

# Aspiration for development

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**Abstract:** *Hochiminh City today and the former Pearl of Orient, Hanoi nowadays and Hanoi of 20-30 years ago, Danang - the most worth-living city now and Danang in the old days, those are absolutely not small changes.*

*In the very first days of 2015, Hochiminh City announced that its GDP per capita has reached 5,000 USD a year; Hanoi inaugurated the longest cable-stayed bridge in the Southeast Asia. At the end of 2014, new weapons received for national defense were the third Kilo-class submarine named HQ-184 Haiphong and the SU-30MK2 fighter jet. Such events have left a not trivial impact on the development.*

*However, besides such positive changes, the country has been coping with many severe problems that are intractable to resolve. Looking back at the realities of development, especially in recent years, many phenomena can be recognized as contradictions in terms that must be accepted despite our will.*

*The development should have been more commensurate with the potential. Indeed! But the aspiration for development always goes beyond and is more ideal than the reality.*

**Key words:** Aspiration for development, Hochiminh city, Hanoi, Danang

## **I. The thirst for “dragonization”**

1. After the World War II, the whole Asia was a land of poverty, backward and too much stagnancy in comparison with Europe. The vast majority of people throughout the region were illiterate. Japan, in a position of defeated

nation, bitterly accepted the status of being occupied country. The vast mainland of China was as the ocean of peasants, who were regret of the lost position of the Qing Dynasty. Singapore then belonging to Malaysia and Hong Kong, a British Colony were

the same as the dilapidated and dirty fishing villages. Taiwan was as the poor town. The Philippines and Thailand were little healthier but there was no difference, other than a bazaar with a very few of the wealthy...

Longing to the West, the thirst of poverty eradication was inflamed from people, in spirit of politicians, those devoted all their heart to the nation. Apart from Park Chung Hee, Lee Kuan Yew, was there anybody in Asia daring to dream of a healthy, developed and civilized nations as western countries?

2. In this context, Vietnam has seized power and become independent from a feudal-colonist country. President Hồ Chí Minh sonorously read the Declaration of Independence, establish the very first democratic republic nation in Asia, denoting the “most earnest desire” of independence for the country, freedom for people, and opportunities for all to have adequate food, clothing and education; of poverty eradication, civilization, and standing shoulder to shoulder with powerful nations throughout the five continents (The Complete Writings of Ho Chi Minh, Vol. 4, 2000, pp.12, 33, 161).

But after that moment, there was a war in Vietnam, another war, and war again. Till the mid-1980s of the XX century, peace has been really existing. Peace urged the thirst for development. However, the centrally planned,

heavily subsidized mechanism constrained all potentials.

3. At the end of 80s of the XX century, on the other hand, the Asian miracle made the world surprise. South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore become “four tigers” with GDP per capita of 10,000 USD a year and have full basic characters of the democratic and civilized societies. Theorists have been trying to draw experience on comparing the new industrial countries (NICs) with traditional industrial countries - the industrialization in Europe took many centuries with stages of “the blood and mud of all its times, from the head to the heels” of capitalism (K. Marx and F. Engels, Collected Works, Vol. 23, 2002, p.1078).

These experiences spread to Vietnam right in the launching time of “Đổi mới” (Renovation). The wind of “Đổi mới” inflamed the fire of creation that led Vietnam to a new status only after a decade. Hoping that by the year of 2020, Vietnam will have become an industrial country. This statement has been noted in the Resolution (Vietnam Communist Party, 1996, p.19). In 2009, after a long striving time since the country was independent, Vietnam GDP per capita reached the number of 1,000 USD a year - the starting level of median income. In 2006, Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization (WTO). In 2008, foreign investors queued up for licenses to “pour capital

into Vietnam” with nominated number of over 64 billion USD - a huge number for any developing countries (Registered FDI into Vietnam in 2008: More than 64 billion USD, <http://vneconomy.vn/...>). Hopes are nourishing with new hopes.

## II. Necessary and sufficient conditions

1. Passing by the first 15 years of the XXI century, if it's necessary to denote the characters of the East Asian cultures and people at macro scale, it must be mentioned one of the easily recognized that is the psychosphere for development. Truly called as its nature is the “thirst for development” or “aspiration for development”.

As being remarked by Western scholars, in East Asia, especially in developing countries, from the presidents to laymen, from intellectual circles to workers, most of them are much concerning with the development. It's easy to find people who everyday always expect a perspective of healthy economy, a prosperous country. Pessimism is not favorite doctrine in Asia, thus it has no space to exist. This psycho-feature is rather unfamiliar with the western people. But in East Asia, including “dragonized” economies like South Korea and Taiwan, or the followers as Malaysia, Thailand, China, and Vietnam... the aspiration for development is rather heatedly represented everywhere at different

levels and realities. As for China, there is an aspiration of powerful nationalism inside the thirst for development, the “Chinese Dream” - Chauvinistic desire of the “awaken Asian lion”<sup>(\*)</sup>.

2. This reality can be measured with evidences and indicators. In this point, “ghost obsession” is the very equivalence of resources and potentials, including traditional cultural capital that is considered as the “dragonizing” condition. The problem is that, comparing the cultural fundaments utilized by South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, there is not a lack of, but sometimes, a plenty of those fundaments in many other nations.

In reality, the Confucian culture plays the greatest significance in Chinese mainland than any other countries. Vietnam is also a land deeply imbued with Confucian culture. In Malaysia, Confucian culture's significance is rather great. However, to date, the positiveness of this culture is almost not emerged in boosting economic growth and social development in China, Vietnam and Malaysia. On the contrary, since hundred years now, Confucianism has been regarded as a barrier inhibiting science, obstructing

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<sup>(\*)</sup> In 1816, Napoleon Bonaparte said about China: “China is a sleeping lion. When she wakes she will shake the world.” (Refer to: Gabriel Racle (2005), *L'Éveil de la Chine*. *L'Express* 13-19 Décembre 2005, <http://www.lexpress.to/archives/94>).

trade, constraining creation, annulling individual freedom, holding back social advancement, or even as the so-called “eat-people doctrine”<sup>(\*)</sup> (Lu Xun, <http://www.wattpad.com/...>).

Regarding the human resource, social resource and political will in terms of potential, it's difficult to affirm that South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore has something preeminent that other countries can not be compared with. As for human characters in particular, it's hard to point out the strength and weakness among qualities like diligence, fondness of learning, intelligence, dynamism, social responsibility... at community or national levels. Yet, this is not a case of comparison in specific individual with his or her own dignity, personality. Even in poor countries, it's still easy to name politicians, social activists, intellectuals... who are highly appreciated in terms of their ability. And if it has to compare the persons of the same responsibility in the four “dragonized” countries, there are no winners or losers.

Since theorists interpreted the emergence of “dragon” countries with the causes of culture and people, what means the reasons associate with

national characters, in similar cultural regions, the emerged comparative thought has created “pressure” on governments and responsible persons. Public opinion wonders why a nation like Vietnam with its people, those are famous for intelligence, diligence, fondness of learning etc, with many individuals, who have strong political will, lucid mind of development, and high social responsibility etc, with a rich culture consisting of fine qualities, with the advantage of national characters corresponding to the development trend etc, but the country is still obstructed by many problems, has not found a way out from the middle-income trap, and has not adequately developed as it has to.

3. Vietnam is stronger obsessed by the “dragonization” dream than any other developing countries. Regarding the cultural capital, to date, Vietnam is such a society that is too strange or too different from South Korea or Taiwan. In Confucian cultural belt, Confucianism in Vietnam is the culture formed and acquired from the good of the Sung Confucianism, is not “blind loyal”, not inflexible, and not dogmatic as earlier Chinese Confucianism. Furthermore, the Vietnamese Confucianism, if existed<sup>(\*)</sup> (Refer to: Kim Đình, 1963,

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<sup>(\*)</sup> “History has no chronology, and scrawled all over each page are the words: “Virtue and Morality.” Since I could not sleep anyway, I read intently half the night, until I began to see words between the lines, the whole book being filled with the two words - “Eat people.”

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<sup>(\*)</sup> Kim Đình (1915-1997) is the first scholar, who believes that Confucianism originated from Vietnam, China was “the host of Confucianism from the Qin – Han dynasties” only.

<http://www.dunglac.org...>) is regarded by a certain researchers as Primitive Confucianism originated locally and bearing Vietnamese specific features. Regarding human capital, social capital, dignity of the powers and the will of development, it's hard to say that Vietnam has any disadvantages or lacks positive and necessary factors that were utilized by South Korea and Taiwan during 1960-1990 period. In recent dozen years, along with culture, other factors related to psycho-attitude of a nation that won the wars, has maintain a high rate of economic growth for over a decade and has successfully integrated etc. All of these factors hasten the "dragonization" aspiration. Being in interrelation with a certain countries in the region, Vietnamese could not hide the attitude that Saigon is not poor, but on the contrary, is wealthier in comparison with Seoul, Bangkok or Manila very recently.

However, all of above mentioned statements are just necessary conditions. Sufficient conditions consist of other more factors as opportunity seizing, right strategy, not being a technological follower, mobilizing the public power, efficient macro management and transparent administrative apparatus, etc. These factors themselves have the function of *activating* national power, releasing and multiplying resources for take-off.

Dragonization, as indicated by David Depice, an American scholar interested in Vietnam, is not necessary path to trail (Refer to: Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Asia Programs, 2008, <http://www.undp.org.vn...>) if macro management does not achieve optimum efficient, even for the countries that are towing into terrace and waiting for the take-off. Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Brazil are such countries. To date, it means over 20 years from the Asia's miracle occurred, there's no countries joining the rank of new NICs.

Vietnam is just therefore far from the terrace.

### **III. Aspiration for development by contradictions**

1. There has been global economic crisis from 2008. Vietnam has bared the consequence twice with hairbreadth inflations. The real estate market has been frozen until now. Vinashin, Vinalines - the economic boils and the weakness of the state-owned enterprises have popped. Bad debts got stretched out. Many economic subject can not absorb resources or in more accurate word, the resources are absorbed in annul way without any wealth generated. Hot and intricate events created tension and anxiety in both economic and social lives, in sovereignty protection as well as in psycho spiritual life.

Thus, the year of 2014 ended, many people breathed a sigh of relief because the situation was not so bad. In supervision report presented in Vietnam National Assembly, dated November 1st, 2014, Commission for Economic Affairs informed that over 3 years of restructure, the macro economy has been more stable. The quality of the economy has evolved and maintained the growth rate. GDP per capita rose. Inflation was under control. Bad debts were partly settled. Credit rating was improved. And, foreign enterprises still proved expectation of Vietnam (Refer to: PV, 2014, <http://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn...>)

2. However, the situation is like the fact that patient's health is a bit recovered but still kept disease. GDP growth in 2011-2015 has not achieved the level of 6.5-7% - the target set by National Assembly. The weaknesses of the economy were not basically resolved. In 2014, trade surplus with the world as a whole was at more than 2 billion USD, but trade deficit with China alone was at over 20 billion USD, what caused trade balance severely uneven (Refer to: Bích Diệp, <http://dantri.com.vn...>). The change in growth pattern, restructure of economy seemed to be inaccurate "acupoint trigger". The Director of Vietnam Institute of Economics, Dr. Tran Dinh Thien remarked: "The recession kept on during seven years and Vietnam

economy now is the most fragile state ever for the last 30 years" (Refer to: Văn Nam, 2015, <http://www.thesaigontimes.vn...>).

This is not to mention the other flaws, boils in socio-cultural life. Many must-cope-with problems seem to be intolerable. The science is moving ploddingly and is in a rather long distance behind outer world. Education management is insufficient and education quality makes a slow progress. Corruption and dissipation are easy to occur but there is such a lack of evidence that the majority turn a blind eye to corruption. There are too many social acts that join hands to petty corruptions. Policy consists of many provisions that stay away from the real life. "Project-favor mentality" is popular among public authorities. Social morality gives cause for concern. The relationship among senior and junior officers, teacher and student, doctor and patient, police officer and citizen, civil servant and counterpart etc, is sometimes so distorting that a person, who epitomizes the dutiful official, becomes the minority, of course. Deceitfulness and emotionless can be found everywhere, and become familiar in daily newspapers.

3. Facing such situations, Vietnamese people in general, from responsible politicians to street cleaners, are longing for each step-up of the

country, what shows such a fervid aspiration for development. It can be agreed with someone's saying that, it's lucky if there have been some people getting angry with the bad things. Such touching suggestions, such irritated critics, all of them more or less comprise the interest in the real state of the country, what is the expression of aspiration for development. Because there is an objective reason: prior to 2000, dragonization trail was estimated as if it was coming to the final stage, but now, that so rough, so far trail is not close but still fairly open.

And, in the very first days of 2015, the aspiration for development once again awakened.

4. In the *Meeting on implement the Government's resolution; The Conclusion of City Communist Party Committee and The Resolution of City People's Council on the tasks of social, cultural and economic development, budget projection in 2015*, took place in December 27<sup>th</sup> 2014 in Hochiminh City, Chairperson of City People's Committee Mr. Lê Hoàng Quân announced that in 2014 the city's economic structure was transformed in the right track, growth pattern gradually developed in-depth with reasonable productivity and competitiveness, budget revenues and FPI attraction increased. The city's GDP per capita reached 5,131 USD - for any reasons this milestone is worthy of encouragement (Refer to: A

*firm "spring-board" for Hochiminh City to start New Year 2015 confidently*, <http://www.vietnamplus.vn...>).

In Hanoi, in the morning of January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015, the longest cable-stayed bridge in the Southeast Asia was inaugurated. Võ Nguyên Giáp Road links Nhật Tân Bridge with Noi Bai T2 Terminal with VIP Lounge are officially operated. These four projects has been invested with approximately 2 billion USD, creating new appearance for the Capital and new image of the country's development (Refer to: *Inaugurating 4 priority constructions with approximately 2 billion USD investment*, <http://vnexpress.net...>).

Of course, there is still a doubt about untransparent issue in constructing these projects. Nevertheless, the fact that the country has such new looks everyday cannot be less meaningful for the development. Back to history, it can be realized that there are always problems at all times, for unknown reasons, these problems are unresolved and left for the next generation; the next generation again has its own problems so that things are not settled till the end. Despite of this fact, life is progressing; despite of this fact, the aspiration for development is just a kind of vain hope. "Life moves forward through contradictions" wise

Hegel said like this<sup>(\*)</sup> (<http://www.runivers.ru...>). It's resigned to make use of his thought for accepting the dissatisfied in today's reality. This means that life is not Garden of Eden with full of the good. The bad and boils are located somewhere in that Garden. The struggle eradicating the bad and boils will gradually realize the aspiration for development.

Hochiminh city today wins much more praises than that of the former Pearl of Orient. Only 20 years passed by, Danang associated with the fame of Nguyễn Bá Thanh, is now regarded as the most worth-living city. Hanoi nowadays certainly looks much better than that of in 1981 master plan assisted by Russian. Beyond hundreds testiness of the undone and of maybe better things, let's be pleased with things in hand.

The aspiration for development is often satisfied in such way □

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(\*) "Life moves forward by contradictions, and live contradictions are many times richer, more variegated, and more meaningful than appear to the mind of man at first glance". <http://www.runivers.ru/philosophy/chronograph/439453>.

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