

## Phan Boi Chau's Patriotic Thought

*O pensamento patriótico de Phan Boi Chau*

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### ABSTRACT

Phan Boi Chau (1867 -1940) was a well-known patriot, intellectual, revolutionary, writer, poet, and educator. Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought combines viewpoints on national liberation and country development from the East and the West with the unique cultural tradition of the Vietnamese people's valiant battles and sacrifices against invaders in order to address historical and social issues. His patriotic beliefs are deep and profound in many ways, and in addition to sharing some historical traits, they also have unique qualities that capture the essence of the era.

KEYWORDS: Phan Boi Chau; patriotic thought; Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought

### RESUMO

Phan Boi Chau (1867 -1940) foi um conhecido patriota, intelectual, revolucionário, escritor, poeta e educador. O pensamento patriótico de Phan Boi Chau combina pontos de vista sobre a libertação nacional e o desenvolvimento do país do Oriente e do Ocidente com a tradição cultural única das valentes batalhas e sacrifícios do povo vietnamita contra os invasores, a fim de abordar questões históricas e sociais. Suas crenças patrióticas são profundas e profundas em muitos aspectos e, além de compartilharem alguns traços históricos, também possuem qualidades únicas que captam a essência da época.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Phan Boi Chau; pensamento patriótico; O pensamento patriótico de Phan Boi Chau

## 1. Introduction

Phan Boi Chau (1867 - 1940) was one of the exemplary intellectuals, revolutionaries, writers, poets, and educators of Vietnam in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Phan Boi Chau emerged as a shining star in the sky of Vietnamese patriotism, hailed as a "hero, an angel, a selfless advocate for independence, revered by 20 million enslaved individuals" (Ho Chi Minh, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, p.172). Throughout his tumultuous life, he left behind numerous invaluable ideologies, serving as beneficial lessons in our nation's current development process. Patriotism is one of the most important ideas, acting as a unifying theme across Phan Boi Chau's ideological framework. This is due to the fact that history required that the internal strength derived from the national tradition of patriotism be awakened and harnessed in order to drive out the French colonialists, protect national independence, free the people, and gradually strengthen and develop the nation of Vietnam.

In this article, we employ the principles of dialectical materialism, comprehensiveness, specific historical context, and developmental approach, while simultaneously adopting a historical-philosophical perspective, a cultural-philosophical perspective, and specific methodologies, especially textual analysis, to elucidate the viewpoints within Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought system.

## 2. Problem Resolution

### 2.1. *Concept of Patriotism:*

Patriotism is a fundamental principle that permeates Phan Boi Chau's ideological system. In his works, he employed various terms such as love for the country, love for the land, love for the homeland, love for the nation, national devotion, love for the people, ethnic compassion, compassion for all, and unity with the nation, depending on the audience and circumstances. However, the term he most frequently used is "love for the country." Despite the different terms, their essence remains consistently understood. Furthermore, Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought encompasses not only systematic beliefs and notions regarding love for the homeland, pride in the country's natural landscapes, cultural traditions, and legendary history, but also includes perspectives on defending the motherland, safeguarding the nation, and being prepared to fight and sacrifice to repel invading forces. His vision aims to ensure the prosperity and strength of the nation, guaranteeing that all citizens lead lives of warmth, prosperity, and happiness.

It can be seen that love for the homeland occupies a central position in Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought because it not only holds significant importance in the formation and development of each

nation, as well as each individual, but also because the homeland is the root, the place where we are born, where we grow, and it is also where the value of each person is honored. He explained:

What people cherish most is nothing but themselves. Above oneself are the ancestors, parents, below oneself are the children, grandchildren, but in reality, they are all part of oneself. Where do our ancestors and parents come from, who do our children and grandchildren rely on? Upon reflection, isn't it our country? Thus, our country is the destiny of ourselves. What gives value to ourselves? It's our country. If our country is lost, our value diminishes. What gives us rights? It's our country. If the country is lost, our rights are lost too. The value and rights we have today are already settled and need not be questioned anymore. (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p.26).

In addition, in Phan Boi Chau's philosophical work *Philosophy of Human Life*, he explains that human love for the homeland also stems from the inherent goodness of human nature. He writes: "Humans are a social species; a creature living in herds." (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p.183). He explains: "Humans exist within the universe, and it is inevitable that they recognize society as a very important treasure trove because the kinds that provide spirit, activities, and guide the content for humans are all found within society." (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p.183). In his opinion, what makes human beings more valuable is the ability to show care, assistance, and mutual support, and encompassing all of that is the love for the homeland. Furthermore, he also specifies that the content of love for the homeland is essentially the love for all the material and spiritual elements that constitute the country, such as the affection for each river, stream, every mountain, forest, each banyan tree, riverside pier, communal yard, every village, and the beloved territory of the motherland.

## 2.2. *Content of Patriotism*

Firstly, according to Phan Boi Chau, patriotism fundamentally involves a deep love for the homeland and an unwavering commitment to the nation's complete independence and territorial integrity. He articulated this sentiment clearly: "the important thing about a country lies in its sovereignty, the important thing about sovereignty lies in its independence" (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p.60). Consequently, in the face of national subjugation, the collapse of the dynasty, and the suffering of the people, patriotism manifests as a profound hatred for the enemy and a resolute determination to liberate the country and secure its independence. This is not merely about harboring deep-seated enmity towards the enemy but involves an intense emotional response to their atrocities, as Phan Boi Chau described, feeling "tears and gnashing of teeth."

For Phan Boi Chau, confronting invading enemies demands a singular course of action: "to rise from the ashes, to kindle and burn the solid iron block, which will shed fresh blood to repaint the bell of

freedom" (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 2, p.290). Collaboration with the French invaders was unthinkable. He also vehemently condemned those in power who ceded portions of the territory or surrendered both the land and the sovereignty of the people to invaders.

Moreover, Phan Boi Chau emphasized that achieving national independence and liberation requires addressing the issue of sovereignty. A nation's sovereignty must be fully intact to manifest its independence. He understood the essential conditions for the existence of a nation and a national community: a nation must provide "protection for its people internally, and externally, be able to contend with foreign powers, making those foreign powers fearful" (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p.38). This comprehensive understanding underpinned his vision of a strong, independent nation capable of safeguarding its people and asserting itself on the global stage.

*Secondly, patriotism in the thought of Phan Boi Chau is also manifested through a deep love for the people; through love for the heroes who have bravely sacrificed for the people and the nation. He believed that "without the people, there is nothing; the land is abandoned, the sovereignty is lost!"* (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 57-59). However, for the people to be able to fulfill their role, they must have rights, because "without rights, the people cannot live!", and "when the people perish, the nation perishes as well." (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 8, p. 57-59). Also, out of love for the country, he harbored anger towards those who willingly handed over the country to foreign powers. He denounced them as traitors, calling them enemies of the nation, unworthy of being called human.

Furthermore, he believed that loving the homeland is not just about sincere and heartfelt emotions, but it must also be transformed into concrete actions to address the practical demands in each historical period that the motherland faces. Therefore, in the context of the socio-historical conditions of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when Vietnam demanded liberation from foreign occupation, liberation of the nation to achieve independence, liberation of the people from exploitation and oppression to ensure a warm, free, and happy life, it was necessary to employ violent methods to expel the foreign invaders and liberate the country.

From his deep love for the people, Phan Boi Chau recognized the immense power of the masses. Therefore, he believed in harnessing the strength of the people in the cause of national liberation, liberation of the country, and liberation of oneself. He advocated educating the populace to cultivate knowledge and understanding of their rights and responsibilities towards the nation.

*Thirdly, patriotism in the thought of Phan Boi Chau is also expressed through a sense of pride in the historical traditions and cultural heritage of the nation.* He explained that one of the important factors that constitute a nation is the value of its cultural heritage because these values create the identity and inherent strength

of the Vietnamese people. According to him, these traditional cultural values, forged through thousands of years of tumultuous history, have contributed to the formation of a heroic nation with illustrious kings and courageous people.

*Regarding the education of the people in preserving and promoting the cultural identity of the nation*, Phan Boi Chau believed that in order to foster pride, protect, "nurture" and "continue writing" the glorious history, and promote the cultural identity of the nation, education is indispensable, because:

"In life, regardless of whether in Europe or Asia, East or West, whether with white or yellow skin, it is essential to ensure livelihoods. To preserve life, nurturing is necessary, and nurturing must involve two methods: one is nurturing the physical body, and the other is nurturing the spirit. If the spirit is noble, then the physical body becomes useful. Conversely, if the physical body is strong and capable, then the spirit has a foundation to rely on. Therefore, education cannot be neglected for a single day." (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 7, p. 212-214).

*2.3. The patriotic thought of Phan Boi Chau, besides its common historical aspects, also demonstrates distinctive and unique features.*

In which:

*The first characteristic is the unity between the national spirit and nature of the times.* The ethnic essence in Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought is the inheritance of Vietnam's patriotic values. The love and patriotism of the Vietnamese people have emerged and developed through the ups and downs of our nation's history of founding and defending the country. It is a long chain of struggles against feudalism and resistance against invasions by far more powerful nations than our own.

The ethnic essence in Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought is also reflected in the transitional nature of Vietnamese society during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, a period marked by significant social upheavals. In the coexistence of lingering old ideologies and emerging new ones, society's consciousness was still influenced by traditional beliefs while new ideas had yet to gain sufficient independence and influence to guide social development and human activities, thus creating a turning point in history. During this period, old and new ideologies intertwined and provided explanations for each other, primarily interpreting Confucian thought.

Besides, nature of the times is also evident in Phan Boi Chau's reception and affinity towards various Western, American, and progressive Japanese and Chinese ideological currents, as well as the democratic and bourgeois ideologies of France. However, the methods of violence and non-violence

employed by different countries worldwide each had their own justifications. Therefore, in embracing these diverse ideologies

For Phan Boi Chau, especially after 1905, he had the opportunity to engage with various ideological currents from Europe and America, as well as with many progressive figures from Japan and China. Moreover, the colonialists could not conceal the democratic and bourgeois ideologies and institutions of France. The influence of bourgeois democracy, economic power, science, and culture from France inevitably fostered a trend of national reform among intellectuals and businessmen in Vietnam. Therefore, Phan Boi Chau had to find rational justifications to defend his revolutionary nationalist approach. The history and society of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam both allowed and compelled individuals to see things anew.

*A distinctive feature of Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought is the integration of the aspirations and ideals of national liberation with the historical and social realities of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Vietnam.* This is a critical aspect of Phan Boi Chau's patriotism because it serves as the nucleus and the connecting thread among various perspectives within his patriotic worldview. In this context, "*Self-strength means*: One must rely on oneself, cultivate one's own strength without waiting for anyone else's help" (Phan Boi Chau, 2001, *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, p. 39). Because if one relies on others for strength, that strength belongs to others, not oneself.

According to Phan Boi Chau, patriot, and the Vietnamese intellectuals of his time, Vietnam was colonized by the French because the Vietnamese were considered inferior to the French. If the Vietnamese people remained passive without making any efforts in this fiercely competitive world, they would not only lose their national sovereignty but also face the risk of extinction as a nation. To avoid the danger of "national extinction," there was no other path than for the Vietnamese people to awaken to this reality and make every effort to revive and thrive in this world.

*In particular, the patriotic thought of Phan Boi Chau reflects a profound humanistic aspect:* it is the core content throughout his entire system of thoughts and actions. Phan Boi Chau always aimed to liberate people from unjust oppression, to break free from spiritual domination, and to create conditions both materially and spiritually to build increasingly perfected individuals.

The humanistic aspect in Phan Boi Chau's thought is also shown in his focus on real people, the patriotic individuals, namely the Vietnamese people who are oppressed and exploited by "hostile forces".

#### 2.4. Value in Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought

Firstly, Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought contributed to enriching and diversifying the Vietnamese nationalist thought throughout the course of national intellectual history. Phan Boi Chau was not only deeply patriotic with a steadfast revolutionary spirit but also a *central* figure in a particular historical period, serving as a *transitional* figure of the era. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, an era that swiftly progressed, some individuals struggled to keep pace, remaining stagnant, while others made efforts to catch up with the times, striving to pave the way for revolution.

Secondly, Phan Boi Chau emerged on the stage of history as a politician, a writer, and a thinker. At the core of his being, the most precious aspect he inherited from previous generations and left for posterity was patriotism. He used literary works, poetry, dramas, and prose as weapons to awaken the patriotic spirit, instill heroic courage, expose the crimes of colonialists, and serve as means for national salvation. Alongside his vast and invaluable literary legacy, Phan Boi Chau's towering personality epitomized a revolutionary generation and also left behind a cultural heritage.

Thirdly, Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought contributed a solution to the path of national liberation, the liberation of the Vietnamese people, and the individual during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This was the tendency towards bourgeois democracy on the foundation of a Confucian patriot. He endeavored to devise a direction, strategy, and tactics for the resistance struggle against French colonialism. Phan Boi Chau asserted that Vietnam's independent sovereignty extends beyond territorial boundaries to encompass independence in history, culture, civilization, customs, and traditions. He emphasized this in the face of the loss and disintegration caused by French colonial invasion, highlighting the Vietnamese people's readiness to sacrifice to defend that independence and freedom. Phan Boi Chau combined various methods to liberate the nation, such as harnessing internal strength, fostering unity among the people, educating the populace, instilling patriotism, fostering national pride and dignity, cultivating the will to fight to protect the nation's independence, simultaneously calling for external support, “advocating for solidarity among kindred peoples”, and simultaneously struggling against and denouncing the atrocities of the invading forces.

Despite its significant values, Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought faced certain limitations, stemming from both objective and subjective reasons, which hindered his success in achieving his objectives. Firstly, Phan Boi Chau was still influenced by the outdated notions of Confucianism that dominated Vietnamese society at the time. Drawing on classical Confucian works such as the Analects, the Doctrine of the Mean, and The Great Learning, he translated, excerpted, interpreted, and applied these principles to explain and analyze the social circumstances of late 19th and early 20th-century Vietnam in many of his works. He utilized Confucian moral principles to express the content and methods of patriotism.

Secondly, Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought exhibited fluctuations in his worldview, which was not strictly political and sometimes even leaned towards compromise with the colonizers. Given the historical conditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this represented one of the greatest limitations of Phan Boi Chau and other Vietnamese intellectuals. His worldview was a transitional blend of various societal aspects of that period

### 3. Conclusion

*Firstly, in terms of theoretical significance,* Phan Boi Chau's patriotic viewpoints contributed to enriching and adding distinctiveness to the historical stream of Vietnamese nationalist thought. From this, they ignited internal sources of strength for the country's development towards the goals of prosperity, national strength, democratic society, and civilized equity.

Especially, in his thought, Phan Boi Chau emphasized the immense power of national unity to liberate the people, the country, and humanity. He clearly pointed out the need to implement the concept of "unity among ten social classes" to unite and harness the internal strength to address the demands of reality. However, due to both objective and subjective limitations in this unity perspective, he couldn't fully unleash that unparalleled strength. Nonetheless, in the current nation-building process, understanding, inheriting, and leveraging these values while eliminating and overcoming the limitations in historical unity perspectives in general, and those of Phan Boi Chau in particular, still hold tremendous significance.

*Secondly, in terms of practical significance,* according to Phan Boi Chau's patriotic thought, addressing practical demands requires the promotion of patriotism and the tradition of national unity, along with fostering a sense of independence, autonomy, and resilience among the people. It involves international integration without sacrificing the traditional cultural identity of the nation.

In the national revolutionary struggle, Phan Boi Chau emphasized the role of internal strength which, according to him, primarily lies within the people, where individuals are not isolated entities in society but rather the collective effort of various social strata. Therefore, it is necessary to build a united national bloc to gather strength and address the historical demands of society.



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LONG, Cao Xuan; HOAN, Ngo Huy. Phan Boi Chau's Patriotic Thought. *Kalagatos*, Fortaleza, vol.21, n.2, 2024, eK24051, p. 01-09.

Received: 03/2024  
Approved: 07/2024