

Patriotic Thought of Ngo Thi Nham – An Approach from the Perspective of Vietnamese Patriotic Culture in the 18th Century

Le Thuy Hang^{1*}, Nguyen Van Phuong²

^{1,2} Faculty of Political Theory, Tra Vinh University, Vinh Long Province, VIETNAM. Email: lethuyhang@tvu.edu.vn, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8473-6247>, Email: phuongnv1211@tvu.edu.vn, <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6048-5219>

*Corresponding Author: lethuyhang@tvu.edu.vn

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ABSTRACT

Ngo Thi Nham (1746 - 1803) was a prominent Vietnamese scholar official whose life and thought embodied the transformation of patriotic culture in 18th-century Vietnam. Living through the decline of the Le-Trinh regime and the disintegration of Confucian orthodoxy, he confronted a period marked by social unrest, foreign aggression, and moral crisis. This study examines Ngo Thi Nham's patriotic thought through the lens of Vietnamese cultural traditions of patriotism, emphasizing how he redefined the moral foundations of loyalty and national identity. Employing historical-philosophical and cultural analysis, the article identifies three key dimensions of his patriotic philosophy: the principle of relieving the people's burdens as a form of serving the nation; the reinterpretation of loyalty, shifting from fidelity to a dynasty toward devotion to the people and the survival of the country; and the affirmation of national pride through the preservation of Vietnam's cultural autonomy and moral integrity. By situating Ngo Thi Nham within the broader evolution of Vietnamese patriotic culture, this study elucidates how his ideas reflected a transition from feudal loyalty to cultural nationalism, thereby enriching the intellectual heritage of Vietnamese patriotism and contributing enduring values to the nation's philosophical tradition.

Keywords: Ngo Thi Nham; Patriotism; Vietnamese Thought; Confucianism; National Identity; 18th Century Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Patriotism is a fundamental driving force and plays a decisive role in the survival and development of the Vietnamese nation. It has become an enduring cultural tradition of the Vietnamese people, one that did not arise spontaneously but was forged through thousands of years of struggle for independence and peace. This cultural tradition of patriotism has been deeply ingrained in the sentiments, emotions, and willpower of generations of Vietnamese, forming an invincible strength that has enabled the nation to triumph over every invading force, even the most powerful of their time. As President Ho Chi Minh affirmed: "Our people have a deep and passionate love for their country. Throughout history, whenever the nation was invaded, that spirit would surge forth; it formed a tremendous and powerful wave that swept away all dangers and difficulties, and submerged all traitors and invaders" (Ho, 2011d, p. 38).

Moreover, the tradition of patriotism is one of the fundamental value pillars within the system of Vietnamese spiritual and moral values. It serves as a moral criterion for evaluating individuals, distinguishing the good from the bad in society. As Tran observed, "Patriotism has become a social and humanistic philosophy of the Vietnamese people" (Giau, 1980, p. 100)

The 18th century in Vietnam is a historical period with many historic transformations. The Vietnamese feudal dynasty gradually fell into an inevitable decline. The country was divided into two regions by the Trinh and Nguyen

feudal factions for nearly 200 years. Constant warfare between the northern and southern regions caused extreme hardship for the people. The Vietnamese society in the 18th century was primarily based on an agricultural economy with a low level of productivity, resulting in a very backward, stagnant, and conservative social life. The political life had elements of both tragedy and heroism. The tragedy was that the king was not truly a king, the mandarins were not truly mandarins, the country had both a king and a lord, and the Confucian feudal ideology was powerless against the realities of the society. The heroism was that the social conflict between the peasant class and the feudal landlords was increasingly intense. Peasants everywhere revolted and carried out a series of uprisings; as a result, the 18th century was historically named as the century of peasant uprisings, with the pinnacle being the Tay Son uprising. The Tay Son uprising brought a new vitality to the feudal society of that time. It made contributions to the solution of social conflicts by abolishing the Lê-Trịnh-Nguyen feudal regime, and it moved towards national unity. Particularly, the Tay Son peasant uprising fulfilled the will and aspiration to protect the country from invasion by the northern feudal enemies.

The sharp conflict between the peasants and the feudal mode of production, the violent and fierce disintegration of the Le-Trinh political regime, along with the prestige and growth of the Tay Son peasant movement, brought about the deep division of the Confucian scholar class of Vietnam at that time. The division stemmed from the Vietnamese conception of the Confucian concept of loyalty, resulting in three distinct perspectives related to the Tay Son dynasty. It was the first perspective, in which, under the Tay Son dynasty, certain scholars strictly adhered to the sacred Confucian principle of "a loyal subject does not serve two kings". They absolutely opposed the will of the peasants and the nation, and even "set a fox to keep the geese" (allowed invaders to enter the country to harm people). Those were such as Ly Tran Quan, Tran Danh An, and ...etc. It was the second one, in which certain scholars were dissatisfied and pessimistic, and sought to maintain their "pure and noble" status, so they retreated into seclusion and ignored political affairs. Those were such as Le Huu Trac, Nguyen Thiep, Pham Quy Thich, Nguyen Du, and Pham Nguyen Du...etc., It was the third one, in which certain scholars were time-aware and prioritized the interests of the people and the country over their own personal prejudices, siding with the people and the Tay Son insurgents, fighting against invasions, resisting the second invasion by the Qing dynasty, and rebuilding the country after the war. Those were such as Nguyen Thiep, Phan Huy Ich, Ninh Ton, Nguyen Ba Lan, Tran Ba Lam, and Ngo Thi Nham.

One of the prominent historical figures and great thinkers of the period is Ngo Thi Nham. He embodies a true intellectual, capable of closely tracking specific complications of life to make the right decisions that are appropriate to the objective reality. In all circumstances, an unchangeable feature of Ngo Thi Nham is characterized by his noble qualities of an intellectual, his spirit of patriotism, his love for the people, his determination for national independence, his ideals and aspirations for the liberation of individuals, the people, and the Vietnamese nation, and his creativity as well as his relentless struggle for justice.

The spirit of patriotism is one of the traditional values and common sentiments among nations around the world. For the Vietnamese, the concept of "patriotism" has a rather broad and profound connotation. As for the Vietnamese language, the words "nước" or "đất nước" (nation) are used to refer to a country, nation, and homeland. Accordingly, "đất nước" (nation) is the sovereign territory of the Vietnamese community, including the living environment and the means of material production. "Land and water" in the pure Vietnamese sense are also the primary capital goods owned by the wet-rice agricultural population. Thus, a nation is also the place that ensures the survival and defines the social status of every Vietnamese person. Therefore, to speak of patriotism or love for the country is to speak of the affection of the Vietnamese people for their survival conditions and their daily living environment. The sentiment towards the country, which is newly aroused, is normally spontaneous. Then, through the process of maintaining and defending the country, the patriotism of the Vietnamese people gradually develops into a conscious sentiment. At that point, patriotism or love for the country becomes a patriotic will or a patriotic spirit. Therefore, the spirit of patriotism is the conscious sentiment of every Vietnamese person towards their country. The spirit of patriotism develops through the struggle with nature, natural disasters, and especially with foreign invasions. Simultaneously, the idea of patriotism emerges when issues of the independent nation, sovereignty, strategies and tactics for defeating enemies, and understanding and applying the rules of warfare for national defense become the rational awareness of a segment of the Vietnamese population. In other words, the idea of patriotism is theoretically the reflection of the sentiment of love for the nation and love for the people. The emergence of patriotic thought followed the fundamental laws of dialectical materialism as articulated in Marxist-Leninist philosophy: "Material conditions determine consciousness, and consciousness, in turn, reacts upon material conditions in a positive and transformative manner"; and "Social being determines social consciousness, yet the anticipatory and guiding role of social consciousness directs social existence along its proper path". These principles, first formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, emphasize the dialectical relationship between material life and spiritual development wherein human consciousness, once awakened by real socio-historical conditions, becomes a dynamic force that reshapes those very conditions (Marx & Engels, 1994, p.254).

From this dialectical interaction, the love for one's homeland was gradually elevated from an instinctive sentiment into a conscious value system, thereby becoming a distinctive cultural tradition of the Vietnamese nation.

Reflecting the social reality of 18th-century Vietnam, Ngo Thi Nham's patriotism for his homeland extends beyond affection for the people, landscapes, and the cultural and spiritual life of the Vietnamese society. It manifests into theoretical thinking through concepts such as "people"; "reducing the people's burdens to nurture their power" (khoan thư sức dân); "loyalty", "protecting national borders – the people" ... In summary, Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism is a system of views on loyalty, valuing people and "reducing the people's burdens to nurture their power", the spirit of national superiority, the sense of national pride, and the art of flexible and adaptable struggle in defending the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ngo Thi Nham's ideology has attracted special attention from generations of Vietnamese intellectuals. There have been subjective evaluations of his ideology of patriotism under the influence of the political and social life of the time, but there have also been objective assessments with scientific and progressive methods.

The classical historical book of the Nguyen dynasty, named "Khâm định Việt sử thông giám cương mục" (Comprehensive Mirror in Vietnamese History), compiled by royal historians at the Nguyen-dynasty owned National Office of History (Quốc sử quán Triều Nguyễn), judged Ngo Thi Nham as "disloyal and unfilial" ("bất trung, bất hiếu"), labeling him "Sát tứ phụ nhi Thị Lang" (The killer of four fathers to get promotion as a Vice Minister as "Thị Lang") (Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences - Institute of History, 2007b, p. 754).

Similarly, with a unilateral view and subjective evaluations of Ngo Thi Nham, the work named "Đại Nam Quốc sử diễn ca" (The Chronicles of The Great South History in Verse) by Le Ngo Cat and Pham Dinh Toai also presented a one-sided view on Ngo Thi Nham, describing him as "disgraced in academia, regretful in officialdom" ("khoa danh đã nhục, quan trâm cũng hoài") (Pham & Le, 1999, p. 216).

Concurrently, the historical multi-chapter novel with "Hoàng Lê nhất thống chí" (The Historical Chronicles of Hoang-Le Unification), compiled by Ngo Thi Nham and other members of the Ngo family within the Ngo-family-owned literary group (Ngô gia văn phái), provided explanations, evidence, and counterarguments to prejudices imposed on him by contemporary intellectuals and scholars. The novel was written by the Ngo-family-owned literary group, with Ngo Thi Nham as the principal author. Therefore, some parts of some information may lack objectivity in evaluating his ideology.

The critical analyses and evaluations of Ngo Thi Nham are also found in the book series "Việt sử tân biên" (Newly Revised Vietnamese History), particularly in volume 3 (1959) "Nam Bắc phân tranh hay là loạn phong kiến Việt Nam" ("North-South Division: Civil War or Feudal Anarchy in Vietnam") and volume 4 (1961) "Từ Tây Sơn mặt đệp đến Nguyễn Sơ" (From the Decline of the Tay Son to Nguyen So) by Pham Van Son. In those volumes, Pham Van Son praised and exaggerated Nguyen Hue's achievements while intentionally downplaying the role and determination of the intellectual class of Bac Ha, including Ngo Thi Nham. Pham Van Son argued: "In summary, for over a hundred years, the bureaucratic intellectuals of the late Lê dynasty only flocked to where power was strong, never showing any talent for national governance, and lacked the personal qualities and morals of true scholars. They always appeared cowardly, self-serving, selling out people and the country to both internal and external forces, serving any master, and bowing to any king. If it was said to be the fate of the nation, then such fate was deteriorating, leading to the emergence of political prostitutes; or conversely, political prostitutes caused the nation's decline and the people's shame" (Pham, 1961, p. 67). From that perspective, Pham Van Son concluded: "Some Le dynasty officials like Phan Huy Ich, Ngo Thi Nham, Vu Huy Tan, and Tran Ba Lam, although highly respected, played only subordinate roles in the governmental apparatus of the time" (Pham, 1957, p. 415).

Before the August Revolution, there were research articles that defended and vindicated Ngo Thi Nham. A notable example is the work "Ngo Thi Nham, vua Quang Trung thời bình" (Ngo Thi Nham, King Quang Trung – Peaceful Reign) by Sông Bằng, published in Tri Tân magazine, Hanoi, issues 109 and 110 in 1943. In the article, the author expressed the view that Ngo Thi Nham always thought about the national interests: "King Quang Trung, being a legitimate and rightful king, logically required talented individuals to first think of the national interests, to utilize their outstanding expertise to support the country. Why did they cling to the crumbling throne of the Lê dynasty? Perhaps, as a result, did Ngo Thi Nham abandon the Lê dynasty to serve the Tay Son dynasty???" (Bang, 1943, p. 109).

In the years after the August Revolution in the North and after 1975, the continued evaluation of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism became increasingly objective and scientific. However, there were also opposing opinions. In particular, the work "Sơ thảo lịch sử Văn học Việt Nam" (A Preliminary Outline of the History of Vietnamese Literature) (Volume III), edited by Van Tan, Nguyen Hong Phong, and Nguyen Dong Chi, published

by Literature-History-Geography Publishing House, Hanoi, in 1960, also mentioned Ngo Thi Nham. However, from the authors' perspective, Ngo Thi Nham was merely an opportunist, as they stated: "Surely he followed the Tay Son with a time-oriented mentality. His couplet in response to Dang Tran Thuong: "The era of Warring States, the era of Spring and Autumn; being in whatever times, one had to act in times" ("Thế Chiến quốc, thế Xuân thu, gặp thời thế, thế thời phải thế") clearly revealed his mentality (Van, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 1960, p. 284).

Next, the article *From Ngo Thi Nham to the Tay Son Literary Movement* by Vu Duc Phuc in Literature Journal No. 4, 1973, suggested that Ngo Thi Nham "tended to exaggerate any successful military advice he gave" (Vu, 1973, p. 6) when assisting the Tay Son in their fight against the Qing dynasty's invaders. The author also raised his doubts: "It is not surprising that "The Historical Chronicles of Hoang-Le Unification" ("Hoàng Lê nhất thống chí") portrays Ngo Thi Nham in a flattering light, but it is not a good idea to entirely believe it. Despite the embellishment, it leaves gaps: if Quang Trung greatly praised Ngo Thi Nham and trusted his military skills, then after the Qing army was defeated, why did Ngo Thi Nham not become a military advisor or strategist for any general?" (Vu, 1973, p. 6).

Alongside various criticisms about Ngo Thi Nham for different reasons, there have been more objective evaluations that recognize his contributions and bravery in siding with the Tay Son to fight against the Qing invaders. These evaluations also affirm Ngo Thi Nham's boundless patriotism. First and foremost, there is the research article by Vu Khiêu titled The issue of evaluating Ngo Thi Nham, published in the Literature Journal No. 4, 1973. In this article, the author asserted: "It is impossible to accurately evaluate Ngo Thi Nham if we view him through the lens of feudalism or discuss him according to Confucian 'moral principles.' Moreover, it is impossible to correctly assess him without having a complete set of accurate historical documents and analyzing those materials with the most scientific methods" (Vu, 1973, p. 92).

From analyzing the events and pivotal decisions in Ngo Thi Nham's life, Vu Khiêu provided the most objective and comprehensive evaluation. He affirmed that Ngo Thi Nham was a person with "patriotism, love for the people, a creative mind, and a relentless fight for justice" (Vu, 1973, p. 117).

Continuing to assess Ngo Thi Nham's patriotism, in the work "Bàn về văn hiến Việt Nam" (Discussion about Vietnamese Culture and Traditions) published by Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House in 2002, Vu Khiêu likened Ngo Thi Nham to "a phoenix standing among a flock of chickens" (Vu, 2002, p. 387-388).

In 1973, the work "Ngo Thi Nham, một nhà trí thức sáng suốt và dũng cảm đã đi theo nông dân khởi nghĩa Tây Sơn" (Ngo Thi Nham, a sagacious and courageous intellectual, joined the Tay Son peasant uprising) by Van Tan, published in the Journal of Historical Research in January and February 1973, addressed and dispelled previous doubts and biased views found in the work "Sơ thảo lịch sử văn học Việt Nam" (A Preliminary Outline of the History of Vietnamese Literature) - Volume III. In this article, Van Tan (1973) commented: "He was a passionate patriot and made contributions to the struggle to protect the country" (Van, 1973, p.10). In the conclusion, Van Tan evaluated: "Ngo Thi Nham's actions showed that he was far superior to the contemporary scholars" (p. 10).

Furthermore, the work *Ngo Thi Nham in Tay Son's Literature* by Mai Quoc Lien (1983), though centered on Ngo Thi Nham's literary contributions, highlighted the main contents and characteristics of his thoughts, including his patriotism (Mai, 1983).

Evaluating Ngo Thi Nham's patriotic ideology, the late General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Truong Chinh (1975), affirmed: "Ngo Thi Nham is among the ranks of geniuses and will forever be a shining star in the Vietnamese sky" (Truong, 1975, p. 33), comparing him to other great figures of Vietnam.

In summary, many scholars from different periods have researched Ngo Thi Nham in general and his ideology of patriotism in particular, with various perspectives and interpretations. Over time, and under the light of the method of dialectical materialism and the historical-logical method, it can be affirmed that Ngo Thi Nham was a genuine patriotic intellectual, making significant contributions to protecting the people and the country from the threat of invasion and the harsh rule of the feudal powers.

This paper aims to address two issues:

- The first is the foundation for the formation of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism.
- The second is the basic contents of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism.

METHODOLOGY

Regarding the theoretical basis, the research is conducted based on the worldview and methodology of dialectical materialism and historical materialism.

Regarding the research methodology, the author employs the following specific methods:

Literary Method: The research on Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism is conducted based on his works preserved in the complete collection of Ngo Thi Nham. These include prose, poetry, odes, records, essays, proclamations, petitions, and ceremonial documents; autobiographies and letters; comprehension, vows,

responses, guidance, and debates, all of which reflect the social realities and his thoughts. Therefore, researching Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism requires carrying out scientific research on various works and documents; searching, discovering, filtering, analyzing, and synthesizing information about his ideology of patriotism in his works to identify the content and characteristics of his patriotic thoughts.

Historical-Logical Method: The historical method is employed to identify the content about his patriotism through various historical events of the 18th-century Vietnamese society. The logical method is resorted to eliminate random phenomena, helping to grasp the essence and rules of the movement and development of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism. Thanks to that, a comprehensive, truthful, and scientific understanding of his ideology of patriotism is gained.

Compare-and-Contrast Method: Ngo Thi Nham's life and patriotic thoughts evolved through three different historical periods: the Le-Trinh era, the Tay Son era, and the Nguyen era (when Nguyen Anh (Gia Long) ascended the throne). The transition and replacement among the historical dynasties influenced the content and characteristics of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism. Therefore, the compare-and-contrast method helps identify similarities and differences in his patriotic thoughts across those different historical periods, demonstrating the determining role of social existence over social consciousness as well as the backward impact of social consciousness on social existence. This method provides the most accurate understanding of the content and characteristics of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism.

Additionally, to ensure its objectivity and scientism, in the research on Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism, various philosophical methods and socio-science-and-humanity interdisciplinary methods, such as analysis and synthesis, deduction and induction, and structural system methods, are employed together to study the content, characteristics, and historical significance of Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Basis for the Formation of Ngo Thi Nham's Ideology of Patriotism

First, Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism is influenced by the economic, political, and social life of 18th-century Vietnam. It was a significant historical period with such many upheavals that Dutton (2006) named the 18th century in Vietnam as an "intellectual ferment" (Dutton, 2006, p. 26) among the populace classes, particularly the intellectual class in the society. A series of various ideological trends in turn emerged for the sole purpose of developing the economy and stabilizing people's lives. As an intellectual in the society, Ngo Thi Nham had no way out of the situation of that "intellectual ferment", and he couldn't help being deeply concerned about the hardships faced by farmers in particular and the Vietnamese people in general. His deep concerns reflected Ngo Thi Nham's sacred sentiment for the country's fate, forming the core content of his ideology of patriotism. Moreover, it was also a significant historical period with the decline of the Le-Trinh feudal conglomerate. Since then, widespread peasant uprisings took place throughout the country, not only in the North under Trinh lords but also in the South under Nguyen lords, to request fundamental rights to live, work, and seek happiness. Those factors caused a severe crisis in people's lives. Not neglecting to take advantage of opportunities to invade Vietnam, the Qing Dynasty mobilized 290,000 troops to cross the border. At the time, the peasant movement took on the additional responsibility for the national liberation. Supporting the Tay Son rebels was a historical necessity for Ngo Thi Nham so that he could fulfill his ambition to "help the people and save the country".

Second, Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism is also influenced by his family's education process and the patriotic traditions of the Vietnamese people. As one of the expressions of the social consciousness, the content of his ideology of patriotism is impacted by the absorption, inheritance, and development of Confucian and Buddhist cultural values, as well as by his own subjective factors. Via those, Ngo Thi Nham refined, supplemented, and perfected the moral values, ethics, and socio-political views of Confucianism, particularly those of Confucius and Mencius, to fit the practical circumstances of Vietnam, creating a unique identity in his ideology of patriotism. In addition to Confucianism, Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism is impacted by Buddhism, especially the Vietnamese Buddhist view of "renouncing the world without abandoning it." Therefore, in his later years, he became one of the four founders of the Truc Lam Zen sect, and his Buddhist works still brimmed with the fervor of a patriotic individual. Furthermore, his ideology of patriotism is dominated by his subjective personal factors. For instance, his family tradition of scholarly achievement served as a goal of learning to help the people and the country, which was both a motivation and an important objective in forming Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism. Along with his family factors, Ngo Thi Nham himself was a determined individual with a strong passion for practical activities, with an ability to overcome difficulties, and with great patience to cultivate his character. All of those factors came together in his mind, forming a solid foundation in forming his ideology of patriotism across different historical periods.

The Fundamental Contents of Ngo Thi Nham's Ideology of Patriotism

Views on “reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power”

“Reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power”, in Ngo Thi Nham's patriotic thoughts, means that people are considered the root of the nation and the center of the universe, and also means caring for and nurturing the people's power and educating them. Ngo Thi Nham lived in an era of continuous warfare, including civil wars and wars of national defense. Although periods of peace were short, they were sufficient for Ngo Thi Nham to express the spirit of “reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power” in his memorials, writings, poetry, and prose, etc., in both of his life phases as an official in the Lê-Trinh dynasty for the first and later with the Tay Son insurgents. From the spirit of “reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power”, Ngo Thi Nham enriched the content of the Vietnamese patriotism in the 18th century. The idea of “reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power” is as follows:

First, it considers people as the root of the nation. The 18th century witnessed the extreme suffering of farmers, reportedly the so-called "century of peasant uprisings", when farmers were pushed to the brink, resulting in numerous successive revolts, as the saying “a worm will turn” goes. Consequently, some local officials and landlords at the time viewed people as enemies, with their interests completely opposed to people and the nation. Social conflicts became increasingly intense and fierce. Witnessing the extreme poverty and "destitution, with people scattered across neighboring regions" (Ngo, 2003, p. 566) of the people in Hai Duong, where he was a newly-assigned official, Ngo Thi Nham did not remain indifferent, unlike many officials of the Le-Trinh dynasty who considered it normal. Instead, he continuously sent memorials and petitions to the court, urging the lords to "nurture the people's power, which is an immediate task that cannot be delayed" (Ngo, 2003, p. 566), to reassure the people so that "peace and prosperity can reign sustainably forever" (Ngo, 2003, p. 577) Ngo Thi Nham expressed the difference in his thoughts from those of many Le-Trinh officials by emphasizing the importance of the people and viewing them as the root of the nation.

Second, it is taking care of people's material well-being and nurturing their power. Ngo Thi Nham inherited the idea of “reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power” from the Vietnamese patriotic tradition. It is one of the determining elements forming the spirit of “reducing people’s burdens to nurture their power” in Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism. In particular, it is taking care of people's daily lives.

The king must care for people and have compassion for them. According to Ngo Thi Nham, since "the king acted as the parent of the people" (Ngo, 2006, p. 225), he had to fulfill the responsibilities and duties of a parent. The most important responsibility of a parent was to take care of their children's lives, which meant the king had to take care of the people's lives, showing compassion and "sufficient empathy" for the "hardships and illnesses of the common people" (Ngo, 2004, p. 633). Caring for the people's lives is not only the king's duty but also the shared responsibility of the educated class and the officials. Ngo Thi Nham believed that "A gentleman had to be tolerant and nurturing towards people. If he were aware of being tolerant and nurturing people, he could effectively govern them" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 453). When Ngo Thi Nham served as an official, he upheld the principle of "loving people and nurturing them first and foremost, which was why the loyal servants tirelessly dedicated themselves, day and night, without idleness" (Ngo, 2003, p. 598) Because he "loved people like his own children" and regarded people as the purpose of his career, Ngo Thi Nham stood out from the prevailing ideology of his time, becoming a distinction from the majority of officials, siding with the Tay Son insurgents the common peasant soldiers, and, together with people, resisting the invasion by Qing forces.

The king must clearly identify the most essential needs in people’s lives. He should satisfy those needs through economic policies, primarily focusing on the material well-being of the populace. Ngo Thi Nham recognized the role and importance of food for people in maintaining the existence of the state and its political institutions. First and foremost, Ngo Thi Nham identified the role of "rice" as a nucleus, one of the most important factors in the relationship between people and rulers. Rulers must care for people, specifically by ensuring their access to food. When people are well-fed, all orders from rulers are obeyed by people. Ngo Thi Nham believed that "the nation [was] rooted in the people, and the people value rice as their treasure. When there is a severe shortage of rice, can it still be called a nation?" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 631). Even people's food was regarded by Ngo Thi Nham as more crucial than the nation's existence when he asserted that "a strong city [was] not as valuable as rice" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 640). It means that the power struggles among the feudal forces, without concern for people’s lives, are merely meaningless wars. Ngo Thi Nham affirmed that people were the foundation of the country; as long as the foundation remained, the country would survive. Therefore, "the city [had to] have the people to guard it, and the people must have rice to live," and "one [couldn't] neglect the root to keep the branches" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 640). Furthermore, taking care of people's food by restoring production, especially by facilitating people to cultivate and farm to support themselves and pay taxes to serve the country, is crucial. Indeed, Ngo Thi Nham focused on agricultural cultivation and good care for people’s material lives from the early days of his participation in the court's politics. His critical concerns about abandoned fields and vagabond farmers were presented to the Trinh lord through various petitions such as "The Presentation of the Belonging Official", "Draft for Con Quan Cong

on Establishing Agricultural Settlements", "Petition of Declining the Position of Joint Agricultural Commissioner", "Petition on Managing the Tong Ninh Silver Mines" and "Petition on Managing the Thái Nguyên Garrison"... etc., When Ngo Thi Nham served the Tay Son dynasty as an official, agricultural issues continued to be of his concern, and were clearly expressed in the "Proclamation Encouraging Agriculture", which was considered a key agricultural policy during the Tay Son period. The difference in Ngo Thi Nham's agricultural policy during his service under the Le-Trinh and the one in the Tay Son dynasties was his attention to migrant people. During the Le-Trinh period, Ngo Thi Nham advocated for land distribution to people "without distinguishing between native and guest households" (Ngo, 2003, p. 567). In the "Proclamation Encouraging Agriculture", during the Tay Son period, Ngo Thi Nham emphasized: "The best way to protect people [was] to bring vagabond people back to reclaim abandoned fields, turning vagabond and workless farmers into diligent ones" (Ngo, 2004, p. 265). In addition, all of Ngo Thi Nham's petitions and agricultural policies share the common point that the state must bring people back to reclaim land, allocate land to people, regard people as the main subject of fields, and facilitate them to take the initiative in production. The state collects taxes from the cultivated land area and should "consider each plot of land for tax adjustment" (Ngo, 2003, p. 598). To have good cultivable land, initially, it is necessary to have investment from both the state and people - "wealthy people [invested] in cattle, plows, hoes... and [provided] capital, and depending on the amount invested, they [were] granted ranks and titles" (Ngo, 2003, p. 590). A notable point in Ngo Thi Nham's agricultural policies was his disapproval of the "soldiers farming" policy, even though he acknowledged that the policy made the state of Qi prosperous during the Spring and Autumn period. He believed that the "soldiers farming" policy was merely a stratagem to "force consolidation to increase public reserves" (Ngo, 2003, p. 598) and under the current circumstances, "that method would also have been effective" (Ngo, 2003, p. 599). Thus, by fully allocating land to the farmers and facilitating them to reclaim wasteland for farming, and with a clear tax policy, the ultimate goal was "a well-fed populace, preventing theft and robbery" (Ngo, 2003, p. 591). It is the special and innovative aspect of Ngo Thi Nham's spirit of "reducing people's burdens to nurture their power" (khoan thư sức dân).

Views on "Loyalty"

According to Ngo Thi Nham, "loyalty" is closely associated with "trustworthiness". It is a method of action for a gentleman. Ngo Thi Nham asserted: "The way of becoming a man must require him first to uphold trustworthiness; the saintly virtue is nothing more than benevolence" (Ngo, 2003, p. 390). For him, loyalty and trustworthiness are fundamental reasons for all success. He wrote: "Without loyalty and integrity, one is deceitful; being deceitful, one is not sincere; without trustworthiness, one becomes negligent; being negligent, one is not enduring. On the contrary, being loyal and sincere leads to sincerity; being sincere, one is not lazy; being trustworthy, one endures; enduring, one becomes limitless" (Ngo, 2003, p. 498). Therefore, he always vowed to be "loyal and trustworthy", believing that such virtues would be blessed by Buddha and the heavenly way, ensuring eventual success. Ngo Thi Nham believed that practicing "loyalty and trustworthiness" would help every individual to develop the resilience to overcome all temporary difficulties in life. During his career as an official, Ngo Thi Nham faced at least two major hardships. The first was being wrongfully accused at the Trịnh lord's palace, forcing him to flee to preserve his life. The second was falling out of favor in Quang Toan's court. Throughout those disappointments in his career, Ngo Thi Nham always trusted in the outcomes of his practice of "loyalty and trustworthiness". According to him: "Upholding loyalty and trustworthiness, one will be honored in youth and fulfilled in old age" (Ngo, 2003, p. 343). For Ngo Thi Nham, "loyalty and trustworthiness" were the "rudder" and the "compass" guiding his life. "Uphold benevolence as the pole to steer, and loyalty and trustworthiness as the rudder; Every year, make a raft and set it afloat under the bright stars of the Big Dipper" (Ngo, 2004, p. 360)

Believing in and adhering to "loyalty and trustworthiness", during unexpected bouts of illness, Ngo Thi Nham encouraged and reassured himself: "Keep a loyal and trustworthy heart, and one will mostly recover from illness. Why not strive even harder to invigorate the spirit" (Ngo, 2005a, p. 225)

In the final years of Quang Toan's reign, even though he was neglected and shunned by the court, Ngo Thi Nham still actively and diligently participated in politics because his heart, loyal and trustworthy, never wavered. He wrote in his poetry collection "Cầm đờng nhàn thoại": "With the sail of loyalty and trustworthiness, the boat continues to drift" (Ngo, 2005a, p. 374). Or during a boat trip on the Nhat Le River, moved by the scenery, Ngo Thi Nham wrote: "Hoist the sail of loyalty and trustworthiness, sail with the swift current; Row straight towards the sandy embankment; Look up to see the cluster of Tử Vi stars as if facing the supreme ruler" (Ngo, 2004, p. 371)

Furthermore, Ngo Thi Nham used 'loyalty and trustworthiness' to encourage his friends. For instance, in his poem "Congratulating a Friend on a Promotion and New Command," he wrote: "Praise to you for bringing loyalty and trustworthiness, testing the first sail" (Ngo, 2003, p. 107). After the events of the year of the Mouse and the years of hiding from the pursuit of the court of the Le king and Trinh lord, Ngo Thi Nham saw the decay in the political life of the time. He witnessed a bureaucracy formed through "commercial transactions" of buying and

selling positions, where the kings and lords favored those with "glib tongues" over truly talented individuals. The political scene appeared like a painting full of sycophantic laughter surrounding the kings and lords. As a result, the society saw the emergence of a devious bureaucracy that exploited the view of loyalty for personal gains, causing much suffering for people. For the time as a refugee, Ngo Thi Nham exclaimed: "If faded loyalty and trustworthiness are under superficial embellishments, merely "like 'a trap to catch fish" or "a net to arrest rabbits", it is the crime of those who feign benevolence" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 116). According to Ngo Thi Nham: "Clarity, tolerance, loyalty, and trustworthiness are all the profound meanings of the civilization" (Ngo, 2003, p. 541). Therefore, he vehemently condemned and harshly criticized those who did not uphold loyalty and trustworthiness, exploiting "loyalty" for their personal gains. He wrote: those "who are treacherous ones without loyalty are not different from market merchants. It is right for them to be despised in scriptures" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 34).

For Ngo Thi Nham, "Loyalty" is reflected in the reciprocal relationship between the king and his subjects. Amid the corruption of the Lê king and Trịnh lord in the 18th century, Ngo Thi Nham's concept of loyalty to the sovereign underwent a transformation aimed at restoring what seemed to be the outdated values of original Confucianism, as well as the traditional Vietnamese values of "loyalty to the country". The transformation and restoration are expressed by the fact that Ngo Thi Nham was one of the first Vietnamese Confucian intellectuals in the 18th century to speak out against "blind loyalty". The pinnacle of "loyalty" is sacrificing one's life to repay the king. However, Ngo Thi Nham asserted: "The duty of a subject sometimes requires death, and sometimes it does not; there are deaths that are meaningful, and there are deaths that are not" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 182). When facing death, a subject must consider carefully whether their death would benefit the country. If one dies merely to show loyalty to the king, it is not a true expression of 'loyalty' concept. Therefore, Ngo Thi Nham always reminded himself and his friends that "life and death are not to be taken lightly" (Ngo, 2006, p. 74). While fulfilling their duty, subjects must devote themselves entirely, sometimes even sacrificing their lives to protect the king and the country. But Ngo Thi Nham stated: "Some deaths are heavier than Mount Tai, some are lighter than a feather. Deaths that are not righteous, stubbornly holding onto trivial matters like commoners, are actions a gentleman does not commit" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 534) and "do not let people take death lightly" (Ngo, 2006, p. 309). Even in life-and-death struggles, a gentleman must "ignore the circumstances, preserve oneself; this is the integrity and the establishment of a scholar" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 534). For a true scholar, there is something very important, even more important than the king. They are the affairs of the country and the family. Therefore, one must overcome and control personal emotions, avoiding "dying in vain when it is better to live and manage" (Ngo, 2005b, p. 294). It can be seen that with his concept of "loyalty", Ngo Thi Nham stood beyond the ethical standards of loyalty to the sovereign held by contemporary Confucians, choosing a righteous path that aligned with the moral principles of the nation.

Views on the Spirit of National Superiority and the Sense of National Pride

Through the lens of Ngo Thi Nham, the values of the Vietnamese people's civilization clearly demonstrate the intrinsic strength throughout the nation's survival and development. His spirit of national superiority and his sense of national pride are expressed in many of his literary works, but are conveyed the most distinctly and profoundly in his poetry collection named "Narration about the envoy's journey to China" ("Hoàng hoa đồ phả") which Ngo Thi Nham composed while serving as the chief envoy to the Qing Dynasty to request the official emperor title for Quang Toan in the spring of the year of the Buffalo (1793). This collection of poems describes the author's overflowing emotions during his journey to and from Yên Kinh (Beijing). For Ngo Thi Nham, Vietnam's cultural and civilizational traditions had long been established and had been affirming their unique characteristics within the flow of history. However, the northern feudal powers consistently claimed that the culture and civilization of Vietnam, as well as those of some neighboring countries, were merely parts, namely barbarians (Man Di) living in the surroundings of the greater Chinese Huaxia civilization. The theory also had certain impacts on the people of countries in the region. It was because it deceived the people toiling hard in the fields, and it was a basis for some pseudo-intellectuals to betray their countries. Naturally, for some true intellectuals, not only in Vietnam but also in countries like Korea and Japan, etc., were aware of the fact that it was one of the methods used to assimilate the cultures of neighboring countries, and it also served as a pretext for China to send troops to "civilize" the peoples they considered as barbarians. In the poem named "Phan Mao Mountain", Ngo Thi Nham, using a classic literature reference, implied that the culture of the Southern nation (Vietnam) belonged to the Southern nation (Vietnam) and never became the Chinese culture: "The cinnamon worm of Uy Da fell into a deep mountain cave" (Ngo, 2005a, p. 136). The poetic sentence implied the criticism of Trieu Đa's conquering of Au Lac and his attempts to assimilate it. In fact, Trieu Đa's efforts were futile. The people of the Southern nation, descendants of Au Lac, forever remain the people of the Southern nation, just as similar as the fact that a belostomatid, a native product of the Southern nation, never becomes a cinnamon worm (Mai, Do, Kieu, & Tran, 2001, p. 137). With his knowledge, Ngo Thi Nham condemned some Chinese intellectuals who had such narrow-minded thoughts that they intentionally belittled Vietnamese culture to serve their political

schemes. Moreover, he highlighted the differences between the two countries to counteract the scheme of assimilating Vietnamese and Chinese cultures, boldly stating: "Speechlessly understand the spring scenery in the Southern sky and the Northern sky; The emotions are the same, but the scenes are different" (Ngo, 2005a, p. 53). His will to affirm the value of Vietnamese civilization was constantly driven by Ngo Thi Nham's thoughts. He proved: During the Zhou dynasty, the country of Viet Thuong brought white pheasants as presents for Duke Dan of Zhou. Duke Dan of Zhou thought that his virtue was not sufficient and refused to accept them. The envoy said: "I heard from the elders of my country that the sea has not had waves for three years, surely a sage has descended in China, so I was sent to pay a visit and homage..." (Ngo, 2005a, p. 48). With the literature reference above, Ngo Thi Nham wanted to assert that Vietnam had an early civilization and had talented prophets who were in no way inferior to ones in China and were even equally talented to ones in China. According to Chinese feng shui masters, due to its geographical position, China was a great country located at the center of the universe, with smaller countries surrounding it, just as all rivers flowed into China. Therefore, it was natural for other countries to pay tribute and present offerings to China. However, according to the Chinese feng shui, "civilization developed first wherever the land's energy originated" (Ngo, 2005a, p. 49). As a result, by stating that the Ninh Minh River originated from the South, Ngo Thi Nham implied that Vietnam was civilized before China. In recent studies, some researchers have acknowledged that "the influence of Dong Son culture that has spread northward along the Yuan and Xiang Rivers to the territory of Chu state is very obvious" (Tran, 1997, p. 95). The author, Tran Ngoc Them, even has grounds to claim: "There was a system of ancient Vietnamese writing during the flourishing Đông Sơn civilization around the 4th century BC, before the Han invaded and dominated the land of the ancient Vietnamese for over a thousand years" (Tran, 1997, p. 108). Therefore, it can be affirmed that Vietnam has had a long-standing civilization, and to some extent, it may have preceded that of China. In a word, Ngo Thi Nham's implication throughout his poetic works is the clearest manifestation of the national pride and national superiority in Ngo Thi Nham's ideology of patriotism.

CONCLUSION

In the history of Vietnamese thought, although scholars have expressed differing interpretations of Ngo Thi Nham's patriotic ideas, a historical-logical analysis allows us to affirm that Ngo Thi Nham was a true patriot and a man of deep compassion for the people. His patriotic thought was both rich in content and profound in meaning. Central to his philosophy was the conviction that the people were the sole object through which he expressed his loyalty and love for the nation. Among the many aspects of Ngo Thi Nham's patriotic thought, the most prominent is his profound sense of national pride rooted in the cultural and civilizational heritage built by earlier generations of Vietnamese. At the same time, he sought to cultivate and transmit the values of patriotism embedded in Vietnamese cultural tradition, especially to younger generations, as a moral and intellectual inheritance. The distinctive elements of Ngo Thi Nham's patriotic thought not only enriched the connotation of patriotism within the Vietnamese philosophical tradition but also contributed to the diversity and depth of Vietnamese patriotic culture in the 18th century. Through his life and writings, Ngo Thi Nham exemplified how love for the people, national pride, and cultural identity could merge into a unified philosophy of patriotic humanism, one that continues to resonate in Vietnam's intellectual heritage today.

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