

Cultural Life of Cadets and the Construction of Integrity Values in the People's Army Schools of Vietnam Today

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ABSTRACT: Integrity is one of the core ethical values in military schools, serving as a compass for behavior and contributing to the formation of the revolutionary soldier's character. The construction of integrity values within military schools cannot be separated from the cultural life of cadets—a social space with its own institutions, norms, and distinctive cultural practices. This paper focuses on analyzing the role of cadets' cultural life in constructing integrity values in military schools. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Pierre Bourdieu, Max Weber, and Clifford Geertz, the paper approaches cultural life as a field of practice where values and moral norms are tested and reproduced, thereby contributing to the construction of integrity.

KEYWORDS: Cultural life, integrity, military schools, Military Technical Academy.

1. INTRODUCTION

The processes of globalization and international integration are unfolding deeply and vigorously, exerting profound influences on various aspects of social life, including the spiritual, psychological, behavioral, and lifestyle dimensions of individuals, families, communities, and society at large. These processes are transforming perceptions of cultural values in both positive and negative directions. Within this context, the identification, construction, and orientation of cultural values appropriate to the new conditions of the nation and the era for the younger generation is of critical significance. Such efforts help them not only preserve and promote the precious traditional cultural values of the nation but also cultivate willpower, strengthen resilience, and foster creativity and latent capacities in the cause of national development.

The draft documents of the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam emphasize the need to: *"Build an advanced Vietnamese culture imbued with national identity, comprehensively based on the system of national values: peace, unity, independence, democracy, prosperity, civilization, and happiness; the system of Vietnamese cultural values: national identity, democracy, humanity, science; the system of Vietnamese family values: progress, civilization, prosperity, happiness; and the standards of the Vietnamese people: patriotism, solidarity, self-reliance, compassion, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and creativity."*

In the current context of extensive and multidimensional exchanges with the world, society is confronted with new requirements for the construction and development of fundamental ethical values within social institutions, including the value of integrity in military schools.

2. INTEGRITY – A CORE VALUE IN THE MILITARY ENVIRONMENT

Integrity is a moral quality, a noble virtue reflecting purity, uprightness, and honesty in the face of temptations, especially those related to reputation, power, wealth, and material interests. Integrity is manifested through the conduct and activities of individuals and organizations, grounded in ethical standards and compliance with the law, ensuring honesty, uprightness, and the constant promotion of incorruptibility, dignity, honor, and righteousness without servility, opportunism, or self-interest.

The *Vietnamese Dictionary* explains: "*Liem*" means "a quality of purity, not coveting the possessions of others, not appropriating public property"; "*Chinh*" means "upright, morally proper." Thus, *liem chinh* signifies "being clean and upright: practicing diligence, thrift, integrity." According to President Ho Chi Minh, "*Liem is purity, not greed*"—always respecting and safeguarding public and people's property, never infringing upon even the smallest belonging of the State or the people, never desiring positions, wealth, comfort, or flattery. Speaking of "*Chinh*", Ho Chi Minh emphasized that it means "not crooked, but frank and proper." A person with *Chinh* is just, impartial, acts righteously, and firmly defends justice.

Transparency International (2019) defines integrity as "behaviors and actions consistent with ethical and moral principles and norms accepted by individuals and organizations, creating barriers against corruption." On a broader scale, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) views integrity as "adherence to commonly accepted rules and standards." In

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public service, integrity means compliance with shared rules and standards governing that domain. From this perspective, integrity can be considered at multiple levels: individual integrity, collective integrity, or the integrity of civil servants, officials, and leaders.

Integrity represents a fundamental human virtue, particularly for cadres and Party members, where “*liem*” and “*chinh*” are central qualities embodying revolutionary ethics. Karl Marx asserted: “*No person, not even the most eminent legislator, is allowed to place themselves above the law they are sworn to uphold.*” In any state, arbitrariness by state agencies and officials entrusted with public authority may occur. To restrict such arbitrariness, the law, discipline, and integrity must be emphasized to safeguard the legitimate rights and freedoms of all members of society, especially human freedom.

V.I. Lenin, in leading the construction of the Soviet state, recognized the dangers of the corruption of state power even in a socialist state, leading to bureaucracy, corruption, embezzlement, and bribery within state apparatuses. He warned: “*A typical phenomenon in Russia is bribery. Everywhere there is bribery. Under such conditions, when bribery and corruption are rampant, no kind of politics can be successfully carried out.*” From analyzing the nature and dangers of bureaucracy, corruption, and bribery in socialist systems, Lenin insisted on a firm and resolute stance: every act of bureaucracy, corruption, or bribery must be punished. Preventive mechanisms must be built, and a determined struggle against corruption, bribery, and negative phenomena must be waged within the Party and the State. Those engaging in bureaucratism and corruption must be resolutely expelled. To achieve this, the Party must be persistently and resolutely built into a pure, strong organization, enhancing its ability to resist degeneration, while regularly practicing integrity.

In Vietnamese cultural tradition, integrity is not only a personal ethical quality but also a measure of human worth in relation to the community, the nation, and the just cause. In the military sphere, particularly within military schools, integrity bears special significance. Military schools are institutions tasked with “*training cadres, officers, and technical and professional personnel with firm political steadfastness, absolute loyalty to the Party, the Fatherland, and the People; closely attached to the cause of army building; possessing organizational discipline, initiative, readiness to undertake and successfully complete assigned tasks; endowed with creativity, professional knowledge, and competence appropriate to positions of responsibility, as well as military, technical, and professional skills necessary for leadership, command, management, combat readiness, and other military missions; and with strong health.*” To accomplish this mission, military schools must value the preservation, inheritance, and development of noble cultural values, including the cultivation of integrity.

In the military environment in general, and in military schools in particular, integrity is manifested in the awareness and steadfastness of revolutionary ideals; absolute loyalty to the Party, the Fatherland, and the People; readiness to fight and sacrifice for national independence; absolute obedience to superiors’ orders; courage in defending justice; disciplined, collective-oriented living imbued with comradeship; diligence in study and training; simplicity in lifestyle; sincerity in conduct; and rejection of corruption, opportunism, and self-interest—living by the principle of “*not taking even a needle or a thread from the people.*”

From the perspective of Max Weber’s theory of social action, integrity is not merely a psychological characteristic of the individual but an expression of a value system orienting behavior, deeply influenced by social contexts, institutions, and organizational culture. In military schools, the cultivation and development of integrity cannot be shaped coercively through administrative orders or political slogans but must permeate naturally through daily cultural practices, where cadets absorb, interact with, and reproduce values within their living and learning environments.

According to Clifford Geertz, culture is “a system of meaning created by humans,” in which moral behavior is a form of symbolic practice. Thus, cultural life becomes the arena where values such as integrity, honesty, straightforwardness, and self-respect are expressed and regenerated. The construction of integrity must therefore be carried out through education as a “*living value*”—to be felt, internalized, and practiced regularly throughout the entire living and learning environment of cadets. This underscores the vital role of cultural life as the locus where ethical values are formed, reinforced, and transformed into concrete and sustainable behaviors.

3. CADETS’ CULTURAL LIFE – A SOCIAL SPACE FOR CONSTRUCTING INTEGRITY

Cultural life is a comprehensive category encompassing multiple dimensions such as ideology, religion, beliefs, politics, economy, culture, and society. It exists to satisfy cultural needs and orient individuals toward values of truth, goodness, and beauty. In Vietnam, perspectives on cultural life have been rich and diverse. After the August Revolution, Ho Chi Minh, under the pen name *Tan Sinh*, conceptualized cultural life in a simple manner: a “new life” that included appropriate attitudes toward old and new values, linking culture with productive labor, building a new spiritual life, shaping new morality, and cultivating new ways of living and lifestyles. In the context of the nation’s then-low educational level, Ho Chi Minh used the word “new” instead of “culture” to make the concept more accessible to the people. The essay *New Life* can be considered the first work laying a theoretical foundation for cultural life construction after the 1945 Revolution.

Since the 1980s, the term “cultural life” has become increasingly popular in Vietnam. At that time, its connotation was understood narrowly as cultural lifestyles and customs associated with funerals, weddings, and cultural or artistic activities. Up to now, there has been no unified definition of cultural life. From different research perspectives and approaches, the concept has been understood in various ways. Synthesizing the concepts, definitions, and viewpoints of Vietnamese scholars, cultural life may be

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defined as the totality of human cultural activities occurring through interactions with natural and social environments, serving to satisfy both material and spiritual cultural needs, and contributing to the improvement of quality of life. Cultural life is expressed dynamically through cultural values and norms, cultural institutions, and cultural practices. It embodies the crystallization, selective inheritance, and actualization of values of *truth–goodness–beauty*, aiming at human development and perfection of personality.

In the specific environment of military schools, cadets' cultural life is understood as the entirety of values, norms, institutions, and practices that take place within the military-pedagogical cultural context. It contributes to shaping and developing the personality, political steadfastness, and cultural qualities of future officers of the Vietnam People's Army. The cultural life of cadets does not exist independently but is shaped by two factors: the distinct characteristics of the military environment and those of the educational environment. The military environment, characterized by high politicization, discipline, and collectivism, gives cadets' cultural life its unique traits. Meanwhile, the educational environment, with the mission of comprehensive human development, emphasizes the orientation, pedagogical, and organizational functions of cultural activities. From this approach, cadets' cultural life in military schools can be defined as the unity of material and spiritual cultural expressions formed and developed through cadets' interactions with the military-pedagogical cultural environment. It includes systems of values, norms, institutions, and cultural practices that contribute to shaping personality, cultivating political-ideological qualities, and building the cultural resilience of future military officers.

Cadets' cultural life in military schools is composed of several elements:

1. **Cultural value systems** that cadets aspire to, such as patriotism, discipline, combat spirit, collectivism, and social responsibility.
2. **Cultural norms** that regulate behavior and lifestyle, including military codes of conduct, discipline, internal regulations, and learning/living rules.
3. **Cultural institutions** such as cultural houses, libraries, clubs, art troupes, and mass organizations.
4. **Cultural practices** expressed through participation in learning, recreation, entertainment, physical training, social interaction, cultural-artistic movements, sports, and military rituals.

Together, these elements form a highly organized cultural ecosystem embedded within the military context. In this space, cultural values are not only transmitted but also practiced and tested through social relationships what Bourdieu (1990) refers to as the "*social field*", where *habitus* (cultural dispositions) are formed and orient individual behavior. Through participation in cultural practices, cadets gradually learn to distinguish values from non-values, right from wrong, justice from self-interest, and collective from individual interests. In this way, they progressively develop and reinforce ethical capacities, including integrity. Thus, cultural life not only reflects but also constructs social realities by establishing behavioral norms, maintaining collective rituals, and fostering internal self-regulation.

4. THE ROLE OF CADETS' CULTURAL LIFE IN CONSTRUCTING INTEGRITY VALUES IN MILITARY SCHOOLS

Within military schools where education and training, political-ideological cultivation, military drills, disciplinary practice, and regularity-building are integrated—the formation of personality traits, particularly the value of integrity, cannot be separated from the cultural environment in which cadets live, study, and train. From a cultural-studies perspective, cadets' cultural life is not confined to leisure activities, associations, or cultural-artistic and sports movements; rather, it is a highly organized system of institutions, norms, and social practices capable of orienting and reproducing integrity a core virtue in the ethics of revolutionary soldiers. The role of cadets' cultural life in constructing integrity values in military schools can be seen in several dimensions:

First, cultural life as an institution that maintains community stability and continuity.

In military schools, cadets' cultural life is designed to be rich, wholesome, civilized, and progressive. Daily life is organized in a rigorous, scientific, and exemplary manner, with clearly structured schedules comprising eleven daily regimes: flag hoisting, wake-up, morning exercise, morning inspection, study, meals, weapon and equipment maintenance, sports and production activities, reading news, listening to broadcasts, roll call, and rest. Weekly activities such as the Monday flag-raising and troop review, Monday political briefings, and camp-wide sanitation—are also strictly and consistently maintained. This mode of organization is highly symbolic, reflecting cultural assumptions that prioritize stability, order, and collectivism core values of military culture. In particular, the cadets' living space from campus landscape to internal orderliness in barracks (rooms, beds and lockers, folding blankets and mosquito nets, hanging clothes and towels, arranging backpacks, weapons/equipment, and study tools) is standardized and unified in the direction of regularity and a distinct military aesthetic. This constitutes a characteristic cultural discourse in which "beauty" is not merely formal but bound up with regularity, neatness, precision, and a strong sense of discipline. Such practices do more than maintain order and discipline; they continually reaffirm foundational values, with integrity at the center. Here, integrity is not an abstract moral norm but a "cultural behavior schema" reiterated in cadets' cultural life through concrete scenarios: honesty in study, training, and examinations; forthright, impartial, and objective self-criticism and criticism; fairness in emulation and commendation. Repetition builds a "cultural sensibility" a stable form of moral cognition that does not rely solely on external supervision.

Second, cultural life as a social field that constructs integrity.

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Cadets' cultural life constitutes a distinctive social field in which individual actions, perceptions, and orientations are shaped by internalized rules and structures. In this environment, integrity is not merely "taught" but "lived," permeating behavior and thought through direct experience. For example, practices such as maintaining a study logbook, a training diary, a weekly self-assessment record, or weekly emulation scoring are cultural acts that are administrative in form yet ethically educative. When cadets evaluate themselves weekly on honesty, discipline, and mutual support, they are not only recording conduct but also engaging in self-reflection—a crucial precondition for integral behavior. Culture, as a structured environment, thus converts ethical ideals into social practice. As Bourdieu notes, habitus is history embodied in the human body; integrity in military schools becomes a military cultural habitus—cadets act with integrity as a cultural reflex rather than as mere compliance with imposed rules.

Third, cultural life as a "web of meanings" that imbues integrity with symbolic force.

Within this web, integrity is not only behavior but also symbol, manifested through mottos (e.g., "Courage – Intellect – Professionalism – Cooperation"; "Exemplary in partisanship; innovative; democratic, disciplined, humane, united; teaching well, studying well"; "Pioneering, creative, united, disciplined; teaching well, studying well, working well"; "A gun unclean will rust; a person untrained will lack resolve"), through exemplary role models, and through collective rituals (flag-raising ceremonies, Party admission ceremonies, oath-taking of new soldiers, high-point emulation launches). These symbols link individuals to the collective, and present actions to long-term value systems. When cadets perceive that upright habits and acts of integrity are recognized, honored, and become part of collective identity, they are more likely to reinforce and extend such behaviors. In short, culture functions as a mechanism of moral empowerment, enabling cadets to "see themselves" in norms and "bind themselves" to values.

While cadets' cultural life plays a crucial role in constructing integrity in military schools, it is also necessary to recognize that not every cultural space within these schools is conducive to this aim. Inconsistencies between words and deeds; achievement-driven formalism in education and training; lack of objectivity and fairness in emulation and commendation; laxity in management and discipline; and practices of covering up minor violations to "protect comrades" or "preserve class reputation" can lead to ethical compromise, erode trust, and diminish the effectiveness of integrity education. This shows that cadets' cultural life is not only a positive space but also a "field of value contestation," where the construction of integrity must be continually reinforced through cultural dialogue, critique, and soft forms of accountability. In practice, several limitations remain: (i) many cultural activities, though diverse in form, remain movement-oriented and insufficiently deep in ethical substance; (ii) cultural institutions in military schools often lack flexibility and creativity, underutilizing cadets' agency in shaping cultural spaces with distinctive personal and collective imprints; and (iii) formalism persists in implementing certain emulation movements, widening the gap between rhetoric and action in practicing integrity. For cultural life to become a genuine ethical foundation—a "value-constructing space" for integrity—it must be organized as an ecosystem in which integrity is not a slogan but a principle governing all behaviors, choices, and interactions. This requires a synchronized set of solutions—organizational and institutional, practice-oriented, and, most importantly, rooted in cadets' own cultural awareness and inner strength.

5. DISCUSSION: SOLUTIONS TO LEVERAGE CADETS' CULTURAL LIFE FOR CONSTRUCTING INTEGRITY IN MILITARY SCHOOLS

First, establish a standardized integrity value framework within military schools.

Integrity can only be practiced when it is shaped into a concrete, identifiable, and assessable set of cultural standards. Accordingly, an integrity value framework should be institutionalized via codes of conduct, assessment criteria, and feedback procedures across the school; embedded in curricula, political-ideological education, training assessments, and especially in emulation movements, commendations, and disciplinary mechanisms. For instance, beyond grades and disciplinary compliance, assessments should add criteria for honesty in study, constructive critical capacity, and the courage to acknowledge mistakes. This aligns with Durkheim's (1961) view that morality is the outcome of socialization, wherein sanctions and rewards are instruments for shaping behavior.

Second, restructure cultural institutions toward cadet-centered "constructivist" education.

Building a culture of integrity requires a shift from directive education to constructivist education. Schools should reconfigure cultural institutions—tradition houses, cultural centers, Ho Chi Minh rooms, libraries, clubs, sports and arts spaces—toward greater cultural autonomy for cadets. Cadets should be enabled to propose, organize, and manage cultural activities that fit their disciplines, age, and interests, within military regulations and school-specific rules. Cultural institutions should serve as genuine public spheres where cadets deliberate, debate, and critically discuss ethics, values, and beliefs, thereby deepening their understanding of integrity as a lived personal and communal value consistent with Habermas's (1989) thesis on open forums as essential to forging ethical consensus, even within highly disciplined, regularized military environments.

Third, cultivate dialogic and reflective cultural spaces in cadet life. A vital condition for nurturing integrity is reflexivity—the capacity to scrutinize one's actions, choices, and motives through a moral lens. To make this a cultural practice, design high-substance dialogic activities in the military-pedagogical environment: Political and Spiritual Culture Days, Law Days, youth forums, academic seminars, and experience-sharing sessions. Such spaces help cadets gradually form the habitus (Bourdieu, 1990) a system

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of durable behavioral dispositions built through repeated practice. Through reflexivity, cadets do not merely comply with integrity as an external rule; they live integrity as an internal virtue.

Fourth, embed integrity into everyday cultural practices. Daily cultural activities study and training, arts and culture, physical education and sports, reading news, current-affairs sessions, squad and team meetings—should be redesigned as “cultural scripts” carrying explicit ethical messages. In these scripts, small acts self-discipline in learning and training, fairness in task allocation, honesty in admitting faults, mutual support among comrades—become vivid expressions of integrity. These activities should not be treated as mere “soft supplements” to the formal curriculum; they must be systematically and intentionally integrated into the school’s value education architecture. Learning is a meaning-making process mediated by social activity, and ethical meanings such as integrity are internalized only when they become part of the stories cadets tell and live every day.

Fifth, strengthen cultural competence and exemplar responsibility among cadet managers and faculty. Cadets’ cultural life is shaped not only by regulations but also powerfully by the behaviors and lifestyles of managers and lecturers who hold symbolic power in the military-pedagogical milieu (Bourdieu, 1991). Enhancing this cohort’s cultural competence, especially their exemplary integrity, is therefore a prerequisite for a healthy, normative cultural environment. Mechanisms should be developed to evaluate cultural competence, alongside professional development in value education, ethical leadership, and culturally competent feedback methods for cadets. Consistency between words and deeds among managers and faculty provides the most compelling, “living” evidence of integrity.

Integrity in military schools is a foundational value shaping the ethics of revolutionary soldiers. It cannot be forged by slogans or rigid moral templates alone; it must be nurtured by a vibrant, flexible, humanistic cultural life in which cadets’ cultural experience plays a pivotal role. Constructing a cultural ecosystem where integrity is the throughline requires harmonizing values, norms, institutions, practices, and character formation. Military schools are not only sites of knowledge transmission; they are crucibles of cultural values that foster holistic human development—especially standards such as honesty, autonomy, responsibility, and integrity. These are core qualities of the revolutionary soldier’s character, contributing significantly to national construction and defense in the new era—a period of the Vietnamese nation’s ascent.

CONCLUSION

The cultural life of cadets in the People’s Army schools of Vietnam today is not only a distinctive feature of the military environment but also a vital foundation for fostering and strengthening moral values, particularly honesty and integrity. Through cultural, artistic, sporting, and collective activities, as well as community engagement, cadets are trained in discipline, responsibility, and moral uprightness—core qualities of revolutionary soldiers. In the context of globalization and the complex influences of the market economy’s negative aspects, building a healthy, diverse, and military-specific cultural life becomes increasingly urgent, serving as a “soft shield” against moral decline while creating a favorable environment for education and personality development of future officers. To enhance the effectiveness of constructing integrity values within military schools, it is necessary to combine the leadership and direction of the Party, the Central Military Commission, and the Ministry of National Defense with the proactive role of administrators and lecturers, along with the self-discipline and active participation of cadets themselves. Ultimately, cadets’ cultural life is not only a “spiritual playground” but also a “school of ethics,” where young soldiers are trained, tempered, and matured, thereby contributing to the formation of a corps of officers who are both morally upright and professionally competent, capable of meeting the demands of building a revolutionary, regular, elite, and gradually modernized People’s Army of Vietnam in the new era.

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