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Tran Thi Minh Tuyet

AWARENESS OF DEMOCRACY AND THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN VIETNAM DURING THE DOI MOI PERIOD: SITUATION TO SOLUTIONS

Abstract. Historically, every step of human society has been associated with the advancement of democracy, and the “Doi Moi” (Renovation) process in Vietnam is no exception. With the principle of “Renovation must be democratic, and democracy for renovation”, the “Doi Moi” process in Vietnam has created a major turning point in the development of the country in general, and in the awareness of democracy and the democratization process in Vietnam in particular. The article discusses both the changes in the Communist Party of Vietnam’s awareness of democracy through its National Congress documents (from the Sixth to the Twelfth National Congresses of the Communist Party of Vietnam) and the process of democracy implementation for about 35 years of “Doi Moi” in Vietnam. The author analyses the achievements and limitations in democratization of the country and propose some basic solutions to accelerate this process in Vietnam.

Keywords: democracy, democratization, Doi Moi, the Communist Party of Vietnam.

Introduction

The attractiveness of the democratic theme results from its important role in the development of individuals and societies. In human history, democracy is both a state institution which recognizes that power belongs to the people, and an eternal social value the humanity has fought for to gain.

Compared to many other countries, Vietnam has not experienced slavery and bourgeois democracy, so far, there are still shortages of democracy regime, institutions and regulations; the culture of democratic practice of the people is not high. Meanwhile, the political single-party regime desires the promotion of democracy to prevent negative behaviors in state agencies and “anti-democratic” phenomena such as abuse, autocracy, monopoly, corruption, waste, etc. Therefore, the promotion of democracy and construction of a socialist law-based state are now urgent tasks of Vietnam.

Also, the “heat” of democracy in Vietnam results from conflicting assessments about it. For a lot of reasons, many people of Western countries, including scholars occupied with the theme of democracy, still have a negative assessment of the democratic life in Vietnam. Due to limitations of democracy implementation in Vietnam, some organizations and countries have concluded that there is no democracy in this country, and nowadays they consider Vietnam to be the single-party totalitarian state. Vietnam is ranked 140 out of 167 countries in the Economist Democracy Index 2017 [Democracy Index 2017].

As Vietnam’s external communication is still quite limited, in the world there is hardly any information about the “Doi Moi” achievements. At present, it is necessary to have objective assessments of the status of democracy in the country that experiences a big “transformation”. The evidence of the “transformation” is as follows: Vietnam chose the way to socialism at the same time as North Korea and Cuba, but in comparison with them, it has been changing faster and firmly towards democracy. Even compared to China, the country that to some extent was “open” earlier than Vietnam (1978), the democratization process in Vietnam is still considered to develop “faster than that

in China” [Lokshin 2011: 38]. Contrary comments on democracy in Vietnam are also a reason to attract attention of researchers to this theme.

As a matter of great theoretical and practical significance, democracy in Vietnam during the “Doi Moi” period is a fascinating theme.

Literature Review

Due to the great contribution of democratic dynamics to the current development of Vietnam, the theme “Democracy in Vietnam during the Doi Moi period” has been either the direct or indirect subject of a number of Vietnamese scholars’ works.

In his book “Democracy and Democracy at the Rural Basis in the Doi Moi Process” [Hoang Chi Bao 2010] Hoang Chi Bao analyzed the main problems of the process of democratization of this country and clarified the implementation of grassroots democracy in rural regions of Vietnam, the living and working area of the majority of its population.

A research agency under the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) published the book titled “Democracy, Human Rights — Global Values and National Characteristics” [Central Theoretical Council 2011]. This is a collection of articles by prestigious theorists, who criticize a number of Western institutions and governments, especially the United States, that have used democracy issues to intervene in Vietnam’s politics. The evidence is that President Bill Clinton signed the Public Law 103—258 stipulating that May 11, 1994 is the “Vietnam Human Rights Day”. On July 31, 2013, the US House of Representatives passed the Vietnam Human Rights Act 2013 (H.R. 1897) and every year, the US Department of State has issued “Vietnam Human Rights Report” criticizing Vietnam for violating democracy and human rights. To refute the viewpoint “Human rights are higher than sovereignty”, Vietnamese theorists emphasize that Vietnam is ready to absorb the achievements of Western democracy but it desires to maintain national independence, sovereignty, and socialist orientation, taking into account its national characteristics.

In his book “Some Issues on Democracy, Dictatorship and Development” [Ho Sy Quy 2014] Ho Sy Quy encouraged the democratization process in Vietnam with the emphasis: Dictatorship is something that every country must avoid and promoting democracy is the only way to choose.

Answering the question “Is there democracy in a single-party state?”, the author of the book “Practicing Democracy in the Condition of a Single Ruling Party” affirmed: The nature of democracy does not depend on whether there is one or many parties, but on whose interests the ruling party represents. Therefore, the practice of democracy in Vietnam is entirely feasible, but the CPV must accelerate the democratization process in the Party and in society [Pham Van Duc 2017: 73—74].

Recently, Nguyen Duy Quynh in his article “Understanding Some Factors Affecting the Relationship between the Communist Party and the People of Vietnam Today” emphasized: “Compared to the period before the Doi Moi process, Vietnam's democracy has made great improvements” [Nguyen Duy Quynh 2018: 40]. However, the article did not focus on the theme of democracy, and the author only considered the practice of democracy as one of four factors affecting the relations between the CPV and the people of Vietnam.

The fact that Vietnam has maintained political stability and the Doi Moi process achieved undeniable successes the issue of democratization in Vietnam has become the concern of experts in many countries.

In his article “Some Characteristics of Vietnamese Ideological and Political Life before and after the Eleventh National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam” G.M. Lokshin (Russia) assessed: “With the transition to a market economy and openness to the outside world, the political system here has also begun to change towards democratization and liberalization. In Vietnam, ...the process of democratization and the expansion of citizens’ liberties is steadily under way; in addition,

this development, according to many experts, is the irreversible one...” [Lokshin 2011: 37]. Several researchers compared the democratic life in Vietnam and other countries. In his article “Rule of Law, Democracy and the Sequencing Debate: Lessons from China and Vietnam” Randall Peerenboom, Associate Fellow of Oxford University, compared the awareness of democracy in China and Vietnam with that of other countries and drew the conclusion: “The end goal of the development process for most people in Russia, China, Vietnam and around the world remains democracy, albeit not necessarily the particular forms of liberal democracy found in Euro-America” [Peerenboom 2009: 10].

Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet, a Filipino researcher, having compared democracy practice in the Philippines and Vietnam, stated that “the political system in the Philippines has democratic institutions and processes, yet does not serve well the majority of people’s interests, while the political system in Vietnam has meager democratic processes, yet seems to serve the majority of people better than occurs in the Philippines” [Kerkvliet 2005: 1—2]. However, comparing political institutions between some ASEAN countries, Leslie Holmes stated that “Vietnam is seen as the least democratic of the ASEAN states after Myanmar” [Holmes 2007: 26].

In short, the democratization process in Vietnam has been attracting the attention of many scholars. Each of them, originating from his/her research intent, has mentioned the issue of democracy in Vietnam in different degrees and has different ways of assessing it. The author of this article would like to generalize the issue of democracy in Vietnam during the “Doi Moi” period developing it from theory to practice, from the assessment of the situation to recommending solutions for the future.

Awareness of Democracy and the Democratization Process in Vietnam during the Doi Moi Period

“Democracy” is derived from the Greek words (Demos: people; kratos: power or rule) with the meaning “the power of the people”. Being an issue with a long history, “democracy” has many different definitions. First of all, democracy is a form of a state system in which power must belong to the people. That is how Abraham Lincoln understood it in his famous formula: “Democracy is the government of the people, by the people, for the people”. V.I. Lenin argued that “Democracy is a category belonging exclusively to the political field” [Lenin 1977: 258]; “Democracy is a form of state, one of the morphologies of state” [Lenin 1976: 123]. Ho Chi Minh emphasized: “Democracy means that the people are the masters and the people own the regime. Moreover, democracy is also a social value of all humanity”, “it is the most precious thing for the people” [Ho Chi Minh 2011: 457] and therefore, democracy never loses, even if the state disappears. Thus, democracy is both a political and a social category; also, it is a historical and a permanent category expressing the eternal desire of mankind.

Using the definitions of “democracy”, it is possible to get the following concept of “democratization”: It is the transformation period during which democracy ceases to be a possibility and an ideal, but becomes common reality; it is the actual implementation of the theory of democracy.

In Vietnam, the “Doi Moi” period began in 1986, when the Sixth National Congress of the CPV announced a sweeping reform program. Up to now, it has lasted for nearly 35 years and has created a major turning point in the CPV’s awareness of democracy and democratic implementation.

The CPV’s awareness of democracy and the process of democratization of the country during the “Doi Moi” period

The Sixth National Congress (1986) of the CPV opened a new period of democratization in all spheres of the country, especially in the democratization of the economy after drawing the lesson from “must thoroughly grasp the thought of ‘taking people as the foundation’, building and promo-

ting the mastership of the working people” [CPV 1987: 29]. The Platform for national construction in the transition to socialism passed at the Seventh National Congress of the CPV (1991) affirmed: “The essence of the renewal and consolidation of our country’s political system is to build the socialist democracy..., it is both the goal and the driving force of our social renewal process” [CPV 1991: 125]. Also, the Congress raised the question: How to ensure full democracy in the situation of a single ruling party?

After 15 years of “Doi Moi”, the Ninth National Congress of the CPV (2001) identified “democracy” as a goal in the overall target system of the Vietnamese revolution: “National independence is associated with socialism, wealthy people, strong country, an equal, democratic and civilized society” [CPV 2001: 85—86]. Continuing to implement new thinking, when defining the characteristics of socialism in Vietnam, the Tenth National Congress of the CPV (2006) changed the phrase “mastered by the working people” in the 1991 Platform for “mastered by the people” [CPV 2006: 68]. This is not merely a change of words but a new standpoint of the CPV: Eliminating class discrimination, promoting the national great unity.

At the Eleventh National Congress of the CPV (2011), the Party’s awareness of democracy was a new step forward, as democracy got a new place in the target system: “wealthy people, strong country, an equitable, democratic and civilized society” [CPV 2011: 70]. The Platform for national construction in the transition to socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011) adopted by the Eleventh National Congress of the CPV also affirmed: “Socialist democracy is the nature of our regime, both as a goal and a driving force of national development” [CPV 2011: 84—85].

Increasing awareness of the role and power of democracy, the documents of the Twelfth National Congress of the CPV (2016) affirmed that all the people had the right to “participate in all stages of the decision-making process related to benefits and life of the people” [CPV 2016: 169]. For the first time, the people’s monitoring is clearly stated in the documents of the Congress as an important measure to practice democracy.

Thus, for nearly 35 years of “Doi Moi” process, the CPV has become increasingly aware of the role of democracy and the need to ensure people’s mastership in practice. When the goal of perception has become the reality, the CPV’s awareness of democracy has gradually been transformed into its actions. As a result, the democratization process during the “Doi Moi” period has attained the following achievements:

First, the people’s right to master is gradually legalized. This is the first step in the process of democratization, because democracy and the law are the two sides of a unified structure: The law ensures that democracy becomes reality and once the law is in place, democracy must be implemented in the legal framework. During the “Doi Moi” period, the Constitution of Vietnam has been amended twice; many laws have been issued and undergone some amendments, such as Criminal Law, Civil Law, Labor Law, Enterprise Law, Cooperative Law, Investment Law, Land Law, Education Law, Bidding Law, Bankruptcy Law, Press Law, Publication Law, Intellectual Property Law, Social Insurance Law, Health Insurance Law, etc. In particular, on February 18, 1998, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPV issued the Grassroots Democracy Regulation and in April 2007, the Vietnam National Assembly Standing Committee passed the Ordinance on Exercise of Democracy in Communes, Wards and Townships to ensure the people’s mastery in the most direct and widespread manner. The ordinance with legal binding has become the basis for implementing the principle “People know, people discuss, people do, people supervise”.

Second, the democratization process has been taking place in all essential spheres of the country. In politics, it is the renovation of the political system and the change of the CPV’s leadership style with the spirit of “taking people as the foundation”. In the economy, it is the transition of centrally planned subsidized economy to a socialist-oriented market one. At present day, the multi-sector economy with many forms of ownership was legally acknowledged, the major markets were

gradually established, labor became a special commodity and people (including the CPV's members) are also allowed to establish and operate private companies and have autonomy in their consumer activities, the "hunger eradication, poverty reduction" programs are promoted. In the sphere of culture and ideology, it is the process of socializing education, promoting unity in diversity, encouraging creativity and critical thinking on the basis of respect for national interests and for the law. In the sphere of society, the 2013 Revised Constitution devoted Chapter 1 consisted of 37 articles to expand human and civil rights. The new items in its content have shown a clear step forward in the process of democratization in Vietnam.

Details are as follows: Formally, human rights and citizen basic rights — obligations are solemnly placed in Chapter 2, immediately after the Chapter "Political Institutions" (in the 1992 Constitution, citizen rights and obligations are in Chapter V); The way of constitutional human rights has also changed radically. The use of the terms "people [have the rights to]" and "citizen [have the rights to]" shows that human rights are natural and inherent. The state has the responsibility to respect, protect and implement them, rather than give them to the people. In terms of content, in order to meet the needs of international integration, the 2013 Constitution separates human rights and citizen rights, adds a series of new rights such as: Everyone has the right to live (Article 19), everyone has the right to enjoy and access cultural values, participate in cultural life, use cultural facilities (Article 41), everyone has the right to live in a clean and healthy environment and has obligations to protect it (Article 43); citizens have the right not to be deported, handed over to other state (Article 17); citizens have the right to be identified to ethnic groups, use their native language (Article 42), citizens have the right to have social security (Article 34), etc. Thus, human rights and citizen rights in the 2013 Constitution has been expanded.

In general, the democratization process in all spheres of Vietnam has created a great motivation for the "Doi Moi" process. However, it still does not fully meet the requirements of reality, because the limitations in the implementation of democracy still exist in all spheres of social life. Details are as follows:

In the sphere of politics, democracy in the CPV in particular and in the political system in general have not been fully implemented. Authoritarian, dictatorial issues, formal or extreme democracy (it means that democracy does not go hand in hand with national discipline) still exist at all the levels, the most serious at the grassroots one. As the system of administrative agencies is still very cumbersome, its functions and tasks are not clearly distinguished, it is easy for cadres to "fight each other for the success, blame others for the mistake". Cumbersome administrative procedures also cause problems for people and business. The supervisory and critical functions of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and mass organizations are still limited. The actions in the personnel work have not been transparent, so the phenomenon of "soliciting for position, for power, for planning position and rotation of officials" is still too well-known. As there is no mechanism to control power, many cadres have turned the rights empowered by the people into their personal power.

In the economic sphere, information still lacks transparency, especially on land planning or project bidding. The "backyard" of cadres is quite common and this phenomenon makes the economic development in a "distorted" and unfair situation. Corruption is a blatant violation of democracy when the wealth of the people has been appropriated by a number of cadres, but the phenomenon is now still very serious and increasingly sophisticated. Equality of economic sectors, especially the private one, is in fact not guaranteed; living standards of people in rural and remote regions are much lower than those in cities.

In the sphere of culture and society, copyright infringement is spread, there is still negative experience in the health and education services, causing negative public opinion in society; security and social security have not been guaranteed well. Due to the drawbacks of globalization and market economy, some traditional ethical values have gradually been lost; the spread of inappropriate

culture from the Western countries to the youth has increased; also, cultural tastes of the people are greatly changed. Although this phenomenon takes place not only in Vietnam, but in many developing countries, this is the issue that needs to be addressed urgently. Now, the CPV and Vietnam government cannot rely on the “self-regulation, self-balance, self-elimination” function of the society, but they must actively build the Vietnamese cultural value system of the people in the integration period. The ways to train “global citizens”, with a Vietnamese soul and a Vietnamese spirit and to make them know how to preserve and promote good traditional cultural values and international relations, is an important issue of Vietnam’s education today.

These limitations are the practical basis to find effective solutions for the future.

Solutions to Accelerate and Expand the Democratization Process in Vietnam

Practicing democracy in the situation of a single ruling party, in the process of building the law-based State, developing a socialist-oriented market economy and international integration is a new, very complicated and difficult issue. In order to accelerate the process of democratization in Vietnam, special attention should be paid to the following solutions:

First, it is necessary to increase the awareness of cadres, the CPV’s members and all the people on democracy, because the correct perception is the premise for the correct action. It is important to make the cadres in state administrative agencies realize that the rights of the CPV and the state are in fact the rights of all people, entrusted by people to serve everyone. Therefore, it is necessary to change the reception of the nature of state. The state does not have the right to give and “rule”, but it has the responsibility to serve the people. Also, it is necessary to re-realize the state of democracy in Vietnam. The use of the phrase “promoting socialist democracy” leads easily to the misconception that, in Vietnam, with its regime, institutions, and policies, the only need is to promote their “performance”. In fact, socialist democracy in Vietnam is still in the stage of establishing, constructing and expanding. For the people, improving the reception of democratic rights must at the same time reinforce their responsibility and maintain their morals.

Second, to enact a number of laws to pave the way for the development of democracy. The Law of Protests, the Law of Associations must be enacted, because Article 25 of the 2013 Constitution affirms clearly that citizens have the right to “organize associations and protest” [National Assembly 2014: 18]. In a multinational state, like Vietnam, it is necessary to promulgate the Ethnic Law to ensure the practical implementation of the principle of “unity, equality and mutual assistance between ethnic minorities”. In order to improve the social supervision and criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the Law of Social Criticism must be enacted, because currently there is no sanction that requires from state administrative agencies to receive opinions or explanations on criticized issues. While the fight against corruption is the exercise of democracy, the Law of Property Declaration should be promulgated in order to support this fight and create a basis for the acquisition of corrupt assets.

Third, Vietnam must continue to reform organizational work. Specifically, the democratization process in the CPV must be stepped up as a basis for the expansion of democracy in the whole society. Now that all the anti-democratic phenomena are resulted from uncontrolled power, there must be a mechanism for controlling power and increasing accountability of state agencies. The CPV must strengthen its links with the people, actively engage in dialogue with all the people, especially with intellectuals, in order to know their opinions.

Fourth, it is necessary to increase transparency in policies, enhance inspection activities and strengthen the capacity of media agencies. Transparency and publicity are not only characteristics

of modern administration but also conditions for promoting democracy, because they limit the corruption, bureaucracy, monopoly and laziness of cadres. Inspection activities and the tradition power of the media should be promoted to make contributions to the timely prevention of anti-democratic phenomena and to replicate best practices.

Fifth, it is necessary to create appropriate institutions and sanctions to realize the role and responsibility of supervision and criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and other socio-political organizations. Dependence on the state budget makes it difficult for these organizations to fulfill their critical roles and responsibilities. Also, a self-governance model of residential communities must be promoted on the basis of state and village conventions, not offending the law. On the other hand, it is also necessary to resist the phenomenon of “over-limited” democracy resolutely, by preventing it from causing harm to the interests of the nation, while democracy is the benefit of all the people.

Some remarks and reviews

The CPV declared that Vietnam is building a socialist democracy, which is formed in the process of building socialism to ensure the people's, especially the working people's, mastery. Creating such democracy is a very long process. Nearly 35 years of the Doi Moi period is only the first step in that process, but its achievements are undeniable. CPV's General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong emphasized: “The atmosphere of democracy in the Party and in society has been more open. Many difficulties in the development process have been discussed, removed and solved effectively by all the people” [Thu Hằng: 26.04.2019].

The successes of the implementation of democracy in Vietnam have proved that the nature of democracy does not depend on having one or many parties, but on whose interests the ruling party represents, on what is the purpose of the state power. Therefore, the single-party system with many mass unions and social organizations in Vietnam guarantees the implementation of democracy, provided that the CPV is to develop the theories of democratic practice in the context of a single ruling party, to lead the country according to the Vietnam Constitution and laws, to promote democracy within the CPV and strengthen the unity of people. Now it is necessary not only to give the mastery to all the people, but also to show them what the sense and ability of the mastery are.

After nearly 35 years of “Doi Moi” process, the implementation of democracy in Vietnam is still having some limitations; there is still a big gap between the CPV's awareness of democracy and the process of democratization of Vietnam; the experience of democratic practice of other countries is not really acquired. This is understandable, because the development of democracy in a country that lacks democratic background, like Vietnam, is really very difficult; it is impossible to get immediate good results in a few decades. Anyway, “Doi Moi” has changed the country, the social atmosphere and the life of the people in Vietnam. Therefore, its achievements are very encouraging; the main drawbacks have been considered as practical basis for policy makers to find out solutions.

Democracy is a universal value, but the common must exist in the individual; besides the common characteristic of ensuring the basic freedoms of people, democracy also has the specific characteristics associated with the history and cultural traditions of each nation. The facts show that Eastern democracy does not follow Western one; the individual in Eastern countries is always connected to the community, personal interests must abide by the true and supreme ones of the entire nation. Today, the uniqueness of democracy in Vietnam is reflected in the following points: It is not a multi-party regime, the only leadership belongs to the CPV; the Vietnamese government is not the “trias politica” (separation of powers); the people of this country do not elect the President but the National Assembly, etc. In this context, it is necessary to maintain a critical and creative spirit when acquiring the experiences of democratic practice of other countries.

There is no common model of democratic enforcement for all countries. Like other countries, Vietnam has its own criteria for democracy. Therefore, it is impossible to take one country's democratic standards and regulations to impose and assess the democracy of another. It is "anti-democratic" to do so. After all, the humanity, the democratic "content" of a social regime, must be "measured" by people's satisfaction. Randall Peerenboom made an interesting comparison: "In contrast to the vast majority of citizens dissatisfied with the government in Asian democracies, nearly half of Chinese and nearly 70 % of Vietnamese are satisfied with their government" [Peerenboom 2009: 8]. Due to some differences in perceptions, on the one hand, Vietnam is willing to engage in dialogue about democracy with other countries to increase understanding and to minimize disagreements, thereby opening up opportunities for strengthening cooperation. On the other hand, it fights resolutely against individuals who take advantage of democracy to oppose a sovereign state.

Conclusion

The awareness and reality of democracy practice in Vietnam during the "Doi Moi" period has contributed to enriching the theory of democracy in general and the development path of Vietnam in particular. The undeniable success of the "Doi Moi" period in Vietnam results from many causes, including the active role of democratic dynamics. However, democratization in Vietnam will be a very long process, because the people's democratic aspirations and the demand for human creativity constantly increase in the era of intellectual economy, that desires true democracy. Meanwhile, currently the democratic life in Vietnam still has many shortcomings.

The reality shows that there is a big gap between the awareness of democracy and the rule of law, between the law and its enforcement. It should be further emphasized that the process of democratization in Vietnam is not simply improving the law, reforming institutions, renovating the organization of the public authority and improving the quality of the civil servant but also developing democratic culture in the CPV and in society, making it deeply embedded in social life to impact moral values in human behaviors. This is not a simple issue but with the results achieved in nearly 35 years of the "Doi Moi" process, Vietnam has a solid premise for the development and completion of democracy in the future.

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Author:

Trần Thị Minh Tuyết, PhD (History), Associate Professor, Senior Lecturer of the Academy of Journalism and Communication, Vietnam. E-mail: tuyetminh1612@gmail.com

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Чан Тхи Минь Туэт

ПОНИМАНИЕ ДЕМОКРАТИИ И ПРОЦЕСС ДЕМОКРАТИЗАЦИИ ВО ВЬЕТНАМЕ В ПЕРИОД ОБНОВЛЕНИЯ: ВРЕМЯ РЕШЕНИЙ

Аннотация. Исторически каждый шаг человеческого общества связан с развитием демократии, и процесс «дой мой» (обновления) во Вьетнаме не является исключением. Следуя принципу «Обновление должно быть демократическим, а демократия служит обновлению», процесс «дой мой» явился поворотным моментом в развитии страны в целом, а также в осознании принципов демократии и продвижении процесса демократизации в частности. В статье рассматриваются как изменения в понимании Коммунистической партией Вьетнама демократии в документах съездов, так и внедрение её принципов и механизмов в течение 35 лет обновления. Автор анализирует достижения и ограничения в демократизации страны и предлагает несколько основных решений для ускорения этого процесса.

Ключевые слова: демократия, демократизация, дой мой, Коммунистическая партия Вьетнама.

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Автор:

Чан Тхи Минь Туэт, к.и.н., доцент, старший преподаватель Академии журналистики и средств массовой информации, Вьетнам. E-mail: tuyetminh1612@gmail.com

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