

MAIN FACTORS INFLUENCING THE FORMATION OF PHAN CHAU TRINH'S REFORMIST THOUGHTS

PRINCIPAIS FATORES QUE INFLUENCIAM A FORMAÇÃO DOS PENSAMENTOS REFORMISTAS DE PHAN CHAU TRINH

Thanh Thi TRINH

University of Social Sciences and
Humanities,
Vietnam National University Ho Chi
Minh City,
Vietnam

ttthanh081185@gmail.com

Received: 03 Dec 2024

Accepted: 19 Feb 2025

Published: 15 Mar 2025



Abstract: From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, under the invasion and rule of French colonialism as well as the weakness of the feudal court, Vietnam fell into a state of tumult and darkness; the people's lives were miserable and desperate. Faced with this situation, several great revolutionaries having patriotic spirit emerged, putting forward many progressive reformist ideas to save the country and help the people. One of the great and outstanding thinkers in this reformist movement was Phan Chau Trinh. Within the scope of this article, the author presents some of Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thoughts, and analyzes some of the main factors that influenced the formation of his reformist thoughts. The article uses the research method of the dialectical materialist and historical materialist standpoint, considering Phan Chau

Trinh's writings and the related materials of contemporary activists. The article shows that the reformist thoughts of the patriot Phan Chau Trinh originated from his revolutionary spirit and love for his compatriots and shows his awareness of accepting new and progressive thoughts; through that, Phan Chau Trinh's thoughts made significant contributions to the cause of national liberation of Vietnam, especially reflected in the inheritance by Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Keywords: Phan Chau Trinh's thoughts. Main influences/aspirations. Revolutionary ideas. Vietnam.

Resumo: Do final do século XIX ao início do século XX, sob a invasão e o domínio do colonialismo francês, bem como a fraqueza da corte feudal, o Vietnã caiu em um estado de tumulto e escuridão; a vida das pessoas era miserável e desesperadora. Diante dessa situação, surgiram vários grandes revolucionários com espírito patriótico, apresentando muitas ideias reformistas progressistas para salvar o país e ajudar o povo. Um dos grandes e destacados pensadores desse movimento reformista foi Phan Chau Trinh. No escopo deste artigo, o autor apresenta alguns dos pensamentos reformistas de Phan Chau Trinh e analisa alguns dos principais fatores que influenciaram a formação de seus pensamentos reformistas. O artigo usa o método de pesquisa do ponto de vista materialista dialético e materialista histórico, considerando os escritos de Phan Chau Trinh e os materiais relacionados de ativistas contemporâneos. O artigo mostra que os pensamentos reformistas do patriota Phan Chau Trinh se originaram de seu espírito revolucionário e do amor por seus compatriotas e mostram sua consciência de aceitar pensamentos novos e progressistas; com isso, os pensamentos de Phan Chau Trinh fizeram contribuições significativas para a causa da libertação nacional do Vietnã, especialmente refletidas na herança de Nguyen Ai Quoc.

Palavras-chave: Pensamentos de Phan Chau Trinh. Principais influências/aspirações. Ideias revolucionárias. Vietnã.

INTRODUCTION

Phan Chau Trinh was born and grown up in Tay Loc village, Tam Ky prefectural city, in the province of Quang Nam. His hometown was a revolutionary tradition-rich place. Witnessing the failure of the Loyalist's movement and various 19th-century uprisings, Phan Chau Trinh firmly believed that national salvation hinged on the people's inner strength, that is, prioritizing their well-being as the cornerstone of national revival. Being inspired by this conviction, he articulated his reformist ideas, eloquently expressed in his motto, "Invigorate the people's spirit, Broaden the people's mind, and enrich the people's well-being" ([PHAN, 2009, p. 20](#)), or shortly say, to implement the enterprise of *Civil education*, *Civil awakening*, and *Civil livelihood*. The origin of Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thought may stem from several factors. Of subjective part, it is his inherent brilliance, his unwavering patriotism, and his being exposure to progressive global thoughts through the *New Books'* and *New Journals'* movements that undoubtedly shaped his worldview. On the other hand, under objective conditions of historical background domestically and internationally, the transformative influences propelled him to transcend the old traditional Confucianism and to embrace a progressive, democratic ideology.

To study some of these main factors influencing the formation of Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thoughts, the author employs approaches of dialectical and historical materialism. It is historic logic method that was mainly used to analyze and clarify the above factors.

1. The basic content of Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thoughts

At the turn of the 20th century, the world and Vietnam witnessed significant political upheavals and economic fluctuations. These tumultuous times profoundly impacted the awareness of Vietnamese patriots, including Phan Chau Trinh. In Vietnam, the harshly oppressive rule of French colonialism, the Nguyễn dynasty's waning power, and the perceived ineffectiveness of Confucianism in guiding the nation's liberation struggle, all contributed to the urgent need for a new ideology and a fresh approach to the fight for independence. Amidst this backdrop/time, the democratic revolutionary movement emerged, led by patriotic scholars like Phan Boi Chau, Tran Quy Cap, Huynh Thuc Khang, and Ngo Duc Ke, to name but a few (FRANCIS, 1977). Among them, Phan Chau Trinh stood out as an exemplary in the Modernization movement. His progressive, democratic,

and reformist ideas inspired as a wind of change into the Vietnamese struggle for independence. Phan Chau Trinh's reformist ideology encompassed a wide range of perspectives on various aspects of society, including economics, politics, and socio-cultural issues. However, the cornerstone of his ideology was the triad, Invigorate the people's spirit, Broaden the people's mind, and enrich the people's well-being (Enlighten the People, Awaken Their Spirit, Improve Their Lives). It will be discussed as follows:

- *Enlightening the People*. In his view, Phan Chau Trinh firmly believed that national liberation and freedom from colonial rule based on transforming Vietnam into a powerful nation. And it is the truth that people, equipped with knowledge and education, are the energies to fuel the nation. His educational philosophy contrasts with the traditional Confucian learning, which include reciting proses and verse as well as repeating classical texts/ anti-learning from bookishness (the study which does not pay attention to the content but only picks up the cliché), the corrupt customs. Phan Chau Trinh advocated for a radical shift away from rote memorization. Instead, he championed the establishment of schools that would teach the Vietnamese language and impart practical scientific knowledge. He also opposed the prevalence of outdated customs and extravagant practices. Discussing on this new learning, in his letter to Nguyen Ai Quoc on 1922, he mentioned,

In my humble opinion, if we could learn some sound theory, or a good method, to summarize its ideologies, and intend to bring benefits to our compatriots, we should not resort to rely on foreigners to make a stir superficially, but instead to immerse ourselves in the rural villages, to rally our fellow countrymen to the cause with the same heart, and assemble together to overthrow the oppressive and brutal regime. That would be a success... For this reason, I recommend you should arrange to return, devote your talents to inspire people, exhort compatriots to join forces to defeat the oppressive power then it can succeed for sure. (PHAN, 2005, p.99-100)

Phan Chau Trinh's ideal of enlightening the people is seen as a progressive and reformist one. In his vision of education reform, an educational system was 'universal, intensive education, not to seek a plan for reaching higher status with profits of officials as in pragmatic learning, but to serve as a mean to liberate people' (PHAN, 2005, p. 231). This viewpoint stood in stark contrast to the Confucianism scholars's learning that implemented limited educational practices of the past. It is also denounced the French colonial education system, which aimed to produce subservient individuals rather than empowered citizens. Phan Chau Trinh envisioned that achieving national liberation first and foremost was

grounded on the enlightening modernization for Vietnamese people. Phan Chau Trinh's educational philosophy represented a revolutionary departure from the prevailing norms of his time, marking a significant step forward regarding to the era when he lived and resisted colonialism.

- *Awaken the people's mind.* Phan Chau Trinh was aware of the colonial-feudal regime's deliberate policy of keeping the Annamese people ignorant and being docile, politically apathetic. Phan Chau Trinh and other men of high purpose agreed that, due to fearing the potential for revolution among people with political awareness, the system had imposed strictures on political discourse ([HOANG, 2002](#)). Phan observed that,

Viewed from a historical perspective, the Vietnamese people are neither indecent nor unintelligent, so why is it that under the protectorate government in the past sixty years they have remained ignorant and stubborn, unable to learn the strengths and excellence of other people? ([PHAN, 2009, p. 120](#))

It is evident that the colonial-feudal regime forced people to lead trivial lives and to distance them from the political struggle. In response to this oppressive environment, Phan Chau Trinh advocated for the urgency of awakening the people's consciousness, fostering a sense of homeland's condition, patriotism, and communal solidarity. By instilling these values, he raised the spirits of self-reliance and self-strengthening among the people. He believed that, only through political awareness and a firm grasp of their rights and duties, they could break free from the shackles of colonial exploitation and semi-feudal oppression. Phan Chau Trinh's enlightening people's mind ideology embodied a revolutionary spirit, seeking to revive the nation's glorious heritage.

- *Enrich the people's well-being.* Driven by his deep love for his motherland and for his compatriots, Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thoughts was centered on an essential goal: to elevate the lives of the Vietnamese people, ensuring their well-being and happiness. He firmly believed that national power was inextricably linked to economic, cultural, and social advancement. To achieve this vision, Phan Chau Trinh advocated for a multifaceted approach to economic development. He recognized not only the importance of land reclamation and agricultural expansion, but also emphasized the need to diversify the economy by developing various industries. Thus, education played a pivotal role in Phan Chau Trinh's modernization plan. His project focused on a system that not only broadened people's minds but also equipped them with practical skills and vocational training. In addition, to further propel economic transformation and improve living standards, Phan

Chau Trinh proposed the establishment of trade associations and enterprises, focusing on activities such as tree planting, textile production, commerce, and domestic goods manufacturing. His insights, as it were to say, would not only serve the immediate needs of the people but also contribute to the revitalization of the nation's socio-economic conditions.

Besides, Phan Chau Trinh underscored the importance of learning from one's adversaries, to be as same level as them first, then it would be sound to argue on revolution or fighting for peace. It is the interaction with civilization trends Phan Chau Trinh believed, that facilitates the premise for nation's modernization. He called for people's participation, encapsulated in his exhortation, "Hurry up men, to learn a skill. Then teach others to have strong will" ([NGUYEN, 2006, p. 174](#)). His revolutionary underscoring the need to acquire the skills and knowledge of the West, not as a form of subservience, but as a means of empowerment, may be considered as novel and radical. His progressive ideas of the concept of "capital" (trade for profits) seem to show his purpose of flourishing economy driven by innovation and entrepreneurship. He called for striving, "To have skills shaprly. To get products lovely. Trading specialties oversea. And reap the benefits both near and far. To accumulate more and more interests. Take trading spreads beyond" ([NGUYEN, 1995, p. 146](#)).

Phan Chau Trinh's modernization ideology transcended the confines of his time. His emphasis on education, economic development, and self-reliance resonated deeply with his contemporaries, including Phan Boi Chau, Tran Quy Cap, Huynh Thuc Khang, and Ngo Duc Ke, among others. Together, they rallied the populace to challenge oppression, fight for social justice, and improve the lives of ordinary Vietnamese. The emergence of Phan Chau Trinh's progressive ideology was a testament to the interplay of subjective and objective factors.

2. Subjective factors influencing the formation of Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thought

Phan Chau Trinh (1872-1926)¹, with courtesy name *Tay-Ho*, *Hy-Ma*, and pen name's *Tu-Can*. He was born in Tay Loc village, Ha Dong District, (now locate in Tam Loc, Phu Ninh District, Quang Nam province). His background was of a family which was traditional, patriotic, that brought him a well-educated childhood. He was received the degree of "Recommended Men" in the imperial city of Hue in 1900. At the year of the Ox's cohort

(1901), he received the *On the Supplementary List* of Presented Scholars's degree. In 1903, he was hired to work as secretary in the Ministry of Rite. His exceptional intellect, profound knowledge, and unwavering love for his country shaped his extraordinary life, leading him to chart a course for national enlightenment and liberation.

Phan Chau Trinh, a man of towering figure in Vietnamese intellectuals's history, possessed not only wisdom, merits, and subtlety to his era, but also embodied the essence of a true patriot and visionary leader, who had compassion on his fellow men. Being an exemplary officials in the Nguyen's dynasty that practiced Confucianism and Scholarism, but unlike many of his contemporaries who sought high status with benefits or retreated into self-imposed isolation, Phan Chau Trinh remained steadfast in his commitment to the betterment of his nation and its people. He recognized the deep-seated flaws of the feudal system and the obsolescence of traditional Confucian values and defective custom. With unwavering conviction, Phan Chau Trinh denounced the corrupting Nguyen dynasty, boldly advocated for the challenging of the monarchy with its decaying feudal society and promoted democratic ideology. Also, Phan called on the French colonialism government to empower rights for Vietnamese people. Seeing that the status quo of deceitful officialdom and the exploiting people, he decided to leave to find a path that could help people, liberating his motherland, as we may say, "the man of high purpose resigned his official position in the imperial capital and engaged in a path travelling across the nation to find his companies, his compatriots when surveyed the minds and the wish of his people" ([THU, 2000, p. 14](#)).

Phan Chau Trinh, like many of his patriotic men of high purpose during that era, embarked on a relentless journey of exploration, traversing various lands in pursuit of a path to salvation for his country and its people ([CAO, 2016](#)). His travels took him to Japan, China, and France, where he immersed himself in the progressive ideologies of these nations, seeking inspiration for a suitable salvation strategy for Vietnam. Throughout his years of going abroad in France, Phan Chau Trinh actively engaged with fellow patriots, particularly maintaining close communication with Nguyen Ai Quoc (Ho Chi Minh). In his letter dated December, 18, 1922, Phan Chau Trinh remained his enthusiasm, "[If] I may have a chance to come back to my homeland, then I will try my best to encourage people throughout our country to join forces to overthrow the old regime" ([THU, 2000, p. 40](#)).

Not just being relied only on mere education and propagating new democratic ideas and new knowledge, Phan Chau Trinh and fellow revolutionaries of his era galvanized the populace through transformative movements, challenging the feudalism's values, typically

with the *Modernization* movement. Driven by revolutionary passion and radical ideals, Phan Chau Trinh ignited a revolution of thought, awakening the nation and stirring within the people a spirit of self-reliance and self-strengthening. He acknowledged that those who took up the national affairs would inevitably face hardship and sacrifice. Phan Chau Trinh also championed patriotism, condemning those who raised the banner of rebellion in the name of restoring the monarchy, turning a blind eye to the plight of the country and the people. His words echoed a fervent plea to awaken the scholars, the intellectuals, and his compatriots, to revitalize the national spirit (i.e, to *Invigorate the people's spirit*).

Whilst Phan Chau Trinh's revolutionary ideology and its approach did not achieve complete success and faced certain limitations, his modernization thoughts undoubtedly presented an idea and a vision that transcended the notions in his time. In evaluating Phan Chau Trinh, many scholars have acknowledged that compared to most officials of his era, he was a man who concern for the country's fate, pondering the country's circumstance. They also recognize him as the most enthusiastic promoter of reform, as aptly stated by a contemporary, "he was the first to embark on the path of political reform for our nation", and "[Sir Phan] was not only a patriotic man of high determination, he was also Vietnam's first revolutionary politician" ([HUYNH, 1959, p. 33](#)); and, he "was an enlightened thinker, who prescribed deep and enduring changes to society" ([VINH, 2018, pp. 59-60](#)).

3. Objective factors influencing the formation of Phan Chau Trinh's reformist thoughts

In addition to subjective factors of Phan Chau Trinh's exceptional intellect, profound knowledge, and unwavering love for his country and its people as mentioned above, the foundation for his ideological transformation seems to be as well laid on other conditions. With the turbulent historical context of late 19th and early 20th century Vietnam, the winds of change sweeping across the world, particularly the rise of democratic ideals and the advancements of Western thought, had a profound impact on Phan Chau Trinh's reformist trajectory (BIEN, 2021). Besides, the emergence of progressive thought within Vietnam, including the growing influence of anti-colonial movements and the spread of reformist ideas, further stimulated Phan Chau Trinh's intellectual development. He engaged with these currents of thought, seeking inspiration and refining his own vision for national salvation. In

short, Phan Chau Trinh's transformation from a Confucian scholar to a revolutionary leader was shaped by several objective factors as follows:

Firstly, on domestic historical background and global context at that time. As the late 19th century transitioned into the early 20th, Vietnam found itself under the oppressive servitude of the colonial-feudal government. On one hand, the French colonial administration harshly exploited the country's resources, while the feudal Nguyen dynasty, once a symbol of power, had grown increasingly weak and ineffective. On the other hand, the scholar's class, traditionally revered for their knowledge and wisdom, remained largely indulging themselves with old poems and verses within outdated traditions and failed to adapt to the changing times. Against this backdrop of national crisis, a series of patriotic uprisings erupted, each reflecting the desperation of the servants and famers, for example, The Loyalist movement, led by the King Ham Nghi and Ton That Thuyet in 1896; Hoang Hoa Tham's Yen The uprising, spanning several decades. Other movements, such as the secret societies in the South and the patriotic endeavors of Ky Dong and Mac Dinh Phuc etc., also emerged, but ended with failure. Observing these events, Phan Chau Trinh, a profound thinker, delved into a deep analysis of the nation's plight. He recognized that Vietnam's defeat stemmed from its profound backwardness in economic, political, and cultural spheres compared to the Western powers. In the face of this painful reality, Phan Chau Trinh concluded that national salvation hinged on the transformation of Vietnam itself. He advocated for reforms, emphasizing the urgent need to modernize the country and propel it towards progress and civilization. He believed that without these reforms, Vietnam would continue to languish in weakness, leaving its people mired in suffering and deprivation.

In the world, it is witnessed the rise and vigorous expansion of Western capitalism. Capitalist nations embarked on a relentless campaign of colonial conquest, invading weaker nations, and imposing their dominion. This era of ruling imperialism gave rise to a surge of anti-colonial liberation struggles and reform movements across the globe. Among these, the burgeoning tide of democratic revolutions posed a significant impact to the oppressed peoples, including Vietnam. However, Phan remarked,

“There is no one who cares to compare the Western learning with our *Old Learning* and to single out what is good and what is bad so that our people may be able to judge and select the path for their future.” ([PHAN, 2009, p. 126](#))

During his time in France, he was exposed to great civilizations and learned advanced things that a small country like Vietnam has never had, which further motivated him to want

to study and serve his motherland. He wrote, “Be quick to get trained. Let's bring it back and teach it at homeland” ([NGUYEN, 1995, p. 129](#)).

In the East, there are a bundle of reforms and revolutions in nations, such as the reforms in Siam during the reign of King Mongkut and Chulalongkorn, the The Indonesian National Awakening period in Indonesia, the Buddhist Association in Burma, the Nanyang branch of Tongmenghui in Singapore, the Xinhai Revolution (1911), The Hundred Days' Reform or Wuxu Reform of the group Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, Tan Sitong, Yan Fu with the support of the Emperor Guangxu in China. Phan Chau Trinh drew particular inspiration from the Meiji Restoration in Japan, a remarkable transformation that propelled the nation from feudalism to modernity. The Meiji Restoration, initiated by Emperor Meiji in 1868, ushered in a period of sweeping reforms that modernized Japan's political, economic, social, and military structures. Phan Chau Trinh, deeply impressed by Japan's remarkable progress, embarked on a journey to the country in 1899 to firsthand witness the fruits of the Meiji Restoration. Inspired by the Meiji Restoration's emphasis on popular participation and national unity, Phan Chau Trinh also advocated for the expansion of civil rights and the sense of public justice (in short, social ethics are based on a sense of public justice, and public justice is in turn based on a sense of personal justice). He believed that Vietnam should learn Japan as an exemplary through its ethics and civilization. From the country's reality and the world's events, Vietnamese modernists like Phan Chau Trinh see more clearly that, the feudal regime of the Nguyen Dynasty is outdated and not strong enough to shoulder the fate of the Nguyen Dynasty destiny of the nation, from then on he advocated the need to reform the country and find a new path of struggle for the nation.

Secondly, on the influences of 'New Books' and of 'New Journals' upon his reformist thoughts.

The 'new books' and 'new journals' are considered to be books, newspapers, and documents that contain many new ideas and knowledge. The ideological content in New Books' texts is mainly knowledge about natural sciences and social sciences from the West, translated into Chinese and Japanese. In New Journals' reading, articles and news are presented by Chinese reformers such as Liang Qichao, the editor-in-chief of the *Shinwu Bao* (時務報) and the Weekly *New Citizen* (新民叢報). These journals advocate the reform and innovation movement and spread Western bourgeois democratic thought. Therefore, New Books were spread from China and Japan to Vietnam. Introducing information on social sciences and technology from Europe and America translated into Chinese and Japanese, the *New Books* had a great influence on contemporary thinkers. Phan Chau Trinh noted,

In France at that time, distinguished philosophers such as J. J. Rousseau, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and others, one after another, rose up to expound their views of popular rights. Within a few decades, the influence of their ideas was felt throughout Europe. ([PHAN, 2009, p. 99](#))

During Phan Chau Trinh's time, Confucianism was the dominant ideology. He himself grew up in the "imperial loyalty - patriotism" stream of thought. However, with his own vision and understanding, he recognized the limitations of Confucianism and the failures of the Nguyen dynasty at that time. This failure lay in the fact that the people's level of education was too low and too backward, leading to the weakening of the country. The deadlock of national salvation and liberating people of Vietnam required a new ideology, a new revolutionary path suitable for the times, which was a necessary requirement of Vietnamese society at that time. Therefore, when exposed to new and progressive ideas from *new books* and *new journals*, most patriotic scholars, including Phan Chau Trinh, saw this as a new awakening breeze. These ideas made him passionate and eager to spread these new thoughts to enlighten the minds of the Vietnamese people. On the basis of strongly criticizing the Confucian education system, Phan criticized passive education, stifling creativity and not bringing benefits to the people. Phan was ashamed to admit,

Covered over by the scholarship of the civil-service examinations, the time-honored great national traits and the shining spiritual qualities were hiding themselves inside and could not develop to endure independently. These traits and qualities bordered on the fringe of perishing, yet no one realized it. (PHAN, 2005, p. 70)

Phan Chau Trinh hoped to arouse the national spirit, then it is possible to reform the country so that the country can step out of 'the darkness'.

Phan Chau Trinh seem to read attentively several classical texts of New Books, including, J. J. Rousseau's *Du Contrat Social*, Montesquieu's *Esprit des lois*, Wei yuan (魏源)'s *Illustrated Treatise on the Maritime Kingdoms*, Zheng Guanying's *Words of Warning to a Prosperous Age* (盛世危言 shèngshì wēiyán), Kang Youwei's *A Study of Confucius as a Reformer of Institutions* or *On Confucius as a Reformer* (孔子改制考), *Great Unity* or *Datong Shu* (大同書), *A Study of the Forged Classics of the Xin Period* (新學偽經考 Xinxue weijing kao) and *Wuxu Reform's Record*, Liang Qichao's *Collected Works of Yinbingshi* (飲冰室文集), etc. Western bourgeois democratic ideas and progressive ideological trends in the writings of the Chinese, Japanese and Western thinkers mentioned above did awaken patriots and progressives at that time,

including Phan Chau Trinh. He seemed to be enlightened, as if he had a source of motivation to find a path to reform the country, for national liberation.

New Books and New Journals might be the fundamental factors that influenced the formation of Phan Chau Trinh's democratic ideology and his views on civil rights and reforming the nation. In particular, he identified the following basic elements of the reform movement: the role and position of individuals, the role of culture, and the spirit of self-reliance and self-strengthening of the nation. His awareness transformation, after exposing himself to new books and new journals, was of the recognition on the new and progressive things happening in many different countries around the world. From this view, he wanted to propagate and popularize these advances to the people and turn them into strong reform movements for the nation. It is worth noting that Phan Chau Trinh's and the other patriots of the time embraced new books and new journals not to satisfy a curiosity about the new, but rather to find a new direction for the cause of national liberation. His ideas made a significant contribution to the patriotic movement in the early years of the 20th century in Vietnam ([DO & NGO, 2023](#)).

In criticizing the values, it is does not mean that Phan Chau Trinh denies all the values of the Vietnamese people, nor completely denies the role of Confucianism. He considered training and cultivating according to Confucian morality as a regular practice. He noted that the nation's long history has shown that Vietnam are not a weak nation, but in the period, people are stagnant, and the reason is that they had not yet developed the spirit of self-reliance, self-strengthening, had not regained the nation's pride because the people's level of education was still low and cannot recognize reality. He believed that,

Viewed from a historical perspective, the Vietnamese people are neither indecent nor unintelligent, so why is it that under the protectorate government in the past sixty years they have remained ignorant and stubborn, unable to learn the strengths and excellence of other people? ([PHAN, 2009, p. 120](#))

However, according to Phan, in the historical situation where the nation is suffering from slavery and misery, absorbing new things, and reforming the country is an inevitable requirement of history. The more he encountered the New Books, the more he believed in the path of bourgeois democratic revolution. He explained, “Ever since the translations of Western books were imported to our country, the elite people began to be aware of the dominant trends in the world and the critical future of our people” ([NGUYEN, 2006, p. 557](#)).

Thirdly, on bourgeois democratic ideology and the reform movement in Vietnam in the 19th century

From the late 19th century onwards, in the face of a nation at risks of being perished and a comprehensive crisis, many Vietnamese revolutionaries were driven to seek a way to save their people and their nation. A number of radical and progressive thinkers emerged, including Bui Vien, Nguyen Truong To, Nguyen Lo Trach, Pham Phu Thu, Dang Huy Tru, Nguyen Tu Gian, Tran Dinh Tuc, to name but a few. These were progressive thinkers, knowledgeable individuals who had had the opportunity to be exposed to world civilizations through documents and journals. At the same time, the influence of the reformist thought movements in some Asian countries such as China and Japan led to the emergence of bourgeois democratic thought and the national reform movement. The pioneers in the national reform movement were Nguyen Truong To, Pham Phu Thu, Dang Huy Tru, and Nguyen Lo Trach, among others.

It can be said that the person who had the most significant impact on Phan Chau Trinh's ideological transformation from Confucianism to democracy and national reform was Nguyen Truong To. Nguyen Truong To was a mandarin of the Nguyen dynasty, who had extensive experience interacting and collaborating with the French. Therefore, his activities in the country's reform movement were quite broad. Phan Chau Trinh was deeply impressed by Nguyen Truong To's petitions to the Nguyen court, proposing solutions for national reforms. Similarly, Nguyen Lo Trach also submitted petitions to the court; he also had many works discussing national reforms, such as *The Qǐ man who concern the sky falling down* (from popular Chinese idiom, 杞人憂天 – Qǐ rén yōu tiān), explaining the reformist thoughts; and *On the World Situation* (1892), propose urgent reforms in all aspects to help the country escape the deadlock situation.

In terms of his reformist ideology, Phan Chau Trinh was also influenced by his fellow countryman from Quang Nam, Pham Phu Thu. Pham Phu Thu was a highly active figure in the Nguyen court, and it is noteworthy that his activities were all for the sake of the people and the nation, including many progressive ideas. He believed that the country needed to be comprehensively reformed; that policies in politics, foreign affairs, the military, and the economy needed to be changed to cope with the threat of further French invasion. In addition, Phan Chau Trinh also adopted and was influenced by many progressive ideas of the reformers of the time. He also collaborated with many progressive patriots to carry out the path of national reform.

To sum up, the 19th-century democratic reformist ideas had a considerable impact on Phan Chau Trinh's political thought. He inherited and developed the progressive reformist views of his predecessors, adapting them to form his own doctrine and introducing them to the people. Alongside other revolutionaries, he organized various struggles, most notably the Modernization movement. However, Phan Chau Trinh opted for a path of peaceful reform and struggle, avoiding violent revolution. This may be considered a limitation of his ideology, may be affected by the historical context where many revolutionary movements had been bloodily suppressed without achieving independence. Therefore, he believed democracy was more urgent than independence, and national strength was a prerequisite for independence. To achieve this, he advocated for awakening people, eliminating outdated traditions, and embracing progressive, modern ideas.

CONCLUSION

It can be seen that, for the first time in the history of intellectuals, great scholars abandoned officialdom to campaign to save the country adopting bourgeois democratic ideology. This action is a rejection of the old values, encouraging an example of a heroic figure with new bourgeois colors, both inheriting tradition and boldly innovating it ([LE, 2001, p. 189](#)). The formation of these innovative ideas by Phan Chau Trinh and other progressive reformers of this period all stemmed from the profound revolutionary spirit and love of country and people. These high purpose people who are extremely sensitive to historical changes and know how to absorb new things and advances in the world aimed to propose reformist solutions to make the country stronger and strong enough to overthrow feudalism. Not only is he an excellent leader and the initiator of the Modernization movement in Vietnam, Phan Chau Trinh, with his progressive reform ideology, has made significant contributions to the nation's revolutionary path of liberation. In Vietnam, that is most clearly shown by the fact that Nguyen Ai Quoc inherited many of his ideas and added them to his path of national salvation.

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