

THE THOUGHT OF EDUCATION REFORMATION OF NGUYEN TRUONG TO AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE IN EDUCATION RENOVATION IN VIETNAM TODAY

**Bui Thi Thu Hien, PhD, Vietnam National University (VNUHCM), Vietnam; Email:
btthien2505@gmail.com**

***Abstract:** Nguyen Truong To was one of the initiations of the country's reform trend in Vietnam in the late nineteenth century. His systematic and comprehensive reform proposals cover all areas of social life; in it, he paid much attention to education reform. His reform ideas reflect a new vision and thinking to meet the requirements of national history, protection of sovereignty and national development. The article clarifies the content of educational reform ideology of Nguyen Truong To, from which we draw some implications for the cause of educational innovation in Vietnam nowadays.*

***Keywords:** Nguyen Truong To, reform, education reform.*

I. Introduction

Nguyen Truong To (1828-1871) was born in Bui Chu village, Hung Trung commune, Hung Nguyen district, NgheAn province, Vietnam. From an early age, he was famous for his extraordinary intelligence and was even recited as "The child prodigy". Born into a Christian family, Nguyen Truong To was raised in a Confucian environment, so he has rich knowledge of both the East and the West. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Vietnamese society was still a backward feudal society. Under the Nguyen Dynasty, the country was in a state of serious crisis: the economy was exhausted, politics and society were in turmoil, military was weakened, foreign invaders were watching and plotting to invade. In that situation, the issue of national renewal was urgently raised. Nguyen Truong To is an intellectual with a patriotic heart, profound education, progressive thought beyond the old feudalist ideology at the time. For nearly 10 years, from 1863 to 1871, Nguyen Truong To sent to the Nguyen dynasty nearly 60 proposals to reform the country. His reform thought has been shown systematically and comprehensively in all fields such as economics - finance, politics, administration, military, diplomacy, culture, education, ect.

in which the thought of education reformation of Nguyen Truong To has a rich and profound content, the goal he wishes is to change the way of simple science of politics and ethics by pragmatic learning, paying attention to science and technology as the Western education model and proposing a new educational perspective that "learning and fostering talents is a great way to bring the country to prosperity". Thought of reform in education and other ideas about reform and national renewal, Nguyen Truong To has played a very important role in the modern history of Vietnam and is significant for the renewal of education in Vietnam today.

II. Research content

1. Vietnamese social situation at the end of the nineteenth century

By the nineteenth century, Vietnam remained a backward feudal country, ideology deeply influenced by Confucianism, meanwhile, Western capitalism firmly consolidated its position in the capitalist country and conducting colonization. The Western colonial invasions into the Eastern countries were increasingly strengthened and this invasion strongly struck the feudal strongholds of the feudal countries of the East, disrupting the structure as well as the military regime Autocracy existed for thousands of years. In Vietnam, in 1858, France began to invade Vietnam and therefore Western culture, civilization and ideology began to invade and influence Vietnam. In the face of the stormy development in science and technology in the world, the profound bureaucracy of Confucianism in Vietnam, the product of Confucian education - could not help but be embarrassed.

Returning to the reality of contemporary Vietnamese education, the Nguyen Dynasty at that time took Confucianism as the national study and the Confucian education system became strict and complete from the central to local levels. However, after about eight hundred years of existence and creating many brilliant achievements in culture, the Confucian education regime in Vietnam has revealed many shortcomings.

The essence of Confucian education is the teaching of holy morality. Every word in the Confucian scriptures is imbued with moral commandments. On the other hand, due to the purpose, the Nguyen Dynasty was very aware of using Confucianism as a tool of thought to dominate the people, so they only focused on exploiting aspects that were directly meaningful to the foundation contemporary politics and thus failed to bring into play all the positive values inherent in the Confucian classics. In addition, because the manual printing method led to books of this period being both limited in variety and lacking in quantity, those who wanted to study broadly did not have enough means to improve their knowledge. By the time of Emperor Tu Duc

91847-1883), the way of learning "from the exam chapter" added harsh regulations on school rules such as "writing, abstinence", which greatly limited the creativity of human thinking. Therefore, the choosing of talent is very superficially selective, sometimes not true to the talent, sometimes missed to the whole life, just by a small negligence about the rules. With such educational content, it cannot develop human creativity, cannot be the basis and standards for human development, serving the country's socio-economic development.

2. The content of education reform thought of Nguyen Truong To

Criticism of Vietnamese Confucian education, an education that does not make people who serve the requirements of reality but teaches in the cult of Chinese historical figures, idols of the gentlemen of the ancient times, Nguyen Truong To pointed out: "Are we still indebted to them today? Can today's people not keep up with those of old? Or want to call them back to life? How weird, can't understand" [1,249]. He critiqued the way of teaching quoting, refining his words: "From public schools to private schools, we have to race together to refine every good sentence, every word skillfully, why so bad?" [1, 250]. Not only criticized the teaching method, but he also criticized the contemporary learning style: "... when I was a child, I learned literature, words, poetry, richness, and when I grew up I worked, then law, calendars, soldiers, pictures, ect. When I was a child, I learned astronomy, geography, politics, customs in China, but when growing up, I use geography, astronomy, politics, and customs of Vietnam, ect. There were many things like that, speaking a dry lip I also do not mention all"[1, 249].

With this way of learning, education can only create people who uphold ethical and political principles without a scientific worldview to adapt to historical conditions. From the above criticism, Nguyen Truong To compared the education of Confucianism in Vietnam with the education of some countries that he has known such as Japan and Korea. He pointed out that those countries also read Chinese books, but for fun, when practicing and working, they follow their country conditions, do what they see and hear, where they used to go. That's why they have growth. This comparison represents an insight into his time. For him, an outdated education in both content and method that still maintained and survived would be a big mistake. It will bring great harm, that is: the custom will be more and more corrupted, the human heart will be more and more false, frivolous, and empty. Such harm will greatly contribute to the decline of the nation.

With dialectical thinking about the relationship between social existence and social consciousness, the re-impact of social consciousness on social existence, Nguyen Truong To

pointed out the cause of the limitations in contemporary Vietnamese Confucian education. The reason is due to teaching and learning conditions. The teaching and learning conditions here are the educational content: “The Psalms”, “The Scriptures” of Confucianism are outdated; The teacher's capacity, intellectual capital and methods are limited, there is no access to the new; Other material conditions such as books are few, the court implements a policy of seclusion in education, education only serves the interests of contemporary politics but does not serve the interests of the majority of the masses.

The goal of education

The determination of educational goals is the top task, having a decisive role in the education and training of talents of a country. When determining the right educational goals, quality human resources will be trained to meet the development needs of the country, on the contrary, when incorrectly determining the educational goals, the country will be stagnant, backward.

Before talking about academics, Nguyen Truong To pointed out the importance and necessity of learning. If people often stop studying as a means to honor, to progress, Nguyen Truong To thinks that learning and fostering talents is “the key to the ups and downs from past to present, is prosperity or decline between us and others” [1, 221], and education is “a great way to become rich”. Absorbing the quintessence of Confucianism, he said: “Even though a saint must learn to be good at it” and “knowledge of man, even though his intellect is still lacking, even though he is intelligent, there is a thing not to know” [1,142], it means that who is already a human, even though he is intelligent, there are also defects in intelligence, incomplete and therefore must be educated - trained, learned. Only then will man become useful.

As a person who fully grasped the educational situation of the contemporary Nguyen Dynasty, Nguyen Truong To said that only the inertia and backwardness of Confucian education can be eliminated by properly defining the educational objectives. Therefore, from the new perception of the superiority of Western civilization, Nguyen Truong To proposes a new educational approach with the aim of “pragmatic” education. According to him, the educational goals must be consistent with the present, bring the learning content into practice: “Learn by yourself, learn in things, learn techniques” [1, 222]. He suggested the court to aim for a new goal, to learn things that meet the urgent requirements of the country, cannot be conservative, need to learn unknown things to know, to do.

About the educational content

From the reality of the country and the proposals to the court about changing educational objectives, Nguyen Truong To said that it is necessary to establish an educational program to meet the requirements of reality, which is the training of people with enough virtue and talent to contribute to the responsibility of the country.

Due to the fact that education at that time focused on ethical and political education, and underestimated the application of economic and scientific practices, he proposed to overcome the limitations and shortcomings of contemporary scholarship. In the new educational program, according to Nguyen Truong To, there is a need for inheritance and development. He said that learning the new, the pragmatic is not wanting to get rid of all the old, on the contrary “having to take the beauty of ours knowledge, but also the beauty of others to create”.

In that sense, he laid out new subjects and proposed to establish more faculties: Faculty of Agriculture to create more agricultural managers, to make the methods and knowledge of this discipline popular in education for improvement. progress for production, increase labor productivity; The Faculty of Astronomy and Geography aims to teach people with a scientific understanding of nature; The Faculty of Technology aims to train knowledgeable people in this field to exploit the country's resources and minerals; Faculty of Law to teach the people with knowledge of law, through which everyone must live by law, including the king, ect.

The proposal to establish Faculties in the new educational program proves that: on the one hand, Nguyen Truong To has attached the educational program with the educational purpose, which is knowledge education associated with practice. On the other hand, the content of the education program of Nguyen Truong To is comprehensive, educating knowledge on natural sciences, social sciences, he attaches great importance to vocational education, language education, ethics education.

In educating natural sciences, he attaches special importance to the development of the Faculty of Technology. This demonstrates far beyond contemporary thinkers and politicians, because at that time the word “industry” was still very new to Vietnamese society in general and the Nguyen court in particular. Besides, he also suggested the court choose people to send abroad to train and encourage language learning. The purpose of this is that Vietnam needs to open up in the field of education in order to create the exchange and learning of knowledge of different ethnic groups in the world. At the same time, from the perception that training talent is an important task of the education sector, affecting the prosperity or decline of the country, Nguyen

Truong To has proposed a plan to train talents for the country through formal school system, focusing on natural science; Talent training through vocational schools, through practical activities that are not the classic books of ancient China.

He said: “Learning what is unknown to put into practice. That is what practice for the present and to benefit the next” [1, 277]. With this thought, Nguyen Truong To has broken out of the way of thinking that has become the tradition of Confucian education in Vietnam. In his mind, we can see that the problem he posed for this purpose was not merely in the learner's work, but also in the role of a teacher. Teachers must teach what learners do not know, and teach knowledge associated with practice. To do so, teachers and learners must teach and learn new knowledge, which can be applied in practice, not old, because old-mindedness does not meet the requirements that history is and will require. It can be said that Nguyen Truong To's thought on education is influenced by Western thought. With the view of the purpose of education, Nguyen Truong To set a theoretical basis for the relationship between teacher and student, and learning is associated with practice.

About the educational method

Nguyen Truong To criticized the academic style of the society at that time, a way of learning by heart and dogma, which was to memorize according to books, arrange the words for picky. He said that the pragmatic way of learning is “to learn what is unknown, to know and put into practice”, education combined with productive labor, theory associated with practice, through practice to learn. “Practicing” according to Nguyen Truong To is “practicing what is in reality, for the present and bringing to the benefits for the future” [1, 288], “practice” in managing of country and “practice” in the profession of each person.

The learning method associated with practice, according to Nguyen Truong To, is not only applied to natural sciences, technical sciences, but also in social sciences. This is a bold new point of view that can overcome the limitations of contemporary learning. According to him, it is necessary to study “the law of the country, the rules of the village, the advantages and disadvantages of the teaching style, ect. to understand, amend and save if not done in a province, a government must also be experimented in a village. That is the learning of country management, helping life” [1, 249]. At the same time, Nguyen Truong To encourages self-study and needs a method of assessing the capacity of learners. When discussing the method of general technical education, he proposes a self-researching method: “If anyone mastered books on Western machines, techniques useful for practical use, then translate them into books. The

translated books took 1000 pages as criteria to submit to the Ministry, then together with the western marshal for approval, if not wrong, the translator was certified as a home bachelor”[1, 226].

In terms of means of learning, the "pragmatic" way of learning not only uses the scriptures, history and stories as in the way of bookish learning, but also uses science and technology books, which are teaching tools purchased from the foreign country. And more importantly, learning and practicing through productive labor practices. He also suggested setting up more vocational schools.

With Nguyen Truong To, learning the new, learning pragmatism is not about wanting to get rid of all the old, but on the contrary, having to take your own goodness available, and must include the good things of others to create. Nguyen Truong To's thought on learning demonstrates the dialectical nature of the educational process: teaching and learning new things from his or her existing good things, that is, going from the known to the unknown, combining the past with the present, the ability to retain, to learn the beauty of his father already has and in addition, to learn the good things of the world is the creation. This point of view, in our present words, is to combine tradition with modernity, in the process of acquiring the new, inheriting the old and developing creatively, cultures of different ethnic groups can inherit each other. By doing so, Nguyen Truong To said: “What people have, we also have and what we have, people don't have” [1, 224]. He also advised that "although a saint also learns not to be bored, ordinary people must learn", this thought is still valid up to now, consistent with the point of building a learning society, lifelong learning.

Although the thought of education reformation of Nguyen Truong To had many progresses, ahead of its time, it was not considered and applied in practice by the Nguyen court to rectify the outdated education at that time. His ideas are based on a certain scientific basis but lack a real basis, not enough facilities to carry out. In other words, although Nguyen Truong To's reform thought reflected the needs of the times, always stemming from Vietnamese practice, it was not suitable to the reality of Vietnam at that time. That is one of the reasons why Nguyen Truong To's reform thought cannot be implemented. However, Nguyen Truong To's reform thought has implications for the reform of education in Vietnam today.

3. Applying the thought of education reformation of Nguyen Truong To in education renovation in Vietnam today

The thought of education reformation of Nguyen Truong To has profound practical value in the reform of education in Vietnam today. In the process of national renewal and development, Vietnam always pays attention to education and considers education and training the top national policy, investment in education is investment in development.

Applying the thought of education reformation of Nguyen Truong To in Vietnam today, it is necessary to:

Continue to improve educational objectives on the basis of modern educational philosophy. In Vietnam, education and training are always considered as the top national policy, investment in education is investment in development, with priority given to socio-economic development programs and plans. The educational objectives are to comprehensively develop Vietnamese people with ethics, knowledge, health, aesthetics and profession, quality of competence and civic consciousness; have patriotism, national spirit; promote the potential and creativity of each individual. Education - training aims to improve people's knowledge, develop human resources, train talents, to meet the requirements of the cause of building and protecting the country. Thanks to identifying appropriate educational objectives for Vietnamese conditions, Vietnam's education has made great achievements and gradually integrates into the world.

In teaching and learning, it is necessary to combine a variety of suitable methods and techniques. In the teaching and learning process, it is necessary to combine a variety of suitable teaching methods and techniques in order to promote students' creativity and self-learning ability. In teaching, the monotonous use of a method will not be highly effective. In order to promote learners' positivity and creativity in searching for knowledge as well as practice, it is necessary to use a variety of methods, especially today's modern teaching methods.

Thus, the "pragmatic" learning style suggested by Nguyen Truong To is qualitatively different from the contemporary one, and is really the basis of the new education, demonstrating the very dialectical nature: Education is for the richness of the country, with scientific and modern content, with methods and means suitable for all types of schools, diverse and rich forms of education in order to bring effective education.

III. Conclude

Through the educational content of Nguyen Truong To, it can be seen that his thought has far surpassed his predecessors and contemporaries. He proposed a progressive education,

“pragmatic” learning style, comprehensive content and a “promoting learning with practice” in accordance with educational objectives. Comparing the two times of history, we further affirm the contributions and vitality of the thought of education reformation of Nguyen Truong To in general and educational reform in particular both in history and to Vietnamese practice. Therefore, it is necessary to further promote his educational spirit to build a truly scientific and modern education, meeting the needs of training human resources for the cause of national construction.

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