

# CLAN CULTURE WITH LOCAL GOVERNANCE, CASE RESEARCH OF DA NANG CITY

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Local governance is not a new issue in the world, but in Vietnam, the term of local governance has only been mentioned and studied in depth in the past few years. Local governance can be understood as a set of entities that have the ability to impact, control and influence economic, cultural, social development, political and security situations, as well as the planning, promulgation of policies and planning at the local level. Vietnam - with the characteristics of a country with a long-standing agricultural tradition, local governance cannot be separated from cultural entities that have existed for a long time and have strong influence in localities, especially rural areas. Among them, the issue of clan and clan culture is one of the important factors affecting local governance. Through the case of Da Nang city, this article will focus on clarifying the role of clan culture in local governance in this city.

**Keywords:** *Clan; Family culture; Role; Local governance; Da Nang City.*

## 1. Introduction

Governance in general and local governance in particular were born in association with the emergence and development of the State, from the primitive to the modern level. In which, local governance is one of the three main levels of governance activities, including global governance, national governance and local governance. Along with the development of human social history, the role and position of local governance are increasingly affirmed and promoted; associated with the interests of local communities, ensuring stable and sustainable development. However, with many different approaches, the issue of local governance also has inconsistent understandings and applications, *“Local governance is a concept that only exists in doctrines and does not have an official connotation in international documents or in the Constitutions and laws of countries”* (Ngoc, 2014, p.34).

It would be a mistake to understand local governance as only including the legal system, policies and governance methods of the local public authority system. Because governance at the local level cannot be separated from local institutions, which are cultural products of the community, it is formed, existed and maintained over many years. Therefore, it can be understood that local governance is a part of national governance, including a system of general regulations of the State and specific regulations of the locality

(conventions, village regulations, customs) to maintain all social activities, ensuring political and social stability, social order and safety, people have the right to express their wishes and interests when the local government cannot meet them. In some European countries with experience in local governance, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany..., the importance of regulations and institutions specific to each locality in governance is recognized.

With the characteristics of a long-standing agricultural society in Southeast Asia, local governance in Vietnam has the outstanding feature of being inseparable from informal governance institutions, especially local governance in rural areas. Autonomy is one of the important characteristics of Vietnamese village culture, *“each village is an autonomous organization within the country”* (Anh, 2014, p.116). According to the results of the 2019 Population and Housing Census in Vietnam, the number of people living in rural areas of our country is 63,086,436 people, accounting for nearly 65.6%, more than 1/3 of the population are farmers (Vietnam.unfpa, 2019).

One of the important factors in the informal governance system affecting local governance in Vietnam is the issue of clans and clan culture. Along with the ups and downs of Vietnamese history and society over the past centuries, clans and clan culture have always accompanied and had significant influences. In local governance, from

the monarchical period to the present, clans still have an important and multi-dimensional influence. With a specific survey in Da Nang city, a locality located in the middle of the country with many unique features in clan culture, we will clarify the role of clan culture in local governance here from a multidimensional, dialectical perspective.

## 2. Research overview

Research on state governance in general and local governance in particular has been of interest to scholars and researchers around the world quite early. Since the 1960s, many researchs have appeared related to the decentralization process in many countries around the world, with research affirming and promoting the role of people in local governance.

Local governance according to the above approach plays a role in guiding the socio-economic development process of the locality through determining strategic vision, developing planning and development plans, directly managing local affairs, exploiting and effectively using local resources; organizing law enforcement, implementing decisions of the central government in the locality, reflecting the aspirations and interests of the people and creating conditions for local people to have more opportunities to participate in state work; caring for the material and spiritual life of local people, implementing social justice and equality in the locality.

In 1985, the European Union adopted the Convention on Local Self-Government, which requires countries wishing to join the European Union to join the Convention. The European Charter on Local Self-Government, which came into effect on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1988, has been ratified by over 30 European countries and to be used by Central and Eastern European countries as a guideline on local government in the development of constitutions and related legal documents. Local autonomy is understood as the real right and ability of local self-governing bodies to decide and manage a large part of social affairs, within the legal framework and to be responsible for serving the interests of local residents (Duc, 2007).

In Vietnam, in recent years, with the urgent need to innovate local governance to suit the requirements of national construction and development in the new situation, many researchers have published works on local governance, such as: *International experience in local self-government and the possibility of application in Vietnam* (Cuong, 2016); *Local development management* (Nhue, Thu., & Cuc, 2015); *Local self-government regime in the world and the issue of application in the innovation*

*of local government organization in Vietnam* (Tri, 2020),... In addition, there are also a number of articles published by authors in specialized journals that also deeply address local governance, such as: research by authors Pham Hong Tung, Vu Cong Giao, Cam Thi Lai, Nguyen Van Thoi, Nguyen Thi Phuong, Dao Thi Thanh Thuy, Nguyen Vu Hoang, Nguyen Hai Hoang Duc,...

The authors' research has affirmed the importance of local governance in local construction and development; policy planning and implementation as well as the importance of local communities among the subjects participating in local governance. These are valuable scientific researchs for the author to inherit, supplement and complete the research content "Clan culture with local governance - Case research in Da Nang city".

## 3. Research method

On the basis of inheriting the research results of previous authors, in order to clarify the research problem, we apply a combination of many different methods, on the basis of interdisciplinary and regional approaches to be able to identify the research object comprehensively and objectively. Methods of collecting, synthesizing and analyzing documents are used to search for sources of documents about the research subject. On that basis, analyzing, screening and compiling data sources to identify and clarify the role of clan culture in local governance through the case of Da Nang city. In addition, this research also uses methods of comparison, contrast, fieldwork and field surveys...

## 4. Research result

### 4.1. Clan culture in Da Nang: Theory and practice

For every Vietnamese person, the family lineage and family culture are important and closely related issues. Because, from the moment of birth, each person lives, to be nurtured and matures in the environment of the family community. The family lineage and clan have become the most noble and sacred things that Vietnamese people remember.

According to scholar Dao Duy Anh, "Clan is family, relatives, species" (Anh, 2009, p.603). With the characteristics of a society following the patriarchal model, it can be understood that "clan or lineage gathers all the paternal descendants of the same recognized ancestor" (Philippe & Oliver, 2002, p.343). Family is not simply a matter of blood but also binds people together by moral foundation as well as many other factors. "Vietnamese people, regardless of their circumstances, also belong to a clan, that is, a family in the broad sense, firmly organized, closely linked by blood, by material

interests, by religious beliefs and by the moral bonds of the community” (Leopol, 2006, pp.241-242).

From the family comes the family culture. It is an inseparable part of national culture. Clan culture can be understood as “the living and spiritual activities of a clan, the center of which is ancestor worship, including three categories, with material and tangible values and spiritual and intangible values created and accumulated by the clan community through the process of practical activities” (Le, 2018, p.24). It can be seen that clan culture is a characteristic of Vietnamese culture, originating from village communities that are based on agricultural economy. Since ancient times, clan culture has been the connection between individuals, between families in a clan, between generations in the same family..., where order and family traditions are always respected, the spirit of solidarity, attachment, respect for elders, neighborly relations... are always cherished and preserved by everyone. Broadly speaking, clan culture is an important foundation of traditional Vietnamese society and an important factor influencing local governance in the past and present. It is a cultural entity containing all the material, mental and spiritual cultural values produced by families during the process of formation and development. Those values are expressed in multidimensional relationships: between the clan and the village, the region and the nation; between the clan and the family and individuals belonging to the clan and other clans. Da Nang City is currently located in the cultural space of Quang Nam, a land with a long history and has witnessed profound cultural exchanges and acculturation between Vietnamese culture, Cham culture, Chinese culture, Japanese culture and Western culture. Therefore, choosing Da Nang as the location to survey the role of clan culture is completely reasonable, because the history of this land is closely linked to the migration and settlement of Vietnamese people to the South, placed in the relationship of exchange and acculturation with indigenous peoples, typically the Cham people.

Most of the clans in Da Nang originated from the North (mostly Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh) migrating to the South after the event of 1471 under King Le Thanh Tong, followed by the event of Nguyen Hoang guarding Thuan - Quang land in 1558. Many clans became the Predecessors and Postdecessors who established villages in Da Nang. There are also some families that have indigenous origins, living together with the Vietnamese for a long time but still maintain their identity (Ong, Tra, Che families...). Besides, there are some Chinese

families who migrated here from the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Choosing Da Nang as a research area will contribute to clarifying the role of family culture in the history of building and developing the city, especially in local governance here.

#### 4.2. *Clan culture and local governance*

##### \* Cultural aspects

One of the important aspects of local governance is cultural governance. With the approach towards building a culture with identity and in line with sustainable development trends, it can be seen that clan culture plays an important role in building a harmonious cultural environment, respecting traditional values, as well as effectively implementing cultural policies at the grassroots level, especially policies on promoting learning and talent.

For Vietnamese people, “*A drop of blood is thicker than water*”, the relationship of family and bloodline is the source that binds all members together. In Da Nang, today, most families still live together in the same space. Therefore, besides the relationship of lineage and blood, people also treat each other with the relationship of village and neighborly affection. Maintaining the relationship within the lineage will contribute to maintaining the stability and cohesion in the relationship in the locality. From there, the State’s campaigns, policies and guidelines will quickly come into practice. The clan will play an important role alongside the local government in mobilizing descendants to comply with all policies and guidelines. The role of clan culture in local governance in the cultural aspect in Da Nang has been affirmed through clan conventions and regulations.

The clan covenant of the Tran Viet clan in Khue Trung village (Cam Le district) clearly states: “All clan members must participate in studying and understanding state laws, live and work according to the constitution and laws. Implement well the Party’s guidelines, policies and the State’s laws, regulations of the local government and fulfill their civic duties to the country” (Clan Covenant).

Practice in Da Nang shows that clan culture has played an important role in the movement “All people unite to build a cultural life in residential areas”, cleverly integrating this content into clan activities and including it in clan rules for families to seriously implement. “All descendants in the family must always uphold the spirit of solidarity, promoting traditions, selecting and inheriting the good customs and rituals left by their ancestors and grandparents. Research and promote the good things of other ethnic groups and in society to enrich the activities of their own family, together

build a cultural family, a cultural residential area and a cultural clan” (Clan Rules).

Also through the clans, the traditional beauty of clan culture in Da Nang is preserved. The tradition of solidarity and mutual support stands out. Valuable artifacts and relics associated with clan culture such as genealogies, ancestral tombs and communal houses are protected, preserved and honored. Along with that, local governance in the cultural aspect has a great contribution of clan culture in promoting education, cultivating ethics and personality, contributing to nurturing talents from clans. This is also an important educational function of the clan, along with the family, school and society. From a very early age, clans in Da Nang have been aware of investing in the education of their children and grandchildren, because only education and knowledge can help the family and clan develop and keep up with the times.

Da Nang City is one of the leading localities in the country in building models of learning families and learning clans. Since 2014, the city has implemented the project “Promoting lifelong learning movements in families, clans, and communities”. In order to implement the project, each residential group and village will select at least 2 typical clans for pilot implementation. By 2023, the number of clans recognized as learning workers in the city will reach over 70%. Many clans have a tradition of building a movement to encourage learning, such as: Ngo clan - Thanh Khe Tay ward, Thanh Khe district, Le Tan Thai clan - Man Thai ward, Son Tra district, Nguyen Huu clan - Hoa An ward, Cam Le district... The development of these studious families has had an impact on promoting the learning promotion movement of localities in particular and the whole city in general, towards the goal of building a learning society and a lifelong learning movement.

Once again, the strength of clan culture in Da Nang is affirmed, contributing to the successful implementation of the proposed cultural development goals, at the same time demonstrating the important role of clan culture in local cultural management.

\* Socio-economic aspects

The power of clan culture not only influences history and culture but also plays an important role in the socio-economic development of each locality. It can be seen that clan culture has shown its influence on local governance in terms of socio-economic aspects. Clan culture is a solid foundation for developing the family economy with the mutual support and assistance of clan members. It is also a factor in maintaining social stability in the locality.

Clan culture in Da Nang is a solid foundation for economic development, especially the household economy that has existed for a long time. Before urbanization, most of Da Nang residents lived on agriculture. The nature of agriculture always emphasizes community support. Farm work requires the cooperation of many people. Besides neighbors, relatives are an important force in production. Clans in Da Nang all have measures to help their relatives in agricultural production, such as: exchanging labor, working together, supporting each other when plowing and harvesting.

In areas where flooding often occurs during the rainy season, the family members always support and help each other overcome difficulties. Besides the main occupation of rice farming, many families also have traditional occupations such as flower growing (Le family in Liem Lac village, Cam Le) and fish sauce making (Mai family in Nam O village, Lien Chieu). Their experiences and secrets in production are passed down from generation to generation.

In the context of integration and development of the current market economy, clans in Da Nang have now established a “Clan Fund” to support descendants in the clan to borrow capital to do business. Families in difficulty or in need of capital for business can ask their clan to borrow money for a certain period of time. Of course, this loan amount is interest-free. When repaying, the borrower will contribute more to the fund when they have made a profit with the desire to show gratitude to their family and help those in need like themselves. This practice has demonstrated the important role of clan culture in ensuring economic development and social stability; it is the basic and important foundation for local governance.

\* Political aspect

The clans in Da Nang have made important contributions to the process of reclaiming land and establishing villages. This is the first foundation for the process of building and developing this land later. The clans have made great contributions in reclaiming land, establishing villages and developing the economy in a land that is still wild and harsh. The ancestors of many clans have become the ancestors and descendants of many villages, they are respectfully worshiped by villagers in the village communal house, have solemn tombs built and incense is burned all year round.

Throughout history, in the past as well as in the present, clan culture in Da Nang has had a significant influence on the local political environment. Over the periods, clans have made many contributions

to building the government system, preserving and ensuring a stable and safe environment in the locality. Through clan rules, family traditions, and clan regulations, descendants strictly abide by the law, do business honestly and contribute to society. That is a solid foundation for local governance, leading to a peaceful and progressive life.

Clan culture, in addition to its positive impacts on local governance, still has many limitations stemming from various causes. Although the importance of clan culture in local governance is affirmed, clan culture cannot replace state management. This has been stated by many researchers: “If active, informal institutions will contribute to strengthening and improving the quality and effectiveness of local governance. On the contrary, outdated and backward customs, bureaucracy, authoritarianism, bribery, group interests, favoritism, and bias towards relatives in the allocation of public resources, recruitment, promotion, etc. are barriers and obstacles to local governance” (Thoi, 2023).

When surveying clan culture in Da Nang, we still see negative issues stemming from the limitations of backward feudal ideology and jealousy and envy between clans. Ideas such as “male superiority and female inferiority” still weigh heavily on the thoughts and actions of a significant number of families. Although society is increasingly civilized and progressive, the struggle for gender equality is continuous, and society has a more objective view of gender, clan culture is still an area where gender equality has not yet achieved its set goals.

The issue of having a son to continue the family line becomes a burden for young couples and their families, especially those of the first generation, the only male descendants in the family. This gives rise to violations of the population law, those who do not have a son try to have a son to continue the family line, putting great pressure on society, causing many difficulties for local administration.

Along with that, placing too much importance on emotions, kinship and family relationships also causes many negative consequences in bringing the law into life, ensuring fairness, objectivity and democracy in all activities. In addition, factionalism and clan ideology are also an obstacle to local governance because large clans, which make up the majority of the local population, often hold important positions in the government apparatus; clan members with positions often seek to put their descendants in as many agencies as possible, even though their professional qualifications are not guaranteed. This leads to jealousy, envy, factionalism and competition for influence.

## 5. Discussion

The clan culture in Da Nang has a long history of formation and development; it is constantly preserved and enriched by generations of Da Nang people. This is a prominent advantage of the clan culture in Da Nang. The central location of the country as well as the role of witness to many historical events have made Da Nang a place for many clans to settle down. Over hundreds of years, the clans have built and glorified the good values of clan culture on this land.

Those good traditions can be mentioned as: love, share, support each other, help each other overcome difficulties and hardships. Always being united and attached creating a great community strength. Always consciously preserve and maintain the ancient traditions and customs in the relationships and interactions with each other in life. All of these create the strength of the family culture in the confrontation with many foreign cultural factors.

From the practice of Da Nang city, the role of clan culture in local governance is affirmed. Clan culture has made an important contribution to creating a stable and developing political, economic, cultural and social environment in localities. Creating a solid nucleus for implementing local policies.

The roles of clan culture, such as: mobilizing descendants to build a new cultural life, building and developing the economy, maintaining social security and order, promoting education and talent promotion... have had a positive impact on local governance. It can be seen that clan culture has truly become a solid foundation for local authorities and related sectors in bringing policies to the grassroots, maintaining stability and development in each community. Proper recognition of the role of clan culture in local governance needs to be given due attention in order to have appropriate solutions to promote advantages and limit negative impacts.

## 6. Conclusion

It is necessary to affirm and promote the role of the local community, in which the clan is an important entity for local governance. Above all, clan culture is the subject that exists and has influences on local aspects from a very early age. Knowing how to promote the role of clan culture will contribute to promoting success in local governance. Respect and listen to the opinions and wishes of the clan in planning, building and implementing local policies. Besides, it is necessary to boldly point out the limitations of clan culture in local governance and have solutions to overcome them; so that clan culture can truly become an important informal institution that promotes and improves the effectiveness of local governance.

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## VĂN HOÁ DÒNG HỌ VỚI QUẢN TRỊ ĐỊA PHƯƠNG, NGHIÊN CỨU TRƯỜNG HỢP THÀNH PHỐ ĐÀ NẴNG

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Quản trị địa phương là vấn đề không còn mới trên thế giới nhưng tại Việt Nam, thuật ngữ quản trị địa phương mới chỉ được đề cập và quan tâm nghiên cứu chuyên sâu trong vài năm trở lại đây. Có thể hiểu quản trị địa phương là tập hợp của những chủ thể có khả năng tác động, chi phối, ảnh hưởng đến sự phát triển kinh tế, văn hoá, xã hội, tình hình chính trị, an ninh cùng việc hoạch định, ban hành chính sách và quy hoạch ở địa phương. Việt Nam - với đặc trưng của một quốc gia có truyền thống nông nghiệp lâu đời, việc quản trị địa phương không thể tách rời khỏi những thực thể văn hoá vốn tồn tại lâu đời và có sự chi phối mạnh mẽ tại các địa phương, nhất là nông thôn. Trong số đó, vấn đề dòng họ và văn hoá dòng họ là một trong những yếu tố quan trọng tác động đến quản trị địa phương. Qua trường hợp thành phố Đà Nẵng, bài viết này sẽ tập trung làm rõ vai trò của văn hoá dòng họ với quản trị địa phương tại thành phố này.

**Từ khóa:** Dòng họ; Văn hoá dòng họ; Vai trò; Quản trị địa phương; Thành phố Đà Nẵng.