

TO DEVELOP VIETNAMESE CULTURE AND PEOPLE IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALIZATION AND GLOBAL ECONOMIC CRISIS

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The subject of developing Vietnamese culture and people is being discussed in a special context: the world is staggering in the financial-economic crisis. Our country is faced with deflation, an increasing unemployment rate and the worry of sea and island disputes with some neighboring countries. This situation has given rise to both opportunities as well as challenges. Also, it has cast a harsh light on many complicated matters that need to be analyzed and evaluated both in theoretical study and practical application.

1. The world economic crisis and new aspect of the knowledge economy and culture

Globalization has been frequently analyzed in books, magazines, and other forms of communication but in the past six months it has surprised us by its many facets. The prosperity it brings turns out to be too fragile; actual and virtual elements exist in every aspect of WTO's members' economy and daily life: virtual commodity, virtual money, virtual potentials and virtual values (this is also true for non-WTO's member-countries). In favorable conditions when

people have confidence in translating the potential into the actual, then the virtual (e.g. knowledge, trademark value, stock market price and increasing index of stock market..., etc.) may turn into the actual (actual money and commodity price..., etc.) after a certain period of time. But when that confidence decreases or shatters, the virtual cannot turn into the actual though its contribution has been included in companies' balance sheets and financial reports and is paid, consumed in the way of "counting your chickens before they are hatched". The global financial crisis, springing from America, has unveiled that the virtual part has accumulated for years and overwhelmed the actual; the more developed a country's knowledge and information technology economy, the more virtual elements it bears. The world is actually overspending what it can produce; people become their own debtors and they will have to pay off that debt in many coming years.

The United States, the world economy superpower, the vanguard of

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globalization trend and the world's leading knowledge economy, has exposed its basic flaws and weaknesses when hit by the crisis. From being a powerful creditor twenty years ago, the US now is the world biggest debtor. According to US Department of Treasury, in the fiscal year 2008, beginning from October, 1st, 2007 to September, 30th, 2008, its budget deficit tripled that number of the previous year, accounting for 3.2% GDP. It is predicted that this will increase to 10-12% in 2009. The United States has a financial institution which is held as the world model with a vast array of elite intellectuals, experts and business managers and powerful administrative institutions like FED (Federal Reserve System, established in 1915), SEC (Securities and Exchange Commission, established in 1934 with a staff of 3,798 in 2007), many world top audit companies, business assessing and ranking firms etc. Yet, this institution cannot forecast and prevent the collapse of giant banks and insurance companies, cannot prevent the financial frauds of 50 billion USD by Bernard Madoff and 8 billion USD by Allen Stanford (1). Other large-scale financial frauds happened outside America, like the second largest French bank Société Générale (SocGen) exploiting information technology to conduct virtual transactions causing the loss of 7,3 billion USD (2); Satyam Computer Service Ltd, India's fourth-largest software-services provider admitted their accounting fraud, falsifying earnings and assets to create a virtual profit up to 1 billion USD.

It is human greed leading to the excessive and un-governmentally controlled development of technology, mostly information and financing technology that cause this economic-financial crisis.

All in all, the main reasons for this crisis vary: stemming from economics, politics and the government's administrative capability to science-technology and culture. In this paper we focus only on the reasons of culture and technology.

First, information technology, including computing, telecommunication, the Internet, cyber social network etc. has created a cyber society paralleling real society and human beings are more and more attracted and increasingly dependent on it. How would human beings cope without electricity, cell phones and the Internet? All work in our modern time, part of the knowledge economy, is based on cyber resources and tools to virtualize the real world. Information is the reflection rather than the nature of the real world. Modern information technology has created a virtual multidimensional world (3D, 4D...) which is superior to the real one in both speed and range of information searching, transmitting, reflecting and exchanging, commercial transaction, investment and payment etc. Moreover, in terms of financial activities which involve various kinds of goods, services and tools, it is difficult to verify reports and information on the financial situation, assets and actual value of a company, bank and investment fund. The virtual is often mistaken for the actual and sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, it even replaces the

actual. The visual representation of information combining with the cyber world of technology has altered the consciousness and behavior of individuals, organizations, and societies; triggered a herd mentality on a national and global scale. Panic and its tendency to spread widely and quickly can lead banks and stock markets to collapse, even those in developed countries.

Two quintessential examples for this are: (1) at the time when the stock market of Vietnam was in its climax (from February to March, 8th, 2007), share indexes of most companies on Ho Chi Minh Stock Exchange increased by ten to sixty times their initial value (10,000 VND/ share), some warnings voiced concerning the market's overheated development and its bubble status only to be criticized for being unconstructive, thus disregarded by the public and by investors. Now, when the market price of these stocks falls by about 10 times, it causes a corresponding loss of money to investors. It is dangerous that most stock brokers and investors in Vietnam are individuals investing with money from selling physical assets such as land, gold etc. or from their savings. The bubble state of a price also can be seen in the case of the current housing market. (2) Until now, the index's increase or decrease of the two Vietnamese stock exchange floors remain dependent on the American stock exchange rather than the business performance of listed companies and news of our country's macro economy.

Second, globalization, deriving from the revolution of science and technology,

liberalization of trade and investment, has cast a mould for social behavior and lifestyle which is widely catching with its highly internationalized and unpredictable nature. In this globalized culture and lifestyle, the actual and the virtual are hard to distinguish, price is mistaken for value. We rarely learn from or take advantage of the positive side of globalization but often imitate its negative side thus we are usually at a distinct disadvantage to others. Consumerism culture, the American lifestyle, has taken shape and spread across our country through many forms and venues like commodity, films, television, communication, economic experience and theory, business, etc. while we, Vietnamese people, easily impressed by stimulus packets and American consumerism, often perceive that all American billionaires lead a luxurious and extravagant life rather than fully realize that they are also hard-working, not wasteful with their money yet generous to charities.

For the past two years, the number of "supercars" whose price is around 150 thousand USD and 1.35 million USD bought by Vietnamese businessmen has risen to fifty. Meanwhile Bill Gates, the world's richest man, in his visit to Vietnam only took a 16-seat minibus to travel from Noi Bai airport to Hanoi and Warran Buffet, the world's second richest man, is driving an old car whose market price is about 10 thousand USD. And it is more difficult for us to make out why these two men pledged to donate over 95% of their property to world charity funds. In contrast, in Vietnam is there any billionaire willing to donate one third of his/her property?

The combination of South Korean cinematic culture and its business has increased love for Korean products right in Vietnam while in Korea, Vietnam is represented by poorly educated Vietnamese brides and groups of trainees working illegally (after breaking the contract). What is alarming in recent times is that the "national prestige" of Vietnam is fading due to organized corruption cases (PCI Pacific Consultants International–East-West Avenue Project as an example), the lack of national pride and such amoral behavior in business as counterfeit and imitation goods, and the abuse of chemicals in food production for export and domestic use.

The facts show that Vietnam has not been able to achieve a state of rapid and sustainable development in part because its national value and identity have not had a filter to remove negative impacts and promote the positive side of the globalization process. Despite having many achievements in economic growth during the last two decades, we have not yet created a successful development model which can be compared with that of Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, or Hong Kong. In other words, instead of following Eastern Asia's success stories, Vietnam's current economic development model is more similar to that of South East Asia.

2. New guidelines for developing Vietnamese culture, people and nation

In a crisis, there are always opportunities; the lessons, the experiences drawn from those first stricken by the crisis may be useful examples for the unaffected ones. The

dilemma is also a chance for us to renew the economic administrative institution and restructure the business system for better results. So, what exactly are the lessons that are applicable to our methodology, that are beneficial for the development of Vietnam's culture and people? In our opinion, they are:

1. There should be a thorough grasp of culture and its role in the development of the Vietnamese people and nation

Culture, in the broadest terms, "is the combination of every lifestyle and the solutions that human beings have ever created to meet life's demand and existence's need" (Refer to 3, pg.431). In other words, culture is the personification of human beings against the objective world; it is the product of human beings' emotion and talent. Human beings are "cultured animals" thus we often take human's life for its cultural life or cultural aspect. It is an over abstraction that leads to mistakes in perception and action. In reality, before the coming of cultural life and cultured human beings, there existed pre-cultural human beings who were steeped in basic instincts with physiological demands like food, clothes, housing and traveling at a basic level in that primitive society. If these basic needs were not met, it would be impossible to demand from them a rich spiritual or cultural life as well as great acts of humanism. In the process of globalization, it is naïve and unpractical to wish to obtain an organization or society with low levels of economic development but with high level of spiritual and cultural life. Local culture once summarized this matter in

folk songs and in proverbs like “one often misbehaves when he/she is in poverty”; “man will stop at nothing to satisfy his demand” etc. K. Marx also once mentioned human beings’ first historical act would lead to the state of “degradation”; the “first historical act” is man’s need to have something to eat, something to wear, and shelter before he can compose poems and practice religious beliefs or philosophy etc. and he must take precautions against threats of deviating behavior which would lead to that state of “degradation.” Hence, culture must serve for the development of people in reality, first in economics, rather than prevent them from satisfying their natural demand by sets of theories and doctrines. Also, we should not have too many expectations that the nations that are rich in national identity will bring competitive capacity or differentiation to our businesses in the global market.

Culture also bears duality. Any culture has its two sides, including delusion, complacency and conservatism. In point of fact, culture often stays in the potential form among individuals and communities. If leaders or managers are incapable of exploiting or bringing into full play these hidden resources, then national culture forever remains a virtual force, “a pending project.” Sometimes, it even can spontaneously transform into a “harmful culture”, a “weak culture” or a counter-civilization force which thwarts the development of the society.

Being well aware of the very important role of culture, the resolutions of the 8th Party Congress, 1996 stressed “Culture

is the society’s spiritual bottom line; it is simultaneously the goal and the momentum for economic and social development” (4, pg.10). However, the matter that needs closer investigation is the connotation of the *spiritual bottom line*? What is the negative side of national culture and its impact on our nation’s development? How do the two sides of Vietnamese culture interact? Why haven’t we brought into full play the power of our national culture as we did in the two recent wars of resistance against first the French colonialists and the American imperialists?

2. *Awareness of culture’s many roles as a “filter”, a “break” and an “exhaust valve” for humans in business and economic activities should be further fostered*

We have repeatedly contended that culture is a nation’s goal, momentum, spirit and adjusting system for development; culture in business is one of the major forces in, as well as a tool towards, maintaining steady and sustainable development. Fostering culture in business ensures long-standing prosperity for business people (Refer to 5, pg.46-55; pg.72-77). The reality of our country’s socio-economic development process for the last 20 years has proven that the theory is difficult to put into practice and that culture’s positive role does not only stop with that process. Thus, we need to have a closer look at culture’s role in an individual’s life and society.

A cultural filter is a metaphorical expression of our Vietnamese culture’s ability to selectively obtain elements

from foreign cultures in the process of economic and cultural exchange. The cultural brake is its ability to preserve national culture values and regulate it within a safe boundary against the threats of rapid-fire and overheated development, high growth rate coupled with little effectiveness, and business behavior dazzled by short-term benefits like “exchanging culture for economic growth.” The exhaust valve is its capability to stabilize and release culture’s (art, sports, religious beliefs) shortcomings, stress and so on, helping cultural subjects lead a life of balance, peace, contentment and happiness because knowing how to breathe, relax and laugh is also a way to enrich our life.

In terms of lifestyle, three aforementioned elements in each nation’s culture vary in their nuance and degree. For example, American culture has a good cultural filter (the culture of a “hotpot”) but a weak brake and exhaust valve have brought it the highest number of people suffering from hysteria which lead them to commit suicide and murder. Japan has a good filter and brake but a problematic exhaust valve cannot prevent the karoshi syndrome which causes high suicidal rate among businessmen. What about us? It is obvious that Vietnamese people are very optimistic; we have a good exhaust valve but a hard-to-appraise filter and brake. Look at how Hanoi’s authorities licensed the building of a hotel in Thống Nhất Park and the way we organize festivals in Hương Pagoda and Yên Tử. It seems that we are willing to exchange environment and culture for economic

development. We need cultural development in which cultural elements act as momentum for economic development, however, we also need culture’s functions as a filter, a brake and an exhaust valve which maintain people’s life in purity, peace and contentment.

3. There should be a policy prioritizing national interests in the globalized world

Managing the relationship between national interests and nation is not only a difficult question for politicians and scientists but also attracts great public concern. In 1924, Nguyễn Ái Quốc’s viewpoint that “nationalism is the momentum of a country” (Refer to 6, pg.465) was just a minor issue next to Communist International’s (Comintern) about the global proletarian revolution and its impacts on realistic socialism which lasted for 65 years until the Soviet Union collapsed and was followed by the development of nationalism in many trends, including extremist nationalism. In Vietnam, during Doi Moi, our Communist Party’s policy has been to promote and bolster nationalism insofar as nationalism is not insular or extreme in its nature. We often claim that internal force is essential, external force is important but we have not yet determined the relationship between national interests and those of humankind; the word “harmonious” is not explicit enough. How could there be a harmonious relationship between two such different interests?

In this time of globalization and international reputations, the trend of nationalism is taking its shape more

firmly. The lifestyle of tolerance, symbiosis and respecting other's distinction is respected and held as a standard of cultural and political behavior. The choice by Norway and Switzerland to remain non-EU members rather than follow an international movement and England's refusal to replace its pound sterling by Euro for short-term benefits are both deprived from their political freedom and democratic values and their authorities' confidence. It is clear that these countries have a very good filter and brake.

Vietnam is increasingly integrating into the globalization process and free trade. It is about time we realized that national interests are the first and most important factor in our diplomatic strategy and national security policy; nationalism is the greatest force that needs to be maintained and promoted. Historical experiences and lessons show that every country has its lines and policies determined and many other measures used just for the sake of its own national interests; a majority of civilized governments without question still do not practice what they preach if it is not best for their national interests.

Regarding national interests, economy is given priority over culture; the latter has often served as a tool to achieve political and economic goals (like international ping pong and orchestra diplomacy). We must not give in to our long-term political and economic benefits, territorial integrity and national independence for sentiment and gratitude between leaders. To settle the sovereignty dispute concerning Hoàng Sa and Trường Sa and the sea border, we approve the view point expressed in the

seminar held by Institute of Diplomacy on 17th, March, 2009 entitled "Sovereignty dispute over Eastern Sea: History, Geopolitics and International Law" that: the possibility of settling the sovereignty dispute by diplomatic ways between negotiators is being discussed but its feasibility is not highly appreciated because no country will yield its sovereignty. Besides, we also agree with the seminar's major recommendations which are as follows:

- Rely on national strength and international strength to defend Vietnam's sovereignty over the Hoàng Sa, Trường Sa Islands and Eastern Sea. National strength: to bolster national solidarity (domestic and abroad); international strength: international law and Vietnam's justice.
- National Assembly needs to pass the law concerning the sovereignty over the Hoàng Sa, Trường Sa Islands. Government should build up a comprehensive and synchronous sea strategy, involving many aspects, in which it gives priority to modernizing the military to strengthen the defensive power.
- Regarding Eastern Sea's sovereignty dispute, it should be Socialized, Publicized, Internationalized and Non-sensitized.
- To build up a complete legal record of this issue for the purpose of political struggle, propaganda which also can serve as evidences in case the nation is judged in an International Court of Justice (Refer to 7)

In the globalization process, we should not hold the illusion that internationalism would take the place of nationalism; fraternity and behaviors of culture would overshadow economic and political interests. National interests

remain a *modus operandi* and motive for any nation's economic, political and diplomatic activities etc. Our nation's greatest driving force is the national solidarity, made up by both domestic and overseas Vietnamese communities, international force, specifically the international law and world culture. Our political philosophy is to wisely combine and promote this dual force for the sake of the comprehensive and sustainable development Vietnamese people and nation.

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