

ISSUES ARISING IN BUILDING THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF COMMUNE-LEVEL KEY OFFICIALS IN VIETNAM TODAY

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Abstract: This article focuses on clarifying the key issues arising in the process of building the political culture of commune-level key officials in Vietnam today. By employing political culture theories and analyzing the practical context of commune-level officials, the paper demonstrates that political culture plays a vital role in enhancing the quality of leadership, management, and public service at the grassroots level. Research findings indicate that the process of building political culture among these key officials currently faces several prominent challenges: limited awareness of political culture; a subset of officials exhibiting signs of degradation in political ideology, ethics, and lifestyle; persistent violations of the law and public service discipline; and a general capacity that falls short of the demands of local governance reform, market economy development, and digital transformation. Furthermore, proactive and timely capacity to identify and combat negative and hostile elements remains inadequate. Based on these findings, the article affirms that cultivating political culture for commune-level key officials in Vietnam is an urgent requirement, contributing to the enhancement of operational efficacy and efficiency of grassroots governments, reinforcing public trust, and meeting the country's development demands in the new era.

Keywords: Political culture, cadre/officials, commune-level, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

The commune level has historically held a foundational position within the political system and national administration. As the tier of government closest to the citizenry, it is directly responsible for organizing and implementing Party guidelines and the State's policies and laws; simultaneously, it serves as the most authentic reflection of the people's sentiments, aspirations, and livelihoods. Consequently, the efficacy and efficiency of commune-level government operations carry profound significance in consolidating public trust in the Party, the State, and the regime.

Throughout the country's development process, the commune level acts not only as an "extended arm" of the national political and administrative apparatus but also as the intersection between formal administrative institutions and the traditional self-governance of village communities. This intricate intertwining imprints distinct characteristics onto the activities of commune-level key officials: they must ensure the strict and uniform execution of laws and policies while maintaining social flexibility, harmonizing community interests, and preserving solidarity and stability at the grassroots level. Therefore, these key officials require not only

professional competence and managerial skills but also political fortitude, public service ethics, and a political culture tailored to the demands of the new era.

In the contemporary context of accelerated industrialization, modernization, digital transformation, the construction of a socialist law-governed state, and deepening international integration, the expectations placed upon commune-level key officials have become increasingly stringent. Present-day Vietnam faces a confluence of intertwined opportunities and challenges, including climate change, economic restructuring, labor migration, and the imperatives of sustainable development and enhanced local governance. These multifaceted challenges demand that commune-level key officials be politically steadfast, professionally proficient, and possess an exemplary political culture to improve the quality of leadership, management, and public service.

However, in reality, academic inquiry into and the cultivation of political culture for commune-level key officials in Vietnam have yet to fully correspond with their role and the nation's and region's new developmental requirements. According to the Communist Party of Vietnam (2021, Vol. 2, p. 168), "A subset of cadres and Party members exhibit weak political fortitude, degradation in political ideology, and remain skeptical or vague about the Party's goals, ideals, and the path toward socialism in our country; a minority experience confusion, vacillation, and loss of confidence; isolated cases even deny Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the Party's renovation policy." Additionally, a segment of officials has experienced a fading of ideals, diminished willpower, and an aversion to hardships, leading to degradation in political ideology, ethics, and lifestyle, as well as manifestations of "self-evolution" and "self-transformation." Alignment in perception and action regarding Vietnamese cultural values and human archetypes remains incomplete. Certain manifestations of lifestyle and behavioral culture degradation, corruption, wastefulness, and negativity persist; instances of discrepancy between words and actions, non-compliance with Party principles, bureaucracy, individualism, opportunism, pragmatism, factionalism causing internal disunity, and a failure to uphold accountability before the Party and the people continue to evolve in a complex manner.

Given the unique position and role of the commune level, the imperative to upgrade the quality of key officials in the new development phase, and the current limitations in fostering political culture among this cohort in contemporary Vietnam, a systematic and comprehensive study on this subject is essential. Formulating appropriate solutions to enhance the caliber of commune-level key officials to meet the development demands of the country and the region in the new era is an issue of urgent theoretical and practical significance.

2. Theoretical Framework

In Western political science, the study of modern political culture is closely linked to the development of the behavioralist school. The seminal work that initiated this research trajectory is *The Politics of the Developing Areas*, edited by Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman (Almond & Coleman, 1960). The authors argued that political research cannot be confined merely to formal institutions such as the state, constitutions, or laws; rather, it must incorporate informal elements, including social psychology, values, beliefs, and political attitudes of individuals. According to Almond and Coleman, political culture is the aggregate of individual orientations, attitudes, and values toward the political system. Concurrently, political culture always synthesizes traditional and modern elements, shaped through the process of political socialization.

Continuing the development of this research direction, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, in their classic work *The Civic Culture* (Almond & Verba, 1963), constructed the "civic culture" model based on a comparative study of political culture across five nations: the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and Mexico. According to the authors, the political culture of a society is composed of three basic types of political orientations: participant, subject, and parochial. The stability of a democracy depends on a harmonious combination of these orientations, particularly the responsible political participation of citizens. This work is widely regarded as the foundational milestone for the subfield of political culture research within modern political science.

Alongside Almond and Verba, Lucian W. Pye made significant contributions to expanding political culture research into the fields of political development and political modernization. In works such as *Political Culture and Political Development*, Pye posited that political culture reflects the "subjective dimension of political life," encompassing values, symbols, emotions, and psychological orientations that govern human political behavior.

In his view, political culture plays an exceptionally vital role in the political stability and modernization processes of developing nations.

Approaching the subject from the perspective of political order and political institutionalization, Samuel P. Huntington, in *Political Order in Changing Societies*, argued that political instability in developing countries stems from an imbalance between the level of social political mobilization and the state's institutional capacity. According to Huntington, if socio-economic modernization is not accompanied by the development of appropriate political institutions and political culture, it will lead to political crises and a decline in the legitimacy of the ruling system.

Since the late 20th century, the study of political culture has further expanded to address issues such as social capital, political trust, and governance efficiency. Francis Fukuyama, in *Trust*, asserted that social trust is a crucial foundation for economic development and political stability; high-trust societies typically possess superior capacity for social cooperation and institutional efficacy. Later, Fukuyama extended this line of inquiry in his works on "political decay," highlighting the risks of institutional stagnation and trust crises in modern democracies.

From a methodological standpoint, Emil Ordukhanyan, in "A Comparative Analysis of Political Culture" (Ordukhanyan, 2019), systematized the analytical approaches to political culture while emphasizing its role in explaining socio-political phenomena and political behavior. Stephen White, in "Political Culture and Political Science" (White, 1979), also contended that political culture serves as an essential tool for the comparative study of political systems and for explaining differences in political behavior across nations.

Numerous recent studies have begun to approach political culture in relation to regional culture and sustainable development in the Mekong Delta. The article "Preserving and Developing the Cultural Value System of the Mekong Delta Region" by Nguyen Viet Thanh and Vo Thi Kim Xuan (Nguyen & Vo, 2024) emphasizes the role of the regional cultural value system in social development and political stability reinforcement in the Mekong Delta. The authors argue that regional cultural characteristics—such as community spirit, flexibility, cultural syncretism, and a sense of gratitude and emotional attachment—exert a direct influence on leadership styles, management practices, and political conduct at the grassroots level.

A specialized, in-depth research work on political culture in Vietnam is the book *Political Culture and the Cultivation of the Leadership Cohort in Our Country Today* (Pham, 1995) by Pham Ngoc Quang. The author comprehensively systematized the theoretical issues of political culture, including its definition, structure, functions, and characteristics. Concurrently, he analyzed the reality of political culture in Vietnam, its impacts on political activities, and the training of leading cadres in the country.

The objective of this educational initiative is to foster self-discipline, cultivate personal growth, and train party members in revolutionary ethics in accordance with Ho Chi Minh's ideology. This approach is rooted in the principle of integrating theory with practice, along with harmonizing (Luong Thi Hoai Thanh, Vu Thi Phuong Le, Nguyen Viet Thanh. 2025).

The works of Lam Quoc Tuan (Lam, 2007, 2016, 2021) represent prominent studies on solutions to elevate the political culture of the leadership cohort in contemporary Vietnam. The author proposes a comprehensive system of solutions, including: enhancing political knowledge; educating on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought; cultivating ethics and lifestyles; innovating cadre-related work; fostering the political dynamism of cadres; and raising the political culture level of the masses.

Khuat Trong Nam (2021), in the article "Building Political Culture for Key Cadres Under the Impact of International Integration and the Negative Sides of the Current Market Economy," highlights the adverse effects of the market economy's downsides and international integration on the political qualities, ethics, capacity, and prestige of the cadre cohort from a political culture perspective. On this basis, the author affirms that upgrading the political culture for cadres at all levels is an urgent requirement in the current phase to maintain political fortitude, public service ethics, and accountability before the people. The article also suggests several solutions to enhance the political culture of key officials to meet the country's development demands in the new context.

The approach to the political culture of commune-level key officials involves selecting methodologies to acquire specific knowledge regarding the values and norms created by these officials, and utilizing those values and norms in the execution of public duties within commune-level local governments—the primary arena of their political activities. In the literature of international and Vietnamese scholars, three prominent, valuable approaches emerge as the theoretical foundations for studying the political culture of commune-level key officials: **First**, the approach based on the theory of the subject's political orientations. In their work *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Almond & Verba, 1963), Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba categorized the political object into four types: the political system as a whole; input elements (channels and institutions providing information); output elements (decisions, policies, and laws); and citizens as political subjects. For each type of political object, political culture is manifested through three dimensions of orientation: cognitive orientation (knowledge), affective orientation (feeling/attitude), and evaluative orientation (judgment). This approach provides a scientific tool for the comparative study of political cultures, facilitating the assessment of congruence between political culture and political institutions. However, this approach exhibits certain limitations: (1) it primarily operates at the national or ethnic level, falling short of conceptualizing political culture in its broadest sense; (2) it leans heavily toward citizens' perceptions and attitudes regarding current political processes, thereby failing to fully elucidate the origins and essence of political culture. Through this lens, the political culture of commune-level key officials can be examined via its core components: political knowledge, ideals, beliefs, activities, and capacity.

Second, the approach based on political choice theory, epitomized by Aaron Wildavsky in *Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference Formation*. Accordingly, political culture is viewed as the subjective dimension in choosing among political alternatives under specific conditions where choices are not infinite. Similar to the political orientation approach, the author regards political culture as the subjective dimension of the political system and process. This approach supplements the tools for identifying the origins and nature of political culture. However, it primarily emphasizes group roles rather than providing a holistic, comprehensive view of political culture. Thus, according to this approach, the political culture of commune-level key officials constitutes an integral part of the national political culture, contributing to the formation of traditional Vietnamese political culture values.

Third, the stratified (layered) approach to political culture. A prime example of this approach is presented by Phan Xuan Son in the article "The Issue of Culture in the Context of International Integration" (Phan, 2017). Drawing on the stratified framework utilized by the University of Texas, this approach delineates political culture into distinct layers: the value layer, which describes the values of political culture, including core values; the normative layer, which concerns behavioral norms, protocols, and rituals manifested through the standard codes of conduct of political actors; the political persona layer, which categorizes political figures into individuals, collectives, and societal political forces, including heroic figures representative of culture and political culture; and the final layer, political symbols. Under this approach, political culture encompasses the political values and norms pursued by commune-level key officials, their knowledge, ideology, ideals, beliefs, and behaviors, as well as the heroic figures and symbols representative of this cohort.

3. Research Methodology

This study is grounded in the methodological framework of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. Concurrently, it applies the Communist Party of Vietnam's perspectives on cadre development, cultural enrichment, and political culture cultivation within the context of building a socialist law-governed state.

To elucidate the issues arising in the process of building the political culture of commune-level key officials in Vietnam today, the article employs the following primary research methods:

Documentary Analysis and Synthesis Method: This method is utilized to examine Party documents, State policies and laws, and domestic and international academic literature concerning political culture and commune-level cadres. On this basis, the author inherits established theoretical insights to construct a robust scientific foundation for the study.

Logical and Historical Method: This approach is applied to clarify the formation and evolution of political culture theories within specific historical contexts. Simultaneously, it analyzes the emerging requirements imposed on

commune-level key officials by the contemporary backdrop of building a socialist law-governed state, digital transformation, and international integration.

Systemic-Structural Method: This method is employed to examine the political culture of commune-level key officials as a holistic entity composed of multiple interrelated elements, thereby identifying the contradictions and issues arising in the current process of political culture cultivation in Vietnam.

Empirical Analysis and Practical Review Method: This approach is used to evaluate the current status of the commune-level key official cohort, thereby identifying the limitations, inadequacies, and practical challenges confronting the cultivation of political culture in the current phase.

Comparative and Contrastive Method: This method is leveraged to delineate the gap between the demands of local governance reform, digital transformation, and modern local government construction, and the actual state of political culture among commune-level key officials in Vietnam today. Additionally, statistical and comparative techniques are applied to process and cross-reference collected data to clarify the characteristics, trends, and issues inherent to this cohort.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Contradiction Between Officials' Limited Comprehension of Political Culture and the Imperatives of Fostering Political Culture Among Commune-Level Key Officials in Contemporary Vietnam

Despite having undergone fundamental training in political theory, law, and state management, and having developed within a structured socio-cultural environment, most contemporary commune-level key officials in Vietnam lack systematic and comprehensive knowledge of political culture. This deficit is particularly pronounced regarding practical political skills within local state administration. The political culture values and norms currently possessed by these officials are primarily acquired through higher education or postgraduate programs, as well as accumulated practical experience throughout their careers.

Meanwhile, within many current cadre training and institutional development programs at the grassroots level, political science and political culture have not yet been established as independent, systematic modules. Educational initiatives regarding political culture are predominantly integrated into general political theory training courses, Party cell meetings, and activities of socio-political organizations. Consequently, they fall short of fostering a comprehensive development of political capacity for officials.

The level of political culture comprehension among commune-level officials reveals noticeable constraints. A significant number of officials demonstrate an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of the concepts, values, norms, structures, and behavioral codes of political culture within public service. In practice, Party committees, leaders, and mass organizations at the commune level have primarily concentrated on political and ideological education or administrative and professional training, while failing to allocate adequate attention to developing practical political skills and political conduct capacity for officials.

This cognitive and tactical limitation in political culture among a segment of key officials serves as a primary driver behind substandard attitudes and behaviors observed during the execution of public duties at the grassroots level in recent times.

In the context of constructing and perfecting a socialist law-governed state, a thorough and profound comprehension of political culture among commune-level officials is an urgent prerequisite. This comprehension must extend beyond merely mastering concepts, perspectives, foundational bases, and influencing factors; it requires a clear grasp of the structure, core value systems, standard norms, and demands of cultivating political culture under new conditions. However, reality indicates that the majority of commune-level officials are currently ill-equipped in these areas. This creates a distinct misalignment between the empirical capacity of the cadre cohort and the overarching requirements of building and developing political culture within today's law-governed state framework.

Presently, amid profound and complex shifts in the regional and global landscapes-particularly regarding economic, geopolitical, socio-technological, and defense-security transformations-nations face a dual reality of intertwined opportunities and escalating challenges. Within this context, equipped with the dialectical materialist

worldview and the revolutionary outlook on life derived from Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought, alongside an alignment with the Party's renovation policy and State laws, commune-level key officials in Vietnam are increasingly overcoming mechanical, dogmatic, and simplistic mindsets in both perception and practice. The comprehension of socio-political issues is increasingly executed based on a dialectical methodology that links theory with practice, ensuring comprehensiveness, objectivity, and a fit with specific historical conditions.

Consequently, the commune-level key official cohort has gradually applied Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, the Political Platform, the Party's renovation line, and State laws to local political realities. The 13th National Party Congress emphasized this requirement: "Elevate the Party's theoretical thinking, step up practical reviews and theoretical research, and timely provide scientific bases for formulating the Party's lines and guidelines, as well as the State's policies and laws" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, Vol. 2, pp. 234-235). Notably, the lessons of success and limitation within the political activities of these officials have contributed to a rich repository of empirical political knowledge, inherited and transmitted across generations of cadres. Overall, commune-level key officials possess a seasoned reserve of empirical political knowledge due to their regular, direct participation in political activities and movements, as well as their tenure across diverse positions within the political system. For older officials, this depth of practical engagement further enriches their capacity to navigate and resolve socio-political issues at the grassroots level.

4.2. Degradation in Political Ideology, Integrity, Ethics, and Lifestyles Among a Subset of Cadres: A Contradiction to Efforts in Building Political Culture Values and Norms for Commune-Level Key Officials in Vietnam Today

Currently, the task of building and developing the core norms and values of political culture among commune-level key officials in Vietnam has received significant attention and deployment from Party committees and authorities. In practice, however, this process presents several prominent issues. A subset of cadres still possesses unstable political stances and lacks a comprehensive and profound understanding of their positions, roles, duties, and responsibilities in the new context. Manifestations of mediocrity (a "mediocre mindset") and bureaucratic working styles persist, coupled with a lack of close empirical engagement, which ultimately leads to low efficiency and subpar quality of work. As noted in the documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, "Certain cultural and social aspects are transforming slowly; some facets of the cultural environment remain unhealthy" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026, Vol. 1, p. 20). Furthermore, "The degradation of political ideology, ethics, and lifestyles, along with internal manifestations of 'self-evolution' and 'self-transformation,' continue to evolve in a complex manner" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026, Vol. 1, p. 246). It is also observed that "Manifestations of cultural deviance and the degradation of ethics, lifestyles, and social evils still occur in many places" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026, Vol. 1, p. 224).

Additionally, localized parochialism, status-seeking, and the comparison of personal interests persist, acting as barriers to both organizational and individual development. Some officials still exhibit individualism, a lack of organizational discipline, and a failure to promote internal democracy, thereby undermining solidarity and unity within the commune-level political system. Concurrently, conservative attitudes, hesitancy, aversion to hardships, and a lack of initiative and creativity remain visible. Working methods remain heavily formalistic and paper-driven, detached from the practical lives of the populace, and in certain instances, a lack of vigilance has created loopholes for negative influences to take hold. A small segment of key commune-level officials utilizes unscientific, "undemocratic, and unprincipled" working methods, which compromises the quality and efficacy of work and fails to meet the goals set out in Party resolutions. Alarmingly, "The degradation of political ideology, ethics, and lifestyles has shown no signs of abating" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026, Vol. 2, p. 125), resulting in "weaknesses, stagnation, evasiveness, shifting of blame, and a fear of responsibility" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026, Vol. 1, p. 247). This situation is compounded by the fact that "a segment of cadres fails to meet requirements, while numerous social, environmental, and livelihoods issues remain pressing" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026, Vol. 1, p. 20).

In the execution of state management duties at the commune level, there are instances where insufficient emphasis is placed on guidance, implementation, inspection, and supervision. Instead, administration relies heavily on ad-hoc, situational handling and chasing immediate results, which lacks sustainability. Individualism-manifested through the "ego" eclipsing the "collective good"-along with a pragmatic, self-serving lifestyle, accountability

evasion, and an aversion to difficulties still exists among a subset of officials. There are even cases where individuals abuse their positions and authority to execute tasks in violation of regulations, thereby damaging the credibility of local grassroots governments.

In the final analysis, these manifestations stem directly from individualism, which breeds internal disunity, suspicion, and a mutual loss of trust. This, in turn, sparks negative phenomena in cadre affairs, such as unsubstantiated complaints and denouncements that poison the working environment and erode organizational prestige. The phenomenon of a discrepancy between words and deeds, a lack of innovative spirit, and working merely to get by ("presenteeism" or passive compliance) remains prevalent among a segment of officials. Furthermore, certain leading cadres fail to set exemplary standards, as their rhetoric does not align with their actions, which diminishes the trust of both the public and subordinates.

Bureaucracy, estrangement from the masses, conflict avoidance, and the evasion of criticism and self-criticism still occur. Although many dedicated, responsible officials remain deeply attached to the people and are willing to overcome adversity to serve the community, there are still numerous instances of degradation in character, ethics, and lifestyle. These individuals lack a spirit of public service, and some even display authoritarian, harassing behaviors that infringe upon the legal rights and interests of citizens. Some leadership figures also lack close grassroots oversight, fail to firmly grasp practical situations, and rarely listen to the opinions of subordinates and the public, leading to formalistic and inaccurate cadre evaluations.

Finally, although corruption and wastefulness have been targets of prevention and control, they have not been completely eradicated. Certain officials still abuse their positions and power for personal gain, causing grievances among the people and giving rise to negative practices during administrative processing. These behaviors not only cause public discontent but also severely weaken the people's trust in commune-level governments. Ultimately, the reality of political ideological, ethical, and lifestyle degradation among a subset of commune-level key officials poses a major contradiction to the imperatives of constructing, consolidating, and developing the values and norms of political culture within the framework of building a socialist law-governed state today.

4.3. Legal Violations by a Subset of Cadres: A Contradiction to Efforts in Building a Clean and Strong Grassroots Local Government

Violations of discipline, operational processes, working regulations, and laws among a subset of commune-level key officials in the Mekong Delta region continue to persist. These are manifested through illicit practices such as "protection rackets" (providing illegal patronage), bribery and extortion (such as illegal road tolls/kickbacks), substandard behavior, inappropriate forms of address, and even breaches of public service ethics during the execution of duties. These actions incite public discontent, erode social trust, and tarnish the prestige and honor of commune-level governments. Although these phenomena are not widespread, they have not been completely eliminated, thereby generating negative public opinion.

In reality, several serious incidents with major consequences have arisen, triggering mass petitions and complaints, which in turn destabilize local social order. A number of law-breaking officials have faced disciplinary actions, and some have even been criminally prosecuted. In addition, violations of protocols and procedures in administrative processing, falsification of records, non-compliant handling of tasks, and infringements upon the legal rights and interests of citizens still occur in certain localities. These issues exert a highly negative impact on the efficacy and efficiency of state management at the commune level.

In recent years, the number of officials disciplined for violations during the execution of public duties remains a matter of concern. These infractions primarily pertain to negligence, acts contrary to legal regulations, breaches of operational protocols, or the abuse of positions and power for personal gain. Concurrently, several organizations within the commune-level political system have not been consolidated or rectified in a timely manner; discipline and order remain loose in certain quarters, and the quality of organizational activities is constrained, undermining overall leadership and managerial effectiveness.

These manifestations of legal and public service discipline violations among a segment of commune-level key officials have created a sharp contradiction with the imperatives of constructing and perfecting a socialist law-governed state. In a law-governed state, all actors-especially the officials entrusted with executing state power-

must uphold the rule of law, strictly comply with statutory regulations, and adhere to public service ethical standards. Nevertheless, within a segment of the commune-level key official cohort, there remains a persistent "degradation in political ideology, ethics, and lifestyle, alongside individualism, 'group interests,' wastefulness, apathy, and achievement obsession" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021, Vol. 1, p. 95). Consequently, the existence of legal violations within the cadre cohort not only dilutes the enforcement power of the law but also shatters public trust in grassroots authorities. This underscores the urgent requirement to strengthen power control, tighten organizational discipline, and upgrade the quality of officials in the current period.

4.4. The Contradiction Between the Limited Quality of the Key Official Cohort and the Demands of Local Governance Reform, the Market Economy, and Digital Transformation

In the contemporary context, the process of reforming local governance-coupled with developing a socialist-oriented market economy and accelerating digital transformation-imposes increasingly stringent demands on commune-level key officials in Vietnam. Moving beyond traditional administrative management capacities, this cohort must now possess a synthesis of strategic thinking, flexible operational competence, adaptability to digital environments, and a profound socio-economic understanding within an integrated world. In reality, however, the quality of a segment of commune-level key officials reveals severe constraints, creating a distinct contradiction with these new development imperatives.

Regarding cognitive capacity and governance vision, a subset of officials remains overly reliant on empirical experience, lacks innovative thinking, and fails to keep pace with modern governance standards. The application of advanced management tools and approaches rooted in New Public Management (NPM) and digital governance remains clumsy and often formalistic. Within a market economy framework, balancing interest relations, promoting sustainable development, and managing social risks require officials to possess analytical and forecasting capabilities; yet, this remains a significant weakness for many grassroots cadres. Regarding digital transformation capacity, although guidelines for building digital government and digital society have been vigorously deployed, the information technology proficiency of commune-level officials remains uneven. Many lack fundamental digital skills and fail to proactively leverage data to serve management activities. This deficit not only diminishes the efficiency of administrative reform but also impedes the transparency and openness of commune-level government operations.

In terms of public service quality and demeanor, some officials have yet to adapt to the service-oriented demands of modern administration, exhibiting passivity, an aversion to change, and a reluctance to engage with novel concepts. Meanwhile, the dynamics of a market economy and international integration require the cadre cohort to be dynamic, professional, and anchored by solid public service ethics and political culture. Consequently, the contradiction between the empirical quality of commune-level key officials and the demands of local governance reform, market economy development, and digital transformation is not merely an issue of individual capacity; it represents a systemic challenge that compromises state management efficacy and threatens the sustainable development of the region in the current phase.

4.5. The Imperative of Early and Remote Identification and Countering of Sabotage Plots Against Political Culture Cultivation Versus Current Delays and Passive Realities

In the context of deep global integration and the rapid proliferation of cyberspace, factors influencing political culture have become increasingly diverse, intricate, and difficult to regulate. This reality imposes an urgent requirement for proactive, early, and remote identification of risks and challenges, alongside a resolute struggle against subversive plots and tactics designed to degrade the political culture of the cadre cohort, particularly at the commune level. In practice, however, these efforts among commune-level key officials in Vietnam reveal significant limitations, falling short of mandated expectations.

Regarding identification capacity, a subset of officials lacks the proficiency and analytical skills required to evaluate multi-dimensional information, especially within cyberspace. Manifestations of "self-evolution" and "self-transformation" from within, or distorted and erroneous allegations targeting political perception, are often not detected in a timely manner; in isolated cases, individuals have been influenced without even realizing it. In terms of proactivity, initiatives to protect the ideological foundation and safeguard political culture values at the commune level remain reactive and lack predictive insight. The implementation of preventive measures, public

opinion orientation, and counter-arguments against false viewpoints is irregular, lacks depth, and is poorly integrated with local realities.

Regarding coordination mechanisms and operational tools, the connectivity between local actors, as well as between commune-level authorities and upper-level specialized agencies in protecting the ideological foundation and fostering political culture, remains fragmented. Concurrently, the application of digital technology in monitoring, analyzing, and processing information is limited, which diminishes overall operational efficacy. Consequently, there is a sharp contradiction between the imperative for proactive, timely identification and countering of negative and hostile elements, and the reality of passive, delayed operational methods at the grassroots level. If left unresolved, this contradiction poses an underlying risk of eroding the ideological foundation, undermining the political culture cultivation of commune-level key officials, and ultimately threatening the sustainable development of local communities.

5. Conclusion

Through empirical inquiry, this study has elucidated several critical contradictions and emerging issues. First, there is a pronounced contradiction between officials' limited comprehension of political culture and the imperatives of fostering political culture among commune-level key officials. Second, the degradation in political ideology, integrity, ethics, and lifestyles among a subset of cadres directly undermines ongoing efforts to establish core political culture values and norms within this cohort. Third, legal and public service discipline violations committed by a segment of officials stand in stark opposition to the objectives of constructing a clean, strong, and effective grassroots local government. Fourth, constraints in the overall quality of key officials conflict sharply with the modern requirements of local governance reform, market economy development, and digital transformation. Finally, a significant mismatch persists between the strategic imperative for early and remote identification and countering of subversive plots and the passive, delayed realities currently observed in practice. While the positive achievements recorded thus far serve as a vital foundation, the aforementioned limitations and systemic contradictions impose an urgent requirement for a comprehensive overhaul of perceptions, mechanisms, and operational methodologies in cultivating political culture for commune-level key officials, particularly in the Mekong Delta region. Ultimately, these findings establish the essential theoretical and empirical groundwork upon which appropriate solutions can be formulated in the subsequent section, aiming to elevate the political culture of commune-level key officials and empower them to meet the demands of Vietnam's new era of national development.

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