



## Research Article

**FAMILY CULTURE AS A VALUE FOR CONSTRUCTING  
THE ORIENTAL IDENTITY  
(THE CASE OF TIENG DAN NEWSPAPER (1927-1943))  
BY HUYNH THUC KHANG)**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The process of acculturation with Western cultures might have an impact on Vietnamese intellectuals from the early twentieth century, which enabled them to make wise choices so that they, once again, reaffirmed their beliefs on their national values. Moving in completely the same circle with Oriental cultures, Vietnam undoubtedly shared with them a myriad of common customs and beliefs, in particular family values originally based on Confucianism. Additionally, many activists in Vietnam, somehow, in the interaction with Western cultures, decided to preserve and promote the family values, which are considered as the foundation in constructing Vietnamese identity in comparison with Oriental norms and values. ‘Tieng Dan’ newspaper, whose editor was Huynh Thuc Khang, is a typical example for that trend.*

**Keywords:** cultural identity, Orient, Huynh Thuc Khang, family culture.

**1. Introduction**

From the end of the nineteenth century to the first decade of the twentieth century, the Vietnamese systemic culture patterns were confronted with considerable changes due to the impact of acculturation from Western culture and civilization. The more the indigenous culture acculturates to other cultures, the more it become highly self-conscious about its identity. “Identifying identity means *comprehending*: how we see ourselves and how others see us?” (Chris Barker, 2011, p.298). *Stuart Hall (1987) stated that identity was continuously “hit” and challenged by cultural interactions and it caused unstoppable changes in the ways we were shown or solved the systemic cultures surrounding us. This is a remarkable feature in the process of cultural exchange and acculturation. In relation to the Western culture, Vietnam is in the Eastern Asian cultural trajectory. The Eastern Asia concept, according to our approach, is understood as a cultural region with specific*

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features, not just a geopolitical region. In Eastern Asia, “the acculturation from external civilization always takes place within the framework of the preservation and honor of indigenous values” (Ho Si Quy, 2006, p.171). In addition to the prevailing Western civilized values, the family culture on the Confucian foundation has been chosen by many intellectuals, including Huynh Thuc Khang to form Vietnamese identity in particular and Eastern Asian identity in general.

Huynh Thuc Khang (1876-1947), one of the typical progressive activists in the early twentieth century, *would gain great advantages* from his press forum. We would like to mention the People’s Voice (1927-1943), the first national language newspaper in Central Vietnam. Chairman and editor of the People’s Voice - Huynh Thuc Khang - wished to use the newspaper as an educational tool to disseminate progressive ideas and let people be aware that they are Vietnamese. In terms of cultural relations, the educational purpose of the People’s Voice is considered as a sense of self-recognition, self-affirming Vietnamese cultural identity in relation to other cultures; it the journey in which Huynh Thuc Khang attempts to identify the “Oriental cultural truth” (ibid., p.589)<sup>1</sup>.

## **2. Huynh Thuc Khang’s discussion about the matter of family culture in the Confucian viewpoint**

The concept of *Family culture*, in our approach, is a system of values and norms that regulates the relationships in families, dominates the behaviors of family members and distinguishes one family with another. Traditionally, Vietnamese attach great value to families. Families are of more importance in cultures with Confucian traditions. Therefore, when discussing family culture, Huynh Thuc Khang traced back to the difference between the Orient and Occident.

### **2.1. Family culture in the the Oriental and Occidental difference**

On many of the leading articles of the Tien Dan, Huynh Thuc Khang had in-depth discussions about the relationship between the Orient and Occident on the ground of national cultural development. From the Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc movement, the modernists soon determined the distinction between the Orient and Occident, indicates the original characteristic of our civilization as “being always static”, while European civilization as “being always dynamic” (Chuong Thau, 1997, p.121). Sharing the same point of view with Dong Kinh Nghia Thuc, Huynh Thuc Khang supposed that in the Orient it is the precious order and discipline that makes it unique. We are strong on order, while the West on evolution. “*The term “old” is often used in the same sense with the word “order”, the term “morden” with the word “progress” in philosophy*” (ibid., p. 262). Many people fear that “*in a society, in order to have order, there must not be evolution; if there*

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<sup>1</sup> The materials in Tieng Dan newspaper are taken from Huynh Thuc Khang's collection, collected and compiled by Chuong Thau & Pham Ngo Minh (2010). In this article we only briefly note (ibid, page).

*is evolution, order cannot exist*” (ibid., p.262). However, Huynh Thuc Khang affirmed: “Order and evolution must go together... so that a society is created” (ibid., p.262)

This means that he thinks a society can only evolve (dynamic) based on the foundation of order (static). The relationship between the Orient - old - static and the Occident - modern - dynamic was analyzed and traced to the source by Huynh Thuc Khang. Asserting the difference in regional and national identity as Huynh Thuc Khang's way of doing is not to proscribe the Occident. Scholar Huynh Thuc Khang has never adopted a persistent attitude towards hostility to the Occident, or followed blindly. Huynh Thuc Khang was aware of the national identity only when taking social progress as the final option. Amartya Sen (2016) argues that the problem lies in the choice: “*In each social context, there are some potential identities that can become important and significant, which can be evaluated based on their acceptable ability and relative importance*” (p.73). The “static” value, or the stability of order and discipline of the Eastern Asian civilization discussed by Huynh Thuc Khang “was establish in a way that reconciles with the current scholars world and prepares for the “national back-and-forth movement in the future” (ibid., p.520).

Huynh Thuc Khang has objectively and carefully acknowledged the roles of fundamental values that constitute achievements of Oriental culture. He re-established the belief in Confucianism (in the family case) of stabilizing social order - East Asian identity, and thereby proposed the preservation and promotion of family culture (the foundation of creating social order) – a “support”, a “launch pad” for innovation and development.

According to Confucianism, Family culture is the indogenous characteristic of “static” culture. Huynh Thuc Khang reminded readers that “In order to have a society, there must be families (ibid, p.263) and” no family is not the original character of Vietnamese people “(ibid., p.470). Families are an important link between individuals and a society. Tran Ngoc Them (2016) in the study of the Vietnamese value system also suggested that the sentiment-based culture and hierarchy in the family in accordance with Confucian ideology create a remarkable difference in our culture, compared to the Occidental. For Confucian reformers, families with family traits, family religions, family rites... deserve to be honored as the pre-eminent patterns of a society. “Talking about familyism, Confucian is very thorough; from worshipping ancestors, raising children and grandchildren, to interacting with other relatives. All create an elegant and gentle appearance.” (ibid., p.522).

Huynh Thuc Khang's view of honoring and restoring family culture further persuades the Tieng Dan readers when he exploits the “sacredness” of families in the Vietnamese consciousness. Families are associated with the ancestors, with the antecedents; especially with what is the best of the past. Indeed, according to Anthony Giddens (1990), “*In traditional societies, the past is honored and symbols are valuable because they include and maintain the experiences of generations*” (p.37) cited by Stuart Hall (2006, p.278).

Huynh Thuc Khang has always insisted on the superiority of family culture as he proposed that “Most of prosperous Asian societies are stemmed from familism” (ibid., p.522).

## **2.2. Family culture in the challenge of background context.**

Huynh Thuc Khang also assessed the challenges of the modern context, which leads to the preservation of family cultural values. Firstly, cultural contact with the Occident causes disturbances in the Vietnamese value system and gaps in tradition. More and more people have separated themselves from Confucian influence and saw it as a manifestation of progress and innovation. Secondly, while new values have not been shaped, many people are confused, misled, and disoriented. This is a transitional period that Huynh Thuc Khang called “unfinished works”. Consequently, “*the majority of young people are too passionate about individualism and materialism [...] yet abandon their families*” (ibid., p.470). When it comes to family education, there is a fear of being criticized as obsolete. The society faces insecurity, and even the intellectuals themselves are confused when “From rituals of ceremonies to customs and habits are eradicated, because of the reformation” (ibid., p.520). However, it was Huynh Thuc Khang who recognized Confucianism in terms of dynamism when honoring practical and feasible values of family education in the current context. Tran Dinh Huou contended: “Confucianism will not be rigid but very lively if associating it with family lifestyle, relatives, neighbors, habits, mentality, mindset...” (Tran Dinh Huou, 1996, p.154).

Most cultural values that each individual holds are selected from the previous generation, directly from one’s father or grandfather. According to Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, *cultural capital is passed from generation to generation through the habit formed in the original family. Cultural participation of young people is mainly driven by the background of their families because it requires a practice of cultural orientation to be formed through early interaction with cultural capital in the family* (Bourdieu, 1984, 1986) stated by Willekens, M., & Lievens, J. (2014, p.100). Approaching in this perspective, the awareness of Confucian activist like Huynh Thuc Khang is justified in the universality and in the social context at that time.

## **3. Huynh Thuc Khang and some specific viewpoints on family education based on Confucianism**

Specific views on family education according to Confucianism were expressed in many communal lectures in the Tieng Dan and these opinions focused on the “Family Education “ (originally written by a Chinese author - Qua Bang Van) translated by Huynh Thuc Khang and published many times in the Tieng Dan. The preface was not only concise but also drastic, and showed the absolute consensus and agreement on the viewpoint between Huynh Thuc Khang and the author of the work: “*In a society, who has no descendants? Who does not want their children and grandchildren to become good people? [...] Isn’t family education something that is always focused on?*”; “*Whoever is in charge of parents should not disregard this essential book*” (ibid., p.1511). Within the

limits of the article, we focus on clarifying some issues such as the pattern of parents; how to raise and treat children and some specific children's education matters.

### **3.1. About parental pattern**

Huynh Thuc Khang emphasized the role of parents in family education as the very first teachers in their children's lives. The translator of the book "Family education" wrote: "*Family education is a method of teaching children to become good people. That is families play the role of schools, and while children are students, parents are teachers*" (ibid., p.1511). The responsibility of educating children of parents is one of Confucian precepts. The intervention and support from schools in our country situation at that time was inadequate, so the responsibility of educating children was greater."... ways of educating people who have become mature are just the tip of the iceberg, but teaching children in the family is the root" (ibid., p.1511). Parents must set a model for their children: "*Family education always focuses on children's personality development, which cannot be fully transmitted by their parents, but parents can make good models by themselves, and the children who have been impassioned would gain a lot...*" (ibid, p.1537).

Taking the real life of parents as models for children or exemplary teaching methods is a positive and effective way of doing things; "*In front of children, parents must be careful, should not let go of their own will and do wrong things*"; "*If a parent says a bad word, takes a bad action or displays a bad behavior, not only will the child fall under that influence, but many other teachings will lose their effects*" (ibid., p.1537). Parents educate their children with their own patterns and norm deliberately yet at the same time very natural. "*Family is a cultural environment for an individual to be both unconscious and conscious in receiving cultural values of family and the society [...]. This is the process of true culturalisation*" (Nguyen Van Hieu, 2017, p.329). To teach children by the modeling method, parents have to improve and keep cultivating themselves.

### **3.2. Parental informal education for children**

Regarding the attitude of parents, according to Confucianism, parents are expected to exert almost absolute authority in most families. It is just parents' facial expressions that play an important roles in abstaining their children from conducting mischiefs. "When parents see their child do or say something wrong, they just simply show anger in their faces. For those who are much more mischievous, a glower would appear to work. This act would refers to the fact that there is no need to rebuke him but he does still not dare to repeat his bad behaviors." (ibid., p.1515). The prestige and control the parents exercise actually create a distance, i.e a powerful distance.

Secondly, in terms of teaching children, "Parents must strive for consistency. No matter how difficult it is, they must stick to their decision rather than giving up" (ibid., p.1514). Parental steadfastness is a must in educating children; even if the child pleads for something they wish, "parents indulgence is strictly prohibited" (ibid., p.1514). Parents

must agree with one another, lest “if parents have conflicts, it will be bad examples for children,” then the act of teaching children is no longer effective (ibid., p.1514). The unity of parents in children education is essential, almost functioning as an art. For example, the method of teaching children to do good has eight steps that both parents must coordinate: “instruction - sensory - support - stimulation - prevention - study - reward - punishment” (ibid, p.1525). Teaching children is not arbitrary; it needs to have a proper sequence, both emotional and persuasive, sometimes even forceful. Even the way to reward and punish must be smart and worthy, then the children will respect you and be obedient.

Behaviors of parents with children is a two-way relationship: kind-hearted father – respectful son. This is a Confucian ideal. “Parents treat children, strictly but patiently and warm-heartedly” (ibid, p.1517). In the family, normally, the father functions as a serious discipliner and the mother a gentle advisor. It is interesting to see that the family has assigned the father absolute respect and also the mother responsibility to harmonize family relationships. The mother educates her child with her femininity and love. Thus, the family education is operated both by family style and by family rules.

On the other hand, these dimensions also have dynamic, metamorphic spaces that match the actual situation. Absolute authority in the Eastern Asian family has a certain value in establishing discipline, but it should be limited. Huynh Thuc Khang was very pleased with the argument: “... the father and the son are still respectful, but seem peaceful, making the children mentally active” (ibid., p.1513). However, indulgence, to some extent, is believed to be good, but too much of it would spoil the children. This is the manifestation of the distinction of the old female essence and constantly complementing the advanced and modern elements.

### ***3.3. Parental specific educational contents for children***

With a center of human thought, Confucian doctrine proposes an ideal of a human being. Huynh Thuc Khang paid special attention to: “morality must be on talent; without morality the talent will be of no value. The content of the Tieng Dan newspaper follows the beliefs in Confucianism of the editor” (ibid., p.1768). Domestic education the family centers around morality education. “When the school is specialized in teaching literature, the family cherishes maintaining its virtue”. “When the child has a false moral manifestation, it is his or her family that is to blame”; “It would be such a shame if one’s child is considered “mischievous” or “uneducated” (ibid., p.1512). Huynh Thuc Khang focuses on family culture at the value and standard level. He affirms: “From social basis, in the issue of education, we must take” social norms “(Nhan, Le, Nghia, Tri, Tin) as the tradition” (ibid., p.263). He applauded the author’s viewpoint through educating young people about specific qualities Morality - Ceremony - Credibility - Intellect - Reliability.

For example, the morality is built up from very small things such as teaching children to avoid cruelty: “Cruel things or similar things are strictly forbidden; such as killing animals or regarding ceasing one’s life as a leisure activity. If they are not told to

avoid such things, no matter how innocent and benevolent he is, it is very likely that one day he will become a sociopath” (ibid., p. 1557). The harm of telling lie is also vigilant to forge the word “credibility”: “One time being a liar means forever a liar. The person who is untruthful is an unwanted one – no sooner or later he will be excluded from his own society” (ibid., p.1551). Another remarkable point is that Huynh Thuc Khang pays close attention to teaching children how to be independent. When children are young, let them do whatever they can. Without relying on anyone, being independent from thinking about action, a child can become a useful person: “A self-reliant is always of significance; domestic people who know that they can be self-sufficient will be able to strengthen themselves; useful for yourself; I am independent, I cannot be constrained by anyone else, but I have been experienced by the experienced and intellectuals who have advanced” (ibid., p.1548).

In short, basically, the traditional values of Huynh Thuc Khang's family are highly appreciated, but the connotations of those values have changed. Eliminating factors that are the resistance of development, paying special attention to morality, morality and responsible life, Huynh Thuc Khang gradually recreates the traditional family values in the new face needed for new work

#### **4. Conclusion**

Huynh Thuc Khang, along with his activities of the *Tieng Dan* newspaper, chose and *orientated the key values toward their readers in Vietnam, particularly in the Central. While Confucianism was being eliminated, the opinion of “preserving the indigenous values, accumulating and internalizing the novel patterns” from Huynh Thuc Khang really placed true values in education.* Huynh Thuc Khang pointed out the role of family education, emphasizing the role of educating children, recognizing family culture in the ability to *form* Vietnamese identity and Oriental identity. That confirms the consciousness of reforming the country from within, from human potential.

During the intercultural interactions, the attitude towards Confucian values (the case of family culture) is the attitude towards the national tradition. The small survey above can be seen as a talk about how to traditionally actively participate in the process of modernization, the path “to modernity from tradition” (the word used by Tran Dinh Huou, 1999). Family culture is a traditional value, but dynamically participating in the development of the country, starting from education to national construction, building a sense of national and national spirit. The intellectuals of the era have done a good job of appraising cultural values based on thinking about national identity, contributing to solving the modernization problem. Currently, the context of globalization has posed many challenges for Vietnam, including the value system. The lesson about the orientation of the value of newcomers in the early twentieth century in the sense of building national identity is a modernization philosophy that needs to be promoted.

❖ **Conflict of Interest:** Authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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#### VĂN HÓA GIA ĐÌNH NHƯ MỘT GIÁ TRỊ KIẾN TẠO BẢN SẮC ĐÔNG Á (TRƯỜNG HỢP BÁO TIẾNG DÂN (1927-1943) CỦA HUỖNH THỨC KHÁNG)

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#### TÓM TẮT

Trong quá trình tiếp xúc với phương Tây, các trí thức Việt Nam đầu thế kỉ XX đã có những lựa chọn đúng đắn nhằm khẳng định hệ giá trị dân tộc. Nằm trong quỹ đạo văn hóa Đông Á, Việt Nam chia sẻ nhiều giá trị văn hoá chung của khu vực, trong đó phải kể đến văn hóa gia đình trên nền tảng Nho giáo. Trong tương quan với văn hóa phương Tây, nhiều nhà duy tân đã lựa chọn bảo lưu và phát huy văn hóa gia đình như một giá trị kiến tạo bản sắc Việt Nam nói riêng và bản sắc Đông Á nói chung. Báo Tiếng Dân (1927-1943) của nhà duy tân Huỳnh Thúc Kháng là một trường hợp như thế.

**Từ khóa:** bản sắc văn hóa, Đông Á, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, văn hóa gia đình.