

## Nguyen Ai Quoc's Activities in France in the Years 1911-1920

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### **Abstract**

*Nguyen Ai Quoc's journey to find a way to save the country lasted three decades (1911-1941) with many related activities, events, countries and people. However, this study only covers the years Nguyen Ai Quoc lived and worked in France in the first decade (1911-1920), since he decided to leave the Fatherland and come to France (1911) until finding a way to save the country (1920).*

**Keywords:** *Nguyen Ai Quoc, Ho Chi Minh, France, Vietnam, National Independence.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh is a special person, his life and thoughts are closely linked to the struggle for and protection of Vietnam's independence in the twentieth century, and the process of building and developing the country. He did not write memoirs and rarely confided about himself. His life was filled with months of tireless activities for the cause of liberating the country and its people. There have been many studies and articles about him from different perspectives, but research on him is still an attractive topic and there are still many gaps. Based on an in-depth analysis of Nguyen Ai Quoc's activities in France in the years 1911-1920 in relation to the historical flow of the two countries Vietnam and France, this study clarifies the meaning and role of his activities. That action contributed to the process of him finding a way to liberate the country.

Nguyen Ai Quoc's journey to find a way to save his country originated from the fact that he chose France as his first destination. A different choice from many contemporary patriots. Later, Nguyen Ai Quoc explained the reason for choosing to go to France: “When I was thirteen years old, for the first time I heard three French words: Freedom, Equality, Fraternity... I really wanted to get acquainted with the French culture. French civilization, wanting to find out what is hidden behind those words” (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, vol.1, p.416). But in reality, Nguyen Ai Quoc's activities while in France and throughout his life were not simply wanting to know and understand French civilization, but to realize the desire to liberate the country and its people. His choice then was “a courageous innovation” (Song Thanh, 2005, p.63); a historic decision, “a very special new event that has never happened before” (Nguyen Manh Ha, 2021). Nguyen Ai Quoc's special beginning has inspired many scientists to find ways to research and explain.

On July 6, 1911, Nguyen Ai Quoc arrived at Macxay port, France. A new horizon opened up and he gradually shaped a specific path. In France, in September 1911, he wrote to President of the French Republic Armand Fallières and the Minister of Colonies to request admission to the Colonial School (Alain Ruscio, 2020, pp.29-33) but received no response. Not long after, Nguyen Ai Quoc continued to follow the ships' journey, leaving France for the US, UK and many different countries and continents, observing and learning about reality while working to make a living. Around the end of 1917, he returned to Paris, starting a period of exciting practical activities and he - Nguyen Ai Quoc quickly became a name “with strange appeal” (E. Cobelev, 2010, p.68). He became the first Vietnamese “dare to expose the crimes of the French colonialists right in Paris” (Tran Dan Tien, 2020, p.50).

Nguyen Ai Quoc's activities in France made him a person who received “special attention” from the French Republic government in Paris as well as the French colonial government in Indochina. At the same time, he turned from a patriot to Leninism and became an international communist soldier. What is especially interesting

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is that Nguyen Ai Quoc found a way to fight French colonialism and win national independence right in the French capital Paris” (Vu Thi Hong Dung, 2022).

### **Research Questions**

The article focuses on clarifying research questions, which is also the orientation in which the report conducts research:

Why did Nguyen Ai Quoc choose France as his first destination?

What were Nguyen Ai Quoc's typical activities in France?

What significance did the activities in France have on Nguyen Ai Quoc's process of finding a way to save his country?

### **The Reason Nguyen Ai Quoc Chose to Go to France First**

This is one of the fascinating events when researching the life and career of Nguyen Ai Quoc - Ho Chi Minh. It not only marked the first choice in the journey to find a way to save the country, but also reflected the difference in theoretical and practical thinking and perception of Nguyen Ai Quoc with other patriots of his time. Historian researcher Pham Xanh believes that Nguyen Ai Quoc chose to come to France to “expand his vision and observations to the wider world outside and to a specific Western country that is dominating his country. The compelling reasons that brought him to France were the traditions of freedom, equality, charity and civilization of the country that he heard and knew and the brutality of the colonialists in the colonies that he witnessed. opinion... That is something that people feel they must discover and recognize” (Pham Xanh, 1990, p.18). Besides, William J. Duiker - American historian also has similarities with Pham Xanh's commentary when he said that in 1911, Nguyen Tat Thanh left the Fatherland “full of love for the Fatherland as well as understanding of the Fatherland, clearly about the injustice that the colonial government had caused to his people. To Thanh, there seems to be no way to solve this problem domestically. Perhaps that can be found abroad” (William J. Duiker, 2000, p.29). William J. Duiker mentioned the reality of Vietnam in the early twentieth century, when all methods of saving the country according to different ideological and political trends failed and Nguyen Tat Thanh soon recognized that deadlock. Therefore, he went to France hoping to find a way to resolve the deadlock that history was posing.

There have been many studies approached from many angles giving different reasons for Nguyen Ai Quoc's choice to go to France, but most of them have the same assessment that Nguyen Ai Quoc's departure from the Fatherland in 1911 was the out of patriotism, the purpose was to find a way to save the country and he had a great desire to liberate the country and its people. Through research, we found that there were several main reasons why Nguyen Ai Quoc chose to go to France first:

Firstly, Nguyen Ai Quoc realized the failure and understood the cause of failure of contemporary patriotic movements according to different ideologies.

Second, Nguyen Ai Quoc saw the patriotism, the resilient and indomitable will to fight, and the tradition of solidarity of the Vietnamese people - an important decisive factor in the cause of liberating the country. He understood that what the Fatherland needed right now was not wealth or guns, but rather the path and method that could bring independence to the country and freedom to the people.

Third, Nguyen Ai Quoc witnessed the brutal domination and oppression of the French colonialists on the people and country of Vietnam, but also knew that there was a France famous for its civilization, democracy, and equality... He wanted to go to France, wanted to see directly the freedom, equality, and civilization of the country that was placing the yoke of domination on his Fatherland. From there, we hope to understand France and the French colonial rule to find a way to defeat the French colonialists.

Fourth, France is one of the central countries of Europe, where many ideological and cultural trends are concentrated and born, and where many famous figures in the world gather and operate. Coming to France,

Nguyen Ai Quoc will have more opportunities to expand his knowledge and determine the specific path to take.

Fifth, perhaps at the time of his departure, Nguyen Ai Quoc's understanding of France was greater than that of other capitalist countries. At the same time, France is directly related to the fate of Vietnam, the events that happened to his father and his family.

### **Typical Activities of Nguyen Ai Quoc in France**

In France, Nguyen Tat Thanh worked many different jobs to make a living, spending time going to the library and self-studying to improve his knowledge, French language, and political and social activities among the workers. He became acquainted with journalists, artists, intellectuals, political and social activists of France (Jules Roux, Marius Moutet, Paul Vaillant Couturier...) and of a number of other countries living in France. According to Tran Dan Tien: Usually, Mr. Nguyen only works half a day, working in the morning to make money, and in the afternoon going to the library or attending political talks. At night, he went to a rally in Paris... (Tran Dan Tien, 1984, p.36). Nguyen Tat Thanh actively researched and participated in trade union activities, opposing colonialist policies of exploitation in the colonies. The names Nguyen Tat Thanh - Nguyen Ai Quoc are associated with activities and events that marked his change in perception and actions.

After Nguyen Tat Thanh wrote two letters with the same content sent to Armand Fallières (French President) and Minister of Overseas France Albert Lebrun in September 1911 to apply to study at the Colonial School but was not accepted (William J. Duiker, 2000, p.31), he decided to leave France, follow the ship's journey to many countries on all continents, continuing his path to find the truth. Having spent a period of time traveling to many places, I have gained new awareness and understanding of the nature of capitalism, colonialism, and the lives of people in countries famous for civilization, democracy, freedom, and equality. such as England, America, to underdeveloped countries in Africa and Asia such as Algeria, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Sudan... at the end of 1917, Nguyen Tat Thanh returned to France. From here, a period of his exciting practical activities began.

Nguyen Tat Thanh “finds every way, almost everywhere, to gather sympathetic people, especially people in the Socialist Party, to express their dissatisfaction with the Government's methods of action and have given them their voluntary support. In France, this is our only hope” (Alain Ruscio, 2020, p.68), he became a member of the French Socialist Party and the League of Human Rights. Those were the first socio-political organizations he joined in France.

He quickly became a special figure because of his activities condemning the domination of the French colonial government and the right to independence and freedom of the colonial people, An Nam. In particular, on June 18, 1919, Nguyen Tat Thanh, on behalf of the group of Vietnamese patriots in France, signed Nguyen Ai Quoc's name on the An Nam People's Claim and proactively printed it and sent it directly to the Conference. The peace meeting of the victorious countries after World War I was held in Versailles (France). The name Nguyen Ai Quoc appeared from here and he began to receive “special” attention from the French Government in Paris as well as the French colonial government in Indochina. The Claim requires the French Government to recognize the freedom, democracy, and equal rights of the Vietnamese people such as political freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of association and assembly, freedom of residence, Freedom of learning... was not resolved by the Versailles Conference or the French government, but it made Vietnam known to the world. Nguyen Ai Quoc became the first Vietnamese colonialist to fight directly on the international forum with the French government demanding the country's basic national and democratic rights. The claim was the first result of his famous practical activities. For the French, the Claim was considered “a “bomb” that shocked French public opinion. As for the Vietnamese people, this is “spring thunder... Right now in the French capital, on an international forum, there is a Vietnamese person blatantly standing up to demand legitimate rights for his entire nation, public opinion is like that. The world is abuzz with discussion. Who doesn't respect or admire you? At that time, everyone we met in France talked about independence and self-determination, and they all talked about Nguyen Ai Quoc. The very name Nguyen Ai Quoc itself has a strange appeal” (E. Cobelev, 2010, p.68). Also from this event, “The name Nguyen Ai Quoc became known in nearly all groups” (Alain Ruscio, 2020, p.179) and he began to be on the special interest list of secret police and the French authority.

Right in the magnificent capital of Paris, Nguyen Ai Quoc read Lenin's "First draft of theses on national and colonial issues" (hereinafter abbreviated as Theses) published in the Humanitarian newspaper dated September 15, 1919, July 16-17, 1920, the thesis points out the formality of bourgeois democracy and the task of communists and Communist Parties "to defeat the deception of bourgeois democracy that is concealing the vast majority of people in the world. The earth is colonially and financially enslaved by a small minority of very rich, advanced capitalist countries" (Lenin, 1978, vol.41, p.198). The thesis raises basic issues, the path to liberate colonial peoples, and the role of the Communist International. In particular, "The most important thing in the policy of the Communist International on national and colonial questions is to bring the proletariat and working masses of all peoples and all countries closer to each other, together to carry out a common revolutionary struggle to overthrow the landlords and the bourgeoisie. Because only that closeness can ensure victory over capitalism, without that victory it is impossible to abolish national oppression and inequality" (Lenin, 1978, vol.41, p.199). So, to completely defeat capitalism, there needs to be an alliance and unity between the proletariat and peoples around the world.

After nearly a decade of traveling through many countries, interacting with all types of people, Nguyen Ai Quoc understood that the capitalist regime cannot bring true freedom and happiness to working people and that the path of bourgeois revolution cannot bring true freedom and happiness to working people, can be the path to national liberation and class liberation for the Vietnamese people. Therefore, when reading Lenin's Theses, Nguyen Ai Quoc saw in it the answers to the things he had been wondering and looking for for a long time. He realized that the specific contents of the Claim sent to the Versailles Conference in 1919 had been raised to a theoretical level by Lenin in the Theses.

Lenin's theses completely changed Nguyen Ai Quoc's perception. He went from being a patriot to Leninism, finding the way to liberate the country. The thesis provided Nguyen Ai Quoc with theories on the path to national liberation, becoming a guidebook on the path of revolutionary activities. Later, Nguyen Ai Quoc confided his feelings when reading Lenin's Theses: "Lenin's Theses made me so moved, excited, clear, and confident! I was so happy that I cried. Sitting alone in my room, I said loudly as if speaking in front of a large crowd: "O fellow people who are tormented and suffering! This is what is necessary for us, this is the path to our liberation. From then on, I completely believed in Lenin, believed in the Third International" (Ho Chi Minh, vol.10, p.127). He affirmed "... Leninism for us, the revolutionaries and the Vietnamese people, is not only a magical "handbook", not only a guideline, but also the sun that illuminates our path to final victory, to socialism and communism" (Ho Chi Minh, vol.10, p.128).

The fact that Nguyen Ai Quoc read Lenin's Theses and found the way to save the country was a special event, a turning point not only in his life but also in the country of Vietnam. No one at that time could have imagined that from this event, Nguyen Ai Quoc would have tireless activities and efforts to realize that theory and path that would help Vietnam gain independence in 1945 and continue the current cause of building the Fatherland.

In addition, at the end of 1920, Nguyen Ai Quoc attended the 18th National Congress of the French Socialist Party, which opened on December 25, 1920, meeting in the city of Tours with the participation of 285 delegates. Nguyen Ai Quoc was the only colonial resident in the delegation (including 8 people) of colonial party committees. At the Congress, Nguyen Ai Quoc sat on the left side of the meeting room, belonging to a group of people who supported the policy of joining the Third International. At the same time, he was the representative of Indochina invited to speak by the Chairman of the afternoon session of December 26, Emilia Gude. In his speech, Nguyen Ai Quoc frankly condemned the crimes and cruel rule policies of the French colonialists in Vietnam, calling on the Socialist Party to take practical actions to support the struggle of the Vietnamese people. He said: Comrades, I should have come here today to join you in contributing to the world revolution, but with deep sadness, I came here as a party member. society, to protest the heinous crimes in my homeland... In Indochina, the colonialists tried every way to poison us with opium and make us stupid with alcohol... The Socialist Party needs to take action. Act practically to support the oppressed native people... The Party must propagate socialism in all colonial countries. We see that the Socialist Party's entry into the Third International means that the Party specifically promises that from now on it will appreciate the importance of the colonial question... In the name of all humanity, in the name of all All socialist party members, both right

and left, we call on: Comrades, please save us!... (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, vol.1, pp.34-35). Thus, Nguyen Ai Quoc was the only colonial delegate to attend and speak at the Congress of a major political party in France and received the agreement and support of many delegates in attendance.

Also at the Congress, Nguyen Ai Quoc voted to approve the French Socialist Party's participation in the Third International because he thought, "The Third International pays close attention to the issue of colonial liberation. The Third International said it would help oppressed peoples regain their freedom and independence" (Tran Dan Tien, 1984, p.65). At the same time, soon after, the French Section of the Communist International was established and Nguyen Ai Quoc was one of the founders of the French Communist Party. This was Nguyen Ai Quoc's first practical activity after he found the way to save the country. So from a patriot, Nguyen Ai Quoc came to Leninism and quickly became the first Vietnamese communist.

In addition, Nguyen Ai Quoc also had many other activities in France in the years 1917-1920 such as participating in rallies, speeches, and meetings of different associations and groups to not only fight for Vietnam but also encouraged the struggle movements of other colonies and the world proletarian movement... Along with that, Nguyen Ai Quoc also actively wrote many articles on the Internet, condemning and denouncing the crimes of the French colonialists. This was also the period when he cherished and wrote the first lines for the famous work Judgment of the French colonial regime, published later. In particular, it was also the time when he had meetings with a particularly powerful figure of France and the French colonies at that time - Minister of Colonies Albert Sarraut, in which Nguyen Ai Quoc directly confronted, not Trembling with fear, he affirmed that what he needed most in life was "my people are free, my country is independent..." (T.Lan, 2020, p.26). These are activities that both demonstrate Nguyen Ai Quoc's will, mettle, purpose, and way of fighting, while also affirming the maturity of his practical activities.

### **The Meaning of Activities in France in Nguyen Ai Quoc's Journey to Find A Way to Save the Country**

During the 30-year journey abroad to find a way to save the country (1911-1941), Nguyen Ai Quoc went through 28 countries, in the first 10 years - the decade of finding a way, paving the way, both working to make a living and observing, learning from practice, he went through 21 countries, staying the longest in America (1912-1913), England (1913-1917) and France (1917-1923). That 10-year journey helped Nguyen Ai Quoc gradually understand: everywhere people want to live freely, free from colonial rule and exploitation; clearly recognize friends and enemies; understand that the working people of all countries are friends, and that imperialism is also the enemy everywhere. At the same time, Nguyen Ai Quoc also understood that in the struggle for national independence and human liberation, there was a need for solidarity between oppressed people and colonial peoples, as well as a close connection between the struggle of the people of colonial countries with the working class in the main country.

However, the time spent living and working in France was especially important in Nguyen Ai Quoc's journey to find a way to save the country. This was the time when Nguyen Ai Quoc matured in theoretical thinking and practical activities.

First of all, the fact that Nguyen Ai Quoc's application to a colonial school was not approved by the French government helped him understand how difficult it was to rely on France's help, or to collaborate with France to help the country. From there, he had a clearer direction for the path he would take next. He decided not to stay in France and continued to search for a way to realize his goals and aspirations of bringing independence to the Fatherland and freedom to his people. The decision to go to many different countries helped Nguyen Ai Quoc expand his practical understanding in all aspects so that when he returned to France, he could have specific, practical activities to fight for national independence.

During the process of participating and operating in the French Socialist Party, Nguyen Ai Quoc understood the role of the organization and knew how to rely on the organization to fight. Since then, he has had experience in practical activities, in building and developing organizations and expanding political and social relationships. These years helped Nguyen Ai Quoc have a legitimate status, standing in a political organization of the French Republic, expressing the voice of the people of a colonial country, of a country being dominated by colonialists.

Create favorable conditions for him to approach and come to Marxism-Leninism, choosing the path of proletarian revolution to liberate the country and its people.

From the results of sending the An Nam People's Claim to the Versailles Peace Conference, Nguyen Ai Quoc realized the fake democratic nature of capitalism, the “enlightenment” of the motherland of France. In particular, he understood that the cause of liberating his country and people must be done by himself, and cannot expect or rely on help from the mother country or outside countries. This was a mature step in Nguyen Ai Quoc's perception and practical activities. That perception was different from that of many predecessor revolutionaries at that time and he understood why the path to saving the country of Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, Reform ideas, wanting to cooperate, relying on Japan or the French colonialists themselves... did not lead to victory.

By reading Lenin's Theses, finding the way to save the country, participating in the 18th National Congress of the French Socialist Party, voting for the French Socialist Party to join the 3rd International and become a One of the members who participated in the founding of the French Communist Party, became an international communist soldier... Nguyen Ai Quoc clearly understood the path to take, shaped and determined the path and methods to win the war. independence for the nation, liberating the people from colonial rule. This is an outstanding step of maturity, maturity in cognitive thinking and practical activities of Nguyen Ai Quoc. He not only found the way to save the country, but more than that, he shaped the way and route the path would take to reach the destination. At the same time, be clearly aware of the role and power of international solidarity, the close relationship and mutual impact between the struggle movement of the main bourgeoisie and the movement for national independence. Understand the development trend of the world revolutionary movement. Therefore, he placed the Vietnamese revolution as a part of the world revolution, the Vietnamese national liberation revolution within the general trajectory of the world proletarian revolution. He formed a system of political arguments to build, organize, and develop the revolutionary political party - the Communist Party of Vietnam later.

It's interesting that most of Nguyen Ai Quoc's activities that marked changes, developed theoretical cognitive thinking, and practical activities all took place in France, right in the middle of Paris - the capital of light of France. Europe, more specifically, is the country that dominates Vietnam. It was the years of active activities in France that proved that Nguyen Ai Quoc's decision to choose to go to France first, to come to France to directly learn and hope to find a path for the Fatherland, was correct. Nguyen Ai Quoc was successful in his journey to find his way. This is something that patriots of the time could not do.

## **CONCLUDE**

Historical reality demonstrates the special role and significance of the years Nguyen Ai Quoc lived and worked in France in the process of finding a way to save the country, his revolutionary life as well as the process of fighting for independence. Vietnam's national establishment. It was in France that Nguyen Ai Quoc found the way and the way to defeat the yoke of French colonialism. It was in France that he understood the true value of freedom, equality, fraternity, and the truth that nothing is more precious than independence and freedom. Besides, it was also from France that Nguyen Ai Quoc made the world know about Vietnam, know that Vietnam is a country and people that are being colonized by the French colonialists and erased from the world map. How does the world currently exist? And also from France, Nguyen Ai Quoc not only started his activities to fight against French colonial rule, but also began a life full of dangers under the supervision and “special attention” of the Government. French colonial power, and is also the one who laid the foundation and origin of the relationship between Vietnam and France, for the understanding of the French people, a truly civilized and democratic France with an independent Vietnam, peace, unity, peace-loving, resilience, solidarity and humanity.

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