Thanh Hoa Identity from the Perspective of the Traditional Cultural Origin

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Abstract: Xứ Thanh (Thanh Hoa Province) is a cultural sub-region with two prominent characteristics, including: the transition-based (from the geographical, historical, linguistic, and cultural perspectives) and the crystallization-based (mainly from the historical, cultural, and human perspectives). The two characteristics made a contribution towards formation of people's identity in this "sacred land", where the talent and spirit of many extraordinary people were tempered in various periods of the national history. The identity is seen as a cultural code that has been strengthening the community cohesion through the entire history. At the same time, it helps to create new jumps in development and disclose hindrances in the current context of comprehensive international integration. What we have to do about the regional cultural identity is to recognize the strengths and minimize the inertia-based hindrances, which tend to arise not only in the area of Thanh Hoa but also all over the country.

Key words: Identity; culture; traditional; modern; Thanh Hoa; Xứ Thanh.

1. Introduction

Thanh Hoa appeared for the first time as a *lộ* (an administrative unit like a province) at the time of the Ly Dynasty and was then founded administratively as a province in 1841 (at the ruling era of Thieu Tri, the Nguyen Dynasties). In reality, however, Thanh Hoa was formed and known as a cultural sub-region a long time ago in history. There have been many research works analyzing the cultural identity of this area [3, 6, 8, 9, 14, 17]. In this paper, I would like to re-affirm and highlight some marginal features to show the formation of this cultural sub-region, based on its natural and geographical conditions as well as its socio - humanity context and historical karma. Regarding to those factors, it is easy to realize the transition - based and the crystallization - based prominent characteristics, which shaped sustainable values and particular identity of the area and people.

2. Characteristics of Thanh Hoa cultural sub-region

2.1. The transition-based feature

Regarding to the geographic aspect: Researchers have shown the transitional position of Thanh Hoa topography, which

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runs downwards from the North to the Central Vietnam as well as from the mountains to the plains and towards the sea. Le Ba Thao, a geographer, argues that some opinions about joining the plain of Ma River to the Red River Delta have been raised, but "it is not necessary and there are not any convincing reasons for this". According to him, "if we want to find out a natural transition of the plains, we can see it obviously in this area. If we go further due south of Ha Tinh, we will find the natural climate more and more tropical. On the contrary, if we go further north of Thanh Hoa, we will realize that the climate changes more and more under the influence of cold winter" [12, p.205]. Besides, the topography of Thanh Hoa is connected directly to the Northwest Vietnam by mountain ranges. According to Le Ba Thao, "there are waves of mountains and hills running from the Northwest to the limestone mountains in Bim Son (and then to the plain in Thanh Hoa) and the schist mountains in Thanh Thanh as well as the mountains in the middle of Chu River and the mountainous areas of Lam and Con Rivers" [12, p.102].

Regarding to the administrative aspect: Thanh Hoa used to be named as *"lộ", "phủ", "phủ lộ", "thừa tuyên", "xứ"*, and *"trấn"* (administrative units in the feudal periods) and finally it was identified as a province. In spite of the changes in the administrative name, it is always located in the transition from the North to the Central Vietnam as an administrative unit between the two parts of the country.

Regarding to the dialectic aspect: Based on 3 criteria, including tone, phoneme, and vocabulary, Vietnamese language linguists divided Vietnam language into 3 regional dialects: the Northern, the Central, and the Southern [2, p.87]. According to this division, the dialect in Thanh Hoa is really a controversial topic, as it is listed by some researchers in the Northern dialectic group [5, p.15, 16], but it is also listed by others in the Central dialectic group [1, p.6]; sometimes, it is divided into two smaller parts, of which the dialect in Northern Thanh Hoa is listed in the Northern dialectic group and the dialect in Southern Thanh Hoa is listed in the North Central dialectic group [13, pp.51-60]. The dialect in Thanh Hoa is sometimes seen as a transitional dialect between the Northern dialect and the Central dialect, because it consists of both isogloss of the Northern and the Central dialects [2, p.89].

2.2. The crystallization-based feature

Significant cultural values of this sub-region are shown in three aspects, including: history, culture, and people.

2.2.1. Regarding to history

The appearance of ancient Viet people with stone hand-tools in Nui Do 30 thousand years ago and the continuity of brilliant cultures such as Da But, Hoa Loc, and Dong Son demonstrate the crystallization of the peak values of Vietnamese cultures and civilizations in the prehistoric time. Archaeological evidence has affirmed convincingly that ancient Viet people started to occupy and settle down in the plain area in Thanh Hoa nearly ten thousand years ago. "People of Da But culture occupied the coastal plain area in Ninh Binh - Thanh Hoa, when the marine transgression reached its peak in the Holocene from 7,000 to 5,000 BP, and in the period of marine regression afterwards. According to the 14^{C} radiocarbon dating

determination of the Da But cultural artifacts, the earliest date ranges from 6,390 - 60 BP to 6,430 - 60 BP; and, the latest date is 4.700 - 50 BP for the artifacts found in Go Trung vestige. This demonstrates that Da But culture existed during the period from 7,000 to 4,000 BP" [17, pp.15 - 31]. Following Da But culture, there were civilizations in the Iron Age, of which the most outstanding is Dong Son culture. Those civilizations set up the foundation for the establishment of Van Lang Kingdom.

The long history of habitation in this area further affirms the linguistic evidence. In a research work on dialects, Hoang Thi Chau made a comparison between Thanh Hoa and other areas of multi-dialects. She highlighted "surprising" similarities between the multi-dialectic area and the area of ancient habitation from the archaeological and historical perspectives. Combining archaeological evidence with the dialectic one, Hoang Thi Chau realized that the plain areas of the Red River, Ma River and the coastal plain in Nghe Tinh, more specifically Vinh Phu Province (comprising the modern provinces of Phu Tho and Vinh Phuc), Thanh Hoa, and Nghe Tinh were the very places where archaeological vestiges dating back to the Stone Age and the late Bronze Age had been found. They are not only the places, where vestiges of prominent cultures from Phung Nguyen to Dong Son periods have been discovered, but also the places, where dialects can be seen most clearly. She argued: "the self-sufficient economy in a wet rice-growing society, where village was considered as the basic unit of habitation with separate customs and people just kept closed life in the village,

strengthened ancient traces of language" [2, p.221]. According to Karl Marx, "Dialect is the product of a commune. Based on some opinion, it is the very existence of a commune: it is a way for the commune to manifest itself" [4, p.230]. Based on her own linguistic analysis, Hoang Thi Chau affirmed: "dialect is valuable heritage to create the village cultural symbol; it is the luggage that people take with themselves when they migrate to other places so that they can use it to set up a close relationship with those who came from the same community. It also differentiates them from people of other dialectic groups with some extent of discrimination. It helps them to keep a strong relation with the place of origin, where they want to come back to lie down satisfyingly after passing away" [2, p.232].

When talking about cultural regions and sub-regions in Vietnam, the concept of "sacred land with extraordinary people" can be used to indicate many places, of which Thanh Hoa is a really particular sub-region as it is the homeland of "three kings and two lords", who created historic turning-points and made a significant contribution towards the national history in the great revival or turbulent periods. Making an assessment about this sub-region, Phan Huy Chu [in his encyclopedic work titled *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí (The Regulations of Successive Dynasties by Subject-Matter)* composed in the early 19th Century and submitted to the King Minh Mang in 1821 gave utmost praise, in which he emphasized the brilliance of extraordinary historical figures. He stated: "in the previous dynasties, this land was always considered a very important district. At the time of the

Le Dynasty, it was seen as a fundamental area. Its natural conditions have produced a lot of kings and leaders as well as well-known scholars. The local products are also valuable and different from those in other places. Land is sacred, so people are excellent. As a result, extraordinary people have appeared. Its vitality is the highest in our country" [3, p. 47].

2.2.2. Regarding to culture

A long history of habitation of Viet people in the area of Thanh Hoa led to the convergence and creation of tangible and intangible cultural values of the whole complex of mountainous, plain, and coastal cultures in this sub-region.

It can be said that the diversity of customs and faiths, of which most are typical for the faiths in the North and some are for those in the South, is found in Thanh Hoa. Concerning this aspect, Hoang Ba Tuong affirmed: "All the regions and faiths from all over our country can be found in Thanh Hoa and they are highly revered by local people here" [14].

Mountainous culture

The topography of Thanh Hoa consists of ranges of mountains running downwards from the Northwest. It is, therefore, not surprising that many vestiges of mountainous deity worship have been found in this area. According to *Thanh Hóa chư thần lục (Deities Worshipped in Thanh Hoa),* there are 414 vestiges of mountainous deity worship in Thanh Hoa. According to Ngo Duc Thinh, "this expresses the people's inner feeling towards the place of origin in the mountains. Recent archaeological research works have demonstrated that ancient

people migrated from mountainous caves along Ma River to the plain area in Thanh Hoa during the time from the Neolithic Age to the Early Iron Age" [17, p.229].

Plain culture

The Mother goddess cult (Dao mu) from the North was continued uniquely in Thanh Hoa. This is shown clearly by the worship to Lieu Hanh Princess - the major goddess - in Song Temple, which is one of the Mother goddess cult centers. Thanh Hoa is not only the place where a lot of Lieu Hanh Princess worship temples are found, but it is also the place where the duel between two Taoist-influenced faiths, including Nội đạo tràng (Taoism internal practice) and the Mother goddess cult, took place, according to the legend. One of them is a witchcraft school and the other is a fairy school. There are male Taoist masters in one school, but female goddesses in the other. Interestingly, in spite of being defeated in the duel, the Mother goddess cult got more reputation and caused strong influence in this area. On the southward expansion, the Mother goddess cult suddenly stopped its expansion in Thanh Hoa in the 18th Century. This is not legendary but historical, in reality. From Nghe An Province southwards, the number of Lieu Hanh Princess worship temples is far fewer; for a long time, rituals of the Mother goddess cult could not pervade in those areas; only after Doi moi (Renovation), have the rituals been practiced there due to the power of market economy. In our opinion, this reality shows that the Northern Region is limited to the South in Thanh Hoa. Although transitional factors in the topography, administration, and language are found, the limit of the

Northern Region resulted in the formation of cultural particularities in Thanh Hoa and Nghe Tinh provinces in history.

The sea - coastal culture

From the perspective of faith, we can see original features about this land. The three sea deities (including: the Four Princess Saints, the East Sea Lord, and the One-leg God), who are worshipped popularly in the Northern and the Central Regions, are attached so closely to life of people in Thanh Hoa that the worship to those deities has become a distinguished feature of this province. With five estuaries of Ma River, including Linh Truong (Lach Sung and Lach Truong), Hoi Trieu (Lach Hoi), Lach Trao (Yen River or Lach Ghep), and Tan Estuary (Bang River or Lach Bang), there are extremely abundant vestiges of the sea-deity worship in Thanh Hoa. The worship to the sea deities that are popularly worshipped in the North and the Central together with the worship to the sea deities that are just worshipped in Thanh Hoa (such as *Bà Triều*) not only demonstrates the sea conquest and adaptation but also shows the frequent and profound exchange with the two above-mentioned regions in history. Archaeological vestiges in this sub-region reveal obviously the process of sea conquest and adaptation: "People of Da But culture occupied the coastal plain by 3 periods according to the sea-level (the marine transgression and regression) in the Holocene, as below: In the early period lasting from 7,000 BP to 5,500 BP, they occupied the plain area next to the mountains and exploited aquatic products (mainly mussels) in the estuaries; In the period lasting from 5,500 BP to 5,000 BP,

the marine transgression reached its peak, flooding all the coastal lowlands. At that time, some groups of people kept staying there, for example in *Con Co Ngua (the Horse-Neck Bank)*, to exploit the sea products; whereas, others moved to higher places such as Lang Cong and Dong Vuon or mountainous caves such as *Hang Sao (the Mynah Cave)*; And, in the period after 5,000 BP, they started to move to the coastal areas, such as Go Trung (in Thanh Hoa Province), Hang Co and Hang Mo (in Ninh Binh Province)" to exploit the sea" [11, pp.24 - 38]. Owing to the early adaptation to the sea and a long history of the sea conquest, people in Thanh Hoa created a culture towards the sea, in which tangible and intangible factors such as customs, faiths, the sea-deity worship rituals, cuisines, livelihoods, boats, sampan villages, and fishing people are mixed tightly together to form distinguished particularities of this cultural sub-region, where the Northern characteristics gradually faded, but the seaward characteristics of the Central Region became more and more obvious.

2.2.3. Regarding to people

Thanh Hoa bears not only the "transition-based characteristic" shown in its flexibility but also the "crystallization-based" characteristic shown in the formation of its particular identity as well as the migration-based expansion of its identity to the South in history. Let's take the ancient Imperial City Hue as an example. The progenitors, who came from Thanh Hoa, made up a high proportion. Philippe Papin argued convincingly that Vietnamese people used the idiom "ra Bắc,

vào Nam" (go out to the North, go in to the South) by default; it shows the speaker's position between the two regions, of which one is a place of vast plains (the North) and the other is a remote place full of obscure obstacles (the South). From both geographical and historical perspectives, this middle position is partly appropriate to the location of Thanh Hoa and Nghe Tinh. It is undeniable that migration of local people to other regions in the country resulted in the spread of their cultural identity.

In my opinion, the two aspects of Thanh Hoa cultural identity, which were formed and developed by time, owing to the geographical, historical, and cultural characteristics, demonstrate the hesitation between two poles; and, the flexible transition did not make the steadfast and arrogant crystallization smoother. This particularity of Thanh Hoa people will be analyzed in more detail in the following part.

3. Identity: a historical product or a contemporary story?

3.1. Identity, cultural identity and a story about regional cultural identity in Vietnam

In the context of globalization, the issue of identity is urgently burning, especially in the countries that have just started comprehensive international integration like Vietnam. There are, however, a large number of opinions about identity and cultural identity. Different opinions have led to different behaviors and attitudes, of which some are really extreme. One of the extreme behaviors is the local discrimination, which is even exhorted too much, leading to the risk of causing rifts in

the great national solidarity that has been created by Vietnamese cultural "unity".

- Subjective and objective aspects of identity

What is identity, indeed? According to the common understanding, identity is a private feature that makes an entity different from others. The definition of identity can be found in the Oxford Dictionary as below: identity is the similarity of a person/entity across contexts and time and the state or reality of the very person/entity to distinguish the person/entity from others by particular characteristics or features. The common understanding does not mention yet the limitation, the acceptability/harmonization, and the value of identity, which are neither perceived correctly by the community that bears the identity nor accepted by other communities. At a more general and objective extent, we can rely on the definition made by Günter -Trommsdorff, a well-known German sociologist. He assumes that identity is a complex comprised of three factors: the self-perception (including all tangible and intangible cultural elements); the sensation of self-values (self-assessment); and, control belief (the expression of the identity of a community in carrying out activities of exchange with other communities, in which the identity is objectively evaluated by other communities) [22, p.21].

Based on this opinion, we can come to a conclusion that cultural identity must consist of there factors, such as: the shape-making of tangible and intangible cultural values of communities/nations; the self-recognition of those values; and, the

evaluation of those values made by outsiders via activities of exchange.

- Cohesion and creation of social capital

From the objective perspective, it is easy to realize that identity plays a significant role in connecting individuals who have cultural similarities. Although they do not have the ties of kinship with each other, their relationships are relatively close and stable. Associations of fellow-countrymen (at different levels such as associations of those who come from the same province/district/commune/village) are popularly founded in Vietnam. This is evidence for the linkage. Like glue, identity is valuable for making special "capital", which is not financial but social. When an individual joins a community of identity, he/she will own this social capital. In reality, a lot of people have taken full advantage of this capital to improve themselves and get career achievements.

- Group identity - viewed from the theory of transnational identity

A recent research work of Stephen James focuses on transnational identity [23], based on the surveys on Vietnamese communities in England. The research findings highlight that resources-based identity will become value-based identity and transnational identity; it can be linked to the home nation (the place of origin), but it can separate from the nation; it may change its linkage to another nation/city/or residence area. The research findings can be completely applied in Vietnam to a smaller extent, in which I temporarily use the term of "inter-regional identity" to imply the identity that has been brought from one region to another one, but it still keeps the

same values as well as positive/negative impacts in the place of destination. This phenomenon has been very common in Vietnam, especially in the period of Doi moi, when flows of spontaneous migration has increased rapidly due to economic transformation that has led to uneven development between regions and has widened the gap between the urban and the rural. The so-called inter-regional identity has resulted in many remarkable consequences in the current context of development (industrialization, modernization, and urbanization) in Vietnam.

- The story about "inter-regional identity" in Vietnam

In Vietnam, to a small extent, regional identity is recognized as community behavior (of those who come from the same cultural region/sub-region. For example, the typical style of Hanoi people is elegant; Southern people - generous; and, the Central people - rustic). In reality, big differences in behavior between people from different cultural regions/sub-regions have created a gap that cannot be overcome easily; they sometimes heighten previous stereotypes, suspicions, and divisions. Relatively stable patterns were formed by village culture, according to which people psychologically preferred similarities but disliked differences. This still remains true among people in Vietnam at present. It is, therefore, necessary to realize frankly that people in Vietnam are not willingly prepared to accept new things; they find it difficult to receive differences (or different identities), such as differences in sex, occupations, and regions, etc. The fact that people can hardly sympathize with others,

respect others, and overcome the obstacle of differences has resulted in a lot of negative corollaries at various magnitudes. Regarding to family relationship, for example, a lot of marriages have ended in divorce, because of regional cultural differences. In society, it is rather common that people have considerable difficulty in getting a promotion in their organizations/institutions just because they come from other region. People coming from the same region/sub-region tend to gather together, forming social groups to struggle for their group interests, defying general principles and standards.

They are the theoretical and practical premises we used to analyze Thanh Hoa people's identity (formed by the tradition) in the current context.

3.2. Identity of Thanh Hoa people – from the traditional to the modern time and issues involved

Based on the recognition of characteristics in Thanh Hoa cultural sub-region, we can see that this land has tempered the vehement will of vitality, the high sense of self-reverence, and living skills among Thanh Hoa people (herein, the living skills mean the ability to adapt themselves to new environments and positive behavior to cope effectively with demands and challenges in daily life[1]).

It is always difficult to make self-recognition of identity, as people can hardly overcome the amour propre (i.e. self-love and they do not want to/cannot realize their

own shortcomings; they do not want to hear other indicate or make an assessment of the shortcomings). This remains completely true for Thanh Hoa people, although they often have introspection about their homeland and their people. There is an anecdote that almost all Thanh Hoa people know. It is about the parallel sentences: "*A lot of forest, a lot of land, a lot of people; Working from early morning, working till late evening, but still being hungry*" (composed by the Secretary of the Provincial Committee of Communist Party, Le Huy Ngo, at the conference on Le Van Huu held in Thanh Hoa in 1990); and, "*There is a king, a lord, and a first doctoral candidate; Talking about the moon, about wind, but the stomach is not full*" (unknown composer). Those parallel sentences mention the value, the pride, and the concern about bring into play the value/cultural identity in the provincial development. From another perspective, the failure to introduce its identity outward (some companies refused to recruit workers who come from Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, and Ha Tinh) should be seen as a reminder of the necessity of realizing correctly the strengths and shortcomings of Thanh Hoa people, in order to improve themselves to "meet requirements for industrialization, modernization, and enhancement of the image of Thanh Hoa people in the eye of Vietnamese as well as international friends", as directed by the provincial government.

Regarding to Thanh Hoa people's identity, three contradictory aspects can be described, as below:

- *Firstly, the prominent creation of individuals versus the customary inertia*

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[1] According to the definition made by the World Health Organization.

It is not difficult to realize that a lot of great historical and cultural figures were born and grew up in Thanh Hoa. Those extraordinary people made significant changes or unforgettable hallmarks in the national history. It is impossible not to mention "the three kings and two lords" during the rise and fall of Vietnam for the past 5 centuries. It is impossible not to mention Ba Trieu with her courageous declaration, Le Van Huu with profound learning, Dao Duy Tu, who was both a scholar and a warrior with excellent strategies, and many other famous people, who have been mentioned in various research works.

The prominence of extraordinary people in Thanh Hoa was created, owing to the homeland cultural ground founded solidly by the long-lasting tradition. The "sacredness" of Thanh Hoa sub-region was mentioned in *Lịch triều hiến chương loại chí (The Regulations of Successive Dynasties by Subject-Matter)*. The book *Đại Nam nhất thống chí (The Official Geographical Record of Dai Nam* composed at the time of the King Tu Duc) also described the creativity and hard-working of Thanh Hoa people, as below: "Students like literature; farmers like to take up farming; regarding to workers, most of households are highly skilled at making stone items; very few people do trading, etc." [9, p.218]. Besides, however, we can see traditionally inherent limitations that have resulted in obstacles to their creation and more or less have led to social insecurities in rural areas of Thanh Hoa for a rather long time. Obsessed by the stuffiness in the rural village, Phung Gia Loc complained: "What was that night?" He revealed that the image of Quang Vinh

Commune (Quang Xuong District) [19] could be seen easily in some places of Thanh Hoa. It was just a small-scale administrative unit, but the number of officials amounted to several hundreds. In some local areas, people had to make weird contributions, as he told in the "Unbelievable stories in a rural area" about Hai Loc Commune (Hau Loc District), etc. [20] What are those obstacles, indeed? Are they the very administrative customs or the habits of thinking about exercising powers or something else? This is the question, to which Thanh Hoa people in all positions have to work together to find an answer.

- Secondly, the cleverness of outlook versus the hindrance of vision

In the search for new breakthroughs for economic growth, people in Thanh Hoa made pioneering steps in development of tourism. The significance and effectiveness of this breakthrough are shown in the statistic data on tourist activities in Sam Son (Thanh Hoa Province) and Cua Lo (Nghe An Province) – the two popularly beautiful beaches that attract a great number of visitors every year.

For the past few years, the number of visitors to Sam Son has been increasingly higher; it increased from 2.1 million visitors in 2012 to 2.5 million and 3.1 million in 2013 and 2014 respectively. In 2015, the number of visitors coming to Sam Son on the occasion of the national holidays on the 30th April and 1st May is estimated to be 30 thousand. As a result, there were long traffic jams from Thanh Hoa City to Sam Son Beach; and, the entire beach was too crowded. In the meanwhile, the number of visitors coming to Cua Lo in 2012, 2013, and 2014 is 1.935 million, 2.12 million, and

2.25 million respectively. The number of visitors coming there on the above-mentioned occasions is estimated to be 35 thousand [10].

Although both Nghe An and Thanh Hoa have a beautiful beach, Thanh Hoa gets more advantages than Nghe An, as Sam Son Beach is nearer to Hanoi than Cua Lo Beach and the population in Thanh Hoa is higher (according to the national census in 2009, the population of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An is 3.4 million and 2.9 million persons respectively). In fact, Thanh Hoa has taken those advantages effectively to develop its tourism industry.

For recent years, however, serious shortcomings have been revealed in the tourist development in Thanh Hoa due to its unprofessional management of tourism, especially improper behaviors towards visitors. Those shortcomings will gradually reduce the trust from visitors as well as the number of visitors to Thanh Hoa. If they are not soon improved appropriately, the number of visitors to Sam Son will drop down and it will lose the competition with Cua Lo.

- Thirdly, the remarkable resilience in market economy versus the village culture-based stagnation

As described above, people in Thanh Hoa migrated towards the South for many times in history. According to Ngo Duc Thinh, "during the reclamation of the Southern region, the Nguyen Lords mobilized a large number of people in the flows of migration from Thanh Hoa and Nghe Tinh to the South. They are the very ancestors of local people in the Central and South-Central Coastal provinces at present.

Thus, there are surely social and cultural linkages between people in Thanh Hoa and those in the Cochin-china (Southern Part of Vietnam), especially Central provinces, as a historical reality" [17, p.223]. In the historical waves of migration, Thanh Hoa people were those, who "left the homeland but did not leave the tradition"; they brought with themselves their cultural identity to the place of destination; it pervaded in their own community so thoroughly that we can realize it after several hundreds years (for example, this can be demonstrated by trade villages, vestiges, religions and faiths in the middle and southern areas of the Central Vietnam). From the contemporary perspective, "the historical and cultural fossils" brought by Thanh Hoa people to those areas were so valuable and positively significant that they were accepted and shared by other communities.

To search for opportunities to try, recently Thanh Hoa people have migrated not only to the South, but also to all other places of the country and abroad as well. In the places of destination, they have shown their cleverness and have gained a lot of achievements. In the current migration, some factors such as identity, personality, strengths and shortcomings of Thanh Hoa people can be seen easily. At the time of digital technology, the shortcomings of some people can be disseminated rapidly in the Internet. At that time, some comments of malice can result in a campaign for discrimination and boycott against laborers, who come from Thanh Hoa.

Realizing this unreasonable unfairness, some research works have been done,

aiming at giving an explanation for those extreme reactions. Phan Quang wrote: "they do not have strength in doing the jobs that require carefulness and meticulousness in every detail; instead, ideologically they prefer to be leaders and they are faithful to what they inherently have had, etc. The plain of Ma River is the third largest in our country, but people in Thanh Hoa cannot rely on growing rice in the field to live on. Every year, they encounter severe droughts, storms, and icy winters. Natural calamities may deprive them of rice and other grains such as potato and cassava anytime. Due to those severe living conditions, Thanh Hoa people have the habit of saving money and spending it very meticulously so that none is wasted" [8]. In the meanwhile, Ngo Duc Thinh assumes that Thanh Hoa people prefer to become leaders, so they do not admire each other, resulting in loose cohesion of their community (especially in comparison with people in Nghe Tinh) [17, p.224].

Some researchers argue that this stems from the dialect or the localism among a lot of Thanh Hoa people. In our opinion, the negative preconceptions about Thanh Hoa people stem from neither the dialect nor the localism among Thanh Hoa people, but the haughtiness is formed by the excessive pride among those who were born and grow up in the "sacred" homeland. This psychological feature results in a particular pattern of behavior among Thanh Hoa people, which is not accepted by people in other areas. According to international research works on cultural identity, it is a very product of history [20]. It is affirmed that identity was formed in the past and is still added with new strokes at the present.

For Thanh Hoa people, this is completely true, as we can see their traditional values at present as well as tradition-based shortcomings that should be overcome appropriately in the current context of rapid social changes.

Overall, based on the 3 above-described aspects of Thanh Hoa people, we can come to a preliminary conclusion that there are remarkable opposites in the thinking and character of Thanh Hoa people (progressive vs. conservative; clever vs. narrow-minded; resilient to develop in the modern economy vs. stagnated due to the pattern of community behavior formed by village culture). Those opposites were formed by the historical and cultural codes, of which the transition-based and the crystallization-based features play the key role. The transition-based feature resulted in the flexible behavior and the crystallization-based one resulted in the steadfast behavior with some haughtiness, which makes it difficult for them to get on well with community. For a person alone, it is really difficult to comprehend separately and clearly those features. For a region, it will be much more difficult, because of the hindrances resulting from the collectively excessive pride.

4. Conclusions

At present, in every province and our country as a whole, there is a tendency to do research on identity, aiming at giving an explanation for "inappropriate developments to potentials". One of the promising approaches is to find out culture-related reasons. Research on cultural identity of a community, however, must be done in correlation with other

communities, in order to avoid excessive assessments of regional identity, which may lead to a new type of localism and reduce the general cohesion and consensus for the purpose of national development. Research works on Thanh Hoa identity should be carried out from both perspectives. On the one hand, it is necessary to highlight specifically factors of regional identity, which have been strengthening the community cohesion. On the other hand, it is necessary to show hindrances and explain how to remove the hindrances. It is important to avoid emphasizing and praising regional cultural identities too much, as this may lose the unity of diversified cultural particularities in Vietnam.

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