

ĐẶNG HUY TRÚ 'S THOUGHT OF SELF- RELIANCE AND AUTONOMY AND ITS HISTORICAL MEANING

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ABSTRACT

Dang Huy Tru (At Dau 1825 - Giap Tuat 1874) is not only a writer, poet, economist, and politician but also one of the first thinkers of "germination of civilization in Vietnam"; His ideas in many fields are quite rich and distinctive, and self-reliance and autonomy are among the core thoughts . Due to some subjective and objective conditions, such ideas have not become a reality in Viet Nam. However, if the limitations of historical conditions are filtered out, his ideas may be useful historical lessons for the current reform of the country.

Key word: *Dang Huy Tru, self - reliance, autonomy*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dang Huy Tru (1825 - 1874), self-named Hoang Trung, titled Vong Tan, Tinh Trai, is considered as the bright thinker in the history of modern thoughts in Vietnam as well as the flagship of the national liberation movement. Dang Huy Tru's thought system is quite abundant and distinctive in many aspects, from economics, military, education, human morality, to essential issues, religious beliefs, etc... However, it is found that the unique, unusual, core content of his viewpoint system is self-reliance and autonomy. This idea not only reflects the socio-historical conditions but also originates from the Vietnamese national cultural tradition, which is characterized by patriotism, compassionate spirit, and cohesion of the national community tempered throughout thousands of years struggling dauntlessly, indomitably, self-reliantly, intelligently and creatively against foreign invaders, and protecting the independence of the nation and the country's culture against all the conspiracy of assimilation of foreign countries. The adoption of Confucian ideas, Buddhism, Taoism, as well as the achievements of new philosophy tracks on self-reliance and autonomy of China, Japan, Persia and Korea, were made use of to the historical-social conditions of Vietnam at that time.

The concepts of "self-reliance", and "autonomy",

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According to Dang Huy Tru, "self-reliance" and "autonomy" are people's ability of self-strengthening, and self-determining all their own issues. There is a strong connection between the two concepts: in order to have power it is necessary to be self-reliant and vice versa. Self-reliance is based on the principle of autonomy, but self-government does not mean "closed", or "self-important" as considering oneself the most, regardless of the external resources, self-strengthening in his belief is that in the process of development, promoting and developing internal resources should be considered as a decisive factor; on the other hand, it is necessary to acquire external strengths, such as learning the scientific and technical achievements of other countries, and to consider them important resources, but, absolutely, not to be dependent on them. On the basis of absorbing and synthesizing the achievements of self-reliance and self-government of some countries, which had been published in Tianjin newspaper and in Guangzhou, a weekly magazine in Chinese and in some foreign languages, Dang Huy Tru wrote a work "Counselled by Wild Lake Owner while being sick - recorded in poetry" to synthesize his understanding of self-reliance and autonomy. Accordingly, when analyzing the cause of "reconciliation" of the Qing dynasty, Dang Huy Tru said that it was the Qing dynasty's strategy of adjournment to build their forces "in order to let the people and the army have a temporary rest, meanwhile, the king and his mandarines still stayed up late in the night in plot designs. Training army and hoarding money supply to defeat the enemy must not be forgotten" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.436*). When he learned of Persia's victory over Austria, he said that the reason for this victory was that Iran had done right in line with the self-reliant and autonomous policy of the country. It was also due to the fact that this country was able to manufacture fast guns and educate its people so well that there was a firm consensus among people. As a result, the alliance between Iran and the mighty country Russia became the strongest in Europe" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.436*). Upon studying Korea's self-reliance and autonomy in terms of economy and diplomat, Dang Huy Tru indicated that the country had "forbiddene Chinese merchants purchasing cheap goods and hoarding goods from entering the country". In the country, people who arbitrarily purchased goods from Chinese merchants would immediately be punished" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.437*). He stated that Cao Ly undertook this policy to develop the domestic economy and not to allow outsiders to spy on.

Concerning Japan, Dang Huy Tru appraised that it had just been a small country, which "had not been significant at all" in the East Sea; however, it did become powerful because of experiencing indignation. He wrote, with reference to Japan's self-reliance and autonomy, "of the six skills of marital arts, swords are dealt with instead of bows; "advance and retreat" was taught for horse riding, "thí phóng tủng kích" was taught for shooting guns, both sailing and shooting were trained for mariners, and "navigation techniques" was for steersmen" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.437-438*).

The great achievements that those countries had gained upon struggling for self-reliance and autonomy encouraged and motivated Dang Huy Tru to apply their experience to Vietnam's circumstance. This is also an original characteristic of his thought in comparison with that of contemporary thinkers, because these people might be conservative, apathetic, or feeble-minded who were easy to surrender or accept foreign domination or may be dependent ones, who expected foreign countries to bring our country independence, freedom, happiness and development. According to Dang Huy Tru, to have those good things, it was essential that people had to rely on themselves. His analysis was as follows: "The severe whites are not listening to good words, whereas the country

cannot lose our people and land. In the Court, there are a number of mandarins with different formal dresses, who could give a big support. Besides, there are still lots of scholars of the three provinces to assist.

Asking for the support of England? It cannot be done, for it is like getting a wolve through the back door. A tiger is availble in the mountain, but how can we know whom to to beat it?" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.390*)

Thus, the thought concerning self-reliance & autonomy of Dang Huy Tru is a proposal for solutions to the characteristics and urgent requirements of our country's social history at that time whereby it is essential to rely on the country's power itself so as to build and bring the country's internal strength into full play; to be associated with the scientific achievements of human civilization in order to liberate the country and develop it for determining the destiny of the nation and of each individual.

The content of self-reliance & autonomy is quite abundant and thorough but can be generalized in the following areas:

Firstly, to be self-reliant and autonomous in the field of economy, according to Dang Huy Tru, first, it is necessary to focus on "enriching the country", because "money" and "economic potential" are essential for the country to buy machinery, weapons, and invite foreign teachers to teach its people. But in order to have these, there is no other way than economic development, for the economic, political and social situation in our country is extremely "worrying". He stated, "Our Vietnam, a stretch of land running along the coast, earns just enough for its expenses every year. Since the year of Mau Than (1858), floods, droughts, typhoons, diseases as well as epidemics made the expenditure of the country increase more and more, which resulted in the country's financial shortage. Three provinces of Cochinchina including Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa, Dinh Tuong were rich in natural resources and large areas of land had been occupied by the French colonialists, who even demanded annual compensation of 288,000 taels of silver. (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.436*).

Hence, according to Dang Huy Tru, in order to restore and develop the economy for "making money for society", our country first needs to carry out two inseparable tasks, namely production and trade. Only the link between manufacturing goods with the commerce and circulation of commodities can create new economic resources and help the country develop sustainably. Dang Huy Tru writes, "I never care whether to explore the wilderness or to overcome dangerous waves." To exploit salt & iron mines, "Quan Trong" is the right person to recommend, to break flesh ground, he deserves is small "Phan Tu". However, could doing nine jobs as well as trading to gain a big interest in around some decades be able to help wipe out the enemy?" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.394*).

On the other hand, to facilitate goods circulation, according to him, it is necessary to concentrate on investment in upgrading, constructing and developing bridges and roads as well as clearing rivers and canals at the same time. Dang Huy Tru pointed out, "Located in the north of the ancient Hoa Lu and in the south of Chau Hoan, this river and the old port of Chau Ai displayed in the map are used for transportation, which is very beneficial for the country's activities. The people were never afraid of difficulties in efforts to dig and dredge rivers and canals. The Van Lich river was cleared, so thousands of boats can go to the capital in just a few days.

The project was done due to the livelihood of the people. Millions of people enjoy fun sailing on the river” (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.129*).

In addition, realizing the fact that economic development plays a very important role in social life in general and in self-reliance and autonomy in particular, Dang Huy Tru raised some requirements for the virtues of economists. This is quite a new point given by Dang Huy Tru because in the Vietnamese history of thought, many Vietnamese thinkers have brought up general human moral standards, but the moral standards of “trade” and of “doing business” seem to be abandoned owing to the heavy influence of the Confucian view as well as the conception of feudal society, of which trading was considered as a low profession. In his view, the ethical standards of economists, if properly conceived, are not beyond the moral norms of Confucian thought that regulate human beings as kindness, decorum, uprightness, wisdom and faithfulness, but they have been concretized through specific activities of trade such as weighing, measuring, counting, and quality of products. Dang Huy Tru explained, “Measuring every inch meticulously does not make a noble-minded man the poor one in the world.”

Weighing, measuring, and counting are the rules of a nobleman. Travelling everywhere (East-West-South-North) makes a good student. Loss or interest - the nature of business is not predetermined, but it cannot dominate the righteousness of our heart. Do not let Hao-the star (sao Pha Tai) appear. Do good things to bless your wife and children ” (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.371*). From the specific work of trading, he made generalizations into four specific ethical standards of the trade including: industry, ability, uprightness, and integrity, which he explained as follows:

"Ability: to be able to do great work

Industry: to know the value of time

Upstraightness: to say true things

Integrity: To keep your heart clean

The above advice should be followed as rules.

The six words must be complied with.

Wish: Profit increases, evils are removed

Both public and private interest must be concerned.

If we have to go elsewhere, think of each other as though we were side by side, miles far away but still see as if we were close together. Everyone is of one mind. Loyalty is an everlasting treasure. Straightness is the guide.

Guarantee to keep the will as strong as rock. Be mindful so as not to feel ashamed of yourself ”. (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.400*)

Besides raising ethical standards of economists, Dang Huy Tru also severely punished those people who violated professional standards in business for incorrect weighing and measuring, extortionate prices,

and worse product quality than that had been advertised. This is to remove the bad reputation for this profession. He writes, "Punish the act of price squeeze to satisfy people's heart."

Forbid people to intrude into private assets for their sake.

If the management is ignored, evildoers appear

Difficulties will accompany the path of failure". (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.400*)

The second considered domain is military: from a self-reliant and autonomous point of view, Dang Huy Tru asserted his militant stance while criticizing those who held a neutral view. He said that whatever it was, the purpose of Vietnam was anti-French, "now the only interests of the country is to fight against French. The only one thing the imperial court needs to discuss the most is to struggle against the French colonists." (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.35*) Accordingly, in order to expel the invaders and regain the independence and freedom for the country and its people, the imperial court also had to pay attention to organizing and rebuilding the army. together with developing the economy. As he stated, "the military, the clutch of victory" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.529*). However, on comparison, our troops were weaker than the invader's in many fields such as our soldiers's armaments and their discipline; Meanwhile, "the wicked French and British colonists who take advantage of powerful warships and fast guns, with the secret assistance of the Christian, have appeared everywhere, invaded many countries, ruthlessly killed a number of people. Everyone in the world is filled with anger, not just our country". (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.436*) Therefore, the first thing the court needs to do is invest in armaments by many different ways, such as buying from abroad or building military factories right in the country ...

In addition to military equipment, the brave spirit and sense of discipline of soldiers need to be educated, since, in his view, to create the strength of an army, it is necessary to have a strict and clear discipline. A soldier must have the spirit of courage and always obey the state law and commands from senior officers. In the military order announced to the Bắc - Sơn soldiers, Dang Huy Tru issued regulations and punishments to soldiers as follows, "In a battle, only be forward, not backward. Behead those who turn back for fear."

When marching to any place, soldiers will be on trial for actions like insulting, scolding civilians, raping, and mugging. Stealing even a bunch of vegetables or a branch of tree of the people is under the military law.

Making the army disordered, not keeping order and making noise are accused of being guilty by the law" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.540*).

Also, for the limitations and difficulties that the military was experiencing, he raised five vital issues to reorganize the military for a well-ordered, disciplined approach: firstly, having transportation routes cleared to provide enough food for soldiers to consume in the fight against the enemy; secondly, selecting officers and soldiers who are capable of virtue and health; Thirdly, disbanding the troops with exiles guarding at the frontiers as these are essentially secured areas; fourthly, reducing the benefits of governors (Tông đốc), provincial governors (Tuần phủ), Tax and finance mandarines (Bổ chánh), Justice mandarines (Án sát), Prefect (Tri phủ), District Chief (Tri huyện) as well as the 'extra benefits' of the court's mandarines, which would be re-granted when the country is at peace. If so, then the military provisions will be added" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.224-225*); fifthly, abrogating the policy of shortening the military service period. According to Dang Huy Tru, if these five things were done, the military would

overcome the shortcomings that they were facing, and as a result, "the soldiers are just the right ones", which would contribute greatly to the success of the national liberation later.

The third is the field of human beings: In the view of Dang Huy Tru, self-reliance and autonomy were not only manifested in the development of the country's economy and military, but also shown in the spirit and the beliefs of people, making people have faith, willpower and energy to strive and fight. Therefore, he divided the belief of people into two categories: the first is in terms of "the gods". He believed that the gods were the ones who had positive impacts on the people. The gods can not only bless the people's life and the people can ask for their help, but it is also the standard to judge, warn, and punish the wrongdoers of the mandarin class, by which the gods adjust the wrong behaviors of the ruling class to better the country; and these were the deities he admired greatly. Dang Huy Tru writes, "Burning incense at quiet night, I pray before the gods: "This poor man is so unrighteous that may bring misfortune on the whole people, which makes him so full of guilts that nowhere to print. As for punishment to this soul, the hell is available; there are thousands of people, the body is not able to compensate for. Could thou get the spirit, bless the people". (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.265*) Or in "Prayer for rain", Dang Huy Tru wrote, "This humble man is guilty to the people and to the gods, which caused affliction for the inferior. So I set up the platform to pray the gods for help, asking them to forgive sins for this poor person and to bless the whole people by asking God to order the rain god to remove the drought. Wishing the best for tomorrow, water for the rice, joy and music every house, full storehouses for wealthy people " (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.191*) ;Secondly, the belief in holy ghosts negatively affects people's lives in such a way that just harms the people and making both the spirit and life of the poor people more miserable as they went superstitious. Hence, he criticized and banned this kind of belief, for the activities asking the spirits for assistance will negatively influence the people as well as weaken the economy, political system as well as internal forces of the country. Given the economic aspects, according to Dang Huy Tru, the activities cost the people's money and time, making the lives of the people suffer more and more, thus affecting the country's development; considering spiritual aspects, this makes the people's thoughts, will, affections, and beliefs dependent, not self-promoting, just waiting for supernatural forces instead of being self-reliant to manufacture more products for themselves, their families, and the society. He wrote," It is clear that mourning for the funeral is forever! Why are guests invited this day? Want to enjoy the fortune of the ancestors? It is hard to say that you were dedicated to serving the one who was alive, why making noise at his or her death" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.98*) or when witnessing superstitious activities in society, he wondered," How strange it was! Who was the old mag that dared fool people into inviting the soul back? What a mess!

Swallowing and spitting out torch ash and incense smoke at the time when the brothers and sisters ascend or show up. Meeting the souls in Hell, the women were attracted a lot. Their mesmerizing charms were very sophisticated!

May Lo Duke (Lỗ Công) burn them to death". (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.99*) Consequently,superstitious activities will have psychological and emotional effects, creating dependence for the people, which affect the people's and country's development as well as the goal of national liberation. Therefore,the activities should be strictly forbidden.

On the other hand, in order for people to develop on their own and to decide the destiny of their own, their families and their country, from the viewpoint of Dang Huy Tru, it is necessary to focus on human education. Accordingly, one of the causes of the country to be an object of the French colonists was at that time the Vietnamese education in a conservative, backward state made people become so weak and feeble-minded that they were not able to defeat the invader; therefore, for the national liberation, there must be talented people to meet the requirements of social history. Thus education has a very important role, as he wrote, "The modern-day intellectuals need to strive for self-improvement, to read a great number of books, and to humbly devote themselves to take part in the examination in Doanh Chau. The first is to be in response to the King's interest in literature as the names were lightly written at the top of the list; the second is to pay their debt of gratitude to ancestors and parents; the final thing is to be free from labour service and bureaucracies' demands" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.121*).

Given the object of education, standing in the view of the purpose of education, he said that more than ever, the country needs talented people. But he also found that "talent cannot be born accidentally" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.364*) but must be through education and training, so everyone needs to be educated, regardless of classes they belong to; Considering the content of education in terms of the purpose of education and the object of education, Dang Huy Tru said that it was necessary to train people with deep knowledge in many fields to make them develop all-sidedly over the virtue, talent and health.

Based on the educational situation of our country at that time, he wrote, "we haven't known completely about astronomy, mathematics, so how we can understand the mystery of nature and make careful arrangements for the people soon" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.271*) he also criticized the content of education as well as the way the students applied to learning at that time, by then "half of the scholars to school are unreal learners; even someone becomes haughty like a celebrated scholar. The three-examination writing style was kind of dependent on people, so on being requested about the way of writing, the learners had nothing to say" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.121*). Dang Huy Tru, therefore, argued that it was necessary to reform the educational content to avoid "cliché and uselessness" to the society, the country and the people, or not to educate what was already known but what the society was in need, to acquire new, valuable contents for society such as astronomy, mathematics, physics, science and technology, etc., to teach the people; In terms of educational methods, he found that the teaching and learning process was a unified process, mutually interacting between teachers and learners to achieve the goals set forth in education he raised many different methods which depend on the task and function of each object to apply appropriately to achieving good results in the education process. With regard to teachers, their role is very important in education. It can influence and change the characteristics and thoughts of a human being. He wrote, "Teaching with love makes the evil turn out to be gentle as a child; a happy face makes foxes come out of sly" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.294*). Therefore teachers need to pay attention to their actions, gestures, and words. On the other hand, as a person who teaches and transfers knowledge, the teacher needs to derive new understanding while revising what he has learned and to impart to students what he knows with all his heart. Besides, Dang Huy Tru pointed out that teaching was a process of teachers' self-discovery and self-teaching on the path of knowledge discovery. He wrote, "...day and night devoting themselves to *teacher and learners grow together*" to make fun in the place of honor, not treating each other like strangers or keeping secret about what they have already known" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.121*).

Besides, good teachers are the ones who understand each learner so well that they can have good methods and appropriate knowledge to communicate and teach. He explained, "To understand throughout the past and the present, to have deep knowledge of governing the country, books must be the first. But the one who has just worked out must start in small steps, just like a person who wants to cross a river must start from the wharf" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.122*). As for students, they have to be active and eager to learn and explore their own knowledge, Dang Huy Tru explained: "Concerning the way of study, nothing is better than setting high demands for oneself. The students have to strive to accomplish what they target to do. Do some modifications if it is needed. Otherwise, try and read more books to expand knowledge so as not to feel ashamed before the ancestors.... Hence, the career will last long" (*Trà Lĩnh group, 1989, p.122*)

Throughout Dang Huy Tru's thoughts of reliance and autonomy, it can be realized that he is truly one of the "first innovators in Vietnam". His self-reliant ideas are abundant, profound and relatively systematic. Due to a number of subjective and objective conditions, such ideas have not brought the Vietnamese ship to the shore of self-reliance and autonomy as he desired. However, if historical limitations are not in consideration, his thoughts still has certain practical historical meanings and lesson, especially in the course of national renewal. The lesson is that it is vital that all kinds of resources need to be evaluated, organized, properly and effectively used for the development of the country. Based on the spirit and tradition, in the revolutionary period, the Communist Party of Vietnam has determined: "Bringing into play the internal strength is to attract and make use of external forces effectively. Enhanced internal strength is to ensure independence, economic self-reliance and successful international economic integration. Bringing into full play the internal resources, first of all, is to develop the human resources and resources of the entire nation, efficiently exploit natural resources and make good use of the State's resources. It is decisive that appropriate policies are in place to maximize the materials, intellectual and spiritual capacities of all people and of all economic sectors, especially the private sector - a potential source of the country-in order to make a significant contribution to job creation, accelerate and improve the socio-economic development". (*Vietnam Communist Party, 2006, p.437-438*)

External forces "play an important role in development. Good internal and external combination will form the strength to build the country. External forces include capital, knowledge, technology, management skills and market ... to supplement internal resources, creating more conditions for mobilizing and using internal resources with higher efficiency. In the context of globalization and international economic integration, the forces become more important.

As a developing country, to rise up and catch up with other countries, we cannot take lightly the attraction and good use of external forces". (*Vietnam Communist Party, 2006, p.180*) "It is also a lesson that, in order to be self-reliant and autonomous, it is necessary to mobilize all resources and elements in society of which the Vietnamese human factor is the decisive factor in the success of the self-reliant and autonomous policy so as to address the demands of Vietnamese history. In the process of renovation and international integration, the Communist Party of Vietnam has determined that for the sustainable and independent development of the country, the economic potentials must be strengthened, coupled with national defense and security" (*Vietnam Communist Party, 2006, p.181*), and at the same time it is necessary to take better care of social welfare, job creation, hunger

elimination and poverty reduction, cultural and educational development, health care, and the connection between economic development and social and cultural development.

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