

A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE OF THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION'S IMPACT ON VIETNAM'S SPIRITUAL AND CULTURAL LIFE

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Abstract

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is transforming Vietnam's economic, cultural, and spiritual landscape through the accelerated adoption of artificial intelligence, automation, and pervasive digital connectivity. This article investigates how key 4IR dynamics—global cultural flows, platform-mediated communication, data-driven governance, and shifts in labour regimes—intersect with Vietnam's philosophical and cultural traditions rooted in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Marxist humanism. Drawing on an integrative qualitative thematic review of peer-reviewed literature and policy documents (2015–2025), combined with interpretive philosophical analysis, the study identifies four overarching themes: first, tensions between cultural continuity and the commodification of heritage; second, changing youth values and the emergence of digital subjectivities; third, ethical challenges associated with automation, datafication, and surveillance; and (4) the mediating influence of education and cultural policy. The findings argue that while 4IR poses significant risks of cultural erosion, it also presents opportunities for renewal through digitisation, creative industries, and community-centred cultural technologies. The paper introduces a Vietnam-specific analytical framework that links technological drivers, institutional mediators (education, policy, and digital platforms), and resulting impacts on cultural identity and spiritual well-being. It concludes with recommendations for human-centred AI governance, curriculum reform integrating digital citizenship and cultural literacy, strengthened support for the digitisation of intangible heritage, and community partnerships that sustain spiritual practices in hybrid online–offline forms. Achieving a balance between modernisation and cultural stewardship is essential if Vietnam is to harness the benefits of 4IR without compromising the values that underpin its social cohesion and spiritual life.

Keywords: *cultural identity, Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), modernisation, spiritual life, Vietnam*

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is profoundly transforming the global economic, social, and cultural landscapes (Khuat, 2024). As societies embrace new technological advancements, such as artificial intelligence (AI), automation, and the Internet of Things (IoT), countries must find ways to adapt while preserving their core cultural identities and societal values. In Vietnam, a nation with a long-standing tradition rooted in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Marxist ideologies, this challenge is particularly pressing (Nguyen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2023). The rapid infusion of global digital technologies into Vietnamese society, especially through social media and digital platforms, has created a complex environment where the country must balance modernisation with the preservation of its cultural and spiritual heritage. Region-specific analyses indicate that Asian contexts face distinctive ethical and social concerns around AI deployment (Checketts et al., 2025), and in Vietnam these tensions are increasingly visible in governance and public trust debates (Tran et al., 2025). Comparative evidence from Southeast Asia further indicates that cultural values, religious norms, and identity structures continue to mediate how technological modernisation is experienced, particularly among younger generations navigating globalised consumer and media environments (Sulaiman et al., 2025).

To guide this analysis, the study examines three core research questions. First, how is the 4IR reshaping Vietnam's cultural identity and spiritual life across education, heritage, and everyday practices? Second, through what institutional mediators (e.g., policy, education, platform governance) do these technologies produce risks of erosion or opportunities for renewal? Third, what normative resources from Vietnam's Confucian, Buddhist, and Marxist traditions help interpret these changes?

Correspondingly, the study pursues four objectives: O1—synthesise global and Vietnam-specific scholarship on 4IR and culture/spirituality; O2—identify thematic patterns and gaps relevant to Vietnam; O3—propose an analytical framework linking technological drivers, mediators, and cultural-spiritual outcomes; and O4—derive implications for governance and education consistent with Vietnam's value traditions.

This study seeks to explore how the 4IR is influencing Vietnam's cultural identity and spiritual life. Modernisation in Vietnam, especially since the *Đổi Mới* reforms, has prioritised economic growth (Hiep, 2018; Viet Hanh, 2020). However, Manh (2020) stresses that this growth must not come at the expense of cultural values. The rapid modernisation brought by 4IR poses both opportunities and challenges to Vietnam's unique cultural framework. On one hand,

technological advancements can promote Vietnam's rich heritage on a global stage, allowing for the preservation and dissemination of its cultural identity through digital platforms (Nguyen & Tran, 2022). Recent evidence from Huế's smart-tourism transition shows how platform-enabled curation and service innovation reshape satisfaction for both residents and visitors (Dieu et al., 2025), even as heritage-oriented AI initiatives must confront algorithmic "bias loops" that can distort collections and interpretation (Foka et al., 2025). Parallel regional studies show that digitalisation frequently intensifies negotiations between tradition, religion, and modern lifestyles rather than producing uniform cultural outcomes (Sulaiman et al., 2025). On the other hand, the potential erosion of traditional values, as Western influences become more prevalent, threatens the continuity of Vietnam's spiritual and cultural practices (M. T. Nguyen, 2023).

In order to situate the current study within a broader theoretical framework, it is important to provide a general background of the 4IR and how it reshapes various aspects of life in Vietnam. Vietnam's embrace of the 4IR is reflective of its ongoing efforts to modernise its economy and integrate into the global technological ecosystem. As a result, Vietnam has implemented a series of policies designed to foster digital transformation across all sectors, including manufacturing, education, and healthcare. These policies have positioned Vietnam as a rising player in the digital economy, but they also raise critical questions regarding the preservation of the nation's cultural identity and spiritual values. These state strategies unfold alongside debates on AI ethics, governance, and trust specific to Vietnam's political context (Tran et al., 2025). At the regional level, evolving economic and trade relationships—including Vietnam's expanding partnerships with neighbouring Southeast Asian economies—also form part of the broader structural context in which digital transformation and policy reform are unfolding (Burova, 2025).

The integration of AI, IoT, and automation technologies into Vietnamese society has driven substantial economic growth, particularly in urban development initiatives such as the construction of smart cities in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (Nguyen & Tran, 2022). These cities aim to enhance urban planning, transportation, and governance by using Big Data and AI to improve the quality of life for citizens. The economic benefits of this modernisation are clear; however, there is growing concern about the long-term impact of these changes on the social fabric of Vietnamese society. Such deployments foreground normative questions about transparency, privacy, and social licence that the Asian AI ethics literature has begun to address (Checketts et al., 2025).

At the core of this study is the question of how technological advancement interacts with the spiritual and cultural identity of a nation. Vietnam's history and

its cultural heritage are deeply intertwined with its philosophical traditions. Confucianism, Buddhism, and indigenous spiritual practices have long shaped the country's societal structure, familial relationships, and individual behavior (Le, 2016; Nguyen, 2020; Tran, 2017). Confucianism, with its emphasis on hierarchy, respect for authority, and communal responsibility, has historically provided a moral framework for Vietnamese society (Truong et al., 2021). Similarly, Buddhist values of harmony, compassion, and balance have influenced not only personal conduct but also the broader national identity (Nguyen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Yet, as the 4IR unfolds, these long-standing traditions face unprecedented challenges. The introduction of global technologies is reshaping traditional ways of life, introducing ideologies that conflict with established cultural norms. The rapid growth of digital culture, driven by platforms like social media and entertainment outlets, has significantly altered social interactions in Vietnam (M. T. Nguyen, 2023). Younger generations are increasingly integrated into a globalised digital culture, leading to concerns that traditional Vietnamese values, such as community and family cohesion, may be overshadowed by more individualistic, consumer-driven ideologies (Vu Hoang, 2021). Empirical research from other Southeast Asian contexts similarly highlights how youth engagement with digital culture is filtered through religious affiliation, moral frameworks, and community norms, underscoring the need for culturally grounded interpretations of technological change (Sulaiman et al., 2025).

One of the central concerns raised by scholars is the erosion of Vietnam's cultural identity in the face of Western influences (Doan, 2024). Western-dominated digital platforms expose Vietnamese youth to global trends and lifestyles that may dilute their connection to traditional cultural practices. The rich tapestry of Vietnamese customs, from family-oriented celebrations to spiritual festivals, risks being overshadowed by the allure of Westernised, materialistic lifestyles that prioritise personal success over collective well-being (Doan, 2024). As a result, the younger generation's engagement with globalised digital communities has introduced new modes of expression that differ significantly from those of previous generations.

In this context, it is crucial to explore the implications of cultural erosion and the rise of digital culture on Vietnam's societal values. Digital platforms often facilitate cross-cultural exchange, offering Vietnam the opportunity to project its cultural identity on the world stage while simultaneously adapting to global trends. However, the risk of cultural homogenisation is ever-present, as the introduction of global technologies blurs the boundaries between national and global identities (Truong et al., 2021). Vietnam must carefully navigate this

terrain, ensuring that its distinctive cultural markers, which have historically defined its way of life, are not lost in the process.

To mitigate these risks, the Vietnamese government has implemented policies that emphasise the importance of preserving national identity in the face of globalisation. Educational reforms have been central to this effort, with the government prioritising the integration of cultural education into the national curriculum (M. T. Nguyen, 2023). Comparable regional studies emphasise that inclusive and equitable education systems, as well as community-based learning institutions, play a crucial role in mediating the social and cultural consequences of modernisation and mobility in Southeast Asia (Abu Bakar & Subramaniam, 2025; Bakar & Subramaniam, 2025). By teaching younger generations about their heritage and values while simultaneously equipping them with the skills necessary to thrive in a globalised, tech-driven world, Vietnam aims to instill a sense of cultural pride and resilience. Empirical work in heritage-linked tourism likewise shows how digital transformation can be channelled to strengthen place-based identity when designed with resident perspectives in mind (Dieu et al., 2025).

Moreover, the government has sought to encourage cultural innovation by promoting local digital content and cultural products. For example, the digitisation of cultural festivals and historical landmarks allows Vietnam to preserve its traditions in a modern format while reaching a global audience (Vu Hoang, 2021). This type of cultural adaptation not only fosters economic growth through tourism and digital commerce but also strengthens national identity in the face of global cultural trends. By leveraging digital platforms for cultural preservation, Vietnam can safeguard its heritage while adapting to the demands of the 4IR. At the same time, curatorial uses of AI in cultural heritage must adopt safeguards to detect and mitigate algorithmic bias, so that digitisation enhances rather than distorts cultural memory (Foka et al., 2025).

While the cultural and societal implications of the 4IR are a focal point of this study, it is equally important to consider how the 4IR influences Vietnam's philosophical discourse, particularly in relation to spiritual life. The spiritual life of Vietnam, once deeply rooted in Confucian and Buddhist traditions (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Pham et al., 2023), is now being reshaped by new societal dynamics brought on by technological advancements. The shift toward pragmatism and presentism in youth value systems reflects a growing disconnection between traditional values and modern demands, which poses a risk to the country's cultural and spiritual coherence (Doan, 2024). Complementing these traditions, recent Buddhist scholarship

interprets AI as a possible medium for self-cultivation and ethical self-overcoming, offering a constructive lens for navigating technological change (Krašovec, 2025).

Advanced technologies, particularly AI and automation, raise philosophical questions about human existence, freedom, and identity. These technologies challenge traditional conceptions of the self and community, introducing ethical dilemmas about the role of technology in shaping human life. As automation becomes more prevalent in industries ranging from manufacturing to healthcare, the value of human labour is called into question, prompting urgent reflection on the moral and social implications of these changes (Khuat, 2024; Nguyen & Tran, 2022). Vietnam's ongoing debates over AI governance and public trust further illustrate how these philosophical tensions materialise institutionally (Tran et al., 2025).

Vietnam's embrace of the 4IR has been swift and far-reaching, but the challenges it faces in preserving its cultural and spiritual identity are profound. The 4IR has brought about significant technological advancements, positioning Vietnam as a rising player in the digital economy. However, as these technological changes reshape the country, concerns about the erosion of Vietnam's cultural and spiritual heritage persist. The government's efforts to promote digital literacy, cultural education, and cultural innovation are essential in ensuring that Vietnam navigates this era of rapid change while safeguarding the values and traditions that have long defined its society.

The next section synthesises global and Vietnam-specific Literature Review to locate the study in current debates; the Methods then operationalise the research questions outlined above; Result and Discussion present the thematic results within the proposed framework and situates implications for Vietnam and Southeast Asia; and the conclusion advances governance and education recommendations consistent with Vietnam's value traditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global scholarship on 4IR and society

Across the international literature, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is widely characterised as a techno-economic paradigm in which digital, physical, and biological systems converge, generating clear productivity gains while simultaneously producing labour displacement, reskilling pressures, and a reordering of social relations around human-machine boundaries, the dignity of work, and distributive equity (Popkova et al., 2019; Schwab, 2016, 2018; Yang & Gu, 2021). At the level of governance, pervasive datafication and algorithmic decision-making promise efficiency but also heighten surveillance risks, privacy

trade-offs, and dehumanising tendencies—challenges that require explicit normative frameworks, value-sensitive design, and philosophically grounded ethics rather than purely technical fixes (Khuat, 2024; Pham et al., 2022; Schwab, 2018). Cultural dynamics are similarly ambivalent: global platforms can amplify local voices and creative economies while also accelerating homogenisation and the commodification of heritage where market logics eclipse preservation mandates (Popkova et al., 2019; Yang & Gu, 2021). Education repeatedly emerges as a key mediator; curricula that integrated digital competencies with civic-ethical formation and cultural literacies appear to buffer societies against 4IR shocks and value drift (Ho, 2020; Schwab, 2018). Recent work extends these debates in the Asian context by detailing region-specific ethical and social concerns of AI (Checketts et al., 2025), examining bias loops and mitigation in cultural-heritage applications (Foka et al., 2025), and offering religious-philosophical readings of AI as a Buddhist technique of self-overcoming (Krašovec, 2025). Taken together, the global record suggests a dual trajectory: 4IR can erode cultural–spiritual continuity or support it through creative digitisation and ethics-aware governance, with institutional design determining which path prevails (Khuat, 2024; Schwab, 2018; Yang & Gu, 2021).

4IR in Vietnam: thematic insights

Vietnam’s experience largely reproduces these global dynamics but refracts them through a distinct philosophical triad and a tradition of state-led modernisation. Policy since *Đổi Mới* (since 1986) has prioritised growth and global integration (Hiep, 2018; Viet Hanh, 2020), and recent digital-society agendas emphasise data infrastructure, smart-city pilots, and e-governance—promising coordination gains while demanding calibrated safeguards for rights and cultural integrity (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; Yang & Gu, 2021). In education, innovative pedagogies show that Confucian-heritage learners can assimilate new modalities when technical competencies are coupled with moral formation and socially oriented achievement (Ho, 2020; Truong et al., 2021). Philosophical assessments caution, however, that youth value orientations are shifting toward pragmatism and presentism under platformised life, underscoring the need for explicit value education in the digital age (Doan, 2024; Pham et al., 2023). In the cultural domain, rapid urban development and tourism intensify pressures toward commodification of both built and intangible heritage, even as deliberate digitisation and cultural-tech initiatives open preservation and internationalisation pathways under responsible stewardship (Ngo, 2020; M. T. Nguyen, 2023; T. Q. Nguyen, 2023; Vu Hoang, 2021). Complementing these trends, a fuzzy-set study in the heritage city of *Huế* demonstrates how smart-

tourism experiences shape satisfaction among tourists and residents, illuminating culture–technology interactions in a Vietnamese context (Dieu et al., 2025). At the level of spiritual life and ethical reflection, automation and datafication reintroduce questions about labour, selfhood, community, freedom, and human flourishing, inviting renewed engagement with Vietnam's Confucian, Buddhist, and Marxist resources (Khuat, 2024; Le, 2016; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Tran, 2017). Concurrently, new evidence on AI ethics in Vietnam highlights governance, trust, and societal tensions that shape how these technologies are received and regulated (Tran et al., 2025). Overall, Vietnam faces a cultural–spiritual double bind, as heightened risks of erosion alongside opportunities for renewal—whose resolution hinges on policy design, educational reform, and platform governance (Nguyen & Tran, 2022; M. T. Nguyen, 2023; Truong et al., 2021; Vu Hoang, 2021).

Synthesis and remaining evidence gaps

Building on the global record and Vietnam-specific insights, several unresolved gaps remain. First, empirical depth is limited: few mixed-methods or longitudinal studies track how concrete 4IR technologies (AI platforms, algorithmic feeds, surveillance) reshape rituals, temple/pagoda participation, family practices, and intergenerational value transmission. Second, regional and socio-demographic variation is insufficiently documented outside major cities, particularly among ethnic-minority and rural communities. Third, intervention evidence is sparse: digitisation programmes (e.g., VR/AR for intangible heritage, digital festivals) are rarely evaluated for effects on cultural attachment and spiritual well-being. Fourth, integrative theory is underdeveloped, calling for frameworks that fuse Confucian/Buddhist/Marxist perspectives with contemporary AI/data ethics to guide policy and education. Fifth, platform governance remains insufficiently examined, especially how content algorithms mediate youth value shifts and cultural-identity outcomes in Vietnamese settings.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed an integrative qualitative design that combined a thematic review of peer-reviewed scholarship and policy documents on 4IR and society (global and Vietnam, 2015–2025) with interpretive philosophical analysis grounded in Vietnam's Confucian, Buddhist, and Marxist traditions. Sources were located via major academic databases (e.g., Scopus, Google Scholar) and official policy portals using keyword combinations such as “Fourth Industrial Revolution/Industry 4.0,” “digital transformation,” “cultural heritage,” “spiritual

or religious life,” “Vietnam,” “education,” and “surveillance or AI ethics.” Inclusion criteria required substantive engagement with 4IR technologies or governance, clear relevance to culture/spirituality, education, or heritage, an analytical or empirical contribution, and publication in English or Vietnamese; conversely, duplicate commentaries lacking analytic content and items unrelated to cultural/spiritual outcomes were excluded. The analytic procedure began with open coding to inductively derive first-order codes (e.g., heritage commodification, youth value shift, automation ethics, surveillance and privacy, pedagogical mediation) and then moved to axial coding that consolidated findings into the four cross-cutting themes reported in the Literature Review. These themes were then situated within an analytical framework linking Drivers (automation, platforms, datafication) to Mediators (education, policy, platform governance, community institutions) and to Outcomes (cultural continuity/erosion; spiritual well-being/alienation), while a deductive layer integrated insights from Confucian, Buddhist, and Marxist thought to interpret ethical tensions around labour, selfhood, community, and freedom. To enhance trustworthiness, the study employed source triangulation across academic, policy, and sector reports, negative-case analysis to register instances where 4IR appeared to strengthen cultural attachment, and analytic memoing to document interpretive decisions and theory–data integration. The principal limitation is the reliance on published literature and policy documents; primary fieldwork lay beyond scope. Future research should use mixed methods (surveys, interviews, ethnography) across regions and groups to test and extend the proposed framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Impact of the Fourth Industrial Revolution on Vietnam’s Cultural Identity

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has introduced unprecedented changes in global societies, and Vietnam is no exception (Popkova et al., 2019; Yang & Gu, 2021). As a nation with a rich cultural heritage, Vietnam faces significant challenges in preserving its unique identity while integrating into the increasingly connected and digitised global landscape. The convergence of physical, digital, and biological technologies under 4IR has led to concerns about cultural erosion and the rise of a digital culture that may undermine the transmission of traditional values. This section examines the impact of 4IR on Vietnam’s cultural identity, particularly focusing on the tensions between cultural erosion and globalisation and the challenges posed by the rise of digital culture.

Cultural Erosion vs. Globalisation

Globalisation has always posed challenges to the preservation of cultural identity, but the speed and scale of change in the era of 4IR have amplified these concerns. Vietnam, with its long-standing cultural practices deeply tied to traditional rituals, is particularly vulnerable to the risk of cultural homogenisation brought about by global digital networks and technological advancements. Scholars such as M. T. Nguyen (2023) argue that the rapid integration into global digital platforms—through social media, streaming services, and other digital content—poses a risk of diluting traditional Vietnamese values, as the younger generations increasingly consume Westernised content. The traditional practices that define Vietnamese culture, including its festivals, folk songs, and communal rituals, may gradually lose their place in a society that becomes more attuned to global cultural norms.

The process of cultural erosion is not a new phenomenon; however, 4IR intensifies it by facilitating the widespread dissemination of globalised, often Western, values and lifestyles. According to Vu Hoang (2021), Vietnam's tourism-driven economic development, particularly in cultural heritage sites, has already shown signs of prioritising short-term economic gains over the preservation of traditional cultural values. As the country becomes more integrated into the global economy, its cultural sites and practices risk being commodified and altered to meet global consumer expectations. This transformation mirrors the broader trend of cultural homogenisation, where distinctive cultural identities are overshadowed by a globalised monoculture, which threatens to erode Vietnam's national identity over time.

In contrast, globalisation also presents an opportunity for Vietnam to engage in cultural exchange and promote its unique heritage on the global stage. M. T. Nguyen (2023) emphasises that digital platforms can serve as powerful tools for cultural preservation and promotion. Through initiatives like virtual museums, digital libraries, and online learning modules focused on Vietnamese history and arts, Vietnam can present its culture to a global audience while also safeguarding its traditions for future generations. This demonstrates that while 4IR may pose risks to cultural identity, it also offers opportunities for countries like Vietnam to assert their cultural distinctiveness in the globalised world.

Rise of Digital Culture

The rise of digital culture in Vietnam, particularly among the younger generation, presents a significant challenge to maintaining the transmission of traditional values. As younger Vietnamese increasingly engage with global digital communities through platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, their exposure to non-traditional, often Western, content has grown exponentially.

According to Doan (2024), this shift has led to a noticeable change in value orientations, where modern ideologies such as pragmatism and presentism have gained prominence over traditional Vietnamese values like collectivism and patriotism. The immediacy of the digital age, where content is consumed and shared in real-time, often prioritises short-term gratification over long-term cultural continuity, leading to a weakening of intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge.

The rise of digital culture is also reshaping how cultural identity is constructed and expressed in Vietnam. For example, digital platforms allow for the creation of virtual identities that may diverge from traditional cultural expectations. Nguyen and Tran (2022) argue that this shift is part of a broader societal transformation, where digital tools are used not only for economic and political purposes but also for cultural expression. In this instance, Vietnamese youth are increasingly shaped by global digital trends, which can obscure the distinctiveness of Vietnamese cultural identity. The consumption of global entertainment content, particularly from Western countries, has led to the adoption of new social norms, values, and even fashion, often at the expense of traditional Vietnamese customs and lifestyles.

However, digital culture also offers a platform for Vietnamese youth to redefine and innovate their cultural identity. Ho (2020) notes that innovative pedagogical approaches, such as team-based learning and flipped classrooms, have shown that Confucian heritage learners in Vietnam can adapt to new educational paradigms while still retaining core values of discipline and collectivism. This suggests that the rise of digital culture does not necessarily have to lead to the abandonment of traditional values but can be used to reinforce and adapt these values to modern contexts. Digital tools can be harnessed to engage the youth in cultural activities, such as virtual reality tours of historical sites or online competitions that celebrate traditional Vietnamese art forms.

Despite these opportunities, the challenge of preserving Vietnamese cultural identity in the face of a rapidly globalising and digitising world remains significant. Pham et al. (2022) highlight the importance of modernising Vietnam's philosophical and cultural frameworks to address the realities of 4IR while ensuring that cultural values are not lost in the process. This modernisation process must involve a careful balance between adopting global technological advancements and safeguarding the unique aspects of Vietnamese culture. For example, cultural policies must prioritise the protection of intangible cultural heritage, such as traditional festivals, languages, and crafts, even as they integrate digital technologies into educational and cultural institutions.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution presents both opportunities and challenges for Vietnam's cultural identity. On the one hand, globalisation and the rise of digital culture threaten to erode traditional Vietnamese values, as younger generations become more integrated into global digital communities. The commodification of cultural heritage and the widespread dissemination of Westernised digital content risk diluting Vietnam's distinct cultural practices and values. On the other hand, digital technologies also offer new platforms for cultural preservation and promotion, allowing Vietnam to engage in global cultural exchanges while safeguarding its heritage.

To navigate these challenges, Vietnam must adopt a balanced approach that leverages the benefits of 4IR while mitigating its potential negative impacts on cultural identity. This includes fostering digital literacy among the youth to ensure they can engage with global digital culture in ways that reinforce, rather than undermine, traditional Vietnamese values. It also requires updating cultural policies to reflect the realities of a globalised, digitised world, ensuring that Vietnam's cultural identity remains vibrant and distinct in the face of ongoing technological and societal transformations. Through careful planning and strategic use of digital platforms, Vietnam can maintain its cultural identity while embracing the opportunities of 4IR.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution's Influence on Vietnamese Spiritual Life

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has also significantly impacted various aspects of life in Vietnam, particularly the nation's spiritual and philosophical outlook. As the country navigates the challenges and opportunities of this technological revolution, its deep-rooted spiritual traditions—shaped by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Marxism—are increasingly subjected to scrutiny and transformation. This section analyses the profound influence of 4IR on Vietnamese spiritual life, focusing on themes of loneliness, philosophical dilemmas, and shifting notions of freedom.

Loneliness and Fragmentation

One of the most pervasive effects of modern technology globally, and in Vietnam, is its impact on interpersonal relationships and community structures. Traditionally, Vietnamese society has been deeply communal, with strong ties to family and local communities playing a central role in the lives of individuals. However, the rapid rise of social media and digital communication tools has introduced a paradox: while people are more connected than ever, they often experience a growing sense of isolation. This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "loneliness in the crowd," is becoming increasingly prevalent in Vietnam as

social media and digital networks create new forms of interaction that lack the depth and intimacy of face-to-face communication.

The transition from traditional, community-based interactions to virtual relationships has contributed to feelings of alienation among many individuals. As Ho (2020) discusses in the context of Confucian heritage cultures, there is a tendency for individuals to withdraw into themselves, using digital platforms as a substitute for genuine interpersonal connections. This can exacerbate existential loneliness, where people, despite being surrounded by digital interactions, feel isolated and disconnected from those around them. This sense of alienation is further compounded by the fast-paced, competitive lifestyle driven by technological advancements, leaving little time for introspection or personal relationships. As a result, many Vietnamese individuals may find themselves struggling to reconcile the demands of modern life with the traditional values of family, community, and social harmony that have long defined their spiritual life (Truong et al., 2021).

Philosophical Dilemmas

The Fourth Industrial Revolution also presents profound philosophical dilemmas for Vietnam, particularly regarding the role of labour, ethics, and the value of human effort in an increasingly automated world. Vietnam's spiritual and philosophical traditions are deeply rooted in Confucian and Marxist ideals, both of which place a high value on the dignity of labour and the collective well-being of society (T. Q. Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023; Pham et al., 2023). Confucianism emphasises moral responsibility, ethical behaviour, and the importance of hard work as a means of personal and societal advancement (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2024; T. Q. Nguyen, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2023). Marxism, which has significantly influenced Vietnam's political ideology, views labour as central to human fulfilment and social progress (Doan, 2024).

However, as AI and automation become more prevalent in industries ranging from manufacturing to healthcare, these traditional notions are being challenged. Automation threatens to displace workers in many sectors, raising ethical questions about the future of work and the value of human effort. If machines can perform tasks more efficiently than humans, what is the role of human labour in society? This dilemma strikes at the heart of Vietnamese spiritual life, which has long emphasised the moral and social importance of work. As automation reshapes the labour market, there is a growing need for philosophical reflection on how these changes will affect not only the economy but also the moral responsibilities of individuals and the broader social fabric (Manh, 2020).

Moreover, the ethical implications of AI and automation extend beyond labour. The increasing reliance on technology in decision-making processes—whether in governance, healthcare, or education—raises concerns about the potential dehumanisation of society. As machines take on more roles traditionally held by humans, questions arise about the ethical boundaries of technology and the moral responsibilities of those who design and implement it. This issue is particularly relevant in Vietnam, where Confucian ideals of moral integrity and collective well-being are deeply ingrained in the cultural consciousness. The rapid pace of technological change in 4IR calls for a reevaluation of these philosophical principles and their relevance in a world where machines play an increasingly dominant role (Doan, 2024).

Changing Notions of Freedom

As Vietnam embraces the technological innovations of 4IR, particularly in urban areas like Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, new questions arise regarding privacy, individual freedom, and state oversight. The widespread use of surveillance technologies, such as facial recognition systems and IoT-enabled devices, is intended to improve urban life by enhancing security, optimising traffic flow, and monitoring public spaces. However, these technologies also pose significant challenges to traditional notions of freedom and privacy.

In Vietnam, where the state plays a central role in regulating society, the use of surveillance technologies raises concerns about personal autonomy and the potential for excessive state control. While these technologies offer numerous benefits, including increased safety and efficiency, they also create opportunities for intrusive monitoring of individuals' daily lives. As Nguyen and Tran (2022) argue, the integration of digital governance and smart technologies into everyday life requires careful consideration of the balance between technological progress and the protection of individual freedoms.

Furthermore, the concept of freedom in Vietnam is not solely about personal autonomy but is closely tied to the collective good. Confucianism, which has shaped much of Vietnam's spiritual life, views individual freedom as inseparable from social responsibility. However, as surveillance technologies become more pervasive, there is a growing tension between the desire for individual privacy and the need for social order. This dilemma is particularly pronounced in urban areas, where the concentration of surveillance technologies is highest, and individuals may feel that their freedom is increasingly constrained by the state's monitoring efforts (Nguyen & Tran, 2022).

In addition to privacy concerns, the Fourth Industrial Revolution is also reshaping the ways in which individuals express their freedom. Digital

technologies have created new platforms for self-expression and communication, enabling people to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions with a global audience. However, this digital freedom is not without its risks. As Pham et al. (2022) note, the increasing digitalisation of society has led to new forms of social pressure, with individuals' online identities becoming subject to constant scrutiny and judgment. This can lead to a sense of constraint, as people feel the need to conform to societal expectations and present a curated version of themselves online.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is transforming Vietnamese spiritual life in profound and complex ways. As modern technology reshapes interpersonal relationships, traditional community-based life is increasingly fragmented, leading to a sense of loneliness and isolation. At the same time, the philosophical dilemmas posed by automation and AI challenge long-standing Confucian and Marxist ideals regarding the value of labour and moral responsibility. Furthermore, the widespread use of surveillance technologies is prompting a reevaluation of notions of freedom and privacy in a rapidly digitalising society. As Vietnam continues to navigate the challenges of 4IR, it will be essential to strike a balance between embracing technological advancements and preserving the spiritual and philosophical values that have long defined its cultural identity.

Challenges for Vietnam's Spiritual Life and Cultural Heritage

Preservation of Vietnamese Cultural Identity

Vietnam's rich cultural heritage, a blend of indigenous traditions and external influences, is facing a significant challenge in the wake of rapid technological advancements under the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). This revolution, driven by innovations in AI, big data, and IoT, has brought transformative changes to the socio-economic fabric of the country, but it also poses a risk of cultural homogenisation and erosion of traditional values. The preservation of Vietnam's cultural identity, while adapting to this technological revolution, is essential for maintaining the nation's unique spiritual and cultural legacy.

Historically, Vietnam's cultural identity has been deeply rooted in Confucianism, Buddhism, and local animist beliefs, with a strong emphasis on familial values, community, and social harmony (Truong et al., 2021). The Confucian influence, in particular, has shaped Vietnam's philosophical and educational systems, instilling values such as respect for authority, filial piety, and collective responsibility. However, as the country embraces 4IR, these values are being challenged by the influx of Western ideologies and a globalised digital culture (Manh, 2020). The growing dominance of digital platforms, particularly

social media, has introduced new forms of communication that prioritise speed, efficiency, and individualism over traditional communal and spiritual practices.

One of the primary concerns is the potential loss of local traditions, art forms, and spiritual practices in the digital era. These elements of cultural heritage are at risk of being overshadowed by more dominant global cultural trends, particularly from the West, which can dilute the distinctiveness of Vietnamese identity (M. T. Nguyen, 2023). The proliferation of Western entertainment and media content on digital platforms, for instance, has significantly influenced the lifestyle choices of younger generations, who may feel disconnected from their cultural roots (Doan, 2024). This shift has raised concerns about the fading of cultural identity, especially in rural areas where traditional customs and rituals still hold great significance.

Additionally, the pressure to modernise and adapt to global economic standards may further marginalise cultural heritage sites and practices. In urban areas, rapid development has often led to the destruction of historical buildings and spaces that embody the spirit of Vietnamese culture (Ngo, 2020). This trend is exacerbated by the focus on economic growth, which sometimes overlooks the importance of preserving cultural and spiritual landmarks for future generations. The commercialisation of heritage sites for tourism, while economically beneficial, can also lead to a superficial representation of culture, stripping away its deeper spiritual meanings and reducing it to a commodified experience for visitors (Vu Hoang, 2021).

Balancing Technological Growth and Ethical Considerations

As Vietnam moves forward with technological development, it must confront the ethical and moral implications that arise from these advancements, particularly concerning spiritual life. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is not only transforming how people work and interact but also influencing their ethical frameworks and spiritual well-being (Schwab, 2016). The challenge lies in integrating these new technologies into everyday life without compromising the spiritual and moral values that have long guided Vietnamese society.

One of the key ethical challenges posed by 4IR is the potential dehumanisation of individuals in a highly digitalised world. As AI and automation take on more roles traditionally performed by humans, there is a risk that personal identity and human connection may become diminished (M. T. Nguyen, 2023). Technologies such as AI-driven social media algorithms, virtual relationships, and even sex robots raise questions about the impact of such innovations on human intimacy, ethical behaviour, and the sanctity of personal relationships (Schwab, 2016). In some cases, these technologies may foster

alienation and existential loneliness, as people increasingly interact with machines rather than forming meaningful human connections (Doan, 2024). The spiritual consequences of this trend are profound, as individuals may struggle to find purpose and meaning in a world where technology dominates social and personal spaces.

The rapid pace of technological change also raises questions about the moral responsibilities of scientists, policymakers, and citizens. The ethical use of new technologies, particularly those related to surveillance, AI, and big data, must be carefully considered to prevent violations of privacy and human dignity. For example, the use of AI in social control, such as the monitoring of personal behaviours through facial recognition or data tracking, poses a threat to individual freedoms and could lead to societal unrest (Schwab, 2016). The challenge for Vietnam is to develop a governance framework that ensures that technological advancements serve the common good, protect human rights, and promote ethical behaviour.

Education plays a crucial role in addressing these challenges. Vietnam's education system must adapt to prepare future generations for the ethical dilemmas posed by 4IR while ensuring that traditional values are not lost. This requires a balanced curriculum that fosters both digital literacy and an understanding of Vietnam's cultural and spiritual heritage (Nguyen & Tran, 2022). Integrating ethical education into the school system can help equip students with the tools to navigate the complexities of modern life while remaining rooted in their cultural identity.

To maintain this balance, Vietnam must also ensure that its cultural policies reflect the needs of the digital age. Policy reforms should focus on protecting cultural heritage while encouraging innovation in cultural industries, such as the creation of digital content that promotes Vietnamese traditions and values (Manh, 2020). Additionally, there must be greater public awareness about the ethical use of technology and the importance of safeguarding privacy, personal freedom, and spiritual well-being in the face of rapid digitalisation.

In short, Vietnam's spiritual life and cultural heritage are facing unprecedented challenges in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The country must carefully navigate the tension between preserving its rich cultural identity and embracing technological growth. This requires a comprehensive approach that includes policy reforms, education, and public engagement to ensure that technological advancements contribute positively to society without eroding the spiritual and moral foundations that have long been central to Vietnamese life.

The Role of Education and Culture in Responding to 4IR

The 4IR, characterised by rapid technological advancements, presents a unique challenge for Vietnam. While 4IR offers significant opportunities for economic growth and innovation, it also raises concerns about cultural erosion and the preservation of national identity. In this regard, education and culture are vital instruments for Vietnam to negotiate the complexity of 4IR while preserving its cultural legacy. By fostering an education system that integrates both technological and cultural components, and by promoting local cultural practices through technology, Vietnam can strengthen its cultural resilience and ensure sustainable development in the digital age.

Education as a Cultural Shield

Vietnam's education system plays a crucial role in safeguarding the country's cultural identity in the face of rapid globalisation and digital transformation. Education, when designed with a focus on both technological literacy and cultural preservation, can serve as a cultural shield, enabling students to embrace modernity while maintaining a strong connection to their national heritage. As the country integrates more deeply into the global economy through 4IR technologies, it becomes essential to instil a sense of national pride and cultural awareness among the younger generation. This dual emphasis ensures that students are equipped to engage with global innovations while remaining rooted in Vietnamese values.

Historically, education in Vietnam has been deeply influenced by Confucian principles, which emphasise moral education, respect for authority, and the importance of learning as a means of achieving societal harmony (Truong et al., 2021). In the context of 4IR, Vietnam's education system must evolve to address new challenges while retaining these foundational values. According to Doan (2024), the current education system should focus on re-evaluating traditional and modern values, ensuring that the youth are not only equipped with technological skills but also guided by a balanced value system that promotes patriotism, responsibility, and community service.

One of the key strategies for preserving cultural identity through education is the integration of Vietnamese history, language, and philosophy into the curriculum. By emphasising the country's rich cultural heritage and philosophical traditions, education can help students navigate the challenges posed by 4IR, such as cultural homogenisation and the loss of local traditions. Manh (2020) highlights the importance of updating cultural policies to reflect the realities of 4IR while ensuring that students are well-versed in their cultural

heritage. This approach not only promotes cultural preservation but also fosters a sense of pride and belonging among students, encouraging them to become cultural ambassadors in a globalised world.

Furthermore, the education system must embrace digital technologies to enhance learning while simultaneously promoting cultural values. For instance, digital platforms can be used to teach students about traditional Vietnamese art forms, literature, and historical events. This approach aligns with Nguyen and Tran (2022), who advocate for the use of digital tools in education to promote a digital society that blends traditional Vietnamese values with modern technology. By leveraging digital technologies, Vietnam's education system can create a learning environment that prepares students for the demands of 4IR while reinforcing cultural identity.

Promotion of Local Cultural Practices

In addition to education, the promotion and preservation of local cultural practices are vital for maintaining Vietnam's cultural resilience in the digital age. One of the key opportunities presented by 4IR is the ability to use technology to promote and preserve traditional practices such as Vietnamese folk festivals, art, and spiritual ceremonies. By digitising cultural heritage and creating digital platforms for cultural exchange, Vietnam can ensure that its traditions are not only preserved but also shared with a global audience.

Vu Hoang (2021) emphasises the need for sustainable cultural preservation, particularly in the context of tourism and heritage conservation. The integration of technology into cultural preservation efforts can help mitigate the risks of cultural erosion by creating a bridge between modernity and tradition. For example, digital platforms can be used to document and promote traditional festivals, rituals, and crafts, ensuring that these practices are accessible to future generations. Additionally, virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies can provide immersive cultural experiences, allowing users to engage with Vietnamese traditions in new and innovative ways.

Digital technologies also offer a powerful tool for fostering local pride and cultural resilience. As M. T. Nguyen (2023) notes, the digital revolution facilitates cross-border cultural exchanges, enabling Vietnam to promote its cultural heritage on a global scale. This not only enhances the country's cultural visibility but also fosters a sense of pride among local communities. By using digital platforms to share traditional practices, Vietnam can strengthen its cultural identity and ensure that its unique traditions are preserved in the face of globalisation.

Moreover, leveraging technology to promote local cultural practices can help address the generational divide between traditional and modern lifestyles.

As M. T. Nguyen (2023) observes, 4IR has triggered a conflict between traditional and modern values, with younger generations often embracing technology-driven lifestyles at the expense of traditional practices. By integrating digital technologies into cultural preservation efforts, Vietnam can create a more inclusive approach that appeals to both younger and older generations. For example, social media platforms can be used to engage younger audiences with traditional practices, while digital archives and e-learning modules can provide accessible resources for learning about Vietnamese history and culture.

Education and culture are essential tools for Vietnam to respond to the challenges of 4IR while preserving its cultural identity. By integrating technology into education and promoting local cultural practices through digital platforms, Vietnam can navigate the complexities of globalisation and digital transformation. The education system must serve as a cultural shield, equipping students with both technological skills and a deep understanding of their national heritage. At the same time, the promotion of local cultural practices through technology can create a bridge between modernity and tradition, ensuring that Vietnam's unique cultural identity is preserved and celebrated in the digital age. Ultimately, these efforts will enable Vietnam to thrive in the 4IR while maintaining its cultural integrity and resilience.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is reshaping Vietnam's cultural and spiritual landscape in ways that are both enabling and disruptive. As demonstrated in this study, the convergence of artificial intelligence, automation, and pervasive digital connectivity has begun to alter patterns of work, social interaction, and meaning-making. Yet modernisation does not inevitably produce cultural erosion. Where governance, education, and community institutions act as effective mediators, technological change can be harmonised with Vietnam's longstanding philosophical and cultural traditions. The critical challenge is therefore not whether Vietnam should modernise, but how to ensure that technological progress aligns with the values that sustain social cohesion.

The findings point to a dual trajectory. Digital technologies can expand Vietnam's cultural presence globally through digitised archives, virtual museums, online learning, and creative industries. At the same time, platform-driven consumerism and intensifying individualism—particularly among younger generations—threaten communal bonds and interrupt intergenerational cultural transmission. Whether 4IR leads to cultural renewal or erosion will depend on how institutions

translate technological developments into concrete outcomes through policy reform, curricular innovation, and platform governance.

Several implications for policy, education, and community development emerge from this analysis. First, Vietnam should strengthen human-centred AI and data-governance frameworks that emphasise transparency, accountability, privacy-by-design, and cultural sensitivity. Cultural-impact assessments should accompany smart-city and e-government initiatives to ensure that technological deployments enhance rather than weaken cultural identity. Second, education systems at all levels must integrate digital citizenship, media and data literacy, and AI ethics with Vietnamese cultural literacies and the philosophical resources of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Marxist humanism. Achieving this will require sustained investment in teacher training and curriculum reform.

Third, cultural agencies and local communities should work together to digitise intangible cultural heritage, including rituals, oral histories, and craft knowledge, ensuring that preservation efforts are participatory and authentic rather than commercialised or superficial. Fourth, partnerships with digital platforms are necessary to enhance the visibility and diversity of high-quality Vietnamese cultural content and to mitigate algorithmic biases that narrow cultural exposure. Complementary school and community programmes should address digital loneliness and value drift among young people by promoting meaningful cultural participation both online and offline.

A further priority is the development of a national “cultural-tech” ecosystem through targeted public procurement and grant schemes that support Vietnamese-language digital content, heritage-based educational media, and innovative cultural technologies. Such an ecosystem should operate under open standards that build domestic capacity. In addition, Vietnam would benefit from establishing a national ethics forum that brings together scholars of Confucian, Buddhist, and Marxist traditions with technologists, educators, and policymakers. This forum would provide ongoing guidance on the ethical use of AI in education, cultural institutions, and public administration, and would help revitalise public discourse on the dignity of labour and human flourishing in an increasingly automated economy.

This study’s limitations stem from its reliance on published literature and interpretive analysis. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal, mixed-methods approaches across regions and social groups to capture how specific technologies reshape rituals, family practices, and intergenerational value transmission. Evaluations of digitisation and cultural-technology initiatives, supported where possible by open data, would enable stronger evidence-based scaling. Effective implementation of the recommendations advanced here will

require cross-ministerial coordination across the sectors of culture, education, information and communications, and labour, as well as structured partnerships with local communities and digital platforms.

In conclusion, Vietnam can navigate the opportunities and disruptions of the Fourth Industrial Revolution without sacrificing its cultural and spiritual identity, provided that technology is treated as a means rather than an end. Embedding ethics within governance, coupling digital competence with cultural literacy in education, empowering communities to steward heritage with digital tools, and investing in research that measures cultural and spiritual well-being are all essential steps. Pursued collectively, these measures transform the tension between modernisation and cultural stewardship into a productive balance that strengthens Vietnam's distinctive contribution to the global digital commons.

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