



## THE IMPACT OF INDIAN CULTURE ON VIETNAM FROM THE ASPECT OF DIPLOMATIC EXCHANGE AND COOPERATION

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### **Abstract:**

India is a South Asian country with a land area of 3,287,590 km<sup>2</sup>, the world's second-largest population, and the world's seventh-largest economy in nominal GDP (2016). More than 2000 years ago, the Southeast Asian native culture class of Vietnam, alongside the Chinese cultural mainstream, is the bold mark of Indian culture. Since the Cold War, India has continued to advance its policy toward the East through diplomatic relations, and Vietnam is one of the countries with which India has established early diplomatic relations. The continuous exchange and cooperation from the past to the present has helped India to accompany Vietnam in many different areas, ranging from culture, painting, art, architecture, religion, and so on, to trade, education, and science.

**Keywords:** India, multiculturalism, cultural flow, History of Vietnam, cultural acculturation, indigenous culture

### **1. Introduction**

Vietnam is a meeting place for many people from Southeast Asia's four different language groups - ethnic groups (Mon – Khmer, Thai – Kadai, Han – Tibet and Nam Dao). With a population density concentrated in the plains and coasts, and a culture of community-based, aggregated, and highly integrated rice agriculture in Southeast Asia, the feudal dynasties in Vietnam's history always create favorable conditions for the cultural development of brother peoples living on the same national territory, so Vietnam demonstrates its multiculturalism and multi-ethnic people from the beginning. Furthermore, because Vietnam is located at a crossroads of cultural exchange - trade from the north down and from the west to Vietnam - it attracts a large number of migrant flows from Indian and Chinese civilizations, making the Vietnamese culture both united in the oriental cultural infrastructure of agricultural origin culture in general and diverse and rich in ethnic cultural identity. The article presents the impact of Indian culture in Vietnam through the process of diplomatic exchange and cooperation using the method

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of analysis and synthesis, thereby outlining some achievements and prospects of cultural cooperation and exchange between the two countries in the coming period.

## **2. India's cultural footprints in Vietnam**

### **2.1. Cultural footprints through the process of exchange between two countries**

From a historical standpoint, the India-Vietnamese cultural exchange occurs very early on. The Luy Lau Buddhist Center (Thuan Thanh District, Bac Ninh Province today) was the first Buddhist center directly influenced by India and spread by Indian monks before the Northern Colony. *“As a result, the number of Buddhist monks in Giao Chau has been quite large, and the translation of Khuong Tang Hoi’s scripture (around 200-247), more or less, demonstrates that Buddhism is popular and Buddhist schools attract a relatively large number of students”* (Thich Nhat Hanh, 2019). Notably, intercultural interaction between the two countries occurs peacefully and voluntarily via transmission channels, first established by Indian merchants, then by missionaries such as Brahman and Buddhist monks, via both sea and land (Tran Nam Tien, 2016). Indian civilization has been in contact and exchange with ancient states in the territory of Vietnam such as Van lang - Au Lac in the North, Champa in the South Central and Phu Nam - Chan Lap in the South. All three states have received India's influence to varying degrees, with Champa culture receiving the most Indian culture, to the point where Sharma (2011) claims that Champa culture has its roots in India and Cham people are the descendants of Indian migrants from the Champa land of India. The impact of Indian culture on Vietnamese culture can be seen in many fields, including architecture, art, religion, and state organization. In Champa culture, all of these characteristics converge in a full, dense way. Vietnamese culture has absorbed many aspects of Indian culture through Champa culture. Champa architecture is remarkably similar to Indian architecture. Champa's architectural vision was influenced by Indian art. The Cham tower temple complex consists of the main temple (called kalan in Cham), with small temples, extra structures and low walls surrounding it. Kalan represents the mythical Mount Meru, the axis of the universe, surrounding Mount Meru are celestial bodies and the oceans are represented by small temples and low walls. Kalan is a place of worship for Hindu or Buddhist gods or a set of yoni-linga mascots. According to Hindu architectural concepts, Kalan Champa is divided into three parts: The tower base represents the real world; The tower body represents the spiritual world; The tower roof represents the god world, where the gods gather (Tran Ky Phuong, 2012). The art of Cham in Vietnam, which originated in India, is a visible reality, with a system of sculptures and statues in Indian style, both in content and form; the Cham people's traditional instruments are quite similar to those of India such as Mridang, Dholak, Shehnai, Talāk flute, Tanpura; Cham folk dances are strikingly similar to traditional Indian folk dances (Sharma, 2011). In the 4th and 5th centuries, the Cham also adopted Indian rice cultivation techniques, such as the Cham rice variety, which yields two crops of rice per year, and the Indian technique of building sophisticated irrigation systems. The Cham main festival, Katê, is thought to have originated in Hinduism

because it has the same rites as the Indian rite, and the chants are about Indian gods such as Shiva and Vishnu, and the ceremony moderator was a Cham Brahman. India is the origin of traditional Cham crafts such as jewelry, pottery, and textiles. Based on the existing data, Sharma (2011) claims that the Cham people's mother tongue belongs to the Sanskrit language family, that the consonants and vowels used in Cham language are almost identical to those used in Sanskrit or Hindi, and that the pronunciation is identical. Cham museums in Vietnam have a large collection of documents and artifacts related to the Cham community's art, culture, and traditions, making it possible to compare and recognize the obvious similarities between Champa culture and Indian culture.

## **2.2. Cultural footprints through the process of cooperation between two countries**

The intersection of Vietnamese and Indian cultures has occurred naturally, proactively, and deeply in the past. However, the process of cultural exchange between the two countries only became comprehensive, conscious, and solid when Vietnam and India established their official cooperation relations. The friendly relations between Vietnam and India are founded on the leaders of the two countries, President Ho Chi Minh and President Rajendra Prasad, Prime Minister Nehru, which is further compensated by the two peoples' similar history, which is the struggle for national independence, national liberation from the dominance of the French and the British. After the victory over Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was one of the first foreign heads of state to visit Vietnam; Deputy Prime Minister Pham Van Dong visited India in 1955; President Ho Chi Minh officially visited India in February 1958, and Indian President Rajendra Prasad visited Vietnam in 1959. Vietnam-India relations have been formal since 1956, when the two countries established diplomatic relations (Communist Journal, 2017). Vietnam and India elevated their diplomatic relations to the level of ambassadors in January 1972. A series of official visits between senior leaders from the two governments took place in July 2007. On the Vietnamese side, Vietnam Communist Party General Secretary Nong Duc Manh visited in 2003, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited in 2007, National Assembly President Nguyen Phu Trong visited in 2010, President Truong Tan Sang visited in 2011, Vietnam Communist Party General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong visited in 2013, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited in 2014, and so on. On the Indian side, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee officially visited Vietnam in 2001, the first female President of India Pratibha Patil visited in 2008, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited in 2010, Vice President Hamid Ansari visited in 2013, President Pranab Mukherjee visited in 2014. Most recently, on September 2 and 3, 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially visited Vietnam at the invitation of Vietnam's Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc. Based on the two countries' long-standing good relations and their desire to build a region of peace, stability, cooperation, and prosperity, Vietnam and India have elevated their relations to "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" (Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2016). Accepting the invitation of the President of the Senate of the Republic of India, H. Anxarin, and the Speaker of the House, X. Mahagian, President of the National Assembly Nguyen Thi Kim

Ngan led a high-ranking delegation of the National Assembly of Vietnam to visit India from December 8 to 11, deepening bilateral relations. Many bilateral cooperation documents in all fields, including culture and art, were signed during official visits between the two countries' senior leaders.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, due to socio-historical conditions, Vietnam and India had cultural, material and spiritual differences; however, there is a solid foundation of cultural intersection between the two countries, especially since the two countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1956. That is the foundation for frequent cultural diplomacy between Vietnam and India. From the 1960s to 1975, relations between the two countries were close, with India providing both material and spiritual support to the Vietnamese people in their resistance to the United States; With the establishment of the Indian-Vietnamese Friendship Society in 1977, relations between the two countries entered a new era after 1975. Since then, many cultural exchange activities have taken place between the two countries, including large-scale Vietnamese film festivals in India. However, due to the effects of the global and regional situations, particularly the Cold War, relations between the two countries encountered many difficulties between 1975 and 1990. After the Cold War ended and globalization became a strong trend in the 1990s, Indian-Vietnamese relations underwent significant changes, not only in political and diplomatic relations, but also in all fields of economy, science and technology, security - defense, culture - education, and so on. In particular, since 1992, India has pursued a "Look East policy" of expanding relations with Southeast Asian countries, which has been continuously pursued by the Indian cabinet for nearly two decades, with Vietnam serving as the region's focal point due to its long-standing friendly relationship with India. In September 2014, at the ninth East Asia Summit (EAS) in Myanmar, Prime Minister Narendra Modi decided to rename the policy "Look East" to "Action in the East" - citing India's progress in cooperation with ASEAN countries, "Vietnam plays an important role in India's strategic priorities in Southeast Asia" (Tran Nam Tien, 2016). This is a critical premise for cultural exchange between Vietnam and India to flourish in the twenty-first century. It can be said that, on the basis of the historical relationship between Vietnam and India, the historical and cultural similarity, which is further strengthened by official diplomatic relations between the two states, cultural exchange between Vietnam and India has developed more comprehensively and deeply as the twenty-first century has begun in the context of international integration and development. Cultural exchange and cooperation, as well as the promotion of "soft power" on both sides, have had a positive impact on the understanding and mutual trust of two Asian countries, laying the groundwork for relations between Vietnam and India to truly become "comprehensive strategic partners".

Cultural exchange between Vietnam and India was implemented in the first decade of the twenty-first century through a variety of activities in many fields of culture and art. Cinema is one of the two countries most successful cultural exchanges. Vietnamese audiences have long been familiar with the distinct Bollywood cinema, with artist names such as Amithabh Bachchan, Aishwarya Rai, Shah Rukh Khan considered

cultural symbols of India. Indian films have created a “fever” in Vietnam in recent years as an alternative to the previous wave of Korean films, when much long-duration television series with up to a thousand episodes covered many Vietnamese TV channels, often aired during golden hours, with a large number of audiences. Some of the series that comprise the “phenomenon of Indian films” on Vietnamese television: *Hongey Judaa Na Hum* (70 episodes) on VTV3; *Forever together* (75 episodes), *Pavitra Rishta* (1300 episodes), *Punar Vivaah* (250 episodes) on VTV9; *Balika Vadhu*, *Diya Aur Baati Hum*, *Saraswathichandra*, *Family secrets of Khan*, *Beauty Curse*, *Forever together*, *Kasamh Se*, etc. These are films that have gone viral on television and have been broadcast numerous times due to their popularity among Vietnamese audiences on many local TV channels. For example, Vinh Long TV broadcasts *Saath Nibhaana Saathiya* (717 episodes), Ho Chi Minh City TV broadcasts *Iss Pyaar Ko Kya Naam Doon* (192 episodes), *Jodha Akbar* (96 episodes). Furthermore, audiences can watch many Indian films on channels such as TodayTV, Echannel, and many other cable TV channels such as VTV, SCTV, K+, MyTV, HTVC, and AVG. Not only in the media but many cinema exchange activities between the two countries take place directly in many large cities throughout Vietnam, with positive results. From December 12-23, 2015, three Vietnamese cities (Da Nang, Hanoi, and Ho Chi Minh City) hosted the first Indian Film Festival (IFF). Eight Hindi films with Vietnamese subtitles were shown during the festival. On December 19, 2015, a conference on "Film production cooperation and its role in promoting the tourism industry" was held in Hanoi. The Film Festival's opening ceremony and conference were attended by 11 Indian film producers and directors, as well as many Vietnamese leaders, producers, and directors, and a large number of participants (Van Tuan, 2015).

Literature is viewed as a bridge between peoples' cultures, a channel of cultural exchange that has been implemented by the two countries of Vietnam and India since the early twentieth century, bringing a great deal of understanding about the two peoples' cultural characteristics and personality psychology. Indian literature is a long-standing and valuable literature that Vietnamese researchers and translators have introduced, selected, and translated into Vietnamese. Vietnamese readers have access to a wide range of Indian literary works, including myths, fairy tales, epics, poetry, and novels: *Indian epics* translated by Cao Huy Dinh, Pham Thuy Ba, Social Science Publishing House, 1967; *The Gardener*, Rabindranath Tagore, translated by Do Khanh Hoan, An Tiem Publishing House, Saigon, 1969; *Ancient stories of India*, translated by Kim Hai, Phi Loan, Kim Dong Publishing House, 1985; *The stories of Ve ta la - Indian folk tales*, translated by Nguyen Tan Duc, Social Science Publishing House, 1987; *Mahabharata: Indian epic*, Nguyen Que Duong editor, translated by Cao Huy Dinh, Ham Thuy Ba, Literature Publishing House, 1989; *Collection of modern Indian short stories*, translated by Luu Duc Trung, Youth Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, 1992; *Ramayana: Indian epic*, translated by Xuan Quy, Da Nang Publishing House, 1998; *Asian literature collection, volume 2: Literature India*, curated and introduced by Luu Duc Trung to the National University, 2002; *Indian Mythology*, translated by Le Thanh, Fine Arts Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh, 2004 (Luu Duc Trung, 2009). In addition, there are many research works by Vietnamese authors on

Indian literature from ancient to modern times, and some authors of typical works of Indian literature are included in textbooks, curriculum, and teaching materials in Vietnam from high school to university. In particular, a distinguished representative of Indian literature, the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913, was introduced by Vietnamese literary researchers and translated into Vietnamese as early as the 1920s of the twentieth century. Many performances of performing arts, particularly Indian dance, have taken place in Vietnam. In 2014, within the framework of the Indian Festival held in Vietnam from March 5 to 15, 2014, in three cities including Hanoi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnamese audiences enjoyed Indian dance with many rich genres: Classical Dance performed by Sangeet Natak Academy, Folk Dance performed by Kalbelia Screw, and so on. Also in 2014, from June 25 to 29, the 12-member Indian Dance Era Screw, sponsored by ICCR, performed in three localities including Hanoi, Phu Tho and Yen Bai.

The Indian government has invested approximately \$3 billion in the project of preserving and restoring the Cham temples of My Son Sanctuary, one of the main Hindu temple centers in Southeast Asia and the only heritage of its kind in Vietnam, which was recognized by UNESCO in 1999. This has been regarded as a notable high point in the collaboration between art and architecture. Currently, many Cham tower temples in central Vietnam are degraded, and many tower temples are "disappearing." The Indian government's investment project to preserve and restore Cham tower temples is a project with practical significance, emphasizing the Indian government's interest in a strong similar culture, and the long-standing relationship between Champa culture, Indian culture, and Vietnamese culture. This project was signed in October 2014 during Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's official visit to India. Aside from the aforementioned outstanding project, a number of research projects on the Champa-India relationship have also been carried out.

Under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITEC), many Vietnamese applicants have received various scholarships. Each year, ITEC awards 150 scholarships to Vietnam, including 16 scholarships under the General Cultural Scholarship Scheme (GCSS), 14 Educational Exchange Programme (EEP) scholarships and 10 Mekong Ganga Cooperation Scholarship Scheme (MGCSS) scholarships. In July 2007, India established the Vietnam-India English Training Center to assist Vietnam in its language integration into the ASEAN community. In addition to education and training, many cultural exchange activities between Vietnam and India were carried out: In 2014, there was a Buddhist Festival organized by the Central Institute of Himalayan Culture Studies, Food Festival, and Yoga Programs, among other things, part of the Indian Festival held in Vietnam from March 5 to 15, 2014, in Hanoi, Da Nang, and Ho Chi Minh City. The above artistic activities during the festival were warmly welcomed by Vietnamese audiences. *"In 2017, India established the Cultural Center in Hanoi, which is an effective channel for promoting Indian culture, bringing the image of the country and people of India to Vietnam, and contributing to the strengthening of the two countries' comprehensive and friendly strategic partnership"* (Vietnam News Agency, 2017).

On the Vietnamese side, in many cultural exchange events or in commemorating significant events in the two countries' partnership, Vietnam has introduced to the Indian public special features of Vietnamese culture such as food, cinema, performing arts, and so on. In 2012, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and India, as well as 5 years of strategic partnership, "Vietnam Cultural Days" were held in some Indian states. On January 9, 2012, during the closing of the "Vietnam-India Friendship Year", the Indian Council on Cultural Relations and the Vietnamese Embassy in India co-organized a special music and dance program performed by artists from the Vietnam cultural union. The ICCR Organizing Committee praised the program for "*clearly demonstrating the similar cultural traditions between India and Vietnam, contributing to a solid foundation for long-term relations between the two countries*" Tran Nam Tien (2016).

### **3. Prospects of cultural exchange and cooperation between Vietnam and India in the coming period**

The process of cultural exchange between Vietnam and India occurred in both directions at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Even if the exchange process becomes two-way, the Vietnamese side's proactive cultural exchange activities are limited, and there is no specific strategy. As a result, the Indian people's understanding of Vietnam and Vietnamese culture is inadequate. So, how do Vietnamese culture and its distinctive features reach India and its people, as Indian culture and some Asian countries such as Japan, Korea, and China have done well in Vietnam? Here are some ideas for promoting Vietnamese culture in India, particularly among Indians, and among foreigners in general. Regarding the promotion time: "Vietnam Day" or "Vietnam Cultural Days" should be held more frequently, more regularly, or more times throughout the year, not just during years with significant events related to the two countries' foreign relations. Regarding the promotion method: It is recommended to use many channels, including the official diplomatic channel between the two countries, the two governments, and the media such as television, social networks, and personal channels, because any Vietnamese with sense and capacity, as well as a good cultural and foreign language background, can become "cultural ambassadors" for Indian and foreign friends to better understand, love, and promote Vietnamese culture. Furthermore, if there is an English-language "Vietnamese Culture" program on television and social media, it will be effective. The promotion content must be complete, comprehensive, and highlighted, emphasizing the most unique aspects of Vietnamese culture:

- Cuisine: The Vietnamese are familiar with Indian curries, as well as Korean kimchi and Japanese sushi, so Vietnam can completely establish the brand of Vietnamese cuisine, such as Vietnamese pho, nem ran, bun cha;
- Apparel: India has the sari, Korea has the hanbok, Japan has the kimono, and Vietnam has the ao dai. The Vietnamese ao dai was chosen as the country's national costume by the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, and it has a

subtle and traditional beauty, not to mention grace and sexiness. Vietnamese cuisine and ao dai are now very popular in some Asian and global countries. During the seminar, which was part of a series of activities commemorating the 20th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and South Korea (1992-2002), a South Korean professor presented a discussion in which it was written that: in Korea, Koreans referred to Vietnam as “*the country of pho and ao dai*”. It is entirely possible to successfully promote these characteristics in Vietnamese culture in India and other countries;

- Music and performing arts: Vietnam can introduce Quan Ho Bac Ninh folk songs, Hue royal court music, Gong culture in the Central Highlands, Hat Xoan, which are types of performing arts recognized by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, or traditional ethnic dances such as Cheraw dance, Xoe Thai dance because Indians have a particular taste for the type of dance art;
- Tourism has both potential and strengths in terms of promoting Vietnamese culture: Some tours that Indian tourists, in particular, and foreign tourists in general, are interested in are ecotourism, which brings visitors to nature and allows them to enjoy natural beauties such as Ha Long Bay - ranked third in the Top 10 most impressive world heritage sites in Asia, Son Doong cave (Quang Binh province) - one of the world's largest natural caves, located in the Phong Nha - Ke Bang cave complex,...; Historical tourism, which takes visitors to famous historical relics associated with Vietnam's "global seismic" victories, which are also well-known and popular among Indians, such as Dien Bien Phu, Cu Chi Tunnels, Vinh Moc, and so on; Cultural tourism: it is highly recommended to introduce Champa culture to Indian tourists, with Cham tower temples in the Central region, My Son Sanctuary, and so on. Visitors to India can directly visit and recognize the similarities between Cham tower temple architecture and Hindu temple architecture in India, as well as statues and reliefs of Hindu gods such as Shiva, Visnu, Lasmi, linga yoni, and so on. In addition, spiritual tourism is popular among Indian visitors. Home to one of the world's major religions, Buddhism, the Indian government is pursuing "Buddhist diplomacy," a policy aimed at creating a cohesive relationship between India and the countries that practice this religion, including Southeast Asia and Vietnam. Vietnam can fully implement this policy because there are many beautiful, ancient pagodas with a long history in Vietnam, such as Huong Pagoda, Huong Tich Cave, Yen Tu, Bai Dinh, and so on. Although Hinduism is today's dominant religion in India, the number of Buddhists is small, but pilgrimages to ancient temples where Indian origins originated will be an interesting experience for many Indians.

#### 4. Conclusion

*“Vietnam, in particular, and Southeast Asia in general, are regarded as India’s second home, as well as a repository for traditional Indian cultural values”* (Ha Dan, 2012). The main factors



affecting the formation and development of Indian cultural flows in the history of Vietnam are the paths of exchange and cooperation. Through that process of exchange and cooperation, the values of Vietnam's Southeast Asian indigenous cultural infrastructure have always played the leading, core, and key role, with the greatest vitality and resistance, but Vietnam has also demonstrated the ability to disseminate and localize exogenous cultural values in a clever and intelligent manner. Today, Vietnam's culture is multi-ethnic, adaptable, gentle, and tolerant, ready to integrate all achievements of human culture and civilization and continue to transform them into values imbued with the Vietnamese spirit. This is a solid foundation for cultural cooperation and exchange between Vietnam and India in the coming stages. At the same time, it encourages Vietnamese cultural managers and cultural policymakers to reflect in order to devise reasonable and effective strategies for bringing the "soft power" of Vietnamese culture to countries in South Asia and the region, as well as other countries around the world, so that cultural exchange activities truly become a two-way interaction between the cultures of the two countries.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Tran Minh Duc, currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Cultural Industry, Thu Dau Mot University, Binh Duong Province, Vietnam. He is a research expert in several fields: Anthropology, Religion, History, Culture, author of more than 100 articles and speaker of many international conferences held in Vietnam.

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