

# Impact of Community Culture on Sustainable Social Development in Vietnam Today

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## Abstract

The article presents the concept of sustainable development, sustainable social development; depicting the basic features of village culture in the traditional and contemporary in Vietnam; analyzing the positive and negative impacts of village culture on sustainable social development. Based on that, it proposes a number of main, appropriate and feasible solutions to overcome negative impacts and promotes positive impacts of village culture on sustainable social development in Vietnam currently.

**Keywords:** Village culture, Vietnamese traditional culture, sustainable development, sustainable social development

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## 1. Research problem

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, concluding that the concept of sustainable development was “a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” [Pham, 2019]. Sustainable development is a process with a balanced and harmonious combination of three aspects: economic development, social development and environmental protection. This was a strategy in which each country would base on its economic, social, political, geographical, cultural, human resources and comparative advantages to make appropriate guidelines and policies, ensure harmonious development between nature and society; between material life and spiritual life; between economic development associated with progress and social justice; between global cultural integration and preserving and promoting national identity. Sustainable development was not only a motto of action but also a vital goal, and a modern life philosophy of the entire world, regardless of national, ethnicity, gender, age, cultural level and political opinion.

In the process of leading the revolutionary, the Communist Party of Vietnam has always been consistent in the view of synchronous, harmonious, coordinated development of the economic, political, social, and cultural fields, creating combined strength to successfully implement the country's sustainable development goals. The 10th Central Conference, term IX (2004) determined: "Ensuring the connection between the task of economic development is the center, building and rectifying the Party is the key, and constantly improving culture and the spiritual foundation of society; Creating synchronous development of the above three areas is a decisive condition to ensure the comprehensive and sustainable development of the country" [Communist Party of Vietnam, 2005]. The 13th Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam affirmed the special importance of sustainable social development, so Section VIII was reserved. Strengthen management of sustainable social development, ensuring progress and social justice [Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021].

Sustainable development is expressed through steady progressive upward movement, lawful, civilized and progressive upward movement, a transformation in all fields, including the inheritance and promotion of the values of the past, the present and the future [Do, 2021]. Sustainable social development is ensuring social justice and progress, political stability, and preserving cultural diversity [Pham, 2019].

To accelerate the process of sustainable social development, we need to understand the factors that affect that process. In this article, the author analyzes village culture and its impact on the process of sustainable social development, thereby proposing some main and feasible solutions for sustainable social development in Vietnam in present.

In the research process, the author adheres to the principle of unity between theory and practice; principles of objective, comprehensive, historical - specific consideration, etc. At the same time, the author uses materialist dialectical methods, generalization and abstraction, analysis and synthesis, and induction and interpret.

## 2. Methodology

As a country located on the Indochina peninsula in Southeast Asia, bordering the East Sea, Vietnam has full opportunities for cultural exchange with foreign countries. Vietnam has a long-lasting history of over four thousand years in building and defending country. Vietnamese people have valuable qualities such as hard work, intelligence and creativity, “the leaves protect tattered ones”. Vietnamese people call each other with two affectionate words "compatriots". With such a geographical space and dynamic cultural features, Vietnam has a

culture imbued with its own identity, having both positive and negative impacts on the process of sustainable social development.

### **2.1. Village culture - traditional and contemporary**

Vietnam is one of the countries belonging to wet rice civilization, agriculture depends on nature, this regulates community organization - which is a rural model based on blood relations - clan - village – commune [Tran, 2004]. Throughout history, that community organization has created a unique cultural space that called "village culture".

Village culture is a concept associated with the image of traditional Vietnamese villages with three basic characteristics: 1) Community consciousness (village democracy consciousness in production and protecting villages, building culture, lifestyle, ethics). 2) Sense of self-management. All problems occurring in social life and community life are first resolved by self-conciliation between disputing parties, and when self-reconciliation fails, the intervention of state law is sought. 3) The specific and unique characteristics of each village such as accent, worshipping Thanh Hoang, wedding customs, funerals, lifestyle, etc. collectively called village rules [Tran, 2000].

Village culture is expressed through symbols with traditional values such as banyan trees, wells, communal yards, dikes, rice fields, family genealogies, village conventions, festivals, etc. Customs, beliefs, traditional crafts, songs, lyrics, and dances are unique to each village.

According to Vietnamese cultural researchers, for Vietnamese people, a village is a residential unit of farmers that has existed for a long time and is cohesive, sustainable, and stable in many aspects. Despite not being a state administrative unit, the village is considered as an extension point in the state's management of the province - district - commune. A village is a self-governing unit or area. In fact, village culture can be considered as the main cultural line in Vietnamese life. Village culture is deeply ingrained in each person's mind, creating a personality with local imprints and regulating the lifestyle and behavior of each individual throughout their lives, no matter where they settle down, what carriers and social status. That autonomous characteristic of Vietnamese villages has led to rural customs is more important than the law, or in popular parlance, imperial power bends to suit rural customs. So, what are village rules? How have village regulations impacted the process of sustainable social development?

Village rules are actually folk sayings, if expressed in scientific language, they are "Huong uoc" (for the Kinh people) and "Customary Laws" (for 53 other ethnic groups). Village Conventions and Customary Laws are written products created by the Village community. The Agreement contains a system of diverse conventions, serving as the village's spiritual platform and a tool to adjust relationships within rural communities. The regulations in the Village Convention and Customary Laws are strictly followed by the people, becoming a custom passed down through generations as an unconscious phenomenon in community.

*Historically*, the Village Convention appeared around the 15th century, while the Customary Law appeared since the formation of ethnics, which has a much longer history than the Village Convention. Since their appearance until now, through ups and downs depending on political perspective of the ruling governments, the Village Conventions and Customary Laws still have current value and are always adjusted and supplemented accordingly.

*In terms of construction principles*, Village Conventions and Customary Laws are formed on the Village democratic mechanism (a primitive grassroots democracy). The democracy in Village Conventions and Customary Laws is expressed in the fact that the convention is directly agreed upon by the residents themselves based on the unified will according to the principle of "the minority obeys the majority" and equal rights, meaning that all people in the community have the same voice regardless of economic potential or social status. However, as an unwritten rule, the opinion of the elderly, people with moral reputation, people with high educational level are always respected more by the community.

*In terms of content*, Village Conventions and Customary Laws contain issues related to the rights and civil obligations, expressing their needs and aspirations. Therefore, they closely and fully reflect the problems of community life and are promptly changes when life changes. The issues raised in the Convention and Customary Law are specific, clear, expressed in folk style, closely linked to local customs and traditions in history. The Conventions and Customary Laws creators are people who understand the local culture and language, so the Conventions and Customary Laws have the power to spread quickly and widely in the community.

### **2.2. The impact of village culture on sustainable social development**

Culture in general has long-live basic values. Culture represents a community's identity and is considered a measure of humanity in certain historical periods. Culture serves people, but it also impacts people, makes people and society developing. In the Resolution of the 5th Central Conference of the 8th Party Central Committee on building and developing Vietnamese culture, our Party affirmed: "Culture is the spiritual foundation of society, not only a goal but also a force for socio-economic development" [Communist Party of

Vietnam, 1998].

Firstly, village culture is a rich material to form legal norms based on "customary law" principles. Nguyen Tran Bat commented on the relationship between law and culture: "Culture is the most important foundation for building law. If the law is built on cultural experiences, that is, it acknowledges life and does not impose it on life, then the speed of penetration of law into life will be faster, then complying with the law becomes a cultural habit of people. Experience in law-making in developed countries shows that the closer the law is to people's customs and habits, and the higher the cultural quality, the easier it is to be accepted" [Nguyen, 2005].

Secondly, Village culture is the practical basis for law enforcement and a means of promoting legal development. Reality proves that a highly cultured society is a society in which all citizens will seriously enforce the law, complying with the law becomes a habit - this is the basic condition for upholding the law, contributing to ensuring sustainable social development.

Thirdly, village rules - an expression of village culture - have an important role in reducing the overload of state laws, in regulating social relations, and in promoting precious traditions of the nation, thereby contributing to promoting sustainable social development.

In feudalism, local conventions and customary laws play an important role in community life, contributing to regulating and evaluating people's behavior. Thanks to the Conventions and Customary Laws, Vietnamese society for a long time has had a state of "prosperous nation, peaceful people", villages have almost no phenomena of disorder, theft, social evils. Everyone lives in "neighborly love". In general, although the feudal state apparatus is quite compactly staffed, it operates very effectively, the main reason is thanks to the help of Conventions and Customary Laws as "an invisible hand".

After the August Revolution (1945), in order to build a new life, the Party and State of Vietnam carried out a cultural ideological revolution, essentially eliminating feudal remnants, customs, and lifestyles. But in the process of implementation, due to leftist ideology and hasty subjectivity, the Convention and Customary Laws were abolished without a serious study of the consequences of this action.

The cause of national construction and development in recent years has shown that simply using law to regulate social relations is unsuitable. The abolition of Conventions and Customary Laws unintentionally ignores the beauty of traditional culture, limits the development of fine customs, and leaves gaps that no matter how perfect the law is, it cannot fully cover. That reality requires a return of the Convention and Customary Law - that is the reason for the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Term VII (June 10, 1993) on continuing socio-economic innovation in the countryside advocates encouraging the construction and implementation of the Convention, promoting people's self-governance in areas where the law cannot or does not need to be adjusted.

Reality shows that Village Conventions and Customary Laws play an important role in country developing. However, they are also a huge obstacle in the process of sustainable social development. Many times, in many places, national law has been localized or distorted according to the subjective will of local officials. Today, the notion "Custom rules the law" still live persistently, just as Marx once said: "The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living" [C. Marx and Ph. Engels, 1995] gave rise to the modern Village Rule - it is a reborn rule not depend on the village but in state agencies. Each state agency is like an autonomous unit, setting its own regulations, causing confusion and slowing down the overall work progress, significantly affecting the implementation of state law. For example, the lack of cooperation between state agencies and journalists when they return to reportage is related to violations of law by these agencies, conflicts between the court and the inspection agencies in judge some cases [Nguyen &Bui, 2023].

The above presentations show that village culture is also a difficulty to the process of sustainable social development in Vietnam today.

### **2.3. Some solutions for sustainable social development under the impact of village culture**

To promote the values of village culture and overcome its negative impacts on sustainable social development, the article proposes solutions as follows:

Firstly, *building a socialist rule of law state*: Around the world, building a rule of law state has become a reality over the past two centuries. Developed countries have been implementing social management by law, implementing the principle of rule of law. For developing countries, including Vietnam, building a rule-of-law state will create opportunities not only for economic development, ensuring social justice and equality, and environmental protection, but also towards sustainable social development. The 13th National Party Congress affirmed: "Continue to build and perfect the Vietnamese socialist law-governed state of the people..."[Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021]. In the process of building and perfecting the Vietnamese socialist rule of law state, we need: 1) *There must be a clear distinction between Village Conventions, Customary Laws and legal laws*. Local conventions and customary laws are only effective within the scope where the law cannot regulate and they need to be voluntarily implemented. 2) *It is necessary to determine the dialectical relationship between village conventions, customary laws and legal laws to find ways of impact and interaction*

between "village rules" and "national laws", between civic obligations and community members' responsibilities to create a legal corridor and democratic freedom for the people. Accordingly, "village rules" are just an "appendix" meant to refer to and implement what the country's rules are missing or cannot be adjusted, while the national laws are general and popular regulations for all citizens.

Secondly, build an advanced culture with national identity: Culture, first of all, village culture - an endogenous part of Vietnamese culture - has positive and negative impacts on social development. Society is sustainable, so in the process of development we need to "drain the mud and bring the fresh", filter outdated elements. We need to preserve, promote and develop culture that is suitable for the needs of society, turn them into an endogenous strength serving sustainable development in our country. The Central Conference Resolution five (term VIII) clearly pointed out: "The general direction task of our country's cultural career is to... build and develop a Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity"[ Communist Party of Vietnam, 1998].

Thirdly, *implementing democracy*: Democracy is a product of human history, the result of a long and difficult struggle of progressive people against the forces of monarchy. Regarding to the relationship between democracy and modern social development, Luong Dinh Hai wrote: "For developing countries that have not yet experienced democracy like our country, ... Social democratization is a prerequisite for building a rule-of-law, a driving force for the development of modern society." [Luong, 2006]

Fourth, *raise people's education*: in a highly educated society, people will have the opportunity to contribute greatly to social development, preserve cultural diversity, and fight for fairness, equality, and social progress. In there, people will actively participate in the legislative, executive, and judicial processes, and will voluntarily implement the law, thereby forming a legal culture, for which respect for the law is a fundamental condition for sustainable social development.

### 3. Conclusion

Today, with the development of the world economy, many challenges pose to humanity such as climate change, erosion of traditional culture, increasing social inequality... The above problems can only be resolved at the global level and in each country by promoting sustainable economic, social and environmental development. Sustainable social development is a development that ensures progress, justice, social equality, law-respected, and all precious values of traditional culture are preserved and developed.

Sustainable social development in Vietnam is influenced by many factors, including village culture. Village culture and village rules have a great influence on sustainable social development in Vietnam today. Village culture makes that process both difficult and advantageous, sometimes speeding it up but sometimes inhibiting and slowing it down. Therefore, to achieve the goal of sustainable social development, we need to implement a number of solutions such as: building and perfecting Vietnam's socialist rule of law state; building an advanced culture imbued with national identity; promote democracy; raise people's knowledge, eliminate the way of thinking and doing things that "custom rules the law". Just as Professor and Doctor of Science Vu Minh Giang affirmed: "In the current era, culture is not only an asset for us to preserve, for us to cherish, for us to be proud of, be considered, but also the country's soft power to be able to expand cooperation and compete fairly in the international arena"[Thong & Le, 2021].

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