

Political Culture in Vietnam Today

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Abstract: Political culture plays a great role in national governance. It increases the endogenous power of a country, which is reflected in the country's competitiveness in the international arena, ensuring the country's survival and sustainable development. Therefore, building a political culture will bring into full play the activeness and creativity of the people and the whole society, creating a consensus for the country's sustainable development. In Vietnam today, the current situation of building a political culture is still in need of improvement. During the period of renovation, the country needs to implement many solutions, the most urgent of which is the fight against corruption in the state apparatus to improve the political culture.

Keywords: Renovation, political culture, Vietnam.

Subject classification: Politics

1. Introduction

The term "political culture" first appeared in the mid-twentieth century. This term is associated with the work of two American scientists, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba. These two authors opine that "The Political Culture of a Nation is its Population's Way of Sharing the Forms of the Orientation of Interest in Political Objects" [4, pp. 14-15]. Werner J. Patzelt wrote that "Political culture is values and knowledge, views and attitudes of the population; forms of behaviour and political participation; open or implicit rules of the political process; the daily

foundations of the political system and a collection of all the cultural and customary aspects of the existing society" [5, pp.143-144]. According to Thomas Meyer, "The political culture of a society is the overall values, orientations, views, habits and willingness to act politically with general influence in society" [3, p.251].

Although different, these concepts all have certain things in common when they consider political culture to be a subjective dimension of politics and a political process. Political culture is understood as the key to exploring the relationship between the political system and the political environment and with political

actors. As a type of culture, political culture is imbued with the permeation of culture into politics and is politics of a cultural character. Political culture is not just politics or culture alone, or a simple combination of these two domains, but represents core values in each political system. Thus, from the concepts presented above, it is possible to understand that political culture is the overall values formed in practice, expressed in awareness, ideals, beliefs and ways to participate in cultural and political life of subjects following standards consistent with the common goals of society.

In modern societies, political culture plays a key role in the quality of orientations that affect the survival of a political system. This orientation can take three forms: (1) cognitive orientation (that is, people's knowledge of the political system, in which a legitimate democracy is to make people fully aware of the power apparatus, in order not to be vague, not to uphold power); (2) affective orientation (that is, the perception of transparency and control over the effectiveness of political decisions); and (3) evaluational orientation (that is, recognising the credibility or unreliability of a political system).

Political culture is a core element that has a decisive meaning for the comprehensive development of the country in general, cultural construction and development in particular. This is the profound humanity of cultured politics. Because political culture is primarily a cultural value, it is a factor that constitutes a paradigm of cultural values and becomes an important element in the cultural life of

societies. Political culture is shown first in the political goals of an institution, at the ideological and intellectual level of political organisations and people on the basis of understanding the laws of motions of society, political relationships as well as political institutions, aiming to orient and manage social development effectively.

Political culture plays an important role in expressing the objectives, political paths and political institutions. Cultural characteristics and the political culture level are first manifested in the target orientation of political institutions, working for the benefit and happiness of humanity. Political culture is also reflected in the nature of political behaviour in a democratic and fair manner. The core issue in political culture is to build a cultural environment and a political environment which are characterised with democracy and humanity. Thomas Meyer opines that "Political culture plays a key role in the presence and operation of all political systems" [3, p.251].

Referring to the role of political culture is referring to the cultural values crystallised in the whole operation of a political regime; thereby, the recognition of the nature, trends and prospects of a political regime is made possible. Political culture with a democratic and progressive meaning is often geared towards the highest goals of liberating people, respecting human rights, and creating conditions for people to develop comprehensively. This is because, to speak about political culture, it is necessary to speak about political people. Political people must possess good qualities, morals, lifestyles, charisma and personalities. Those qualities represent high

levels of political culture. Political culture is also expressed in the art of organisation, education and persuasion of the masses to operate according to political paths, policies and guidelines.

The article features the characteristics of the political culture in Vietnam; analyses, evaluates, and points out the achievements and limitations in building the political culture in Vietnam in the years of its renovation; thereby, puts forward solutions to improve the political culture in Vietnam today.

2. Characteristics of the political culture in Vietnam

The political culture in Vietnam originates from its indigenous culture, shaped and developed in the process of forming a sense of state and nation, crystallised into the tradition of building and defending the home country by generations of Vietnamese people, and cultivated from the fine traditions of the nation. Throughout Vietnam's history, it has always faced foreign aggressors in its struggle to preserve its people; therefore, the Vietnamese people had to unite. The spirit of the Vietnamese nation manifests in such a way that personal interests must be subordinate to the interests of the community, and the interests of the community must be subordinate to the interests of the State and the Nation. The attitude towards national interests is an important standard benchmark of the Vietnamese political culture. Accordingly, the Vietnamese political culture embodies patriotic traditions, national independence, self-reliance, solidarity and unity, resilience

and undaunted struggle to defend the national sovereignty and territory as well as its determination to build a strong country. These features have become the traditional sustainable values of the Vietnamese political culture.

The current Vietnamese political culture takes Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's ideology as the ideological foundation and guideline for its actions, led by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). The CPV was born out of the Vietnamese political culture. Since its inception, the CPV has gathered around all patriotic forces and quickly gained the right to lead Vietnam's revolution. The successful August Revolution brought the CPV to the position of a ruling party as a historical necessity. The Party's goal is not only to win and seize power but to build a rich and strong Vietnam, where the people can live in freedom, prosperity and happiness. The leadership position of the CPV in the political system of Vietnam is in line with the laws of motion of the Vietnamese people. Despite the collapse of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the '90s of the twentieth century, the CPV and the Vietnamese people still insist on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's ideology in building a modern Vietnamese political culture.

3. Results and limitations in building a political culture in Vietnam during its renovation

After more than 30 years of renovation, the Vietnamese political culture achieved important results. Regarding its political

ideology, Vietnam chooses and persists on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's ideology, taking both as an ideological foundation and a guideline for its actions. In economic terms, Vietnam has been building and developing a socialist-oriented market economy. Regarding state institutions, Vietnam builds a socialist rule-of-law State of the people, by the people and for the people, operating under the leadership of the CPV, managed by the State of Vietnam, and owned by the Vietnamese people. Regarding culture, Vietnam builds an advanced culture heavily imbued with national identity. Regarding foreign affairs, Vietnam implements a foreign policy of independence, self-control, diversification and multilateralisation of international relations. Vietnam determines that building the CPV is a key task, constantly improving the leadership capacity to meet the requirements of the comprehensive renovation of the country.

The triumphant reality of the national renovation shows that the contingent of public officials and civil servants play an important role in building and developing political culture. Thanks to the higher and more comprehensive levels of qualification, the contingent of political leaders have gradually been intellectualised, always upholding a sense of discipline, self-cultivating and self-training to fulfil the assigned tasks. Many public officials are dynamic, creative, and are adapting to the integration trend in the context of globalisation. The majority of leaders and managers in the political system are capable, qualified and prestigious; have a political character, steadfast goals and ideals of national independence and socialism,

innovative thinking, capable of formulating guidelines and policies, exercising leadership, and directing implementation.

The level of awareness for the political culture of the CPV and the people of Vietnam has been raised. Vietnam is not only capable of handling domestic issues but also actively participates in global issues and is recognised internationally. Education levels of public officials, party members and the people have been improved. The process of implementing guidelines and policies on the development of political culture in the political system has been gradually improved and implemented effectively. The task of building a cultural and political environment is considered an important task of Vietnamese political culture. All the personnel management and organisation, inspection and dissemination/communication work lay an important emphasis on building a political culture for public officials, party members and the people. This has great significance in improving the leadership capacity and prestige of the CPV, especially the implementation of the 4th Plenum's Resolution of the CPV's 11th Congress on "A number of urgent issues in Party building at present" and the 4th Plenum's Resolution of the CPV's 12th Congress on "Intensifying the building, taking corrective measures for the strengthening of the Party; preventing, repelling the degradation of political ideology, ethics, lifestyle, expressions of self-evolution and self-transformation internally".

Democracy in Vietnam's political system is increasingly strengthened. The participation of the people in the political and cultural life of the country is clearly reflected; the people's confidence in the leadership of the

CPV and the political system led by the CPV is increasing continuously. Although certain negative phenomena of social life and degeneration and degradation of a significant portion of public officials and party members still exist, Vietnam maintains its social stability. More than 20 years of implementing the "Grassroots Democracy Regulation" is a clear demonstration of democratic spirit with the active participation of the people in the political and cultural activities of the country. Recently, the Government stated: "In order to bring into full play the people's ownership, the State must do well its development enabling function. The State does not replace the people in doing things but must focus on building an appropriate institutional framework and creating necessary conditions for the people to promote their capacity and creativity for their own sake and to contribute to society. Only when the people are wealthy, the country will be strong. Socialisation is not only to mobilise resources but also to create conditions for the society to perform those functions and jobs that the society can do better" [6].

In recent years, the education for improving political culture for public officials, party members and the people have been paid due attention, and important initial results have been gained. Typical evidence for this is the affirmation of the political power of the people which is clearly and fully reflected in the 2013 Constitution. The determination of "the people being the roots" is a prominent thinking of political culture, showing the humanity value of the citizen-centric politics which is evident in many

documents of the CPV and the State of Vietnam since the "Platform of national construction in the transition period toward socialism" promulgated in 1991 and enriched in 2011.

In addition to the achievements above, the Vietnamese political culture has revealed the following weaknesses:

First, Vietnam's legal system is still incomplete, even stifled with overlapping, and many contents fail to meet the requirements of building a rule-of-law state. The capacity to build and enforce laws, mechanisms and policies is not very high. Some legal documents are still issued slowly and unrealistic. Cases of harassment, negative practices, victimisation because of judicial wrongdoings, and crimes not being dealt with, still exist. Clear, synchronous and effective regulations on the mechanism of assignment, coordination and control of state power at all levels remain desirable. The organisational structure of the apparatus and operational mechanism of basic institutions in the rule-of-law state and the judiciary are still irrational, leading to low efficiency. A habit of living and working under the law has not been established in the political system, and a portion of the population is still not aware of the important role of law in life.

Second, public administration reforms are still slow and inconsistent. Administrative procedures are still troublesome, annoying the people and businesses. The organisation and operation of the local government apparatus in many localities are renovated only slowly, ineffective and inefficient. The management, direction and accountability on all levels of government are still stifled with limitations and not clearly defined.

Openness, transparency, feasibility and stability are still weak. Order and discipline in state management and execution of public duties are still not strictly enforced. The mechanism of decentralisation of socio-economic management is not adequate in many aspects, especially in the State budget, investment, organisation, staff management, management of natural resources, urban management, public assets, and state-owned enterprises. The coordination between ministries, branches and localities is still slackened, reducing the effectiveness and efficiency of centralised and unified management on the part of the central government, dynamism and responsibility on the part of local governments.

Third, a significant portion of public officials and party members, including a number of high-ranking officials, experience deterioration in political ideology, ethics and lifestyle with different expressions of fading of ideals, "self-evolution", "self-transformation", keeping away from the people, violating democracy and ownership of the people, falling into individualism, selfishness, autocraticism, opportunism, pragmatism, running after fame and money, position-envy, localism, abuse of given position and authority for personal gains, corruption, wastage, arbitrariness, being disorganised, undisciplined and unscrupulous. The contingent of public officials at the central level (strategic level) are very important but have not been properly developed and prepared. In some cases, performance evaluation and placement of public officials are not as righteous and objective as required. Performance appraisal is not based on job requirements/job descriptions; and placement is not based on strengths, forte or capacity. All

this adversely affects the prestige of the leading agency and the development of the political system of the country.

Fourth, dissemination/communication, education of political culture, ethics, and lifestyle are also stifled with formalistic manifestations and are not developed enough to encourage and regularly improve the revolutionary will and spirit of public officials, civil servants, and the people. The inspection, supervision, and maintenance of order and discipline in many places and levels in the political system are still superficial. Violations of rules and regulations are still not dealt with on a serious, uncompromising and regular basis. The oversight role of elected bodies is still not fully performed. Social monitoring and criticism by the Fatherland Front and socio-political mass organisations have not been promoted and are still coupled with poor effectiveness.

4. Solutions to improve the political culture in Vietnam at present

First, it is necessary to build a healthy, creative and humane cultural and political environment, enabling comprehensive and sustainable development for people and society. The cultural as well as the political environment (including a harmonic total of values, relations, organisations, political and cultural institutions and practical activities) deeply influence the existence, transformation and development of each individual and organisation, and are integral parts of political culture. It is essential to building a cultural and a political environment imbued with the spirit of

democracy, order and discipline, and humanity in society on the basis of promoting traditional values in combination with the best values of humanity of struggling to overcome conflicts in the cultural and political environment, to create consensus for an enhanced political culture of Vietnam.

Second, exercising democracy and respecting democracy must be the starting point which has a direct bearing on the whole process of building and developing the political culture in Vietnam. In order to exercise democracy, on the one hand, it is necessary to resolutely fight against the allegations of hostile forces seeking ways to undermine the great national unity bloc. On the other hand, it is necessary to expand democracy within the population, and to create solidarity, unity and consensus in society. Expanding democracy within the population is a decisive factor to ensure the realisation of a modern and humanitarian political culture, in which democracy in the political culture at the grassroots level should be direct democracy. All calls for democracy will become meaningless without creating democracy and equality in the relations of political culture. Building a true political culture consistent with the wills and aspirations of the people is one of the high values of a democratic and modern political culture.

Third, it is necessary to focus on building a system of political and cultural values as well as political and cultural relations. Values are a meaningful necessity and can inspire every person and every organisation to act and to strive. The values of a political culture are considered to be living cells of a clean and healthy political

and cultural environment. Conversely, the degradation and deterioration of political and cultural values will pollute the political and cultural environment. It is obligatory to make the values of Vietnam's political culture become popular beliefs. At the same time, it is important to listen to and to refine the opinions and aspirations of the people to convert them into standard values. In the political and cultural environment, relations among classes, sections, ethnic groups, religions, and socio-political organisations create fundamental political and cultural relations of political institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to make sure that equality and democracy are truly realised in leadership thinking and practice. At the same time, it is important to minimise differences and oppositions, to take care of and to nurture consensus. This is a high demand for improving the political culture in Vietnam at present.

Fourth, it is necessary to build and to organise a system of political and cultural institutions to ensure effective operations. This institutional system includes leadership institutions to determine the principle of proper relations between the Party, the State and socio-political organisations; institutional arrangements for the implementation of socio-political and professional organisations; and an institutional setting of ways and means for political and cultural activities. This system of institutions must ensure the most favourable conditions for the political and cultural activities of the masses. Building and operating this institutional system in practice will create a healthy political and cultural environment. At the same time, it is necessary to innovate practical cultural

and political activities in the direction of strengthening dialogue, receiving information and aspirations of the people, resolutely eliminating the imposing, imperative, bureaucratic and subjective habits and practices.

Fifth, it is necessary to promote the perfection of the law, to develop and to promulgate specific, easy-to-understand and easy-to-implement legal documents associated with the organisation and enforcement of laws, in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the entire political culture. It is important to further strengthen the linkage between the National Assembly's oversight and the inspection and supervision by the Party, the Fatherland Front, political and social organisations and the people's supervision. It is necessary to promote the implementation of the master programme of public administration reform towards building a democratic, modern, professional, dynamic and effective public administration. It is important to define responsibilities and accountability mechanisms of state agencies and to abolish those administrative procedures that cause troubles or make life difficult for the people and enterprises.

Sixth, it is obligatory to thoroughly grasp the objectives set out by the 7th Plenum of the CPV's 12th Congress, namely, "Building a contingent of public officials, especially strategic-level ones, with qualities, capabilities and prestige, on the same level of task requirements; sufficient in quantity, with quality and structure suitable for the strategy of socio-economic development and national defence; ensuring a continuous and steady transition between generations, capable of leading Vietnam to become a

modern industrialised country by the year 2030" [2, p.57]. Efforts should be made to continue renovating and to build a contingent of qualified, capable and prestigious public officials at all levels to meet the requirements of the new period. Attention should be focused on building a contingent of strategic-level public officials to be on par with task requirements. Care should be given to strictly controlling the power and authority in personnel management work, combating illegal running for office and cheating justice, promoting the role of the people in building the contingent of public officials. At the same time, it is obligatory to strengthen political and ideological education, to improve revolutionary ethics for the contingent of public officials with a focus on those contents of ethics, historical and cultural traditions of the nation. It is necessary to combine closely and effectively between training and work-out in practice, and to promote learning and following Ho Chi Minh's ideology, ethics and style.

Seventh, it is necessary to resolutely fight against corruption in the state apparatus, sectors, from the central to the grassroots levels. Currently, the situation of collusion among degraded and deteriorated public officials, civil servants and public employees in the state sector with those operating outside the state sector has become popular for corruption crimes. Therefore, it is necessary to expand anti-corruption activities outside the state sector so that anti-corruption work can be synchronous and effective. In addition, international corruption crimes are problems of all nations, including Vietnam. Therefore,

it is necessary to expand negotiations, to sign mutual agreements on legal assistance and cooperation in crime prevention with other countries. Moreover, it is necessary to internalise and enforce the UN Convention against corruption in accordance with Vietnam's conditions and laws.

5. Conclusion

The political culture of each nation is a complex structure, containing diverse knowledge of the various areas of social life. The awareness and proper identification of cultural and political institutions, the building of a cultural and a political environment as well as the harmonious settlement of relationships, and the observance of objective laws among those institutions play an important role in developing the political culture of each nation. In Vietnam at present, to motivate the rapid and sustainable development of the country along the socialist path, it is necessary to renovate and to perfect institutions in general, institutions of political culture in particular, as well as updates of and approaches to concepts, to promote the role, to clarify the true situation, and to set solutions for improvement of political culture in Vietnam.

Notes

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