

The References of Vietnamese States and the Mechanisms of World Formation¹

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The article provides a method of exploring ideational polities, which proceeds through highlighting the networks of discursive reference, which are made to argue for the nature or existence or right to existence of a given polity. This method enables a comparative study of the state. As case studies, four paramount conceptions of Vietnamese states in the 11th, 15th, and 20th centuries are explored and compared. They show how similarly and differently geopolitical identity was defined by Vietnamese-speaking state-makers at four crucial junctures in Vietnam's history. They indicate that the state is configured but nonidentical with the world. The generation and construction of the world imagined in human mind involves the mechanism of coreference. Coreference is a two-level process complex by which a world is united via semiotic universalization at the level of the codes but remains (or becomes) heterogeneous via semantic reorientation at the level of the contents.

1 The Image of Political Order

The state is a phenomenon that is pervading and dominating our public life and even penetrating our private life. Although the state is not in every time and every place the pervasive and dominant agent/process/structure in the public life, it certainly has the tendency of becoming that. From the moment history began to be written, the state has been an unavoidable category for understanding social life and human affairs.

The state matters, and it matters in two ways. On the one hand, it creates a practical problem for human beings in social life – e.g., it divides people into two camps: the one is trying to sustain a political order while the other is against that. On the other hand, it challenges the human mind with a theoretical problem as to how to adequately conceptualize that phenomenon. For example, is there a 'common denominator' for both a West European republic of the 20th century and a Southeast Asian kingdom of, say, the 11th century, and if there is, what is it? Or is the "state" merely a catch-all word to cover different forms of governance/ domination or, are there

1 **Author's Note:** This article is a heavily revised version of a paper I originally wrote for a seminar on "Traditional and Contemporary Conceptions of the State" (University of Mainz, 1999), led by Prof. Manfred Mols, to whom I am grateful for the stimulation. I wish to thank Dr. Jörn Dosch (Stanford University), Prof. David G. Marr (Australian National University), Dr. Aiviet Nguyen, and Prof. Keith W. Taylor (Cornell University) for their valuable encouragement and criticism on an earlier draft of this paper.

indeed certain features common to various political orders that were dominant at different times in different regions?

The word "state" is a problematic one. It is overburdened with the common sense of "bounded territory + government + citizens" or Weberian meanings, such as "patrimonial bureaucracy." Yet Max Weber himself, who was asserting that the state was but a modern phenomenon, used the same term "state" for non-modern polities as well, perhaps in lack of an appropriate vocabulary (for Weber's ambiguity, see Anter 1996). Toward the end of the 20th century, it seems that we have found in the term "polity" an umbrella denotation for the most relevant kind of political entities. However, the term "polity" also is something of a misnomer because it may imply the systems theory connotation, which distinguishes between polity as the structure, politics as the process, and policy as the outcome, of the political system. For several theories of the state do not define the state by its structures but by its processes or by its outcomes. In this essay I adopt a timely and fuzzy logical solution for the dilemma. At the departure, I have been using the words "state" and "polity" more or less interchangeably, with "state" referring more to a political order while "polity" rather to political system. Doing so, I avoid imposing a specific concept of the state upon the objects. Only at the end, if there would appear some necessity, I would suggest a clearer differentiation between "state" and "polity."

One of the major ways to expand the horizon of our own understanding of the state is to explore the eyewitnesses' conceptions of their respective polity. Conceptions of state are contents of thought, at once products and tools of the experiencing and thinking about a dominant form of governance. As such, they are images of political order. They give information about the eyewitnesses' ways of looking at, imagining and perceiving the dominant political order of their time. Less obviously, they bare the problem complex 'underlying' a given political order. Thus, studying conceptions of state can help us understand the ways state-makers and state-thinkers raise the major questions about their dominant political order as well as their strategies or designs for dealing with the complex of problems adherent to that order.

Conceptions are foremost manifested in texts. Thus, the task of exploring conceptions of state can preeminently be carried out by reading historic texts in which a polity or a cluster of polities are concerned. In this essay, I shall join the exploration into the realm of Vietnamese conceptions of state by attempting to read or, to use a more vivid word, to picture polities as they were articulated in historic texts. I have chosen a picture-frame that keeps the pictures flat: Not the meanings of the words and phrases stand at the focus of analysis, but the discursive reference between them. Admittedly, certain meanings of the words and phrases still have to web the backdrop of the pictures for there is no picture without backdrop. Yet these backdrop meanings are selected among the most plastic ones such that they will not distort the pictures significantly. With such a frame I hope to be able to figure out some patterns of the networks of reference the texts produce, making possible a comparison of polities-as-articulated-experiences throughout the flow of time in the area now called Vietnam. This comparison results, among others, in a hypothesis on the 'mechanisms' of world 'formation' – that is, on the ways the imagined world that exists in human mind is discursively generated and constructed.

Things discussed, or issues, represent certain problems, at least discursive, because they require description or explanation or justification. The description, explanation and justification of an issue are advanced by the *reference* of the issue. In turn, the reference of the issue can shed light on the problem situation the issue represents. A crucial feature of the intelligible discussion is that an issue is – implicitly or explicitly, in these or those respects – taken for problematic; and the general way of resolving this problem is to refer the issue to other things which are taken for granted, be they facts or norms.

Therefore, if we look at texts wherein the state (as a category of thought) or a concrete political system is discussed, especially at those texts in which the nature or existence or right to existence of the state or of a concrete polity is *articulated*, we can remark that albeit in many cases statehood is taken for granted, yet the nature or existence or right to existence of a concrete state is always described, explained or justified by referring to some other '*truisms*'. Here, the state plays the role of a *pivotal issue*, but in turn, is reasoned as an *emergent 'matter of course'*, thus, refers to a broader order and a deeper problem at the same time: It displays an *issue complex*. Indeed, as a man-made set of resources and rules – that is, of artificial facts and norms –, the state, any concrete polity, is a host of both potential problems and possible solutions for the problems themselves, posing a problem complex, which emerges from the networks of relations between things. The issue complex mentioned above represents the way state-makers and state-thinkers approach the real problem complex underlying the existence of their respective polity. Hence, exploring conceptions of state can shed light on the ways state-thinkers and state-makers view the *problem situation* adherent to the state and on the probable *resolution orientation* they bear in mind regarding this problem situation.

The central topic of this essay is the *discursive reference of states* in Vietnam. Thus, I am oriented towards examining what the Vietnamese polities are referred to and how they are referred – that is, described, explained, and justified – in various texts by Vietnamese-speaking authors, texts written or told in different times and places, by different persons in different moments and positions. To the best of my knowledge, such an endeavor has not been done yet. So, my current attempt can only be an initial step in this avenue. As a consequence, this essay can expose but tentative pictures about four Vietnamese polities and an initial comparison limited to four 'peaks' on the entire landscape of Vietnamese views of polity.

The texts selected are those each of which was authoritatively announced at a crucial juncture of a Vietnamese polity respectively. Each text must discuss directly and massively the nature or existence or right to existence of the respective Vietnamese polity. In accordance with these criteria I have chosen four texts: the poem "In the Southern Country's Mountains and Streams the Southern Emperor Resides" by Ly Thuong Kiet on the eve of a decisive battle against the Song Chinese in the late 11th century; the "Great Proclamation upon Laying Low the Ngo" by Nguyen Trai in the wake of the triumph over the Ming Chinese in the early 15th century; the "Declaration of Independence" by Ho Chi Minh in the wake of World War II and of the August Revolution in the mid-twentieth century; and the "Political Report" by Le

Duan after the close of the Vietnam War and on the occasion of the reunification of Vietnam in the late 20th century.

Although the four Vietnamese polities selected (Dai Viet in the 11th century, Dai Viet in the 15th century, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, both in the 20th century) are grouped in a single category of thought that I denote with the words "state" and "polity," this categorizing does not assume any single object called "the Vietnamese state," which has not fundamentally changed over time. Rather, this essay has examined four separate objects, which presumably belong to one single category: *the ideational polity*.

2 "In the Southern Country's Mountains and Streams the Southern Emperor Resides"

Vietnamese pupils today are taught in the school that their nation's first "declaration of independence" was the poem now usually titled "Nam Quoc Son Ha Nam De Cu" (In the Southern Country's Mountains and Streams the Southern Emperor Resides).² This poem's author was reportedly Ly Thuong Kiet, commander-in-chief for the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225). He is one of the most famous personalities in Vietnamese history because of his military victory over the Song Chinese. According to Sino-Vietnamese records, the marshal had this poem read as the voice of heaven addressing his troops in the face of a crucial battle with the Song in late 1076, probably aiming to enhance his soldiers' morale and to derange his enemy's nerve. I translate the poem in a less stylized manner such that the discursive reference of the poem can be evident also to readers who cannot read it in classical Chinese:³

The Southern country's [*quoc*] mountain and river the Southern Emperor in-habits.

The separation is natural and allotted in Heaven's Book.

If the bandits come to trespass it,

You shall, in doing that, see yourselves to be handed with failure and shame!

At the heart of the poem is an order, which is, on the one hand, challenged by the "bandits," but, on the other hand, guaranteed in a natural way by the Book of Heaven. This order represents a problem and a matter of course simultaneously, while the "Book of Heaven" and "Heaven" occupy the domain of the ultimate points of reference. In the domain of the ultimate points of reference, the Heaven seems to be the supreme source of authority, and the Heaven's Book the host of the primary

2 Originally, the poem had no title. Modern Vietnamese often use the first line of the poem to title it. Here I adopt the translation in Wolters (1982: 115) for the title of the poem, whereas within the poem I translate the line in a slightly different way.

3 An original version of this poem, which was written in classical Chinese, can be found in Tran Trong Kim 1951: 108. For alternative translation of the first couplet, I would point to O. W. Wolters: "In the Southern country's mountains and streams the Southern emperor resides / A clear division is fixed by Heavenly writ" (1982: 115) or Stephen O'Harrow: "Over the mountains and rivers of the South reigns the Southern Emperor. Clear cut, our destiny is inscribed in the Book of Heaven" (1979: 172). For the second line, I have consulted a translation by Keith Taylor (e-mail to the author, dated 10 March 1999). For the second couplet, I have consulted Aiviet Nguyen's suggestion (e-mail to the author, dated 4 May 1999). I am grateful to them all. Any shortcoming in the translation presented above is mine.

truisms. Let us look at the emergent order – which is at once the pivotal issue – and its relations to the ultimate points of reference.

The emergent order is portrayed in the first line of the poem: "Nam quoc son ha nam de cu." This order's most salient feature is the relationship between the *nam de* (southern emperor) and the *nam quoc son ha* (southern country's mountains and rivers). There are not only the relationship between the "mountain and river" (*son ha*) and the "emperor" (*de*) but also the ones between *nam* (south) and *quoc* (country, state), between *quoc* and *son ha*, between *nam* and *de*, and, implicitly, the relationship between the south (*nam* or Vietnam) and the north (*bac* or China).

The relationship between *de* and *son ha* is described (or justified) by the "inhabiting" (*cu*) of *son ha* by *de*. But *son ha* does not stand in this relationship only; it is also related to *quoc*. The "emperor" may not occupy "mountains and rivers" in general but he inhabits the "mountain and river" of a *quoc*. The (emergent) order in issue is a complex, multilayered relationship between the southern country's 'geography', its 'ruler', the 'south', and the 'north' (which remains implicit in the poem). The content of this order is twofold. An internal order is defined by the occupation of the country's space or 'geography' (maybe both physical and human, even supernatural) as a place of habitat (*cu*) by its ruler. An external order is defined by the separation (*tiet*) of the south from the north. In fact, the word *tiet* is not explicitly referred to the division of "south" and "north."⁴ On the one hand, it can be considered as referring to any divisional relationship alluded in the first line. Reasonably, that relationship would be the implicit division between the south and the north. But theoretically, *tiet* might hint to the (perhaps functional) division of *quoc* in "mountain-and-river" and "emperor" as well. In order to avoid any arbitrary exclusion, I have rendered the phrase "*tiet nhien*" into "the separation is natural," and Wolters has translated it as "a clear division" (1982: 115). On the other hand, the phrase may refer to the one following it, too. In O'Harrow's translation: "Clear cut [*tiet nhien*], our destiny is inscribed in the Book of Heaven" (1979: 172). Thus, in the broadest sense what is allotted in the Heavenly Writ would not merely the division of south and north, but actually the whole order represented in the first line.

While *quoc* (specifically, *nam quoc*) is the code for the political order argued for as a matter of course, *quoc*'s content encompasses the dual relationship between (i) its 'geography' and its ruler and, (ii) between the both halves, south and north, of the domain "under heaven" (the world). As the poem is opened with "the southern country's mountain and stream" (*nam quoc son ha*), it may give the impression of its first concern being the defense of a domain. Yet taken as a whole, the poem exhibits that its central concern includes the defense of a comprehensive cosmic order, the separation between south and north and the occupation of a distinct domain by a ruler. This order is articulated as a natural one and in order to be showed as such it borrows the heaven's support, which is manifested in the heaven's book.

The pregnant form of this Tang-style poem requires massive use of implicit reference. It forces, therefore, the interpreter to adopt both the broadest intratextual context and the (extratextual) historical one. The problem complex underlying the

emergent order is thus portrayed (i) at one level in a triple relationship between the heaven and the world (Sino-Vietnamese: *thien ha*, Chinese: *tianxia*, literally: under heaven – which remains implicit in the poem), between south and north within the world, and between land and ruler within the southern domain; (ii) at a second level in the quadrilateral relationship between "south" (*nam*), "country/state" (*quoc*), "mountains and rivers" (*son ha*) and "emperor" (*de*); and (iii) at a third level in the relationship between the whole order and the "bandits" (*nghich*).

3 "Great Proclamation upon Laying Low the Ngo"

In the early 15th century, Dai Viet's history met a severe cleavage. The Ming China occupied the country in two decades from 1406/7 to 1427/8. In 1428, after the Ming was forced to withdraw their troops from the country, Nguyen Trai, then chief minister, in the name of Le Loi, the new emperor of Dai Viet, composed a poem in order to proclaim the pacification. The work, entitled "Binh Ngo Dai Cao" (Great Proclamation upon Laying Low the Ngo),⁵ was written in a classic Chinese genre called *phú*. This poem is now considered by many modern readers "the second declaration of independence of Vietnam," alluding to the poem by Ly Thuong Kiet as the first and the Independence Declaration by Ho Chi Minh as the third.

The Proclamation is opened with the statement that the linchpin of humanity/charity (*nhan*) and righteousness/justice (*nghia*) lies in providing peace for the people (*an dan*).⁶ O'Harrow (1979: 171) translates the first couplets of the poem as follows:

Though deeds charitable and just	
undertake to bring the people peace,	1
the army, their protector and avenger,	
first must fell the tyrant cruel.	2

Thereafter, the Proclamation portrays the *quoc* of Dai Viet. The portrayal is carried out in five couplets:

Now think upon this Dai Viet land [<i>quoc</i>] of ours;	
Truly is it a cultured nation [<i>bang</i>].	3
As mountain and river make for various lands [<i>phong vuc</i>],	
so our Southern ways [<i>phong tục</i>] must differ from the North.	4
It was the Trieu, the Dinh, the Ly and Tran,	
who in succession built this country [<i>quoc</i>].	5
Even as the Han, the T'ang, the Sung and Yüan,	
each was sovereign [<i>de</i>] in its own domain.	6
Sometimes strong, sometimes weak,	
yet never lacking heroes,	7

5 An alternative (and more standard) translation of the title is "the Proclamation on the Pacification of the Chinese." However, the translation I have chosen here, which is by O'Harrow (1979: 165), is much more accurate than the 'standard' translation. I also adopt his rendition for the text of the Proclamation because I believe his is hitherto one of the most accurate English translation of the Proclamation. See O'Harrow (1979) for detailed discussion and arguments. Although O'Harrow did not translate the Proclamation entirely, but fortunately, he did render its opening part (the first nine couplets), which is of the most importance for the purpose of this essay.

6 The phrase "an dan" can also be understood as "making the people peaceful." This meaning seems however not very accurate in the context of the Proclamation.

This depiction of the *quoc* of Dai Viet prepares the mise-en-scène of the facts recounted in the lines that follow the portrayal. These lines, for their part, serve to reinforce the point stressed in the above depiction:

we beat the ambitious Liu Kung
and crushed Ch'ao Chie with his dream of grandeur. 8
There was So Tu captured at Ham Tu Pass
and Black Horse [*O Ma* or Omar], the Mongol
come to grief at Bach Dang Bay. 9

It is the repeated attempts of invasion by northern forces that catch the central concern of the local discussion in these lines. But the Proclamation shows that this problem is always resolved, and it is resolved because of the various strengths Dai Viet holds. Most directly, it is the strength of never lacking talents and heroes (*hao kiet*). But there are more fundamental strengths, definitely depicted in the previous lines. Concisely, the source of strength is pointed out in the third line: "Now think upon this Dai Viet land of ours / Truly is it a cultured (*van hien*) nation." This strength is stressed by referring Dai Viet to another thing, the "civilization" (*van hien*). The main effect of this reference is the establishment of a logical link from the nature of the kingdom to the primary truism – that is, the ultimate point of reference.

This ultimate truism is introduced in the very first line of the poem. It represents the fundamental axiom of the whole argumentation. This axiom states that the linchpin of deeds human and righteous is to bring the people peace. Throughout the Proclamation, the principles of humanity/charity (*nhân*) and righteousness/justice (*ngĩa*) provide support to all things that eventually triumph, whereas the "heaven" (*thiên*), occasionally "heaven and earth" (*thiên địa*), and the "people" (*đan*), occasionally "spirits and peoples" (*thần dân*), are the supreme authorities judging over these principles and other occurrences.

If the poem is to show some coherency, a channel for thought to flow from the first two couplets to the third one is to be built, namely through the words "humanity and righteousness" (*nhân ngĩa*) in the first couplet and the word "cultured/civilization" (*van hien*) in the third one. But this channel does not seem obvious at first glance; it is, however, necessary if the coherency of the poem is supposed. Under the conditions of coherency, this implicitness leads to an effect of self-reference, either a mutual reinforcement or a loophole: *nhân ngĩa* is referred to *van hien* and vice versa. It is plausible, however, that Nguyen Trai took the link between *nhân ngĩa* and *van hien* for granted. If so, for him, "humanity and righteousness" represent the very contents of "civilization."

Posed as if a truism but also referred to other, more primary, truisms, the *quoc* of Dai Viet represents exactly an emergent matter of course. Let us look closely at the main contents of this emergent order, which are demonstrated in the five couplets following the first two. In the third couplet, there is an attribution of the Dai Viet "land" (*quoc*) to a "civilized congregation" (*van hien chi bang*, O'Harrow's translation: "cultured nation"). In the fourth couplet, the poem claims that there are differences between "territories of mountain and stream" (*son xuyen chi phong vuc*) as well as between "customs of south and north" (*nam bac chi phong tục*). It is not quite clear as for what the "territories" and "customs" refer to, but judging from the

context of the poem and from the context of the standard Sino-Vietnamese usage of the period, it is reasonable to assume that Nguyen Trai means in those lines the distinctiveness of the south's (i.e., Dai Viet's) territory and customs, from the ones of the north (i.e., China). Here, the text is reasonably not about the south and north of Dai Viet, which is already the "southern empire," but "south" and "north" mean the southern and the northern empire respectively.⁷ The fifth couplet exhibits Dai Viet by means of its history of statehood, claiming that this is as long-rooted and sovereign as the one of its counterpart, the northern empire. The first line of the sixth couplet is ambivalent because it can be rendered equally accurately either as "the strengths [of Dai Viet] alternate in the course of time" or "although the strengths [of Dai Viet and China] are now and then not equal to one another." But it is clear that the second line of the couplet refers the 'fact' of never lacking outstanding talents to the *quoc* of Dai Viet. The image of the *quoc* of Dai Viet, which is depicted in the Proclamation, appears to be a match against the one of China. The *quoc* of Dai Viet stands in its overall relationship to China and has the overall feature of civilization. It is defined particularly by a separate 'territory', a distinct 'way of life', a long-rooted 'history', by its sovereign 'government', and last but not least its abundance in 'talents and heroes'. These are also the sources of its strengths, which are demonstrated in its various victories over the northern invaders.

The problem complex underlying the Proclamation is, however, more than Dai Viet's civilized existence parallel to China. In another respect, there is also the problem of fulfilling deeds "human" (Sino-Vietnamese: *nhan*, Chinese: *ren*) and "righteous" (Sino-Vietnamese: *nghia*, Chinese: *yi*), whose quintessence lies in the enterprise of bringing "peace" to the "people." While *quoc* and *bang* are the codes for the emergent order, their relationship to the ultimate truisms is featured by their civilization, their being-cultured, whose fundamental contents are "humanity and righteousness." This civilization link is to produce the effect that the *quoc* of Dai Viet, by means of the principles of humanity and righteousness, possesses direct access to the two supreme authorities, the "heaven" (or "heaven and earth") and the "people" (or "spirits and peoples"). Here, the political order is still intertwined with a cosmic order, but the weight is no longer on the cosmic one (as in Ly Thuong Kiet's poem), for it is not solely the heaven, but also the people who is in charge of judging over the legitimacy of the political order. The parallelism of Dai Viet and China (represented by the figuration of south and north) still plays a crucial role, yet the division now finds its expression not only in the natural aspects (mountain and river), but also in the social ones (way of life and history). Unlike Ly Thuong Kiet's *quoc*, Nguyen Trai's *quoc* is legitimized less via its cosmic relations but more via its social linkage (to the people, by humanity/charity).

4 "Declaration of Independence"

After the conquest of Le Loi, whose triumph was discursively marked by the Proclamation on the Pacification of the Ming Chinese, Dai Viet had been able to persist as an autonomous realm for four and a half centuries before its inheritor, now called

7 See also O'Harrow (1979: 168-9) for a more detailed argumentation.

Dai Nam, was gradually subdivided into a French colony (Cochinchina – today Southern Vietnam) and two French protectorates (Tonkin – today Northern Vietnam, and Annam – today Middle Vietnam) during the third quarter of the 19th century (1859-1883).

In 1945, at the end of World War II, the Viet Minh, whose core was the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP), succeeded in seizing power from the Japanese army. In a mass meeting organized to celebrate Vietnam's independence, which incidentally took place on the same day as Japan declared its capitulation (2 September 1945), a "Declaration of Independence" (Tuyen ngon Doc lap) was announced by Ho Chi Minh, head of the ICP and president of the provisional government of the fresh-born Democratic Republic of Vietnam.⁸

The Declaration is opened with citations from the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen:

"All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

(From the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America: 1776)

"All men are born free and with equal rights, and must always remain free and have equal rights."

(From the French Revolution's Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen: 1791)

Ho Chi Minh's Declaration refers these American and French propositions as "immortal" and "undeniable truths." Having appealed to the 'self-evident truths' inscribed in the American and French 'sacred texts', it accuses the French colonialism of having "abused the standard of liberty, equality and fraternity, ... invaded our country and oppressed our countrymen, ... acted contrary to the ideals of humanity and justice, ... deprived our people of every democratic liberty," and of having "wreck[ed] our country's oneness and prevent[ed] our people from being united." (Cf. Ho Chi Minh 1977: 53). This introductory part is followed by a more detailed list of grievances against the French in order to justify before the world the breaking of ties between the colonies and the mother country. It is worth noting that this argumentation design neatly resembles the one of the American Declaration of Independence. The concluding section of the Vietnamese Independence Declaration is devoted to the explicit arguments for Vietnam's right to freedom and independence. The last paragraph of the Declaration states:

8 There are several reprints of the Declaration, which are not completely identical with one another (Marr 1995: 226f.). A 'standard' English translation can be found in Ho Chi Minh (1977: 53-56). However, none of the Declaration's English translations available to me seems to have paid sufficient attention to the idiosyncratic aspect of codes of discourse such as "dan toc," "nuoc," "dan," "nhan dan," etc. As a result, they render these words in some arbitrary manner, paying little respect to the authors' choice of vocabulary. For example, the same Vietnamese word is translated in different sentences into different English words or some words are translated interchangeably although a close examination could suggest that the text's author did not use those words interchangeably. For that reason, I will use my own translation of the Declaration, while heavily consulting the translation in Ho Chi Minh (1977).

Vietnam has the right to enjoy freedom and independence and in fact has become a free and independent country. The entire Vietnamese nation/people [*dan toc*] are determined to mobilize all their zeal and energy, to sacrifice their lives and property in order to safeguard their freedom and independence.⁹

There are both theoretical and practical reasons for which this statement is made. The practical reasons are claimed in the paragraph next to the final declaration:

A nation/people [*dan toc*] who have courageously opposed French enslavement for more than eighty years, a nation/people who have resolutely sided with the Allies against the fascists during these last years, such a nation/people must be free, such a nation must be independent.

The theoretical reasons are asserted in the paragraph immediately before this one:

We are convinced that the Allies, which at the Teheran and San Francisco Conferences upheld the principle of equality among the nations [*dan toc*], cannot fail to recognize the right of the Vietnamese nation/people [*dan toc*] to independence.

The ultimate reasons are introduced as self-evident truths in the very beginning of the Declaration. The intratextual context of the Declaration suggests that it is the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen that serve as the supreme discursive authorities for the argumentation in the text.¹⁰ Thus, the primary truisms are the "undeniable truths" inscribed in these discursive authorities, namely the "rights of man and the citizen" to "life," "liberty," "equality" and "the pursuit of happiness." They concern, however, rights of individuals, not of collectives. In the US Declaration of Independence, the inference from the individuals' rights to the collectives' ones is brought about by two propositions built upon the first three in the section of preamble:¹¹

9 I render the word "dan toc" as nation/people because it can adequately be translated neither as "nation" nor as "the people." Shawn McHale indicates that in the 1920-1945 period, "quoc gia" was often used to mean nation, and "chu nghĩa quoc gia" to refer to nationalism. But "quoc gia" also had the meaning of state – reflecting the fact that in this period, nationalism was still often conceived in elitist and statist terms. In this early period, the terms "dan toc" was little used. According to McHale's observation, in the 1930s, people – especially communists – started to use the term "dan toc" to refer to the people. It was also at this time that the term "chu nghĩa dan toc" – what McHale sometimes translates as "ethnonationalist populism" – came into use. At this time, Vietnamese radicals began to talk about "chu nghĩa dan toc" as well, contrasting this view of nationalism (as an ethnonationalist, popularly based belief) with the believes of people like Bui Quang Chieu or Pham Quynh, all of whom had elitist views of nationalism (e-mail to the author, dated 7 May 1999). I am indebted to Shawn McHale for this information.

10 David Marr, judging from the historical context, comments: "Anxious to link Việt Nam's present with past world revolutionary traditions, and to bow diplomatically toward Washington and Paris, Hồ Chí Minh opened [the Vietnamese Independence Declaration] with a quotation from the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, mentioned previously, and followed that with a passage from the 1791 French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen" (1995: 226). On the other hand, the quotations from the 1776 and 1789 Declarations might serve another intention as well: "In deciding to open the Declaration with the 1776 and 1789 quotations, Hồ Chí Minh was not only tipping his hat to Washington and Paris, but more importantly placing Vietnam squarely within the world revolutionary line of succession. While it was not politic to mention the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, educated listeners could draw their own conclusions" (ibid.: 229).

11 See Lucas (1989) for a discussion of the rhetoric style of the American Declaration of Independence.

Proposition 1: All men are created equal.

Proposition 2: They [all men, from proposition 1] are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.

Proposition 3: Among these [man's unalienable rights, from proposition 2] are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

Proposition 4: To secure these rights [man's unalienable rights, from propositions 2 and 3] governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.

Proposition 5: Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends [securing man's unalienable rights, from propositions 2-4], it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

(See Lucas 1989)

Unlike the American Declaration of Independence, the Vietnamese one has made no explicit inference from the *individuals'* rights to liberty and equality to the *nations'* rights to freedom and independence. Beside the "unalienable rights" to life, liberty, equality and happiness as well as the ideals of humanity and justice, it affirms the rights to statehood and national unity without giving any reasons. In other words, it considers the rights to statehood and national unity as being self-evident as it regards the individuals' rights to life, democratic liberty, equality and happiness. However, if the Declaration is to maintain a coherency, it must suggest an implicit generalization that bridges the gap between the individuals' rights to liberty and equality and the nations' rights to freedom and independence. Again, like the implicitness of the link between humanity and righteousness and civilization in Nguyen Trai's Proclamation, the omitted connection between the individuals' rights and the nations' rights in Ho Chi Minh's Declaration produces either a loophole or a mutual reinforcement. Probably, Ho simply took the generalization for granted. On the other hand, he might mean that the individuals' rights to liberty and equality and the nations' rights to freedom and independence are each other's premises.

This implicitness forces the interpreter to look after contexts other than the Declaration itself. We may now take up the motto of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: "Independence – Freedom – Happiness." (This is also the motto of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, which has inherited it from the DRV.) As to whose independence, freedom and happiness this motto refers to is made explicit in an October 1945 letter of Ho Chi Minh to the People's Committees in the whole country (North, Middle, South) and at all levels (province, district and village). He wrote: "But without happiness and freedom for the populace [*dan*], the country's [*nuoc*] independence would be meaningless."¹² As the word "dan" denotes both a collective (the populace of a country) and a category of humans (the human in the state – in the modern

12 See Ho Chi Minh (1977: 59) for a 'standard' translation of this letter. This translation renders the word "*dan*" as "the people." In fact, the term "dan" denotes the common people in the state and/or the population of a country. It is often used in contrast to "the government," "the court" as well as "the official" or "the mandarin." Thus it can be best translated as "populace," while "the people" reserved for such terms as "nhan dan" or "dan toc."

sense, this is the citizen), and there is no distinction between the terms "liberty" and "freedom" (both are "tu do") in Vietnamese, this ambiguity left a broad leeway to interpretation in human rights debates among those Vietnamese, who appeal to Ho Chi Minh for authority. The contrasts he made in that sentence cause a strong tendency toward "freedom" meaning personal freedom. Given these contrasts, the 'liberal' may interpret "dan duoc tu do" as liberty for the citizen. But the official Party line wants to see herein freedom for the people as a whole, meaning by *dan* not an aggregation of persons but an 'organic' whole. A recent illustration for the Party standpoint can be found in the commentary of the Party's central daily *Nhan Dan* in the May 13, 1999 issue, which described NATO's air strike on Yugoslavia as "an insult to human rights." Contrary to the Western concept of human rights, which was utilized in order to provide the moral basis for the military attack of the Western alliance, the Vietnam Communist Party organ claimed: "The most fundamental human right is the right to live peacefully in an independent nation."

Interpreting a text means putting it into a certain context. This context can be the text itself; in this case the overall criteria are the presumed self-consistency and coherency of the text. One can also (and often does) take other works of the same author or his/her real life as the context. It seems that anyone who is judging from Ho Chi Minh's communist background would come to an interpretation for the Declaration's mysterious network of reference between personal freedoms and national independence, an interpretation that is similar to the above quoted Party standpoint. In David Marr's reading, for instance, "there was the implicit assumption that personal freedoms needed to be deferred until the nation of Vietnam was strong and safe from foreign threats" (1995: 229). This understanding, however, is not completely free from conflict with Ho's own clarification that "if *dan* (the populace) would not be allowed to enjoy happiness and freedom, the country's independence would be meaningless," for reasons I have discussed in the last paragraph. But even if one takes the September 1945 Declaration of Independence and the October 1945 Letter together for forming a self-referential system, which is quite reasonable, the ambiguity of the notion "dan" still remains vivid. The term "*dan*" Ho used in the two texts can generate both meanings "nation/people" and "the citizen," but remains best to be translated to the more generic term "populace." Thus, "tu do cho dan" – freedom for the populace, in Ho's sense, rather means a vague liberty of the populace as a whole *vis-à-vis* the government. As such, freedom for the populace can include individual liberties and personal freedoms as well. David Marr's reading provides an opposing interpretation because his context is the historical circumstances in late 1945 (Cf. Marr 1995: 229). This kind of interpretation presumes consistency and coherency of word and deed, which is not necessarily an inevitable criterion of textual analysis. At this score, however, one has to distinguish between textual effects, which involve the text-reader interaction, and the thought process the text's author actually had in his/her mind when writing the text. The two are not independent from one another but each retains its own autonomy.

At the heart of the Independence Declaration stands Vietnam's right to freedom and independence. Here, Vietnam is regarded both as a *nuoc* (country/state) and a *dan toc* (nation/people). While *nuoc* can be considered as the vernacular version of *quoc*,

the term *dan toc* was created in the modern age to translate the (originally West European) notion of nation. *Dan toc's* invention and re-invention have to do with the East-West cultural encounter in general and with the phenomena and concepts of nation and nationalism in particular. The relationship between *nuoc* and *dan toc*, as appears in the text of the Declaration, is the relationship of a country with its sovereign. Sovereignty of *dan toc* is equated with freedom and independence of *nuoc*. The two constitute the emergent matter of course for which the Declaration endeavors to argue.

The problem complex underlying the Declaration stands in the relations of Vietnam to actors of international arena, namely France, the US, Japan, the Allies and, last but not least, the world, to which the Declaration is addressed. On the other hand, it focuses on the relationship between the country and its sovereign, the nation/people. While *nuoc* and *dan toc* are the codes for what is reasoned as the emergent order, the content to these codes is a twofold order. An external order covers Vietnam's relations to the world. In the moment the Declaration was announced, this order is highlighted by the newborn state's relationship to France, Japan, America and the Allies. An internal order is made up, on the one hand, of the country, its sovereign (the nation/people) and the relations between them, on the other hand, of its government, its populace and the relationship between the government and the populace, wherein the government is defined as "representing the entire Vietnamese populace [*toan dan Viet Nam*]." This internal order is further clarified in the October 1945 letter of Ho Chi Minh to the People's Committees in the whole country and at all levels:

Our nation/people's [*dan toc*] unity and the Government's wise guidance have allowed us to break the bonds of slavery and win back our independence and freedom... Without the populace [*dan*], we shall have no strength; without the Government, no guidance. Therefore, the Government and the populace [*dan*] must form a monolithic whole. We have founded the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. But without happiness and freedom for the populace [*dan*], independence for the country [*nuoc*] would be meaningless.¹³

It is worth noting that also in this text Ho Chi Minh did not use the terms "dan" (populace/people) and "dan toc" (nation/people) interchangeably. The unity of *dan toc* refers to the monolithic whole formed by the government and the *dan*, whose representative is the government. A picture emerges from four interrelated elements, *nuoc* (country), *dan toc* (nation/people), *chinh phu* (government) and *dan* (populace), with two explicit and two implicit axes. The axis connecting the *dan toc* and the *nuoc* serves as the outer pivot of the whole, while the axis connecting the government and the populace the inner pivot. Implicitly, there are also the relationship between the country (*nuoc*) and its populace (*dan*) and the relationship between the government and the nation/people (*toan dan* can be regarded as a shorthand phrase for *toan the dan toc*).

13 See Ho Chi Minh (1977: 59).

5 "Let the Entire People Unite to Build the Socialist Vietnamese Fatherland"

The birth of a new Vietnamese polity was proclaimed by the Declaration of Independence, but the existence of this modern state was immediately questioned by the great powers in the region: France, China (Kuomintang), Great Britain and, to an increasing extent, the United States. This state, in order to maintain its standing in the world, had to involve in two succeeding wars, the first Indochina War (1946-1954) and the second, usually called the Vietnam War (1961/4-1973/5). The Vietnam War ended in 1975 with the military win of the state founded by Ho Chi Minh. In the following year Vietnam was officially reunified and the state was renamed the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. This event was marked by the first session of the National Assembly of reunified Vietnam in mid-1976. Central to this session, a "Political Report" was delivered by Le Duan, First Secretary of the ruling Vietnam Workers' Party. The core ideas and standpoints presented in this Political Report were repeated in the Political Report of the Central Committee to the Fourth Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party in late 1976 and, by the Stalinist usage, enshrined in the Congress's Resolution, which is to be held the most momentous document guiding the society in the following period (Cf. SRVN 1976, CPVN 1977).¹⁴

The Political Report to the National Assembly is entitled "Toan Dan Doan ket Xay dung To quoc Viet Nam Xa hoi Chu nghia" (Let the Entire People Unite to Build the Socialist Vietnamese Fatherland).¹⁵ It is subdivided in six sections. The first section acclaims and gives a general assessment of the Vietnamese people's victory over the "US imperialists," the victory which led to the reunification of Vietnam and opened the opportunity for socialism-building in both regions (the South and the North) of the "Vietnamese Fatherland." The second section delivers the arguments for the central statement about the characteristics of the "new stage of socialist revolution." In the third section, the long-term general strategies for socialist revolution in this new stage are outlined. The fourth section is devoted to the determination of the concrete tasks to implement the line set out in the previous section and of the foreign policy. The fifth section concerns the constitution and proposes in the name of the

14 The vision of polity outlined in this Report is still effective and ruling in early 21st century Vietnam.

15 An official English translation of the Political Report is documented in the booklet "The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam – Structure and Basis" (see SRVN 1976). The word "to quoc" plays a crucial role in this statement: It is the building of *to quoc* what the Report is all about. *To quoc* means literally "ancestral land," but it can relatively aptly be rendered as "motherland," "fatherland," or "homeland" because they all share the meaning of "the country of one's parents or ancestors" (see Merriam-Webster 1994: 424, 554, 759). Yet the problem is with the overtone of each word. "Fatherland" has the masculine inclination which does not exist in the Vietnamese term, while "motherland" has the overtone of the country from which people of a colony derive their origin and "homeland" the overtone of the land of one's birth, which does not encompass completely what the term "to quoc" emphasises. The above-mentioned booklet renders the word "to quoc" either as "fatherland" or "homeland." However, in the official English translation of the 1992 Constitution, "to quoc" is translated as "motherland." Yet, this choice of vocabulary can vex the research because there is the Sino-Vietnamese word "mau quoc," which deserves more to be translated as "motherland". In this essay, I have endorsed a double-track option: I render "to quoc" to "homeland/motherland" and "fatherland," both ways of rendition being of equal value.

Party's Central Committee the guiding line for drafting a new constitution. The concluding section reaffirms the will to build a finer fatherland, then transforms this will into a series of slogan, "battle-cry" for the "struggle of socialist transformation and construction."

For the purpose of this essay, I will focus on the second and third sections of the Report. The argumentation begins with the determination of the objectives for the new stage of socialist revolution: building on the fatherland "the finest society that has ever existed in the 4,000-year history of the nation," taking the homeland forward "to reach the radiant peak of civilization," and carrying into practice the "sacred Testament of President Ho: 'To build a peaceful, unified, independent, democratic and prosperous Viet Nam, and make a worthy contribution to the world revolution'" (Cf. SRVN 1976: 16). Afterwards, the Report argues why socialism is the necessary way to achieve these objectives. The chief propositions claimed in this part are:

In the present era, when socialism is the only solution to all urgent problems facing the various countries on the road forward, national independence and socialism are inseparable, indeed are closely bound together (SRVN 1976: 16).

and

Today, when our Fatherland has gained complete independence and when the country has been cleared of all aggressors and has been reunified, nation [*dan toc*] and socialism merge into one (ibid.: 17).

The inseparability of national independence and socialism, the fusion of nation and socialism, are the "content of the age" – as the Party propaganda often says; moreover, this is the "truth of our time" – as stated in the Report (ibid.: 16). An ultimate point of reference for these propositions is the "law of development of human society," which dictates the "necessary development of the Vietnamese revolution ... in our era, the era of transition from capitalism to socialism on a world-wide scale" (ibid.). The Report points out that it is Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party who realized and acted in accordance with this 'requirements of the time,' this 'historical imperative,' by "integrating patriotism with socialism" and "holding high the banner of national independence and socialism." This "combination of the strength of our nation with that of our time" is, the Report explains, the reason why the Vietnamese have won the wars with "two big imperialisms," the French and the American (ibid.: 17).

The addressees of the revolution are "the working people" and "our Homeland." Taken for granted are the working people's "age-old dream of being for ever freed from oppression, exploitation, cold and hunger and of enjoying a plentiful life, a secure future, a civilized and happy life" as well as the ideals of the Vietnamese *to quoc's* "eternal independence and prosperity" and "complete unity" (ibid.: 17f.).

The domain of the ultimate truisms is therefore many-layered. At one level, there is the necessary telos of human history discovered by Marxism-Leninism (ibid.: 16). At a second level, the country, the nation and the homeland/motherland possess the qualities that their right to independence, prosperity and unity is unquestionable. Furthermore, there are not only "our," i.e. Vietnamese, nation and people but also

"the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world" (ibid.: 17), which can be located at a third level of the domain of the supreme discursive authorities. The picture of this primary order can be imagined as an advance obedient to the developmental laws of human history, discovered by Marxism-Leninism and realized by Ho Chi Minh and the Communist Party, in this advance the Vietnamese nation takes part side by side with other oppressed nations and working peoples of the world. This is not merely a picture of "working men of all countries, unite" (The Communist Manifesto) but also one of "the oppressed nations of the world" and, first and foremost, of "our people [*nhan dan*], our country [*nuoc*], our nation [*dan toc*], our fatherland [*to quoc*]."

Summing up the second section, the Report is conflating the ends and the means:

For each of us Vietnamese, love of country [*nuoc*] now means love of socialism; it means devoting all our zeal, strength, intelligence and talent to the building of our socialist homeland [*to quoc*] (ibid.: 18).

The part following this overall statement, then, outlines "the basic content" of this 'grand design' of building a socialist homeland/motherland. That is the task of "socialist transformation and socialist construction" in all fields of society: building a new, socialist economy, including socialist industrialization, large-scale socialist production and socialist relations of production; building a new, socialist culture, including socialist revolution in ideology; and building a new, socialist type of man (SRVN 1976: 20-36). This all-round socialist transformation and construction would amount to a novel social system, the "regime of socialist collective mastery" (*che do lam chu tap the xa hoi chu nghia*). The building of regime of socialist collective mastery is the common purpose of the transformations of economy, culture and man (ibid.: 36). Thus, building a socialist homeland/motherland is nothing but constructing a regime of socialist collective mastery. The reason why this regime is worth achieving is: "This is genuine mastery, mastery in the fullest sense of the word" (ibid.: 37). Here, the point of reference is the Communist Manifesto or, more exactly, a quotation from the Manifesto: "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (SRVN 1976: 37). In the Communist Manifesto, this phrase refers to a future association that the communists believe will take the place of the old bourgeois society, the one of classes and class antagonisms. The regime of socialist collective mastery, in which "on the basis of full mastery by the collective, by the social community, full freedom is ensured for everyone" (ibid.: 36-7), is therefore identified as the society of future, the one which has necessarily to come after the "law of development of human society."

The pivotal issue to the Report is the regime of socialist collective mastery. We have seen how this order is argued to be a matter of course, an emergent order. Let us look at its content now. This order finds "its concentrated expression" in the trilateral relationship between "the Party" (*Dang*), "the State" (*Nha nuoc*),¹⁶ and "the people" (*nhan dan*). That is "the mastery exercised by the working people through the socialist State and under the leadership of the vanguard Party of the working class"

16 I deliberately distinguish between "the state" in my own vocabulary and "the State" in Le Duan's language. This is because I use the word "state" in a broader sense and descriptive manner, while Le Duan conceived of "the State" obviously in a much more particular sense and prescriptive manner.

(SRVN 1976: 37). This relationship is also identified as a "proletarian dictatorship" (ibid.: 39). Later, a concise formula to this order – "the Party as leader, the people as master, the State as administrator" (*Dang lanh dao, nhan dan lam chu, Nha nuoc quan ly*)¹⁷ – became a popular slogan and found its preeminent place in the Preamble of the 1992 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. The Preamble indicates that one of the central functions of the Constitution is to institutionalize this relationship between the Party, the State and the people. In other words, the formula "the Party as leader, the people as master, the State as administrator" carries the essence of the socialist *to quoc* as it *should be*.

The problem complex underlying the Report is centered on the building of a socialist fatherland. Rhetorically, it is no "nation-building" and more than mere "state-building." It is "Fatherland-building" (*xay dung To quoc*), a fatherland that is socialist. This fatherland building involves building a "correct relationship between the Party, the people and the State." The Report uses the formula "State of the people, by the people and for the people" to characterize the relationship between the State and the people (ibid.: 37). Yet, the content Le Duan ascribed to this formula must differ completely from the one Abraham Lincoln might have in mind when speaking of "Government of the people, by the people, for the people" in his Gettysburg Address (1863).¹⁸ The Report stresses that, on the one hand, "our people in general must be re-organized in a careful, concentrated and comprehensive way into a State," on the other, "[the State] pervades [the socioeconomic structure] instead of lying above or on the margin of that structure, ... applies all measures – administrative and economic, educational and legal measures, coercion and persuasion, organizational and ideological work – so as to manage the economy and society in all respects" (SRVN 1976: 37). Thus, the State is (read: should be) *the* totalitarian organization of the people. The State is "of the people, by the people, for the people" in the way that the people exercises their mastery over society and manage their own lives through the State (ibid.). The paragraph characterizing the nature of the State through its relationship with the people suggests that the totalitarianness of the State would make the highly-organizedness of the people possible and vice versa (Cf. SRVN 1976: 37f.).

While the relationship between the State and the people still shows some symmetry, the relationship between the two and the Party is definitely asymmetric. "Party leadership alone" will communicate to the activities of both the State and the people a "strong revolutionary" and a "truly scientific character" (ibid.: 38f.). Streams of scientificity and revolutionariness can spill from the Party into the State and the

17 Literally, the formula can be rendered as "the Party leads, the people masters, the State manages." There is no convergence in translation of this formula, however. The problem is with the word "quan ly," which is rendered as "manager" in earlier translations but changed into "administrator" in later ones. This probably has to do with the Vietnam Communist Party's changing policy on the role to be played by "the State" in the economy. In Vietnamese, the verb "quan ly" has various connotations such as "monitor," "supervise," and "control," beside "manage" and "administer," but the strongest connotation in contemporary usage is probably "control."

18 It is not sure whether Le Duan was aware of Lincoln's authorship of the formula "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." It is, however, certain that a genealogical thread of the slogan "State of the people, by the people, for the people" stems from Ho Chi Minh.

people because "[s]cience and revolution, revolution and science, these are the twofold essence of the Party" (ibid.: 38). The Party, for its own part, obtains this twofold essence from Marxism-Leninism – which is to Le Duan the scientific doctrine of revolution – by firmly grasping this ideological system. The asymmetric relationship between the Party on the one hand and the State plus the people on the other is reinforced by the statement that the source of strength, "the best guarantee of success for the socialist revolution in the new stage," as well as "the basic factor in all the great victories of the Vietnamese revolution over the past decades" has been and is the Party's leadership (Cf. ibid.).

At the heart of the pivotal issue to the Report there are (i) an identity of nation and socialism, (ii) the building of this identity, now dubbed "socialist Fatherland," whose very nature is (iii) the "regime of collective mastery." While "socialist Fatherland" and "regime of collective mastery" are the codes for the emergent order the Report endeavors to argue for, their contents have two sides. An external side encompasses their relations with "the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world" and, in a negative sense, with "imperialism." An internal order can be pictured by means of a triangle whose three vertices are "the Party," "the State," and "the people," where the mutual interrelationship of the people being comprehensively organized into the State and of the State pervading all aspects of social life makes the bottom line, while the Party stands at the top, pouring out of its essence scientificity and revolutionariness over the bottom. The Party itself possesses scientificity and revolutionariness due to its firm grasp of Marxism-Leninism. By virtue of its relationship to Marxism-Leninism, the Party attains "the truth of our time" and the governing rules of human history, thus providing through its leadership the best guarantee of success for the socialist revolution. A political order entwines with a historical order, where the linkage is legitimized via intellectual power of "the vanguard party of the working class."

6 The Frame and the Contours of the Pictures

I have explored four conceptions of polity in order to figure out in each: (i) the emergent order (secondary matter of course, pivotal issue), (ii) its ultimate points of reference (primary truisms, supreme discursive authorities), (iii) the characteristics of the linkage between the two, (iv) sources of strength for the emergent order, and (v) the problem complex underlying the emergent order. I have also highlighted how these things are encoded and what their contents are. The contents are identified in terms of networks of reference. Here, the word "content" is used not as opposed to "form" but as distinct from "code." Content is no negation of form; it is more than form in the one respect and less than form in the other. In terms of the distinction form/medium, *content* can be conceived of as *form within medium*, while *code* as *form without medium*. These formulations also help clarify the differences between content and meaning, for *meaning* belongs to the category of *medium*.¹⁹

19 For a discussion of the distinction form|medium and meaning as medium, see Luhmann 1997: 44ff., 190ff.

Comparing the four conceptions of state, we can remark some striking similarities and differences between these Vietnamese experiences throughout the passing millennium:

1. All four concepts locate the state at the junction of an outside world and an inside realm. In Ly Thuong Kiet's and Nguyen Trai's, it is exclusively the Northern Empire (China) that embodies the outside world; while in Ho Chi Minh's and Le Duan's, the outside world encompasses the entire globe and particularly the great powers in the region.
2. The codes of polity vary over time. In the late 11th century, Ly Thuong Kiet used solely *quoc* (country/state) to encode a polity. *Bang* (congregation/nation) appeared in Nguyen Trai's Proclamation in the early 15th century, but *quoc* might be more standard and both could be used interchangeably. In the mid-20th century, Ho Chi Minh applied both words "nuoc" (country/state – the vernacular version of *quoc*) and "dan toc" (nation/people) to designate a polity. Yet, *dan toc* is the more specific term, therefore, designates more aptly his specific polity form, though he could use both words more or less interchangeably. In the late 20th century, Le Duan reinvented the term "to quoc" (fatherland) to denote his time-specific form of polity, certainly taking such words as "nuoc" (country) or "dan toc" (nation) for more general.
3. The salient features of polity also change in the course of time. For Ly Thuong Kiet, a polity (*quoc*) is defined by the inhabitation (*cu*) of a domain (*son ha*) by its ruler (*de*). For Nguyen Trai, the characteristics of a state include dimensions such as territory (*phong vuc*), way of life (*phong tục*), emperorship (*de*), and the talents (*hao kiet*). In the mid-20th century, Ho Chi Minh's polity encompasses four components on two sides. On the external side, there are the country (*nuoc*) and its sovereign, the nation (*dan toc*); on the internal side, the government (*chinh phu*) and the populace (*dan*). 30 years later, Le Duan redefines his socialist fatherland in terms of the Party (*Dang*), the State (*nha nuoc*) and the people (*nhân dân*).
4. Subject to change are the ultimate sources of authority as well. For Ly Thuong Kiet, only heaven can judge and rule over earthly occurrences. In Nguyen Trai's view, the supreme judges and governors are no longer wholly cosmic: There is *dan* (the populace) beside heaven in the 'last instance'. Ho Chi Minh's Declaration seems to bear the impress of modernity: He refers ultimately to the ideals of the American and French revolutions, and the people's will seems to co-determine the course of history. For Le Duan, the world and history function after objective laws discovered by Marxism-Leninism.
5. The basic concerns do not remain the same either. For Ly Thuong Kiet in 1077, it is the defense of natural domain for the southern emperor; for Nguyen Trai in 1428, the restoration of humane and righteous peace for the populace; for Ho Chi Minh in 1945, the reestablishment of freedom and independence for the nation; while for Le Duan in 1976, it is the building of socialist society for the working people and the fatherland.

7 The Code, the Content, and the Co-reference

Albeit varying in their specific features, all the threads communicating between the emergent order and the ultimate sources have at least one in common: They intermingle the particular with the universal, the 'domestic' with the 'international', the local with the global. These linkages function as the chief arguments legitimizing the respective Vietnamese polities. Each of them embeds an image of political order into a worldview.

1. Ly Thuong Kiet's poem bases its chief argument on the natural link between the cosmic order and the political order found on earth (there are the south and the north distinct from each other, henceforth, the southern emperor, too, have the right to rule on his own domain so as does the northern emperor on his one). This natural link, therefore, is one of the major features of his view of the world. At that time, the classic Chinese concept of the world was the "under heaven" (Sino-Vietnamese: *thien ha*, Chinese: *tianxia*), with which Ly Thuong Kiet must have been familiar. It is tempting to assume that this worldview was shared by Ly Thuong Kiet and his contemporaries in Vietnam, China and other Sinitic countries of his time. Yet the similarity was but in the *codes*. The *contents* of the two worldviews conflicted with each other in the most crucial point: The Chinese concept of "under heaven" stressed the existence of only one single sun under heaven, whereas Ly Thuong Kiet asserted exactly the opposite. The concept depicted in Ly Thuong Kiet's poem can be considered as representative for the Ly concept of world order since it must have caught some core patterns of the belief Ly Thuong Kiet shared with his audience (here: his troops) about the human world. Yet, if formulated in a binary frame of China vs. Vietnam, it could only represent our 20th century view of the regional order in this area. For, if the Chinese court's power depended upon bureaucratic control, one cannot uncritically assume *the* Chinese concept of world order shared by everyone lived at that time in the territory under the Chinese emperor's rule. It is possible that the patterns of world order as believed by Ly Thuong Kiet shared some common features with the ones believed by a certain local community in China.²⁰ If that proves true, then we have to 'deconstruct' our 'regionalist' and 'nationalist' vocabulary when talking about the past(s). In a recent article, from another perspective, Keith Taylor (1998) has also cast doubts on the appropriateness of our 20th century regional and national frames in analyzing the past(s), calling for a move "beyond histories of nation and region."

2. The universal order presented in Nguyen Trai's Proclamation is encoded by such words as *nhan* (humanity), *nghia* (righteousness) and *van hien* (civilized). At first glance, Nguyen Trai seems to have shared the ideology on universal order of this kind not only with his own country's literati but also with literati in China and other Sinicized countries of his time. Yet his emphasis was two-faceted. On the one hand, there were the supreme values and key codes of discourse shared with China (and

20 To the best of my knowledge, this topic still remains a 'virgin land' for researchers. One of the first attempts to discuss a possible "textual community" along the South China coast in Song China's Yue region and in Ly Dai Viet could be James Anderson's paper that was presented at the 1999 Association for Asian Studies Annual Meeting. However, he eventually changed the direction of his interest in the paper to another topic (see Anderson 1999).

other 'Sinitic' countries of that time). On the other, Nguyen Trai displayed a vision of *quoc* and *bang* (country/state and nation/congregation) that contradicts the ones believed by his Chinese contemporaries. Stephen O'Harrow (1979: 173f.) notes:

Altogether, Nguyen Trai's vision of the nation is more reasoned, more comprehensive than previously seen. Yet, at the same time, it is more particularly Vietnamese. Where Tran Quoc Tuan chose to cite examples of great warriors from Chinese and even Mongol history, Nguyen Trai could list various defeats of Chinese generals at the hands of the Vietnamese. When he refers to the 'Chinese' tradition, he does so most artfully, readily implying Vietnamese equality within that tradition. Thus, for instance, he creates the saga of his lord in such a way that Le Loi enters the pantheon on a footing with the greatest of heroes, already acknowledged by Chinese and Vietnamese alike.

3. The grand strategy of discourse Ho Chi Minh employed in the 1945 Declaration does not differ from the one used in Nguyen Trai's 1428 Proclamation. The supreme values now are encoded by such words as *tu do* (freedom), *binh dang* (equality), *doc lap* (independence), *bac ai* (fraternity), *dan chu* (democracy) or *hanh phuc* (happiness). Of these words, *tu do*, *binh dang*, *doc lap*, and *dan chu* were invented to translate the Western notions of freedom, equality, independence and democracy respectively, first into Sino-Japanese, then taken over into Sino-Vietnamese. These codes of universal values are shared with "the world" (*the gioi*) that traces its roots from the American and French Revolutions. The code to the category of the most relevant units that make up the world, the *dan toc* (nation/people), is also a shared code of modernity. Yet, my reading of the 1945 Declaration must lead to the question whether Ho Chi Minh's understanding of the content of *dan toc*, his vision of the nation, is as "more particularly Vietnamese" as Nguyen Trai's or it shared much, if not all, of its striking features with certain foreign concepts of nation such as the Soviet ones by Lenin or Stalin, and the Chinese ones by Sun Yatsen or Mao Zedong. In any case, modernity to Ho Chi Minh, as well as Confucianism to Nguyen Trai, to use O'Harrow's metaphors, "is the framework within which events took place, but not necessarily the motor which propelled them" (O'Harrow 1979: 174). Indeed, Ho Chi Minh, while referring the theoretical reasons of Vietnam's freedom and independence to the American and French propositions and the Allies' pledges, has pointed to his nation/people's own endeavors, sacrifices, courage, zeal and energy as the practical reasons for Vietnam's freedom and independence.

4. In the 1976 Report, Le Duan clearly endeavored to integrate the national into the international. He was to explain and justify why and how "nation and socialism merge into one" (SRVN 1976: 17). In order to do that, he referred to the "law of development of human society" and the "truth of our time" (ibid.: 16). The universal order now was no longer a spatial, i.e. timeless, image, but extended to and expressed its major meaning in the dimension of time. The values that link the global order of socialism and the local order of the Vietnamese nation are encoded by such words as *khoa hoc* and *cach mang*. These words were created in the modern age to translate the Western notions "science" and "revolution" respectively. In Le Duan's view, these values are also universal – that is, they are shared by the world as he thinks of. The code to the local order, the *to quoc* (homeland/motherland or fatherland), is not particularly Vietnamese either. One can find the Soviet counterpart of

this code in the 1936 (Article 133: "To defend the fatherland is the sacred duty of every citizen of the USSR") and 1977 Constitution of the USSR (Chapter 5: "Defense of the Socialist Motherland"), which had been standards for the Vietnamese Communist rhetoric. Thus, the reinvention of the term "to quoc" in the 1976 Report seems to be a local Vietnamese manifestation of a shared process that occurred in the Soviet-led world under Stalinism and Neo-Stalinism as an attempt to avoid the 'classic' nationalist framework which contradicts the internationalism of the working class. Yet, once the perspective of escape from nationalism has come into play, one can also mention the slogan "Europe of Fatherlands" (stemming from de Gaulle's concept of "Europe des patries"), which was arising in debates over the evolving framework for the 'postnational' European Community/Union. Thus, these perspectives can pose the concept of socialist fatherland within the broader context of 'postmodern' conditions. On the other hand, despite the shared code of "socialist fatherland," it is said by an anecdote that Le Duan claimed the concept of "collective mastery" and, therefore, the formula "the Party the leader, the people the master, the State the administrator" to be uniquely Vietnamese, even, his own inventions. However, the Vietnam Communist Party rhetoric has been employing the "Party-State-people" framework equally for foreign communist countries, too. Here, the figuration of self stands in a complex interrelationship with the figuration of other.

8 Mechanisms of World Formation

The ways of intermingling the universal with the particular, the 'domestic' with the 'international', as depicted in the four texts suggest the existence of a level at which the codes are shared within a "world." Each documents set out to define a Vietnamese identity respectively. In doing so, they utter their own points of view regarding their respective self. In either case, from the point of view of the self, the self is not derivative of the other(s) but rather, the self and the other(s) are equal constituents of a larger world. To the four texts, the Vietnamese selves regard the institutions and values they endorse neither "Chinese" (in the cases of Ly Thuong Kiet and Nguyen Trai) nor "Western" or "European" (in the cases of Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan). Rather – and what Stephen O'Harrow (1979: 174) concludes on musing over Nguyen Trai's view of the world are also true for Ly Thuong Kiet, Ho Chi Minh and Le Duan – "they were sharers within a larger circle." Self and other are configured and the configuration of self and other involves the figuration of the world. The 'mechanism' of this configuration is what I would call the *coreference*, the interreference that universalizes a series of key codes of discourse. The universalization of code is not accompanied by the universalization of content, however.

This 'superficial' universalization is true not only for the four Vietnamese cases depicted in this essay. For nonmodern Southeast Asia in the lowlands as well as the uplands, Deborah Tooker (1996) has concluded a similar phenomenon, though she focused more on the static than on the dynamic aspect of the topic. She found that despite the universality of a set of spatial codes that index hierarchical status and power direction, these symbolics are used differently according to contexts and points of view: Their semantic contents undergo contextual shifts. The target of

Tooker's critique were the "encompassment models" of polity described by generations of Southeast Asia scholars hitherto:

These models of precolonial polity proposed by Heine-Geldern (1942), Wheatley (1983), Tambiah ('galactic polity' in the form of a center surrounded by satellites) (1977), Geertz ('theatre state' and 'sinking status' pattern) (1980), Condominas (*emboîtement*, 'emboxment') (1978, 1980) and Errington (1989), or even by Marxist approaches where the models are labeled as 'ideology', take the same form, namely, a vertical, totalizing top-down, center-out hierarchy of levels by which higher levels encompass lower ones. Thus, these approaches can be characterized as following a Dumontian style of encompassment hierarchy. While encompassment *is* a characteristic of indigenous models (such as the Akha *dzöma*/householder relationship in rice rituals), *the model itself is not encompassing*, and must be related to specific contextual usages that have political and status implications of hegemony and resistance. In fact, the notion of encompassment is so inherently political (as it implies political hegemony) that it would be difficult to imagine general applicability of any single encompassment model. Politically speaking, encompassment always proceeds from a particular set of interests (Tooker 1996: 351, original emphasis).

In addition to the encompassment model, where the pattern of power at a high level is covering all lower levels of geointegration (e.g., the incorporation in *myan* or state-level *mandala* polities of village polities and households), Tooker showed the existence of alternative concepts, such as that of the Akha, who "index a different center of potency (whose content is defined differently), that of their own village polity, and reverse the order of hierarchy and status relations with the dominant polity, *using the same symbolic spatial set as used in the lowlands*" (ibid.: 352, original emphasis). The four Vietnamese texts I have pictured represent a third model that is neither encompassing nor reversing-replicating but 'matching'. These Vietnamese states are considered (by Vietnamese state-makers) as equal components of the world, be the world made of "the North" and "the South" (as in Ly Thuong Kiet's and Nguyen Trai's poems) or of the modern, sovereign nation-states (as in Ho Chi Minh's declaration and Le Duan's report).

All the three models indicate that there is no universality of the contents, but rather the contents are redefined, reoriented, in different ways according to contexts and points of view. Local innovations, adoptions or manipulations can contribute to this reorientation. As a result, the world that exists in human mind is not homogeneous in content but, at the same time, united in code. On the one hand, a polity would be meaningless without a larger world. The state is cogenerated but nonidentical with the world. On the other, the world is universalized by code (form without meaning) but not by content (form within meaning). Thus, world formation operates at two levels. At the 'macro' level, there are processes of *semiotic universalization* by which a set of codes generates a world (which in turn pertains to this set of codes). The mechanism of world formation at this level is coreference. At the 'micro' level, there are processes of *semantic reorientation* by which the contents to these codes are redefined and used in different fashions according to contexts and points of view. We can identify at least three mechanisms of world formation at this level: (i) 'encompassment' as described in many models of the *mandala* polity, (ii) 'reversal replica-

tion' as exemplified by the Akha, and (iii) 'match' or 'emulation' as presented by the four Vietnamese conceptions of state.

This two-level model of world formation suggests the existence of mediating mechanisms between the levels of the codes and the contents. It is beyond the scope of this essay to illustrate these mediating mechanisms. However, it is not difficult to observe phenomena where changes in the contents lead to changes in the codes and vice versa. Since contents are forms within meaning and codes are forms without meaning, the reorientation of contents can involve not only the redefinition of meanings but also the manipulation of forms, which can lead to the change of codes. The change of codes in turn can obviously generate the redefinition of meanings.

It is worth emphasizing that the models of polity and mechanisms of world formation I have presented above are *ideational* realities, not *socioeconomic* ones. This accounts for the textual bias of the analysis I have done. Here, the world is examined in its communicative aspects. Given the mechanism of coreference, a world can be defined as the universe of a set of shared codes. It is united 'formally' (by code) but not 'informally' (by content). The world at large is woven by the cross-reference of overlapping and intersecting subworlds and the binding elements are the codes. It is the polity that plays a key role in the generation and construction of the world.

This two-level mechanism applies not only to synchronies but also to diachronies. We have seen how Dai Viet and China, or Vietnam and France, or the Akha and the Thai, belong to one world respectively. They shared the same codes but not the same contents to these codes. A similar phenomenon can be observed among the various Vietnamese states throughout the centuries. Our comparison has showed how four ideational polities, while sharing a 'symbolic' commonality, still are not isomorphic.

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(Submitted June 2000)