

Communication about Maritime Sovereignty in Vietnamese Press

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***Abstract:** this paper is a part of research project about the maritime and island in Vietnamese press will focus on the role of the journalism in Vietnam on disseminating the related information about the sovereignty in Vietnam during the significant conflict in the sea base. On looking at the recent research in Vietnam and the role of journalism in social development, this paper focus on the main ideas about the improvement of social awareness about the maritime sovereignty, about the protection and promotion of maritime cultural values in Vietnam, and suggests ideas for the development of press in Vietnam .*

1. Introduction

Vietnam is a coastal nation with a coastline that stretches more than 3.260 km. It has inner seas, territorial waters, adjacent waters, exclusive economic zones and large continental shelves (which take up more than 1 million km², three times larger than its land space), and approximately 3000 coastal islands and two off-shore groups of islands named Spratly and Paracel, which are of great strategic importance. The Vietnamese government has been exercising its sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands for many centuries. Vietnam's sovereignty is validated by international law and recognized by a set of legal and historical evidence ratified in the Law on the Sea in 2012. In reality, sea and islands have up to now played a crucial role in Vietnam's socio-economic development and the maintenance of national defense-security and always attached to important historical marks.

The Resolution of the 10th Congress of the Communist Party stated that: "The development and implementation of a comprehensive, intensive and focused strategy for developing maritime economy helps Vietnam become a strong regional power in terms of maritime economy, which is associated with the maintenance of national security and defense and international cooperation". The Resolution of the 4th Congress of the Central Party Committee (10th term) dated February/2007 on Vietnam's Maritime Strategy until 2020 reaffirmed that the edification and education about maritime sovereignty is one of the important measures that has to be promoted

among the solutions to successfully realize the Strategy. The leading and significant role of the mass media is included in these measures. The 11th Congress of the Party continued to assert: "The strong development of maritime economy contributes to fully realizing the maritime status and potentials of Vietnam, in which the development of maritime economy is attached to the maintenance of national security and defense and the protection of maritime sovereignty".

Following these policies and guidelines, the Vietnamese press, through its education about maritime sovereignty, has contributed to raising the understanding of the international community of Vietnam's rightful claims, legal bases, historical and practical evidence that validate its sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands and the policies and guidelines of Vietnamese Communist Party and State on the South China Sea, appealing to the recognition and support of the international community. At the same time, it has helped Vietnamese people be more aware of the position, role, potentials and importance of Vietnam's sea and islands and of their responsibilities and obligations in protecting maritime sovereignty. It has contributed to publicizing and encouraging new and good practices in the protection of maritime sovereignty, the insurance of social welfare, the preservation and promotion of traditional cultures in maritime and coastal areas, the cultivation, development and exploitation of maritime resources, and maritime search and rescue.

Since 2010, as the South China Sea disputes becomes more "controversial" and the situation becomes more complicated and unpredictable, which threatens the security and sovereignty of countries, including Vietnam, the press has accelerated its coverage of Vietnam's struggle in protecting its maritime sovereignty and territorial integrity; Vietnam's political, legal and diplomatic efforts to confirm its sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands. It has continued to raise popular awareness of sea and islands and of economic operations in conjunction with the development of popular fronts and people's security in coastal areas. Several press agencies have published their series of intensive and focused articles that create profound social impact

and recognition, generating deep changes in the awareness and actions of different state authorities and sectors and the whole population, thus contributing to a high level of social consensus in the Party's guidelines and the Government's policies and legal measures in response to the South China Sea issue.

There are recent research in Vietnam related to the role of press on disseminating the maritime sovereignty in some area, such as the economic issues as The press and the development of maritime economy in Central Vietnam (The Central Executive Committee 2007; The Central Committee for Propaganda 2008; Ho Dung 2015); Improving the quality of radio programs about maritime issues on VOV (Nguyen Thi Hoa 2011) [4]; the history perspective about Vietnamese and Sea (Nguyen Van Kim 2011), the role of communication on making the maritime popularly (Pham Thuy An 2013; Van Cong Nghia 2014; Nguyen Thi Quynh Nga 2013). In additions, some related research work is closed to general development of journalism in Vietnam (Duong Xuan Son 1995; Nguyen Thi Quynh Nga 2013). However, there is lack of comprehensive research closely related to the maritime sovereignty, especially since the disputes in the sea base in the East sea of Vietnam. This paper is a part of the research project funded by Vietnam National University (QG 14.31) will look at the general aspect of communication about the maritime sovereignty in Vietnamese press.

2. The press' role in the communication about sea and islands

2.1. The press educates and communicates about maritime sovereignty

Currently, by realizing the arduous mission of protecting Vietnam's maritime sovereignty, the Vietnamese press proves to be a channel that guides and orients the public towards the effective observance and implementation of the Party and Government's policies and guidelines regarding the protection of maritime sovereignty. The press also helps the international community to understand and support the perspectives and standpoints of Vietnamese government concerning the South China Sea issue and Vietnam's sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands. It serves as a core channel that provides knowledge and information about domestic and international current issues, including the protection of maritime sovereignty, in an honest, timely and comprehensive way, which contributes to consolidating the people's confidence in the leadership of the Party and State.

The Vietnamese Party and State makes clear that: *"The protection of territorial sovereignty and*

maintenance of peace and stability in the South China Sea bear an integrative nature. Solutions to the South China Sea issues have to be included in the totality of socio-economic strategies for development and the peaceful, independent, and autonomous foreign policies, and the multilateralization and diversification of international relations. Reactionary groups have to be resolutely kept from devising their schemes to attack and disrupt the leadership of the Party and State, and from sowing mistrust and division among Vietnam and other relevant countries in their international relations" (Nguyen Tan Dung 2011).

Following the above guiding principle and by evaluating the efficiency of the press in educating about maritime sovereignty in recent years, on February 1st 2013, the Central Committee for Propaganda issued a guiding text no 74-HD/BTGTW on the education about sea and islands, in which it asked the Party's Committees, local authorities, associations, sectors and socio-political organizations to acknowledge that the protection of maritime sovereignty is one of the crucial political missions to be accomplished in 2013 and later years. To fulfill this mission, local sectors and authorities and socio-political organizations devised their locally respective communication plans, among which the press played a leading role.

Sea and islands constitute an important and inherent part of Vietnam, therefore the education about the protection of maritime sovereignty itself means protecting the survival and cultural space of thousands of Vietnamese generations. Through different contents and forms and in different genres, the press has meticulously focused on covering and educating about Vietnam's sea and islands, where different *Vietnamese cultural strata* are formed and where *Vietnamese cultural residues* are stored for hundreds of years. These articles reveal the fact that, in the pre-historic periods, the creators of such cultures as Dong Son, Sa Huynh, Champa, and Oc Eo – Phu Nam steadily traveled from coastal midlands and central plains to maritime areas, gathered maritime resources for their livelihood and adopted maritime elements into their own collective cultures. On the contrary, in the neo-stone age, generations of population of the Nam Dao culture traveled from maritime areas into the Vietnam's mainland. They learnt to exploit land resources and consume the products made in plains and forests to survive, and eventually mingled with the ancient Vietnamese natives there. Maritime areas became living spaces where different ancient Vietnamese cultures were combined and nurtured, contributing to the cultural and mental identity of Vietnamese as a nation. Stretching across a vast area and being gifted with favorable geographical conditions as it is an intersection of important maritime routes in the world, Vietnam's maritime space is not merely a

living space but a source of political, economic and cultural interactions between different countries in the region and worldwide.

Through its reports, the press investigates and clarifies a variety of legal issues pertaining the validation of Vietnam's sovereignty over its sea and islands according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982 and Vietnam's legal instruments, including the Vietnam Law on the Law 2012; and in particular the legal devices that help Vietnam to confirm its sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands such as *nautical diagrams, charts and diagrams*. The press also explains the Vietnamese Party and State's viewpoints in settling maritime disputes and different efforts made by Vietnam and relevant countries to define their maritime boundaries. Its utmost objective is to affirm Vietnam's sovereignty and resolutely defends its maritime sovereignty under any circumstance, and at the same time to maintain maritime peace and strengthen Vietnam's friendly relations with other countries without being provoked, exploited or manipulated. The press manages to raise people's revolutionary watchfulness so that they are ready to respond to every situation and are equipped with properly-oriented ideological messages. Most notably, different press agencies from the Central to local level made timely coverage about the aggressive and hostile actions of the Chinese ships towards some Vietnamese fishermen, who were exploring and exploiting oil and catching fish in the South China Sea. For example, in 2012 the cable of a Vietnamese ship named Binh Minh 2 was cut by Chinese ships, and in recent years there have been countless examples of Chinese ships intimidating, attacking, chasing and disrupting the ships of fishermen in central Vietnam. Most notoriously, China was illegally anchoring its HD 901 oil rig in the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of Vietnam from May 2nd, 2014 to July 16th, 2014. 187 reporters, 143 of which were domestic and 35 were foreign, personally came to the Paracel islands to cover this event. Domestic and foreign reporters, journalists and press agencies produced more than 2000 detailed stories and articles through different platforms about this event.

To successfully educating the people, especially fishermen, about maritime sovereignty, the press always tries to be up-to-date, continually improves its contents and diversifies its formats so as to find appropriate ways to communicate to each respective audience, helping every person to develop his awareness and understanding of the rules and regulations concerning sea and islands. Thanks to this, fishermen feel more empowered to engage in their maritime activities and dare to stand up against the aggressive actions of foreign, especially Chinese, navies and coastguards. This also helps every Vietnamese to define and be aware of his

responsibilities as a citizen in protecting his Motherland's maritime sovereignty.

Recently, the education and coverage about maritime sovereignty in Vietnamese press has been regularly promoted. The press plays an important part in confirming Vietnam's maritime sovereignty, raising the people's awareness of the need to protect maritime sovereignty, popularizing the images of Vietnam's sea and islands as well as Vietnam's indisputable sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands to the international community, and greatly contributing to Vietnam's diplomatic efforts to negotiate with other countries and to resolutely vindicate and protect its sacred maritime sovereignty.

2.2. The press educates and communicates about the protection and promotion of maritime cultural values in developing maritime economy and tourism

The press has through different contents under different formats publicized and introduced about beautiful sceneries, instructed people about the exploitation, cultivation and processing of aquatic products, and promoted the protection of maritime environment.

Vietnamese cultural heritage is a combination of the intellect, affection and traditions of Vietnamese ethnic groups then and now. Through various catastrophes in the past and despite having been devastated and razed by wars and arduous natural disasters, this cultural heritage remains an enormous, unique and valuable treasure of the country. It is one of the important resources of the Vietnamese nation in its progress of innovation, development and international integration. The protection and promotion of cultural heritage in general and maritime cultural artifacts in particular is directly pertinent to the implementation of the Vietnam Maritime Strategy until 2020 – already approved by the 10th Central Executive Committee at the 4th Central Congress. Cognizant of this potential, the press has actively communicated about the advantages of each area and each region to ensure the effective development of human resources and attraction of investment.

Tourism is an integrated economic sector that mobilizes and utilizes *natural resources* (geological conditions, terrains, climate, hydrological and ecological conditions, sceneries and landscapes) and *humanistic resources* created by human, among which cultural heritage plays an important role. Cultural heritage is a crucial part of every tourist destination and significantly boosts its value. Conversely, without being transformed into accessible products that are introduced and publicized to tourists, cultural heritage loses its vitality and fails to expand its values. In this process, the press serves as a bridge between culture and

tourism by vigorously collecting information and communicating about different cultural assets and advertising the sceneries and land spaces, contributing to tourism development. In recent years, several coastal provinces such as KhanhHoa, Da Nang and QuangBinh have considered tourism and maritime tourism as an important economic sector and invested on press activities that produce and utilize diverse tourism products, contributing to the sustainable development of maritime economy.

In addition, the press participates in the management and supervision of the planning and development of maritime economy, ensuring the connection, association and correlation between regions and areas. Shores, islands, the ocean and groups of islands are supposed to be part of a living space with economic and security stakes. The absence of scientific examination and evaluation results in poor performance or ineffectiveness, and even disrupts the balanced development of maritime economy.

The enormous potentials of maritime economy have been raised by numerous articles. Therefore, in order to effectively exploit and transform these potentials into useful resources that contribute to national industrialization and modernization, the Vietnamese Party and State are supposed to invest appropriate resources into the pivotal and strong industries at coastal areas, islands and groups of islands such as *oil exploitation and processing, sea ports and maritime transportation services; sea products exploitation and processing, and tourism*. Possible priorities include developing service providers, establishing strong enterprises that can reach out far and wide, combining economic development with maritime control; mobilizing financial, scientific, and technological and human resources to effectively exploit the potentials of maritime areas; developing socio-economic infrastructures and security-defensive structures on the Spratly islands and off-shore islands, facilitating the acceleration of people's productivity in the islands and groups of islands.

By advertising, publicizing and introducing Vietnamese maritime cultural assets to everyone in the globe, the press manages to make known to international tourists the great contributions of Vietnamese maritime culture to that of the entire human race. It contributes to promoting Vietnamese cultural values as Vietnam interacts and integrates with other national and ethnic cultures in the world.

The press is also particularly concerned about protecting maritime environment. While propagating cultural values, the press does not fail to point out bad conducts and potentially damaging behaviors towards cultural resources and assets. It criticizes and condemns many tourists who willfully discard litter on the ground during festivals, doodle on the exhibits in vestiges and famous landscapes and thus

diminishes the value of these cultural assets. The press also calls for collective efforts in protecting and preserving cultural assets and in encouraging environmental protection and better treatment of the landscapes.

The reality in recent years shows that the majority of newspapers and broadcast stations have developed their specialized culture sections, which regularly addresses specific contents relating to the protection and promotion of maritime cultural values, while at the same time strongly criticizing and condemning bad practices that damage cultural heritage in particular and maritime sovereignty as a whole.

2.3. The press greatly contributes to protecting the system of knowledge in Vietnamese maritime culture

The Vietnamese maritime cultural heritage consists of a myriad of diverse assets. In recent years, as Vietnamese sea and islands are continuously encroached, the collection and examination of archives necessary for the protection of Vietnam's sovereignty has been actively promoted. Through the information published by the press, Vietnamese becomes increasingly aware of the value of such archives that confirm Vietnam's sovereignty over its sea and islands as nautical maps and charts, historical records, imperial and wooden blocks of the Nguyen dynasty; among which the imperial and wooden blocks are recognized by UNESCO as artifact of heritage in the Memory of the World program in the Asia-Pacific region.

The press contributes to revealing maritime culture itself is a rich system of native knowledge. As the fishermen engage in their daily struggle with storms and waves, they gain plentiful knowledge about the ocean. These experiences not only contribute to their livelihood but above all empower the fishermen to overcome all hardships and survive the threatening storms at the ocean. These experiences constitute a system of knowledge the fishermen have acquired about maritime environment.

Through its articles, the press also propagates knowledge about the various tools used to collect and catch aquatic products. A variety of instruments used by the fishermen include ships, rafts, casting nets, different kinds of nets, different kinds of fishing rods, among which the vessels are most notable. Aside from being fishing tools, the vessels bear cultural characteristics and reflect different ethnic and local cultural identities, in particular the GheBau (large sailing boats) at XuQuang (the area surrounding Quang Nam and Quang Ngai) and the rafts at Sam Son (Thanh Hoa).

The press provides and communicates ample information about maritime culture as a system of knowledge and techniques related to the cultivation

and catching of aquatic products in their respective ecological systems, such as off-shore and in-shore areas (going off the shore and back to the shore), estuaries, lagoons and mangroves.

Through different genres, the press reveals the system of knowledge about the preservation and processing of aquatic and marine products. If fishing is primarily the task of men, processing and consumption are the tasks of women. Different processing methods include drying, salting, producing fish sauce and sauces in general. Caught fish is primarily consumed at once or otherwise processed.

The press enthusiastically communicates and introduces about the features of maritime environment. The features of each maritime environment include sea currents, tides, springs, canals, coastal lagoons, climate, the rich and diverse underwater living species and aquatic fauna, fishing seasons, climatic and astronomical features. These features constitute a bank of knowledge in the minds of fishermen and manifest in their professional routines, in idioms, proverbs, folk songs, verses, sea shanties and ancient tales.

The press also meticulously introduces about the diverse and unique system of religious tenets, beliefs, rituals and customs of Vietnamese maritime culture, which plays an important part in the spiritual life of fishermen. This is explained in their living and working conditions at the ocean that embraces them and at the same time threatens and challenges their life. Therefore, religious dogmas and beliefs constitute their only “foothold” on which they stand to face the mighty and endless ocean. Local fishermen at coastal villages always revere their ancestors and forefathers, which localities in Central Vietnam call the custom of ancestor or relative veneration. They set up sacred altars in their house and pay tribute to their ancestors during their death anniversaries and holidays. They also burn incense and pray to ancestors when their family receives good news or bad luck. Coastal villages always have Buddhist pagodas and temples and communal houses that revere village gods. Catholic churches are also built up. The reverence of *His Fish (whale), the four Goddesses, one-legged God (Độc cước)* is a religious custom characteristic of many coastal villages. The custom of worshipping His Fish under different sacred names and titles can be seen in any Vietnamese coastal village. Most remarkable however are the villages in Central Vietnam. The veneration of ancestors, *the four Goddesses, Lady Po Nagar, and Lady of Sea Dragon (Thủy Long)* is also a custom that bears maritime characteristics. Along with their beliefs, coastal fishermen preserve a variety of rituals that often combine the features of agricultural and aquaculture practices.

3. Conclusion

The press and mass media play a particularly important role as a bridge connecting millions of people in mainland Vietnam to their beloved remote islands and appealing to the international community to gain support for Vietnam’s rightful and just efforts to protect its maritime sovereignty and national security.

In recent years, the Party and State and public authorities at different levels have devised various policies and measures to promote the communication about maritime issues and the mass media serve as a pioneering channel.

- *The press provides reports about maritime issues for the audience:*

The newspapers have also opened up many specialized sessions and columns that report about Vietnamese sea and islands, the emblematic navy men who defend the sacred islands of their Motherland every day, the daily life of productive and hard working sailors, or the sturdy wives who wait for their in-service husbands despite their sufferings. These articles help the public to better understand the difficulties and daily life of the army men who patiently watch over their motherland’s skies and sea. In addition, they contribute to transforming the thinking and awareness of public authorities and sectors, socio-political organizations and the people about the significance, role, and importance of sea and islands in the cause of industrialization and modernization and in the development and protection of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

- *The press uses its specialized pages to publish the evidence and data that verify Vietnam’s maritime sovereignty*

Many newspapers particularly focus on the evidence that support Vietnam’s maritime sovereignty over the Spratly and Paracel islands. Ancient maps confirming that these islands belong to Vietnam have been regularly published and exposed by newspapers through their series of articles about these maps and their reports on the owners.

The press also encourages individuals and organizations to collect and amass the pieces of evidence that validate Vietnam’s maritime sovereignty.

- *The press is a useful channel through which the statements of Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Vietnam’s resolution to maintain its national sovereignty can be made known*

The speeches given by Vietnam Foreign Ministry spokesman have been published by the Vietnamese press on a regular basis. The TV transmits images and includes news stories in the most important program airing at 7PM everyday. Radio and print newspapers also use their prioritized sessions to publish full statements from the Ministry. For their part, e-newspapers integrate texts, images and sound into their main articles.

- *The press is especially interested in overseas Vietnamese and international partners that support Vietnam in its fight to defend justice. In addition, it substantially communicates about the Vietnam Law on the Sea that is recently published by the National Assembly.*

Every Vietnamese overseas is a potential spokesman that communicates about Vietnam's maritime sovereignty and an agent that invites international friends to support Vietnam in its multilateral negotiations about maritime sovereignty over the South China Sea. Writing contests such as "Learning about Vietnamese sea and islands" held by the Voice of Vietnam did not limit the number of contestants regardless of their territory, which makes Vietnamese overseas eligible to join as well. Many press agencies have raised funding for Spratly islands and received the support from many domestic agencies, organizations and individuals and even overseas Vietnamese.

4. Acknowledgement: The author thanks VNU-Hanoi on granting the research project number QG.14.31. This paper is a part of this project.

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