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The Southeast as a cultural zone and roles of culture - people in the sustainable development of Southeast

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ABSTRACT

The Southeast plays a very important role in Vietnam's economic development. Although social science researchers are well located in the Southeast, there remains a paradox that the Southeast culture has not been sufficiently researched into.

Applying the method of culture zoning based on three-dimensional change of Subject - Space - Time developed by the author, the article concludes that the Southeast is a separate cultural zone besides the Southwest and lists some typical characteristics of Southeast in terms of the cultural elements (focusing on the organizational culture) and the system of cultural personality characteristics of Vietnamese people in the Southeast. The analysis of Human Development Index (HDI) of Southeast shows that this development is unbalanced and unsustainable.

To achieve the balance and sustainability, the Southeast needs to focus on investing in the cultural and human development; reduce the village community and replace it with the social community; minimize the rural nature, agriculture, farmers and enhance the urban civilization, industrial culture and citizens.

Keywords: *cultural zone, roles of culture, sustainable development, Southeast*

1. Introduction

We all know that the Southeast plays the most important role in the economic development of Vietnam: While the area of Southeast accounts for only 7%, the population accounts for 17%, the contribution of Southeast for the total State budget accounts for 41%; the per capita income is more than 5,200 USD/person, more than 2

times the national average income (figures 2018). But there is a paradox in that while the economic role of this zone is highly significant, the cultural role of Southeast remains inadequate. Referring to the Southern culture, people mainly think about Southwest culture. The number of research studies on Southwest culture is much more remarkable than that of the Southeast. In the selected bibliography of Southern culture up to 2013 that we collect including 1,614 names, the specific research materials on the Southeast's aspects is only 172, while there are 796 about the Southwest (ratio: 1/4.6). Of the 172 specific research materials on the Southeast's aspects, there has not been treatise on the overall picture of Southeast culture yet.

Arguably, the spiritual basis of society, the target - motivation of development is the culture, not the economy. In other words, the culture is the target and the economy is the tool. Therefore, in order to overcome the paradox of conflict between economic development and delay in cultural research, the research into the culture and people of Southeast should be strongly promoted.

This article presents an outline of Southeastern cultural research in that direction. The research was expected to be conducted by the same approach and methodology applied to the research of Vietnamese culture in the Southwest (Thêm, 2014). In particular, the theoretical method is combined with the experiment, the qualitative method is supplemented by the quantitative method and the theoretical and qualitative methods play decisive roles. The main theoretical and qualitative research methods that we used were the "principles of the Book of Changes" - system - type (Thêm, 2016). The results will be verified, supplemented and adjusted with the field survey method and the quantitative technique questionnaire.

The first thing is to determine the position of research subject: What position does the Southeast occupy on the map of Vietnam's culture zoning?

2. The Southeast as a cultural zone and cultural subzones of the Southeast

Comparing Vietnam cultural zoning to Vietnam zoning concerning other aspects, we will see that it is remarkable that while the tables of agricultural and forestry ecological zoning; socio-economic and military zoning all consider the Southeast as a separate zone besides the Southwest, the tables of traditional Vietnamese cultural zoning often consider the whole South as a cultural zone. That is dividing the Vietnamese cultural space into 7 zones (Thịnh, 1993), 8 zones (Vinh, editor 1995), 9 zones (Khánh & Cận, 1995), 6 zones (Vượng, 1997). Only Vinh (1995) divides the South into two cultural zones: Dong Nai - Gia Dinh (Southeast) and the Mekong Delta.

But whether it is one or two, all tables of traditional Vietnamese cultural zoning are made intuitively without relying on any scientific reasoning or zoning method. Huỳnh

Khái Vinh (editor, 1995) frankly said that his zoning was only to “*generalize (intuitively)*” the zone levels and their relative boundaries. In response to this gap, Trần Ngọc Thêm (2014) developed a method of cultural zoning based on three-dimensional change of Subject - Space - Time: The three-dimensional change (intermediate cases on the boundary will be dealt with by rounding method) will create a new coordinate system and a new cultural zone.

Accordingly, the feature that make the Southeast separate from the Southwest, in terms of *space K*, lie in the difference and opposition between highlands (average 100-200m) in the East and the lowest region of the country (average 0.7-1.2 m)-the West; between the basaltic land that is convenient for industrial crops and industrial development in the East and the largest alluvial region of the country that is convenient for growing rice, fruit trees and aquaculture - the West; between the gateway of all traffic flows with the deep sea that is easily accessible to the other countries in the East and the position that is closer - the West.

In terms of *subject C*, the people of Southeast are more ethnically diverse than the Southwest. In the Southeast, the ethnic group that ranks behind Vietnamese (accounting for 93.5% of the population) is Chinese (4%) and then many other ethnic groups such as Cham, Khmer, Xtieng, Cho-ro, Ma, while in the Southwest, the ethnic group that ranks behind Vietnamese (92%) is Khmer (7%), then Chinese (1%) and finally Cham (0.1%). The population density of Southeast ranks second (617 people/km²) in the country, 2, 3 times higher than the national average density and 1.4 times higher than the average density of Southwest.

In terms of *time T*, the Southeast cultural zone is formed earlier (in the 17th century), while the Southwest cultural zone is formed later. The Southeast makes stronger exchanges with other regions throughout the country and even with the West. Nowadays, the Southeast makes the fastest industrialization and urbanization in the country, while the Southwest continues to be a rural region. With all these differences, it can be concluded that the Southeast is *a separate cultural zone* besides the Southwest.

According to this zoning method, the Southeast cultural zone can be divided into three subzones with clear difference in three dimensions Subject - Space - Time, including *urban* cultural subzone (Saigon - Ho Chi Minh City), *industrial* cultural subzone (Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Ba Ria - Vung Tau), and *agricultural* cultural subzone (Binh Phuoc, Tay Ninh)).

3. Characteristics of Southeast in terms of the cultural elements

Considering the cultural structure of three elements of “awareness - organization – behavior” (Tran Ngoc Them, 1996), the characteristics of Southeast are most evident in the organization element (collective and individual life).

In *the culture of collective life organization*, the Southeast has two outstanding characteristics in comparison with the Southwest: firstly, the Southeast has the *highest urbanization rate* in the country and it is much higher than the Southwest: over 51 % (higher than the average urbanization rate in Vietnam of 26.2% and higher than the worldwide average urbanization rate of 47%). However, the urbanization and industrialization rate is moving rapidly. While the Southeast is attached to the North and Central, it can be easy to recognize the second characteristic that is *the village community nature* in the Southeast, especially in the industrial cultural subzone, which is deeper than that of the Southwest. This characteristic constitutes a paradox: the village community nature and urban - industrial nature are two quantities that are inversely correlated: Wherever the industry and urban development is stronger, the village community nature should be lower.

In *the culture of individual life organization*, the Southeast has a large workforce of skillful intellectuals, the economic value generated from the gray matter resources is much higher than the Southwest. For many years, the Southeast always has the highest human development index (HDI) in the country, the Northern Delta ranks second - these regions usually have HDI higher than the national average HDI. (Table 1 includes figures in 2012).

TABLE 1. Ranking regions by HDI and component indicators

	1. HDI	2. Expected life expectancy (year)	3. Adult's literacy rate (15 years and over)	4. General admission rate (%)	5. Per capita GDP (USD by PPP)
The whole country	0.752	73.05	94.50	63.43	3,979.3
Southeast	0.811	75.69	96.90	63.55	8,020.5
Red river delta	0.770	74.27	97.50	72.50	3,593.5
Southwest	0.746	74.39	93.10	59.29	3,572.9
North Central & South Central Coast	0.730	72.41	94.30	62.79	2,890.7
Central highlands	0.704	69.40	92.10	59.80	2,853.8
Northern Midlands and Mountains	0.679	70.29	88.80	58.27	1,939.7

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2015; UNDP and VASS, 2016, p.33

For many years, the data show that the Southeast has the high human development index (HDI), because the per capita GDP is always high (in Table 1, the orders of regions ranked by HDI values in column 1 and the per capita GDP in column 5 are completely coincide). Compared to the Northern Delta, the life expectancy indicator of Southeast is not much higher, while two educational indicators (Adult's literacy rate and general admission rate) are lower than those of the Northern Delta; though they are higher than those of four regions.

Although the formula of calculating HDI does not reflect all the diversity in human development, the apparent imbalance of components that make up HDI also shows that the development of Southeast is *unbalanced* and *unsustainable*. To achieve the balance and sustainability, the Southeast needs to focus on investing in the development of cultural - human factors. In addition, the village community nature of Southeast that is higher than that of Southwest clearly shows that the cultural and human factors of Southeast need to be further invested and developed.

4. Characteristics of Southeast in terms of the cultural personality

Doãn Chính (Editors, 2013) highlighted five characteristics of the Vietnamese community's traditional lifestyle in the Southeast: *the bold; the dynamic, the creative, the sensitive, the adaptive to circumstances; the practical; The chivalrous; the liberal, the generous, the tolerant* (pp. 325-400). However, these characteristics are intuitively listed rather than systematically documented.

Trần Ngọc Thêm (2014) outlined a system of cultural personalities of Vietnamese people in the Southeast in five characteristics, among which each characteristic has a certain position in the system and in comparison with corresponding or relevant characteristics of Southwest. Five characteristics of cultural personalities of Vietnamese people in the Southeast are ranked in descending order of importance: (1) *the dynamic*; (2) *the practical*; (3) *the tolerant*; (4) *the straightforward*; (5) *The chivalrous*. Meanwhile, the cultural personality system of Vietnamese people in the Southwest has six characteristics ranked in descending order of importance: (1) *the river nature*; (2) *The chivalrous*; (3) *the straightforward*; (4) *the tolerant*; (5) *the practical*; (6) *the open* (p. 836-837), x. Table 2.

TABLE 2. Comparison of cultural personality systems of Southeast and Southwest

Cultural personalities of Southeast			
1	The dynamic	the open	6
2	The practical		5
3	The tolerant		4
4	The straightforward		3
5	The chivalrous		2
		the river nature	1
		Cultural personalities of Southwest	

The similarity between the cultural personality systems of two regions is *four common characteristics* and the differences are expressed in three points:

Firstly, these four common characteristics are in reverse order in terms of the importance: in the Southeast, *the practical* is clearer and more important than the

tolerant, the straightforward and *the chivalrous* ranks final; whereas in the Southwest, this order is reverse: The chivalrous is clearer than the straightforward and tolerant and *the practical* ranks final.

Secondly, the most typical characteristic of Southeast is *the dynamic*, while in the Southwest, it is the open (and the open is the faintest characteristic, ranks final out of six characteristics of Southwest). The fundamental difference between the dynamic and the open is that the dynamic is proactive (always acting confidently and decisively), while the open is cognitive and somewhat passive (supporting the new, not conservative and receptive, integrating it into oneself), x. Table 3.

TABLE 3. Comparison of the dynamic and the open

		The dynamic	The open
Content	1	Be always active	Supporting the new, not conservative
	2	Acting confidently and decisively	Receptive, integrating it into oneself
Nature	1	Proactive	Cognitive
	2	Active	Somewhat passive
	3	Extrovert	Extrovert
	4	Positive	Positive

Thirdly, the most typical characteristic of Southwest is the river nature, while this characteristic is completely absent in the Southeast.

Compared to the system of traditional cultural personalities of Vietnamese people (Thêm, 2016) which is typical in the Northern and Central Plains, the system of traditional cultural personalities of South - both the Eastern and the Western - *has significant differences* and markedly **high positivity**.

Between two southern regions, this positivity is also different: While the positivity of the cultural personality system of Southeast is clear in such characteristics as dynamic and practical (the characteristics *favor action and behavior*), the positivity of the cultural personality system of Southwest is clear in the characteristics such as the chivalrous, the straightforward (the characteristics *favor quality and relationship*).

5. Conclusion

Applying the method of culture zoning based on three-dimensional change of Subject - Space - Time developed by us, it can be concluded that the Southeast is a separate cultural zone besides the Southwest. In terms of the cultural elements, the characteristics of Southeast are most evident in the organizational cultural element.

In particular, in the culture of collective life organization, the Southeast has two outstanding characteristics leading to a paradox: while the Southeast has the highest urbanization rate in the whole country and this rate is much higher than that of the Southwest, the village community nature in the Southeast, especially in the industrial cultural subzone, is deeper than that of the Southwest.

As well as the culture of individual life organization is concerned, for many years, the Southeast has reached the highest human development index (HDI) in the country, because the per capita GDP of Southeast is always high. Compared to the Northern Delta, the life expectancy indicator of Southeast is not much higher, while the two educational indicators are lower than those of the Northern Delta. In other words, the human development of Southeast is unbalanced and unsustainable.

To achieve the balance and sustainable development, the Southeast needs to focus on investing in the cultural and human development; reduce the village community and replace it with the social community; minimize the rural nature, agriculture, farmers and enhance the urban civilization, industrial culture and citizens.

The general considerations mentioned above in this research proposal need to be further developed; it is necessary to carefully study the current situation of cultural elements and characteristics of Southeast. On the basis, identifying the human-cultural value system that is appropriate to the characteristics of Southeast, developing sustainable development strategy for the Southeast, a system of solutions to realize this strategy. There are definitely great possibilities for these tasks to be bought into practice as the research force interested in social sciences have mainly been living and working in the Southeast.

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