



## TRAN QUOC TUAN'S POLITICAL THOUGHTS

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### **Abstract:**

Tran Quoc Tuan's political thoughts emerged and developed in the particular historical condition, when Vietnamese people carried out resistance wars three times against Yuan - Mongolian invaders in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, so his thoughts were deeply realistic. Although his political thoughts did not actually become a coherent ideological system but they were filled with many viewpoints and thoughts which were ahead of his time and had some very unique features and values. They were national characteristic and inheritance feature with positive adaptation and deep humanistic spirit. Tran Quoc Tuan's political thoughts were expressed in some aspects, such as (1) putting the national interests above all the interests of an individual; (2) dignifying the role and position of the people in the struggle for national construction and national defend; (3) building strategies to construct the country and fight against foreign invaders.

**Keywords:** thoughts; adaptation; nation, country; patriotic; national defend

### **1. Introduction**

Tran Quoc Tuan's ideas reflected profoundly and vividly the social reality of Đại Việt country in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The process of formation of his patriotic, political and military thoughts associated with the resistance war against Yuan - Mongolian invasion. His thoughts, which were indicated comprehensively and deeply in the fields of politics and military, have been meaningful until today.

#### **1.1 Biography of Tran Quoc Tuan**

Tran Quoc Tuan (about 1232-1300) was born in Tu Mac village, My Loc district, Nam Dinh province, Vietnam. Tran Quoc Tuan was intelligent, studious and soon famous for both literature and martial arts. When he was a child, Tran Quoc Tuan always cultivated knowledge as well as trained his mental and moral qualities. When he grew up, he was not only an exceptional talented General who was not only good at military tactics with unyielding fighting skills but also an intellectual and a preeminent talent of

our country. In three times of Yuan - Mongolian invasion into Dai Viet country, he was all appointed by King Tran to be a Commander-in-chief to lead the army to fight against the enemy for the country salvation. Especially, in the war resistance against Yuan - Mongolian invaders in the second and the third time, he was nominated as Grand Duke to command the whole army. Under his leadership and military tactics, Dai Viet army and the people made the victory in Chuong Duong, Ham Tu, Van Kiep, Bach Dang, then expelled Yuan - Mongolian troops out of our country; and his great merits were recorded in the history of Vietnamese nation. After the war resistance against Yuan - Mongolian invaders were successful in the third time, the country was peaceful and Tran Quoc Tuan retired to live in Van Kiep.

The works of Tran Quoc Tuan mainly comprised: *Binh Thu Yeu Luoc* was a famous work of military ideology; *Hich Tuong Si 1284 (Call of Soldiers)*, which advised all soldiers to study and train martial arts, learn and acquire military tactics and encourage patriotism of Vietnamese people and soldiers. *Van Kiep Tong Bi Truyen Thu* was a military artistic work of Tran Quoc Tuan. Additionally, Tran Quoc Tuan also imparted many sayings, which were deeply philosophic aiming at reminding and admonishing people, are so valuable instructions for any King who holds the whole state destiny through the ages. The most typical statements which enlightened his thoughts, determination and his noble personalities were mentioned in the history. To him when the fatherland is in danger he fails to eat during the day and to sleep at night. Tears roll down his cheeks and his heart bleeds as if it were being cut to shreds. He trembles with anger because he cannot eat the enemy's flesh, skin his enemy alive, chew up their livers, and drinks their blood. He would gladly surrender his life a thousand times on the field of battle if he could do these things. He thinks that the King and all his inferiors must be unanimous, all the families must be harmonious and all people make contribution to build the country, etc.

## **2.2. The content of Tran Quoc Tuan's political thoughts**

Political ideas which always arise from some certain economic-socio conditions reflect and respond to economic-socio relations of a certain society. After thousands of years of hard work, tense and persistent struggle, which was aiming at adapting to the nature, Vietnamese people have built for themselves a unique culture, a flourished Red River civilization, a united political organization, which led to the establishment of rural commune - one of the premise for the formation and development of Van Lang state (700-258 BC) and Au Lac state (257-208 BC). The arrival of Van Lang - Au Lac states created a significant development step for opening up a new era of building and defending the country from invasion and marked the birth of politics and formation of political ideology.

Political ideology under Ly-Tran Dynasty marked a new development milestone of political thinking; fundamentally changed from the sovereignty and national independence ideology to build a sustainable nation, prosperous traditional customs; from the political philosophy which mainly protects the country from invasion to the philosophy of building an independent, prosperous nation with long-term fate, helping

the people be wealthy as well as bringing happiness to the people. The political thoughts in this period were vividly expressed through some concepts and profound political philosophy about "the people's ideas", "the people's popularity", "dignifying the people", "pro-the people policy". They reflected a strategic vision in a new historical period, such as "gaining the people's popularity", "the people's will is the rampart for defending the country from invasion," "consensus", "harmony" ... etc.

It can be said that the outstanding political ideology of this period is still patriotic ideology, the compassion for the people, the deep hatred for the enemy and determination to fight against Yuan - Mongolian invaders in order to preserve the independence, sovereignty of the Fatherland. The political thoughts of Tran Quoc Tuan, which merged and formed not only basing on the historical, economic, and political – social conditions, but also reflected the urgent demands of Dai Viet society at that time. They were expressed the following major contents such as; firstly, patriotism and the national spirit; secondly, the ideas about the people.

### **2.2.1 The patriotic ideas and the national spirit**

In the viewpoint of political philosophy, "*patriotism is the principal of moral and politics as well as a social sentiment, the content of which is people's love and faithfulness to the Fatherland, the pride of the past and present of a country and the will to protect the benefits of the Fatherland*" (Philosophical Dictionary, 1975, p. 712). Patriotism was formed soon and tested over thousands of years through the resistant war of building and defending the country from invasion. So, the patriotic tradition has been fostered and developed during a long time to become one of the noblest and the most stable traditional values of Vietnamese nation. Under Tran Dynasty, patriotic thoughts played a key role in assembling the people and launching the war against Yuan- Mongolian invaders. The patriotic thoughts of Tran Quoc Tuan were expressed lively through some contents, such as; first, the will and the deep hatred for the enemy; second, the concern and worry for the safety of the country; third, the spirit for protection of the national independence and the determination to fight against Yuan - Mongolian enemy.

In term of Tran Quoc Tuan's will, the deep hatred for the enemy and the wholeheartedness for the cause of national salvation and resolve to fight against Yuan - Mongolian invaders, all of which were shown specially, mainly in the Call of Soldiers. In this work he praised the heroism, inviolable fidelity and sacrifice for the country. The conception "faithful subjects and righteous officers" indicated one feature of patriotism under Tran Dynasty. It was a vivid and specific manifestation of the Vietnamese patriotism in the feudalism, which is used to fight against invaders. Tran Quoc Tuan exemplified some faithful subjects who dared to sacrifice themselves for the country. He considered faithfulness as a compulsory requirement that each person subject must show towards the King. Under Tran Dynasty, the perspective of faithfulness also associated with the concept of filial piety. Filial piety is not just the relationship between parents and children, but also the relationship between an inferior to the King. Filial piety implies the loyalty, so infidelity is disloyalty. Accordingly, filial piety did not only

advise everyone to be grateful to their parents, but also asked them to be faithful to the King. So, filial piety is regarded as a political principle, not just a moral norm.

Tran Quoc Tuan thought that "piety" is the root of "loyalty". If anyone is not dutiful to their family, they may become rebellious against the King. He said: "*Any inferior is rebellious due to their undutiness towards their parents*" (The Complete Annals of Đại Việt, 2009, p. 331). "*Tran Quoc Tuan was also appreciated as a man, who was heroic and skillful at military stratagem, was wholehearted to conserve his loyalty*" (The Complete Annals of Đại Việt, 2009, p. 332).

Regarding King and his subjects' relations, the loyalty is dignified but the loyalty here is attached to the patriotism, not just only faithfulness to the King and the reign. In the Tran Dynasty, the King and his people's relations were consentaneous and not completely separate from each other. "*Apparently, even though the whole world has to serve a noble person – the King; but seen from the inside matter, my people and he are flesh-and-blood compatriots with the same worries and the same fun; after an audience, we will feast on together; if anyone who does not go home at nightfall can stay and sleep in the palace in order to show their compassion for each other*" (The Complete Annals of Đại Việt, 2009, p. 292).

To be a Commander who was profoundly patriotic and felt hatred for Yuan – Mongolia enemy, Tran Quoc Tuan was heart-broken and felt great anguish at the sight of the country which was trampled by the enemy. He appealed to soldiers for being determined to defeat the enemy to achieve the victory; we did not accept humiliation of losing the country. He pointed out the crimes of the enemy; took the fidelity to provoke the self-esteem of martial soldiers. Tran Quoc Tuan criticized a part of soldiers that "*you remain calm when your King is humiliated; you remain indifferent when your country is threatened. You, officers, are forced to serve the barbarians and you feel no shame*" (Institute of Arts, 1989, p. 391). From the deep hatred for the enemy, Tran Quoc Tuan censured the neglectful attitude of some soldiers towards the humiliation. He sternly awakened some soldiers who still lived in luxurious surrounding. With his patriotism, his love for the people, he willingly sacrificed himself for the country. "*If I would gladly surrender my life a thousand times on the field of battle, or even my dead body was wrapped in horse leather, I would vow myself to sacrifice*" for our beloved Fatherland.

Tran Quoc Tuan sternly condemned the soldiers, who immersed in the pleasures of drinking, singing, cock fighting and gambling, got rich and forgot the national work; or someone who were keen on hunting game but delayed the military work; and someone who were not studious for martial training and learning military tactics. If we unfortunately were defeated by the enemy, the disastrous consequences would be immeasurable. "*If Yuan - Mongolian troops overflew into our country, all of us would be captured. What grief! And not only would I lose my fief, but your property would fall into enemy hands, too. It would not be my family alone that would be evicted, but your wives and children would also be reduced to slavery. It would not be only the graves of my ancestors that would be trampled under the invader's heel, but those of your ancestors would also be dug; both was I suffered from the humiliation in this life for a hundred years later, which could not be avenged, and your reputation was blackened as defeated Generals forever.*" (Institute of Arts, 1989, p. 392).

Tran Quoc Tuan clearly spoke out the great cause in order to help all soldiers know that being faithful to the King and dedicated their lives to the country are honorable. If we lost, or surrendered to the enemy, which led to losing our country, we would be named as defeated and humiliated Generals. Patriotism and faithfulness under Tran Dynasty were highly expressed from the aristocrat class, soldiers to the masses strata. Tran Quoc Tuan proclaimed towards King Tran that "*When my head is not off, our state will be safe. Please do not worry about this issue, Sire.*" (Institute of Literature, 1989, p. 386). Tran Quoc Tuan's patriotism is the crystallization of the patriotic tradition and cultural elite of Vietnam. He was the best military Commander who led the army to protect the country and the interests of the aristocracy under Tran Dynasty, so his patriotism was expressed in the most powerful way.

### **2.2.2 The ideas about the people**

Tran Quoc Tuan had some greatly profound perspectives towards the people, especially the ideas of "respecting people", "having-good-relationship-with-people policy", "people are the root of a country". When talking about the people, he was mentioning about the crowded and tremendous force in the society, who can make wealth, material and spiritual values of society. They are the basis, the foundation of a society. They are the pioneering force who fights against the oppression and exploitation in order to promote the progress of social development.

Dignifying the people is seriously esteeming the people's ideas and thoughts, benefiting the people, upholding the role and immense power of the people; considering the people's power, ideas and thoughts as the core issue to decide the fate of a country. Tran Quoc Tuan attached great importance to the issue of unity, which he tried to consolidate the solidarity among the entire people and imperial families in order to take advantage of the people's consensus. He said "*A flamingo can fly high due to its six wing feathers, without these six wing feathers, it is just as a usual bird*" (The Complete Annals of Đại Việt, 2009, p. 304). Accordingly, some heroic individuals who can demonstrate their role and make history have to thank to the assistance, support and consensus of the masses. Tran Quoc Tuan generalized the philosophy of the people's role in the People's War, which was the entire people's unity, the national participation to fight against the enemy. This is the common philosophy of every just war against the invasion in historical process of Vietnam.

Tran Quoc Tuan approved the "pro-the people" policy, which expressed the closeness to the people, strongly attached to the people, took care of the people's lives, relied on the people, all of which in order to manage the society and national development. The thoughts which were "pro-the people" policy and "the people are the root of a country" were actually progressive and soon appeared in Vietnam. In the ruling course of every King, he is always aware that gaining the popularity of the masses means that the country will be prosperous; on the contrary; being unpopular with the masses can lead to decay of a country. Evidently, the King must love the people, benefit the people, bring up and take care of the people, all of which aim at strengthening the country power.

Tran Quoc Tuan promoted the policy which was “taking the people as the root of a country”. The people are inextricably linked to the country. A country must have the people; a country is set up by the people; anywhere there are no people, there is no country; so that the people are the foundation of a country. The political thought about “taking the people as the foundation of a country” is like “a red thread” throughout the entire political ideology of Tran Quoc Tuan. It is shown in the following issues (1) The people are considered as a great force who create materials and wealth for the existence of the society; (2) The people are the root of a country, the foundation to consolidate the Dynasty, who can build and develop the country; (3) the state must respect the people, love the people, exist for the benefit of the people; (4) the people’s power, ideas and thoughts are the core issue to decide the fate of a country. Tran Quoc Tuan said that “*The people are the root of a country, if the root is decayed, the state sustaining elements will decline*” (Institute of History 1977, p. 249). In the process of preparing and practicing strategies and tactics to fight against Nguyen – Mongolia enemies, Tran Quoc Tuan, he maintained the People’s war.

Tran Quoc Tuan laid “gaining the people’s popularity” policy<sup>1</sup>. He claimed that the people are the basis to conduct the resistance war for national defence. Tran Quoc Tuan said that in order to build a stable and powerful society, the King and all his inferiors must be unanimous, all the families must be harmonious and the whole people make contribution together to build the country. Tran Quoc Tuan affirmed that building the people’s trust towards the King was a prerequisite for building and defending the country. Evidently, Tran Quoc Tuan has made greatly generalized notions about the people, the role of the people in the resistance war as well as promoting the strength of national unity in fighting against the enemy.

### 3. Discussion

In Tran Quoc Tuan’s political ideology, he always upheld the spirit of independence, self-reliance and self-strength, which were manifested in the following ways (1) The patriotism, the will to secure the national independence and determination to defeat Yuan - Mongolian invaders; (2) affirming the national independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country; (3) constructing Dai Viet to be powerful in all aspects. Tran Quoc Tuan respected the spirit of independence, self-reliance and the sense of self-strengtheness among the people. He cheered the patriotism of soldiers, the Army and the whole people of the country, who were ready to fight against the enemy creatively in all conditions and determined to protect the national independence firmly. Tran Quoc Tuan carried out the People's war properly, artistically, creatively, which based on the whole people’s patriotism and resilient willing to fight against invaders and promoted the spirit of community unity and the military tradition for more than a thousand years of Vietnamese, which is known as fighting the large-scale troops by the small-scale troop, taking the small numbers to win great numbers.

In his political thoughts, Tran Quoc Tuan highly promoted the patriotism in the cause of building and defending the Fatherland. Tran Quoc Tuan upheld the national

spirit, which put the national interests above all, implemented the requirement of strengthening the national unity in order to fight against foreign invaders. We desired to defeat Yuan - Mongolian aggression and defended the independence, sovereignty, national interests of our country from Yuan – Mongolian invaders at first. Being patriotic, compassionate for the people and faithful to the national interests, Tran Quoc Tuan attempted to keep the piety which is the subjects' faithfulness to the King, the children's filial duties to parents and considered the Fatherland as the most vital issue in his life. Absorbing national spirit and the concept of "the people are the root of a country", "patriotism and compassion for the people" and "national salvation is to save the people", Tran Quoc Tuan concluded all these factors into the book, name of which is "*The best policies for defending the country from invasion*". This is the assets for the cause of building and protecting the country later through the special thought "gaining the popularity of the people is the best policy". Tran Quoc Tuan did not only promote the patriotism in the Tran Dynasty through the national spirit, but also showed the vivid unique patriotism which was associated with the spirit of independence, indomitable resilience, national unity and sacrifice for the country.

Tran Quoc Tuan always thought that "people are the root of a country" and the solidarity of entire nation in the cause of protecting the national sovereignty and independence. Along with high sense of independence, self-consciousness of national building, highly promoting patriotism in building the country and fighting against aggressors, Tran Quoc Tuan also inherited and absorbed some ideas which were about the people, tradition of national unity, promoting the strength of national solidarity, and creating synergy to fight against Yuan - Mongolian invaders. This is a very progressive idea which is ahead of the times. National unity is a system of viewpoints about the principles, educational methods, assembly and organization of the revolution, which aims at promoting the highest level of national strength and strength of times in the career of struggle for the national independence.

### **3. Conclusion**

It can be affirmed that the political ideology of the Tran Quoc Tuan was deeply realistic. Although his political ideology has not really become a coherent system but it contains many viewpoints and thoughts, which have lasted through the centuries. They are patriotic thinking, relying on the people, gaining the people's popularity and building national unity. In order to develop the country, Tran Quoc Tuan laid down a policy promoting virtuous and talented people, selecting brilliant people to serve the country. These political thoughts were proper, innovative, ahead of the times with the significance towards the history and reality for the construction, development and protection of the country today. Tran Quoc Tuan with his contribution to a good political background, based on "having-good-relationship-with-people policy" and "considering people as the root" policy, remained its precious values until today.

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