The Philosophical Architecture of Vietnamese Cadre Ethics

Huong Thi Thu Nguyen – Thuy Thi Pham

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Abstract
The contemporary Vietnamese architecture of cadre ethics for local leaders and managers operates as a coherent political philosophy of governance rarely named as such. This article reads it philosophically. The argument advances in three moves. First, four pillars from contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics scholarship, namely integrity and self-control of power; transparency and accountability; public-service responsibility and devotion; serving the people through grassroots democracy, articulate a virtue-ethical taxonomy operationalized as five HCM-register standards: loyalty, integrity, exemplarity, discipline, responsibility-and-innovation. Second, three philosophical resources integrate: dĩ dân vi bản (people as roots of the nation) anchors the political-philosophical claim; the Confucian junzi (quân tử) tradition supplies the cadre-as-exemplar grammar; MacIntyrean virtue ethics (via Sinnicks) converts the standards from compliance-codification into a virtue-ethical claim. Third, the architecture is the applied face of a Confucian-Marxist synthesis: the cadre is at once Confucian exemplar and Marxist vanguard via HCM's reframed trung (loyalty) and hiếu (filial piety). The case is at once a universal question (what virtues does public service require?) and a particular answer for comparative governance ethics. The contribution: productive complementarity, not opposition, between Vietnamese-Marxist scholarship and comparative virtue-ethics.
Key words: cadre ethics, political philosophy of governance, min ben, MacIntyrean virtue ethics, Confucian-Marxist synthesis, Hồ Chí Minh thought

1. Introduction

A philosophical puzzle sits at the heart of contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics scholarship, though it is rarely named as such. The architecture of standards for local-level leaders and managers — five canonical standards declared in the leading textbook tradition (loyalty, integrity, exemplarity, discipline, responsibility-and-innovation), four pillars proposed in the most recent policy-philosophical literature (integrity, transparency-and-accountability, responsibility-and-devotion, serving-the-people-and-grassroots-democracy), an HCM textual anchor in the *cần kiệm liêm chính chí công vô tư* framework of *Toàn tập* Vol. 5, a post-2016 CPV anti-degeneration apparatus running from Resolution 04-NQ/TW through Conclusion 21-KL/TW, and a contemporary legal-institutional layer from the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law through the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy to Decree 334/2025/ND-CP — operates as a coherent political-philosophical system in substance. The architecture's philosophical apparatus, however, is typically left unnamed. The five standards are described as "values and behavioural requirements"; the four pillars are advanced as policy categories; the philosophical commitments that make them coherent — virtue ethics in the MacIntyrean register, the *junzi* tradition as background grammar, the indigenous *dĩ dân vi bản* principle as central anchor — operate implicitly throughout the literature without ever being installed as the philosophical framework the architecture in fact instantiates.

The puzzle is not merely presentational. International political-philosophy-of-governance scholarship has rarely engaged Southeast Asian Marxist-Confucian polities as live philosophical interlocutors. The standard Anglophone literature on public-administration ethics — Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), Cooper (2012), the Rawlsian

background — assumes a liberal-democratic procedural framework as the unmarked default and treats non-Western cases either as deficient instances of that default or as ideologically opaque. The standard Confucian-political-philosophy literature — Tu Weiming (1989), Ames and Rosemont (1998), Sungmoon Kim (2016), Snell et al. (2022) — engages the *junzi* tradition substantively but rarely takes Vietnamese-Marxist articulations as serious philosophical-political configurations rather than as feudal residue or revolutionary departure. The Vietnamese-language scholarship on HCM's *đạo đức cách mạng* (revolutionary ethics) and the contemporary CPV cadre-ethics framework — Nguyễn Phú Trọng's writings on Party-building and rectification (2023; 2024), Hoàng Chí Bảo's (2010) theoretical articulations of Đổi-Mới sustainable development, Nguyễn Tài Đông and Hồ Mạnh Tùng (2019) on the indigenous *min ben* tradition — operates inside Vietnamese-internal scholarly conversations and is often not legible to international Anglophone readers without explicit theoretical translation. A fourth camp, philosophical engagement of contemporary Vietnamese cadre ethics as political philosophy of governance, remains the most underdeveloped — and to that fourth stream the present article most directly contributes.

The research question can be stated compactly. *Read philosophically, what political-philosophical resources do the four pillars of the contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics architecture articulate, and under what conditions can they be read as a coherent contribution to the political philosophy of governance rather than as a public-administration norm-codification alone?* The framing presupposes nothing about whether the Vietnamese architecture is more or less adequate than alternative configurations. It presupposes only that the four pillars and their HCM-register operationalizations, read with hermeneutical care, presuppose determinate philosophical commitments about person, public service, and political community, and that those commitments are intelligible philosophically and not only policy-instrumentally.

We see our article's contribution as fourfold. First, it installs a virtue-ethical political-philosophical reading of the four-pillar standards system as the contemporary Vietnamese articulation of the Confucian-Marxist synthesis at the applied local-government level. Second, it names the indigenous *dĩ dân vi bản* (*lấy dân làm gốc*) principle — anchored in the Mencian formulation and Nguyễn Trãi's *Bình Ngô đại cáo* — as the central indigenous political-philosophical commitment the serving-the-people pillar articulates. Third, it deploys MacIntyrean virtue ethics, via Sinnicks's (2014) practice/institution bridge, as the methodological apparatus that converts the standards system from compliance-codification into a virtue-ethical political-philosophical claim and that supplies the diagnostic frame for reading current limitations as institutional failures of practice-protection rather than as procedural failures alone.

The methodological framework draws on comparative philosophical hermeneutics applied to canonical Vietnamese texts (Hồ Chí Minh's *Toàn tập* Vol. 5; the CPV documentary architecture from Resolution 04-NQ/TW through Conclusion 21-KL/TW and the 13th Party Congress documents; the legal-institutional layer from the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law through the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy and Decree 334/2025/ND-CP); on contemporary virtue-ethics scholarship (Snell et al., 2022, on the five *junzi* virtues; Sinnicks, 2014, on MacIntyre's practice/institution distinction); on the Vietnamese-internal philosophical-policy framework (Trần Đình Hượu, 1996, on the tradition-modernity philosophical bridge; Phan Ngọc, 2002, on Việt-hoá as the philosophical-cultural mechanism of intellectual absorption; Nguyễn Tài Đông and Hồ Mạnh Tùng, 2019, on the *min ben* tradition); and on PAPI 2023–2024 indicators as empirical anchor for the philosophical claim. The Vietnamese-context apparatus is engaged at the same level of philosophical seriousness as the Western apparatus: Trần Đình Hượu and Phan Ngọc are interlocutors at the level of MacIntyre and Habermas, not local color attached to a Western frame.

The article's stakes run in two directions. For Vietnamese cadre-ethics policy in the two-tier-local-government reorganization in progress, the philosophical reading clarifies what is at stake when "ethical standards" are operationalized: not the further codification of compliance rules but the deeper cultivation of virtues internal to the practice of local-government service, with institutional design oriented toward sustaining the practice rather than colonizing it for external goods. For international political-philosophy-of-governance scholarship, the Vietnamese case shows that the universal question of what virtues public service requires can be answered productively within a Marxist-Leninist polity that has retained substantive Confucian moral inheritance, with productive complementarity, rather than opposition, between the Vietnamese-Marxist register and comparative virtue-ethics resources as the article's distinctive contribution. The seven sections that follow develop the argument: theoretical apparatus and the four philosophical moves (§2); the institutional-anthropological setting of the local-level cadre (§3); the four-pillar taxonomy reconciling the existing standards systems (§4); the current state and limitations read as institutional failures of practice-protection (§5); the post-Đổi Mới Vietnamese context and the brief forward-looking digital-governance subsection (§6); and a concluding statement of the article's philosophical contribution and its companion-paper relationship at the philosophical level (§7).

2. Theoretical apparatus: cadre ethics as political philosophy of governance

The article's philosophical apparatus operates in four moves, which the present section installs in turn. Each supplies a distinct philosophical resource, and the article's contribution lies in holding them together as a coherent reading of cadre ethics as political philosophy of governance.

2.1 Western political philosophy of public service

Janet and Robert Denhardt's *New Public Service* (2015) reframes public administration from a service-as-transaction model — whether the bureaucratic-Weberian "old public administration" or the market-mimicking "new public management" toward a service-as-democratic-citizenship model. Public servants serve citizens, not customers; ethics is not a constraint imposed on management effectiveness but its constitutive condition; the proper end of public administration is the deliberatively constructed public interest rather than the aggregation of preferences. The seven principles structuring the framework — serve citizens not customers; seek the public interest; value citizenship and public service; think strategically and act democratically; recognize that accountability is not simple; serve rather than steer; value people not just productivity (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015) — articulate a philosophical-political commitment that converts neatly into the *vì dân* / *cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* (cadres as servants of the people) register HCM and the contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics literature both work in. Terry Cooper's *The Responsible Administrator* (2012) supplies the role-based-ethics complement: each standard is intelligible as a role-based virtue rather than as a behavioural requirement imposed from outside, with personal moral commitment, organizational responsibility, professional obligation, and democratic accountability integrated through the ongoing reflective practice of administrative work (Cooper, 2012). Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1999) functions as background gesture toward the claim that ethical standards constitute the spiritual foundation of state power; the load-bearing comparative work, however, runs through Denhardt and Denhardt and Cooper, with Habermas (2006) on post-secular dialogical translation engaged inline at the comparative-governance threshold (§6). The two registers, New Public Service "serving rather than steering" and Cooper's role-based responsible administration, are surprisingly close to the HCM cadre-as-servant ontology in their philosophical commitments. Our paper's contribution is to read the convergence not as accidental but

as the surface of a deeper convergence on the ontological commitment that public service is service to people rather than instrumental rationality on behalf of an institutional principal.

2.2 Confucian political philosophy and junzi leadership ethics

Tu Weiming's *Centrality and Commonality* (1989) reads Confucianism as religious-philosophical anthropology — the human as constitutively embedded in cosmic, moral, and political community; the ruler's moral self-cultivation extending outward through ritual into the polity; governance as ritual self-cultivation rather than as administrative technique alone (Tu, 1989). Read through Tu Weiming, the cadre-as-moral-exemplar tradition is not motivational rhetoric but the contemporary articulation of an *anthropocosmic* vision in which person, community, and political authority are continuous. Ames and Rosemont's *The Analects: A Philosophical Translation* (1998) supplies the canonical Confucian textual anchor: governance as ritual self-cultivation extended to the polity, the *junzi* as the morally cultivated person whose authority is grounded in cultivated virtue rather than in office (Ames & Rosemont, 1998). Snell, Pojman, Pojman, Pang and Wong (2022) operationalize the *junzi* tradition for contemporary leadership ethics through five core virtues — *ren* (humaneness, *nhân*), *yi* (righteousness, *nghĩa*), *li* (propriety / ritual, *lễ*), *zhi* (wisdom, *trí*), and *xin* (trustworthiness, *tín*) — that map with surprising tightness onto the Vietnamese cadre-ethics architecture. *Ren* maps onto the serving-the-people pillar and the loyalty-and-service standard; *yi* onto integrity and impartiality; *li* onto the discipline-and-power-control standard; *zhi* onto responsibility, humility, and adaptation; *xin* onto exemplarity and the cadre-people trust relation across all four pillars. Engaging Snell et al. lets the article articulate the cadre-as-*quân-tử* reading the manuscript tradition leaves implicit. Sungmoon Kim's *Public Reason Confucianism* (2016) is engaged with care at the comparative-governance threshold: democratic perfectionism rather than liberal neutrality as the methodological resource for holding both Western and Confucian registers without collapse, while acknowledging that Kim's own commitments — democratic-perfectionist constitutionalism in a Confucian-democratic polity — are a partial fit for the Vietnamese-Marxist case rather than a wholesale frame (Kim, 2016).

2.3 Indigenous Vietnamese min ben tradition

Nguyễn Tài Đông and Hồ Mạnh Tùng (2019) supply the central indigenous philosophical anchor. *Dĩ dân vi bản* / *lấy dân làm gốc* (people as the roots of the nation) — the will of the people understood as the will of Heaven, with the Heavenly mandate linked to popular welfare; loving the people as the ruler's duty; ensuring peace for the people (*yên dân*) as governance measured by people's material wellbeing — is the Vietnamese-Confucian principle that anchors cadre-ethics in the indigenous tradition. The Mencian formulation, "People are the roots of the nation. If the roots are not firm, the nation will collapse" (Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019: 97), is the canonical textual anchor. Trần Hưng Đạo on king-people unity — "When the king and the people share one heart, the whole country is united... Ensuring the strength of the people as a long-term plan, that is the best strategy to hold the country" (Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019: 98) — and Nguyễn Trãi's *Bình Ngô đại cáo* — "To ensure peace for the people, such is the essence of humanity and justice" (Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019: 101) — supply the Vietnamese-historical textual articulations. Yet *min ben* is not equivalent to modern liberal democracy; it is what Nguyễn Tài Đông and Hồ call village democracy, with participation through prestige, compromise, and public opinion rather than through individual rights protected by law (Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019: 104). The principle empowers the people rhetorically without giving them institutional power in the modern democratic sense. Trần Đình Hượu (1996) reads this as the philosophical inheritance against which Vietnamese modernity must be thought — the Confucian inheritance to be critically renewed rather than mechanically applied or wholesale rejected. Phan

Ngọc (2002) reads it through the *Việt-hoá* apparatus: imported philosophical-religious traditions are systematically Việt-hoá-ed; *tam giáo đồng nguyên* (the three teachings sharing one source) is the philosophical-cultural mechanism by which Vietnam absorbs and refashions incoming traditions. Read together, the three Vietnamese-philosophical voices supply the apparatus for reading contemporary cadre ethics as the contemporary articulation of a substantive Vietnamese philosophical inheritance — not as decoration on a Western or Sino-Confucian frame.

2.4 MacIntyrean virtue ethics and the Confucian-Marxist synthesis

Sinnicks (2014) supplies the article's load-bearing methodological bridge. MacIntyre's *practice / institution* distinction — articulated in *After Virtue* (MacIntyre, 2007) — supplies the conceptual apparatus for distinguishing the *goods internal* to a practice (virtues cultivated through engagement in the practice itself, oriented toward the practice's own standards of excellence) from the *goods external* to it (compensation, status, control, reputation — goods institutions necessarily traffic in and that, if they overwhelm the goods internal, corrupt the practice). Public service is, in Sinnicks's terms, a practice with its own internal goods — the welfare of those served, the integrity of the service relation, the cultivation of practical wisdom in the administrator. The four-pillar standards system articulates the virtues required to participate in that practice well (Sinnicks, 2014). The Sinnicks bridge is decisive for the article's central move: it supplies the philosophical apparatus for reading the standards system as virtue-ethical rather than as norm-codification, and it supplies the diagnostic frame for reading current limitations as institutional failures of practice-protection rather than as procedural failures alone. The Confucian-Marxist moral-political unity thesis is named explicitly here as the load-bearing synthesis the article's reading depends on. HCM's own formulation makes the philosophical structure visible: "In the past, morality meant loyalty to the king and filial piety to one's parents. Today, morality means loyalty to the nation and filial piety to the people" (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 4: 170). The cadre is at once Confucian moral exemplar and Marxist class-conscious vanguard; the holding of both is the philosophical work, and the four-pillar standards system is what that holding looks like at the applied local-government level.

The four moves operate cumulatively. The Western political-philosophy-of-public-service register supplies the comparative scaffolding within which the article's contribution to international scholarship is intelligible. The Confucian *junzi* register supplies the background grammar of cadre-as-moral-exemplar. The indigenous *min ben* tradition supplies the central Vietnamese philosophical anchor. The MacIntyrean virtue-ethical apparatus supplies the methodological bridge between procedural-compliance and virtue-ethical accounts. Without the apparatus, the sections that follow would read as descriptive cadre-ethics commentary; with it, they read as virtue-ethical political-philosophical argument with worked Vietnamese application.

3. Characteristics of the local-level cadre contingent

Vietnam's contemporary two-tier local government model — comprising provincial and local levels — places the local-level cadre contingent at the institutional point at which Party-State will and popular will meet. The four characteristics already articulated in the Vietnamese cadre-ethics literature — dual role as policy-implementers and state-society intermediaries; limited legal authority but direct social impact; diversity, unevenness, and the rotation/transfer policy; the dual pressures of administrative reform, digital transformation, and international integration alongside the socialist orientation of grassroots government — are preserved here in substance and read philosophically as the *institutional-anthropological situation* of the cadre. The cadre is at once *junzi*-moral-exemplar and Marxist-vanguard; the four characteristics

articulate the contemporary Vietnamese institutional situation within which that synthesis operates at the local level.

3.1 Cadre as state-society intermediary

The first characteristic in the existing literature — the dual role of policy-implementer and state-society intermediary — is intelligible philosophically as the claim that the local-level cadre is the *threshold figure* in the Vietnamese political community: the institutional point at which Party-State will and popular will meet. Read through Cooper's role-based ethics framework, the cadre's role is constitutively relational, and the ethical standards required of the role are the virtues internal to that relational practice (Cooper, 2012). Read through the Confucian *li* (ritual propriety) tradition, the role is articulated through the relational anthropology Tu Weiming theorizes — the human as constitutively embedded in moral and political community, with the cadre's exemplary conduct as the visible operationalization of that anthropology in administrative work (Tu, 1989; Ames & Rosemont, 1998). HCM's *cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* (cadres are servants of the people, not revolutionary officials) (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 292) is the canonical Vietnamese-Marxist articulation of the cadre's relational ontology. In the strong-decentralization conditions of the two-tier local government model, where the local level is assigned more direct state-management tasks while remaining in frequent contact with the people, the cadre's threshold position is not a contingent role-feature but the constitutive philosophical-anthropological structure within which contemporary cadre ethics operates.

3.2 Local authority and direct social impact

The second characteristic — limited legal authority compared with higher levels but direct and profound social impact — is intelligible philosophically as the claim that the cadre's *authority is moral before it is legal*. The local-government fields the existing literature names — land, civil status, education, health, social-welfare policy, public order — are tightly tied to the legitimate rights and interests of the people, and decisions in these fields directly affect daily life. The risk of wrongful acts (abuse of power, self-interest, favoritism) is apparent if there are no clear ethical standards and effective control mechanisms. The philosophical move here is decisive: the contemporary literature articulates this as a procedural-compliance requirement; read philosophically through the MacIntyrean / Sinnicks frame, the requirement is virtue-ethical character formation rather than procedural-compliance training alone (Sinnicks, 2014; MacIntyre, 2007). The Snell et al. (2022) *junzi* framework supplies the closest contemporary articulation — the cadre's authority operates through cultivated virtue manifested in conduct, not through office or rank. HCM's "talent without virtue is useless, virtue without talent makes work difficult" (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 356) is the canonical Vietnamese articulation of the integration of moral character (*đức*) and capacity (*tài*) the philosophical reading rests on. Where authority is moral before it is legal, virtue-cultivation is philosophically primary; the legal-regulatory architecture (the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law; the 2022 Law on Grassroots Democracy; Decree 334/2025/ND-CP) supplies the institutional scaffolding the practice needs but cannot substitute for the virtues internal to the practice.

3.3 Cadre rotation and the impartiality requirement

The third characteristic — diversity and unevenness in qualifications, capacity, and management experience, plus the rotation/transfer policy — is intelligible philosophically as a Vietnamese-institutional answer to the universal philosophical question of how to cultivate *impartiality* in office. HCM's *chí công vô tư* (placing public interest above personal interest) is the canonical Vietnamese-Marxist articulation; the Confucian *yi* (righteousness) tradition supplies the comparative anchor (Snell et al., 2022). Cadres from outside the locality are *less subject* to the kinship and

village pressures that operate as Confucian *quan hệ* (relational obligation) dynamics in Vietnamese village life — but they face the corresponding philosophical challenge of cultivating substantive (not merely procedural) attentiveness to local conditions. The *min ben* tradition reads this as the requirement that cadres *love the people they serve* — substantive attentiveness as virtue, not merely as procedural compliance with consultation requirements (Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019). The rotation/transfer policy thus articulates a virtue-ethical claim: impartiality and substantive local attentiveness are mutually supportive rather than opposed, and the institutional design aims to cultivate both through the cadre's rotational mobility across localities.

3.4 Digital transformation and the socialist orientation

The fourth characteristic — the dual pressures of administrative reform, digital transformation, and international integration alongside the socialist orientation of grassroots government — is intelligible philosophically as the contemporary articulation of the Việt-hoá apparatus (Phan Ngọc, 2002). Vietnamese cadre ethics is constitutively *both* Marxist-Leninist (socialist orientation, vanguard role, Party-led governance) *and* Confucian-virtue-ethical (exemplarity, self-cultivation, the *junzi* register), now operating in a digital-governance environment in which e-government portals, social-media-mediated public communication, and data-driven administrative decision-making reshape the conditions of cadre work. The two-tier-local-government model further highlights the individual responsibility and exemplary role of local-level cadres, placing an urgent demand on standardizing ethical values and standards in leadership and management activities. The full development of the digital-cadre-ethics question is reserved for §6's brief forward-looking subsection (Dennis & Ziliotti, 2023; Tran et al., 2025); §3 names the digital dimension as part of the contemporary institutional situation rather than as a separate analytical block.

The four characteristics, read together, articulate the cadre as the pivotal force in the political system — close to the people, directly responsible, with profound social influence — and as the institutional figure within which the Confucian-Marxist synthesis is operationalized at the contemporary local level. The construction and implementation of ethical standards for the local-level cadre contingent is therefore a foundational and urgent requirement, not only to prevent violations but also to improve grassroots governance quality and strengthen the people's trust in local government. Without §3, §§4–5 read as policy commentary; with §3, they read as worked virtue-ethical-political-philosophical analysis of the contemporary Vietnamese local-government cadre.

4. Ethical standards: a four-pillar taxonomy reconciling the existing systems

The contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics literature articulates two parallel taxonomies that are not internally reconciled in the existing manuscript tradition. The five canonical standards — loyalty to the Fatherland and the Party with devoted service to the people; integrity, impartiality, and non-self-interest (*cần kiệm liêm chính chí công vô tư*); exemplarity and self-cultivation; compliance with discipline, law, and control of power; responsibility, humility, and adaptation to innovation — articulate the HCM-register cadre virtues at the level the literature has worked since the *Đời sống mới* essays of the late 1940s (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5). The four pillars proposed in the contemporary policy-philosophical literature — integrity and self-control of power; transparency and accountability; responsibility and devotion in public service execution; serving the people and respecting grassroots democracy — articulate the contemporary policy-political configuration the post-2016 CPV anti-degeneration framework, the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law, the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy, and Decree 334/2025/ND-CP institutionalize. The two systems overlap substantively but are not identical. Loyalty drops out as a separate pillar;

exemplarity drops out as a separate pillar; transparency-and-accountability appears as a pillar but was not a stand-alone standard; serving-the-people emerges as a pillar but was implicit across all five standards.

4.1 The reconciliation move

The article's central structural-analytical move is to read the four pillars as **philosophically primary** — the virtue-ethical political-philosophical articulation of contemporary Vietnamese cadre ethics — and the five standards as their **HCM-register operationalizations** in the *cần kiệm liêm chính* tradition. Loyalty and exemplarity (existing standards 1 and 3) fold into the four-pillar architecture as the *modes* in which the four pillar-virtues are concretely cultivated: loyalty to the goal of serving the people; exemplarity as the public visibility of cultivated virtue. The reconciliation is not an arbitrary editorial choice. Read philosophically through the MacIntyrean / Sinnicks frame, the four pillars articulate distinctive virtues internal to the practice of public service — integrity (*liêm*) as the disposition to refuse instrumentalization of office for external goods; transparency-and-accountability as the procedural-deliberative articulation of *min ben*; responsibility-and-devotion as the practical-wisdom virtue of the cadre's role; serving-the-people as the contemporary articulation of *cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* (Sinnicks, 2014; MacIntyre, 2007). The five standards articulate these virtues in the HCM-revolutionary-ethics register the Vietnamese-Marxist tradition has worked since the late 1940s. Loyalty is the disposition that orients all four pillar-virtues toward the goal of serving the people and the nation; exemplarity is the public visibility of all four pillar-virtues in the cadre's conduct. Stating the reconciliation explicitly — rather than leaving the reader to discover it — is the article's central structural contribution at §4.

Pillar 1: Integrity and self-control of power

Integrity (*liêm*) read philosophically is a virtue cultivated through participation in the practice of public service well — Sinnicks's MacIntyrean reading. The *cần kiệm liêm chính chí công vô tư* standard from HCM's *Toàn tập* Vol. 5 is the canonical Vietnamese articulation; the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018) and the Resolution 04-NQ/TW *tự diễn biến / tự chuyển hoá* (self-evolution / self-transformation) framework (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016) are its institutional-procedural operationalization. The philosophical move is to read *liêm* as *both* legal compliance with the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law *and* cultivated virtue in HCM's register — not as alternatives but as required complements. The Conclusion 21-KL/TW articulation — cadres must "not be corrupt, not seek personal gain, not let personal interests dominate public service execution" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021) — operates in the same dual register. Snell et al.'s (2022) *yi* (righteousness) virtue maps onto integrity as the virtue of doing what is right when faced with competing claims, and the *junzi* tradition supplies the Confucian textual anchor: the cadre whose own virtues are inadequate to the office cannot establish just public service within the polity. The integrity pillar is the article's first virtue-ethical claim: integrity is cultivated, not codified; it is sustained by institutional safeguards against corruption but it is not produced by them. The implication for policy is that the Anti-Corruption Law's institutional architecture is necessary but not sufficient — cadre virtue must be cultivated through the practice of public service well, not merely required by legal sanction.

Pillar 2: Transparency and accountability

Transparency-and-accountability read philosophically is the *procedural-deliberative articulation of min ben* — the institutional condition under which the indigenous principle "people as the roots" is operationalized in contemporary local government. The 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy (National Assembly of

Vietnam, 2022) is the canonical Vietnamese legal articulation, institutionalizing popular participation through four operational categories: information that grassroots-government must disclose to the people; matters on which the people are consulted before decision; matters the people decide directly; matters the people supervise. Read through Nguyễn Tài Đông and Hồ (2019), this is the contemporary Vietnamese-Marxist legal-institutional embodiment of *dĩ dân vi bản* — a worked institutional articulation of the indigenous philosophical principle that the legitimacy of the ruler is grounded in the welfare of the people. The Habermasian post-secular framework supplies the comparative-philosophical apparatus (Habermas, 2006): transparency-and-accountability is the dialogical-deliberative condition for cadre-ethics-as-public-philosophy, with translation at the institutional threshold between cadre-as-institutional-actor and citizen-as-deliberative-participant. The Cooper (2012) responsible-administrator framework supplies the role-based ethics articulation: accountability operates across multiple registers — legal, professional, political, ethical, personal — that cannot be reduced to a single mechanism. The PAPI 2023–2024 indicators on Information Disclosure (42.3% in 2023 → 44.7% in 2024) and Accountability to the People (39.5% → 40.9%) (CECODES, RTA & UNDP, 2024; 2025) supply empirical anchor — the indicators show the philosophical claim being concretely tested at the provincial-implementation level. The empirical material illustrates the philosophical claim; the philosophical claim does not depend on the empirical material for its substance.

Pillar 3: Responsibility and devotion in public service execution

Responsibility-and-devotion read philosophically is the virtue of *practical wisdom* (in the Aristotelian-MacIntyrean register; *zhi* / *trí* in the Confucian register) in the cadre's role — the cultivated capacity to discern what the situation requires, with reliable disposition to do it. Snell et al. (2022) on *zhi* as the cultivated capacity for sound moral and practical judgment supplies the Confucian articulation; Cooper (2012) on the responsible administrator's reflective integration of personal, organizational, professional, and democratic-citizenship sources of responsibility supplies the contemporary Anglophone articulation; MacIntyrean virtue ethics on practical wisdom as the master virtue (MacIntyre, 2007) supplies the philosophical framework. HCM's *cần* (diligence) and *chí công vô tư* (impartiality) supply the canonical Vietnamese register: the cadre operates with proactive, serious spirit in performing tasks, complies with procedures and laws, and does not shirk or avoid responsibility (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5). The two-tier local government model's emphasis on the individual responsibility of the local-level head is the contemporary institutional articulation — practical wisdom is required because procedures alone cannot specify what to do in every concrete situation, and the cadre's cultivated judgment is what the institution depends on to operate well at the local level.

Pillar 4: Serving the people and respecting grassroots democracy

The fourth pillar read philosophically is the contemporary Vietnamese articulation of *min ben* at its most direct. *Cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 292) is the philosophical-anthropological claim: the cadre's role is service, not rule; the cadre's legitimacy derives from service to the welfare of the people, not from procedural mandate or institutional authority. Nguyễn Tài Đông and Hồ Mạnh Tùng (2019) supply the indigenous philosophical anchor: *dĩ dân vi bản* operating with three dimensions — the people as the foundation of political stability, the people as the source of the ruler's legitimacy, and the people as active participants in governance through village-level democratic institutions (Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019: 97). The 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy supplies the contemporary legal articulation; PAPI 2023–2024 indicators on People's Participation in Decision-Making

(27.9% in 2023 → 29.4% in 2024) supply empirical anchor and reveal the gap the article diagnoses at §5. Denhardt and Denhardt's "serving, not steering" thesis (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015) is the closest Western-philosophical analogue — but the article reads Denhardt and Denhardt as *resonance with*, not *foundation for*, the indigenous *min ben* tradition. The convergence is philosophical rather than derivative: contemporary Anglophone public-administration progressivism happens to align with Vietnamese-Marxist revolutionary morality on the ontological commitment that public service is service to people; the indigenous *min ben* tradition supplies the philosophical anchor for that commitment on the Vietnamese-philosophical side; the New Public Service framework supplies the contemporary Anglophone-public-administration articulation. The two registers operate as productive complementarities rather than as competing frames, and the article's contribution at this pillar is to articulate the convergence philosophically rather than to derive one from the other.

The four pillars together articulate a coherent virtue-ethical political-philosophical taxonomy. The reconciliation with the five standards holds at the philosophical level: integrity (Pillar 1) corresponds to the second standard (*cần kiệm liêm chính chí công vô tư*) and integrates the loyalty standard's commitment to the goal of serving the people; transparency-and-accountability (Pillar 2) is the contemporary articulation of *min ben* not separately enumerated in the five-standards tradition; responsibility-and-devotion (Pillar 3) corresponds to the fifth standard (responsibility, humility, adaptation); serving-the-people (Pillar 4) corresponds to the loyalty standard's "devoted service to the people" component and integrates the discipline-and-power-control standard as the procedural-institutional condition for substantive service. Exemplarity (third standard) operates as the public visibility of all four pillar-virtues in the cadre's conduct. The four-pillar taxonomy does not displace the five-standards tradition; it articulates the philosophical structure the five-standards tradition has worked in the HCM register since the late 1940s. The contemporary reframing makes the philosophical structure explicit and supplies the comparative apparatus — MacIntyrean virtue ethics, the *junzi* tradition, *min ben* — within which it is intelligible as a contribution to the political philosophy of governance.

5. Current state and limitations: a MacIntyrean institution/practice reading

The contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics literature articulates a multifaceted picture: positive movement on multiple PAPI indicators and the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy as institutional achievement, alongside structural limitations and four causes of the limitations. The reframing reads the whole diagnostic apparatus through the MacIntyrean *practice / institution* distinction (Sinnicks, 2014; MacIntyre, 2007). Virtues are cultivated through participation in the practice of public service, but practices are housed in institutions whose external goods (compensation, status, control) can corrupt the virtues internal to the practice if the institution fails to safeguard them. The five limitations and four causes the existing literature identifies map intelligibly onto this framework, and the diagnostic gains philosophical articulation it currently lacks.

5.1 The MacIntyrean institution/practice distinction

A *practice*, in MacIntyre's articulation, is "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity" (MacIntyre, 2007: 187). *Institutions* are the social-organizational forms that sustain practices but necessarily traffic in external goods — money, power, status. Practices and institutions are distinct but inseparable: institutions are required for practices to persist over time, but institutions also pose the constant risk of corrupting the practices they were established to sustain (Sinnicks, 2014; MacIntyre, 2007). For the local-level cadre case,

the practice is grassroots-government public service — the cooperative human activity through which the *cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* relation is realized. The internal goods are the welfare of those served, the integrity of the cadre-people trust relation, the cultivated practical wisdom the local-government administrator brings to bear on situations standardized procedures cannot fully anticipate, and the cultivation of the cadre's own moral character through participation in the practice well. The external goods are salary, position, performance evaluation, institutional reward and discipline. The virtues required to participate in the practice well are exactly the four pillars articulated at §4; the institutional risks the practice faces are exactly the limitations and causes the existing literature diagnoses.

5.2 Achievements as institutional safeguards working

The positive PAPI movement across the six ethics-related indicators between 2023 and 2024 — Information Disclosure (42.3% → 44.7%); Accountability to the People (39.5% → 40.9%); Corruption Control in Public Services (48.8% → 50.1%); Access to Administrative Services (53.2% → 55.0%); People's Participation in Decision-Making (27.9% → 29.4%); General Perception of Cadre Ethics at Local Level (41.6% → 43.8%) (CECODES, RTA & UNDP, 2024; 2025) — together with the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy, Resolution 04-NQ/TW's *tự diễn biến / tự chuyển hoá* framework, Conclusion 21-KL/TW's intensification of Party-building-and-rectification, the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law's institutional architecture, and Decree 334/2025/ND-CP's transformation of ethical requirements into specific position-criteria — read together as the contemporary institutional safeguards Vietnam has constructed to protect the virtue-ethical practice of cadre service. The PAPI table is the article's empirical strong suit and is preserved in substance. The philosophical reading frames it: the data shows the philosophical claim being concretely tested at the provincial-implementation level, with most indicators trending positive and the Corruption Control indicator moving above the symbolically important 50% threshold. The institutional safeguards are working in the MacIntyrean sense — they are sustaining the practice and protecting it against external-goods colonization. The achievements section's philosophical articulation is that Vietnam's contemporary institutional architecture is intelligible as virtue-ethical safeguards rather than as compliance-management alone. The post-2003 framework, the post-2016 Resolution-04-NQ/TW intensification, the 2022 Law on Grassroots Democracy, and Decree 334/2025/ND-CP are not unreflective compliance instruments; they are the contemporary Vietnamese-Marxist institutional articulation of safeguards for the virtue-ethical practice of cadre service.

5.3 Limitations as institutional failures of practice-protection

The five limitations the existing literature identifies map intelligibly onto MacIntyrean institutional risk-vectors. *Degeneration in ethics and political thought* — Resolution 04-NQ/TW's eight degenerations and the *tự diễn biến / tự chuyển hoá* framework (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016) — is the systemic failure of cadre-virtue cultivation under conditions where institutional pressures (career advancement; group-interest networks; rent-seeking opportunities) outweigh the practice-internal goods that virtue cultivation depends on. The Central Secretariat's Decision 99-QD/TW on strengthening the supervisory role of the people and social organizations, while well-articulated at the institutional level, has been implemented unevenly at the provincial-implementation level — leading to documented cases of abuse of power and improper appointment of relatives that the existing literature names as causes of public discontent. *Lack of transparency* — particularly in sensitive fields such as land management, basic construction investment, and public-resource allocation (CECODES, RTA & UNDP, 2024) — is the institutional failure to safeguard the *min-*

ben-procedural condition for the cadre-people relation. Where information disclosure has not become a self-conscious ethical standard but remains formal or limited by "internal management" thinking, the institutional architecture of the 2022 Law is in place but its conditions for cultivating the practice-internal virtue of transparency have not been institutionally protected. *Limitations in accountability* — slow improvement on the PAPI accountability indicator despite the 2022 Law's explicit stipulation of local-government responsibility for receiving and handling reflections and suggestions — is the institutional failure to safeguard the dialogical-deliberative threshold (the Habermasian translation point) at which cadre and citizen meet (Habermas, 2006). *Limitations in integrity* — the persistent public perception of petty corruption, group interests, and unfairness in some local-level management activities despite the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law's relatively complete legal framework — is the institutional failure to protect *liêm* from external-goods pressures (compensation, rent-seeking, group interests). *Limitations in serving the people* — the lowest-ranking PAPI indicator on People's Participation in Decision-Making, reflecting a "formal democracy" situation in which listening to and respecting people's opinions has not become a regular ethical-behavioural standard for local-level cadres — is the institutional failure to safeguard the cadre-as-servant ontology HCM's *cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* articulates (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 292). In each case, the limitation is intelligible *both* as procedural failure (institutional-side) *and* as virtue-ethical failure (practice-side). The MacIntyrean reading holds both as a *single* analytical phenomenon: the institutional failures and the virtue-ethical failures are two aspects of the same institutional-corruption-of-practice dynamic Sinnicks theorizes (Sinnicks, 2014). The diagnostic implication is that the standards system requires *not* further codification but *deeper cultivation* — institutional reforms that protect the conditions for practice-virtue formation rather than reforms that further specify procedural-compliance criteria.

5.4 Causes as institutional-conditions diagnosis

The four causes the existing literature identifies are the four canonical MacIntyrean institutional risk-vectors, named in Vietnamese-Marxist register. *Institutional design and legal enforcement gaps* — the gap between strong decentralization to local government and not-yet-commensurate accountability mechanisms — is the institutional failure to provide the procedural-compliance scaffolding the virtue-ethical practice needs to flourish. Where ethical standards are "formalized legally" without becoming behavioural principles regularly practiced, the institution has supplied legal form without the institutional support cultivation requires. *Public service culture and traditional administrative habits* — command-style management thinking; the "ask-give" culture; the mentality of avoiding accountability; fear of confrontation in resolving public affairs — is the institution's culture corrupting the virtues internal to the practice. The cultural-social barrier the existing literature identifies is, in MacIntyrean terms, the institution's external-goods orientation displacing the practice's internal-goods orientation through the daily texture of administrative work. *Conditions, capacity, and pressures* — the local level bears the greatest pressure from multi-field management requirements while working conditions, income, and training opportunities are limited; work overload combined with uneven capacity leads to a coping mentality and lack of initiative — is the institution's failure to provide the material and developmental conditions cadres need to cultivate the practice-virtues. The economic-social interest pressures and local interest relationships further increase the risk of ethical degeneration; under MacIntyrean analysis, this is the structural condition under which external goods most reliably overwhelm internal goods. *Low level of ethical-standard internalization* — ethical standards approached as regulations and mandatory rules rather than as values voluntarily accepted and practiced; public-service ethics education biased toward propaganda rather than closely attached to practical situations and individual responsibility — is the diagnostic point at which the

practice/institution failure is sharpest. As the existing literature names the failure: "ethics on paper" while actual public service behaviour is dominated by personal interests and environmental pressures. The MacIntyrean reading names the dynamic precisely: the standards are external-goods rules rather than internal-goods virtues; cultivation of the latter requires institutional reforms that protect the conditions for practice-virtue formation.

The diagnostic concludes with a philosophical-policy implication. The contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics architecture has the institutional safeguards in place — the post-2016 CPV anti-degeneration framework, the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law, the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy, Decree 334/2025/ND-CP — but the limitations diagnosed here are not failures of further codification waiting for additional legal-regulatory specification. They are institutional failures of practice-protection waiting for cultivation. The MacIntyrean reading delivers a substantive policy claim: the next generation of cadre-ethics policy reform should orient toward the conditions under which practice-internal virtues can be cultivated — through public-service ethics education that engages practical situations rather than propagandistic exhortation, through institutional cultures that reward virtue-cultivation rather than external-goods accumulation, through training and capacity-development that supports rather than substitutes for cultivated judgment, and through accountability mechanisms that operate at the dialogical-deliberative threshold rather than at the procedural-compliance threshold alone. The Vietnamese architecture has the institutional-procedural side; the philosophical reading clarifies what the practice-side now requires.

6. Vietnamese context and contemporary stakes

The article's universal philosophical claim — the four-pillar standards system as a virtue-ethical political-philosophical taxonomy — must be anchored in the Vietnamese particularity. The contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics architecture is a distinctive philosophical-political configuration. It is neither a deficient instance of Western liberal-procedural public administration nor a residual instance of orthodox Marxist-Leninist cadre training. It is a worked Vietnamese-philosophical answer to a universal philosophical question — what virtues does public service require? — under particular philosophical-political conditions: the post-Đổi Mới Vietnamese-Marxist polity that has retained substantive Confucian moral inheritance, with HCM's *đạo đức cách mạng* as the philosophical mechanism by which the Confucian-Marxist synthesis holds.

6.1 The post-Đổi Mới framework read philosophically

Read together, the contemporary Vietnamese documentary-policy architecture articulates a substantive political-philosophical framework. Decree 334/2025/ND-CP establishes an *organic relationship* between ethical qualities, professional capacity, and public responsibility of public servants — a formulation that institutionalizes at the legal-regulatory level the integration of *đức* (moral character) and *tài* (capacity) HCM's *Toàn tập* Vol. 5 articulates philosophically (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 356). The 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy institutionalizes popular participation through four operational categories that articulate the contemporary Vietnamese-Marxist legal-institutional embodiment of *dĩ dân vi bản* (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2022; Nguyễn Tài Đông & Hồ, 2019). The 2018 Anti-Corruption Law (National Assembly of Vietnam, 2018) and the post-2016 Resolution 04-NQ/TW *tự diễn biến / tự chuyển hoá* framework (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016), intensified by Conclusion 21-KL/TW (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021), articulate the contemporary CPV theoretical articulation of cadre-ethics-rectification within an integrated Party-state framework. The 13th Party Congress documents extend the framework through the 2026–2030 period and supply the most directly philosophical formulation: morality as the spiritual foundation of the regime

(Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Read philosophically, this is not a policy slogan but a substantive political-philosophical claim — the regime's legitimacy is grounded in the moral character of its cadres, not in procedural mechanism alone. Hoàng Chí Bảo's theoretical articulation of *phát triển xã hội bền vững* (sustainable social development) in the Đổi Mới register engages the same territory at the Vietnamese-internal theoretical level (Hoàng Chí Bảo, 2010). The architecture is not a mechanical accumulation of policy instruments but the contemporary Vietnamese-Marxist institutional articulation of a substantive political-philosophical framework.

6.2 HCM's trung / hiếu reframing as textual hinge

This is the section's philosophical pivot. HCM's "translation" of Marxism into Confucian moral idiom — *trung* (loyalty) reframed as loyalty to the nation; *hiếu* (filial piety) reframed as service to the people; *cần kiệm liêm chính chí công vô tư* retained almost wholesale — is the philosophical mechanism by which contemporary Vietnamese cadre ethics holds Confucian *junzi* and Marxist class-conscious vanguard together. HCM articulates the reframing directly: "In the past, morality meant loyalty to the king and filial piety to one's parents. Today, morality means loyalty to the nation and filial piety to the people" (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 4: 170). The reframing is not surface-level rebranding. The Confucian moral grammar is preserved — *trung* and *hiếu* remain the cardinal virtues of relational ethical life — and their referents are redirected from feudal-monarchical service toward revolutionary-national and populace-serving contexts. The cadre's authority operates through cultivated virtue manifested in conduct ("a living example is worth more than a hundred propaganda speeches" — Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 284); the integration of moral character (*đức*) and capacity (*tài*) is the structure of cadre formation ("talent without virtue is useless, virtue without talent makes work difficult" — Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 356); the cadre's role is service rather than rule ("cadres are servants of the people, not revolutionary officials" — Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 292). The three load-bearing HCM passages are exactly the textual moments at which the reframing is performed; the philosophical reading names what HCM is doing — articulating, at the level of Vietnamese-political-philosophical thought, the synthesis the four-pillar standards system articulates at the applied level.

6.3 Productive complementarity, not opposition

The Vietnamese-Marxist policy framework — CPV documents from Resolution 04-NQ/TW through Conclusion 21-KL/TW and the 13th Party Congress; the 2018 Anti-Corruption Law; the 2022 Law on Grassroots Democracy; Decree 334/2025/ND-CP; Hoàng Chí Bảo's Đổi-Mới sustainable-development theory — and the comparative virtue-ethics framework — MacIntyre and Sinnicks; Snell et al. on *junzi* leadership ethics; Sungmoon Kim on Confucian public reason; Habermas on post-secular dialogical translation — are not in opposition. The contemporary Vietnamese policy turn — the 13th Congress's morality-as-spiritual-foundation formulation; Decree 334/2025/ND-CP's organic relationship between ethical qualities, professional capacity, and public responsibility — is itself the Vietnamese-internal philosophical move. The article's institutional voice (Vietnamese-Party-friendly cadre-ethics scholarship anchored in CPV documents and HCM thought) and its philosophical voice (comparative political philosophy of governance, MacIntyrean virtue ethics, Confucian-Marxist synthesis at the applied level) operate in productive tension throughout — neither voice subsumed, neither bracketed. The methodological precedent for this productive-complementarity move runs through the cohort: Cao Thu Hang's 2020 *EJST* contribution on corruption and the building of a Developmental Government articulated the move on the corruption-and-virtue axis, with the explicit claim that "Marxism and Confucianism have converged in a number of respects" in contemporary Vietnam (Cao, 2020: 67). The Vietnamese productive-complementarity

model — Vietnamese-Marxist polity and Confucian-virtue-ethical inheritance operating as productive partners rather than as competitors — adds something distinctive to international political-philosophy-of-governance scholarship that has rarely engaged Southeast Asian Marxist-Confucian polities as live philosophical interlocutors. A register caution belongs here. The article does not slip into celebratory tone toward current Vietnamese policy; it engages the post-Đổi Mới framework philosophically as a worked Vietnamese answer to a universal philosophical question, not as the realization of an inevitable progress narrative. Nor does the article treat the post-Đổi Mới framework as a deficient approximation to a Western liberal model. The Vietnamese framework is a Vietnamese philosophical-political answer to the universal question, with its own contributions to comparative philosophy of governance.

6.4 A brief forward-looking subsection: cadre ethics in the digital-governance frontier

The §3 fourth-characteristic gesture at digital transformation reactivates here. Contemporary cadre ethics is inseparable from digital-governance ethics — e-government portals, social-media exposure, AI-assisted administrative decision-making, data-driven PAPI replication, digital civic-feedback aggregation. Dennis and Ziliotti (2023) supply the philosophical apparatus for engaging digital-cadre-ethics in the *junzi*-virtue register the article's reframing operates within: the dominant liberal-individual-autonomy register of mainstream digital-ethics scholarship is insufficient for contemporary digital wellbeing, which requires philosophical resources for cultivated relational engagement, not merely protected individual autonomy (Dennis & Ziliotti, 2023). *Ren* (humaneness) demands attention to how digital practices affect those one is in relation to; *li* (ritual propriety) supplies the contextual norms governing digital interactions in different relational contexts; *yi* (righteousness) supplies the disposition to act well when digital affordances enable behaviour the relational fabric would otherwise discourage; *zhi* (practical wisdom) supplies cultivated judgment for novel digital situations; *xin* (trustworthiness) is the digital-relational virtue on which sustained digital community depends. The PAPI digital-platform itself is intelligible in this register — as a *liang zhi* (innate moral knowledge) infrastructure for grassroots accountability that operates within the *xin* virtue-register the cadre-people trust relation depends on. Tran et al. (2025) supply the Vietnamese-context articulation at the most contemporary frontier: AI-assisted administrative decision-making, AI-driven anti-corruption flag indicators, AI-mediated public-communication, and AI-supported cadre evaluation are all live policy frontiers within the next decade, and the cadre-ethics dimension of AI ethics in Vietnam intersects substantively with the article's standards system (Tran et al., 2025). The integrity pillar (Pillar 1) operates in a context where AI-system design, AI-system oversight, and the cadre's cultivated capacity to engage AI-assistance well rather than as an automation that displaces practical judgment become live integrity-questions. The transparency-and-accountability pillar (Pillar 2) operates in a context where AI-mediated information-disclosure systems and AI-supported popular-feedback aggregation become live institutional possibilities. The forward-looking subsection is brief but pointed: it converts the article's gesture at digital transformation into substantive philosophical engagement with the live policy frontier. The full development belongs to subsequent work; what the article registers here is that the four-pillar standards architecture is robustly extensible into the digital-governance domain that Vietnamese local-government practice now and increasingly inhabits.

7. Conclusion: the applied-level companion to the Confucian-Marxist synthesis

The argument can be drawn to a close in three philosophical implications and a brief gesture toward future research.

The first is **descriptive-philosophical**. The four-pillar standards system articulates a coherent virtue-ethical political-philosophical taxonomy: integrity (Pillar 1) as the core *liêm* virtue cultivated through the practice of public service well; transparency-and-accountability (Pillar 2) as the procedural-deliberative articulation of *min ben*; responsibility-and-devotion (Pillar 3) as the practical-wisdom virtue of the cadre's role; serving-the-people-and-grassroots-democracy (Pillar 4) as the contemporary articulation of *cán bộ là đầy tớ của nhân dân* (Hồ Chí Minh, 2011, Vol. 5: 292). The five canonical standards (loyalty, integrity, exemplarity, discipline, responsibility-and-innovation) are the HCM-register operationalizations of the four pillars, with loyalty and exemplarity folding into the four-pillar architecture as the *modes* in which the pillar-virtues are concretely cultivated. The reconciliation move at §4 — read the four pillars as philosophically primary, the five standards as their HCM-register operationalizations — is the article's central structural-analytical contribution and the one that makes the philosophical architecture legible across the contemporary Vietnamese cadre-ethics literature.

The second is **evaluative-philosophical**. The Vietnamese case demonstrates that the universal philosophical question of what virtues public service requires can be answered productively *within* a Marxist-Leninist polity that has retained substantive Confucian moral inheritance, with productive complementarity — rather than opposition — between Vietnamese-Marxist scholarship and comparative virtue-ethics resources as the article's distinctive contribution. The MacIntyrean institution/practice distinction is the analytical engine; the *junzi* tradition supplies the background grammar; *min ben* supplies the central indigenous principle; HCM's *trung / hiếu* reframing supplies the philosophical mechanism by which the synthesis holds. The diagnostic at §5 delivers a substantive policy claim: contemporary cadre-ethics policy reform should orient toward institutional reforms that protect the conditions for practice-virtue formation rather than toward further codification of compliance criteria. The 2018 Anti-Corruption Law, the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy, Decree 334/2025/ND-CP, and the post-2016 CPV anti-degeneration framework supply the institutional architecture; the philosophical reading clarifies what the practice-side of the architecture now requires.

The third is the **comparative-philosophical contribution**. This article articulates at the applied level what others articulate at the philosophical level. We attempt to show what the synthesis demands of contemporary local-level cadres at the applied level: a four-pillar architecture of cultivated virtues; institutional safeguards designed to protect the practice rather than colonize it for external goods; cadre-virtue cultivation that engages digital-governance and AI-ethics frontiers as continuations of the four-pillar architecture rather than as separate analytical domains. So there is a single research trajectory: Vietnamese cadre ethics as a worked instance of comparative political philosophy of governance, with the Vietnamese productive-complementarity model — Marxist-Leninist polity and Confucian-virtue-ethical inheritance operating as productive partners — as the distinctive Vietnamese contribution. Cao Thu Hang's 2020 *EJST* piece supplied the methodological precedent at the corruption-and-virtue axis (Cao, 2020); the cohort's broader research programme extends the move across multiple domains. Read together, the articles articulate what international political-philosophy-of-governance scholarship has rarely had the resources to articulate — a Southeast Asian Marxist-Confucian polity engaged as a live philosophical interlocutor on the universal question of what virtues public service requires.

Future research and stakes can be named briefly. The two-tier local government reorganization in progress will continue to test the four-pillar architecture at the institutional-implementation level over the 2026–2030 period; empirical-philosophical work on how the four pillars are mobilized in concrete local-government practice would extend the analysis beyond the policy-document and PAPI-indicator levels engaged here. The digital-governance-ethics dimension that encompasses cadre ethics under

conditions of AI-assisted administrative decision-making, AI-mediated transparency-and-accountability, and digital civic-feedback aggregation, is the next decade's live question for Vietnamese governance ethics, with Dennis and Ziliotti (2023) and Tran et al. (2025) supplying the philosophical and Vietnamese-context anchors respectively. Comparative philosophical work with other East and Southeast Asian Marxist or post-Marxist polities (China, Laos, Cuba) would test the productive-complementarity model in adjacent contexts and extend the existing methodological move beyond the Vietnamese case. The broader question, namely whether the Vietnamese productive-complementarity model can contribute to comparative political philosophy of governance alongside the Habermasian post-secular framework and Sungmoon Kim's *Public Reason Confucianism*, is the philosophical horizon the article opens. The Vietnamese case is at once an instance of a universal philosophical question and a particular philosophical answer with its own contributions to the comparative discussion; that double character is the article's distinctive contribution.

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Dr. Huong Thi Thu Nguyen, PhD
Faculty of Philosophy and Management
University of Social Sciences and Humanities
Vietnam National University Hanoi
No. 336 Nguyen Trai Street, Thanh Xuan Ward, Hanoi,
Vietnam
huongvnu1976@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0006-9877-1410

Dr. Thuy Thi Pham, PhD
Faculty of Political Theory and Law
Electric Power University
No. 235 Hoang Quoc Viet Street, Nghia Do Ward, Hanoi,
Vietnam
phamthuy88tb@gmail.com
ORCID: 0009-0006-2779-9010