



Research Overview on the Life of Families with Foreign Elements in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

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Abstract. Ho Chi Minh City is considered a safe land of perching birds, where diverse and colorful cultures converge. Experiencing many difficulties throughout history, Ho Chi Minh City has been growing and developing to affirm the country's leading position. Alongside the city's economic and social development, the cultural environment has been significantly diversified. For instance, the imprints of families with foreign elements as the result of transnational marriages - have become the trend of the 21st century. The article summarizes, discusses, and analyzes related articles, including theories, regarding the topic: "The Life of families with foreign elements in Ho Chi Minh City" with the literature review approach.

Keywords: literature review · multicultural family · marriage · family relation involving foreign elements 1

1 Introduction

Since the beginning of 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected many parts of the world and aspects of the socio-economic and cultural life of the affected nations. Vietnam has also not been immune to the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is now the fourth wave. One of the pandemic prevention measures that the Vietnamese government took since the end of 2020 was to suspend commercial flights and only allow flights with important cases which made many foreigners marrying Vietnamese people not have many opportunities to bring their small families back to visit their paternal homeland. Not to mention that from March 8, 2020, all passengers of international flights landing in Vietnam must be quarantined for 14 days; other countries in the world also apply the same policy as Vietnam's for passengers flying from Vietnam, ... which leads to many people, if there is no urgent work, they have to "stay where they are" because flying back and forth takes nearly a month of two-way isolation, affecting work and life. This situation has lasted for nearly two years now; city governments are cautiously proposing measures and policies for socio-economic recovery after the pandemic [1]. Our research question is whether staying in the new home country of the spouses (most of the time, Vietnam is the homeland of the wives in transnational marriages) for a long

time causes inhibitions in the psychology of people far from home? Especially family reunion holidays? What are the effects of economic, cultural, and social life on families with foreign elements or multicultural families in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam? With a relatively new way of posing problems in Vietnam, the implementation of an overview study has certain scientific and practical significance, contributing to the implementation of Decision No. 1280/QĐ-UBND dated April 14, 2020, of the Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee on the Movement "All people unite to build cultural life" in Ho Chi Minh City.

1.1 Research Theories and Theoretical Bases on Family and Family Culture

The first article is "Các lý thuyết tiếp cận nghiên cứu gia đình và văn hóa gia đình trong xã hội hiện nay" (Theories of approaching family research and family culture in today society) [2]. The author has shown that family and family culture are the topics of interest to social science researchers in many disciplines. Family and family culture are complex issues that need to be based on an integrated approach, combining many different but not mutually exclusive approaches. In the article, she presents some theoretical approaches that are commonly used in studying family and family culture in today's society: the structural functionalist approach; the conflict theory approach; the feminist approach; the development approach (life path); the cultural area theory approach; and the intercultural exchange approach. We agree with the author on the interdisciplinary approach to family and family culture research, and each theoretical approach usually explains only certain aspects of family life. There will be no theory explaining all the family problems; in other words, some aspects of family life are suitable only to be applied in one approach and not in other approaches. In the current social context, when studying family and family culture, selecting a theoretical approach will affect the interpretation of data and different conclusions despite the same material. There are cases when choosing to combine several approaches will provide profound and complete explanations, complementing each other. Or, when two approaches may be at odds, researchers can test which approach is correct by looking at which social facts support which approach. From there, researchers will decide how to approach theories following their own research goals, subjects, and viewpoints.

Changes in marriage, family, and divorce are closely related to modernization. Modernization can reduce family size, thus increasing the likelihood of divorce, and raising women's socially independent status. Modern marriages based on love and affection may be less stable than those based on socio-economic ties. Prejudice or stigma about divorce gradually decreases and, in turn, increases the level of divorce in society. In addition to the effects of modernization, traditional values and customs about marriage and family also play an important role in shaping new norms. Today, many women enjoy the social and economic independence they gain from gender equity in education and the labor market. In this article, the authors also analyze the theory of cultural change and maintains traditional values: Modernization has a close relationship with cultural change. This relationship is explained in many different approaches. A school that emphasizes the convergence of values due to modernization or political and economic forces that lead to cultural change. In modern society, value transformation takes place in many

different fields. The growing popularity of transnational marriages in Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta, is a testament to cultural change, maintaining traditional cultural values in parallel with the addition of new cultural elements to integrate culture in marriage families of different races, ethnicities, ... Applying these two theories in our research, we put forward the research hypothesis: multicultural families living in the bride's hometown, specifically living in the most modern urban area in Vietnam - Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam will have the dominant Vietnamese culture more clearly, especially in families with economically independent women; or these couples live close to the Vietnamese community in the area of residence; the husband goes to work far away; working time from morning to evening or working away from home for a long time; their Children study in Vietnamese schools or live close to their mothers and grandmothers.

Family values and family relationships based on the theory of family values are identified as important institutions. Economic decisions, human capital, labor markets, and credit markets, such as job types, wages, career opportunities, homeownership, and financial assets - occur in the family and depend a lot on family values. Our research object is transnational marriage with many cultures together, so family values in family culture certainly vary by country; each member of society will not be identical and similar to each other.

On the other hand, social organization is a vivid expression of ethnic culture. The family is both a social institution and a bloodline unit. The family is both a part of the administrative system of a country and a basic unit, so it is always strongly influenced by the ethnic community and depends on the development level of the ethnic groups, which have different developmental teachings. Nevertheless, the family is a historical category, an essential cell of society, and a complex field that includes many aspects and relationships such as socio-biological, production – economy; ethics – aesthetics; psychology – law. In the current context, related to our research topic, whether the marriage has foreign elements or transnational marriage, it is clear that Vietnamese family culture has been changing in integration. Consequently, there needs to be more in-depth research on the issue in question because the Vietnamese family culture, according to the contemporary and syncretic calendar, is very diverse; we cannot take “our nation as the center: to recognize the culture of other ethnic groups.

There are 35 articles in the Yearbook of the 2020 Science Seminar “Xây dựng gia đình hạnh phúc, phát triển bền vững trong thời kỳ công nghiệp hóa, hiện đại hóa đất nước” (Building a happy family, sustainable development in the period of industrialization and modernization of the country) [3], Committee Propaganda – Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, in which most articles mentioned marriage, family, culture, family education, the role of women and socio-political organizations contributing to preserving and promoting the fine traditional culture of Vietnamese families. Those articles are of high content of theoretical basis, manipulating concepts such as: “building a happy family and responsibility in marriage” [4], the authors restate the concept of marriage, marital relationship and responsibilities of each member according to Directive No. 49 - CT/TW dated February 21, 2005 of the Secretariat (Session IX) on “Xây dựng gia đình thời kỳ CNH – HĐH đất nước” (Building family in the period of industrialization and modernization of the country); the article “Tầm quan trọng của giáo dục gia đình đối với việc hình thành, nuôi dưỡng và phát triển nhân cách con người Việt Nam trong giai

đoạn hiện nay” (The importance of family education in the formation, nurturing and development of Vietnamese human personality in the current period), Phan Thi Hong Xuan [5] recalls the content of the task of building Vietnamese culture and people to meet the requirements of sustainable development of the country in the spirit of the Resolution of the Ninth Conference, the Central Committee of the Party (Session XI) “Family is an important environment, directly educating lifestyle and forming personality”, ... a quote from President Ho Chi Minh “A good family makes a good society, a good society makes a better family. The nucleus of society is the family”; Nguyen Thanh Tung, in the article “Văn hóa gia đình – cái nôi giáo dục, nuôi dưỡng nhân cách con người” (Family culture - the cradle of education and nurturing of human personality), questions the influence of consumer society on human personality, the value of family culture on human personality, etc. However, most articles have not mentioned marriage and family with foreign elements in HCMC.

Talking about Vietnamese families, it is impossible not to mention “Nội” and “Ngoại”. The article “Những chuyển dịch qua không gian và thời gian và khái niệm của người Việt về “Nội” và “Ngoại” (Transitions through space and time and Vietnamese concepts of “Nội” and “Ngoại”)), shows that “Nội” is the opposite of “Ngoại”, in the kinship structure of the Vietnamese people. The paternal side (Nội) consists of people of the same bloodline from the father or the husband’s side. The maternal side (Ngoại) consists of people from the mother or the wife’s side of the same bloodline. Although there have been changes than before, paternal relatives are still valued by many families and individuals and are more invested in bonding and nurturing (worshipping) purposes when compared to maternal relatives. The paternal lineage has a depth of time, history, and ancestors because it is counted from many generations. Dr. Erik Harms writes, “The ideal family in Vietnam values the paternal family model and is organized around the man. But this idea ignores the role of the wife (and the maternal side) in the reproduction of the paternal line. The distinction between “nội” and “ngoại” is only in each person’s mind. When it is shown in the direction of “bên trọng, bên khinh”, “bên nặng, bên nhẹ” (the paternal side is more important than the maternal side), the negative consequences in the development process will be many. In the current period, whether the preference of “Nội” over “Ngoại” according to Vietnamese cultural traditions has changed, especially for marriages with foreign elements in Ho Chi Minh City in the new context of the Covid-19 pandemic affecting all levels of socio-economic life in Vietnam as well as in other countries, Vietnamese brides and children of multicultural families not being able to return to the “Nội” side at the will of foreign husbands; living a long time with the “Ngoại” side, so “Ngoại” becomes “Nội”; “Ngoại” becomes “Nội” because of geographical distance and conditions, the possibility of family reunification on the “Nội” side. These are the research questions and hypotheses we posed in the research topic.

1.2 Transnational Marriage; Marriage with Foreign Elements

Talking about transnational marriage in the past time, perhaps the marriages between Vietnam - Korea, Vietnam - Taiwan are mentioned the most because there are many marriages between Vietnamese brides and Korean and Taiwanese grooms, through brokers: Nguyen Van Tiep and colleagues under the sponsorship of POSCO TJ Park Korea, conducted a research project “Nghiên cứu hiện tượng phụ nữ Việt Nam lấy chồng Hàn Quốc:

thực trạng, xu hướng và giải pháp” (Research on the phenomenon of Vietnamese women marrying Koreans: current situation, trends, and solutions) [6]. This study combines both Vietnamese and Korean sides and is considered one of the first studies conducted from the Vietnamese side on the issue of marriage between Vietnamese brides and Korean grooms. Moreover, this is also considered one of the starting premises for the topic of Vietnamese - Korean multicultural family research.

Trong quyển sách “Hiện đại và động thái của truyền thống ở Việt Nam: Những cách tiếp cận nhân học” (Modernism and the dynamics of tradition in Vietnam: Anthropological approaches), Faculty of Anthropology, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University – Ho Chi Minh City, there is an article related to our research content, it is: “Quyền lực ở Việt Nam nhìn từ trong ra: Tranh luận với quan niệm về hiện tượng xuyên quốc gia: Một vài nhận xét ban đầu về những nữ di dân người Việt lấy chồng ở Đài Loan và miền Nam Việt Nam” (Power in Vietnam from the inside out: Controversy with the concept of transnational phenomena: Some initial observations on Vietnamese female migrants married in Taiwan and South Vietnam [7] that demonstrates a multi-dimensional view from a foreigner’s point of view.

The article “Di cư xuyên quốc gia qua kết hôn với người nước ngoài của phụ nữ ở đồng bằng Sông Cửu Long từ lý thuyết xã hội học” (Transnational migration through marriage with foreigners of the Mekong Delta women from sociological theory) of Phan Thuan and Du Thi My Han [8] shows that like many articles on migration, the authors of the article affirms that migration is a common phenomenon in society, especially in the current new situation, there is migration in the form of marriage to a foreigner in transnational migration. In Vietnam, especially in the Mekong Delta, this phenomenon has been happening more and more. As the name of the article suggests, the authors present research theories on transnational migration and transnational marriage: Structural pressure theory, social network theory, and explanation from the perspective of sociological theory. Accordingly, each theory has its reasonable “core” and applies rationality to explain different aspects of the problem. From the explanations from the perspective of sociological theory, the author also makes some recommendations. Because the object of our research is transnational marriage and multicultural families living in Ho Chi Minh City, among the recommendations given by the author, we only agree with the author on one recommendation: localities need to step up the propaganda of the movement to build a happy and sustainable family, and to replicate the movement throughout the population in order to build a progressive family; promote gender equality, limit violence to contribute to increasing optimism for women in the Mekong Delta about domestic marriage.

Another name for transnational marriage, Dr. Phan Cong Khanh and the research team recognize this phenomenon as “Marriage with foreign elements” through the topic “Hôn nhân có yếu tố nước ngoài ở Khu vực Nam bộ hiện nay” (Marriage with the foreign element in the Southern Region today) (Ministry-level scientific research project - National Academy of Public Administration HCMC, 2008). The results of the research are presented in four chapters: Chapter 1: Overview of the picture with foreign elements in the South; Chapter 2: Causes and social effects of marriage with foreign elements in the South, Chapter 3: The integration ability of Vietnamese brides in foreign countries; Chapter 4: Issues, advocacy trends of marriage with foreign elements in the South and

solutions. Reading all 305 pages of the research study, the topic focuses on analyzing Vietnamese brides abroad, not marriage and families with foreign elements living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Therefore, our research direction is a new research direction that there are hardly any scientists who do in-depth research [9].

The international research article “Taiwanese-Vietnamese transnational marriage families in Taiwan: Perspectives from Vietnamese immigrant mothers and Taiwanese teachers” by Eva Chian-hui Chen (Doctoral Thesis in Psychology, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2011) shows that transnational marriage in which one spouse immigrates to the other’s home country, has recently increased significantly across Asia. The author’s research focuses on Taiwan, where many Southeast Asian women have immigrated as spouses in the last decade; their children are currently going to school in Taiwan. These trends have caused social and educational debates in government and the public. However, little is known about these cross-border marriages, how they socialize with their children or how the children live once they enter the Taiwanese education system. The research takes the case of Vietnamese women, one of the largest “new” immigrant communities in Taiwan, as the main research object. Questions such as (1) how do immigrant mothers raise children? (2) what are the teacher’s educational goals for the Vietnamese-Taiwanese children... The author concludes that: the majority of immigrant mothers quickly learned Mandarin. They are motivated by a desire for higher education for their children and realize that speaking Mandarin to their children is important to their success in the early grades. The mothers also let their children participate in extra programs after school. Furthermore, most Vietnamese mothers revealed that they have tried to instill values from their home culture and hope their children will eventually learn the Vietnamese language and customs. They also reported difficulties in their relationships with their husbands and in-laws raising children... The way of posing the problem and part of the research results of Eva Chian-hui Chen will also be our approach. However, the context is different – the location of our research subjects are foreign husbands who are living and working in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. [10].

1.3 Human Development Issues, State Management Policies for Marriage and Family Relations with Foreign Elements

Directive No. 03/2005/CT-TTg dated February 25, 2005, of the Prime Minister on strengthening state management over marriage and family relations with foreign elements. The Directive points out: Most Vietnamese women, before going abroad to live with their husbands, have not been given enough consultation to have the necessary knowledge about the law, language, customs, and traditions of the host country; as a result, it was difficult for them to integrate into the community and settle down in a foreign country. Some Vietnamese women, after going abroad, fall into unfortunate circumstances but have not been protected by the laws of the host country promptly. It can be seen here that the Directive has not mentioned the state management of marriages with foreign elements in Vietnam. Until April 22, 2011, in Can Tho city, Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan chaired the National Conference on marriage and family relations with foreign elements. Co-chaired by: Minister of Labor, War Veterans, and Social Affairs Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan; Secretary of Can Tho City Party Committee Tran Thanh Man; Deputy Minister of Justice Dinh Trung Tung; Vice President of the

Central Committee of the Vietnam Women's Union Nguyen Thi Kim Thuy. Attending the Conference were: leaders of the National Assembly's Social Affairs Committee; Ministries of Labour, War Veterans and Social Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs; representatives of the Committee for Culture, Education, Youth, Adolescents, and Children of the National Assembly, the Ministries of Public Security, Information and Communication, Culture, Sports and Tourism, Planning and Investment, Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union Central Committee; Vietnamese Ambassador to Korea, Head of Vietnam Economic and Cultural Office in Taipei; leaders of People's Committees, Departments of Labor – War Veterans and Social Affairs, Departments of Justice of 35 provinces and centrally-run cities (localities with many Vietnamese women marrying foreigners); representatives of many central and local media and communication agencies. In the coming time, to prevent and repel negative and deviant phenomena and to make marriage and family relations healthy with foreign elements, in the process of continuing to thoughtfully and effectively implement Directive No. 03/2005/CT-TTg dated February 25, 2005 of the Prime Minister on strengthening state management over marriage and family relations involving foreign elements and relevant provisions of law, ministries, branches, agencies and People's Committees of provinces and centrally-run cities need to focus on directing many contents which include: The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism strengthens the state management of families; assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with relevant agencies and People's Committees of provinces and centrally run cities in directing the building of a prosperous, progressive and happy family; replicating the advanced model of marriage and family support with foreign elements, ...

Perspectives on the multicultural context in South Korea, the article “South Korean Society and Multicultural Citizenship” (Xã hội Hàn Quốc và Quốc tịch đa văn hóa) by Assoc. Prof. Choe Hyun [11], Cheju National University states that marriages with foreign elements account for 12% of all marriages in Korea and makes recommendations by referencing the models of the United States, Canada, and France for multicultural citizenship and assessing evaluate its applicability to Korean society.

1.4 Multicultural Education

Nguyen Thi Minh Phuong with the master's Thesis “Gia đình đa văn hóa Việt – Hàn ở thành phố Hồ Chí Minh” (The Vietnamese - Korean multicultural family in Ho Chi Minh City) [6], also shows the interest in learning more deeply about the cultural life of Vietnamese - Korean multicultural families. Thereby we can also clearly see the cultural panorama of the era that is gradually shifting with more diverse colors. If it was considered a luxury to marry a foreign husband in the past, this trend is gradually becoming common. The fact that Vietnamese women marry Koreans has become a phenomenon that needs social attention in terms of economy, society, and culture. The research topic has clarified practical issues, actual situation, cultural adaptation process of Korean husbands and Vietnamese wives, issues of children's education in Vietnamese - Korean multicultural families in Ho Chi Minh City in particular and multicultural families in Vietnam in general. The research has forecasted the development trend of multiculturalism and made policy recommendations from the two sides of Vietnam - Korea, thereby contributing to building happiness and sustainability of Vietnamese -

Korean multicultural families in Vietnam now and in the future. At the same time, Kim Kyung Hee's Master's Thesis with the topic "Giáo dục con cái trong gia đình đa văn hóa Hàn – Việt tại thành phố Hồ Chí Minh" (Educating children in the multicultural family of Korean – Vietnam in Ho Chi Minh City) [12] has also contributed to building an appropriate educational environment for children born into multicultural families. Thereby, we can see the government's attention in general and scientists in particular to the issue of educating children of Vietnamese - Korean families, a core issue to solve problems in the married life of Vietnamese - Korean families.

2 Conclusion

The above works show that theoretical and practical issues have been studied extensively and comprehensively by Vietnamese and foreign scientists. However, there are not many works and articles with content on the lives of families with foreign elements in Vietnam, especially economic, cultural, spiritual, and multiculturally educational life in transnational marriage families living in HCMC. The remaining problems of the authors' topics that have been done in the past will be further clarified by the research team through the fieldwork process; if VNU-HCM approves the registration for performing science and technology tasks, category B, the research results suggest policy consultations for relevant agencies and departments in order to realize the goal of building a cultural and civilized urban lifestyle in Ho Chi Minh City.

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