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Tác giả: Xuan Phong NGUYEN (Academy of Journalism and Communication)

Political culture is a subdiscipline of culture, emerging in societies with class division and friction. Political culture represents the understanding of political events, activities and processes; and the capacity of organizing the political power structure based on a certain social norm to regulate mutual benefit relationship between social classes and protect the interests of the ruling class in line with the social development and progress.(1)

Vietnam's political culture reflects the Vietnamese people's attitudes, trust, patriotism, feelings and aspiration for peace, independence, democracy and progress. Vietnam's political culture resulted from thousands of years working and struggling to build and defend the country as well as the exchange and absorption of world civilizations' values in a continuous process of intercultural integration.

Vietnam's political culture was first formed from the establishment of the Van Lang State, under the reign of the Hung Kings. It is the fruit of the Red River Civilization with the wet rice cultivation for thousands of years that forges the country's national identity.

1. Vietnam's traditional political culture upholds patriotism

Patriotism has been the most consistent ideological value throughout Vietnam history. Patriotism was the core that guided the country through all the wars to firmly protect the national sovereignty. It is the red thread that runs through the entire history of Vietnam from ancient to modern times. President Ho Chi Minh succinctly stated: "Our

people have a passionate patriotism. It is one of our precious traditions. From ancient times to the present, whenever the Fatherland was invaded, that spirit was aroused; it combined into an extremely powerful wave; it passed through all dangers and difficulties, and engulfed all the traitors and bandits". The Vietnamese people had to go through many arduous and long struggles of bloodshed to protect their country. Throughout the history of mankind, few nations have endured so many hardships and overcome all difficulties as Vietnam has.

From the dawn of history when there was no written language or historical record, Vietnamese people had to fight against foreign invasion. This is reflected in the legend of Thanh Giong who defeated the An invaders. Despite the elements of myth and fantasy, the story showed the spirit of community cohesion of the ancient Vietnamese people, a political philosophy whose thread was the patriotism in every citizen. That spirit in each individual contributed to the formation of the entire nation's patriotism. From the time of Qin Shi Huang in the North (in the 3rd century BCE) to the present, Vietnam suffered wars in more than half of the twenty-four centuries. Specifically, from the first recorded war until 1930, our country went through nearly 1,120 years of war. Thus, it can be seen that the peace time to build the Vietnamese civilization was so little. Vietnamese people mainly grow up in the resistant wars against foreign invaders, which also formed the patriotism among generations of the Vietnamese with tradition of wisdom, strength, and solidarity.

The war against Chinese feudalism was the earliest, longest and fiercest one in the country's history. The ancient Vietnamese people continuously craved for restoration of the Hung King's reign and national independence from the Chinese. The revolt led by the Trung Sisters from 40 to 43CE awakened the national consciousness. It was followed in the 10th century by a series of struggles and uprisings to gain national independence and establish an independent feudal monarchy in Vietnam called Dai Viet. In the 11th century, Dai Viet culture flourished. With the establishment of the Ly Dynasty, political and social culture was in the heyday and played a leading role in the formation of the ideological foundation of what is now modern-day Vietnam. Under the leadership of Vietnam's historical heroes, from Ngo Quyen to Nguyen Hue, the

people defeated the Chinese invaders during different feudal Chinese dynasties such as the Song, Yuan, Ming and Qing. The patriotic tradition, by upholding the spirit of Vietnam's national independence and sovereignty, has been one of the country's ideologies from the past, present and into the future. The spirit that "nothing is more precious than independence and freedom" became the country's motto, the reason for living, and the most noble value of Vietnam from the Au Lac period to the Ho Chi Minh era.

2. Vietnam's traditional political culture promotes community cohesion against natural disasters

Vietnam belongs to the tropical and monsoon climate belt characterized by hot, humid, and rainy weather which is highly favorable for agricultural development. Therefore, from ancient times, the Vietnamese soon applied wet-rice cultivation. Wet-rice agriculture is the essential part that ensures the survival and evolution of the community. To prepare for and survive severe natural disasters such as drought and flood, the ancient Vietnamese inhabitants had to unite, work together to build dikes to prevent floods in the flood season and construct irrigation facilities to store water for the dry season. The need to build dikes was acknowledged very early in history when the indigenous people began to organize into communities, at which point there was no written language. The legend of Son Tinh and Thuy Tinh, known as the Mountain God versus the Water Lord, describes the fierce battle between people and natural disasters. Throughout many generations of Vietnamese people, the river and sea-dike systems were built up to maintain and protect the villages and fields.

Vietnamese people built over 8,000 km of dikes in total, which was so impressive. Undoubtedly, a lot of human labor was put into the dike building work since the dikes needed annual maintenance and preservation after the construction. To accomplish such vast projects, the people could only rely on the strength of community. This was an indispensable condition which sparked the idea of solidarity for coexistence and co-production. Many parts of the territory were expanded as the result of reclaiming

land from the sea. The frequently harsh climate and natural disasters led to the choice of wet rice farming, a complicated cultivation method that involved many processes. As a result, they had to acquire numerous skills and knowledge to control and harness the water. These were essential constituents of community cohesion in the battle against natural disasters.

3. Vietnam's traditional political culture promotes solidarity to form the national-state

On the basis of mutual interest, a unified state of the Vietnamese people was established from 15 tribes. Hung King's regime was formed through unity and agreements of tribes to perform the heavy common tasks. The creation of the first state in Vietnam was completely different from the Western countries where the state emerged from class conflict. The Vietnamese nation was set up based on the national consciousness which appeared and developed early. People soon became enlightened to build a nation-state.

The first national-state was established to unify tribes and individuals for the purpose of solving community affairs. From a cultural perspective, researchers believe that the Vietnamese people's response to natural floods was to build dikes. Dike building to prevent floods became a characteristic of the inhabitants in the north of Vietnam. Out of the enormous amount of manpower needed to create these flood barriers, the idea of community was formed. This contributed to the formation of community spirit since only with the community and solidarity could people survive. Therefore, the Vietnamese people have a saying, "good leaves cover torn leaves." It was the unity of interests among the individuals, the inhabitants and the whole community, the society that formed a tight bond to create the national synergy to respond to the harsh nature. This bonding has been challenged, experienced and accumulated throughout many historical periods and generations, to formulate cultural political values. The community cohesion was required to gather forces together and organize national strength against threats from foreign ethnic groups and severe nature.

4. Vietnamese political culture promotes the idea of being close to the people

In the history of Vietnamese political ideology, the concept of the People has a special meaning. People are the root, the source of the strength and the steady support through all the dynasties. Practice has shown that wars for independence or national defense could only be won when the whole nation's strength has been mobilized. Whenever the country was at war, all the people united to fight against the enemy. It became a tradition which has become deeply rooted into the heart of the people and was transformed into the mindset and action of all Vietnamese dynasties and communities.

From the early days of nation-building and defense, it was not a few individuals, leaders, and localities but the vast majority of the people in Giao Chi territory that perceived the nation as their master. Therefore, it was understandable that when the Trung Sisters launched the rebellion against the Chinese invaders, more than 60 localities rose up and joined them. When Trieu sisters rode an elephant and played the drum, "the whole Chau Giao was shaken". Such solid consciousness was reflected throughout history, motivating the struggles which become fiercer and fiercer over time. In ancient times, all Vietnamese feudal dynasties knew how to rely on the people and mobilize the national strength to achieve historic victories. Sentiment and ideology about the nation associated with the people became political principles.

The idea of respecting and upholding the will of the people throughout history highlighted the fact that only when the government respects the people and upholds the people can the whole country be stable. On the contrary, when the government despises the people, it will fail. Ho Chi Minh Thought is the pinnacle of contemporary Vietnamese political culture, reflecting his infinite love for the people, his respect for the people and his absolute belief in their strength. He said: "I have only one desire, the ultimate desire. That is how to make our country completely independent, our people completely free, all compatriots have food, clothes and education".(2)

5. Traditional political culture has great acculturation and tolerance

The acculturation and tolerant spirit of traditional Vietnamese political culture has consistently been demonstrated in many ways. First, it merges imported foreign cultural phenomena with indigenous traditional cultures such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and later Christianity. It also opts for the appropriate elements of other cultures to enrich itself.

At the same time, many foreign cultures when introduced into Vietnamese society did not conflict but supported each other and co-existed with the local culture. For example, quite a few Buddhist pagodas worshipped Taoist deities.

During the Dinh, Le, Ly and Tran Dynasties, many monks were also Taoists. The royal court included both Taoists and Buddhist monks. During these periods, many monks were appointed to receive Chinese emissaries and their communication skills and extensive Confucian knowledge gained the respect of those emissaries.

The dominance of traditional fusion ensured religious harmony throughout the country. The phenomenon "The three religions of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism have the same root" in Vietnamese society has rarely been seen elsewhere in the world. It appeared naturally in the feelings and actions of the people. The Ly and Tran Dynasties held exams of all three religions to select the talented people who would advise the king to rule the country. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism followers integrated and adapted to the nonsectarian national culture. The three religions did not resort to conflict but supplement each other. Since the Nguyen Dynasty, the spirit of religious fusion was not limited to indigenous beliefs and the Three Religions but expanded to Christianity and elements of Western culture. Despite initial resistance, Vietnamese Christianity gradually integrated into the local culture by highlighting the slogan of "living evangelically in the hearts of the nation" and gradually built up their own tradition of "respecting God and loving the country".

In the current period, the acculturation and tolerance in Vietnam's traditional political culture has grown to a new height within the framework of Ho Chi Minh's Thought and personality. In addition to combining East and West values, Nguyen Ai Quoc, later to become President Ho Chi Minh, was the first Vietnamese leader to go further by integrating Eastern and Western cultural values with socialist ideals. Furthermore, thanks to his spirit of acculturation and tolerance, Ho Chi Minh developed a broader vision, outlined and solved many problems beyond time.

6. Traditional Vietnamese political culture respects the talented to govern the country

A nation-state with a great and unique culture is expressed first of all by the public's popular culture and the elite's high intellectual level. In its long history, Vietnam's national culture has produced a contingent of dignitaries and intellectuals, many of whom were cultural and political celebrities imbued with the aura of their ancestors. Nguyen Trai wrote in the Proclamation of Victory over the Wu, "Our Dai Viet country is inherently a civilized country." This meant Dai Viet had many talented people, that is, national luminaries who all contributed to the cause of building and defending the country. Than Nhan Trung, an eminence of the Le Dynasty, said, "talent is the source of the nation's vitality. When the vitality's source prevails, the country is prosperous and advances. But when it disappears, the country weakens and diminishes." Talents are the product of history and the pioneers that make history.

During the time of fighting against Chinese feudalists, there emerged the role of the Buddhist clergies. During the Tang Dynasty in China, Tang kings invited many well-known Vietnamese artists to the Chinese royal palace to lecture and make paintings. Those artists were talented people who contributed to preserving Vietnam's soul during those dark periods such as Duy Giam, Phung Dinh, and Thien Tang Nhat Nam.

After the country claimed its independence, the Ngo, Dinh, and Pre- Le Dynasties wanted to build an independent and sovereign state. Therefore, they considered recruiting talented people to govern the country as a national policy. At that time,

Buddhism was the most powerful religion, becoming a spiritual foundation in the national construction. At the time it was understood that only monks who had knowledge, morality, and social prestige could hold important positions. Moreover, the monks were trained in Sinology, becoming diplomats and poets who praised Vietnam's feats and spirit. The kings in Dinh and Pre- Le Dynasties often consulted the monks on important domestic affairs.

Along with the development of the state apparatus, in addition to recruiting talented monks, the Ly Dynasty also embarked on training the most talented people to serve the country. In 1070, Ly Thanh Tong built the Temple of Literature and opened Quoc Tu Giam (School for the Sons of the Nation) to nurture education and select the talented students. In addition to the scholars, the Ly Dynasty still elevated the monks with their great expertise such as Van Hanh, Vien Thong, Vien Chieu, Man Giac, and Khong Lo. During the Ly Dynasty, many famous talents such as Ly Dao Thanh, To Hien Thanh, and especially Ly Thuong Kiet played a pivotal role in the dynasty, helping to fight the Song invaders.

Unlike the Ly Dynasty, the Tran Dynasty emphasized the role of the aristocracy and royal class. The Tran Dynasty advanced the development of education and culture. Such generals as Tran Quoc Tuan, Tran Quang Khai, and Tran Nhat Duat and such kings as Tran Thai Tong, Tran Thanh Tong, and Tran Nhan Tong all improved their knowledge and culture to become not only generals and kings but also the great intellectuals of the country. A school system with a secular orientation was gradually formed and eventually separated from the pagoda.

The Tran Dynasty strengthened the Temples of Literature, the National Academy and the administration of systematic examinations. Phan Huy Chu commented, "Despite establishing the imperial examinations, The Tran Dynasty was fair in selecting people, so educated Confucians could show their talents"(3) This might explain why there were many famous genius talents in the Tran Dynasty, working in diverse fields such as politics, diplomacy, law, history, and poetry. In addition to exceptional generals, the Tran Dynasty had excellent masters as Nguyen Hien, Le Van Huu, Mac Dinh Chi,

Pham Su Manh, Le Quat, and Truong Han Sieu. In the second half of the fourteenth century, Chu Van An, a teacher with an advocacy for true learning rather than joining the ranks of mandarins, made education reach its zenith with the bloom of talents.

Confucianism became the national religion in the Le Dynasty, which contributed to the growing number of Confucian scholars who became a fundamental resource for nurturing talents. The Le Dynasty had many historical figures and great cultural works namely Nguyen Trai with "Proclamation of Victory over the Wu," "Quoc Am Thi (Selected Poems in National Language)" and "Du Dia Chi (Geographical Notes);" Ngo Si Lien with "Complete Historical Records of Dai Viet;" Le Thanh Tong with the "Hong Duc Code" and "Hong Duc Quoc Am Thi Tap (Selected Poems in National Language of the Hong Duc reign)" Luong The Vinh with "Dai Thanh Toan Phap (Great Compendium of Mathematical Methods);" and Nguyen Binh Khiem (Le and Mac Dynasties) with "Bach Van Quoc Am Thi Tap (Poems in National Language by Bach Van)." Under Le Trung Hung's reign, famous scholars like Le Huu Trac, Le Quy Don, Phan Huy Ich, Phan Huy Chu, Dang Tran Con, and Doan Thi Diem wrote famous scientific works that contributed to the uniqueness of Vietnamese culture.

Despite its short existence, the Tay Son Dynasty (1771-1802) had many famous talents, such as Nguyen Hue, Ngo Van So, Bui Thi Xuan, Ngo Thi Nham, and Nguyen Thiep, Phan Huy Ich, and others.

Under the Nguyen Dynasty (1802-1945), the organization and education of talented students was similar to that of the Tran and Le Dynasties. National poets Nguyen Du and Nguyen Cong Tru, Chu Manh Trinh and Cao Ba Quat were prominent scholars in the country's culture. Later, patriotic scholars, such as Ton That Thuyet, Phan Dinh Phung, Hoang Dieu, Phan Boi Chau, and Phan Chu Trinh took the lead in the cause against French colonialism.

The idea of "recruiting and well-treating talented scholars," is in essence the policy of employing talented people under a system of conceptions and tactful behaviors. This

includes discovering the talented, recruiting them, promoting them within the educational institutions, and trusting them in the long term. Thanks to that tradition, over the centuries, the nation has had many excellent scholars who have rich and comprehensive knowledge and knew how to apply their education to make great achievements in practical activities, actively contributing to social progress, being recognized and honored by their communities.

7. Vietnam's traditional political culture emphasizes the rule of law

It is widely acknowledged that historical heritage includes economic, military, cultural, and social aspects that were inherited from previous eras. However, some might think that our forefathers used to live without law, which is not true in Vietnam's history. Our people established law long ago, both written and oral, and it occupied a significant position in Vietnamese civilization and culture. Our forefather left very pride-worthy legal legacies, including the law of the nation, villages and communes' conventions.

As documented in both books and legends, Vietnam has used the law since ancient times. It might be to some extent influenced by customs and habits but in general included specific orders and rules. Therefore, it was written in The Book of the Later Han that "The law of the Vietnamese people had more than ten articles different from that of the Han people." This proves that Vietnam's forefathers knew how to govern the country from the early days. During ten centuries of dominating Vietnam, Chinese rulers applied Han laws to assimilate and restrict the Vietnamese people. Eventually uprisings broke out with concerted efforts to resist Han laws. While the Chinese rulers controlled from the central government to the districts, people in the villages and communes upheld the tradition of "following the village customs to oppose the country's laws." By this it is meant that village conventions (as mainly passed by oral tradition) were promoted to unite against foreign invaders. As a result the people's mindset to "oppose the laws but promote the customs" came into existence.

Under the three feudal dynasties of Ngo, Dinh, and Pre- Le, the people had to protect their administration, maintain unity and independence from the Chinese invaders. As a result, the compilation of laws was limited. There were some of Khuc Hao's political orders about strengthening the administrative apparatus and Dinh Tien Hoang's determination to take penal measures to deter rebellion and country separation.

Under the Ly Dynasty, the laws of Dai Viet were officially written down for the first time. In 1042, Ly Thai Tong issued "Hinh Thu," (Book of Punishments) marking an important milestone in the codifying of law in Vietnam. The document was established to replace the regulations and laws issued through the old edicts. According to Ngo Si Lien's Complete Historical Records of Dai Viet, the Book of Punishments was a 3-volume set of rules and legislations. The subjects of regulation were varied and extensive, covering settlements of lawsuits, complaints, trial procedures, and money compensation. The Book of Punishments codified laws from property ownership and family marriage within civil, family and marriage laws. It set down general principles on the operation and organization of the State, such as regulations on recruitment of mandarins, reward and punishment, and the people's obligations. Today these regulations are called administrative laws. Most importantly, it systematized regulations on crimes and penalties for acts dangerous to society. The Ly Dynasty made advances in expressive language, the content, and the systematization and codifying of laws. Certain principles were set forth during procedures. The laws of this period were deeply influenced by Buddhism; thus, it applied many lenient policies to show benevolence and tolerance of the governors.

In the Tran Dynasty, the laws were gradually renewed. Although the benevolent root of Buddhist law was preserved, the idea of the consistent rule of law was enhanced. Correspondingly, Confucianism gradually surpassed Buddhism, although Buddhism was the state religion. The Tran Dynasty built many essential laws that regulated most areas of social life, including The National Dynasty Criminal Law (1230), Hoang Trieu Ngoc Diep (Dynasty's historical record) (1267), Hoang Trieu Dai Dien (Dynasty's regulations) (1341), and the Penal Code (1341).

Adding to the legal spirit of the previous dynasties, the Le Dynasty brought the country's laws to a new height. Notably, it established the National Royal Penal Code originally published under the reign of Le Thanh Tong (1483), also known as the Hong Duc Code. This marked a peak of Vietnamese laws when compared to all previous dynasties. It included wider scope of legal norms in the areas of criminal, civil, marriage and family, and legal proceedings. Later, like the previous dynasties, the Nguyen Dynasty paid more attention to strengthening laws to protect the feudal autocracy. In 1815, the "Royal Court Law," also known as "Gia Long Law" was published. This code was clearly influenced by both the Hong Duc Code and the Qing Dynasty Laws.

In short, Vietnamese laws appeared from the earliest stages along with the country's establishment. Like in other countries, Van Lang and Au Lac laws were not verbally expressed at initial stage. Instead, the customs and practices were enforced by the nascent state and public society.

For thousands of years, Vietnam has built its cultural identity. Its culture has become a force that helps the nation overcome many challenges. It accompanies the rise and fall of the nation and the change of dynasties to form the political culture's identity. That political culture was formed and fostered through many different historical periods and become a driving force, a value, and a strength for the nation to overcome difficulties to maintain the independence and growth as today. Amid the current trend of globalization, Vietnam's traditional political culture's values need to be protected, maintained, and renewed to suit emerging political and social realities for future development.

Tài liệu tham khảo

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