Moral education or political education in the Vietnamese educational system?

Dung Hue Doan*
Nong Lam University, Vietnam

Vietnam has experienced the influences of different social standards and values of Confucianism, Communism and several major religions, such as Buddhism and Catholicism, and has also undergone tremendous social change in recent decades. Consequently, moral education in present-day Vietnam takes various forms and definitions. Nowadays, moral education is incorporated in the formal curriculum and taught as a single subject of study at all levels of the Vietnamese education system. The focus of moral education in primary schools is character and personality building. In secondary schools, the syllabuses focus on citizenship education, emphasising the notion of developing a socialist citizen. In higher education, the ideas of inculcating socialist thoughts and socialist principles are as important as building intellectual ability, thus, Marxist sciences and Ho Chi Minh thoughts are compulsory taught courses and make up 12% of total study hours in the undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum. Therefore, there are two different systems of morality existing in Vietnamese society – traditional morality and socialist morality. Traditional morality is transmitted through informal channels of education, such as family education and religious institutions, while socialist morality is enforced through formal channels of the national curriculum and in various social activities and movements. However, it is still a real challenge for the Vietnamese educational system to redefine the objectives and content of moral education in order to cope with the complexity of a fast-changing society.

Introduction

In almost all primary schools in Vietnam, the important role of moral teaching and learning in school life is constantly emphasised by the motto ‘Tien hoc le, hau hoc van’. The wording normally appears in a large red banner posted right at the main entrance. This Chinese-Vietnamese saying implicitly means that proper manners in human relations are the very first thing to be learnt at school, while knowledge and language are only secondary. Another common phrase that emphasises the role of morality is ‘Hong – Chuyen’. It literally means ‘red mind and expertise’. These are considered a pair of key qualities of social human beings that the socialist educational system aims to produce. ‘Red mind’ symbolises socialist ideology and values. Similarly, ‘talent and virtue’, ‘intellect and morality’ are other common combinations at all times associated with qualities of scholars, intellectuals and

*Nong Lam University, Linh Trung, Thu Duc, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Email: doanhuedung@hcm.vnn.vn

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public administrators. ‘Moral’ in the Vietnamese context is a broad term, relating to the practice, manners or conduct of human beings in relation to each other. Moral education is also associated with standards of behaviour justified by people as right and proper, and is to be conducted willingly without the interference of law. Moral education is also understood as perspectives, viewpoints and behaviour of people in such social relations as self in relation to other persons, groups and organisations (SRV MOET, 2004a, p. 69). Organisation refers to the State, social-political organisations, religious bodies and so on. Moral education, therefore, takes various forms and has its definitions shaped by socio-political standards and values prevailing at the time. This article aims to explore the role and characteristics of moral education in contemporary Vietnam in the contexts of social changes and under the long-lasting impacts of different social values of Confucianism, Communism and several religions.

Background information on the national education system

The Vietnamese educational system has evolved through six distinct stages, which correspond to the main phases of the nation’s history. During the earliest stage (939–1858), traditional education profoundly bore the imprint of Chinese civilisation. As a result of a millennium under Chinese domination (111 BC to 939 AD), the intellectual and cultural patterns of the Vietnamese society were strongly influenced by the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. Consequently, traditional education focused on the teaching of Confucian thoughts and the principles of self-cultivation of virtues, unity of man and heaven, relevance of social order and political harmony.

By contrast, the education system during the period 1858–1945 was based upon the French colonial assimilation policy. It is worth mentioning that, during the French influence, Quoc Ngu (national language), present-day Vietnamese, a Romanised script of the spoken Vietnamese language, was created by Western Catholic missionaries who subsequently spread Catholic influences in Vietnamese cultures.

During the subsequent period 1945–1954, education under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) operated amid the gunfire of nationalist struggles against Japan and then France for independence. The period 1954–1975, during which Vietnam was split into two opposing states, witnessed two completely different systems of education: the North followed the Soviet model, while the South adopted a mixed American and French model. During the period between 1975 and 1986, education was then characterised by a highly centralised management system in a unified nation, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). Finally, in the contemporary period since 1987, the national education system has undergone tremendous reforms since doi moi has been launched and has allowed a market-oriented economy to emerge in the country.

Doi moi, literally translated as ‘to make a change’, was introduced by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) at its Sixth Congress in December 1986 (CPV
Moral or political education in the Vietnamese educational system? 453

Mary McNaughton

1996), about the same time as the Soviet Union began perestroika. The party leadership regarded it as a new policy, essential not only for the nation’s economic survival, but also for the necessary political and social renewal in order to meet the country’s development needs in the future. The cornerstone of doi moi was to transform the centrally planned economy into a market-oriented system capable of competing effectively in the international arena. In other words, doi moi is the attempt to create a market economy in Vietnam by pursuing openness in economic relations in order to provide the necessary conditions to achieve modernisation. It has brought about tremendous changes in the political and socio-economic life of Vietnam in the last decade. These have included encouraging more active public participation, promoting private entrepreneurship and facilitating the emergence of a mixed economy that embraced non-socialist sectors alongside socialist sectors. Thus, the educational system needs to respond to diverse learning needs of the people at different levels and relies not only on the national budget but also on tuition fees contributed by learners.

The national education system nowadays comprises five levels: preschool education (five years, ages 3–5); primary education (five years, ages 6–10); secondary education (seven years, ages 11–18); higher education and postgraduate education. In addition, vocational education and training provides educational opportunities for those secondary school leavers who are unable to enter higher education (see Table 1).

Based on sources of financial support, educational institutions fall into four categories. First, public or state-run (cong lap) institutions are funded by the government. The majority of staff working in public schools are government officers or permanent staff members. Second, semi-public (ban cong) institutions are provided with rudimentary premises by the State. Third, people-founded (dan lap) schools are created and managed by a social organisation and excluded from State-funding schemes. Lastly, private (tu thuc) schools or universities are financed and administered completely by individuals or groups of individuals. These forms of institutions are found in all levels of the educational system.

Regarding the policy-making system, the central government, through the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and its departments, formulates and adopts education policies. In effect, education reforms are based on the overall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Student population</th>
<th>Teacher population</th>
<th>Number of schools/institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschools</td>
<td>2,586,700</td>
<td>106,666</td>
<td>10,104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>8,350,200</td>
<td>362,627</td>
<td>14,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>9,228,300</td>
<td>379,657</td>
<td>12,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>1,145100</td>
<td>18,177</td>
<td>526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher education</td>
<td>1,032400</td>
<td>39,985</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>33,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SRV MOET, 2004b.
guidelines and agenda promulgated by the Central Committee and the Politburo of the CPV. In other words, education policies are formulated, revised and updated in accordance with the State's general action plans defined at the CPV national congresses and the Vietnamese National Assembly manifestos every five years. In particular, the National Assembly also promulgates the laws on education and makes decisions concerning budgetary and strategic plans for educational development.

Under this centralised management structure, each level of the education system is subject to a different degree of central control over the curriculum. The primary school and secondary school curricula are national and compulsory and, therefore, centrally controlled. The number of hours, curriculum content and textbooks are dictated by the MOET. Central control over the curriculum consequently enforces common practices and standards across the whole system, and is associated with the adoption of a national system of qualifications. In higher education, the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula also follow the uniform frameworks set by the MOET, which determine the total number of credits and the percentage of core courses, required courses and specialised courses for each field of study. Control is centralised particularly in respect of required courses, such as Marxist-Leninist political sciences, in terms of the number of hours and the teaching content. In the following sections, the centralised control of the MOET over the curriculum will be analysed in detail in relation to moral education.

**Moral education in the formal curriculum**

Moral education is incorporated in the formal curriculum and taught as a single subject of study at all levels of the educational system. This has been legalised by the Education Law implemented in 1998. The overall objective of education, as stated in the Law, aims to produce ‘fully developed Vietnamese citizens. These must acquire morals, knowledge, good health, aesthetic sense, occupation, and loyalty towards national independence and socialism; who nourish personality and capability essential to fulfil the mission of building and protecting the country’ (SRV MOET, 2004c, Chapter One, Article 2). In effect, it is also stated in the Education Law 1998 that the content of education must place a strong emphasis on moral and citizenship education. Therefore, moral education occupies significant parts in the curriculum, focusing on character education, citizenship education and political education in primary, secondary and higher education respectively. The curriculum of moral education in primary and secondary schools is centrally controlled through the use of a series of compulsory textbooks, which are titled *Ethics education* for Grades 1–5 (ages 6–10) (SRV MOET, 2003a, b, c, d, e) and *Citizenship education* for Grades 6–12 (ages 11–17) (SRV MOET, 2003f, g, h, i, 2004a, d, e) and through various extracurricular activities.

Moral education in the primary school focuses on character and personality building, which aims ‘to teach students to respect, love and show good behaviour towards grandparents, parents, teachers, older people; to love brothers, sisters, and friends; to be sincere, confident, eager to learn, and appreciative of nature’s beauty’
The syllabus of moral education in each grade is typically topic-based. At primary level (Grades 1–5), ethics lessons are taught through pictures, games, storytelling, rhythm and rhyme verse. At the end of each lesson there are always comprehension questions followed by inference questions. The lesson content falls into five main aspects: (1) matters relating to self, character and personality; (2) relationship of self to other people; (3) matters relating to nature; (4) matters relating to national identity and love for nation; and (5) matters related to community and society. The focus and topic areas of the moral education taught in primary schools are summarised in Table 2.

The syllabuses that are taught in lower secondary schools (Grades 6–9, ages 11–14) focus on citizenship education. However, a major part of the teaching content also covers similar topics taught in ethics lessons in primary education. Another part aims to introduce the Constitution of Vietnam and basic rights and duties of Vietnamese citizens. Citizenship education in high schools also covers basic areas of social policy, such as existing laws and socio-economic policy. Citizenship education in high school (Grades 10–12, age 15–17), however, has an overall emphasis on introducing philosophy and principles of Marxism and Leninism. The notion of developing a ‘socialist citizen’ is strongly highlighted. The model of socialist citizen is described as a patriot who loves manual labour, and knows how to live and work for the harmony and benefits of the community. In this context, a materialistic lifestyle, criticised as consumption, is still alien to the traditional values of the nation, the values obtained through hard work and struggles for the independence and stability of the country.

Though moral education or citizenship education has been treated as an important single subject in the curriculum, its impact on children’s personality and character development is very limited. Students perceive these courses as compulsory parts of the study programmes. Substantial weaknesses can be found in the teaching content and methods (SRV MOET, 2004b, p. 23). In other words, unit topics that are widely criticised by teachers as plain and narrow are taught repeatedly in different grades (as shown in the summary in Table 2). In addition, the quality of reading texts used in textbooks for moral and citizenship education is far lower than the texts used in literature textbooks, therefore they fail to draw children’s attention and interest. Teaching resources are another issue, as there are no specialised teachers for moral education. For example, at primary school this subject is taught by the teacher in charge of the class, who is responsible for teaching all the subjects on the curriculum. In secondary and high schools, moral education is normally taught by the headmaster or those support staff whose main job is to maintain the mission and activities of the Communist Party unit. Above all, the objectives of moral education for primary and secondary schools, as mentioned above, are actually unclear and unfocused (SRV MOET, 2004b, p. 23). The teaching content, therefore, is not deep enough to cultivate in children essential virtues, proper manners and a high sense of responsibility for self-development or for the progress of the community.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Sample topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade 1</td>
<td>Cultivation of virtues (tidiness, obedience, friendliness, politeness)</td>
<td>Being neat and tidy, Nourishing family love, Being respectful and obedient to teachers, Being cooperative with friends, Saying thanks and apologies, Protecting plants and trees in public places</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 6</td>
<td>Building proper manners and behaviour at home and school (respect for elderly, teachers)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Understanding and appreciating the natural environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 2</td>
<td>Cultivation of virtues (punctuality, truthfulness, respect, labour, politeness)</td>
<td>Being punctual, Recognizing mistakes and correcting mistakes, Increasing interest in doing housework, Caring for friends, Being polite while talking, making suggestions and requests, Helping the disabled, Protecting animals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 7</td>
<td>Development of love for nature, love for community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 3</td>
<td>Cultivation of virtues, development of cultural awareness, friendly attitudes towards people from other countries, appreciation of soldiers and national defenders</td>
<td>Showing respect to Uncle Ho Chi Minh, Keeping promises, Working independently, Helping neighbours, Appreciating veterans and soldiers, Respecting international visitors, Respecting other people’s confidential matters, Saving water resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 8</td>
<td>Building personality (honesty, hard-working, self-discipline, self-esteem)</td>
<td>Being studious, Active participation in team work, Being punctual, Never telling lies, Helping bullied children, Helping teachers, Keeping promises, Saving money and time, Taking care of grandparents, Helping neighbours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing proper relations with other people (friends, family members, neighbours)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade 4</td>
<td>Cultivation of virtues (sincerity, cooperative spirit, respect for other people)</td>
<td>Sincerity in study and work, Cooperative attitude in study and work, Respecting former teachers, Sharing emotions with friends, Making grandparents and parents happy, Respecting the elderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 9</td>
<td>Development of understanding of foreign countries, kindness to foreigners, appreciation of national identity</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grade 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Age 10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
In higher education, the ideas of inculcating socialist thoughts and socialist principles among students are as important as building intellectual ability. The objectives of higher education are defined by the Education Law as ‘to equip learners with political, moral qualities and willingness to serve people; with knowledge and professional ability consistent with the level of education received, with good health essential to meet the demand of building and protecting the nation’ (SRV MOET, 2004c, Chapter 2, Article 35, p. 38). Therefore, political thoughts are enforced by compulsory taught courses and through activities and movements led by the Communist Youth Union throughout student life.

In the undergraduate curriculum, political subjects make up 23 credit hours, accounting for 12% of total study hours, including Marxist-Leninist Philosophy, Marxist political economics, scientific Socialism, Ho Chi Minh thought, and history of the Vietnamese Communist Party. The role of political subjects has been reinforced by Decree 6134 dated 15th July 2004 by the Ministry of Education and Training, according to which all undergraduate students have to sit for Marxist sciences and Ho Chi Minh thought as required examinations before graduation (SRV MOET, 2004f).

In addition, the Office for Political Affairs, a special office found in every university, also frequently organises various extra activities to ensure that the Communist mentality is upheld in the life of the university. Common activities include regular talks, seminars and contests to educate the revolutionary tradition of the Communists. Other common objectives of these seminars and talks are also to interpret Ho Chi Minh’s ideology, and to update students about current political issues in the world. The biggest activity in student life is the so-called Green Summer Campaign, which motivates students from all universities to go to remote and disadvantaged areas of the country to assist the communities in agricultural work and to teach the illiterate basic language lessons. The overall purpose is to upgrade the standard of living of the poor and the needy. Another significant meaning of the campaign is to nourish revolutionary spirit among students, the spirit that encourages young people to go and do voluntary work in poor and war-destroyed regions. This campaign, though voluntary, involves thousands of students every year and has made a great impact on the life of the community. For instance,
during the summer of 2005 more than 300,000 volunteer students assisted a remote district in Thanh Hoa, a province in North Vietnam, to reconstruct 80 sites including civic houses, schools, public roads and electric lines. The students also organised 900 summer seminars and group activities for 4000 children in the district (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2005).

It is worth mentioning the system of grading, so-called self-improvement grades, used by the Office of Political Affairs to give ranking marks to every student for all extracurricular activities they participate in during each semester. Taking part in the Green Summer Campaign, for example, will give students high credit. Side by side with academic achievement, grades of self-improvement are the other important criteria qualifying students for selection for scholarships and grants.

Despite all these tremendous efforts made by the Ministry of Education and Training, by the Office of Political Affairs at every university and by every single teacher of Marxist-Leninist subjects, higher education students are not really convinced that those subjects are necessary for their intellectual and moral development. In contrast, they easily find the principles and ideologies taught in classroom are contradictory to what they experience in real life. For example, they live their real life in a growing market economy, an emerging consumer society, which accommodates a big gap between the poor and the rich, whereas they learn at school that socialist society ensures social equality for every individual. They also learn that workers and the working class shape the morality and power of the society; however, it is hard to trust the leadership capability of the working class. Recent research on young university graduates in Vietnam showed that by the 1990s not only had young people become anxious about getting rich, but the dream of getting rich had also become a common goal. In this context, young people, and university graduates in particular, seem to realise that achieving individual success by way of becoming wealthy professionals fits well with the overall national objectives, which are ‘wealthy people, strong country’ (Nguyen, 2004, p. 169).

At postgraduate level, Marxist-Leninist Philosophy is still a compulsory subject that requires 60 study hours. It comes from the ideology that Marxist sciences serve as the foundation for all sciences, and that Marxist philosophy on scientific research provides the guiding methods for all types of scientific research studies. In effect, all research studies in social sciences need to make good reference to Marxist ideologies. It is therefore very common that most dissertations, theses and research papers start their research background section with lengthy pages about strategies and principles quoted from the Vietnamese Communist Party’s documents. Thus, higher education curricula have been under strong criticism from participants, teaching staff and the wider public for their over-emphasis on political subjects (Nguyen, 2004, p. 172). A study on the motives for overseas study among Vietnamese academics in 2000 found that the discouraging quality of the postgraduate education inside Vietnam has motivated a large number of university staff to seek overseas study. One of the perceived major shortcomings of the programmes is the requirement of many political subjects, viewed as irrelevant and time-consuming (Doan, 2000, p. 177).
While political education and political objectives are overemphasised at all levels of the educational system, political courses have never been perceived as useful courses. Students have many reasons for why they dislike political subjects. The first reason is because the subjects are not seen as practical in their search for knowledge. Furthermore, political subjects are not relevant to students’ academic interests or to their future careers. Above all, the concepts of socialist morality seem to be prevailing within the scope of the courses only. Thus, Vietnamese educators and sociologists generally comment that moral education either has not been taught at all in school or has been taught improperly (Duong, 2000). The term ‘moral education’ has not been properly defined, and has actually been understood and implemented as political education.

Various forms of morality and their impacts

Vietnamese educators are also concerned that key social values are gradually deteriorating among the young generation (Vo, 2005). As Vietnamese society has begun to modernise, young Vietnamese also start searching for their own image and identity. Unfortunately, in order to present a particular image of themselves they have tended to imitate the image of models found in commercial photos and fashionable movies, which in fact only promote a luxurious, material life and earthly values. People also claim that the poor quality and inappropriate methods of moral education in the educational system have resulted in the increase of social problems, as well as the decrease of morality among young people (Nguyen, 2005). It is obvious that moral education in the formal curriculum has been mistakenly replaced by political and legal teaching, and therefore has very little impact on the development of personality, character and the morality of students (Duong, 2000). In other words, the objectives of education are not easily achieved, as expected in the Education Law (SRV MOET, 2004b, p. 23).

There is growing concern about what kind of morality is being taught at school, given that a large number of young people seem to think more of what is to their own benefit than for others, and seem unfamiliar with Vietnamese traditional virtues. In fact, from Grade 10 in high school, students are taught about two different systems of morality existing in Vietnamese society, that is traditional morality and socialist morality. The first is associated with a system of virtues and values rooted in Confucianism. Confucian principles, which emphasise social order and the self-improvement of human beings, have had a long-lasting influence on Vietnamese culture, especially during the feudalist period. Social order under Confucianism is maintained by the implementation of strict principles of human relations, both in the family and society at large. In effect, Confucian principles enforce absolute respect and obedience of children to parents, wife to husband, subordinate to superior, subject to master, and students to teachers. Confucian values also emphasise the contribution and devotion of individuals towards the progress of the community. These principles have become part of traditional values as they ensure power
relations and the progress of society. Besides, Confucian values also emphasise the superior role of male over female in the contexts of family, community and society. Family education somehow helps preserve these principles. Nguyen’s research shows that although young graduates in present-day Vietnam are very much concerned about success in terms of career and finance; they are also concerned about achieving harmony and happiness in various interpersonal relationships, particularly relationships with parents and love relationships. They carry on the traditions of maintaining strong links with parents and the family, respecting older people and obeying parents’ opinions with regard to marriage. Their notion of success in life would be incomplete and imbalanced if it resulted in only professional and financial gains and lacked aspects of family success (Nguyen, 2004, p. 174).

In certain areas where religious institutions have strong influence on the thinking of the community, moral values are also conveyed through the teaching of religious texts and community activities. Morality and social values are transmitted through various channels: family, school and community. Christian churches and Buddhist pagodas usually provide a complete series of religious lessons for different age groups and different levels, which focus mostly on teaching morality. It is worth mentioning that religious education is not allowed in the formal education curriculum. However, churches and pagodas play a significant part in educating family cultures, community spirit and moral values among religious members.

It is not very controversial to claim that family and community are more effective than school in transmitting traditional values among generations since family education has a long-established tradition in Vietnamese society. In addition, Vietnamese society has a rich family-oriented culture, therefore family education is highly valued. In particular, mothers and grandparents have important roles in shaping children’s personalities and helping them develop morally through family education. There is a popular saying emphasising the influence of mother and grandmother on children, that is ‘children’s mistakes come from mother, grandchildren’s mistakes come from grandmother’ (Con hu tai me, chau hu tai ba). Data from Nguyen’s research also suggest that amid social change, young people regard ingredients for success in family life as ‘still including traditional elements, such as filial piety through respectful, harmonious and loving relationships with the parents ... These underpin the emphasis on the institution of the family and its values’ (Nguyen, 2004, p. 173).

However, in the process of the modernisation of society, where both parents work outside the house, family bonds become less solid. This situation is more obvious in nuclear families as children are sent to school and spend most of their time at school from a very young age. The education of children is put completely in the hands of teachers. The opportunity for family members to get together at family meals and engage in family education has also become rare in modern life. This raises widespread concern that the family structure is in danger of falling apart, and preserving traditional principles and values becomes more and more difficult in the present day.
Alongside traditional values, socialist morality emphasises the responsibility of the individual towards the nation as a socialist society through the respect of labour and observation of socialist principles. The socialist principles require the full commitment of individuals to the success of socialism. A socialist perspective is also enforced as the only philosophy of life. Because of its rigid view, socialist morality can only be transmitted and delivered through institutionalised channels, formal, obligatory and compulsory. However, this gives rise to quite a dilemma when the market economy has had a gradual impact on individual perspectives about values. In other words, personal achievement in terms of career and wealth are considered as life concerns and life goals by a large number of Vietnamese youth, as found in social research on the conception of ‘success’ of young graduates in Hanoi in 2000. This research concluded that ‘under the socialist regime, everybody could be successful as long as (s)he contributed to the collective and the general cause of building socialism. Now in the market economy, success is no longer an across-the-board notion defined by the socialist state. That is to say, success prior to the 1990s was a “nationalised” notion, but in the doi moi era it has been “privatised”’ (Nguyen, 2004, p. 174).

Besides formal lessons and compulsory courses on morality and politics given at school and university, people of all ages are regularly requested to participate in various social activities which are led by political movements and organisations, consistent either with their age groups or professions. These activities, ranging from contests to campaigns and movements, usually aim to review revolutionary traditions, to train young people to love and respect labour, to preserve socialist values and so on. Popular activities include singing contests to highlight revolutionary music, essay-writing contests on the revolutionary tradition of the Communist, and knowledge contests on the history and tradition of the Communist Party of Vietnam. It is the main job of the Trade Union and The Communist Youth Union in every workplace or residential area to play active roles in leading these activities. A report from the Chairman of the Trade Union in Quang Nam, a province in Central Vietnam, remarks that there are too many contests being organised, which consume time and money. Twelve contests required by the national Trade Union within nine months is viewed by this Chairman as a big waste of time and money (Nguyen, 2005). Campaigns and movements normally bear strong revolutionary values in their titles, such as ‘the movement of patriotism competition’ (phong trao thi dua yeu nuoc), or ‘enriching the flame of revolutionary tradition’ (tiep lua truyen thong). The former urges everyone in his or her own profession and workplace to perform his/her job to the best possible degree, and also to fulfil extra duties in order to contribute more to the cause of nation building. The latter particularly reminds young people to read and think more and more about national heroes and revolutionary soldiers, and to help families of dead soldiers and families which have made a great contribution to the success of the Communist Party.

Since modernising, Vietnam is facing new social problems such as the increasing rate of divorce, child abuse, drug addiction, power abuse and corrupted governance.
Hence people are worrying about the deterioration of traditional values and therefore questioning the role and outcomes of moral education in the formal curriculum. The values of traditional morality are still held in high esteem by the public and are expected to have an increasing role in the formal curriculum (Duong, 2000; Nguyen, 2004). In other words, it is now necessary for Vietnam to redefine the meaning and objectives of moral education so that moral teaching and learning will deal closely with matters relating to the betterment of individuals as social beings.

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