The Lessons of Yên Bái, or the “Fascist” Temptation: How the Đại Việt Parties Rethought Anticolonial Nationalist Revolutionary Action, 1932–1945


On Sunday, June 17, 1945, tens of thousands of Vietnamese gathered in Hà Nội’s Bách Thảo Garden for a commemorative event dedicated to the memory of Nguyễn Thái Học, the nationalist revolutionary leader who had been guillotined exactly fifteen years before. The call for a large public gathering had been launched in the press several days earlier by the National Đại Việt Alliance [Đại Việt Quốc Gia Liên Minh], which at the time was the most important nationalist revolutionary force in northern Vietnam. The event’s program had been presented in detail on the title page of the alliance’s press organ, Haiphong Daily [Hải Phòng Nhật Báo], as well as other daily newspapers.¹
The next day’s press reports emphasized in particular the stoicism of the tens of thousands of participants in a quasi-ritual celebration under heavy rain.4 This was the first official commemoration of the thirteen nationalist revolutionaries who had been guillotined by the French colonial state fifteen years before.3 More than sixty thousand people participated in Hà Nội, as did thousands more in the south of the country.4 The popular success of this observance by the National Đại Việt Alliance in 1945 marked, in a very concrete and lively way, the return of the Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng (VNQĐĐ) [Vietnamese Nationalist Party] onto the political scene of northern Vietnam. It was the foundation of something new rather than a simple regurgitation of hagiographic facts by the press. This was, at least, the hope of the nationalist revolutionaries who organized the event.

An article in the special edition of the Haiphong Daily, distributed at the event, carried the headline: “The Significance of the Yên Bái Mutiny and the Ceremony of 1945.” In it, the anonymous author established a connection, and even a continuity, between the Yên Bái uprising of 1930 and the budding revolution of 1945. By emphasizing the solemn character of the ceremony, he tried to invoke the same spirit of patriotic sacrifice that had guided Nguyễn Thái Học and his comrades.5 This article investigates the nature of the link between the VNQĐ’s abortive uprising attempt at Yên Bái in 1930 and the coming of a “new era” in 1945, as signaled by the formation of the Trần Trọng Kim government that March.6

To examine the connection between the two events, this article first investigates the emergence of nationalist (noncommunist) revolutionary doctrines by the Đại Việt parties after the VNQĐ’s failure at Yên Bái, before returning to the particular conditions of the creation and evolution of the Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng (ĐVQĐĐ) [Great Vietnam Nationalist Party] up to 1945. I will focus on the construction of the doctrine of the “Survival of the People” [đân tộc sinh tồn chủ nghĩa] by the ĐVQĐĐ’s Trường Tù Anh, as a revolutionary alternative not only to colonialism and communism, but also to the VNQĐĐ. In research published in Sài Gòn in 1969, Nguyễn Ngọc Lư emphasized the difficulty of obtaining information about these parties, both because they had to operate underground and maintain a culture of secrecy, and also because important propaganda
documents simply disappeared. This study is based principally on work in French archives, the Vietnamese periodicals collection of the National Library of France (BNF), and studies and monographs about the parties. It is important to acknowledge that the debate among Vietnamese nationalist revolutionaries explored here principally concerned Vietnamese born in northern Vietnam or based in Hà Nội.

The Lessons of Yên Bái: Between Commemoration and Coming to Terms

Nguyễn Thái Học’s famous dictum that “one becomes an exemplary being even if one fails” [không thành công thì thành nhân] reveals much about the revolutionary leader’s expectations prior to launching the failed Yên Bái insurrection. As though he had foreseen it, the nationalist insurrection was a failure but also guaranteed its protagonists a place in posterity. For the journalists writing in 1945, the failure of the VNQĐĐ was not the salient point. Nguyễn Thái Học and his men did not have the luxury of waiting for the right moment. Their leaders faced a real dilemma (and in fact their credibility hinged on it): following the colonial authorities’ large-scale crackdown on the party in 1929, they could act immediately and be killed or risk mass arrests. Ultimately, the party leaders had to accept death in order to save the honor of their fallen comrades. As a result of this self-sacrifice, the population’s esteem for the VNQĐĐ remained intact. Despite censorship and repression, over the next fifteen years, the memory of that sacrifice was preserved. This was to change in 1945 in the wake of the Japanese coup of March that abruptly put an end to French rule in Indochina. It unleashed tremendous hopes among all political formations, summarized in the popular motto “independence” [độc lập].

French colonial censorship disappeared overnight and facilitated discourse on previously contentious issues. The biographies of nationalist heroes, previously distributed clandestinely, now circulated openly in the press. The VNQĐĐ and its thirteen martyrs became the object of detailed accounts and a new historiographical approach. Most of the newspapers published the dramatic stories of the Nationalist Party’s members in installments. On June 17, 1945, the day of the commemoration, special editions were published. The newspaper Binh Minh [Dawn] reminded
its readers of the importance of that day: “Our sacred duty is to remember those who failed heroically and who sacrificed themselves for independence.”

A journalist in *Đồng Phát* [Voice of the East] proposed the construction of two modest temples at Yên Bái and at Vĩnh Yên to pay tribute to the combatants who had died in 1930 so that “when a Vietnamese goes to these places of contemplation, he would need little more than a bit of incense and a flowerpot in order to meditate wholeheartedly.”

In 1945, the VNQDĐ clearly appeared to be the main promoters of the National Đại Việt Alliance. This phenomenon is easily explained by the fact that the hagiographers and propagandists were none other than the comrades of Nguyễn Thái Học; they were the organizers of the memorial celebration and the members of the newly founded alliance. The writings of Nguyễn Thế Nghĩa and Như Trong Tông, the articles of Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, and the editorials of Nguyễn Triệu Luật illustrate the link between the two periods.

For example, Nguyễn Triệu Luật’s editorial on Nguyễn Thái Học is key to grasping the new role he assigned to political leadership. In the editorialist’s opinion, a leader [lãnh tụ] has to possess outstanding virtues in order to be admired by his men, but his greatest virtue must be “sincerity” [thành]. Whatever mistakes he might make, a leader with this character trait would be respected and followed. It was therefore thanks to his sincerity that Nguyễn Thái Học knew how to attract the admiration of his contemporaries. Even the most gifted of his comrades had to acknowledge that he alone had the stature of a leader.

Through his editorial, Nguyễn Triệu Luật also revealed that the nationalist movement in 1945 was still searching for a real leader, one as virtuous as Nguyễn Thái Học.

The keen interest in this martyred leader in June 1945 did not change the fact that the questions of the day were no longer those of 1930. Even though the press continued to be virulently anticolonialist, the country had passed into the hands of a national government that was doing its utmost to consolidate independence. The problems of famine and the price and circulation of rice were regularly reported in newspaper columns. The unification of political forces was more topical than ever, and everything related to the symbolism of the self-proclaimed Empire of Vietnam (such as the flag, the hymn, and the national name) was under discussion.
revolutionary nationalists consequently had to position themselves relative to the new government.

For the nationalists, the issue of the unification of political forces into one party was therefore crucial. This was what the National Đại Việt Alliance tried in vain to do for six months, from March through August 1945. Composed of various Đại Việt parties, the National Alliance had been formed in several stages. Among its other aims, the alliance wanted to play an important political role. In order to allow the National Alliance to incorporate as many political forces as possible, it organized, in June 1945, the celebration of the heroes of Yên Bái. Undoubtedly, the ultimate goal was to revive the memory of the heroes of 1930.

But commemoration was insufficient; the new nationalist party needed a structure to provide moral guidance. As affirmed by Nguyễn Triệu Luật in his editorial in the Haiphong Daily, supporting the government of Trần Trọng Kim was not an end in itself. In order to pass onto the next stage, it was necessary that a single party take over the reins of power and thus apply the well-known rule of di dâng trị quốc [governing the nation through the party]. As the consequence of recent Vietnamese political evolutions, these groups needed to unify as one large popular party capable of directing the masses.

In fact, from a political point of view, the situation had evolved considerably since 1930. The world economic crisis had opened the doors to two major Vietnamese political insurrections in Indochina and engendered a crisis of conscience among intellectuals and the raising of social issues. The first revolutionary parties had established two distinct camps: nationalist and communist. Thereafter, it was necessary to choose between the two political options. The ideological conflict between the two currents had rapidly transformed into violent fights inside the colonial prisons and penal colonies, as well as in the ranks of Vietnamese revolutionaries exiled in South China. This is what Phạm Quỳnh referred to, in 1938, as “the war of ideologies,” a political deadlock for him. Nationalist revolutionaries regarded 1938–1939 as “decisive years” for their involvement. International developments made a considerable imprint on the Vietnamese consciousness: The Russian revolution of October 1917 had numerous supporters in Asia, whereas the National Socialist revolution and the
emergence of European Fascism provided an alternative to communism and democratic regimes. The question of the rising and organization of the masses was present everywhere in the world.

It was consequently not by chance that Nhưong Tông’s June 17, 1945, speech, which aimed to evoke the spirit of sacrifice of the VNQDD’s combatants following the failure of Yên Bái, compared the death of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party’s martyrs to that of Adolf Hitler, who had committed suicide in Germany a month earlier. Nguyễn Triệu Luật continued this comparison in the editorial of the Haiphong Daily the day after the commemoration. The comparison may surprise today, but in May–June 1945, the nationalist writers openly wrote on this topic. The writer Vũ Bằng publicized his sadness in a three-page article entitled “Hitler Has Fallen” in Trung Bắc Chữ Nhật. In his own paper, Nguyễn Triệu Luật commented on Hitler’s suicide, describing it as an “eternal lesson” to remember [bái học nghìn thu]. He also praised Hitler’s patriotism, his sacrifice, and the symbiotic relationship he had been able to create with his people, and he further glorified Hitler’s death as proof of his love for the German people. In a later issue, Nguyễn Triệu Luật returned to the causes of the war by defending Hitler and by reflecting on the responsibilities of his predecessors. All the same, Nguyễn Triệu Luật insisted in one of his editorials that he was not a fascist:

There are people who ask me: you must be a fascist? Why do you like this fascist leader? No thank you, I am neither a fascist nor any other kind of —ist. I am only ardently attached to the people of Vietnam, because I still have some hot blood in my veins. Hence, naturally, by observing this man who lives for his people, who dies for his people, who absolutely and entirely sacrifices himself for his people, I cannot but admire him entirely and absolutely.

In the 1940s, Nguyễn Triệu Luật’s passionate remarks were not unusual. As recalled and summarized by Nguyên Vỹ in his fictional account of young Tuấn, a large proportion of the population, and in particular Vietnamese youth, admired Hitler, the small and insignificant lance corporal who had risen to the highest levels of government and whose Third Reich had returned grandeur to Germany.
In fact, National Socialism appeared then to many revolutionaries as the sole true ideological alternative to communism. In an article entitled “Which Regime?” [Chế độ nào?], published in April 1945 when the fall of Nazi Germany was imminent, the journalist Linh Mai promoted National Socialist ideology as an effective instrument for managing the affairs of the country. Of course, these expressions of hope were not intended to import the ideas, let alone the practices, of Hitler or Mussolini. Rather, in the Vietnamese context, these men wanted to find a third way, an intermediary way between communism and colonialism, with the former considered dangerous and the latter hated and moribund. It was necessary to construct a Vietnam that was new and liberated of the humiliating colonial past. For Linh Mai, a political program [chính chương] had to focus on six essential tasks:

1. To increase the reproductive strength of the Vietnamese and of national production;
2. To promote mutual help among the people and to equitably share the citizens’ revenues;
3. To radically solve the problem of unemployment;
4. To restore and revise the system of communal rice fields;
5. To organize cooperatives in order to eradicate speculation;
6. To eliminate harmful traditions and customs.

Consequently, the National Socialism of the revolutionaries of the National Đài Việt Alliance was premised on the idea that it was necessary to maintain and develop national strength and solidarity, to consolidate the independence of the nation of Đài Việt, and to eradicate the social roots of inequality.

All of this could only be productively undertaken under the direction of a single strong party. In the context of decolonization, this form of National Socialism sought above all to arm the new state on the ideological plane and to allow the nationalists to link the heroic past of Đài Việt to its future. In this sense, the struggle of the nationalist revolutionaries of 1945 was similar to that of many other countries then undergoing decolonization.

We should keep in mind that the revolutionaries of the VNQĐĐ of 1930 had seen in the Chinese revolution of 1911, and then in the Russian
revolution of 1917, models to follow to liberate themselves from the colonial yoke, but they had also witnessed the violent rupture between the Chinese communists and nationalists in 1927. In the political newspaper created by Nguyễn Thế Nghĩp in 1937, the journalist Nhân responded to an appeal launched by a colleague at Tân Việt Nam [New Vietnam] to constitute a “united front” between diverse Vietnamese political groups:

In the past, unification attempts had been fated to deplorable failure. And it is interesting to see our neighbors, the Chinese, run into similar difficulties. The experience of the Kuomintang’s cooperation with the Chinese Communist Party between 1924 and 1927 constituted a rare lesson on which we have to meditate. The deplorable result it has led to should be attributed, according to several witnesses, to the untrustworthiness of the partisans of Borodin. The same grievance has been revived by the Annamite [Vietnamese] nationalists against some of the compatriots who are affiliated with the Third International and who had allied with them for united anti-imperialist action.36

Thus, older nationalist militants and the young nationalist revolutionaries who followed them saw no other option than to follow the new Asian and European authoritarian and imperialist models. It is not surprising that many Asian intellectuals in the 1930s saw Fascism as a source of progress, modernity, and liberation. This slow but progressive political transformation took place between 1932 and 1945 in the context of widespread cultural modernization.

The Turning Point of the 1930s: The Emergence of New Concepts of National Socialism

In the late 1920s, the VNQĐĐ followed in the footsteps of Phan Bội Châu, the true father of the armed nationalist struggle for many Vietnamese. The vocabulary of supporters of independence had been transformed since earlier in the century by powerful new concepts such as “people” [dân], “nation” [quốc], “struggle for life” [cạnh tranh sinh tồn], and “republic” [công hòa] that nourished the following generations of the VNQĐĐ and the Đại Việt parties, notably through works published by the famous Tonkin Free School [Đồng Kinh Nghĩa Thục]. The examples of the Chinese revolution of 1911 and the writings of Sun Yat-Sen (partly translated by
Nhượng Tông), which were motivated by the will to belong to a pan-Asian world, defending the “yellow race,” further animated the nationalist revolutionary project of the 1920s. Despite the successive failures of Phan Bội Châu and the VNQDĐ, the nationalist revolution would continue to occupy the minds of Đại Việt activists in the 1940s.

The influence of ultranationalist movements in Europe, China, and Japan on two generations of Vietnamese revolutionaries (the VNQDĐ and the Đại Việt) is undeniable. In Europe, it was of course Italian Fascism and German National Socialism that attracted the attention of the revolutionaries, but not just that. The Parti Social Français (PSF) of François de La Rocque was well represented in colonial Vietnam, and the press closely followed the political project of Jacques Doriot. The feats of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk or the action of Japanese or Chinese nationalists provided other inspiring examples. In China, Chiang Kai-shek had set up the Blue Shirts to consolidate his power. In Japan, young nationalist officers had attempted a coup d’état in 1936. The political evolution of the surviving companions of Nguyễn Thái Học attests to these new influences, and the ties that some of them maintained with the younger generation confirm this.

Returning to the year 1932 enables us to better understand the ties between the two nationalist revolutionary generations. In that year, the colonial police enacted their final attacks on the VNQDĐ. Indeed, the party’s reconstruction attempts were next to impossible because of colonial repression, and its members, who had been dispersed in Yunnan, Southern China, or the penal colonies of Sơn La or Poulo Condore, were in difficulty. It was also in 1932–1933 that young intellectuals in Hà Nội founded a self-proclaimed “autonomous” literary group, the Self-strength Literary Group [Tự Lực Văn Đoàn; TLVĐ]. The moribund VNQDĐ, however, did not take on a new life until after the coming to power of the Popular Front in France and the subsequent shift in colonial policy toward the revolutionaries of the early 1930s. By that time, the VNQDĐ had given way to a moderate nationalist expression through the works of the TLVĐ.

The historical importance of the TLVĐ for the cultural and political evolution of the country should not be underestimated. The group around Khái Hùng, Hoàng Đạo, and Nhật Linh modernized Vietnamese literature and liberated it from tradition through its newspapers and novels, which
brought to light the reaction of Vietnamese youth toward a society in full flux. The TLVD promoted and theorized modernity by means of a ten-point manifesto that promised the coming of a new era. Simultaneously, the liberation of VNQDĐ members from the colonial penal colonies had a direct impact on the emergence of a militant historical nationalism, which was open to the ultranationalist European doctrines and in search of an original position from which to liberate the country. For a period of five years between 1932 and 1937, the VNQDĐ went through an extremely painful period. Considered politically dead within the country, the party nevertheless restructured itself in southern China. Two of the founders of the TLVD, the writers Khải Hưng and Nguyễn Tương Tam, for their part, would use the political turning point of 1938 to create a new political party named Đại Việt Dân Chính.

If one looks closely at the list of those sentenced by the Commission Criminelle of 1929, one finds the names of several former comrades of Nguyễn Thái Học who had escaped prison or the death penalty. Several of them pursued their clandestine activities. This was the case of, for example, Nguyễn Thế Nghịệp, who had been liberated under the condition that he inform on VNQDĐ to the French Sûreté, or of Trịnh Văn Yên, a young bomb-making expert, who had in fact never been apprehended. For his part, Nguyễn Thế Nghịệp underwent a far more intricate journey. Described by a Sûreté agent as a “disquieting character,” Nguyễn Thế Nghịệp went on to transform the VNQDĐ into the Parti National Travailliste Annamite [National Annamite Workers’ Party]. In 1938, the party’s aims became clearer in its meetings and writings, with key slogans such as:

[T]o combat communism; to denounce the authorities’ exactions and abuses of power; to advocate non-obedience to the law and non-payment of taxes; to discredit the metropolitan politics; to draw attention to Japanese and Hitle-
rian propaganda campaigns in order to awaken the patriotic sentiments of the population and arouse the distrust of the indigenous population towards France.

It did not take the revolutionary Như Trọng a long time to find his old comrades again and reactivate a network of revolutionary nationalists. The VNQDĐ took over the direction of three newspapers (Dư Luân, Tân
Báo, and Zân) and used them to pursue its new anticommunist platform. From 1936 to 1938, Nguyễn Thái Học’s former comrades resumed their activities throughout the North. The revolutionaries moved freely, though under police surveillance, between the Red River Delta and the provinces of northern Annam, until a new law on April 30, 1938, restricted their movement. The colonial Sûreté noted that the outcome of these propaganda tours was that the best of the recruited activists now formed the core of a “combat unit” [corps de combat].

This activism had direct consequences for the emergence of new Đài Việt parties. Tân Báo’s April 1938 call for the creation of political parties to face the colonial state has to be seen in this context. A similar passion for politics was evident as early as 1936 in the columns of the newspaper L’Effort. Directed by the nationalists Vũ Đình Dy and Nguyễn Đặc Lộc, both of them close to the VNQĐĐ, this French-language paper regularly reiterated the following point:

> It is time the members of the various elected Assemblies of Indochina raise and resolve the question of the political parties and, on the model of the big modern democracies, organize themselves into political formations and at the same time work to organize the masses, whose interests they have the duty to defend.

In another issue, L’Effort argued that there was value for colonial authorities in allowing Vietnamese to organize themselves politically: “In order to end the existence of clandestine organizations and of secret societies, give us the freedom of association.” The young nationalists of the north, excited by political debates of the moment, took this fundamental right for themselves; they did not wait for the colonial state’s permission to create, between 1936 and 1942, in the shadow of the Popular Front and in secret, four new revolutionary Đài Việt parties influenced by the European and Asian authoritarian models. These parties, led by young and ambitious leaders, rallied two generations of nationalists. They were the Đài Việt Quốc Xã of Nguyễn Xuân Tiêu, the Đài Việt Dân Chính of Nguyễn Tưởng Tam, Trường Từ Anh’s Đài Việt Quốc Dân Đảng, and later also Lý Đồng A’s Đài Việt Duy Dân. According to the historian Tạ Chí Đại Trường, a “traditional political imprint” was common to the creation of these new
parties. These nationalists “turned towards an ancient past by hanging on to the terms Đại Việt and by attributing to them an excessive value, with the aim of re-evaluating the less than shining contemporary reality of this country.”

The paradox of the Popular Front, which represented a real political opening, was to create the conditions for an intensified nationalism founded on two important observations by the nationalist revolutionaries: the association of Indochina’s government with communism and colonialism due to the socialist-communist nature of the metropolitan government, and the enthusiasm of some Vietnamese politicians for that political opening. This enthusiasm, though moderate, was perceived as treasonous by the more intransigent nationalists who saw this Franco-Indochinese framework as the beginning of the extinction of the Vietnamese nation. This kind of discourse was explicit in the 1945 declaration of the Đại Việt Quốc Xã. Revisiting the reasons for its creation in 1936, this small nationalist party affirmed that it was born in reaction to those Vietnamese “chameleon politicians” who had adhered to the new policy of French Indochina’s Governor General Brévié and who had somehow forgotten that their country was still colonized. They were right insofar that the situation of colonial subjects was far from satisfactory. L’Effort hence opposed the return of “racial sentences” that demonstrated continued injustice against the Vietnamese. The Popular Front’s window of political opening remained brief. Though it did not give the VNQDĐ the chance to re-establish itself in a dominant way, it facilitated the emergence of a new revolutionary idiom with heavily ultranationalist accents. Hence, in 1939, Trường Tù Anh proclaimed a so-called “Doctrine of the Survival of the People” [Dân tộc sinh tồn chủ nghĩa] as the motor of the ĐVQĐĐ’s revolutionary action. It reflected the ambition of many revolutionary nationalists for a “scientific” and specifically Vietnamese political doctrine.

The Making of a New Nationalist Doctrine: “The Survival of the People”

Trường Tù Anh, alias Cả Phương and Trường Khán, was born on August 11, 1914, in Mỹ Thanh village in Phú Yên Province (Hòa Phong township, Tuy Hòa district). Part of a large family with ten children that was
originally from Thanh Hóa Province, he was initiated into political activism by his father, Trường Bội Hoàng, who was known for his anticolonial ideas. Between 1914 and 1934, Trường Tử Anh grew up in the context of the patriotic struggle led by the modernizing scholars of his region. Like many of his fellow countrymen, he was marked by the failure of Yên Bái. In his opinion, this defeat was due to both the VNQĐĐ’s ideological shortcomings, as the party had no doctrine adapted to the Vietnamese population, and weaknesses in the party’s political organization, which lacked unity and secrecy.60

The young revolutionary Trường Tử Anh, a simple provincial before he became a law student at the University of Hà Nội in 1935, understood the political challenges faced by all who dreamed of overthrowing the colonial order. In his mind, the success of this project, after the failure of Yên Bái, rested on the building of a clandestine, secretive revolutionary party armed with a solid and original political doctrine. Fascinated by the fates of his peers, Trường Tử Anh began to elaborate a new doctrine that he intended to be “specifically Vietnamese.” It is with this goal that he drew up in 1936 a political text entitled “The Necessity of a New Ideology for Our People,” which emphasizes the necessity of “creating a particular utopia that has to be respected by the sovereign down to the people.”61 He believed that the Vietnamese population was endowed with a unique character, and that a doctrine adapted to it was a sine qua non of broad popular support.62 For Trường Tử Anh, as for many young revolutionaries of that era, the years spent in Hà Nội were years of ideological learning. As we have seen, after the coming to power of the Popular Front between 1937 and 1939, an explosion in journalistic activity permitted the former members of the VNQĐĐ, as well as other more moderate nationalists, to develop their political convictions vis-à-vis communism and European and Japanese authoritarianism, as well as to debate the imminent world war.

It is in this particular context that one has to locate the creation of Trường Tử Anh’s ĐVQĐĐ. As Trần Ngọc Lập, one of the ideologues of the party, recalls, the ĐVQĐĐ was made up of “experienced elements of nationalist revolutionary groups and particularly those elements of the VNQĐĐ who had remained in the country following the failure at Yên Bái.”63 Thus, several important cadres of the VNQĐĐ, such as Nguyen
Văn Viến, Đảng Xuân Tiếp, or Giáo Lai (Professor Lai) were among the ĐVQĐĐ’s founding members. The party was founded, according to official sources, on December 10, 1938. This event came about after years of ideological crystallization, after Tân Báo’s call to form new parties, and in the midst of the struggle against the Popular Front in Indochina, which had not responded to the amnesty demands of the nationalists and which continued to forbid or censor their press.

In order to assert their own Vietnamese political creed, other political doctrines had to be criticized, most notably Marxism. In his earliest writings from 1936, Trường Tứ Anh explained that Marxism was harmful because “it denies man’s individual value, contests the importance of the ethnic entity and of race, and thus deprives humanity of the condition prior to its existence and civilization.” He concluded that “this materialism, far from being beneficial to the majority or favorizing the development of the worker, represents nothing but misery, desolation, and distress, and is in reality nothing but a definitive catastrophe.”

This critique of communism was far from unique. The former members of the VNQĐĐ, as well as moderate nationalists, also criticized communism during this period. In fact, Nguyễn Thái Học’s VNQĐĐ, with its vague ideological foundations, had broken into two factions: left-wing figures who would convert a few years later to the national communism of the Việt Minh, and supporters of a National Socialism, a kind of anticolonial and anticomunist revolutionary right-wing group embodied by the well-known intellectual Như Ông Tông. Whereas the political program of the VNQĐĐ did not clearly distinguish between friend and foe, the ĐVQĐĐ’s early political texts indicate it had made up for this ideological gap by displaying a radical anticommunism coupled with a fierce anticolonialism. At the same time, the ĐVQĐĐ distinguished itself from the VNQĐĐ by basing itself on a revolutionary doctrine [lý thuyết cách mạng] rather than simply on direct action. The party’s propaganda texts also insisted on the inadequacy of other political doctrines for Vietnam, including Italian Fascism and Hitler’s National Socialism: Italian Fascism placed the nation above everything else, whereas Nazism was the exclusive tool of the superior Aryan race. According to Trường Tứ Anh, these two nationalist forms did not serve human beings.
It appears that Trường Tử Anh did not want to rely on any existing doctrine but had ambitions to create an entirely original one that would reflect the “criteria of Vietnamese nationhood.” However, in order to construct his doctrine, he had to draw on the models of the time. If one believes the former deputy director of the Viêt Minh’s Sûreté in Hà Nội in 1945–1946, Trường Tử Anh was greatly influenced by a certain Trịnh Văn Yên, an admirer of Hitler and author of a brochure on the “survival of the races” [chủng tộc sinh tồn]. It is true that Trịnh Văn Yên, who had joined the VNQĐĐ at the age of 14 and was the party’s bomb-making expert, belonged to the same generation as Trường Tử Anh. He was thus the link between Nguyễn Thái Hôc’s VNQĐĐ and the future ĐVQĐĐ in the making. In any case, though it was founded in December 1938, the ĐVQĐĐ was not made official until the end of 1939 through an explicit “Declaration to the People” [Tuyên cáo quốc dân] that was published as the first part of its party manifesto [bản tuyên ngôn Đại Việt quốc dân Đảng].

The first paragraphs of this declaration insisted on the strength of Đại Việt, a small country that had succeeded in conquering its “vital space” through southward movement [nam tiến] and the destruction of other kingdoms, most notably that of Champa. Trường Tủ Anh’s text emphasized the spirit of resistance, conquest, and adaptation of the Việt people over many centuries. To some extent, he summarized Sun Yat-Sen’s belief that “race is created by natural forces. The nation is created by military force.” But, he wrote, the heroic efforts of the Đại Việt had quickly been destroyed by French colonization. In the ensuing paragraphs, he insisted on the destructive aspects of colonization and on the dangers of a total disappearance of the Việt nation. According to him, social Darwinism was a universal natural law. Only the struggle for its own survival would allow the people of the Đại Việt to avoid disappearance. This nightmare of annihilation, disappearance, and natural selection among nations was a recurrent theme in the writings of modern Chinese intellectuals, as well as Phan Bội Châu and other Vietnamese lettrés.

In a clear sense, Trường Tủ Anh was responding politically to the anxieties and expectations raised in the writings of nationalist intellectuals of the 1920s. The terms struggle, race, government, and nation were also
found in the writings of Trần Hữu Độ in the south, for whom colonization was “genocidal,” or in the texts by Như Trọng in the north, one of the former leaders of the Nam Đồng Thủ Xã, which had led to the creation of the VNQĐĐ. The remedy for the problem of decadence and the menace of extinction resided in the creation of a revolutionary nationalist party that was ready to put into action a political program that Trương Tự Anh summarized as consisting of national liberation and social re-education, the latter being a kind of radical social reform. It was hence necessary to overthrow the colonial power by means of revolution and to install a strong Vietnamese state inspired by Đại Việt’s glorious past.

Thus, the motivation behind Trương Tự Anh’s doctrine was his refusal to allow Đại Việt to be annihilated or subjugated by another state. He contextualized the creation of the party by placing it in the international context of the beginning of the Second World War in September 1939. This context allowed him to insist on the necessity of his party: a party ready to respond energetically to national decadence and the dangers of internationalism. In order to do this, the party had to be directed with a strong hand. In the particular context of imminent war, democracy was, of course, not a viable option. The former members of the party clearly recognized the necessity of total obedience of the cadres to the leadership of the party, and in particular to its young leader. He was often described as speaking little and as being appreciated by his comrades.

Can one consider Trương Tự Anh to have been a young fascist? This important and necessary question was in fact put to Đảng Văn Sung, one of the great personalities of the party, who was close to him in the 1940s. Đảng Văn Sung responded without hesitation that “there is no doubt that Anh was a fascist at that time.” He explained the reason. When France was defeated by Germany in 1940, the only nations that seemed to follow their own path were Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Imperial Japan. Even France was quick to adopt a fascist form of government with Pétain’s rise to power. According to Đảng Văn Sung, Trương Tự Anh was impressed by the strength and organization of the fascist systems. Even if the ĐVQĐĐ could not be accused of having being fascist at the time, he believed that in order to lead the national revolution to its conclusion, the country could not rely on undisciplined nationalists. It was hence necessary to build up
a structured and secretive political organization, made up of determined and disciplined militants, directed by an iron hand, in order to win the struggle for independence. One must acknowledge the fact that the colonial context remained the framework of the Đại Việt parties’ struggle and that their brand of nationalism had been conceived of and built in reaction to colonization and its destructive effects on the Vietnamese identity and heritage. On the ideological level, there is no doubt that a change took place in 1947 under the influence of Trần Ngọc Lập (Trần Việt Sơn) and Nguyễn Ngọc Huy (alias Hùng Nguyên), the Đại Việt’s two ideological reformers. The ĐVQĐĐ began to react to global transformations at the end of the Second World War and abandoned the principle of the “leader” [lãnh tụ chế].

What did this “Doctrine of the Survival of the People” [Chủ nghĩa dân tộc sinh tồn] consist of? For Trần Tử Anh, the struggle for survival was a universal law, as made clear in a subtitle of his concise presentation of the doctrine published in 1939: “The question of existence is at the center of history.” Only struggle could assure human beings a communal way of life and descendants. This process was the same for nations. Without struggle, there would be no long-term survival. In order to do this, mankind possessed a particular ability to adapt, which had allowed it to be victorious and to progress relative to its ancestors. This progress could only be realized through the formation of society. The best form of society, he believed, remained that of the nation. For the leader of the ĐVQĐĐ, Marxists had gone astray by imposing the concept of internationalism to their struggle. Internationalism was “incapable of resolving the vital question” because it contained within itself antagonistic feelings and the seeds of war. Only a national revolution was possible because it remained within the framework of the nation, the ideal social form, neither too small nor too big. Only the nation could solve the problem of solidarity within the human race. This idea was deeply influenced by social Darwinist thought.

Through the “Doctrine of the Survival of the People,” Trần Tử Anh defended two core political principles. The first was the necessity for a national revolution. The Đại Việt could not possibly receive its liberty from its French colonial masters. Neither could it trust the French left, just as colonialist as the right-wing parties. It was therefore necessary to wrest
away independence through revolution. This in turn made necessary the party, armed with a solid doctrine, as a revolutionary vanguard. The second principle centered on what might be called “the third way of the Đại Việt.” This involved a national program of revitalization, which was coupled with state interventionism in the economic arena. In order to put this program into practice, Trương Tử Anh believed in the necessity of a “secret dictatorial regime” that would create national unity among the people and guarantee their existence within the nation. In light of the party’s communist enemies, there is no doubt that the strongest of its organizational principles was secrecy. When pledging allegiance to the party, activists consented to respect a twelve-point regulation that was principally based on preserving secrecy in all circumstances.84

The ĐVQĐĐ in Action (1940–1945): Secrecy, Propaganda, and Military Preparation

France’s defeat by Nazi Germany in May 1940 had a tremendous influence on Vietnamese nationalists, proving to them that the colonizing power was no longer invincible and that the opportunity for a rapid overthrow of its power was no longer impossible. In September 1940, Hà Nội was shaken by the news that nationalist armies had attacked the Lạng Sơn region in the wake of a Japanese offensive.85 This attack had immediate repercussions for the Đại Việt parties. By stimulating revolutionary activity, it became the starting point of an anti-French propaganda campaign led by the clandestine groups.86 However, the nationalists suffered a defeat when the Japanese quickly abandoned the leaders of the Phúc Quốc army after the attack on Lạng Sơn, leading to their rapid elimination.

The period of the Japanese occupation, from 1940 to 1945, was particularly paradoxical. Relations between the nationalist revolutionaries and the Japanese remained ambiguous. Although some Japanese intellectuals, such as Kiyoshi Komatsu, shared a sincere friendship with well-known Vietnamese personalities, and although the Kempeitai offered its support to some nationalist activists pursued by the colonial Sûreté, the maintenance of the political status quo prevailed.87 Vietnam was now under a double Franco-Japanese domination. The French remained at the helm of the colonial Sûreté and had reorganized it.88 Hence, many members of the VNQĐĐ
and ĐVQDĐ remained distrustful, and the course of events vindicated their judgment.

In September 1941, the Tonkin Sûreté launched a vast operation against Vietnamese nationalists suspected of having ties to the Japanese. Nguyễn Tưởng Tam’s Đại Việt Dân Chính was a particular target. Within a month, the Sûreté made 132 arrests, principally among the members of the ĐVDC, the ĐVQDĐ, and the ĐVQX, a heavy blow for the young nationalist revolutionary parties. The leader of the ĐVQX, Nguyễn Xuân Tiêu, had already been arrested in the month of August, and Trường Tù Anh himself was apprehended in Hà Nội on October 4, 1941. The Sûreté’s inquiries led to disquieting discoveries: the project to form a “democratic and popular” army, a brochure concerning the training of assault troops, and Nazi propaganda documents. In between his first arrest in October 1941 and his escape from a Hà Nội hospital in September 1944, Trường Tù Anh was again arrested, tortured, incorporated into a special forced labor section, put under house arrest, and arrested once again in July 1944 after having left his village without authorization. According to Phạm Văn Liêm, the young ĐVQDĐ leader benefited from Japanese protection upon his return to Hà Nội in 1943 to allow him to pursue his revolutionary activities. He may also have left for Cochinchina. It is without doubt thanks to this protection that his party grew in student circles, in particular at the cité universitaire in Hà Nội.

Constantly under the watchful eyes of the Sûreté, the nationalist students of the VNQDĐ had to take extraordinary precautions when recruiting and mounting propaganda operations. That said, the new Vichy policy in Indochina towards youth, promulgated by Governor General Decoux and organized by Maurice Ducoroy, paradoxically gave the students the opportunity to display a “pure nationalism,” which made things difficult for colonial authorities. Tourist excursions and theatre performances became pretexts for defending and rediscovering the history of the Đại Việt of yore in order to nourish a shift of consciousness among the students. In particular, the Faculties of Law and Medicine became a breeding ground for young nationalist sympathizers of the ĐVQDĐ. But the revolutionary party did not remain cloistered in the university residences. In 1942, the cadres of the Phú Yên provincial section led a revolt against the Annam Sugar
Company [Société Sucrière d’Annam], which had been heavily affected by the new economic conditions. Beginning in late 1944, the party organized its own guerrilla fighters known as maquis [chien khu], first in Kép (Bắc Giang Province), at Lạc Trĩu (between Hải Dương and Bác Ninh Provinces), and then at Di Linh (Thanh Hóa Province).

When French authorities were overthrown by the Japanese coup of March 9, 1945, only the nationalist militants of the Đại Việt Quốc Xã formed the avant-garde of the anti-French struggle on the side of the imperial Japanese army. Some young nationalists paid for this with their lives. Everywhere in Tonkin, the cadres of the National Đại Việt Alliance celebrated their victory and organized meetings to support an independent Đại Việt. Sometime after the formation of the alliance in 1944, Trường Tự Anh delegated Nguyễn Sĩ Đình and Phạm Cảnh Hoàn, two important cadres of his own party, to play a leadership role within the alliance. His goal was undoubtedly to try to reorganize and control this disparate movement.

However, dissention and rivalry quickly weakened the ties between the National Đại Việt Alliance and the ĐVQĐĐ. Sapped by petty factionalism, the National Alliance first transformed itself into the National Association of Vietnam [Việt Nam Quốc Dân Hội], before a new regrouping was attempted through the Association of the New Vietnam [Tân Việt Nam Hội]. The principal fault line was the division between the parties led by Nguyễn Xuân Tiệu and Trường Tự Anh, who both clashed with the efforts of Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn and Nguyễn Thế Nghịệp to maintain the old VNQĐĐ. Rivalries and leadership questions increasingly paralyzed the actions of the alliance. The Đại Việt parties, essentially made up of political cadres, did their best to fill the political vacuum following the resignation of the Trần Trọng Kim cabinet in August 1945. But internal discord and flawed decision making within the nationalist movement during the decisive days of August 1945 left the political field open to the Việt Minh. This movement, which was relatively unknown until August 1945, had succeeded in positioning itself as an alternative to the Nationalist Alliance. In brief, during the decisive days of August, the alliance lost all opportunity to take power. The discords were fatal for the alliance and prevented the Đại Việt parties from taking power.
According to the historian Phạm Văn Sơn, “the nationalists [of the alliance] had opened the way, but had lost the struggle.” The well-organized Việt Minh knew how to use this opportunity. It filled the political vacuum with its new anti-Japanese slogans and knew how to attract undecided nationalists. Despite the Việt Minh’s seizure of power in exceptional circumstances—notably the nonintervention of Japanese forces in the August Revolutionary days—all seemed not yet lost for the revolutionary nationalists. Beginning in September 1945, Hồ Chí Minh was forced to follow a “united front” policy with all nationalist groups, including the revolutionary nationalists. The Indochinese Communist Party’s Central Committee had pursued the policy in its period of reconstruction between 1932 and 1935. It was, of course, nothing other than a political maneuver that would eventually lead to the elimination of its nationalist competitors.

**Conclusion: An Unexpected End**

The Vietnamese nationalist revolutionaries of 1930 to 1945 were prisoners of a political deadlock. The collapse of liberal democracies in Europe and the rise to power of authoritarian regimes in Germany, Italy, France, and other countries around the world had an enormous impact on Vietnamese anticolonialist thought. But this was not the only factor. The simple fact of being colonized, the heavy weight of repression, and daily humiliations led nationalists to a radical, revolutionary, and exclusive ideology in order to affirm themselves politically, spiritually, and vitally as citizens of an endangered community. The nationalisms of Trường Tự Anh or Lý Đòng A, all specifically Vietnamese, offered answers to this basic crisis.

But can it really be said that the Đài Việt parties were fascist? The answer is far more complex than it seems. Evidently some intellectuals were lured by the idea of a “Vietnamese Fascism.” However, fairly quickly and for various reasons, this temptation did not have lasting consequences. Hence Nguyễn Tuong Tam, who was, according to the colonial Sûreté, a “fervent admirer of Nazism” in 1939 when he founded the Đài Việt Dân Chính, would merge his small revolutionary party into the Outer VNQĐĐ [VNQĐĐ Hải Ngoại] after having been convinced of the danger of Japanese imperialism. To some extent, the ĐVDC’s political program evoked a version of national communism (return to an agrarian
community and forced egalitarianism). Nguyễn Xuân Tiểu disappeared from the political scene for a decade. He continued his political activity during the establishment of the Republic of Vietnam as a fervent supporter to Ngô Đình Diệm, before becoming an opponent to Ngô Đình Diệm’s family dictatorship. For the ĐVQX, there is no trace of a precise political doctrine. It seems that Nguyễn Xuân Tiểu’s group was more akin to a pro-Japanese militia. The complex and esoteric theories of Lý Đồng A’s ĐVDD resembled a secret society more than a political party. Trường Tù Anh’s ĐVQĐĐ, finally, tried to preserve individual liberties, whereas his “scientific” nationalism, with its touch of social Darwinism, contained traces of protectionism. With its holistic explanation of the world, the “Doctrine of the Survival of the People” of the ĐVQĐĐ above all reminds one of an ideological nationalism that was never put into practice. Trường Tù Anh thought that the missed opportunities of the August Revolution would have allowed his party to join the Việt Minh or even overthrow it through a coup d’état. For Như Trọng, a “Socialist Republic” [Công Hòa Xã Hội] remained to be put into place before it could give rise to the fourth stage of the VNQĐĐ’s program. In any case, the pseudo-fascism of the parties remained restricted to ambition and the search for a political model. All of them failed in their attempt to provide the new Empire of Vietnam [Việt Nam Đế Quốc] with a viable doctrine. One of the responses to this “fascist temptation” is perhaps to be found in the behavior of the Vietnamese youth during the August Revolution, which emerged out of the five years of Vichy rule in Indochina that preceded it.

Much as in Europe and other parts of Asia, in the Vietnam of the Trần Trọng Kim government, the awakening of the masses and the incorporation of youth into new political parties was an urgent political question. The militarization of the youth and the formation of armed militias had not been the sole domain of the Đại Việt parties. Hundreds of thousands of youth had been enrolled in the Frontline Youth Group [Thanh Niên Tiền Tuyến] of Minister Phan Anh in northern and central Vietnam, and in Dr. Phạm Ngọc Thạch’s Vanguard Youth [Thanh Niên Tiền Phong] in the south. Commander Nolde, an agent of the Deuxième bureau, described this phenomenon succinctly when he highlighted the “fascist character of the rebellion.” According to him, despite its communist trappings, “in reality,
the rebel movement has a pronounced fascist character,” which he tried to explain as such:

An Asian “racial” character that is heavily inspired by the Japanese propaganda (many of the rebels admit this openly); An extreme nationalism in the style of Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy; Obsession for the parade and mass demonstrations (here one sees the Pétainist drilling of Mister Ducoroy, who has given to the Indochinese youth a pseudo-fascist mentality); Complete disrespect for the life of other people and a mania for the use of the torture that is so dear to the Gestapo.\textsuperscript{111}

Paradoxically, the nationalist movements had prepared the ground for the Việt Minh, which, draped in a nationalist cloak, took power in Hà Nội with relative ease. This revolution, the “final result of the osmosis, the unpainful passing from one state to another,” according to Philippe Devillers,\textsuperscript{112} had been the uprising of an entire despised people thirsting for independence, and not that of a single party. Is it necessary to remind the reader that the situation in late August 1945 was still quite open?

The danger of the nationalist ideas of Trường Tù Anh or those of Lý Đồng A did not escape the professional revolutionaries of the Indochinese Communist Party, who immediately organized a hunt for reactionaries [phân đồng], counter-revolutionaries [phân cách mạng], and traitors [phân quốc] in order to eliminate the nationalist revolutionaries. This repression, which was carried out by the party’s assassination squads beginning in mid-1945, lasted until the end of 1948.\textsuperscript{113} The conflict between nationalists and communists, caused by what Đỗ Hữu Đông has called the “Occidental rift” [déchirement occidental] on Vietnamese soil,\textsuperscript{114} took on the character of a confrontation between opposing forces of professional revolutionaries, each convinced about the righteousness of their respective doctrines. The romanticism of the revolutionaries of the VNQĐĐ in 1930 was thus relegated to the past.

It would nevertheless be too easy to characterize this confrontation as a fight between the “Japanese Fascists and their lackeys” and the authentic revolutionaries of the Việt Minh front under the far-sighted leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party. The events instead show us that the situation was more complex. If there were many fascist apprentices in the ranks of the nationalist revolutionaries and in the youth movements, those on the side of the communists and their sympathizers who would indulge
their admiration for Nazi Germany in a Stalinist national communism were numerous too. The country’s major youth organizations, directed by the leaders who had rallied to the Việt Minh (Tạ Quang Bửu, Phan Anh, and Phạm Ngọc Thạch), were dissolved and reformed into the National Salvation Youth [Thanh Niên Cứu Quốc] or the Tự Vệ, the Việt Minh’s self-defense militia. Passing from one kind of nationalism to another was not a problem for the majority of the youth, who were receptive to the Việt Minh’s nationalist discourse.

Today, hardly anything of this ideological struggle is to be found in the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s official historiography. The history textbooks methodically return to the importance of socialist theory as the engine and guide of the Vietnamese national communist revolution. Nevertheless, this forgotten history is critical for broader understandings of Vietnamese history during decolonization. How can one explain the return of a triumphant nationalism and the renaissance of the Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng during the Bảo Đại years from 1949 to 1955? How can one explain the existence of two anticommunist republics in South Vietnam from 1955 to 1975? The missing links to these questions are to be found in the historical evolution of Vietnamese nationalism from the beginning of the twentieth century, and particularly in the genesis of a Vietnamese political rift between revolutionary nationalists and Leninist-Stalinist communists that was first visible in the late 1920s and erupted during the bloody years of 1945–1946.

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ABSTRACT
To fully understand the complexity of ideological commitments in Vietnam between 1945 and 1975, it is useful to return to the 1930s, when the attraction of the Vietnamese nationalists for the Fascist European regimes led a number of them to publicly celebrate the figure of Adolf Hitler. Within the context of the Popular Front in France and a certain political openness in Indochina, the intellectual and organizational turmoil of the nationalist parties gave substance to a doctrine nourished by Western models but that nevertheless remained uniquely Vietnamese. This article addresses the question of the “fascist temptation” of the prewar nationalist Đa Việt parties, which is rarely addressed by historiography.

KEYWORDS: Vietnam, nationalism, Đa Việt Party, anticommunism, Hitler, Survival of the People (doctrine)

Notes
1. Hải Phòng Nhật Báo, June 12–16, 1945, with a detailed presentation. Also see Binh Minh, June 12–16, 1945; Đồng Phát, June 9, 12, 15, 16, 1945; Tri Tân, June 14, 1945.
2. Đồng Phát, June 19, 1945; Trung Bắc Chữ Nhật, June 24, 1945. The cover featured the commemoration ceremony dedicated to Nguyễn Thái Học. Nevertheless, the journal raised the question of why the organizing committee had omitted the commemoration of Phạm Hồng Thái, even though this had been featured on the program of the National Đa Việt Alliance. See “Tại sao ban tổ chức lại bỏ quên Phạm Hồng Thái hôm làm lễ kỷ niệm liệt sĩ Việt Nam ở Khán Sơn?” [Why Did the Organization Committee Forget Phạm Hồng Thái on the Anniversary Day of Vietnam’s Martyrs in Khán Sơn?], Trung Bắc Chữ Nhật, June 24, 1945, 9–10, 22.


6. The nationalist press expressed a strong belief in a new era. See, for example, Long Diên, “Thời đại mới, tự tương mới” [New Era, New Thought]; *Tri Tân*, June 14, 1945; and the editorial “Một kỷ nguyên mới” [A New Era], *Trung Bác Chữ Nhật*, May 6, 1945. The latter henceforth inscribes itself in a new era and aims to strengthen the independence gained thanks to the Japanese, supports a new culture [văn hóa mới], and calls for living in fraternity, peace, and justice.


9. This was at least the intention of the editors of the special issue dedicated to the VNQĐĐ of the *Hải Phòng Phát Nhật Báo*. Its authors signaled that they wanted to reestablish a certain number of facts about the VNQĐĐ rather than to romanticize the revolutionary adventure. The presentation of this new and revised history in 1945 was written by those who had shared in the glory and the sufferings of their executed compatriots. Among these writers were Như特朗 Tông, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, and Nguyễn Thế Nghịệp.

10. *Đông Phát*, for instance, started to publish from June 13, 1945, onward a history of the VNQĐĐ in forty-eight installments, written by Tam Thanh. (The numbering of the installments contains several errors.) The last installment was published on August 15, 1945, and the editions of the following days gave way to the reporting of present-day events, notably the taking of power of the Việt Minh. *Trung Bác Chữ Nhật* also published several articles starting on June 24, 1945, in particular under the authorship of Đạo Trính Nhật.

14. In 1945, as previously mentioned, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp published a history of the VNQDD outside Vietnam (Việt Nam Quốc Dân Động ở hải ngoại); Những Tổng also published the party’s history in his Nguyễn Thái Học (1902–1930) (Hà Nội: Việt Nam Thư Xá, Cổ quan tuyển truyền Trung ương của Việt Nam Quốc Dân Hội XB, 1945); Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Thăm mộ chiến sĩ Nguyễn Thái Học” [Visit of the Tomb of Combatant Nguyễn Thái Học], Binh Minh, May 23, 1945.
16. See, for instance, the motto of the daily Động Phát during March–September 1945: “Tội ác của thực dân” [The Crimes of Colonialism].
22. In 1938, the journalist Nguyễn Thế Vinh wrote in the first issue of his political journal: “Considering the current situation in Vietnam, we ask the question: On the political plane, which is the ideology that most conforms with our level of civilization that we have to follow? Communism or nationalism? We leave
the answer to the people. For us, however, it would not be communism.”

Chính Trị Tuần Báo, October 18, 1938.


26. This comparison of Nguyễn Thái Học and Hitler was also made in several accounts of the celebration. See “Lễ truy niêm nhà cháu mẹnh Nguyễn Thái Học và 12 đồng chí” [The Memorial Ceremony of the Revolutionary Nguyễn Thái Học and His Twelve Comrades], Binh Minh, June 19, 1945; Hải Phòng Nhật Báo, June 19, 1945.

27. “Nguyễn Thái Học and Hitler were prepared to accept death with elation because they did not want to see their countries crushed under the boots of their enemies,” in Nguyễn Triệu Luật, “Quốc kỳ” [The National Flag], Hải Phòng Nhật Báo, June 19, 1945.


31. Ibid.

32. Nguyễn Vỹ, Tuán, chàng trai nước Việt: Chứng tích thời đại từ 1900 đến 1970, tập II [Tuán, Young Man of the Viêt Country: Eyewitness of the Period from 1900 to 1970, vol. 2] (Los Alamitos, CA: Xuân Thu, 1999), 432–433. Hitler was not an unknown personality to Vietnamese readers. In addition to several mentions in the periodical Ngày Nay, an important biography was published in the newspaper Quốc gia [Nation] under the title “Tiều sữ Hitler” [Biography of Hitler], starting April 19, 1939. Through more than twenty installments, the unreported author recounted the German dictator’s years of training, his youth, and his rise to power.

33. Linh Mai, “Chế độ nào?” [Which Regime?], Hải Phòng Nhật Báo, April 16, 1945, 1–2. Four years earlier, in another way, Nhật Nham, a journalist of the famous intellectual periodical Trí Tấn, questioned the impact of the flight to England of the “hero” Rudolf Hess on the continuation of the war (see Nhật-Nham, “Rudolf Hess, một yêu nhân đáng Quốc-xã Đức” [Rudolf
Hess, a Major Character of the German National Socialist Party], *Trí Tân*, June 3, 1941.


35. In 1941, the French colonial police Sûreté had put its hand on the political program of the Đại Việt Dân Chính, which was also very inclined to defend the interests of the people. See Archives Nationales d’Outre-Mer (ANOM), RST/NF 6495, “Dai Viet Dan Chinh” folder; Guillemot, *Dai Việt, indépendance et révolution au Viêt-Nam*, 129–132.


37. See, for example, the articles putting forward Nazi methods of militarizing society, in particular women: “Nhà nữ lãnh tụ Quốc xã Bã Scholtz Klink (Quốc xã 100% chỉ huy 30 triệu phụ nữ Đức…)” [The National Socialist Leader Klink (100 Percent Nazi with Thirty Million German Women under Her Wings…)], *Tân Báo*, June 28, 1938; “Phương pháp đào tạo đối chỉ huy của nước Đức quốc xã” [Training Methods of the Commander Team of Nazi Germany], *Hải Phòng Nhật Báo*, April 13–14, 1945, translation by Nguyên Thế Nghiệp from an article on the Nazi Germany’s elite leadership formation in the Vogelsang camp.

38. Phong Luc, “Avec Doriot par Drieu La Rochelle” [With Doriot by Drieu La Rochelle], *L’Effort*, September 8, 1937. From 1938 to 1940, the Far Eastern Section of the Parti Social Français (PSF) owned a newspaper in Sài Gòn entitled *Le Flambeau de l’Indochine* [The Beacon of Indochina].


40. Between 1937 and 1939, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, Nguyễn Thế Nghiệp, Nguyễn Văn Lộ, and former VNQDD members ran three periodicals. Each of these papers, *Le Message* (three issues in 1937), *Dự Lụan* (1938), *Tân Báo* (1938–39), and *Zân* (1938–39), was subject to the colonial Sûreté’s censorship, seized, or forbidden.

41. See Martina T. Nguyen’s discussion of the so-called “cultural nationalism” of the TLVD in her PhD dissertation, “The Self-Reliant Literary Group.”


45. On Trịnh Văn Yên, see Cảm Đình, Vụ án Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng, 69.


47. Ibid.

48. Apart from these papers, Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn also led the publishing house ABC, which published books on political doctrines and parties (SFIO, PCUS, Guomindang) and political personalities. See the advertisements in the paper journal L’Effort during the first months of 1937.

49. On the protest against the new law, see Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn, “Cảm chỉnh trị phạm không được đi lại thâm nau” [Ban on Mutual Visits by Former Political Prisoners], Tân Báo, May 13, 1938.


51. “Cần cứu vào những điều kiện nghiêm: Chúng tôi yêu cầu lập các chính đảng, đặc biệt thêm quyền hạn viễn dân biểu” [On the Basis of Our Experience: We Demand the Creation of Political Parties, in Particular to Extend the Rights of the People’s Representative Chamber], Tân Báo, April 22, 1938.

52. L’Effort 8 (November 27, 1936): 1. See also the first page of the December 11, 1936 issue: “The formation of political parties is in no way an obstacle to a country’s evolution; to the contrary. It is also not in contradiction with the laws of humanity,’ as claimed by a certain colleague.”


54. Nguyễn Tưỡng Bạch, Việt-Nam một thế kỷ qua, 117.

55. Guillemot, Dai Việt, indépendance et révolution au Việt-Nam, 64–73; Hoàng Văn Đạo, Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng, 227–228.


57. “Lời tuyên bố của Đại Việt Quốc Xã Đảng” [Proclamation of the Đại Việt National Socialist Party], Hải Phòng Nhật Báo, August 9, 1945, 1.

59. Biographical information is drawn from the following: Nguyễn Ngọc Lưu, Luật khổ vê hai chủ nghĩa chính trị Việt Nam, 35–36; Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Lịch sử các học thuyết chính trị (quyển II) [History of Political Theories, vol. 2] (Sài Gòn: Cập Tiến, 1971), 221; Huệ Vũ, “Tháng 12: Tưởng nhớ lại một nhân vật lịch sử” [December: Souvenirs of a Historical Figure], Tự Do Dân Bản [Open Petition to Mr. Marius Moutet, Minister of Colonies, in Favor of the Last Victims of the Big Drama of 1930], L’Effort, July 9, 1937, 1. See also, “Une pétition en faveur des prisonniers politiques indochinois” [A Petition for Indochinese Political Prisoners], L’Effort indochinois, July 7, 1939, signed by twenty-nine people.

60. Huệ Vũ, “Quê hương và gia thế Đảng trưởng Trưởng Tự Anh” [The Native Soil and the Prestige of the Family of the President of the Party, Trưởng Tự Anh], Đại Việt 8 (Spring 1994): 52–53.


64. Hoàng Văn Đạo, Việt Nam Quốc Dân Đảng, 217; Quang Minh, Cách Mạng Việt Nam Thời Cần Kim, 35.

65. The question of amnesty for prisoners was regularly brought up in the nationalist press. See, for instance, the August 6, 1937, issue of L’Effort. In a long preamble to an article on the VNQDD written by A. Clémenti, Vũ Đình Dy defended his former VNQDD comrades: “Supplique ouverte à M. Marius Moutet, ministre des Colonies, en faveur des dernières victimes du grand drame de 1930” [Open Petition to Mr. Marius Moutet, Minister of Colonies, in Favor of the Last Victims of the Big Drama of 1930], L’Effort, July 9, 1937, 1. See also, “Une pétition en faveur des prisonniers politiques indochinois” [A Petition for Indochinese Political Prisoners], L’Effort indochinois, July 7, 1939, signed by twenty-nine people.

66. Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng, Chùa nghiệp Dân tộc sinh tồn yếu lạc, 15–16.
67. The dangers and lies of communism were denounced by the papers of Nguyễn Thé Vinh, who had spent several years in Soviet Russia. As a privileged eyewitness, he openly criticized communist doctrine and its consequences. (See his Chính trị Từng thu, published in 1938). During the August Revolution, the unforgiving Việt Minh assassinated Nguyễn Thé Vinh for his political opinion.


69. Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng, Chữ nghĩa dân tộc sinh tồn yếu lược, 16–18. Regrettably, the lack of documents does not allow us to affirm with absolute certainty that the criticism of fascism and Nazism was the result of Trường Tù Anh’s reflection.


71. One finds a trace of Trịnh Văn Yên in the journal Zàn in 1938–1939. This short-lived publication was for a time politically directed by Nguyễn Ngọc Sơn; see the August 15, 1938 issue.


75. Tuyên Ngôn Đại Việt Quốc Dân Đảng 1939 (USA, 1985), 11.

76. Ibid., 16–17.

77. Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Lịch sử các học thuyết chính trị (quyển II), 223.


did not hesitate to quote from Mein Kampf to illustrate an article on the organization of the youth (Hương Sơn, “Chào cờ, tổ chức thanh niên” [Salute the Flag, Organize the Youth], Tân Á, June 22, 1945.


81. Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Lịch sử các học thuyết chính trị (quyền II), 223.


84. Guillemot, Đại Việt, indépendance et révolution au Việt-Nam, 151–156. In matters of discipline, party cadres also had to follow the Ten Commandments.


87. Guillemot, “Vietnamese Nationalist Revolutionaries and the Japanese Occupation,” 234–237. The support of Japanese deserters to the guerrilla fighters of the VNQDD Front was very late. The Kempeitai was the military police of the Japanese imperial army. Especially in Indochina, it was a major actor in the repression of the French after the Coup of March 9.


91. ANOM, RST/NF 6495, “Dai Việt Dân Chinh” folder, Note No. 19720, “Activité révolutionnaire au Tonkin,” Hà Nội, September 16, 1941; Note No. 19885, “Dai Việt Dân Chinh,” Hà Nội, September 19, 1941; Note No. 19963,
“Activité révolutionnaire au Tonkin – Parti ‘Dai Việt Dân Chinh,’” Hà Nội, September 20, 1941, a document followed by the interrogations of Tran Van Lu and of Nguyen Han, both DVDC affiliates, as well as the translation of the military training manual; Note No. 23398, “Dai Việt Dân Chinh dans ses relations avec les militaires,” Hà Nội, October 30, 1941; Note No. 23577, “Activités nationalistes et anti-françaises,” Hà Nội, October 31, 1941; Note No. 23718, “Au sujet de Tran Van Lu (ex-secrétaire au Bureau Militaire),” Hà Nội, November 3, 1941; Note No 24602, Hà Nội, November 12, 1941.

92. ANOM, GGI 65492, HCF-IC, Direction de la Police et de la Sûreté fédérales, January 24, 1949, “Les partis nationalistes vietnamiens” [fasc. No. 45], 85 pp. There is a note on Trương Tụ Anh in the index.


94. ANOM, GGI 65492, Note on Trương Tụ Anh.

95. Guillemot, Dai Việt, indépendance et révolution au Viêt-Nam, 94–98.


98. Those who died included Trần Văn Nhung and other adherents of the ĐVQX.


100. “Tân Viêt Nam Hội,” Binh Minh, April 20, 1945, 1; Duy Nhất, May 1, 1945, last page.

101. See, for example, the articles of the nationalist press (Binh Minh, Đông Phát, and Trung Bác Chủ Nhất) between August 15 and the end of August 1945.

102. For details, see Guillemot, Dai Việt, indépendance et révolution au Viêt-Nam, 223–243, 261–267.


105. Nguyễn Ngọc Lưu, Lược khảo về hai chủ nghĩa chính trị Viêt Nam, 20; Nguyễn Ngọc Huy, Lịch sử các học thuyết chính trị (quyển II), 210–211.

107. According to a former comrade of Nguyễn Xuân Tiêu at his funeral, the “National Socialist” label was chosen by Nguyễn Xuân Tiêu to signify strength, in total ignorance of what Nazism was. See Jean-Claude Pomonti, “La troisième voie n’est pas encore tracée” [The Third Way Is Not Yet Drawn], Le Monde, September 27, 1972.

108. The activity of the members of this small party, mainly composed of urban intellectuals, continued in South Vietnam during the republican period until the fall of Sài Gòn.


110. Phạm Mạnh Phan, “Cuộc phong văn của Tri Tân,” 34.


115. To be convinced of this, it is sufficient to recall the particular trajectories of Nguyễn Khắc Viện, Trần Đại Nghĩa, or Trịnh Văn Yên (the last one, a former VNQDD member who had passed into the ranks of the Việt Minh).

116. In particular, in the Việt Minh militia (Tự Vệ) bitter young nationalists were taken under the wings of Võ Nguyên Giáp in 1946, as he feared a pro-VNQDD drifting in their ranks. See Guillemot, “Au cœur de la fracture,” 191.

117. The oath taken by Hồ Chí Minh and his government on Ba Đình Place on September 2, 1945 illustrates the nationalist intention of the Việt Minh very well. See Phạm Mạnh Phan, “Trước bàn thờ Tổ Quốc trong ‘Ngày độc lập’” [Facing the Motherland’s Altar on “Independence Day”], Tri Tân, September 6, 1945, 6, 18.