

## Consolidated Summary

*(A summary of essays on social sciences, the national educational system and the modernization of Vietnam)*

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For over the past one hundred years, the Vietnamese, especially the intellectual class, has continuously addressed the question of national modernization with the aim to erase pages of historical infamy, of being colonized, pressured, and exploited because Vietnam is backward, weak, and incapable of resisting foreign invasion. In the situation of no self-determination, our educational system was also under the foreigners' control, driving it to the direction they wanted. Our thinking is being gradually westernized. This education foundation and (new) thinking have brought about a situation whereby the majority of Vietnamese intellectuals have a Vietnamese body but a French (or American) mind, think like Westerners and behave like Westerners. If today's Vietnam has not completely lost its Vietnamese character, a large part is thanks to the common people – unfortunate at first – but now fortunately – who were forgotten or were not Westernized, and a small part thanks to a small number of intellectuals, who were obliged to follow the Westernization trend, but still questioned the value of the European-American education system, and do not want to completely give up Eastern values. Thanks to this, Vietnam has not lost its roots and Eastern ideas have been preserved.

Today, the crisis of Western society which stems from the grave crisis of their ideas, requires us to reset the question of who is right and who is wrong, who is superior and who is inferior, especially when a number of Western intellectuals are looking to the East for some leeway. If we continue with the Western tread, then one day not far we will find ourselves in the present crisis which is shaking their civilization. Nothing is more illogical than this attitude of closing one's eyes to follow them like that.

When speaking of modernizing the country, one must discuss social sciences. Before 1930, the issue was not so considered. Our previous generation, when discussing about modernization of Vietnam, did not think about understanding the social structure, especially Vietnamese society, and the thinking system that served as the foundation of such society. They focused on science and technology, meaning the branches rather than the roots, the outside rather than the inside. The first people who looked at the issue of social structure are those who later followed communism. They looked at the correct issue, but unfortunately, they went in the wrong direction, thus, creating destruction, death, divisiveness, consequences that our country has suffered for the past thirty years: Communist paradise (this is a theoretical paradise) is a bloody and fiery paradise. No one can contradict this. The reason is that they embarked on the wrong thinking, or more accurately, they have blindly accepted a thinking system and a research method and reasoning that may be (may be only, not at all certain) appropriate for Russian society but detrimental to Vietnamese society.

However, not only those who blindly follow the communist thinking and reasoning are wrong. Those who follow the thinking and reasoning methods of the West against communism are equally wrong. They blindly accept the methods, the language, and the research proposals of the West. Consequently, one should not be surprised that their solutions for modernizing Vietnamese society have led to failure. More dangerously, they have widely opened the door for the invasion of foreign culture, transforming Vietnamese culture/civilization to a culture of profiteering, of individualism, and of worshipping the power of money and weaponry.

As it is well known, today's social studies originated from August Comte, who had tried to bring science to social sciences with the goal to control and dominate society like we can control and dominate the physical world with natural sciences. This was why the term that August Comte used initially was "Physique Sociale" or Social Physics. The meaning behind this term was that society is the object of the research for sciences. From there in a straight line, we would arrive at the opinion that human beings are physical objects, and intellectual values are eliminated. This is the direction that led the science of sociology, especially in the USA, to a dead end today.

In Vietnam, sociology – or social sciences – is a brand new study. This is why, facing the dead end of Western social sciences, we have to be very cautious. We need to assess the methods that were adopted in the West and that we have absorbed, and from there we can find a new direction for social sciences in Vietnam. This is the objective of all the authors who contributed to this special issue of Tu Tuong. This is only the first step. None of us could boast that we have found the direction that everyone should follow. However, the directions/alternatives proposed are those that can be researched, dissected, modified, and through this work, we would have opportunities to learn further, to think further so that those who are committed to the restoration of a national educational system can maintain the valuable parts of our country's civilization (meaning what our forebears have tried to search and find) while absorbing what is positive from foreign civilizations in order to build the foundation for the modernization of our country.

The foundation of the intellectual thinking of Vietnamese society consists of two systems, the Indian and the Chinese ones, similar to the intellectual thinking of the West, which combines the Latin and Saxon thinking. This is why our civilization is a civilization that gracefully merges Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. To modernize Vietnamese society, we have to understand thoroughly the basic three ism above. From there, we can consider what to keep and what to change in order to reach the establishment of a unique Vietnamese social science, appropriate for Vietnam in terms of content as well as form, and would actively contribute to the modernization of Vietnamese society, in a Vietnamese spirit.

This issue of Tu Tuong consists of a number of essays that, despite the different titles, are directed to one focus: we can assess Eastern or Western thinking under new angles, dissolving the inferiority complex of the Vietnamese people when comparing East and West, and opening new directions for the research of a number of subjects that are closely related to the modernization of the Vietnamese society.

The article by Professor Buu Lich shows us that the concerns of French sociologists are different from Vietnamese concerns. Their concerns are for a society that is strongly proceeding toward a technological and urban civilization, with the realization that without timely and appropriate

solutions to address the issues caused by increasingly overcrowded living conditions and machinery in the cities, France would suffer from serious, problematic bottlenecks, with no remedies in sight, like the US society today (trash, dust, traffic jams, thievery, crimes, budget deficits, sadness and emptiness. The article also discusses the problem that Professor Wright Mills calls “investigate for the sake of investigating”, focusing on form rather than benefits, and as Professor Stanislaw Andreski had severely condemned in “The Uses of Comparative Sociology (Berkeley, 1965) the more one uses erudite terms the more one considers oneself to be scientific and intelligent.

The article by Professor Nguyen Xuan Lai can be considered as a transition between Western view to Eastern view. Professor Lai is very cautious when advancing some ideas on methods to research villages and hamlets in Vietnam, especially in the adoption of methods that can be effective in the West but which may bring no results but on the contrary inflict damages when adopted in Vietnam. However, this is not to say that Western authors are no good. But with the exception of Paul Mus, the French author of the book Vietnam: Sociology of a war (Seuil, Paris, 1952) and Gerald Hickey, the American author of the book, Village in Vietnam (Yale, 1964), there has been no Western author who can clearly understand Vietnamese society and advance an effective research method for the Vietnamese Society,

With the article of Professor Kim Dinh, we enter a new environment, Vietnamese environment, with the definition of the term “society.” Analyzing the term “society” as Professor Kim Dinh has done is probably the starting point for a brand new method, entirely Vietnamese, and one that especially closely resembles the reality. If we see in the character “xa” two parts, “thi” (soul) and “tho” (land), then the Vietnamese society is a combination of villages, souls, and land. Only when we see it this way can we understand the Vietnamese issue at its roots. And to see things that way, we have to know *Chu Nho*, the old Chinese based characters, an instrument that Americans, and those Vietnamese who only learnt from Western civilization do not have. We can adopt this method in the basic investigation of “quoc gia” Vietnam, the Vietnamese “state”. Based on European or American traditions, when one considers the term “state” or “etat”, one thinks about its basic structure (legislative, executive, judicial, and other principles). But in the Vietnamese thinking, “quoc gia” is a new term. The historical term is “xa tac”. Both the characters “xa” and “tac” include the character “thi” (“tam linh” or soul) and indicates the place of worship. Even the character “quoc gia” is full of meaning: our “state or etat” consists of two basic parts – “quoc” country and “gia” home, family – completely different from the Western concept!

In this spirit, Professor Ton That Thien reset the issue of democracy (dan chu), and questions the view that Confucianism is corrupt, obsolete, and the blind way of following the West to search for a political solution that can be effective for Vietnam, forgetting that foreign solutions or answers which do not originate from Vietnamese thinking would not bring about the results that the Vietnamese wish.

The article by Professor Vu Van Mau has an important position special to Buddhist sociologists in particular, and for all Vietnamese sociologists in general. The article brings forward the question of whether Buddhism is appropriate for science of sociology, and whether Buddhism can be used as a foundation for policies to build a healthy and sane society? Professor Mau

answers yes and presents his reasons to demonstrate that these could open the way for a program of extensive research for those who are committed to a national educational system.

The article by Professor Ngo Trong Anh takes a deeper step into the field of Buddhism in its relations with sociology, especially in the “Hoa Nghiem” thinking. According to this way of thinking, “whatever the individual is, his society is the same, and vice versa.” This is also the view of today’s sociology, one that moves away from the view by August Comte (emphasizing the influence of society over individual). Nevertheless, different from the sociology way of “Hoa Nghiem” which expects that individuals must change and not wait and depend on society, a reflection of himself.

Next, the Venerable Thich Minh Chau reminds us that Buddha, although he paying attention to politics, also distinguished between the political views of monks, Buddhist practitioners and laymen.

Lastly, Pham Cong Thien warns us that we have to avoid bringing the Western intellectual crisis to the East, especially through terminology. The author analyzes the term “sociologie”, and notes the effect of using this term: this effect is the failure of Western Sociology. The term “sociologie” consists of two parts: “logos (logic) and socius (entity). This is where the failure came from. Comparing this distinction with the distinction made by Professor Kim Dinh (society: combination of villages, hamlets on the basis of soul (tam linh), land and cultivate fields (dien tho), we see that the difference is very wide and very important. And this difference is the issue that needs more thoughts from those who focus on the question of returning to the source and reestablishing the national educational system.

To establish the question of soul (tam linh) is not only to consider the fundamental Eastern thinking. Specially as concerning the science of sociology, to establish this question is to enter into an intensive discussion among contemporary Western sociologists. Thus sociology has two main trends: 1) science is science and must exclude all questions on values and non-things (vo the) and 2) sociology is closely related to human being, and talking about human beings is to talk about values (because human being is not a thing), so sociology cannot disregard values and what is related to the soul (tam linh). The first view is the prominent view in the US and the second view is prominent among European scholars, especially in the United Kingdom and Sweden. The American view is presented clearly in the Essays in Sociological Explanation by Neil J. Smelser (Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1968) and the European view is presented in the book Social Science and Social Purpose by T. S. Simey (Constable, London, 1968). We have to find a way to bring to Vietnam’s society a way of life which includes the soul (tam linh) and materialistic aspect (vat chat), the collective organization (doan the) and the individual (ca nhan). But this road must be a road that bring us to a unique Vietnamese thinking. This is the road that we are searching together, and with those who share our thinking via the periodical Tu Tuong.

One additional point that needs to be brought up is the issue of disseminating Vietnamese thinking to the world. As Professor Le Van Sieu emphasizes in Vietnam Van Minh Su Cuong (La Boi, Saigon 1964), the world only knows about Vietnamese civilization through the works of Western authors, so that their views – and their policies – towards Vietnam are erroneous. But if we want to change this situation, we not only have to research and invent (sang tac) but also need

to present our thinking through respected works in foreign languages to be disseminated widely around the world. If we cannot accomplish this, the world will still think that Vietnam is a backward country and it is thanks to the French earlier, and then to the Americans today that Vietnam has been somewhat modernized and civilized. This is a heavy responsibility, demanding from Vietnamese scholars a burning love for their country and a high level of capability and conscience.

By Ton That Thien