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Three Historical Methodology Textbooks Under the Republic of Vietnam (1954-1975)

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Abstract: *Phương pháp sử học* (*Historical Methodology*) by Nguyen Phương (1964), *Sử học nhập môn (Sử học phương pháp luận)* (*Introduction to Historiography - Historical Methodology*) by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan (1970), and *Nhập môn Phương pháp sử học* (*Introduction to Historical Methodology*) by Nguyen The Anh (1974) are three historical methodology textbooks used in the higher education system in the South under the Republic of Vietnam administration (1954-1975). They were written by highly-regarded historians with widely known historical works, who were also professors teaching at various educational institutions during this period. Given the methodological nature of these works as well as the prominent positions of their authors, these three textbooks have the capacity to reflect the historiography formed and developed within the academic institutions of the Republic of Vietnam—a topic that still invites exploration by researchers seeking a comprehensive and thorough understanding of this period. Through a case study of the three textbooks, this article offers several observations on the trends shaping the landscape of Republic of Vietnam historiography in higher education institutions and the factors influencing historical thought. It also examines the relationship between East Asian and Euro-American traditions in Republic of Vietnam historiography within the context of the modernization of historical studies.

Keywords: Republic of Vietnam historiography; historical methodology; historiographical modernization; 1954-1975.

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1. Introduction

Republic of Vietnam historiography from 1954 to 1975 is a noteworthy topic because it was formed during a period of national division under the Republic of Vietnam regime. It also occurred amid a wave of contact with Western culture in the form of American culture and scholarship. Although the historiographical legacy of this period is undeniable, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies of its legacy.

One of the aspects that helps identify a historiography is the set of prevailing theories, methodologies, and historical thinking that govern it, which manifest

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through various channels: speeches, books, press publications, and journals. Drawing on this approach, we selected as a case study three significant historical methodology textbooks published during the Republic of Vietnam period. These textbooks are significant because they helped to define methodological discourses within educational and academic research institutions during this period. They were also designed for and widely used in university education. Although there is little precise information available on publication numbers, the 2,000 copies of the second printing of Nguyen Phuong's *Phương pháp sử học* in 1974 suggest that the publication's circulation most likely extended beyond university campuses. The textbook authors were professors at educational institutions such as Hue University, the Faculty of Letters at Saigon University, and Van Hanh University in Saigon. They are renowned historians who have published many notable historical works: for example, *Việt Nam thời khai sinh* (*Vietnam in its Genesis*) (1965) and *Việt Nam thời kỳ bành trướng Tây Sơn* (*Vietnam During the Tay Son Expansion Period*) (1968) by Nguyen Phuong; *Việt Nam thời Pháp đô hộ* (*Vietnam under French Domination*) (1970) and *Kinh tế và xã hội Việt Nam dưới các vua triều Nguyễn* (*Vietnam's Economy and Society under the Nguyen Kings*) (1968) by Nguyen The Anh; *Chế độ chính trị Việt Nam thế kỷ XVII và XVIII* (*Vietnam's Political System in the 17th and 18th Centuries*) (1974) by Le Kim Ngan. Some of them also held important roles in the Historical Research Association (e.g., Nguyen Phuong was the President of the Vietnam Historical Association). This record of scholarship suggests that the authors were not methodologists in a purely theoretical sense. The theoretical and methodological issues set out in their textbooks are likely to have shaped the way they wrote history; conversely, some of these issues probably arose, at least in part, from their own research practice. There is, of course, always a gap between theory and practice, one that depends on how well individual researchers apply theory. A comprehensive understanding of a historiography would also require a much broader investigation, since historical theory alone is expressed via many channels (e.g., magazines, journals, and even historical works themselves). Nevertheless, these three textbooks clearly merit focused investigation as a case study.

The three methodology textbooks *Phương pháp sử học*, *Sử học nhập môn (Sử học phương pháp luận)*, and *Nhập môn Phương pháp sử học* have been researched, introduced, and referenced to varying degrees, especially the two books by Nguyen Phuong and Nguyen The Anh. Shortly after the publication of Nguyen Phuong's *Phương pháp sử học* (Historical Methodology), Le Van Hao noted that it conveyed the prevailing historiographical thought of the time: it "attempted to introduce the erroneous historiographical viewpoints and methods of the imperialist bourgeois academic circles" (1969: 32-47). Later, Truong Huu Quynh, who worked in the South following national reunification, published two book reviews in the *Journal of Historical Studies* (Truong Huu Quynh 1978a, 1978b). These reviews criticized the works of Nguyen Phuong and Nguyen The Anh, labeling them as "two documents on the historical theory of the South during the US-puppet era" (Truong Huu Quynh 1978b: 125). As the most in-depth examinations of these two textbooks to date, Quynh's reviews were driven by an ideological struggle to defend Marxist historiography; consequently, many points require further discussion to reach a more comprehensive evaluation. In *Lịch sử sử học Việt Nam*

(*History of Vietnamese Historiography*), Phan Ngoc Lien and Nguyen Ngoc Co (2011: 280) also referenced Nguyen Phuong's *Phương pháp sử* (*Historical Methodology*) and Nguyen The Anh's *Nhập môn sử* (*Introduction to History*) when discussing theoretical perspectives in the South from 1954 to 1975. Phan Ngoc Lien and Nguyen Ngoc Co criticized these books, as well as other work published during this period, as for espousing "bourgeois historiography […]aimed at opposing Marxist-Leninist viewpoints in historical research, […] criticizing and denying Marxist socio-economic doctrine, and distorting scientific objectivism and the Communist partisanship in Marxist historical research" (Phan Ngoc Lien and Nguyen Ngoc Co 2011: 280). Other interpretations of this work were less critical. Phan Phuong Thao (2025: 19-20) classified the textbook by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan as a "publication discussing methodology and research methods" that covers "both Western and Eastern historical methods," while categorizing the works of Nguyen Phuong and Nguyen The Anh as "monographs that delve deeper into historical methods and methodology." Vu Thi Thu Thanh (2020: 72) noted that "unlike the academic context of the early 20th century, Southern historiography at that time already had textbooks guiding historical research methods by authors such as Nguyen Phuong, Le Kim Ngan and Chau Long, [and] Nguyen The Anh." She also pointed out that "in the actual practice of writing history, each historian utilizes and critiques historical sources differently, leading to distinct historical interpretations and writing styles".

In general, previous studies acknowledge that the three analyzed textbooks clearly reflect the dominant historiographical thought in South Vietnam at the time, even though the actual practice of historiography was much richer and more diverse due to the complex relationship between theory and its application. However, a comprehensive understanding of the three works remains elusive. This gap exists because past evaluations were either rooted in strict class standpoints or had not made these publications their primary focus. Therefore, analyzing the content of the three textbooks to identify their dominant historiographical thought serves a vital purpose. It allows us to understand the historiographical environment of the era and evaluate the contributions of South Vietnamese historiography (1954-1975) to the modernization of the discipline—marking the transition from monarchical historiography to historical science. Consequently, this article builds upon previous scholarship while addressing a gap that has yet to be thoroughly explored.

The article examines the following research questions: What were the characteristics of historical methodology textbooks in the higher education system of the Republic of Vietnam? What factors shaped them? What methodologies did they propose? What was the relationship between Euro-American historiography and the East Asian historiographical tradition in Republic of Vietnam historiography? And how is Republic of Vietnam historiography positioned within the history of modern Vietnamese historiography? The research is based on the hypothesis that the formation and development of modern Vietnamese historiography is the result of East-West cultural contact from the 19th century to the present. This cultural exchange expanded from the Eastern domain (primarily Chinese historiography) to France (from the late 19th to mid-20th century), and subsequently to the Soviet Union and Euro-American spheres during the second half of the 20th

century to the present. Throughout this process, the traditional East Asian historiographical legacy always paralleled and interacted with the Western historiographical tradition during the Westernization/modernization of historiography. The article employs fundamental historical research methods: document content analysis, historical contextualization, logical synthesis, and comparative analysis. Document content analysis serves as the primary method to examine the three textbooks, focusing on the methodological information they provide to identify their governing historiographical viewpoints, reasoning, and schools of thought. The historical method is applied to situate Republic of Vietnam historiography within the specific political and socio-cultural context of the 1960s and 1970s, placing it within the historical flow of modern Vietnamese historiography. The logical method is utilized to synthesize and systematize these historiographical viewpoints. Finally, the comparative method is used to highlight the distinct characteristics of Republic of Vietnam historiography relative to the overall progression of modern Vietnamese historical studies.

Here, the phrase "modernization of historiography" is used to refer to the standardization of the research process and the handling of historical sources; the construction of methodology and the application of scientific methods to historical research; the diversification and updating of contemporary historiographical trends; and the expansion of academic networks?

2. Historical Context

The specific historical circumstances, marked by the division of the country into the North and the South, created distinct developmental trajectories for the historiography of each region. In the South, academia was situated in a position that was simultaneously free and yet governed by the political objectives of the regime and the intrinsic needs of the intelligentsia. The conditions of war generated an urgent need to develop a system of historical theory capable of serving as a foundation for historical works, aimed at consolidating patriotism and national consciousness. Among the various perspectives, Marxist thought remained known and was utilized by certain intellectuals in their research. This was similar to the contemporary state of literature in the South[1]. Meanwhile, Northern historiography between 1954 and 1975, and immediately after national reunification in 1975, was nurtured in a general spirit where ideological struggle was deemed a vital revolutionary task of historiography. In the 1965-1978 orientation of the Institute of History[2]:

"historical science must also rush to the battlefield fighting with its own weapons [...] These are not merely "issues intrinsic to historical science itself" but also the demands of the Vietnamese revolution at this time—an ideological and cultural revolution [...] Building the

[1] In addition to the influence of Western ideological currents and literary theories, literature was also profoundly impacted by fluctuations in political and religious life, as well as the struggle for national reunification and the defense of national culture. Marxist viewpoints in literature were therefore quite notable (Vo Van Nhon 2016: 26).

[2] The Institute of History is an authoritative agency within the orthodox historiographical system of North Vietnam. It was established in 1960 under the State Committee of Sciences and was modelled on previous agencies: the History Group of the Literature, History, and Geography Research Board under the Party Central Committee (1953); the History Department of the Literature, History, and Geography Research Board under the Ministry of Education (1956); and the State Committee of Sciences (1959).

historiographical contingent in terms of historical theory and methodology is to accelerate the process of researching, compiling, and teaching, serving the two revolutionary strategies that the entire Party and people are undertaking: the struggle to liberate the South." (Van Tao 1978: 5-6)

Researching methodological issues in historiography, especially the viewpoint of Marxism-Leninism, was increasingly prioritized as it was considered the theoretical foundation of Marxist historiography (Institute of History 1981: 26-27, 231-233).

Higher education served as the incubator for historical methodology. The transition from the French model to the American model brought about a profound transformation in how Southern historians approached knowledge. After 1954, the South inherited the higher education system established by the French since the early 20th century. From 1965, and especially from the early 1970s, Southern higher education began to exhibit the influence of the American paradigm. This was typified by the organizational model of multidisciplinary universities, including both state (e.g., University of Saigon, University of Hue, and University of Can Tho) and private institutions (e.g., University of Da Lat and Van Hanh University). Prevalent shifts occurred primarily in private institutions like Da Lat and Van Hanh, as well as in several newly established universities post-1965, such as the University of Can Tho, Thu Duc Polytechnic University, and the community college system (Hoang Thi Hong Nga 2023: 128-133).

Socially, the South during this period possessed a complex structure. Demographic shifts led to changes in the ideological makeup of of the intelligentsia in general and historical researchers in particular. The aftermath of the Geneva Accords witnessed the migration of over a million people from the North to the South, comprising forces belonging to various parts of the French ruling and military machinery, a number of relatively wealthy individuals, a minority of intellectuals, and Catholic compatriots (in addition to French military forces). From 1965 onward, the United States deployed half a million troops to the South, who introduced American lifestyles and cultural products. Consequently, a not insignificant segment of Southern society was influenced by the cultural values of the United States, adopting a fast-paced lifestyle and showing less regard for traditional national culture (Nguyen Dinh Le and Phan Hai Van 2019: 177, 187). This evolution not only altered the demographic structure but also shaped the composition of the intelligentsia and the research community in the South during this period, thereby influencing the ideological framework of Southern historians at the time. Culturally and ideologically, while Confucianism still retained a certain level of influence, the impact of French culture persisted through authors trained in the colonial French education system—a legacy that continued into this era, particularly during the First Republic.

Concurrently, the influence of American culture gradually permeated through cultural exchange and the steady introduction of American-style education, especially after 1963. Southern society was ultimately influenced by multiple cultural sources: the remnants of Chinese culture, the still-powerful influence of European culture, and the emerging impact of American culture (Vo Van Nhon 2016: 25). Several literary studies, despite originating from very different standpoints, are relatively consistent in their assessment of the prevailing ideological trends influencing

Southern literature during this period. Nguyen Vy Khanh (n.d.), for example, identified existentialism, phenomenology, metaphysics, psychoanalytic methods, sociological methods, and structuralism, alongside Marxist philosophy, Catholic philosophy, and Buddhism, as influencing the literary trends and theories of this era. According to Vo Van Nhon (2026), existentialism, psychoanalysis, and structural/structuralist theory were the main tendencies, alongside Marxist and feminist perspectives. He also noted that phenomenology and the New Criticism were introduced en masse following the collapse of the Ngo Dinh Diem regime in 1963 (Vo Van Nhon 2016: 26-27). *Văn học miền Nam 1954-1975 tập III* (*Southern Literature 1954-1975, Volume III*) by Huynh Ai Tong (2012)—a biographical compilation introducing writers and artists who had collaborated with *Sáng tạo* (*Creation*) magazine—also revealed the presence of existentialism, Marxism, structuralism, and psychoanalysis. In a 2014 article, Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox (2014: 377-395) not only sought to answer why existentialism played a central role in the intellectual life of the South in the 1960s but also traced the presence of phenomenology, structuralism, existential Buddhism, Catholic Personalism, and Marxism (especially in relation to Sartre's philosophy), alongside the initial influences of the American counterculture movement. In addition to Kant, Freud was also mentioned in popular thought of the time. It is worth noting that the references used in these wide-ranging surveys of intellectual thought extend beyond literature, reflecting the ideological situation of the intelligentsia of this period more generally. This is the ideological context in which we must examine historiographical thought of the period.

In the field of historiography, merely looking at the research topic of the Hung Kings, one can perceive this intellectual diversity among authors in South Vietnam, as they included individuals working in various fields: Historiography, the Faculty of Letters, the Directorate of Cultural Affairs, and the military (psychological warfare officers of the Saigon army) (Nguyen Thi Phuong Chi 2023: 62). The differences among the methodology textbooks, at the same time, reflected the polarization of the scholarly community during this period. From the contemporary ideological critique perspective of the North, Le Van Hao's 1969 article identified eight main tendencies within contemporary Southern historiography: the plagiarizing tendency; the pure historiography tendency; the local gazetteer tendency; the reactionary tendency; the non-national, uprooted, and xenocentric historiography tendency; the psychological warfare historiography tendency; the "third way" historiography tendency; and the progressive historiography tendency (1969: 32-47). This created a Southern historiographical landscape filled with struggles between old and new currents of thought, comprising scientific and progressive elements, as well as severe limitations.

Within this complex context, the historiographical thought of the authors of the three textbooks specifically manifested in the form of historical works, rather than remaining as mere theories. Thus, works on historical methodology only partially help to identify their historiographical persona; similarly, a few textbooks only partially reflect the entirety of Republic of Vietnam historiography. Nevertheless, they represent a crucial component, as methodological publications possess the capacity to encapsulate the dominant historiographical thought, the research methods, and even the

overall state of contemporary historiography.

3. Regarding Three Historical Methodology Textbooks in the Republic of Vietnam during the 1954-1975 Period

Phương pháp sử học (Historical Methodology) by Nguyen Phuong (1964)

Nguyen Phuong's (1964) *Phương pháp sử học* (*Historical Methodology*) was the first historical methodology textbook published in South Vietnam by the University of Hue. He also authored several other historical works that have also been the subject of discussion, such as *Việt Nam thời khai sinh* (*Vietnam in its Genesis*) and *Việt Nam thời kỳ bành trướng Tây Sơn* (*Vietnam during the Tay Son Expansion Period*), but his methodological contributions are particularly significant. Some even suggest that he had "a fairly clear inclination towards methodological issues in history and historical research methods" (Truong Huu Quynh 1978a: 83).

The book was based on articles previously published in the journals *Bách Khoa* and *Đại học*. It was reprinted for the second time in 1974 by Sao Mai publishing house, which is the version I rely on in my analysis. The author's purpose in compiling the book is clearly stated in the Introduction. Stemming from his perception of the lack of methodology in contemporary Vietnamese historiography—which the author likened to the state of history writing in France over half a century prior—he states that: "in writing the following articles on 'Historical Methodology,' we do not merely wish to clear the way and challenge those with misguided theories about the profession of history writing [...] but precisely to assist those with good will and courage who seek to understand the historical discipline, and especially to guide the gifted individuals who wish to choose history as a distinct profession" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 11). The content of the book consists of two parts: historical methodology (10 chapters—189 pages) and an appendix entitled "Teaching History in High Schools" (3 chapters—37 pages).

The main part of the book progresses from theoretical issues (The Status of Historiography; The Meaning of History; A Method for Studying History; Auxiliary Disciplines for Historiography) to the historical research process (Choosing a Topic to Write; Collecting Historical Sources; Critiquing Evidence: External Criticism; Critiquing Evidence: Internal Criticism; Writing History; Footnotes and Bibliography). This accurately reflects the author's own practical orientation: "the following articles will speak in general terms about all stages of historical methodology, without delving into lengthy theories or complex details. Those who wish to research deeply into each stage must read more specialized books" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 11). The "hands-on" instructional nature of this historical methodology textbook is clearly demonstrated.

Sử học nhập môn (Sử học phương pháp luận) (Introduction to Historiography - Historical Methodology) by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan (1970)

Sử học nhập môn (Sử học phương pháp luận), published in 1970 by publisher Van Hao, is 187 pages long. It consists of an Introduction (three sections: The Issue of Definition, The Scope of Historiography, The Benefits of Historiography); Part One: Western Historical Methodology (including Chapter I: The Issue of Choosing a Topic; Chapter II: The Issue of Collecting Materials; and Chapter III: Critical Examination of Historical Materials); and

Part Two: Eastern Historiographical Concepts and Methods (including two chapters: Eastern Historiographical Concepts and Eastern Historical Methods). According to Tran Anh Tuan, this work was originally mimeographed course material for the Historical Methodology class in the History and Geography Department, Faculty of Letters, Saigon University, during the 1963-1964 academic year, and was taught by Professor Truong Buu Lam. When published by Van Hao in 1970, the title was changed to *Western Historical Methodology*, and the author was no longer listed as Truong Buu Lam (Tran Anh Tuan 2021). We currently lack additional documents to form a stance on this assertion.

Nhập môn Phương pháp sử học (Introduction to Historical Methodology) by Nguyen The Anh (1974)

Nhập môn phương pháp sử học was published after the two aforementioned works. Originally lithographed in 1972 for internal circulation, it was then typeset and printed for the second time in 1974. The 1974 edition comprises 114 pages, totaling 11 chapters:

1. A Brief History of the Historical Discipline
2. The Spirit of Historiography Today
3. The Purpose of Historical Research
4. Defining a Historical Event
5. The Role of the Historian
6. The Role of Historical Sources
7. Time and Space in History
8. A Special Field of Research: Economic and Social History
9. The Value of Truth Discovered by Historiography
10. The Status of History in Culture
11. Familiarizing Oneself with the Method of Critiquing Materials

In 2018, the book was reprinted by Khai Tam Books and the Tri Thuc Publishing House under the title *Phương pháp sử học: Những nguyên tắc căn bản* (*Historical Methodology: Fundamental Principles*).

Among the three methodology textbooks, those authored by Nguyen Phuong and Nguyen The Anh are more widely known. The absence of the textbook by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan in works on the history of historiography in the North post-1975 may be due to two reasons: limitations in accessing Southern source materials during the partition period or differences in evaluating the academic value of each work. Although clarifying this phenomenon falls outside the scope of this article, it suggests a fascinating research direction regarding the academic relationship between the two regions during this period.

4. The Landscape of Republic of Vietnam Historiography (1954-1975)

4.1. Ideological Standpoint and Methodological Pluralism

The "anti-Communist" nature occasionally evident in the textbooks under analysis is an undeniable feature. For example, Nguyen Phuong argued that the "impetus of Communism" occurring "fiercely" is "highly detrimental" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 208); and that "Marxist theory, taking economics as the sole power controlling human beings living in society, precisely commits that excessive absurdity" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 15). He also criticized Marx's view that "matter determines history" and, furthermore, that:

"the key to this dialectic is one class struggling against another, and the proletariat struggling against the bourgeoisie is thus only due to the material issue; therefore, nothing directs history as much as matter [...] To know why an event occurs, knowing only the material conditions is, of

course, insufficient; the historian must necessarily pay attention to non-material motives as well, meaning those motives generated by human free will" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 158-159).

Meanwhile, authors Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan criticized Communist historians for "distorting documents" or "forcing documents to declare even when they contain nothing" to serve a preconceived outline regarding the progression of social evolution (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 39).

These views on Marxism and Marxist historiography should be read in the context of Vietnam between 1954 and 1975, when the ideological confrontation between the socialist North and the US-backed South shaped historical writing on both sides. Read in this light, they reveal as much about the political conditions in which the textbooks were written as about Marxism itself. This polemical dimension, however, should not overshadow the textbooks' methodological content and contributions, which deserve a more balanced assessment. In his review of Nguyen Phuong's textbook, Truong Huu Quynh criticized him for distorting Marxist historiography, which Nguyen Phuong labelled "Soviet Russian historiography"; for holding a subjectivist conception of history that, unlike the theories of Western thinkers such as Aron, Croce, Dewey and Marrou, lacked a systematic philosophical basis; and for relying on an outdated understanding of Marxism drawn from late nineteenth-century works. He concluded that "with his pre-existing hostility, Nguyen Phuong could do nothing but distort Marxism" (Truong Huu Quynh 1978b: 87–90). These judgements, too, were made from a particular position and can now be revisited. Taken together, re-examining the three textbooks in this way can help identify this period's Southern historiography more fully.

While existentialism, structuralism, and psychoanalysis were popular in the intellectual and literary life of the South, historical methodology revealed differences in the field of history despite ideological pluralism, being closely tied to the positivist tradition, presentism, objectivism, and the *Annales* School[3]. Presentism seemed to be among the historical ideas in the South most heavily attacked by the North. As early as the beginning of the 1960s, Phan Ngoc Lien and Chiem Te argued that: "'Presentism' in America, a sect of the subjectivist tendency in historiography, advocates that historical research must serve the political line of US imperialism. In the South of our country, some people claiming to be historians also actively serve the robbers and sellers of the country," and cited Nguyen Phuong as an example (1970: 170). This was also one of the points used by Truong Huu Quynh to criticize Nguyen The Anh's book *Nhập môn phương pháp sử học* (Truong Huu Quynh 1978b: 132-133).

Nguyen Phuong's book displays the profound imprint of positivism, mentioning Langlois and Seignobos twice in the short Introduction and focusing on the techniques of historical source criticism. However, he does not entirely adhere to this school, arguing that "there are writers of historical method, like Mr. Langlois and Seignobos, who advocate that an event, to be credible,

[3] The Annales School, founded in France by Lucien Febvre, initiated the New History movement that emerged in the 1930s in opposition to positivist historiography. The school held that history is constituted by all factors related to human activity, located its underlying causes in geographical, economic, social, intellectual, religious and psychological factors, and argued that, beyond the "short period" of events, historians should examine the "long period" of slowly developing structures. Until the 1970s, its prevailing view divided history into three levels of decreasing importance, with the economic-demographic level regarded as the most fundamental. Its leading representatives were Febvre himself and Marc Bloch, who stressed the integration of history with other disciplines (Hoang Hong and Tran Kim Dinh 2020: 138-141, 149).

must have two witnesses to suffice; if more cannot be found [then what is argued ...] is deemed incorrect, because we cannot count an observation as a witness" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 124-125). More prominent is the influence of objectivism, which, according to Truong Huu Quynh, is clear in the author's historiographical concept introduced in the "Rewriting History" section; he highlights the value of the "total history" (*histoire totale*) school (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 87) and fiercely opposes historical materialism, deeming it one-sided. He was profoundly influenced by the French and American academic models. Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan criticized positivism (19th-century experimentalism) as attempting to "resurrect the past exactly as it occurred', which they argue is "truly unacceptable," and of repeatedly emphasizing that "history is a dialogue of this person with people of the past" (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 12, 10, 13, 23), demonstrating the influence of modernism. However, the work by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan functions as a practical manual. It examines specific aspects of the historical research process, and details chapters on topic selection, the collection of materials, and critical examination of collected materials. Nguyen The Anh's book, meanwhile, is systematic, comprehensive, and updated with the latest global historiographical trends, and is profoundly influenced by Toynbee's work.

Despite sharing a non-Marxist historiographical approach, the differences in historiographical thinking among the three methodology works under analysis here are diverse, rich, and highly polarized. Vu Thi Thu Thanh's observation that "there was a freedom of thought in research, teaching, and artistic activities. East-West philosophical currents, from ancient to modern, were present from lecture halls to sidewalks through a diverse book and press market serving all strata and reader needs" in the South perhaps requires further discussion, but explaining that diversity stems from the prevalence of diverse influences among Southern intellectuals, from Kant and Freud to Marx, including popular thought of the time such as existentialism and structuralism[4]; the development of the publishing market; the loose relationship between the government and intellectuals despite the government's desire to control intellectuals and universities; and the loose connection between politics, academia, and ideology, which led to ideological diversity and the "diffuse" nature of historical discourse in the South when compared with Northern historiography (Vu Thi Thu Thanh 2020: 78-79).

Within the scope of the three textbooks, the imprint of American academic influence—specifically regarding American historians' names and historical theories—is quite faint compared to the clear, ongoing French influence. The American influence in this case is perhaps primarily manifested in institutions (the higher education model), as well as permeating the work of individual professors and researchers who had integrated into the Euro-American academic network at that time, enabling them to update the developments of world historiography during the process of building the methodology of historical science.

[4] Here, the author seems to mistakenly associate postmodernism with representatives of existentialism and structuralism: "In addition, fashionable philosophies and ideologies of the time such as existentialism, structuralism, and postmodernism by thinkers like Heidegger, Marcel, Jaspers, Merleau-Ponty, Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Lacan, Foucault also flooded books and newspapers in the South" (Vu Thi Thu Thanh 2020: 79).

4.2. Professionalization of Historical Research: Historical Sources, Source Criticism, and Academic Standards

In Southern historiography during this period, an emphasis was placed on establishing standards for the historical profession, from the theory of historical sources to research techniques and historical presentation.

The theory of historical sources was emphasized and introduced in the three methodology textbooks. Nguyen Phuong's book devoted over thirty per cent of its content (77 out of 227 pages of the entire volume) to such work, which indicates the importance of historical sources in the overall structure. In "Collecting Historical Sources," Nguyen Phuong explained the position, role, and characteristics of historical sources as the "capital of the past," which historians use to construct research works; the position, characteristics, and methods of collecting historical sources; and ways of classifying historical sources in multiple ways: as relics, records, and oral traditions, or as direct/primary/firsthand and indirect/compiled; and as private or public. At the same time, he also warned against excessively idolizing historical sources and considering them the entirety of the issue, because "historical sources are only a means, not the end of writing history." The author pointed out that bibliographical works (*Kinh tịch chí*) are where historians can find lists of research materials; in other words, he emphasized the role of *Kinh tịch chí* for collecting sources in particular, and historical research in general. He detailed how to create a preliminary research bibliography by noting information read from documents or obtained from letters or interviews with contemporaries on loose sheets of paper or cards, which he called the "event recording method." Meanwhile, the next two sections of the book present source criticism, from external criticism to internal criticism. Not only does he explain step-by-step and state working principles, he also guided application through specific examples, as well as provided comments and evaluations on common historical sources "so that history students can evaluate the historical sources they use accordingly" (e.g., chronicles, biographies, memoirs, diaries, correspondence, folklore, daily newspapers). Similarly, in Nguyen The Anh's book, the issue of historical sources was also highly valued. He devoted significant space to the issue of historical sources and the historical research process. A section on the role of historical sources covered topics such as: historical sources as evidence of the past; finding and selecting materials; technical aspects of the material issue; exploiting materials; the role of texts in historical research; and Sino-Vietnamese documents left by the Nguyen dynasty. An appendix included source commentary exercises to help readers familiarize themselves with the method of critical document analysis.

Another feature of these works, which functioned largely as manuals or hands-on guides, was the introduction of techniques for presenting historical works specifically and meticulously, particularly when citing sources. Nguyen Phuong noted that, "Footnoting, for some historians, seems not only superfluous but also harmful. A commonly cited, and perhaps more practical, rationale is that if we footnote the sources we use, those footnoted places will be stolen by others who give no thought to our research efforts [...] Another, stronger reason against footnoting is that if one must footnote, one won't know where to stop; furthermore, footnoting is bothersome, requires much effort, and in some cases is impossible to do." Concurrently, he provided instructions on the necessary

citation information and formatting for each type of document, from books to daily newspapers (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 175-176, 179, 181, 184, 185). Certain footnoted citations within the book can be seen as specific practical guides, supplementing the instructions in the main text. The issue of citation had been a subject of interest and discussion prior to 1945, observable in the case of Nguyen Van To, who criticized the habit of not citing sources in some contemporary works, while he himself was criticized by those who did not support this presentation style[5]. Given the reality noted by Nguyen Phuong, this content held significant meaning in forming a scientific working style according to Western standards.

4.3. Expanding the Knowledge Connection Network and the Interaction between Eastern and Western Historiographical Traditions

The methodology works demonstrate a level of updating on Marxist historiography through translations or works published in the North, such as the case of an article by Chinese scholar Jian Bozan or works by Tran Van Giap (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 66, 76, 77). Between the North and the South:

"in the fields of culture, arts, and academia, the voices of reason and heartfelt songs still met through the airwaves; books, newspapers, and films from the two regions were still exchanged, even if they had to go through Phnom Penh or Paris. There were always writers, cultural workers, and teachers in the South who deliberately mentioned the names and works of Northern intellectuals in university lecture halls or in publications openly published in Saigon, despite all pressure, taboos, and threats; the North always paid attention to following, introducing, and reviewing cultural and artistic works from the liberated zones and urban areas of the South." (Le Van Hao 1970: 1-15)

However, there were limits to this cultural exchange. For instance, by 1969, in the field of translation, "it is regrettable that currently there is no cultural exchange between the two regions!" (Le Van Hao 1969: 32-47). Nevertheless, there were still works like *25 năm xây dựng xã hội chủ nghĩa ở miền Bắc* (*25 Years of Building Socialism in the North*) by Truong Ba Can (1970)—the only historical work in the South under the Saigon regime that researched socialism in North Vietnam (Do Quang Hung 2013) — which "was constructed using many documents and data mostly taken from books and newspapers published in the North" (Nguyen Cong Binh 1974: 76-84). Regarding the topic of the Hung Kings, which Southern authors researched and discussed enthusiastically, they "consulted many articles and research books by scholars in the North. It was precisely the opinions of French scholars and those in North Vietnam that initiated the research and discussions of authors in the South" (Nguyen Thi Phuong Chi 2023: 75).

Historians demonstrated a connection with a broad intellectual network during the process of cultural contact and exchange by citing numerous historiographical schools, prominent figures representing different academic trends, and historical knowledge from outside Vietnam. In Nguyen Phuong's book, for example, many historians and historical works representing Western and American historiographical schools are mentioned. These included Langlois, Seignobos, Wilson, Catroux, Joseph Sabin, W. Eames and R.W.G Vail, William H. Allison, Clarence S. Brigham, Weiner, Le

[5] See also Dinh Thi Thuy Hien. 2022. "Quan điểm sử học của Nguyễn Văn Tố qua các bài viết trên Tạp chí Tri Tân [Nguyen Van To's Historiographical Viewpoints through Articles in Tri Tan Magazine]." *Journal of Historical Studies* 5(553): 41-42.

Gros Clark and Oaisley, and J. Laniel, as well as the world historiographical situation in China and Soviet Russia (the Soviet Union) (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 15, 54, 44, 70, 75, 83, 92, 134, 179, 187-189). The book's bibliography primarily consists of English-language books published in the US, along with some French works.

Although the book by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan does not focus on theoretical issues, it still shows the influence of Western academia. The *Annales* School is emphasized with certain representative historians and journals, such as Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre's *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale* (Annals of Economic and Social History) – which "is perhaps a journal we must follow" – and *Revue Historique* (Historical Review), as well as journals such as the *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* (UK) and the *American Historical Review* (US), noting that "all American historians belong to this journal. Therefore, perhaps we can trust this journal" (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 66, 69-70). Additionally, the authors provide specific information about the archives in Taiwan regarding Sino-French relations concerning Vietnam. Reference books for this textbook include several pre-1954 books (French colonial period), books published in South Vietnam from 1954 to 1975 (translations of ancient texts, archives, publications), and several post-1954 world historiography works, primarily in French, along with some English-language works.

Nguyen The Anh cites diverse theories and references many prominent figures: Jean Bodin and Michelet, and pays particular analytical attention to Arnold J. Toynbee's civilizational historiography trend, and Marc Bloch and the *Annales* School (Nguyen The Anh 1974: 14, 16-21, 23, 26). Truong Huu Quynh notes Nguyen The Anh's attention to Toynbee's objective idealism, B. Croce of Italy, "reactionary" modernism, capitalist economic cycle theory, Rostow's (US) explanation using four general causes, and economic materialism. Quynh notes that "additionally, to a lesser extent, we also see *Nhập môn phương pháp sử học* influenced by the subjective idealism of R. Aron (French historian), J. Burckhardt (Swiss historian), Max Weber (German theorist), L. Ranke (German historian), or the objective idealism of H.I. Marrou (French historian)." (Truong Huu Quynh 1978b: 127-128) The extensive referencing and citation of various historiographical schools, including Marxist theory, is indirectly affirmed through Truong Huu Quynh's criticism that "while using and citing many different documents to compile a book on historical methodology without himself possessing or being guided by a definitive, consistent viewpoint, the author of *Nhập môn phương pháp sử học* cannot help but turn his work into a sort of compilation of different thoughts on historiography." This "inconsistency" is a manifestation of the "objectivism" prevalent among "social science circles in the South during the US-puppet era." Truong Huu Quynh continues the criticism by arguing that "in whatever form, the author of *Nhập môn phương pháp sử học* still reveals himself as someone who advocates that historiography is subjective, as a spokesperson for the subjectivist school in historiography," and that even though "having skimmed through a few works on historical materialism to write 'a special field of research [...]' he still reveals a refusal to accept the decisive role of the popular masses in history. At most, he only acknowledges 'organs representing the people'" (Truong Huu Quynh 1978b: 127-129, 132). Furthermore, his source commentary exercises all utilize foreign documents from China and France (Nguyen The Anh 1974: 93, 100-102, 107, 110, 112).

A point to note is that the imprint of pre-1954 historiography (the French model) is clearly manifested in many respects. The authors of historical methodology textbooks inherited the achievements of Vietnamese historiography—something reflected not only through the imprint of positivist thought and the works and documents they inherited, but also deeply embedded and absorbed through the very cultural-educational environment that nurtured them.

Thus, setting aside the aspect of ideological standpoint and struggle—a revolutionary task in the context of recent reunification—we clearly see a broad openness to the external academic world and its strong influence in shaping historical methodology during this period under the Republic of Vietnam administration. In the North at this time, there were also efforts to stay updated by reading and understanding contemporary historiographical works, authors, and concepts (historiographical tendencies). However, the difference was that such understanding was primarily utilized to sharpen the weapons of struggle (for instance, used for book reviews, as Truong Huu Quynh did here), rather than being widely disseminated. Meanwhile, a number of factors created the possibility for pluralism in historiographical viewpoints, and could even spark debates and disagreements. These included the institutional and political conditions, as well as the background diversity of historians in the South, the educational models they enjoyed, their professions, and political attitudes. There was also the diversity of universities (public, private, religious) within the education system of the Republic of Vietnam. In addition, the publishing and press market, despite control and censorship, possessed a certain market nature and freedom. Finally, the study-abroad and academic exchange networks expanded more than before with the United States...[6].

In the context of expanding cultural contact and exchange with Western academia and historiography - with an additional door through the United States - it is fascinating to examine the relationship with traditional East Asian (specifically Chinese) historiography. The legacy of traditional Chinese historiography and the updating of East Asian knowledge can also be observed in these methodology books.

Knowledge of traditional Chinese historiography was an important asset for Southern historians in the process of assimilating modern historical science. As Nguyen The Anh noted, "Vietnam is imbued with Confucianism and deeply influenced by China, so traditional Vietnamese historiography also shares similar characteristics with traditional Chinese historiography" (Nguyen The Anh 1974: 8). Situated within a context where Vietnamese historiography of this period was striving to assimilate modern historical knowledge, methods, and thinking by keeping abreast of global historiographical trends, knowledge of traditional Chinese historiography served as a bridge and a reference frame for comparative perspectives. In his words: "To understand the historical views of great civilizations, we can compare the evolution of Chinese and Vietnamese historiography with the evolution of Western historiography" (Nguyen The Anh 1974: 4).

Within the content of the textbooks, Chinese and East Asian historical knowledge functioned as a source of data and visual examples for the authors to

[6] For example, Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan cited an article by Nguyen Phuong in *Đại học* magazine and wrote: "we certainly will not mistakenly—like some scholars following objective scientific standards, standing on today's viewpoint to look back at ancient methods with skeptical, strict eyes—criticize: 'it is no longer useful for our objective era'." (Chau Long, Le Kim Ngan 1970: 89).

analyze and interpret methodological issues. For instance, when analyzing James V. Bryce's views on what a historian must do, Nguyen Phuong found similarities by referencing a saying in the *Zuo Zhuan* (Tả truyện) (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 14). When presenting Chronology as an auxiliary discipline for history, alongside naming Western scholars like Penck, Brückner, Milutin Milanković, Alexander T. Wilson, Libby, and Pormann, Nguyen Phuong introduced the highly useful lunar-solar calendar conversion works by Mathias Tchang and P. Hoang, which were published in Shanghai (1905, 1910) (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 43-47). Sharing this view, Nguyen The Anh also affirmed that a researcher of Eastern history needs the lunar-solar conversion calendars of Mathias Tchang and P. Hoang, along with that of Vietnam's Nguyen Ba Trac (Nguyen The Anh 1974: 29-30).

In historical source criticism - one of the central issues in the methodology textbooks - ancient Chinese texts were utilized to illustrate specific concepts and operations. To elucidate the concept of "indirect historical sources" or "compiled works," Nguyen Phuong placed the classic Western histories of Herodotus and Titus Livius alongside famous Chinese historical works such as Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (Sử ký), Ban Gu's *Book of Han* (Tiền Hán thư), Fan Ye's *Book of Later Han* (Hậu Hán thư), and Sima Guang's *Zizhi Tongjian* (Tư trị thông giám) (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 70). This also occurred similarly with bibliographical (*Kinh tịch chí*) works (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 75-76). Pei Yuan's *Guangzhou ji* (Quảng Châu ký) was cited to analyze "accuracy" - one of the elements of external criticism - alongside numerous Western documents (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 90). Furthermore, books like *Shui Jing Zhu* (Thủy Kinh chú) and the *Book of Later Han* were cited as bases for determining specific historical issues, such as the name of Trung Trac's husband, alongside the case of Gideon Welles' diary in the US, which was used as an example to analyze the integrity of historical sources (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 95-97). Similarly, when analyzing the concepts of history, history writing, and historiography, Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan relied on the *Shuowen Jiezi* (Thuyết văn giải tự), published in Shanghai in 1928, to explore semantic origins, while simultaneously making connections to Sima Qian's renowned *Records of the Grand Historian* (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 5-6). In the context where historiographical knowledge expanded globally, they observed that moral conceptions were prevalent in Vietnam, China, and the West alike (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 20).

Going beyond merely inheriting the legacy of Chinese historiography—and by extension, traditional East Asian historiography—and perceiving them more profoundly in the illuminating light of contemporary academia, the textbooks demonstrate that while opening a new door to Western contact via Euro-America (especially the US), Southern historiography continuously strove to stay updated on the contemporary state of Chinese historiography. Looking at the neighboring nation, Nguyen Phuong analyzed the contemporary attitude toward the past as a cause for rewriting history: "There are countries, such as China for example, from 1954 to the present, that have launched a movement of 'valuing the present over the past,' or like Soviet Russia since 1917, which considered economics the almighty force governing human life and rewrote history to highlight that aspect" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 54). He expressed agreement

with the viewpoint of "Chinese theorist" Jian Bozan (Tiễn Bá Tán), who criticized the attitude of excessively exalting historical sources (Jian Bozan 1959)[7]. This updating was also demonstrated by Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan's introducing of the archives on Sino-French relations regarding the Vietnam issue in Taiwan (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 66), or by Nguyen Phuong using the printed edition of *Records of Wu* (Ngô chí) in the Twenty-Five Histories published by the Literature Research Society in Hong Kong in 1959 to cross-reference with Dai Viet's *Complete Annals* (Toàn thư) (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 108). In the bibliography of Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan, the appearance of Liu Huru's *Selected Annotated Historiography* (Sử học tuyển chú), published by Wen Xing magazine in 1964, serves as clear evidence of their grasp of contemporary Chinese historiography (Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan 1970: 189).

Notably, Nguyen The Anh analyzed the transformation of Chinese historiography under the impact of new trends: "Contact with the West has caused Chinese historians to revise their history, and recently, the adoption of Marxist viewpoints has led some historians to dedicate a broader space to peasant issues and peasant rebellions, as well as to the historical role of ethnic minorities (Mongols, Tibetans...). On the other hand, excavations have uncovered many archaeological materials whose analysis permits a questioning of the data of traditional historiography. The progress of the humanities provides new research methods, and these methods permit the correction of enduring errors and determine the new aspects under which Chinese history can be studied" (Nguyen The Anh 1974: 8).

Through the lens of modern historical methodological knowledge, the traditional Chinese historiographical legacy was not denied but viewed scientifically. In principled professional advice for historians involving the study of valuable historical works, Nguyen Phuong stated that "historical works that survive to challenge time usually do so thanks to two characteristics: their uniqueness, or their correctness coupled with a magnificent presentation." Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* was cited as an immortal historical work not only for later generations to appreciate but also for historians to emulate: "if historiography is a science, writing history is an art, and an art can only be mastered after much practice under the guidance of great masters" (Nguyen Phuong 1974: 59-60). Chau Long and Le Kim Ngan even praised the historiographical viewpoints of feudal Chinese historians, considering them as scientific as modern science: "The following discourse on the method of making history by Mr. Dai Ji Fu shows us a Confucian scholar in China from three hundred years ago who already had many valid opinions, discussing historical methodology no differently than professional historians in today's scientific era" (1970: 176).

The above analyses indicate a continuity and active reuse of East Asian historiographical knowledge. Historians utilized classic East Asian historical sources within the source criticism process standardized by new methods/Western positivism, rereading and interpreting historical sources under the illumination of new methodological tools. Thus, the East Asian knowledge system provided the intellectual framework to 'indigenize' the imported Western methodology. The

[7] This article was published in the *People's Daily* on July 15, 1958, republished in *Xinhua Semi-monthly* in 1958, and translated by Nguyen Khac Dam and published in the *Journal of Historical Studies*.

interaction between East Asian and Western historiographical traditions reveals not only the context but also the methods and characteristics of the process of historiographical academic contact and exchange in Vietnam under the Republic of Vietnam.

5. South Vietnamese Historiography in the Effort to Modernize Vietnamese Historiography

The reunification of the country in 1975 opened a new chapter as the contingent of Southern intellectuals joined hands to contribute to the nation's historiography (Tran Kim Dinh 2015: 181). One of those contributions was precisely the system of historical methodology textbooks.

In the early 20th century, East-West cultural contact brought numerous new ideological currents into academia. Under the influence of positivist historiography, concepts such as "historical sources," "historical source criticism," "historiographical concepts," and "Western methods of writing history" were addressed and discussed quite animatedly. However, pioneering scholars like Nguyen Van To had not yet been able to produce a theoretical work on historiography (Dinh Thi Thuy Hien 2022: 34-50). In 1950, the "first historical theoretical work in Vietnam written according to dialectical thought," which was also the first book on historical methodology in Vietnam—*Muốn hiểu sử học* (*Wanting to Understand Historiography*) by Dao Duy Anh (Dao Duy Anh 1950)—was published (Hoang Hong 2005; Hoang Hong (ed.) 2025: 30; Phan Phuong Thao (ed.) 2025: 19). During the 1954-1975 period, the Southern historical circle, with its diversity (ranging from the University of Hue and Saigon University to the journals *Sử Địa* [*History and Geography*] and *Văn Sử Địa* [*Literature, History, and Geography*]), continued to actualize that desire through the publication of methodology textbooks. This was a crucial contribution to Vietnamese historiography, which was building its scientific foundation (Hoang Hong and Tran Kim Dinh 2020: 323).

The differences between the historiography of the two regions created a complementarity, viewed from the perspective of the history of historiography. While socialist Northern historiography participated in the Soviet and Eastern European academic networks, focusing on sharpening Marxist historical theory, taking on political tasks, and concentrating on core issues such as partisanship, scientific nature, and historical periodization (Van Tao 1978: 12-13), Southern historiography expanded its contact and exchange with Anglo-American academia with a more open spirit. After the publication of Dao Duy Anh's *Muốn hiểu sử học* (*Wanting to Understand Historiography*) in 1950, the North had to wait until the late 20th century to form official Marxist methodology textbooks (such as the 1980 draft by the Hanoi National University of Education) (Hoang Hong 2025: 33), while the South had already published research guidebooks following Western standards. This mutual supplementation held significant meaning in enhancing the internationalization of Vietnamese historiography during this period.

When the door to contact with Euro-American academia—especially the highly novel contact with the United States—created conditions for contemporary Euro-American historical methods and thinking to be received, and for domestic historiography to integrate into an increasingly broader and more diverse academic network, it was also a process of re-examining the legacy of East

Asian historiography using Euro-American methodology and research methods. This demonstrates the indigenization that occurred during the process of assimilating the Western historiographical tradition by Republic of Vietnam historiography in the 1954-1975 period.

In summary, within the specific historical context—war, national division, a wave of Western cultural contact expanding to the United States, the transition from the French educational system to the American model, the diversity of social structure and political ideology, and the consciousness of national identity—historiography at the educational institutions of the Republic of Vietnam (1954-1975), despite limitations, created a multidimensional dialogue space, contributed to the modernization process of historiography, and left behind a precious documentary legacy for unifying future Vietnamese historiography.

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The author used an AI-based tool (Gemini) to assist with language editing and translation during the preparation of this manuscript. All intellectual content, including the study design, data analysis, and interpretation of results, was developed solely by the author. The author take full responsibility for the content of the manuscript.

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