Marriage and the Family in Urban North Vietnam, 1965-1993

Danièle Bélanger and Khuất Thu Hông

Abstract. The article explores the change in the process of choosing a spouse in Hanoi between 1960 and 1990. Theory suggests a linear transformation which would be from arranged to free love marriage. However, our analysis, based on qualitative data collected in 1994 (twelve groups interviews), shows that the changes may be more complicated. Traditionally, marriage in Vietnam is arranged by the parents among rich people and may be freer among the poor. Contrary to China, children were often consulted before the final choice of a spouse was done by their parents. In Vietnam, during the 1960s and 1970s, the State played an important role in matching couples according to political criteria; the State also prohibited traditional and elaborated ritual and organized simple weddings, with the objective to undermine family's role and eliminate social class inequalities. However, if parent could do little for the wedding itself, they remained very important in choosing a spouse for their child or suggesting potential mates. In the 1980s and 1990s, the State slowly withdraw and marriage ritual took a more traditional form. Young people had more freedom to meet potential spouse but parents' approval was a prerequisite for a final choice. In spite of political pressure in the 1960s and 1970s for the family to let the children marry freely and the opening of the country since 1986, choosing a spouse remained a responsibility and a concern of parents. Across the decades, the intergenerational relation is rather stable when it comes to marriage.

Keywords: Marriage customs; mate selection; parental authority; civil marriage; political affiliation; family compatibility; age at marriage; Vietnam.

1. Introduction

The transition from celibacy to marriage stands as an eloquent moment in a person's life in Vietnam. This rite of passage also emphasizes the extent to which family is central to Vietnamese society. However, the nature and intensity of the family's role and involvement in marriage has evolved in a
complex manner influenced concurrently by the "traditional", the "socialist" and the "modern" models (Peltzer 1993). According to Peltzer, the traditional model started to erode in the urban areas as early as the 1920s. Free-choice marriage as opposed to the traditional marriage organised by the parents emerged as another possibility. In the following decades, the socialist State reinforced the marriage as being between two consenting individuals who chose their partner freely (particularly in the 1959 Law on Marriage and the Family, see Luật Hôn nhân và Gia đình 1959). Considering this context, the first question this article tries to answer is what has been the role of the family in the process leading to marriage in urban Vietnam between 1965 and 1985, a twenty year period of the socialist era? As has been suggested for China (Wolf 1985), did the socialist State, highly concerned with matters traditionally belonging to the family such as marriage, fertility and divorce, largely "replace" the family, particularly in urban areas, through a new set of social prescriptions for mate choice based on political criteria, strict policies and the enforcement of rules?

Marriage since the "renovation" is the second part of this article. Vietnam's history has taken a drastic turn since the second half of the 1980s with the adoption of a comprehensive program of reforms called đổi mới, translated as the renovation. The masterpiece of the renovation is the transition to a market economy (Turley 1993a); but political reforms have also modified people's relationship with the state (Turley 1993b). As we shall see later, a withdrawal of the State's involvement in marriage is one small, yet significant, outcome of political reform. A second question our article addresses is what is the role of the family in marriage since the renovation? What is the new marriage pattern emerging in the midst of economic and political transformations?

In order to document marriage change over the last three decades of Vietnam's history, we shall focus on one aspect of the process: mate selection. How did the mechanisms and criteria leading to the choice of a mate evolve in north urban Vietnam? How did the family, the State and the individual interplay to satisfy their desires and fulfill their requirements in the marriage process over the two periods of observation? A qualitative approach has been chosen to bring some light on a topic little covered by the recent literature on Vietnamese society (Allman et al. 1991; Banister 1993).

The marriage pattern emerging from our data questions the impact of the socialist family "model" between 1965 and 1985. In fact, much of the traditional model seems to have remained in spite of the introduction of the party-state as a new actor involved in the process of mate selection. Superposition of two forces rather than conflict between them would better describe urban marriage under socialism in Vietnam before 1986. Renovation appears to entail both a reemergence of some aspects of the traditional model and a give way to elements of a new model. One major finding is that the family remains central to the process of selecting a mate over the two periods studied (1965-1985, 1987-1992) and for the three generations of people interviewed (1940-1949, 1950-1959; 1960-1969). The discussion examines the implication of our result on age at marriage, and for gender and intergenerational relations.

The study of the urban north is justified by our limited knowledge of the urban family in Vietnam. Moreover, it is a key population to study in the understanding of the impact of the State policies on people's behavior, since this population was the most exposed to them. Finally, the renovation is particularly intense in the cities, so this population might be the forerunner of social and demographic trends to appear on a larger scale.

2. Family Change in Vietnam

Recent demographic data suggest important changes in the Vietnamese family. One of the most striking results of the first Demographic and Health Survey done in 1988 is that the urban population of the country has completed its demographic transition with an average of 2 children per woman by the end of the 1980s (VDHS 1988 1990). The same survey offered the first national data on marital status and age at marriage. The median age at marriage increased between the generation surveyed (from 21,4 years for the women aged between 45 and 49 years to 23,4 years for the ones aged from 30 to 34 years). Among the four regions studied (urban north, rural north, rural south), the urban north has the highest median ages at marriage. The 1989 census showed ages at marriage of 23,2 years for women of 24,5 years for men (Banister 1993). Urban averages were higher, 26,5 years for men and 24,7 years for women. The proportion of individuals marrying is very high, with only 5% of women and 3% of men still single beyond the age of 30 (The Population of Vietnam 1991). This pattern of high intensity and late timing is similar to the one observed in East Asia (Xenos and Gultiano 1992). Retrospective data from a survey on the family done by Hirschman and Loi suggests that the preferred living arrangement in both urban and rural Vietnam over the last few decades has been the independent nuclear household, but the extended family remains the chief source of social and emotional support (Hirschman and Loi 1994). Anthropological work done by Hy V. Luong showed a "male-oriented kinship system to some extent countered by a non-male oriented system" (Luong 1992: 76). Both authors mention the considerable flexibility of gender roles and obligations.
3. Traditional Marriage in Vietnam

Vietnam belongs culturally to East Asia since it is part of the Confucian cultures along with China, Japan and Korea. However, geographically it belongs to Southeast Asia. If the Vietnamese family system has raised debates over its belonging to either East or Southeast Asia (Hirschman and Loi 1994), the literature on marriage suggests a very close model to the East Asian one, more specifically the Chinese one.

Traditional marriage in Vietnam is dominated by family interests and was arranged by the parental generation. In the Confucian culture, marriage guaranteed the continuity of the patrilineage and age support for parents (Tran Dinh Huou 1991). Timing of marriage was early and the parents started to plan the event when their children entered puberty (Phan Kê Bính 1990). The first criterion was compatibility between two families since marriage could modify the social and economic status of a family (Insun Yu 1990). In general, the selection was made among families in the same social class, with similar economic levels (Alexandre de Rhodes 1646). In this androcentric world, the selection of the daughter-in-law was very important: "the ideal for women was that of the dutiful daughter-in-law" (Keyes 1997: 187). A big age gap between two fathers might not be welcome since it could create trouble in the couple's relationship. This criterion is still important in rural marriage nowadays (Khuất Thư Hồng 1994). The matching of the year of birth of the couple was considered in the selection process since the ages of the future couple could be either suitable or incompatible according to the Lunar Calendar horoscope. A consultation with a fortune teller was made and if the ages of the future spouses were not compatible, the process was interrupted since incompatible ages could lead to an unhappy marriage and may bring bad consequences upon the whole family (Hà Văn Cầu 1993). Virtual and personal characteristics of women were based on Confucian doctrine "Three Obediences, and Four Virtues" (Tam Tòng, Tư Đức).

4. Marriage and the Law

The First Law of Marriage and the Family was promulgated in North Vietnam by the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1959. The basic principles of the Law were: 1. Individual freedom in all matters concerning marriage; 2. Monogamy as the only legal marriage; 3. Equality between men and women, protection of women's right in the family; and 4. Protection of children's rights. Nearly 30 years later, a new Law of Marriage and the Family was enforced on 3 January 1987 consisting of 57 articles in 10 chapters. The Article on Marriage are explained in the Second Chapter which defines the conditions of legal marriage. Minimum age at marriage is 18 years for woman and 20 years for man (Article 5, Chapter 2). Marriage is decided voluntarily by two persons man and woman, nobody can force them or interfere with their decision (Article 6, Chapter 2). The principle of voluntarism in marriage is explained by true love between man and woman without any economic consideration (Gió lohn Nhâm Dăng dinh Việt Nam 1994). Monogamy is defined as the only legal type of marriage in the country (Article 4, Chapter 2). Nowadays in Vietnam marriage is legal after registration of the couple with the local administration (Ứy ban Nhâm dân, The People's Committee). For government staff, a letter from the workplace must be sent to the local administration in order for the marriage to be registered. The wedding is a family event.

5. Data Method

The data was collected in three districts of the city of Hanoi in the last four months of 1994. We conducted a qualitative survey through a series of twelve group interviews, reaching a total of 112 participants. Our context characteristic was that all participants should have married in Hanoi since our objective was to study urban marriage. Our first break characteristic was the cohort of marriage. We thus had six groups of people married before the renovation and six married after. Within each marriage cohort, the groups were homogeneous for education (second break characteristic): primary, secondary, vocational and college or university. All groups were interviewed about the marriage 1, 2 and 3 give the main characteristics of the groups and participant Our unit of analysis in the first step was the group. However, since many participants expressed themselves extensively on their own personal experience, looking at individuals and comparing them across the groups was a more enlightening approach considering the nature of the data. Our data is closer to what one would obtain from individual in-depth interviews than from focus group discussion, in which people express opinions and perceptions rather than long personal accounts of their lives. We believe that this particularity of the data makes not only the exploration of attitudes possible but also that of behavior.
Table 1
NUMBER OF GROUPS AND PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education/years</th>
<th>1965-1985</th>
<th>1987-1992</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary*</td>
<td>4 groups</td>
<td>3 groups</td>
<td>7 groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32 participants</td>
<td>27 participants</td>
<td>59 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary and</td>
<td>2 groups</td>
<td>3 groups</td>
<td>5 groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational</td>
<td>23 participants</td>
<td>30 participants</td>
<td>53 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and</td>
<td>2 groups</td>
<td>3 groups</td>
<td>5 groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>53 participants</td>
<td>57 participants</td>
<td>112 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * There was only a total of 7 (seven) with Primary Education.

Table 2
MEAN AGE AT FIRST MARRIAGE ACCORDING TO MARRIAGE COHORTS AND BIRTH COHORTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage cohorts</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1965-1985</td>
<td>26.5 (55)</td>
<td>25.5 (37)</td>
<td>27.6 (18)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Birth cohorts</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1940-1949</td>
<td>29.5 (21)</td>
<td>27.4 (14)</td>
<td>31.7 (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>26.5 (39)</td>
<td>25.0 (22)</td>
<td>28.1 (17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>25.3 (47)</td>
<td>24.0 (31)</td>
<td>26.6 (16)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS ACCORDING TO PLACE OF BIRTH AND EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary</th>
<th>Second/Vocational</th>
<th>College/University</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hanoi City</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other provinces</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since our emphasis is on mate selection, we will look at the criteria leading to the choice of a spouse, the role of the State, the family and the individual in this process and the way these different forces are intertwined. Simultaneously, the initiation of the selection process and its final outcome will be described. Dating does not figure in our data. The topic did not figure among our interview topics and very few participants mentioned this period on their way to marriage. In fact, the criteria for choosing a mate have such a crucial importance right from the outset of the process that dating usually starts when the person "selected" is considered as the future husband or wife. Courtship of several potential mates is not the norm in Vietnam as in Thailand and the Philippines (Cheung et al. 1986), although this might be changing for the younger generations.

6. Result

6.1 The process of getting married before the renovation: 1965-1985

The main characteristic of this period is that both the family and the State are involved in marriage. In spite of this dual force upon mate selection, there is no clear delineation between these two spheres of influence. Rather, the family is an important mediator of the possibilities and limits for matching as defined within the political society. However, when seeking to marry a child, the family also has its own preferences, often inherited from the traditional marriage pattern prevailing until the middle of the 20th century. The data also show that the State could act directly on mate selection through the co quan¹⁰.

6.2 Family compatibility: the coexistence of traditional and new meaning

Marriage in Vietnam being governed by collective rather than by individual interests, family and social compatibility are central in the choice of a mate. Compatibility under the traditional marriage pattern was already described earlier in the article. During the period under study, some aspects of the traditional idea of compatibility persisted but others were replaced by new ones. The main shift is from economic to political compatibility, since in the new system, economic differences between people were leveled off. Thus, economic and social compatibility are no longer related to economic status but rather to the political one, which was defined by the lý lịch. The lý lịch is the inquiry made
into one's family, going back three or more generations, on the moral and political antecedents of all members. A good lý lich is thus a guarantee of a good family as defined by the ideology. It also opens the door to employment in the government, the most desired position for urban people at that time. Other aspects of family compatibility existing in the traditional marriage pattern remain very important in the process of mate selection. Endogamy of education, of urban or rural origin, and of life style (nhất nep), as well as similar ages of the parental generations must also be respected. But how to achieve this family compatibility? Our data sketches two main paths, the first one being through the family and the second one via the co quan.

For fifty percent of our participants, the parents initiated the process of mate selection by introducing a future potential spouse to the adult child. By family, we mean the parents, with the mother usually playing a more important role.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1957, married at 23, secondary education) "I just finished vocational school. I was careless about everything. I married because my parents introduced me to him, our families knew each other from before".

However, the cases in which the opinion of the child is not considered in making the final decision are rare during this period.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1948, married at 31, vocational education) "Concerning the family, I followed my parents' opinion because my parents were not too fascist ... My parents have very lucid perception about my marriage".

The traditional model with the whole process being taken care of by the family existed during the American war when families wanted to marry a son, enrolled in the army, in hopes of having grand children.

(A man born in the province of Nam Ha in 1941, married at 28, primary education) "The first time I married was in 1969. At that time I was in the army. My family and my wife's family arranged the match and organised the wedding. I only had a three day permission for my wedding".

When the family selected candidates, the process would last until one candidate satisfied both the family and child's preferences. For the other half of our participants, the adult child takes the initiative to start the process, but the parent's approval is necessary.

(A woman born in Vietnam in 1947, married at 28, vocational education) "We knew each other through friends ... my husband was the friend of my friend’s husband. In short, I introduced him to my family and I let my parents decide".

If the parents are opposed to the child's choice, the child must abandon and seek a new partner. In some cases there was opposition between the parents and the young people.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1948, married at 31, vocational education) "... if parents did not accept (our choice) since parents always perceive things more clearly, so perhaps we have to say good-bye".

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1950, married at 26, vocational education) "When I was 26, I got married. At that time my family did not agree because our ages were not compatible. But we maintained our decision, I told my family that if they did not agree, I would not marry anyone else after, so they had to accept".

Compared with the traditional marriage pattern, we observe a tendency in these groups toward increasing the adult child's involvement in his or her marriage. Nevertheless, the traditional model in which parents chose and decided is still rather common for people married in Hanoi between 1965 and 1985.

The approval of the work place administration, the co quan, is also required for the marriage to take place. At this level, the political boundaries must be respected in order to obtain this compulsory civil approval. However, our data show that the urban Vietnamese family of the north integrated this political criterion into its own and that through the traditional mechanisms of the mate selection process guided their children towards good potential spouses. The integration of political values in mate choice was not only essential to the maintenance of the family social status but also to the social and professional position of their children. In other words, the parents had to deal with both their desires and the ones of the political community in order to insures a good marriage and a good future social life for their offspring.

(A woman born in the Nghe An province in 1949, married at 27, university education) "I built a family when I was 26 years old, it was considered late at that time. The reason why I married so late is that I was in love with a soldier for four years but we could not marry because my family is traditional and believed my family was not compatible with our family: in my family both my father and mother worked for the government. His father was a professor and his mother was just a housewife. My family strongly disagreed since we did not share the same family background, and if I married him it would not facilitate my social ascension".
(A woman born in Hanoi in 1945, married at 22, college education) "In our time, when we wished to build a family we had many dreams but the limitations were numerous because of the circumstances of that period. At first I was in love with someone from a capitalist family, my family told me that it was impossible to marry him. At that time the family background was very important. Because he was from a capitalist family access to university was very difficult for him, and if he can study, it is only in certain fields such as forestry or agriculture which did not have much social prestige ... A similar story happened to my husband's older brother. First he loved a very beautiful girl but she is from a capitalist family so his family did not agree. Then someone introduced him to a very ugly girl but her family had an excellent revolutionary history ... so his family agreed immediately. Once one is a government cadre so the potential spouse's family backgrounds is very important."

The most important criterion in mate choice during this period was that the future spouse, man or woman, should work for the government (be a cán bộ trong biên chế, a permanent government cadre) and not in the private sector. This criterion is mentioned by all the participants who discussed criteria for mate selection.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1957, married at 23, secondary education) "The ideal husband at that time, first the two families should be close to one another, second he should have a stable job, third, he must be a government cadre, in his family no one should be in the private business. It was like this at that time. If someone in his family is involved in private business we disliked them because these families had one foot in the public sector and one foot in the private one. All the members of the family must be working for the government: my family and many others could only accept these families."

(A man born in China in 1945, married at 32, vocational education) "It was an absolute requirement for the people of my time to choose someone who had a stable job in order to maintain the family. Everyone looks for a government cadre with a permanent position."

Working for the government did not only guarantee economic stability since the work place (the co quan) provided housing and food, but also meant having a good family background since the lý lịch had been accepted. It was thus a guarantee of family compatibility and did not raise any difficulties from the co quan from whom approval was needed.

However, respecting the political boundaries did not mean respecting all family compatibility criteria. Families of urban origins could marry a child to a rural family; families should share the same educational level.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1957, married at 26, college education) "I married when I was 26, in 1983. At that time it was late. But because I worked in the peripheral area of Hanoi I did not dare marrying someone from there."

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1957, married at 23, secondary education) "... about the family, both families should be government cadres, the ages of the parents of both sides must be the same so the relationship can be good. I am the eldest child of my family and if I want to marry someone who is the youngest in his family, my parents would not agree."

The major role of the family is thus to be the guardian of compatibility as defined by the new State as well as by traditional marriage pattern.

Although family compatibility was achieved mostly through parental involvement, the data show that the State participated directly in achieving this goal through the co quan. When employed by the government, the approval of the co quan is required in the process; selecting a mate without respecting the political boundaries could influence one's aspirations for political involvement in the party. In some cases it may affect one's opportunities for professional promotion. The marriage approval can also be delayed or refused.

(A woman born in Thai Binh province in 1959, married at 23, vocational education) "My co quan was very strict, if we wanted to start dating someone, we must inform the organization and cadres department of my co quan. If the organisation gives permission only then we can start dating and then marry."

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1939, married at 33, vocational education) "My lover and I wished to marry, my family agreed but at that time the co quan played the most important role for the final decision because until the two co quan (the one of each person) give permission we cannot marry ... We loved each other for four years before we could marry. He is from the South so the organisation must investigate his post to make sure he did not already have a family in the South. Overall it was very complicated. At that time, everyone who wanted to start dating must go through the co quan. If the lý lịch had anything unclear then it was difficult."

In the midst of these social requirements, individuals express very personal preferences. Physical and psychological preferences figure among the important criteria.

(A woman born in Thai Binh province in 1959, married at 23, vocational education) "... the ideal (husband) should be five years older than I, he should be government cadre and his family should work for the government because my family is government cadre. Concerning physical appearance he should be tall and handsome."
stable job in the government. The achievement of professional stability in the government is a sine qua non criterion for marriage for both spouses. As we explained earlier it represents a crucial criterion for family and individual compatibility. However, it is also what determines timing of marriage in one’s life. This norm leads to a late age at marriage since the correct timing does not depend on age but on economic independence from the family.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1960, married at 24, college education) "I thought that the ideal age at marriage is difficult to pinpoint, but we must have a stable job, it is only then that we can build a happy family".

If the child has reached this condition but postpones marriage, the family might interfere to force the child to marry.

(A man born in Ha Tay province in 1953, married at 28, university education) "I am the oldest of my family, when I was 28 and still single, my parents were very worried. They wanted to have grand children. So if they had not forced me, I may have delayed more. Since my parents were not healthy, they needed me to marry".

One third of the sub-sample of people married between 1965 and 1985 were born in Hanoi. These people were also the most educated ones. For them, family involvement in the process of mate selection was more intense than for the people with rural origins and lower educational levels. For the latter, the work place played the major role since their families often lived far away in the countryside.

(A woman born in Thai Binh province in 1959, married at 23, vocational education) "My family lived far away so they were not involved in my marriage. In my case, the important in my life is my work place, there was the organisation, the union and my self. My life was my work place".

From a birth cohort perspective, the data show differences between the people born in the 1940s and the ones born in the 1950s. The participants born before 1950 lived their childhoods during the promising period of socialism and came into the marriage market at the beginning of the American war. Many of them had to postpone their marriage, and their opportunities to meet potential spouses were limited since most men were at war and women stayed with their families. As a result, marriage for this group is most likely to be delayed.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1939, married at 33, vocational education) "My case is different since I married when I was 36 years old (sic). It was the time of the American war, first I was in love with someone but he died on the battlefield, I only know about his death in 1971 then in 1972 I built my family. At that time I was already 36 (sic)".

In order to be a good marriage candidate, one must have achieved some important steps in his or her life course. Both men and women should have completed their secondary school or university education and should have a

The tremendous importance of the family and the work place (co quan) in marriage explains why meeting places were confined to social spaces.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1960, married at 24, college education) "My parents were very traditional, they did not gave us occasions to meet other young people for example to participate in birthday parties and festivals. So I had no chance to make friends".

(A woman born in Thai Binh province, in 1959, married 23, vocational education) "We worked at the co quan and met each other there and we started dating. I only paid attention to the people working for the government, not the ones who worked in the private sector".

One condition for a good match is that the wife should be a few years younger than her husband (4 or 5 years is the most common age difference mentioned in our data). This condition is widely mentioned by people no matter of their educational level or their rural or urban origin. The participants of our group interviews justified this preference in various ways. The age difference maintains the hierarchy in the couple, the man being the leader and the protector of the wife and children. On the other hand, it is believed that women mentioned that they wish their husband to be like an older brother who will guide, protect and pamper them. Men wish their wife to be obedient and well behaved. This desired relationship is obviously inherited from the traditional norms. No age difference is perceived as a threat to the harmony and stability of the family.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1960, married at 24, college education) "About the age difference, I thought that the husband must be older than his wife for 4 to 5 years. This way he is more mature and the women will respect him as an older brother".

(A woman born in Vinh Phu province in 1958, married at 26, college education) "... then I thought that the husband must be older than me, so I will respect him more and he will pamper me. If we are the same age, it is not convenient".

(A woman born in Ninh Binh province in 1946, married at 34 vocational education) "I thought (at that time) that the best age difference was between 5 and 6 years, because the husband is like a big brother who will take care of the family. If we marry someone of the same age, so according to the saying 'cả mẹ mỗi lúa' (we cannot stand each other and will quarrel all the time)".

In order to be a good marriage candidate, one must have achieved some important steps in his or her life course. Both men and women should have completed their secondary school or university education and should have a

(A man born in Hai Hung province in 1957, married at 25, secondary education) "In my opinion the ideal wife first must be a healthy woman second comes the physical appearance, third the personality".
For this generation, the difference between desires and reality is the greatest both in terms of timing and mate selection, as shown by the life of one participant.

(A woman born in Ha Tay province in 1947, married at 25, secondary education) "When I was young, 17-18, I dreamt to have a husband 1 or 2 years older than me, equal in physical appearance with me and with the same or higher educational level. I should be the only one he loves. When I was 17, I joined as young volunteer for the war. In my division we only had women, so the circumstances for meeting men were very difficult. All my old friends were in the army... the other women of my division and I often talked about our dreams and criteria (for the ideal husband) which were very simple: the person did not have to be a member of the party. Later, I had a job at the Ministry of Interior where a high social position and morality were the norms prevailing for the people working there. If we loved someone we had to advise the co quan for approval. My future husband came to my family to introduce himself and his co quan talked to my co quan. But we had not dated yet, we simply had been presented. I thought that everything had been arranged. At that time if anyone who wished to marry someone from my Ministry the co quan had to investigate his family background (lý lich). In my case his co quan showed that he was a party member, even a leader of a party unit, so it was not necessary to make any inquiry about his past, they simply agreed. They believed that I was old for a single woman, so they wanted to match us together. They (probably, a co quan member) were from the same village as my husband (and wanted to help him marry). I thought that he was a party member and 10 years older than I, so I accepted. On the day we went to register our marriage, I found out that he was 20 years older than I, but still did not know that he was already married (to another woman). At that time, I thought that I was old (to find a husband), my family had agreed, so I decided to marry and finish with all this, to have a husband. After I realised that I made a big mistake, I believed in my co quan, I thought he was a party member and that his family background was good (lý lich trong sach). I did not suspect but it was no guarantee at all, there was no happiness, nothing. Then I thought again and again about everything and I suspected everyone. I thought the organisation mediocre, I trusted the organisation, I trusted my friends who introduced me to him, so I agreed. When I was young, I was a very romantic girl of Hanoi, but I had an unhappy life, I want my daughter to be happy, not to suffer like me".

The rationale behind the norm for the timing of marriage could be countered by the context. The preferences for a mate were countered by the complicated sets of requirements imposed by the family and the State.

On the other hand, the generation born during the 1950s reached the marriage market after the war and benefited from a more stable socio-political context. Their meeting possibilities of meeting a spouse were greater and it was in some ways easier to take into consideration family and political expectations as well as personal preferences. However these two generations endured considerable pressures from the complex requirements of the political community and the family. Dealing with these pressures and fulfilling one's personal preferences was rather difficult. Overall, even if this group includes people born over a twenty year period, the pattern and attitudes observed are fairly homogeneous: the effect of the period in which they married seems to have had a strong normative effect both on their behaviour and preferences.

6.3 Marriage during the renovation: 1987-1992

The sub-sample of people married after 1986 is much more homogeneous in terms of individual characteristics than the previous group: two-thirds of them are born in Hanoi and for the ones born outside the city, the migration to the city took place several years before they married. They all married between 1987 and 1992. However, the norms and attitudes toward marriage are less homogeneous than for the older cohorts: the marriage pattern and preference show different tendencies.

6.4 Child's choice and parents' approval

The shifting pattern already observed with the previous generation from one in which the parents introduce the potential spouse to the young adult to one in which the young adult introduces a potential spouse to the parents is now completed. All the people from the younger groups selected their spouse themselves. In spite of this freedom of choice, parental approval is central to the process, although it has a different meaning among the people interviewed. In general, parents do not oppose their children's choice.

(A man born in Hanoi in 1967, married at 24, secondary education) "For every one when you have found the good person, so you must introduce him or her to your parents brothers and sisters and family. Naturally, parents do not prevent you to marry".

(A man born in Hanoi in 1963, married at 28, secondary education) "In my case I decided everything myself, I simply informed my parents. Of course I must present her to my parents. For me, consulting parents is only to know their opinion, but I am the one who really make the decision. My parents are easy going, they did not oppose at all".

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1963, married at 24, university education) "I thought that when we are about to marry, we have to pay attention to the opinion of the family. I agree with our friend who just spoke. When we are in love, we often do not see things clearly, so it is easy to make mistakes ... Then the opinion of the family is very important".
In case of parents' refusal, a cleavage between men and women appears: women want to obtain their parents' approval through negotiation and persuasion before they marry, while men can marry even if their parents do not support their choice. In spite of this evolution between the two groups, parents are still at the center of the process: official presentation to both sets of parents is key element as well as parents' approval.

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1963, married at 23, university education) "If two people wish to marry, they decide themselves. But before they must inform their parents. If something leaves the parents' unsatisfied, then they must persuade them".

(A man born in Vinh Phu province in 1967, married at 24, secondary education) "I had to live independently since I was young. I do respect my parents but because they live in the countryside, asking for their opinion has only a ritual meaning. If my parents would have prevented me from marrying to my wife, I would have married her anyway".

As in the previous group, parents opposition is raised because the child's choice does not respect the rules of family compatibility. However, compatibility for this group is mainly inherited from the traditional pattern; the political factor no longer has influence. One important factor reemerging is the emphasis put on the economic status of the other family. This aspect is more salient for the groups with a university education: for them, pressure from the parents to respect family compatibility is much stronger.

(A man born in Tanh Ha province in 1967, married at 23, university education) "In my case when I loved my wife my parents did not agree because ours families were not compatible. My parents wanted me to marry someone who had a high educational level... I loved her during five years, but my mother still opposed our marriage. At that time, I was studying in Russia, my mother even came there to interfere into our relationship during one year. My lover was not from Hanoi. My parents thought that because I am from Hanoi and that I studied abroad, so we must select my future wife very carefully. I was convinced I was going to live with her for the rest of my life, but not with my parents, so I decided to marry her".

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1945, married at 22, college education, talking about her daughter) "I think the young people have more freedom than before. I already have a son-in-law. Although he studied with my daughter in Russia, his family is not from Hanoi and is not intellectual as ours. My husband is older so he is more traditional. At the beginning, he did not agree because he thought his family was not compatible with ours. I had to negotiate for a long time to convince him and finally he accepted... I think that nowadays because our society has changed a lot, there is much more freedom in marriage, there are less constraints and the political matter and the family background do have as much importance as before".

Although parents might oppose their child's choice because of a lack of family compatibility, for most young people, the family background of their future spouse is not a dominant criterion.

(A man born in Ha Tay in 1958, married at 32, university education) "I do not pay attention to the family of my wife. Once you are in love you are only concerned about the person herself, you want to know if she is suitable for you or not. If her family is not rich, it is no problem. If you choose a wife from a rich family and that you rely upon them, perhaps in the future, your wife will not respect you".

The role of co quan has nearly disappeared from the process. It remains important only for certain people such as the military or people working for the Ministry of Interior. For the majority, it is a purely administrative formality, since government workers still must obtain a written authorisation from their workplace to marry.

Friends are now very important in the process. They somehow replace the parents and the co quan: they act as intermediaries by identifying potential spouses and introduce them to their friends wishing to find a mate. When making the final choice of one's future spouse, friends are consulted. Although the attention given to friend's opinions varies from being the most important one to being accessory, the necessity of seeking advice from peers is mentioned by nearly all participants.

(A man born in Vinh Phu province in 1967, married at 24, secondary education) "In consulting, what had the most value for me, was the opinions of two good friends. There are many things you cannot tell to your parents or brothers and sisters, but you can tell everything to your friends".

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1969, married at 21, vocational education) "I thought that the opinion of my family and the one of friends has the same weight".

Since people choose their mate themselves, the family and the work place are not the major meeting places any longer. In fact, places and opportunities to meet potential spouses are much wider than before. Social activities outside the kinship and co quan network are developing. Before the mid 1980s meeting was only possible in places where social interactions were submitted to control; nowadays, meeting places are numerous, open and escape parental supervision.

(A woman, born in Hanoi in 1968, married at 24, secondary education) "I think that in our time we meet each other mostly through our friends... I think that there are many advantages in meeting someone through friends. For example, the husband of my friend already knew well my future husband, while his wife knew me. This way we did not lose
Age difference is still mentioned by most people in this group, but it is no longer a compulsory criterion. In fact the emphasis rather than being on individual criteria is put on the desired relationship with the future spouse. Unlike the older generation, the desired relationship is not always the "elder brother younger sister" type. Many differences characterise the younger generations. First, men are split into two group: the ones hoping for a relationship in which the wife is confined to the domestic sphere and in which they are responsible for the social and financial aspects. The other group prefers a more egalitarian conjugal union: their wife must be intelligent and the spouses must be able to share.

(A man, born in Thai Lan in 1954, married at 33, university education) "... for me the ideal wife should fulfill the following criteria: first she should be the person who knows well about family matters, such as taking care of her husband and children. This means that she should pay attention to his work, his health is feelings. She should be there for her husband for everything, not only for cooking. The wife must be a friend for her husband".

(A man, born in Thanh Hoa province, in 1967 married at 23, university education) "In my opinion, to choose a wife, the most important is femininity expressed in her gentleness, she must be careful for the family, her husband and children. It is the first criterion. The second one is beauty. It is very important. Concerning her profession, in my own opinion, it is not necessary that she has high education. If she has it, it is welcomed, but it is not necessary. Mainly, she has to know how to take care of the family, so the husband can concentrate on his work. She can have a job to contribute to the family income but it may be any job, like sewing".

(A man, born in Hanoi in 1961, married at 28, University education) "In my opinion, in the ideal couple the spouse must respect each other. The wife listens to the husband and the husband listens to the wife. There is no imposition of the male (patriarchy). Both have responsibilities to take care of children. Then both spouses must have solidarity to maintain the family economically".

Half the men wanted a traditional division of labor in the couple and the other half, wanted a more egalitarian division. However for women, most of them wished for an egalitarian relationship. Some women emphasised the need to be independent economically before marrying.

(A woman, born in Hanoi in 1964, married at 25, vocational education) "In my opinion, for a couple to live together, first they must understand each other, second they must have a stable job... other people may not like for women to go to work, they want them to be housewife. Nowadays men and women are equal. In the society they work together. Before men were the leaders of the family but now many women are better leaders than men".
(A woman, born in Hanoi in 1960, married at 30, university education) "For example if someone is 22 but is still studying she should not marry at that time. She must finish her studies before and wait to find a stable job, so she will not be dependent. If the woman is dependent economically, when she enters family life it will be more difficult for her. If she has a stable job she is more active and will not be spat by her husband".

(A woman, born in Hanoi in 1969, Married at 21, vocational school) "According to me, in order to marry both persons should be ready. The man will be the bread winner, so he must be mature enough to support economically his family. For women, the most important is to be ready to take care of the family and to be able to assume the responsibility of being mother".

Just as for the first group, marriage can occur when economic independence is reached. Ideally, one should thus have achieved professional stability and be ready to be economically autonomous. However, it is no longer necessary that the future spouse work for the government. The private sector is now acceptable and could even be more valued since salaries in the private sector may be higher than in the public one. It is no longer compulsory that both spouse have achieved work stability before marrying. One job is sufficient as long as the other one is on his or her way to obtaining a permanent job. Nowadays, one source of income may be enough for a family whereas before, for the vast majority of urban people, survival of a family required at least two incomes in the public sector. This does not mean that working for the government is completely excluded. For people who have a university education, some positions in the government offer particularly interesting benefits and a respectable revenue.

(A man born in Hanoi in 1969, married at 21, secondary education) "... the man must be the leader so it is not necessary that his wife has a revenue. It is better if the woman has a job but in the case she does not, it is OK".

(A man born in Hanoi in 1958, married at 30, secondary education) "In my opinion both the husband and the wife should have a stable job. If the family economy is stable it brings happiness to the family".

As a result of the increased freedom that children enjoy and of the higher economic potential of some families, some participants suggest that early marriage is more common than before, but marrying at young ages before attaining social stability is neither encouraged nor well perceived. Norm for age at marriage seem to have evolved over the two periods under study: for the birth cohorts of the 1940s and the 1950s late marriage was tolerated and possible because of the many perturbations brought by the war and the precarious economic situations of many families. As a result, late age at marriage was socially acceptable. However, since the renovation, the city of Hanoi is more prosperous and the tolerance for very late marriage-especially for women-has diminished. For the last few decades, the social norms may have returned to an earlier pattern. However the push factor for earlier age at marriage might be countered by longer studies and more so by a severe housing shortage.

Housing is mentioned by the participants as a salient problem for young couples, which can postpone marriage. Since the 1960s housing has been a problem in Hanoi both in terms of availability and high density. In 1989 one third of the housing units had less than 4m² per person and two thirds less than 6m² (Kết Quả Điều Tra Mẫu Nhà ở 1990). Whereas before a government job was a way to obtain a housing unit, nowadays accommodation provided by the State is hardly possible to obtain since there is an acute housing shortage in Hanoi. Besides, State housing has lowered in social value now given that private building is allowed.

(A man born in Vinh Phu province in 1967, married at 24, secondary education) "About the housing problem, for people who have family in Hanoi, it is no problem. But for many young people from the provinces, the first criteria for them is to look for a spouse is housing".

(A woman born in Hanoi in 1962, married at 27, university education) "To have a house is not necessary because nowadays in Vietnam to have a house is very difficult. If someone has one it is OK. But if he does not, so he cannot wait (to marry)".

The marriage transition now taking place in urban Vietnam modifies the whole process of entry into the first union. First, the opportunities and ways to meet potential spouses expanded and the presentation by a third party is no longer compulsory. Second, young adults initiate the process; the child introduces a potential mate to their family and not vice versa. Parents' approval is crucial for the majority although some cases of opposition have been documented. The criteria for mate choice are more heterogeneous; for men the physical criteria dominate whereas for women social integration of their husband is a priority. That one's spouse be able to adapt to the rapidly evolving context is very important for most of them. However, the emphasis is not on the way to describe the ideal partner but rather the ideal couple. The data has shown preferences for a traditional model and a more egalitarian one from both men and women. The younger generations interviewed often relate the changes in marriage to the opening of the country to the market economy.

(A man born in Thanh Hoa province in 1960, married at 30, University education) "Love in marriage is important, love must come from oneself. Before people waited for an arrangement (from the family) or from the organisation... before, 5 or 7 years ago because of the subsidised system, everyone was constrained by many obligations..."
Nowadays our time is open, everything is open, people are free so we have more contacts, and people communicate more. Marriage is more democratic.

The ambiguity found over certain preferences suggest that the people married shortly after the renovation are still "making" the marriage transition. They are at the intersection of the traditional, the socialist and the modern model of marriage. These generations spent all their childhood and adolescence under the socialist planned economy period and entered the marriage market right after the renovation. The influence of the socialist economy time is clearly expressed by some women who said that the best situation is that one spouse work for the government and the other for the private sector.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

Social practices concerning the selection of a spouse during two periods of Vietnam's history have been documented in our paper. The data collected from people who were married between 1965 and 1985 indicate how a superposition of forces acting upon marriage candidates has shaped the observed pattern. In spite of intense State involvement in mate choice, the persistence of traditional norms in the process reveals the strength of the traditional values. This observation suggests that the socialist ideology promoting marriage as a personal choice between two consenting individuals has not penetrated the social norms in Hanoi. Although the inhabitants of Hanoi have been particularly exposed to the promoted ideology, families continued to reproduce many cultural schemes pertaining to the pre-socialist era. This finding gives a different picture than the one sketched for urban China in the literature. The changes in the Chinese family—including marriage changes—were mostly stimulated by strong State intervention at different levels (M. Wolf 1985; A. Wolf 1986). In contrast, Vietnamese traditional values survived the socialists one ather than competing, the two cohabited until the reforms of 1986, which favored the expression of traditional ways. Trying to separate the family and the State's influence on spouse selection appears as an unfruitful enterprise since the two have been closely intertwined, as shown by the results.

The maintenance of some aspects of the traditional model during the socialist era together with the withdrawal of the State in marriage after the renovation, unsurprisingly led to a new marriage pattern. For the younger generations who married in the years following the renovation, the entanglement of the traditional, the socialist and of a new or modern model contributes in describing the contemporary Vietnamese marriage pattern. Peltzer in discussing gender relations in urban Vietnam since renovation stated that: "In contemporary Vietnam, gender relations, like the rest of Doi moi's renovated edifice, are a postmodern mixture stretching from pre-Confucian days to the recent legacy of a nation split between the socialist and the capitalist worlds". (Peltzer 1993: 332). The ambiguity found in the interviews of the younger generations perhaps reflects the confusion foreseen by this author. First, contemporary intergenerational relations appear ambivalent for the young adults who married around 1990, they proudly state their independence in choosing their spouse but must consult friends and speak highly of their parents' ability to give them sound advice. Parents' approval remains for the majority a pre-requisite to marriage. Second, the data suggest a rather puzzling orientation of gender roles in the conjugal unit. For men and women, we have documented preferences going from a clear separation of gender role between the domestic and the social spheres to a very egalitarian one. Further investigations are needed to explore these questions in contemporary Vietnam. The confusion over gender and intergenerational relations renders difficult the description of the new pattern. However, needless to say that a marriage transition has definitely occurred in Hanoi, even though it is probably no yet completed. If it probably started some 60 or 70 years ago, much of the traditional pattern prevailed until late this century with many young adults having their parents looking for potential spouses for them. Most of the changes observed appeared with the generations married around 1990 and born in the late fifties and early sixties. The strong period effect uncovered by our data suggests an association with the economic and political reforms, although the process must obviously be put into a broader perspective and a longer time frame.

One major finding is the centrality of the family in the process leading to marriage for both periods observed in the data. This observation is consistent with other research done on this topic for East and Southeast Asia. Taiwan, which has achieved an incomparable degree of economic and social development compared with Vietnam, also shows the continuity of the parental generation's role (Thornton, Chang and Lin 1994). The Vietnamese case confirms that the Asian family is far from evolving as the nuclearization theory of W. Goode had predicted in the 1960s (Goode 1963). This finding also corroborates Hirschman and Loi's conclusion on the importance of family ties in Vietnam (Hirschman and Loi 1994). The important role of friends in our data documents the development of extra kinship relations for the younger generations.

For many other countries in the continent, a nuptiality transition took place at the onset of the fertility transition (Rele and Alam 1993). So far, the sources available for Vietnam do not allow for a more in-depth analysis of the
demographic transition. A fertility survey done in 1994 should soon shed more light on nuptiality patterns in Vietnam. Nevertheless, our data offer hints in the understanding of the forces which might affect the timing of marriage. The rising age at marriage found in the 1988 DHS means a longer period of celibacy in urban Vietnam. Considering the growth of freedom of the young people with regards to their family, an increase in pre-marital sex is most likely to happen. Policy to promoting contraception for singles is yet non-existent in Vietnam since most births occur within legal unions. However, young women are most likely to suffer from unwanted pregnancies leading either to an abortion or an earlier marriage than desired. Banister (1993) shows a rise in age-specific fertility rates in 1988 compared with the 1978-1982 and 1983-1987 periods. This result may be due to increased sexual activity amongst young people before marriage or of an increase of sexual intimacy early in marriage (Rindfuss and Morgan 1983).

A second implication drawn from our data concerns the possibility that social differentiation created by the reforms may have loosened up the norms associated with timing of marriage for some segments of the population. Families having sufficient financial potential might be able to support their children after marriage so that the latter need not wait until professional stability has occurred in order to marry. On the other hand, the lower strata might be confronted with more difficulties in obtaining a stable job than before and suffer from the shortage of housing. The standard deviation for the average age at marriage would be due to reasons other than those concerning the generations married before the renovation. For the older generations, the influence of the war and the political differentiation would better explain the differences observed in timing, although economic stability of both spouses was crucial since counting on one's family was nearly impossible. Socio-economic differentiation probably now favours the emergence of traditional strategies for social ascension through alliances. Whereas marriage mostly had to protect the family status under socialism, it may serve to enhance it since the renovation. One of the participants surprised by the behaviour of the young generations says eloquently that: "In our time, the heart could beat without calculus. Today people count first and love after". As a result of the search for a high profile candidate, particularly by the highly educated, marriage might be delayed for a long period and for women, it may become impossible. Permanent celibacy might occur in urban Vietnam in the near future as it is now the case for the overseas Chinese communities of East and Southeast Asia (Leete 1994).

Nowadays, the growing economic power of some urban families may increase financial transfers between family members and thus contribute in maintaining the role of parents in marriage (Domingo and King 1992). The continuity of the parental role in marriage could thus not only be a cultural preference but also a result of new family dynamics in the economic sphere. On the same topic, Domingo and King argue for other Asian countries that the resource allocation within families has been "favorable for daughters as they are increasingly valued for their formation of alliances" (Domingo and King 1992: 107). In urban Vietnam, daughters work since the socialist policy enforced the employment of all urban citizens in order to increase production (Thrift and Forbes 1983). Education was also equally accessible for both sexes. However, Vietnam inherited the Confucian's son preference. But if traditionally the marriage of a son has preoccupied the parents much more than the marriage of a daughter, our data show that parents are equally involved in the marriage of their children. In urban areas, it is obvious that a daughter might have the capacity to support her parents as much as a son. The status of daughter might thus improve even further with the renovation. However, the freedom the young adults now enjoy may worry some parents about prenuptial pregnancies. Parents may encourage a daughter to marry younger than the norms for timing would prescribe to avoid the possibility of such an awkward situation. One participant clearly expressed this concern saying that she was lucky to have a son since those having daughters had to worry a lot.

The nuptiality pattern of urban Vietnam recalls the one documented by Hajnal for pre-industrial England (Hajnal 1982). At that time, the young people had to reach economic independence before marriage and had to be employed a few years in order to raise enough money before marriage. In Vietnam the norm for independence before marriage is very strong since the 1960s. Although it might be for different reasons over time, this pattern has an important effect on timing of marriage. However, marriage change is much more than timing. We believe that our qualitative approach has enabled us to uncover important changes in the process of getting married since 1965 in Hanoi. The bulk of analysis on the nuptiality determinants use individual characteristics to explain this behavior. These analyses have greatly contributed to the comprehension of the importance of some factors influencing age at marriage, such as education. However, a family perspective is crucial for the understanding of nuptiality change in Asia. Enough research on the Asian family has shown us the centrality of the family in decisions later affecting demographic behavior. Moreover, as McDonald stated, "nuptiality patterns form a subset of a society's marriage customs, presenting the readily observable and measurable aspects of marriage behavior". (McDonald 1985: 89). We believe that the study of entry into union in demography would benefit by integrating qualitative research into the well developed quantitative research on nuptiality. The comprehension of processes of evolving gender and intergenerational relations in such decisions as marriage
s certainly just as important as the knowledge of demographic trends and their determinants for the understanding of human reproduction.

Note

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2. "... Doi Moi was a comprehensive program that the party adopted in Sixth National Congress in December 1986, about the same time as Soviet perestroika. It survives as a search for ways to make Vietnam prosperous and strong yet socialist in a world lacking a functioning model save the ambiguous example of China. . . . The economics of do i moi have opened the way to new forms of ownership and management, including a resurgent private sector and market, decentralization of management, and expansion of economics ties with the non-socialist world. The politics of do i moi have encouraged initiative at all level of society and State, in an effort to mobilize support for continued reform and to shore up the legitimacy of the existing regime through greater openness and participation" (Turley 1993a: 1-2).

3. The findings show a different picture of marriage in urban Vietnam than M. Wolf (1985) has documented for urban China. She suggests that the family and the State were in conflict and that ideology successfully replaced traditional family values. Although the mechanisms to control matching of spouse put in place by the State in both China and Vietnam are similar, the success of the ideology in penetrating and replacing family values does not appear to have been very conclusive for urban Vietnam. This hypothesis emerging from the analysis of our data on marriages between 1965 and 1985 is confirmed by the results on marriage after the renovation.

4. The first national census, done in 1979, did not collect information on marital status.


7. In a qualitative survey on rural marriage done in 1994 (Khuu Thi Hong 1994), women married before 1954 reported that they had no right to take part in the selection of their future spouse. Many of them had never met their future husband before the wedding day. Evidence from this survey shows that traditional marriage was still the norm in the rural areas until the middle of the century.

8. One of the districts is peripheral (Nghia Do) and two are central (Ba Dinh and Dong Da). Our choice of districts covers three different geographical sectors of the city.

9. John Knodel (1993: 93) defines the control characteristic as "those common to all groups" and the break characteristic as "those that differentiate groups from each other".

10. The co quan is the work unit in the public sector. When working for the government, one automatically belong to a co quan. The co quan is also the political and social organisation. It distributes housing unit and coupons for food and clothes. Through the co quan one has access to public services such as health care.

11. The term ne nep qualifies a disciplined, well-behaved, and well-educated family.

12. In the Vietnamese system of person reference, one of the most common ways to designate oneself and the addressee is to use pronouns referring to a kinship relation. The conjugal relationship uses such pronouns: the wife refers to herself and her husband addresses his by em (younger sibling); the husband refers to himself and his wife addresses him by anh (older brother). Although Luong (1990) emphasises the use of minh for both spouses to address themselves and their partner, we found in our urban sample many examples of the importance of calling each other anh em as a justification to look for a partner with which this use of pronoun is possible. This finding suggests a male-oriented hierarchy in the relation between spouses, as mentioned by Luong, 1990. The non-use of the pronoun minh in Hanoi coincides with the observation made by Phan Thi Dac (1966).

13. The saying cd mé mê là literally means "fishes from the same group". It designates people from the same age, i.e., from the same rank. The participants often use it to express that they cannot get along with someone of their age since the relationship does not correspond to any hierarchical one.

14. Nearly 15 percent of the survey sample of women who had abortion or menstrual regulation did not have a child yet and 7 percent were single (Hieu, Stoekel, Van Tien 1993). Although these percentages are not high, it testifies to a need for contraception amongst young adults.

References


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