

ACCULTURATION THROUGH DIALOGUES IN INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION^(*)

PHẠM XUÂN NAM^(**)

1. Awareness of acculturation

Upon the discussion of cultural diversity as a premise and condition of the exchange between various cultural communities, it is impossible not to pay attention to a phenomenon named *acculturation* by Western scholars. This term is translated by some Vietnamese scholars as cross culture or cultural hybridization; however, such translations evaluated by Hà Văn Tấn to be impossible to cover contents of this definition. According to this scholar, this term is defined in a Memorandum in 1936 by three American cultural anthropologist namely R. Redfield, R. Linton and M. Herskovits that “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either of both groups” (Hà Văn Tấn, 1981).

Based on this definition, Hà Văn Tấn said: “The occurrence of acculturation does not only mean the contact or mixture (interlace, hybridization) of different groups’ cultures but more importantly it also means the changes of cultural patterns of such groups” (Hà Văn Tấn, 1981). Consequently, he

recommends the term acculturation that can cover the two major contents of the definition, namely *contact* and *changes* (Hà Văn Tấn, 1981).

Considering acculturation through dialogues, we should clarify a question that is whether the continuous first-hand contact among cultural groups and communities always results in changes in terms of *acculturation* as per defined above. It is possible to answer this question through facts happening in some cultural groups and communities during their histories.

For instance, after Cristoforo Colombo discovered the America in the late 15th century, Spanish colonists, for the sake of “cultural civilization”, occupied Yucatan peninsula (currently belonging to Mexico) in 1527. During around one century, such foreign invaders did not only decimate Maya communities on this peninsula but also destroyed and burned down every cultural heritage of the native as they regarded such cultural heritages as Satan’s products! Surprisingly, studies on the

^(*) The study conducted under the Product KX.03.04/11-15 “Impacts of acculturation and cultural integration on the current development of Vietnam”.

^(**) Prof. and Dr., Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences.

remaining data later proved that Maya had managed to develop their own nation and had unique pictographs along with outstanding achievements in mathematics, health and astronomy.

It is clearly revealed in this case that the contact between two cultural communities does not result in the acculturation of any groups. On the contrary, it is the violent contact forced by Spanish invaders that has led to the perdition of such a prosperous culture of Maya! Many other similar events occurred with Incas community and some other Native American communities in both the South America and North America under the widespread development of the European colonists in the 16th-17th century.

Therefore, which factors are important for the *contact* between two groups, communities of different cultures to become *changes* in the original cultural patterns (or models, styles) of either of both groups?

In our opinion, such factor is the *dialogue between cultures* various forms.

2. Conception of dialogue among cultures

Dialogues among cultures have been existing for a long time. Communities of various tribes, clans and nations have, over thousands of years, have crossed large oceans and high mountains to meet up with each other and share numerous cultural products and values of which each community has its own creativeness in their unique natural, historical and social conditions. Such cultural products and values are of great variety that results in demands for the exchange and dialogue among cultures.

It is, in fact, believed by many people that only after the introduction of the theory "American scholar Samuel Huntington *"The Clash of Civilizations"* (1993) did peace-

loving political, cultural and social activists worldwide react by putting forward dialogues among cultures and civilizations.

As the matter of fact, UNESCO initiated and sponsored a large-scaled study on the *Silk road* in the 1980s in order to identify the "contact and dialogue" between Asian-European cultures from the ancient-medieval time (UNESCO, 1998, p.VIII).

It was stated in a speech by the United Nations General Secretary at that time Kofi Annan a decade later in the occasion of *International year for dialogue among civilizations* (2001) that "In the history, cultures and civilizations have developed and grown up by dialogues and discussions, by learning other cultures and being encouraged by such cultures to look for new knowledge (Kofi Annan, 2002, p.2).

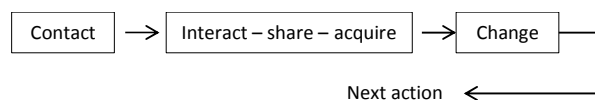
According to Kōichirō Matsuura, UNESCO Director General, "when the global integration is promoted, leading to the increasing interdependence, civilizations and cultures will have to contact, innovate, interact, exchange information on the basis of equal dignity and tolerance" Kōichirō Matsuura, 2005, p.648).

The discussion about connotation of the definition of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is; however, remained limited. According to K. Matsuura, "In the broadest sense, dialogue among cultures and civilizations is a cultural process through which people know what they have in common and learn how to respect others' rights" (Kōichirō Matsuura, 2005, p.645). Basically, this definition mainly focuses on the meaning and purpose of dialogue among cultures and civilizations rather than focusing on the connotation of the definition.

While concerning about such opinions, we pay attention to the definition of a Vietnamese cultural anthropologist, Hữu Ngọc, about intercultural dialogue – another name of dialogue between cultures. In fact, Hữu Ngọc considers intercultural dialogue is only a form of acculturation (Hữu Ngọc, 2004, p.102).

This is possible to be regarded as a noticeable suggestive concept; however, in our humble opinion, intercultural dialogue is not a *form* of acculturation but a *factor* of acculturation.

However, to have a definition of dialogues between cultures, we should first clarify some major aspects related to this definition:



At the first place, cultural contact is a necessary but not sufficient condition of cultural changes as cultural contact itself cannot automatically result in cultural changes. As per proved above, it is unnecessary for culture A to turn into culture A' on contacting with culture B. Only when having dialogues between cultures can contact turn into changes. Moreover, cultures cannot conduct dialogues by themselves. Only human beings – founders of physical and mental values forming various cultures – can take part in cultural dialogues (Edgar Morin, 2004, p.6).

Secondly, dialogue, in the common sense, is the exchange of information, ideas or perspectives between two or more people. Dialogue between cultures can be considered to be a process that occurs with the contact, reaction, share-acquisition,

leading to changes in cultural values (core factors of a cultural pattern) – a process that can be done by representatives or people belonging to different cultural communities.

Thirdly, in the series of cause-effect relationships from cultural contact to changes or acculturation, dialogue is a intermediary phase that has effects on the transformation or combination of endogenous cultural values and exogenous ones of partners taking part in the dialogue.

Fourthly, the transformation or combination of cultural values is typically reflected at various levels in which some cultural values are declined, some are borrowed, some are changed while some are completely created thanks to the suggestions and promotion of the dialogue.

Based on the above analyses, we would propose a definition: “*Dialogue between cultures is a process that*

occurs with the contact, reaction, acquisition, leading to changes in cultural values (core factors of a cultural pattern) - a process that can be done by representatives or people belonging to different cultural communities. In the series of cause-effect relationships from cultural contact to changes or acculturation, dialogue is a intermediary phase that has effects on the transformation or combination of endogenous cultural values and exogenous ones of partners taking part in the dialogue.

The process of dialogue between cultures can be imagined as follow:

The above definition and diagram help us hereinafter use short phrases including *acculturation through dialogue* or *contact, exchange, dialogue between cultures* or shorter phase namely *dialogue between cultures*.

Dialogue between cultures is often conducted in various forms of which some most important

forms are: Direct oral dialogue, dialogue through the study of writings or behavior observation. It is actually proved by our history that during the long journey finding a way to liberate our nation, Nguyễn Ái Quốc – Hồ Chí Minh, the preeminent representative for core values of our national culture that is The Concept of Vietnamese Patriotism, continuously conducted oral direct dialogues or dialogues through works of famous cultural anthropologists worldwide. As a result, He could integrate outstanding values of Eastern and Western cultures that were creatively adopted to his career of liberating his nation, liberating the society and people of his homeland.

If the true goal of acculturation through dialogue is that each partner of this dialogue knows how to evaluate, select and acquire quintessence of other cultures to enrich its national character, what Hồ Chí Minh said in his response to foreign journalists after the August 1945 Revolution will be regarded as a typical expression: “The advantage of Confucianism is the personal ethnic self-improvement. The advantage of Jesus region is the humanity. The advantage of Marxism is dialectical working method. The advantage of Sun Yat-Senism is having policy suitable to our nation’s conditions. Confucius, Jesus, Karl Marx, Sun Yat-Sen have something in common, don’t they? They all want to bring happiness to the human beings and the society. I try to become their student. I am who I used to be, a patriot” (Trần Dân Tiên, 1949, p.91).

From lessons of our ancestors from the ancient – medieval time, particularly from lessons and the golden example of Nguyễn Ái Quốc – Hồ Chí Minh at the contemporary – modern time in acquiring cultural quintessence

based on the preservation and promotion of national cultural character, we can conclude that cultural diversity is the premise for the acculturation through dialogue among different cultural communities. It is the creative acculturation (not reproducing, copying) through dialogue between cultural communities can, in turn, make close the gap between them as well as create new differences that promote the further dialogue.

3. Orientation of preserving the cultural diversity and promoting acculturation through dialogue in the international integration

In such a basic applied study, we would like to propose some oriented suggestions on the preservation of cultural diversity and promotion of acculturation through dialogue in the current international integration of our country.

Opportunities and challenges

Since the late 1980s, under the impacts of the modern scientific – technical revolution, the production socialization has crossed the border of separate nations, making the globalization and international integration an inevitable trend spreading from economics to other sectors.

In terms of culture, it is modern means of communication, particularly information “superhighway” with Internet that has created the most favorable conditions for nations, cultural communities from every corner of the world to quickly exchange ideas, knowledge, inventions, discoveries and data, making remarkable contributions to enriching their mutual cultural knowledge. This process; however, poses severe threats of the homogeneity of value systems, reducing the diverse creativeness of cultures – a crucial factor for the healthy

and sustainable development of each nation and the human beings. Such threats are increasingly serious when some forces consider their nations' cultural values to be "typical" and "general" that makes them arrogant and desire to impose such values on other nations by a possibly called "cultural imperialism" policy with undeniable and sophisticated tricks.

Under this circumstance, the diverse but united culture of more than 50 peoples on the territories of Vietnam established and developed over thousands of years also has both significant opportunities and challenges. Noticeable opportunities are the potential successful development of an advanced culture deeply imbued with its national identity along with the more contact, exchange and dialogue with other cultures worldwide; accordingly, we can popularize eminent values of Vietnamese culture as well as acquire cultural quintessence of the human beings to enrich our national culture. Possible challenges are risks of losing our own characters and being dissolved in a "uniform international culture" rather than integrating into the mankind's culture and civilization.

The loss of basic orientations

In order to take advantage of every opportunity and overcome any challenges, the preservation of the cultural diversity and promotion of acculturation through dialogue in the widespread international integration should be in following basic orientations:

Firstly, have both feet on the ground

Undertaking commitment to the cultural diversity in order to preserve the national cultural character during the contact, exchange and dialogue with other cultures

requires representatives or people belonging to different culture communities two basic qualities: (i) being as imbued with eminent cultural value of their nations as possible; (ii) having as rich knowledge of eminent cultural values of other nations as possible.

This is the philosophy "*have both feet on the ground*". It is important to know both strengths and weaknesses of our culture and other cultures in a practical and objective manner.

As said above, it is features of the natural environment, political, socio-economic conditions and multifarious external relationships we have had during our history that have formed features of Vietnamese, including deep patriotism, profound reliance on our own strength, studiousness, open-mindedness, tolerance, sensitivity and flexibility in contacting and communicating with many other culture communities. However, due to long-term reservation of the stagnate Asian production manner and the effects of physiocrat and oppressive commerce of feudal dynasties in an education which has been focused, for a long time (and even today), on former competition-examinations with an emphasis on theory rather than practice; therefore, Vietnamese are not creative in science – technology, have ragged, scattered, leveled, subjective thinking and business without long-term strategies.

In such a current situation of globalization and international integration when Vietnam is reaching the world and compete with other countries, Vietnamese community should do the utmost to improve our education, prove our outstanding cultural values, supplement deficient values and remove backward and out-of-date values with a sound mind.

It would be the basis for us to develop a human resources that is intelligent, ambitious and strong enough to spread the beauty of Vietnamese culture as well as to select and acquire humane, scientific, proper and advanced factors of other cultures including ancient and modern, Eastern and Western ones. This is regarded as a pivotal factor that arouses potential, generates aspiration for creativeness, creates new physical and spiritual cultural values in the cause of industrialization, modernization and international integration for the purpose of wealthy people, strong country, just and civilized society, “being well-matched with nations in five continents”, as per desired by Uncle Hồ.

Secondly, properly handle the relationship between “receiving and giving”

Vietnamese culture is an open culture. In the prosperous periods, Vietnamese culture always bases on three major factors: i) Ability to create endogenous cultural values; ii) Ability to selectively receive exogenous cultural values; iii) Ability to combine endogenous and exogenous cultural values to create new cultural values, meeting the nation’s development demands in the general development trend of the human beings.

Particularly, with achievements of the modern scientific – technical revolution, noticeably, information technology and communications, Vietnam may and needs to take advantage of new favorable conditions to further open its vision, select and learn beauty of various cultures worldwide in a more effective manner.

For instance, we can and have to:

- Learn from the “Sun-rising country” experience of the harmonious combination between “*Western techniques and Japanese*

moral standards” during the innovation process to modernize the nation;

- Learn from India the will to develop its information technology to promote its productivity, quality and efficiency of its economic products as well cultural and art products.

- Learn from the Lion symbolized nation the ambition to develop the future in the formula: “*Western-Eastern culture and Singaporean features*” in terms of trustworthiness, knowledge, solidarity and life (Minh Hoàng, 2007).

- Learn from Korean “*lesson of becoming a dragon*” based on the intensive investment into high quality secondary and tertiary education

Obviously, learning, however, does not mean copying exactly every experience of other nations because each nation has its own geographic, political, socio-economic conditions and cultural traditions. Therefore, the servile imitation of every model will sooner or later result in failure. Centuries-old experience of our ancestors reveals that we should learn with independent and self-control spirit. Such learning aims to create new values, particularly those possible to solve our existing problems, making contributions to enriching the human being’s culture.

Regarding this issue, Hồ Chí Minh used to advise: “We can imitate the beauty of any Western – American nations; however, *what is the most important is creativeness*. We should have something for others to learn in return to what we have learnt from them. We should not borrow without paying” (National Salvation Newspaper, 1945).

This is the application of the dialectics of “*receiving and giving*”, “*borrowing and*

paying” in the contact, exchange and dialogue between cultures.

Thirdly, promote the potential creation of unique cultures of the nation, enhance the dialogue with other cultures, create favorable conditions to get faster access to the knowledge based economy

One of the most outstanding features of the current globalization is the advent of the knowledge based economy based on the modern science and technology. In the knowledge based economy, economy and culture are really mingled. Culture – expressed through the ability to reach the truth, the good and the beauty in the production – plays the role of promoting the creation of more added values in various sectors and economic products. On the contrary, the more developed the economy is, the more favorable conditions it can create for people – as individuals and national community – to further prove the unique cultural creativity.

It was predicted by Karl Marx 150 years ago: In the knowledge based economy, “working time is no longer and must be no longer a measure of assets. Generally speaking, it is the reduction of the society’s essential labor, corresponding with the *scientific, technical development, etc.*, of individuals thanks to time released and thanks to means created for this purpose” (Karl Marx and F. Engels, 2006, p.370-371).

In such circumstance, in case of having a modern means of information technology, each labor of certain knowledge and skills can write an article, make news, make a film, take a photo, compose music, etc. and upload their diversified science, lecture, arts via the global broad band network to share with domestic and international people of concerns.

Individuals’ position in the contact, exchange and dialogue between cultural communities is increasing. Every horizon is opened for real talents.

Vietnam’s current knowledge based economic development indicator is remained low; however, if we can take advantage of favorable conditions created by the era, we can manage to implement the “shortened” industrialization strategy in the modern orientation to quickly approach the knowledge based economy based on the “combination of Vietnamese’ knowledge with new knowledge of the human beings” (Vietnam Communist Party, 2006, p.88).

By doing this, each of our economic product exchanged to the world will contain a high content of intelligence and culture. On the other hand, each contact, exchange and dialogue between Vietnamese culture and other cultures can contribute to promoting the international integration in terms of economics and other sectors.

Fourthly, preserve cultural diversity and acculturation through dialogue with the awareness of "seek for accord, maintain differences"

In fact, “seek for accord, maintain differences” derives from the awareness of the relationship between general things of the human being and particular things of each nation during the contact, exchange and dialogue between cultures. Noticeably, the wave of economic globalization is, in this context, overflowing to every “corner” of this planet. This economic wave, however, cannot lead to the global cultural homogeneity.

Experience reveals that Japan has taken part in the internationalization and then globalization process for over the past century; however, it has not lost its cultural

character. Similarly, India and China are actively taking part in the international economic integration; who can think that such character rich cultures that have existed for over the past 5,000 years can be assimilated by cultures of any countries.

Nowadays, it is the awareness of “*seek for accord, maintain differences*” during the contact, exchange and dialogue between cultures that makes us want to find out similar features to make Vietnamese culture closer to other diversified regional and international cultures. This is the strong desire for the peaceful existence in independence and freedom among nations. This is the determination for a real change in ecological environment protection for the sustainable development of current and future generations. This is a dream for gaining new scientific-technical achievements and applying such achievements to bring people happy lives.

Implementing “*seek for accord, maintain differences*” in dialogue between cultures, we also aim at discovering value character between Vietnam and other nations.

Such unique characters themselves do not; however, lead to the distance, prejudice and even “conflict” between cultures as per Samuel Huntington’s justification. On the contrary, “*seek for accord, maintain differences*” encourages cultures to exist with each other and makes their own contributions to promoting the human being’s civilization.

What is more important, by discovering common and unique values via dialogues, Vietnamese culture and that of other nations will really react – share – acquire in the direction of diversifying each other while keeping their own unique features rather than infringing or assimilating each other □

References

1. Kofi Annan (2002), *Dialogues between cultures and civilizations*, translated by Ngô Thế Phúc, Document for the study conducted by Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences, No. TN 2002-60, Hanoi.
2. Karl Marx and F. Engels, *Complete work*, Volume 46, part II (2006), National Politics Publishing House-The Truth.
3. Minh Hoàng (2007), *The World. Singapore*, <http://dulich.tuoitre.vn/thegioi/199110/the-gioi-singapore.html>
4. Edgar Morin (2004), *Dialogue Assumes Equality*, in: UNESCO (2004), *The New Courier*, January.
5. Hữu Ngọc (2004), *Intercultural dialogue between Vietnam and the West*, Memorandum of Asian – Pacific conference on “*Dialogue between cultures for peace and sustainable development*”, Hanoi, December.
6. Kōichirō Matsuura (2005), *Roles of UNESCO in the 21st century* Social Sciences Publishing House – Vietnam Federation of UNESCO clubs, Hanoi.
7. Hà Văn Tấn (1981), “Cultural exchange of ancient Vietnamese”, *Arts magazine*, May.
8. Trần Dân Tiên (1949), *Stories of President Ho’s Active Life*, Chinese translation of Trương Niệm Thúc (1949), *Stories about Hà Chí Minh*, Tam Liên Publishing house, Shanghai, June.
9. *National Salvation Newspaper*, published on 9/10/1945.
10. Vietnam Communist Party (2006), *Documents of the 10th National Party Congress*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.
11. UNESCO (1998), *The Silk Roads - High Way of Culture and Commerce*, Paris.