

Ngày nhận bài: 11/08/2024 | Ngày phản biện: 26/08/2024 | Ngày xuất bản: 25/10/2024

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1. In the 16th century Vietnamese culture first contacted Western culture with the introduction of the national language.

This was the effort by Catholic missionaries to Romanize the Vietnamese language. Most researchers agree that Western culture greatly influenced Vietnamese culture through French colonial invasion and accelerated exploitation, especially from the beginning of the 20th century with the development of the press in national language.

Up to this point in the late 19th century, three types of writing have been used to record the Vietnamese language: Han or Chinese scripts, Nom scripts, and national Romanized scripts, the lettering of the national language in use today. By invading and placing the yoke of domination on Vietnam from the second half of the 19th century, the French colonialists gradually eliminated Han and Nom scripts. Initially, the French colonialists carried out an educational policy solely for training interpreters and staff, who served the colonial administration, so they actively spread the French and national language.

The schools in this period included the elementary schools in the commune, the primary schools at district level, the high school at provincial level, and colleges and universities at regional level. Accordingly, students at different educational levels were taught French, along with humanities and science. Study of French language and culture became compulsory for higher education. In addition, the French also opened several scientific research facilities such as the Pasteur Institute in Saigon (1891), the Institute of Oceanography (also known as The Fish House) in Nha Trang (1896), and

the French School of the Far East (École française d'Extrême-Orient) in Hanoi (1898), as a way of both imposing their control and supplementing on their colony's indigenous civilization.

On April 6, 1878, the Governor of Cochinchina Lafont signed the Decree on the use of the Annamite language with the Latin alphabet, stipulating that from January 1, 1882, all official documents, decrees, decisions, orders, judgments, instructions, etc. should be written, signed and promulgated in Romanized scripts.⁽¹⁾ On December 28, 1918, King Khai Dinh issued an edict officially abolishing the Confucian exams. Since 1919, after the organization of the last provincial exam, the national language automatically become the official language of Vietnam.

Remarkably, according to priest Truong Ba Can, in 1867, after returning from a trip with Bishop Gauthier to Rome, Nguyen Truong To wrote the "Eight urgent things to do" which called for "publishing a daily newspaper, in which are posted edicts, instructions, ordinances and notes, works of famous people and current national affairs so that students can read and know domestic affairs."⁽²⁾ This was an innovative proposal, reflecting a strategic vision of Nguyen Truong To. However, as is known today, there was no reason for this at the time. The press which Nguyen Truong To saw in the West belonged to a socio-cultural structure that was vastly different from that of Vietnam. Although he was very eager to realize what he witnessed in the West, and thought it would be helpful for social reform, he could not do it in his country. Moreover, journalism was not only a matter of a civilization gap or technology development but also a phenomenon with social and cultural factors. Journalism originated in Western countries with more public attention paid to social and political issues and high-level industrial production, and labor assignment.

When the French invaded Vietnam intending to erase the indigenous culture, they changed the old social foundation of the country. By the early 20th century, the feudal system inevitably declined. Along with forming a new class structure in the colonial society, some ideas from the West, including bourgeois ideology penetrated Vietnam.

The French coercively imposed a Western cultural model or at least created something similar. Based on the cultural institutions directly resulting from the two colonial exploitations, the social structure changed drastically. Researchers have noted that the increasing number of middle class in urban areas led to their increasingly important role in cultural life. The French invasion led to changes in all areas of society in Vietnam. It also created necessary conditions for the birth of the press.

The first newspaper to appear in Indochina was "Le Bulletin Officiel d'Expédition de la Cochinchine." It was written in French and first published on September 29, 1861. This was an official publication that served the occupation and rule by the French in the early period of Cochinchina. In 1864, "Le Courrier de Saigon," often called "The Saigon Times" added pages for literature, historical events and other documents calling for commercial investment from France in the Far East. It was not until April 15, 1865 that Gia Dinh Newspaper, the first Vietnamese language newspaper, appeared. This newspaper also aimed at spreading the policies of the French authorities throughout the southern region.

At first, Gia Dinh Newspaper was published by a French interpreter named Ernest Potteaux. It was not until 1869 when Mr. Truong Vinh Ky was appointed the director(3) and Mr. Huynh Tinh Cua became chief editor of Gia Dinh Newspaper that the appearance of the new newspaper had significantly changed.

Besides announcing the government's official documents and decrees, Gia Dinh Newspaper published columns on history, fairy tales, and poetry. Later, people mentioned Phan Yen newspaper as one of the first private newspapers, founded by Mr. Diep Van Cuong in 1898. Phan Yen was the old name of Gia Dinh Citadel. Phan Yen was a national language newspaper, published weekly with 7 or 8 issues under its belt before it was banned. Dai Nam Dong Van Daily newspaper was established around 1892 and printed entirely in the Chinese language in the Tonkin region. With issue No. 793 on March 27, 1907, this paper was renamed Dang Co Tung Bao newspaper and printed in the Vietnamese national language, thus, it is considered the

first newspaper in national language in Hanoi.

It can be said that Cochinchina was the cradle of the Vietnamese press with the opening of Gia Dinh Newspaper which played an essential role, especially in its popularization and affirmation of the national language. "Aside from Phan Yen newspaper, Gia Dinh Newspaper had been the only newspaper in Vietnam for nearly 40 years until Nong Co Min Dam was published in 1901." (4)

Some people believed that the French had issued several policies to support and create conditions for developing the national language press, such as opening the France-Vietnam school, abolishing the imperial exams in Tonkin and Annam, requiring local government officials to be proficient in the national language, and partially reducing the strict regulations on newspaper publishing in Vietnamese. However, by the end of the 19th century, the number of newspapers in national language was limited, including Gia Dinh Newspaper (1865), Thong Loai Khoa Trinh (1888), Nam Ky Nhat Trinh (1897), Phan Yen Newspaper (1898), and Nong Co Min Dam (1901). (5) It was not until the early 20th century that the urbanization and development of the urban class and lifestyle, and through the activities of Vietnamese entrepreneurs that the press began to diversely develop.

2. Before the contact with Western culture, Vietnamese society existed and developed peacefully with a local agrarian culture and features of traditional Asian culture.

On the one hand, that culture was centered around the family structure, which was typically focused on sentiment and stability. On the other hand, it was historically heavily influenced by Chinese Confucianism. For thousands of years, the social organization of the Chinese feudal state strongly influenced the Vietnamese feudal dynasties.

Since the second half of the 19th century, the French invasion had a profound impact on all of Vietnamese society both in its organization and appearance. At the beginning of the 20th century, Vietnam needed to modernize and break out of the box of the thousand-year traditional heritage to strive for new values. It had been more than 40 years since the French expeditionary army opened fire on Da Nang, usurping the nation's independence and freedom. In the early 20th century, the French invaders had successfully imposed their colonial culture over the traditional culture of Vietnam. Due to the policy of colonial exploitation, the influence of French and Western culture and civilization, traditional Vietnamese culture began to change. And so, by the early years of the 20th century, the acculturation between Western culture and Vietnamese culture (both through the coercion of the French colonialists' invasion and the consciousness of a part of Vietnamese scholars) gradually changed the latter.

In the early 20th century, after suppressing patriotic movements, the French colonialists completed the military pacification of Vietnam and increased its colonial exploitation on a grand scale. To do so, a policy of extreme domination was imposed in the most important areas of the economy, politics, culture, and education. The ultimate goal of colonialization was to gain financial profit for France. However, the harsh rule of the French colonialists could not prevent the progressive national culture that formed and developed during this time. From the beginning, representatives of the new thinking were Confucian scholars, progressive patriots such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, Huynh Thuc Khang, Tran Quy Cap, Dao Nguyen Pho, Ngo Duc Ke, Tran Cao Van, and Dang Nguyen Can. These were the pioneers in various movements that destroyed the outdated concepts of feudalism, which in their opinion, was the cause of Vietnam's weakness and failure. Many well-known scholars in the community resolutely fought against conservatives. The progressive scholars were eager to find new ways to save the country and the homeland.

In 1904, two revolutionary movements appeared almost simultaneously: the Dong Du movement led by Phan Boi Chau and the Duy Tan movement initiated by Phan Chau Trinh. After the taxation protests in the Central region and the poisoning of French soldiers in Hanoi in 1908, the French colonialists suppressed both movements.

The Vietnamese people did not welcome the imposition of the Western invaders' culture. French and Western culture was met with resistance and public outrage by the majority of the indigenous people because Vietnam already had a long and proud heritage. However, it cannot be denied that Vietnamese culture, with its prominent progressive thinking, had been infusing new blood in its world outlook by the 20th century. Some researchers have commented that this national culture, by the enforced contact with Western civilization, became even more fresh and lively in its own right, despite invasion and domination by the French colonialists.

In the eyes of innovative intellectuals, this presented an opportunity for the nation to find a way out of the foreign dominance. It gave them a stronger resolve to change their imposed destiny and move towards a lasting future of independent nationhood. "Until the 19th century, Vietnam and its East Asian neighbors had had a culture independent and isolated from the world. However, after this point it became entwined with the world, forcing it to blend Western culture into its everyday life, and forcing it into a trajectory with the world's historical movements. The change from medieval to modern culture included changes from a Sino-based culture to a Greekbased European culture, with the development of capitalism occupying a dominant position in the modern world culture." (6)

3. From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Vietnamese intellectuals who mostly were Confucian scholars, soon recognized the need to modernize the national culture.

Their views were diverse, but most of them agreed that the use of the Romanized scripts was more effective than the use of Chinese characters. Nguyen Van Vinh and Pham Quynh were notable representatives of the opposing view. Even between them, Pham Quynh was a royalist, while Nguyen Van Vinh demanded to replace the monarchy with a national government. Nevertheless, both of them were in favor of using Romanized scripts as the national language. Pham Quynh believed the national

language was the best foundation for developing national studies at a new level, a tool for preserving and developing Vietnamese culture. For Nguyen Van Vinh, the Romanized scripts presented an opportunity to fix our races, to turn the Vietnamese people into a force of a new era.

In 1909, in the introduction to Luo Guanzhong's book "Romance of the Three Kingdoms", which was translated from Chinese into Vietnamese by Phan Ke Binh, Nguyen Van Vinh predicted that "The success or failure of our country in the future depends on the national language." In 1917, in the magazine Nam Phong, Pham Quynh admitted that "Our country's problem now is the literature in the national language. If this problem can be solved, learning will progress, people's education can be expanded, and we can expect evolution. When the national language is used as an official language, our people will be able to acquire new sciences and create an appropriate foundation to our status and personality as a people." (7)

For many Vietnamese intellectuals at that time, patriotism and resistance to colonialism meant improving people's education and promoting the movement of the nation towards civilization and modernity. A quick way to raise the people's intellectual level and modernize the country was to make the national language popular among the people. As an example, Japan rose from a small country to a power in Asia in the early 20th century with renovation and acceptance of Western technocratic civilization.

This motivated many Vietnamese intellectuals to move toward the modernization trend. They established Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc School in the footsteps of the Khanh Ung Nghia Thuc School (Keio Gijuku) in Japan. Leaders of this movement included Luong Van Can, Tran Quy Cap, Nguyen Quyen, Duong Ba Trac, Hoang Tang Bi, Nguyen Huu Cau, Nguyen Van Vinh, Pham Duy Ton, and Nguyen Ba Hoc. With the publication of the book "Van Minh Tan Hoc Sach" (1904) (the new book of civilization), the leaders of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc stated six prioritized policies. First, with the use of a new writing style, "Everybody in the country who goes to school

should take the national language for themselves as the first means, so that within a few months all are literate..." Many prestigious scholars involved in leading the reform and renovation movements urged their compatriots to learn the new national language. This was succinctly put by Tran Quy Cap that "The national language is the soul of the country. It must be used by our people." (8)

As history proved, the introduction of the Vietnamese national language opened up a huge new horizon for Vietnamese culture. According to patriotic norms, spreading the national language was a revolutionary act and a united expression of the country's spirit. In 1868, Truong Vinh Ky wrote a book *Tieng Annam thuc hanh dung cho truong thong ngon* (Practical Vietnamese language for interpretation schools). In 1876, he published a book *Sach hoc danh van quoc ngu* (How to spell the national language). In order to spread the national language in the community, Truong Vinh Ky selected several books that were easy to understand and familiar to the Vietnamese readers to publish in the national language. These included "The Six Cattles' Argument for Merit," "Luc Van Tien" by Nguyen Dinh Chieu, and Phan Tran Story. However, the dissemination of the national language was not a simple undertaking. It was a revolution in culture and crystallized the wisdom, effort, and enthusiasm of an entire population over a long time to overcome many challenges. Truong Vinh Ky and Huynh Tinh Cua brought subjects ranging from poetry to science into the press in the new national language. They served as director and editor-in-chief of *Gia Dinh*, the first national language newspaper in Vietnam, published in 1865.

By the early 20th century, the private sector increased its participation in the field of publishing and press. The use of the national language by the press gradually shifted newspapers away from being a tool of the colonial government. The newspapers became a channel to spread academic ideas, a cultural space where people could discuss culture, literature, academic subjects as well as all other aspects of life.

By the early 20th century, the press had penetrated all three regions of Vietnam, and the national language was explained and became a component of the unified

Vietnamese language. It provided expression with clarity, accuracy, and flexibility in all issues of ordinary life from politics, culture, and science to modern literature, and art. Obviously, during this period, the press made a significant contribution to perfecting and popularizing the national language, enabling it to modernize Vietnamese culture to become brighter and more expressive.

By the early 20th century, the economic, cultural, and social structure in Vietnam had drastically changed. Significantly, it moved toward the Western model, specifically the French model. Despite being new and tightly controlled by the colonial state, the press conveyed a considerable amount of cultural knowledge to the population, contributing to raising people's awareness and understanding, and gradually becoming an essential part of social and cultural life.

During this period, some newspapers focused on spreading ideology, culture and civilization. Many Confucian scholars or French-educated intellectuals became famous journalists, translators, or editors such as Phan Ke Binh, Nguyen Do Muc, Nguyen Ba Hoc, Pham Quynh, Le Thuoc, and Dao Trinh Nhat. Many intellectuals became 'journalists cum researchers' such as Nguyen Huu Tien, Tran Trong Kim, Nguyen Van Ngoc, Dao Duy Anh, Huynh Thuc Khang, Ngo Duc Ke, and Phan Khoi. Some became businessmen, researchers, or public speakers. These people were called the "golden generation," and the timeframe was called "the age of giants." These nicknames vividly depicted the cultural portraits of enlightened people with a spirit and aspiration who aimed to give their compatriots a new, more civilized, and happier life. These intellectuals were filled with national spirit, and actively participated in journalism with enthusiasm, using the press as a cultural tool hoping to fulfill the promise that a new style of communication would render the ancient traditions obsolete.

It might explain why from World War I to the early 1930s, a boom of the press in the national language was witnessed with a significant increase in quantity and content. In 1922, compared to 19 national language newspapers in three regions of Vietnam, there were 36 newspapers in 1927 and 47 in 1929. Some typical national language

publications during this period included: Dong Duong tap chi (1913/1918), Trung Bac Tan Van (1915/1945), Nam Phong (1917/1935), Nu gioi chung (1918), Thuc nghiep dan bao (1920/1933), Khai Hoa nhat bao (1921/1927), Huu Thanh Tap chi (1921/1924), Dong Phap Thoi bao (1923/1928), An Nam Tap chi (1926/1930), Than Chung (1929/1930), Trung lap bao (1924/1933), Tan dan bao (1924/1925), Phap Viet Nhat Gia (1927), Tieng dan (1927/1943), Ha Thanh ngo bao (1927/1929), Bao Dong-Tay (1929/1932), Phu nu tan van (1929/1935), Ki lan bao (1928/1929), and Van minh (1926/1931).

Through the press in their own national language, Vietnamese people could access the ideas of Chinese Neo-Reformists and Japanese Reformists, thereby gaining a vision for their own nation. People could access literature, philosophy, and the humanities from ancient times to the Enlightenment in France and Western Europe. That was the reason why Pham Quynh praised the journalist's profession when he wrote in Nam Phong: "Journalists will be partly responsible for making our country good or bad in the future." (9)

It can be said that the press in the national language has made an incalculable contribution to the modernization of Vietnamese culture in the early 20th century, despite living under the yoke of the French colonialists. Many kinds of literature and artistic achievements such as poetry, novels, plays, paintings, and music produced in this period still surprise us and receive our admiration today.

Tài liệu tham khảo

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