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THE REFLECTION OF CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS IN THE EDUCATION OF VIETNAM

Introduction

Culture and education have been an inseparable pair of definitions, existing parallelly and having a dialectical relationship when the history of human beings started, the history of culture also began, and the beginning of cultural history was also the starting point of the history of education. To learn about the culture of a certain country, initially, we need to approach the education of that country. Education in Vietnam has been connected with Vietnamese culture for thousands of years¹. Therefore, this education system does not only contain the characteristics of culture in general, but also reflects the unique imprints of Vietnamese culture.

Definition of Culture, Cultural Characteristics and Education

Culture: This terminology was defined differently by Vietnamese researchers and other scholars in the world.

In one of the earliest studies focused on Vietnamese culture, Prof. Dao Duy Anh insisted that: "Culture in general is all aspects of people's life, in other words culture is all activities in human life" (Dao Duy Anh 1938, p. 13).

In the work *The foundations of Vietnamese culture*, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tran Ngoc Them stated: "Culture is a general system of material, spiritual values which is created by human and is accumulated in the realistic activities in the context of interacting amongst humans, natural environment and society" (Tran Ngoc Them 1999, p. 10).

The international reseachers have given other definitions which seem to be more specific than the ones above.

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¹ The terminology of Vietnamese Culture was understood widely, including all of the ethnics who live in Vietnam territory.

James Banks in the work *Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies* affirmed that culture is “the behavior, patterns, symbols, institutions, values, and other human made components of the society” (Banks 1984, p. 52).

Patricia Marshall gave another distinctive perspective, emphasizing the human position in dealing with the outside world. According to the author, culture is “consistent way in which people experience, interpret, and respond to the world around” (Marshall 2002, p. 8).

As we can see, each author has raised a vital part of definition of culture. While Dao Duy Anh gave the readers suggestion of the way to approach culture in terms of daily life activities, Tran Ngoc Them showed us the objectives of culture studies. While J. Banks proposed the fundamental elements in establishing culture, P. Marshall presented the relationship between humans and culture, investigating culture based on the subjective position of humans.

All of the definitions are useful for us in understanding the concept of culture and solving the tasks of this article. However, we decide to choose the definition of President Ho Chi Minh and consider it as a framework of having a crystal understanding and comprehensive studying.

Because of the existence as well as the purposes of life, humans create and invent languages, morality, law, science, religion, literature, art and the tools for daily life activities on clothing, food, accommodation, and the methods to use. The whole of those creations and inventions are culture. Culture is the sum of living modes and their expression which human beings produced in order to adapt to the human demands and survival requirements (Ho Chi Minh 2000, p. 431).

Cultural characteristics

The terminology of characteristics is understood as unique and typical features and signs to distinguish one object from another. Hence, we can define cultural characteristics as the features which only exist in a certain culture, making it different from other cultures.

Education

John Dewey defined that: “Education is a social process; education is growth; education is not preparation for life but is life itself” (https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/42738.John_Dewey 2016). In terms of kanji literally, education means instructions, cultivation and care. It not only includes teaching responsibility (*giáo* – teaching), but also carries the affection and caring (*dục* – raising) (<http://tgpsaigon.net/baiviet-tintuc/20140320/25241> 2014). From those, it is possible to understand that education is the process of interactions between the teaching and learning, through that, knowledge, skills and habits are transmitted from previous generations to suc-

cessive generations. The traditional environment of education is the school, however, education is not limited itself in that space. Education can be fulfilled in families and social activities. Basing on education, individuals improve themselves in order to meet the requirements of life.

General View on Vietnam Education

The folk education of Vietnamese people

As we mentioned, education began along with the start of cultural activities (in another way of interpreting, cultural activities are the activities of human daily life). In the primitive society, education had not been really formed, there was only *educational phenomenon*², that is the activities of sharing experiences in making the tools for producing. Though, the educational phenomenon became the elementary factor of building *the Vietnamese folk education*.

According to Phan Ngoc Lien, the Vietnamese folk education existed thousands years ago. The features of this education are no teachers, schools, and books. The content of this education mainly focused on the way to producing tools, the knowledge related to producing, the changes in natural conditions and the way to communicate with others. The method of this education was settled based on affection, responsibilities and obligations of members of the families, clans and tribes (Phan Ngoc Lien 2006, p. 24-25).

It is easy to see the plenty of topics in the content of Vietnamese folk education when learning the folk songs, proverbs and crambo which are still preserved in the present. Some topics were mentioned often are the affection amongst members of the families and the respect for elder people.

Công cha như núi Thái Sơn
 Nghĩa mẹ như nước trong nguồn chảy ra
 Một lòng thờ mẹ kính cha
 Cho tròn chữ hiếu mới là đạo con
 (Dad's labor is as big as the Thai Son mountain
 Mom's love is like water flowing from the source
 Respect and honor parents with all heart
 Uphold the filial piety is children's duty)

Some sharing about the practical experiences:

Chuồn chuồn bay thấp thì mưa
 Bay cao thì nắng, bay vừa thì râm
 (Dragonflies: fly low, rain is coming
 Fly high, sky is cloudy, fly highest, the sun will shine)

² Words of Prof. Phan Ngoc Lien.

or sharing the experiences in producing:

Cơn đặng đông vừa trông vừa chạy
Cơn đặng nam vừa làm vừa chơi
Cơn đặng bắc đổ thóc ra phơi
Cơn đặng tây mưa giây, gió giật
 (If you see the storm in Eastern, just running
 If you see the storm in Southern, keep playing
 If you see the storm in Northern, can drying paddy under sunshine
 If you see the storm in Western, it will be heavy hurricane)

The knowledge of the Vietnamese folk education has not lost, but inherited in the next education models of Vietnamese people. This is one of the characteristics of Vietnamese culture and education.

The Education in School

The school is not an exclusive environment where Vietnamese people are educated, but in the sphere of this writing, we would like to narrowing to educational environments, only mention the educational models have been applied to Vietnam.

First is *the feudal education*, also known as the Confucian education, this educational model appeared quite early in Vietnam. After invading the Au Lac (in 179 BC), the Northern feudal dynasties wanted to assimilate rapidly Vietnamese people. In the beginning of the 1st century, the King of Han dynasty sent Chinese people to Vietnam and taught Vietnamese people speak Chinese. Many Chinese scholars were distributed over Jiaozhi (Giao Chi)³ to civilizing the indigenous people. Despite this education is not national education of Vietnamese people, this is the first official education in Vietnamese history. Especially, when Chinese dynasties intended to use education as an assimilated tool to eliminate Vietnamese customs and merger entirely Vietnamese into Chinese culture. Vietnamese people not only acquired Chinese culture selectively, but also assimilate back some sectors of Chinese culture. Thus, Vietnamese people succeeded in the struggle to release out of the domination of Chinese dynasties after over 1000 years.

After having the independence and autonomy, the feudal dynasties of Vietnam immediately concerned more on developing education. In the dynasties of Ngo, Dinh and the Early Le, the schools had not been built, the teaching and learning were carried on by monks in pagodas and temples. Chinese and Sanskrit were use as main languages in teaching and writing. This leads to the high position and important role of monks

³ In the Chinese domination of Vietnam, China divided Vietnam territory into several districts. Jiaozhi district included the Northern area of Vietnam nowadays, except for the upstream of Da river and Ma river. Jiaozhi also included a part of southwestern Guangxi (China) (Phan Huy Le, Tran Quoc Vuong, Ha Van Tan, Luong Ninh 1991, p. 159).

in the early feudal society. In 1070, the Temple of Literature was built in Thang Long (Hanoi nowadays), the first official university of Vietnamese education. This triggered the development of the Confucian education in Vietnam. This education concentrated on training and recruitment of talented people who can assistance the Kings in tackling the country's problems and having the initiatives in national building. The feudal education tended to remember the content of classical books rather than locating on scientific and technical issues. In specific periods, such as Ho and Tay Son dynasties, the national spirit was enhanced. This led to the idea of using Nom instead of Kanji (Chinese), as an official language, was suggested. Due to the limitations of circumstances and the historical crisis, this idea did not promote efficiency in practice, Chinese is still the main language was used during 10 centuries of Vietnam feudal dynasties. Despite of the drawbacks, the Confucian education still contributed prominently in training the Vietnamese cultural notabilities (for instance, Le Van Huu, Nguyen Trai, Nguyem Binh Khiem, Le Quy Don and Nguyen Du, etc.), who played outstanding roles in building the country prosperously and protect the independence of Vietnam from the Chinese ambition to dominating Vietnam.

Since the middle of 19th century, Vietnam also began to reach out to a new model of education, that is *Western education*, be specific, that model came from France. In parallel to Confucian education which already had existed, French operated the project of constructing the schools in Vietnam. In 1919, the Confucian education were terminated in Vietnam. At that time, there had two systems of education: one is for children of French people. The program of this system followed the program in France. The other is the system of French-Vietnamese schools, which was designed for Vietnamese children basing on an indigenous program. French educational model targeted on training the staff and personnel of assistance the ruling of French imperialism in Vietnam. The content of teaching had a little progress compare to the feudal education (emphasize on pragmatic matters, strengthen scientific and technical subjects). In fact, it still did not meet the requirements of cultural and social development of Vietnamese people.

In the first decades of the 20th century, Vietnamese Revolutionary Movement expanded rapidly. The presence of Vietnamese Communist Party since 3rd, February 1930 not only is the turning point on the path of national revolution, but also is a milestone in the history of education in Vietnam. From then, ideas of building a program of revolutionary education began to be implemented. In 1943, the introduction to *The outline of Vietnamese Culture* (written by Truong Chinh) created fundamental conditions to shape the countenance of Vietnamese revolutionary education, which is the education of people, by people and for people with three principles: National, Scientific and Prevailing. After the success of the August Revolution in 1945, the issue of constructing a revolutionary education was underlined. The educational reform, fulfilled in 1950, marked the turning point in Vietnam

education, a new educational program, with a maxim of tightening the practice and learning, altered old curriculum of Hoang Xuan Han.

From 1954 to 1975, Vietnam was temporarily divided into two parts (as the decision of Geneva Agreement in 1954 on Vietnam). This led to the special status of Vietnam education. In the North of Vietnam continued its pursuit of the revolutionary education, building a new model of socialist, people, adapting the needs of developing in the North and giving the essential foundations in order to release the South of Vietnam from American imperialism and unified the country. In the South of Vietnam, two systems of educations paralleled existing. The education system ruled by the Republic of Vietnam government was influenced intensely the model of American education, followed the principles are Humanistic, National and Open. Beside the education of the Republic of Vietnam, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam had their own system and program of education (this system was impacted by the revolutionary education in the North of Vietnam).

After 1975, the country was unified, despite of facing many difficulties, Vietnam education still achieved accomplishments, fulfilled the objectives of

training scientific technical and economic management staff; enhancing the qualification, political quality and the absolute loyalty to the Vietnamese Communist Party, working class, nation; keeping the close contact with workers and peasants; having the abilities to organizing and mobilizing the people; understanding the natural and social rules, solving the scientific, technical and economic management issues; being able to update the advances of science and technology in the world (*Introduction to...* 1978, p. 13).

After the Reform in 1986, education is considered as a priority national policy in the process of industrialization and modernization of Vietnam. Vietnam education has more opportunities to grow and catch up the trend of progressive educations in the world.

The cultural characteristics reflect on Vietnam education

Inheritance

Arising initially with the foundation of Southeast Asia culture, Vietnamese culture has been exchanging and acculturating other cultures (such as Chinese, Indian and Western) to mould the present Vietnamese culture with the characteristics of diversity, plenty and strongly highlight the national identity. That is the consequence of inheriting the essence values of the previous cultures and combining with new elements of modern cultures.

In the same way as culture development, Vietnam education also is built and completed. The inherited characteristic of Vietnam education is shown in distinguishing aspects, we are going list some of them, for instance the inheritance to content and

program, the inheritance to behavior in teacher–student relationship and the inheritance of infrastructure and intellectuals.

The first point we can see that is the educational content was inherited from different educational models. Although, certain governments had their own educational contents which adapted the specific requirements. The core contents, such as, patriotic education, affection and filial piety to their parents were inherited throughout the history of education in Vietnam. Besides, the achievements of the previous education also inherited and promoted efficiency in the successive educations. It can be counted like folk songs, proverbs and rhymes of *the Vietnamese folk education* have become an important part of Vietnam modern educational content. The literatures, poems from feudal intellectuals are integral part of the present teaching, helping students gain a comprehensive perspective on development and achievements of Vietnamese culture.

The another aspect showing the inheritance is program, the program is inherited from various educational backgrounds. The feudal education in Vietnam was constructed due to the model of Chinese dynasties. The Vietnam education in contemporary history absorbed the educational models from Western countries (France, America, Russia) to establish the educational curriculum. Inheritance also took place within interior educations. For example, after the success of the August Revolution, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government was established. However, this government had to face to adverse conditions, they had not got the facilities to build up a new educational program. That why the program (written by Hoang Xuan Han), was used in the period of Tran Trong Kim's Cabinet, continued to utilize in the first five years before promulgating a new one.

Teacher–student relationship is another factors to display the inherited characteristic of Vietnam education. Base on some cultural features, such as esteem literature and intellectuals, respect elder people, Vietnam education carries a high position of teachers and requiring students respect their teachers seriously. This is one of the conventional behaviors of Vietnamese people. In the later period, the democracy and equality was brought into Vietnam by Western educations. Though, this cannot erode the solemn behavior in teacher–student relationship of Vietnamese people.

Finally, the inheritance manifests in terms of infrastructure and intellectuals. French and America built the schools in Vietnam do not mean they desired to civilize as they propagated. In spite of that, the facilities of schools, libraries and laboratories are authentic assets, which we are succeeded and maintain in the Vietnam modern education. Moreover, the French and American educational models contributed prominently to educating and training revolutionary intellectuals, namely Tran Van Giau, Dang Thai Mai, Vo Nguyen Giap, Nguyen Van Huyen, etc., who were not only played outstanding roles in the success of the national liberation, but also in building the framework of the culture and education of Vietnam nowadays.

Continuity

During over 2000 years, Vietnam has experienced many ups and downs stages. Historical researchers have calculated Vietnamese people have to suffer the war time more than the peaceful time to build up their country. Despite of that context, Vietnamese culture still keeps the continuous development. Facing to foreign machinations of assimilating Vietnamese people and destroying indigenous culture, Vietnamese culture has always asserted its bravery, became the foundation of power for Vietnamese people defeated all foreign invasions, protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country. In the one hand, education is an effective instrument to maintaining the continuous development of culture. In the other hand, the continuity of culture makes the facilities for lasting education without interruptions.

Overcome the difficulties of country's circumstance, Vietnam education has never been suspended. In the time of the domination of Chinese dynasties, Vietnamese people took advantage of presence of Chinese scholars in Vietnam to cultivate Vietnamese people and improve their knowledge. Under the Vietnamese feudal dynasties from 10th to 19th century, there were a lot of civil wars, the country partition into several parts. Despite of that, the central and local government still focus on retaining and developing education. In 20th century, Vietnam had suffered two brutal wars, though, this cannot be the reasons detain the growth of education. To avoiding the destruction of bombs, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government had evacuated school's material, teachers, students to rural areas to ensure the continuity of education. Because of the continuity, education has met the targets of people training in specific periods, it is a core factor to create achievements in all fields of national history.

Humanitarianism

As in many cultures and educations in the world, Vietnam education is formed by people and exists for people. Therefore, the position of people is always in the center of educational plans and programs. The more progressive education, the more profound concern about the demand of people.

In the feudal period, education concentrated on training a gentleman (*Quân tử*) with five outstanding virtues: humanness (*Nhân*), proper rite (*Lễ*), righteousness or justice (*Nghĩa*), knowledge (*Trí*), integrity (*Tín*). These virtues would be the foundation for the gentleman (*Quân tử*) completing his tasks in his whole life including the following 8 steps: (1) Approach and perceive the outer world (*Cách vật*); (2) Gain knowledge (*Trí tri*), (3) Practise in reality (*Thành ý*); (4) Be transparent (*chính tâm*); (5) Improve oneself (*Tu thân*), (6) Organize the family (*Tề gia*); (7) Rule the government (*Trị quốc*), (8) Keep the peaceful life in the world (*Bình thiên hạ*). These criteria only referred to the requirements of training rulers, in terms of humanitarianism, and they were in-

adequate and biased. People who were under the Confucian education depended on normative rites, lack of initiatives and creations.

In the colonial period, the content of education was extended, the aims at education were more practical. However, the rights of people were still unequal. The colonial education minimized the chances of attending school, it was designed only for rich families and people who served in colonial administration.

Only in the revolutionary education, humanitarianism is appreciated entirely. This education set the goal of training comprehensive people that include “morality, knowledge, strength, aesthetic”. These people have abilities to control themselves, society and nature. It can be seen that the socialist education has been building an education for everyone. In that system, people were encouraged to be creative and initiative. Prof. Nguyen Van Huyen affirmed: “developing human beings under humanitarian ideals means humans can come back to themselves, developing all of the essence elements which belong to humanness, humanities and humanitarianism, doing all things that humans need and will need” (Le Quang Trang, Nguyen Trong Hoan 2001, p. 457).

These days, Vietnam education is trying to establish the best conditions for implementing humanitarianism and training socialist people to fit the increasing demands of the country.

Conclusion

Culture and education in Vietnam have been mutually connected for over 2000 years, making the foundations for gaining the achievements and the development of Vietnam. Learning some characteristics of culture, such as inheritance, continuity and humanitarianism, which are present in Vietnam education does not only allow us to recognize the relationship of culture and education better, but also lets us gain a comprehensive perspective on studying education in Vietnam.

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The reflection of cultural characteristics in the education of Vietnam

Abstract: Culture and education have gone together over 2000 years, making the foundations for development of Vietnam. The authors discuss connections between culture and education. They claim that not only the education system contains the characteristics of culture in general, but also reflects the unique imprints of culture. In this case they concentrate on Vietnamese culture and the general view of it was presented in the first part of the text. In the next part the characteristic of education in Vietnam is briefly described. Then they specify how the cultural characteristics reflect on Vietnamese education. The main elements of the connection is inheritance and continuity of culture.

Keywords: culture, education, Vietnam, inheritance

Refleksje na temat charakterystyki kulturowej w edukacji w Wietnamie

Streszczenie: Kultura i edukacja współistniały ze sobą przez ponad 2000 lat, kładąc podstawy pod rozwój Wietnamu. Autorzy artykułu zastanawiają się nad połączeniami między kulturą a edukacją. Twierdzą, że nie tylko system edukacji zawiera elementy specyfiki kulturowej, ale także działa to w drugą stronę, edukacja odciska się na kulturze. W tekście autorzy skoncentrowali się na kulturze wietnamskiej, której ogólna charakterystyka została zaprezentowana w pierwszej części tekstu. W kolejnej opisano zwięźle specyfikę edukacji wietnamskiej. Następnie wskazano, jak specyfika kulturowa wyraża się w edukacji. Głównymi elementami połączeń kultury i edukacji są dziedzictwo kulturowe i ciągłość kulturowa.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, edukacja, Wietnam, dziedzictwo