



The Shifts of Masculine Domination in Vietnam: Examining Mixed and Hybrid Characteristics in Feminist Texts on Vietnamese Newspapers in the Early Twentieth Century



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[*Abstract*]

This paper aims to identify the shifts of masculine domination, illuminating Vietnamese men and women's actual position in society through surveying the mixed and hybrid characteristics described in the feminist texts in the early twentieth century. This paper concentrates on the feminist writings of the two exceptionally male intellectuals Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882–1936) and Phan Khôi (1887–1959). In order to implement these goals, the paper first examines the popular phenomenon of ventriloquism among Vietnamese male intellectuals, whose dominant attitudes may still be unveiled in feminist texts. Secondly, the paper focuses on surveys of men's direct discourse in constructing the model of women's liberation. From these two contents, this paper answers the following questions: Why have Vietnamese men become feminists? What were the causes, purposes, and effects of this phenomenon? To look at the nature of Vietnamese feminism, this paper will show the shifts of masculine domination in Vietnam as another form of protecting men's privileges. All analyses in this study will ground discussion on the economic, political, and social

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contexts and conditions of Vietnam in the early twentieth century.

Keywords: feminism, masculine domination, feminist texts, Vietnamese newspapers

I . Introduction

Vietnamese society in the early twentieth century is multifaceted and complex. This issue is publicly discussed in the press which served as a major medium for conveying and reflecting on Vietnam's social, political, economic, and cultural aspects during this period. In these shifts in all aspects of life, although Western thought is imprinted in every element of the Vietnamese in urban areas (see Hoài Thanh and Hoài Chân 2007), especially in the upper classes, traditional view of women's roles and functions is quite conservative, which seems hopeless for women. Therefore, the emergence of a series of social phenomena such as women committing suicide, prostitution, and women trafficking (mostly through marriage) can be viewed as an inevitable consequence of Vietnam's concession process (which includes acculturation and cultural resistance). The gravity of this social trend has shifted public debates toward women's issues, emphasizing determining the causes and finding solutions to prevent that gloomy reality.

With the appearance of columns devoted to women in many newspapers such as *Lục tỉnh tân văn* (Six South-Vietnam Provinces' News), *Đãng cổ tùng báo* (Dai Nam's Daily News), *Đông Dương tạp chí* (Journal of Indochina), *Nam phong tạp chí* (Journal of South Wind), *Hữu thanh* (The Sound), *Thực nghiệp dân báo* (A Civil Newspaper of Professional Practices), *Trung Bắc tân văn* (The Centre-North's News), *Đông Pháp thời báo* (The Indochinese Courier), or the publication of specialized newspapers for women such as *Nữ giới chung* (Women's Bells), *Phụ nữ Tân văn* (Women's News), *Phụ nữ thời đàm* (Women's Discussions), *Đàn bà* (Women), *Đàn bà mới* (New Women), *Nữ giới* (Female Gender), *Việt Nữ* (Vietnamese Female), women became a pressing issue and had a profound influence on many areas of Vietnamese society at that time. In the

context of a colonial country, French colonial policies, the new ideas of Western feminism, social emergencies, and gloomy realities in Vietnam altered the face of society, fractured personal and community relationships, and sparked debates about women's issues, compelling men to reconsider their views on women's roles and functions in society.

However, the early 20th-century feminist movement in Vietnam was not a purely social phenomenon that fought for women's equal rights and emerged from the influence of Western feminism in the context of Vietnam's becoming a French colony. It was also a campaign related to many political, economic, and cultural issues as well as nationalism. Writings supporting this feminist movement reveal that gender oppression, the reception of Western thoughts, and an antagonistic relationship between Feminism and Confucianism contain many factors concerning the historical and political fate of Vietnam. They became the underlying motivation for the development of Vietnamese feminism. Based on examinations in the female newspapers, this paper aims to identify the shifts in masculine dominance, illuminating Vietnamese men's actual position in society as well as showing another form of protecting men's privilege through a survey of mixed and hybrid characteristics described in the early twentieth century feminist texts. This paper concentrates on the feminist writings of the two exceptionally male intellectuals, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh (1882–1936) and Phan Khôi (1887–1959).

It is an obvious fact that the "women's issue" in Vietnam did not just begin with the establishment of female newspapers; it started earlier, even before the first women's newspaper, *Nữ giới chung* first saw light in 1918 (Nguyễn 2001). This is a movement that was initiated and carried out by men—radical male intellectuals. In the early stages, when women had voicelessness, feminist texts appeared either in the form of ventriloquism or masculine discourse. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh, one of the two authors on whom this writing concentrates, was a well-known Vietnamese journalist, writer, and radical politician. He was not just an exceptional intellectual with a profound understanding of Western culture but also of Vietnamese traditions and customs. Known as the "father of journalism in

Vietnam," he was the editor-in-chief of two newspapers, *Đăng cổ tùng báo*,¹ a Vietnamese and Chinese bilingual newspaper in Tonkin² (1907), and *Đông Dương tạp chí* (1913), the first Vietnamese newspaper that gathered most of the leading personalities, including Confucian (conservative) and new intellectuals, as well as the first newspaper to instruct people on how to use the Vietnamese script. He was elected to the Tonkin Advisory Council and held some important positions in the colonial government. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh continuously served as the principal editor of the newspaper *Trung Bắc Tân văn*, (founded by Schneider) in 1914, and he founded the French newspaper *L'Annam Nouveau* with the intention of promoting his ideology in 1931. After witnessing Western civilization firsthand, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh desired to reform the nation by developing domestic publishing business to spread the Quốc ngữ script (Vietnamese) and refute the backward feudal practices. The second individual is Phan Khôi, a talented journalist and one of the leading intellectuals who established the cultural groundwork for Vietnamese society in the early twentieth century. In his journalism, Phan Khôi proved himself a scholar and thinker. He contributed significantly to various newspapers, including *Đăng cổ tùng báo*, *Nam phong*, *Lục tỉnh tân văn*, *Thực nghiệp dân báo*, *Hữu Thanh*, *Thần Chung*, *Phụ nữ Tân văn*, *Phụ nữ thời đàm*, *Tràng An*, and *Sông Hương*. In addition, he was also a notable translator of the Protestant Bible, a Vietnamese linguist, and literary critic. Phan Khôi discussed a wide range of topics in his writings, including criticizing Confucianism's old views and receiving Western ideas. These two eminent intellectuals' voices had a profound effect on the spiritual life of Vietnamese people in general and women in particular. Selected to survey two authors, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh and Phan Khôi, where one writes in the name of a female voice³ (the female

¹ *Đăng cổ Tùng báo* is the follow-up newspaper of *Đại Nam Đồng văn nhật báo*, published weekly, in two languages: Vietnamese and Chinese. No. 1 of *Đăng cổ Tùng báo* (also known as *Đại Nam*), followed by *Đại Nam Đồng văn nhật báo*, started with No. 1 (793), March 28, 1907; the last edition is No. 34 (826), November 14, 1907. The director is F. H. Schneider and Editor-in-chief is Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh.

² North Vietnam

³ In *L'Annam Nouveau*, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh admitted to impersonating a female voice in *Đăng cổ tùng báo* and *Đông dương tạp chí*, and in this French newspaper, he wrote entirely as a male intellectual.

ventriloquistic cross-dressing), and one who openly speaks from a male's perspective, the article aims to provide a convincing interpretation of a representative facet of the early 20th-century feminist movement in Vietnam and to highlight the shifts in masculine domination that were revealed in this movement—a movement that fought for women's equal rights, but fiercely initiated and enforced by men.

To implement these goals, firstly, the paper examines the popular phenomenon of the female ventriloquistic cross-dressing of the Vietnamese intellectuals, whose dominant attitudes were embedded in feminist texts. Secondly, the paper focuses on men's direct discourse in constructing the model of women's liberation. From these, the paper answers the following questions: Why did Vietnamese men become feminists? What were the causes, purposes, and effects of this phenomenon? Finally, to look at the nature of Vietnamese feminism, this paper will show the shifts of masculine domination in Vietnam as another form of protecting men's privileges. All analyses in this study will be based on the economic, political, and social contexts and conditions of Vietnam in the early twentieth century.

II . The Phenomenon of Ventriloquism in the Early Twentieth Century Vietnamese Feminist Movement: A Wake-up Call for Gender inequality and the initial Changes in Men's Consciousness

In a country heavily influenced by Confucian thought and haunted by the "curse" (idea) of Confucius that "women and servants are hard to deal with" (Waley 2012), women are naturally marginalized in important agendas and they become men's shadows and have to endure many disadvantages and losses in their spiritual and material life. As the editor-in-chief of the Vietnamese section of the first Vietnamese-language printed newspaper in Vietnam, *Đảng cổ tùng báo* (1907) Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh took advantage of the golden opportunity, under the civilizational politics of the colonial rulers, to enlighten the people as to Vietnamese women's roles. Although this

newspaper has only existed for nine months, its column *Women's Words* strongly tackled women's issues. This was the first time in the history of Vietnamese journalism and publishing that women's voices were registered in the public forum. Although it had some troubles with ventriloquistic cross-dressing, this phenomenon became the foundation for the feminist movement in Vietnam in the early twentieth century. Later, when *Đảng cổ tùng báo* was suspended, the column *Women's Words* continued to appear in *Đông Dương tạp chí*,⁴ also edited by Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh under the pseudonym Dao Thi Loan, starting from issue number 5⁵ (see more Mai 2017).

Concretely, arguing about women's issues by gender crossing, *Đảng cổ tùng báo's* editor-in-chief tried to completely conceal his male identity and spoke out with a female voice, Miss Dao Thi Loan, a gentle and humble girl. For example, "i am only a shy girl, who got used to obeying but now dares to discuss social issues. Although you might feel bored because nothing can be compared to your strong arguments, the hope of my voice's whispers and gentleness might attract you" (V. V. Nguyễn 1907a No. 801). To overcome voicelessness for thousands of years, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's ventriloquism as the female voice of Dao Thi Loan was hidden by women's foolish and "clumsy" words, such as "i only use reasonable and sweet words to talk to you with the hopes that you listen to me in happy emotions" (Nguyễn 1907a No. 801). in that way, in spite of dealing with women's issues, women's discourse defaulted to sweet, gentle, easy-to-listen words. in addition, in the cases where many readers had a suspicion of Dao Thi Loan. On behalf of the newspaper *Đảng cổ tùng báo*, Nguyen had to confirm Dao's female identity in many different ways (V. V. Nguyễn 1907b No. 802; 1907c No. 809; 1907d No. 816; 1907e No. 817). He even used to take another man's name to illustrate that Dao Thi Loan is a real woman, and that he has seen her "pearl face". This immediately

⁴ *Đông Dương tạp chí* published its first issue on May 15, 1913 in Hanoi. This is a weekly newspaper published on Thursday.

⁵ Women's issues continued to be discussed in the column *Women's Words (Propos de Femme)* in the magazine *Trung Bắc tân văn*. However, many different authors wrote about women's issues in this period.

dispelled doubts about "the counterfeit of a female voice in "Mr. Tan Nam's mouth" (Nguyễn 1907e No. 817) and people believed that "indeed the Moon (shows a girl) appeared under the sky of Annam"⁶ (Nguyễn 1907e No. 817).

Using a gender-crossing mark/voice, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh appeared in the public forum as an educated woman who created an unprecedented phenomenon in the history of Vietnamese journalism. He used female ventriloquistic cross-dressing to bring a new nuance to writing. The female voice was a strange phenomenon that surely stimulated the reader's curiosity and touched their psychological expectations in the early twentieth century. On the one hand, by masking under a woman's words, all the stories, evaluations, or judgments about men were reflected from a woman's angle, so men would be curious to hear them irrespective of whether they followed/affected them or not; on the other hand, it also made sexual attractions. For example, male readers confessed that "from listening to the voice of the peach cheeks, every night is not unthinking, every day is not unexpectant" (No. 817). On the contrary, for female readers, the woman's speeches-insider's voice-surprised them. They admired her from building an image and an example to follow. No doubt, the public emergence of a woman's voice made a deep impression on the community. Vietnamese men who had never respected women's words suddenly had to listen to them, even if they were still very annoyed.

Impersonating a woman, Nguyen began to discuss some important issues related to women's status. Firstly, there were discussions about banning women from being educated. Facing views that "Educated girls are easy to love an amorous and dissolute person. Women who are literate might write love letters to other men" (Nguyễn 1907a No. 801), Dao Thi Loan argued: "How should a man live so that his wife respects him? it is better than to keep her only at home. if a man has narrow-minded thinking, he just makes a bondage life for his wife and just loves himself" (Nguyễn 1907a No. 801).

Besides direct arguments, addressing concise and vivid daily

⁶ Annam or Dai Nam is the old name of Vietnam.

stories is another way that Dao used to criticize men's backward viewpoints. This matches women's timidity and gossip, and Dao Thi Loan's touches on many important issues retold in the form of collectedly ordinary stories. For example, she describes a scene at a railway station where a man leisurely walks without anything in his hands while his wife is very busy being subservient, bringing a child in one hand while in the other bag and baggage; she carries a bamboo basket on her head (*Woman's Words*) (Nguyễn 1907f No. 803). She also represents scenes of some men using vulgar and obscene words to tease women (Nguyễn 1907g No. 806). It can be seen that publicly retelling these facts in the newspapers strongly impacts communication, especially among men, forcing them to wake up. Even one reader had to say: "Men's mouths/words are enough, why does the newspaper need to bring Ms. Dao's mouth/words so that she can tell men that are not good...". (Nguyễn 1907i No. 814). On behalf of the newspaper *Đãng cổ tùng báo*, Nguyen replied: "Our Dai Nam is the first to appear with Ms. Dao Thi Loan. Although sometimes she is quite hot, her words are indeed reasonable and meaningful. So, we should please her" (Nguyễn 1907i No. 814).

In particular, when talking about a viewpoint of men's polygamy, Dao's "womanly" voice became harder and clearer: "A gentleman says to respect weak women. That means he must be fair first. If a man wants his wife to only have a man/husband, he must have a wife" (Nguyễn 1907j No. 815).

Paralleled to criticizing conservative men, in the discourse of ventriloquistic cross-dressing, Nguyen also turned to teach and criticize women's bad habits in order to induce them to change. In a "counterfeit" woman's eyes, gambling, drinking, and drug addiction, as well as gossiping and slandering others, were women's bad habits and completely unacceptable (V. V. Nguyễn 1907j No. 818; 1907k, No. 819). Thus, the education of girls was an important thing. Because, according to Nguyen (Ms. Dao Thi Loan's voice), "teaching women" is the best way and it relates to the race of Vietnamese people and "Dai Nam's future." (Nguyễn 1907m No. 822). Women are human beings who take care of everything in their homes, from taking care of their children's education to building a

cozy sphere in their homes.

Despite having existed for a short time and having a small number of publications, the voice of Vietnamese "women" in the press in the early twentieth century created a huge impetus, marking the first movement that fought for women's equal rights and initially changing their position in society. Because of political reasons, *Đảng cổ tòng báo* was suspended, and the column *Women's Words* continued to be published in another newspaper called *Đông Dương tạp chí* also by the name Dao Thi Loan. However, "her" language is more decisive in this period. For example, "i think that good and reasonable words have been used by gentlemen, but bitter medicine must also have sugar to take it easier. Whenever the newspaper's editor-in-chief allows me to whisper a few words a week, i will try to cleverly bring sweet "gifts" and mix them with bitter words" (Nguyễn 1913a No. 5), she said. Her "bitter words" here mean the criticism directed toward both men's and women's backward viewpoints to reform/rescue the nation. The purpose of the column *Women's Words* was clearly outlined in the first writing of this 5th issue of *Đông Dương tạp chí*. "in the family standards, we need to have good housewives. This task is partly dealt with now thanks to the civilized wind, then we have to educate the skills and preserve women's virtues" (5).

From the viewpoint of "Happy and virtuous things depend on the mother," that means, women's role in the family is very important because they take on the responsibility of raising children. However, their illiteracy and ignorance resulted in extremely harmful educational practices (Nguyễn 1913b No. 7). The lack of knowledge made women raise their children and look after themselves after giving birth with many old-fashioned and barbaric things (Nguyễn 1913c No. 8; 1913d No. 9; 1913e No. 10; 1913f No. 11; 1913g No. 12; 1913h No. 13). Also, Dao discussed some trivial things in women's daily lives, such as *how to be happy* (Nguyễn 1914a No. 38), *making women more beautiful* (Nguyễn 1914b No. 48), *how to eat betel nuts* (Nguyễn 1914c No. 49), *using vulgar words* (Nguyễn 1914d No. 50), and *wearing and making up* (Nguyễn 1914e No. 51). it can be seen that *Women's Words* directly mention the criteria of a woman's virtues, called the *four feminine virtues* (diligent work, tasteful

appearance, proper speech, and good morals). in Dao's discourse, women's *four feminine virtues* were supported as the norms that Annamese women must uphold (Nguyễn 1913i No. 16). And to encourage those virtues, Dao reminded Vietnamese women by telling them about French women's qualifications, including 7 virtues: sweetness, gentleness, patience, merry face, courage, understanding, and determining their fate (Nguyễn 1913i No. 16).

Thus, requiring a perfect woman as well as speaking out about some issues that had never appeared in the female mind before, including the perception of polygamy, expose the fact that Ms. Dao's discourse contained men's desires with hybrid characteristics. Female ventriloquism is a "solution" for the feminist movement in Vietnam, making the relationship between men and feminism a particular phenomenon in the early twentieth century. *Women's Words* can be considered the earliest case in this period. Later, a number of other phenomena of female ventriloquistic cross-dressing also appeared, such as the case of Dã Lan Nu Si (see more Lại 2022), the pseudonym of Đào Duy Anh who was the main pen of the column *Women's Forum* in *Tiếng dân*⁷ (*People's Voices*) in Huế. And more particularly, Dã Lan Nu Si was also named for the translation book "*Women in Campaigning*" (translated into Vietnamese), published by Quan Hai Tung Thu, Hue, 1928. This book's popularizing of socio-political knowledge, in which many political, social, and philosophical terms are explained, has a significant impact on society's awareness of the feminist movement⁸ (Dã Lan 1928). Female ventriloquism becomes an interesting use of "masks."

Actually, ventriloquism is not Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's unique creation, it could be seen as a part of Vietnamese literature and has a long history, spanning folklore, medieval literature, and even modern literature. in medieval literature, for instance, male poets used female ventriloquism to speak for women when they were

⁷ The gentle style of writing in discussions on women's issues in the column *Women's Forum* of the newspaper *Tiếng dân* edited and written by Đào Duy Anh in the years 1927-1929, significantly impacted society.

⁸ The book has five main sections and focuses on issues of women's movements, the two major trends on women's issues in the world, and the movement that fought for women's political rights, feminism in the UK and China as well as knowledge for women.

voiceless and uneducated, as evidenced in works like *The Lament of an Odalisque* (宮怨吟曲) by Nguyễn Gia Thiều, *Lament of the soldier's wife* (征婦吟) by Đặng Trần Côn, and poetry of two female poets whose identities are still unknown, namely Hồ Xuân Hương and Đoàn Thị Điểm. However, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's female ventriloquism is distinct from the works of medieval poets in terms of content, quantity, and voices. Concretely, if the fundamental topic of medieval poems is the women's loneliness and sufferings under male dominance as the tragic victims, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's counterfeit voice, despite still being a kind of gentle voice, is the fight for women's rights to be human beings, to be educated, and to have professions. If few names spoke for women during the Middle Ages, Dao Thị Loan's female voice (Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's mask) inspired many other female voices, forming a movement that fought for women's rights and changing the entire society's perception. If female ventriloquism in the Middle Ages imbued with the dreary, helpless, and lamenting voice, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's was the strong and determined voice, facing men's backward views and condemning them. It can be said that these differences made Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's discourse more convincing.

However, ventriloquistic cross-dressing is probably been awareness as only a temporary solution by male intellectuals due to forced circumstances. Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh profoundly understood his ventriloquism as a pressing requirement. "if we want to witness a liberation, then it must be the liberation made by the woman herself, not anyone else" (Nguyễn 1934a No. 304). Thus, "those who signed under their female pseudonyms will spread their ideology to the many other women and girls who were those newspapers' readers," he explained (Nguyễn 1934a No. 304).

III. Men's Direct Discourse in Vietnamese Feminism: A Model for Women's Liberation was Constructed by Men.

From the female ventriloquistic cross-dressing in the column "*Women's Words*," women's issues were openly and enthusiastically discussed in many different newspapers, especially the appearance of women's specialized newspapers. However, as mentioned, even in

female newspapers such as *Phụ nữ tân văn*, *Phụ nữ thời đàm*, *Phụ nữ tân tiến*, *Đàn bà*, *Đàn bà mới*, and *Nữ giới*, the male intellectuals' role in writing is still huge [see more (Cao 2019), (Đặng 2008)]. Besides Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's female ventriloquism, or later Đào Duy Anh's (Dạ Lan 1928), mostly men directly showed their strong voices on women's issues. Male intellectuals supporting feminism include Confucian intellectuals and Western intellectuals such as Phan Bội Châu, Phan Chu Trinh, Phạm Quỳnh, Nguyễn Phan Long, Phùng Ngọc Tường, Ngô Thúc Diệp, Trịnh Đình Rư. However, Phan Khôi was a special case. He devoted his whole life to "women's issues" in order to change communication perception and communication, in which he focuses on discussions about the relationship between women and Confucianism in Vietnam. In his analyses, gender inequality in Vietnam is a consequence of Confucian backward ethical practices. Confucianism, especially from the Han and Song dynasties, and also known as neo-Confucianism, teaches that a virtuous woman must obey the men in her family, and its tenets lead to a decline in women's status in society.

As the main pen of both *PNTV* and *PNTĐ*, Phan Khôi fought strongly against Confucianism's backward ideas. His speeches attracted the attention of different social classes and it was strong and direct language. For example, when encouraging women to participate in educational activities, he said that "women must realize their basic requirements and rights" (Phan June 13 1929a No. 7); when discussing the precepts that force women to obey, Phan used judicial language: "The precept that compels a woman to keep her loyalty to the memory of her dead husband is due to men's selfishness and thereby makes women's lives dark" (Phan 1929a No. 21). Men and women "are born as human beings in the world"; thus, "under any political regime, it is important to maintain our personality..." (PNTV No. 21 19/9/1929); and he expressed that "if we want to wake up women and develop society, we must change the rituals that are dominating women" (Phan September 26 1929c No. 22).

Thus, the difference in the use of language, including utilizing vocabulary and the rhetoric of feminist discourses (reasoning techniques), between men and women, undoubtedly, reveals their

attitudes and real status in society. Phan's male discourse and Nguyen's female ventriloquism are quite typical if compared with Robin Lakoff's point of view presented in her work *Language and Women's Place*: "Our use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings. Woman's language has as its foundation the attitude that women are marginal to the serious concern of life, which are preempted by men." (Lakoff 1973: 45) Although illustrations of marginalized women have gradually changed in Kira Hali, Miriam Meyerhoff, Susan Ehrlich, and Scott Fabius Fiesling's research (2004), especially in Susan Lanser's "Toward a Feminist Narratology" (Lanser 1986), undeniably, the concept of women's discourse in Vietnam is still bound by many social conventions such as women's voice is "weak," gentle, and emotional (Nguyễn Văn Vinh).

In order to overcome many unequal prejudices that existed as normal standards in the male-dominated society of Vietnam and fight for women's equal rights, Vietnamese male intellectuals first had to quell their egos. In their feminist texts, they chose a way that did not pay much attention to abstract theoretical issues and elaborated philosophical views of feminism, and also did not seek to encourage a radical revolution in society about gender with demands for "powerful equality between men and women," "women's liberation," or "freedom in sex," and "free marriage," but rather to discuss "women's daily issues." Phan Khôi and many other male intellectuals shared the same viewpoint of helping women become themselves (Phan 1933d No. 12). Women were not only taught to sew, go to the market, cook, give birth, and raise children, men wanted women to become "human beings." "What a man knows, a woman should know." "The only thing women need to remember is that while learning new knowledge, women should depend on themselves level" (Phan 1933c).

From the purpose of awakening women and helping "*women in being human*" rather than being *a servant* (Phan 1933d No. 12), Phan Khôi advocated: "What should be done for women? They have to be educated and have a certain knowledge foundation" (PNTV 1929 No. 1). "Everything, if just as necessary for men, is also necessary for women. There is no law, no custom that can force

women and girls not to enjoy the happiness of those three essential upbringings" (*PNTĐ* No. 21 2-3/6/1931). Thus, defining education as the "root of human evolution," feminism from Phan Khôi's and other male intellectuals' perspectives in Vietnam raised the issue that education is first and foremost. If a woman gained independence in both material and mind, she would be able to take care of her body and spirit. And they would have the "knowledge and ability" to be equal to men (Phan 1933a No. 1).

Furthermore, education from men's perspective not only helps wives and mothers have knowledge about traditional morality and culture but also gives them cognition about social and historical issues that related to the fate of the country. All these reasons are perceived as education's goals, but what men expect from educated women is their perception of limitations and abilities that are suitable for each circumstance of Vietnamese women: "Let the woman realize that there are many good and noble things in our traditional morality and customs that should be preserved and respected. Modifying and changing to suit the times is a natural thing, but we need to carefully think about what identities we must keep respectfully, what bad customs we should remove" (*PNTV* 1929 No.1). Thus, education's great role was realized and implemented by male intellectuals at the beginning of Vietnamese feminism.

The next issue that Phan Khôi fought for women's equal rights is women's motherhood and profession. Talking about women's motherhood and profession, it seems that the initiators and activists have touched on the most difficult and sensitive issues of the feminist movement. The question of the woman's profession becomes a difficult issue to compromise on. Facing the rooted cultural viewpoint in the community's psychology that a woman's profession is to be a wife and mother, Phan Khôi explained: "We must make sure that every woman respects her profession in order to live on her own abilities, giving up the habit of living off her husband and relying on her children, asking for her uncle, losing all the motivation of her actions. As we know, if we live depending on someone, that means, we are slaves to them. Thus, how we can say about freedom and equality" (*PNTV* 1929 No. 1).

Phan's advocate initially helped Vietnamese women realize that equality is not an issue that can be achieved by empty words. Women who want to occupy an equal position in society must have equal knowledge and occupation first (Phan 1933a No. 1). However, social occupations and the job of motherhood that are associated with "being a wife and mother" were not easily reconciled and accepted in both sexes. Vietnamese women's occupations became a difficult problem to solve. This situation seems to be similar to the concept of European and American women's social occupation from the beginning to the 40s of the twentieth century. "Happy housewife" is a women's ultimate goal, and they will feel "embarrassed" if they have to go out to work (Friedan 2010: 53-100). If working outside deprives American women of their desire to be happy (Friedan 2010), Vietnamese women's professions also do not escape from the boundary of their houses. Phan Khôi, in his article "Opposition to the article *On the Motherhood of Women*,"⁹ thoroughly analyzes the so-called "motherhood/natural job" of Vietnamese women and strongly opposes considering motherhood as a women's profession: "Motherhood! Women's natural duties! On what basis does the author say that a woman's profession is in the kitchen, the room, and the inner house? An outlook of the natural job should be changed from time to time." Because "considering women's work that is only placed in the kitchen and the room is a sentence that is just created by people, how can it be called a women's profession?" (Phan 1933b No. 5) According to Phan, for a woman's natural job, he accepted two things, including giving birth and breastfeeding. A woman's genital organ can produce a baby, and the same is called the breast, but only the women's breast can flow milk to nurse a child. Thus, he only admitted that "women are born in order to entrust these two things to them." That is a natural job" (Phan 1933b No. 5).

To give more convincing arguments, based on the changes in

⁹ in this article, Phan Khôi argued with Bang Hoang Tang Bi's article published on *Trung Bắc tân văn* about women's divine duties/working wife and mother. Bang Hoang said: "Women should only stay at home, take care of the kitchen, manage servants, and work in the garden work, but should not be involved in outside work."

circumstances in Vietnam, Phan showed that in the early twentieth century, in reality, Vietnamese women started to go out for work. Because of being a French colonial country, most of the work at home, including silkworm and silk rearing, cooking alcohol, and sewing, disappeared due to the appearance of factories. This leads to a situation where there is no work at home but more and more outside jobs and more businesses that need women to work. He confirmed, "Nowadays women can't stay in the kitchen because of new circumstances and requirements. Anyone who understands the fact that in our country for almost half a century now, it has been found that in this society, inevitably, there must be some women going out to work like men; hence, going to work is not because of their gossip" (Phan 1933b No. 5).

Thus, the law of supply and demand in society is the foundation for the notion of professional women to appear. Although the view of women's occupations and their duties is not easy to change, these arguments initially help women realize who they are and their place in society. The long-term suppression of male rule deprived Vietnamese women of awareness and the will to be human. The argument that "motherhood is a woman's profession," associated with staying at home and being a wife and mother, had begun to waver and is no longer relevant.

Based on fighting for women's rights to be educated and have a profession, Phan Khôi expanded women's issues into *"Women with Literature."* According to him, when the level of human evolution developed equally, men and women shouldered social work equally, and knowledge would not be exclusive to men (Hoai Thanh and Hoai Chan 2007). Facing the reality that most writers are male and the literature is written by men, while its contents mainly talk about women, using women's stories to express their feelings, even impersonating women (the phenomenon of ventriloquism) to talk to women, Phan Khôi openly persuades women to take this opportunity: "if literature is truly feminine-centered, women should actively advocate their literature, and then literature may be more advanced than before." Because how can men talk to women more delicately than women talking about their own affairs?" (PNTV 1929 No.2). "in this context, i think if women have not yet accepted the

burden of literature as her own, it is a disadvantage for mankind and society" (*On the literature of Vietnamese women*) (Phan Khôi) PNTV 1929 No. 1).¹⁰

However, Phan Khôi's advocacy and enthusiasm for the issue of *women in literature* were opposed by some male intellectuals. These intellectuals believed that literature and "literary studies need to be diligent in finding, recording, and remembering a lot and also need to be compared and considered carefully. Women who are inherently shallow in nature can not do it" (Phan 1929b No. 6). Thê Phụng even emphasized that women's femininity was not suitable for literature: "if a man writes good poetry, he must be an elegant, profound person, and he also has a sense of purpose and determination. How can a woman have these qualities? Women are inherently shallow, a bit like children, although all the "romantic" looks and characteristics are there." (Phan 1929b No. 6) Responding to Thê Phụng, and expressing enthusiasm for the future of women's literature which may be at that moment "just a hypothesis," Phan Khôi strongly protested: "if the feminine feature is women's nature, why have women always been under oppression, being toys for men?" To be oppressed for a long time makes them cowards as men's toys, becoming weak and sniveling" (Phan 1929b No. 6).¹¹

Although "*women with literature*" is the last issue in the "women's issues," in fact, it is also a crucial aspect to show women's voice and their position in society. *Writing* is proof of a woman's evolution of knowledge. By gaining a certain level of knowledge, women can change their awareness and move their internal minds. it can be seen that, in the early twentieth century, it was impossible to expect *L'écriture Feminine* as proposed by H. Cixous (Cixous and

¹⁰ The Phung strongly opposed the fact that women could compose poetry (PNTV No. 6 6/6/1929).

¹¹ Thê Phụng's argued that men often don't want to shed tears directly because they will "lose their self-esteem," so they must entrust themselves to a woman. Because when the women cry, it is easy to make people feel pity," Phan Khôi exposed the cowardly falsehood: "His view is very heartless that he confessed the men's feelings. Why do men all have thoughts and feelings that they can blame on women and refer to women? (...) Then those men are both despicable, cunning, and timid; the same thing with women in your eyes!" (PNTV No. 6/6/1929).

Sellers 2014) in Vietnam, but women began to express their views on social life through certain discourses. Phan's incentives, although considered as his hypothesis and causing some objections from conservative male intellectuals, actually wake up women and initially form a new desire for women. in fact, women's *writing* has gradually improved.

Although Lakoff supposed that women use a kind of language that is different from men's and is a discourse of powerlessness (Lakoff 1973), many researchers debated that "women's language" is more complicated. it seems to not only exist with characteristics of "polite, emotional, enthusiastic, gossipy, talkative, uncertain, stupid, and chatty," as opposed to men's words, which are "capable, direct, rational, rational, illustrating a sense of humor, unfeeling, strong (in tone and choice word) and blunt" (Kramarae 1980: 58). Women's strong and active voices may be hidden under gentle and resigned marks, or other sexual models, or depend on their contexts (Lanser 1986; O'BARR and ATKINS 2005; Spender 1985). This indeed raises a question about the nature of Vietnamese feminism in the early twentieth century. Obviously, we can find an effective social movement toward women's issues, but it is not a revolution with comprehensive and radical changes. it is still a gradual change and is convincingly illustrated in the language. in Phan Khôi's discourse, although we can recognize a strong voice fighting for women's equal rights, these rights and an emancipative model are chosen by men. Feminism's nature requires the development of internal forces, thus, when the internal capacity of Vietnamese women is weak, it is unavoidable to have a strong masculine voice in feminist discourse, and women's liberation is still evaluated and controlled by men.

IV. The Shifts of Masculine Domination in Vietnam: Another Form of Protecting Men's Privilege

The fact was confirmed by the men themselves: "in this social regime, people and women have always been suffering. The people are fooled by the rulers in order to oppress them, just as men make women stupid in order to control them easily" (Phan 1929c No. 3).

This reality is one of the crucial reasons to force radical male intellectuals to speak out. Thus, considering this feminism in the context of colonial Vietnam in the early twentieth century, it shows some of the following characteristics:

First of all, feminism in Vietnam is a particular phenomenon because its initiators and executors in the beginning period were male intellectuals. This led to the relationship between men and feminism being a controversial issue and containing many implications that transcend the boundaries of so-called "women's issues" or "women's rights." in the complicated context of the colonial nation, the most significant goal of this feminist movement was mainly to focus on the country's destiny, in which its reform from the inside is the best way to escape slavery. Hence, feminism is associated with two main tasks, including raising the female labor force and opposing Confucianist backward ideas. Phan also confirmed this meaningful purpose in his struggles as to "preparation to lead our nation on the path of development, avoiding to destroy it" (Phan 1933a No. 1). it was an intellectual's important duty to "understand that meaning," and to have a heart for the nation's future in bringing out women's issues in order to "research and help women's evolution, that is, to help our nation's evolution" (Phan 1933a No. 1). This can be considered an urgent cause associated with the nation's fate. it becomes a driving force for men to change their perception and stand up to fight for women's equal rights besides the other reasons arising in society, such as women committing suicide, prostitution, and trafficking in women at this time (Cao 2019; Firpo and Goscha 2013).

In order to encourage women to join social activities, male intellectuals encouraged them overcome obstacles in their minds that originated from Confucianism, the tenets of which are deeply entrenched in Vietnamese communication (Trần 1996; Cao 2019). in the complicated political situation of a semi-feudal colonial nation, Western thoughts transformed many traditional values (Hoài Thanh and Hoài Chân 2007) and made the "peaceful land" (Phan Khôi) alter with new nuances, including both good and bad. Everything is presented and fully displayed in the mixture of light and darkness, chaos and hope, opportunities and tricks, and attempts and

achievements. Obviously, the feminism of Vietnamese male intellectuals is different from other feminist movements in the world because of special reasons (see more Mackie 2003; Allen 1991). Living under French colonial rule, radical intelligentsia found that half of the major workforce in society had been "forgotten" as unfamiliar Western ideologies permeated society, rendering Confucianism backward. They live under strict control of unsound ethical standards, losing their human rights and failing to promote their strengths. Recognizing that women are half of the labor force that contributes to the recovery and prosperity of the country, radical male intellectuals spoke out and fought for women's human rights to wake up the whole nation about their independence and sovereignty. At that time, the sense of men's male supremacy was not as pressing as national destiny. Thus, men's proactive change does not lose or reduce their position, but rather maintains their authority in another form.

Thus, perhaps it would not be necessary to question men's "sincerity" when they express their "sympathy," fight for women's equal rights, and be feminists as some Western academic scholars mentioned (Jardine and Smith 1987; Kiberd 1985). In fact, Vietnamese women during the French colonial period did not "forget" their desires, did not "repress" their dreams, or "felt" lacking in something "ambiguous" (as American women in *The Feminine Mystique*) (Friedan 2010). They have never experienced the so-called "complete pleasure" of being a working mother and wife in their whole lives. Subsistence life takes up their whole time and energy. What they faced were survival, hunger, ignorance, and even family violence. So feminism was indeed understood by the aristocracy and the intelligentsia. Feminist thought and practices occurred in the small groups of the upper class or wealthy families. As for most lower-class women at that time, feminism was something completely unknown. Therefore, the feminist movement in Vietnam, first of all, was a movement that fought for women's rights to be human beings, the right to be educated, the right to have a job and enjoy happiness. Feminism and its philosophical foundation, thus, are understood quite simply, without the comprehensive and profound knowledge of philosophy and anthropology as Western feminism in

the later period.

Secondly, based on an examination of the relationship between men and/in feminism, it is not only to recognize this movement's nature but can also determine men's roles and contributions to Vietnamese women's liberation. Living under gender oppression for thousands of years, Vietnamese women were taught to be good wives and mothers. Their sphere was limited at home; thus, there was not any woman capable enough to shoulder the responsibility of undertaking social work and confidently fighting for their rights. Due to the lack of educated and talented women, the emergence of men's voices, especially those who are influential people in society, became an inevitable phenomenon and provided huge support for the movement that fought for women's equal rights. Phan Khôi himself also defended this solution and opposed the requirement of having female newspapers that are advocated by women. He asserted, "it is too hasty to say that in our country today. it makes no sense at all." "The women's issue has just emerged for several years, and most women do not have the right to be educated" (PNTV No. 15 8/8/1929). Therefore, "women are naturally slower than men in the path of evolution" (PNTV No. 15 8/8/1929). Also, according to Phan, "if there is no woman to do the feminist movement, men can do it for her. There is no reason that is not right" (Phan 1933c No. 12). This reality becomes one of the crucial reasons why Vietnamese feminism is different from others in Asia.

Looking back on men's roles in Western feminism, we can realize the same point here that Mill's contributions to the Western feminist movement in the 1860s are considered a turning point as he fully outlines the injustice and brutality against women in all aspects of society (in his book *The Subjection of Women* 1869) (Mill 2018). Vietnamese male intellectuals also play an important role in the feminism of colonial Vietnam. However, the difference is that Vietnamese men not only initiate "women's issues" but also carry them out, even using female ventriloquistic cross-dressing to stimulate women's activities.

The last point that the article would like to discuss is men's

discourse in the feminist movement. it is uncovered here that men's authoritative voices were still maintained and prevailed. if almost all feminists agree that feminism must be necessarily created by women's voices, in which they are subjects who carry out feminism's tasks and then aim to change their position, then feminism in Vietnam would be a "particular phenomenon." The most significant speeches in the Vietnamese feminist movement are men's discourse in the first stage. in the circumstance of a colonial nation, because women "are still very weak," and "cannot be self-sufficient," it is inevitable that men's discourse emerged as sympathy and understanding. This feminist movement, as Phan Khôi said, emerged as "forced by natural law" (Phan 1933a No. 1), but "most of them were unresolved and still pended." Thus, most significantly, besides understanding "its true meaning" (Phan 1933a No.1), Vietnamese feminism has been unavoidably imbued with men's "authority," expressed through reminders, admonitions, teachings, and warnings in male or ventriloquistic discourses.

When men played a key and proactive role in all activities of fighting for women's equality in society, they were both subjects and objects of investigation and analysis. Thus, we have the right to suspect the so-called "renunciation," or removing authority, which has been deeply rooted in the Vietnamese man's ego, is hard to lose. That is why Phan Khôi's discourse (and other male intellectuals) as well as the phenomenon of Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh's female ventriloquism, on the one hand, aims to gradually eliminate injustices against women, on the other hand, has protected and maintained masculine domination (in the active position). in Vietnam, the disparity between men and women regarding their knowledge and capacities was so huge that led to the result of remaining in men's dominant position of power, although women might achieve certain human rights in the early twentieth century. Hence, men could share, sympathize, and encourage women, but the "liberation" considered from the Western point of view (for example, Cixous, Cohen, and Cohen 1976; Cixous and Sellers 2014) could not achieve. it can even be said that men learning feminism may just protect their "privileges through the discourse of resistance" as Robert K. Pleasants showed in his examination (Pleasants 2011).

Women still live in the divine "golden circle" of this male-dominated ideology. Phan Khôi himself, when discussing "*Women and national affairs*", on behalf of *PNTV* also wrote: "Yes, Vietnamese women do not need to argue in the parliament. Women just stay in the bedroom, worriedly advise their husbands, and teach their children. That is to do national affairs in a very profound and noble way." (Phan 1933b No.5)

if the women's *voice* is considered the key guide in any feminist movement in the world, it can be seen that the Vietnamese women's voice is quite vague, whereas mainly men's voices have emerged. For the first stage of feminism, women's voices are just a kind of ventriloquism (counterfeit voices), although undeniably appearing female language of this phenomenon strongly influences society and becomes a "revolution" for communicational perception. As i mentioned above, the immediate requirement of having a strong and decisive female voice would be blasphemous. However, when considering the issue of gender inequality in Vietnam, it is necessary to reiterate here that implementing Confucian practices has various nuances caused by the influence of indigenous religion called Mother Goddess religion that John K. Whitmore used to recognize in his research on Confucian beliefs in Vietnam: "Think twice before using the term *Confucianism* in Vietnamese history" (Whitmore 1987). This reality also reveals that the Mother Goddess religion makes Confucian practices different from other cultures. This indigenous religion that deifies women has greatly influenced the Vietnamese family members and community's behaviors, becoming the reason for many distortions in Confucian practice in Vietnam. Vietnamese women seem to enjoy a form of "soft power" in their families.¹² in addition, as researchers on Vietnamese Confucianism show that Confucian practices in Vietnam have just been strictly carried out in the upper class, there have been quite a few shifts in Vietnamese families in the lower (Phạm 2016; Trần 1996; Trần 2008). Thus, male intellectuals' support for women's equality may have originated from communication's respect for the

¹² in the early 20th century, women began to work in factories, so economic power caused her status in the family to change, although Confucianism was still strong.

Mother. From another perspective, sharing equal rights for Vietnamese women in this period is also a share of responsibility with the work related to the country's destiny. However, in my opinion, the view of a woman's virtues as "good at social work and housework," from which a new standard has been formed and prevailed, seems to be the heavier burden on women.

Since women's issues were discussed mainly from men's female ventriloquistic and direct discourse, the views on women's liberation were strongly influenced by the male perspective. Or in other words, the emancipative model of Vietnamese women was constructed by men. For example, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh himself also said that "women have some things that cannot be done because they are bound by women's divine duties of working wife and motherhood or certain physical limitations." (Nguyễn 1934a No. 304). He emphasized: "An Anamese woman needs to realize who she is and what she needs to change in learning feminism, and they must prepare to live with an irreversible trend, not by claiming rights that they have never been denied, not by demanding things that they do not feel they really want, not by the self-delusional way, stroking oneself with false things that men crammed into their heads"(Nguyễn 1934a No. 304).

Facing the fact that the vast majority of women were not interested in the feminist movement due to their resignation or their submissiveness originating from "their absolute inability to implement certain civil rights" (Nguyễn 1934b No. 356), Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh suggested that women could achieve their emancipation and reduce inequality by "doing it through the renewal of women's roles in their family, begin by herself, and denying all ties of power to her husband and her children, as an individual" (Nguyễn 1934b No. 356).

And also, from a man's perspective, Nguyễn Văn Vĩnh strongly affirmed that: "it is useless to praise and flatter the masculine qualities in a woman while ignoring the natural feminine qualities that make women stand out from men in the poetic and tender aspects of life" (Nguyễn 1932 No. 102). For him, while waiting for a woman to express her desire and be able to implement all her rights, "the fact of this new life will do the job of accelerating this

process without our rushes to push women to have to leave their motherhood" (Nguyễn 1932 No. 102).

Although the feminist movement in Vietnam took place within the boundary of the French colonial rulers' "civilizational" policy, it gained certain achievements by male intellectuals in effectively implementing policies associated with the nation's existence and prosperity. It also faced a great deal of censorship by the French colonialists, but the French's policies and decrees promulgated at this time (the 1900s) relating to colonist education are the great results of this movement.¹³

V. Conclusion

The phenomena of female ventriloquistic cross-dressing and men's direct discourse that fought for Vietnamese women's equal rights in the early twentieth century are significant representations that demonstrate important shifts of thought which, remarkably, form the foundation for changing women's position in society. However, all these phenomena do not decline the male's position in society. This shift's illustration is quite complicated because, in the feminist movement that fought for Vietnamese women's equality, men were the ones who actively initiated, penned, and implemented in the

¹³ On education: During this period, the French implemented a renovation of the entire educational system and then formed a new education with three levels, in order to completely get rid of the influence of the Sinology model. This system of schools had many different levels of training and professionally organized classes. Education was developed in a variety of schools and classroom models; the education system was widely distributed. The curriculum at schools was built with comprehensive content, not only social sciences but also natural sciences, technology, foreign languages, etc. According to John K. Whitmore's assessment, for the construction of this new education, "the French invasion" has a more important meaning in: "bringing to the end of the Confucianization by abolishing the exams in Chinese and the popularization of Vietnamese (Quốc Ngữ)." Although the process of Westernization did not really "help Vietnamese culture get rid of China completely" (Tong Phong 1988), it was an important turning point to shake the Han cultural foundation in Vietnam. On policies for women: women had permission to go to school; women could participate in education and training work, and women could work in other professions.

press (popular media at that time) and were the main force at the early stage. Male intellectuals also bring the strongest discourses on fighting for women's equal rights. Therefore, it is inevitable to be confirmed that Vietnamese feminism is a movement developed under the "control" of male power. The "rights" that male intellectuals aim at are mainly the right to "be a human being," within the limits of the traditional moral standards that have been modeled and taught in the community associated with women's physical characteristics and motherhood. Also, in this struggle, because men are both the object and the subject, the shift of masculine authority when the feminist movement prevails is an active shift within a certain framework. The supremacy of male domination is not lost when feminism appears, but rather the act of "sharing" responsibility with the nation and community when Vietnamese society has changed, becoming a colonial country.

Thus, the cause of men's "voluntariness" in fighting as well as the concession of equal rights for women is the compromise between cultural and political goals, between traditional cultural norms and national interests. In addition, in the context of a colonial country, losing its sovereignty forced the male intelligentsia to call for the improvement of women's position to gather the strength of the entire population to reform the country. Men's discourse at that time is the first voice that helps women realize their abilities, that women were born to "be human beings" and not to "become a tool, let people show off, serve and satisfy the pride" of men (Nguyễn 1932 No. 102).

Vietnamese men do feminism, either by female ventriloquism or by directly fighting with their strong voices, so this movement is in men's domination. Inconcretely, within male supremacy, Vietnamese feminism, although publicly opposing backward tenets of Confucian doctrine towards women, maintains these norms in criteria on *công, dung, ngôn, hạnh*.¹⁴ Equality here is only on educational and professional grounds. That means women have the right to study, have a job, and participate in social activities.

¹⁴ Four Virtues (*Công, dung, ngôn, hạnh*) are "morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work"

However, besides those, they still have to ensure the completion of household chores as an inalienable duty or compulsory work. invisibly, liberation and equality force women to make efforts and try many times over to ensure both tasks in the family and society. Thus, although the change in men's consciousness of women's roles and position is a basic and solid foundation for the feminist movement to have a chance to develop, the shifts of masculine domination are effectively another form of protecting men's privileges in Vietnam in the early twentieth century.

This research is funded by Vietnam National Foundation for Science and Technology Development (NAFOSTED) under grant number 602.04-2020.304

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Received: Oct. 5, 2022; Reviewed: Nov. 29, 2022; Accepted: July 10, 2023

