

## VIETNAMOLOGY ON THE PATH OF DEVELOPMENT INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE, AND COOPERATION

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Vietnamology (Vietnamologie) or Vietnamese Studies is a scientific discipline specialized in studying Vietnam in such fields as history, geography, language, literature, culture, economics, politics, and ecological environment or in the fields of interdisciplinary studies.

Vietnam first became the official name of our country in 1804 in Gia Long dynasty and existed by 1838 when King Minh Menh changed that name into Dainam. After the Revolution in August 1945, Vietnam was restored as the official name of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and has been the official name of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam until now. However, Vietnam, the name of our country, called by people, existed many years ago, according to the geography book (1435) by Nguyen Trai in King Duong Vuong – Hung Vuong Dynasty. Naturally, legend has it that Vietnam first came into literature, was written in *Vietnam the chi* by Ho Thong Thoc in Tran Dynasty, and was popular in the poetry and literature from the sixteenth century to the seventeenth century. The importance is that it was not until the official name – Vietnam had been adopted did Vietnamology begin and the name of this discipline has not been correspondingly changed to the official name of our country in each period. This discipline should be considered to be originated from the current nation – Vietnam with its territory and population

to come back to the past. All groups of ethnic people and communities of people settle down in this territory together with nations, their cultural achievements all belong to Vietnam's history and culture. Vietnamology should be considered not only to be Vietnamese Studies by foreign scholars but also Vietnamese Studies by Vietnamese scholar.

From that point of view, Vietnamology has gone through three periods until now.

- The first period: The formation and development of Vietnamology in ancient – medieval times when there were notes and descriptions about Vietnam, its people, history, and cultures by Vietnamese and foreigners.

- The second period: Contemporary Vietnamology.

- The third period: Modern Vietnamology.

### 1. Ancient – Medieval Vietnamology

The first notes about Vietnam were found in the ancient Chinese bibliography, in 25 sets of history books about royal dynasties and in the works of private houses. These ancient bibliographies were gathered by the Thanh Dynasty as a voluminous series *Tu kho toan thu*. This is a precious source of historical documentation which Vietnamese and foreign scholars have been exploiting and until now the information this source has not been exploited up.

After restoring the independence in the tenth century, the compilation of Vietnam's history, literature, and geography was

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initiated in the Ly Dynasty (1009 – 1225) and was strongly developed from the Tran Dynasty to the Nguyen Dynasty (1802 – 1945). The treasure of Vietnam's bibliographies left a huge Han Nom heritage consisting of sets of national history such as *Dai Viet su ky toan thu*, *Kham dinh Viet su thong giam cuong muc*, *Dai Nam thuc luc*, codes, series of books, and poetry, literature, history and philosophy works by such famous authors as Le Van Huu, Nguyen Trai, Ngo Si Lien, Nguyen Bim Khiem, Ngo Thi Si, Le Quy Don, Phan Huy Chu... In addition, we should mention a source of various documentation which contains diversified information reflecting the life of people such as the folklore of the Kinh people and ethnic minorities, official documents of the reign of King Nguyen, family records, land register, village regulations which Vietnamese scholars have been trying to gather and have planned to exploit.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Vietnam started its contacts with some Western countries such as Portugal, Spain, Holland, France and England and the letters, travellers' notes and recollections written by clergymen and western merchants to supplement a new source of documentation with the consideration and description in comparison with western cultures. Also at that time, Vietnamese script came into the world as an exchange between Vietnamese culture and western cultures product of Vietnam and Western cultural exchange and the beginning of a documentation source was written in Vietnamese script.

At the end of the nineteenth century, three sources of documentation above were formed with many famous authors, but Vietnamese study is mainly carried out by Vietnamese scholars with many works and

poetry, literature, history, monograph compilation, in which there was partial reference to Chinese bibliographies. The foreign scholars who studied Vietnam during this period were mainly Chinese ones. There were some valuable monographs on Vietnam such as *Giao Chau cao* by Tran Cuong Trung, *An Nam hanh ky* by Tu Minh Thien in the reign of King Duong, *Vien kieu thu* by Ly Van Phuong in the reign of King Minh, *An Nam chi* by Cao Hung Trung in the reign of King Thanh. These works on Vietnam in this period were written in the style and genre of ancient–medieval Vietnamese and East Asian cultures which were deeply influenced by Chinese culture.

## 2. Contemporary Vietnamology

In the world history, the contemporary period was the period of the capitalism development, of industrial civilization with many important economic, cultural, scientific, and technological advances. However, Vietnam and Eastern countries, except Japan, during the contemporary period were invaded and dominated by colonialism. In the conventional opinion of Vietnamese historians, the contemporary period was the period of French domination, the domination period of French colonists. The main historic content in this period was French domination and the resistance against the French domination. On one hand, it was the colonial exploitation and the repression of colonialism and on the other hand, it was the resistance against colonialism and the national liberation of Vietnamese people. Moreover, it should be recorded that this was also the period when the modernization of Vietnam's socio-economic, cultural, and scientific structures was implemented. In social and human scientific fields under the colonists'

domination and in the Vietnamese – Western cultural exchanges through French culture, many modern cultural and scientific achievements were introduced into Vietnam and they influenced and modernized Vietnam's culture and sciences. Since then there have been two trends of modernization in Vietnam: On one hand, colonists' government imposed western culture and sciences on political institutions, educational system and cultural institutions. On the other hand, Vietnam's traditional discipline shifted to the direction of modernization. In this contemporary period, a series of modern western sciences and arts came out into society in Vietnam such as archaeology, ethnology, linguistics, text studies, museology, musicology, painting, architecture, drama, and press.

In that context, Vietnamology was deeply changed. French and Western scholars who studied Vietnam were mainly in the French Orient archeological institute (*Ecole française d'Extreme – Orient-EFEO*) founded in 1900 with the headquarter and the main library in Hanoi. Western scholars applied modern methods to Vietnamese studies and a number of scientific works were published *Bulletin of the Orient archeological institute* (*Bulletin de l' Ecole Francaise d' Extreme- Orient, BEFEO*). This bulletin together with the *Do thanh hieu co Hue* bulletin (*Bulletin des Amis du Vieux Hue, BAVH*) and the bulletin of Indochinese Study Association (*Bulletin de la Societe des Etudes Indochinoises, BSEI*) were French and Western scholars' main magazines studying Vietnam in the general and Indochina in particular. In the first half of the nineteenth century, these scholars gained a lot of research achievements in such fields as archeology,

ethnology, linguistics, history, geology, and geography with great names of famous orientalists such as Henry Maspero, Leonard Aurousseau, Paul Pelliot, Leopold Cadiere, Emile Gaspardonne, and Andre Pierre Gourou. The French Orient Archeological Institute deserved great credit for preserving Han-Nom bibliographies and apitaphs, setting up scientific files of object cultural heritages, and building museums (3). Vietnamology was not considered as a specific discipline, but it was closely linked to Indochinese Studies or Chinese and Indian Studies. In addition, Eurocentrism and the thoughts of colonialism were also marked in some authors. At that time Vietnamology was developing within the development of Western countries' Orientalism discipline.

Vietnam's traditional disciplines were rapidly changed in the direction of modernization and started with the reform thoughts of such reformers as Bui Vien, Nguyen Truong To, Nguyen Lo Trach and Dang Huy Tru and the efforts by Western countries' intellectuals with national mind and the Vietnamese scholars with progressive mind. They used the reasoning, methodologies, and scientific knowledge of Western countries to study Vietnamese history and culture. The representative scientists who followed this way of modernization were Truong Vinh Ky, Nguyen Van Huyen, Nguyen Van To, Tran Van Giap, Hoang Xuan Han, Dao Duy Anh, and Dang Thai Mai. A newly originated trend in this period was the acquirement and introduction of Marxism into Vietnam, the man who paved the way was Nguyen Ai Quoc, and since then there has been a research work on Vietnamese history and culture in the view of historical materialism.



In brief, contemporary Vietnamology consists of two lines: Vietnamese study of Vietnamese scholars and Vietnamese study of the Western Orientalists, which were developed in the condition of French colonists' domination.

### 3. Modern Vietnamology

After the victory of the August Revolution in 1945, Vietnam gained its independence, but then we had to carry out two resistance wars for 30 years (1945 – 1975) in order to complete national independence and reunification. In the war condition Vietnamese studies faced many difficulties but gained some basic achievements to set up the formation of modern Vietnamology. That was the establishment of Literature, History, and Geography section in 1953 and then the establishment of History Research Institute, Literature Research Institute, Archeology Research Institute and Ethnology Research Institute under the State committee of Social Sciences (after that its name was the National of Social Sciences, National centre of Social Science and Humanity and now it is the Institute of Social Sciences). At the same time, Vietnam's university system, in which there were sciences and subjects to train and to study history, archeology, ethnology, linguistics, literature, geography, and geology, was established. For the first time in history, a group of scientists who studied Vietnam in the most important specialties were trained at home and the Vietnamese were implemented in the modern scientific trend.

Since the war ended in 1975, especially from the initiation of renovation in 1986, together with the achievements of socio-economic development and international integration, Vietnamology has had more

advantageous conditions to develop. Until now, the training and researching system, which is related to Vietnamology in our country, has been considerably developed and has been comprehensive. Apart from the disciplines established in the past, since the 1980s of the twentieth century, many new disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, environmental ecology, politics, economics, jurisprudence, and culture studies have been established. Vietnamese training and research institutions mainly are the Institute of Social sciences, the Institute of Science and technology, universities and some Institutes and Scientific centres. Some young scientists are trained in foreign countries to become masters or doctors.

The collection and exploitation of documentation sources in the last few decades have been paid attention to by Vietnamese scientists. The investigation and excavation were implemented national wide and made clear the development phases of prehistory in Vietnam, from north to south, from east to west, from coastal areas and islands to the mountainous areas in the North, in the central part and on High Lands. The cultures such as Dong Son, Sa Huynh-Champa and Oc Eo have been more deeply understood on the basis of new archeological discoveries. Especially, in 2003 – 2004 the discovery of the historical relic, Hoang Thanh Thang Long in Hanoi with the history of over 1000 years has been drawing much attention from the whole country and from the foreigner who have studied Vietnam. The voluminous treasures of the official documentations of the reign of King Nguyen, ten thousands epitaphs, land registers, family annals, and village regulations which have been excavated, have brought satisfactory

results. The documentations of folklores, especially the epics, customary law, and music of ethnic minorities, which have been collected, are full of promise.

Together with specialized researches, Vietnamese study in the interdisciplinary trend is concentrated on and implemented in many scientific works, especially in the research programmes and themes at the state level. In 1989, a Vietnamology interdisciplinary research organization was established in Hanoi University. That was centre for Vietnamese studies and cooperation, this name was changed into Vietnamese Study and Cultural Exchange centre for under Vietnam National University, Hanoi in 1995, and recently it took the name of Institute for Vietnamese Studies and Sciences development. The training of Vietnamology for foreign students at university level was developed in some big universities and recently a Vietnamology programme for masters and doctors has been planned so that this programme can be implemented in the coming years. It is obvious that on the way to development, Vietnamology has also shown some limitations, especially reasoning abilities and methodology, which should be improved in order to keep up with scientific trends in the world.

After World War II, Oriental studies in the world, which went through many great changes, which greatly influenced the development of Vietnamology in foreign countries. Eastern countries regained independence, colonialism was abolished, and on the way to independent development, each Eastern country reorganized their own nation, history, and culture studies. After the crisis in the 1950s – 1960s, the Oriental studies in the Western countries also changed in opinion and method of approaching Eastern countries, they

established exchange and cooperation relations on the equal principle with Eastern countries. From specialised disciplinary research to interdisciplinary research, the diversity of disciplines is a new development trend of modern Oriental studies.

Vietnam pioneered the national liberation movement, renovation, national reconstruction, and integration into the region and the world have gained many new achievements after the war, and Vietnam has drawn the attention and research from foreign scholars. In that context, modern Vietnamology came into the world and established its position in the development of Oriental studies in the world. Foreigners who study Vietnamology came from various philosophic and scientific schools of thought, so they have different political view points. However, being scientists, they have the same target and expectation to get to know Vietnam seriously and objectively with a conception that Vietnam is an independent country with long history and culture, exists and develops in connection with the other cultures of South East Asian, East Asian and South Asian regions, especially China, India and some Western cultures. Particularly, of the foreign scientists who study Vietnamology, some of them are foreign Vietnamese scholars in the Vietnamese communities. They study Vietnam not only as a scientific subject but also with their feeling and deeply national sentiment.

The development of modern Vietnamology, which is dependent on the certain circumstances of every country, cannot avoid the ups and downs of history.

France pioneers research into Vietnam in Asia and there used to be famous French Vietnamologists, but now the

succession of previous generations seems to be interrupted and I do hope that young French scientists will bring Vietnamology in France to a new development.

The Vietnamese study in the Soviet Union, China, and Eastern European countries used to develop vigorously but it fell down after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe and in the Cultural Revolution of China. However, I am very glad to see the efforts to maintain the activities of the Vietnamologists in extremely difficult circumstances and the recovery of Vietnamology in China, Russia, and Germany in recent years. Vietnamology in the Soviet Union was built by the famous Orientalist, A.A. Guber and it reached the peak in the 1970s – 1980s of the twentieth century with a group of the best scientists and research organizations in the world at that time. Recently, Russian Vietnamologists have assembled forces in Moscow Vietnamese Study Centre with annual scientific seminars and the Vietnamese Cultural Institute in Vladivostok. Vietnamology used to have a long tradition in China and since the 1990s; it has developed quite rapidly as an independent discipline or as a part of South East Asian Studies. Vietnamology develops in universities of provinces which share the borders with Vietnam such as Quang Dong, Quang Tay and Van Nam.

Vietnamology in America developed rapidly during the war in Vietnam but it fell down when the war ended. In recent decades, Vietnamology in America and in Canada has continued developing and in addition to senior Vietnamologist, there have appeared young Vietnamologists. It is noted that modern Vietnamology has a tendency of spreading out and developing

rapidly in many countries. Apart from the countries mentioned above, Vietnamology and Training have been established in some universities of Japan and South Korea; Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore in South East Asia; Australia; Holland, Belgium, England, Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Italy in Europe. In Australia, Vietnamology came into being and developed rapidly with many world famous scholar. I am very glad to see that Vietnamology has been established in some neighbouring countries in the South East Asian region such as Laos, Indonesia and the Philippines. Especially, Vietnamology has developed rapidly in Japan and in South Korea.

In Japan, Vietnamology first came into being at the end of the nineteenth century, then it was established during the World War II and developed rapidly in the pro-Vietnamese movement in the war time, especially in the exchange and cooperation between two countries in the last two decades. In 1987, a famous Vietnamologist and Orientalist, Yamamoto Tatsuro, who gathered over 100 scholars, formed the Vietnamese Study Association in Japan. Until now there have been more than 300 Japanese Vietnamologists in all fields, including many generations and annual seminars on Vietnamology are held. At present, Japan has a group of Vietnamologists who are the most powerful and well-trained in the world.

In South Korea, Vietnamology just started in 1966 when the Vietnamese Department was established in Hankook University. Until now, there have been four universities and colleges in South Korea, which offer courses in Vietnamology and the Vietnamese Study Association in South Korea has 70 members.



A typical feature of modern Vietnamology is that most of scientists can speak Vietnamese, many of them use Vietnamese fluently and some of them also understand Han script and Nom script.

Vietnamology has its position in international scientific forums. In international seminars such as international history congress organized by the international committee of historic sciences (CISH) every five years, the seminar of Asian historians (IAHA) organized every two years, annual seminar organized by America's Asian Study Association and seminar on Orientalism and on South East Asian Studies, there are always some scientific reports on Vietnam. In Europe, the Vietnamese Study net named Euroviet has been established since 1993 and an international seminars on Vietnam is organized every two years. Lately, some international or national seminars on Vietnam have been held in many countries on the occasions of Vietnamese historical events or they have been organized because of the demands of developing the exchange and cooperative relations with Vietnam. For example, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Dien Bien Phu victory and the Geneva Conference, two international seminars were held in Paris and Peking.

The Vietnamologists in the world have had many research works on Vietnam, in which there are voluminous and valuable works. According to the statistics by David Marr in Vietnamese book catalogue published in 1992, of the 1038 books, articles and research papers on Vietnam 577 were written by foreign authors, accounting for 55 per cent (2). Particularly, the subject of the French war in Indochina (1945 – 1954), takes up 11.702 items among which 10.308 were written by

foreign authors, accounting for 88,5 per cent (1) (see rucsio 2002). Some statistics, although insufficient and not quite up-to-date, show foreign Vietnamologists' role and contribution to Vietnamese Studies.

It is time the development of Vietnamology in the world required the exchange and cooperation among Vietnamologists, between Vietnam and the Vietnamese Study organizations in the foreign countries. The two-way relation above is essential for the development of modern Vietnamology. Vietnam is the research subject of Vietnamology, is the exchange place of the most plentiful documentation sources that can create good conditions for foreign scholars to exploit and supply and exchange Vietnamese scholars' research achievements. The research results of international Vietnamology contribute to a better understanding of Vietnam viewed from different culturally and historically comparative perspectives, hence increasing the objectivity and diversity of the subject. In fact, bilateral and multilateral cooperative projects on Vietnamese studies, single-disciplinary or interdisciplinary, have proved very successful through cooperative efforts of Vietnamese and foreign scientific institutions. For further development, which Vietnamologists desire, it is necessary have a higher level of cooperation, more comprehensive and regular and with better organization.

Being aware of this need, in 1998, Hanoi National University, in collaboration with the National Center for Humanity and Social Sciences, held the first international workshop on Vietnamology in Hanoi. Out of 600 participating Vietnamologist scientists 300 were from 26 foreign countries. They

brought to the workshop the latest research results fostering a better understanding and deeper knowledge on Vietnam. They also grabbed this chance for improving communication and mutual understanding. It was the biggest international workshop on Vietnamology ever held, marking a new development stage of cooperation among Vietnamologists around the world. At the discussion table on July 16 1998 and the closing session on July 17 1998, all participating scientists agreed that international workshops on Vietnamology be held periodically, that an international Committee on Vietnamology linking Vietnamologists and related organizations be established, and that an information channel be set up for the exchange and updating of documents and research results and the sharing of research and training experience in Vietnamology and Vietnamese language training.

Unfortunately, after the great success of the first meeting, those proposals and plans have been very slowly implemented; as a result, the second workshop does not take place until today, six years later. For this reason, I would like to recommend that, at this workshop, besides reports and discussions, we spend some time, especially at the round-table meeting, discussing and seeking solutions to accomplishing the first workshop's proposals. To broaden cooperation and communication in Vietnamese studies is not only the desire and goal of Vietnamologists but also an objective and essential requirement for the development of Vietnamology in the twenty-first century. Good organization and an effective mechanism of operations will definitely play an important role in promoting Vietnamology inside Vietnam and around the globe, opening a new chapter of the history of Vietnamology in the context of world integration and globalization.

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