



CORE VALUES OF VIETNAM VOCOTRUYEN

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Abstract:

In the past every country had a martial arts associated with cultural characters and physical state of its people. Martial arts were not simply the practice of fighting skills, of using arms and legs to settle conflicts or a show of muscular strength. Also, their effects were to enhance health, improve physicality, train will, spirit and good philosophies of life. It is necessary for martial arts practitioners to train both physical and spiritual force, maintain the tradition of teacher deference and moral respect, rituals, orders and disciplines etc.. Vietnamese traditional martial arts (Vocotruyen) are not an exception so it has particularly vital values in life.

Keywords: martial, tradition, Vocotruyen

1. Introduction

On the base of the development of human society together with the fights for survival, for protection of territory and country, martial arts were born. They were first constructed in troublesome situations and perfected through challenges. Martial arts contributed glorious pages to the history, appeared as a proof for resolute spirit, inexhaustible struggle, fearlessness of death, difficulty or danger and as a creative mind of people. In conjunction with the growth of global martial arts, Vocotruyen was formed in the struggling period of Vietnamese people. It closely connected with existential combats or with fights against invaders during thousands years in the history. However, it is not for such the reasons that Vietnamese martial arts is purely

experience of arraying troops or giving forms, strikes, positions, but also a skillful combination of Confucianism, traditional Chinese medicine, theories, eastern philosophies and an outlook on life vividly and practically. That outlook is the way to acknowledge *“life, martial arts, martial arts teaching and martial art learners”*.

Developing Vocotruyen is advancing Vietnamese culture and characters due to a conception that practicing martial art gives us a sturdy body, an enduring health, a firm stuff that prevents us from being unafraid of difficulties, hardship and helps us form a strong will as well as an unyielding spirit. Martial art implies martial art philosophy that is one of the roads leading each practitioner to *“the Truth – the Goodness – the Beauty”* in life.

Vietnamese martial art could be seen as a precious part of national culture. As from its birth, formation till development, martial art always accompanies the fights for constructing and protecting the country. It presents spirits and typical characters of the nation although the country spent thousands of years being dominated. Soon realizing those, Vietnamese government, in many years, has permitted martial art schools to operate, has encouraged the increase of many national sports with the aim at preserving and promoting the country’s cultural values towards the world via Vocotruyen, and advertising the image of the country and its people to foreign friends.

2. Content

2.1. Historical values of Vocotruyen

Having passed though thousands years building and defending the country, the existence and growth of a country, a nation bases on patriotic spirit, indomitable will, brave in combats, sacrifice for the common interests, respect for historical values and traditional culture of that nation. Vocotruyen has accompanied the history of struggles for the nation’s protection and construction. It has gone into history, which expresses the spirit of martial art philosophy, humanity values, national characters together with spiritual values, fighting art and philosophy in the martial art that other martial arts seldom have.

Vietnamese people, from ancient times to the present, have appeared to be the ones who love peace, appreciate harmony and friendliness. However, running along the length of Vietnamese history, Vietnamese people, in every dynasty, have to struggle against mighty aggressors. Not only invaders from the North, the Yuan-Mongol but also the Champa or the Siam nourished an evil ambition to usurp Great Viet. Therefore, there were lots of battles against foreign invaders such as a rout over the Southern Han troops on Bach Dang river in 938, defeats over the Song in 981 and 1077 and the Yuan-Mongol in 1258, 1285 and 1288, insurrections against the control of the Ming Dynasty

during the years from 1418 to 1428 or the Qing Dynasty in 1789 (Le Kim Hoa, 2011, p. 24). In the years of late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the invasion of French colonialists with the greatest weapon and firepower at that time took control over our country. Nonetheless, Vietnamese army and people, with proactive strategies and simple weapons (sword, spear, scimitar...), rose up body and soul against aggressors and betrayers and achieved a huge victory no matter how strong the enemy was, which obviously manifests an undying spirit and a steadfast will of the nation. As the call from the president Ho Chi Minh *"It is better to sacrifice everything than to lose the country and to become a slave ."* made enemies anxious and terrified.

With ups and downs of national history through thousands years, through so many resistances against invaders with so many battles, martial art was formed and developed and has left practical values in the construction and protection of the nation. These values were kept in history from time immemorial *"Eternally lineage is secretly handed down the most basic books on warfare"* by Hung Dao Great King - Tran Hung Dao, or Nhan Hue King – Tran Khanh Du wrote *"those books have been used for three generations being all-victorious"*.

Together with the correlation between history and cultural features, philosophical tradition of Vietnamese people, Vocotruyen is a pride of Vietnamese people in general and of those who love this martial art in particular. Although its growth has experienced much historical rise and fall, prohibition from the domination of colonialism, it has been still preserved and fostered up to now because of those who are enthusiastic and devoted to the martial art with all their life. Vocotruyen has developed in nearly forty countries worldwide so far. On August 19th, 1991 the federation of Vietnam Vocotruyen was established according to Decision No. 252/CT by the chairman of ministers board. Twenty-four years later, in the afternoon of August 8th in Hanoi – Vietnam, the congress to establish World Federation of Vietnam Vocotruyen (WFVV) – term I (2015-2020) was officially taken place. WFVV along with spirit of martial art philosophy, martial art culture by means of competitions, teaching, training as well as other activities aims at maintaining, propagating and researching the development of the essence of Vocotruyen to the world.

Nowadays, in the new age, Vietnamese country and people come into advanced and modern technologies, cultural interrelation, the adoption of other martial arts into Vietnam. Still, Vocotruyen does not fall into oblivion, but on the contrary strongly grows not only at home but also abroad. Today, the martial art training is not for fighting aggressors, bullying the weaker, but for improving health, attitude, character, self-defense, helping people in danger, and especially training "principles" in martial art philosophy, "endurance" in life philosophies of the martial art.

2.2. Cultural values of Vocotruyen

Preserving and encouraging the national culture is a mission that the government and people particularly concern. They regard cultural characters as the soul of the nation. In the Central Resolution five, the Eighth National Congress of Vietnamese Communist Party about the construction and development of Vietnamese culture being progressive and clearly expressing national characters states that: *“In the time of industrialization and modernization of the country, the whole Party and people are encouraged to push up a high in the movement of emulating patriotism, proving cultural potentialities, comprehensively developing cultural campaign. The whole nation solidly build cultivated life and contribute to the native construction and defense”* (Central Committee of Vietnamese Communist Party).

Being understood in the normal way, *“character means specific nuances, characteristics, particularities; culture means material and spiritual values that are created by human beings in history”*. There are many ways to figure out cultural character from common notions and private ones, which are the whole material and spiritual values that are typical for cultural character of the nation and have been formed, existed and grown throughout a long history of a country, a nation.

The advancement of Vocotruyen cannot be separated from the development of the country and has an enormous influence upon the society, which includes life values, great sacrifice, noble mind, teachers’ deference and moral respect and virtuous quality of Vietnamese people.

Martial arts learners are always reminded by their teachers about the national origin *“when you eat a fruit, think of the man who planted the tree”* that is considered as a good quality of the Vietnamese. What we have today as well as the martial arts essences that we learn come from huge contribution of predecessors, of martial arts masters who created, developed and preserved it despite of their bloodshed or their life sacrifice for the existence of Vietnamese martial arts (when French colonialists and American empire invaded Vietnam, they forbade masters to open martial arts training schools).

2.3. Virtuous values of martial arts learners

The martial arts include both martial arts skills and martial arts philosophy. Discussing about principles in the martial arts philosophy, we talk about: human behavior – responsibly live to ourselves and society; universal truth – direct the learners to a better life and social usefulness. Not only Vietnamese martial arts but also that of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, etc. teach learners to give priority to virtues.

As mentioned, the history of martial arts is along with battles closely. However, it is not for that the practitioners only know the strikes with hands, legs, or know

fighting. In martial arts, there is a lofty philosophy, altruism, and a magnanimous person. The desire for practicing martial arts is to develop human completely in terms of both physicality and mind, to lead human to the truth, honesty, goodness, evil avoidance in life, and to the beauty in soul and body “*Truth – Goodness - Beauty*”. The philosophy in martial arts forces the learners to overcome many difficulties and challenges from outside, and more importantly to win ourselves. Through martial arts learning, practitioners will be trained many precious qualities such as endurance, tolerance, agility, ingenuity, bravery, and especially the top qualities of martial arts learners including modesty, moderation, simplicity, altruism and compassion.

Masters of martial arts often teach that: learning martial arts are to improve health, protect ourselves and the weak, live justly and face offensive situations. Hence, it is necessary for learners to know how to use martial arts, not to employ martial arts into evil purposes, in oppressing and harming others, forcing others to death, etc.. Those are great philosophy as well as learners’ virtues that are gradually shaped via martial art learning process.

2.4. Values of noble spirit

Noble spirit of the Vietnamese is formed by the combination of the tradition of patriotism, bravery, undauntedness, indomitability in the wars against invaders, diligence in productive labor, unity in combats. This spirit is shaped step by step, which is regarded as the pride of the nation.

According to sociological aspect, noble spirit is dignifying martial arts skills and philosophy. The martial art users do not attack defeated people, push others to death, use strength to oppress the weak, and take advantage of the crowd to brutalize small groups

Having experienced dark years under aggressors’ domination and struggles for survival, the Vietnamese have shown a steadfast spirit and daring to lay down for righteousness. That spirit is always maintained and promoted. Especially it will erupt together with the patriotism when the country is at risk.

Nobleness: It is the veneration and the prominence of martial arts, the love for refined and aristocratic behaviors of martial arts community, etc.. The function of martial arts is “fighting”. The “veneration” and “prominence” of martial arts do not mean revering fighting or belligerence, but relate to the respect for good traditional moral values which are available in the martial art itself or achievable through the process of martial arts training. The manifestation of nobleness lies in daily communicative behaviors and attitudes such as respecting teachers and the elder, tolerating the young, behaving friendly with fellows, showing affection to others, sharing and helping each other in study, sickness or difficulties. According to Dr. Tran

Long, the noble spirit of the nation is shown through such the factors as no presumption with success, no bore with failure, no attack on defeated people, a glory for players and a useful life for ourselves and others. (Tran Long, 2013).

Therefore, martial arts learners' noble spirit is the reverence of aristocratic qualities, well-educated actions, justice, civilization and kindness towards people *"Take benevolence and righteousness to defeat cruelty, nourish generosity to replace brutality"* (Nguyen Trai).

2.5. Values of martial arts learners' righteousness (martial arts righteousness)



Figure 1: *The Sect of Tinhvodao (Russia) is performing the salutation rite*

According to Confucian deities, one of the noblest qualities to form human personality and individuality is righteousness. *"Righteousness is at the same time the human dignity, rituals, political regulations, cultural and virtuous norms, which purely has standards of traditional philosophy of each nation and plays an extremely important role in the whole social life"*. With the cultural typicality and the tradition of "teacher deference, moral respect" of Vietnamese people, "righteousness" is always put to the top. It is a model, a measurement in all social communication

Righteousness is the standard behavior form between people and people, between practitioners and practitioner and between practitioners and their masters. Practitioners' righteousness is manifested in the greeting and salutation before the performance. The word Righteousness in martial arts teaches the practitioners norms in the martial arts school, respect for the elder and toleration for the younger. Righteousness educates the protection for honor of the sect, of each member. A real practitioner is more and more respectful, modest, not arrogant, haughty, boastful, and does not show off martial arts skills if unnecessary.

The martial arts master Ho Tuong says that *“A real martial arts learner does not consider greeting as righteousness, but the form and the expression of righteousness. Greeting hides a very important content, which is the lodestar of the learners. Greeting is the principle of martial arts and the virtue of learners that is generally called martial arts philosophy”*. To him *“Greeting is like a light bulb, martial arts philosophy is electric current. If there is no electric current, the light bulb will not be able to give light; If there is no spirit of martial arts philosophy, the greeting seems to be only a nod of head”*. *“The arrogance and self-satisfaction are the biggest enemies of martial arts learners. Learning has no end. Who does not feel the deficiency will not add anything. Who does not know to hide himself will not fly high. A full barrel will not contain any extra. It is obligatory to lower down yourself if you want to jump up high. It is a must to curve your body if you want to jump over a high bar”*. To martial arts learners, *modesty does not make them smaller, but gives them strength to move forwards; does not make them shorter than their opponents, but makes the opponents not taller than them”*.

To martial arts practitioners, *“righteousness”* is a firm and unifying content trained constantly in the whole process of teaching and learning the martial arts. As righteousness is considered as one of friendly ways helping people self-improve their soul and characters, be mindful of moral principles, and gradually enhance and perfect personal qualities, mind and determination.

The present development, integration, cultural exchange among countries in the world together with the fast growth of information, media system and other aspects of society have generated positive sides along with negative ones. If everybody is not steady in their mind accepting those changes without serious consideration, they will be melted into a whirl of ill culture making traditional values of each nation easy to be corrupted, distorted and making human’s morality spoiled. The present circumstance demonstrates the fact that only martial arts still maintains the tradition of *“teacher deference, moral respect”*, esteeming and keeping righteousness. For those come to the club which is not simply a place for practicing martial arts techniques, enhancing health, training fighting skills as some people think, but a martial arts school, a morality school and a place for educating moral principles, personality and way of life...The first lesson for martial arts learners is righteousness (righteousness of martial arts, righteousness of social life), respecting teachers and other practitioners. In martial arts school, based on many tests learners are assessed according to two criteria including martial arts achievements and moral quality through their behavior and relation with other people.

With that meaning, nowadays, many martial arts sects in the world in general as well as Vocotruyen in particular have been broadly developed in the globe, and mingled with the flow of the world martial arts. By means of martial arts exchanges,

performances and competitions, there have been cultural exchanges so that people in different countries understand, share and get closer to each other more and more.

2.6. Technical typicality of Vocotruyen

Vocotruyen is varied and diversified in strikes structure, disposing troops in battle formation, the introduction of katas, effective fighting techniques, etc. that creates for Vocotruyen specific characteristics and makes it difficult to be mistaken for other sects in the world.

Common characteristics of Vocotruyen are divided into two main parts: *Katas and weapons*. Katas and weapon lessons in Vietnamese martial arts are methodical. Strikes are written in the form of introductory poems with familiar verses in Han-Vietnamese scripts such as six-eight- word distich verses, seven-word-eight-line poem, five-word poem, 4-line stanza, seven-seven-six-eight-word quatrain verses...There are also many katas and weapon lessons in completely ancient Vietnamese scripts following the six-eight-word distich verses helping the practitioners understand and remember easily.

All katas and weapon lessons of Vietnamese martial arts has moderate length which takes more or less three minutes to finish. These lessons are mainly conducted to two directions: the front direction and the back direction which means the primary advocate is to attack and defend. The learners use the left and right sides to dodge or evade attacks and then get back to the two main directions. From there, the typical fighting technique of Vietnamese martial arts is expressed, which is the initiative in attacks.

Katas in Vocotruyen have techniques using punches, arms, fingers, hand sides, wrists, hand backs, knuckles and palms. However, the most remarkable techniques use elbows, reverse strikes... Moreover, Vocotruyen has many kick strikes using heels, foot sides, insteps, shins, knees...Vocotruyen also uses flying kicks, reverse kicks... In both hand and leg techniques, Vocotruyen combines skills in attack and defense, in giving kick, reversible strikes, counter attacks, upper-middle-lower techniques.

Particularly, Vocotruyen always concerns the effectiveness of attack strikes and kicks so the specific approach of Vocotruyen is giving strikes uninterruptedly that makes the opponent simultaneously get confused in imagination and create a great result in attacks.

Weapon lessons used in Vocotruyen include many different kinds: stick, lance, halberd.. in distant attacks and sword, broadsword, a pair of hooks, dagger.. in close attacks. Vocotruyen also has particular weapons like bow and arrows, crossbow, slingshot, harmful gas, dart...



Figure 2: The practitioners of Little Dragons Sect (France) perform weapon lessons

Besides, Vocotruyen teaches the learners to practice breathing skill, inner force, outer force, attack and remedies for spots on the body, approaches combining martial arts with oriental medicine to cure injuries and joint sprains during the trainings and competitions.

From the technical characteristics as well as having gone through many different stages and generations, Vocotruyen has become creative and been continuously supplemented so that it always suits the physical stage, psychology and physiology of the Vietnamese in general, the physical stage of people in other countries, and the trend for developing modern sports, hence, it is accepted by many countries in the world. Statistics from the Vocotruyen federation shows that at present there are about more than forty nations worldwide participating in practicing Vocotruyen and gathering in the ancestral country annually to take part in the world traditional martial arts festival.

3. Conclusion

With a variety of techniques and a wide range of katas and weapon uses, Vocotruyen has brought the practitioners numerous choices appropriate to each person's physicality. Practical values advantageous to social life and values about outlook on life have shaped typical features for Vocotruyen. As the martial arts practitioners train not only muscles, fighting skills purely, but also personality, the study of martial arts is, therefore, the learning of how to live as a man. Coming to martial arts school means coming to "moral school" because the practitioners here will be taught about virtues,

righteousness. The school is the place educating personality, raising human dignity, increasing life values, humanity values to a higher level, helping them comprehend that martial arts is martial arts philosophy followed by martial arts techniques which means studying righteousness and virtues before learning fighting skills.

Biodata

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