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Some Comments on the Father's Role of Educating and Taking Care of Children

Mai Huy Bich

Abstract:

Cultural approach to family life among the Kinh people in Vietnam suggests some noteworthy features of fathers' roles in child caring and teaching. The article has tried to combine this cultural approach with a social one that examines social factors and changes that affect fatherhood in Vietnam during the second half of the last century. This may help to put forward some hypotheses for further studies of fathers' roles.

Keywords:

Families; Fatherhood; Father-child relationship; Couvade.

In the eyes of many Vietnamese, families usually take a two-parent form which includes at least a father, a mother, and their children. It cannot be denied that the mother plays a great role in the parent-child relationship. In literature, from folk poetry to the masterpieces of famous artists, there are innumerable compliments to mothers. There is also actual scientific evidence to confirm the indispensable and irreplaceable role of mothers. Regarding fathers, their parental role with children has also been recog-

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nized in popular proverbs, such as: "A father's kindness is as high as a mountain, a mother's kindness is like water running endlessly out from the source." However, the father's role is generally less emphasized, receives less attention, and may even be regarded as less important than the mother's. Unfortunately, until recently, sociologists have only conducted a few reliable and persuasive studies on the role of fathers.

Being aware of the important role of the father, Western sociologists claim that the absence of the father has changed the way the mother establishes and develops her relation with her children. Researchers have spent a lot of time and made great effort to survey the difference between families with fathers (referred to as a complete family) and families without fathers. For example, in many American families, single parents are closer to their children and cater more to their children's demands. The power relationship also changes. In a family with both a mother and a father, rules are set up by both parents. They generally have an implicit understanding to back each other up in childrearing matters. In a family with a single parent, there is no other parent to set up and maintain the rules within the family. Therefore, children have more opportunities to negotiate the rules, and a single parent is more likely to make concessions, because it is difficult to argue with the children all the time. As a result, children in single-parent families are more likely to be responsible and cooperate more with the one parent (Strong et al., 1986:520-527).

To recap, American sociology divides the family into two kinds. Western sociologists in general bring forward the concept of "a dual practice of fatherhood", and identify clearly two kinds of family: those with a father and those without a father. This is a specification of the concepts "complete family" and "incomplete family." Recently, however, these twin concepts have been criticized because of their negative implication of incompleteness and unusualness. Many sociologists have made efforts to adjust the theoretical concept by eliminating these two concepts and their strong moral judgment, and replacing them with more neutral concepts, such as "single-parent family," "lone-parent family," "one-parent family" and "two-parent family". The concept of the "father-absent family" is a kind of "single-parent family." In the United States of America (USA), where divorce rates (the proportion of marriages ending in divorce in the USA are the highest in the Western world. U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998; US Department of Health and Human Services 1999; United

Nations 1998:383) and single-mother families have increased in recent decades, the concept of the "absent father" is used to refer to fathers who rarely meet their children or do not have any contact with their children, due to divorce or separation. Many people believe that the increasing proportion of father-absent families is the cause of many social problems. In the book *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (1995), David Blankenhorn argued that societies with a high divorce rate have to cope with not only the fact that many children lose their fathers, but also the deteriorating conception of fatherhood, with many dangerous consequences.

Since the literature on fatherhood in Vietnam is still very poor, thin, and diffused, and it is generally difficult to empirically test the conception of fatherhood, this article is intended to suggest further study on the role of fatherhood in the aspects of taking care of and bringing up children. The role of the father may be very familiar with many people and might even be regarded as a given, rather than a matter to determined. This article does not seek to make a general assessment, but is only intended to restate some notable aspects in traditional Vietnamese Kinh culture and the role of the father within the family before 1945 as well as some recent socio-economic changes and their effects on fatherhood. Thus, this article hopes to state some reasons why it is necessary to carry out considerably more studies on the role of fathers with children. Moreover, it will try to draw out some assumptions related to the classification of parental roles that have long been popular in Western sociological theories on family, and emphasize that these classifications will need to be supplemented within the Vietnamese context.

I. The general role of the father

Before discussing the role of the father in the Vietnamese family, let us consider the role of the father in general.

Based on many research findings from numerous societies and different cultures, anthropologists assert that the most important role is that of the mother with her children, and secondary, the role of the father. According to them, the basic unit of society is not the nuclear family, but what they call the "mother-child unit". The role of the father is not as clear as that of the mother. Fatherhood is not necessarily associated with blood relationship (consanguinity), and is a social rather than natural process, whereas motherhood is determined by a more natural process.

Compared to motherhood, fatherhood is clearly separated from biological reproduction. Some men do not even know that they have fathered children until the women inform them.

One author argues that a nuclear family consists of at least two small groups: the first one includes a man and a woman, and the other one includes a mother and her children. These two small groups do not have to necessarily exist at the same time. If these two small groups coexist, it is because of the nature of the relationship between the man and the woman (Harris, 1983:34). In other words, the man joins the family because of the relationship with the woman. The relationship between the father and the child is just the extension of the man-woman relationship between the mother and the father.

Parenting is deeply gendered, meaning there is a difference between motherhood and fatherhood. One woman anthropologist points out that by separating the father from the mother-child unit, modern social science has emphasized the difference between motherhood and fatherhood (Moore, 1988:24).

So what is this difference? First of all, as sociobiologists have noted, men only have one innate orientation: the sex drive. This draws them to women. Whereas women have two orientations: a sexual one, drawing them toward men, and a reproductive one toward the young. The interaction between the mother and the child includes many natural reactions as well as those obtained through learning. Compared to the close mother-child relationship, *the close relationship of the father and child is obtained through social learning*. Other primates do not play the role of fatherhood. But for human beings, parenting is mainly done through learning from women as well as due to the requirements and norms of kinship relations, and not as an innate nature of men (Rossi, 1978:5-6).

We will see a clearer difference between motherhood and fatherhood by considering some examples below.

According to N. Townsend, an American researcher, the role of fathers to their children is not direct, but through the mediating link of women. It is impossible to describe or think of the father-child relationship as independent from the spousal relationship, or without the very important intermediary role of the mother. Of course, many men are well aware of how many children they want to have, when they will have children, and how

their desired children will generally look like. But at an important point in their life, fatherhood depends on the cooperation of the wife. Although they do not always passively depend on women and can actively choose and persuade or put pressure on women to bear children, the mediating link of women remains crucial. Townsend claims that there are five moments at which the mediating role of the mother is the most significant: (1) at marriage, (2) when they decide the time to have children and the number of children to have, (3) when labor is allocated after the children are born (who goes to work and who stays at home to take care of the children), (4) in gendered parenting; (5) and after divorce. Specifically, for men, getting married means having wife and children. To be a father, men must get married, so their fatherhood depends on marriage. Thus, "getting married and having a mother for my children" is a decision that is made at the same time. This is a "package deal." Men cannot talk about "having children" without talking about "being married." For men, "having children" is a part of "getting married and being married"; men can only think about the father-child relationship within the family relationship with a woman. In contrast, single women can consider their desire to have children without a long-term relationship with a man.

In marriage, the readiness and activeness of the wife will decide the timing of children. Men may actively participate in the decision of when to have children, but preventing a pregnancy, which is considered the responsibility of women in the USA, makes men dependent on the cooperation of their wives. Regarding the timing for children, American women generally have more rights in this decision than Vietnamese women; the later are under pressure to have children soon after marriage, especially sons, from their husbands and husbands' extended families. During motherhood and fatherhood and the raising of children, once again women serve as the mediators between the men and their children. There are differences not only between the time and effort that each gender spends on raising children, but also between the nature of motherhood and fatherhood itself. Many men believe that motherhood is "natural," that mothers are naturally closer to and more affectionate with their children, that mothers are the first person children confide in and seek advice from, and that mothers have to understand their children's needs and schedules. In brief, the mother has no choice in her role. Whereas, the father has a choice in fulfilling his role as a father and can do so sporadically.

Not only in American families, but also in many other cultures, it is expected that the father plays the role of disciplining their children, whereas the mother is expected to behave more gently. Vietnamese Kinh people often say "Strict father, affectionate mother" and "A hundred lashes from a mother is not as frightening as one threat from a father". Many mothers, both in Vietnam and the USA, often tell the fathers when their children misbehave so the fathers can punish the children. Therefore, the threat "to tell father" is a serious warning and is often effective in preventing children from misbehaving. According to N. Townsend, even in matters of discipline and punishment, where the father's role is extremely powerful, the mother is still an important mediators. Like many Vietnamese women, when their husbands are not at home, American mothers also admonish their children by threatening to tell their fathers their bad behaviors. However, it is mothers who decide when to tell the fathers and what to tell, and therefore, they can influence when fathers punish their children and how seriously to punish them. Thus, mothers are the intermediary source of information and expectation between fathers and children, mediating the interaction between father and children. In other words, a husband is a resource that can be mobilized by the wife in her dealing with their children, and in the father's relationship with their children, the wife serves as the intermediary.

Moreover, when the father becomes too angry with their children, the mother often intervenes to calm him. Disciplining children can be carried out in two fairly common ways. One approach is having the father support the mother in using parental power and disciplining children. The second approach, if the mother is strict, is to allow the father to make it up with the children, such as by organizing games (e.g. taking children to the park), because many people believe that in a family there should be one strict person and one gentle person. In fact, the possibility of action from the father depends on the mother's daily activities and work schedule. Thus, the mother also plays a mediating role in the father playing with or getting angry with their children (Townsend, 2001).

Gender differences between parental roles and the mediating role of the mother in the father-child relationship are also reflected in many other aspects. Studies from other countries show that mothers generally invest a great deal in their children, even during spousal conflict or divorce. In contrast, fatherhood is more influenced by specific circumstances: a

father's investment in his children decreases when the mother-father relationship deteriorates. In the other words, fatherhood depends largely on the relationship with the mother of his children. Many fathers who are divorced from the mothers, and who living temporarily with the mothers without the intent of establishing a permanent relationship or without any strong attachment, or those with children out of wedlock are often not close to their children. Meanwhile, motherhood often exists with little dependence on a spousal relationship. Relationship between the mother and father affects but does not determine motherhood. In short, fatherhood is a process more sensitive to circumstances than motherhood (Doherty et al., 1998:207). Thus, the mother creates an important background for fatherhood.

This phenomenon can be seen not only in Western countries, but also in Vietnam. In polygamous societies before 1960, the situation of "having many wives and numerous children to these wives" was quite popular, and the spousal relationship deeply affected the blood relationship between the father and children, although many men say "regardless of which wife a child is born, (s)he is my child". Many men showed favoritism to the children of the wife they loved more, and thus, this wife could use this to garner valuable and rare resources for her children. Her children could receive more love, attention and property. This is especially clear when kings chose heirs to the throne. For example, in 18th century, Lord Trinh Sam followed his concubine Dang Thi Hue's advice and chose his younger son Trinh Khai as heir to his throne, rather than the eldest son Trinh Can. This example illustrates the mediating role of the mother in the father-child relationship.

II. The role of the father among Kinh ethnic Vietnamese

As discussed above, due to natural propensity, fathers generally are more orientated toward their wives, and less so toward their children. Compared to mothers, they need to learn more how to perform their role (of fatherhood). Fathers in the Kinh ethnic group in Vietnam (comprising over 80% of the population) have to overcome more barriers to form strong attachment with their children due to traditional conception about the role of men.

a. Fatherhood in the Vietnamese tradition

Vietnamese cultural tradition appreciates the indispensable role of father-

hood. This is evident in some historical personage, proverbs and literary works. A proverb that goes "A child without a father is like a house without a roof" is expressing this view. However, there is no representative data on how Vietnamese regard fatherhood, and it is difficult to test the prevalence of views expressed in folk and popular culture. We do not know how popular and true are the views regarding fatherhood.

In Kinh families, especially in the north, the role of men is generally emphasized. There is a separation between men and women, and the integration between the two genders is not encouraged. Each gender not only has its own role, but also occupies a separate space in the house. As mentioned in one study (Pham Van Bich, 1999:35-36), the two genders in the family separate from each other in terms of their space in the house: they have separate places not only for sleeping, eating, and sitting, but also for hanging the washing. In every home there is a woman's corner. This space is located in "the darkest and most humid place, near paddy basket, trunks, kitchens and earthenware vessels for pickling eggplant where women live." (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975:89-90). In many families, because of the close relationship between the mother and the newborn baby, young children are more often taken care of by the mother. As Hue Tam Ho Tai points out, young children, both sons and daughters, were taken care of by mothers until they were about six or seven years old, in the corner reserved for women. But beyond this age, boys were educated by the father, while girls remained with the mother and stayed with her until they grew up, got married, and moved to their husband's house. Thus, the Confucian family requires the discontinuity and rupture for women when they get married. They have to leave their parents' house and move to live in an environment which is new or even frightening. To some extent, men also suffer from dislocation and have to move even earlier, when they are transferred from their mother's quarters to their father's, and when they receive their father's socialisation into a man's world. This has a great impact on motherhood and on memories about childhood. It is the image of the mother (not the father's or any other person) that is used to represent the nostalgic days of childhood and the close ties to one's own past (Hue Tam Ho Tai, 2001:169). It is not unreasonable to say that, although it is praised, fatherhood is not as much respected as motherhood.

Vietnamese people believe that not only giving birth, but also raising

and educating children, are firstly and mainly the responsibilities of the mother, and not the father. Therefore, success or failure in these matters is attributed to the mother, as reflected in these proverbs: "A mother creates blessings"; "A mother is responsible for the foolishness of her child"; and "A mother is responsible for bad children, a grandmother is responsible for bad grandchildren." For girls, the role of the mother is so important that it overshadows that of the father. In the past, in many places, before deciding a marriage, along with finding out about the girl, the bridegroom's family also asked about her mother in details, but not about her father, and the reason for this practice was premised on the ancient respect for a mother's educating her children and the view that good or bad children is due mainly to the mother. They inquired about the girl's mothers in order to know more about the girl's character." (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975:92).

When educating children, the father often follows strict rules: "In educating children, the father has to be strict, speak little but rightly, be impartial and decisive, love the children but keep them at a distance, and not let them act on their own free will." (Tran Dinh Huou, 1991:42-43). As a result, in the past, not only in upper class families but also in working class families, fathers purposely "kept the love for children in mind," and created a distance between their children (especially daughters) and themselves.

Although a father may be close to and cherish the child and traditionally calls her "beloved daughter", in a culture that practice gender separation, this is not common. Why should there be a distance? One of the reasons is the profound hierarchy based on generation, age, and gender in the Vietnamese family; the distance is very necessary for the father to maintain this hierarchy and his power. Meanwhile, there is no similar distance between the mother and children. Moreover, as the mother and daughter are of the same gender, of the same "womanhood condition," and share the same plight, they can sympathize with each other as "virtual friends." Therefore, besides the need for the mediating role of mothers in the relationship with children, somewhat similar to the role of American fathers mentioned above, Kinh fathers also need mothers to act as the intermediary in their relationship with their children to overcome the father-child distance in terms of generation and gender. "What a father expects from his children is expressed through the mother. What children expect from their father is also revealed through the mother." (Le Thi Nham Tuyet,

1975:91). In other words, even when the father and children live together in the same house, only through the mother as an intermediary can there be a "passage of communication" to enable each to understand one another.

In the Mekong River delta, there is a difference in fatherhood in many families. According to a researcher in the program "Homemaker" titled "Behind the village bamboo hedges," broadcasted on VTV3 in the evening of 20 June 2002, many men were drunk all the time, from day to day, and the drunkenness made them forget their wives and children. It is unknown when this custom started, but it is possible that they consider drinking and drunkenness as a symbol of masculinity that can help them fulfill their role as fathers and husbands.

Moreover, another long-standing significant characteristic of the Kinh family structure is the regular and long absence of the father. According to family classification based on Western sociological theory, there are only two types of family: with or without a father. But in Vietnam, there is a type of family with a father who is really in name only. The father is always away from home for many different reasons. This is related to a cultural belief that men can and need to fly high, "be ambitious in life", while women are attached to the house and kitchen. The absence of men can be seen in the lyrics of folk songs, such as "I am away; you are home, taking care of garden and old mother." The husband is absent from home even when the wife gives birth. The women have to "be in labor alone", while the husband just worries from a distance: "I am worried about you alone about to give birth with nobody to rely on. When you have a baby, who will help in rain or shine, day and night?"

It can be said that the situation of a separated family, with the "husband in the South, and the wife in the North", and the image of women bringing up children and taking care of parents-in-law alone when husbands are away from home for a long time, have long been a core feature of Kinh culture. Almost all Vietnamese know the story of Ms. *To Thi* who brought up children alone and desperately waited for her husband for so long that she turned into a stone statute. This became the cultural symbol through the image of *Vong Phu* (a woman waiting for husband for a long time).

Impressions about the father's absence from home are expressed in letters and the arts and are also recorded in scientific studies. Throughout our national history, the standing danger of foreign aggression has required

men to join the army and go away from home to fight the enemy. In peace, a large number of men still have to leave hone and join the army to be prepared to fight the enemy. Under old regimes, the ruling classes often mobilized men to serve in the army to fight other parties in power and suppress farmers' armed uprisings (They were conscripted by kings, lords, and their village to fight as soldiers). The farmers' revolts attracted men to join their rank ("You follow the Tay Son's Lords, I will stay back to farm and take care of old mother").

Another characteristic of Vietnam history is that authorities at all levels have mobilized a large force of labor to work on public construction: digging rivers and canals, building gutters, canals, dykes, fortifications, and temples. This required many men to leave their families for a long time (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975:73-85). There were also many fathers in the old regime who were always away from home to study, work as mandarins, or to earn a living. In sum, innumerable fathers had to be away from home, and from their wives and children, for ages to labor, serve in the army, study, and work as mandarins. One researcher has noted the female constancy in the family and male absence from the family (Hue Tam Ho Tai, 2001:168).

Not only were many fathers constantly absent from home, but in many cases, when they came back, they appeared unreliable. In a folk story of "The Woman of Nam Xuong" in the 16th century, a soldier came home after many years away from home. The little son had not been born when he left; so he only knew his mother, not his father. The first time the son met his father, he refused to acknowledge him as his father and told him that his father only came home at dusk. Immediately, the father suspected that his wife was unfaithful. Distraught, she threw herself into a well. That evening, the father took his son to the altar to worship the ancestors. The son pointed to his father's shadow on the wall and said that it was his father. At that time, the father realized that his wife was not unfaithful, but had tried her best to keep the image of the father in her son's mind. Similar stories are often told to girls to help them understand the importance of women's faithfulness, but instead, they also emphasize the fearful unreliability of men (Hue Tam Ho Tai, 2001:170).

The dual image of a reliable mother and an unreliable father continues to be illustrated in contemporary Vietnamese performance, in such vivid movies as "Decent Story" (Chuyện tử tế) (1988) directed by Tran Van

Thuy. This story is about a woman peasant whose husband deserted her and she was expelled from her village because she contracted leprosy. Because she wanted to build a house to shelter her little boy, the mother made each brick with her bare hands, despite the disease eating away her flesh. According to the director, this mother is the greatest image of decency. But the ideal image of this self-sacrificing mother once again arouses the unreliability of men and fathers (Hue Tam Ho Tai, 2001:184).

Researchers have not been able to let us know how realistic these images are with strict scientific evidence. It is too much of a generalization if we say that these images about fathers are in reality quite widespread. However, it is significant and not incidental that fathers are portrayed like this.

In brief, according to Kinh's cultural traditions, many fathers are not as close to their children (especially daughters and young children) as mothers. They are also absent from home for many reasons. It is not surprising, not strange, not special, or even uncommon when the father is away from home. It is obvious that the mother has to take the place of the father, has to be fully responsible for the family. Meanwhile, a family with only the father and children and with the mother away from home is considered unnatural, rare, worthy of sympathy, and in need of compassion, as illustrated vividly in the folk proverb that goes "A child-caring cock".

b. Socio-economic changes in the past half century and fatherhood

Since the second half of the 20th century, since the establishment of a new political regime, the Vietnamese family has been experiencing dramatic and substantial changes. Many economic, cultural, social changes related to children have been affecting fatherhood, significantly influencing the father-child relationship, more or less improving fatherhood.

The approval of the International Convention on Children's Rights and the propagation of the concept of children's rights, originating from abroad, have gradually established and popularized the concept that considers childhood as a period of weakness, when the child is powerless and in need of special protection and care. Schooling is becoming more open and universal, and school time is being prolonged not only for children in the city and better-off families but also for children in rural areas and medium income families. One of the consequences of these changes is the increase in the responsibilities of parents toward children. These responsibilities include financial ones (to provide normal food and clothes, school uniforms, school lunches, and educational toys); constant presence to take care of children, especially during the first five years of their lives; providing warm affection and protection from danger (especially in the city environment with high buildings and heavy traffic that make it dangerous for children to play on their own); and stimulating their intellectual growth. In conclusion, compared to the past, these changes have generated many new and more demanding requirements for fatherhood.

On the other hand, it can be supposed that up to now, there is still the traditional view that the responsibility of taking care of and bringing up children is firstly and mainly that of the mother and not the father. There is still the father-child distance. One socio-linguistic study has compared the interactive relationship between the two sides in middle class families in Ho Chi Minh City: on one side, the mothers (and grandmothers) and children, and on the other, the fathers (grandfathers) and children. The findings show that mothers, grandmothers and children joke with each other quite freely and "equally," and there is no need for ceremony among generations when they call and communicate with each other. In contrast, fathers, grandfathers and children rarely joke as freely and equally (Phan Thi Yen Tuyet et al., 2000:107).

The primary reason is that cultural tradition often changes more slowly than socio-economic and technical changes (a situation referred to as "cultural lag" by sociologists). In addition, besides some articles in the Law on Marriage and Family stipulating fatherhood and some other policies, we have not actually altered significantly the cultural tradition regarding the father-child relationship. The second reason is that many socio-economic changes have actually prolonged traditional views and practices regarding the father-child relationship and fatherhood and the constant absence of the father. This is evident in the following factors:

1) First is the impact of wars. Tens of years of consecutive wars against French colonialism and American imperialism and border wars in the north and southwest have not only made millions of children loose their fathers or made their fathers too disabled to take full responsibility of fatherhood, but also made many fathers have left their families and children for a long period to serve in the army and fight against the enemy. After the war against French colonialism, a large number of revolutionary officers and army soldiers moved from the South to the North, and for many, their wives and children stayed behind in their native villages.

Therefore, many children lived apart from their fathers from the time they were born to their maturity. Many fathers were away without news of their family for almost their entire life. They occasionally visited home for a few days. They could not and did not have to bring up children. They were like the husband of Ly, a retired professional army officer, in the novel "The Fall in Garden" (1985) by Ma Van Khang. As a result, between many fathers and their children, besides the traditional distance in the father and child relationship as mentioned above, there was also a physical distance that could not be solved because they lived away from each other for too long. For some fathers, despite having their children and grandchildren around later, in the words of the main character in the short story *The Retired General*" (Nguyen Huy Thiep, 1987) they felt "alone in a strange land."

2) Second, post-war recognition of service and contributions has impacted on the concept of fatherhood.

During a fierce period of the war against the American (1966), President Ho Chi Minh extolled Vietnamese mothers, stating: "Our people are thankful to the mothers in both the North and the South who gave birth and reared the heroic generations of our country" (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975: 332-333). The credit to mothers for bearing and bringing up heroes for the nation continues to be recognized recently. In 1994, the National Assembly adopted a resolution granting the title "Heroic Vietnamese Mother" to show gratitude, in accordance with the traditional saying, "When drinking water, remember its source." The granting of this title has been carried out enthusiastically all over the country. However, there is no similar title for fathers and no father of heroes has been recognized or given credit for service to the country. So in families which have qualified to receive the title "Heroic Vietnamese Mother," what then is the role of the father? This question suggests that one unexpected consequence of granting this title is that it overlooks the role of fatherhood in these families and depreciates the role of fatherhood in general.

Whether we like it or not, people still remember a well known folk story. The mother of the hero of Giong village carried him in her womb for many months and suffered from many bad rumors to bring up a disabled son for three years until she herself paved the way for him to save the country (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975:92). Not only Thanh Giong, but also many other national heroes share similar characteristic. The role of the mother is quite remarkable, "while the father is almost unknown, or only known a little", not only in the lives of preeminent people in the early Christian era like Hai Ba Trung, Ba Trieu, but also in the custom of worshipping mothers of heroes, civil mandarins and military mandarins who helped Hung King (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975:62-63).

It is likely to be argued that granting the title Heroic Vietnamese Mother now is the continuation of this custom. If this is so, how should the above-unexpected consequence be taken into account?

3) Third, during the period from 1954 to 1989 in the North and from 1975 to 1989 in the South, urban and industrial centers attracted a large amount of manpower from rural areas for the task of building the country. Many of these migrants had families in villages; they could not bring their families with them for many reasons, foremost of which was the government's policy of household registration. For families separated due to fathers having to make a living elsewhere, fathers could only meet their children on home visits, on weekends (described in an old proverb as the time he "cancels his service, pumps the bicycle tire, listens to the weather forecast, and watches the time"), during vacation or holiday, or when children could visit their fathers. To borrow an American informal expression, the role of father is similar to a "Sunday daddy." The existence of this kind of family and the acceptance of couples, parents, and children to live away from each other for a long time surprised many Westerners, because it is very difficult for them to imagine such a family life. Swedish sociologist Rita Liljestrom called it "a strange aspect of Vietnamese society" (Mai Huy Bich, 1993:84).

In addition, governmental policies at that time for distributing ration tickets and granting a leave due to a child's illness regarded the children of a civil servant as dependents of the mother and not of the father. In families with fathers working as civil servants and mothers not working for the state, this policy not only discriminated between fatherhood and motherhood, but also deepened an old perception that mothers, not fathers, are responsible for their children.

Meanwhile, as a comparison, it should be noted that in many developed countries, such as Sweden, there are government policies to encourage and create good conditions for fathers to participate actively in educating and bringing up their children. Both mothers and fathers are allowed to

have maternity leave and leave to take care of young babies and ill children with full salary. For example, in Sweden, if a father does military service (for two years) and does not have income to support his children, he gets a government subsidy based on the number of children he has, regardless of the mother's income (Nasman, 1993:17). Obviously, these policies encourage men to perform the role of fatherhood well.

4) Fourth, since the introduction of the innovative policy (Doi Moi), a lot of families in rural areas have reallocated labor between the two genders, resulting in the fact that many men have left the village to earn a living in urban areas and centers of industrial manufacturing, business and services, and there has been a growing feminization of agricultural work in rural areas. The number of father-absent families has increased. As a comparison, the number of married women working away from home (such as working as domestic helpers for city families) is increasing, but men still account for a larger proportion of the labor rushing to urban areas. One of the reasons is possibly the impact of the factor called "an economy of gratitude". When examining labor division based on gender among families, many American researchers found that this allocation led to different recognition of each gender's contribution, a fact called an economy of gratitude by American researcher Arlie Hochschild. Whose contribution is recognized and whose contribution is assumed as a given is not correlated to the contribution itself, but is mainly related to the gender of the contributor. According to the findings of two researchers Carolyn Cowan and Philip Cowan, for men, "paid employment "counts" as childcare, meaning that when men are working, they are considered to be doing something for their children. Moreover, wives consider their husbands' taking care of children as a contribution to the spousal relationship. On the other hand, women's employment is seen as detracting from their motherhood, and their husbands do not consider their wives taking care of children as building the marriage (Cowan et al., 1999). In other words, although they both work for a living, each gender attaches a different meaning for the other spouse's relationship with their children.

Moreover, in early 1980s, a number of Vietnamese went to work in Russia and former Eastern European countries. Since the late 1980s, globalization and Vietnam's integration into the world economy have attracted a lot of labor force to many different countries. Due to the influence of many factors (such as the cultural tradition of accepting the absence of men

from home more easily than women and the demand of the international labor market) the number of men leaving home to work abroad is higher than women. It is probably the case that many of them have a family.

In sum, these flows of labor migration domestically and internationally have increased the number of father-absence families in Vietnam.

5) Fifth, recently there have been a growing number of father-absent families due to divorce and mothers who cannot get married or who have to accept the life of being a single parent.

For divorced families, many children do not receive the attention and education of their fathers for various reasons, such as the fact that the fathers and children are separated, there may be a long-term tense or even hostile relationship between the mothers and the fathers after the family is broken (in some cases, a parent seeks revenge by winning the children to their side), and the fathers being irresponsible. Newspapers and research studies have mentioned such cases.

For families with single mothers, many women often form short-term relationships with men just to have a biological father for their children. When they get pregnant, they often sever that relationship. Therefore, the child is born without knowing his or her father, and in many cases the child even gets the mothers' family name (a kind of matriarchal family). This is actually a fatherless family mentioned by researchers, and they have experienced some serious problems in the present context.

6) Finally, it must be mentioned that there has been a change related to the place for birthing and the custom of the participation of the father in taking care of the newborn child.

In rural areas before 1960, pregnant women gave birth at home and not elsewhere, as it was believed that child-bearing brought bad luck to people near her. Therefore, a pregnant woman only had relatives with her, and the husband more often than not witnessed her labor pains. Moreover, according to an old custom of the Kinh people, after a pregnant woman gives birth, she gets up and gives her place in bed to her husband, and he is on a special diet like the one for a new mother. Or just three days after giving birth, the mother gets up and cooks for her husband, while the father sits on the bed and takes care of the baby. The father in this case is called the "birthing man". According to one researcher, "Until recently, in Vietnamese rural areas, when the wife has a difficult birth, the husband has to climb up

the roof of the house or wade across the pond … to help his wife give birth more easily" (Le Thi Nham Tuyet, 1975:35-36). The researcher does not say where this custom was implemented and how widespread it was, but this custom has been called "couvade" by anthropologists.

At first sight, in the eyes of modern medicine, this custom seems extremely odd. For a pregnant woman, it is not only impossible to help her when she has a difficult birth but it is also peculiar that the new mother has to leave the bed so soon. Moreover, the newborn is handed to the father. But on closer examination, we can see that this custom seems both peculiar and symbolic and affects not only the spousal relationship but also the father-child relationship. The profound and fine effects include the husband and father's empathy toward his wife in labor, bonding between the father and child, and the sense of responsibility of fatherhood right when the baby is born. If we take into account that the father and child strong attachment is mainly obtained by learning and social practices (as mentioned above), the custom of "couvade" enables the father to touch the skin and body of his baby right after birth, impressing on him that the weak and powerless newborn is in need of his protection and care. This is the liveliest visual lesson about the responsibility of fatherhood.

In contrast, during the period from about 1960 to 1989, due to the expansion of the medical network, most of rural women in the North gave birth at communal medical stations, maternity homes, or obstetrics hospitals. In addition, there was a "medicalization" of many aspects of social life, which meant that scientific knowledge of Western medicine and obstetrics was brought in and propagated, overwhelming other kinds of local knowledge. People no longer heard of the custom of couvade. Thus, few husbands and fathers witnessed their wives giving birth and cuddling their newborns. Borrowing the saying of the British sociologist A. Giddens, the men were "dispossessed of a living experience'. Giddens had opined that in the pre-modern era, each person could witness and experience many phenomena like sickness, death, mental disorders, and so forth. But due to the specialization of modern institutions, and the establishment of hospitals in general and psychiatric hospitals in particular, these phenomena no longer occurred at home and among family members. As a result, many people were "dispossessed of a living experience" of these above phenomena. Based on this author's analysis of another study (Pham Van Bich, 1999:207-209), to apply Giddens' concept, it is possible to say that

because many women did not give birth at home, men were dispossessed a living experience of witnessing a moment when their wives' lives were often in danger (in traditional saying, the "dangerous period of being pregnant"). It was likely that many new fathers became further separated from a major event of human life, and could not understand and sympathize with their wives. Moreover, many fathers lost the chance to directly touch their children's skin and bodies when they were just born. As a result, the feeling of their children as "a drop of their blood and a piece of their intestine" was not as intense.

Due to the change in the medical system after the implementation of the innovation policy (Doi moi), since the early 1980s, many pregnant women in the cities have gone to maternity homes and obstetrics hospitals, and even to hospitals with international experts in obstetrics (where the presence of the husband is compulsory). At the same time, in many rural areas, the trend of some women giving birth at home has returned. However, there is no evidence that husbands are also returning to their traditional role, or even symbolic role, of supporting their wives during their childbearing and cuddling their newborns, like in the old custom of "couvade". Although it is not necessary to restore the custom that might be considered outdated and backward, it is necessary to *recognize its significance for the spousal relationship and the father- child tie, and to find a suitable form to replace it*. As analyzed above, this custom serves as a school for fatherhood". When this old school disappears, it needs to be replaced with a new form for learning suitable to the new context. It is notable that many fathers start to play their role of fatherhood only when their children are old enough. But if they are expected and encouraged to implement their role as soon as possible, then the custom of couvade requiring their contact with their children when they have just been born is very meaningful.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this article is not intended to negate fatherhood, but rather to call attention to some aspects of fatherhood which seem very obvious to us, so familiar that they are considered to be a given and not a matter to question. In fact, they strongly influence the role of fatherhood among Vietnamese Kinh people and should be taken into account, tested and surveyed in specific studies. Nature directs men to their wives more than to their children; but this innate orientation is not stationary, but varies in and

space. "Couvade" reflects a cultural effort to overcome this orientation. On the other hand, many traditions of the Kinh people reinforce this orientation with more stereotypes. They consider that the mother is mainly responsible for the children, and many fathers often keep their distance when taking care of and educating children. Moreover, the absent father is quite common. In addition, many changes have now increased the situation of the father-absent families. In fact, some present social and economic movements are the continuation of the past: the conception that mother, and not the father is responsible for the children, the father-child distance, the regular absence of the father, and the perceived insignificance role of fatherhood. Meanwhile, changes have created a discontinuation with past practices (for example the disappearance of "couvade"), that established a firm foundation for early physical contacts between fathers and children, right when the children are just born. The disappearance of this custom shows that culture is not stationary, but changes.

To conclude, it is possible to say that if a society requires a division of role between mothers and fathers, it is not enough to encourage men to play the role of fatherhood. It is important to formalize the requirements of men taking care of newborn babies and bringing up children in order to counteract their innate orientation, promote social learning, and train them to fulfill the role of fatherhood.

On the other hand, in theory, the distinction of two and only two types of families (the father-absent and father-present families) is obviously not enough, because this distinction takes into account only whether there is a father in family. It does not take into account how fatherhood is actually performed. The type of family in which a father is absent from home for a long time is definitely not the same as that of a father who is always present at home, because the former only carry out his role on weekends, holidays or from a distance. It is also quite different from families without a father due to divorces or single mothers. While some researchers have established a theoretical concept called "maternal deprivation" to refer to the situation of children having to be away from a mother because the mother is absent from home (even just to go to work for a few hours a day), no similar theoretical concept is proposed to show a similar absence by the father. The above dichotomy simplifies reality and needs to be supplemented with at least one variation: families with fathers who are constantly absent from home.■

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The Vietnamese Communist Party's Policy of Mobilizing Women in the 1930-1945 Revolution for the National Liberation

Dang Thi Van Chi

Abstract:

At the beginning of the 20th century, under the French colonianists' policy of colony exploition, and in conjunction with political, economic and social changes, Vietnamese women, with awareness of their role and interests, became an important social force attracting more and more attention of the whole society. This article analyses the fact that women became the object of propaganda from organizations and contemporary political trends. The author clearly points out that, immediately upon its establishment, the Vietnamese Communist Party properly assessed the role of Vietnamese women in the mission of national liberation and worked out a proper line of propagandizing and organizing women to participate in the struggle led by the Party. By analysing the effective use of the press and revolutionary propaganda leaflets, the author concludes that the Vietnamese Communist Party encouraged, attracted, and organized a large number of women to participate in the struggle, making a significant contribution to the victory of the August 1945 revolution and opening a new era for the Vietnamese population in general and Vietnamese women in particular.

Keywords:

Policy of mobilizing women; Vietnamese Communist Party; 1930-1945; Women

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In the early 20th century, as a result of two campaigns of colony exploitation by the French colonialists, there were important economic, social and cultural changes. These were important and necessary basics for the reception of bourgeois democratic thoughts from outside and the establishment of new trends in revolutionary propaganda. Along with these changes, the increasing presence of women in factories, plantations, and mines participating in socialized forms of labor brought about by capitalist methods of production and the emergence of a class of women intellectuals (teachers, journalists, writers, poets, etc.) caused women to become an important social force, attracting the attention and efforts of all contemporary political trends.

1. Political background and viewpoint of the Vietnamese Communist Party(1) about the role of women in the national democratic people's revolution.

After World War I, in 1918, several political trends and parties took form in the petty capitalist and capitalist class in Vietnam. Political organizations had different viewpoints about women's role depending on their political aims. For example, Pham Quynh, Minister of Education in the Hue court, who together with King Bao Dai planned to resume the implementation of the 1884 Treaty and called for "national sovereignty", "constitutionalism", "national unification", highly appreciated Vietnamese women in history but only took upper-class women into account. According to him, "for women, the most important thing is to establish a character suitable to one's social condition". Under social changes and the influence of French culture, he believed that upper-class women could take part in innovating society, in other words Europeanization, but it should be within their own families, "making examples of their families" by doing charity and relief work, child protection, and setting up "salons to receive famous scholars to talk about national and life issues, with the hope it will affect the evolution of the Vietnamese nation" (Nam Phong Newspaper, October 1917).

Bui Quang Chieu, leader of the Constitutionalist Party and Nguyen Phan Long, both of whom represented the middle-class national reformist trend, considered the "women's role is in the house" (Bui Quang Chieu, Women New Literature, 20 June 1929) or "women should only choose to be housewives" (Nguyen Phan Long, Women New Literature, 11 July

1929), thus they did not need to take part in social work, the struggle for equal rights, and women liberation. They believed that women were not equal to men because of women themselves, "because of their nature, not through anyone's fault". The political objectives of the capitalist class as represented by Bui Quang Chieu were to ask the French Government to expand democratic and liberal rights in Indochina and to allow the native capitalist class greater participation in colonial councils. Therefore, he opposed women who asked for equal right to men, as he was afraid that assisting women in the struggle for equal rights would mean assisting them to become "protestors ... in the family as well as in society (Bui Quang Chieu, Women New Literature, 20 September 1929).

In general, these organizations and political trends did not mention national liberation and thought that women should only be homemakers. Only Phan Boi Chau surpassed his contemporaries in terms of political viewpoint, moving gradually from monarchism to bourgeois democratic thought, and then approaching socialist thought. His patriotism helped Phan Boi Chau accurately assess the role of women in national liberation in the early 20th century. He also actively mobilized our people to struggle for national liberty. However, since his house arrest in Hue in 1925, Phan Boi Chau's activities were restricted to speeches, propaganda leaflets, and his ideas about organizing and uniting women stated in the book "Women's Issues" published 1929 were not implemented in revolutionary reality.

The Vietnamese Nationalist Party, founded in December 1927, was a revolutionary party of the petty capitalist class and patriotic progressive intellectuals based on "Nam Dong literary society" group. The policy of this party was to promote a national revolution, fight against the French colonialists and the autocratic monarchy in order to establish democratic political institutions. However, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party did not have grassroots in the labor class. Although the initial regulations of the Vietnamese Nationalist Party allowed women to join the Party, they had to do their activities in a separate cell. Later, the Vietnamese Nationalist Party for some reason no longer allowed women to join the Party, but rather gathered them in a separate union called the Vietnamese Women's Union (with the exception of one party cell of women founded before the change in policy that included the participation of Ms. Bac and Ms. Giang). According to the Regulations of the "Vietnamese Women's

Union", the purpose of this union was to:

1. Cooperate with men in undertaking national revolution.

2. Establish a democratic republic group.

3. Assist and protect oppressed nations (Tran Huy Lieu, 1958: 118).

These above purposes indicate that the Vietnamese Nationalist Party was concerned with organizing and attracting women, but did not have a plan to mobilize women for their particular requirements.

On 3 February, 1930 (according to pre-1945 revolutionary newspapers it was 6 January, 1930), the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) was founded in Hong Kong by unifying three communist organizations established in Vietnam at the end of 1929, marking an important breakthrough in Vietnamese national history and ending a time of crisis in the national salvation of the Vietnamese people. The summary political program of the Party (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 2) clearly stated the objectives of the Party as doing "bourgeois revolution of civil rights and land revolution to progress towards a communist society" and "equal rights between men and women" - which was one of the 13 main policies of the Party, and one of the 10 objectives mentioned in the Appeal (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998:14) of the leader Nguyen Ai Quoc on the foundation of the Party. The 1930 political thesis (Vietnamese Communist Party, Volume 2, 1998: 95) of the Vietnamese Communist Party also clearly stated one of the ten "essential tasks of a bourgeois revolution of civil rights" which was implementing "equal rights between men and women". The Resolution of the Central General Conference in October 1930 on mobilizing women clearly expressed the Party's viewpoint on women's role in the people's democratic national revolution led by the Party, as well as the Party's policy of mobilizing women. The determination that women were an important force accounting for "a large part of the proletarian class" who were exploited not only by capitalists and feudalists but also restricted by feudal customs and morality, and "did not have any freedom", led to the confirmation that if women could be awakened to revolutionary ideas, they would enthusiastically join the revolution and become "an essential force. If the women in the public at large do not join the revolutionary struggle, the revolution cannot be victorious". The Vietnamese Communist Party asserted the significant and decisive role of women in the people's democratic national revolution, thus it regarded mobilizing

women as "a very big and essential task" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 188). This is one of the basic differences between the Vietnamese Communist Party and other contemporary political organizations, at the same time, it is also a source of strength which led the Vietnamese Communist Party to victory.

2. The Indochinese Communist Party's (ICP) policy of mobilizing women

In the 1930s, in publicly issued bourgeoisie newspapers, women's rights and women liberation were mentioned quite often, with slogans demanding the right for women to go to school and calling on women to learn a trade in order to live independently, regarding this as a solution to the implementation of women's rights and the objective of women's propaganda. However, they still targeted only women in the upper class. It can be seen that this campaign for women's rights had the features of the theory of women's right to freedom - bourgeois women's rights, which was entirely separate from the movement of national liberation. Therefore, in its resolution on the propagandizing of women, IC Party emphasized "helping women escape from capitalist thought, overthrowing the illusion of 'equal rights between men and women' within the frame of capitalism" and propagandizing to women the awareness that only when the nation is independent and the feudal system removed would women have real opportunities for equality and freedom. Therefore mobilizing women to participate in revolutionary activities was very essential because "if women stand on the sidelines of the revolution of workers and peasants, the objective of national liberation will never be reached" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 189). Unlike all previous patriotic and revolutionary movements, the targets of the Vietnamese Communist Party's propaganda were working women, female workers and peasants, which made up a majority in society. To mobilize women to participate in revolutionary activities, our Party emphasized that first of all women should be re-organized into workers' unions, peasants' unions, youth unions and separate women's unions. Specifically, the Party set the following requirements for the workers' unions: "Workers' unions must set up a women's commission to develop propaganda for women" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 139). The female commissioner of the workers' union was responsible for examining living and working conditions of female workers in order to make recommendations to the General Workers' Union for

slogans suitable to women's requirements and interests, then mobilizing and attracting female workers to take part in Workers' Union activities. For the Peasants' Unions, the Party also pointed out that "Under the executive committee, the Peasants' Union organizes departments for the mobilization of women, to convince female peasants to participate in peasants' union to struggle together" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 155), and that "if we want women to participate in revolutionary struggles, we have to first overturn all religious or moral customs, and give them political training ... making them more aware of social class in order to attract them to join the unions of the proletarian class"; "In the leading institutions of the Party and Youth Union (from local to central levels), Women's Committees should be organized or there should be a person tasked specifically to manage this issue". In addition, IC Party also planned "to establish women's organizations like the 'Women's Alliance' to promote the interests of women and the complete liberation of women" and attract all women who were not members of Workers' Unions and Peasants' Unions such as "workers' wives and street sellers" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 190-191).

In leading the revolution, the Party was always concerned about and directed the organization and mobilization of women. The resolution of the second Central Conference (March, 1931), in the item addressing party cells, it was pointed out clearly that "if there are female workers in the factory, the party cell must send one or two party members to work with them, in accordance with the plan set forth by female officers of the City Party Committee or Zone Party Committee. Even if there are no female workers, they should also send someone to mobilize the wives of workers. These party members must maintain close contact with the female officers of the Workers' Union". (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1999: 111).

At the first Party Congress of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1935, the mobilization of women was considered one of the urgent tasks of the Party. The Party pointed out clearly that it was necessary to organize women's participation in the Party, Communist Youth Union and revolutionary unions, to admit active women into steering agencies, and to attract women to suitable organizations through public and semi-public forms. "Each level of Party cell has to set up a Women's Commission. The person responsible for that commission is entitled to attend conferences of

the Party Committee, to vote about women's issues" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 2002: 66). Accordingly, there should be special propaganda documents for women. Newspapers of the Party and other revolutionary unions needed to have articles about mobilizing women as well as taking a stand against the tendency to denigrate women and reactionary propaganda of upper class and feudal theories aiming to prevent women from participating in the struggle. The Party also emphasized that in struggles with the participation of women "...there must be special slogans for women (such as equal wages for equal work, no night work, 2 months of maternity leave before and after giving birth with full salary in accordance with the action programs of the Party, Workers' Union, Communist Youth Party... Oppose polygamy and the French government's maintainance and exploitation of prostitution to collect tax)" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 2002: 66-67).

Faced with our nation's new opportunities, during the 1936-1939 period of democratic mobilization, the Party made timely plans about organizing work, specifically about women, emphasizing that "it is necessary to set up public and semi-public Women's Unions ... to protect the common interests of all people and women in particular" such as Unions of 'democratic women', 'liberated women', 'progressive women', or 'supporting women' (Vietnamese Communist Party, 2000: 244), and in regions with many women's organizations with different names, 'Women's Alliances' should be set up to unite them. In the general election of people's representatives in the North in August 1939, under the leadership of the Party, the Indochina Democracy Front proposed a list of candidates along with their minimum action program. The program stated slogans relating to women's interests such as "oppose prostitution; equal salary for women and men with similar jobs; women with talents equal to men should be given similar positions in public and private institutions; protect women and children (before and after giving birth, women working in offices and factories shall all receive paid maternity leave, establish daycare facilities for newborns)" (The News, issue 12, dated 25-29 June 1938).

In 1939, World War II broke out. In September 1940, the Japanese fascist army entered the North and on the 8th in May, 1941, the Central Conference decided to establish a broad United National Front called the Vietnam Independent Alliance (Viet Minh for short). One of the ten main programs of the Viet Minh was "equal right between men and women".

The organizational structure of the Front included a Women's Union of National Salvation. The Union's regulations stated clearly that it aimed to "unite all patriotic Vietnamese women to fight for women's everyday interests and together with other organizations of national salvation to fight against French colonialists and Japanese fascists for the complete independence of Vietnam" (Tran Huy Lieu, 1960:8).

In 1941, faced with the urgent situation of mobilizing the anti-imperialist movement, a Resolution of a conference of officers from the entire northern region gave the following instructions: do not use femaile agitprop officers for transportation work, rather "train others to do transportation work and let female agitprop officers do their work'; "It is necessary to train more female cadres by training female party members from members of the Women's Union of National Salvation ... issue propaganda leaflets to appeal to urban women. Use all the means to unite women of all classes" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 2000: 198), because "Only with the participation of women will the national liberation struggle easily achieve success" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 2000: 301). Revolutionary reality showed that this correct policy of mobilizing women and the Indochinese Communist Party's timely guidance of the women's movement made a decisive contribution to the success of the August 1945 Revolution.

3. Revolutionary newspapers and propaganda leaflets - an effective means of propagandizing and mobilizing women

Right when it was founded, the VC Party was very concerned with mobilization and propagada, considering it an important task "to convince people and the vast majority of workers and lead them in the struggle". In the process of leading the revolution, the Party always closely supervised and offered timely guidance for the mobilization of women through revolutionary newspapers and propaganda leaflets, pointing out that "the Party's newspapers are liaison instruments between the Party and the working people: "(Vietnamese Communist Party, 1999: 117). Therefore, revolutionary newspapers had to address the everyday life of the workers and peasants, introduce political issues, basic political concepts and suitable political slogans, and the literary style of the newspapers had to be simple, understandable for working people. Mobilization "must be based on the educational level of workers and peasants". As for mobilizing women,

the Party emphasized "Regarding propaganda, newspapers of the Party, Youth Union, Workers' Union and Peasants' Union must address practical issues for women or have a separate column for those articles" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1998: 191). It is remarkable that, apart from articles written specifically for women, in most propaganda leaflets and Party appeals women were always given equal standing with men through the pronouns of address "Men and women..."

In 1930-1931, under the leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party, for the first time, workers and peasants united in the struggle. In this movement, the Party provided timely and close guidance for the work of organizing women. Most revolutionary propaganda leaflets of the Party during this period included slogans demanding rights for women, for example: equal rights between men and women; no marriages forced by parents; no polygamy; and the overturning of the unsound custom of despising women (Revolutionary propaganda leaflets. No BTCM 187/Gy374).

On 8 March 1930, under the guidance of the Southern Regional Party Committee and the Southern Workers' General Union, for the first time Vietnamese women celebrated Women's Day. To guide women in the struggle, the Party launched a propaganda program and distributed leaflets to appeal to women to participate in the struggle. The program introduced the significance of the 8th of March as the day "to struggle for women's liberation all over the world", the day when women all over the world united to struggle against "all the tricks of exploiting and dominating women, against capitalistism, an oppressing and exploiting regime, and against imperialist war". The program also talked about Russian women, revealing the oppression and exploitation of Indochinese women under the colonialist regime. On this occasion, the Party issued propaganda leaflets with the appeal to women: "Working Indochinese women must participate actively in workers' and peasant organizations in involved in the struggle, and together with men establish a revolutionary front to promote the liberation of the proletarian class and all oppressed people" (Revolutionary propaganda leaflets, No 1920/ Gy 616). Meanwhile, they also set up specific tasks for Indochinese women: "First of all, remove all unsound customs and traditions, the ruins of the feudal regime... discuss common demands of the proletarian class, participate in large numbers in organizations involved in the struggle... participate enthusiastically in everyday work... Regarding the everyday work of the

people's organizations, women and girls have to take an active part just as men do", and affirmed that this was the only way by which women could "protect the interest of the proletarian class, and liberate women" (Vietnamese Communist Party, 1999: 67).

In revolutionary newspapers during this period, there was a lot of news about women's activities and examples of women in the struggle. The newspaper The Proletarian Flag, issue 3, in 1931 reported: "On 21 January, a woman waited for the sanitary worker(2) at the market to give speech commemorating the anniversary of three comrades L"(3); "On 21 January in Hanh Thong Tay market (Gia Dinh), a woman gave a speech which was cheered by people, so much so a woman was moved to tears..."; the Workers and Peasants Newspaper, issue 26, 1 October 1931 reported that in Song Loc, a district chief beat a pregnant woman nearly to death. Some women going to market heard about it and immediately went to some neighboring communes to appeal to men and women for help. People in 6 neighboring communes (in Dang Xa zone) responded and the struggle soon became a demonstration of strength with approximately ten thousand people "surrounding the district chief, declaring his guilt and sentencing him to death, starting a widespread struggle" of people in Nghi Loc district. The Suffering Working People Newspaper, issue 13, published 18 September 1930 reported: "This fierce struggle is like other fierce struggles in Thanh Chuong, Ben Thuy, Can Loc, Ha Tinh which were led by women. Everywhere, women are bravely sacrificing themselves". The article also affirmed that: "In this period of fierce struggle, while workers, peasants and soldiers are united in the struggle, women are also starting to participate in the struggle, and gloriously so, lending great strength to the people's force. It means that women have broken the chains of slavery which had long confined them, and are participating in the struggle".

In the period from 1930 to 1935, French colonialists encouraged a movement of happiness and youthfulness to delude young people. Regarding women, there was a women's liberation movement with 'modern girls', night fairs, speeches from the South to the North on the topic of 'liberated women' and 'career women', and articles in bourgeois newspapers like Women's New Literature Newspaper (1929-1935), Women's Discussion on Current Topics (1930-1934), Phong Hoa (1932-1936), which misled the women's struggle. During this period, some progressive intellectuals

like Phan Khoi, Diep Van Ky who were aware of the Vietnamese people's condition of slavery, mobilized to liberate women from feudal morality. Some people who were influenced by the bourgeois women's rights movement called for education and careers for women, and considered this to be the objective of the mobilization of women. To fight against these trends, during the period 1934-1935 the Women's New Literature Newspaper published many communist journalists who disclosed the real situation of women: "Nine out of ten women are ignorant; all women are considered as children by the law .. women in Indochina can not organize themselves to protect their interests" and pointed out that the reasons for this were "the law does not allow women to set up trade unions and participate in all political and social rights related to their right to exist" (Women's New Literature, 11 April 1935). They also pointed out that calling upon women to liberate themselves was only "idle talk" and emphasized the most pressing thing to be done: "The most important task in mobilizing women is to penetrate into the public. Firstly, the nation will be liberated, then all humankind will be liberated" (Women's New Literature, 6 December, 1934).

In 1936, the Popular Front was set up in France. The Popular Government took office and made some progressive reforms. The Indochinese Communist Party took advantage of this to launch a movement demanding freedom and democracy all over the country. Many revolutionary newspapers published publicly became the offices where the revolution was guided and led, specifically the new Young Spirit newspaper (issue 1, published 6 June 1936), New Society (issue 1, published 10 October, 1937), Present Life (issue 1, published 1 December 1938), New Day (issue 1, published 19 April, 1939), The News (issue 1, 2 April, 1938), Rice Branch (issue 1, published 15 January, 1937), The People (1938-1939), etc.

Due to the favorable political situation, the Indochinese Communist Party planned to mobilize the establishment of legal public associations to organize and educate people as well as train cadres in order to create a force to be used in the struggle. To instruct people, many issues of the Labor Newspaper (1938-1939) included procedures to establish associations legally, the significance of legal associations, and techniques in dealing with the colonialist authority's tricks to prohibit and disband fraternal associations.

The News newspaper (issue 14, published on 2 - 6 July, 1938) analyzed "Women's responsibilities" in the National Assembly election of 1938 and mobilized women to support representatives endorsed by The News and Present Day newspapers, emphasizing that mobilizing for "these candidates to be elected is to open a new era in the history of women's liberation in this nation".

Newspapers were also where misleading thoughts in the mobilization of women were attacked. In the issue of the New Society newspaper published on 10 November, 1936, there was an article by Tam Kinh (Nguyen Thi Trac – an agent of the branch of the Northern Indochinese Congress) against the Present Day newspaper for publishing an article which criticized the conference of Northern women on 24 September, 1936. It pointed out the intention of the article in the Present Day Newspaper was to "take advantage of our low educational level and make sport of it for readers, which we strongly condemn", and called upon women to "put themselves above that unconcious ridicule. We should just actively and enthusiastically do our work..."

In the article titled Discussing Women's Issues with the female writer Tuyet Dung (The People, issues 16, 17, 18 published on 14, 17, 21 September,1938), the author Nguyen Thi Kim Thanh criticized the fascist theory of "Women returning home" as aiming to take women back to the position of "good wives and mothers" who "run a house effectively". The article emphasized and pointed out the fact that "advising women to be content with their fate as housewives does not only confine women to slavery but also misses out on half of the force that could be used in the struggle for national liberation in society, in general the liberation of humankind". It also warned that "each man and woman should keep in mind that 'the family is broken when the nation is lost' and that the family cannot be happy and equal if society at large is discontented".

Regarding some women's incorrect awareness about women's liberation, the article titled The Issue of Women's Liberation (The People newspaper, issue 35, published on 7 December 1938) analysed and pointed out specific manifestations of this wrong thinking; "For example, some women are superficial because their family situation oppresses them, persecutes them and restrains them, which makes them think that liberation means leaving their families, escaping with an obscure thought about freedom... Some women misunderstand that liberation is dissolution and equality

means romance. They are profligate and imitate various fashions, become utterly absorbed in impure pleasure-seeking and drawn-out dissipation in casinos full of material evils and carnal desire and forget about their responsibilities to family and society". The article also emphasized that in order to deal conclusively with the issue of woman, women could not be separated in terms of gender, but rather "the essential aspect of the issue is the general aspect, the aspect of class".

By the year 1939 the Indochinese Communist Party was forced to work in secret, and the Party's newspapers also had to publish secretly among the people. After the period of democratic mobilization the revolutionary public forces were trained in the practical aspects of the struggle, so revolutionary newspapers during this period focused on introducing international news, analysing the world and national situation, giving instructions for the struggle against the war, resisting the war, denouncing crimes of the French colonialists and Japanese facists towards our people, and in particular held up examples of model revolutionaries and instructed people to participate in specific activities to prepare for the general uprising to seize power. The Independent Vietnam Newspaper (1941-1945) had articles with questions and answers about the Work of Organizing Women and specific issues like: "Can women join armed units? If they cannot, what kind of work can they do? What are the weaknesses of our women?" (Independent Vietnam Newspaper 1941-1945, 2000:462). In 1945 New Year's issue of the National Salvation Newspaper, there was an article "What Women Can Do" pointing out that in history, Vietnamese women had long been patriotic participants in wars against foreign aggression with typical examples like the Two Trung Sisters, Lady Trieu, and the female general Bui Thi Xuan; or more recently Miss Tam carrying weapons for Phan Dinh Phung, the third wife of De Tham, Miss Nguyen Thi Minh Khai, Miss Giang, etc. And the article concluded that women could shoulder hard work like men, and moreover "they have to do the work that men find difficult to do well". Specifically "acting as street vendors to go on reconnaissance" or "guarding offices and venues where revolution is discussed" or "acting as good-natured peddlers" who transport weapons, working as couriers, carrying out agitation and propaganda among enemy troops, providing emergency medical care, or "even joining guerilla troops and running for election to revolutionary councils", etc.

Revolutionary newspapers during this period were published and handed

out in Viet Bac revolutionary bases and countryside, so the literary style was simple, understandable, easy to remember and learn by heart, and used a lot. For example, on the issue of the Drive Off The Enemy newspaper published on 15 July 1944, there was a long poem encouraging women to struggle against the war with detailed instructions:

Women! Don't cry as it is no use... Roll up your trousers and go to the army camp. We urge and convince our husbands to come home. Lie down to block trains. Let's shout at facists...

Or in the Freedom Newspaper issue 6 published in 1941, there was an article "A Beautiful Woman Draws The Sword" with strongly appealing poem:

...Stand up, women! We can draw the sword as well as anyone. Who is our national enemy? They are the French colonialists, Japanese fascists and unpatriotic Vietnamese... Break down the unjust regime, which has sunk women in a life of hardship for ages...

When the newspapers were published, these articles encouraged women to participate in the revolutionary struggle, becoming an essential force in the general uprising to seize power in August 1945.

Conclusion

When the Vietnamese Communist Party was first founded, it accurately assessed the important role of Vietnamese women in the revolutionary movement. Women were enlightened and drawn into most of the struggles led by the Party. Many women were leaders in strikes and demonstrations showing strength. Many actions by women became the catalyst for larger movements like the Xo Viet Nghe Tinh movement, etc. Women were always present at demonstrations, strikes for demands, demanding freedom and democracy, freedom of trade union, protesting colonial reactionaries, etc., in the 1936-1939 movement of democratic mobilization. Especially, in the 1939-1945 movement of national liberation, women played an important role in the pre-uprising struggle as well as the general uprising of the August revolution. The victory of the August revolution affirmed the correctness of the Vietnamese Communist Party's policy of mobilizing women, which was to clearly perceive the essential role of women and to inspire and mobilize the patriotic tradition of fighting foreign aggression in the historical spirit of "When the enemy comes to the home, even the women fight". The victory of the August revolution was

also the victory of closely linking the objectives of liberating the nation, liberating the classes and liberating women; it was the victory of using newspapers and revolutionary propaganda leaflets effectively. Meanwhile, the victory of the August revolution also expresses that the Vietnamese Communist Party's policies about women fulfilled women's aspirations in a way that was compatible with our nation's tradition of respecting women.■

Notes

(1) The Vietnamese Communist Party, founded on 3 February 1930, was renamed the Indochinese Communist Party in October, 1930.

(2) This is an informal way to refer to the work of changing toilet-bins in the city previously.

(3) Meaning Lenin, Lepneck and Luxemburg

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The Issues of Child Domestic Workers in Vietnam Viewed from a Comparative Perspective

Nguyen Van Chinh

Abstract:

Although studies on children in domestic service are growing, how this type of work is interpreted and the nature and meaning attributed to it is very different. A number of child labour studies tend to reflect the fact and direct causes of the phenomenon rather than digging further into the deep roots of problem. The ways that children's work is interpreted is so different because the knowledge of researchers are usually based on universal standards, values, norms and practices, while the specific cultural context in which the work occurs is rarely examined in-depth. In this paper, an attempt will be made to examine child domestic work in Vietnam and elsewhere based on the assumption that such work is closely related with cultural structure. How education is perceived and the expected future roles for children (boys and girls) have a great influence to the pattern, extent, and nature of child domestic work. In addition, the traditional concept of childhood in relation to the cultural backgrounds of various societies in Asia will also be examined to see how these factors influence child domestic work. This paper is mainly drawn from the author's field research in a Northern Vietnamese village and various reports on child work in Asia that support the author's argument.

Keywords:

Child labour; Traditional concept of Childhood; Domestic service; Filial duty.

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Introduction

Recent studies on child labour in Asia generally agree that child domestic service is rather substantial, and the hiring of domestic workers is an integral part of the Asian tradition (Black, 1997; Pflug, 2003). It should be noticed that although studies on children in domestic service are growing, how this type of work is interpreted and the nature and meaning attributed to it is very different. There seems to be a popular trend to regard the housework carried out by children as a kind of non-productive service that helps develop their skills and self-confidence. This type of work is relatively light and regarded as not so harmful to children's development, and therefore acceptable (Shah, 1996:5; ILO, 1993:6; George, 1990: 2-13; Meyers, 1989:5; Luz Silva, 1981:173). It is, however, unacceptable if a child is hired to carry out the same type of work for others outside of their own homes. In this case, it is seen as a form of slavery (Black, 1997), a kind of work that is hidden from public view and labour inspection where "most of child servants end up in working horrible conditions, do not receive an education, and end up perpetuating the cycle of poverty that persuaded their parents to send the child away to work in the first place." (CRIDOC, 2004:3; see also Pflug, 2003). In contrast to this point of view, White (1994, 1996) strongly argues that it is hard to make a distinction between 'acceptable' and 'unacceptable' forms of child work. White's observations point out that those children themselves generally do not welcome unpaid labour, including housework and family farm work, but rather, they wish to escape from it. As he puts it, "For many children however, working in a factory or other large-scale enterprise comes high on the list of preferred kinds of work, while working at home occupies a very low place" (White, 1996:5-6).

The issues surrounding child domestic service are indeed controversial and need to be carefully examined, particularly the different views of the child, childhood, the meaning of their work, and their roles in the family and society at large. As we see it, a number of child labour studies tend to reflect the fact and direct causes of the phenomenon rather than digging further into the deep roots of problem. The ways that children's work is interpreted is so different because the knowledge of researchers are usually based on universal standards, values, norms and practices, while the specific cultural context in which the work occurs is rarely examined in-depth. In other words, the economic situation of the children's family is measured with a belief that it is the direct and most important cause driving children into work. The relation between children's work and cultural backgrounds, norms, and ideology of a specific society is often overlooked.

In this paper, an attempt will be made to examine child domestic work in Vietnam and elsewhere based on the assumption that such work is closely related with cultural structure. How education is perceived and the expected future roles for children (boys and girls) have a great influence to the pattern, extent, and nature of child domestic work. In addition, the traditional concept of childhood in relation to the cultural backgrounds of various societies in Asia will also be examined to see how these factors influence child domestic work. This paper is mainly drawn from the author's field research in a Northern Vietnamese village and various reports on child work in Asia that support the author's argument. The concept of child domestic work used in this paper refers to children from the age of 6 to 15 performing domestic tasks in any setting. It is not limited to just children working in an employer's house, with or without wages. The author's conceptualization of the concept is intended to be much broader, covering children performing domestic tasks at home for their parents. This is because labour of this type also gives adults free time, facilitate the work of others or substitutes for the employment of others (Schildkrout, 1981:95), and is seen as a contribution to the maintenance of the household economy. This definition is used as it allows researchers to approach children's work from a broader perspective, in order to understand the dialectical relation between the work done by children and societal appreciation for such work.

An overview on child domestic work in Asia

While child domestic labour is seen as "one of the worst forms of child labour" and child laborers are viewed as "the most vulnerable and exploited children of all" (Black, 1997:1), there is a shortage of information and data regarding this topic. The available literatures on this theme normally do not provide any national estimates as to how many children are involved in domestic labour. Some available figures are mainly based on estimations from certain places and period of time. It can be said that the real scope and extent of child domestic work is largely unknown. This can be attributed to the fact that the majority of child domestic workers are employed in individual and private households where they are almost "invisible" (Black, 1997) and access to them is difficult. In addition, their jobs are "neither registered nor do they form part of any system of official job registers" (Pflug, 2003:12).

The information that is available is still useful as it allows us to have an idea on the scope and extent of child domestic service in Asia. For example, in India, a country with the largest number of working children in the world, there are about 13.5 million children under the age of 15 engaged in domestic labour. Of this figure, 90% of them are girls. In the Philippines, the largest exporter of domestic workers in the world, it is estimated that there are about one million children working as domestic helpers. In a recent report on child domestic workers in Asia, Pflug provides the following figures (estimated):

- In Dhaka, Bangladesh: 300,000 children work in domestic labour

- In Jakarta, Indonesia: 700,000 domestic workers

- In Nepal, approximately 62,000 domestic workers (under the age of 14)

- In Sri Lanka, about 100,000 children are employed in domestic work and food catering (Pflug, 2003:5).

- In Phnom Penh, Cambodia: about 27,950 child domestic workers, which constitute almost 10% of all children at the age between 7 and 17 (NIS, 2003:4).

The above estimations do not cover children who were performing domestic work in the households of their parents, guardians or other relatives, which must be the largest majority of working children. This fact is also recognized by one ILO survey on child labour in four countries that includes India and Indonesia: "In one country, four out of every ten children and as many as nine out of ten in another were engaged in domestic work" (ILO, 1996:30). However, most studies on child labour exclude the work carried out by children within their own household, considering this as not a problem for further examination.

As reported by various surveys, the majority of child domestic workers in urban settings are from the rural areas and a larger proportion of rural children who stay in their home village are involved in domestic work as part of their daily house tasks. This suggests that domestic work is part of the lives of rural children and there exists a flow of children from rural areas migrating into urban settings to find job in the service sectors and as domestic helpers.

As far as gender, the proportion of girls and boys may vary from place to place, but findings from various surveys indicate that the majority of child domestic workers are girls. For example, the four-country ILO survey mentioned above reveals: "Among children engaged in paid domestic work, girls outnumbered boys and represented two-fifths of all working girls in one country" (ILO, 1996:30). Recent surveys in Hanoi (Vietnam) report that in a sample of 219 child domestic workers under the survey, 100% of children at the ages between 12 and 15 were girls, and in the older age group (between 16 and 17 years of age), 98.3% were girl (Save the Children Sweden, 2000: 35). Most of the children were employed for the first time to work as domestic help at the age of 11 and 12. A similar situation is found in other Asian countries such as India and Pakistan, where most of the children start working as child domestic workers around the age of ten, and many start at as young as age 5. In Bangladesh, "more than 20% of child domestic workers were between 5 and 10 years old" (Pflug, 2003:13).

Almost all of the children employed to work in domestic service have a low education. Some of them have never attended school. A recent survey on child domestic workers in Hanoi, Vietnam (a country with a high literacy rate, where 86.6% of those over ten years of age are able to read and write) reveals that most of them stopped going to school a year or two before they left school to become domestic helpers. About one third of them dropped out of school somewhere between grades 1 and 5 and never went to the lower secondary school (Save the Children, 2000:49). Most of the employers under the survey said it is not necessary for the children working in domestic service to have a high education. This helps explain why children with a low level of education can find employment opportunities in this sector. Girls who not finish primary education can find domestic work.

The causes for children dropping out of school include economic reasons, such as parents being unable to afford the cost of education and parents needing children to work to supplement and raise the household's income. However, surveys have also revealed a number of non-economic factors. Among these, there is a relatively popular trend of thinking that education is somehow less important for girls than for boys. Such a perception is deeply rooted in gender differentiation between boys and girls in the past, in various Asian countries. Furthermore, in rural areas today, many parents expect their daughters will learn the skills of domestic work so they can perform these tasks better when becoming a wife in the future. Moreover, "the concept of working children in Asia was partly seen as give-and-take relationship with their parents – children being brought up by their parents and parents in turn expecting their children to help them" (Pflug, 2003:7).

As a general practice in various Asian countries, domestic service is regarded a sort of job for the poor, and therefore it is not respected. For centuries in Asia, there have existed a considerable number of children who work in domestic service for others as a way to pay their parents' debts. The common feature for those children who do this work is that most of them are "live-in workers". They are separated from their parents and families for a long time, ranging from several months to a number of years. It is rare to hear that child domestic workers are able to talk directly with their employers about their working conditions. Their employment is usually discussed among their parents, guardians, brokers and employers. It is in this context that child abuse and exploitation occurs. Various literature on this topic finds that once employed, these children will soon have to work full time without holidays and joys, mopping in the house all day and living with the risk of violence and abuse. This is particularly true with girl domestic workers who can be "at risk of sexual harassment and rape not only by male members of the employer's house but also by male visitors" (Pflug, 2003:23). That is the reason why studies on child domestic workers voice strongly that this type of child employment is in fact a form of slavery that has a bad long-term influence on these children's development, mentally and physically (Black:14).

Case of Vietnam

Our conversations with children who stay home and help their parents with household chores strengthen the assumption that they do not like this kind of work at all. We usually hear them label such household tasks as "work without a name," suggesting that their labour is not fully recognized by adults. Given a choice, they would prefer to do jobs "with a name" (means incomes) rather than stay home working on household chores. My own observation reveals that at the age of six or seven, children in rural areas are already expected to participate in various types of domestic tasks, while girls tend to take on these tasks at an earlier age than boys. Helping parents in domestic tasks is widespread among peasant families, regardless of their household economic backgrounds. Our survey at a northern Vietnamese village (Nguyen Van Chinh, 2000) indicates that from the ages of 9 and 13, girls contributed an average of 2.7 hours per day in various house tasks, which was almost equal to the contribution of the female adults. Boys within the same age group contributed an average of 1.5 hours per day to housework. While most of the house tasks are not income-generating activities, certain domestic work contributes directly to raising

income, such as raising livestock and collecting "free goods."

The author sees housework as having a special meaning for children. By doing house tasks, children show their obedience and good morality and fulfil their filial obligations towards their parents. However, boys are not expected to participate in doing house tasks in the same intensity or ways as girls. Observations elsewhere share this view (Schildrout, 1978; Rydstrom, 1998). Embedded deeply in the cultural psyche of the Vietnamese society, obedience and good behaviour are considered among the most highly valued characters of children, particularly with respect to girls. Girls are only commended as 'good' when they show their obedience to parents by fulfilling house chores. On the other hand, if the socially established norms applied to the girls are not followed, girls are criticized as undisciplined and naughty. Parents do not seem to care as much about their son's obedience. Furthermore, a girl's involvement in household tasks is not simply regarded as a duty. It is through these tasks that she is expected to learn the skills of performing typical "female" house chores and the good behaviour expected of her gender. In the research, the author observed that for most girls, even after they have completed their "productively assigned tasks" such as farming or handicrafts, continue on with cooking, sweeping and washing, while boys were free from house tasks. Girls were told that housework was their natural duty. If girls envied their brothers' free time while they had to do house chores, they might be reminded by their parents that envy is a bad character for girls. Self-denial is regarded as a top virtue a girl needs to learn during her childhood. The mothers teach their daughters to be self-denial through practicing daily house chores and interacting among the family members. Daughters are always reminded that if they do not know how to run house chores and behave correctly, they may never find a husband. Even if they get married, they may be punished by their husbands. In a sense, the differentiation in house tasks performed by girls and boys is in fact a process of socialization in which gender-specific roles are shaped for the children's future lives. Such a pattern of socialization is greatly regulated by the male-oriented structure of the family and patriarchal order consolidated further by Confucian ethics.

While housework by children is seen as a process of socialization, and at the same time, a contribution to maintaining the household stability, the author's finding is that this type of work is undesirable from the children's point of view. The adults usually argue that teaching children to master

housework skills is part of their upbringing. At the same time, adults recognize that children's help in housework provides parents with more advantages and make their lives easier. The authors observed that when children did not carry out their assigned tasks properly, they were punished by their parents, or in some instances, by their elder brothers and sisters.

For many adults interviewed, housework performed by children is regarded as light, simple, and suitable for young people and an important contribution to the household economy. Children themselves, however, do not share the same idea. They regard housework as somewhat boring. The children generally do not seem to welcome this type of work. Apart from their desire to work for wages, another reason for dissatisfaction is that their labour is not fully appreciated by their parents.

The author has indicated earlier that helping parents in domestic work is seen as a common task for Vietnamese children, particularly in rural areas, and household chores is usually started at an early age. Children's involvement in housework is thought not only a form of socialization but also a contribution into household economy. Children whom the author studied who engaged in house chores regularly, particularly boys, do not like to be domestic helpers, and wish to get away from it. From their perspective, if they have to do something to help parents, they prefer doing something that earned money rather than running odd jobs that are not fully recognized. This view is different from the adult's attitude on at least two points: one, children's house task is a natural division within the household and is a contribution to maintain the household economy, and, two, house task is light work that does not harm the children's development, but on the contrary, helps them learn more skills for their future. It is this way of adult thinking that helps explain why the employment of children in domestic work is seen as "normal."

Available statistics indicate an upward trend of children entering the labour market since Vietnam adopted economic reforms in the mid of 1980s (Nguyen Van Chinh, 2000). This is seen as a new phenomenon because during the 1960s and 1970s, under the centrally planed economic system, the employment of child domestic workers almost disappeared. All forms of child work were regarded as the remnants of feudal exploitation that had to be wiped out. Surprisingly, after two decades of application of the market-oriented economy, child labour in domestic work has returned and become more rampant than before. An investigation by Giang Ha Vi reveals that there are about 18,000 children at work in the

city of Hanoi; most of whom are child domestic workers (1995). Another report by Nguyen Dinh Chuc (1994) indicates that 90% of child domestic workers in Hanoi are girls, and most of them are coming from the poor peasant families outside of Hanoi.

Although to date there has been no large scale official survey, pilot studies on child labour in Vietnam tend to confirm the fact that a substantial number of children are hired to work as house servants in urban settings. This is taking place, although Vietnam became a signatory to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child immediately after it was issued, and the national 1994 Labour Code prohibits all forms of child employment for those under the age of 15. This means that the children who are younger than 15 who are hired to work as domestic helpers are working illegally. No employers in our study who use child workers, however, have been sanctioned or convicted. On the contrary, the demand for child domestic workers has increased recently and becoming more commercialized. It seems that there is tacit agreement that child employment in this field is not so serious, even it is seen as "an objective process of natural division of labour" (Nguyen Dinh Chuc, 1993:3).

Our findings from a recent research on child domestic workers in Hanoi indicate that in addition to employers who are from better-off households, more than a half of employers using child helpers are government officials and salaried workers with an average level of income. Perhaps the cheap payment of between 200,000 and 300,000 *dong per month*, (roughly 17 – 20 $US) is the main reason a household with a modest income can hire a child helper. Besides, the employers prefer child workers because they are believed to have some advantages over adult workers, such as having innocence, good behaviour, obedience and submissiveness. Our research also found that most of the hired children in individual households in Hanoi are from the rural areas and a smaller proportion of them are from the outskirt of city. Peasant families with low income tend to find their daughters a job in the domestic sector in urban settings, and such work is seen as "light work" that can help overcome their family hardship. Most of child workers send their salaries home to support their families. Our interviews also reveal that by doing jobs with income, children practice the "obligations and duties of a child towards the parents" and show their "dutifulness."

A common route for hiring a child helper is through the introduction of relatives or acquaintance. Most of the child domestic workers we talked

with reported that their first contact with the employers was from family acquaintances. About 30% of child workers in our sample were working for their relatives or those who have close relations with their relatives. This kind of relationship is seen as a warranty from both sides, with the parents believing that their children will not be violently abused and the employers being ensured that the child will behave correctly. Such relationships, however, do not actually guarantee that the child workers are well cared for by their employers.

Our survey in Hanoi indicates that once the child enters their employers' house, they are supposed to work full time, and have no time for any form of education. Only a few child workers report that they are still in school and are perform part-time domestic service to supplement their educational costs, and this work is only commenced on the occasions of holidays such as New Year festival or summer vacation. In terms of working time and nature of work, there is not much difference between the child and adult workers. There is, however, one apparent difference: their wages. Although they do the same tasks, child workers always receive a lower salary, ranging from a half up to two-thirds of an adult worker's salary. Furthermore, employers normally do not pay directly to child workers but to their parents or guardians. In many cases, we found the employers pay only once or two times a year so that the child workers will not run away from their assigned tasks but work harder. However, we want to point out that although the public media has reported a number of cases where child domestic workers were abused and violently punished by their employers, we did not find any such cases in our sample. In our interviews with working children, opinions of children regarding their employers' abuse are vague. Many of them tend to appreciate the support of their employers in their time of need. Good treatment and bonus are often repeated in the stories of child workers when they talk about their employers. This is understandable because they do not want to be dismissed from work. Their stories also tell that they are more experienced than their age. On the other hand, most of the employers did not seem to cooperate actively with researchers but felt shameful to expose the fact that they employ a child to run house chores in order to keep their own children in school.

Stories told by child domestic workers reveal that by living and working in their employers' homes, they have little chance to make friends with their peers in their neighbourhoods. In addition, they have an inferiority

complex due to their status and education that acts as an invisible barrier hindering them from looking up peers who are in school. They usually swallow their tears when they are faced with discriminatory labels, such as "the children of clumsy peasants." A research on the mental state of child domestic workers in Hanoi brings out the fact that these children are always feeling homesick and lonely simply because they have found it difficult to integrate into the environment of their employers' family atmosphere (Tran Thi Minh Duc, 2004:218-228).

The child, childhood and globalization

As stated earlier, there is no doubt that poverty is the common reason of child domestic labour in Asia, and as we see it, most of child labour studies are focused on this cause. The socio-cultural context within which children's work take place is, as usual, overlooked. Such studies tend to bear a "rational" character, based on economic hard facts, and mostly neglect the cultural aspects, which in fact influence greatly the extent and nature of children's economic activities (Rodgers and Standing, 1981:23). From the author's point of view, cultural constraints and social institutions have an important implication because they help us understand the "gender dimensions" as well as the reasons why children are involved in work at such an early age. For instance, recent studies on child domestic workers in Asia found that most domestic workers tend to be women and young girls because "girls are perceived to be more silent and submissive and less likely run away." It is, however, found that in Nepal, "a large number of boys working as domestic workers in the Kathmandu area because girls are less mobile than boys and only a few leave their village and family unless and until they are married." (Pflug, 2003:31)

"Some ethnic groups consider girls or women to be 'impure' during the time of their menstruation – they are therefore not allowed to work in or enter the kitchen and other rooms of the house during that time. [...] It is commonly thought inappropriate for single adolescent females, who are non-family members, to live and be employed within the households" (Pflug, 2003: 31).

Besides, there still exists in a number of Asian countries a long traditional practice where poor parents falling deeply into debts usually opt to send their children to work as domestic workers in repayment of their debts; these children become the bonded labour of the creditors/employers. Findings from a survey on poverty in a province in Vietnam in 1993

reported that among the rural poor households, about 30 percent lacked food for three months a year or more. In coping with this situation, these households often take to borrowing (food and cash) as the first remedy to survive, but unfortunately, 56 per cent of the households were unable to pay back their debts. Because of this, 8.3 per cent of poor households had to send their children to work as servants as a form of debt payment while five per cent had to give away their children to others for adoption (MAFI, 1993:334).

The two examples mentioned above indicate that while poverty is a common cause pushing children to enter the labour market, the way their labour is used is different. The difference is rooted in the cultural structure, in how children are perceived, and their status and position within the family and society.

According to the prevailing attitude today, in the well-developed and industrialized Western societies, the child is defined as someone who needs care and protection and childhood is a specific period in human life where one needs special concern and support (Woodhead, 1990:60). The term "need" implies a distinct status accorded to children and priority for protecting and promoting their psychological welfare. Childhood is seen as a time for playing and learning, enjoying innocence, free from responsibility, and certainly, free from working. From this perspective, a child is considered dependent on adults, and it is the responsibility of the adult to ensure that they are protected and supported so that they can enjoy their childhood. Such attitude became a popular ideology of the European twentieth century; and the state was regarded as having a duty to ensure a realization of this ideal childhood (Archard, 1993).

It can be said that this conception and view have become the main features of Western ideology of the child and childhood in contemporary times, which have inspired the development of the modern concept of childhood and an international instrument guiding policies on children rights and their development. The international Convention on the Rights of the Child was also built on this basis, with an emphasis on protecting children from any forms of hazards as well as providing them with services for their development.

While the Western concept of childhood emphasizes the "rights of children," the popular attitudes in many Asian societies tend to regard "obligations of children" as part of their socialization. The social structure that

is based on the system of hierarchical order, and a number of constraints and social status is a good source of reference for children's socialization. The author will try to demonstrate that there is a difference between the Western and Asian concept of childhood, and this concept has a great influence on how children are employed in domestic work.

In the author's study on children performing housework in a Vietnamese village, there was a gap between adults and children regarding their view on the importance of children carrying out household tasks. Parents and adults generally do not recognize children in domestic work as a type of labour but rather as a normal feature of society. In contrast, children themselves regard this form of work as a boring assignment, or in their words, "work without a name." That domestic work by children is perceived as very normal and familiar stems from a long tradition in various Asian societies that see work as part of childhood training; therefore, it is regarded as normal to ask children to do house chores, particularly girls because domestic work is seen as part of being female members in the family. This finding gives me a sense that there is a close relation between the traditional values in society and using children in domestic work. In societies where the use of child assistance in house tasks is common, their employment in this type of work is also seen as normal. Pflug's report on the situation of child domestic workers elsewhere in Asia is a good example to support the author's observation:

"In some countries in Asia, such as Nepal, this may be connected to a traditional value system which believes that one religious or ethnic group or caste should serve another and has customarily supplied others with domestic labour. In countries with minority populations, children from indigenous groups are sent to work in households of the majority population" (Pflug, 2003:18).

Back to the case of Vietnam, the author would like to maintain that perceptions of children's position and their roles in society are heavily influenced by Confucian ethics and values which were existed on this society for many centuries, and their remnants are still a source of reference for the ordinary people's thinking and action. This is true because for about five centuries starting from the 15th century onwards, the laws approved during Vietnam's feudalism period incorporated the basic principles of Confucian ethics into the administration of society, in which the relationships between parents and children were always the center of social relationships. The absolute authority of the father within his family was rec-

ognized by law: 1) The father, as the head of the family, had full power to manage all property of the family; 2) The father had explicit ownership of his wife/wives and children. He could mortgage his children or force them to work for earnings; 3) The father had full rights regarding his children's education and marriage (Dao Duy Anh, 1994:116). Under these laws, children were regarded as their father's property and therefore had to fully comply with his authority. As children, they had no rights at all. This law was deeply rooted in the basic Confucian doctrine of children's "Filial Duty" (*Dao Hieu*).

Filial duty is regarded as the primary virtue of children towards their parents. *Filial duty regulates children's obligations to take care of their parents* (and grand parents, if any) in order to repay their labour in raising the children. Caring for the parents means that children should dutifully provide adequate material means and pay special regards to their parents. Moreover, *filial duty emphasizes children's obligations to obey their parents*. For instance, children were not allowed to argue with their parents or bring legal actions against them regardless of how badly they were treated. Furthermore, children were not allowed to leave their parents when their marriages were to be arranged by the parents, irrespective of their wish. Together with strict regulations on the rights and obligations between the father and his children, Confucian ethics also emphasize the different status of son(s) and daughter(s), which were complied in textbooks and translated into rhythmic process for popular circulation. Though it is hard to assess the prevalence of the Confucian remnants and how they impact on contemporary Vietnam society after several decades of socialist transformation, it is believed that such long traditional values of children's obligations to their parents and attitudes about their roles and position within the family and society are still strongly preserved as influential factors in the children's life and work today. As noted above, we often found these aspects while talking with children about the meaning of their work.

In the wake of globalization today, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was issued by the United Nations, includes the universality of all rights of children in the convention, seeing children as individuals with their own voices to be heard and respected, and provisions aimed at meeting their best interest and protection. It is apparent that today's modern world tends to emphasize the globalization of children's rights and regards childhood as a long period of human immaturity, and therefore,

children have a right to be helped (Woodhead, 1990:60-67). Such a globalizing perspective on children's rights is also positively responded to by many states in Asia. On the other hand, long traditions in Asian cultures that put obligations rather than rights on the children are likely prevailing at the grass-root levels of societies. Among these are obligations of the younger towards the elders, of children towards their parents, etc. Born and raised in such a cultural environment, children are, right from an early age, taught to accept these traditions and obey them accordingly. Without a doubt, these cultural ties are a burden of the past working against the globalization of children's rights. While the rhetoric is loud about the rights of the child, the roots of child abuses and exploitation that are embedded in the cultural background are still often overlooked. This is indeed a great challenge for a transformation from obligations to rights of the child in societies where features of conservative ethics are still deeply entrenched.■

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Social Determinants of Age at First Birth in Vietnam

Tran Thi Minh Thi

Abstract:

The birth of one's first child is an important life course event which has important implications for both the individual and society. In Vietnam, aside from a smattering of technical reports and surveys, barely any studies have been conducted to investigate women's age at first giving birth (hereon, "age at first birth"). This paper explores the current patterns and social determinants of age at first birth in Vietnam using data from the Vietnam Demographics and Health Survey 2002. Studies of fertility around the world indicate that in most developing countries, there has been a trend toward delayed family formation as societies become more modern, and as more young women obtain higher schooling and enjoy widened career opportunities. In contrast, my results indicate a trend toward a decrease in age at first birth over the last several decades, which may reflect Vietnam's recent war-torn history. My findings also indicate that other factors, including levels of urbanization, educational attainment, religion, and especially age at first marriage, significantly influenced women's age at first birth, with the latter being the strongest driving force and predictor of women's age at first birth in Vietnam.

Keywords:

Age at first birth; Multivariate analysis.

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I. Introduction

The birth of her first child is an important life course event that marks a woman's transition to motherhood. The timing of women's age at first birth affects many fundamental aspects of everyday life of individuals and families, and is also related to institutional patterns and even the fertility transition of the entire country (Hirschman and Rindfuss, 1980; Rindfuss et al., 1983). At the micro level, childbearing may affect women's educational and occupational attainment, career path, marital stability, asset accumulation, health, as well as the spacing of subsequent children and completed family size (Bumpass et al., 1978; Bumpass, 1986). A mother's age at first birth may also influence the social environment and intellectual development of the child, as well as subsequent opportunities available to the woman and/or her children. At the macro level, trends in the age at first birth have important effects on the pace of social development, period fertility trends, and the state of the economy (Rindfuss and John, 1983).

My study examines the trend and social, geographical and cultural determinants of women's age at first birth in Vietnam. Two research questions are: (1) What is the overall pattern of women's age at first birth in Vietnam? (2) What are the social determinants of women's age at first birth, and socioeconomic and cultural variations?

II. Methods and data

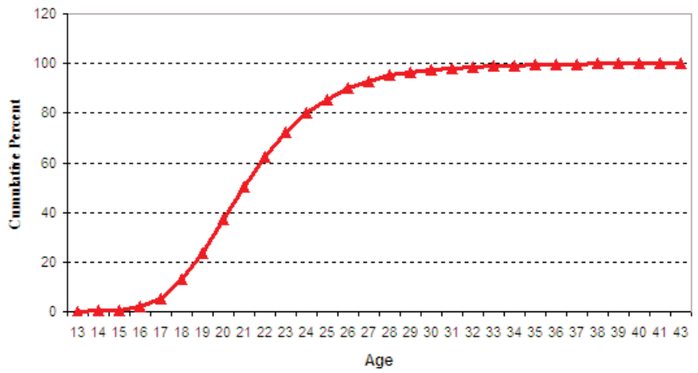
Data are taken from the Vietnam National Demographic and Health Survey 2002 (VNDHS, 2002). This national level survey aims to collect up-to-date information on family planning; childhood mortality; health issues such as breastfeeding practices, pregnancy care, vaccination of children, and treatment of common childhood illnesses; HIV/AIDS, as well as utilization of health and family planning services (GSO, 2006). In this paper, I use the individual women questionnaire which was used to collect information on 5665 ever-married women aged 15-49. In my bivariate and multivariate analyses, I limit the sample to women aged 30-49 to overcome a bias caused by the number of women who get married and enter motherhood at a young age (4045 ever-married women aged 30-49). Additionally, by the age of 30, more than 90% of women have given birth to their first child, and the population of women aged 30-49 presents a good distribution of the population as a whole. Because most respondents in my analyzed sample were born and grew up from 1953 to 1972, analyzing their age at first birth means that the findings for this special historical period may not reflect the current patterns.

In the analysis, then, it is necessary to "weight down" the over-sampled areas and "weight up" the under-sampled areas. By weighting the cases, it is possible to provide nationally representative estimates of the population behavior patterns as a whole. Two methods of data analysis are descriptive and multivariate regression. I will describe trends and current patterns of the age at first birth in Vietnam and differences among predictive groups at the time of their first childbearing event using some frequencies and cross tables. Tests of mean differences using the Scheffe and Bonferroni test in ANOVA are applied to explore whether there are significant associations between the independent variables and dependent variables. In addition, the F-test is examined to capture whether there are mean differences across categories.

III. The pattern of age at first birth

There is evidence that the pattern of women's age at first birth has not changed distinctly within the past five years. In 2002, the mean age at first birth of all-ever married women was 22.0 and the mean age at first marriage was 20.6. As illustrated in the figure below, the youngest age at first birth was 13 in the 2002 survey, but the number of such cases was very small. The oldest age at first birth was 43. In the 2002 survey, 97.2% of interviewed women had their first child by age 30 and the typical age at first birth for all cohorts was 21 to 23. Vietnam reports a remarkably high level of early first childbearing events and a moderate level of postponing the age at first birth at the present (Figure 1). If a higher proportion of older women had a child before age 21, then a country that seems to experience an increase in age at first birth would actually have less change, and the trend would be closer to one of stability. Postponing the birth of the first child is not truly a serious matter since only 5% of women have a late first birth. However, when the number of women having their first child at a young age is high, it not only causes them health problems, economic hardship, future promotion opportunities for them and their family, but it also places greater burdens on the State in terms of infrastructure construction requirements, and provision of health and social welfare services as well as employment opportunities for a younger population both at present and in the future.

Figure 1: Cumulative Percentage of Age at First Birth of Vietnamese Women in the Demographic and Health Survey 2002



Source: Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey 2002 (N=5665)

Mean age at first birth and cohorts

As revealed in Table 1, the common age at first birth for all cohorts is from 21 to 23, but the youngest cohort reported a shift toward a younger age at first birth. Specifically, the mean age at first birth of the 1953-1957 cohort is the highest (23.3) and mean age is lowest in the most recent cohort, born from 1968-1972 (21.6). In other words, there has been a constant decline in mean age at first birth among Vietnamese women over time.

A similar trend is found for the age at first marriage, which is consistent with other similar studies (Nguyen Huu Minh, 2000; Vu Manh Loi, 1998). The question is whether this trend is a structural change or related to other possible social conditions? Though Vietnam remains a poor country in which the feudal period broke shortly in 1945, it is not possible to create comfortable potentials for any dramatic structural change in fertility behavior early. Therefore, these gradual declines may be a result of historical chaos in Vietnam in the 20th century which included wars and revolutions for independence from Colonial rule and other forms of foreign influence.

The cohort born in the 1950s grew up during two great national wars: the

Table 1: Mean Age at First Birth by Social and Economic Factors For 30-49 Year Old Women with Children

Independent variables	Birth cohorts			
	1968-1972	1963-1967	1958-1962	1953-1957
Age at first birth	21.6	22.5	22.9	23.3
Age at first marriage	20.3	21.0	21.3	21.6
<18	18.3	18.3	18.5	18.3
18-20	20.4	20.6	21.0	21.1
21-23	22.9	23.0	23.1	23.3
24-26	25.0	25.0	25.2	25.5
>27	28.6	29.4	29.8	30.6
Women's education attainment				
No education	20.8	22.2	21.3	21.2
Primary school (1-5)	21.1	21.5	22.0	22.1
Secondary school (6-9)	21.6	22.2	23.1	23.8
High school (10-12)	22.1	23.9	24.0	25.3
College, university (>12)	25.0	25.9	25.5	25.6
Husband's education attainment				
Primary school	21.1	21.9	21.8	22.4
Secondary school	21.4	22.3	22.9	23.5
High school	22.1	23.0	23.4	23.5
College, university	24.1	24.9	24.6	25.1
Geographical Region				
Northern Uplands	21.6	21.5	22.2	22.8
Red River Delta	21.0	23.0	23.8	24.3
North Central	21.5	22.3	22.9	23.2
Central Coast	21.8	22.9	23.3	22.8
Central Highlands	21.8	23.8	22.3	22.5
Southeast	23.2	22.9	23.2	24.0
Mekong River Delta	21.5	22.2	22.2	22.3
Type of residence				
Urban	22.9	23.8	24.1	24.4
Rural	21.4	22.1	22.6	23.0
Childhood place of residence				
Large city/capital	22.7	23.9	23.5	24.5
Town	21.8	22.8	23.6	23.9
Countryside	21.5	22.2	22.8	23.1
Religion				
No religion	21.6	22.5	23.1	23.6
Buddhist	21.8	22.6	23.0	22.5
Christian	21.3	21.9	21.7	22.4
Others	21.3	21.2	20.1	20.8
Ethnicity				
Kinh	21.7	22.6	23.1	23.5
Ethnic groups	21.2	21.6	22.0	21.9

Source: Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey, 2002 (N=4045)

late French War and nearly twenty years of the American War. They entered adulthood in late -1960s and early 1970s, when war was still fierce. The majority of Vietnamese men during these years either joined the army or carried relevant war duties and fought in the front, leaving women to serve as great supporters in the rear or also join the armed struggles themselves. If a woman was not married, she needed to wait for men from the front to come back because men were not locally available. If a woman was already married, having a child constituted a similar difficulty because her husband was fighting in the front. In any case, marriage and/or childbearing were often not available options. War, in changing the material of women and redefining the relationship between expected social roles and family roles, of which all individual benefits are placed under national or public priorities. The special social context of the war era thus provided women with a macro reason for delaying marriage and, consequently, the age at first birth. In this sense, the highest average age at first birth of cohort in the study in comparison to the younger cohorts cannot be considered as the result of enlightened progress regarding fertility, but rather should be understood as a result of wartime conditions.

The cohort born in the late-1950s and early-1960s shares a similar social historical background of childhood with those born four years earlier. They grew up during the American War, which may have caused interruptions to their education, recreation, and other relevant opportunities. A difference is that when this cohort entered the age of dating in the late-1970s, the war had just ended and the country was reunified and this event may have strongly changed these women's fertility behaviors. Reunification brought women opportunities of meeting young men who survived from the fronts and subsequently increased the possibility of getting married and having children. After the war, never-married men and women tended to get married quickly and married couples also (re)started their active sexual relationship, leading women to give birth to mark their family's reunion. This phenomenon may have caused a baby boom generation and reduced age at first marriage and age at first birth because males became more available and individuals were released from the national call of duty to fight Vietnam's enemies. On the other hand, age at first marriage and first birth decreased only slightly and remained high compared with those of younger cohorts for two reasons. First, a considerable number of young males died during the war (Hirschman et al., 1995) so the pool of potential male marriage partners for women was considerably diminished. Second, after 1975, women who were considered to have passed the marriageable age did not have children because there may have been no available older men for them. Additionally, warfare might have had an important effect on delaying marriage because of the men's military duty and the high war-related death rates among potential male marriage partners (Nguyen Huu Minh, 1998).

The ages at marriage and first birth of women born in the mid-1960s, who entered adulthood in early-1980 in peace time, were not influenced by war. However, entering the 1980s, the country was confronted with new difficulties caused by the cataclysms of yet more border wars in 1978-79, as well as food scarcities, a production decline, and sky-high prices. The price readjustment in 1981 and the general price-wage-money readjustment in 1985 had additional serious consequences. In the mid-1980s, Vietnam's economy faced serious problems due to the widespread inefficiency of state enterprises, vulnerability to fluctuations in foreign aid, and shortages of capital and consumer goods. The centralized method of economic management, which was relatively successful in war-time, turned out to be not suitable to peace-time national (re)construction. The country fell into a socioeconomic crisis and people's lives were full of difficulties. In this situation, people tended to delay marriage and/or childbearing to pay attention to earning activities. In 1986, Vietnam carried out renovations in all aspect of life: economic, political, ideological, cultural, and educational. There followed an unprecedented change in institutions and organizations. Since Renovation, there has been a significant increase of income and living standard for all people. Therefore, people feel they can afford and are confident in their ability to marry, bear and rear children.

The cohort born in the late-1960s and early-1970s has the youngest age at marriage and age at first birth. These women entered the age of marriage and childbearing in the early-1990s when Vietnam had attained some remarkable achievements after more than five years of renovation. The nation's socioeconomic performance provided individuals with higher living standards and income, more accessible social services, such as health care and healthier social environments, and this in turn created favorable conditions for personal choices in decisions regarding marriage and first childbearing.

ANOVA tests demonstrate that there are mean differences in age at first birth across birth cohorts (F=23.105 and df = 3/4040). Scheffe and

Boferroni tests suggest the differences across all categories of birth cohorts, excluding the difference between the cohort 1958-1962 and the cohort 1953-1957.

Age at first birth and level of education

Educational attainment has clear effects on all mean ages at first birth of all cohorts. The ANOVA tests show there are mean differences in age at first birth across educational attainment groups (F=61.401 and df = 4/3967). As revealed in Table 1, for the most recent cohort, women with lower levels of education tend to have their first child at a younger age, compared with more educated women. Women with college/university education give their first birth nearly 4.2 years and 3.9 years later than women with no education or only some primary schooling, respectively. The t-test for equality of means states that both differences are significant. The difference between higher educated women compared to secondary school educated women is nearly three years. All cohorts report the same pattern that the mean ages at first birth increase as education increases. Although maternal higher education associated with later timing of first birth regardless of birth cohorts, the magnitudes of the proportions are substantial for the younger cohorts. The profound effects of education among recent cohorts could be attributed to the breakdown of traditional cultural barriers that in the past saw motherhood as the main career for women and also enhanced career opportunities for contemporary educated women.

Husbands' educational attainment also appears consistent with mean age at first birth of women: as the husband's schooling increases, his wife's mean age at first birth also increases. Declines in the mean age at first birth are more common among husbands with lower levels of education. However, the education levels of husbands are more weakly correlated to the age at first birth than are the wives'. For example, the mean difference between husbands with no education and husbands with a bachelor education of all cohorts is less than 2.9 years. There may be a role conflict for women between their own education, namely their social role, and early family formation with burdens such as caring for and bringing up children at the very first period of life, namely their family role. An illustration of the main responsibility of women in caring for and bringing up children is the proportion of breastfeeding prevalence (i.e., 90% of children in every subgroup are breastfed, VNDHS, 2002). It is hard for a woman to begin a family if she is going to school and working at the same time.

However, the responsibility of caring for children is much reduced for Vietnamese husbands. Traditionally, women are given the main or sometimes the sole responsibility of rearing children. Though efforts at gender equality have assigned some child-care responsibilities to men, in the early years of family formation, it is hard for a man to take over his wife's roles in child-care, especially if the child is being breastfed.

Other examination of relationship between percentage distribution of age at first birth and education level (table of data is not shown here) also suggests a very strong impact of schooling on the timing of giving first birth. Almost half of women (44% to 49%) with primary or less schooling have their first child before reaching age 21. The comparable figure for women with some secondary schooling is 30%, and only 20% for women who have completed tertiary schooling. In the meantime, only about 4% of women with no education report delaying the birth of their first child until age 27; the proportion increases to about 7% among women with a secondary school education, reaches about 12% among high school educated women, and finally peaks to 22.6% among women with a college or university education.

Age at first birth and other social background variables

The data show that social background variables, type of residence, religion and ethnicity are associated with mean age at first birth. The seven geographic regions represented in the study have specific characteristics of socioeconomic and cultural heritage, though they all share the general common Vietnamese culture.

The decline across cohorts is largest in the Red River Delta. The reason why there was such a great change in the Red River Delta will be discussed later. Among the cohort born in 1963-1967, the lowest mean age at first birth was women in the Northern Uplands and the highest mean age at first birth was in the Central Highlands. In the last two cohorts, the Red River Delta reports the highest mean age at first birth, and the youngest average age at first birth is among women in the Mekong River Delta. The data do not indicate strong differences in the mean ages at first birth among the different Vietnamese geographical regions. The interesting point is that all regions share the same pattern of a declining average mean age at first birth of the youngest cohort, excluding the Southeastern region. Additionally, changes in the mean age at first birth are not really stable in any region because South East is the most developed area in

Vietnam at the present. The tests of mean significant differences show that only differences between the Red River Delta and the Northern Uplands, between the Red River Delta and the Mekong River Delta, between the Southeast and the Northern Uplands, between the Southeast and the North Central regions, and between the Southeast and the Mekong River Delta are significant at F = 11.778 and df = 6/3965.

Though both rural and urban women report gradual declines in age at first birth across cohorts, the level of decline in the mean age at first birth of rural women are larger than urban women. In all cohorts, mean ages at first birth of rural women are always much lower than those of urban women. Specifically, urban women born before 1962 have a mean age at first birth of approximately 1.4 years later than their rural counterparts. Again, the t-test reports a significant difference.

Childhood place of residence reports different mean ages at first birth among four cohorts. Women spending their childhood in the countryside tend to have a lower mean age at first birth than those growing up in urban settings. Therefore, as level of urbanization increases, the age at first birth increases. For instance, for the latest cohort born in 1968-1972, on average, women spending their childhood in the countryside gave birth 1.27 years and 0.95 year earlier than those in large cities/capitals and towns, respectively. However, the t-tests report that only the difference between women whose childhood was spent in the large cities and in the countryside are significant.

Religion and mean age at first birth have a close relation. Among the youngest birth cohort and the 1963-1967 birth cohort, Buddhist women have the highest mean age at first birth and the declines are largest among women of small religions such as Caodai, Hoahao, and Islam. Christian women report a moderate decline of the mean age at first birth. For the two older cohorts, women with no religion report the highest average age at first birth and significant declines are still common in women of small religions. The levels of difference among religions are smaller over time, specifically between Buddhist women and women without religion. The test of specific mean ages for the various religions reported shows that mean differences between no religion women and Christians, between no religion women and women with a small domestic religion, between Buddhist and Christian women, and between Buddhist and women with another small religion are significant.

Ethnic differences in the age at first birth between Kinh and ethnic groups are not as large as expected. Kinh women tend to give birth at a higher age than women of ethnic groups. The age at first birth of the most recent cohort of the Kinh group is 0.5 year higher than the ethnic groups. There is evidence that the ethnic gap in the mean age at first birth is closer by birth cohorts and the t-tests reports that the differences are all significant.

In general, Table 1 reports a continuous decrease in the age at first birth and the age at first marriage across all cohorts over time. The high average age at first birth is characterized by the older cohorts, better educated women and men, women residing in more urbanization areas, women with no religion or Buddhism, and among the Kinh group.

Diametrical difference in the mean age at first birth between the Southeast and the Red River Delta raise alternative interesting explanations relating to the regions' different historical and cultural heritage. Historically, the Red River Delta was the center and origin of Vietnamese civilization, with over a thousand years of sacred cultural and historical traditions and customs. Ninh Binh province, the ancient capital city, and then Hanoi, the next capital city of almost all feudal dynasties of Vietnam, are in this region. As a result, the influences of Confucian ideology and feudal perceptions of marriage and family from the central government in Hanoi were direct and may be the strongest in the Red River Delta, as compared to other regions. During the wars in the twentieth century, the perceptions of family, hierarchy, community, and traditional social authority relations as consequences of Confucian cultural traditions may have been interrupted. After the wars, the government implemented population and family planning policies which banned arranged marriages and which dramatically restricted the number of children a couple. Those born and raised in the North have been socialized into accepting and living with centralized political regimes (Dalton et al., 2002). Individuals may decide the age they get married and have the first child, but they are hardly freed of Confucian ideological influences regarding marriage and family, including the traditional preference for sons. In contrast, Southeast or South Vietnam is 300 hundred years of historical establishment. Thus the official ideology of Confucian and feudal dynasties have never been direct and strong in this land. Moreover, those who were born and raised in the South had their early socialization experience formed in a partially open and chaotic political system. Southerners also have some experiences of Western-style democracy because they have had some taste of it

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Age at First Birth by Birth Cohorts (%)

Indicators	Birth cohort				
	1968-1972	1963-1967	1958-1962	1953-1957	General
Age at first birth					
<21	41.0	32.5	27.4	25.7	32.2
21-23	37.3	34.0	37.1	33.5	35.6
24-26	14.3	20.4	20.5	23.1	19.3
27-29	5.5	8.3	9.0	9.6	8.0
>30	1.7	4.8	6.1	8.2	5.0
Median	21.0	22.0	22.0	23.0	
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey, 2002 (N=4045)

during the American War (Ong, 2004). All these conditions allow more modern attitudes toward marriage and family and fewer influences by Confucian ideology among Southerners, which subsequently increases in age at first marriage and first birth in this region.

Table 2 presents a percentage distribution of the age at first birth by birth cohorts. The data indicate that the recent cohorts have begun to give first birth at a younger age than the older cohorts and the youngest cohort reports the highest proportion of giving the first birth by age 21. The proportion of women delaying the first child to after 27 is higher among the older cohorts. Over time, there are fewer and fewer women who postpone their first childbearing event past age 30.

The relationship between distribution of age at first birth and other social factors will not be presented here. Detailed effects of all variables on age at first birth are examined in the multivariate analysis.

IV. Social determinants of age at first birth

The results of multivariate analysis are presented in Table 3. Model 1 includes birth cohorts, current place of residence, childhood place of residence, religion, and ethnicity. In Model 2, women's education is added to show the effect of education attainment on women's age at first birth. Model 3 adds the husband's education attainment variable. The final

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis of Age at First Birth

Predictive variables	Dependent variable: Age at first birth Metric coefficients			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Intercept	21.626	24.033	23.763	29.188
R square	.065	.106	.106	.746
N	4,045	4,045	4,045	4,045
Regions				
Northern Uplands(reference group)	-	-	-	-
Southeast	1.027***	1.224***	1.230***	.359**
Red River Delta	.673***	.541**	.539**	.072
North Central	.233	.280	.296	.202
Central Coast	.513**	.678**	.680**	- .046
Central Highlands	.868**	.950**	.953**	- .053
Mekong River Delta	.155	.710***	.728***	.183
Childhood residence				
Capital/large city (reference group)	-	-	-	-
Countryside	- .967***	- .393**	- .383**	.151
Town	- .393	- .374	- .382	.161
Religion				
No religion (ref. group)	-	-	-	-
Buddhist	- .397**	- .287	- .284	- .157
Christian	-1.194***	- .937***	- .936***	- .182
Others	-1.922***	-1.517***	-1.512***	- .341**
Ethnicity				
Non Kinh group (reference group)	-	-	-	-
Kinh group	.698***	.130	.118	- .214**
Birth cohort				
1968-1972 (reference category)	-	-	-	-
1963-1967	.797***	.847***	.844***	.129
1958-1962	1.280***	1.359***	1.354***	.438***
1953-1957	1.616***	1.790***	1.785***	.645***
Women education				
No education		-3.683***	-3.484***	- .317
Primary school		-3.494***	-3.291***	- .010
Secondary school		-2.572***	-2.397***	.353**
High school		-1.620***	-1.448***	.251
College, university (ref. category)		-	-	-
Husband education				
Primary (ref. category)			-	-
Secondary			.128	.017
High school			.005	- .079
College, university			.444	.085
Age at first marriage				
<18				-11.221***
18-20				- 8.954***
21-23				- 6.674***
24-26				- 4.542***
>27 (ref. category)				-

**** Significant at p<0.001 level; ** Significant at p<0.05 level*
Source: Vietnam Demographic and Health Survey, 2002 (N=4045)

model includes all previous predictors and adds the women's age at first marriage as an intervening variable.

In Model 1, all predictors of the model are statistically significant. The model reports that, controlling for other variables, living in the Southeast increases the age at first birth by 1 year, compared to women living in the Northern Uplands, which is the largest difference among the seven regions. Women whose childhood was spent in less urbanized areas also have a lower age at first birth. More specifically, women in the countryside enter motherhood almost 1 year (b= -.967) earlier than women growing up in the capital or a large city, while living in towns reduces women's age at first birth by 4.7 months (.393*12=4.7), relative to women raised in the capital/large city. Buddhist women report having the first child about 4.8 months (.397*12=4.76) earlier than women with no religion. The difference then increases to about 14.3 months (1.194*12=14.3) for Christian women and peaks to about 23 months (1.922*12=23.06) for women of other small religions.

In Model 2, women's education is added. The second model reports the statistically significant influences of all predictors, excluding ethnicity. After controlling for women's educational attainment, the effects of place of residence, religion, and birth cohorts on the age at first birth change slightly. In this model, there are some statistically significant decreases in the effects of living in the Red River Delta; of childhood in the countryside; and of subscribing to Christianity and small domestic religions; and some statistically significant increases in the influence of living in the Southeast, Central Coast, Central Highlands, or Mekong River Delta; and birth cohorts on the age at first birth. Women's education remains a powerful effect on the age at first birth.

Model 3 adds the husband's education attainment as a predictor for a woman's age at first birth. With the intervention of the husband's education, the strength of effects of women's education achievements on the age at first birth decline, but it is still statistically significant and in the same direction. The effects of all levels of women's educational attainments are about more than 2 months lower with the intervention of the husband's education attainment.

However, the effects of women's educational achievement on the age at first birth even decline more dramatically and abruptly when adding the age at first marriage variable in the final model (Model 4). The age at first

birth of women with a high school education, no education or some primary education shows no significant difference from the age at first birth of women with a college/university education. In general, findings of the effects of a woman's educational attainment level are consistent with the general sociological literature, which argues that education is a principal status determining factor, and that increases in education have similar modernizing effects on individual behavior in diverse settings (Rindfuss el al., 1983). The risk of early first birth was found to be significantly lower for women with higher education attainment.

Controlling for other variables, the education level of the husband never constitutes a statistically significant predictor of the wife's age at first birth. No matter what lower or higher level of education the husband has attained, it is not related to the timing of the first birth in the family. Since the husband's and wife's educational achievements are closely related, there may be an overlap between these two predictors. The relationship between the educational attainments and the age at first birth appears to be more strongly driven by women's education level.

With the addition of the age at first marriage factor in Model 4, the effects of the geographical regions on the age at first birth diametrically change, except for the case of the Southeast. Living in the Southeast now increases the age at first birth by more than 3 months compared with living in the Northern Uplands; but the effect declines to one third, compared to previous models, with the intervention of the age at first marriage variable. Living in other geographic regions are no longer statistically significant predictors of the age at first birth and show no difference from living in the Northern Uplands.

Model 3 highlights the trend that women whose childhood place of residence was in the countryside tend to have the first birth about 4.6 months earlier than women with urban backgrounds. When additionally controlling for the women's age at first marriage in Model 4, the childhood residence is no longer a statistically significant predictor of the age at first birth. This may reflect the overlap of women's other social statuses, such as the age at marriage and geographic regions. Women in urban areas are more likely to marry later, therefore they will give their first birth later. So, if we control for age at first marriage the effects of urban area would be taken away.

Religion in Model 3 is a statistically significant factor which affects

women's age at first birth, when holding other variables constant. However, in the Full Model, Buddhist and Catholic women are not statistically significantly different from no religion women, but women with a small domestic religions are. In this Model, women with a small domestic religion report the age at first birth to be about four months earlier than no religion women.

Ethnicity seems not to be a stable significant predictor of the age at first birth. In the first background model, Kinh women give birth about two thirds of a year later than minority women. After adding women's and husbands' education attainments, ethnicity is no longer a significant predictor of women's age at first birth, which may reflect the strong impact of education on the age at first birth, and that regardless of ethnic group, the age of first birth may change once the intervention of education appears (Model 2 and Model 3). In the full model, belonging to the Kinh group statistically significantly influences the age at first birth but the model reports that Kinh women give birth about 2 months earlier than minority group women, which may reflect an overlap between educational attainments, the age at first marriage, and geographical settings.

It is very interesting to look at the birth cohort factor. It is clear that this predictor has strong, statistically significant effects on the expected difference in age at first birth. Though the levels of influence on the dependent variable vary across the models, the women's year of birth is always significantly consistent with the age at first birth, regardless of controlling variables. In the full model, with the intervention of the age at first marriage, the birth cohorts 1963-1967 and 1968-1972 enter motherhood as early as the others. Women born in 1958-1962 gave the first birth more than four months later than the youngest cohort, and the oldest cohort gave their first birth about six months and a half later than the birth cohort 1968-1972. Therefore, though the effects of birth cohort on the age at first birth decrease after controlling for age at the first marriage, it is a strong and substantial predictor of the timing of the first birth, with the direction that older women gave their first birth at a higher age. The more recent cohorts tend to have their first child at younger age. As discussed above, living at peace-time and hence better availability of mate selection is probably among an important reasons of this trend.

The above discussion has partly stressed the statistically significant influence of women's age at first marriage on their age at first birth, showing

that, with the intervention of the age at marriage predictor, dramatic changes among other explanatory variables occur. Most predictors are no longer significant predictors, except for living in the Southeast, belonging to a small religion, belonging to the Kinh group, having secondary schooling, and being born before 1962. The age at first marriage has a persistent positive and significant effect on the timing of the first birth and is a driving-force determinant of the woman's age at having her first child. The distance between each category is about 2.3 years (11.2 - 8.9 =2.3 and 8.9 - 6.6 =2.3 etc) except for the age cohort 24-26 to 27+, which is 4.5 years, which implies that if women get married at age 18-20 or wait until 21-23 (a change of 3 years), their first birth will still be about 2.3 years later regardless of their age at marriage.

Women who marry early may be more influenced by traditional perceptions of and prescriptions for marriage, family, and women's roles within these institutions. To the extent that women are influenced by social and family pressures as well as by their own individual motivation to marry early, it may be harder for them to resist having their first child early, and they may subsequently tend to also (want to) have many children. Their feelings of rewards as recognition for maintaining lineage, economic support, affection, and perceived happiness in old age than social sanctions for childlessness or remaining in a single state beyond a certain age. In contrast, women who delay the age at first marriage are often not influenced by traditional viewpoints of marriage and family. They desire matters such as educational attainments and career promotions more than getting married and giving birth to their first child early.

Conclusions

In most developing countries, there has been a trend toward delayed family formation and delay in giving first birth as societies become more modern and more young women obtain schooling (Hirschman and Rindfuss, 1980; Rindfuss et al., 1983; Rindfuss and Hirschman, 1984; Nguyen Huu Minh, 2000). This delay in age at first birth contributes to the overall decline in fertility and increased participation of young women in non-household activities, including higher education and employment.

In contrast to the trend in other Asian countries, my results show a trend toward an earlier age at first birth (at least from the 1953-1957 cohort to the 1968-1972 cohort). This pattern likely reflects the recent history of Vietnam, and the pattern of delayed marriage during the long period of

war and hardship in the 1970s and 1980s. More recent cohorts show a "moderate" trend toward earlier family formation in the 1990s. Additionally, levels of urbanization measured as one's place of residence, modernization measured by birth cohort, women's educational attainment, religion, and especially age at first marriage are found to significantly influence women's age at first birth at the present.

Age at marriage is sometimes not included as a predictor of age at first birth because of the causal ambiguity and the extremely high correlation between age at marriage and age at first birth (Rindfuss et al., 1983; Rindfuss and Hirschman, 1984). However, in populations where marriage is nearly universal and signals the onsets of childbearing, age at marriage has a strong influence on a variety of demographic, social, and economic phenomena (Bloom and Reddy, 1986). Rather, in Vietnam, the age at first birth is propelled by historical conditions: wars and economic hardship before the Renovation in 1986, broad social changes such as the shift from arranged to free-choice marriage, and a massive expansion in education and employment. Therefore, age at first marriage is included as a predictor and is a driving force of the age at first birth in Vietnam. When adding it as a co-variate in the regression model, age at first marriage mediates almost all of the influence of other social background variables on age at first birth. An increase in the age at marriage for women likely increases the age at first birth and likely increases the bargaining power of the wife and reduces the power imbalance within the family since women who delay marriage may have more opportunities to increase their educational attainments leading to higher social status and a good career.

The relationship between the educational attainments and the age at first birth is driven by women's education level. Having no education or some primary education is a strong factor that leads to early marriage and first childbearing. Postponement in early childbearing is more common among better educated women and these declines are also larger than those experienced by less educated women. Therefore, education has a strong delaying effect everywhere; increases in education have similar modernizing effects on individual behavior in diverse settings (Rindfuss et al., 1983). High levels of education perhaps provide young women with status or abilities that reduce the importance of early family formation. However, since education in Vietnam is mostly possible to young people and is centralized in urban settings, cohort and region variables remain as influences on the age at first birth. In addition, the effect of social structural variables

might interact with individual characteristics: high levels of education should reduce the probability of a first birth in a woman's early 20's because she is more likely to be establishing a career. By her early 30's, however, the same woman may be anxious to "make up" for lost childbearing time (Rindfuss et al., 1984). The effect of cohort might also vary with individual characteristics, i.e., the effect of period factors might be stronger at some ages than others. The influences of historical events such as the American war on the first birth process would be stronger among women in their late teens or early twenties than among those aged 30+. However, the effect of educational attainment on age at first birth is smaller when adding age at first marriage because women perceive schooling as more compatible with marriage than with parenthood and are more likely to enter into marriage than parenthood prior to the completion of their schooling.

In general, the more urbanized is a woman's place of childhood residence, and the greater her level of educational attainment, the later is her age at first birth. These findings are consistent with previous literature on the effects of urbanization and modernization on the age at first birth. (Teachman and Polonko, 1985; Rindfuss and John, 1983; Rindfuss and Hirschman, 1984; Bumpass et al., 1986; Maxwell, 1987). Residing in the Southeast of Vietnam is a continuously significant factor that is correlated with a delay in the age at first birth regardless of any controlling variable. However, these effects are not always significant in the same direction, which may reflect the fact that urbanization and modernization in Vietnam are in a very early phase, and that there are neither too backward nor too progressive areas and/or communities in Vietnam at this period of time. The urban-rural difference, though, becomes insignificant in the model when adding the woman's age at first marriage. It is a considerable predictor of the age at first birth in Vietnam because living in urban areas is associated with alternative good options for individuals. Again most of these differences disappear once controlling for age at marriage, suggesting most of these factors work their effects on age at first birth by intervening the timing of marriage. This insignificant relation may also reflect the overlaps among predictors, for instance, residing in the rural areas may lead to early marriage and low educational attainment and these results in turn are responsible for early age at first birth.

Women with no religion or who just practice ancestor worship generally have a later age at first birth than other women with different religions.

Buddhist women, whose effects on the age at first birth are very similar to women with no religion, show a trend of delayed first birth than do Christian women. However, religion loses its statistical significance when controlled by the educational attainment and/or the age at first birth. Women with small domestic religions such as Caodai or Hoahao always resemble a continued statistical significantly predictor of the age at first birth whose declines in postponing the first childbearing are clearly reported.

Vietnam has been an economically dynamic region in the developing world. Economic change has been accompanied by many other attributes of modernization, including the widespread availability of education, modern transportation, and the mass media during the post Independence era. In Vietnam, those who were born before the 1960s are regarded as the traditional generation, those born from the 1970s to 1980s are widely regarded as the transition generation, and those born after the 1980s are called the modern generation with a strong movement toward a modern life style. If studies are conducted with cohorts born after the 1980s, it is more likely to see a slight delay of the age at first marriage and the age at first birth because of government policies of economy, population and family programs, as well as further changes in the social norms of traditional marriage and family, specifically among higher educated and more urbanized women.■

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Seminar on the results of the project "Interdisciplinary Study of Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam," VS/RDE-05, 2007

The "**Interdisciplinary Study of Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam Project**," VS/RDE-05 is part of the 2004-2007 Vietnam-Sweden study cooperation program. This program has been implemented with the cooperation of the sponsor of SIDA (Sweden) and three Vietnam-based Institutes: the Institute of Sociology, the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, and the Institute of Ethnology. The main objective of the Project is to train postgraduates and young researchers to improve their research competence.

On 3 and 4 July in Cat Ba and Hai Phong, and on 10 July 2007 in Hanoi, the Project organized a seminar to report the study's results.

Participants included Project Director Professor Dr. Trinh Duy Luan and members of the project management board on the Vietnamese side, and experts Dr. Helle Rydstrom and Dr. Wil Burghoorn on the Swedish side. In addition, researchers participating in the Project from the Institute of Sociology, the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, and the Institute of Ethnology also attended. Project Director Professor Dr. Trinh Duy Luan gave the opening address and introduced the aims and contents of the Seminar.

At the Seminar, 16 reports were presented focusing on topics of marriage and family in rural areas during Vietnam's transitional period. For example, there were reports on patterns of marriage age, patterns of falling in love, and making decisions regarding marriage; changes in marriage rituals; wedding customs; marriage among minority ethnic groups; the role of the family line; powers of wives and husbands in the family; spousal disputes and domestic violence; conceptions of sex; people's awareness about the family; satisfaction with family life after marriage; parents' role in educating children; the impact of parents' social status on children's education level; migration; and job and occupation patterns of wives and husbands.

Many of the issues raised by the reports attracted a lot of attention and generated lively discussions. Authors received a lot of feedback and suggestions for further analysis, as more speciffically outlined below:

With regards to study content, there were comments that for issues considered as complicated and multi-sided, such as the powers of the wife and husband within a marriage, and the nature of dowry, there should be more careful analysis. For example, there were some opinions that basically the significance of the dowry is initial financial establishment for a couple's children, but there is also a difference in dividing the dowry for daughters versus gifts for sons. When daughters get married they often receive money, gold or some kinds of property as a marriage dowry, which obviously become their personal property later. Sons often inherit land, which imperceptibly becomes common family property, as land will be used by the next and future generations.

Regarding methods, opinions prevailed that authors should use multivariant analysis methods to specify the relationship between influencing factors and issues requiring explanation. Moreover, there should be comparison with other studies and this comparison should take into account data suitability. Authors should be careful when drawing conclusions on the basis of data collected from a small sample.

Most also agreed that reports should make use of existing theory as well as innovate or update such theories, specify and define concepts and terms used, and refer to foreign documents in order to make proper and clear explanations about newly arising study issues.

Some reports raised particularly interesting matters for discussion, including: the relation between labor allocation and gender equality; wives' and husbands' satisfaction with family life after marriage; and different understandings about family.

At the end of the Seminar, Professor Dr. Trinh Duy Luan concluded that although there were limitations on exploring the issues intensively mainly due to the lack of data, in general, study topics covered all the data available. This project was not only a good opportunity for senior researchers, but also for young researchers to improve their interdisciplinary study competence.■

Minh Khuong

The Seminar for Making Contributive Ideas to the Report on the Vietnamese Family Survey 2006

On 13th December 2007, in Hanoi, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in cooperation with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) organized a seminar to discuss and make suggestions for a Report on the Vietnamese Family Survey 2006. The Seminar was convened to collect contributive ideas and suggestions from experts, managers, and leaders for the main findings of the Vietnamese Family Survey 2006 presented in the report, as well as to discuss neglected matters and the application of study results in establishing family policies. Contributive ideas and suggestions in the Seminar will be the basis for the compiling team to perfect the report, which is to be announced at the beginning of 2008.

The Seminar was attended by representatives from all state authorities and study institutions, including: the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the Committee of Nationalities, the Ministry of Health, the Central Committee of Propaganda and Training, the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences, the General Statistics Office, the National Assembly's Committee of Culture and Educating Teenagers, the Union of the Elderly, the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, the Institute of Sociology, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, and many international organizations, such as UNICEF, UNIFEM, UNDP, UNAIDS, etc.

The Report on the Vietnamese Family Survey 2006 resulted from qualitative and quantitative studies of Vietnamese families in 2006 conducted by the (former) Committee of Population, Family and Children in cooperation with the General Statistics Office, and the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, with technical support provided by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), and the sponsorship of UNICEF.

The General Report on the Vietnamese Family Survey 2006 prepared by the Institute for Family and Gender Studies consists of 2 parts: the *Introduction* and *Survey Results*. The *Introduction* (chapters I and II) introduces the Vietnamese Family Survey and the methods of survey. The *Survey Results*, which consist of 10 chapters (chapters III through XII), are about: the socio-demographic characteristics of households; marriage characteristics; making choices and decisions regarding marriage; spousal relationships; parent-child relationships; juveniles in the family; the elderly in the family; domestic disputes, conflicts and violence; living conditions and welfare of families; and some main findings and considerable matters. In addition, the report also includes references and related appendices (e.g., list of surveyed areas, questionnaires, and sample errors of some main indicators).

At the Seminar, after the opening address of Mr. Le Do Ngoc of the Department of Family, Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, the General Statistics Office's' representative, Mr. Do Anh Kiem, outlined the methods of collecting information, and the process of conducting the survey and analyzing the data. Then, Dr. Nguyen Huu Minh, Director of the Institute for Family and Gender Studies, presented the major findings of the survey.

The Seminar received a lot of feedback from participants. In general, the General Report was highly appreciated, and judged as quite excellent due to its incorporation of qualitative and quantitative data. The Report analyzed many aspects of the family, and provided a lot of information related to the development of the family in the time of industrialization and modernization. Conclusions of the Report reflected the real social conditions facing families, and discovered families' problems requiring consideration and suitable policy at present. Some of the areas requiring policy consideration include: big disparities in living standards among areas and regions; the change in couples' conception of marriage, from suitable alliance to suitable economic and social status of individuals; women's active role in keeping family happiness; and worries of the elderly about children.

Some participants made suggestions for further improving the report. Specifically, there should be further study of the characteristics of some

types of families, like families with and without blood-relationship, joint family, etc. As well, further attention should be paid to the life situations of the elderly, particularly those aged over 80; the impacts of ethnic groups' customs (e.g., the custom of wife abduction; living with the wife's family; etc.) on marriage and family formation (e.g., early marriage, children's rights, domestic violence, etc.). Finally, as for scientific and practical values of the survey in the General Report, the seminar encouraged the compiling team to perfect and publish the report, including the data and conclusions of the Vietnamese Family Survey 2006, soon.■

Tran Hong

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