

ĐÔNG KINH PRIVATE SCHOOL OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE VIETNAMESE EDUCATION RENOVATION MOVEMENT IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

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1. In order to recognize the value and impact of Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness, his story should be placed in the historic context. It is obvious that the emergence of Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness in Vietnam in the early 20th century originated from certain historic conditions. Under the impact of the first colonial occupation from 1897-1914 by the French following the 40- year war from 1858- 1896, Vietnam had undergone drastic social changes. It was changes in the economy and society that facilitated new bourgeois ideologies in Vietnam through China and Japan at this time. In charge of new ideologies were progressive patriotic feudal intellectuals who had attended Confucianism schools.

Many of them were very successful, namely, Lương Văn Can, Nguyễn Quyền who were true patriots, who saw the breakdown of old academic systems and the inadequacy of Confucianism in saving the country.

Accordingly, they eagerly absorbed a bourgeois academic system from the West, the weapon that the enemies were using to appropriate the country and rule the people. For patriotic feudal intellectuals in the beginning of the 20th century, improving

culture was the primary key to national liberation. It might be concluded that it was an ideological revolutionary, a change in thinking that totally differed from the old way of thinking, and the use of the enemies' own weapons to beat them. Educational renovations were an inevitable measure, a breakthrough in initiating other changes.

Along with the Hue Court's signing of the Patent on 6 June 1884 the feudal class had no more historic role in the country. From the later part of the 19th century to the early 20th century, complex changes of national and international historic context left feudal patriotic intellectuals with the ruling revolutionary power represented in the bourgeois ideology which was growing among the people. It was also evident that two trends of revolution originated from the degree to which feudal intellectuals were affected by bourgeois ideology due to many factors, but especially great patriotism and a steadfast will for independence.

2. Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness's educational revolution was expressed both in academic content and pedagogical methods.

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First, the academic content. One could easily find that the school's main objective was to be a force against foreign domination and a force to bring about national liberation. Within a few months, Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness's committee edited a great number of textbooks such as *Quốc dân độc bản, Việt Nam quốc gia sử, Nam quốc vĩ nhân, Quốc văn giáo khoa thư, Luân lý giáo khoa thư, Việt Nam quốc sử lược, Nam quốc địa dư*. (1). Most importantly, *Văn minh tân học sách* (1, tr.113-134) was edited in 1904, three years before the school's establishment. It was considered to be the school's guidelines. On a basis of a national pride, the analysis of the Vietnamese people and land, and the comparison between our country and other countries in the world, patriotic feudal intellectuals came to the clear-cut conclusion that, "For the time being, in order to achieve civilization, intellectual improvement for people is indispensable." They kept brainstorming to, "find the way to improve people's intellectual standards. Among difficulties and obstacles six ways were found," referring to six guidelines, four related to education.

- First, the use Vietnamese script. It was the "first step to broaden our minds."

- Second, a focus on Vietnamese books while editing them because such books, "provide materials of rivers and canals, customs, civics, literature, and history which can be used as examples for later generations," as well as to carefully check evidence, quotes in and translations to Vietnamese, and "good sayings and features of Eastern and Western ideas, old and modern philosophies, and good works of the people and their ways of life."

- Third, change examination methods, leave out the style of parallel constructions,

only Vietnamese script and Mathematics should be examined, encourage discussions among students who are allowed to, "discuss and answer freely," as long as the study and examinations are not contradictory to their future work.

- Fourth, encourage talented people to pursue education, give graduates work at ministries and institutes, and for those who do not know French, specialized books should be provided for theirself study (*Cải cách Công pháp, Tây sử, Luật lệ, Hội điển, Địa đồ, Toán học v.v...*).

Through these four guidelines it is obvious that the revolutionary spirit was very strong.

Feudal intellectuals' determination, bravery, and their wish for self-improvement would be more appreciated given Vietnamese historic background in the beginning of the 20th century. For the first guideline, they confirmed the convenience of Vietnamese script, "its spelling and pronunciation are simple, quick." (1, tr. 123, 125). Their patriotism and devotion to the people of those from Confucianism schools, their advocacy of new things which were seen as useful to the country's improvement is worthy of high appreciation. Also with that, they got rid of old conservative ideas, and were ready to welcome the new things though they were brought by Western people. For the second guideline, with the same spirit, realizing the weaknesses of old teaching methods and education contents they called upon the immediate selected learning the essence of foreign cultures. For them rare books such as *Khâm định Việt sử cương mục, Thực lục, Liệt truyện (history); Nhất thống chí, Lịch triều chí, Địa dư chí, Gia Định chí, Đồ Bàn thành ký, Hưng Hoá thập lục châu ký, Nghệ An phong thổ thoại (geography); Công hạ kiến văn, Vân Đài loại ngữ, Phủ*

Man tap lục... (military and politics) were available. Chinese and western histories should be, “read to get the general idea,” “wordy and lengthy parts should be left out to facilitate the simplicity,” (1, tr. 123, 125).

It could be said that the French plot to colonize Vietnamese education by forcing people to study French, their attitude then expressed admirable bravery. It was their deeds that failed the French plot to assimilate Vietnamese education as well as its people. Those used to attending French-Vietnamese schools could never forget the sentence, “Our forefather is *Gaulois*,” which was taught to young Vietnamese children from the first day they came to school. When moving up to higher grades, they would study French history instead of Chinese history, and for Vietnamese history students read articles praising the Mother Country, Great France!

For the third guideline, which mentioned the examination adjustments, things were much more positive. Right from the beginning, it was confirmed that although books had been edited, perfection could not be achieved without examination adjustments! In my humble opinion it was a great combination of concurrent learning and working guidelines.

The fourth guideline was to encourage talented people by providing graduates with work at ministries and institutes. It is common knowledge that people with studies should be used.

It was beyond people’s expectations that Confucianism followers who had been trained traditionally in a rigid style could have initiated new teaching methods which promoted independent thinking and using graduates based on their majors after their graduation, as well as the retraining old people with new things, which even now

have not been done effectively.

In short, the four education guidelines of Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness which were introduced in “*Văn minh tân học sách*,” expressed their vision for revolutionary improvements. That such guidelines were proposed by old people shows that most of feudal intellectuals in the early 20th century were patriotic and confident in new things. They were true national intellectuals.

The education guidelines mentioned above were applied in editing textbooks and establishing curriculum which was based on the new guidelines by China and Japan with a focus in Natural Science, Mathematics, Geography, History, Literature, Civics, and even Sports and Physical Exercises. For older students of upper grades who were competent at Chinese script and were used to writing the old examinations in Chinese “*Tân thư*” were used as teachers. For younger students, the school actively edited some Chinese books and Vietnamese script books as learning and propagandizing materials. *Quốc dân độc bản*, the most important book, was regarded as a textbook of Civics combined with general books focusing on the need for democracy and self reliance.” For history and geography, *Đại Việt địa dư*, *Nam quốc địa dư giáo khoa thư*, *Nam quốc vĩ nhân truyện*, *Nam quốc giai sự*, *Cải lương môn học quốc sử giáo khoa...* could be named. *Luân lý giáo khoa thư* in terms of Ethics was thought as “national essence, education root” (1, tr.148). Patriotic literatures by Phan Bội Châu, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền, Phan Châu Trinh...and finally references imported from China and Japan especially *Toán pháp tu tri*, *Cách trí tu từ*, *Bác vật tân biên*, *Nông chính toàn thư*, *Quản khuy trắc lệ* ... could be named.

Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness's main content was meant to fight against the backwards thinking of conservative feudal intellectuals and to call on people to learn Vietnamese script and about new technical sciences to improve the country's business and industries, all of which were new things demanded by students because of their necessity.

Certainly a part from attractive, new, and practical teaching methods and good, thorough lectures, the sense of conversion was also much increased. Further more, in order promote a passion for learning among students and the wish to explore new things, schools held a lot of lectures, literature sessions, newspaper and literature lectures, extra curricular activities, and additional curriculum to provide students chances of enhancing their active roles by contributing to the lessons.

3. In general, Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness was not only a school, but also a revolutionary organization established by advanced patriotic feudal intellectuals whose trends were to systematically renovate the patriotic movement waved by Phan Bội Châu and Duy Tân. Despite having separate guidelines they shared the goal of liberating the country. After nine months of operation from March to December, 1907, Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness fostered a public, legal, effervescent, and determined revolutionary movement regarding both cultural and ideological fronts. It was the bourgeois oriented ideology that helped the country prepare spiritually for the cause of national revolution in the new age.

Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness took the leading a role and achieved great educational, cultural, and political accomplishments. It was the educational cultural improvement that

contributed to the brooding national bourgeois economy. Though Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness was finally beaten by the enemies' frantic persecution, the school's impact was engraved in people's minds. It made a contribution to awakening the country's patriotism, to initially attack feudal ideology, to pave the way for bourgeois ideology, accordingly, to contribute spiritually to the later, more widespread revolutionary movements. Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness's experiences and his plentiful activities and other public schools in the north and central regions would be inherited and upheld by later revolutionary movements, providing both a wider range of a content and methods.

More than ever, updated and efficient lessons from Đông Kinh Private School of Righteousness in terms of school organization, curriculum establishment, and textbook editing, and the combination between advanced educational content and appealing imparting methods. Above all he developed the heart of teachers and the humanity of teaching future generations, all of a noble objective of serving people, the revolutionary cause, and the liberation of the nation, which should be studied and applied seriously and creatively in the new context. As stated by the Party and the State, "education is the leading policy."

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