

Chapter 3

Traditional Concepts on “Sustainability” in Vietnamese Culture and Its Impacts on Forming Modern Values of Sustainable Development



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Abstract Vietnam is an agricultural country characterized by wet-rice civilization, and the livelihood of its people mainly depends on the nature. Due to geopolitical characteristics, Vietnam had to encounter unceasingly wars and assert their identity to resist against the Sinicization and Westernization. Does the aforementioned context lead to the fact that “sustainability” is considered as an objective or a value of the Vietnamese after thousand years of national construction and protection? Does the concept of “sustainability” in Vietnamese culture has the same meaning as “sustainability” in the concept “sustainable development,” which was newly brought into Vietnam, how does it impact on the shaping of modern values of “sustainable development”? The article applies generalization and “Yi-ology” as the two main methods to answer these questions; in addition, contextual analysis method and comparison are also employed to concretize conclusions inferred via the methods of “Yi-ology” and generalization. Thereby, the paper discovers certain distinctions between the traditional concept of “sustainability” and modern value of “sustainable development” imported to Vietnam, and the process of shaping modern values of “sustainable development” in the country, on one hand, needs to lean on, on the other hand, has to struggle to be liberated from the ties of tradition.

Keywords Sustainability · Traditional culture · Value · Sustainable development

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1 Introduction

After decades of constant war and confrontation with the postwar socioeconomic crisis, Vietnam implemented an open-door policy, shifted to a market-based operating economy. The new mechanism unleashed the longing for riches and economic resources which had long been constrained, but the fast-growing economy also contributed to a more or less materialistic society, a society of luxuriation, chasing economic growth, ignoring moral values, and destroying the environment. This is a problem of Vietnam and also the problem went through by many other countries in the world when overheated economy has left seriously social, cultural, and environmental consequences. The concept of “sustainable development” appears in the Brundtland Report and is defined as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*” (The World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). However, when “sustainable development” is introduced into the life of each member state, this concept will be welcomed in various ways, depending on not only the political viewpoint, the policy system, the laws of each country but also on its traditional culture. “Tradition - contains the inherent elements of culture and society, embodying the code of conduct, ideological standards, customs, habits, lifestyles and behaviors of a shaped community of people in history, becoming stable and being passed down from generation to generation and being preserved for a long time” (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2002). Traditional culture with the system of values and negative characters is formed and preserved for a long time, shaping psychological factors, personality, and national identity, which can be easily accepted but can also exclude policies, new values from the outside being brought for the transplant due to the conservativeness, obsolescence in the new context, not being adjusted to adapt to the changes of the times. Traditional culture is not only valuable but also intertwined negative characters, which are two sides of a problem. On the other hand, placed in the movement and development of culture, at this time and some contexts, some conceptions and behaviors are considered to be valuable but at other time, in different contexts, such conceptions and behaviors become worthless. Up to now, there have been many valuable studies about culture, values, and negative characters in Vietnamese culture. Therefore, the article is devoted to discussing these traditional factors, which concept is valuable and negative for Vietnam today, upon the receipt of the policy of “sustainable development.” The article defines “counterpart factors” of the Vietnamese to receive “sustainable development” policy to an extent, traditional conception of Vietnamese people of sustainability, and whether the concept of “sustainability” in Vietnamese culture is synonymous with “sustainability” in sustainable development introduced by the United Nations. How do values and negative characters in traditional culture negatively and positively impact the formation of modern values of sustainable development?

2 Methodology

In responding to the aforesaid research questions, the context of Vietnam as a specific nation and country is defined. This context includes the geographical context, conditions of the nature and soil related to the geographical context, which in turn leads to social characteristics, historical problems decided by geopolitical factors. This context has been further referred to the villages namely production community, community of people who make ends meet and cultural communities of the Vietnamese. The contextual method is used to personalize Vietnamese conventional way of thinking, the national consciousness of Vietnamese nationals as well as to detail the habits, personalities, and traditional conceptions that form Vietnamese people’s viewpoints in the past. The linguistic approach is also set out to identify traditional concepts through the system of proverbs that express the conclusions, life experiences of people in the country through sentences, and phrases with timbre and rhymes. Through these traditional concepts, the generalization methodology is used to identify groups of values that are close to sustainability, namely stability, harmonization as well as to identify negative characters, such as bad habits of giving preference to appearance; short-term way of thinking, which are contrary to intrinsic value; and the sustainability in Vietnamese culture itself. The conflicts between values and negative characters and the complicated and confusing interchanges and conversions in Vietnamese psychology and, the mutual interaction between the state’s social management policies and society and the impacts of socio-culture to the implementation of state policies, etc., are interpreted by Yi-ological method, putting the reviewed subjects in the movement of Yin and Yang concept which is concurrently existing and reciprocal.

After clarifying the concept, values in traditional Vietnamese culture in terms of sustainability and adjacency to sustainability, the article uses comparative methodology to identify the similarities and disparities between the sustainability in traditional Vietnamese culture and sustainable values derived from sustainable development from the outside world which have been introduced to Vietnam recently. However, sustainable development with in-depth professional issues from an economic, sociological, or environmental perspective is not the object of this paper. The article only approaches “sustainable development” with the definition of The Brundtland Commissions¹ as well as the concretization of this policy of Vietnamese Government through specific objectives and tasks to compare it with the conceptions, values in Vietnamese culture and tradition.

The generalization method continues to be used to identify the problems of contemporary Vietnamese society that arise from the reservation and transformation processes of traditional culture and are promoting and hindering the policy of “sustainable development” from being realized in Vietnamese social life.

¹The definition of The Brundtland Commissions is one of the most commonly used definitions with pillars and criteria for evaluating sustainable development.

3 Results

3.1 Identifying “Sustainability” in Vietnamese Tradition and Culture

The current geographical position of Vietnam stretches along the meridian from the North to the South, associated with the history of the march to the South, starting from the North of Dai Viet kingdom, through the Central region, associated with the territory of Champa kingdom (Champa) and down to the south where there was a fertile land - part of the Kingdom of Funan and surrounding areas in the southern tip of the Indochina peninsula whose sovereignty had yet to be claimed; bordering the sea to the east, China to the North, leaning against the Truong Son mountain range to the west like a natural rampart. Over one thousand years since independence in 938, Vietnamese national history was associated with wars with feudal Chinese states from the North and wars with other big countries in the twentieth century. “A remarkable feature of Vietnamese history is that the anti-invasion appeared many times with high frequency, for a long time and in the fierce conditions of a small country, it must resist the aggression of a big country and fighting against foreign aggression is not only their own ends but a means to achieve a higher end than independence and peace and national construction” (Phan, 1998). In addition, Vietnamese history witnessed a nearly 500-year period starting from the end of the sixteenth century with constant civil wars between feudal groups located in geographical areas along the length of the country and with problems of division and reunification.² It is such geographic and historical characteristics that created the spirit of a Vietnamese nation who always faced wars and thus always desires peace and stability. The status of Vietnam is a small country in the war fighting against big ones not for competition and territory expansion. The victory of Vietnam in the wars with the major countries was the victory in the battle of self-defense, repelling invasion intention of major countries; therefore, almost after each war, the Vietnamese were humble, tolerant, keeping peace with big countries with the highest goal of long-term peace and stability.³ On the other hand, in peacetime, the policy of ruling the country of dynasties and political regimes also showed harmony and flexibility with the people, attached importance to the people, took civilians as the foundation,

²From the middle of the sixteenth century, the Le dynasty and the Mac forces competed for power, forming the South–North dynasties, followed by a war between the feudal corporations Trinh and Nguyen that took the Gianh river as the dividing line between Dang Trong-Dang Ngoai lasted until the Tay Son dynasty and was unified only when the Nguyen Dynasty entered the political arena at the end of the eighteenth century. When the French came to Vietnam, the French policy of “Divide to govern” established different political regimes in Tonkin, Annam, and Cochinchina; the twentieth century saw the separation of the country under the Geneva agreement into two South–North regions at the 17th parallel until 1975.

³The postwar diplomatic behaviors of the Tran Dynasty after defeating the Yuan Mong army, the Le Dynasty after the defeat of the Ming Dynasty, and Quang Trung troops after the victory of the Qing Dynasty showed this flexible and peaceful policy.

decreased the pressure imposed on people, as Hung Dao Dai Vuong Tran Quoc Tuan said in 1300: “In peace time, we have to decrease the pressure imposed on people to make deep-rooted successive plans. That is the best policy to defend the country” (Le, 1967). Compared with the history of neighboring countries such as China or the Khmer, it is clear that even though the strong citizen-friendly policy of Dai Viet’s rule having its original purpose of national defense: “...fight against the Chinese colonialists and against the expansion of China, the ruling class of Vietnam - the representative of our nation at that time - must try to escape from the Chinese influence deeply rooted in the people and people to create their own bravery. To do so, we must be close to the people, get to know the people, empower the people, limit the authoritarian tyranny, flexibly combine the state concentration and the village democracy, the State and the society, the official (orthodox) and the folk, the exogenous and the endogenous, the traditional reservation and the innovation...” (Tran, 2000), but it still contributed to the harmonization of Vietnamese society and to the creation of a Vietnamese national identity.

In terms of economy and mode of production, Vietnam’s economy is a farming agricultural economy that mainly cultivates wet rice along the river basins. Unlike cereal farming which is not much dependent on water sources and nomadic farming which is associated with the shift from one place to another, the wet-rice economy depends on water and irrigation system, requires the stability in terms of the production location, living place of residents, and requires a particularly high demand for water treatment by community collaboration. This has formed a wet-rice civilization with high stability in terms of residence, production location, mode of production, and daily activities of the residents. Vietnamese society was organized into villages and communes, where groups of residents resided, closely associated with the life of each individual for the fulfillment of the demand for water management, natural disaster prevention,⁴ and self-defense. The villages acted as autonomous and self-governing institutions - with the governance apparatus and village conventions and rules - the social norms of the village are highly accepted by the State: “Vietnamese village convention - a legal cultural product bearing the characteristics of the history of social struggle and natural struggle for thousands of years of the Vietnamese nation” (Le, 1998). Because the northern colonial government was unable to intervene too deeply in local community of the Vietnamese during more than a thousand years of domination, this model of community organization was typical and formed “village culture” of Vietnamese people; on the other hand, it is these autonomous villages that help Vietnamese people to preserve their local cultural values against the risk of assimilation.

Regarding psychology and lifestyle, because of the aforesaid natural–social characteristics, Vietnamese people’s characteristics are similar to sustainability. These are the preference for stability (unwillingness to change) and harmony.

⁴Vietnamese people have to coexist and gradually improve nature with embankment and dyke maintenance because the main area of residence is next to large rivers flowing into the sea or short, steep rivers, sea embankment to reclaim land.

Vietnamese people tend to prefer stability in the way that their living space remains unchanged and geographically stable and farming, cultivation activities and community cultural activities are conducted within villages. Vietnamese people stick together in their villages and consider them as their own small universe. Not many people leave their village, their homeland for another village, or somewhere else.⁵ The stability is also reflected in the preservation of traditional production method, the wet-rice agriculture production method has been lasting since the dawn of forming the nation. Industrial production only started upon the arrival of the French in Vietnam when only a part of the population was literally industrial workers, while before that, only a part of the population was doing handicraft in craft villages and urban areas. In Vietnamese people's view, the concept of stability meant "building a house – getting married with a woman – buying a buffalo" ("lam nha – lay vo – tau trau"), which represented the stability in residence ("building a house"), family life ("get married"), and the way to make ends meet ("buying a buffalo" – because buffalo was a means of production), "Buffalo is the opening of a business" ("con trau la dau co nghiep"). The way to make ends meet was confined in the space of survival and the space of survival is the living space.

The preference for harmony of Vietnamese people comes from the "yin and yang" philosophy which "originates from the Southeast Asia, the only place in the world where wet-rice farming was born and people lived on such farming throughout the history" (Tran, 2016), and reproduction belief which promotes the combination of "yin and yang", male and female, parents, the sun and the moon, etc., phenomena and things are interpreted in the "yin and yang" methodology, which looks for contradictory objects, classifies and groups them into "yin" and "yang", in order to solve life's problems by putting events, things in the "yin" group with those in the "yang" group to form contradictory pairs, to find the interferences, harmony, balance between them; interference and harmony are the basis for proliferation and balance is the basis for stability. From eating, dressing, building houses to reproduction, giving birth, getting married, treating diseases, prescription to funeral, the harmony and balance of "yin" and "yang" are always desired. It is the state of harmony and "yin"–"yang" balance that leads to a moderate, harmonious, and non-extreme attitude toward life.

From the aforesaid analysis of values that resemble sustainability and from (geographical, historical, environmental, social) context, the sustainability in Vietnamese value system and in Vietnamese society can be more specifically identified as follows: First, it is reflected through the spirit, national aspiration for peace, long-term stability, no war, and no destruction caused by natural disasters. In other words, from the geopolitical and geo-economic perspective, it can be seen that sustainability is an ideal value in the minds of Vietnamese people, originating from their own demand for peace and stability. Second, sustainability is reflected through the

⁵ Although a significant part of the people followed Lord Nguyen to the South from the end of the sixteenth century, this process of "emigration" was also a process of reclaiming a long and vast realm. Although the South has many adjustments in customs and practices to suit the new living conditions, the inhabitants of new land still has the roots and essence of Vietnamese people.

political ideology of decreasing the pressure imposed on people, the harmonious relationship between the State and the people in which the State did not intervene too deeply into village communities and their domestic policies, which brought about a society without major conflict among communities caused by religious, ethnic, and regional conflicts. Last but not least, the sustainability is reflected through the preference for stability and love of harmony of Vietnamese farmers, those who created Vietnamese cultural identity, stemming from the psychosocial characteristics of residents in the wet-rice agriculture in villages (Fig. 3.1).

However, when looking back at history, there was not much theoretical knowledge about “sustainability” in the history of Vietnamese ideology. Like other countries and ethnicities in the world, Vietnamese nationals also thought of development but the question how “sustainable” is in sustainable “development” was not well defined. In the mind of Vietnamese people, stability is the basis for sustainability and for development. In order to reach sustainability, stability must be achieved. In order to develop, stability must be achieved. In other words, stability is a precondition for the purpose of obtaining sustainability and development. Stability means the safety in terms of security, way of making a living, family emotion, and the engagement with the society. Without stability, the conditions to meet these needs will be threatened. Development goes after stability. For individuals, families, generations, “development” is understood as “prosperity,” which means the promotion

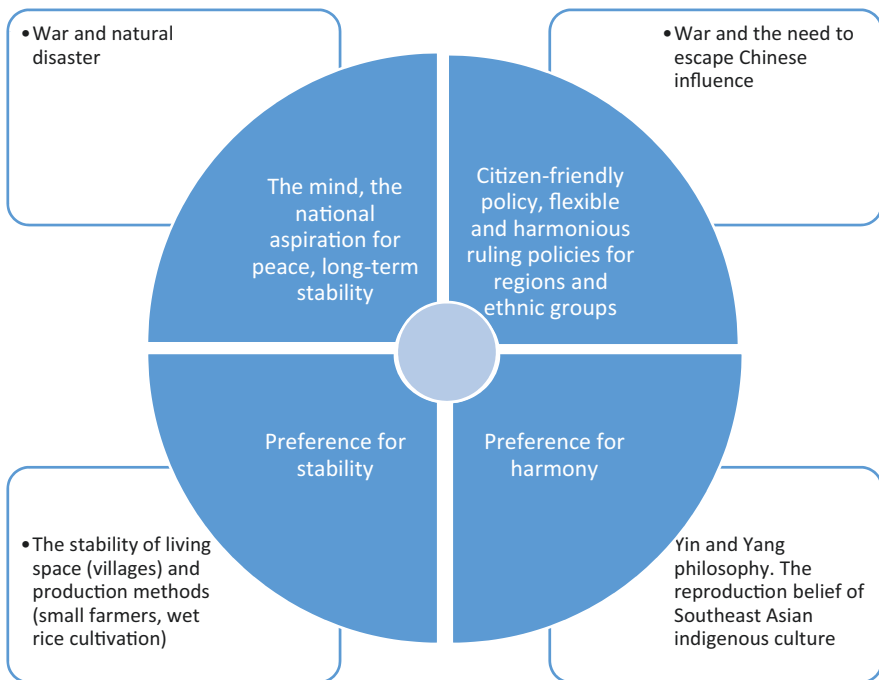


Fig. 3.1 Traditional Vietnamese cultural factors shaping sustainability

in career path as officials, in privileges, the increase in production, land, houses, and better success and prosperity gained by the next generations compared with the previous ones. At a national level, Vietnamese feudal dynasties wanted to build a developed society, but the model of a sustainably developed society was not specific. A peaceful and prosperous society envisioned by Confucianists was even the model of a society that was more or less nostalgic, ambiguous, and mythical as one in the Yao and Shun dynasties in Chinese ancient culture. The lack of a concept of development of sustainability, in particular, and the lack of knowledge about many fields, in general, were a limitation of Vietnamese people. Vietnamese people are “more intuitive than logical” (Dao, 2000), making it unlikely for policies to be long-term, consistent and sustainable.

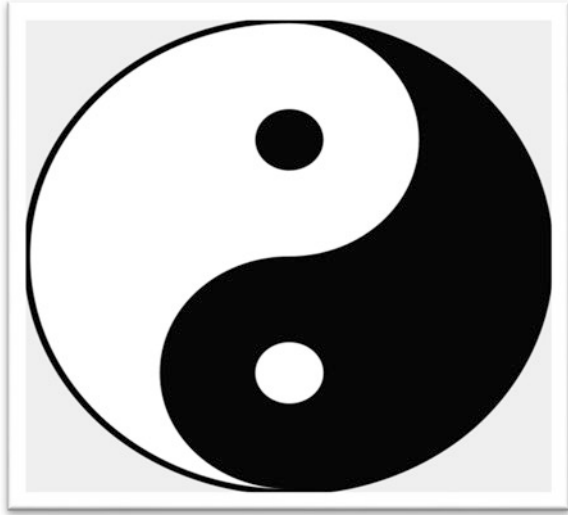
Lacking the theory of sustainable development, Vietnamese people even lacked the motivation for sustainable development. In traditional Vietnamese culture, individuals and their own development (which was the driving force of community development) have not been properly recognized and only people of the community may be appreciated. “Only as a member of the community, not as an individual, people have little value. That value is associated with his role in the community and in society. Before being a Jack, a Mango, he had to be a farmer, a teacher, a worker or a merchant from one village or another. In the context of the community, people only have the right to choose different shades of the same living spectrum.” (Do, 2005). The need to unite individuals to fight against invaders and to conquer the nature has urged people to form community, those who possessed common nature of the community and lived for the community’s sake. Individualism was even suppressed and the motivation for community development from a personal perspective was difficult to be activated. Because stability is associated with safety and individual people depend on the community, individuals do not have opportunities for development and their innovation and creativity are eliminated. “Society goes up mostly based on differences with the community. If everyone shares the same lifestyle, way of thinking and feeling, how can social breakthrough and improvement happen? Our country is still poor partly because the Vietnamese tend to be more community-oriented, so individualism tends to be limited. The personality is less appreciated by residents of the wet-rice culture.” (Bui, 2006). Small-scale business and small-scale handicraft production industry are also the results of small-scale agricultural production, small businesses, which stably happened in each village with high autonomy and separation from others. The “small and medium” scale is suitable with material resources and weak theoretical thinking of Vietnamese people. The preference for stability is associated with that for harmony, so Vietnamese people do not like to make some breakthroughs, run big business, think big, erase the old, build the new and everything should happen in an order, in the philosophy expressed in the Vietnamese proverb: “nang nhát chat bi” (it means that “many a little makes a mickle”).

The mode of small-scale agricultural production also resulted in selfishness, “ruong ai nguoi nay dap bo” (farmers care about their own fields). When people run after their personal benefits, the common good is forgotten and jeopardized, which leads to the way of life similar to an English proverb: “everybody’s business is

nobody’s business” (in Vietnamese ones: “cha chung khong ai khoc” (people do not cry for their common father)), “lam vai khong ai dong cua chua” (no one close his pagoda gate if there are so many monks). For common properties (from common living space to landscape, ecological environment, natural resources), the awareness of preservation and protection is low because people do not consider those properties their own belongings, thus assume no personal responsibility for any consequences, like the meaning of “flood kills all” (“lut thi lut ca lang”). The chase after personal interests is the key to explain why Vietnamese people have no awareness of environmental protection due to their thinking (considering environment is public and movable property and taking advantage of the common to gain personal interests without care about sacrificing their personal benefits for the common good), besides their unawareness. The pursuit of personal small interests will inevitably lead to conflicts with other individuals and the desire to be superior to others. Because people want to be superior to others and chase after personal benefits concurrently, the desire of superiority is manifested in external and vain criteria such as title, degree, award, and most dangerously, in the focus on appearance rather than content, leading to the obsession of achievement and the tendency of chasing after trends. When people run after their own benefits, it leads to the conflicts with others and the selfish attitude toward benefits. Such attitude is reflected in various Vietnamese proverbs: “den nha ai nha nay rang” (light is only shed within its owner’s house), “trau ta an co dong ta” (buffaloes feed on their own grass fields), “an cay nao rao cay ay” (who fences the tree has the right to eat fruits), “trau buoc ghet trau an” (the chained buffalo hates the fed one), and “con ga tuc nhau tieng gay” (cocks envy each other in terms of their crowing sounds); besides personal interests, there are also selfish group benefits such as “trong lang nao lang ay danh, thanh lang nao lang ay tho” (each village strikes its own drum and worships its own saint).

Therefore, besides positive values and those close to sustainability, there are also many negative characters and negative values. Vietnamese people in the traditional culture uphold community values, the ones that create solidarity among individuals and the strength against invaders, natural disasters, and the stability of the community but that also suppresses personal character, the new, breakthroughs and motivation for development. Personality is suppressed but selfishness arises due to the mode of small-scale production and reliance on the community, due to community responsibility, not personal responsibility. It is the sense of community of Vietnamese people, which dignifies community values, that brings about personal interests, group interests, selfishness, and internal separation. However, when facing common risks (invasion, natural disaster), Vietnamese people give up their personal benefits to unite and to overcome such risks. However, when the threat of common interests no longer exists, people tend to think for their own sake. These are contradictory examples belonging to the two categories of “yin” and “yang,” both moving (correlating) and standing still (existing); but there is “yin” in “yang” and there is also “yang” in “yin.” When “yin” in “yang” increases, “yang” decreases and “yin” increases, when “yang” decline to a certain level, “yang” in “yin” will increase, leading to a decrease in “yin.” The Yi-ological method express values and negative characters approaching sustainability of Vietnamese people in the following figure (Fig. 3.2).

Fig. 3.2 Values and negative characters of sustainability which are both reciprocal and existing in village culture, small agriculture according to “yin and yang” principle



3.2 “Sustainability” in Sustainable Development: The Origin and Acculturation to Vietnam

In modern society with internationalization and globalization, the concept of “sustainable development” from the outside world has also been introduced into Vietnam. In 1980, IUCN – in partnership with the UN Environment Program (UNEP) and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) released the term “sustainable development” in the *World Conservation Strategy*, despite certain limitations (Seghezzeo, 2009), contributed to define the concept and shaped the global conservation and sustainable development agenda with Sect. 20 Toward sustainable development of the Strategy (IUCN et al., 1980). In 1987, “The Brundtland Report focused primarily on the needs and interests of humans, and was concerned with securing a global equity for future generations by redistributing resources toward poorer nations to encourage their economic growth in order to enable all human beings to achieve their basic needs. The report expressed the belief that social equity, economic growth and environmental maintenance were simultaneously possible, thus highlighting the three fundamental components of sustainable development, the environment, the economy, and society, which later became known as the triple bottom line. The report discussed the need to apply integrated, sustainable solutions to a broad range of problems related to population, agriculture and food security, biodiversity, energy choices, industry, and more” (Pisani, 2016). Today, sustainability is a qualitative feature of “sustainable development” recognized with the harmonization and balance of three key factors namely society, economy, and environment. Sustainable development is commonly recognized and simplified as a development model where economic growth is parallel to social justice and environmental protection.

“Sustainability,” linguistically, is understood as a sustainable state (Sustainability is the ability to exist continuously, the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level). In terms of value, if sustainability is understood as a value (value is the nature of the object that is rated by the subject as positive in a comparative relationship between this object and other objects of the same type and is located in a specific space and time), sustainability is understood as a positive nature of development based on the comparison with other unsustainable development models, defined in a broad extent (with three pillars namely economy – society – environment) and in an enduring period. The sustainability in sustainable development directs toward the harmony between individuals and the communities, between people and the nature, the intrinsic equality of distribution, bringing added value to human development including material values as well as spiritual ones. Within each pillar, sustainable development is interpreted and assessed through the following criteria:

Firstly, economic sustainable development. Economic sustainability requires common prosperity for all, not only focusing on profitability for a few, within the permissible limits of the ecosystem nor violating the basic rights of human. The right to use natural resources for economic activities is equally shared. The economy that is considered sustainable is the one with high GDP growth and GDP per capita. The proportion of industry and services is higher than that of agriculture in GDP structure. Economic growth must be a highly efficient growth and it does not accept the achievement of growth at all costs.⁶

Secondly, social sustainable development. Social sustainability focuses on equality and society always needs to create favorable conditions for human development (human development index (HDI) is the highest criteria of social development) and strive to give everyone the opportunity to develop their potential and provide an acceptable living condition. Social sustainability is the guarantee of harmonious social life. There is equality among social strata and gender equality; the gap of living conditions among regions is not large in terms of per capita income, intellectual level, education, health, life expectancy, social welfare, enjoyment of culture, and civilization.⁷

Thirdly, environmentally sustainable development. Environmental sustainability means the proper use of environmental factors, natural conditions, rational exploitation and use of natural resources, protection of environment and quality

⁶The sustainable development in terms of economics is often expressed through the following common criteria: Firstly, gradually reducing energy and other resources consumption through saving and lifestyle changes; Secondly, changing consumption needs in order not to harm biodiversity and the environment; Thirdly, equality in access to resources, living standards, health services, and education; Fourthly, eliminating hunger and reducing absolute poverty; Fifthly, adopting clean technology and industrial ecology (recycling, reusing, and reducing waste, renewing used energy).

⁷Social sustainable development includes a number of main contents quantified through criteria such as: Firstly, population stability, rural development to reduce the pressure of migration into urban areas; Secondly, minimization of negative impact of the environment on urbanization; Thirdly, improvement in education and elimination of illiteracy; Fourthly, protection of cultural diversity; Fifthly, gender equality, giving attention to gender needs and interests; Sixthly, the increase of public participation in decision-making processes.

enhancement of living environment, and a guaranteed human living environment quality. It is to ensure the purity of air, water, land, geographic space, and landscape. Environmental sustainability requires maintaining a balance between protecting the natural environment and the exploitation of natural resources for the benefit of people in order to restrict the exploitation of natural resources at a certain limit which enables the environment to recover and provide long-term support, equalizing the living conditions for humans and other living species on earth.⁸

The sustainability of sustainable development, which originally means the long-term stability, in sustainable development, has shown the harmony in the interests of present and future generations. Sustainable development is divided into three aspects namely economic, social, and environmental aspects with many different evaluation criteria but the core of sustainability in each area, in all three areas, is harmony and more generally speaking, the harmony among the three areas mentioned above. Thus, it can be generalized that the “sustainability” in sustainable development includes two attributes namely long-term (time axis) and harmonious (spatial axis, harmony among communities, geographical areas, between the conduct and relationships between people and people and between people and nature).

When comparing the sustainability in sustainable development policy introduced from outside into Vietnam recently and traditional Vietnamese concepts of sustainability, it can be seen that: firstly, in Vietnamese ideological history, there was neither theory of sustainable development nor policy on sustainable development. As regards policy level and beyond, the Vietnamese political ideology, there was no theory close to the theory of sustainable development accessible on three economic - social - environmental pillars. Secondly, Vietnamese people already have concepts and values close to the two attributes “harmony” and “long-term stability” in the connotation of sustainable development. These are important bases and driving forces, which promote the reception of sustainable development policies and raise the value of sustainable development in Vietnamese culture; Thirdly, it is the traditional culture of Vietnamese people that contains concepts and negative characters that are against the attributes of sustainable development (Tables 3.1 and 3.2).

The “sustainable development” policy was introduced into Vietnam and was received in the course of Vietnam’s international integration and learning from international experience. Sustainable development as an exogenous element has step by step been introduced into Vietnam and according to cultural theory, this is a cultural acculturation starting from exposure to reception,⁹ and ending with changes

⁸Specific criteria for quantifying environmental sustainability are: Firstly, effective use of resources, especially nonrenewable resources; Secondly, development does not exceed the load-bearing threshold of the ecosystem; Thirdly, protecting biodiversity and protecting the ozone layer; Fourthly, controlling and reducing greenhouse gas emissions; Fifthly, strictly protecting sensitive ecosystems; Sixthly, reducing emissions, solving the problem of (water, gas, soil, and food) pollution, improving and restoring the environment of polluted areas, etc.

⁹The notion of legal acculturation has just emerged for approximately 100 years, indicates a contact, an exchange between two cultures that share close racial, geographical, or historical connections. A number of Vietnamese scholars, of whom Ha Van Tan is a notable representative, has interpreted “acculturation” into Vietnamese by combining two Sino-Vietnamese words, consecu-

Table 3.1 Comparison of concepts and values of Vietnamese people shaping “sustainability” in traditional culture and Attributes of “sustainability” in the modern concept of “sustainable development”

Traditional culture of Vietnamese people	Attributes of “sustainability” in the modern concept of “sustainable development”
Aspiration for peace and for long-term stability	Long-term existence/stability
Citizen-friendly, flexible and harmonious ruling policies	Harmony
The stability of living space and production methods	Long-term existence/stability
Yin and Yang philosophy, the reproduction belief (the preference for harmony in the behavior with the natural environment and social environment)	Harmony

Table 3.2 Comparison of criteria of contemporary modern concept of “sustainable development” and traditional culture of Vietnamese people

Criteria of contemporary concept of “sustainable development”	Traditional culture of Vietnamese people
Economic sustainable development	Lacked theory on economic development; Did not attach much importance on economic development; Highlighted the virtue of hard-working labor and thrift to get further accumulation.
Social sustainable development	Attached much importance on the harmony between individual and individual in community, among communities in society; Did not encourage individual development.
Environmentally sustainable development	Mainly introduced the theory of living in line with rule of nature, rule of “yin-Yang”.

of the receiving community/nation. Reception demonstrates the creativity of culture, is the process of creating new values for the receiving subjects and reception is also the process of creating new, added values for the culture of the receiving community/country. This process is hindered by adversities but is also motivated by pros and the problem posed for policymakers is to proactively absorb, transform as well as to take advantage of the pros and limit the cons (Figs. 3.3 and 3.4).

tively “tiếp” (接, contact, receive) and “biến” (变, change, transform), and made up a new compound word: “tiếp biến”. “Tiếp biến” reflects the characteristics of acculturation: 1, “contact” =>2, “reception” =>3, “transformation” (as a result of the contact and reception between two or more cultures or culture communities). The process of acculturation could impact two or more cultures through mutual symbioses, exchanges, and communications; however, the impact prevailing is the transition from greater culture with higher level of civilization to the smaller one with lower level of civilization. The smaller culture with lower level of civilization shall receive the values and achievements of the greater culture with higher level of civilization. The nature of this process is receiving and modifying exotic elements to harmonize with the indigenous culture’s endogenous elements, which later become exogenous elements, hence increasing the values of the indigenous culture.

Fig. 3.3 Relationship between values that create sustainability and negative characters that limit sustainability in the traditional heritage of Vietnamese culture

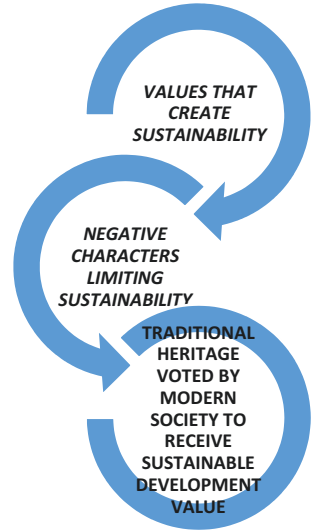
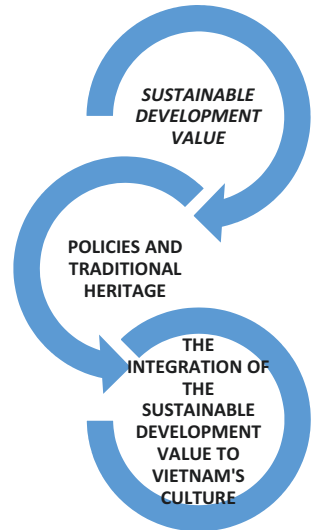


Fig. 3.4 Relationship between exogenous factors (sustainable development value) and endogenous (State policies and traditional heritage preserved by Vietnamese society) in the process of cultural acculturation



The modern Vietnamese society has a myriad of changes. After decades of stabilization of traditional values under feudalism, Vietnamese society applied significant Western cultural values under the influence of French people since 1858 and of the American people in the South of Vietnam in the period of the Vietnam War (1954–1975), and especially the socialist culture in Northern Vietnam since 1954. Ever since the reunification of the country in 1975, the society faced many fluctuations due to the war, which were poverty created by the devastated economy, the value crises among people who contributed to the revolution and postwar emerging

people who profited from the war, etc. In many circumstances, the belief crisis was very significant after the socialist system in Eastern Europe collapsed. The downfall of an ideology and of a value that is seemingly sustainable made the Vietnamese people’s mindset more fragile. A society with unstable institutions and an incomplete legal framework, a transitional economy to an unstable market mechanism was an opportunity for individuals and businesses to implement business activities involving elements of illegal transfer of assets from state to private ownership, which brought about large sources of capital accumulation, and at the same time enriched and corrupted the section of competent state officials who were entitled to manage public administration. These two groups increased their assets rapidly and the nature of their activity was convulsive, creating a habit of living a fast-paced, luxurious life and contributing to the formation of a more or less materialistic and shallow lifestyle (Vietnamese people consume a lot of alcohol,¹⁰ and buy tons of luxurious cars¹¹). This creates social division and dissatisfaction. Thus, from a psychosocial perspective, the contemporary context of Vietnamese society is still a society of the phenomenon of urgent living, short-term way of thinking. It is these characteristics that show a social attitude that has not yet reached the proper state of mind to practice the theory of sustainable development but also needed to further receive the theory of sustainable development. The context of the early years of the twenty-first century when sustainable development was introduced to Vietnam was when Vietnam’s economy made significant changes from a commanding economy, focusing on bureaucracy and subsidy to a socialist-oriented market economy. The economy grew fast and people’s lives were improved. However, the emerging economy was also caught up in hot demand, with many social problems arising and the ruined environment. Therefore, the goals set by sustainable development are in line with the contemporary context of Vietnamese society and the needs of contemporary Vietnamese society. The state of Vietnam has seen the consequences of hot growth which posed negative environmental problems and social instability.¹² Vietnam also sees the lesson learnt by other hot growth countries, especially the

¹⁰According to the information of Deputy Minister of Health Nguyen Thanh Long at the Conference to collect comments on the Draft Law on the Prevention of Alcohol and Beer Harm, which was held by the Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization on April 13, 2018, the situation of alcohol and beer consumption in Vietnam is very alarming. “Vietnam ranks second among Southeast Asian countries, tenth in Asia and 29th in the world”. See:

<https://www.nhandan.com.vn/suckhoe/item/36072902-viet-nam-dung-thu-29-tren-the-gioi-ve-su-dung-ruou-bia.html>.

¹¹Although Vietnam has the average income per capita in the region, Vietnam is the country that consumes the most luxurious cars in Southeast Asia. See: <http://tapchitaichinh.vn/ngghien-cuu-trao-doi/viet-nam-la-quoc-gia-tieu-thu-nhieuu-xe-hoi-hang-sang-nhat-dong-nam-a-138782.html>.

¹²The ninth National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam held in Hanoi from April 19 to April 22, 2001, evaluated the process of implementing the Resolution of the Eighth National Congress, which revealed the following weaknesses: The economy did not steadily, efficiently and its competitiveness was low; A number of urgent and harsh socio-cultural issues were slowly resolved; Mechanisms and policies were not synchronized and did not create a strong motivation for development; Corruption, degradation of political ideology, morality, lifestyle in a large number of cadres and party members were very serious.

lesson of China – the neighboring country providing models as great reference for Vietnam - in order to make socioeconomic policies (and later on the Chinese communist government also gave the theory of a harmonious society¹³). On the other hand, the Vietnamese state also takes suggestions of sustainable development as a reference for “socialist orientation” in the realization of a great policy that is not really theoretically clear. That is the policy of building a socialist-oriented market economy.¹⁴ With the shift from the economic theory of communists about income equality for everyone to a market economy operating according to market rules, the equality in terms of income, educational, health and social benefits, cultural enjoyment, equality among different strata in the society and gender equality are close to communist ideals and socialist colors.¹⁵ In 2011, the Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam identified “The socialist society that our people built is a society of prosperous people, powerful country, fairness, democracy and civilization; possessed by the people; with a developed economy based on modern productive forces and appropriate and advanced production relations; having an advanced culture imbued with national identity; where people enjoy wealth, freedom and happiness with conditions for inclusive development; where all ethnic minority groups in the Vietnamese community are equal, united, respected and helped each other to develop together; a socialist State based on Rule of law, which is of the people, by the people, for the people and under the leadership of the Communist Party; having friendly relations and cooperation with countries around

¹³“In September 2004, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of the CPC decided to list “the capability of building a socialist harmonious society” as one of the five governing capabilities that the CPC endeavors to enhance. The general requirements for building a harmonious socialist society are: democracy and law; fairness and justice; integrity and friendship; vigor and vitality; stability and order; and the harmonious coexistence of man and nature”. See: http://cpcchina.chinadaily.com.cn/2010-09/16/content_13918117.htm

¹⁴An unprecedented policy and exception to most countries in the world. However, the head of the Communist Party of Vietnam clarified this policy as follows: “The socialist-oriented market economy is a new economic model in the period of transition to socialism... The development of the socialist-oriented market economy shows the country is very selective about achievements of humankind civilization, in order to develop the active role of the market economy in boosting the production force, labor socialization, technology advances, while improving product quality, contributing to enriching society and improving people’s living conditions. However, it is necessary to devise effective measures to limit negative phenomena of the market economy, including pure profits, fierce competition, excessive exploitation and division between the rich and the poor.” (Radio Voice of Vietnam, 2003). See: <http://vietnamembassy-usa.org/news/2003/11/socialist-oriented-market-economy-concept-and-development-soluti>

¹⁵The institution for the market economy with socialist orientation in the spirit of Resolution of the fifth Plenum of the Central Conference XII “Perfecting the socialist-oriented market economy institution” is perfecting the relationship between the State, markets, and society on the principle of “strong state - effective market - dynamic, creative society”. However, the socialist orientation with one of the nuclei is the orientation of distribution relations, whereby the distribution relations ensure fairness and create motivation for development; resources are allocated according to socioeconomic development strategies, planning and plans; distribution system is implemented mainly based on labor results, economic efficiency, at the same time as the contribution of capital and other resources as well as the distribution channels of social security system and social welfare.

the world”.¹⁶ The sustainable development whose nucleus is the harmony has been favorably accepted into Vietnam due to the compatibility of political factors and political history when Vietnamese people are always finding a political model that harmonizes needs, resolves fairly distribution relations, limits the gap between rich and poor, and stratification. In other words: “Fortunately, socialist ideologies are not unfamiliar with traditional public opinion about a universal society. For us, it is estimated that socialism will create a cultural continuity for our development. For Vietnamese people (most of whom are farmers), socialism is synonymous with social justice, an idea coined by Confucius more than 2500 years ago.” (Tran, 2000).

The acculturation of “sustainable development” concept into Vietnam has developed a new component pillar of defense and security besides the three pillars of economy, society, and environment. According to the Viet Nam Sustainable Development Strategy for 2011–2020 (Decision No. 432/QĐ-TTg of Prime Minister, 2012), sustainable development is a long-term requirement during the national development; an effective and harmonious combination of economic and social development with protecting environment and conserving natural resources, maintaining national defense and social security, aiming for “stable and effective growth along with social equality and progress, environment natural resources conservation, maintenance of stability in politics and society, protection of independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity for national interests”. This policy acculturation represents politic ideology of the State of Vietnam as sustainable development in Vietnam is inseparable from the traditional aspiration of the nation, which is sustainability in national defense and security, deriving from the necessity to defend our fatherland. Sustainable development also needs a balanced contribution of resources for defense and security duties.

In recent years, the direction to form a tectonic government that the State of Vietnamese has pursued also establishes a policy foundation for sustainable development, with considerable support between tectonic state model and sustainable development model. “In Vietnam, the term “tectonic government” is a fairly new concept. However, tectonic government can be regarded as the government which orients, sets framework and conditions to develop and serve the public interest. The tectonic government focuses on building an appropriate institutional framework, facilitating and promoting people’s capacity and creativity for personal and social benefits”. In our opinion, whether learning from governmental models of Japanese, Korean, Singaporean, and Chinese or not, tectonic government is a state model with competent authority (the common feature of the model of State in East Asia influenced by Confucian culture and centralized political tradition) to maintain political stability and social order without over-interfering the market, boost economic

¹⁶The Executive Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, “Cuong linh xay dung dat nuoc trong thoi ki qua do len chu nghia xa hoi (bo sung, phat trien nam 2011)” [The Platform of Building the Country in the Transition Time to Socialism (supplemented and advanced in 2011)] See: <http://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang/dai-hoi-dang/lan-thu-xi/cuong-linh-xay-dung-dat-nuoc-trong-thoi-ky-qua-do-len-chu-nghia-xa-hoi-bo-sung-phat-trien-nam-2011-1528>

development and harmonize social benefits and conflicts, ensuring a secure society for the present and the future.¹⁷

In the current context of a market-governed economy, a society in which core values are restored to the norms where citizens have freedom to do business, the Internet, information and communication infrastructure is growing remarkably together with international values and globalization affecting Vietnam via the Internet; the awareness and sociopsychological features of Vietnamese has been dramatically changing, especially in urban areas and among young people. There have been fluctuations in the value scale of Vietnamese people recently when the preference toward stability and harmonization of rural communities has transformed rapidly with considerably high rate of industrialization and urbanization, shifting their occupations from agriculture to industry¹⁸ and their living environment,¹⁹ a more powerful and progressive generation is being established; the number of start-ups founded based on novel and unique ideas²⁰ are creating independent people instead of community people. This provides a proper basis of awareness, social psychology, created by the new “intelligent” and “elite” population to implement and support constructive policies on sustainable development of the State.

¹⁷ However, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc, the head of current government, has mentioned this model on many official forums several times and pointed out four primary features of a tectonic government: First, the government needs to construct a strong institutional system for economic development; second, the State only invests in areas which private enterprises cannot invest instead of manipulating the market; third, the government must create a favorable business environment; and forth, the government has to maintain integrity and transparency.

¹⁸ On the socioeconomic situation in the second quarter and the first six months of 2019, according to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (Tong cuc Thong ke) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment: “In the general growth of the whole economy, the sector of agriculture, forestry and fishery increased by 2.39%, contributing 6% to the general growth; the sector of industry and construction grew by 8.93%, contributing 51.8%; the service sector expanded by 6.69%, contributing 42.2%” (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2019a, 2019b). See: https://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=622&ItemID=19251

¹⁹ Based on statistics of the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (Tong cuc Thong ke) under the Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, the population of urban areas in Vietnam in preliminary 2018 was 33,830,000 over the total population of 94,666,000; that of rural areas was 60,836,000 (Access <https://www.gso.gov.vn/default.aspx?tabid=714>, on the table “Dân số trung bình phân theo giới tính và thành thị, nông thôn”, choose value “Tổng số (Nghìn người)” on variation “Cách tính*” (column 1), choose value “prel2018” on variation “Năm*” (column 2) and choose value “Thành thị”, value “Tổng số”, value “Nông thôn” on variation “Phân tổ*” (column 3). This means urban areas accounted for 35.74% of the national population, increasing by 16.23% compared with the population 12,880,30 in 1990 (the result of 12,880,30 obtained by the same way excluding value “1990” instead of “prel2018” on variation “Năm*” equivalent to the proportion of 19.51%.

²⁰ According to the statistics of Echelon Magazine, Singapore is one of the largest online magazines on startup in Southeast Asia, Vietnam currently has approximately 3000 innovative startups, nearly doubling the estimated figure by the end of 2015 (about 1800 enterprises). Topica Founder Institute (TFI) also claimed that Vietnam received 92 investment deals with a total capital of over US\$291 million, nearly doubling the number of deals and increasing around 50% of total investment capital, compared with those in 2016 (50 deals with US\$205 million). See: <https://tinnhanhchungkhoan.vn/thuong-truong/su-troi-day-cua-cac-doanh-nghiep-the-he-moi-245247.html>.

Nevertheless, the negative characters in Vietnamese conventional way of thinking, even deeply rooted as national identities, still exist, which are meanness and selfishness in preferring personal short-term benefits to long-term benefits for the community and future generations. Social development makes the aforementioned inferior characters evolve into variations of “tenure way of thinking”²¹ and “group interests, interest group” becoming nagging issues in Vietnamese contemporary society. Modern Vietnamese society is still credit-driven,²² meanwhile the qualifications and qualities are not guaranteed, leading to the “scare and lie,” dealing, hiding, law violating way of thinking, public servants lying in reports, interviews, and questions leads to the proliferate phenomenon of lying, skepticism, and collapsed beliefs in society.²³ Virtual values also contradict sustainable development toward the truth and stability.

4 Conclusions and Discussion

Thus, it can be seen that the context of natural and social history of Vietnamese has formed the preference for stability and harmony, together with the desire for peace, prosperity, and longevity of a nation suffered from wars, which has built the foundation for the sustainability of Vietnamese traditions and culture. The history of political ideology, which tended to be citizen-friendly and to decrease the pressure imposed on people, has also formed these favorable attitudes of Vietnamese people. However, the Vietnamese still lack systematic ideologies and theoretical viewpoints on development and sustainable development. In traditions and culture, the Vietnamese have not distinguished between stability and sustainable development;

²¹ In negative sense, the notion of “tenure way of thinking” is thinking inappropriately regardless of rules, conditions, and circumstances of an individual or a group of people in an agency, entity, and organization during their term on duty, aiming to pursue short-term objectives and interests for material and immaterial benefits for themselves and their “interest group,” ignoring common goals and long-term interests of the community; incompetent qualifications and capacity, lack of information and uncertainty of the circumstances lead to incorrect and inadequate awareness; establishing and implementing guidelines, resolutions, programs, procedures, and plans that are not effective and practical, or even bringing unpredictable results and consequences for the present and the future.

²² Credit-driven way of thinking has led to misconducts in emulation and reward procedures, bribing for certificates and qualifications. Ministry of Education and Training had to conduct campaigns such as “Say no to misconducts and credit-driven practices in examinations.” There is also the “Department of Emulation and Reward” in the administrative system in ministries and ministerial agency which assists Ministers to manage the emulation and reward practice in ministries and departments.

²³ See Nguyen, T. T. N. (2015): *Hiện tượng giả dối trong đời sống người Việt từ góc nhìn giá trị học* [Deception phenomenon in Vietnamese life from the study of value viewpoint] (based on survey results in 2014), in Tran, N. T. (editor) (2016), *Một số vấn đề về hệ giá trị Việt Nam trong giai đoạn hiện tại* [Issues on Systematic Values of Vietnam in the period of industrialization]; Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City National University, Vietnam, 412–424.

Vietnamese people still appreciate stability and lack proper knowledge and interpretation about development.

The Western theory of sustainable development has been introduced to Vietnam; on the other hand, the core of this theory is the sustainability in socioeconomic and environmental aspects based on the balance of economic, social, and environmental requirements. Therefore, the implementation of this theory brings numerous advantages from the positive characteristics of traditional culture in achieving sustainability as stated above. Vietnamese government has also acknowledged the positive values of sustainable development theory, realized the similarities with the political direction they follow, thereby accepting and adjusting this theory to suit the context and developmental direction of Vietnam. Regarding superstructure policy, sustainable development is relatively compatible to current guidelines and policies of the State of Vietnam and is favorable to accept the value of traditional and cultural development into Vietnamese society.

Nonetheless, the application and implementation of sustainable development theory are also hindered by Vietnamese deep-rooted traditions and cultures, especially variations of meanness, selfishness, narrow, and short-term visions about individual or group benefits in public sector. These conventional characters remain not only in rural and agricultural areas but also in urban and business areas; in fact, business culture of many enterprises is still influenced by these negative conventions.

Hence, compared with previous research, this paper offers abundant investigation into values and negative characters in Vietnamese traditional culture in comparison with sustainability, especially clarifying the distinction between viewpoints of sustainability in traditional culture and sustainable development policy set in the early twenty-first century. Precedent research has left this matter untouched.

This article has not used sociological survey research methods to assess accurately the variations as well as preservations of values and negative characters related to the sustainability and sustainable development of Vietnamese people. In fact, it is not easy to work out such expected sociological investigations, so the hypothesis on the changes of sustainable values, popular cultural notions of sustainability are mainly justified by generalization method and Yi-ological method, which partially reduces the accuracy of research results.

In order for sustainable development to become a standard for socioeconomic development activities, for codes of conduct between people and people, people and nature in contemporary Vietnamese society, the nation needs to confront the pros and cons of this process. Vietnam also needs to consider their cultural diversity, alternative and multidimensional effects to plan and complete the policies. It is clear that further studies are indispensable to propose solutions that reduce obstacles, promote supports, then internalize the value of sustainable development in Vietnamese culture instead of mere application and imposition of top-down policies so that "sustainable development" actually progress in Vietnamese culture and society permanently.

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