

ORGANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF VIETNAM GENERAL EDUCATION IN WARTIME (1945-1954) – A CASE STUDY OF TAN AN PROVINCE

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Abstract

Tan An was a former province in the Mekong Delta, now part of Long An Province, Vietnam. During the Vietnamese resistance against French colonialism (1945-1954), in addition to military, political, and economic activities, Tan An province vigorously organized and developed general education, becoming a highlight of the educational movement during the war in southern Vietnam. Using the methods of writing educational history and oral history, this article outlines the process of organizing and conducting general education in Tan An and its impact on the local resistance efforts. The results show that despite continuous warfare, general education activities in Tan An persisted, achieving significant accomplishments in eradicating illiteracy, raising public awareness, developing teaching staff, and constructing schools and classrooms suitable for wartime conditions. The educational development process in Tan An provides valuable lessons for building and developing general education during wartime, including experiences in leveraging the tradition of self-reliance to advance education and mobilizing community contributions when the state focused all resources on the war effort.

Keywords: General Education, Schools, Tan An, Wartime

1. Introduction

Before 1945, Vietnam was a French colonial territory. In August 1945, Vietnam declared independence by establishing the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, just two weeks after Vietnam declared independence, the French colonialists returned, initiating the second invasion of Vietnam, which lasted from 1945 to 1954 (IVH, 2002). From August 1945, the war was led by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (also known as the Viet Minh) against the French colonial forces, who operated under the guise of the State of Vietnam, a government-sponsored by France. This conflict spread across the entire territory of Vietnam, resulting in two distinct areas of control. The State of Vietnam, under French patronage, controlled the majority of the territory, including all urban areas, administrative centers, economic hubs, and densely populated regions. In contrast, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Viet Minh) managed to control only certain parts of the

territory, primarily in sparsely populated mountainous and forested areas. In the regions controlled by the French, the State of Vietnam maintained the educational system established by the French during the colonial period. Meanwhile, in the areas under the control of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the government established a national, democratic education system designed to support the comprehensive, nationwide resistance effort of the Vietnamese people (Tran Hong Quan et al., 1995). In the context of war, how did the Democratic Republic of Vietnam organize and develop education? What impact did educational activities have on the resistance effort and on the comprehensive development of the economy, society, and culture in those regions? These are crucial topics that require further research to shed light on Vietnamese history in general, and the history of Vietnamese education in particular, during a unique historical period. Studying the organization and activities of education during wartime will also clarify the lessons learned about organizing and developing education in such challenging times. To help address these research questions, this article examines and reconstructs how the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's government organized and conducted educational activities in Tân An province, a locality where fierce battles took place throughout the nine years of war in southern Vietnam (Phan Xuan Bien et al., 2005).

2. Documents and research methodology

The topic of the history of Vietnamese education from 1945 to the present has not captivated the academic community. To date, only a few publications have been released in Vietnam. The most comprehensive is the publication “50 Years of Educational Endeavor” (Tran Hong Quan et al., 1996). This publication outlines the overall landscape of Vietnamese education, including early childhood education, general education, vocational education, higher education, teacher training, educational infrastructure, and education management. In this publication, the organization and activities of general education during the war are briefly introduced, mainly covering the context, policies, and general strategies; the organization and activities of individual localities and regions have not been studied. Another publication considered quite detailed on the history of Vietnamese education from 1945 to 1995 is a specialized study in the field of state management of education. This publication also presents some information on the directives and operations of the state management agencies of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam regarding educational activities during various periods (Le Van Giang et al., 1995). For general education from 1945 to 1954, the publication outlines several directives from state management agencies concerning the reform and construction of Vietnamese general education schools after the August Revolution of 1945, policies for redirecting the activities of general education schools during the war, and the first educational reform undertaken by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1950 (Le Van Giang et al., 1995). A notable in-depth publication on general education is the concise history of the educational endeavor (Vo Thuan Nho, 1980). The author presents key aspects of the Party's educational policies and the development of the education sector during each transformative period of the Vietnamese revolution from 1945 to 1980. Recently, another publication, “General Education in Southern Vietnam 1954-1975” (Ngo Minh Oanh, 2018), has provided an overview of the general education curriculum, teachers and school management, examination and school inspection activities, and some observations on general education in southern Vietnam. It can be asserted that, to date, research publications on the education of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam from 1945

to 1954 are still quite scarce; among these, studies on individual localities are even more limited. The existing research results do not fully reflect the educational endeavors led by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

Regarding research methodology, this paper employs the historical method in education research. With a specialized approach, the paper selects significant events, arranges and presents them chronologically, and establishes the relationships between these events and the historical context. This is a common method in the study of educational history (Gary McCulloch, 2016). Given the prolonged and intense conditions of war, documents related to the organization and activities of education were extremely scarce and scattered. Therefore, the paper also uses the oral history method by conducting interviews to gather information from historical witnesses, most of which is typically unavailable from textual sources. These materials provide data on local policies, teachers, students, schools, classrooms, and significant events in educational activities at the local level. The oral history method is quite popular; it compiles historical data through interviews, which are often recorded and sometimes videotaped, with individuals who participated in or observed important events or periods (Stephen Counce, 1994).

3. Results and discussion

3.1 The Education Movement and the Eradication of Illiteracy in Tan An 1945-1946

On September 2, 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declared its independence. The celebration of independence took place in the capital, Hanoi, and many localities across the country. In Tan An, an expanded provincial Party Committee conference was held at the house of Tong Than (Binh Lap - Chau Thanh) to review leadership efforts in gaining control over localities and establishing the revolutionary government (Phan Xuan Bien et al., 2005). Based on the program of the Viet Minh Front, the Tan An provincial Party Committee and People's Committee focused on urgent tasks: combating hunger, illiteracy, and foreign invaders. All cadres and Party members from the provincial to the district, commune, and village levels engaged in propaganda and mobilization efforts to educate the populace, encourage participation in building the government, maintaining public order, and preparing to counter the French colonialists' re-invasion plans (Phan Van Nhan, 2008).

In October 1945, President Ho Chi Minh issued a call to combat illiteracy, emphasizing that the widespread illiteracy among the vast majority of the population was a significant obstacle to the country's progress and prosperity. Consequently, the urgent task of the state at that time was to enhance public education. Ho Chi Minh urged Vietnamese citizens to "first know how to read and write the national language," and to contribute to the Popular Education Movement; those who were literate were encouraged to teach those who were not, and those who were illiterate were urged to strive to learn (Ho Chi Minh, 2011). In response to President Ho Chi Minh's call, the Viet Minh Front and People's Committees at all levels across Tan An province actively mobilized the populace to participate in the "eradicate illiteracy" movement. Every citizen, regardless of gender, age, or status, was called upon to attend literacy classes and eliminate illiteracy. To spearhead the movement, the Provincial Information and Propaganda Committee invited renowned teachers from Tan An at the time, such as Le Ngoc An, Huynh Ngoc Tinh, Truong Van Biet, Vo Quang Chiếu, Duong Van Dieu, and Tran Van Don. These educators not only taught directly and trained other teachers but also compiled spelling and reading exercises suitable for the

public's literacy levels. Drawing from their previous teaching experience, teachers Vo Quang Chieu and Huynh Van Thon prepared several instructional materials for spelling exercises, which were widely distributed among the people (Rum Bao Viet, 2008).

At the beginning of November 1945, the "eradicate illiteracy" campaign was officially launched throughout the province, starting with a vigorous promotional drive that encouraged thousands of illiterate individuals to attend classes. Slogans such as "Attending literacy classes is patriotic," "Teaching literacy classes is patriotic," and "Eradicate illiteracy, strengthen Vietnam" were enthusiastically embraced by the public. In the hamlets and villages, farmers worked in the fields during the day and gathered for communal activities and literacy classes in the evening. When schools and classrooms were insufficient, temples, pagodas, or private homes were used as makeshift classrooms. In the absence of desks and chairs, people sat on wooden planks; when blackboards were unavailable, doors were used; when chalk was scarce, clay and white lime were used for writing. In the evening classes in Tan An, where there were no oil lamps, firewood and torches were used for lighting. Within a few weeks of the campaign's launch, the movement to eradicate illiteracy had spread widely across localities; thousands of people, including many elderly and children, had learned to read and write (Nguyen Thanh Long, 2012).

To focus on teacher training, the Tan An provincial resistance government directed the Propaganda and Education Committee to organize short-term pedagogical courses. Most of the attendees, who had not previously attended formal teacher training, received professional training (practical teaching, sharing classroom management experiences) and participated in cultural activities that integrated reading and spelling lessons to create an engaging atmosphere for the literacy classes. In the last months of 1945, the Military-Civilian-Political Propaganda Council of Tan An province intensified efforts to mobilize the populace to actively participate in combating hunger, illiteracy, and foreign invaders, while also preparing for the first National Assembly election of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. However, from this period onward, the literacy campaign faced a decline as French forces expanded their occupied areas, frequently conducting military operations to search for and encircle Viet Minh cadres, establishing a puppet government, and tightening control in temporarily occupied regions.

Entering 1946, the warfare became increasingly intense. The Tan An Provincial Resistance Administrative Committee had to move continuously, relocating from My An Phu to Long Ngai Thuan. Despite these difficulties, the literacy campaign continued to be prioritized and gradually developed. In April 1946, the Literacy Promotion Committee (under the Tan An Provincial Propaganda Committee) was established, with teacher Nguyễn Văn Tam appointed as its head. Immediately after its formation, the committee organized three task forces to spread out to different localities. The first task force, including teachers Vo Van Truoc and Thuoc, was assigned to Chau Thanh district. The second task force, with teachers Vo Quang Chieu (Hai Chieu) and Nghi, went to Thu Thua district. The third task force, consisting of teachers Pham Van Manh and Nguyen Van Con, was dispatched to Moc Hoa district (Nguyen Van Diep, 2012).

During this period, the Tan An Provincial Party Committee also established mobile propaganda teams to disseminate the policies and strategies of the resistance and to mobilize the populace to participate in the resistance efforts. Coordinating with these mobile propaganda teams, the task forces of the Literacy Promotion Committee not only focused on education (establishing Literacy Promotion Committees comprising members

from various national salvation organizations such as the Women's Union, Farmers' Association, and the Resistance Administrative Committee, and providing professional guidance on literacy teaching to local cadres and teachers) but also engaged in propaganda activities to rally public support for the resistance (Phan Van Nhan, 2008).

Thanks to the active efforts of the task forces, the literacy campaign saw significant progress. Many families became "home classrooms" for their members and neighbors. In areas under our control, in addition to classes held in private homes, temples, and pagodas, there were also "letter learning" classes set up in busy places like ferry docks and market gates. These simple classes featured a board made of planks or woven bamboo and a few amateur teachers. When people passed by, the teachers invited them to read or spell a few words written on the board; only those who could read fluently were allowed to pass. Initially, some people were irritated and resistant, but gradually more people supported this method as they saw its purpose and positive impact. The Literacy Promotion Committee also organized "public bookcases," collecting books, newspapers, and propaganda materials about the resistance (such as the Nhat Tri newspaper, Duong Song newspaper, and Tan An Information Bulletin) and integrating them into the teaching content. This combined literacy education with resistance propaganda (Pham Thanh Phong, 2012). In the final months of 1946, the activities of the Literacy Promotion Committee grew quite strong. In Chau Thanh district, literacy campaign officers were present in many villages, even in areas occupied by the French military such as Binh Tam, Phuoc Tan Hung, and Thuan My. In Thu Thua and Moc Hoa districts, in addition to providing professional guidance, the Literacy Promotion Committee also organized cultural performances to inspire patriotism and determination to resist the enemy.

3.2 Educational Activities in Tan An Province 1947-1954

At the end of 1946, Vietnam entered a period of nationwide resistance. The literacy campaign in the Tan An provincial base areas continued to develop. The Literacy Promotion Committees at all levels coordinated with the Information and Propaganda Department and patriotic organizations to actively mobilize people to strengthen the literacy movement and eradicate illiteracy. From mid-1947, following directives from the Southern Region Committee and the Central-Southern Interprovincial Committee, the Tan An Provincial Party Committee focused on developing the Dong Thap Muoi base (Moc Hoa district) as a headquarters for many provincial and higher-level agencies and units. By the end of 1947, the Southern Region Committee had established itself in Kinh Ba, Go Thap; the Southern Resistance Administrative Committee was located along the Lagrange Canal (now Duong Van Duong Canal); the 8th Zone Command was based in Nhon Ninh, Tan Hoa; the Southern Resistance Radio Station was situated in Hau Thanh and Nhon Hoa Lap communes; and the Southern Military Arsenal was set up in Kinh Co, Kinh Quan, Cay Vong. The Tan An Provincial Party Committee was headquartered in Phong Phu and Thuy Dong communes. Numerous other provincial agencies from Cho Lon and some districts of Tan An and Cho Lon also established their headquarters in Dong Thap Muoi. By early 1948, most hamlets in Dong Thap Muoi had resistance agencies and armed forces stationed there (Nguyen Tan Phat, 2004).

Before becoming a base, Dong Thap Muoi was a wild, sparsely populated area with a low level of literacy (95% of the population was illiterate). Therefore, the Tan An Provincial Party Committee aimed to develop Dong Thap Muoi economically, culturally, and educationally, starting with eradicating illiteracy and building a new way of life. To

implement this policy, the literacy campaign was widely launched. Personnel from zone and provincial agencies were mobilized to participate in the literacy eradication efforts. Every night, hamlets were lit by the lights and fires of literacy classes. During the day, people worked in the fields and fought against invasions, while in the evening, they attended classes carrying oil lamps or torches. Patriotic organizations (Women's Union, Youth Union, Farmers' Association) organized many literacy classes for their members. The Moc Hoa District Party Committee alone established four primary schools, attracting hundreds of students. Notably, Tuyen Thanh Commune Primary School had over 200 students, and Kinh Bui Primary School (Nhon Hoa Lap Commune) had about 150 students (Nguyen Van Kien, 2009).

At river docks, crossroads, and intersections, the literacy agencies often hung wooden boards with the alphabet and basic syllables written in charcoal or clay, allowing people to learn to read and spell anywhere, anytime. Local resistance committees also set up "information stations" to test the reading and writing skills of passersby; those who could not read had to stop and learn a few letters before being allowed to continue. Although this method was somewhat rigid and insensitive, it proved effective in eradicating illiteracy in the Dong Thap Muoi region (Nguyen Van Kien, 2012).

In the early difficult days of establishing the base and eradicating illiteracy, Dong Thap Muoi benefited immensely from a valuable resource: a team of intellectuals, civil servants, students, and pupils from Saigon, Cho Lon, and Gia Dinh, who were mobilized to the area to join the resistance, primarily in information, propaganda, and education roles. Many of these individuals became literacy teachers in Dong Thap Muoi. Additionally, the 8th Zone Committee organized rapid training courses for literacy teachers to meet the growing educational needs of the cadres, soldiers, and local people. The literacy agency, strengthened and working with the information and propaganda agency, excelled in both literacy efforts and resistance propaganda. Educational content was designed to teach both literacy and propaganda (Le Van Chi, 2008).

Alongside building the Dong Thap Muoi base, the area on the left bank of the Vam Co Tay River, including My Thanh Dong, My Quy, Binh Hoa, and Binh Thanh communes of Thu Thua district, was developed into a military zone called Dong Thanh. From late 1947, agencies of the 7th Military Region Command, Tan An Province, and Cho Lon Province relocated to this base. The Military Region Political School and the Party Schools of Tan An and Cho Lon provinces also moved here (Le Van Dat, 2009).

Along with building living and working facilities and a transportation network, agencies and units stationed in the Dong Thanh base actively promoted the "new way of life" movement in production and daily activities. Besides growing rice, agencies and families utilized vacant land to plant bananas, vegetables, beans, gourds, and raise chickens and ducks to improve daily meals. Food and drinks were cooked thoroughly, and chopsticks with two ends were used during meals. Houses were expanded to include yards, gardens, and playgrounds for children. Wedding and funeral customs were simplified and practical. Social evils such as gambling and theft were eliminated, and superstitions significantly reduced. Notably, the literacy campaign and cultural supplementary education developed vibrantly. Officials from various civilian, administrative, and party sectors enthusiastically participated in literacy teaching outside of working hours. Classes were held in private homes or agency offices after work. Some classes were conducted at noon, others in the evening, for both adults and children. Many words and resistance-related

topics were incorporated into elementary reading and spelling exercises. Teachers not only taught literacy but also disseminated news and new work directives, such as supporting the "rice jar for soldiers" movement, "resistance chickens," and "resistance banana groves" (Le Thi Giot, 2012).

In August 1947, the Southern Resistance Administrative Committee established the Southern Education Department and the Institute of Resistance Culture. These government agencies were tasked with eliminating the remnants of colonial and ignorant culture and building a Vietnamese culture, initially focusing on eradicating illiteracy and improving the population's cultural level. Subsequently, the Southern Resistance Administrative Committee directed provinces to establish Educational Departments to manage local educational work. In January 1948, the Tan An Provincial Educational Department was established, with Le Ngoc An as Head and Vo Van Truoc as Deputy Head. The department was based in Thanh Hoa Commune, Moc Hoa District (now Thanh Phuoc Commune, Thanh Hoa District). The Tan An Provincial Educational Department comprised three divisions: Literacy Promotion, Primary Education, and Book Writing (Le Van Dat, 2012).

Following our victory in the Viet Bac Autumn-Winter Campaign of 1947, which destroyed the French colonialists' "quick attack, quick victory" strategy, they were forced to switch to a prolonged war strategy. The Southern Region became a focal area for the French army to consolidate and rebuild their strength. In Tan An, from early 1948, the French established numerous watchtowers and outposts along waterways and roads, particularly near revolutionary bases, aiming to encircle the resistance forces both militarily and economically. In just Chau Thanh and Thu Thua districts alone, the French army set up 68 various posts and watchtowers. The French military presence in Zone 8 reached 26,000 troops, including both expeditionary forces and local auxiliaries (Rum Bao Viet, 2008).

On our side, after more than two years of conducting an all-people, all-out resistance war, the Party and government organizations at all levels were continuously strengthened and consolidated. The organizations within the Viet Minh Front grew stronger, gaining widespread influence among the people. Every organization held training classes, mainly focusing on the Viet Minh Program, the rules of the National Salvation Association, etc. The armed forces of the province and districts were formed and gradually developed. Information and education sectors built organizational systems from the province to the district level, and in many places, even to the commune level. In the Dong Thap Muoi base area, the Party, government, and armed forces organizations continuously grew stronger. In temporarily occupied areas, guerrilla warfare and anti-tyrant activities took place everywhere. These were favorable conditions for resistance activities, including educational work. Right after establishing the organizational structure, the Tan An Provincial Department of Education promptly developed a teaching staff. Some officials and employees, who were teachers escaping from the occupied areas to join the resistance in various civilian, governmental, military, and factory units, were invited to work at the Provincial Department of Education. By March 1948, the Tan An Department of Education had gathered dozens of teachers who were patriotic intellectuals, such as Mr. Duong Van Dieu, Mr. Huynh Van Dang, Mr. Nguyen Van Sum, Mr. Nhan, Mr. Tam, Mr. Chien, Mr. Thuoc, Mr. Don, etc. With a relatively strong teaching force, the Tan An Department of Education promoted the establishment of a central primary school for the province. This school served as a place of learning for the children of cadres, martyrs'

families, families with contributions to the revolution, people in the base area, and those cadres who had interrupted their studies to join the resistance (Rum Bao Viet, 2008).

In April 1948, the first primary school of Tan An province was established, named Nguyen Van Dinh Primary School, with Mr. Duong Van Dieu as the principal. The school had more than 10 teachers (Mr. Nhan, Mr. Tam, Mr. Chien, Mr. An, Mr. Thuoc, Mr. Don, Mr. Gia, Mr. Hien, Mr. Bay Quan, etc.), all of whom were teachers from the occupied areas who had left their families to join the base area. Initially, Nguyen Van Dinh Primary School had two classes: the fifth grade was located at Rach Cay Cam, Thanh Hoa commune (Moc Hoa district), and the fourth grade was at Phong Phu commune, Moc Hoa district (now part of Thanh Phuoc commune, Thanh Hoa district). The school's operating funds were partly supported by the Zone 8 Committee, partly contributed by the local people, and partly collected from donations sent from occupied areas (Pham Thanh Phong, 2009).

The first resistance primary school of Tan An province was built simply and compactly. The fifth-grade class at Rach Cay Cam was constructed from melaleuca trees, with a roof made of "dung" grass (a type of grass in the area), and the desks were made from melaleuca trees, with boards for writing. The fourth-grade class had some old desks and chairs. To adapt to wartime conditions, the class was organized in a military style. The school had a chief and deputy chief of the brigade. Each class was organized into a detachment, with a detachment leader and deputy leader. Each detachment was divided into three squads, with a squad leader and deputy leader. Teachers and students lived and worked together at the school, building houses, making desks, catching fish, collecting firewood, cooking food, and helping the local people repair houses and harvest rice on their days off (Rum Bao Viet, 2008).

Not so long after the establishment of Nguyen Van Dinh Primary School, in July 1948, the Tan An Department of Education founded a second primary school, named Vo Van Truoc Primary School. The school was located at the Da Bien Wharf, Thanh Hoa commune (now part of Binh Phong Thanh commune, Moc Hoa district), with Mr. Huynh Van Dang, a graduate from France, as the principal, and Mr. Nguyen Van Sum as the vice-principal. The students of Vo Van Truoc School were the children of cadres and employees of civilian, governmental, and military agencies in the resistance zone and local people in the base area. Most of the teachers at Vo Van Truoc School were patriotic intellectuals participating in the resistance, and some were officials working in various provincial agencies such as Mr. Nguyen Chanh Sac, Head of the Information and Propaganda Department, Mr. Tran Dinh Vu, Deputy Chairman of the Viet Minh Association, Mr. Tran Nam Hung, a doctor, and Mr. Vo Van Muoi, Head of the Treasury Department (Le Nghiem, 2002).

In the middle of 1948, following the directives of the Southern Region Party Committee, the Tan An Provincial Party Committee established the Propaganda and Training Committee, with Mr. Nguyen Van Minh, a Standing Member of the Provincial Party Committee, as the Head. From then on, educational activities were directed by the Propaganda and Training Committee and closely coordinated with the information, propaganda, training, and cultural sectors in some work fields. In the last months of 1948, the French intensified pacification efforts both in occupied and base areas. Militarily, the French army rapidly expanded its network of outposts and watchtowers along waterways and roads, especially in areas near our bases. They increased the frequency and scale of

their sweeps into base areas, with larger battles involving air and naval support occurring on average once a month. These frequent sweeps and the "three cleans" policy of the French (burn all, kill all, destroy all) made maintaining educational activities extremely difficult. Nguyen Van Dinh and Vo Van Truoc Schools had to frequently change locations. Teachers and students had to escape and hide in flooded melaleuca forests for many days, find high ground to sleep by campfires at night, and even cut melaleuca trees to make platforms to sleep in the forest (Le Thanh Chau, 2012).

By October 1949, due to increasingly dangerous conditions, Vo Van Truoc School had to temporarily cease operations. Nguyen Van Dinh School moved to a new location at Ca Rung Temple, Vinh Loi commune (now part of Vinh Hung district), relying on food supplies and the protection and support of local people. Overcoming hardships and difficulties, teachers and students of Nguyen Van Dinh School strived to implement the motto "self-management, self-reliance, and voluntary learning"; learning combined with practice, learning from teachers, peers, and the people; integrating formal education with extracurricular activities. In teaching, the school always combined learning with labor (building school facilities), production (growing vegetables, farming, fishing, milling rice, pounding rice), and helping the people harvest rice, dry rice, and repair houses...

Alongside the development of grassroots education and cultural enrichment in the base areas, during the years 1948 - 1949, the struggle movement in the occupied areas of Tan An province against the colonial education system of the French colonialists was fervent. The Mothers of Soldiers Association, the Sisters of Soldiers Association, actively mobilized dismissed teachers to refuse teaching according to the French military's education curriculum, taking the opportunity to incorporate patriotic and revolutionary content into the school. In July 1949, numerous educators and students in Tan An province and the districts of Thu Thua and Chau Thanh actively participated in activities in response to the school boycott by educators and students in Saigon protesting against Bao Dai's visit to the Pétrus Ký High School and the Gia Long Girls' High School in Saigon. This was followed by activities commemorating the August Revolution, school boycotts against terrorism, demanding freedom for teachers and students participating in revolutionary activities who were arrested by the French military. Especially, in response to the student demonstrations on January 9, 1950, a large number of educators and students in Tan An province simultaneously boycotted schools, organized rallies (Phan Van Nhan, 2008).

From the beginning of 1950, the French army launched intense sweeps into the base areas, establishing more fortresses, conducting encirclement, blocking, increasing arrests, and reinforcing their deceptive machinery in the occupied areas. Politically, the French army intensified propaganda to build an "independent national army within the French army," creating conditions for factions (notably the Seven Viễn force) to rise up in support of the pacification campaign. Moving into 1950, the French army mobilized additional auxiliary forces, established more entrenched fortresses deep in the base areas, swept through, plundered the property of the people, while employing tactics to sow discord and division among cadres, party members, and the masses. In the occupied areas, the French army carried out numerous raids, arrests, and killings of revolutionary cadres and bases. The loss of cadre and party members increased (Phan Xuan Bien et al., 2005).

In response to the new schemes and tactics of the French army, in October 1950, the Tan An Provincial Party Committee conducted a review of the situation and outlined

appropriate principles and measures to strengthen the eradication of traitors and bandits in the occupied areas, determined to seize the initiative in the base areas. In the field of education, the Provincial Party Committee and the Administrative Resistance Committee directed the continued improvement of cultural standards for officials of various departments, organizations, and the masses in the base areas. At the same time, schools needed to use their activities to mobilize the people to build a new life (Phan Xuan Bien et al., 2005).

Implementing the directives of the Provincial Party Committee and the Administrative Resistance Committee, at the end of 1950, Tan An Education Department both maintained the existing classes in Cà Rung and opened a new school called Tân Phong Elementary School in Tân Thiết (now in Bình Phong Thạnh commune, Mộc Hóa district) with about 30 students in the third grade. Some students who completed the fourth grade at Nguyen Van Dinh School were transferred to continue studying the third grade at Tân Phong School. With the efforts of the cadre, teachers, and the resilient spirit of the students, educational activities in Tan An province continued to thrive and develop.

Following the Second National Party Congress (February 1951), based on the practical situation on the Southern battlefield, the Central Party decided to establish the Central Bureau of the South and reorganize the battlefield, forming two sub-regions: the Eastern Sub-region and the Western Sub-region. According to this decision, Tan An province, along with My Tho and Gò Công provinces, merged into a new province called My Tho province, under the Eastern Sub-region. The southern part of the lộ 16 road in Thu Thua and Chau Thanh districts was merged to form Vam Co district; the northern part of the lộ 16 road in Thu Thua and Chau Thanh districts was merged to form Thu Thua district. In My Tho province (new), the territory of Tan An province consisted of three districts: Thu Thua, Vam Co, and Moc Hoa. The Provincial Party Committee and the Administrative Resistance Committee of My Tho province arranged provincial-level agencies into three working groups: Group 1 included the Provincial Party Committee Office, the Administrative Resistance Committee Office, the Provincial Command Steering Committee, and the Police; Group 2 included Civil Affairs agencies, the Viet Minh Front, and Economic Affairs; Group 3 included Propaganda, Information - Culture and Art, Education, and the Political Bureau of the Provincial Command, abbreviated as Propaganda - Information - Culture - Education. In August 1951, the My Tho Provincial Party Committee organized a study session to thoroughly grasp the directives of the Central Bureau of the South on increasing production, self-supply, self-reliance, while directing Moc Hoa district to perform well in base work, protect the security of resistance agencies, and continue to develop education, healthcare, and culture.

Implementing the directives of the Provincial Party Committee, in the late months of 1951 and early 1952, schools in the Dong Thap Muoi base area organized their cadre of teachers and students into teams, guerrilla units, and transmission teams. Teachers and students together protected the schools, organized study activities under the spirit of "When the French army comes to fight us, we study; when the French army leaves, we study." Each time the enemy approached, teachers and students together submerged desks and chairs in the water to hide them, students were organized for evacuation, with some staying behind to protect the school. In difficult circumstances, the optimistic spirit and sense of responsibility were evident through widely disseminated poems and folk songs among teachers and students, such as "Our School," "Student Duty."

“My School

“From dawn till dusk, we're off to school,
In learning and laughter, we find our rule.
With golden star and crimson hue,
Our flag flies high, as we sit and learn.

Our school, a beacon of radiant light,
Where winds caress, and flags take flight.
In our school, there's a portrait of Ho Chi Minh,
Watching over us, with a gentle glare.

Desks and benches, with ink stains and wear,
Wooden legs, sturdy and bare.
Though rough-hewn, they're dear to me,
In our school, where love runs free.

Student Duty

When the bell tolls, boong boong,
Into the classroom, my heart sings a tune.
Teachers smile, with wisdom to share,
I strive not to falter, to learn with care.

Beyond these walls, soldiers brave,
Amidst white bones, crimson flowing.
Here, beneath the flag's bright hue,
I must fulfill my duty, true” (Pham Thanh Phong, 2009)

In February 1952, the District 8 Party Committee opened Dong Thap Muoi High School located in Thanh Hoa commune. Some students who completed the third-grade program at Tan Phong School were transferred to continue their studies at the high school level. Throughout 1952, the French military continued to intensify their occupation activities, sweeping through the base areas, dividing guerilla zones, consolidating their pseudo-authority, gathering civilians, and arresting soldiers... By the end of 1952, the aftermath of the storm in the Year of the Horse caused extensive damage to many homes, fields, gardens, and schools in the Dong Thap Muoi region. Alongside officials, soldiers, and civilians, the teachers and students of Nguyen Van Dinh School, Tan Phong School, and Dong Thap Muoi High School had to harvest rice to sustain themselves, clear water plants, and cut wood to exchange for rice. Teaching and learning were disrupted for a short period (Phan Van Nhan, 2008).

In January 1953, at the expanded provincial party conference in My Tho (held in Bac Chang, Tuyen Thanh commune, Moc Hoa), the determination of the Central Committee regarding the orientation of activities in guerilla zones and temporarily occupied areas was emphasized, affirming the determination to expand the base areas. At the conference, Mr. Nguyen Van Minh - Head of the Propaganda Committee and concurrently Head of the Organization Committee of the Provincial Party Committee, and Mr. Nguyen Thanh Can (Sau Can) were appointed as Head of the Education Department. Educational activities at Nguyen Van Dinh School, Tan Phong School, and Dong Thap Muoi High School were resumed. Additionally, more schools in Nhon Hoa Lap and Phong Phu were supplemented with well-trained teachers returning from District 8. In December 1953, the My Tho Education Department established anti-illiteracy teams and spread them to

the communities to teach the people. From Phong Phu commune to Tuyen Binh commune, where the population was sparse and transportation was difficult, teachers traversed swamps and crossed streams to promote literacy. In houses with a few people, they taught together; in cases where only one person was learning, the teacher still taught. Rice was both self-produced and provided by the population. In this way, with great enthusiasm and dedication, the literacy teams worked diligently from one hamlet to another until mid-1954, when our people achieved a decisive victory in Dien Bien Phu, forcing French colonial rule to sign the Geneva Accords and ending the victory in the fight against France (Le Van Chi, 2008).

4. Conclusion

In the context of war, the educational enterprise organized by the government of the Republic of Vietnam in Tan An province achieved significant milestones. Notably, the campaign to eradicate illiteracy yielded encouraging results. Thousands of people learned to read and write through grassroots educational programs. Many teachers emerged from the grassroots educational movement and actively contributed to the comprehensive, protracted, and self-reliant national resistance since the nationwide struggle began.

Despite the numerous difficulties and hardships, the cadre, teachers, and students of Tan An province quickly matured. Many students in the resistance base areas later became key leaders of the Central Committee, such as Nguyen Van Tu – Party Central Committee member, Chairman of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor, and Le Buu – Director General of the General Department of Sports and Physical Training (Phan Van Nhan, 2008). The achievements of the grassroots educational movement and cultural enrichment initiatives, the teaching and learning activities of the resistance schools in the Dong Thap Muoi base areas, and the silent sacrifices of many officials, teachers... remain indelible marks in the memories of generations working in education at the grassroots level. They are invaluable assets for the Tan An education sector to inherit and continue to write new chapters during the 21 years of resistance against the United States.

The organization and activities of general education in Tan An during the war left valuable lessons and experiences. Developing the education sector in the current peaceful and stable context today requires remembering and appreciating the achievements and educational activities during the revolutionary struggle and resistance against invasion. Amidst myriad challenges, the cadre, teachers, and staff of the Tan An education sector consistently adhere to the government's principles, closely connect with the people, fulfill the core missions of the sector, and find unique methods to sustain and develop educational work in all circumstances. The determination to overcome difficulties, willingness to endure sacrifices and hardships, dynamic and creative spirit, resilient courage, and dedication to the profession... are significant lessons from the education system during the war, which still retain their value today.

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