

NGUYEN AN NINH'S THOUGHT ON DEMOCRATIC ENLIGHTENMENT AND  
THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN SHAPING FREE INDIVIDUALS

*O PENSAMENTO DE NGUYEN AN NINH SOBRE O ESCLARECIMENTO  
DEMOCRÁTICO E O PAPEL DA EDUCAÇÃO NA FORMAÇÃO DE INDIVÍDUOS  
LIVRES*

*EL PENSAMIENTO DE NGUYEN AN NINH SOBRE LA ILUSTRACIÓN  
DEMOCRÁTICA Y EL PAPEL DE LA EDUCACIÓN EN LA FORMACIÓN DE  
INDIVIDUOS LIBRES*



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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to clarify the content of Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment and analyze the role of education in the formation of free individuals from the perspective of educational science and social psychology. The research method used is the analysis of documents, combined with an interdisciplinary approach that draws on educational psychology and humanistic philosophy. The research results show that Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment is founded on awakening the individual through education, viewing education as the central means of forming free individuals capable of independent thought, self-choice, and self-responsibility to the community. This thought demonstrates profound similarities with modern educational theories on holistic human development and individual autonomy. The significance of this research lies in providing a new approach to studying Nguyen An Ninh's thought, while also suggesting theoretical and practical implications for civic education and liberal education in Vietnam in the current context.

**KEYWORDS:** Nguyen An Ninh's thought. Democratic enlightenment. Liberal education. Free human being. Individual autonomy.

**RESUMO:** *Este estudo tem como objetivo esclarecer o conteúdo do pensamento de Nguyen An Ninh sobre o esclarecimento democrático e analisar o papel da educação na formação de indivíduos livres sob a perspectiva da ciência da educação e da psicologia social. O método de pesquisa utilizado é a análise documental, combinada com uma abordagem interdisciplinar que incorpora a psicologia educacional e a filosofia humanista. Os resultados da pesquisa indicam que o pensamento de Nguyen An Ninh sobre o esclarecimento democrático se fundamenta no despertar do indivíduo por meio da educação, concebendo a educação como o meio central para a formação de indivíduos livres, capazes de pensamento independente, de autodeterminação e de responsabilidade pessoal perante a comunidade. Esse pensamento apresenta profundas convergências com teorias educacionais modernas sobre o desenvolvimento humano integral e a autonomia individual. A relevância deste estudo reside em oferecer uma nova abordagem para a análise do pensamento de Nguyen An Ninh, além de sugerir implicações teóricas e práticas para a educação cívica e a educação liberal no Vietnã no contexto contemporâneo.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Pensamento de Nguyen An Ninh. Esclarecimento democrático. Educação liberal. Ser humano livre. Autonomia individual.*

**RESUMEN:** *Este estudio tiene como objetivo esclarecer el contenido del pensamiento de Nguyen An Ninh sobre la ilustración democrática y analizar el papel de la educación en la formación de individuos libres desde la perspectiva de la ciencia de la educación y la psicología social. El método de investigación utilizado es el análisis documental, combinado con un enfoque interdisciplinario que incorpora la psicología educativa y la filosofía humanista. Los resultados de la investigación muestran que el pensamiento de Nguyen An Ninh sobre la ilustración democrática se fundamenta en el despertar del individuo a través de la educación, considerando la educación como el medio central para la formación de individuos libres, capaces de pensamiento independiente, autodeterminación y responsabilidad personal hacia la comunidad. Este pensamiento presenta profundas similitudes con las teorías educativas modernas sobre el desarrollo humano integral y la autonomía individual. La relevancia de este estudio radica en ofrecer un nuevo enfoque para el análisis del pensamiento de Nguyen An Ninh, además de sugerir implicaciones teóricas y prácticas para la educación cívica y la educación liberal en Vietnam en el contexto actual.*

***PALABRAS CLAVE:*** *Pensamiento de Nguyen An Ninh. Ilustración democrática. Educación liberal. Ser humano libre. Autonomía individual.*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the context of contemporary Vietnam, which is undergoing profound economic, political, and cultural transformations, the issue of forming free individuals with independent thinking, civic responsibility, and the ability to actively participate in social life is becoming increasingly urgent. The development of a socialist-oriented market economy along with international integration has created new conditions for individual development while also posing many challenges regarding value crises, cognitive dependence, and the risk of losing individual subjectivity. In this context, education not only plays a role in transmitting knowledge but also becomes a key space for shaping personality, independent thinking, and individual freedom.

Therefore, returning to study liberal ideas in Vietnamese history has special significance both theoretically and practically (Long, 2019; Pham, 2020a). Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment emerged in the context of Vietnamese society at the beginning of the twentieth century, when the country faced a comprehensive crisis in culture, politics, and national spirit (Tai, 2017; Think, 2017). He not only criticized institutional dependence but, more profoundly, the enslavement in thinking and the spiritual life of the Vietnamese people (Long, 2019). In many of his writings, Nguyen An Ninh emphasized that national liberation could only be sustainable when it began with individual awakening through education and freedom of thought (Tinh, 1996; Pham, 2020b). This viewpoint is clearly expressed in articles published in "*La Cloche Fêlée*", where he called on Annamese youth to think for themselves, evaluate themselves, and take responsibility for their own destiny and that of their community, in the spirit he called the ideal of Annamese youth (Ninh, 2012).

Studying Nguyen An Ninh's thought is therefore not only an activity of reconstructing the history of his thought, but also a basis for reflecting on the role of education in shaping free individuals in the current context. However, in current academic research, Nguyen An Ninh's thought is often approached primarily from the perspective of political history or the patriotic movement of the early twentieth century, while the educational and liberal aspects of his worldview have not yet been systematically analyzed from the perspective of educational science and social psychology. This gap creates an urgent need to reinterpret his thought as a system of educational viewpoints aimed at liberating people from cognitive and spiritual dependence.

The research problem that this article focuses on is clarifying the content of Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment and analyzing the role of education in shaping free

individuals according to his conception. The study poses a central question: what elements constitute Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment, and what role does education play in shaping the free individual according to that perspective? In addition, the study also raises specific questions related to how Nguyen An Ninh viewed the relationship between the individual and society, between individual freedom and community responsibility, and the educational mechanism he believed could awaken and liberate people.

The objective of the study is to clarify Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment as a system of educational views on the free individual, while analyzing the theoretical values and practical implications of this thought for civic education and liberal education in Vietnam today. Based on textual analysis and comparison with traditional Vietnamese views on spiritual values, this study shows that Nguyen An Ninh inherited and transcended traditional values to build a new concept of the free individual, linked to independent thinking and social responsibility.

The main contribution of this research lies in providing a new approach between the study of educational thought and social psychology, thereby enriching the understanding of Nguyen An Ninh in the history of Vietnamese thought. It also suggests new directions for educating the new type of person in the current development context. Based on this, the article identifies specific research questions including: the context in which Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment was formed; how he viewed education in the process of forming the free individual; and which values of this thought remain relevant to contemporary Vietnamese education. These questions guide the entire analytical content of the article, aiming to clarify the relationship between liberal educational thought and the development of free human beings in the historical process and in the present.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Assessment of research results*

First, studies on Nguyen An Ninh mainly focus on identifying his position as a representative political and cultural thinker of Vietnam in the early twentieth century. Many works have affirmed Nguyen An Ninh as a pioneering intellectual with profound critical thinking towards the colonial regime and the spiritual structures that hindered the development of the Vietnamese people.

In his research on “*Traditional spiritual values of the Vietnamese people*”, Tran Van Giau emphasized that thinkers like Nguyen An Ninh made significant contributions to the transformation of national spiritual values towards modernity, in which freedom of thought and individual consciousness are placed at the center of social development (Giau, 1993). Later studies continued to develop this approach by analyzing Nguyen An Ninh as an anti-colonial thinker with a strong critical discourse on national shame and spiritual dependence. Kevin Pham, in “*Nguyen An Ninh's anti-colonial thought: A new account of national shame*”, clarified the depth of Nguyen An Ninh's reflective thought, arguing that the concept of national shame he used was not only aimed at criticizing the ruling regime but also at awakening the individual and the moral responsibility of each person in the community (Pham, 2020a). These studies make a significant contribution to clarifying the ideological foundation and context of the formation of Nguyen An Ninh's liberal democratic views.

In addition, some works have directly approached Nguyen An Ninh's democratic thought and affirmed the liberal nature of his conception of humanity and society. Tran Mai Uoc, in “*Nguyen An Ninh's Idea on Democracy and the association with the development of Democracy in innovation and integration in Vietnam today*”, argued that

Nguyen An Ninh's democratic thought does not stop at demanding political reform but aims to build a democratic foundation from the individual through the development of a sense of freedom and social responsibility in the context of Vietnam's current innovation and integration. (Uoc, 2023, p. 6)

Nguyen Thi Lien Nhi, in “*Basic characteristics of Nguyen An Ninh's political ideology and the meaning of that ideology*”, also points out that: “Nguyen An Ninh's political thought has progressive democratic characteristics when placing the individual as the subject of history and emphasizing the role of enlightenment in social movement” (Nhi, 2023, p. 75). However, in these studies, education has only been seen as an auxiliary means for the process of political awakening and has not yet been analyzed as a central component in the formation of a truly liberated human being.

Conversely, international theoretical studies on liberal education and free human beings have developed strongly in recent decades. Hadzigeorgiou, in “*Reclaiming Liberal Education*”, emphasizes that “liberal education has the core goal of fostering independent judgment and a sense of freedom in learners within a society increasingly dominated by instrumental and

market logic” (Hadzigeorgiou, 2019, p. 11). Burrows, in “*Liberal Education and Effective Action*”, further develops this view by arguing that “liberal education should not only aim for knowledge but also facilitate responsible and effective action by free individuals in social life” (Burrows, 2019, p. 298). These studies show that liberal education is considered the foundation for forming free individuals capable of self-reliance and consciously participating in society.

In the context of globalization and the knowledge economy, some studies have criticized the trend of narrowing the purpose of education to the development of purely human capital. Obinna Christian Edeji (2024) also points out that “an educational approach based on neoliberal economic logic risks undermining the right to education as a right to holistic human development and blurring the goal of forming a free individual” (p. 100734–6). These criticisms are significant when compared with the ideas of Nguyen An Ninh, who early warned of the danger of people being turned into tools if education is not linked to freedom of thought and spiritual liberation.

In studies on education in Vietnam, some works have directly approached the concept of liberal education through Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology and the context of current educational reform. Nguyen Hong Diep, in “*Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology on Liberal Education and its Application in Educational Reform*”, argues that “Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology on liberal education emphasizes the holistic development of the individual and the spirit of self-learning and autonomy, which can be effectively applied in current educational reform” (Diep, 2021). However, these studies have not placed the issue in direct dialogue with Nguyen An Ninh’s thought, although the two thinkers share important points of convergence regarding the role of education in shaping free individuals. Studies on educational development in the context of international integration also focus more on systemic capacity and policies than on the depth of educational thought and worldview (Tri, 2021; Yan & Sumiya, 2023; Vu, 2024).

## RESEARCH GAPS AND DIRECTIONS

From the overall assessment of the aforementioned studies, the following research gaps can be observed: Firstly, although Nguyen An Ninh’s thought has been extensively studied, these studies primarily approach it from a historical, political, and cultural perspective, without systematically analyzing the role of education in the structure of his liberal democratic thought. Secondly, studies on modern liberal education have not placed Nguyen An Ninh’s thought in dialogue with international educational theories on the free individual, even though he is a

typical example of indigenous liberal thinking in a colonial context. Thirdly, the relationship between individual liberal education and traditional Vietnamese spiritual values in Nguyen An Ninh's thought remains unclear and is subject to much debate.

Based on this, the research direction of this thesis is defined as reinterpreting Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment as a system of educational views on free individuals and placing it in dialogue with modern liberal education theories. The research not only contributes to a new approach in the study of Nguyen An Ninh but also contributes to a broader discussion on the role of education in shaping free individuals in Vietnam in the context of current development and integration.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Through studying, comparing, and interpreting Nguyen An Ninh's original texts, such as articles published in "*La Cloche Fêlée*" and his collected works, this research clarifies the meaning of the concepts "*democratic enlightenment*", "*individual freedom*", and the role of education in his system of thought. A key advantage of this method is that it allows direct access to the author's ideas within a specific historical context, thereby limiting the risk of subjective interpretation or the imposition of modern viewpoints on historical thought. However, a limitation of the textual analysis method is its heavy reliance on the researcher's interpretive ability and its susceptibility to the influence of the initial theoretical approach if the analytical framework is not strictly controlled.

Furthermore, this study utilizes the historical analysis method to place Nguyen An Ninh's thought within the economic, political, cultural, social, and educational context of Vietnam in the early twentieth century. This method clarifies the conditions for the formation of liberal democratic thought and explains why education was considered the central path to human liberation by Nguyen An Ninh. The advantage of the historical method is that it avoids ahistorical approaches while highlighting the contemporary relevance and enduring value of the researched ideas. A limitation of this method is that it is difficult to completely separate contextual and ideological elements without combining it with conceptual analysis methods.

Conceptual analysis and interdisciplinary comparative methods were also applied to compare Nguyen An Ninh's views on free individuals and education with modern liberal education theories and humanistic psychology. This method clarifies the similarities and differences between indigenous liberal thought and international theories, thereby contributing

to expanding the theoretical value of the research. The advantage of the comparative method is that it facilitates interdisciplinary academic dialogue and increases the ability to generalize research results. However, a limitation of this method is the risk of homogenizing different ideologies if the comparison criteria are not carefully controlled.

In addition, the study uses synthesis and interpretation methods to connect disparate analytical results into a unified argument about the role of education in shaping free individuals according to Nguyen An Ninh's thought. This method enhances the coherence of the research but requires the researcher to exercise high caution in ensuring consistency and avoiding inferences that go beyond the scope of the data. The combination of these methods allows the research to approach the topic comprehensively while clearly identifying the scientific limitations of the conclusions drawn.

## RESULTS FINDING

### *The structure of Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment and the concept of a free man*

Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment is formed on the foundation of a profound conception of a free man as the central subject of social and historical life. In his writings and works, Nguyen An Ninh does not approach democracy as a mechanism of power or a technical institutional design, but primarily as a state of mind of human beings. According to him, a society can only function in a democratic spirit when each individual is capable of independent thought, self-judgment, and self-responsibility for their actions. This concept is clearly reflected in articles published in "*La Cloche Fêlée*" where Nguyen An Ninh repeatedly criticized the state of spiritual dependence, considering it the root cause that makes people easily accept external imposition and domination (Ninh, 2012).

Analysis of Nguyen An Ninh's writings reveals that he particularly emphasized the role of individual consciousness in the process of social democratization. He argued that the most effective oppression is not violence but ideology, when people lose the capacity for self-reflection and accept imposed values as self-evident truths. He stressed, "Our nation will never despair" (Ninh, 2009, p. 272). Therefore, democracy in his thought is primarily the liberation of people from self-destruction.

In his article on the ideals of Annamese youth, Nguyen An Ninh called on the younger generation to build their ideals based on intellectual freedom and personal self-respect,

considering these as the foundation for all meaningful social actions. Nguyen An Ninh said: “The task of today’s generation of youth is truly heavy. Our current historical period makes that task many times more difficult” (Ninh, 2009, p. 72). Thus, the free individual in Nguyen An Ninh’s thought is not a selfish individual but an individual with the capacity for self-reliance to participate in community life consciously and responsibly.

Research also shows that Nguyen An Ninh’s thought on democratic enlightenment inherited and transformed the traditional spiritual values of the Vietnamese people. Tran Van Giau, in “*Traditional Spiritual Values of the Vietnamese People*”, pointed out that, “values such as self-respect and community spirit are enduring values in the history of Vietnamese spirituality, but need to be reinterpreted in the modern context to play a positive role” (Giau, 1993, p. 115). Nguyen An Ninh carried out this reinterpretation when he placed traditional values within a new framework of thought that emphasized freedom of thought and the individual as the subject of history.

Revolutionaries never stand outside reality, no matter how dangerous it is, they must always stay in reality and fight to maintain or advance. To be a little far from reality is to leave it entirely for one’s enemies to freely master it, to give up, to tie oneself to the ruling class. (Ninh, 1996, p. 29)

From the above analysis, it can be affirmed that Nguyen An Ninh’s thought on democratic enlightenment is composed of three basic elements: freedom of thought, individual consciousness, and social responsibility. In his thought, the free individual is both the starting point and the ultimate goal of all social change. This is the characteristic that creates the philosophical depth and lasting value of Nguyen An Ninh’s thought in the history of Vietnamese thought.

### ***The role of education in forming the free individual according to Nguyen An Ninh’s thought***

Education always plays a central role in the entire structure of Nguyen An Ninh’s thought on democratic enlightenment. For him, education is not limited to the framework of schools or formal training programs, but is understood as a continuous process of intellectual enlightenment and awakening in social life. According to Nguyen An Ninh’s conception, education primarily aims to liberate individuals from cognitive and spiritual dependence, thereby forming the capacity for self-reliance in thinking and action. He argued that when

people are not properly educated, they easily become targets of manipulation and control by imposed ideologies. “It means tying yourself up and giving your life to the enemy” (Ninh, 1996, p. 29). This viewpoint is consistently expressed in his writings criticizing the colonial regime, where he points out that colonial education policies contributed to maintaining the spiritual dependence of the indigenous people.

Further analysis reveals that Nguyen An Ninh viewed education as a process of nurturing three core competencies of a free human being: Firstly, the capacity for independent thinking, allowing individuals to ask questions and seek answers instead of passively receiving pre-existing knowledge. Secondly, the capacity for moral judgment, enabling people to distinguish right from wrong and take responsibility for their choices. Thirdly, the capacity for conscious social participation through dialogue and responsible action. These capabilities show that education in Nguyen An Ninh’s thought has a distinctly liberal nature, similar to the concept of liberal education in modern educational theory. Hadzigeorgiou (2019) emphasizes that liberal education has the core goal of developing learners’ independent judgment and intellectual freedom in a society increasingly dominated by instrumental logic.

The research results also show that Nguyen An Ninh’s educational thought has a significant overlap with modern educational theories that emphasize the connection between education and social action. Burrows, in “*Liberal Education and Effective Action*”, argues that: “liberal education is only truly meaningful when it helps learners transform knowledge into effective and responsible action in social life” (Burrows, 2019, p. 301). This perspective is similar to how Nguyen An Ninh viewed education as a path for individuals to stand up and participate in the process of social transformation, rather than waiting for handouts from the outside. In particular, Nguyen An Ninh did not limit education to the school environment but used the press, public speeches, and debates as means of social education to directly influence community consciousness. This shows that he had an early awareness of the role of public space in shaping free individuals, similar to how current research emphasizes the role of subjectivity in higher education and teacher development (Hendriksen et al., 2024).

Comparing Nguyen An Ninh’s thought with other studies on liberal education in Vietnam reveals many similarities with Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology on liberal education, particularly in emphasizing the holistic development of the individual and the spirit of self-learning and self-reliance. Nguyen Hong Diep also points out that: “liberal education in Ho Chi Minh’s Ideology aims at forming individuals with knowledge, morality, and social responsibility” (Diep, 2021). However, research results show that Nguyen An Ninh’s unique

point is that he places education in direct relation to the liberation of individuals from spiritual slavery in the colonial context, thereby highlighting the critical depth and progressive nature of his educational thought.

### *Contemporary value of Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment for education and human development today*

To date, Nguyen An Ninh's thoughts on democratic enlightenment retains its profound relevance in the context of education and human development. In the context of globalization and the knowledge economy, education is facing increasing pressure from market logic and economic efficiency, leading to the risk of narrowing its purpose to purely human resource training. Obinna warns that "an approach to education based on human capital theory may diminish the right to education as a right to holistic human development and obscure the role of education in shaping free individuals" (Obinna, 2024, pp. 100734-7). Comparing this with Nguyen An Ninh's thought reveals that he recognized early on the danger of human instrumentalization if education is not linked to freedom of thought and spiritual liberation.

In the context of current educational reforms in Vietnam, Nguyen An Ninh's thought can still provide an important frame of reference for repositioning educational goals towards a human-centered approach. Studies on educational development in the context of international integration show that educational reform is facing the challenge of balancing the requirements of system efficiency and the depth of humanistic values (Tri, 2021; Hoduc et al., 2022; Vu, 2024). Research results indicate that Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment can contribute to solving this challenge by emphasizing the role of education in forming individuals' independent thinking and social responsibility, rather than focusing solely on short-term measurement indicators.

Furthermore, Nguyen An Ninh's thought also offers valuable insights for building a democratic foundation from the grassroots in the context of innovation and integration. Tran Mai Uoc argues that, "Nguyen An Ninh's democratic thought can be applied in the current process of democratic development in Vietnam by strengthening the role of individuals as subjects of social innovation and creativity" (Uoc, 2023, p. 8). The research results show that emphasizing education as a process of forming free individuals is not only significant for the field of education but also contributes to building a sustainable political and cultural foundation for social development.

From the above analysis, it can be affirmed that the contemporary value of Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment lies not only in its historical significance but also in its ability to provide a theoretical foundation for reorienting education towards the comprehensive development of free individuals. Studying and applying this thought can enrich discussions on educational reform in Vietnam today, while opening up new approaches to connecting education with the goal of sustainable human and social development.

## DISCUSSION

The research results show that Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment has a structure and depth that goes beyond the common approach in previous studies, which mainly viewed him as an anti-colonial political thinker or a patriotic intellectual of the early twentieth century. Compared to the works of Kevin Pham, which focus on analyzing the concept of "national shame" as a political reflection discourse (Pham, 2020a), Nguyen Thi Lien Nhi's research (2023) emphasizes "the democratic characteristics in his political ideology"; this study highlights a less explored aspect, namely the central role of education in shaping free individuals as the foundation of democracy. Shifting the focus of analysis from institutions and revolutionary movements to education and individuals allows for approaching Nguyen An Ninh's thought as a liberal educational viewpoint with independent theoretical value.

This study also points out the fundamental similarities between Nguyen An Ninh's educational thought and modern liberal education theories. While Hadzigeorgiou emphasized that, "liberal education needs to be reaffirmed as a process of fostering intellectual freedom and independent judgment in learners" (Hadzigeorgiou, 2019, p. 302), Nguyen An Ninh had already raised this requirement in the colonial context when he criticized the "paralysis of thought" caused by imposed education. This "convergence" shows that Nguyen An Ninh's thought not only has historical value but also the potential for "dialogue" with contemporary international educational theories. Compared to previous studies that often placed Nguyen An Ninh's thought within the Indochina context or the Vietnam Studies research area, such as analyses of the reception of transnational anti-colonial thought (Pham, 2021), this study expands the dialogue space of Nguyen An Ninh's thought to the fields of educational science and humanistic psychology.

Compared to studies on liberal education in Vietnam, especially those approaching it from the perspective of Ho Chi Minh's Ideology (Diep, 2021), Nguyen An Ninh's thought

shows a distinct difference. While liberal education in Ho Chi Minh's Ideology is placed within the framework of building a well-rounded individual to serve the revolutionary cause and national development, in Nguyen An Ninh's view, education is first and foremost placed in direct relation to the liberation of the individual from spiritual slavery. This demonstrates the critical and progressive nature of his thought, and adds a new "slice" to the study of the history of Vietnamese educational thought. This result contributes to enriching Tran Van Giau's (1993) assessment of the movement of traditional spiritual values in the modernization process by showing the role of education in transforming those values into the subjective capacity of modern man.

In terms of research value and significance, the results achieved have both theoretical and practical significance: Theoretically, the research contributes to repositioning Nguyen An Ninh's thought in the history of Vietnamese thought not only as a political thinker but also as a liberal educational thinker. This approach helps to broaden the analytical framework of Vietnamese thought in the early twentieth century from the perspective of man and education instead of focusing only on movements and institutions. Practically, the research provides an important frame of reference for current discussions on educational reform in the context of education facing many pressures from the demands of economic efficiency and international integration. When UNESCO called for a rethinking of education as a global common good, emphasizing the role of education in human development and social responsibility (UNESCO, 2015), Nguyen An Ninh's ideas can be seen as an indigenous intellectual resource contributing to deepening this orientation in Vietnam.

The research results also show that Nguyen An Ninh's ideas have profound cautionary value regarding the current trend of "instrumentalizing education." Obinna Christian Edeji points out that "approaching education purely according to the logic of human capital risks diminishing the right to education as a right to holistic human development" (Obinna, 2024, pp. 100734–8). Comparing this with Nguyen An Ninh's ideas, it can be seen that he warned of this danger early on in the colonial context, when education was used as a tool to maintain dependence. This demonstrates the contemporary relevance of Nguyen An Ninh's ideas in guiding education towards a more humanistic and liberating direction.

However, this study also has certain limitations that need to be acknowledged: Firstly, the study is primarily based on the analysis of ideological texts and comparative theories, thus lacking the opportunity to conduct empirical research or surveys of educational practice to directly verify the applicability of Nguyen An Ninh's thought in the current context. Secondly,

placing Nguyen An Ninh's thought in dialogue with modern liberal education theories remains general and needs further development through systematic comparative studies. Thirdly, the study focuses only on the role of education for the individual and has not delved into analyzing the institutional and policy conditions necessary for liberal education to be effective in practice.

Overall, the study has achieved fundamental results in clarifying the educational dimension of Nguyen An Ninh's democratic and liberal thought, while also opening up new approaches for the study of thought and educational reform in Vietnam. The limitations mentioned above also suggest further research directions such as empirical research on liberal education in the context of contemporary Vietnam or a deeper comparative study between Nguyen An Ninh's thought and modern humanistic educational theories.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study has clarified Nguyen An Ninh's thought on democratic enlightenment as a consistent system of viewpoints, centered on the free individual and using education as the fundamental means to liberate individuals from cognitive, spiritual, and social behavioral dependence. The research results show that democracy in Nguyen An Ninh's thought is not understood primarily as an institution of power, but as a mental state associated with the capacity for independent thinking, a sense of responsibility, and the ability of each individual to participate in society. Education therefore plays a central role in shaping the free individual through the process of intellectual enlightenment, fostering critical thinking, and nurturing intellectual freedom. The study also points out the profound "convergence" between Nguyen An Ninh's thought and modern liberal education theories, thereby affirming the timeless value and international dialogue potential of this thought. At the same time, this research contributes to "repositioning" Nguyen An Ninh in the history of Vietnamese thought, not only as an anti-colonial political thinker but also as a liberal education thinker. This approach broadens the analytical framework of Vietnamese thought in the early twentieth century, shifting from a focus on the national liberation movement and institutions to a focus on human beings and education. Simultaneously, the study provides an important theoretical reference frame for discussions on educational reform in Vietnam today, in the context of integration and the challenges of the instrumentalization of education. However, the study also has certain limitations: The analysis is primarily based on written texts and theoretical comparisons, thus lacking the opportunity to empirically verify the applicability of Nguyen An Ninh's thought in the contemporary

educational context. Furthermore, the relationship between liberal education thought and specific institutional conditions has not been fully analyzed. Therefore, further research could focus on empirical studies of liberal education in Vietnam or a deeper comparative study between Nguyen An Ninh's thought and modern humanistic education models to further clarify the practical application value of this thought.

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