

## The Heart - The highest value of culture

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Received 14 July 2016; published 15 November 2016

**Abstract:** *As for culture, there is no a minor or major culture. Every culture has its equal value and significance. Culture is considered to the last as the human philosophy of each nation. On the basis of reviewing and analyzing the diplomatic events, from the cultural angle, between Vietnam - USA and USA - Japan related to the Tale of Kiều and the fact that US released atomic bombs on the two cities in Japan, the author clarifies the highest value of culture - the Heart.*

**Keywords:** Culture, the Tale of Kiều, Vietnam, Japan, the United States of America, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Barack Obama, the Heart.

It can be said that in terms of logics, the comparison between *the Tale of Kiều* and 1945 atomic bomb disaster in Japan may be typical of the disparity, even the opposition. One side is the exquisite of Humanity, the cultural spirit of a nation. The other side is the pinnacle of brutality and irrationality. In other words, if *the Tale of Kiều* is a symbol of culture, then the US army dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki is *counter-culture*.

*of Kiều*, as a cultural value, has become an emblem of publicizing and legalizing the Vietnam-USA relation gradually. And that the US President has visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki 71 years after extermination has waken up the green spout of humanity, indirectly as *exculpation of the souls of a gross injustice to be free* in the living man's heart, in order to enter the flow of culture.

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These opposite events are taken as standardized references in the present time for two different stories. *The Tale*

*of Kiều* is not only a symbol of culture, but also an embodiment of the philosophy of life, philosophy of human

life of the Vietnamese people. Because if culture is *sediment* of human life, the meaning of human life is the content of cultural communication. Nearly one century ago, the scholar Phạm Quỳnh used to write: “One nation can not but have a national flower, *the Tale of Kiều* is our national flower; one nation can not but have a national characteristic, *the Tale of Kiều* is our national characteristic; one nation can not but have a national spirit, *the Tale of Kiều* is our national spirit” (Phạm Quỳnh, 2001: 119) and “*The Tale of Kiều* continues to exist then our language continues to exist, our language continues to exist then our country continues to exist” (Phạm Quỳnh, 2001: 123), which is for such a reason.

It is said that if it is required to speak about *the Tale of Kiều* in brief, it is *the Story of the Heart in capitalized letters*. For the Vietnamese people, forever is also a word *love* for every beginning. How can love be gotten if without a soul or with the absence of the heart? Through 3,254 sentences in *Kiều*, Nguyễn Du *played a note* on the up-and-down and sorrowful period of *Kiều* as a result of the people without a Heart. And Nguyễn Du well knew *Kiều* was also *exculpated* only when people still had the Heart.

This was Nguyễn Du’s sentiments when he set pen to paper to *close* the Tale of *Kiều*: “*The nature of goodness derives from our own will/ Therefore the heart is worthwhile thrice the talent*”, but left open the clearness and leadership of the

heart in all social relationships. With that meaning, the Heart is a dominant component of the philosophy of human life and philosophy of diplomacy of Vietnam.

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On 23rd May 2016, President of the United States of America Barack Obama, on his official visit to Vietnam from 23rd to 25th May 2016, made a speech on the Vietnam-USA relation which *touched the heart and the pride* of the Vietnamese people. Any Vietnamese could feel *the Heart* of the Speaker through His *capital* of Vietnamese history, culture and philosophy. President Obama asserted: “I also come here with a deep respect for Vietnam’s ancient heritage. For millennia, farmers have tended these lands - a history revealed in the Dong Son drums. At this bend in the river, Hanoi has endured for more than a thousand years. The world came to treasure Vietnamese silks and paintings, and a great Temple of Literature stands as a testament to your pursuit of knowledge. And yet, over the centuries, your fate was too often dictated by others. Your beloved land was not always your own. But like bamboo, the unbroken spirit of the Vietnamese people was captured by Lý Thường Kiệt - “the Southern emperor rules the Southern land. Our destiny is writ in Heaven’s Book”.

Today, we also remember the longer history between Vietnamese and Americans that is too often overlooked. More than 200 years ago, when our

Founding Father, Thomas Jefferson, sought rice for his farm, he looked to the rice of Vietnam, which he said had “the reputation of being whitest to the eye, best flavored to the taste, and most productive.” Soon after, American trade ships arrived in your ports seeking commerce.

During the Second World War, Americans came here to support your struggle against occupation. When American pilots were shot down, the Vietnamese people helped rescue them. And on the day that Vietnam declared its independence, crowds took to the streets of this city, and Ho Chi Minh evoked the American Declaration of Independence. He said, “All people are created equal. The Creator has endowed them with inviolable rights. Among these rights are the right to life, the right to liberty, and the right to the pursuit of happiness.” (Quoted from: <https://vn.usembassy.gov/vi/obama-ncc240516/>).

President B. Obama mentioned *a Missed Chance*<sup>(\*)</sup> to build peace in Vietnam and fasten the diplomatic relation between Vietnam-USA from 1945 and 1946. The Vietnamese Communists, with the Heart and their historic mission, led: “A people who fearlessly stood on the side of the Allies to be against the fascists” (Hồ Chí Minh, Complete works, 2002, volume 4: 3). Those Communists rescued a lieutenant pilot R. Shaw in the mountains in Cao Bằng and took him back to Côn Minh in January 1945.

(\*) See Documentary *A Missed Chance* of the Director Nguyễn Mộng Long.

Those Communists and President Ho Chi Minh were proactive in meeting with the AGAS on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1945. And those Communists received the military skill training from the *Deer Team* as support of the Allies for the Allies. They were the meetings to initiate the Vietnam-USA relation. Unfortunately, the original seeds could not sprout because *the heart* only came from one side, the side of Vietnam, the side of Hồ Chí Minh, so: “once again, we have learned a bitter truth - that the war, despite whatever purposes each party had, only brings pain and tragedy” (Quoted from: <https://vn.usembassy.gov/vi/obama-ncc240516/>).

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Culture is generally a bridge to begin diplomatic relations, and culture is also quantitative and qualitative for the profoundness of such relations. Quantification can be seen in educational relations, scientific cooperation, especially in the field of high technology, national strengths. And qualification has more abstract sense, which is sometimes felt through numerous types of relations in multi-dimensional space of culture. But this division is of relative significance.

The tale of Kiều, a cultural masterpiece of Vietnam, has been viewed by the Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States of America in each period as a *cultural span* in itself to step over the past, move forward in a relation which has not been absolutely smooth,

not fully integrated into the same flow. The former US President Bill Clinton, after his official visit to Vietnam in 2000, quoted from Kiều: “*Just as the lotus wilts, the mums bloom forth/ Time softens grief, and the winter turns to spring*” (Quoted from: Nam Hằng, 2015), implying that cold winter passed, spring stirred itself to signal the green buds would be ready to crack. His way of saying also gave an implication that the Vietnam-USA relation began to thaw. The former President Bill Clinton made an *impression* not only in the capacity as a person who opened the door promoting the Vietnam-USA relation but also as the first US President who *affirmed* the meaning of the universe philosophy of the Vietnamese people via a cultural text. Such a philosophy has made the space less distant, made US become closer to the Vietnamese land but still lacked something: “The beauty reached its level, however, it is the beauty of bewilderment, without humanity, secretive innermost feelings, expectation, dream, and misery, struggle, provision and worry” (Hồng Duy, 2016). In other words, the wind has changed its direction but the people’s mind is still very unsteady. Because the *heart* of the partner is still shy and careful (we do not herein discuss about *irregularity* of words but go into expressive nuance and implications of the language of reflecting the *depth* of the relation between the two political institutions through *acculturation*).

On 7<sup>th</sup> July 2015, at the reception of the Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the US Vice President Joe Biden, Mr. Joe Biden read a sentence from Kiều as a present to the Vietnam General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng: “*Thank heaven we are here today. To see the sun through parting fog and cloud*” as an allusion which informed that the level of the Vietnam-USA relation was *much deeper*, but just *parting fog, parting cloud*, so “all the progress made up to this time-point, as admitted by him (Joe Biden - author) and President B. Obama, is only an initial step of a relation” (Thái An - Thanh Bình - Bích Thủy, 2015). Because there still exist many problems difficult to solve, that is, the presence of doubt and reservation in the Vietnam-USA relation<sup>(\*)</sup>.

Therefore, the *Heart* is not an *eternal truth* yet. The belief is not strong enough to become a guiding flag for the relation, as in the way of saying of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) - the founder of American pragmatism. That was also one of the messages through President B. Obama’s speech in Hanoi on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2016: “We learned a lesson taught by the venerable Thích Nhất Hạnh, who said, “In true dialogue, both sides are willing to change”. In this way, the very war that had divided us became a source for healing” (Quoted from: <https://vn.usembassy.gov/vi/obama-ncc240516/>).

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<sup>(\*)</sup> The ban on lethal arms sales to Vietnam has not been lifted yet.

As *mutual understanding*, General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng evoked the *Heart* to stream out and created the symmetry in the cultural values when he cited the words of the former President of the United States of America Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) to speak about the role of belief in cooperation: “Believe you can and you’re halfway there” (Quoted from: Chung Hoàng - Bạt Tuấn, 2015). That belief is the one formed from the essence of the humanity values. With such a meaning, Nguyễn Du and Theodore Roosevelt seem to have no gap in terms of time because what covers all is “*people know to love people*”<sup>(\*)</sup>.

President B. Obama chose the two sentences from Kiều: “*Please take from me this token of trust, so we can embark upon our 100-year journey together*” to conclude his emotional speech. *What he imprinted* on the Vietnamese people’s memory is that the US President *saw and recognized* the traditions and depth of humanity of Vietnam; the national pride and patriotism of Vietnam; hospitality and honest smiles of Vietnam; loyalty and sentimental attachment to friends, etc. Therefore, when he cited *Mountains and Rivers of the Southern Country* of Thái úy Lý Thường Kiệt, lyrics of *Road to Glory Days* of the late musician Trần Lập, mentioned singer Sơn Tùng M-TP, etc., he really *moved* the heart of the Vietnamese people - a sincere emotion

<sup>(\*)</sup> The lyrics of the *First Spring* of the late musician Văn Cao.

and such a emotion do the Vietnamese people have valued. This is a characteristic of Vietnamese culture. So, “it is time we should not remain any more embargo. I think, and we have considered much about this decision, Vietnam can buy our weapons. *We don’t want this ban to be a factor to divide the relation between the two countries* (emphasized by author). We are highly encouraging the dialogues in military cooperation between the two countries” (Nam Hằng, 2016).

It is said that President B. Obama has fulfilled his historic mission, but we think that he has just started that fulfillment. The evidence is the point where he wanted to close with a meaning that closing is for opening: “*Saying: “Please take from me this token of trust, so we can embark upon our 100-year journey together”*”. What he wanted to close was an *unintentional mistake* of misunderstanding which had resulted in *sufferings for both sides*. What he wanted to open was that “we have shown that hearts can change and that a different future is possible when we refuse to be prisoners of the past. We’ve shown how peace can be better than war. We’ve shown that progress and human dignity is best advanced by cooperation and not conflict. That’s what Vietnam and America can show the world. (Quoted from: <https://vn.usembassy.gov/vi/obama-ncc240516/>).

That is the key, the red flame of humanity values in particular and culture in general to thaw in relations, for

dialogue instead of confrontation in all corners on the planet. It is much more meaningful when in the world today there exist *violent diplomatic* or desires to change the world by the power of weapons of mass destruction and nuclear weapons.

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Japan was the first nation in the world which suffered atomic bombing disasters. By order of President Harry S. Truman, the US army threw two atomic bombs on the two cities, Nagasaki (6<sup>th</sup> August 1945) and Hiroshima (9<sup>th</sup> August 1945) of Japan, which caused horrific loss of humans and the excessive level of physical destruction. US threw two atomic bombs, whether it should or should not be in terms of military purposes, which have been discussed too much over the world and the very Japanese people also want to close a heart-breaking past page and don't reawaken it any more. President B. Obama confirmed: [Japan] "does not want to once again open the question about the errors of the parties for a series of past events of which the peak was resorting to atomic bombs" (Quoted from: Vũ Hoàng, 2016). The life shows that nobody wants to revive a painful past, especially when such pain meant tragedy. In that case, tragedy became woe in majesty. Woe in majesty resulted from the significance of the event.

Japan is an close ally of the United States but the majority of the Japanese

people are still waiting for an apology from US for the event of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. It is said that it is *likely to come* in the future because the diplomatic phenomena have taken place as its omen.

With respect to culture, we are approaching the event from the angle of *behavioural culture*. *Behaviours are a manifestation of the Heart of the cultural subject*. So, in cultural nature, behaviours are relational acts of the cultural subjects. The 71-year period is enough for the insiders and outsiders to *understand, fully understand* then *be enlightened* with the multi-dimensional results of the event. Even they do not exclude the possibility that a single event has become a series of events.

The first milestone in a series of events in 2016 is *the Hiroshima Declaration* "For a world without nuclear weapons" which was announced by the Foreign Ministers of G7 developed countries right after a memorial ceremony for atomic bomb victims. And people are *enlightened* that nuclear possession is very dangerous. Hiroshima and Nagasaki have shown that: "71 years ago, the horrifying Death from the sky changed the face of the world, which proves that humans who own nuclear weapons may destroy themselves" (Lê Thu, 2016). Thus the world should "find the bravery to jointly spread peace, pursue a world without nuclear weapons" (Quoted from: Vũ Hoàng, 2016). Nuclear weapons are not all. It is a representation of inhumane power and

strength. It is a tool of the evil. A dark which has been unfamiliar with culture for centuries. Atomic bombs can dry up oceans with their terrible destructive power, eliminate even a fixed planet but can not make human will collapsed. *So the Heart of humans is all. This is the true strength of the nucleus.*

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Today's world is like a *matrix* but not a *Flat World* as seen by Thomas Friedman (2006), and through its flow is not only the *third wave, power shift* or *future shock* as found by the American futurist Alvin Toffler. It is just the tip of the iceberg. What people can see easily is like consciousness in human life. What people often forget is like unconsciousness and its meaning in the adjustment of individual behaviours.

The heart seems to be plunged in the whirlpool of oppositions. The opposite peak of the world today is not political differences but polarization between the rich and the poor<sup>(\*)</sup> (See: L.V.Khánh, 2016). This oppositeness is governing the world and creating non-traditional cultural values. But it is not the *sunset* of the heart but vice versa - the *heart* in different forms is increasingly

<sup>(\*)</sup> In 2015, according to Oxfam, 50% of the world's assets are in the hand of 62 persons. Mark Goldring, CEO of UK Oxfam, commented: "It is simply unacceptable that the poorest half of the world's population owns no more than a small group of the global super-rich - so few, you could fit them all on a single coach". This shows the increasingly growing inequality which threatens the economic expansion and social links.

occupying important positions in social relations, in the sense of civic responsibility, in culture to create humanity values, significance of human life with the breath of the times.

It is said that the heart will create a *culture of human heart winning*. It is an eternal rule. The rule that the good wins the evil. That rule is like a permanent wind which is blowing strength into each individual but how such strength would be depends on not only *the I* but *the We* as well.

Time is the *retained trace* of the heart of an individual and of a people or a nation. So the heart is always an *unfading and fascinating impression of culture* □

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