The Relationship between Friendship Characteristics, Ethnic Identity and Value Systems of Youths from Ethnic Minority Groups in Viet Nam: A Conceptual Framework for Research

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Abstract

In recent years, values issue has received growing attention from researchers of many sciences around the world. Further, globalization encourages communication and values exchange between nations as well as ethnic groups. The values of ethnic majority groups have great influence on the value systems of ethnic minority groups, and ethnic minority groups face threats to their value systems. Viet Nam is a country with 54 ethnic groups, so learning cultures and exchanging values among them are common. However, studies on the changing value systems of youths from ethnic minority groups have been neglected in Viet Nam. By reviewing past studies conducted around the world and in Viet Nam on values and its relationship with variables such as ethnic identity and friendship characteristics, this study aims to introduce a suitable conceptual framework to explore values of youths in ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam.

Keywords: Values, value systems, friendship characteristics, ethnic identity, ethnic minority groups.

1. Introduction

Vietnam is the homeland of many nationalities, including an ethnic majority group (Kinh) and other 53 ethnic minority groups (Tày, Nùng, Hoa, Sán Rìu, Ê Đê, Gia Rai, Xê Đăng, X'Tiêng, Chăm, Pa Kô, Vân Kiều, H'Mông, Lạch, Dao, and so forth). Legend has it that all ethnic groups are descendants of Lac Long Quan and Au Co. After hatching out of a hundred eggs, half of them follow their mother to the mountain, the other half accompany their father to the sea. They join hands to build their nation which has an S-shape with two archipelagoes: Hoang Sa and Truong Sa. Throughout the historic process of national construction, defence and development, all the ethinic groups live together in one country from time immemorial and develop a tradition of patriotism and unite and assist mutually in the conquest of nature and in social struggle. The ethnic groups live close to one another and know the cultures of others through everyday relations. Although involved in cultural exchange, they try to keep the identity of their own culture. The diversity of the cultures among ethnic groups does not take them off the track of the common development of the nation, just as the peculiarity is in tune with the generality in the dual category of philosophy (Nam, 2004).

However, the ethnic majority groups usually dominate in number, economics, politics and culture, hence their values have great influence on the value systems of the ethnic minorities. In this acculturational context, each ethnic minority group has to reorganize their value systems based on selection, acceptance and criticize new values from the value systems of others to protect themselves from the threat of losing identity. They, in other words, try to find effective strategies to maintain their own specific values as well as remain their ethnic group status. Young people who have weak personal defense and unstable ethnic identity, specially, this situation becomes much more challenging.

In Viet Nam these days, young people from minority ethnic groups have more chance to studying, living or working with those from the majority group. A problem is that they do not want to become too different from the major group because of racial discrimination. So, two common strategies are used to cope with this situation: trying to assimilate in the majority group and hiding their special ethnic characteristics.

For the first strategy, youths from minority groups seek a chance that the "membership can confer large boosts in status, help people reach important goals, assist them in refining and clarifying their own self-concept, and contribute to obtaining desired changes in society" once belonging to the dominant group (Baron, Byrne, & Branscombe, 2006). They tend to try to make friends with more peers from the majority group athough this kind of relationship can not bring them trust, empathy, and intimacy as friendship with those from their own groups. As Telfer (1971) asserted, friendship is "*life enhancing*" which makes us "feel more alive". It can be said that friendship has significant meaning in people's well-being. Hence, the low quality of friendships will affect the psychological well-being of youths from minority groups. As Smith and Silva (2001) argued, one of consequences of friendship characteristics is that ethnic identity relates to positive well-being more strongly than to compromised well-being. Some other factors such as self-esteem, sense of belonging, pride, affirmation, knowledge of history, traditions, values orientation also influence ethnic identity of minority youths (Phinney, 2000). Acording to Heaven (1999), group identities have a logical link to people's values and belief systems. The role of ethnic groups to which individuals belong shapes their identity and group membership also has implications for self-evaluation or value systems.

For the second strategy, many youths in ethnic minority groups tend to accept values of the majority group, then reorganize their own value system. They lose important values important to their ethnic chacracteristics because of the link of values not only to attitudes and behaviours but also to group identities, this consequently leads to the threat of ethnic group's survival (Heaven, 1999).

The two common strategies lead them to face negative changes in their value systems. Because: friendship characteristics, ethnic identity and value systems of youths from minority groups have corelations with each other, they all might be threatened.

However, there are only limited studies on value systems of youths from ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam. Particularly, there is no research conducted to explore the changing value systems of youths from minority groups in relation to their ethnic identity and friendship characteristics.

2. Theoretical foundation for the conceptual framework

2.1. Values and value systems

2.1.1 What are values?

Rokeach, one of the most well known psychologists in the field of values, defined value as "enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence" (Rokeach, 1973). Feather (1994) is influenced by Rokeach's theory and considered values as "organized summaries of experience that capture the focal, abstracted qualities of past encounters, that have a normative or oughtness quality about them, and that function as criteria or frameworks against which present experience can be tested… But they are not affectively neutral abstract structures. They are tied to our feelings and can function as general motives". Similarly, based on Rokeach's theory, Golden (2002) continued to develop the concept of value. His definition of value is: "An enduring belief that a specific way of behaving or a specific life goal is personally or socially preferable to any other. Values have cognitive, affective, and behavioral components". Schwartz (2007), another well known psychologist on values, formed his own Value Theory. Acording to him, values are defined as "desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles in people's lives."

Although there are various ways to define values, for the most part they all seem to agree with Rokeach about values' features (Feather, 1994; Golden, 2002; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2007):

- Values are relatively enduring. This feature helps maintain the contiunuity of human personality and society.
- Values are beliefs. They are not inextricable tied to objective but emotion, cold ideas.

- Values are preferences. They can also be viewed as "conceptions of the preferable" in personal or social factors. Hence, values are considered motivational constructs or desirable goals which people strive to attain.
- Values are abstract goals that transcend specific actions and situations. This abstract nature of values can help distinguish values from other concepts like norms and attitudes, which usually refer to specific actions, objects, or situations. Values refer to a mode of conduct or end-state of existence.
- Values serve as standards or criteria which guide the selection or evaluation of actions, policies, people, and events.
- Another feature of values is hierarchical which can distinguish them from norms and attitudes. The important relations between values organize them into an ordered system of value priorities.

2.1.2 Value systems

Being organized into systems is one of the most important features of values. Value system can then be defined as the "enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-state of existence along a continuum of relative importance" (Rokeach, 1973). Each value is ordered in the value system. So, a new value will be integrated into an organized system once it is possessed. As the change happens, a reordering of priorities among values will occur in the value system because of the interrelation. This relative feature of values also let us see the whole value system as it remains relatively stable over time. This character of value system enables itself to be relatively stable and flexible enough to keep the unique personality in the sameness and continuity throughout the socialization process within a given culture and society. This relatively stable character can also allow the rearrangement of value priorities under the effects of changes in society, culture, and personal experience at the same time.

Golden (2002) viewed value system as a total number of values existing within a hierarchy. By citing Maslow's renowned "Hierarchy of Needs" model, he emphasized the benefits of hierarchical models as well as the importance of human values.

Values Theory of Schwartz (2007; 2010) focuses more attention on explicating the structural aspect - the dynamic relations - among values. Schwartz suggested that psychological, practical, and social consequences of actions in pursuit of any value may conflict or be compatible with the pursuit of other values. So, the integrated structure of values can be realised through the conflicts and compatibilites among all values. "Self-enhancement vesus self-transcendence" and "openness to change vesus conservation" are two orthogonal dimensions that help summarize the structure of value systems and service as basic motivations in constituting a universal principle that organizes value systems. The structure of motivational oppositions and compatibilities apparently organizes people's value systems even if they might have substantial difference in thinking about the significance of each values. Thus, it is possible to study the whole systems of values, rather than single values.

2.2 The relationship between values, value systems and other variables

There were some studies conducted to understand the relationship between values (Alwin, 1984; Mayton & Furnham, 1994; Rokeach, 1973). By pointing out problems of former studies, Schwartz (1996) examined the relationship between a full set of value priorities and other variables, not in a piecemeal mode but an organized, coherent structure. Thus, this structure has two implications on relations of values with other variables:

1. Adjacent values might have similar associations with other variables.
2. The associations should decrease stably from the most positively to the most negatively associated value between values and other variables .

Furthermore, a particular attitude or behavior that correlates most positively with one value can also correlates most negatively with another value at the same time. So, the expected pattern of those associations may be similar with the relationship within value systems. It makes easier to interpret the relations of values with other variables when considering value systems as integrated structures (Schwartz, 2007).

2.2.1 Values as a dependent variable

Scientists and psychologists usually explore the influence of life circumstances in which a person grows up, such as age, gender, education, religion or even socialization, learning experiences, social roles, expectations and sanctions, and abilities on values (Schwartz, 2007). Differences in life circumstances can affect value priorities to contribute to the differences in background characteristics. Life circumstances can encourage people to pursue or express some values more easily than others as well as force the constraints against the pursuit or expression of another values. People usually try to adapt their values to their life circumstances by upgrading attainable values and downgrading thwarted values. This phenomenon happens to most of values, but not to all and the reverse will occur especially to values that concern material well-being (power) and security.

2.2.2 Values as an independent variable

People's values are not only affected passively by other variables. There are also various reciprocal influences in the relationship between other life circumstances and values. Value priorities influence many aspects of people's life: from the level of education, the development of particular abilities, choosing particular friends, mating, jobs and travel opportunities to different political, economic, or eligious systems. So, these value-based choices can create people's life circumstances (Schwartz, 2007).

To explain how values can influence behavior, Schwartz (2007; 2010) used four processes:

* Values must be activated in order to affect or cause behavior. The more accessible, important and high-priority a value is, the more crucial it is for activating behaviour (Bardi, Calogero, & Mullen, 2008). Another factor that can activate values is value-relevant aspects of situations.
* After values are activated, they will influence the direction of motivation in order to affect prosocial behavior most critically. Thus, in the second process, values serve as a source of motivation that lead to action. Actions will become more attractive, more valued subjectively if they can promote attainment of valued goals. They can also become less attractive and more disvalued subjectively. High-priority values play a central role in self-concept. Furthermore, values often influence the action's attractiveness without our being conscious of alternatives and consequences of actions (Feather, 1988).
* In the third process, values influence people's attention, perception, and interpretation in a particular situation. They define situations according to how important values are attained, so differences in impotance of values will lead to different actions. High priority values take part as chronic goals that guide people to find out and concentrate on value-relevant aspects of a particular situation (Schwartz, Sagiv, & Boehnke, 2000).
* In the last process, values influence the planning of action. Even if a decision is already made, stronger self-transcendent values can influence the planning and persistence of actions in the face of obstacles. The more important the goals are, the more they can enhance stronger motivation to plan action. So, people form action plans based upon their higher priority values. While planning actions, people will focus more on the pros of desired actions than on the cons as well as strengthen the persistence in difficult situations and distractions, the readiness to resume goal-directed activity after interruptions and their belief in their ability to win the valued goal.

In conclusion, it is not the priority given to a single value that guides behaviour and attitudes but the trade-offs among competing values that are implicated simultaneously in the behaviour (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992). Hence, while investigating values as an independence variable in the relationship with other factors, we must consider the importance of the values in encouraging or discouraging behaviour.

2.3 The relationship between ethnic identity and value systems

"Ethnic identity is the degree to which individuals perceive themselves to be included and aligned with an ethnic group" (Smith & Silva, 2001) (p. 42). In constrast, Phinney (2000) defines ethnic identity as "a central defining characteristic of many individuals, particularly those who are members of minority groups" (p. 256).

There are many studies conducted on the relationship between value systems and ethnic identity. Crandall, Schiffhauer, and Harvey (1997) compared the relevance of three factors: group membership, social identity and personal identity in Black students in Florida with those in Oklahoma.

The findings suggest that people have more chance to sort themselves acording to interests and physical similarities when they are in the dominant group on campus. Such opportunities may not exist if they are a distinct minority in a particular society. Augoustinos and Walker (1995) supported that group members or collectivities could bring people a "common-sense theory" of the world by sharing ideas, thoughts, and images. According to Hogg and Vaughan (1995), acceptable attitudes and ways of thinking that matched closely to people's values and value systems are suggested by their identities (Feather, 1984; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2007). As a consequence, group identities have a logical link with people's values and belief systems (Heaven, 1999). For example, strongly ethnocentric peers usually lead to difficulty in expressing universalist values (Schwartz, 2007).

Phinney's (2000) descriptions of ethnic identity demonstrated that ethnic self-identification, affective components, cognitive components and differences in components of ethnic identity related to age, phenotype, and context are all included in ethnic identity as well as value orientations such as individualism or collectivism. Similarly, Smith and Silva (2001) indicated that "more than a mere cognitive heuristic or coping strategy, ethnic identity pervades both world-view and behavior" (p. 42). In deep, exploring and making acommitment to one's ethnic group enable individuals to achieve a better ethnic identity. This contributes to create a strong and secure sense of self that guides important life decisions (Ong, Phinney, & Dennis, 2006).

Furthermore, in Heaven's (1999) opinion, values are highly relevant to people's views about their own self-description and group belongingness. Then, the groups – political, ethnic, religious – to which individuals belong are important in shaping their self-definitions and identities. So, different groups encourage different values which are related to members' attitudes and behaviors. This viewpoint parallels Hogg and Vaughan's assertion (1995) that identities endorse acceptable attitudes and ways of thinking; and supports Braithwaite's (1997) idea that values can shape attitudes and guide behavior both directly and indirectly. Williams (1959) also suggested that the differences or similarities of the more important values and beliefs will have the greatest effect on relationships among individuals or collectivities, for example, of different ethnic categories. A study conducted by Lorenzo-Hernandez and Oullette (1998) revealed differences in the strength of ethnic identity, perceived value congruence, and the ranking of the value solutions between groups.

2.4 The relationship between friendship characteristics and value systems

Acording to Friedman (1989), nomally, we learn our first values from early caretakers' moral socialization such as parents or family. Then, friends' needs, wants, fears, experiences, projects, and dreams strengthen the significance and worth of our values and standards and frame our new standpoints. The difference in friendship characteristics which are contributed by the difference of friends' characteristics has both direct and indirect effects on children (Berndt, 2002).

Friedman (1989) explored this process by appealing to the notion of bestowal. For this, the sharing of viewpoints and the commitment between friends are two important things need to forcus on. Friendship enables us to understand friends' experiences and perspectives then gain different knowledge and values by coming to adopt their values as parts of our own sense of values or by rejecting what our friends value and abide by. On the other hand, the commitment lets us view our friends seriously as unique persons and encourage us to find their values, interests, reasons, etc. as reasons for us to reach for similar values and think: "from her goals and aspirations, her needs, her character - all of which one feels prima facie invited to acknowledge as worthwhile just because they are hers" (p. 4). In this case, friends mutually influencing each other's sense of values and enhance the dynamics of the friendship.

Crandall et al. (1997) hypothesized that people form friendships along the dimensions that they value. Within a particular setting, people tend to make friends with others in their own social categories rather than others who have similar personal interests if they are minority group members. However, they are more likely to form friendships based on similarities rather on personal dimensions when they are from majority groups. The strengthened salience in social identity of minority members may limit their available friendship options as well as assortment along many similarity dimensions (interest, phisical, values, etc). In a study conducted by Williams (1959), the results revealed that people are likely to choose friends from persons who have more similar value orientations.

Larson (2010) indicated that to maintain low conflict and high depth within friendships, it is significant to perceive similarity in terminal and instrumental values. Hence, for high-quality friendships, perceived value similarity is really important.

Each society has its own cultural norms and values. So, friendship characteristics across cultures may are differ and vary. It can be seen that differences in friendship characteristics exist along various cultural factors: including the meaning of friendship, the norms and values that guide friendship behavior or even the styles of friendship. In sum, cultural values may strongly affect friendship characteristics (Bae, 2003).

3. Conceptual framework for further research on the relationship between friendship charateristics, ethnic identity and value systems of youths from ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam

Limited studies have been conducted on values, value systems of youths from ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam. Most studies concentrated on exploring vocational value orientation (Quyen, 2008; Thanh, 2008) or value orientation (Quyen, 2009; Hao, 2008, 2009). There is no research on the relationship between value systems and other variables of youths from ethnic minority groups.

Based on the review above, the following conceptual framework can be used to guide research on value systems of minority youths in Viet Nam.
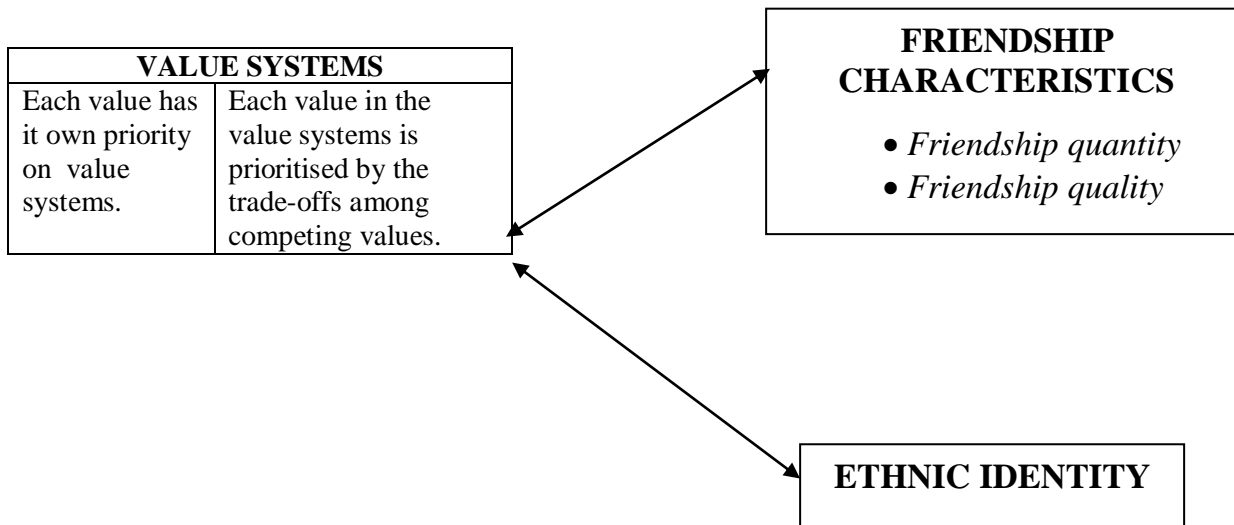
Figure 1. Conceptual framework

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to present a research-based conceptual framework for further research on the relationship between friendship charateristics, ethnic identity and value systems of youths from ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam. Because this paper examined values and value systems in the context of globalization as well as their relations with other variables, the conceptual framework can be adapted and applied to Viet Nam and other countries.

Acknowledgement

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