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1. Definition and implication of the concepts

- Politics and political institution

According to Soviet scholars, politics is a part of the superstructure of society including political ideology and political institutions. Basically, politics is often understood as the affairs of the state, the country governance, the relations among classes, states and the peoples. It is a “participation in the affairs of the state, the regulation of the agencies, tasks, and contents of the state’s activities covering issues of the state establishment, management of the country, the classes of people, and conflicts among partisan interests. The basic interests of classes and their reciprocal relationships are also manifested in politics. Politics also expresses the relations both between peoples and between nations. Relations among classes and thus their politics are rooted in their economic position. Political ideas and institutions that correspond to them are superstructures on top of the economic infrastructure.”(1)

- Political institution is a concept that refers to agencies and its sanctions that allow it to exist in a power complex. In this article, political institution is used as a general concept referring to the state, its legal system and the political nature of a social regime throughout all historical periods.

- Political system

Political system is a commonly used concept in the world today. According to the general definition in the Soviet Encyclopedia, it is “a system of factors consisting of

the state, political parties, trade unions, and religious organizations and movements involving political pursuits, political norms, traditions, and institutions.”(2)

Accordingly, when speaking of a “political system,” it is about the whole system. The elements constituting the political system described in the definition are sufficient only in modern political institutions. Of these elements, the most important is the state government because the essence of politics is state power. To understand a political system, it is impossible to separate the state from its ideology and ideological foundation. Therefore, the ideological foundation should be understood as a determinant that governs the characteristics of a political system which is also under great influence from its traditional political standards and institutions. With the above analysis, the “concept of a political system” should be understood as a type of state organization with a certain ideological base “corresponding” with a certain political situation on the foundation of a certain historical and cultural tradition.

2. The basic content of nationality - the influential factor in the development of political institutions

Marxism-Leninism believes that the state always carries in it the nature of a certain class. The state is a tool to realize the purpose of the ruling class and to protect the interests of the class or corporation that dominates society. Usually, the emergence of the state is the result of socio-economic development to a high level in each community. When the society is divided into antagonistic classes, the state appears as a dominating instrument of one class over the other classes in that society.

With Vietnam’s specific natural geographical conditions, its culture, nationality, and special historical circumstances, the first state in Vietnam appeared mainly not as a result of unreconciled class struggles but on the basis of a division which represented the Vietnamese community at that time. This original state met the objective requirement for providing water infrastructure and for the struggle against foreign aggression. The development of the economy and the level of social division in Vietnam under the ancient Hung King period, as determined by many researchers, was still quite low and could not be compared with other countries which had been established at that time. However, the State of Van Lang was born. Its existence has

been proven to be historically authentic. Clearly, there were some objective pressures forcing the nascent first Vietnamese state to emerge early, before the economy had developed to the extent that the society had reached a sufficient level of differentiation. That objective pressure was the need for a unified organization above the scale of the "village," to benefit the whole Vietnamese community. Therefore, from the very beginning, the state in Vietnam revealed its community characteristics, representing interests of the community rather than protecting class interests. In other words, from the very beginning, the class characteristics of our state were not clearly shaped.

This state with the form named "commune representation" existed not long before the country fell into foreign feudalism. The country entered a period of losing independence with lasting thousands of years. Chinese dynasties took turns to dominate Vietnam. It is completely reasonable to say that the colonial governments were the ruling tools of the Chinese, so they acquired profound class characteristics. While that is true, it does not reflect the true nature of their governments. Those were governments of national enslavement which existed not only in the feudal class, but for the benefit of the Han people in Jiaozhou. Under Chinese rule, there were many waves of immigration from China to Vietnam. Many Han soldiers after being discharged from the army, decided to stay and work, and even criminals who were exiled to our country also enjoyed special privileges of the colonial government, being valued more than the native Vietnamese.

Meanwhile, all Vietnamese, regardless of being rich or poor, and even some people who joined the colonial apparatus suffered discrimination. The Han ruling policy pushed all classes of Vietnamese people to one side against the government. The biggest social conflict during the Chinese rule was a conflict of nationalities. The successive anti-government uprisings that broke out during this period were all manifestations of national resistance. The initiators and leaders of those movements were people from families that held positions in the state apparatus under the Hung Kings (Two Ladies Trung), or were Vietnamese people who worked in the government for the early Vietnamese rulers (Ly Nam De, Tinh Thieu, etc.). Most of them were rich Vietnamese people in the localities (Phung Hung, Khuc Thua Du, and so on).

Vietnam experienced a unique period in world history. The Vietnamese lost their independence and sovereignty and had to live under the rule of foreign governments for more than 1,000 years, then they regained their independence. It is a serious statement regarding the uniqueness of this period in world history because there is no other nation experienced a similar thing. Other nations either regained independence sooner, or were completely assimilated. Vietnam as no other nation has endured such a long and arduous fight for independence. From the Vietnamese point of view, this period of more than 1,000 years of subjugation to Chinese rule was considered an annexation of their national sovereignty. Under Chinese rule, the government served as a tool to enslave and oppress the Vietnamese nation. Therefore, the goal of all national liberation movements during this period was to return power to the Vietnamese.

From the Vietnamese point of view, during this millennium, the Chinese- backed government was perceived in a unique way: either the government is ours or it is the enemy's. Ordinary Vietnamese people have not had many opportunities to understand that the government belongs to only one class. From a principled point of view, it can be said to be ambiguous, but it is an historical fact. The national conscience of the Vietnamese people was formed early and expressed strongly in part because of the historical circumstances just discussed.

This political tradition was incorporated into independent feudal states in subsequent historical periods. From the 10th century, the country entered an era of independence. Feudal dynasties successively ruled the country. Inevitably each dynasty had policies to care for its class. But those rights would not have lasted long if the rulers did not rely on the strength of the whole nation. As a small country that bordered a huge Chinese empire ruled by feudal dynasties with expansionist ambitions, it was always difficult for Vietnam to survive without closely-knit internal cohesion. For the sake of the nation, those in power had to uphold the nation above all else. And in fact, the feudal governments of Vietnam with few exceptions proved to be worthy representatives of the nation. Therefore, as political historians have pointed out, the Vietnamese feudal class in their peak period was the one representing the interests of the nation.

There is much evidence that the will of all classes of people can be found in the policy of feudal states. An important social feature of feudalism was the caste system. In studying Vietnamese feudalism, a loose structure of castes can be found. However, there were no extremities among the Vietnamese castes as often seen in other feudal countries. Transition between classes frequently occurred and often took place with ease. Crossing between castes was not taboo. A talented person coming from a poor peasant background could still become a high-ranking mandarin, if he passed the exams.

Furthermore, due to the connection between the noble and common people, as well as between the feudal state and the people, the greatest feature of Vietnamese civilization during the feudal period were found in the villages, not in an imperial civilization as found in many other countries.

The gap between the rich and the poor was slowly established in society. It is no coincidence that until the land reform period in the mid-20th century, privatization of land in Vietnam had not been completed. In the north over 20% of the cultivated area was state owned. In many localities, such as Nam Dinh, that rate was as high as 30-35%. Along with the disparity between rich and poor, research findings show that, one of the factors that hindered the process of privatization was the impact of the feudal state itself.

From these facts, it is determined that in traditional thinking, Vietnamese people rarely have circumstances to see the state as a tool of a particular class. Considering political systems, only one feature has been mentioned that it either represents all the people or it runs counter to the best interests of the nation.

This is not to say that the class nature of the political system in Vietnamese history is obscured, because any state has an embedded nature of a certain class. But in the case of Vietnam, it has been clearly shown that class features in the political systems have always been relegated to a secondary role, after the primacy of nationality. In reality, history shows that a political system in Vietnam can only be strong once the ruling class is integrated into the mainstream of the nation.

The “nationality” attribute is also reflected in the legal “representation” of the common interests, which serve the community as well as interests of all classes of people. In the history of Vietnam, the three most powerful dynasties of Ly, Tran and Early Le created Dai Viet civilization and achieved miraculous achievements in the resistance war against foreign invaders and in the construction of large-scale irrigation projects. Those civic works by the state were needed before undertaking the tasks of stabilizing and developing the country. In some dynasties, despite their very complete and massive administrative apparatus, their focus was placed on consolidating the ruling power while social improvements were neglected. This invariably led the country to crisis and weakness. This scenario occurred in the case of the Ho Dynasty in the 15th century and the Nguyen Dynasty in the 19th century.

In fact, the successful dynasties mentioned above did not underestimate the function of civic projects as a means to govern the country. In order to consolidate the authority of the family, the leaders of the Tran dynasty devised an initiative to cede the throne early so that the next king could train and demonstrate his ability in governance. If the new king failed to do the job, the father king could remove him and replace him with another son. And this rite of passage that researchers still call “King’s Father” clearly came from the strategy of protecting the family’s right to rule. Under the Le dynasty, the aristocracy and mandarins, due to the policies of the state, always had special privileges. However, the leaders of the feudal states in this prosperous period knew how to regulate the relationship between the ruling function, protecting the interests of the dominant group as well as their social function wisely.

Many historical and political studies agree that European feudal states did not spend much effort implementing their social functions, but essentially expended their capital maintaining stability and public order. The strength of those states depended mainly on increasing the size of their standing military forces.

The progressive feudal dynasties of historical Vietnam used their political position to arouse the spirit of national solidarity and turned it against foreign invaders to win decisive victories.

On the whole, as research shows that the common denominator of most ancient and medieval Vietnamese political dynasties was to harness the power of the people by improving their lives and help them building strong community infrastructure. In return the people were inspired to stand with their government in both the building of their country and in winning glorious victories in defense of their country. This feature is considered as a regularity of Vietnamese politics in the history.

3. Conclusions

First, nationality is a prominent and deeply reflected factor that governs the nature and operation of political institutions. In the current context, it must be considered a very important premise that needs to be measured when building a political system in Vietnam.

Second, when building the agencies of the state in Vietnam, it is necessary to pay close attention to the public function (social function) of these institutions. It should be remembered that their function is to serve and represent the people who make up the nation. This is not just the usual attention to an inherent function of the state but rather an emphasis on a venerable political tradition that has proven to be crucial to the strength of the Vietnamese State. This feature is a prerequisite and auspicious condition for building a state of the people, by the people, and for the people according to the socialist orientation of the Party today.

Third, success of past political values of the nation should be cherished, renewed, and creatively developed for the coming era of industry 4.0 integration. It is essential to build on the past to shape the future of Vietnam's political growth with a focus on improving the political system. This can be accomplished by building a socialist law-governed state of the people, by the people, and for the people and so fulfilling the goal of prosperous people, strong country, democratic, equitable, civilized society.

Tài liệu tham khảo

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