



Writing the history of Vietnamese heroes-heroines fighting against the invaders from the North in “History of Vietnam by Paintings”

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to study the history of Vietnamese heroes-heroines fighting against the invaders from the North from a book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North). The historical method, which was mainly document study, was employed in this study.

The study revealed that the book addresses two heroines, Hai Bà Trưng, as a smart female leader and glorified king; and Bà Triệu, as a woman with physical strength and the spirit of the need to protect the country and six heroes, namely Lý Nam Đế, as a talented chief commander who ruled people throughout the country; Triệu Quang Phục, as a loyal general; Lý Phật Tử, as the descendant of the great chief commander; Mai Hắc Đế, as a strong warrior leader, Phùng Hưng, as a king, Bô Cái, as a great man and Khúc Thừa Dụ, as a person who changed the outcomes of a rebellion differently.

Keywords: History by paintings, heroes-heroines, Chinese rule

Introduction

Vietnam is a country with a long history of fighting since the establishment of the country, called the Kingdom of Văn Lang around 3,000 BC. Sometimes, it was split into smaller kingdoms and then reunited. Then it had been under the rule of China since 111 BC. Until 938 AD, it gained independence from China. During the time when the North Vietnam was under Chinese rule, there was a mixture of ethnicities, languages and cultures between the Chinese and the indigenous peoples. During the Chinese rule, there were conflicts, rebellions and wars. The study of leaders known as heroes and heroines, which is an important part of the study of historical activities, has been conducted because they are important persons playing an important role in the change in history and praised by society (DanTingLi, Dararat Mettariganond and Benjawan Narasaj, 2018). While China dominated Vietnam for over 1,000 years, there were many rebellions and armed fights between the Vietnamese and the Chinese military. So, many important heroes and heroines have been mentioned in the pages of history.

1. Historical background of Chinese entry into Vietnam before 938 AD



Figure 1

Source: <https://kritayaporn.weebly.com/36483623363736183604360936343617-vietnam.html>

In the 3rd century BC, the Han people, living in the Yellow River Valley, united China and other ethnicities living in southern China and the Yangtze River Valley into their empire. Soon, China was able to expand to the south until it conquered Vietnam in 111 BC. The objectives of governing Vietnam of China were to abolish the identity of Âu Lạc, assimilate traditional culture and unite all with China. China tried to make Vietnam accept the rule, and controlled the thoughts and minds of Vietnamese people, so the perception and understanding were built through Confucianism, Chinese characters, as well as the immigration of the Han to live in Vietnam (Thananan Boonwanna, 2021: 53).



At that time, the Vietnamese had to pay tributes to the Chinese royal court and taxes to Chinese civil servants and soldiers who were stationed in Vietnam. Most of the tributes included ivory, mother-of-pearls, pearls, myrrh, tropical fruits, embroidery materials and silver and gold cloth (Nguyen Khac Vien, 2009). Buddhism and Taoism that entered Vietnam were evident from the 2nd to the 6th century AD. They were intermingled with indigenous beliefs of the Chinese people who immigrated to Vietnam.

Therefore, there were conflicting relations of both parties. China had the policy of economic exploitation and cultural assimilation. On the other hand, Vietnam was against the policy. Forces were gathered many times for rebellions. Vietnam had struggled for centuries to preserve the identity of the Vietnamese people and a feeling of love for their homeland. While the Vietnamese tried to maintain their identity, it was undeniable that Chinese culture had been mixed in many ways for over 1,000 years.

2. The structure of the book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North)

The book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North) is one of the books in a series of Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh (History of Vietnam by Paintings). It was first published in 2012. It was a collaboration of the artists, the researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City and the TP. Ho Chi Minh publisher (Nhà Xuất Bản Trẻ - TP. Hồ Chí Minh). The objective of the book is to inform about Vietnamese heroines and heroes during the anti-Chinese period. The book informs about “the invaders from the North” from 111 BC to 938 AD with a total of 300 pages. Two heroines addressed in this book are Hai Bà Trưng (pages 6-68); and Bà Triệu (pages 69-122). In addition, the book also provides the information of six heroes, namely Lý Nam Đế, Triệu Quang Phục and Lý Phật Tử (pages 123-184); Mai Hắc Đế (pages 185-210); Phùng Hưng (pages 211-242) and Khúc Thừa Dụ (pages 243-300). It is presented through detailed information and pictures.

3. Writing the history of Vietnamese heroes-heroines fighting against the invaders from the North in a book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North)

The book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North)

addresses two heroines and six heroes. The content in the book is mostly presented by pictures and the context of Vietnam and the heroism of these people are described.

3.1 Heroines

The Vietnamese heroines featured in the book are Hai Bà Trưng and Bà Triệu.

Hai Bà Trưng: A total of 62 pages in the book is provided to write about Hai Bà Trưng, divided into four periods. **First**, the information of before the start of the fight against the invaders from China, including the movements of the two sides, the context of Vietnam when it was ruled by the nhà Hán dynasty and the start of flag-raising and gathering rebel forces from across the region is provided. **Second**, the information of the first phase of the fight against the Chinese invaders, namely the generalship of the two women in the fight against the enemy army, the planning for the battle of the rebels until they conquered is presented. **Third**, the information of the period after the fight against the Chinese invaders, namely the rule of Trưng Trắc, the praise of these two female leaders and the deployment of forces to prevent another invasion of the enemy is elaborated. **In the last period**, the information of the second phase of the fight against the Chinese invaders, namely the return of China's invasion, the irresistible strength of the invaders led by Mã Viện and the death of Hai Bà Trưng is provided (Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 6 -68). The book presents Hai Bà Trưng as two sisters who were the intelligent rebel leaders in deploying the undercover in the Chinese army and attacking on both land and sea. They were the female leaders respected by both men and women, who were ready to fight by their side. Trưng Trắc was the queen regnant who ruled the country after Vietnam gained independence from China. She was honored by the Vietnamese people because people were happy under her rule. No tax was charged for up to 2 years. The people's lives were improved. The prisoners were released to their homeland. She is also recognized as the female leader of the Vietnamese people. The book focuses more on their heroism and Trưng Trắc. It is not written much about her sister, Trưng Nhị because the book needs space to write about the rule of Trưng Trắc, who became the queen regnant.

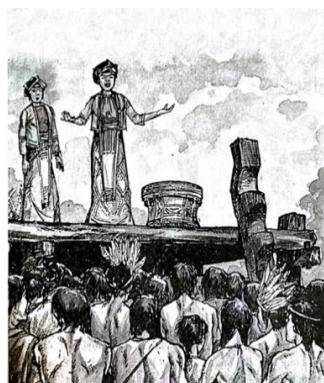


Figure 2: Picture of Hai Bà Trưng in Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc that was

calling on the people to fight against the enemy to save the country

Source: Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2 (p. 21(, by Trần Bạch Đằng)Ed.(, 2012, Nhà Xuất Bản Trẻ.

Bà Triệu: The book provides 53 pages to write about Bà Triệu, divided into three periods. **First**, the information of before the start of the fight against the invaders from China, including the movements of Bà Triệu and her older brothers, Triệu Quốc Đạt, since being under the rule of the nhà Ngô dynasty and the fighting ability and the strength of Bà Triệu, the plan before gathering troops until the start of flag-raising to lead the rebels fighting against the invaders is described. **Second**, the information of the first phase of the fight against the invaders from the North, namely the movements of Bà Triệu in leading forces against rebels, the heroism of Bà Triệu in becoming a leader in place of her brother, the greatness and awe of Bà Triệu and the rebel forces that terrified the forces of the nhà Ngô dynasty is presented. **Finally**, the information of the second battle with the invaders from the North, including the movements of Bà Triệu and her fight against the invaders after the nhà Ngô dynasty appointed Lục Dận as the governor of Giao Châu as well as the strength of the invaders that cannot be resisted and the Bà Triệu's choice to end her life is provided)Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 69-122(. The book addresses Bà Triệu as a woman who was physically strong with the spirit of the need to protect the country. In the book, her capacity in martial arts is also presented. She was able to fight with men of a similar age. Due to her physical strength, she can defeat a white elephant on her own. The portrayal of Bà Triệu focuses on her combat leadership, unlike Hai Bà Trưng that the rulership is described.



Figure 3: Picture of Bà Triệu in Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc that was leading the rebels to retake the Cửu Chân fortress from the invaders

Source: Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2 (p. 111(, by Trần Bạch Đằng)Ed.(, 2012, Nhà Xuất Bản Trẻ.

3.2 Heroes

The Vietnamese heroes featured in the book include Lý Nam Đế, Triệu Quang Phục, Lý Phật Tử, Mai Hắc Đế, Phùng Hưng and Khúc Thừa Dụ.

Lý Nam Đế: The book provides 45 pages to write about Lý Nam Đế, divided into four periods. **First**, the information before the fight against the invaders from the North, namely the context of Vietnam ruled by the Lương dynasty, many great generals and the greatness of the rebel forces under the leadership of Lý Nam Đế is provided. **Second**, the information of the first fight against the invaders from the North, namely the heroic deeds and the victory in retaking the main fortress as well as the repelling of the invaders and the plan to prepare for the return of the invaders is presented. **Third**, the detail of the period after the fight against the invaders from the North, including the rule of Lý Nam Đế, the establishment of the dynasty, the changing to the Thiên Đức era, the move of the capital to the mouth of the Tô Lịch River and changing the name of the country to Vạn Xuân is explained. **Finally**, the information of the second fight against the invaders from the North, including the fight after the rule, the return of the army from China led by Vạn Xuân, the plan to counter the forces, the weakness of the rebel forces which cannot fight against the invaders and the death of Lý Nam Đế is presented)Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 125-170(. The book portrays Lý Nam Đế as a chief commander respected by many talented generals who wanted to join the fight for territory. He was the ruler who made a lot of contribution to the country. At the end of his life, Lý Nam Đế was portrayed as the one who were revered and respected by people all over the country.



Figure 4: Picture of Lý Nam Đế in Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc and his two younger brothers calling on people to join forces in the fight. The rebel forces were supported by many people in the area.

Source: Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2 (p. 130(, by Trần Bạch Đằng)Ed.(, 2012, Nhà Xuất Bản Trẻ.



Triệu Quang Phục and Lý Phật Tử: The book provides 13 pages to write about both of them. The book combines the content of Triệu Quang Phục with Lý Nam Đế and Lý Phật Tử because it was an overlapping period. Triệu Quang Phục was also the loyal general of Lý Nam Đế. The book presents the story of Triệu Quang Phục from the time after the death of Lý Nam Đế to the time when he established himself as a king called Triệu Việt and the battle for the throne with Lý Phật Tử while fighting against the invaders from China. In the end, Triệu Quang Phục was unable to seize power and lost his rule to Lý Phật Tử (Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 125-181). **Lý Phật Tử:** The information provided in the book is the same period as Triệu Quang Phục, since the beginning of the rule by Lý Phật Tử as a descendant of Lý Nam Đế, his success in taking power from Triệu Việt and his surrender to the nhà Tùy dynasty) Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 174-184(. However, the book does not much mention of the leadership in the fight against China of Triệu Quang Phục and Lý Phật Tử because at that time, Vietnam had already expelled China from the country. So, the book mentions only about the Vietnamese people fighting among themselves for the dominance in the country. The book presents Triệu Quang Phục as a loyal general of Lý Nam Đế and the king after Lý Nam Đế. In addition, the book presents Lý Phật Tử as a descendant of Lý Nam Đế, making many people respect him until he was in power and wanted to take the power from Triệu Việt. The book does not portray him as the leader in the fight against China because in the end he was the one who surrendered and made the country under Chinese rule again.

Mai Hắc Đế: The book dedicates 23 pages to write about Mai Hắc Đế, divided into two periods. **First**, the stories of the period before the fight against the Chinese invaders, including the oppression of the Vietnamese under the rule of the nhà Đường dynasty, leading the rebels against the enemy rule, planning to attack the fortress, proclaiming himself as an emperor, moving the Vietnamese capital to Vạn An and starting to form ties with neighbors such as Chămpa for joining forces against invaders are presented. **Second**, the information of the fight against invaders from China is provided. The book does not provide much detail on the battles and the heroism of Mai Hắc Đế. It only mentions that he led his troops to defeat the enemy and ruled the country. In the end, due to the strength of the forces led by Dương Tu Húc, the rebels were defeated and had to escape to the forest. The book also informs about the death of Mai Hắc Đế) Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 202-210(. The chapter written about Mai Hắc Đế also emphasizes the context of Vietnam at that time in order to illustrate the transformation of the country. Although there are 23 pages in the chapter, only 8 pages are the content written about Mai Hắc Đế, and his heroism is not written in detail. The rest of the pages in the chapter is all about the context of Vietnam at that time. The book wants to present Mai Hắc Đế as the leader of the village warriors who had the strength to defeat China and had connections with neighboring kingdoms only.

Phùng Hưng: The book provides 29 pages to write about Phùng Hưng, divided into two periods. **First**, the detail of the period before the fight against the Chinese invaders as well as the Phùng Hưng's family background, his fighting abilities and the time when Phùng Hưng led the rebellion to fight against the invaders, which was the nhà Đường dynasty is provided. **Second**, the

book presents the information of the period of the fight against the invaders from the North, the leadership of Phùng Hưng, the approaches used to attack the invaders and the help from other generals until they were able to conquer. The information of Phùng Hưng's ruling of the country after regaining territories and his death after just seven years of ruling the country is also presented (Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 213-233(. The book focuses on portraying Phùng Hưng as a person who was physically stronger than the average person. He can kill a tiger with his bare hands. In addition to physical strength, his intelligence is also presented. He loved reading history books and was also the leader of the village who liked to travel to different cities to learn the culture and people's way of life until he was honored as the great King, **Bố Cái**. In addition to his strength, the book also portrays Phùng Hưng as an intelligent, exploratory and far-sighted leader.

Khúc Thừa Dụ: The book provides 35 pages to write about Khúc Thừa Dụ, different from other heroes and heroines mentioned earlier. The writings on other heroes and heroines focus on leading troops, raising the battle flag, taking over fortresses and defeating the invaders, but the writing about Khúc Thừa Dụ focuses on his intelligence and praises him as the one who laid the foundation for the declaration of independence from Chinese rule and the one who changed the outcomes of the rebellion which were different from other heroes and heroines)Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2, 2012, 254-280(. The book presents Khúc Thừa Dụ as the one who was trusted by the Chinese court and the person who changed the outcomes of the rebellion. There was no battle while he was the leader. The book presents Khúc Thừa Dụ as the last hero before Vietnam was independent from thousands of years of Chinese rule. Although there is a picture presenting while he was standing in front of the troops, there is no picture of the battle between the rebel forces and the Chinese army. The book focuses only on Khúc Thừa Dụ's ingenuity in planning and negotiating with China unlike other heroes and heroines who had to fight before regaining the land.



Figure 5: Picture of Khúc Thừa Dụ in Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc, taking the lead against the invaders

Source: Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2 (p. 256(, by Trần Bạch Đằng)Ed.(, 2012, Nhà Xuất Bản Trẻ.



4. Conclusion and recommendations

According to the study of the book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North), it was found that the paintings and writings of two heroines were presented: Hai Bà Trưng (62 pages), and Bà Triệu (53 pages); and six heroes, namely Lý Nam Đế (45 pages); Triệu Quang Phục and Lý Phật Tử (13 pages); Mai Hắc Đế (23 pages); Phùng Hưng (29 pages), and Khúc Thừa Dụ (35 pages). The book does not present only their leadership in the battles, but also the context of Vietnam as well as other individuals who joined the forces. The book also gives a few different details to show the differences of each individual, such as their intelligence in planning, the ways they were praised by people in the country, the ways they ruled the country and their physical strength or battle abilities.

The book titled “Lịch sử Việt Nam bằng tranh 2: chống quân xâm lược phương bắc” (History of Vietnam by Paintings-Volume 2: Resistance against the Invaders from the North) is a reading for pleasure book. It is not a book published by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam. It is not a book for teaching at different levels of education. But it can be read to increase basic knowledge because it is easy to read. The book mostly presents pictures with only 7-8 lines of narration per page. Or it can be used as a book for reading to enhance the knowledge learned in class or from other history books because some Vietnamese history books give little space to write about the heroes and the heroines of the era that was ruled by China who fought against China. For example, the book titled “Vietnam: A Long History” by Nguyen Khac Vien (2009) provides only four pages to inform about the rebels. Also, only five leaders, namely Hai Bà Trưng, Bà Triệu, Lý Nam Đế, Phùng Hưng and Khúc Thừa Dụ are written about. In addition, the content of the book also contains the instillation of nationalism through patriotic heroes and heroines.

Other Vietnamese history textbooks should be studied in order to understand the objectives of visualizing Vietnamese heroes and heroines and the ideology of building a nation-state through presentations of important historical figures.



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