

MORALITY CULTURE IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY – AN ISSUE AND SOLUTIONS

LÊ QUÝ ĐỨC – HOÀNG CHÍ BẢO (ed.) **Morality culture in our country today – An issue and solutions.** H.: Culture-Information and the Institute of Culture Studies, 2007, 252 p

Summarized by
VŨ HOÀNG

After twenty years of renewal, the country's social-economic life has witnessed positive changes. Fresh elements, features in moral values, standards and norms have emerged. Traditional ethical ties of the nation are restored, playing an important role in consolidating the society, family and community. Nevertheless, the effects of negative aspect of a market economy have caused increasingly serious deficits in ideology, morality and life-style. The book with three parts contributes to answering the question of why the morality culture in Vietnam today exposes such many negative aspects, and presents some solutions that aim to make the morality culture healthier in Vietnam in the current period

In the **first part – general theoretical issues concerning morality culture**, the authors answered the following questions: What is morality culture? What are the elements of morality culture? What role does morality culture have in the social life? What is difference between morality culture and morality?

Around the perceptions of morality culture, the authors looked into the concept of morality culture as an important component of culture; systemized the existing perceptions of morality culture and held the view that some perceptions of morality culture in our country “do not yet indicate basic characteristics of morality culture, which

for instance reflect the development level of a morality culture; not refer to a system of symbolic and reflective means of a morality culture, which is how people honor ethical value, norms and acknowledge celebrities with high morality” (p.23).

According to the author, “morality culture is an element of spiritual culture in society, representing the ethical level of a community (which includes a mixture of ethical values, norms, standards and symbols of the community). These components enter into the community life owing to social-cultural institutions, which are reflected through ethical behaviours of individuals, groups and communities (especially through celebs)” (p.24).

With such a conceptualization, the authors formulated a structure of morality culture, which includes the following factors:

- Ethical values, standards and norms;
- Social-cultural institutions of morality
- Ethical behaviors of human beings as individuals, groups and communities.

With regard to the function and role of morality culture, the authors affirmed: “the morality culture has the most basic function to play and is more superior to other cultural components” (p.49). They then concentrated their analysis on such basic roles and functions as:

- *Personality education and development function*: in other words, morality culture has a function to socialize human beings, to humanize human beings and

to make humans as natural creatures to be social humans, ensuring the historical continuity of mankind and human communities.

- *Value-oriented, community adherence function*: through the scale of values, it assembles communities, link communities together for the common goal. Additionally, through the building up an outstanding ethical personality model, this function symbolically recognizes ethical values, standards and norms of social-cultural institutions.

- *Social organization and management function*: this function presents the role of morality culture in constraining the aggressive instinct inherent in human beings, aiming at ensuring communities living in security. Through public opinion, customs and practices, morality culture brings all members of the community together and tailors their behaviors commensurate with the interests of groups and communities.

Part two – *Morality culture in our country today*

Before going into analysis of morality culture in our country today, setting a look on both national and international levels with a view to making clear the economic, political, social and cultural factors that have a direct impact on the morality culture in our country today, the authors held the views that the effects and impacts, whether direct or indirect, by the preceding factors have emerged or are coming up, causing social consequences on the life of every individual, family and community at large. Thus, it is very important to make

an accurate assessment on the real status of morality culture in order to work out appropriate solutions in an objective, scientific, progressive and development-oriented manner.

Speaking of changes in values and standards of morality culture in our country today, the authors contended that “it is hard to identify the real status of morality culture in our country today. This is because it is in progress, changing with numerous factors causing both positive and negative impacts” (p.84). Hence, the authors discussed the real status of morality culture from two following aspects:

- *Ethical values, standards and norms*

The pro-active manifestations of morality culture reflect various fresh features of ethical values and standards acknowledged in society, which are formulated in a more humane manner. Attention paid by the entire society to human beings is more explicit and straightforward. The novel social-political, ethical platform “all for happiness of the people”, “all for a powerful country with prosperous people, a society characterized by justice, democracy and civilization” superseding the orientation “all for socialism” has raised an awareness on ethical values of social-economic development at the time being. Various ethical values and standards in society are re-visited and conceptualized, such as: economic benefits, employment, labor, democracy, obligations, accountability, community spirit, etc.

More especially, renewal in morality thinking is associated with economic

thoughts and change in ethical awareness on labor. Any form of labor or whatever the job may be undertaken, with our own labor power that can exert in good effects in reality, be able to ensure our own lives and make contributions to the society as long as no violations of the law are made, is considered as *beneficial labor*, socially recognized values in respect of ethics.

The authors observed that “this change has a radically brought in a great impact on the shaping of novel ethical values, the habits, practices and life-style of people in society in the renewal period with a market economy” (p.90).

It is the market economy, which traditionally operates in line with the rule of value and profit earning, that formed a social-economic environment to cause changes in terms of psychology and ethical perception of human beings complying with new criteria and value-based directions (practicability, efficacy; interest-based orientation, capacity awareness; autonomy, personal accountability, etc). Such an environment becomes a pre-condition for the shaping of an ethical model and personality in our society in the renewal period.

The new perception on capability in a market mechanism has spurred human beings and society to take capability as a guarantee for morality, to illustrate ethics by capability, to use actions and implementation performance as an ethical measure, the purpose and momentum of ethics. Against this background, there appear in our society good business households, outstanding

farmers, farm owners who become millionaires thanks to their successful business by their own labor power and help many to have a job and earn incomes. They are workers and intellectuals representing for creativity and sensitivity to the renewal, making crucial contributions to the development of various fields in the social-economic life.

The authors then came to confirm that *“this is the key trend in morality culture evolution* despite the fact that there are the back sides, counter-morality and ethical deficits, which co-exist in our society. However, it is undeniable that positive ethical values are being shaped in behavioral attitudes, life style, work, study, improvement of personality in a working environment, schools operating in a market economy and democratization. They are positive changes in ethical values and norms in our society in a market economy” (p.96)

Nevertheless, the success and achievements in economic term recorded in our country owing to the socialist-oriented market economy are not sufficient to ensure that deficits of the morality culture created by that mechanism or due to the impact of external elements as well as other attributes can be eliminated. The authors contended that “morality in our society now is embedded in two sides, both the positive (progressive) and the negative (depressing), which obstruct development of the country. The depressing side under the morality culture perspective becomes a counter-development. If ethical deficits are not

properly remedied, posing a risk of losing a generation, it can be said that there would be unforeseeable social consequences on the survival and development of a nation” (p. 99)

The negative apparitions appear in the following aspects:

Firstly, individualism and humanity deficits in life perception and style are swelling in our society through different strata and groups, from producers, businessmen to public official and civil servants as well as the youth.

Conflicts between public and private interests, individuals and society come from inharmonized development between the “self” and the public, which is partly attributable to limited awareness, but in the authors’ views principally due to poor governance and undermined education of the duty and responsibility of individuals, the ignorance of citizenship in education and self-education. (p.101)

When individualism is excessively and absolutely recognized, it will turn on selfishness. The growing phenomenon in our society today is “excessive enjoyment, moral deterioration, laziness, idling, indiscipline, and making rich illegally” (p.105).

Secondly, it is the lose of personality as the heart, morality, compassion, love, tolerance and humanity are partly weakening against the power of money, greediness, selfishness, motives to undertake evil acts and commit crimes for society.

Having not only reviewed morality culture by getting through ethical values,

standards and norms as discussed above, the authors also made clear morality culture from such social-political institutions as: the Party, State, social and political mass organizations, schools and families.

a. Political institution: the Party and State apparatus, apart from the function of taking social leadership and management, are also playing the role of a social-cultural institution on morality. This is because the Communist Party of Vietnam is a ruling party, the State is a tool of the Party, which takes the role of leading and building up society in general and formulating the morality culture in particular (p.111).

The Communist Party of Vietnam is a bright emblem of morality culture of the nation and the times. "Our Party is morality, civilization, independence, peace and affluence" (Ho Chi Minh), being the leading force for the height of culture and morality culture of the nation. This statement is affirmed by the glorious victory of the August Revolution, the great victory in the resistance war against external aggressors, gaining national independence and defending the Homeland. "The Party's morality culture, which embodies outstanding ethical values of the nations and the times, is reaffirmed by the renewal cause. Bearing upon that culture, the Communist Party of Vietnam has led the people to surpass serious challenges posed by the socio-economic crisis took place after 1975; to survive amid the arduous "political quake" that caused the collapse of the socialist regimes in the

Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; to stand firmly against the monetary storm in 1997-1998; to ensure social and political security in the context of the world undergoing complicated changes" (p.112).

Nevertheless, it would be a shortcoming without acknowledging weaknesses, odd phenomena that are deficits in ideology, political awareness, ethics, life style of a "not small proportion of public officials and party members". The weaknesses and odd phenomena can be synthesized in 5 major points as follows:

- First, deficits in ethics, life style of public officials and party members are increasing in terms of both scope and extent;
- Second, opportunism and individualism are on increase, especially among public officials holding power, money and public assets;
- Third, the situation of more talk than action; or speech is given but no action is taken by not a few numbers of public officials and party members;
- Fourth, bureaucracy and red tape, non-engagement with people, preferring merits to the truth;
- Fifth, corruption, power abuse against the people, causing serious consequences in various fields, making the assets, capital and money of the State and the people lost.

That situation has caused people's dissents, worries and less confidence in the Party and State, becoming a factor that hinders the advancement of the renewal drive, a potential danger

threatening the life of the Party and our regime (p.113-128).

b. *Morality culture in other social-cultural institutions (political-social organizations, schools and families)*

The authors expressed their particular concerns about negative aspects of families in Vietnamese society today under the ethical perspective. Namely:

- In marriage and family relationships, there is a growing trend of something like marriage of advantage, selfishness, individualism. A prevailing phenomenon that for the sake of money, in pursuit of private benefits or being embedded in debts, people are not undoubtedly cheating, exploiting, trafficking spouses or children. When benefits can not be obtained, they are willing to abandon or mal-treat their children or parents;
- Irresponsibility in husband-wife, parents-children relationships is commonly seen;
- Behaviors in relation to the perception of men's superiority and women's inferiority remain in practice;
- Additionally, there appear ideas and acts reflecting the divergence of family and public interests. In pursuit of making rich, many people spare no evil tactics or criminal acts to achieve their goals, which sometime cause damages to the society and deprive the life of others.

As such, the authors concluded that morality culture in our country today is undergoing both positive and negative changes. The former is illustrated by fresh features in ethical values and standards, which comply with the

humanity and ethical tradition of the nation as well as the demand of the times. The public heart still expresses the voice of honesty, calling for the termination of the evil, the bad for the sake of happiness, liberty, social security for human beings.

The negative side is an apparition of excessive changes of ethical values and standards, which are to some extent associated with the bad and the evil, causing more or less a crisis in value and losing its role as a social orientation. Morality is now at an alarming level when there appear deficits in ideology, ethics and life style of a "not small" proportion of public officials, party members and the populace in all walks of life.

So as to address these problems, according to the authors, it is imperative to build up a new morality culture on the ground of a buck of economic, political, social and cultural solutions, which are suggested in the third part of the book – ***Building up a morality culture in our country today.***

Before making suggestions, for the authors, it is necessary to identify the nature of our country's morality culture at the time being, as follows:

- It is important to make clear ethical values and standards on the ground of the economy in the current period, which is in transition to socialism;
- That our policy is to build up an economy with multi-sectors operating in line with a "socialist-oriented" market mechanism is to speak of the influence of socialist morality, political-social

ideology. This is also a direction of the morality culture in the transition to socialism in our country. This direction is to ensure the building of a morality culture in our country to be characterized by voluntary, pro-active attitudes and in a humane manner in practice. Nevertheless, to link ideology with practice, it is important to concretize the ideology with peculiar standards for each development stage of society, avoiding illusions.

- It is crucial to define the nature of morality culture, which in the authors' views is regulated by the social-economic development goal, aiming at building "a powerful country with prosperous people and a society characterized by civilization, justice and democracy". It is a dual goal: a strong country with prosperous people (in economic, material terms), and a just, civilized and democratic society (in human and social terms). More specifically, the dual goal is to drive economic development for social and human development; individual development is to boost community and national development. To promote individual development is to enable individuals to make rich, but it is important to draw attention to poverty reduction and hunger elimination in community.

The authors finally suggested the following solutions:

1. To boost economic development and to handle social problems in the context of a market economy (p.172-197)

- The authors emphasized that social-economic development is the foundation

on which a new morality culture is built (p.184). The creation of a new morality culture has to bear upon the harmonious linkage between "economic human beings" and "ethical human beings". This relationship can be configured like a pyramid, in which the bottom line is represented by civil society - market economy - rule of law state, whereas the peak of the pyramid gathers human beings embracing characteristics of a new morality culture.

- It is important to address social problems in a market economy. More particularly, attention should be drawn to ensure the tenet of social justice, to remedy the tendency of commercializing social fields. Hence, it is necessary to work out epoch-making policies, to intensify the formulation of law and law compliance among public officials, party members and in the populace, and to consolidate and develop the education-training and public health sectors.

2. To bring into full play the role of political-social institutions (p.197-214)

- *To bring the role of the Party into play:* it is a must to strictly adhere to the principle of criticism and self-criticism. "Each every party member should self-examine his/her responsibility in relation to the on-going deficit in ideology; members of the Central Committee of the CPV need to adhere to criticism and self-criticism in a serious manner" (p.199). Additionally, the personnel work, nomination, promotion and positioning of service-men and service-women must be conducted in a serious, public and democratic way. At the same time, it is important to specify clearly

the responsibility vested with the people who advance and take guarantee for the nominees. The campaign of learning and following the thoughts and ethical model of President Ho Chi Minh should be deepened.

- *To promote the role of the State:* it is radically important to intensify and build up a rule-of-law state with socialist characteristics. Only a real rule-of-law state is in place, can its function of a special social-cultural institution be implemented in building up a morality culture at the time being. The function is illustrated by the role of the State in regulating interests in a multi-sectoral economy, implementing social justice through laws and policies; furthering administrative reforms and decentralization; handling in a strict, timely and open manner corrupt officials regardless of their positions and social status, or whether they are still in office or retired.

3. *To bring into play the role of other social-cultural institutions:* it is necessary to make the building up a social morality culture and family morality culture to be a key task undertaken in the formulation and development of an advanced culture deeply imbued with national identities. School is an essential social institution, realizing various societal functions: literacy teaching, vocational training and living-skills teaching. These functions are closely linked with the formulation of ethics in human beings. Thus, according to the authors, it is important to develop an efficient educational philosophy, which bases the

development of Vietnamese education sector in line with the development demand of the nation and the times. Additionally, it is imperative to promote development freedom of individuals, to link individual development with community development. Overall, it is a scientific philosophy characterized by a deeply humane morality.

In the meantime, it is recommendable to develop a macro and micro social-tutorial environment of the country and school respectively, which embraces fine ethical values. It is therefore necessary to alter the teaching methodologies and contents of social sciences and humanity subjects being taught in universities in a way that excites learners to acquire positive humanity values of the subjects, helping them to have a correct learning attitudes and motives.

4. *To develop the personality of modern Vietnamese in relation to the building up of a new culture*

- To formulate a strategy of human development: Modern intellecture, humanity characteristics are at the core of the concept of modern human beings and personality. "To modernize the youth" is the sole solution to modernize the nation in future. It is thus required a good combination of fine traditional values of the nation and the quintessence of the times to produce new values of personality in the youth, as well as to terminate bad habits and practices in the past that are still maintained in each Vietnamese today.

- The authors especially placed emphasis on educative contents, which include:

+ inheriting and bringing into play traditional values of the nation, absorbing progressive ethical value of the mankind. Tradition education must go hand in hand with the shifting of long-lasting backward values to the modern ones, converting outdated values to realize the new duties and demands for the sake of the nation and to catch up with the times. Change is not only made, but it is important also to make up inadequate values in our traditional morality culture. It is hence necessary to educate the patience spirit, to practice thrift in work, to awaken the consciousness of duty, responsibility, compassion and honor of every single Vietnamese over the country's situation. It is also badly crucial to educate the feeling of shame, irritation and hatred against negative phenomena, etc. (p.235).

+ Innovating and educating new ethical values and standards. According to the authors, the five attributes identified in the Resolution of the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPV (Tenure VIII) represent the personality of Vietnamese in the renewal, industrialization and modernization period. They are:

- Patriotism, striving for national independence and socialism; having a

determination to rise up, bringing the country out of poverty and backwardness; embracing a spirit of solidarity with peoples around the world in the struggle for peace, national independence, democracy and social progress.

- Collectivism and being united for the common goal.

- Having a healthy and civilized life style; practicing thrift; being honest, compassionate; respecting public disciplines, national laws and community rules; being conscious of eco-environment protection and improvement.

- Whole-hearted dedication to work with high professionalism, good technical skills, creativeness and high productivity for the sake of ourselves, families, collectives and the society at large.

- Continuing study, improving our knowledge and professional skills, the sense of aesthesis (aesthesia) and physical strength (p.238-239).

The book has a significant contribution to making clear, not only in theoretical but also in practical terms, the building up a morality culture in our country - an issue of great concern at the time being.