

Communicating national identity post-Covid in Vietnam: Nationalism as an imaginative fandom

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Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Chapter 1: Traditional nationalism: A historical-political generative programme of collective consciousness</i>	9
<i>Chapter 2: Emergence of social media in Vietnamese political communication and social impact of Covid-19</i>	12
<i>Chapter 3: The nation: imaginative imagined fandom</i>	16
The nationalist: Discursive learning social agents	16
Re-imagining the Vietnamese form of nationalism as an imaginative fandom.....	18
<i>Chapter 4: The national fandom’s mechanism: the perpetual annoyance of mistranslation..</i>	21
The aim of the fandom	22
Deciphering “the out-group”	23
<i>Conclusion</i>	25
<i>Bibliography</i>	27

Introduction

Today's political communication sees an extensive utilisation of social media, in which Media scholars Mihelj and Martinez argued that social media political communication has made discourse about nationalism more heterogeneous with significantly increased partisanship of the media users¹. Concerning this social phenomenon, this paper aims to explore how political actors in the Vietnamese nationalism discourse can be plausibly understood in the age of social media political communication. The guiding research question of this paper is *From the Vietnamese government's perspective, under what conditions can a discourse on Vietnamese political history be designed which considers the dynamic and communicative relationship between the state and its people?*

On nationalism in his book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson proposed that nationalism is an imagined community since its fellow members have neither met each other nor experienced the communion physically as a totality². As such, with its essence in being imagined with a particular style, nationalism is never false or genuine despite being a product of imagination. Consequently, regardless of being limited within the boundaries of imagination by being the theoretical manifestation of the nation, nationalism always prevails as something deep and meaningful for its members, who are ready to kill or sacrifice for the sake of the prescribed nationalistic ideals³. Anderson argued that national imagings have cultural roots, which manifest as ideologies and historical narratives providing an infrastructure assisting the dominant imagination of the nation and its national subject⁴. Further, such a dominant nationalist discourse is perpetuated with concrete cultural artefacts and monuments, regulating the architecture of its subjects' living habitats, which, in return, consolidate the dominant nationhood imagination⁵. So, nationalism is a historically continuous socialisation process of an identified population, which concerns the manipulation of the plentiful subjective imaginations. Anderson referred to the nation as a "legacy of imperialist officical nationalism", in which nationhood is actuated through

¹ Sabina Mihelj and César E. Martínez, "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'New' Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 2 (April 1, 2021): 331–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12685>.

² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 2006), 1-8.

³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 9-36.

⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 163-186.

mass media, education system, and administrative regulations to perpetuate such a dominant discourse on what the right nationalism is⁶. He opined that the imaginative power of nationalism determines the official conceptualisation style of the national imagining⁷. However, I propose that this imaginative power's role in constituting the internal dynamic of its members' imagination was overlooked, leading to the philosophical concern of whether nationalism is prescribed or a product of a dynamic meaning-making process among multiple subjectivities.

In *Encoding/Decoding*, Stuart Hall argued that communication of socially constructed artefacts is a meaning-making process in which negotiations to interpret such a text are inevitable and they shall provide no definite answer to the right understanding and reproduction of this communicated cultural product⁸. This socio-cultural communication process is a discursive and reciprocal understanding process where the author or the encoder creates a text with their subjective discursive knowledge based on personal worldview, and the text receivers interpret this text with their own set of discursive cultural meaning-making tools. Since this meaning-making process is discursive and reciprocal, no correct answer is deemed possible about the concerned object. Most importantly, this communication process is by nature political regarding how different people with different socio-cultural backgrounds dialectically and reciprocally influence each other in the interpretation process⁹. In *Distinction*, Bourdieu stated that social discourse, especially assisted with the socialisation function of public education, acts as a reproduction of a dominant culture which facilitates and perpetuates historical domination of the powerful social group, in which the general cultural consumption reproduces the cultural and political resources of such a dominant group that legitimises their distinguished social status¹⁰. Therefore, the socially constructed narrative about nationalism has more nuances than just being merely an imagined community exerted by the dominant social group that Anderson proposed in *Imagined Communities*¹¹. Not only that, in Anderson's conceptualisation, nationalism is sustained with the invention of the printing technology, especially with the circulation of newspapers (mass media), which constituted collective national memory and forgetfulness

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 113-114.

⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 158.

⁸ Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language* (Routledge, 1980), 128-38.

⁹ Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 128-38.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "Introduction," in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Harvard University Press, 1987), 1-7.

¹¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 9-36.

assisting the production and reproduction of the national imagining¹². The need to re-evaluate the communicative nature of nationalism as an imagined community is even more critical in the age of social media (many-to-many communication), in line with Hall and Bourdieu's communication theories¹³.

Concerning Vietnamese nationalism, Anderson's nationalism and implications of Stuart Hall and Bourdieu's theories on social discourse are applicable to examine how nationalism works in Vietnam for two reasons, despite those theories being Western-centric. First, Vietnam was a colonised country in the 19th and 20th centuries and its historical nationalism is attached to the history of (de)colonisation¹⁴. From a Marxist perspective, Fuchs argued that nationalism, as an ideology, arises from the context of colonialism and imperialism to legitimise a particular class domination by creating an illusional common interest of the nation, such as the claim of self-determination and declaration of independence¹⁵. So, today's Vietnamese nationalism closely relates to the Western cultural conceptualisation of nationalism. Fuchs also wrote that a declaration of independence only occurs when the nation's society experiences external threat detrimental to its existential and political status, which asserts that nationalism has a strong relation to a country's positionality in international relations¹⁶. Secondly, Vietnam's aims to become an emerging power in international politics dominated by Western political powers such as the United Nations highlights that this rather biased international recognition of nationhood plays a crucial role in validating the Vietnamese state's domestic legitimacy¹⁷.

The Vietnamese government's conventional dissemination of a national identity through political-historical discourse directly linked to state legitimacy should be reconsidered. Especially when its state communication about historical-political legitimacy has been criticised for being authoritative with propaganda over-use to provide a monopolistic national narrative on the state's political power over history and its people¹⁸. Meanwhile, the emergence of social

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

¹³ Hall, "Encoding/Decoding"; Bourdieu, "Introduction."

¹⁴ Tran, "Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh's Journey to Become a Communist (1911 - 1920)."

¹⁵ Christian Fuchs, "Introduction," in *Nationalism on the Internet: Critical Theory and Ideology in the Age of Social Media and Fake News*, 2019, 1–18.

¹⁶ Fuchs, "Introduction."

¹⁷ Luong Tinh and Vu Thi Ngan, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Emergence of Vietnam as a Middle Power," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41, no. 2 (December 21, 2021): 303–25,

<https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034211057569>; Mulligan, "The Uses of Legitimacy in International Relations."

¹⁸ Giang Nguyen-Thu, "Vietnamese Media Going Social: Connectivism, Collectivism, and Conservatism," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 77, no. 4 (November 1, 2018): 895–908, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0021911818002504>.

media has challenged state political communication's authoritarianism in the Vietnamese context¹⁹. The Vietnamese government has extensively integrated social media political communication to secure its public presence and political impact on Vietnamese citizens, who are now not only media consumers but also active media users²⁰. Regarding this social dynamic, I propose that if the Vietnamese state does not change its political-historical discourse about the ruling power - the government and the Vietnamese Communist Party, public discontentment with the state's governmental practices can arise more vigorously in the age of digital media²¹.

Interestingly, during Covid-19, the Vietnamese government reconciled its public diplomacy thanks to effective political communication in consolidating public trust in the government through a demonstration of performed transparency in administrative decision-making²². Factors contributing to this state's public diplomacy improvement were the effective use of authoritarianism in information management to disseminate scientific health information and to prevent misinformation, as well as the recognition that Vietnamese people were active social media users who acquire information from social platforms on a daily basis²³. Apart from these practical reasons, one rhetorical factor contributing to the Vietnamese state's pandemic communication success was the use of a historical war narrative that implicitly legitimised the power of the Vietnamese government²⁴. The outcome of Vietnam's state Covid-19

¹⁹ Vu Dinh Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41, no. 1 (April 1, 2022): 3–33, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034211002850>.

²⁰ Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

²¹ Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

²² Kris Hartley, Sarah A. Bales, and Azad Singh Bali, "COVID-19 Response in a Unitary State: Emerging Lessons from Vietnam," *Policy Design and Practice*, February 1, 2021, 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/25741292.2021.1877923>; Le Thi Tam et al., "Receptivity of Governmental Communication and Its Effectiveness During COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency in Vietnam: A Qualitative Study," *Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management* 22, no. S1 (May 10, 2021): 45–64, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40171-021-00269-7>; Viet Phuong La et al., "Policy Response, Social Media and Science Journalism for the Sustainability of the Public Health System Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Vietnam Lessons," *Sustainability* 12, no. 7 (March 24, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12072931>.

²³ Hartley, Bales, and Bali, "COVID-19 Response in a Unitary State: Emerging Lessons from Vietnam"; La et al., "Policy Response, Social Media and Science Journalism for the Sustainability of the Public Health System Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Vietnam Lessons"; Tam et al., "Receptivity of Governmental Communication and Its Effectiveness During COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency in Vietnam: A Qualitative Study."

²⁴ Long Vũ Hoàng and Hải Đăng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia," *Southeast Asian Media Studies Journal* 3, no. 1 (2021): 69–92, https://www.academia.edu/61444119/Digital_Nationalism_during_the_COVID_19_Outbreak_in_Vietnam_Collective_Forgetting_and_Domestic_Xenophobia.

communication was that trust in the government was raised, and Vietnam's international status was significantly improved, which has had a positive impact on the domestic legitimacy and power of the Vietnamese government²⁵.

Also, Fuchs argued that during social difficulties, the state usually nationalises occurring issues to draw boundaries and consolidate the dominant collective interest for administrative purposes. This nationalisation of social issues tends to create a strong distinction between the recognised in-groups and out-groups of the official nationalism²⁶. With the emergence of social media, nationalism is narrated with more partisanship since citizens, as media users, have relatively increased autonomy compared to traditional mass political communication²⁷. Social media empowers citizens in civic engagement by facilitating them with technological means to voice in the mediated political sphere²⁸. In line with these theoretical insights about online political communication, Vietnamese new nationalism on social media also sees the nationalisation of significant social phenomena with increased citizen's political autonomy, especially in the most recent social event such as Covid-19²⁹. The pandemic saw significant changes in how the government used the nationalist narrative to tackle Covid-19 and how the public actively accepted to comply with this narrative³⁰.

So, it can be seen that the political-historical narrative plays a major role in consolidating the government's identity of being the ruling power in Vietnam, which mediates and perpetuates the government's authority in making the Vietnamese people accept that it is the national legitimate historical subject, followed by compliance with the government's political leadership not only on a rhetorical level but also in practice. Still, there were theoretical gaps in understanding Vietnamese nationalism as a social artefact since the suggested factors contributing to the Vietnamese state's effective use of nationalism were empirical, namely the

²⁵ Tam et al., "Receptivity of Governmental Communication and Its Effectiveness During COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency in Vietnam: A Qualitative Study."

²⁶ Fuchs, "Introduction."

²⁷ Mihelj and Martínez, "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'New' Nationalism."

²⁸ Mihelj and Martínez, "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'New' Nationalism."

²⁹ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

³⁰ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

government's use of social media political communication or performed transparency³¹. There might be a philosophical basis for understanding and designing Vietnam's political-historical narrative with the current dynamic of digital media political communication. This paper explores and reflects on the philosophical basis of Vietnamese new nationalism.

To answer the research question, I discussed and analysed the contemporary Vietnamese media landscape to highlight the dynamic of current relations among social agents of mass political communication. The discussion in this section points out a need for re-imagination of the form and dynamic of Vietnamese nationalism since the conventional communication hierarchy has been distorted due to the emergence of social media and the impact of Covid-19. As such, it is necessary that the contemporary Vietnamese form of nationalism be reconceptualised. This reconceptualisation consolidates the stance that nationalism is manifested and sustained by an imaginative community rather than an imagined community, in which the nationalist sentiment is created and reinforced by each person's will to be attached to a collective to gratify their individualistic needs. Consequently, such an internal dynamic of nationalism would lead to a new perspective on how Vietnam as a state should be governed. The Vietnamese government's primary concern is not what profile its historical subject should have but how to regulate communication flow among relevant social actors. These social actors can only be known through an identification process – a detour with an analysis of their communication dynamics. In this detour to identify relevant social actors, the role of Vietnamese national leaders and their relationship with their followers is re-defined. As such, there should be no leadership role in the current Vietnamese contemporary political context. The Vietnamese government system is a work division among social actors to sustain social cohesion and solidarity. My conclusion concerning the historical subject of Vietnam's new nationalism is that there should be no official nationalism and thus no official political-historical subject.

³¹ La et al., "Policy Response, Social Media and Science Journalism for the Sustainability of the Public Health System Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Vietnam Lessons"; Tam et al., "Receptivity of Governmental Communication and Its Effectiveness During COVID-19 Pandemic Emergency in Vietnam: A Qualitative Study."

Chapter 1: Traditional nationalism: A historical-political generative programme of collective consciousness

Constructionist communication theory suggests that social reality is dominantly built upon social communication processes³². In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson also suggested that nationalism is not a physical entity but a product of collective imagination, in which the narratives on nationalism have binding power on how involving people imagine their belongingness to this nation³³. As nationhood imagination is political, Anderson emphasised the primary role of political elites' leadership in perpetuating the discourse on official nationalism³⁴. Considering Vietnamese politics, the historical narrative in nationhood discourse closely relates to the political elite's leadership, which indirectly legitimises the current government and the Vietnamese Communist Party³⁵. Conventionally, Vietnamese political discourse on national history defines the official historical subject as Vietnamese people collectively in charge of the Revolution against both colonialism and class oppression³⁶.

The idea of "Vietnamese people ruling Vietnam" emerged from the decolonisation time against French colonisation, which came from Ho Chi Minh's Thoughts³⁷. Ho Chi Minh was the first president of modern Vietnam, whose political ideals still play an essential role in Vietnamese today's politics³⁸. Before the Revolution in 1945, the moral code stemming from Confucianism in Vietnam required its people to obey the ruler to sustain social stability³⁹. To free the country, Ho Chi Minh proposed that Vietnamese people had to change this mindset radically by embracing nationalism, in which the majority of Vietnamese people were meant to

³² Michael R. Carter, "The Hermeneutics of Frames and Framing," *SAGE Open* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 215824401348791, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013487915>.

³³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

³⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 161.

³⁵ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

³⁶ Thi Chin Doan, "Core Values of Vietnam's Socialist Model in Ho Chi Minh Thought," *Political Theory Online Journal*, April 26, 2021, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/item/781-core-values-of-vietnam%E2%80%99s-socialist-model-in-ho-chi-minh-thought.html>.

³⁷ Minh Trung Tran, "The Eternal Vitality of Ho Chi Minh's Ideology, Morality and Style," *Political Theory Online Journal*, December 21, 2020, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/item/752-the-eternal-vitality-of-ho-chi-minh%E2%80%99s-ideology-morality-and-style.html>.

³⁸ Doan, "Core Values of Vietnam's Socialist Model in Ho Chi Minh Thought."

³⁹ Thi Minh Tuyet Tran, "Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh's Journey to Become a Communist (1911 - 1920)," *Political Theory Online Journal*, July 4, 2022, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/item/1107-nguyen-ai-quoc-ho-chi-minh%E2%80%99s-journey-to-become-a-communist-1911-1920.html>.

be the ruler of the country and themselves; they should not submit to any external power⁴⁰. Thus, the idea of the historical subject is directly linked to nationalism in Ho Chi Minh Thought, a leadership style having strong ethos in Vietnamese cultural, political, and historical education about nationhood⁴¹. In Vietnam, the ruling class imposes its worldview on the public through a grand national narrative by disseminating nation-wide propaganda, shaping society's collective memory of how the Vietnamese official national subject should be like and whom it should submit to in the political sphere⁴².

Traditionally, the propaganda of the official discourse about nationalism in Vietnam is sustained by mass media⁴³. In this essay, mass communication is restricted to journalism. By law, Vietnamese journalism is the mouthpiece of the Vietnamese Communist Party to serve its orientations since the Party claims itself to be the party and the government of the people and for the people⁴⁴. At the same time, Vietnamese journalism has professional practices and routines to secure objectivity and critical reflection towards this national political discourse. It plays the double role as both the disseminator of the Communist hegemonic discourse and the watchdog of the political elites⁴⁵. Thus, what is said in mass media is assumed to represent Vietnamese people's will and their interests without partisanship. Still, the monopoly role of the state over mass media creates scepticism among the public about the state's hidden political agenda-setting⁴⁶.

⁴⁰ Tran, "Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh's Journey to Become a Communist (1911 - 1920).

⁴¹ Nguyen-Thu, "Vietnamese Media Going Social: Connectivism, Collectivism, and Conservatism."

⁴² Alessandro Belmonte and Michael Rochlitz, "Collective Memories, Propaganda and Authoritarian Political Support," *Economic Systems*, September 1, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecosys.2020.100771>; Doan, "Moral Education or Political Education in the Vietnamese Educational System?"

⁴³ Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

⁴⁴ Thi Lai Cam, "Provisions on Communist Party of Vietnam in Article 4 of 2013 Constitution," *Political Theory Online Journal*, January 26, 2021, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/item/764-provisions-on-communist-party-of-vietnam-in-article-4-of-2013-constitution.html>. The second point of the article states that "2. The Communist Party of Vietnam is closely associated with the People, shall serve the People, shall submit to the supervision of the People, and is accountable to the People for its decisions"; Văn Thắng Lưu, "Vai Trò Của Báo Chí Trong Đời Sống Chính Trị Việt Nam Hiện Nay," *Tuyên Giáo*, June 1, 2022, accessed April 4, 2023, <https://tuyengiao.vn/nghien-cuu/vai-tro-cua-bao-chi-trong-doi-song-chinh-tri-viet-nam-hien-nay-141463>.

⁴⁵ Lưu, "Vai Trò Của Báo Chí Trong Đời Sống Chính Trị Việt Nam Hiện Nay"; Hoàng, "Political Theory Education for Journalists, Editors and Technicians of Press Agencies: Situation and Solutions."

⁴⁶ Nguyen-Thu, "Vietnamese Media Going Social: Connectivism, Collectivism, and Conservatism"; Hoàng, "Political Theory Education for Journalists, Editors and Technicians of Press Agencies: Situation and Solutions."

Nevertheless, since the 2000s, the Internet has become more common among the Vietnamese population, followed by the increasing use of social media⁴⁷. Social media make mass communication, such as newspapers, no longer the only path to instant information access. With this new communication technology, users can also become content creators, meaning that other users do not only get information from the "professionals" but also ordinary people in a much faster way than traditional word-of-mouth communication. Such a new communication dynamic problematises the perception of the social world among the Vietnamese population⁴⁸. As social media have a massive userbase, the Vietnamese government participates in this emerging online political arena to reach its people⁴⁹. However, this new form of political communication has implied a more nuanced nature of many-to-many communication, which changes the way nationalism or the collective of people sharing the same national "tag" in a radical way.

⁴⁷ Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

⁴⁸ Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

⁴⁹ Thị Trường Giang Nguyễn and Thị Thu Nguyễn, "Sử Dụng Mạng Xã Hội Trong Truyền Thông Chính Trị ở Việt Nam," Political Theory Online Journal, September 9, 2022, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/index.php/dien-dan/item/4465-su-dung-mang-xa-hoi-trong-truyen-thong-chinh-tri-o-viet-nam.html>. The English title is "Utilising Social Media in Political Communication in Vietnam"

Chapter 2: Emergence of social media in Vietnamese political communication and social impact of Covid-19

Media scholars Mihelj and Martínez argued that the participatory nature of digital media users had weakened the state's power to exert a dominant national identity over its population⁵⁰. Social media technological affordances facilitate users with the capacity to personalise their information resources, which leads to more partisanship in online political communication, making nationhood imaginations heterogeneous rather than homogeneous⁵¹. The many-to-many communication structure on social media suggests that if the information is mediated by anyone, it is challenging to be traced back to the source⁵². This communication dynamic, in which information receivers become disseminators with the capacity to edit media content, implies that political communication's conventional hierarchy with the audience's belief in the integrity of the sources has been distorted⁵³. Further, social media reinforce post-truth characteristics of communication because their algorithms consolidate users' echo chambers, restricting these users' accessibility to divergent informational sources⁵⁴. The social media impact on political communication was highlighted during Covid-19. Health communication saw the distortion of the conventional top-down communication hierarchy that favours experts and authoritative figures' dominance on the submitted audience⁵⁵. The primary explanation for this social phenomenon is that the diffusion of digital media has created more agency for the audiences compared to traditional mass political communication, which empowers them with the capacity to personalise resources of information⁵⁶. This implies that people tend to have more trust in

⁵⁰ Mihelj and Martínez, "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'New' Nationalism."

⁵¹ Mihelj and Martínez, "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'New' Nationalism."

⁵² Brian H. Spitzberg, "Comprehending Covidiocy Communication: Conspiracy Theory, and Fake News," *Communicating Science in Times of Crisis*, May 3, 2021, 15–53, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119751809.ch2>.

⁵³ Spitzberg, "Comprehending Covidiocy Communication: Conspiracy Theory, and Fake News."

⁵⁴ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

⁵⁵ Diego Laurentino Lima, Maria Antonieta Albanez A. De Medeiros Lopes, and Ana C. Brito, "Social Media: Friend or Foe in the COVID-19 Pandemic?," *Clinics* 75 (May 15, 2020): e1953, <https://doi.org/10.6061/clinics/2020/e1953>; Edson C. Tandoc, Zheng Jie Lim, and Richard Ling, "Defining 'Fake News,'" *Digital Journalism* 6, no. 2 (February 7, 2018): 137–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>; Henry Kwok, Parlo Singh, and Stephen Heimans, "The Regime of 'Post-Truth': COVID-19 and the Politics of Knowledge," *Discourse* 44, no. 1 (August 10, 2021): 106–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2021.1965544>.

⁵⁶ Mihelj and Martínez, "Digital Nationalism: Understanding the Role of Digital Media in the Rise of 'New' Nationalism"; Spitzberg, "Comprehending Covidiocy Communication: Conspiracy Theory, and Fake News."

information resources proximate to their personal worldviews rather than from the distant authority⁵⁷. In Vietnam, as the Vietnamese government has participated in social media political communication among many other rivals, including its political opponents, the mentioned social phenomenon of online political communication also occurred in this country⁵⁸. As opposed to traditional mass communication, the Vietnamese state's authoritative discourse on official nationalism is highly challenged due to this distorted communication hierarchy⁵⁹.

Under Covid-19's impact, the government used the rhetoric of solidarity and nationalism to encourage its people to do something highly personal and private. This was expressed in phrases like "Staying at home is patriotic," which were dispersed via social media channels⁶⁰. Since the form of delivered messages appeared as personalised and the reference to the "outside world" was limited due to the lockdown, Covid-19 political communication promoted proximity and intertwinement between the public and private sphere⁶¹. After the lockdown, the separation of the public and the private became clearer as the artefacts of the public sphere were accessible again. Yet, this sphere's distinction was in the context of "the new normal", meaning that the public-private intertwinement did not disappear but accumulated in this new norm. This is a revelation of how the public and the private can interplay with each other. This newly revealed relationship between the public and the private makes apparent the fluidity of social life (re)imagination and radically changes how the collective of Vietnamese people is represented in each person's worldview. What was significant about pandemic communication was that the Covid-19 regulations, such as lockdown and quarantine, reinforced the private aspects of nationalism, which was traditionally believed to belong to the public. As such, nationalism was within each person's household and private imagination, expressed by personal acts, namely "staying at home". On this very rare occasion, the Vietnamese people experienced the intangibility of nationalism, which was directly linked to the moment of historical re-imagination

⁵⁷ Lima, De Medeiros Lopes, and Brito, "Social Media: Friend or Foe in the COVID-19 Pandemic?"; Spitzberg, "Comprehending Covidiocy Communication: Conspiracy Theory, and Fake News."

⁵⁸ Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

⁵⁹ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia"; Lam, "Information and Communications Technologies, Online Activism, and Implications for Vietnam's Public Diplomacy."

⁶⁰ Hartley, Bales, and Bali, "COVID-19 Response in a Unitary State: Emerging Lessons from Vietnam."

⁶¹ La et al., "Policy Response, Social Media and Science Journalism for the Sustainability of the Public Health System Amid the COVID-19 Outbreak: The Vietnam Lessons."

of this sentiment. It was no longer the monuments, the flags, etc., but it must be the people who actually reconstructed the image of the nation and the collective people in their private life, including its most banal form⁶². Therefore, the collective imagination of nationalism was enacted by each person with their own discursive understanding of the concept, which was also effective in reinforcing national solidarity against the pandemic⁶³.

Consequently, during Covid-19, any private activity could link to the experience of public life, which is the identification with nationhood due to the proximity between the lockdown (public) and private life. For example, playing sports or doing yoga at home could link to nationalism or a sense of togetherness with the community. This was why the sentiment with the nation was not purely patriotism, as the form of this sentiment was represented through banality and personal ego, leading to a sense of intimacy with nationalist sentiment. The intimacy occurred when the public aspect was inescapable, as the virus and lockdown were real in everyday life, in both banal and significant forms, from washing hands and wearing masks to falling ill or even death. In other words, it is the new attitude to accommodate and balance the new distorted relationship between the imagined public and the private sphere, where the public is inescapable in private life. Therefore, any attempt to improve private life quality would go hand in hand with the reconciliation with public life, which appeared in the form of nationalist sentiment, perceived by the person experiencing it.

Nationalism becoming a privately intimate experience is problematic because it implies that narratives about the nation are unavoidably individualistic. During the pandemic, Vietnamese people used the state's nationalist rhetoric and health regulations to serve their personal agenda in an attempt to seek freedom from the virus⁶⁴. Meanwhile, this individualism is highly opposed to the Vietnamese hegemonic stance on how nationalism should work⁶⁵. Concerning Anderson's argument on the individual's imagination of nationhood, the

⁶² Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia." I agree with the authors of this article that after the pandemic, the national is personal.

⁶³ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

⁶⁴ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

⁶⁵ Viet Quang Ly, "Ho Chi Minh's Viewpoints on Prevention and Combat against Manifestation of Degradation in Political Ideology, Morality and Lifestyles of Party Members," Political Theory Online Journal, October 20, 2020, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/item/736-ho-chi-minh%E2%80%99s-viewpoints-on-prevention-and-combat-against-manifestation-of-degradation-in-political-ideology-morality-and-lifestyles-of-party-members.html>.

individualism I just pointed out is different because this imagination is a result of the subject's pro-active imaginative behaviour in constituting the collective idea of nationhood, not just simply about trying to draw belongingness to the nation⁶⁶. So, Covid-19, as a social phenomenon, supports my argument that the political elites and ordinary people mutually construct the idea of nationalism. Here, I propose that understanding the Vietnamese political-historical narrative on nationalism needs recognition of relevant social agents' subjectivity in digital nationalism, a perspective adopted extensively in fandom/audience studies, which posits that fandom is an imaginative community rather than an imagined community⁶⁷.

⁶⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*.

⁶⁷ Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?"

Chapter 3: The nation: imaginative imagined fandom

The nationalist: Discursive learning social agents

Regarding the impact of Covid-19 on Vietnam's political communication, I argue that the public sphere is possible to be part of the private sphere, and the narrative on nationalism concerns an individualistic and intimate topic⁶⁸. To understand this new nationalism, it is necessary to map how Vietnamese people would distinguish their private life from public life. McAllister argued that the Vietnamese state has always attempted to assimilate itself with Vietnamese traditional cultural rituals⁶⁹. This state's integration strategy aims to emphasise its inevitable and inescapable political legitimacy over its people since these rituals are perceived as worthy of collective preservation and regarded as essential for each person's private life⁷⁰. Thus, I want to explore how extensively the nationalism narrative roots in the Vietnamese people's individual perception of their social life through the examination of public-private distinction.

I suggest the distinction can be drawn based on imagined context distinction, not physical context distinction. Conventionally, Vietnamese nationalism appears in the public space, where people submit to a hegemonic discourse about sovereignty and have to act in accordance with an institutionalised persona⁷¹. Therefore, the public-private distinction is more about self-control since the public/private identity is signified based on what identifies it - the imagined communication context, rather than pure external forces such as physical discipline. What identifies a person's social persona is discursive and based on how involving interlocutors mutually and reciprocally identify each other, which is not based on a given desired persona that the interlocutors want to have. This is also an interplay with communication power in the meaning-making process, which requires participants to actively engage and be imaginative of their roles while communicating with each other. As such, each person's role identity in any specific context is not identified based on an identity's category but through its identification, which is not formal and normative but contingent.

⁶⁸ Hoàng and Đặng, "Digital Nationalism during the COVID-19 Outbreak in Vietnam: Collective Forgetting and Domestic Xenophobia."

⁶⁹ Patrick McAllister, "Religion, the State, and the Vietnamese Lunar New Year," *Anthropology Today* 29, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 18–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8322.12018>.

⁷⁰ McAllister, "Religion, the State, and the Vietnamese Lunar New Year."

⁷¹ Anh Vu and Binh Huy Le, "The Politics of Civil Society Narratives in Contestation between Liberalism and Nationalism in Authoritarian Vietnam," *Contemporary Politics*, July 20, 2022, 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2022.2102320>.

Covid-19 saw that the vocabulary signifying the two public and private spheres could equally appear in the same sentence, distorting the traditional and normalised imagination of social roles. The distorted political communication hierarchy highlighted the question of how social agents, as media users, draw the line between contexts of communication to appropriately perform their social persona's matching with the communication context. The concern is more critical when it comes to how individuals shift from being private and public social agents while being in the same physical place.

If Covid-19 made nationalism an intimate experience, then the way nationalism can function and exert power over individuals is because they are active imaginers. The totality of these individuals' utilisation of nationalism in serving personal agendas conditions nationalism as a collective value. Therefore, nationalism is part of each individual's identity and is individualistic, making it a tool for the individual to influence the social world. As such, the conceptualisation of nationalism as a collective identity superior to individualistic identity is outdated since nationalism is only enacted through media users' personal experience and active engagement in the discourse on an individualistic level. Nationalism is only possible if the individuals initially actuate it in their worldviews.

Since the Vietnamese government aims to foster interrelations among its people so that they are as free and dignified as possible, the Vietnamese historical subject must be compatible with the social reality that individuals learn and act upon social constructs discursively⁷². Then, suppose the media play such an essential role in creating an imagined collective consciousness. In that case, the political-historical discourse on nationalism must define its historical subject, including its "media user" attribute. As such, in a mediatised world, where truth is not possible due to the problematic methods of verification, the historical subject necessarily be active media users who are able (or forced) to control their worldviews. In Vietnamese contemporary political discourse, the historical subject's profile is no longer the people with nationalist sentiments who passively experience nationhood through mass media but are active media users contributing to the meaning-making of nationalism. Therefore, the realisation of the omnipresence of active imagination is a necessity.

⁷² Doan, "Core Values of Vietnam's Socialist Model in Ho Chi Minh Thought."

Re-imagining the Vietnamese form of nationalism as an imaginative fandom

I suggest this internal dynamic of nationalism is similar to fandom's dynamic. Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington argued that fandoms are collectives of people who are not passive consumers of mediated content but also active and participatory members of such community, contributing to the existence and durability of the shared identity⁷³. Fandoms should be understood as imaginative communities since the agents within these communities are actively interpreting received texts, reproducing those texts creatively, and can even be the text producers as long as their content is relevant to the shared identity. Nationalism can be understood as imaginative fandom because nationalism is enacted through the form and content of a narrative with a process of proactive imagining and enacting belongingness to a fandom. Yet, the nation is not a mere social group since it has "hard" social consequences with institutions and institutionalised actors. People appear in profiles in nationalism as patriots, civil servants or citizens. Those profiles are the rituals and actualisation of nationalism, which have binding power on the material people.

Nationalism is a product of an imagined world enacted by individual actions. Therefore, it is expressed in the form of a shared collection of personal worldviews, not of the collective. The collective does not think, but each agent in the collective thinks and forms a collective convention. This means that nationalism is from within each person, and an individualistic working mechanism is what makes it collective. Then, the historical subject compatible with nationalism is not a concrete profile decided by any formal institution or institutionalised actor but by the individual social members as a totality. No definition is possible to "catch" the historical subject since the material world is experienced through individual worldviews and enacted via personalised communication resources. Most importantly, the subject exists from within and is with fluidity, meaning that defining the historical subject equals studying the past to define the historical subject as compatible with that historical period. That defined historical subject can only be known in hindsight, not prescribed. However, it is crucial to have an indication of the historical subject based on the past because this subject acts as a point of departure for any future decisions, playing as a source of anticipation but not a determinant. This is especially fundamental in the case of constructing and perpetuating nationalism, which serves the most institutionalised imagined community with binding power over the individuals

⁷³ Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?"

politically. It is because social norms, laws and regulations have positive effects on every individual. Combined with the argument that nationalism is individualistic, it can be said that devotion to one's nation is to devote to one's own worldview.

So, my sketch of the Vietnamese national historical subject is that this subject must have a sense of self with situational characteristics. Since a person at any communicative moment would have simultaneously existing potential profiles, that person will have to clearly define when they act as a national historical subject. Each potential subjective worldview is the concrete background of each imaginative imagined community (e.g., social class, cultural group, gender, etc.) that a person has, and these communities are compatible with their own specific social persona. If that person cannot clearly define their communication position, they can easily confuse their simultaneous subjectivities' reasoning. The choice of persona is critical in the mediatisation age, where each platform acts as a different reality and requires individual flexibility in identity performance. There is no longer one historical subject but only relative subjectivities in the background of the identified individual. This is because there is no concrete materiality but multiple realities at one moment, which is identified through the forms of multiple imagined profiles and contexts. The fluidity and flexibility of the subject challenge the single identification of the people in Vietnamese political discourse but highlights the relations of individuals' worldviews.

Reflecting on the history of the Vietnamese Communist Party, which is currently the only ruling power in the Vietnamese political system, the ruling power's ideological shift to Communism proves the fluidity of the historical subject. The material people at ideology shifting moment are not attached to any values and expectations since they must get rid of what binds their socio-cultural positionality to construct an entirely new socio-political structure. Although historical experience still plays a determining goal in the identity's identification, the moment of submitting to an ideology is not determined by the material history, but it is the moment of enacted belief in a particular worldview that decides the subject's action⁷⁴. This enacted belief depends on the sentiment of trust in the possibility to change the reality – the subject's trust in its own mobility power.

In line with Vu's proposition that public trust in the government facilitates national solidarity, I argue that trust is a fundamental factor sustaining people's cooperation with the

⁷⁴ Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?"

state's governance⁷⁵. To foster this mutual trust, it is necessary to embrace the individuals' trust in their own power when they live in a society, which is trust in the relationships with others constraining these individuals' being. So, a society is more than a collective identity with shared values and practices; it is with internal dynamics and active trustable relations with others.

⁷⁵ Van Vu, "Public Trust in Government and Compliance with Policy during COVID-19 Pandemic: Empirical Evidence from Vietnam," *Public Organization Review* 21, no. 4 (October 6, 2021): 779–96, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-021-00566-w>.

Chapter 4: The national fandom's mechanism: the perpetual annoyance of mistranslation

The main concern of Vietnamese political discourse on the legitimate historical subject is no longer the definition of this subject but the governance of this subject's social relations through communication. Contemporary Vietnamese society sees new media reinforcing the individual worldview. As such, people live with simultaneously signified worlds, which are connected as a collective in the forms of imaginative imagined (online) communities, which inherit offline communities' power to create binding social constructs⁷⁶. So, to achieve the goal of a cohesive and functioning society, the first objective is to bind people as a collective, both online and offline. This collective no longer has an essential collective identity but the mechanism of an internally dynamic society. What binds people in an imaginative-community nation is not the regulation of human bodies and thoughts but mutual trust and submission to the recognition of involving parties' power. The goal of an imaginative community with increased political partisanship is not to have any collective goal but to stay as a collective with internal interrelations among social subjects. This is because the collective goal is always the goal of the past, which is known in hindsight but imposed on the anticipation of the future⁷⁷. Shifting the focus on trust does not lead to a more stable society, but it is possible to point out how a cohesive society should function.

The new Vietnamese nationalism discourse should not be about institutionalising people to fit in with a given national historical subject. It is impossible to design a role model for people to follow since they live in a common imagined territory with individualistic imagination about shared nationhood. As such, it is impossible to prescribe an architecture of human relations in society. People are free to create and recreate themselves and their social relations. If they choose to live in such a shared society, they should know that a society is a collective of trusting

⁷⁶ Sandvoss, Gray, and Harrington, "Introduction: Why Still Study Fans?"

⁷⁷ Đức Thảo Trần, *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, ed. Robert S. Cohen, trans. Daniel J. Herman and Donald V. Morano, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, vol. 49 (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986). This is an interpretation of Tran Duc Thao's argument on "the past", he wrote "The past is lived as past in memory. But intended with the objective determination of being past, it will no longer be characterised as past but as present: it is presently past (79)". And, in combination with his concluding statement on Marxism "As the realisation of the human form of humanity, Marxism achieves the ideal aspirations of the past. But this itself is not asserted in terms of an idea: it is the actual movement of the social totality where the traditional formations are absorbed in the proletariat by the materiality of their real life (218)."

and trustable parties. There is no essence of a human as a nationalist but only social profiles to fulfil, based on which they can determine their choices of relationship with others. Yet, what matters is not how people play but how these roles bind each other since they all live in the same material world, no matter how it appears to each of them and how each of them weaves it.

The aim of the fandom

The historical subject is not an empty and normative profile of a population. However, it provides a common name, such as nationhood and its compatible system of values, a hegemonic ideology, to serve the government's administrative purposes. The production process of nationalist collective identity should be focused on because it creates relations among involved actors. Still, this imagination of nationhood should not be deemed a social determinant but an anticipation of society's durability.

Whoever is in control of nationhood must be ready for any changes and adaptation if historical time requires. The historical moment mentioned here is the need to shift from conceptualising nationalism as an imagined community to an imaginative community. This change is urgent since the conceptualisation of the historical subject must be compatible with the socio-political reality of interrelations among people. Imposing the conceptualisation of a preferred historical in the past is to escape from a critical historical moment under the name of historical legitimacy, which is to bend the revealed reality rather than recognise it. To enact this adaptation, social reconstruction of nationhood shall need collective trust. It is the case where trust is important since one person cannot perform their power without trust that they have the power to change. So, what matters in this historical moment is that collective trust fosters a cohesive and functional society. Trust is necessary for a socially negotiated legitimacy and, thus, an effective government. So, the essence of a functioning society under the name of nationhood is the possibility to change, not the possibility of reaching an ideal. Concerning Vietnamese politics with a one-party system, having no opportunity for the alternative is the cause of distrust, a (paradoxical) problem of a one-party political system, which acts as both the root of conspiracy theories and the desire to reach transparency.

Most of the time, distrust comes from the mystification of "the out-group", that the other cannot be touched, communicated, and understood⁷⁸. This mystification can be understood as an artificial distancing technique to tell apart the in-groups and the out-groups. It is the belief that there is a lack of proximity and sympathy between the two so that the group of interest can be highlighted. Regarding the role of the authoritative bodies in Vietnamese society, distrust in these institutions might come from the belief that there is the other in the indivisible collective of people, or the out-group within the in-group. This out-group is generally the "from-above power".

Deciphering "the out-group"

From my perspective, I think that Ho Chi Minh was wrong in pointing out that there should be (somewhere) an ideal type of leaders and leadership representing the ruling class in a socialist society⁷⁹. This is because the use of terms such as "ruling" and "in power" reminds and perpetuates the discourse of "the oppressor and the oppressed", making the social imagination inescapable of the "oppression" dialectic. I think that in order to demystify "the other", a shift of perspective is necessary for seeing the relationship between the government and the people. Since the Vietnamese government is trying to reach the ideal of building a government that is close and belongs to its people, there needs a dialogue between these two parties. There should be a structural change in the operation of the government's communication towards its people. Instead of top-down communication and power exercise and having a hierarchical communication regarding government and the people (in the case of neither being above the other), the operation of the political mechanism should be based on the principle of "work-division". This means that the government is not the highest institution in exercising power in the context of politics, but it is an actor within the whole picture of political activity.

The difference between the government (the ones considered as having elite power in the traditional perspective) and the people is the difference between "the one who can do something"

⁷⁸ Zhongyuan Wang, "From Crisis to Nationalism?," *Chinese Political Science Review* 6, no. 1 (January 4, 2021): 20–39, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-020-00169-8>.

⁷⁹ Quoc Khanh Lai, "Ho Chi Minh's Tolerant and Generous Leadership Style," *Political Theory Online Journal: Research Journal and Scientific Voice of Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics*, September 24, 2021, accessed April 4, 2023, <http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/theory-research/item/813-ho-chi-minh%E2%80%99s-tolerant-and-generous-leadership-style.html>; Ly, "Ho Chi Minh's Viewpoints on Prevention and Combat against Manifestation of Degradation in Political Ideology, Morality and Lifestyles of Party Members."

(in brief, "the able") and "the one who wants something to happen" (in brief, "the aspirer"). This is the distinction in formal politics concerning activities between the institutions, which is distinctive from general politics or lobby politics, where anyone could engage in political activities. The analogy of this new perspective could be taken from the role of diplomats and ordinary citizens with regard to international relations among countries. In this perspective, "the able" is the one with authority because of the particular social function that their occupation and its function bear. "The aspirer" is the one contributing to society and is the main social subject who can express society's will. "The able" is part of "the aspirer"; the fact that they are called "the able" is due to the function of their job, which allows them to execute decision-making (for example, working in the government or having the function that can make decisions in equivalent context). As such, the people working in the Parliament have certain functions of their occupation where such functions allow (and require) them to decide matters on a national level. "The aspirer" would need to actuate their will, which has social consequences, through "the able", namely, changing a particular law or writing a new law. With the "work-division" principle, no institutionalised actor would have more power than the other in the theoretical political context, as long as no one, especially "the able", does not abuse the function of their role/occupation. The abuse of power stems from the abuse of the role's function, not the abuse of power as such. An example of abuse is that "the able" refuses "a will" because their occupation's functions allow them to do so, despite this will being plausible, can be actuated or at least discussable. If "the able" exercise their function accurately, "the able" would bring forth "a problem" or "a will" in a public discussion, for example, putting forward in the Parliament. The role of "the able" is similar to a mediator, or doing the non-particular, to tell apart from "the aspirer", who does concrete and particular work in their social life.

If there is only one party, then there is no party because everyone is forced to be in such a collective. Having one party means that people can temporarily forget the "us vs. them" narrative and the urge to be defined as different. This means that people are forced to be in one collective and that all opinions in the collective must be considered to secure cohesion. Just like when people are forced to be in one historical time of the pandemic, if it is inescapable, it has to be changed from within. So, the "one-party system" can exploit this collective annoyance of inescapability to make people relate to each other rather than making them want to escape it.

Conclusion

This essay explores the possibility of the contemporary Vietnamese political-historical subject in the post-Covid era, where the political communication hierarchy sees both media outlets and users as the main actors of information dissemination. I propose that defining an absolute historical subject is detrimental to both Vietnamese political and cultural affairs. The argument for this thesis was built based on an evaluation of the dominant political stance on Vietnamese national history – the Vietnamese government. I have adopted concepts from fan studies about imaginative community and explained that this imaginative capacity is possible with the subject's capacity to execute historical judgement and anticipation of the future. As this essay aims to explore the concept of a new historical subject in Vietnamese political history, it ends with a suggestion for a different perspective of looking at the governmental power structure in this country where the individualistic stance of the citizen was in the spotlight. Firstly, I discussed the contemporary Vietnamese social and political media landscape and concluded that collective values in Vietnamese collectivism are no higher commands from the political elites but are enacted by each individual of that society through a reciprocal social communication process.

Consequently, it is essential that the form of contemporary Vietnamese nationalism be re-imagined, focusing on its followers' imaginative capacity rather than on the imposition power of collective values. To consolidate this argument, I explored an individual's identity distinction concerning an interplay between their public and private personas. I argue that there is a fluidity of context distinction in identifying the individual's subjective stance towards its object – a common national historical narrative. This fluidity is immanent in the subject's being and relationship with other happenings relating to it. This means that the Vietnamese nationalist historical subject has no fixed profile but appears with a multitude of possibilities at any given time, which is dependent on the subject's active imagination of the self. So, the historical subject has no identity but is known only through its identification with the concurrent meaning-making process with its interlocutors. The context of subjective perception is not given but based on the imaginative capacity of whoever is involved in the communicative and imaginative situation.

At the same time, history acts as a powerful agent in Vietnamese culture and politics. Also, the history of Communism in Vietnam has a close relationship with the establishment of Vietnamese nationalism, by being the premise of modern Vietnam. The basis for legitimacy and

power of the current ruling power attached to this established nationalism, the Vietnamese Communist Party and its government, should be understood from the perspective of an imaginative community as well. I propose that in the current Vietnamese political context, there should be no leaders performing leadership. Its government system should be understood as a totality of work-division mechanism between involving social actors. Therefore, the definition of the historical subject in the Vietnamese political context is not a fixed term targeting any specific social profile and group but a fluid negotiation process among relevant social actors such as government employees and citizens.

Nevertheless, this conceptualisation of new Vietnamese nationalism comprises significant limitations as the perspective adopted to evaluate the Vietnamese historical subject is Western-centric. Also, I have not dwelled upon the cultural norms and traditions seen from the perspective of the Vietnamese socio-cultural lens. Meanwhile, Vietnamese culture might dominantly adopt a different conceptualisation of an individual's imaginative capacity. This implies that the expectation of how each individual should act within their own political context is possibly socio-culturally dependent.

Further research could be done on this topic by taking a stance from a more Vietnamese-oriented perspective, where individualism is not focused on, but the responsibility of each individual towards their society is emphasised. Plus, there should be more consideration of the historical-cultural context of Vietnam, where collectivism and authoritarianism are a norm in its traditions of politics. For example, Burr argues that there is an interaction between Confucian and Communist expectations of a person's role in society and in different social context⁸⁰. Such an interaction between ideologies concurring in Vietnam is unique to this country's socio-political setting. These unique social dynamics should be investigated with more depth. Lastly, the sensitivity of cultural relativism and ethnocentrism should be recognised. Future philosophical judgements should be aware of biased perspectives rooted in assuming cultural context as the absolute factor regulating political norms and expectations.

⁸⁰ Rachel Burr, "The Complexity of Morality: Being a 'Good Child' in Vietnam?," *Journal of Moral Education* 43, no. 2 (May 15, 2014): 156–68, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240.2014.893421>.

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