

The Role of Culture in Economic and Social Development during the Process of International Integration in Vietnam

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2023.71046>

Received: 11 September 2023; Accepted: 21 September 2023; Published: 20 October 2023

ABSTRACT

During the process of integration, traditional culture is highly respected and fundamentally restored (Vietnam's traditional culture has a rich history spanning thousands of years, surpassing the nation-building histories of many countries, which means it possesses sustainability and a greater influence than many might imagine). The new perspective on culture has sparked a revival of many previously neglected or even stigmatized traditional values, bringing Vietnamese culture back to its normalcy and reconnecting it with its past. Cultural values and diversity, including the diversity of local cultures and ethnic groups, such as Cham culture and Funan culture, are being studied more deeply, reviving the objective humanitarian significance of the existence of Vietnam's diverse ethnic communities within an independent and unified nation. The achievements of human civilization that have once been present in Vietnam, such as French civilization in Vietnam or the accomplishments of the Nguyen Dynasty, are increasingly recognized as rational and inherited elements of Vietnamese culture. The awareness of society, especially the institutions responsible for economic growth coupled with cultural development, the pursuit of progress, and social equity, is increasingly recognized and implemented practically and effectively.

Keywords: Development, culture, human, international integration.

INTRODUCTION

Culture is the sum of all material and spiritual values created by humans, accumulated through practical activities. It is a core element that defines the identity of a social community and can influence the psychological and behavioral aspects of individuals living within that society.

In recent times, Vietnam has achieved numerous successes in various aspects of social life, ranging from economics, politics, and culture, to security, defense, and foreign affairs. Cultural reforms have breathed new life into Vietnam's culture, reshaping its appearance and promoting a significant shift in cultural mindset. Traditional culture has garnered increased attention, and ethnic cultures have been rightfully recognized. The population has been exposed to the achievements of various cultures, gaining access to new artistic and cultural values from around the world, while also creating new cultural values. However, alongside these achievements, there are still limitations and challenges in the development of culture during the process of international integration. This article provides an objective assessment of cultural development over time, serving as a scientific foundation for policy planning in this unique field.

RESEARCH METHODS

According to the perspective of Marxism-Leninism: "Culture is the entirety of the achievements created through the creative labor activity of human beings – the activity of material production and reproduction for the real life of human beings" (Marx & Engels, 2000, p. 136). Culture is second nature, nature is transformed by the subjective consciousness of human beings; it is a unique mode of living activity, a distinctive way of life for human beings. In the Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, K. Marx

wrote: “The practical creation of an objective world, the transformation of inorganic nature, is the proof of the self-affirmation of man as a conscious species-being... Through this production, nature appears as his work and his reality” (K. Marx & Engels, 2000, p. 136-137). According to K. Marx, culture emerges through the practical activities of human beings, with the most fundamental and characteristic activity being labor and the transformation of society. Culture arises from the interaction between humans and nature, as well as among humans themselves. Culture is the manifestation of the level of development of human beings in these relationships, and humans are the creative subjects of culture. Human beings use culture to develop their capabilities while transforming and changing nature, simultaneously transforming themselves. In this process, humans increasingly realize the social power of labor and gain a clearer understanding of their creative capacity, their essential human nature – the creative aspect of themselves in culture, the reproduction of the natural world, and the “construction” of nature for themselves “according to the laws of beauty.” Through this creative labor activity, along with their existence and development in the real world, humans have established boundaries to differentiate their way of life from the survival methods of animals.

Moving on to Ho Chi Minh, with his rich and diverse revolutionary life experiences and his assimilation of cultural essence from both the East and the West, he left a valuable intellectual legacy for the Vietnamese people, including his ideas about culture. In his diary “Prison Diary” (1942-1943), Ho Chi Minh presented a relatively complete and meaningful perspective on culture: “For the sake of survival and the purpose of life, humanity has created and invented language, writing, ethics, laws, science, religion, literature, art, and tools for daily living, including clothing, food, shelter, and means of transportation. All these creations and inventions are culture. Culture is the synthesis of all forms of activity along with its manifestations that humanity has produced to adapt to the needs and demands of existence” (Minh, 2011, p. 458).

Ho Chi Minh’s perspective on culture not only catalogs the fundamental elements of human spiritual life but also clarifies the nature and function of culture. He regarded culture as the realm of spiritual life, belonging to the superstructure, to distinguish it relatively from other aspects of social life. Culture must take the lead in all tasks of defending and building the nation. Therefore, at the National Culture Conference in November 1946, he affirmed, “Culture paves the way for the nation” (Minh, 2011a, p. 15).

In the modern era, as humanity has made significant strides in economics, politics, and society, culture has received increasing attention and in-depth study, giving rise to the field of Cultural Studies. One of the pioneering scientists in the field of Cultural Studies was Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), who, in his book “Primitive Culture” published in London in 1871, defined culture as follows: Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

With this perspective, culture has expanded into various areas of social life, encompassing a complex array of achievements and values that individuals, as members of society, have attained. These areas include knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and habits.

In 2001, in the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, UNESCO put forth its viewpoint on culture: “Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual and material attributes, beliefs, practices, and values that characterize a society or a social group. It includes not only arts and letters but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions, and beliefs” (Dan, 2006, p. 19).

This demonstrates that UNESCO has defined culture as comprising both material and spiritual values associated with a particular nation, people, or society. Culture is an element of the superstructure, a means for humans to exist and develop, and a way for them to distinguish themselves from the animal world.

By synthesizing practical experiences and the development of culture worldwide, especially in the context

of nation-building and development, the Communist Party of Vietnam has presented a comprehensive and profound perspective on Vietnamese culture: “Vietnamese culture is the result of thousands of years of creative labor, fierce struggles to build and defend the nation by the community of Vietnamese ethnic groups, and the result of interaction and assimilation of the essence of many world civilizations for constant self-improvement. Vietnamese culture has forged the soul, spirit, and bravery of Vietnam, illuminating the glorious history of the nation” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998, p. 40).

Additionally, the paper’s approach is based on the worldview and the methodology of Marxist philosophy, and at the same time uses specific research methods such as analysis and synthesis, logic and history, inductive and interpretation, abstraction, generalization, comparison, comparison and literary methods for research and presentation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The current situation of cultural development

Firstly, it can be seen that Vietnamese culture has a rich and ancient tradition spanning thousands of years of history. It has endured numerous wars and fluctuations, which have resulted in the accumulation of many positive values. These include a deep-rooted patriotism, courage, adaptability to changing circumstances, tolerance, a sense of community, compassion, optimism, and a profound sense of family values, diligence, and hard work. Presently, Vietnam is known internationally as a peaceful, modern, youthful, and dynamic nation, actively engaging in global cooperation for peace and prosperity. Furthermore, the backdrop of Vietnam’s transformation, the juxtaposition of the old and the new, creates a unique and compelling force within Vietnamese culture. The current cultural landscape aims to inherit traditional cultural values while simultaneously embracing new values, looking towards the future with ideals such as democracy, modernity, humanity, liberation, tolerance, and openness. Recognizing these fundamental characteristics and qualities of Vietnamese culture, both in its tradition and in the present, holds significant positive implications for transforming them into the “soft power” of the nation and for building persuasive relationships with international friends.

Secondly, Vietnam possesses a rich and distinctive cultural heritage that has been cultivated over thousands of years of history. The country is blessed with abundant cultural resources that encompass a wide range of forms and hold significant value across various dimensions. These cultural assets are not only recognized at the regional but also international levels, creating favorable conditions for economic, cultural, and social development. Vietnam’s extensive cultural heritage, and majestic and picturesque landscapes, serve as invaluable assets with the potential for transformation into unique products and services. They contribute to economic growth, trade, and the establishment of the Vietnamese cultural brand and status.

Thirdly, there has been a significant enhancement in the positive and proactive engagement of the people in creating, preserving, propagating, and appreciating cultural and artistic values. The latent cultural creativity and potential of the people have come to light and shone brightly in creative activities, performances, and the dissemination of culture, literature, and arts. The fields of literature and arts, as well as mass media, have made remarkable progress in meeting the spiritual needs of the people. Community cultural activities, particularly festivals, have become immensely attractive today. Through widespread popular movements, cultural values have gradually permeated various aspects of life, manifesting as lifestyles, daily behaviors, and community relationships, contributing to social stability and progress. The cultural potential of the nation has been affirmed, artistic domains have flourished, and the cultural values of Vietnam have shone brightly, recognized by the world as an indispensable part of the precious heritage of human culture. Socializing cultural activities has had a positive impact on mobilizing resources for cultural development. It has gradually infused new vitality into all areas of cultural, sports, and tourism activities, aligning with the trends of development and economic integration in the regional and global contexts.

Fourthly, Vietnam's legal framework for cultural management has been gradually enhanced. Over time, many legal documents have been newly formulated or amended, supplemented to establish a legal framework conducive to cultural activities in line with the new circumstances. Numerous vital laws about culture and other legal documents have contributed to refining the cultural system to meet the demands of the new era. These include the Press Law, Cultural Heritage Law, Advertising Law, and Publishing Law, among others. In addition to the legal system and cultural policies, the Government has issued strategies related to cultural development, such as the Cultural Development Strategy until 2020 (issued in 2009), the Cultural Diplomacy Strategy until 2020 (issued in 2011), and the Family Development Strategy of Vietnam until 2020, with a vision to 2030 (issued in 2012). These serve as the foundation for implementing cultural activities in practice.

Fifthly, the "socialization" policy in cultural activities has yielded tangible results, with an initial mobilization of various societal resources. Socialization is considered one of the crucial solutions to attract social resources and involve different economic components in creative activities, the provision and dissemination of cultural products, and the establishment of a socially responsible community in the cultural development cause. This policy has created conditions for robust and widespread cultural activities, gradually enhancing the cultural enjoyment of the people. The diversification of cultural actors, transitioning from a single-source funding model by the state to multi-party participation, collaboration, and coordination among various societal actors in cultural activities, promotes diversity in cultural forms, ideas, trends, and styles of cultural expression, offering the public a richer spiritual experience.

Sixthly, cultural and artistic products are becoming increasingly rich and diverse. There is experimentation with various new forms and methods of expression, enriching genres, artistic styles, and artistic products. This is happening alongside efforts to preserve and promote traditional art forms. Some visual art, music, and film works have received high awards both nationally and internationally. The application of modern technology and techniques to cultural product production is gradually being implemented. Many cultural and artistic projects have encouraged new creativity from individual artists, attracting the attention of young people and offering fresh perspectives on contemporary life issues.

Seventhly, economic development and improved living standards of the people provide the foundation for the emergence of a cultural consumption market with increasing demand. Culture, once primarily seen as a medium for propaganda, is gradually becoming an economically valuable sector that generates profits for society. Tourism activities are particularly emphasized, with the cultural potential being exploited to make Vietnam a more attractive tourist destination. This contributes to economic growth and enhances the quality of life for residents.

Furthermore, international cultural cooperation has been intensified, contributing to enhancing the country's image and promoting Vietnamese culture and people to the world, creating "soft power" for the nation. Cultural exchanges with foreign countries are expanding alongside the process of Vietnam's multilateral and diversified international relations, contributing to strengthening friendship, and mutual understanding, and promoting the image of Vietnam's land, people, culture, and arts to the global community. Information technology, especially mass media, has made significant advancements. Telecommunications infrastructure and the Internet continue to receive substantial investment for robust development. The activities of news and media agencies have undergone innovations, actively integrating and learning from the world's communication experiences, achieving remarkable progress with multidimensional information and rich content. This contributes to raising public awareness, expanding knowledge, and providing access to the latest global knowledge, thereby increasing labor productivity and improving the quality of life for the people.

However, alongside the achievements, there are also some limitations in the development of culture in Vietnam during the international integration process.

Vietnam today is a society that harbors many contradictions. The country has deeply integrated and developed relatively quickly, even during the previous financial crisis and the current COVID-19 pandemic. The economic and social landscape has many bright spots, highly regarded by various international organizations and the global community. Vietnam's international reputation is increasingly open and wide-reaching. However, from another perspective, the values within Vietnamese society also exhibit concerning aspects, including phenomena that lack value or even run counter to values.

The Human Development Index is high, but human behavior seems to be losing its ethical grounding. Economic growth and the emergence of a middle class have led to increased wealth disparity. Poverty rates remain high in remote and underprivileged areas, and the risk of falling back into poverty is a constant threat. While educational and healthcare indices have improved, the quality of education remains weak, and healthcare relationships still have numerous issues, at times prioritizing profit over service. Traditional values are being restored, and the essence of world culture is being absorbed, yet disparities and hypocrisy in many cases are considered normal. While the happiness index is on the rise, the number of people satisfied with their lives hasn't increased.

Cultural tourism, festivals, showbiz, and more have developed, but uncultured and anti-cultural behaviors are still quite prevalent. The nation is dynamic and progressive, but the system and mechanisms still have the potential to corrupt individuals and erode culture. Trust continues to deteriorate significantly.

Social crimes are typical signs of the degradation of human morality. Before 2020, crimes occurred almost daily, and it's noteworthy that the severity of violent crimes increased over time. During the COVID-19 outbreak, although there was a decrease in violent crimes, other types of crimes still shocked society. This situation is reflected in reports from the Ministry of Public Security, the Anti-Corruption Steering Committee, the National Assembly's Judicial Committee, and in media reports on public security. The rising trend in violent crimes is inseparable from the drug addiction and trafficking problem. Despite Vietnam's strict laws against drug-related crimes, the scourge continues to grow. Since 2019, the National Assembly has had to address the risk of Vietnam becoming an international drug trafficking hub. Drug-related crimes directly undermine society's efforts to build a better human character. The gravity of the issue lies in the fact that according to the Minister of Public Security in response to a National Assembly query on June 4, 2019, as drug-related crimes increase, so do other types of crimes, and for every shipment of drugs entering Vietnam, 10 families will have a member sent to prison.

The clearest indication of human degradation and moral decline is when high-ranking officials of the Party and the State violate the law. In recent years, when major cases have been prosecuted, most citizens can't help but be surprised to learn that among the serious criminals, some were once high-ranking officials in the police force, the military, and senior Party and State officials such as Central Party Committee members, Politburo members, etc. The most recent example is the Conclusion of the Party Central Committee on October 1, 2021, regarding the examination and enforcement of discipline against 9 individuals and the Standing Committee of the Party Committee of the Vietnam Coast Guard for the 2015-2020 term. From November 2 to November 4, 2021, during the eighth session, the Central Inspection Commission proposed disciplinary actions against some leaders of the Ministry of Health and the Party Affairs Committee of the Ministry of Health for the 2016-2021 term. In the past, few people would have thought that individuals with social status and responsibilities could be the masterminds behind social disorder and be willing to harm the country.

The human resources for cultural development are weak and lack specialized management skills, especially innovative capacity and business management skills. The quality of the cultural management cadre at all levels is not keeping up with the rich, diverse, and complex development of cultural activities, leading to difficulties in policy planning, guidance, enforcement, and handling violations of laws and cultural policies.

Investment in culture does not correspond to the role and position of culture in development. Overall, the

level of investment in culture in the total budget is relatively low compared to other sectors, not commensurate with reality, and not evenly distributed. The system of facilities and infrastructure for cultural activities, in general, is underdeveloped, in a state of disrepair, lacking cohesion, and with low efficiency. Planning and investment in key cultural infrastructure development are lagging. The cultural infrastructure system in rural areas, especially in remote and far-flung areas, is still lacking, not well-coordinated, and not genuinely adapted to the characteristics of regions and the needs and aspirations of the people. The content of activities is still poor and not practical.

The quality of cultural services and products is not yet high; there is a lack of cultural brands at the national, regional, and international levels, as well as a shortage of high-quality cultural products that contribute to enriching the soul, building character, and providing moral education. The situation of importing and having a trade deficit in foreign cultural products in Vietnam surpasses cultural exports, and the absorption of foreign cultural products lacks discernment. Vietnamese cultural products have not truly been creative or diverse, and they do not meet the needs of the public. Their competitiveness in the domestic and international markets remains low.

The distinctive cultural identity of ethnic minorities is at risk of fading away. Many ethnic minorities have gradually lost their unique cultural traits in the process of development and integration, resulting in a poor cultural and artistic life. Many forms of intangible cultural heritage of ethnic minority communities have not been adequately documented and protected. Many cultural and artistic forms have not received sufficient attention, including high-level and traditional arts, public arts, and new arts.

Theoretical activities and literary and artistic criticism are still limited and do not address many issues of daily life. The gap between many theoretical issues and real-life situations is not only not narrowing but tends to expand. There are few in-depth research works on literary and artistic theory, and their quality is not high. They have not answered many pressing questions raised by practical situations or have provided unconvincing answers. Currently, two contradictory realities exist: On the one hand, cultural theory lags and follows real life, with numerous fundamental and urgent questions posed by practice remaining unanswered or receiving inadequate answers. On the other hand, due to the lack of proper guidance, direction, and orientation of correct theory, many cultural phenomena occur spontaneously, leading to confusion in practical guidance, passivity, and a lack of clear and timely policies, and effective strategies. Artistic criticism has not contributed to timely direction, guidance, adjustment, and companionship with creative work. Sometimes, it tends to be lenient and evasive or overly dogmatic and negates the scientific nature of artistic criticism. It has not thoroughly analyzed and criticized the erroneous and biased trends.

Some solutions for the development of Vietnamese culture

From the above situation and by effectively seizing opportunities while overcoming challenges, the development of Vietnamese culture in the process of international integration requires the implementation of the following solutions:

First, raise awareness and transform it into action throughout society in the construction and development of culture. The strategies and policies of the Party and the State need to become practical and effective action programs for all ministries, sectors, and localities. Propaganda efforts through various media should be proactive, creative, and engaging, staying closely connected with the evolving social context, including assessing the impact of new media. Further, enhances the understanding of the role and position of culture in the overall development of the country. Culture should be one of the driving forces for the sustainable development of the country in the coming years.

Second, focus on building Vietnamese individuals with qualities that meet the requirements of the new era. These qualities include patriotism, compassion, loyalty, honesty, unity, diligence, and creativity. Develop and promote a way of life based on the principle of “Each person for everyone, everyone for each person.”

Foster a lifestyle characterized by self-respect, self-reliance, adherence to the Constitution and the law, environmental protection, and a harmonious balance between personal and societal interests. Emphasize individual responsibility towards oneself, family, and society. Affirm and honor what is right, good, positive, and noble; disseminate and promote high moral values and humanitarianism.

Third, perfect the cultural framework to promote freedom and creativity. Invest resources, especially human resources, rationally in culture. Avoid assigning individuals who lack expertise or have low credibility to cultural responsibilities within party committees. This has been one of the reasons why culture has not been valued enough.

Fourth, build a healthy cultural environment that creates conditions for the development of Vietnamese culture and individuals. A healthy cultural environment within families, schools, and society as a whole will shape and nurture the cultural character and lifestyle of the Vietnamese people. It ensures that the good is protected, upheld, and enhanced, while the bad and the negative are rejected and condemned. Reform education at all levels, emphasizes ethics, arts, and creativity in the curriculum. The knowledge and skills acquired in schools should help instill cultural values that permeate society.

Fifth, develop cultural industries to create cultural products and services by Vietnamese, for Vietnamese, and benefit Vietnamese culture. This will help spread Vietnamese cultural values, and the nation's soft power, and drive socio-economic development.

Sixth, enhance international integration, including cultural integration, to promote cultural messages and showcase images of Vietnam and its people to the world. At the same time, selectively assimilate the world's cultural treasures to enrich Vietnamese culture. This is an essential trend in the context of current globalization.

CONCLUSION

Over the past nearly 35 years of reforms, Vietnam has emerged from a group of poor countries, with continuous improvements in material and cultural living standards, and an elevated position on the international stage. The development of Vietnamese culture in the coming years is crucial for the overall development of the nation. Leveraging opportunities, capitalizing on strengths, mitigating weaknesses, and overcoming challenges will be the best way for Vietnam to develop its culture, truly turning it into a driving force and a goal for the nation's development, so that culture can indeed "light the way for the people," as Ho Chi Minh once earnestly advised.

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