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Sun Yat-sen and the Revolution of Vietnam

Nguyễn Văn Khánh*

Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) is a great democratic advocate and a leading figure in contemporary-modern Chinese history. This paper narrates Sun Yat-sen's visits and activities in Vietnam, with an emphasis on his ideological influence as shown in many Vietnamese patriotic organizations and in the political viewpoints of two most renowned Vietnamese revolutionaries, namely Phan Bội Châu and Hồ Chí Minh. It also clarifies the influences and role of Sun Yat-sen and his Three Principles of the People in Vietnamese revolutionary progress in the first half of the 20th century.

Sun Yat-sen's visits and activities in Vietnam

During his revolutionary career, Sun Yat-sen visited Vietnam a number of times, during which he relied on and collaborated with Vietnamese democratic, progressive and patriotic forces to build up military strength and prepare for the revolts against the Qing regime.

His first footprint was made during a visit to investigate Vietnam's situation and propagate revolutionary messages.

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From 1900 to 1908, Sun Yat-sen came to Vietnam several times to perform revolutionary operations aimed at patriotic overseas Chinese.

His first visit was on 21 June 1900. He came to Saigon from Hong Kong and resided there for over two weeks, then left for Singapore on 8 July 1900.¹ The purpose of Sun's visit was to meet Paul Doumer, the then Governor-General of French Indochina. However, when he arrived, Doumer had left for Hanoi.² Sun was only able to meet one of Doumer's secretaries, and received no support from him.

Though unable to gain favorable results from the visit, Sun Yat-sen successfully established contact with a number of overseas Chinese in Vietnam such as Li Zhu Chi, Ma Pei Sheng, and Ceng Ji Zhou. These characters eventually contributed a great deal to Sun's revolutionary endeavors.³ In addition, this provided Sun with an opportunity to open up his relations with the overseas Chinese and extend his propaganda activities among this population in Vietnam.

Sun Yat-sen came to Vietnam for the second time to visit an industrial exhibition at the invitation of the Governor-General of French Indochina. He arrived in Hanoi on 13 December 1902⁴ and stayed there until mid-1903. He then left for America via Japan.

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1. Dương Trung Quốc. "Tôn Trung Sơn ở Hàng Buồm" (Sun Yat-sen in Hàng Buồm), *Tiền Phong online Newspaper*, 19 July 2005. <http://www.tienphong.vn/van-nghe/hang-buom-co-mot-ngoi-nha-16234.tpo> (accessed 15 July 2016).
 2. Nguyễn Văn Hồng, Nguyễn Thị Hương and Chương Thái. *Tôn Trung Sơn với Việt Nam* (Sun Yat-sen and Vietnam), Vietnam Education Publishers, Hanoi, 2013.
 3. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Vẽ sáu lần Tôn Trung Sơn đến Việt Nam hoạt động cách mạng" (On the Six Times Sun Yat-sen Came to Vietnam for Revolutionary Purposes), *Journal of Historical Research*, 5 (2011): 52-60.
 4. Dương Trung Quốc. "Tôn Trung Sơn ở Hàng Buồm", *ibid.*
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This time, Sun intended to ask for French support in "using Hà Nội as a conduit to transport weapons to South China, for the political purpose of defeating the Qing dynasty."¹ However, he failed.

In order to come into contact with some overseas Chinese to disseminate revolutionary messages and develop his forces, Sun Yat-sen presented himself under the alias of Gao Da Sheng. With the help of Huang Long Sheng from Guangdong, manager of a European clothing store in Hanoi, Sun was not only able to encounter and deliver revolutionary lessons to many overseas Chinese, but also created the Xingzhonghui (China Revival Society) in Hanoi to unite the Chinese and rally their support. Sun Yat-sen also traveled to Saigon. There, he connected with the overseas Chinese that he had met two years before, created new contacts with the Chinese in Saigon, and strengthened revolutionary propaganda among this population.

The third time Sun Yat-sen visited Vietnam was in summer of 1905. During his trip from Europe back to Japan (so as to connect different forces into a united party that was powerful enough to lead the Chinese into revolutionary endeavors), on 7 July 1905, he visited Saigon. His letter to an overseas Chinese in Singapore named Chen Suo Nan confirmed this.

At the end of 1905, Sun Yat-sen visited Vietnam for the fourth time, accompanied by his comrades Hu Han Min and Wang Jing Wei. According to his *Autobiography*, during this visit Sun established a cell (referred to as a ministerial division)

1. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Về sáu lần Tôn Trung Sơn đến Việt Nam hoạt động cách mạng", *op. cit.*, p. 53.

of *Tongmenghui* to promote propaganda activities and prepare for revolution.¹ He resided in Saigon for a while, until 1906, and then left for Indonesia.

The fourth visit produced notable results: apart from establishing a branch of *Tongmenghui*, Sun Yat-sen managed to gain funding from overseas Chinese in Vietnam (by issuing the Chinese revolutionary bond),² proving it was an appropriate and lucid decision to target overseas Chinese as the first propagators of revolutionary ideas and advocates of his forces.

In August 1906, Sun Yat-sen came to Vietnam from Singapore. It was his fifth visit. His purpose was to further consolidate propaganda activities and develop revolutionary forces among overseas Chinese in Chợ Lớn and gradually expand them to the six provinces of lower Cochinchina ("Basse-Cochinchine" in French), including Mỹ Tho and Sa Đéc. In every place he visited, he was warmly welcomed by the Chinese. Sun left Sài Gòn for Japan on 9 October 1906.³

Sun Yat-sen visited Vietnam for the last time on 4 March 1907, and dwelled there for about a year. During this time, he and his comrades attempted to move their overseas revolutionary headquarters from Japan to Vietnam.⁴

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1. Sun Yat-sen. *Chủ nghĩa Tam dân* (The Three Principles of the People). Vietnamese translation by Nguyễn Văn Diệm, Nguyễn Tu Tri and Nguyễn Văn Hồng. Institute for Science Information, Hanoi, 1995, p. 33.
 2. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Nhìn lại một số 'trung tâm cách mạng' do Tôn Trung Sơn xây dựng ở Đông Nam Á" (Review of Some "Revolutionary Centers" Founded by Sun Yat-sen in Southeast Asia), *Journal of Southeast Asian Research* 3 (2016): 43.
 3. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Vẽ sáu lần Tôn Trung Sơn đến Việt Nam hoạt động cách mạng", *op. cit.*, p. 55.
 4. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Nhìn lại một số 'trung tâm cách mạng' do Tôn Trung Sơn xây dựng ở Đông Nam Á", *ibid.*
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In Hanoi, he established the headquarters of *Tongmenghui* at number sixty-one, Gambetta Street (now Trần Hưng Đạo Street). He and some of his comrades also came to Hai Phong to find a place to hide weapons and ammunition.¹ A short time later, under attentive supervision by Sun Yet Sen, a *Tongmenghui* cell was officially founded in Hải Phòng. At the same time, Sun contacted Vietnamese patriots such as Hoàng Hoa Thám and other feudal intellectuals at the Tonkin Free School (*Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục*) in Hanoi, including Nguyễn Quyền, to begin planting revolutionary seeds. Around the end of October 1907, Sun mobilized his forces to attack Zhennanguan (Youyi Quan) and emerged victorious. Having occupied Zhennanguan and recruited the routed soldiers, Sun intended to collaborate with the revolutionary forces in Shiwan Mountain to attack Qinzhou that he failed, and his revolutionary forces had to retreat to Vietnam.

The overseas Chinese directly led revolutionary armies at Fangcheng, Qinzhou and delivered heavy blows to the Qing armies. Under the leadership of Huang Xing, the patriotic overseas Chinese in Vietnam fought bravely and effectively. The most notable among them was the ferocious You Shou and the audacious Ma Lu. Though smaller in number, the revolutionary forces were able to crush the Qing armies in Đốc Sơn campaign and relentlessly exhausted them for months along the terrains of Qinzhou, Lianzhou, and Shangsi.²

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1. Danny Wong Tze-Ken. "The Contribution of the Vietnamese Chinese to the 1911 Revolution in China", *Journal of the Department of History, University of Malaya* 3 (1994-1995): 129-150 (140).
 2. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Sự tham gia của người Hoa và Hoa Kiều ở Việt Nam vào các cuộc khởi nghĩa do Tôn Trung Sơn phát động ở biên giới Trung-Việt (1907-1908)" [The Participation of the Chinese and Overseas Chinese in Vietnam in the Revolts Instigated by Sun Yat-sen at the China-Vietnam Border (1907-1908)], *Journal of Southeast Asian Research* 10 (2011): 42.
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Sun Yat-sen also directed a number of small uprisings in Hekou (Yunnan) near the China-Vietnam border. He put three overseas Chinese in Vietnam in charge of military affairs: Huang Ming Tang, Wang He Shun, and Guan Ren Fu. Part of the revolutionary forces gathered and set up ambush at the Vietnam-China border, while another portion moved to act as a fifth column that infiltrated deeply into the Qing army and stood readily until the time was right.

The revolt attracted quite a few overseas Chinese from Vietnam, including those who had participated in the glorious Zhennanguan campaign. The revolutionary armies gained huge victories, captured numerous weapons, and killed the Chief for Border Defense.¹ Later, due to the cooperation between the Qing court and French colonists, the revolt began to stagnate because of logistical difficulties and food shortages, forcing the revolutionary armies to finally retreat to Vietnam.

The Chinese revolutionary armed forces led by Sun Yat-sen along the China-Vietnam border not only disrupted the rule of the Qing dynasty, but also helped to boost the morale of Vietnamese patriots in their struggle against the French imperialists for national salvation at the beginning of the 20th century.

Aside from the preparation for armed rebellion, during his visits to Vietnam, Sun Yat-sen aimed to rely on the press to effectively disseminate revolutionary ideas to the overseas Chinese. Through relentless efforts, the idea to establish a newspaper house proposed by the Tongmenhui in 1905 finally resulted in the publication of *Xingzhong Daily* (China Revival

1. Nguyễn Văn Hồng, Nguyễn Thị Hương and Chương Thâu. *Tôn Trung Sơn với Việt Nam, op. cit.*, pp. 163-167.

Daily) newspaper in Sài Gòn. Its main purpose was to broaden the scope of propaganda activities. Prior to this, in 1906, the overseas Chinese in Vietnam procured over 3,000 *đồng*-worth of shares from *China Daily* in Hong Kong¹ to advocate for Sun Yat-sen and Chinese revolutionary efforts. Next, some progressive overseas Chinese in Saigon, influenced by Sun Yat-sen's ideologies, established the Cui Yu Jing Lu (literally, a hidden cabin where fighting spirits are held) to spread their revolutionary ideas by purchasing and then distributing free books and newspapers to the public, and composed selected radical songs that promoted the fight against the Qing dynasty.

To better support the propagation of revolutionary ideas, Sun Yat-sen also helped the overseas Chinese in Vietnam establish several social organizations. Under his leadership, they founded the *Guangdong Commercial School* at Hàng Buồm, Hanoi, and the *Commune of Xingzhong* in Chợ Lớn, Saigon.²

In conclusion, during his revolutionary career from 1900 to 1908, Sun Yat-sen paid six visits to Vietnam and resided there for over two years. During these visits, he carried out propaganda activities and attempted to boost patriotic sentiments among the overseas Chinese, and mobilized them to support and participate in domestic revolutionary endeavors in China. These initial successes allowed Sun to create a number of organizations that united the overseas Chinese to conduct armed operations, using them as well as Chinese in general as crucial members. Sun Yat-sen's continuous radical efforts in Vietnam

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1. Nguyễn Văn Hồng, Nguyễn Thị Hương and Chương Thảo. *Tôn Trung Sơn với Việt Nam*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.
 2. Nguyễn Thị Hương. "Hoạt động của Tôn Trung Sơn và đảng của ông trong người Hoa và Hoa kiều ở Việt Nam đầu thế kỷ XX" (The Activities of Sun Yat-sen and His Party with regard to the Chinese and Overseas Chinese in Vietnam in the Early 20th Century), *Journal of Military History* 2 (2014): 33.

greatly contributed to the victory of the Xinhai Revolution in 1911, while simultaneously affecting the ideological foothold of Vietnamese patriotic organizations that adopted a bourgeois democratic stance.

Sun Yat-sen and patriotic organizations that strived for bourgeois democracy in Vietnam

Sun Yat-sen's ideological influence was deeply rooted in the political ideas and guidelines of patriotic and revolutionary organizations that adopted a bourgeois democratic posture in Vietnam at the beginning of the 20th century, such as the *Vietnam Restoration League* and the *Vietnam Nationalist Party*.

1. *Vietnam Restoration League (1912-1917)*

Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) and Phan Châu Trinh (1872-1926) were the two most celebrated and notable Vietnamese patriots of the early 20th century. Unlike Phan Châu Trinh, who never strayed away from a moderate stance, Phan Bội Châu resolved to forcefully overthrow the colonial invaders to restore Vietnam's independence and then follow the example of Japan and Western capitalist countries. To this end, he respectively founded the Association for Modernization in 1904 and the Vietnam Restoration League in 1912. Phan Bội Châu's patriotic ideas in these two political organizations showed a clear transformation from the monarchial to the republic on democratic stance. Several factors triggered this transformation, the most relevant of which was the shift in the socio-economic situation of Vietnam, equally important was the impact made by French and Western democratic ideas, as well as Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People. When he was in Japan (1905), Phan Bội Châu met Sun twice for discussions, and realized that

“the democratic republic regime is both good and effective”. Therefore, through his revolutionary activities in China and many encounters with the Chinese party’s revolutionaries, Phan Bội Châu increasingly absorbed democratic ideas.¹

The triumph of the Xinhai Revolution (1911) was one of the direct causes leading to Phan’s decision to give up monarchial ideas and adopt instead democratic republican thoughts. Realizing the Xinhai Revolution offered valuable lessons for the Vietnamese revolution, at the end of 1911 Phan Bội Châu composed *The Modest Recommendations for a United Asia* to unite Asian countries in a fight to oust the imperialists for independence. In February 1912, at the house of Liu Yongfu in Guangdong, Phan Bội Châu and a number of Vietnamese feudal patriots decided to establish the Vietnam Restoration League. Its motto was “Chasing the French away, restoring Vietnam and establishing a Vietnam National Republic”. Its organizational structure and operating principles were similar in many ways to those of the China Tongmenghui, although not as elaborated.²

With the introduction of VRL, Phan Bội Châu resolved to embrace a bourgeois democratic standpoint, following the example of Sun Yat-sen during his Xinhai Revolution.

In terms of organizational structure, VRL consisted of three branches: General, Legislative, and Executive Affairs. The League issued military bonds for fundraising, composed

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1. Chương Thân. *Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) – nhà yêu nước, nhà văn hóa lớn* (Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) – A Great Patriot and Man of Culture), Culture and Information Publishing House, Hanoi, 2012, p. 45.
 2. Chương Thân. “The Relationship between Sun Yat-sen and China’s Xinhai Revolution with Phan Bội Châu and Vietnam’s Revolution”; in *Cách mạng Tân Hợi: 90 năm sau nhìn lại 1911-2001* (Xinhai Revolution: 90 years in retrospect 1911-2001), Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2002.

a book on the strategy of VRL, devised military rules and regulations for organizational and operational purposes, designed a national flag (a yellow square with a centered set of five red stars) and a military flag (red background, white stars). In August 1912, VRL established the Association for the Invigoration of China and Revitalization of Asia aimed at garnering support from Asian patriots for the Vietnamese revolution. It recruited around 200 members. VRL emphasized using violence to overthrow the French. To that end, it founded the Restoration Army, whose recruits were from mountainous areas near the Vietnam-China border and put under the leadership of officers graduating from the Beijing School for Military Officers, Beijing School for Ordnance, and Guangxi School for Army Personnel.

Deeply influenced by the violent approach to revolution, VRL's operations primarily leaned towards personal assassination and terrorism, reflecting a sense of hastiness and adventurism. Phan Bội Châu said, "To find a way to survive under deadly circumstances, violence is the only way we can rely on."¹ It was necessary to make *startling actions* to *shake up the nationalistic spirit among the people*.

During its short existence, VRL conducted many attempts to assassinate crucial members of the French government and its agents. The most famous killing were these of Governor-General Albert Sarraut as well as officers of the French colonial administration such as Lê Hoan, Hoàng Trọng Phu, and Nguyễn Duy Hàn. However, two assassinations occurred in 1913 only led to the death of provincial governor Nguyễn Duy Hàn and two French lieutenant colonels. Afterwards, the

1. Phan Bội Châu, Phạm Trọng Điềm and Tôn Quang Phiệt. *Phan Bội Châu niên biểu* (The Chronicle of Phan Bội Châu), Literature-History-Geography Publishing House, Hanoi, 1957, p. 146.

French colonists responded with vigorous measures of white terror and managed to capture and imprison hundreds of VRL assassins. In January 1914, Phan Bội Châu himself was imprisoned by Chinese militants in Guangdong and kept in custody until the beginning of 1917.

During the First World War (1914–1918), a number of VRL's core members continued their violent operations against the French in Yunnan (September 1914), Phú Thọ, Nho Quan, Móng Cái, Quảng Trị (1915). However, they all ended up in failure and were brutally suppressed. Given the failure of a series of operations, VRL leaders such as Nguyễn Thượng Hiền, Đặng Tử Kính and Hoàng Trọng Mậu planned to take drastic measures at the Vietnam-China border, and to take advantage of support from Germany spies.¹ They decided to attack Lạng Sơn, Móng Cái and Hà Khẩu. Due to internal disagreements, only 100 members directly participated in the operation (13 March 1915) and failed to implement the given plan. Additionally, the League launched a number of assaults on the military posts of Bát Xát (Lào Cai) in 1916; Đồng Văn (Hà Giang) in 1917; Mường Khương (Lào Cai) in 1918. Interestingly, the tentative uprising of Emperor Duy Tân (May 1916) and the Thái Nguyên uprising² led by Đội Cấn and Lương Ngọc Quyến (1917) were VRL's greatest and last attempts. For Phan Bội Châu and VRL, the Thái Nguyên uprising put an end to its series of valiant armed revolts. The movement slowly disintegrated afterwards.

Despite following the path of bourgeois democratic revolution set forth by Sun Yat-sen in his Xinhai Revolution

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1. Nguyễn Khánh Toàn, ed. *Lịch sử Việt Nam* (Vietnam History), Social Sciences Publishing House, Hanoi, 2004, 2: 169.
 2. Đinh Xuân Lâm, ed. *Lịch sử Việt Nam*, Vietnam National University Press, Hanoi, 2016, 3: 235–243.

(China), VRL's political guidelines and operations were not radical enough. As much as it learnt from Tongmenghui's Political Program created by Sun Yat-sen for the Xinhai Revolution, namely, "revive China, establish a nationalist regime, and distribute land equally among people", VRL only resorted to "chase the French away, restore Vietnam and establish a Vietnam National Republic" without a concrete motto to mobilize a force large enough, including especially Vietnamese farmers, to promote the support and participation of all popular classes in their struggle for national liberation. This is a loophole in Phan Bội Châu's revolutionary ideas and one of the reasons for the collapse of VRL and other Vietnamese patriotic endeavors that favored armed revolution at the beginning of the 20th century.

Clearly, Phan Bội Châu was directly influenced by Sun Yat-sen's bourgeois democratic ideas during the Xinhai Revolution (China), and contributed a bourgeois movement to the whole progress of Vietnamese National Liberation at the early 20th century. The bourgeois democratic ideology was strong enough to enhance Vietnamese morale in their struggle against the French and feudal rule, thus striving for independence and paving the way for national development according to the democratic republic standpoint as taken up by Western countries.

2. *The Vietnamese Nationalist Party (1927–1930)*

After Sun Yat-sen's death, his ideas continued to greatly impact other Vietnamese patriotic organizations, one of which was the Vietnamese Nationalist Party (VNP).¹ Its predecessor

1. Nguyễn Văn Khánh. *The Vietnam Nationalist Party (1927–1954)*. Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2016.

was Nam Đồng thư xã, a printing house, which consisted of a number of petty bourgeois intellectuals, most of whom were adherents of Sun Yat-sen and his Three Principles of the People. In 1926, the Nam Đồng thư xã printed the first two books- *Tiểu sử và học thuyết Tôn Dật Tiên* (Sun Yat-sen's Autobiography and Doctrine) and *Thủ lĩnh Đảng cách mạng Trung Hoa* (Leader of China's Revolutionary Party). Nam Đồng thư xã also intended to translate Sun Yat-sen's writings in Vietnamese. However, it was closed by the French colonial administration in 1927. And VNP was formed on 25 December 1927.

During its existence, VNP did not provide a consistent and clear political program. According to two of its core members, Trần Huy Liệu and Phạm Tuấn Tài, the first principle and objective adopted at the founding conference was "first national revolution, then world revolution."¹ VNP stated that it aimed to overthrow tyranny, establish a republican national regime of Vietnam in which the people would be entitled to freedom of speech, movement and assembly, including freedom of belief. To achieve this goal, VNP advocated that the revolutionary process should be divided into three periods: secret, semi-public, and open revolt. During this period, based on the prepared forces, VNP would establish suicide squads, in coordination with Vietnamese patriotic soldiers in the French army under the command of military officers trained abroad, to launch uprisings in urban areas and claim victory.

In late 1928, VNP drafted its new charter at the request of Nguyễn Khắc Nhu. This charter was longer and more detailed than the former, which stated that VNP doctrine was

1. Trần Huy Liệu and Văn Tạo. *Tài liệu tham khảo lịch sử cách mạng Việt Nam cận đại* (Reference on the History of Contemporary Vietnam Revolution), Literature-History-Geography Publisher, Hanoi, 1958, p. 31, 93, 113, 121.

democratic socialism. The purpose of the party was to unite forces, both men and women, to boost national revolution, build a direct democracy, and help the oppressed peoples. In essence, VNP wanted to resort to violence in its fight against the colonialists, thus winning national independence and building the republic; then, it would help other colonies to perform their national liberation revolution. The charter was revised on 2 May 1929.

The final Action Plan of VNP was completed before the outbreak of the Yên Bái uprising and also specified the principles of liberty-equality-fraternity. Its purpose was national revolution, political revolution, and social revolution. In order to achieve the above objectives, VNP aimed to conduct the revolution over four periods: embryo (secret), preparation (semi-secrets), open revolt and reconstruction (seize power).

However, Sun Yat-sen advocated a revolution conducted in three stages: 1/ Military: use military might to flatten the obstacles to build the foundation for a nation; 2/ Propaganda: encourage and stimulate the people to eliminate feudalism and establish a local self-governing council (parliament style); 3/ Constitution: implement the Five Constitutional Rights (legislative, executive, judicial, supervision, and examination).¹ To realize nationalism, he proposed three tasks: 1/ Promote advocacy and leadership to awaken the people's hatred against the Qing; 2/ test the struggle through armed insurrection path; 3/ carryout the revolution of the masses to overthrow the Qing dynasty.²

1. Nguyễn Văn Hồng, Nguyễn Thị Hương and Chương Thuần. *Tôn Trung Sơn với Việt Nam, op. cit.*, p. 12.

2. Dương Thành Lợi. *Triết lý quốc trị Đông phương* (Eastern Thoughts on National Governance), Làng Văn, Hanoi, 1996, pp. 341-367.

Influenced by his Three Principles of the People, VNP used the standpoint of bourgeois nationalism to solve national problems. In its charter and its action plan, VNP focused on national issues, treating the struggle against oppression for national liberation as the first task, the basic mission of the party. The ultimate purpose was to use violence to overthrow the yoke of the French empire to win national independence, establish a republican government, exercise the right to freedom and democracy, and pave the way for capitalist development in Vietnam. VNP's political program mentioned the Period of Reconstruction, but the content and the steps were very generic, like "spreading literacy, educating people with a public conversation, claiming freedom of speech."¹ This limitation stems from a weak social basis of bourgeois nationalist movement. In other words, it was due to the economic and political weakness of the bourgeoisie in Vietnam. Owing to a weak bourgeoisie, VNP had to acquire and wield the Three Principles of the People in its own way.

However, the national view and nationalism of the VNP were unlike those of Sun Yat-sen. As we know, at the end of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, along with the continued implementation of policies to protect the rights of the Manchus, and worsening inequality between ethnic groups. The Manchus also applied multiple policies to

1. On this point, the journal *La Revue Franco-annamite*, issued on 4 August 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". Quoted from 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* 1 and 2 (1975).

create opportunities for the gradual intervention of powers into China. In this context, Sun Yat-sen basically wanted to "overthrow the Royalists", i.e. the Qing government, for the establishment of a nation. This intent was demonstrated in four large agendas of the *Tongmenghui* founded in 1905, included the following: eliminate the Thát enemy, restore China, establish a nation for the people, and distribute land equally among them. Excluding the invaders meant defeating the Manchu to establish a Republican government centered on the Han people.

Later, at the time before and after the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, influenced by Western theories and due to the intervention of increasingly blatant aggression of the imperialist countries in China, Sun Yat-sen turned to the ideas of "a republic with five ethnic groups". The basic content of this nationalism was that "in the Central Land of China, beside the Han there are other groups like Manchu, Mongolian, Hui, Tibetan; thus, ethnic equality is required." This idea can be considered as the second phase in the development of Sun Yat-sen's nationalism. However, until later, it was just another version of the Great Han nationalism. He once said, "The Chinese government should be ours, Han; when the authorities were people of other ethnic groups, the country was not ours. Then it was not our country, the country of the Han... The current government belongs to the Manchu, thus Chinese people still have to revolt."¹ He stressed that "when we talk about nationalism, it is ethnic nationalism, thus it is only satisfactory in China but not abroad."² After the May Fourth Movement (4 May 1919), especially after the cooperation between Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party (1923), Sun's

1. *Tôn Trung Sơn toàn tập* (Sun Yat-sen's Completed Works), 1981, 1: 324.

2. Nguyễn Văn Hồng, Nguyễn Thị Hương, and Chương Châu. *Tôn Trung Sơn với Việt Nam, op. cit.*, p. 90.

concept of nationalism was also added and developed with the Three Great Policies, i.e. allying with Russia, supporting workers and peasants, containing capitalist and equal land distribution. He advocated "national reconciliation", national salvation, "national self-determination" and development of a "Great China". As such, Sun Yat-sen's nationalism initially started as "anti-Manchu", then shifted to "the republic of five ethnic groups" and finally to nationalist "Greater China". But ultimately, it was essentially Great Han ethnic nationalism.

Meanwhile, VNP nationalism focused more on battling oppression and domination by colonialists and foreign imperialists. VNP's national stance was not only disclosed in its principles and objectives, but also reflected in how it evaluated the revolutionary forces in its guiding principle and specific revolutionary actions.

In its political agenda, as well as its specific revolutionary actions, VNP did not advocate class struggle; when considering and laying out revolutionary forces it still used the bourgeois standpoint. The programs and charters drafted in 1928 and 1929 identified its basic motto as uniting all people, including both male and female forces, irrespective of class, religion, and age in its struggle to implement its principles. But there was no coherence among the Party's programs and actions. In fact, there was still discrimination within VNP, with priority given to some classes at the expense of others, as evidenced in its development. VNP's priority was to admit Vietnamese soldiers in the ranks of the French army, followed by the national bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, urban intellectuals and notables, civil servants, and the well-off people in the countryside. As for the working class and peasants, the VNP only planned to organize them into groups and considered them Party's sympathizers. There were fundamental differences in

the way the revolutionary forces of Nguyễn Ái Quốc's Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League were organized and developed compared to those of VNP. The Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League was a socialist-oriented organization, which from the beginning focused on public advocacy, political education, and organization of the working class and farmers. The VNP in fact lowered and denied the revolutionary leadership of the working class.

In summary, although there were many variations in different times, the core political ideology of VNP was nationalism. But its nationalism was not completely identical to the Three Principles of the People of Sun Yat-sen. Sun Yat-sen found that the Chinese people's spirit had been repressed by the Western political and economic power. Thus, he thought it was important to recreate national strength; the people must regain national sovereignty to build an independent nation. Sun's view was also aimed towards building equality among ethnic groups: Chinese, Mongol, Tibetan, etc. But, deep down, his wish was for the Han ethnic group to dominate the government. His nationalism was essentially ethnic nationalism (Han). Meanwhile, VNP nationalism involved patriotism and a desire to mobilize the people for national liberation.

Influenced by the context and changing situation in Vietnam and the world after World War I, the VNP's version of nationalism absorbed new nuances and contents, which was not quite the same as nationalism under feudalism. Under feudalism, nationalism was defined by the motto "*We had our own mountains, rivers, and boundaries, we had our distinctive customs and culture*" (Nguyễn Trãi - Cáo bình Ngô, or Great Proclamation upon the Pacification of the Wu), on the basis of Confucian ideology. Meanwhile, VNP nationalism, for

its part, was associated with the need to fight colonialism for independence and freedom and national self-reliance, in order to ultimately make the people prosperous and the country strong.

Sun Yat-sen – Hồ Chí Minh and Vietnamese revolution

While still alive, Sun Yat-sen and Hồ Chí Minh never met each other. Yet, Sun Yat-sen's life and career left profound marks on Nguyễn Ái Quốc-Hồ Chí Minh's emotional and ideological life. And despite their ideological differences, "Sun Yat-sen and Hồ Chí Minh shared a subterranean historical and temporal bond."¹

Hồ came to realize that Sun's ideas contained many elements that were in line with local historical development and could be adopted in the context of Vietnamese revolutionary history. In commenting on Hồ Chí Minh, Sun Yat-sen and China's revolutionary progress, former Vietnamese Prime Minister Phạm Văn Đồng said: "During his career abroad, President Hồ had a profound attachment with Sun Yat-sen as well as China's revolutionary development and people."²

Hồ Chí Minh's ideological background was not only formed by Marxist-Leninism and traditional Vietnamese patriotism, but also adopted other cultural and ideological essentials of humankind, of which the most direct and intimate were the democratic and national ideas contained in Sun Yat-sen's

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1. Institute of Chinese Studies - Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences. *Tôn Trung Sơn-Cách mạng Tân Hợi và quan hệ Việt Nam-Trung Quốc* (Sun Yat-sen-Xinhai Revolution and Vietnam-China Relations), National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2008.
 2. Phạm Văn Đồng. *Hồ Chí Minh lãnh tụ của chúng ta* (Hồ Chí Minh - Our Leader), Sự thật Publishing House, Hanoi, 1969, p. 20.

Three Principles of the People. Hồ borrowed and creatively utilized the progressive elements of these Principles in his revolutionary endeavors in Vietnam. Hồ Chí Minh studied Sun's revolutionary methods, especially the use of Confucian ethics to stimulate and improve the revolutionary morale of all people.¹

The impact of Sun Yat-sen and his Three Principles of the People on Hồ Chí Minh and the Vietnamese revolution was first of all reflected in Hồ Chí Minh's reverence, respect and admiration towards the former. Driven by this appreciation, Hồ Chí Minh diligently studied and learnt from Sun Yat-sen's nationalist spirit and relevant revolutionary ideas contained in his Principles.

The impact of Sun Yat-sen and China's revolutionary progress on Nguyễn Ái Quốc-Hồ Chí Minh became evident through Hồ Chí Minh's early articles in the 1920s, when he was involved in revolutionary activities in France. According to Nguyễn Ái Quốc, Sun Yat-sen's Revolutionary Statement was an innovative one. The Statement "contains several progressive objectives: first, to openly fight imperialism and militarism; second, to unite the oppressed nations in colonized countries and the international proletariat; third, to learn from the example of the Russian revolution."²

In his article "The Imperialist Countries and China" published in the 57th issue of *International Postal Journal* in

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1. Lê Thị Tinh. "Ảnh hưởng của Tôn Trung Sơn và chủ nghĩa Tam dân đối với Hồ Chí Minh" (The Influence of Sun Yat-sen and his Three Principles of the People on Hồ Chí Minh), *Journal of Social Sciences* 8 (2015), 64-65.
 2. The National Center of Social Sciences and Humanities. *Cách mạng Tân Hợi: 90 năm sau nhìn lại 1911-2001* (Xinhai Revolution: 90 years in retrospect), Social Sciences Publishing House, 2002, p. 279.

1924, Nguyễn Ái Quốc wrote: "As Sun Yat-sen is the Father of China's Revolution, the leader of Guangzhou Administration, he is always loyal to his principles, even under the hardest circumstances. His party's statement-the Kuomintang-is an innovative one. It contains many provisions that are clearly anti-imperialist and anti-militaristic. His party strongly calls for the unity among oppressed nations in colonized countries and the international proletariat. It agrees with the Russian revolution."¹

At the end of 1924, Nguyễn Ái Quốc returned to Guangzhou to perform revolutionary tasks as assigned by the Comintern. There, he was provided with opportunities to study the situation in China and Sun Yat-sen's ideas. By then, the Three Principles of the People had been updated and added more positive and revolutionary elements. "After seeing the advertisement in *Guangzhou daily*, he found a way to become the translator for Borodin, the political advisor to doctor Sun Yat-sen and the Guangzhou administration. He translated many Chinese newspapers into English. He spared no effort in studying China's political background. The principles of Doctor Sun Yat-sen are national independence, civil freedom, and the people's happiness. He both worked and researched while living there."²

According to Đặng Thanh Tịnh, among all the revolutionary doctrines in the world, that of Sun Yat-sen was considered by Nguyễn Ái Quốc as most relevant to conditions in Vietnam. At the time, it was what Vietnam was in need of and Nguyễn Ái Quốc was seeking. Therefore, Nguyễn Ái Quốc became all

1. *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập* (Hồ Chí Minh's Completed Works), National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 2011, 1: 343.
2. Trần Dân Tiên. *Những mẩu chuyện về đời hoạt động của Hồ Chủ tịch* (Anecdotes about President Hồ's Life and Activities), National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, 1995, p. 71.

the more respectful towards this great leader of the Chinese people, and grew to be Sun's genuine student.¹

In 1925, after having established the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League, Nguyễn Ái Quốc was directly in charge of training and disciplining Vietnamese youngsters, whom he brought back to Vietnam to engage in propaganda and advocacy activities, to develop the ideological foundation for a communist party.

One of the elements taught by the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League in its short courses in Guangzhou was the history of revolutions worldwide, including the Russian Revolution, Xinhai Revolution, and some existing revolutionary movements in China driven by the Three Principles of the People and the Three Great Policies. In studying and examining the experiences from these revolutions, Nguyễn Ái Quốc always took a discriminatory, critical and discerning approach so as to creatively apply the positive aspects in the Three Principles to Vietnam's particular historical conditions. He was concerned with national independence, but only focused and prioritized it after considering Vietnam's particular circumstances and timing. His most original initiative was to combine national independence with the people's freedom and happiness.

Having entered Guangzhou, on 13 November 1926, Nguyễn Ái Quốc wrote a series of articles titled "The Developments of our Special Envoys in China" for *L'Annam* journal in Saigon, in which he revealed the first victories of China's Nationalist revolutionary army in the Sun Yat-sen-led Northern Expedition. As for the people's affection

1. Đặng Thanh Tịnh. "Hồ Chí Minh với chủ nghĩa Tam dân của Tôn Trung Sơn" (Hồ Chí Minh and Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People), *Journal of the Party History* 6 (1993), 17.

towards Sun Yat-sen, Nguyễn Ái Quốc said, “The revered enthusiasm shown by the Chinese people towards their late leader imbues them with a will to achieve self-liberation through diplomacy, which has become undeniable.”¹

In March 1927, also in Guangzhou, Nguyễn Ái Quốc wrote the article “The Second Anniversary of Sun Yat-sen’s Death” for the 150th issue of *L’Annam* (31 March 1927). The article praised Sun Yat-sen’s contributions to the Kuomintang and Chinese Government.

At the end of 1927, Nguyễn Ái Quốc returned to China from Europe to prepare for the unification of different communist parties into a revolutionary political organization. He said to his comrades: “We have to connect different social classes as well as the people to liberate our nation and the working class. To this end, a united organization is needed, which can be named Revolutionary Youth or Communist Party, but its political thesis has to be as follows: 1. national dependence; 2. freedom for people; 3. happy citizens; 4. moving towards socialism.”²

In the Party’s political thesis, Nguyễn Ái Quốc not only localized and transformed Sun Yat-sen’s *Three Principles of the People* into national independence, freedom and happiness for the people, but also effectively combined Lenin’s two-step revolutionary strategy with these principles to compile the *Concise thesis of the Communist Party of Vietnam*. Moreover, his thesis on land was not built on generic policies such as land equality as proposed by Sun Yat-sen, but on concrete tasks and goals for resolving the land issues faced by farmers, through such mottos as “Land for the farmers” and “All land belongs to

1. Hồ Chí Minh Institute. *Hồ Chí Minh biên niên tiểu sử* (Chronological Biography of Hồ Chí Minh), National Political Publishing House, 2006, 1: 358.

2. Trần Dân Tiên. *Những mẩu chuyện về đời hoạt động của Hồ Chủ tịch*, op. cit., p. 75.

the farmers". This was a concretization and continuation of the motto "Distribute land equally among people".

In 1945, the August Revolution was successful and a new government was founded. President Hồ Chí Minh used a set of concepts "Independence-Freedom-Happiness" as the motto of this new Vietnam. They were adopted from Sun's Three Principles of the People and the motto "Freedom-Equality-Fraternity" of the 1789 French Revolution, but were elevated to a new height by including class consciousness, people's consciousness, nationalism and radical revolution. They were the elements of a democratic and nationalist revolution under the leadership of the working class, with Marxist-Leninism as its core ideology and guiding principle.

Aside from creatively applying the contents of the Three Principles of the People, Hồ Chí Minh dedicated himself to studying Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary methods, especially the use of Confucian ethics to stimulate and improve overall morale. Hồ Chí Minh explained the Confucian idea of "self-cultivation, family management, national governance, and world pacification" in a simple yet digestible way for the Vietnamese people. Sun Yat-sen's thoughts and actions were applied to himself before being spread to the whole world, while Hồ Chí Minh used his own simple yet refined life as an example for the public.

In the second session of the First National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (9 November 1946), Hồ Chí Minh said: "The government has done its best to adhere to the three principles concerning the people's welfare, civil rights and nation."¹ This clearly showed that these contents were

1. *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập*, National Political Publishing House, 2000, 4: 978.

actualized in reality and became included in Hồ Chí Minh's process of national construction.

Next, in *The Call for Patriotic Emulation* on 11 June 1948, Hồ Chí Minh declared that Vietnam's revolutionary mission would focus on "both fighting for independence and national construction" so that the "whole population has enough food and clothing; the whole population knows how to read and write; the entire army has enough provision and weapons to eliminate the invaders; the whole nation will finally be independent and unified. Therefore, we strive for national independence, the people's freedom and their happiness. These three ideas were proposed by the great revolutionary Sun Yat-sen."¹ This was Hồ Chí Minh's dexterous and original use of Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles of the People to engage the existing revolutionary situation in Vietnam, in order to define the course and prospective goals of the struggle against the French for national development.

Sun Yat-sen's influence in Vietnam was not only manifested in his visits, his residence and years of propaganda and political activities across the country; but became deeply rooted in the political ideas, organizational structure and operational principles of Vietnamese patriotic organizations, most notable of which were VRL and VNP. Several Vietnamese revolutionaries, Nguyễn Ái Quốc - Hồ Chí Minh in particular, were extremely positive and respectful towards Sun Yat-sen not only because he was a great revolutionary, but also because his Three Principles of the People were "in many ways relevant" to the conditions in Vietnam, and Hồ Chí Minh vowed to "become one of his little students,"² as well

1. *Hồ Chí Minh toàn tập*, op. cit., 5: 913-914.

2. Thành Duy. *Danh nhân Hồ Chí Minh* (Hồ Chí Minh as a Celebrated Person), Lao động Publishing House, Hanoi, 2000, p. 870.

as Karl Marx's, in the struggle for independence, freedom and happiness of Vietnam.

Obviously, through his activities in Vietnam and his revolutionary ideas that manifested and revolved most concretely around the Three Principles of the People, Sun Yat-sen directly left his influence and impact on the political awareness and standpoint of several Vietnamese patriots such as Phan Bội Châu and Nguyễn Ái Quốc - Hồ Chí Minh. Sun effectively inspired the Vietnamese movement for national liberation to adopt new contents and characteristics, and promoted the emancipation of the Vietnamese people on their own terms to quickly regain independence and national freedom and happiness for their countrymen.