



## Philosophical Thoughts of Le Quy Don

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### ABSTRACT

Le Quy Don was not only a distinguished statesman, deeply imbued with national pride, self-respect, and profound patriotism, but also a man of remarkable erudition. His extensive knowledge spanned multiple fields, including philosophy. This was reflected in his contemplations on key concepts such as “dao” (dào - the Way), “ly” (lý - principle or reason), “khi” (qì - vital energy), “Thai cuc” (Taiji - the Supreme Ultimate), as well as “am” (yīn - yin) and “duong” (yáng - yang). Moreover, his philosophical thought encompassed profound reflections on human nature, governance by law, ethics, and morality, emphasizing the cultivation of virtues such as humaneness, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, loyalty, and filial piety

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## INTRODUCTION

Le Quy Don (2-8-1726 - 11-6-1784), from Dien Ha village, Son Nam Ha town, now Dong Phu village, Doc Lap commune, Hung Ha district, Thai Binh province, his childhood name was Le Danh Phuong, his courtesy name was Doan Hau, his alias was Que Duong, he was an official in the Le Trung Hung period, and a great scholar of Vietnam during the feudal period. Le Quy Don's works include: 1. Books discussing classics and stories: Dich Kinh phu thuyet (Shallow Commentary on the Book of Changes), consisting of 6 volumes. Thu Kinh dien nghia, consisting of 3 volumes, engraved and printed, with the author's title dated 1772. Xuan Thu luoc luan. 2. Books researching ancient books: Quan thu khao bien (Examining and Discussing Books), consisting of 4 volumes.

Thanh mo hien pham luc (Recording about the models of the sages), including 12 volumes. Van dai loai ngu (Speech, divided into types, in the place where books are read), including 4 volumes, written in 1773. The book is divided into 9 sections, each section is divided into many articles. 3. Books collecting poetry and literature: Toan Viet thi luc, including 20 volumes (according to Phan Huy Chu), but currently there are 15 volumes left. Hoang Viet van hai (The King's pool of literature in the country of Viet), is a book collecting good essays. 4. Books researching history and geography: Dai Viet thong su (History of Dai Viet), including 30 volumes (according to Phan Huy Chu), written in 1749. However, currently only a few parts remain: De ky (2 volumes), recorded from the year Le Loi rose up (1418) to the year he died (1433). Nghe van chi (1 volume), recording about literary books. Biography (11 volumes), records the concubines, princes, famous ministers (during the reign of King Le Thai To) and the rebels (from the end of the Tran dynasty to the Mac dynasty).

Dai Viet su ky tuc bien (compiled by Nguyen Hoan, Le Quy Don, Vu Mien). Bac su thong luc (Recording all the events during the diplomatic mission to China in 1760-1762), 4 volumes, written in 1763. Phu bien tap luc (mixed notes on the politics of the border region), 6 volumes, written when the author was appointed as the Deputy Governor Tham Tan quan co in Thuan Hoa prefecture (1776). Kien van tieu luc (Short notes of things seen and heard), 12 volumes, with the author's title dated 1777. This is a collection of notes about the history and culture of Vietnam from the Tran dynasty to the Le dynasty. Am chat van chu, 2 volumes, records the instructions of Chinese scholars, with the author's corrections. Lich dai danh than ngon hanh luc, consisting of 2 volumes, recording the work of famous ministers of the dynasties. 5. Poetry and literature: Lien Chau thi tap, consisting of 4 volumes, recording the poems of Le Quy Don and other poets, and the responses of poets of the Qing and Goryeo dynasties when he was an ambassador to China. Que Duong thi tap, consisting of 4 volumes. Que Duong van tap, consisting of 3 volumes. Regarding Nom literature, now there are only: The seven-word eight-line poem "Ran dau lat hoc". The classic essay: "Vang chi nhu gia, tat kinh tat gioi, vo vi phu tu".

The essay asking about the sentence “Get a husband worthy of a husband, worth the effort of beautifying red cheeks and black teeth”. The classic essay: “Mother, I want to get a husband”. The “khai” (open, start) poem written in prose recorded in *Bac su thong luc*.

With profound knowledge, Le Quy Don became the “synthesizer” of all knowledge of the era, including philosophical thoughts, expressed in world views, on perception, on politics-society and human ethics that were very rich but no less strict and profound.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A growing body of scholarship has sought to illuminate the life and intellectual contributions of Le Quy Don (1726–1784), a preeminent Vietnamese Confucian scholar, statesman, and polymath. Existing literature predominantly focuses on his encyclopedic erudition, literary legacy, and historical significance within the cultural and political milieu of 18th-century Đại Việt. Foundational texts such as *Vietnamese Literature Map* by Thanh Lang and Bui Hanh Can’s *Le Quy Don* (1985) present rich biographical portraits and celebrate his moral virtues and national spirit, yet often offer only superficial accounts of his philosophical depth. Similarly, Phan Huy Chu’s monumental *Lich Trieu Hien Chuong Loai Chi* (1992), especially in the sections “Nhan vat chi” and “Van tich chi,” serves as an invaluable bibliographic and historiographic source, cataloging Le Quy Don’s extensive writings without offering a systematic exploration of the conceptual structures embedded within them.

Further contributions by Duong Quang Ham (*Summary of Vietnamese Literature History*, 1986), Van Tan (*The Person and Career of Le Quy Don*, 2012), Tran Van Giap (*Studies on Han-Nom Books*, 2003), and the editorial team of *Phu Bien Tap Luc* (2012) all reinforce the image of Le Quy Don as a towering figure in Vietnamese intellectual history. These works collectively reaffirm his place in the national canon but rarely treat his philosophy as a coherent or innovative system of thought. More philosophically oriented texts—such as Doan Chinh’s *History of Vietnamese Philosophical Thought* (2013), Nguyen Dang Thuc’s *History of Vietnamese Ideological Thought* (2005), and Le Manh That’s *Vietnamese Thought from the 13th to 19th Century* (2001)—move beyond biography to engage with his metaphysical and ethical ideas. These studies identify key elements of his worldview, including notions of *dao* (the Way), *li* (principle), *qi* (vital force), *Taiji* (Supreme Ultimate), and the dialectics of *yin* and *yang*, alongside Confucian moral categories such as *ren* (humaneness), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (ritual propriety), *zhi* (wisdom), *zhong* (loyalty), and *xiao* (filial piety). However, such references are often fragmentary, and the interpretations remain general, descriptive, or confined to Le Quy Don’s role as a transmitter of orthodox Confucianism. Crucially, the philosophical literature lacks rigorous analysis of the internal logic, coherence, and originality of Le Quy Don’s thought.

His metaphysical propositions, cosmological views, epistemological reflections, and political-ethical positions have not been systematically reconstructed, let alone critically evaluated in comparison with contemporary thinkers in East Asia such as Zhu Xi, Wang Fuzhi, or Ito Jinsai. There is also little attempt to trace the development or transformation of his ideas across different works – from *Van Dai Loai Ngu* (Categorized Discourse from the Great Library) to *Kien Van Tieu Luc* (Informal Records of Learned Knowledge). Furthermore, while Le Quy Don's thought is often contextualized within the framework of Vietnamese Confucianism, few studies interrogate how his work both conforms to and departs from Chinese Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, particularly in his subtle fusion of metaphysical speculation with empirical observation, and in his nuanced stance on the role of *li* and *qi* in the structure of reality.

Another major lacuna lies in the under-theorized contemporary relevance of Le Quy Don's thought. His reflections on law, governance, education, and moral cultivation offer fertile ground for re-examination in light of modern philosophical discourses on legal rationalism, virtue ethics, and the ethics of responsibility. Despite his frequent invocation in Vietnamese intellectual and cultural history, Le Quy Don is rarely positioned within the global history of philosophy or integrated into comparative studies of non-Western thought systems. Most existing works remain largely philological or historiographic in orientation, with limited engagement from contemporary philosophical methodology.

Moreover, many of Le Quy Don's philosophical writings remain untranslated or under-translated, and those that are available often lack critical annotation or thematic organization. This linguistic barrier continues to constrain broader international engagement with his ideas. Thus, there exists a substantial gap in the literature: the absence of a focused, interdisciplinary, and philosophically rigorous study that reconstructs Le Quy Don's thought as a systematic worldview, situates it within regional and global contexts, and explores its relevance to current theoretical and practical concerns.

This article seeks to address this gap by offering a critical reappraisal of Le Quy Don's philosophical thought. It aims to reconstruct the key metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical foundations of his work; assess their coherence and distinctiveness within the broader East Asian Confucian tradition; and reflect on their potential contributions to contemporary philosophical discourse.

## **METHODOLOGY**

**Purpose:** From the general presentation of Le Quy Don's life and career, the article presents and analyzes to clarify the content of Le Quy Don's philosophical thought from worldview, outlook on life, epistemology, to socio-political issues fundamentally and systematically.

**Methodology:** The article is approached from the perspective of historical philosophy, cultural philosophy and value philosophy, and the authors also use specific research methods such as the method of unifying logic and history, analysis and synthesis, induction and interpretation, abstraction, generalization, comparison, comparison, and literary method.

Main Findings: First, present an overview of Le Quy Don's background and career. Second, systematize the content and basic characteristics of Le Quy Don's philosophical thought on the following aspects: worldview, epistemology, expressed in the views on "dao" (dào, road, way) "li" (lǐ, reason), "khi" (qì, qi), "Thai cuc" (Taiji, Extreme), "am" (yin) and "duong" (yang); socio-political issues, expressed in the views on people, on moral governance and rule of law; ethical issues, morality, promoting the ethical views of humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, neutrality, filial piety, etc.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Views on the world in Le Quy Don's philosophical thought: Based on the absorption of the thought of the Book of Changes as well as the thought of Song Confucianism, Le Quy Don presented the universe and all things through the categories of "dao" (dào, road, way) "li" (lǐ, reason), "khi" (qì, qi), "Thai cuc" (Taiji, Extreme), "am" (yìn, yin), "duong" (yáng, yang). However, Le Quy Don had his own views on these issues. Different from the cosmology of Zhou Dun Yi (1017 - 1073) in the Theory on Taiji diagram: "From the infinite (wújí) it is Extreme (Taiji). Extreme (Taiji) moves and gives birth to yang (yáng). When it moves to its fullest, it is still, and from stillness it gives birth to yin (yìn). One movement and one stillness are the roots of each other. When yin and yang are separated, two principles are established. Yang transforms and yin combines to give birth to water, fire, wood, metal, and earth", Le Quy Don, believes that "Extreme (Taiji) is one, the first chaotic energy. One gives birth to two, two gives birth to four to form all things" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 38).

The main idea in his philosophy is: Extreme (Taiji) is one (the greatest source is one). This source is the origin, not born from any entity. This greatest source generates heaven and earth. Heaven takes emptiness as its body, emptiness is the way of heaven. Earth takes stillness as its body, stillness is the way of earth. All things come from heaven and earth, the original virtue from heaven for all things to originate is qi (qì), the original virtue for giving birth to all things is form. Therefore, heaven and earth have qi and form, all things receive qi and form. He wrote: "How great is the virtue of heaven! All things begin thanks to heaven, that is talking about qi. How great is the virtue of earth! All things are born thanks to it, that is talking about form.

Talking about heaven and earth, they all have form, they all have qi; talking about all things, they all come from the qi (qì) of heaven, and take shape in the earth" (Don, Van dai loi ngu, 1995, vol. 1, p. 53). He believes that the way is the body of heaven, earth, and all things. "The Road (way, dào) exists within things. Every thing has a Road (way, dào)" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 25). The Dào is understood as the characteristics and laws of things; the Road (way, dào) does not play the role of an entity that creates a Extreme (Taiji). The view of "nothingness" and "being" in Le Quy Don's ontology: In Van dai loi ngu, Le Quy Don wrote: "Closing is nothingness. Opening is being", "being and non-being follow each other" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 38).

Thus, Le Quy Don's view of "being" and "non-being" is fundamentally different from Lao Tzu's view. Le Quy Don understands "being - non-being" as two properties, two states (closed, open) of Extreme (Taiji), therefore, there is no mutual relationship between them. In the "being - non-being" relationship, he definitely leans towards "being", rejects "non-being", and therefore, rejects Lao Tzu's idea of exalting "infinity".

The theory of "li" and "qi" in Le Quy Don's ontology: According to Le Quy Don, "Extreme (Taiji) is the first chaotic qi" which includes both li and qi. Unlike Chu Hy, Le Quy Don did not place li above qi, did not consider li as the way of "the upper form" and qi as the instrument of "the lower form" (Chu Tu ngu loai, vol. 49) like Chu Hy, but considered "li as being in qi" (Don, Van dai loai ngu, 1995, vol. 1, p. 37), "li resides in qi" (Don, Van dai loai ngu, 1995, vol. 1, p. 53). Although Chu Hy always said "li never leaves qi", "having li means having qi" (Ngu loai, vol. 1), he still had to admit: "In fact, li comes first, but we cannot say that today there is li, and tomorrow there is qi. But there must be before and after." (Chu Tu toan thu, vol. 49). In Le Quy Don, the relationship between li and qi is the relationship between rules and material existence. Principle, therefore, exists attached to objects, within objects, and cannot exist outside objects, or apart from objects. Principle exists in the air, not in the sense of a mysterious existence, but it "relies on the air to manifest itself" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 37).

He considered li as the law of the operation of qi. Le Quy Don wrote: "The whole space between heaven and earth is qi. The word "li" is only to say that it is something real, not nothingness. Li has no form, and human energy appears. So li is in qi. Yin, yang, mechanism, coincidence, knowledge and action, substance and use, can be spoken of against each other; but li and qi cannot be spoken of against each other" (Don, Van dai loai ngu, 1995, vol. 1, p. 53). Le Quy Don affirmed: "Li means to say it is real, not that it does not exist" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 37) to deny the concept of li as "infinite" of Trinh and Chu. Thus, li is a real existence. And on that basis, he did not oppose li with qi, as two elements belonging to "upper metaphysics" and "lower metaphysics". His concept of qi clearly shows the materialist stance on the world: "everything in the sky and earth is qi."

Viewpoint on cognition in the philosophical thought of Le Quy Don: As mentioned above, li is one of the fundamental categories in Ly hoc of the Song Dynasty, meaning rule, principle, spirit, abstract, invisible, in contrast to khi which means temperament, instrument, concrete, visible matter. Depending on the philosophical stance of materialism or idealism, li is conceived to come before or after qi. In Le Quy Don's philosophy, he did not oppose li to qi. He said: "Yin and yang, odd and even, knowledge and practice, substance and use can be placed opposite each other to talk about. But li and qi cannot be placed opposite each other to talk about" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 37). He also considered li to be an attribute of qi, something abstract, without form and li exists in qi, thanks to qi, li can appear.

The principle here is not the spiritual entity but the rules of existence and development of things. He wrote: "If there is a thing, there is a rule" (Book of Songs and Interpretation)... Therefore, according to Le Quy Don, in perceiving things, one must perceive the principle, that is, perceive its rules and nature; the purpose of perception is to discover the hidden existence within things.

However, Le Quy Don's epistemology also revealed an idealistic and metaphysical viewpoint when he proposed the concept that matter has life (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 40). This concept originated from the ancient East about the mysterious transformation of creation. Due to the mysterious mechanism, all things have a change in state: "The qi of heaven sinks down, the air of earth rises. The air of heaven and earth are both life" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 40,41). "The mysterious mechanism is sometimes bad, sometimes good, sometimes in order, sometimes in chaos, it is exactly like that". Therefore, he considered heaven and earth to have "temperament", the air is "miraculous", very sophisticated, humans, heaven and earth all have "spirit", thanks to that "heaven knows, earth knows - Thien tri, dia tri". In terms of social-historical cognition, he proposed combining both "reason" and "the situation" to "break down the old wall and rebuild a new verdict".

According to Le Quy Don, "knowing "li" without knowing "the situation" is not enough to accomplish anything; understanding "the situation" without knowing "li" cannot determine the matter" (Don, 1997, p. 465), so he proposed a comprehensive viewpoint when perceiving society and history: "It seems that few people can fully understand both "li" and "the situation", but often attach it to their own understanding, and frame it on one side" (Don, 1997, p. 465). Therefore, to accomplish and determine things, one must grasp the rules of society (li) and the agents who are operating society by material force (by the situation), not by the Mandate of Heaven. Unfortunately, that policy cannot be implemented in a conservative, stagnant feudal society.

Regarding the method of cognition: Le Quy Don advocated associating cognitive events with the economic and social circumstances of the era that produced it. Because of this determination, he found that "when putting one's mind into that era, putting oneself in that situation, one often feels moved [before the events of] ancient times" (Don, 1997, p. 467). Thus, human cognition and thought have a certain relationship with the material conditions that produced it. Otherwise, it cannot become the truth. Furthermore, he also believed that perceiving the "right" to find the "wrong" and vice versa, looking at the "wrong" to find the "right" can see the meaning, otherwise one will fall into "bias" or "pretentiousness". He highly valued the role of humans: "Fate is created by humans, not fate creates humans. The principle of heaven and man being one" (Don, 1995, vol. 1, p. 52).

Besides, his concept of society and people sometimes revealed the idea of predestination, when he said: "The prosperity or decline of the country... the fate of scholars are all predetermined in the sacred underworld" (Don, 1997, p. 340). This is a teleological view of society and history.

The political and social viewpoint in Le Quy Don's philosophical thought: First of all, it is Le Quy Don's viewpoint that "the root of the country is the people". In the work *Quan thu khao bien*, when he said: "The root of the country is the people, the king's destiny is also the people. The powerful ministers causing chaos inside, the hostile countries causing trouble outside are not too worrying. Only when the people's hearts waver is it very scary" (Don, 1997, p. 340). That scary thing, according to him, is because the people's position is a "landslide" position that nothing can stop. That position is born from the changes because the people's hearts are not at peace. He said: "If the people are not at peace, it is easy to cause changes, the people easily cause changes is the "landslide" position. Therefore, he reiterated the argument in Luc Gia's New book: "To build a country, create prestige, expand territory, and subdue distant places, one must first win the hearts of the people" (Don, 1997, p.197).

The second is Le Quy Don's view that the people's hearts are the driving force of social development: Le Quy Don always affirmed that the people's hearts are related to the rise and fall of the country. He wrote: "... to be pleased by the people of all countries", but if the people's hearts are lost, the country will be lost. Therefore, according to him: "If you know how to improve your virtue to win the hearts of the people, then the heroes of the world will be willing to follow..." (Don, 1997, p.164). But to win the hearts of the people, you must know how to use virtue to lead the people, and use rituals to restrain the people (morality uses ethics, discipline uses rituals and rules. He repeated the words of Van Duong Phu in *Dat Chu thu*: "The people are hundreds of millions of people, and the king is only one person. How can one person fight a large number of people?" (Don, 1997, p.89). He cited the story of Tu San "burning the books at the gate of Thuong Mon to gain the people's trust" (Don, 1997, p.90) to prove his advice. So, governing the country "needs to only make the people happy" (Don, 2007, p.61).

However, pacifying the people is not the only strategy. Le Quy Don also pointed out the relationship between "people" and "soldiers" and "money" and affirmed that the three things are always linked together to survive. "When the army is tired, money is exhausted, the people are miserable, and the state has no good plan for the future, it can only accept failure" (Don, 1997, p. 203).

He also proposed a way to choose talented people: Choosing a general must also be someone "admired by the people" (Don, *Quan thu khao bien*, p. 331). According to him, "intelligent kings, although considering the use of talented people as urgent, still want to nurture more talent and virtue so that their will for the great cause can be more successful" (Don, p. 425).

Regarding Le Quy Don's national pride and self-respect: During his trip to Yen Kinh, when the Dai Viet embassy passed through the Chinese prefectures, they were all called "di quan di muc" (Savage mandarins) by the Qing Dynasty officials, meaning barbarian officials. He spoke out in protest. From then on, they abandoned these derogatory terms and called the Dai Viet embassy the An Nam Cong su. In his work *Kien van tieu luc*, when talking about the regime and rituals of the Chinese feudal dynasties, Le Quy Don affirmed: "In the South, the two dynasties of Ly and Tran were famous for their culture." (Don, 2007, p.61). *Quan thu khao bien* is a book that mainly studies Chinese ideology and philosophy,

with deeply researched and illustrated discussions about their historical events. Through that, Le Quy Don also did not miss the opportunity to talk about the Song Dynasty learning the military tactics of the Ly Dynasty of Dai Viet, which according to them was a “very talented” way of using troops, and had to “teach the generals” and “practice in that way”. Thanks to that, the Song Dynasty won many places and became a powerful and prosperous country (Don, 1997, p. 458).

In the *Van dai loi ngu*, with the spirit of national pride, he mentioned that in the early years of the Yongle period, the Ming Dynasty invaded our country, sent people to learn how to make cannons from Ho Quy Ly and Le Trung, thanks to which “this weapon was passed on to China.” (Don, 2007, vol. 2, p. 82 -83). *Dai Viet thong su* is a typical manifestation of Le Quy Don’s spirit and responsibility towards posterity about the nation's foundation since the founding of the country, which according to him “is not inferior to China”, so the fact that the historians of the previous period “made sketchy records” is “reprehensible”! During his time as an official in the southern region, he devoted himself to recording the trading of zinc to mint coins between the Nguyen Lords and the Netherlands, copper with Japan, copper pots and trays brought by Western ships for sale; the casting of guns in Thuan Hoa and clearly recorded the design, color; and characteristics of each type of clock sold by foreign merchants. Studying carefully the “sticky pearl”, “shining pearl” ..., studying carefully the Westerner Tu Ba Tam who worked as an astronomer in the Nguyen Lord’s inner court for 30 years, he brought along dozens of books, all in Western characters. He knew how to use Tu Tam Ba’s “Sea map” to examine the sea route from Thuan Quang to the countries in the region, etc.

When learning about the people of Western countries, Le Quy Don admired them but did not worship them. Through careful observation, he found that: “The Western ginseng brought in by ships is now also favored by the Chinese, one kilogram can cost up to 10 taels of silver. I have drunk that ginseng, and it is dry and tasteless, and it is not beneficial to the vitality. Recently, a person in Hangzhou wrote a book called *Bon thao tung tan*, praising Western ginseng for its ability to nourish the lungs, reduce heat, generate new heat in the body, and eliminate depression, which is also an over-praise” (Don, *Van dai loi ngu*, 2007, vol. 3, p. 210). From this observation, Le Quy Don believed that “what is so strange about ginseng production that we just assume that Chinese ginseng is the real thing, and do we also demand that agarwood, sandalwood, and cinnamon be brought over by ships from overseas?” (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 210). Having traveled a lot and experienced a lot, Le Quy Don affirmed: “Most of the good products are produced in the South, spices, medicines, fruits, vegetables, some of which are not available in China” (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 211).

Le Quy Don highly appreciated talented Vietnamese people who, when studying abroad, quickly absorbed sophisticated techniques, such as Nguyen Van Tu, from Dai Hao commune, Dang Xuong district, Quang Nam, who studied in the Netherlands for two years as a child and “learned the craft, could make various types of clocks and very skillfully make telescopes.” (Don, 2007, p. 421). As a great cultural figure with a sense of national pride, Le Quy Don was very conscious of introducing Vietnamese culture to foreign scholars. During his diplomatic mission to China, he showed his works *Quan thu khao bien*, *Thanh mo hien pham luc*, *Tieu Tuong bach vinh* to famous Confucian scholars of the Qing Dynasty and Korean envoys to read and write prefaces. They all admired him and considered him a “Master of the South”. His exchanges with Korean and Riu Kiu (Japanese) culturalists in China at that time were great contributions to the cultural exchange between Vietnam and the two countries, which Dai Viet envoys such as Phung Khac Khoan (1528 - 1613), Nguyen Cong Hang (1680 - 1732), from the 16th to 17th centuries had contributed to opening up. To limit the influence of Chinese learning, Le Quy Don comprehensively and thoroughly researched this culture. His book *Van dai loai ngu* contained a large amount of information on classical Chinese works and authors such as *Bac Duong thu sao* by Ngu The Nam, *Nghe van loai tu* by Au Duong Tuan, *Thai Binh ngu lam* by Ly Phuong... demonstrating his intelligence.

The reconciliation of virtue and rule of law in Le Quy Don’s political thought: Le Quy Don always nurtured the idea of reforming a declining society into a healthy, peaceful and prosperous society. Le Quy Don’s concept was to promote rule of law. When he was trusted by the Trinh lords, he wanted to rely on the power of the Trinh family to establish a legal system. In terms of politics, he wanted to reconcile the Confucianism's theory of virtue, humanity and rule of law with the Legalism's theory of rule of law, in which “law” is the main one, “virtue” and “rite” are secondary and interspersed.

In the work *Kien van tieu luc*, volume IX: *Thien Dat*, Le Quy Don expressed his respect for the Three Equal Teachings and advised some short-sighted Confucian scholars: “The teachings of the Buddhas and the Laotians are pure, empty, sublime and tranquil, not tied to things, that is also the teachings of the enlightened ones to cultivate themselves; From profound discussions about morality and spirituality, nothing is without mysterious meaning. We Confucian scholars, always holding on to different prejudices, often refuting, is that right?” (Don, 2007, p. 425).

Viewpoints on ethics in Le Quy Don’s philosophical thought: Le Quy Don always kept in mind the importance of speech and action. Speech can express important things with solid arguments worth spreading, but only in action can one see the full wonder and usefulness of speech. Le Quy Don’s life has proven this. He said: “A sage makes speech from a superficial point of view and then thinks about the practical point and finds it profound.” (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 6). For this reason, in his life, he prepared himself with the necessary knowledge.

Although busy with official affairs, Le Quy Don still took the time to read, take notes, write, and study to thoroughly consider what he heard and saw. He advised: "If you can learn one sentence of the words of the sages of the past, you will achieve limitless talent. If you apply them to a village, you will have achieved many benefits. Being born a thousand years later, you are fortunate to see the entire words of the sages. However, if your thoughts and words are contradictory, your understanding and practice are different, your career and fame are not significant, then it is true that saying that many things are useless" (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 6).

Among the issues that the people need to pay attention to, first of all, they need to have a proper attitude towards the people, they need to know how to question themselves, when they make mistakes, they should not blame others or use others as a shield. Le Quy Don advised: "... the person who does the right thing, when the people criticize him, should blame himself, and should not explain himself by saying that the sages were criticized" (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 10).

In the art of behavior, he advocated: "Too hard will break, too soft will fail. Only when there is a balance of hard and soft appropriately can the application be appropriate" (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 12). Therefore, his moral advice to the people is "to be urgent, to postpone, to do, to rest", not to be impatient, not to let go, to be moderate and moderate. According to him, if you want to stabilize the country, you must first win the hearts of the majority of the people; Do not cause resentment among the people, then the political activities will become clear and favorable, meaning, "One must thoroughly understand human feelings before one can talk about politics." (Don, 2007, vol. 3, pp. 10-12).

In handling public and private affairs, Le Quy Don demonstrated the principles of caution, fairness, and distinction. He repeated the Book of Rites: "Public affairs cannot be discussed privately. When in an official position, one should talk about official matters, when in a prefecture, one should talk about prefecture matters, when in a warehouse, one should talk about warehouse matters, when in court, one should talk about court matters. One must be very careful, not only to keep one's position within the scope of not being careless outside, but also to avoid revealing secrets and avoiding the evil of cunning." (Don 2007, vol. 3, p. 12).

In the book Hieu kinh (Books on filial piety) Le Quy Don aimed to remind the ancients of the maturity of a great mandarin in his speech as well as in his actions: "... do not say illegal words, do not do immoral things, speak to the world without making mistakes, do to the world without causing resentment, only then can one maintain the ancestral temple." (Don, 2007, vol. 3, pp. 10, 12).

The virtues and nature, knowledge and talent of a person are difficult to predict because they are "born from their own talents", but to evaluate a person, as well as to win people's hearts, one cannot help but base it on that. Therefore, to achieve that, one must cultivate oneself and train oneself. "Taking purity as the root, taking care and tolerance to preserve, taking respect and caution to practice, treating with fairness, being pure and transparent, upright and harmonious, diligent and simple and quiet to achieve longevity and regularity will certainly win people's hearts" (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 16). Only then will "the

inferiors consider and listen”, “the superiors look down”, “Living in a closed house, one can clearly see from the court to the countryside”, “Fame and reality are all about oneself” (Don, 2007, vol. 3, p. 17). Carrying out that work is a painstaking process like “from a termite nest, one can form a hill.”

He mentioned Ly Binh’s advice to his family members to avoid mistakes in establishing a career: “Anyone who does work, young people establishing a career cannot be careless, do not carelessly comment on anyone, do not carelessly say anything” (Don, 2007, vol. 3, pp. 17, 18). He quoted the family teachings of Lieu Tan of the Tang Dynasty on family rules: “Cultivate yourself with filial piety as the foundation, respect as the root, fear as common sense, diligence and thrift as the rule; Behave in harmony at home, be simple and respectful when interacting with outsiders...” (Don, 2007, p. 20, 21) and he also mentioned that Thoi Vien of the Later Han Dynasty once advised: Do not speak of other people's shortcomings, do not boast of your own strengths, do not hold grudges when doing favors for anyone, do not forget when receiving favors from anyone, do not crave for worldly praise, only take humanity as a basis, think carefully and then act.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Le Quy Don was not only an excellent politician with a high sense of national pride and self-respect, a deep patriotism, a concern for and closeness to the people, understanding the people's wishes, and wanting reforms in Vietnamese society, but also a scholar who loved to read, learn and write, with extremely profound and diverse knowledge. With his profound knowledge, Le Quy Don became a “synthesizer” of all the knowledge of the era, including philosophical thoughts, expressed in the views on “dao” (dào, road, way) “li” (lǐ, reason), “khi” (qì, qì), “Thai cuc” (Taiji, Extreme), “am” (yìn, yin), “duong” (yáng, yang) and the views on people, on rule of law, on ethics, morality, promoting humanity, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, moderation, filial piety... very rich and profound.

That was mentioned by historian Phan Huy Chu in the early years of the 19th century: “He had a different quality, was more intelligent than others but (still) kept a gentle disposition, and studied tirelessly. Although he passed the imperial examinations, his hand never left the book. Throughout his life (he) wrote many books. Discussing the classics and history, he was profound and broad, and talking about allusions, he was complete and clear. His forte was outstanding, famous in the world. The literature and poetry he wrote was called Que Duong tap, which had several volumes” (Phan Huy Chu, 1992, p. 391), “He was a man of extensive knowledge... His poetic style was pure. His words were natural..., flowing freely and abundantly without thinking like a long river or ocean, reaching everywhere, truly the style of a great man” (Phan Huy Chu, 1992, p. 136).

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