

Phan Bội Châu

Phan Bội Châu (Vietnamese: [faːn bõǰʔ tɕəw]; 26 December 1867 – 29 October 1940) was a pioneer of Vietnamese 20th century nationalism. In 1903, he formed a revolutionary organization called the “Reformation Society” (*Duy Tân hội*). From 1905 to 1908, he lived in Japan where he wrote political tracts calling for the independence of Vietnam from French colonial rule. After being forced to leave Japan, he moved to China where he was influenced by Sun Yat-sen. He formed a new group called the “Vietnamese Restoration League” (*Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội*), modeled after Sun Yat-sen's republican party. In 1925, French agents seized him in Shanghai. He was convicted of treason and spent the rest of his life under house arrest in Huế.

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Phan in 1940	
Native name	潘佩珠
Born	26 December 1867 Sa Nam, Nghệ An Province, Vietnam
Died	29 October 1940 (aged 72)
Organization	Duy Tân Hội, Việt Nam Quang Phục Hội
Movement	Đông-Du Movement

Aliases

During his career, Phan used several pen names, including Sào Nam (巢南), Thị Hán (是漢), Độc Kinh Tử, Việt Diệu, and Hàn Mãn Tử.

Early years

Phan was born as **Phan Văn San** (潘文珊) in the village of Dan Nhiem, Nam Hoa commune, Nam Đàn District of the northern central province of Nghệ An.^[1] His father, Phan Văn Phổ, descended from a poor family of scholars, who had always excelled academically. He spent his first three years in Sa Nam, his mother's village, before the family moved to another village, Đan Nhiễm, his father's home village, also in Nam Đàn District. Until Phan was five, his father was typically away from home, teaching in other villages,^[2] so his mother raised him and taught him to recite passages from the Classic of Poetry, from which he absorbed Confucian ethics and virtues.^[3]

When Phan was five, his father returned home and he began attending his father's classes, where he studied the Chinese classics such as the Three Character Classic, which took him just three days to memorize.^{[3][4]} As a result of his ability to learn quickly, his father decided to move him to further Confucian texts, such as the Analects, which he practiced on banana leaves. In his autobiography, Phan admitted he did not understand the meaning of the text in great detail at the time, but by age six, he was skillful enough to write a variant of the Analects that parodied his classmates, which earned him acclaim from his father.^{[3][4][5]}

At the time, the central region of Vietnam where the family lived was still under the sovereignty of Emperor Tự Đức, but the southern part of the country had gradually been colonised in the 1860s and turned into the colony of Cochinchina. In 1874, an attack on Hanoi forced Tự Đức to sign a treaty to open up the Red River for French trade.^[6] In Nam Đàn District, a Binh Tây (*Pacify the French*) movement sprung among the local scholar-gentry, and Phan responded at the age of seven by playing Binh Tây with his classmates, using "guns" made of bamboo tubes and lychee bullets.^[3] The unrest was enough to prompt the imperial court to bring in troops to quell the opposition to Huế's deal with the French.^[4] Phan's family was not affected by the crackdown, but the movement had a deep impact on him.^[4] Later in life, he noted that as a youth, "I was endowed with a fiery spirit. From the days when I was a small child ... every time I read the stories of those in the past who were ready to die for the righteous cause, tears would come running from my eyes, soaking the books."^[7]

When Phan was thirteen, his father sent him to another teacher with a better reputation. Since the family lacked the money for Phan to travel far away, he studied with a local cử nhân graduate who was able to borrow a range of books from wealthier families in the area.^{[3][4]} In 1883, the French finished the colonization of Vietnam by conquering the northern part of Vietnam, and the country was incorporated into French Indochina.^[8] Phan drafted an appeal for "putting down the French and retrieving the North" (Binh Tây thu Bắc). He posted the anonymous appeal calling for the formation of local resistance units at intervals along the main road, but there were no responses and the proclamations were soon torn down. Phan realized no one would listen to a person without the social status ensured by passing mandarin examinations.^{[7][9]}

In 1884, his mother died and his aging father was growing weaker, forcing Phan to help support the family.^[10] In 1885, the Cần Vương movement began its uprising against French rule, hoping to install the boy Emperor Hàm Nghi as the ruler of an independent Vietnam by expelling colonial forces.^[11] The imperial entourage fled the palace in Huế and attempted to start the uprising from a military base in Nghệ An.^[4] The scholar gentry of the province rose up, and Phan attempted to rally approximately 60 classmates who were prospective examination candidates to join in the uprising. Phan called his new unit the *Army of Loyalist Examination Candidates* (*Sĩ tu Can Vương Đội*) and convinced an older cử nhân graduate to act as its commander. They had just begun to collect money and raw materials to make ad hoc weapons when a French patrol attacked the village and scattered the students. Phan's father forced him to seek out the commander to have the membership list destroyed to avoid French retributions.^{[4][7]}

With his father growing weaker, Phan decided to keep a low profile to avoid trouble with the French colonials so that he could support his family. He did so by teaching and writing, while still continually preparing for examinations.^[12] During this time, he quietly acquired books on military strategy by the likes of Sun Tzu and Đào Duy Từ, the military strategist of the Nguyễn lords who stopped the Trịnh lords with a defensive wall, and Trần Hưng Đạo, the military commander of the Trần Dynasty who repelled Mongol invasions of Vietnam in the 13th century.^[13] Phan cultivated a small number of his students whom he identified as having abundant pro-independence sentiments. He enthusiastically received visits from Cần Vương visitors and passed on their tales to his students, particularly those concerning Phan Đình Phùng who led the Cần Vương effort.^[12]

Phan failed the regional mandarin exams for a number of years in a row. By the time he was 30, he traveled to Huế to teach, to "improve his contacts" and to obtain some special tutoring in preparation for his next exam attempt. In Huế, Phan quickly made friends with similar political values and beliefs. One friend, Nguyễn Thượng Hiền, introduced him to the unpublished writings of

Nguyễn Lộ Trạch, a Vietnamese activist/reformist.^[14] This was Phan's first encounter with the Self-Strengthening Movement in China and other major political and military reforms made around the world. After returning to Nghệ An in 1900, Phan passed the regional mandarin exams with the highest possible honors.^[14]

Marriage and family

At the age of 22, Phan married Thái Thị Huyền, who was from the same village. The union had long been arranged by their parents, who were acquaintances. Phan was the only son in the family, and his wife initially did not bear him any children, so she arranged for him to be married to a second wife so that the family line could be continued. This practice was not uncommon in Confucian families of the time. His second wife bore him a son and daughter, and his first wife later bore him another son.^[15]

When Phan passed the regional examinations in 1900, he was eligible to become a public servant. However, Phan had no intention of pursuing such a career and only wanted the qualification to increase his *gravitas* in rallying anti-colonial action. With his father dying in the same year, Phan had no more family obligations, and decided to travel abroad to pursue his revolutionary activities.^{[14][16]} Phan served divorce papers on his wife so she would avoid retribution from colonial authorities for his activities.^[15]

Phan met with his wife only once more following the divorce: when he was pardoned and released from Hỏa Lò Prison more than two decades later. He was then sent to a loose form of house arrest in Huế and the train stopped at Vinh, Nghệ An, Vietnam. On the way, his wife said, "I am very happy. From now on, my only wish is that you will hold to your initial aspiration. Do whatever you like, and do not worry about your wife and children."^[17] While Phan was living out his final years, his children and their families came to visit him, but never his wife. When she died, she instructed her children not to tell Phan so as to not distract him.^[17]

Activism in Vietnam

Phan spent the first five years of the 20th century living in Huế and traveling the country. Phan drew up a three-step plan to get the French out of Vietnam. First, he would need to organize remnants of the Cần Vương movement and other sympathizers of the cause. Second, he would need to attain support from the Vietnamese imperial family and the bureaucracy, many of whom had already come to grips with French colonial rule. Finally, he would need to obtain foreign aid, from Chinese or Japanese revolutionaries, to finance the revolution.^{[16][18][19][20]}

It was only later that Phan realized that obtaining independence for Vietnam would be much more difficult than expected. He became familiar with the works of famed European thinkers, such as Voltaire, Rousseau and Darwin. Phan was also influenced by the writings of such Chinese Confucianists as Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei.^[18] The European and Chinese works, which had only entered Vietnamese circles a few years later,^[21] opened Phan's mind to more expansive thought regarding the struggle for freedom of his people. Liang's *Hsin-min ts'ung-pao* ("The Renovation of the People") influenced Phan's revolutionary ideas and beliefs, as it criticized the Chinese government and proclaimed that the Chinese people's consciousness needed to be awakened to further the country into the modern era.^[22]



Phan studied the works of Enlightenment philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Kang, one of the major thinkers that influenced Phan, took the idea of Social Darwinism and discussed the survival of the fittest concept as it applied to nations and ethnic groups. He described the dire outcomes that would face China if the country did not embark on a series of reforms, similar to those faced by the Ottoman Empire and colonial India. He believed that reforms made by Peter the Great and Emperor Meiji were excellent examples of the political restructuring that needed to take place to save China. From Kang's work, Phan realized why Emperor Tự Đức's decision to ignore Nguyễn Trường Tộ's proposed modernization reforms had led to the downfall of Vietnam and had allowed for French rule in Vietnam.^[23]

Phan continued to seek support from the scholar-gentry and the bureaucracy serving the French, before shifting his focus to obtaining support from members of the imperial family.^[24] Phan had moved to Huế, claiming that he was preparing for the metropolitan imperial examinations, but in actuality he planned on drumming up support among the various factions of royal family. Phan traveled to Quảng Nam to meet with Nguyễn Thành, a contemporary anti-colonial revolutionary activist who was involved in the Cần Vương movement. Thành suggested that a royal associate of his, Tôn Thất Toại, could help lead the revolution.^[20] Phan rejected the offer, but took Thành's advice to seek support from direct descendants of Emperor Gia Long, the founder of the Nguyễn Dynasty. These direct descendants were still highly respected by wealthy Mekong Delta landowners who Phan hoped would raise the bulk of the money needed to finance the revolution.^{[25][26]}

Prince Cường Để and the Vietnam Modernization Association

By the spring of 1903, Phan had found a perfect candidate to lead the revolution: Prince Cường Để, a direct descendant of Gia Long's eldest son, Canh. Để's descendants had long been dissociated from the emperor and his family since the early 19th century. Để's father was personally sought by Phan Đình Phùng to take Hàm Nghi's place and lead a popular revolt against the French in the 1880s, but he declined. By 1894, he suggested that his son, then 12 years old, could be the new face of the revolution.^[27] This plan was never executed as Phùng died in January 1896. Cường Để changed the course of his life and began studying history, economics and geography and thought admiringly of the heroic achievements of Trần Hưng Đạo, Zhuge Liang, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, Saigō Takamori, Cavour, Otto von Bismarck, George Washington, and Abraham Lincoln.^[28]

After getting Cường Để to support the revolutionary cause, Phan wrote his first significant work, *Lưu Cầu Huyết Lệ Tân Thu* (*Letter from the Ryukyus Written in Tears of Blood*). He argued that independence in Vietnam could only be achieved "through a transformation and revitalization of national character". The book was moderately successful amongst the Vietnamese populaces and received attention from other nationalists like Phan Chu Trinh. However, many mandarins were reluctant to publicly support Phan's ideas, and as a result, he came to realize that he couldn't rely on the bureaucratic elite to support his cause.^[29]

Phan created the **Việt Nam Duy Tân Hội (Vietnam Modernization Association)** in 1904; Cường Để led the association as its president, while Phan served as general secretary.^[30] Despite its growing member base, Duy Tân Hội struggled financially. Phan had hoped to obtain financial assistance from China, but the country was forced to abandon its suzerain relationship with Vietnam after the 1884–85 Sino-French War.^{[31][32]} Phan and Cường Để decided to seek aid from Japan, which had recently won a war against Russia, had successfully imposed reforms and seemed more inclined to help out revolutionaries in a nearby Asian country. Phan was selected to visit Japan to secure the funds needed to sustain Duy Tân Hội.^[29] Phan did not speak Japanese and had no contacts in Japan, so he sought help from Liang Qichao, who was living in Japan since being exiled years earlier.

Liang introduced Phan to many prominent politicians, including Ōkuma Shigenobu, a well-liked statesman who had previously served as Prime Minister of Japan for a few months in 1898. Phan asked Okuma for financial assistance to fund the activities of Vietnamese revolutionaries. In his letter to Okuma, Phan stated that Japan should be obligated to help Vietnam since both countries were of the "same race, same culture, and same continent". Japan could also promote its interests in Vietnam and prevent French and Russian expansion into China.^[32] However, Phan was unsuccessful in procuring aid from the Japanese. The Japanese government did not want to damage its own relationship with France, while opposition party members promised financial aid to Vietnamese students wishing to study in Japan, but also advised Phan not to start a revolutionary movement until Japan was more willing to help the cause.^{[29][33]}

In Guangxi and Guangdong, the Vietnamese revolutionaries arranged alliances with the Kuomintang by marrying Vietnamese women to Chinese officers. Their children were at an advantage since they could speak both languages and they worked as agents for the revolutionaries and spread revolutionary ideologies across borders. This intermarriage between Chinese and Vietnamese was viewed with alarm by the French. Phan's revolutionary network practiced this extensively; additionally, Chinese merchants also married Vietnamese women, and provided funds and help.^[34]

Early writings

Frustrated by the Japanese response, Phan turned to Liang, who explained to Phan it was naïve to expect financial assistance from the Japanese. The Vietnamese people would have to look only within Vietnam for support and financial backing. Liang told Phan that he could best serve the cause by writing and distributing pamphlets advocating for the revolution to rally support from the Vietnamese and others abroad. Phan took Liang's advice very seriously and immediately began to publish materials to obtain support for the revolutionary cause.^[35]

These writings, perhaps the most widely recognized of Phan's works, include: *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su* (*History of the Loss of Vietnam*), *Tan Viet Nam* (*New Vietnam*), *Ai Viet Dieu Dien* (*A Lament for Vietnam and Yunnan*), *Hai Ngoai Huyet Thu* (*Letter from Abroad Written in Blood*), *Viet Nam Quoc Su Khao* (*An Outline History of Vietnam*), and *Ai Viet Dieu Dien* (*A Lament for Vietnam and Yunnan*). All were initially written in Chinese and then translated to Vietnamese, upon which they were smuggled into Vietnam. These works, most notably *Viet Nam Vong Quoc Su*, were critical in intensifying the nationalist fervor in the country.^[35]

Việt Nam vong quốc sử

Liang published Phan's 1905 work *Việt Nam vong quốc sử* (*History of the Loss of Vietnam*) and intended to distribute it in China and abroad, but also to smuggle it into Vietnam. Phan wanted to rally people to support the cause for Vietnamese independence; the work is regarded as one of the most important books in the history of Vietnam's anticolonialism movement.^[36] The book helped revive the name "Vietnam", which was not commonly used at the time.

The book is noted for its negative assessment of the response of the Nguyễn Dynasty in the 19th century to the colonial challenges facing Vietnam and the failure to modernize, with the Nguyễn instead turning to ultra-orthodox conservative Confucianism. The book presents strident and emotive memorials to the key figures of the Can Vương movement of the late 1880s and early 1890s, led by mandarins such as Tôn Thất Thuyết and Phan Đình Phùng, who led guerrillas against the French. The Cần Vương attempted to overthrow the French rule and establish the boy emperor Hàm Nghi as the ruler of an independent Vietnam.^[36] The book also analyzes the French social and economic policies in Vietnam, which it regards as oppression. In the book, Phan argues for the establishment of a nationwide pro-independence front with seven factions or interested groups with a specific motivation to fight the French colonial authorities.^[36]

The book is written in a style that differed from the prevailing writing technique and structure of the scholar gentry of the time. The scholar gentry under the Confucian education system fostered by the classical imperial examinations were molded by their study and memorization of classical Chinese poetry and literature. As such, the literary style tended to be poetic, indirect and metaphorical, relying on allusions and imagery to depict an idea. Phan eschewed this traditional style to write in a direct, ordinary prose style, especially in his analytical and argumentative sections. The book precipitated a new style of writing among scholar gentry revolutionaries, who later tended to use a more direct style.^[37]

The book created a reaction in China, sparking follow-up essays by Chinese writers who were taken aback by the Phan's description of Vietnamese life under French colonial rule. It generated gloomy pieces by Chinese writers who predicted that their nation would suffer a similar fate if they failed to modernize. One such Chinese response later became a teaching text at the Tonkin Free School in Hanoi, a school run by Phan's contemporaries to promote the independence movement. However, Phan did not receive much of a reaction in terms of aid towards his independence efforts, since the book made Chinese readers worry about their own future.^[37] The book had a much better reception among Vietnamese readers. Phan and a colleague, Đặng Tử Kính, left Japan for the first time in August 1905, carrying 50 copies of the book that were to be distributed throughout Vietnam, of which further copies were made inside the country. Phan's direct writing style, without the use of allegories, upset traditionalists but made the book more accessible to literate people who had not been trained in classical literature.^[37]

Đông-Du Movement

In 1905, the Vietnam Modernization Association agreed to send Phan to Japan to get Japanese military assistance or weapons. The *Duy Tân Hội* had turned more radical after Japan's victory over Russia led to the popular belief that Japan would soon turn its attention to ridding Asia of the western imperialist powers in general. However, Phan soon realised that Japanese military aid would not be possible, and turned his attention to using Japan as a base to train and educate young Vietnamese students, by starting the

Dong Du (Visit the East) Society. The number of Vietnamese students sent to Japan for training peaked at 200 in 1908. However, due to pressure from the French government, especially after the signing of the Franco-Japanese Treaty of 1907, Japan declared Phan to be persona non grata and expelled him in 1909!^[38]

After Đông-Du

In 1909, after being deported from Japan, Phan went to Hong Kong with Cường Để. There, he made plans to raise money and bring to Thailand the Vietnamese students who had studied in Japan, but had now been dispersed. He had previously had the foresight to establish a base in Thailand.

But instead he received news of an armed uprising in Vietnam, led by Hoang Ha Tam. So he assembled his comrades in Hong Kong, and sent two people to Japan to buy 500 of the Arisaka Type 30 rifles. But after buying the weapons to support the uprising with, they could not afford to hire a ship to smuggle the rifles into Vietnam. So, in July, Phan went to Thailand to ask their government to help with the smuggling. The foreign minister refused, since it would be a major diplomatic incident with France if it leaked out. So he had to return to Hong Kong and wait for the money needed for smuggling. The money never arrived, and news arrived that his fundraising organiser was dead, and that the uprising was going badly. Phan donated 480 of the rifles to the forces of Sun Yat-sen. He then tried to smuggle the remaining 20 of the rifles via Thailand, disguised as first-class luggage. This attempt failed. He spent the first half of 1910 begging on the street, selling his books, and spending all his money getting drunk at the pub. This went on until he met an elderly woman, Phan Po-Lin, who took the entire movement into her house. Funds arrived and he planned to move to Thailand. He arrived in Thailand in November 1910, and all his students and followers who could, took up farming there.



Phan (*right*) with Cường Để, circa 1907.

Vietnam Restoration League

The Wuchang Uprising occurred in China on 10 October 1911. It quickly spread and declared itself the Republic of China. This greatly inspired Phan, since he had many friends among the Chinese revolutionaries. Phan thought this new regime would fix all that was wrong with the old China, and unite with Japan to defeat the Europeans and build a strong Asia. Leaving the farm in the hands of his comrades, he went to China to visit his friends there.

The old Vietnam Modernization Association had become worthless, with its members scattered. A new organization needed to be formed, with a new agenda inspired by the Chinese revolution. A large meeting was held in late March 1912. They agreed to form a new group, the **Vietnam Restoration League**. Cường Để was made president and chairman; Phan was vice-president.



Phan Bội Châu

People voted to campaign for democracy instead of a monarchy, despite strong objections of people from southern Vietnam. The organization's sole purpose was to kick out the French and establish a democratic republic. However they had no funds and had great difficulty getting revolutionary leaflets into Vietnam. Also, the new Chinese government was too busy and would not help the movement with anything other than allowing Vietnamese comrades into its education and training system. The Vietnam Restoration League came up with a proposed flag design. Previously, Vietnam never had a flag, only banners to represent royalty. Their flag idea had 5 five-pointed stars, arranged in a square with a star in the middle. It symbolized the five regions of Vietnam. The national flag had red stars on a yellow background, and the military flag had a red background with white stars. The yellow represented their race, the red represented fire which represented their location to the south of China (see I Ching), and the white represented the metal of their weapons. They also created a book on military strategy and regulations for their army. They even printed their own currency, which they agreed to honour when, or rather "if", they attained power. If they won they could easily pay people back, and if they lost it wouldn't cost them anything. The "money" was printed in a similar way to the Chinese paper notes.

They also formed an organisation called the **Association for the Revitalization of China**. It was dedicated to getting support from China for independence movements in smaller Asian countries, starting with Vietnam of course. Using a medical centre as a front, and a fancy office they managed to create the false impression that they were a huge successful organisation. They got hundreds of people to join, and sold a huge amount of their made-up currency. They changed some of the leadership positions of the "Vietnam Restoration League" to allow the Chinese to take part. However, they could not get enough money to buy more weapons until they had proved themselves with a military attack of some sort. Everyone said they needed something big and explosive because the people of Vietnam were short on patience. So Phan sent five people with a few grenades to the three regions of Vietnam. The grenades they sent to the North were used on a minor target, the governor of Thái Bình province, two officers and a French restaurateur. They were meant to be used at the mandarin examinations when all the officials would be gathered. Those they sent to the centre via Thailand did not make it to Vietnam at the time, and they had to throw their grenades away. Those that they sent to the south were used on some Vietnamese. The attacks in the North enraged the French, and they demanded Phan be arrested, but the Chinese government refused. But the value of Phan's special currency dropped dramatically after the failure.

They had no money, so they decided to trick a pharmaceutical company in Japan into providing lots of expensive drugs for them on credit. They then closed down their medical centre and didn't pay their debt. But their membership slowly dwindled, and the difficulty of getting into Vietnam increased. And changes in the government of their Chinese province made things difficult. And they had to close their office and send their comrades away.

Vietnam during World War I

By 1914, Phan was arrested by the Chinese authorities and thrown in jail on suspicion of helping rival Chinese authorities. The intervention of the Chinese minister for the army, stopped them from killing him or handing him over to the French. But he was kept in prison for almost four years until 1917. In prison he wrote many biographies, including his own, and other books. World War I began shortly thereafter. The country remained a member of the French Empire, and many Vietnamese fought in World War I (see **Vietnamese Expeditionary Force**).

Some 50,000 Vietnamese troops and 50,000 Vietnamese workers were sent to Europe to fight for France in the war, and thousands lost their lives at Somme and Picardy, near the Belgian coast and many more in Middle East. At the time it was referred to Vietnam's "Baptism of Fire". More than 30,000 Vietnamese died during the conflict and 60,000 were wounded. The Vietnamese endured additional heavy taxes to help pay for France's war efforts. Numerous anti-colonial revolts occurred in Vietnam during the war, all easily suppressed by the French.

In May 1916, the sixteen-year-old king, Duy Tân, escaped from his palace in order to take part in an uprising of Vietnamese troops organized by Thái Phiên and Trần Cao Vân. The French were informed of the plan and the leaders arrested and executed. Duy Tân was deposed and exiled to Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean. One of the most effective uprisings during this period was in the northern Vietnamese province of Thái Nguyên. Some 300 Vietnamese soldiers revolted and released 200 political prisoners, whom, in addition to several hundred local people, they armed. The rebels held the town of Thái Nguyên for several days, hoping for help from Chinese nationalists. None arrived and the French retook the town and hunted down most of the rebels.

While he was in prison, he organised some of his comrades to meet with the German government in Thailand. They donated a large amount of money and promised more if a spectacular action could be done in Vietnam against the French. The comrades attempted an action but failed completely, wasting all the money. After his release, Phan travelled to Beijing and to Japan, and then to various parts of China trying to get back into Vietnam. When he eventually got to the border of Yunnan Province and Vietnam, he discovered that World War I was over and his plans of using it to help defeat the French were hopeless. Phan wandered around China for years after this without accomplishing anything significant. He pondered collaborating with the French, who were now ruled by the Socialist Party (France), and he wrote a booklet about why collaboration with the French would be good. He later changed his mind and blamed this thinking on Phan Ba Ngoc, who was assassinated by one of Phan's supporters for being a collaborator with the French.

Literary Chinese was the language used to communicate in Japan and China by Phan **Đi** Châu.^[39]

Relations with the Socialists

At the start of 1921, Phan studied Socialism and the Soviet Union in the hope of gaining assistance from the Soviet Union or socialist groups. He translated a book called "An Account of the Russian Revolution", by Fuse Katsuji into Chinese. He then went to Beijing to meet with Soviet representatives, Grigori Voitinsky and Lap. Lap said that the Soviet Union would educate, train and pay for, any Vietnamese students Phan wanted to send, provided they would engage in social revolution and teach socialism in Vietnam afterwards. Lap was keen to hear more about the political situation in Vietnam, since Phan was the first Vietnamese revolutionary to come into contact with them. Lap requested Phan write a book in English about the situation, but Phan was unable to do so as he spoke no English. Phan wrote of the Russians: "One thing I cannot forget is how dignified, courteous, and sincere the Russians appeared to me. Their language and their expression was at times calm, at times vigorous."

Correspondence with Hồ Chí Minh

In late 1924, Hồ Chí Minh returned from Moscow to Canton. Hồ and Phan corresponded several times about the program of a new organisation Phan was trying to start up and other such things. Phan had been a friend of Hồ's father and had known Hồ when he was a child. They were interested in meeting each other again, but never got a chance.

Final capture

In 1925, Phan arrived in Shanghai on what he thought was a short trip on behalf of his movement. He was to meet with Ho Chi Minh, who at that time used the name, Ly Thuy, one of Ho's many aliases. Ho had invited Chau to come to Canton to discuss matters of common interest. Ho was in Canton at the Soviet Embassy, purportedly as a Soviet citizen working as an secretary, translator and interpreter. In exchange for money, Ho informed the French police of Chau's imminent arrival. Chau was arrested by French agents and transported back to Hanoi.^{[40][41][42][43]} This is disputed by Sophie Quinn-Judge and Duncan McCargo, who point out that this is a legend made up by anti-communist authors, considering that Lam Duc Thu's reports showed that the French already had all the information they needed from their own spies. Also according to Quinn-Judge and McCargo, Ho was rapidly gaining adherence from the "best elements" of Vietnamese Quoc Dan Dang to his idea, thus having no motivation to eliminate Phan, and that Phan considered Ho more like a successor, rather than a competitor, thus Ho had plenty reasons to support such a respected activist as a figurehead for his movement.^{[44][45]}

Phan himself wrote about this event:

"I did not realize that every minute of my activities was being reported to the French by Nguyễn Thượng Huyền, a man who lived with me and was supported by me. When this Nguyễn Thượng Huyền first arrived in Hangchow, he was with Tran Duc Quy; I was quite dubious about him. But later I heard that he was a great-nephew of Main Son (Nguyễn Thượng Hiền), well versed in literary Chinese, the holder of a cử nhân (舉人) degree and familiar with French and quốc ngữ. Owing to his capabilities, I kept him on as my secretary without suspecting that he was an informer for the French.

"At 12 noon on the eleventh day of the Fifth Month, my train from Hangchow arrived at the North Station Shanghai. In order to go quickly to the bank to send the money, I left my luggage at the depository and carried only a small bag with me. As soon as I came out of the train station, I saw a rather luxurious automobile and four Westerners standing by it. I did not realize that they were French, because in Shanghai there was a great mixture of Westerners and there were swarms of foreign visitors. It was quite common for cars to be used to pick up hotel guests. Little did I know that this car was there to kidnap someone! When I had gone a few steps from the station, one of the Westerners came up to me and said in Mandarin: 'This car is very nice; please get in.' I politely refused, saying 'I do not need a car.' Suddenly, one of the Westerners behind the car with a great heave pushed me inside it, the engine accelerated and we were off like a shot. In no time we had already entered the French Concession. The car drew up to the waterfront, where a French warship was docked. I now became a prisoner on this warship."

When he was transported back to Hanoi, he was held in Hỏa Lò Prison. At first, the French authorities did not release his real name, in order to avoid public disturbances. But it quickly leaked out who he was. A criminal trial followed, with all the charges going back to 1913 when he had been sentenced to death in absentia. The charges included incitement to murder and supplying an offensive weapon used to commit murder in two incidents, which had resulted in the deaths of a Vietnamese governor on 12 April 1913 and of two French majors on 28 April 1913. The court sentenced Phan to penal servitude for life. He was released from prison on 24 December 1925 by Governor General Alexandre Varenne, in response to huge public protests. He was placed under house arrest in a house in Huế where Nguyễn Bá Trắc lived. Trắc was a former member of the Đông-Du movement who had become an active collaborator with the French. Guards kept the house under surveillance, so visits by his admirers were a bit inhibited. More public protests against his house arrest caused the authorities to allow him to move to a house which had been organised by his supporters. It was a thatched house divided into three sections and had a medium-sized garden. Here he was able to meet his supporters, his children and his grandchildren. In 1926, when Phan Chu Trinh died, Phan presided over a memorial service for him in Huế. In 1931, he also gave a speech at a rally celebrating the anniversary of the Yen Bai Uprising during which Lý Tự Trọng shot and killed French secret police officials who might have been there to assassinate him.^[46] Phan spent his last fifteen years living a quiet life in Huế. He would often relax by taking boat trips on the Sông Hương (Perfume River). He died on 29 October 1940, about a month after Japan invaded northern Vietnam. Most cities in Vietnam have named major streets after him.^[47]



Phan Bội Châu's House in Ben Ngu, Huế, where he spent his last fifteen years living

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