

Confucian Influences on Vietnamese Culture

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Abstract: For 1,900 years of dissemination in Vietnam, particularly in two periods such as Later Lê Dynasty (1428 - 1527) and Nguyễn Dynasty Early Period (1802 - 1883), Confucianism caused vigorous impacts on Vietnamese culture. It mainly influenced upper classes and strata in society, but it did not take root in lower social classes and strata. For the spiritual culture, Confucianism made a contribution towards formation of an orthodox culture besides folk that was attached closely with ethnic sense, resulting in the core of ethnic culture. Confucianism made the spiritual culture of Vietnamese people in the medieval time significantly Chinese-inclined; at the same time, it held back and caused negative impacts on Vietnamese traditional culture, both spiritually and materially. The more significant Confucianism was considered, the weaker Vietnam became and the more regressive Vietnamese culture was kept. Eventually, Confucianism became powerless and faded, when we encountered the situation of losing the country in the late 19th century.

Key words: Vietnamese culture, Confucianism.

1. Introduction

For the past over 100 years, since Confucianism declined, there have been many scholars studying and discussing issues relating to Confucianism in Vietnamese culture. At first, there were Phan Bội Châu, Trần Trọng Kim, Đào Duy Anh, Dương Quảng Hàm, Ngô Tất Tố, Nguyễn Duy Cần, and Kim Định etc. More recently, there were many others such as Cao Xuân Huy, Trần Văn Giàu, Trần Đình Hượu, Quang Đạm, and Trịnh Doãn Chính etc. Yet, most of the research works on Confucianism in Vietnamese culture were carried out from the perspective of philosophy, history, or literature. Regarding to Confucianism generally and Confucianism in Vietnam specifically, they mainly focused on some aspects such as ideology, education and literature. One of the aspects that haven't been studied much is the practical effect of

Confucianism on Vietnamese culture; i.e. realistic Confucianism and its interaction with Vietnamese culture. Such a cultural practical issue should be viewed from the perspective of cultural study.

To approach this issue, we have applied theories on the cultural system, according to which ethnic culture is seen to consist of three factors, including: cultural actors, cultural activities, and cultural particularities. Of the three factors, the cultural actors (i.e. the very ethnic groups) play the key role. Cultural activities include various practical fields of the cultural actors and they are divided into two groups: tangible culture (also called as material culture) and intangible culture (also called as spiritual culture). The cultural system exists in a cultural environment,

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which is composed of two elements: cultural space and acculturation exchange. In such a cultural system, Confucianism is a dichotomous component: it is a part of the spiritual culture and has a close interaction with spiritual cultural activities; at the same time, it is a part of the cultural actors and has a close interaction with attributes of the cultural actors.

To talk about realistic Confucianism and its interaction with Vietnamese culture, therefore, it is firstly necessary to study reciprocal impacts between Confucianism and spiritual cultural activities as well as attributes of Vietnamese cultural actors.

2. Major positive impacts of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture

Confucianism was disseminated for 1,900 years in Vietnam, from the beginning of its dissemination to its decline. During the period under the domination by Northern invaders, for the first centuries AD Chinese administrators such as Guang Xi (1-5 AD), Yan Ren (29 – 33 AD), Shi Xie (187 – 226 AD), and Du Huidu (early 5th century) made every effort to disseminate Confucianism in Jiao-Zhou (Vietnam). At the same period, flows of acclimation migrants and refugees continually moved from the north, bringing culture of the Han Dynasty to Jiao-Zhou. Yet, it was the thriving time of Việt - Mường culture. Thus, the internal culture was so great that it selected and converted imported cultural factors into its own power. In the meanwhile, Confucianism was used as a tool to strengthen the invaders' State institutions. As a result, although Confucianism was disseminated for a thousand years in

Vietnam, it could not penetrate into Việt - Mường culture. Việt - Mường people were successful in preserving the ethnic culture, maintaining the national consciousness, and keeping the indomitable will to fight for independence.

Only at the time of monarchical systems (from the 11th century), was Confucianism highly appreciated by the feudal governments. To build and complete the State institutions, the feudal class found sharpened weapons from Confucianism, which could not be provided by the contemporary Buddhism and Taoism: the mystique could create royalty; the sacredness could create the king and subject relationship; the norms and content of the government official training could help to extend to power of the King. At the time of the Later Lê Dynasty, Confucianism became the “monolatry” in the royal culture, making Buddhism and Taoism become the folk culture. Especially, Confucianism was considered as the national religion at the time of Nguyễn Dynasties. For this period, the absolutely centralized system did utilize the Confucian principles of “three moral bonds” and “five constant virtues” to protect the king – subject hierarchy and to maintain the constant ruling of the King family line. In the pinnacle of power, Confucianism developed its power to the maximum, leading to a period of chaos and stagnation that lasted until late 19th century, when the country was invaded by the French colonialists. Together with the decline of the feudal system and the feudal class, from the beginning of the 20th century, Confucianism was no longer viewed as an

orthodox ideology and it no longer played a role in regulating behavior and morals of people. The uprising of the Duy Tân and Đông Du Movement (Vietnamese for Modernization and Eastern Study, 1905 - 1908) ended completely the time of Confucian domination in Vietnam.

Based on the above-mentioned outline, we can realize that Vietnamese feudal class highly respected Confucianism, because it was somewhat helpful for national building. The major reason, however, is that Confucianism was used as an effective tool to rule over the people. That's why Confucianism always played the role of a lifebuoy for all feudal dynasties from 1070 (when the King Lý Thánh Tông built the Temple of Literature in Thang Long) to 1883 (when the Treaty of Huế was concluded to recognize the French protectorate over Vietnam), despite all vicissitudes of history.

Owing to active and persistent dissemination made by the feudal class at the medieval time, Confucianism step-by-step infiltrated into a part of Vietnamese cultural actors, including the aristocrats, government officials, scholars, and village notables. Confucianism also took root in a part of the spiritual culture in society, forming an orthodox culture in addition to folk spiritual cultural activities. As a result, Vietnamese spiritual culture was partly Sinicized. On the contrary, Confucianism was also partly Vietnamized after its dissemination in Vietnam.

Due to impacts caused by Confucianism, social stratification took place more profoundly in Vietnam; Vietnamese cultural actors were divided into two groups, of which one consisted of Confucian scholars, aristocrats

and officials following the Confucian pattern; and, the other consisted of inherent classes such as farmers, craftsmen, and businessmen. The former group was responsible for national governance. They decided to select treatments to be implemented, depending on specific situations. The later group was responsible for provision of materials to meet the demand of the upper classes and themselves as well.

In the history, there were a lot of dignified and virtuous Confucian scholars such as Mạc Đĩnh Chi, Chu Văn An, Nguyễn Trãi, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, Võ Trường Toản, Ngô Tùng Châu, Trịnh Hòa Đức, Lê quang Định, Ngô Nhân Tịnh, Nguyễn Công Trứ, Phan Thanh Giản, Trần Tiến Thành, Nguyễn Đình Chiểu, Nguyễn Khuyến, Nguyễn Huy Đức, Nguyễn Thức Tự Khiếu Năng Tĩnh, Trần Đình Phong, Lương Văn Can, Phan Bội Châu, Đặng Nguyên Cẩn, Ngô Đức Kế, Phan Châu Trinh, Huỳnh Thúc Kháng, and Trần Quý Cáp etc. No matter it was at the time of peace or the time of chaos, those scholars always kept a life of virtue, showing sound behavior and actions for the sake of the nation and the people as well.

In terms of cultural activities, Confucianism mainly caused impacts on spiritual activities. In community-based culture, at the household level, Confucianism combined with Han culture to create the patriarchal regime with the male extreme chauvinism. This regime co-existed with the tradition of male chauvinism of our folk culture. At all levels, including household, family line, and national ones, Confucianism caused a direct impact on building the regulation of

heir-ship, according to which the heir-ship and the right of inheritance were determined to be given to the paternally eldest son; whereas, the folk custom determined that the heir-ship and the right of inheritance were provided for the youngest son. At the whole national aspect, Confucianism was used as a foundation for establishment of Đại Việt State body, including the administrative system, the military forces, the civil system, salaries etc. as a simulation model of those in China. This model co-existed together with the community-based organizational model at the village level, which was built from the time of Văn Lang – Âu Lạc State.

In terms of religions and beliefs: Vietnamese Confucian scholars viewed Confucianism as a religion, eliminating and boycotting any other religions except for some ideas accepted and encouraged by Confucianism such as: the belief in the will of God and ancestor worship etc. Thus, Confucianism became really a religion of Vietnamese men, in addition to some religions for women such as Buddhism and Đạo Mẫu (*refers to the worship of mother goddesses*).

In terms of customs: Due to impacts caused by Confucianism and Han culture, a part of our customs, especially marriage and funeral rituals, were Sinicized. At the medieval time, models of Confucianism and Han culture were used as the standards for various customs. As a result, by now many people are still writing descriptions of those rituals and customs in the Vietnamese modern culture, as if they were copies of customs from the Chinese medieval culture. In fact, except for marriage and funeral

rituals that were carried out according to the model of Confucianism and Han culture, Vietnamese people in different local areas with different religions had different ways to carry out their customs.

In terms of education, at the medieval time Confucianism was viewed as a foundation to set up an official system of education in Vietnam with 4 levels: Imperial – Provincial – Inter-district – and District. The exams were held at 4 levels, including: *sơ khảo* (the primary test), *thi Hương* (the preliminary exams); *thi Hội* (the intermediate exams); and *thi Đình* (the advanced exams). Based on the results of those exams, the State officials and village notables were selected. This official system of education existed in parallel with the folk education at families, trade villages, and hamlets, where children were taught how to treat properly towards family members, parents, grandparents, ancestors, relatives, neighbors, and gods etc. For the entire length of 844 years (from 1075 to 1919) with Chinese study and examinations in Vietnam, the Confucian educational system produced thousands of junior bachelors, bachelors, doctors (laureates at the feudal exams), of which many cultural scholars or scientists were well-known, such as Lê Văn Hưu- a historian, Nguyễn Trãi – the world cultural celebrity, Ngô Sĩ Liên – a historian, Lương Thế Vinh, Nguyễn Bình Khiêm, Phùng Khắc Khoan – the first doctoral candidates, Lê Quý Đôn and Phan Huy Chú – great scholars of Vietnam etc.

In terms of literature and arts, Confucianism made a contribution towards formation of some kinds of literature, including: examination

literature (such as literary dissertations, Royal proclamations, petitions, essays, literary books, poetry, rhythmic prose etc.), Chinese-typed literature (such as Tang prosody, Odes, couplets etc.), classic references, Confucian-disseminating books, Confucian-influenced writings and art. Those products constitute an orthodox literature and art, which existed in parallel with folklore and folk art.

In terms of language and documents, the acculturation generally and dissemination of Han culture specifically left a deep influence on Vietnamese language and writing. Regarding to the phonetic aspect, suffix consonants of Việt and Mường languages changed; tones were added; auxiliary syllables used at the Môn - Khmer time were removed; for Vietnamese modern language alone, compounds of prefix consonants also disappeared. Regarding to the grammatical aspect, affixes of Việt - Mường languages used at the Môn-Khmer time were gradually lost; for Vietnamese modern language, affixes were added to form Hán - Việt words; compounds and many words of Chinese-origin were imported. In terms of the vocabulary, both Việt and Mường languages contain a lot of elements derived from Chinese; for Việt language alone, 70% of all vocabularies came from Chinese words. The number of Chinese-originated words used at present is very great and they are used very frequently, including ancient Sino-Vietnamese words, medieval Sino-Vietnamese words, contemporary Sino-Vietnamese words (conversational language of Hoa people in South Vietnam), and words containing Sino-Vietnamese elements. Of all Vietnamese vocabularies,

particularly culture-related ones, Chinese-originated words make up an overwhelming proportion in all the three areas: words, syntax, and affix. These Chinese-originated vocabularies cover almost all cultural aspects, in which Vietnamese people were influenced by Chinese culture. The most obvious influence can be seen in spiritual cultural activities, including: traditional social organizational method (titles, names, kinship, administrative organization, military organization, apparatus of mandarins etc.); religions, beliefs, customs, and rituals (beliefs, religions, education, system of competitive examinations, lifespan customs, ceremonies and rituals etc.); literature and art (terms, administrative literary styles, examination styles, academic literary genres, and some stage forms etc.); language (geographic naming, vocabulary borrowing and copying, forming new words from Chinese origin etc.). Such a sinicized and Confucian acculturation existed in parallel with preservation of Môn-Khmer originated phoneme, grammar and vocabulary as well as adoption of Tày, Chăm, Hoa, Khmer and French languages in Vietnamese language.

In terms of writing system, Chinese language was used in official documents for the entire feudal period. As Chinese was used as a tool to disseminate Confucianism, it was often called Confucian writing or writing of Confucian deities. The acculturation of Han culture and Confucianism in the field of language took place together with Vietnamization of non-native writings. At the time of Trần Dynasty, Nôm writing - a Chinese derivative writing - was created to disseminate folk culture and the Confucian

orthodox culture as well. By the early 20th century, together with the Duy Tân – Đông Du Movement, *Quốc ngữ* writing (national language), which was initially formed in the 18th century, developed further and became a common writing of all the people. It played a very significant role in disseminating new thinking and knowledge to get away from Confucianism.

Thus, for the 2000-year period in contact with Han culture, Confucianism did cause serious impacts on Vietnamese social life, particularly during the Later Lê Dynasty (1428 - 1527) and the Nguyễn Dynasty Early Period (1802 - 1883). The two areas influenced most by Han culture and Confucianism were cultural actors and spiritual culture. For cultural actors, Confucianism mainly caused impacts on the upper social classes and strata; whereas, it did not take root deeply in the lower social classes and strata. For spiritually cultural life, Confucianism made a contribution into formation of the orthodox culture, but it could not replace the folk culture that was inherently attached with the ethnic consciousness and constituted the core of the ethnic culture. This means that Confucianism divided the superstructure of Vietnamese society into two contradictory parts, including the Confucian orthodox culture and the native folk culture. These two cultures amalgamated with each other and caused mutual influence on each other as well. In addition, Confucianism was partly Vietnamized in Vietnam, so it is different from Confucianism in China. In the meanwhile, the folk culture was partly Confucianized. Many customs originated

from China and from Vietnam existed at the same time. Thus, it would be a serious mistake, if we thought or described Vietnamese culture as a copy of Han culture.

Indeed, influence of Confucianism and Han culture on Vietnamese culture ended by the late 19th century. For the contemporary Vietnamese culture, Confucianism is no longer viewed as an official ideology or religion, but there are just some Confucian remnants left in several customs and rituals in Vietnam.

3. Major negative impacts of Confucianism on Vietnamese culture

Besides “contributions”, of which the most obvious is that Vietnamese spiritual culture at the medieval time was Sinicized considerably, Confucianism caused direct and indirect damage to Vietnamese traditional culture. Damage was not only caused to the spiritual cultural area, but it was also caused to the tangible culture of Vietnam.

Firstly, it was the damage in education. At the time under domination by the Ming invaders (1407 - 1428), the independence of Đại Việt was abolished and all cultural heritages from the Lý – Trần Dynasties were destroyed severely; the system of neo-Confucian education was imposed on scholars in Đại Việt. By the early 15th century, there were no Confucian scholars of the Ming Dynasty. Consequently, Confucian scholars venerated most at that time were scholars of the Song Dynasty (neo-Confucianism) with great representatives such as Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, Cheng Hao, Cheng Yi, Zhi Xi... After King Lê Thái To seized the national independence, there were just crumbs of cultural heritages from the Lý – Trần

Dynasties left. As a result, education at the Later Lê Dynasty had to rely on neo-Confucian literature. After the Nguyễn Dynasty ruled the country, they found neo-Confucian viewpoints useful for its governance. The neo-Confucian education was consequently venerated as an object of monolatry; neo-Confucian books, such as *San Zi Jing (Three Character Classic)*, *Mingdao jia xun (Ming Taoist Training)*, *Sizhu (Four books)*, *Wujing (Five Books Classic)*..., were widely taught and disseminated. For the content of education at that time, social knowledge and rules of conduct drawn from another culture that existed hundreds or thousands years ago were viewed as gold standards for thinking and treatment of Vietnamese people, regardless of ethnic differences and social changes. Such a content of education was even worse than the knowledge and skills Confucius used to teach his students through the *Classic of Poetry (Yi, Shi, Shu, Li, Le, Chungqiu – i.e. Interpretation, Poetry, Book, Ritual, Music, Spring and Autumn)* and the *Liuyi or the Six Arts (Rituals, Music, Riding, Archery, Writing, and Calculation)*. The key learning method was exegesis and bookishness (poetry composition and hackneyed writing). It is a really dogmatic and frivolous learning method, which was just helpful in decoration of intellectual appearance but was helpless for human society.

According to Trần Trọng Kim, “at the time of the Lý and Trần Dynasties, the way of learning in our country followed the Confucian method of exegesis from the Han and Tang Dynasties. From the time of the Lê Dynasty, we followed the neo-

Confucian educational model, using the Cheng – Zhou books as standards. Thus, we just hovered around the two ways of learning, but we could not get over them and could not set up any new theories”; “For the entire period covering many dynasties such as the Lê Dynasty, the Mạc Dynasty, the Later Lê Dynasty, the Later Lê Warlord Period, and the Nguyễn Dynasty, Confucian learning seemed to be flourishing, but our scholars often had a very serious weakness; most of them just learned literature for the sake of passing examinations; very few scholars obtained profound knowledge of Confucianism in order to find out great principles or create new valuable theories like Chinese scholars. It was a shortcoming of our scholars, indeed”.

According to Đào Duy Anh, “talking about feudal intellectuals at the Lê Dynasty, Lê Quý Đôn roughly argued that after a troubled period, national independence was restored, but there were very few Confucian scholars. At the time of Hồng Đức (the Later Lê Early Period) competition examinations were expanded, but men of letters were inclined to impractical literature. At the time of Đoan Khánh, men of letters became very decadent”. King Minh Mạng used to make a comment on the examination-conscious learning as below: “The system of competition examinations have made people get misunderstanding for a long time. Inherently, literature does not have to follow any certain principles, but those who do literary work are now sticklers for trite and hollow styles, showing off each other; each group gives prominence to its own method and dignity. With such a learning

way, certainly there will be fewer and fewer talented people”. Looking at those comments, we can imagine how Confucian scholars became deteriorated at the time of the Lê and the Nguyễn Dynasties. Even at the time of monolatry for Confucianism in Vietnam, Confucian education was so shamelessly base. The main reason is the very system of competition examinations and the neo-Confucian theories, which deprived of vitality and made education worse and worse.

Since the human training was quite erroneous at the beginning, most of the State mandarins, who were the very products of such an educational system, were completely useless. New mandarins appointed from examinations had to do nothing, except for signing administrative documents prepared and submitted by professional secretary staff. Promoting, downgrading, dismissing, and transferring State mandarins did not cause any influence on the local administrative system and ministries as well, as there was an apparatus of secretary staff taking care of it. In the royal court, state affairs were managed by the King and high-ranking mandarins. It is the nature and the very dark side of the Confucian educational achievements and mandarin recruitment, which used to be glorified by Confucian-supporting people. In the history of feudal education, Nghệ Tĩnh, Quảng Bình, and Quảng Nam Provinces were traditionally popular places for education and graduation. Nghệ Tĩnh, a sacred area with a lot of preeminent people and traditional fondness for learning, is where many national heroes were produced. It is also the very place that provided “Nghệ

Tĩnh scholars” for other provinces. In the meanwhile, Quảng Bình was well-known for “8 famous villages”, including Lê Sơn, La Hà, Cảnh Dương, Thổ Ngọa, Văn La, Võ Xá, Cổ Hiền, and Kim Nại, where many people of great learning came from. Quảng Nam was famous for “Wufeng Qi Fei” (Five phoenixes take off together; i.e. 5 fellow-country men passed high examinations at the same time). This province also produced a lot of talented and righteous people for the country. The “traditional fondness for learning”, however, just created Confucian scholars and mandarins, who were good at poetry but could not do anything useful for national economy and people’s livelihood. Although some of them achieved great benefits for the nation, owing to what they learned from the traditional culture but not the system of bookish competition examinations (One of the examples is Nguyễn Công Trứ, a scholar from Hà Tĩnh Province. He was not only a talented military general, who commanded troops against rebellions, but he was also an eminent economist, who conducted reclaiming work towards the sea in Kim Sơn and Tiền Hải etc.)

In the political terms, the Confucian viewpoint of loyalty to the king made a lot of Confucian scholars and people devote life to protect or restore the throne for parasitic or puppet kings. Instead of making the nation prosperous and united, those kings made the State degraded, the country troubled, and people miserable. Mạc Đăng Dung, a founder of the Mạc Dynasty, killed the king to usurp the throne. After losing the country, he raised the troops in

rebellion. Yet, he was supported by many people to reset up the royal dynasty in Cao Bằng. Nguyễn Kim appointed Lê Duy Ninh, an incompetent wanderer, to the throne as King Lê Trang Tông, because he was a relative of the Lê Dynasty. Trịnh Tùng and his children killed kings of the Lê Dynasty. However, they did not usurp the throne officially. In fact, they were not afraid of the prestige of the Lê kings, but they were afraid of the viewpoint of loyalty that was profoundly disseminated in the people in Tonkin (Đàng Ngoài – North Vietnam). Nguyễn Gia Long unified the country, ending long-lasting civil wars. However, many people still raised rebellions for the sake of restoring the Lê Dynasty, causing a lot of troubles for the people in the North. More deplorably, silly loyal people or those who took advantage of the loyalty threw away the sense of shame and national pride to become lackeys for the enemies, bringing calamities to the country and the people. Lê Chiêu Thống was thought to “set a fox to keep the geese”, but he still remained supported by courtiers and royal members. Đồng Khánh, Khải Định, and Bảo Đại were just puppet kings, but a lot of courtiers kept loyalty to them, although they clearly realized that it also meant they were loyal to the French colonial government. In the past, there was a popular saying disseminated by Confucian scholars: “The King says a subject must die, the subject will be considered disloyal, if he/she does not die. The father judges a child must die, the child will be considered undutiful, if he does not die”. On the whole, all behavioral and moral standards that a

man of honor must have are less important than the unconditional loyalty.

In the economic terms, the monolatry of Confucianism restrained economic development in Vietnam, weakening internal forces and leading to the loss of the country. Due to the Confucian ideology, some jobs were despised, although they were really necessary and useful for society and people such as singers, dancers, and traders etc. Those, who worked as singers (for example, a singer of *tuồng, chèo, ca trù, and hát bội*) were disdained with a proverb: “it’s worthless to be a singer”; i.e. the job of singing was not listed in four categories of people, including: intellectuals, peasants, workers, and traders, according to the Confucian viewpoints. Those, who did a trading job, were also despised, because it was listed as the lowest among the four categories of people. That’s why there was a story about Đào Duy Từ, a well-known scholar in Vietnam. He was forbidden to take examinations, because he came from a family of a singer. As a result, he had to move to Cochin-chine (*Đàng Trong*) to set up a career, blaming the Nguyễn Lord for paying too much attention to doing business (it was a job of a dealer) and advising him to take care of national affairs as a clear-sighted king. During the civil war between Tonkin and Cochin-chine, however, the governments of both parts implemented the free-trade policy due to the demand for external resources. Therefore, some port towns such as Phố Hiến, Hội An, Nông Nại Great Town, Mỹ Tho Great Town, Sài Gòn, and Hà Tiên were established. At the time of the Nguyễn Dynasty, after the country

was united, the Confucian ideology gained complete domination. Consequently, some policies such as the policy on “highly appreciating agriculture but minimizing trade” or “the close-door policy” were promulgated, restraining the country in poverty and backwardness. This is one of the causes for the loss of our country to the French colonial government afterwards.

In the social terms, the Confucian viewpoint of inequality trampled on women. The “moral standards” imposed by Confucianism on women were the three obediences (according to which women have to obey her father as a daughter, her husband as a wife, and her sons in widowhood) and four virtues (including morality, proper speech, modest manner, and diligent work). All of those standards enabled women to undertake well the task of serving men. Furthermore, the system of Confucian education and examinations was provided for only men; almost all 100% of women could not take part in it; they could get only education from family and folk culture; very few of them were literate and very few could learn knowledge from the Confucian education. For the entire medieval time, therefore, all national as well as village activities were carried out by men. The only task undertaken by women was to do housework; they were sometimes overloaded with some other things, such as small trade or farming work. Yet, their position at home and in society was not improved at all.

In terms of external relations, the Confucian ideology distorted Vietnamese people’s view towards Chinese culture as well as cultures of neighboring ethnic groups.

Vietnamese scholars often had inferiority complex towards Chinese culture, forgetting their origin; whereas, they had a patronizing behavior towards local cultures. Although a part of scholars remained conscious of the national origin, another part of scholars tended to identify Vietnamese national origin the same as the origin of Han people, considering that Vietnamese culture had been “educated” through Han culture. For those scholars, “civilization” means the same as Chinese culture. Due to such an error in the viewpoint, they adapted Vietnamese legends to make them more familiar to the origin of Han people (the legend on Hồng Bàng family name). They considered Vietnamese language and Nôm writing as “vulgar tricks”, while highly respecting Han language as well as all documents in Han language (this is true for all dynasties, except for the Hồ Dynasty and the Tây Sơn Dynasty). They looked down on native customs, while trying to imitating Chinese culture (King Minh Mạng forbade women in the North from wearing skirts, because he wanted them to wear trousers like Han women). They considered ethnic groups, which hadn’t been Sinicized, as “barbarous” and it was, therefore, necessary to educate them so that they would be similar to Han people (this was the most obvious at the time of King Minh Mạng).

For all the above-mentioned reasons, the more significant Confucianism was considered, the weaker Vietnam became and the more regressive Vietnamese culture was kept. More deplorably, when we confronted a materially outstanding civilization from the West and the risk of losing the country

became very serious, Confucian faithful scholars still used Confucian “transcendent” viewpoints to sneer at “the Western” and refuse proposals of renovation. Encountering the danger of losing the country, Confucianism was completely powerless and droopy. After Vietnam became a colony under the domination of the French government, Confucianism remained as garbage from the past, but it was still used by the semi-feudal colonial regime to enslave the people. By the early 20th century, the Duy Tân – Đông Du Movement initiated by intellectuals of Confucian and Western studies, officially ended the fate of Confucianism in Vietnam, opening a new period for the Western acculturation and international cultural integration.

4. Conclusion

Confucianism made a considerable part of Vietnamese spiritual culture Sinicized at the medieval time. It caused impacts on both spiritual and material cultural aspects of Vietnamese people. With the dark side, it resulted in serious damage to Vietnamese culture. In the past, Confucianism was completely unnecessary for Vietnamese culture in many places and for many periods. At present, Confucianism is more unnecessary for Vietnamese culture. To form moral standards for Vietnamese people at the new period, we need to rely on theoretical grounds and combination of traditional and modern spiritual values. For traditional spiritual values, it is essential to study Vietnamese native values, instead of digging up Confucianism as some xenophiles and nostalgic people used to do. Quang Đạm, a researcher with profound learning, presented the following comment: “In

conclusion, Confucian principles often restrained social development in our country, keeping us at a lower position. In the scope of Confucian world, there is no way better than to go back to the Zhou and the Tang Dynasties. In the meanwhile, the Vietnamese tradition on national independence and legitimate right to life has incessantly shown its quintessence and identities that can never be removed by any influence. The ruling system by Han invaders and the past feudal dynasties did venerate Confucianism, while preventing development of Vietnamese tradition. The quintessence and mettle of Vietnamese nation, however, always show an everlasting vitality in all situations”.

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