Cội Nguồn: Cultural Resources and Sustenance in Doing Ministry with Immigrants

Research Paper
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Vietnamese history was marked by mass emigration after the fall of Saigon in 1975 when the Communists took control of South Vietnam and the American military withdrew from Vietnam. About two million Vietnamese became refugees between 1975 and 1995. English-speaking journalists used the term "boat people" to describe the first wave of Vietnamese refugees who fled the country due to the oppression by the Communist government after Communist regimes had taken control of the Southern area of Vietnam.[1] Vietnamese immigrant families who resettled in the United States are caught between two cultures and two worlds: East and West, their homeland and the United States. [2] Peter C. Phan calls it the betwixt and between status: to be neither here nor there.[3] In ministering to immigrant families, I witnessed how immigrants are not integrated or accepted by either cultural system, which shakes their self-identity, sense of agency, and belonging. Immigrant parents are concerned that their children might lose the connection to their cultural heritage in a new land and their original identity. Many researchers emphasize how young immigrants suffer discrimination and assimilation that negatively impact their identity formation.[4] Some share that they refuse to speak their native language, while others try to change to American names, dye their hair, and wear makeup to be more American. In the short term, conforming to the dominant culture may enable young people to meet their need to fit in, but it impacts them severely for a long time. I argue that *Cội Nguồn* (the origin, the original starting point) can enrich the Christian identity and sense of belonging. I explore how to use the *Cội Nguồn* concept using culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) to accompany immigrant families in identity formation and to recover from their loss of culture and origin. I argue that *Cội Nguồn* is both a resource to be sustained and a form of cultural wealth and sustenance to enrich and enhance Vietnamese immigrant identity formation. Part I addresses the issue of losing connections to the cultural rootedness caused by immigration, acculturation,

and assimilation. Part II introduces the notion of *Cội Nguồn* and its various dimensions (in the context of the homeland and family). The third part evaluates the relationship of *Cội Nguồn* to identity formation as an integrating process between faith and culture. The final section will offer practical implications in youth ministry with immigrant families.

PART I: THE LOSS OF THE ORIGINAL IDENTITY BY IMMIGRATION AND ASSIMILATION

Immigration and assimilation influence identity formation severely. The issue of losing the connection to their cultural heritage in a new land impacts their identity formation.[5] People undergo the acculturation process only when they must adapt and adjust to a new culture or when a new culture is implemented in their community. Assimilation can be in different degrees of voluntary or forced process. For the individual, acculturation may mean "a process of giving up one's traditional cultural values and behaviors while taking on the values and behaviors of the dominant social structure."[6] Assimilation is a form of acculturation in which "one culture changes significantly more than the other."[7] An identity shift due to acculturation impacts individual and group behaviors, cognition, and personality. Marginalized, separated, and assimilated individuals experience more stress during acculturation than those whose choices and values lead to integration.[8] Some might feel ambivalent, while others may feel alienated. In her dissertation, Nhi Lieu argues that immigrants have been transformed in the aftermath of im/migration and the changes in geographical and cultural contexts. [9]

One of the negative impacts of assimilation is the ambiguity in identity to choose either being Vietnamese or American or being Vietnamese-American. On the one hand, migrants need to preserve their Vietnamese cultural heritage. On the other hand, they must adapt and be resilient to survive in the new land. Some scholars have examined the conflicting processes of

simultaneously unfolding assimilation, cultural preservation, and invention, and gendered and classed constructions of ethnic identity.[10] The process of keeping their Vietnamese tradition and adapting to new cultural norms and behavior in America presents a dilemma similar to DuBois's concept of *double consciousness*, "a sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt, and pity."[11] Immigrants must put forth a great effort to cope with the confusion between uprootedness, abandonment, the longing for a home, and moving forward to a new life. For Asian immigrants, emerging into the White dominant culture can be a danger of losing their connection to their cultural and traditional heritage.

Acculturation to meet the White culture's standard harms immigrants, as Morrison points out, "As though our lives have no meaning and no depth without White gaze.[12] The reality is that Vietnamese parents struggle to sustain and promote traditional values and practices. At the same time, children face obstacles as immigrant children regarding their cultural identity and work to define who they are. Their original identity is lost due to disconnection from their roots and conforming to the dominant culture.

Living far from one's homeland might lead to losing one's cultural identity, especially for young people who have to negotiate between two cultures to define their identity. Peter C. Phan described the youth as dwelling "at the margins of two cultures, attracted to both but repelled by both, not sufficiently American for the one and not sufficiently Vietnamese for the other."[13] Vietnamese American youth face obstacles in identity formation. Some never become sufficiently confident to develop high self-esteem because their parents criticize them at home for not honoring the Vietnamese "cultural and moral code."[14] Peer pressure to be like their American friends and to feel they belong may force them to merge fully into American culture

and lose their roots. It is inevitable for Vietnamese youth to feel ambivalent and unstable. The theme of conflict and the "either-or" choice seems to put significant pressure on Vietnamese adolescents. These adolescents need guidance and support to "develop a well-differentiated and clearly defined sense of self" or a separate identity, borrowing Kegan's words.[15] A crucial task is supporting Vietnamese immigrants in maintaining and sustaining a solid cultural heritage while adapting to Western culture. They can rely on core cultural values to maintain their identity, such as their views of family and national belongings. The next part introduces the concept of *Cội Nguồn* and its values as a source of identity.

PART II: *CỘI NGUỒN* IN THE SOCIAL-CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE (1434)

"We drink from our wells" is a well-known phrase from Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of liberation theology. Gutierrez calls on people to embrace a new way of living the Christian life to live as a Latin American with their unique experience as a people. Reflecting on the word "well" in the context of Vietnamese culture as a source that forms Vietnamese ways of thinking and acting, I propose that the concept *of Cội Nguồn* can serve as a response to the loss of connection to the rootedness in Vietnamese immigrant communities in the diaspora. *Cội Nguồn* is the sense of collective and communal belonging of Vietnamese culture, which means "the origin, the original starting point, or source." The word *Cội* itself means "long-lasting," and *Nguồn* means "a beginning" or "source." Thus, we can understand *Cội Nguồn* as the primary source of beginning and ending. It is the cradle from which all life comes out and returns, where everything crystallizes and converges. If anything becomes separated from the *Cội Nguồn,* it will inevitably fade away and turn to nothingness, like a stream cut off from the water's source. The following will review the Vietnamese concept of *Cội Nguồn* in the context of the homeland and

the families.

1. ***Cội Nguồn* in terms of the homeland:**

In the context of the nation, the meaning of *Cội Nguồn* is based on the tradition of remembering those who have contributed to the land and the national identity. *Cội Nguồn* relates to the Vietnamese myth of origin in the process of birth and growth. The origin of the Vietnamese people dates around 1000 to 200 BCE. Vietnamese oral traditions hold that *Bac Bo* was the nucleus of an indigenously developed Vietnamese civilization with powerful kingdoms ruling over vast populations before the arrival of the Chinese.[16] Vietnamese tradition believes the first polity belonged to King An Duong Vuong, who named his country Au Lac. Co Loa was the country's first capital in The Red River Delta and adjacent to the *Thanh Hoa* province in Northern Vietnam. This kingdom existed from the middle of the third century BC to AD 43. This was also when the Chinese Han Emperor put down the revolt of the indigenous Trung sisters.[17] This legend is mentioned in the creation myth of the Vietnamese People called "One Hundred Eggs."[18] According to the legend, all Vietnamese people can trace their ancestry to the marriage of the dragon father Lac Long Quan and the immortal mother Au Co.[19] This myth of origin maintains a significant role in the culture of ancient Viet Nam and modern-day Vietnamese societies as a matter of belief, faith, culture, and tradition. The collective death anniversary of the Hung Kings is one of the most significant Vietnamese national ritual celebrations, demonstrating how *Cội Nguồn* is grounded in the land and the country's origin as a social tie for individuals and communities.

A long-suffering journey is written in Vietnamese national history in building the country of our ancestors. Coi Nguon is highly connected to ancestral stories and spirits. The existence of Vietnamese people is grounded on the level of the people that has been passed down through

generations. *Cội Nguồn* calls forth a heartfelt sense of the sacred when they reflect on their homeland. *Coi Nguon* is a symbol of rootedness and stability of the Vietnamese identity, anchored in the motherland, the people, and the families.

The concept of *Cội Nguồn* has shifted for the Vietnamese people in the diaspora. As the boat people, they transform the idea of Cội Nguồn, which shows their flexibility and skills for changing and adapting. They carried a motto when they left Vietnam: "*Chung toi di mang theo Que Huong"* (meaning: We bring *Que Huong* when we go). *Cội Nguồn* is anchored in the homeland, the Vietnamese people, and their families. *Cội Nguồn* is a symbol of rootedness and stability that Vietnamese people embrace to know who they are. Vietnamese people in the diaspora shift their source of rootedness **using the second cultural concept,** *Que Huong*. *Que Huong* reflects the same meaning as *Coi Nguon* regarding the homeland for *those who live far from the country or their native place*. *Que Huong* means a native land or the origin place where a person was born, which represents a feeling of being fundamentally at home. The *Que Huong* is understood to shape its inhabitants, molding their identity, livelihood, and characters such that it might be understood as a second womb, *the womb of the community*. *Que Huong* is a sacred place to remember and return to when possible. For Vietnamese people, *Que Huong* is their blood. The life of the people is inseparable from the land. The land is their blood. If someone forgets *Que Huong*, they do not have a purpose or a meaningful life. Therefore, Vietnamese people living overseas must compulsively return to *Que Huong* physically and spiritually. Both *Cội Nguồn* and *Que Huong* are sources to support the Vietnamese people to recover from their loss of origin. It is an invisible but strong bond that calls those in the diaspora to return physically or imaginably through their memory. Exploring and interpreting these sources can

change their personal and communal understanding. They help them understand more about their ancestors and the valuable traditions in their motherland.

2. *Cội Nguồn* in Terms of the Family

In the context of Vietnamese families, Cội *Nguồn* is the cultural heritage of the ancestors, who have given us life and have paved the way for the next generations. *Cội Nguồn* is connected to the ancestral cult. The practice of ancestor veneration unites family members and promotes solidarity in society. The culture emphasizes multi-generational extended families originating in the same *Cội Nguồn*. By honoring ancestors, people strengthen their collective sense of belonging. The Vietnamese believe their ancestors still have a social role in the family, expressed in many rituals such as New Year celebrations, weddings, and funerals. By performing these practices, people say a human need for belonging, meaning, and purpose. Ancestor veneration fulfills the human condition to know *Cội Nguồn*, where one came from, and to remember those who gave us life and home. Venerating ancestors is vital in strengthening the family lineage and forming a group and individual identity. Vietnamese people consider ancestor veneration as a unifying aspect of the culture, connecting all members through ritual and as a manifestation of *Cội Nguồn.*

Some characteristics of the traditional family are collective community, hierarchy, and patrilineal family.[20] From a purely socio-cultural dimension, it is worth noting that pre-Confucian Vietnamese society was indigenous, primarily observing animism. During the early monarchy eras (third millennium BCE), indigenous animism developed into the cult of the dead and the imperial cult to honor and revere dead ancestors, heroes, leaders, kings, and emperors. Some scholars attribute the ancestor cult's origin to the imperial cult's development during the

Hồng Bàng dynasty. Family and lineage have had an important place in Vietnamese traditions for three millennia to remind them of their *Cội Nguồn.*

For many Vietnamese in the diaspora following 1975, *Cội Nguồn* continues to have a powerful symbolic resonance as they attempt to make sense of their historical losses and struggles abroad. However, it becomes more grounded in the context of families than the homeland. After the Vietnam War 1975, many Vietnamese left Vietnam and never returned. Vietnamese people in the diaspora who claimed *mấ*t *nước* (meaning they lost their country, *the Republic of Vietnam)* after the fall of Saigon on April 30, 1975, might risk their cultural source of *Cội Nguồn*. The tension and division have continued to impact the Vietnamese people in the diaspora who claim *Cội Nguồn* as their rootedness. These people see *Cội Nguồn* as identical to the political regime, and they cannot compromise by embracing *Cội Nguồn* with communist ideology. This tension leads people to anchor their roots more in the family context. This change has been taking place in the concept of *Cội Nguồn* among the Vietnamese in the diaspora, especially for younger generations, when their primary cultural source now is not the homeland but their families. *Gia Dinh* (which means family) plays the role of *Cội Nguồn* for Vietnamese immigrant families. As mentioned above, the myth of origin demonstrates why Vietnamese culture is a family orientation culture. I believe the god reflected in Vietnamese mythology is an anthropomorphic god symbolizing the faces of mothers and fathers. Thus, the theological understanding of *Coi Nguon* is reflected in the incarnational mystery in the family, the place dearest to the Vietnamese people.

PART III: THE RELATIONSHIP OF *CỘI NGUỒN* TO IDENTITY

It is essential to tap into *Cội Nguồn* and use it as a source to negotiate between the "old" and the "new" by finding connections to rootedness and reinforcing the cultural identity of the

immigrant families grounded in their intergenerational ancestral legacy. Cultural or ethnic identity plays a crucial role in identity formation, and I argue that *Cội Nguồn is* a form of cultural wealth and sustenance to redefine and rebuild identity.

Cultural Identity (CI): Being and Becoming a Vietnamese American Grounded in *Cội Nguồn*

Ethnic identity and CI are a part of a person's or group's identity and self-perception in the broader context of their nationality or ethnicity.[21] Mary C. Waters defines identity in terms of how people are recognized and come into the place of recognition that others give them. A strong relationship exists between being a first-generation immigrant and choosing to identify based on national origin.[22] Seyla Benhabib has suggested that first-generation people usually want to know and identify with some strands of a collective narrative through which the past is accounted for and the future is anticipated.[23] Cultural Identity as experiential complements the idea of living with and through differences. Our identities are ways of making sense of our experiences.[24] According to scholars such as Jean S. Phinney, the three main components of ethnic identity are affection, cognition, and behaviors. [25]

Cội Nguồn becomes a motivation to accompany immigrants through the ongoing process of building their CI without romanticizing the past but moving forward to reclaim and rebuild their tradition. This resonates with Stuart Hall's definition of identity as "a narrative" that cultures construct concerning who they are and where they came from.[26] To prevent them from forgetting or losing their roots, they are called to strengthen their CI grounded in *Cội Nguồn* and simultaneously enrich *Cội Nguồn* in their present circumstances and move forward to the future. Stuart Hall defines cultural identity as a matter of 'becoming' and of 'being.' It belongs to the end as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history,

and culture. CI has a history. But, like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power.[27]

CI is also a generic term to refer to individuals' sense of belonging to cultural groups. Ting-Toomey and Chung, in their Identity Negotiation Theory, explore the process of acquiring an ideal identity when people achieve the secure feeling of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued.[28] Similarly, Sussman and Yinger argue that CI is the communal identity that is obtained from the awareness of individuals of their in-group memberships.[29] Indeed, individuals find their existence embedded within a more significant presence in the collectivity of one's group. CI emerges from a given heritage when a person exists in this world. In the context of Vietnamese culture, CI is most reflected through *Cội Nguồn,* when people embrace their origin story within a bigger story of the group to which they belong.

Vietnamese immigrant CI refers to the practical attachment of immigrant individuals to their Vietnamese cultures. Vietnamese immigrants also form bonds with those who immigrated and resettled in a new land with their cognitive awareness of their in-group memberships. Like the collectiveness reflected in the notion of *Cội Nguồn*, when they left Vietnam, immigrants experienced a cross-cultural transition from a familiar cultural environment to a relatively new one. This change in the cultural environment may trigger the individuals to re-organize their sense of identity.[30] Living in a new cultural environment, they adopt new cultural behaviors or learn new cultural beliefs, allowing them to self-reflect on their "old" cultural practices. This process, therefore, led to the operation of identity reconstruction.[31]

Immigration is often seen as an important event that can shape and reform identity. The first and second Vietnamese immigrant generations strongly sense their ethnicity and CI based

on their homeland but also constantly vacillate between the two cultures. An attempt to cope with the dilemma surfaces when parents or children must choose between parents' culture or children's culture. More importantly, the immigrant youth has intensely experienced the tension between the two worlds. We need to embrace *Cội Nguồn* as a source to anchor their identity in the wisdom of their Vietnamese culture and traditions wisely to maintain a balance and harmony with the American culture in their acculturation process.

2. Religious Identity (RI): Being and Becoming a Vietnamese American Catholic Grounded in *Cội Nguồn*

RI is a specific identity grounded in religion, faith, or belief. It is more about the group identity of members of a religion. "The presence and impact of religion on individuals' lives were undeniable and did not disappear with time."[32] Faith is one of the most critical factors for refugees and immigrants to sustain and hope for a better life despite difficulties.[33] Peter C. Phan explains RI as a source to search for one's identity with "a reference to the transcendent and sacred Reality or God."[34] RI is a dynamic process with many stages: adaptation, synthesis, and integration. RI is both personal and social. Phan echoes Erik Erikson to connect RI with God as the ultimate guarantor of human identity. Moreover, RI serves as a lens people use to see the world, interpret their experiences, make meanings, and form their beliefs and values.[35]

Phan takes a further step to connect RI with religious belonging as two sides of a coin. "The formation of RI is ineluctably connected with belonging to and feeling solidarity with a particular group, be it family, ethnicity, race, gender, class, profession, or religion."[36] Religious belonging is beyond membership. It is "a profound sense of commitment and vocation" to a religious institution.[37] Religious belonging is more crucial to people when it enables them to make meanings and commitments that help them find a sense of fulfillment, i.e., vocation.

RI's formation has to go hand in hand with CI. When the Church changed its approaches from exclusion to inculturation to tap into the cultural source, such as Cội *Nguồn*, Vietnamese Catholics experienced the dual identity of being Vietnamese yet remaining Catholic. Cội *Nguồn* and its value offer Vietnamese the collective perspective to sharpen their RI by reading their life's history with a cultural and theological lens. Identity formation following Cội *Nguồn* will connect faith with culture, meaning, and being in human experiences along God's salvation history. This lens enables believers to discover and integrate their identities and lives holistically and authentically.

RI's formation is not a static or fixed entity but a dynamic and constantly evolving personal and social reality. Peter Phan emphasizes the concept of a three-fold meaning: individual meanings, shared meanings with others, and the perceptions that others have of themselves.[38] CI is mixed with, or at least linked closely to, RI.[39] Religious practices, primarily through churches, pagodas, and temples, offer vibrant communities where the Vietnamese can gather to celebrate religious and cultural festivals and rituals. In doing so, they adapt better to new countries and maintain their ethnic and national identity.[40] Integrating cultural wealth and resources[41] and religious ressourcement enrich Vietnamese American Catholics. Through the lens of faith, Vatican II emphasized the role of culture in RI. Authentic identity is rooted in the cultural and religious background as a stable aspect of Vietnamese immigrants' self-perception, communal values, and ethical commitments to the common good. In the Roman Catholic Church context, Phan offers five pieces of advice for Catholic youth, especially college students searching and shaping their RI to fulfill their spiritual and religious quest for diversity and pluralism. (1) RI is both a gift and a task; (2) Since the religious quest is a communal journey, not an isolated one, they first need to anchor their RI in their faith tradition and follow its moral

teaching; (3) As a Catholic, they belong to the Church that calls for constant conversion and holiness, and young people can contribute to that by their presence and support; (4) A danger exists for young people who may risk their identity formation by becoming a religious butterfly moving from one denomination or religion to another. It is better to deepen their faith in one tradition in participation and practices before exploring other religions and traditions; (5) Finally, RI is a lifelong process to enrich young people's lives through beliefs, rituals, prayers, and ethical practices. God's graces and others' support and companionship will make that journey fruitful.[42] Following Cội *Nguồn*, the ongoing process of cultural and religious identity formation can enhance immigrants' sense of belonging to religious and cultural traditions.

Based on the concept of Cội *Nguồn,* Vietnamese immigrants shape their cultural and religious identity with the mentality that "I am beyond myself," the collective being. Cultural understanding of Cội *Nguồn* is a gift from our ancestors. However, *Cội Nguồn* is not a rigid object but an ongoing process to which everyone contributes to identity formation as a way to carry on the Vietnamese tradition of Cội *Nguồn—echoing* Phan, who sees RI as a gift from God and as an invitation to make that identity more personal and intimate. Thus, RI embedded in Cội *Nguồn* is both a blessing and a task for individuals and the community. Cội *Nguồn*, as a tradition, is handed on more fully when done among people and the community. "People are the tradition in their persons."[43] *Cội Nguồn* is life-changing when it is not just an object, a tradition, but the people themselves. Boat people who are navigating between the Old and the New enriched *Cội Nguồn* in their own experience as dislocated and uprooted people. They learned to reinforce themselves in *Cội Nguồn*, not solid and stable, but fluid and flexible.

In envisioning ways to accompany immigrant families in faith formation grounded in *Cội Nguồn*, Vietnamese can nurture their younger generations grounded in *Cội Nguồn* as "active

sources or loci of theological insights"[44] to cultivate their sense of self, collective memory, and communal belonging. Everyone has a root, a homeland to which they can return. Immigrant children need to understand their parents' experience of their land and the importance of *Cội Nguồn*. Introducing the concept of *Cội Nguồn* helps those born out of *Cội Nguồn* but who still belong to it. Thus, to succeed in faith education, formators must create an encounter between faith and culture, religious practice, and people's traditions.

PART IV: DOING MINISTRIES WITH IMMIGRANT POPULATIONS

In a communal culture like Vietnamese, immigrant parents struggle to shape and form in their children an identity grounded in their cultural heritage. Theresa O'Keefe contributes to the ministry of the immigrant population by exploring "the nature of the conflicts among adolescents and their immigrant parents, elders, peers, and the culture at large."[45] One of the challenges is that adolescents are made to feel not part of the dominant culture, and this sense of being an outsider causes adolescent children of immigrants to experience the macrosystem differently than their peers.[46] O'Keefe advises ministers and mentors to help parents and children first by "recognizing that adolescents and their elders experience the same culture differently."[47]

Ministries with immigrant populations must offer programs beyond general faith formation and church services to meet the immigrant's particular needs. For example, they need space that enhances their sense of belonging in a new land and helps them understand cross-cultural challenges. O'Keefe describes the nature of the conflicts among adolescents and their immigrant parents, elders, age peers, and the culture at large and offers some techniques for ministers to accompany immigrant families with programs. O'Keefe also recommends, "The adolescent children of immigrants need some dedicated time and space to share their

experiences, frustrations, and joys with those sympathetic to their situation. Ministers attentive to that need can see that it is met."[48]

Ministries with immigrant adolescents accompany them in identity formation, offering them space and resources to cultivate robust relationships. Creating space is essential for collaborative conversations that empower people to tell, revise, and create stories. I believe giving space for people to tell their stories is a prerequisite to cultivating trust-building and authentic listening with one another. "Intentionality in story-sharing" is essential in youth ministry.[49] Through robust relationships, adolescents learn how to integrate into communities and find their purpose in life. The more adolescents see their invisible longing to know and be known, the more they enhance their sense of authentic self and belonging.

"Sustaining practices, sustaining identity."[50]

Practices embedded in *Cội Nguồn* is the Vietnamese voice calling to enable those who are losing their identity to reconnect and reclaim it. Inherent in this call is the belief that all people have the potential to positively shape their sense of identity and belonging if they find the origin point. This call helps people return to their origins for spiritual and cultural healing.

Storytelling and listening transform a family into a community of memory. Retelling a story is vital in identity formation. To be more specific and in connection with *Cội Nguồn*, let the adolescent hear the ancestral story of the boat people from their parents, and vice versa, so the adolescents see themselves as part of this larger story that continues in the diaspora. Let the adolescents also tell their stories of living in *Cội Nguồn* in the diaspora. Telling family stories turns memories into the present reality and holds the truth as the foundation for the future.[51]

Family stories must be told and retold in a context that values family histories. Children and young adult family members must learn the family's tales anew. In the long-term, family members affirm the membership and identity and the meaning of their lives together in the telling.[52] Family members share and rewrite their stories and experiences that bind them together and create their life's main themes and rhythm. For immigrant families, their past (i.e., *Coi Nguon*) experiences shape how they adapt, adjust, assimilate, or acculturate to fit the current family's values and needs.[53] Immigration becomes part of their family story to create new plots and new themes of life. Immigrants indeed recreate their religion as they migrate. They do not simply adopt the religious ways in their new home but bring traditions and worship styles with them; in the same way, they carry back spiritual paths learned in their new home to the homeland. Storytelling in the family impacts memory formation. The crucial point is that they remember not merely to memorize but to reclaim traditions. In families that treasure *Cội Nguồn*, adolescents deepen their memory and enhance their knowledge about families and practices. Rooted in *Cội Nguồn*, the ancestral stories the parents tell help the adolescent hear and tie their stories into a larger story.

Remembrance is another practice that nurtures and nourishes family values embedded in *Cội Nguồn*. By remembrance, the family stories are transmitted from generation to generation, especially in immigrant children, until they can claim *Cội Nguồn* as their own. Peter C. Phan reminds Vietnamese immigrant families, both the elder and younger generations, to remember. "Remembering aims to know the truth, forgive, and heal."[54] "Always remember where you came from" is an emerging ethic of migrant memory. Immigrant families must remember the rootedness embedded in their cultural and religious heritage. "Unless migrants understand why they must remember their past, what they should remember, and how they should remember it,

they will fail to meet the challenges and forfeit the unique opportunities the *Deus Migrator* has given them."[55] It is time to educate children and young people to increase their awareness and deepen their conviction in their traditions and families. Family identity is a cultural identity internal to the family: how a family does things and how they live together.[56] A significant aspect of family identity is togetherness, which can be enhanced through a family praying, having meals, reaching out in service, attending sacraments, and keeping Church teaching. Similarly, Katherine Turpin argues adolescents achieve the interpreting skills of "sorting through the multiple narratives of significance from religious traditions, cultural values, workplaces, and family traditions to discern which ones they will stake their lives on."[57] Connecting young people to *Cội Nguồn* beyond their family context is a way to form identity: "Families and communities can provide intergenerational connections to traditions and the broader sources of wisdom."[58] Examining how Vietnamese immigrants build their identity based on faith and religion is crucial.[59] Theologically, *Cội Nguồn* serves as a source of grateful remembrance that enables people to be believers. Pope Francis writes: "Memory is a dimension of our faith which we might call 'Deuteronomic,' or 'grateful remembrance.'[60] One of the greatest moments for Christians to remember God is when Jesus established the Eucharist and called his disciples to do that daily to remember him. Applying *Cội Nguồn* in its theological expansion toward God as a source of life inspires Vietnamese in diaspora not just to return to their homeland, physically or spiritually, to relink and anchor their identity *Cội Nguồn* but also contribute to creating God's home within them. Remembrance by participating in cultural and religious rituals helps immigrants make meaning. This practice helps them connect the past to serve the present and future life.

Rituals are another practice. To tap into *Cội Nguồn* and its values in faith formation, families can use rituals as a significant practice. Diana R. Garland defines rituals or routines as activities or celebrations that have meaning. It provides security and a sense of meaning and purpose in family relationships that may be hard to communicate in any other way.[61] Family rituals are opportunities to organize their life together to share experiences that make meaning. Such rituals include how families eat together or gather for family events such as a wedding or death anniversary. My family has a great tradition of planting a new tree named after the new child in the garden. We also have a ritual of lighting a candle at the ancestor altar whenever family members face difficulties asking for prayer and intercession from the ancestors. Among many rituals, *Tết Nguyên Đán (Tết) is* an essential holiday. The Vietnamese Lunar New Year celebration occurs during the second new moon after the winter solstice, usually between January 21 and February 20. *Tết,* the most popular holiday and festival in Vietnam, brings people together to celebrate the most sacred time of the year. Vietnamese believe that *Tết* is not only an occasion for family reunions to reinforce family bonds but also their filial duty to return home first to thank God together and then to reverence the family altar or visit the cemeteries where their ancestors are buried. Culturally, *Tết* is a celebration for the whole family, among the living and those who have died. Having been celebrated for over a thousand years, *Tết* has experienced many changes concerning its celebration, but *Tết* maintains its most essential meaning: to bond the family members in a sacred connection, fostering the gratitude of the descendants to their ancestors. Likewise, the richness of cultural activities harmonizes the ties among individuals, families, and society. *Tết* is a special occasion for Vietnamese people in the diaspora to reflect and find a sense of belonging. *Tết* is a significant time to bring people together through spiritual and cultural links that connect humans with the divine, the dead, and one another; it can

transcend time from the past to the present and toward eternity.[62] Celebrating *Tết* makes the Vietnamese American Catholics unique in their cultural and religious identity and enhances their skills to bridge the intergenerational gaps. *Tết's* ritual also creates a family identity based on family stories about how they celebrate *Tết*. Families are constantly recreating themselves and their world, changing stories and rituals.[63] Vietnamese parents are called to teach their children what it means to be Vietnamese, a Vietnamese American, and a Vietnamese Catholic American through various rituals to maintain and enrich traditional Vietnamese values.

Ministerial practices: O'Keefe recommends ministerial practices such as being dedicated mentors and offering space and time for immigrant adolescents to be with one another or adults to share their journey.[64] However, it is challenging for adolescent children when their parents fail to be a model of faith for them. Therefore, we need more than a single-family to fulfill our ministry to be a witness of faith. Moreover, the need for mentors for parents and children is urgent in immigrant families, especially when they come from societies that treasure communal values and familial orientation. By listening to their stories and dreams, parents and mentors can help them meet their spiritual needs grounded in spiritual communities, according to Katherine Turpin.[65]

Turpin seeks to mentor beyond the family's context because we can tap into collective wisdom from communities, especially the elderly and traditions "older than their parents." They are all critical contributions of faith communities to young adults. Adolescents need mature adult mentors different from their parents, particularly when their parents cannot fulfill their modeling role. In collaborative conversations, mentors open the door and spend time with and for adolescents, enabling them to unfold their stories, even their curiosity, failures, and obstacles.[66]

Mary E. Moore recommends mentoring as a practice that cultivates faith in young people. She defines the act of mentoring as "supporting the relational, vocational, and spiritual life of others."[67] Mentoring is a ministry itself that nurtures both the mentor and the mentee. "To mentor is to recognize, develop, and use one's gifts and to recognize, develop, and encourage others' gifts."[68] Moore shares with Turpin and O'Keefe the crucial role of having mentors in young adults' lives. However, she also offers five actions that mentors can apply toward growth in accompanying others: walk with others, listen and explain, model, share opportunities and responsibilities, and guide.[69] Additionally, Moore emphasizes the importance of collaborative mentoring practices as a gift to others.[70]

An effort to reconnect immigrant families to cultural sources as well as help immigrant families access available resources from schools and faith-based communities is vital. When ministers, educators, and mentors intentionally use practices that enable families to communicate well with one another through sharing, listening, and cherishing the same values and traditions, they fulfill their mission toward the well-being of immigrant families. They create space, time, and opportunities to offer immigrants a way to discover their rootedness and to build their sense of self within a precious family narrative that can help them bounce back from crises and traumatic experiences they have faced during their immigration and resettlement.

These recommended practices help immigrants navigate the journey and create a home in a new place. In ministering to the immigrant population, people should not underestimate the critical part of cultural and ethnic identities. When teachers, ministers, and parents find ways to elicit and hear the stories of a family, they can teach, encourage, and lead in a culturally relevant way. [71] Well-known sayings in Vietnamese tradition, such as "Drink water, remember the spring," or "Eat the fruit, remember the tree planter," encapsulate Vietnamese's high regard for

their ancestral traditions, such as *Cội Nguồn.* A theological understanding of *Cội Nguồn* has shaped and strengthened the Vietnamese family toward family solidarity, showing respect and honor to ancestors and teaching people to live with grateful remembrance as a family tradition. To sustain *Cội Nguồn* in Catholic parishes is a way to preserve, maintain, and develop cultural and religious identity for Vietnamese Catholics.

Conclusion

The capacity to sustain their cultural roots and be open to change in adaptation substantiates the cultural vacillations of immigrants. We (educators, ministers, caregivers) can accompany immigrants whose identity is shaken or shifted by immigration and whose sense of belonging is needed by tracing back to their original cultural wealth and anchoring their identity in that source as sustenance to their being and becoming in a new land. Envisioning ways to help immigrants acculturate without assimilation and decentering Whiteness in their identity formation to survive and thrive beyond the White gaze is not an option but a shared mission.

Exploring ways to understand and interpret the Vietnamese concept *of Cội Nguồn* and applying it to identity formation is a central point of this paper. *Cội Nguồn*, with its communal and family orientation, can be a rich resource for immigrant families in identity formation. The cultural tradition of *Cội Nguồn* transforms people to be more appreciative of their ancestral heritage. Many immigrant families came to the United States empty-handed, but after some years, they have made every effort to create a future for their children and descendants. Now is the time for them to listen to each other's stories, dreams, and vocational goals with trust and respect and continue living life fully and meaningfully. When ministers and educators support immigrant families to create a welcoming and trusting atmosphere at home, they offer children opportunities to openly share what they have experienced in adapting to a new culture. Children

learn more about their cultural heritage through family rituals and shared stories. The supporting network from the extended families also serves as a factor in elevating immigrant families in bridging the intergenerational gaps. We can achieve these goals by practicing intentionally and with consistency.

Cội Nguồn serves as a critical intervention to cultural heritage and identity crisis when immigrants embrace it as both a source and sustenance to strengthen and enhance immigrant identity formation. *Cội Nguồn* enables people to access others' gifts and talents. Older people have wisdom and experience, while younger generations share their energy, excitement, and courage. This reciprocal sharing helps to construct a new narrative that enriches everyone. As Thich Nhat Hanh, an influential Buddhist, said, "Vietnamese people would never forget their origins no matter how far they are from home."[72] Vietnamese people seem to feel better about their *Cội Nguồn* as a source with the help of mythology, legends, and folklore through oral tradition that one generation passes to the next with the hope of carrying on their practices to preserve and enhance their cultural heritage. I want to end this article using Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre's words: “For the story of my life is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past, and to try to cut myself off from that past…is to deform my present relationships.”[73]

[1] Quan T. Tran, "Anchoring Vietnamese Boat People's Memory and History: Refugee Identity, Community, and Cultural Formations in the Vietnamese Diaspora," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), vi & Nghia M. Vo, *The Vietnamese Boat People, 1954 and 1975–1992* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2015), 2.

[2] Vietnamese immigrants arrived in the U.S. in distinct waves. There were 839,310 Vietnamese refugees who came to the United States between 1975 and 1992; among them, 796,310 escaped by sea and 42,918 over land to the shelter of camps in other countries before resettling in the United States. (See Nghia M. Vo, *The Vietnamese Boat People*, 2.) Another wave of 693,022 came to the U.S between 1990 and 2008, which was largely a group of re-education prisoners who had been imprisoned for three years and beyond with their families. (See “Office of

Refugee Resettlement (ORR)" 2010) Since 1999 a smaller wave of Vietnamese people has come to the U.S as legal immigrants based on their family sponsorship policy or for studies abroad.

[3] Peter C. Phan and Jung Young Lee, eds., *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1999), 113.

[4] Son, Daye, Braquel R. Egginton, Yaxin Lu, Amy L. Ai, Loren D. Marks, and David C. Dollahite. "New Christians in a New Land: Faith Journeys of Asian American Immigrant Families." *Marriage & Family Review* 54, no. 7 (October 3, 2018): 648–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/01494929.2018.1469571; Fabienne Doucet, "(Re)Constructing Home and School: Immigrant Parents, Agency, and the (Un)Desirability of Bridging Multiple Worlds," *Teachers College Record: The Voice of Scholarship in Education* 113, no. 12 (November 2011): 2705–38, https://doi.org/10.1177/016146811111301201.

[5] In this paper, I use the term *immigrants* to include all Vietnamese refugees and immigrants

[6] Donald R. Atkinson, Susana Lowe, and Linda Matthews, "Asian-American Acculturation, Gender, and Willingness to Seek Counseling," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 23, no. 3 (1995): 131, https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.1995.tb00268.x.

[7] Garcia, R. L. & Ahler, J. G., "Indian Education: Assumptions, Ide- Ologies, Strategies.," *Norman: University of Oklahoma Pr*, 1992, 13–32.

[8] Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville J. Herskovits, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38, no. 1 (1936): 149–52, https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1936.38.1.02a00330.

[9] Nhi Lieu states that the complexities of Asian and Vietnamese cultural transformation cannot be simply categorized into a binary framework of "assimilation" vs. "retention" but rather as a process that considers the different ways Vietnamese culture is invented, re-invented, remembered, and imagined through electronic and digital channels of expression. Lieu states that "the assimilation of refugees into the American landscape simultaneously served both domestic and foreign policies in promoting the U.S. as a democratically exceptional nation that does not engage in colonialism but fights for freedom. "Nhi T. Lieu, "Private Desires on Public Display: Vietnamese American Identities in Multi-Mediated Leisure and Entertainment," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2004), ProQuest, 15.

[10] See Nhi T. Lieu, "Private Desires on Public Display & Barkan, Elliott R., Rudolph J. Vecoli, Richard D. Alba, and Olivier Zunz. "Race, Religion, and Nationality in American Society: A Model of Ethnicity: From Contact to Assimilation [with Comment, with Response]," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14, no. 2 (1995): 40.

[11] Du Bois, W.E.B. (1965). *The Soul of Black Folk*. New York, NY: Avon Books. (Original work published 1903), 45.

[12] Django Paris editor, H Samy Alim editor, and ProQuest, *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*, Language and Literacy Series (New York, N.Y.) (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 17.

[13] Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 76.

[14] Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics*, 76.

[15] Robert Kegan, *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 16.

[16] Nam C. Kim, Lai Van Toi, and Trinh Hoang Hiep, "Co Loa: an investigation of Vietnam's ancient capital," *Antiquity* 84, no. 326 (2010):doi:10.1017/s0003598x00067041.

[17] Nam C. Kim, "The Origins of Ancient Vietnam," 2015, 143-144, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199980888.001.0001.

[18] The Vietnamese original myth began with Lac Long Quan. Lac Long Quan's mother was a water dragon. Therefore, Lac Long Quan inherited both power and strength from his parents. He had the body of a dragon and magical powers. One day, when Lac Long Quan traveled through the country to maintain peace in the land, he met Au Co [Au Co means a royal mother or a mother goddess in Vietnamese myth). She was an immortal mountain Thần [Thần means a divine figure]. Au Co and Lac Long Quan fell in love and married. This magical union laid a sack of one hundred eggs from which hatched one hundred sons. With Au Co, Lac Long Quan created a human language and used it to name all things on earth. When their children matured, they taught them how to gather fruits, make tools for hunting and fishing, and how to build huts. Later, Au Co showed them how to plant sweet rice as a main food for the Vietnamese. In all ways, they had a wondrous life. After some time living with Au Co, Lac Long Quan told his wife one day: "I am by nature like a dragon in the water, while you are like a goddess "Thần" on the mountain. Our habits and customs are different. We must live apart from each other. Now of all our children, half will go with me to the underwater palace, and the other half will stay on land with you. If either group encounters misfortune, then the other group must help them". The hundred children of Lac Long Quan and Au Co understood their father's wish and divided themselves into two groups. Fifty followed their mother up to the mountains, and

fifty followed their father into the ocean. They became the ancestors of the Vietnamese people. Because of this legend, the Vietnamese people referred to themselves as the Dragon and Au Co descendants who came from the same family a long time ago. Au Co and her fifty sons went to the highlands. She crowned the eldest son, Hung Vuong. Then Hung Vuong named the country Van Lang [It means the land of learned people] and made Phong Chau its capital. So, began the dynasty of Hong Bang, and with it the foundation of the Vietnamese nation. The myth ended by introducing the appearance of the first king and the first name of Vietnam in ancient times. (See Nghia M. Vo, *Legends of Vietnam: An Analysis and Retelling of 88 Tales* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2012), 57-61.)

[19] K. W. Taylor, *A History of the Vietnamese* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[20] Van Bich, Pham, *The Vietnamese Family in Change: The Case of the Red River Delta* (London: Routledge, 2013), 8, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315027609.

[21] You will observe an alternative use of ethnic identity and CI in this paper.

[22] Mary C. Waters, "Ethnic and Racial Identities of Second-Generation Black Immigrants in New York City," *The International Migration Review* 28, no. 4 (1994): 796, https://doi.org/10.1177/019791839402800408.

[23] Seyla Benhabib, "The 'Claims' of Culture Properly Interpreted: Response to Nikolas Kompridis," *Political Theory* 34, no. 3 (2006): 385, https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591706286779.

[24] David Adams, "Mohanty, Satya P.. Literary Theory and the Claims of History: Postmodernism, Objectivity, Multicultural Politics," *Research in African Literatures* 31, no. 3 (2000): 43.

[25] Jean S. Phinney, "The Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure: A New Scale for Use with Diverse Groups," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 7, no. 2 (April 1, 1992): 156–76, https://doi.org/10.1177/074355489272003.

[26] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Undoing Place?* (Routledge, 1997), 231–42.

[27] Hall, 225.

[28] J. Hotta and S. Ting-Toomey, "Intercultural Adjustment and Friendship Dialectics in International Students: A Qualitative Study," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations Ijir* 37, no. 5 (2013): 218, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2013.06.007.

[29] Nan Sussman, "The Dynamic Nature of Cultural Identity Throughout Cultural Transitions: Why Home Is Not So Sweet," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4, no. 4 (2000): 43.

[30] Jorge Larrain, *Identity and Modernity in Latin America* (John Wiley & Sons, 2013).

[31] Ariel Knafo and Shalom H. Schwartz, "Value Socialization in Families of Israeli-Born and Soviet-Born Adolescents in Israel," *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 32, no. 2 (March 1, 2001): 213–28, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022101032002008.

[32] Thompson, John.B. (1995). *The Media and Modernity: a social theory of the media*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

[33] Kathleen Troy Amidei, "From Generation to Generation: A Case Study on Factors in Family and Faith Community Impacting Faith Development" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012), 263, https://search.proquest.com/docview/1081495570?pq-origsite=primo.

[34] Peter C. Phan, "Religious Identity and Belonging Amidst Diversity and Pluralism: Challenges and Opportunities for Church and Theology," in *Passing on the Faith: Transforming Traditions for the Next Generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, ed James L Heft* (New York City: Fordham University Press, 2006), 164.

[35] Phan, "Religious Identity and Belonging", 165.

[36] Ibid., 165.

[37] Ibid., 165.

[38] Ibid., 164-165.

[39] Jan Arizonang, *The Batak People: A Search For A Religious-Cultural Identity* (Frederiks, 2003), 125.

[40] Peter C. Phan, *Vietnamese-American Catholics* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 3.

[41] Peter Phan lists cultural wealth in myths of origin, everyday stories, religious texts and rituals, spiritual traditions and practices, literature and art, philosophy and worldview (Phan, 183).

[42] Phan, 2006, 183-184.

[43] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 44.

[44] Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective, eds Peter C. Phan & Jung Young Lee* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 147.

[45] O'Keefe, "Colliding Ecosystems," 474.

[46] Ibid., 474.

[47] Ibid., 474.

[48] Ibid., 475.

[49] Anne E. Wimberly, *Soul Stories: African American Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 15.

[50] Borrow phrases from Bucholtz et al, Language and Culture as Substance, Chapter 3, 47.

[51] Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 322.

[52] Garland, *Family Ministry, 333.*

[53] Garland, 282.

[54] Agnes Brazal and Maria Theresa Davila, *Living With(Out) Borders: Catholic Theological Ethics on the Migrations of Peoples* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2016), 131.

[55] Agnes Brazal and Maria Theresa Davila, *Living With(Out) Borders,* 141.

[56] Garland, 305.

[57] Turpin, "Exploring Callings in the Midst of Uncertainty," 111.

[58] Turpin, 111.

[59] Both Peter C. Phan and Miroslav Volf echo the same perception of God as humanity's ancestor. God is the loving and caring parent who made our home on earth. "God as homemaker is, perhaps, a surprising image, and yet if we look across the entire biblical canon, we can see a thread of homemaking that runs throughout its long, winding course." See Ryan McAnnally-Linz and Miroslav Volf, "The Homemaking God," Reflections | Reflections-Yale Divinity School, last modified Spring 2023, https://reflections.yale.edu/article/future-god-pursuit-divine/homemaking-god.

[60] Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 2013, §13.

[61] Garland, 305.

[62] Paul Pham and Richard Rutherford, "The Liturgical Inculturation of the Cult of Ancestors in Vietnam," 2008, 4.

[63] Garland, 333.

[64] O'Keefe, *Colliding Ecosystems*, 475.

[65] Katherine Turpin, "Exploring Callings in the Midst of Uncertainty," in *Calling All Years Good: Christian Vocation throughout Life's Seasons edited by Kathleen Cahalan and Bonnier Miller-McLemore* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 115.

[66] Ibid., 114.

[67] Mary E. Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 256.

[68] Ibid. 257

[69] Ibid., 256-9.

[70] Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act,* 256.

[71] Garland, 295, 301.

[72] Taylor, Keith Weller, *The Birth of Vietnam*, 2009, 77.

[73] O'Keefe, *Navigating toward Adulthood,* Ch.1, 256.