

Original Research Article

Perception of Western Civilization in Early 20th-century Vietnam: The Case of Huynh Thuc Khang (1876-1947)

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Abstract: This article examines the perception and selective acculturation of Western civilization in early 20th-century Vietnam, the case of Huynh Thuc Khang (1876–1947)—a typical indigenous intellectual. Utilizing a qualitative methodology grounded in content analysis of Huynh Thuc Khang’s writings—particularly his editorials in *Tieng Dan*—the study investigates the evolving attitudes toward Western values within the broader context of East-West cultural contact. It highlights how Huynh Thuc Khang, as an elite indigenous intellectual, moved beyond simplistic dichotomies of “spiritual East” and “material West” to advocate for a critical, dynamic, and contextually relevant engagement with Western advancements in science, technology, and social organization. The findings show that his selective adoption was characterized by the integration of endogenous (native) and exogenous (foreign) factors, with a strong emphasis on preserving national identity while promoting sustainable development. The study concludes that Huynh Thuc Khang’s case exemplifies the active and conscious role of intellectuals in mediating cultural transformation, offering enduring lessons for contemporary debates on globalization, modernization, and identity.

Keywords: Cultural Acculturation, Western Civilization, Indigenous Intellectuals, Modernization, National Identity, Huynh Thuc Khang.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The early 20th century was a period of profound upheaval in Vietnam’s social and cultural history, strongly impacted by the French colonial invasion and colonization process. Western civilization, with its progressive values in science, technology, and social organization, posed many challenges and opportunities for the development of traditional Vietnamese society. In that context, the role of indigenous intellectual class became particularly important in recognizing, reacting to, and adjusting the process of cultural acculturation to meet the needs of national renewal and development.

The case of Huynh Thuc Khang (1876-1947), a exemplary intellectual of this transitional period, clearly reflects the process of self-reflection and selective adoption of Western civilizational values from the perspective of an indigenous intellectual. He not only had a deep understanding of the strengths and limitations of Western civilization but also demonstrated a sense of responsibility in reconciling tradition and modernity to move towards Vietnam’s sustainable development.

This paper aims to analyze and clarify Huynh Thuc Khang’s perception of Western civilization within the historical context of the early 20th century, while also exploring the meaning and lessons of this experience for studies on cultural acculturation and sustainable development in contemporary society. In doing so, the paper contributes to clarifying the role of intellectuals in guiding the cultural and social development of transitioning nations under the pressure of globalization and modernization.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a qualitative research method, focusing on the content analysis of Huynh Thuc Khang’s writings and dissertations, especially his articles in the *Tieng Dan* (1927-1943), where he served as editor-in-chief. The data is systematized around key arguments: perception of Western values, comparison of East and West, and a selective, critical attitude when adopting new things. The method of juxtaposition and comparison is also applied to clarify Huynh Thuc Khang’s views in relation to some of his contemporaries. The analysis process is situated within a specific historical-social context, combined with theoretical frameworks on

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cultural acculturation and the role of intellectuals. The entire research process is built on the principles of academic integrity, clear citation, and aims to clarify the significance of the acculturation of Western civilization through the lens of a representative indigenous intellectual in the course of Vietnam's social development.

3. Theoretical Basis and Literature Review

Cultural acculturation is the process by which communities with different cultures come into direct and prolonged contact, leading to changes in the original cultural patterns of one or both sides. "Cultural patterns" here do not just reflect the overall style or characteristics of a culture but also include smaller levels such as forms of expression, values, and norms (Nguyen Van Hieu, 2017). According to the International Organization for Migration (2004) and David L. Sam (2006), acculturation is the selective and active adoption of elements from another culture — from ideas, words, and values to institutions and behaviors. In terms of methodology, we can distinguish between spontaneous acculturation and conscious acculturation, in which only a small part of the community, usually the elite intellectuals, has the ability and perception to consciously acculturate to orient societal values (Nguyen Van Hieu, 2021). Acculturation, therefore, needs to be studied from the perspective of cognitive culture, through specific subjects, focusing on the interaction between endogenous factors (native values and traditions) and exogenous factors (external influences). This study also applies Leonard Talmy's (1995, p. 80) theory of the cognitive cultural system, which emphasizes the function of "receiving, implementing, and transmitting culture" in each individual. Talmy's (1995) perspective helps clarify the internal operating mechanism of the acculturation process, especially when considering the case of Huynh Thuc Khang—a typical indigenous intellectual in receiving, criticizing, and adjusting the values of Western civilization to suit the historical and social conditions of early 20th-century Vietnam. The cognitive cultural system not only helps intellectuals like Huynh Thuc Khang to purposefully select, transmit, and spread new values but also to maintain the continuity of national cultural identity in a context of profound change. Huynh Thuc Khang has been widely studied, especially in the historical and political aspects. However, the aspect of cultural perception, specifically how Huynh Thuc Khang acculturated Western civilization, has not been fully explored. This is the research gap that this paper aims to address.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Perceptions of Western Civilization's Characteristics

By the 1920s and 1930s, Vietnamese intellectuals' understanding of the value of Western civilization had moved beyond simply exploring "what is the West" to a more advanced stage of examining "the

West" in relation to "us", aiming to find a way to "adopt" what would be beneficial for the nation. As Huynh Thuc Khang noted, "*Nowadays, talking about Westernization is certainly not met with the rejection or hatred of the past, nor is it merely a time for cliché slogans; we should focus on how to genuinely and practically implement it*" (Tieng Dan No. 939, 1936). From the perspective of cultural acculturation, Huynh Thuc Khang's perspective was that of an elite intellectual—a cultural subject—who was consciously evaluating and selectively adopting new ideas to guide societal values.

In the early 20th century, perceptions of the differences between Eastern and Western cultures were a subject of intense debate. The common belief was that the West was "material," excelling in science and technology, while the East was "spiritual," distinguished by its philosophy and ethics. Under the strong influence of Confucian thought, the generation of intellectuals before Huynh Thuc Khang tended to sharply divide Eastern and Western cultures into "spiritual" and "material". This was partly due to a psychology of opposition and self-defense against French colonization and partly from a desire to preserve traditional values. Their limited access to comprehensive information about the West made their views one-sided and created a stark opposition between the two cultures. Huynh Thuc Khang, however, argued that this distinction was not entirely accurate. He re-examined the two cultural models, critiquing the opinions of his contemporaries by stating, "*Many people often say that Eastern civilization is spiritual, and Western civilization is material. At first glance, it seems so, but on closer inspection, it is not*" (Tieng Dan No. 126, 1930). He contended that both civilizations combine both spiritual and material elements. For instance, the mechanical skill of the West requires "intellectual effort," which is a form of "spiritual civilization". Conversely, the East, in its thousands of years of existence, must have "traversed the path of mechanics and industry" to survive. Huynh Thuc Khang wanted to affirm that one cannot simplify and clearly divide civilizations into spiritual and material. Continuing to view Eastern and Western cultures through such an oppositional lens could lead to misunderstandings and limit the ability to learn and adopt the strengths of both civilizations.

Huynh Thuc Khang overcame this by proposing a more integrated and progressive viewpoint. According to Huynh Thuc Khang, the "dynamic" quality, the characteristic of Western civilization, offers many advantages that Eastern cultures should learn from. In terms of society, one must consider two aspects: the 'static' aspect (*état satique*) which is order, and the 'dynamic' aspect (*état dynamique*) [noted by Huynh Thuc Khang] which is progress (Tieng Dan No. 126, 1930). A 'dynamic' culture not only focuses on discovering and applying new techniques but also encourages creativity and progress in society. Asserting that the 'dynamic' principle is the driving force of

evolution, Huynh Thuc Khang wrote an article titled “Only with Dynamism Can There Be Progress - Dynamism is the Engine that Pushes Humanity on the Path of Advancement” (*Tieng Dan* No. 903, 1936). The “dynamic” thinking of Western culture promotes continuous development and improvement, from building houses to transportation and communication methods. He wrote, “*From living in dens and caves to the magnificent architectural styles of high-rises and grand gates of today’s civilization, if we consider the trend of replacing the old with the new, the single act of ‘building a house’ has undergone countless instances of ‘dynamism’ and gradually improved to this day, it’s not a natural occurrence*”. Using the pen name Hai Au, he emphasized that a “dynamic” culture brings flexibility and convenience, helping people proactively adapt to changes in society and technology. Adopting and applying these new advancements helps improve life and creates innovative solutions for complex problems. At the same time, he also suggested that the East needed to increase the “dynamic” quality in its culture to evolve and develop like Western cultures. He stated, “*The thoughts of humanity—even scientists—are also initiated by some kind of ‘dynamism’ which later leads to this or that invention, and on the path of human evolution, ‘dynamism’ is the driving force. Conversely, if one clings to the state of ‘permanent stillness’, one will only see decline, because without dynamism, there can be no progress!*” (*Tieng Dan* No. 903, 1936).

Examining the scientific achievements of the West, Huynh Thuc Khang further affirmed that evolution is an inevitable law. The driving force of cultural creation is the desire for progress, the “passion for what is good”. In his article titled “*Is Laziness and Comparison the Reason that Urges Humanity to Progress?*” (*Tieng Dan* No. 1074, 1937), Huynh Thuc Khang used what he considered a “humorous” way of speaking to express the law of cultural evolution through his reflection on the characteristics of Western civilization: “*being lazy to walk, people raised horses to ride, but riding horses was still tiring, so they created cars; there were already stairs, but they invented elevators. The work of progress throughout human history is nothing more than the goal of making people healthier, using less strenuous effort, and enjoying a full and happy life*” (*Tieng Dan* No. 1074, 1937). The concept of “comparison” that Huynh Thuc Khang used, from the perspective of cultural acculturation, should be understood as the attitude/consciousness of comparing oneself to another civilization—“the other”—and comparing the past with the present, and the present with the future. Indeed, “*Civilization has a special advantage in cultural relations and influence. A society that reaches a higher level of civilization is often specifically manifested in cultural fields when compared to a society at a lower level of development*” (Nguyen Van Hieu, 2021, p.45). Huynh Thuc Khang's perception of culture brought many new theoretical points to the context of cultural transition. By examining these differences in Western

civilization, he recognized that the laws of evolution and cultural creativity were the driving forces for human development and progress.

Continuing his reflection, and with a mind-set of “comparison” with other civilizations, Huynh Thuc Khang pondered the future of the nation: “*What do the people of Indochina want? What do the Vietnamese people want? Whatever the peoples of the world want, we, the Vietnamese people, want the same things. This desire is no different from what civilized nations have wanted*” (*Tieng Dan* No. 937, 1936). The answer was provided at the end of the article: “The Vietnamese people only want to enjoy the happiness of life like other nations”. Progress in science and technology often leads to changes in production methods, communication, and daily life, which in turn affect the values, beliefs, and behaviors within society. This is the path that leads to shifts in social structure and transforms the deep-seated structure of a cultural system. Huynh Thuc Khang recognized that the essential and ‘inevitable’ path to survival was to study and follow Western civilization.

The Western civilization model of that era was seen as a goal and a source of inspiration for social development. “Democracy” and “science” were the two values that created the prosperity and superiority of Western nations in the early 20th century. They became the comprehensive symbols of Western culture, as well as the goals that Eastern nations aimed for. Naturally, while recognizing the value of Western civilization, Huynh Thuc Khang always linked it to the fact that it was a civilization brought by colonialists. Therefore, whether he liked it or not, his acceptance was quite strict. From the perspective of cultural acculturation, one can see that the “cultural filter” of the progressive intellectuals of this period was actively sifting, analyzing, and reflecting.

It can be said that in the early 20th century, the process of adopting European cultural thought was mainly from the lessons of the Meiji Restoration. Whether Western values were transmitted directly or indirectly through the example of Japan was not a concern for Huynh Thuc Khang. His concern was the excessively large gap that made the process of Westernization slow: “*On the path of Westernization, we are already half a century late! We should look to the example of Japan and the tracks of China*” (*Tieng Dan* No. 939, 1936). Based on his understanding of the characteristics of Western civilization, Huynh Thuc Khang continued to contemplate how to effectively apply the Western civilizational model. He questioned why Japan's reforms were successful, fast, and effective: “*Westernization has been transmitted to the East for nearly a century, but only Japan has achieved good results, meaning they imitated the West and America and were able to do it just as well as them, not falling short at all*” (*Tieng Dan* No. 515, 1932). In Huynh Thuc Khang's view, Japan's success in applying Western models was precisely because it “Westernized

thoroughly,” everywhere one would hear “Western” instead of “the Master said,” and “*they made an effort to learn from the West, eat Western food, wear Western clothes, travel to the West, live in the West, and even their politics, laws, technology, and commerce were all Western*” (Tiang Dan No. 939, 1936). Meanwhile, the “tracks of China” served as a cautionary tale because “*China's Westernization was not thorough*”. Similarly, in India, the Philippines, and Vietnam, this reform process often faced difficulties and even failed due to a state of being “*half-cooked, half-raw*”. “*Many times, the more they imitated, the more their flaws were revealed, unable to escape the reputation of being 'a goat's body with a tiger's skin, silver on the outside, lead on the inside'; some even developed a negative reaction, becoming so weary of civilization that they returned to vehemently oppose it, such as Gu Hongming in China, Gandhi in India, etc.*” (Tiang Dan No. 939, 1936). The Japanese accepted giving up outdated cultural elements, learning, and applying the best of the West decisively and without hesitation. In contrast, China, despite adopting some superficial elements of Western civilization, still retained too many outdated and obsolete elements in its social and political structure. The difference in how Western culture and economics were received and adapted (such as the strong resistance from Gu Hongming and Gandhi) led to unintended setbacks. Huynh Thuc Khang made it clear that the root of the unsuccessful Westernization was that China, Vietnam, and some other countries had not fully grasped the spiritual aspect of Western civilization's values. Indeed, “*the fundamental difference between many Asian countries and Japan was their way of assessing Western civilization*” (Vo Van Sen, 2017, p. 5). It can be seen that Huynh Thuc Khang's perceptions were highly theoretical, not much different from modern cultural theory today. Tracing back through history, our nation's tradition of saving the country had always been a violent tendency. Therefore, according to Huynh Thuc Khang, the tendency toward reform to save the nation, to be successful, had to be carried out synchronously and thoroughly, harmoniously combining East and West, and required determination and consensus from the entire society.

Regarding Western culture, Huynh Thuc Khang inherited the ideas of the “*predecessor*” generation but had more progressive, flexible, and adaptable viewpoints. In the wave of national modernization and salvation in Asia, Phan Châu Trinh expressed his view on the “sole” necessity of the “*path of Europeanization*” if one wanted “*life to become more and more renewed*” (Phan Châu Trinh's opinion on encouraging the learning of foreign languages) (Tiang Dan No. 887, 1936). Phan Bội Châu also advocated for “the Vietnamese people to learn from the French” by studying the example of Japan's Meiji Restoration. However, according to Vinh Sinh, “*Even Phan Bội Châu himself and those involved in the Đông Du movement rarely specified what experiences we needed to learn from Japan's modernization, so the content of the Meiji Restoration*

generally remained something abstract to us Vietnamese” (Vinh Sinh, 2016, p. 278). Furthermore, a major characteristic of Phan Bội Châu's patriotism was his deep hatred for the French colonialists. In his patriotic poems, it seems the fire of hatred made him extremely harsh toward those who had harmed the nation, and harsh even toward the achievements of Western civilization. Looking at a calendar he was given for the New Year, Phan Bội Châu was frustrated:
For a whole year I'd forgotten,
Thanks for giving the calendar, I now know.
East and West all mixed up, black with red,
Old and new made clear—servants bow to their master.
January stands atop December,
While our day lies beneath the Western day... (*Thank you for the gift of the new year's calendar*).

In contrast, from the perspective of a moderate reformist, Huynh Thuc Khang was calmer and more practical in his view of cultural exchange and learning from the West. In his article “*The Issue of the Lunar and Solar Calendars in Our Country*” (Tiang Dan No. 346, 1930), Huynh Thuc Khang approached the issue on a scientific basis, analyzing the necessity of using the solar calendar for three main reasons: “domestic and foreign news,” “record keeping,” and “dealing with circumstances”. He wrote: “*For any matter of public or private interaction with others—letters, contracts, deadlines—the solar calendar is used, never the lunar calendar; if the lunar calendar is remembered, it is only for looking at the moon, not for any interaction with anyone*”. In his article “*What is a Calendar?*” (Tiang Dan No. 360, 1931), he wrote a long essay answering the question “*Why must there be a calendar?*”. According to him, if the Vietnamese people wanted to survive and develop in a competitive global environment, they needed to “go with the common global flow,” meaning they had to adhere to common world standards, including the use of the solar calendar. Using the solar calendar was not just a minor issue but part of the process of adapting to the overall progress of the world.

In summary, these analyses once again affirm that Huynh Thuc Khang's new perception of the characteristics of Western civilization was always situated within the context of Eastern-Western cultural acculturation. This perspective was based on a spirit of questioning the very nature of a dominant civilization to find the right path toward modernization and independence.

4.2. Perceptions of Western Civilization's Power

Like Phan Châu Trinh, Huynh Thuc Khang recognized that the superiority of Western culture, specifically the remarkable development in science and technology, had created a significant gap between Vietnamese society and Western countries. The lack of access and application of these advances left Vietnam in a state of backwardness: “*Viewed from a historical perspective, the Vietnamese people are neither indecent*

nor unintelligent, so why is it that under the protectorate government in the past sixty years they have remained ignorant and stubborn, unable to learn the strengths and excellence of other people?" (Nguyen Van Duong, 2006, p.137).

Huynh Thuc Khang reflected on the nation's prolonged backwardness and was aware of the "true nature of evolution": *"The word evolution/progress [tân hoá] have long been used by scholars of biology, eugenics, philosophy, education, and even natural and social sciences. It is a pity that each scholar defines it differently, making it difficult for the reader to find a clear concept. The reason is that, in the face of the state of evolution in the vast universe, it is difficult to find its true nature"* (Tieng Dan No. 540, 1930). Huynh Thuc Khang examined the material quality of civilization and the impact of material things on the spiritual realm. He noted that material things in society not only include tools and means of production but also the way people live. The development of science and technology affects people's spiritual culture and way of life. For example, Westerners might have the opportunity to dress better and build more comfortable houses thanks to the development of technology and material resources. He also focused on the difference between the Annamese people and Westerners in their use and development of material things. The Annamese, due to a lack of tools and material resources, had fewer opportunities to live and progress compared to Westerners. This difference also impacted their spiritual life and their way of living (Tieng Dan No. 540, 1930).

Compared to the younger, Western-educated intellectuals like Phạm Quỳnh (who was 16 years younger than Huynh Thuc Khang), Huynh Thuc Khang maintained the necessary cautious attitude of a Confucian scholar. While Phạm Quỳnh (whether he wanted to or not) particularly praised the French and seemed to only see the advantages of Western civilization, stating that *"the French are actually a 'state of mind' and this state is a synthesis of all the best things that Western civilization has created"* (Phạm Quỳnh, 2007, p.394), Huynh Thuc Khang had foreseen the potential dangers of civilization from an early stage. In a spirit of critical thinking, Huynh Thuc Khang on the one hand acknowledged the great contributions of European civilization in shaping global civilization, stating that *"Today's civilization, everyone recognizes Europe as the original producer and founder of civilization for the whole world"* (Tieng Dan số 906, 1936). On the other hand, he also pointed out the negative side of the power of Western civilization. In his article *"Civilization Committing Suicide"* (Tieng Dan No. 906, 1936), citing Liang Qichao's predictive opinion of "civilization bankruptcy," Huynh Thuc Khang argued that while the inventions of civilization lead humanity to a new stage of progress, *"it is the achievements of science and technology that harm humanity"*. This reflection was confirmed by the losses of the two world wars. Thus, no

longer holding the enthusiastic thoughts of his early days, Huynh Thuc Khang called for a *"more humane civilization"*, emphasizing the necessity of developing a new, more responsible, and compassionate civilization to better meet global needs. He wrote, *"If Europe were to establish a heavenly kingdom, living up to the name of a world paradise," the whole world would instead "share the feeling that a new, more humane civilization is needed"* (Tieng Dan No. 906, 1936).

Speaking about the "decline of civilization" (Tieng Dan No. 696, 1934), Huynh Thuc Khang noted that even though Western nations had achieved great development in many fields like philosophy, science, and industry, problems still existed in modern civilization. He particularly emphasized the imbalance between material and spiritual development, the threat of war, and the consequences of crises. Huynh Thuc Khang criticized the weaknesses and consequences of Western civilization, including its corruption and lack of balance in development. He stressed that blindly worshipping and imitating Western models could lead to the loss and confusion of traditional cultures and values in Eastern countries.

Huynh Thuc Khang also recognized the value of learning and applying Western scientific advancements to innovate the nation's academic foundation. He encouraged the use of Western reasoning to solve problems with a high degree of scientific rigor and logic, viewing it as a tool to enhance the quality of knowledge and scholarship in society. He affirmed that applying a scientific spirit was essential to improve society and promote national development. Motivated by the need for action, as *"our academic world today is no longer a time for empty talk"* (Tieng Dan No. 695, 1934), Huynh Thuc Khang always linked the study and introduction of Western science with practical application. For example, he believed that "Western reasoning" should be immediately applied to *"cure the disease of speaking and hearing the nonsense"* (Tieng Dan No. 318, 1930). In his article *"Establishing Words and Understanding Words"*, Huynh Thuc Khang introduced the *"profound and strict laws of logic"*. He carefully detailed the definitions of each word, such as *"mâu is..."* and *"thuần is..."*, before defining the *"law of contradiction"* (*loi le la contradiction*). Emphasizing that the primary purpose of reasoning is rational things and the subsequent goal is to find truth through debate, Huynh Thuc Khang connected this law to the method of writing books: *"For scholarship and writing, the main purpose is to express the truth, and to examine the truth, it is most necessary to base it on the facts of the laws of logic [...], anyone who has the will to write must understand the law of contradiction so that their book will not be disjointed like a goat's head on a dog's body"* (Tieng Dan No. 318, 1930). With a deep perception of the importance of the scientific spirit and logical thinking, the editor-in-chief of the *Tieng Dan* newspaper enthusiastically encouraged the public to embrace

“scientification”. In the article “*We Need to Learn the Basics of Scientification*” (Tieng Dan No. 763, 1935), he provided an example of the necessity of arranging ideas in a logical order to write a “*scientified essay*”: “*When one first thinks of a thesis, the ideas in the mind are chaotic and fragmented; one must reorganize them, determine which should be the premise [...] and then, following the rules of logic, develop them into an essay that has a clear order [...] and is not contradictory*”. This is a clear manifestation of Western scientific thinking, where logic and clarity are key elements. Similarly, the article also required “*individuals, from their words to their actions, to look ahead, think afterward, and ponder carefully*” because a “*person who knows how to govern themselves*” is a “*scientified person*” (Tieng Dan No. 763, 1935).

In facing Western civilization, Huynh Thuc Khang expressed a discerning and cautious perspective. He recognized the outstanding development of Western civilization in science, technology, and industry but, at the same time, also emphasized its weaknesses and dangers. He pointed out that material development could lead to an imbalance with the spiritual, and both could cause terrible consequences such as war and crises. Huynh Thuc Khang warned early on about the negative side of science: “*We live in this scientific age, and to compete for survival, we need to embrace scientific thinking, abandon old, entrenched habits, and only then can we step onto a new path, provided we don't exploit science to harm people*” (Tieng Dan No. 763, 1935). In summary, Huynh Thuc Khang did not deny the value of Western civilization but, at the same time, did not blindly worship it. Always considering, viewing from multiple dimensions, and maintaining a certain vigilance was the characteristic of Huynh Thuc Khang's perception of Western civilization in the context of East-West cultural acculturation. This was also a common characteristic of many Vietnamese intellectuals in the early 20th century, such as Phan Bội Châu and Phan Châu Trinh, who both advocated for innovation while preserving and promoting traditional values. This trait demonstrates an open yet cautious approach, a readiness to learn without losing one's identity, and a direction for sustainable development based on a harmonious combination of tradition and modernity.

As the takeaway points, Huynh Thuc Khang's perception of Western education had two major aspects: first, he saw it “as it is” (the nature of Western civilization), and second, he saw it in the context of its colonial nature and specific historical circumstances. Nevertheless, Huynh Thuc Khang still managed to recognize its superior and useful aspects, as well as its limitations, in order to selectively build the foundation for a new education system.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis above demonstrates that Huynh Thuc Khang's perception of the value and power of

Western civilization was not a passive reception or a hostile rejection. Instead, it was a process of conscious, active, and selective cultural acculturation. A standout feature of Huynh Thuc Khang's thinking compared to many contemporary intellectuals was his objective assessment of both the strengths and weaknesses of the West, while also consistently preserving the nation's traditional identity.

First, Huynh Thuc Khang asserted that the distinction between the spiritual and material aspects of the East and West should not be absolutized, thereby refuting the rigid, opposing views that had previously existed. This perspective showcased his critical thinking and opened up the possibility of adopting scientific and technical achievements to serve the interests and happiness of the community. He emphasized the practical element—that all new values needed to be tested and selected based on the nation's needs and specific historical conditions.

Second, Huynh Thuc Khang warned against the dangers of blindly adopting and superficially imitating Western civilization, particularly the risk of losing the foundation of traditional culture and causing an identity crisis. He recognized the West's outstanding developmental achievements (in science, technology, organization, etc.) while also seeing the “decline disease” and spiritual and moral deviations. Consequently, he proposed that people should be alert and actively select the “good and clever” aspects to serve the nation's renewal and integration needs, without losing their core values.

Third, the cultural acculturation in Huynh Thuc Khang's case highlights the element of conscious intellectual acculturation—a crucial driving force that helps society transform its value system, moving beyond the boundaries of spontaneous public reactions. His theoretical activities, journalistic work, and educational advocacy not only contributed to the spread of new perception but also conveyed a message of reform based on the harmonization of East and West. This affirmed mediating role of indigenous intellectuals in the process of modernization, sustainable development, and the preservation of national identity.

Placed in the current context of globalization, Huynh Thuc Khang's selective and deliberate mindset toward accepting foreign culture continues to serve as an important reference point. It helps guide policies on integration, education, building cultural identity, and developing Vietnamese society in a harmonious way, balancing tradition and modernity.

Huynh Thuc Khang's case shows that the acculturation of Western civilization in early 20th-century Vietnam was a proactive and conscious process led by the elite intellectual class. His understanding of Western civilization was notable for a spirit of

harmonization, critique, and selectivity, emphasizing the role of intellectuals in guiding society to overcome conservative limitations while avoiding the extreme trends of outright rejection or blind admiration. The paper has clarified that Huynh Thuc Khang's perception and practice of Western cultural acculturation not only contributed to renewing thought and adapting to global changes but also played a significant role in preserving and developing traditional values. This was aimed at achieving a balance between innovation and identity, and between material and spiritual development—the foundation for the sustainable development of modern Vietnamese society.

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