

## PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT OF NGUYEN TRAI AND ITS MEANING TO VIETNAM TODAY

[O PENSAMENTO FILOSÓFICO DE NGUYEN TRAI E SEU SIGNIFICADO PARA O VIETNÃ NA ATUALIDADE]

*Kien Thi Pham\**

University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

*Bui Xuan Dung\*\**

Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education, Vietnam

**ABSTRACT:** Nguyen Trai was a thinker who had a significant influence on the history of Vietnamese thought in the 15th century. Nguyen Trai's philosophical thought crystallizes the nation's traditional cultural values, patriotism, and creative inheritance of the good values of "benevolence and righteousness" of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. The article uses the method of dialectical materialism and synthetic analysis to clarify the philosophical thought of Nguyen Trai. The paper describes that Nguyen Trai's benevolence and righteousness. That is a rational connection with the idea of people's favor and people's peace. Manifest in compassion, tolerance, and even enemies. Benevolence and righteousness are both a means and an end. Benevolence and righteousness express in the idea of building a peaceful country. Thereby, the article clarifies the meaning of life education for people, responsible lifestyle, and living for the community for today's Vietnamese generation.

**KEYWORDS:** Nguyen Trai; the thought of benevolence and righteousness; culture of Vietnamese people today

**RESUMO:** Nguyen Trai foi um pensador que exerceu profunda e significativa influência na formação cultural do povo vietnamita no século XV. A partir dos conceitos de "benevolência e retidão", oriundos do Confucionismo, do Budismo e do Taoísmo, a filosofia de Nguyen Trai propõe viver certos valores culturais, tais como nação, patriotismo e herança criativa como guia de ação. O artigo tem por objetivo apresentar as base do pensamento filosófico de Nguyen Trai aplicando o método do materialismo dialético sobre a análise dos conceitos-chave benevolência e retidão. A partir de uma relação interna desses conceitos, Nguyen Trai acredita ser possível estabelecer uma conexão racional que favoreça a paz dos povos, através da compaixão e da tolerância, inclusive com os inimigos. Benevolência e retidão representam a ideia de construir um país baseado na paz. O artigo trata, também, de esclarecer o significado da educação na vida das pessoas, propiciando um estilo de vida responsável e sustentável para a comunidade vietnamita dos dias atuais.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Nguyen Trai; conceitos de benevolência e retidão; cultura atual do povo vietnamita

### *Acknowledgment*

*This research is funded by University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The research also receives funding from Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology and Education, Vietnam*

\* Dr., School of Social Science, University of Economics Ho Chi Minh City (UEH), Vietnam. E-mail: [kienpt@ueh.edu.vn](mailto:kienpt@ueh.edu.vn). \*\* Dr., Faculty of High Quality Training, Ho Chi Minh City. University of Technology and Education (HCMUTE), Vietnam. E-mail: [dungbx@hcmute.edu.vn](mailto:dungbx@hcmute.edu.vn)

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Benevolence and righteousness* appeared quite early in ancient Chinese history of philosophy. Many famous Confucian scholars, including Confucius, Mencius, Xunzi, Dong Zhongshu, etc. discussed a lot about benevolence and righteousness. That's why this is not a new thought. Influenced by that, "benevolence and righteousness" has existed for a long time in our country's history of thought. However, Nguyen Trai's thought of "benevolence and righteousness" reached a new level of the times - something that no one before and even in his time had been able to achieve. In particular, Nguyen Trai's thoughts, especially his thought of "benevolence and righteousness" is not only significant in his own time, but also remains valid until today and perhaps in the future. Therefore, studying the thought of "benevolence and righteousness" of Nguyen Trai and highlighting its significance in the current education of lifestyle are necessary.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this article, we want to clarify the thought of "benevolence and righteousness" of Nguyen Trai in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and its values in constructing and promoting the culture of Vietnamese people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the context of global integration.

Therefore, this article uses methods of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, combining with methods of logic, historical studies, comparison, analysis and summary.

On that basis, the article clarifies the basic contents in the thought of benevolence and righteousness of Nguyen Trai, and through which factors they are expressed; at the same time, it systematizes his thought of benevolence and righteousness. From there, the values of Nguyen Trai's thought for the construction and development of culture of Vietnamese people today are explained.

## 3. IDEOLOGICAL CONTENTS

### 3.1. Biography of Nguyen Trai

In the nation's history, Nguyen Trai (1380 – 1442) is a great intellectual and one of the outstanding leaders of the Lam Son Uprising. He made great contributions in planning strategies to fight against the invasion of the Ming Dynasty and to build the state of the Later Le Dynasty in its early period. Nguyen Trai summarized the regular issues in the struggle to build and defense the nation in history and highlighted the decisive role of the thought of benevolence and righteousness in gaining victory. His thought of benevolence and righteousness was established as the country went through many great changes: the Tran Dynasty was usurped by the Ho Dynasty, and the Ming Dynasty, taking advantage of this development, sent troops to invade and dominate the country. Also, his father - Nguyen Phi Khanh - was captured and brought to China by the Ming troops. Nguyen Trai wanted to go with his father, but Nguyen Phi Khanh refused and advised him to stay and help with the liberation of the country. Following his father's words, Nguyen Trai made great contributions to the planning of directions, policies and strategies to fight against the Ming invasion and liberate the nation. Moreover, Nguyen Trai is also a great thinker of Vietnamese people in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

It can be seen that his thought were clearly shown in 10 years (1407 – 1417) of contemplating and pondering about a way to save the country and the people. In 1418, when the Lam Son Uprising led by Le Loi was initiated, Nguyen Trai quickly travelled to

Thanh Hoa to present his "Binh Ngo sach" (Strategies for pacification of the Wu) to Le Loi, in which he advocated the use of benevolence and righteousness as weapons. His thought of benevolence and righteousness is expressed in many works, such as: "Quan trung tu menh tap (a collection of text and letters written by Nguyen Trai on behalf of Le Loi to Ming generals, as well as moral lessons for generals and soldiers of the Lam Son Uprising); "Binh Ngo dai cao" (the summary of 10 years of fighting against the Ming invaders, which is as valuable and meaningful as the second Declaration of Independence of the nation); several edicts and presentations written under the reign of Le Thai To and Le Thai Tong (1433 - 1442); "Lam Son thuc luc" (a historical memoir recording 10 years of the Lam Son Uprising, compiled by order of Emperor Le Thai To in 1432); "Vinh Lang than dao bi (an epitaph on the stele in Vinh Lang, telling about the background and career of Emperor Le Thai To); "Uc Trai thi tap"; "Quoc am thi tap" (a collection of 254 poems written in Nom script); "Chi Linh son phu" (a rhapsody written in Chinese, describing the event of Lam Son troops retreating to Chi Linh mountain for the third time in 1442); "Bang Ho su luc" (a prose written in Chinese telling the story of Tran Nguyen Han); "Sach Luat thu" (a book written in 1440 - 1441). All of the above works was summed up and drawn into rules by Nguyen Trai to serve the cause of building and protecting the country in the specific historical conditions of Vietnam, thus lifting the thinking of Vietnamese people to a new level. Through his main and typical works, such as *Quan trung tu menh tap*, *Binh Ngo dai cao*, *Uc Trai thi tap*, *Quoc am thi tap*, *Du dia chi*, Nguyen Trai's thought reflects many aspects of the society in his time: politics, military, diplomacy, culture, the role of people, social ideals, etc. Nguyen Trai's thoughts, expressed through the above works, not only are valuable in terms of theory and practice for the society at that time, but also profoundly influential throughout the history of Vietnamese thought in general.

The life, qualities and career of Nguyen Trai are an eloquent testament of his thoughts, to which Vietnamese people pay a lot of respect. With his talent and virtues, he is revered as a hero who is an embodiment of the spirit and quintessence of the nation. The late Prime Minister Pham Van Dong once said: "As both a scholar and a warrior, Nguyen Trai is a national hero. He used politics, internal affairs and diplomacy to save the country and the people, to bring eternal peace and wash away a thousand years of regret. His military strategies and tactics helped the weak to defeat the strong, the few to beat the many, the righteous to be victorious against the cruelty. To him, both literature and martial arts are weapons that are as strong as storms and as sharp as swords... In our country's history, he is truly a great man in many aspects..." (Pham Van Dong, 1962). The most precious merit and greatest career of Nguyen Trai are his earnest patriotic heart and his glorious victory against the invaders to save the country and the people.

For many years, there have been many research works on Nguyen Trai's thoughts from political, cultural, literary, artistic, etc. perspectives. However, studying Nguyen Trai's philosophical thoughts, especially the values of "benevolence and righteousness" is still quite new. In this article, we would like to discuss the thought of benevolence and righteousness - the key philosophy that covers the entire life and dedication of this brilliant thinker.

### 3.2. Basic contents of Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness

Nguyen Trai's view on benevolence and righteousness is not only a philosophical category but also a very important method of reasoning. In all of his works, benevolence and righteousness are clarified in different contexts. Sometimes they are discussed separately: benevolence is mentioned 59 times and righteousness - 81 times. In total, he used the words "benevolence" and "righteousness" 140 times. Sometimes, they accompany each other. Thereby, it can be seen that one of the fundamental views in Nguyen Trai's

thoughts is "benevolence and righteousness". Of course, it should be emphasized that Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness, despite inheriting from the thought of Confucius and Mencius, is hugely different - it is more positive, expanded and enhanced. In general, Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness is shown in his works, such as: Quan trung tu menh tap, Binh Ngo dai cao, Uc Trai thi tap, Quoc am thi tap, Du dia chi. This thought is formed from a systems of philosophy on human, society, politics, military, diplomacy, etc., which are dominated by his worldview. Nguyen Trai's thought inherits the view on "benevolence and righteousness" of Confucianism, but it has been expanded and developed to leave a unique mark in the history of Vietnamese thought. Nguyen Trai absorbed the "benevolence and righteousness" thought of Mencius in a non-mechanical and non-dogmatic way, adding his own creativity and development to demonstrate the deep and earnest love for the country and the people of a national hero. He created a rather special power in the history of wars, which is using the thought of "benevolence and righteousness" to fight the enemy. Mencius' thought of "the people must be valued the most" was fully inherited by Nguyen Trai. To him, the people is the pain, love and belief, and the strength of the rising tide. The people is the orientation for the whole thought of Nguyen Trai, which is peace and mercy for the people.

Thus, Nguyen Trai's thought is the unity between heavenly way and human way, which is expressed in humanitarianism. The views in Nguyen Trai's thought is the result of inheriting traditional philosophical views of the East in general and of the nation in particular. Nguyen Trai's "benevolence and righteousness" thought has become one of the most prominent thoughts of the nation, because it is the convergence of humane thoughts passed from one generation to the next, then continue to flow in the tradition of being benevolent and righteous of Vietnamese people later on.

To Nguyen Trai, benevolence and righteousness are a thought and moreover, a very important method of reasoning. The contents of this thought are demonstrated as follows:

*First, the thought of "benevolence and righteousness" is the root of the heavenly way.*

Therefore, in state management, the monarch must see the value of benevolence and righteousness in ruling the people, because: "works of benevolence and righteousness take root in bringing peace to the people", so "destroying righteousness and ruining humanity, Heaven and Earth seems to approach annihilation" (Binh Ngo dai cao). Benevolence and righteousness are the roots of the conduct of a leader and a monarch to the people: "The great cause must take benevolence and righteousness as the root" (reply to letter of Phung Chinh). Therefore, the goal of being benevolent and righteous, which is "peace for the people", following the heavenly way to protect the people by fighting the enemy with benevolence and righteousness must be achieved (Letter calling for surrender of generals and soldiers at Binh Than citadel). Thus, benevolence and righteousness mean to save the country and protect the people, which is a strategically significant category that Nguyen Trai pointed out for Le Loi's victory over the Ming Dynasty to bring peace to the country and governing it prosperously. And as such, this view gained a new depth of quality compared to the traditional Confucian view.

*Second, "benevolence and righteousness" reflect the role and power of the people - there must be a dialectic connection between the management role of the feudal state and the meeting of requirements of the people to ensure the peace and respect for the people.* Nguyen Trai was a Confucian scholar, so it is inevitably that he would be deeply influenced by Confucian thoughts. He himself also believed that "our hearts must stay close to the way of Confucianism." Therefore, he also "follow the way of benevolence and righteousness, and wholeheartedly worship the royal court" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Binh Ngo dai cao) But Nguyen Trai himself was a child of Vietnamese people, who was born and raised in a time of chaos. He also suffered from the pain of being separated from his family. Therefore, he understood the sufferings of people as well as the values of life, and thus his benevolence and righteousness also bear the humane spirit of Vietnamese culture. Thus, the difference

in Nguyen Trai's thought of "benevolence and righteousness" compared to the thought of Confucius and Mencius is that benevolence and righteousness are first and foremost for bringing peace to the people. In the letters sent to generals of the enemy and calling for surrender of citadels, Nguyen Trai mentioned a lot about this.

Benevolence and righteousness mean *for the people* and *bringing peace to people*. He believed that: "works of benevolence and righteousness take root in bringing peace to the people", "use the army of benevolence and righteousness to save the suffering people and defeat sinners", "divine and tremendous warfare does not require killing; the benevolent and righteous army is only for the protection of the people" (Nguyen Quang Ngoc, 2008). Benevolence and righteousness in Nguyen Trai's thought are to love the country and the people, and to fight the enemy to save the country and the people. Nguyen Trai considered "peace of the people" as the purpose, and "defeat of cruelty" as the goal and means of benevolence and righteousness. Therefore, a benevolent and righteous man must take care of eliminating "violence", i.e. chasing away the invaders. He must fight in a way that is "appreciated by heavens and supported by the people", so that "the weak can defeat the strong", "the few can win over the many", "with supreme righteousness we conquered the fierce and cruel; with ultimate benevolence we took the place of the oppressive and tyrannical" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Binh Ngo dai cao). Being benevolent and righteous mean fighting for Vietnamese people to survive and develop. It is like a miracle that leads to "Heaven and Earth, having passed through hardship was restored to prosperity; the sun and moon having been darkened, shone once more" (Nguyen Trai, 1976: Binh Ngo dai cao). Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness, thus, has the nuance of traditional Vietnamese patriotism. Here, it can be seen clearly that this thought has surpassed the thought of Confucius and Mencius with creativity and development in specific conditions of Vietnam. To Nguyen Trai, the thought of benevolence and righteousness has a dialectic connection to the idea of listening to people's needs and bringing peace to people, which is a great ambition and a strategic goal that must be achieved. Thousands of years before Nguyen Trai, many thinkers in the history of Chinese philosophy, such as Mencius, etc. had pointed out the important role of the people, their power, their vision and their wisdom. In Vietnam, the thought of peace for the people had become a code of ethics in the Ly - Tran era. During that period, thoughts about being close to the people, having mercy for them, etc. appeared and contributed positively to the flourishing Ly-Tran era. Nguyen Trai absorbed, inherited, expanded and enhanced the thought of peace for the people throughout his life. Bringing peace to the people means terminating acts of cruelty and tyranny against the people. It also means ensuring the people a peaceful life and not to "trouble" them. With this thought, Nguyen Trai presented a truth: the flag of "benevolence, righteousness and peace for the people" must be raised, the hearts of the people must be connected to create the strength of the country. He advocated saving the country by the power of the people, using the strength of the people to gain victory in the resistance war. It is an immutable and long-standing strategy, a rule for building and protecting the country of Vietnamese people.

Benevolence and righteousness in Nguyen Trai's thought also mean respect and gratitude for the people. "The people" were always mentioned and appreciated by him even after the resistance was successful, the country was liberated and proceeded to a new chapter. Nguyen Trai understood that the people produce food and clothes; that the emperor's palaces are also built on the sweats of the people: "anything of large scale and splendid comes from the hard work of the people" (Nguyen Trai, 1976: Letter of call for surrender to the tribal chief of Dieu Dieu citadel). With that in mind, when he was appointed as a court official by the emperor, Nguyen Trai immediately thought about the people who are working hard. He wrote: "The benefits enjoyed by court officials are for repaying the hard work of the people." Nguyen Trai lived his whole life being close to the people. Therefore, he clearly saw the noble virtues of the people, understood their earnest

aspiration and witnessed their great power in the creation of history. "*Benevolence and righteousness*" mean truly consider the people as the root of the nation, truly be close to them, truly have compassion for them, and truly work for them. To be benevolent and righteous is to save the country and the people. In order to do that, acts of cruelty must be eliminated; in order for those acts to be eliminated, the power of "ultimate benevolence" must be used. That thought of Nguyen Trai is also the power to protect the nation, which is demonstrated through the role of a patriot. This thought was also demonstrated in the earlier period during the fight against the Yuan invaders. Hich tuong si (Exhortation to the military officers) also emphasized: "Every century has heroes who sacrificed their lives for their country". This is a very new and humane perspective of Nguyen Trai.

*Third, the thought of "benevolence and righteousness" means wholeheartedly love the people, so mercy must be shown even to the enemy.* The "mental tactics" was used beautifully by Nguyen Trai to touch the hearts of common people as well as to help the enemy to turn good. This is the resistance strategy which had been considered carefully by Nguyen Trai. The basis for this strategy is the quintessence of military tactics in the ancient history of China and Vietnam, which Nguyen Trai creatively applied to the practice of national liberation in the context of the country fighting against the Ming invaders. "Mental tactics" use reasoning to influence the mind and consciousness of the enemy, clearly state the truth, persuade and guide them back to the right path, thereby smashing their fighting spirit, causing them to lose their will to invade, to feel weary, to accept the path of reconciliation and withdraw their troops. Of course, that strategy was always used by the Lam Son army in combination with physical attacks with weapons, military and diplomatic tactics; and history has proved that it absolutely worked.

In particular, Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness also stands out with the view of how to treat the enemy when they have been defeated or surrendered. It proves the "mercy" and "tolerance" of Vietnamese people in general as well as the benevolence of Nguyen Trai in particular. Nguyen Trai and Le Loi advocated not to kill the enemy when they are defeated, but "use ultimate benevolence to conquer the cruel", which means to create conditions and provide means, necessities and food for them to withdraw safely. Thus, the Ming did not lose their face for losing the battle, and the soldiers can also reunite with their families. In the letter to Wang Tong, he wrote: "Bridges are repaired, boats and carriages are ready, you can choose to withdraw your troops on roads or waterway and restore peace and stability" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Letter to Wang Tong). According to Nguyen Trai: "Taking revenge is common; but preferring no killing is a morally correct way of action". Benevolence and righteousness are for the happiness of the people and the peace of the country - that is Nguyen Trai's burning aspiration. Therefore, he said: "The use of army, above all, is to preserve the country. Letting Wang Tong and his men return and tell the Ming emperor to return our land, there's nothing more important than that" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Letter of request). "Eliminating the risk of war" and "preserving the country above all" are Nguyen Trai's humane political view. It can be said that this is a noble humanitarian spirit and a deep philosophy.

Nguyen Trai's strategy of using benevolence and righteousness to save the country and the people and to "establish an eternal peace" has great significance in terms of both theory and practice for the struggle to liberate and construct our country. Nguyen Trai and Le Loi, along with the armed forces and people of Dai Viet resolutely enforced a very creative and humane way of ending the war: "for the eternal existence of the nation, we spare ten thousands of soldiers. For the friendship between the two countries, we extinguish the war" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Letter to Chief Commander and officials in Thanh Hoa). This is truly a great thought of a talented person, an ideology with vitality that "resonates forever".

Thereby, it can be seen that Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness went one step further to become the idea of building a peaceful country with

benevolent monarch and loyal subjects and without resentments: "a monarch only wants his subjects to have peace, martial arts should follow literature, by doing that, the country will remain stable and prosperous" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Quan trung tu menh tap); "the country is as peaceful and prosperous as in the era of Emperor Yao and Emperor Shun - there's nothing I want more than that" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 - Rhapsody of Chi Linh Mountain). Thus according to Nguyen Trai, a peaceful country will have a prosperous and beautiful life; at the same time, it exists in harmony and peace with other countries. It can be said that Nguyen Trai's socio-political ideas are in line with the aspirations and dreams of the nation and the people; and reach the highest level as allowed by the historical conditions at that time. Nguyen Trai's conception, therefore, is very positive and full of humane spirit.

*Fourth, the thought of benevolence and righteousness is a military art in the defense and protection of the country.* The military history of our country has proved that the use of benevolence and righteousness as a military tactic in difficult situations always bring along resounding victories. The thought of benevolence and righteousness resounds throughout the use of benevolent and righteous army to save suffering people and drive out the enemy. Especially, in that circumstances, "tactics are for eliminating the wicked", "benevolence and righteousness are for the defense of the realm". It is because of that thought, benevolence and righteousness are the tactics in the anti-invasion period.

Nguyen Trai's thought of *benevolence and righteousness* in regaining national independence is inherited from traditional ideologies of the nation and developed to a new level. The poem of "Over the mountains and rivers of the South, lives the Southern Emperor" composed by Ly Thuong Kiet in the 10<sup>th</sup> century addressed the issues of territory and national sovereignty. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Nguyen Trai's national independence in "Binh Ngo dai cao" was developed to a new level. In addition to territory and national sovereignty, it now covers many other issues such as: a people with long-standing civility, its own customs and state from Trieu, Dinh, Ly, Tran dynasties, a tradition of fighting to build the nation, an independent correlation on a par with Chinese feudal dynasties, and heroes in every generation. Thus, Nguyen Trai's thought of national independence represents patriotism and a deep sense of national self-esteem, which became the most important content in the third Declaration of Independence of Vietnam.

The thought of *benevolence and righteousness* is presented by Confucianism to educate superior persons of how to rule the country; however, Nguyen Trai applied this thought to the specific circumstances of our country and came up with a different conception that *benevolence and righteousness* are not only the relationship between people from the point of view of Confucianism, but are for "peace of the people". Therefore, right at the start of "Binh Ngo dai cao", Nguyen Trai affirmed:

*"Works of benevolence and righteousness take root in bringing peace to the people  
In raising an army, nothing takes precedence to doing away with the cruel"*

(Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Binh Ngo dai cao)

This is Nguyen Trai's idea for internal and external affairs, which acted as the basis for the strategy of Lam Son Uprising as well as the foundation for the construction of a prosperous Later Le Dynasty. Internal affairs use *benevolence and righteousness* policy. The basic content of this policy is "peace for the people". Meanwhile, for external affairs, the policy is "dealing with the cruel". According to Nguyen Trai, in order to achieve "peace for the people", the cruel must be eliminated, acts of invasion and oppressive forces must be defeated to create conditions for the people to have a peaceful and proper life. *Peace for the people* means to act "according to heaven's will", "in line with the people's will", dare to sacrifice, take "the weak against the strong", "the few against the many", "use supreme righteousness to conquer the cruel", "use ultimate benevolence to overthrow the

tyranny". Nguyen Trai's thought of *benevolence and righteousness* inherited traditions of the nation in Ly – Tran era. *Peace for the people* is his strategy to protect the country and ensure its position.

Nguyen Trai's thought of "*benevolence and righteousness*" not only reflects the good relationship between people, but also the thought of "*respecting*" and "*being grateful to the people*". Chinese Confucianism divides the society into two categories: Superior and inferior, in which the superior ones are educated and knowledgeable, who take the role of rulers; while the inferior ones are those who are not educated and thus are ruled. However, throughout his life, Nguyen Trai never once mentioned that distinction, but mainly talked about the people with "*respect*" and "*gratitude*". He realized that: The people produce food and clothes, that the emperor's palaces are built on the sweats of the people, "*anything of large scale and splendid comes from the hard work of the people*". Therefore, it must always be remembered that "*the benefits enjoyed by court officials are for repaying the hard work of the people*". Moreover, he was also aware of the great role of the people: *Raising bamboo as our banner, commoners assembled from all four directions. Making libations of wine and feasting with officers, our soldiers were like fathers and sons* (Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Binh Ngo dai cao).

Many years in the life of Nguyen Trai were spent being close to the people and going deep into their life. Therefore, he understood their sufferings as well as their precious virtues. He clearly saw their earnest aspirations and their great strength in the struggle for national liberation. According to him, it was the people who made the history, who stood up to fight the Ming invaders, liberate the country and regain freedom. They can "push the boat" and also "flip the boat" to create a profound social transformation. Nguyen Trai's thought of *benevolence and righteousness* also means "*mercy for the people*". When the country was invaded, he was pained and intolerant of the cruel actions of the Ming invaders:

*"Burning commoners in conflagrations of cruelty  
Burying the people in depths of disaster"*

(Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Binh Ngo dai cao)

He denounced the heinous crimes of the Ming army:

"Should the bamboo of the Southern mountains be completely cut down, it would not be sufficient to record all their evil-doing  
All the water of the Eastern Sea would not be enough to wash away their filth"

(Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Binh Ngo dai cao)

He was tormented with the suffering of the people:

*"Due to the vice of the Ho and the violence of the Wu army, some are imprisoned, some are bound by nominal titles"* (Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Letter of Request). Recently, the Ho family usurped the throne and overthrew the Tran dynasty, lying to the royal court and causing commoners to suffer. Nguyen Trai also directly advised the emperor and court officials to make the people rich, to nurture and love them: "*His Majesty must love the people and take care of them, so that even in rural villages there is no voice of anger, resentment and sorrow* (Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Quan trung tu menh tap). Or "*now commanders of cities obey the royal court's order, raising people like parents raising their children, loving them wholeheartedly*"

(Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Letter to Chief Commander and officials in Thanh Hoa).



Nguyen Trai stayed very close to the people and understood their hardships, so his heart always thought about the people and sympathized with their sufferings under the domination of the Ming invaders as well as the oppression and exploitation of feudal officials. Normally, a feudal court official being a Confucian scholar must have the thought of *being loyal to the monarch*, in life and in death. But Nguyen Trai's belief is that *"Patriotism is loyalty to the monarch"*. He was loyal to the royal court because he had a very high sense of responsibility to the emperor and the country. Because of that loyalty, he advised the emperor to have mercy for the people. He evoked deep and concrete emotions for the emperor to sympathize with and care about the interests of the people. In his belief, only a monarch who cares about his subjects and have mercy for them can gather the people and exploit their strength both physically and mentally to build a powerful force in the struggle for national liberation as well as for the construction of a prosperous country. Therefore, his thought of *"Patriotism is loyalty to the monarch"* encourages being loyal to the royal court on the basis of patriotism, of putting the interests of the country and the national about all. That's the difference between his thought and the thought of "loyalty to the monarch" of Chinese Confucianism.

*Fifth, the thought of "benevolence and righteousness" in the construction of a peaceful and prosperous country.* According to Nguyen Trai, the ideal model of society is one in which: "the monarch only wants his subjects to have peace, martial arts should follow literature, by doing that, the country will remain stable and prosperous" (Nguyen Trai, 1976 – Binh Ngo dai cao). A peaceful country is where the monarch is benevolent and his officials are loyal, so that even in rural villages there is no voice of anger, resentment and sorrow. Thus, the country will have a prosperous and beautiful life, and at the same time exist in harmony and peace with other countries. It can be said that Nguyen Trai's socio-political ideas are in line with the aspirations and dreams of the nation and the people; and reach the highest level as allowed by the historical conditions at that time. Nguyen Trai's conception, therefore, is very positive and full of humane spirit.

The strategic and scientific vision in Nguyen Trai's thought is also shown in his view on calling for talents to help the country and the people. Nguyen Trai believed that the decisive factor in the cause of building a peaceful and prosperous country is the people. How to promote all the positive elements of the people? In the strength of the people, which factor is the strongest motivation? Nguyen Trai pointed out that factor to be talents. In the *Edict of calling for talented people*, he believed: "there are many talented people in life", so the royal court must appeal to them in different ways, such as through education and examination, or nomination: "court officials of third rank and higher each nominates one person, either at the court or in the countryside, whether they have become an official or not, if they are talented and can help the emperor, then... they will be awarded title depending on their talent", or nominate "those with great talent hidden in the army or in the countryside" to shoulder the work of taking care of the people and the country. Thus, it is clear that Nguyen Trai paid great attention to training, fostering, developing and using talented people in ruling the nation and bringing peace to the people. This human resources strategy of Nguyen Trai, to date, is still very valid.

In summary, Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness is the core content in his entire system of philosophical and political ideas. This large-scale thought goes beyond the conventional politics and reaches the level of generalization to become the foundation and the basis for policies and standards in political relations as well as the principle in the management of the nation. Not only has great significance in his own time, *on one hand*, Nguyen Trai's thought of benevolence and righteousness also leaves a unique mark in the Vietnamese history of philosophy; *on the other hand*, it also has far-reaching influence on the political practice of the country in later times.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Results

From studying Nguyen Trai's thought of "benevolence and righteousness", we see that it is necessary to build and develop values of benevolence and righteousness in the culture of Vietnamese people today.

The building and development of Vietnamese people's culture today need to have many values to suit the new life and the trend of global integration and development. One of the key values in this article, which is drawn from the study on Nguyen Trai's thought is the value of benevolence and righteousness. This value needs to be renewed and modernized to protect and develop the country.

In order to do so, the thought of benevolence and righteousness must be gradually absorbed by the intelligentsia; managing officers at all levels must have the mindset of being close to the people. This thought is also the basis for protection and development of the country. In the process of building and renovating the country towards socialist orientation, it is necessary to see that benevolence and righteousness means working wholeheartedly for the people, so that the strengths of the nation can be promoted more than ever, especially in the context of the fight against Covid in our country today. This can be an opportunity for us to defeat all enemies who want to invade and destroy our country. Being benevolent and righteous means all Vietnamese people work together to fight bad habits and obsolete customs, strive to build a rich and strong country, and enhance the country's position in the regional and international arena. This is also an issue posed for today's era: to build Vietnam into a country of international stature. President Ho Chi Minh once said: People should be taken as the root of the country; the root is strong, so is the tree. Victory is gained on the hard work of the people. Revolution is the cause of the masses (Ho Chi Minh, 2011, Vol.5: 335). Whether that cause is successful depends on the role and the strength of the people. Therefore, promoting the strength of the people is indispensable in this age. The country renovation led by our Communist Party is an everlasting and difficult task on our path to successfully establish socialism. For that cause to be successful, one of the important factors is promoting the mental and physical strengths of the masses. V.I. Lenin pointed out that one of the greatest and most frightening risks facing a ruling party is that the party becomes bureaucratic, detached and off-grid with the masses (V.I. Lenin, 1977, Vol. 44:426). That is why the current renovation of Vietnam needs to promote the relationship between the Party and the people even more. The close-knit relationship between the Party and the people is a vital issue posed in today's context of going on the socialist path that our Party and People have chosen. Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW dated June 9, 2014 at the 9<sup>th</sup> Central Conference of the 11<sup>th</sup> Session "About developing Vietnamese culture and people to meet requirements for the sustainable development of the country" determined: in cultural development, the focus is on developing people with good personality and lifestyle, who possess basic characteristics of patriotic, compassionate, righteous, honest, industrious and creative (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2014). This is the typical model of new people today that each person, each family and organization, union or social group, etc. needs to pay attention to while conducting their activities, thereby creating synergy to build new people of the modern era. Therefore, we need to continue to inherit the progressive ideas that in consistence with traditions of the nation and the era:

*First, building the "for people" lifestyle.* Building the "for people" lifestyle is important. Many tend to chasing after material benefits and forget the good values of their fathers and the moral standards of compassion and sympathy, etc. This lifestyle will help build a better society without exploitation, and thus people will become happier. We live

with each other, so there must be equality, sharing, sympathy, mutual benefit and respect, so that our society is more developed and more civilized.

*Second, building a responsible lifestyle.* In the current context of international integration, as the foreign and pragmatic lifestyle and culture pose the risks of degradation of ideals and morality, detachment from traditions, loss of national identity and deviation from the socialist direction, a responsible lifestyle becomes more and more significant. In order to lead a responsible lifestyle, we should live with compassion, care and sympathy for others, especially having mercy for the mistakes of others and a sense of responsibility in building and protecting the country; at the same time, we need to train ourselves to be disciplined and to realize our responsibilities with ourselves, our family, our society and our country. Thereby, it contributes to consolidating beliefs and stances, gradually perfecting the personality of each Vietnamese person, and for each and everyone to be more conscious about the national construction and defense. It also contributes to preserving the fine traditional values of the nation and helps our homeland to become richer and more beautiful.

*Third, building a lifestyle for the community's sake.* An individual's life cannot be separated from his community's life. In order for the community to further develop, each individual needs to join hands to build the community and become a source of strength to fulfill their duties in all areas of social life. Therefore, in addition to being responsible to themselves, Vietnamese people today also need to build a lifestyle for the community's sake. In that way, the unification of the community to promote its role and strengths will be increased day by day; at the same time, this lifestyle also has great meaning in community development and economic growth, helping the community to progress toward the values of truth, goodness and beauty. It is this lifestyle that helps the community to develop and integrate more and more, thus contributing to the overall development of the country.

#### 4.2. Discussion

Through studying Nguyen Trai's thoughts, it can be seen that in his time - the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the values of benevolence and righteousness was proved by the practice, and until now, this thought is still valid. Today, after nearly 35 years of renovation, Vietnamese people have step by step built and enriched their values on the path towards socialism and comprehensive international integration. However, in the development of the country, traditional values are both the driving force and a unique feature. Therefore, it is necessary to preserve and promote values of the thought of benevolence and righteousness in the new era, so that its values continue to spread to the political, cultural, social and spiritual life of our nation.

Findings of this research can be used as references for learners and researchers in the fields of philosophy and culture studies, as well as for state managers to better understand the personality and thoughts of Nguyen Trai. At the same time, it also provides an additional theoretical basis for the work of building and promoting the culture of Vietnamese people today.

### 5. CONCLUSION

"Benevolence and righteousness" are the core of a great thought in Nguyen Trai's system of ideas, which is demonstrated through his works that endure until today. With the inheritance and development of this thought from Chinese philosophy, Nguyen Trai contributed to elevating the traditional thinking of Vietnamese people towards humanitarianism. Nguyen Trai's "benevolence and righteousness" are not accidental occurrences or stem from his subjective will, but the crystallization of national traditional

values and cultural quintessence of humanity and the nation, the voice that profoundly reflects the needs of society at that time. Despite the ups and downs of history, Nguyen Trai's thought of "benevolence and righteousness" still has practical values and meanings for the cause of building and defending the country today. These are lessons about patriotism and national independence, about humanity and the importance of building and developing human culture in Vietnam today.

## REFERENCES

- 1.The Communist Party of Vietnam (2011), *Documents of the 11<sup>th</sup> National Congress*. Hanoi. National Political Publishing House.
- 2.The Communist Party of Vietnam (2014), *Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW* dated June 9, 2014, the *9<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Party Central Committee* (11<sup>th</sup> Session), on building and developing culture and people of Vietnam to meet requirements for sustainable development of the country.
- 3.Pham Van Dong (1962), *Nguyen Trai - The National Hero*. People's Newspaper, September 19, 1962.
- 4.Nguyen Hung Hau. (2002). *General history of Vietnamese philosophical thought*, Vol.1. Hanoi. VNU Publishing House
- 5.Ho Chi Minh. (2011). *Full collection*, Vol. 8. Hanoi. National Political Publishing House.
- Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2008), *The Process of Vietnamese History*. Education Publishing House, Hanoi.
- 6.Nguyen Tai Thu. (1993). *History of Vietnamese Thought*, Vol. 1. Hanoi. Social Sciences Publishing House.
- 7.Nguyen Trai. (1976). *Full collection*. Hanoi. Social Sciences Publishing House.
- 8.V.I. Lenin: *Full collection*, Progressive Publishing House, M, 1977, vol. 44, p. 426.