

The Impact of Social Change on Vietnamese Families

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SHORT ABSTRACT

Vietnam has experienced dramatic changes during the past century, including prolonged periods of war, socialist collectivization, political reunification, a shift from a centrally-planned to a market-based economy, and an extensive opening to the outside world. Major policy initiatives designed to affect basic aspects of family life, including marriage, gender relations, and family size, have also been adopted. This research focuses on the impact of these social changes on family behavior, particularly marriage, living arrangements, and the division of household labor. We use data from the Vietnam Surveys of Family Change, a representative sample of three marital cohorts that correspond to major historical periods—the war years, the years following the country's reunification, and the year following the passage of renovation policies. Data are available from both north and south, allowing a comparison between these two regions that, until recently, experienced different governments and social and economic conditions.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Introduction

Throughout Asia, and most of the developing world, major social, political, and economic changes have occurred over the past few decades. These changes are likely to substantially impact key institutions, including the family. Dramatic changes have characterized Vietnam during the past century, including prolonged periods of war, socialist collectivization, political reunification, a shift from a centrally-planned to a market-based economy, and an extensive opening to the outside world. Additionally, major policy initiatives designed to affect basic aspects of family life, including mate selection and marriage, gender relations, and family size, have been adopted by the Vietnamese government.

Vietnam's unique recent history has also resulted in substantial regional differences. Soon after French colonization in the 19th century Vietnam was divided into three different administrative regions. The end of French colonization in the 1950s resulted in Vietnam's division into two regions. The North was controlled by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under a communist government while the Southern U.S.-backed regime operated under a modified capitalist economy. In addition to the distinctly different economic structures operating in the North and South, these two regions also passed substantially different family laws and policies. Reunification did not occur until 1977 and therefore these two regions have very different historical experiences.

Although speculation on the effects of these social and economic changes and historical circumstances is common, little systematic, empirically based research has been conducted into the nature and extent of family change and the major influences on it. We focus on how the combination of wartime and revolutionary experiences, socialist ideology, market reforms, the exposure to Western ideas and media, and regional differences have effected marriage, living arrangements and the division of household labor.

Data

We utilize recently collected data from the Vietnam Surveys of Family Change (n=2,592) to document and explain the extent of historical and regional differences on family behavior. This survey contains a representative sample of three marital cohorts from the Red River Delta (north) and the South East and Mekong Delta (south). Figure 1 illustrates our sampling regions. In order to measure changes over time and the influence of historical time on life course trajectories, three purposively chosen marriage cohorts were targeted for interviews, with each cohort corresponding to important historical periods in Vietnam's recent history:

- 1) The War Cohort- the first cohort married between 1963 and 1971, representing the period just prior to and during Vietnam's war for reunification when the country was still divided into two governments. For the North, this period is marked by aggressive collectivization efforts and mass mobilization.

- 2) The Reunification Cohort- the second cohort married during 1977 and 1985, the early post-unification period when economic hardship and social upheaval was most

severe and when a centrally planned economy was pervasive. Economic growth was stagnant during this period and food shortages were common.

3) The Renovation Cohort- the final cohort married between 1992 and 2000, the years when economic reforms and the opening of Vietnam to global influences were well under way. Even though *Doi moi* was passed in 1986, it was not until the early 1990s that these reform efforts were put into place and noticeable change was evident.

Results

Data from the south is currently being cleaned and results are yet unavailable, and therefore our preliminary results include data from the Red River Delta sample only. Table 1 provides a description of this sample and some information on changes in marriage across our three cohorts. Findings indicate substantial decreases in parentally arranged marriages and the proportion of couples who met through their parents or relatives. Increases in the incidence of premarital sexual activity are evident across the three cohorts, as are increases in the incidence of young couples living with their parents after marriage. Multivariate models are then used to examine the factors effecting these outcomes (See Tables 2 and 3). The division of household labor is also examined (See Table 4).

These results will be discussed in the context of the different social and economic conditions experienced by each cohort, and by the different policy contexts they experienced.

Conclusion

Vietnam has experienced dramatic social changes over the past few decades, including the end of military conflict, reunification of the country, the transition to a market economy and increased urbanization. The impact of these changes on family behavior, however, has not been uniform. Some family patterns have clearly diverted from the 'traditional' pattern. For example, the incidence of arranged marriage has substantially declined and premarital sexual behavior is far more common. On the other hand, there is also evidence of a return to family traditions. Living with parents after marriage, a common feature of Vietnam's patriarchal family structure, has become more common in recent cohorts. Other areas have remained largely unchanged. Despite substantial government policies and rhetoric on gender equality, women continue to perform the majority of household tasks and there is little evidence that Vietnamese men are doing more in the home.

The recent economic reforms in Vietnam were instituted in the mid-1980s, and enactment really began in the 1990s. Therefore, we are looking at individuals who grew up and were socialized before market reform. The current cohort of young Vietnamese that grew up in the 1990s are likely to be further impacted by market reform changes. It is yet to be seen what impact this will have on their future marriage patterns.

Table 1. Sample Description and Cohort Changes in Marriage and Living Arrangements: Red River Delta Sample

	War Cohort	Reunification Cohort	Renovation Cohort
Mean age at marriage for men	25.32	25.64	26.41
Mean age at marriage for women	21.56	22.23	21.51
Grew up in urban area	17.13	23.15	30.56
Less than 12 th grade education	65.74	65.74	55.79
Spouse was chosen mainly by parents or family	3.5	0.5	0.9
Met spouse through parents or relatives	27.31	17.36	11.81
Premarital sexual activity	4.86	8.56	21.53
Lived with parents after marriage	61.11	70.37	74.77

TABLE 2. The Probability of Premarital Sexual Activity

	MODEL 1				MODEL 2		
	beta	Odds ratio	s.e.		beta	odds ratio	s.e.
Constant	-4.21		.593		-4.01		.593
Marital cohort (war=0)							
Reunification	.596*	1.81	.286		.633*	1.88	.289
Renovation	1.64***	5.17	.258		1.14***	3.14	.315
Male (female=0)	1.15***	3.15	.225		1.16***	3.21	.226
Marital age	.022	1.02	.023		.023	1.02	.023
Grow up in urban area (rural=0)	.470*	1.60	.210		.536*	1.71	.211
Low education	-.212	.809	.194		-.761**	.467	.282
Interaction between education and renovation cohort					1.00***	2.73	.374

Model 1 Log-likelihood $\chi^2(6)=117.29$

Model 2 Log-likelihood $\chi^2(7)=124.54$

TABLE 3. Probability of Living with Parents After Marriage

	MODEL 1			MODEL 2		
	beta	odds ratio	s.e.	beta	odds ratio	s.e.
Constant	2.14			2.10		
Marital cohort (war=0)						
Reunification	.486**	.149	1.63	.497**	1.64	.150
Renovation	.800***	.156	2.23	1.13***	3.08	.218
Male (female=0)	.428**	.143	1.53	.437**	1.55	.143
Marital age	-.096***	.017	.098	-.098***	.91	.017
Grow up in urban area (rural=0)	-.071	.154	.931	-.106	.90	.152
Low education	.571***	.133	1.77	.744***	2.11	.155
Interaction education and renovation cohort				-.603*	.55	.276

Model 1 Log-likelihood $\chi^2(6)=88.50$

Model 2 Log-likelihood $\chi^2(7)=93.26$

Table 4. Logistic regression (coefficients expressed as odds ratios) indicating husbands' and wives' roles in specified domestic decisions during the first few years of marriage

Dependent variable and covariates	Household production	Expensive purchases	Family and kin relations	Social life as a couple
Decision was made mainly by husband				
Cohort 1977-85	1.41*	1.49**	1.27	1.22
Cohort 1992-00	2.26***	2.04***	1.43*	1.29
Female	0.56***	0.68**	0.44***	0.52***
Rural	1.16	1.52**	1.03	1.09
Wife has high education	0.87	1.03	0.71*	0.59**
<i>Decision was made by husband and wife equally</i>				
Cohort 1977-85	1.21	1.17	0.91	1.14
Cohort 1992-00	1.15	1.04	1.17	1.19
Female	1.19	1.28*	1.27*	1.14
Rural	0.56***	0.63***	0.78	0.82
Wife has high education	1.28	0.98	1.22	1.52**

Notes: Reference (omitted) categories are cohort 1963-71, male, urban, wife has less than 12 grade education. Results are limited to respondents who indicated that the particular decision was made by one or both members of the couple.

Significance levels: * $p \leq 0.05$ ** $p \leq 0.01$ *** $p \leq 0.001$

Figure 1: Vietnam Map and Study Regions

