

Leiden University

Asian Studies (Research), Humanities



**Universiteit  
Leiden**  
The Netherlands

**REINTERPRETING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE:**

STUDY ON THE HISTORICAL WRITINGS OF PHAN BỘI CHÂU AND HOÀNG CAO

KHÁI

RAN TAI

Supervisor: Dr. Kiri Paramore

### **Abstract**

This thesis compares the texts of Vietnamese national history written in the colonial period by two competing reformist intellectuals Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải. Exposed to the currents of thought such as Social Darwinism and the theory of evolution in early twentieth century Asia, both of them realised the backwardness of Vietnam and stressed the necessity of reform. However, Phan decided to fight against the French while Hoàng chose to collaborate with them. As will be shown in this thesis, both Phan and Hoàng, despite the difference of their political stances, endeavoured to justify their respective propositions by constructing the historic past of Vietnam.

As two reformist intellectuals, Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải regarded the introduction of Western civilisation in late nineteenth century Asia as a key moment for the Vietnamese people to get rid of their backward conditions and evolve into a civilised nation. However, they shared different opinions about the nature of this transition of Vietnam. Phan Bội Châu was inclined to view the French invasion as a “Messianic” moment which marked the “rupture” between the past and present in Vietnamese history. In his historiography, Vietnamese society in the past centuries was inherently barbarous, and this barbarousness led to the current backwardness of the country. Meanwhile, Phan Bội Châu, as an anti-French activist, emphasised that the salvation of the Vietnamese nation should never rely upon the assistance of France. He insisted that albeit France was a civilised state, it played an anti-progressive role in the process of Vietnam’s modernisation. Therefore, resisting against the French colonisation naturally became the most important step in the national salvation and rejuvenation. To justify his anti-French proposition, Phan constructed a genealogy of national heroes who, out of their inherent

“anti-foreign nature”, participated in the resistance against China’s invasions in the previous millennia. Meanwhile, he included the present anti-French revolution into the glorious anti-foreign tradition of the Vietnamese nation.

Hoàng Cao Khải systematically refuted Phan in *Việt sử kính* and *Việt sử yếu*. Based on the theory of the transition of models of civilisation, however, Hoàng Cao Khải argued that it was not the inherent barbarousness of the Vietnamese people but the decay of the model of civilisation that Vietnam followed in previous times that resulted in the inferior status of Vietnam in the current international competition. In Hoàng’s narrative, the history of Vietnam is depicted as a gradual and consistent process towards civilisation, in which China, because of its superiority in competition, functioned as the first model for Vietnam to follow and eventually made the later a domain of civilisation. Considering the power of France which had been demonstrated in its recent competitions with Vietnam, Hoàng suggested that France had already replaced China as the new model of civilisation for Vietnam to follow. In the face of Phan Bội Châu’s emphasis on the anti-foreignness of the Vietnamese nation, Hoàng employed the analytical framework of the dichotomy between “universal principle” and “brute force” to analyse those uprisings against the China’s colonisation and argued that most of them were merely contingent responses to inappropriate policies based on the “brute force”. Moreover, by utilising the ideas of Social Darwinism to reinterpret the connotation of “universal principle”, Hoàng justifies the behaviour which employed “brute force” in the process of disseminating so-called “universal principle” and civilisation.

Apart from their interpretation of the past, this thesis examines their imagination of the future as well. Based on their discussions about the issue of Champa, it points out the shared “pro-imperial” orientation of Phan and Hoàng in their opinions on the international status of Vietnam after modernisation. That is, neither Phan (despite his anti-colonialist stance) nor Hoàng

realised the underlying nature of the phenomenon of colonialism itself let alone intending to challenge or subvert the current colonial order. The world they envisioned in which a decolonised Vietnam situated is still established upon asymmetrical relations of power.

## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Abstract</b>   | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>   | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| 1. Research questions   | 10        |
| 2. Literature review  | 11        |
| 3. Chapters   | 17        |
| 4. Sources  | 17        |
| <b>Chapter Two: Relocating Vietnam in the new world system</b>  | <b>19</b> |
| 1. Reacting to the decay of Vietnam   | 21        |
| 1.1 Can Vương movement: the last traditional resistance   | 22        |
| 1.2 Saving the nation and race: the emergence of the new concepts   | 26        |
| 2. Finding Asia in Japan, relocating Vietnam in Asia  | 30        |
| <b>Chapter Three: History and resistance: Phan Bội Châu and his <i>Việt Nam quốc sử khảo</i></b>              | <b>37</b> |
| 1. National sovereignty and the evolution of the Vietnamese people  | 38        |
| 1.1 The deadlock of Vietnamese history: the underdevelopment of national sovereignty                          | 38        |
| 1.2 Untying the deadlock: rescuing national sovereignty through the linear-progressive historiography         | 42        |
| 2. Constructing an anti-foreign Vietnam   | 47        |
| 2.1 Anti-foreign struggles and the defence of national sovereignty  | 48        |
| 2.2 “Anti-foreignness” as the imperative for the progress of the Vietnamese nation                            | 50        |
| 2.3 “Anti-foreignness” as the national spirit of Vietnamese people  | 53        |
| 3. Champa as a predicament in Phan Bội Châu’s narrative   | 56        |
| 3.1 Barbarous Champa versus civilised Vietnam   | 57        |
| 3.2 Phan’s “new Vietnam” and the discourse of colonialism   | 59        |
| 4. Chapter conclusion   | 62        |
| <b>Chapter Four: History and Reform: Hoàng Cao Khải and his <i>Việt sử kính</i> and <i>Việt sử yếu</i></b>    | <b>63</b> |
| 1. The transition of models of civilisation, and the continuity of Vietnamese history                         | 64        |
| 1.1 China, the first model of civilisation  | 65        |
| 1.2 France as the new model of civilisation   | 67        |
| 2. Reevaluating Chinese colonisation: “universal principle” and “brute force”                                 | 69        |
| 2.1 Universal principle and moral order   | 70        |
| 2.2 Universal principle and Social Darwinism  | 72        |
| 3. The imperative of collaborating with France  | 75        |
| 3.1 The impossibility of resisting against the French: an analysis based on aspects of technology and finance | 77        |
| 3.2 Refuting the discourse of “race struggle”   | 80        |

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| 3.3 The “fortune” of Vietnam to be protected by France | 82        |
| 4. Chapter conclusion                                  | 85        |
| <b>Chapter Five: Concluding remarks</b>                | <b>87</b> |
| 1. The nature of the historic past of Vietnam          | 87        |
| 2. The subjectivity of the Vietnamese people           | 88        |
| 3. The status of Vietnam in future global affairs      | 89        |
| <b>Bibliography</b>                                    | <b>91</b> |

## Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the supervision of Dr. Kiri Paramore. As my thesis supervisor, Kiri Paramore generously gave his time and insight into positioning my research in the historiography of early modern Vietnam. It is his valuable advice and abiding encouragements that supported me to finish this thesis. I also thank Professor Alexander Woodside, Nam-lin Hur, Liam Kelley, Kathlene Baldanza, Bradley Camp Davis, Dr. Ya-pei Kuo and Dr. Limin Teh for their instructions. I owe special thanks to Dr. Luo Jingwen who shared me with his PhD dissertation and scanned Phan Bội Châu's *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* for me.

During my two years in Leiden and one semester of exchange at The University of British Columbia in Vancouver, I have met many great friends and benefited from our insightful conversations. I would like to express my gratitude to Jackson Liu, Alice Simionato, Kanghun Ahn, Xiao Boyu, Chen Wenxi, Rahul Tanwani, Alex Zhao, Zheng Biao, and Dr. Yu Bocan. I owe Alice Simionato a deep debt of gratitude for her proofreading of my draft thesis. I also want to thank Bo Yi for her company during my fieldwork in Vietnam.

Lastly, I would like to express my deep gratitude towards my family, especially my dear departed grandmother Niu Shulian, my mother Xiao Hong and father Tai Zhihua. To them I gratefully dedicate this thesis.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In the seventeenth year of the Bảo Đại 保大 reign (1933), the well-known monthly journal *Nam Phong* (南風 Southern Ethos) reported an obituary of the former viceroy of Tonkin, Hoàng Cao Khải 黃高啟 (1850-1933). Most of this obituary was dedicated to reviewing Hoàng's "honourable" feats in pacifying anti-French resistance between 1885 and 1896. Following the obituary were an imperial edict from the pro-French Nguyen Vietnamese Emperor Bảo Đại (1913-1997) and a eulogy composed by his imperial official of rites. In the edict, the emperor praised Hoàng Cao Khải's great contribution to the Nguyen court and ordered his grand minister, Pham Quynh 范瓊 (1892-1945)<sup>1</sup>, to attend Hoàng's funeral on his behalf in Hanoi.<sup>2</sup> As the funeral was under way, seven hundred kilometres away from Hanoi in Hue, Hoàng Cao Khải's political and intellectual antagonist, Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) was spending his eighth year under house arrest. Seven years later on 29 October 1940, Phan passed away and was buried near the bank of the Perfume River.

Today, Hoàng Cao Khải's grand mansions have fallen into disuse and his tomb is enveloped amidst the houses of the ordinary in Tay Son Street, Hanoi. Except for condemning his treacherous behaviour of collaborating with the French during the colonial period, Hoàng Cao Khải's name is rarely mentioned by either the communist authorities or the Vietnamese people. His works are scarcely known either—even the librarian of the National Library in Hanoi showed me a dazed expression when I asked her to check two historical books of Hoàng Cao Khải on the database. Compared to Hoàng, Phan Bội Châu is revered today as a national hero. Streets, schools and even hotels are named after him in all parts of Vietnam. Surrounding his tomb a

---

<sup>1</sup> Phan Quynh was also the general secretary of *Nam Phong*.

<sup>2</sup> *Nam Phong* 1933, issue 188 26-28.



memorial house has been established as one of the national patriotic education bases. Phan's writings including his autobiographies, political critiques, historical writings, and poems have been widely read, studied, and some of them, especially those expressing patriotism and anti-colonialism, have even been incorporated in university and secondary school curricula (Marr 1978, 9). In comparison with the boom of the literature on Phan Bội Châu, most of Hoàng Cao Khải's works remain poorly researched.

This polarisation regarding people's attitudes to Hoàng and Phan is related to an imbalance in the scholarly historical narrative of modern Vietnamese history in the middle twentieth century. During the Vietnam War (1959-1975), Phan Bội Châu became one of the most important figures in the study of Vietnam. Scholars from both the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the United States placed Phan Bội Châu in their grand narratives of the anti-colonial struggle of Vietnam. They portrayed Phan as a great patriot who devoted his whole life to the cause of modernising the backward Vietnam, enlightening the ignorant people, and establishing an independent nation-state. Hoàng Cao Khải, on the other hand, was depicted as a cunning collaborator who assisted the French for his private interests to oppress the uprisings of Vietnamese people and severely impeded the process of modernisation of Vietnam.

For the DRV scholars, Phan Bội Châu's patriotic zeal and his selfless devotion to the previous anti-French movement provided abundant cultural resources for the mass mobilisation and political propaganda of North Vietnam at that time (Luo 2012, 7). As for the Western scholars, especially those who were working in North American universities, their narration of Phan Bội Châu and, by extension, the colonial history of Vietnam, were more or less influenced by the nationwide anti-Vietnam War Movement (1965-1970).<sup>3</sup> Through their narratives, they

---

<sup>3</sup> Some representative scholars in modern Vietnamese studies participated in this movement in various ways. David G. Marr for instance, became an outspoken critic of the escalating US intervention in Indochina (Miller 2017, 135). Besides, the universities where they worked or studied (Berkeley and Georgetown) were very important bases of the Anti-war protests (Huey 2012, 3-11).

attempted to construct the anti-foreign tradition of Vietnam to imply that it was the United States' misreading of Vietnamese history that resulted in the final collapse of the illusion that, with the help of foreign forces (France in the past and the United States at present), the division of Vietnam could be maintained and those foreign powers could prevent Vietnamese people from consolidating their victory (Duiker 1976, 13). As the pioneer of the anti-French movement, Phan Bội Châu thus became the most significant object in their narratives of modern Vietnamese history, while Hoàng Cao Khải, due to his collaboration with the French forces which had been swept out of Vietnam, was naturally marginalised and even excluded from the relevant research. It seems fair to assume that both the DRV and American scholars regarded history as an agency to express their various propositions and concerns.

Interestingly, however, such agency had already been employed by their researched figures Phan Bội Châu and his antagonist Hoàng Cao Khải half a century earlier. Comparing the texts of Vietnamese national history written by Phan and Hoàng, this thesis intends to demonstrate how they, through re-narrating and re-interpreting the historic past of Vietnam, made history an effective way to justify their respective political propositions.

## **1. Research questions**

As two representative Vietnamese intellectuals in an important transitioning period, Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải were exposed to new ideas from the West such as Social Darwinism, the theory of evolution, and relevant concepts of international law, which significantly changed their way of understanding the world they were living in. They creatively adopted and transformed these currents of modern thought, and consciously employed them to interpret the past and envision the future of Vietnam.

This thesis intends to probe two questions. First, how Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải adopted and transformed new ideas and concepts from the West in their historiography; Second, how they utilised the constructed past of Vietnamese history as a means to understand French colonisation and to justify their different political propositions.

## 2. Literature review

Although few scholars in previous literature directly made these historical writings their main research objects, their studies have still demonstrated the tremendous impact of transcultural interaction on the thought of Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải. By and large, relevant research experienced three phases as shown below.

The first phase (1950s-1960s) was mainly led by Vietnamese scholars. During this period, Phan Bội Châu became the protagonist in scholars' narratives of modern Vietnamese history.<sup>4</sup> In this initial stage, the major contribution of these scholars was confined to two aspects: the collection and collation of Phan Bội Châu's works,<sup>5</sup> and the discussion of Phan's revolutionary activities and political stance. In their research, Vietnamese scholars praised Phan Bội Châu for his dedication to the anti-French movement, but they, to some extent, failed to demonstrate the complexity of Phan Bội Châu's thought. Luo attributes this phenomenon to the historical context of the Vietnam War. For the DRV authorities, Phan Bội Châu's patriotic zeal and his nationalist stance contained the power to unite the Vietnamese people and to arouse their morale for the current anti-American struggle. In this context, even though there were some discussions of

---

<sup>4</sup> Luo Jingwen in his PhD dissertation made a holistic summary of the Vietnamese literature on Phan Bội Châu (Luo 2012, 6-9). It should be pointed out that except Anh Minh, most of scholars that Luo mentioned in his literature review are from North Vietnam.

<sup>5</sup> In this period, Phan Bội Châu's memoirs *Ngục Trung Thư* (獄中書) and *Niên Biểu* (年表) were translated from classical Chinese into romanised Vietnamese scripts *quốc ngữ*.

Phan's thought, the results of these discussions had to eventually be matched with DRV ideology (Luo 2012, 7).<sup>6</sup>

It was not until the late 1960s that studies on Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải moved beyond the above-mentioned stage and began to touch upon their interactions with Western ideas. In this stage, most of the pioneering achievements were conducted by North American and Japanese scholars. Among them, David G. Marr and his milestone work *Vietnamese Anti-colonialism, 1885-1925* should be noted at first.

In this book, Marr did emphasise the critical role that Phan Bội Châu played in the Vietnamese anti-colonialist movement. However, he also moved beyond the previous Vietnamese literature on Phan Bội Châu's anti-French activities and extended the research perspective from the domestic to the international. Employing sources varying from Phan Bội Châu's biographies to the French diplomatic archives, Marr systematically investigated the development of Phan Bội Châu's thought. According to him, there are two factors that mark the key turning points in the thought of Phan Bội Châu: the introduction of Western ideas through the works from Chinese reformists such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao;<sup>7</sup> and his interaction with Chinese political emigres, Japanese politicians, and other activists sharing the idea of pan-Asianism.<sup>8</sup> Those Chinese books provided Phan with a new vocabulary to explain the tragedy of Vietnam,<sup>9</sup> and the communication with other Asian revolutionaries enabled him to rethink the past and future of Vietnam from a broader perspective.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> As Trần Nghĩa pointed out, despite the discrepancy, Vietnamese scholars in the 1960s shared the consensus that the features of Phan Bội Châu's thought were patriotism, nationalism, and radicalism (armed riot) (Luo 2012, 7).

<sup>7</sup> Marr 1971, 98-101.

<sup>8</sup> Marr 1971, 112-155.

<sup>9</sup> Marr 1971, 100.

<sup>10</sup> For Marr's discussion of Phan's historical writings *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* and *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*, see Marr 1971, 114-119 and 148-149.

Following Marr, William J. Duiker and Alexander B. Woodside continued this topic and conducted many in-depth examinations of Phan's interpretation and adoption of new ideas such as democracy, liberty, sovereignty, and civil rights. To emphasise the nature of Phan Bội Châu as a transitioning figure in the nationalist/revolutionary movement of Vietnam, Duiker and Woodside spared no effort in demonstrating the links and tensions between Phan's "classically trained mind" and his perception of those Western-imported ideas.<sup>11</sup> Apart from the North American scholars, Japanese researchers also participated in relevant discussions. Among them, Shiraishi Masaya was the most significant one not only for his extensive examination and use of primary source materials written in Vietnamese, Chinese, and Japanese but also for his broad research perspective which expanded the previous Japan-Viet or Sino-Viet framework to a multilayered investigation of the development of Phan Bội Châu's thought.<sup>12</sup> Focusing on Phan's views of Japan and his appeal for cooperation among the Asian nations sharing the same race and culture, Shiraishi shows the critical role Social Darwinism played in Phan's writings, especially in those that relate to the establishment of an independent nation-state.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its achievements, the aforementioned scholarship presents two important problems. First, the basic framework that scholars employed in their research seems a bit flawed. These scholars divide Vietnamese scholars into two camps on the basis of their attitudes towards the French colonisers, the collaborating and the resistant, and simply assume the resistant to be morally virtuous and progressive whereas the collaborating to be immoral and reactionary. Marr makes an interesting account for this division. According to him, in a Confucian society "scholar-gentry collaborators were extremely vulnerable to savage intellectual and moral attacks

---

<sup>11</sup> See Duiker 1976, 44-47; and Woodside 1976, 36-38. Prior to them, Marr had also analysed the relationship between the traditional Confucian discourse and the Western ideas in Phan's early works. See Marr 1971, 103.

<sup>12</sup> Before Shiraishi, Kunie Kawamoto and Terahiro Teruo in the 1960s had shown interest in Phan Bội Châu's activities in Japan. For detailed summary of Japanese literature, see Luo 2012, 10-11.

<sup>13</sup> See Shiraishi 1988, 57-64. Apart from Shiraishi, Vietnamese scholar Vĩnh Sinh compares Phan Bội Châu and Fukuzawa Yukichi's opinions on national independence, which also contributed to this topic. See Vĩnh 1988, 101-139.

from the minority of their peers who were willing, to a greater or lesser degree, to jeopardise their immediate positions in favour of some future goal, some dream that allowed them above all to retain their self-conceptions of individual purity” (Marr 1971, 82). This “moral covenant” that the resistant minority complied with would enable them to gain the support from the majority of Vietnamese people (Marr 83). Hence, for the collaborating intellectuals, due to their immoral treachery to the Confucian doctrines such as “risk death to do a man’s work”, “sacrifice life to defend righteousness”, and “in such conditions, if we don’t act, who will?”, their authority and legitimacy were demolished, so was their status in the narrative of modern Vietnamese history.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Hoàng Cao Khải, albeit his name is mentioned in some literature, the discussion about him is merely confined to his interactions with Phan Dinh Phung, the early anti-French leader during the Can Vuong movement (1885-1896).<sup>15</sup> Except for the letter he wrote to persuade Phan to give up, most of his writings are almost entirely overlooked.<sup>16</sup>

Apart from the research framework, the way these scholars dealt with Phan Bội Châu’s historical writings is also problematic. Taking Phan’s *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* as an example, Marr and Duiker simply regarded this book as Phan’s explanation of governmental processes in the modern state after he accepted the ideas of Sun Yat-sen,<sup>17</sup> however, they more or less dismissed the framework of historiography and the logic of narrative that Phan Bội Châu used in this work.<sup>18</sup> In other words, they merely viewed Phan’s historical writings as the result of his absorption of those Western ideas instead of the process in which Phan actively employed, transposed, and internalised these new concepts.

---

<sup>14</sup> Similar arguments can also be found in Duiker’s book. See Duiker 1976, 28-30.

<sup>15</sup> Marr 1971, 66-68; Duiker 1976, 29.

<sup>16</sup> The English translation of Hoàng’s letter and Phan’s response. See Lam 1967, 121-127.

<sup>17</sup> Marr 1971, 148-149; Duiker 1976, 46-47.

<sup>18</sup> Admittedly, the lack of sufficient primary sources in this period might result in this problem. As Duiker noted, by the time he finished his book the full text of *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* was not yet available in the United States. See Duiker 1976, 46 note 37.

With the publishing of the complete works of Phan Bội Châu and the digitalising of two history books written by Hoàng Cao Khải, namely, *Việt sử kính* (越史鏡 Mirror of Viet history) and *Việt sử yếu* (越史要 Essentials of Viet history) in the twenty-first century, their historical writings began to attract increasing attention in academia. Although the binary framework remained influential in their research, scholars of this period still made much progress in demonstrating the complexity of the thought of Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải.

In a comparative approach, William F. Pore examined the thought and activities of Phan Bội Châu and his Korean intellectual counterpart Pak Unsik. Focusing on their historical writings, Pore points out that albeit both Phan and Pak absorbed and employed Western ideas in their writings, the basis of their thought was still derived from the “borderless and unitary East Asian intellectual sphere centred on China”.<sup>19</sup> According to Pore, the sense that more than a millennium of proud and successful participation in the Sinic world order and its cultural manifestation have served as models has appeared again and again at different times in Korea and Vietnam, including the era of Pak and Phan. Even the seemingly detrimental effects of French and Japanese colonialism, with their chauvinism and militarism, are commensurate with that model and exerted a significant impact upon Pak and Phan’s perception of the colonial situations in that time.<sup>20</sup> Although both of them are anti-colonialist, their positions are not contradictory to but coexisting with the pro-imperial, that is, culturally classical and politically China-centred orientation in their thought.<sup>21</sup>

Following Pore, Luo Jingwen also discusses this pro-imperial-anti-colonial duality in Phan Bội Châu’s thought and further points out that Phan’s pro-imperial orientation brought about a latent predicament in Phan’s discourse of decolonisation. This predicament is manifest in

---

<sup>19</sup> Pore 2006, 298.

<sup>20</sup> Pore 2006, 304.

<sup>21</sup> Pore 2006, 298.

Phan's imagination of a decolonised "new Vietnam" as itself a kind of imperial power, which Phan hoped would impose its chauvinist and militarist power on other weaker nations, thus eventually becoming a replica of the brute colonial force against which Vietnam had previously fought.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from the discussion about Phan Bội Châu, the amount of literature on Hoàng Cao Khải also witnessed an increase in this stage. Based on Vietnamese primary sources, Truong Buu Lam systematically reviewed the Vietnamese perception and description of French governance in *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings on Colonialism, 1900-1931*. This book gives equal space to introduce the arguments of both the anti-colonialists and the collaborators. Hoàng Cao Khải's thoughts on French colonialism are viewed as one of the responses that Vietnamese intellectuals made to the crisis of early twentieth century Vietnam, and is analysed together with other anti-colonialist ideas.<sup>23</sup>

Following Lam, Liam C. Kelley on his academic blog posted two short essays on the Social Darwinist ideas in Hoàng's *Việt sử kính*<sup>24</sup> and on the concept of unilineal evolution in *Việt sử yếu* respectively.<sup>25</sup> Though relatively short essays, these are probably the earliest English literature that touches upon the kernel of Hoàng Cao Khải's historical writings. Through a brief investigation of some parts of the selected text from Hoàng's writing, Kelley grants Hoàng some credit as a moderniser and a nationalist historian, instead of merely a notorious collaborator.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Luo 2012, 151-152.

<sup>23</sup> Lam 2000, 69-98.

<sup>24</sup> Liam C. Kelley, "Hoàng Cao Khải's Social Darwinist Ideas," Le Minh Khai's SEAsian History (blog), July 15, 2012, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2012/07/15/hoang-cao-khais-social-darwinist-ideas>.

<sup>25</sup> Liam C. Kelley, "Hoàng Cao Khải and Unilineal Evolution," Le Minh Khai's SEAsian History (blog), October 11, 2012, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2012/10/11/hoang-cao-khai-and-unilineal-evolution>.

<sup>26</sup> In another article on the transformations of Trần Hưng Đạo's representation and the emergence of modern nationalist ideas in the early twentieth century Vietnam, Kelley introduces the main argument of Hoàng Cao Khải regarding the new historiography of Vietnamese history (Kelley 2015, 1983-1984). Prior to Kelley, Vietnamese scholar Chương Thâu in an interview also discussed Hoàng's nationalist stance in his historical writings. ("Đánh giá lại Hoàng Cao Khải", Thanh niên online, last modified October 4, 2007, <https://thanhnien.vn/van-hoa/danh-gia-lai-hoang-cao-khai-141038.html>.)



To sum up, despite the contribution that previous scholars made as mentioned above, until now there has been little literature that systematically reviews the historical writings of Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải, let alone comparing the similarity and difference between their historiography and demonstrating the latent dialogue between the texts of their respective historical writings.

### **3. Chapters**

This thesis is structurally divided into five chapters. Following this introduction in which I have outlined the research questions and reviewed the previous literature on Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải's historical writings, chapter two will examine the lives and careers of these two principal figures from their births to the early 1900s. The major part of this thesis will be covered in the third and fourth chapters. Focusing on the text of *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*, the third chapter will systematically investigate Phan Bội Châu's historiography and the way he adopted and transformed new ideas and concepts borrowed from the West to reinterpret the past and envision the future of Vietnam. Parallel in structure to chapter three, the fourth chapter will analyse the historical narrative of Hoàng Cao Khải's *Việt sử kính* and *Việt sử yếu*, in which I compare the similarities and differences in their perception and interpretation of Western ideas and demonstrate how Hoàng Cao Khải made use of them to refute Phan Bội Châu's proposition and formulate his own project for the modernisation of Vietnam. Some tentative concluding remarks will be given in the fifth chapter.

### **4. Sources**

In writing this thesis, I have attempted to rely, to the greatest extent possible, on primary sources written by the two principal figures in their original form, that is, in Chinese. As the main

sources of the works of Phan Bội Châu's historical writings, I obtained the third volume of the complete works of Phan Bội Châu (*Phan Bội Châu toàn tập* 潘佩珠全集) in reprints of the original from Dr. Luo Jingwen. This volume includes the text of Phan's *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (越南國史考 A study of Vietnam's national history). For the text of *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* (越南亡國史 History of the Loss of Vietnam), I referred to the Chinese version to the seventh volume of *Archives of the Sino-French War* (中法戰爭) and the English translation to *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition: Introduction to Asian civilisations*. Most of the information of Phan's life is revealed by his autobiographies *Ngục Trung Thu* (獄中書 Prison Notes) and *Phan Bội Châu Nien Bieu* (潘佩珠年表 A Chronology of the Life of Phan Bội Châu), of which the English translation is included in *Reflections from Captivity: Phan Bội Châu's 'Prison Notes' and Ho Chi Minh's 'Prison Diary'* and *Overtured Chariot* respectively.

Since the hard copies of Hoàng Cao Khải's *Việt sử kính* (越史鏡 Mirror of Viet history) and *Việt sử yếu* (越史要 Essentials of Viet history) were not available, I obtained the entire text of these two books which was digitalised by the Vietnamese Nôm Preservation Foundation from its online database. The page number of these two books marked in this thesis is in accordance with the original version as contained in this database.

## Chapter Two: Relocating Vietnam in the new world system

The land of nowadays Vietnam has been regarded as part of a world of Sinitic culture (Liam 2005, 9). Even the name of this country, “Viet Nam”, was given by the Jiaqing 嘉慶 emperor (1760-1820) of the Qing dynasty (1644-1911). In 1802, the Gia Long 嘉隆 emperor of the newly established Nguyen dynasty, Nguyen Phuc Anh 阮福映 (1760-1820), dispatched three envoys to Beijing with the task of seeking a new title for their kingdom. Initially, Nguyen proposed to combine the character “Nam” (南 literally, “South”) from the previous name “An Nam” (安南 literally “the Secure South”) with the “Viet” 越 in “Viet Thuong”<sup>27</sup> to create the new name of his kingdom. However, considering that “Nam Viet” ever referred to the kingdom that Zhao Tuo (240 B.C-137 B.C) established, of which the territory had once included part of Guangxi and Guangdong provinces of the Qing, the Jiaqing emperor thus rejected Nguyen Phuc Anh’s proposal but ordered that the new kingdom be named Viet Nam (Kelley 114-16). Actually, this new appellation was used extensively neither by the Qing nor the Nguyen. The Qing court continued to use the offensive word “Annam” while the Nguyen invented another name, “Dai Nam” (大南, literally “Great South”), to refer to its kingdom in the court documents and official historical compilations (Benedict 2006, 158).

Nevertheless, this story of naming reveals nothing but the traditional location of Vietnam in the Sinitic world system: geographically, Vietnam was situated in the far south of the “Middle Kingdom” (China); politically, it was subjected to Chinese empires as one of the vassals in the

---

<sup>27</sup> Viet Thuong 越裳, the people who ever presented a white pheasant to the Zhou king in distant antiquity (Kelley 2005, 115).

tributary system and shared a political system similar to that of China; culturally, Vietnamese, especially those bureaucrats and intellectuals, as Alexander Woodside points out, shared the common teachings of Confucius, wrote Chinese characters, and wore Chinese-style gowns (Woodside 1971, 199).

With the decay of the Qing empire since the 1840s, however, this Sinitic world order continuously encountered threats from the West. In 1858, as part of a renewed European assault on China during the Second Opium War (1857-60), the French authorities ordered Admiral Charles Rigault de Genouilly (1807-1873) to launch a raid on Đà Nẵng and continued its northward expansion. Since then, the Nguyen regime gradually lost sovereignty over its territory. Simultaneously, although the nominal suzerain-vassal relation between the Qing and the Nguyen would remain, the tributary position of Vietnam in the world of Sinitic culture had been inevitably relinked to a new imperial nation-state world system directed from Paris (Christopher 2016, 66). In 1884, with the signing of the Tianjin Accord between the Qing and France and the Second Treaty of Hue between France and the Nguyen court, the seal presented by the Qing to Gia Long was ordered to be melted down and Vietnam officially became a colony of France.

Facing French expansion and colonisation, the Vietnamese elite reacted to this deteriorating situation in a variety of ways. Some of them firmly resisted the French forces while others regarded French rule as tolerable, and were thus inclined to collaborate with the colonisers. No matter resistant or collaborating, however, Vietnamese elites in the late nineteenth century had to experience a drastic revolution of their minds and to reconsider their position in the new world order.

## 1. Reacting to the decay of Vietnam

By and large, the resistance of Vietnamese people against the French colonisation can be divided into three stages. The first stage is marked by the Can Vuong movement (1885-1896) which was led by the traditional scholar-gentry class. At the turn of the century, a new generation of patriots had grown up with the memories of these defeated Can Vuong heroes. They, on the one hand, were a product of the scholar-gentry class whose educational background was rooted in the traditional Confucianism; on the other hand, they were becoming gradually exposed to Western ideas through the new works 新書 either introduced by the French administration or smuggled in by Chinese merchants. Some of them such as Phan Bội Châu (1867-1940) and Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926) even travelled abroad and had direct connections with other revolutionaries, political reformers, and scholars from different regions around the world. In this stage, the new world system gradually took its shape in the minds of Vietnamese intellectuals, which, in turn, spurred them to bring Vietnam abreast of the modern world. As Duiker put it, this generation represented the period of transition between traditional and modern Vietnam (Duiker 1976, 31). With the imprisonment of Phan Bội Châu in 1925, a new generation who received modern education and had an international (communist) background rose up and continued leading the movement from an elite-centred resistance into the period of national mass mobilisation. Ho Chi Minh (1890-1969) was the most prominent figure from this period onward.

Apart from the resistance, many Vietnamese intellectuals, in various forms, cooperated with the French out of different intentions.<sup>28</sup> Among them, Hoàng Cao Khải was arguably the most important one, not only for his high rank in the puppet Nguyen court and the Protectorate

---

<sup>28</sup> In the fourth chapter of his book *Vietnamese Tradition On Trial, 1920-1945*, for example, David Marr discussed the collaboration between the Vietnamese intellectuals with the French authorities in the popularisation of the *quoc-ngu* language (modern Romanised Vietnamese) and how they reconstructed the collective identity of the Vietnamese nation through the new-style education.

government but also for his dedication to suppressing the Can Vuong “rebels” and his theoretical construction of Vietnamese national history to justify French colonial rule.

In the following part of this section, I will briefly review the different reactions to the French invasion in the late nineteenth century.

### **1.1 Can Vuong movement: the last traditional resistance**

With the death of the Tu Duc 嗣德 emperor (1829-1883), the French imposed a child-emperor on the throne as the Ham Nghi 咸宜 emperor (1872-1943). Simultaneously, with the withdrawal of Qing troops by the end of May 1885, the French took the chance to emasculate the lingering war party in the Hue and to suppress resistance activities (Marr 1971, 47). As a reaction, the leader of the war party and the regent, Ton That Thuyet 尊室說 (1839-1913), launched a raid on the French barracks in Hue but it was soon crushed. Ton That Thuyet thus fled from Hue with Ham Nghi and other royal members into the mountains. Several days later, the Ham Nghi emperor issued the famous Can Vuong (勤王, literally “aid/save the king”) edict formally calling on all patriotic elements to rise in support of the king and fight against the French (Duiker 1976, 26-27). Under the banner of “saving the king”, scholar-gentry and peasants throughout the country launched several scattered resistance acts against the invaders. With the capture and exile of Emperor Ham Nghi by the French in 1888, this movement reached its nadir. There was still some sporadic resistance in the mountain areas led by the most determined patriotic general Phan Dinh Phung (1847-1896), however, this movement eventually collapsed with his death in 1896.

As Marr pointed out, the Can Vuong could not, in any sense, be regarded as revolutionary (Marr 76). It was just a group of devoted men pledging sacred oaths of loyalty and vengeance under the banner of the traditional Confucian concept of fidelity (106). First, it was never national

in scope, but rather restricted in scattered locations (76). Second, the leaders were confined to relying on the Confucian symbols of righteousness and duty to the monarch. As long as the centre of the movement, namely the Ham Nghi emperor, was captured, those symbols would lose their power of organising efficient resistance. On top of this was the poor military capability of the Can Vuong troops (Duiker 1976, 27-28). Third, which is the most critical issue, the object of mobilisation in this movement was limited to the minority of the elite gentry class and had little access to the masses. In this sense, there was little to differentiate the Can Vuong movement from the resistance against Chinese invasions in previous times. As Duiker argued, had Phan Dinh Phung's movement successfully repulsed the invaders, it would not have changed the traditional dynastic rotation of Vietnamese history but just ushered in a new ruling dynasty (Duiker 28). Failed in practice, however, Phan's spirit of resisting the foreign invasion deeply influenced and totally changed the life of a young school boy living in a village of Nghe An 義安 province, north central Vietnam.

Born in a scholar-gentry family in 1867, Phan Bội Châu received a Confucian education from his father and was instilled in Confucian virtues by his mother (Marr 1971, 83). By the age of six, he had learned all of the *Book of Three Characters* and started reading the *Analects* in a private school under the instruction of his father (Phan 1999, 48). When he was seventeen (1883), Bắc Kỳ<sup>29</sup>, the region of northern Vietnam, was totally lost. To respond to the call of the spontaneous patriotic resistance in the lost area, Phan drafted an appeal: *Binh tay thu bac* (平西收北 “Put down the French and Regain the North”) and posted it on the big trees along the road. However, within a few days it was torn down and destroyed. At that moment, he realised that his words were “empty” and “insignificant” due to his humble station (Phan 50). After that, he

---

<sup>29</sup> The Vietnamese name for the area in the north of the Ninh Binh province on the Red River Delta, later known for French as Tonkin.

spared no effort to prepare for the mandarin examination, hoping thereby to increase his influence.

Two years later, the French had invaded the capital of Hue and the Can Vuong edict was spread throughout the country. Phan responded to the royal edict by appealing to his fellow classmates to organise a company of sixty schoolboys as the Si Tu Can Vuong Doi (試生勤王隊 Unit of Examination Candidates to Save the King) (Phan 1978, 12). Due to the lack of financial support and weapons, their resistant activities were suppressed by the French within less than ten days. As he lamented forty years later, his resistance activities during this time were tantamount to a “childish game”, like “a violent tiger trying to cross a river” (Phan 1999, 52). In the following ten years, Phan, on the one hand, devoted himself to self-improvement, reading books on the art of war by the ancient strategists with the expectation of using them as models for action in the future; on the other hand, he continued to participate in several mandarin examinations held by the puppet Nguyen court (53-57). Simultaneously, the remnant troops of the Can Vuong movement led by Phan Dinh Phung continued the sporadic resistance in the mountains of northern Vietnam.

Just as Phan Dinh Phung’s guerrilla force got some minimal victories in 1888, Hoàng Cao Khải was appointed by the French as the Bắc Kỳ Kinh Luoc (北圻經略 The viceroy of Hanoi), representative of the emperor in Tonkin (Hanoi), to pacify the resistant remnants. Hoàng was the first Vietnamese high official who rallied to the French colonisers when they invaded North Vietnam in 1883. Coming from a prestigious scholar-gentry family in the same village of Dong Thai in Ha Tinh province as Phan Dinh Phung, Hoàng Cao Khải had known Phan from their childhood days (Marr 1971, 66). Because of this relationship, Hoàng in 1886 wrote a letter to his old schoolmate Phan to persuade him to give up. In this letter, Hoàng, on the one hand, highly credited Phan with his courage, loyalty, and righteousness in a powerful traditional Confucian



tone; on the other hand, he pointed out Phan Dinh Phung's resistance and his overwhelming patriotic passion was based on the suffering of the ordinary people, which was contradictory to the values of Confucianism:

“Until now, your actions have undoubtedly accorded with your loyalty. May I ask however what sin our people have committed to deserve so much hardship? I would understand your resistance, did you involve but your family for the benefit of a large number! As of now, hundreds of families are subject to grief; how do you have the heart to fight on? I venture to predict that, should you pursue your struggle, not only will the population of our village be destroyed but our entire country will be transformed into a sea of blood and a mountain of bones.”<sup>30</sup>

As for the French colonisation, Hoàng queried Phan: “Are you not ashamed to see that the governor-general, who comes from a foreign country several thousand miles away, knows how to care for our people while we, who were born and raised in this country, remain blind to the sufferings of its people?”<sup>31</sup> Here, Hoàng used the concept of “people” to deconstruct the reason of Phan's resistance. Both of them, as Confucian mandarins, were apparently aware of the teaching of Mencius: “the people are the most important element while the monarch the lightest”.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, albeit Phan dedicated himself to the monarch, he actually abandoned the very basic righteousness which required to protect the people. Despite Hoàng's political motive, by then his understanding of the French invasion was still confined to the traditional Confucian framework. He regarded the French colonisers as good officials of morality, just like those Chinese officials who brought the civilisation to barbarous Vietnam in the previous centuries.<sup>33</sup> Besides, albeit

---

<sup>30</sup> For English translation of this letter, see Truong Buu Lam, *Patterns of Vietnamese Response to Foreign Intervention: 1858-1900*, 122-127.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See *Mencius, Jinxin II*.

<sup>33</sup> This argument was continued throughout the historical works of Hoàng Cao Khải. See the fourth chapter of this thesis.

Hoàng emphasised the importance of the ordinary people, he regarded them not as an entity with relevant civil rights in the modern political sense, but rather as the subjects under the traditional rule of the monarch and his mandarins.

Like Phan Bội Châu in the 1880s, Hoàng had not yet realised that what France brought in was a new order totally different from the traditional Confucian one which had long dominated international relations in the old Sinitic world. This situation started to be changed with the influx of imported books from the West and China in the late 1890s.

## 1.2 Saving the nation and race: the emergence of the new concepts

It was probably by 1897 that Phan Bội Châu realised that the traditional scheme of resistance was not capable to save his country (not just the monarch or dynasty) any more. According to his autobiography, he was shown by Nguyen Thuong Hien<sup>34</sup> (1868-1925) some new books including *Thien ha dai the luan* (天下大勢論 The Great Trends in the World), Liang Qichao's *zhong dong zhan ji* (中東戰記 History of the War in the Middle East), *Fa pu zhan ji* (普法戰紀 History of the Franco-Prussian War) and Yu Jiyu's *Ying huan zhi lue* (瀛寰志略 A Short Account of the Maritime Circuit)<sup>35</sup>. Through reading these books, he “began to have a rough idea of the rivalries in the world” and “was profoundly struck by the tragic prospect of the ruin of nations and the extinction of races” (Phan 1999, 58). The influx of these new books, especially

---

<sup>34</sup> Nguyen Thuong Hien was a son-in-law of the Regent and the leader of the Can Vuong movement Ton That Thuyet. He passed the court examination in 1892 and was granted the post of education director in Ninh-binh. In 1907 he retired and joined Phan to Japan. Later he established contact with the German and Austrian ministers in Bangkok around 1915 to look for helps for the anti-French activities. He spent his last years in a Buddhist temple in Hangzhou, China (Phan 1999, 57-58, note 26).

<sup>35</sup> Encountering the reality of the changing world in late nineteenth century, intellectuals in China started introducing the Western knowledge to their countries by translation, especially those about sociology and politics. Among those intellectuals, Yan Fu (1854-1921) was to most prominent one. He translated a batch of books of the West including Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (天演論), Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (原富), Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* (群學肄言), John S. Mill's *On Liberty* (群己權界論) and *A System of Logic* (穆勒名學).

those smuggled from the Qing China<sup>36</sup>, significantly refreshed the traditional Vietnamese intellectuals' perception of the position of their country in the new world system. As mentioned before, in the Sinitic world system, the position of Vietnam was defined by the Middle Kingdom. Albeit sharing the same classic Confucian culture with its northern neighbour, Vietnam was deemed as the humble status in the China-centred hierarchical system. With the failure of the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, however, the intellectuals in the Qing dynasty had to acknowledge the weakness of China. They realised that there was a broader arena outside of the traditional tributary system, in which China was not the centre any more. In this new world system, competitions among different countries would not only result in the transition of dynasties like what happened in previous times but also result in the ruin of the state and the extinction of races (亡國滅種). The most recent example was the loss of the Ryukyus.<sup>37</sup>

To enlist the support of court officials, Phan wrote *Luu Cau Huyet Le Tan Thu* (琉球血淚新書 Letter from the Ryukyus Written in Tears and Blood),<sup>38</sup> in which he gave a painful account of the humiliation brought about by the loss of the country, the decline of its liberties, and foretold ultimate catastrophe in the future (Phan 1999, 66). Despite the traditional tones echoing in the text, Phan in this booklet used a new lens to relocate Vietnam in the new world system. This lens referred to a new genre of history called *wangguo shi* (亡國史, literally “lost country histories”). Interestingly, Phan Bội Châu was not unclear that by then the territory of the Nguyen dynasty had already been occupied by the French. In this sense, as a *guo* 國 or state in English, Vietnam was already lost, just like the Ryukyus. Yet how could Phan, as a man of a lost state, still believe that Vietnam would survive if it took the lesson from the perishing of the Ryukyu

---

<sup>36</sup> Due to the French censorship, most of the Chinese political journals and the works of Chinese reformists such as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei were purchased from local Chinese merchant community and circulated by private copies (Marr 1971, 99-100).

<sup>37</sup> Like Vietnam, Ryukyus was also in the Sinitic tributary system. In the late nineteenth century, it was annexed by the Japanese empire.

<sup>38</sup> The full text of this little book is unavailable now, but Phan discussed the content in his autobiography.

Kingdom seriously? As Rebecca Karl pointed out, in the first years of the twentieth century, *wangguo* was re-articulated away from its traditional meaning of a change of dynasty to a modern meaning of colonisation (Karl 2002, 15). In the case of the Ryukyu Kingdom, it was its failure to properly recognise the twin problems of its ineffective internal rule and the foreign (Japanese) assaults that ultimately resulted in its loss. For Phan Bội Châu, apparently Vietnam as a state had lost (*wangguo*), but still there was the possibility for Vietnamese people as a nation to be sustained if they could actively launch the struggle against both the internally corrupt government and French colonisation. He thus argued that there were three measures that should be immediately implemented: (1) opening the people's minds 開民智; (2) stirring up the people's morale 振民氣; (3) fostering the people of talent 植人才 (Phan 1999, 66). Albeit this corrective plan of Phan Bội Châu was still phrased in the tradition of Mencius and the self-strengtheners (Marr 1971, 103), he began to see the modern world as an ongoing historical process in which Vietnamese people as a nation should actively participate for their survival.

Focusing on the crisis of the Vietnamese nation, Phan Bội Châu's anti-French outlook gradually changed from one based on obedience and traditional loyalty to the monarch to one based around the salvation of the nation and race. In the two articles composed after *Luu Cau Huyet Le Tan Thu*, Phan emphasised that the salvation of the nation and race was the prerequisite for freedom, equality, and independence. In *Wenming lun* (文明論 "On civilisation"), Phan criticises the superstitious customs in Buddhism and those popular religions derived from China and points out the futility of practising religious rites for individual benefits. In Phan's opinion, civilisation means the replacement of the blind belief in those cults and deities. He argues:

"Mind is the god. If one could expand his mind to respect his country, to love the same race, to save his fellow countrymen, and to kill their collective enemies, he

himself is the god. Why bother to depend on the gods existing outside of oneself (Phan 2000 vol.1, 335)?”

Despite the ambiguity in his interpretation of “heart” and “god”, Phan apparently intended to highlight the importance of nation 國 and race 種, and even directly regarded them as a kind of belief (Yang 2015, 132).

Similarly, in *Zhe lun* (哲論 “On Philosophy”) Phan Bội Châu argued that the present issue was neither to debate the orthodoxy of religions nor to consolidate individual freedom but to save the nation and protect the race. Regardless of one’s religious background (Confucianism, Buddhism, or Christianity), claimed Phan, one could be regarded as productive as long as he “loves his race and nation, and overwhelmingly fights against the enemy” (Phan 2000 vol.1, 342). Moreover, Phan’s interpretation of freedom, as Yang Zhende points out, was not based on the individual as in modern Western liberalism, but on collective well-being (Yang 2015, 134). Admittedly, Phan did pay attention to individual struggle, but the ultimate goal lies in the salvation of nation and race. He expounded:

The father can freely practise his kindness 慈, the son can freely express his filial piety 孝, the king can freely insist on benevolence 仁, and the officials can freely respond with respect 敬. As observed, the principle of freedom is embedded in every single thing. No matter how powerful he might be and no matter how prestigious his status, he cannot restrain and force me. In my eyes and chest exists only freedom. But the gist of freedom was to love the nation and protect the race to which I belong (Phan 2000 vol 1, 344).

The same view goes on in his elaboration on the value of equality and independence (Phan 345-346). As Yang argue, in this period, Phan Bội Châu endeavoured to include both the traditional moralities of Confucianism and Western concepts such as freedom, equality and

independence under the banner of *Aiguo baozhong* (愛國保種, literally “love the nation and protect the race”) (Yang 2015, 134).

In fact, albeit using the terms nation 國 and race 種 Phan neither explicitly articulated their respective different connotations and meanings, nor explained the relationship between these two concepts. It was not until 1905 when Phan went to Japan and witnessed the rise of the new world order that he could systematically answer these questions.

## 2. Finding Asia in Japan, relocating Vietnam in Asia

The death of his father in 1900 left Phan Bội Châu free to continue his resistance activities. With Ngu Hai [Dang Thai Than] and other comrades he secretly worked out a preliminary three-stage plan: First, contact the remnants of the Can Vuong movement and the outlawed patriots to call for a violent uprising; Second, seek alliance with members of the royal lineage through whom they could gain support from other influential persons; Third, send someone abroad to ask for assistance (Phan 1999, 59).

In the subsequent three years, Phan started the first stage, gathering his comrades and disciples to discuss the affairs of the movement and travelling to the borderlands to contact outlaw rebels and tribal leaders.<sup>39</sup> With the help of Dao Tan (1845-1907), the governor of Nghe An, Phan’s project went quite smoothly. In 1903, he met Nguyen Thanh (1863-1911), one of the influential Can Vuong leaders, in the Imperial Academy of Hue. Considering the Southern Vietnamese rice-bowl was the land that the Nguyen dynasty had opened up and could provide

---

<sup>39</sup> The first bandit Phan sought was Hoàng Hoa Thám (1858-1913), a famous “imperial bandits” who halted the French troop by attacking the railway, seizing trains, supplies and even capturing a local official for ransom in the late 1890s in northern Vietnam. His resistance forced the French authorities to grant him a regional fiefdom, which made him the rallying cry for other anti-French movements. Phan celebrated Hoàng Hoa Thám as the “George Washington of Vietnam”. Later, Phan turned his attention to Liu Yongfu (1837-1917), the founder of and chief commander of the celebrated Black Flag Army (Davis 2017, 153). For more information about Liu Yongfu and his Black Flag Army, see Bradley Camp Davis’ *Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands*.

sufficient financial support for the planned enterprise, Nguyen Thanh suggested Phan Bội Châu find a direct descendant of King Gia Long (1762-1820), the founder of the Nguyen dynasty, as titular leader of the movement. Ultimately, Phan found Prince Cuong De (1882-1951), the direct descendant of Gia Long's eldest son, and later declared him the head of the newly established anti-French organisation Duy Tan Hoi (維新會 literally, "Modernisation Society") in 1904.

Following the advice of Nguyen Thanh, Phan decided to go to Japan to seek help, especially funding and weapons for violent resistance. Accompanied by two assistants, Phan Bội Châu set out from Haiphong to Hong Kong.<sup>40</sup> After a short delay while waiting for the end of the Russo-Japanese hostilities, they embarked from Shanghai for Japan. On his arrival in Kobe in late May/early June 1905, Phan immediately took an early train bound for Yokohama to meet the famous Chinese reformist and constitutional monarchist Liang Qichao (Phan 1999, 84). Phan was already quite familiar with Liang's works and was deeply attracted by his thinking. In a letter he drafted to Liang Qichao before the meeting, Phan said: "since the day of my birth, we have been destined to know each other; after ten years of reading your writings, I feel as if you are my old acquaintance (85) ."

In fact, when Phan was in Hong Kong, he had found out that the Chinese revolutionary and the monarchist parties were "just like ice and hot coals" (85). As an outsider, however, Phan kept a good relationship with both sides. Considering his significant influence both in the Chinese emigre and in the Japanese government, Phan Bội Châu firstly turned to Liang Qichao. As he frankly professed in his first autobiography: "I had learned that Liang had lived in Japan for a long time and understood Japanese affairs quite well. I hence decided to go to him and ask him to introduce me to the Japanese (Phan 1978, 30)." In this sense, despite his sincere scholarly respect for Liang Qichao, the ultimate goal of Phan Bội Châu was to use Liang as a middleman to contact

---

<sup>40</sup> Hong Kong gave Phan Bội Châu a very good impression according to his observation. He recalled that he never saw the British authority bullied the native people like what the French did to the Vietnamese (Phan 1978, 28).

the Japanese government in order to get assistance with regard to the insurrections of Duy Tan Hoi in Vietnam.

Greatly moved by his letter, Liang Qichao invited Phan Bội Châu to come to his office. Their communication was conducted in a traditional way, using written Classical Chinese “brush-talk”, which could be traced back to the ancient time when the envoys from different vassals went for the audience with the Son of Heaven in Beijing. Albeit those envoys spoke different dialects, they could communicate through writing the same Chinese characters. Like their ancient counterparts, Phan Bội Châu and Liang Qichao used brush pen to set down their words and communicate with each other, especially when they discussed more complicated matters that could not be orally translated by Phan’s assistant Tang Bat Ho.<sup>41</sup> According to Phan’s memoir, their first brush-conversation lasted three or four hours (Phan 1999, 86). Liang basically rejected Phan’s plan of launching violent attacks against the French and warned against letting the Japanese military into Vietnam (Marr 1971, 109). He recommended instead that Phan should be concerned about cultivating an independence-minded people (Phan 1999, 86). A few days later, Liang brought Phan to Tokyo to meet some important Japanese politicians such as Count Okuma<sup>42</sup> (1838-1922) and Viscount Inukai<sup>43</sup> (1855-1932). Both of them were liberal party leaders. According to David Marr, Japan’s Asian policy, before 1905 was an “ill-coordinated but honest hodgepodge bred of idealism, opportunism, and chauvinism” (Marr 1971, 110). On the one hand, both civilian politicians and chauvinists showed a special concern for neighbouring

---

<sup>41</sup> One typical example of the brush-talk is the communication between the Vietnamese envoy Phung Khac Khoan 馮克寬 (1528-1613) and the Korean envoy Yi Sugwang 李晬光 (1563-1628) in 1597, see Baldanza Kathlene, *Ming China And Vietnam: Negotiating Borders In Early Modern Asia*, chapter 7. Excerpts from Liang’s and Phan’s brush-talk were published later as the seventh instalment of Liang’s *Ziyou shu* (Book of Freedom), under the title “Ji yuenan wangren zhi yan” (A Record of the Words of a Lost Person from Vietnam), *Xinmin congbao* 67 (19 April 1905) (Karl 2002, 267 note 41).

<sup>42</sup> Okuma Shigenobu was the co-founder and major leader of the Progressive Party. He served twice as prime minister and also made a great contribution to the Meiji Restoration.

<sup>43</sup> Inukai Tsuyoshi was also the leading figure of Progressive Party. In the 1900s, he actively associated with both leading figures from the pan-Asian movement and with chauvinist leaders like Toyama Mitsuru. He was also a supporter of Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary activities.



China and a desire to limit the expansion of Western imperialism; on the other hand, with the development of the national power of Japan, especially with its victory in the war with Russia, imperialist or chauvinist sentiment was also rising in Japanese society. Phan Bội Châu would gradually feel the impact of this shift in the following years.

The first meeting with Okuma and Inukai did not yield the result Phan had expected. To Phan's disappointment, considering that giving weapons to Vietnamese resistant activists might provoke conflict not just between Japan and France, but also between Europe and Asia, Okuma and Inukai refused to give him any direct military assistance but only promised in the name of their party to accept Vietnamese students to study in Japan (Phan 1999, 88).

Shortly after this meeting, Phan Bội Châu sent a letter to Okuma in which he re-articulated his arguments regarding the necessity for Japan to assist the Vietnamese in their anti-French activities. In this letter, Phan situated the relations between Vietnam and Japan in the context of the dichotomy between Europe and Asia. He emphasised:

“Vietnam is not on the European continent, but the Asian. Vietnam is common to Japan in race, culture, and continental positioning, yet the French are left to spread their bestial venom without fear. Hence the French are unaware that Asia already has a major power, already has Japan. The strength of Japan has been felt in the Northwest, all the way to the Qing and to the Russians. Why then has Japan allowed the French to trample over Vietnam without trying to help us?”<sup>44</sup>

In the first decade of the twentieth century, as Karl puts it, the concept of “Asia” was shaped by two simultaneous structures: imperialism and its ongoing attempts to subject the non-West to a Western-dominated world system; and state-dominated concepts of national and regional formation. Accordingly, these two structural trends generated a space in which

---

<sup>44</sup> See Phan 2000 vol. 2, 494. The translation of this text was quoted from Marr 1971, 113.

anti-imperialist and state-based resistance developed in the form of pan-Asianism (Karl 1998, 1096). For the Japanese government, Japan had risen as a powerful state with intact sovereignty in the continent of Asia. Simultaneously, it was also becoming a member of the imperialist states in the world whose interests paralleled those of the European powers. Therefore, as Munholland points out, Japan would serve as “an element of stability” and help maintain the status quo in Asia (Munholland 1975, 666). In terms of the letter he sent to the Japanese, however, as a man whose state had already lost, Phan Bội Châu’s perception of Asia was based on the alliance of the same yellow race struggling against colonialism. For Phan Bội Châu, the basic elements of which “Asia” consisted were various nations of the yellow race rather than separate states. In this sense, in the slogan of “love the nation and protect the race” that he put forward in the aforementioned articles (*Zhe lun* 哲論 and *Wenming lun* 文明論), “*guo*” 國 (nation) referred to the ethnocentric communities such as the Vietnamese, the Chinese, and the Japanese, while “*zhong*” 種 (race) was a human category based on the colour of skin.

In fact, this notion of competition between the white and yellow races, as Luo points out, was widely shared by many elite-scholars including Liang Qichao and Phan Bội Châu (Luo 2012, 162). By emphasising that only the yellow race was capable of competing with the white, these intellectuals hoped to encourage their compatriots to strive against the white invaders and ally with other nations of yellow skin. In other words, beyond the aforementioned state-based Asia, there was another discourse of Asia, one that was rooted in non-state-centred practices and shared by many emigres from the colonies or semi-colonies like Vietnam and China. In this alternative discourse, the connotation of the “common race” was expanded to a new dimension: the “common sickness”.

The signing of the Franco-Japanese Treaty in June 1907, according to which Japan and France agreed to recognise and respect each other’s colonial possessions in Asia, totally

disillusioned Phan Bội Châu. Since the discourse of the “same culture and same race” had already proved to be a failure in allying Japan and struggling against the West, those weak nations from various regions in Asia had no choice but to organise together under the banner of “the common sickness”. In the same year, Phan Bội Châu started contacting some Yunnanese nationalists and even voluntarily became an editor for their periodical *Yunnan*.<sup>45</sup> Simultaneously, Phan also joined 滇桂粵越聯盟會 (Society for the Alliance of Yunnan, Guangxi, Guangdong, and Vietnam) and 東亞和親會 (Society of East Asian Alliance).<sup>46</sup> Albeit the political stripes of the members in these societies varied from nationalism to anarchism, all of them were inclined to place their hope of regaining independence in an alliance of the peoples of the “same sickness” (Shiraishi 1990, 111). These societies were ephemeral and lasted for only eighteen months. In 1908, the Society of East Asian Alliance was forcefully disbanded by the Japanese authorities because it “did not constitute the kind of Greater Asian movement that the Tokyo government favoured (Jansen 1954, 124).” And Phan Bội Châu was forced to leave for Hong Kong the next year.

To some extent, the failure of this non-state-centred pan-Asianism forced Phan Bội Châu to rethink the status of Vietnam in Asia. Witnessing the rise of Japan as an imperialist state and the collapse of the societies for the alliance of the “same sickness”, Phan realised that the independence and freedom of the nation, for which he struggled with his anti-colonial resistance, had to be reified in the form of the sovereign state. In his 1907 article *Tan Viet Nam* (新越南 The New Vietnam), Phan depicts the future of Vietnam as a powerful modern nation-state in the following ten aspects:

---

<sup>45</sup> Yunnan is a province of China which borders northern Vietnam. For more details of the interaction between Phan and the Yunnanese nationalists in Japan, see Shiraishi 1990, 103-110.

<sup>46</sup> Both of the two societies were established in 1907-1908. The members in Society of East Asian Alliance came from those “lost countries” such as China, Vietnam, India, Korea, Philippines, and individuals from the Japanese Socialist party (Karl 1998, 1111).

(1) No protecting power; (2) No obnoxious mandarins; (3) No dissatisfied citizens; (4) No soldier without glory; (5) No unequal taxes or forced labour; (6) No unjust law; (7) No imperfect education system; (8) No unexploited mineral resources; (9) No neglected industry; (10) No losing commercial ventures.<sup>47</sup>

Apparently, for Phan Bội Châu, the revitalisation and wellbeing of a nation needed to be politically affirmed and consolidated in the form of a state. Hence, establishing an independent nation-state became the ultimate goal of Phan's anti-French struggle. And this goal was historicised through Phan Bội Châu's innovative composition and interpretation of the national history of Vietnam.

---

<sup>47</sup> See Lam 2000, 106-107.

### Chapter Three: History and resistance: Phan Bội Châu and his *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*

Just before being expelled by the Japanese authorities, Phan Bội Châu published *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (越南國史考 literally, “Thoughts on Vietnam’s National History”) in early 1909.<sup>48</sup> As the title implies, what this book attempts to do is not to simply record the events in Vietnamese history but to demonstrate the author’s explanation of the development of the Vietnamese people and the governmental processes in the modern state (Marr 1971, 148). Different from the negative tone of his 1905 work *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* (越南亡國史 literally, “History of the Loss of Vietnam”) in which he laments the loss of sovereignty and the miseries people suffered from the French colonisation, Phan Bội Châu in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* views Vietnamese history and the future of Vietnam in a quite positive light. This transition of the narrative tone is closely linked with Phan Bội Châu’s acceptance of the idea of democratic republicanism and his innovative reading of the theories of social evolution.<sup>49</sup> In his interpretation of Vietnam’s national history, Phan combines these two ideas to envision a future modern Vietnamese nation-state.

---

<sup>48</sup> According to his autobiography, in November 1908 *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* was still being written. It was possibly published in the next year (1909) since Phan indicated “it had to be completed quickly and printed” (Phan 1999, 165).

<sup>49</sup> Most of Phan Bội Châu’s knowledge about the theories of social evolution were obtained from Liang Qichao (Phan 1999, 83). According to Onogawa Hidemi, Liang Qichao played a significant role in interpreting and disseminating these theories. Those idioms such as 自然淘汰 (“natural selection”), 優勝劣敗 (“the superior triumph and the inferior are defeated”), and 適者生存 (“survival of the fittest”) were introduced into China through Liang’s translation of the relevant Japanese works (Onogawa 1982, 295). Dr. Kiri Paramore pointed out for me that in Japan Herbert Spencer was the main source of what is now loosely called Social Darwinism. In fact, the theory of Herbert was not actually Darwinism and is rather called Social Organism Theory. Spencer proposed the phrase “the survival of the fittest” as equivalent to Darwin’s “natural selection” (Spencer 1864, 444-45). In *Principles of Sociology*, Spencer argues that a society is an organism, subject to universal laws applicable to all organisms, and therefore susceptible of analysis by scientific methods (Simon 1960, 294). As one of the “universal laws”, “survival of the fittest” was employed by Spencer to explain the struggle for existence among societies (Spencer 1974 [1967], 78).

The following sections of this chapter will focus on two significant issues that Phan Bội Châu discusses in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*: (1) the relationship between national sovereignty and the evolution of Vietnamese people; (2) the construction of the genealogy of national heroes and the anti-foreign spirit.

## 1. National sovereignty and the evolution of the Vietnamese people

*Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* is full of tension. And this tension is mainly embodied in the two different narrative lines that Phan Bội Châu applies to his interpretation of Vietnamese history: one focuses on the growth and decline of the national sovereignty which constantly appeared (rose and fell) in different periods in Vietnamese history, while the other turns its attention to the linear-progressive process of the evolution of the Vietnamese people. These two lines construct the basic narrative framework of *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* and set the positive tone for Phan's historiography.

### 1.1 The deadlock of Vietnamese history: the underdevelopment of national sovereignty

Breaking the traditional historical narrative based on dynastic succession, Phan Bội Châu divides Vietnamese history into four phases in accordance with different conditions of national sovereignty:

- (1) the times of complete sovereignty 國權十分完全之時代
- (2) the times of semi-sovereignty 國權半未完全之時代
- (3) the era in which the sovereignty was faintly discernible 國權若有若無之時代
- (4) the period when the sovereignty was totally ceded to others 國權全委他人之時代 (Phan 2000, vol. 3 452-453)

For Phan Bội Châu, national sovereignty is linked to the concept of independence: “externally, the nation is not oppressed or ‘protected’ by other countries; domestically, the political power is totally controlled by themselves” (Phan 452). And among the aforementioned four phases, the worst situation of totally being annexed by the foreigners, unfortunately, took the largest portion of Vietnamese history (453). In the previous three thousand years, points out Phan, the period of Vietnam as an independent state of complete sovereignty was only maintained for about ten years under the leadership of Lê Lợi (1384-1433) who restored the autonomy of Vietnam from the Ming’s occupation in the early fifteenth century (452). Even though those who felt resentful in being ruled by the Chinese attempted to struggle for independence, most of them ultimately failed (454).

Phan attributes the underdevelopment of national sovereignty to a lack of civil rights. He opens his discussion by quoting international law:

There are three requirements for nationhood: people, territory, and sovereignty. Without them, no human community can be considered a state. Among the three factors, people are of the most importance, for without people, neither territory nor sovereignty will exist. The existence of a state depends on the people and the existence of people is inextricable from their civil rights 民權 (Phan 2000, 459)

This analysis advanced Phan’s political thought beyond a fairly simple and uncomplicated Confucianism (Duiker 1976, 42). Although Phan still quotes Mencius’ *minweigui junweiqing* (民為貴君為輕 literally, “The people are more important than the monarch”), the connotation of it has been totally changed. That is because the foundation of the relationship between the people and the state has been converted. The people are not any longer regarded as subjects but free citizenry with relevant civil rights. However, it should be pointed out that when Phan Bội Châu discusses the issue of civil rights, he does not emphasise the basic human rights such as

individual freedom and independence that modern Western liberalism highlights, or at least they appear to be secondary. What he emphasises is the obligations of the citizenry to the state, such as active participation in national politics.

Phan Bội Châu highly admired the parliaments of Japan and other Western countries, especially its function in restricting the expansion of the power of government, regarding it as testimony to the development of civil rights and the symbol of national prosperity (459). Compared to the West, lamented Phan, the development of civil rights in Vietnam lagged far behind. There are two aspects, according to Phan, that can explain this phenomenon: first, the oppression from the tyrants and the corrupt officials; second, the ignorance of Vietnamese people. Phan regards some policies implemented by open-minded rulers in Vietnamese history as beginning civil rights. However, since “the development of civil rights was not what those tyrants and officials would like to see”, brutal rulers harshly trampled on civil rights and welfare. As a result, in Vietnamese history, the development of civil rights was nipped in the bud, which further led to inertia and stagnation of Vietnamese society (Phan 462).

Apart from the courts and corrupt mandarins, the people themselves are also implicitly criticised for their lack of intelligence 民智. Phan Bội Châu goes on to write:

“Alas! How great the contribution that people’s intelligence would make to the development of civil rights! Now I have to lament that our people have no intelligence. The previous history did not record anything about the people just because there was indeed nothing about them worthy of being memorised.” (Phan 464)

Phan continues to enumerate five “foolishness” 愚 of Vietnamese: 1. they distrusted each other too much to collaborate in order to complete one single task; 2. they were obsessed with useless luxury while ignoring important undertakings; 3. they were selfish without a sense of



collectivity; 4. they focused on individual interest and dismissed the public; 5. they just cared about themselves and their families and paid little attention to the affairs of the nation (464). As Duiker points out, Phan's dissatisfaction with the nature of Vietnamese people is highly reminiscent of the views of Liang Qichao (Duiker 1976, 46). From 1902 to 1906, Liang wrote a series of essays on the issue of the renovation of the people 新民. In these essays, Liang harshly criticises the conventional attitudes of the public in China. Prior to Phan Bội Châu, for example, Liang Qichao had emphasised the importance of collectivity 群 and the power of the state.<sup>50</sup> In this sense, both Liang and Phan maintained that what the people of the two countries needed was a long-term goal, a concept of community benefit for which all would sacrifice their personal needs (Duiker 46).

Similar to Liang Qichao, Phan Bội Châu argued that people's intelligence 民智 is manifested by their senses of patriotism and collectivity 愛國合群 (Phan 463). He opens his discussion by demonstrating how efficient Japan and other Western countries were in coping with domestic and diplomatic affairs:

“When these countries encounter urgent issues such as war, diplomatic crisis, natural disasters, and rebellions, their people will actively help the government through providing financial support or labour. And the social infrastructure including the railways, shipping, and bureaus of agriculture, industry and commerce, were all organised spontaneously by the people (Phan 463).”

Regarding the relationship between civil rights and the senses of patriotism and collectivity, Phan makes a bold analysis which is based on a highly idealised assumption: if the people can unite together and make a contribution to the state, then the state would not reject to endow the relevant rights to the people. Given the ruler insists not to compromise, assumes Phan,

---

<sup>50</sup> See Liang Qichao's *Lun ziyou* (論自由 literally, “On Liberty”) and *Shizhong dexing xiangfanxiangcheng yi* (十种德性相反相成義 literally, “The meaning of the ten moralities which are inter-contradictory while interdependent”).

the people “will definitely rise up and launch a revolution to fight for their deserved rights” (463). Due to their “foolishness”, however, Vietnamese people paid attention only to their own concerns and ignored the affairs of the nation. In this sense, it was Vietnamese people themselves who abandoned their civil rights, and this ultimately led to the powerlessness of the state and the loss of national sovereignty in the previous centuries.

By and large, the tone of Phan Bội Châu in his narrative about the loss of national sovereignty of Vietnam is quite negative. He attributes the loss of national sovereignty in Vietnamese history to the underdevelopment of civil rights, however, due to the people’s lack of intelligence and their indifference to the affairs of their states, civil rights could not be fostered anyway. Apart from Mencius’ platitude, traditional Confucianism could not provide any other powerful discourses but keep silent. It is the theory of Social Darwinism that armed Phan Bội Châu to break that deadlock.

## **1.2 Untying the deadlock: rescuing national sovereignty through the linear-progressive historiography**

The second narrative line in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* focuses on the evolution of the Vietnamese people. Different from the division of the historical stages based on the non-dynastic successive framework applied to the discussion of the national sovereignty of Vietnam, Phan Bội Châu views the process of the evolution of the Vietnamese people and society from the perspective of Social Darwinism. According to Shiraishi, social Darwinist ideas were introduced to Vietnamese intellectuals around 1900 through Chinese literature (Shiraishi 1990, 97).<sup>51</sup> As the name implies, Social Darwinism is an evolutionary theory which applies the idea of natural

---

<sup>51</sup> As discussed in the second chapter, Phan Bội Châu had read many “new books” before he visited Japan, so he would be quite familiar with the theory of Social Darwinism.

selection and the principle of survival of the fittest to the realm of society (Xu 2012, 182).<sup>52</sup> At the heart of Social Darwinism is the idea of competition for survival (183). If an individual wants to survive, he/she must compete with each other. Similarly, if a nation wants to be strengthened, everyone belonging to it shall be capable of uniting themselves into a solid community in order to compete with other nations. Based on social Darwinist ideas and other relevant concepts of modern sociology, Phan Bội Châu divided the timeline of the evolution of Vietnamese people and society into six stages:

- (1) the stage of animal 動物之時代;
  - (2) the stage from animal to the barbarous 由動物而趨野蠻之時代;
  - (3) the stage of barbarous 野蠻之時代;
  - (4) the stage from the barbarous to enlightenment 由野蠻而趨於開化之時代;
  - (5) the stage of enlightenment 開化之時代;
  - (6) the stage from enlightenment towards civilisation 由開化而趨於文明之時代
- (Phan 456-58).

In this chronological narrative, Vietnamese people experienced a long period of non-enlightenment for more than two thousand years from the days of mythology to the late era of the Tự Đức reign (1847-1883). During this period, argues Phan, either Vietnamese people still maintained barbaric customs and had no idea of competition (in the second stage as listed above), or they were aware of warfare but the conflicts and hostilities were merely confined to communities of the same race that severely exhausted the society while bringing nothing for the progress of the people (456). Therefore, Phan Bội Châu regarded Vietnamese people and society

---

<sup>52</sup> In fact, originally Social Darwinism in Europe was applied to explain the origins of inequality existing in a single society or nation. According to Shiraishi, Chinese and Vietnamese intellectuals understood this theory as a persuasive explanation for the origins of the difference among nations, i.e., between the stronger and wealthier and the weaker and poorer (Shiraishi 1988, 78-79).

over long stretches of time from the remote antiquity to the reign of the Tự Đức (1847-1883) as barbarous 野蠻.

To a large extent, Phan's perception of progress and civilisation is similar to Fukuzawa Yukichi (1835-1901) and Liang Qichao. Both of them underline the importance of competition and progress with regard to civilisation. Fukuzawa, for example, points out "civilisation ultimately means the progress of man's knowledge and virtue" (Fukuzawa 1973, 37) and the progress of knowledge and virtue derive from competition.<sup>53</sup> Liang Qichao also introduces the Darwinist view of social progress in his essays, and even states "competition is the mother of civilisation" (Liang 1903, 159). More importantly, both Fukuzawa Yukichi and Liang Qichao confess that at the current time the West represented the most instructive paradigm of civilisation for Japan and China.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Phan Bội Châu regards the introduction of Western civilisation into Vietnam through the Christian missionaries and later the French military invasion as the drivers for Vietnamese society to get rid of the barbarous phase. In his narrative, the late period of the Tự Đức reign (1847-1883) ushered the transition of Vietnamese society from the barbarous to the enlightenment:

[During this phase], the new knowledge was not yet introduced into Vietnam and the route to the Western world was not explored either, nevertheless, there had been a few intellectuals at the court realising that Vietnam should make contact with Britain and Germany instead of relying on Qing China, and suggesting to

---

<sup>53</sup> Fukuzawa believed that when "a hundred thousand enterprises spring into life together to enter the struggle for the survival and development of the fittest", in which "some reach a state of relative equality and equilibrium", "the powers of intellect become dominant and become the means whereby civilisation can progress" (Fukuzawa 1973, 19-20). For more detailed analysis on Fukuzawa's interpretation of civilisation, see Vinh 1988, 121-122.

<sup>54</sup> Fukuzawa admitted "civilisation is an open-ended process" thus "we cannot be satisfied with the present level of attainment of the West", nevertheless, he still argued that at present these who were to give thought to their country's progress in civilisation must necessarily take European civilisation as the basis of discussion, and must weigh the pros and cons of the problem in the light of it (Fukuzawa 1973, 15). Relevant discussion on the thinking of Fukuzawa and Phan Bội Châu regarding Western civilisation, see Vinh 1988, 121.

send students abroad to study Western knowledge, especially Western military theories. (Phan 2000, 456-457)

Unfortunately, the corrupt faction at the Nguyen court impeded this reform project and thus ultimately nipped the precious opportunity of enlightenment in the bud. It is noteworthy that Phan Bội Châu does not simply attribute those opposing voices against the “enlightenment” at the court to the conservative political stance of a cluster of mandarins. Instead, he emphasises it was the “barbarous poison” (“野蠻之毒”) which affected the whole Vietnamese nation that led to this unfortunate result (457). Here, the word “barbarous” does not signify the primitive or uncivilised behaviours or manners any longer but specifically referred to the rejection of Western civilisation. This is why Phan Bội Châu believed the recent three or four years when “the wind and rain from the West and America” swept across the Vietnamese society was the beginning of enlightenment in Vietnamese history (457). For Phan Bội Châu, the impact from the Western world brought Vietnam more opportunities than miseries. On the one hand, the failure of defending the invasion of the French forced an increasing number of Vietnamese people to acknowledge the decline of the traditional world, especially the futility of immersion in the Confucian classics and participating in the civil service examination as the way to save the nation (457); on the other hand, it provided Vietnamese people with a new field in which competition was not confined to exhausting infighting within the same race but expanded to the realm of the struggle between the yellow and white races (“黃白之戰”).

Regarding the discourse of race struggle, Phan Bội Châu shares the same view with his Chinese counterparts, including Liang Qichao, who believed that the white and the yellow race are superior to other races in the world. Therefore, only the yellow race has the potential to compete with the white (Luo 2012, 162). This discourse, according to Yang Ruisong, succeeds the highly discriminative and hierarchical categorisation of race which derived from eighteenth

and nineteenth century Europe. By this categorisation, European people constructed “the inferior other” in contrast to their own superiority. Intellectuals in late nineteenth East Asia accepted this concept but converted its connotation from white supremacy to equality between the yellow and white races (Yang 2010, 88). As Social Darwinists, they viewed the relentless struggle for survival as the principle of nature, thus the inferior would be inevitably annihilated by the most powerful and racially superior. Now that the yellow race was deemed to be as inherently good as the white, they could alter their lot by improving and developing their wisdom and power (Shiraishi 1990, 59).

In terms of Vietnamese people, Phan Bội Châu believed that they would survive from the French colonisation and ultimately achieve the goals of civilisation as long as they could get rid of the “barbarous sickness”. At the present time, learning from the West had been proved by the success of Japan the only feasible choice. Phan Bội Châu thus asserted that if an increasing number of Vietnamese people could realise this point and send their children to study abroad, the progress of Vietnamese society would be furthered. He predicted:

With Vietnamese people being gradually enlightened, the unity of their community and the degree of their intelligence will be significantly enhanced and improved. They will unite the power, share the interests, and integrate the ambitions of thousands of individuals into a solid one. Now that Japan could be civilised in forty years since the Meiji Restoration, it seems to be possible for Vietnam to become a modern state of civilisation in the following decades. (Phan 2000, 458)

To some extent, the aforementioned arguments of Phan Bội Châu can be viewed as a typical demonstration of what Prasenjit Duara terms “the linear, teleological model of Enlightenment History” (Duara 1995, 4). In this narrative of history, according to Duara, nation was seen as a

collective historical subject, which could not only “overcome dynasties, aristocracies, and ruling priests and mandarins who are seen to represent merely themselves historically”, but also be “poised to realise its destiny in a modern future” (Duara 4). For Phan Bội Châu, Vietnamese people are such a collective historical subject who can save themselves from undesirable situations and alter their destiny.

In *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*, Phan Bội Châu, on the one hand, pointed out that the foolishness of the Vietnamese people resulted in the underdevelopment of civil rights, which ultimately led to the frequent loss of national sovereignty and the cyclical nature of the dynastic successions; on the other hand, he emphasised the necessity and inevitability for his compatriots to accept Western civilisation to get rid of the cyclicity of history. For Phan Bội Châu, the arrival of Western civilisation in the late nineteenth century brought the critical or even the “Messianic” moment for Vietnamese people to transit from the barbarous to the enlightenment, which marked the end of the past but also claimed the rebirth of Vietnam as a modern civilised nation-state.

Paradoxically, however, in late nineteenth century Vietnam, the “Messianic” moment arrived simultaneously with the advent of the French colonisers, and the linear, teleological model of history was inextricably embedded in the latter’s political propaganda. To tackle this dilemma, Phan Bội Châu started to construct a vision of the political subjectivity of Vietnam.

## **2. Constructing an anti-foreign Vietnam**

Seeing he acknowledged Western civilisation at the time marked the peak of the development of human society, why did Phan not just let the French colonise Vietnam and reform it? In other words, seeing Phan Bội Châu believed the ultimate goal of Vietnam was to be westernised, what was his motive for participating in the anti-French movement? Phan responded to these questions through his interpretation of the concept of “anti-foreignness” 排外. First, from

a historical perspective, Phan linked the “anti-foreign” movement to the just cause of defending national sovereignty. Second, he argued that the essence of French colonisation was opposed to progress, and thus could by no means be regarded as representative of civilisation. Therefore, the “anti-foreign” movement was not contradictory to, but rather imperative to the process of enlightenment of the people, and the establishment of a modern nation-state.

## 2.1 Anti-foreign struggles and the defence of national sovereignty

Phan Bội Châu believed that anti-foreign struggle was inseparable from the defence of national sovereignty because Vietnam as a state was founded by anti-foreign national heroes. In the preface of *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* titled “On the State” 原國, Phan links the individuals to his/her ancestors, history, and state. He questions:

We love nothing more than ourselves. Our ancestors and parents and our offspring are actually parts of us. Where did our ancestors and parents come from? And on what can our children rely? I have long pondered over these questions and finally realise that the answer is the state (Phan 2000, 421).<sup>55</sup>

Vietnam as an independent state, according to Phan, was established or revived by three significant kings who defended national sovereignty through history: Hồng Bàng 鴻龐, the kings of the Vietnamese in prehistoric times; Ngô Quyền 吳權 (898-944), the founder of the Ngô dynasty (939-965) who defeated the incursion of the Southern Han (917-971) in the early tenth century and “restored national sovereignty” (Phan 424); Lê Lợi (1384-1433), who restored the complete autonomy of Vietnam from the Ming’s occupation and established the later Lê dynasty in the early fifteenth century. Thanks to their resistance against the interference or invasions of

---

<sup>55</sup> Similar argument that linked the origin of Vietnamese state to the national ancestors could be found in *Hải Ngoại huyết thư* (1907). In that book, Phan said: “Our ancestors bequeathed this land to us, their descents, and we, the descendants, inherited this land from them. This country is our family fortune, and our treasured heirloom.” (Phan 2012, 357)



various Chinese empires, all three were regarded by Phan Bội Châu as the collective ancestors 祖 of the Vietnamese people (429-430).

It should be pointed out that in Phan's narrative, anti-foreign does not necessarily mean an absolute rejection of any foreign influence. A good example can be seen in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* where Phan Bội Châu discussed the evolution of the Vietnamese people from the so-called *nan man* (南蠻 literally, "southern barbarians") to *hua zhong* (華種 literally, "civilised race" or "Chinese race"). Based on his research of historical documents and personal observation, Phan pointed out that the primitive race of Vietnam were the southern barbarians whose toes crossed and foreheads were tattooed (Phan 432). As for their level of civilisation, Phan states:

In ancient times, those people whose toes crossed were foolish, ignorant and crude just like wild animals. History indicated they had no idea what marriage or rites were. Till now, these uncivilised people are still living in Vietnam in a quite limited number. All of them are as foolish and ignorant as their ancestors. As for the majority of our nation, we are very clever and wise because we had been already assimilated into the Han race 漢種 since the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) (Phan 432-433).

Phan Bội Châu acknowledged that the assimilation 混化 or "Sinicisation" 漢化 of the Vietnamese people was an inextricable outcome of China's conquest and colonisation.

Interestingly, however, he viewed this process in a positive light:

The dominant race of our nation now is definitely *Han* (漢 literally, "Chinese"). Considering the barbarous race whose toes crossed and foreheads were tattooed, they were assimilated into *hua zhong* or the civilised race, and I have to admit that this was absolutely a catastrophe for our ancestors, but at the same time, it was also a great fortune for their offsprings (Phan 434).

In fact, emphasising the fact that Vietnamese belonged to the race of *hua* does not necessarily mean that Phan recognised China's invasion and colonisation as just and legitimate. By contrast, Phan, from the social Darwinist perspective, indicated that for Vietnamese, becoming *hua* was the prerequisite for the anti-foreign struggle:

During the long period of being annexed by the northern court for more than one thousand years, none of our people dared to rise up and fight against the occupiers. Probably at the time, Vietnamese people were so ignorant and foolish that they could be easily tamed and made slave like horses and cattle (Phan 484).

According to his narrative, it was not until the tenth century that the aforementioned Ngô Quyền rose up and successfully forced the Chinese occupiers out of the territory of Vietnam for the first time. Phan Bội Châu argues that, albeit many heroes emerged such as the Trưng sisters (in the first century) and Mai Hắc Đế (?-722) before the uprising of Ngô Quyền, the anti-foreign struggles inevitably failed due to the ignorance of the mass of the Vietnamese people. In this sense, the “great fortune” which the descendants received from their assimilated ancestors was the ability to expel the Chinese invaders and revive the national sovereignty of Vietnam.

## **2.2 “Anti-foreignness” as the imperative for the progress of the Vietnamese nation**

Apart from national sovereignty, the progress of the Vietnamese nation is also taken into consideration in Phan's discussion of the need for an anti-foreign movement. He argues that the racial inferiority of the Vietnamese people led to Chinese colonisation in ancient times, but in recent decades, it was the cultural underdevelopment and the corrupt political system that resulted in the inability of Vietnamese, as the yellow race who are inherently as superior as the white, to compete with the French. This was the ultimate cause of the loss of national sovereignty. In *Việt*

*Nam vong quốc sử*, for example, Phan attributes the backwardness of Vietnam to the inappropriate policies of the Nguyen authorities:

Vietnam is just like a sick man, drowsy and weak. It allows the excessive power expansion of the monarch and the factions, oppresses the development of civil rights; it admires literature with meaningless content and despises warriors (Phan 1957, 515).

In *Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư* (海外血書 “A letter from abroad written in blood”) which was written in 1909, Phan even directly points to the monarchical system and harshly condemned the tyrannical kings and the corrupt mandarins for their greed and brutality (Phan 2012, 354). According to him, when the “foreign brigands” (the French) arrived, the king “donated his people’s children to them and sold his people’s fields to them, in order to purchase for himself clandestine moments of comfort and pleasure” (Phan 355). Facing the corrupt Vietnamese monarch and his mandarins, Phan anchors his hope on the French colonisers to help Vietnam reform the existing political system and implement a democratic policy. In *Việt Nam vong quốc sử*, he writes:

If the French can really dedicate themselves to enlightening our people and cultivating our capability, help us to eliminate the corrupt political and educational system that had existed for hundreds of years, and give us some leeway for revival, it is still not too late to have heroes rising up to revive our lost independence in one hundred years (Phan 1957, 513).

To Phan’s disappointment, however, France as the strong and vigorous country, did not assist Vietnam, but rather exploited it and duped the Vietnamese people. Phan indignantly laments: “The French are supposed to be civilised, and yet they treat the stupid, blind Vietnamese as if they were fish or meat (Phan 2012, 343).” Moreover, by maintaining the Nguyen monarchy

as the puppet and cooperating with the greedy mandarins, French colonisers continued constraining people's freedom and plundering people's wealth.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, although France was a civilised country, the way it treated Vietnam was barbarous. Therefore, not only could French colonisation not help Vietnam in its current plight, it severely impeded the progress of Vietnamese society towards Western civilisation.

What was worse, by manipulating colonial education, French colonisers deprived the Vietnamese people of their basic right to be educated and thereby attempted to cut off their access to the ideas of equality, freedom, and democracy (Chen 2005, 69). On the one hand, the French authorities kept the number of local students low in order to ensure that not too many were exposed to "subversive" Western ideas (Philip 2001, 420); on the other hand, they restricted the popular and cultural movement led by Vietnamese intellectuals. For instance, the famous Dong Kihn Nghia Thuc (東京義塾 Eastern capital non-tuition school) which was mainly organised by the members of Phan Bội Châu's society and other open-minded intellectuals in Hanoi was ordered to cease functioning in 1908 (Marr 1971, 181). Shortly afterwards, Phan Bội Châu's Phong Trào Đông Du (東遊運動 literally, "Go to the East movement") also failed under pressure from the French and Japanese authorities.

When Phan Bội Châu published *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* in 1909, the political climate in Vietnam and even in Japan had significantly deteriorated. The imperial forces (France and Japan) had overtly collaborated with each other and utterly nipped the endeavour of Phan's mild reform through self-strengthening education in the bud. Even worse, it appeared the national identity of the Vietnamese people would be annihilated by the assimilative approach being taken in colonial education. Facing these predicaments, Phan Bội Châu in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* extended his

---

<sup>56</sup> According to Phan's estimate in *Việt Nam vong quốc sử*, ordinary Vietnamese people were to be taxed on at least nineteen items per year (Phan 2012, 347-53).

discussion of anti-foreignness from his previous ideas of defending foreign military invasions and protecting national sovereignty, to the domain of national spirit.

### 2.3 “Anti-foreignness” as the national spirit of Vietnamese people

In modern Vietnamese history, *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* was arguably the first history book which explicitly defined the national character of Vietnamese people as “in favour of anti-foreignness” (Phan 2000, 474). Facing critiques that simply attributed Vietnamese surrender to the Westerners to the nature of Vietnamese people in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* Phan chose to emphasize the anti-foreign deeds of national heroes in past centuries. In his narrative, not only the aforementioned kings who restored the autonomy of Vietnam from China’s occupation, but also others who had resisted the Chinese invaders were included into a genealogy of national heroes, regardless of the results of their resistance.

Heroes, for Phan Bội Châu, played a significant role in national development:

The fate of the current world is determined by heroes. Without heroes for even one day, the world will not exist any more. The United States would die if there was no Washington. Italy would not exist without the three nobles.<sup>57</sup> Nor would Japan survive if there were no hero like Saigō and Kido.<sup>58</sup> Heroes are like cloth and food that protect and breed the world (Phan 2000 vol.2, 457).

Ostensibly regarding them as the impetus of change in the world, Phan Bội Châu exaggerated the function and importance of heroes. As a matter of fact, for Phan Bội Châu, what really mattered here was not what actually happened in history, but how the deeds of these

---

<sup>57</sup> The “three nobles” refers to Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), Camillo Benso (1810-1861), and Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882). According to his autobiography, Phan Bội Châu read Liang Qichao’s *Biographies of the Three Founding Heroes of the Italian State* when he arrived in Japan. Phan becomes a great admirer of Giuseppe Mazzini for his statement: “Education and insurrection should go hand in hand” (Phan 1999, 111).

<sup>58</sup> Saigō Takamori (1828-1877) and Kido Takayoshi (1833-1877) were considered as the three great nobles in the Meiji Restoration together with Ōkubo Toshimichi (1830-1878).

heroes, through interpretation, could inspire national imagination and national confidence (Luo 110). A good example in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* is Phan's narrative about Trần Hưng Đạo 陳興道 (1228-1300).

As the general who successfully fought off Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century, Trần Hưng Đạo was well known in Vietnam. According to Kelley, Vietnamese had revered Trần as the moral exemplar, great general, potent deity and Confucian moraliser before the nineteenth century (Kelley 2015, 1966-1982). In Phan's narration, however, Trần Hưng Đạo became the "first successful anti-foreign hero" 排外而成功之第一英雄 (Phan 2000, 476). Phan Bội Châu argues that there are three aspects that could account for Trần Hưng Đạo's great feats. First, he was very sincere and devoted 熱誠. According to Phan, when the Mongol came to raid, the emperor stated to Trần Hưng Đạo, "Given the strength of the bandits, I must surrender." Trần then replied, "First cut off my head, and then surrender." Phan admired, "If one could have the same devotion as Trần, it would not be difficult to mend the sky and fill the sea" (Phan 478). Second, Trần Hưng Đạo was versed in military strategies 識高. He left many military instructions for his fellow generals and these ultimately helped them in defeating the Mongol invasion (479). Third, Trần Hưng Đạo had a noble personality 高尚人格. Different from the traditional accounts which attributed the feats of Trần to his excellent talent, Phan believed that it was Trần's sincere patriotic sentiment that underlined his success in the anti-Mongol wars (480).<sup>59</sup>

To a great extent, the narrative about Trần Hưng Đạo's noble personality can be viewed as the reification of moral requirements such as the senses of patriotism and collectivity 愛國合群 that Phan emphasised in his earlier discussions of the relationship between civil rights and national sovereignty. For Phan Bội Châu, all of the Vietnamese people have the anti-foreign nature, but only when they consciously participate in anti-foreign movements and perform

---

<sup>59</sup> As Kelley points out, this narration was adapted from German and French Romantic nationalist ideas and was part of the new nationalist discourse in East Asia at the turn of the twentieth century (Kelley 2015, 1990).

meritorious service for the progress of society, can they be viewed as heroes and representatives of the national spirit. In the case of Trần Hưng Đạo, for Phan despite six hundred years have passed since Trần fought off the Mongol invasion, his noble personality is still encouraging Vietnamese people to continue the everlasting anti-foreign cause.

Apart from famous national heroes, Phan Bội Châu also includes those who ever participated in anti-foreign movements and whose names had remained unknown in the genealogy of national heroes:

Although they failed in expelling the Chinese bandits from our country and restoring our territory, we still regard them as heroes. For without these anonymous heroes in large numbers, the famous heroes will not appear (Phan 475).<sup>60</sup>

However, Phan Bội Châu believes that admiring the feats of the national heroes is not enough. In terms of the ordinary people, emphasises Phan, it is more important for them to actively partake in the heroic cause and defend national autonomy and independence. To encourage his compatriots to do so he even claimed that: “As long as one has an anti-foreign heart, he/she is a hero (Phan 488).”

Phan Bội Châu’s linking of anti-foreignness to national spirit, as Luo Jingwen has pointed out, can be seen as a response to his intellectual equal, Phan Chu Trinh (Luo 2012, 113). Phan Chu Trinh (1872-1926) was Phan Bội Châu’s tough antagonist as well as comrade. Both of them believed Vietnam should be civilised and Vietnamese people should be enlightened, however, Phan Chu Trinh argued that the first enemy of the Vietnamese people was not the French but the corrupt Hue regime. This contradicted Phan Bội Châu’s adherence to the idea of constitutional

---

<sup>60</sup> In the 1910s, Phan composed *Hậu trần dật sử* 後陳逸史 (The history of the late Trần) in which Phan narrates the story of some ordinary people who spontaneously rose up to resist the invasion of the Ming in the early fifteenth century. Due to the limitation of the traditional historiography, their feats were not covered in the official records and thus remained unknown for Vietnamese people.

monarchy. Phan Chu Trinh was willing to cooperate with France as long as France opposed the Hue court and promised to transform Vietnam (Duiker 1976, 52-53). According to Phan Bội Châu's memoir,

After Phan Chau Trinh returned from Japan, he vigorously championed the position of “Up with Democracy, Out with Monarchy”. He vehemently assailed the monarchy without questioning the French regime, advocating a policy of “Making Use of the French in the Quest for Progress” 倚法求進步. Public opinion all of a sudden began to be perplexed, and the risk of strife within the movement was imminent (Phan 1999, 126).

In this sense, constructing the genealogy of national anti-foreign heroes enabled Phan Bội Châu to defend his anti-French stance from the historical dimension. That is, the anti-French movement was not only imperative in the senses of restoring national sovereignty and enlightening the Vietnamese people, but more importantly, it was also a manifestation of the anti-foreign nature of the Vietnamese nation. In other words, the current anti-French movement was an episode of the grand and everlasting national epic of Vietnam. Through his emphasis on anti-foreign heroes in a grand historical narrative of Vietnam, Phan Bội Châu hoped to gain the dominant position in debates over the direction of the revolutionary movement (Luo 2012, 113).

However, when it comes to the issue of Champa, the historical narrative that Phan Bội Châu applied to the above discussion encountered a predicament.

### **3. Champa as a predicament in Phan Bội Châu's narrative**

When constructing a historically anti-foreign Vietnam in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*, Phan Bội Châu fails to explain the following two pivotal issues. First, what does the subject of the so-called anti-foreign Vietnamese people exactly signify – who are the Vietnamese people, and



who not? Second, once it successfully modernises and restores its autonomy through the anti-foreign movement, how will Vietnam deal with international affairs and other states?

Through his discussion of Champa, a kingdom which had existed for more than one thousand years in a location currently part of present-day southern Vietnam, Phan Bội Châu revealed his opinions on these questions. Simultaneously, a predicament also emerged in his historical narrative.

### 3.1 Barbarous Champa versus civilised Vietnam

Like the Ryukyu Kingdom, the Kingdom of Champa had been a tributary state of China. As an Indianised kingdom which had remarkably different traditions from those of the Vietnamese, Champa had frequent interactions with the various Vietnamese regimes to its north over long stretches of time. It was not until the early nineteenth century, however, that the powerful Nguyen dynasty gradually expanded its border further into the south and ultimately annexed the lands of Champa which make up three-fifths of the territory of the present-day Vietnam (Li 1998, 111).<sup>61</sup> From the standpoint of the Cham people, however, the Vietnamese southward expansion was tantamount to an invasion. Interestingly, in Phan Bội Châu's historiography, the loss of Champa is regarded as a doomed result according to the ideas of Social Darwinism.

Regarding it as a proud achievement in Vietnamese history, Phan dedicates one chapter of *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* to demonstrate the efforts of the various Vietnamese regimes in dealing with the affairs of Champa. He firstly justifies the Vietnamese invasion by arguing that,

---

<sup>61</sup> Li Tana believed the interaction between the Vietnamese regimes and the kingdom of Champa in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries provided a new space for pursuing the possibility of a more multidimensional consciousness of Vietnamese identity, and suggested that Vietnamese society could thrive more or less outside a Confucian framework (Li 1998, 121)

The Cham people were like animals. Their chiefs were barbarous and always fell into in-fighting with each other. Neither did they have good politics nor education (Phan 2000, 497).

Therefore, Phan questions: “How can they exist in the era of competition?” Based on social Darwinist principles, Phan Bội Châu points out,

Survival only belongs to the fittest while the weak are doomed to be the prey of the strong. If you do not annihilate others, you will be destroyed. Just because the intelligence of us Vietnamese was slightly superior to the Chams, they were inevitably defeated and annexed by us Vietnamese. What if other nations’ intelligence is tens of thousands of times superior to ours (497)?

To a great extent, the case of Champa in Phan’s narrative can be viewed together with the Ryukyus as a historical lesson for reflecting upon early twentieth century Vietnam. As Phan himself stated, the suffering of Champa was not far from Vietnam: “Now we lament Champa, but there will be no one to lament our Vietnam in thirty years (497)!” However, Phan attributes the loss of Champa to its own flaws while mentioning nothing about the expansionism of the Nguyen dynasty. By contrast, he regarded this expansion proudly as a great achievement of the Vietnamese ancestors:

Initially, the Cham people were barbarous and difficult to tame. Our dynasty [the Nguyen] thus changed its previous tactic of the scattered raids instead launching massive sweeps into the areas of Champa. After the lands were swept empty, Vietnamese people migrated in. Since then onward, the population of the previous Champa boomed and the number of arable lands expanded significantly. Today, this region became the central province 中州. All of the feats above were made by our noble ancestors (498).

In this narrative, the subject of the Vietnamese nation was endowed with another feature apart from anti-foreignness: expansionism.<sup>62</sup> Different from how he responds to French colonisation, Phan Bội Châu admires the expansionist policy of the powerful Nguyen dynasty and its incursion into Champa, regarding it as an inevitable consequence from a Social Darwinist perspective---the inferior is doomed to be conquered and civilised by the superior. Ironically, the similar discourse was also manipulated by the French to justify their invasion and colonisation of Vietnam in the early twentieth century. In this sense, there was a collusive relationship between Phan's imagination of a modernised "new Vietnam" and the colonialist discourse of the French.

### 3.2 Phan's "new Vietnam" and the discourse of colonialism

As discussed before, Phan Bội Châu viewed the modernisation of Vietnam as a linear-progressive process towards Western civilisation. In this process, as Anthony Smith points out, nation, as a cultural artefact, was created to channel social reform and political mobilisation. And to create a convincing representation of the nation, a worthy and distinctive past must be rediscovered and appropriated (Anthony 1997, 36)<sup>63</sup>. In Phan Bội Châu's narrative of Vietnamese national history, facts in Vietnamese history were selected, reinterpreted, and even distorted if necessary, to serve as a cultural legacy for mobilising Vietnamese people to fight in unison against the French for national independence and modernisation. In *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*, those who once fought against Chinese invasions are revered as national heroes and defenders of national sovereignty, even though they were totally ignorant about the modern concepts of nation, state and sovereignty. And the expansion of Vietnam and its annexation of Champa in previous

---

<sup>62</sup> Another example can be seen in Phan's narrative about the anti-foreign feats of Lý Thường Kiệt 李常傑 (1018-1105). Lý was a general of the Lý dynasty (1009-1225) who spearheaded the attack upon the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) and occupied the Qinzhou prefecture 欽州, Lianzhou prefecture 廉州, and Yongzhou prefecture 邕州 in Guangxi province. Phan Bội Châu highly admired Lý. He wrote: In the three thousand years of Vietnamese history, we always passively attacked in response to the invasions. It was so proud for me to review how Lý Thường Kiệt organised the troop, erected the banners of righteousness, and conquered the lands of China (Phan 2000, 482).

<sup>63</sup> Also see Shen 2000, 82-85.

centuries are reinterpreted as the glorious feats of the collective ancestors of the modern Vietnamese nation. In short, through historical construction, Phan Bội Châu attempts to demonstrate that the Vietnamese nation is capable of self-strengthening and establishing a modern nation-state, or in his own words, a “new Vietnam”.

However, after being modernised, what would this “new Vietnam” look like? In his *Tan Viet Nam* (新越南 New Vietnam), written two years earlier than *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*, Phan Bội Châu outlined his image of a revived future Vietnam:

After restoration, we shall determine the domestic as well as foreign affairs of our country. The work of civilisation will go on, day after day, and our country’s status in the world will be heightened. We shall have three million infantrymen as fierce as tigers, looking into the four corners of the universe. Five hundred thousand of our navy men, as terrifying as crocodiles, will swim freely in the boundless ocean. We shall send ambassadors into every country of Europe, America, Japan, the United States, Germany, England. These countries will make ours their first ally. Siam, India, and other countries of the South Seas will look up to our land as the dominant state. Even the big countries of Asia, such as China, will be brother countries to ours. The enemy, France, will be afraid of us; she will listen to us, ask us for protection. Our flag will fly over the city of Paris, and our national colours will brighten the entire globe. At that time the only fear we shall have is that we will not have enough time to protect other countries nor to marry the French women. All the shame and humiliation we have suffered previously, which resulted from being protected by others, will have become potent medicine to help us build up this feat of modernisation. Commemorative monuments will be erected; a thousand torches will illuminate the entire world. The wind of freedom

will blow fiercely, refreshing in one single sweep the entire five continents. Such will be the victory of our race. How pleasant that will be!<sup>64</sup>

If Phan Bội Châu's narrative of Champa only implies that a powerful Vietnam in the previous history could dominate the destiny of those weak countries, a modernised Vietnam at the present time will not only become the hegemon of Southeast Asia but also take revenge on France and make it its protectorate. In this sense, except for its current backwardness, for Phan Bội Châu there is no difference in essence between Vietnam and other imperialist states such as France and Japan. Once modernised, the "new Vietnam" is tantamount to a replica of the Western empires. Albeit Phan Bội Châu stresses the imperative of resisting French colonisation, he does not challenge but rather reinforces the logic underlying the whole discourse of colonialism (Luo 2012, 152).

To some extent, this predicament in Phan's historiography is inextricable from what Karl terms the "weak-state narrative".<sup>65</sup> According to Karl, in the face of the onslaught from the West, this narrative placed the historical burden of building national strength squarely in the realm of the state, which quickly imposed an effective closure upon the types of questions posed about history. As a consequence, the urgent efforts at making up for the legacy of "weakness" through state-building became the main focus of historiography (Karl 2002, 22-23). In the case of Phan Bội Châu, he anchored his hope of rescuing Vietnam in Western civilisation, while failing to reflect on the hegemonic and colonialist factors deriving from it. Even though he participated in the Society of East Asian Alliance in Japan and was in contact with those anarchists who held anti-imperialist views, Phan himself neither accepted nor adapted their ideas in his historical

---

<sup>64</sup> See Lam 2000, 106-107.

<sup>65</sup> Karl points out that after the deposing of the Qing dynasty in 1911, a statist narrative of modern Chinese history re-conceptualised the period from the First Opium War (1840) through the Republican revolution (1911) primarily as an era of weakening state power and of staged diachronic "backwardness" vis-a-vis Euro-America and Japan (Karl 2002, 22). In the case of Vietnam, however, historians like Phan Bội Châu had already applied this narrative in their historical writings no later than 1909.

writings.<sup>66</sup> As a result, Phan Bội Châu's historiography is inevitably trapped in a collusive relationship with the discourses of colonialism and imperialism.

#### 4. Chapter conclusion

This chapter explored Phan Bội Châu's historiography in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*. First, through analysing the two divided narrative lines that Phan Bội Châu applied to the discussion of the relations between national sovereignty and civil rights, it noted that the introduction of Western civilisation marked the rupture between past and present in Phan Bội Châu's historical narrative. For him, only through modernisation/westernisation could Vietnam get rid of the situation of backwardness and restore its lost sovereignty.

Second, this chapter probed the motivation behind Phan Bội Châu's emphasis on "anti-foreignness" as the nature of the Vietnamese people. In his narrative, Phan, on the one hand, acknowledged that France was a developed and civilised country, on the other hand, he pointed out the anti-progressive role of France in the process of Vietnam's modernisation. In order to encourage the Vietnamese people to participate in the anti-French struggles, Phan Bội Châu constructed a genealogy of national heroes who participated in the resistance against China's invasions in the previous millennia and included the present anti-French revolution into the glorious anti-foreign tradition of the Vietnamese nation.

Last, through analysing Phan's narrative of the loss of the Champa kingdom, this chapter demonstrated a latent predicament in his historiography. Due to the lack of necessary criticism and reflection regarding the expansionist and colonialist essence of modern Western civilisation, a modernised "new Vietnam" that Phan envisioned ultimately became a replica of Western colonial hegemony.

---

<sup>66</sup> According to Luo, Phan Bội Châu does not mention the word "imperialism" in his works written in Japan (1905-1909). Even in his memoirs, this word is rarely used (Luo 2012, 153).

## Chapter Four: History and Reform: Hoàng Cao Khải and his *Việt sử kính* and *Việt sử yếu*

Just as Phan Bội Châu was contacting the remnants of the Can Vương movement and other outlawed patriots to call for a violent uprising in Vietnam, Hoàng Cao Khải's career as a high official serving in the Protectorate government ended in 1902, with his memorial for retirement being approved by the Thành Thái 成泰 emperor (1879-1954). After that, Hoàng returned to Hanoi and spent the rest of his life in a private mansion until his death in 1933.<sup>67</sup>

Yet while Hoàng Cao Khải was out of office, he still maintained influence through his writings upon the world of Vietnamese intellectuals. Between his retirement and the outbreak of World War I (1914-1918), he composed two significant books on the national history of Vietnam, *Việt sử kính* (越史鏡 literally, “Mirror of Viet history”) in 1909<sup>68</sup> and the three-volume *Việt sử yếu* (越史要 literally, “Essentials of Viet history”) in 1914. In these works, Hoàng Cao Khải spared no effort in justifying French colonisation and appealing to his compatriots to collaborate with the colonisers.

As regards the contents, *Việt sử kính* and *Việt sử yếu* can be seen as a systematic response to Phan Bội Châu. First, contrasting against Phan's argument that the advent of Western civilisation marked the point of rupture between the stagnating past of Vietnam and the future, Hoàng Cao Khải rather emphasised the continuity of Vietnamese history in the sense of pursuing civilisation. Second, Hoàng attributed the previous anti-foreign uprisings in Vietnamese history

---

<sup>67</sup> As the long-time collaborator, Hoàng Cao Khải was one of the targets that Phan Bội Châu's newly established Quang Phục Hội (光復會 literally, “Restoration Association”) attempted to assassinate. According to Heather Streets-Salter, by the end of 1912 Quang Phục Hội was in lack of fundings. To garner continuing financial support, they needed to demonstrate the capacity for action rather than mere rhetoric. They plotted three assassinations but only successfully killed another traitor Nguyen Duy Han in April 1913. Hoàng Cao Khải and the French Governor General Albert Sarraut (1872-1962) survived (Heather 2017, 182-183).

<sup>68</sup> *Việt sử kính* was initially written in *chữ quốc ngữ* (國語字 national script), the romanised script favoured by many reformist literati who demanded immediate abolition of the Confucian examination system and replacement of Chinese characters (Marr 1971, 147).

to the corruption and immorality of some Chinese colonisers instead of to the inherent anti-foreign character of Vietnamese people. Third, through analysing the geopolitical circumstance of East Asia at the time and the colonial policies that France implemented in Vietnam, Hoàng stressed the imperative of collaborating with the French and condemned anti-French resistant activities. The following chapters will discuss these three points in detail.

### **1. The transition of models of civilisation, and the continuity of Vietnamese history**

Different from Phan Bội Châu, who regarded the previous times before the introduction of Western learning in the middle nineteenth century as the times of “animals” and “barbarians”, Hoàng was inclined to view the history of Vietnam as an endless process of development. Based on the linear sequence of dynastic succession, Hoàng divided the ancient history of Vietnam into five periods in *Việt sử yếu*:

- (1) the period of prehistory and primordial countries 上古建國之時代;
- (2) the era under the rule of China 內屬之時代;
- (3) the autonomous period 自主之時代;
- (4) the period of the development of civilisation 文明長進之時代;
- (5) the era of conflicts and separation between the South and the North 南北分爭之時代

According to this division, since it had been assimilated into Chinese civilisation, Vietnam had already been a civilised country far before the advent of the French. In this historical outlook, China or Chinese civilisation provided the paradigm for the development of Vietnamese society.



## 1.1 China, the first model of civilisation

Like Phan Bội Châu and other reformist intellectuals such as Fukuzawa Yukichi and Liang Qichao, Hoàng Cao Khải's perception of civilisation is inextricable from his conception of competition.<sup>69</sup> Believing “competition was the mother of progress” (Hoàng 1914, vol.1 11), Hoàng attributed the development of Vietnam, from a poorly organised cluster of some primitive tribes to a unified and civilised country, to internal and international competition. According to *Việt sử yếu*,

In two thousand years under the rule of Hồng Bàng 鴻龐, the Vietnamese people were ignorant of competition. It was not until the era of An Dương Vương 安陽王<sup>70</sup>, that competition appeared in Vietnam. And when Qin Shi Huang 秦始皇 (259BC—220BC) seized and occupied our country, the scale of competition was significantly expanded (Hoàng, vol.1 11).

However, due to its inferiority in competing with China, Vietnam was inevitably annexed by various Chinese empires in the following one thousand years from the Qin dynasty (the third century BC) up until the late Tang dynasty (the tenth century AC) (vol.1 11). According to Hoàng, during this period China demonstrated overwhelming superiority in international competition and thus could be seen as the paradigm of civilisation. Under the rule of China, Hoàng points out, Vietnam obtained unprecedented and comprehensive development in the fields of politics, economics, military affairs, and education (Hoàng 1914, vol.1 12-14).<sup>71</sup> Simultaneously, Vietnamese people also evolved from barbarians into the civilised. He argued:

---

<sup>69</sup> For the view of Liang and Fukuzawa regarding the relationship between competition and civilisation, see the third chapter of this thesis.

<sup>70</sup> According to the later written accounts, An Dương Vương was leader of Âu Việt 甌越 tribes in the third century BC. He defeated and seized the throne of the last Hùng Vương and annexed the state of Văn Lang 文朗.

<sup>71</sup> Hoàng enumerates five aspects that China was advanced in: the feudal system, the complete bureaucracy, military organisation, tax law, and educational pedagogy, especially the teachings of Confucius.

Our nation in the past times was barbarous. Since being governed by the Chinese, not only did the boundary between the races become blurred, but also the degree of *jiaohua* (教化 literally, “transformative moral teachings”) was significantly improved (Hoàng 1909, 31).

Similar to Phan Bội Châu, Hoàng believed that after this long process of assimilation of more than one thousand years, Vietnamese people acquired the “characteristics of civilisation” (文明之性質) as well as the “ability to compete” (競爭之能力) (Hoàng 1909, 3), which enabled them to expel the Chinese occupiers and eventually restore autonomy:

During the periods of the Ngô 吳 (939-965), the Đinh 丁 (968-980), and the Lê 黎 (980-1009), our country only had kings and boundaries. It was not until the Lý 李 dynasty (1009-1226) that the rulers began to treat our country as a political entity and the law was properly implemented. By then, the embryo of civilisation had started to emerge. From the Trần 陳 dynasty (1225-1400) to the Hồng Đức 洪德 reign (1470-1497), the *liyue* (禮樂 literally, “rites and music”) was developed, which ultimately made Vietnam a domain of civilisation (Hoàng 1914, vol.2 1).

It should be noticed that Hoàng Cao Khải in the above argument links civilisation to the concept of *liyue*. According to the relevant research, *liyue* referred to a complete set of norms designed by those Confucian sages to direct political activities and people’s daily life (Zhu 2014, 101). In this sense, Hoàng believed that it was the implementation of *liyue* that led to the civilisation of Vietnam. Facing the onslaught of Western civilisation in the nineteenth century, however, the ever superior model of civilisation based on the Chinese *liyue* proved to be weak and inferior to the competition. Therefore, the quest for alternative models of civilisation became for Vietnam to follow became the core of Hoàng Cao Khải’s story of modern Vietnamese history.

## 1.2 France as the new model of civilisation

Hoàng used social Darwinist ideas to explain his view of the transition of a model of civilisations based on China to one based on France in *Việt sử kính*:

The relationship between the strong and the weak determines the result of competition in the present world. The inferior has to rely on one who is better in order to develop 開化 and the weak has to turn to the strong for survival. This principle is not only applicable to our nation. If one nation can annihilate the “inferiority and weakness of their roots and characters” (劣弱之性根), and if it can dedicate itself to preserving its race, this nation will become superior and strong. This is the result of the principle. In the past, we were under Chinese governance for one thousand years and France was also ruled by the Roman Empire for four hundred years. We were assimilated into China and obtained independence; France was also integrated into Rome and became a “domain of civilisation” (Hoàng 1909, 2).

Obviously, the criteria of civilisation in Hoàng’s historical narrative is cosmopolitan and globally applicable. Synchronically speaking, the model of civilisation does not necessarily have to be single. China and Rome, because of their superiority in competition, once functioned as the models of civilisation for Vietnam and France respectively. Under the rule of China and Rome, the inferior Vietnam and France were civilised and eventually became parts of the domain of civilisation. From the diachronic perspective, however, being civilised is by no means a zero-sum game in which one can permanently maintain one’s status in the world. For Hoàng Cao Khải, the model of civilisation is alterable and replaceable with the vicissitude of times. As he articulated in the preface of *Việt sử yếu*:

Previously, our country [Vietnam] was aware of *jiaohua* through China. In the present time, we understand *wenming* (文明 literally, “civilisation”) through Great France.<sup>72</sup> Considering that competition is the prerequisite for progress, intellectuals of our country are supposed to regard France as our guide (Hoàng 114, preface 5).

Compared to Phan Bội Châu, who indicated in his *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* that the advent of the French in the nineteenth century marked the rupture between the “barbarous” stagnating past and the modern civilised present, it seems that Hoàng Cao Khải tended to view the history of Vietnam as a continuous and gradual process towards civilisation. For him, the transition of the model of civilisation from China to France is regarded as the manifestation of this continuity. In this sense, Hoàng Cao Khải can be seen as a typical representative of the scholars in French colonial employ. As Kelley points out, these scholars applied what he terms the “little China” theory in their historical writings. According to this theory, Vietnam became a miniature replica of China during the millennium under Chinese rule, and it was precisely through its contact with the various Chinese empires, and by adopting many of their customs and political institutions, that Vietnam was able to maintain its autonomy until the advent of French rule (Kelley 2005, 9). Similar logic is deeply embedded in Hoàng Cao Khải’s historical narrative to justify French colonisation. As demonstrated above, Hoàng views China and France as the models of civilisation for Vietnam in various periods. Hence, by recognising the positive influence of China during its occupation, Hoàng Cao Khải implies that Vietnam will, in the long run, receive a similar infusion of civilisation under the tutelage of the French.

---

<sup>72</sup> Considering the intertextuality of classical Chinese, in this quotation *jiaohua* and *wenming* are mutually translatable.

## 2. Reevaluating Chinese colonisation: “universal principle” and “brute force”

Apart from the discrepancy between Hoàng Cao Khải and Phan Bội Châu on the issues of civilisation, their accounts of the anti-foreign struggles during Chinese domination significantly vary as well. Phan Bội Châu viewed anti-Chinese resistance as the manifestation of the national propensity of the Vietnamese people. For Phan, as long as one identifies himself/herself as Vietnamese, he/she is supposed to be anti-foreign and participate in resistance activities (Phan 1957, 539). As for Hoàng Cao Khải, however, he argues that those anti-foreign uprisings were not motivated by the anti-foreign nature of the Vietnamese people but by their resentment of inappropriate policies that some corrupt Chinese occupiers implemented. In *Việt sử kính*, Hoàng employs the concept of the dichotomy between *gongli* (公理 literally, “universal principle”) and *qiangquan* (強權 literally, “brute force”) to evaluate the ruling modes that the various Chinese empires had implemented in Vietnam in the past millennium. According to Hoàng,

There are two completely different ways of governance. One is based on the universal principle. If there is a matter which is supposed to be tackled in accordance with the universal principle, our people will definitely dedicate themselves to it without any complaints about the hardship and arduousness; The other way is rule by brute force. Backed by strong power, invaders act in an unbridled way for unrighteous goals. Even if they use the nasty trick of force and oppression, ultimately, however, our people will neither submit to them nor obey their rule (Hoàng 1909, 24).

Ostensibly, the binary division between “universal principle” and “brute force” is derived from the classic Confucian dichotomy of *wangdao* (王道 literally, “the Kingly Way”) and *badao* (霸道 literally, “the Despot’s Way”). According to Mencius, the so-called *wangdao* means

gaining people's support by virtue while *badao* is to subdue them by force.<sup>73</sup> As a moderniser versed in Confucianism, however, Hoàng Cao Khải, on the one hand, used this framework based on traditional Confucianism which emphasises the importance of the morality of the rulers, while on the other hand, he further infused his interpretation of the “universal principle” with social Darwinist ideas. The following subsections will discuss these two points respectively.

## 2.1 Universal principle and moral order

Hoàng Cao Khải regards *kaihua* (開化 literally, “enlightenment”) and *yazhi* (壓制 literally, “oppression”) as the essence of “universal principle” and “brute force” respectively, and believes this dichotomy can be employed to analyse the Chinese governance of Vietnam (Hoàng 1909, 25). In his narrative, since the Han dynasty (206BC-220AD), the Chinese rulers, in general, did not oppress the development of Vietnamese society but treated Vietnamese people in the same way that they treated the Chinese. On the one hand, they assisted Vietnamese people to establish effective administration systems; on the other hand, they shared the government with the local people and gave them access to regional offices. Therefore, Hoàng believed that under the rule of the various Chinese empires, Vietnamese people were gradually enlightened and the society of Vietnam obtained much progress (Hoàng 25-26). In this sense, the rule of China can be seen as the manifestation of “universal principle”.

Now that the policies that the Chinese implemented in Vietnam were based on the “universal principle”, why did Vietnamese people, during the past millennium still rise up and fight against Chinese colonisation? Hoàng Cao Khải attributed the cause of people's resistance to the immorality of Chinese officials. In Hoàng's narrative, Chinese officials played the most critical role in the process of colonisation (Hoàng 1909, 28). Considering that they were in charge

---

<sup>73</sup> See Mencius, *Gongsun Chou I*.

of the implementation of the colonial policies, their personal morality would determine the nature of colonisation. According to Hoàng, from the Han dynasty to the Tang dynasty (618AD-907AD) there were plenty of virtuous officials. During this period, officials such as Xi Guang, Shi Xie, and Jia Cong<sup>74</sup> dedicated themselves to serving and educating the local people, which significantly increased the degree of civilisation of Vietnam (Hoàng 27).

With the decay of the Tang dynasty, however, the officials sent to Vietnam were frequently changed in rotation compared to previous times and as a result, many immoral persons were selected as officials by the central government. They manipulated the law to unjustly threaten the local Vietnamese people and crudely exploited them through levying excessive taxes and assigning arduous but unnecessary tasks of construction, which caused people's resentment and ultimately gave rise to mass resistance (Hoàng 27-28). For Hoàng Cao Khải, it was the corruption and immorality of the Chinese officials that caused the loss of "universal principle" and the expansion of "brute force". Based on this assumption, Hoàng in his narrative converted the object of the resistance movement from Chinese colonization itself to the moral disorder of the governance.

As demonstrated above, ostensibly, Hoàng Cao Khải in his historical narrative still leaves some leeway for legitimating the resistance of Vietnamese people against the Chinese. However, the target of this resistance is confined to those corrupt officials and their exploitive policies instead of Chinese colonialism per se. By employing the ideas of Social Darwinism in his reinterpretation of "universal principle", Hoàng actually refuses to acknowledge the necessity of resisting Chinese colonisation in general and further suggests that for an inferior Vietnam, collaborating with a superior China was the best choice at the time.

---

<sup>74</sup> Xi Guang 錫光 (?-?), Shi Xie 士燮 (137-226), and Jia Cong 賈琮 (?-187AD) served as the Administrator of Jiaozhi Commandery 交趾郡 (present-day northern Vietnam) in different periods of the Han dynasty.

## 2.2 Universal principle and Social Darwinism

In *Việt sử kính*, Hoàng Cao Khải argues that in every age, all countries, during the process of establishing colonies, had to sacrifice a great amount of their population and resources.

Therefore it was necessary, after they established the colony, to dispatch their officials to tax the people and recruit them to serve as soldiers. Nevertheless, colonisers feared that people would not submit to them. So they tried to gain the people's support by giving benefit to them and by employing transformative moral teachings. According to Hoàng, these tactics are widely used by colonizing countries (Hoàng 1909, 28). Once a colony was established, however, it had never been the case that the colonial country would exterminate the people there. Employing social Darwinist ideas, Hoàng continued arguing,

It is the natural principle in the world that the superior gain while the inferior lose. Without the superior, the light of development will never arrive in the land of the inferior. Hence, it is the *tianzhi* (天職 literally, “divine duty”) of those who are inferior to pay taxes and serve as soldiers for those who are better. If the inferior are still ignorant of this principle and keep resisting against the superior, considering the imbalance in strength between the two, I am afraid that those who are inferior would not avoid being exterminated (Hoàng 28-29).

For Hoàng Cao Khải, the social Darwinist view of the world that “the superior win while the inferior are defeated” (優勝劣敗) is the most fundamental principle. In the case of Vietnam, as long as the imbalance in strength between Vietnam and China remained unchanged, collaborating with the Chinese colonisers instead of resisting against them was not only the duty of Vietnamese people as the inferior but also the best choice for their survival and social development. Under the rule of China, according to Hoàng, the intelligence of Vietnamese people was gradually developed, which in turn forced the Chinese rulers to take up a more systematic



control over the political field of Vietnam. Hoàng thus argues that it is unfair to merely admire the governance of those Chinese dynasties of Han, Wu 吳 (222AD-280AD), and the Jin 晉 (265AD-420AD) while condemning the Tang (618AD-907AD) and the Ming dynasties (1368AD-1644AD), just because the policies that the former three dynasties implemented in Vietnam were less complex and restrictive than that of the latter (Hoàng 1909, 29). In other words, for Hoàng Cao Khải, the policies adopted by the Chinese officials to rule Vietnam became increasingly draconian as evidence that Vietnamese society had gained progress. Following this logic, Hoàng even regarded morally corrupt officials in a positive light together with the virtuous ones:

Don't you see those who taught us rites and morality like Ren Yan 壬延<sup>75</sup> and Shi Xie 士燮<sup>76</sup>? Without their teachings, how could Vietnam have become civilised? Don't you see those who fought with us like Li Bin 李斌 and Ma Qi 馬騏<sup>77</sup>? Without their incitation, how would Vietnamese people have risen up and restored their national independence? In this sense, it is fair to say that both our benefactors and enemies brought great merit to our country (Hoàng 1909, 31).

According to the analysis above, one may notice that although Hoàng Cao Khải initially emphasises the difference between “universal principle” and “brute force”, ironically, through infusing his interpretation of “universal principle” with the relevant concepts of Social Darwinism, he actually accepts the logic based on “brute force” and regards it as a fundamental principle of international relations. A typical example of this logic can be found in Hoàng's narrative of Vietnam's annexation of the kingdom of Champa:

---

<sup>75</sup> Ren Yan (?-?) served as the Administrator of Jiuzhen Commandery 九真郡 during 29AD to 33AD. The period under his rule witnessed the prosperity of civilisation in Vietnamese society.

<sup>76</sup> Shi Xie (137-226) served as the Administrator of Jiaozhi Commandery 交趾郡 (present-day northern Vietnam) during the Eastern Han dynasty and the early Three Kingdoms period of China. He was deified in the sixth century and is still honoured today in some Vietnamese temples.

<sup>77</sup> Li Bin (1361-1422) and Ma Qi (?-?) were the officials of the Ming dynasty. They were sent by the Chinese central government to Annam to suppress the local uprisings.

With the development of human intelligence, competition between races become increasingly intense. The strong race will definitely defeat the weak. Hence, only if the strength of the two races in competition is similar, can “universal principle” become accessible. Otherwise, when there is a great disparity in strength between the given two races in competition, the one who controls “brute force” will stand out and annex the weak. This is the inevitable result in accordance with the “universal principle” (Hoàng 1909, 37).

Furthermore, Hoàng believes this “inevitable result” is not contradictory to *rendao* (人道 literally “the way of humanity”). Unlike Phan Bội Châu who emphasises the importance of national sovereignty and the geopolitical boundary of Vietnam, Hoàng Cao Khải in his historiography views the land as the “common property of the world” (世界之公產) and argues that people all over the world had the basic human right of being civilised. According to him, what really mattered was not who actually owned a given stretch of land, but whether they could bring civilisation to the uncivilised people living there. Taking Champa as an example, Hoàng argues that since Vietnam was more civilised in comparison, civilising the inferior Chams was the obligation of Vietnam (Hoàng 37). Considering the imbalance in strength between Vietnam and Champa, it was inevitable that Vietnam would adopt “brute force” as expedience in its annexation of the land of the Cham. And this military expansion, according to Hoàng, should be viewed as a necessary process in the diffusion of civilisation instead of as offensive or barbarous behaviour against “universal principle” (Hoàng 37).

By now, it is fair to assume that under the influence of social Darwinist ideas, the boundary, in Hoàng Cao Khải’s historiography, between “universal principle” and “brute force” becomes blurred. Due to the imbalance in strength between two countries, the civilised one had always to rely on “brute force” in the process of disseminating “universal principle” and

civilisation. Hence, colonisation, as a form of the “brute force”, is legitimised in Hoàng’s historical narrative. Nevertheless, in the face of Phan Bội Châu’s appeals for the alliance with Japan and other Asian countries of the yellow race to resist the invasion of the white, Hoàng realised that the discourse employed to justify China’s colonisation of Vietnam in the previous eras was insufficient to respond to those anti-French advocacies. In other words, apart from the historical dimension, it was necessary for Hoàng Cao Khải to justify the French colonisation of Vietnam from the practical perspective to further elaborate the necessity of collaborating with France.

### **3. The imperative of collaborating with France**

With the end of the military campaigns of 1895-96 in Tonkin, the French government claimed that the colony was fully pacified (Munholland 1975, 656). In the following years until the First World War, the French Protectorate authority adjusted its colonial policies in Vietnam. According to Munholland, French colonisers believed that they could maintain their previous benefits in the colony while simultaneously promoting the welfare and prosperity of the native Vietnamese people. The doctrine of “association” thus gained favour among French colonial theorists as the ideological foundation for French imperial rule (Munholland 655). Based on this “associationist” doctrine, the Protectorate authority showed some tolerance to the native self-strengthening movements led by the reformist intellectual societies.<sup>78</sup> These societies, however, soon became a renewed nationalist force which threatened the rule of the French authorities.

---

<sup>78</sup> It should be pointed out that the French authority never ceased to surveil those societies. According to the original document of the Protectorate government, the governor-general of Indochina formed a secret police unit to infiltrate meetings of those societies that were disseminating anti-French literature. See Munholland 1975, 657.

Among these societies, Phan Bội Châu's Duy Tân Hội was the most important one. In 1907, it established Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục (東京義塾) in Hanoi with French approval to provide young Vietnamese with education based on Western learning (Munholland 657). According to Marr, Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục initially served as a marketplace for competing influences and ideas, rather than as the exclusive property of either reformists or activists (Marr 1971, 172). However, the activist influence and participation in this school during 1907 gradually gained the ideological upper hand and this became increasingly apparent to the French authorities. Phan Bội Châu's *Việt Nam vong quốc sử*, *Hải Ngoại Huyết Thư*, and other distinctly violent texts were secretly brought into Vietnam from Japan, then re-published, and distributed by this agency (Marr 181).

As mentioned previously, Phan Bội Châu in these texts harshly criticised the French colonisation in Vietnam and regarded it as the main obstacle to Vietnamese modernisation. Meanwhile, he admitted that it was extremely tough for those Vietnamese patriotic societies to terminate French rule, given the current gap in strength between them and the French colonisers. However, the rise of Japan with its victory in the Russo-Japanese War enabled Phan Bội Châu to envision the possibility of allying with Japan to resist against France under the banner of the race struggle between the yellow and white races. Although his attempts to seek military assistance from the Japanese authorities eventually failed, there was no doubt that the nationalist discourse that Phan employed in his writings played a significant role in inciting extremist anti-French sentiment among Vietnamese people.

In March and April of 1908, a large-scale tax revolt erupted in central Annam, which took the Protectorate government several weeks to pacify. According to the following investigations, the French authorities confessed that those nationalistic, anti-French works which were composed by exile nationalists such as Phan Bội Châu and Phan Chu Trinh had been able to exploit "real

and imagined grievances among the local population”, which became a serious threat to the French (Munholland 658). Two months later, some Vietnamese nationalists attempted to poison the garrison in Hanoi. This plot was later proved to be linked to nationalist leaders abroad (Munholland 659).

Retired from the Protectorate government, Hoàng Cao Khải could not lead the Protectorate troops and militarily suppress these nationalist riots any longer like what he did in pacifying the Can Vương movement two decades ago. In the battlefield of ideology, however, Hoàng Cao Khải, as one of the most influential scholars who collaborated with the French, still served the French colonisers and spared no effort to justify their colonisation in Vietnam. His justification can be divided into three arguments. First, through comparing the imbalance in technological strength between France and Vietnam in the current period with that between China and Vietnam in previous times, Hoàng Cao Khải pointed out it was futile, if not impossible, to resist the French given the current condition of Vietnam. Second, Hoàng refuted Phan’s employment of the discourse of race struggle and his advocacy of allying with Japan. Last, through his analysis of the nature of French colonialism and the current geopolitical circumstances, Hoàng attempted to prove that collaborating with France was imperative for Vietnamese people at the present stage.

### **3.1 The impossibility of resisting against the French: an analysis based on aspects of technology and finance**

In *Việt sử kính* Hoàng Cao Khải regards the recent nationalist riots as the result of the pernicious influence of the Russo-Japanese War:

Five years ago, because our people knew about the victory of Japan over Russia, they believed that a small country could fight against a big one, and a weaker race

could rise up against the stronger. That was why they started founding underground societies and parties to agitate our people and even went plotting against the French in foreign countries (Hoàng 1909, 18)<sup>79</sup>

Hoàng Cao Khải argues, however, neither the agitation within the borders nor the conspiracy abroad could fundamentally threaten French colonisation. He refutes those who questioned why Vietnam as a country with 336,000 square kilometres of land and a population of more than 15 million could not restore its autonomy, and those who intended to draw the precedents of Ngô Quyền and Lê Lợi in chasing the Chinese colonisers away in the tenth and fifteenth century to prove the ability of Vietnam to defend its sovereignty. Hoàng points out that all of these arguments failed to recognise the fact that the technology which the French now used to rule Vietnam had been far more advanced than what China employed before:

In the past, China and our country shared the same educational system and the same level of technology. Although China is situated near our country, communications between the two countries have always been inconvenient (Hoàng 19).

This inconvenience, believes Hoàng, resulted in the high expenses for the Chinese troops to conquer and govern Vietnam. By contrast, although France was geographically separated from Vietnam, it could dispatch colonial troops from India or even from Africa to Vietnam within fifteen days simply through a telegram. Besides, the development of the traffic and communication tools from the steamship to the submarine, from the train to the aircraft, and from the telegraphy with wires to wireless communication would further enable France to enhance its control over the colonies. Facing these facts, Hoàng reasons “how can our outmoded technology expect to fight against these modern technologies (Hoàng 19)?”

---

<sup>79</sup> Translation referred to Lam 2000, 158.

The above argument of Hoàng Cao Khải, to a large extent, continues the logic in the letter he sent to Phan Dinh Phung. As discussed in the second chapter, by comparing the wide gap in strength between the colonisers and the colonised, Hoàng Cao Khải demonstrates the futility of resistance and the necessity of cooperation. The only difference is, Hoàng in this period did not fully base his argument on the traditional Confucian discourse which merely stresses the benevolence of the ruler for the people, but chose to draw on the cases of other countries to justify the current French colonisation and persuade his compatriots to accept French rule:

Apart from technology, the financial aspects should be taken into consideration when discussing modern warfare. In the past ten years, Transvaal in South Africa fought against England for more than two years; England spent more than three hundred million pounds. The war is still going on and becoming increasingly vicious. In the end, Transvaal was made a protectorate of England. Six years ago Japan fought against Russia, spending more than one million yen a day on military supplies. Japan is a poor and frugal country, so spending such high expenditures had definitely exhausted its financial resources. Eventually, it had to accept the conditions for peace without imposing any war reparations upon Russia (Hoàng 20).<sup>80</sup>

Considering that Vietnam was even poorer than Japan, Hoàng continues reasoning “how can we expect to challenge a rich country like France?” Yet the victory of Japan in the Russo-Japanese War still gave rise to a new optimism for those who ventured into foreign countries (especially Japan) to agitate against France. Holding the banner of “race struggle”, they insisted that Japan, as a country sharing the race and same writing system with Vietnam, would assist them to fight against the white French colonisers. Based on the current geopolitical

---

<sup>80</sup> Translation referred to Lam 2000, 158-59.

circumstance and his perception of the global colonial system, however, Hoàng argues that seeking Japanese or Chinese assistance is tantamount to taking poison.

### 3.2 Refuting the discourse of “race struggle”

The discourse of race struggle, as has been discussed in the third chapter, held that only the yellow race had the “potential” to compete with the white race. Therefore, as long as the yellow race could unite together and make the “potential” abilities into practical ones, then they would have the opportunity to defeat the white invaders and defend their national sovereignties. For Hoàng Cao Khải, however, this is absolutely an illusion. According to him, the current international relations can be simplified as the relations between the colonisers and the colonised. Contrary to the past, a powerful country in the present system colonising a colony is not for the sake of boasting about having so many subordinate lands any longer. After obtaining a colony, they simply settle their people in it and bring their manufactured goods to be sold there. Thus, the closer the colonial country to its colony, the faster the people can arrive in the colony and the more numerous the goods (Hoàng 20). For Hoàng Cao Khải, this was a universal process in which race does not play a critical role. Hoàng suggests his compatriots think of how China and Japan treated the countries of the same race:

Look at the Chinese who emigrated to our country. They simply came to settle down here; they did not enjoy any advantageous position, and yet they captured all the commercial businesses from our people. Again take a look at Japan. It has colonised Korea only for five or six years, and already Korea has encountered untold difficulties and sufferings. What can we expect of the people who belong to the same race or who share with us the same written system (Hoàng 20)?<sup>81</sup>

---

<sup>81</sup> Translation referred to Lam 2000, 159.



To some extent, Hoàng Cao Khải's refutation of the discourse of "race struggle" is inextricable from his fundamentalist interpretation of Social Darwinism. In this interpretation, the world is homogenised as a structure of power and the development of history is reduced to a process in which "the superior wins while the inferior is defeated" ("優勝劣敗"). In this process, the superior constantly expand their rule over the inferior while the weak have to rely on the strong for their survival and development. For Hoàng Cao Khải, the current colonial system established in Asia is a manifestation of this structure of power. Within this system, the "good race" ("優種") is synonymous with the superior and the colonisers while the "weak race" ("劣種") refers to the inferior and the colonised. Therefore, the fate of the inferior will never be changed regardless of how the intimacy between the inferior and the superior was in the realms of culture, ethnicity, or race.

As Hoàng illustrates in the above quotation, although both Japanese and Korean belong to the yellow race and share the same Sinitic culture, it had been proved that Japan did not intend to assist weak Korea to get rid of its backward conditions as some people had anticipated. By contrast, taking the geopolitical advantage, Japanese colonised and exploited Korea like what those invaders of the white race had done in other places of Asia. Therefore, no matter how the discourse of "race struggle" is constructed, it will never fundamentally threaten the current global colonial system as long as the gap in strength remains between two given countries.

Being clear about the oppressive essence of the colonial system, however, Hoàng never thinks about overturning it. For him, it is inevitable that a weak country is colonised by the strong, however, it is also the colonisation that renders the inferior the opportunity to acquire strength and independence. To seize this opportunity, implies Hoàng, there are two aspects that the weak country should take into consideration. On the one hand, the inferior country is

supposed to accept the governance of the superior instead of resisting against it. As he argued in *Việt sử kính*,

Is assimilation a good thing? Or, is it bad? If we [the weak] can actively assimilate ourselves into the superior, it is not impossible for us to become strong; Otherwise, if we are forced to be assimilated, there will be no chance to escape from annihilation (Hoàng 1909 40).

On the other hand, among the colonial countries, the weak country should select, if possible, the most appropriate one and accept its governance. As a collaborator with the French, Hoàng Cao Khải believed the French were the best rulers for the Vietnamese people.

### **3.3 The “fortune” of Vietnam to be protected by France**

Different from those anti-French activists including Phan Bội Châu who regarded French colonisation as the major obstacle to the development and independence of Vietnam, Hoàng Cao Khải argued that only by relying on France could Vietnam have a prosperous future. He provides two reasons for this proposition.

The first reason is based on his perception of the particularities of French colonisation. According to him, all colonial countries are interested in settling their own people in their colonies while France is an exception:

Look at England and Prussia; the people they send to their colonies are the poor ones, and poor people, once settled in the colonies, they never nurtured the hope of one day returning back to their homeland. As for France, her people are prosperous; they are used to their bourgeois way of life. In fact, ever since Napoleon the First, French laws guarantee equal shares in inheritance, so that sons and daughters receive equal part; they all can afford to live in comfort, even in

affluence. Precisely because of the comfort and affluence of their way of life, even [French] farmers and businessmen, let alone civil servants, will return to their countries after a stay of about three to four years in the colony. This shows us that the French, in acquiring their colonies, simply made their colonies places for entertainment (遊賞園) instead of permanent settlements (長住舍) (Hoàng 1909, 22).<sup>82</sup>

Obviously, Hoàng's above argument is problematic. He excessively exaggerates the difference between the French colonisers and other colonisers and subjectively postulates that the particularity of the French will definitely bring some "good results" to the colonised. After all, being an affluent country does not necessarily mean it will not exploit the colony. In the case of Vietnam, as Phan Bội Châu denounces in *Việt Nam vong quốc sử*, the French imposed at least nineteen kinds of tax in Vietnam varying from land taxes to tobacco taxes, which had weighed heavily on all Vietnamese people.<sup>83</sup>

The second reason is based on Hoàng's concern about the current geopolitical situation. According to him, of all countries that surround Vietnam, some have become particularly powerful; some are on the way to become powerful, so that in order to defend Indochina, Vietnam needs a greater number of troops, which will require a greater amount of money (Hoàng 22). Considering that Vietnam is too poor to afford these expenses, collaborating with a trustworthy country to maintain the current situation will thus be a wise choice. Among those colonial countries, asserts Hoàng, France is the best one:

By now France has already spent approximately seven hundred million francs in conquering Vietnam, however, the benefits it reaped from Vietnam do not amount to that much. In this condition, if it proposes to bring in more troops and therefore

---

<sup>82</sup> Translation referred to Lam 2000, 160.

<sup>83</sup> See Phan 1957, 527-533.

spend more money in our country, the French parliament will not agree to it. In recent years the French government have all declared that France and Vietnam should unite together to form a company. That is why they apply the policy of association with our people, aiming at satisfying us so as to enlist our support for the defence of our own country. Hence, isn't it the good fortune of our country to be protected by France (Hoàng 22)?

For Hoàng Cao Khải, more than “protection”, the French colonisation will eventually enable Vietnam to regain its independence. Similar to Phan Bội Châu, Hoàng regards the enlightenment of people as the prerequisite for national independence. However, he emphasises this “enlightenment” has to be dominated by the French. In Hoàng's narrative, the French are portrayed as kind teachers and generous bosses. On the one hand, they established the modern educational system to enlighten the Vietnamese people; on the other hand, the policy of association they implemented gave those who had acquired specialised knowledge and those who were skilful in their craft the opportunities to be recruited in the colonial government and to be employed in their own professions. According to Hoàng,

Although the French hold the sovereignty [of our country], our people constitute the rank and file both in the political field and in the various professions.

Everywhere we hold the majority; the French are but a mere minority (Hoàng 23).

With the progress of modern education in the following decades, Hoàng believes Vietnamese people will become as intelligent as the French. According to him, it is relatively easy for an intelligent race to govern over a stupid one, but it will be difficult even for an intelligent race to dominate another intelligent race. Hence, eventually the French will give Vietnam the autonomy back and it will only protect Vietnam in foreign affairs (Hoàng 23).

#### 4. Chapter conclusion

Employing the comparative method, this chapter investigated the discourse that Hoàng Cao Khải manipulated to justify French colonisation through his writings of *Việt sử*, and attempted to demonstrate their dialogic relations with Phan Bội Châu's *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo*. In general, Hoàng Cao Khải challenges Phan's narrative of Vietnamese history in two aspects. First, Hoàng in his writings depicts Vietnamese history as a consistent and gradual process towards civilisation. For him, civilisation is a cosmopolitan concept which can be represented by different countries in various times. Different from Phan Bội Châu, Hoàng believes the transition of the model of civilisation from China to France in the late nineteenth century did not mark the primary rupture between past and present. By contrast, he views this as just one of many similar transitions he observes through an outlook which emphasized the ongoing continuity of Vietnamese national history since pre-modern times.

Second, contrasting with Phan Bội Châu who regarded the previous anti-foreign movements in Vietnamese history as the manifestation of the national character of the Vietnamese people, Hoàng Cao Khải argues it is necessary to place incidents of anti-foreign resistance in their given historical contexts and analyse the policies that the occupiers implemented. On the one hand, employing the analytical framework of the dichotomy between "universal principle" and "brute force", Hoàng indicates that most of the anti-foreign deeds of the Vietnamese people in past times were merely contingent responses to inappropriate governance based on the "brute force". On the other hand, he utilises the ideas of Social Darwinism to reinterpret the connotation of "universal principle". By doing so, Hoàng justifies the behaviour of those colonisers who employed "brute force" in the process of disseminating so-called "universal principle" and civilisation.

Last, based on his analysis of the global colonial system and the geopolitical circumstances of the early twentieth century Asia, Hoàng Cao Khải refuted Phan Bội Châu's proposition of seeking assistance from those countries of ethnic closeness and sharing the same race with Vietnamese to resist against the French colonisation. For Hoàng, the French "protection" would not only help Vietnam maintain its political status in the present world system, eventually, it would also enable Vietnam to restore its independence in the future.

## **Chapter Five: Concluding remarks**

This thesis has scrutinised the historical writings of Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải. It argues that despite the difference of their political stances, both of them endeavoured to construct the past of Vietnam as a tool to justify their respective political propositions. They utilised Social Darwinism, that is, the idea of interracial competition and the principle of survival of the fittest to the realm of society, as the theoretical basis in their narration and interpretation of Vietnamese history. Through the prism of Social Darwinism, both Phan and Hoàng realised and acknowledged the backwardness of Vietnam and stressed the necessity of reform. In the following section, three issues in their historiography will be highlighted: the nature of the historic past of Vietnam, the subjectivity of the Vietnamese people, and the status of Vietnam in future global affairs.

### **1. The nature of the historic past of Vietnam**

Phan Bội Châu is inclined to view the Vietnamese people and society over long stretches of time from remote antiquity to the late nineteenth century as inherently barbarous. In his historical narrative, the Vietnamese people during this period were ignorant of competition and their civil rights were not sufficiently fostered, which caused a deadlock of Vietnamese history. National sovereignty was not sustained through dynastic successions but was instead frequently lost to foreign invaders. It was the advent of the French colonisers and the introduction of Western civilisation that marked the “rupture” between the past and present of Vietnam and ushered in the “Messianic” moment for the Vietnamese people to evolve into a civilised nation.

Different from Phan Bội Châu, Hoàng Cao Khải emphasised the inherent continuity of Vietnamese history. In his narrative, the history of Vietnam is depicted as a gradual and consistent process towards civilisation. For Hoàng Cao Khải, civilisation is a cosmopolitan concept, of which the criteria is globally applicable. Because of its superiority in competition, China in the previous millennia conquered Vietnam and disseminated civilisation to the barbarous Vietnamese people. Under the governance of China, Vietnamese people were racially and culturally assimilated into Chinese and Vietnam became the domain of civilisation. However, with the decay of China in the late nineteenth century, the model of civilisation transited to France. This transition, argues Hoàng, did not mark the rupture but demonstrated the inherent continuity of Vietnamese history.

## **2. The subjectivity of the Vietnamese people**

For Phan Bội Châu, there is no doubt that the Vietnamese people have their cultural and political subjectivity. This subjectivity, according to Phan's historical narrative, was obtained through the struggles against the Chinese invaders over the past centuries. To provide a testimony to this subjectivity, Phan Bội Châu constructs a genealogy of anti-foreign heroes of Vietnam, in which he includes those Vietnamese people who participated in resistance against foreign invasions and the defence of national sovereignty. He regards the "anti-foreign" spirit manifested in these struggles as an inextricable part of the national character of the Vietnamese people.

In contrast to Phan, Hoàng Cao Khải is inclined to believe that Vietnamese people lack collective subjectivity. Politically, as a weak nation, they were always under the rule of foreigners. Culturally, the Vietnamese people consistently kept learning and accepting the culture of foreign rulers. Their resistance to foreign rulers was not motivated by what Phan Bội Châu



sees as an “anti-foreign” national character but was rather a contingent response to inappropriate policies that immoral officials implemented in a given period.

### **3. The status of Vietnam in future global affairs**

Despite their opposite attitudes towards French colonialism, both Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải believed that the accomplishment of modernisation is the prerequisite for Vietnam to restore its autonomy and independence. Nevertheless, they have different opinions on the international status of Vietnam after modernisation.

In Phan Bội Châu’s narrative, with the success of the anti-colonial struggle and the accomplishment of modernisation, Vietnam will replace the hegemonic status of France in Southeast Asia. Not only will it restore the lost national sovereignty, but also it will use the powerful force to conquer other weak states and exact revenge on France. Therefore, it seems fair to assume that albeit Phan Bội Châu insisted his anti-colonialist stance, he did not intend to challenge or subvert the current colonial order. In other words, a modernised Vietnam in Phan’s expectation is just a replica of the Western colonial empire. As for Hoàng Cao Khải, even if Vietnam becomes modernised and powerful, it will not challenge the dominant status of France in Southeast Asia. Instead, Vietnam and France will remain their cooperative relations, that is, albeit France will still hold the sovereignty of Vietnam, domestically it will grant Vietnamese people considerable autonomy. Apparently, Hoàng’s description of the essence of a modernised Vietnam is based on his theory of the transition of the models of civilisation. According to the latter, Vietnam, as a weak state, was and will always be like a humble “student” following the representatives of civilisation.

Despite the above-mentioned nuances, their conception of the future of Vietnam, to a great extent, provides a testimony to what Pore terms the “pro-imperial” orientation in the

thought of East Asian intellectuals. According to him, when Vietnam gained autonomy from the Chinese Empire, direct control from the outside was removed, but the China-centred world order maintained significant influence on Vietnamese intellectuals and facilitated their understanding of the colonial order in the late nineteenth century (Pore 2006, 298). For them, albeit France replaced China and became the centre of the colonial system, it did not change the hierarchical structure of that order. As this thesis demonstrates, the world that both Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải envisioned is established upon asymmetrical relations of power, in which the central place will be taken by the most powerful state while the status of others is determined by their respective national strength.

To conclude, by scrutinising the historical writings of Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải, this thesis had attempted to illustrate the complexity of their thought and further to enrich academic discussions about early modern Vietnamese intellectual history. Here, one limitation should be pointed out, that is, all the works of Phan Bội Châu and Hoàng Cao Khải that are referred to in this article were written before 1914. Some researchers have noticed and investigated other works of Phan Bội Châu written after the World War One (1914-1918), and demonstrated the shift of Phan from a firm reformist appealing for modernisation to a critic who began to reconsider the essence of so-called “modern civilisation”.<sup>84</sup> As for Hoàng Cao Khải, currently, few scholars touch upon the transition of his thought on Western civilisation and French colonisation after 1914. With more original materials being discovered and collated, however, it is possible for scholars to fill this blank in the future.

---

<sup>84</sup> See Luo’s analysis on Phan Bội Châu’s scientific novels *Guo Wai Guo* (國外國 literally, “The Lost Wonderland”) and *Yuan Guo* (猿國 literally, “The State of Apes”) (Luo 2012, 121-123).

## Bibliography

### A. Sino-Vietnamese Primary Sources

- Hoàng, Cao Khải. *Việt sử kính* 越史鏡 (Mirror of Viet history). Hanoi: Vietnamese Nôm Preservation Foundation (NLVNPF-0118, R.1822), 1909.  
<http://lib.nomfoundation.org/collection/1/volume/130/>
- *Việt sử yếu* 越史要 (Essentials of Viet history). Hanoi: Nôm Preservation Foundation (NLVNPF-0117-01, 0017-02, 0017-03, R.173-175), 1914.  
<http://lib.nomfoundation.org/collection/1/volume/127/>
- Phan, Bội Châu. *Phan Bội Châu toàn tập* 潘佩珠全集 (The complete works of Phan Bội Châu), volume 1-3. Edited by Chương Thâu. Huế: Nhà Xuất Bản Thuận Hóa, 2000.
- *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* 越南國史考 (A study of Vietnam's national history). In *Phan Bội Châu toàn tập* vol. 3: 420-518.
- *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* 越南亡國史 (History of the Loss of Vietnam). In *Zhong Fa Zhanzheng* 中法戰爭 (Archives of Sino-French War), edited by Shao Xunzheng etc..Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1957.
- *Wenming lun* 文明論 (On civilisation). In *Phan Bội Châu toàn tập* vol.1: 333-338.
- *Zhe lun* 哲論 (On Philosophy). In *Phan Bội Châu toàn tập* vol.1: 339-342.
- Nguyễn, Khắc Xuyên, *Mục lục phân tích tạp chí nam phong 1917-1934* (Index to Contents of the Journal Nam Phong, 1917-1934). Saigon: Bộ văn hóa giáo dục, 1968.

### B. Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Benedict O. *Imagined Communities: Reflections On The Origin And Spread Of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso, 2006.
- Anthony, D. Smith. “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Revival.” In Geoffrey Hosking and George Schopflin eds., *Myths and Nationhood*. London: Hurst&Company, 1997.
- Baldanza, Kathlene. *Ming China and Vietnam: Negotiating Borders in Early Modern Asia*. Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Chen, Li. “Lun faguo zhimin tongzhi xia de yuenan jiaoyu” (Education in Vietnam under French colonial rule). *World History* 5 (2005): 67-76.
- Davis, Bradley Camp. *Imperial Bandits: Outlaws and Rebels in the China-Vietnam Borderlands*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017.

- Duara, Prasenjit. *Rescuing History From The Nation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Duiker, William J. *The Rise Of Nationalism In Vietnam, 1900-1941*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976.
- Dutton, George Edson., Jayne Susan. Werner, and John K. Whitmore. *Sources of Vietnamese Tradition*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Fukuzawa, Yukichi. *An Outline Of A Theory Of civilisation*. Tokyo: Sophia University, 1976.
- Goscha, Christopher. *The Penguin History Of Modern Vietnam*. London: Penguin Books, 2016.
- Heather, Streets-Salter. *World War One In Southeast Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Huey, Rebecca. "Protest in Practice: The University of California Irvine's Place in the Anti-Vietnam War Movement from 1965-1970." *Archival Research Fellowship Papers* (2012) : 1-15. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/37d0v03b>.
- Jansen, Marius Berthus. *The Japanese and Sun Yat-sen*. Cambridge and Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954.
- Karl, Rebecca E. *Staging The World: Chinese Nationalism At The Turn Of The Twentieth Century*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002.
- "Creating Asia: China In The World At The Beginning Of The Twentieth Century". *The American Historical Review* 103 no.4 (1998): 1096-1118.
- Kelley, Liam C. *Beyond The Bronze Pillars*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005.
- "From Moral Exemplar To National Hero: The Transformations Of Trần Hưng Đạo And The Emergence Of Vietnamese Nationalism." *Modern Asian Studies* 49 no.06 (2015): 1963-1993.
- "Hoàng Cao Khải's Social Darwinist Ideas," Le Minh Khai's SEAsian History (blog), July 15, 2012, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2012/07/15/hoang-cao-khais-social-darwinist-idea>. (Accessed on 14 December 2018.)
- "Hoàng Cao Khải and Unilineal Evolution," Le Minh Khai's SEAsian History (blog), October 11, 2012, <https://leminhkhai.wordpress.com/2012/10/11/hoang-cao-khai-and-unilineal-evolution>. (Accessed on 14 December 2018.)
- Lam, Truong Buu. *Colonialism Experienced: Vietnamese Writings On Colonialism, 1900-1931*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.
- *Patterns of Vietnamese Response To Foreign Intervention, 1858-1900*. New Haven: Yale University, 1967.

- Li, Tana. "An Alternative Vietnam? The Nguyen Kingdom In The Seventeenth And Eighteenth Centuries." *Journal Of Southeast Asian Studies* 29 no.01 (1998) : 111-121.
- Liang, Qichao. *Yinbingshi wenji leibian* (Collected writings from the Ice-Drinker's Studio). Tokyo: Shimogoro Shimogawa, 1904.
- Luo, Jingwen. "A Study on Phan Boi Chau and His Chinese Novels," PhD dissertation, National Cheng Kung University, 2012.
- Marr, David G. *Vietnamese Anti-colonialism 1885-1925*. Berkeley: Los Angeles, London, University of California, 1971.
- *Vietnamese Tradition On Trial, 1920-1945*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Meng, Ke. *Mencius*. Chinese Text Project. <https://ctext.org/mengzi/jin-xin-ii/ens>.
- Miller, Edward. "David Marr's Vietnamese Revolution." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 48 no.01 (2017): 135-142.
- Munholland, J. Kim. "The French Response To The Vietnamese Nationalist Movement, 1905-14". *The Journal Of Modern History* 47 no.4 (1975): 655-675.
- Onogawa, Hidemi. *Wangqing zhengzhi sixiang yanjiu* (A study of the political thought in late Qing). Translated by Lin Mingde and Huang Fuqing. Taipei: Shibao wenhua, 1982.
- Phan, Bội Châu. *Overtured Chariot: The Autobiography of Phan Boi Chau*. Translated by Vinh Sinh and Nicholas Wickenden. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1999.
- "Prison Notes." In *Reflections From Captivity*, 3-52. Edited by David G. Marr. Translated by Christopher Jenkins and Tran Khanh Tuyet. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1978.
- Philip, G. Altbach. Review of *French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa* by Gail Paradise Kelly and David H. Kelly. *Comparative Education Review* 45, no. 3 (2001): 419-421.
- Pore, William. "Literati Voices on the Loss of National Independence in Korea and Vietnam: A Transnational Perspective, 1890–1920," PhD dissertation, The George Washington University, 2007.
- Shen, Sung-Chiao. "Imagine China: Construction of the Genealogies of Chinese 'National Heroes' in Late Qing." *Bulletin of the Institute of Modern History Academia Sinica*, no. 33 (2000): 77-158.
- Shiraishi, Masaya. "Phan Bội Châu in Japan." *The Vietnam forum : a review of Vietnamese culture*, no. 13 (1990): 91-121.
- Simon, Walter M. "Herbert Spencer And 'The Social Organism'". *Journal Of The History Of Ideas* 21 no.2 (1960): 294-299.
- Spencer, Herbert. *The Principles of Biology*. London and Edinburg: Williams and Norgate, 1864.

- *The Evolution of Society : Selections from Herbert Spencer's Principles of Sociology*. Translated by Robert Leonard Carneiro. University of Chicago Press, 1967. Reprint, Midway: 1974.
- Vinh, Sinh. *Phan Boi Chau and The Dong-Du Movement*. New Haven: Yale University, 1988.
- Woodside, Alexander B. *Community And Revolution In Modern Vietnam*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976.
- Xu, Jilin. "Social Darwinism In Modern China." *Journal of Modern Chinese History* 6, no.2 (2012): 182-197.
- Yang, Ruisong. *Bingfu, Huanghuo Yu Shui Shi: "xifang" Shiye De Zhongguo Xingxiang Yu Jindai Zhongguo Guozu Lunshu Xiangxiang* (Sick man, yellow peril and sleeping lion: the image of China and the discursive imagination of modern Chinese nation under the perspective of the "West"). Taipei: Zhengda Chubanshe, 2010.
- Yang, Zhende. "Bohua xin guojia: shixi panpeizhu hanwen zhenglun lide minzu zhuyi" (Designing a new state: On nationalism in Phan Bội Châu's Chinese political articles). In *Dongya shiyu zhong de Yuenan* (Vietnam in east Asian perspective), edited by Chung Tsai-Chun, 125-170. Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2015.
- Zhu, Cheng. "Liyue wenming yu shenghuo zhengzhi" (The civilisation of rites and music and the politics of everyday life). *Journal of Sun Yat-sen University (social science edition)* 54, no.6 (2014): 100-111.