

The Changing Face of Shame: Relationships, Marriage and Globalisation in Contemporary Vietnam.

Based on Life Story-interviews in Contemporary Haiphong City, Vietnam.

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I would like to dedicate my thesis to my grandmother who has been a great inspiration to me, and one of the many reasons is that she would always travel to destinations few people had not even hear of.

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1.0 Introduction

In my dissertation, I will go through the process of designing and performing research in empirical sociology of religion in relation to my field of interest. My chosen field of enquiry is the topic of “shame” amongst a selected sample of the Vietnamese men and women who live in the city of Haiphong, since I find it very interesting as I have some experience from my former visits when working at an international hotel in Haiphong city for six months from January to July in 2010.

Through declarations, laws and propaganda, the government’s role for family behavior has been clearly specified and seen as a crucial factor of the country’s modernizing efforts (Jayakoda & Phuong, 2013:234). By investigating possible changes in the gender roles in contemporary Haiphong may show to what extent there has been an influence caused by its modernization associated with cultural globalization from a much larger access to Western media portraying new alternative models of gender relations on several levels; in the family, and in social and working relations. The exposure to outside media and the pressure of contemporary economics have been seen as eroding the traditional role in families in several nations, East Asia included (Dalton, Hac, Nghi, & Ong, 2002:7).

1.1 Problem formulation

I will investigate how the men and women in Haiphong describe and define a suitable marriage partner in terms of good behavior, responsibility, suitable “marriage material” to see if the expectations of a traditional Confucian hierarchal structure and function is still present, and/or popular in the family household and authorities in society. Since the family in Vietnam has been officially considered to be the core of the Vietnamese society (Drummond & Rydstrom, 2004:9), and the importance of a hierarchal well-managed family in the Confucian doctrine means peace and order in the whole country (Drummond & Rydstrom, 2004:8)

indicates that changes in gender roles in Vietnam can be revealed when concentrating on the family matters between parents and children, wife and husband and family in-laws. Since the Confucian hierarchy keeps the private and public spheres closely intertwined, and an individual's disgrace goes on to become the family's disgrace, looking at what is considered as shameful acts will create an image of how significant this religious culture is in contemporary Haiphong. Investigating what is characterized as a shameful act in the society of Haiphong will hopefully reveal if there is a change in the traditional Confucian (and paternalistic) hierarchy in the family as a result of the renovation; *Doi Moi*, as the government's aim to reduce the high number in poverty by changing the planned economy to a market economy to include the country in competing in the global economy by opening up to the outside world. In the first decade of the 21st century, the county has had a massive economic growth with considerable progresses in living standards and an even greater global integration (Jayakoda & Phuong, 2013:231), also, the female labor force participation in Vietnam has one of the highest rates in the world (Jayakoda & Phuong, 2013:243). And by opening up to the media from the outside world, especially from the West, may have created new images of romance, love, marriage, sexual intimacy and sexual relations (Phinney, 2008:652). Therefore, I will ask about their thoughts of being single, divorced and premarital- and extramarital sexual relations to see if cultural globalization has had an impact on these matters.

So, my main research question is:

How are broader changes in society (e.g. Western media exposure, changes in women's economic roles) impacting on gender relations in Haiphong, and in particular on intimate partner relationships, marriage and understandings of shame? What do the adult people in Haiphong think causes these changes, and what do I/outsideers think can be the cause of these changes? Hence my sub-questions are:

- What acts are considered to be shameful, and why?
- What acts of shame are to be the most damaging to the family, and why?
- What changes in intimate partner and marriage relationships do respondents report in their own lives and in society in the past two decades?
- What reasons do respondents give for these changes?
- How do these insider accounts relate to explanations given by scholars?

1.2 Personal Background and Motivation

My curiosity was caused by an underlying tension in a group of Vietnamese colleagues or friends when someone had said or done something which was “not good” became easier to recognize the longer I stayed there. But my observations of what actually was “not good” would not always be translated or outlined to me by the others, for reasons I would imagine could be related to my new membership in the group, and as cultural outsider. And often the answers to my questions in this context would be for example: “Of course it is hard for you to understand this....., but here in Vietnam, what Miss Binh did, is not good, but shameful”. Answers like these would often indicate an attitude of “no further questions”. Not necessarily because it was too difficult to understand if it could just have been more elaborated, but more that those questions curbed the twittering of gossip in most episodes. Other times, even though the presence of an awkward silence in a group of Vietnamese people would be very recognizable, it still felt uncomfortable to break the silence to ask questions about the issue at stake, which seemed so obvious to everyone else.

However, what I did notice was a command factor; was often that these incidents occurred when it was a matter of gender roles of what was “expected” to be done by the men and by the women. For example, it was not allowed for women to work night shifts at the hotel, and the respond to my “why” was “Because the women have to stay at home at night and rest, take care of the baby, and especially if the neighbors see her coming home late they will gossip about her reputation of where she might have been all night”. Silencing away from my feministic thoughts, I chose to only question the last comment regarding reputation, which was that “surely, having been to work would be a good alibi if someone was to question once absence”, another attitude of “no further questions” would trail. It was just not acceptable to be done otherwise, and questions on the matter seemed to be inexplicable.

My observations of the significance of authoritative relations at work and other social relations seemed to have its foundation in the importance of the family and patrilineal hierarchy. For example, a Vietnamese résumé would contain not only the person applying for the jobs’ name, but also the names of his/her parents and grandparents. And so, my curiosity of what these shameful acts could be, and its meaning in its context grew significantly.

On my return to Haiphong after four years, I noticed that almost all restaurants and cafes now had free WiFi, and definitely all the hotels, as opposed to my previous visits where the charge for access to internet cost ten to fifteen dollars a week. Also, on my return to Haiphong, I

noticed some considerable changes since my previous stay; the TV commercials and soap operas were more western in body gesticulation as for example hips moving such as belly dancing and salsa, and the brands of clothing were more westernized than earlier. And there were a lot more bars playing all kinds of music genres, unlike before where Vietnamese hits were the most popular ones. Several places they were serving a wider variety of alcohol. And the locals did not seem to care as much about what was going on behind the curtains in the windows of expats' bars where the foreigners went as opposed to earlier, which shows that the people in the centre of Haiphong city have been more accustomed to a more Western form of life.

1.3 Contributions

Contributions I'm hoping my study will have to this field of study is a contribution to the growing literature on the study of gender and family relations in the contemporary Vietnamese society, and the cultural and religious aspects of what is considered honorable and what is negatively defined in the public life. Also it will hopefully be useful to comparative studies of religious and social science in South-east- and/or East Asia. And last but not least, I hope to get a better understanding of how the Vietnamese operate their social positions and identities as male and female in the Vietnamese society so that the next time there are news, conflicts or gossip on the agenda, on a high or lower level of significance, I will be able to identify the issues at stake, and by reading my master thesis will share this knowledge with other Westerners researching Vietnamese culture and religion, or other cultural outsiders curiosity.

1.4 Definitions

1.4.1 "Shame"

When investigating the concept of *shame*, and writing in my second language, there should be a thorough definition of the word *shame* by referring to Sinclair (2001) *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary for Advanced Learners, 3rd edition*;

“Shame” is an uncomfortable feeling one gets when something wrong or embarrassing has been done by that person (or when someone close to that person has), also shame can be used as an expression to indicate that someone ought to feel shame for something they have said/done, or if somebody brings shame on a person will make other people lose their respect, and by saying something is a shame; is an expression of regret of it happening (Sinclair, 2001:1424).

1.4.2 Shame in Vietnam

In the Vietnamese Confucian culture, an individual’s shame goes on to become the family’s shame, which means that the family is considered more important than the individual (Webber, 2003:232).

If one is rumored of being unfilial (*bat hieu*) towards the family, it is one of the worst accusations, because filial piety and concern for one’s family are considered fundamental obligations in Vietnam (Soucy, 2006:124). The concept of filial piety (*hieu*) is a Confucian concept; that children are expected to be responsible and attached to their family which they are in great debt to, which involves deceased ancestors as well as parents (Soucy, 2006:124). An example of generating shame in this context might be a mother approaching her misbehaving child by referring to all the suffering she has endured for the child; as for example giving birth, and by doing so – creating a feeling of shame (Soucy, 2006:125).

As in other Asian countries, the concept of *face* is important to the Vietnamese, and can be illuminated roughly as a quality which reflects the dignity, prestige or reputation of a person, a group or even a company¹. According to Nhung (2014:223), “the *face* in Vietnamese is both an individual and a collective possession and a subjective value, conditionally dependent on social evaluation”. The Confucian-based concept of “face” in English originates from the literal translation of two Chinese characters; *mien/mianzi* and *lien/lian* (Mao 1994, cited in Nhyng, 2014:223). Goffman (1967)² took the Chinese concept by associating it with “a pattern” of verbal and non-verbal actions where someone expresses ones view of the situation, and thereby ones evaluation of the participants, and then he presented a number of collocations of the term “face” to include “have face”, “be in face” and “maintain face”, and argued that in the Anglo-American culture; to “lose face” would be the same as to be in

¹ Kwintessential (2014) *Vietnamese- Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette*:
<http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/vietnam.html>

² Cited in Pham Thi Hong Nhung (2014:223).

wrong face/out of face, while to “save face” would be to sustain from the impression of having “lost ones face”. Another proposal drawing from Goffman’s concept, is Brown and Levinson’s (1978, 1987, cited in Nhung 2014:223) model which is a model where the *face* is the center of the concept measured in politeness; positive or negative, where the *face* is something which has been emotionally invested, and can be lost, preserved or captivated, and must always be attended to in interaction, and that the substance of *face* may be different across cultures, but the people’s awareness of their self-image is still universal. In Vietnam, the shame of not being perceived as polite may harm ones image of being called *vô ý vô tú* which means moral insufficiency (Nhung, 2014:228).

In Vietnam, the two translatable words to the Chinese *mian/mein*, and *lien/lian* are the Vietnamese; *mặt* and *thể diện*; where *mặt* means the face, or top front of the body, and several other meanings depending on how you build the wordings to describe it, or use it in a sentence, while *thể diện* means, or represents a certain Vietnamese concept of *face*, which can be associated with an individual’s image in social evaluations, associated with a sense of shame (Nhung, 2014:225) or directly translated in my dictionary; mortifying. The Vietnamese tend to use *mất mặt* to describe a person’s “loss of face” and *mất thể diện* is more command to use as shameful in a group setting. It is important to bear in mind that the Vietnamese dialect and phrases can be very different from where you travel in the country. In Haiphong, *mất mặt* is a verbal expression of a person’s “loss of face” and *mất thể diện* is used when put into writing.

Nhung’s (2014:226-227) states that face loss incident corpus shows that the *face* is a very sensitive phenomenon, and that Vietnamese may have a feeling of *face loss* from trivial incidents to more serious happenings. And so, it can mean anything for feeling *mất mặt* (loss of face) for what people; friends, neighbours, co-workers or walk-byers, might think, even though it is not true, the *face* can, for example; be damaged by a person’s parents being informed publicly that their child was fined for driving on a red light which would bring shame on to the parents, or a feeling of *mất mặt* (loss of face) was also exemplified of a man being repeatedly phoned by his wife in front of his friends, because he feared they might think that he is not “the man” of the house, and his role as the husband is not respected since his wife is harassing on him on the phone, or a worker being spoken to by his boss in front of his staff which might harm his image as a responsible manager (Nhung 2014:227).

In Western politeness behaviour, the key-explanations have become the desire to be loved, supported and admired, and by having full freedom of doing what one wants, while the *face* in an Asian context is to be saved by the public judgement which is subjective and beyond the individual's control (Nhung, 2014:229).

1.4.3 Confucianism

When searching for which religions that can be found in Vietnam, sometimes Confucianism came up as a religion, or as part of an syncretic blend of religions, and other times as a teaching of influence that describe the position of an individual in Vietnamese society³. The founder of Confucianism, Master Kong; Confucius (also known as Ju Jiao in Chinese), who lived from 551 to 479 B.C., did actually not intend to form a new religion, but wished to make sure that an unspecified religion from the Zhou Dynasty would not dissolve but to be revived and interpreted⁴. The Confucian values and norms of behavior in basic human interactions and in primary social institutions starting from the individual and the family, which was focused on people having to act correctly which in turn, could reform and perfect a society, and all human relationships involved a set of defined roles and mutual obligations⁵. In my master thesis, I will use the meaning of Confucianism as part of a historical tradition in teachings of moral, conduct and ethic.

1.5 Related research

There is limited empirical research cited in the literature on Vietnam on attitudes towards the family and family relations (Dalton et. al, 2002:7).

The readings related to my field of interest are more linked to suppression and abuse; Sexual violence against Asian women (Lee & Law, 2001), impacts of illicit drug use (Webber, 2003) and induced abortions (Gammeltoft 2003) in the Vietnamese societies.

In particular, Gammeltofts' (2003) study is related to the northern Vietnamese aspect of performing a "shameful act" - induced abortion, in relation to religious beliefs, culture and

³ Kwintessential (2014). *Vietnamese- Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette*: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/vietnam.html>

⁴ Berling, A. J. (2015) *Confucianism*. In Asian Society – Worldwide Locations: <http://www.asiansociety.org/confucianism>

⁵ Berling, A. J. (2015) *Confucianism*. In Asian Society – Worldwide Locations: <http://www.asiansociety.org/confucianism>

family. What Gammeltoft (2003) points out, and is relevant to my research of “shame”, is that during Vietnam's troubled history, the loss of dear ones in wars and revolutionary causes are officially recognized and celebrated as heroes who sacrificed their lives for the collectivity (Malarney, 2001 cited in Gammeltoft, 2003:139), while other forms of suffering are not recognized seen in the public life (Gammeltoft, 2003:138).

Gammeltoft (2003:139) concluding remarks are that in contemporary Vietnam, induced abortion has become a conventionalized and institutionalized response to the problem of controlled fertility by the State, despite the moral disquiet existing in the past regarding the practice of abortion. Ritual practice enables youths to create a social world that allows for various interpretations of reality; ontologically as well as morally (Gammeltoft, 2003:139).

This social limitation of a discretely performed social fix of an abortion, while providing immediate social relief through ritual practice, there is still an unchanged larger cultural order which condemns unmarried pregnancy and masks the experience of sorrow when having to resort to abortion by unmarried women and men (Gammeltoft, 2003:139-140). Gammeltoft (2003) is seeking to investigate how the younger people use religious rituals to mediate between the conflicts of “old fashion”/traditional and “modernized” acts and behavior. The expectations from their parental generation of not having premarital sex and in the absence of good contraceptive supply is introduced to a “modernized” practice of easily available induced abortion, which is not related to their local culture. The exposure of Western media and culture that legalizes premarital sex (above a certain legal age of course), but the lack of practical means and social support to cope with these actions, which in turn results to pregnancy and easy access to induced abortion which causes psychological difficulties for these unmarried women and men because of their religious rooted beliefs about conception and parenthood, so they turn to religious rituals to bridge the gap trying to make their “wrong” deeds “right”. And by doing so Gammeltoft (2003) reveals both anthropological and sociological justification as she examines the different layers of religion, culture, modernity and individual meaning making.

Though these studies give an insight into how people culturally cope with feelings of guilt and shame in Vietnamese societies, they draw the concept of “shame” to the more extreme cases. My field of interest is also the minor aspects of “shame” in the everyday life with a main focus on gender roles in social relations, not only in the most extreme circumstances.

Bélanger (2004) is researching the family, gender, demographic change, reproductive health and youth in Vietnam (Drummond & Rydström 2004: 15). In her chapter *Single and Childless Women of Vietnam: Contesting and Negotiating Female Identity?* (2004:96), is based on her in-depth interviews conducted in the capital Hanoi and two vicinity villages in 1998. (Bélanger 2004:102). The unmarried women (*e chong*) who have passed the suitable marriageable age in Vietnam are considered to have failed to fulfil their essential function, and every woman's duty; to marry and provide sons for male descendants (Bélanger, 2004:96). Most of the Asian countries, unlike the European countries, have long been seen as a near-universal female marriage by demographers since almost all women in the age of 30 to 35 in the earlier generations were married (Bélanger, 2004:96). Her analysis from her data which was gathered from 1998, suggests that some women have lost their interest in marriage and biological motherhood, and how these women negotiate the social acceptability in a social context by not fulfilling their essential duties, and not necessarily, as some demographic literature suggests; that they were victims of a tight marriage market, nor were they "failed" to marry, as the public opinion had implied (Bélanger, 2004:97). And that many countries in East and Southeast Asia now have rates showing that women remaining single in their 30s indicate that near-universal marriages is no longer the norm throughout the region (Bélanger, 2004:97). In Vietnam, the women who reached their marriageable age around the time of the American War, believed in a "fate" of singlehood by devoting themselves to help their family and civil responsibilities, Bélanger (2004:97) is therefore focusing on women in the age of 26 to 39 since they were in their "primes" for marriage during the years of the renovation in Vietnam and also considering what this renewal may have had on these women's lives. Bélanger (2004) gives me a good insight into the early history up to today's visions of Vietnamese women and how they are now experiencing to be frowned upon by their surroundings for being single as opposed to other areas in Vietnamese history where choosing a life in lonesomeness was celebrated.

Jayakoda & Phung (2013) have studied quantitatively gender equality and father involvement in Vietnamese history, with a main focus on today's increased globalization and Western notions of the modern, involving the egalitarian views on household relationships may indicate a more involved father in Vietnam today (Jayakoda & Phung, 2013:230). Jayakoda & Phung (2013:237) also specifies that longitudinal data are very rare in Vietnam, and that empirical data that may specifically evaluate the extent of change or continuity are nonexistent. The 2592 respondents from their quantitative study were quite extensively

divided between 50 % of women and men, 50 % urban and rural, and 50 % resident in the south and north (Jayakoda & Phuong, 2013:238) and may not be as relevant in my study as I am only concentrating on one city in the north of Vietnam; Haiphong. However, their study questions whether the father/husband may or may not be more participating in the family household of raising children, and possibly be assisting in the daily chores in the future which is relevant in my study of possible changes in the gender roles caused by modernization. But if this concerns the society in Haiphong, is hard to say.

Phinney (2008) has also investigated modernized aspects after the *Doi Moi* and the Vietnamese governments' different campaigns of defining an ideal Vietnamese family after the renovation in the capital of Hanoi, through ethnographic research. However, Phinney's (2008) report was part of a National Institute of Health-founded study about love, marriage and HIV, revealing men's extramarital sexual relations and marital HIV risks in Hanoi. Though the metaphor, and title of their article; "Rice is essential but tiresome; You should get some noodles" is familiar and well-known for my informants in Haiphong; wife being the "rice" and local girlfriend being the "noodle", but I do not know to what extent it can be understood in the exact same perspective since dialect and context may be different, and/or perhaps seen as something to be more legal in a big city capital, I am suspicious on drawing this image into the same context as my informants', nor am I focusing on the HIV statistics.

Werner (2004) also has contributions to my study of looking at womanhood's relations in the Vietnamese family in the northern countryside, but Werner (2004:29) has a main focus on the relationship between the husbands' mother, or mother in-law and the daughter in-law, and investigates this by showing a popular Vietnamese movie showing scenes reflecting several ethical obstacles and questions to find out how the two different generations relate to it. Her chosen method in her study is inspiring as it gives an outsider a chance to watch a movie that is generated in a culture one does not know, which gives the outsider a great chance of asking what the movie was about without asking too personally, and to then compare between generations what their thoughts were to possibly reveal norms, dogmas, personal experience or, perhaps even witness a catharsis. Werner's (2004) study was published in 2004, therefore I would not presume that this movie is as popular in today's society or whether it sheds light on the same issues, nor did I have the resources to invite focus groups to a home cinema.

1.5 Structure

This master thesis contains five chapters. This first chapter consists of general information about my purpose for choosing to write this paper with an introduction, problem formulation and personal background and motivation, and the contributions I'm hoping my study will have to the field. Followed by a section that will clarify some definitions that will be essential to identify early in this reading, and a presentation of previous research related to my field of interest.

In the second chapter, I present the theoretical and contextual framework that is relevant and crucial to know before considering any possible changes in the society in contemporary Haiphong, starting with an introduction of the city Haiphong, then a timeline from early history and legends through the periods of war, up to present-day Vietnam, followed by an outline of the country's relation to modern times, religion, social hierarchy and gender roles.

In chapter three, consists of the methodological approach my thesis relies upon to carry out the survey. The ontological and epistemological assumptions, what I have considered as challenges and advantages for conducting fieldwork, research ethics, how I selected and recruited my informants followed by a brief introduction of their history background, and some field notes of my observations and encounters as a researcher in Haiphong.

Chapter four is where I will present and analyse my findings. I will highlight my informants' events, thoughts and opinions that I consider to be meaningful

In chapter five I will answer my research question and sub-questions in my conclusions, and propose any further relevant research questions.

2.0 Contextual/Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I develop my account of important concepts begun in 1.4 and 1.5 above, deepening my account of these concepts by locating them in their cultural and historical context.

2.1 Haiphong City

The city of Haiphong is located 102 Km. northeast of the capital Hanoi, and is known as the biggest port and industrial city in the northern delta of Vietnam, and the third largest city in the country, after Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, with its 1 907 705 citizens (in December 2011); 46.1 % living in urban areas and 53.9 in rural areas⁶. The city in itself does not attract many tourists compared to other cities, but many tourists travel through Haiphong on the way to Cat Ba Island with its white sand and blue beaches, or Halong Bay which has been on the list of UNESCO since 1994. Most of the foreigners located in Haiphong are working at international shipyards or as English teachers in public schools or private centers, which mostly tend to leisure within their own platforms, and at the expats' bars or other social gatherings arranged at international hotels. So even though Haiphong is the third largest city in Vietnam, not nearly as many tourists travel there for a longer stay compared to the two larger cities; Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh. There is minimal, if any, research done on the topics of possible changes in hierarchal and social relations in Haiphong city which makes it particularly interesting to investigate since the city is the third largest in its quantity of citizens in Vietnam, and has a divided percentage living in rural and urban areas. Also it does not resemble Ho Chi Minh or Hanoi as a destination to attract travelers from the outside world, which is significant since the people in Haiphong city does not seem to mix much with foreigners, especially not in the more rural areas. Which makes it interesting to investigate to which extent the society in Haiphong has been modernized.

⁶ Hai Phong Portal (20.08.2012) *Geography and Population*:
http://haiphong.gov.vn/Portal/Detail.aspx?Organization=UBNDTP_En&MenuID=7259&ContentID=30875

2.2 The History of Vietnam

The demographic, socioeconomic and historical contexts has had a powerful influence on the Vietnamese family life as the countries' social change have reconstructed virtually all aspects of the society (Jayakody & Phuong, 2013:231). A brief presentation of the history of Vietnam seems inevitable since it has had such a major impact on how it is today. Pieces reflecting historical legends and history can be found, and hopefully easily recognized after this knowledge, in everything from art, lyrics, poems, clothing, folklores, jokes, even signs on a package of Vietnamese cigarettes.

2.2.1 History and legend

According to the Vietnamese traditional legends, the country was created when King Lac Long Quan⁷ got married to immortal Chinese Princess Au Co who was descendent from the High Mountains, where she carried 100 eggs which hatched out to 100 sons, which created a nation that stretched from northern Indonesia to the southern China (Le, 2015). But the king and princess decided to get separated, since they thought their diverse background heritages would make them unhappy in the final end anyway, and so Princess Au Co took 50 of her sons back to her mountains, and King Lac Long Quan took the rest of the 50 sons and ruled the lowlands (Le, 2015). From King Lac Long Quans' 50 sons, his eldest; Hung Vuong turned out to be the founder of the first Vietnamese dynasty, and so to be the founder of the Vietnamese nation as he took over after the kings' death around 2879 B.C (Le, 2015). And from this legend, the country *Viet Nam* was united; *Viet* meaning the mountains in the north, and *Nam* the lowlands in the south which unified the country both culturally and geographically, but also symbolically as it is spelled in two words in Vietnamese (Le, 2015). The Hung Dynasty, named *Au Lac* was ruled by the legendary Hung kings until it was crushed by a Chinese General Trieu Da around 207 B.C. and named *Nam Viet* which is considered to be the end of the era of historical legend to go on to be the true beginning of written Vietnamese history (Filseth, 2012). Nam Viet was then conquered by the Chinese Han Dynasty, and ruled by China for a thousand years from around 111 B.C to roughly A.D. 939 when the Chinese Tang Dynasty was falling (Pelzer, 1992:77; Filseth, 2012) the legendary General Ngo Quyen was finally able to drive them out and established the first of the "Great Dynasties" of Viet Nam (Le, 2015). When Vietnam was under Chinese rule, they were introduced to several innovations to benefit the people within agricultural, education and

⁷ Also known as "Dragon Lord of Lac" or "Dragon Lord of the Seas".

techniques, but they were also forced to change their language, customs and culture into Chinese which led to frequent rebellions (Le, 2015), and one of the most famous are the Trung sisters who devoted their lives to lead the rebellion in 40 to 43 A.C (Nguyen 1987, cited in Bélanger, 2004:98) that would briefly free the Vietnamese from the Chinese for a period of three years. While under Chinese rule, the society was subjugated by a Confucian ideology which continued until the Late Le Dynasty from 1428 to 1788 as the Le Code (Jayakody & Phuong 2013:233) which is one of most important dynasties in Vietnamese history, including the Ly Dynasty (1009-1225) and the Tran Dynasty (1225-1400) were Confucianism was also significant (Le, 2015; Filseth, 2012). It was not only the northern countries Vietnam had to defend itself from, the southern kingdom Champa, known as today's Cambodia, was also a threat. The influence from Champa also brought the Buddhist religion to become more dominant in Vietnam as early as in the Early Le Dynasty (980-1009). During the 1600s, European missionaries and traders had made a strong impact which also brought Catholicism to Vietnam (Filseth, 2012). Buddhism was also up-and-going in this period, and even though the Confucian teachings were the most dominant in the circles of the crowned heads, the freedom to practice one's religion was allowed (Filseth, 2012).

2.2.2. French Colony

The Nguyen Dynasty (1792-1883) was the last of the dynasties which was gradually taken by the French (and made part of the Indochina colony) since Nguyen rulers became more and more suspicious, and even hostile in the end towards the political influence the missionaries had, made the French decide to finally take over the country (Le, 2015). Even though the Nguyen rulers were still leaders it was only symbolically since the French had the ultimate power, and under the French colony, the borders between today's Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam was geographically drawn (Filseth, 2012) Also a French inspired legislation was introduced, together with a new writing system that removed the former partly modified Chinese writing into using Roman alphabet; the *quoc ngu* which was basically Vietnamese written in Roman letters (Le, 2015; Filseth 2012); the significance of the Vietnamese cultural language will be more elaborated later in this thesis.

The country's independent movement ending the French colony started in the 1920s and the August Revolution in 1945, the north of Vietnam was ruled by its Communist leader; Ho Chi Minh as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) supported by the Chinese which was the first part of the country that finally declared its independence (Jayakody & Phuong,

2013:234). Even though the French tried to reclaim the country, the supporters of Ho Chi Minh in the Communist party; Viet Minh fought hard to keep them out. In 1950, both Mao in China and Stalin in the Soviet would recognize DRV, and China provided military assistance (Filseth, 2012). In 1954 there was a provisional division of the country where the Geneva Accord was signed and the country was divided into South- and North Vietnam (Jayakody & Phuong, 2013:234). The people in South Vietnam was very disappointed when Ho Chi Minh had to sign the agreement after hard pressure from his two allies Soviet and China, and after the agreement, several southern Vietnamese with Communistic views traveled to the north, and many Christians fled to the south (Filseth, 2012).

2.2.3 The Vietnam War

The Vietnam War between North- and South Vietnam lasted from 1957 until 1975, with USA's active participation supporting South Vietnam from 1963 until 1973⁸. The Vietnam War started as a rebellion against the South, and became a civil war between North Vietnam, with Ho Chi Minh from Hanoi; supported by the communistic Soviet Union and China, and South Vietnam with anti-Communistic Ngo Dinh Diem from Saigon (with a heavy support from the USA); supported by South Korean and Australian troops. USA withdrew from the war in 1973, and two years later the war ended after North Vietnam took over Saigon on the 30th of April in 1975. In 1976 the two states were united to The Socialistic Republic of Vietnam (Cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam) with a communistic rule⁹. 59 000 Americans and between two and three million Vietnamese lost their lives in the Vietnam War¹⁰. The fact that the great USA- super power that had never before lost a war, now had to withdraw from Vietnam has been highly debated over the last decades, and is how I first heard about the country of Vietnam.

2.2.4 The *Doi Moi*

The definition of *Doi moi* actually means renewal or renovation, and was introduced in Vietnam at the Sixth National Congress of the Communist Party in December 1986, which was a turning point in the Vietnamese economics, politics, and especially in the social sphere, as well as Vietnams relationship to the outside world (Phinney, 2008:650). Before the *Doi Moi*, Vietnam was one of the poorest countries in the world with 7 out of 10 Vietnamese

⁸ Hovde, K.O. (2013) Store norske leksikon. *Vietnamkrigen*: <http://snl.no/Vietnamkrigen>

⁹ Ryste, M.E. (2012) Store norske leksikon. *Vietnam, 9th version*: <http://snl.no/versionview/489868>

¹⁰ Hovde, K.O. (2013) Store norske leksikon. *Vietnamkrigen*: <http://snl.no/Vietnamkrigen>

living in poverty (Jayakoda & Phuong, 2013:235). The Communist Party decided to start changing its centrally planned economy towards a Western market economy with a socialist direction, with a main aim to compete in the global economy, but also the government intended to dismantle the agricultural-based collectives in favor of household production (Phinney, 2008:652). As a result of the *Doi Moi*- process; the state made reductions in the educational funds, and removed most of the welfare supports by eliminating most of the social safety nets such as care for the sick, childcare and health care, also the state started to reduce and close state factories and allowing expansions of import and export markets from private companies (Craig 2002, cited in Phinney, 2008:652). Vietnams development since the *Doi Moi* reform has been pronounced as “one of the most dramatic turnarounds in economic history” (Dollar & Litwack, 1998:1; cited in Jayakoda & Phuong, 2008:236). The Vietnamese Communist Party seemed to reduce its political tight grip on controlling the society, but retook control after the fall of Communistic leaders in China and the Soviet Union in 1989 and Vietnamese government has continued with its monopoly of power (Filseth. 2012). Today, the Vietnamese citizens have more freedom in their private discussions than in the past, the authorities continue to punish those who criticize the state openly, and for instance there are strict governmental policies to follow when teaching or writing on political topics¹¹. The Vietnamese government has had a major trouble with corruption as a result of a lack of transparency, accountability and media freedom, but also because of low pay for the government officials and several inadequate systems for holding officials accountable for their corrupt actions¹².

2.3 The Media in Vietnam

Integration from the outside world has transported an enormous amount of consumer items, especially technology; motorized vehicles, mobile phones, DVD-players and access to internet and foreign movies (Phinney, 2008:652). I find it noteworthy to say that from 2010 where very few had Facebook accounts (and the people who did was helped by me to establish them), today; practically all of my former Vietnamese colleagues in all the departments at the hotel I used to work; have Facebook accounts. Which is understandable

¹¹ Freedom House – Vietnam. (2014) *Vietnam – Freedom in the World 2014*:
<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/vietnam#.VUT04fntmko>

¹² Global Security (17.08.2014) *Vietnam – Corruption*:
<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/vietnam/corruption.htm>

reading that Vietnam had in 2014¹³ the third-highest number of internet users in Southeast Asia.

Popular Western and Chinese TV channels have also become accessible on the TV in every household in Haiphong in the last couple of years. Still, Vietnam has remained a one-party Communist state, and the authorities have followed the Chinese example of maintaining a tight grip on the social media. The internet freedom in Vietnam has been under restrictions and sensor by the Vietnamese Communist Party (CPV), military and other government organizations, and from September 2013 the Decree 72 went into effect which says that blogs and social websites such as Twitter and Facebook should not be used to share news articles, but only “to provide and exchange personal information”¹⁴. The main justification for the law is according to the authorities is to uphold “national security” and aimed at opposing online copyright violation¹⁵. There have been several arrests over the last years, for example on the 12th of February 2015, the people’s court in the southern province of Dong Nai sentenced three bloggers to 12 to 18 months in jail for using their Facebook accounts to “disseminate content that incited and led to anti-state demonstrations” by implying that the Vietnamese Communist party is too lax with China, which was a violation under criminal code 258 which penalizes “abusing democratic freedoms”¹⁶. Not only where they imprisoned, governmental authorities’ confiscated two motorbikes, mobile phones and cash from the bloggers which according to Reporters Without Borders reflect the tough grip the authorities have to prevent freedom of information and expression¹⁷. The head of the Reporters without Borders Asia-Pacific desk; Benjamin Ismail¹⁸ stated that “We strongly condemn the court’s verdict and call for the immediately release of these jailed citizen-journalists”. So even though the Vietnamese government has opened up to the outside world, there are still restrictions on what, and what not to inform and communicate through these technological devices.

¹³ Freedom House – Vietnam. (2014) *Vietnam – Freedom in the World 2014*: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/vietnam#.VUT04fntmko>

¹⁴ BBC News (01.09.2013) *Vietnam Internet Restrictions Come Into Effect*: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-23920541>

¹⁵ Galperin & Sutton (10.09.2013) In Electronic Frontier Foundation: *Defending Your Rights in the Digital World*: <https://www.eff.org/internet-censorship-bill-goes-effect>

¹⁶ Reporters Without Borders (12.02.2015): <https://en.rsf.org/vietnam-three-bloggers-get-jail-terms-for-17-02-2015,47588.html>

¹⁷ Reporters Without Borders (12.02.2015): <https://en.rsf.org/vietnam-three-bloggers-get-jail-terms-for-17-02-2015,47588.html>

¹⁸ Reporters Without Borders (12.02.2015): <https://en.rsf.org/vietnam-three-bloggers-get-jail-terms-for-17-02-2015,47588.html>

2.4 Religion

Buddhism (85 %) and Roman-Catholicism (6, 6 %) are the two major religions¹⁹ other religions are Protestantism, Muslim, Caodaism and HoaHao Buddhism²⁰. However, most Vietnamese who are not Christians tend to follow a syncretic blend of the “three teachings” (*tam giao*) – the teachings of the Buddha, Confucius and Lao Tze (Pelzer, 1992:77). This blend resembles Chinese popular religion which came to Vietnam when the country was under Chinese rule for a thousand years. Vietnam is geographically part of Southeast Asia, but many argue that the country is closer to East Asia due to its familiarity of Confucian culture which is more similar to China, South Korea and Taiwan (Belanger, Oanh, Jiane, Thuy & Thank 2003, cited in Jayakody & Phuong, 2013:232). Although, during the colonial period the French would write about observations of women having a higher status in the society compared to the Chinese women (Insun 1994, cited in Jayakody & Phuong, 2013:233).

The Vietnamese form of Buddhism is also influenced by Vietnamese traditions, such as religious rituals consisting of worshiping several divinities; Taoist deities, bodhisattvas and Buddhas, and the souls of local heroes or deceased ancestors (Gammeltoft, 2003:131). Spirit possession rituals, or *Len dong*, related with the Mother Goddess religion; *Dao Mao*, is one of the oldest traditions in Vietnam (Fjelstad & Hien, 2006:7). In every region in Vietnam, and amongst Vietnamese communities overseas, there are temples dedicated to mother goddesses and temples for spirit possession rituals (Fjelstad & Hien, 2006:7). Starting from the beginning of Vietnamese history by looking at the traditional historical materialism, nearly all historical (and several non-historical) discussions about Vietnamese women’s uniqueness starts with the assertion that before the introduction of hierarchical and patrilineal Confucian structure in Vietnam, the country had a matriarchal structure which remained in some of the minor and more significant customs in the society long after Confucianism had arrived (Drummond & Rydstrøm 2004:1-2). For example the Goddess symbolizing the country and nation; Mother *Au Co* who was said to have given birth to the 100 children, is the creator of the multiple ethnic groups of Vietnam, while according to Vietnamese myth, the goddess of the sun and the moon and the lady *Nu Oa* were active in the creation of the universe and its features of mountains, and rivers and a patched up heaven with stones (Thin, 2006:19-20). A mother goddess supervises over each one of the four realms, or “palaces” (*tu phu*); Heaven

¹⁹ Ryste, M.E. (2012) Store norske leksikon: <http://snl.no/.versionview/489868>

²⁰ Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs (17.03.2014): <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt.vietnam/nr050324092159/>

(*thien phu*), Earth (*dia phu*), Water (*thoai phu*), and Forest and Mountains (*nhac phu*) (Thin, 2006:20). The concept of these four elements has many connotations, and might be the reason why it fell so naturally together with the worldview of the Kinh peoples (the majority ethnic people in Vietnam) cosmology of the Yin (*am*) and Yang (*duong*) (Thin, 2006:21).

2.4.1 Cosmology

According to Taoist views of the evolution and structure of the cosmos, the elemental essence of the universe (the Tao) was evolved around the Yin and Yang (Thin, 2006:21). Men and women are constructed as what is said to be their bodily forces; the female and her body is associated with the forces of *am* (known as *yin* in Chinese) which is in harmony with categories as the earth, water, cold, moon, passivity, darkness, decrease, inwardness, responsiveness, inferiority, negativity, downwardness, right, the north, even numbers and centrifugal force (Rydstrøm, 2004:76). While the male body *duong* (known as *yang* in Chinese) is associated to the fire, heaven, sun, lightness, movement, stimulation, activity, superiority, upwards, increase, positivity, the left, the south, centripetal force and odd numbers - and together these two combine their forces and create harmony (*hoa thuan*) in both local and universal levels (Rydstrøm, 2004:76). In the Mother Goddess religion, the cosmological views about the heaven, earth and water, and mythical perceptions about these gods of these elements, and the oral history of the Kinh people about the Hung kings, all mix and combine to be this distinctive, localized religion in Vietnam (Thin, 2006:23).

The Mother Goddess religion reflects the strength of the nation's traditions, and is praised for helping historical kings, generals and princesses and others who have helped to defend and expand the nation, and by this historicization of the spirits of the Mother Goddess religion, narrates the distresses of daily life with national history, expressed through the needs and desires of worshipping and during the rituals of spirit possession (Thin, 2006:25).

In Vietnam, the understanding of happiness or *luck* is according to Soucy (2006) translated to *loc*, and this *loc* is essential to any ritual and ritual spaces, whether when practiced in communal houses as temples and shrines, or where saints, gods, goddesses and spirits are worshipped, or in people's homes in front of ancestral altars (Soucy, 2006:108). The term *loc* is a Sino-Vietnamese word which has been borrowed from the Chinese language meaning "a salary of a mandarin" (Soucy, 2006:109). The person who gives away *loc* cares about the recipient, and wishes happiness and fortune for him/her. Happiness, good fortune and material wealth are all regarded as one and the same in the Vietnamese context. Even rituals performed

as motivation for wealth have no negative association in the Vietnamese culture as they would do in the Western European culture if one were to go to church and pray for lots of money. In Vietnam, religion is regarded as a legitimate opportunity in the quest of material wealth (Soucy, 2006:116). In the Asian beliefs, as in Confucianism and Buddhism, differ from western religion like Christianity in the concept of congregations, and how often people are expected to appear in a church or a mosque, except for special ceremonies and festivals (Kelly & Graaf, 1997²¹). And other forms of individual participation instead of collective worshippers are frequently seen as the same, or even more important than a collective service, as for example meditation, prayer, or other rituals as worshipping the ancestors or living a spiritual life where membership has little, or no meaning at all (Norris & Inglehart, 2011:56).

For example before, during and after the Chinese New Year called *Tết* in Vietnamese, there are several traditional ceremonies and rituals performed, but these rituals are made by individuals and families not as a collective congregation, and has no connection to a specific temple or shrine, which is similar to Przeworsky & Teune's (1970)²² example of their observations of the New Year celebration or the commemoration of the feast of the dead in August performed in Japan.

Usually only women make offerings and allocate *loc*. Vietnamese men, on the other hand, never issues *loc* (Soucy, 2006:119). In Vietnam, the central role for a woman is to ensure a “happy family” by being the family care-giver, which starts from when the woman becomes married until she gets old and becomes a grandmother and great grandmother (Soucy, 2006:119). The woman is therefore “in charge” of the family's luck; in every aspect of the word since *loc* creates a strong link between happiness, luck and money. By performing her religious rituals - she will provide her family with *happiness*. The women in northern Vietnam are seeking supernatural help by attending pagodas (Buddhist temples) which is “natural” because they define themselves as delicate, gentle and needy of others. According to Vietnamese men, religious practice is viewed as a sign of weakness, and only practiced by women. Still, in Vietnam the term “weakness” as I have mentioned in the cosmological section; is considered by both women and men to be an attractive quality in a woman. To envisage a “strong” woman is negative - which in turn makes it difficult for a “strong” woman to find a marriage partner; “*as a woman, they need divine assistance because they are weak, and by doing so, they are showing that they are feminine and therefore more desirable*”

²¹ Cited in Norris, P. & Inglehart, R. (2011).

²² Cited in Norris, P & Inglehart, R. (2011:56).

(Soucy, 2006:121). The practice most associated with the term *loc* is, according to Soucy (2013), part of a larger process where the woman undergoes self-sacrifice for her family by performing these religious rituals, but also by giving birth (Soucy, 2006:123).

2.4.2 Renewal and Religion

Under Ho Chi Minh's communist ruling, the Vietnamese families were forced to abandon Confucian principles and other feudal vestiges since Ho Chi Minh thought the country needed to modernize in a different direction (Jayakoda & Phoung, 2013:234). Since the 1950s, the Vietnamese Communist Party condemned mediumship as part of the anti-superstition campaign (Norton, 2006:58) since they wanted to downplay the significance of old traditional religions by rather being in favor of atheism, which was the motto of Communism; to actively repress religion (Norris & Inglehart, 2011:60).

This traditional Vietnamese religion was also often frowned upon, especially by men and by the more established societies, by for example saying it is a woman's religion, it was also long condemned by the government, which is most probably because prior to the *Doi Moi*, the government might have thought that selling "false hope" to people living in one of the poorest nations in the world would be to waste money by paying such "social evils" (Fjelstad & Hien, 2006:7-8). As a result of the *Doi Moi*, the Vietnamese government downplayed the state controls on religious practices, and revitalization began of the spirit possessions rituals when the Vietnamese started to participate more openly in practices of public rituals, renovating places of worship and buying and selling religious objects (Fjelstad & Hien, 2006:7).

Even though the Vietnamese government has been applauded for its economic renewal, it is also criticized for committing several violations against human rights for prosecuting unofficially recognized Christian and Buddhist faith communities (Filseth, 2012). According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs²³; it says in the 2013 Constitution under Article 24 that the Socialist Republic of Vietnam clearly states that "everyone has the right to freedom of belief and religion; following or not following any religion", and that "all religions are equal before the law", but it is "prohibited to infringe on the freedom of belief and religion to others or to take an advantage of this freedom to violate State law and politics". On the other side, all the religious groups, and most individual ordained priests' members, are

²³ Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs (17.03.2014): <http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt.vietnam/nr050324092159/>

required to join a party-controlled supervising body and obtain permission for most of their activities, and for those who fail to register will be harassed or/and arrested²⁴.

2.5 The social hierarchy

The Vietnamese language contains such a significant part of the culture used in everyday life, and in the Vietnamese language, the pronoun is significant when addressing somebody, especially if the person addressed is older; polite articles are placed at the beginning and end of a reply (Soucy, 2006:124). There are also set roles between siblings. It is culturally inappropriate for a sibling to try to guidance an older sibling, especially if it is a sister talking to an older brother (Webber, 2003:234). It is not only in the Vietnamese language the social hierarchy between two individuals or in a group is noticeable. The gesticulations also reveal this social hierarchy which is part of the Vietnamese, and several other Asian nations, customs and etiquette²⁵, as for example the humble body language when being addressed by someone in the grandparents generation or people with a high power position; it is very important to always pass and receive an item with both hands, especially if that person is older than yourself, never touch someone on their head or pass an item over someone's head as the head is seen as the most holy part of the body, and also, never start eating before the elders.

The public and private spheres in modern Vietnam are closely entwined with one another, which can be the reason of the Confucian way of thinking in the society since the Confucian doctrine has no separation between the governmental relations of state and politics on the one side, and the relations of family and socialization on the other, instead these relations are all closely integrated in a one prodigious hierarchal order (Tuong Lai 1991, cited in Drummond & Rydstrom 2004:7). The Confucian doctrine stresses duty, loyalty, honor, filial piety, respect for age and seniority, and sincerity, and includes that a well-managed family means peace and order throughout the country (Drummond & Rydstrom, 2004:8).

Due to this Confucian heritage in the Vietnamese society, traditions of worshipping the patriarchal ancestors is widespread in contemporary Vietnam, and the father, or the eldest son

²⁴ The Freedom House – Vietnam. (2014) *Vietnam – Freedom in the World 2014*: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/vietnam#.VUT04fntmko>

²⁵ Kwintessential (2014). *Vietnamese- Language, Culture, Customs and Etiquette*: <http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/resources/global-etiquette/vietnam.html>

is therefore the head of the family household (Drummond & Rydstrom 2004:9). After a traditional marriage ceremony, the bride moves, both in spirit and body, from her birth home to her husband's home where she will live together with him and her parent in-laws, where she takes on her 'new' role as a devoted wife and daughter in-law. This marriage tradition is most commonly performed if the husband is the eldest son in his family. The *tam tong*, called the three submissions for a Vietnamese woman means that; firstly you must submit to your father, and when you get married you must submit to your husband, and when the husband dies you must submit to your first son (Binh, 2004:71).

Traditional dogmas of what a proper Vietnamese woman should behave and how to do, is taken from orthodox Confucian texts (Marr, 1981:192, cited in Binh, 2004:49) and to fit the Confucian pattern of a well-bred woman, most of a woman's lifetime was bounded by hundreds of prohibitions and taboos, as for example; "*Do not shrug, no not sigh, Don't talk to a man that is not a relative, Do not say hello to him so as not arouse suspicion, When sowing do not let your needle be idle*" (Binh, 2004:49).

The Feminine Four Virtues, called *Tu Duc* which includes the *cong* (housework, cooking), *dung* (appearance, beauty), *ngon* (speech), and *hanh* (conduct, moral) and is traditionally prescribed for Vietnamese women (Binh, 2004:50). These ethical principles and guidance to appropriate behaviours were used to guide young women to become virtuous women and desirable matches for wives (Binh, 2004:49). Many Vietnamese academics have in the last years been discussing whether the *Tu Duc* should be considered a feudal remnant and be disregarded completely, or should the *Tu Duc* still be regarded as qualities that is relevant in today's society and therefore should be preserved or inherited (*ke thua*) (Binh, 2004:54).

In the tradition of patrilineal ancestor worship, having a son means that the connection between the deceased and the future members of the patrilineal age are guaranteed which is defined as the "inside lineage" (*ho noi*) while having daughter does not secure the connection between the future children and the fathers patrilineal, and is defines as the "outside lineage" (*ho ngoai*) (Rydstrom 2004:75).

Since the male body is considered to be in the "hot" category, as mentioned in the cosmology section, it is also the element of blood since the masculine semen will continue the bloodline, but this "hot" element is though also located in the female body, so throughout a woman's life, she is thought to be more or less "cool" and "hot" during times of menstruation, pregnancy and birth due to increased or decreased quantities of blood, it is therefore important

for a woman to balance her diet between “hot” and “cool”, if she does not, she will risk that her body will become too “heated” which may provoke an undesirable character which may behave in a “hot” masculine manner (Rydstrøm, 2004:76). By balancing the diet means to avoid “hot” food and drinks, such as for example snake meat and snake wine since the snake is symbolized as “heat” and known to stimulate the masculine potency, and the same goes for dog meat and alcohol (Rydstrøm, 2004:83) as in Vietnam will often be referred to as “good for the man”. These types of dishes are served at local restaurants where the majority are men, if a woman or a girl should eat dog meat, they will be jeopardized of becoming “too hot”, and according to Rydstrøm (2004:83) to risk getting a rash, or red itchy spots on the skin.

2.6 Women’s Position

Since the 1920s, the gender equality in Vietnam became part of the governmental policy aim at improving conditions for women and girls, and educating citizens about equality of genders (*nam nu binh dang*) which was aimed to interrelate with attempts to remove the nostalgia of feudalism (*phong kien*) known as Confucian principles and values due to general concerns regarding women’s positions in social society (Drummond & Rydstrøm, 2004:2). In the 1930s, the Vietnamese Communist Party argued that women’s liberation should be connected with the class perspective, and demanded broader possibilities within the occupation and educational levels, individual freedom to get married and divorced, eliminated polygamy²⁶ and as a respect to women’s rights; an eight month maternity leave (Drummond & Rydstrøm, 2004:2). In 1945 the Women’s Union (*Hoi phu nu Viet Nam*) was founded as a link to the Communist Party, and has been, and remains concerned about any setbacks towards the Confucian, feudal principles or other superstitious thinking that might influence the ideal of equalities between men and women (Drummond & Rydstrøm, 2004:3). The reason for the Communist Party’s interest in gender equality was also to reformulate the values of Vietnamese femininity to make women break away from feudal family ideology and serve the cause of national liberation by contributing with women’s labour and potential for the revolution (Binh, 2004:52) and several new policies were intensively implemented to support this mass mobilization in the 1960s and 1970s, such as for example the “whole nations

²⁶ Since the 1950s, polygamy was officially illegal in Vietnam, but according to Bélanger (2004:106) there is anthropological evidence that documents that polygamy still exists in some villages in Vietnam.

struggle against the U.S. aggression” (*nhân dân cả nước đấu tranh công giặc Mỹ xâm lược*) which received a huge feedback from women in the South and the North (Binh, 2004:52). An example of a heroic female soldier is Nguyen Thi Dinh and her army who was awarded by receiving praise from Ho Chi Minh himself on the 20th anniversary of the Vietnam Woman’s Union (Binh, 2004:52). What is said about the heroic Nguyen Thi Dinh, is that she gained respect and obedience from her fellow male army members was by acting like a man, and by being loud spoken, straight-forward, confident and competent in fighting turned out to be tolerable, even praiseworthy during the war area (Binh, 2004:52) yet again when looking back in Vietnamese history.

After the war, and into the renewal; new campaigns from the government have been implanted by establishing the household as the primary economic unit (Phinney, 2013:654) after the arrival of *Doi Moi*’s market economy that among several things; supporting the private enterprises, the government made the family, rather than the community or the nation, the focus of state-building efforts (Phinney, 2013:654).

According to Phinney (2013); there are two *Doi Moi* policies that particularly made a setback in the ideal women’s journey away from the feudal, Confucian family structure, was the Law on Marriage in 1986 which gathered the acknowledgement that a woman’s identity is first of all grounded in being a mother, and the Happy Family campaign which was a policy that meant that the success of the nation is associated to each individual couple’s ability to create an “economically successful household without the benefit of state-aid” (Phinney, 2013:654). This turned out to be the modern starting point for a growing process initiating from this implemented global market economy that resulted in men’s growing urge to seek women outside their marriage, and a growing demand for sexualized leisure to meet this masculinity tied to commercialized sex (Phinney, 2008:652).

3.0 Method

In this chapter I will go through the research design and method I have chosen for my study to gather empirical evidence, and my ontological and epistemological assumptions. Furthermore there will be an evaluation of challenges and advantages I accounted for when conducting the interviews, a description of my approach when recruiting informants, an explanation of my selection, a brief introduction to my informants, and lastly, my field notes of my encounters and first observations when returning to Haiphong.

3.1 Method and Research Design

The intended method for my field of enquiry is an ethnographic qualitative approach which means my main data-gathering and analyzing techniques involves participant observation and open-ended interviews. In ethnographic research, open-ended interviewing is the main form of interviewing, and can either be discursive or semi-directed. My open-ended interviews will be a blend with both discursive and semi-directed; discursive as I will start the interview by asking the informant to begin by telling his/her own life story however wished, choosing freely what he/she considers being important (Bray, 2008:309). But also later become semi-directed as I will continue the interview by asking more pointed questions, directing them in the direction of what is relevant to my study of interest (Bray, 2008:309). The questions will still be open-ended as they do not rely on a restricted frame of questionnaires (Bray, 2008:309).

Ethnography provides an approach of recording and analyzing information in a more flexible way which can help when trying to understand the dynamics of a human social world the researcher comes across when performing the investigation (Campelli 1996 cited in Bray, 2008:298). Participant observation involves gathering cultural information by observing the community of people under study, in their natural environment over an extended period (Dewalt & Dewalt 2002 cited in Bray 2008:305). In ethnographic research; participant observation is known as the main-data collecting technique (Bray 2008:305).

My in-depth face-to-face interviews will be oral history interviewing which is a method that records and examines the biological explanations of people's lives, which is primarily a life story interview technique though it differs since it is primarily a historical project which only needs to cover a certain period of the interviewees life (Thompson & Lummis, 2009). This

method is useful when studying specific social, cultural and historical issues through an individual person's life story, and it explores the linkage between the individual lives and wider public events (Thompson & Lummis, 2009). Using oral history technique in my in-depth interviews may offer both objective and subjective evidence as it is conveying data and description, and also emotions and changing consciousness (Thompson & Lummis, 2009).

In an inductive strategy the information is gained by gathering objective data so that regularities can be established, and by applying inductive logic searching for the plausibility of a general law as more and more instances are observed (Staiton-Rogers, 2006:83). In my study I'm using the tool of a life history interview to investigate what themes or relationships emerge.

3.2 Ontological and epistemological assumptions

An ontological question is to ask *what* is studied, or what the nature of the object of investigation is, while an epistemological question is to ask *how* to know things (Della Porta & Keating, 2008:21-22). Epistemological questions ask about the relationship between the researcher and his/her object, and about what form of knowledge that is generated (Della Porta & Keating, 2008:23).

Crinis (2012:172) as a feminist ethnographer discusses the challenges faced by researchers when they employ feminist principles in their ethnographic studies, and criticises the feminist assumption of an egalitarian relationship between the researcher and the researched, and reflects on her own research experience in the field of multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork (Crinis, 2012:169). According to Avishai, Gerber & Randles (2012:394), feminism can operate as a blinder as it can limit the ability to see and interpret the empirical realities that might not fit in to the feministic expectations. Also, Avishai et. al. (2012:394) reflects upon the tensions between their political emotional response and objectives, and their intellectual quest in producing reliable knowledge. And this dilemma emerges when the researchers' feminist political commitments collide with the subjects' worldview, which forces the researcher to reconcile her views which are not mutual understanding, but it is still the feminist researchers' responsibility to interpret and represent the subjects' views accurately and fairly (Avishai et. al., 2012:395). Although I am a female ethnographic researcher, my ontological and epistemological assumptions are not positivist as I am not assuming that there

is an objective entity, I am studying the contemporary Vietnamese society to see if female agents are breaking their traditional roles as a cause of the country's modernization.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions that will be relied on in my study will be between post-positivist and interpretivist. Interpretivist because it is focusing on meaning and context, and post-positivist because it is about relating subjective experience to structural factors of shared culture and other aspects of context (Della Porta & Keating, 2008:23-24).

The ontological issues will be understood as the reality is both present and knowable, but not easy to access, and also subjectively shaped by experience, hence post-positivist and interpretivist (Della Porta & Keating, 2008:23). The epistemological issues will be studied as interpretivist since I am asking about the informants' subjective understanding and experience of change in the modern society in Haiphong.

3.3 Insider - Outsider

Swe (2013) defines strengths and weaknesses of the qualities of 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness' when gathering information from people with different backgrounds. Inside research meaning the researcher has the same ethnicity and cultural heritages as the informant which can be beneficial since a lot of intimate knowledge is already present (Swe, 2013:231). However, an insider may take some 'taken-for-granted' understandings when recognizing the familiar cultural, and by doing so, leave out essential information (Swe, 2013:231). An outsider may or may not gain the same trust as an insider. Swe (2013) debates that an outsider can get more information from a person with a different background, because an outsider would not be judgmental since he/she would be unfamiliar with the culture (Swe, 2013:231).

3.4 Challenges and Advantages

Challenges to look out for would be my lack of the Vietnamese language and also that, especially being an outsider, trying to get in to gain trust might not result in such a comfortable and trustworthy dialog as wished.

Also when looking at the role of gender in my role as a female researcher will be taken into consideration, as other factors of a researcher's identity (as for example; ethnicity, age and class), the social relationship between the personalities of the researcher and the researched, time and place of the research and even the precise topic under discussion (Mercer, 2007:4).

According to Epstein, Fahey & Kenway (2013:474); traveling in itself is ethnographic research, and is an essential part of the field work, since when one fly's across continents, passing through airport lounges, between and within familiar and strange places, in taxis and trams, one sees and hears about matters and issues that perhaps could be relevant to one's own inquiries, and by doing so, such histories and/or connections can easily be carried along as a part of the field work. Through-out my travels to , and in Haiphong city, I carried a notebook in my bag constantly to note down all of my impressions and observations as they came along, as recommended by Bray (2008:309).

For a long time, ethnographers have dealt with issues of conducting interviews in foreign languages, and according to Winchitz (2006:84-85) possible risks and/or humiliation due to wrong vocabulary for the ethnographer, have the potential of becoming methodological gems if this misunderstanding of communication is dealt with openly. Therefore I will be open and humble about my lack of the Vietnamese language right from the beginning, and show comprehension when my interviewees speak English, which I knew from my former experience that many Vietnamese in northern Vietnam feel shy of talking English with foreigners, especially if they get criticized or asked to repeat their words too many times.

The wording in my interview will be kept as simple as possible, without any "technical or specialized jargon", and the meaning must be clear (Bray, 2008:310), what Bray (2008:310) also specifies is that a researcher has to develop the capacity to improvise, judging from former observations as to how valid some of the follow-up questions may be to the particular interviewee, which can enable the researcher to avoid asking irrelevant questions.

Also, as Zoe Bray (2008:307) points out, and I took into consideration; is that during the passage of fieldwork, the researcher will form friendship with certain people more than others, on account of personal affinities. And in that context a researcher should not be surprised if some informants are not communicating as openly as others (Bray, 2008:307).

An advantage in my situation was that I am familiar with the Vietnamese gesticulation and body language, which would be useful when performing history interviews and meeting people on different levels in society, since it made it easier to interpret when to take the

conversation to a deeper level of trust and confidentiality, and when the conversation seemed to stand still or uncomfortable, I would take a step back.

3.5 Research ethics

Out of respect for my interviewees, I would always let them know that they would all be anonymous under invented names to protect their anonymity. Also I made it particularly clear that the interview was not, in any way, related to any governmental or political affairs which could have had consequences if the interviewees' identity should be revealed, taking into account that Vietnam does not have freedom of press. Knowing that in this context, a tape recorder might be seen as intimidating by my interviewees, I prepared myself for the probability of only being able to make notes during the interviews, I therefore developed a stronger discipline of noting everything down quickly and succinctly (Bray, 2008:312) bearing in mind that I might sit for hours in each interview without a tape recorder, combining empathic understanding while taking important notes.

I also prepared myself for the possibility that I might be situated in a zone of conflict when interacting with my informants as I could be asked implicitly or explicitly to take sides, or perhaps asked to express an opinion on the matters at stake (Bray, 2008:313), or to be asked to help justify certain actions. I therefore prepared myself, as good as one can, to respond in a neutral manner. For example, when one of my male informants were vividly describing the difference between a wife and a local girlfriend, or when a female informant told me she was going to lie to her husband about her travel plans in order for him to let her travel away over the weekend, I did not help to justify nor to criticise the moral issues at stake.

3.6 Recruitment

It was not hard to get in contact with the local men in Haiphong city if one wanted to, simply by walking down a street with several local restaurants serving the local Haiphong beer draught around dinner time, would provide plenty of opportunities as a foreigner to be invited to sit down and make conversations as the people in Haiphong are very curious and interested in Western polite foreigners. Mostly these introductions would reveal the most crucial information needed to potentially recruit people for an interview since the first questions that

would usually be exchanged was; where are you from? How old are you? What is your name? This information would reveal if the informant was from the agrarian country side, or from the urban city; and which part of it, and also if the informant was originally born in Haiphong and within my selected age group.

Since I already had some contacts in northern Vietnam after living there for six months in 2010, would turn out to help me to get in contact with more local men and women, also some of my female informants were identified using the snowball method as I would be sent further to several people that was within my assortment for selecting informants, that would not mind being interviewed. There was also the possibility of getting help from other Vietnamese with the translation if the Vietnamese-English phrases should be too difficult.

‘Gatekeepers’ are generally seen as institutions or informants standing at a ‘metaphorical’ gate of a metaphorical fenced compound, which allows or not, the researcher to enter, and these imaginary guarded compounds are formed on the basis of, to some extent; shared unity between the society – from working in the same institution, working at the same place, shared cultural, racial and/or ethnic backgrounds, life experiences, age, sexual identity, religion, language, etc. (Crowhurst, Roseneil, Hellesund, Santos & Stoilova, 2013:527). Difficulties can be met when trying to access such compounds as a researcher, and various implementers acting as gatekeepers may direct and introduce the researcher to the interviewees, by creating conduits for access to them (De Laine, 2000, cited in Crowhurst et.al. 2013:527). Thanks to two of my informants acting as gatekeepers, I was brought to the country side where I was fortunate to be introduced to several farmers households and families who rarely met with foreigners, to dine and drink in a traditional Vietnamese cuisine, which I would probably never have had the pleasure of meeting as a curious tourist, or even as a random researcher. Apparently, not even many Vietnamese city people could have said to have been in such rural areas, if not for family relations or having the right contacts, because of the class difference between the agrarian country side and the modern city life. Some of my Vietnamese friends in Haiphong city owned a restaurant in the center of the city where I was invited to use the second floor as a work station for conducting and transcribing interviews. But mostly, my informants would rather suggest a café of their own choice, or their own home as an alternative to have the interview.

3.7 The Selection

My ideal number of informants did not turn out to be the same as scheduled, although many informants were within my reach of recruitment, there were not enough hours in a day to spend enough time with all of them. Lunch time at noon was usually too short to have an interview as it only lasted for around 30 minutes, so the most suitable time to socialize in Haiphong was around dinner time after six o'clock in the evening when people have finished work and, when interviewing my female informants; had finished preparing the meal at home. When interviewing my male informants we usually ate out at a street diner. Several times I would experience that there had been an underlying arrangement which I felt much honored, but also obligated, to be invited to my informant's home to meet the whole family and have dinner, and often answer questions about Norway, and Europe, and talk English with the young children and the brothers and sisters. On two occasions, I was asked as a favor to lecture English to children that were homeschooled so they would be more familiar with speaking English with a *tây*; which is the name for a foreign person with a westerner language and appearance, since the Vietnamese-English may sound different from classic English. It was also often my informants would call for us to have a longer conversation after the interview was finished and my pen and paper was back in the bag. Often, my interview questions would be asked back to me and my own personal life experience, which I did not mind answering, but ended up being quite more time consuming than I first presumed. But on the other hand, I sometimes got a lot more detailed information from my informant when doing so since we were now comparing our life histories, which might have created a safer zone than earlier, and since the interview had already finished, and if I felt it was appropriate, I would ask if I could use this post-information in my notes, and every time I would get an approval.

Since the Vietnamese language and culture has an obvious structure of hierarchy when it comes to age, my main focus was on interviewing women and men in the age group between 28 to 38 years. When addressing someone within this age difference, compared to mine, I would address informants older than me as big brother or big sister – *anh* or *chị*, followed by their surname, if the same age; *bạn* and someone younger as little brother/little sister – *em*. If I would have interviewed someone older, as for example in the mid-40s; I would have had to address them as uncle or aunt – *chú* or *cô* followed by their surname, and in this social hierarchy, my personal questions would seem to have been outrageous to ask someone in that generation. As would any of my misinterpretation or misunderstanding, even how innocently,

be taken more offensively. Also due to much bigger barriers in the English language when communicating with this generation and my poor limitations in the French language, which some would tend to know much better, also made me put the focus on people within my brother/sister-addressees. This resemblance to other South-east-Asian countries, where the social hierarchy is noticeable through, for example, language, age and gender as it does in the Chinese Mandarin language (Chen, 2011:131) and Vietnamese language (Soucy, 2006:124), which could have an effect on power relations that may be a significant variable in ethnographic interviews (Chen, 2011:132).

For those I interviewed in the same age range as myself, I hoped would give me some insights into similar age group related experiences. On the other hand, I took into consideration that such an advantage could go in the opposite direction since a single female student at the age of 28 is (and was the last time when my age was 24) considered abnormal since most of my Vietnamese contacts got married in their mid-twenties.

But because of my “abnormal” relationship status, my informants would tend to elaborate more of why our cultures are so different, and that my way of living might not be as abnormal in my country as in theirs; so I would get more explanations than having to ask questions around the topics of marriage, single life and the hierarchy within the family.

The selection of informants my material for the thesis is built on, consists of 12 informants; four men and eight women where the eldest was 38 and the youngest was 28 years old. Another criteria was that all of my informants must have been born, and currently living in Haiphong city, seven of my informants have lived in other provinces, cities or countries for some periods, but have all returned to continue their lives in Haiphong. Each interview lasted between 60 to 120 minutes. I used Nvivo as a tool when analyzing my transcripts which turned out to very helpful.

3.8 About my Informants

Specific events and moments that reveal the issue addressed by the researcher may be about the behavior and reactions of individuals to specific instances, and their relationship to other people and ideas. In these descriptions the researcher must mention all those details that are revealing (Bray, 2008:313)

By giving a brief introduction of my informants provides an image of the variety in background and education my informants have which is relevant when analyzing the data, as for example if an informant who has grown up in a more modern city culture might reveal different ways of thinking compared to an informant who has grown up in a more agrarian culture. These presentations of my informants also show that I have interviewed people from different levels in the society; high- or low salaried professions, where they live, married or not, number of children etc. This information will help the reader to situate the person in the analysis (Bray, 2008:313).

The challenge in this process is to make an introduction of the selected interviewees while anonymizing them, without it jeopardizing the meaning of contents. One of my female informants said I could use her real name, and that she was wide-open about her opinions, but still I chose to stick with my plan of anonymizing all of my informants. I have tried to leave out any information that might reveal the identity of my informants by not mentioning any specific locations of where they work, or where they live, except from whether it is in the center of the city, or out on country side in Haiphong. The names I have invented for my informants, all have in command that they reflect the cultural characteristic of my informants; the names are all traditional Vietnamese, but I have not had any associations to my informants' real names or identities when I chose them. The idea of renaming my informants with Vietnamese names instead of numbers, as Informant 1, Informant 2, etc. is another lesson from Bray (2008:314) which is that it is a reflection of the location of the ethnographic field study. Also, when renaming my informants it felt appropriate to address them as politely as possible since a Vietnamese name looks strange, and feels rude for me to be standing alone without an addressing title, even how intimate and personal the presentations of these peoples' life stories may be. And the reason I chose not to add Vietnamese titles such as *em*, *anh* or *chị* as mentioned above, is because that is how *I* would have addressed them in the Vietnamese language according to how older or younger they are compared to me, which I thought could complicate the meaning when representing my informants life stories to an audience I don't know what age might me, and English is after all the language I have chosen to write my master thesis.

3.8.1 The women

Mrs. THU is 33 years old, she got married when she was 23 years old, but she and her husband are considering a separation in the future, but she is still living together with her

husband, parent in-laws and her ten year old son in Haiphong city. She took a seven yearlong education at the University of Tourism in Hanoi when she was younger, and has worked in several foreign ship companies in Haiphong, but now the last five years she has owned a restaurant and a bar in the center of Haiphong.

Miss PHUONG is unmarried and 33 years old, she recently returned to Haiphong after working in Nha Trang for 4 years, she has now moved back with her parents, niece and nephew in Haiphong, and works as an office assistant at a foreign company. Since Miss PHUONG is unmarried, she is still living together with her family after returning to Haiphong which she enjoys since she has a close relationship with her family. But it is very unlikely she would have lived anywhere else, or alone, since she is unmarried.

Mrs. DANG is a 35 year old teacher in the English and the Russian language in secondary school, and lives with her husband and family in-laws, and their two children; a girl aged nine and a boy aged three. She was 24 years old when she got married. Mrs. DANG has traveled to several countries both in Asia and in Europe and has had a lot of criticism from her parent in-laws for leaving the home for her own entertainment. Mrs. DANG defines herself as a strong feminist and states that she is not popular in her family or several of her acquaintances.

Mrs. HUE is a 29 year old waitress at a restaurant in Haiphong; she got married when she was 23, and today she has a four year old daughter, and lives with her husband who works as a motor engineer. Her husband is from the country side in a different province in northern Vietnam, and Mrs. HUE is from a rural area of Haiphong. The husband wants Mrs. HUE to quit her job and help him out with the business back home, but Mrs. HUE disagrees strongly and wishes to have a job outside of the home. She is quite uncertain of how long she will be able to stand against her husband's demand as it is he who has the final saying on the matter since he is the head of the family. Mrs. HUE is very grateful that her husband's family live in another province since she does not want to live together with her parent in-laws since they are known to be very narrow minded and old fashioned.

Ms. HOANG is working as a personal assistant at a shipyard, she lived a few years in Ho Chi Minh City when she was young since her father was a soldier in the Vietnam war and in Cambodia, but returned to Haiphong with her family because her father was the eldest son and therefore had the responsibility to take care of his parents when they got sick. The economic resources have always been limited in Ms. HOANGs' life. Ms HOANG was forced to get married when she was 26 years old since she was told she was getting too old. HOANG

had a brief time to choose a husband and get married. Ms. HOANG got divorced four years ago after several years of getting physically abused by her husband. They got one seven year old son who is autistic, which now lives together with Ms. HOANG, her parents and little brother in Haiphong City. She is 34 years old.

Miss HUYEN works in tourism and she now lives with her aunt and uncle and their two children in Haiphong city after her parents moved to another province. Miss HUYEN is born in the country side of Haiphong. She is 31 years old and unmarried. Miss HUYEN is not unhappy about being single although her family and relatives are giving her a hard time, because she is working to save up money to build a better future, and when her saving has increased; it is time to find a husband.

Mrs. NGA is 32 years old and recently moved back to Haiphong after living in France for five years with her husband, they have two children; a boy who's five years and a girl aged three. She works as a brand manager at a facility company in Haiphong. Mrs NGAs' husband comes from France and they got married when she was 25 years old. They have decided to stay in Haiphong for the next years since Mrs NGA has a strong connection to her family and friends there, and is happy to be back.

Mrs. MAI is married with two children; a boy aged 10 and a girl aged five, and lives with her family in-laws. She is 33 years old and works as an English teacher in the centre of Haiphong. Mrs MAI is from a more rural area in Haiphong, and got married when she was 22 years old with her boyfriend. Mrs MAI and her husband are currently having trouble in their marriage due to her husband has had an affair, but Mrs MAI determined to stay married to her husband, and has asked her parent in-laws to make her husband end his affair with his local girlfriend.

3.8.2 The men

Mr. QUAN is 37 years old and married with two children; a girl and a boy aged eleven and five. Mr QUAN got married when he was 25 years old. He works as a sales and marketing manager in a local company outside of Haiphong, and has a long experience from working in sales departments in former companies. Mr QUAN was born in the centre of Haiphong city.

Mr TAN is 35 years old, and he and his wife have two girls; the eldest is ten years old and the young is nine months. Mr TAN was born and raised at the country side of Haiphong, he got

married when he was 25, and he started working as a waiter at a hotel in the city, and after ten years he is now working as a sales manager at a hotel in Haiphong for the last year. His wife and he have had difficulties in their marriage after his wife found out that he had an affair with his local girlfriend.

Mr DUNG is 38 years old, and returned from Canada after four years, to his roots in Haiphong. Mr DUNG got married when he was 27 years old. His wife and he are now divorced, and have two children; a boy aged 12 and a girl who is four. His ex-wife still lives with the children in Canada, but Mr DUNG talks to his children almost every day. Mr DUNG works as a painter and architectural designer, and owns two restaurants and one bar in Haiphong. Even though Mr DUNG was born in the city of Haiphong, his future plans are to follow the Buddhist philosophic way of living, together with the traditional Vietnamese agricultural lifestyle out on the countryside of Haiphong.

Mr HAI is 28 years old, unmarried and works as a bartender in Haiphong, he lives with his parents in the city, but comes from the country side of Haiphong. He quit university five years ago and has worked as a bartender ever since. Mr HAI's future plans are to someday get married and own a café or a restaurant in Haiphong. But finding a wife is not on his schedule this year.

3.9 Field notes

3.9.1 Foreign Researcher

Turner (2010:126) describes, in *Challenges and dilemmas: fieldwork with upland minorities in socialist Vietnam, Laos and southwest China*, about problems I can relate to when re-negotiating my role afresh depending on the gender, educational and religious background of companions; when I was in the company of men and women in the country side, I acted in a more Asian modest way (knowing the gestures of hand shaking with elders and manners around the dinner table) which really gave a good feedback of me being a very polite *tây*²⁷, even more polite than Vietnamese girls (several said) as opposed to when I was hanging with the educated men, I played up a bit more of a Western image which I assume (and Smith

²⁷ Vietnamese name for people with a Western appearance.

2006:143 cited in Turner 2010:126 claims) made it easier to gain both access to the men and women, or at least more access than if it would have been for a male researcher.

Turner (2010:128) also talks about the strict forces of governmental authorities controlling and limiting researches in these parts of Asia; Laos, southern China and Vietnam. In my experience, I was told that official suited men had been asking about me at the local bar where a friend of mine worked, and also in the reception in my hotel, where they had been presenting a picture of my passport, or a picture known from my former, or present visa application, which could indicate that I was under inquiry by official agents. Also I got several questions regarding my business of travelling in Vietnam, which I had never been asked before, on my departure from Vietnam. I found it comforting to read from Turner (2010:131) that I was not alone in the experience of being questioned in such a manner and, to some extent I'm not sure about; viewed with suspicion regarding my business in the country. My questions were not angled towards any governmental or political affairs in particular neither was I trying to reach any upland minorities in the country. Many of the researches who have applied to travel in Vietnam, or Laos and southern China for that matter, with a researchers stamp in the passport are met with strict attitudes and even been told to bring a Vietnamese assistant from the government to the research site as a surveillance (Turner 2010:127). If published findings are to be seen as offensive to the government concerned, and especially if read by senior officials, it is highly likely that future access will be denied for either the researcher, people associated with the researcher, or even for people coming from the same country as the researcher (Thurstun, 1983:9, cited in Turner 2010:128). I can now understand why my way of travelling around with a pen and notebook asking questions, in a smaller city, with many local police officers on different grounds watching, would have seen my way of approach as suspicious. Especially since my passport showed I was there as a tourist. The reason for this was that I only travelled to Vietnam two times to do my research, and for two shorter periods of time; once I stayed for a month, and the second time for only two weeks, which I thought would have been too little time to have been suspected as a 'fake' tourist.

Secondly, I travelled as a private person, and not on behalf of the University of Agder, so it was not on the agenda to apply on behalf of anyone else than myself.

But when I talked about this episode to my Vietnamese contacts, I was assured that some of my friends in Haiphong are politically active, and have contacts on different levels in the

governmental departments, so I knew help was only a phone call away to elaborate the reason for why I was interviewing people. But I don't believe I'm denied access to travel back to Vietnam, yet.

First, when I introduced my field work to my first informants, I made the mistake of using the words culture, or heritage, which scared people away from agreeing to be interviewed, thinking they had to remember some Vietnamese history or special events and dates; which are many, and quite different out from who I spoke with. I found it easier to ask about the history and religious rituals when I was not interviewing, not that I was not allowed to take notes of the information I got, but I found that when asking my informants on the spot made them feel too awkward or scared, so I decided to ask such questions more randomly at any time of the day, to anyone.

I therefore changed my introduction to:

- I want to find out about Haiphong today, and what the modern times feels like for you, and what may have changed. No matter what you say, it will not be a wrong answer, because it is your personal opinion. All the people I interview will be anonymous; I will use made-up names, so that it will make it very difficult for people to know who I have been interviewing, and who said what. If there are any questions you don't want to answer then that is no problem, you decide. I would like to start this interview by talking a little bit about you and your family background, if you don't mind. I will be taking notes while we talk, and if there is anything you would like me to skip or leave out from my notes – just let me know. Also, if you don't want to answer some of my questions, then you are free to do so, and we can stop the interview at any time you wish, if you should feel uncomfortable. So please start where ever you would like, and I will ask you some follow-up questions along the way, or do you have any questions before we start?

3.9.2 Comparing Haiphong to other Cities

When talking about any resemblance between Haiphong and other cities with the people I spoke to in Haiphong, the answers would be short and precise; there is not much of a resemblance. Especially when buying a motor bike or a car in Hanoi, the first thing on the agenda is to change the license plate, since having a registration number that begins with 30

or 31 will greatly increase the chance of being pulled over by the police in Haiphong, as these registration numbers show the car is from Hanoi. Also, the chances of getting away without a huge fine are limited. So, even though Haiphong is only 201 KM northeast of the capital Hanoi, there is some tension from the people of Haiphong towards the people in Hanoi.

As for people in Haiphong describing the people in Ho Chi Minh, they describe the southern Vietnamese as the part of the country who was last to have its liberation, while the northern Vietnamese had its independence earlier, and so the northern Vietnamese are much cleverer in saving money, while the southerners spend much more money by eating and drinking out and prioritizing their own entertainment of the day, instead of saving for the future. This has been emphasized by referring to how much nicer cars, houses and clothes people in the north have compared to what the people have in the south.

The European workers that were located in Haiphong earlier are now few since most of the projects on the ship yards have become limited; there is now a lack of Belgians, Dutch, Germans and English business customers staying at the hotels and in town. On the other hand, the Japanese business men have increased, so for the time being people who are applying for well-paid jobs are more often signing up to learn the Japanese language.

3.9.3 Urban and Rural Haiphong

The difference between people coming from the urban and the rural areas in Haiphong are quite noticeable, especially if one knows the Haiphong dialect. The people living in the city centre are using less slang in their vocabulary than out on the country side which, I'm told, has great significance when the people in the city are teaching their children how to speak and express themselves; in a classic Vietnamese non-slang way which means are well-taught and from the urban area, which will be beneficial for their future careers. What made me pay attention to the difference between the rural and urban areas in Haiphong was the phrase; *nhà quê*, which (directly translated) means country side or rustiness, but it may also mean boor. When someone in the urban areas would mention the phrase *nhà quê*, most people would laugh as it is related to someone, or something described as old fashioned, or out of date. But it can also describe someone or something as being stupid or a klutz. The connotation to the word *nhà quê*, signifies that being a farmer in Haiphong is considered to be in a lower category in the society. When I travelled out to the countryside I was told that such a phrase would be unappreciated and not to be socially accepted by the people living in the rural areas, on the contrary; it could be perceived as degrading and hurtful. While one of my

informants would use the phrase *nhà quê* to describe himself in a humorous tone and then highlighting that he was proud to be a farmer. The people I met with in Haiphong love to tell jokes, and there are several jokes on the expense of farmers, though the reliability of them being historical or non-historical is hard to say, and these jokes usually reach the climax of laughter when the “farmer” has said or done something short-sighted and very stupid.

4.0 Presentation of Findings and Analysis

In this chapter I will present and analyse my findings collected from the 12 life story-interviews from the men and women that was conducted in Haiphong. It is impossible to reproduce every interview I made in full detail in how my informants acted, their tones or attitudes in their voices when they mentioned certain topics, or how their gesticulations were when they were expressing their opinions or feelings, or even pain. Of course, it is obvious that the opinions and thoughts from my sample of informants is not stereo typical and includes all the people in Haiphong, but the backgrounds of my informants are diverse as they represent the life stories of people coming from both urban and rural areas of Haiphong, and different levels in society.

4.1 Re-negotiating the family roles

Several of my informants would define a shameful act as a wife's choice to spend her time elsewhere then back home with the family, and especially her children. The most unforgivable sin is to leave your child behind back home, even leaving your child too long with your mother in-law is described as a shameful act to be done by a mother, even the informants who had done this as, as for example for Mrs. THU when leaving her son back home with her husband or parent in-laws to socialize with her friends and coming home late after work, was considered as a bad deed which Mrs. THU said was "*looked down on by many in the society*". And that her parent in-laws felt shameful or *mát măt* when their neighbours and acquaintances noticed the time of her return back to the family household. Mrs. THU on the other hand stated that she would keep on doing it.

The frowning was two-sided; to leave the children 'alone', and that she changed her behaviour into more of a Western way; that she got enlightened by what was *out there*, or that she no longer would accept the chores belonging to the women, and the freedom that is acceptable for the men in the Confucian family hierarchy, "*that the men in Haiphong are treated like kings*". And Mrs. DANG explained further that;

The men in Haiphong are very friendly, generous and easy-going, but they are rarely together with their families back home, but always out drinking beer after work, and

that is because it is “their right”, and they leave everything behind. But in one way, it is not their fault since it is their parents and the society that makes them like that.

Mrs. HUE who was planning to go on a weekend holiday by herself, had to get her husband’s permission, she was going to lie to her husband and say that she was going away “with work” to Hanoi, but actually she was going to travel around Vietnam and explore the scenery for her own desire. And she was not shy to admit this – to me. She saw an opportunity, and asked me for advice on how to travel, in the mid of the interview. It was obvious that the shame lied on how much time she would use on her own entertainment and she continued by saying: *“I feel jealous of you who are from Norway who can just travel anywhere you want to whenever you feel like it. So I want to do the same”*.

If leaving the family home for the weekend by explaining that it was “work related” would have increased the possibility that it would be accepted by Mrs. Hues’ husband for her to travel. But if it would have been for her amusement only, her husband would have denied her to travel.

As Ms. HOANG says when she was asked; do you see any changes between generations of women in their role as wives?

Yes I do, the wife used to stay at home, deliver the baby, be a good support to the family in-law, cook the food and wait for the husband to come home. Now, besides those duties, the wife also goes to work on top of that, while also needing to keep relations with the colleagues and friends. The wife has got a lot more responsibility now than before. And not necessarily a better one.

So, three out of four of the married women, and Mrs. THU who is considering a separation but still living with her husband and family in-laws, said that they were not going to stop prioritizing their own entertainment, even though it is hard to admit and to stand by with full confidence. Mrs. MAI on the other hand, was more dedicated to stay home, and if she was going to go out to meet any of her own friends, she would “*naturally*” bring her children along.

But Mrs. MAI cried that *“the men in Haiphong don’t have to participate in the daily family chores as long as they have a job that finances the household. They can basically come and go whenever they want to”*.

Mrs. DUNG is certain there will be more women who will prioritize their own entertainment, even though it is described as a shameful act by the society;

And Mrs. DANG continues:

But now, the Vietnamese see a lot of things from the media today, and they are thinking “why shouldn’t we also live like that?”, but still they are too scared to go through with it because of the lack of knowledge. The Asian way of thinking is still in control of the way most women think today, but there is a change coming from all of the Western influence; especially due to the movies, and television. When it comes to marriage in the Vietnamese society, you love by chance, not by choice. They push you into getting married because it is something you have to do! And after you get married, you have so many duties to your family in-laws, to your husband, and of course the baby! We are suddenly trapped in a place we don’t want to be in”

The men in Haiphong don’t know how to express their affection after they get married, not many couples can share things together.

Miss. HUYEN states:

Plenty of changes, plenty! Now people think differently about what duties belongs to the husband and what duties belongs to the wife. Before, only the boy would go to school, and the girl would stay at home learning from her mother how to take care of the house, and prepare the meals, and look after the younger siblings or, when older, look after the baby.

Or Mrs. DANG when traveling to other parts of the world for leisure said that the fact that she had travelled to other countries for her own entertainment was frowned upon by the other members of her family and relatives.

For me (Mrs. Dang), I have travelled to many places; Paris, Amsterdam, and I've seen a lot of difference there. And why should I return here and do something I don't like? It is not like that in other places or in many other countries.

Also elaborated by Miss. HUYEN:

People travel more, they see the changes from abroad, and they think "I can do that too". In Ho Chi Minh, you see the changes more clearly than here in Haiphong. But the changes are coming; I'm pretty sure about that! Now, both the girls and boys go to school, and that makes them equal when it comes to cleverness. The husband's decision isn't the only "right" answer anymore. But of course it is the wife that still takes care of the home and the children. But she is no longer "locked-up" in the kitchen like before. The hierarchy between wife and husband is not yet equal over all, but the changes influenced by the western society you can see.

The Western influence does not only come from the television or from traveling, but also from other people in the contact network witnessing these possibilities; as Mrs. THU explains:

...when they (the Vietnamese) look at the western men, take my friend for example; she married an Australian man, and moved there. When I talk with her, she says that her Australian husband helps her with everything around the house. They share the work.

The men on the other hand, were describing the change of power positions between husband and wife as a more positive change, or they were more acknowledgeable to this change, or at least they didn't criticize the fact that the wife has become more of a boss in the family household compared to before. As Mr. TAN answered when I asked if he thought there had been any changes of generations of women in their role as wives, Mr. TAN said:

*Yes! Before, the husband was the man of the house. Now, the woman is the "man" of the house *laughing. You see how different I am when I'm here with you guys, and*

how I am when I'm back home with my wife. She will tell me what to do. She will call me and ask me to buy milk for the baby, and, what do you call it again?

- A nappy?

- Yes, a nappy! My wife has become my boss.

Later on that same evening when Mr. TAN drove me back to my hotel, we had to stop for him to buy nappies, milk, and now also sugar, to bring back home to his wife and baby. As he went in to purchase what was on his shopping list, he turned and gave me an impression of embarrassment. It was obvious that having to buy baby products was something he was neither used to nor comfortable with. When he returned from the shop, he rushed over to his motorbike and threw the grocery bag containing the nappies into the compartment in his motorbike. He then looked over at me and said: *"Phew! Finally that's over! If any of my buddies would have seen me now, I'd never heard the end of it!"*

Clearly, husbands performing errands for their wives are quite frowned upon in some circles in Haiphong. When I asked him if he would have felt shameful; *mát mặt* if someone would have seen him, he nodded silently.

Mr. QUAN said he did not feel threatened by the wives position in the family in the homes in Haiphong and feels that the man still holds a strong position, and said with quite a scornful laughter:

"We (the men) do see our wives getting more demanding. Perhaps, eventually, the wife is more powerful than the man. Ha ha! No, seriously, the woman has her strength back home; she is the one who knows how to do everything"

Mr. DUNG on the other hand when I asked if he had noticed any changes between the gender roles in the family:

Changes? Yes, dramatically! The experience I've had with this is that the wife's role in the family life is decreasing. There is less and less energy to make your own family happy. And these changes are for the worst. The family relationship is going worse. The relationship between father and son, mother and son, father and daughter, mother and daughter, and mother and father, are all going worse. And these core- or main factors are the ones building the society. I'm thinking about the education of their

children, and the relationship between the parents. We need to get the man and the woman educated enough to deal with problems before they get married. What is difficult in life is what they see from the Western television. And when they do, things get worse.

It is the education and background, and I don't mean the education you get in school necessarily. It is the way they are educated into looking at life differently. The politic in Vietnam is very different. People in general are getting more educated when you see them going to school, but they are not getting the right knowledge. We need a filter from the Western television and facebook!

I'm finding Mr. DUNG's meanings interesting since though he is from the urban part of Haiphong, and he has lived for a while abroad in Canada, his view on the Western influence is very negative as if he did not want this Western culture to perhaps follow him back home too his Vietnamese roots in his suitcase. He was though not unhappy about his children growing up in Canada with his ex-wife as he is certain that she will raise them well, plus he speaks with them on the phone almost every day. And since he has decided to live according to the old traditional Vietnamese lifestyle, his friends and even children are calling him *nhà quê* which he finds amusing since he is very proud to be associated with people from the rural areas of Haiphong.

I drive out to the countryside every day to work on my new project, and there is never rush hour when you are headed in that direction, and I feel sorry for the great experience all the people standing in "the wrong lane" in the rush hour are missing out on. We need to be proud of our family roots!

4.2 Communicating Outside the Family Zone

Both of my two informants; Ms. HOANG and Mrs. MAI who both have experience of having been physically abused by their husbands explained how the Western influence of "*opening up to friends and relatives outside of the family household*" has helped them to cope with this issue, by either leaving the husband as Hoang did, or going to the parent in-laws and asking them to "*stop their son from hitting her*". Mrs. THU said she also have friends and acquaintances with experience of their husband physically abusing them, and Mrs. THU explain that this is known to be command from the earlier generations in Vietnam, and that

the modification of why this physical abuse is declining in the household, is that the privacy in the family life is opening up; resulting in women being more open about their life back home when having intimate conversations with close friends, so in Haiphong today, the wrongdoing gets revealed outside of the private family zone, as opposed to before where it was more command according to Mrs. THU: *“The husband used to beat his wife very often. You could see it many times, and still the wife would not tell anybody about it, or ask for help and absolutely no divorce”*.

And Mrs. THU continues:

Now, if the husband beat his wife, he will be fined 2 million dong! Also the wives talk to each other more openly now, they talk about their relationship, and how they are doing. Before, everyone would keep quiet about their personal affairs back home, no matter how bad it would be.

Now however, the communication outside the family zone involves that other acquaintances and perhaps even colleagues will know about the husbands physically abusing his wife which puts the husband in a position where he can be socially evaluated in a negative way which is shameful, creating a feeling of *mất mặt* or *mất thể diện*, not only to him, but his parents as well.

4.3 “Tricked” into Marriage

It seems like all the married, separated and divorced women I have been interviewing, (except from Mrs. NGA who decided to get married to move to France with her husband) see themselves as ‘tricked’ or misled into a marriage. Mrs. THU, Mrs. HUE, Ms. HOANG, Mrs. DUNG and Mrs. MAI all said they were too young to understand the consequences of what it meant when they were told to get married by their family and relatives, and when they realized how strict the hierarchy between husband and wife, and daughter in-law and parent in-laws actually was, they regretted for giving their vows.

Mrs. THU explains: *“when I was young, my mother used to teach me how to sow, cook, etc. But now, there is not much teaching of that back home anymore, but a mother in-law is still expecting the daughter in-law to be able to do so”*.

All five of my female interviewees who are or have been married, clearly stated that they were way too young to get married when they did, and that the society (especially the family) forced or tricked them into getting married at this early stage, not themselves. And as a cause of this, their personal lives (and possibly marriage lives) could have been better. Mrs. DUNG described it as; *“monkey see; monkey do”* when I asked about the pressure around having to get married before one felt ready for marriage, Mrs. DUNG explained ; *“the family is the closest circle of trust, and since they know what is best, their children do what they are being told to do without any questions”*.

As in Mrs. HUEs’ case, the family of the husband visited her family to rush the date for marriage, and together, their families pushed them into getting married, which was something Mrs. HUE clearly was not ready for. And Mrs. DUNG also says:

“When it comes to marriage in the Vietnamese society, you love by chance, not by choice. They push you into getting married because it is something you have to do! And after you get married, you have so many duties to your family in-laws, to your husband, and of course the baby!”

4.4 “Best Age” for marriage

All of the women said that the age they were in when they got married, was too early, and thought that an older age (than the age they got married in) would have been “the best” age to get married in, for women in general, but particularly Vietnamese women. Because after most Vietnamese have finished the university at the age of 24-25 years old, my informants thought that a woman needs time to just work and experience life on her own. When asked of what the “best age” for marriage should be; all of my female informants believed that the “best age” is between 25 to late twenties or early thirties.

As for the male informants, the “best age” for marriage would be lower than the female informants’, the “best age” should be between 22 to 27 years. What is important to mention is that in Vietnamese culture of social hierarchy, and especially in the language, it is still very abnormal for a wife to be older than her husband. Both my male and female informants who were on the subject said that it is not possible in the Vietnamese language for a wife that is older than her husband to address him in the proper manner or vice versa.

Divorce is becoming more common, even having a child outside or post- marriage by divorcing the husband after the baby is born.

As mentioned by Mrs. DANG:

When you get pregnant, only the mother comes to take care of you, and your mother in-law. You don't see the husbands in the hospital, never. They only come to see the baby, and then they leave again. They leave for work – that's where the husband goes, and the wife should just accept that.

The absence of the husbands and fathers home with the family was also stated by what Mr. TAN said: “*My daughter cries when she sees me, she is almost one year now, and she is afraid of her own father!*” And when I asked him why he thought that was the case, he answered: “*I'm not much home, just either working or eating and drinking out with my friends*”.

Mr. TAN seemed assured that his daughter would come around eventually, and be happy to see him when he comes home late from either work or other social gatherings. He then explained further:

That is the thing with marriage; you have a wonderful start for maybe two-three years, feeling the in-love feeling, but then the baby comes, and all the chores and responsibility takes over. Of course I will always stay by my wife side, but a man has his needs. Vietnamese men are very suong (horny).

4.5 Women's responsibility in the family

Why the women have so much more responsibility than the men back home with the housework and taking care of children can be associated with The Confucian four virtues Tu Duc; *cong* (labour), *dung* (appearance), *ngon* (speech) and *hanh* (conduct). These Confucian four virtues were traditionally prescribed for Vietnamese women to bring great honour to her family, and later her family in-laws when she got married (Binh, 2004:51). Each of these four female virtues acts together in a connected chain, and if any of them are not followed, the chain will be broken (Binh, 2004:50). If a woman mastered all of these four virtues, her family in-laws would feel blessed with merit (*phuc duc*) for having such a decent daughter in-

law who would bring peace and harmony to her family in-laws, give a upright representation of her own parents, and also the daughter in-law would be praised for showing a deep sense of filial gratitude to her own parents who raised her in such a well manner (Binh, 2004:51).

Several of my interviewees had knowledge to elaborate these to me, especially Mr. QUAN:

Cong: *it's not only about cooking good food for the family, but also know how to take care of the family, teaching children, being a good worker in a company, team work, and taking full responsibility in her work.*

Dung: *is not only beauty by face and body, but also her soul, the strength enough to work well, take care of the family and social work, staying healthy to get a good and healthy baby, the knowledge to teach them well. And by being healthy, she will always give full power to focus on her job which will make her successful and never feel tired or fed up.*

Ngon: *Saying good things, gently, always keep smiling, polite, and knowledgeable; knowing how to treat people right and solve the problems intelligently.*

Hanh: *is about moral qualities, her love for her family, husband and kids, having a true married love, not a feeling of in-love.*

Mr. QUAN was clear that the Four Virtues was clearly still present in an ideal wife, even though they are not so elaborated anymore he had to admit, and “*not as old-fashioned as the meaning they had in the older history*”. And when I asked Mr. TAN, he answered:

*Hmmm, these traditions are old rules that were taught before. So I wouldn't ask my “wife to be” if she could promise to keep these points. But there are qualities in these things that would make me think that if a girl acts like that, then I would feel a stronger attraction, maybe. The behaviour is most important of those four points. Because it shapes the way she is towards me, my parents, my children, and friends. It is the thing you can relate to, in the end. She might get fatter or older, and lose her looks, or her voice may change. But the behaviour is the easiest thing to address or ask for a change *laughter.*

But these are not looked at as something that is important to teach to today's youth. It is to some extent important as they have been taught to my informants when they were young, but they don't value them in the same way as their older generation. But if the woman acted in a way that was according to these ideals it would not be negative when the men were asked to describe what qualities and duties a wife should have. But my informants in my age group did use these qualities to describe the ideal wife, and duties of a wife (of course it would be hard not to do so, as there are a lot!). But the *Cung* and the *Hanh* was mentioned by all of them; the wife has to be able to do the housework and take care of the family; the baby, the husband and the family in-law. They all mentioned that an ideal woman must be able to take care of the family and the chores in the house, and Mr. Dung: "*The wife is the decorator in the house, and the man builds the house*".

The importance of having a son in the South-Asian countries was often mentioned by my informants, and by four of my female informants said that the son-boy-man in Haiphong, is treated like a God, while having a girl is less fortunate. Mrs. HUE said that her husband got sad when he was told that the wife was expecting a girl instead of a boy. And the ideal family (it is only allowed to have two children in Vietnam, publicly!) is first a girl, then a boy. Then the big sister can take care of her little brother, and the big sister and the mother will together both learn how the family life is, and going to be in their future marriages; wife taking care of all the husbands' needs. The *Tam tong*; where the daughter is said to first follow her father, then follow her husband then follow her first son, if her husband should be the first to pass away, was also said to out of the rule book, even by Mr. DUNG, although Mr. QUAN said the father is the only one that is significant now.

4.6 Single Women

The women I have interviewed which have not gotten married yet, have gotten a lot of criticism from the people around them because of their single state. And they feel bad when someone states this fact - joking or not. But they all have their hopes up that they eventually one day will get married. So, they have pretty much postponed the idea, or they are still looking for someone out there to be their husband to-be. Even though they know their time "is up" age wise, as far as the society will acknowledge it, to find a partner for marriage, they are still positive to find someone out there. However, the 'reason' or the most command suspicion for why these women are still single, have been that they are, most probably; "hot-tempered"

and difficult to be around, or because they have to work hard to support their family. Bélanger (2004:96) also mentions that Vietnamese women, who do not get married within the fashionable timeline, will be considered abnormal and negative rumours about what is “wrong” with them due to their single state will circulate amongst their relatives, neighbours and acquaintances. But like Bélanger (2004:114), the women I interviewed who were still single, did wish to find a husband and become a wife and mother in the future, but they did not think that marriage and childbearing are unavoidable cornerstones of female identity.

Miss HUYEN: *-I'm not married, so I'm unlucky since I'm 31 years and still not married.*

Me: *-Do people tell you that you are unlucky?*

Miss HUYEN: *Yes, they do. It is mostly for joking. Like when I'm with my family around Tet holiday (Chinese New year) they always say “this year you will have luck and get married”. You know, they always ask you about it. “When?”, “how long?”, “why not?” things like that. And when some people ask me about it, I hear in their voice that they are not joking, they are serious about my unluckiness, or that I'm strange or weird because I'm still single. And that makes me sad when people joke like that. Because they don't know me, and they don't know if I want to be single, or if I choose to stay single. You know, there are many people in Haiphong who does not have the chance to “get out there” and look for a possible partner for marriage because they are busy with providing for their family and working.*

4.6.1 “Hot-tempered”

At first, when I heard the phrase “hot-tempered” I thought it meant that someone was uncontrollable or aggressive, but it turns out that “hot-tempered” is a far more complex saying.

For example, people from Haiphong are known to be called loud-spoken by people from other provinces, and the reason they are said to be loud-spoken is because Haiphong is a city close to the harbour, and so the people have to shout in dialogs to drown the sounding roars from the waves. The women from Haiphong are known to be very beautiful but, unfortunately very

loud which seen as is as a negative quality in women since the feminine qualities should be gentle, sweet and elegant as opposed to the masculine qualities which are naughty, energetic and difficult to control (Rydstrøm, 2004:82). Also, when I asked questions about unmarried women and men, both Mrs. MAI, Mrs. THU, Miss. HUYEN and all of my male informants, mention that an old and unmarried woman is often suspected to be “hot-tempered”, which is the reason why she is still single. Unmarried men on the other hand, had no nicknames or negative associations since the man is capable of reproducing even in his older age, and besides; an old man can always marry a younger woman. A “hot-tempered” woman is considered to have difficulty getting married since she is not carrying out her female character; *tinh nu* (Rydstrøm, 2004:74), because she is acting in a more masculine way; “over heated”. And the loud-spoken women from Haiphong are considered to be hot-tempered women. So the cosmology from early centuries is still in the vocabulary when defining negative qualities in women in Haiphong city.

Mrs. THU: Today, I have several friends who are divorced, and a good friend who have never been married. Now, my mum, who is very traditional and conservative, would even say that it is no problem. It is better to be happy alone, than to be married to someone and feel unhappy.

The dating market for the single women on the ‘wrong’ side of the 20s, is limited and has made my female informants Ms. HOANG, and the sister of my male informant Mr. HAI, to choose a husband from the ‘left over piles’, mainly because both of these women got married not because they were in-love with their fiancés, but because it was time for them to get married as soon as possible. So their families started asking around for men in the same age group as their single daughters, and arranged for them to meet in haste.

4.7 Local Girlfriends

Other shame related findings, have been to break a marriage, as in being the local girlfriend, making the husband leave his marriage. But all three of the four men I have interviewed, where *very* familiar with the fact that husbands find a local girlfriend every now and then, but the marriage is highly respected, and even today, will carry on despite the difficulties on the way, except from my one male informant who was divorced.

Mrs. MAI said:

Today, many couples get divorced because the husband is cheating on his wife, from my former class in high school; ten of the girls have gotten divorced. And today, more and more are getting a divorce, and that is a big, big change from before.

The men on the other hand were more decided on that a marriage is a marriage, and a local girlfriend is *just* a local girlfriend, or as Tan described:

*.... In Vietnam we have a saying: "You eat rice for breakfast and noodles for lunch" *laughing. But you will always come back to the "rice". The "noodles" you can eat on every corner, but the "rice" is back at home. A local girlfriend lasts only temporary, but you always come back to the wife back home at some point.*

And when I asked if there were any incidents of the wife having a local *boyfriend*, Mr. TAN answered:

Some do, but not so much as the men. The women spend more time back home taking care of everything after they have finished work. And because of that it is faster to notice if the wife is missing for some hours than it is for the man.

But the difference is that if a Vietnamese woman finds a boyfriend, and she stays over night with him, then she will leave her husband the next day, because she feels a stronger love for this boyfriend. If she does not spend the night there, then she still loves her husband the most. The husband will stay overnight with his local girlfriend, but return home to his family in the morning. Women are more serious than men on that point.

I think what Mr. TAN means here, is that the Vietnamese men care less and unaffected by having extramarital sex while the Vietnamese women becomes more affected, so affected that the possibility of her breaking the marriage might even be greater. Maybe because in order for a Vietnamese wife to have extramarital sex she would have to leave the household, most likely on her own, which will make people miss her absents much earlier.

5.0 Conclusion

In this mater thesis, I have been investigating how the broader changes in the society impacts on gender relations in Haiphong, and in particular on intimate relationships, marriage and understandings of shame, and what the adult people in Haiphong thinks causes these changes. I have outlined both the English Dictionary's and the cultural Vietnamese definitions of shame to highlight that a shameful act is seen as something more serious in the collective society in Vietnam. I have developed my account of important concepts and deepened my account of these concepts by locating them in their cultural and historical context.

Furthermore, I have gone through my research design and chosen method to gather empirical evidence, and my ontological and epistemological assumptions, an evaluation of challenges and advantages I accounted for when conducting the interviews, a description of my approach when recruiting informants and an explanation of my selection, for now to come to my concluding chapter.

My inductive approach by gathering material concerning what people in Haiphong define as shameful acts shows that the Vietnamese governments' way of opening up to the outside world has had an impact on the society of Haiphong. The women, and men for that matter, have been introduced to new ways of delegating the chores in the family household and to prioritize their own individual entertainment. This has been influenced by traveling to European countries, observing foreign tourists and interacting with business connections traveling and staying in Haiphong, and by watching Western movies and television.

The choosing of husbands for women in Haiphong is limited when they reach the age above what is considered to be the ideal age for marriage and they have to settle with what is left in the singles market.

None of my female informants who are, or have been, married are happy about their marriage partner, and/or the marriage situation they are in. One of my female respondents, Ms. HOANG decided to leave her marriage after being physically abused by her husband, who she perhaps not would have chosen in the first place if it had not been for the pressure from her surroundings of finding a husband as soon as possible, while Mrs. MAI is expecting her parent in-laws to reprove her husband when he becomes too aggressive towards her.

The decision making when searching for the ideal husband is influenced by the Western media and other women in their contact network who have married a westerner, which makes them open up to what can be expected of a marriage partner; share the house work, which is something my male informants think less of. Mr. Tan and Mr. Quan were both more ironic about this, and Mr. Tan felt very embarrassed when having to buy milk and diapers back home to his wife and baby, and as I see it; having to do so to get on good terms with his wife after she exposed his extramarital affair not long ago. The appearance of a mother figure and a father figure back home is not looking bright for the moment, as Mr. Tan said that his almost one year old daughter cries when she sees him or when he tries to hold her, which is because he is rarely and often late back home, Mr. TAN admits.

Some of my female informants said they don't need the husbands of Haiphong anymore, and that some women now get married only to have children, to then get divorced as the husband is not of any use anymore, except for financial support. But the women I've interviewed who are divorced or separated do not explain this as their reason for leaving, and only one of my informants actually new someone who had done this.

The women in Haiphong are more liberal than the men, which becomes more clear when the wife moves in to her family in-laws, and they feel tricked by being pushed into an old-fashioned feudal Confucian home of their newlywed husband where their new place in the family hierarchy makes them follow the feudal Confucian tu duc structure they thought was out of fashion long ago. But why should the women have become more liberal than the men? It is unlikely that this is purely upbringing, since why should families raise men to be more conservative than women. More likely, the combination of much increased educational and economic opportunities available to women (compared with less drastic change for men) means that for them the traditional system no longer fits; hence they are more open to the liberal influences in the Western media to which they are exposed.

For women I interviewed, then, the cultures of both traditional Confucianism and reformed Communism, with their emphasis on maintaining the appearance for family harmony for the good of society, no longer works. With greater economic independence and exposure to more individualistic alternatives, the imperative to maintain face is, while still powerful, no longer compelling. But the individualistic views that make one want to do something for oneself that is not your purpose or role in the society; places the individual in the danger of generating shame or *mất mặt /mất thể diện* on to the rest of the family; both the parent in-laws who let

you in to the family circle, and the family who “failed” in their up-bringing, which again creates a disorder in the structure. This shows that this one-party Communistic nation has failed to abandon the feudal Confucian hierarchy, if that is the plan?

Why appearance is so important might also be anchored in the Confucian doctrine mentioned by Drummond & Rydstrøm (2004:8); where a hierarchal well-managed family in the Confucian doctrine means peace and order in the whole country, which can be very beneficial to the Communist one party system. The women of Haiphong, then, find themselves on the wrong side of two powerful ideologies (Communist and Confucian), caught between these and another, Western liberalism with its individualist orientation, and the result seems to be great discontent with current marital arrangements.

Hence the last campaigns as (Phinney, 2013:654) mentions, the Happy Family Campaign and the Law on Marriage Campaign increase this contradiction, moving women’s journeys away from the feudal Confucian structure but tying them to a traditional old fashioned housewife model, yet also approving (on economic grounds) working outside the home, increasing the material basis of female independence. In this model the men may continue with their regular lives, including lives on the side, as long as they insure the family both reproductively as well as financially; yet this formula is unlikely to satisfy women who see the possibility of alternatives.

My female informants’ responses show that there are women who are challenging this structural hierarchy because they are unsatisfied in their situation of being the one having to do all the chores back home, and having difficulties getting approval to prioritize their own entertainment without generating shame. How these contradictions will work out in the long term remains unclear; but it seems unlikely that a return to traditional Confucian values is a likely outcome in an economy increasingly dependent on women’s labour.

5.1 Further Relevant Research Questions

What I would be interested in focusing on as future relevant questions would be to see if these changes which are challenging a long tradition of the country’s structural hierarchy, especially if it evolves further, creates a smaller gap between the duties of men and women, and husbands and wives in the society. And if so, would this create a new campaign indoctrinated

by the government authorities to either create a setback of such an evolvment, or perhaps create a campaign in favour of this evolvment if the women's labour is considered a greater economic strength for the country than being tired out back in the family household?

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7.1 Attachment 1 - Interview Guide

In the first section in my interview guide, I started by asking my informant to introduce him/herself, and if there were any information I felt was missing between questions 2-12, I would ask them when my informant was finished with the introduction. In the second section I asked more pointed questions.

Section 1

- 1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?**
 2. How old are you?
 3. What is your profession?
 4. Education?
 5. What is your relationship status?
 6. How many brothers and/or sisters do you have?
 7. Where in Haiphong are you from?
 8. How long have you lived there?
 9. Can you tell me a little about your family?
 10. How many people live in your household?
 11. What kind of professions do/did they have?
 12. If married, how old were you when you got married?
-

Section 2

13. What age do you think is 'the best' age to get married?
14. What do you see as the most important qualities in a wife?
15. What do you see as the most important duties of a wife?
16. Do you see any changes of generations of women in their role as wives?
17. What do you think of these changes? And are there any changes you would like to make?
18. Do you think two people should live together without getting married first?
19. Do you know anyone who does this?
20. What makes a good reputation for a single/married woman? Single/married man?
21. What makes a good reputation for a single/married man?

22. Do you have a role model?
23. Can you think of a time when your family was most proud of you?
24. What do you think you would have to do to make your family feel ashamed of you?
25. What shameful acts do you think are unforgivable? And forgivable?
26. What do you think about when you hear the word 'shame'?
27. Is there anything else you would like to add to the topics we have been talking about?

Thank you so much for taking your time to give this interview!