



Patriotic activities of teachers and students against the new colonial education system in southern Vietnam – a case study of Long An – Kien Tuong Province (1954-1975)

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ABSTRACT

The patriotic activities of teachers, students, and pupils in the temporarily occupied regions of Long An – Kien Tuong were a particularly important part of the open political struggle on enemy territory during the resistance against the United States. Immediately after the 1954 Geneva Agreement, many schools in Long An – Kien Tuong established revolutionary bases. Some teachers mobilized colleagues, students, and the public to fight against anti-communist activities, forced conscription, and to demand civil rights and democracy. In subsequent years, Long An – Kien Tuong became the site of numerous diverse and creative struggles (rallies, demonstrations, leafleting, journalism, cultural activities...), attracting the participation of many educators and students. Some teachers and students actively participated in armed and covert operations, displaying many heroic acts of combat and sacrifice. Alongside activities in liberated areas, the struggle of teachers and students in the temporarily occupied regions of Long An – Kien Tuong contributed distinctive values, enhancing the illustrious history and tradition of Long An province's education sector today.

Keywords: *patriotic activities, teachers, students, Vietnam war*

1. Introduction

During the Vietnam War from 1954 to 1975, the Vietnamese Workers' Party made efforts to develop revolutionary education in liberated and revolutionary base areas while leading the movement of students, pupils, and educators against the new colonial education

system of the United States and the Saigon government. With the principle that education is also a revolutionary front, the struggle movement of students, pupils, and educators in Southern Vietnam began early and gradually expanded under the leadership of party organizations. According to Tran Hong Quan (et al., 1995), the initial struggles were sporadic and quiet, involving small groups of educators, students, and pupils with simple content and clever forms such as incorporating progressive and revolutionary ideas into lessons, replacing or omitting politically motivated content serving the Saigon regime from curricula and textbooks. These efforts gradually developed into a broad movement across many urban areas and temporarily occupied regions in the South. The struggle movement of teachers, students, and pupils became a progressive force with significant influence in most urban areas and regions under U.S. and Saigon government control. Studying the patriotic activities of teachers and students against the new colonial education system of the United States and the Saigon government not only provides a clearer understanding of the local resistance history but also offers a scientific basis for evaluating the role and importance of education in the national democratic revolutionary period. This article outlines the development of patriotic activities by teachers and students against the new colonial education system in Long An – Kien Tuong province, a strategic gateway to Saigon and a region with a distinctive revolutionary movement in Southern Vietnam during the resistance against the United States from 1954 to 1975.

Documents and research methods

Education in Southern Vietnam under the new colonial regime (1954-1975) has been a compelling topic for Vietnamese scholars. Recently, several monographs on this subject have been published. Nguyen Kim Dung (2022) approached Southern Vietnam's education under the Saigon government as a historical entity that existed more than half a century ago, a sufficient time to have a relatively objective perception of a historical subject. The author asserts that, on one hand, the education system of this period was seen as a product of the old regime, and therefore, needed to be criticized and abolished. However, on another level, it is evident that this education system trained many generations of students, including elite intellectuals in various fields such as science, technology, and social sciences. This publication reconstructs a historical period of Southern Vietnam's education from different perspectives: the context impacting education, the state of the education system under the Saigon government, and the Saigon government's solutions for education.

Another notable publication is by Ngo Minh Oanh (et al., 2018), which provides an overview of Southern Vietnam's education (1954-1975), the general education curriculum, teachers and school management, examination and inspection work, and some remarks on Southern Vietnam's general education and proposals for current educational reforms. Although these publications present many fundamental issues of Southern Vietnam's education in terms of policies, content, impacts, achievements, and

lessons learned, they do not address the patriotic activities of teachers and students against the new colonialism in education.

A prominent work on the struggle movement of Southern teachers and students against new colonialism is the project by (Nguyen Tan Phat chief editor, 2024). In this publication, the author dedicates nearly half of the content to the political struggle of students, pupils, and teachers against the Americanization of education and repression in major cities in Southern Vietnam. Specific areas such as Saigon, Da Nang, and Ben Tre are described in detail. This publication also discusses the development of revolutionary education, i.e., the education system organized by the revolutionary government in liberated zones and bases, linked to the revolutionary struggle's development. The surveyed and described localities include Southeast Vietnam, Southwest Vietnam, Central Vietnam, Region V, and the Central Highlands.

In addition to the relatively large-scale monographs mentioned above, the patriotic activities of Southern teachers, students, and pupils are also discussed in several publications about the history of the anti-American resistance in Southern Vietnam. Notable examples include "Education in Southern Vietnam during the General Offensive and Uprising of the Mau Than Spring 1968," which includes many articles, memoirs, and compositions by Southern teachers, students, and pupils who directly participated in the Mau Than Spring Offensive and Uprising (1968), thus recreating a heroic period of Southern Vietnam's education (Nguyen Quoc Bao, chief editor, 2019).

Besides these comprehensive monographs, some book chapters and scientific articles also address various issues related to the patriotic activities of Southern teachers and students. Tran Hong Quan (et al., 1995) affirms that the struggle movement of Southern teachers and students is an indispensable part of Vietnamese educational history. Nguyen Van Hiep (2014) presents the history of revolutionary education in the Thu Dau Mot base area from 1945 to 1975. Truong Thi Be Hai (chief editor, 2022) presents the educational history of Vinh Long province from 1732 to 2010, with the patriotic activities of teachers and students highlighted as a historical focal point of the locality.

Regarding research methods, this article employs the historical education method. With a specialized approach, the article selects representative events, arranges and presents them chronologically, and establishes relationships between them and between historical events and their contexts. This is a commonly used method in educational history research (Gary McCulloch, 2016). Given the prolonged and tense war conditions, the materials related to educational organization and activities were extremely scarce and scattered. Therefore, this article also uses the oral history method by conducting interviews to collect information from historical witnesses, most of which is often unavailable from textual sources. These materials provide data on local policies, teachers, students, schools, classrooms, and significant educational events in the locality. The oral history method is a fairly common approach that synthesizes historical data through interviews, often recorded and sometimes videoed, with participants or observers of important events or periods (Stephen Counce, 1994).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Patriotic activities against the new colonial education system in Long An – Kien Tuong before the Dong Khoi movement (1960)

Long An is a province in the southwestern region of Vietnam, located at the gateway to the Mekong Delta, adjacent to Ho Chi Minh City. The Saigon government established Long An province on October 22, 1956, by merging Cho Lon and Tan An provinces. Kien Tuong province was established by the Saigon government in late 1956, adjacent to Long An. After 1975, Long An and Kien Tuong provinces were merged into the present-day Long An province (Thanh Phuong, Luu Quang Tuyen, chief editors, 1989).

From the early days of the resistance against the United States, the Vietnamese Workers' Party identified the struggle movement of teachers, students, and pupils in the temporarily occupied regions as a particularly important part of the open political struggle on enemy territory. It was one of the core forces for building the worker-peasant-intellectual alliance within the united front. Party organizations and youth unions were to lead the student movement to serve as a core, a launching point, and a catalyst for struggles in cities and enemy economic-political centers. With this perspective, the establishment of Party bases in schools and the leadership of the struggle movement of teachers, students, and pupils were given careful attention and close direction throughout the anti-American period. Schools in temporarily occupied regions often became the sites of open struggles against the United States and the Saigon government (Nguyen Van Diep, 2012).

Inheriting and promoting the patriotic tradition of their predecessors, the resistance movement among intellectuals, teachers, and students of the Tan An and Cho Lon provinces against the Americans began early and was quite strong.

The opening of the waves of resistance demanding the implementation of the Geneva Agreement and the general election to unify the country was the Peace Protection Movement in Saigon – Cho Lon. This movement saw the participation of numerous intellectuals and students, many of whom were from Tan An and Cho Lon. Notably, the initiator and leader of this movement was a Long An native intellectual – lawyer Nguyen Huu Tho (Nguyen Van Kien, 2012).

From that time, alongside legal and public activities, the Party committees of Tan An and Cho Lon provinces actively built up core forces and established Party bases in urban areas. The organizational form "Hieu doan hoc sinh" (Student Union) was introduced from the liberated zones into cities and towns to gather students, fostering their comprehensive development in ethics, intellect, physicality, and aesthetics. This form was widely embraced by the youth and students.

In the provincial capital Tan An, two schools, Thanh Tien and Huynh Ngoc, had strong student movements. Many teachers at Thanh Tien were involved in the resistance against the French or had taught at the Nguyen Van To Resistance School (such as teachers Chau Van Bay, Vo Van Muoi [also known as Muoi Huong], Huynh Ngoc Tinh, Nhan, and Ngai...). Therefore, under the direct guidance of the Secretary of the Tan An Provincial

Party Committee, Nguyen Van Minh, officials like Ut Thai, Hai Ngoc, and Le Minh Dieu engaged with patriotic and progressive teachers at Thanh Tien School (Le Thanh Chau, 2012). They built core student groups and organized protests demanding civil and democratic rights both inside and outside the school.

In a short time, a core student group was formed at Thanh Tien School, including Nguyen Thanh Long (Ut Long), Huynh Dinh Thang, Le Van Thinh, and Le Van Hieu, who played pivotal roles in organizing numerous enthusiastic protests between 1955 and 1956 (Le Thi Giot, 2012). Notable actions included the successful struggle to establish the Student Union (with Le Minh Dieu as its president), the fight to reduce tuition fees, and the successful organization of a student cultural group that sang revolutionary songs to encourage patriotism among the public (with Huynh Dinh Thang as the group's leader). The most significant were the two waves of protests in July 1955 and July 1956, demanding the implementation of the Geneva Agreement.

As a result of these experiences, some core students at Thanh Tien were admitted to the Youth Labor Union. In June 1956, the Youth Labor Union's branch at Thanh Tien School officially formed, including members like Le Minh Dieu (Secretary), Huynh Dinh Thang, Le Van Hieu, Nguyen Thanh Long, Le Van Thinh, and Tran Van Ty.

Simultaneously, efforts to build core bases and establish the Youth Union at Huynh Ngoc School were expedited. At the beginning of 1957, Le Van Hieu was transferred from Thanh Tien to Huynh Ngoc to serve as the Youth Labor Union's branch secretary. The youth branches of Thanh Tien and Huynh Ngoc schools often collaborated in organizing protests, drawing in students from other schools in the town to demand the establishment of the Student Union, oppose the militarization of education, and fight against terror and aid refugees.

Patriotic activities supporting the revolution among the teaching staff were closely linked with the student movements in Tan An town. Teachers who had returned from liberated areas (known as "hoi cu" teachers) despite being closely monitored by secret police, sought to incorporate patriotic and national spirit into their literature, history, and geography lessons while refusing to teach civics, a subject aimed at propagating the enemy's political rhetoric. Many teachers at Thanh Tien, like Chau Van Bay, Vo Van Muoi (Muoi Huong), and Hai Ngai, were arrested by the enemy or transferred but continued to connect with revolutionary and progressive organizations such as the Patriotic Teachers' Association in Saigon – Gia Dinh and the Vietnam Private Education Union (Nguyen Van Kien, 2012). They secretly disseminated revolutionary literature to colleagues and students. Some teachers (Nhi, Nghi, and Quan) actively gathered signatures from the public to petition for the general election to unify the country. Amidst the American-Diem regime's suppression, these activities affirmed the patriotic spirit, struggle awareness, and noble character of Tan An – Cho Lon's teaching staff during the early days of the anti-American resistance (Phan Van Nhan 2008), .

In many enemy-controlled areas in Cho Lon province, the anti-American and anti-Diem struggles led by teachers gained significant traction, encouraging patriotism and igniting broader public resistance movements. Private schools like Tri Tan and Nguyen Van Nho

(Duc Hoa district) had many revolutionary teachers who, post-Geneva Agreement, actively mobilized teachers, students, and the public to oppose anti-communist campaigns, conscription, and demand civil rights (Truong Thi Kim Tien, 2012).

In the 1955-1956 school year, hundreds of student parents in Hiep Hoa and Duc Hoa protested, demanding the enemy authorities restore the schools built by the resistance government during the anti-French period, repair classrooms, and provide sufficient furniture for students. Residents in the Rung Dau area (Tan My commune) organized to clear trees and build schools for their children, forcing the enemy authorities to acknowledge them. In these schools, teachers ensured students didn't sing the Diem regime's national anthem and taught patriotic and revolutionary songs during cultural activities.

At Huu Thanh School (Duc Hoa district), the courageous actions of teachers Thai Kiem Cai and Huynh Ngoc Tu in breaking the "national flag" of the Republic of Vietnam and refusing to propagate Americanized culture had a positive effect on other teachers and students. These teachers also regularly gathered enemy intelligence to support the revolution (Pham Thanh Phong, 2009).

In July 1956, when the enemy betrayed the Geneva Agreement and refused to hold the general election, the resistance movement among teachers and students at Tri Tan and Nguyen Van Nho schools intensified. From 1957 to 1958, teachers and students at these schools often distributed leaflets, raised the Party and national flags in markets and along roads, sometimes even near enemy outposts. By late 1959, several schools in Duc Hoa and Hiep Hoa had established Youth Labor Union branches, some schools had party members, forming preparatory cells to directly lead the student movement. Some infiltrated enemy spies among the teachers were exposed, warned, and isolated; in some cases, they faced severe consequences (head shaving, physical punishment...) (Pham Thanh Phong, 2009).

In late 1959 and early 1960, amidst the fervent Dong Khoi movement, revolutionary teachers in several occupied schools in Long An and Kien Tuong provinces mobilized students to go on strike, march, and shout slogans like "Down with the American imperialists," "Long live President Ho Chi Minh"... Patriotic songs and slogans were cleverly conveyed to students by their teachers during classes.

3.2. Patriotic activities and resistance against the education system of neo-colonialism in Long An and Kien Tuong from the Dong Khoi movement (1960) to 1975.

After the success of the Dong Khoi movement, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Nguyet (Muoi Nguyet) – a cadre of the Tan An Provincial Mobilization Committee during the anti-French period – was assigned to Tan An town to mobilize core forces in the student, intellectual, and educational movements. In 1960 alone, she built an assault force of dozens (mostly students) who distributed leaflets in crowded places such as the Tan An market, cinema, Cao Dai temple, Catholic church, and Tan An iron bridge... The assault group even managed to distribute leaflets at the Long An provincial governor's mansion. To evade the enemy, leaflets were meticulously hidden inside fake banh tet cakes mixed with real ones. The leaflets' content

focused on demands for democratic freedoms and opposition to American and Ngo Dinh Diem's suppression of the people... (Phan Van Nhan, 2008; Nguyen Van Ky, 2012)

In Duc Hoa district, the patriotic movement among teachers and students continued to thrive. For many years, My Hanh commune (Duc Hoa district) served as the base for the Saigon student and pupil committee. In August 1961, when the base was discovered and besieged by the enemy, committee secretary Tran Quang Co was killed, and Le Quang Vinh and Le Van Dung were captured. In Duc Hoa town, many teachers' homes became places to print leaflets using homemade presses or shelters for revolutionaries. Students participated in distributing leaflets and creating wall newspapers that exposed the injustices and corruption of the Saigon regime and praised the revolution...

From 1961 to 1964, in the Mekong Delta provinces – notably Ben Tre, My Tho, and Long An – thousands of youths volunteered to join the armed forces yearly, including many students joining the main army. In Long An, a junior high school (secondary level) in Ben Long, Tan My (Duc Hoa district), opened a seventh-grade class (equivalent to sixth grade today) with 16 students in the 1963-1964 school year, all of whom participated in the revolution, with two becoming martyrs (Trien and Duc). In 1964 at Can Giuoc High School, to oppose the Diem regime's education policies, Bay Viet Chinh – an educational activist in the district – gathered some students to form the "Bright Torch" group and published the Bright Torch journal. The group even burned a row of school buildings to express their resistance.

The student movement in the urban area of Tan An was quite strong during 1963-1964, under the guidance of Nguyen Thi Nguyet (Nam Quan), Nguyen Thi Hanh (Sau Chuot), and Muoi Le. The most frequent form of struggle was distributing leaflets in areas like Cau Sat and Can Dot. To ensure both safety and effectiveness, many bases came up with the idea of dipping leaflets in water and then scattering them on the rooftop of Tan Duc Tuong's herbal medicine shop (on Ngo Quyen Street, Zone 1). Once dry, the leaflets would fly into the market, causing confusion and worry among the enemy. In 1963, hundreds of students from Tan An High School shut down the school and organized meetings to protest conscription, oppression, and the arrest of students, demanding the enemy authorities change the principal and release detained students.

Also, in Tan An town, the activities of the "May Mua Thu" writing group left a significant mark on the student movement. The core of this group was Le Thi Mai (pen name Mai Thu), a secret Party member. The group's journal compiled articles expressing patriotism and opposition to the Saigon government, becoming the righteous voice of Tan An town students and surrounding areas. After publishing a few issues, the journal had to cease due to intense enemy repression (Nguyen Van Kien, 2012)

Moreover, some students in Long An actively participated in armed activities. On August 14, 1964, two female students from Tan An High School, Le Thi Mai (Mai Thu) and Nguyen Thi Cam, planted a timed bomb to eliminate American and Filipino advisors at their headquarters (on Nguyen Trung Truc Street, Ward 2). However, due to technical errors, the bomb exploded early, and the two sacrificed their lives heroically.

On June 4, 1969, a female student from Ben Luc High School, Mai Thi Non (who joined the Ben Luc district's secret armed forces in 1964 at the age of 13), hid a bomb in her school bag and went straight into the Ben Luc district chief's residence to punish the cruel enemy. The bomb exploded, killing many enemy soldiers and police, and Mai Thi Non died at the age of 18 (Le Thanh Chau, 2012).

The courageous spirit of Le Thi Mai, Nguyen Thi Cam, and Mai Thi Non quickly spread, strongly motivating the student struggle. Following that were grenade attacks in the Binh Lap office area, the Ao Quan chicken coop area, and others, shaking the enemy's oppressive machinery (Truong Thi Kim Tien, 2012).

In Hau Nghia town and Duc Hoa district, from 1965, some schools had secret revolutionary cadres working to mobilize, educate, and recruit active students into the Party and Youth Union. Many teachers regularly monitored the enemy, providing information and documents to the revolution, such as Ms. Huong (Hiep Hoa town), Ms. Loan (Duc Hoa town), Ms. Tuyet (a teacher at Duc Hoa Elementary School), Ms. Nguyen Thi Sach, and Ms. Le Thi Khoe (teachers at Binh Thuy School, Duc Hoa Dong), etc. When the enemy's artillery killed Ms. Phuc (a teacher at the elementary school in Binh Thuy hamlet, Duc Hoa Dong commune), the local people brought her body to Duc Hoa district, demanding the enemy compensate for her life and rebuild the school (Phan Van Nhan, 2008).

Through the struggle movement, many patriotic and steadfast examples of teachers and students from Duc Hoa - Hau Nghia emerged. Teacher Ly in Duc Hoa was a respected educator who operated openly and was tortured to death by the enemy. Teacher Truong Tan Sang, who taught at the Tri Tan private school, was assigned by the Party to lead the secret armed team (special forces team) responsible for eliminating enemy operatives in the district, distributing leaflets, and fighting against the enemy's cultural enslavement. The Duc Hoa special forces team achieved significant victories, eliminating Sergeant Nga and several notorious enemies with blood debts to the revolution, and planting mines at the Duc Hoa district chief's office. In 1971, Teacher Truong Tan Sang was arrested by the enemy while teaching in class and sentenced to prison.

At Long An Teachers' Training School from 1968-1975, many patriotic activities were conducted by teachers and students, including organizing cultural events condemning war and demanding peace and justice. Some teachers participated in patriotic and progressive organizations. Many students at the school harbored anti-war sentiments, opposed oppression and injustice, and sympathized with the revolution.

Although not directly participating in the local struggle, the actions of patriotic youth Nguyen Thai Binh (from Can Giuoc) highlighted the patriotic tradition of Long An - Kien Tuong students during the anti-American resistance. In his letter to the U.S. President, Nguyen Thai Binh asserted the national consciousness, peace aspirations, independence, and fighting spirit of Southern students: "As long as American invaders remain in our country, we will resolutely fight against them. We would rather sacrifice everything than lose our independence and become enslaved." Nguyen Thai Binh's heroic sacrifice on

July 2, 1972, at Tan Son Nhat Airport became a shining symbol of patriotism and revolutionary heroism among Vietnamese youth, particularly Long An - Kien Tuong students (Pham Thanh Phong, 2009).

The patriotic struggle activities of educators and students from Long An - Kien Tuong in the temporarily occupied areas were a distinctive feature throughout the anti-American resistance. Along with movements in liberated and contested areas, the struggle of Long An - Kien Tuong educators and students in temporarily occupied areas made significant contributions to the great victory of the resistance, enriching the glorious traditional history of revolutionary education. Through the movement, many teachers and students became Party members and youth union members, continuing their mission as educators on the educational front after the complete liberation of the South and national reunification (Nguyen Van Diep, 2012).

4. Conclusion

The patriotic activities of teachers and students in Long An – Kien Tuong against the colonial education regime were continuous and varied, evolving from cultural and educational activities into a political struggle movement. Importantly, these activities often acted as a catalyst for political movements in temporarily occupied areas.

The struggles of teachers and students in Long An – Kien Tuong contributed to limiting the impact of the new colonial education system imposed by the U.S. and the Saigon government. These efforts hindered the Saigon government's goal of using education as a crucial tool in their fight against communism and the revolutionary movement. The actions of teachers and students, even to a certain extent, curbed the objectives of organizing education in the South to “directly contribute to pacification efforts through primary and adult education programs in the Republic of South Vietnam” (Ho Huu Nhat, 1999). These activities thwarted attempts to train individuals with nationalist ideologies against communism, those serving the social management apparatus, and skilled workers to develop the South along a capitalist economic path.

The patriotic activities of teachers and students in Long An – Kien Tuong also helped affirm that “Education is the cause of the entire Party and people,” “Educational development is always linked to and serves the requirements of the revolutionary cause and the socio-economic development needs of the locality,” and “The goal of education is to train comprehensively developed Vietnamese individuals” in the educational cause of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, now the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

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