

SACRIFICE

Life is a game of chance.
The chance is against us.
It's worth dying now for the country
and set an example of sacrifice
Nguyễn Thái Học

Viet-Nam is not only a land of legends and learned men but also a land that men have acquired acre by acre in a cruel mother nature for more than four thousand years. The cradle of the Vietnamese nation, the delta of Tonkin bordered by mild hills of the Hundred Thousands Mounts of China and squeezed in the South by a quasi-impenetrable range, the Annamitic Cordillera, reduced to 15,000 km² but rich of all the mud pulled out by the Red river, continues to be threatened by the latter with the discharge of 500m³ at low tide up to 3500m³ during the highest crests.

Phạm Hồng Thái



To master the blows of sword of the Red River, the Vietnamese people resort to a method of building dikes, which requires not only an increased watch of dikes but also a perpetual struggle. Facing the never-ending change of nature, the caprice of the Red river and the territorial ambitions of China, the Vietnamese people owe their safety at the cost not only of their labor and courage but also of their sacrifice in the **long march toward the South**. This sacrifice is not foreign to the majority of Vietnamese in particular the men and women of character. It also becomes a cult that one likes to maintain and ceaselessly praise for Vietnam to excite the whole people before the threat of foreigners.

The sacrifice is the surest way to maintain the perfection of the homeland but it is also the synonym of loyalty and dignity. A great person is the one who dares take the responsibilities in moments of difficulty in his or her life but it is also the one who knows how to sacrifice himself or herself for a good cause, in particular for his or her country. The sacrifice is indispensable to the word "honor" in Vietnam. Because of this moral dignity, many military people preferred suicide to surrender (**Trưng Trắc, Trưng Nhị, Trần Bình Trọng, Võ Tánh** etc..). That is why it is the habit to say:

Hùm chết để da, người chết để tiếng.

A dead tiger leaves its hide, a deceased person his reputation. The history of Vietnam is also that of sacrifices. The duty of a Vietnamese is to serve his or her country wholeheartedly. The greater the danger, the better his or her loyalty seems to be. Heroes sacrifice for their fatherland. No matter what happens, his honor is never tainted. It is the case of the scholar **Phan Thanh Giản**, signatory of the Franco-Vietnamese treaty of 1868. After having failed to put up with the French in the defense of the three western provinces of the Mekong delta (Vinh Long, An Giang and Hà Tiên) he chose to surrender and decided to poison himself in 1967 because he thought it was the only way to save the people and to show his fidelity to emperor **Tự Đức**. The same, **Nguyễn Tri Phương** (1873), adversary of **Francis Garnier** and **Hoàng Diệu** (1882), adversary of **Henri Rivière** preferred suicide after having failed to defend Hà-Nội city.

HY SINH

During the French occupation, sacrifice became the flame of hope lit by unknown people such as **Nguyễn Trung Trực**, **Phạm Hồng Thái**. The former accepted to die in the stead of his mother captured after having succeeded in blowing up the French "Espérance" on its passage on the "Nhật Tảo" river in Long An while the latter, chased by the Chinese police in his escape, preferred to throw himself in the river after having failed to assassinate the French governor **Merlin** during his passage by Canton in 1924. Admiror of his courage and sacrifice for his fatherland, the governor of Canton later buried his remains in a cemetery solely reserved for the 72 Chinese heroes and known as "**Hoàng Hoa Cương**" in Vietnamese.

If this sacrifice is not a vain word for men, it carries a particular meaning for the Vietnamese women. Princess **Huyền Trân** of the Trần dynasty was proposed to become in 1306 the wife of king **Chế Mân** (Jaya Simhavarman) in exchange of the two territories of Champa Chau Ô and Châu Rí. She had to sacrifice her life, her love for reason of State.

The same, three centuries later, a princess of the Nguyễn dynasty, of the name **Ngọc Vạn** to whom the word "Cochinchina" or (Cô chín Chine) was attributed, was not late in following Huyen Tran's footsteps in becoming the concubine of Cambodian king **Prea Chey Chetta II** in 1618 in exchange of the facilities granted to Vietnamese in their settlement in the region Đồng Nai Mô Xoài which is no other than the Saigon-Cholon region today.

Her youger sister, princess **Ngọc Khoa** was proposed to become a few years later the wife of the last king of Champa, **Pô Rome** in 1630. This alliance condemned her to be the prime target of the Cham in their hate against the Vietnamese people. Her presence on the Cham soil served as a pretext for lord **Nguyễn Phúc Tần** to launch an expedition and annex the last territory of Champa in 1651. One cannot blame the Cham for hating princess Ngọc Khoa at that time because of her, they have lost their homeland. But Ngọc Khoa illustrates for us Vietnamese the sublime sacrifice she consented for her country and her people.

Phó Đức Chính - Nguyễn Thái Học - Nguyễn Trung Trực



But the sacrifice the most renowned remains that of the 13 Vietnamese nationalist heroes of whom **Nguyễn Thái Học** is a part. They were all executed on the guillotine on June 17, 1930 after having failed in their uprising against the French at Yên Bái. Impassible before death each of them tried to shout "Long live Vietnam". Even one of them, **Phó Đức Chính** requested the permission to face the blade of the guillotine at the time of his execution. His sacrifice did not turn out useless because it shows the Vietnamese people the way to follow to obtain independance and the price to pay for freedom. This way is full of obstacles as one has seen during the past six decades but nothing could stop the Vietnamese people to have access to independence and freedom because there are always in this people, individuals who are ready to die for their country, individuals who think sacrifice illustrates well the sublime sense of solidarity of the individual with a great cause.