



The shift in historical perception from tradition to modern in Viet Nam in the early twentieth century

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ABSTRACT

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the intelligentsia of the colonial countries and ones being threatened by Western colonial dominance in Asia began to re-perceive the problems of sovereignty, nation-state, and re-ask questions like "What is history for?" as well as review what previous historians wrote about their national history. From re-realizing history and rewriting history according to new perspectives, historiography in these countries has shifted from "traditional" to "modern" with taking Western science as the main direction. Vietnamese historiography is also not out of that general change. Examining the product of historical books at the beginning of the twentieth century, Phan Boi Chau is considered as the pioneer historian for that historiographical turn. The article focuses on analyzing the new historical viewpoints of Phan Boi Chau from the global perspective of the flow of thought in Asian countries at that time.

Keywords: *historical perception, modern historiography, Phan Boi Chau, traditional historiography, the early twentieth century*

1. Introduction

In a study about the change of historical perception and writing in a global context, Iggers, Wang et al. (2008) interested in the contacts between Western and non-Western historical writing traditions. The authors noted that upholding nationalism in colonial countries deprived of sovereignty was the most tendency that built up through the rewriting of their national history by the indigenous intellectuals based on new concepts

imported from the Western such as "civil rights", "sovereignty", "intellectual standard", "civilization", "demographics", "nationality" (Iggers, Wang, et al., 2008; see also Milner, 1995; 2011). However, for Vietnam, Iggers, Wang, et al (2008) argued that since the 30s of the twentieth century, the historical writing in Vietnam has just started to enter a new, modern perspective that influenced mainly by French historical thought (Iggers, Wang, 2008). Meanwhile, David Marr (1981) affirmed that Phan Boi Chau could be considered the first modern historian of Vietnam when he rejected Confucian moralist historiography (David Marr, 1981). Ta Ngoc Lien (2007) said that Phan Boi Chau was the first person to open a new historiography in Vietnam, but different from the author from above, he has put together the entire Vietnamese historical shift in the first half of the twentieth century is "new history" while the historical perceptions of Phan Bội Châu different from Vietnamese historians post-him. In terms of historical perception, Phan Boi Chau was influenced by Western ideology indirectly through contact with thinkers and politicians in East Asian countries and reading the newspapers and literatures of them. Hue-Tam Ho Tai (1992) said that Phan Boi Chau was immersed in the writings of Luong Khai Sieu, Khang Huu Vi, through which he became acquainted with the ideas of Rousseau, Montesquieu and knew the names of the nineteenth-century nationalists such as Mazzini and Cavour (Tai, 1992 see also Milner, 2011). But, historians after Phan Boi Chau were influenced directly through training, contacting, and working with French scholars, and then they followed a historical perspective different from Phan Boi Chau such by review Iggers, Wang (2008) stated above..

A comprehensive assessment of the historical viewpoint of Phan Boi Chau must include the work of Tran Van Giau. In the book titled *Development of Ideas in Vietnam from the Nineteenth Century to the August Revolution* (Vol. 1), Tran Van Giau (1997) dedicates one chapter to discussing philosophical and political ideas as well as the historical view of Phan Boi Chau, focusing his "progress" or "development" views instead of the historical cyclical notions of traditional Confucian historiography toward Vietnamese history. However, up to now, Vietnamese historians mostly use Marxist historiography as the starting point and also the endpoint of historical evaluations and interpretations, still category Phan Boi Chau' historical view in the bourgeois historiography, because they divide the historical writing globally only the history was written between by the bourgeois historians and by the proletarian historians. That leads scientific discussions and research to get into a rut, without creativity and exploration because any historical views cannot escape from that determinism.

This article presents the historical views of Phan Boi Chau in the global perspective of the circulation of ideas in the contact between Eastern and Western in the Asia region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth to recognize the universal and the

particular points. Each period in history has significant implications of its time, trying to outline and understand what happened in its historical context is to better understand its social structure and social mobilities, thereby seeing the diversity, multi-directional, universal, and specificity of forms of social activities and lives. It is also not out of the purpose of understanding the choice, identity, and position of each nation-state in global history. This is a context-based historical approach instead of a deterministic historical approach. In this article, besides clarifying what is “new” in Phan Boi Chau's historical outlook compared to traditional historiography, we present a modern historical framework of Phan Boi Chau based on pair of concepts nation-state is analyzed on the citizenry-territory relationship that discarded the old historiographical framework based on the relationship between rulers and subjects; of dynasties, individual rulers, and good or evil advisors.

2. Method

We used two analytical methods for the documents were printed in Vietnam late nineteenth and early twentieth century: historical comparative method and context analysis method. Historiographical comparison between the Western and the Eastern means to seek the patterns and formulas that are commonly used to write their country's past, especially in Asian countries, then compare with the written products of Vietnamese historians at the same time to find the similarities and differences. To analyze the historical cognitive transition from traditional to modern, a lexical-semantic network of indigenous languages was presented clearly in a new nationalist perspective; a new narrative style, and new possible directions for the ladder of civilization. The context analysis method is based on the research article, historical writings. We classified and sorted by themes and topics: Asian publishing markets; the prominent authors-historical works from time to time; the societal-political-cultural ideological movements appeared in the early twentieth century and their consequences; the sovereignty status of states and the relationship between the colonial government and the social classes in colonial nation; educational and intellectual status, ideological exchange between countries. These topics were then examined to create a large context for the flow of thought and information in the early twentieth century.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, there are two remarkable historical works: *Viet Nam vong quoc su* [History of the Loss of Vietnam] (1905) and *Viet Nam quoc su khao* [A Study of Vietnam's National History] (1909) that written by Phan Boi Chau. Until 1920 Tran Trong Kim's *Viet Nam su luoc* [Brief History of Vietnam] just had printed, but this work follows a different historical narrative style and in an alternative social context change. Based on the emergence of a new lexical-semantic system, including combining them to create a new narrative for Vietnamese history in these

historical writings, we try to note Phan Boi Chau's outlook in a global perspective and to bring a new interpretation about him in history of Vietnamese historiography.

3. Results

Traditional historiography in Vietnam in the nineteenth century

The concept of "traditional history" was used by Ta Ngoc Lien (2007) in the article entitled *Su hoc Viet Nam trong nua dau the ky XX va nhung dac diem cua no* [Vietnamese History in the First Half of the Twentieth Century and Its Features]. The Vietnamese tradition of historical writing is a practice based on Confucian morality originating from the Confucian Four Book and Five Classics (see Chau Long, Le Kim Ngan, 1970). They focused on the annual-biographical dynastic histories; the activities of ruling families and provided models of correct behavior. Since this historical practice existed during the feudal period, it is also called feudal or Confucian historiography. The Nguyen dynasty was the last in the monarchy in Vietnamese politics, but in the history of Vietnamese history, this period was the strongest development stage in number the quality of the historical products printed. Considering only the activities of the historians and the official works, that is by mandarin historians and the Nguyen Dynasty's publishing, the number is far higher than the number of publications of the previous dynasties (Phan Thuan An, 1998). In the early nineteenth century, after conquering land to a term, the Nguyen emperors paid great attention to the compilation of national history, viewing it as a useful cultural tool in stabilizing and consolidating the Vietnamese people's consciousness after a long period of disagreements, divisions, and consolidation of the role and prestige of the Nguyen Dynasty (Nguyen Huu Tam, 2008). In 1811, Gia Long established Su Cuc [the History Department] and enactments two imperial orders to collect historical documents that recorded in the past decades in population to write national history (Quoc Su Quan Trieu Nguyen, Vien Su hoc translated, 2007). In 1820, Minh Mang continued to promulgate one royal decree and one imperial order to establish Quoc Su Quan [the National History House] to replace Su Cuc [the History Department] from The Gia Long's period and request to gather documents from the people.

Quoc Su Quan [National History House] operated in 1821 and ended in 1945, is the place to compile many historical works for the Nguyen Dynasty such as *Dai Nam Thuc Luc* [The Veritable Records of Dai Nam] (560 volumes), *Dai Nam Nhat Thong Chi* [The Unification Records of Dai Nam] (47 volumes), *Minh Mang Chinh Yeu* [Essential Records of Minh Mang] (25 volumes), *Kham Dinh Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc* [The Imperially Ordered Mirror and Commentary on the History of Viet] (53 volumes), ...In addition to the task of compiling, it is also a place to engrave, copy, distribute,

archival many validities historical sources. Commenting on the activities of the Quoc Su Quan, Phan Thuan An said that there is no previous agency that has compiled and engraved such large works in Vietnam before the nineteenth century (Phan Thuan An, 1998). Besides, there are also works not compiled by the Nguyen dynasty's official historians agencies such as Lich trieu tap ky [] of Le Cao Lang, Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi [Categories Records of the Institutes of Successive Dynasties] of Phan Huy Chu, Viet Su cuong muc tiet yeu [Essential Records and Commentary on the History of Viet] of Dang Xuan Bang...At this time, the geographic-historical writings also strongly developed, perhaps because of the division of Dang Trong - Dang Ngoai ended, along with the process of Nam tien [Southern Advance] and breaking southward fallow land that created the Vietnamese territory is much larger than that of the 15th century. On the other hand, it was the process of land redistribution and local administrative apparatus establishment after Gia Long was crowned. The typical works for this historical-geographic line include Gia Dinh Thanh Thong Chi [Gia Dinh Citadel Records] of Trinh Hoai Duc, Nghe An's sign by Bui Duong Lich, Hoang Viet Du Dia Chi [Records of the Imperial Viet Territories] of Phan Huy Chu...(further bibliography, see Dang Duc Thi, 2000)

Evaluation of historical works in the twentieth century, Dang Duc Thi (2000) argued that Bien Nien [the Annals] is still the mainstream, besides there are Thuc Luc [The Veritable Records] and Cuong Muc [Commentary] and the historical works at this time clearly show the research inquires, carefully chose "factual" events than before use. They used many different documents to compare and select an event to become a historical event. In the first half of the nineteenth century, historical recording activities were mostly reserved for the historical periods of the Nguyen lords and Nguyen kings, but in the second half of the nineteenth century, the Nguyen dynasty compiled Kham Dinh Viet Su Thong Giam Cuong Muc [The Imperially Ordered Mirror and Commentary on the History of Viet] that was general history which from the Hung King dynasty to 1789 (Dang Duc Thi, 2000). In summary, the traditional historical writing style is generalized in the following points: (i) using the narrative form of Bien Nien [The Annals], Thuc Luc [The Veritable Records] and Cuong Muc [Commentary] to write history; (ii) the main recording object of the origins and activities of ruling families and personages; (iii) evaluation and commentary on historical events and figures based on the Confucians' worldview (Dang Duc Thi, 2000).

Historiography shift from traditional to modern in Asia in the early twentieth century

Anderson (1991) argues that language is an important trace to consider the shift from traditional to modern by saying that "the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of the human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the

modern nation” (Anderson, 1991). Indeed, Milner (1995) used many Malay documents to trace the development of modern political consciousness in Malay society and recognized that modern language appeared only in Malay and Indonesian language in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century (Milner, 1995; see also Kumar, 1997). These documents often describe the decline of the East and the rise of Europe and then, from which a new spirit is in existence in these countries in the first year of the twentieth century (Milner, 1995; Rappa, Wee, 2006). Milner (1995) also states that if the previous historical records were written for the purpose of moral teaching or an instrument of dogma, the historians, in the early twentieth century, would have accepted the new constructs and concepts follow the social evolutionary model, in which they perceive the people role in the historical movement to "pressing forward... to change... their condition" (Hourani, 1983). Historians agreed that the sense of evolution is the process typical to individual development in the self-awareness “man’s faculties, sentiments, and ideas” (Hourani, 1983).

Studies on the formation of modernity in China society showed that the new perspective emerged in the literature in the early twentieth century in which the territory, sovereignty, citizenry, and state must be linked together. That new perception of China’s past and present is not only strengthened as a practical model for envisioning China as a modern nation-state (Wang, 2001) but also as a political formula whose the radical intellectuals such as Luong Khai Sieu, Khang Huu Vi and others who supported them in the early twentieth century. This perspective was used by historians in China in the early twentieth century to rewrite Chinese history (Xu, 2008; Lin, 2013; Zeng, 2019). In general, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the national history of the non-Western regions used the Western ideas, especially the history of civilization, to build new historiography in which promote social progress (Iggers, Wang, et al., 2008).

Phan Boi Chau - the first modern historian in Vietnamese historiography in the early twentieth century

Vietnamese historiography studies have all confirmed the "progressive" character (Tran Van Giau, 1997) or "pave the way" or "new" (Ta Ngoc Lien, 2007) of Phan Boi Chau's perspective for the turn of the twentieth century. Considering the merits and ideology of Phan Boi Chau, David Marr (1981) argues that Phan Boi Chau can be considered the first modern historian of Vietnamese history (David Marr). As we all know, Phan Boi Chau is not only one of the organizers of political movements, but also a prominent ideological and political propagandist in the early twentieth century through most of his writings. Therefore, the use of historical writing as a sharp weapon for the struggle against French colonialism was also not out of his purpose. Phan Boi Chau wrote *The History of the Loss of the Country* (1905) as a denunciation of the crimes of the French colonialists to the people in his country and the international communities and he wrote

A Study of Vietnam's National History (1909) as a proposal for modern solutions to Vietnam. Trying to rewrite nation history according to a new perspective, Phan Boi Chau got rid of the chronology narrative following the rise and fall of dynasties, the personages and good and evil advice to give on important topics for a new perception of a modern nation-state such as the history of national-territorial formation; the natural resources of the nation; the maintenance and expansion of borders-territories over time; diplomatic relations. Especially, he presents a state in terms of the citizenry, territory, and sovereignty in which citizenry was most important. These headings convince and support the presentation of a Darwinian social evolutionary of linear development that he was influenced by Chinese neo-writers (Milner, 2011). Vietnam's timeline of that linear progress was divided into six periods: animals, animal-primitive, primitive, primitive-developing, developing, and civilized. civilized, from civilizing trends to civilization. Finally, Phan Boi Chau predicts that Vietnam will enter a period of civilization after regaining sovereignty.

Phan Boi Chau's modern cognitive framework differs from the Confucian traditional framework one in that he does not emphasize the relationship between ruler and subject in the Confucian state as previous historians, but instead changes to a nation-state category. He tried to emphasize citizenry to motivate the Vietnamese people to self-sense their rights, to self-educate, to self-consciously embrace the destiny of their family as well as the destiny of the nation and the nation and dignify patriotism rather than personal fidelity to a ruling family (David Marr, 1981). Breaking the Confucian connection between politics and morality, Phan Boi Chau also redistributes the difference between national history and the annals-biographic dynastic histories; between hero/hostile when he said that "how can national history follow the principles of the ruling dynasties" (Phan Boi Chau, 1962). For him, a person is hostile to a ruling family, it is called the hostility of each family, but if that person brings benefits to the nation, the Vietnamese, he is a hero.

Besides, in the traditional perception, the king was considered as a son of heaven, the theocracy, and the entire people as servants of the ruling, and they are obliged to subdue the authority. Phan Boi Chau argued that is a mutual relationship rather than a subordinate relationship for the common good not only of the nation but also for each member of that state. Phan Boi Chau tried to identify the power structure and found that the traditional historical writing strengthened that power for the ruling families. Historical events and personages were chosen for moral teaching, of protecting the ruler. He restructured that power in the direction of clearly defining the role - the function of a modern state in domestic and foreign affairs. The government needs to pay attention to develop education to intellectual standards, move on the way of civilization to avoid falling into backward conditions, corruption, closed self-interest. Phan Boi

Chau clarified the responsibilities and duties of each agency in the protection of national sovereignty, how to balance the harmonious common and private interests. He said the king-mandarin is just the representative of the people in a country, the government along with the cabinet must action how to bring many benefits to the nation and its citizen; to maintain national independence; have specific socio-economic agenda declared and discussed with the citizen; has a plan to allocate human and financial resources for each agenda goal (Phan Boi Chau, 1962). For example, when discussing the exploitation of natural resources for the national economic development, the interests of the whole government, the people, and investors, he writes "for every mine is exploited, the engineers, miners and the bureaucrats were chosen by the government to pick up well-educated staff and agreed by the people...the profits from mining must be reasonably divided between them" (Phan Boi Chau, 1962).

Discussion

In Asia's idea context, Phan Boi Chau's historical view generally followed the perception shift from traditional to modernity in common historical interpretation at that time. First, the basic social evolutionary model of Darwinian's interpretation, in which time is no longer understood as the "stagnant" "circumvolution" "past is the better time than now" but rather is the evolution time that evolves with the history of human social progress. Second, history describes as the process toward civilization in which a culture is symbolized like the physical form of the human being's spirit. The spirit of a culture or a nation is understood as the characteristics of civilization or national identity. It is the character of a people are crystallized from ideology, religion, art, and lifestyle, where each individual's self-awareness of reason and will and their capacities is the driving force for the development of society and as result, through the accumulation of each individual that constitutes social progress (Guizot, 1842, Lecture I, III; Hourani, 1983; Bowden, 2004). Third, taking the West's achievement as a ladder toward civilization, the articles of the intellectual's outside West on social evolution used the "escape from Asia" "out of the East" as a criterion for diverging universal social progress. This idea turned out in the early twentieth century, but later it was criticized because of just an extension of the Western vision away from regional countries outside the West. Phan Boi Chau also based on those common civilization standards to diverge his country's past.

However, in Vietnamese historiography, Phan Boi Chau not only raises new conceptual frameworks about the nation-state, truly patriotic sentiment but also gives the possible solutions for Vietnam's political independence and social progress. Phan Boi Chau tried to apply the progressive linear time but integrating the status of the nation's sovereignty, for him, must be the full and complete sovereignty. He said that only the periods of 548-571, 939-945, 968-970, and 1428-1429 were the Vietnamese had complete and full

sovereignty. Because the Vietnamese heads of state were gained sovereignty from China, they refused to be ordained, did not identify themselves as a court of China and considered themselves king of their country. That means other stages were the period that Vietnamese sovereignty was incomplete and dependent. Besides, Phan Boi Chau realized that "traditional historiography did not record anything to the ordinary people, because they did not have anything worth reminded of" (Phan Boi Chau, 1962). Phan Boi Chau did not discuss the rise and fall of dynasties instead that discusses the rise of the citizenry and the importance of education for the intellectual standards of a nation. Tran Van Giau supposed that Phan Boi Chau's new perspective only have just appeared after World War I (Tran Van Giau, 1997).

4. Conclusion

In the nineteenth century, the Nguyen Kings compiled a huge amount of historical records according to the traditional historiography that containing much information about the history and culture of the Vietnamese nation. However, with the collision between East and West ideological currents during the expansion of colonialism, Asian intellectuals began to re-perceive their country's history and they thought that their nation might be escaped the domination of Western colonialism by reaching the common ladder of the western civilization. Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Vietnam has become a colonial country of French colonialism. Realizing the strength and a higher level of civilization of French colonialism, the Vietnamese intellectuals thought that it was necessary to improve people's intellectual standards through education and disseminate Western ideas through poetry and printed materials and Phan Boi Chau is a pioneer in that propaganda work. Through two historical works, Phan Boi Chau has contributed to changing old historical thinking, although the purpose of writing history was mainly to serve his political - revolutionary way. Unlike the later generations of historians such as Pham Quynh, Nguyen Van To, Hoang Thuc Tram who received the knowledge directly from the French scholars, Phan Boi Chau was the recipient of new western historical views indirectly from the intellectuals from China and Japan, most clearly in the idea of Luong Khai Sieu, but those are also common ideas in the early twentieth century in Asia (see also Iggers, Wang..eds, 2008; Macintyre, S, Maiguashca, J, and Pók, A. 2011; Xu, 2008).

In Vietnamese history, Phan Boi Chau was not a person that creates a historical school on which based on historical methods and interpretation patterns, but he is considered to be one of the modern historians of Vietnam by using the political and social functions of history to express patriotism for his nation and taking history to carry out political agendas for his political path. Through that, he gives modern language to his writings to make a change in the spirit of Vietnamese toward modernity. Compared with other

historical works in Vietnam, the book *A Study of Vietnam's National History* written by Phan Boi Chau has many new insights contributing to the turning point in changing Vietnamese historiography in terms of historical interpretation. Though at that time, Leopold von Ranke's positivist methods make him become a modern historian and history became a science. The positivist method for historical sources includes many different technical stages to criticize historical data in order to find out historical facts as "what really happened". When compiling history writings, Phan Boi Chau still knew that strict requirement, but clearly, he emphasized the political function rather than the intellectual function of history. However, for Vietnamese historiography, his new historical views along with the nation-state cognitive framework based on the citizenry-territorial relationship were included in the rewriting of Vietnamese history, Phan Boi Chau deserves to be considered the first modern historian of Vietnam.

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