

WOMEN, THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY,
AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR IN HANOI

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of women in a transitional economy. Doi moi, the process of 'renovation', is the restructuring of the economy from centrally-planned to market-driven. The consequences of this restructuring is affecting women's economic roles in the economy and in the household in very specific ways. Vietnamese women have a long history of participation, if not domination, of trading activities. The simultaneous lifting of restrictions against the private sector and mass unemployment resulting from cuts in subsidies to state-owned enterprise has resulted in a blossoming of the informal sector, and a revival of this 'traditional' occupation for women. This revival has taken place with the tacit, sometimes outright encouragement of the government, which looks to the household to play the economic and social role necessary to replace the shrinking state sector employment and crumbling social services system.

This thesis looks specifically at the informal sector in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, and issues in the lives of women who participate in it. The thesis describes in general terms the situation of urban women in contemporary Vietnam, reviews some of the major economic developments in Vietnam since reunification in 1975, and looks at some issues in urbanization trends in Hanoi which affect and involve the informal sector. The focus of the thesis is a discussion of qualitative research interviews conducted in 1991-92 with

women in informal sector activities, which details these activities and the ways in which this type of employment affects women's roles within the household and in society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES	v
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENT	viii
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction	1
General Description	1
Research Question	9
Women and Traditional Roles	12
CHAPTER TWO: Women in Vietnam: General Situation	20
History of the Economy Post 1975	20
Women in Contemporary Urban Vietnam	41
General Attitudes Towards Women	71
Social Customs Regarding the Family	72
Women and Households	80
Conclusion	85
CHAPTER THREE: Women and the Household Economy in Hanoi	87
Hanoi Context	87
Trends in Urbanization in Hanoi	100
Contacts with 'Officialdom'	115
Access to Sources of Credit	116
Attitudes towards 'Doi Moi'	126
Household work and Informal sector activities	130
Conclusion	133
CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion	134
Income generation and allocation: Household strategies	134
Gender and the market	137
Does the market economy liberate or enslave?	138
BIBLIOGRAPHY	142

LIST OF TABLES

	Page	
1.1	Urban Population	4
2.1	Average Monthly Index of Inflation, 1986-1990	29
2.5	Underemployment by Sex, Major Age Groups	37
2.6	Economically Active Population	38
2.7	Economically Active Population by Economic Activity	38
2.8	Population by Sex and Age Groups	39
2.9	Birth Rate and Death Rate, Population Growth Rate	39
2.10	Urban Population	40
2.11	Selected Indicators of Maternal Health and Maternal Health Services	44
2.12	Selected Indicators on Health Services and Education	44
2.13	Average Number of Children Ever Born / Woman	45
2.14	Family Planning and Health Services in the Workplace	45
2.15	Contraceptive Prevalence Rate	46
2.16	Induced Abortions	46
2.17	Educational Attainment and Illiteracy	50
2.18	Population by Education Level and Sex	50
2.19	Per Cent Currently Attending School	50
2.20	Literacy Rates by Sex	51
2.21	Principal Reasons for Student Drop-Outs	52

2.22	Scientists, Engineers, and Technicians	
	Engaged in Research	53
2.23	Female, Male Average Monthly Wages by Sector	53
2.24	Distribution of Women Workers by Industry	57
2.25	Percentage of Women in Different Branches of the National Economy	57
2.26	Women's Employment by Sector and Residence	58
2.27	General Indicators on Female Labour	59
2.28	Working Population in the Informal Sector	60
2.29	Informal Sector Occupations	61
2.30	Population by Sex, Age Group, in Urban and Rural Informal Sector	62
2.31	Population by Sex, Engaged in Selected (Illicit) Activities	63
2.32	Women Members of the National Assembly	70
2.33	Women: Marital Status & Age at First Marriage	76
2.34	Average Age of Mother at Birth of First Child	76
2.35	Marriage and Divorce Rate	76
2.36	Average Household Size	81
2.37	Distribution of Households by Composition of the Family	81
2.38	Domestic Chores by Household Members	82
3.1	Population of Hanoi, 1975-1988	99
3.2	Selected Indicators on Interviewees	112

LIST OF FIGURES

		Page
1.1	Map of Vietnam	2
3.1	Map of Hanoi	89
3.2	Map of French Quarter, Hanoi	
	Showing Street Markets	97
3.3	Map of Selected Street Blocks, Hanoi	
	Showing Informal Sector Activities	106

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The names of the women who consented to be interviewed and who are mentioned in the text are pseudonyms. The errors are real, wherever they be, and they are mine.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The first and most important point to make about Vietnam is that it is undergoing a period of intense and fundamental change. It is difficult to get a grasp of the current situation because it is current so fleetingly. Much of the legal structure of the country is new; the effect of policies still unknown or only roughly assessed.

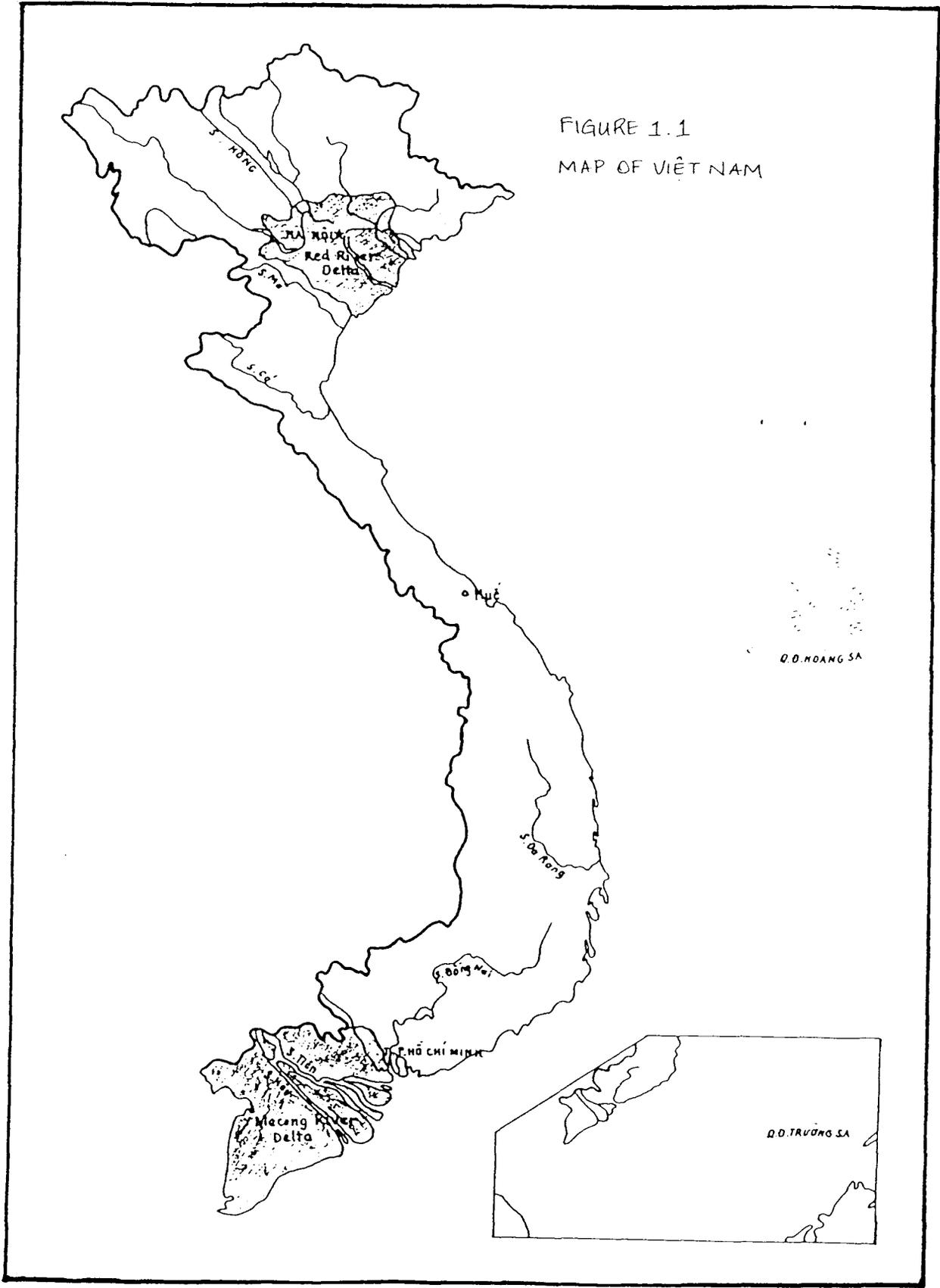
Vietnam is one of the largest countries in the world by population. Its current population numbers almost 70 million and is growing at a rate slightly over 2%. In Southeast Asia Vietnam is second in population size only to Indonesia, but is fourth in land area, occupying only 0.2% of the total world land area.(1)

Vietnam is a long, narrow territory (see Figure 1.1, Map of Vietnam) bordered by China, Laos, and Cambodia along a total of almost 4000 kilometres. The coast line of Vietnam, its eastern border, is 3260 kilometres long. Vietnam has a total land area of 331,041 square kilometres and an average population density of 209 persons per km² in 1992.(2)

The two main population centres are the Red River Delta in the north and the Mekong River Delta in the south; the Red River Delta has a population density of approximately 1085 persons/km², and the Mekong River Delta has a population

1 Nguyen Trong Dieu (1992): 7.

2 Statistical Yearbook 1992: 5. Nguyen Trong Dieu gives this figure as 330,363 km².



density of approximately 385 persons/km², though both are highly uneven.⁽³⁾ Much of the description of the country is centred in the contrast/juxtaposition of the two deltas and the two main cities.

Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, lies inland along the Red River, in the heart of the Delta, and has a population density of about 2288 persons/km². Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon, lies adjacent to the Mekong River Delta and is the country's commercial hub, with a population density of 1984 persons/km². Originally founded almost a millenium ago as the country's capital by King Ly Thi To who named it Thang Long (Ascending Dragon), Hanoi these days is a genteel city in disrepair; 'decayed elegance' is an appropriate description. Hanoi is the cultural heart of Vietnam, the heart of its civilized, almost metropolitan culture. Ho Chi Minh City was founded only 300 years ago and reached prominence under the French. The city now has a bustling stock market atmosphere and commerce is unmistakably dominant. Hanoi houses the national symphony in a copy of the Paris Opera House; Ho Chi Minh City hosted Vietnam's first beauty pageant in 1987.

Much more sparsely populated than the deltas and of far less political or commercial importance are the highlands in the northwest and the central areas. Most of Vietnam's 53 ethnic minority groups live in the mountainous areas of the country, and total less than 16% of the population of

3 Statistical Yearbook 1992: 6-7. Nguyen Trong Dieu gives different figures.

Vietnam.(4) The average population densities for these areas are 50 persons/km² in the central highlands and 115 persons/km² in the northern mountainous areas.(5) The government is actively attempting to resettle farmers out from the deltas into the central regions and the highlands, though this programme has met with resistance from both sides, the lowland farmers and the upland residents.

At the time of reunification (1975), the urban/rural population ratio was approximately 21% to 79%, according to General Statistics Office figures. The alteration in favour of the urban population has been gradual and recent, although exact figures vary, and sometimes greatly, as is shown in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1 **Urban Population** (as % of Total Population)

	<u>1976</u>	<u>1979</u>	<u>1984</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>1991</u>	<u>1992</u>
a)	20.6	19.2	18.9		19.8			
b)		19.2			21.6	21.6	21.6	21.8
c)		18.0			19.0			
d)					19.4			
e)	20.5	19.1	18.9	24.8				

Sources: a) Ministry of Construction (1992)
b) Statistical Yearbook 1992
c) Population of Vietnam
d) Atlas Vietnam Population
e) Selected Indicators on Women 1975-1989

4 Nguyen Trong Dieu: 83.

5 Statistical Yearbook 1992: 6-7.

As of 1990 the urban population was 13.3 million, and by 1992 it was 14 million.(6) The urban population, given current trends, will increase rapidly in the near future. According to the publication, Population of Vietnam, during the decade 1979-1989 the rural population grew at a rate of 2.3% per annum, and the urban population at a rate of 3.4% per annum. According to 1989 Census figures, women account for 52.14% of the urban population.(7)

It should be noted that northern and southern urban populations at reunification were significantly different. South Vietnam experienced sharp rural to urban migration during the war and had an urban population in 1975 of 31.3% of the total. North Vietnam had experienced urban to rural migration during the war and in 1975 had an urban population accounting for 12.3% of the total.(8)

Population projections published by the Ministry of Construction indicate that by 2010 the national population will increase to over 90 million, and the urban population will increase to 16.2 million.(9) This estimate, however, does not allow for urban population increase due to migration, a shortcoming whose importance can be seen from the United Nations' estimate, which does account for migration and which

6 Statistical Yearbook 1992: 8. Statistical sources so vary, and urban boundaries have been changed, particularly for Hanoi, over the past few years. This is clear from Table 1.1, and is a chronic problem with information on Vietnam.

7 Atlas Vietnam Population: 10.

8 Population of Vietnam: 13-4.

9 As quoted in McGee (forthcoming).

indicates that Vietnam will have an urban population of 33.8 million in 2010, more than double the Vietnamese projection.(10)

The rate of migration according to Vietnamese sources is 2.8% for the whole country (3.5% for men, 2.2% for women). In general there are four main migration flows within the country--one, from the northern part of the country to the southern (which is less crowded and where the weather is less dramatic than in the north); two, from the overpopulated deltas to the highlands; three, from urban to rural (mainly retirees and demobilized soldiers); and four, from rural to urban (mainly young job-seekers).(11) In recent years it is this last category which has been most dynamic.

Up until 1990 the urban population was kept 'artificially' small--that is, those who wished to migrate to urban centres and would otherwise have done so, were prevented from doing so by residence and rationing policies. Staple goods were rationed until 1989-90 and ration entitlements were issued only at the official place of residence. Permission was required to move residences, and was particularly difficult to get for migration to an urban centre unless the potential migrant was assigned to an official job in that centre. Without permission, the migrant would have had no ration entitlement, no education entitlement for her/his children, no hospital assignment, and no official job, as well

10 As quoted in McGee (forthcoming).

11 Tran Thi Que: 3.

as being subject to and subjecting family members left behind in the rural area and urban 'hosts'--if living with city-based family--to 'criticism' from the local authorities. The restrictions have eased somewhat, but such migration is still actively discouraged, and the present situation of new urban migrants is still rather unclear. Many migrants are 'seasonal migrants' visiting the cities in the periods between agricultural seasons or when there is surplus labour at certain times during the agricultural year. According to Vietnamese researchers, the restrictions against this type of migration have never been so strict as to be insurmountable for migrants with connections in the city, but rather served to deter long-term migrants.

In Hanoi evidence of this recent upsurge in rural to urban migration is so far found mainly in anecdotal reports, such as police statistics. Between 1981 and 1990 the Hanoi police 'stopped' 22,868 homeless persons (45% were women), but 30% of these persons were apprehended just between 1988 and 1990.(12)

The article which quoted these statistics in its discussion of homeless women also noted that while most

12 Le Thi Quy (1993); the inference from the paragraph noting these statistics is that these homeless persons were peasants seeking work in Hanoi. This is a not unreasonable assumption given that extended families and providing a roof over the heads of even the most distant cousins are unquestioned norms for most Vietnamese. The number of homeless can only represent a small proportion of the number of rural residents coming to Hanoi, as most would have a relative of some kind to stay with or at least the VND 600 for space in one of the dormitories set up for transients.

migrants were from northern Vietnam (25% from Hanoi and its suburbs), which is to be expected, with much smaller numbers from central and southern Vietnam, there were no migrants of ethnic minority background, which is distinctly unexpected given the experience of developed countries, notably Canada (First Nations), and Australia (Aborigines), for example. It is not clear whether this is the result of stricter measures on the part of the government to restrict movement of minority peoples, better or more accepted living conditions in minority areas, or cultural customs which proscribe this response to lack of work.

The author divided the migrants/homeless into two categories: 'professional' and 'seasonal'. Approximately two-thirds of the permanent migrants, and almost three-quarters of the seasonal migrants, answered that their primary reason for coming to Hanoi was the poor circumstances and lack of work in their home villages. The survey of homeless also noted that while many migrants come to Hanoi on their own, some also bring with them their whole family, and even relatives and neighbours.

At the same time as migration restrictions were being eased formal sector job opportunities were shrinking through massive layoffs from state enterprises whose subsidies were cut. As would be expected, rural to urban migration has skyrocketed, at least comparatively speaking. The concurrent encouragement of the private sector has, naturally enough, led

to an explosive growth of the informal sector from almost negligible to booming.

RESEARCH QUESTION

There are two ideas which are being explored in this research. One is the form taken by the deliberately induced process of 'doi moi' or 'renovation' in Vietnam and its emphasis on the private sector and on the household as the basic unit of production. The other, and the main issue, is the form which the gender division of labour takes in a society transforming itself according to this process of renovation. Either one of these topics would be more than sufficient material to fill out several theses. The specific way in which I have chosen to look at the intersection of gender and development in Vietnam is to look at the production of an urban informal sector from a process of economic restructuring and to examine how the production of that sector produces a particular social space for women out of a former space which was utterly the opposite in character.

In other words, what is happening to women's work and women's lives in the transition from socialism to a market-based economy? How do their households adapt income-earning strategies to compensate for new problems and to take advantage of new opportunities? How is the gender division of labour played out in these new circumstances? And does the new economic structure being built seem to be involving or segregating women?

To try to answer these questions I looked for women whose lives seem to most vividly personify this dramatic shift. So I went to the market. More precisely, I chose to interview a small number of women chosen from several occupations: vegetable sellers, cooked food vendors, and tea sellers. I also chose a few women who had slightly larger but still household level enterprises, cafe owners and hairdressers. These were qualitative interviews conducted with two co-researchers who acted in turn as translators, one each from the Centre for Women's Studies and the Institute of Economics of the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities. For the first half of the interviews my co-researchers arranged interviews with women traders with whom they were acquainted (as we had not secured all the necessary levels of permission and needed to ensure that we would not be reported to the police). For the second half of the interviews, which took place some months later and some with permission of the local authorities, we picked an area of town, the old French residential quarter, and wandered about approaching likely-looking traders.

The process of writing over a year after the research was conducted has uncovered numerous gaps and inadequacies in the research interviews. The questions I would like to ask based on more than two years first hand knowledge of Vietnam are not the questions I thought to ask after having been here only three months. The political climate has changed, also, over that time, and questions which were unthinkable with strangers

then could be broached now. However, the answers I would get now would be different in character to the answers I got then precisely because the events and attitudes which have changed to allow the level of permissible interaction to deepen have altered the situation in general. Those potential answers could not describe the situation then nor the response at that time of those women to it. What I have now to work with is both symptomatic and descriptive of the situation as I confronted it then. For these reasons also, I have chosen not to situate my research in the context of a review of the western literature of the informal sector and the role of women. This is not to say that such a contextualization would not be helpful, or even better, just that it was not possible to do justice to such an endeavour under the particular circumstances of researching and writing in Vietnam.

The interviews were all conducted in Hanoi and do not pretend to accuracy for the whole of the country. They are however, in my opinion, indicative in general terms. The situation in Hanoi is clearly different from that in Ho Chi Minh City. The two cities have had dramatically different histories. They approached the contemporary era from opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, Hanoi from four decades of socialism preceded by only French colonization, Ho Chi Minh City from only a decade and a half of socialism immediately preceded by economic and de facto colonization by the United States and formerly by the French.

The study of the informal sector should need no justification in and of itself. The study of the informal sector in Hanoi is particularly relevant as it embodies the transformation of a landscape. The move away from central planning with its collective organization and restrictions against both migration and the private sector, allows a new, previously illegal, use of urban space. With its emphasis on the household as the 'basic unit' of economic organization, doi moi ('renovation') creates a new human landscape, with the potential to alter fundamentally the role that women play within and outside of their households.

WOMEN AND TRADITIONAL ROLES

Before beginning a discussion of the situation of contemporary urban women in Vietnam, it is first necessary to look, albeit briefly in this instance, at some aspects of the historical role of women in Vietnam, as they influence the role of women in contemporary Vietnam.

The use of the term 'traditional' is controversial, and so it should be. The conceptualization of 'traditional' roles, particularly in a time of great social change cannot but be turned to particular ends. 'Hotly contested' does not yet describe the issue in Vietnam, but it is certainly much in evidence in academic journals.⁽¹³⁾ Vietnam is particularly adept at re-interpreting its history to suit whatever its

13 Cf: Tran Thi Vinh (1993 and 1992); Vu Thi Phung (1991); Le Thi Quy (1992b).

present purpose may be. Examples include the sudden about-turn in political philosophy accompanying the doi moi (renovation) process which announces that not only was Marxism mis-interpreted by overzealous cadre, but that Ho Chi Minh in fact espoused what is now being termed 'Ho Chi Minh Thought'. Another example is the recent focus on study of Hoi An, an ancient port town near Danang, at a time when the Vietnamese government is trying very hard to rationalize the mutual commercial courtship between Vietnam and once-despised Japan (which occupied Vietnam during World War II). Hoi An was home to a community of Japanese traders in the 16th century; establishing a history of the relationship helps to smooth over more recent wounds. (14) One more example is the elevation of ancient women soldiers, real and mythical, to the status of 'national' heroes through stories and songs during the mobilization of women for the resistance movement against the French colonial overlords. The celebration of women heroes was made concrete, literally, by newly independent Vietnam in the renaming of streets. Pelzer discusses the malleability of 'tradition' in the conception of the traditional Vietnamese woman by suggesting that the current perception of southern women as being 'more traditional' "in their deference to men and devotion to their husbands," may stem from the importation of the american 'housewife' role

14 A rash of articles, books, and colloquia on Hoi An have appeared or taken place in recent years. Cf. The National Committee for the International Symposium on the Ancient Town of Hoi An (1993) Ancient Town of Hoi An. Hanoi: The Gioi Publishers.

"among the inflated urban middle class of South Vietnam". This class was a new phenomenon developed out of the American policy in South Vietnam to 'win hearts and minds' through subsidized consumer goods, motorbikes and so on, the "Honda revolution". This class had not existed in traditional Vietnam and neither had this role for women.(15)

The discussion of what is 'traditional' is fascinating and complicated and deserves serious contemplation. It is the subject of another, different, thesis. Here I have only the space to look very briefly at women in 'traditional' Vietnam, using the term according to the current orthodoxy.

Two points should be noted about Vietnam's history, and the effect it has had on the form of the Vietnamese traditional family. During most of Vietnam's history the country has been at war, so that it has not been uncommon for members of the family unit to be separated for long periods of time, with the husbands and other adult males away fighting the enemy leaving wives at home to care for the children and parents-in-law. Thus, women in Vietnam have long been accustomed to coping independently with the economic survival of the household. Second, as a Vietnamese sociologist aptly put it, "Ten centuries under the rule of Chinese feudalism has left deep marks".(16) Chinese influence structured the traditional family according to two models--Tam Dai Dong Duong and Tu Dai Dong Duong--an extended family with three or four generations,

15 Pelzer (1993): 317.

16 Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 175

respectively, and made the "supreme power" holder the senior male, or cu co.(17)

According to Confucian precepts, a woman had to conform to the 'three obediences'--to father, to husband, to son--according to her stage in life. Women also had to embody feminine social norms--Cong, housework, Dung, beauty, Ngon, polite forms of address, and Hanh, virtue.(18)

Following the Confucian tradition, marriages were arranged by the parties' parents almost without exception, hence the ill-fated love storylines of classical literature (in Kieu, the most famous Vietnamese poem and story, the heroine chooses her own partner and promptly meets with disaster and ruin, thus neatly acknowledging both the Vietnamese tradition of strong women--discussed below--and the Confucian precept of obedience to one's parents or else).

Feudal law did not permit divorce, according to Khuat Thu Hong, whose writing on this subject probably dates from the mid-1980s and seems rather conservative, nor allow for the right of daughters to inherit family property. Land and property was inherited by the eldest son, in large part, with some smaller division of property among younger sons. In spite of the abolition of private ownership by the Communist Party (now being reversed somewhat by long-term use rights to land), Khuat states that even today:

17 Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 175.

18 Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 176.

[husband's property comes from wife's labour],(22) which points out both the acknowledgement and appropriation of women's economic activities.

An article assessing legal aspects of women's status in traditional Vietnam compares Le and Nguyen dynasty (1428-1527 and 1802-1945 respectively) codes and concludes that the Le Code "represented genuine Vietnamese custom with its idiosyncracies and incorporated original provisions unknown in any Chinese code...to give equal civil rights to Vietnamese women" and that "the Le Dynasty pursued a genuinely Vietnamese tradition and upheld women's civil rights on an equal footing with those of men".(23) In fact, goes the argument in this paper, the Le Code fit so much better "the cultural patterns of Vietnamese society" that even into the twentieth century the Vietnamese "remained faithful to the tradition embodied in Le law".(24)

Another article by a well-known Vietnamese scholar giving a sweeping overview of the history of women in Vietnam argues that the Hong Duc law code of the 15th century recognized certain rights of women, including property inheritance and the right to sue for divorce, among others. Several reasons are given for the 'preservation' of these rights of women in the face of Chinese aggression and domination; not only were rights of women seen as simply something Vietnamese to be retained against the imposition of things not Vietnamese, but

22 Mai Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet: 67.

23 Ta Van Tai: 23 and 42, as quoted in Drummond (1990).

24 Ta Van Tai: 42, as quoted in Drummond (1990).

also that women held roles important enough to warrant such rights. Women's roles in society were enhanced through the "tradition of nation and class struggle of the Vietnamese women [sic]" which gave women "prestige", and were reinforced by the system of small-scale wet rice cultivation which dominated Vietnamese agriculture. Women performed "the major role in labour", and, it is suggested, because women were dominant in economic activity "[they] could preserve [their] roles and status, and enjoyed high appreciation".(25)

This historical view of women in Vietnam rests heavily on the presumption that the definitively Vietnamese granting of rights to women is a product of tradition, not of women's continuing importance as actors in their society; how women manage to retain a place on the stage of Vietnamese history throughout the years of Chinese domination and Confucian influence is unexplained. The practical role that women held in Vietnamese society seems to be much less important than the perception that their civil rights were a distinguishably Vietnamese tradition.

I would argue that the tension between this 'Vietnameseness' historical view of women in the face of highly patriarchal Confucian practices and a truly participatory role for women has shifted over the course of this century. These shifts have been from a true concern for women and their liberation from oppression to a tool of resistance mobilization efforts to a genuine effort to make

women fully participating members of society to tokenism in the face of great cultural challenges to this newly exposed, highly homogenous, society.

CHAPTER TWO: WOMEN IN VIETNAM: GENERAL SITUATION

To situate the discussion of my research interviews, I need first to outline in broad terms the economic developments of the contemporary period in Vietnam, and to describe in general terms the situation of women in contemporary Vietnam, particularly in urban areas.

Much if not most of the material available on the situation of women in Vietnam focusses on the situation of women in rural areas. This is unsurprising given that approximately 80% of the population lives in the countryside. However, the conditions of women in urban areas are distinctly different from the conditions pertaining to women in rural areas. Here, I would not do justice to either by attempting to discuss both. This chapter, as far as possible, will focus on the situation of women in urban Vietnam.

In this chapter I will discuss briefly the economic history of Vietnam from reunification 1975 to the present. I will then discuss some of the demographic features of women which are helpful in describing present socio-economic conditions in Vietnam, and outline some of the features of day-to-day life and customs which shape the situation of women in urban Vietnam.

HISTORY OF THE ECONOMY POST 1975

Since the end of the war with the United States, the Vietnamese economy has experienced numerous twists and turns

of policy, direction, and practice. The socio-economic model that Vietnam has, since Independence in the 1950s (in the north), tried to apply is the Soviet model of a centrally-planned economy. For various reasons, this model has not worked and has not produced the desired level of development in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government is in the process of dismantling the crippling state economic structure and determining new and more efficient methods of socio-economic organization. The name given this process is doi moi, or 'renovation', and the goal of this process is to produce a market-oriented economy. This restructuring is what is described in brief in this section. In the meantime, until these reforms can be completed, Vietnam is still hampered by the lack of the institutional infrastructure associated with market-based economic relations, in particular "an effectively functioning legal system, [a framework for] national implementation of central policies, and an adequate statistical basis for economic planning".(1)

For this discussion of recent economic developments, the post war period can be most conveniently, and meaningfully, broken down into its three Five Year Plans, each of which signalled a distinct shift in economic policy.

Reunification to 1980

It is common for Vietnamese texts to begin a discussion of this period with something along the lines of 'After the

1 Fforde and de Vylder (1988): 14.

victorious expulsion of the US aggressors...'. Regretfully, that seems inappropriate on the pages of a foreigner's text, for in truth, to foreigners who have never experienced occupation of their country, it is difficult to comprehend how important a mental as well as national/territorial victory this was. April 30th 1975 was the first day in Vietnamese contemporary history on which there were no foreign governors of any kind in Vietnam, and the first day in many years on which there was no war.

The exultation of Vietnam's first Five Year Plan as a reunified country is evident in its immediate, later to be proven hasty, wholesale 'export' of the socialist principles of economic organization, which had been developed in North Vietnam and in practice there for several decades, to the whole of the country. The most fundamental of these principles, is of course, central economic planning. In the centrally controlled economy, the non-state sector, which by this time only really existed in the former South Vietnam, was repressed. Economic relations were reoriented away from market forces towards a basis on distribution, and forms of ownership and organization of production were "simplified".(2) Broadly, the strategy, which was intended to build "a self-supporting economy", emphasized heavy industry and investment in large capital projects to the detriment of other sectors of the economy.(3)

2 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 17.

3 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 17.

For the first couple of years the private sector in the south, in which the Hoa (ethnic Chinese) figured largely, was tolerated by the SRV out of the need for the goods and foreign exchanged it produced. In 1978, however, when the private sector dominated the southern economy, and at the same time as relations with China were worsening, the government began to close down the private sector by introducing a new currency, closing tens of thousands of private businesses, and relocating thousands of "bourgeois tradesmen" to rural areas.(4)

Competition with the private sector was not the only problem the planners of Vietnam's first independent strategy had to confront. In fact, the most serious problem was then, and remains a problem even now, infrastructure. The war had seen the destruction of every bridge in the north, six of the railway lines, hundreds of kilometres of dykes and irrigation canals, plus schools, hospitals, farms, houses ("five million square metres of houses [were] burned"), whole sections of towns and cities, and over 300 villages completely destroyed.(5) In the south, in addition to extensive damage to buildings, land, and livestock, the destruction of nine thousand of its fifteen thousand villages had forced ten million people out of their homes.(6) Even if these figures may have been somewhat inflated, this is still an impressive

4 Tan Ten Lang: 18-19.

5 Tran Hoang Kim (1992): 22.

6 Tran Hoang Kim (1992): 22.

record of damage and posed a serious challenge to the new national government.

The Vietnamese economy overall suffered from a relatively low level of technological development, with industry contributing only some 25% of the national income and agriculture employing three-quarters of the labour force. Most of the machinery in industry was imported, and the level of domestic technical expertise was low (one Vietnamese engineer per 20,000 workers). The industrial technology that was in place was concentrated in food processing, particularly in the south where it comprised 90% of all industry.(7)

Yet even though this was a predominantly agricultural economy, the most pressing, and chronic problem was still the shortfall between consumption needs and domestic production. Even though consumption was limited through rationing, foreign loans had to be used to import food and other materials needed close the gap. Between 1976 and 1991 GDP did not once meet expenditure, although the proportion of external aid spent on importing necessary consumables decreased from 21.5% in 1976 to 8.9% in 1991.(8) In addition, to meet losses by production units, state subsidies had to be extended through writing off debts and the "non-accounting of costs in many items [sic]"(9), contributing to the strains on the budget.

Cuts in foreign sources of aid and loans precipitated by the Vietnamese involvement in Cambodia and the related border

7 Tran Hoang Kim (1992): 21.

8 Tran Hoang Kim (1992): 20.

9 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 18.

war with the Chinese in 1979, plus the diversion of resources away from the domestic economy in order to fund these actions, combined with natural calamities, a fall in yearly food production between 1976 and 1978 from 13 to 11 million tonnes, and the exodus of 'boat people', which meant the loss of a large group of "economically active and productive" Vietnamese, all contributed to an abrupt fall in the annual growth rate from 9% in 1976 to 2% in 1978.(10) By 1979 it was clear that a new economic approach had to be adopted.

The Sixth Plenum of the Party Central Committee in the fall of 1979 issued a new set of economic policies which advocated slackening the pace of the 'socialist transformation'.(11) In agriculture, the household contract system was introduced which allowed for short-term allocation of land to farming families. Similar reforms were introduced in industry and handicraft production, although the scope and implementation of these reforms in both sectors were narrow and slow.

Worsening economic conditions throughout the country-- there were "food riots and peasant unrest" in the fall of 1980 (12)--pointed out all too clearly the weaknesses of this

10 Tan Ten Lang: 19.

11 "The organizational forms of production must not be fixed... production must be organized in the direction of gradual centralization, specialization, cooperativization and association in order to attain high economic results." Part II of the resolution issued by the Sixth VCP Central Committee Plenum: "Measures and Policies". As quoted in Tan Ten Lang: 28.

12 Tan Ten Lang: 34.

centralized economic organization model and its resultant low level of domestic economic development.

1981-1985

This Five Year Plan marked out the "tactical concessions"(13) to economic necessity that had already begun, while retaining the principles of socialist economic organization at the core of economic thinking. Most importantly, these concessions included the household quota or contract system, which acknowledged the failure of collectivization to motivate production to attain the necessary levels. Although the government remained hostile to the idea of a non-state sector, still this represented a crucial breach in the socialist management style. Necessarily, rationing was decreased though not eliminated altogether until the end of the decade, and the range of goods to be traded at market prices was enlarged alongside wide-ranging price adjustment policies implemented in October 1984 and October 1985.(14)

In industry, enterprises were permitted to conduct business outside the provisions of the Plan. To enable this non-Plan business, enterprises were permitted "to buy, sell, and exchange raw materials and materials that the State could not ... supply".(15) In addition, some direct foreign trade links were allowed, to facilitate import and export. This

13 Fforde (1991): 7.

14 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 18.

15 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 19.

Plan also saw the important restructuring of the economy away from the inappropriate Soviet style large scale capital investment in heavy industry.

The household contract system and the encouragement of outside-the-Plan business are evidence of the conceptual adjustment in socialist economic organization--moving away from tightly-controlled vertical links between individual units and the State and permitting the independent and 'market-force inspired' formation of horizontal links between units. While such adjustment might at this point still have been limited, it was the foundation without which the broadening of these horizontal links and individual economic units into market-driven supply-demand activity could not have been broached.

1986-1990

1986 was in many ways the watershed year of post-war economic development for Vietnam. The VI Party Congress held in 1986 severely criticized the progress of the Party and the government (which are for the most part synonymous) in economic development. This congress marked a distinct theoretical shift in economic policy-making. Mistakes were acknowledged (indeed flaunted) in the economic policies adopted and their implementation, and policy was henceforth to move away from centralized planning, with the intention of eventually doing away with it altogether. It was after this

Congress that the Vietnamese people experienced what Fforde terms the "de-Stalinisation of everyday life".(16)

As Fforde describes it, from 1986 economic policy moved toward "a 'commercialization' of exchange relations", abandoning the practice of supply according to the Plan and the two-price system. Also following this congress, as products of its new policies, came a great liberalization of foreign trade, a greater role for local authorities, and a decline of hostility toward the private sector.(17)

Specifically, the Party's new policies were to be guided by the need to develop all sectors of the economy simultaneously and to diversify the forms of ownership.¹⁸ The open-door policy was reaffirmed, with goods for export, along with agriculture and consumer goods for domestic consumption, being the three new areas of focus as economic restructuring de-emphasized heavy industry.(19)

During the mid-1980s Vietnam experienced a period of rapid and steep inflation--over 300%, with estimates as high as 390%, in 1988 (20). Price adjustment measures had been taken since the disastrous agricultural year of 1987 in an

16 Fforde (1991): 8.

17 Fforde (1991): 8.

18 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 19.

19 Fforde (1991b) however, asserts that "The real sectoral priorities of the authorities did not change commensurate with the needs of the national economy. Despite certain statements to the contrary, the state did **not** shift those national resources it controlled significantly into new priority areas such as agriculture, consumer goods and exports." (106).

20 Vo Dai Luoc, Le Dang Doanh as quoted in Luong (1993): 140.

effort to bring prices closer to the reality of supply and demand, with the state gradually reducing its subsidies and relaxing its control over the sale of raw materials (retaining its price-setting authority over "essential goods"--steel, oil, electricity, etc.(21)). However, as supply-demand relations were commercialized, many enterprises experienced severe shortages in inputs no longer allocated to them but needing to be purchased in the market. The state's response was to print more money to alleviate these shortages and enable production. In 1989 the situation was brought under control with the enactment of anti-inflationary policies. According to one Vietnamese economist, the monthly index of inflation was at 14.5% in 1988 and was brought down to 2.5-3% by 1990.(22) According to another source, the monthly index of inflation over the period of this Plan was as follows in Table 2.1.

<u>1986</u>	<u>1987</u>	<u>1988</u>	<u>1989</u>	<u>1990</u>
20%	10%	14%	2.5%	4.4%

 Source: Communist Party of Vietnam (1991): 78

State-owned enterprises were granted autonomy in the conduct of their business, but their subsidies were cut and

21 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 20.

22 Vu Tuan Anh (1991): 24.

they were required to pay taxes. This abrupt change to 'self-accounting' forced many of them out of business and into bankruptcy by the end of the decade. Non-state enterprises were encouraged, and in 1988 17,000 private enterprises were established ("46 private enterprises, 1,100 small industrial units and 15 thousand individual households" (23)).

The new market-based economy did not really get underway until the late 1980s, when, in 1988-89, the contract system was overhauled. Unlike the reform of the contract system of the early 1980s which emphasised the role of cooperatives and insisted that they remain the dominant agency in the countryside, the newly reformed contract system severely reduced the role of cooperatives.

At the same time as the market-oriented reforms were beginning to take hold, Vietnam experienced a potentially disastrous setback in the loss of its primary trading and economic partners--the eastern bloc. This has meant not only the loss of major export markets, but the return of thousands of 'guest workers' to join the masses of Vietnam's unemployed.

The Post-1990 Economic Situation

It is clear that the private sector in the 1990s has already become a very strong force. Of those that were employed in 1992, local industrial labour figures showed a total of 1.85 million workers, of which only 322,000 were employed in the state sector. Of the 1.53 million in the non-

state sector, 1.22 million were employed in private households (or about 80%). In Hanoi, of 77,800 industrial workers, 44,900 were employed in the non-state sector (58%), and 23,500 of those in private households (30%).(24)

The 1992 Constitution underlined the importance of the non-state sector by enshrining the freedoms to be accorded to it in Article 21:

Individual economy (kinh te ca the) and private capitalist economy (kinh te tu ban tu nhan) are allowed to choose their own organizational structures for production and commercial development and are allowed to establish their own business concerns without any limitations on the scale of their activities in sectors that are beneficial to national strategy and people's livelihood. The development of the household economy is encouraged.(25)

At the 1991 VII Party Congress, the Communist Party of Vietnam issued a 'strategy' for the decade up to 2000 in which the non-state sector figures prominently:

Some major tasks to be carried out are... To vigorously develop the **family economy** in various forms...

The **individual economy** is to be encouraged to develop in various sectors and trades in urban and rural areas alike... The **private capitalist economy** is to develop without limits in terms of scale and place in sectors and trades which are not prohibited by the law... **Household economy** is not an independent economic sector, but it is encouraged to develop quickly.(26)

The Party Congress also acknowledged that the structure of urban employment has already shifted away from the state

24 Statistical Yearbook 1992: 65.

25 As quoted in Ngo Vinh Long (1993): 204.

26 Communist Party of Vietnam (1991): 114-116, 161.

sector and its subsidized enterprises, and that state sector employment alone is no longer adequate (see also Table 2.2 Income by Industry):

In urban areas, those working in loss-making production establishments lead a very hard life, while people engaged in services or commerce are, in general, fairly well off.

A sizeable segment of the population is still living below the poverty line... Experiencing the most acute difficulties and seeing their living standards drop considerably, are those whose main incomes consist of salaries and social benefits.(27)

The encouragement of the private sector to take up the slack left by the shrinking state sector has led to a ballooning trade and services sector. The number of persons in private trade (including 'alimentation and services') nation-wide has increased by one-third over the four years 1988-1992, from 717,000 to 951,800. In Hanoi there were 38,700 persons in private trading in 1988 and 53,800 in 1992 an increase of almost 40% over those four years.(28) See Table 2.3, Workforce in Trade by Sector, for 1989 figures from the Census.

According to Nhan Dan, the daily newspaper of the Communist Party, the private sector in 1993 produces 60% of Vietnam's GDP.(29) The paper also reported that 27 million people are now employed in the non-state sector, and only 3

27 Communist Part of Vietnam (1991): 81.

28 Statistical Yearbook 1992: 190.

29 It also states that in the period prior to economic liberalization this sector already produced 50% of GDP, though there is no source given for this figure. As reported in the Vietnam News 22.09.83: 1.

TABLE 2.2 : AVERAGE INCOME BY INDUSTRIES, 1990

	Civil servant	Sole trader	Handicraft and small scale industry worker	Entrepreneur
Income per workers, 1000 dong/month .	51	117	105	84
Share of :				
Major source	46%	84%	83%	74%
Minor source	19%	5%	9%	11%
Other sources	35%	10%	7%	15%

Source : Le Thi (ed) (1993) : 53. Based on figures from the Ministry of Labour.

TABLE 2.3 : WORKFORCE IN TRADING BY SECTOR, URBAN/RURAL, 1989

	Thousand persons				
	Total	Collective	State Enterprise	Others	Not stated
Total	1 879.9	66.7	532.3	1 277.3	3.5
Male	548.3	24.3	252.7	270.2	1.0
Female	1 331.6	42.4	279.6	1 007.1	2.5
Ratio F/Tot. (%)	70.8	63.6	52.5	78.8	71.4
Urban	1 133.5	33.4	353.5	744.5	2.0
Male	335.4	11.5	163.1	160.1	0.5
Female	798.1	21.9	190.4	584.4	1.5
Ratio F/Tot. (%) in Urban	70.4	65.5	53.8	78.5	75.5
Rural	746.3	33.3	178.7	532.8	1.5
Male	212.9	12.8	89.5	110.1	0.5
Female	533.4	20.5	89.2	422.7	1.0
Ratio F/Tot. (%) in Rural	71.5	61.5	49.9	79.3	66.6

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 154.

TABLE 2.4 : UNEMPLOYED POPULATION BY SEX, MAJOR AGE GROUPS AND URBAN, RURAL RESIDENCE

	Thousand persons							
	1976		1980		1988		1989	
	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.
Urban	626.5	55.0	891.3	54.99	772.5	56.00	766.5	54.49
13-14							66.3	48.27
15-19	140.3	56.09	198.8	56.24	172.3	57.23	170.9	55.76
20-24	114.0	58.33	161.3	58.34	139.8	59.44	138.7	57.82
25-44	245.0	60.61	348.5	60.49	302.0	61.59	299.7	59.93
45-49	58.8	47.96	82.9	47.89	71.8	48.89	71.3	47.41
50-54	50.1	45.31	73.9	45.74	64.2	46.42	63.6	45.28
55-60	18.3		25.9		22.4		22.3	
Only from 15 yrs+							348.3	
Rural	223.5	71.36	328.0	72.84	272.9	68.63	273.5	72.76
13-14							207.0	52.32
15-19	52.9	67.49	77.5	68.77	64.4	64.91	64.5	68.84
20-24	43.1	70.30	62.9	71.70	52.4	67.56	52.5	71.62
25-44	86.7	79.24	126.9	80.93	105.6	76.23	105.8	52.55
45-49	18.4	77.72	26.9	79.18	22.4	74.55	22.4	79.02
50-54	16.3	64.42	24.9	66.27	20.7	62.32	20.8	65.87
55-60	6.1		8.9		7.4		7.5	
Only from 15 yrs+							780.1	47.37
Ratio unempl./total economically active population								
13 -14							27.4	25.9
From 15 yrs+							5.1	4.7
Total							5.8	5.4

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989, : 34-36, 142

million in the state sector. By January 1993 there were 578 private enterprises in Hanoi, Hai Phong, and Ho Chi Minh City, employing 25-26,000 workers out of the total two million workers in the non-state sector of these cities. Most of the non-state enterprises have an investment capital of less than US\$1000 (VND 10 million).(30)

However, the picture is not yet rosy. As acknowledged by the VII Party Congress, there is a serious shortfall between employment opportunities created in the private sector and the available workforce:

Employment is a particularly acute problem. Over the past four years and more, the implementation of the policy on a mixed commodity economy has created important conditions for the provision of more jobs... Thanks to these measures, during the 1986-90 period, some 4.2 million new jobs were created. However, the efforts made and the progress achieved have met only part of the demand for jobs from society; the number of unemployed from various sources is growing rapidly. Policies and measures aimed at solving this problem are still ad hoc and inconsistent in character.(31)

With a labour force growing by 3.2% per year, an increase numbering 1.1 million workers, Vietnam since 1990 has experienced massive unemployment. The official unemployment rate, based on the 1989 Census, is 6% nationwide out of a labour force of 34 million. The rate in urban areas is officially 9-12% (see Table 2.4, Unemployment by Sex, Age, and Residence, for 1989 figures on Unemployment showing percentage of women). This means approximately 150,000 unemployed in

30 Vietnam News 22.09.93: 1.

31 Communist Party of Vietnam (1991): 82.

Hanoi and about twice that in Ho Chi Minh City.(32) The Asian Development Bank estimates that the real national rate of unemployment is much higher, about 20%.(33) Underemployment, of course, is even higher and much more difficult to estimate. No figures are available for urban underemployment, but in rural areas it is estimated that farmers work only 200 days per year. See Table 2.5 for official figures on underemployment in 1989. One current estimate calculates underemployment in rural areas at almost 30% of the workforce, or the equivalent of five million unemployed.(34) Over the period since 1990 to the time of writing, September 1993, approximately 800,000 workers have been laid off from state enterprises. Also joining the ranks of the job seekers are demobilized soldiers (about half a million), guest workers returned from abroad (about 200,000, particularly from the former Soviet Union), and repatriated 'boat people' (about 30,000 thus far with more to come).

As can be seen from the tables on un- and under-employment, and from Tables 2.6 and 2.7 on the 'economically active population' 1976-1988, women form a majority of the workforce and a majority of the unemployed. Vietnamese Women in the 80s noted that "In big cities such as Hanoi, Hai Phong, Ho Chi Minh City, 60 per cent of young people asking for jobs

32 The National Centre for Employment Promotion at the Ministry of Labour, as quoted in Hiebert 1993.09.02: 16.

33 As quoted in Heibert, Murray (1993.09.02): 16-17. Much of the following discussion of unemployment is based on the information in this article. This would mean almost 700,000 urban unemployed.

34 Hiebert, FEER, 22.5.93.

TABLE 2.5 : UNDEREMPLOYMENT POPULATION BY SEX AND MAJOR AGE-GROUPS

	Thousand persons					
	1980		1984		1988	
	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.
Visible underemployment	1 312.7	52.57	1 784.2	51.56	2 183.1	51.09
15 - 19 years	333.2	51.20	441.6	50.59	568.8	49.30
20 - 24	328.8	50.97	429.3	50.08	502.3	49.29
25 - 44	493.2	54.20	667.8	53.20	841.6	52.79
45 - 49	86.4	53.47	125.5	53.47	149.2	51.54
50 - 55	45.3	51.88	70.0	51.57	76.4	52.36
Over 55	25.8	57.75	40.0	57.75	44.8	58.26
Invisible underemployment	1 649.4	48.53	2 133.4	49.57	2 644.0	46.60
15 - 19 years	428.4	47.20	579.6	48.24	695.2	46.00
20 - 24	328.8	47.08	429.3	47.40	491.4	45.30
25 - 44	637.6	50.19	813.6	51.19	1 071.1	47.02
45 - 49	129.6	47.99	175.7	50.31	215.2	47.50
50 - 55	90.6	47.02	105.0	49.43	128.6	47.98
Over 55	34.4	54.07	30.2	58.28	42.5	52.94

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989, : 36-38.

TABLE 2.6 : ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION

	Thousand persons / %					
	1976		1980		1981	
	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.
Total economically active population	19358	55.30	21638.5	55.40	22537.2	55.30
Urban	3581	54.79	4047	54.58	4237	54.50
Rural	15777	55.42	17591.5	56.72	18300.2	55.49
Age-groups :						
Below 15 years	920	54.57	1060	54.62	1100	57.91
15 - 19	2323	54.80	2510	55.10	2614	56.01
20 - 24	2948.4	54.98	3245	58.27	3348	56.93
25 - 24	7843	56.29	8874.5	55.21	9371	54.80
45 - 49	1936	54.24	2163	55.02	2203.2	54.70
50 - 55	2516.6	54.60	2856	55.75	2950	54.27
Over 55 years	871	53.96	930	54.73	951	54.15

Note : Working population in the national economic branches comprises persons under labour-age (below 16 years old) and persons above labour-age (female over 55 years old, male over 60 years old).

TABLE 2.7 : ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION BY ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

	1976		1980		1985		1988	
	Total	% F/Tot.	Total	% F/Tot.	Total	% F/Tot.	Total	% F/Tot.
Agriculture; hunting and fishing	40.69		15256.6	68.56	18978.6	43.58	21102.0	44.59
Mining & manufacturing, electric, gas, water	1662.3	59.41	1867.3	60.04	2356.5	63.84	2957.7	55.90
Construction	881	51.25	1008	51.76	831.6	33.95	856.1	64.49
Wholesale, retail sale, restaurants and hotels	1651.2	47.80	1429.5	41.60	1614.9	38.24	1886.3	38.74
Transport, storage and communication	393.6	57.09	382.7	57.88	443.6	33.23	433.8	71.92
Financing insurance real estate and business services	285.1	65.31	312.3	65.03	363.6	47.85	373.1	65.53
Collective property, social branches (education, health)	860.1	45.02	1001.9	51.99	1064.1	59.98	1056.3	32.71
Others	350.1	64.30	380.2	69.41	372.4	52.04	256.5	24.05

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 25 (table 2.6), 26-27 (table 2.7).

TABLE 2.8 : POPULATION BY SEX AND AGE GROUPS, 1989

Age group	Persons		
	Total	Female	% F/Tot.
Total	64 375 762	33 145 025	51.49
0 - 14	25 222 598	12 308 171	48.80
15 - 19	6 805 682	3 447 986	50.66
20 - 29	11 751 928	6 134 256	52.20
30 - 39	7 988 601	4 208 459	52.68
40 - 49	4 141 582	2 248 829	54.30
50 - 54	1 913 138	1 059 910	55.40
55 - 59	1 945 438	1 046 969	53.82
60+	4 600 542	2 687 744	58.42
Not stated	6 253	2 701	43.19

Source : Completed Census Results, Vietnam Population Census - 1989, VI :16.

**TABLE 2.9 : BIRTH RATE AND DEATH RATE, AND POPULATION GROWTH RATE, %
1983, 1988**

Years	Birth rate	Death rate	Growth rate
1983	2.844	6.940	2.510
1988	2.664	6.300	2.034

Source : Job Creation and Income Generation for Women, : 17.

TABLE 2.10 : URBAN POPULATION, 1989

Age	Total (persons)	% Female/Total	
Total	12 260 960	51.86	
0-14	4 110 475	48.60	Total under 20
15-19	1 366 658	50.80	44.7%
20-29	2 418 973	53.80	
30-39	1 853 774	53.40	
40-49	946 717	53.60	
50-54	391 629	53.80	
55-59	366 253	51.90	
60 yrs+	805 280	58.4	

Source : Completed Census Results, Vietnam Population Census 1989, VI : 17.

are young girls".(35) Women's employment is and clearly must be a major policy concern for contemporary economists and planners in Vietnam.

WOMEN IN CONTEMPORARY URBAN VIETNAM

In order to look at the situation of women in contemporary Vietnam, it is useful to start with a brief demographic overview. The 1989 national Census provides the most recent full set of statistics, although there are yearly updates of economic statistics. Unfortunately, developments in Vietnam have been so rapid over the period since the Census that the Census data should be used only as indicative rather than descriptive of contemporary Vietnam.

Two of the most important things to note about Vietnam's population is that it is predominantly female and young (see Table 2.8). In 1989, women accounted for 51.48% of the total population; 39% of the population was under 15 years of age and 50% was under 20. Approximately 19% of the population was urban in 1989 (see also Table 1.1), and women accounted for 52% of urban residents (see Table 2.9).

The issue of the imbalance in the sex ratio and the shortage of men is brought up constantly in discussions of 'women's issues'. Usually it is cited as the reason behind 'social problems' such as illegitimate children, for example:

Another social problem arises for women working in State farms far from cities and cultural centres,

in labour teams with the predominance of women: they have difficulty in marrying for shortage of men. Childbirths outside marriage are seen in many production teams and forestry establishments. Although they enjoy all the rights of the nursing mother and the assistance of the collective, they are facing difficulties of being lonely mothers who have to bring up their children themselves.(36)

In practical terms, this imbalance in a society with a confucian tradition based upon the family and the production of descendents means that there is a tremendous pressure to marry which it is not possible to satisfy. Consequently, there is a comparatively large number of marriageable women who are not able to marry and are thus somewhat left out of mainstream society, as there is little in the way of role models for single, unmarried women. This imbalance contributes to the creation of almost a desperation at the personal level which translates into a tolerance on the part of women of marital discord, infidelity, and unequal contributions to household productive and reproductive tasks, as became evident in the interviews, even while it should create participatory opportunities for women at the public level.

Women and Health

There is a shortage of good information on the status of women's health in Vietnam, especially for the 1990s. Table 2.10 shows life expectancy and mortality rates in urban and rural areas for the period 1976-1987. Table 2.11 shows selected indicators on maternal health for urban and rural

areas, and Table 2.12 shows selected nation-wide indicators in health and education services. These tables show an overall decline in the provision of services and level of health. This situation has deteriorated even further in the 1990s as the chronic underfunding of the health system worsens. Many health care workers provide services on a private basis to supplement their generally very low incomes, and tend to absent themselves from their 'full-time' positions in hospitals and clinics. Even in hospitals patients often have to pay for medicines and to pay 'incentives' to get medical attention.

Another example which illuminates this deteriorating situation is that of maternity leaves. Although the state stipulates that each woman is entitled to six months maternity leave, (37) in fact many perhaps most women cannot take their full leave. This is for two reasons. One, the employer may be difficult and insist that a woman worker return to work earlier. In most cases the workers are in no position to refuse or complain for fear of losing their jobs. Two, the pay during maternity leave is the full 'official' pay and does not include bonuses, lunch allowance, and the salary additions which often make up a sizeable proportion of the total take home pay. Therefore, women on 'full pay' maternity leave are actually receiving much less than their usual monthly income. For most, this shortfall in income makes it impossible to take

37 Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 78, 39.

TABLE 2.11 : SELECTED INDICATORS OF MATERNAL HEALTH AND MATERNAL HEALTH SERVICES IN URBAN & RURAL AREAS

	Persons							
	1976		1980		1984		1987	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Child births attended by trained personal	768951	47.6	849486	50.9	814 841	46.4	8426444	45.2
Urban	287080	96.0	246075	96.5	257535	97.0	252720	97.2
Rural	481871	36.5	603411	42.6	557306	37.4	589924	36.9
Maternal deaths & mortality rates per 100,000 live birth	293	18.2	384	23.0	400	23.7	395	21.2
Urban	25	08.4	28	11.0	31	11.7	17	6.5
Rural	268	20.3	356	25.1	369	24.7	278	17.4
Mothers breast-feeding 6 mths after childbirth	1451760	90.0	1508605	90.3	1421335	80.9	1489579	80.1
Urban	239200	80.0	206805	81.1	199125	75.0	176800	68.0
Rural	1212580	92.0	1301800	190.0	1222210	82.0	1312779	82.1
Women 15-49 with nutritional anaemia	20000	00.15	11500	10.11	25100	0.19	28150	0.22
Urban								
Rural								

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 101-102.

TABLE 2.12 : SELECTED INDICATORS ON HEALTH SERVICES AND EDUCATION, 1989 COMPARE WITH 1980

School attendance per 10,000 people :	In 1989 : 1,877 In 1980 : 2,371
Doctors and assistant doctors per 10,000 people :	In 1989 : 10.8 In 1980 : 8.3
Hospital beds per 10,000 people :	In 1989 : 33.6 In 1980 : 37.0

Source : Le Thi (ed) (1993) : 54.

TABLE 2.13 : AVERAGE NUMBER OF CHILDREN EVER BORN PER WOMAN FROM 15 TO 49 YEARS OLD (1989)

	Whole country	Urban	Rural
Total	1.94	1.35	2.07
Age - groups :			
15 - 19	0.05	0.02	0.05
20 - 24	0.65	0.40	0.72
25 - 29	1.73	1.17	1.90
30 - 34	2.76	1.99	3.02
35 - 39	3.64	2.74	3.93
40 - 44	4.36	3.53	4.63
45 - 49	4.93	4.34	5.11

TABLE 2.14 : FAMILY PLANNING AND HEALTH SERVICES IN THE WORK-PLACE, (NUMBER OF BENEFICIARIES)

	1976			1980			1984		
	Total	Female	% F/Tot.	Total	Female	% F/Tot.	Total	Female	% F/Tot.
Family planning services & health services									
At community level	85 003	60 305	70.94	106 803	73 664	68.97	237 262	163 633	68.97
At district level	495 810	251 750	50.78	600 768	414 360	68.97	1 282 975	884 833	65.85
At provincial level	127 550	90 488	70.94	126 944	87 504	68.93	237 340	163 666	68.96
Total	708 363	542 543	76.59	834 515	576 528	69.09	1 757 577	1 212 192	68.97

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 135 (table 2.13), 107 (table 2.14).

TABLE 2.15 : CONTRACEPTIVE PREVELANCE RATE (CPR) FOR MARRIED FEMALES IN THEIR REPRODUCTIVE AGE AND METHOD CURRENTLY USED

	1988 (a)	1991 (b)	prevelance by %	
Contraceptive use (% married couples)	38%	43%		
	1976	1980	1984	1988
Contraceptive methods (c)				
Sterilization	0.28	0.79	0.91	0.92
Pills	0.51	0.80	0.89	1.05
Condom	0.61	1.59	1.82	2.11
IUD	18.03	26.83	25.09	26.12
Others	18.72	18.01	21.23	30.18

(a) Population - Public Health Census 1988

(b) National Commission of Population Family Planning

Source : (a), (b) Vietnam Social Sciences Iss.4/1992, : 55.

(c) Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 23

TABLE 2.16 : INDUCED ABORTIONS BY URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

	1976	1980	1984	1988
Total	70 281	166 176	361 918	811 176
Urban	21 084	63 352	130 290	373 141
Rural	49 197	103 364	231 628	438 035

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 106

advantage of their legal entitlement, even if their supervisors/employers are cooperative.

Overall, urban women tend to bear fewer children and later in life than rural women, as is shown in Table 2.13, and, as was shown in Table 2.11, to have much greater access to health care personnel.

Family planning is an issue central to women's health. It is also a priority for the government, and for that reason there tends to be rather more information available, though even so the information is sketchy and incomplete. Tables 2.14, 2.15, and 2.16 give some general indicators on family planning and contraceptive use.

In general there is a very strong reliance on the IUD as the primary form of birth control. According to the Demographic and Health Survey in 1988 over one-third (39%) of married women use modern birth control methods. Of these, the overwhelming majority, 89%, use the IUD. The UNFPA estimates that in 1988 over one million women had abortions, and that therefore approximately one of every three pregnancies end in abortion. Clearly, however, the majority of Vietnamese women use traditional methods of birth control, such as breastfeeding, which averages more than 14 months for both urban and rural mothers.(38) The pill is not available, nor are diaphragms, and condoms are of very poor quality and not always universally available. IUDs are not of particularly good quality either, and seem to be manufactured in only one

size. Stories of women getting pregnant with IUDs in, having IUDs fall out, getting chronic infections from IUDs, etc., are commonplace. Adequate medical attention is rarely available from the underfunded national health system, and gynaecological problems are often left untreated. One official from a large agricultural college in a rural province near Hanoi estimated that 80% of the women students and faculty of the college have chronic untreated gynaecological infections, including syphilis and herpes.(39)

Vasectomies are not yet common, and there seems to be great resistance to them. Given reports such as this one-- that at a clinic performing vasectomies in a rural town the same syringe was used to give an anaesthetic to seven patients in a row(40)--it is easy to believe that infections and complications are common and that resistance to the operation is high.

In other words, family planning remains very much a woman's responsibility, and it is her health which is endangered because of poor hygiene practices (born of necessity perhaps) and inadequate health care (due to underfunding).

An 1983 study of reproductive behaviour showed that the indicative factors among different social groups ("peasants, workers and intellectuals") are the mother's age, education,

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- 39 Conversation with Dianne Hentschel, Canada Fund Coordinator, after her visit to the province in question.
 40 Conversation with Dianne Hentschel, Canada Fund Coordinator, after her visit to the province and village where this happened.

and parents' occupations.(41) The survey showed that the age of the mother at the birth of her first child differed greatly among these three social groups, but that over 70% of all married women had their first child after one year of marriage [seems to mean: within one year of marriage--may also mean, not in the first year of marriage]. Unsurprisingly, given data from other developing countries, the survey showed that intellectuals had the lowest average number of children, and the highest number of children was found in families "doing free business"(42) which, given the period, would likely refer to households in non- or partly non- cooperative agriculture (ie: vegetables, flowers, fruit trees). As well, and as is in evidence in other countries, the study showed that there is "an inverse correlation between the number of children and the cultural level of the couples, where the length of women's education had a decisive influence".(43)

Women and Education

Generally speaking, Vietnam has a high rate of literacy compared with other developing countries, especially for women (see Table 2.17). However, as is clear from Tables 2.18 and 2.19, women in Vietnam have an overall lower rate of educational attainment than men, particularly at the higher levels, although the figures for vocational school

41 Trinh Thi Quang, 1983, in Khuat Thu Hong: 184.

42 Trinh Thi Quang, 1983, in Khuat Thu Hong: 185.

43 Trinh Thi Quang, 1983, in Khuat Thu Hong: 184.

TABLE 2.17 : EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND ILLITERACY BY AGE 15, IN URBAN AND RURAL AREAS

	Thousand persons									
	1976		1980		1984		1988		1989	
	Total	% F/Tot	Total	% F/Tot	Total	% F/Tot	Total	% F/Tot	% of Males	% of Female
Urban										
No schooling (illiterate)	187.4	52 %	159.4	51 %	164.0	51%	177.0	52 %		
Primary	2230.2	50	2239.2	48	2134.3	48	2302.7	48		
Secondary	155.0	48	138.2	48	150.4	48	181.0	48		
Rural										
No schooling (illiterate)	722.1	52	673.7	52	704.1	51	740.3	51		
Primary	8981.9	47	9484.2	48	1583.3	46	9628.3	44		
Secondary	403.3	42	585.6	48	645.8	44	757.0	48		
Total										
No schooling (illiterate)									7.8	16.7
Primary									80.4	74.4
Secondary									11.8	8.9

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989: 72-73; Le Thi (ed) (1993): 20

TABLE 2.18 : PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION BY EDUCATION LEVEL AND BY SEX, AGE 15 AND OVER, 1989

	Men	Women	Total	Urban	
				Men	Women
Professional level					
No level	88.1	93.3	90.9	48.9	69.5
Technical workers :					
With diploma	3.7	0.9	2.2	7.9	2.0
Without diploma	2.6	1.2	1.8	5.9	2.9
Vocational school	3.1	3.3	3.2	4.9	6.6
College and university	2.5	1.9	2.3	6.6	3.3

Source : Le Thi (ed) (1993) : 20.

TABLE 2.19 : PER CENT CURRENTLY ATTENDING SCHOOL BY AGE GROUP, SEX AND RURAL/URBAN RESIDENCE, 1989.

Age group	<u>Rural areas</u>		<u>Urban areas</u>	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
5 - 9	62.4	61.7	73.8	74.0
10 - 14	78.0	71.1	87.5	86.0
15 - 19	26.8	16.5	37.7	34.0

Source : Unicef : 169

TABLE 2.20 : LITERACY RATES BY SEX

	Total (Thous. pers.)		Literate (Thous. pers.)		Percent literate %	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
Total	55393.6	28707.1	46992.8	23375.4	84.9	81.5
5 - 9 years old	8580.7	4176.6	5587.4	2707.9	65.2	64.9
10 - 14 -	7526.9	3561.6	6999.3	3378.3	93.0	92.6
15 - 19 -	6820.1	3443.5	6365.6	3210.0	93.4	93.3
20 - 24 -	5999.7	3119.8	5649.5	2919.8	94.2	93.6
25 - 29 -	5667.2	2971.4	5358.6	2777.9	94.6	93.5
30 - 34 -	4733.4	1774.1	4470.2	2994.0	94.5	92.9
35 - 39 -	3325.3	1774.1	3095.7	1609.9	93.1	90.8
40 - 44 -	2234.6	1195.5	2042.8	1048.9	91.5	87.8
45 - 49 -	1964.7	1083.1	1720.9	888.4	87.6	82.1
50 - 54 -	1942.1	1076.5	1625.3	815.7	83.7	85.8
55 - 59 -	1966.5	1044.7	1535.0	695.5	78.1	66.6
Over 60 -	4632.5	2701.2	2542.4	1028.7	54.9	38.1

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 168.

No year given

TABLE 2.21 : PRINCIPAL REASON FOR STUDENT TO DROP-OUT, BY SEX AND URBAN, RURAL RESIDENCE

Thousand persons

	1985-1986			1986-1987			1987-1988		
	(1) Total	(2) Female	(3) Male	(1) Total	(2) Female	(3) Male	(1) Total	(2) Female	(3) Male
Urban	306.0	161.1	144.9	420.6	217.5	203.1	600.6	309.9	290.7
Financial constraints	137.7	83.5	54.2	193.2	115.9	77.3	288.3	172.8	115.5
Intellectual disability to complete schooling	91.8	44.6	47.2	126.3	64.2	62.1	186.2	91.1	95.1
Marriage	1.8	1.1	0.7	2.1	1.5	0.6	3.2	2.1	1.1
Augmenting family income	5.6	3.6	2.0	8.2	5.1	3.1	15.6	10.8	4.8
Others	69.1	28.3	40.8	90.8	30.7	60.1	107.3	33.1	74.2
Rural	714.3	397.6	316.7	893.9	485.4	408.5	1359.5	738.3	621.2
Financial constraints	396.0	241.8	154.2	498.2	303.8	194.4	788.3	481.8	306.5
Intellectual disability to complete schooling	228.5	116.2	112.3	267.3	133.1	134.2	394.8	189.1	205.7
Marriage	7.3	5.6	1.7	11.2	7.5	3.7	16.4	12.3	4.1
Augmenting family income	16.8	11.7	5.1	19.4	12.6	6.8	26.7	18.6	8.1
Others	65.7	22.3	43.4	97.8	28.4	69.4	133.3	36.5	96.8

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 88.

TABLE 2.22 : SCIENTISTS, ENGINEERS AND TECHNICIANS BY SEX, ENGAGED IN RESEARCH AND EXPERIMENTAL DEVELOPMENT BY FIELD OF EXPERTISE.

	Persons					
	1982		1985		1988	
	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.	(1) Total	(2) % F/Tot.
Total	697 430	35.47	772 554	37.27	776 775	37.35
Natural sciences	117 622	3.37	129 789	3.55	130 498	3.56
Engineering and technology	135 995	29.13	150 648	30.59	151 472	30.65
Medical sciences	64 670	56.24	71 847	58.91	72 240	59.04
Agricultural sciences	43 782	22.60	48 671	23.66	48 937	23.71
Social and humanities	335 359	46.98	371 599	49.35	373 628	49.46

TABLE 2.23 : FEMALE. MALE'S AVERAGE MONTHLY WAGES FOR FULL-TIME WORK IN MAJOR SECTORS OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES (INDUSTRIES)

	US\$								
	1987			1988			1989		
	(1) Average	(2) Female	(3) Male	(1) Average	(2) Female	(3) Male	(1) Average	(2) Female	(3) Male
Agriculture, hunting, Forestry and fishing	8.0	7.9	8.1	8.1	8.0	8.2	10.1	10.0	10.2
Mining and quarrying	9.0	8.8	9.2	9.2	9.0	9.4	11.0	10.8	11.2
Manufacturing	9.2	9.0	9.4	9.5	9.5	10.0	11.5	11.3	11.7
Electric, gas, water	8.5	8.0	9.0	8.6	8.4	8.8	8.8	8.6	9.0
Construction	9.1	9.0	9.2	9.2	8.8	9.6	11.2	11.0	11.4
Wholesale, retail trade, restaurant and hotels	8.2	8.2	8.2	8.3	8.3	8.3	10.3	10.3	10.3
Transport, storage and communication	9.7	9.4	10.0	9.9	9.8	10.0	11.9	11.8	12.0
Financing, insurance, real estate & business service	8.0	7.8	8.2	8.2	8.0	8.4	10.2	10.0	10.4
Community, social & personal services	7.9	7.8	8.0	8.0	7.8	8.2	10.0	9.8	10.2
Others	9.1	9.0	9.2	9.3	9.2	9.4	11.3	11.2	11.4

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 32 (table 2.23), 84 (table 2.22).

qualifications (3.1% of men, and 3.3% of women in 1989) are a notable exception.

It is also clear from Table 2.20 that girls have lower school attendance rates at secondary school level than boys, even in urban areas, although higher primary school attendance rates. Table 2.21 shows the principal reasons for student drop-outs, and shows that women generally drop-out in larger numbers than boys in both urban and rural areas, and that the most common reason was 'financial constraints'. These figures are from the 1980s and I would suggest that the cost of education has only risen, and rather rapidly. This is particularly so in urban areas where the quality of the educational system is perceived to have seriously deteriorated in recent years, and where most students attend supplementary classes. It is only by teaching these supplementary classes (on an informal basis) that teachers are able to generate a sufficient income, and as with health care workers, their focus is naturally turned to the arena in which their main income is derived, to the detriment of their state sector responsibilities.

Women and Employment

In 1990 there were 16.96 million women of working age (16-55 years). Estimates for the year 2000 put the figure of women of working age at 22.01 million, with 73% in rural areas.(44) This will mean a real increase of at least 1.7

44 Le Thi (ed) (1993): 44-45.

million working age women in urban areas--or almost the entire official population of Hanoi (45)--within the next 7 years. These figures are conservative. They take into account only the natural growth rates and do not account for migration. The figures also include only 'adult' labour and do not consider child labour or retirees working to supplement pensions, both of which are present in relatively large numbers in the informal sector.

The massive layoffs in state enterprises due to the introduction of the self-accounting system and the termination of subsidies affected women's employment much more than men's. Over the 1990-1991 period a total of about 880,000 workers were laid off, and of these 60-65% were women workers.(46) In general, directors and managers perceive women as being more expensive labour than men, because of maternity leave, child care needs, and the demands of domestic work. Women workers are seen as having "lower productivity" and higher costs.(47) As well, women workers generally have lower skills training; 93.3% of working age women have no technical skills or professional qualification (see Table 2.19). Women do have overall impressive professional qualifications, given the country's 'developing' status, but still participate in

45 1992 official population of Hanoi (province, not broken down into urban and rural) is 2.106 million. This figure would not, of course, include migrants without registered residence.

46 Le Thi (ed) (1993): 45.

47 Noted in Le Thi (ed) (1993), 21, and in every discussion with Vietnamese economists, male and female, regarding the situation of state enterprises and women's employment.

professional activities at a much lower rate than men, except in categories that might be described as having 'soft' or 'feminine' characteristics such as health care and social sciences (see Table 2.22). It is also clear from Table 2.23 that women generally participate in economic activities in all industries at a lower wage rate than men.

The structure of women's employment is shown in Tables 2.24 and 2.25. Table 2.26 shows women's employment by sector and residence, and Table 2.27 gives some general indicators on women in the labour force. It is clear that women make up the majority of the workforce in Vietnam. The majority of Vietnamese women work in agriculture, dominating this sector as well as commerce (70%), education, finance and credit, and health services. In urban areas, almost 20% of urban women are in the field of education, and two-thirds of working women work in trading and industry.

Looking specifically at informal sector activities, Tables 2.28, 2.29, and 2.30 all show the predominance of women in this sector over the last 15 years up to 1989. In urban areas in 1989 women accounted for almost 60% of the total informal workforce. Table 2.31, 'illicit' activities over the period 1975-1988 shows that women have dominated unlicensed petty trading at about 70%. A 1988 figure for informal sector participation shows almost 1.3 million persons in this sector, over 800,000, or 64% of which were women. The predominance of women is even clearer in certain occupations such as in small scale trading where of 237,300 traders in 1989, there

TABLE 2.24 : THE DISTRIBUTION OF WOMEN WORKERS AMONG INDUSTRIES

INDUSTRIES	%
Agriculture, forestry and aquaculture	78.2
Statistics, banking, finance and planning	2.0
Science, education and public health	4.4
Mining, machinery and chemical industries	0.1
Textile and leather industries	4.7
Food processing industry	1.3
Construction, glass and porcelain	2.0
Transportation	0.3
Commerce	8.3
Public service	0.6
Others	2.6
TOTAL	100.0

Source : Le Thi (ed) (1993) : 33.

TABLE 2.25 : PERCENTAGE OF WOMEN IN DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

	%
Agriculture	53.20
Forestry	41.70
Industry	43.20
Construction	26.00
Commerce	70.80
Post and Telegraphy	46.40
Communication and Transport	14.40
Education and Training	67.10
Sciences	37.70
Culture and Arts	34.30
Finance and Credit	54.50
Medical Service, Social Insurance, Gymnastic and Sport	63.70
State management at different levels	28.70

Source : Figures given by Vietnam Women's Union

TABLE 2.26 : WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT BY SECTOR AND BY RESIDENCE

	Percentage of people working in various industries (%)	% OF TOTAL WORKING WOMEN (a)		% F/TOTAL
		Urban	Rural	
Industry	8.67	30.4	05.62	43.2
Construction		03.87	00.41	20.0
Agriculture	84.40	11.9	85.03	53.2
Forestry		00.23	00.27	41.7
Communications and Transport		07.68		15.4
Post and Telecommunications		00.47	00.03	46.4
Trading	3.50	31.59	04.29	70.8
Public Housing, Services & Tourism		02.57	00.17	48.2
Social & Cultural Services	2.80			
Research		00.47	00.024	37.7
Education and Training		18.36		57.1
Culture and Arts		00.58	00.03	34.3
Healthcare and Social Services		03.43	00.64	54.5
Finance		01.28	00.13	54.5
State Management	0.68	02.37	00.21	28.7

(a) Women aged 13 and over

Source: Le Thi (ed) (1993) : 68.

TABLE 2.27 : GENERAL INDICATORS ON FEMALE LABOUR, 1989 (1)

	Total	Female	% F/Total
Population 10 yrs +	45 760.2	24 362.7	53.2
Population 15-60 yrs	33 935.6	18 188.2	53.6
Urban	9 861.0	5 204.5	52.8
Rural	35 899.2	19 158.2	53.4
Economically active population 13 yrs+	30 520.9	15 787.5	51.7
worked >6 months	27 579.6	14 354.0	52.0
worked <6 months	1 165.5	575.4	49.4
unemployed	1 775.8	858.1	47.9
Non-economically active pop. 13yrs+	7 594.4	4 441.4	58.5
still at school	2 656.0	1 108.6	41.7
houseworkers	1 697.0	1 521.9	89.7
disabled	1 902.5	1 037.2	56.4
Population 13 yrs+ working in			
economic sectors urban and rural	28 745.2	14 929.4	51.9
urban	5 208.9	2 526.2	48.5
rural	23 536.3	12 403.2	52.7
By economic sector			
collective	15 660.5	8 520.2	54.4
state	4 338.4	2 127.7	49.0
others	8 626.8	4 211.6	48.8
Rate of unemployed to total economically active population (%)	5.8	5.4	

(1) Not including special enumeration groups, women in the army, or students and workers abroad.

Source: Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 138-139.

**TABLE 2.28 : WORKING POPULATION IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR
BY URBAN AND RURAL AREAS, 1989**

	TOTAL (1000s)	Females (1000s)	% Female/Total
Total	12400.2	7203.2	58.0
Unemployed	1775.8	851.1	48.3
Still at school	3728.7	1635.9	43.2
Houseworkers	2578.9	2270.2	91.9
Disabled	2368.1	1328.4	56.0
Others	1894.7	1010.6	53.3
Urban	3819.2	2284.2	59.8
Unemployed	788.7	380.3	48.2
Still at school	1126.7	527.3	46.8
Houseworkers	882.0	848.4	96.1
Disabled	465.6	255.2	54.8
Others	556.2	273.0	49.0
Rural	8581.0	4919.0	57.3
Unemployed	987.1	477.8	48.4
Still at school	2656.0	1108.6	41.7
Houseworkers	1696.9	1521.8	89.6
Disabled	1902.5	1073.2	56.4
Others	1338.5	737.6	55.1

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 159.

TABLE 2.29 : INFORMAL SECTOR OCCUPATIONS, YEARLY 1976 - 1989

	Thousand persons													
	1976		1977		1978		1979		1980		1981		1982	
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
Sale workers (1)	352.0	246.0	320.0	234.0	318.0	238.5	264.0	198.0	320.0	240.0	173.3	130.0	229.7	161.0
Craftsmen (Male/Fem.) in production process (2)	502.0	201.0	526.5	216.0	461.0	194.0	488.6	200.0	502.7	212.0	551.0	237.0	608.4	24.0
Services workers														
Waitresses and waiters	70.0	49.0	69.0	48.5	67.0	50.2	66.0	46.2	66.2	46.2	41.4	29.0	51.7	40.0
Barbers & hair-dressers	28.0	21.0	28.0	20.0	27.0	18.9	26.3	18.5	27.0	19.5	26.4	26.4	26.6	26.6
Others	52.0	25.0	50.5	25.0	48.0	24.0	35.0	18.0	13.9	7.0	19.7	10.0	25.2	23.0
Professional workers (3)	10.0		9.5		9.6		9.2		7.0		6.8		6.85	
	1983		1984		1985		1986		1987		1988			
	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female		
Sales workers (1)	226.6	158.6	212.0	148.4	179.6	125.7	182.0	127.4	173.0	121.0	237.3	166.0		
Craftsmen (Male/Fem.) in production product (2)	665.4	300.0	640.2	256.0	582.2	156.7	615.4	252.3	782.8	321.0	911.7	364.6		
Service workers														
Waitresses an waiters	42.7	30.0	46.6	33.0	49.6	35.0	42.8	30.0	20.3	18.0	59.3	42.0		
Barbers, hair-dressers	22.9	22.9	25.2	25.2	21.1	21.1	19.0	19.0	15.9	15.9	21.9	16.2		
Others	19.7	11.0	37.7	19.0	44.0	21.0	41.7	21.0	19.8	10.0	51.6	36.2		
Professional workers (3)	6.9		6.9		7.1		8.0		8.5		10.3			

(1) Including hawkers, retail workers & others

(2) Including tailors, dress-makers, carpenters, related workers and other artisans

(3) Including clerical workers, transportation workers and others

Source : Selected Indicators on Women's Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 61-63

TABLE 2.30 : POPULATION BY SEX AND AGE-GROUP IN URBAN AND RURAL INFORMAL SECTOR

	Thousand persons							
	1976		1980		1984		1988	
	Total	% F/Tot.	Total	% F/Tot.	Total	% F/Tot.	Total	% F/Tot.
Total population in informal sectors	1029.8	53.34	941.7	55.88	1393.1	30.95	1297.9	63.71
Informal sector workers								
Urban	484.9	55.93	447.3	56.47	661.7	35.05	623.0	47.83
Rural	535.9	51.00	494.4	55.34	731.4	34.35	674.9	48.73
Informal sector workers by age groups								
Below 15								
15 - 19	230.7	53.32	212.8	55.87	314.8	34.69	293.6	48.23
20 - 24	187.8	55.48	173.3	55.86	256.3	34.69	238.8	48.28
25 - 44	395.0	61.11	364.4	64.30	539.3	39.42	502.3	55.56
45 - 49	81.7	53.24	75.3	55.78	111.4	34.65	103.8	48.36
50 - 55	66.3	53.39	61.3	55.79	90.5	37.35	84.4	48.22
Over 55	59.3		54.6		80.8		75.0	

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 64-65

TABLE 2.31 : POPULATION BY SEX, ENGAGED IN SELECTED (ILLICIT) ACTIVITIES

	Thousand persons			
	1976	1980	1984	1988
Unlicenced petty trading (1)	352.0	320.0	212.0	237.3
Female	246.4	240.0	148.4	166.0
Illegal brewing of alcohol	25.0	26.9	29.3	35.0
Female	7.3	8.1	8.9	12.0
Prostitution	50.6	31.5	35.5	43.1
Others (2)	619.5	693.0	804.0	994.0
Female	247.8	277.2	321.6	398.0

(1) Including small traders, restaurant and other services without licences.

(2) Including craftspeople in handicrafts and small industry, construction, private transportation.

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 68.

were 166,000 or 70% women, or in waitering, where of 59,300 waiters, 42,000 or 71% were women.(48)

It is important to remember, and cannot be overemphasized when looking at these figures, that 1989 was a turning point-- the end of the rationing of staple goods. It was not until after the Census period that the private sector and the informal sector really took off. More recent figures will probably show not only an overall increase petty trading but possibly an increase in the share of women in informal activities overall. This will demonstrated more clearly in the results of the 1994 Population Census.(49)

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The rest of this chapter will be concerned with describing in general terms some of the more important and more interesting aspects of the contemporary social role of women in urban Vietnam.(50) First, I will discuss in general terms some of the political aspects of the situation of women.

48 Figures as quoted in Le Thi Quy (1992c).

49 The 1992-93 National Household Economy Survey conducted by the General Statistics Office and the State Planning Committee with technical assistance from the World Bank will also illustrate this phenomena when the results are published next year.

50 There is great difficulty in getting recent information which conforms to western standards of academic rigour. There is work being done, little is published thus far. Much of the information which is available either refers to the early/mid eighties, and thus is no longer the situation of the early nineties, or else is not clear about the source of the data upon which the conclusions are based nor about how that data was collected. For the specific period of 1988-1992 which is of greatest relevance to this thesis, there is very little information available at all.

Then I will look at some social aspects of women's lives and the customs prevailing which contribute to their shape. I will also discuss some of the more problematic issues which concern women and which, at least to some extent, arise out of the changing socio-economic conditions.

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The issue of women's rights was one of the first tackled by the Communist Party of Vietnam upon gaining power. The first constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1946 states that "Women are equal to men in all respects".(51) In the 1960 Law on Marriage and the Family, women were guaranteed equal rights between husband and wife. The 1980 Constitution further specified that the State would have a duty to promote women's participation in society at all levels. Article 63 of this Constitution states

Woman and men have equal rights in all political, economic, cultural, social and familial respects. The State and society shall see to the heightening of women's level in all spheres-- political, cultural, scientific, technical and professional--and shall ceaselessly promote the role of women in society. The State shall have a labour policy consonant with the conditions of women. Women and men doing the same work shall receive the same pay.(52)

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- 51 Article 9. As quoted in Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 89.
- 52 As quoted in Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 34-5. A 1990 UNICEF publication notes in its discussion of this law, "It is significant that when dividing property during a divorce, non-salaried work in the household is given monetary value".(160) Chapter VII, Article 42 does state "The household work is a productive one" (as quoted in Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 82). It is

From the time of its inception during the anti-colonial movement, the Vietnam Women's Union has had the responsibility of fighting for and safeguarding women's rights in Vietnamese society. Recognizing the level at which this work must take place, in 1987 the Vietnam Women's Union determined its mandate to include, among other tasks, "to take part in policy-making, to control and supervise the implementation of policies, laws, and regulations related to women and children..." (53)

Recognizing the importance of incorporating the safeguarding of women's rights into policy-making, the Council of Ministers in 1988 passed Resolution 163/HDBT which gives the Women's Union the right to participate in discussions of proposed policies or amendments to policies relating to women and children:

Article 1: All Ministries, State Committees and other organs under the Council of Ministries, the People's Committees of all levels (hereafter called levels of government), when elaborating State plans, or working out policies for solving economic and social problems relating to women and children, shall discuss them with the Women's Union of the same level. In the process of implementing those policies and plans, if important [changes] and amendments are made, the afore-mentioned levels of government also shall discuss them again with the Women's Union...

Article 6: To ensure close coordination between the various levels of government and of the Women's Union, it is necessary to hold direct and regular working sessions between the various levels of the

interesting that Vietnamese sources do not make this point in discussion of women's rights in marriage, and nowhere have I been able to find an explanation of how any value is assigned to this 'productive' work.

Women's Union and the corresponding government level.(54)

Thus the dialogue between social and economic concerns, to draw the alliances very broadly, has been legally embedded in the governmental decision-making structure. Whether or not the role proffered to the Women's Union is exercised is, however, another matter, and it seems that, in fact, the Women's Union has neither the expertise nor the influence necessary to fully avail itself of the opportunity this Decision presents.

That policies and economic restructuring associated with doi moi (renovation) can and do have negative social as well as positive economic effects, particularly for women, seems to be well recognized by academics, though perhaps not so well by decision-makers. Some of the policies which have recently been 'exposed' for their negative effects on the situation of women include, the policy to eliminate subsidies in the state sector helped to alleviate the pressures of a struggling and inefficient economy. A direct effect of this policy was mass layoffs from those inefficient enterprises which most heavily depended upon subsidies. An indirect effect of this policy was to create unemployment for women, the majority of the newly released workers whose severance pay if any is usually wholly insufficient start-up capital for an enterprise.

54 As quoted in Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 83, 85. These regular working sessions are stipulated to take place every year, six, or three months depending on the level of government

The land-use rights policy, also, has indirect negative effects on the situation because of its impact on the issue of family planning. While the policy was designed to encourage better use of agricultural land, the effect of the ensured stability of land taxes over five years and long-term rights to use land, along with promises to adjust land allotment according to the number of household members after five years, was to encourage early marriage and multiple births, thus qualifying for additional land allotments and greater household labour.(55) Again, this has a particular effect on women, whose health is endangered by repeated pregnancies and births, and whose opportunities for higher education and off-farm employment may be proscribed by their reproductive value to their households and families in the formulation of their economic/labour strategies.

Another, less official, 'policy' pointed out by a Vietnamese academic in a recent article is tourism-related prostitution, which is promoted by hotels and tourist companies in the belief that tourism cannot flourish unless prostitutes are available.(56) This view comes from observation of the situation in Thailand, where sex-tourism has proven distinctly profitable. Unfortunately for the establishment of an effective AIDS campaign, sex-tourism and westerners are seen by the government as the primary culprits

55 This issues is discussed briefly in Le Thi (1993): 5. This effect of household land use policy is well-documented for China, also.

56 Le Thi (1993): 5-6. This is also noted in Pelzer: 313.

in the spreading of AIDS, and education has focussed mainly on these and the 'socially undesirable' elements such as drug-users. There is no acknowledgement that the majority of prostitutes in Vietnam do not ever come in contact with foreigners.(57)

Overall, the negative/positive conundrum with regard to economic policies seems to be an accepted topic of academic debate.(58) The potential for social concerns regarding the situation of women to be convincingly presented in the decision-making arenas decreases with decreased participation

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- 57 An American living in a central province of Vietnam recently reported that AIDS prevention messages are regularly broadcast over neighbourhood loudspeakers, and that young children, instead of yelling "Lien Xo" (Soviet) or "Nguoi Tay" (westerner) as they do in Hanoi, call out "SIDA", the french acronym for AIDS, as he passes by.
- 58 In a recent issue of the Centre's journal, ProfDr Le Thi of the Centre for Women's Studies (Le Thi (1993b)) argues that social policies to counter-effect the negative consequences of economic policies must be formulated and implemented in tandem with those economic policies. She argues that economic policies need a strong social base to succeed and that economic plans to increase income and quality of work cannot be implemented unless there is strong social organization, and a well-educated and skilled labour force. To this end, social policies must ensure equality among the population and between men and women, social welfare--"education, public health, culture, transportation, etc."--and so on. There need to be mechanisms which adjust for differences in income, consumption levels, and access to welfare facilities. Unfortunately, the article does not go so far as to suggest concretely what these policies might entail, and Dr Le Thi states that she does not see the purpose in analyzing each of the policies now in place. Instead, she argues that future policies must be made on a scientific basis which she calls a 'system approach' using gender and historical analyses of the present situation of women. This, however, is not done in this article.

of women in these arenas (see Table 2.32). As the authors of Vietnamese Women in the Eighties state:

...the number of women in leadership positions is still not proportionate to the great contributions of women in different economic and social branches. The low percentage of women in leadership is due in part to the fact that leadership now requires scientific and technical level and managing qualifications which women in general are still not able to satisfy because of historical conditions, many women have not received systematic training, are busy with household chores and the upbringing of children and they have an inferiority complex. Another reason is the influence of feudal ideologies, the remnants of the lack of respect for women, which still linger in the mind of people. A number of cadres do not like to promote women, and when they are compelled to, they do not care for their training and recycling.(59)

Table 2.32 Women Members of the National Assembly

	VII Legislature 1981-1986		VIII Legislature 1987-1991	
	No.	%	No.	%
Members of National Assembly	108	21.77	88	17.74
Deputy Speaker	1		1	
Vice-President of State Council	0		0	
Member of State Council	1		1	
Presidents of National Assembly Committees	0		3	42.85

Source: Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 69.

It is very difficult to get figures on the number of women in management positions in the private sector, but the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce (Vietcochamber) identified 17 women

Director-Generals of private or state-owned enterprises in 1992.(60)

GENERAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS WOMEN

One Vietnamese sociologist sums up the equivocal attitude towards the role of women in family and society as held by Vietnamese academics, journalists, and sundry intellectuals aptly, if perhaps somewhat unconsciously:

Unlike men, who are relatively free to aspiring for self-development and a position in the social hierarchy, women may have good social positions, they may take part in many social activities, but still they remain responsible for the happiness of their families [sic].(61)

Another prominent Vietnamese academic from the Centre for Women's Studies, in an article entitled "The Vietnamese Woman in Scientific Creation and Technological Transference", describes the Vietnamese view of the interdependence between women's roles in society and in the family:

In the Vietnamese society the woman has two duties: productive labour and family labour. Her first one, at the same time her "natural function" is to act as a wife and mother. The birth, suckling, taking care of and bringing up of their children are a sacred mission of every woman, the female scientist is no exception. For a woman the family has a very important role, and sometimes it is the duty number one in her life. To attend on the husband and children, to build a cosy home and to create a harmonious and happy family is the

60 Meeting at Vietcochamber, July 1993. The Vietcochamber representative also noted that on a recent business tour to the United States 10 of 26 delegates were women, but had no information as to the seniority of these women or from which enterprises they had come.

61 Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 185.

source of life and sentimental mainstay of the woman. For a female scientist, the feeling with difficulties and complexities of study and creation, the encouragement and inspiration of the husband and children are always the motive number one conducting to her scientific achievement.[sic] (62)

Contemporary researchers and academics try very hard to reconcile the economic demands on women with women's responsibility for reproductive tasks and with the socialist goals of full participation in public and productive spheres, as is illustrated in the quotes above. Now, however, they have also to reconcile the emerging popularity of more traditional views of women, as discussed in Chapter One. That this reconciliation has not yet been effected is unsurprising- this issue has hardly been satisfactorily dealt with in many 'developed' countries. All that can be said at this point is that the degree of attention it is given is encouraging.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS REGARDING THE FAMILY

Courtship and Marriage

Marriages are no longer necessarily arranged, and romantic love is a theme runs through daily life to an almost unbelievable extent.(63) Young couples are, though, often 'introduced' through family friends or work colleagues of

62 Hoang Thi Lich (1992): 16.

63 At one of my interviews a young researcher from the Centre for Women's Studies acted as my interpreter. At the end of the interview, I invited her to raise any issues which interested her and which hadn't been addressed. The one question she wanted to ask was "Do you love your husband?" She was serious in her enquiry and the respondent was serious in her answer, and neither seemed to find it at all an indelicate, inappropriate, or surprising question. It was the one issue I hadn't even considered raising in my interviews.

their parents. Or they may meet at evening english or dancing classes which are acceptable places to meet prospective girl/boyfriends without parental intervention. Individual dating is pretty much unknown until the couple is engaged or practically so and most 'dates' involve a chaperon or a group of friends. Couple dating is often an indication of a pending, accepted, engagement.

Generally speaking, the courtship will progress through group outings, then the young man will begin to call upon the woman and her family at their home. If he gets along well with her parents, he will continue calling. After a time he is in the habit of calling fairly regularly, and it is accepted by the family that they will become engaged eventually. The only impediment may be the incompatibility of their horoscopes, faith in which is increasing rapidly (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that this faith is becoming more overt).

This sort of acknowledged but informal situation may last for several years--formal engagements generally last only a few weeks (in accordance with the traditional wedding customs). Often a wedding will only be prompted by age (thirty is considered by young men a good age to marry, and by their parents rather late, so by then their parents are quite insistent that a marriage should take place) or the impending departure of the prospective groom to go abroad to study or work. This is common in, though perhaps fairly particular to, Hanoi. In most other areas of the country the impetus to

marriage is more likely parental insistence or pregnancy. In almost all cases, the bride goes to live with her new in-laws, and their main interest in receiving her is her additional labour and production of descendents. Young men who get scholarships or go to work abroad as guest workers almost always marry immediately before leaving, if they have not already married, in order to leave someone to look after their parents (and perhaps still to provide some insurance that they intend to return).

Engagements are rarely broken, and are considered an embarrassment to the family of the jilting party and often an insult to the family of the jilted party.

A survey of young singles in Hanoi in 1983 determined that the most important quality in a prospective mate was "a stable occupation for both wife and husband".(64) The next most important qualities in choosing a spouse were 2) qualities that would contribute to a harmonious domestic life-
-"the wife should take care of the children, do the housechores well and behave politely to her own parents and her parents-in-law [while] the husband should be gentle to his children and wife [and] know how to take care of them", and 3) "personal qualities, such as character, education and cultural level etc.". (65) Women in urban areas tend to marry later (see Table 2.33) and to have children later than their rural counterparts (see Table 2.34).

64 Mai Kim Chau, 1983, in Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 182.

65 Mai Kim Chau, 1983, in Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 182.

Contemporary weddings in Vietnam, especially in the cities, are a curious mix of western styles and traditional customs. Although for certain parts of the ceremonies the bride will wear a white western style wedding dress and the groom usually wears a suit and tie all through the various ceremonies, the general theme is the traditional one of the groom taking the bride away from her family to join his.

The culmination of the three weeks of ceremonies and feasts, which began with an offering of gifts from the groom's family to the bride's, ends when the groom comes to take the bride from her family home. He and his family and friends all arrive at the bride's house and are given tea and candies. He is introduced to the bride's ancestors at the family altar by the bride's parents, who also tell the ancestors what a good daughter she has been to them. She cries at being taken from her family and home to show gratitude for her parent's care of her. The unmistakable message is that she is being taken out of her own family and inserted into another which she is expected to serve.

TABLE 2.33 : WOMEN : MARITAL STATUS AND AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE

	Mill. persons			
	1976	1980	1984	1988
Total (age group 15-49)	25.56	27.70	29.99	32.28
Currently married *	62.38	62.00	62.49	62.44
Never married *	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.11
Widowed *	1.10	1.11	1.35	1.42
Divorced or separated *	1.17	1.13	1.08	1.12
Age at first marriage *	20.07	21.10	21.28	21.34
Urban				23.20
Rural				21.00
Red river delta				22.20
Mekong delta				21.80

Note: * These figures are % of the total female population aged 15-49 at the end of each year (31December).

TABLE 2.34 : AVERAGE AGE OF MOTHERS AT BIRTH OF FIRST CHILD BY URBAN AND RURAL RESIDENCE

	1984	1985	1986	1987
National	23.2	23.3	23.6	24.2
Urban	24.7	24.8	24.3	24.8
Rural	22.3	22.4	22.6	23.5

TABLE 2.35 : MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATE BY URBAN, RURAL RESIDENCE

	%		
	1976	1979	1988
Total marriage rate per 1000 population	6.10	5.68	5.80
Urban	5.93	5.96	5.53
Rural	6.14	5.62	5.87
Total divorced rate per 1000 population	0.26	0.27	0.28
Urban	0.32	0.34	0.35
Rural	0.24	0.25	0.21

Source : Selected Indicators on Women's Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 24 (table 2.35), 104 (table 2.34), 138 (table 2.35).

Extra-marital Affairs

Vo la com, bo la pho

[Wife is rice, girlfriend is noodle soup]
 Interpretation: A wife is for everyday (and essential); a girlfriend is more exciting (but something you get tired of if you have too much)

Ong an cha; ba an nem

[Husband eats grilled meat; wife eats spring rolls]
 Interpretation: If the husband has an affair, the wife will, too.

Although it is too delicate a subject to press in interviews, or even with friends, it is clear from the frequency that the topic is raised that extra-marital affairs are extremely common. The first saying is so popular that it is often one of the first Vietnamese sayings a foreigner, male or female, is taught by a Vietnamese friend, male or female. It is certainly one of the first comments to be made in a discussion about women in Vietnam. The women's papers, which appear to be read almost as often by men as by women, are full of articles about jealousy, how to behave if you find out your husband has a girlfriend, and so on.

Without delving too deeply into this issue, for lack of data, I would argue in general terms that extra-marital infidelity is as widespread as it seems to be due to several factors. These are, the numerical shortage of available men (see Figure 2.1, age pyramid, which shows the imbalanced sex ratio), unhappy and unfulfilling marriages (for both parties) due to social pressure in favour of marriage and against divorce (discussed below), and the lingering perception of the

status-enhancing effect, for men, of having several wives/ concubines/ girlfriends.

Divorce

Divorce is still fairly uncommon but on the increase, especially in urban areas (see Table 2.35 above). In rural areas divorce is quite rare (is my impression). Women still often feel a stigma attached to divorce and will not say that they are divorced, but that their husbands are 'away' (studying or working abroad). It is common for people to be abroad for long periods if they are lucky enough to go at all. In rural areas, seasonal labour-seeking migration is fairly common, for example, in one fishing village I studied, the fishermen often went south to seek work on fishing boats and were away for up to and sometimes more than six months per year.

There seems to be little expectation of marrying again after being divorced. Divorced or separated women move back in with their families and generally take the children, if any, with them. It seems to be generally acknowledged that men 'cannot' raise children on their own, so a widower with children, if he and his family had been living separately, would move back with his family, or invite other family members to live with him, or give the children to a family on his or his wife's side.

In point of law, women should get half the communal property plus all they had brought into the marriage, upon

divorce but it is not clear through what mechanisms this is enforced. In some cases, in perhaps most cases, it may take many years for the divorce to become final (most of the women I have met who are divorced say they waited five or more years before getting the divorce decree) and it is not clear what guarantees they have over the division of the property in the meantime. It seems that the partner with the richer and/or more powerful and supportive family is able to ensure a fair division, or even a preferential division. There is generally very little recourse to the court system (the People's Courts). As many divorced women seem to find themselves in difficult circumstances, it would seem that women do not generally get much in the way of property out of a divorce; most likely the husband's family would object very strongly to his giving up anything to the wife who was on her way back to her family.

A 1983 sociological study of divorces indicated that in 1979 one out of 14 marriages ended in divorce, in 1980 one in nine, in 1981 one in eleven. The survey noted four reasons for divorce, with "Differences in character of the couples [sic]" being the most common (45%), and with "Adultery" having "a tendency to increase".(66) The other reasons for divorce were "Consequences of the feudalistic marriage and family system" and "Conflicts concerning either the wife or the

66 Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 190. The survey referred to was carried out by Nguyen Thi Ngoc Khanh (1983).

husband with the family on both sides, especially conflicts between the wife and her mother-in-law".(67)

WOMEN AND HOUSEHOLDS

"All housework belongs to women. Women train for employment, why do men not have time to train for housework?" (Ms Kim, 47, hairdresser)

"We have our housework and we thank our leaders for giving us the opportunity to work in the office." (Ms X, 37, researcher)

Some general characteristics of households are shown in Tables 2.36 and 2.37. These tables indicate that household size is tending to decrease, or at least did so during the 1980s, and is usually smaller in urban areas than in the countryside. The incidence of female heads of households is generally increasing, and I would argue that the present figure should be significantly, even taking into account only the increase in long-term migration which leaves women with full responsibility for the day-to-day survival of the household. If the definition of the head of household is taken to be the main income-earner, then women, particularly in urban areas, as is being shown in this thesis, might well comprise the vast majority of household heads.

**TABLE 2.36 : AVERAGE HOUSEHOLD SIZE, URBAN AND RURAL,
AND FEMALE HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS**

	1976	1980	1984	1988
Average / household /size (pers./house)	5.84	5.59	5.35	5.26
Urban (pers./house)	5.3	5.1	4.89	4.65
Rural (pers./house)	5.93	5.72	5.47	5.42
Percentage of women heads/total number of heads of households by age groups	18.35	19.33	20.34	20.70
15 - 24	0.53	0.72	0.65	0.63
25 - 44	6.09	6.25	6.91	6.80
45 - 59	6.98	7.15	6.87	7.51
60 and over	4.75	5.21	5.91	5.82

TABLE 2.37 : DISTRIBUTION OF HOUSEHOLDS BY COMPOSITION OF FAMILY

	1976		1980		1985	
	(1) Number	(2) %	(1) Number	(2) %	(1) Number	(2) %
Married couples without children living alone (couples)	199304	02.13	203874	02.20	199751	02.13
Male living with children, relatives no wife present	73920	00.79	77843	00.84	74086	00.79
Female living with children , relatives no husband present	104978	01.12	112131	01.21	105971	01.13
Single male living alone (1000 persons)	4436	30.24	4614	31.23	4599	30.53
Single female living alone (1000 persons)	5641	37.61	5649	38.22	5652	37.48
Married couples with children living alone (1000 coupl.)	8256	88.23	8161	88.07	8221	87.66
Married couples (with or without children) living in her or his family (1000 coupl.)	3437	36.73	3400	36.69	3415	36.42
Others						

Source : Selected Indicators on Women Status in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 19-20 (table 2.36),
112-113 (table 2.37).

TABLE 2.38 : DOMESTIC CHORES BY HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Family chores	Mainly done by wife	Mainly done by husband	Done by both
Buying foodstuffs	70.3	6.8	18.3
Buying clothes	57.6	12.3	27.1
Buying cultural articles	46.1	30.3	18.9
Buying costly articles	28.0	34.8	32.3
Deciding how to decide labour in production	26.8	36.6	35.5
Planting new trees	23.3	25.2	32.4
Deciding on children's marriage	10.8	7.8	27.3
Seleting a job for children	9.4	10.6	35.6

Source : Vietnamese Women in the Eighties : 29.

Household Work

Generally speaking, the household chores (social reproduction tasks) are the responsibility of the women of the household. In fact a nickname for 'wife' is Tuong Ba, "Minister of the Interior". Another is "my house", Nha Toi. The men of the household may 'help out' (a phrase which disclaims any intimations of responsibility). Women whose husbands do participate in household work often describe how 'lucky' they are 'to have a good husband who helps around the house'. They also consider themselves lucky if he does not drink or smoke too much. According to a survey by a researcher at the Institute of Sociology (in 1983), women spent 3 hours and 15 minutes a day and men only 1 hour and 50 minutes on household chores.(68) The survey results also indicated that over half of the time spent on household chores was spent on shopping [remember that this was during the period when staple foods were rationed, and therefore much time would have been spent in line-ups]. The researcher concluded that "the most effective way to reduce the burden of household chores for women is not 'redistribution of this burden' to each member of the family, but an upgrading of the trade system and the social service network".(69) The authors of Vietnamese Women in the Eighties note that "In the division of labour concerning household chores between wife and husband, the husband usually does more simple jobs, such as

68 Survey conducted by Trinh Duy Luan, referred to in Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 186.

69 Khuat Thu Hong: 187.

buying an eye lotion or petroleum, cooking simple dishes, etc.".(70) Table 2.38 shows a mid-1980s allocation of household chores between husband and wife.

In general, few labour-saving devices for household work are available or marketed in Vietnam. The purchase of electrical appliances generally follows this pattern, according to my observations, fan/s, rice cooker, (huge jump in price) television, refrigerator, video machine. Long after, and still very infrequently purchased, washing machines. Small neighbourhood laundries (hand washing) do exist, it should be mentioned, but are not widely used, or used as the primary means of washing. Until March of 1993, mops were unheard of and unseen in Hanoi, and the ubiquitous tile floors had to be washed with a cloth rag. Mops are still not common, and are not well made.

Overall, wives, daughters, and eventually daughters-in-law, do the majority of the work and take the responsibility for it. In rural families, according to one sociological survey (1986), wives perform the bulk of household chores while men perform the bulk of the work in production activities, but husbands in younger couples tend to contribute more to household work than husbands of the generations before them, indicating an evolving division of labour within the household.(71) The same survey indicated that women spend

70 Vietnamese Women in the Eighties: 27.

71 Khuat Thu Hong (1991): 186. The survey referred to was carried out by Mai Kim Chau of the Department of Family Sociology in 1986.

more time on the care and education of children than do men, and spend more of their free time on "family duties"; "Other activities, such as raising their knowledge and cultural level (reading newspapers and books), and extramural activities (visiting friends) are less frequent amongst women than men".(72) Women have input into decision-making, but mainly on day-to-day issues, for which they keep the budget, according to this survey, while in younger couples, where "other more important matters" are concerned, "the couple have [sic] to discuss first, although the husband shall have the final say".(73) Khuat notes that the author of the survey concludes "women have a status and role as the head of the family" and that "apart from productive activities and other social activities, women still **voluntarily** undertake most of the household chores" [my emphasis].(74)

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have not raised in any detail some of the such serious issues facing women in contemporary Vietnam as prostitution. My research did not include such activities, for logistical reasons, and other sources information are limited, and so is space.

This chapter has tried, however, to give a general overview of the situation of women in Vietnam at present. The history of the economy from 1975 to the present provides a

72 Khuat Thu Hong: 186.

73 Khuat Thu Hong: 185

74 Khuat Thu Hong: 186

background of economic developments which contribute to current pressures on employment opportunities and explains how the informal sector has come to take on its present characteristics, which will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE: WOMEN AND THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY IN HANOI

As a way of more concretely contextualizing the discussion of the urban informal sector, and to complement the preceding discussions of the macro economic conditions and of the general situation of women in contemporary Vietnam, this chapter will begin with a brief description of the setting itself--Hanoi. The remainder of the chapter will be devoted to discussing the general themes brought out in the interviews conducted with women in informal sector businesses.

HANOI CONTEXT

Hanoi after 1975 and up until the end of the 1980s was a quiet civil service city--the seat of the national government and the hub of northern Vietnam. Most of the city was residential, punctuated by occasional vegetable markets, government buildings, state-run food outlets, and a distinct 'commercial' district of two or three blocks with the state-run department stores and book stores, as well as pockets of 'office' districts with ministry after ministry housed in vast, decaying, ochre-painted, French buildings.(1) With the dawning of the 1990s evidence that the market-oriented doi moi reforms were taking hold seemed to be that Hanoi had become one continuous hairdressing salon/ noodle stand/ outdoor market. The Thirty-Six Streets of the Old Quarter (the oldest

1 They are not, of course, uniformly ochre; the State Planning Committee is pink.

part of the city) (see Figure 3.1) had come determinedly back to life with household-sized factories in every second front room on Tin Street, Bamboo Ladder Street, Pagoda Flag Street, and Rush Mat Street, to name but a few [these are not the direct translations of the 36 street names--each of which refers to a specific guild, such as the sellers of grilled fish, lychee fruit, conical hats, cotton products, etc.--but the names of the products in which each street now specializes]. Dong Xuan market, in the centre of the Old Quarter, is the largest market, wholesale and retail, and marks the centre of trading activity in the city.

The 'business district' which had previously been centred around Trang Tien and Pho Hue (see Figure 3.1) began to spread out along Hai Ba Trung, Ly Thuong Kiet, and Tran Hung Dao Streets, the main streets in the old French residential quarter. Markets sprang up seemingly spontaneously yet in concert along selected streets all over the city, concentrating certain types of products in particular places. Thus, crockery and glassware are found on Ham Long Street, wall hangings on Tran Quoc Toan, scissors and knives on Nguyen Khuyen Street. These specialized markets started up naturally, and are now in the process of being 'organized', which in some cases means being moved to less prominent/disruptive locations.

Some, perhaps most, of these specializations reflect the specializations developed fifty years ago or more. Mai Hac De Street, for instance, had developed a reputation for good food

even before the French left, and by 1991 the street-side food stands had returned, with houses along both sides of the four blocks of the street opening cafes in their front rooms and noodle and rice shops on the sidewalk. In addition, there are distinct areas of town for such 'businesses' as embassies, most of which are concentrated in the area near Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum, trading in tvs and electronic equipment, along Hai Ba Trung Street, and tiles and porcelain products, along Cat Linh Street.

The reasons for this expansion of trading activity into formerly strictly residential sections of town are, according to representatives of the Institute of Urban Planning, the consequences of the new economic policy (doi moi) allowing greater private trade and the demand of the public for greater services and goods.(2) The expanded business area is the result of cooperation between the government, cooperatives, and the private sector, in building shops and in building up particular areas, i.e. the Dong Xuan market area (see Figure 3.1). The Dong Xuan market renovation (construction of a new market building) was an example of a government policy being carried out with private funds--the government office in charge of the project planned and designed the new building, auctioned the stalls off, took 50% of the value of the bid price in advance, used these funds plus additional government funds to finance the construction, then took the remaining 50%

2 Meeting with representatives of the Institute of Urban Planning. HaNoi: 03.04.92. Most of the discussion following is based on information from this meeting.

of bid price once the market was finished. Any shortfall between the total recouped through stall rentals and the cost of the construction will be met through tax revenues from the market. This example is being repeated with other large general markets around the city.

The small street markets are more of a headache for planners, and the solutions are not quite so evident. The problem for planners is to reconcile their inability to close up the markets altogether (for various reasons including the lack of commitment of the authorities to such an exercise and the fear that wide-scale closure of these markets might invoke protests from their customers) with the short-term need to move the markets off the main roads and areas with important offices, and the complaints from residents on whose streets these markets have been relocated. Relocations have to be decided upon in consultation with the neighbourhood People's Committees, none of which is willing to accept the noise and disruption of a street market. Yet the authorities seem unable or at least unwilling to close them down altogether.

The authorities do launch, from time to time, upon missions to clear sidewalks. On these forays, the police on their motorbikes with sidecars, will swoop down upon a particular block with its offending noodle stands or vegetable sellers, and scoop up the benches, stools, tables, and awnings, unless the proprietor manages to get these moved off the sidewalk before the police get them piled into the

sidecar.(3) Fines are demanded from the vegetable sellers who sell from baskets attached to their bicycles or from baskets slung on shoulder poles unless they manage to move off before the police can stop them.

The planners, in other words, have to reach a balance between social order, urban pressures, consumer convenience, and private sector initiatives. In any such effort, the cooperation of the local authorities must be obtained, and this is often difficult to accomplish. Two conflicting pressures may operate: one, the local authorities do not want the market in their area because of the associated problems of noise, traffic disruption, mess, and residential complaints; two, local authorities do not want to move markets off the main roads because they derive revenue (through taxes/fines) from it--relocating a market off a main road risks decreasing its revenue.

3 One morning as I sat in a cafe, I noticed a flurry of activity at the pho (noodle soup) stands across the street. The alarm had been spread along the street, silently but effectively, that the police were in the street around the corner and heading this way. Across the way in one of the pho stalls, I noticed a old man of about 70, slurping up his bowl of noodles. The two young sisters on duty at the stall picked up the table on which his bowl was rested and carried the table into a little alley off the sidewalk, leaving him sitting on the bench with his chopsticks in one hand and his aluminum spoon in the other. The police came by, berated the stall owner, the girls' mother, tossed a couple of unoccupied benches into the sidecar, demanded some fine, and left. The two girls brought the table out from the alley and placed it again in front of the old man, who shovelled in another mouthful of noodles quite complacently. The whole sequence took less than three minutes.

In the old French residential quarter (Figure 3.2), where most of my interviews were conducted, few changes are planned, apart from the extension of business and commerce facilities into this area, which is already occurring. In fact, as the Institute of Urban Planning representatives conceded, this area will in time likely become a primarily foreign residential and commerce area. This too is already occurring. There is policy to protect the old villas and other buildings, but it is questionable how far this policy is enforceable. It is not permitted to tear down the French villas, so instead, residents build concrete additions beside, in front, behind, and on top of the French buildings, thus obscuring and effectively ruining their aesthetic and historic value.

The People's Committee has, however, recently announced a new plan to renovate villas in the French residential district for rent to foreigners, though there does not as yet seem to be any funding lined up for this project.

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Thuy is very nervous about being asked questions. She declines an invitation to sit at a nearby quan nuoc (tea stall) and puts her basket of toiletries, which she carries on her head, down on the sidewalk where we are standing. She won't go anywhere, but she'll talk to us right here. We each take off one thong to sit on so our clothes won't get dirty on the pavement. We're on a side street near a major market and we soon attract a large crowd. It is about nine in the morning.

Thuy started coming to Hanoi to peddle three years ago in the agricultural off-season. She only stays in her village in a neighbouring province when she is busy with the rice crop, and so she spends at least half the year in Hanoi [she may be nervous because she has no residence permit for Hanoi]. Her sister had started coming in to Hanoi the year before, and that gave Thuy the idea that it might be a profitable endeavour.

Thuy is twenty-one and her husband is twenty-five. In the village they share a house with his parents and one of his eight siblings, but Thuy and her husband have their own kitchen. Both of Thuy's parents also used to be peddlers. Her in-laws gave her and her husband two sao (a sao is 360 square metres) of rice land to work. They get two rice crops off it, but the agricultural work only occupies Thuy two to three months of the year.

In Hanoi, Thuy gets up at about 05:30 to have breakfast and wash. She goes to Bac Qua market, behind the huge Dong Xuan wholesale market, to buy her toiletries. Her basket is crammed with bars of soap, little bottles of shampoo, tubes of toothpaste, plastic clothespins, hand towels, metres of elastic, hair barrettes, needles, tiny pots of cao sao vang-- "Golden Star Aromatic Balm", the Vietnamese equivalent of Tiger Balm, and bottles of eucalyptus oil--both the Vietnamese brand and the far more expensive Singaporean import, and innumerable other sundries. She sets out by about 08:30 or

09:00, and walks around touting her bits and pieces until about 21:00.

Thuy's average profit is about VND 5,000/day. Her husband also comes to Hanoi to sell toiletries and he makes about the same, she says. They pay VND 600 each per night to sleep in a dormitory with about 15 other people, most of them rural seasonal migrants like themselves. Before she goes back to the village she buys presents for her parents and her in-laws. The most she's ever been able to take back to the village from one of her trips was VND 100,000, but she says that sometimes she only has "some tens of thousands of dong" to take home.

According to Thuy, she and her husband are self-supporting and "not yet thinking about saving". Her description of their decision-making processes, "whoever wants something that person will buy it". She says she only comes to Hanoi to work because there are no opportunities in her village, but if she could find something else to do she would like to give this up. "It's not good for women in the social thinking because you leave home to go around Hanoi and go around the streets and it is easy for things to happen. The people in the village think maybe you will become a prostitute".

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KEY TO FIGURE 3.2
MAP OF MAJOR STREET MARKETS, FRENCH RESIDENTIAL QUARTER, HANOI

Food and fresh goods:

- (1) Produce market (vegetables, fruit, and flowers)
- (2) Meat or fish market
- (3) Cooked food vendors
- (4) Bia Hoi (draft beer, usually served with goat meat)
- (5) Packaged food (usually imported)

Goods:

- (6) Bicycles
- (7) Bicycle parts
- (8) Dishes, porcelain, household utensils
- (9) Cloth
- (10) Clothes (modern styles)
- (11) Wall hangings
- (12) Electrical appliances
- (13) Toys
- (14) Wooden furniture

Specialized shop areas:

- (15) Bookstores
- (16) Automobiles
- (17) Electronic appliances

TABLE 3.1 : POPULATION OF HANOI 1975-1988

Year	Million pers., %					
	Total	Female	Male	% F/Total	National annual growth rate	% Urban/Tot.
1975	1.33	0.66	0.67	49.00	3.28	21.50
1976	1.49	0.74	0.75	49.66	3.20	20.50
1977	1.49	0.76	0.73	51.00	2.60	20.00
1978	2.53	1.28	1.25	50.59	2.03	19.70
1979	2.57	1.31	1.26	50.97	2.00	19.10
1980	2.62	1.36	1.26	51.90	2.47	19.20
1981	2.71	1.36	1.35	50.18	2.30	18.60
1982	2.77	1.39	1.38	51.06	2.30	18.40
1983	2.82	1.44	1.38	51.06	2.15	19.10
1984	2.88	1.45	1.43	50.34	2.24	18.90
1985	2.94	1.48	1.46	50.34	2.15	18.90
1986	2.98	1.50	1.48	50.33	2.08	19.30
1987	3.05	1.53	1.52	50.16	2.07	19.60
1988	3.09	1.55	1.54	50.16	2.03	24.80

Source : Selected Indicators on Women in Vietnam 1975-1989 : 8.

TRENDS IN URBANIZATION IN HANOI

Hanoi since 1990 has been on the receiving end of a sharp rise in rural to urban migration (see Table 3.1 for the 1975-1988 population of the province of Hanoi). The abolition of the system of rationing eliminated the major obstacle to such migration. The dissolution of the cooperatives in many areas also contributes heavily to the increase, as the shift to a household-centred system of production enables choices about income-earning and marketing strategies to be made. Health care and education are the remaining services which are tied to residence, and these are loosening, too. The health system has progressively deteriorated and the widespread availability of private health care makes it almost obsolete for those with the money to pay. Primary schools, also, are experiencing a decline in enrollment, it seems, as parents are choosing to take their children out of school earlier in order to put them to work on the household's land or enterprises; in 1989, only 60% of primary school pupils completed Class Five.(4)

Hanoi has a bustling informal labour market of rural workers come to the city to look for work. Men and women both work in the construction industry, and men also work as mobile traders as Thuy's husband above, although petty trading is generally dominated by women. Two of the largest 'free labour' markets are at O Cho Dua and Lang Ha Street (see

Figure 3.1), and they attract some hundreds of rural workers looking for construction jobs.(5)

One thing which is vital to note about the informal sector in Hanoi, yet which is fairly uncommon, to judge from the literature on the informal sector in developing countries, is that it engages people from almost all socio-economic groups in the city. It is not by any means limited to the marginalized or low-income groups. Coming out of a centrally-planned socialist economy, almost all groups are low-income, and deviation from the average or mean income has been, until recently, within such narrow limits as to be fairly negligible. On the whole, urban dwellers have been a little better off in terms of access to non-food goods, and high-level cadre have been better off in terms of perquisites such as housing. Those who were lucky enough to travel abroad on 'study tours' or other junkets were and are able to save and bring back a considerable (in Vietnamese terms) amount from the per diem (or by buying goods abroad and bringing them back to sell on the black market, such as fans or motorbikes).

Yet, it seems to be universally understood, particularly at the time of the interviews, that almost everyone in Hanoi has a second job, and this second job is in the informal sector, of necessity, as a worker cannot be registered at two official jobs. It is the second job which is often the most important in terms of cash income, as the official salaries are extremely low, too low to survive on. Now, in 1993, it

5 Hiebert 27.05.93: 60. Cf. Hiebert 02.09.93: 16-7.

seems to be the case that virtually every household has at least one informal source of income, and the member providing it is generally working full-time at that informal activity.

On average, an adult resident of Hanoi in 1991 had a minimum monthly expenditure of 100-150,000 DVN. On average, the official monthly wage of working age resident of Hanoi in 1991 was 50,000 DVN (see also Table 2.2 in Chapter Two which gives average incomes).(6) The official occupation does, however, provide a housing entitlement, in most cases, as well as hospital and education assignments.

It should also be noted that the social assumption is that everyone of working age will either be in school or have an official job. Certainly there are young adults who graduate from school or university and do not find employment, but until very recently, they were few and far between (at least officially). It is still unusual to find a woman of working age who is a full-time mother or housewife. Such inactivity would have attracted suspicion in a society with such a high degree of conformity and is at present out of the question for all but the most affluent households, who are still small in number.

With the market reforms and the termination of subsidies to state-owned enterprises many thousands of workers were laid off (one estimate is that as many as "tens of thousands" (7) of workers lost their jobs in Hanoi alone, though these

6 Conversation with Tran Thi Van Anh, Senior Researcher, Centre for Women's Studies, Hanoi SRV; 21.08.91.

7 Nguyen Xuan Mai (1993).

numbers seem rather exaggerated). Two thirds of these laid-off workers were women.(8) This more or less abrupt release of workers forced most of them into informal economic activities, as there were for the most part no privately run industries with jobs for them.(9)

Thus, the informal sector in Hanoi really comprises all levels of society. Up until this point there have been for the most part few households whose members were wholly employed within the informal sector with no state sector ties or subsidies, and very few households who have no members employed within the informal sector (in its broadest sense). A recent household survey in Hanoi indicated that 82% of households have workers in the 'private and household economy sectors', with in Hanoi "nearly 14,000 private industries and approximately 60,000 workers".(10) This study also concludes

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- 8 This point was reaffirmed by Dr Tran Thi Van Anh, Senior Researcher at the Centre for Women's Studies, referring to a report by the Women's Unit of the Central Trade Union.
- 9 Most private enterprises of any scale such as factories are in the main formerly state-owned enterprises which have been 'privatized' and thus did not create new jobs during this period but merely (although it is still quite an accomplishment) prevented these lucky workers from being unemployed. Nguyen Xuan Mai points out that most private industries cannot compete with imports because they lack capital, equipment, and up-to-date (or even recent) technology. Most households "concentrate in business and service spheres. Many households give up their traditional profession to deal in foreign-made goods or a service business". Mr Mai quotes from a 1992 report which estimates that 70% of privately invested capital is invested in trading and services. Nguyen Xuan Mai (1993).
- 10 Nguyen Xuan Mai (1993). Casual estimates of participation in the informal sector in Hanoi range up to 40-50% (working full time at informal sector activities). My own estimate at the time of the interviews was 85-90%

that almost half the workers participating in the private sector have improved their standard of living; a quarter have remained at the same level over the last five years. Of those households that have no participation in the private sector, 40% have experienced a decline in the standard of living.

Because of this, two characteristics of the informal sector commonly pointed to in studies of other developing countries are not found here, or are heavily muted, or perhaps have simply not yet emerged. These are the social and spatial differentiation of the informal sector from other urban sectors. The first, denotes the sense of the informal sector as a cohesive social force, or more often, a not very cohesive social force which by its illicitness is marginalized and seen to be in opposition to other, more conservative, better-connected, better-off, social/political forces. The second denotes spatial distance from other urban groups. Murray, in her study of the informal sector in Jakarta describes informal sector activities as taking place in specific and separate spaces from formal sector activities as is the living space of participants in the informal sector also separate and usually contiguous with the spaces used for economic activities.(11)

This is not true of Hanoi, where there is little social differentiation over space, though there is some in the characters of different neighbourhoods. Even within the more desirable neighbourhoods, however, there is a wide range of

of all workers working at least part-time in informal activities.

11 Murray (1991): 12 and passim.

income groups and occupations, although the very lowest levels, for example scavengers or domestic workers or even poor relatives, may only be present as non-residents. Informal sector activities can be said to be present in almost all neighbourhoods, pretty much universally, the embassy area near Lenin's statue and the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum (see Figure 3.1), which area is clearly the 'power' centre of city, being a notable exception.⁽¹²⁾ Yet even here, motorbike washing services on the sidewalk are only a street or two away, and mobile vendors with carrying baskets full of oranges or pomellos, while discouraged, are still occasionally found. See Figure 3.3 for a spatial view of informal sector activities on several streets where interviews were conducted. Observations of informal activities for this figure were made in the late morning, when the stalls that serve pho (noodle soup) for breakfast were closing down, and some of the afternoon food stalls were opening (such as the candied popcorn which is sold mainly to kids on their way home from school).

Under the system of rationing, each registered resident of the city was permitted 1-1.5 kilos of meat per month. Rice, fish, and some vegetables were also rationed. Other vegetables were sold by farmers to the State shops at low,

12 This area houses, within a few blocks square, the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum and Museum, the Office of the Government, the Communist Party Central Committee, the State Planning Committee, the National Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and many of the embassies and embassy residences including the former Soviet Embassy, the Chinese Embassy, and most of the other former Eastern Bloc embassies.

set, prices. There were very few vegetable sellers in the streets, and no street food stalls, although there was a black market for rationed foods.(13) The lifting of the system of rations has meant that vegetable sellers crowd many streets with a seemingly abundant supply of produce. Food stall owners can buy vegetables and meat directly from the farmers, or at the early morning wholesale markets. Most workers eat lunch at street food stalls now, instead of bringing food to work in a lunch pail.(14)

The police often exact a small unofficial rent from market sellers of 200-3000d. More often now, there are fines for selling produce on non-market streets, unless the offender can gather up her/his wares and move off quickly enough. Food stalls, small shops, sidewalk barbers, tea shops, and the like are all at risk now too from the police on their sidewalk-clearing missions.

The change in attitude towards the informal sector is well illustrated in this comment about vegetable sellers by a researcher. The status of vegetable sellers in their home villages has changed since 'renovation' was introduced. They now enjoy more respect from other villagers than they had before, when their activities were next to illegal. Previously, young women vegetable sellers who marketed in the city would have few opportunities to marry. But now many young village women peddle into the city to sell vegetables,

13 Conversation with Tran Thi Van Anh, Senior Researcher, Centre for Women's Studies, HN: 25.10.1991.

14 Vinh Quoc: 25.

because of the income opportunities this activity presents. Choosy young village men who refuse to consider marriage with a trader may find few available women left in the village to choose from.(15)

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Tuyet left her position as a teacher in 1989 because the salary was so low, only VND 60,000 per month (or about US\$6.00). About six months after she quit her state sector employment she began work as a cooked food vendor, opening a quan com binh dan ('people's rice' stand). Tuyet's husband's family, with whom she lives, are quite rich by 1991 standards. They have two houses with four people living in one and five in the other, both in the Old Quarter. Her husband's parents seem to be separated--the father lives with Tuyet and her husband and their five year old daughter while the mother lives in the other house with her son and daughter and daughter's husband and child. Tuyet's brother-in-law is a self-employed electrician and Tuyet says he earns about VND 1 million/month and is divorced. Tuyet's sister-in-law's husband is unemployed, while the sister-in-law herself is a doctor in a research office and earns only VND 100,000/month.

In her own family Tuyet, who is 32 in 1991, is the oldest of four children, one of which lives with his wife in the

15 Conversation with Tran Thi Van Anh, Senior Researcher, Centre for Women's Studies, HN: 25.10.1991.

former Soviet Union and sends home to his parents at least US\$1,000/year.

Tuyet's com binh dan ('people's rice') stand is popular and lucrative, earning her approximately VND 500,000/month (eight times her income as a teacher). The period before Tet (lunar new year) is the best time for business, she says, as are the winter months generally, "At Tet, people are busy with their own businesses so they have no time to cook and they eat out more".

Her husband is a self-employed electrical engineer who left his state sector job at the same time as his wife. He also earns about VND 500,000/month. Her father-in-law keeps his VND 50,000/month pension for his own expenses, apart from meals, which Tuyet and her husband provide. They spend almost her entire income on food (VND 500,000/month), and she pays VND 80,000/month in taxes, saying that her taxes are very high because she is on a street dominated by cigarette wholesalers (a highly profitable enterprise), and the tax collector thinks she must have a very high income. Their house is privately owned and their electricity and water charges are minimal [they may well be 'diverting' electricity from other lines in the street]. VND 100,000/month is spent on her daughter's education, for extra lessons.

In their house, Tuyet says, they have a colour television, a cassette player, a refrigerator, fans, a sewing machine, and two motorbikes. Most of these things they had already, before she went into business, but the two motorbikes

they were able to buy after she opened her cooked food stall. She says that she had already saved a lot of money before she started working as a vendor, but now she is able to save about VND 500,000/month.

Tuyet gives her retired parents about VND 50-100,000/month to supplement their VND 100,000/month pension. She also gives her other brother and sister, who are both single and live at home, clothes and some money ("maybe around VND 100,000 a month").

All of this would indicate that Tuyet's and her husband's incomes, which are both earned in the informal sector, are considerably higher than stated, probably by 20-25% at least. Tuyet manages the household budget, and her husband gives her his total earnings. She makes all the household purchases.

Tuyet's day starts at about 06:30, finishing around 16:00. She says, "This is a very long day, but I am used to it". She doesn't say who does most of the household chores, but that she hires someone to wash their clothes. She doesn't cook an evening meal; the family eats leftovers from the com binh dan stall. So after four o'clock she is "absolutely free--free to sleep and play". Tuyet's favourite entertainment is dancing, and she goes once or twice a week to dancehalls with her husband or with friends, sometimes taking her daughter.

She says that running a com binh dan is not always fun, and that she would like to change jobs, have a higher income, maybe open a restaurant. Right now, though, "this job fills my stomach".

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"My life is to come to work and go home for lunch, sleep, and come back to the shop and go home to sleep." (Mr Chan, 76, tea seller)

In general, I had the impression that participation in the informal sector effectively eliminated participation in wider society. The social world of participants in this sector is narrowed down to the space in which they carry out their activities. For most of those who are not mobile traders, this means a world of only one or two city blocks, plus the market and, for some, the pagoda. For some, even less. Many of the noodle and rice stalls are located on the doorstep of the proprietors' house. For these women, their life is acted out between the early morning market (unless someone else in the family goes, which is frequently the case, or the 'wholesellers' have a delivery arrangement), the house and the sidewalk where the stall is located, and on the first and fifteenth of the lunar month, the pagoda. For women who sell vegetables in the market, their arena of activity is equally circumscribed.

Mobile vendors, on foot or on bicycle, have a much wider daily world. However, these women are often among the most

TABLE 3.2 SELECTED INDICATORS ON INTERVIEWEES

	POB /Res **	Av. Income VND/mth	Education Level	Previous Employment	State/ Priv	Why left?	Yrs in presnt job	Age	# Hh Mbrs	3 Gen HH?	Main income earner	Main domestic worker
Cooked Food Vendors												
Com Pho	U/U	300,000	primary?	ran food stall	P	retired	30	60s	5	no	interviewee	children?
Com Pho	U/U	500,000	college?	teacher	S	quit	1.5	32	4	yes	interviewee/spouse	hired
Bia Hoi	U/U	300,000	2ndary	dept. store wkr	S	quit	6	37	3	no	interviewee	interviewee
Com Pho	U/U	450,000	2ndary?	electric. coop	S	quit	3	25	5	yes	interviewee/spouse	interviewee + mother-in-law
Drink Stand Owners												
Tea stall	R/U	150,000	primary	veg seller	P	retired	2	61	4	no	interviewee	husband
Tea stall	R/U	60,000	primary	local CP office	S	retired	1	76	5	no	spouse (wife)	wife
Vegetable Sellers												
Stall in street	U/U	4-500,000	2ndary?	auto factory	S	quit	8	26	4	yes	interviewee	interviewee
Stall in market	U/U	600,000	2ndary?	had stall 20 yrs	P	---	20	59	4	no	interviewee	daughter
Mobile Vendors												
Veg on bicycle	R/R	100,000	2ndary?	main job: farm	P	---	10	30	6	yes	mother-in-law	mother-in-law
Veg on shldr baskets	R/R Hn suburb	20-80,000	primary?	also: manual work, farming	S	---	50	65	6	no	interviewee? daughters?	interviewee
cooked food	R/R	150,000	2ndary	main job: farm	P	---	3	18	6	no	not sure	mother
toiletries	R/R	125,000	1st class	also farmer	P	---	3	21	2	no	interviewee/spouse	interviewee?
Shop Keepers												
Cafe	?/U	300,000	college	nurse	S	quit	?	40s	4	no	interviewee/spouse	interviewee
Cafe	Thail/ U	500,000	college	teacher	S	quit	6	50s	2	no	interviewee	interviewee
Cafe	R/U	450,000	2ndary?	factory wkr	S	quit	10	44	5	no	interviewee	interviewee
Hairdresser	Thail/ U	1,200,000	2ndary	state hair shop	S	quit	2	47	3	no	interviewee	daughter/niece
Hairdresser	U/U	? 300,000*	2ndary	no job	--		0.16	18	3	no	didn't know	mother
Wkr in furniture shop	?/U	100,000	2ndary	cooked food vendor	P	closed	1	46	4	no	interviewee	husband

* Interviewee reported VND1,200,000 but other evidence suggested this was a very great exaggeration.

** Place of Birth/Place of Current Residence, Urban or Rural

marginalized in terms of education, culture, and political participation to begin with. The four mobile vendors interviewed were all rural residents. Two come to look for work in the city for an extended period on a regular basis, and two live close enough to bicycle into the city to sell produce from their rural residences, grown themselves or bought in the commune. The lowest cash earners of the interviewees (given the intermittency of their trading), this group includes both the lowest educated of the group, the three largest families, and the poorest household overall (see Table 3.2 which gives some general characteristics of the interviewees).

In terms of culture, Hanoi offers a great deal in the way of cultural events--numerous live theatre productions, cinemas, traditional opera performances, art exhibits, museums (which are specifically designed for the semi-literate), regular literary and cultural publications (monthly magazines), and so on. Few of the women in the informal sector have the opportunity to take advantage of them. Most of the women I spoke to neither took part nor attended any cultural events, nor could remember when the last time they had done so had been. Many of them went to the pagoda on a fairly regular basis, and said they had no time for anything else.

The initial impressions gleaned from walking around the streets are of the astonishing and well-exercised literacy of vendors and traders and others in the informal sector. Women

sitting on low stools at their sidewalk tea stalls reading; cyclo drivers waiting for passengers discussing some item reported in the police paper; vegetable sellers in the market reading the daily paper during the slow periods; young children reading serial novels while minding the stall during mother's afternoon siesta; these are only some of the innumerable images of literacy.

Interviews, however, indicated a somewhat less pervasive passion for reading than I had initially assumed, though reading and access to reading materials is certainly much higher than in many other developing countries. There are private lending libraries every few blocks, dozens of book stores, several daily papers and scores of weeklies and bi-weeklies, which are flogged by the ubiquitous xa me newspaper vendors.⁽¹⁶⁾ Most of the interviewees said they would not purchase newspapers or books, but occasionally read them if available. A woman who runs a quan bia hoi (draft beer stand) told me, "I only read during the day when there are few customers. Maybe the newspaper, but not very much because I'm too tired and reading is for nothing". One of the mobile vendors said, "I don't read because we don't have money for books or newspapers. And there is no purpose in reading". The one man we interviewed, who had a quan nuoc (tea stall), told me, "On Saturdays I often go to my neighbours to watch

16 These are young homeless children who have been taken in by a charitable organization sponsored by Radda Barnen (Swedish Save The Children), given housing and education, and sent out to sell newspapers and magazines in the cafes and on the sidewalks.

tv. I don't read or play the lottery or play chess. My wife goes to the pagoda sometimes".

Others, however, mentioned reading as a main source of entertainment. An 18 year old hairdresser said, "Usually I spend about VND 10,000 a day for my pocket money. I buy snacks and books and [youth] newspapers. Sometimes I read stories, and I watch tv, and I go to films with my friends." A forty-seven year old hairdresser told me, "For entertainment it is usually reading, the youth newspapers. And watching tv. And I go to the pagoda".

CONTACTS WITH 'OFFICIALDOM'

Regarding political involvement, I saw no evidence of this on the part of any of the women I interviewed. None of them mentioned involvement with the Women's Union or attendance at Women's Union meetings. Contact with the world of politics and officials seemed to be limited to regular contact (pleasant or unpleasant according to their trade and the situation) with the neighbourhood police and the tax collector. For the tea sellers and cooked food vendors, these contacts would be mainly centred around the removal of the stalls and their accoutrements from the sidewalks. For the perambulating vendors, these contacts would mainly involve fines levied for trading outside the market. Those who rent space in the market don't generally have these troubles with the police, and those who have small shops in the front of

their house have only to 'win' police approval, and maintain it.

None of the women I interviewed had a clear idea about the tax system, how it was administered and how taxes are calculated, or what tax/taxes they ought to be paying. Mobile vendors mostly escaped tax altogether, though some reported being stopped occasionally and asked to pay tax, although possibly and more likely the officials were police requiring a fine and calling it tax. Those whose trading activities were stationary or relatively so, generally 'came to an arrangement' with the tax collector. This arrangement, as it was described by a woman who had a small furniture store, came about in this way. The tax collector informed the shop owner that she should pay VND 600,000 per month in tax (US\$60.00, a huge amount) She argued that her income from the shop was nowhere near as high as the tax collector assumed. In the end they agreed that she would pay VND 400,000 in tax and VND 20-30,000 to the tax collector, plus, of course, a small gift at Tet (lunar new year). The neighbourhood police also get a small 'token of recognition' at lunar new year.

ACCESS TO SOURCES OF CREDIT

None of the women I interviewed, and none of the women in the urban informal sector (or for that matter in the formal sector) I've ever spoken to before or since, seemed to have ever considered attempting to access formal sources of credit

(i.e. banks). Some of the women did have savings accounts (17), or at least had thought about opening them--but it is important to remember that up until this time any open accumulation of capital would have been regarded with deep suspicion, and that in late 1990 a farmers' cooperative bank had folded. This would have deepened reservations about using official financial institutions. It is estimated that only about 6% of the population uses formal sector banks.(18) As well, up until the year or so before these interviews, there were sanctions against the private sector and so obviously there were no mechanisms by which to encourage or facilitate private enterprise and many by which to discourage and punish.

In the meantime, informal sources of credit flourish. The most common are rotating credit associations, or hui. One estimate reckons that hui provide approximately 40% of the credit in the countryside and 60% in the cities.(19) Moneylenders and pawnshops also operate in the cities, charging usually 1% interest per day or 20% per month(20) though none of the women I interviewed reported borrowing from a moneylender. Rotating credit associations, on the other

17 These accounts have a very limited function--only deposit and withdrawal for which notice is needed. There are no inter-bank transfers or other services normally associated with a bank account. Only in September 1993 were the banking regulations changed to allow private individuals to open 'full service' bank accounts. This point was made by Dr Tran Thi Van Anh, personal communication, October 1993.

18 Hiebert: 04.03.93.

19 Hiebert: 04.03.93.

20 Hiebert: 04.03.93.

hand, are common, and are as much informal savings mechanisms as sources of credit; perhaps more so.

One of the young com binh dan stall owners, Thuy, is a member of a ten person rotating savings association, or hui. She puts aside VND 5,000 every day and every ten days contributes VND 50,000 to the fund. After three months she is able to draw VND 500,000. The first two who draw from the fund get only VND 450,000, and the later ones may pay less than the VND 50,000 contribution. The exact arrangement depends upon the amount bid by the participants for the opportunity to draw, and thus use, the money early on.

Other groups operate by charging interest on the money lent in the early rounds, "[those] who borrow the money first benefit from gaining access to Dong 2 million [for example] after only paying in 200,000 [one round]. Later kitty users profit from being paid interest by the other members".(21)

The hui are high-risk, and operate on mutual trust, or at least, a trustful relationship with the organizer.

Most of the interviewees who borrowed money did so from family members because there would be no interest charged. One of the vegetable sellers said "We mainly try to manage on our own money but during the year maybe we borrow sometimes from our neighbours, very small amounts. Usually I borrow from other people in the family, but only small amounts because we are all poor. In 1984 we borrowed money to build

21 Hiebert: 04.03.93.

our house, but we borrowed from our families so we wouldn't have to pay interest".

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Ba Que (Grandmother Que) thinks she is about 65 years old. She is not sure of her birth date but knows that her husband is about two years older than she is. She sells vegetables from her own garden in the living quarter on the outskirts of Hanoi where she lives. She was born in Hanoi, as were her parents, in the same living quarter.

In Ba Que's house there are fourteen people living, though only six eat together. The house is made up of five large rooms, though from her description it is difficult to work out if they are all part of the same structure or if some are free-standing but close by. Ba Que has four daughters and three sons. Two of her sons are married and live in the same house with their families, but eat separately. One of her daughters is married and lives with her in-laws.

The other four are single and still live with Ba Que and her husband. The oldest daughter is forty and working; the two youngest daughters are twenty and twenty-three, and both are mentally retarded. The youngest son works in a textile factory and is 'engaged' to the daughter of the local People's Committee Chairman. He spends most of his time working for free for his fiancée's family in their brickmaking business-- they feed him, and he is allowed to sleep in their house with his fiancée sometimes [which is highly unusual], although his parents cannot meet the girl's parents' demand of VND two

million to pay for the wedding. Ba Que says "because the father is the head of living quarter they don't care about people rumouring about them, their purpose is only to get richer".

Ba Que sells her vegetables from baskets carried on a shoulder pole, usually in the large market called Cho Hom in the centre of the French residential quarter. She grows only high profit vegetables, such as cauliflower (which is very profitable but requires high inputs of labour and fertilizer). Ba Que's vegetable selling is highly irregular. She earns anywhere from VND 20-80,000 per month, depending upon how many days she has vegetables ready to take to market that month. In November 1991 she sold vegetables only one day, and made about VND 20,000. In October she had come into the city to sell vegetables three times, earning in total VND 80,000.

Ba Que says she has been growing and selling vegetables all her life, though previously she worked for the local vegetable cooperative. She is now retired but has no pension. Her garden, about one sau (360 square metres) in size, provides enough vegetables for the family, and her income from selling vegetables provides enough to purchase food for herself and her husband.

Ba Que does other work when she can find it. For example, she carries dirt in her shoulder baskets on construction sites. She also works for a tea company, doing manual labour, whenever they have work for her. This type of work gets her about VND 5,000 per day, each day being 07:00 to

18:00, but is highly intermittent. In November 1991 she had worked ten days for the tea company. Her husband earns a little working as school guard for VND 40,000/month, and helps a bit in the vegetable garden. He is retired from his job in a textile factory gets a pension of VND 38,000/month. Her oldest daughter gives her about VND 50,000/month, but Ba Que is not sure what proportion of the daughter's total income this represents. The daughter is saving money to renovate the house and build a second floor for herself. The second youngest daughter works in a workshop for the mentally handicapped and gives her mother her total income of VND 50,000/month. The youngest daughter can't work and stays at home, helping with the housework. Ba Que's youngest son (who is engaged), and the strongest member of the family, therefore potentially the greatest income earner of the household, works in a textile factory and does not contribute any of his income to Ba Que's household, although Ba Que contributes to the VND 100,000/month he must pay for a training course at his factory. His eldest sister is also helping him pay.

Ba Que's household spends most of their combined income on food, the greatest proportion on rice [VND 220,000/month on rice out of VND 270,000 on food], although she says that they only eat twice a day and rely heavily on cassava and sweet potato which are cheap carbohydrates. They don't pay rent or tax or electricity or water charges.

Why is Ba Que's household spending money to renovate the house if they don't have enough money for food? Ba Que says

that her children decided they wanted to have the renovations done, and that because Ba Que could not get a loan to pay for it the children have taken over ownership of the house. Ba Que has an outstanding debt of VND 350,000 which has been owing for a long time for rice bought on credit. The rice merchant does not charge her interest on this debt "because they know I am very poor". If she borrowed money to pay for the VND 2 million wedding the prospective bride's parents insist on, she would have to borrow from a moneylender and pay 30% interest per month. However she cannot do this as she cannot foresee being able to pay back any of it.

"My family is very unhappy," says Ba Que; one daughter is married to a drunkard, one daughter believes a fortune-teller's prediction that if she gets married her husband will die, and two daughters are mentally handicapped. She says that her children do not respect her or listen to her because the family is so poor. If she kept her earnings for herself and her husband the children would ignore her altogether, "children love their parents if their parents have money". As it is, her oldest daughter forces, "pushes", her mother to look for work no matter how strenuous. Sometimes her husband gives her money from his earnings, but "sometimes he plays cards with it". She says, "I have a terrible life. I would rather be dead, but my mother is still alive and I must look after her sometimes".

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The issue of decision-making within the household perhaps the most crucial for determining the roles and power relationships of the household members. It is in corresponding measure, elusive. Much of the trouble in trying to get an answer which would shed light on the state of decision-making roles within the household is the difficulty in formulating the questions. My impression was that few of the interviewees had thought about their situation in the way I wanted to, and few were interested in doing so.

I had wanted to show that either the income earned in the informal sector, which routinely exceeds the income from the formal sector, decisively gave women earners a commensurate decision-making /power role in the household, or that this income made no impression upon the confucian/patriarchal household/ gender role models. Or perhaps that socialism had achieved for women such a clearly equal role within the household that access to income-generating but time-consuming activities would win them nothing additional but consumer opportunities. Of the three options, the second seems now most predominant, but my impressions from the interviewees favoured the first option. Perhaps the closest approximation of reality lies somewhere between all three.

Given my observations of the year or so subsequent to doing the interviews, I would reconstruct, in very general terms, the situation of women workers (formal or informal sector) in the household in this way. Nearly fifty years of socialism had clearly advanced women a considerable way

towards equality with men, yet very few of the women I have talked with seemed to have felt 'equal' with men in society, in the workplace, in authority, or in the household. The 'renovation' of the economy to a market-based system has loosened the official strictures against discriminatory attitudes and behaviours, even though they may have been only partly effective, permitting a degree of freedom hitherto undreamed-of. This freedom is by no means complete nor does it approximate western ideas of freedom, but it has allowed for a sharp return (or uncovering?) of confucian and patriarchally-based roles, of a gender-based division of labour within the household which leaves the responsibility for reproductive work overwhelmingly with women.

In more concrete terms, this means for decision-making, that women generally manage the household budget, make the day-to-day marketing decisions, and find the resources to meet the financial demands of the household/family strategies decided upon (such as education, investment in business). However, women do not usually make these larger-scale decisions, even decisions about large purchases, themselves, and are often either not included in the decision-making process formally (ie: not asked to deliberate the pros and cons of the issue) or their input is in the end disregarded. Also it is important to consider that managing an ample household budget is a very different activity in character and scope to managing an insufficient household budget. The one offers the potential of some degree of choice, priority-

setting, and decision-making. The other is more of a burden than an advantage.(22)

This was what was reported to me in the interviews. Women said that their husbands 'announced' that large purchases (ie: tvs) would be made. Or that they would discuss financial matters with their husband and then the husband would decide. Some told me that no matter whether or not the husband discussed the matter with her before making a decision, if she disagreed with the decision she simply 'hid the money somewhere else'. Without going to that extreme, some women, disapproving of a proposed purchase, would simply say that she had not got enough money saved. As most of the issues requiring a decision within the family also require finances, women thus have this built-in decision-making input by virtue of being the household bankers.

The contemporary Vietnamese decision-making process is one of consensus-building and avoidance of individual responsibility. Thus when asked about decision-making procedures on household matters, many women simply responded that an issue would be discussed and then [somehow] an agreement or a decision seemed to be made. Some said that their husbands (or their husband's family, with whom they lived) made the larger scale decisions, but after some discussion revealed that in fact, they themselves often overtly or covertly vetoed or negated these 'decisions'.

22 I am grateful to Dr Tran Thi Van Anh for making this point to me.

Others said at first that they made all the decisions affecting the household themselves or in equal part with their husbands, yet eventually it became evident that in fact many decisions had been made and actions taken with which they disagreed.

The point is that clearly this is a difficult issue to access, and the structure of decision-making is obscure even to those who live it, let alone those outside. The definition of the relationships that decision-making as a point of entry for the observer and as a tool of the exercise of power for the participants should illuminate is tricky and at best instinctual.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS 'DOI MOI'

In a study published in the quarterly Khoa Hoc Ve Phu Nu (Science about Women) by the Centre for Women's Studies, Nguyen Xuan Mai states that in a recent household survey almost three quarters of the respondents "appreciated" the development of a multi-sector economy and the opportunity to engage in private business: "they think this policy has a good influence on their families".(23)

One interviewee, a vegetable seller, told me that her trade is more difficult due to the combination of competition and inflation, "before [four or five years ago] I could make VND 2000 in one day, and buy about four kilogrammes of rice. Now I can make VND 4000 in one day but that buys me less than

two kilogrammes of rice". Moving into a more profitable trade, such as selling meat or fish, isn't possible because "I haven't got enough ability and I would need better knowledge" as well as more initial capital.

A poll of Hanoi residents, conducted by Nhan Dan, the daily paper produced by the Communist Party, indicated that 54% of respondents felt that progress had been made in improving living conditions and solving unemployment problems in 1992. Almost 80% felt there had been improvements in urban management, and 60% felt there had been improvement in the economic situation of Hanoi's rural suburbs.(24)

Overall, the interviewees were positive about the doi moi in the socio-economic situation brought about by doi moi. Those who had been in informal sector activities prior to economic liberalization tended to bemoan the increased competition that doi moi has brought in this sector.

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Ba Binh (Grandmother Binh) lives in a one hundred year old house down the street from one of the major Hanoi markets, Cho Hom. The house used to belong to another branch of her family but they moved to South Vietnam in 1954 [when many Catholics moved south]. This was one of several houses her family used to own and rent out. The second floor has been

24 Nhan Dan (1993) in World Economic Problems: 39-40.

allocated to another, unrelated, family now, and Ba Binh's household has only the ground floor.

In Ba Binh's household there are five people, Ba Binh and her husband and their three unmarried children (four others are married and live elsewhere; one daughter was a 'boat person' and has just moved to Canada). Her husband is now retired from his job at a state-owned printing company. He could have quit but did not want to because he would have lost his benefits, including priority places in the educational system for their children. The three children at home, ranging in age from 16 to 26 have no jobs but help out with Ba Binh's cooked food stall on the front doorstep.

In fact, between Ba Binh and two of her married daughters, they run four different food stalls all in the one place. In the morning one married daughter has a pho (noodle soup) stall. At lunch, Ba Binh offers com binh dan (people's rice). In the afternoon, the eldest married daughter sells chao (rice congee), mainly to schoolchildren, and then in the evening the same daughter has a quan nuoc (drink stand). Each of these are a separate business, although Ba Binh does not charge rent to her daughters and sometimes helps them out by cooking the noodles, sometimes even buying the noodles or other ingredients for them. She taught her daughters the business, and their pho and chao stalls are quite recent, only a couple of months old at the time of the interview.

The younger married daughter's pho stall brings in about VND 5-6,000/day plus breakfast for whoever in the household is

up. The lunchtime com binh dan earns about VND 10,000/day and feeds everyone from the family who shows up (often including the married daughters' families). The afternoon chao stand earns VND 7-10,000/day, and the evening drink stand about VND 4-5,000/day in the winter, at least twice that in the summer.

Ba Binh's two youngest children, a son and a daughter, who live at home, help her with her lunch-time service. They do all the cooking, the son cooking the rice and the daughter the vegetables. Ba Binh says she has been running food stalls for thirty years, first starting up when her oldest daughter was two years old. Her mother was a famous cook and taught Ba Binh and her sister how to cook, then her sister who was a professional cook taught Ba Binh how to cook for the stall. When her sister moved away, Ba Binh had to look after her parents and needed to earn extra money.

In this household the various members keep their money to themselves, "so my house is peaceful". Ba Binh provides all the domestic money needed from her business; the household members all eat from the food cooked for the stall.

Ba Binh's household doesn't seem to have many expenses. Food comes mainly from the businesses, the house is privately owned so there is no rent, and though Ba Binh used to pay about VND 20,000/month in taxes, right now business is not very good and she is not paying any taxes. Her voluntary expenses she lists as giving money to her grandchildren when they ask, giving pocket money to her unmarried children

because they help her in the business, giving money to the pagoda, and occasionally giving free lunches to beggars.

Ba Binh is not clear about who takes on the responsibility for the housework, but it seems to be her job to organize and the children at home do the chores she allocates. She says she and her husband never argue so she doesn't know who makes the decisions, and her only entertainment is going to the pagoda. Do the other children help her out at all? "It's good enough if they don't want any money from me!".

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HOUSEHOLD WORK AND INFORMAL SECTOR ACTIVITIES

Schedules

The following are a selection of several of the interviewees' daily schedules. Most of the women were vague about their round of daily activities, insisting that they did nothing but sit at their stalls all day and this was much too boring to detail. Many of them clearly did do little more than sit all day at their stalls and then go home to do household chores, go to bed, get up, buy stock, and sit all day at the stall.

Thuy is a vegetable seller with a small streetside stall near an established market. Her winter schedule is:

03:00	Wake up
03:30	Go to Bac Qua market to buy vegetables
06:30	Set up stall and start selling --has lunch while minding the stall
18:00	Close up and go home
19:00-20:00	Grate papaya and carrot at home for wedding salads (November is the big wedding season)
21:00	Go to bed (unless a large number of orders for salad, in which case may grate until 22-23:00)

Her summer schedule is pretty much the same, but she gets up an hour later because there are not so many varieties of vegetables to sell and so she doesn't need so much time at the market. She also closes the stall a little later, maybe 19:00 or 20:00 if she isn't selling well that day.

Lan has a bia hoi (draft beer) stall which she runs with a cousin. Lan's schedule is about the same year round, although in the coldest months (after Tet, lunar new year) she has somewhat shorter days.

05:30	Wake up Wake daughter to prepare lessons before school Clean the house, wash clothes Go to market Make the food for the whole day
11:00	Open the stand --daughter prepares lunch and dinner
ca 12:00	Go home for lunch (1 hour break)
18:00	Dinner --Husband brings dinner to the stand --partner takes dinner break
21:00	Close up and go home --husband prepares bath
22:00	Go to bed

Huong is a cooked food vendor, selling corn on the cob from carrying baskets. She and her mother come in from the countryside in the agricultural off-season to augment their household's farming income. They stay with an uncle, a relative of her mother's, who doesn't charge them rent but to whom they bring presents from the countryside, such as sticky rice (which is expensive in Hanoi).

04:30	Wake up
05:00	Go to the market near Dong Xuan, under Long Bien bridge to buy corn
	Go back to Uncle's house to boil the corn
08:30	Set out to sell the cooked corn and the juice
11:30	Return to Uncle's house for lunch
12:30?	Set out again (Huong walks an average of about 20k in a day)
21:00	(or whenever sold out) Return to Uncle's to sleep

Hoa is a vegetable seller from a neighbouring rural commune. She bikes the one hour into Hanoi every day at about 07:00 after buying vegetables in her village. She usually spends all day in one street near a large established market, unless she gets moved off by the police, and then she goes to a nearby street for while. When she sells out, usually at about 19:00 in the summer, a little earlier in the winter, she leaves Hanoi to pedal the one hour home.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to provide a more detailed look at particular issues of the informal sector and the specific ways in which they intersect with women's role in the household. It has also attempted to convey some of the flavour of Hanoi's informal sector, in part by describing some of the stories of women who participate in it.

Overall, it is clear that doi moi, the process of economic reform, has produced national advances in development and improvements in the standard of living, particularly in urban areas. Yet it is also clear from the comments and the stories brought out in the interviews that the new market tends to engage women's participation in ways which tend to marginalize their non-economic involvement in society, limiting them for the most part to a narrow, economically-focussed space with few opportunities for political, social, or other public sphere participation.

The final chapter will discuss the general income generating and allocating strategies that urban households in Vietnam seem to pursue in the new market-based economy, as well as drawing some general conclusions about the effects of the market on the role of urban women.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

The questions left to be answered are these:

- o What are the strategies of income generation and income allocation that contemporary urban households tend to adopt in this period of economic liberalization?
- o How are the gender division of labour manifest in these strategies?
- o Are new economic roles which engage women's participation enabling women to exercise greater choice?
- o Does the market economy tend in practice to enslave or to liberate women from constrictive social roles?

This concluding chapter will draw upon the preceding material from interviews, observations, and secondary sources to answer these concerns, at least in general terms, as well as to look briefly at the implications for policy-making that these preliminary conclusions entail.

INCOME GENERATION AND ALLOCATION: HOUSEHOLD STRATEGIES

Each of the interviewees came from a household that either lived in a privately owned house or had one member of household engaged in formal sector employment. The formal sector employee ensured the household of subsidized housing, medical, and education privileges. This strategy of a foot in both camps thus provides both the benefits, which are often not otherwise available, and the cash. It may also be a hedge

against the possibility of a future hard-line revival overturning market reforms.

All the women I interviewed worked full-time in the informal sector, but other women I talk with, such as researchers, work 'full-time' (nominally) in the formal sector, but also work in the informal sector. Their activities run the full range from selling clothing on a streetcorner to 'consulting' for international NGOs to interpreting for visiting business missions.

In those households where a member of working age works full-time at informal sector activities, the most common household strategy is for women members, usually the wife in a nuclear family, to leave formal sector jobs to enter the informal sector. In this strategy there is the cooperation if not the encouragement of the state, as a worker must get permission to leave state sector employment. State enterprises, as mentioned earlier, have had to lay off large numbers of workers as a result of cut subsidies. These workers are mainly women. Given the lack of formal sector opportunities, and the lack of available capital, these women workers often have no choice but to engage in small-scale informal sector type activities.

In the interviews with women who were the main income earners for their households, these women indicated that their income was usually spent on domestic consumption first, before drawing on the incomes of other household members. In many cases, the other members did not contribute their earnings to

the household budget, but kept this money aside for personal use, 'pocket money'. In other words, in most households with members engaged full-time in the informal sector, women's income generating activity is communally enjoyed, while the cash income of other members is private.

The deeper question is, does this income-generating/household-supporting role translate itself into the opportunity to exercise choice, to participate in decision-making? As noted in Chapter Three, it is extremely difficult to get at this question, for cultural and conceptual reasons. Culturally, decision-making is a consensus exercise and responsibility is to be avoided. Conceptually, decision-making procedures are difficult to analyze by the participants. It is perhaps telling to note that with regard to household issues such as education, large-scale purchases, and the like, women did not seem to express much disagreement with the decisions that had been made in their households, even in the cases where they said they were not the decision-makers.

In very general terms, few of the women interviewed discussed their income as if they 'owned' it, but in terms of 'managing' it on behalf of the household. Only the best-off discussed entertainment activities which cost money (dancing, buying newspapers/books, going on picnics). This is not to say that women do not choose to spend their incomes on their households, and could not do otherwise if they preferred, only that the low degree of variation in the responses from the

interviews would indicate that women do not tend to seriously consider other, more 'selfish', spending options.

GENDER AND MARKET

In Vietnam, the market exemplifies the gender division of space into public and private. The market, the arena critical to the government's economic reforms, is dominated at the local, private, level of individual transactions by women traders. It is administered at all public levels by men--tax collectors, police, market managers, planners, and sundry other officials.(1)

The governmental restrictions against private trade which were in force until the late 1980s and the subsequent release of those restrictions, primarily and most directly affected women, because they affected and shaped the arena where women dominate--local level trading--and because the reforms served to release (or push) more women than men into that arena through massive public sector layoffs.

Pelzer, in her assessment of gender relations in Vietnam, argues that from the late 1980s, commodification has led to a crisis of social relations and a 'nostalgia' for traditional values fueled by a concurrent freeing up of restrictions on

1 This is also noted in Pelzer: "Socialization of trade and attempts to limit market exchange in the period from the late 1950s to the late 1970s had entailed an extension of control by male administrators over what had been a female-dominated sphere of activity. Rural women in cooperatives in the North in the late 1970s, for example, complained of fines imposed by primarily male cooperative managers for going to market instead of turning up for work in the fields..." (323).

the expression of some aspects of those values, such as religion.(2) I would argue that a far less benign term than 'nostalgia' should be employed. Clearly, the phenomenon in process is a return to familiar roles for social relations in a period of great socio-economic upheaval. However, the cause of that upheaval, the liberalization of the economy, is marginalizing the social participation of women and constricting the options for social roles. That is, the emphasis on the individual economic unit required by the market-based economy, combined with formal sector unemployment and crumbling social safety net resulting from economic reforms, are creating a period of enormous social insecurity for a nation of people emerging from a period of high cultural homogeneity with a high degree of importance attached to conformity. In other circumstances this period might well resolve itself in a reaffirmation of the socialist model of gender relations, but in this case the traditional economic role of women comes into play, fitting so conveniently with the new economic imperatives. The end result is the effective entrapment of women within a particular economic role which comes provided with social implications.

DOES THE MARKET ECONOMY LIBERATE OR ENSLAVE?

Herein lies the central question in this issue--are the economic reforms currently underway beneficial or detrimental to women? Does this new/newly resurfaced urban landscape

advantage or disadvantage women? How to assess the effects of doi moi on over half of society?

Clearly, Vietnam is experiencing a difficult but understandable transition period. It is almost unfair to assess the progress made thus far in the reforms, but it is important to indicate its direction.

Vietnam's pressing need is for cash and capital. The most dynamic sector of the economy is the private, and one of its most dynamic elements is the informal sector. This is also the sector which is most likely to grow, even balloon, in the near future as it requires little start-up capital and minimal infrastructure, both of which Vietnam lacks. This sector is, further, so widely ranging as to encompass all socio-economic levels of contemporary society. With proper planning and administration, it will be possible to coopt the majority of these informal activities and businesses into the formal sector, and create an enduring consumption-oriented urban society. Consumer goods spending has already begun, but in large extent it is the spending of previously accumulated capital (hoarded cash and gold) and the satisfaction of long-unmet needs. Once the demand for goods previously unavailable is met, and the private reserves expended, the challenge will be to ensure continued consumption and spending, as well as channeling savings through public institutions, banks, not burying gold in the ground or hiding cash under the bed where it cannot circulate. These institutional reforms are already

either underway or under discussion, but it will be some time before they are fully implemented.

In the meantime, it is important to look ahead to the potential result of these reforms for society, given the present trends described in the preceding chapters. Clearly, the present tendency is for women to disengage from formal sector employment, where necessary or advantageous to the household, or at least to restrict their participation, in order to engage in informal sector activities which bring in greater cash incomes. It would seem that this trend is only going to intensify, abetted by the traditional economic role of Vietnamese women and the current resurgence of traditional, confucian, social roles.

This does not mean to say that a reversion to the traditional household roles for women where they are almost totally marginalized from society is inevitable. But in order for the successes that socialism has won for women and for women's participation in society to not be lost, it will be necessary for the directors of Vietnam's socio-economic reforms to reconcile several potentially conflicting factors: one, the limited absorption capacity of the formal sector and the urgent need to provide income generating opportunities on a mass scale; two, the potential for marginalization inherent in informal sector activities; three, the demands presented by household reproductive tasks; and four, the pressing need to develop human capital.

To do all this, the Vietnamese government will need to recognize informal sector activities and their infrastructural requirements (which are often in opposition to the goals of urban planners) as legitimate and desirable in the short term. Institutional reform programmes will need to accommodate the needs of the informal sector with regard to taxes and regulation. And a sincere effort will have to be made to shore up the crumbling social services and education systems, not only to provide a safety net in this critical period of transition but also to provide a solid base for future development, to provide a healthy and skilled workforce. In all of these endeavours, the government will need to involve and ensure, and indeed will rely on, the participation of women.

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