

From Confucianism to Nationalism: Fictive Kinship and the Making of the Vietnamese¹

*Trong Duong TRAN**

Abstract

This paper examines how political discourses have changed as scholars seek answers regarding the origins of the Vietnamese people. The origin(s) of the Vietnamese people has long been a subject of debate. Confucian scholars from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries claimed themselves to be descendants of Han people, the successors of the Han civilization. The colonial scholars (from 1860 to 1945), when using the theory of race, anthropology, and social evolution theory, thought that the Annam people were a hybrid breed, still in the process of evolution, and needed to be enlightened and civilized. Indigenous scholars combined the Han ideology of Confucianism and the ideology of the French to claim that the Vietnamese were the descendants of the Hùng Vương. This ideological transformation was aimed at calling for patriotism, fighting against the French, and defending the nation from colonial domination. The results reveal that the process of changing paradigms in Confucian thought through colonialism led to the formation of fictive kinship and the spread of nationalism in Vietnam.

Keywords: Confucianism, race, fictive kinship, nationalism, invented tradition

Od konfucijanizma do nacionalizma: izmišljeno sorodstvo in oblikovanje Vietnamcev

Izvilleček

Članek raziskuje, kako so se na podlagi znanstvenih raziskovanj porekla Vietnamcev spremenili politični diskurzi. Izvor(i) Vietnamcev je tako že dolgo predmet razprave. Konfucijanski učenjaki so med petnajstim in devetnajstim. stoletjem trdili, da so potomci Hanov in nasledniki hanske civilizacije. Kolonialni učenjaki (med letoma 1860 in 1945) so ob uporabi rasne teorije, antropologije in teorije družbene evolucije menili, da so ljudje Annam hibridna rasa, ki je še vedno v procesu evolucije, zaradi česar jo je treba civilizirano razsvetljevati. Domači učenjaki so združili hansko ideologijo konfucianizma in ideologijo Francozov; tako so lahko zatrjevali, da so Vietnamci potomci Hunga

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* Trong Duong TRAN, Institute for Sino-Nom Studies,
Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, Vietnam.
E-mail: trantrongduonghn@gmail.com



Vuonga. Ta ideološka preobrazba je bila usmerjena k pozivanju k domoljubju, boju proti Francozom in obrambi naroda pred kolonialno prevlado. Izsledki raziskave razkrivajo, da je proces spreminjanja paradigem v konfucijanski misli skozi kolonializem privedel do oblikovanja izmišljenega sorodstva in širjenja nacionalizma v Vietnamu.

Ključne besede: konfucianizem, rasa, izmišljeno sorodstvo, nacionalizem, izumljena tradicija

“Người Việt”: Research on the Archaeology of Knowledge

“Người Việt” (lit. “Việt people”) is a concept that has been commonly used in Vietnam for years. It is used in tandem with the words “Việt tộc”, “Kinh tộc”, or “dân tộc Kinh” (ethnographic terms). All of these terms should be distinguished from the concepts of “dân tộc Việt Nam” (“the nation of Vietnam”, “người Việt Nam” (i.e. “the people of Vietnam”) as political and social concepts. These terms represent a political discourse which intends to homogenize distinct groups of peoples into a single historical construct that aims to obscure multidimensional differences (hidden within various contradictions which people must then cover—from issues of culture and history to political authority). We can find countless ways in which these concepts are hazily expressed, from popular newspaper articles to scholarly research. This shows that the Vietnamese-speaking community has always used the concept of “người Việt” in different intellectual contexts, despite the fact that “người Việt” have many different origins, such as groups of Chinese, Chăm residents, and so on. They have been Vietnamized to receive a co-origin and new privileges from the dominant ethnic group. The community of “Vietnamese”, which accounts for over 80% of the population, worked to create a single identical voice regarding its roots in accordance with the ideology of the times, based on both science and pure faith. They thus held a belief that all “Vietnamese” share the same blood, all belong to the race of the Dragon and Fairy (con Rồng cháu Tiên, i.e. Vietnamese), and all are descendants of the Hùng Kings.²

When researching history, people often only pay attention to the events that they wish to find, and leave out the “historical concepts” which reveal what

2 The “Dragon” means Lạc Long Quân (貉龍君), while the “Fairy” is Âu Cơ (媼姬). Lạc Long Quân was a dragon king, living under the sea. Âu Cơ is a fairy, living on a mountain. Lạc Long Quân married Âu Cơ and gave birth to Hùng Vương. See *Huaxia* lineage in *Đại Việt* (Nguyễn 1435, 1–2; Ngô 1479, 1; Kelley 2012, 96; 2015b, 165). Hùng Vương now is considered by the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to be the national ancestor, and the Vietnamese claim to be the race of Dragon and Fairy.

contemporary people thought and which tools they used for thinking. A basic operation of historiography and intellectual archaeology is to use linguistic remnants to recognize ideological and political context; language and script are historical sources which make explicit that which the ancients thought. We know that language is the point at which human thinking exists and is constructed. Hence when studying history people are forced to use language traces to analyse the subject's discourse, knowledge and power, as well as the channels it uses (Foucault 1972).

In particular, what concepts have Confucian and colonial historiographies used to refer to the community of people we now call “Vietnamese”? In the first example, Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940)³ in *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (1909) called the Vietnamese “people of our country” in opposition to “European people” and “Japanese people”. In a second example, historiographies of the Nguyễn dynasty (1802–1945) self-identify those who speak the Vietnamese language and write literary Sinitic as “Han people”, whereas the Chinese of the time were called “Qing people”, and those Chinese who fled to and lived in Vietnam called “Ming people” (Choi 2004, 136–38). In the third example, Ngô Sĩ Liên (1479) uses the paired concepts of “Our Việt's Talented People” and “Han people”. The change of vocabulary/terminology is an expression of ideological change. This is the product of a process of cultural exposure or epistemological mutation, which may also be the result of a forced political push. The unseen coordinators behind these surface disturbances are various ideologies, political discourses, and anonymous agents.

The results show that, from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries, Confucian scholars with the view of “no inferiority to *Zhonghua*” (無遜中華, *Vô tổn Trung Hoa*) thought that they were the descendants of Thần Nông, and of the same blood lineage as “Han people”. The political model (envisioned according to a family model) is based on an intellectual foundation of orthodoxy (which is, in turn, based on blood lineage). They believed that they had blood ties with an ancestor who had existed for centuries. When exposed to fields of scientific colonialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the concept of ideological fictive kinship continued to flourish in the intellectual contexts of racism, Social Darwinism, and colonialism, and become part of the native intellectuals' concept of “nation”. They used the fictive kinship and nationalism ideology in combination with other ideas (for example, Marxism) to serve the ends of anti-colonialism, anti-feudalism and national independence.

3 Phan Bội Châu (1867–1940) was a famous Confucianist, and a Doctor of the Nguyễn dynasty. He advocated Japanese aid to help with expelling France, he thought that the Japanese were Asians with “red blood-yellow skin”, who had the same enemy as the Europeans with “white skin-yellow hair”.

Fictive Kinship in Confucian Historiography

Here, I will analyse the Confucian historiographical discourse by exploiting the linguistic evidence in *Nam Việt Dư Địa Chí* by Nguyễn Trãi (1435) and *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư* by Ngô Sĩ Liên (1479), the first two “standard books” to mention the origin of “Việt” (越). The relevant content is summarized as follows: Kinh Dương Vương (4th generation descendant of Thần Nông, Đế Minh’s son) was king in Vietnam (粵南) and the primordial ancestor of the Hundred Yue (百 粵, Bách Việt).⁴ Kinh Dương Vương married Vụ Tiên and gave birth to Lạc Long Quân. Lạc Long Quân married Âu Cơ and gave birth to Hùng Vương. Hùng Vương was the king of Văn Lang and passed on the rulership for eighteen generations of descendants, all of whom took the same title of “Hung King” (Nguyễn 1435, 1–2; Ngô 1479, 1). The first text only uses concepts such as “Việt kingdom” (越國) or “Our Việt” (我越). The following text uses concepts such as “Talented men of Our Việt” (我越人才) and “Our Việt Kingdom” (我越國) in opposition to “Han people” (漢人).⁵ A political pedigree in *Đại Việt* was established to reinforce the Confucian government in a period of strong growth. The mandate of writing history came from the emperors, while the Confucianists were the historians responsible for writing the political and orthodox history of the ruling group. Ngô Sĩ Liên constructed a Han genealogy within the Confucian historiographical genre. The Confucian view considers that political history is the history of the ruling clans, and the first clans to rule the Vietnamese land was the Hồng Bàng. The Hồng Bàng chronicle is an historical invention, an invented tradition (Kelley 2012; Kelley 2015b). This work is a collection of myths regarding the national founder(s) of the political institutions of Han Confucianism combined with folklore and legends from the Tang era. This created tradition on the one hand creates the legitimacy and blood relation, the cultural link of *Đại Việt* in face of the Ming dynasty, while at the same time creating *Đại Việt*’s authority to invade Champa to the south.⁶

4 “Hundred Yue (Baiyue, Bách Việt) is a term that Chinese scribes used in antiquity to refer collectively to the many diverse peoples who inhabited the region to the south of the Yangzi River.” (Kelley 2012, 126)

5 後李琴仕至司隸校尉，張重為金城太守。則我越人才得與漢人同選者，李琴、李進有以開之也。(Ngô 1497, vol. 3 (卷之三), 6)

6 Thanks go to Prof. Ho Tai Hue Tam (Harvard University) for putting the idea of Champa into my head. Champa was an ancient kingdom ruled by the Cham, but gradually conquered by the Vietnamese. Today the Cham are one of 54 ethnic groups in Vietnam.

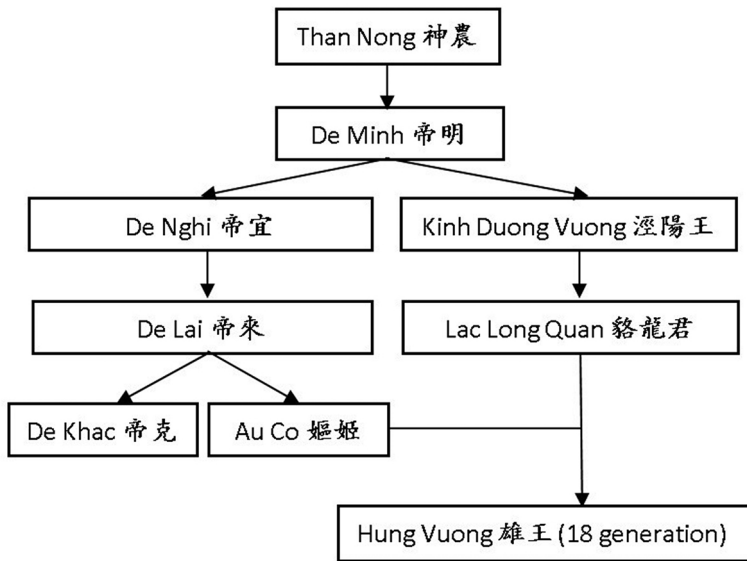


Table 1: Han lineage in Đại Việt (Nguyễn 1435, 1–2; Ngô 1479, 2)

The conception of the Vietnamese people having Han origins is a historical concept dating to the fifteenth century. Ngô Sĩ Liên's method was “using history to prove the Confucian canons” (以史證經) and, conversely, the content of Confucian classics (like *Shujing*) were recycled in order to continue and extend orthodox histories of Đại Việt. Ngô Sĩ Liên was of the opinion that the origin of Đại Việt's political regime in his time was derived from the political model in Confucian classics. Therefore, we see that several legendary ancient emperors of Huaxia were incorporated into Đại Việt's political lineage. Seeming to understand the fragility of this construction of invented tradition, Ngô Sĩ Liên commented that: “Putting full faith in historical books would rather be without books. I just transcribe the old story to pass on this point of doubt to future generations 信書不如無書，姑述其舊，以傳疑焉” (Ngô 1479, 3). Thus, Confucian ideology forced Ngô Sĩ Liên to create a table “Han lineage” for Đại Việt. However long the political history of Huaxia extended, the history of Đại Việt would also be of equal length. This was a Confucian political tradition constructed in order to consolidate the political authority of Đại Việt.

The consequence of imitating political models and Confucian ideology was this eventual historical identification and blood lineage identification. The people of Đại Việt were seen as a migrant branch of the Han people; the ancestors of Đại Việt were Han and the length of Han history was shared by Đại Việt. The heart

of this political lineage table (according to this family/clan model) is the concept of “orthodox lineage”. Orthodox lineage or legitimacy is established by blood lineage, historical traditions, authority traditions, state models, and Confucian ideology. Around these two nuclear concepts, many generations of Confucians have used a set of related ideas such as “Han civilization” – “Han music and Han rites” – “Tang regulations” – “Domain of Manifest Civility” (Kelley 2003; Trần 2013). The imitation of the state model of feudal dynasties in Đại Việt entailed the acceptance of blood relation. The literary Sinitic historical records from the twelfth century onwards show that, from the perspective that wherever manifest civility and ritual transformation was to be found, there too was the political centre, the royal dynasties from Lê to Nguyễn considered their kingdom to be a “central kingdom” with various self-appellations such as “central efflorescence” (中華), “central plains” (中州), and “central kingdom” (中國) (Trần 2013, 25–28). On the basis of the Confucian canon, these words can be used to describe any country so long as it uses the Sinitic language, Sinitic characters and Confucian classics (Woodside 1970, 1819).

	Confucian ideology 儒教		
Han music - rites 漢禮樂	Domain of Manifest Civility 文獻之邦		Tang regulations 唐制度
	Country 國家	Clan 家族	
	Orthodoxy 正統	Blood 血統	
	Han Civilization 漢文明		

Table 2: The Relation between orthodoxy and Blood in Confucian Ideology.

This self-identification culminated in the Nguyễn dynasty (19th century), when the emperors such as Gia Long (1802–1820), Minh Mạng (1820–1841), Thiệu Trị (1841–1847), and Tự Đức (1847–1883), along with Confucian historians, considered themselves as the legitimate descendants of the Han people and the worthiest successors of Confucian governance. The concept of “Viet people” was no longer useful. The documents of the Nguyễn dynasty (such as *Đại Nam nhất thống chí*, *Đại Nam thực lục*) all self-identify the “Vietnamese” as “Han people”, while groups of people from China are called by the names of the current dynasty, for example “Qing people”. What happened in the minds of the Confucianists of this period?

From the perspective of the *Hua-Yi* (華夷)⁷ paradigm, the Nguyễn dynasty viewed the Qing as being of barbarian origin, having invaded and conquered the Han peoples from the north. The Qing dynasty implemented various regulations which differed from the Confucian tradition in China, such as the music and rites or “caps and robes”. The Qing dynasty forced people to cut their hair and change their clothing according to the Manchurian customs. Hence, in the Nguyễn dynasty’s view, the Qing no longer preserved the inner essence of Huaxia. The Minh Mạng emperor (1820–1841) once explicitly stated that: “The ancestors of the Great Qing were Manchu ... Manchus are Yi ... Moreover, our kingdom of Nam Ha is a land of civilization, it can’t be compared to those (Manchu) people. 大清、其先滿人、... 夫滿、夷也、... 況我國南河文物之地非此之比。” (Quốc 1844, vol. 26, 23; Trần 2013, 29) Double criteria have been used to distinguish culture and people (*Hua-Yi*). The Qing dynasty was regarded as a court ruled by the Yi. Hence China was no longer regarded as the “central kingdom” but rather simply *Yi*, or barbarians. Meanwhile, according to the genealogy arranged by Ngô Sĩ Liên with its regulations of ritual transformation, caps and gowns, and Confucian classics, the Nguyễn dynasty asserted itself as the legitimate successor of the Han people (both in terms of bloodline and culture/politics). This is the reason why Confucian scholars of the Nguyễn dynasty (from kings to mandarins) all claimed to be Han. The centre of the civilized world had thus moved to Vietnam. Vietnam was the only place at that time to simultaneously preserve the bloodline of the Han as descendants of the Holy Emperor Thần Nông, study Confucian, Mencian, and Cheng-Zhu orthodoxy, and follow the regulations of the Zhou, Han, Tang, and Song dynasties (Kelley 2006, 317). The apparel of the Vietnamese ambassador’s delegation in 1841 and the *Yi bian* (夷辯) of Lý Văn Phức (1785–1849) in Minnan caused a great number of Qing scholars to weep at the sight of long vanished Han culture. On this particular occasion, there was even a local mandarin who cast his cap to the ground upon the realization that he had become a barbarian (Lý 1841, 18). The interesting point is that Lý Văn Phức was originally from Min and had emigrated to Vietnam, after which he became an official of the Nguyễn dynasty. His delegation trip was very much a return home, and his treatise demonstrated a strong political authority through its discourses of Confucian learning and blood lineage origins.

7 *Hua-Yi* (華夷) are two concepts used in classical Chinese documents. The Chinese identify themselves as *Hua* (Efflorescents), who is at the center of the world. And the other peoples living around them are called four *Yi* (i.e. barbarians four types live in four sides of the world). “Efflorescents were people who maintained what they believed was a sophisticated and interrelated system of ritual and governance that had first taken form in distant antiquity, a system that Confucius later looked back to as a model for the people of his day to follow. The Efflorescents judged the sophistication of their system to be superior to the practices of both the peoples on the peripheries of the Efflorescent culturo-ritual sphere and those within the Efflorescent realm who did not follow these practices, called ‘Barbarians’.” (Kelley 2006, 316)

The remarks of Minh Mạng and Lý Văn Phức are a clear stage for ideologies regarding the origins of the Viet people (i.e. the Han), and were used in the political arena. The discourse on *Hua-Yi* became the core tool for Vietnam to implement policies for ruling ethnic groups (within its territorial boundaries), as well as for relations with neighbouring countries (Champa, Siam, Laos, Java, ...). “Han people” were said to be located in the political centre of the region, while other groups were considered to be barbarians. Even Westerners (i.e., people from France, the Netherlands, Britain, Portugal, and so on) were, in the eyes of the Nguyễn dynasty “foreign barbarians” 洋夷, or were identified by racist terms describing physical characteristics such as “red hair” 紅毛, and were seen as peoples who were not exposed to transformative civilization. However, this ideology of Han origin came with a price when Vietnam came face-to-face with a non-Han civilization: that of the West. Once again, the perception of ethnic origins would totally transform within the context of East-West cultural clashes from the late nineteenth through early twentieth centuries.

Race and Fictive Kinship: The Making of Nationalism

At the end of the nineteenth century, France gradually used Western military and civilizational power to establish a ruling regime in Vietnam. This great political shock caused changes to the whole society and ideological life. After thousand years of knowing only Han culture, Vietnam has first clashed with a new civilization, a new scientific tradition and ideology which had displayed its authority. The Nguyễn dynasty, from the position of a Đại-Việt-Nam centre of Huaxia, followed the trail of the Qing dynasty when it was conquered and ruled by people they called “foreign barbarians”. The reality of being conquered was a severe challenge to a mindset which had been hardening for nearly two millennia. The Vietnamese were forced to think differently in accordance with the times, even though the old ideology remained. The Confucian concept of moral rule was gradually replaced by technocracy. Machines and trains would replace literary Sinitic literature and civil examinations. The concept of “Han people” would be replaced by new categories such as “*nation Annamite*” and “*peuple Vietnam*”. The outdated *Hua-Yi* theory would be replaced by anthropology. The ideology of orthodoxy and blood lineage would be interwoven in a complex combination with racism and Social Darwinism to form the idea of “nation”. Nationalism was created in many ways, from the prison system, the French Vietnamese school system, linguistic/cultural policy, the colonial museum system, the press system, and the doctrine of private printing, leading to the Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục school of patriotic Confucianists, the source of new books from China and Japan

(Nguyễn and Lương 2017). Confucianists who were aware of the concept of “nation” re-confirmed their ethnic origins and began to cherish the dream of overthrowing the colonialists to gain national independence (Motyl 2001, 572). Before 1870, Théophile Marie Legrand de la Liraye had already published the book *Notes Historiques sur la Nation Annamite*. Legrand de la Liraye was the first scholar known to have used the term “nation Annamite” meaning the “people from Annam” and “peuple An-Nam”. He reused the word “An Nam”—a noun used by Chinese dynasties with the meaning “(the ruler) made the Southern people peaceful”, that is to say, latter day colonialists borrowed the term of the previous ones. After Legrand de la Liraye, many scholars published studies to contribute to creating new knowledge about writing about Vietnamese history and Vietnamese origins, including Trương Vĩnh Ký with the book *Cours d'histoire Annamite a l'usage des écoles de la Basse-Cochinchine* (1875), Louis-Alfred Schreiner with *Abrégé de l'histoire Annamite* (1906), and Pierre Marie Antoine Pasquier with *L'Annam d'autrefois* (1907). These authors use the concept of “Jiaozhi people”⁸ to describe two intersecting big toes and regard it as an ethnic marker. These anthropological theories only helped the authors to propose new concepts recognizing the origins of the Vietnamese; in research however, they had no other option aside from quoting again the invented traditions which Ngô Sĩ Liên proposed from Thần Nông to the Hùng Kings. All these historical books are basically histories of ruling clans who exercised authority over “*le royaume d'Annam*” (from the “*Première Dynastie Hồng Bàng*” to the “*Dynastie des Nguyen*”). They followed the “stream of history” and admitted that the Vietnamese people were originally a group of Han migrants who underwent many phases of intermarriage with various indigenous groups.

In 1904, Paul Giran published his work *Psychologie du peuple Annamite: le caractere national- l'Évolution historique – intellectuelle, sociale et politique*. From an anthropological perspective, the author dedicated chapter one to write about the origin of the Annamite people in comparison with their predecessors—“Jiaozhi”, “Hua”, and “Malay”. He considered race to be a unique trait in the formation of a “nation”, and described the Annamese as a group belonging to the yellow race of *Mongoloides*, located somewhere between Turk and Han Chinese. The Annamese were a branch which migrated along the Red River towards the southeast. Their direct blood lineage was close to that of the Southern Chinese, manifested through language, character traits, and habits. On the one hand, the Annam shared many characteristics with the Han Chinese race through direct and continual interaction with this dominant group. On the other hand, contact

8 The term *Giao Chi*/ *Jiaozhi* (交趾 or 交趾) was used to refer to the Red River Delta region and the people who lived there in early Chinese texts.

with the Malay race gave them characteristics that gradually differentiated them from the Han Chinese. The central thesis of the author is that the people of Annam were the product of migration from central continental Asia which swept southeast, mixing blood with various indigenous peoples, Southern Chinese, and Malays. The most basic factor which led to the creation of the Annameese was Chinese conquest (Giran 2019, 51). The hybridization between ruler and ruled was a two-way process of assimilation. Jiaozhi had such strong assimilation skills in the process of immersion in Chinese civilization that it was impossible to distinguish between those who were assimilated and those who did the assimilating. This assimilation/hybridization created a new people—the Annamites: stronger, better organized, more civilized, and hungrier for independence (ibid., 53). Giran's research was a breath of fresh air at the time of the book's introduction. He simultaneously used methods from biology, anthropology, migration theory, and Social Darwinism, thereby making hypotheses about the origin and evolution of Annamites. If we pay attention, we realize that the author did not mention the Hồng Bàng and Hùng Vương chronicles, but was only concerned with Jiaozhi as a precursor to modern day Annam.

The point of Social Darwinism is that the civilized peoples (superior) have a mission of civilizing barbarian ones (inferior peoples, those in need of civilizing). The French at that time thought that they were the “Greeks of the world”, and at the highest peak in the evolution of mankind (Nguyễn 2019). The task of the French was thus to meet the needs of mankind all over the world. Saviour theory was both a theoretical basis and a guideline of action for the French (Salon 1983, 32). The determination of “Annamese origin” was done in order to put the Vietnamese under the new colonial regime of the French. Discourses on the origin of the Annameese were essentially sophistries white-washed with science which manifested the racism that allowed the French to justify invading the lands of other peoples under the pretext of a civilizing mission. Thus, Social Darwinism, French saviour theory, and civilization theory were used by the French to dominate both ideology and politics in relation to Vietnam.

In 1907, following the education model of Keiō Gijuku (慶應義塾) in Japan, many Confucian intellectuals (who identified themselves as new intellectuals) established the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc School, compiled and published many history textbooks aimed at popular education, cultivation, and renewal (Nguyễn 2013, 65, 160). The book *Cải lương nông học quốc sử giáo khoa thư* (1906) continued to record the Hồng Bàng clan (from Kinh Dương Vương to Hùng Vương, 2622 years) and placed in the first section “The First Prosperity of Our Nation” under “Ancient History” (Đông 1906, 7). In 1909, Phan Bội Châu published *Việt Nam quốc sử khảo* (*A Study on Vietnam History*) (Literary Sinitic). This is a book

which was compiled by the author, however he declared that it was titled “national history” because “everyone in the country is in this book” (Phan 2015, 1). Clearly, Phan Bội Châu and the Confucian scholars in Đông Kinh Nghĩa Thục assimilated the concept of the nation from the West to compose a work that dealt with the history of all members of the nation’s national community, which readers (national citizens) were responsible for reading and understanding. “National history” (in “Quốc sử” of the Nguyễn dynasty), was originally the history of the state as constructed by the court historians (equivalent to “standard history”). Phan Bội Châu rejected this Confucianist content, and reinforced the meaning as the “history of people in the same country of Vietnam”. This is an important indicator of the change in the historical paradigm: the abolition of the written history of the ruling lineage and the shift to historiography for “national people”. It is from here that Phan Bội Châu implemented a “revolutionary ideological history” in Vietnam (Trần 2019, 39–44).

The Confucians continued to imagine the nation based on blood lineage modelled after a family/clan. Phan Bội Châu wrote: “Wherever the parents came from, whatever we children and grandchildren relied upon, thinking again and again, isn’t that *our country* (emphasis by the author).” (Phan 2015, 33) In the following sections, he uses the words “our fatherland” in conjunction with the primordial patriarch Hùng Vương. 1909 is the earliest date at which the words “Fatherland” (祖國) appear in Vietnam. “Fatherland” is understood as “the country of our ancestors” corresponding to the word “*patrie*” in French (Đào 1932, 303; Hue 1937, 922).⁹ The ideological structure of “fatherland” includes a series of neologisms such as “race” (人種), “demographic” (人口), “geography (of our country)” (地理), “state” (國家), and “national rights” (sovereignty of our country, 國權), “national citizen” (國民), “civil rights” (民權), and “independence” (獨立) (Hoàng 1906; Liu 1995; Kelley 2015a; Trần, 2019). Phan absorbed Western ideas (those of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Darwin) through the flow of new books from Japan and China (Nguyễn 1917, 5–18; Luo 2011). He was re-interpreting the history and origin of his country by way of combining the concept of “race” and Hùng Vương—“the primordial ancestor of our country”. Phan Bội Châu removed the Thần Nông lineage (the Han lineage from the Confucian viewpoint) from the genealogy of Vietnam, and placed Hùng Vương as the first ancestor of the Vietnamese race. He argued that his racial elements were like those of various barbarians south of China (Phan 2015, 53). In the process of interracial mixing with the Han, the Jiaozhi peoples—originally “stupid, simple, and honest” gradually turned into “beautiful, civilized people with proper caps and robes” (ibid., 56).

9 See more on the etymology of “*patrie*”: “erre des ancêtres, pays natal. Pourquoi le prononcer ce nom de la patrie? Dans son brillant exil mon coeur en a frémi.” (CNRTL n. d.)

Although being of northern origin and the product of a long process of interracial mixing, according to him, anyone “who was born and raised in the same parents’ country, that is, have been in one country, are siblings of one family”. The concept of “*tong bao*” (同胞: same bloodline, same foetus) of Confucianism from Nguyễn Trãi’s time (1380–1442)¹⁰ was combined with that of “compatriot” by Phan Bội Châu to create a new concept of “*đồng chủng*” (同種, co-race). This is how fictive kinship forms in parallel with nationalism, and becomes a core part of nationalism. All of this racial reasoning is directed to a purpose throughout the book, which he explicitly states: “only if those of the same race love one another can they be called human ... within to protect those of the same foetal sac, without to compete with alien races” (ibid., 52). The formulae of “same race + same blood

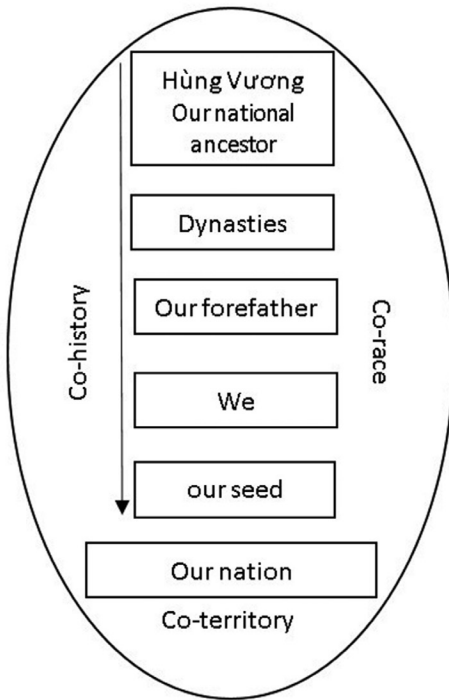


Figure 1: Mixing the Confucian concept with racism and nationalism.

10 In the fifteenth century, Nguyễn Trãi wrote a couplet in Vietnamese: “*đồng bào cốt nhục nghĩa càng bền, cảnh bắc cảnh nam một cội nèn*” (Trần 2018, 129). “*Đồng bào*” is a term of literary Sinitic origin 同胞, originally meaning siblings born to the same mother, and only afterwards used to describe a community of peoples. *Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư* records the myth of Lạc Long Quân marrying Âu Cơ, after which she gives birth to an egg sac from which are born 100 male children, the oldest of which was Hùng Vương. This is proof that for many centuries Vietnamese believed they share a blood relation to each other.

lineage + same history” is regarded by Phan as a political weapon which can serve the purpose to which he committed his entire life: using force to expel the enemy, establish independence, and regain national power for Vietnam. Phan’s fictive kinship ideology can be seen as a pre-war expression of nationalism in Vietnam (Duiker 1971, 77). The East-West collision caused him to change from “loyal-to-the-ruler” to “loving-the-nation” and become the leading proponent of patriotism in the early twentieth century. Mixing the Western idea of ethnicity with the Confucian concept of Hùng Vương as primordial ancestor, fictive kinship is a concrete manifestation of the phenomenon of glocalization, that is, the simultaneity of the global and local dimensions of transcultural flows (Berg and Wendt 2011, 12, 213–35; Robertson 1995, 28, 2; see Scheme on the previous page).

In his *Brief History of Vietnam* (1920), Trần Trọng Kim inherited the French view of national origin. Remarkably, he was the first to use the concepts “Vietnamese” and “Vietnamese people” in parallel with the word “people” (Thái people, Man people, Mọi people, and so on) and “seed” (like Han seed, Tam Miêu seed), “species” (Tam Miêu species). Although it is contained in two brief pages, Tran’s research is strewn with concepts which were coming into formation:

Vietnamese people have many ethnic groups, such in northern highlands with the Thai peoples (i.e., Thổ people), Mường, Mán, and Cát; in Central Vietnam, there are Mọi and Chăm (from Hời); in the South, there were the Mọi, Chăm, Chà Và, and Khách. The populations of these people from these three regions total less than one million, whereas the Vietnamese people make up the remainder. (Trần 2005, 13)

This passage shows that the author considered “people” to mean “nation” and that the different assemblies of ethnic groups (Việt people, Thái people, Mọi people, etc.) on the Vietnamese territory cumulatively created the “Vietnamese people”. Trần Trọng Kim was the first person known to use “Vietnam”, the official title of the Nguyễn dynasty, to construct the concepts of “Vietnamese race”, “Vietnamese nation”, and “Vietnamese people”. According to his view, the term used to mean “people” or “race” is a translation of “ethno” (now “ethnicity”) and “Vietnamese” (carrying connotations of citizenship, nationality) is an aggregation of all peoples/ethnicities who lived on the territory of Vietnam at that time. It can be expressed by the following formula: {Vietnam people + Thái people + Mường people + Mán people + Mèo people + Mọi people + Chăm people + Chà Và + Khách ... = VIETNAMESE}.

Hence, from Phan Bội Châu to Trần Trọng Kim, we see the emergence of European nationalism into early twentieth century Vietnamese scholarship. The French

brought this ideology to Vietnam, using it as a tool to rule and exploit the colony, and at the same time its seeds sprouted on colonial fragments. The Vietnamese intellectuals then reused nationalism as an instrument for thinking and reflecting on themselves and those around them with a new perspective in relation to those who ruled them. Eventually they even used it as a political tool to combat the discourses and authorities that had moulded it in the first place. The ideology of nation in the works of intellectuals would spread to the minds of ordinary people in society, shaping their affections, consciousness, responsibilities, and closely related political desires to individual and community interests. This explains why the historical writings of the Phan Bội Châu and Trần Trọng Kim (typical elites of their time) were widely reprinted in the twentieth century, even up to the present day. It can be said that these intellectuals created a new paradigm seen through the eyes of Westerners (or rather, a new a paradigm that drew on European nationalism, and also colonialism). In particular, and most importantly, they created and spread the concepts of “Vietnamese people”, “Vietnamese ethnicity”, etc. into the minds of millions. Vietnamese people happily removed the concept of “Han descent”, focusing more on the national symbol of Hùng Vương (Smith 2009). Hùng Vương is an endemic product of fictive kinship in Vietnam, and this “political product” contributed to the revolution of national liberation for independence under the leadership of another ideology: Marxism.

The transformation of the thinking system was not only expressed in historical works but also spread widely and strongly in the press. In *Nam Phong Tạp Chí* (1931) Phạm Quỳnh made statements about what Vietnamese people were thinking about their ethnic origins. In the article “Tourism of Laos”, he described the eastern side of Trường Sơn as

a pure race of Annamite ethnicity, its culture imported and received from China, outstandingly belonging to the Chinese world ... The people of Jiaozi, apart from thousands of years being casted in the mould of Chinese music and rituals, became increasingly fertile and populous, filling the entire Red River basin to the point of being cramped and needing to expand southward past Đèo Ngang, flooding into Champa. (Pham 1931, 5)

In addition to the terms “race of Annamites” and “Jiaozi” (used to refer to historical entities in history), Phạm Quỳnh also uses “Vietnamese race”. Take for example this passage which he wrote: “The vocation of our Vietnamese race is to colonize this whole Indochina, to bring the flag of China to fight against India, turning this Indochinese land into a Chinese pure land.” (ibid. 1931, 6)

This is a very clear statement of Phạm Quỳnh on the issue of “racial destiny”. He argued that the Vietnamese ethnicity is a race which belonged to Chinese culture and the Chinese world. This race had a heaven-appointed destiny to expand and colonize the whole of Indochina. This is to say, Phạm Quỳnh’s ideology is a mixture of Đại Hán expansionism and French colonialism. This desire for political power is a reflection of both a subconscious self-esteem, as well as an inferiority complex when confronting the reality of the French colonialists in Indochina. That is, the weak/conquered one is at the same time nurturing dreams of ruling over other weaker nations than himself, while he himself is powerless against the French. This is the complex mentality of Phạm Quỳnh, a victim of colonial thinking that the “Vietnamese race” has a divinely mandated colonial vocation which was proven by the traditional Southern expansion of the Vietnamese before the Cham and Khmer. But the dream of this type of thinking was immediately awakened by reality, when he shyly realized that Siam had become an independent country, and that Cambodia and Ai Lao were also protected by France. Phạm Quỳnh’s expansionist dreams also flourished in many other political groups, to the extent that some later political parties would have in their name the term “Indochina”, such as the Indochinese Communist Party and the Indochina Communist Federation. The political discourse of Phạm Quỳnh basically takes the “Vietnamese race” as a nucleus, and combines historical knowledge of Confucianism with Social Darwinism. But Phạm Quỳnh’s “reformed” nature of political activity made him quickly fall into the past, when a new wave of enthusiasm emerged: Marxism.

In 1941, Nguyễn Ái Quốc in the *History of Our Country* wrote: “Over five thousand years, our brilliant ancestors have been in harmony. Hồng Bàng was our country’s ancestor, our country was then called Văn Lang, ... An Dương Vương was replaced by Hùng King; the national name Âu Lạc” (in Ho 2000, 221). This is a poem about 4,000 years of Vietnamese history in 210 six-eight verses. This historical text was used to propagate the national spirit, foster patriotism, and encourage the people to unify and join the Việt Minh Front in service of the struggle for independence. Nguyen inherited most of what Ngô Sĩ Liên wrote about the origins of the Vietnamese, but he deliberately cut out Thần Nông and the idea of Han origin. He wrote about the history of Vietnam as a history of the indigenous people—“pure Vietnamese”—struggling against the aggressors of generations of Vietnamese people over thousands of years. This poem represents an attempt to use historical knowledge for political purposes. Since 1945 onwards, when the Communists gained power, this poem has continued to exert its effects on a vast scale with unprecedented effectiveness. It has become a political authority for Marxist historians to continue in creating new constructs about the history and origin of the Vietnamese. Hùng Vương thus became a symbol of the origin of the nation (Smith 2009), and nationalism

mingled with Marxist thought and saturated the minds of tens of millions of people in Vietnam, a process that continues until the present day (Nguyễn 2014).

Conclusion

The issue of “Vietnamese origins” has always been answered in various ways under the influence of ideology and political power. The participation of politicians in the process of writing history has made such hypotheses carry within themselves the political discourse and ideology of their times. The origin of Viet people in Vietnam was initially a problem for the Confucian historiographical tradition. Under the cultural discourse of fictive kinship, Han genealogies (from Thần Nông to the Hùng Kings) were constructed by Confucian scholars in fifteenth century. This was an invented tradition and bloodline included in the efforts of the Vietnamese court to connect with politics in China. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Vietnam was colonized by the French, French scholars used new ideas about race and nation to explain the origins of the Vietnamese. They believed that Annamite were formed during a long process of bloodline mixing. From the perspective of evolution and colonialism, they believed that the Vietnamese people were an object in need of civilizing and racial improvement. This explanation served the purposes of French dominion. Under these ideological changes, native intellectuals both retained the idea of Confucian kinship and acquired racist ideologies to form a fictive kinship through the symbol of the patriarchal Hùng Kings. Fictive kinship became the core of nationalism. Finally, it combined with Marxism into a hybrid ideology in order for serve the Communist independence movements.

(The article was translated by Dan Nguyen of Columbia University)

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