

Reform Leadership Force in Japan and Vietnam (The Second Half of the 19th Century and the Early 20th Century)

Linh Thi Phuong Pham
Can Tho University, Can Tho City, Vietnam

In the historical period of the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, Asian countries had to deal with the pressure of Western colonial aggression in many different ways and forms. During this period, in Japan and Vietnam, leadership forces appeared to reform the country in the direction of bourgeois democracy to strengthen/exert itself and defend national independence. In Japan, the reform force was an alliance headed by the Mikado with the effective support of the samurai and the outside daimyo (tozama daimyo). In Vietnam, the forces that initiated the reform movement were Confucian intellectuals and patriotic elites who had early contact with Western civilization. The similarities and differences of the reform leadership forces in Japan and Vietnam under economic, cultural, social, and ideological conditions stipulate and affect the success or failure of the renovation in these two countries.

Keywords: the reform leadership force, Japan, Vietnam

Content

The late 19th century and the early 20th century were the periods when Western capitalism changed from free competition to monopoly capitalism, and that Western colonialism expanded, invaded, and divided colonies became strongest. Facing these challenges, Asian countries have had very different responses to protect their independence, preserve territorial integrity, and develop the country. In some countries, there was a people's armed struggle under the leadership of patriotic forces; in some countries a reform movement towards the bourgeoisie took place. In Japan, there was the Meiji Restoration, while in Vietnam the modernization thought of Nguyen Truong To, the reformist thought of Phan Chau Trinh, the Dong Du movement of Phan Boi Chau, etc., appeared. To the mass failure of the movement in the armed struggle movement of the people of Asia, a revolution was not the only way to develop society, but reform is the inevitable continuation of the revolution. The reform movements normally take place and win by the way from the top down while the revolution is the cause of the masses of the people, taking place and winning by the way from the bottom up. Therefore, the factor that ensures the success of the reform is not the people, but the upper class or the reform leadership force. Studying the factors affecting the reform leadership force as well as the similarities and differences between the reform forces in Japan and Vietnam will help us have more accurate judgments about the success or failure of the renovation work in these two countries.

The Factors Affecting the Reform Leadership Forces in Japan and Vietnam (From the Second Half of the 19th Century to the Early 20th Century)

About the Politics

For Japan, the Taika reform in the middle of the 7th century laid the sociopolitical foundation for Japan's transformation into feudalism in the direction of absorbing the progressive results of the feudal system of Tang Dynasty in China at that time. By 1192, Yoritomo was officially named Shogun by the Emperor and the word "Shogunate" (Bakufu) was officially used to refer to the headquarters of the Shogun. From here, the Shogunate regime existed parallel to the government of the Emperor until 1868. This is also one of the important features showing the difference of Japanese feudalism from other feudal regimes in Vietnam. The basis of the Japanese administrative and social system in this period was the feudal states, called the "han". There were about 260 han in the whole country. The han was actually a large domain headed by great lords—the daimyo who submitted to the Shogunate. The Edo period was the period when the central government achieved relatively uniform control over the entire territory, from central to local, through a military institution headed by the Shogunate. Accordingly, the Shogunate is headed by the shogun Tokugawa in Edo and is headed by lords (daimyo) who ruled over 260 domains (han) in localities. This decentralized and military political mechanism has historically been referred to as the "system of bakufu and han" or the "Bakuhan system" (Bakuhan taisei). The basis of existence for this regime is based on the absolute loyalty of the samurai class and the balance in the power structure between the central (Bakufu) and the local (han) on both important issues that are economy and politics. In the political system of the Edo period, there was still the government of the Emperor in order to ensure the long-term legal status of the Shogunate. In order to maintain the institution, the Shogunate needed a spiritual and political support for the entire nation of Japan because the emperor was nominally still the most powerful person and the symbol of national unity. In principle, the shogun is the emperor's servant and manages the country on behalf of the emperor, so it is responsible for maintaining political security and economic development for the country. Thus, it can be seen that

the Japanese political system of this period was established on the principle of three poles, meaning as a triangle of power including: Emperor (Kyoto)—Shogun (Edo)—Daimyo (local lords). Its stability and unity depended on the power of the central government as well as the recognition and belonging of the local lords to the Shogunate. (Ninh, 2016, p. 66)

For Vietnam, since independence after the victory over the Southern Han army on the Bach Dang River in 938, after a thousand years of Northern domination, it had to face successive invasions of Chinese dynasties. Although Chinese dynasties were a threat to the national independence, they also influenced Vietnamese politics, society, and culture. Starting from the Le Dynasty (1427), Confucianism became the ideological foundation for political institutions in Vietnam. The feudal dynasties of Vietnam had to go through complicated internal struggles to gain and consolidate power against opposing forces in the country. When Nguyen Anh ascended the throne, he founded the Nguyen dynasty and built a unified state covering the entire territory of Vietnam. The Nguyen Dynasty built the state apparatus of an autocratic monarchy with a central authority, headed by the king, and a system of mandarins selected through Confucian examinations. Continuing the rule of Gia Long, upon ascending the throne, King Minh Mang built the strongest autocratic feudal political institution in Southeast Asia. However, unlike the previous dynasties, the Nguyen Dynasty did not have the legitimacy for its power before the people, encountering the loyalty of the Northern people to the Le Dynasty. Therefore, the first kings of the Nguyen Dynasty always had to deal with all attempts to restore the Le Dynasty. The harsh policy of the Nguyen Dynasty was willing to suppress any opposition that led to the political instability of the country. According to

statistics, under the Nguyen Dynasty, there were more than 200 revolts and uprisings throughout the country. The large number of uprisings was an important manifestation of the political crisis under the Nguyen Dynasties. This is different from the more than 200 years of peace during the Shogunate in power in Japan.

During the period of existence, the Nguyen Dynasty implemented the foreign policy of “Closed-door” absolutely and persistently. Japan during the Shogunate period also implemented the policy of “Closure of Country”—seclusion from the ports like the Nguyen Dynasty, but this policy was not thorough because Japan was still open to trade with the Netherlands. This lack of radical in foreign affairs helps Japan absorb a lot of new knowledge and update information about the Western world through the Dutch. This is also one of the differences in the factors affecting the reform forces in Japan and Vietnam.

Thus, for Japan, the feudal system was decentralized, the emperor reigned but the Shogunate ruled and the independent mechanism of the local han headed by the daimyo had a positive impact on the socio-economic development, and the national security. In Vietnam, the autocratic monarchy with a central authority was consolidated under the Nguyen Dynasty by many repressive policies. The political regime that concentrated power on the king and the mandarin system of the Nguyen Dynasty did not encourage economic development but also made socio-political instability with many uprisings.

Social Factors

One of the peculiarities in Japanese socio-cultural life is the tradition of respecting the hierarchy and the relationship between patron-client. The division of social classes in the Tokugawa Bakufu period is called the status system (Mibun Seido). Those are the government officials, peasants, artisans, merchants (Shi, No, Ko, Sho) classes. The “Shi” here is a warrior, that is, a samurai, which is different from the Shi class in Vietnam who are scholars and intellectuals in society. The samurai class accounted for 6%-10% of the entire population (about 30 million at the end of the Tokugawa period). It was the noblest, the most respected and was divided into several ranks, the highest being the Tokugawa shogun. The samurai class is considered a class of noble origin. Peasants were the basic force in feudal society, accounting for about 80% of the population. They resent the feudal system, but their consciousness had not yet developed enough to plan to overthrow the old social structure and establish a new one. Artisans and merchants make up about 6%-7% of the population. In fact, the distinction between artisans and merchants is not clear and is collectively known as chonin (townspeople). They mainly live in urban areas and gradually become rich and influential, greatly influencing the economic and cultural life of the country. The key sources regulating national survival and development such as commercial economy, agricultural economy, production, and distribution of money are all held and controlled by urban people. Their success reversed the system of samurai—peasants—artisans—merchants into merchants—artisans—peasants—samurai, bringing the urban class to the powerful forefront of society.

The social basis of the Shogunate government was the samurai class. They always played a decisive role and they were the vanguard of nationalist movements. However, by the end of the Tokugawa period, this caste was seriously turned upside down.

At the end of the Edo period, the impoverishment of samurai was evident. Many low-level samurai who could not live on a meager salary had to leave their masters to wander and become ronin, and in many Hans, there was also the abandonment of samurai titles for rich merchants and peasants... (Luc, 2010, p. 41)

The lord's poverty was not enough to support the samurai, so they were forced to turn to business—the profession that was previously despised by the samurai. From there, the bourgeois samurai class was born. In the same

process, they were exposed to progressive bourgeois-democratic ideas. Especially, through the movements of Dutch and Western studies, this class formed an idea of renovating the country. Samurai is a class that is good at both civil and military, as well as has a national spirit and a high sense of discipline, and dares to take responsibility, etc., leading this class to come to a unified action to protect national sovereignty in the reform movement in Japan.

Gia Long, after ascending the throne in 1802, decided to take Confucianism as the ideological basis for a new dynasty and take the Chinese model as a template. The Confucianism that the king used was the ideology used by Zhou Xi during the Song Dynasty to identify kingship with divine power. The conceptions of heaven and earth were especially promoted by the Nguyen kings and mandarins to strengthen the throne and justify the legitimacy of the dynasty. Vietnamese society according to Confucianism was also formed according to the hierarchy of scholar, peasant, worker, and merchant. Scholars in Vietnam are the scholar class and only study Confucianism. They were bound by Confucian ideology and the king-mandarin relationship, so they were absolutely loyal to the court and very conservative.

Vietnamese peasants made up the huge majority of the population. They are both bound by harsh Confucian teachings and controlled by the regulations of the village rules and conventions where they reside. This is different from peasants in Japan because they have relative freedom in terms of economic and social status. Due to the policy of respecting peasants—repressing merchants, the class of merchants and artisans in Vietnam is insignificant and does not play an important role in society as in Japan. Vietnamese merchants were hindered from developing by the imperial court and competed by overseas Chinese merchants. Due to the lack of conditions, the artisan and merchant class in Vietnam was weak and did not have any social influence during this period. In Japan, by contrast, the urban class of artisans and merchants rose to the powerful top of the class hierarchy at the end of the Tokugawa period because of the development of the craft economy and commerce.

From the social perspective, Vietnam under the Nguyen Dynasty was conservative and passive. From the ruling feudal kings and mandarins to the ruled classes below, they were all influenced by the outdated Confucian thought. Vietnamese society dominated by the monopoly of Confucianism did not create a social force strong enough to lead and rally forces to create a positive change for the country. Therefore, in Vietnam, the hierarchical social relations of scholars-peasants-artisans-merchants hardly changed much. In Japan, the social relations changed. The economic development of Japan in this period also deeply divided the samurai class. Some samurai were impoverished and had to do production business, so they became the bourgeois samurai. This is the force that became the flagship of the Japanese renovation movement in the early modern period.

Economic Structure

Japan in this period has made significant progress in developing a commodity economy. The sankin kotai (alternate attendance) regime created objective factors that promote the development of many manufacturing industries, expand transport routes, accelerate urbanization, increase consumer demand and commercial needs, enhance the role of merchants, and make them richer and richer. At this time, Japan had major national highways such as Tokaido, Nakasenko, Nikkodocho, Oshudochu, Koshukaido, and many secondary roads. The activities of trade and exchange of rice and goods at the trading centers managed by the Shogunate such as Osaka, Kyoto, Nagasaki, etc., of the lords created large cities that could dominate the economy of the whole country.

Since the 17th century, besides the traditional agricultural economic structure, in Japan, an urban-centered industrial and commercial economic structure has been formed. Among the cities, Kyoto, Edo, Osaka, and

Nagasaki are considered as the most important economic centers and are typical urban models of Japan in the early modern period. The merchant forces here are not only rich merchants but also investors, currency traders, creditors with great economic power. According to statistics

In 1700, about 10% (or about three million people) of Japan's population lived in towns or cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants. Edo, with millions of people, is the largest city in the world. Kyoto and Osaka, with about 350,000 inhabitants, are comparable to London or Paris. By any measure, Japan was one of the largest cities in the world in 1700. (Gordon, 2003, p. 23)

The development of cities, production centers, and financial trade created a diversity for the development of the public and commercial economy. Through business activities, many merchants accumulated great wealth and became a powerful social force as well as held many important economic fields, step by step affirming the formation of a structure of the industrial-commercial economy, with the city as the center. This is the expression and concentration of Japan's power. The development of urban economy in Japan during this period greatly affected the economy, culture-society and political institutions at that time.

Completely opposite to the development of Japan, the Nguyen Dynasty, since coming to power in Vietnam, has thoroughly implemented the policy of "respecting peasants—repressing merchants". Regarding the internal trade, the court considered rice and salt to be strategic commodities controlled by the state, so it was forbidden to trade from one region to another. This policy causes congestion and stagnation of goods, causing an imbalance between supply and demand in regions. Regarding foreign trade, the court enforced a policy of monopolizing trade with foreign countries. Foreign ships carrying goods to Vietnam have to go through many declaration procedures, many taxes and also give gifts to the court or port officials. The policies restricting trade have limited the development of the commodity economy. The handicraft industries are also not developed. The Nguyen Dynasty held large factories such as minting money, minting guns, and building ships. Good artisans concentrated on working in state-owned construction sites. These policies significantly inhibited the development of handicraft industries.

Regarding agriculture, the Nguyen Dynasty allowed private fields to develop, and at the same time, maintained public fields, so the process of privatization of land was restrained. In addition to encouraging people to reclaim wasteland, the Nguyen Kings did not have effective measures to improve farming techniques for agricultural land. The in-kind rent policies adopted during this period were an economic setback. Progressive policies applied such as reclamation, establishment of hamlets, equalfield, dyke protection, and confiscation of private fields helped the Nguyen Dynasty restore the degraded agriculture left behind by the last century and stabilize people's life somewhat. However, these policies are not enough to bring the agricultural development to a higher level.

Thus, before the French colonialists invaded, Vietnam's economy was still in an extremely backward and underdeveloped state. In contrast, before the Western colonialists tried to penetrate, Japan had a much more developed industrial and commercial economy than other contemporaries. The development of cities in Japan is associated with feudal production methods, reflecting the internal development in the industrial and commercial economy and this is an important premise underpinning the success of the Meiji Restoration in 1868.

The Cultural and Ideological Elements

The cultural and ideological foundation built the basic power for the reformation in Japan. In the late Edo period, cultural life is rich and varied. "In Japan, the official philosophy of the early Tokugawa period was Zhu

Xi's (1130-1200), a preeminent scholar in the important period of philosophical revival during the Song Dynasty in China" (Sansom, 1989, p. 266). Confucianism in Japan was not of the Han School but the Song School, also known as the Zhu Xi School (Shushigaku). The Song Dynasty neo-Confucianism of the Zhu Xi School was an effective tool for the Tokugawa Shogunate to maintain their feudalism. A special feature in Japan is that there has never had any ideology occupying a unique position in society as in Vietnam. "Although Confucianism prevailed in academic circles, the cultural and intellectual life in the Tokugawa period was generally very diverse and prosperous" (Sinh, 2014, p. 84). The classes of urban dwellers and warriors were still influenced by other ideological trends such as National Studies (Kokugaku), Dutch Studies (Rangaku), and Western Studies (Yōgaku). Those who followed new ideologies were those who became the core force of the later innovation. Thanks to the new ideologies from the West such as Dutch Studies or Western Studies, a wind of change blew through the Japanese of the time, thereby enriching their spiritual life.

Hence, they became more open-minded, easily accepted new values, and received progressive views conforming with national interests. This explains why Western spirit and Western civilization are more easily accepted in Japan than in Vietnam.

Japanese education during this period also had profound changes. The economic development in urban areas promoted educational popularization in Japan. A series of rural schools and pagoda schools were built to meet the academic needs of the commoners. The class of urban dwellers also wanted their children to enjoy education and become intellectuals as the ruling class because the moral values and behaviors of the class of warriors were general standards for the whole society. For merchants and urban dwellers, cultural knowledge and calculation skills were essential for their offspring to enlarge trade and commerce in the future. Thus, education became a general demand of the whole society. Before the establishment of the modern education system, schools self-founded by the class of merchants had been plentiful and teachers and literate people had been numerous in society.

When Gia Long ascended the throne, Confucianism was taken as the ideological basis. The education and examination system under the Nguyen dynasty was also built to train mandarins serving the court. The civil service examination system created capable and moral mandarins conforming with the requirements of the governance of the country based on an orthodox point of view and absolute loyalty to the king. In the Confucian education and training system, professional knowledge was not encouraged to be promoted; the main teaching content was the Four Books, the Five Classics, and the classics of Chinese Confucianism. The knowledge of teaching and learning is, therefore, often unrealistic, hackneyed, and stereotypical.

In the context of a new era, the period of opening up and exchanging with other countries, especially Western countries and under threat of colonialism lurking, the Confucian learning that was supported and highly valued by both the court and the feudal intellectuals no longer met the demand. The archaic Confucian curriculum was no longer appropriate. (Thuan, 2014, p. 107)

In addition to the Song Confucian thought, several ideologies and trends such as National Studies, Dutch Studies, and Western Studies influenced Japanese society in the Edo period. In Japanese society of the time, there was "the Theory of urban dwellers" (Chonin Gaku) or known as "the Creed of townsmen". These schools of thought had a positive impact on the Japanese people's cultural life that became more open and diverse. Hence, they were more easily receptive to Western civilization than the closed Vietnamese society under the domination of Confucianism. It was the unique position of Confucianism in Vietnamese society that made the society's thought become limited and have difficulty accepting the achievements of Western civilization during this period.

The Vietnamese education system was constrained by Confucian ideology for the purpose of training the stereotypical bureaucracy that originated from the Nguyen kings' needs. For Japan, the economic development led to the people's a very high demand for education along with the desire for training people serving the needs of expanding trade among regions in the country. The teaching content was very diverse. In particular, due to the influence of trends such as Dutch Studies and Western Studies, knowledge of geography, nature, science, calculation skills, etc., were also taught in the school system in Japan.

The political, cultural, ideological, economic, and social differences between Japan and Vietnam had a great influence on the formation of reform forces in the two countries during this period. It can be seen that the reform thought in Japan was born much earlier than in Vietnam.

The Forces as Leaders of Reform Movements in Japan and Vietnam

Some Comparisons

It can be seen that the similarity in the forces as leaders of reform movements between Japan and Vietnam is that they appeared when the country was under pressure of invasion by Western colonialists and the risk of losing national independence. Both Japan and Vietnam in the second half of the 19th century were subjected to sign unequal treaties in the context of capitalism prevailing in Europe. The intelligentsia in Japan and Vietnam was all intellectuals in feudal society, all received Song Confucian thought of China, and got the respect of society. Under threat of losing national independence along with the desire for innovation to be selfreliant, the intelligentsia advocated initiating a reform movement following the direction of bourgeois democracy. Reform policies in Japan and Vietnam were characterized by bourgeois democracy and comprehensive reform in terms of economy, politics, culture, society, and education. This shows the self-awareness and self-awakening of the progressive intelligentsia in both countries about their country's stagnation, backwardness, and slow development compared to the West.

In Japan, the vanguard of the reform movement was the low class of samurai. The samurai class in Japan had both literary and martial qualities, and took Bushido thought as the moral basis for the warrior's behaviors, which became a tradition of the Japanese nation later. The deep roots of bushido were the teachings of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shinto. Buddhism equipped the samurai with an attitude of silence, leaving everything to fate, stoic composure in the face of danger or disasters, contempt for danger, and calm, submitting themselves to the inevitable fate. Confucianism was the moral foundation of bushido, but the core foundation was still Shinto. Shinto advocated the worship of nature, all things, and ancestors, which was the link connecting people with their roots, tightening the love for the country to become deeper. Shinto filled in what other religions did not have such as loyalty to the royalty they serve, reverence for ancestors, filial piety to parents, submission, and restraint. Therefore, the intelligentsia of Japan was different from that of Vietnam, although they were all influenced by Confucianism.

Samurai in Japan was a heterogeneous caste which was the low class of warriors having the lowest economic and social status, the nucleus and the initiators of the reform. The radical class of samurai and the outside lords (tozama daimyo) came from the samurai class in the southwestern han of Choshu, Satsuma, Hizen, and Tossa. They were considered the pioneers of the reform movement in Japan. They were soon aware of the danger affecting the survival of their nation, so they raised the flag of reform following the direction of bourgeois democracy and became the most important force to bring the Meiji Restoration to success.

In Vietnam, the forces of the reform movement were patriotic feudal intellectuals and the progressive Confucian intelligentsia. This was the vital feature that determined the nature and characteristics of the reformation in Vietnam, which had been long and heavily influenced by Confucianism. In the context that countries of East Asia had been renovating their country following the direction of bourgeois democracy to safeguard national independence, the progressive intelligentsia in Vietnam also quickly grasped this trend. The first proposals for reform were submitted to the Nguyen Dynasty by Pham Phu Thu in late 1859; the final reports were presented by Nguyen Lo Trach around 1884. Typical representatives of the reform trend during this period may include Nguyen Truong To, Dang Huy Tru, Pham Phu Thu, Tran Dinh Tuc, Nguyen Lo Trach, etc. The reformers of the late 19th century almost had direct or indirect contact with Western civilization. At the beginning of the 20th century, the renovation movement pertained to radical Confucian intellectuals such as Phan Boi Chau, Phan Chau Trinh, Luong Van Can, Huynh Thuc Khang, etc. These patriotic Confucianists were all influenced by the wave of New Books and New Literature through exchanges with China and after the resounding victories of Japan in the Sino-Japanese War (1898) and the Russo-Japan War (1904-1905).

For the forces in Vietnam, almost all of them came from the radical Confucian intelligentsia and more or less contacted Western civilization, so they initiated the reform movement to modernise, self-strengthen, and protect national independence. However, those were only a few progressive Confucianists in the majority of Confucian scholars in Vietnam of the time that was still too conservative and biased in imperial interests to approve innovation. Besides, Confucian education did not create acumen in thinking ahead of the new era, so Vietnamese reformers were still limited within the scope of feudal thought. The ability to adapt to the changes of the period is not as high as that in Japan during this time.

In Japan, the force initiating the reform movement was a powerful alliance with strong economic and military power. It was the association of a large number of the low-ranking samurai, the lords in the economically and militarily flourishing Southwestern states, the urban dwellers, the merchants with economic power, and the rural wealthy bourgeois farmers. In particular, many outstanding leaders of the reform movement coming from the low-ranking samurai and participating in economic and political reforms in localities such as Obuko Toshimichi, Saigo Takamori, Kido Katayoshi, Ito Hirobumi, Iwakura Tomori were energetic innovators, talented politicians and became the mainstay of the Meiji government later. It can be seen that the force of the reform movement in Japan was a solidary alliance in the front line that reflected that innovation was not only the desire of a part of Japanese society but also the internal demand of the socio-economics in Japan of the time. In Vietnam, the class of patriotic feudal intellectuals and the progressive Confucian intelligentsia who initiated the reform included those who had direct or indirect contact with Western civilization, so they accounted for only a small number in society and were not influential enough in the whole country. In contrast, the conservative, xenophobic, anti-reform Confucianists prevailed, thereby limiting these innovative thoughts. Therefore, unlike Japan having the solidary alliance and support of the society, Vietnam has the solitary initiating force.

In the reformation, the role and the position of the leader are very important, determining whether that reform program will succeed or fail. There was also a huge difference in the Japanese and Vietnamese reform leadership, which affected the success or failure of the reformation in the two countries. In Japan, the highest leader of the country was Emperor Meiji. A leader who is wise and sensitive to the national situation is an extremely important factor for the successful reform of the country. The talent of Emperor Meiji could be seen through the selection of talents, gathering around him a team of talented young leaders with scientific knowledge and thought of reforming the country. There were many reasons for the success of the Meiji Restoration in Japan, but the most

important one was that Meiji Emperor was the ruler of the country who had enough political and economic power, thereby easily implementing and deploying the reform program following the direction of bourgeois democracy. In Vietnam, the force having thought of renovating the country in this period was a very small group of mandarins and patriots who had more contact with the outside and higher awareness than their contemporaries but occupied the less important positions in the existing power system. They belonged to the class of the advanced Confucian intelligentsia or patriotic scholars. They got divided, wavered on their attitudes towards the colonialists, and vacillated between the interests of the class and the interests of the whole nation. Their hatred for colonialism shortened the distance between the masses and them, but their origin from the wealthy class easily pulled them nearer to the authorities. The initiators of reform in Vietnam were not absolute leaders like Meiji in Japan. Therefore, the influence of the reform movement in Vietnam was not as far-reaching as that in Japan. This was also one of the important factors for the failure of the reform movement in Vietnam.

In Japan, the head of the country was Emperor Mutshuhito who was also the leader of the reform program to “enrich the country and strengthen the army”, while in Vietnam, the head of the Nguyen Dynasty was King Tu Duc who had real political power at that time but refused the reform of the country. “Standing in the position of the supreme ruler whose personal interests were directly threatened by the incessant uprisings of the people throughout the region, Tu Duc put his interests and the interests of his family above the national interests” (Lan, 2002, p. 187). In Vietnam, thoughts of innovations appeared very early. The content was either relatively systematic such as the reports of Nguyen Truong To, Dang Huy Tru, Nguyen Lo Trach or sparse such as those of Pham Phu Thu, Tran Dinh Tuc, etc. This shows that the fundamental reason for the failure of the reform thought in Vietnam at the end of the 19th century was that the leader of the country refused to carry out reforms. It was the political power of the reform leader that determined whether the reform program would be successful or not. For example, in Japan and Siam (Thailand), Emperor Meiji and King Chulalongkorn were both the heads with the real power and the leaders of the successful reform movement in these two countries. In China, King Quang Tu had no real power, which led to the failure of the reform movement of 1898 although it lasted 103 days. In other countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam, the initiators were the low classes, patriotic feudal intellectuals, the radical Confucian intelligentsia, or the low class of aristocrats, so the reform movements failed.

Thus, it can be seen that the human factor played an important role in the reform movements in Japan and Vietnam during the early modern period. In terms of the human factor, the role and the position of the leader in the reform process were very vital. They determined the success or failure of each reform movement in each country. This was clearly proved by the role of the country’s leader in the Meiji Restoration in Japan and the reform in Vietnam. Meiji in Japan was a king who kept abreast of current affairs and took up the reformation to maintain and ensure the supreme position of the feudal class, thereby creating the internal force for the development of the country and the preservation of national sovereignty. In Vietnam, reform movements started and happened ebulliently but generally failed. The main reason for the failure may be the human factor in the reform. The leaders of reform movements were all from the low class of aristocrats, the progressive Confucian intelligentsia, the commoners, the patriotic feudal intellectuals who had early contact with Western civilization, so they did not have real power. Therefore, the exhortation and the mobilization of the people to participate in the reform were limited. Until there was no longer the leader, the movement was extinguished. Furthermore, it is clear that one of the important reasons for the failure of the reform movement in Vietnam was the repression of the French colonialists in the early twentieth century.

Conclusion

The reform movement in Japan and Vietnam appeared under the influence of subjective and objective factors. It can be seen that a strong catalyst for the birth of reforms in these two countries is the risk of invasion and enslavement by Western colonists. In the face of the mass failure of the armed struggle movements of the people of Asia, reform is considered the way to modernize the country and respond most effectively to the wave of aggression by Western colonists in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The political, economic, social, and ideological factors affecting the reform leadership forces in Japan and Vietnam are quite different. In Japan, the premises for the emergence of reform ideas appeared much earlier than in Vietnam. This is due to the development of the capitalist economy, the richness and diversity in cultural-ideological life, the initiative of the samurai, and the country's leader, Emperor Meiji, in acquiring Western civilization to serve the development of the country. For Vietnam, the reform thought of a few progressive Confucian intellectuals arose when they came into contact with Western civilization or the need to protect national independence from the French colonial invasion, but the result of the internal movement of the socio-economic of Vietnam at that time. The similarities and differences of the reform leadership forces in Japan and Vietnam have proven that reforming the role and position of the reform leader is very important, determining the success or failure of the reform program. Typically, in Japan, the reform process took place successfully, led by Emperor Meiji who was running the country, having enough political and economic power, so it was easy to implement the reform program. In contrast, the reformers in Vietnam are those from the lower strata of the society who initiate, they do not have enough political and economic power, so they do not realize the reform program. For Tu Duc, the head of the country who was not aware of what was the right path and the most effective way to save the country, the urgent hearings, the enthusiastic renewal proposals of the advanced Confucian intellectuals are like meaningless blank sheets of paper. It can be seen that the political power of the reform leader is extremely important in realizing the reform program and achieving success. In the reform process, the role of the reform leadership force is extremely important and still has practical value for the renovation cause of our country today.

References

- Gordon, A. (2003). *A modern history of Japan from Tokugawa times to the present*. United Kingdom: Oxford University Press.
- Lan, L. T. (2002). *Reform thought in Vietnam in the second half of the nineteenth century*. Ha Noi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Luc, N. T. (2010). *The Meiji restoration and Vietnam*. Hanoi: Vietnam Education Publishing House.
- Ninh, V. D. (2016). *The reform movement in countries of East Asia (from the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century)*. Ha Noi: Ha Noi National University Publishing House.
- Sansom, G. B. (1989). *Japan: A short cultural history (Volume 2)*. Ha Noi: Social Sciences Publishing House.
- Sinh, V. (2014). *Japan in the early modern period*. Ha Noi: Labour Publishing House.
- Thuan, T. (2014). *Attitude of the Vietnamese feudal intellectuals in the period of the exchange between the East and the West (from the seventeenth century to the early twentieth century)*. Ho Chi Minh City: Ho Chi Minh City General Publishing House.