶ F. Davidson, *Faces of the Vietnam war*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 1995, p. 39-40.

⁷ Ho Van Thong, *Referenced book*, p. 22.

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