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Methods of historical data analysis and criticism in historical research

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ABSTRACT

In historical research, historical sources play a decisive role in the quality of historical research products. History is reflected in historical sources and through historical documents, historians can learn about history. In order to obtain an objective and reliable source of historical data to reconstruct the past, historians must adhere to the principles and methods of analyzing and criticizing historical data. This research article describes methods and techniques for analyzing and criticizing historical data in historical research.

Key words:

historical data, history, historical data analysis, historical data criticism, historical research

I. INTRODUCTION

Historical research is “the systematic collection and objective evaluation of data related to past occurrences in order to test hypotheses concerning causes, effects, or trends of those events which may help to explain present events and anticipate future events” (Gay, L. R. 1981).

According to Isaac and Michael, historical research involves reconstructing “the past systematically and objectively by collecting, evaluating, verifying, and synthesizing evidence to establish facts and reach defensible conclusions, often in relation to particular hypotheses” (Isaac, Stephen & William B. Michael. 1981).

“True historical research, or historiography, is concerned with analyzing and interpreting the meanings of historical events. It is the process by which a researcher is able to reach a conclusion as to probable truth of an event in the past by studying objects available for observation in the present” (Goldhor, Herbert. 1972).

It may be considered, “as a scholarly attempt to discover what has happened” (Mouly, George J. 1978).

Historical research is “the process of systematically examining past events to give an account of what has happened in the past” (Johnson, chapter 12).

Thus, we may conclude from above that true historical research is a process of reconstructing the past through systematically and objectively collecting, evaluating, verifying and synthesising evidence relating to the past events to establish facts and defensible conclusions, often in relation to particular hypotheses (if appropriate), to arrive at a scholarly account of what happened in the past (Hong Khanh, 2003).

In historical research, we often face questions such as: Can historians objectively and honestly reflect on what happened in the past? On what basis can historians reconstruct what happened in the past objectively and accurately? In order to properly perceive what happened in history, the most important factor that the historian must have is historical sources. However, historical data sources are created together with historical events and are affected by different objective and subjective factors, so not all historical sources can ensure objectivity and high reliability. Therefore, historians must conduct analysis and criticism of historical sources to eliminate subjective and misleading factors contained in those historical documents before using them for research.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND RESEARCH METHOD

Theoretical foundation: The article is built on the basis of epistemology of current Vietnam's history, in which the focus is on the historical materialist perspective and the dialectical method to approach the problem with references to other modern research theories.

Research method: The article uses an array of research methods suitable to the research problem, in which the main ones are analysis – synthesis, comparative - contrast, interpretive and inductive methods to analyze theoretical issues related to the research problem. In order to clarify the contents related to historical criticism, the researchers apply research methods and techniques to conduct surveys, analyze and critique, and clarify the objectivity and practical value of historical documents in historical research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The role of historical data in historical research

According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, history is "the process of arising, developing over or until the death of a certain phenomenon or thing" (Hoang Phe. 1994). Phan Ngoc Lien defines: "History is the process of objective reality of the previous human society or the history of events, phenomena, and characters that existed in the past, meaning the history of human and becoming the object of awareness of those who research, teach and study history" (Phan Ngoc Lien 2011) Thus, history is all that happened in the past ⁽¹⁾, it is an objective reality that exists independently of human consciousness and is the object of historical science.

Historical perception is the reflection of historical reality in human consciousness. A characteristic of history is that it happens only once, not repeated, historians cannot conduct experiments to make historical events repeat as they happened in the past for research. Hegel said: "history is the unity of objective and subjective... it involves more than what happened and more than the accounts of it" ("The term History unites the objective with the subjective" side... It comprehends not less what has happened, than the narration of what has happened" (White, H, 1987).

However, when a historical event occurs, it leaves traces in different historical sources ⁽²⁾. These historical documents are evidence of the past, they contain different information about history, helping us understand the historical reality reflected in it. In fact, "nothing can replace documents - without them there is no history. Historical data exists objectively, independently of the perceiving subject and on the basis of information obtained from the results of historical analysis, historians reconstruct history" (Thien

Phuong, 2014). Historical scientific research is essentially the process of perceiving objective historical reality. A historical event is often reflected in many different historical sources. In the research process, although not directly approaching the research object, historians can still approach indirectly by reproducing the data recreating the past through historical sources, thereby understanding the nature and laws of history. That is why in historical science, researchers are faced with epistemological questions such as: "How can we know about the past? What does it mean to explain historical events? Is objective knowledge possible?" (Fay, B. 1998).

The gap between historical perception and historical reality completely depends on the available historical sources and the subjective competence of the historian. If the source of historical data is found to be complete, accurate and objective, and the historian has good research capacity and experience, the research results will be close to historical reality ⁽³⁾. Or as Callinicos puts it: "historical "facts" come ready-made" and it is the historian who "transmutes old records in archives into the struggles and passions of the once-living human beings of whom these documents are the traces" (Callinicos, A. 1989) However, the research results, no matter how serious, are only historical perception, not history.

In order to get the most accurate perceived historical results possible, researchers first need to have rich, accurate and objective historical sources. Analysis and criticism of history is the process of clarifying the authenticity of the history, the era and the author of a historical document, considering whether the history is intact or has been modified, and whether its content is correct, accurate, objective or not ⁽⁴⁾. That process consists of two parts: analysis and criticism of the form of historical documents and analysis, criticism and evaluation of the content of historical documents.

Methods of analysis and criticism of historical data

Analysis and criticism of the form of historical data

Formal criticism is aimed at determining the authenticity of historical data. When dealing with a historical document, the historian's first job is to determine whether the history is real or fake. To know the authenticity of historical data, historians need to clarify external data of historical data such as: origin, author, time, place and purpose of historical data formation and whether historical data is the original or a copy. Whether or not the document contains an author, place, and time of creation, verification remains an indispensable step for the historian.

First, determining the origin of historical data: the origin of history, under what circumstances, is it reliable or not is the first issue that historians need to verify when finding historical data.

For example: on verifying the origin of the Prison Diary: August 27, 1942, on the way from Ba Mong (Jingxi District, Guangxi Province) to Ping Ma (Tian Dong District, Guangxi Province) Ho Chi Minh was arrested by the Kuomintang government in Tuc Vinh (Thien Bao district, Guangxi province) and taken to Tinh Tay district. On August 29, 1942, Ho Chi Minh was imprisoned in C.H.S prison in Tinh Tay district for more than two weeks and this is also the time when he started writing his diary in prison, this diary writing process lasted until Uncle Ho was released (September 10, 1942). After returning home, Ho Chi Minh lost this diary.

After the diary in prison was found, Ho Chi Minh displayed it at the Land Reform Exhibition in Hanoi (September 1955) and later, this diary was sent to the Chamber of Commerce by Uncle Ho. The archives of the Central Party Office, but the keeper of the archives did not know Chinese characters, and when the diary was sent in, no one talked about the background of the work, so it was mixed with other Chinese books and documents. At the beginning of 1959, the Prison Diary was accidentally discovered by Pham Van Binh, then assigned to the Institute of Literature to translate, publish, and distribute for the first time in 1960. Also included in the archives at the Vietnam Revolution Museum. Thus, the origin of the Prison Diary has been clearly identified and confirmed by the author - Ho Chi Minh himself. It has been proved that this is the real version with a clear origin.

Second, identify the author of the history: it is necessary to determine exactly who and what agency created the history. This is very important for historians because the reliability and value of historical documents are very much dependent on the competence, views, interests and purposes of the author who created them and at the same time the content of the historical documents. Works also reflect the ideological views of their authors.

For example, about the case of the author of the song "Á tế á ca". This is a quite famous poem composed in association with the Reformation movement in the early 20th century. For a long time, many researchers were unable to pinpoint the author of this poem, "some say it's Nguyen Thien Thuat, some say it's Tang Bat Ho, some say it's Phan Boi Chau" (Doan Le Giang. 2012).

According to Doan Le Giang, in 1997, Mr. Vu Van Sach discovered the Nam Hai Bo Than Ca (another name for A Te A Ca) in the National Archives Center 1 - Hanoi, File

71836, Phu Thong, Ambassador of Tonkin) and came to the conclusion that the author of the poem was Phan Boi Chau, composed in 1906 in Japan and sent back to the country. From this conclusion, the subsequent published works on this poem all credit the author as Phan Boi Chau: Chuong Thau in the work of Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc and the Cultural Reform Movement in the early twentieth century (Culture and Information Publisher, Hanoi, 1997, p. 428) included this poem in the selection of works and properly named the author as Phan Boi Chau; or in the General Collection of Vietnamese Literature, volume 22 (Science Publishing House, Hanoi, 1996, p.175) compiled by Chuong Thau also officially included this poem in Phan Boi Chau's Poetry section".

However, through analyzing the content of the poem, Doan Le Giang has proven specifically about the author of the poem as follows: The name of the poem "Nam Hai bo Than ca" means "Song of a servant who hides from the people of the South Sea", which means that the author of the poem is not only a fugitive far from his hometown but also a criminal running away.

The author of this poem is the man who has wandered for many years in Shanghai, Yokohama (Hoang Tan). Once joined the Japanese army, returned victoriously against Russia. In that victory, he was given wine to celebrate the victory by Japanese Emperor Meiji (reigned 1868-1911), but he did not drink it right away, but knelt down, raised a cup of wine, and told him about his status "being guilty of having to hide" and the plight of his country. Who was that? Definitely not Phan Boi Chau. Because Phan Boi Chau did go to Japan, and he was not a "servant guilty of having to hide" (a god, ashamed of himself), nor did he join the Japanese army to fight Russia, nor had he ever met Emperor Minh. Treat, let alone drink, kneel in the middle of the table. The year the poem was published, about 1905-1906, Phan Boi Chau was only about 38-39 years old, so he could not be called an "old man". So who was that person? The fact that a servant was guilty of having to evade, join the Japanese army and cry in the middle of the court for help is associated with the name of Tang Bat Ho⁽⁶⁾. As analyzed above, the poem "Nam Hai bo Than Ca" (Song of a servant hiding from the South Sea people) is not by Phan Boi Chau. At the same time, it is not by Nguyen Thuong Hien, Nguyen Ba Trac, because Nguyen Thuong Hien went to Japan in 1908, Nguyen Ba Trac went there in 1909, but this poem was created before 1906. The poem is also not by Nguyen Thien Thuat and Duong Ba Trac because they are not active in Japan" (Doan Le Giang. 2012).

Thus, the correct identification of the author of the song "A-te-a-ca", i.e. "providing the national anthem (Song of national awakening)", Nam Hai bo Than ca (Song of a servant who hid from people in the South Sea) is not Phan Boi Chau but Tang Bat Ho.

Determining the source of the document has helped historians to have more historical data about Tang Bat Ho and at the same time correct the historical content that used this poem when studying Phan Boi Chau.

Third, determine the time and place of historical data formation: the value of historical data depends on the time and place of its formation, if the relationship of historical data with historical events is not known. It reflects, then that data will have low reliability, even become worthless. Historical data born at the place and time historical events took place (direct history) will have high reliability, conversely, historical records are born further away from the space and time of historical events and is reflected (indirect history), the lower the reliability. Determining the time and place of formation of historical documents will make an important contribution to determining the truth - falsehood as well as the value of historical sources.

Direct history records normally have a time and place of birth that coincide with the time and place of the event. For indirect historical records, the time and place of formation of historical data are divided into two groups: those with the time and place of their formation and those without specifying the time and place of their formation. Whether or not the history records the place and time of its formation, we also need to analyze and critique its authenticity before using it.

For historical documents that record the time and place of their formation, we only need to determine the origin and relevance of the text. However, for ancient historical documents, or those that do not specify the time and place of their origin, we would build our criticism on the form and content of the historical documents to conduct criticism as follows:

Based on the form of historical data: based on materials, writing, old - new historical records to determine the date and location of its formation. For example, for an epitaph of the Tran dynasty, the words written on the epitaph cannot be the national language, the writing is no longer sharp (due to being worn down by rain and wind), and the body of the stele can't have traces of modern stone saws, or a text dated to the 15th century, but a map in which it is printed in color by laser technology does not make sense.

Based on the content of the historical documents: the information of the historical documents also helps us determine the time and place of the record's formation, specifically: names of administrative places, functions services, dialects, cultural traditions, etc. For example, a document was born under the Nguyen Dynasty, its content will comply with the principle of cavalry, the national name used in the document (if any) will be Dai Nam. Or as in the case of the book "Compendium of the Battle" as mentioned

above, it also records events after Tran Quoc Tuan's death (the time of Lord Trinh, Tay Son, etc.). It proves that the book "Compendium of the Battle" was not born under the Tran dynasty and was not written by Tran Quoc Tuan.

Fourth, determine whether history is original or copied, real or fake: in historical research, historians refer to and directly exploit many original historical sources, the reliability of the work used study higher. Therefore, determining whether the history is an original or a copy is very important.

For example, Mr. Ho Duc Thanh⁽⁷⁾, whom Ho Chi Minh showed the Prison Diary to while in China, said that the diary which he was first shown by Ho Chi Minh was "closed with newspaper sheets cut out and sewn together, the words were written with fountain pens" (Tran Dac Tho, 2011). However, the People's Daily, published on September 13, 1955, had an article about the event that the diary was exhibited by reporter Phan Quang: "The diary is small in size, with yellow paper. The front page has a picture of two strong fists raised to break the chains ..." (Song Thanh, 2013) and in the article "Uncle Ho's Prison Diary" published on the People's Daily on the 19th. On May 5, 1957, Nguyen Tam said: "In the exhibition hall of revolutionary documents, there is a small papyrus notebook, on the cover there are four words meaning stories in jail".

Thus, the Prison Diary, stored at the Vietnam Revolution Museum, which was confirmed by Ho Chi Minh as his, is only a copy (with corrections) by the author Ho Chi Minh from the original first written in the prisons of Chiang Kai-shek's government. In terms of text, this diary is not the original written text for the first time, but it is still a valid text as the original because it was copied and edited by Ho Chi Minh himself.

Or, as in "A New Storehouse of Lincoln material," published in the United States in 1928, published President Lincoln's "unpublished writings," including letters from a young Lincoln and papers related to his relatives with autographs. However, later, Paul Minor proved that the ink used (green) and the handwriting in these documents were not Lincoln's (Le Tu Thanh. 1996. p. 156). A forgery of historical data was discovered.

Analysis and criticism of the content of historical data

For direct historical data, it is enough for the historian to criticize the form and determine the authenticity or forgery of the historical record. But indirect historical data is not enough because, in the content of indirect histories, the author of histories can intentionally fabricate or misrepresent historical reality due to memory, ability, desire to brag, and the influence of interests or maybe because of "forced circumstances". Therefore, for this type of historical material, historians must conduct careful criticism and assessment of issues related to its content before using it.

First, determine the reflection motive of historical data: in fact, for historical sources recorded by humans, there is often a subjective nature within the content of the historical data. Authors who record historical events that are influenced by the viewpoints of the times and institutions may also intentionally fabricate or misrepresent historical reality because they want to brag, for their own benefit or for the sake of their own interests, or "forced situation", due to limited capacity or can also be due to accidental mistake ⁽⁸⁾. Therefore, the historian must analyze whether the author really directly witnessed or heard, had the ability to acknowledge (observe) the happening, was honest and impartial ⁽⁹⁾. Which force do they stand on, the interests of the force? Are they prohibited or forced to write from anyone's point of view?

Second, compare and contrast historical data: a historical event that occurs is often reflected in many different historical sources, so historians need to compare and contrast the content of the historical source with consideration of other relevant historical sources to see if they are compatible. If there is a match, the historian must further consider what is the cause (for example, there is a similar error): pre-arrangement, collusion between witnesses, having common interests, having the same mood, or because they both reflect the objective reality of the historical events.

Currently, many historical works, especially local history, often use indirect historical sources, especially later accounts of people who witnessed the events (memoirs). Such accounts need to be analyzed and compared with other historical documents to see if they are consistent with each other, otherwise the historian will be easily led to the situation that the same event, but many different, even contradictory facts.

For example, when writing about the reason why Nguyen Tat Thanh dropped out of Quoc Hoc Hue High School, many documents relied on a number of memoirs and said that because Uncle Ho participated in the fight in the tax resistance movement in Hue, he was expelled by the colonial government (10). However, in reality, the tax resistance movement in Hue took place in April 1908 and it was not until August 1908 that Uncle Ho was admitted to Quoc Hoc Hue High School. Due to the lack of comparison of documents, some authors have made the above unfortunate mistake.

Third, analyze the logic in the content of the history: the historian must consider whether the contents of that history are contrary to the objective laws, whether they contradict each other or not, thereby developing unusual things in history. This work requires the historian to have erudition and caution.

For example, in many ancient histories of Vietnam, it is recorded that Hung Dao Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan wrote the work "Binh Thu Compendium" and this book series had

long been lost (Le Quy Don and Phan Huy Chu confirmed this). Currently, in the bibliographic system of Vietnam, there is a book of "Binh Thu Compendium" (considered by Tran Quoc Tuan) that has been translated and published, and many historians have cited this book as an original historical document about the resistance war against the Nguyen army or about Tran Quoc Tuan. However, (Ngo Duc Tho, 1989) (Institute of Hán Nôm Studies) has proved that the content of the book being circulated today is only the result of an assembling from a number of different Chinese military books and it is a fake book, not the work of Hung Dao Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan.

IV. CONCLUSION

In historical research, historical sources are the most important evidence to determine the existence of history. Historical sources include two types: The first is direct historical data, which is directly born in the course of historical events (also known as historical relics), for example: paper birth certificates, Ngoc Lu bronze drums, Nguyen Dynasty's scrolls, government announcements and decisions, treaties and agreements. The second is indirect histories, which are historical documents that reflect historical events through another person - the author of the history, for example: memoirs, historiography, official histories of the writing agencies. History: Dai Viet historical records, Dai Nam Thuc Luc ⁽¹¹⁾.

In order to be able to reconstruct and properly perceive the objective historical reality, in addition to fully searching for historical sources, historians need to determine the reliability, objectivity, and truthfulness of historical sources. That is, to conduct analysis and criticism of historical data, no matter how reliable the sources of historical data are found, historians also need to critique, analyze and process according to scientific and comparative methods, compared with different sources. If the historical source is insufficient or not critically studied, the historian will be in the risk of being separated from the historical truth.

V. Glossary:

- 1) Social history covers the time period from the appearance of man to the present day. During that time period, there are events and phenomena that have passed (that is, happened and have ended), there are also events that have arisen from the past, continue to happen in the present and future.
- 2) Historical data are things that contain a fact or information about a certain historical event.

- 3) If the capacity of the researcher is limited, no matter how reliable and rich the historical data source is, it cannot bring good results. In contrast, a researcher with good capacity but limited historical resources cannot reconstruct history.
- 4) The method of historical analysis - criticism is derived from the historical criticism method of the German scientist G.B. Niburu (1776-1831). He views the historian's activity as solving a problem with two unknowns: First, analyze - critique historical sources with the aim of discovering reliable information; second, reconstructing historical reality on the basis of received data and information.
- 5) However, according to Tran Dac Tho: "It was comrade Ho Viet Thang, a compatriot with Uncle Ho, once a minister and deputy chairman of the State Planning Commission, who discovered this diary and it was discovered by Mr. Comrade Ho Viet Thang handed it over to Uncle Ho. Comrade Ho Viet Thang remembers that when he received the diary, Uncle Ho said: "I thought this book was lost, but luckily I found it" (Comrade Ho Viet Thang's speech, recorded)" (Tran Dac Tho, 2011)
- 6) According to Doan Le Giang, this poem is by Tang Bat Ho for the following reasons: This poem is associated with Tang Bat Ho and the whole truth (The wandering body has become a scoundrel / So many years in Shanghai, Hoanh Tan; going to Japan to pray. hospital) and legend (crying for help at the triumphal table). It was Tang Bat Ho who was really the "hidden servant" due to the Can Vuong activity against the imperial army. Tang Bat Ho is about 10 years older than Phan Boi Chau, so it is more suitable for the word "old body" in the poem than Phan Boi Chau (Old body preserves sand). Mr. Tang also wrote poetry. We suspect that this Asian version is also a translation and that the translator may also be Le Dai, a famous poet of "Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc" because the verses are quite similar to the translation of "Hai Ngoai huyet thu".
- 7) Ho Duc Thanh is a revolutionary activist who used to work as an ambassador in Long Chau (China) to help Vietnamese revolutionary organizations in the late 30s and early 40s of the twentieth century. In 1946, he was elected to the first National Assembly and served as a member of the National Assembly of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam for 14 years. At the end of the middle of September 1943, Mr. Ho Duc Thanh had regular contact with Ho Chi Minh in the military cooperation in Liuzhou (Guangxi, China) and was shown the diary by Uncle Ho in prison.
- 8) In the process of reflecting history, people cannot fully reflect historical reality, even though they themselves are very impartial. In addition, it may be due to limited capacity or being provided with wrong information, the authors rewrote and reflected in an inaccurate way.

- 9) To gain fame, archaeologist Charles Dawson used a slightly ancient human skull grafted with the lower jawbone of an ape (about 100 years old, polished and painted to appear ancient). So Charles Dawson obtained a skull that was both human and monkey and buried in the ancient ground in Piltdown. Waiting for a while when the excavation site returned to normal, archaeologist Dawson went there to excavate that precious human-monkey skull. (Le Tu Thanh 1996).
- 10) This problem can be found in the following books: In the book *Ho Chi Minh – the formation of a great personality*, Youth Publishing House, City. Ho Chi Minh by (Tran Thai Binh, 2007), page 35 reads: "On August 27, 1910, the sentence was approved, and he (Nguyen Sinh Huy - TG) was sentenced to 100 rods, which was changed to a downgrade of 4 levels and being revoked. Nguyen Sinh Cung was expelled from school at that time for participating in anti-tax protests with the people. In the book *Ho Chi Minh: A Life*, New York: Hyperion, 2000, author William J. Duiker also said that Nguyen Tat Thanh was expelled from school for participating in the anti-tax movement in Hue.
- 11) In addition to this classification, there are many other ways of classifying: analyzing historical data into two categories (Relics and traditional historical documents); classification of historical documents by form (written history, material history); classification by field (artifacts; film, photo, audio recording; ethnographic history, language history; oral history)

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