

Role of Family and Lineage in New Rural Construction at Present

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Abstract: Rural development, including the New Rural Construction program, is one of the important targets of national development in the period of industrialization and integration. There remain, however, many difficulties in implementation of the program, in which some of the goals of the program in regard to the cultural aspect have not been met yet. This paper focuses on analyzing and elucidating the roles played by the family and lineage in preservation and promotion of traditional values during the process of new rural construction, such as: providing mutual assistance in daily life and production; bringing social capital into full play; connecting spiritual ties among individuals in the family and lineage; establishing family and lineage networks; and, educating on the lifestyles, orientating the choice of occupation as well as developing the household economy.

Key words: Family; lineage; rural; traditional culture; value.

1. Introduction

The family and the lineage are extremely significant institutions in the Vietnamese society. Traditionally, the family, the village and the nation are the three mainstays for national foundation and development, of which the family is considered a key institution for preservation of traditional cultural components. Given the continuous and vigorous changes in the social and individual values in the current context of development and integration, the family and lineage bears special significance in preserving traditional cultural values as a cradle for fostering profound values of humanity. One of the targets in the new rural construction program is to preserve and promote the traditional cultural identity, making our culture become an effective

dynamic for industrialization and modernization of agriculture and the rural areas. To that end, traditional cultural values must be preserved and promoted in every rural family and lineage. The question is how to bring the roles of the family and lineage into play so that the values can be most preserved and developed in the current context of modernization, rapid development, and international integration. This paper describes some comments on the family and lineage roles in the current period of rural development.

2. The role in providing mutual assistance in daily life and production

Concerning the characteristics of Vietnamese peasants in history, Pierre Gourou wrote: "Peasants in the Tonkin

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delta live in narrow circumstances, but they have created a complicated civilization surrounding individuals with a network of relations of the family and village. The provision of mutual assistance during agricultural cycles helps small land owners acquire more laborers not in the way of hiring.... Peasants often borrow to invest in production and make up for losses, to meet urgent needs". [8, pp.330 - 339].

Recent studies show that production and trading activities based on the family - lineage network have brought about encouraging results, as households can get a firm financial source to rely on, owing to help from family members and relatives. According to a survey on rural households conducted in 2008, assistance provided by family members and relatives always leads to practical results and it is considered by all households to be the first choice, when they encounter difficulties and need help. The research also reveals that assistance provided by parents and other family members is extremely significant for young newlyweds. To start a married life as well as production and trading activities, they are certainly in need of capital. As they have not yet accumulated sufficiently and can make somewhat risky/venture investment without experiences, it is really necessary to be assisted by the family members [3].

In ethnic minority areas, the network of mutual assistance in production and life has always been maintained among lineage and family members. In addition to spiritual assistance, they also provide material help with funding, labor, seeds, cattle breeds and plant varieties, etc., which is very useful for households, especially those with low income [1].

According to the traditional culture of the Vietnamese family, the sense of providing mutual protection and help in production and life among family members is very common and viewed as a value and a norm of living for every family member. The value of "respecting and prioritizing the ties of kinship" still prevails remarkably today. In the lineage and family linkage, prevailing is the relationship with members of one's paternal side, followed by that with those on the maternal sides, and then, that with other members of the lineage [2].

In the new rural construction program, the values of the lineage and family linkage can be seen as a type of social capital, which is very useful for households to get more opportunities to take part in chains or networks of economic activities. This helps bring them with more benefits and higher productivity. The network of mutual assistance in production activities is stable and reliable on the basis of trust already affirmed among the lineage and family members. This kind of relationships is profoundly maintained in rural communities at present, enabling households to get assistance in funding, labor as well as to overcome consequences of economic losses due to bad harvests, natural calamities, and diseases.

3. Role in connecting spiritual ties among individuals in the family and lineage

From the perspective of the spiritual life, the family is always viewed as a reliable mental support for the members. In the opinion of Vietnamese people, their minds are always with their own family, whenever they get success or failure. Family rituals strengthen the trust and empathy with the sincerest emotions among family members.

Spiritual activities towards family, lineage, and ancestors have resulted in particular characteristics in the spiritual life of Vietnamese people.

For every Vietnamese person, subconsciously, the sanctity of the graves of forefathers and the temples of ancestors is the most sacred belief. In daily life or whenever an important event is taking place in the family, Vietnamese people usually burn incense and pray to ancestors as a dynamic and a source of support, no matter if they are then in the home village or anywhere else. Besides, community-based relationships, especially the ties of kinship, are very highly appreciated; for example, “blood is thicker than water” or “one shall rely on uncles and aunts when father and mother are away”, etc. This is a type of solidarity and mutual help, on which every lineage and family member can rely effectively. The sense of the lineage and ancestry is kept profoundly in mind of all people. Particularly, they always think about close relatives and their minds are with the home village, especially when they get old or achieve success in life. The major meetings of lineage members are held on the ancestor-worshipping day and during the Tet holiday, when almost all members gather in the home village for sacred rites.

According to the pattern of rural habitation, particularly in the plains of North and North Central Vietnam, households of the same family and lineage often live in one village or commune, where the lineage distribution is identified specifically with residence of every branch of the lineage surrounding the temple of ancestors. In the same residence community, households of different lineages also have

close relations with each other in daily life as well as spiritual events such as ancestor-worshipping, lineage meetings, longevity celebrations, funerals, weddings, grave-decorations, etc. Those spiritual events strengthen the ties between individuals, who have the same lineage or the same origin in the community. Those events also create occasions for lineage members to see one another and enhance the lineage-based network of mutual assistance through meaningful activities such as education promotion, donation of money and labor toward rural development, and provision of assistance for production etc. Those assistance is quite effective in the mobilization of the local people to take part in social activities for rural development, for example, the making of roads, building of the village cultural center and library, etc.

There is an altar in almost every Vietnamese home to make worship to the deceased ancestors and/or parents and family members. Every lineage and its branches have its own ancestral shrine or worship hall, where they together carry out worship to the ancestors. Whenever a member of the lineage or family encounters some difficulty in life, the ancestors are always seen as a spiritually reliable prop helping him/her overcome the difficulty. To a certain extent, such a belief influences the behaviors of descendants, preventing them from doing activities against the lineage and family norms of living so that ancestors will not be ashamed of them [4]. The ancestor-worship is made to show many meanings, including the expression of gratitude for the parents' birth-giving, the commemoration of the origin (each person has his/her own ancestor), the hope for assistance provided

by forefathers from the other world, etc. The culture of ancestor-worship still maintains its significance and is continued in the modern family life [7].

Spiritual activity is the very thread connecting all family members together, resulting in close cohesion on the basis of the belief in some sacred world, where people are inclined to do the good, love to work, and live in harmony with the community and nature. Family rites and customs, including ancestor worship, are often involved with agricultural production and the living environment. They always make people feel the familiarity, friendliness and sacredness. Participation in the rites and customs makes people closer to each other and link them into big families and lineages with close relationships in daily life.

The lifestyle in each lineage or family is particularly significant for maintenance of the living norms of individuals. The norms are likely to be applied to education of the family's next generations. This not only helps preserve the family traditions but also partly contributes toward social and community stabilization.

Regarding the spiritual life of the Vietnamese family in rural areas, an outstanding feature is that spirit-based relationships play a special role in helping households to get good balance in daily life. Owing to the relationships, additionally, lineage and family members can make an important contribution toward social stabilization and cultural improvement [8].

Owing to the above-mentioned reasons, the roles of lineage have strongly revived since 1986, when the socio-economic renovation was initiated by the State. The

ancestor-worshipping activities have been resuscitated; the activities of grave-building, road repairs, family-annals compilation, etc. have been taking place vigorously.

As a source of effective assistance to the new rural construction activities, the connection between different lineages has been intensified, making positive impacts on rural development. The lineage connection, however, has also resulted in new challenges; for example, the phenomenon of "[trying to have] officials from our own lineage" leads to formation of factions in the grass-roots political system in some localities, hindering the process of rural development.

4. Role in educating on lifestyles, orientating choice of occupation and developing household economy

In the current campaign for rural cultural household and village development, family-based education is playing an extremely important role. To achieve the criteria of a cultural household, the family need firstly to comply with traditional norms and rules that are still of value. They consists of the norms relating to the relationships between parents and children, between grandparents and grandchildren, among family members, and among families in the same lineage. Of those norms and rules, some behaviors are seen as good traditions, for example, the family hierarchy that requires that one not be insolent to their grandparents and parents; siblings respect and help one another; everyone keep the family traditions and try to do the good and charity, etc. With those friendly, healthy and education-oriented behaviors, the family-based education makes a significant contribution toward minimization of activities of disunity or treatment/behavior

which is of insufficient cultural value toward family members as well as others in the same community.

In the family relationships, children have responsibility to take care of parents. At the same time, the latter assume the responsibility to help and advise their children in social communication and daily work, educating them on how to behave properly toward members in the family and community so that the fine traditions of the family and lineage are preserved. Traditionally, filial piety is a crucial part of the moral education of the Vietnamese family. It is shown via children's behavior of deep gratitude towards parents for birth-giving and education. This leads to the sense of close family sentiments and responsibility for serving parents [6, pp.215-216].

One of the most important goals in the family-based education is to teach children to have a sense of duty toward labor. Since early childhood, children are often instructed by the grandparents and parents to love to work hard with lessons on production and daily life learned from previous generations. Due to the particular characteristics of rural areas, people mainly subsist on manual labor, so peasants are often industrious, thrifty, and labor-loving. This contributes to the formation of values and dignity of the children in the family. Occupational education and the sense of self-reliance at work make children know how to take advantage of favorable conditions in the home village to get success and make contributions to the community and society. This is really significant for rural development at present.

In the current context of rapid changes, it is very important to maintain the family

traditions in terms of the education on behavior and communication, and orientating the children regarding the choice of occupation. Furthermore, children should also be provided with opportunities to work and make contributions toward the family and society as well. As the market economy and international integration are now taking place in rural areas, some negative social phenomena, for example, children's maltreatment toward parents; children's failure to take care of old parents, or phenomena of moral deterioration, have been occurring among part of the population in both urban and rural areas. The main reason is that a number of families have turned the back on the traditional values, while accepting new elements too hastily and arbitrarily. The situation further demonstrates the importance of family-based education not only in maintaining traditional cultural values but also in making contributions toward the rural stability and development.

Family-based orientation of the choice of occupation is of extremely high significance in rural areas today. In parallel with the existence of the trends of attaching more importance to trade and less to agriculture, those of placing importance to the latter remain relatively prominent in the village culture. It is still common that peasants want to teach their children to keep the agricultural work in combination with other forms of production in order to stabilize the family life. In reality, the rural economy in Vietnam is traditionally of self-reliance, in which the household is viewed as the basic economic unit. It mainly relies on small-scale and fragmented production. To speed up rural development, therefore, it is

necessary to pay special attention to agricultural production and respect individuals' choice of employment on the basis of the family-based orientation.

It can be realized that family and lineage traditionally constitute one of the important pillars of national development. They are attached closely to the rural context, since it is the very main place of their residence and development. Given the agricultural culture they live in, Vietnamese rural inhabitants have set up strong cohesion through the ties of kinship and community to cope with natural calamities, diseases and provide mutual assistance in production. Family and lineage are, consequently, especially important for peasants. The ties of kinship have been maintained and developed for generations, connecting them together with spiritual activities, proper behaviors and traditional customs of every family and lineage member.

At present, it is still proved that family and lineage maintain and bring into full play their role in rural development. Owing to the lineage and family network, mutual assistance in daily life and production is provided and a reliable mental support/spiritual prop is created for the members. At the same time, family and lineage are considered very important for education of ethics and lifestyle as well as the formation of dignity for every individual. To bring the role of family and lineage fully into play, it is necessary to disseminate widely the good values of family and lineage so that they can become an important cell in rural development particularly and national

development generally in the current context of international integration and development.

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