

Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy of life: A foundation for Vietnamese political thought and national resilience



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Abstract This article examines the profound philosophy of life embedded in the political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan, a legendary hero, strategist, and symbol of Vietnamese resilience against the Yuan-Mongol invasions in the 13th century. Tran Quoc Tuan's contributions to the Vietnamese nation extend beyond his military genius, encapsulating a rich philosophical outlook on life, governance, and the art of war. His thoughts, deeply rooted in the values of patriotism, humanity, and unity, propelled Dai Viet to remarkable victories and significantly influenced the development of a cohesive, independent feudal state. This paper delves into the core aspects of Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy of life, including the ethical conduct of generals, the moral obligations of leadership, and the strategic application of humanistic principles in military tactics. By analyzing Tran Quoc Tuan's literary works and historical contributions, this study highlights the enduring relevance of his philosophical insights for contemporary political and military strategy, national unity, and cultural identity. Tran Quoc Tuan's legacy, characterized by a harmonious blend of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist thought, remains a beacon of national pride and a guiding principle for the Vietnamese people's spirit of independence and self-reliance (Pham et al., 2025). The new contribution of the article lies in systematizing the fundamental content of Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy of life, highlighting its historical significance in the development of Vietnamese national history, thereby affirming that his philosophy is also the philosophy of the entire Vietnamese people, symbolizing the spirit of self-reliance and the resilience of the nation.

Keywords: philosophy of life, Tran Quoc Tuan, Vietnamese political thought

1. Introduction

The history of Vietnam (from the primitive states Kingdom of Văn Lang 2879 BC until present) is replete with stories of heroism, resilience, and strategic genius that have shaped the nation's identity and cultural heritage (Do & Ngo, 2023; Kiernan, 2017; Le et al., 2009; Taylor, 2017). Among the pantheons of Vietnamese heroes, Tran Quoc Tuan (陳國峻, 1229/1231 - 1300), also known as Tran Hung Dao or Grand Prince Hưng Đạo (興道大王), stands out as a paragon of military excellence and philosophical depth, even a saint in Vietnamese history (Kelley, 2015; Man, 2022; Nguyen, 2012; Pham, 2009; Phuong, 2006; Taylor, 1983; Tikkanen, 2024). His leadership during the three pivotal wars against the Yuan-Mongol invaders in the 13th century not only ensured the independence of Dai Viet (now Vietnam) but also left an indelible mark on the nation's collective consciousness and elevated the dynasty's status in Southeast Asian history (Dinh, 2017; Pham, 2017; Wolters, 1995). This article aims to explore the rich tapestry of Tran Quoc Tuan's political thought, focusing on his profound philosophy of life that transcends the mere tactics of warfare to encompass a broader vision of governance, ethical leadership, and national unity.

Tran Quoc Tuan, also known as Grand Commander Hung Dao, is revered not only for his unparalleled military acumen but also for his deep philosophical insights into the conduct of life and statecraft. His legacy is encapsulated in several seminal works, most notably the "Binh Thư Yếu Lược" (Military Provisions Essential Tactics), which offers a glimpse into his strategic mind and humanistic approach to leadership. At the core of Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy lies a commitment to the welfare of the people, the importance of national unity, and the ethical responsibilities of leaders. These principles were instrumental in galvanizing the Vietnamese people to stand united against one of the most formidable military forces (Yuan-Mongol) of their time (Dinh, 2017).

The relevance of Tran Quoc Tuan's thought extends beyond the historical context of the Yuan-Mongol invasions, offering timeless insights into the essence of leadership, the importance of moral integrity in governance, and the unyielding spirit of national resistance. This article seeks to dissect the multiple dimensions of Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy of life, drawing parallels between his teachings and contemporary issues in political and military strategy, national cohesion, and cultural



identity. By revisiting Tran Quoc Tuan's legacy, we aim to underscore the enduring significance of his thought for future generations, highlighting how ancient wisdom can inform modern challenges and inspire a nation toward greater unity and resilience.

Research questions

1. What is the political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan?
2. What contents does the philosophy of life in Tran Quoc Tuan's political thought include?
3. What are the contributions of Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy of life to the history of the Vietnamese nation?

In examining the life and contributions of Tran Quoc Tuan, this study not only pays homage to a national hero but also seeks to enrich the scholarly discourse on Vietnamese historical and philosophical studies. Through an analysis of Tran Quoc Tuan's writings and deeds, this article endeavors to illuminate the depth of his intellectual and strategic contributions, affirming his role as a cornerstone of Vietnamese cultural and national identity.

2. Literature Review

The scholarly exploration of Tran Quoc Tuan's contributions to Vietnamese military strategy and national philosophy has spawned a rich tapestry of literature that delves into his unparalleled legacy. This literature review aims to critically analyze the body of work surrounding Tran Quoc Tuan, with a focus on his philosophy of life, military strategies, and their enduring impact on Vietnamese cultural identity and governance.

Tran Quoc Tuan's strategic acumen, particularly during the Yuan-Mongol invasions, has been the subject of extensive study. Researchers such as Le Minh Quoc (2009) and Pham Hong Son (1997) have highlighted his innovative military tactics and deep understanding of terrain and psychological warfare. These studies often underscore Tran Quoc Tuan's ability to integrate traditional Vietnamese guerrilla tactics with principles drawn from ancient military treatises, demonstrating a unique fusion that tailored classical strategies to the Vietnamese context. This synthesis of knowledge, as documented in the "Binh Thư Yếu Lược" (Military Provisions Essential Tactics) (Tran, 1977), highlights Tran Quoc Tuan's strategic genius not only in combat but also in fostering a resilient national spirit.

At the heart of Tran Quoc Tuan's military philosophy lies a profound commitment to the welfare of the Vietnamese people, a theme that resonates deeply with the work of scholars such as Nguyen Quang Ngoc (2009) and the collective efforts of researchers at the Vietnam Institute of History (1981, 2000). These studies emphasize Tran Quoc Tuan's humanistic approach to leadership, where the prosperity and security of the populace were paramount. His strategies were not merely about defeating the enemy but also about ensuring the minimal impact of warfare on the civilian population. Moreover, Tran Quoc Tuan's leadership during the Mongol invasions is highlighted through his work, "Hịch tướng sỹ" (encouragement to soldiers), which aimed to boost soldier morale and national unity. This work is significant for its expression of patriotism and the human virtues of loyalty and collective interest, contributing to the successful defense against the Mongols (Thom, 2018). This aspect of Tran Quoc Tuan's thought aligns with the Confucian ideal of benevolent governance, suggesting a deep-rooted philosophical stance that valorizes the moral and ethical dimensions of leadership.

Furthermore, Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophical insights, which amalgamate Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist elements, offer a rich field of analysis for understanding his comprehensive worldview. His adherence to Confucian ethics, particularly the virtues of loyalty, filial piety, and righteousness, informed his approach to leadership and governance, promoting a harmonious society centered on moral rectitude. However, as highlighted in studies by scholars such as Ha Van Tan and Pham Thi Tam (2003), Tran Quoc Tuan also embraced the Buddhist principles of compassion and detachment, which tempered his military campaigns with a sense of mercy and ethical conduct. Moreover, Taoist influences can be discerned in his strategic flexibility and emphasis on living in harmony with the natural world, which were critical to his guerrilla warfare tactics. This integration of philosophical perspectives has been critically analyzed by Le Dinh Sy (2000), who posits that Tran Quoc Tuan's multifaceted worldview significantly contributed to the development of a distinctly Vietnamese approach to statecraft and military strategy.

The enduring impact of Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy on Vietnamese cultural identity and national resilience is another crucial area of scholarly interest. Works by Nguyen Khac Thuan (2001) and the broader historical analyses provided in "Đại Việt sử ký toàn thư" (The Complete Annals of Đại Việt) (2009) argue that Tran Quoc Tuan's legacy transcends his military achievements, embedding itself in the national consciousness as a symbol of Vietnamese resilience and independence. His life and teachings, imbued with a deep sense of national pride and unity, continue to inspire contemporary discourses on national identity and sovereignty. The relevance of Tran Quoc Tuan's thought in the modern era, particularly in the context of global challenges and the preservation of cultural heritage, is a testament to the timeless nature of his contributions.

In synthesizing the literature on Tran Quoc Tuan, it becomes evident that his significance to Vietnamese history and philosophy extends far beyond his military victories. His profound understanding of human nature, governance, and the art of war offers valuable insights into the cultivation of national unity, ethical leadership, and cultural resilience. The body of scholarly work reviewed herein not only celebrates Tran Quoc Tuan's historical contributions but also underscores the relevance of his philosophical and strategic thought in addressing contemporary issues. As Vietnam continues to navigate the

complexities of the modern world, the principles espoused by Tran Quoc Tuan remain a guiding light, reflecting the enduring spirit and identity of the Vietnamese people.

In conclusion, the literature on Tran Quoc Tuan provides a comprehensive overview of his multifaceted contributions to Vietnamese military strategy, political philosophy, and national identity. His integration of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist thought into a coherent philosophy of life and governance continues to resonate, offering a rich vein of scholarly inquiry. Future research could further explore the application of Tran Quoc Tuan's principles to contemporary geopolitical and social challenges, thereby continuing to illuminate the relevance of this pioneering historical figure to modern Vietnam and beyond.

3. The political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan

Sacrificing his personal and family interests and placing the interests of the nation—the country above all—Tra Quoc Tuan truly became a symbol of patriotism, unity, and determination to maintain independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity. The political-military thought of him is concentratedly expressed through famous works such as “Binh Thư Yếu Lược” (Military Provisions Essential Tactics), “Hịch Tu²ng Sĩ” (encencagement to Soldiers), etc. These works have left a deep mark in the history of Vietnamese thought because they are both a true reflection of the historical, social, economic, political, and cultural conditions at that time and the result of inheriting the political, military thoughts of predecessors. The political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan highlights basic issues such as patriotism and the national spirit of people with many contents of profound significance, such as “people are the root”, “close to the people”, “respect the people”, “easing the burden on the people is a deep-rooted strategy, that is the supreme strategy to keep the country”, united to fight the enemy “the king and officials united, brothers harmonious, the whole country concentrated its efforts so that they had to admit defeat” (Tran, 1977, p. 397). The most distinctive feature in his political thought is the unity between the national, people, and class characteristics, in which the national characteristic is emphasized above all. The military thought of Tran Quoc Tuan is one of the decisive factors for the victory of the army and people of Dai Viet in the 13th century. He inherited the tradition of fighting the enemy of our nation and simultaneously absorbed all the essence of military thought of ancient China; from there, he formulated military art suitable for the historical–social conditions of the country. It is a system of viewpoints on people's war, unity in fighting against foreign invasion, building an army deeply father-son, focusing on quality when building the army with the motto using the short to defeat the long, taking less to defeat many, taking soft to win hard, and taking small to control large. These are truly scientific viewpoints, transcending the era and reaching the peak of the art of people's war in the feudal era. Thus, the birth of the political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan met the practical requirements of the resistance wars against the Yuan-Mongol invaders and reflected the aspirations for independence, self-reliance, and self-strength consciousness of the nation. It is the embodiment of noble sacrifice, the spirit of unity fighting to protect the nation—the country. The uniqueness of the political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan is the harmonious combination between the tradition of patriotic, steadfast, indomitable resistance against foreign invasion and the spirit of unity, love, mutual assistance in the process of nation-building and defense with rational elements in the thought of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. It is also a characteristic of the economic, political-social situation of the Tran dynasty (1226–1400) (Thi My Hanh, 2022) because it was the time when Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism (the three religions co-origin) were all absorbed to build a good political system, with harmony and tolerance as the foundation. Owing to the ability to skillfully apply flexible political lines, flexible strategies, promote humanity, implement human virtues, and win the hearts of the people, the spirit of tolerance, the charity of Buddhism, and the Tran dynasty created a golden era, the most brilliant development in the history of feudal Vietnam. Those essences most clearly converged in the political thought system of Tran Quoc Tuan.

4. The content of the philosophy of life in the political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan

Tran Quoc Tuan's approach to leadership and military strategy is deeply rooted in his philosophy of life, particularly in how he valued and interacted with people. He placed paramount importance on the role of a general in warfare, believing that the key to success in battle begins with recognizing and nurturing the general talent. Tran Quoc Tuan's strategic insights emphasized the necessity of assembling a diverse team of generals, each bringing their unique strengths to the fore (Tran, 1977). He advocated for a holistic approach to military leadership, where Confucian generals excel in planning, brave generals shine in combat, inspirational generals boost morale with their courage, cunning generals specialize in devising intricate strategies, and artistic generals bring creativity. By combining these diverse talents, Tran Quoc Tuan argued that a military force could achieve unparalleled excellence and effectiveness, highlighting the critical role of versatility and adaptability in achieving success.

4.1. Rules of conduct for generals

Given that generals play a particularly important role in the fate of the nation—the people—Tra Quoc Tuan requires maintaining the way of being a general to ensure the interests of society and the nation—the people first. From there, he set out his own standards for generals. For the nation, the interests of the nation—the people—must be paramount because the peace or danger of the state depends on one general (Do et al., 2022). To do so, generals must know how to cultivate

themselves to keep themselves clean. For the king, generals must know how to be a servant and must be absolutely loyal to the king. He said “those who are double-hearted cannot serve the king,” implying that generals must know how to forget themselves to repay the king (Tran, 1977). Tran Quoc Tuan emphasized that generals must prioritize the well-being of the people, advocating against seizing their land or disrupting their farming. He believed in the importance of a general being seen as a protector of people’s lives, urging them to treat the populace as the foundation of the nation’s strength. This involved fostering unity and reducing burdens to build a prosperous country. Generals were also encouraged to balance tolerance and discipline within the ranks, with a focus on strictness and adherence to military rituals to maintain order and unity. Emphasizing empathy, Tran Quoc Tuan suggested that generals should deeply connect with their soldiers’ experiences, treating them with the same care as one would family members. In dealing with enemies, he underscored the need for strategic insight, advising generals to adapt their tactics on the basis of the enemy’s strength and never to underestimate them regardless of numerical superiority, emphasizing prudence and strategic planning over recklessness. For themselves, generals must know how to sacrifice personal and family interests, know how to give up frivolous pleasures, and constantly cultivate and train to know how to treat people truly well. Tran Quoc Tuan emphasized that a general must relinquish familial bonds and personal desires, focusing solely on the mission at hand. He advocated for a mindset where the general prioritizes the call of duty over personal survival, choosing to face death for the chance of victory. In his view, eliminating a hundred foes could restore order, defeating a thousand could lead to the capture and defeat of the enemy’s leader, and conquering ten thousand could enable dominion across the world (Tran, 1977). This philosophy underscores a commitment to sacrifice and the strategic cost of achieving monumental success. Thus, Tran Quoc Tuan is based on basic relationships to set out the standards and rules of conduct that generals need to have. Through that, he reflected on the profound philosophy of life in the political–military thought system. His philosophy of life not only strongly influenced the fighting spirit of the kings and officials of the Tran dynasty but also contributed to creating the spirit of Dong A of Dai Viet in the 13th century.

4.2. *Morality as a general*

Inheriting the views of Confucianism, Tran Quoc Tuan required generals to have enough human qualities, such as humanity, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, faithfulness, loyalty, and filial piety. These categories originate from Chinese philosophy but are vividly transformed, bearing many elements of Vietnamese tradition. Humanity is the ability to love people. He said, “Seeing a sick person is like yourself being sick” (Tran, 1977, p. 78) and “pitying the sick person, that is, to show humanity” (Tran, 1977).

Tran Quoc Tuan’s philosophy emphasizes the moral and ethical framework within which generals and soldiers must operate, prioritizing the welfare of vulnerable segments of society, such as the poor, weak, and sick. His advocacy for courtesy as a guiding principle in military conduct reflects a belief in the power of decorum and discipline. Tran Quoc Tuan posited that adherence to a set of norms, or courtesy, is crucial for generals, particularly in how they respond to orders and face the outcomes of battles. This approach to leadership underscores the importance of responsibility and sacrifice, where personal and familial ties are secondary to duty.

His instructions for generals to maintain their behavior within the bounds of courtesy and to avoid arrogance, greed, and deceit highlight a deeper understanding of leadership’s impact on unity and morale. According to Tran Quoc Tuan, the loss of courtesy could lead to disillusion among the people and insubordination among the ranks, illustrating how moral integrity is intertwined with military discipline and effectiveness.

The distinction between rewards and punishments based on courtesy further illustrates his nuanced approach to leadership. By advocating for a merit-based system that recognizes even the smallest contributions, Tran Quoc Tuan underscores the importance of fairness and generosity in maintaining discipline and morale. This system, rooted in the principles of righteousness and loyalty, serves as a foundation for establishing a cohesive and motivated force, with the ultimate goal of safeguarding the nation and its people.

Loyalty and righteousness are central to his philosophy, serving not only as moral virtues but also as the basis for national unity and strength. Tran Quoc Tuan’s emphasis on these values reflects his belief in the intrinsic link between personal virtue and public duty. He ingeniously intertwines these concepts with the spirit of patriotism, urging generals and soldiers to place the interests of the nation and its people above their own.

The concept of “Sát Thát” in Dai Viet during the 13th century, derived from the loyalty and righteousness of its military leaders, highlights the transformative power of these values in shaping the nation’s character and resilience. Tran Quoc Tuan’s perspective on family management further extends these principles beyond the battlefield, advocating for the prioritization of national over familial interests. This broader application of loyalty and righteousness to both the military and domestic spheres signifies a comprehensive vision for societal harmony and prosperity.

His association of loyalty to the king with patriotism and righteousness with national consciousness underscores a holistic view of service and sacrifice. Tran Quoc Tuan utilizes the dichotomy of honor and shame to motivate generals and soldiers, advocating for innovation in tactics and dedication to the country’s welfare as the highest expressions of loyalty and service.

Moreover, Tran Quoc Tuan's emphasis on filial piety extends beyond traditional familial obligations, advocating for a broad application of respect and care for the populace. This expanded definition of filial piety reinforces the interconnectedness of individual, familial, and national duties, suggesting a leadership style that is compassionate, people focused, and strategically mindful of the greater good.

Wisdom, according to Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy, is characterized by foresight and adaptability. He argues that effective leadership requires a deep understanding of people and situations, as well as the ability to anticipate and strategically respond to challenges. This emphasis on wisdom highlights the complexity of military and political leadership, demanding not only moral integrity but also intellectual acumen.

He said, "In the army, there are sick people, generals must personally bring medicine to treat; the army has dead people, generals must mourn... whenever there are rewards, they are divided equally for officials and soldiers; when there are actions, they must gather all generals to discuss, the plan has been decided and then attacked. Therefore, generals and soldiers grace for wine and blood. Therefore, soldiers have the joy of buffalo fighting and the spirit of throwing stones; love each other like children following father and brother, like hands and feet supporting eyes and head, no one can stop" (Tran, 1977, pp. 64--65).

This philosophy of life not only created unity between kings and officials in the court but also expanded to the unity of the whole nation. He always advised that "if the general is arrogant, the soldiers are lazy, will surely lose" (Tran, 1977, p. 65). The kings and officials of the Tran dynasty may have made many achievements and left many marks in history as such.

In summary, Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy offers a multifaceted framework for leadership that integrates moral principles, strategic wisdom, and a deep commitment to the welfare of the nation and its people. His teachings, which emphasize courtesy, loyalty, righteousness, and wisdom, provide a comprehensive model for military and political conduct that is both ethically grounded and pragmatically effective. This blend of moral and strategic considerations reflects a profound understanding of the challenges and responsibilities of leadership, with enduring relevance for both historical and contemporary contexts.

4.3. *The art of being a general*

Tran Quoc Tuan believed, "the art of using troops, all things humane, trustworthy, intelligent, brave, strict, lacking one thing is not" (Tran, 1977). To win people's hearts, generals must possess five virtues and five talents. Tran Quoc Tuan delineates a comprehensive framework for leadership, rooted in both virtue and talent, to guide generals in their conduct and ensure their success. He identifies five core virtues: high morals to uplift societal norms, filial piety to ensure a lasting legacy, trustworthiness to forge strong relationships, broad love to garner popular support, and strength to achieve commendable deeds. These virtues are complemented by five essential talents: bravery to deter adversaries, intelligence to navigate complexities, humanity to foster love among the people, trustworthiness to maintain integrity, and loyalty to avoid duplicity. This blend of virtues and talents outlines a holistic model for effective leadership.

Additionally, Tran Quoc Tuan highlights the importance of humility in a general's character. He warned against the pitfalls of arrogance, suggesting that an overreliance on intelligence and courage can lead to downfall and even contribute to the collapse of dynasties. Humility, in his view, is not just a personal virtue but a strategic asset that enables generals to connect with the people and effectively counter adversaries.

Tran Quoc Tuan's strategy for winning the hearts of the people involves a nuanced understanding of human motivations and behaviors. He proposes stimulating the rich with pride, the extravagant with extravagance, and the poor with the prospect of wealth, among other tailored approaches, to influence diverse segments of society. This method provides deep psychological insight into leveraging individual tendencies and societal dynamics to foster loyalty and support.

Through this multifaceted approach, Tran Quoc Tuan emphasized the need for generals and leaders to cultivate a noble character, marked by an unwavering love for the country and its people. Such character development is essential for leaders to truly serve as the "parents" of the populace, nurturing and guiding them toward collective well-being and fulfilling the responsibilities entrusted by the nation (Do, 2022a).

In essence, Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy presents a sophisticated blueprint for leadership that balances moral integrity, strategic acumen, and psychological insight. It underscores the importance of self-improvement, empathy, and humility in building a strong, cohesive society. By adhering to these principles, generals can not only achieve personal excellence but also inspire and lead their people toward prosperity and stability, embodying the true essence of servant leadership.

4.4. *The spirit of humanity*

The political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan always promotes humanity. In *Binh Thư Yếu Lược*, he affirmed that "humanity is the purpose of human life and the purpose of generals, being a general must fight for justice, fight for the interests of the people" (Tran, 1977). For him, humanity must be placed first and is the root of all work. Generals must engrave that in their minds. Therefore, the way of being a general takes humanity as the root. Tran Quoc Tuan's principles for military leadership are deeply intertwined with the cultivation of moral virtues, highlighting the essential role of human dynamics in achieving successful outcomes. He posits that the essence of military strategy lies in winning the hearts of the valiant, enforcing a fair

system of rewards and punishments, and integrating the intellectual disciplines of literature and martial arts, alongside the philosophical concepts of hardness and softness, and the moral principles of courtesy and righteousness. This holistic approach prioritizes moral strength before physical prowess, emphasizing the importance of ethical leadership in military operations.

Central to Tran Quoc Tuan's philosophy is the promotion of humanity, not only within the ranks of superiors and subordinates but also toward the wider community, including neighboring countries and innocent civilians. His guidance for generals to practice humanity in leadership and to base international relations on trust illustrates a forward-thinking approach to both internal management and foreign diplomacy. The directive to spare innocent lives during military campaigns further underscores his commitment to ethical conduct in warfare.

The concept of human harmony is a cornerstone of Tran Quoc Tuan's political thought, reflecting the belief that the alignment of human interests and efforts surpasses the strategic advantages provided by natural or temporal conditions. By placing human harmony at the forefront, Tran Quoc Tuan elevates the collective will and unity of the people as fundamental to the nation's strength and resilience, especially in the face of external threats.

This emphasis on unity and harmony extends to the relationships between the king and officials, among military leaders, and within the ranks of soldiers. Tran Quoc Tuan advocates for a harmonious governance structure that enables the effective utilization of talent and fosters an environment of mutual support and collective effort. According to him, such harmony not only facilitates significant achievements in governance and military endeavors but also establishes a durable framework for national stability and prosperity.

Tran Quoc Tuan's advocacy for harmony as a governing principle is reflective of his deep understanding of the interplay between moral integrity, strategic wisdom, and the human element in leadership. He views harmony not merely as a desirable state but also as a strategic imperative that ensures the cohesive and concerted action necessary for the defense and development of the nation. This approach highlights a sophisticated appreciation of the complexities of leadership, where moral virtues and strategic considerations are seamlessly integrated to guide both governance and military strategy.

5. Discussion

Through research, the author agreed with researchers who approached the system of political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan from the perspective of the theoretical and practical activities of the Tran dynasty. When researching Tran Quoc Tuan's political thought, researchers from the Vietnam Institute of History unanimously affirmed the contributions of Tran Quoc Tuan to Vietnamese national history. All of them believe that Tran Quoc Tuan is "a general talented in both literature and martial arts", "a meritorious official of the Tran dynasty" and "a great hero" of the Vietnamese nation (Vietnam Institute of History, 2000). Researchers have also agreed with the view that "he is both a strategist who outlines the strategy and the person who directly organizes and implements resistance to victory. Moreover, he also knew how to learn from the experiences of previous generations, refer to "the military arts of various schools", then summarize practical experiences and leave a valuable legacy of military thought contributing to enriching the treasure of Vietnamese military theory" (Vietnam Institute of History, 2000, p. 303). His philosophy of life has become representative of the philosophy of the entire Vietnamese nation in the context of fighting foreign invaders and building an independent feudal state. The contributions of Tran Quoc Tuan to Vietnamese national history can be summarized in both theoretical and practical aspects.

5.1. Contribution in terms of theory

The philosophy of life in Tran Quoc Tuan's political thought revolves around the issues that he requires and advises generals to cultivate and train to achieve, thereby reflecting his philosophy of life and the general philosophy of the whole nation. This philosophy has summarized the relationships among the king, the subject, kings and officials in court with the people, and generals and soldiers (Do, 2022b), as well as the attitudes toward the country, toward the people, toward oneself and toward the invading enemy. Above all is the spirit of patriotism, national pride, the responsibility of the people to the fate of the nation and the will to fight and defeat the invading enemy to build an independent, powerful feudal state. Through those ideas, Tran Quoc Tuan has enriched and deepened many new contents for the history of Vietnamese thought. Familiar categories, such as humanity, courtesy, righteousness, intelligence, loyalty, and filial piety, and thoughts, such as "taking people as the root", "respecting people", "close to people", and "easing the burden on people," Tran Quoc Tuan, have made their content more profound and bear many elements of the nation. Moreover, those philosophies affirmed the stature of Dai Viet's political thought in the 13th century. His philosophy proved that Dai Viet is a small but very resilient country rich in patriotism that is always united and ready to sacrifice personal interests to protect national interests. His philosophy of life is truly progressive, has received the support of the people and has become the theoretical flag for gathering a large number of people to stand up to expel the Yuan-Mongol invaders and build an independent, powerfully developed Dai Viet in many fields.

5.2. Contribution in terms of practice

The philosophy of life in Tran Quoc Tuan's political thought had a strong impact on the practical society of Dai Viet in the 18th century. His notions about patriotism, "easing the burden on people", building an army "taking less to defeat many,

taking weak to defeat strong, taking small to control large,” constitute one of the theoretical bases for determining strategies and tactics to fight Yuan-Mongol invaders and build a powerful, unified Dai Viet. Nguyen Quang Ngoc commented, “The talented generals of Dai Viet such as Ly Thuong Kiet, Tran Quoc Tuan again knew how to effectively apply the strategy of a small country against a large country, take the initiative to attack, defend, or strategically retreat to attack, use intelligence to take weak to defeat strong, as well as actively end the war with peace. These are extremely valuable national defense experiences of the nation that have been inherited and promoted in later historical periods” (Nguyen, 2009, p. 94). The glorious victories of the Dai Viet nation before the powerful Yuan-Mongol army provided convincing evidence for his contributions. His philosophy has met the urgent problems that society poses: (1) the problem of promoting the spirit of unity and the determination to defeat the yuan-mongol; (2) the problem of considering and eliminating personal and class conflicts to protect national interests; and (3) the problem of building an independent, powerful feudal country. The source of strength for Tran Quoc Tuan to solve the historical and social problems posed is that he had the correct perception of the role of the people as the invincible strength in the nation-building and defense struggle. Therefore, that source of strength must always be preserved, consolidated, and developed throughout every era. History has proven that people's war has become one of the decisive factors for the victory of the army and people of the Tran dynasty in particular and for the cause of building and defending the homeland of Vietnam in general. With intelligence and wisdom, along with passionate patriotism, Tran Quoc Tuan has made great contributions to helping the Tran dynasty build a strong political system, value legal governance, use talent, take the field village system to develop the economy, build an independent religion as an ideology, harmonize religions to unify the will and especially take care of the people, easing the burden on the people as a deep-rooted strategy, and consider it the supreme strategy to keep the country. Owing to establishing a political–military system with humanity, tolerance, and harmony, Tran Quoc Tuan helped the Tran dynasty become the most strongly marked dynasty in the history of feudal Vietnam, attracting the participation and support of the people in the fight against foreign invaders, consolidating the dynasty and building a rich and strong country. This is the highest practical meaning of the philosophy of life that Tran Quoc Tuan left for posterity. In the context of Dai Viet having to confront the most powerful Yuan-Mongol military force in the world at that time, the philosophy of life in his political thought had a strong effect on harmonizing conflicts between personal interests, class interests, and common interests of the nation—the people—enhancing the unity strength of the entire nation to fight and defeat the invading enemy, stabilize politics—society, develop the economy, culture, and care for people’s lives. This promotes the great strength of the people in the cause of building and defending the country. With that meaning, the political thought of Tran Quoc Tuan still has a spreading influence to this day.

6. Conclusions

This article has thoroughly explored the multifaceted political thought and philosophy of life of Tran Quoc Tuan, an emblematic figure in Vietnamese history whose teachings have left an indelible mark on the nation’s identity and resilience. Tran Quoc Tuan’s contributions extend beyond his military acumen, embodying a profound philosophy that integrates ethical leadership, patriotism, and the welfare of the people into the fabric of national unity and governance. Through a comprehensive review of the literature and an in-depth analysis of Tran Quoc Tuan’s seminal works and strategies, this study has illuminated the enduring relevance of his insights for contemporary and future challenges facing Vietnam and beyond.

Tran Quoc Tuan’s philosophy, characterized by its blend of Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist influences, offers timeless guidance on leadership, governance, and the art of war, emphasizing moral integrity, humanistic values, and strategic flexibility. His commitment to the welfare of the people and the importance of national unity underpin his military strategies, which not only aimed at defeating the enemy but also minimized the impact on civilians, showcasing his profound humanism.

The article has identified Tran Quoc Tuan’s political thought as a harmonious integration of traditional Vietnamese values with the essence of ancient military strategies tailored to the specific historical and social context of Dai Viet. This unique synthesis facilitated remarkable victories against the Yuan-Mongol invasions and contributed significantly to the development of an independent, cohesive feudal state, emphasizing the role of the people as the root of national strength.

Furthermore, Tran Quoc Tuan’s legacy, as analyzed in this study, highlights his significant theoretical and practical contributions to Vietnamese national history. His philosophy of life, which focused on the moral and ethical obligations of leadership and the strategic application of humanistic principles in governance and military tactics, not only enriched the historical and philosophical discourse but also offered practical solutions to contemporary societal challenges.

In conclusion, the enduring significance of Tran Quoc Tuan’s thought lies in its capacity to inspire unity, resilience, and ethical governance, serving as a guiding light for future generations. His legacy underscores the importance of integrating moral values into leadership and strategy, advocating for a balanced approach to handling modern geopolitical, social, and cultural challenges. Tran Quoc Tuan’s philosophy of life remains a beacon of national pride and a foundational pillar for fostering a spirit of independence, self-reliance, and strong national identity among the Vietnamese people. As we navigate the complexities of the contemporary world, the principles espoused by Tran Quoc Tuan continue to offer valuable insights and inspiration, proving that ancient wisdom can indeed inform and guide modern endeavors toward greater unity, integrity, and resilience.

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Ethical consideration

The author commits to strictly adhering to the principles of scientific integrity established by Ho Chi Minh City University of Law.

Conflicts of interest

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