

Pham Phu Thu's Thoughts on National Reform

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SUMMARY

Pham Phu Thu is a prominent political figure and a great intellectual, who made significant contributions to the economic, cultural, political, and social life of Vietnam in the late 19th century. He made major contributions to the reform movement in the country at that time. This article focuses on analyzing the key aspects of his reformist thoughts in areas such as economics, science and technology, politics and society, education and culture, military and diplomacy, etc., in order to clarify his central idea: that reforming the country is essential to protect national sovereignty and foster development.

Keywords: Pham Phu Thu, reformist thought, economic reform, late 19th century,...

INTRODUCTION

In the annals of Vietnamese ideological history, Pham Phu Thu (Phạm Phú Thứ) is recognized as a preeminent reformer who made monumental contributions to the nation across a diverse spectrum of fields, including economics, science and technology, socio-politics, culture, education, and military diplomacy. Against the backdrop of a profound national crisis during the latter half of the 19th century, he emerged as a vanguard of the reform movement. As a pragmatic reformer, his innovative and audacious ideas were aimed at safeguarding the nation from the existential threat of foreign aggression. His reformist philosophy not only held critical significance within its historical context but also continues to offer valuable insights for the nation-building endeavors of the present day.

MAIN CONTENT

Economic Reform Philosophy

In the late 19th century, with the invasion of the French colonialists, Vietnam was falling into a crisis in all aspects of economy, politics, and society. The agricultural economy of the nation, which was already poor and backward, placed under the rule of the Nguyen Dynasty, made the economy even more disordered; from there, leading to a social crisis, successive peasant uprisings broke out against the feudal court [1, p.72]. In that context, Pham Phu Thu perceived that economic development was the foremost important issue in reforming the country. To develop the economy, Pham Phu Thu was concerned with the comprehensive development of agriculture, industry, and commerce, applying Western science and technology.

Regarding agriculture, *Pham Phu Thu*, similar to Nguyen Truong To, paid attention to agricultural renovation, especially the issues of irrigation and dikes. Immediately after being appointed as the tri phu (Prefect) of Tu Nghia, Pham Phu Thu exerted great efforts to encourage farmers to develop agriculture through measures of land reclamation, expanding irrigation, and establishing 50 nghĩa thương granaries (state-sponsored charitable granaries) to cope with famine. Pham Phu Thu also submitted a memorial requesting the construction of the Cu Nhi dike (Dien Ban district – Quang Nam province) and the excavation of the Ai Nghia river (Dai Loc district). Successively in the years 1873 and 1874, he urgently organized the distribution of relief to save famine-stricken people caused by floods by proposing that Hung Yên provincial officials release 500,000 units

of grain (phuong) – (a traditional unit of grain capacity), while simultaneously organizing people for land reclamation, planting short-term crops, and restoring irrigation works; concurrently, he released 500,000 units of grain (phuong) from the Hung Yen provincial granary for distribution and mobilized wealthy individuals to open the province’s rice barns to save the villagers from starvation. On the other hand, he organized healthy individuals to perform land reclamation, plant short-term food crops, and open irrigation in Dong Trieu and Nam Sach to combat famine more fundamentally. Alongside combating famine, he constantly paid attention to recovering agricultural production, developing small-scale handicrafts, and building villages and urban streets within the province [5, p.114].

Regarding industry and handicrafts, he advocated encouraging industrial sectors so that the people would have sufficient daily necessities through tax reductions, generous rewards, and ensuring consumption for the people: “considering households that can produce utensils in the provinces, such as the Bat Trang pottery village in Bac Ninh, appropriately rewarding them, exempting them from corvée labor and miscellaneous services, so that they may become sophisticated in technology, and utensils become skillful and beautiful, then purchases will naturally be many, goods will naturally be consumed, and later, applying tax regulations to levy taxes, in this way utensils become more sophisticated day by day, and both the state and the people benefit” [7, p. 1394].

Pham Phu Thu proposed the abolition of the ban on felling ironwood to develop industry; specifically for use in shipbuilding, while simultaneously establishing regulations for acquiring ironwood whereby households felling trees must return the products to the imperial court, and if they have a need to use them, they would buy them back to avoid resource depletion which the state could manage. He petitioned the imperial court to allow the building of ships and the manufacture of transport boats. He directly directed and successfully built a copper-sheathed ship named Thuy Nhap. Besides that, he also initiated the exploitation of more than 10 iron and coal mining sites to create jobs and increase income for the nation.

Considering that alcohol brewing among the populace was growing strongly and was difficult to control, while on the other hand affecting the economy, production, and social order as it was “wasting rice, corrupting the people, and of no benefit”, he proposed taxing alcohol brewing to facilitate control and prevent waste through measures such as “Issuing decrees to localities to search within their jurisdictions for how many households currently have brewing kilns, maintaining them exactly as they are without allowing any increase, only permitting brewing with state-issued licenses, and fixing how much the annual tax quota is, there will be limitations” [7, p.1392]. Additionally, he also advocated for heavy taxation on gambling and opium to prevent waste, facilitate management, and increase the budget for the locality. He argued that, “alcohol taxes and gambling taxes, please let those localities combine them with opium taxes, all levied annually; the total tax amount from those three provinces combined will be no less than several hundred thousand quan of money, which can prevent waste and assist with expenses” [7, p.1392]. He further proposed exempting miscellaneous services and lightly taxing small-scale handicraft households.

Regarding commerce, Pham Phu Thu held that commerce played a vital role in the development of the nation. Most notably, he identified the crux of the national economic policy as the need to rapidly develop a market economy and open trade. He proposed the policy: The State should encourage the people to trade freely and produce freely. He also recognized that facilitating trade and opening markets was highly beneficial:

“Expanding and assisting the world in a timely manner

If markets do not facilitate trade

Then from where would the nation have sufficient troops

You all should judge the situation

And go out to see how the districts conduct business...” [7, p.847].

He provided clear and specific measures to effectively implement the trade policy. He *“petitioned the imperial court to utilize private merchant ships to transport rice and paddy from provinces to be sold in the capital; use*

state ships to transport military provisions, armaments, heavy goods, and to protect the coast” [7, p.1578]. He pointed out the disadvantages of using state ships to transport paddy to the capital and the disadvantages of using private ships. He proposed that the state regulate reasonable freight rate scales to pay for the people's ships and interest rate scales calculated based on the weight of the rice, as well as stipulate strict inspection procedures for purchase and sale prices. This work aimed to further develop and strengthen the private economy, serving as a premise for economic and social development. It manifested a new economic thinking during that era [2, p.38].

In 1867, upon perceiving that foreign merchant ships were entering and leaving ports freely beyond the imperial court's control, he proposed regulations that ships carrying silk and rice could only enter Cam gate (Ninh Hai) and were not permitted to dock at Tra Ly gate (Nam Dinh); additionally, he proposed collecting taxes at Cam river and Tra post to avoid budget loss as well as to demonstrate the strictness of the imperial court: *“Regarding the matter of rice and silk (passing) the Cam river, I think taxes should be collected according to the agreement, leaving no path for the French to spread gossip and slander. Cunning merchants find ways to evade taxes; (if we) publicly conduct inspections, there will not be much loss. They truly cause disruption to seize profits; we use our power sometimes heavily, sometimes lightly, either adding or subtracting; at Cam river, one must deliberate the methods, not driving away their spontaneous arrival; Trà post does not prohibit but is effectively like a prohibition”* [7, p.1804]. He advocated for the abolition of patrol stations at seaports and river mouths that had obstructed much of the trade of goods. This stemmed from his desire to attract other countries to trade for economic development, necessitating equal treatment of merchant ships from all nations.

Furthermore, Pham Phu Thu proactively introduced many other audacious reforms to promote the development of commerce. Specifically: He advocated applying a new tax regulation for merchant ships in the form of taxing based on the quantity of goods rather than the vessel size as before to ensure objectivity in taxation, make the inspection of books easier, and also limit the acceptance of bribes by managing officials here. He introduced the following levels: *“Large vessels carrying rice offshore are encouraged to contribute 40 quan (a string of cash coins), medium vessels 30 quan, small vessels 20 quan; as for other goods, large vessels pay 10 quan, medium vessels 7 quan, small vessels 3 quan (except for ships without rice)”* [7, p.1393]. He also advocated for the free trade of rice, including by Chinese merchants, in accordance with the tax tariff (according to the levels the imperial court had previously set). In Hai Duong province, he petitioned to open two additional rice markets in An Bien (An Duong, Do Son) and Don Son (Dong Trieu).

In commerce, Pham Phu Thu especially valued the opening of trade as an objective and inevitable trend, *“opening ports for trade is something that cannot be prevented or withheld”* [7, p.1446]. He regarded the expansion of trade with foreign countries as a necessary action, creating mutual goodwill and trust, reducing hostility, and preventing the seeds of invasion; therefore, he established the Nha Thuong Chinh (Customs Bureau) in Ninh Hai, together with the French consul to open an international trade port (the history of Hai Phong port begins from here). He cited the examples of China and Siam (Thailand), where inviting many merchant guests leads to high tax revenue, benefiting both parties. He argued: *“Please open the way to clear ten thousand strands of suspicion, to empathize with the feelings and thoughts of everyone, like the Eastern and Western countries, following the old practices around the Minh Mạng era, to take the benefits of nations through trade and commerce, clarifying the current measures of the Qing Empire and Siam, thereby to prosper the nation's resources, and thereby nurturing them from within so they do not suspect”* [7, p.1399]. His efforts helped expand foreign trade, promoted the consumption of agricultural products, restricted manipulation by dishonest merchants and embezzlement by officials, and brought a new face to the commercial sector.

With these innovative ideas on developing the domestic economy, Pham Phu Thu reached the pinnacle of an economic development policy planner in the 19th century. But the important thing is that he did not stop at ideas; he had ideas that were tested, applied in reality, and achieved very noteworthy results.

Reform Ideology on Science and Technology

In the second half of the 19th century, while a segment of Confucian scholars showed cowardice before the enemy and modern civilization, Pham Phu Thu believed that the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese nation

could assimilate human civilization and Western science and technology to be equal to and surpass others. These reformist ideas on science and technology were the result of diplomatic missions through many nations: Egypt, Italy, France, Spain... He directly witnessed the achievements of Western civilization. Thanks to a receptive attitude and diligent learning, upon returning home, he persuaded the imperial court to promulgate production methods and perfect 27 “buffalo carts” (technology that Pham Phu Thu acquired in Egypt) which had a productivity many times higher than the use of water buckets at that time.

Pham Phu Thu held that the assimilation of foreign science and technology was necessary but must be selective and appropriate for the society and traditional culture of the nation. This ideology coincided with the reform ideas of Nguyen Truong To; because *“it is not about discarding all the old to seek the new... one must take the existing merits of one's own, and also take the newly created merits in the world. In this way, what the world possesses, we also possess; what we already possess, the world does not; taking two parts of knowledge to counter one part of knowledge, who would dare to despise our country”* [1, p.118]. Notably, he emphasized the assimilation of Western civilization while simultaneously upholding national pride, never feeling inferior as a small country and always asserting that our country does not have to be dependent or debase itself before large nations. He wrote:

“The South has long been praised for its civilization

Why should strength and prosperity belong only to China” [7, tr.940].

That very thing made him constantly ponder how to catch up with Western civilization and learn their strengths. From there, he wanted to train human resources for the home country. He said, “I think we should adopt their strengths so that we can have prestige with foreigners”, and if we want to send people there to study, they are ready to impart their methods. He cited examples of several countries that followed Western techniques, such as: Egypt relied on the French for assistance in building armories and hired the British to build plants to desalinate seawater into fresh water; China learned shipbuilding techniques from the British. He boldly put forward the idea of requesting the French to help the imperial court train the army and teach the populace methods of commerce.

Pham Phu Thu held that when there are modern ships, we must have a team of people who know about technology, are proficient in waterways, and have experience when going out to sea. Therefore, he introduced an initiative to establish a maritime school to train human resources specifically for this sector. He explained that, *“It is necessary to establish a maritime school, covering all sea territories, deep and shallow river mouths, nautical miles and degrees of the nation's maritime routes and neighboring countries, along with all methods and tools for preparation and repair of ships in the maritime industry, drawing diagrams for study, and making instruments for practice...”* [7, p.1391]. Through this, we see his long-term vision in developing the waterway transportation system. However, he set selection criteria for learners who must meet all conditions: they must be tú tài (baccalaureate) candidates, recruited extensively from provinces, aged 30 or below, and physically healthy... after finishing their studies, they needed to take a qualifying examination to be appointed as officials and assigned to ships in the provinces. This proved the vision regarding the recruitment of human resources for this industry.

Alongside the policy of training a scientific and technical team, Pham Phu Thu also actively built a repository of scientific and technical terminology in our country. To express encyclopedic concepts and scientific and technical terms that were new and completely foreign to Vietnamese people at that time using the ancient Han language, Pham Phu Thu had to create a type of synthetic scientific terminology ensuring all three requirements: scientific, national, and modern [3, p.481]. The fact that Pham Phu Thu painstakingly researched and gave birth to scientific and technical terms enriched Vietnam's Vietnamese treasury; until now, these terms are still used daily for communication as well as work.

Simultaneously with training resources and building a synthetic scientific terminology system, he promoted the dissemination of science and technology. Pham Phu Thu took specific practical actions to implement his reformist ideas. Specifically: he rebuilt the Hai Hoc Duong publishing house (established during the Gia Long reign (1802) but later closed) with the purpose of promoting the woodblock printing tradition of Lieu Chang

village; he reprinted a number of Western scientific and technical books, written and translated into Han characters by Western and Chinese missionaries such as: *Vạn quốc công pháp (International Law)*, *Bác vật tân biên (New Treatise on Natural Philosophy)*, *Khai môi yếu pháp (Essential Methods for Mining)*, and *Hàng hải kim châm (The Mariner's Compass)*. At the same time, Pham Phu Thu also mentioned several scientific and technical issues such as casting guns, coal mining, steel smelting, glass manufacturing... explaining the features and effects of sulfuric acid in industry. These works were all considered tân thư (new books) of the 19th century, having a strong spread and being supported by scientists and modern scholars at that time. With those efforts, he was honored as “the father of the reform movement in Vietnam” [4, p.62].

Not stopping at printing books for public reading, Pham Phu Thu also performed practical actions such as: When visiting Egypt, he saw an improved tool that was simple yet very suitable for agriculture in his homeland: a water wheel powered by buffalo strength. He immediately had someone draw a model to popularize it in the localities upon returning to the country. He wrote: “*Manufacturing method: Two wheels, one placed horizontally, one placed vertically with an axle inside, a horizontal beam is placed on top to hitch the ox, an axle is placed inside the wheel. At the axle, level with the water, a bucket is hung to scoop water*” [7, p.845]. Later, when widely applied in many localities, this tool truly brought benefits and was highly favored by the people because it reduced human labor and saved time. “*From the 15th day of the leap fourth month until now, it is calculated that using sweep poles to irrigate 2 mẫu (a traditional Vietnamese unit of land area) of fields each year costs 150 quan. He used the ox-drawn wheel machine which cost 15 quan and could scoop water to irrigate 3 mẫu of fields*” [7, p.845]. By 1965, in Dong Ban village (Dien Bien), there were 17 buffalo-powered water wheels irrigating hundreds of mẫu of fields; subsequently, many places inside and outside the province followed suit, and it became a popular irrigation tool... He directly guided craftsmen to build a “new model” sea transport vessel and the “copper ship” named Thuy Nhac. This was a very modern ship at that time. This achievement marked the result of his spirit of responsibility and capability in applying science and technology.

Thus, as a patriotic Confucian scholar with an interest in novelties, when setting foot in France, he spent time observing all aspects, especially science and technology. Being a person with a reformist mind, he embraced scientific and technical knowledge very rapidly. He hoped that what he assimilated would assist him in disseminating science and technology into his country for the purpose of national development and resisting invading enemies. In reality, Pham Phu Thu was the first person to fulfill this noble mission. Along with a number of individuals with progressive ideas, his active operations early on formed a current of thought leading to a fierce struggle between reformism and conservatism.

Reform Ideology on Socio - Politics

In the 19th century, the Nguyen Dynasty step-by-step consolidated its power, building a highly centralized feudal political system. Within this, the King's authority was “supreme”. The Emperor called himself the Son of Heaven - the son of god, ruling the people on behalf of heaven. However, in the context of other nations worldwide preparing to enter the Industrial Revolution, several neighboring countries like Japan and Siam... reforming toward capitalism, and especially while Western capitalists were actively preparing to invade Vietnam, the building of an autocratic, bureaucratic monarchical apparatus in our country was no longer suitable for the era and the historical trends at that time. The Nguyen Dynasty's focus on consolidating the prerogatives and special interests of the royal clan in such a way would not strengthen national unity, but rather hindered the nation's development, making it conservative and stagnant, failing to integrate with the outside world and failing to align with the trends of the times.

Along with several other progressive thinkers, Pham Phu Thu recognized the inadequacies within the contemporary management apparatus. As early as 1850, he disagreed with the “cumbersomeness, complexity” and wastefulness of the head of the Hue court. Noticing that King Tu Duc rarely presided at the Kinh dien (Royal Lecture Hall), Pham Phu Thu submitted a memorial criticizing the King for neglecting court affairs. However, Pham Phu Thu's goodwill was not only unacknowledged by Tu Duc, but on the contrary, he was dismissed from his position and sentenced to hard labor.

In 1865, after being promoted to *Thư Hộ bộ Thượng thư* (Acting Minister of Finance) concurrently serving as

a High Minister of the Cơ mật viện (Privy Council), Pham Phu Thu requested the establishment of four Tuyên phủ sứ (Commissioners of Pacification) in the border areas of Quang Tri, Binh Dinh, Nghe An, and Hung Hoa, specifically as follows: the 9 districts of Cam Lo for Quang Tri, An Tay (west of Binh Dinh), Tran Tay in Nghe An, and Dien Bien district in Hung Hoa. Along with the proposal to establish these Tuyên phủ sứ, he also recommended building citadels, establishing markets, modifying customs taxes, and implementing the measure of “local chieftains having hereditary succession” so that “fathers and sons, brothers and cousins together hold the defenses”... but the matter was not successful [6, p.758].

Thus, it can be seen that Pham Phu Thu was a person of integrity, daring to criticize even the King without fear of being demoted; although he was demoted many times, he never lost his resolve. He was deeply concerned with court affairs and the organization of officials within the imperial court; he advocated building Pacification zones, constructing citadels, and establishing markets... to strengthen the border defenses, protect the nation's territorial integrity, and boldly proposed measures to lead the country out of the invasion of Western capitalist nations, but all of his proposals, as well as those of other reformers at this time, were rejected by the court.

Reform Ideology on Culture and Education

Stemming from practical needs, 19th - century reformist thinkers all asserted the role and urgency of educational reform. If Nguyen Truong To held that the rectification of scholarship is the great root of the nation, and studying to nurture talents is the path leading to wealth and strength, then Pham Phu Thu believed that the root of a country's wealth and strength is the nurturing of talents to seek utility from them; therefore, he placed the issue of education at the forefront.

Pham Phu Thu's reformist ideology on education was clearly manifested in the perspective of practical learning (học thực dụng). He wrote: “*Please promulgate the nation's books to seek true learning*” [7, p.1390]. In this petition, the content he presented was quite concise but succinctly expressed his viewpoint on practical learning. To make learning practical, he proposed “*please grant the books: Việt sử (History of Viet) and Liệt truyện (Biographies) of the subjects of our dynasty, Hội điển (Administrative Repertory), Nhất thống chí (Unified Geographical Records), Luật lệnh (Laws and Decrees), calligraphy model books, etc*” [7, p.1390] instead of only teaching and learning entirely according to Chinese books. This stemmed from Pham Phu Thu's perception of the rigidity, stereotyping, and impracticality of the educational curriculum of that period. According to him, the most necessary learning is to study the history, geography, laws, and customs of our Southern land rather than learning knowledge about astronomy, geography, politics, and customs far away in China. He wrote: “*Our nation's civilization has produced many talents; if we exclusively teach using Chinese books and poetry, being too pedantic about literary logic, I fear we will not utilize all talents; please grant the books: Việt sử and Liệt truyện of the subjects of our dynasty, Hội điển, Nhất thống chí, Luật lệnh, calligraphy model books... to the schools*” [7, p.1390]. This proves he highly valued practical learning, aiming toward a comprehensive education.

He proposed that the examination regulations should be re - examined: the terms of the examination sessions, the criteria (requirements) for selecting candidates, focusing on training talented people, and reforming a number of subjects and examinations; “*including the investigation of examination session terms and the selection of students, who naturally must know historical precedents, understand work and the implementation of governance, which would be very beneficial, added with beautiful handwriting, so that both form and substance may be brilliant and clear, thereby reaping the utility of a foundation of practical learning*” [7, p.1390]. He also valued the annual selection of talented and virtuous people, so in a letter sent to the Dien Phuoc Association (Dien Ban), he clearly stated: “*I wonder how many names will be famously mentioned in the selection session at the beginning of next year's month, how many people will have their stains washed and flaws polished, serving as a deterrent and lesson for future generations? This matter relates to customs, the hearts of the people, and serves as a model for the progressive classes of the future; it is not a small benefit and is a specific solution*” [7, tr.1369].

Pham Phu Thu further proposed opening foreign language schools and translating foreign books to examine the situation of neighboring countries. He suggested establishing a translation agency under the Ministry of Rites (bộ Lễ) to translate foreign books and documents; then selecting intelligent officials, granting them

positions and salaries to go there to learn to speak and write languages such as English, French, Siamese... After that, they would teach the younger generation. He wrote: *“Please appoint an official with dedicated responsibility for interpretation to hope for achievement; please select officials: Chủ sự, Viên ngoại, Lang trung, one person for each rank (with generous salaries) to go to the translation houses for foreign languages, managing the officials originally belonging to the Hanh Nhan office to bring books teaching English, French, Siamese, Cambodian, divided into each subject for study”* [7, p.1391]. Besides that, he also offered the idea of establishing a boarding French language school in the west of Hue city in 1865, but not until more than 10 years later (1875 - 1876) did he implement it in Hai Phong when he served as Governor - General. According to him, learning from the West was not only about learning foreign languages and customs but also about learning their science and technology to reform the country. To encourage the study of Western characters, Pham Phu Thu granted students one quan of money and one phuong of rice each month.

Thus, with the above measures, we see that the education he conceived had to be practical, had to meet the need for raising people's intellectual standards, and aimed toward the progress of the era's civilization - scientific and technical civilization - a comprehensive education suitable for all ages.

In socio-cultural life, Pham Phu Thu emphasized religious solidarity for national reconciliation. He also proposed that the imperial court implement specific measures to ensure solidarity between secular people (lương) and Catholics (giáo), such as regarding priests, officials should convene them to clearly state what needs to be done and use sincerity to advise them. Regarding parishioners, officials must use the law to teach them to write, avoid wrongdoings, and be cautious when adjudicating matters related to parishioners. All those proposals aimed to implement the motto of winning people's hearts: *“even a worn-out broom can still be considered for use.”* He himself, far from discriminating between secular and religious people, also had an attentive attitude of assistance, thus gaining the affection and trust of priests, bishops, and Catholic followers.

Reform Ideology on Military and Diplomacy

In the circumstances of Vietnam during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, reformers clearly perceived the weakness of our nation's army against the weaponry strength of the French. Therefore, they held that the immediate task was to urgently overhaul military affairs, invest in military equipment, and manufacture weapons...Pham Phu Thu believed that to protect the nation, one must be self - reliant, meaning one must possess military strength and specific solutions:

“Cultivating the body, value lies in self-reliance

Advise the four limbs of the body not to be lazy

Caring for national affairs means preparing armaments

Not for a single day can they be neglected

Let alone this matter must be suppressed” [7, tr.871].

Stemming from the above viewpoint, Pham Phu Thu introduced many specific solutions to consolidate and strengthen the army's power, such as: Adding civil officials to commanding positions in the military, as well as a strategy of utilizing talented people based on merit to assign positions; the Vũ khố (Armory) Bureau should have the function of manufacturing cannons; purchasing Western cannons (as our cannons were pipe - style weapons from the Gia Long era, nearly 100 years outdated), and the army increasing marksmanship training; organizing military recruitment meticulously in localities to avoid personnel shortages; behaving flexibly with the French to request them to train our soldiers; establishing a Maritime School to teach nautical technical research; researching our coasts and river mouths and those of neighboring countries; repairing ships; and drawing maps of Vietnam's coasts and rivers; increasing salaries for military officials and soldiers. He regarded salary increases as a medicine that influenced the preservation of integrity and self-reliance. He wrote: *“increase emoluments for nourishment to encourage scholars, dedicate generals to strengthen the troops. For if emoluments are insufficient, it harms the people; if generals have no power, the troops disintegrate,”* and *“following duties from dawn till dusk while emoluments are insufficient to substitute for*

plowing and hoeing, it is hard to expect everyone to possess the conduct of a gentleman scholar” [7, p.1432].

Regarding diplomacy, after analyzing the world situation and the balance of forces between us and the enemy, Pham Phu Thu's diplomatic stance was to temporarily “reconcile” with France merely as a way to gain time to reform the country, open foreign relations, learn Western science and technology, consolidate forces, and plan for national recovery. Simultaneously, Pham Phu Thu argued that it was necessary to exploit the contradictions between France and other countries - specifically the major contradiction between France and Britain - and exploit internal contradictions among the French.

In the strategy for dealing with France, Pham Phu Thu employed very flexible and dynamic measures, not rigid but continuously developing through each stage; in which, the urgent requirement was to develop national internal strength. In 1867, he submitted a memorial presenting the goals to be implemented for reform and self-reliance, consisting of three stages: (1) Maintaining a truce with France to gain time to develop the military and commerce; (2) When the economy develops, the imperial court will negotiate using economic compensation measures to have Western colonialists withdraw their troops; (3) When the nation's economic potential is strong enough yet France maintains an aggressive attitude, then “vow to never live under the same sky”. Depending on specific situations, appropriate measures would be introduced, such as: When France first began to attack, we use the form of righteous volunteer armies to support the imperial troops. When Cochinchina was lost: “do not provoke but do not let them do whatever they want” (bất thích bất tùy). With these three stages for dealing with France, it is not difficult to recognize his new points in the process of struggling against the French, manifesting progressive thoughts, logical thinking methods, and decisiveness in all situations.

It can be seen that Pham Phu Thu was also very flexible in diplomatic work; he avoided unnecessary friction in relations with France but still upheld the nation's laws. He guarded against their plot to utilize parishioners and strictly prohibited those who used religion as a pretext to gather and cause disorder. He advocated “respecting etiquette, not using force to conquer others” (tại lễ, bất lực chinh). But simultaneously, it was necessary to expand relations with other countries to avoid “being isolated” or “being despised”. Pham Phu Thu advocated a temporary peace and concessions with France, but at the same time advocated for expanding diplomatic relations so as not to face France alone. Therefore, he also advocated establishing diplomatic relations with Britain, Spain, and Prussia to limit French manipulation. Additionally, he focused on establishing diplomatic relations with South Asian countries, including Thailand.

CONCLUSION

Pham Phu Thu is regarded as a reformer with a non-traditional reform path. He proposed reforms with rich content across many aspects: economy, science and technology, socio - politics, education - culture, military - diplomacy... His ideology manifested a new level of thinking in solving the nation's urgent issues. A new economic thinking toward commodity economy development instead of the petty - peasant economic thinking was proposed. An outward - looking, broad diplomatic thinking was constructed. A tolerant and open cultural thinking was initiated. An advanced, practical, and comprehensive educational thinking based on the Western model replaced traditional education. His national reform efforts aimed to raise internal strength, restore the country, and strengthen the military to be capable of resisting foreign invasion. Pham Phu Thu's contributions to national history are truly respectable; for they both manifested the nation's aspirations and met the historical requirements set forth at that time.

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