Identities of Vietnam's Southwestern People: Perception and Content from Their Own Perspectives

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Received on 20 July 2020. Revised on 11 August 2020. Accepted on 16 August 2020.

Abstract: The study was conducted to discover the identity of people living in southwestern Vietnam in the current new development context. With quantitative and qualitative methods, data was collected through semi-structured interviews of 1,731 household heads from 17 communes, towns, and wards in the eight southwestern provinces, namely Ben Tre, Can Tho, Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, An Giang, Dong Thap, Ca Mau, and Kien Giang. The questionnaire listed 46 characteristics of human identity arranged in pairs of opposite nature and asked respondents to identify the characteristics of the people in the region, and at the same time to explain why those characteristics were selected. The results of the quantitative analysis showed that 23 characteristics were identified with a very high concentration from respondents on five identity groups, covering relationships with society, politics, culture, nature, labour, and oneself. The qualitative descriptions listed the intrinsic manifestations of each characteristic. The results showed that people living in southwestern Vietnam recognised many identity features that were similar to their traditional characteristics, but also pointed out that those features that had changed and their implications had new contents in the current period.

Keywords: Human identity, recognising identity, Vietnam’s Southwestern people.

Subject classification: Psychology

1. Introduction

Identity is a behavioural style, typical of a community in the face of different challenges of life. These are ways of thinking and methods of thinking, lifestyles and ways of life, how to behave and relate to one another in communities, how to build and retain the homeland, how to maintain creativity in culture, science, literature, and art [8] [9], [10], [14]. Identities of people in southwestern Vietnam reflect generalised characteristics of the community, commonly found in many people, demonstrating human behaviour, and choices in relations to objects, different issues in life, reflected in the choice of value systems and behavioural standards, and people’s lifestyles and personalities.

The Southwest of Vietnam is a land with its own characteristics regarding historical formation, geography, and population. The identities of southwestern people have been summarised in many studies from different perspectives. The most common characteristics of people in the southwestern region can be listed through various studies as follows: straightforwardness, frankness, and directness [12], [13]; a sense of honour and fairness [12], [2]; openness, open-mindedness, ease of accepting new things and adaptability [12], [13], [6]; honesty, simple-heartedness [3], [13]; ethics [11]; harmony with nature [6], [12], [2]; generosity, non-providence, having no worry about saving for tomorrow [13], [12]; practicality and factuality [12], [2]; liking for leisure [7]; a sense of business, ease of doing big business [12],; daring to think and act (i.e. enterprising), toughness, assertiveness, bravery [13]; entrepreneurship [3], agility and flexibility in economic activities [2]; daring to think and act [3]; hard-working [5]; being dynamic and creative [2], [3]; lack of community attachment of the Vietnamese people [12]; attachment with the community of the Vietnamese [2] and the Hoa, or Vietnamese of Chinese origin [6], [4] ; little family cohesion [12]; friendliness [13]; and tolerance [12], [13]. These characteristics are described in terms that may not be the same and are approximate in each historical context, which may be characteristic of different ethnic groups in southwestern Vietnam (such as Kinh, Hoa, Khmer, and Cham) and may have a wider or narrower range of connotations.

In the new development context in Vietnam today, the Party and the Government raise general requirements about the Vietnamese person such as: “development of personality, ethics and morality, intelligence, creativity, physical and mental wellness, social responsibility, civic obligations, and sense of law compliance” [1]. These are the characteristics of the new Vietnamese people in accordance with the requirements of national development which have not been mentioned by the traditional society. These are also requirements in the Southwest in the current new context, meeting the sustainable development goals of the region.

A noteworthy point is that most of the research on human identity in the southwestern region was conducted from a historical and cultural perspective. The research methodology used was mainly qualitative by considering those characteristics during the historical development and cultural formation of the region. Currently, the new development context has a great impact on the identity of people. In particular, the living and working conditions of people there have been changing drastically under the impact of climate change as well as the requirements of sustainable development. The question is that whether human identities in this region today are different from the ones that were summarised in previous studies. And, are the new human characteristics to meet the new development requirements set forth by the Party also found in the southwestern people? This article is designed to answer these questions from the perspective of those people themselves - their recognition of who they are in the region they live in, as well as the content of those features through what they experience, view and summarise that can give us a new perspective on the people of Vietnam’s southwestern region today.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Sample size

Research data was collected from 1,731 people, representing households in 17 communes, towns, and wards in the eight southwestern provinces, namely Ben Tre, Soc Trang, Tra Vinh, Can Tho, An Giang, Dong Thap, Ca Mau and Kien Giang. In which, sample distribution is as follows: (1) by the place of residence: rural: 73.5%, township, town, or ward: 26.5%; (2) by occupation: farmers: 39.9%, sales and services: 22.4%, workers: 15.5%, state officers: 10.9%, homemakers: 9%, unemployed: 2.3%; (3) by ethnicity: Kinh: 78.6%, Hoa 3.5%, Khmer: 12.1%; and Cham 5.7%.

2.2. Research tools

Questionnaires were used to collect data on the characteristics of people in the region. These characteristics were synthesised from two sources. The first were the ones found in previous studies of other authors, such as practicality, generosity, friendship, and so on. The second source included those new human characteristics that can meet the national development requirements according to the orientation of the Party and the State, such as creativity, eagerness to learn, adaptability, care for the national issues, fairness, and compliance with the law. The authors then added features in contrast to those indicated, for example: liking to be idle and liking to be busy; thrifty and generous, and so forth. The questionnaire listed 23 pairs of traits that were randomly arranged in columns A and B. Respondents answered by choosing one feature in column A or column B, which they considered to be a characteristic of the people in southwestern Vietnam. The questions did not ask the respondents to evaluate themselves but to comment on the people of the southwestern region in general. Therefore, their assessment was relatively objective. In addition, the selected features had four options in one spectrum, including not only the original features which were considered the identity of people but also their opposite features. Next, the study interviewed local people directly, asking them to describe the real-life features from their perspectives.

2.3. Analysis method

The gathered data was analysed by using descriptive statistics with the assumption that any choice which acquired a probability of > 0.5 (i.e. more than 50% of the respondents) will be considered a characteristic recognised as an identity of southwestern people. The qualitative analysis was applied with additional descriptions of the identity recognised to highlight the content of each identity from the perspective of the respondent. Similar content was referred to as a category in the coding process.

3. Research results

3.1. Recognising human identities in the southwestern region

The perceptual results of the research into human identities are shown in the table below. According to this table, the following characteristics can be recognised as the majority (endorsed by more than 50% and marked in bold).

Table 1: Identification of Characteristics of People (Percentages in Descending Order)

Column A characteristics	A Sure	A Hesitant	B Hesitant	B Sure	Column B Characteristics	Total (N)
A. Sociability	96.5	1.7	0.5	1.3	B. Unsociability	1,722
A. Law compliance	94.7	3.3	1.0	1.0	B. Poor law compliance	1,722
A. Poor ethics	1.2	0.7	3.5	94.5	B. Ethics	1,721
A. Family line cohesion	93.6	2.3	1.2	3.0	B. Poor family line cohesion	1,722
A. Fairness	92.8	4.9	0.9	1.4	B. Poor fairness	1,723
A. Poor friendliness	2.9	0.6	2.7	93.7	B. Friendliness	1,720
A. Being down-to-earth	91.7	4.7	1.7	1.9	B. Dreaminess	1,724
A. Tolerance	90.0	6.3	1.2	2.5	B. Poor tolerance	1,721
A. Poor attachment to community	5.7	1.2	3.7	89.4	B. Attachment to community	1,715
A. Honesty	88.3	4.5	1.9	5.3	B. Choosing of ways to speak/act to please others to achieve one's targets or to avoid others feel displeased with him/her	1,348
A. Harmony with nature	86.8	3.9	2.1	7.2	B. Infringement of nature	1,718
A. Non-straightforwardness	11.8	3.9	5.2	79.1	B. Straightforwardness	1,725
A. Paying of attention to current affairs of national importance	86.1	4.0	1.3	8.6	B. Paying of little attention to current affairs of national importance	1,719
A. Eagerness to learn from others	84.2	4.9	2.7	8.2	B. Unwillingness/ hesitance to learn from others	1,722
A. Attachment of importance to money	3.9	2.7	11.8	81.6	B. Attachment of importance to affections/human relationships like gratitude, generosity, helpfulness……	1,721

Column A characteristics	A Sure	A Hesitant	B Hesitant	B Sure	Column B Characteristics	Total (N)
A. Enterprisingness (lit. daring to think and act)	79.1	9.4	3.5	7.9	B. Dare to think but not to act	1,726
A. Thrifty	77.3	7.2	3.7	11.8	B. Generosity	1,717
A. Preference to be idle	23.2	4.3	8.8	63.6	B. Preference to be busy	1,722
A. Ease to adapt	76.2	5.8	3.4	14.6	B. Difficulty to adapt	1,721
A. Lots of contributions to community	73.9	6.0	3.5	16.6	B. Poor contributions to community	1,721
A. Feeling not liking to do business	15.7	3.5	9.2	71.6	B. Feeling to like doing business	1,722
A. Capability	66.1	12.3	5.7	15.9	B. Incapability	1,726
A. Poor creativity	26.3	5.3	6.2	62.2	B. Creativity	1,723

Source: Results of the State-level Scientific Research Project entitled "Identities of the People Living in Southwestern Vietnam in the New Development Context", coded as CN-TNB.DT/14-19/X19.

(1) Social identity: This includes the characteristics that people show in their relationships with others. The identified characteristics are sociability (96.5%), friendliness (93.7%), attachment to family-line (93.6%), tolerance (90%), attachment to community (89.4%), and attaching importance to/respect towards affections/human relationships, such as gratitude, generosity, helpfulness, etc. (81.6%). That means, in human relationships, people are identified firstly as people who are sociable with those around them, friendly in contact and in behaviour, tolerant, value attitudes over money and are strongly attached to their families, relatives, as well as the surrounding community.

(2) Political-cultural identity: This includes the characteristics that people in the southwestern region expressed in political and cultural life in general. These are also the new human traits needed to meet today's nation-building requirements that the Party has set forth. These include compliance with the law (94.7%), ethics (94.5%), fairness (92.8), taking care of the country's current events (86.1), and many contributions to the community (73.9%). Here, in relations with society in general, people in the Southwest are considered to have a sense of compliance with the law, ethics, and treat everyone fairly. They are interested in the current news, national development orientation, and contribute to their communities.

(3) Personal identity: This includes the characteristics of each person in everyday life. These are: being down-to-earth (91.7%), honesty (88.3%), straightforwardness (79.1%), and thrifty (77.3%). It can be understood that, in life, in general, the people are identified as

down-to-earth, honest, simple-hearted, and straightforward people. They are not merely too clever in their talking or interacting with others. They are thrifty, and "calculate" to spend wisely, not recklessly.

(4) Environmental identity: This includes traits expressed in relation to nature. In this regard, people are being in harmony with nature (86.8%) and adapting to change (76.2%). Accordingly, they are nature lovers, have a lifestyle close to nature, and accept the harshness of nature to adapt to the changes and live with it.

(5) Economic identity: This includes the characteristics that are demonstrated in economic activities. They are: eager to learn (84.2%), enterprising lit. daring to think and act (79.1%), love for business (71.6%), being capable (66.1%), liking to be busy (63, 6%), and creativity (62.2%).

The above-summarised identity groups are based on their relative relationships with human beings, society, nature, oneself, and labour activity. This division does not imply that a characteristic can be present in only one group but that it can be manifested differently in different groups. Considering the percentage of respondents for each characteristic, it can be seen that characteristics of social and political-cultural identities are those with the highest proportions of respondents and that these are very clear manifestations of southwestern people's identities recognised by the general public (i.e. they were recognised by more than 90% of respondents). Meanwhile, the characteristics of personal identity, environmental identity, and economic identity have a slightly lower rate of choice (around 70-80%). This shows that these features have a certain differentiation in people's perceptions and assessments.

3.2. Content of people's perceived identity from their perspective

3.2.1. Human identities in the southwestern region that are reflected in the relationship with human beings

Content of attachment to the community (N=149)

Community attachment expressions were compiled from 149 respondents and divided into two groups. *Firstly*, community attachment is shown in that people are always ready to help others in the community. Respondents pointed out that cases of poverty and disease were always cared for, not only by authorities (from a policy perspective) but also by those around them. If someone in the community lacked food or clothing, they would receive them from someone else. If someone in the community lacked money, they could receive loans from someone else. If someone knew a vacant job was available somewhere, they would tell others about it. With ordinary local people, they also offered help when someone's family had an event or incident such as a death anniversary, a funeral, a wedding, constructions or repairs of a house. They can contribute manual efforts such as the erection of a make-shift arcade, preparing a banquet, or contributing ideas and comments on plans. They are always ready to help one another regardless of whether the person being helped is familiar or unfamiliar. *Secondly*, the attachment is also evident in the harmonious relationship in community life: "A good neighbour indeed is a neighbour in need". Everyone lives harmoniously, confides, asks, talks, shares with neighbours, or frequently visits others' houses at times of sorrow or happiness. They

work together for something of the community such as inviting one another to participate in local activities and movements and joining and at death ceremonies or weddings in the village. In the community, they do not discriminate based on wealth, ethnicity, and religion. They treat one another in harmony and refrains from causing conflicts, disputes, and hatred. They unite in production and daily life. "Most people care for one another, showing their warmth, enthusiasm, and dearness".

Content of attachment to the family lineage (N=143)

Summarising the shared opinions of 143 respondents, we grouped them into three main groups showing the attachment to the family lineage of southwestern people. First, it is the help between siblings and relatives. Brothers and sisters happily take care of one another when problems arise and give help in cases of sickness and other needs. Siblings and relatives support one another in their work, such as providing business guidance and sharing job information. Family line members live in unity. In terms of affection, cousins and relatives share their mutual affection, protection, and help in times of distress, and maintain close and helpful relationships. Siblings in the family neither argue nor create conflicts, nor seek problems. "Everything is settled through amicable conciliation". Relatives often visit and take care of one another. They love their children and grandchildren, and live happily and in harmony, and maintain affectionate relationships with one another. Family and relatives are always the top priority in many joint activities. "When there is a party (in cases of death anniversary, funerals, and weddings), family members will come first, then the neighbours". In their free time, they often meet to talk and care for the health of everyone in the family lineage. They can confide their affairs without hesitation with their brothers, sisters, and close relatives. Besides this, they consciously maintain blood relations with relatives for generations to "avoid losing their ancestors", and many families can live under the same roof with several generations. They never leave the family line members alone, especially those who live close to one another. They create a link in the family line together, and such a dear affection has also been maintained over many generations. "When a problem arises in the family, just one call and your brother and sisters gather right away without any controversy" or "A person must live with a family origin, so family lineage must be respected, and this is human morality".

Content of sociability (N=173)

Synthesising 173 shared opinions, we found that, first, the sociability is reflected in the indiscrimination, meaning that everyone is the same, the same friendliness is for everyone, and everyone can happily be treated equally. If "someone comes from another place, people still treat them well". People are hospitable, do not discriminate, and do not offend anyone, regardless of ethnicity or social class. "Wherever I go, they always give me thoughtful care, consider me a family member, and will treat me with any delicious food they have". They also do not distinguish between rich and poor, but only distinguish good and bad. The sociability is also reflected in the integration with one another. People get together at work, as well as in entertainment activities, and share their sadness and happiness. They easily exchange and get along

with one another, and like community activities conducted together. Everyone is also sociable in exchanging stories and chats. Neighbours "frequently visit one another" and exchange business experiences. Help is also seen as an aspect of sociability. Anyone faced with a problem will surely receive help from their neighbours according to their ability. "Whatever problems may arise with someone; neighbours will surely come to help them". "If anyone is in business trouble, neighbours will join hands for help". "A neighbour indeed is a neighbour in need" is especially true in cases of sickness and mishaps.

Content of friendliness (N=172)

Friendliness is an indicator of a good attitude towards outward contact. It is openness, intimacy, readiness to contact and bring a good state to the contacted people. Here is the summary of friendly expressions received from 172 respondents. *The first* is the readiness to meet and to contact. People are always ready to contact everyone. With everyone they meet, they "will talk happily", and everyone is "warmly welcomed and greeted". They talk openly and warmly welcome them. They easily integrate into the community. Friendliness is not only shown to acquaintances but also to strangers: "Meeting strangers is still accompanied by happy talk and exchange of stories. No signs of shyness with strangers at all". *Second*, friendliness is also reflected in the sincere and thoughtful treatment characterised by the people. They have good feelings for everyone. They are easy-going, gentle, sociable, and close to people. They visit one another often. They are enthusiastic and proactive in helping others in times of distress. They are "very willing to help strangers". They are "cheerful and affectionate" people in dealing with others. The sincerity is easy to see in that they "eat often together", to be happy and show their hearts, the food can be simple, not fussy and be served at home.

Content of tolerance (N=142)

Tolerance means accepting differences and things that are unlike you, and accepting things you do not like to a certain extent. The opinions of 142 respondents about the manifestations of this characteristic can be synthesised into the following groups. Forgiveness must be first mentioned. People are forgiving and forgetting the faults of others easily. "Wrongdoings will be forgiven, displeasing or offending things will be ignored without a thought". "Wrongdoings can be easily forgiven as long as they are admitted". They are generous and tolerant people, and for them, "whatever is said is finished and off one's mind". "If there is something hard to deal with, it should be ignored, with no memory and no hatred". If there are any problems, they are also easy to forgive, ready to ignore other people's mistakes, something like "anger in the morning, peace in the afternoon". They think that this is "ethical" and people should behave like "what can be ignored should be ignored, and one should forget what hurts him". They live in harmony with no one being angry at another for a long time and everyone is generous with other people. The next expression of tolerance perceived is to sympathise easily. They can sympathise with people in difficulty and can "help others even though those persons were not kind to them before".

Tolerance is also being not selfish. They open their hearts to help people around them and live with attaching importance to/respect towards affections/human relationships such

as gratitude, generosity, helpfulness, etc., and do not attach importance to material wealth. They like to live in peace and support one another.

Content of "trọng tình nghĩa" (attaching importance to/respect towards affections/ human relationships such as gratitude, generosity, helpfulness, etc. (N=149)

This is a characteristic of the human-to-human relationship, expressing the importance of affection and obligations towards one another. The opinions of 149 respondents can be synthesised into two main groups of expressions of the characteristic. (1) This characteristic includes mutual help. "Anyone in need because of poverty or sickness can be helped wholeheartedly". For example, "if someone moves their home, they can receive help". Help is diversified and can be in terms of money (e.g. loans), labour, and time. "Everyone is willing to help people in need even though they are not acquaintances". "People whose relationships are not special can still receive help and they are not to be ignored". When anyone is faced with mishaps, the community joins hands to help. The willingness to help is shown quite naturally. "If someone is asked for help to get something done, s/he is ready to accept it". One's own obligations in the community's common affairs are readily understood. "Community members go to work together to do common community affairs together, such as repairing village roads and participating in commune programmes". They unite in production, daily life, and contributions to the community. (2) This characteristic is also shown in everyday acts of expressing emotions such as inquiring after one another's situations and chats. "People work and close doors during the daytime, but we meet and chat in the evening". A neighbour indeed is a neighbour in need. People live in harmony with one another. They come for help when there are funerals, weddings, and parties. It is also a feeling of being bonded with others, caring, loving one another, understanding one another, coming together in a sincere, friendly, happy, and sociable manner.

3.2.2. Identities shown in political and social aspects

Content of "Making many contributions to the community" (N=116)

Based on the opinions of 116 respondents, two main groups of people's contributions to the community can be identified as follows. The first is financial contributions and manual effort to local activities such as building bridges and roads, growings plants with flowers, trees and ornamental plants, donations to local campaigns such as charity programmes, poverty alleviation, disaster prevention, and building the new countryside/new rural areas. These activities are often carried out by the commune authorities with the participation of local people and almost everyone contributes. The second is to contribute ideas to build communities such as sharing experiences, collaborating in com-munity activities, and contributing ideas to the production and activities of local people.

Content of paying attention to national affairs (N=118)

"Paying attention to national affairs" describes a broader human interest in such affairs, being not just confined to individual or family life. The characteristics first include finding information about the current situation and orientation of the country's economic

development. The responses of 118 people show that people in the southwestern region are very interested in the economic situation and current affairs of the country. Interesting topics include economy, domestic politics, the situation in the society, weather, on-going events, of which economic and agricultural topics are of greatest interest (e.g. prices, goods, production and business methods, knowledge of farming, prevention of natural disasters, and climate change, and many more). They search such information from sources such as television, newspapers, talks with other people, the internet, of which watching TV is the most popular for daily news. Favourite and popular TV channels with local people are news programmes, such as VTV3, VTV7, Vinh Long Television, *Thời sự 24 giờ* (24-hour news), *An ninh* (Security), *An ninh Tổ quốc* (Security of the Fatherland), *Người đưa tin* (Messenger), Agriculture.

Content of fairness (N=78)

Social equity is a concept that expresses an equal relationship between individuals and society. In life, equity is reflected in equal treatment among everyone. Below are explanations of 78 respondents about the fairness they perceive in Vietnam's southwestern people. Those opinions can be synthesised into the following groups of expressions. The first is fairness and equality in treatment. People treat outsiders equally, regardless of being rich or poor, of religion, with no calculations of gain or loss, and with unbiased treatment. They treat others equally as brothers and help others equally. The second is fairness and equity in the division. In the family, people divide assets equally among their children: children are given equal shares of assets, regardless of being boys or girls, big or small. "What is bought should be divided among all the kids". In the community, they like to divide work or benefits fairly. The third is to behave rightly with sins. They will not cover up but openly speak about sins without unreasonable defence. "Anyone guilty must take the consequence", even if it is their loved one. The fourth is fairness in affection. They show equal love for their children and be at peace with everyone. They "neither defend anyone nor ignore anyone". Finally, it is fairness in social affairs. They do not listen to one side. Rather, they need to listen to everyone's opinion before reaching a decision, discuss together to make the fairest decision agreed by everyone.

Content of law compliance (N = 142)

Law compliance is one of the requirements of the rule of law for all citizens and organisations in society. Synthesised information from 142 respondents shows the basic manifestations of this characteristic. The first group of manifestations is in compliance with the law. Respondents said that southwestern people strictly abide by the laws that the State promulgated, such as the Law on Road Traffic [Safety]. Perhaps this is the most popular law for them because most of the people surveyed mentioned this law. The second group of manifestations is to comply with regulations and policies promulgated by local authorities, such as no gambling, no alcoholism, and no drugs; no fighting; participating well in local activities, maintaining security, order and regulations on building a new countryside, contributing to the poverty reduction fund, and more. In general, they said that most people would live peacefully and do not want to do wrong nor oppose any rules and regulations.

Content of ethics (N=128)

Social ethics are built on written, as well as unwritten, standards and statutory norms. Opinions about ethics were rather unanimous. In terms of behavioural standards and norms, southwestern people follow ethical standards and norms, such as respect for politeness and rites, respect for superiors and concessions to inferiors, respect for grandparents, parents, helping and caring for others, speaking moderately and temperately, living well together, having a sense of conscience, thoughtfulness, honesty, and refrain from wrongdoing. In business, ethics is reflected in the fact that people like to do righteous business, neither cheating nor doing things dishonesty. In these two groups of expressions, the majority mentioned morality in human-to-human behaviour, while a few opinions were given on ethics in business.

3.2.3. Identities of people shown in economic activities

Content of busying oneself with work (N=216)

With the opinions of 216 respondents, the following groups can be pointed out. The first is busying oneself doing business. All respondents indicated that today everyone must work, and time is mainly devoted to working. Work takes up a lot of the days' time and the demands of the job keep them busy. Compared to sitting idle and enjoying leisure time, they prefer being busy because it is a livelihood for them. "Everyone works to make a living"; "Everyone has to work and that is natural for human beings"; "If you do not have a job, you must try to find one". People do several different types of jobs (such as office work, selling insurance policies or selling goods online; working at home and as a hired labour; cultivating crops and raising livestock; besides main jobs, also working part-time such as building roads, making thatched roofing materials...). Second, work is everyone's need, everyone who can work will find jobs to meet their needs. They go to work to "make ends meet"; to "make money and increase income"; "to make sure their families lead a decent life" so that they can get out of poverty with stronger spending power and "have to work hard to get good results". Third, emotions and habits. They are happy to busy themselves with work and "feel bored doing nothing". They like to move around, not to sit still. They are used to busying themselves with work, and accustomed to being busy: "We feel accustomed to being busy and will feel tired and uncomfortable sitting idle".

Content of competence (N=196)

Most respondents believe that south-western people are capable because they are effective people. This is shown in the fact that they "know how to apply new science and technology", know to explore new things, "plant trees according to new technical models" with higher yields, constantly renovate farming models to be market-oriented, and they "know how to calculate" in business. They often take the initiative and learn from others to do business more effectively. Their jobs and businesses are always developing, with better efficiency and effectiveness each year. "More job establishments are being created", and currently, many jobs are available here, "there is a job surplus you know". They know how to research and find new things to do things more effectively. Better capacity results in the fact that life

has been improved markedly. Children go to school; many people have got rid of poverty and have enough food. Their lives are better and more stable. Their living conditions are renovated. They can contribute their own money to make public roads cleaner and more beautiful. The number of better-off families is increasing, "many households build new houses, not makeshift ones", and "families buy new amenities and modern conveniences". Another group of manifestations of capacity is the ability to overcome difficulties. Doing business now is not easy, many difficulties arise continuously, but people here know how to handle difficult times and know how to cope with risks.

Content of love for business (N=193)

Answering the question why people love to do business, many think that business is a very familiar thing to them because "Everyone does business, more or less", such as selling agricultural products, breakfasts, clothes, and running restaurants and cafes, and more. In addition, they have a positive attitude towards business, considering the business not difficult. "Any business will be okay as long as it helps you make money, and everyone has something for sale and should be happy with that". In their opinion, running one's own business is effective as one can earn immediate profits. Respondents said, business results in high profits and it is easier for one to get rich, so his economic conditions will be stable. Therefore, "everyone loves to do business if they have capital". People realise the advantages of doing business in the Southwest because this is the granary of rice, fruit, and fishery products for the region. They find that "business is more active than crop farming because the price of agricultural products is unpredictably fluctuating, and farmers have to depend on traders. Business brings more benefits, higher profits, is more stable, and healthier than farming", and people "do not need agricultural land". "One is capable of doing business as long as they know how to calculate", and business makes people dynamic and open-minded. Moreover, "everyone wants to get rich", so "everyone must do business to survive" and get rich. To do business is to be [one's own] boss/master (lit. to be the owner, i.e. to be self-employed, to be nobody's hired labour), and they "love to be [their own] bosses".

Content of "daring to think and act" (enterprising) (N=162)

"Daring to think and act" refers to turning new, breakthrough thoughts and ideas for which there have been no precedents into action to implement those ideas in practice. From the opinions of 162 respondents, it can be seen that the manifestations of "daring to think and act" in the southwestern people are quite diverse in scope, both in business and within their personality. In business, they are assertive and seize any available chances. For example, when working away from home, "if anyone says there is a good job available somewhere and if they think it is good for them, they agree to go there right away", "if they say they love to trade, they do it immediately", "whatever can be done is done, if you cannot do it, then think and do it eventually", "they dare to invest a hundred million Vietnamese dong in shrimp farming", "whatever crops they want to farm they do it without hesitation"; "they always have the idea of planting a new crop and when the conditions are right, they do it even without any capital". They dare to come up with

initiatives and build implementation plans, especially in the application of new techniques; “anyone who knows new techniques will apply them right away” with “trials and errors”. “Daring to think and act” is identified as a character of the southwestern people. They do not hesitate, but dare to take risks. When they have set a goal, they are sure to attain it. Their assertiveness is shown in that if they have an idea, the implementation of that idea does not depend on other people, rather it “depends on those who have the idea in the first place”. “For them, saying goes hand in hand with doing”.

Content of eagerness to learn from others (N = 159)

Learning is seeking and discovering new knowledge, an essential characteristic of a growing society. Opinions of the 159 respondents reveal the characteristic of Vietnam’s southwestern people in the present period. They said that today’s doing business relies heavily on science and technology. Therefore, for effective business, they must regularly acquire new knowledge and skills, and find new methods and techniques in agriculture, fishery, and other occupational activities, or even learn new professions (such as sewing, weaving, and trade). In particular, applying scientific and technical advances to agricultural activities is important, such as in using appropriate amounts of insecticides, how to cultivate new crops and when is the appropriate climate for certain crops. It is important that from learning that, they always “learn from experiences to apply new knowledge better suited to their activities”. Their learning is diverse and can happen in training classes organised by the government, thematic seminars organised by the Farmers' Association, and by individuals exchanging experiences and perspectives, as well as self-learning through television programmes and “"sneaky learning" from others”.

Content of creativity (N = 51)

Creativity is doing something newer, more effective than the old one. The synthesised opinions of 51 respondents show the manifestation of creativity in them and how they apply new techniques in an innovative manner consistent with existing conditions, such as for crop cultivation, animal husbandry, and farming. For example, the improvement and making of agricultural machinery for work to make farming more effective or to take initiatives to shorten harvest time and increase productivity. Creativity also shows the changes in production and business to work more effectively. The main characteristic of the creativity of the southwestern people in the application of science and technology is the combination with experience, but rarely applying entirely new things they have learned. That means they apply and improve things based on their experience.

3.2.4. Identities of southwestern people in the relationship with the natural environment

Content of harmony with nature (N=138)

Harmony with nature is a way of life in which one behaves, get along well with, loves, protects, and considers himself a part of nature. With the opinions of 138 respondents, harmony with nature of the southwestern people has the following manifestations. First, it is important to “keep nature intact and be content with what nature gives you”, and “keep the southwestern land intact and do nothing to change it”. In business, they

choose to adapt to nature and to rely on nature for livelihoods. Land and water coming from nature are used to cultivate. "After fruit crops are being harvested, they choose not to improve farming land. They think Mother Nature nourishes them, gives them land and water for farming and business in compliance with the law of nature". They accept the harshness of nature and respond to, but do not complain. Harmony with nature is also reflected in their love for nature. They love a lifestyle that is attached to rivers, nature, trees, and fresh air. They love planting trees and gardening. They lead a non-fussy, natural lifestyle, such as love for "hanging hammocks in the garden, outdoor life, leisurely resting in nature", "feeling at ease when outdoors", combined with a dislike for building structures made of concrete, and a love for living close to nature, and "self-grown vegetables, food, and less purchased foods". In addition, they assume that southwestern people are grateful for nature and keen to protect it. They do not cut trees but plant more of them. They "neither change nature nor harm it".

Content of ease of adapting to change (N=69)

Ease of adapting to change is the ability to get used to changes in the surrounding environment to be able to live well and cope with such changes. Synthesising the opinions of 69 respondents, we can see the characteristics of southwestern people adapting to change is not only indicated in the field of change of nature but also in society and employment. With nature, they "watch the weather and do business". Whatever the weather they face, they all have a business style that suits it. They can also "adapt well to climate change, with saline intrusion, and with floods". Not only that, although agricultural and fishery activities depend a lot on nature, when natural disasters like storms and floods occur, they quickly overcome the consequences of these to ensure that their lives stay normal. At work, they quickly catch up with change: changing jobs or workplaces, and changing from something ineffective to something more effective, applying the better, doing new things, catching up with the time, and easily learning from others for a better life. They are also easy to adapt to social change: even if they go somewhere else (working far from home), they can still live and integrate well. The State's new policies are easily accepted and followed by them.

3.2.5. Identities of southwestern people in personal life

Content of thrift (N=215)

Thrift is a trait related to material use and consumption of human beings, reflected in the absence of luxury, the absence of wastefulness, consumption in moderation and appropriateness. From the opinions of 215 respondents, the following manifestations of frugality can be seen. (1) First, it is saving money. Although "they succeeded in selling goods, they only spent half of the money earned and kept the rest as savings". In addition, they said that "what can be saved must be saved", such as collecting rainwater for use, not using tap water to save on water bills, and electricity is only used when needed to also save on electricity bills. (2) Spending right: In consumption, southwestern people uphold the spirit of spending right: "Spend money on only whatever needs to be

spent on", "whatever you buy you need to ponder and to calculate", "buy only those things that are well worth buying and badly in need of", "spend money for the right purpose and reasonably", and "buy enough, not surplus". Nowadays, they do not like to be wasteful. They said that "a wasteful way of life coupled with over-spending is not appropriate" in the current living context. (3) The purpose of saving: They realise the meaning and the purpose of saving is to take care of the future (so they will have money when needed to take care of old age, to be prepared for sickness, to protect themselves, to pay debts, to have capital to do business, to develop their family economy, to take care of family and house), and to have something "left for the children". They said that "making money is hard, so you have to save money" and "people who make money are few and their dependants are many, so they have to save money to do other things and to be prepared for difficult times".

Content of being down-to-earth (N=152)

Being down-to-earth is the characteristic of those who think and behave in accordance with the current situation, with no illusions or pretensions; practical and realistic. Synthesising 152 descriptions of respondents, the following two groups of manifestations of this feature can be identified. (1) Live with the present situation: People care for life in the present. They take care of business and make money to live. They are satisfied with doing business just "to have enough food for survival". They need to work and act, to "make use of it to be able to work and to trade" in the present. (2) Live with your own reality: "if you do not have money, you do not dream high or think far", and "just think about what you can do". They spend only as they can in the present, "live with what you can afford", so that "your family lives in accordance with its own resources, and owes nobody a debt of gratitude". Moreover, they "do not ask for and do not dream about what they cannot afford", and they lead a simple life. They accept reality without delusions, and they accept difficulties.

Content of honesty (N=100)

Honesty is to reveal yourself naturally as you are, being candid. Through 100 opinions of respondents, we can see the following descriptions of honesty of the southwestern people. (1) Honesty means speaking frankly and to "say the facts", "say what is on your mind", and "being afraid of neither offending others nor hurting them with direct comments". What they say is true and they do not make up stories or say bad things or exaggerate. (2) Honest nature: Southwestern people "are not greedy, do not lie to or deceive others". They "like to be treated honestly" and "live without calculations". (3) Trust: Due to their honest nature, southwestern people "easily trust others" and are not sceptical and seldom doubt others' words.

Content of straightforwardness (N=165)

Straightforwardness is a person's trait of frankness, not beating around the bush or being evasive. With 165 comments, the manifestations of the straightforwardness of southwestern people are multifaceted. (1) Speaking frankly: The southwestern people express their frankness through the spoken language such as "if you see something wrong, you will give your opinion frankly" and do not "backbite". When they feel dissatisfied, they say their opinions straight-forwardly and "do not beat around the bush

or are smooth-tongued". They "speak directly to the problem to be resolved" and "speak their minds straight to one another" both in daily life and on special occasions such as "meetings where straightforward comments are given". (2) Telling the truth: Frankness also means that they "speak their minds and tell the truth" and "tell right from wrong", "without fearing to displease others or to be hated by others", as well as "give comments for the learning from experiences and improvements". (3) Behaving frankly: Straight-forwardness is shown not only in speech but also in everyday behaviour. They behave in a manner which is "sincere, in compliance with their true nature", "not memorising unpleasant deeds made by others to them", and "not lying". Therefore, they are "easy to understand and for them, there is no need to be smooth-tongued". They said, "frankness lets other people understand them right away, and to be smooth-tongued easily leads to misunderstanding". They also said that straightforward behaviour "[helps to] retain the villagers' affection" because "when we have a conflict, we will talk with one another frankly and let it go", so it is easier for them to sympathise with and understand one another.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to explore the identity of Vietnam's southwestern people from the perceptions of the people around them and to interpret the inner meaning of that identity from their perspectives. The results have shown that people have identified with a high concentration of 23 characteristics within five groups of human identities, including social identity (harmony, friendliness, family attachment, tolerance, community attachment, and attaching importance to/respect towards affections/human relationships, such as gratitude, generosity, helpfulness…), political and cultural identity (compliance with the law, ethical values, fairness, attention to current affairs of the country, contributions to the community), environmental identity (living in harmony with nature and being easy to adapt to change), economic identity (eagerness to learn, enterprising, love for business, capability, creativity), and personal identity (being down-to-earth, honesty, straightforwardness, and frugality). These five identity groups cover the entire human life in society with different forms of activities, reflected in the character, lifestyle, behaviour, action, and thinking of today's southwestern people of Vietnam.

The interpretations and lists of manifestations of these identities in the eyes of the southwestern people are diverse but also consistent. The diversity is shown in that each identity feature is described in many different dimensions. For example, love for business is seen in three perspectives such as a favourite job, a positive emotion to business, and a view on the advantages thereof. On the other hand, frugality is described as a concept (that is, to know how to save, to know how to spend right), but also as the result and goal of saving. The consistency is shown in that although each feature is multifaceted, it is still explained focusing on its nature. This can provide suggestions for the consideration of the structure of concepts related to human identity. For example, the trait of being down-to-earth in the people consists of two dimensions, focusing attention on the current

life and living exactly in compliance with their own reality. Ease of adaptation includes three aspects, namely adapting to natural changes, adapting to change at work, and adapting to social change. All three aspects are experiencing a lot of changes in the current context in southwestern Vietnam. On the other hand, the expressions listed were consistent with many people. These descriptions also show that several related characteristics, such as attachment to the community, attachment to the family line, harmony, and so forth, all have in common the aspect of helping. On the other hand, a commonality of eagerness for learning, capability, and creativity reflect the application of science and technology. These results suggest that it is reasonable to combine identities into a group with many related characteristics and show relativity in the naming of these identities. That explains why there are many names for these identities if viewed from different angles, not only by using different descriptions but also from the multi-faceted character of each identity in the lives of these people.

The identities of the southwestern people in the current development context, identified through the perspectives of their own, share some points of consistency, but also differ from those summarised in the studies listed above.

We believe that those identities and traits of consistency are not only common with many people but also last long and remain stable over time. This is true with many of the above-discussed traits and characteristics. In addition, some characteristics have changed under the impact of many social factors, impacting living conditions and personal characters with regards to their thriftiness, love to be busy, and attachment to the family and the community. These people are living in a society with many changes happening daily, with limited resources. Amid this, doing business is no longer as easy as before, along with multilateral exchanges and acquisition of new knowledge. Thus, the southwestern people realise that they need to save for a more stable life and not to spend wastefully. This is coupled with a situation in which nobody can know for sure what is in store when tomorrow comes. Although social mobility is becoming more and more advanced as people can find jobs in many places, it is not easy to leave relatives and villages behind for good. Therefore, they maintain a close attachment with the community and neighbourhood. Unlike migrants in history who might have left their home villages often alone, today's migrants to the region often come and live in groups, with families and siblings accompanying them or being invited to come later as soon as the first settlement has been successful. Thus, they usually live close together which makes family attachment a noticeable feature of today's southwestern people of Vietnam.

The results also show that people are characterised with similar traits as mentioned in the Political Report of the Party's Central Committee of the 12th tenure, such as compliance with the law, fairness, attention to the State and the country, and so forth. These are necessary and needed characteristics in the current context. The survey participants also positively assessed these features as the identities of Vietnam's

southwestern people. However, there is also a need for diachronic studies to confirm its existence as a trait in these people's identities.

Note

[1] This paper was published in Vietnamese in *Tâm lý học*, số 3, 2020, and then developed into this English version. Translator: Luong Quang Luyen. Language editor: Etienne Mahler. The paper is part of the results of a State-level scientific research project entitled "Identities of the People Living in Southwestern Vietnam in the New Development Context", coded as CN-TNB.DT/14-19/X19.

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