

**SOME COMMENTS ON THE COMPILING
OF THE LESSON “VIETNAM WAR (1964-1975)”
IN HISTORY TEXTBOOK GRADE 12
OF THE REPUBLIC OF FRANCE**

Dau Duc Anh

Vinh University

Received on 4/6/2019, accepted for publication on 13/7/2019

Abstract: The paper presents the content, forms, and methods of compiling the lesson “Vietnam War (1964-1975)” in history textbook grade 12 of the Republic of France. The research will shed lights on the advantages of compiling and designing specific historical lessons in the history textbook in France. From these findings, the article has come up with some scientific conclusions as a reference for designing and compiling a specific history lesson for Vietnamese high school in the current period.

1. Introduction

Programs and history textbooks in Vietnamese high schools today have been of a great concern amongst society. One of the outstanding issues is that the history books in high school now focus on compiling in a way that presents an overwhelming number of facts, rather than build up the necessary competencies for students. This way of compilation makes high school history lessons become dry, dull, and overloaded. As a result, it might demotivate students in learning history course. Ultimately, Vietnamese students could not remember the basic historical knowledge after finishing their studies.

The Republic of France is boasting about its world's leading advanced education. Therefore, studying the design of a specific lesson in a French history textbook will give us a better view of the history education program at high schools in France. Thereby, the study has made a significant contribution to the innovation of methods on how to compile history textbooks at Vietnam's schools at the secondary level. The study is also in line with the Resolution 29 on “fundamental, comprehensive innovation of education and training” of the 11th Party Central Committee which states “Education should be transformed from focusing on knowledge to concentrating on developing learners' competencies and qualities”. The research is in accordance with the target set by the state confirming that “Vietnamese people should be educated in the way that they can develop their full potential and creativity” the education system should be “open and pragmatic” (Ministry of Education and Training, 2015).

2. Content

2.1. “A program, many textbooks” in the Republic of France

In France, from the curriculum for the history course at high school regulated by the Ministry of Education, editors and publishers will actively choose ideas, content and forms to compile appropriate textbooks provided that they abide by set of regulations of the National Council for School System Evaluation. The implementation of “a program,

many textbooks” in France firstly forges positive competition in compiling textbooks among authors and publishers. Also, implementing this principle will bring more choices for the local schools and teachers in teaching history. Thus, understandably, the curriculum for history course is a compulsory “ordinance” and the textbooks are the “main references” for the teaching process in France.

Regarding all history textbooks in France for 12th grade, although authors and publishers can choose different ways to present contents, all the books must revolve around five major themes introduced by the Minister of Education Jean-Michel Blanquer on July 21, 2010 as follows: 9-10 hours: Economic growth, globalization and social transformation from the middle of the nineteenth century (*Croissance économique, mondialisation et mutations des sociétés depuis le milieu du XIX^e siècle*); 16-17 hours: Wars in the twentieth century (*La guerre au XX^e siècle*); 10-11 hours: The century of dictatorship (*Le siècle des totalitarismes*); 7-8 hours: Colonisation and decolonisation (*Colonisation et décolonisation*); 15-16 hours: The French and the Republic (*Les Français et la République*) (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 8).

In this article, we use the 12th grade history textbook published by Nathan Publisher, written by Guillaume Le Quintrec (editor), Mathias Burgé, Jean-Marie Darier, Juliette Hanrot, Daniel Henri, Florian Louis, Anne-Claire Michel. The authors of this book are all teachers teaching history in French high schools (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 1).

The lesson “Vietnam War (1964-1975)” is one of four articles of the chapter “Cold War (1947-1991)”. All four lessons in the chapter revolve around answering the two questions raised at the beginning of the chapter: Why did the two superpowers avoid the war in Berlin or Cuba but confronted indirectly in Vietnam? (*Pourquoi les deux superpuissances évitent-elles la guerre pour Berlin ou Cuba, mais s’affrontent-elles indirectement au Viêtname?*) and How did the confrontation in East/West end? (*Comment cette confrontation Est / Ouest s'est-elle terminée?*) (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 204).

2.2. Summary of lesson content

The lesson “Vietnam War (1964-1975)” (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 200-223) comprising two main parts including lessons (*cours*) and supplementary material (*dossier*), with four pages and each of them is presented briefly in two pages. In addition to that, there is a list of questions. All parts serve to answer the main question raised right at the beginning of the article: “How was this war typical of regional conflicts during the cold war?” (*En quoi cette guerre est-elle exemplaire des “conflits régionaux” de la guerre froide?*).

2.2.1. The lesson

In the lesson (*cours*) of the textbooks, there are three main contents including:

- A. “From decolonization to cold wars” (*De la décolonisation à la guerre froide*).
- B. “The U.S. intervention” (*L’intervention des États-Unis*).
- C. “The defeat of the U.S” (*L’échec des États-Unis*).

The three main issues of the lesson are presented very briefly and concisely about the causes, happenings, and consequences of the Vietnam War. The obvious point in this section is that the author only presents big milestones, the general issue of the war, not the details of specific events.

All other parts of the lesson are aimed at illustrating and clarifying the three basic contents mentioned above. Specifically, the textbook provides students with data such as: the increase in the number of US military forces in South Vietnam from 1963 to 1972. The textbook also reinforces, provide terms, (notions clés) such as detention (détente), policy of prevention (endiguement ou containment), domino effect theory (Théorie des dominos); vocabulary (vocabulaire) such as: National Front Liberation in South Vietnam (Front national de libération-FNL), Indochina War (Guerre d'Indochine), Vietnam War (Guerre du Vietnam), Indochina (Indochine), Democratic Republic of Vietnam (République démocratique du Vietnam) and Viet Minh (Việtminh) (Figure 1).

In the next section, the textbook provides data, photos, maps, and excerpts from Robert McNamara to clarify the three main contents of the lesson. Specifically, in document 1, the author gives a map of the Vietnam War with specific notes on the French Indochina borderline, the road separating Vietnam, the control area of the North and the Central region. FNL's control zone (1966-1972), the main US military bases, the US bombing-affected area, the Ho Chi Minh highway allowing North Vietnam to supply FNL (Figure 2).

In the second part of the document, the textbook presents an excerpt from a book published in 1995 which analyses the failure of the US during the Vietnam War by US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara under President Kennedy and Johnson administration.

The third document is a picture of the massacre of soldiers or prisoners of war in the Mekong Basin's operation of the South Vietnamese army in 1962 with two US military advisers.

The fourth document is the survey on American public opinion about “whether the landing of US troops in Vietnam is a mistake”.

VOCABULAIRE

FNL : Front national de libération, créé au Sud-Viêtnam en 1960 pour lutter contre le gouvernement pro-américain et réunifier le Viêtnam. Ses adversaires l'appellent le *Việtcong* (ce qui signifie « le Viêtnam communiste »).

Guerre d'Indochine : guerre qui oppose la France au Việtminh de 1946 à 1954.

Guerre du Viêtnam : guerre qui oppose le Sud-Viêtnam et les États-Unis au FNL et au Nord-Viêtnam de 1964 à 1975.

Indochine : nom générique donné aux colonies françaises du Cambodge, du Laos et du Viêtnam (Cochinchine, Annam, Tonkin).

République démocratique du Viêtnam : elle est proclamée en 1945 par Hồ Chí Minh. Le terme désigne le territoire contrôlé par le Việtminh de 1946 à 1954, puis le Nord-Viêtnam de 1954 à 1975.

Việtminh : nom abrégé de l'Alliance pour l'indépendance du Viêtnam fondée en 1941 par Hồ Chí Minh et dominée par les communistes.

Fig. 1: Vocabulary



Fig. 2

2.2.2. The dossier

In the dossier (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 222-223), there are five documents, including two "written channels" and three "imagery channels", the content revolves around the "Bad war of Americans in Vietnam" (La "sale guerre" des Américaines au Viêtnam). These materials serve to supplement and clarify the lesson content (cours) mentioned above (2.2.1).

In this section, the textbook compiles three images: The Vietnamese anti-American poster with the title "Indomitable and heroic victory of the South" (Le Sud est inflexible et victorieux) (Figure 3)¹; "The photo has gone around the world" (Une photo qui a fait le tour du monde) about the child named Kim Phuc, who suffered severe burns during the Napalm bombing of the US army on June 8, 1972 in Trang Bang - Tay Ninh (Figure 4), The photo "Active bomber" (Des bombardiers en action) talks about the Napalm bombing of the South Vietnamese and American armies to Danang in 1962 (Figure 5).

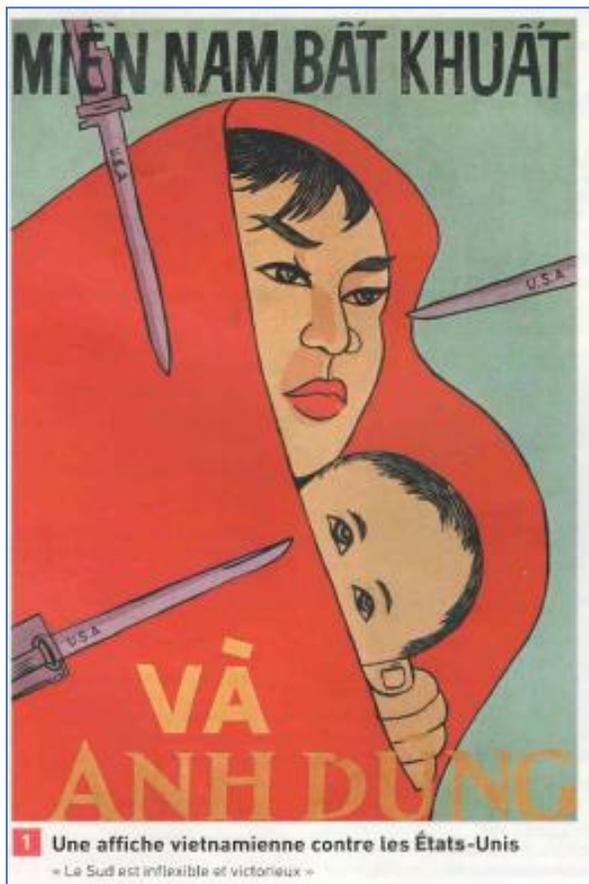


Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

¹ The original Vietnamese text on the poster: "The South Vietnam - Indomitable and audacious". Textbooks' footnote: "The South Vietnam - Indomitable and Heroic" (Le Sud est inflexible et victorieux).

In addition to the picture channel, in the second document of this section, the textbook quotes the memoirs of Doctor Dang Thuy Tram (1943-1970): “I do not know what people think they look at a bombing of those Americans. This afternoon like every other afternoon, the bomber flew around the neighborhood and a rocket was launched down to hamlet No. 13 Pho An district, two jets took turns to skydived attacking the village. Each of the bombs left the heavy plane, crush down and flared. As soon as they hit the ground, square-shaped petrol bombs burst out, gleaming in the sunshine. The plane still howled whenever series of bombs fell leaving deafening explosions.

From a position not far away, I sat still staring the scene, realizing my heart was full of hatred. Who was burned in that fire? In the sound of a long blast, who lost their lives to the bomb holes dug deep into the ground? The old lady sat beside me, staring at the hamlet's village, remarking: “This is where the wife of Hung is living.” Oh, anonymous heroes, no one on this earth can suffer more than you, the brave South Vietnamese” (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 222).

Besides, in the fourth document of this section, the textbook's author also quotes an article titled “The American Army justify their action” (American L'armée américaine justifie son action) by John Steinbeck. American writer John Steinbeck (1902-1968) was a war correspondent in Vietnam for the Newsday Daily. In an article in February 1967, he cited some leaflets dropped by US planes:

“A warning for people in villages in southern Vietnam” (Avertissement aux habitants des villages du Sud Viêtnam)

Your villages have been entirely surrounded by US and Vietnamese forces (Vietnam Republic - author). We will attack and destroy the Vietnamese communists [...]. To protect you from all the dangers during this war operation, we urge you to quickly leave the houses so that we can guide you to the designated area. You will be transferred to a civilian area where you will receive medical care, provision of temporary food and shelter throughout the campaign. After that, you may soon be able to return to your home. For your safety, please cooperate with us. Act immediately because we will do it in a few minutes.

“A warning for civilians in North Vietnam” (Avertissement aux civils du Nord Viêtnam)

The bombardment is not directed at you. Don't risk your life. Stay away from all military targets such as gas stores and other oil storage areas; bridges, railways and waterways which are used for military and military supplies; artillery barracks, all military equipment, power plants, military ports” (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 222).

In addition, the document also provides students with much vocabulary related to Napalm bombs and agent orange.

2.2.3. The list of questions

And finally, the textbook presents the system of questions presented in the form of open-ended questions, data sheet analysis, material excerpts and images. The lesson “Vietnam War (1964-1975)” comprises three main question groups:

The question group that defines the meaning of each document, the question group that collects a lot of materials, the question group that organizes information². In particular:

The questions that define the meaning of each document (Cerner le sens d'un document):

1. "How does this poster introduce US action in Vietnam?" (Comment cette affiche présente-t-elle l'action des États-Unis au Viêt-nam?) (document 1).

2. "Correctly introduce the author of this document (nationality, occupation, hometown) and point out the meaning of the author's testimony" (Présentez précisément l'auteur de ce texte (nationalité, fonction, localisation) et montrez l'intérêt de son témoignage (document 2).

3. "What role did this picture play in the Vietnam War?" (Quel rôle cette photographie a-t-elle pu jouer dans la guerre du Viêt-nam (document 3).

4. "Why did American troops drop leaflets to the South and North of Vietnam?" (Pourquoi l'armée américaine largue-t-elle des tracts au Sud-Viêt-nam et au Nord-Viêt-nam?) (document 4).

Question group that collects multiple documents (Confronter plusieurs documents):

5. "Why were civilians at the center of the conflict?" (Pourquoi les populations civiles sont-elles au coeur du conflit?) (document 1, 2, 4).

6. "Why did American troops use Napalm?" (Pourquoi les Américains utilisent-ils des bombes au napalm?) (document 2, 3, 5).

4 L'armée américaine justifie son action

L'écrivain américain John Steinbeck (1902-1968) est correspondant de guerre au Viêt-nam pour le quotidien Newsday. Dans un article de février 1967, il cite plusieurs tracts largués par l'aviation américaine.

Avertissement aux habitants des villages [du Sud-Viêt-nam]

Vos hameaux sont entièrement encerclés par les forces des États-Unis et du Viêt-nam qui vont très prochainement attaquer pour détruire le Viêt-cong qui vous oppresse et vous met en danger ainsi que vos familles. Afin de vous protéger de tout danger pendant cette opération, nous vous pressons de quitter rapidement vos maisons pour vous diriger vers la zone indiquée par nos haut-parleurs. Vous serez transportés vers un point de ralliement civil où des soins médicaux, de la nourriture et des abris temporaires vous seront fournis pendant toute la durée de l'opération. Après quoi, vous pourrez rapidement rentrer chez vous. Pour votre propre sécurité, coopérez avec nous s'il vous plaît. Agissez immédiatement, puisque nous allons avancer dans quelques minutes. [...]

Avertissement aux civils [du Nord-Viêt-nam]

Les bombardements ne sont pas dirigés contre vous. Ne risquez pas votre vie. Tenez-vous à l'écart de toutes les cibles militaires comme : les réservoirs d'essence et les autres zones de stockage de pétrole ; les ponts, les voies ferrées et les voies navigables utilisés pour le transport du ravitaillement militaire et des troupes ; les baraquements, les emplacements d'artillerie, toutes les installations militaires, les centrales électriques, les installations portuaires de la marine de guerre.

John Steinbeck, *Dépêches du Viêt-nam*, trad. Pierre Guglielmina, © Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2013.

Fig. 6

² Besides, other lessons in the French History textbook of 12th grade also have groups of questions: Explaining photos; Extracting the information from the document; Identifying the relationship between the text and the historical context; Identifying text; Analyzing materials in its context; Discussing a critical viewpoint on a document ... See also: Guillaume Le Quintrec, *Histoire 1^{re} L/ES/S*, Édition Nathan, 2016.

Group of questions for synthesizing and organizing information (Synthétiser et organiser les informations):

7. “Explain what the Vietnam war was and why it had changed the image of the US to public opinion” (Expliquez en quoi consiste la guerre du Viêtnam et pourquoi elle a altéré l’image des États-Unis dans l’opinion).

Such lesson design and materials, and all these questions serve a common aim at clarifying the Vietnam War and answering this question “How this war is typical of regional conflicts in the Cold War” (En quoi cette guerre est-elle exemplaire des “conflits régionaux” de la guerre froide?). From that, the questions have played an essential part in answering the two main issues raised at the beginning of the Cold War chapter (1947-1991)³.

2.3. Comments

From the overview of the lesson, we draw a few remarks as follows:

1. First of all, we see that the French History textbook is designed in a way that minimizes detailed, hard-to-remember and boring historical events. Materials for lessons include rich, multi-dimensional channel of information with selective images. In particular, the picture channel was the main source of information with typical images which are interesting and impressive for learners to learn about this war. The word channel is presented very briefly and concisely.

2. Through systems of questions (such as question attracting attention to students at the beginning of the lessons, questions at the end of documents and lessons), combined with word channel, imagery channel, we can see clearly that the purpose of the textbook editors - besides providing basic knowledge - they intend to build up students’ competencies. Amongst them are the reading comprehension skills, skills related to exploiting information from documents and images; critical thinking skills associated with selecting information and classifying materials to find the answers for the questions accordingly. Furthermore, students’ analyzing and evaluating skills would be improved when they are supposed to assess the nature of historical events, or when they are asked to present their personal opinions.

3. The lesson is designed for illustrating and clarifying one of the three major topics of the textbook (Guillaume Le Quintrec, 2016, p. 5-7). Thereby, the students will be able to generalize historical events, identify the position, role, and impact of each event in the context, and related those events with each chapter in the textbook.

4. The content of the lesson, the figures, and the illustrations and the system of questions are crucially focusing on forming students' key vocabulary and concepts which are the essence of events and historical issues.

5. Finally, the history textbook in France not only is presented and designed scientifically and logically but also pays great attention to the design and form. It is the presentation of each lesson and the whole book that plays an essential role in creating a

³ “Why did the two superpowers avoid war in Berlin or Cuba but face indirectly at the confrontations in Vietnam?” (Pourquoi les deux superpuissances évitent-elles la guerre pour Berlin ou Cuba, mais s’affrontent-elles indirectement au Viêtnam?) and “How did the East / West confrontation end?” (Comment cette confrontation Est / Ouest s'est-elle terminée?). Guillaume Le Quintrec, *Histoire 1^{re} L/ES/S*, Édition Nathan, 2016, p. 204.

strong impression and drawing interest from students. Moreover, it also facilitates students on how to use and exploit the information from textbooks.

3. Conclusion

The problem of renewing textbooks in general and history textbooks in high school in Vietnam today, in particular, is one of the issues attracting attention not only from scientists but also from the whole society. In particular, the promotion of research, reference to the compilation of history textbook in highly educated countries like the French Republic is also one of the positive measures to improve the quality of history textbooks in Vietnam. From selective research and reference, we hope that we will make an important contribution in innovating the way of compiling textbooks and teaching methods in high schools. We have no other aims rather than innovate the Vietnamese education system which is in line with Resolution 29 on “fundamental, comprehensive innovation of education and training” of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam.

We believe that the implementation of renovating history textbook and ways of the compilation will make history course in high school in Vietnam no longer be a dry subject in which students have to remember hard numbers and details of historical events. From that, students can easily grasp the nature of historical events. More importantly, history course books will form and equip the necessary “capabilities” for students to adapt to the industrialization and modernization of Vietnam and keep up with the robust development of the industrial revolution 4.0 in the current period.

REFERENCES

- Ministry of Education and Training (2015). *Some documents for the Board of General Education Program Development*. Hanoi.
- Ministry of Education and Training (2018). *Draft of the General education program*.
- Ministry of Education and Training (2018). *Draft of History Program, Bulletin officiel spécial N°9 du 30 septembre 2010*.
- Source: <http://www.education.gouv.fr/cid53319/mene1019675a.html>. Date cited September 20, 2018.
- Guillaume Le Quintrec (2016). *Histoire 1^{re} L/ES/S*. Édition Nathan.
- Guillaume Le Quintrec (2012). *Histoire Terminales L/ES*. Édition Nathan.
- Guillaume Le Quintrec (2014). *Histoire 2^{de}*. Édition Nathan.
- Thierry Bianchi (2016). *Histoire Géo Terminales L/ES: 38 fiches-méthodes pour comprendre le cours*. Édition Ellipses.

TÓM TẮT

MỘT VÀI NHẬN XÉT VỀ VIỆC BIÊN SOẠN BÀI “CHIẾN TRANH VIỆT NAM (1964-1975)” TRONG SÁCH GIÁO KHOA LỊCH SỬ LỚP 12 CỦA CỘNG HÒA PHÁP

Bài báo trình bày nội dung, hình thức và phương pháp biên soạn bài học “Chiến tranh Việt Nam (1964-1975)” trong sách giáo khoa Lịch sử lớp 12 của Cộng hoà Pháp. Từ đó, rút ra những ưu điểm của việc biên soạn một bài học lịch sử trong sách giáo khoa Lịch sử ở Pháp. Từ kết quả nghiên cứu đó, bài báo đã đưa ra những kết luận khoa học mang tính chất gợi mở cho phương pháp biên soạn một bài học lịch sử trong chương trình sách giáo khoa Lịch sử ở trường phổ thông của Việt Nam trong giai đoạn hiện nay.