



## Traditional Vietnamese Culture in The Contemporary Context: Discussions on Sustainable Values

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**ABSTRACT:** Vietnam has undergone profound historical transformations throughout its long process of nation-building, warfare, social transition, and modernization. These historical experiences have shaped a system of traditional cultural values that played an important role in maintaining social stability, community cohesion, and national identity over many centuries. However, within the contemporary context of globalization, marketization, and international integration, many traditional cultural values have gradually transformed and now face new challenges of adaptation. This article examines the transformation of traditional Vietnamese cultural values in relation to contemporary concepts of sustainable development and social modernization. The study applies methods of historical analysis, contextual interpretation, and generalization to analyze the formation, continuity, and transformation of Vietnamese traditional cultural values across different historical and socio-cultural contexts. In particular, the article evaluates both the positive and negative dimensions of traditional culture in relation to present-day sustainable development goals. The findings suggest that while many traditional values—such as social harmony, community solidarity, and aspirations for stability—continue to provide important foundations for sustainable development, certain conservative cultural patterns may also constrain innovation, individual creativity, and adaptive capacity in modern society. Therefore, the article argues that contemporary Vietnam should both inherit positive traditional cultural values and critically reassess outdated cultural norms in order to build a more sustainable and adaptive cultural framework for the future.

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**Published Online:**

June 11, 2026

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**KEYWORDS:**

culture, sustainability, sustainable development, values.

*Cite the Article:* Tien, N.V. (2026) *Traditional Vietnamese Culture in The Contemporary Context: Discussions on Sustainable Values. International Journal of Human Research and Social Science Studies*,3(6),555-564. <https://doi.org/10.55677/ijhrsss/07-2026-Vol03106>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Traditional Vietnamese culture, with its long-preserved system of values and identity, has profoundly shaped psychological characteristics, behavioral norms, personality traits, and the broader formation of Vietnamese national identity over many centuries. As a cultural system formed through historical experiences of agricultural civilization, foreign invasion, social organization, and communal life, traditional culture has continued to influence contemporary Vietnamese society in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand, traditional cultural values may facilitate the reception and adaptation of new policies, modern institutions, and external cultural influences. On the other hand, certain conservative and outdated elements within traditional culture may resist change and hinder social adaptation in the context of globalization and modernization (Nguyen, 2009). Traditional culture therefore contains not only constructive values but also limitations; these dimensions coexist as interconnected aspects of the same socio-cultural reality. Historical studies have demonstrated that Vietnamese cultural identity evolved through a long process of interaction between indigenous traditions, Confucian influences, colonial encounters, and modern nation-building efforts, creating a distinctive cultural system characterized by resilience, adaptability, and continuity (Marr, 1981; Jamieson, 1993).

Moreover, within the dynamic process of historical and social transformation, particular values, customs, and patterns of behavior that were once regarded as socially meaningful may gradually become less relevant or even obstructive under new socio-economic conditions. Contemporary Vietnamese society has experienced significant cultural changes associated with urbanization, marketization, migration, digital communication, and international integration, all of which have contributed to the transformation of traditional lifestyles and value systems (Le, 2022). The transition from a predominantly rural and community-based society

toward a more industrialized and globally connected society has created tensions between inherited cultural traditions and emerging modern values. Similar transformations have been observed in many Vietnamese rural communities where traditional village structures and social relations have adapted to the expansion of market-oriented economic activities and globalization processes (Luong, 2010). At the same time, increasing international integration has intensified debates concerning cultural identity, cultural governance, and the preservation of traditional values within a rapidly changing social environment (Tran, 2024).

In the modern era, the concept of “sustainable development,” introduced by the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, was defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Since then, sustainable development has become a globally influential framework guiding economic, social, environmental, and institutional policies across diverse national contexts. The adoption of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development further expanded this framework by emphasizing the interconnectedness of economic prosperity, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and effective governance (United Nations, 2015). However, when the concept of sustainable development was incorporated into the socio-political life of different member states, it was interpreted and implemented in various ways depending not only on political perspectives, policy systems, and legal frameworks, but also on the traditional cultural foundations and historical experiences of each society. In Vietnam, sustainable development has gradually become integrated into political orientations and national development strategies associated with social equity, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and political stability (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Seventh Tenure, 1993).

Increasingly, international organizations have recognized that culture is not merely an outcome of development but also a critical driver of sustainable development. UNESCO's recent assessment of Vietnam emphasized the importance of cultural participation, cultural heritage preservation, and cultural governance in supporting long-term sustainability and social resilience (UNESCO, 2025). Likewise, studies on Vietnamese cultural heritage have argued that preserving traditional cultural resources contributes not only to national identity but also to social cohesion, community resilience, and sustainable development capacity (Tu, 2019).

This issue is not unique to Vietnam; many countries around the world have experienced similar challenges when excessively rapid economic growth generated serious social inequalities, moral crises, environmental degradation, and cultural disruption. In Vietnam, the transition toward a socialist-oriented market economy since the late twentieth century has accelerated economic growth while simultaneously creating complex social and cultural transformations. In many cases, rapid modernization has contributed to materialistic lifestyles, short-term thinking, environmental pressures, and changing social relationships, thereby generating concerns regarding cultural sustainability and social cohesion (Nguyen, 2015). Research has also shown that market reforms and economic liberalization have contributed to new forms of social differentiation and inequality, creating both opportunities and challenges for social stability and sustainable development (Taylor, 2004).

At the same time, the Vietnamese state has increasingly emphasized the importance of balancing economic development with social stability, cultural identity, and institutional modernization. Recent policy discussions concerning the “developmental government” model also demonstrate efforts to strengthen governance capacity while encouraging sustainable and socially balanced development (Nguyen & Vu, 2018). These orientations are also reflected in Vietnam's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to integrate economic growth, social inclusion, environmental protection, and institutional effectiveness within a comprehensive national development framework (Ministry of Planning and Investment of Viet Nam, 2023). Therefore, this paper primarily focuses on discussing traditional cultural factors from two perspectives: their positive dimensions (values) and their negative dimensions (limitations), as well as how these cultural characteristics influence the formation, adaptation, and implementation of modern values associated with sustainable development in contemporary Vietnam.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative research approach combining historical analysis, document analysis, socio-cultural interpretation, and interdisciplinary literature review methods. The research focuses on examining the relationship between traditional Vietnamese cultural values and contemporary concepts of sustainable development within the broader context of social transformation, globalization, modernization, and institutional transition in Vietnam.

Data for the study were collected from multiple sources, including historical documents, classical and contemporary Vietnamese cultural studies, political and policy documents, academic publications related to Vietnamese cultural identity, sustainable development theories, and socio-cultural transformation in modern Vietnam. The study also draws upon official documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, policy orientations concerning sustainable development, and previous scholarly works on traditional culture, social psychology, governance, and Vietnamese value systems. Particular attention was given to studies examining cultural transformation in rural communities, behavioral norms in traditional and modern family structures, and the emergence of new social values under market-oriented reforms (Nguyen, 2009; Le, 2022).

Historical analysis was applied to examine how geographical conditions, agricultural civilization, war experiences, village structures, and traditional socio-political institutions contributed to the formation of stability-oriented cultural values in Vietnamese society. The study additionally analyzes how collective consciousness, village autonomy, and harmony-oriented worldviews became

deeply embedded within Vietnamese social organization and daily life. At the same time, interpretive and comparative methods were used to evaluate both the positive and negative dimensions of traditional cultural values in relation to contemporary sustainable development objectives.

In addition, the study adopts a socio-cultural and developmental perspective to analyze the processes through which the concept of sustainable development has been culturally adapted and localized within Vietnamese society. Rather than viewing sustainable development solely as an imported Western theoretical framework, the article examines how this concept interacts with indigenous cultural traditions, collective values, political orientations, and historical experiences specific to Vietnam. The research also considers how Vietnamese policy frameworks have attempted to reconcile rapid economic growth with social equality, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and political stability within the context of socialist-oriented development strategies (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Seventh Tenure, 1993).

Furthermore, the study pays attention to contemporary social phenomena associated with globalization, marketization, and governance reform, including changing behavioral norms, social trust, moral perceptions, and institutional adaptation in modern Vietnamese society (Nguyen, 2015). Discussions concerning the developmental-government model and state modernization are also incorporated to better understand current policy approaches aimed at balancing economic efficiency, social stability, and sustainable development goals (Nguyen & Vu, 2018).

Through this interdisciplinary qualitative approach, the study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the compatibility, tensions, contradictions, and transformations occurring between traditional Vietnamese cultural values and contemporary sustainable development strategies in the current historical context.

### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **3.1. Results**

##### **3.1.1. Identifying the Characteristics of Stability in Traditional Vietnamese Culture**

The historical development of Vietnamese society has been profoundly shaped by conditions of prolonged warfare, agricultural civilization, environmental adaptation, and collective survival. Throughout much of its history, Vietnam faced repeated invasions from powerful northern Chinese dynasties as well as colonial intervention from Western powers beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. At the same time, the country also experienced internal political fragmentation and civil conflicts for nearly five centuries, particularly from the late sixteenth century onward. Under such conditions, the Vietnamese conception of national existence was not associated with territorial expansion or imperial conquest, but rather with survival, self-defense, and the preservation of social order and cultural continuity.

As a relatively small state confronting much larger powers, Vietnam historically developed a political culture emphasizing defensive warfare, reconciliation, and long-term stability. Vietnamese victories over the Mongol-Yuan, Ming, and Qing forces were primarily defensive rather than expansionist in nature. Consequently, postwar diplomacy often prioritized compromise, tolerance, and peaceful normalization in order to avoid prolonged instability. This political mentality contributed to the emergence of a cultural orientation favoring social harmony, moderation, and stability over radical confrontation or expansionism. During peacetime, Vietnamese dynasties also implemented governance principles centered on social harmony, flexible administration, and people-oriented rule. The governing philosophy of “taking the people as the foundation” became an important political and cultural principle in Vietnamese statecraft (Le, 1967; Tran, 2000).

Economically, Vietnamese civilization historically developed around wet-rice agriculture concentrated in major river basins such as the Red River Delta and the Mekong Delta. Unlike nomadic societies or dry-grain agricultural systems, wet-rice cultivation required stable settlement patterns, long-term irrigation systems, coordinated water management, and intensive communal cooperation. The dependence on irrigation and collective labor contributed to the formation of highly stable residential communities and village-centered modes of production. Consequently, Vietnamese society evolved into what many scholars describe as a “wet-rice civilization,” characterized by permanence in settlement, continuity in livelihood practices, and strong communal interdependence.

Socially, Vietnamese villages functioned as semi-autonomous communities closely tied to individual life and collective identity. Villages not only served economic purposes but also operated as systems of social governance, cultural preservation, disaster management, and self-defense. Due to frequent flooding, storms, and environmental pressures, local populations had to cooperate in building dikes, reclaiming land, and protecting agricultural production. Village conventions and customary regulations therefore became highly influential institutions in regulating social relations and maintaining communal stability (Le, 1998). Even during periods of foreign domination, external authorities often struggled to penetrate deeply into village communities because local social organization remained highly resilient. This structure contributed significantly to the preservation of indigenous Vietnamese cultural identity despite centuries of foreign influence.

From a socio-psychological perspective, the historical conditions of agricultural life, warfare, and communal organization gradually produced cultural values emphasizing harmony, continuity, and collective stability. Vietnamese people traditionally prioritized stable residence, stable occupations, and stable social relationships. Cultural activities, agricultural production, religious practices,

and communal rituals were largely organized within the village environment, reinforcing strong attachments to local communities and ancestral homelands. In traditional Vietnamese perceptions, social stability was often symbolized through three essential life goals: “building a house, getting married, and buying a buffalo,” representing stability in residence, family life, and livelihood production.

At the same time, this stability-oriented worldview also shaped Vietnamese attitudes toward economic development and social mobility. Industrial production and large-scale capitalist development appeared relatively late in Vietnamese history, primarily during the French colonial period. Before that, economic activity remained dominated by small-scale agriculture and handicraft production organized within village communities. Small-scale economic organization suited both the material conditions and the relatively limited tradition of abstract theoretical thinking within traditional Vietnamese society (Dao, 2000). Social harmony and collective cohesion were often valued more highly than individual ambition, competition, or disruptive innovation.

However, while these cultural characteristics contributed positively to social cohesion and long-term continuity, they also generated important limitations in relation to modern development. Strong communal dependence often reduced opportunities for individual autonomy, personal creativity, and social differentiation. Individuals were expected to conform to communal expectations and collective norms rather than pursue independent forms of self-development (Do, 2005). The need for unity in resisting foreign invasion and managing environmental challenges reinforced collective consciousness but simultaneously constrained individualism and innovation. These dual dimensions of Vietnamese traditional culture can be summarized more systematically in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Stability-Oriented Characteristics of Traditional Vietnamese Culture and Their Implications for Sustainable Development**

<b>Cultural Dimension</b>	<b>Historical/Social Foundation</b>	<b>Positive Contributions to Sustainability</b>	<b>Limitations for Modern Development</b>
Political culture	Repeated wars of self-defense against larger powers	Encouraged peace orientation, reconciliation, and long-term social stability	Tendency toward political caution and limited institutional experimentation
Wet-rice agricultural civilization	Dependence on irrigation systems and communal labor	Strengthened collective cooperation, environmental adaptation, and local resilience	Limited economic mobility and dependence on traditional production systems
Village-based social organization	Autonomous village governance and customary regulations	Preserved indigenous identity and strengthened social cohesion	Reinforced localism, conservatism, and resistance to external change
Harmony-oriented worldview	Yin-yang philosophy and collective social ethics	Promoted social balance, moderation, and conflict avoidance	Discouraged competition, radical innovation, and individual assertiveness
Community-centered social values	Collective survival under warfare and environmental hardship	Fostered solidarity, mutual support, and social responsibility	Suppressed individualism, creativity, and independent thinking
Stability-oriented livelihood patterns	Fixed agricultural settlements and localized economies	Created continuity in social life and intergenerational cultural transmission	Limited entrepreneurship, large-scale industrialization, and modernization
Moral emphasis on social conformity	Strong communal expectations and village norms	Maintained social order and cultural continuity	Restricted diversity of lifestyles, perspectives, and social experimentation

From the perspective of contemporary sustainable development, many of these traditional characteristics continue to provide important cultural foundations for social stability, environmental adaptation, and community resilience. Nevertheless, some elements of traditional culture may also constrain innovation, institutional reform, and adaptive capacity within the context of globalization, technological transformation, and market-oriented development. Vietnamese society therefore faces the complex challenge of selectively preserving constructive traditional values while simultaneously overcoming cultural limitations that hinder long-term modernization and sustainable development.

### **3.1.2. Traditional Cultural Values in Relation to “Sustainable Development” in Contemporary Society**

The transformation of Vietnamese society during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries created profound changes in cultural values, social structures, and development orientations. After many centuries of maintaining relatively stable traditional values under the feudal system, Vietnam gradually absorbed Western cultural influences through French colonialism from the second half of the nineteenth century, American influence in Southern Vietnam during the mid-twentieth century, and socialist ideology in Northern

Vietnam during the same period. These overlapping historical experiences produced a complex cultural environment in which traditional, socialist, and capitalist-modern values simultaneously interacted, competed, and adapted to one another.

Following national reunification in 1975, Vietnamese society entered a difficult postwar period characterized by economic devastation, poverty, institutional instability, and ideological uncertainty. The consequences of prolonged warfare generated not only material destruction but also social fragmentation and crises of values. Revolutionary ideals that had once unified society during wartime became increasingly challenged by economic hardship and changing social expectations. Moreover, the collapse of socialist systems in Eastern Europe during the late twentieth century created additional psychological uncertainty and weakened confidence in previously stable ideological frameworks. Under such circumstances, Vietnamese society became increasingly vulnerable to social instability, opportunism, and moral disorientation.

The transition from a centrally planned economy toward a socialist-oriented market economy further accelerated these transformations. During the early phases of economic reform, incomplete legal frameworks and weak institutional capacity created opportunities for corruption, illicit privatization of state assets, and the emergence of powerful interest groups. In many cases, economic liberalization generated rapid wealth accumulation for certain social groups while simultaneously widening social inequality and public dissatisfaction. Contemporary Vietnamese society therefore began to exhibit characteristics associated with accelerated modernization, including materialism, short-term thinking, social competition, and growing pressure for economic success.

From the perspective of sustainable development, these transformations revealed important contradictions within Vietnam's modernization process. On the one hand, economic reforms significantly improved living standards, reduced poverty, and expanded opportunities for international integration. On the other hand, rapid economic growth also generated serious environmental degradation, urban overcrowding, resource exploitation, and moral concerns regarding corruption, social trust, and unequal distribution of wealth. Consequently, sustainable development emerged as an increasingly relevant framework for balancing economic growth with social stability, environmental protection, and cultural continuity.

Vietnamese policymakers recognized that uncontrolled economic expansion could threaten long-term national stability and social cohesion. Experiences from neighboring China and other rapidly industrializing societies provided important lessons regarding the social and environmental consequences of "hot growth" models. As a result, the Vietnamese state gradually incorporated sustainable development principles into broader political and economic strategies associated with socialist-oriented modernization.

At the policy level, sustainable development was interpreted not merely as an environmental concept, but as a comprehensive framework integrating economic growth, social justice, political stability, cultural preservation, and national security. In this regard, sustainable development aligned relatively well with Vietnam's long-standing political emphasis on social harmony, distributive equality, and collective welfare. The transition toward a socialist-oriented market economy maintained ideological commitments to equality in education, healthcare, social welfare, and cultural participation despite the increasing operation of market mechanisms. In the 2011 Socio-Economic Development Platform, the Communist Party of Vietnam defined the ideal socialist society as one characterized by prosperity, democracy, justice, civilization, comprehensive human development, equality among ethnic groups, and harmonious international cooperation (Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Seventh Tenure, 1993). This vision reflected a broader attempt to reconcile market-oriented development with socialist principles and national cultural identity. Importantly, the Vietnamese adaptation of sustainable development also expanded the conventional three-pillar framework of economy, society, and environment by adding a fourth dimension: national defense and security. This addition reflected Vietnam's unique historical experience as a nation shaped by repeated warfare, struggles for independence, and geopolitical vulnerability. In the Vietnam Sustainable Development Strategy for the period 2011–2020, sustainable development was therefore defined as a process combining socio-economic growth with environmental protection, efficient resource use, political stability, and the protection of national sovereignty.

The integration of defense and security into sustainable development demonstrates how global development theories are often culturally localized within specific historical and political contexts. In Vietnam, sustainability cannot be separated from the long-standing national aspiration for peace, territorial integrity, and political stability. The concept of sustainable development was therefore not adopted mechanically from Western theoretical models, but rather selectively adjusted to fit Vietnam's historical experiences, political ideology, and cultural traditions emphasizing harmony, stability, and collective resilience.

Nevertheless, important tensions remain between traditional cultural patterns and contemporary sustainable development objectives. While traditional values such as communal solidarity, social harmony, moderation, and collective responsibility support aspects of sustainability, certain cultural tendencies also hinder modernization and institutional reform. The persistence of short-term thinking, relationship-based governance, localism, and excessive concern for immediate group interests can weaken long-term planning and policy implementation. Moreover, rapid marketization has intensified consumerism and material aspirations that sometimes conflict with environmental sustainability and social equality.

These contradictions illustrate that sustainable development in Vietnam is not simply a technical or economic issue, but also a deeply cultural and political process involving the negotiation between tradition and modernity, collective stability and individual creativity,

economic growth and social justice, as well as globalization and national identity. Table 2 summarizes the major interactions between traditional Vietnamese cultural values and contemporary sustainable development objectives.

**Table 2. Interactions Between Traditional Vietnamese Cultural Values and Contemporary Sustainable Development**

Traditional Cultural Characteristics	Positive Contributions to Sustainable Development	Emerging Contradictions and Limitations
Emphasis on social harmony	Supports political stability and social cohesion	May discourage critical debate and institutional reform
Collective responsibility and community orientation	Encourages social solidarity and mutual support	Limits individual creativity and independent thinking
Respect for stability and order	Facilitates long-term social continuity	Creates resistance to innovation and rapid adaptation
Village-based social traditions	Preserves local identity and cultural continuity	Reinforces localism and fragmented governance
Socialist-oriented equality values	Supports welfare policies and distributive justice	Difficult to maintain under market competition
Historical experience of warfare and insecurity	Strengthens resilience and national unity	Encourages excessive prioritization of security concerns
Harmony-oriented political culture	Facilitates compromise and conflict reduction	May delay structural reforms and accountability
Market-oriented modernization after Đổi Mới	Improves economic growth and living standards	Generates consumerism, inequality, and environmental pressure
Expansion of international integration	Increases access to global knowledge and technology	Intensifies cultural transformation and value conflicts
Sustainable development policy adaptation	Integrates economy, society, environment, and security	Implementation remains uneven due to institutional and cultural constraints

Overall, the Vietnamese experience demonstrates that sustainable development is not simply the application of universal global principles, but rather a culturally embedded process shaped by historical memory, political ideology, institutional structures, and collective social values. Sustainable development in Vietnam therefore represents an ongoing negotiation between inherited cultural traditions and the demands of modernization, globalization, and long-term national resilience.

### 3.2. Discussion

The transformation of Vietnamese society from a war-oriented economy to a market-oriented development model has generated profound changes not only in economic structures but also in cultural values, social psychology, and patterns of social behavior. After decades of continuous warfare and postwar socio-economic crises, Vietnam implemented the Đổi Mới reforms and gradually opened its economy to global markets and international integration. This transition released long-suppressed aspirations for economic mobility, wealth accumulation, and material improvement. At the same time, however, rapid economic liberalization also accelerated consumerism, social competition, and the pursuit of material success, contributing to significant changes in Vietnamese moral and cultural life. Similar developments have been observed in many transitional societies where market reforms simultaneously create opportunities for economic advancement and new forms of social differentiation and inequality (Taylor, 2004).

Traditional Vietnamese culture historically emphasized communal solidarity, moderation, social harmony, and moral obligations toward family and community (Nguyen, 2002). Nevertheless, the expansion of market mechanisms introduced increasingly individualistic forms of social behavior associated with competition, private economic interests, and personal advancement. As a result, contemporary Vietnamese society now reflects a complex coexistence of collectivist traditions and market-driven values. This contradiction has become particularly visible in urbanization, business culture, educational competition, and changing family relationships. Studies of Vietnamese villages undergoing market transformation have similarly shown that traditional communal values have not disappeared but have instead been selectively adapted to new economic and social circumstances (Luong, 2010). Historically, Vietnamese society developed under conditions of prolonged warfare, environmental hardship, and agricultural dependence, all of which reinforced collective consciousness and a preference for stability. As noted by Phan Huy Lê (1998), resistance against foreign invasion was never solely military in nature, but fundamentally associated with broader aspirations for peace, national survival, and long-term reconstruction. Consequently, Vietnamese political and cultural traditions prioritized social cohesion, social order, and the reduction of internal conflict. The Vietnamese worldview also drew heavily upon the philosophy of “yin and yang,” which emphasized balance, harmony, complementarity, and moderation in both social and natural relationships

(Tran, 2016). Historical scholarship has further demonstrated that Vietnamese cultural traditions evolved through long processes of adaptation to external influences while preserving a strong sense of cultural continuity and collective identity (Marr, 1981; Jamieson, 1993).

Within traditional Vietnamese thought, harmony was not merely an ethical principle but also a broader cosmological orientation governing social organization, family life, gender relations, religious practices, architecture, medicine, and agricultural production. Social stability was therefore associated with maintaining equilibrium rather than encouraging radical transformation. Such values contributed positively to social continuity, resilience, and communal cooperation over many centuries. However, these same characteristics also generated important limitations for modern development because excessive emphasis on harmony and conformity could discourage critical thinking, institutional innovation, and individual creativity.

From the perspective of sustainable development, Vietnamese traditional culture contains both supportive and contradictory elements. On the positive side, values emphasizing moderation, collective responsibility, environmental adaptation, and long-term social stability align closely with sustainable development objectives. Traditional village communities historically practiced forms of resource-sharing, collective irrigation management, and local environmental adaptation that reflected relatively sustainable patterns of social organization. Moreover, the Vietnamese preference for social balance and harmony created favorable conditions for accepting sustainable development discourse when it was introduced during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These characteristics are broadly consistent with the principles of sustainable development articulated in the Brundtland Report and later incorporated into the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987; United Nations, 2015).

At the policy level, sustainable development became increasingly compatible with Vietnam's broader socialist-oriented development strategy. Vietnamese policymakers recognized that rapid economic growth without social balance could generate serious environmental destruction, widening inequality, corruption, and social instability. Consequently, sustainable development was not interpreted solely as an environmental framework but rather as a multidimensional development strategy integrating economic growth, social equity, cultural preservation, and political stability. In this regard, sustainable development became closely associated with the broader ideological goals of the Communist Party of Vietnam and state modernization strategies. Recent national assessments of SDG implementation further indicate that Vietnam increasingly views sustainability as a comprehensive framework encompassing economic, social, cultural, environmental, and institutional dimensions (Ministry of Planning and Investment of Viet Nam, 2023).

However, despite these ideological compatibilities, the practical implementation of sustainable development in Vietnam continues to encounter significant cultural and institutional obstacles. Certain deeply embedded social habits originating from traditional agricultural society remain influential in contemporary governance and economic life. These include relationship-based decision-making, short-term thinking, localism, excessive concern for immediate group interests, and limited commitment to long-term institutional accountability. In many cases, these tendencies have adapted themselves to new market conditions rather than disappearing altogether.

Particularly under conditions of rapid urbanization and market competition, traditional collectivist structures have sometimes transformed into informal networks of patronage, favoritism, and group interests operating within both public administration and private business sectors. Such practices weaken institutional transparency and reduce public trust. Contemporary Vietnamese society also increasingly experiences phenomena associated with credentialism, symbolic status competition, and performative success, where formal appearances are occasionally valued more highly than professional competence or ethical responsibility. These tendencies contribute to dishonesty, exaggerated reporting, concealment of institutional weaknesses, and declining social trust.

At the same time, globalization and digital communication technologies have accelerated cultural change, exposing Vietnamese society to competing value systems associated with consumerism, neoliberal individualism, and global popular culture. Younger generations increasingly encounter tensions between traditional expectations emphasizing obedience, social conformity, and communal responsibility, and modern aspirations centered on personal freedom, mobility, creativity, and self-expression. This generational transformation has created new debates concerning morality, identity, family values, and the meaning of social success in contemporary Vietnam. Recent studies of cultural governance in Vietnam suggest that contemporary cultural policy increasingly operates between the preservation of cultural traditions and pragmatic adaptation to globalization and international integration (Tran, 2024).

In recent years, the Vietnamese state has attempted to address these tensions through the orientation toward constructing a "developmental government," a governance model emphasizing institutional effectiveness, strategic coordination, and state-guided modernization. According to Nguyễn Thị Thu Hoà and colleagues (2018), the developmental-government model seeks to create favorable institutional conditions that promote social creativity, public welfare, and national development. Influenced partly by governance experiences from Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and China, this model attempts to balance market dynamism with political stability and long-term national planning.

Nevertheless, the coexistence of rapid marketization and unresolved traditional social habits continues to create contradictions within Vietnam's sustainable development process. Sustainable development ultimately requires institutional transparency, public

trust, long-term planning capacity, environmental responsibility, and ethical governance. Yet social phenomena such as corruption, false reporting, opportunistic behavior, and short-term economic thinking remain significant challenges. In this context, “illusory values” associated with appearances, symbolic prestige, and superficial success are fundamentally incompatible with sustainable development because sustainability depends upon truthfulness, accountability, and long-term social responsibility.

Furthermore, cultural sustainability has increasingly emerged as an important dimension of contemporary development policy. International research and UNESCO assessments have emphasized that cultural heritage, cultural participation, and cultural diversity contribute significantly to social resilience, community cohesion, and sustainable development outcomes (UNESCO, 2025). In the Vietnamese context, cultural heritage preservation should therefore not be viewed merely as an act of safeguarding the past but also as a strategic resource for sustainable future development (Tu, 2019).

The relationship between traditional cultural values and sustainable development in Vietnam can therefore be understood as both complementary and contradictory. Some traditional values provide important foundations for resilience, social cohesion, and environmental adaptation, while others limit institutional modernization, creativity, and policy effectiveness. These dynamics are summarized in Table 3 below.

**Table 3. Traditional Vietnamese Cultural Values and Their Contemporary Implications for Sustainable Development**

<b>Cultural/Social Characteristics</b>	<b>Positive Implications for Sustainable Development</b>	<b>Negative Implications for Sustainable Development</b>
Emphasis on harmony and balance	Supports social cohesion and conflict reduction	May discourage criticism, innovation, and reform
Community-oriented social ethics	Encourages collective responsibility and solidarity	Limits individual autonomy and creativity
Historical resilience under warfare	Strengthens national unity and long-term survival orientation	Reinforces excessive prioritization of security and stability
Wet-rice agricultural mentality	Encourages cooperation and environmental adaptation	Maintains localism and conservative social thinking
Respect for social order	Contributes to political stability	Weakens social activism and institutional accountability
Socialist-oriented equality values	Supports welfare policies and distributive justice	Difficult to reconcile fully with market competition
Rapid market-oriented modernization	Improves living standards and economic growth	Generates consumerism, inequality, and environmental pressure
Relationship-based social organization	Facilitates informal cooperation and social networking	Encourages favoritism, corruption, and group interests
Harmony-oriented governance culture	Reduces social confrontation	Delays structural reforms and critical institutional change
Credentialism and symbolic prestige culture	Encourages educational aspiration and status mobility	Produces formalism, dishonesty, and superficial performance evaluation

Overall, Vietnam’s experience demonstrates that sustainable development is not merely a technical policy framework but also a complex cultural transformation process involving tensions between tradition and modernization, collectivism and individualism, stability and innovation, as well as political legitimacy and market competition. The long-term success of sustainable development in Vietnam will therefore depend not only on economic growth or environmental policy, but also on the country’s ability to critically adapt traditional cultural values to the demands of contemporary global development while preserving social cohesion and cultural identity.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

For sustainable development to become a genuine normative foundation for socio-economic development activities, as well as for patterns of interaction between individuals and between humans and nature in contemporary Vietnamese society, Vietnam must openly acknowledge and confront the negative consequences generated by the market economy and deep international integration. Rapid economic growth and globalization have created important opportunities for modernization, poverty reduction, and technological advancement; however, they have also intensified social inequality, environmental degradation, excessive materialism, and the erosion of certain traditional moral values. These challenges demonstrate that sustainable development cannot simply be understood as economic growth, but must instead involve a balanced and long-term process integrating economic prosperity, social justice, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and political stability.

At the same time, Vietnam must carefully consider cultural diversity and its multidimensional influences when designing and improving development policies. Vietnamese society is characterized by diverse regional, ethnic, historical, and socio-cultural experiences, meaning that the implementation of sustainable development cannot rely solely on rigid or universal policy frameworks. Cultural adaptation and contextual flexibility are therefore essential. Traditional cultural values such as community solidarity, social harmony, collective responsibility, and respect for stability continue to provide important foundations for sustainable development. Nevertheless, certain conservative cultural patterns—including short-term thinking, excessive dependence on communal conformity, and resistance to innovation—may also hinder creativity, institutional reform, and adaptive capacity in the context of globalization and technological transformation.

Addressing these contradictions requires continuous interdisciplinary research capable of identifying both the opportunities and limitations embedded within Vietnamese cultural traditions. Such studies are necessary for proposing practical solutions that minimize obstacles while strengthening supportive cultural factors in the localization of sustainable development values within Vietnamese society. Sustainable development in Vietnam should therefore proceed gradually through processes of social adaptation, public participation, institutional improvement, and cultural transformation, rather than through the rapid imposition of rigid top-down policies or externally imposed development models. Only through a balanced, culturally sensitive, and context-specific approach can Vietnam establish a sustainable development framework that is both modern and deeply rooted in its own historical and cultural realities.

**Funding Statement:** This research did not receive any financial support from public, commercial, or non-profit funding agencies.

**Author Contributions:** The author solely contributed to the study design, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation, and approved the final version for publication.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Data Availability Statement:** The datasets analyzed during the current study can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

**Conflict of Interest:** The author affirms that there are no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research reported in this paper.

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