



The spiral of power: From losing the source and manipulation to true sovereignty – An interdisciplinary inquiry from the origin human culture

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Abstract

This paper investigates a recurring paradox in human history: when people lose their sovereignty, they struggle to reclaim it; yet, in their quest for liberation, they are often deceived and relapse into new, more sophisticated forms of servitude. The central thesis is that this “spiral of power” is not merely a political or economic phenomenon but stems from a profound spiritual rupture - a disconnection that Vietnamese philosophy identifies with the evocative term “*lạc Cội lạc Nguồn*” (losing the Root, losing the Source). This paper proposes the “**Origin Human Culture**”¹ (*Văn Hóa Cội Nguồn*) as a **primary interpretive lens**, facilitating a critical and comparative dialogue with Western theories (Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Foucault, Zuboff) and classical Eastern thought (Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism). This approach aims to illuminate conceptual gaps that this indigenous philosophy can help address. The paper analyzes the evolution of deceptive mechanisms from the classic “sycophant” (*nịnh nhân*) to “algorithmic servitude” in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and constructs new concepts such as “informational alienation” to demonstrate their direct linkage to the erosion of sovereignty. This inquiry demonstrates that breaking this vicious cycle requires a comprehensive solution that integrates an external legal foundation the “**Supreme Dharma-King**” (*Pháp Vương Tối Thượng*) with an internal spiritual transformation: “returning to the True Heart, True Nature” (*Chân Tâm, Chân Tính*). The aim is to contribute a unique, culturally-rooted perspective to the universal discourse on human consciousness and sovereignty, in line with the mission of *Spiritual Science in Human Evolution*.

Keywords: spiral of power, origin human culture, losing the source, algorithmic servitude, informational alienation, supreme dharma-king, true heart, consciousness evolution

Introduction: The Eternal Paradox of Freedom

In the unceasing flow of human history, a persistent paradox remains: the aspiration for freedom and human rights perpetually impels people to fight to reclaim their inherent values. Yet, ironically, these noble efforts have often led to a vicious cycle. We term this phenomenon the “spiral of power,” which manifests in two distinct but interrelated cycles. The first cycle, famously articulated by Lord Acton (1907), involves those who gain power: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The second, which is the central focus of this paper, involves the people: in their struggle against oppression, they seize or delegate power, only to be deceived by new actors, ultimately relapsing into more sophisticated forms of servitude and losing their sovereignty once more.

This paradox is not just a socio-political tragedy but also a profound philosophical and spiritual crisis affecting the evolutionary journey of human consciousness. It reflects a loss that is not merely external but one that resides deep within: a “losing of one’s way” in the perception of oneself and one’s place in the universe (Cao, 2000). This paper operates on two levels: analytically, it proposes a model for how these power cycles historically operate; normatively, it presents a potential solution for breaking this cycle, derived from the ethical-philosophical framework of Origin Culture.

Nowadays, this paradox is being reenacted and accelerated in new forms in the digital age. The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and complex algorithmic systems, initially heralded to free humanity from the burdens of labor and enhance cognitive abilities, now harbors the risk of creating unprecedented forms of control and manipulation (Agrawal, Gans, & Goldfarb, 2022; Crawford, 2021). These systems, with their capacity to predict and shape behavior on a massive scale, pose an urgent question: Are we entering a new cycle of re-enslavement, where the shackles are no longer iron and steel but invisible streams of code and data? (Zuboff, 2019).

This paper argues that the root of the spiral of power lies in a spiritual rupture, a concept profoundly identified in Vietnamese philosophy as “*lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn*” (losing the Root, losing the Source)². Using the doctrine of the “**Origin Human Culture**” (*Văn Hóa Cội Nguồn*) which, according to its foundational texts such as the *Long Hoa Mat Tang* (Cao, 2000), was established by Hùng King of Vietnam in 2959 BCE as a central interpretive lens, we will conduct an interdisciplinary dialogue with the great thoughts of the East and West. Through this, the paper will demonstrate that only a comprehensive solution - one that combines an external legal structure with an internal spiritual transformation, as proposed by the “Origin Human Culture” can truly break this vicious cycle, opening a genuine evolutionary path for humanity. In this way, this paper not only diagnoses a historical problem but also proposes a viable path toward a sovereign and sustainable future in the contemporary context.

Literature Review: A Dialogue Between Civilizations

To analyze the spiral of power, it is necessary to construct a dialogue between the major schools of thought, not merely to list them, but to have them illuminate one another, thereby highlighting their similarities, contradictions, and ultimately, finding a path of synthesis at a higher level.

The Legitimate Origin of Power and Its Decline: Heavenly Mandate, Social Contract, and Celestial Will

The dialogue begins with the question of the origin of legitimate power. Classical Eastern thought, particularly in China, bases authority on a sacred concept: the “Mandate of Heaven.” The monarch, or “Son of Heaven,” is believed to receive this divine mandate to rule, and his legitimacy depends entirely on his virtue (*Đức*) and adherence to the Way (*Đạo*) and benevolence

(*Nhân*) (Lǐjì, Dai, 2022; Wei, 2012). In contrast, since the Enlightenment era, Western philosophy has secularized the origin of power, placing it in the “social contract,” where power derives from the consent of the governed, as argued by John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau, 2017; Commons, 2017).

From the perspective of *Việt học* (Vietnamese Origin Studies)³, the “Origin Human Culture” provides a more holistic viewpoint. It introduces the concept of “**Celestial Will of the Heavenly Father**” (*Thiên Ý Cha Trời*), which is best understood not as a singular idea but as an integrated whole. For the sake of analytical clarity, its components can be disaggregated:

- **Metaphysically**, it is a universal cosmic law, akin to the sacredness of the Mandate of Heaven.
- **Ethically**, it manifests internally as the innate “Human Conscience” (*Lương Tâm*), which serves as a moral compass.
- **Politically and legally**, it provides the ultimate grounding for a just social contract and constitutional order. The unique power of this concept lies in its synthesis, positing that a just political order must be a reflection of an inner moral compass that is itself aligned with cosmic law (Cao, 2000). True power is thus institutionalized through a constitution that upholds the rule of law, where the “**Supreme Dharma-King**” (*Pháp Vương Tối Thượng*) meaning the Constitution itself is King, not the individual monarch, holds supreme authority (Cao, 2014e).

The decline of power is also explained differently. In Eastern thought, the fall of a dynasty is the result of moral decay (Han, 2016). Western thought tends to seek causes in social and economic structures, such as Karl Marx’s “labor alienation” (Marx, 1988). The “Origin Human Culture” offers a deeper diagnosis, suggesting that both individual moral decay and the corrosion of social structures are symptoms of a root illness: “*lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn*” – “**losing the Root, losing the Source.**” This state of spiritual rootlessness can be understood by disaggregating its dimensions:

- **Spiritually and metaphysically**, it is a disconnection from one’s true self and the laws of the universe.
- **Ethically**, it manifests as an inner moral collapse.
- **Sociologically**, it results in the breakdown of social cohesion and power structures. This argument finds a striking parallel in the cyclical theory of history of Ibn Khaldun, who argued that dynasties fall when their ‘*Asabiyyah*’ (social cohesion) weakens due to luxury and the loss of original values (Khaldun, 2016). The weakening of ‘*Asabiyyah*’ can thus be seen as a sociological manifestation of the spiritual state of “*lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn*.”

The Mechanism of Deception and Re-enslavement: From the Sycophant to the Algorithm

When power declines, people struggle to regain it but often fall into the trap of deception. This mechanism evolves in sophistication, reflecting changes in societal consciousness and technology. In Eastern thought, the classic archetype is the “*nịnh nhân*” (sycophant), a specific human agent who uses slander to manipulate a ruler (Wei, 2012). In the West, this deception becomes increasingly systematized. Michel Foucault described manipulation institutionalized in the architecture of the Panopticon, a model of total surveillance that automates compliance (Foucault, 1977). Following this, Gilles Deleuze developed the concept of “societies of control,” where power operates flexibly through networks and codes (Deleuze, 1992). Finally, in the

digital age, deception reaches its zenith with algorithms that invisibly manipulate user behavior, realizing the society of control on a global scale.

Methodology

This paper employs a qualitative theoretical analysis based on an **interdisciplinary dialogical synthesis** approach. This method does not merely compare ideologies but actively constructs a dialogue between them for the purpose of critique, synthesis, and innovation. We wish to clarify that this approach does not position any single framework as an absolute evaluative standard. Rather, it seeks to foster a balanced and open-ended dialogue, maintaining the spirit of academic pluralism. Specifically, the methodology is implemented through the following steps:

1. **Establishing an Interpretive Lens:** The principles of the “Origin Human Culture,” as presented in the original texts of author Cao Đức Toàn and his associates (e.g., Cao, 2000, 2014e, 2015), are used as a **primary interpretive lens**. This indigenous framework is not used to normatively judge other theories, but to provide a unique cultural and philosophical perspective that can reveal “blind spots” or unexamined assumptions within mainstream discourse.
2. **Inter-Civilizational Dialogue:** Concepts from Eastern thought (e.g., Wei, 2012; Han, 2016) and Western thought (e.g., Foucault, 1977; Marx, 1988; Zuboff, 2019) are placed in direct dialogue with the VHCN framework. This process helps to highlight points of convergence, differences, and contradictions in how civilizations interpret power, freedom, and alienation.
3. **Critique and Synthesis for Innovation:** From the dialogue, the paper synthesizes insights to create a more comprehensive view. For example, it critiques the materialist focus of some Western theories for potentially neglecting the spiritual dimension, while also noting that some Eastern ethical solutions may lack a robust legal structure to prevent the abuse of power.
4. **Theorizing New Concepts:** Based on this synthesis, the paper proposes new theoretical concepts such as “informational alienation” and “algorithmic servitude” to describe specific forms of disempowerment in the digital age.
5. **Resolving Contradictions:** Where streams of thought conflict, the framework of *Việt học* is used to propose a synthetic perspective at a higher level, offering a comprehensive solution that combines both internal and external factors.

Through this methodology, the paper aims to innovate a feasible path to liberation, based on a respectful and critical dialogue between the wisdom of the Origin and established global theories.

Results and Discussion: Breaking the Spiral of Power

Analyzing the spiral of power through an intercultural lens reveals a complex architecture of social, psychological, and ideological relationships. By using the “Origin Human Culture” as a compass, we can chart a clear path to escape this vicious cycle.

The Primacy of Spiritual Disconnection: “Losing the Source” as the Universal Root Cause

While Western theories often identify external, structural causes for the loss of power, both *Việt học* and Eastern thought point to a deeper, internal cause. *Việt học* identifies it radically as

“*lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn*” - a state of spiritual rootlessness (Cao, 2014e). This perspective helps to reposition Western analyses: phenomena such as alienation or sophisticated power structures are not the root causes, but symptoms of this disease of spiritual disconnection (Cao, 2000). Consequently, this explains why revolutions that focus solely on external structures are often doomed to fail or create a new form of tyranny. The history of Văn Lang (the precursor to modern-day Vietnam) is a powerful testament to this theory. Its collapse came only when later kings “lost the Source,” abandoning the spiritual-legal foundations of the nation (Cao, 2014e; Nguyễn, 2013a).

The Evolving Mechanisms of Deception: From Personal Manipulation to Algorithmic Servitude

The mechanism of deception in the spiral of power is not static but continuously evolves in sophistication. This evolution can be mapped across three stages, corresponding to shifts in the primary locus of power and control.

Era	Agent of deception	Mechanism of deception	Target of deception
Pre-Modern	Individual (e.g., sycophant, treacherous official)	Rhetoric, Slander, Manipulation of Ritual	Monarch, Ruler
Modern	Institution (e.g., state, factory, asylum)	Surveillance, Discipline (Panopticon), Ideology	Citizen, Worker
Contemporary	Impersonal System (e.g., AI, algorithm, network)	Algorithmic Governance, Behavioral Nudging, Data Extraction	Digital User, Consumer

In the digital age, this has culminated in a new form we propose to call “**algorithmic servitude**.” The algorithm is the ultimate sycophant: invisible, omnipresent, and capable of shaping desires on a massive scale. To clarify this, we construct two new theoretical concepts:

- **Informational Alienation:** Extending from Marx’s concept of labor alienation (1988), this is the condition where humans are dispossessed of the products of their own being. Personal data, as manifestations of our thoughts, become the property of tech corporations, while their creators are detached from the value they produce. This resonates with Shoshana Zuboff’s (2019) “surveillance capitalism” and Luciano Floridi’s (2014) analysis of the infosphere, but with a specific emphasis on the *ontological* separation from one’s digital self.
- **Algorithmic Servitude:** This is a state of dependency on non-transparent AI systems. “Prediction machines” not only predict but also shape behavior, turning freedom of choice into a controlled illusion (Agrawal, Gans, & Goldfarb, 2022). This servitude is unique because it operates not through coercion but through seduction and convenience, making it a form of voluntary, yet profound, disempowerment.

Within the VHCN framework, these modern phenomena are interpreted as manifestations of the “**Mạt Pháp**” (**Dharma-Ending Age**), an era of spiritual and moral decline where

“heretical theories” (*tà thuyết*), propagated by human ignorance and greed, delude humanity and lead them away from the truth (Cao, 2025b). The algorithm, in this view, can become the perfect vehicle for these modern “heretical theories.”

The Incompleteness of Partial Solutions and the Fallacy of “AI Alignment”

The spiral of power persists because the proposed solutions are often incomplete. The modern problem of “AI alignment” is a prime example of this fallacy (Russell, 2019; Christian, 2020). Researchers are attempting to create an external intelligence that is perfectly aligned with human values, while humanity itself has not achieved internal alignment. This is an attempt to apply a technical solution to what the VHCN framework would diagnose as a root spiritual problem. While technically vital, focusing solely on aligning an external entity is a dangerous distraction from the more urgent work of re-aligning ourselves with our Source.

While the VHCN framework offers a profound spiritual vision, we acknowledge potential critiques. The practical institutionalization of such a spiritual-legal system in a pluralistic, secularized world presents significant challenges. Furthermore, like any grand theory, it risks being interpreted with idealistic or essentialist overtones if not critically engaged. This paper, therefore, presents it not as a final answer, but as a vital contribution to a necessary global conversation.

The Path to Comprehensive Liberation: The Synthesis of the Origin Human Culture

The solution proposed by the “Origin Human Culture” is unique in its comprehensiveness. It is an inseparable synthesis of external order and internal transformation.

- **The External Framework: The Supreme Dharma-King (*Pháp Vương Tối Thượng*):** This is the principle in which the Constitution, Law, and Dharma are the highest power, the “King” of the nation (Cao, 2014e). The foundation of this legal code must be the expression of “Celestial Will made public” and “Human Conscience,” ensuring it does not become the tool of any individual or faction (Nguyễn, 2013b).
- **Internal Transformation: Returning to the True Heart, True Nature (*Chân Tâm, Chân Tính*):** This is the path of spiritual evolution. “True Heart, True Nature” is the primordial, pure self, the “Universal Spiritual Awareness” that exists in every human being (Thích, 2014). The practice of “returning” to this self helps people escape the domination of the discriminating mind, which is the source of all greed, anger, and delusion (Cao, 2000). Modern consciousness studies support this, showing that a transformation in worldview can lead to profound changes in social and political behavior (Schlitz, Vieten, & Miller, 2010).

The societal vision is one of **Heavenly Authority, Human Sovereignty, Universal Unity (*Thiên Quyền - Nhân Chủ - Đại Đồng*)**. This is the ultimate goal: to build a “Heaven on Earth” (*Thiên Đàng Trần Gian*) (Cao, 2014e), a just, democratic, civilized society where people live in freedom and happiness.

Conclusion

The cycle of “losing power - seeking power - misplacing power” is a persistent tragedy of humanity. Analyses from Eastern and Western thought have provided valuable diagnoses of the symptoms and mechanisms of this spiral. However, their solutions are often partial. The table below summarizes this core difference:

Feature	Việt Học (Origin Human Culture)	Eastern Thought (Classical)	Western Thought (Modern)
Root Cause of Disempowerment	“ <i>Lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn</i> ” (Spiritual Disconnection)	Deviation from “Way” & “Benevolence” (Moral Decay)	Structural Flaws (Economic, Political) & Psychology
Mechanism of Deception	Cognitive Manipulation rooted in spiritual decline	<i>Nịnh nhân</i> (Sycophant), Abuse of <i>Shu/術</i> (Methods)	Ideology, Surveillance (Panopticon), Algorithmic Control
Nature of the Solution	Holistic (Synthesis of Internal & External)	Primarily Internal (Self-cultivation)	Primarily External (Structural/Legal Reform)
Ultimate Goal	“Heaven on Earth” (Unity of Heaven, Earth, Man)	Social Harmony, Dynastic Stability	Individual Freedom, Social Justice

The “Origin Human Culture” offers a groundbreaking explanation and a comprehensive solution. It posits that the root of all disempowerment is “*lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn*” – a spiritual rootlessness. Therefore, the path to liberation demands a dual revolution: establishing a righteous legal order externally with the “Supreme Dharma-King,” and undertaking a spiritual revolution internally to “return to the True Heart, True Nature.”

In the context of a modern world facing new forms of manipulation from AI, this ancient wisdom becomes all the more urgent. It reminds us that “AI alignment” will be incomplete if humanity itself has not “aligned” with its Source. The “Origin Human Culture” is presented here not as a universal panacea, but as **a valuable indigenous contribution** to the global dialogue on human evolution. It is a unique perspective that suggests a path of “*Bất Chiến Tự Nhiên Thành*” achieving sustainable victory not through conflict, but through the power of righteousness, wisdom, and spiritual enlightenment. Studying, understanding, and engaging with these principles may help humanity end the vicious cycle of power loss and find true freedom.

Footnotes

1. “**Origin Human Culture**” (*Văn Hóa Cội Nguồn*) refers to a comprehensive philosophical, spiritual, and governmental system attributed to the Hùng Kings dynasty of ancient Vietnam. Its core principle is the inseparable unity of spiritual enlightenment and social governance, positing that a just society can only be built upon a foundation of collective spiritual awakening and a legal framework that reflects universal cosmic laws. This paper treats it as an indigenous interpretive framework for dialogue.
2. “*Lạc Cội, lạc Nguồn*” is a profound Vietnamese philosophical concept signifying a state of ontological rootlessness. “*Cội*” refers to one’s ancestral and cultural roots, while “*Nguồn*” refers to the primordial source of the universe and consciousness. The term thus describes a dual alienation: a disconnection from one’s historical identity and, more fundamentally, a severing from one’s true spiritual self and the cosmic order. It is presented here as a culturally-rooted, integrative concept for understanding societal decay.
3. In the context of this paper, *Việt học* (**Vietnamese Origin Studies**) refers specifically to the study of Vietnamese history and philosophy through the unique lens of the

Origin Human Culture framework. It is distinguished from the broader academic field of Vietnamese Studies (*Việt Nam học*), which encompasses a wider range of historical and cultural research methodologies.

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