

Searching for the Original Text of the Declaration of Independence Read by President Ho Chi Minh on 2 September 1945

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[Text] The 1945 Declaration of Independence is a very important historical document that symbolizes our nation's step into the age of independence, freedom, and socialism.

The American Declaration of Independence, which was written in 1776, was the first Declaration of Independence in history to oppose colonialism and free a colony in the modern period. It was written and proclaimed by representatives of the American bourgeois class.

The Declaration of Independence written by President Ho Chi Minh in 1945 was the first Declaration of Independence to be written by a communist leader on behalf of the nation "once the proletarian class had become the nation."

Many countries in the world that have waged a struggle against imperialism and won national independence have told their people and people throughout the world about their independence and set a National Day. But they do not have a Declaration of Independence with the nature of a historical document.

Our 1945 Declaration of Independence has become a part not only of our nation's history but also of the history of the struggle for independence by oppressed nations around the world and of the history of the world proletarian revolution. It is an immortal document that will shine forever.

The 1945 Declaration of Independence is tied to the renowned Ho Chi Minh, the great leader of our nation and party.

Because this is an important historical document that almost everyone has read or heard and that all general school students have studied, the title "Searching for the Original Text of the Declaration of Independence Read by President Ho Chi Minh on 2 September 1945" may seem very strange. Can it be possible that the text that has been printed in many books and that has been printed and reprinted many times, including in the Selected and Collected Works of Ho Chi Minh, is not the original text?

The answer is, No, it's not.

The American Declaration of Independence has been reprinted countless times in dictionaries and books. And after more than 200 years, not one word or mark has been changed, and the signatures of those responsible before history at the bottom of the Declaration of Independence have been photographed from the original.

What about Vietnam's Declaration of Independence? We have revised it many times. The more revisions we make, the more different it becomes as compared with the original. Thus, restoring the original text of the Declaration of Independence read by President Ho Chi Minh on 2 September 1945 will be of great value in many respects. This will form a reliable basis for historical, political, literary, linguistic, and educational research, for museum exhibits, and for domestic and international propaganda.

I have relied on 14 documents of the party and state organizations responsible and on recorded statements made by President Ho in 1955 in order to make a comparison. Those documents include:

1. A four page booklet with covers published by the government on 3 September 1945.
2. A poster published by the government on 3 September 1945.
3. CUU QUOC, No. 6, 5 September 1945.
4. CO GIAN PHONG, No. 16, 12 September 1945.
5. "Chat Xieng," first printed in 1946 by the Su That Publishing House. This has been reprinted four times.
6. "Stories About the Life and Activities of President Ho" by Tran Dan Tien, Su That, and Van Hoc publishing houses. This has been reprinted many times.
7. "For Independence and Freedom and for Socialism," Su That Publishing House, 1970.
8. "Party Documents, 1939-1945," first printed in 1963 and reprinted in 1977.
9. Ho Chi Minh, "Selected Works," Su That Publishing House, 1960.
10. HOC TAP, August 1973.
11. "The Declaration of Independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam," introduction by Pham Van Dong, Su That Publishing House, 1975.
12. Ho Chi Minh, "Collected Works," Su That Publishing House, 1980, volume 1.
13. Ho Chi Minh, "Collected Works," Su That Publishing House, 1983, volume 3.
14. Ho Chi Minh, "Collected Works," Su That Publishing House, 1984, volume 4.

In general, there were four periods when the documents were revised, with a total of 22 points.

In 1945, there is one difference between the booklet and the poster, perhaps because the poster did not print the entire text. But in CUU QUOC, there are four points that differ from the booklet. And in CO GIAI PHONG,

there are three points that differ from the booklet and four points that differ from CUU QUOC out of a total of 22 points.

The "Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh" published in 1960 contain the most revisions, 12 out of 22 points.

One word in "Party Documents, 1939-1945" published in 1963 is different from the "Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh" published in 1960.

Three words in the August 1973 issue of HOC TAP differ from the "Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh" published in 1960.

With 10 differences like this, because we don't have the original document read by President Ho, it is very difficult to determine what the original text is. But an analysis based on the various documents has shown that the booklet published on 3 September 1945 is the root document. Why? Two documents were published on 3 September 1945, the booklet and the poster. These two documents differ on only one point. In the second section, the sentence in the booklet reads: "Broad-minded thinking means that all the people in the world were born equal. All people have the right to live, be happy, and be free." But in the poster, six words are missing. It says "right to live, be happy, and." The other texts that were published shortly after the Declaration of Independence was written (the texts in CUU QUOC and CO GIAI PHONG and the French translation for broadcast by the Vietnam News Agency from Bach Mai on 15 September 1945) are complete texts just like the booklet. Even though the various texts printed later differ in various places, they are all complete tests like the booklet.

The CPV [Communist Party of Vietnam] Central Committee and state should issue a decision on the official use of one Declaration of Independence that should not vary from one printing to the next. Whenever it is translated into a foreign language, that text must be used as the basis. People should not be free to use whatever text they want, which has been the case for many years.

The following is the original text of the Declaration of Independence as printed in the booklet published on 3 September 1945. To alert readers about where this differs from later texts, I have compared this text with the text published in Volume 4 of the "Collected Works of Ho Chi Minh" published by the Su That Publishing House in 1984 and placed those passages in parentheses.

(Fellow Citizens Everywhere)

"All people are born (with) equal (rights). They are endowed by the creator with inalienable rights, among which are the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

These immortal words are contained in the 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States. In broad

terms, that sentence means that all peoples in the world are born equal and that every people has the right to live, be happy, and be free.

The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen issued during the French revolution in 1791 states:

"People are born free and equal, and they must always enjoy freedom and equality of rights."

Those are truths that no one can deny.

But for more than 80 years, the French colonialists used the banner of freedom, equality, and fraternity to steal our country from us and oppress our people. Their actions were totally contrary to humanity and justice.

Politically, they did not give our people any democratic freedoms.

They promulgated uncivilized laws. They established three different systems in the central region, south, and north in order to block the unification of our country and prevent our people (nation) from uniting.

They built many more prisons than schools. They beheaded our patriots and put down our rebellions in a sea of blood.

They stifled public opinion and implemented foolish policies.

They used opium and liquor to weaken our race.

Economically, they exploited our people to the bone, causing poverty and hardships for our people and ruining our country.

They robbed us of our land, forests and mines (mines), and raw materials.

They had a monopoly on printing money and monopolized imports and exports.

They imposed hundreds of irrational taxes, which impoverished our people, particularly the farmers and merchants.

They prevented our bourgeoisie from becoming wealthy (advancing). They ruthlessly exploited our workers.

In the fall of 1940, the Japanese fascists invaded Indochina in order to establish more bases from which to attack the Allies. The French colonialists abjectly surrendered and opened our country to the Japanese. Our people then had to wear the bonds of both the French and the Japanese. Our people suffered even greater hardships and greater poverty. The result was that at the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941, from Quang Tri to Bac Ky, more than 2 million people died of starvation.

On 9 March this year, the Japanese disarmed the French army. The French colonialists had to flee or surrender. Not only have they failed to "defend" us, but during these five years, they have also sold our country twice to the Japanese.

Prior to 9 March, the Viet Minh appealed countless times to the French to join forces to resist the Japanese. But the French colonialists did not answer and began terrorizing the Viet Minh even more. Even after they lost, they cruelly killed many political prisoners at Yen Bay (Bai) and Cao Bang.

However, our people still have a tolerant and humanitarian attitude toward the French. After the change on 9 March, the Vietnam Minh helped many Frenchmen escape across the border, rescued (many) Frenchmen from Japanese prisons, and protected their lives and property.

The truth (fact) is, since the autumn of 1940, our country has been a colony of Japan and not of France. When Japan surrendered to the Allies, people throughout our country rose up to reserve (seize) power¹ and established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (Vietnam Democratic Republic).

The truth (fact) is, our people have recovered Vietnam from the Japanese and not from the French.

The French have fled, the Japanese have surrendered, and Emperor Bao Dai has abdicated. Our people have broken the bonds of almost 100 years of colonialism in order to create (build) an independent Vietnam. Vietnam is independent. Our people have toppled the old monarchy and established a democratic republic.

Thus, on behalf of all the people of Vietnam, we—the provisional government of the new Vietnam—proclaim ourselves completely free of any colonial relationship with France and hereby abolish all treaties signed by France with respect to Vietnam and all of France's special rights in Vietnam.

The entire Vietnamese people will fiercely (resolutely) oppose the plots of the French colonialists.

We feel that the Allies, who recognized the principle of national equality at the Tehran and San Francisco conferences, must recognize the independence of the Vietnamese people.

A people who have bravely resisted the yoke of French slavery for more than 80 years and who have bravely stood on the side of the Allies in resisting the fascists these past years must be allowed to be free! That people must be independent!

For the reasons given above, the provisional government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam solemnly declares to the world:

“Vietnam has the right (to be) free and independent, and the truth (fact) is, a free and independent country has already been established. All the people of Vietnam are resolved to use their spirit, power, lives, and property to preserve this freedom and independence.”

Ho Chi Minh (President), Tran Huy Lieu, Vo Nguyen Giap, Chu Van Tan, Duong Duc Hien, Nguyen Van To, Nguyen Manh Ha, Cu Huy Can, Pham Ngoc Thach, Pham Van Dong, Dao Trong Kim, Vu Dinh Hoe, and Le Van Hien. (This part is not in the “Collected Works.”)

Restoring the original text of the Declaration of Independence read by President Ho Chi Minh on 2 September 1945 is a scientific problem, a historical necessity, and, at the same time, a politically significant problem that must be examined carefully.

Footnote

1. The poster says “seize power” (gianh, not danh), but the booklet says “reserve power.” In my view, “seize” is more correct. But in order to respect the historical document, we have retained the original word “reserve.”