

Trung Sisters and Women in the Twenty-first Century

The Trung Sisters are the first Vietnam's heroines who defeated the Hans, terminated their control and liberated the country. This historic event displays the people's independent spirit and unity.

According to *Viet Nam Su Luoc*, written by Tran Trong Kim, about 1970 years ago, To Dinh, the cruel and ruthless governor of Giao Chi province, harshly applied domination and assimilation policy. The local people were very miserable and very poor but they had to pay high taxes and bribes. Their land was taken. They lived in a tightly controlled society and could not move around or trade freely.

To Dinh killed Thi Sach (1) who was the son of Châu Diên Province's Military Chief. Out of personal vengeance and indebted to their country, his wife, Trung Trac, a daughter of Me Ling Province's Military Chief, staged an uprising with her sister, Trung Nhi, forcing To Dinh to flee to Nam Hai province. People from nearby provinces of Cuu Chan, Nhat Nam, and Hop Pho joined their forces to form a unified strength. The Trung Sisters regained control of 65 citadels in Linh Nam within months and formally declared themselves as queens in 40 AD. They established the capital in Me Linh.

In December of 41 AD, the Hans ordered General Ma Vien to lead a massive army of soldiers to retake Linh Nam and to punish Trung Sisters for creating war and causing people miserable lives at the frontier. In March of 42 AD, Ma Vien's armed forces marched along the coastal line, clearing forests and mountains to merge with its naval forces led by Luu Long from Nam Hải Island. Together, they advanced into Lang Bac. After many fierce battles, Trung's motley army could not face the well-trained Hans military and withdrew to Me Linh. Ma Vien continued pursuing and attacking Me Linh. Trung's defense forces were smashed. Trung Sisters retreated to Cam Khe. At Hat Mon village, Phuc Tho district, Son Tay province, in devastated situation, rather than be captured, Trung Sisters drowned themselves in the Hat Giang River on February 6, 43 AD. They died in defense of human rights and the country's independence.

After that Ma Vien ordered to have a copper column erected with six words "Copper column falls, Giao Chi doomed" to warn the Vietnamese and to mark the southern tip of China border.

Folklore from northerners said that the Trung Sisters' bodies were found being draped with flowers dropped by birds, floating along the river bank. The local people picked up their bodies and buried them. Folks believed that Trung Sisters had supernatural power and prayed for the Queens' protection during great disasters, severe droughts and floods. Trung Sisters' temples were built in many places, such as the one in Hat Mon village, Phuc Tho district, province Son Tay, which today, is Ha Tay province (combining Ha Dong and Son Tay provinces), the one in Dong Nhan village, Hai Ba Trung district, Ha Noi province, or the one in Ha Loi village, Me Linh district, Ha Noi province.

Vietnam is a small country but it had its first heroines thousands of years before France had Jean d'Arc. How proud it is! The pride of Vietnam is even more if we understand the social formation. It was an oppressed society, ruled by the Hans, based on their "man is more important than woman" and "woman is man's slave" concepts. The women belong to the house and kitchen. Their lives and roles in society are not important, not existent. But the Trung Sisters were courageous enough to overcome the social mistreat and unjust customs and habits, to upset God's Order in staging an uprising against the Hans and, thus, leave a legacy. They had to be talented and virtuous to gain the people's and army heroes' support. They had to be excellent and courageous field generals to confront the enemies in battles. Who aren't afraid of dying but they'd rather die than be captured by enemies. Their sacrifice was extraordinary and enormous.

The Trung Sisters proved that even a woman, in any difficult situation, was still able to make great contributions to the country, to the people if she had a notable mission, strong conviction, devotion, courage, and compassion. Thus, if they would not achieve fame, they would succeed as human. Their story has been a great inspiration for many Vietnamese generations, especially women.

Their Memorial Holiday was observed every year in Saigon, with participating students from the Gia Long and the Trung Vuong high schools, acting as Trung Sisters, wearing yellow traditional costumes and hats, sequined shoes and swords, seating on elephants, looking absolutely beautiful, majestic, and impressive. After the Black April in 1975, from all corners of the world, even in the scanty environment, the Vietnamese Refugee Communities have been solemnly celebrating the Trung Sisters' Day, to remember them and show deep gratitude to their contributions in the Vietnam history and culture.



The Trung Sisters' Temple at Dong Nhan village,

Hai Ba Trung district, Ha Noi province

**The Trung Sisters' Memorial Holiday on March 7, 1957
in Saigon**

Today, women's role is praised, recognized by the International Women Day (IWD) on the 8th of March every year. There are many non-profit organizations to fight for and protect women's dignity and rights. In addition to the family roles and responsibilities, women have opportunities to hold leadership and important positions in every occupation and to make contributions to society, humanity, and human rights. Their contributions are necessary to soften the suffering of broken lives so as to rebuild a more compassionate and peaceful world, to eradicate inhuman social practices in uncivilized countries which imposed on women such as circumcising female sexual organs in Africa or stoning women who have unapproved affairs in the Middle East or human trafficking and sex trades.

The Vietnamese women, who are proud to be Trung Sisters' offspring, who have potential strengths, patience, extreme endurance, and passionate patriotism, have risen to the challenges and participated in many campaigns and efforts to protect and expand Vietnam under the Chinese occupation, the French domination, and the civil war against communism.

In the 21 century, Vietnam has had many unsolved problems. Domestically, they have faced human right challenges, widespread corruptions and social injustices, exploited work-trade program, frightening human trafficking and sex slave of young Vietnamese women and children with neighboring countries. The culture has been heavily influenced by Chinese culture and lost its national characteristics. These problems are direct results of socialism in Vietnam and the Party's inability to govern and lead the country to prosperity and power.

Internationally, the Party has no authority and competency to protect the country's interests. China, a giant and wicked neighbor, is always ready to offend Vietnam, a cowardly and fearful neighbor. Boundary posts were pushed deep into Vietnam territory. Part of Ban Gioc waterfalls was taken. Vietnamese sovereignty on Spratlys and Paracels islands was revoked by China. "Strange ships" (2) have been traveling in Southeast sea territories and have terrorized local fishing boats. A large crowd of Chinese came to the highland through the bauxite mine development program; they live in isolated areas and are domineering over local people.

In this declining situation, depraved morality, lost sovereignty, and risking Chinese domination and assimilation, the Trung Sisters spirit rises like a sacred and bursting flame in our minds and souls, encouraging Vietnamese women to take challenges, take responsibilities and accomplish them with compassion and dedication to protect the country's sovereignty and interests. When our souls are agitated, our wills are depleted, our bodies are exhausted, let's remember the Trung Sisters' sacrifice. Let's visualize their last moments to feel the great anguish with swelling tears, to see that we are not measured up to them, to push ourselves more and more because freedom is only obtained by blood and life! Don't hesitate and be reluctant because the people are waiting and the country is calling. By culture, arts, professionals, education, civil and military services, or even protesting or being imprisoned, etc., **by all means**, we must follow Trung Sisters' footsteps to serve our country and make a name for ourselves.



In 40 AD, the Trung Sisters' uprising in Me Linh province left a heroic history for generations. Even though their army was not well trained and the timing was off, their actions incited the people and shocked the Hans. The author imagines the Trung Queen's last moments in this poem to honor her. As a woman, she had extraordinary courage.

Hát River's Churning Waves

Tô Định, the governor of Giao Chỉ province,
Cruel, plunderous, and greedy.
Out of personal vengeance and indebted to their country,
Willing to sacrifice, the Sisters staged an uprising,
On elephants with pointing swords, they directed their army,
Under parasols and waving flags, Your Majesty.
They recaptured 65 citadels.
Tô Định fled to Nam Hải island.
Trungs established capital Mê Linh in Lĩnh Nam,
And formally enthroned as queens.
The Hans were shocked and worried.
Ordered Mã Viện and Lưu Long to attack with a massive military.
Defeated in the spring of the year 42 AD,
The Trung's army withdrew from Lăng Bạc and retreated to Cẩm Khê.
Their defense forces were weakened and smashed.
Exhausted, desolated and no place to go,
Alarmed and lost in a deep forest,
Still hearing the screams of their wounded soldiers.
With heavy heart, they kept on going,
To the bank of Hát River pounded with waves. (3)
Twilight was falling on land
The sky was eventually pale as darkness came.

“Oh Lord, this is a dead end!”
There was no hiding place in sight.

In front, the river was muddy with churning tides
The Hans quickly followed behind.
Devastation overshadowed everything,
Head down in deep sorrow,
Nothing was more painful,
Than losing a battle and a war.
Mournfully, tearfully they swore:
“In this life, unfinished personal vengeance and failing the country,
In the next life, would be a Vietnamese,
To protect the nation and crush the Chinese”.
Bowling down to my land,
To my hometown and the souls of people and soldiers,
Use water of the Hát River to wash away our shame, (4)
To protect our integrity and the spirit of Mê Linh.
Surrounded by broken, bright moon’s pieces,
The bodies were swept away by rushing current,
Shivering cold, chilled to the bones,
The earth and vast sky were crashing down.
Gave in. Let go of this life.
Forever in history: Mê Linh and Trung Queens.

- (1) Other sources indicate that the name of Trung Trắc’s husband was Thi. He joined his wife’s army and was killed in battle.
- (2) The Communist Party cowardly avoids identifying China ships as invaders. They call these ships as “Strange ships”.
- (3) A portion of Day River is called Hát River.
- (4) The Chinese History and the book *The Birth of Vietnam* by Keith Weller Taylor, indicate that the Trung Sisters were captured and beheaded. But according to *Đại Việt Sử Ký Toàn Thư*, the Trung Sisters drowned themselves in Hát River, the year of 43 AD. How the Trung Sisters died would not diminish their sacrifice. It was forever a great one!

Nguyễn P. Thúy, 10/29/2010