

Văn Khánh Nguyễn

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# The Vietnam Nationalist Party (1927–1954)

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 Springer

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# Foreword

In the 1920s, an event occurred that transformed the Vietnamese political landscape. This was the almost simultaneous establishment of three political organizations: the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Việt Nam Cách mạng Thanh niên đảng—VRYL) in 1925, the New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Tân Việt Cách mạng Đảng—NVRP) in 1927, and the Vietnam Nationalist Party (1927).

The assessment and evaluation of the two former organizations followed the dominant path of Vietnamese revolutionary development, which aimed toward socialism. As for VNP, from the onset, it was not clear which position and role it would play in the revolutionary movement from 1925 to 1930; at that time making it more difficult to assess what it might influence and how it may impact the subsequent development of the Vietnamese revolution.

Materials pertaining to the development of the VNP prior to 1945, found in the occupied territory during the resistance war against France and America produced both within and outside the country, were of limited value. These are mostly primarily focused on serving egoistic political interests. Within the territory occupied by the revolutionary government after 1954, when the North was liberated, there has been no monograph which gives an in-depth account of this issue and scholarly work on the subject has chiefly been some papers published on conference proceedings or paragraphs in common historical books.

That led Prof. Dr. Văn Khánh Nguyễn to choose VNP in the history of the Vietnamese revolution, a complex issue, as a topic for his research and teaching material in the Faculty of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Thus, this is a daring and audacious decision.

The author's mission is to research *VNP* in a systematic and comprehensive way, from its origins to the establishment and development, to its political ideas and organizational structure, and finally its internal divisions and decline as a political force after the Yen Bai uprising, so as to define the role and position of this organization in the revolutionary movement from 1927 to 1930 and hereafter. He has done so by making a comprehensive survey of materials, both official and unofficial, both domestic and foreign, which include not only conventional documents but also texts from localities and hometowns of vital

personalities of this organization. The challenge before him was to utilize such a complex collection of documents and then compare, contrast, and evaluate them based on Marxist—Leninism, Hồ Chí Minh ideology, documents of the Party, and with the advice of Party leaders who gave comments on *VNP* such as Lê Duẩn, Trường Chinh, etc. He has done so with great success.

Now the work has been completed, republished (with amendments and additions), and presented to both domestic and foreign readers, including first of all undergraduates, graduates, and research fellows majoring in history as a necessary reference. The author is apparently not satisfied with his results and thus would like to receive constructive comments and advice. The composer of this preface also shares that honest and proper desire.

Prof. Đinh Xuân Lâm

# Preface

Vietnam Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng—VNP) was one of the patriotic and revolutionary parties that played a great role in the national liberation of Vietnam in the first half of the nineteenth century. However, after independence was restored in the North (1954) and in the whole country (1975), there no systematic examination of party. This study was originally designed to fill this lacunae in scholarly studies of the independence movement by providing a number of systematic and comprehensive evaluations of the VNP with the intention of tracing the development of this organization from its establishment in December 1927 to its disastrous defeat and suppression connected with the failure of the VNP designed during the Yen Bai uprising, after which it declined as a major historical force. It was completed in 2005 with support from the Asia Research Fund, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and Social Sciences Publisher (Khoa học Xã hội).

However, in the seven years since that study took place, a few monographs were published relevant to the study of the VNP, such as *Lịch sử Chính phủ Việt Nam/History of Vietnamese Government*, Volume 1 (Hanoi: Chính trị Quốc gia Publisher 2006) and Francois Giullemot's *Đại Việt/Great Vietnam*, (Paris: Indes Savants, 2012). Additionally, I continued to collect more materials on the operations of the VNP itself, especially on its activities after the Yen Bai uprising through to the complete liberation of the North (1954). I discovered that the VNP, despite its decline as a revolutionary movement after the establishment of the Vietnam Communist Party in 1930 and the Yen Bai disaster, remained active as nationalist and anti-communist groups whose overseas operations were aimed at disrupting the Communist Party and Vietnamese revolutionary movements. These additional materials and insights have prompted me to add a new chapter (Chap. 5) to this edition of my work which offers much in-depth information on the organization and operations of various parties/groups associated with the VNP and the VNP itself after its suppression by the French in 1930. I have also taken this opportunity to broaden the treatment accorded to the VNP in this work's introductory and concluding sections. It is my hope that this current paper will help readers

make a fuller and more accurate evaluation of the role of this political party in the Vietnamese national revolution during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Keeping in mind the spirit of all scholarly inquiry, I welcome constructive feedback from my colleagues and readers so that I can continue to revise and make further improvements to this book.

Văn Khánh Nguyễn



# Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a prolonged study and research by the author on VNP (Vietnamese Nationalist Party). During the preparation for materials and writing of this book, I received support and encouragement from various agencies, institutions, and individuals such as the National Archives Center No. 1, the The Vietnam Museum of Revolution (now the Vietnam National Museum), central libraries, Culture—Information Departments, provincial and city museums and libraries in Yen Bai, Phu Tho, Vinh Yen, Phuc Yen, Ha Tay, Hanoi, Hai Duong, Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Hai Phong, Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, etc. I also sought references and used some materials collected by *Phạm Xuân Thanh*, a student in the 26th term from Faculty of History, Hanoi University (now University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Hanoi National University) during his field trip before graduation, under my direct supervision in the summer of 1986.

I also give thanks to Prof. Đinh Xuân Lâm, a close and honorable teacher of mine and an expert in Vietnamese pre-modern history for reading, commenting the draft, and writing the foreword.

On the occasion of its publication, I hereby convey my deep appreciation to agencies and institutions that provided me with additional materials and helped me in publishing the book; especially young colleagues such as Dr. Trương Thị Bích Hạnh, Ms. Nguyễn Thị Minh Nguyệt, and Ms. Michelle Miguel Galvez (Faculty of History, University of Social Sciences and Humanities), staff from Office for Research Affairs who assisted me enormously in designing, editing, and completing its draft for publication.

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# Abbreviations

GVNP	New Vietnam Nationalist Party (Tân VNP dân đảng)
GVP	Great Vietnam Party (Đại VNP dân đảng)
LIV	League for the Independence of Vietnam (Việt Nam Độc lập đồng minh hội)
NPGV	National Party of Great Vietnam (Đại VNP xã đảng)
NVRP	New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (Tân Việt Cách mạng Đảng)
PPGV	Popular Party of Greater Vietnam (Đại Việt Dân chính đảng)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VNP	Vietnam Nationalist Party (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng)
VRL	Vietnam Revolutionary League (Việt Nam cách mạng đồng minh hội)
VRYL	Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (Việt Nam Cách mạng Thanh niên đảng)

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# Chapter 1

## Research Overview and Documents

This chapter provides a broader view about the related literature which mentioned the foundation and the development of the Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNP) in Vietnam's modern history. Through archives, research books, and articles written in French, English, and Vietnamese since 1945 the author revealed some important issues about VNP, which until now have not been investigated by Vietnamese and foreign historical experts. Based on this basic cause, this chapter describes the main focuses on reconstruction of the documents related to the VNP, for instance: political ideology, organization system, and primary activities in various areas during different periods. Additionally, by using Marxist–Leninist historical perspective, historical research methods, and logical methods on which the author has built his research objectives to shed light on and explain the characteristics of the patriotic intellectual class of Vietnamese society before 1945 which will be explained in the next chapters.

### 1.1 The Study of Vietnam Nationalist Party in Vietnam

Since the First World War (1914–1918), the movements for national liberation in Vietnam brought new, diverse and strong organizational, and ideological developments, reflected in the continual establishment of three revolutionary organizations: *Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League* (Hội Việt Nam Cách mạng Thanh niên–VRYL) (1925), *New Vietnam Revolutionary Party* (Tân Việt Cách mạng Đảng–NVRP) (1927) and *Vietnam Nationalist Party* (Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng). The establishment, survival, and development of these three revolutionary organizations created momentum for a great stride in national movements from 1925 to 1930. Therefore, the research on VNP plays a significant role in both study and practice, helps discover and identify tendencies in this historical period, and draws lessons for the Vietnamese Revolution in the future.

As a patriotic party and embodiment of revolutionary nationalism, with its establishment and movements during the 1920s of the twentieth century, VNP played a particular role in the identification of an approach toward national liberation. This progress was vividly embodied in the struggle for ideology and organization between two revolutionary schools, namely socialism represented by VRYL and capitalist revolution represented by VNP. Therefore, a research on the development of VNP can provide inclusive and scientific understanding of the revolutionary trends for the Vietnamese national liberation, and those of other oppressed nations in their struggle for independence against imperialism and colonialism.

Beyond that, VNP was a bourgeois party whose majority of members were patriotic bourgeois intellectuals. During its development and partition, the organization contributed quite a few communism-converted members to Vietnamese communist force. There were also several members who became corrupt and dishonest, they later worked as minions for imperialists and feudalists and betrayed national and popular interests. Thus, the acknowledgement of positive revolutionary characteristics and historical role of VNP before 1930, and the reactionary nature of pseudo VNP members afterward, is essential and constructive in both research and practice.

For over 60 years, VNP is not highly regarded in the official literature. Before 1954, there were some books that dealt with VNP. In *Viet-nam la tragédie indo-chinoise*<sup>1</sup> (Vietnam–An Indochina tragedy), published in Paris in 1931 as a historical chronicle, Louis Roubard introduced historical materials surrounding the Yen Bai uprising (February, 1930). However, this book only captured the details and events relating to VNP and was not a study on it.

A second material which directly mentioned about VNP was *Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'Indochine française*<sup>2</sup> (A contribution to the research on the political history of French-occupied Indochina) of Louis Marty, Director of the Sûreté Général Indochinoise, published by the Government General of Indochina in 1933 in Hanoi, and later reprinted as *Parti national annamite des émigrés en Chine* (The National Party of Annamese emigrants in China). This book provided a systematic collection of documents on its history. However, as a person in charge of the colonial administrative system, Louis Marty could not avoid biased and historically false evaluation when he considered VNP an insurgent army.

The work by Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp entitled “*Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng tại hải ngoại*”<sup>3</sup> (The VNP overseas) published on *Hải Phòng nhật báo* (Hai Phong daily

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<sup>1</sup>Roubaud (1931), Duong (1965).

<sup>2</sup>Louis Roubaud, *Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'Indochine Française* (A contribution to research on the political history of French-occupied Indochina) (The volume which wrote on VNP translated by Long Dien and published in the Journal of History and Geography, Sai Gon, 6th issue (IV–VI, 1967, pp. 96–123); 11th issue (VII–IX, 1968, pp. 156–196). French version: *Contribution à l'histoire des mouvements politiques de l'Indochine Française*, Vol. I, II, *Le Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (1927–1932)*, Hanoi, 1933 (52 pages).

<sup>3</sup>Nguyen The Nghiep, “VNP tại hải ngoại” (Overseas VNP), Hai Phong daily newspaper, 1945.



news) in 1945, offered huge information about the activities of VNP overseas after the Yen Bai uprising.

In 1949, Nhung Tông recompiled the biography of Nguyễn Thái Học in his book *Nguyễn Thái Học (1902–1930)*.<sup>4</sup> Bạch Diên also composed a book of similar kind named *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and the VNP<sup>5</sup>). In general, these works could only describe and capture the events regarding activities of VNP.

During the period of 1951–1952, on *The Popular* (Phổ Thông) magazine released by Student Association of Law school (*Hội sinh viên trường Luật*) in the occupied area, Văn Huy gave a brief account of VNP in his article named “*The National movement in Vietnam*” (*Phong trào quốc gia tại Việt Nam*).

After 1954, the South historians (under America–Diem era) began to voice their interests in VNP. In 1956, Hoàng Văn Đào published his book called *VNP (Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954)*<sup>6</sup> (VNP: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), which gave an informative account of its activities. However, this book overvalued the historical significance of VNP, and even attempted to remove the differences between its former members who had followed a more progressive and revolutionary inclination before 1930 and pseudo members of VNP afterward.

In 1969, the work of Cố Nhi Tân<sup>7</sup> as novels about Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Thị Giang, Phó Đức Chính, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, and Lê Hữu Cảnh also provided primary materials about the leaders of VNP. In general, the embellishment of VNP was typical of the opinions provided by the South historians before the national liberation (1975).

Prior to 1954 in the North, there had not been any monograph on VNP. It was only known through said articles and documents. These sources of information were dispersed, small, and disorganized, and contained biased and incorrect evaluation of events.

It was not until peace was restored in the North (1954) did the historical scholarship in general and studies on Vietnamese modern history started to grow. At this time, *The Research Committee on Literature, History and Geography* (Ban nghiên cứu Văn Sử Địa) was established, and later its house organ was created and named the *Magazine of Literature, History and Geography*. According to its strategy, Vietnamese historical and literary works were going to be published since 1955. There were two prominent works on Vietnamese modern revolutionary history. The first was the collection of 12 volumes compiled by Trần Huy Liệu and several other members of the research committee, including the fifth volume<sup>8</sup> that provided direct accounts of VNP. It was literally the first work by North Marxist

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<sup>4</sup>Tong (1949).

<sup>5</sup>Dien (1950).

<sup>6</sup>Van Dao (1965).

<sup>7</sup>Tan (1969).

<sup>8</sup>Lieu and Tao (1958).

historians that offered particularly comprehensive and systematic description of the structure and activities of VNP. Next was the work of Trần Huy Liệu named *Lịch sử 80 năm chống Pháp* (80 years of history against the French) and published in 1957. It included two volumes: the first volume dealt with our history from the French occupation to the end of our armed revolution at the end of nineteenth century, and the second volume tackled patriotic movements and revolution in Vietnam from the early twentieth century to 1930, including the activities of VNP. As a general description of the Vietnamese history, this book could not make a specific study on the various aspects of VNP, and only gave a brief account of its political ideology and activities.

To amend the shortcomings of the above work, another research named *Lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Vietnamese premodern history), fifth volume written by Trần Văn Giàu, Đinh Xuân Lâm and others<sup>9</sup> was published in 1963, which provided a rather comprehensive report of VNP—related issues, but the organization itself was mentioned modestly. As for evaluation, the authors offered a few opinions on the role of VNP, but they were still reserved. The activities of VNP (enlargement of organization and membership), especially at the local level, were timidly described. Similar to *Lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* the fifth volume, two other works were published shortly afterward,<sup>10</sup> namely *Lịch sử Việt Nam 1919–1929* (Vietnamese history 1919–1929) by Hồ Song (printed in 1979); and *Lịch sử Việt Nam, Tập 2* (Vietnamese history, 2nd volume) whose main editor was Nguyễn Khánh Toàn (printed In 1985). These two works, in addressing different issues of modern national history, had an introduction about VNP as a patriotic and revolutionary organization and relative contributor to Vietnamese national liberation before 1930. Apparently, compared to previous materials, these two works, published at the end of 1970s and middle of the 1980s of the twentieth century, successfully amended the shortcomings in on the study of VNP both in materials and evaluations. However, as common historical researches, they only gave an overview of the purposes, principles and activities of VNP without delving into scientific details.

It was not until 1997, on the 60th anniversary of the founding of VNP, did Yen Bai authorities collaborate with Vietnam History Association to organize a workshop entitled *Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2–1930: Một số vấn đề lịch sử*.<sup>11</sup> (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930: Some historical issues). Nevertheless, the workshop only

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<sup>9</sup>Van Giau et al. (1963).

<sup>10</sup>Song (1979).

<sup>11</sup>The papers in this workshop were collected and published in the proceedings, focusing on the introduction and evaluation on Yen Bai uprising. Thus, various important and elemental issues such as VNP's political ideology, operations and their role in the Vietnamese Revolution were not researched and addressed systematically and thoroughly. Yen Bai Department of Culture and Information – Viet Nam Institute of History, *Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2, 1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues) (Workshop proceedings, Dec, 1996), Yen Bai, 1997.

focused on the activities of VNP before, during, and after the Yen Bai uprising. Numerous other basic and important issues such as political ideology and the role of VNP in the Vietnamese Revolution were not adequately and fully addressed.

## 1.2 The Study of Vietnam Nationalist Party Outside Vietnam

In foreign countries, the history of VNP does not rise much concern within the researchers as social or religious issues. There are different research trends and purposes among foreign researchers nevertheless. Some researchers aim to serve their governments or political groups/institutions. Some are driven by the genuine interests in the Vietnamese history. These concerns have promoted the founding of various research centers on Vietnam (or *Vietnamese studies*) in the West in recent decades. These centers were often the results of anti-war movements against America in support of Vietnam. Most notable of all were the centers for *Vietnamese studies* in Russia, France and America. In the former Soviet Union and the current Russia, apart from two common historical works on Vietnamese pre-modern and modern histories,<sup>12</sup> there were several other monographs on the proletariat, bourgeois, national liberation and the Soviet–Nghe Tinh uprising,<sup>13</sup> Literally, in the past 50 years, Russian historians have offered significant contributions to the detection of important research issues relating to Vietnamese history, to mention some of the most notable names are A.A. Guber, C.A. Mkhitarian, A.P. Shiltova, M.A. Treskov, I.A. Ognetov, D.V. Deopik, O.V. Novacova and Socolov. However, there is no meticulous monograph on VNP. This organization is nominally mentioned (on archaic, unnamed documents) in some general stories of Vietnamese liberation movements or of Vietnamese premodern and modern histories.

Compared to the Russian, the French conducted their researches on Vietnamese premodern and modern histories earlier, at least one or two centuries ago, as a way to serve its aggressive policy and domination over Vietnam. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1960s–1970s of the twentieth century were research centers on Vietnam in France founded by prominent scientists such as J. Chesneaux, G. Boudarel, Le Thanh Khoi, Ph. Devillers, Ch. Fourniau, P.R. Féray, D. Hémery, P. Brocheux, Ph. Langlet, etc..., who composed distinguished works on

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<sup>12</sup>Mkhitarian (1970), (1980); Novakova and Xvetov (1994–1995).

<sup>13</sup>Mkhitarian (1967). See more collections of Russian and Vietnamese researchers in recent years on the working class, the dissemination of Marxist—Leninism and revolutionary knowledge, etc...

Vietnamese socio-political and economic histories.<sup>14</sup> Apart from them, there were studies by the British and the American scholars. One example was a research named “*Những nguồn gốc bản địa của chủ nghĩa quốc gia Việt Nam*” (The native origins of Vietnamese nationalist movements) by Milton Saks (in *Anatomy of a conflict*, Illinois, published in 1968); and *Vietnam anti-colonialism*, Berkeley, 1971 by David. G. Marr, etc... There were other monographs by J. Buttinger, W. Duiker on Vietnamese national liberation and President Hồ Chí Minh.

In short, the common propensity of European and North American scholars was their emphasis on the role of intellectuals in Vietnamese national liberation. They tended to focus on the “pioneering” role of urban petty bourgeois, including intellectuals and civil servants as members of VNP. This incomprehensive outlook partly resulted from a historical fact that, when revolutionary movements in Vietnam first occurred, as national history in the early twentieth century was going through a transitional stage, the urban petty bourgeois, especially young intellectuals, played the pioneering role; as the first and foremost participants and leaders in the national struggle against colonialism. However, the shortcoming of bourgeois historians was their exaggeration of the contributions and role of intellectuals at the expense of the role of the working class among Vietnamese. In addition, when identifying the source of national liberation in Vietnam, they primarily focused on external factors without considering the internal peculiarities, namely the new socioeconomic basis, patriotism and our national self-reliance. Few understood that *the contact and incorporation of patriotism and communism were inevitable results in Vietnamese national liberation during the 1920s, and were even innate drives of the sincere patriots in VNP* who were in search of a way for national liberation.

In conclusion, due to the limitations in research purposes and opinions, foreign bourgeois scholars did not pay much attention to the study and the research on VNP. There were other works mentioning about this organization, but were not official, short of materials and subjective in conclusion and evaluation. This was partly a result of greater attention paid to other research topics, and few materials that evaluated the position and the role of VNP in Vietnamese national liberation prior to 1930.

To amend these weaknesses, the main aim of our research is to collect, gather, assemble, and introduce documents, especially those on the political ideology, organizational structure, and operations of VNP in different areas systematically.

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<sup>14</sup>Chesneaux (1995).

Chesneaux (1971).

Khôi (1955).

Lesvi (1931).

Hémery (1975).

Féray (1979).

Boudarel (1969).

Brocheux (1995).

Brocheux (2011).

Guillemnt (2012).

Based on additional sources of information, particularly those attained from field researches and investigations in Bac Giang, Yen Bai, Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, Ha Tay, Hai Phong, Thai Binh, Hai Duong in recent years. We would like to offer the most comprehensive and objective presentation and evaluation on the role and historic contributions of VNP to Vietnamese revolution prior to the founding of Vietnamese Communist Party.

### 1.3 Sources and Approaches

As other historical researches, this study was conducted based on the historical materialism founded by Marxist–Leninism and Hồ Chí Minh ideologies. They are guiding the scientific instruments, directing thinking, and research methods. By combining the historical and the logical methods, analysis, and synthesis, the study made in–depth examination of events and specific aspects, and provided precise evaluation and conclusion on VNP.

Apart from the said methods, we also used psychology to analyze and clarify the causes and progress of ideological transformation of VNP’s leaders such as Trần Huy Liệu, Phạm Tuấn Tài, and Tô Chấn towards socialism under the impact of communism.

To complete this research, we first and foremost made use of classical Marxist–Leninist works and considered them the main ingredients guiding our research thinking and methodology. Books such as *The Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and *The Class Struggles in France, the Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* by Karl Marx helped to form the scientific analyses and insights on social classes and clarify the status and political attitude of each class, including intellectuals and petty bourgeois—the crucial members of VNP. To improve and develop understanding of the structure, status and tendency of each class in Eastern colonized societies, we also consulted other works by V.I. Lenin and J. Stalin. By inheriting the arguments of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Lenin and Stalin concluded that the inevitable path towards national liberation lay in revolutionary socialism combined with proletarian revolution in native countries. Many works written by V.I. Lenin and J. Stalin on the East and the revolution for national liberation became essential in understanding the Eastern social classes, the status, political attitude, and revolutionary capacity of each class in colonial societies.

In addition, theoretical works by President Hồ Chí Minh and leaders of the Party and State also contribute greatly in research orientation and analysis of colonial Vietnamese and VNP. Articles of President Hồ Chí Minh in the 1920s and later articles on Indochina, Vietnam and Russian October Revolution such as *Bản án chế độ thực dân Pháp* (French Colonialists on Trial), *Tham luận tại Đại hội lần thứ V Quốc tế Cộng sản* (paper in the 5th Congress of the Communist International) (1924), *Lenin và phương Đông* (Lenin and the East) were essential in evaluating the socio-political conditions, characters, and features of Vietnamese

national liberation movements, and the attitude of domestic classes and parties. Additionally, General Secretaries of the Vietnamese Communist Party such as Lê Duẩn, Trường Chinh also wrote significant articles and works to examine different classes, the characteristics and features of Vietnamese revolutionary movements in the 1920s, the ideological trends and positions of early revolutionary organizations such as VRYL, NVRP, and VNP. Most prominent works included *Một vài đặc điểm của cách mạng Việt Nam* (Several features of Vietnamese revolution) (Su That Publisher, Hanoi, 1958), *Dưới lá cờ vẻ vang của Đảng, vì độc lập tự do, vì chủ nghĩa xã hội tiến lên giành những thắng lợi mới* (For the glory of the Party, for independence, freedom, and socialism fighting for new victories) (1943), *Bàn về cách mạng Việt Nam* (On the Vietnamese revolution) (1952), *Cách mạng dân tộc dân chủ nhân dân* (The National Democratic Revolution) (1975) by Trường Chinh. In studying VNP in particular and Vietnamese premodern and modern histories in general, these works provided a solid ground for understanding and created the theoretical foundation for rational arguments.

It should be noted that, apart from the mentioned theoretical works, the documents and instruments of Communist International, especially those concluded in its 5th and 6th Congresses, also provided valuable theoretical grounds for the evaluation on political status and attitude of the petty bourgeois, and the features of Vietnamese revolution before the proletarian party was founded.

## 1.4 Goals and Missions

- Research and clarify the conditions that led to the establishment and development of VNP, and also portray its activities both before and after the Yen Bai uprising (1930).
- Criticize some leftist and rightist opinions on VNP, and identify its position among social classes by analyzing its political programs and statutes.
- Evaluate comprehensively and objectively the contribution and role of VNP in the movements for Vietnamese national liberation before the establishment of Communist Party.
- By studying the founding, development, and failure of VNP discover the feature and maturity of patriotic intellectuals and Vietnamese national movements toward socialism.

To achieve these goals and missions, the book comprises seven chapters. Apart from the introduction which includes the literature review, research goals, and materials, including chapter that the author describes the conditions which led to the introduction of petty bourgeois and VNP, focusing on the role of new capitalist forces and presence of bourgeois, and urban petty bourgeois.

The next chapters present the process of establishment of VNP based on its predecessors such as *Nam Dong Publishing House* (*Nam Đồng thư xã*) and the First cell (*Đệ nhất chi bộ*). Regarding the political ideology of VNP, after criticizing

leftist or rightist views of previous writers, the book analyzes different transformations in its program and statute since establishment (December, 1927) to before the Yen Bai uprising (February, 1930), and indicates that the core essence of its political ideology is patriotism and *nationalism*. We also identify the similarities and differences between nationalism of VNP and nationalism in Sun Yat-sen's Three People Principles.

Apart from clarifying the class-related nature of VNP, I also describe the social backgrounds of its members, its structure, organization, and activities since establishment (December, 1927) to before the Yen Bai uprising (early 1930).

Most of its members were patriots found among urban petty bourgeois (civil servants, teachers, students, etc.), landlords, wealthy farmers, and Vietnamese soldiers in the French army.

Apart from its cells, VNP also developed its popular organizations such as women's union and farmer's union to maintain its activities.

VNP worked on the principle of "*democratic centralism*", in which the subordinates elected a board of superiors and followed its leadership. During its two years of existence, VNP primarily focused on constructing its organization and recruiting members. It also carried out other activities, such as publishing *Revolutionary Soul* (*Hồn cách mạng*) journal, printing articles to educate party members, fundraising by running Vietnam hotel (Việt Nam Khách sạn) in Hanoi, and racketeering local rich families. VNP preferred violent activities, terrorism, and assassination, particularly the assassination of the labor recruiter Bazin in February, 1929.

The Yen Bai uprising (February, 1930) was considered the first and last great campaign of VNP. I also devoted one chapter, Chap. 4 to give a systematic and comprehensive account of the preparation, development, results, and historical significances of this rising and clarifying the fundamental causes leading to its failure.

In this book, the author analyzes the ideological division within VNP under the impacts of VRYL and communism, both within and outside French colonial prisons, before and after the Yen Bai uprising. This division led several members of this party, most notably Trần Huy Liệu, Tô Chấn, and Phạm Tuấn Tài to leave the bourgeois course of VNP and follow the more sophisticated way of the working class.

To add to the first edition, this edition includes Chap. 5 that describes the ideological and organizational division of VNP, and also reactionary activities attempting to disrupt Vietnamese revolution of some variant groups/organizations/parties of VNP since the failure of the Yen Bai uprising (1930) to the North peace restoration in 1954.

In Chap. 6, the book focuses on evaluating the contribution and role of VNP in Vietnamese national liberation movements before the establishment of Vietnam Communist Party in three respects: its dissemination of and education on patriotism and nationalism among the people; its attempt to expose people to the shortcomings and weaknesses of bourgeois revolution, which led them toward proletarian revolution and contributed to their rapid ideological alteration

from bourgeois to proletariat; its creation of essential and valuable lessons for Vietnamese revolution in addressing national affairs, its methods to develop, mobilize revolutionary armies and instigate armed uprisings, etc.

The work also has an appendix, including biographies of prominent leaders of VNP such as Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, Phó Đức Chính, Đoàn Trần Nghiệp, Nguyễn Thị Giang, and printed books and articles used for the public information, training and running of Nam Dong publishing house and VNP; and collects and presents some pictures and memoirs of crucial members of VNP.

Futhermore, the book could provide missing informations of *VNP in the history of Vietnamese revolution*; especially it can be used as a reference for historical study, research and teaching, especially on Vietnamese revolutionary history, and for locals and foreign people who are concerned about Vietnamese history in general.

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# Chapter 2

## The Establishment of the Vietnam Nationalist Party

This chapter examines and clarifies the conditions of bourgeois nationalist movements, especially the establishment of Vietnam Nationalist Party, in which, the role of economic and social factors was emphasized as the most important to create the foundation for revolution trends. Significantly, based on the birth of the economic follow capitalism, the bourgeoisie, and petty bourgeoisie class, many such as educated students, rich farmers, and sellers had a strong position in latter patriotic organizations. Through which, by the crystallization of three main milestones that are presented in terms of Nguyễn Thái Học, the foundation of the Nam Dong Publishing House and the First Cell, since December 25, 1927 VNP were officially established. From then, the appearance of VNP has been regarded as one of the three biggest revolutionary organizations in Vietnam; likewise, it supported the movement of national liberation in Vietnam to the later stages.

### 2.1 The Conditions for the Establishment of National Revolutionary Movements and Vietnam Nationalist Party

#### 2.1.1 Socioeconomic Conditions

The end of World War I led to the “glory” of not only French imperialists but also others of Allied force. Despite its victory, France suffered the most in the aftermath, as its economy declined significantly, its agriculture hampered, and thousands of villages, factories, manufacturers, and infrastructures destroyed. To repair these damages, after the war, French imperialists boosted the exploitation of their colonies to gain profits for France.

In Vietnam and Indochina, after the end of World War I, colonial governments began to implement new economic, political, and cultural policies. These policies caused huge impact and structural changes in our economy and society, creating new conditions for the national liberation to adapt itself with new mankind developments.

Economically, the French colonial rulers continued their investment, exploitation and conducted various policies. The total investment of French government and capitalists increased dramatically compared to the pre-war period. From 1888 to 1918, the total investment of both French government and investors was only 1 billion Francs, during 6 years, from 1924 to 1929, and the amount of French capital invested in Indochina, especially in our country, was 4 billion Francs,<sup>1</sup> which was “6 times larger than that 20 years ago”.<sup>2</sup>

With such a huge investment, the French spent most of their budget on economic sectors generating huge profit, which were not in competition with their country’s production, and only provided “*materials and products which were not available in France.*”<sup>3</sup> Among the sectors, agriculture (first and foremost rice, rubber, and industrial crops) received most investment, with a dramatic increase from 178 Francs in 1914 to 645 Francs in 1927. The total amount of French capital invested in agriculture in this period was 1272.6 million Francs.<sup>4</sup> The amount of lands seized by French capitalists increased rapidly from 301,000 ha (1900), 775,700 ha (1928) to 1,200,000 ha (1930). Most of these lands were used as plantation for rubber and industrial crops. In 1930, in Cochinchina alone there were 606,500 ha of plantation.

Next to agriculture were mining and manufacturing, and the main policy of French was to limit industry in Vietnam “*because this is not a strong market to consume industrial products.*”<sup>5</sup> But to serve the economic exploitation of French bourgeois, various new French companies and enterprises were established after the war, which dominated investment and business activities in Vietnam. In 1929, of both old and new enterprises, there were 50 agricultural companies, 46 industrial companies, 19 mining companies, and 31 trade companies whose headquarters were in Vietnam.<sup>6</sup> Also, several other companies controlled their operations from France. Regardless of locations, all companies were under the supervision of Indochina Bank and its branches. It was once said that “*the Indochina Bank was the heart and soul of Indochina economy.*”<sup>7</sup> Thanks to increased investment and technical facilities, transportation was established and consolidated. Trade was

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<sup>1</sup>Chesneaux (1995), Nguyễn (2000).

<sup>2</sup>See Chinh (1957).

<sup>3</sup>See Robequain (1939), Rouband (1931).

<sup>4</sup>Henry (1932).

<sup>5</sup>Vũ (1941).

<sup>6</sup>Isoart (1961).

<sup>7</sup>Philippe (1952).

expanded both within and outside the country. Along with economic activities, the French colonial rulers also exploited our people by various forms of tax. Apart from direct tax (targeted at people and land), they also implemented other forms of tax, including three exclusive ones on wine, salt, and opium. Tax became too heavy for the people and workers, and at the same time generated large profit for the budget of each region of Vietnam and Indochina in general. Needless to say, *“the most reactionary policy of the French was to monopolize the economy, trade and the banking sector and keep Vietnam economy in a backward state.”*<sup>8</sup>

Along with economic exploitation, the colonial government also conducted various political frauds and maintained an obsolete educational system to discourage and dampen the resistance of people. Since the early twentieth century, French colonialists gradually have diminished and removed the Confucian educational system, and quickly replaced it with a new structure. Accordingly, the French educational system was established and divided into grades from elementary school to colleges and universities. During the 1920s, the system of colleges and universities were expanded along with the establishment and consolidation of centers and empirical research institutes. Additionally, the French published various books, newspapers, and magazines as a way to propagandize Western culture and their exploitation policy, under the guise of such a catchy word as “civilization.” The political system from central level to provincial, district, and communal level was reformed and strengthened based on their “rural administrative reforms,” as a means to consolidate their authority as they were ready to prevent and suppress any resistance from our people. Patriotic actions, progressive and revolutionary ideologies were prohibited and destroyed.

In short, after the war, all deceptive plans and tactics were employed and implemented by the colonialists in Vietnam. Apart from economic abuse, political oppression, the cultural and ideological control of French colonialists generated profound changes in Vietnamese economy, boosted the development and enlargement of bourgeois economic relations, reduced feudal and pre-capitalist production relations, and helped capitalist economy intervene and mingle with traditional economic relations. This was a typical socioeconomic form in Vietnam, which proved the famous argument of Karl Marx: *“The invading nation always forces the defeated nation to follow its mode of production... or retains the old mode of production and gains profit from it; or combines the old and new mode of production to generate a mixed form.”*<sup>9</sup>

Economic prosperity also led to an increase in population. In 1931, the population of Vietnam was 17,700,000 people. Apart from the economy, society also encountered big adjustment and stratification. Representatives of the feudal system were disappearing while other classes of the new social structure arose rapidly and continuously, which constituted the society of colonial capitalism.

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<sup>8</sup>Duan (1958).

<sup>9</sup>Marx and Engels (1958).

From being a superior class in the country, feudal landlords became subordinates and political pawns of the colonial government. But “*it was common in colonial era for feudalists and imperialists to cooperate.*”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, French colonialists did their best to support landlords, protected and facilitated their power and allowed them to do whatever they wanted in rural areas. As spongers and reactionaries, feudal landlords were a target that the national liberation sought to eliminate.

Vietnamese farmers accounted for 90 % of the population, and were a strong and leading force in the struggle against French in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But under the domination of the French, our people became poor and desperate, their status degraded significantly. Due to land appropriation of feudalists and colonialists who imposed high tax, natural calamity, drought, and poor crops, various farmers went bankrupt, and had to leave their villages and head to cities. But the limitation of industry proposed by French colonialists caused many farmers to “*be stuck at going back to the hometown or entering factories and mines*” because “*even a transport was controlled by two or three people, and the number of workers looking for job in factories outnumbered available vacancies...*”<sup>11</sup> Thus the majority of them had to return to hometown and worked on small farms, or became farm workers or guards of the landlords. According to statistics of the colonial government in 1931, the number of land owners in Indochina was only 2,179,500 among the total 20,170,000 population.<sup>12</sup> According to another French author, the number of farmers without land in Tonkin and Annam accounted for 50 %; those in Cochinchina accounted for 60–70 % of the population,<sup>13</sup> most of the farmers would likely become semi-proletariat in rural areas. Meanwhile the number of colonialists and landlords accounted for 7 % population and rich farmers owned 50 % agricultural lands. French exploitative policies made the division among farmers much extensive and fast. Farmers also suffered from the oppression and tyranny of landlords, and bound by conservative customs and ways. “*Poor, unemployed, shabby, distressed, such was the situation of Indochinese farmers.*”<sup>14</sup>

But their very hardship and low status made farmers to become closer and closer with laborers. As a social group without an organized, structured, and solid economy, although bearing great hostility towards feudalists and colonialists, farmers were not able to form an independent and ordered political entity. But “*the revolution of native farmers was ripe*”<sup>15</sup> and they only waited for a new and

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<sup>10</sup>Duan (1970).

<sup>11</sup>See Chinh (1959).

<sup>12</sup>Truong Chinh, Vo Nguyen Giap, *Vấn đề dân cày* (The issue of peasants), Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup>Y. Henry, *Economie agricole*, Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>14</sup>Truong Chinh, Vo Nguyen Giap, *Vấn đề dân cày* (The issue of peasants), Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup>Hồ (1980).

progressive class, to rally and lead them in their struggle for national independence and self-liberation, the laboring class.

Unlike the working class in capitalist countries, the one in Vietnam was born early and even before national bourgeois. *“It originated not when the first capitalists among national bourgeois appeared, but right when the first exploitative act of foreign capitalists occurred.”*<sup>16</sup> Prior to World War I, the number of laborers in Vietnam was only 5,000,000. In 1929, according to colonial government, it rose to 2,210,000, among them 8,600,000 worked in trade and industry sector, 8,100,000 in plantations and 5,300,000 in mines. Not to mention thousands of non-professional laborers who were either seasonal or contract workers.

Unlike farmers, laborers lived primarily in industrial centers and big cities such as Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, and Sai Gon, although they only accounted for 1.3 % population.

The living and working conditions of Vietnamese laborers were particularly low. The daily wage of an average worker was only 2.5–3.0 dimes, yet the wages for women and children were only one-third of that of males. The average income of a laborer was only 48 Francs, while that of a European civil servant or a trader was around 5000–6000 Francs. Laborers usually had to work with poor and primitive equipments, and virtually did everything manually. The length of working day lasted for 10–12 h, sometimes even 14 h, without any social security. This oppressed life led to the awakening and rising of class awareness among laborers as Karl Marx stated: *“Its purpose and historical mission (the laboring class) were defined clearly and undoubtedly...by the very life that constituted it.”*<sup>17</sup>

Born and bred in a colonial country, apart from the similarities with international laboring class, Vietnamese laborers possessed their own characters, such as they had to suffer the trilateral oppression of the colonial rulers, capitalists, and feudal landlords; had more favorable conditions to develop a firm alliance with farmers; did not have to encounter bourgeois laborers and thus could avoid corporatism; were able to absorb Marxist–Leninism and Hồ Chí Minh ideology from the very beginning, and also inherited the national patriotic spirit, etc. These characteristics helped them rise as sole leaders of Vietnamese revolution.

Although the scheme and intention of French imperialism were to impede and prevent the development of colonial industry, their exploitation created natural factors for the establishment and expansion of Vietnamese bourgeois. As Lê Duẩn put it: *“As a result of the expansion and zest of French colonization after the first world war, a frail native bourgeois class was born”*.<sup>18</sup>

Before the war, Vietnamese capitalists constituted a minimal social class. During the war, taking advantage of the occupied-by-war French, Vietnamese bourgeois expanded their business to many economic sectors and rapidly rose in

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<sup>16</sup>Duan (1965).

<sup>17</sup>Marx and Engels (1963).

<sup>18</sup>See Duan (1968).

economic strength and in political status. In the middle of 1920s, Vietnamese bourgeois were officially integrated as a class. During its development, the capitalists were split into two types: comprador bourgeois and national bourgeois. Comprador bourgeois usually acted as contractors and brokers for domestic traders and foreign capitalist companies. This class had directly affiliated interests with the imperialists and feudal landlords. National bourgeois were new, small, and suppressed by foreign bourgeois. Their budget only accounted for 5 % that of foreign bourgeois in vital economic sectors.<sup>19</sup> Most of national bourgeois worked in light industry and manufacturing sector, such as embroidery, printing, paint production, grading, sugar production, soft production, and auto repair. There were also capitalists who established ship repair companies or ship companies (especially Bạch Thái Bưởi in Tonkin who had 30 ships and over 1500 workers). In addition, there were capitalist handicraft manufacturers which employed 15–20 laborers around cities as well as handicraft companies. Examples were the jar manufacturers in Thanh Hoa, bowl manufacturers in Bat Trang, Hanoi, embroidery manufacturers in Ha Dong, Hanoi, etc.<sup>20</sup>

Along with economic development, the ideological advancement of Vietnamese bourgeois also improved greatly as compared to the early twentieth century. Since 1920s, they have improved market competition and they went to oppose corporations and syndicates. At the end of 1918, in Cochinchina (Cochinchina), the Cochinchina Company of Engineering Trade and Society was founded by great bourgeois such as Nguyễn Văn Của and Trương Văn Ban, etc.

Vietnamese bourgeois also urged and encouraged Vietnamese to develop capitalist economy and production, and pushed consumers to use domestic products to promote national economy. In 1927, Vietnamese bourgeois established the Bank of Vietnam to designate loans for individuals.

Vietnamese bourgeois even used the press to popularize their way of business. Newspapers such as Profession Popular Newspaper (*Thực Nghiệp dân báo*) of Nguyễn Hữu Thu and Bùi Huy Tín; Enlightenment (*Khai hóa*) of Bạch Thái Bưởi reflected the rights and desires of Vietnamese bourgeois to develop investments and enlarge import and export, trade and goods, etc.<sup>21</sup>

In addition, Vietnamese bourgeois opposed the domination and impediment of foreign bourgeois, as reflected in such notable activities as the boycott of Chinese overseas (*tẩy chay khách trú*) in 1919 and dissent over French monopoly in Sai Gon port in 1923.

However, due to their affiliation with foreign bourgeois, at least the French, the nature of Vietnamese bourgeois was twofold. On the one hand, they objected to oppression and hampering of French bourgeois and joined the struggle against French for national independence; on the other hand (mainly) they easily joined

<sup>19</sup>See Nguyen Khanh Toan (ed.), *Lịch sử Việt Nam—tập 3* (Vietnamese history—3rd volume), Ibid, p. 174.

<sup>20</sup>See Binh (1959).

<sup>21</sup>Nguyen Cong Binh, *Tìm hiểu giai cấp tư sản Việt Nam thời Pháp thuộc* (Introduction to Vietnamese bourgeois during the French occupation), sđđ, p. 114.

in hand with colonialists and feudalists to protect their shared rights. Therefore, “*Vietnamese bourgeois were not able to play such a role as Chinese and Indian bourgeois...*”<sup>22</sup> “*With the mentioned economic conditions and nature of Vietnamese bourgeois and landlords, Vietnam was not able to formulate a successful revolution for national liberation of bourgeois character and led by the bourgeois (see Footnote 22).*” Due to their submissiveness, “*apart from acting as minions, bourgeois sought no more than profiting from imperialists*” (see Footnote 22).

Apart from extending its exploitation and governance, after the First World War, the colonial government was particularly concerned about investments in urban areas. In 1930, the total budget for urban development in Vietnam amounted to 130 million Indochina dongs. Beside the extension of old cities such as Hanoi and Sai Gon, several new cities were established such as Hai Phong, Da Lat, Nha Trang, and Da Nang. Urban and rural districts were extended in size and their infrastructure such as streets, bridges and houses improved so they would be upgraded to commune-level towns and district-level towns. It could be said that, along with the colonial exploitation of French colonialists, urbanization has also developed rapidly since the early twentieth century, especially since the end of 1920s, reflecting a new picture in our country. As cities were expanded, petty bourgeois increased radically in number. In the early twentieth century, urban residents accounted for only 3.6 % total population, in 1930 this rate increased to 8 % and 10 %. In Hanoi alone, in 7 years from 1921 to 1928, the population rose from 75,000 to 126,000. In 1930, Hai Phong’s population was 12,000. Among urban residents, petty bourgeois accounted for a large part and played different roles such as teachers, students, pupils, officers, independent intellectuals, small craftsmen and traders. The number of elementary and secondary teachers alone in 1929–1930 was 12,000<sup>23</sup>; there were around 328,000 elementary students, 7545 secondary students, 509 college and university students, and 130,000 officers having license tax.<sup>24</sup> In 1930, the number of professional craftsmen was 210,000. Particularly in Tonkin, professional craftsmen accounted for 7 % of rural population. The number of neo intellectuals (Tân Học) was still nominal, with only 2000 people in 1930.<sup>25</sup>

Living conditions of urban petty bourgeois were both low and perilous. Living expenses in cities rose dramatically. In Hanoi alone, post-war living costs increased by 65 % compared to the pre-war period.

Apart from rising expenses, urban population also suffered from different taxes. Only a minor fraction of officers and intellectuals were highly paid, while most of them had to rely on minimal wage for living, not to mention that they were

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<sup>22</sup>Le Duan, *Một vài đặc điểm...*, Ibid, p. 7–8.

<sup>23</sup>P. Lesvi, *Indochine*, Paris, 1931, p. 205. See also: Trinh (2009).

<sup>24</sup>Annuaire Statique de l’Indochine (1923–1928), pp. 84–88; adopted from Vietnamese history, 2nd volume, p. 176, Gourou (2003).

<sup>25</sup>The Asiatic review, 1937, T. 33, Number 14, p. 365. Adopted from C.A Mkhitarian (ed.), Vietnamese modern history, p. 34.



devalued and exploited by European colonialists and officials. Students and pupils were not allowed to develop their intellect and were subject to the French obscurantist educational system.

With urban extension came changes in customs, lifestyles and psychology of a large population living under the influence of Western culture and technology, as shown in newspapers written in French and the national language. Sino education was removed (in 1919) and replaced by the growth and domination of France–Vietnam schools and Western educational institutions that regulated both training curricula and contents. New printing equipments and institutes came into being, paving way for the development of printing and publication. In 1929, there were 153 newspapers and magazines published in Vietnam, by contacting new opinions and ideas in newspapers and books, the ideology and psychology of a number of citizens, especially urban citizens, greatly changed; outdated feudal customs and lifestyles were at risk and limited. Reasonably, the transformations in lifestyles, living conditions and customs made it easier for urban petty bourgeois (students, pupils, intellectuals, etc.) to receive new ideologies, including democratic capitalism, thus became more aware of their identities and followed the right path to maintain personal, community, and national interests.

Being heavily exploited and loving their country, most of the petty bourgeois, especially intellectual bourgeois were willing to join movements against imperialists. The Communist International stated: “*The petty bourgeois played an important role in colonial and semi-colonial countries... They were the toughest representatives of not only personal rights of petty bourgeois but also common and objective rights of the whole national bourgeois.*”<sup>26</sup> Our Party also affirmed that bourgeois “were important revolutionary agents and reliable supporters of the laboring class”<sup>27</sup> and the reality of our revolutionary history in the 1920s confirmed these arguments.

In short, the transformations in socioeconomic configuration, the formation and development of colonial capitalism as a new economic structure, new economic sectors and social classes, especially the bourgeois and urban petty bourgeois, although small, created materialistic conditions for the reception of new ideas and helped define the character, content and direction of Vietnamese national movements in the early twentieth century.

### ***2.1.2 Ideological Conditions***

With the large-scale invasion and exploitation of French colonialists in our country in the early twentieth century, Vietnamese society saw a combination and interaction of different economic and social relations resulting from different modes

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<sup>26</sup>C.A Mkhitarian (ed), *Vietnamese modern history*, p. 34.

<sup>27</sup>*Report on 6th Congress of the Communist International on colonialism.*

of production. Apart from obsolete feudal and pre-capitalist relations were the emergence and expansion of capitalist relations (some resulting from Vietnamese domestic feudal society, and others from external forces via colonialism). These economic and political relations developed contradictory and overlapping interests between diverse classes. Excluding traditional conflicts between landlords and farmers, our society also developed more rigorous struggles, such as between our nation (including the people) and colonialists, between national bourgeois and foreign bourgeois. These conflicts had to be promptly solved if further development was to be initiated.

At this moment, the utmost historic missions were the struggle against French imperialists to restore national independence, the removal of subordinate feudal landlords to return lands to farmers, the liberation of farmers and laborers from capitalist oppression and development of a better society under communism in Vietnam. They were according to the foreseeable path of Vietnamese revolution and the natural revolutionary progress in colonial countries, which started with October Revolution.

But since the late nineteenth century, despite relentless attempts and developments of our patriotic movements, which included both violent armed struggles and peaceful negotiations with diverse and varying methods, there was no social force able to recognize the correct path of Vietnamese revolution.

Vietnamese had deep love for their country. Since the first act of invasion by French, bearing that rich tradition, our people have been united to conduct the heroic resistance to aggression. Our persistent war to protect the motherland was a vivid embodiment and gallant chant of independence, freedom, patriotism and huge sacrifice of our forefathers. Unfortunately, our armed revolutions in the second half of nineteenth century (including the Royalist movement (Cần Vương) and other spontaneous peasant efforts) were turned into bloodbaths. Failure of the national movements in the late nineteenth century was mainly due to the lack of an advanced class that was able to gather the population and lead it to ultimate victory.

As leaders of the resistance to French in the late nineteenth century, most of the intellectual mandarins came from feudal backgrounds. In response to the shameful surrender of Nguyen court, these mandarins supported the population, organized and involved them in the struggle against French invaders. *“But the strong resistance of mandarins basically did not come from any remaining source of feudalism, rather, from the national spirit of independence, from a thousand-year culture embedded in them and the people, and erupted under the name of the Royalist movement”*.<sup>28</sup>

However, as products of feudalism, which would soon become obsolete, these mandarins were not able to surpass their shortcomings originating from their backgrounds and contexts. Most of the early revolutionaries such as Phan Dinh Phung

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<sup>28</sup>The Central Committee of Researchers on the Party's History, *Ba mươi năm đấu tranh của Đảng (tập 1)* (30 years of the Party struggle) (1st volume), Su That Publisher, Ha Noi, 1966, p. 11.

and Hoang Hoa Tham aimed to drive away the French, but were unable to identify the enemies of Vietnamese revolution, who were colonizers and feudal landlords having surrendered the French, the exploiters and enslavers of our people. They did not realize that the goal of revolution was to regain independence and establish a democratic republic country in which people would have control over the state and enjoy other democratic rights. In essence, “*they did not successfully recognize the mission of Vietnamese revolution, its enemies, motivations, and the leading revolutionary class.*”<sup>29</sup> Therefore, despite being deeply patriotic, feudal intellectual mandarins were not capable of attracting and mobilizing the people and nation in national liberation. It resulted in the ultimate failure of all patriotic struggles. But the failure of the late nineteenth century national movements indicated that the old methods of armed rebellion created by intellectual mandarins could not lead to ultimate victory.

In the early twentieth century, Western capitalist ideas swiftly entered our country via China and Japan, creating new opportunities and prospects for Vietnamese national liberation movements. In the new international and national context, our national movements for liberation entered a new stage with different characteristics and inclinations.

The first inclination started by Phan Bội Châu took the form of armed revolution against French imperialists to restore national independence.

Another trend was formed by Phan Chu Trinh, which aimed to implement social reforms by opening the economy, upgrading culture (by relying on French colonialists), and then develop the country based on European capitalism.

With the above contents and goals, our national movements for liberation were more advanced compared to those in the late nineteenth century. But in some respect, the dual nature of having both violent and reformative inclinations in the early twentieth century showed the ineptitude of bourgeois movements. Patriotic mandarins who followed each inclination, despite their profound and genuine devotion, were not able to mobilize and unite the people under a single party, with common policies, methods and goals. The methods to attain national liberation of Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh contained progressive aspects, but also exposed their deficiencies in understanding of nationalism and democracy. While “*Phan Chu Trinh wanted to rely on the French to make reforms*”, “*Phan Bội Châu hoped to lean on Japanese to drive away French. This course was dangerous; it was no less than chasing out one enemy while welcoming another.*”<sup>30</sup> In conclusion, the said inclinations did not generate common policies and approaches to guide the whole national movement, and were not able to guide the fight for national independence to victory. Under the influence of the October Revolution, revolutionary movements of worldwide proletariat and laborers erupted dramatically and insistently attacked the front and back of imperialism.

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<sup>29</sup>Le Duan, *Giai cấp vô sản với vấn đề nông dân trong cách mạng Việt Nam* (Proletariat with the issue of farmers in Vietnamese revolution), Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup>Chinh (1975).

In colonial and dependent nations, various struggles of the working class also broke out to demand for life improvement and reject aggressive imperialists. Early in 1919, in Korea, the population united to commence a revolution against Japanese imperialists. In May, another nationalistic and democratic uprising named May Fourth took place in 150 cities and 20 provinces of China, attracting over 10 million dissenters. This vigorous movement generated favorable conditions to establish the China Communist Party in July 1921.

Apparently, the triumph of October Revolution triggered a wave of remarkable struggles in every Western and Eastern country. In several countries, the proletariat began forming their own party. Accordingly, on March 6, 1919, Lenin and his communist comrades met in Moscow and decided to establish the Third International—International Communist. Upon its introduction, the Third International began to promulgate Marxist–Leninism and lessons from the October Revolution on a global scale, and reinforced revolutionary movements in countries significantly.

Thanks to the victory of October Revolution, Nguyễn Ái Quốc, a prominent nationalist and pioneer among Vietnamese patriots, was enlightened by Marxist–Leninism and discovered the truth: “*Only socialism and communism could liberate oppressed peoples and international workers from slavery.*”<sup>31</sup> He also recognized that: “*There was no alternative to national liberation and independence other than proletarian revolution*” (See Footnote 15). With this mindset, in the 18th Congress of French Socialist Party in Tours (December, 1920), Nguyễn Ái Quốc voted to support the Third International and helped establish the French Communist Party, becoming the first Vietnamese communist.

After learning about Marxist–Leninism and lessons from the October Revolution, Nguyễn Ái Quốc started to disseminate Marxist–Leninism from France to Vietnam. In the period of 1921–1925, he wrote approximately 80 articles (excluding *Bản án chế độ thực dân Pháp*) published on newspapers such as *L’Humanité* (Humanity), *Đời sống công nhân* (The life of workers), *Correspondence international* (International Correspondence), *Pravda* (Truth), etc.... These articles and his inspiring activities gained huge popularity in Vietnam, and inspired patriotism and revolutionary consciousness among our people.

During this time, the rapid development of Chinese revolutionary movements also made great influences and impacts on Vietnamese revolution. In Vietnamese political and ideological atmosphere, on books and newspapers, on news received from overseas, the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen and Xin Hai Revolution were respectfully propagated by Vietnamese intellectuals. Leaders of Chinese Communist Party such as Sun Yat Sen, Huang Xing, and Hu Hanmin were celebrated by many Vietnamese writers. The honorable death of 72 martyrs at Huang Hua Guang spurred deep emotions within Vietnamese patriotic youth at that time.

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<sup>31</sup>Hồ (1980).

The May Fourth Movement (1919), cultural movements, and especially revolutionary causes from 1923 to 1925 generated deep implications for Vietnam while Vietnamese bourgeois was emerging. The Three Principles and Theory of Sun Yat Sen created new prospective for Vietnamese progressive revolutionaries. Not a few Vietnamese would like to learn from Chinese nationalism (resistance to Qing dynasty) to promote Vietnamese nationalism (resistance to French colonizers).

Exposed to October Revolution via the activities of Nguyễn Ái Quốc and Vietnamese overseas and other international revolutionary movements of which the French proletarian movements and Chinese revolutions were most relevant, Vietnamese patriots developed ideological differentiation. Some (mostly youngsters), having high political sensitivity, followed the example of October Revolution and went to Thailand and China in search of a proper way to liberate their people and nation. Most of these youngsters were later trained by Nguyễn Ái Quốc and recruited into our first socialist organization named VRYL (established in June, 1925). Other youngsters stayed within the country to participate, organize, and direct patriotic movements, with their highest peak as the great cause for democracy and freedom in 1925 to 1926.

This cause was launched by the press activities of several young intellectuals in Cochinchina. From 1922 to 1923, on *La Tribune indigène* (The Indigenous Tribune) of Phạm Phú Khai and Bùi Quang Chiêu, numerous articles were published to criticize the prominent colonialists in Cochinchina at that time such as Cognag (Cochinchina Governor); Outrey (representative of French National Assembly in Cochinchina); and De La chevrotière (the most intransigent bourgeois in Cochinchina). Other newspapers such as *L'Indochine* (Indochina) of the lawyer Monin and *La voix libre* (Voice of Freedom) of Professor Ganobsky voiced their protests over the corruption and tyranny of French authorities. While denigrating individuals among the evil higher-ups in Cochinchina, they also asked for the rights of Vietnamese landlords and bourgeois who had conflicting interests with French bourgeois.

The most contemporary progressive newspaper was *La Cloche fêlée* (The Broken Bell) of Nguyễn An Ninh, a Western-influenced intellectual who were prominent among Cochinchinese bourgeois, petty bourgeois and intellectuals at that time. The newspaper rigorously attacked not only French authorities, but also the whole French colonial system to vindicate its nationalism.

Apart from newspapers written in French in Cochinchina, there were patriotic and democratic newspapers publicly or privately distributed throughout the nation, and helped directly or indirectly awaken the spirit of nationalism and support national movements. Since 1925, while sending petitions to Governor General Varenne to demand for the release Phan Bội Châu and mourning of Phan Chu Trinh, etc., patriotic newspapers started quite a few stirring and rousing activities. *Profession People Newspaper* in Hanoi described the widespread petition for the release of Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh. *Indochina Times* (Đông Pháp thời báo) in Sai Gon supported the appeal to mourn for Phan Chu Trinh and release Nguyễn An Ninh. The *Pháp Việt nhất gia* condemned colonialism, opposed the Indochina Bank, strongly criticized the policy of “France-Vietnam Fraternity”

(Pháp Việt *đề huề*), and requested freedom of speech.<sup>32</sup> Publishing houses relentlessly published books and newspapers which inspired patriotism and nationalism, such as Great Learning Publishing House (Cường học thư xã) in Sai Gon; Quan Hai Publishing House (Quan Hải tùng thư) in Hue; *Nam Dong Publishing House* (Nam Đồng thư xã) in Hanoi, etc. They were representatives of a new social class, young petty bourgeois intellectuals, in the field of culture and ideology.

In the field of national revolution, the movements were even more stimulating. The first two movements were the boycott of Chinese overseas (1919) and opposition to monopoly in the trading port of Sai Gon (1923). These were early struggles for economic rights of Vietnamese bourgeois against foreign bourgeois. Then, early in 1925, Governor General Varenne, a member of the France Socialist Party, came to Sai Gon and encountered demonstrations and petitions asking for civil rights, including freedom and democracy. The false promises of Varenne finally caused the advocacy of France–Vietnam fraternity by hack writers such as Bùi Quang Chiêu to be criticized by progressive newspapers. Patriotic movements reached their highest peak with the appeals to release Phan Bội Châu, mourn for Phan Chu Trinh and hold funeral for Lương Văn Can. During the period of 1925–1926, movements led by petty bourgeois youngsters and intellectuals spread throughout the country. Last but not least, the murder of Governor General Merlin (June 19, 1924) by Phạm Hồng Thái in Guangzhou strongly aroused nationalism in our country, and stimulated democratic awareness in petty bourgeois youngsters and intellectuals who were passionately searching for a way to national salvation.

As democratic and nationalist movements sparkly developed, new ideas were brought to the people and led to the formation of political groups and patriotic, revolutionary organizations such as Vietnam Revolution Union (Việt Nam nghĩa đoàn), Restoration of Vietnam Association (Hội phục Việt), Vietnam Unification Association (Hội Hưng Nam), Youth Party (*đảng Thanh Niên*), most notable and distinguished of which were three revolutionary organizations: *VRYL* established in June, 1925; *VNP* in December 1927 and *NVRP* in 1928.

Although originating at the same time and from similar socioeconomic conditions and backgrounds, these three organizations adopted different political ideas and approaches. While *VRYL* and *NVRP* ultimately followed socialist revolution, *VNP* was not able to detach from the bourgeois doctrine, despite various amendments of its Political Program and Statute. Nevertheless the founding and operation of *VNP* left lasting impressions in our national struggle to resist the French and liberate our country.

Apart from general conditions, the founding of *VNP* was affected by particular historical and ideological prerequisites, especially neo-patriotism and bourgeois doctrine. In Vietnam, after the First World War, under new socioeconomic and ideological conditions, patriotism and nationalism were elevated to a new height. The national revolutionary ideas of *VNP* inherited and advanced the democratic and revolutionary ideas already shown in former Vietnamese national movements.

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<sup>32</sup>See Nguyen (1984).

The political ideology of VNP was first and foremost a result of democratic and national movements in the period of 1925–1926. At this time, driven by patriotism and democratic ideas, most of the founders of VNP actively joined the demonstrations for the release of Phan Bội Châu, mourning for Phan Chu Trinh and funeral of Lương Văn Can. Its crucial members were especially fond of and had close relations with Phan Bội Châu. Trần Huy Liệu, before establishing *Great Learning Publishing House* (Sai Gon), had spent some time in Youth Party. During and after this time, he was extraordinarily drawn to the revolutionary ideas of Phan Bội Châu. Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, who proposed the principle of Strong Party, Enlightened Party (*Chính Đảng cương, minh Đảng nghĩa*), soon came into contact with Phan Bội Châu and was largely influenced by his revolutionary ideas. Later, by instructing Đặng Đình Điền to meet with Phan Bội Châu in Hue and nominating him honorable president of the Party, the leaders of VNP made themselves spiritual adherents of Phan Bội Châu.

Based on the above analyses, it would be right to say that the bourgeois revolutionary and democratic approach of VNP, with *its center as revolutionary nationalism*, was an upgraded incarnation of Vietnamese nationalism. This revolutionary approach was actually a solid combination of bourgeois nationalism and national patriotism formed and developed under new historical conditions of Vietnamese national movements in 1920s.

When researching on the courses of VNP, Nguyen Khanh Toan precisely commented that: “In terms of political courses, VNP was more complete than other revolutionary organizations before the war. Of these organizations, some followed constitutional monarchy, some only focused on fighting the French; some led the country towards capitalism but was unclear as to what political system to be established. VNP was more definite. It represented the tendencies and interests of progressive national bourgeois”.<sup>33</sup>

Ideologically, the founding of VNP was a denial of compromise and reformism in political ideas and a continuation of nationalism that already existed before the First World War. Particularly, the ideological foundations of post-war bourgeois democratic national revolution in Vietnam were the French bourgeois revolution and the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen.

Bạch Diệm said in his book *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and VNP): Vietnamese revolutionary ideas in the years 1925–1927 strictly followed the French revolution in 1789 and theories of Montesquieu and Rousseau, which were advanced at that time. Moreover, the Xinhai Revolution of China generated new motivation for Vietnamese youth. It was said to be the most invigorating instead of “comfortable” comfortable and promising instead of the word “fresh” fresh.<sup>34</sup>

This new motivation provided the founders of VNP with a new revolutionary inclination and theoretical foundation to define the basic tenets of its Political

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<sup>33</sup>Nguyen (1960).

<sup>34</sup>Bach Dien, *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and VNP), Ibid, p. 9.

Program. Nguyễn Thái Học, as a student, hated French history but was interested in Vietnamese history and especially fond of studying the history behind French Revolution. Other members of Nam Dong publishing house (the first organ of VNP) were primarily adherents of Sun Yat Sen. Along with publishing books to stimulate patriotism, Nam Dong publishing house also translated and printed books on the Three Principles and actively promoted them.

Theoretically, the French revolutionary ideas from 1789 to 1794 and the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen were fairly complete revolutionary theories, and contributed greatly to the formation of political doctrine of VNP. In reality, the political courses of VNP were deeply affected by French revolutionary ideas and The Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen.

Needless to say, the founding of bourgeois class and strong spreading of bourgeois thoughts in Vietnam became decisive factors for the establishment of VNP.

## **2.2 From Nam Dong Publishing House to the Formation of Vietnam Nationalist Party**

### ***2.2.1 Overview of the Founder Nguyễn Thái Học***

The founder and highest leader of VNP was Nguyễn Thái Học. He was born in 1901 (the year of Buffalo) in Tho Tang, Vinh Tuong district, Vinh Phuc province. Born to a family of middle farmers, in 1907, Nguyễn Thái Học was sent by his family to study Confucianism with a Confucian teacher; he then studied at Viet Tri elementary school. During his home-stay education, especially after learning about the failure of Thai Nguyen uprising started by Doi Can, Nguyễn Thái Học began to nurture his hostility to the French.

After graduating from elementary school in 1921, Nguyễn Thái Học entered the Hanoi School of Pedagogy. During his study there, to express his inner opposition to colonialism, Nguyễn Thái Học from time to time publicly criticized the attitude of French teachers, so much that the Director of Sûreté Général Indochinoise said that: “*Nguyễn Thái Học was an argumentative and stubborn student.*” Hating the French, Nguyễn Thái Học also despised French history, but was eager to learn Vietnamese and French Revolution history. In 1925, listening to advice from friends he joined an exam for Ministry Clerk (Thừa phái). After succeeding in the exam however, he did not serve the French. In search of more general economic knowledge, he enrolled in the Business College.

At this time, nationwide Vietnamese patriotic movements developed dramatically, such as petitions for the release of Phan Bội Châu (1925) and for the funeral of Phan Chu Trinh (1926). Eruption of national movements influenced the thinking of Nguyễn Thái Học, who was already nurturing his will for national independence and people’s happiness. Governor General A. Verenne made empty commitments for reforms to lighten the people’s protest. In this context, in 3 years



from 1925 to 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học continuously sent requests to Varenne to inform his “*Comprehensive Social Reform Program*.” In the early 1927, he even appealed to the Tonkin Resident Superior to permit the publication of *Nam Thanh* (Voice of Vietnamese) weekly newspaper to protect and support the native industry, but was rejected. Additionally, Nguyễn Thái Học wrote several articles with the hope that his reform ideas would be shown to people. But all letters and articles to colonial authorities and newspapers were unanswered and rejected by the gatekeepers. This fact discouraged his desire to work together with the French to help his people. Since then he concluded that: there was no alternative other than violence to expel the French from his country and save his people.

To fulfill this strong urge, at the end of 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học together with Hồ Văn Mịch sought permanent residence at the headquarter of Nam Dong publishing house with Phạm Tuấn Tài, Phạm Tuấn Lâm, and Hoàng Phạm Trân (Nhượng Tống). There, it was easier for him to discuss and formulate action plans with other young patriots.

It was also interesting that before dropping school to focus opposing the French, in 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học led young patriots to organize the funeral of Phan Chu Trinh at Hai Ba Temple (Hanoi) and encouraged quite a few dropped youngsters and students to hold the funeral for Lương Văn Can— one of the crucial members of the Tonkin Free School (Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục) movement. Activities that aroused strong patriotism in youngsters made Nguyễn Thái Học even more determined to resist the French.

### 2.2.2 *Nam Dong Publishing House and the Creation of “The First Cell”*

As said, as part of the wide and stirring political movements in Vietnam from 1925 to 1926, a large number of printing and publishing houses were born, including Nam Dong publishing house. Its foundation resulted from democratic and national movements, and was also the factor that boosted them more and more. By publishing books to advocate patriotism and democracy, publishing houses contributed to the awakening of national and revolutionary spirit within people, especially young intellectuals, who were enthusiastic in finding a way for revolution. But their operations did not cease at the propaganda of patriotism, and further developed to “*the combination of scattered ideas*.” Trần Văn Giàu put it: “*Nam Dong publishing house of Phạm Tuấn Tài was the most notable. It promoted patriotism, revolutionary nationalism and the Three Principles and was the first organ of VNP.*”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Giàu (1975).

History can attest to this because after some preparation at the end of 1926, Nam Dong publishing house officially began its operations<sup>36</sup> in Hanoi. Founders of this publishing house were teacher Phạm Tuấn Tài (Mộng Tiên) and teacher Hoàng Phạm Trân (Nhượng Tống) and Phạm Tuấn Lâm (Dật Công). The office of Nam Dong publishing house was in the 6th of 96 Street (near Truc Bach Lake, opposite side of Long Chau pagoda). Under the leadership of Phạm Tuấn Tài, Nam Dong publishing house formed close relations with the publishing house *Thuc Nghiep* and other young patriots such as Nguyễn Thái Học, Phó Đức Chính, Hồ Văn Mịch, Lê Văn Phúc, Lê Thành Vĩ, Nguyễn Thái Trác, Vũ Huy Trân, Nguyễn Hữu Dật, Vũ Hiến, Phan Ngọc Trúc, Nguyễn Văn Lô, Trần Vĩ, and Lưu Văn Phùng.<sup>37</sup>

The purpose of Nam Dong publishing house was to publish, edit and promulgate books to arouse patriotism. In its article “*Kính cáo với các bạn độc giả*” (Forewords to readers) it was put that: “*The purpose of Nam Dong publishing houses to publish books which facilitate the education of people. To this end, the published books must be chosen carefully and sold at a low price for popular readers.*” Books created by Nam Dong publishing house were of many types as they could be edited, composed and translated (often with comments). There were historical, political, social and literary books; some books were only published in one volume while some in two, and others even had five volumes such as *Guong thiếu niên* (*Example of Youngsters*) with total of 250 pages.

Books were usually published once, except for *Tiểu sử và Học thuyết Tôn Dật Tiên* (Biography and doctrine of Sun Yat Sen) written by Dật Công (Phạm Tuấn Lâm) and Nhượng Tống (Hoàng Phạm Trân) that was first printed in November 1926 and republished in 1927. A famous book named *Một bầu tâm sự* (Words from the heart) by Trần Huy Liệu was produced by both Nam Dong publishing house in Hanoi and Great Learning Publishing House in Sai Gon.

From 1926 to its closing year in 1928, Nam Dong publishing house issued around 20 books that could be split into these categories:

- On Vietnam: books such as *Guong thiếu nhi* (*Examples of youth*), *Trung nữ vương* (Trung king), etc.
- On China: books on Sun Yat Sen, The Three Principles and Chinese revolutionary stories.
- On Korea: books such as *Nhà vua cách mạng Mạc Tư Danh* (*Mac Tu Danh—A revolutionary king*), *Triều Tiên vong quốc sử* (History of the lost Korea).
- On India: books on Gandhi.

A single book called *Guong thành bại* (Examples of Victory and Failure) introduced the revolutions in less-developed countries and famous quotes in the world.

<sup>36</sup>See: “Góp phần nghiên cứu lịch sử chính trị Đông Dương thuộc Pháp” (A contribution to research on the political history of French—occupied Indochina), *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup>Hoang (1965). According to Huynh (1982). Phạm Tuan Taiwas a teacher; Phạm Tuan Lam and Hoàng Phạm Trân were journalists.

All of the above books were published in Vietnamese. Only a work by Phạm Tuấn Tài named *Ce que disent les grands homes* was published in French, containing French renowned quotes and translation of the editor.<sup>38</sup> After a while these books were confiscated, and the publishing house was closed since the French alleged that these books contained self-political intents. Although closed, Nam Dong publishing house still remained a meeting place for patriotic members who opposed the French. In the middle of 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học and Hồ Văn Mịch sought stable residence at its headquarter, and together with the founders of Nam Dong publishing house, proposed to establish a nationalist party to restore independence with its first organ being “The First cell” (Đệ nhất chi bộ). According to Phạm Tuấn Tài in his *Tuyên cáo các đồng chí* (Announcement to my comrades), Nguyễn Thái Học and members of Nam Dong publishing house initially wanted to form this party on August 26, 1927<sup>39</sup> because “they found the French to be uncooperative...thus had to rely on revolution.”<sup>40</sup>

But Nguyễn Thái Học, Phạm Tuấn Tài and Nhượng Tống initially had disagreements as to the methods and approaches to revolution. Nhượng Tống wanted to conduct peaceful revolution. To defend his intent, Nhượng Tống designed a six-year action program. In 6 years, various cooperatives would be established to unite different groups of people and produce enough supply for self-sustainability, and then asked for autonomy from the French. If the French rejected, school boycotts, economic and labor strikes would be organized to disrupt the overall function of French colonial government.

The six-year program of peaceful revolution of Nhượng Tống was wholeheartedly refused by Nguyễn Thái Học, Phạm Tuấn Tài, and Phạm Tuấn Tài. Nguyễn Thái Học argued that: “*The colonizers brought steel and blood to invade Vietnam, we cannot allow ourselves to use bare hands to oppose their weapons. Just take the Tonkin Free School as an example. A handful of bare-handed mandarins could not do anything and many were slaughtered, others were exiled to Con Dao. Today, going with peaceful revolution is like falling into the old blunder and failure.*”<sup>41</sup>

To avoid that old “blunder”, Nguyễn Thái Học decided “to use steel and blood”, meaning resorting to armed struggle to restore independence. After various arguments between members of Nam Dong publishing house, this approach was finally accepted by the majority. At last, all members decided to establish a secret party that would employ armed revolution. To this end, Nguyễn Thái Học

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<sup>38</sup>Documents on Nam Dong Publishing house can be found more in: Vũ Khiêu (ed.), *Phạm Tuấn Tài, cuộc đời và tác phẩm* (Phạm Tuấn Tài, life and works) (memoir), CTQG Publisher, Ha Noi, 2002, pp. 15–58.

<sup>39</sup>Phạm Tuấn Tài, *Tuyên cáo các đồng chí* (Announcement to my comrades). See full material in: Phạm Tuấn Tài, *cuộc đời và tác phẩm*, Ibid, pp. 518–527.

<sup>40</sup>Tống (1949).

<sup>41</sup>Bach Dien, *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and VNP), Ibid, p. 21.

united his close friends in Hanoi until there were about 10 people; they then organized “*The First Cell*”.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, it could be said that Nam Dong publishing house was the first organ that gathered and aroused the spirit of nationalism and patriotism of young intellectuals who desired to liberate their nation by violence. It was virtually the first entity that led to the foundation of VNP. After “The First Cell” was found, Nguyễn Thái Học and his comrades actively worked and contacted other local patriotic groups to attain more members and organize a conference to establish VNP at the end of 1927.

### 2.2.3 Operations of “*The First Cell*” and Establishment of Vietnam Nationalist Party (December 25th, 1927)

After its founding, “*The First Cell*” primarily worked closely with local patriotic groups and individuals to form a political party. During this time, relations between “*The First Cell*,” Nam Dong publishing house and Vietnamese Nationalists (Việt Nam Dân quốc) group of Nguyễn Khắc Nhuin Lang Thuong Palace, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệpin Bac Ninh, and Hoàng Văn Đào and Hoàng Văn Tùngin Thanh Hoa became closer and closer. Particularly, *Vietnamese Nationalists* of Nguyễn Khắc Nhu (Xứ Nhu) in Lang Thuong Palace since the period 1925–1926 had close association with *Profession Popular publishing house* and *Nam Dong publishing house* in Hanoi. Also at this time, Xứ Nhu began to express his views on social reforms on *Profession Popular Newspaper* (Thực nghiệp dân báo), *Annam Magazine* (An Nam tạp chí), etc. Through these activities, he was able to contact Phan Bội Châuin Hue and following Phan’s advice, he established the group *National Seekers of Talented* (*National Seekers of Talented*) which adopted peaceful revolution. However, it was soon suppressed by the French. This changed the approaches and methods of Xứ Nhu from *peaceful revolution* to *violent revolution*. With the most prominent figures of *National Seekers of Talented*, close friends and the last members of Hoang Hoa Tham movement, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu established *Vietnamese Nationalists* at the end of 1927 and actively prepared for riots against the French. Their first targets were Dap Cau, Bac Ninh, and Pha Lai. The plans were made beforehand on November 11, 1927 and necessary contacts were created in advanced. Xứ Nhu sent his men to contact Nam Dong publishing house and asked for joint actions. His request was received by the majority of Nam Dong publishing house. Accordingly, *Nhượng Tổng* wrote a proclamation urging all localities to support *Vietnamese Nationalists* when it started the riot in Bac Ninh. However, the riot of Xứ Nhu failed because during weapon preparation, a man accidentally triggered a grenade at the manufacturer in *Che Village*

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<sup>42</sup>Bach Dien, *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and VNP), p. 23.

(Bac Ninh). The whole plan was discovered and the French quickly suppressed it. But Xú Nhu and other important members escaped and *Vietnamese Nationalists* was retained.

After the failed attempt, the connection between Nam Dong publishing house and *Vietnamese Nationalists* became even closer, fostering conditions for the later unification of VNP and *Vietnamese Nationalists*. Clearly, the preparation for armed revolution against French of *Vietnamese Nationalists* aroused patriotism within Nam Dong publishing house, and helped support the armed approach of Nguyễn Thái Học and other members. After this event, “The First Cell” increasingly enlisted more members and prepared for the founding of a political party.

Apart from membership recruitment, “*The First Cell*” hurriedly made organizational and ideological foundations for a destined political party in Vietnam. In the night of 24th and early morning of December 25, 1927, a conference to establish VNP chaired by Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn took place at Lê Thành Vĩ’s house in The Giao village (Hanoi), but was later discovered and it was decided to be again held at the headquarter of Nam Dong publishing house. Participating in the conference, apart from members of “the First Cell,” were representatives from Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Hung Yen, Thai Binh, Ninh Bình, Bac Giang, Bac Ninh, Hai Duong, Kien An, Ha Nam, Phu Tho, Vinh Yen, Tuyen Quang, and Thanh Hoa. After discussions, the conference decided to organize a secret political party named VNP. Its aim was to rally nearly all Vietnamese people regardless of class and religion to commence national revolution, using violence to regain independence for Vietnam. Its *Statute* and *Program of Action* were approved at the Conference. The Statute indicated its guiding purpose and organization, membership requirements and set democratic centralism as its working principle. In addition, it specified the structure and functions of its General Committee, Province Chapter, Region Chapter and Cell, and indicated the interval between two regular meetings for 6 months or more.

The conference also elected an Interim General Committee consisting of 15 members and responsible for 7 subcommittees. Nguyễn Thái Học was appointed Party President and Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp became Vice President.

As for structural development, the party emphasized the need to establish public unions among soldiers, considering it one of the main orientations in structural development.

As for publicity, *Revolutionary soul (Hồn cách mạng)* journal would be published as the party’s house organ. In addition, the Party would establish a Publishing Committee consisting of four party members, namely Nhượng Tống (Chief), Ngô Thúc Định, Nguyễn Triệu Luật, Trúc Khê (Ngô Văn Triện), responsible for compiling books used for propaganda.

Thus, the conference on December 25, 1927 was considered the origin of VNP, one of the largest Vietnamese political parties at that time. Its establishment and development marked a turning point in the evolution of bourgeois national movements, and with other political parties, brought Vietnamese movements for national liberation to a new historical stage (Map. 2.1).



Map. 2.1 The organisational structure of VNP (12/1927-2/1930)

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## Chapter 3

# Political Ideology and Organizational Structure of Vietnam Nationalist Party

The analysis of the patterns of political ideology and organizational structure of Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNP) were the main content in this chapter. Influenced by the national ideas in Three People Principles of Sun Yat Sen, the foundations of political ideologies of VNP were patriotism and nationalism throughout struggle periods. Besides that, on the basis of the important factors were raised the political credo of VNP, the author proves the difference in main political thoughts and active form with Sun Yat Sen's ideology, Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (VRYL), and New Vietnam Revolutionary Party (NVRP). Especially, this chapter also describes the characteristics of the VNP from the organizational structure of VNP to activity form, including: building educated and youth student forces, creating activity levels in the areas spanning from North–Central–South of Vietnam

### 3.1 Political Ideology of Vietnam Nationalist Party

#### 3.1.1 *Differences in the Identification and Evaluation on the Political Ideology of Vietnam Nationalist Party*

In the official scholarship on VNP, or in books and treatises on fundamental issues related to this organization, the revolutionary method and political ideology of VNP were defined and evaluated in different perspectives and approaches. Apart from the agreed issues, there were still differences and disagreements on the evaluation of its political ideology, which can be summarized as follow:

The first approach was that VNP was not a purely nationalist, but socialist-affiliated party. Representatives of this approach included Trần Huy Liệu and Bùi Công Trùng. In his work *Lịch sử 80 năm chống Pháp* (80 Years of History Against

the French), referencing a statement found on the first Statute and Political Program of VNP as “*firstly to conduct national revolution, then international revolution,*” Trần Huy Liệu commented: “*Regarding VNP, this statement proved that it was not a pure nationalist party as thought by many. On the contrary, ideologically speaking, it bore prospects of an international revolution against imperialism. In its Second Statute and Program issued in the late 1928, a distinct approach called democratic socialism was mentioned with a small note: “different from the German democratic socialism.” The mission’s utmost priority were the following: promote national revolution, establish direct democracy and assist oppressed nations. It can be said that, VNP was not only a nationalist party but somewhat affiliated with socialism.*<sup>1</sup>”

Based on the opinion that VNP approved the Three People Principles in the first place, Bùi Công Trùng argued in his book *Góp phần nhỏ bé về lịch sử cách mạng cận đại Vietnam* (A little discussion on the premodern revolutionary history of Vietnam) that: “*VNP, in its early days, adopted the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen which was a revolutionary approach of weak bourgeois in a colonial country still intensely affected by October Revolution. Therefore, its national revolutionary nature was not confined in democracy but extended to humanity, and was not limited in domestic sphere but virtually became a part of the international proletarian revolution.*<sup>2</sup>”

The second approach aimed to remove class differences by maintaining that in the political philosophy of VNP prior to 1930, there were at the same time anti-French, anti-feudalism, and anti-communism ideas. This approach was proposed by some Southerners prior to liberation, most notably Hoàng Văn Đào in his book *Việt Nam Quốc Dân đảng (Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954)* (VNP—A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), in which he wrote: “*In its battle against the colonialists, feudalists, communists and dictators, VNP was the pioneering and largest force and also the last fortress of democratic struggle.*<sup>3</sup>”

The third approach, containing different opinions, was quite unitary in its understanding and evaluation on VNP political ideology. Of its representatives, first and foremost was the book *Lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam, tập 5* (Vietnamese premodern history, fifth volume) (1919–1930) by Trần Văn Giàu, Đinh Xuân Lâm, and Kiều Xuân Bá. This volume was published in 1963, and the authors wrote: “*VNP was a prominent revolutionary organization which followed nationalist inclination.*” Following this approach, in 1985, Nguyễn Khánh Toàn and the authors of *Lịch sử Việt Nam, tập II* (Vietnamese history, second volume) argued:

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<sup>1</sup>Lieu (1956).

<sup>2</sup>Trung (1958).

<sup>3</sup>Van Dao (1965).

“VNP founded by Nguyễn Thái Học and Phạm Tuấn Tài was a notable organization of bourgeois democratic revolution in Vietnam (p. 230).<sup>4</sup>”

The above approaches thus generated a question on political ideology that whether VNP was a “*socialist-affiliated*” organization or a representative of revolutionary nationalism. Did it hold anti-communist ideas? To answer this question, it is necessary to make an in-depth analysis of the political program, attitude and actual activities of VNP if more precise and objective opinions are to be found.

### 3.1.2 Political Ideas of Vietnam Nationalist Party

Due to its fragile social foundation and its establishment at the time when Marxist-Leninist ideas were striking deep into the hearts of people, in its two years of existence, VNP was not able to release a consistent and precise political program and did not issue any official document to explain its political programs and action programs.

According to two crucial members of VNP, Trần Huy Liệu and Phạm Tuấn Tài, its primary mission was approved in the founding Conference (December 25th, 1927) as “*firstly to conduct national revolution, then international revolution.*”<sup>5</sup> Other concepts such as “political program,” “party program,” or “doctrine” were not mentioned in the draft of the Statute. The worldview on international revolution of VNP at this moment was not clear.<sup>6</sup>

It simply regarded international revolution as a process involving national revolution followed by international revolution started with other less-developed nations.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>See Tran Van Giau et al. (1963). This opinions is also found in:

– Tran Van Giau, *Sự phát triển của tư tưởng ở Việt Nam từ đầu thế kỷ XX đến Cách mạng tháng Tám* (The ideological development of Viet Nam from the early twentieth century to August Revolution), KHXH Publisher, Ha Noi, 1974. In his book, he also explained that “nationalist revolution was in fact bourgeois revolution”, (p. 583)

– C.A Mkhitarian (ed.), *Vietnamese modern history* (1917–1965), Moscow, 1970, p. 59 (Russian).

– P. Brocheaux, D.Héremy, *Indochine, une colonization ambiguë* (1858–1954), la Découverte, Paris, 1995, p. 299.

<sup>5</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958).

<sup>6</sup>The book *Vietnamese history* (2nd volume) by O.V. Novacova, PIU. Xveto, Moscow, 1995 (Russian) said that the precursor of VNP was established by Phan Bội Châu in 1924 in Guangzhou (China), and its Program of action was identical to the one of its precursor which was based on the Three People Principles (p. 180). However, this opinion was not yet approved due to its lack of evidence.

<sup>7</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*

Regarding its purpose, the party claimed that it aimed to remove the monarchic government and established the Vietnam Nationalist Republic, in which people were given freedom of speech, movement, association and religion.

To this end, VNP divided its revolutionary process into three stages. The first stage was the beginning and covert period when it would develop membership and organization; the second stage was the preparing and semi-public period when it would focus on campaign development and formation of public unions (military, agricultural, labor, etc...), and it would also publish newspapers to promulgate and hearten the public, organize staff members, and prepare material facilities for revolution. The third stage was public or acting period. During this period, when necessary groundwork had been done, VNP would organize death squads in cooperation with patriotic Vietnamese soldiers in the French army to revolt in cities under the command of military officers trained in foreign countries.<sup>8</sup>

At the end of 1928, recognizing that the first Program and Statute were too sparse and as advised by Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, VNP composed the second Program and Statute. This Statute was much longer and more specific than its first counterpart. In this Statute, VNP stated that its doctrine was democratic socialism. Its purposes were to unite all men and women<sup>9</sup> to

- a. Promote national revolution
- b. Develop direct democracy.
- c. Assist oppressed nations.

Basically, VNP intended to use violence to drive away invaders, regain national independence and develop a republic system; and then assist other colonial nations in their efforts for national liberation. This was also the inevitable process and course of Vietnamese revolution which VNP followed. It was not the end; in the early 1929 VNP once again modified and altered its purposes. The modified Statute of VNP in December, 1929 stated its purposes as<sup>10</sup>

- a. *Promote national revolution*
- b. *Construct a direct republic system*
- c. *Assist oppressed nations*

The final *program of action* of VNP released before the Yen Bai uprising even included the principle of Freedom–Equality–Fraternity, and set out its goals as national, political, and social revolutions.<sup>11</sup>

Toward this end, VNP designed a revolutionary program with four phases: Starting (secret), preparing (semi secret), public, and constructing (take over the government).

<sup>8</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.* This policy reflected the progressiveness of VNP in understanding and following social equality, first and foremost gender equality.

<sup>10</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>11</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 105.

Starting phase: secretly mobilize people into military, student, proletarian, and farmer unions.

Second (secret) phase: organize regular armies, weapons, uniforms, and other equipments.

Third phase: (when it would have publicly declared to stop cooperation with the French government and Nguyen court): rally and hold labor and economic strikes, refuse taxes and drive away the French, usurp the court and seize the government.

Final phase (constructing): focus on establishing a *republic government*, educating people, and promoting freedom and democracy.

With its final Statute and Program, the political ideology of VNP showed certain positive changes. From its ambiguous claim to unite all men and women, VNP decided to mobilize and unite all patriotic people to strive for national liberation. It also intended to form unions of labors, farmers, and women to recruit and connect patriotic individuals. However, it still suffered an error regarding democracy, which was its unawareness of the need to eradicate landlords and return lands to farmers.

In the public phase, leaders of VNP still found it necessary to amend its principles. But due to time limitation they adopted the Three Principles of The People as their own principles. In the section on “*Áp dụng Chủ nghĩa tam dân (Applying the Three Principles)*” of VNP, the author of *Tài liệu tham khảo lịch sử cách mạng cận đại Việt Nam (A reference on Vietnamese PreModern Revolutionary History—fifth volume)* wrote: “*Upon engaging in a precarious fight, the party leaders naturally had no time to discuss their principles and amend their doctrine, so they had to “steal” the whole Three Principles. Since then, the Three Principles became official principles of VNP.*<sup>12</sup>” This fact proved that since the development of Nam Dong publishing house-top when it was established and released the first Statute, VNP was affected by China’s Three Principles. But what essentially were these Three Principles? And what parts did VNP employ and borrow from them? To clarify the similarities and differences between the Three Principles (mostly neo Three Principles) and political doctrine of VNP, it is necessary to shed some light on this theory.

The Three People Principles were the main doctrine and foundation of Chinese democratic bourgeois revolution proposed by doctor Sun Yat Sen in 1905. After October Revolution (1917), under the impacts of international revolutions, especially China’s revolution, Sun Yat Sen adjusted and attached several new points and created the neo Three People Principles, with the additional *Three Great Policies (Tam đại chính sách)*: “*Ally with Russia, tolerate Communists, and protect laborers and farmers.*<sup>13</sup>”

<sup>12</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 38. After the Yen Bai uprising was suppressed, imprisoned VNP’s members were engaged in heated debates on the party’s policy. Members who had been captured before February, 1929 only knew about the First Statute and Program of Action. Others who were arrested right before and after the Yen Bai event only recognized the Three People Principles.

<sup>13</sup>This policy was presented during the first Congress of Chinese Koumintang (Jan, 1924). Accordingly, farmers were considered more important members of society and gained more respect from Sun Yat Sen than workers. See Thanh (2002).

The core of The Three Principles was national salvation, to put China in an equal international position, equal economic and political status, and to help it last permanently in the world.<sup>14</sup> There were also three main contents: nationalism, democracy, and the livelihood of people.

- *Nationalism* meant that Chinese nationalism had been lost and to be restored. Sun Yat Sen attempted to uphold nationalism, and considered it a prerequisite of internationalism. He disagreed with people who overvalued internationalism while devaluing nationalism.
- *Democracy* according to Sun Yat Sen was the political power and political control of the people. He argued that China had gained freedom, and to have too much freedom could lead to deformities. Therefore, equality was more important than freedom; and democracy was the means to obtain them. He said: “*the foothold of equality and freedom is democracy, and depends on democracy.*”

Sun Yat San divided politics into two parts: *the tasks of people* and *the tasks of the administration*. He also categorized rights into *civil rights*—belonging to the people, and *administrative rights*—belonging to the administration.

*Civil rights* included four elements: 1/Election; 2/Recall; 3/Initiate (Legislate); 4/Referendum (correct old laws and demand laws to be implemented).

*Administrative rights* were: Executive, legislative, judicial, control, and examination. He considered the five branches’ government ideals.

The livelihood of people, according to Sun Yat Sen, included people’s life, social welfare, and national livelihood. The livelihood of people was thus socialism, communism, and homogeneity. It contained two substances: *Land equality* (Bình dân địa quyền) and *capitalist restriction* (tiết chế tư bản). In other words, communism was the ideal of the livelihood of people, and livelihood of people was the practice of communism.

*Land equality* meant that the government imposed tax based on land prices and purchased land based on the price set by land owners. The successful regulation of land issues was the first part to ensure the livelihood of the people.

*Capitalist restriction* meant that the State regulated capitals used to develop industry so as to avoid monopolistic capitalists. Besides, the State had to borrow foreign money and hire foreign experts to accumulate capital.

The first step of livelihood of people was to ensure that people had enough food. Legal mechanisms had to be created to protect farmers and their farmlands. People were to be provided with access to food, clothing and profit was to be shunned. The State was responsible for people’s life; and people had to fulfill their duties for the State.<sup>15</sup>

Similar to the Chinese revolution, the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen strongly affected patriotic and nationalist movements in Vietnam. But there were various ways through which they came to Vietnam, such as from China and from Western

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<sup>14</sup>Yat Sen (1995).

<sup>15</sup>Thanh (2002), *ibid.*, pp. 267–268.

sources. Each generation of Vietnamese adopted the Three People Principles in its own way. Thus, understanding of Sun Yat Sen's Three People Principles was varied among Vietnamese.

The first Vietnamese generation who encountered with the Three Principles was capitalized mandarins in the early twentieth century, particularly Phan Bội Châu. In 1905<sup>16</sup>, when he was still in Japan, Phan Bội Châu met Sun Yat Sen twice in Yokohama. When the two met, Phan Bội Châu acknowledged “*the completeness of democratic republic system*” and proposed the Chinese revolutionary party to help Vietnam regain independence. After the success of Xinhai Revolution, in the late February 1912, Phan Bội Châu came to Nanjing once again to meet Sun Yat Sen. But since Sun was busy, they only met for some minutes.

His contacts with Sun Yat Sen greatly affected the revolutionary ideas and actions of Phan Bội Châu. Shaped by the Three Principles and Chinese revolution, in the early 1912, Phan Bội Châu and his comrades decided to disband the *Association for Modernization* (Duy tân hội) and established a new revolutionary organ named *Vietnamese for Vietnam Restoration League* (Việt Nam Quang phục hội) to chase away the French, restore Vietnam's independence and create the Vietnam Republic Nationalist.

The second Vietnamese generation who encountered and adopted the Three Principles was bourgeois intellectuals of 1920s, most notably those of Nam Dong publishing house. This group primarily consisted of adherents of Sun Yat Sen, who were passionate about fighting French and restoring national independence. They were heavily influenced by nationalism and aimed not for class struggle. Early in 1926, Nam Dong publishing house, particularly Dật Công (Pham Tuan Cong) and Nhượng Tống (Hoàng Phạm Trân) compiled and published the book *Tiểu sử và Học thuyết Tôn Dật Tiên* (Biography and doctrine of Sun Yat Sen).<sup>17</sup> In its introduction, the authors wrote: “*We compose this book as a great tribute to a hero. He is still unknown to us, his career is still there, so the introduction of him is to let people who were unaware of him know: how a hero is supposed to be.*” (see Footnote 17.) The authors also revealed their intent to translate Sun Yat Sen's books into Vietnamese. But they were prevented due to the French prohibition.

Apart from Nam Dong publishing house, the newspaper *People's Voice* (Tiếng dân) in Hue published translated editions of “*Chủ nghĩa dân quyền của Tôn Dật*

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<sup>16</sup>Phan Bội Châu niên biểu (Chronology of Phan Bội Châu), Văn—Sử—Địa Publisher, Ha Noi, 1957, pp. 63–65; See *Phan Bội Châu toàn tập* (2001).

On the time Phan Bội Châu met Sun Yat Sen in Japan, Nguyen Thanh wrote in “Ảnh hưởng của Tôn Trung Sơn”, Ibid., that it was in 1910, but it was baseless, as according to *Phan Bội Châu niên biểu* and other materials, Phan Bội Châu left Japan early in March, 1909. See more: Shiraishi Masaya, *Phong trào dân tộc Việt Nam và mối quan hệ của nó với Nhật Bản và Châu Á* (Vietnamese national movements and their relations with Japan and Asia), *Tư tưởng của Phan Bội Châu về cách mạng Thế giới* (Phan Bội Châu's ideas on international revolution) (2nd edition), CTQG Publisher, Ha Noi, 2000, p. 301.

<sup>17</sup>Thanh (2002), *ibid.*, p. 270.

*Tiên*” (Democracy of Sun Yat Sen) by himself in 54 issues since November, 1927 to the middle of 1928.<sup>18</sup>

These varied works proved that, despite different names and callings, the ideological ingredients of Nam Dong publishing house and VNP were the Three Principles. Although at times VNP mentioned Freedom, Equality, and Fraternity, those words were in fact equivalent to three basic tenets of Sun Yat Sen’s ideology. This was confirmed by Sun Yat Sen in a speech on March 16, 1924: “*During the French revolution, the motto was Freedom—Equality—Fraternity, which happened to be similar to Chinese slogan today: nationalism—democracy—the livelihood of people.*”<sup>19</sup>

The above analysis confirmed that the political doctrine of VNP, after all, was another version and adaptation of the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen. VNP only extracted the ideas of “nationalism” and “democracy.”<sup>20</sup>

Until the eruption of Yen Bai armed uprising, VNP had not released any clear program that demonstrated its political standpoint. As Hồ Chí Minh later questioned “*what kind of republic system did VNP pursue? How would it plan to govern the country? What methods would it employ to reconstruct the national economy? How would it raise the living standards of laborers, blue—collar workers, farmers and intellectuals? Regarding these issues, VNP had not designed any detailed program.*”

Despite certain shortcomings, a consistent essence of the three Action Programs and Statutes of VNP since December 1927 to its breakup was revolutionary nationalism and armed uprising.

### ***3.1.3 Revolutionary Nationalism—The Core Political Idea of Vietnam Nationalist Party***

Affected by the Three Principles, VNP employed bourgeois nationalism to conduct national movement. In all of its Programs and Statutes, VNP focused on nationalism, and considered national rising and liberation as its principal and guiding mission. The primary purpose (a) was set out in its first statute as “to promote national revolution;” in its amended Statute and program in 1929. It was also defined as “*firstly to conduct national revolution, then international revolution*” (first article); or “*promote national revolution, construct a direct republic system, and assist oppressed nations*” (last article in 1928); or “*conduct national revolution (defeat French imperialists), political revolution (overthrow the king) and*

<sup>18</sup>Yat Sen (1995), p. 189.

<sup>19</sup>Toan (1985).

<sup>20</sup>Tran Dan Tien, *Những mẩu chuyện về đời hoạt động của Hồ Chủ tịch* (Stories of President Ho’s Life in revolutionary activities), Van Hoc Publisher, Ha Noi, 1975, p. 73. *Tran Dan Tien* was a secret name of Ho Chi Minh.



*social revolution (promote democracy and freedom), etc...*” (in its last Program of Action in 1929). The ultimate purpose of VNP was to use violence to expel the domination of French imperialists and regain independence, establish a republic system, realize democracy and freedom, and pave way for capitalist development in Vietnam. In its Program of Action, VNP shed some light on a reconstruction era, but its measures and policies were as vague as “*to disseminate knowledge and educate people by public conversations, and promote freedom of speech.*”<sup>21</sup> This defect came from the fragile social foundation of bourgeois nationalist movements, in other words, the economic feebleness and political incapacity of Vietnamese bourgeois nationalists. As part of the shabby bourgeois nationalist movements, VNP had to adopt and apply the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen in its own way. First, the worldview on national liberation and nationalism of VNP was different from initial nationalism as understood by Sun Yat Sen. Sun Yat Sen commented that: “*Based on the social customs in Chinese history... nationalism means Sino nationalism.*” He also argued: “*If nationalism means Han nationalism, then it can only be applied in China and not other countries.*”<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, nationalism of VNP was the resistance to colonialism and domination of foreign colonialists and imperialists. Historically, the idea of nationalism of Sun Yat Sen later saw some modifications; and even included the three great policies, namely “*ally with Russia, tolerate Communists, protect farmers and workers, and promote land equality and capitalist restriction*”. But VNP only recognized nationalism, democracy and the livelihood of people in its Program of Action; the alliance with Russia, tolerance of Communists, protection of farmers and workers, and land equality and capitalist restriction were ignored. Hence, the core political idea of VNP was *nationalism*. But its idea of national revolution still belonged to the old capitalist category, which was revolution led by bourgeois.

The bourgeois standpoint of VNP was not only shown in its purposes, but also in its evaluation on revolutionary forces, guiding principles and specific actions.

In both its Political Program and actual revolutionary actions, VNP did not recognize the importance of class struggle. In recognizing and arranging revolutionary forces, VNP still employed bourgeois national ideas. In its Program of Action and Statutes issued in 1928 and 1929, it designated that the main principle was to unite all men and women, regardless of class, religion, and age to accomplish its purposes. But there was a big gap between its program and action. In reality, VNP still favored some classes and groups over others. This was clearly evident in its

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<sup>21</sup>On this point, the journal *La Revue Franco—annamite*, said in its Issue dated August 4th, 1929 said that: “If one removes every noble word borrowed from the Chinese revolutionary party in the program of VNP, then only a statement remains: “Ask the French, and then turn away, whatever to do afterwards is unknown to the party’s members because their political and social programs are ambiguous”. See Quốc Anh, “Tìm hiểu mối quan hệ giữa khuynh hướng tiểu tư sản yêu nước với phong trào công nhân” (Introduction to relations between patriotic bourgeois movements and proletarian movements), *Journal of Historical Research*, 1st and 2nd issues/1975.

<sup>22</sup>Sun Yat (1995), *ibid.*, pp. 50–51.

membership development. VNP privileged Vietnamese soldiers working in French army, then national bourgeois, urban petty bourgeois, intellectuals, noblemen, village authorities, and the rich in rural areas. As for farmers and workers, it only admitted them into its unions and considered them party sympathizers. Here we see the key difference between the recruitment and development of revolutionary forces of VNP and VRYL. VRYL was a revolutionary organization which followed socialism, from the beginning it focused on public mobilization, public education and gathering of farmers and workers. VNP on the other hand downgraded and denied the revolutionary leadership of the proletariat. This capitalist standpoint was clarified by F. Engels: “*The interest of bourgeois was to deny the existence of proletariat*” and “*and only allow bourgeois to exist without proletariat.*”<sup>23</sup>

To be fair, the membership development and recruitment of VNP partly resulted from a fact that the Three Principles aimed not to implement class struggle, but rather class harmonization. In addition, its policy was also affected by the heated ideological competition between VNP and VRYL in defining the position and role of Vietnamese proletariat. *Popular Professional* newspaper, while supporting the opening of native industry, endorsed class harmonization between bourgeois and proletariat. Articles of Dật Công, Dật Lâm on this newspaper publicly expressed their objection to class struggle, which literally meant the rejection of the role and function of proletariat in national liberation. Nam Dong publishing house, at the same time, also supported class harmonization. Therefore, it is reasonable why VNP soon discarded class struggle and relied on nationalist revolution.

Due to its refusal, skepticism and distrust toward the working class, VNP sought to rely on individual strength, upheld personal heroism, as adventurousness, enthusiasm, and passion were the characters of bourgeois. VNP argued that: “*the people cannot avoid being disorganized, and thus cannot avoid failure. They also claim that independence requires fighting with enemies, and fighting with enemies requires weapons and training. So VNP would prioritize army mobilization and grenades production to produce magnificent actions and gain good reputation for the party. This is shown in the fact that our Supervising Subcommittee, situated next to the General Committee and directed by Đoàn Trần Nghiệp (Ký Con), made various personal (assumptions) (assassinations)*” choice of word?).<sup>24</sup>

After the assassination of Bazin (February, 1929), to avoid widespread suppression by the French, VNP should have rallied people to maintain its operations and gradually restore its cells. Instead, unable to recognize the power of people, first of all farmers and laborers, during this desperate time, it paid overwhelming concern for preparing for violence and making the final bet under its motto “*if victory cannot be achieved, then at least a deed will be created,*” despite the inevitable failure of petty bourgeois and personal heroism.

In conclusion, despite varied versions given at different times, the core political idea of VNP was nationalism. Yet its nationalism was not entirely similar to the

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<sup>23</sup>See Engels (1960). Adapted from Quốc Anh: *Tìm hiểu mối quan hệ...*, Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>See Tran Van Giao (1975).

Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen, and considerably different from that of VRYL and NVRP. The latter's revolutionary ideas belonged to the category of proletarian revolution which aimed to liberate the whole nation from the colonial domination and achieve socialist revolution, then attempted to overthrow capitalism and construct communism with international proletariat. Meanwhile, nationalism as understood by VNP was national liberation and the establishment of a democratic republic system based on the Chinese revolutionary model and other Western mechanisms. It was clear that VNP was not a secret society, neither was it a socialist-affiliated revolutionary organization. Its nationalism and other issues set out in Program of Actions were confined in the category of old bourgeois revolution. Therefore, after all VNP was literally a representative of bourgeois and petty bourgeois rights and ideas in Vietnam in the 20s of twentieth century.

## 3.2 Social Background and Organizational Structure of Vietnam Nationalist Party

### 3.2.1 Social Background

Membership of VNP primarily consisted of young intellectuals, students, pupils, village authorities, and other Vietnamese soldiers working in the French army.

The founders and highest leaders of VNP were teachers such as Phạm Tuấn Tài and Phạm Tuấn Lâm, or student such as Nguyễn Thái Học.

As a result of colonial education, Nguyễn Thái Học (1901–1930) studied in Vietnam–France elementary school and then in the School of Pedagogy. Traditionally he would have continued family convention and followed commerce at hometown–Tho Tang, but Nguyễn Thái Học left Pedagogy and entered the College of Business. Actively participating in the democratic movements in the period of 1925–1926, Nguyễn Thái Học was exposed and drawn to revolutionary sentiment. He was initially interested in French bourgeois revolutionary ideas in 1789. But French colonialism forced him to leave the old way of social reform and adopt violence to defeat French colonizers. Nguyễn Thái Học assumed that: “At first I thought it was possible to seek cooperation with the French. But relentless failures helped me understand that the French was not willing to work together, and I could not serve my people under French colonization.<sup>25</sup>” At the end of 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học helped establish VNP and became the highest leader of this organization. Till that date, his violent approach had been particularly clear. He claimed that: “The colonial rulers brought steel and blood to invade Vietnam; we cannot allow ourselves to use bare-hands to oppose their weapons. Just take Tonkin Free School as an example. A handful of bare-handed mandarins

<sup>25</sup>See *Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2—1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues) (Workshop proceedings, Dec, 1996), Yen Bai, 1997, p. 79.

could not do anything and many were slaughtered, others were exiled to Con Dao. Today, going with peaceful revolution is like falling into the old blunder and failure.<sup>26</sup>

One of its founders and also member of the highest leading organ of VNP was Phạm Tuấn Tài. He was born in 1902 to a Confucian family in Nam Dinh. Having lost his father at three, Phạm Tuấn Tài lived with his mother, four sisters and his eldest brother Phạm Tuấn Lâm who later cooperated with him to establish Nam Dong publishing house. When he was a boy, Phạm Tuấn Tài learned Han Chinese and then studied the National language and French. Although he was still an undergraduate at Thành Chung School, his Western education was excellent. In the early 1920s, Phạm Tuấn Tài came to Bac Ninh to work as a teacher and participated in social activities of youngsters who shared patriotism with him. In 1925, he was transferred to Bac Kan to teach. A year later, he came back to Hanoi and served as teaching assistant at the Vocational School of Yen Thanh. Here, Phạm Tuấn Tài collaborated with his brother Phạm Tuấn Lâm and close friend Hoàng Phạm Trân to organize Nam Dong publishing housetop publish and disseminate patriotic newspapers and books. After the French closed the publishing house, he was transferred to Tuyen Quang to teach. In the founding conference of VNP, Phạm Tuấn Tài was absent because he was far away, but was still considered a member of the General Committee and held leading role in overall activities. Therefore, when the assassination of Bazin of VNP took place in February 1929, he was arrested and imprisoned in Hoa Lo and later exiled to Con Dao.

But the most prestigious leader of VNP, along with Nguyễn Thái Học, was Nguyễn Khắc Nhu. He was born in 1882 in Song Khe, Yen Dung, Bac Giang. Due to his excellent academic performance and first rank in the region he was called Xứ Nhu (Xu means region).<sup>27</sup> In 1908, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu was appointed Canton teacher at Thinh Liet village, near Phon Xuong military base of Hoang Hoa Tham. In 1922, due to his argument with a French educational inspector, he left his teaching career at public school, and worked as a private teacher and pharmacist. At this time, he actively wrote newspapers to discuss about social reforms and propose to reform customs and lifestyles in rural areas. In 1926, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu intended to organize *Hội National Seekers of Talented* with his comrades to train adolescents as Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục, but failed.

Realizing that social reforms could not provide results, he later joined *Vietnamese Nationalists*, and actively prepared weapons (bombs, swords, etc...) and mobilized soldiers.

Learning about the establishment of VNP, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu directly proposed Nguyễn Thái Học to perform joint actions. Finally, in the early 1928, the whole

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<sup>26</sup>Bach Dien, *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and VNP), Ngay Mai Publisher, Ha Noi, 1950, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup>Lâm and Quỳnh (2000).

*Vietnamese Nationalists* joined VNP, and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu—with his background as a teacher became its second leader.

Apart from Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, in the third Congress of General Committee (December 9th, 1928), an important member and former official in French government, namely Phó Đức Chính, was appointed Vice President of VNP.

He was born in 1908<sup>28</sup> in Da Nguu, Van Giang district, Hung Yen province. After graduating from the College of Public Works, he was transferred to Savanakheth (Laos) to work. There, Phó Đức Chính recruited party members and organized a cell of VNP. After Bazin assassination, Phó Đức Chính was captured and deported to Vietnam and later freed. During this time, he continued his activities and together with Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu devoted their effort to prepare for the revolution of VNP. After the Yen Bai failure was lost, Phó Đức Chính was arrested. On June 17th, 1930, together with Nguyễn Thái Học and other eleven members he was beheaded in Yen Bai. It was said that, before being executed, he requested to lie on the back to see how the guillotine worked. He even shouted stridently “Long Live Vietnam”.

Obviously, the founders such as Phạm Tuấn Tài, Phạm Tuấn Lâm, Hoàng Phạm Trân, and subsequent leaders of the General Committee of VNP (Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, Phó Đức Chính, etc...) were all patriots. Devoting themselves to patriotism, they sacrificed personal interest to rally people to oppose the French and liberate the nation.

Besides, there were important members working for subcommittees and organs of VNP such as Hoàng Văn Đào, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp, Cao Hữu Tạo, and Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn. They were all civil officers (officer of the Residency, teacher) or intellectuals, and under 30s. In his article *Phong trào cách mạng ở Việt Nam* (Revolutionary movements in Vietnam) composed on March 5th, 1930, Nguyễn Ái Quốc said that: “the Nationalist Party consists of mostly officers working for the French administration: teacher, interpreter, small official, etc...”<sup>29</sup>

Clearly, petty bourgeois intellectuals, students, and officers were the crucial and leading members of VNP. In over two years of existence and operation, VNP especially emphasized membership mobilization and enlargement among these social groups. This was shown in a list of its arrested members after Bazin assassination (February, 1930) as follows (Table 3.1).

This draft was included by Louis Marty, Director of the Sûreté Général Indochinoise in the document “Góp phần nghiên cứu lịch sử chính trị Đông

<sup>28</sup>Lâm and Quỳnh (2000), *ibid.* Also according to Vu Huy Phucin his article *Về cuộc khởi nghĩa chống Pháp ở Yên Bái 2—1930* (On the Yen Bai uprising against the French in Feb—1930), *Ibid.*, p. 94, he was born in 1910. But in our opinion, had he been born in 1910 which would mean that if he was 18 in 1928, he could not have graduated from the College of Social Works.

<sup>29</sup>Article written in English (archived at the Central Party’s Office). Adopted from: Trần Minh Tường, “Đường lối và phương pháp cách mạng Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng và Nguyễn Thái Học” (Revolutionary policy and method of VNP and Nguyễn Thái Học), *Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2—1930*, *Ibid.*, p. 107.

**Table 3.1** a list of its arrested members after the Bazin assassination

No	Occupation	Number of members
1	Office staff, secretary	36
2	Civil officer	13
3	Public teacher	36
4	Private teacher	4
5	Sino script teacher	2
6	Student	6
7	Promotional staff	4
8	Trade and engineering officer	10
9	Trader and craftsman	39
10	Landlord, farmer, pharmacist	37
11	Serviceman	40
	Total	227

Dương thuộc Pháp” (A contribution to research on the political history of French-occupied Indochina). After referencing this list, Louis Marty said that: “The brief summary (occupation of the members of VNP) shows that intellectuals and semi-intellectuals account for a large proportion and indicates how dangerous this party is to French security because over 50 % of the culprits work for the government.<sup>30</sup>”

Apart from intellectuals and urban officers, VNP also recruited village authorities, rich farmers, because these were prestigious and influential people in rural areas. This was evident in a survey on the social backgrounds of its members in Kinh Ke commune, Lam Thao district, Phu Tho province—one of the central areas of VNP.

Below is the list of party members working for VNP in Kinh Ke, Lam Thao, Phu Tho<sup>31</sup> (Table 3.2).

Apparently, apart from three members of different backgrounds, nine other members were rich farmers.

Also according to the survey, most of the party members belonging to Kha Lam cell in Kien An, Hai Phong were village authorities, whose leader was Vice President of the General Committee, Nguyễn Phúc Hội.<sup>32</sup> Hence in rural areas, rich farmers and village authorities were the main proportions of VNP.

Interestingly in its operation, enlargement, and development, VNP paid particular concern for Vietnamese soldiers in the French army. Various institutions and

<sup>30</sup>Louis Marty, “Góp phần nghiên cứu lịch sử chính trị Đông Dương thuộc Pháp” (A contribution to research on the political history of French-occupied Indochina), *ibid.*, pp. 105–106.

<sup>31</sup>Collected document in Kinh Ke, Lam Thao, Phu Tho.

<sup>32</sup>According to Mr. Do Van Ducin My Duc, Kien An, Hai Phong and Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng—Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), p. 101.

**Table 3.2** The list of party members working for VNP in Kinh Ke, Lam Thao, and Phu Tho

No	Name	Social background
1	Bùi Huy Hòa	Rich farmer
2	Bùi Danh Toại	Rich farmer
3	Bùi Huy Lập	Rich farmer
4	Bùi Tất Luyện	Rich farmer
5	Nguyễn Văn Lung	Rich farmer
6	Nguyễn Ngọc Oanh	Rich farmer
7	Nguyễn Văn Duân	Rich farmer
8	Nguyễn Văn Diệu	Rich farmer
9	Nguyễn Văn Thông	Rich farmer
10	Bùi Danh Quán	Middle farmer
11	Bùi Huy Thế	Student
12	Phạm Khắc Nhận	Confucian teacher

main offices of VNP were established within French military institutions in Kien An, Son Tay, Hai Phong.<sup>33</sup> They were the crucial agents of VNP who commenced the riots in Yen Bai and other localities in early February, 1930. The enlistment of Vietnamese patriotic soldiers was a unique scheme of VNP to fully utilize available conditions for uprising and making the enemy surprised and desperate. It implemented the idea of our forefathers as “To make a rod for one’s own back;” and adopted the custom of military mobilization used in Bãi Sậy movements in the late nineteenth century, the military incident in Hanoi in 1908 and Thai Nguyen uprising in 1917.

Not only males, VNP also attracted, educated and recruited females. Most notable were two siblings Nguyễn Thị Bắc and Nguyễn Thị Giang in Bac Giang, members of the cell led by Nguyễn Khắc Nhu. The image of lady Giang—comrade and lover of leader Nguyễn Thái Học—has become embedded in our people as a symbol of revolutionary heroism, as she determined to eliminate every mortifying custom and sacrifice personal affection and interests to fight and die for the greater national cause. Also, two ladies Như and Uyển initially joined VNP, and later worked side by side with their brother in VRYL. Obviously, by recruiting females into its membership, VNP demonstrated its progressive and revolutionary nature by appreciating women as well as gender equality in society. In reality, in over 2 years of its existence, the female members contributed massively to military mobilization, communication, circular distribution, flag and uniform designing, and other activities.

<sup>33</sup>C.A Mkhitarian (ed.), *Vietnamese modern history* (1917–1965), Moscow, 1970, p. 60 (Russian).

### 3.2.2 *Organizational Structure of Vietnam Nationalist Party*

VNP was divided into four divisions, namely General Committee (Tổng bộ), Region Chapter (Kỳ bộ), Province Chapter (Tỉnh bộ) and Cell (Chi bộ). Each division contained no more than 19 people. This limitation was due to the fact that, according to regulations set by the French government at that time, every conference with over 19 participants had to gain permission to be organized. With this restriction, the party divisions could avoid censorship under colonial law when organizing conferences.<sup>34</sup>

VNP adopted the working principle of “*democratic centralism*.” Accordingly, cell members appointed a cell president and cell representative. Cell representatives together made up a *district chapter* (Huyện bộ). District chapters once again appointed a president and a representative. Similarly, representatives of a Province Chapter constituted a *Region Chapter*, and representatives of Region Chapters constituted the General Committee. But members of each district chapter, province chapter, and region chapter could not surpass 19.

+ *General Committee* was the highest organ of the structure of VNP, its leaders were Nguyễn Thái Học (Party President), Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp, and Phó Đức Chính (Party Vice President) and other important members such as Nhung Tổng, Tưởng Dân Bảo, and Nguyễn Hữu Đạt. According to the first Statute, the General Committee was divided into three committees, namely Committee of Legislation and Supervision, Committee of Administration, and Committee of Supremacy. It held a meeting every 6 months.

Among the above subcommittees, the Committee of Legislation and Supervision had the most important responsibility and role within their General Committee. This Subcommittee was formed by representatives of three regions (North–Middle–South). The Committee of Legislation and Supervision created an Executive committee with a president, a vice president and seven members responsible for propaganda and training, finance, economy, military, supervising, detecting, and external affairs. Members of the Executive committee were “*reappointed once a year and could be reelected if they had made no mistake during their term*.”<sup>35</sup> The structure of General Committee also included the above components. As for decision making, the President together with two Vice Presidents dealt with all important issues, and executive decision was based on the majority in voting or balloting. The two Vice Presidents assisted and represented the President while he was away.

However, the above regulations were not adequately followed. First of all, the General Committee that was formed by representatives of Region Chapters was not followed. Indeed, VNP never held a conference with representatives from all three regions. Actually, representatives of the Tonkin region formed the General Committee.

<sup>34</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>35</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 89.



As for the six month interval between each term, VNP followed it consistently until before the assassination of Bazin. In the conference to establish VNP on December 25th, 1927, the participants voted to create an Interim General Committee consisting of 15 members responsible for seven subcommittees as follow: Nguyễn Thái Học–Party President, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp–Vice President; Nhượng Tổng–Chief of the Propaganda Subcommittee, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn–Chief of the External Affairs Subcommittee, Trương Dân Bảo–Chief of the Detecting Subcommittee, Nguyễn Hữu Dật–Chief of the Supervising Subcommittee, Đặng Đình Điền–Chief of the Financial Subcommittee, Hoàng Văn Tùng–Chief of the Death Squad Subcommittee, and Lê Văn Phúc–Chief of the Organizing Subcommittee.

After the party conference on July 1st, 1928 in Gia Lam, Hanoi, the official General Committee was established, with eight subcommittees and some changes in personnel. Accordingly, Nguyễn Thái Học was nominated as the Party President, but both Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp and Nhượng Tổng were dismissed from its Executive committee. Hoàng Văn Đào replaced Hoàng Văn Tùng and Bùi Tiến Mai was substituted for Đặng Đình Điền by the Thai Binh Province Chapter.

The third General Committee was officially formed in a conference on December 9th, 1928. At this time, the General Committee saw great changes in personnel and organization. Nguyễn Khắc Nhu was appointed Party President, while Nguyễn Thái Học and Phó Đức Chính became Vice Presidents. The General Committee no longer consisted of eight subcommittees, but was divided into two divisions: Legislation and Executive divisions, including three subcommittees: Committee of Legislation, Committee of Supervision, and Committee of Supremacy. Nguyễn Khắc Nhu was the President of Committee of Legislation and Supervision, Committee of Administration, and Committee of Supremacy; and Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp was the President of Financial Committee. According to regulations, Committee of Legislation and Supervision was charged with making every decision of the party and supervised the implementation of Subcommittee of Finance. Committee of Supremacy was responsible for solving disagreements between Committee of Legislation and Committee of Finance. The third General Committee was also the last in VNP history.

In general, within a year, The General Committee was reorganized three times and changed in personnel and organization. These changes did not result from realistic functioning demands, but from disagreements between members of the General Committee. Due to internal disparities, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp and Nhượng Tổng were dismissed from the Executive committee of the second General Committee. After being departed from the Executive committee, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp secretly contacted the French and gathered his own men to form an independent party. The changes in personnel of the third General Committee were also planned by him as a way to restore his position as President of the Executive committee and trigger the removal of Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu from the General Committee.

In conclusion, the General Committee was not stable and modified regularly in both personnel and organization, creating enormous difficulties for the leadership

of VNP and loopholes for underlings of French colonialists to disrupt the party via the General Committee. A notable example was Bùi Tiến Mai.

+ *Region chapters* were formed by representatives of province chapters. A region chapter was directly responsible for the province chapters and observed orders from the General Committee. It planned and performed all activities within a region and reported to the General Committee. As for organization, a Region Chapter appointed six representatives to stand for it before the General Committee. These six members were in charge of the Chapter and four members were responsible for four subcommittees: Propaganda, Detecting, Finance, and Economy that together formed an Executive committee. Every three months, a meeting was held and members could be reelected if they made no mistake during their term.<sup>36</sup>

In its two years of existence, the operations of VNP were limited in Tonkin, the Tonkin Region Chapter acted like a General Committee. It was not until 1928 did the cells of VNP in Cochinchina find a Cochinchina Region Chapter whose president was Trần Huy Liệu. Other cells in Laos, according to additional regulations of the Party Statute in 1929, were regarded as overseas Region Chapters.

+ *Province Chapters* were formed by representatives of cells. Members in a province chapter could not exceed 19. If a province chapter had more than 19 cells or more than 19 representatives, then different chapters were established and assigned respective numbers 1, 2, etc. A province chapter was directly responsible for all activities of its cells. As a rule, by secret ballot, a province chapter was allowed to elect a provincial representative, a chapter president and four members in charge of four subcommittees: Propaganda, Supervising, Inspection, Finance, and Economy, all four members formed an Executive committee. Members held a meeting once a year and could be reelected if during their term they made no mistake.

According to regulations, whichever province has party cells had to establish a Province Chapter, but in reality only some provinces appointed their representatives to form a Province Chapter or City Chapter, such as the City Chapters of VNP in Hanoi, Hai Phong and Nam Dinh (established in 1928); Thai Binh Province Chapter established in 1928; and Kien An Province Chapter found in 1929. In other provinces such as Hai Duong, Ha Bac, Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, and Yen Bai, VNP did not form any Province Chapter. The operations of cells there were put directly supervised by party leaders such as Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, and Phó Đức Chính.

+ *Cell* was the basic party unit. The establishment of cells was based on administrative divisions. The Party Statute ruled those party members in every commune, village, canton, district, town, or city could form a cell. A cell's membership could not surpass 19, if there were more than 19 members then different cells were organized. Every activity of a cell was under direct management of its Province Chapter. The organization of a cell consisted of four subcommittees for:

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<sup>36</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 87.

propaganda, detecting, finance, and economy. Via secret ballot members of a cell elected an Executive committee consisting of a president and four members in charge of the above subcommittees. A cell was responsible for recruiting new members and reporting to the Province Chapter for approval. A meeting was held once a month. Every member had to participate in the meeting, if not he/she had to inform the Executive committee in advance. Resolutions were decided based on the majority of votes; the cell secretary could cast two votes. These rules were set out in the first Statute. But in reality, due to weak organization, the above rules were often neglected. The number of party members usually exceeded limitations. The Son Duong cell (Lam Thao, Phu Tho) had 40 members. Vong La Cell (Xuan Loc, Thanh Thuy, Phu Tho) consisted of 50 members. Kim Lang Cell (Thanh Ha, Hai Duong) had 25 members and more. Responsibilities were allocated unequally within a cell. Members often violated the principle of confidentiality. As for party membership, the first Statute in 1928 of VNP set out that: to become a member one had to be Vietnamese, regardless of gender, religion or occupation; believe in its doctrine and obey its instructions, be willing to sacrifice personal status, property, life and income for the party; be nominated by a member or members; pay party fee; and voluntarily fight for the party to achieve its ultimate goal. When encountering a worthy person (who wanted to become party member), a party member had to report to a cell's Executive committee for inspection and approval through a conference. In his/her initiation ritual, the new member had to take an oath: *"Before my Nation and my comrades, I, (how many) years old, was recruited into the party, I am honored to take an oath to fulfill my obligations as a party member, absolutely follow the party's orders, keep secret the affairs of the party, and sacrifice my life and status for the party, if I break my oath I will be sentenced before the party."*<sup>37</sup> Article 43 of this statute also indicated the responsibility of party members as to train their spirit, morality, and physical strength to serve the party as a whole. If any member committed a mistake such as treason, embezzlement, or delaying party fee within three months he/she would be dismissed, removed from office or sentenced to death. Every member had to pay one dong for enrollment and a monthly fee (nguyệt liễm) accounting for 5 % of monthly wage. In the *Program of Action* of VNP issued in 1929, it was regulated that every party member had to go through a three month preliminary period to be trained under revolutionary activities, after 9 months he/she could officially participate in the party's affairs. After officially recruited, he/she had to overcome various challenges to be assigned important tasks.

In general, the criteria and standards for membership and recruitment of VNP were relatively shabby and even casual. There was no mechanism to supervise, train, and challenge prospective members. In addition, membership admission and development went on without regards for the established principles. Membership enrollment was carried out "very casually" in some places. For example, in Vong La (Xuan Loc, Thanh Thuy, Phu Tho), after Nguyễn Quốc Đạt joined VNP for

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<sup>37</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 94.

some time, most of his relatives also became party members or party affiliated people. In Kha Lam canton (Kien An) when the Canton Chief was accepted into the party, all subordinate village authorities were admitted as party members. The membership enrollment was noticeably careless and potentially made use by opportunistic members, even minions of the French colonialists, to disrupt the party from within.

Apart from the above weaknesses, shortcomings were shown in the organization and training of party members. While both VRYL founded by Nguyễn Ái Quốc and NVRP had their programs to train members, the members of VNP did not enroll in any political training course both before and after their admission into the party. VNP paid little attention to education, training, and personnel; particularly it did not train and develop a permanent body. Therefore, understanding of the purposes, principles, and operations of its members was very limited, which led to their casual and hasty actions.

Needless to say, the internal regulations and principles and criteria for membership enrollment of VNP were unscientific, disrespected and were not followed entirely and strictly, which was one of the basic flaws of this party.

As a result, after the assassination of Bazin (February 9th, 1929), its organization was largely dismantled. Several leading members of the divisions, from General Committee to its subordinate organs, fell into the hands of its enemies. The most severely disrupted cells were those in Thai Binh, Hung Yen, and Bac Ninh. To avoid its complete collapse, VNP made a few amendments in its organization such as limiting the number of cell members to five, putting Region Chapters under the order of General Committee, and requesting that Province Chapters would be elected by Region Chapters. Cells would be organized by Province Chapters. But at such a time, the principle of democratic centralism was generally dismissed. The Party could not prevent disorganized expansion (choice of word). Along with the founding of new cells was the exclusion of other cells by the French. This state lasted until the Yen Bai uprising and its loss.

Interestingly after the assassination of Bazin, in several conferences of the General Committee, leaders of VNP proposed to recruit members among farmers and workers. It also created a program to organize popular organs in the form of unions, such as Union of women, Union of laborers, Union of farmers, Union of students, and military unions among the French army. The *Amended Statute of VNP* in 1929 stated that the party would develop unions “*to help people become fully revolutionary individuals, and when necessary would organize them into fighting squads.*”<sup>38</sup> This Statute also regulated the organization principles (such as each union had not more than 19 members and led by a chief). The provision on Vietnamese Women’s Union (*Việt Nam Phụ nữ đoàn*) even defined the criteria for membership enrollment and a four-level organizational system (central union, region union, province union, and cell union). Every 10 cell unions formed a

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<sup>38</sup>Lieu and Van Tao (1958), *ibid.*, p. 116.

province union, 10 province unions constituted a region union, and all region unions comprised a central union.

Thanks to this policy, VNP was able to establish a few unions, such as the union of students in some elementary and secondary schools in Hai Phong (these students later joined the assault of Kien An). In Hanoi, there were unions of laborers in some businesses such as Godart, Poinsard, Veyret, Descours, Cabaud, and Denis Fères. The cell in Kim Lang (Thanh Ha, Hai Duong) also formed a union of farmers whose membership was 80. In Phu Tho, unions of women were founded in Vong La, Kinh Ke, Xuan Lung. Particularly, among soldiers, apart from the cells in Kien An, Pha Lai, Hung Hoa, and Yen Bai, VNP recruited party sympathizers into military squadrons. These squadrons were under direct control and administration of the VNP's General Committee.

Above is a general overview of the organizational structure and policy of VNP. Compared to VRYL and NVRP, the rules and regulations of VNP contained various shortcomings, limitations and flaws. They answered the question why VNP was not able to mobilize people and establish popular representation among them. Due to its tangled and unsteady organizational structure, the party was easily disrupted and dismantled by the suppression and terrorism of French colonialists, particularly after the Bazin assassination (February, 1929).

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## Chapter 4

# The Operations of Vietnam Nationalist Party from 1927 to 1929

*In reality, the operations of VNP during its existence were confined in two stages: first stage (membership development) and third stage (acting period), without going through the second stage (preparing stage) as defined in the program of action approved in the Party's establishing conference (December 25, 1927). The Bazin assassination (December 9, 1929) was considered a transition between the first and third stages.*

This chapter explores the changing activities of VNP's from 1927 to 1929. Most of the activities practiced by VNP followed the principle of "centralized democracy." In addition, VNP also focused on building revolutionary forces and developing the party base system in locals of Vietnam with the active participation of many diverse social classes. Furthermore, VNP tried to connect their operations with other revolutionary organizations of Vietnam at this time, but most of these efforts failed leading to isolation of the party and their own activities in a later period. Especially, this period also witnessed the expansion of VNP's activities by means of propaganda and training, building financial base, and terrorizing against the French colonialists to attract public attention to their organization.

## 4.1 Party Cell Development and the Attempted Association with Other Revolutionary Parties

### 4.1.1 Party Mobilization and Cell Development in Local Areas

Until before the assassination of Bazin, the publicity, constitution and development of party cells were performed well by VNP. In nearly two years after establishment, its party cell development went on rapidly, primarily in Tonkin (provinces such as Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, Hai Duong, Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Thanh Hoa, etc...). Moreover, the Party also extended its cells to Laos and Cochinchina.

Until February, 1928, VNP had expanded its organization in Bac Ninh and Bac Giang by integrating with other patriotic groups in this area, especially *Vietnamese Nationalists* of Nguyễn Khắc Nhu (Xử Nhu).

At the end of 1928, the *Vietnamese Nationalists* led by Xử Nhu was established and began its operations in Bac Ninh and Bac Giang with violence as its approach with the French. In search for more members, Xử Nhu sent his men to contact Nam Dong Publishing House in advance. Therefore, on receiving the proposal, Xử Nhu agreed to merge the whole *Vietnamese Nationalists* into VNP (February 1928) and quickly became one of its leading members. The grouping of VNP and *Vietnamese Nationalists* was particularly significant in defining an approach for actions. Interestingly, the participation of Nguyễn Khắc Nhu in VNP “*offered fundamental new developments,*” of which the most important was “*due to him the revolutionary violent approach was more favored within VNP and later actually adopted in the armed uprisings in the early 1930.*”<sup>1</sup>

In Bac Ninh, apart from *Vietnamese Nationalists* of Xử Nhu, there was the group of Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp. With the participation of Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp in the General Committee, starting from early 1928, most members of his group finally joined VNP.

Similar to the group of Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp, an ideologically similar group of VNP in Thanh Hoa, led by Hoàng Văn Tùng and Hoàng Văn Đào was later combined into it.

In early 1928, VNP began its cell development in the provinces of Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho. In these areas, VNP established its firm foothold in the districts of Vinh Tuong (Vinh Phuc), Thanh Thuy, Cam Khe, and Lam Thao (Phu Tho). Particularly, a number of cells developed quite strongly in the village of Tho Tang, Tuan Chinh (Vinh Tuong), Vong La (Thanh Thuy), Kinh Ke, Son Duong, Vu Di, Cao Mai, and Chu Hoa (Lam Thao), etc.

<sup>1</sup>See *Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2—1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), Ibid., pp. 131–135.



In Vinh Tuong, after VNP was established at the end of 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học came back to Tho Tang village to develop its revolutionary institutions.

At the same time, another important party member of VNP named Nguyen Ba Dat also arrived in Vong La (Thanh Thuy, Phu Tho) and rapidly transformed this area into a center of its operations. He enlightened and recruited Nguyễn Văn Khôi (who later became one of the direct commanders of Yen Bai uprising) and Nguyễn Văn Thúy. Until the early 1929, in Vong La there had been three cells of VNP: the Vong La cell consisting of 20 members (directed by Nguyễn Bá Đạt, Nguyễn Đại Tụ), the La Hao cell (12 members and led by Nguyễn Văn Thúy) and Ha Bi cell in Son Duong comprising 8 members (led by Nguyễn Văn Khôi).

After developing the cells in Vinh Tuong, Thanh Thuy, in early 1928, VNP began its large expansion to Lam Thao (Phu Tho). There it established a cell in Cao Mai commune led by Nguyễn Như Liên (Ngọc Tinh). As for membership, the Cao Mai cell had nine members, including Nguyễn Như Liên, Vũ Văn Ké, Nguyễn Văn Ty, Bùi Huy Nhượng, Triệu Văn Tĩnh, Triệu Văn Trinh, Đặng Vi, Nguyễn Văn Bính, and Nguyễn Văn Tuyên.<sup>2</sup> Thanks to the mobilization and propaganda of Nguyễn Như Liên, until June 1928, other members in Chu Hoa, Viet Tien, Phung Nguyen, Vu Di, etc., ... who were enlightened and initiated into VNP. However, due to the scattered scope of operation and their residence, no party cell was formed.

Next to Cao Mai cell, in Kinh Ke another party cell was founded in early 1928. Via a friend named Nguyễn Bá Tiên, Nguyễn Bá Đạt began his publicity and mobilization in Kinh Ke and later formed a cell comprising 12 people.<sup>3</sup> Based on Cao Mai and Kinh Ke, in early 1929, VNP extended its operations to Son Duong and rapidly made this area one of its centers of operations, which consisted of 40 party members.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, compared to other Tonkin provinces, Vinh Phuc and Phu Tho were two areas where the revolutionary bodies of VNP were discovered early and developed quite dramatically. Lam Thao in particular could be considered “*an exclusive operational area of VNP.*”<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, in the organizational system of VNP in Vinh Phuc and Phu Tho, there were no Province Chapters. Every cell activity was directly controlled by Nguyễn Thái Học and Phó Đức Chính.

Apart from the cells, following the order of General Committee, from early 1929, the members also created its unions of farmers, laborers, and women, etc., and appointed them as party sympathizers. In Son Duong, the union of women

<sup>2</sup>According to Nguyen Van Tuyen (younger brother of Nguyễn Như Liên) in Cao Mai Street, former member of VNP, who later joined Vietnam Communist Party.

<sup>3</sup>Document of *Committee of Historical Collections*, Kinh Ke commune, Phong Châu district, Vĩnh Phú province (now Lam Thao, Phu Tho).

<sup>4</sup>Document of *Committee of Historical Collections*, Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>*Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2—1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), p. 161. See also Khánh (1996).

was directed by Nguyễn Văn Toại's (Đỗ Thúy) wife. In Xuan Lung, the extension of farmers unions lasted until the Yen Bai uprising erupted.

Apart from Bac Ninh, the provinces of Bac Giang, Vinh Phuc, and Phu Tho also saw strong party development. Moreover, VNP established and nurtured a number of cells in adjacent areas such as Son Duong, Hai Duong, Hung Yen, Thai Binh, Hai Phong and Hanoi.

Due to its important military location, Son Tay got particular interest from VNP. In June 1926, after a period of propaganda and mobilization, Nguyễn Thái Học formed contacts within Son Tay and established a cell in Chua Thong post, a cell in Co Phap village (Bat Bat district) and recruited several party members residing around Chua Thong.

In Hai Phong, from 1928 to 1929, several cells of VNP were founded in districts such as Chi Linh, Cam Giang, Thanh Ha, Nam Sach, and Binh Giang.

In Chi Linh, the first party cell came into being in Phao Tan (now Co Thanh, Chi Linh districts) and was led by Tuan Loc. Afterward, VNP built another cell in Phao Son village (Binh Giang) and other cells in Chi Ngai and An Nhiem (now belonging to Cong Hoacommune, Chi Linh district).

From this, VNP continued its contacts and cell development in Ninh Xa (Nam Hung), Tran Xa, Tong Xa (Thanh Quang), Thanh Lam, and Minh Tan belonging to Nam Sach district. In Minh Tan commune, VNP formed two cells in Hung Thang and My Xa consisting of various members.

Additionally, the Party also conducted propagation and established some cells in Cam Giang, Binh Giang bordering Lac Dao train station. These cells had close associations with others in Luong Tai (Bac Ninh) and adjacent areas next to the provinces of Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hai Duong and Hanoi.

In Hai Duong, a cell of VNP was established within the Christian district. Next, under the direction of Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Văn Tuấn and Phó Đức Chính, the party contacted Nguyễn Duy Tâm and found a cell in Kim Lang (Thanh Lang commune, Thanh Ha, Hai Duong) at the end of 1928. Subsequently, it employed several members in Kim Thanh, Kinh Mon (Hai Duong), increasing the amount of members in this area to 40 at the beginning of 1929.

Also in early 1929, VNP instructed its men to establish a cell in Mao Khe coal mine (Quang Yen). There a cell was formed whose general secretary was Nguyễn Văn Đại and had around 30 party members.

Hai Phong also saw early cell development of VNP. In mobilizing the people to establish VNP, its leaders Nguyễn Thái Học, Phạm Tuấn Tài paid particular concern for Vietnamese soldiers, students, intellectuals and Chinese overseas, etc. Several members in Hai Phong (later merged by Hoàng Văn Đào into the Hai Phong group) were instructed and enlightened before the establishment of VNP.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the development of membership and cell in Hai Phong gained more advantages and achieved certain results. Until 1928, the Party had set up its cells in the urban areas such as Cau Dat Street, the barrack of red-belt soldiers (lính khổ

<sup>6</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng—Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), pp. 30.

đô), a cement plant, the Department of Post Office and Department of Ship Repair. The areas of Ha Ly, Hang Kenh, Lac Vien, cement plant, the barrack of red-belt soldiers and Cong My (Nam Son) were where VNP had developed party cells. Until before the assassination of Bazin, the number of its members in Hai Phong was around 50.<sup>7</sup>

Under direct supervision of the Hai Phong Province chapter, three siblings, Đào Văn Khê, Đào Văn Chiến and Đào Văn Linh returned to Co Am village to establish the first party cell in Vinh Bao district.

From the Vinh Bao cell, in early 1928, the movements of VNP spread through Thai Binh and developed rapidly in adjacent districts such as Quynh Coi and Phu Duc (now Quynh Phu, Thai Binh). Several youngsters in Thai Binh were enlightened before participating in VNP and later came back to their hometowns to set up cells and extend its influence. Also at this time, two members of VNP whose secret names were Nhat On and Hoa Ma came back to the villages of Phung Cong, Luong My, Nguyen Xa, etc., to rally youngsters and the rich to join and support the party. When the patriotic movements were at a stalemate, VNP under the name of nationalism and The Three Principles rallied numerous foremen, landlords and ordinary farmers to its membership.<sup>8</sup>

In Tonkin, apart from the provinces where party cells were strongly developed, VNP also spread its operations to Tuyen Quang, Hoa Binh. In Tuyen Quang, Phạm Tuấn Tài (after being transferred there by the French) did his utmost to introduce the party to different groups of people. In Hoa Binh, VNP recruited provincial governor Quach Vi (a renowned Mùrềng pharmacist) into its membership.

Also at this time, VNP developed its party cells in Annam and Cochinchina.

In Annam, due to strong competition from VRYL and NVRP (which had already developed strong institutions), VNP could not extend its network. Contacts in this region only appeared in provinces such as Thanh Hoa, Da Nang, Nha Trang, and Phan Thiet. In Thanh Hoa, Hoàng Văn Tùng was the one who contributed to the membership development of VNP. As a northerner, Hoàng Văn Tùng came to Thanh Hoa to teach and covertly established a cell there.

In Cochinchina, the membership development was undertaken by Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn (then a Director General of the Committee for Foreign Affairs). Upon attempting to contact and communicate with other parties to unify for the sake of resistance to the French, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn arrived in Siam to develop party cells but in vain. Afterwards, he came back to Sai Gon and organized a cell of VNP at the end of 1928 (Trần Huy Liệu was cell president). Later, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn established 12 cells in the southeast, 10 cells in the southwest such as in Gia Dinh,

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<sup>7</sup>Pham Xuan Thanh, *Sự ra đời và hoạt động của tổ chức Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng yêu nước tại Hải Phòng—Kiến An những năm 1928–1930* (The establishment and operations of patriotic VNP in Hai Phong—Kien An in the years 1928–1930), Library of Hai Phong Center for Social Sciences and Humanities (Typed document), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup>The Party Executive Committee of Quỳnh Phụ district, *Lịch sử Đảng bộ huyện Quỳnh Phụ 1927–1954* (sơ thảo) (History of the Party Committee of Quỳnh Phụ district 1927–1954 (draft)), Thái Bình, 1992, p. 24.

Cho Lon (Ho Chi Minh city), Thu Dau Mot (Binh Duong), My Tho (Tien Giang), Tra Vinh town (Tra Vinh), Ben Tre town (Ben Tre), Bien Hoa (Dong Nai) and Vung Tau (Ba Ria–Vung Tau).

At the same time, Phó Đức Chính (then director of the Council of organizers of General Committee) was appointed Agent Technique in Savannakhet (Laos). He took this opportunity to mobilize and establish some cells in Laos.

An interesting fact was that in its membership development, VNP paid great concern for the mobilization and instruction of Vietnamese soldiers in French army (particularly red-belt soldiers and bombardiers). In most of the prominent locations of French colonialists in Bac Ninh, Pha Lai, Hai Phong, Kien An, etc., VNP's cells were founded. Until late 1928, in Tonkin, VNP had recruited 400 party members who were Vietnamese soldiers. In Cochinchina, the number was 256.

In conclusion, since its establishment (December 1927) to February 1929, the development of party cells of VNP saw initial success. According to the survey created by Louis Marty, until February 1929, in Tonkin alone, VNP had formed 120 cells consisting of 1500 party members.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the party also developed a number of cells in Cochinchina, Laos and attracted a proportion of energetic inhabitants in Cochinchina.

#### ***4.1.2 The Efforts of Vietnam Nationalist Party to Associate with Other Patriotic Parties***

In the twentieth century, our national liberation movements developed dramatically with different tendencies and approaches. Although revolutionary parties both inside and outside the country aimed to drive away the colonialists and restore national independence, their operations were disconnected, scattered, and inconsistent in both ideas and actions. As a result, the unification of different patriotic associations into a single party was essential for Vietnamese revolution.

Recognizing this demand, apart from propaganda, establishment, and development of party cells, the leaders of VNP also sent their subordinates to contact other parties inside and outside the country in an attempt to unify revolutionary groups. In a conference of the General Committee on April 7, 1928, this policy was discussed and approved by most of the delegates.

To perform it, the General Committee sent Hoàng Văn Tùng's party's representative to contact Tôn Quang Phiệt, the representative of NVRP. Simultaneously, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn and Lê Văn Phúc were instructed to meet VRYL.

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<sup>9</sup>According to Partrice Morlat, the membership of VNP among soldiers was 300 comprising 20 cells. See Morlat (2001).

But the unification of NVRPand VNP was unsuccessful. Meanwhile, despite various discussions between the representative of VNP (Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn) and that of VRYL, the attempt to combine these two groups was also in vain. This was because while VRYL proposed to put the General Committee (when the two would have been united) in a foreign country, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn demanded the vice versa. Actually, this disagreement was related to the right for leadership of the united party. If the General Committee was located in a foreign country, every operation would be put under the leadership of VRYL's General Committee (as the majority of leaders of VRYL were in foreign countries then). On the contrary, VNP would gain the most power if the General Committee was situated within the country. This difference was unsolvable, and thus the unification failed.

The last attempt of VNP was marked with an event in the middle of 1928, when a delegation consisting of Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, Hồ Văn Mịch, and Phạm Tiền was sent to Udon (Thailand) to once again ask for the association with VRYL. In this visit, the delegation tried to persuade and use the influence of VNP to attract Vietnamese patriots overseas. However, this intent and the goal to unite with other parties were fruitless because most of the Vietnamese overseas were already enlightened and recruited into VRYL.

At the end of 1928, the General Committee of VRYL sent instructions to domestic Province Chapters to co-establish an Anti-imperialist-Front (*Mặt trận phản đế*) with VNP, but also failed.

On his way home from Thailand, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn stayed in Cochinchina to seek for the unification with *Aspiration of Youth Party* (Thanh niên Cao vọng đảng) of Nguyễn An Ninh. However, this attempt failed because Nguyễn An Ninh's party disagreed with the violent approach of VNP. At the same time, the attempts of Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn to negotiate with representatives of the Province Chapter of NVRP in Cochinchina, namely Tran Nguyen Phu and Nguyen Dinh Kien, could not foster any result.

Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp played an important role in the negotiations for unification between VNP and *Vietnamese Independence Party*. After being dismissed from the General Committee in its second election (July 1928), Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp went to Cochinchina with the intent to organize a covert party within VNP, then contact and cooperate with the French spies to eliminate the opposition party.<sup>10</sup> There, Nghiep published the *Revue Économique* (Economic Journal) and used it to contact the members of *Vietnamese independence party* such as Nguyễn Đình Di and Nguyễn Văn Ngọc, who just returned from France. Next, again under the name of VNP, Nghiep, and these two traveled to Hanoi to induce Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, Hoàng Văn Tùng to join their faction. However, it did not produce any result since Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn and Hoàng Văn Tùng demanded unification under the sole name of "VNP".

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<sup>10</sup>After August Revolution, the Department of Propaganda belonging to the Interim Government released a number of secret documents composed by the French Sureté Générale in Ha Noi which confirmed that Nguyen The Nghiep had long been a spy for the French. See Tran Van Giau, Đinh Xuân Lam, Kieu Xuan Ba, *Lịch sử cận đại Viet Nam* (Vietnamese Pre-Modern History), Ibid., p. 188.

Although the attempts for unification with other parties failed, this issue was discussed in a meeting of the General Committee on September 15, 1928. After the conference, the General Committee sent Đặng Đình Điền to Hue to meet Phan Bội Châu and offer him the position as honorable party President in exchange of two favors:

First, they asked Phan Bội Châu to persuade different parties to unify with his morals and reputation.

Second, they requested Phan to assist in foreign affairs because he had close relations with foreign statesmen.

On October 10, 1928, Đặng Đình Điền visited Hue and met Phan Bội Châu. After discussing, Phan accepted to assist VNP and said: “*Although I am old, if I can do anything to help the Nation, I will follow your orders with all my strength.*”<sup>11</sup> To keep in touch, Phan offered Đặng Đình Điền a card inscribed with 4 Han letters “*Khả dĩ đoan kim*” (Gold can be shared) as a counter sight.

On December 9, 1928, in the election for a new General Committee, VNP intended to form two main forces within and outside the country to begin revolution. To this end, the new General Committee sent a mission to China and Japan and asked their governments to assist it with finance and troops. To prepare for his trip abroad, Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Tổng were sent to Hue to ask Phan Bội Châu to introduce them to several Chinese and Japanese statesmen. Nevertheless, the assassination of Bazin occurred when the two were not yet ready for their trip. As a result, only Nguyễn Tổng was able to travel to Hue and on the way back he was arrested by French spies and sent to Hanoi. The plan to ask for aids from China and Japan thus failed.

In conclusion, the attempts of VNP to seek for association with other parties within and outside the country were unsuccessful. This failure was primarily because the contemporary revolutionary parties did not have proper and correct policies to unify and merge patriotic groups in the resistance to their common enemy, French imperialists.

As for VRYL, apart from common causes, it was due to its being affected by the Communist International in evaluating the political position of bourgeois in colonial nations. The *Resolution of the 6th Congress* and especially the decree titled “Missions of the Indochina communists” (Nhiệm vụ của những người cộng sản Đông Dương)<sup>12</sup> of Communist International issued on December, 1929 no longer considered native bourgeois a component of democratic and national

<sup>11</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng—Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), *Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup>See Hồng Thế Công, *Lược thảo lịch sử phong trào cộng sản Đông Dương* (A brief history of Indochina communist movements) (1933), (typed, belongs to Institute of Party’s history), pp. 53–55. In our opinion, this leftist approach of International Communist to Vietnamese and Indochinese bourgeois and petty bourgeois was due to the incomplete investigation and understanding of the political and historical conditions as well as the situation of social classes at that time. Also, the reactionary operation performed by Chinese Koumintang in Guangzhou Commune at the end of 1927 negatively affected the opinion and mindset of International Communist.

revolution. In the decree, the Communist International stated that: “*Native bourgeois are generally weak and associated with land ownership and landowners; moreover they are influenced by Chinese bourgeois and their reactionary ideas. A number of bourgeois are now conforming to French imperialism. Others are seeking a compromise with it. Needless to say, all bourgeois cannot overcome the limits of reformist nationalism, and as land reforms develop, they will soon join the reactionary side. However, it does not deny the possibility that several bourgeois would like to pioneer national movements. But they do so to disrupt the movements and betray revolution. We must base on the said facts to constitute our standpoint on bourgeois.*”

Moreover, the Communist International did not regard urban petty bourgeois (most of whom were members of VNP) as crucial members of the national and democratic revolution, as it only considered hired craftsmen, hawkers, and unemployed small intellectuals as the most revolutionary among urban bourgeois.

With the predominance of the said leftist policy employed by the Communist International Executive Committee, communist-affiliated organizations affected by international communist movements at that time such as VRYL and later NVRP failed to constitute a policy to ally with bourgeois in general, and thus had no intention to ally and cooperate with VNP.

Hồng Thế Công (Hà Huy Tập) himself, one of the leaders of Indochina Communist Party, wrote in his book *Lược thảo lịch sử phong trào cộng sản Đông Dương* (A brief history of Indochinese communist movements) that, in the first Congress of VRYL held in May 1929 in Hong Kong, it attempted to prevent the development of VNP, refused to organize an associated front against imperialists with VNP, and had no standpoint on reformist nationalism.

Due to the above reasons, until the Yen Bai uprising, VNP was still isolated from revolutionary organizations within and outside the country. As Director of the Sûreté Général Indochinoise, Loius Marty put it: “*In reality, VNP was cut off from other revolutionary groups in Indochina and until 1930 had no contact with other nationalist Annamese in foreign countries.*”<sup>13</sup>

## 4.2 Other Activities of Vietnam Nationalist Party

### 4.2.1 Propaganda and Training

Every organ of VNP from the General Committee to cells had a so-called Subcommittee of Propaganda. To perform propaganda, the VNP published *Revolutionary Soul* (Hồn Cách mạng) as its house organ. Additionally, the General

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<sup>13</sup>Louis Marty, “Góp phần nghiên cứu lịch sử chính trị Đông Dương thuộc Pháp” (A contribution to research on the political history of French—occupied Indochina), *Ibid.*, p. 102.

Committee established a Publishing Committee (Ban tu thư) responsible for composing and publishing books and newspapers for propaganda and training.

The office of *Revolutionary Soul* was situated at Son Tay Street (Hanoi) and its editor-in-chief was Nguyễn Thái Học, while Đoàn Trần Nghiệp (Ký Con) and five members in *Hanoi student league* (Hoc sinh đoàn Hà Nội) were responsible for its printing. However, it was not until February 1929 that the newspaper released its first issue, which was sparse in both content and appearance and had to be closed due to being disclosed. Since that time to the disintegration of VNP, no further issue was released.

The *Publishing Committee* did not create any notable activity, either. Initially, it was planned that this Committee would publish the first book of VNP named *Lịch sử Thế giới* (World History). But actually only *Cách mạng tiên thanh* composed by Nhượng Tổng (during his time working for Revolutionary Soul) was printed and distributed secretly. After Nhượng Tổng was denied reelection into the Second General Committee (July, 1928), the Publishing Committee automatically broke up.

In general, propaganda was not adequately addressed by the VNP during its existence. While VRYL and NVRP had methodical and meticulous propaganda programs, VNP had no official document or instrument to use for propaganda as well as to introduce its principles and programs of action. Little development and improvement of member training was made by VNP.

Not until 1929, in its competition for influence with VRYL and NVRP, did VNP first intend to develop its system of unions<sup>14</sup> and member training. The reason of this delay and ineptitude was because “*it overemphasized the principle of secrecy, which aimed to not disclose information from internal organization to name.*”<sup>15</sup> Though documents were used to extend membership and train members, their contents were not consistent and only demonstrated the particular conditions and context of a local area.

In Tonkin, VNP frequently utilized the newspaper *People’s voice* (Tiếng dân), Phan Bội Châu’s poems, books and newspapers of Tonkin Free School, etc., ... to spread patriotism and mobilize people to join the party. This method was relatively popular in Hai Duong and other localities belonging to Vinh Phuc and Phu Tho. But the party’s guiding principle and purposes were introduced rather insufficiently. Therefore, numerous members of VNP merely perceived its political doctrine as the Three Principles of Sun Yat Sen.

In Cochinchina, the lack of propaganda and training materials was even more severe. Thus, to train its members, VNP even had to borrow documents from VRYL. This was also an opportunity for the progressive members such as Trần Huy Liệu to perceive Marxist–Leninism and later follow communism and join the communist force.

<sup>14</sup>See *Vietnamese history*, (3rd volume), Ibid., p. 232.

<sup>15</sup>Tran Huy Lieu, Van Tao, *A reference on Vietnamese pre-modern revolutionary history*—5th volume, Ibid., p. 49.



In conclusion, during its existence, VNP had little concern for propaganda and training. Its General Committee never planned and opened any learning courses on its principle, programs of action, or training courses on military and armed revolution, etc. In some places, VNP did organize a little training and propaganda for its members, but the scale was only locally confined and limited.

These shortcomings in training and propaganda of VNP caused a number of members to commit careless and improper behaviors for being unaware of its guiding purpose, organizational and operating principle, especially the assassination of Bazin in February 1929 in Hanoi. Since this event to its collapse, VNP almost renounced training and propaganda in its political agendas.

### 4.2.2 *Financial Activities*

To lessen financial burdens, VNP employed various measures and methods such as:

- Opening businesses
- Party fee and fundraising
- Stealing from the rich

To realize these methods, on August 7, 1928, the General Committee of VNP in Hanoi decided to establish a Subcommittee of Finance and Economy led by Hoàng Văn Đào. With the help of Mai Du Lan (editor-in-chief of *Professional Popular*), Hoàng Văn Đào used a rented House no. 38 in Hang Bong, Hanoi (bordering Tam Thuong alley) of Thuan Thanh Ky as a small store for party fundraising. On December 30, 1928, this store was officially opened under the new name *Vietnam hotel*, specializing in selling breakfast and drinks. Most of the hotel staff were members of VNP. Apart from a business store to raise funds for the party, this location was used to hold regular covert meetings of the General Committee. The Vietnamese hotel operated until February 17, 1929, when it was closed by the French. However, during half a year of its operation, it lent a hand in solving the financial difficulties of VNP.

Also at this time, apart from *Vietnam hotel*, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu established in Bac Giang town a woven workshop for party members to work in and sell their productions to earn some money.

Although trying hard to ensure financial sources, until early 1929, VNP still had insufficient funds to finance its operations. The little profit from business operations, party fees, and donations were not adequate to assist its spending. To solve this problem, VNP initiated various racketeering activities targeted at rich people during the Tet Holiday of 1929. Most notable of these were the robbery of Thua Chuong family in Bac Giang town on 2nd Tet (February 11, 1929), the theft of Phu Hung store in Bac Ninh town on 4th of Tet (February 13, 1929), the racketeering of Hàn Tắc family in Nam Dinh city on 6th Tet (February 15, 1929). These activities helped to temporarily alleviate the financial activities, but new

difficulties soon arose. Apart from the assassination of Bazin, these robberies and racketeering activities directly led to a large-scale suppression of French colonialists to dismantle and eliminate VNP.

### ***4.2.3 The Assassination of Bazin (February 9, 1929) and Situation of Vietnam Nationalist Party Before the Suppression of French Colonialists***

During their colonial exploitation in Vietnam, since 1900, the French colonizers had planted and gathered rubber in Cochinchina on an increasingly larger scale. After the First World War (1914–1918), French capitalists increased their investment on agriculture, especially rubber business. The total area of rubber plantations in Cochinchina rose dramatically, from 33,000 ha in 1925 to 90,225 ha in 1929.<sup>16</sup>

The increase in both quality and quantity of rubber plantations in Indochina and other colonies of France led to a huge demand of human resources. To meet this demand, French capitalists increasingly advanced their labor conscription using scrupulous methods.

Apart from economic exploitation, the inhuman labor conscription of French colonizers caused the working class to be extremely distressed, generating fear as well as indignation among the people. At that time, in February 1929, the labor recruiter Bazin came to Hanoi for a new labor conscription period. On this occasion, VRYL issued a series of circulars urging the people to protest about the French policy of labor conscription. VNP took a unique course by directing Nguyễn Văn Viên (member of the Hanoi city chapter) to ask for permission from the General Committee to assassinate Bazin and drive away a future threat.

Although not receiving consent from the General Committee, Nguyễn Văn Viên decided to carry out the murder on his own. To prepare for this operation, Viên secretly inspected and knew that after his work in office Bazin usually went to the house of his lover named Germaine Carecelle (a mixed-blooded salesgirl working for Goda shop in Trang Tien) in no. 110, Hue Street. Additionally, Viên secretly trained handgun murder of Bazin and assigned this task to two members of VNP, namely Nguyen Van Lan and Nguyen Duc Lung.

On 30 Tet (February, 9, 1929), Viên together with Lan and Lung stationed themselves outside the house of Bazin's lover. At 12 PM, when Bazin was leaving from his lover's house, two gunshots were fired and killed him while the fireworks celebrating Tet holiday were spreading throughout Hanoi. Having finished their business, the murderers quickly fled and left no mark.

The assassination of Bazin generated big jubilation (j) among the people and also anxiety and anger among the colonial rulers. In response, the colonial

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<sup>16</sup>Tran Van Giau, Đinh Xuân Lam, Kieu Xuan Ba, *Lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Vietnamese Pre-Modern History), *Ibid.*, p. 12.

government decided to commence a large-scale campaign to eradicate revolutionary organizations. As for VNP, it immediately issued orders to arrest the party's leaders that had long been under inspection.<sup>17</sup>

To punish the culprits of the Bazin murder, the Governor General of Indochina Pasquier proposed a Decree to establish a Criminal Commission (Commission Criminelle) and since February 17, 1929, began a campaign to investigate and arrest leaders and members of VNP.

Immediately, several members in the VNP General Committee were captured by French colonialists in Hanoi. Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu fortunately escaped. Under brutal suppression of French colonialists, various cells that had been too covert in their operations and informed on by internal spies were largely dismantled. In Thai Binh, Hung Yen, Tuyen Quang, Bac Ninh, etc., the cells of VNP were almost exterminated.

In Cochinchina, the party's system also encountered severe attacks and suffered heavy losses. In June 1929, the Cochinchina Province Chapter was disrupted and Trần Huy Liệu along with other members was arrested. The loss notwithstanding, later the branch of VNP there was maintained for a while.

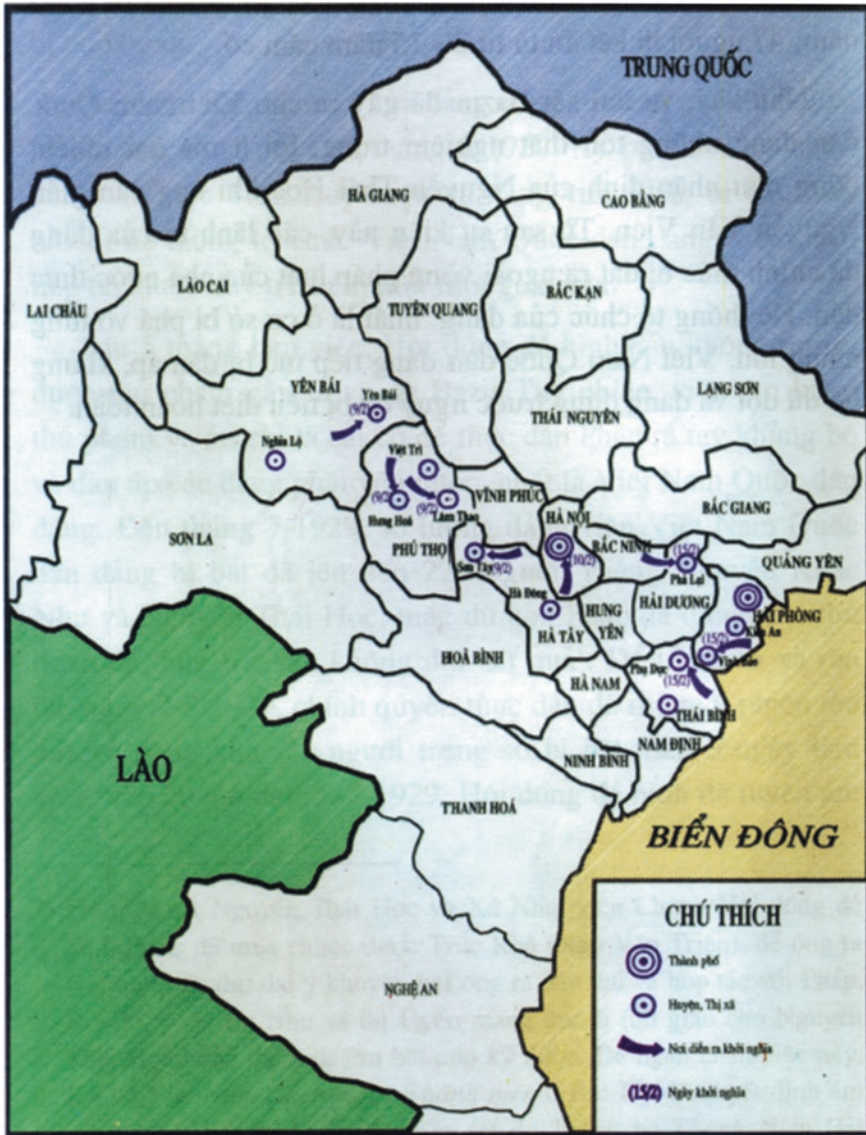
After 5 months, the Criminal Commission had not been able to find the culprits of the Bazin murder. However, the finding of criminals was only a guise over their terrorism and suppression of patriotic organizations, especially VNP. Until July 1929, the number of arrested members of VNP rose to 225. As for Nguyễn Khắc Nhu and Nguyễn Thái Học, despite countless attempts of the French to capture them, there was no result.<sup>18</sup> As deterrence, the colonial government opened a public trial of 73 among the arrested members. After 6 weeks, at 20 PM on July 8, 1929, the Commission issued its final judgments: 2 people were acquitted, 3 were sentenced in absentia (Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu who received 20 years of solitary confinement and Phó Đừc Chính who received 15 years); 26 received 2–5 years of suspended sentence, and 47 received 2–15 years of solitary confinement.

In conclusion, the Bazin assassination caused VNP serious losses, with advantages outweighing disadvantages, as Nguyễn Thái Học forecasted while

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<sup>17</sup>In fact, since the party's establishment, VNP's operations were kept under supervision of the French and quite a few spies infiltrated the party. In addition, several members betrayed the party later and became detectives of the French, as Nguyen Quoc Tuy who revealed to the spies after being deported to Cochinchina: "lately, my same—school comrade Nguyễn Thái Học invited me into a Secret Party whose purpose was to use violence to defeat the colonialists. In this Secret Party there are also Nhuong Tong and Pham Tuan Tai". According to Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng—Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), p. 52.

<sup>18</sup>To capture Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, the Chief of the Criminal Commission named Bride bribed Truc Khe (Ngo Van Vien) to write a letter asking for their surrender and cooperation with the French. Later, he asked Nhu and Uyen to bring this letter to Nguyễn Thái Học in an attempt to induce him. To prevent this, the Tonkin Region chapter of VRYL decided to assassinate Nhu and Uyen. This assassination was carried out by the Hai Phong Region chapter in May, 1929.



Map 4.1 Yen Bai Uprising (2/1930)

preventing Nguyễn Văn Viên from committing the act. After this event, the party's leaders officially became outlaws under colonial legal system. The party's organization, especially cells, was largely destroyed. VNP continued to suffer suppression and terrorism and was in danger of extermination (Map. 4.1).

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## Chapter 5

# The Yen Bai Uprising (February 1930) and the Failure of Vietnam Nationalist Party

The armed revolution of the Party in the Yen Bai and Tonkin provinces during the early 1930s has been the theme of this chapter. It happened in February, 1930, Yen Bai revolution was considered as a brilliant success of VNP in the liberation movement of Vietnam in the modern period. The content from the process of determining the policy, planning of action, preparing uprising, and listing events took place during the implementation of the revolt was interpreted and analyzed in detail. On this basis, the author cites the causes for the failure of VNP and described the suppressions of the French after the revolt. Besides that, this chapter also cites the division of thoughts within the VNP while facing challenges with the other revolutionary organizations before and after the uprising.

### 5.1 The Armed Revolution of Vietnam Nationalist Party in Yen Bai and Tonkin Provinces

#### 5.1.1 Policy and Plan for Armed Revolution

As a party adopting armed revolution as its main guiding approach, VNP favored “the use of force to restore independence for Vietnam”<sup>1</sup> until its disintegration. As its founders realized that “the colonizers were uncooperative”<sup>2</sup> they concluded that “going with peaceful revolution is like falling into the old blunder and failure.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lâm and Phong (1996).

<sup>2</sup>Tong (1949).

<sup>3</sup>Bach Dien, *Nguyễn Thái Học và Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng* (Nguyễn Thái Học and VNP), p. 15.

Upon this thinking, the whole history of VNP from its foundation to disintegration was a series of violent acts. They were not popular acts, but personal assassinations of which the Bazin murder (February, 1929) was most notable.

This assassination and severe containment of French colonizers targeted at VNP directly made its leaders to adopt the armed approach. In light of being completely wiped out, the party leaders, instead of consolidating its structure and waiting for opportunities, decided to evoke an armed uprising. In other words, after the Bazin assassination, the preparation for armed rising was embedded in the agenda of VNP.

Right after the French investigated, confined its members and destroyed its cells, VNP instructed by Nguyễn Thái Học organized an emergent General Committee conference to plan for next moves in the new context. Apart from matters requiring immediate implementation such as organizational consolidation, member recruitment and other changes in organization,<sup>4</sup> armed revolution was put forth by Nguyễn Thái Học in the agenda. He clearly analyzed the current situation: “*At the moment, our Party must quickly lead people to armed revolution. Any further delay according to our Party’s program would surely lead to us detained by the French and dying in prison and our party collapsing*”.<sup>5</sup> Others such as Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, Phó Đức Chính agreed with the armed approach in 1929. As for the plan, the General Committee would like to keep secret till last. In Hanoi, Phạm Thành Dương was entrusted with army preparation.

On December 17, 1929, VNP organized another national conference in Lạc Đạo (Cam Giang, Hải Dương) to discuss specific plans and courses for revolution. In the conference, heated debate occurred between the reformist<sup>6</sup> side and revolutionary side. Finally, all participants agreed on armed revolution.

After this conference, the preparation for armed revolution continued drastically. Unexpected developments resulting from the new context caused VNP to be in a dilemma and forced it to further instigate armed revolution.

Since the Lạc Đạo conference, the General Committee held quite a few other conferences to plan for the armed uprising. In a conference at Dục Hiep village (Thuan Thanh, Bắc Ninh), a program called *Plan for total offensive (Tổng công kích kế hoạch)* was issued. Accordingly, the revolution would be initiated nationwide, focusing on cities, and important destinations of the French army. The main members were primarily enlightened Vietnamese soldiers in the French army and supplementary force consisted of external party members. Weapons were

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<sup>4</sup>At the conference, VNP decided to recruit Su Trach (Nguyễn Văn Trach) into the General Committee.

<sup>5</sup>Hoàng Văn Đạo, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng – Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), pp. 62–63.

<sup>6</sup>The Reformist (also called Neutral) side led by Lê Hữu Cánh and Nguyễn Xuân Huan, proposed to delay revolution and buy time for membership mobilization and party consolidation. However, this approach was overwhelmed by the violent side led by Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu. As a result, the violent approach was approved without any discussion. See: *Vietnamese history (3rd volume)*, Ibid, p. 194.

mainly stolen from the enemies and some were improvised primitive equipments. Also according to this program, the substance of military flags and uniforms was defined: military flags comprised two colors namely red (symbolizing the struggle) and yellow (symbolizing the nation); uniforms consisted of yellow khaki drills, headgears, rubber shoes and yellow ribbons worn around the right arm and in scripted *The army of VNP*.<sup>7</sup> To help promote the revolution, the General Committee emphasized: the emergent activity was to stir widespread propaganda among Vietnamese soldiers working in the French army and built more grenade manufacturers.

Afterward, in response to severe repression that could lead to the official disintegration of the party, on January 26, 1930, Nguyễn Thái Học again called for an emergent national conference in My Xa village (Nam Sach, Hai Duong). In this conference, Nguyễn Thái Học argued that revolution had to be instigated as soon as possible. He said: *“It is said that one should have the upper—hand in battle, but we are now in a disadvantaged position! And yet, can we further delay the struggle to reorganize ourselves? I believe no! Life is a gamble, and if the gamble does not go one’s way he loses all money. If time is not on our side, our Party may lose all members...but we are willing to sacrifice as an example for later generations. If we are not successful then at least a deed is done.”*<sup>8</sup>

Locations and plans of the revolution are as follow:

- The Yen Bai zone directed by Nguyễn Văn Khôi (Thanh Giang).
- The Son Tay zone directed by Phó Đức Chính.
- The Hung Hoa, Lam Thaozone directed by Nguyễn Khắc Nhu.
- The Pha Lai, Hai Duong zone directed by Nguyễn Thái Học and Trần Quang Diệu, Nguyễn Văn Tuyên and Phạm Bá Phổ were deputy commanders.
- The Hai Phong, Kien An zones directed by Vũ Văn Giáp (Vũ Hồng Khanh).
- The Hanoi zone directed by Đoàn Trần Nghiệp (Ký Con).

Also, the conference issued 10 martial laws before revolution.

After My Xa conference, Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu and Phó Đức Chính held another meeting in the mountainous area of Yen Tu (Quan Yen) to allocate responsibilities for supervision in mountainous and plain areas. As planned, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu was responsible for revolution in mountainous areas and Nguyễn Thái Học directed the revolution in plain areas. The starting date was set on February 9, 1930.

Thus, armed struggle was a foreseeable consequence and was equivalent with the revolutionary violent approach of VNP. However, taking the overall agenda of VNP into consideration, the revolution was desperate. For one thing, at this time, VNP had not completed its first phase (popular mobilization). Moreover, due to

<sup>7</sup>*Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2 – 1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), Ibid, pp. 54–55.

<sup>8</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng – Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), pp. 90–91.



the French suppression after the Bazin assassination, VNP was actually in danger of complete destruction. In other words, the intent to kick off revolution came up in a confused situation and was not based on sound conditions and timing. The party leaders recognized this problem at the beginning but their recklessness, negligence plus the idea of “assassinate to gain victory” led them to take the final “gamble” at the expense of death. The failures of VNP from this point resulted directly from this mistake.

## ***5.1.2 The Preparation for Revolution***

### **5.1.2.1 Force Mobilization**

The success of a revolution depends not only on time and timing but also thorough force mobilization. As for VNP, following the assassination of Bazin, the first and foremost task was to restore and develop its organization in local areas.

Soon recognizing the importance of Yen Bai—a significant location in mountainous areas—VNP instructed 3 female members, Nguyễn Thị Giang, Nguyễn Thị Bắc, and Do Thi Tam to get there and develop party cells.

Accordingly, Nguyễn Thị Giang and Nguyễn Thị Bắc found a way to contact with the red-belt soldiers. Until June, 1929, VNP successfully organized a cell in “the female barrack” of the red-belt soldiers post in Yen Bai with around 5–6 party members (including Đội Trinh, Cai Hoàng, Cai Thuyết, and Quân Cầm, etc...) and dozens of party sympathizers. Together they formed a multi-regiment of Yen Bai. It was the only cell of VNP there.

In Phu Tho, following the order of General Committee, Nguyễn Như Liên went from Cao Maito Xuan Lung (Lam Thao) in June 1929 to promote and establish a few cells there, consisting of totally 20 members.<sup>9</sup> Other cells of VNP in Phu Tho were restored and developed until the number of members rose to 200.

In Son Tay, to prepare for armed struggle, VNP’s cells actively arranged their armies and weapons. Thua Lenh village (Bat Batdistrict), where there was a famous plough-making center, was designated as a place to produce grenades and swords. The mission of propaganda received more attention, especially when the branch of VNP there had recruited some corporals and soldiers among the army stationed in Chua Thong, Son Loc.<sup>10</sup>

The attempts of VNP in recovering and developing its cells in Hai Duong also offered certain results. In Chi Linh, after being admitted into the General Committee, Su Trach returned to Dap Khe (Nhan Hue) and contacted Bang Lich to develop a new party cell in March 1929. Later, he communicated with Bep Nhan (Nguyễn Văn Nhận) to establish a cell within the Pha Lai military post.

<sup>9</sup>According to Dao Van Nho (Xuan Lung commune), former member of VNP.

<sup>10</sup>Ha Tay Provincial Party Committee (1992).

In Hai Phong, until 1929, especially after the Bazin murder, due to the brutal suppression of French colonialists and betrayal of Nguyễn Văn Ngọc, various cells of VNP were destroyed. In this context, the VNP's branch in Hai Phong changed its destination for cell development and member mobilization to rural areas, primarily Kien An (now Kien An district, Hai Phong) and Vinh Bao district (then belonged to Hai Duong).

On May 1929, VNP began to develop its cells in Kien An (then a province). The first cell was built in Kha Lam village and Nguyễn Phúc Hội (Vice President of General Committee) was its General Secretary. Until before February 15, 1930, VNP had established 10 cells with 50 party members, including 4 cells in the Kien An barrack, 6 cells in the hamlets of Dong Xa, Phong Cau, Vang Xa, My Duc, Van Dau, Kha Lam, etc...<sup>11</sup> Based on these 10 cells, the Province Chapter in Kien An was formed, and Vũ Hồng Khanh was its president.

Meanwhile, in other areas within Kien An, Hai Phong, the party's cell organization was restructured to some extent. In Kien Thuy district, VNP developed its cells in Dai Dong, Dong Phuong, and Phan Dung. In Thuy Nguyen district, there were party cells in Duong Dong, Minh Tan, Thuy Tu, Thuy Duong, Cau Tu, etc.... Until before the revolution day (February 15, 1930), the members of VNP in Kien An rose to around 100 people,<sup>12</sup> who were primarily village authorities, landlords, middle, and rich farmers.

Especially, in Vinh Bao district, after the Bazin assassination (February, 1929), VNP made considerable developments in its cell enlargement. From a cell in Co Am village, in autumn 1929, it established a number of other cells in Tiem Am, Kim Ngan, Nam Ta, and Diem Nien. There the membership of VNP progressed quite dramatically with 40 members in total.

Through its cell recovery and development, VNP found more positive conditions to conduct a foreseen armed revolution.

### 5.1.2.2 The Incidents During Preparation Phase

While its cell recovery and development and force mobilization achieved great results, new incidents erupted within the Party. One of the causes was because the treachery of a few leading and higher members during its preparing stage. Most prominent among the traitors were Bùi Tiến Mai, Nguyen Văn Kinh, Nguyễn Văn Ngọc and Phạm Thành Dương and his son.

According to Trần Huy Liệu, Bùi Tiến Mai was a French spy who crept into the internal of VNP. By various cunning schemes, he worked himself up to the General Committee. After the Bazin murder, he informed the French on a few

<sup>11</sup>Đề cương lịch sử Kien An (Outline of Kien An's history) (Department of Propaganda and Training of Hai Phong Provincial Party Committee).

<sup>12</sup>(Memoir of Nguyen Van Uoc, Vinh) (Handwritten document of Department of Propaganda and Training of Hai Phong Provincial Party Committee).

members of the General Committee. He was also responsible for the disruption of most of VNP's cells in Thai Binh and these cells could no longer be restored. In return, the French colonialists appointed him Ministry Clerk in the Residence of Thai Binh Provincial Governor. The revolutionary tribunal of VNP chaired by Nguyễn Khắc Nhu sentenced Bùi Tiến Maito death, his execution was given to Nguyen Tam Tinh but he later failed to carry it out.

The treason of Nguyễn Văn Kinh also caused huge damages to VNP. In June 1926, during the post-Bazin suppression of the French, Kinh was captured and induced. According to him, the French spies inspected a few cells to find Nguyễn Thái Học but failed. After released, Kinh told the French spies of the hideouts of Nguyễn Tiến Nguyên (Lieu Ngan village, Bac Ninh) and Nguyễn Tấn Lộc (Co Phapvillage, Bat Bat, Son Tay) as well as the 9 house in Thanh Giam Street (Hanoi), one of the headquarters of General Committee. Although Nguyễn Thái Học escaped, other important members such as Nguyễn Văn Viên (who conducted the Bazin assassination), Nguyễn Văn Viên, Phó Đức Chính, and Giao Lai were arrested, causing massive losses to the party and greatly hampering the upcoming revolution. After investigation, Xứ Nhu issued a death penalty on Nguyễn Văn Kinh. The execution was performed by Ký Con (Đoàn Trần Nghiệp) and Nguyen Duc Chinh in Bach Thao botanical garden (Hanoi), stirring domestic sentiment.

In Hai Phong, Nguyễn Văn Ngọc who was a former member of the Military Subcommittee of VNP in Hai Phong betrayed the party. He informed the spies on the politico-military conference of General Committee held on December 7, 1929 at the 9 house of Cau Dat Street. As a result, most of the participants were arrested, including Nguyen Chi Chu—a Secretary of the Province Chapter there.<sup>13</sup>

Among the incidents occurring from post-Bazin period to before Yen Bai uprising, the betrayal of Phạm Thành Dương caused most severe damages for VNP. In the early 1928, Dương was recruited into party by Nguyễn Thái Học after he arrived to the military post of Chua Thong (Son Tay) from Vong La to develop party cells. In 1929, Dương moved to Bach Mai airfield and was appointed chief of the military affairs subcommittee directly responsible for the army in Hanoi. During that time, Dương was able to develop a large number of cells for VNP through Vietnamese soldiers working for French army. During the emergent conference of the general committee after the first suppression by French colonialists, to prepare for the uprising, he was entrusted by the general committee as military chief in Hanoi. Apparently, Phạm Thành Dương was assigned quite a number of responsibilities in war preparation, and he had a particularly strong association with some Vietnamese soldiers in the French army who were members of VNP.

Thus at the end of 1929, Phạm Thành Dương betrayed VNP and became a minion of France. He paved way for the spies to destroy a grenade manufacturer of

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<sup>13</sup>Later, during their imprisonment in Hai Phong prison, Nguyen Chi Chu and Pham Van Tinh beat Ngọc to death. This additional crime caused them to receive death penalty from the French, and they were executed before Hai Phong prison on February 12th, 1931. (The 22nd issue dated February 12th and 13th, 1931 of Thời báo detailed this event thoroughly).

VNP in the 7th Bis, Vinh Ho (Hanoi), and then led them to Dien Khi hill, Thai Ha hamlet where they found 700 grenades that VNP would use to attack Bach Mai airfield after its uprising in Hanoi. On December 25, 1929, Duong led a few soldiers to Vong La with the hope of catching Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu and Phó Đức Chính but could not find them. For these serious misconducts, the VNP revolutionary tribunal announced capital punishment for Phạm Thành Dương and his son.

Apart from being informed on and betrayed by a number of corrupted members, VNP also performed its revolutionary preparation rather covertly, causing it to be discovered and various cells dismantled by the French. After the emergent General Committee conference, and especially Lac Dao conference (December 17, 1929), war preparation was boosted in everywhere. Concrete grenade manufacturers were built quickly; thousands of grenades and numerous swords and scimitars were produced and stroked in the most secret places to be used for war. Flags and uniforms were made swiftly. Thousands of circulars and proclamations were printed with agar in Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Hai Duong, etc.

While revolutionary preparation was developing, various incidents continually occurred. On September 3, 1929, due to shortcomings in production, a number of grenades exploded in the house of Luong Van Tram in My Dien village (Bac Ninh) causing the death of 3 party members and exposed this manufacturer to the French. Next, on November 20, 1929, the French discovered 150 grenades hoarded by VNP in Phao Tan village (Chi Linh, Hai Duong). Later, numerous grenade manufacturers and storages of weapons and circulars used for revolution were discovered and dismantled by the French such as in Noi Viem village (Bac Ninh), Kha Lam village (Kien An), and others.

The above incidents and betrayal of several party members, especially that of Phạm Thành Dương further erased many party cells, most severely of which were the cells that Duong had directly nurtured and formed. These irreversible damages put VNP at the risk of being completely destroyed, and forced it to commence revolution when the time was not ripe. This happened as Nguyễn Thái Học concluded at the My Xa conference (January 26, 1930): “*We start revolution with steel and blood; we have always used military as the main instrument. Now Phạm Thành Dương has betrayed us, our main force has been damaged largely. Other members and various stockpiles of weapons have been caught by the enemies. If we do not act at once, all remaining members and arms will be eliminated by enemies. Until then, how can a few of our weakened and disorganized soldiers using corrupted grenades and broken weapons battle a disciplined, fully trained and thoroughly armed army?*”<sup>14</sup>

After this conference, the plan for revolution was officially approved; its starting date was set at the night of February 9, 1930. However, after some considerations, Nguyễn Thái Học thought that given the current strength, revolution in the lowland areas could not be commenced on that date. Therefore, he decided

<sup>14</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng – Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), p. 90.

Tô Chấn get it to February 13 and later to February 15, and instructed a man to inform Nguyễn Khắc Nhu (responsible for revolution in upland areas), but this man was captured by French colonialists, so the change was unknown to Nguyễn Khắc Nhu. Thus, in reality the uprisings of VNP occurred without a common starting date. This sabotaged the plan to unite localities in revolution, and also paved way for the French to make preventive methods and increase their vigilance.

### ***5.1.3 Developments and Results***

#### **5.1.3.1 Uprisings in Yen Bai, Hung Hoa (Lam Thao, Phu Tho), Son Tay (February 10, 1930)**

According to general plan, the uprising supervision in these areas was given to Nguyễn Văn Khôi (Thanh Giang), Nguyễn Khắc Nhu (Xứ Nhu) and Phó Đức Chính, and Xứ Nhu was the chief commander. VNP aimed to attack the Yen Bai military post, Hung Hoa and Lam Thao palace. In these places, every preparation was thoroughly prepared in advanced. Party cells in the areas surrounding Thao river and Da river such as Vong La, Xuan Lung, La Hao, Son Duong, Cao Mai, Kinh Ke had already produced arms, designed uniforms, and released announcements, etc., to be set out for revolution.

On February 2, 1930, Xứ Nhu held a conference in Son Tay to discuss about the specific revolutionary plan. According to this plan, all party members of VNP in Xuan Lung village (Lam Thao) would join Nguyễn Văn Khôi and a female group in Son Duong (Lam Thao) to contact the Yen Bai army and commence revolution there.

The forces in Cao Mai, Chu Hoa, Son Duong, Phung Nguyen, and Kinh Ke would attack Lam Thao palace. The remaining forces in Vong La, La Hao, and Ha Bi were divided into two groups: one group would cross Da River to Son Tay and collaborate with Phó Đức Chính to attack Chua Thong military post; the other would cooperate with Xứ Nhu to attack Hung Hoa military post. The time for simultaneous attacks was set at 1 o'clock in the morning on February 10, 1930.

Accordingly, on February 8, 1930, the regiment assaulting Yen Bai led by Bui Tu Toan was set in motion and assembled around Yen Bai military post safe and sound in the afternoon of February 9, 1930. On February 9, 1930, Xứ Nhu held a meeting with other officers who were directly in charge of the attack on Hung Hoa, Lam Thao at the residence of Đỗ Thúylin Son Duong village to make a final plan review. Accordingly, Pham Nhan commanded the force assaulting Lam Thao palace, while Xứ Nhu himself took charge of the attack on Hung Hoa military post.

Under common direction, the uprisings of VNP in midland areas concurrently erupted in the early morning of February 10, 1930 in Yen Bai, Lam Thao, and Hung Hoa.

– *Revolution in Yen Bai:*

Lying close to China—Vietnam border—Yen Bai was an important strategic location. Thus, this was one of the first zones to be chosen as revolutionary battlefields by VNP. After a rapid preparation process, on February 9, 1930, the most of the conditions for revolution had been completed. Quan Cam was initially given the responsibility to command the attack on Yen Bai,<sup>15</sup> but before the outbreak he suddenly got ill so the leaders of VNP appointed Tran Van Lieu and Nguyễn Văn Khôi (who got little understanding of military and mobilization) as direct commanders.

As for the French, their defense in Yen Bai was rather fragile (only 600 soldiers), apart from some green-belt soldiers; there were four groups of red-belt soldiers under the command of Le Tacon. These soldiers were stationed at two posts: the higher post and lower post. However, by forecasting the general plan of VNP as well as the time and arrangement of Yen Bai uprising, they were able to maintain vigilance.

As planned, at 1 a.m. on February 10, 1930, under the leadership of Nguyễn Văn Khôi and Ngo Hai Hoang, the revolutionary army made their first assault on Yen Bai military post. As agreed, the army was split into three groups. The first group was tasked with attacking the lower post, killing all French officers and capturing its arms stockpile. Second group was ordered to assault the higher post and third group was ordered to knock straight into the residences of French officers and non-commissioned officers.

Due to hasty preparation in all areas and preventive defense of the French, the revolution did not occur as expected by the leaders. After some fighting, the revolutionary army rapidly took over the lower post and its arms stockpile, killed, and wounded a few French officers and non-commissioned officers, but was not able to capture the higher post as the French commanded by Lieutenant Colonel—Commander Ta con had made preliminary defense and consolidation. Additionally, although the green soldiers in the next post were persuaded and promised to support the revolution, as there was no supervises they followed the French commanders to fire at the revolutionary army after some reluctance and hesitation.

Unable to occupy the higher post, the revolutionary army split themselves up to capture the train station and some institutions in Yen Bai chef lieu such as the General Post Office, the barracks of the French Foreign Legion soldiers, and transferred weapons to the people to ask for their support for the revolution. However, since VNP did not gain a foothold within the people, its calling received almost no support from them.

The advance of the revolutionary army was halted. Unable to mobilize soldiers and received no advocacy from the people, it was completely isolated. In

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<sup>15</sup>According to the general plan, the Yen Bai uprising was directed by Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, but according to French documents it was led by Quan Cam. Another document stated that the riot in Yen Bai was led by Phó Đức Chính, and the Yen Bai battle itself was led by Ngo Hai Hoang (Cai Hoang). See: *Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2 – 1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), Ibid, p. 98. (Note by Editors).

this context, everyone became scared and nervous, and the morale of the soldiers declined significantly. Commanders such as Nguyễn Văn Khôi and Trần Văn Liên one by one retreated and escaped. A number of active soldiers lacking leadership could do no more than firing frantically at the enemy's post. After a while, the army became chaotic, disorganized, and quickly broke up.

After the outbreak of this revolution, the Yen Bai Resident came to Department of Public Works then to the train station to send a telegraph to Hanoi. At 8 a.m. on February 10, 1930, supported by airplanes coming from Hanoi, the remaining French army and soldiers of the foreign legion made a strong counter-attack. As the morale of the revolutionary army had been already weakened, the enemy's counter-attack met no resistance. The lower post was quickly restored. The remaining revolutionary soldiers at the barrack were confined, some were shot on the spot, and Yen Bai town once again was returned to France. The uprising of VNP, there was entirely crushed.

– *Revolutions in Hung Hoa, Lam Thao(Phu Tho) and the Chua Thong military post (Son Tay)*

In Lam Thao, in the night of February 9, 1930, the revolutionary army gathered at Nguyễn Như Liên's house in Cao Mai village. At around 2 a.m. on February 10th, 1930, a regiment commanded by Pham Nhan attacked the royal palace with grenades and got into it. On the verge of disorder, the palace official Do Kim Ngoc escaped. The revolutionary army quickly captured the royal palace and made fire signals to inform Xứ Nhu, waiting to rendezvous with his army after he had occupied Hung Hoa military post.

Meanwhile, from Son Duong, the revolutionary army followed Nguyễn Khắc Nhu's direct control to cross Kinh Ke and attacked Hung Hoa military post. But as the fifth column inside was discharged to another place, the assault was met with difficulties. Until 4 a.m. on February 10, 1930, recognizing that he could no longer prolong, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu had to withdraw and meet with the branch of Pham Nhan to capture Lam Thao.

In the morning of February 10, 1930, the Phu Tho Deputy Resident, Chevuet, having received urgent information, directly led an army from the province to cooperate with the armed forces in Hung Hoa military post and suppress the revolutionary army in Lam Thao. When the French army came, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu ordered his men to strike back intensely. However, due to the disparity between the two armies most of the revolutionary army quickly dissipated. Some died, others were captured.

Nguyễn Khắc Nhu was sternly wounded and later imprisoned in Hung Hoa jail. There, on February 11, 1930, he slammed his head on the iron wood floor to kill himself honorably. The uprising of VNP in Hung Hoa, Lam Thao utterly failed.

In Son Tay, the attack on Chua Thong military post of VNP was also lost. Due to some treachery, the revolution plan was discovered and the French confiscated all weapons of the red-belt soldiers and prearranged strong defense at night on February 9, 1930. Meanwhile, the external force led by Phó Đức Chính had ambushed outside the post. Until morning when no signal from within was shown,

Phó Đức Chính knew the plan had failed and immediately ordered withdrawal. On February 10, 1930 when morning came, the French began to search hectically and on February 12, Phó Đức Chính was captured at the house of Quan Trang (Lam Man Commune, Son Tay). Thus, the revolution of VNP in Son Tay actually did not erupt.

### 5.1.3.2 Uprisings in Hai Duong, Hai Phong and Thai Binh (February 15, 1930)

As mentioned, in My Xa conference (Nam Sach, Hai Duong), the starting date of nationwide revolution was set as February 9, 1930. However, due to a few changes in the end Nguyễn Thái Học decided to choose another date. As a result, in reality while the revolution in mountainous areas erupted on February 10, 1930 and astounded the public on later days, in plain areas, did not occur until the early morning of February 15, 1930 (please use exact idea if it did or did not happen—specific areas) in Hai Duong, Hai Phong, Thai Binh, and other areas.

According to the general plan, Hai Phong city would be a center of Tonkin revolution, because there lay a large port of strategic importance in Tonkin. To occupy Hai Phong, the revolutionary army had to mobilize a large army there. Thus, the revolutions in adjacent areas such as Hai Duong, Thai Binh, and Kien An “were but parts of the overall military scheme for revolution in Tonkin led by Nguyễn Thái Học”.<sup>16</sup> Accordingly, the revolutionary armies in the areas of Phu Duc (Thai Binh) and Vinh Bao (Hai Phong) would commence simultaneous attacks on these districts and would then together assault the Ninh Giang post (Ninh Giang town, Hai Duong). Meanwhile, the force in Hai Duong would attack Hai Duong chef lieu and Pha Lai military post. After capturing these places, all armies would rendezvous and collaborate with the force in Kien An to attack Hai Phong.

Accordingly, during the night of the 14 and early morning of 15 of February 1930, the armies of VNP concurrently initiated their attacks in the said areas.

#### – *Revolution in Hai Duong:*

In Pha Lai—Hai Duong—the revolutionary force was directly led by Nguyễn Thái Học. After VNP commenced revolution in Yen Bai, the French army in Hai Duong continuously made preventive actions against the uprising they knew would erupt. On February 11, 1930, the Hai Duong commanding officer of provincial garrison led his soldiers to besiege My Xa village (Nam Sach), and on February 12 surrounded Hung Thang village (Minh Tan commune, Nam Sach) to capture Nguyễn Thái Học once and for all. After escaping from the enemy’s encircling, on March 13, 1930, Nguyễn Thái Học returned to Kim Lang village (now in Thanh Lang

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<sup>16</sup>Tran Huy Lieu, Van Tao, *A reference on Vietnamese pre-modern revolutionary history*—5th volume, Ibid, p. 77.



commune, Thanh Ha district, Hai Duong) to discuss about the attack on Pha Lai (Chi Linh). Hence, the army assaulting Pha Lai consisted of VNP's party members in Hai Duong and Bac Ninh.

During the night of February 14, 1930, the revolutionary army in Kim Lang consisting of 150 soldiers crossed the waters of Van Uc River and Thai Binh River, and finally reached Pha Lai. At the same night, party members in the cells of Hùng Thắng, My Xa (Nam Sach) also set out to transport two arms ships (including concrete grenades, guns, and swords) to support the mentioned army. The party members in Phao Tân, Phao Son and Dap Khe cells were also ready and would attack Hai Duong chef lieu when ordered.

But when the revolutionary forces in different areas came close to Pha Lai, Nguyễn Thái Học and his staff ordered them to stop because the plan was exposed. The French had captured all party members within the post and rallied two more regiments of foreign legion soldiers in Pha Lai. Therefore, when the revolutionary army from Kim Lang came to Nau Khe (which was 1 km south of Pha Lai) it was instructed to turn back. The two arms ships having got close to Tru Thon village (Kenh Giang commune, Chi Linh) also received order to withdraw. Nguyễn Thái Học called his soldiers to disband and allowed them to attack the district palaces at will. Thus, the revolution in Pha Lai, Hai Duong did not develop as planned by VNP.

– *Revolutions in Phu Duc(Thai Binh) and Vinh Bao (Hai Duong)*

According to the agreed plan, the forces of VNP in these two areas would simultaneously attack the towns of Vinh Bao town and Phu Duc, then collaborate with the army in Kien An to attack Ninh Giang post, Hai Duong chef lieu and Hai Phong city.

In Vinh Bao, under the leadership of Trang Quang Dieu, an army branch attacked the district on February 15, 1930, captured and murdered the evil district Chief Hoang Gia Mo. But later, the army automatically disintegrated without extending its assault to Ninh Giang post as according to the initial plan.<sup>17</sup>

At the same time, in Phu Duc,<sup>18</sup> the army led by Dao Van Khe also launched its attack on the district palace. Having anticipated this assault, all the mandarins there had escaped, leaving behind a few palace guards. The revolutionary army

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<sup>17</sup>According to Tran Huy Lieu, Van Tao, *A reference on Vietnamese pre-modern revolutionary history*—5th volume. According to another document: After knowing that the Yen Bai uprising was lost, the Kien An group of VNP sent a letter requesting for the delay of riots in Vinh Bao and Phu Duc. But as the messenger as captured, this request was distorted by the French as continuing the riots. Thus, at night on February 17th, 1930, the VNP's members in Vinh Bao instigated riots in an attempt to occupy local governments, but they were all arrested by the French. See: *Lịch sử Đảng bộ huyện Quỳnh Phụ 1927–1954 (sơ thảo)* (History of the Party Committee of Quỳnh Phụ district 1927–1954 (draft)), Thái Bình, 1992.

<sup>18</sup>The Party Executive Committee of Quỳnh Phụ district, *Lịch sử Đảng bộ huyện Quỳnh Phụ 1927–1954 (sơ thảo)* (History of the Party Committee of Quỳnh Phụ district 1927–1954 (draft)), Thái Bình, 1992, p. 38.

occupied the town without any difficulty, confiscated six guns, and retreated quickly after burning all documents and archives. Afterward, similar to the army in Vinh Bao, it broke up automatically.

Thus, in reality the revolution of VNP in Vinh Bao, Phu Duc broke out and was victorious. But these victories could only help alleviate the hostility toward feudal mandarins and raise the revolutionary spirit among people, without causing sufficient damages to the French. Due to the hindrance or failure of operations in other areas, after accomplishing their missions, the two armies in these areas could do no more than automatically disintegrate. The original plan for different armies to collaborate and attack Hai Phong was also ruined.

– *Revolution in Kien An (Hai Phong)*

In My Xa conference (January 26, 1930), the person charged with commanding the revolution in Kien An, Hai Phong was Vũ Văn Giảng (Vũ Hồng Khanh). After this conference, Vũ Hồng Khanh immediately returned to Kien An and held a meeting between members of VNP party cells in Kien An, Hai Phong at the house of Ky Hieu (Dong Phuong) to discuss the revolution. According to the party's status in these areas, the conference decided to discard the revolution in Hai Phong because the enemies were still strong, while the party had lost considerable men after previous incidents. After some consideration, given that VNP still retained a few cells within the red-belt soldiers' barracks and a decent number of cell party members in only Kien An. The conference decided to instigate a struggle there. The whole remaining force in Hai Phong would be mobilized, and together with the army in Kien An, would attack Kien An chef lieu on February 15, 1930. To be more certain, after the conference, Vũ Hồng Khanh sent his men to mobilize party members in Mao Khe mine to join in.<sup>19</sup> When the revolution day was coming close, Vũ Hồng Khanh held another meeting in the area of Ha Ly to devise a specific plan. According to this plan, the local forces in the cells of Phong Cau, Dong Tai, Vong Xa, My Duc, and Kha Lam led by Nguyễn Phúc Hội would join other local armies (including 30 party members who were workers in Mao Khe mine, the party members in Ha Ly party cell (An Hai, Hai Phong) and the student death squad in Hai Phong) and coordinate with another cell from within to quickly occupy the red-belt soldiers barracks, and then absorb the whole Kien An chef lieu.

As a result, during the night of February 15th, 1930, the VNP forces in Mao Khe and Hai Phong (around 80 members) secretly voyaged from Ha Ly to Kien An under the command of Nguyen Van Dai. They crossed Lach Tray river to reach Kien An and stationed themselves there, waiting for signal from the Kien An force.

Unfortunately, an astonishing event happened before the revolution day, as a member of VNP betrayed the party and confessed to the Kien An Resident about the plan, causing it to be revealed. At the red-belt soldiers barrack, the enemies secretly arrested all members of VNP, augmented their town guards, and designed ambush in Quan Tru to trap the revolutionary army from Hai Phong.

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<sup>19</sup>According to Nguyen Van Dai (Dong Quangstreet, Hai Duongcity), former member of VNP at Mao Khemine (Quang Ninh).

Consequently, the liaison officer of VNP from Kien An was captured on the spot upon his arrival in Quan Tru. The Hai Phong force waited so long for signal that it did not dare to advance and later automatically broke up.

Meanwhile in Kien An, the local force surrounding the red-belt soldiers barracks did not make any move, as the members within this barrack showed no movement (as they had been arrested). In early morning, this force also disbanded involuntarily. Thus, the plan of VNP to attack Kien An was sabotaged and the revolution did not happen.

### 5.1.3.3 Armed Violence in Hanoi (February 10th, 1930)

In My Xa conference, the leaders of VNP, after considering overall situation, decided to cancel the revolution in Hanoi because its force there was fragile and shattered after the betrayal of Phạm Thành Dương. Thus, the conference assigned Ký Con (Đoàn Trần Nghiệp) to command a death squad in Hanoi to divert the French and buy time for revolutions in other places.

On February 10, 1930, Ký Con ordered the bombings of a few enemy's departments such as the *Sûreté general* (Security Department), the Police Department and Hoa Lo Prison, using five death squad members, including Nguyen Minh Luan, Nguyen Ba Tan, Nguyen Quang Tran (all were students of the Hanoi School of Engineering) and Ký Con. Technically, these bombings did not result in significant damages to the French colonialists, but they upheld the spirit of Hanoi's people, and forced the French to be more wary.

In February 9 and until after February 15, 1930, VNP carried out individual armed struggles in a few Tonkin areas, which were unanimously called the Yen Bai uprising in history. Due to different reasons, actions in some places were not started and those that took place were brought to failure.

The loss of the Yen Bai uprising in particular and the general revolution of VNP in general resulted from different sources.

First, externally speaking the international capitalism at that time was steady. The world economic crisis starting in early 1929 was not able to weaken and deteriorate international capitalism. In Vietnam and Indochina, the French colonial government and rule had been greatly strengthened after two periods of economic exploitation and colonial development. In other words, our enemies, the French colonialists were still strong. On the contrary, the revolutionary force had not been fully stabilized and enlightened to be ready for revolution. Thus, the Yen Bai uprising erupted when time was not yet ripe, as enemies were still sturdy while revolutionary force was unprepared. In this light, the instigation of revolution was not proper and failure was expected.

But the main reason behind this failure originated from within VNP and the revolutionary force. As mentioned, VNP was a representative of national bourgeois, but the majority of its main members were petty bourgeois intellectuals. During its existence, the party did not issue a consistent and steady political principle; its cells were only developed in Tonkin and a few areas in Annam and

Cochinchina. Its weakness led to the widespread disruption and eradication of its cells by the French suppression and terrorism after the Bazin assassination in the early 1929. Under that very circumstance, the party leaders decided to commence revolution with their motto “if victory cannot be achieved, then at least a deed will be created” and “if we die at least the world knows that nationalism is still alive.” It meant that despite committing to revolution, the leaders had already submitted themselves to failure and pessimism.

Bearing such an idea, the party leaders were not confident, calm, optimistic, and lucid enough to perform the party mobilization and consolidation and prepare necessary conditions for successful revolution.

Moreover, the uprising did not receive popular support and contribution from the people. VNP committed to drive away the French and restore independence, but did not intend to eradicate landlords and return lands for farmers. Additionally, while actively recruiting, mobilizing, and enlisting village authorities, petty bourgeois and even soldiers within the French army, VNP did not have any policy to respond to the needs and desires of farmers and workers—the main ingredients of national revolution. There were few party cells of VNP among farmers and workers. In their revolutions, the armed forces of VNP were isolated without the backing and advocacy from people.

Other causes include the immaturity and error of the revolutionary armies in Yen Bai and other places. Apart from the fragile and inadequately trained and unequipped armies, the political level and leading capacity of their leaders were weak and undeveloped. This was demonstrated clearly in the arms preparation and directing revolutions in Yen Bai, Hung Hoa, Lam Thao, Vinh Bao, and Phu Duc. One of the most vital principles when conducting revolutions was that the revolutionary armies must be constantly progressing. On the contrary, the Yen Bai uprising was ceased after some initial attacks due to the lack of support from soldiers and people, causing the revolutionary armies to disintegrate automatically even before the enemies made any counter-attack.

As a result, the failure of Yen Bai uprising and the general revolution in spring 1930 of VNP were inevitable and predictable. The impact of the Yen Bai uprising and its eruption “aroused the radical spirit among people and tremendously encouraged the increasing revolutionary movements under the leadership of Indochina Communist Party”.<sup>20</sup> It was indeed the most notable movement of VNP—an organization representing bourgeois revolution and contributing largely to our movements for national liberation before 1930.

After the Yen Bai uprising, the France Communist Party, the International Red League, and International Front against Imperialists urged the majority of French laborers to support VNP and Indochina revolution. Various demonstrations of overseas Vietnamese patriots and French revolutionary soldiers were held in Paris to protest over the suppression of Vietnamese by French colonialists. These demonstrations and struggles in support of the progressive and revolutionary forces

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<sup>20</sup>*Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2 – 1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues) (Workshop proceedings, December 1996), *Ibid*, p. 63.

in France lessened the consequences and damages of the white terrorism caused by French colonialists afterward, and supported the endeavor for liberty and independence of Vietnamese patriots.

## **5.2 The Increased Suppression by French Colonialists and Failure of Vietnam Nationalist Party**

After the loss of Yen Bai uprising, the French colonialists commenced a brutal suppression campaign. On February 14th, 1930, the Indochina Governor General Pasquier signed a Decree to establish a Criminal Commission and appointed the Tonkin Administrative Inspector Poutlet Osier as its chief to decide the case of VNP. The hunt for party members and destruction of cells were developing everywhere.

The brutality shown during the time when the French ordered five planes to release 57 bombs (each weighing 10 kg) on the village of Co Am (Vinh Bao, Hai Phong) on February 16th, 1930, and then firing machine guns to destroy the whole village and killing 21 innocents. Next, the French colonialists instructed green-hat soldiers to occupy the village, hunt, and rummage the members of VNP and invade Diem Nien village and Hang Be Street (Hanoi), and other villages.

VNP's party cells in other local areas also suffered from the white terrorism by French colonialists. The villages of Dong Tai, Phong Cau, Kha Lam (Kien An, Hai Phong), La Hao, Vong La, Son Duong, Xuan Lung (Phu Tho), and some areas were nearly exterminated due to the ruthless terror of French army. Most of the VNP's party members were arrested, imprisoned, and trialed at the Tribunal Commission. On February 20, 1930, the French colonialists captured Nguyễn Thái Học and Su Trach at Co Vit hamlet (Cong Hoa commune, Chi Linh, Hai Duong) but later transferred them to Hoa Loprison to wait for trial.

In nearly around a year, the Tribunal Commission continuously opened public trials of VNP in everywhere. Among the 603 party members being trialed, 37 received capital punishment (including the heads such as Nguyễn Thái Học, Phó Đức Chính, Đoàn Trần Nghiệp, and Trần Quang Diệu.).

In a word, the second terror of the French targeted at VNP caused tremendous damages and led to the irreversible breakdown of this organization. The last attempts of VNP (reflected in a number of "reforms" after the Yen Bai uprising) could not undo this.

As mentioned, in Lac Dao conference on September 17, 1929, when discussing armed revolution, the members of VNP were divided into two groups. The pro-war side (led by Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu) decided to commence revolution instantly, while the neutral side, often called "reformist" side (led by Lê Hữu Cảnh, Nguyễn Xuân Huân), proposed to buy some time to consolidate the army. Due to this disagreement, during the whole Yen Bai uprising, the "reformist" side did not raise any provocation but silently prepared for conditions for party reforms.

After the loss of Yen Bai uprising and the arrest of Nguyễn Thái Học, Lê Hữu Cảnh contacted all remaining members and fortified the cells to prepare

for actions. After some preparation, he held a conference with the attendance of Nguyễn Xuân Huân, Lê Tiến Sự, Nguyễn Đức Lâm, and Phạm Văn Hè to elect a new General Committee and proposed a plan to connect with local areas. With these efforts, the cells of VNP among “the reformists” were recovered and developed significantly in Vinh Phuc and Hai Duong.

An interesting fact was that although prolonging preparation, “the reformists” of VNP hastened their actions in the old ways. They relentlessly performed assassinations and racketeering activities which astounded the colonialists, but failed to draw any experience from previous failures as they should have focused on popular propaganda, mobilization, and organization to conduct revolution. Most noteworthy of their activities were the assassination of Governor General Pasquier by Lê Hữu Cảnh, Nguyễn Thị Giang, the murder planned by Vi Van Dinh, Phạm Thành Dương, and the racketeering operation arranged by Nguyen Binh, and his allies. These behaviors even accentuated the pursuit and terrorism of French colonialists aimed at the remaining party members. Under the white terrorisms of colonialists, at the end of June, 1930, the General Committee whose headquarter was at the 12 house in Cho Duoi street was disrupted. The French colonialists captured Lê Hữu Cảnh and Nguyễn Xuân Huân and transported them to Hoa Lo prison.

After Lê Hữu Cảnh was captured, the activities of VNP’s “reformists” continued to expand in Hanoi, Hai Phong, Phu Tho, Vinh Phuc, Hai Duong, and Bac Ninh. In the early 1931, Vũ Tiến Lữ gathered a number of party members in Hanoi and Hai Phong and intended to contact others in different places to restructure the party, but this objective was not fulfilled due to the rigorous hunt by French spies. At the end of 1931, Vũ Tiến Lữ had to flee to Yunnan (China).

In early 1932, the movements of VNP developed quite strongly in Hai Phong. Khóa Vạt (Đào Nguyên Huân) mobilized party members and rapidly became influential in Kinh Mon, Chi Linh, and Cam Giang. On February 19, 1932, the party members within Hai Phong established a Joint Provincial Committee responsible for rallying members and restructuring the party in Hai Duong, Hung Yen, and Bac Ninh.

As for their operations, the “reformists” continued to perform assassinations and racketeering activities to stabilize their finance, and at the same time produced arms and waited till they could begin revolution. They also aimed to send their members to Yunnan to publish books to boost propaganda and mobilization and gain support for its overseas operations.

At the end of 1932, Đào Nguyên Huân was arrested and the movements of “reformists” in Hai Duong came to an end. The last efforts of VNP to restore it failed completely.

After the failure of the Yen Bai uprising, a number of party members fled to Yunnan (China). There, they had to rely on the Koumintang (Chinese nationalist party) to operate and were gradually corrupted by Chiang Kai-shek to the point of becoming his minions and disrupting Vietnamese revolution.

When observing the development of revolutionary nationalism, the *Political Thesis* of Indochina Communist Party issued in October, 1930 predicted that when the people’s struggle reached its highest peak under the leadership of the working

party, revolutionary nationalists would be diverged in two directions, several would seek compromises with colonialists, while genuine patriots would join the Communist Party to conduct an inclusive national and democratic revolution.<sup>21</sup> As a party employing revolutionary nationalism as its main political idea, VNP was no exception. The ideological division and transformation within VNP occurred both before and after the Yen Bai uprising (February 1930).

What led to this division included first and foremost the initial discrepancy in the political standpoints of VNP's party members. This was caused by the following reasons:

VNP did not pay adequate attention to member instruction, education, and teaching. During its existence, VNP never released an official document to adequately explain its Political Program and Programs of action. Thus, its political course was explained and received inconsistently by its organs in various places, especially between the Tonkin Regional Chapter, Cochinchina Region Chapter, and General Committee.

While in the whole Tonkin, VNP took the most use of poems composed by Phan Bội Châu, Phan Chu Trinh, documents of Tonkin Free School, books, and newspapers on the Three People Principles as propaganda materials; in Cochinchina due to their close associations with VRYL,<sup>22</sup> Trần Huy Liệu and his comrades often employed its documents to educate party members, such as *A.B.C chủ nghĩa cộng sản* (A.B.C—Communism) and *Công xã Paris* (the Paris Commune). As a result, although still employing revolutionary nationalism as their main idea, the members of VNP in Cochinchina (one word) were more or less affected by communism. The statement of VNP in its Political Program as “First to conduct national revolution, then international revolution” was explained by Trần Huy Liệu, one of the key members in Cochinchina, with a strong reference to communism. In his work, *Câu chuyện chung* (The Common Story) published by Cochinchina Propaganda Subcommittee on behalf of *Cường Học thư xã*, Liệu wrote: “At this point, whoever talking about national revolution without putting it into the international context is narrow-minded; as anyone who argues for international revolution while forgetting national revolution is irrational.”<sup>23</sup> Here, it is obvious that Trần Huy Liệu had been affiliated with the idea of VRYL on the dialectical relationship between Vietnamese revolution and international revolution. Originally, he and his comrades adopted an international sentiment when explaining the statement “First to conduct national revolution, then international revolution” as international revolution was an ultimate goal, and national revolution was a transition. Based on such an idea, membership recruitment of VNP in Cochinchina often focused on the people who held an international mentality and opposed extreme nationalism.

<sup>21</sup>Tran Van Giau, Đinh Xuân Lâm, Kieu Xuan Ba, *Lịch sử cận đại Việt Nam* (Vietnamese pre-modern history), Ibid, p. 600.

<sup>22</sup>At this time, Tran Huy Lieu had formed close contacts with Hải Triều and other members in the Cochinchina Region chapter of Viet Nam Cách mạng Thanh niên.

<sup>23</sup>Liệu (1960).

Meanwhile, being heavily influenced by the Three People Principles, members of VNP in Tonkin understood international revolution—as conceptualized by Sun Yat Sen—as helping the less developed nations to conduct revolution, but not to ally with international proletariat.

Mentioned were only a few notable examples of the disagreements within VNP, which led to ideological division and transformation in this party. This was the direct consequence of its disregard for political propaganda and education among members. Objectively speaking, this shortcoming, for the most part, resulted from the inadequacy of its political program, which was most vividly showed in its generalization of different revolutionary ideas, as History Professor Trần Văn Giàu put it: “*The most remarkable of revolutionary nationalism at this time was its deprived theoretical foundation.*”<sup>24</sup>

Another reason leading to the political disarray within VNP was the different social backgrounds of its members. Having members of dissimilar classes, including petty bourgeois, national bourgeois, intellectuals, landlords, village authorities, soldiers, and VNP’s political course was perceived by each class in a solitary perspective.

In Kha Lam Canton (Kien An, Hai Phong), where the party’s members were village authorities and rich landlords, the party’s purpose was understood simply as dismissing the French, restoring national liberation and becoming bureaucrats. In other words, revolution for them meant to liberate the nation and restore the old feudal hierarchy. This understanding was particularly distant from the course of a revolutionary party such as VNP.

Especially, within VNP, the intellectuals and petty bourgeois were crucial, permanent members, and also its leaders. The “partial” nature of these members was one of the causes leading to the division and transformation in its political ideas.

Needless to say, VNP as a bourgeois revolutionary party entirely lost its historic role following the loss of Yen Bai uprising in February 1930.

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<sup>24</sup>Tran Van Giàu, *Sự phát triển của tư tưởng ở Việt Nam từ đầu thế kỷ XX đến Cách mạng tháng Tám* (The ideological development of Viet Nam from the early 20th century to August Revolution), p. 552.



# Chapter 6

## Vietnam Nationalist Party from 1930 to 1954

The analysis of the recovery of the VNP has shown a broader view about VNP's activities after the Yen Bai uprising until the end of First Indochina War in 1954. In this chapter, the author presented a series of evidences in which demonstrated the ideological divide of the participating members. In fact, this issue about the activities of the organization itself after the Yen Bai uprising has not been studied before, especially in both domestic and overseas. Author also defines the characteristics of these objectives in contrast to the revolutionary process in Vietnam. From 1947 to 1954, the existence of VNP gradually depredated and completely disintegrated was not inevitable.

After the Yen Bai uprising (February, 1930), VNP was basically dismantled and was no longer able to survive as a political party. However, a number of its remaining party members (some were within the country, some had gone abroad) still attempted to operate, and even intended to restore this political party. But their attempts were hopeless and the last chapters of a soon-to-end novel. More unfortunately, a number of corrupted party members tried to establish reactionary political parties—the different versions of VNP to disrupt and obstruct the achievements of Vietnamese revolution.

### 6.1 Vietnam Nationalist Party After the Yen Bai Uprising

#### 6.1.1 *The Attempts to Recover Vietnam Nationalist Party*

As mentioned, in its National Congress (May 1929) in Duc Hiep village, Thuan Thanh, Bac Ninh, VNP was split into two factions: one led by Nguyễn Thái Học which proposed to create instant general revolution, the other led by Lê Hữu Cảnh, Nguyễn Xuân Huân which insisted to delay revolution lest the army was still

fragile and revolution would surely mean defeat. Finally, the revolutionary side won, leading to the Yen Bai uprising and its failure.

The later faction was also called the *reformist* or *neutral* side directed by Lê Hữu Cảnh, who, after Nguyễn Thái Học was arrested, took over the party leadership and organized a secret conference to elect the Executive Committee of reformed VNP. After this conference, VNP performed rigorous reforms in Vinh Phuc and Hai Duong. Its course was to prolong the preparation period while maintaining the old operations, meaning spontaneous actions, most distinguished of which was the robbing of an Agent Technique by Nguyễn Xuân Huân in 1930.

On July 10, 1930, Lê Hữu Cảnh and Nguyễn Xuân Huân were detained. Later, many members of VNP fell into the hands of the French. Thus, “VNP could no longer expand its propaganda to the whole North Vietnam as before. This activity was confined in single families and a few provinces where the initial leaders still retained some personal influence”.<sup>1</sup>

Until the period of 1931–1932, VNP only maintained a few activities thanks to the efforts of Vũ Tiến Lữ and Đào Nguyên Huân. In the end, Vũ Tiến Lữ was wanted by the colonial rulers so dramatically he had to flee to Yunnan, while Đào Nguyên Huân was captured, leading to the complete downfall of VNP.

### ***6.1.2 Ideological Division of Vietnam Nationalist Party in French Colonial Prisons***

Since 1930, in colonial prisons, besides communist prisoners, a number of VNP party members are being arrested by the French in the aftermath of Yen Bai uprising. Between communist prisoners and those of VNP there were frequent debates and even scrupulous arguments on political ideas and national liberation. Thus, the ideological and political discrepancy between members of VNP was more severely exaggerated. But the profound source of this condition was that initially, VNP did not produce any consistent political course and doctrine. Even at the end of 1928 and early 1929, after an amendment of Party program, although the main political ideas of VNP were democratic socialism and Three People Principles, most of its members still perceived the overall purpose as merely restoring independence and establishing a just and humanistic system. What a just and humanistic system meant was never properly explained.<sup>2</sup> Another reason was the different social backgrounds, classes and groups of VNP’s members. Among them, patriotic intellectuals and petty bourgeois were both its leaders and official members. During its operations and especially when being suppressed, VNP had no time and

<sup>1</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng – Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), p. 54.s.

<sup>2</sup>Phạm Tuấn Tài, *cuộc đời và tác phẩm* (Pham Tuan Tai, life and works) (memoir), CTQG Publisher, Ha Noi, 2002, p. 54.

opportunity to train its members, thus “*not only were its political principles inconsistent, they were understood contradictorily among members*”.<sup>3</sup> These conflicting perceptions of its programs and purposes were the fundamental causes leading to its internal division before and especially after the Yen Bai uprising. To explain this issue, Phạm Tuấn Tài, one of the founders and leaders of VNP said: “*From the beginning the members belonged to or were affiliated with different classes, possessed diverse opinions and were trained under unrelated programs, therefore they were naturally diverged after a failure or event...the ideological gap between members was further widened: some members leaned towards pure nationalism; some followed strict socialism, others wanted to combine different doctrines into a single Party’s doctrine. Disagreements subsequently led to hostility*”.<sup>4</sup>

In Hoa Lo prison Hanoi, compared to the (unlike) VNP’s members who was feeling smug about their circumstances, the communist prisoners transformed it into their learning place. Several political and cultural training classes were organized within the prison and interestingly a few journals such as *Prison* (Lao tù) and *Communism* (Cộng sản) were published and distributed. In Hoa Lo Prison, a great polemic occurred between VNP’s members and communists. The journals, *The Guiding Torch* (Đuốc đưa đường) and *The Right Way* (Con đường chính) took part in this polemic on behalf of the communist members. As for VNP, lest the growing influence of communists would dominate, its leaders in Hoa Lo also developed propaganda among prisoners to compete with them—what they used to neglect—as a way to misrepresent communism. VNP also published the journal *Bút tiêu sấu*, claiming communism as *deficient of three elements* (Tam vớ) (no religion, no family, no fatherland) and propagandized the Three People Principles by explaining such concepts as *fatherland, nation and people*, etc. according to these principles. An intense and heated battle on ideological and political doctrine occurred between communists and the VNP’s members under the form of polemics. Equipped with Marxist–Leninism, the communists rapidly gained advantages over the members of VNP in their fight for political conviction. VNP’s members were losing their confidence due to their inconsistency in political principle and deprived theoretical background. This ideological battle reached such a peak that violent conflicts became potential. Youth self-defense groups were organized by the communists to prevent violent fights committed by VNP’s members. Although the fights did not occur as the French learnt about the situation and separated communists and VNP’s prisoners, this development showed the political and ideological defeat of VNP by the Communist Party. Since this clash, members of VNP were clearly diverted in two directions: Several members affected by communism later joined the communists. The remaining ones gradually developed reformist tendencies, became reactionary members in VNP and went against the revolution and people.

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<sup>3</sup>Phạm Tuấn Tài, *Ibid*, p. 252.

<sup>4</sup>Phạm Tuấn Tài, *cuộc đời và tác phẩm*, *Ibid*, p. 525.

The ideological division and transformation within VNP were also expressed evidently in the deviation toward communism of Trần Huy Liệu and like-minded members such as Phạm Tuấn Tài, Nguyễn Phương Thảo (Nguyễn Bình), and Tô Chấn.

In remembrance of his study and endeavor to become a communist member, Trần Huy Liệu wrote: “*On my way to move from nationalism...to being enlightened by socialism of the working class, I had to overcome arduous conflicts, where new elements conflicted with old ones, old ideas persistently attempted to stop novel thoughts, and gradually the new ideas prevailed*.”<sup>5</sup> *Finally he was aware that the most righteous and inclusive path toward revolution was socialism. But not every party member had the same mindset as him, and this resulted in VNP’s members “being increasingly contradictory and disparate in ideology.”*<sup>6</sup>

This contradiction resulted from the debates on communism among VNP’s members and later developed everywhere and every time, in every form, particularly via press. In particular, the article titled “*Phản đối thuần túy quốc gia chủ nghĩa và phiếm thế giới chủ nghĩa*” (Objection to pure nationalism and baseless internationalism) of Trần Huy Liệu became a focal point of debate, through which the internal conflict of VNP became further severe and out of control. A few days after the first anniversary of the Yên Bái uprising (February 9, 1931), at the office of VNP, a riot caused by extremists and provokers broke out to dispute the communist-associated members.

In Hon Cau prison, Con Dao, to mediate conflicting explanations for the principles and doctrines of VNP, a committee for propaganda was established, which comprised six members: Trần Huy Liệu, Phạm Tuấn Tài, Nhượng Tống (Hoàng Phạm Trân), Lê Văn Phúc, Nguyễn Văn Viên, and Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn. This committee released vague explanations as middle grounds to alleviate the disputes, yet these attempts further heightened the political and ideological disparities. In fact, the political doctrine of VNP was ambiguous and contained many errors. In prison, these errors were further exposed in both thinking and actions. Trần Huy Liệu, a crucial member and prisoner of VNP in Hon Cau jail, commented: “*It is necessary to recognize the ‘deed above victory’ as the guiding principle of VNP then. It not only affected the participants of Yên Bái uprising, but also enthusiasts in prison. While the communists deliberately transformed prison into a revolutionary school upon being transferred there...activists of VNP could find no other choice than committing violence, not to mention corrupted members who had surrendered to the enemies.*”<sup>7</sup> Having been deported to Con Dao prison, VNP members were divided into three groups: most of them still retained the Three People Principles as their core ideas, some had no particular opinion, others bended

<sup>5</sup>Tran Huy Lieu, “Phấn đấu trở thành đảng viên đảng cộng sản” (Striving to Become a Communist Party Member), Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Tran Huy Lieu, “Phấn đấu trở thành đảng viên đảng cộng sản” (Striving to Become a Communist Party Member), Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Tran Huy Lieu—*Memoir*, KHXH Publisher, Ha Noi, 1991, p. 102.

toward communism, including Trương Dân Bảo, Nguyễn Văn Viên, Hoàng Thúc Dị, Lê Văn Phúc, Trần Huy Liệu, and Nguyễn Phương Thảo (Nguyen Binh). After this division, more progressive and enlightened members became more in touch with communist prisoners, and attended the training courses organized by them, which helped to clarify their confusion and reveal the right way for them. In response, a number of reactionary members of VNP such as Nhượng Tống, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn established a hunting party to remove Trần Huy Liệu, Trương Dân Bảo, Nguyễn Phương Thảo, and many others. Fortunately these progressive members were able to survive the internal purge.

At the end of 1934, in his book *Tự phê bình* (Self-criticism), Trần Huy Liệu straight forwardly expressed his faith in the proletariat and communism. Before embarking on the journey from Con Dao back to mainland to work as revolutionist, he said: “*Con Lon was a living hell created by French colonialists. But it was also an academy producing and training revolutionary individuals. Looking at the mainland, I saw a huge vision in front of me. Under the banner of hammer and sickle, I had to move fast as time was urging me, a latecomer*”.<sup>8</sup> In 1936, in his *Tuyên cáo các đồng chí* (Announcement to my comrades) which was actually the last message for his comrades, Phạm Tuấn Tài frankly declared his ultimate faith to be communism and openly said that: “*Nationalism has become obsolete; the Three Principles are but incompetent reformist ideas. Basically, only Marxist—Leninism is capable of overthrowing imperialism and leading oppressed nations to a united world*.”<sup>9</sup> The hammer-and-sickle flag covering his coffin was the recognition that he was admitted into the rank of communists.

The internal conflict from debate and “*polemics*” (in press) to “*violence*” (assassination, murder) brought VNP to complete disintegration as a political representative of bourgeois nationalism in Vietnam in the 1920s. Since the 1930s, VNP had been tainted and even became obstacles to the development of Vietnamese revolution and people.

### ***6.1.3 Domestic Activities of Members of Vietnam Nationalist Party from 1936 to 1945***

After unsuccessful attempts at reformation, the revolutionary movements initiated by VNP were almost paralyzed. It was not until 1936, when the French Popular Front took power, were numerous political prisoners released, including 100 members of VNP. Thanks to this, a number of party organs were recovered and brought back to life.

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<sup>8</sup>Tran Huy Lieu, “Phấn đấu trở thành đảng viên đảng cộng sản” (Striving to Become a Communist Party Member), Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Pham Tuan Tai, *Tuyên cáo đồng chí*, Ibid.

At the end of 1936, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp returned to Hanoi from Thuong Hai to carry out his operations with other members, first in the field of press. However, the *New Journal* (Tân báo) whose editor-in-chief was Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp was closed after 3 months of being; while *Dân* journal (People journal) was published in 1937 with Nguyễn Văn Chân as its main editor, and in 1938 it stopped being published.

In 1940 when the Japanese army set foot on Indochina, old and new parties alike boosted their activities. VNP and *Great Vietnam Party* (Đại VNP dân đảng—GVP) established their bases in Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, Thanh Hoa as military training grounds for young party members.

Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, Nguyễn Hữu Dật, Ngô Thúc Địch, and Nhung Tổng met in a house in front of an entrance garden to Cửa Nam Street, and decided to set up the New Vietnam Nationalist Party (VNP)(Tân VNP dân đảng—GVNP) operating publicly and headquartered at 61st Trang Thi, Hanoi. In early 1944, GVNP teamed up with GVP, *National Party of Great Vietnam* (Đại VNP xã đảng—NPGV) and *Popular Party of Greater Vietnam* (Đại Việt Dân chính đảng—PPGV) to open The United Nationalist Front of Great Vietnam (*Mặt Trận Đại Việt Quốc gia liên minh*) aimed to “ally with Japan to defeat France.”<sup>10</sup> The Tonkin Political Committee was established as a subordinate of the Front to contact with Japanese military authorities. But in order to gain support from foreigners, the parties themselves had to be adequately organized and adaptable, on the contrary most nationalist parties were not stable as they lacked unified leadership, concrete strategies, and adaptability.

On August 6, 1945 and August 9, 1945 the US, respectively, dropped two bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, forcing Japanese government to surrender. On August 11, 1945, the representative of De Gaulle visited Japanese Commander in Chief to request entry into Hai Phong of the French soldiers who deserted in March.<sup>11</sup> The United Nationalist Front of Great Vietnam organized a demonstration to oppose the intended invasion of colonialists and imperialists. At night, the Front held a conference to discuss a coup in the North. There were two factions in this conference:

- The faction of Chu Bá Phụng, Trương Tử Anh, and Nguyễn Tường Long argued that it was necessary to sabotage alliance with Japan if acceptance from the Allied force was to be achieved. They proposed to wait for the overseas forces to arrive in Vietnam with the Allied army before acting.
- The faction of Nguyễn Xuân Tiểu and Lý Cao Kha planned to rely on Japanese army to seize the government, and then wait for the arrival of overseas forces to establish a government.

However, despite relentless debates, the conference could not issue a final conclusion.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup>Phrase used by Hoang Van Dao, *Ibid*, p. 190.

<sup>11</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Ibid*, p. 215.

<sup>12</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Ibid*, p. 216.

Meanwhile, until August 17 and 18 in 1945, Viet Minh had speedily progressed its plan for a coup. In this setting, representatives of The United Nationalist Front of Great Vietnam, VNP and GVNP met with one another. The meeting was filled with conflicting ideas. Some suggested relying on Japanese for the coup, while the others insisted that doing so would lead to suspicion from the Allied force; still others predicted that even if Viet Minh intended to seize the government its insufficient force would not allow that. Finally, no resolution was released in the meeting.

On August 18th, 1945, a large-scale demonstration was held by the Viet Minh in Hanoi, where thousands of red flags with a gold star flew across the capital. In the evening, members of VNP held a meeting with representatives of GVNP. The mentioned coup d'état was once again discussed with heated arguments, but no final conclusion was given. Party members summoned from different bases to perform the coup were ordered to withdraw. As the armed approach lost its utility and their political status declined, the nationalist parties had to withdraw and wait for support from the Koumingtang.

Right after the success of August Revolution, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Việt Nam Dân chủ Cộng hòa) was officially founded (September 2, 1945). On ground of demilitarizing Japanese, the British flooded the South to help France invade Vietnam once again.

Knowing that its main and most formidable enemy was France, the provisional revolutionary Government proposed to discuss collaboration with VNP. In response, several important members of VNP held a provisional convention to decide whether to cooperate with Viet Minh. At last VNP made up its mind to keep in touch with Viet Minh and continue its covert operations to wait for the Allied forces and overseas armies, and then publicly act.

Thus in the period of 1936–1945, VNP had no considerable movement, while national liberation movements directed by the Communist Party developed more and more vibrantly. The propaganda by nationalist parties and VNP was nominal, thus they were rather unknown to the people. On the contrary, the Indochina Communist Party constructed and promoted a strong *United National Front* (Mặt trận dân tộc thống nhất); its strong endorsement for publicity and education made it feasible to rally and attract a large population to support the struggle for national indolence.

VNP undervalued the popularity and role of Viet Minh held a constant belief that Japan was able to survive longer, so it did not maintain any preparation. Moreover, it was unaware of the involvement of the Allied Force in helping France to return to Indochina and misinterpreted the nature of Allied Nations.

In addition, VNP could not issue a united political course. Although VNP, GVNP, and Đại Việt Dân chính agreed to merge under the name of Quốc dân đảng, this plan was not known to the party members. Most members of VNP still followed the Three People Principles of Sun Yat Sen, while members of PPGV believed in National Survival (Dân tộc sinh tồn) created by Trương Tử Anh, and an egalitarian democratic system was what members of PPGV looked for, but they shared a common hostility toward communism. Unable to release a cohesive

political program to mobilize and rally the people which included a lack of practical program of action, overly dependent on external forces without adequate internal consolidation, VNP and other nationalist parties failed in their attempts to seize political power in Vietnam as the revolutionary movements led by Viet Minh Front and Indochina Communist Party increasingly developed.

## 6.2 Vietnam Nationalist Party Overseas

### 6.2.1 Activities of Party Groups from 1931 to 1942

After the loss of Yen Bai uprising, as the French continued to arrest its members and dismantle VNP, several members were compelled to escape to China to continue living and acting. Since then, the overseas presence of VNP was reflected by new party groups whose membership included the mentioned.

#### *Yunnan Province*

In 1929, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp, a key member of VNP, arrived in China and rallied a few overseas nationals to join the party. Nghiệp secretly organized a group called *Railway Committee of VNP* (Đảng bộ đường sắt của Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng) in Yunnan and established a few cells along this railway. In early 1930, the failed Yen Bai revolution was becoming known in China, USSR, and France. In Yunnan, China, the Yunnan governor named Long Yun, with the mindset that Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp possessed domestic authority, secretly aided him by admitting 112 youngsters of VNP into Giang Vo School and 20 Vietnamese workers into his arms workshop.

Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp together with Nguyễn Văn Thọ, Lê Thọ Nam, and Hoàng Văn Nội established Sino-Vietnamese Revolutionary Military Alliance (Trung Việt Cách mạng liên quân). Recognizing the inadequate number of overseas members and their separate locations, in 1930, *Sino-Vietnamese Revolutionary Military Alliance* combined with VNP to form *1st Yunnan Province Chapter* (Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng Vân Nam đệ nhất đạo bộ) headed by Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp. This chapter actively progressed and employed quite a few members, causing the French consulate in Côn Minh to be alert and sought to dismantle it. As a result, the members had to disperse, while Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp sought temporary residence in Mong Tu, Muong La.

On June 20, 1930, Vũ Văn Gin—a former leader of VNP in the uprising in Vinh Bao, Hai Phong fled to China, changed his name to Vũ Hồng Khanh and replaced Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp (now a refugee) as chief of the Provincial Chapter.

Supported by Koumintang Party Committee, the 1st Yunnan Province Chapter did not only avoided being captured by the Yunnan authority but also publicly functioned and recruited a variety of overseas members working as civil servants, chefs, and so forth. The Chapter also invited young party members to enroll in Giang Vo School in Kunming and study to become future talents.



In 1933, when *VNP Overseas Central Committee* (Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng trung ương chấp hành ủy viên biện sự xứ) came into being, the 1st Yunnan Province Chapter changed its name to Yunnan General Cells as a part of the Central Committee.

***VNP Overseas General Committee and VNP Overseas Central General Executive Committee***

In 1930, in Guangzhou, Nguyễn Hải Thần, Trương Bội Công, Trần Bội Long, Đặng Sư Mạc, Lê Trạch Dân, Vi Chính Nam, and Từ Thượng Mai established *Vietnam Revolutionary National Party* (Việt Nam Quốc dân cách mạng đảng). This party was endorsed by China Koumintang but had no particular operation. In 1932, it was restructured as the *VNP Overseas General Committee* (Hải ngoại Tổng bộ Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng), but only lasted for a while before being suspended.

Vi Chính Nam recognized that it was necessary to set up the foundation in Nanjing where no intervention from the French was found, if troubles in Guangzhou were to be avoided. Thus, he continued to contact China Koumintang and established offices in Nanjing. In January 1933, the Zhonghua Minguo government officially recognized VNP as a legitimate party, and offered it freedom of operation in the entire China territory and headquarters in Nanjing. Vi Chính Nam sent his men to Kunming to invite leaders of VNP residing there to Gunming to celebrate the founding of an overseas supreme organization named *VNP Overseas Central General Executive Committee* (Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng Trung ương chấp hành ủy viên biện sự xứ), directed by Vi Chính Nam himself. The 1st Yunnan Province Chapter changed its name to Yunnan General Cells. In provinces such as Guangdong, Guangxi, VNP followed the same procedure to change (Tô Chấn) its organizations.

***League for the Independence of Vietnam and Overseas VNP Central Executive Committee***

In the early 1934, Vũ Hồng Khanh, Nguyễn Hải Thần, and Hồ Ngọc Lâm visited the VNP headquarter in Nanjing to suggest holding a conference unifying overseas VNP's groups into a single organization. The conference decided to establish a new group called League for the Independence of Vietnam (*Việt Nam Độc lập đồng minh hội - LIV*) and appointed Vi Chính Nam as its president. The group's in-house publication was *Vietnamese Youth newspaper* (Việt Thanh), published in both Vietnamese and Chinese. After a short time, at the end of 1935, *League for the Independence of Vietnam* was disbanded due to the conflict between VNP's members and representatives of other political parties. After this event, VNP's members returned to Gunming and worked under the title of *Overseas VNP Central Executive Committee* (VNP Trung ương đảng bộ hải ngoại chấp hành ủy viên hội).

## ***6.2.2 Vietnam Revolutionary League***

In September 9, 1940, as the Japanese in Guangxi crossed Sino-Vietnam border to attack Lạng Sơn, French colonialists granted the concession of Indochina to Japan,

and subsequently suppressed our revolutionary movements and potential oppositions. Under the colonial oppression, reactionary groups broke up and most of their members fled to foreign countries. In response to the expansion of Japanese fascists, the Allied Force (America—Chiang Kai Shek) launched a south military front. To carry out this plan, Chiang Kai Shek ordered the 9th and 10th armies to station in Van Son and Muong Tu, respectively, to prevent Japanese from entering Yunnan and wait for opportunities. The China Koumintang published *A Guide to Vietnam for Chinese Soldiers (Hoa quân vào Việt Nam cần biết)* to introduce Vietnamese customs, lifestyles, and revolutionary parties and *Vietnamese Ancient History and National Culture (Cổ sử Việt Nam và văn hóa của dân tộc)* to distort and offend our historic characters and great history.

General Zhang Fakui, commander of the Guangxi military zone was instructed to prepare for this *Hoa quân nhập việt* (Chinese army accessing Vietnam) plan. Zhang intended to establish a Vietnamese anti-allied force organization and a provisional government in Vietnam but was unsuccessful. In July 1942, supported by Chongqing authority in terms of finance and manpower, Zhang Fakui launched a campaign to establish another political group called *Vietnam Revolutionary League (Việt Nam cách mạng đồng minh hội—VRL or Việt Cách)*.

On November 10, 1942, VRL was officially founded and located at the 15th of Yufeng, Liuzhou. The central executive committee included:

- No affiliation: four representatives including Nguyễn Hải Thần, Trương Bội Công, Trần Báo, Trương Trung Phụng.
- VNP had two representatives namely Vũ Hồng Khanh and Nghiêm Kế Tổ.
- Vietnam Restoration Society (Việt Nam Phục quốc đồng minh) had one representative named Hồ Đức Thành.

Due to its biased and opportunistic outlook, VRL had to deal with various internal disorders. To amend the shortcomings and weaknesses of the League, Zhang Fakui sought reforms and attempted to have it operation in Vietnam.

At this time, Nguyễn Ái Quốc—Hồ Chí Minh was held in custody as Chiang's prisoners. When he could no longer imprison him, Chiang ordered Zhang Fakui to induce him to stay in Liuzhou and use his reputation to alleviate the conflicts between “*Vietnamese politicians*” in exile. As for him, Hồ Chí Minh recognized the necessity to earn sympathy from overseas Vietnamese and unite them in the way toward national revolution. Thus, he held a conference wherein representatives of different Vietnamese parties in China showed up. His speech on our movements for national liberation and situation of domestic parties was appreciated.

Along with Hồ Chí Minh, other communist members also enlightened and encouraged sophisticated members VRL to join the revolution. A subdivision of VRL in Yunnan was established with permanent members as communists and other patriots such as Lý Đào, Phạm Toàn, Tổng Minh Phương, and Dương Bảo Sơn. During the Japanese aggression in GuangXi, while Trương Bội Công, Trần Báo fled without any trace, Vũ Hồng Khanh and Nghiêm Kế Tổ stayed idle in Gunming, the communists and patriots took charge of VRL.

### ***6.2.3 The Unification of Vietnam Nationalist Party***

During World War II, several domestic political parties were established, in the North there were GVNP, NPGV, PPGV, LIV; in the South there were political parties associated with religions such as Caodaism and Hoahaoism. When Japanese overthrew the French (March 9, 1945), GVNP and PPGV communicated with VNP to unify as a means to tackle the thorniest issue among these parties, which was solidarity. In May 1945, the three political parties officially combined into an organization with its names as follows: the domestic name would be *GVNP* (Great VNP) and overseas title would be *VNP*, so as not to offend the China Koumintang.

In conclusion, from 1931 to 1945, a number of Vietnamese political parties individually took form in China. In these parties, leaders of VNP often held leading positions. Thus, these political parties were but different versions of VNP overseas. As VNP before, these overseas Vietnamese parties had no tangible political program and action program and therefore had no particular action. The survival of these parties depended on the auspices and financial support of China Koumintang. In general, before Japanese arriving in Vietnam, VNP continued its propaganda against French and desired to restore national independence. But since 1940, under the pressure of China Koumintang, and as a prejudiced nationalist party, overseas VNP turned its back on revolution and officially became anticommunism. This was reflected in the *Tuyên ngôn đối với thời cục của VNP* (Declaration on the state of VNP) composed by Vũ Hồng Khanh in 1940. In this declaration, Vũ Hồng Khanh urged the French to change their attitude toward Vietnamese revolutionists and said that they could exploit Vietnam as a populous and rich country to restore France. This declaration (title of declaration?) revealed the defeating and reactionary character of Vũ Hồng Khanh and VNP in general.

## **6.3 Vietnam Nationalist Party Returned and Disrupted the Revolutionary Process**

### ***6.3.1 Vietnam Nationalist Party Followed the Koumintang Back to Vietnam***

Under the name of an Allied Force charged with disarming the Japanese army, 20,000,000 Chiang Kai Shek's soldiers invaded a territory in North Vietnam stretching from the 17th parallel to Sino-Vietnam border. The Chiang's army escorted a few overseas Vietnamese in China back to North Vietnam, including members of VNP led by Vũ Hồng Khanh and those of VRL led by Nguyễn Hải Thần, in an attempt to disturb the revolution. VRL was then divided into two factions. The patriots led by Bo Xuan Luat soon followed the revolutionary pathway of Hồ Chí Minh and helped establish and protect the new system. The Chiang-supported faction led by Nguyễn Hải Thần did its best to interrupt the revolution.

However, among the members of VRL led by Nguyễn Hải Thần and VNP led by Vũ Hồng Khanh, there were several who recognized their reactionary nature and thus left them to follow Hồ Chí Minh's Government.

After returning, with the aid of Chiang, VNP and VRL were able to occupy a few areas in Mong Cai, Yen Bai, and Vinh Yen.<sup>13</sup> In the border provinces, headquarters of VNP and VRL appeared everywhere. The return of VNP, VRL, and anticommunist leaders following Chiang's army to Vietnam indicated that a revolutionary government representing Vietnamese political groups had set its firm foothold in Hanoi and was recognized as the United Government of Vietnam including the Central and South.<sup>14</sup>

As a rather huge party at that time, VNP proposed to merge with GVNP and PPGV after returning to the country. On December 15, 1945, the VNP Central Committee was founded and located at Do Huu Vi elementary School (now Phan Dinh Phung High school, Cua Bac Street, Hanoi).

In Hanoi, VNP established headquarters in Quan Thanh and other streets such as Minh Khai (now Bui Thi Xuan), On Nhu Hau (now Nguyen Gia Thieu), Do Huu Vi (now Cua Bac), Hang Day, and Lo Duc. It also used Ngu Xa Street next to Truc Bach Lake as a place to collect tax and train staff members.

VNP and VRL issued a large-scale plan to make all-out attack on the revolutionary government, including the following activities:

- Recruit soldiers and mobilize an armed force of 2,000 combatants, divided into four regiments commanded by a number of former corporals and Japanese and Chiang officers.
- Publish newspapers, released circulars, slogans and banners, open radio stations for unconstructive propaganda.
- Open primary, intermediary, and advanced classes on military and politics; organize seven strategic war zones across the North and Central, appoint staff to control an efficient anticommunist and anti-colonist area.
- Hold demonstrations to protest the Vietnam Democratic Republic Government; kidnap, racketeer, and murder Viet Minh's officers.

The house organ of VNP was *Vietnam* journal (named Vietnam thời báo—the Vietnam Times—prior to 1945) whose editor-in-chief and director was Nguyen Tuong Bach. Additionally, VNP released other journals such as *The Sensible* (Thiết thực), *The People* (Dân chúng), *The Common Freedom* (Dòng tâm tự do), *The National restoration* (Phục quốc), *The Honesty* (Liêm minh), *The Union* (Liên hiệp).

Following the example of Viet Minh's *the Youth League for National Salvation* (Đoàn thanh niên cứu quốc) which employed various progressive students and pupils, VNP established the *The Nationalist Youth League* (Quốc gia thanh niên

<sup>13</sup>*Lịch sử Chính phủ Việt Nam* (History of Vietnamese Government, (1st volume: 1945–1955), CTQG Publisher, Hà Nội, 2004, p. 48. See also Diem (2000).

<sup>14</sup>Buttinger (1957).

đoàn) headed by Nguyen Tuong Bach. Most members of the league despised Chiang's army yet still longed for its support in the fight with Viet Minh.

In comparison with Viet Minh, VNP was more disadvantaged in several aspects, in particular its lack of an economic source and popular support, as it only leaned on the Chiang's army and China Koumintang. At that time, VNP faced two major problems: one was its political doctrine and program; the other was its action approach and program. Yet these problems were not addressed sufficiently by the central executive committee. VNP was short of a detailed action program, particularly with regard to membership consolidation and expansion and party strengthening.

Then a question remained as to whether it was wise to cooperate with Viet Minh. VNP in particular and nationalist parties in general were aware of their weaker forces, inferior and poorly equipped armies, disconnected local organs compared to those of Viet Minh, not to mention the great pressure from Chiang's army. Thus, they thought it was necessary to negotiate with Viet Minh to express their goodwill and also to buy time in their battle with Viet Minh after the Chiang's army left. However, to cooperate with Viet Minh, what specific strategies were to be employed? What were to be done if the French came and Chiang's army fled? How to manage their submissiveness? These complicated and urgent questions were not adequately discussed and addressed.

### ***6.3.2 Vietnam Nationalist Party's Attempt to Disrupt the Revolutionary Government***

Protected by the Chiang's army, upon its way back to Hanoi, VNP relentlessly provoked the revolutionary authorities by attacking offices of the people's committees, demanded the removal of Viet Minh, dismantled and confiscated arms of military groups under the Vietnam Democratic Republic Government. As a result, local governments in different provincial towns in Lao Cai, Yen Bai, Phu Tho, Viet Tri, Bach Hac, Vinh Yen, Bac Ninh, Mong Cai, and other places were occupied by VNP.

In Hanoi, the members of VNP and VRL under the disguise of Chiang's army put forth requests after requests such as asking for two superior positions in the Provisional Government, the replacement of national flag and exclusion of people's committees. VNP alone insisted on having control over the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Youth, and 1/3 of the seats in National Assembly. In response to these demands and the destructive scheme of these factions, the Government held a conference on November 27, 1945 to openly express its disregard for VNP in important ministries, but tried to negotiate and settle the situation peacefully to maintain order for the upcoming General Election.

On November 19, 1945, General Hsiao Wen (Head of the Political Committee of Chiang's army in Vietnam responsible for political issues in North Vietnam)

came forward and organized a joint meeting; with the presence of VNP's leader Nguyễn Hải Thần and leader of Viet Minh. The meeting concluded with three peaceful settlements: (1) The parties stopped confronting each other on newspapers, (2) armies were banned from using arms to settle differences, and (3) support and advocacy were to be given to the South resistance. A few days later, a declaration named “*Đoàn kết tinh thành*” (All for solidarity) was signed, but it was merely a diversionary tactic by VNP.

While negotiations were developing the journal *Vietnam* deemed Viet Minh as Nazi using the image of a swastika on a yellow star. Meanwhile our newspaper *Truth* (Sự thật) condemned the obstinacy of VNP and declared to “*cooperate with every truthful patriotic association excluding undisciplined reactionaries*”.<sup>15</sup> When the General Election was coming, newspapers of VNP simultaneously called for rejection of the General Election, based on the ground that 90 % of our population were still illiterate and thus were unable to fulfill their civil rights, and the pressing objective at that moment was to resist the French, thus election was a waste of time. It was in fact the attempt of VNP to prevent General Election and overthrow the revolutionary government.

On February 25, 1946, at the China Embassy to (in)Hanoi, with the presence of Hsiao Wen, a joint conference between Viet Minh, Democratic Party (Đảng Dân chủ), VNP, and VRL was held. The conference reached a compromise to create a cooperative government for resistance, with its President as Hồ Chí Minh and Deputy President Nguyễn Hải Thần as in the previous Government. Among 10 ministries, Ministries of Defense, Transport and Public Works, Education, Jurisdiction would be controlled by Viet Minh and Democratic Party, while Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Society, and Agriculture would be handed over to VNP and VRL; the other two ministries were given to the southern people.

Three days later, on February 28, 1946, the Sino-France agreement was reached, as expected by the Standing Committee of the Central Committee of Indochina Communist Party. The Chiang's army was going to leave. VNP and VRL, in danger of being abandoned, intervened even more austere, especially in the signing of the Provisional Agreement. Meanwhile their members in the government were idle and irresponsible.

On March 18, 1946, the French army robustly marched to the North, and in early May the Chiang's army began to withdraw. Nguyễn Hải Thần and Nguyễn Tường Tam and hundreds of Chiang's “adherents” fled to China. Vũ Hồng Khanh together with his family and other important members departed to Viet Tri. In the first quarter moon of July 1946, VNP Central Committee had to be reorganized to include 11 members. Two months later, its members decreased to 7 as a few members escaped abroad. At the end of 1946, only two members remained in the board of leaders, namely Nguyễn Văn Chấn and Hoàng Bình.

In the middle of July 1946, the On Nhu Hau case caused conspicuous indignation among people. The scheme of VNP was meant to happen on the occasion of a

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<sup>15</sup>*Độc lập* newspaper, Issue dated February 26, 1946.

French military parody to commemorate French revolution (July 14), in which grenades would be thrown and machine guns fired at the French to provoke them to attack the revolutionary Government, paving way for VNP to overthrow the entire city administration. After several days of investigation, the Tonkin Police Bureau and Police Department broke into VNP's headquarter at the 132nd in Bui Thi Xuan, discovering the whole plan. Next, various headquarters of VNP were inspected. In a headquarter located in On Nhu Hau Street (now Nguyen Gia Thieu) particularly, 7 corpses and various torture devices were found by the police. This incident exposed the malevolence of VNP. Later, General Vo Nguyen Giap (then Minister of Internal Affairs) commented: "*After the On Nhu Hau incident, even the most politically naïve people who had been manipulated by VNP became more watchful*".<sup>16</sup>

### ***6.3.3 The Complete Breakdown of Vietnam Nationalist Party in Local Areas***

In the early 1945, VNP began to establish 7 "strategic war zones" in the North and Central. Within these "strategic war zones", VNP occupied a few towns; other rural territories were still controlled by Viet Minh.

Among them, the Third strategic war zone (Đệ tam chiến khu), encompassing the chef (chef means professional cook) (chief) lieus of Vinh Yen, Viet Tri, Phu Tho, Yen Bai, and a part of Lao Cai, were most heavily populated by VNP' troops. In every chef lieu there was an organ of VNP, several party members were equipped with submachine guns or revolvers, in a few areas they held over 100 rifles. However, except for the zone of Lao Cai—Bao Ha, in other towns and chef lieus, food and ammunition supply was short.

*In Vinh Yen town*, a strategic zone in midland region adjoining the plains, VNP held direct local administration before the Viet Minh General Committee launched revolution. Taking advantage of its power, VNP aimed to use this region as a firm military base to threaten Hanoi and a primary front of the Third strategic war zone. But through both their military and diplomatic strategies, the Viet Minh Front was able to compel VNP to negotiate. In June 1946, the Politico-military Committee of VNP consented to integrate with the Vinh Yen Administrative Committee, two squadrons of VNP were merged into a regiment of the Patriotic Army, and army ranks created by VNP were dismissed and replaced by military badges of the Patriotic Army.

*In Lao Cai town*, the border gate connecting Vietnam and China by railroads, rivers, and streets was vital to the entry of Chiang Kai Shek's army into Vietnam. After following Chiang's army to gain enormous control of Lao Cai province, VNP induced reactionary forces to establish a system of local governments. A VNP's province chapter was formed, located in Coc Leu, and directly took the

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<sup>16</sup>Giap (1997).

force of gendarmes and police. These activities increasingly revealed the reactionary nature and intent to hamper revolutionary achievements and exploitation of common properties by VNP.

*In other provinces* such as Ha Nam, Nam Dinh, Thai Binh, and Thanh Hoa, VNP hastened its efforts to tempt former loyalists of the French and Japanese, Vietnamese traitors, various soldiers and opportunists. It also murdered, kidnapped, and blackmailed Viet Minh's men, sent its men to plunder the countryside, particularly it impeded the activities of liaison and negotiation committees.

In general, while central authorities of the Provisional Government and Viet Minh Front offered to reconcile with Chiang's army and VNP to develop and protect the country in light of the second invasion by the French; in local areas VNP persistently competed with Viet Minh for leadership, attempted to disrupt and hamper the confederacy of administrative and military units. After the On Nhu Hau case, the Police Bureau instructed provincial authorities to track down VNP. The entire operational system of VNP in localities was destroyed. In Vinh Yen, 500 VNP's members surrendered; in Yen Bai, 200 military students who were offsprings of landlords and Japanese officers had to flee; in Thanh Hoa, the whole military force of VNP in Di Linh strategic war zone (Nona Cong) surrender.

### ***6.3.4 The Last Remnants of Vietnam Nationalist Party from 1947 to 1954***

After the French reinvaded Indochina, VNP's leaders attempted to revise its operations in China and other French-occupied areas; while in other territories in Vietnam, VNP created little activity. Moreover, it was further trapped in intricate and irreconcilable conflicts.

Both VNP and GVNP were anticommunism parties but had serious conflicts over political worldviews and approaches.

Since 1947, VNP was split into two sections:

- The first section supported Bảo Đại and cooperation with French to oppose the communists and consisted of notable figures such as Nghiêm Xuân Thiên, Trần Trung Dũng, Vũ Hồng Khanh, and Ngô Thúc Địch.
- The second section resisted Bảo Đại and maintained an opposition to French and comprised vital figures such as Xuan Tung, Hoàng Văn Đào, Nguyễn Văn Chấn, and Lê Ngọc Chân. According to these members, the Bảo Đại government was simply meant to “*be a puppet of French colonialists helping them to defeat the resistant force and suppress national revolution*”.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Document on the organizational structure and operations of reactionary parties from 1947 to 1948, Profile number 612, PTT Office, p. 4 (Giap 1997).



Between the two sections the latter was more favored. In July 1947, VNP participated in the United National Front, endorsed the establishment of a Vietnam nationalist government. VNP retained its desire to rebuild its status and gain support from China Koumintang and the US. Apart from communicating via notes, VNP also sent its men to Nanjing to beg the China Koumintang to protect Vietnam, upheld the France–Vietnam alliance and asked the US for financial assistance.

Additionally, within its organization there were differences. In July 1950, the national congress of VNP was held. In the end, two Central Executive committees were formed and against each other, one was led by Vũ Hồng Khanh and the other represented by Ngô Thúc Địch. At local level division between native nationalists and overseas nationalists took place; “*the natives accused the overseas of procrastination, while the latter blamed the former of following the French*”.<sup>18</sup> In 1951, VNP held the position as Tonkin Governor and sought to remove all members of GVNP from its government, especially in Hai Duong, Hanoi, Son Tay, Ha Nam, and Thai Binh.

Due to these relentless conflicts, VNP did not release any considerable operation, except for a few activities such as counterfeiting money, reorganizing itself using the old members. After the Dien Bien Phu victory (1954), VNP was busy consolidating its foundation near the enemy rear, and at the same time encouraging party members and people to emigrate to the South. At this point, its activities and reputation in the entire territory of Vietnam completely ended.

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<sup>18</sup>Document on the organizational structure and operations of reactionary parties from 1947 to 1948, Profile number 612, PTT Office, p. 24.

## Chapter 7

# Vietnam Nationalist Party in the History of Vietnamese Revolution

This chapter presents previous assessments of the formation and activities of VNP in Vietnam history from 1927 to 1954, while the author highlights the meaningful contributions of VNP in advocating and enlightening patriotism in the people of Vietnam during the early revolution years. More significantly, the author affirms an important role in the metabolism of VNP in the development of nationalist movements of Vietnam, while given the experiment lessons for Vietnam revolutionary on many aspects: methods of organizational system construction, building revolutionary forces, launched the uprising to contribute to the success of the guidelines and fronts policies for the Communist Party of Vietnam in the next periods.

### 7.1 Different Evaluations on Vietnam Nationalist Party

As one of three most remarkable revolutionary parties in Vietnam during the 1920s, VNP played a particular role in the development and transformation of movements for national liberation. However, assessments and evaluations of the contributions and function of this party in the Vietnamese revolutionary history were still controversial and varied.

According to the colonial politician and Director of Sûreté Général Indochinoise Louis Marty, VNP resembled an “*insurgent*” organization opposing the protectorate. With this mindset, he wrote: “*It was said that VNP was involved in various malicious acts, assassinations, robbing and extortion during its operations.*”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Louis Marty, “Góp phần nghiên cứu lịch sử chính trị Đông Dương thuộc Pháp” (A contribution to research on the political history of French-occupied Indochina), *Ibid.*, p. 9.

On the contrary, according to the works composed by Nhung Tông, Bạch Diên and particularly books published in the North during America—Diem era, VNP was overrated with regard to its historic role. In his forewords to the book *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng, lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại* (VNP: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle) written by Hoàng Văn Đào, Nguyễn Đắc Lộc wrote: “Reading this historical book of VNP, one recognizes its achievements and failures. One easily learns that its failure was just temporary, while its achievements lasted forever. One readily understands why VNP earned the historic credit for its great accomplishment in Yen Bai, while other parties only received consolation prize.”<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, Hoàng Văn Đào as an author and insider, exaggerated when he wrote the book’s introduction: “Of all the revolutionary organizations, VNP was the most advanced, organized, consistent and triumphant.”<sup>3</sup>

In researches and treatises on VNP of the North historians before 1975 up to now, judgments and evaluations on its historical role were relatively relevant with historical facts. However, these evaluations were a little overly critical to not fully recognize the contributions of VNP to Vietnamese revolution before 1930s.

To help clarify this confusion, it is necessary to put VNP in the historical context of Vietnamese revolution since the 1920s to 1930s as a transitional phase in history.

It would be reasonable to regard this organization as an advanced and progressive party prior to 1930, based on its political attitude and activities. During the 1920s, the being of VNP resulted from the expected developments and movements of national liberation, and demonstrated a new stage of national movements in Vietnam under the postwar conditions. At the same time, with its political ideas and organization, VNP was part of the national movements from 1925 to 1930.

History shows that the national movements in Vietnam since the end of World War I to the 1925–1926 era were, in fact, large-scale efforts to rally for democracy and independence, with original and diverse revolutionary aims and methods, such as the attempts to ask for the release of Phan Bội Châu, mourning for Phan Chu Trinh, and funeral of Lương Văn Can. These climaxes heightened national liberation to a new level and deepened it with the creation of different political parties possessing diverse tendencies. Of these, VNP was a notable party representing the bourgeois nationalist inclination.

Compared to VRYL and NVRP as contemporary revolutionary counterparts, VNP shared similar features in its founding conditions, the goals and backgrounds of its founders, and other salient factors. Nevertheless, as it developed, VNP gradually revealed fundamentally different courses and approaches from the other two parties.

<sup>2</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng – Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>3</sup>Hoang Van Dao, *Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng – Lịch sử đấu tranh cận đại 1927–1954* (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang: A Contemporary History of a National Struggle: 1927–1954), *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Originating from a distinct condition, and being well prepared ideologically and theoretically by the guru Nguyễn Ái Quốc, VRYL followed socialist revolution from the beginning. Strategies and policies of *Youth* party were founded on the idea of the working class; while VNP adopted bourgeois democracy based on Freedom, Equality, Fraternity and a few principles and contents from the Three People Principles of Sun Yat Sen. Furthermore, since its establishment to disintegration, VNP held a bourgeois standpoint when conducting national revolution.

However, compared to other reformist parties and organizations such as *Constitutional Party* (*Đảng Lập hiến*) or *Vietnam's wind* (Nam Phong), VNP's revolutionary character was evident in its violent approach (a form of armed revolution) to chase away colonialists and regain independence.

But it is not sound to just conclude that “*VNP was the most advanced, organized party*” as Hoàng Văn Đào said.

To be honest, among the “*nationalist parties*” (understood as the revolutionary parties adopting bourgeois nationalism) and compared to other parties, VNP had more specific and popular ideas, political programs, and organizational system. In this aspect, VNP was the most powerful among bourgeois nationalist parties that took part in Vietnamese national liberation. But compared to VRYL and NVRP, VNP was clearly inferior in terms of its inconsistent and unstable political doctrine and unsteady organization.

History shows that, among the continuous revolutionary movements in Vietnam after the First World War, proletarian revolutions became increasingly developed and expanded. Only political organizations that followed this tendency (which were later assembled under the banner of Vietnam Communist Party) were able to mobilize and lead the people to revolution to restore national freedom. VNP became obsolete and failed due to its refusal of this advanced tendency. That is not to say, however, that this organization did not play a role in Vietnamese revolution.

As mentioned, for Vietnamese revolution, proletariat revolution was the sole alternative that could lead to national independence and freedom. Despite not following this course, VNP had no intention to oppose communism. Due to shortcomings in revolutionary theory its guiding principles “*were not as comprehensive and profound as the later Indochina Communist Party's political program, but were in no way conflicting with the early new bourgeois revolution led by Indochina Communist Party.*”<sup>4</sup> The core ideological basis and political foundation of VNP were patriotism and the idea of nationalism. On this ground, VNP and communists were no different. While observing and attempting to approach VNP, VRYL as the most eminent proletariat revolutionary association prior to 1930, on the one hand criticized the adventurous and reckless acts of VNP, on the other hand, it still longed to associate and collaborate with the members of VNP. This was especially shown in the murder of Thi Nhu and Thi Uyen (two turncoats sent by the French spies to search for Nguyễn Thái Học) in May 1928 in Hai Phong.

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<sup>4</sup>*Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2-1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), *Ibid.*, p. 204.

For its part, VNP did not do anything to hamper Thanh niên Party; it even proposed and sought to unite the two organizations in 1928.

Thus, VNP was a bourgeois patriotic party and an integral part of Vietnamese national movements after the First World War. This position proved that it had certain contributions to the developments in the transitional stage of Vietnamese revolution prior to 1930.

## **7.2 The Role of Vietnam Nationalist Party in Vietnamese Revolutionary Movements Until 1930**

### ***7.2.1 Vietnam Nationalist Party with the Dissemination of and Education on Patriotism and Nationalism Among the People***

In over two years of existence, VNP contributed relatively to the arousal and promotion of patriotism and nationalism in different classes of Vietnamese.

Back in the past, when the French colonialists first invaded our country in 1885, our people were determined to relentlessly fight for the protection of national independence, as shown in our long tradition of resolute resistance against foreigners. Due to the shabbiness and corruption of Nguyen court, the lack of a unified leadership and rightful methods, the struggles against the French individually failed. But the courage and determination of Vietnamese generated admiration from even the French. Gosselin—a French Captain—in his work *Empire of Annam (Đế Quốc An Nam)* admitted: “*The French did not come to vacant country. Using primitive equipments, the Vietnamese persistently fought against our cannons in a glorious and courageous manner. Captured, fusilladed and beheaded men maintained a calm attitude without showing any fear or defensiveness. It took us 30 years to obstinately maintain a temporary order: Vietnamese people certainly had limitless perseverance to fight so diligently.*”<sup>5</sup>

In the early twenty-first century, this patriotism was continued in various democratic and national movements aroused by Phan Bội Châu, Phan Chu Trinh and patriotic poems and activities of Tonkin Free School’s warriors, etc. Revolutionary poems by Phan Bội Châu and Tonkin Free School encouraged self-sufficiency, national pride, and the sadness of losing one’s homeland among people, and urged them to stand up for national independence. These works penetrated the hearts of people, especially petty bourgeois intellectuals, stirring up their hunger for national liberation.

Fed by this hunger, the founders of VNP started their revolutionary career with patriotism. On class issues and political ideology, they were adherents of the Three

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<sup>5</sup>Pham Van Son, *Việt Nam đấu tranh sử* (The history of Vietnamese resistance) (second edition with amendments), Ha Noi, 1950.

People Principles and the ideas of Freedom–Equality–Fraternity adopted from the French bourgeois Revolution. But nationalism and revolutionary patriotism were the core political ideas of VNP. Thus, along with other revolutionary parties, VNP inherited the career for national salvation left by Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh in disseminating and propagating patriotism and nationalism among the people. Since its early time, the predecessor of VNP, *Nam Dong publishing house*, released great popular books such as *the Trung king* and *Examples of Victory and Failure* to educate people on the patriotic tradition and national pride, calling people to follow nations in the world to expel aggressors. In its membership recruitment and development, apart from exposing and uncovering the evils of French invaders, VNP used revolutionary poems by Phan Bội Châu and Tonkin Free School, and other significant institutions as instruments to educate the people. These deeds helped develop and improve nationalism and patriotism in the masses.

In its short being, VNP was not on par with VRYL and NVRP in educating, instructing and recruiting farmers and laborers, but it nevertheless awakened and provoked patriotism among Vietnamese soldiers working in the French army, petty bourgeois, national bourgeois and several village authorities and rich landlords in rural areas—in whom the other two parties were not able to enlist and sow the seeds of revolution. By amassing these classes, VNP fairly contributed to the early foundation of a *united national front* (mặt trận dân tộc thống nhất) in the fight against a common enemy.

The most revolutionary deed of VNP was the Yen Bai uprising, which, despite being lost, made a huge impact on domestic and international developments and astonished the French. After this uprising, various patriots were captured and murdered, but their patriotism and fearlessness when facing the invaders were admired and valued by both our people and progressive French natives. In Vietnam, a revolution led by the Indochina Communist Party erupted in the aftermath of Yen Bai uprising to resist the white terrorism by French invaders targeted at VNP. In France, triggered by French Communist Party, a resistant movement to support the Yen Bai warriors broke out. The Vietnamese student association in Paris also released circulars to demand the French government to discharge captured soldiers in Yen Bai. These resistant movements reflected the solidarity, nationalism, and tradition of patriotism in our fight for freedom and independence. It could be said that, the Yen Bai uprising was not only a patriotic act of VNP but also a symbol of the perseverance and long-lasting struggle against foreign invaders by the entire Vietnamese people.

Besides the Yen Bai uprising, patriotic acts and the faithful spirit of higher-ups such as Nguyễn Thái Học, Phó Đức Chính and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, who were determined to sacrifice themselves rather than surrender to the enemy, greatly helped awaken and arouse patriotism and national self-sufficiency among people.

In general, Vietnamese revolutionary movements performed by VNP, in particular the Yen Bai uprising, “*were the continuance of the revolts by patriotic officials in the Royalist movement, upholding the revolutionary tradition of Vietnamese soldiers as happening in the Hanoi poison plot in 1908 and Thai Nguyen uprising in*

1917, and destroying the plot to use Vietnamese against Vietnamese by French invaders".<sup>6</sup> Despite its defeat, VNP made huge contributions to the spreading and teaching of patriotism and national self-sufficiency, and encouraged heroic individuals to stand up against foreign aggressors and regain national independence and freedom, creating a fertile land for communism to develop and prosper.

### ***7.2.2 Vietnam Nationalist Party with the Transformation of Vietnamese Patriotism and National Movements Until 1930***

The failure of the Yen Bai uprising and total disruption of VNP themselves accelerated the transformation of Vietnamese national movements toward proletarian revolution.

Naturally, in every era and nation where classes exist, patriotism and national revolution hold a certain class characteristic. But whichever class plays the central role will decide the nature of national revolution and take a leadership role.

In our history of national founding and protection, when feudal classes represented the nation, the court was responsible for gathering every national force available to struggle against foreign aggression. The resistant wars against Song, Yuan and Ming dynasties launched by Ly, Tran, Le dynasties were most vivid proofs that the traditional nature of patriotism was loyalty to the king and the characteristic of national liberation was feudalism.

But in premodern area, our national struggle against French aggression and slavery developed in a completely different historical context. The French commenced their invasion right at the moment when Vietnamese feudal system was most profoundly and generally in crisis, and feudal classes became the most reactionary forces hampering social development. This reality annihilated the popular belief in feudal kings and mandarins and led to upheavals against imperialists, invaders, and the court at the end of nineteenth century. Since then, patriotism was linked with anti-imperialism, anti-feudalism, and the central theme of national revolution included two elements: nationalism and democracy. Nevertheless, the leadership role in national revolution at this time was mostly played by patriotic feudal officials. Meanwhile in Western countries, capitalism had been triumphant for hundreds of years and became dramatically monopolistic.

In the early twenty-first century, under the profound socioeconomic and ideological transformations and strong impact of bourgeois revolutions in the world, bourgeois revolution was born as an approach toward national liberation

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<sup>6</sup>*Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2-1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử* (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), Ibid., p. 72.

in Vietnam. With the Tonkin Free School movement by Phan Bội Châu and Modernism (Duy tân) by Phan Chu Trinh, etc. In which the character of patriotic movements shifted from feudalism to capitalism and democracy was implemented with more intensively than ever. But the success of Russian October Revolution (1917) brought humankind a history to a transitional period from capitalism and socialism in a worldwide scale. Meanwhile, national movements in Vietnam kept on following bourgeois democratic revolution and once again were not able to catch up with the new progress.

In this historical context, the presence of VNP acted as a stimulus to the development of bourgeois national movements within nationwide revolution, in light of new socioeconomic and ideological conditions arising in Vietnam after World War I. And that very reason explained why the failure of VNP was also the failure of bourgeois tendency, and confirmed the foreseeable victory of proletarian revolution in the new context of Vietnamese national movements: *“There was no alternative to national liberation and independence other than proletarian revolution.”*<sup>7</sup>

In the new era beginning with the success of Russian October Revolution, the strategy of VNP retained obsolete factors and was inconsistent with historical needs and trends. The new era required national liberation to alter its essence to proletarian revolution, and become an essential part of global revolution. When international bourgeois have become reactionaries, the leadership of national movements in colonized countries had to be given to the proletariat and national independence had to be in conjunction with socialism.

The failure of VNP was thus an inevitable part of history. But this failure helped speed up the transformation of national movements from bourgeois to proletarian. *“The multi-dimensional development of Vietnamese revolution after the First World war and following the success of socialist revolution in USSR were so fast that only a pathway was appropriate, namely national democratic revolution; only a class was worthy of leadership, specifically the working class; and only a party was chosen, namely the proletarian party...”*<sup>8</sup> After the loss of Yên Bái uprising, the guidance of national movements was transferred to the proletariat, which was particularly marked by the establishment of Vietnam Communist Party on February 3, 1930. In effect, it made a turning point for Vietnamese revolution.

Thus, the collapse of VNP equipped our people with early awareness of the shortcomings and incompetence of bourgeois revolution, engaged them in proletarian revolution and rapidly promoted the transformation of patriotic movements from bourgeois to proletarian, laid the foundation for the victory of proletarian inclination in Vietnam in the early 1930s.

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<sup>7</sup>Minh (1980a).

<sup>8</sup>Nguyen Khanh Toan, *Vấn đề dân tộc trong cách mạng tư sản* (The issue of nationalism of bourgeois revolution)—1st volume, Ibid., p. 144.



### 7.2.3 *Vietnam Nationalist Party and the Lessons for Vietnamese Revolution*

The period from 1925 to 1930 was when the mobilization for the establishment of Vietnam Communist Party took place among Vietnamese Revolutionary Movements through the activities of VRYL and NVRP. The ideological and political preparation of the Communist Party served to guide and transform national movements to proletarian approach, based on the combination of Marxist-Leninism and practical requirements of Vietnamese revolution.

Besides the above two parties which helped to transform Vietnamese national movements, another revolutionary organization also made its contribution—namely VNP. The being and operations of this party with its peak as the Yen Bai uprising promoted nationalism and national movements and helped to choose and confirm the pathway of Vietnamese revolution in a new area. On the influence and role of VNP in Vietnamese revolution, a founder of Indochina Communist Party wrote: “*It was true that the movements produced by farmers and workers in 1930–1931 after the Yen Bai uprising were more successful. But that uprising in the Red River valley was the stimuli of later movements, and helped stir up the great revolutionary spirit. With this significance, the uprising deserves our respect and is worth being written in the hall of fame among Indochina national movements.*”<sup>9</sup> It could be said that, through its persistent activities from 1927 to 1930, VNP created and left valuable lessons for Vietnamese revolution as follows.

#### 7.2.3.1 On Nationalism

The establishment of VNP with its core political idea as revolutionary nationalism was an inevitable development of Vietnamese national movements in the aftermath of First World War. History shows that nationalism was a fundamental necessity and content of Vietnamese revolution.

In both historical theory and practice at that time, nationalism was always coupled with class nature and was received and addressed by each class with its own perspective and interest. As a bourgeois party with most its crucial members as bourgeois and petty bourgeois intellectuals, VNP addressed nationalism via bourgeois standpoint. Thus, its failure showed the economic and military fragility, feeble social status, and political inexperience of bourgeois. Without an advanced revolutionary idea to guide its activities, Vietnamese national bourgeois could not represent and took the leadership role of Vietnamese revolution. Via a bourgeois worldview, VNP did not fully resolve the issue of nationalism, and thus failed to respond to the objective demands of our national revolution.

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<sup>9</sup>Hồng Thế Công, *Lược thảo lịch sử phong trào cộng sản Đông Dương* (A brief history of Indochina communist movements) (1933), (translated from French version, typed, belongs to Institute of Party's history, Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics).

During the ideological and organizational battle between bourgeois and proletarian inclinations, VRYL and later Vietnam Communist Party continuously pointed out the historical deficiencies of VNP. In the new era, i.e., the transitional stage from capitalism to socialism in a worldwide scale, Vietnamese national movements had to follow the proletarian path if victory was to be gained. Only the proletariat was capable of leading national revolution because their interests were consistent with national interests; because they were “*free and without ownership, if they lost they lost nothing, and if they won they got the world*”.<sup>10</sup> Thus, “*Vietnamese national liberation had to be led by the proletariat to be successful.*”<sup>11</sup>

Based on this correct mindset and the proletarian ground, VRYL defined its guiding purpose in the first place as “first to carry out national revolution, then international revolution”<sup>12</sup> (meaning first to realize national revolution, then international revolution, overthrow capitalism and develop communism). In his lectures for the members of Hội Thanh niên in political classes in Guangzhou (China), Nguyễn Ái Quốc said: “*if we have been devoting ourselves to revolution then we must finish it*”.<sup>13</sup> The first political program of Vietnam Communist Party also indicated the goal of Vietnamese revolution as “*people’s democratic revolution and land revolution towards a communist system.*” It was a comprehensive and correct way to proletarian revolution, which was in sync with the necessity and reality of Vietnamese revolution in the early twentieth century. The failure of VNP was in fact the defeat of bourgeois revolutionary pathway and the vindication of a neo-national and democratic conduit created and directed by Vietnam Communist Party. It was the most proper and correct way for Vietnamese revolution at that time.

### 7.2.3.2 On Violence and Armed Struggle

Using violence to drive away the French and regain national independence was an enduring policy of VNP during its existence and development. Since its establishment to 1930, the leaders of VNP recognized that, to resist colonialists, violence, and armed struggle had to be adopted. This policy was not conducted rationally by VNP but primarily by “*spontaneous actions and thoughts resulting from its poor understanding of revolution.*”<sup>14</sup> Although the first political program of VNP clearly identified three revolutionary phases (membership development, campaign development, and revolution commencement), in reality, its leaders were so hasty

<sup>10</sup>Minh (1980b).

<sup>11</sup>The Central Committee of Propaganda (1977).

<sup>12</sup>Các tổ chức tiền thân của Đảng (Predecessors of the Party), Su that Publisher, Ha Noi, 1977, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup>Hồ Chí Minh Tuyển tập– tập 1 (Ho Chi Minh Selected Works—1st volume), Ibid., p. 242.

<sup>14</sup>Khởi nghĩa Yên Bái 2–1930. Một số vấn đề lịch sử (The Yen Bai uprising February, 1930. Some historical issues), Ibid., p. 249.

that they took a shortcut. VNP had not completed its first phase (membership mobilization and cell development) when it was about to begin revolution. Therefore, the Yen Bai uprising was literally “forced” to erupt when time was not ripe and necessary conditions were not ready. Moreover, this uprising erupted when VNP was dealing with multiple difficulties. After the Bazin murder, the French drastically enforced their suppression, causing huge damages to VNP. Its local cells were destroyed largely and internal divisions and differences developed significantly. In that context, VNP’s leaders still decided to fight to a finish with the enemies. Thus, what directly led to the Yen Bai uprising were the suppression and terrorism of the French, rather than a thoroughly—planned revolutionary movement. It was a fatal flaw of the VNP’s Board of leaders to start an uprising without precise timing, careful preparation and even when it was going to be dismantled completely. It showed the recklessness and haste typical of bourgeois. Uprising was an ultimate endeavor and could only be successful if preparation was adequate and time was ripe. V.I. Lenin once said: “*Never take revolution as a joke,*” but VNP’s leaders were ignorant of this and thus had to pay the tolls, as their uprising was completely lost and their party disintegrated.

Another cause leading to the failure of Yen Bai uprising was indicated by *Youth* (Thanh niên) newspaper (the house organ of VRYL). It was because the revolt “*was planned and implemented in the old way as it was only a revolt of soldiers without the support of nationwide people, which surely led to failure.*”<sup>15</sup> According to plan, the primary force of this uprising was Vietnamese patriotic soldiers in the French army. Thus, when plans had been discovered and all fifth columns eliminated, uprisings were delayed, as shown in the cases in Chua Thong military post (Son Tay), Pha Lai, Hai Duong and Kien An. Moreover, without popular advocacy the Yen Bai riot received no popular support. And there was no centralized leadership and strong coordination between local forces. The starting date of riots in upland areas and those in lowland areas were inconsistent, helping the French to plan ahead and rapidly suppress spontaneous riots scattered in localities.

Vietnamese revolution could draw significant and practical lessons on armed struggle from the loss of Yen Bai uprising. Its failure also vindicated and justified that armed revolution is not a deed done by a group of people, neither is it a series of schemes. With a revolutionary nature, armed struggle is supposed to be carried out by an organized and trained nation; and its victory depends on sound preparation and timing.

### 7.2.3.3 On Political Development

It could be said that VNP made generous efforts in building its political development. In over two years, the Party amended its Statute three times (in 1927, 1928 and 1929) and modified its Program of action two times (in 1927, 1928) to

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<sup>15</sup>Van Hoa and Quoc (1979).

clarify fundamental aspects of its political standpoint. However, these efforts even stressed the inconsistency of VNP's political doctrine. In fact, its political worldview was only a by-product of different ideas, many of which were obsolete and inequivalent in the new era. Its political policies were also vague, even its doctrine was not clearly defined, it initially employed "*democratic socialism*," later substitute with "*Freedom–Equality–Fraternity*" from French revolution and finally borrowed the Three People Principles from Sun Yat Sen.

Besides, VNP did not pay adequate concern for propaganda and training. In over two years of existence, these vital tasks were almost forgotten. This led to the ideological discrepancy among its members that was vividly shown in the internal ideological partition before and especially after the Yen Bai uprising erupted and ended.

As for organization, despite certain achievements in developing a system from central to local, the system of VNP was not stable and its principles were not sufficiently followed. Moreover, complex social backgrounds of its members and its casual party development helped the French to insert spies into it. This was the main cause leading to the rapid disruption of several party cells after being suppressed by the French after the Bazin murder in February 1929.

In analyzing the failure of VNP, *Youth* newspaper, the house organ of VRYL, commented on its 182 issue dated June 28th, 1929 as: "*The doctrine of VNP was ambiguous, its organization ineffective, and its members of mixed categories.*"<sup>16</sup> By criticizing these shortcomings of VNP, *Thanh niên* went on to state that the success of Vietnamese revolution depended on a stable party adhering Marxist–Leninism. Later, practical lessons drawn from VNP helped the governing party become strong politically, ideologically, and managerially.

#### 7.2.3.4 On the Development of Revolutionary Force and National Union

Having a bourgeois standpoint, VNP did not realize the role and power of farmers and workers during its development of revolutionary force. On this issue, in the Second Congress of Indochina Communist Party (February, 1951), Trường Chinh, the Party General Secretary said: "*The hopeless loss of the Yen Bai uprising (1930) ended the revolutionary phase led by bourgeois. The failure of this phase was because a united front led by farmers and workers to resist imperialists and reactionary landlords was not found, revolutionary Parties did not win the hearts of people, their discipline was neglected and their political course was unclear and impractical...*"(see Footnote 15) The absence of political insight caused VNP, in its membership development and mobilization, to only implement propaganda among *Vietnamese soldiers in the French army, national capitalists, urban petty capitalists, wealthy officials and landlords* and considered them crucial revolutionary

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<sup>16</sup>Duan (1968).

agents. Given the new context, this way of viewing and mobilizing revolutionary force was not proper and objective. Having the weaknesses of national bourgeois who were incapable economically and politically and of disorganized petty bourgeois; VNP could not launch anything other than a “*bourgeois national revolution*”<sup>17</sup> and “*only exposed the shortsightedness and thoughtlessness typical of petty bourgeois*”.<sup>18</sup>

Historical facts showed that in Vietnamese colonial society farmers and workers were the most cruelly and heavily exploited. But these two classes became the main revolutionary force not because they were “*the most exploited and oppressed*,” but because of their distinctions. They were also the largest and most revolutionary instruments.

Misinterpreting the role of workers and farmers and distrusting popular power were enormous flaws in interpreting and mobilizing a revolutionary force made by VNP. Nevertheless, VNP made it easy for Vietnamese to have a more proper understanding of the role of other classes in fighting a common enemy. The establishment, existence and development of VNP facilitated the belief that: in such a semi-feudal, semi-colonial country as Vietnam, when the conflict between a nation and its aggressors became the most prominent, only nationalism and Vietnamese patriotism could unite the whole population under a united front. VNP could establish its foothold among Vietnamese soldiers because most of them were forced to fight against their own nation. They were former farmers who carried picks and ploughs and still bore the blood of Lạc Hồng (son of Hùng King and An Dương Vương). They were successors of patriots who played important roles in the Duy Tân movement in Cochinchina from 1907 to 1908, in the plot of Cochinchina mandarins in 1916 and Thai Nguyen uprising in 1917. It was thus necessary to attract and recruit patriotic soldiers into the revolutionary force; and by their activities they proved to be pioneering in national movements. As for national bourgeois, despite being weak and compromisable, most of them were patriotic and thus should be attracted and mobilized. Even among feudal landlords, most of whom had betrayed national and popular interests, there were individuals who were still patriotic, thus they were to be rallied or at least neutralized.

All in all, via its activities, VNP made important contributions to the dissemination and diffusion of patriotism and nationalism among people, and also left precious lessons for our nation on addressing nationalism, developing a political party, conducting armed struggle and especially mobilizing a revolutionary force and establishing a united front of national movements. The existence and revolutionary operations of this party served as practical foundation for Vietnam Communist Party in adopting the right courses and policies.

By correcting the shortcomings in ideology and membership development of VNP, from the beginning Vietnam Communist Party decided to rally the majority of farmers and workers and also did its best to “*engage petty bourgeois, intellectuals*

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<sup>17</sup>Viet Nam Communist Party (2001).

<sup>18</sup>Toan (1985).

and middle farmers in the same force with proletariat... and rally and invite rich farmers, bourgeois and middle capitalists...”<sup>19</sup> to follow revolution. Driven by the strategic standpoint that national liberation was the utmost important task, when World War II was going on, Vietnam Communist Party and Hồ Chí Minh made a sound decision to establish a united front because “when national liberation was of the most importance, it is necessary for us to unite and banish imperialists and Vietnamese traitors to save our nation at this critical juncture”.<sup>20</sup> The successful establishment of Viet Minh Front in 1945 was most powerful justification of our Party’s courses, one of which was to learn from the experiences, though failed, made by VNP in the mobilization and organization of national force prior to 1930.

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<sup>19</sup>Minh (2000).

<sup>20</sup>The Central Committee of Researchers on the Party’s History (1977).

## Chapter 8

# Conclusion

1. History indicates that, in the 1920s, Vietnamese national movements saw great transformations in both content and format under profound socio-economic and ideological shifts. Through various activities by our people, especially the national and democratic movements in the years 1925–1926, foundations for the establishment of patriotic and revolutionary organizations such as VNP were laid. Thus, it could be said that VNP as well as other revolutionary groups was *direct products and consequences of Vietnamese patriotic and revolutionary movements during the 1920s*.
2. The political worldview of VNP and its members' social backgrounds showed that it represented the interests and ideas of bourgeois and elite petty bourgeois of Vietnam. It was clear that when Marxist–Leninism was present in Vietnam, patriotic groups led by petty bourgeois and intellectuals such as VNP could not form an independent political course and a thorough revolutionary approach. This shortcoming plus the mistakes in organizing and choosing operational locations led to the failure of VNP and were the real causes of the increasingly internal division between its members. The loss of VNP was also the failure of patriotic intellectuals who followed the bourgeois course in light of the irreversible development of proletarian revolution founded on Marxist–Leninism and the practical growth of Vietnamese revolution.
3. Despite its short-lived existence, VNP-led operations contributed largely in the spreading of nationalism, the reception and dissemination of freedom and democracy, and also helped diffuse advanced and revolutionary ideas among people. Although its core political idea was *nationalism*, the political course of VNP still belonged to the obsolete category of bourgeois revolution, which was created and led by bourgeois. Not to mention the incompetence of VNP in solving the core issues of bourgeois revolution, especially restoring lands to the

farmers,<sup>1</sup> developing membership, forming policy guidelines and carrying out revolutionary operations. VNP was one of the political groups that contributed greatly to mobilizing the people, organizing, and leading Vietnamese national movements. Although its cause was lost, VNP left valuable lessons for Vietnamese revolution and helped identify the expected course of Vietnamese revolution in a new historical era—the era of proletarian revolution started by the victory of Russian October Revolution. With these contributions, VNP played an important role in boosting the rapid development and accomplishment of Vietnamese national liberation. (See Footnote 1) It is a historical fact acknowledged by not only Vietnamese researchers, but also foreign scholars. Former General Secretary of Vietnam Communist Party, Lê Duẩn stated that “*It is inappropriate to deny the role of petty bourgeois in Vietnamese national liberation movements. We must neither underrate nor overestimate them*”.<sup>2</sup> This was the most rational and objective insight on VNP and Vietnamese petty bourgeois in national movements in the early twentieth century.

4. Since the end of Yen Bai uprising (1930) to before 1945, VNP was almost nonexistent as it only showed up in the power struggle with the communists imprisoned by the French. After the success of August Revolution in 1945, following Chiang Kai Shek’s army, several former members of VNP aimed to return to their country to usurp the revolutionary government. But without popular support and stable organization and due to frequent internal conflicts, VNP’s operations were not effective.

Having lost in the contest for political power and authority with Viet Minh Front and Vietnam Communist Party, the by-products of VNP and VRL attempted to hamper revolution, eliminate the achievements gained from the August Revolution and oppose the population, thus became obstructive to the development of Vietnamese revolution. With their political hostility and various schemes and actions aimed at interrupting the revolutionary process, they turned their back to the rightful interests of the people and noble ideals of VNP, for which its founders and leaders such as Nguyễn Thái Học, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, Phó Đức Chính fought relentlessly and died 80 years ago while restoring their Fatherland’s Independence and Freedom.

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<sup>1</sup>C.A. Mkhitarian (ed.), *Vietnamese modern history (1917–1965)*, Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>2</sup>Le Duan, *Một vài đặc điểm của cách mạng Việt Nam* (Several features of Vietnamese revolution), Ibid., p. 48.



# Appendix 1

## Brief Biography of the Crucial Members of Vietnam Nationalist Party

### 1. Nguyễn Thái Học

Nguyễn Thái Học was born in 1901 in Tho Tang village, Vinh Tuong district, Vinh Phuc province. Born to a family of middle farmers, Nguyễn Thái Học joined an examination for Ministry Clerk. But after succeeding, he refused to serve the French and decided to enroll in the Business College to gain general economic knowledge.

At this time, nationwide Vietnamese revolutionary movements developed dramatically, such as appeals for the release of Phan Bội Châu (1925) and mourning for Phan Chu Trinh (1926). These movements strongly affected Nguyễn Thái Học as a youngster who had nurtured his will to liberate the country, regain freedom, independence, and happiness for his people. Also at this time, A. Varenne, appointed Indochina Governor General, supposedly vowed to make reforms as a way to lessen popular uprisings. In this context, Nguyễn Thái Học continuously sent letters in the years 1925, 1926, and 1927 to Varenne presenting his comprehensive social reform programs. Simultaneously, he wrote several articles for newspapers in the hope that they would make known his reform ideas to the people, but all the letters sent to the leading colonial authorities came back with no result. All the articles were strictly censored and prevented. This erased the illusion to collaborate with the French in serving his people. Since then, he concluded that only violence was able to drive away the French and save his people.

To realize this strong urge, at the end of 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học agreed to seek permanent residence in the office of Nam Dong publishing house with Hồ Văn Mịch. There, it was easier for him to discuss and contact with other young patriotic groups to make action plans.

It should be noted that before dropping out from school to focus on battling the French, since 1927, Nguyễn Thái Học had proven to be good at mobilizing popular support. He called on patriotic youngsters to hold the funeral for Phan Chu Trinh in Hai Ba temple (Hanoi) and afterwards rallied a large number of drop-out students to mourn for Lương Văn Can—a crucial member of Tonkin Free School movement. These movements aroused strong patriotism among youngsters,

causing Nguyễn Thái Học to be even more determined to start a revolution. To this end, Nguyễn Thái Học wrote to his family asking to end his marriage with a wife forced to marry him since his childhood and let her marry another person.

In Nam Dong Publishing House, Nguyễn Thái Học rapidly found a group consisting of revolutionary youngsters in Hanoi at the end of 1927. It was called the *First cell*. At the same time *Vietnamese Nationalists* led by Nguyễn Khắc Nhu in Bac Ninh proposed to attack important military locations of the French such as Dap Cau and Pha Lai. Nguyễn Khắc Nhu sent his men to contact the group of Nguyễn Thái Học and asked for joint actions. This was agreed by Nguyễn Thái Học and the majority of members belonging to Nam Dong Publishing House. When the plan for riots of *Vietnamese Nationalists* was ruined, Nguyễn Thái Học was actively contacting other patriotic groups to discuss the establishment of a revolutionary party. VNP (Vietnam Nationalist Party) was founded on December 25, 1927 and was a combination of patriotic groups led by Nguyễn Thái Học in Hanoi, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp in Bac Ninh and Hoàng Văn Đào, Hoàng Văn Tùng in Thanh Hoa, etc..... After its establishment, VNP began to develop its membership among noblemen, mandarins, village authorities, Vietnamese soldiers in French army, petty bourgeois intellectuals, and national bourgeois. The merger of VNP and *Vietnamese Nationalists* of Nguyễn Khắc Nhu in Bac Ninh created positive results for membership development. Along with membership development, Nguyễn Thái Học also sent his men to contact other revolutionary parties such as NVRP, VRYL to ask for unification of revolutionary forces. In the second election of the General Committee on July 1, 1928, Nguyễn Thái Học was appointed Party President. But in the third election, due to internal disagreements the General Committee was reorganized according to the new statute to contain a Committee of Legislation and Supervision whose President was Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, while Nguyễn Thái Học and Phó Đức Chính were the two Vice Presidents.

In early 1929, VNP was developing fruitfully when the Bazin assassination occurred (Feb 9, 1929). After that, the French increasingly destroyed and suppressed the Party. Various members of VNP were captured and its system was largely dismantled. The French released a bounty of 5,000 dong for whoever was able to arrest Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu.

In this new context, the main task of Nguyễn Thái Học and leaders of VNP was to define a course of action for the party. In a meeting with Nguyễn Khắc Nhu and Phó Đức Chính, Nguyễn Thái Học suggested performing armed revolution and this was agreed by the other two.

To this end, on July 1, 1929 he and Xứ Nhu held a conference in Lac Dao. There, the armed approach was concurred. Next, on December 9, 1929, another conference took place in Vong La to define the plan and starting date. But due to the betrayal of Phạm Thành Dương, secret spies were sent to arrest the conference attendees. Thanks to the assistance of civilians, Nguyễn Thái Học and other leaders escaped. The treason by Duong caused huge damage for the party, but its leaders still determined to commence uprising. On January 2, 1930, Nguyễn Thái Học and Xứ Nhu once again organized a conference in My Xa that belonged to Nam Sach district, Hai Duong province to decide the plan for revolution. According to plan, Nguyễn Thái Học was in charge of the uprising in a lowland region.

Although he knew that the riots in the midland region had failed Nguyễn Thái Học mobilized patriotic forces and planned to attack the Pha Lai post in Hai Duong on February 15, 1930. The assault of Pha Lai was lost but he still insisted on rioting in other localities. Thus, on February 15, 1930, riots led by VNP erupted in Phu Duc(Thai Binh) and Vinh Bao (Hai Phong).

After the riots in Phu Duc and Vinh Bao, the French rigorously hunted and captured Nguyễn Thái Học on February 20, 1930 in Co Vit hamlet (now belongs to Cong Hoa commune, Chi Linh, Hai Duong) and imprisoned him in Hoa Lo prison, Hanoi.

On March 23, 1930, in the conference of the Criminal Commission in Yen Bai, Nguyễn Thái Học assumed all responsibilities and attempted to justify the actions of his Party. But the Commission silenced him and issued death penalty for Nguyễn Thái Học. On June 17, 1930, the French executed him and 12 other crucial members of VNP in Yen Bai.

## 2. Nguyễn Khắc Nhu (1882–1930)

Nguyễn Khắc Nhu, or Xứ Nhu, was born in Song Khe village, Yen Dung district, Bac Giang province, hence his pen name Song Khe. He was born in 1882 (year of the Horse) to a poor Confucian family. Losing his father when 12 and living in a poor family, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu had to work as a domestic worker for an old teacher in the same village. But after a year he returned home. Later, he spent his life in a village pagoda, working as a cattle breeder and studying with monks at the same time. He quickly absorbed the Buddhist books at the pagoda. Subsequently he studied at the house of a patriotic scholar and bachelor named Duong in Noi Due. At this time he was able to meet Phan Bội Châu, who was on his way to Phon Xuong to visit Hoang Hoa Tham. In 1903, he ranked first in the provincial exam in Tonkin region, hence his name Xứ Nhu (Xu means region). In 1906, Xứ Nhu took the provincial exam but failed.

As a witness of the sins done by the French, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu sought to drive them away. In 1908, after enrolling in a pedagogy class, Xứ Nhu was appointed Canton teacher of Thinh Liet. According to old thinking, to be able to participate in revolution one had to possess a certain reputation. Thus, in 1915, Xứ Nhu entered another exam in Nam school but did not produce any result; he continued to teach and wait for opportunities. In 1926, listening to advice from Phan Bội Châu, Xứ Nhu established the *National Seekers of Talented* to develop peaceful revolution. But later, as the French increased their oppression, he once again established the *Vietnamese Nationalists* that followed an armed approach.

After VNP was born in February 1928, Xứ Nhu invited the entire membership of *Vietnamese Nationalists* to join the former. With his reputation, Xứ Nhu rapidly became one of the leading members of the party. In the second General Committee election at the end of December 1928, he was appointed Party President.

In the Yen Bai uprising, Xứ Nhu was charged with commanding revolution in upland region. In early 1930, he returned to Son Duong(Lam Thao, Phu Tho) to directly supervise VNP's riots that simultaneously broke out in Yen Bai, Lam Thao, and Hung Hoa. In a battle with the French in Lam Thao on February 11, 1930, Nguyễn Khắc Nhu was wounded and captured. Nhu committed suicide in Hung Hoa prison to keep his dignity.

### 3. Phó Đức Chính (1907–1930)

Phó Đức Chính was born in 1907 in Da Nguu village, Van Giang district, Hung Yen province. As he had close relations with Nam Dong Publishing House, he became one of the founding members of VNP while still studying in the College of Public Works. After graduation, Phó Đức Chính was appointed Agent Technique in Savannakhet (Laos). There, he established a few cells for VNP. At the end of 1928, he was deported back to Vietnam by the French. In the third election of the General Committee of VNP (December 1928), Phó Đức Chính was elected Vice President of the Subcommittee for Legislation and Supervision. Apart from organizing conferences, he was directly responsible for quite a few important activities, even for holding racketeering activities to gain finance for the Party. On August 24, 1929, on his way to the communication office, he was captured by the French along with Nguyễn Văn Viên, Nguyễn Văn Viên, Giao Lai, and Nguyen Thị Thuýết but was released for no evidence found. In the General Committee conference on December 9, 1929 in Vong La, due to being informed on by Phạm Thành Dương, Phó Đức Chính was surrounded and shot by French spies but still managed to escape.

In the Yen Bai uprising, he was tasked with attacking the Thông military post (Son Tay). Under his direct command, on the night of the 9th and the early morning of 10 February 1930, revolutionary soldiers surrounded the Thông military post and waited for signal from the fifth column for joint attack. But as alarm had been raised within and the fifth column had been eliminated, the revolutionary army could do nothing. Later, the French intensely searched and captured him on December 15, 1930 along with Cai Tan at the house of Quan Trang in Lam An village, Can Thuong canton, Tung Thien district, Son Tay and brought him to Hanoi for trial.

In front of the Criminal Commission which met on March 28, 1930 in Yen Bai, Chính was straightforward and claimed responsibilities for all. He was the only one who did not ask for an appeal. When asked by the Commission President whether he desired amnesty, Chính calmly responded: “My life is devoted to just one cause, now that cause was lost, what’s the reason to continue living?”

After some time of being imprisoned in Hoa Lo, on June 16, 1930 he was deported to Yen Bai and had to wait for execution. On the scaffold, he requested to lie on his back to see how the guillotine worked and yelled loudly “Long lives Vietnam.” This heroic action was deeply remembered by the people.

### 4. Đoàn Trần Nghiệp (Ký Con)

Đoàn Trần Nghiệp was born in Khúc Thủy village, Thanh Oai district, Ha Tay province. Upon entering the Party, as Nghiệp was young he was nicknamed Ký Con. In early 1928, Đoàn Trần Nghiệp joined VNP in Hanoi and quickly gained the trust of his leaders. Thus, Nghiệp was soon tasked with supervising the Hanoi student league and printing *Revolutionary Soul*, whose editor-in-chief was Nguyễn Thái Học and of other materials. The newspaper had its office in Son Tay Street, Hanoi, and at nights there was usually only Nghiệp who stayed there with a

writing desk. But after the first issue of *Revolutionary Soul* was released, Đoàn Trần Nghiệp was transferred to a Vietnam hotel established on September 30, 1928 to work as a storekeeper. Nghiệp worked there until 1929 when the hotel was inspected and closed by the French.

As a brave, calm, covert and reserved personality, Nghiệp was later appointed member and Chief of the Death Squad Subcommittee. Nghiệp directly commanded or participated in the murder of traitors such as the execution of Nguyễn Văn Kinh in Bach Thao botanical garden in Hanoi on December 15, 1929, the murder of Vương Trọng Phước and Nguyễn Văn Khê in Sơn Duong (Lam Thao, Phú Thọ). On January 18, 1930, Phạm Huy Du, the father of Đới Duong, was shot and killed by Nghiệp in Hanoi. Besides, Nghiệp was assigned by the General Committee to plan and implement big racketeering operations (especially one targeted at overseas Chinese traders in a car travelling from Sơn Tây to Hanoi on January 21, 1930).

Đoàn Trần Nghiệp was also responsible for other important tasks of the Party such as maintaining communication between the General Committee and local organs or producing bombs and weapons (swords, knives) to be used by the revolutionary army.

In general, Đoàn Trần Nghiệp was in charge of vital tasks of the party. Nghiệp kept in touch with Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu who were its two leaders. According to Louis Roubaud, Nghiệp was involved in 20 riots, all of which could have resulted in capital punishment.

In the Yên Bái uprising, Nghiệp was tasked with provoking the French in Hanoi to buy time for uprisings in other places. Under his leadership, on February 10, 1930, a number of grenade attacks were started in Hanoi.

After the loss of the Yên Bái uprising, Nghiệp did not give up and cooperated with the reformists led by Lê Hữu Cảnh to reorganize the Party and continue the undone tasks, including the murder of Phạm Thành Dương (April 24, 1930).

For all of the above revolutionary acts, the French put a bounty of 5000 dong for anyone who could capture Nghiệp and ordered their detectives to rigorously hunt for him. After the assassination of Đới Duong, Nghiệp left Hanoi for Hải Phòng. In Du Hang village, in the middle of June 1930, on his way from Hải Phòng to Nam Định, he was arrested.

While he was in prison, in front of the Indochina Chief of Security Arnoux and French journalist Louis Roubaud, Nghiệp was light and happily and fluently answered all the questions from the Chief. To strengthen his words, Nghiệp raised his locked hands to the air while answering, causing the French journalist to be respectful. Following is one of the paragraphs on Nghiệp captured in Louis Roubaud's *Việt Nam tấn thảm kịch Đông Dương* (Vietnam—An Indochina tragedy):

“And then I questioned Ký Con:

– If you have little belief in victory why do you keep on trying?

He responded:

- Everything must be started by someone, and then continued by others. Today we are unsuccessful, but tomorrow there ought to be people who finish the deed.
- What deed?
- Driving away the French from Vietnam.
- Were you trying to achieve that deed by assassinating my countrymen?
- I punished the traitors. If I killed someone it was for the greater good. Are you supposed to do revolution without killing anybody?
- And what was it when you tried to rob passengers?
- Revolution needs money. In the bus there were Chinese who were going to buy some rice. I said to them: “*I was tasked with stealing overabundant stuff from the rich and donating to the poor*”.
- You are a communist?
- I am just a republic as you. I desire for my country what you want yours to have: a democratic government, universal suffrage, freedom of press, acknowledgement of human rights and civil rights to realize independence.

He also said:

- If the French loved us, they would understand our misery.

And he further added:

- The most miserable individuals are elders because they cannot see anything. We are living blind like the elders; we are currently a nation trapped in darkness.

After that, Ký Con came back to his cell.”

That small, young yet brave man, who was more or less involved in most of the riots in Hanoi and other towns, who was deemed colleague of the Chief of Security by Louis Rouband as they were both heads of their respective departments which were built to punish—one belonged to VNP, another to Indochina government, gained admiration from both the French journalist and the cruel bounty hunter Arnoux.

On August 5, 1930, in front of the Criminal Commission in Hanoi, Đoàn Trần Nghiệp literally assumed all grave acts he had committed and was sentenced to death at the end of 1930. He went to the scaffold with Lê Hữu Cảnh, Nguyễn Xuân Huân, Dương Ngọc Tồn, Nguyễn Văn Nho, Nguyễn Quang Triệu, Nguyễn Minh Luân, Nguyễn Trọng Bằng, and Phạm Văn Khuê (Cai Khuê).

## 5. Nguyễn Thị Giang (1908–1930)

Nguyễn Thị Giang was born in 1908 in Bac Giang. Her family consisted of three daughters and they were named after their homelands as Bac, Giang, and Tinh. Tinh was small and went to school while Bac and Giang both joined VNP. Nguyễn Thị Giang was responsible for communication, publicity, and cell development among the soldiers. In the battle of Yen Bai military post, Bac disguised as the second wife of Cai Thuyết to assist the attack from within.

As liaison officer of the General Committee, Giang had opportunities to be close to Nguyễn Thái Học. The two fell in love and Nguyễn Thái Học ended his relationship with his former adultery wife to marry Nguyễn Thị Giang.

After the Bazin murder was discovered, Nguyễn Thái Học was in a constant state of moving and changing his identity to avoid being captured by detectives. Nguyễn Thị Giang not only had to protect herself but also assist her husband and delivered his orders to various cells. She also gave continuous encouragement and support to Nguyễn Thái Học while VNP was intensely attacked and suppressed in early 1929.

Then the Yen Bai uprising was lost and Nguyễn Thái Học was imprisoned. During this time, Nguyễn Thị Giang continued the Party's tasks with the reformists led by Nguyen Hữu Canh, and attempted to contact Nguyễn Thái Học who was in prison to receive instructions. She herself proposed to Lê Hữu Cảnh the plan to obliterate the elite colonialists and their minions and the intent to reform VNP in a new context.

On June 16, 1930, Nguyễn Thị Giang learnt that Nguyễn Thái Học and 12 other comrades were being deported to Yen Bai. She was deeply hurt but calmed herself and equipped a few grenades and a pistol donated by her husband in Hùng Temple. She secretly went with some comrades to Hàng Cỏ station and embarked on a train.

In the early morning of June 17, 1930, Giang and two other comrades disguised as farmers and secretly approached the scaffold in an attempt to prevent the execution, but failed. After seeing Nguyễn Thái Học executed, she was deeply saddened and silently went back to her boarding house, wrote her letters to comrades and parents, boarded a train back to Tho Tang to inform Nguyễn Thái Học 's family, and then committed suicide with a handgun at the village's entrance.

- **Suicide letter written by Nguyễn Thị Giang for her parents in law**

June 17th, 1930

*Dear parents.*

*I am forced to commit suicide, for I cannot revenge for our family and wash out our nation's disgrace! Having committed my love for my husband at Hùng Temple, I now come back to my hometown, and ask for this gunshot to end my life.*

*Your imprudent in-law child!*

- **Letter to comrades**

*I have been a patriot.*

*Unable to save my country, I now have to go to heaven to rally and train my soldiers, bearing my disgrace and saving my noble spirit, hoping for a victorious day! As my comrades, you have to live on to fight the tyranny and save our people from misery!*

Nguyễn Thái Học 's wife.

- **The last poem by Nguyễn Thị Giang**

I failed to help the greater good  
 I failed to avenge for my lover  
 Though I am still a young woman  
 I am determined to die for the populace  
 The revolutionary path is up and ahead  
 But stop I must, for life is not a rose  
 Now my secular life is going to end  
 Difficult though, I have to leave my people  
 Knowing I still preserve my purity

My name is embedded in comrades' minds  
 How enormous sorrow I leave with my death  
 But fate forces me to so go its way.  
 Our national flag still flies at every corner  
 How I am depressed, for not dying before it  
 I have come to the point of no return  
 Receive death as I may later regret  
 But that's life! Oh that is life  
 Who knows life! Who knows mankind?

- **A poem composed by an unknown soldier for Nguyễn Thái Học and Nguyễn Thị Giang**

*Better to die in glory than live with dishonor  
 Dying though, they protect their love and patriotism  
 To the blade of guillotine, he is not afraid  
 To the suicide shot, she is still brave  
 Their virtue will stun the population for years  
 To them victory and failure mean little  
 As he is loyal, and she is truthful<sup>1</sup>*

## 6. Lê Hữu Cảnh

Lê Hữu Cảnh was born in 1901 in Thịnh Quang commune, An Ha canton, Hoang Long district, Ha Dong district (now belongs to Hanoi) to a Christian and pottery trading family. In his childhood, Canh enrolled in a Christian school in Hanoi and later entered the army and stationed in Son Tay.

After the Bazin murder and Lac Dao conference on September 17, 1929, two leaders of VNP, Nguyễn Thái Học, and Nguyễn Khắc Nhu decided to start a revolution. But the neutral group led by Lê Hữu Cảnh said that more time was needed for the insurance of its success. During the revolution, despite staying away from

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<sup>1</sup>These poems were extracted from a hand-written document on Nguyen Thi Giang (Document belongs to the Institute for Historical Studies). See also: Hoang Van Dao, Việt Nam Quốc dân đảng... , Ibid., p. 513.



fighting, Cảnh was not idle but actively recruited more members and began to reform VNP.

After the Yen Bai uprising was lost, Lê Hữu Cảnh contacted the remaining members to reconstruct the cells and discuss action plans. Others from the violent group were still in touch with Cảnh such as Nguyễn Thị Giang and Đoàn Trần Nghiệp. Later, Cảnh and Nguyễn Xuân Huân, Lê Tiến Sự, Nguyen Duc Lan, Phan Van He, etc., ... called on their comrades to elect a new general committee.

However, although spending more time for preparation, Lê Hữu Cảnh and his group maintained the old methods, tending toward individual acts rather than popular mobilization to reform and consolidate the Party. Most notable of their acts were the assassination of Pasquier and spongers such as Vi Van Dinh and Phạm Thành Dương. After these acts, the French increasingly hunted and finally caught Cảnh at the house numbered 12 in Cho Duoi Street (Tue Tinh, Hanoi today). Before the detective, Lê Hữu Cảnh was brave enough to take all the responsibilities. On November 7, 1930, the Criminal Commission issued the death penalty for Cảnh and he was beheaded before Hoa Lo prison with Đoàn Trần Nghiệp and seven other members.

## Appendix 2

# First Statute of VNP (1928)

### Chapter 1: Name—Organization—Purposes<sup>2</sup>

*Article 1*—Name: VNP, abbreviated VNQDD

*Article 2*—Political tendency: Democratic socialism

Purpose: Unite all men and women<sup>3</sup> to:

1. “Promote national revolution
2. Develop direct democracy.
3. Assist oppressed nations.”

*Article 3*—The Party consists of four divisions:

Cell, Province Chapter, Region Chapter, General Committee

### Chapter 2: Cell

*Executive committee—Meeting*

*Article 4*—Party members in every commune, village, canton, district, town, or city can form a cell.

*Article 5*—A cell’s membership cannot surpass 19, if there are more than 19 members then supplementary cells can be organized.

*Article 6*—A cell must strictly obey all instructions from its province chapter. A cell nominates new Party members and asks for approval from its province chapter.

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<sup>2</sup>Extracted from the book of Tran Huy Lieu, Van Tao: *Tài liệu tham khảo lịch sử cách mạng cận đại Vietnam (5th volume)*, Ibid., pp. 81–111.

<sup>3</sup>The amended provision in the draft: Cells elect their respective representatives to Province chapters and their Presidents based on the majority of votes.

A cell holds a meeting each month. Every member has to attend the meeting, if not he/she has to inform the Executive committee in advance.

Resolutions are decided based on the majority of votes; the cell secretary can cast two votes.

Voters cannot assign their votes to anyone else.

Executive committee has the right to call for an emergent meeting, when requested by the majority of cell members.

*Article 7*—A cell elect by secret ballot four subcommittee members responsible for propaganda, detecting, finance and economy. These four members constitute an Executive committee. Other members are enlisted into one of the said four areas depending on their capacity.

*Article 8*—Subcommittee members are elected once a year; they can be reelected if they make no mistake during their term.

*Article 9*—Cell president is permitted to:

- Manage all internal activities of a cell.
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Personally administer propaganda to recruit new members.

*Propaganda member*

- (a) Follow instructions from cell president.
- (b) Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- (c) Personally administer propaganda to recruit new members.

*Detecting member*

- (a) Follow instructions from cell president.
- (b) Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- (c) Personally administer the inspection of party members and strangers, collect information related to the party.
- (d) Find and order location for members' meetings.

*Finance member*

- (a) Follow instructions from cell president.
- (b) Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- (c) Responsible for overall budget, collecting party fee, gathering sponsorship money and donations from members, overall spending, and fundraising.

*Economy member*

- (a) Follow instructions from cell president.
- (b) Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- (c) Manage the establishment and development of businesses to earn profits.

*Representative*

- (a) Transfer aspirations of cell's members to its province chapter.
- (b) Inform his/her cell about instructions and orders from superiors.

### Chapter 3: Province Chapter

#### *Executive committee—Meeting*

*Article 11*—Representatives of cells constitute a Province chapter.

*Article 12*—If a province chapter has more than 19 cells or more than 19 representatives, then different chapters are established and assigned respective numbers. For example the 1st Hanoi city chapter; 2nd Hanoi city chapter, etc.,...

*Article 13*—Province chapter:

- (a) Is an organ commanding cells and commanded by Region chapter.
- (b) Decides and performs decisions in a province and reports to the Region chapter.

*Article 14*—A province chapter meets once in 2 months; members gather and discuss in a similar way as cells' subcommittee members do.

*Article 15*—A province chapter elects by secret ballot: a province's representative, a president, and four subcommittee members responsible for propaganda, detecting and inspection, finance and economy. These six members constitute an Executive committee.

Other members are enlisted into one of the said four areas depending on their capacity.

*Article 16*—Subcommittee members are elected once a year, they can be reelected if they make no mistake during their term.

*Article 17*—Chapter president:

- Manage all internal activities of a province chapter.
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Decide the time of meetings.
- Prepare meeting agendas.

#### *Propaganda member*

- Follow instructions from chapter president.
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Perform propaganda to educate members and develop new cells

#### *Detecting and inspection member*

- Follow instructions from cell president.
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Personally administer the supervision of activities in the province, collect information related to the party, choose and decide meeting locations, manage budgets and activities of cells in a province.
- Inform members about meeting time and related information.

#### *Finance member*

- Follow instructions from cell president.
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.

- Responsible for overall budget of his/her chapter and fundraising.

*Economy member*

- Follow instructions from cell president.
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Manage the establishment and development of businesses to earn profits.

*Representative*

- Transfer aspirations of province chapter's members to its region chapter.
- Inform his/her province chapter about instructions and orders from superiors.

## Chapter 4: Region Chapter

*Executive committee—Meeting*

*Article 18—Representatives of a province chapter constitute a Region chapter.*

*Article 19—Region Chapter is an organ commanding cells and commanded by General Committee. A Region chapter decides and performs decisions in a region and must strictly obey instructions from General Committee.*

*Article 20—A Region Chapter meets once in 3 months. Members gather and discuss in a similar way as province cells' subcommittee members do.*

*Article 21—A Region chapter elects by secret ballot: six region's representatives to the General Committee, a president and four subcommittee members responsible for propaganda, detecting, finance and economy. All constitute the Executive committee. Other members are enlisted into one of the said four areas depending on their capacity.*

*Article 22—Subcommittee members are elected once a year and can be reelected if they make no mistake during their term.*

*Article 23—Chapter President*

Manage all affairs within a region.

- Distribute responsibilities in four areas.
- Decide meeting time.
- Prepare meeting agendas.

*Propaganda member*

- Follow instructions from chapter president
- Supervise the education of members and propaganda in areas where no party cell is found to enhance the party's power.

*Detecting member*

- Follow instructions chapter president
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Manage and gather information related to party and supervise overall activities

- Find and order meeting locations for the Region chapter and inform members on the time and related information of meetings.
- Inspect budgets of province chapters and cells.

*Finance member*

- Follow instructions chapter president
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Responsible for all financial affairs and fundraising.

*Economy member*

- Follow instructions chapter president
- Distribute responsibilities in his/her area.
- Manage the establishment and development of businesses to earn profits.

*Representative*

Apart from doing activities within a region, six representatives also:

- Transfer aspirations of province chapter's members to General Committee.
- Inform his/her region chapter about instructions and orders General Committee.

## **Chapter 5: General Committee**

*Committee of Legislation and Supervision, Committee of Administration, Committee of Supremacy.*

*Article 24*—General Committee consists of three subcommittees:

Committee of Legislation and Supervision.

Committee of Administration.

Committee of Supremacy.

*Article 25*—Representatives of the three regions constitute the Committee of Legislation and Supervision.

*Article 26*—This committee meets once in 6 months.

Members gather and discuss in a similar way as province cells' subcommittee members do.

*Article 27*—The Committee of Legislation elects by secret ballot an executive committee consisting of:

A President, a Vice President, and seven subcommittee members responsible for propaganda and training, finance, economy, military, supervising, detecting, and external affairs.

Other members selected into one of the said areas depending on their capacity.

The executive committee holds regular meetings to review the party's activities.

*Article 28*—The executive members are elected once a year and can be reelected if during their term they make no error.

*Article 29*—President of the Committee of Legislation and Supervision

- Supervise the overall activities of the party.
- Decide meeting time.
- Prepare meeting agendas for representatives from three regions.

*Vice President*

- Assist the President
- Represent the President when he is absent.

*Propaganda and training member*

- Search and study proper propaganda methods for the party.
- Supervise the implementation of propaganda methods of the subcommittee of propaganda of Committee of Administration.

*Finance member*

- Research financial issues of the party
- Supervise the operations of economic organs led by the subcommittee of economy of Committee of Administration.

*Military member*

- Research military issues of the party
- Inspect the spending and distribution of armies, horses, and weapons performed by the subcommittee of military in Committee of Administration.

*Supervising member*

- Research the overall issues of the party.
- Provide legal proceedings, trials, and martial laws to help the subcommittee of supervision and “death squad” of Committee of Administration execute criminals.

*Detecting member*

- Research and find appropriate detecting methods for the party.
- Inspect and approve detecting and investigation methods to be implemented by subcommittee of supervision of Committee of Administration.

*External affairs member*

- Research the external affairs of the party.
- Evaluate the projects created by subcommittee of external affairs of Committee of Administration.

*Article 30*—Committee of Legislation and Supervision inspects and decides all the party’s activities, while Committee of Administration implements them.

*Committee of Administration*

*Article 31*—Members of Committee of Administration are recruited among party members who are capable and influential enough to lead the overall activities to success.

These members are appointed by the following methods:

- Cells' subcommittee members meet and elect by secret ballot worthy members of Committee of Administration and outline their list to be sent by cells' representatives to province chapters.
- Province chapters' subcommittee members approve the list sent from cells, and then, by secret ballot, elect some members and send their list to Region chapters which will then be sent by Region chapters to Committee of Legislation.
- The Region chapters and Committee of Legislation nominate and elect members of Committee of Administration similar to how Province chapters do.

Committee of Legislation can keep or replace professional staff in Committee of Administration to suit the party's interests.

Committee of Legislation can nominate no more than three members to be enlisted into it and Committee of Administration.

Subcommittee members of Province chapters or Region chapters can be elected into Committee of Administration.

*Article 32*—Membership of Committee of Administration is limited depending on the numbers of Region chapters.

*Article 33*—Committee of Administration meets once in 2 months. Its members gather and discuss in a similar way as province cells' subcommittee members do.

*Article 34*—Committee of Administration elects its Executive committee by secret ballot consisting of:

A President.

A Vice President—General Secretary.

Subcommittee members responsible for: liaison and inspection, propaganda and training, finance, economy, military, supervising, detecting, assassination and external affairs. Other members are allocated into one of the said areas depending on their capacity.

Committee of Administration holds regular meetings to modify its activities.

*Article 35*—The Executive committee of Committee of Administration is allowed to attend meetings and discussions held by Committee of Legislation.

*Article 36—President of Committee of Administration:*

- Monitor the overall activities of subcommittees and the implementation of party's activities.
- Decide meeting time.
- Prepare meeting agendas.

*General Secretary*

- Assist the President.
- Represent the President when he is absent.
- Collect documents to compile regulations applied within the party.



*Liaison member*

- Inspect the activities and the divisions, inform subordinates about information, instructions, and orders from the General Committees.

*Propaganda and training member:*

- Supervise the compilation and translation of propaganda documents for non-members and of training documents for members to extend party membership.
- Organize a propaganda team to disseminate the party's information to nationwide localities.
- Organize a board of compilers and translators.
- Manage the printing of the above documents.

*Finance member*

- Do his/her utmost to raise more funds and regulate the party's spending.

*Economy member*

- Establish the party's transaction offices and meeting places, printing houses, book stores, etc., ...

*Military member*

- Supervise the armies, horses, weapons, and the military preparation of members and elect them into fighting squadrons.
- Establish and train a "death squad."

*Supervising member*

- Monitor all judicial affairs.

*Detecting member*

- Manage the overall implementation of party's activities and collect domestic information related to the party.

*Assassination member*

- Assassinate potential traitors who disrupt the party and threaten the Nation.

*External affairs member*

- Keep contact with any foreigner who may help the party promote revolution.
- Maintain contact with all revolutionary groups.
- Select capable young members to study abroad.

*Article 37*—Committee of Supremacy considers contested decisions between Committee of Legislation and Committee of Administration, then suggest its solutions to the latter. The time for consideration is 1 month since it receives the contested decisions.

*Article 38*—Committee of Supremacy consists of six members belonging to and elected by Committee of Legislation and Committee of Administration, each Committee elects three members.

*Article 39*—Committee of Supremacy elects a president and two assessors by secret ballot. The President monitors its overall activities. Two assessors consider and notify the Committee’s decisions to Committee of Legislation and Committee of Administration or its executive committee.

*Article 40*—Members of Committee of Supremacy are elected only once.

## ***Chapter 6: Party Members***

*Article 41*—Membership requirements. To be recruited into the Party, one must

- Be Vietnamese, regardless of gender, religion, or occupation.
- Believe in its doctrine and obey its instructions.
- Be willing to sacrifice personal status, property, life, and income for the party.
- Be nominated by a member or members and take an oath in a conference or before a cell’s Executive committee as follow (without a letter omitted):

*“Before my Nation and my comrades, I, ... years old, was recruited into the party, I am honorable to take an oath to fulfill my obligations as a party member, absolutely follow the party’s orders, keep secret the affairs of the party, and sacrifice my life and status for the party, if I break my oath I will be sentenced before the party”.*

*Article 42*—Members must:

- Donate the party’s budget.
- Train his/her spirit, morality, and physical strength.
- Cooperate in training his/her comrades to establish new cells.

*Article 43*—Any member who commits one of the small or big mistakes will be punished such as:

- Treason.
- Embezzlement.
- Disclose the party’s affairs.
- Leave the party to join another one.
- Oppose the party.
- Damage the reputation of party members or his/her comrades.
- Ignore party fee in 3 months, depending on the degree: confession before a cell’s conference, dismissal, removal from office or death sentence.

Punishment for small mistakes is decided by a cell and for big mistakes decided by General Committee.

*Article 44*—When encountering a worthy person (who want to become party member), a party member has to report to a cell's Executive committee for inspection and approval through a conference.

## Chapter 7: Finance

*Article 45*—The party's budget consists of:

- Initiation fee: 1 dong.
- Monthly fee equal 5 % monthly wage.
- Annual fee
- Donation
- Profits from businesses

*Article 46*—The party's budget and financial operations are implemented based on this procedure:

The General Committee decides annual spending based on party's yearly action agenda, party's business profit, and budget projects of Region chapters and expense forecasts of Committees' members.

General Committee, Region chapters, and Province chapters encourage party members to donate the party depending on their respective financial capacity.

General Committee, Region chapters, and Province chapters need their respective budgets, cells do not.

The budgets of Region chapters and Province chapters are only implemented with the consent of General Committee.

Initiation fee and monthly fee are kept by cells. Cells can use part of their collected fund to pay annual fee for their members.

Donations from every party's division would be transferred to its cashier.

Acceptance of any donation larger than 100 dong requires instruction and approval from the General Committee.

*Article 47*—The party's budget is used as: allowance for party members who sacrifice their rights to serve the party, expenses for representatives, and allowance for families of party members who are killed in action, grants for individuals or organizations who have achieved great deeds for revolution.

## Notes

- I. After the representative of a Province chapter or higher division is enlisted into Committee of Administration or a Region chapter' Executive committee, that division appoints an assistant to that representative. The representative can only discuss, decision making is the task of the assistant.

- II. Three months before the end of its term, the General Committee meets with Region chapters, Province chapters, and cells to elect new members for the General Committee and also vote for a new Committee of Administration. When its term ends, the Executive committee of the former Committee of Administration transfers its tasks to the new members. And new members are introduced to others by old members.
- III. Conferences. Party members must be punctual and maintain a good attitude. In case any member is absent due to acceptable reason, the executive committee must be informed in advance. Whoever has no right to discuss is not allowed to enter the conference.  
In the opening ceremony, the chairman introduces participants, calls roll, and reads the agenda.  
Issues are discussed in sequence as set in the agenda and decided issues are not discussed again. Voting or decision making is done with either ballot or hand raising.
- IV. VNP—dependant agencies and organizations in Laos, Cambodia, and other countries are considered Region chapters. Each of such Region chapters is allowed to designate two representatives to the General Committee.
- V. During party development stage, the General Committee explains and implements the Statute according to the party's guiding principle.
- VI. Party members are permitted to add or amend current provisions of the Statute.
- VII. If any member discovers an organization with similar purpose to the party, he/she must immediately inform the General Committee via the hierarchy of divisions. The General Committee will investigate and set out to unite and connect with that party.
- VIII. Any party member's changing his/her place of residence must be reported to General Committee by his/her cell through the Region chapter and Province chapter. The General Committee then reports to the new cell near his/her new place of residence. After receiving the instruction from General Committee, the cell near his/her new place of residence will add him/her to its list.

## **Amended Statute of VNP (1929)**

### **Purposes**

#### *Article 1*

- (a) Promote national revolution
- (b) Construct a direct republic system.
- (c) Assist oppressed nations

## **Membership requirements**

*Article 2*—To be admitted to the party, one (male or female) has to ensure all these requirements:

- Has completed a preliminary training.
- Has taken an oath.
- Agree to the party's purposes.
- Follow the party's instructions and keep secrets the party's affairs.
- Willing to sacrifice for the party.
- Complete party fee.
- Vow never to leave the party.
- Vow to fight for the party until the ultimate purposes are achieved.

## **Organization**

*Article 3*—The Party consists of four divisions:

General Committee  
 Region chapter  
 Province chapter  
 Cell

### **1. General Committee**

*Article 4*—General Committee consists of:

A president;  
 Two General Secretaries;  
 Two Committee members  
 A finance member  
 A military member  
 A propaganda member  
 A liaison member  
 A detecting and assassination member

*Article 5*—The General Committee's affairs are top secret. Members of General Committee are selected by The Provisional Executive committee from Province chapters and Cells, favoring those that are capable and absolutely trustable.

General Committee is given absolute authority in the management of overall activities.

*Article 6*—When necessary, members of different areas of the General Committee can incorporate a few other members into their areas to assist them.

### **2. Region chapters**

*Article 7*—Region chapters are established by General Committee and follow the exact structural model of General Committee.

*Article 8*—Region chapters must strictly obey the instructions from General Committee. However, Region chapters are given autonomy in some minor affairs within the Region.

### 3. Province chapters

*Article 9*—Province chapters are formed by Region chapters. A province chapter consists of six members:

A President;  
 An assistant in charge of secret documents;  
 A cashier;  
 An investigation member;  
 A propaganda and cell organization members.

*Article 10*—Province chapters must strictly obey the instructions from Region chapters and General Committee but also have autonomy in some minor affairs.

### 4. Cells

*Article 11*—Cells are organized by Province chapters, including:

A President; an assistant in charge of secret documents; a liaison member; a cashier; a propaganda and organization member.

- The President allocates duties within a cell, transfers instructions from superiors to party members, and manages their implementation of instructions.
- The assistant is under direct supervision of the President and can substitute him/her when he/she is absent, takes care of letters, archives, and other secret documents of his/her Cell.
- The liaison member carries out instructions from Cell President, transfers instructions from superiors to his/her Cell, and sends recommendations and aspirations of his/her Cell to superiors.
- The cashier, under the direction of Cell President, takes care of his/her cell's spending and makes profits for it.
- The propaganda and cell organization member is also under the supervision of Cell President; and is responsible for disseminating the party's ideas among the populace and establishing new Cells.

## Unions

*Establishment.* Apart from general activities, cells are also responsible for establishing unions to help people become fully revolutionary individuals, and when necessary will organize them into fighting squads.

Each union consists of no more than ten members. Each union has a chief. The chief has to take an oath, sacrifice for national cause, and overcome challenges to prove his/her bravery.

Each cell has to appoint at least one member responsible for establishing unions. This party member is tasked with training non-party people on the revolutionary principles, instructing them to respect confidentiality, bravery, altruism,

honor, and courage; and finally on the conditions to become revolutionary warriors.

*Training methods:*

- Clearly instruct the definition of revolution.
- Coherently explain the current domestic situation and brutal actions of the French.
- Provide people with a deep understanding of revolutionary activeness.
- Help people understand that to sacrifice for revolution is glory.
- Help people be aware of the interests they are offered by successful revolution and the difficulties and hardships generated by failure.
- Help people recognize the necessity of discretion and menace of corruption.
- Help people apprehend “human honor and valor.”
- Highlight the conditions to become a revolutionary individual such as bravery, altruism, respect for discipline and order, impartiality, restraint from opportunistic acts which could result in undesirable consequences, avoidance of greed and temptations...

## **Vietnam Women’s Union**

### *Statute*

#### **Purposes**

1. Collaborate with male counterparts in national revolution.
2. Establish a democratic republic league.
3. Assist and protect oppressed nations.

#### *Membership requirements*

To become a member of a VNP’s union, one must fulfill these requirements:

- Complete a preliminary training.
- Take an oath.
- Recognize the union’s purposes.
- Follow the union’s statute.
- Be ready to sacrifice for the union.
- Keep secrets the union’s affairs.
- Complete union fee.
- Vow never to leave the union.
- Vow to devote oneself for the party until the ultimate purposes are achieved.

The system of Unions is divided into four divisions: Central union, region union, province union, and cell union.

Each union consists of no more than 19 members.

10 cell unions constitute a province union.

10 province unions make up a region union.

All region unions form a central union.

*Oath:*

“Before my Nation and my female comrades, I, ... years old, was recruited into the union, I am honorable to take an oath to devote my properties, happiness and family for the union, absolutely follow the union’s orders, keep secret the affairs of the union, and do my utmost to fulfill the union’s tasks. If break my oath I will be sentenced to death.”

*Organization*

Central union consists of:

- A president
- A vice president
- Propaganda member
- Detecting member
- Liaison member
- Finance member

Members of the central union are chosen among those of province unions or cell unions.

Central union has total control of the establishment of subordinate unions and sends them instructions.

*Region unions*

Region unions are formed by Central union and must strictly follow its instructions. A region union consists of:

- A president.
- A vice president.
- A propaganda and organization member.
- A detecting and investigation member.
- A liaison member.

The organization of a cell union is similar to that of a province union.

Each cell’s union and province’s union have to appoint a representative responsible for transferring information to superiors and receiving information from them.

## **Respective Task of Members**

The president allocates overall tasks to members. The vice president must follow the president and represent him/her when he/she is absent. The vice president keeps a union’s records and documents. The liaison member follows the president’s orders and serves as a bridge to receive instructions from higher divisions and deliver aspirations of his/her cell union. The cashier is responsible for a union’s spending and extra profits. The detecting member manages a union’s activities and records domestic events. The propaganda member is in charge of training new members and establishing new cell unions.



## Program of Action of VNP (1929)

### Principles

Freedom—Equality—Fraternity

### Purposes

National revolution; political revolution; social revolution.

Program of action is divided into four stages.

1. Starting (secret)
  2. Preparing (semi secret)
  3. Public
  4. Constructing (take over the government)
1. *Starting stage*  
Secretly mobilize Vietnamese into military, student, proletarian, and farmer unions.
  2. *Preparing stage*  
Find secret places to store foods and weapons; prepare armies, organize a “death squad” consisting of loyal members; produce weapons, uniforms, grenades and military equipment; store necessary items; occupy important locations; investigate the French soldiers, find the locations where French weapons, grenades, military equipments, planes and ships are kept, locate their stockpiles of cannons, submarines, and mines.
  3. *Public stage*  
Declare opposition against the French government and Nguyen court, hold labor and economic strikes, refuse taxes; organize general strike; drive away the French, usurp the court; finally establish a civil government.
  4. *Constructing stage*  
Establish a direct republic government, disseminate knowledge and educate people by public conversations, and promote freedom of speech.

### Organizational structure

1. Cell.
2. Province chapter.
3. Region chapter.
4. General Committee.

### Cells

Organization of a cell must be kept secret. Every cell has the same organization. Each cell consists of five subcommittee members responsible for:

1. Liaison;
2. Propaganda;
3. Detecting;
4. Finance;
5. Organization;

- (1) The liaison member reports important news to the party members; decides meeting time and monitors meetings, educates members, allocates responsibilities for subcommittee members, and also decides the responsibilities of party members (the liaison member of a cell can only contact another cell via its liaison member).
- (2) The propaganda member is responsible for educating and recruiting party members.
- (3) The detecting member inspects other members and examines non-party people, investigates events and phenomenon related to the party, and notifies liaison member to inform province chapters.
- (4) The cashier collects initiation fee, monthly fee, and generates a certain amount of profits for the party (payment interval lasts from 1st to 15th according to solar calendar).

### *Organization*

Choose a suitable location and date for meetings.

Initiation fee: 1 dong.

Monthly fee: 10 % wage, excluding special profits and the amount of profits cannot exceed three dimes (0\$30). General Committee, Region chapters or Province chapters, when necessary, can fundraise for the party.

The entire initiation fees and  $\frac{3}{4}$  of monthly fees are incorporated into the provinces' budget.

### *Oath*

“Before my Nation and my female comrades, I, ... years old, were recruited into the union, I am honorable to take an oath to devote my properties, happiness and family for the union, absolutely follow the union's orders, keep secret the affairs of the union, and do my utmost to fulfill the union's tasks. If break my oath I will be sentenced to death.”

### *Responsibilities of party members*

Each recruited member has to undergo a preliminary process of 3 months to be trained under revolutionary activities, after 9 months he/she is officially allowed to participate in the party's affairs. After officially admitted, he/she still has to undertake several other challenges to be assigned important tasks.

### *Punishment*

1. Betray the party.
2. Willful withdrawal.
3. Disclose the party's affairs.
4. Damage the party's reputation.
5. Embezzlement.

Any member who makes one or more of the above acts will be sentenced before other members; punishments will depend on the mistakes.

### *Subcommittee members*

1. Liaison member (assistant)
2. Propaganda member

3. Detecting member
4. Military member
5. Administrative member.

*Liaison member:* control meetings, decide meeting time, and inspect if the subcommittee members fulfill their tasks; subcommittee members of cells must contact one another through their respective liaison members.

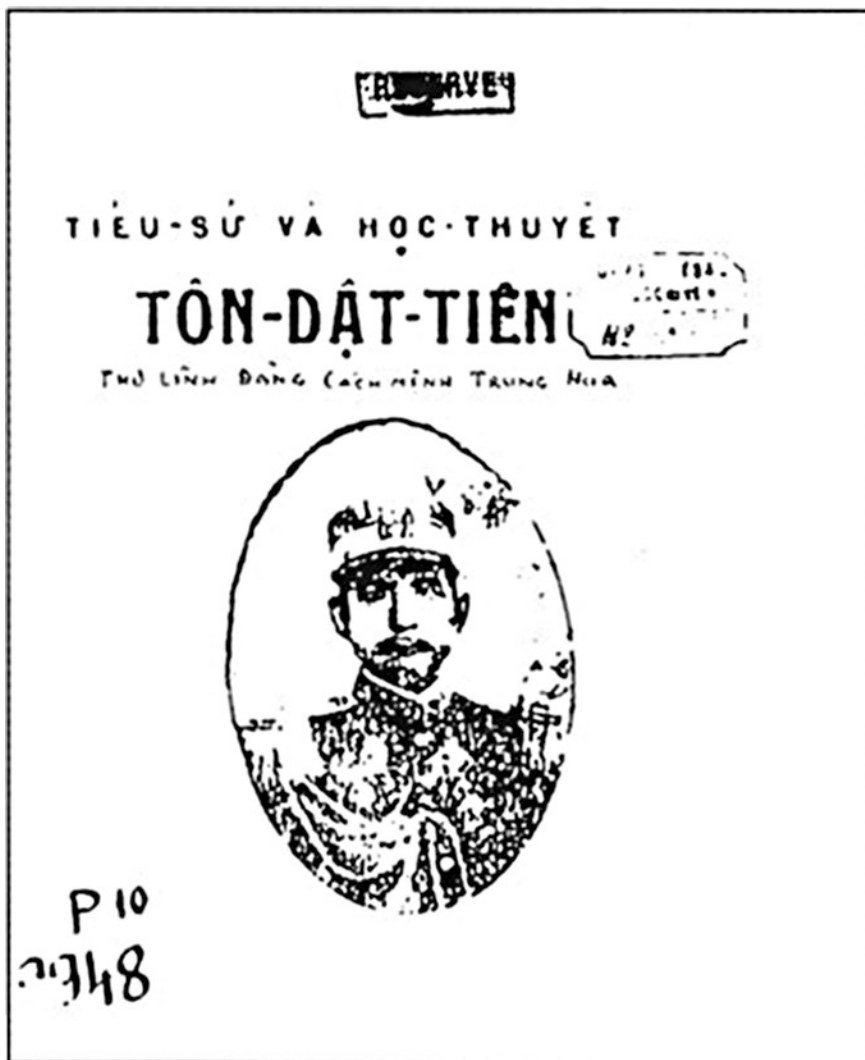
*Propaganda member:* educate and recruit new members, prepare dialogues, compile circulates, translate books, issue newspapers and collect political, economic, and scientific documents.

*Detecting member:* inspect party members and non-party people, investigate the French government and all important institutions, and consolidate the detecting department.

*Military member:* manage military training, translate documents on military strategies, introduce military books, choose appropriate locations for covert operations, investigate the French army's situation, and design military uniforms.

*Administrative member:* make plans to earn more finance, store foods and weapons, produce military equipment, create stockpiles of foods and weapons, and manufacture dry provisions.

**Appendix 3**  
**Materials Related to the Operations**  
**of Nam Dong Publishing House and VNP**



BIOGRAPHY AND DOCTRINE OF SUN YAT SEN

Leader of the China Revolutionary Party

First edition printed in 1926

Second edition printed in

Kim Khue Printing House

Hanoi, 1927

RESERVE

PHẠM-ĐẠT-CÔNG

PHẠM-MỘNG-TIÊN

# GƯƠNG THIÊU-NIÊN

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1928

NAM DONG PUBLISHING HOUSE  
PHAM DẬT CÔNG, PHAM DAT TIEN

**Extraction**

GUƠNG THIẾU NIÊN (Examples of Youngsters)

(Novel co-produced by West and East patriots *Translated and criticized*)

**Purposes**

Translate and criticize heroic and patriotic novels of the West or China which have educational values and meanings to help a number of male and female youngsters who possess shortcomings in knowledge.

Three important notes:

1. The late publication of *Guơng thiếu niên* is due to our personal difficulties, which are not to be easily disclosed.
2. *Guơng thiếu niên* is sold at a low price because having a majority of male and female youngsters reading it is our profit.
3. It is our honor to see *Guơng thiếu niên* referenced in newspapers, and we do not prohibit this act.

NAM DONG PUBLISHING HOUSE

TRẦN HUY LIỆU

WORDS FROM THE HEART<sup>4</sup>

First printed in Hanoi – 1927.

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<sup>4</sup> This book was published simultaneously in two places: by *Nam Dong publishing house* in Ha Noi and *Great Learning publishing house* in Sai Gon in 1927. The Tonkin Governor issued its ban on May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1927. Annam Resident Superior prohibited its publication on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1927. It was distributed, sold and stored in both Tonkin and Annam.



## Amended Program of Action of VNP

In Hoa Lo prison, Nguyễn Thái Học realized that the failure of VNP resulted in its unclear program of action, therefore he drafted a new program to replace the old one. Its details are below:

### First stage (secret operations)

#### 1. *Broaden revolutionary knowledge*

- General training
- Scientific training

#### 2. *Arouse revolutionary spirit*

- Political training
- Research the world situation
- Luật thiên diên (Law of National Progress)
- Awaken revolutionary spirit

### Second stage (secret operations)

#### 1. *Revolutionary Party development*

- Propaganda
- Membership selection
- Membership recruitment
- Preparation of soldiers

#### 2. *Prepare for revolution*

- Preparation of commanders inside or outside military barracks
- Preparation of military equipments.
- Foreign affairs (it is necessary to work with neighboring countries, especially China).
- Military organization
- Strategies making.

### Third stage (public operations)

- Total assault of military barracks (demonstrations, school boycotts, labor strikes, economic strikes).
- Military unification (until national occupation is successful).
- Political tutelage (Use the Party to govern the country in 5 consecutive years).
- Constitutional democracy
  - Establish the republic government
  - Universal suffrage, civil rights implementation.
  - Two Letters Sent from Nguyễn Thái Học to French National Assembly and Indochina Governor General

– **Letter to French National Assembly:**

“Dear delegates of the National Assembly!

I am Nguyễn Thái Học, Vietnamese, 26 years old, President and founder of VNP, and am now captured and imprisoned in Yên Bái prison, Tonkin, Indochina, I would like to discuss with you these details:

As justice goes, anyone has the right to protect his Motherland when it is invaded by other countries, and as humanity goes anyone is obliged to save his people when they are in danger and difficulties. As far as I’m concerned, my Motherland has been dominated by you, the French, for more than 60 years; I see that under your authoritarianism, my people suffer desperately, and my nation would undoubtedly be washed out completely according to natural law. Thus, my rights and obligations cause me to do my best to protect my Motherland now being occupied by foreigners and my people being threatened. Initially, I intended to collaborate with the French in Indochina to serve my Motherland, people and nation, especially in economic and educational expansion. Economically, in 1925, I sent a letter to Governor General Varenne, expressing my aspirations to protect and defend the domestic industry, particularly my desire to open a College of Technology in Tonkin. In 1926, I sent another one to Indochina Governor General, presenting a project to assist poor people. In 1927, I once again delivered a letter to the Tonkin Governor, asking to publish a weekly newspaper, so as to protect and encourage the domestic industry. As for education, in 1925, I sent my requests to Indochina Governor General asking for:

1. Freedom to open free of charge schools for lower-class citizens, especially blue-collar workers and farmers.
2. Freedom to open common publishing houses at villages and technical provinces.

Unfortunately they denied every one of my requests! My letters were unanswered, my projects were left behind, and even my newspaper articles were censored and taken down! These continuous refusals let me know that: the French has no intention to help the Vietnamese, and the only way I can help my Motherland, my people and nation, is to chase them away from my country! Thus, in 1927, I established a revolutionary party named VNP, aimed at destroying the tyranny in my country, and beginning a Vietnam republic government consisting of people who are deeply concerned with the well-being of the masses.

My party operated secretly, and in February 1929 it is discovered by detectives (of the colonial government). Most of our Party’s members were captured, and 52 members were sentenced to solitary confinement for to 5 years. Although many were arrested, our Party did not accept complete disintegration! Under my leadership, our Party still operated and defined its purpose. In Tonkin various national movements erupted, especially one in Yên Bái, in which several French officers were killed. My party was accused of leading and organizing this movement, I was blamed with ordering this attack as I was President of the party. Never did I actually order it, and proper evidence was shown before the Yên Bái Criminal Commission

to prove our innocence. Yet, several party members who have not known about this movement were captured and accused of participating in it! The French Indochina government burned their houses! It instructed soldiers to plunder their rice and shared the loot with one another! Not only my Party members suffered from this discontent, if not tyranny—a majority of peaceful people who were desperately working on their farms also shared the misery! Now in Kien An, Hai Phong, Bac Ninh, Son Tay, Phu Tho, Yen Bai, hundreds of guiltless men, women, elders and children are killed, starved or abandoned as their houses were burned by the French Indochina government! Therefore from the bottom of my heart I would like to express to you this injustice, as it is what will lead my country to complete extermination, denigrate the reputation of France, and what tramples on humanistic values.

Next, I am honored to announce that: I will bear all responsibilities for the political incidents in my country that were directed by my Party since 1927. So please kill me alone and keep alive those who are now locked up in prisons. Because I am the only culprit, the others are guiltless. They are guiltless, because among them there are party members, but it was me who encouraged them to enter the Party to be made known of: what are the duties of a citizen to his country, and what is the dishonor of an enslaved inhabitant. Others were primarily outside the party, but were wrongly accused by enemies or detectives, or slandered by their friends who feared the cruel torture of the Security Department and had to make false declarations. I reiterate these facts to remind you that I am the only that needs to be eradicated, and if it still not enough you can execute my whole family, but please spare the innocent lives that I mentioned above.

Finally, I conclude this letter by informing you that: if the French seeks safety in Indochina rather than turmoil caused by revolutionary movements, they must reform the existing cruel and inhuman political agenda in Indochina; treat Vietnamese people with friendship rather than become authoritarians and tyrants; seek ways to alleviate the mental and material sufferings of Vietnamese, instead of being austere and poisonous!

Please receive my heartfelt gratitude!"

- Letter Sent to Indochina General Governor

Yen Bai, March..., 1930.

Dear Mr. General Governor!

My name is Nguyễn Thái Học, President of VNP, I now stay in Yen Bai prison, and would like to inform you that:

I am, directly or indirectly, responsible for every domestic political incident led by our Party since 1927, as I am its President and founder. So please execute me, but spare the party members or alleged party members now being kept in prisons, because they are guiltless. They are guiltless because, although most of them are party members, they were encouraged to enter the party and made known by me of the responsibilities of a citizen to his nation, and the disgrace of a citizen losing his country; other non-party people were falsely accused by either enemies, detectives or their friends who had blatantly surrendered the Indochina government! I would like to reiterate these facts to remind you that you need only me to kill, as

I am the main criminal. If that is not enough, you can execute my whole family, but I wholeheartedly beg you to spare the others! Later it is my hope that you reflect on France's humility, justice and humanity to stop bombing or plundering innocent villages as you did lately! Those were inhuman acts. And they resulted in thousands of my people now starving and dying in cold!

To conclude this letter, I let you know that: If the French would like to be safe in Indochina and not scared by revolutionary movements they must:

1. Reform the current brutal and inhuman political agenda in Indochina.
2. Treat Vietnamese as if they are friends and not become authoritarians and tyrants.
3. Do their best to alleviate the mental and material sufferings of Vietnamese by restoring their human rights, such as freedom of travel, freedom of conference, freedom of association, freedom of speech; do not tolerate the corrupted officials and decayed and rotten customs in rural areas; open native industry and trade and provide the people with necessary knowledge.

Mr. Governor General, please receive my respect and appreciation, and deep thankfulness!

Your enemy,

Revolutionary Nguyễn Thái Học.”

## Appendix 4

# Pictures and Memoirs of Vital Personalities of VNP

13 Members of VNP Arrested and Executed by the French in Yen Bai on June 17, 1930.<sup>5</sup>

1. *Nguyễn Thái Học*, 27, former student of Hanoi Trade College, born in Tho Tang village, Vinh Tuong district, Vinh Yen province.
2. *Phó Đức Chính* 23, officer in the Department of Public Works, born in Da Nguu village, Van Giang district, Bac Ninh province.
3. *Bui Tu Toan*, 37, pharmacist, born in Xuân Huy village.
4. *Bui Van Chuan*, 37, soldier, born in Dai Cong village, Kien An province.
5. *Nguyen An*, 31, Dong Thanh district, Nghe An province.
6. *Ha Van Lao*, 25, farmer.
7. *Dao Van Nhit*, 20, soldier.
8. *Ngo Van Du*, soldier, born in Hue.
9. *Nguyen Van Thinh*, soldier stationed in Yen Bai.
10. *Nguyen Van Tiem*, red-belt corporal, born in Huong Tra, Thua Thien province.
11. *Do Van Tu*, soldier in Ha Dong.
12. *Nguyen Van Cuu*, soldier, born in Dong Nghe village, Vinh Yen province.
13. *Nguyen Nhu Liên* (Ngọc Tinh), 20, student, born in Cao Mai village, Lam Thao district, Phu Tho province.

## Testament of Phạm Tuấn Tài

### *Announcement to my comrades*

To know of me, no one has ever done better than Lieu.<sup>6</sup> To know of him, perhaps no one has ever surpassed me. Thus, while I was bedridden with my illness, a memory swept through my deprived mind, reminded me of him.

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<sup>5</sup>See *Đông Pháp* newspaper, issued on June 16th, 1945, pp. 1–2.

<sup>6</sup>Extracted from: Phạm Tuấn Tài, cuộc đời và tác phẩm, *Ibid.*, Hà Nội, 2002, pp. 519–527.



**Picture 1** Picture of Nam Dong Publishing House and vital members of VNQDĐ (Source: Vietnamese Revolutionary Museum) Left to right: Nguyễn Hữu Dật, Nguyễn Thái Học, Hoàng Phạm Trân, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp

**Picture 2** Nguyễn Thái Học  
1901–1930



**Picture 3** Nguyễn Khắc  
Nhu 1881–1930



Then, as many words as I would like to say, or had not said to some of you, whatever I tended to write, or had not written, were transferred to him, and I relied on him to achieve what I were not able to do despite countless attempts. In response to my deep trust, he willingly noted these relevant details.

To be more careful, I myself read out and he made a brief summary of the details related to my ideological shift from utopian socialism to scientific socialism.

I was assured that there was no doubt he transferred my ideas precisely, for we knew each other deeply and reciprocally, and there could be no mistake in our communication! 5 weeks later, he did send me a transcript of my words. I was so grateful that even *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* felt like no harm to me. I speculated a day when I could stand under the flag of Marxist–Leninism with my fellow oppressed farmers, workers and people. I was also convinced that my unbiased nationalist fellows, after reading this testament, would genuinely share my sentiment and would one day, together with oppressed farmers, workers and people, revolutionize under the flag of Marxist–Leninism.

Hanoi, November 30, 1936.

Tai

**Picture 4** Phó Đức Chính  
1907–1930



### **I. The context of Vietnam in the years 1925, 1926, 1927**

Looking back at history, it was known by everyone that all the revolutionary parties which broke up in 1929, 1930, 1931 were established in 1926 and 1927. But what is worth knowing is the causes behind these facts.

If we are to investigate the root causes behind, it is inevitable to turn back decades ago, and discuss about the aggression of Western imperialism and the realization and resistance of oppressed nations; but here, let us just cite the recent causes, meaning the latest contexts.

In foreign countries, the Russian revolution was just successful, while the Chinese revolution was still developing. Vietnamese overseas students in France, directly affected by these movements, established political parties and sent newspapers propagandizing about revolution back to our country. Even a backward region such as Indochina could not escape from the influence of these movements, and had to stand up after a long time buried under the West domination.

In our country, continuous events took place, such as Varenne being appointed Indochina governor general, and the return of both Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh. The oppressed population became particularly stimulated, everyone expected social reforms by Varenne, became passionate about the



**Picture 5** Nguyễn Thị Giang ?-1930, Nguyễn Thái Học's wife



**Picture 6** Nguyen Thi Bac—elder sister of Nguyễn Thị Giang, member of VNP



democratic philosophy of Phan Chu Trinh, and were aroused by the patriotism of Phan Bội Châu. But afterwards, expectation became disillusionment, demonstrations were suppressed, and incomplete reforms could not be relied upon. And open movements bring few desirable results. Thus, it became clear

**Picture 7** Co Vit hamlet, Chi Linh, now in Hai Duong province, where Nguyễn Thái Học was arrested in 1930



that, to successfully overcome enormous oppression and the defect of these short-term open movements, a policy was necessary to unite different groups under a solid organization capable of creating social reforms.

The containment of school boycotts by students and labor strikes by blue-collar workers even amplified indignation among the population which was translated to other movements. Thus, previous open and scattered movements became integrated into a single faction. Dozens of formerly overt and noisy operations became covert and quiet.

## II. **Why I and my comrades established VNP**

It was known widely that a revolutionary party was born out of open movements. And the idea that revolutionary parties always came into being in colonized regions was nothing new.

In light of the oppression and popular inspiration, similar to other youngsters, I could not bear confining myself in the scope of schools, being friends with my little students, rather, I decided to stand up and do my best to mobilize and rally my fellow brothers and sisters who shared common beliefs to take actions.

While VNP was on its progress, other revolutionary parties such as VRYL and NVRP were also established by overseas students following instructions from an overseas revolutionary department.

After some discussion and observation with my comrades, bearing in mind the belief in internal forces rather than external factors and the desire to have an independent party of which we had full control, they and I decided to temporarily establish a revolutionary party on August 26, 1927, and officially announced its establishment on December 25, 1927 with its name as VNP (Vietnam Nationalist Party).

Our party's name supposedly suggested that it was a nationalist party. But according to a few leading members at that time and the party's Statute itself when it was first drafted, our goal was "first to conduct national revolution, then international revolution", meaning national revolution was not the ultimate aim, but rather international revolution.

At the end of 1928, the Statute was amended. As mentioned in the draft composed by some members and approved by the General Committee, the party's doctrine was democratic socialism.

Next, in February 1929, the Party was discovered, after numerous members were arrested and several cells dismantled, the remaining members adopted the Three People Principles as Party's doctrine.

In fact, it was not true that the party's leaders wanted to follow pure nationalism as was supposedly interpreted through the first Statute, through the adoption of democratic socialism and Three People Principles. But at that time, they only relied on internal factors and were modestly aware of external factors. In addition, in viewing domestic revolutionary force, they did not grasp the true nature of, and thus could not discern which the leading force was and which was merely supporting ingredient. What's more, the party members were of different classes, statuses and interests, and subsequently their ideas and approaches were disparate. Most of them only saw short-term purposes as regaining national independence, and establishing a just and humanitarian system. But the details of that just and humanitarian system were not explained. As a result, when incidents occurred the party was desperate and hopeless, it had no time and materials to teach its members about any doctrine, thus not only the party's doctrines were inconsistent, its members' perceptions of them were contradictory.

### III. The events in prisons

After a severe loss, most of the party members, except for those who were beheaded or executed, were individually imprisoned. In prisons, for those who still maintained their will, the recent failure served as a lesson.

Unfortunately, from the beginning the members belonged to or were affiliated with different classes, possessed diverse opinions and were trained under unrelated programs, therefore they were naturally diverged after a failure or event.

After countless discussions through conferences and on newspapers, the ideological gap between members was further widened by different opinions: some members leaned towards pure nationalism; some followed strict socialism, others wanted to combine different doctrines into a single Party's doctrine.

Disagreements subsequently led to hostility.

As for myself, of course I was not affiliated with any side, but on the other hand I had not rid myself of the previous ideas so as to follow a distinct course. Thus, among my fellows, the conservative ones did not side with me, yet the progressive ones did not see me as true companion.

#### IV. My ultimate ideology

After relentless researches, discussions and experiences, if I were a truthful agent of revolution it would be natural that, I had to adopt a certain course and come to an ultimate ideology. Now, I can confidently and assuredly announce to you, my fellow comrades, that I have reached that course and found that ultimate ideology.

As a faithful person of revolution, I personally find out that: having been through various ideological shifts and discrepancies, my ideology now maybe different from that in last year, and I cannot afford to let my stubbornness hamper the natural historical evolution. As for party, my opinion is that: successful revolution is the ultimate goal; a party only serves as a tool through which activities are carried out; therefore I cannot let my membership in a party to deter the progress of revolution.

Based on my personal experiences on revolution, I would say that: to demolish an old system and create a new one, the revolutionary force must rely on whichever class suffering the most and being exploited the most. And to annihilate the current system, it is necessary for revolutionary groups in oppressed nations to stand with farmers, workers and population oppressed by capitalists under a common banner. Nationalism has become obsolete; the Three Principles are but incompetent reformist ideas. Basically, only Marxist–Leninism is capable of overthrowing imperialism and leading oppressed nations to a united world.

I am truly certain that if my deceased comrades in the party were alive now, they would voluntarily follow international movements and Vietnam's situation towards complete revolution.

I also believe that my remaining members who are truthful to revolution also share the same belief as me.

**Phạm Tuấn Tài**

## Trần Huy Liệu: Memoir<sup>7</sup>

### *Striving to Become a Communist Party member*

My progress was not as smooth as that of other members, as they were instantly admitted to the party as long as they were involved in revolutionary activities. On my way to move from nationalism to knowing socialism and being enlightened by socialism of the working class, I had to overcome arduous conflicts, where new elements conflicted with old ones, old ideas persistently attempted to impede new thoughts, and gradually the new ideas prevailed. During that long struggling process, Confucianist ideas which I inherited from my feudal background and petty bourgeois sentiment typical of my class greatly hampered and bothered me, trying to hold me back while the spirit of October Revolution was spreading throughout world, the Vietnamese proletarian party had been established. My reason called me to follow a single genuine and complete revolutionary pathway that is socialism. So, my attempt to be admitted into the Party was met not with ease but with difficulties and hindrances. Now I am honored to stand under the Party's banner, follow its guidelines, I am so grateful that I feel like a lost child who haven't seen his mother for a long time, and now he is happy beyond words for seeing her! This memoir was composed long ago, and I just edited it a little bit. But the original content and spirit were "intact".

The Yen Bai uprising by VNP was quickly defeated. This news undoubtedly saddened us, the party's member who had been captured before the uprising and were imprisoned in Hon Cau prison, triggering us to seek for an instant revenge. The planned prison break created by Phạm Tuấn Tài, Bửu Đình and a few members of VNP in July 1930 was discovered. In Hon Cau, I and Trí from time to time repeated the old poem:

"There are still plenty of talented in Guangdong  
Who knows, someday they may return and revolt"  
Then we remained silent and emotional.

Partly due to my consolation for the old members such as Hoc, Nhu, Phó Đức Chính and Nguyễn Văn Viên who died for their country, partly because I was heightened by personal heroism, I occasionally invented emotional poems to express my regret for not finishing my cause, hoping that one day I might return and contribute to it.

However, letting my emotion rise up to the point of losing all my reason was improper enough. My internal ideological terrain also saw conflicts and disturbances.

To be clearer, since I was admitted into VNP, I was no longer passionate about "chauvinism". As far as I understood the main statement of VNP's *Program of*

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<sup>7</sup>This memoir was published in Journal of Historical Research, October, 1960, and later re-printed in *Tran Huy Lieu Memoir*, KHXX Publisher, Hà Nội, 1991, pp. 155–166.

*Action* which was “first to conduct national revolution, then international revolution”, I still made it clear to myself and others that: international revolution was the ultimate end, while national revolution was the transition, much like when one would like to go from Nam Dinh to Hanoi, he necessarily had to pass through Phu Ly although Hanoi was the final destination. I hate anyone who claims to conduct revolution without having a clear routine. Yet I also dislike nationalists who are way too extreme. While being a member of VNP’s Party Committee in Cochinchina, I still befriended Hải Triều and borrowed from him materials of NVRP such as: *Chủ nghĩa cộng sản A.B.C* (A.B.C Communism), *Công xã Paris* (the Paris Commune), and disseminated them in my party. In 1929, after the book *Hận Nhân* was published in Sai Gon, it was banned by the French after 4 days. “At this point, whoever talking about national revolution without putting it into the international context is narrow-minded; as anyone who argues for international revolution while forgetting national revolution is irrational (unsystematic)”. I believed in my mind-set as well as the contemporary policy of VNP.

Then, my belief was smashed after a few days being with the majority of my “comrades” in Con Dao, first in Hon Cau. All of these were arrested in 1929, before the Yen Bai uprising, most of whom were founders, leading members, central staff or directors of local organs. My insight at that time was not coherent enough to discern people within a common sphere; I only had a naïve thought that whoever was in the same party as me had the same thinking and actions as I did. I was rather astonished when I found out that my preliminary outlooks were compromised right at the beginning when it came to the party’s policy. Debates occurred not only around coconut trees, in banana gardens when everyone was doing “corves labor”, under *Bo de* peak, around penman trees when we were strolling along; but also in conferences, in art performances, popular songs and finally on newspapers. At that time, apart from the hand-written newspaper *Hon Cau weekly newspaper* (*Hon Cau tuần báo*) serving as house-organ, we also maintained two magazines named *Sounds of ocean waves* (*Tiếng sóng bể*) and *Discussion* (*Bàn góp*) as for a theoretical discussion. My article “Objection to pure nationalism and baseless internationalism (*phản đối thuần túy quốc gia và phiếm Thế Giới chủ nghĩa*)” then was a focal point of controversies. I was not met with opponents on newspapers but was threatened by others with aggression and violence. In the evening of February 9th, 1931, on the occasion of the first anniversary of Yen Bai uprising, after my explanation of the policies and of our half-red, half-yellow flag, I gained “a victory” by receiving big applauds from the listeners, including even a few who had opposed my ideas. But a few days later, a planned incident occurred. At VNP’s hideout (in Hon Cau island), while I was explaining my ideology before and after joining the party, the light suddenly went off, people holding wood blocks strikes in from all directions and frantic screams were heard. The public debate quickly turned into a violent fight. That night and later nights, I and Nguyễn Phương Thảo had to protect each other by switching between sleeping and waking up, in case we were met by a sudden assassination.

The situation became worse and worse, and a riot was expected to happen. Phạm Tuấn Tài, as one of the founders and most respected members of VNP, had

to personally resolve this dispute, or at least facilitate some reconciliation. Next, a question was widely spread among the members of VNP: “Do you recognize the course set out by the party in its first statute, which was to conduct national revolution, then international revolution?” As expected, everyone replied yes. Thus, a committee responsible for explaining the party’s policy, based on the above question, was established and included 6 members: Phạm Tuấn Tài, Lê Văn Phúc, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, Nguyễn Văn Viên, Trần Huy Liệu and Nhượng Tổng.

The dispute was gradually mediated. After a couple of days when not-so-heated debates took place, the committee came to a full conclusion of the party’s policy as: “First to conduct national revolution, then international revolution, which means to eliminate political, socio-economic oppression (revolution) to achieve happiness for Vietnamese (national revolution) and other people (international revolution)”.

This ambiguous conclusion fortunately was agreed by all the participants. Everyone was able to catch a “sigh of relief”.

Later, the Committee further elucidated some ideas on our nation in the future. Everyone concurred to this statement: “Independent nations must stay within a peaceful world, in other words a peaceful world is formed by independent nations”. It was largely expected that the ideological consensus between VNP’s members was settled. But in reality as they came from different classes, circumstances and patterns, this was not the case. These differences could not be solved by a vague conclusion, and ideological standpoints could be reduced and compacted. Interestingly, I and some others were hated because we were considered to be “communized”. But in fact we were even “*more communist than the communists*”. It meant that, we did not perceive communism from as class-based ideology, but rather as a noble philosophy about which we were passionate. We were even incapable of combining real patriotism with international proletarianism, or distinguishing between nationalism employed by anti-imperialists and that used by greedy capitalists. What’s more, we were ignorant of the principle of popular mobilization that aimed to unite progressive people to collectively fight against colonialists, and particularly in prisons, to resist oppression and protect the repressed people. We were not fully aware of the above principle. Thus we attacked and criticized nationalism and everything containing that word. Heated debates hence occurred. The Committee for explanation automatically broke up. A play scripted by Nhượng Tổng featured a supposed trial in Poland where communists were deemed national betrayals and sentenced to death, as if the aggressive lines in that play were aimed at us. The chill wind from Hon Cau beach was not able to cool the heat being spread throughout a part of the island.

However, at that time it was difficult and not easy at all for us to make known our ideology. On the one hand I spread communism, on the other I published articles on newspapers to criticize communists around us. I tended to oppose nationalism but could not bear parting with VNP. To reconcile these conflicts, some of us planned to escape Hon Cau, return to the mainland and attempt to reform VNP, change its name and design a new policy. As for its name, Phạm Tuấn Tài suggested a slightly amended title as New Vietnam Nationalist Party

because he still retained some affection for the old name. I myself proposed the new names such as Vietnam Socialist Revolutionary Party or Vietnam's People Party. But when it came to a new policy, difficulties naturally arose. At that time we had had some preliminary ideas on communism, but what was needed was a somewhat different policy from communism. After a few recurrent discussions, we "invented" several features or borrowed ideas from other ideology for our new policy, but not anything was as firm and complete as communism. What were we supposed to do next? One option was to hold on the old doctrine of nationalism as opposed to communism. Another was to follow the communist pathway as there was no use resisting it if we were to achieve complete national liberation and struggle against imperialists and feudalists. To be honest, we were especially "fond of" communism but did not want, or rather could not afford to let VNP perish. If this party was to thrive and operate, it had to employ a somewhat different policy than communism. While we were "constructing our policy", we still designed a plan to break out from prison or to escape from Hon Cau. The plan was carefully designed but eventually was miserably ended as I mentioned before.

In 1932, after our planned prison break, the French was no longer content with keeping us under house arrest in Hon Cau and decided to imprison us in Con Lon. Then, the cells were crowded with thousands of political criminals who used to participate in the Yen Bai uprising and revolutionary movements led by Indochina Communist Party. Under the brutal rule of the French, Con Lon became a grave for countless patriots of our Motherland. But it was also a great revolutionary base that provided quite a few members for later national movements. Thus the training for ideology, studying of theory and consolidating of spirit were largely boosted. As for VNP's members, after being transferred from Hon Cau to Con Lon, the internal ideological situation progressed in another direction. Most of the party's members captured both before and after the Yen Bai uprising only recognized the Three People Principles as its main policy, and were absolutely oblivious to its Statutes created since the party was established. In the early 1929, this situation further made it difficult to realize the ideological consensus regarding the party's policy.

After days of debates via published newspapers in the prison or individual correspondences, opinion survey questionnaires were distributed to VNP's members including ones who were sentenced to solitary confinement, penal servitude or exile in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> prisons and other locations on the island. A small proportion of them agreed with the Three People Principles being the party's principle but asked for time to consider it more. In fact, this minority did not believe in the Three Principles from the very beginning but because they "wanted to be safe" in such a complex situation in prisons, they had to seek some "temporary withdrawal". As a result only 6 of us declared to end our endorsement for the Three People Principles, while still remaining members of VNP, namely Tường Dân



Bảo<sup>8</sup>, Nguyễn Văn Viên<sup>9</sup>, Lê Văn Phúc<sup>10</sup>, Hoàng Thúc Dị<sup>11</sup>, Nguyễn Phương Thảo<sup>12</sup>, Trần Huy Liệu.

After this, Phạm Tuấn Tài and I became different in ideological standpoint although we remained common in our sentiment. To be honest Tai was not an adherent of Tôn Trung Sơn and the reformist philosophy. But he personally said to me that the Three People Principles still retained its revolutionary capacity, thousands of party members following it made quite a large number, thus we were supposed to do our best to assist, guide, and encourage them so they would not become desperate. But as for me, I could no longer hold back my opinions as in the eyes of fellow VNP's members, I was almost totally “communized”.

And that made me become more decisive in my ideological standpoint. But it was impossible to just instantly “put an end” to my affiliation with petty bourgeois tendency and Confucian background. In terms of class struggle, I was born to a poor family and had been through poverty, so I was willing to stand in the same group with the oppressed people (not yet with the working class). But my overall ideology was in many ways affected by feudalism due to my familial and educational background. I found the quote “a faithful woman cannot marry two husbands” so relevant with regard to my connection with VNP. I was so moved when thinking about my predecessors in the party and my old friends who drew their own blood to write the title “VNP”, that I committed myself to continue their work and prolong its longevity. Moreover, I held personal attachment to both the party's deceased and living members that was so tight that I could not disengage from it. On the other hand, in the limited space of prison cells, others and I always found it easy to collide with members of different parties. Even in a cell, one corner was occupied by VNP's members, another was inhabited by communists. Relief funds, training classes, liaison committees and everything else were separated between them. Not to mention personal hostility between them which made it ironical that personal hate was the direct source of disagreements between parties rather than ideology and policy. Thus, although having detached from the Three People Principles, we nevertheless kept our membership in VNP. At that time I publicly joined the research and training classes organized by communist prisoners, while still being an editor for a newspaper published in the 1<sup>st</sup> prison camp by VNP whose director was Mr. The (born in Vinh Bao, Hai Phong). My opinions and reasons were naturally perceived by others as thoroughly “communized”. But my fellow members still annoyed my articles as my “provocative” writing style was well

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<sup>8</sup>Tướng Dân Bảo, after joining Vietnam Communist Party, died in the revolution.

<sup>9</sup>Nguyễn Văn Viên later served the French and died in August Revolution.

<sup>10</sup>Lê Văn Phúc after leaving prison joined the Popular Front.

<sup>11</sup>Hoàng Thúc Dị later became editor-in-chief of *Vietnam* newspaper by pseudo-members of VNP (Vũ Hồng Khanh).

<sup>12</sup>Nguyễn Phương Thảo, after becoming members of Indochina Communist Party, worked in Đông Triều strategic war zone during the August Revolution, and later was sent to the South to fight the French under his secret title lieutenant general Nguyễn Bình.

liked, and several members did not really endorse the Three People Principles. In addition, I sent personal correspondences to prisoners in other camps to discuss about revolutionary theory and policy. Then, Nguyen Duc Chinh of VNP, who stayed in the exiled prisoners' camp, also employed a newspaper written in French as a peaceful and progressive forum for sharing ideas. It was our backup weapon. As for conservative and extremist members of VNP, they were not concerned with theory as long as they were not presented with anything related to communism.

Now my ideology became more lucid and my standpoint more advanced. In my articles or correspondences, I clearly clarified the relations between ideology and the party. I figured out that the party was merely a tool to be used in revolution. To reach his end, a revolutionary had to be discerning and flexible in employing his tools instead of grudgingly holding on a tool when it was no longer useful. Of course a revolutionary party would be established to follow a revolutionary ideology, but then it became no longer revolutionary and even betrayed revolution. Moreover, the idea that "a faithful woman cannot marry two husbands" could not be applied in the context of revolution. Ideally speaking, a revolutionary had to be loyal and trustful of both his ideology and his party. But as long as the two contradicted and the party no longer followed its revolutionary ideology, I, as a revolutionary, could respond that "betraying the party" was not equivalent with betraying revolution. In fact, my arguments at that time were only aimed at encouraging, sobering me and settling my internal disagreements rather than going as far as clearly discerning the nature and development of VNP via the class perspective. Then I thought that: my beloved predecessors in the party, if they had been alive and truthful to revolution, would necessarily follow the destined path. I shivered whenever a thought came to me that among my deceased comrades, who knows, some would have contradictory ideological opinions with mine. And such a case was not impossible.

Among the communists with whom I shared the same camp, I was most associated with Bùi Công Trùng and Bui Lam. Both Trung and I had used to write for Indochina Times in Sai Gon and participate in Vietnam Youth Party, thus it was easy for us to form ideological and spiritual intimacy. As for Lâm, his simplicity and truthfulness basically helped him won the hearts of others. Additionally, Tô Chấn was a member introduced by me into VNP; he was arrested in the assassination of Pasquier Governor General, sentenced penal servitude for life and sent to Con Dao. At this time, he had completely abandoned his membership in VNP and stood in the same party with the communists. Knowing me so well, he advised me regularly in his letters, urging me to have a resolute and firm worldview in terms of revolution. At that time an intense matrix of conflicts between my brain and heart took place within me.

Furthermore, my ideology and feelings were not only stimulated by internal happenings but also by external events. In 1934, an unfortunate conflict in Con Dao occurred between the Nationalists and Communists. Excluding the root causes and developments of this conflict, here I only mention its effects on me. A culprit named D, who had used to be jailed with the communists but then banished from the communist side, provided information for the French warders to inspect

and confiscate a few books stored by VNP's members in a secret corner. This act caused indignation among both the Nationalists and Communists. The two held a meeting to make a response. Participants in this meeting included the 6 of my group. When discussions were being exchanged, some extremist VNP's members instigated other members to use violence and attack the communists. As it was planned beforehand, they took knives, sharp sticks and stones and swiftly attacked the communists, especially their leaders. The fight developed for half a day and many were wounded. As a result the French had to jail the two parties separately. In the solitary confinement camp, there was no physical collision between nationalists and communists, but the effects from the next camp were enough to disturb us and make us respond firmly. At that time Phạm Tuấn Tài, still being treated for his illness in the hospital, wrote to us that, while lying in bed all the time he had to prepare some bottles on the headboard in case incidents happened.

After the fights, VNP's extremist members became even more anti-communist. As for the 6 of us, we were viewed by them with resentment as they would "transmit" our ideology to other party members.<sup>13</sup> As for me personally, my 4-year ideological struggle came to a point when I had to define my position in the revolutionary cause. At the end of 1934, before my term of imprisonment ended, I decided to include a summary of my whole revolutionary progress, once and for all, into a small book called *Tự phê bình* (Self-criticism). In this small reading, I made honest reviews of my opinions and actions, more generally of the political standpoint and policy of VNP, attached with a section devoted to criticism of the Three People Principles. This book was excluded by the liaison committee of the VNP group and prevented from being distributed to other members, but it was a declaration of my opinions and personal viewpoints.

One day at the end of October 1934, before embarking on the ship to Sai Gon, I did not forget to visit the grave of Hồ Văn Mịch in Con Dao cemetery and Phạm Tuấn Tài who was suffering from tuberculosis and staying in the 3<sup>rd</sup> camp. Hồ Văn Mịch was present in the celebration of my initiation into VNP, and died in Con Dao. On that day it rained, I had to pass through high grasses and search hundreds of gravestones made of wood, stone or bamboo to find Mịch's. I believed that his soul had really gone, but his remains were covered by relatively solid late rice stones, unlike other gravestones swept by ocean waves, for which I felt so relieved. In front of his grave, I felt like saying to him that I never lost my loyalty and devotion to revolution. But as revolution was progressing, rather than sitting idly I had to go with its flow. In my visit to Phạm Tuấn Tài in a cell where patients suffering from serious tuberculosis were also there, I found it amazing that I could see him once again. Upon saying goodbye, Tài smiled and gave his words to me: *"As long as you return to the mainland you should act with your own conscience*

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<sup>13</sup> After I left Côn Lôn for a while, Trương Dân Bảo, one of us, was suddenly thrust from behind with a sharp needle by corporal Lãng, an extremist of VNP. He was nearly dead while corporal Lãng committed suicide with a knife.

*and ideal. I shall remain here to lead our other comrades to the right path. Should one day I fail and my efforts were lost; I certainly will go with you”.*<sup>14</sup>

Embarking on the Armand Rousseau, the ship which brought me and some other comrades from Sai Gon to Con Dao a year ago, I looked back once and sent my farewell to Con Dao. It would take countless words to describe what was on my mind, what I wanted to write at that time. Con Dao was a living hell created by French colonialists. But it was also an academy producing and training revolutionary individuals. Looking at the mainland, I saw a huge vision in front of me. Under the banner of sickle and hammer, I had to move fast because time was urging me, a latecomer.

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<sup>14</sup>In 1937, thanks to the struggle by French and Vietnamese population through the Popular Front, Phạm Tuấn Tài and various political convicts in Côn Đảo were released. But as soon as he returned to Hà Nội Security Department he could no longer walk and was transferred to Bạch Mai hospital. I set out to visit him as soon as I knew about his situation. Upon seeing me, despite knowing he was going to pass away soon, he avoided mentioning about death and retained his familiar smile saying to me that: “Now I have to make up my mind, if going with the fascists is not possible then the only way is to stand with you under the banner of Marxist–Leninism”. Later, after passing away, he handed me a letter desperately finished by him while he was on bed. Its general idea was to express his opinions and called on Vietnam Quốc đảng’s members, if they were truly patriotic and faithful to revolution, to abandon egoistic interests, desires and partisan thinking, and follow the banner of Marxist–Leninism towards national liberation and world solidarity. Revolution was most imperative. (A zincograph of his testament can be found in Le Travail newspaper. A copy of this document is now archived in the Revolutionary Museum in Hà Nội).

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