



## TRUONG VINH KY'S PROGRESSIVE EDUCATIONAL VIEWPOINT - FIRST TEACHER OF VIETNAMESE NATIONAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION<sup>i</sup>

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### Abstract:

At the beginning of national language education in Vietnam, Truong Vinh Ky is considered a "pioneer" in many issues: the first teacher of the national language, the first national language linguist, and the first national language journalist who served as chief editor of the first national language newspaper. Truong Vinh Ky life has undergone many arduous times and has been evaluated in many different respects, but it is undeniable that his great contributions to the Vietnamese culture during the period of transmutation from the Middle Ages to the Modern period. In particular, his conception of education which has a lot of progress that is still meaningful until today. By using methodologies such as statistics, analysis-synthesis, and comparison, this paper clearly points out Truong Vinh Ky's progressive educational viewpoints, including: building a national education, for the development of the Vietnamese nation; objectives and knowledge attached to practice; excellent teacher's standards. These are still the central objectives of Vietnamese education.

**Keywords:** ethnicity, national language, teacher, Truong Vinh Ky, Vietnamese education

### 1. Introduction

Truong Vinh Ky (1837 - 1898) is considered a special cultural phenomenon in the second half of the 19th century in Vietnam. Until now, the research works on his life and career continue to be born. In the field of education, Truong Vinh Ky is considered the "first teacher" of education in the national language of Vietnam. In his 61 years of life, Truong Vinh Ky has devoted more than 30 years to educational activities. His educational career

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<sup>i</sup> QUAN NIỆM TIẾN BỘ VỀ GIÁO DỤC CỦA TRƯƠNG VĨNH KÝ - NHÀ GIÁO ĐẦU TIÊN CỦA NỀN GIÁO DỤC QUỐC NGỮ VIỆT NAM

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began in 1866 at the Interpretation School until his death in 1898, during which Truong Vinh Ky focused on activities: teaching in the classroom; researching, writing, and publishing books and textbooks; translating from Chinese, Nom characters (Vietnamized scripts from Chinese), French to Quoc Ngu (Vietnamized scripts from Latinization); journalism. Studying this process shows us the educational concept of a talented, dedicated, dedicated, and diligent teacher with the true value of a new education. These concepts contribute to an important orientation for determining the educational philosophy of Vietnam in the current period.

## 2. Research methods

The article used a number of approaches in literary fields such as statistics, analysis - synthesis, and comparison to clarify the progressive conceptions of education of Truong Vinh Ky, and at the same time, showed the meanings and values of these ideas that concepted in the current educational context of Vietnam.

## 3. Research findings

The following were some progressive conceptions of education by Truong Vinh Ky.

### 3.1. Building a national education, for the development of the Vietnamese nation

First of all, Truong Vinh Ky wishes to create a modern education in line with the development trend of the world. That is reflected in the fact that he encouraged and pioneered in spreading the national language script - the language in Latin characters that Western missionaries had worked so hard to build before in Vietnam. Truong Vinh Ky has called, "*The script of Quoc Ngu must become the writing of the country. It must be for the sake of good and evolution. One should; therefore, seek to disseminate this word by any means*" (Collected articles & authors, 2013, p.130).

In the opening section of Annam's Tip Book, *Abrégé Grammaire annamite*, Truong Vinh Ky argues that Chinese characters "*are words imposed by violence*" (Nguyen Van Trung, 1993, p.143) of the Chinese feudal government. It is the type of hieroglyph that has "*killed*" (the word used by Hoang Lai Giang, a Vietnamese writer in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the recorded word of our country before. Therefore, he considered Chinese characters not the national language of Annam (Vietnamese). At the same time, Truong Vinh Ky clearly saw the limitations and obsolescence of Chinese and Nom characters, so he wanted to build a new script for his nation.

On the other hand, being fluent in many foreign languages, Truong Vinh Ky had clearly recognized the superiority as well as the enduring value of the national language script for the development trend of the world. Quoc Ngu script could help Vietnamese stand "on par" with French, English, and other languages in Southeast Asia (through his translation and language research works). Thus, it would help the Vietnamese people to

"comparable with the great powers" of the five continents. And in fact, history has proven that superiority of the national language script.

Second, according to Truong Vinh Ky, the national language is the national language, the "*net Annam language*" (Ancient story). That is, only the national language script reflects the words and voices of the people of Annam. From there, they can understand and learn very quickly. Therefore, it should be widely disseminated among the population. In his work *The Tale of Old Life (Contes Annamites, 1867)*, Truong Vinh Ky asserted that he "*mixed up and mixed-up stories about that and that, printed it out so that children could learn to read the national language script, with the same meaning. For foreigners who want to learn Annam language, learn to understand and get used to it. Now we are reprinting this book, because it has run out, and because people use this book to learn the language, it will be useful. For in it the way of speaking is the way of speaking pure Annamite; there are many languages and many commonly used sentences*" (Truong Vinh Ky, 1867, p.15).

Thereby, not only did Truong Vinh Ky want to help the Vietnamese people be literate and have their own letters, but he also wanted that type of script to help the world know about Vietnam. That is the great vision of a prominent teacher.

Today, the concept of developing the national language script is still a matter of concern for Vietnamese education. We are always proud of "*Our Vietnamese language is rich and beautiful*", and always call for "*keeping the purity of the Vietnamese language*" in the context of the influence of hybrid languages. This shows that Truong Vinh Ky's conception of the development and preservation of the national language script is correct and has humanistic values for the Vietnamese people.

### **3.2. The purpose and knowledge of teaching are associated with the practice**

The knowledge taught by Truong Vinh Ky is associated with practical problems in the daily life of the An Nam people (Vietnamese people): learning letters, learning history, learning geography, products, professions, literature, and art. Vietnamese traditional ethics. Since then, Truong Vinh Ky advocated a comprehensive educational program. This program according to Nguyen Dinh Dau, "*Since the 20s of the next century, the group wrote popular textbooks such as Tran Trong Kim, Nguyen Duy Ngoc, Dang Dinh Phuc, Do Than with books on Vietnamese history, National Literature Textbook, Ethics, Textbook... were all influenced and oriented by Truong Vinh Ky*" (Collected articles & authors, 2013, p.130).

Firstly, it is the recording of instructive stories in folklore. Right from his first work *The Tale of Old Times*, he stated his purpose: "*Speaking: The story of the past, because it is the story of the greats before us to praise the good, and criticize the bad, so that people can correct their ways. eat and live well - be kind*", "*also for people to see praise and imitate, avoid criticism*" (Truong Vinh Ky, 1867 p.15). This work includes 74 stories that Truong Vinh Ky recorded from the words of the people. The work is mainly about moral education, guiding how to live, and how to treat people in life. Sometimes at the end of the story, there is also a comment by Truong Vinh Ky. For example, at the end of the story *Wisdom rather than strength*, the author stated: "*This story speaks of a lowly, incompetent little man, but often takes advantage of the powerful and bullies the common people. Again, it is said that a person who has*

*a great position of power and magnanimity, yet has a strong and unscrupulous attitude, so that the people below him can deceive him” (Truong Vinh Ky, 1867; p.89).*

On the other hand, Truong Vinh Ky is also interested in explaining the meaning of his works and lectures so that readers and learners can understand the value of the work. In his work *Historical Memories of Saigon and Its Surrounds* (1885), Truong Vinh Ky stated his purpose clearly that: *“Today I want to sketch a picture of both the old and the needles of Saigon...Let’s go for a walk. Throughout old Saigon, visit all the areas and voice your observations both geographically and historically. How was Saigon in the past? Before and under Gia Long Dynasty? How were under Minh Mang, Thieu Tri and Tu Duc? What was the scene of Saigon when the French invaders first arrived?” (Truong Vinh Ky, 1885, p.7).* Or in the work *Co Gia Dinh Bay landscape* (1882), although Truong Vinh Ky only had the role of *"copying the national language"* and *"interpreting"*, his purpose was *"to talk about the landscape of Saigon in the past. The French invaders did not take it, took it inside Ben Thanh, Cho Soi to go to Cho Lon, Cho Gao, Lo Gom, Cay Go, Phu Lam, Cau Bong, Thi Nghe, Go Vap, roads, villages, houses, streets, pagodas, temples, and animals on land and under the boat are all... Special Van was good enough to tell the old stories of the old names, and mention the vestiges to pass on to future generations to remember” (Truong Vinh Ky, 1885, p.15).*

Thus, according to Truong Vinh Ky's point of view, if we want others to understand what we are saying, we must first say the meaning of our evangelism. From there, orient learners according to the goals they have set. In the field of journalism, when he was appointed Chief Financial Officer of Gia Dinh newspaper - the first national language newspaper in Vietnam, Truong Vinh Ky drafted a text and printed it on the first page. In it, he clearly stated the meaning and purpose of the birth and dissemination of Gia Dinh newspaper: *"This journal is useful to everyone because it contains everything about the people, the orders of Chief Superintendent, and the will of the people. later how the same is how people do; in it, one learns about the trade; up there, Chau Doc and Ha Tien knew the price of goods at Saigon Cho Lon, but sat in one place and didn't go anywhere, so if he wanted to buy and sell, he met with adoration, and knew even the individual prices of the goods of the Big Markets” (Gia Dinh newspaper, 1969).*

Accordingly, Truong Vinh Ky always clearly and specifically defines the purpose and meaning of his teaching activities. Teaching knowledge is rich and diverse but close and practical. Expressive words are things associated with people's daily life and speech. Those are not sublime, great knowledge, nor are they mere theories. Therefore, most of the works that Truong Vinh Ky left behind have profound meanings.

### **3.3. The teacher is brave, dedicated, loves his job, and dedicates his life**

First and foremost, Truong Vinh Ky is an erudite foreign language teacher. It can be said that he is one of the scholars who know the most foreign languages in Vietnam. Huynh Van Tong (2000) commented that: *“What everyone notices is that Truong Vinh Ky can be proud to be the first Vietnamese intellectual with extensive education to expand to the West. Although most of them were self-taught and studied in the convent, his foreign language ability was remarkable” (Huynh Van Tong, 2000, p.63).* According to the research, he knows about

26 languages, in which, he "*speaks and writes fluently Latin, French, Spanish, English, Chinese, Malay, Cambodian and Siamese*" (Collected articles & authors, 2013, p.130).

The cause comes from both objective and subjective conditions. Objectively, due to circumstances, Truong Vinh Ky was educated in the Church's environment under the patronage of priests: two years at Cai Nhum church, three years in a Cambodian religious school, and eight years in seminary Dulaima in Malaysia. Since then, he was learning Latin and interacting with many international friends in Southeast Asia: Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Myanmar. Therefore, he has the opportunity to know more languages. However, the most important subjective cause is Truong Vinh Ky's intense efforts and passion. Most of the time, Truong Vinh Ky is self-studying and self-taught languages. In his career of about 120 works, there are about 50% of his works on language research, including many research works on vocabulary, communication sentences, and language structure of other countries such as France, Laos, Malaysia, Indonesia, China, Myanmar, and Thailand.

These works were published sporadically over the years, but most concentrated in 1894. Thanks to his ability to know many foreign languages, Truong Vinh Ky was used by both the Nguyen court and the French colonial government. He was conferred with titles and held important positions in the French administration: as an interpreter in Phan Thanh Gian's mission to France (1863), "*Director*" of the School of Interpretation (1866), "*Chief Financial Officer*" Gia Dinh newspaper (1869), "*Language Professor*" at the Colonial Pedagogical School (1871), "*Professor of Oriental Languages*" at Hau Phu School (1873), "*Member of the Standing Council in charge of study all matters related to primary school and education inspection*" (Collected articles & authors, 2013, p.174).

With his experiences in that Southern education, Truong Vinh Ky proposed reforming the education system in a more modern direction: abolishing the way of learning from chapters, establishing study associations in localities, and building an Academy based on Western ideas. However, for the sake of governance, France only partially absorbed his ideas. These ideas were not implemented until the early years of the twentieth century with the end of the examination system in Hue in 1918. Thereby, it showed that Truong Vinh Ky was a man who dared to change, dared to innovate, and dared to propose. produce radical ideas. That is a necessary quality for educators and educational administrators.

Second, Truong Vinh Ky spent a lot of time, enthusiasm, and energy researching, drafting, and publishing documents for education. As a teacher, Truong Vinh Ky focuses on two areas: teaching and research. In which, Truong Vinh Ky's research field has left a rather voluminous career. According to the statistics of the authors in the anthology in the XXI century looking at Truong Vinh Ky, Truong Vinh Ky has 121 works of different genres: research books, researches, textbooks, dictionaries, translations... The content often mentioned by him is comparative research, transliteration, language translation (from Chinese, Nom to Quoc Ngu or French (Mencius - Mencius (1894), Luc Van Tien (1888), Story Kieu (1886)), studying languages of other countries: Cambodia (Vocabulaire Francais - Cambodgien, 1894), France (Grammaire francaise, 1872), China (Grammaire de

langue chinoise, 1894), Malaysia (Guide de conversation). Malaise - Francaise, 1894), Laos (Cours de langue Laotienne, 1894), Indonesia (Cours de langue Inoustante, 1894) and so on.

These studies, although academic, have practical significance to help Southeast Asian countries at that time "*understand each other better*". Today, we are expanding academic links and cultural exchanges between these countries on the basis of their understanding of their languages. In addition, there are textbook works such as Old Life Story (1866), Annamese Practice Textbook (1868), Law Tips for Teaching Lang Sa Language (1869), Sub-textbook on the geography of Cochinchina (1875), Kim Van Kieu story (transliteration, 1875), Quoc Ngu self-immolation (1876), Research works on ethnographic topics: Yellow ants and foul ants (1866), Types of Annam boats (1875), Talk about seaweeds (1876).

Talking about his life's efforts, Truong Vinh Ky admitted himself: "*I was born at the end of my life, thanks to the grace of being imbued with fragrant books, I try to learn from the ancients tirelessly, learn to be human, not for the sake of profit. People think that today's world is messy, the righteous path is more degenerate, the pure style is more relaxed, if there is no good intention, how can we be excited to work to restore the righteous path, promote the good, dare to forget the roughness of our lives? Edit it yourself, add your own ideas later, use a pen instead of words to think for the next person. Not daring to overtake the ancients, hoping for someone to help, hoping for "great peace and happiness" isn't a good thing? That is what I hope so deeply that I happily console myself*" (Nguyen Van Trung, 1993, p.107).

That is the ideal of a true, dedicated, calm, and humble teacher. A noble personality, not greedy, self-seeking. All for the sake of humanity and national development. Thus, it can be seen that, with extraordinary efforts and a pure mind, Truong Vinh Ky deserves to be an exemplary teacher at any educational stage.

### **3. The influence of Truong Vinh Ky's cultural activities on Gia Dinh newspaper**

From the cultural activities carried out, when working in the field of journalism, Truong Vinh Ky has shown consistency with those activities.

In terms of language, Truong Vinh Ky has advocated writing what is related to speech, and daily life, not to mention the high or glossy, elaborate because the nature of the press is to reflect objective reality as it is. However, combined with erudite knowledge, Truong Vinh Ky used many different languages in creating journalistic works (French, Chinese, Nom, Quoc Ngu) to create diversity of languages, and language in journalistic work.

Regarding the topics of the scope of real life, the content reflected in the journalistic work is only the things in daily life: from changing officials, building schools, hospitals, specialized in fighting. price, house fire, premature death, jealousy, business, livestock, farming, and to the stories of the outside world. All are narrated by him through short messages or stories. teaching, guiding, and explaining so that the public can better understand it and apply it to life.

In terms of knowledge, he has always proved to be an extrovert, absorbing the advanced knowledge of Western culture in order to want to help his people get rid of backwardness and stagnation through the knowledge of new fields such as astronomy, climatology, linguistics, ethnography, global geography. From there, helping people overcomes their narrow thinking and boldly reach out to the world.

#### **4. Conclusion**

By studying the concepts of education of the first "national language teacher" Truong Vinh Ky, we see the meaning and value of these progressive concepts. After more than 130 years, these concepts still have practical significance to this day. Issues of ethnicity, practicality, and requirements of teachers' competence are three of the many prerequisites of modern education. That shows the mind and scope of this "sage". Currently, Vietnamese education is searching for and defining an educational philosophy. I think, in order to build that philosophy, it is necessary to study the nature, meaning, and value of Vietnamese education. To do that, it is necessary to study the development of Vietnamese education from traditional to modern. In particular, it is advisable to selectively absorb educational values in periods of innovation and breakthrough development.

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#### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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