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IDEOLOGY AND HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION IN VIETNAM:

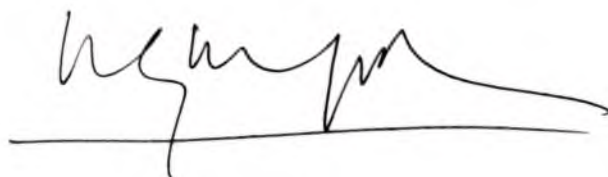
A STUDY OF THE SOCIOLOGY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by

NGUYEN THI THU

A thesis presented for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy in the
Australian National University
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This study is the result of original research
conducted by the author
at the Australian National University

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke at the end, positioned above a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

The problem of ideology in historical studies is central to this work. In addressing this problem, I have concerned myself with the task of analysing the nature of ideology through the case study of Vietnam, in which I examine the teaching material used in history curricula in three periods : French colonial (1885-1954), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (1945-1975) and the Republic of Vietnam (1955-1975). The theoretical framework employed for this empirical analysis is based on the thesis that the dominant ideology in a society -- in its process of diffusion and popularisation (defined here as 'hegemony') - will necessarily pervade that society's interpretation of history, particularly the kind taught in schools.

I have demonstrated that within each period under investigation, there indeed emerged a dominant ideology which decisively influenced the historical consciousness of each : colonialism in the French system, foreignism in the RVN and autonomism in the DRV systems. This ideological identification was reached through a procedure based on the examination of the structural relationship between the ruling ideas, practices and social formation within each of these periods. In its study of history, each period selected, included and excluded both sources and aspects of history for emphasis and neglect. According to its own dominant ideology, each defined or redefined the concepts of tradition and nationalism, and projected a favourable image of itself in the future. In this procedure, it also attempted to incorporate opposing views -- which represented an oppositional ideology -- in order to neutralise their effects. I have also found that the immediate origins of the foreignist and autonomist ideologies and their related historiographic campaigns in Vietnam could be traced to the earlier colonialist ideology and historiography. This led me to identify the relationship between 'hegemony', 'para-hegemony' and 'counter-hegemony', and also the particular characteristics of each.

On the basis of this empirical study of Vietnam, I launched a theoretical analysis of the working of ideology. In the end, I was able to argue for a materialist conception of ideology which both

defines ideology in terms of a growing structure and rejects the conception which confines it to the realm of abstract ideas. I also arrived at a theoretical definition of 'dominant group' within this emergent understanding of ideology. All of this stems from my identification of ideology as 'contextual entity' and 'dialectical struggle' -- an identification which is at once intimately connected with the analysis of human interest in its process of acculturation. In an attempt to distinguish different kinds of consciousness, I arrived at the idea that the sociology of consciousness is a more appropriate form of study than what is commonly known as the sociology of knowledge. This finally led to my putting forward some theoretical considerations for the study of education : I attempted in this way to show the complexity of the educational environment and the realities as well as the potentials of education in its dual role as both apparatus and theatre of hegemonic struggle.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BGDCD	Ban Giáo Dục Cộng Đồng
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de L'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</i>
Bộ Đại Học	Bộ Đại Học và Trung Học Chuyên Nghiệp
<i>Chương Trình Ba Lớp</i>	<i>Chương Trình Ba Lớp bậc Sơ Học Yếu Lược Bản Xứ</i>
DRV	Democratic Republic of Vietnam
DVSK	<i>Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư</i>
EFEQ	L'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient
GDCD	Giáo Dục Cộng Đồng
HVDN	<i>Hùng Vương Dựng Nước</i>
ICP	Indochinese Communist Party
MSU	Michigan State University
NCLS	<i>Nghiên Cứu Lịch Sử</i>
NIA	National Institute of Administration
NLF	National Liberation Front
OU	Ohio University
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
SDV	<i>Sử Địa Văn</i>
SIU	Southern Illinois University
STLS	<i>Sơ Thảo Lịch Sử Việt Nam (by Minh Tranh)</i>
VKHGD	Viện Khoa Học Giáo Dục
VNSL	<i>Việt Nam Sử Lược (by Trần Trọng Kim)</i>
VSD	<i>Văn Sử Địa</i>
VSTG	<i>Khâm Định Việt Sử Thông Giám Cương Mục</i>
UBKHXH	Ủy Ban Khoa Học Xã Hội
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

INTRODUCTION

HISTORY : A SCIENCE OR A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT?

For quite a long time there has been a dispute within the area of what is called the philosophy of history over the nature of the subject of history and the approach which should be taken toward it. Is it a science or an art? Can it ever be independent of individual beliefs and social circumstances? Can history be approached in the same manner, for example, as that of a scientist approaching the phenomena of the natural world?

Modern methods of historical investigation can be said to have begun in the late eighteenth century, with J.C. von Schloetzer and Johann von Mueller, whose aim was to endow the study of history with the status of a science. They set out to "eliminate the haphazard and the slipshod from historical learning, to destroy inaccuracy and error, to provide history with a firm bedrock of proven and verifiable facts" (in Thomson, 1969: 38). This movement, intensified by the pervasive positivism of the nineteenth century, set a scientific standard of historical scholarship which was taken up by later historians such as Leopold von Ranke in Germany, Acton in England, Fustel de Coulanges and Hippolyte Taine in France.

In the 1830s, in protest against what he saw as moralizing in history, Ranke maintained that the task of the historian was "simply to show how it was" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). The concept of scientific history has continued to hold sway since then. Between 1902 and 1911, under the direction of Acton, the *Cambridge Modern History* was published in a dozen volumes. Its aim was to "record... the fullness of knowledge in the field of modern history which the nineteenth century has bequeathed to its successor" (Ward, et al. 1903: V). In this spirit, the more than two hundred scholars participating in this composite work of history endeavoured to present, as they claimed, nothing but facts, and in such a way that "the reader has before him a series of presentations of the most important events and ideas", and so that "He may follow any line of investigation of his own, and may supply links of connexion at his will" (op.cit.: 5). 'Scientific' historiography of this kind, based

on the presentation of 'facts' and the avoidance of biased explanations thereof, originated in the belief which the editors of the *Cambridge Modern History* expressed in the following terms:

Each subject or period has a natural coherence of its own ... It is better to allow the subject matter to supply its own unifying principle than to create one which is inadequate or of mere temporary value.

(Ward et al., 1903: 5-6)

'History as a corpus of ascertained facts' became the principle and the goal of the 'scientific' historian. In *History as a Science* Taylor (1933), following in the path of Ranke, protested vehemently against moralizing and politicizing in history. Taylor described the historian as a person tortured by the conflict between two different personalities -- one, that of a seeker after knowledge, and the other, that of a moralist. The historian is "a man whose house is divided against itself" (Taylor, 1933: 7). There are thus two kinds of history, dependent on two antithetical viewpoints : that of science and that which is oriented toward conduct or sentiment. The former satisfies "the requirements of the human mind" and "has a permanent value", while the latter merely meets "the requirements of the human heart" and has no value (Taylor, 1933: 36-37). How, then is a proper scientific history to be achieved? Taylor's answer was as follows:

The principle of selection to be used in a science of history ... must be derived, like the principle of selection, in any other science, from the facts themselves, not from any outside source.

(Taylor, 1933: 27)

and:

An investigator who wishes to discover truth should make his mind, as far as possible, like the *tabula rasa* of the old psychologists, and be prepared to register first impressions faithfully and on a clear surface.

(op.cit.: 28)

There is no doubt that the school of scientific history bequeathed methods and standards of great intrinsic value to modern historians. By suggesting and refining many admirable techniques for reducing the incidence of traditional abuses and errors such as forgeries and invalid dating, exponents of scientific history made a great contribution to the assertion of the autonomy of historical

scholarship. But how much of *real* value is there in the claims of so-called scientific history? Is it true that a historical fact contains a "natural coherence of its own", and therefore the proper concern of the historian is "simply to show how it really was"? Is it really even possible "to avoid all invention and imagination ... and to stick to facts" as Ranke (in Gooch, 1913: 78) wished? Is it not rigid, arbitrary and unrealistic to categorize the psychological makeup of the historian, as Taylor suggests, in terms of a dichotomy of heart and mind, of a conflict between the desire to advance morality and the urge to promote knowledge?

I shall introduce this study in the simplest possible way, with the assertion that bias is inevitable in the writing of history. This will serve my purpose well enough until I further clarify this idea in Chapter I. It is mere superstition to believe that beyond all the 'biased' histories lies the possibility of producing, through the use of 'scientific' methods, a completely objective and impartial account of past events. Even Thiers, in his actual writing of history, for example his *French Revolution*, as was shown by Gooch (1913: 199-201), was never able faithfully to follow his own recommendation, which was that "we must extinguish all passion in our souls" if we are "to judge men [in history] fairly".

In the final analysis, the most serious weakness of the conventional conception of scientific history lies in its inadequate understanding of the historian as a human being : he or she is looked upon as being constantly in a state of full consciousness of intent when undertaking the writing of history. Taylor's picture of the hyper-aware historian, locked in a crisis of choice between the heart's passion and the mind's reason creates the impression that any 'moralistic' distortion of history can be the result only of a conscious and deliberate act of will on the part of the historian -- the election of the heart to rule the mind. It is as though in his view there appear before the historian two alternative roads -- one of them paved with cold, impartial detachment, leading towards 'scientific' history; the other, decorated with "invention and imagination", to "educational [i.e. moralizing] history" (Taylor, 1933: 37), and that to follow one path or the other was for the historian a matter of choice.

We shall not, in my view, come to any useful conclusion in

this matter unless we make a distinction between conscious distortion and unconscious bias in histories. While the former indicates a deliberate twisting of facts, and is at least theoretically avoidable, the latter implies the presentation of 'facts' determined in terms of specific modes of conceptualisation, and thus inevitable. These built-in biases are created by the human social environment and upbringing, including, most importantly, the very conceptual structure of a person's native language. It is my contention that all genuine historiography falls into the latter category, and it is clear that history is not a 'science' in terms of the positivist concept of the natural sciences, but is clearly a 'social construct'.

The assertion that history is a social construct is of course not merely a reflection of a sociological approach to the question and therefore valueless from the historian's point of view. At the turn of the century, the positivist doctrine of the primacy and autonomy of 'facts' in history began to meet challenges even within the historians' own circle. Philosophers of history such as Dilthey, Croce, Becker and Collingwood represented an anti-positivist school of historiography. In their view, historiography necessarily entails value judgments : "... by eliminating evaluation from historiography, one eliminates historiography itself" (Croce, in Schaff, 1976: 86). Agreeing with Croce (in Gramsci, 1975: 86) that "history is always, and can only be, 'contemporary' history", the historian Edward Carr (1964: 11) vehemently rejected the positivist distinction between 'facts' and their interpretation:

It used to be said that facts speak for themselves. This is, of course, untrue. The facts speak only when the historian calls on them: it is he who decides to which facts to give the floor, and in what order or context. It was, I think, one of Pirandello's characters who said that a fact is like a sack -- it won't stand up till you've put something in it ... It is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of that petty stream, the Rubicon, is a fact of history, whereas the crossing of the Rubicon by millions of other people before or since interests nobody at all.

But does this necessarily mean that "All history is the history of thought" as Collingwood (1946: 215) claimed? Does it mean that there can never be an objective history, and that the historian, in re-enacting the past, is the one who creates history¹? The insight provided by the Crocean tradition is suddenly put at risk by the dangers which accompanied it:

Unlike the natural scientist, the historian is not concerned with events as such at all. He is only concerned with those events which are the outward expression of thoughts, and is only concerned with these in so far as they express thoughts. At bottom, he is concerned with thoughts alone; with their outward expression in events he is concerned only by the way, in so far as these reveal to him the thoughts of which he is in search.

(Collingwood, 1946: 217)

To approach the problem from the other extreme, however, is both futile and meaningless. It is clear by now that to equate history with, or to distinguish it from science is ultimately nothing but a pseudo-problem. The fact which must be borne in mind is that there is a dialectical relationship between history as a real, objective process and history as a human cognitive endeavour. The two aspects of the subject interact with each other and neither can be considered in isolation. Since humans together make history, creating social realities which are in turn subject to human interpretation, it is human interpretation which also contributes to the making of social reality. How, then, does what is learnt through historical study come to be acknowledged as history? We have talked about history as a 'social construct', but this term, though appropriate in some circumstances, involves some difficult complications. At a superficial level, it may suggest a tendency toward 'sociologism', or treating human consciousness exclusively as a social product. At a deeper level, it is in fact a concept in the phenomenologist tradition of Schutz, Berger and Luckmann, and has a specific meaning which -- it will be made clear in Chapter I² -- is not suitable as an analytical tool for the purpose of our research.

My proposition at this point is that we have to look at the study of history as a form of ideology. The question immediately arises: what exactly is ideology? This is a legitimate question, but since it is also a major theoretical problem within this whole investigation, the clarification of the concept requires a separate treatment, which is given in Chapter I. In the meantime, a general outline of the meaning of my proposition will have to suffice. In asserting that historical study is ideological, I support my view with the following general observations:

- a) It is not possible to impose a sharp dichotomy between subjective thinking and objective facts.

- b) Though generally written by individuals, and therefore subjective in its construction, history is essentially socially constructed in the sense that individuals do not exist outside their social context.
- c) As both a subjective and a social construct, historical study is capable of becoming objectivated, and hence acceptable as reality.

Clearly, then, what we face is not the deliberate distortion of the 'truth' by an individual, but rather a situation where each historian can genuinely claim to be representing the 'truth' in his or her work, and in so doing can always be assured of at least some degree of support. This is a situation which always gives rise to heated debate about the truth or the 'scientific' value of the historical events experienced and/or recounted by people inhabiting different social milieux. The question at issue now is: how is it possible that the subjective meanings embedded in histories can emerge as objective, factual description?

APPROACH OF THIS STUDY

The question which I have just raised is, of course, very broad in its scope, extending over a wide spectrum of intellectual activity. At one extreme it touches on a practical problem of historical methodology: in what way should history be written? What techniques should be employed, in order to convince an audience about the truth of a particular perception of the past? At the other extreme we are confronted with a deep theoretical problem whose resolution requires a thoroughgoing philosophical discussion: what is the nature of the human perception of reality, in this case the reality of the past? And what is the ultimate purpose of historical reasoning?

It is not intended that this research project should cover either of these extremes of the philosophical spectrum. I am not particularly concerned with the methodology of history or with the quest for 'historical truth'. Neither do I see it in terms of an exclusively philosophical problem to which an answer may be sought

in purely abstract terms. The task of this study is to seek to perceive how particular social conditions may lead to a particular understanding of the past and to the acceptance of a certain view thereof, and in return, how a particular historical understanding can influence the shaping of a social formation. My purpose is to seek a proper understanding of the working of ideology through the study of historical writing and through an empirical investigation of a particular society. The task thus includes both theoretical and empirical considerations. Its focus will be on the relationship between the idea (specifically, the idea in historical perception) and the social system, and in particular, on the ways in which the idea and the social system change and interact with each other over time.

A project such as this requires a *dual* approach, since its perspectives are both historical and sociological. In attempting to trace the changes in historical interpretation associated with change in socio-political orientations, it is necessary to look far back into history in search of evidence of social change. This study can be called historical for the reason that the material on which it is largely based consists of historical documents.

Historical research of this kind is of course not an end in itself. My aim in tracing the changes in historical interpretation and in socio-political systems is to demonstrate that they are both interrelated and the product of social forces. The problems arising in the pursuit of this aim have to be delineated through the use of sociological conceptualisation:

- a) Description of coherent ideological systems which arise in specific socio-historical environments.
- b) Connection of such systems with particular social strata or categories.
- c) Explanation of the social conditions in which such social groups adopt and develop specific ideological systems; and
- d) Analysis of the process by which these ideologies are diffused among the public by the medium of historical accounts.

It is plain that this study, to some extent, cuts across the standard traditional boundaries between disciplines. On one hand, it will be empirical, involving the systematic study of historical documents. On the other, it has an important theoretical component. The latter involves a conceptual and analytical examination of actual historical situations and problems in order to explain a) how historical presentation reflects a particular ideology, and b) the nature of ideology itself, taking into account the particular ways in which histories can be seen to incorporate and transmit ideology.

With regard to the empirical aspect of the study, I propose to choose a period in comparatively recent Vietnamese history as the subject of empirical investigation. There are two main reasons for this choice.

First, and most importantly, it is the markedly eventful nature of Vietnamese history which makes the choice of its specific context both attractive and appropriate. If socio-political change itself is the key factor in this study, then modern Vietnamese society offers ideal opportunities for us to observe and analyse changes of this kind. For a period of 90 years (1885 to 1975) Vietnamese society underwent a series of quite fundamental upheavals highly relevant to this discussion. Emerging from a predominantly feudal/Confucianist era which had lasted for many centuries, Vietnam fell victim to the great wave of 19th-century European imperialist expansion, and was subjected to a long, alienating period of French colonial administration. The collapse of the French Empire in the Far East marked the end of this period, but Vietnam now found herself, through the machinations of cold-war politics, divided (*de facto*, if not *de jure*) into two parts, with an American-dominated, anti-communist government in the South (the Republic of Vietnam - RVN) set up in opposition to the nationalist, pro-communist and anti-American (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam - DRV) one in the North. The latter two periods, with three distinct political systems in existence at different times and places, present an ideal case study for the critical examination of hypothetical changes in historical perception.

Secondly, for many decades, but particularly during the war which ended in 1975, Vietnam has provided frequent and extreme examples

of political strife, human suffering, cruelty, heroism and violent death. Not surprisingly, research on Vietnam carried out in other countries has tended to focus on these topics. The society and culture of Vietnam has received little attention at the level of serious academic inquiry, especially in Australia. Until recently, discussion on Vietnam has been confined to journalists, politicians, political scientists and some historians. A sociological study of Vietnam is not only justified but also long overdue.

It is true that a number of minor attempts have been made to analyse Vietnamese historiography. All the works which I have encountered, however, have been produced by historians, approaching the subject from an historian's point of view (Honey, 1961; Chesneaux, 1961; Malleret, 1961; Osborne, 1970; Legge, 1976; Whitmore, 1976; Marr, 1979; Wolters, 1979; Taylor, 1980).

These works, except for some which are concerned mainly with tracing the evolution of the historiography of Vietnam (e.g. Honey, 1961; Malleret, 1961), attempt to deal with the subject in terms of its connection with social systems. But limited as they are by the historical approach, which lacks theoretical perspective as well as concern for directional analysis, they fail to provide satisfactory answers to the problem of finding how and why social structure and historical perception are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. On one hand we seem to be confronted with a view that does little more than acknowledge the fact of this dialectical interplay (e.g. Osborne, 1970; Taylor, 1980). On the other, although we are offered a much broader treatment of the subject, we are given no clear indication of the specific connections between ideology and historiography in the mass of facts marshalled in the discussion (e.g. Marr, 1979).

Because most historians work under, but seldom attempt to analyse conceptually, the assumption that there is a close relationship between the historically-bound mentality and historical reasoning, they are often caught in an ironic predicament where the contradiction in their own views, which reflects that which exists between their own time and that of their predecessors, passes undetected. This is evident in the cases where modern students of Vietnamese history in the West unconsciously assume 'colonially-biased' postures while simultaneously aiming criticism at what they see as colonial bias.³

For the reasons which I shall discuss in Chapter I, school history in Vietnam will be the focus of my empirical research. Thus, a few words need to be said about the subject of Vietnamese education. This topic seems to have attracted more academic interest in the West than has the historiography of Vietnam. However, the predominant trend in this field has been to look at Vietnamese education from within, rather than from outside the system. As a result, most studies are non-theoretical, descriptive and policy-oriented. This is because the field of Vietnamese education has been almost completely the preserve of educators, many of whom were Vietnamese who did their research in the United States with the prospect of becoming educational administrators themselves on their return to Vietnam (see, e.g. Dương Thiệu Tông, 1968; Võ Kim Sơn, 1974).

PLAN OF THE STUDY

This work consists of nine chapters which can be roughly divided into three groups. In the first two chapters I shall outline the theoretical framework and the methodology of the research project. Chapter I introduces the theoretical problem and attempts to clarify some of the basic concepts used in this work, such as ideology and hegemony. It also contains an explanation of the relevance of education as an issue in this context. Furthermore I have proposed hypotheses regarding the three questions of ideology, hegemony and school history. My aim in Chapter II is to explain methods and sources and to sketch out the lines along which the empirical study of Vietnam is to be carried out. Chapter II will also provide definitions of such basic terms as 'the history of Vietnam', the 'Hung Kings period' etc., and will present the hypotheses formulated with reference to the particular case study of Vietnam.

The second major section -- of four chapters -- is devoted to an analytical presentation of the empirical data on Vietnam. Chapter III gives an introduction to the three school systems, viewed in the socio-political context of Vietnam in the period 1885-1975, while Chapters IV, V and VI focus on the interpretation of Vietnamese history by scholars under each of the three regimes.

Chapter VII concludes the study of Vietnam by bringing the

three systems together for comparison, analysing the operation of hegemony through the writing of histories for use in schools and showing how ideology is developed and transformed as a result of this hegemonic process.

In the last two chapters I return to the theoretical issue at the heart of the whole work, and examine it in the light of the results of my empirical study. Chapter VIII involves a discussion of the nature of ideology and leads up to my suggestion for a study oriented toward the sociology of consciousness. At the same time I point out the basic weaknesses in what is commonly known as the sociology of knowledge. The purpose of my final chapter is to address the question of education and to discuss it in the light of the implications arising from the new theoretical arguments which I have proposed in the preceding chapter.

Notes to the Introduction

1. In the view of Croce and Collingwood, it is only through the historian that a fact is selected for interpretation, thus becoming a 'historical fact'. This view leads to the assertion that "history is the historian's experience. It is 'made' by nobody save the historian: to write history is the only way of making it" (Oakeshott, 1933: 99).
2. A short critique of this tradition will be attempted in Chapter VIII.
3. This should become clearer to the reader in Chapter IV, in which I examine the influence of the colonialist ideology on the interpretation of Vietnamese history under the French.