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## Perspectives on national rights in Vietnam at the beginning of the 20th century

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#### Abstract

Since the end of the 19th century, capitalism transitioned from free competition to imperialism. Imperialist capitalist countries intensified the exploitation of their laboring populations internally and subjected colonized peoples to invasion and oppression externally. Tensions between colonized peoples and colonialism grew increasingly intense, with strong resistance movements against invasion occurring in colonial countries. By the early 20th century, national liberation movements in Asian countries were widespread, significantly influencing the Vietnamese nationalist movement. This article focuses on studying intellectuals' perspectives on national rights from a bourgeois consciousness, as well as Ho Chi Minh's views on these rights in the early 20th-century historical context. Based on these perspectives, the author discusses and concludes national rights in Vietnam at the beginning of the 20th century and their significance for the present day.

**Keywords:** early 20th century, national rights, Perspectives, Vietnam



## 1. Introduction

The right to self-determination of nations is the right to independently determine the destiny of one's people, such as establishing a separate, independent nation or forming a multi-ethnic state based on equality in rights and obligations with other nations.

Vietnam, a Southeast Asian nation located in a strategically important position in Asia, became a target of French colonial ambitions in their race against other empires. On September 1, 1858, French colonialists initiated an invasion of Vietnam at Da Nang and gradually annexed Vietnam. This marked a period of severe crisis for the feudal regime in Vietnam (under the Nguyen dynasty). Faced with French aggression, the Nguyen dynasty made successive concessions (Treaties of 1862, 1874, 1883), and with the Patenotre Treaty on June 6, 1884, completely surrendered to French colonial rule, making Vietnam a "colonized land, our people slaves, and our homeland trampled under the iron heel of the cruel enemy" (Minh, 2011, vol. 12, p. 401)

The oppressive and exploitative rule of the French colonialists over the Vietnamese people was described as "the most specialized dictatorship, even more atrocious and terrifying than the feudal autocracies of ancient Asian monarchies" (Truong, 1926). Under French domination, Vietnam underwent significant political, economic, and social transformations. The conflict between the Vietnamese people the French colonialists and the reactionary feudal regime became the primary and increasingly intense contradiction. How to overthrow French colonial rule for national independence? How can people escape from suffering, and oppression, and live in peace? These became major questions of the era. National rights are fundamental issues, urgent demands of the people, and the goals of national liberation revolutions in Vietnam. Studying the perspectives on national rights in Vietnam in the early 20th century is a matter of both theoretical and practical significance.

## 2. Literature Review

Human beings are the foremost issue in science, with topics related to humanity, including human rights and the rights of nations, always being prioritized for research by scientists in one way or another. Human rights and national rights are multifaceted concepts, as well as historical concepts, emerging and developing alongside concepts of class, the state, and law. Accordingly, research on human rights is a comprehensive research direction, both fundamental and urgent, with great ideological, theoretical, and practical significance that is highly valued by all countries worldwide. To date, there have been many studies on human rights and national rights from different approaches. Some notable works include:

The author Janusz Simonides wrote the book *Human Rights - New Directions and Challenges* (Ashgate, Brookfield, 1998). The book presents the interrelation and mutual dependence between human rights and peace, democracy, environment, and development. *The Special Procedures of the United Nations in the Field of Human Rights* by Ingrid Nifosi, published in 2005 (Intersentia Publishing, Antwerp), explores the development of the United Nations Human Rights Committee's human rights activities. The book provides an insightful and updated view of the history of organizing special procedures as tools for protecting and monitoring human rights, analyzing the legal framework, explaining the development process, and evaluating their importance in protecting human rights and the rights of nations. Notable among the many works, articles, and websites discussing human rights around the world is *Human Rights Culture and the Rule of Law* by Amqvist, J, published by Oxford and Portland, Oregon in 2005. This book examines the relationship between culture and respect for human rights. The author argues that culture, as a characteristic of individuals, ethnic communities, and nation-states, creates

the conditions for enjoying the rights and freedoms recognized in international human rights law in the most meaningful and effective ways. This provides human rights and national rights researchers with valuable insights when studying the policy-making process of ruling parties regarding the compatibility between policy, culture, and ensuring human rights.

The rich array of resources on human rights worldwide has provided an extensive body of knowledge on concepts and terminology, organizations, and mechanisms supporting the protection of human rights globally. These resources paint a picture of the state of human rights in the modern world and the global legal requirements for the implementation of human rights. However, studies primarily focus on human rights, with those on national rights being intertwined and less clearly defined.

In Vietnam, before the reform period, the struggle for national liberation was about safeguarding the basic human rights of the people (fundamental political rights—the right to live in independence and freedom, the right to control their destiny), which received the consensus of the entire nation and peace-loving people worldwide. In practice, ensuring national rights in Vietnam is rich in experience. However, research on this issue has not received much attention from scholars, and direct studies on national rights have not met practical needs. Since the renovation process initiated by the Communist Party of Vietnam, especially after the reform period and the Central Party Committee's Directive on July 12, 1992, which emphasized the need for scientific research on human rights and national rights, there has been increased attention from the Party, the State, social communities, and many scholars. Numerous works, such as books, monographs, theses, and articles, have been published on human rights. The State has implemented the KX 07 program "People, Goals, and Motives for Socio-Economic Development" (1991-1995). This includes the KX 07-16 project on "Conditions for Ensuring Human Rights and Civil Rights in the Renovation of the Country" by Hoang Van Hao. The project argued that building a socialist democracy and a rule-of-law state in Vietnam are fundamental conditions for ensuring human and civil rights. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (2005), in his book *Political Philosophy on Human Rights*, addressed the political thinking on human rights from a philosophical perspective, analyzing Eastern and Western countries' views, as well as Marxist-Leninist thought on human rights. The book highlighted the various viewpoints on human rights and emphasized the need to develop a socialist-oriented market economy, build a rule-of-law state, and enhance political culture among the people to ensure human rights in Vietnam. From various perspectives, many articles have raised different aspects of human rights, while also emphasizing the need for a correct understanding of human rights and national rights. These include works by Cao Duc Thai (2001), *Human Rights and National Independence and Sovereignty*, which analyzed the relationship between human rights, national independence, and sovereignty, asserting that national independence and sovereignty are essential conditions for ensuring human rights.

Additionally, many articles discuss the achievements in protecting human rights in Vietnam under the leadership of the Party across various fields (economy, politics, culture, etc.) and for different groups. Some notable works include Nguyen Thị Bao (2007), *Ensuring Human Rights in the Implementation of Social Policies in Contemporary Vietnam*; Thanh Nam (2002), *Ensuring the Human Rights of Ethnic Minorities The Special Concern of Our Party and State*. In general, studies on human rights and national rights are increasingly receiving attention from various fields of science, with a strong research community contributing significantly both scientifically and practically. Notably, the number of research works on human rights is increasingly delving into the rich and comprehensive aspects of human rights, particularly through interdisciplinary research collaboration. As a result, valuable research on human rights in Vietnam is continuously updated, supplemented, and enriched over time. This not only aligns with global trends but also better meets the growing demand for the development of understanding

and theory on human rights in the country, contributing to clarifying the practical protection of human rights in contemporary Vietnam.

However, direct studies on the ideology of national rights in Vietnam are still limited. Therefore, our research work, from the perspective of ideological research, aims to clarify the national rights ideology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In general, the research findings of previous scholars have provided valuable directions and research orientations for the authors of this dissertation in addressing the core issues related to the national rights ideology of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

### **3. Research Method**

Research on human rights and national rights is an increasingly popular direction for many scientists in the current context. Research on human rights and national rights is conducted from many perspectives, mainly from economics, philosophy, politics, sociology, etc. This article is based on direct research on some previous works and practical solutions to national rights issues in Vietnam in the early 20th century.

In the process of conducting research, the author applies dialectical materialism methodology with a specific and comprehensive historical perspective; the systematic approach and at the same time inherits the research results of previous works to perfect the theoretical foundations and assessments; at the same time, the author uses a combination of interdisciplinary methods in social science research such as analysis, synthesis, historical, logical, statistical, comparative methods, etc. to carry out tasks to achieve the proposed research objectives.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

#### **4.1. Perspectives of Intellectuals with Bourgeois Consciousness on National Rights**

At the beginning of the 20th century, alongside the presence of Confucian thought and national culture, especially the patriotic spirit and sense of independence and self-reliance nurtured throughout millennia of nation-building and defense, there were also changes in the domestic economic and social structure and the influx of Western bourgeois thought through Japan and China. This created a new foundation for the national liberation movement. Among the patriotic intellectuals of the time, two different ideological trends emerged regarding the choice of methods for the struggle to gain national independence. The first trend, led by Phan Boi Chau, advocated for armed violence to expel the French colonists and secure national independence. However, Phan Boi Chau's thoughts did not stop at violence. He and his associates also advocated for the modernization of the country, pursuing development along bourgeois democratic lines. The second trend, represented by Phan Chau Trinh, focused on modernizing the country by expanding the economy, developing culture and education, and raising public awareness, relying on France to abolish the feudal system and, when strong enough, to achieve national independence.

The armed struggle, led by Phan Boi Chau, identified the task of the Vietnamese revolution as driving out the French colonists and reclaiming national independence. He firmly believed that armed struggle was the inevitable and only path to national liberation. Therefore, throughout his revolutionary life, Phan Boi Chau devoted himself wholeheartedly to the path of armed violence with high determination. In Phan Boi Chau's thought, the most basic strategic guideline was to overthrow the French colonists through violence, liberate the nation, and pursue the goal of saving the country and the people as his ideology, with the ultimate goal of building a new Vietnam.

Phan Boi Chau was a true patriot, regarded as the most progressive thinker among Confucian intellectuals, who had distanced himself from the feudal class. He became aware of his historical responsibility and continuously strived to rise with the times, seeking a new revolutionary method,

a new path for national salvation, beyond the traditional ideological framework. Over the past six decades, since Phan Boi Chau's departure from the public scene, his turbulent and complex life still requires deep reflection on many aspects and overall evaluation.

Coming from a Confucian background, Phan Boi Chau gradually transcended the feudal social consciousness deeply ingrained in him, absorbed bourgeois democratic ideas, and, with his intense patriotism, sparked a new patriotic movement following the bourgeois democratic trend. However, the revolutionary movement for national liberation following the bourgeois democratic path, initiated by Phan Boi Chau and Phan Chau Trinh, ultimately failed. Yet, it left a treasure trove of valuable lessons for Vietnam's revolutionary theory in the struggle for national liberation.

As history has shown, Phan Phan Boi Chau's ideology of national salvation helped ignite a burning hatred for the enemy, urging the people to persist in fighting the French colonists throughout the early decades of the 20th century, leaving many valuable lessons for the Vietnamese revolution. Though it did not succeed, Phan Phan Boi Chau's thought in the national liberation movement at the beginning of the 20th century, with both its progressive elements and its limitations, carries deep theoretical and practical significance. It was an essential accumulation, an important stepping stone that prepared for the inevitable leap in the development of the revolutionary path of national salvation in Vietnam later on. I believe that deeply studying the shifts in Phan Phan Boi Chau's ideology of national salvation will not only allow future generations to gain a deeper, more comprehensive understanding and evaluation of his contributions to the development of the nation's history but also, through an objective and scientific examination of Phan Phan Boi Chau's thought, both its successes and limitations, future generations will gain valuable experience in choosing the right path for national salvation that aligns with the nation's history.

Phan Boi Chau, an organizer and leader, advocated for mobilizing forces through militant means against the French, aiming to establish a political system similar to Japan. In line with this trend, organizations sent Vietnamese youth to study in Japan (referred to as the "Dong Du" movement). By 1908, the Japanese government colluded with the French colonialists to expel Vietnamese students and their leaders. After the failure of the Dong Du movement and influenced by the 1911 Xinhai Revolution in China, Phan Boi Chau founded the Vietnam Restoration Society in 1912, intending to arm against and expel French colonialists, restore Vietnam, and establish a republican national state. However, the society's program and operational plans were not clear. By the end of 1913, Phan Boi Chau was arrested by the French colonialists in China and was imprisoned in Hue until he died in 1940. This marked the end of the influence of the militant trend of the Vietnam Restoration Society on the Vietnamese nationalistic movement.

Through the process of mobilizing forces, leadership, and organizing the struggle, Phan Boi Chau's perspectives on national rights were revealed. He valued and emphasized the rights of individuals, the people's rights, as a vibrant expression of his beliefs in civil liberties. Additionally, this highlights a positive evolution in Phan Boi Chau's thinking. He transcended feudalistic ideologies to adopt progressive values from Western intellectual trends, aiming to harness and unify the strength of the people towards the cause of national salvation, liberation, and modernization. In pursuing this objective, Phan Boi Chau recognized the interconnectedness of civil liberties with national sovereignty and the prosperity and survival of the nation.

Differing from Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, and those with similar orientations aimed for national independence through a reformist approach. Phan Chau Trinh believed in "non-violence, violence leads to death"; it is necessary to "awaken people's intellect, uplift their spirit, and improve their lives," to abolish the autocratic regime, implement civil liberties, awaken the intellect, and broaden

practical careers. To realize this approach, Phan Chau Trinh proposed that the State “shelter” under French protection to carry out reforms. This represented a limitation in the reformist trend to save the nation, as Phan Chau Trinh placed “hope for rebirth and reform in the hands of France, not discerning the nature of the colonial imperialist regime” (Giau, 1975, p. 442). Consequently, when the Duy Tan movement spread across both Central and Southern Vietnam, reaching its peak with the tax resistance in Central Vietnam (1908), the French colonialists brutally suppressed it, killing many intellectuals and protestors. Many intellectuals were arrested, and exiled to Con Dao, including Phan Chau Trinh, Huynh Thuc Khang, Dang Nguyen Can... The tax resistance movement in Central Vietnam was crushed by the French colonialists, along with the event in December 1907 when they ordered the closure of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc School, reflecting the end of the reformist trend in Vietnam’s national salvation movement.

As the French colonialists intensified their second exploitation of the colony, the conflict between the entire Vietnamese nation and the French colonialists became more intense. New classes and social strata emerged in Vietnamese society, all stepping onto the political stage. Among them, the activities that had wide influence and attracted many patriotic students and youth in Northern Vietnam were led by the Vietnam Nationalist Party under Nguyen Thai Hoc’s leadership. Established officially in December 1927 in Northern Vietnam, the Vietnam Nationalist Party aimed to expel the invading French colonialists, achieve national independence, and establish a bourgeois republican regime through armed struggle but dynamically and aggressively, targeting individuals and primarily involving soldiers, students... The uprising erupted in some provinces, predominantly and most forcefully in Yen Bai (2-1930), and although fierce, quickly failed. The failure of the Yen Bai uprising of the Vietnam Nationalist Party demonstrated that it was “...an involuntary and immature violent uprising, which died without ever rising again. The slogan “if not successful, then become human” expressed the impulsive nature of the petite bourgeois, its temporary fervor, and simultaneously revealed its unstable and weak nature” (Duan, 959, p. 41)

Thus, it can be seen that the nationalist movements under the banner of bourgeois democracy of the Vietnamese people have been intense, continuous, and widespread. Although carried out in various ways, they all aimed at the goal of achieving national independence. However, “the national salvation movements, through historical experience, have successively failed” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2007, p.14).

#### **4.2. Ho Chi Minh’s Perspective on National Rights**

The suffering life of the Vietnamese people under the yoke of French colonialism drove the young Nguyen Tat Thanh to seek ways to save the nation. Nguyen Tat Thanh, later known as Ho Chi Minh, on behalf of the Vietnamese nation, exposed and condemned the crimes of colonialism. He declared that the Vietnamese people have the right to enjoy the same rights as other civilized nations, with a steadfast determination to preserve what the nation had achieved.

Ho Chi Minh spent over two decades enduring hardships across five continents and four oceans. In 1911, he traveled to France, then to England and the United States. In 1913, he returned to England from the U.S. to join the British seamen’s union. In 1917, he returned to France during the October Revolution, studying the revolutionary movement in Paris.

In 1919, he presented the demands of the Annamese people at the Versailles Conference. At the 18th Congress of the French Socialist Party discussing joining the Third International on December 30, 1920, Ho Chi Minh voted in favor of the French Communist Party, becoming a communist. This marked a significant leap in Ho Chi Minh’s worldview from nationalist consciousness to Marxist-Leninist consciousness, from someone seeking national liberation to someone defining the path to

independence and freedom for the nation.

During this period, he witnessed the sufferings of various people worldwide. Meeting Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh fully explained the origins of not only the sufferings of the Vietnamese people but also those of other nations globally. In the light of Marx-Lenin's theory, particularly Lenin's brilliant thoughts in "On the National Question and Colonialism," Ho Chi Minh understood that the sufferings of oppressed nations arose with the emergence of private property, class, and state. All the sacred and inviolable rights of human beings have been trampled upon by a few. Although these oppressors claimed no allegiance, they, by their control over the primary means of production and distribution of wealth, dominated and enslaved others without humanity. In both the United States and France, the homelands of the two immortal declarations, the working class also lacked equal rights, the right to live, and the freedom to seek happiness. Worse yet, French and American capitalism, under the banner of freedom, cruelly oppressed and trampled upon the freedoms of other colonial and dependent nations. For Ho Chi Minh, such actions were unacceptable because freedom, equality, and the pursuit of happiness are sacred rights that no one should infringe upon. This conviction was one of the reasons why Ho Chi Minh became an unwavering communist soldier, fighting for the liberation of Vietnam and oppressed nations worldwide.

From 1920 to 1945, Ho Chi Minh deeply grasped the concept of human rights, and national rights, and struggled to defend the national independence rights. He engaged in both practical and theoretical activities in France, actively participating in the colonial research committee of the French Socialist Party and publishing the newspaper "Humanity" (from 1921 to 1923) with numerous articles expressing the desire to liberate people from oppression and exploitation. In 1924, he returned to Guangzhou, organizing the Revolutionary Youth League of Vietnam and conducting training courses for cadres. In 1925, the work "The Judgment of the French Colonial Regime" was published in Paris. In 1927, Ho Chi Minh published "The Path of Revolution." These works reflect his thoughts on human rights, primarily the right to live and to live independently and freely. He criticized the crimes of colonialism while empathizing with the suffering of colonial people, proposing a path to struggle for national liberation and human liberation.

In February 1930, Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh's alias) presided over the unification conference and established the Communist Party of Vietnam. He directly drafted the "Brief Political Platform and Brief Strategy of the Part.

From 1930 to 1945, Ho Chi Minh continued to uphold his views, elevating the ideas of independence, freedom, and fundamental national rights. This was a period of victory for Ho Chi Minh's thoughts both theoretically and practically. He maintained his revolutionary stance, surpassing the "dogmatic" tendencies of international communism, leading the Vietnamese revolution to success. This reflected the law of the Vietnamese revolution, affirming the value and vitality of Ho Chi Minh's ideology.

From the period after the August 1945 revolution to 1969, Ho Chi Minh actualized national rights as the leader of the Communist Party and the Vietnamese state. This was the period when Ho Chi Minh, along with the Party's central committee, led our people in both fighting against French colonialism and building a democratic regime, culminating in the victory at Dien Bien Phu. They conducted the resistance war against the U.S. to save the country and build socialism in the North. Ho Chi Minh's thoughts underwent new developments.

As the leader of the Party and the State, Ho Chi Minh concretized the civil, political, economic, cultural, and social rights of the Vietnamese people.

Through the continuous struggle for national independence and freedom, it can be asserted

that, according to Ho Chi Minh, the profound cause of the extreme suffering of each colonial subject is primarily due to the oppression of classes and nations. A nation that is invaded and loses its sovereignty cannot have freedom for everyone, nor can it ensure equality in civil, political, cultural, social, and economic rights; it cannot guarantee the rights of women, children, freedom of religion, and belief, etc. Thus, in Ho Chi Minh's ideology, human rights and national independence are unified and inseparable, forming the core throughout his revolutionary life.

In 1919, representing the patriotic Annamese, Ho Chi Minh sent an eight-point demand to the Versailles Peace Conference, urging Allied leaders to apply the ideals of self-determination to the French colonial territories in Southeast Asia. In many works such as "Colonialism: The Heart of Darkness," "Equality," "The Abyss of Colonies," "The Bloody Pacification," and "Indochina," Ho Chi Minh focused on condemning his colonialism, strongly criticizing the harsh governance and brutal exploitation of French colonialism in Indochina in political, economic, cultural, and educational fields. Particularly, in the work "The Judgment of the French Colonial Regime," Nguyen Ai Quoc (another alias of Ho Chi Minh) strongly condemned the crimes of colonialism that deprived all human and national rights in the colonies.

The core content of the colonial issue is independence and freedom. Independence and freedom are the greatest aspirations of colonial nations. Ho Chi Minh said, "Freedom for my compatriots, independence for my homeland, that's all I want; that's all I understand." In early 1930, Nguyen Ai Quoc drafted the first political platform of the Party - a creative and correct platform for national liberation, with the core ideology of independence and freedom.

In May 1941, Ho Chi Minh presided over the 8th Central Committee Executive Committee meeting, writing a letter to the people, stating clearly: "At this time, the rights of the liberation nation are above all else." He directed the establishment of the Independent Alliance of Vietnam, launched the "Vietnam Independence" newspaper, and directed the drafting of the "Ten Policies of Viet Minh." In the song "Ten Policies of Viet Minh," he wrote: "The flag of independence flies, building an equal society." In August 1945, Ho Chi Minh summed up the determination to fight for the independence and freedom of our people with the immortal words: "No matter how much we have to sacrifice, even if we have to burn down the entire Truong Son range, we must firmly achieve independence!" The August Revolution succeeded, and on behalf of the provisional government, he read the Declaration of Independence, solemnly affirming to the world: "The Vietnamese nation has the right to freedom and independence, and the fact is that it has become an independent and free country. The entire Vietnamese nation is determined to devote all its spirit and strength, its life and property, to uphold that independence and freedom" (Minh, 2002, vol 4, p. 4)

In letters and communications sent to the United Nations and governments of various countries after the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh solemnly declared: "Our people sincerely desire peace. But our people are also determined to fight to the end to protect the most sacred rights: territorial integrity for our homeland and independence for our country" (Minh, 2002, vol 4, p.4). The nationwide resistance against French colonialism erupted. Demonstrating the determination to protect national independence and sovereignty, Ho Chi Minh proclaimed with resounding calls across mountains and rivers: "No! We would rather sacrifice everything than lose our country, we will never accept slavery."

As the U.S. imperialists fervently expanded the war, pouring troops and modern war machinery into the South, while simultaneously conducting destructive warfare in the North with increasing intensity and scale, Ho Chi Minh upheld the great truth of the era: "Nothing is more precious than independence, freedom." Independence and freedom were the goals of the struggle and the source of strength that led to the victories of the Vietnamese people in the 20th century, a grand ideology of the



era of national liberation. “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom” (Minh, 2002, vol 12, p.108) became the rallying cry of the Vietnamese people and also served as encouragement for oppressed nations worldwide who were fighting against colonialism.

In Ho Chi Minh’s ideology, national rights must also ensure that national independence is closely tied to national unity, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity. National independence and national unity are laws of existence and development for the Vietnamese people, the lifeblood of the Vietnamese nation. This is a grand perspective of Ho Chi Minh. He said, “Vietnam is one, the Vietnamese people are one. Rivers may dry up, mountains may erode, but that truth will never change” (Minh, 2002, vol 4, p.2). Ho Chi Minh condemned the French colonialists for dividing Vietnam into three separate regimes in the North, South, and Central regions to hinder the unification of our country and prevent our nation from uniting.

The struggle against colonialism and for the independence of Vietnam is also a struggle for national sovereignty and unity. Ho Chi Minh clearly stated that the purpose of the August Revolution was to “regain peace, unity, independence, and democracy for our homeland and our people.” The goal of the resistance against French colonialism was to preserve and develop the achievements of the August Revolution, namely peace, unity, independence, and democracy.

The independence and unity of the homeland are the aspirations and will of Ho Chi Minh and the Vietnamese people. Those who accepted the preliminary agreement on March 6, 1946, even though it did not demand that the French colonialists recognize Vietnamese independence, had to acknowledge that “Vietnam is an independent country” with its government, parliament, military, and finances. The implementation of national unification would be determined by a referendum.

Before going to France to “resolve the issue of Vietnam’s independence and unify the North, South, and Central regions,” he wrote in a letter to the people of the South (June 1946), asserting: “The people of the South are the people of Vietnam. Rivers may dry up, mountains may erode, but that truth will never change!” On June 25, 1946, while meeting with journalists, and photographers, and screening films in Paris, he emphasized that “the Vietnamese people demand unification and independence” (Minh, 2002, vol 4, p.246). After returning from France, he declared to the nation: that due to the current situation in France, the issues of independence and unification of Vietnam had not been resolved. However, “the Central, South, and North are all Vietnam. We share a common ancestral lineage, we are all brothers and sisters. Just as a home has three siblings, and as France has regions like Normandy, Provence, and Brittany. No one can divide a family, no one can divide France, and likewise, no one can divide our Vietnam” (Minh, 2002, vol 4, p.418).

With the signing and implementation of the Geneva Accords of 1954 on Indochina, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two regions. Ho Chi Minh identified the goal of the Vietnamese people after the signing of the Geneva Accords as the struggle to maintain peace “to achieve national reunification, complete independence, and democracy throughout the country” (Minh, 2002, vol 7, p.377).

On July 22, 1954, he explained: that the territorial adjustments were temporary measures, transitional steps to achieve a ceasefire, restore peace, and move towards national reunification through general elections. Territorial adjustments “certainly do not mean dividing our country; certainly do not mean partitioning.” He affirmed: “The Central, South, and North are all our homeland’s territories; our country will definitely reunify, and the entire nation will be liberated.” He emphasized: “The struggle to strengthen peace, achieve reunification, and complete independence and democracy is also a long and arduous struggle”. “We must strive to hold free general elections nationwide to unify the country” (Minh, 2002, vol 7, p.223).

Facing new schemes from the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys, Ho Chi Minh asserted:

“Vietnam will reunify, because our country is a unified entity, and no one can divide it.” He advocated for strengthening the North to “truly support our compatriots in the South in their struggle for peace and reunification” (Minh, 2002, vol 8, p.47). At the Third Party Congress (September 1960), Ho Chi Minh declared: “Our nation is one, Vietnam is one. Our people will surely overcome all difficulties and realize the achievement of national reunification, with the North and South being one home” (Minh, 2002, vol 10, p.199).

In 1965, the U.S. imperialists escalated their invasion of Vietnam through the “local war” strategy in the South and a destructive war in the North. In many interviews with international journalists, such as French journalist Danielle Huynh Ben (May 7, 1964), or the British Workers’ Daily (July 1, 1965), Ho Chi Minh reaffirmed: “Vietnam is one. The Vietnamese nation is one.” The U.S. imperialists are the ones dividing Vietnam, and the Vietnamese people will fight to the end for independence and national reunification” (Minh, 2002, vol 11, p.498).

Ho Chi Minh’s ideas about the rights of national independence and reunification did not follow a dogmatic model but were formed and developed in conjunction with the national liberation movements, including the struggle of the Vietnamese people, aimed at overthrowing the yoke of colonialism, achieving national independence and reunification, and establishing an independent national state that continues to develop based on the choices of each nation. This reflects the greatest truth of the era: “Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom”.

#### **4.3. Some comments on the views on national rights in Vietnam in the early 20th century**

Studying and discussing the perspective on national rights in Vietnam in the early 20th century can lead to some fundamental issues as follows:

Since its inception, the Vietnamese people have been determined to sacrifice their blood and bones to secure the right to live on the lands of Giao Chỉ, Cuu Chan, which later became Dao Viet and today is Vietnam. This achievement is the spirit of persistent and indomitable struggle for the right to live in independence and freedom. From the time of the Ba Trung, Ba Trieu, to the era of self-rule, from the 10th century onwards, the right to life of the Vietnamese people has always been cared for and protected on two fronts: national independence and improving people’s livelihoods. The Ho Khuc dynasty, after the resistance war, implemented the policy of “Patience, Simplicity, Peace, and Happiness,” meaning to be patient with people’s efforts, simplify governance, and allow people to live in peace and prosper. The feudal dynasties of Ly and Tran adopted Buddhism with the humanitarian spirit of “compassion, charity, and benevolence” as the national religion. Despite the existence of slaves and servant girls, they still had the status of human beings, with the right to live and opportunities to succeed like Da Tuong, Yet Kieu...

In modern times, at the beginning of the 20th century, Phan Bội Châu and Phan Châu Trinh were pioneers in asserting national rights. Phan Châu Trinh aimed to protect human rights, supported by the French Human Rights Association. He advocated for “Enlightening the People, Stirring the Spirit, and Nourishing the People’s Livelihood.” Phan Bội Châu, on the other hand, was willing to sacrifice and devote himself to the nation’s independence and freedom.

It can be seen that community consciousness is a distinctive feature of Vietnamese culture. Human rights in Vietnamese traditional values are often closely linked to national rights, independence for the nation, and freedom for the people, rather than to individual rights. This deep-rooted patriotic tradition has had a tremendous power to inspire the spirit of countless heroic generations of Vietnamese people, of all classes

who fought and won. This is fully reflected in Ho Chi Minh's thoughts on his journey to seek and struggle for national liberation with the aspiration: "Independence for my homeland, freedom for my compatriots is all I desire, all I understand."

In President Ho Chi Minh's discourses, the issue of national rights occupies a significant position. His thoughts on national rights were articulated at various times, manifesting in numerous writings and speeches. However, the most prominent, focused, and distinct expression was his declaration on National Independence Day.

Seizing the opportunity when the allied countries won the First World War and convened the conference in Versailles (France) in 1919, where US President Woodrow Wilson called for self-determination for nations worldwide, on behalf of Vietnamese patriots in France, Ho Chi Minh sent the Conference the "Petition of the Annamese People" with two main demands: equal legal rights and the rights to freedom and democracy. Although the petition was not accepted by the Conference, this event revealed for the first time Ho Chi Minh's ideas about the rights of colonized nations, primarily focusing on equal and freedom rights. Based on the freedoms, equality, and human rights - "rights that no one can infringe upon" as stated in the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen in 1791, Ho Chi Minh affirmed the sacred and immutable values of national rights: "All nations in the world are born equal, every nation has the right to live, to enjoy happiness and freedom... These are undeniable truths."

Thus, Ho Chi Minh's thoughts on national rights are extremely rich and profound. This is also the prominent viewpoint and powerful ideological stream that played a leading role, in influencing the conception of national rights in Vietnam in the early 20th century. Ho Chi Minh clearly stated that national rights are not granted but inherent rights of the people, won through struggle. According to him, national independence, territorial integrity, and national unity are prerequisites, the foundation of human rights for oppressed nations.

## 5. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, global and regional situations are undergoing complex and unpredictable changes. Current international relations present both opportunities and numerous challenges. Based on the ultimate goal of safeguarding independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, especially sovereignty over seas and islands, along with ensuring human rights, peaceful, prosperous, and happy lives for the people, the entire Party, people, and army of our country continue to adhere to the policy and direction of independence, self-reliance, peace, and friendship with countries, in the spirit of "resolutely and persistently fighting against all plots and interventions of hostile forces in our internal affairs, infringing upon our independence, sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity, national security, and political stability" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, p.164). at the same time, "expanding relations and promoting cooperation with political, social, and people's forces of other countries, striving for peace, national independence, democracy, cooperation, development, and social progress," as affirmed in the Documents of the 13th National Party Congress, to build and protect the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, ensuring it becomes increasingly prosperous, happy, and sustainable.

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