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## **CHANGE IN BEHAVIORAL CULTURE IN VIETNAMESE FAMILIES TODAY**

### **Introduction**

Vietnamese community accounts for over 85% of the country's population, so when it comes to family culture and family behaviors in Vietnam, we often talk about Vietnamese culture. Over 30 years of renovation and in the current trend of international integration, Vietnamese family life has had many changes. Under the impact of economic, political, cultural and social factors, the values of traditional family also change, so the change in behavior among members of today's families compared to the traditional ones is understandable. The problem is that in the change of behavior in today's families, we need to see which signs of behavior are still positive and consistent with today's families to inherit and promote, but remove outdated and inadequate behavior to build a prosperous, progressive, happy and civilized family.

### **Related concepts**

*Family:* Currently, there are many different interpretations of the concept of family. According to researcher Dao Duy Anh, family consists of members in a house; family is a small unit of society, both dependent on society and a mirror that reflects all achievements and contradictions of society (Dao Duy Anh, Overview of Vietnamese history and culture 2014). According to researchers G. Endrweit and G. Trommsdorff, family is a special category because it expresses a certain role structure (father/mother/daughter/son/grandchild/ brother & sister...), gender and generation separation are the criteria of family structure and will transform through it a very special cooperation and solidarity which ceremonially organizes its establishment in all societies. In addition, the society also gives this special group very special functions (Endrweit, Trommsdorff 2001, p. 640). In this study, we use the concept of family according to the Vietnamese Law on Marriage and Family: A family is a group of people who are tied together by marriage, blood or nurturing relations, giving rise to rights and obligations among themselves (Law on Marriage and Family 2015).

*Behavior*: is the reaction of a person to the impact of other person on himself in a specific situation. According to author Trieu Quoc Vinh, “Behavior is the reaction of a person to the impact of other person on himself in a specific situation. It is shown that people are not active in communication but in selective and calculated responses, expressed through attitudes, behaviors, gestures, speech styles – depending on knowledge, experience and personality of each person to achieve the highest communication results” (Trieu Quoc Vinh 2004, p. 12).

*Behavioral culture in family*: is the behavior that members of a family learn and select, recognize, accept in the process of living together to become a pattern, order and tradition of family. Such conduct governs the concept and behavior of family members in their relationship with each other.

In this study, we refer to the change in behavioral culture of Vietnamese families today compared to the traditional ones. In this study, traditional families in Vietnam are understood as the families before 1945, which are feudal ones in Vietnam.

Along with the change in economic, cultural and social conditions, Vietnamese families are experiencing great changes in family size, type and function. Then behavioral culture in families also has certain changes. Here, we refer to the change in the behavioral culture in the families around three basic relationships of husband and wife, brothers and sisters, grandparents and grandchildren.

### **Change in behavioral culture of Vietnamese families. Firstly, it is the change in behavioral culture in the relationship of husband and wife**

In husband and wife relationship, we see clearly in traditional family that husband has a higher role than wife; he retains the right to decide all important things in the family “Only men have the right to communicate with outsiders, women are not allowed to interfere in any matter. So, from the family to the village, receiving guests and social communication, there is nothing to do with women. Because of that, women have little knowledge, like useless people in life” (Phan Ke Binh 2006, p. 58). Property, land, and important household objects belong to the husband. The wife has almost no right to own and decide on these properties. The wife has to obey her husband’s decisions. If there is discontent and disagreement, with the virtues of sacrifice and patience of Vietnamese women plus the thinking and awareness of being “behind the husband”, the wife will always let her husband decide family issues. This is part of Confucian influence into Vietnam: value men above women. Not only in Vietnam but also in the traditional family in Korea, women have to withstand the same behavior. According to Lee Seon Hee, in correlation comparison with Korea in the Middle Ages, we will see that although the status of Vietnamese women is much lower than men’s but it is

higher than the Korean women's at that time (Lee Seon Hee 2012). However, in today's family, this one-sided tyranny is changing. In rural areas, the change in behavior between husband and wife is slower than in urban areas. Men in rural families today are still considered the mainstay, the one who decides everything in the family. Wife always obeys her husband and still depends on her husband. In urban areas, the trend of equality between husband and wife is increasingly evident. The trend of equal conduct between husband and wife is manifested in all economic activities, sex, spiritual life of husband and wife.

Husband in today's family has more respect for his wife than in the traditional family, so the division of property as well as the right to decide the main spending in the family has started to belong to the wife.

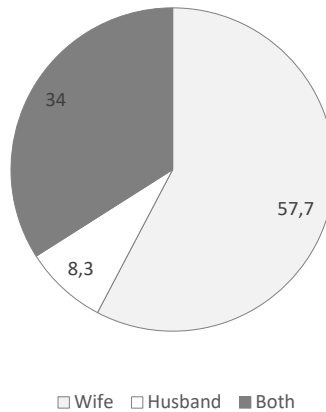
**Table 1.** Main spending decision maker in family

| Work items                              | Main decision maker |      |         |      |       |     |
|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|------|---------|------|-------|-----|
|                                         | Wife                |      | Husband |      | Other |     |
|                                         | Votes               | %    | Votes   | %    | Votes | %   |
| Buy house                               | 118                 | 11.8 | 844     | 84.4 | 38    | 3.8 |
| Buy expensive equipment                 | 231                 | 23.1 | 798     | 79.8 | 29    | 2.9 |
| Buy household appliances                | 669                 | 66.9 | 256     | 25.6 | 75    | 7.5 |
| Daily expenses                          | 871                 | 87.1 | 79      | 7.9  | 50    | 5.0 |
| School fee for children                 | 781                 | 78.1 | 191     | 19.1 | 28    | 2.8 |
| Entertainment                           | 505                 | 50.5 | 438     | 43.8 | 56    | 5.6 |
| Spending for guests, funeral or wedding | 353                 | 35.3 | 612     | 61.2 | 35    | 3.5 |
| Other spending                          | 824                 | 82.4 | 145     | 14.5 | 31    | 3.1 |

Source: Hanoi University of Culture 2012, p. 226.

Although in today's families, husbands still have main role in earning money and main income in the family, general budget is managed by wives. It is clearly shown by our data of survey on young families in Hanoi now.

Sex plays a very important role in husband and wife relationship "The important role of sex is reflected in the contribution to preserving family happiness. 39.9% of respondents rate that sex between husband and wife plays a dominant role from 50% to 70% of the sustainability of family happiness; 49.1% of people think that relationship dominates from 70% to 100% of family sustainability" (Le Thi Thanh Huong 2009, p. 101). In traditional families, sex is considered a "hard to say" issue. Often, wives and many husbands think that it is natural, and no need to discuss much. The wife/husband rarely says what she/ he wants in sex with her (his) spouse. So there is less complexity in this relationship. In a traditional family, wife always obeys her husband and does not dare to take the initiative in sex. Husband in a traditional family rarely pays attention to the attitude and needs of his wife in this matter, because he allows himself the right



**Chart 1.** General budget manager in young family

Source: author\*.

to ask his wife for sex without permission. Furthermore, with the delicate and discreet culture of Vietnamese women, especially with regard to sex, the wives in traditional society are also afraid, not daring to express personal attitude in the matter. However, in today's family, especially in the urban areas of Vietnam, husband starts to show respect and care for his wife's sexual needs, to listen and to share with his wife. And wife also begins to take the initiative in sex, dare to talk about her needs in this regard.

The behavior of husband and wife in today's families on the issue of child care, parenting and organizing family life has also changed in comparison with traditional ones. In a traditional family, as "family tradition", "practice", "habit", besides working with husband in farming, woman returns home for cooking, taking care of children, going to market, cleaning the house, washing clothes... And husband hardly does those things. Even when the wife is tired or too strenuous with houseworks, the husband rarely shares houseworks with his wife. But in today's family, especially in urban areas, the husband knows how to share with his wife and loves his wife when he finds that she is strenuous. He can go to kitchen to cook, wash clothes, help clean the house, take care of the children. "Such men appear more and more in the families with migrant labor wives, young workers' families in industrial parks, families in which wives are social workers and breadwinners" (Le Ngoc Van 2011, p. 419).

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\* The author has distributed a survey of 300 couples about behavioral culture in young families in Hanoi in 2016.

**Table 2.** Housework doer in young families in Hanoi today

| No | Work items                                   | Husband |      | Wife |      | Both |      | Other |     |
|----|----------------------------------------------|---------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-----|
|    |                                              | Vote    | %    | Vote | %    | Vote | %    | Vote  | %   |
| 1  | Going to market                              | 20      | 6,7  | 190  | 63,3 | 74   | 24,7 | 16    | 5,3 |
| 2  | Cooking                                      | 15      | 5,0  | 193  | 64,3 | 77   | 25,7 | 15    | 5,0 |
| 3  | Cleaning house                               | 17      | 5,7  | 168  | 56,0 | 98   | 32,7 | 17    | 5,7 |
| 4  | Washing                                      | 16      | 5,3  | 180  | 60,0 | 89   | 29,7 | 15    | 5,0 |
| 5  | Organizing entertainment and rest activities | 33      | 11,0 | 40   | 13,3 | 214  | 71,3 | 13    | 4,3 |

Source: author\*.

Although there has been a change in behavior between husband and wife towards greater equality, there are still many disadvantaged women in rural families and ethnic minorities in Vietnam. In a study on gender of ethnic minority families in the Central Highlands, through surveys of some ethnic minorities such as Gia rai, Ede and M'ngong, author Nguyen Thi Ha said: women play considerable role in economic contribution to the family and society but they are hardly recognized in this role. All production activities here have the participation of women such as cultivation, animal husbandry... but they are considered as assistants who do auxiliary, simple, negligible, undecisive works... Meanwhile, men are implicitly considered as the mainstay, main participants in the production activities and barely see them in the role of family caretakers (Hanoi University of Culture, 2012, p. 286).

### **Secondly, it is the change in behavioral culture in the relationship of parents and children**

In the traditional Vietnamese families before the August Revolution, children had to follow their parents' advice, whether they were right or not. Everything related to children was decided by parents. Even in marriage, children were not free to find their wife/husband but were arranged by their parents. In the past, the age of marriage in the traditional families was 13 for female and 16 for male. Because of the young age, the marriage was decided by parents. Parents also played an important role in career orientation and vocational training for their children. In traditional Vietnamese society, agriculture played a leading part, so parents were responsible for teaching their children to do farming. Parents also decided their children's education. Thus, it can be

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seen that in the traditional families, in the relationship of parents and children, parents played an important role, decided everything, children had a duty to listen and follow. Meanwhile, the behavior between parents and children in today's families, especially in urban areas, has changed markedly. Parents have more respect for their children; the marriage is decided by the young couple themselves, they do not have to follow their parents' arrangements. Children have actively expressed their opinions in all matters of the family. Parents have listened and respected their children's decision-making rights in relation to their own life as children begin to grow up. It shows that behavior in this relationship is more democratic than before.

In traditional Vietnamese families, parents often valued sons above daughters. Among the children, the eldest son and the eldest daughter-in-law had more roles and responsibilities than other children in taking care of their parents. They had to take care of their parents and family affairs such as funerals, weddings, anniversaries and ancestor-worshipping days, Tet holidays... more than other family members. In the traditional families, daughters-in-law were often considered as children and sons-in-law as guests. When the daughters-in-law entered husband's home, she had to take care all houseworks. The sons-in-law were considered as "guests", as outsiders only, not the ones in the family to take care of his parents-in-law. In the old days in Vietnam, parents used to value sons above daughters. Parents shared all the inheritance, house and land with their sons, but nothing for their daughters. They often said "daughters are children of other family". So when a daughter got married, it was not necessary for her to take care of her parents but she had to take care of her husband's family. The behavior that values boys above girls does not exist in all ethnic groups in Vietnam. According to author Guilmoto when studying culture in Vietnam, it depends on each ethnic group to value boys or girls more. In the South of Vietnam, the Khmer and the Cham prefer girls to boys, and it impacts on the rate of giving birth to boys and girls, leading to the difference in fertility rate (Guilmoto 2012, p. 17). Nowadays, families of some Confucian-influenced countries have also changed their behavior toward girls. In China, even though the mother still wants to have a son, when she knows she has a baby girl, the mother does not accept any behavior to abandon, choose or discriminate against girls (Eklund, Lisa 2011, p. 17). Today's families in Vietnam are different; parents respect both sons and daughters. In rural areas, the discrimination between boys and girls still exists, but in urban areas most parents treat equally with sons and daughters, the eldest with the youngest child in the family. Perhaps because of the law on marriage and family in Vietnam nowadays, each family has only 1 or 2 children, having few children, parents should love more and behave equally among their children. Moreover, the thought that men are more important than women in traditional society has changed, so boys and girls in the family are equally cared for by their par-

ents. Girls also inherited as boys. In fact, parents love and equally divide benefits for the children in the family, regardless of boy or girl, the oldest son or the second son.

**Table 3.** Views on behavior with boys and girls in the family

| No | View                                            | Agree |      | Disagree |      |
|----|-------------------------------------------------|-------|------|----------|------|
|    |                                                 | Vote  | %    | Vote     | %    |
| 1  | Boys must be cared more                         | 60    | 25,3 | 177      | 74,7 |
| 2  | Girls must be cared more                        | 59    | 24,9 | 178      | 75,1 |
| 3  | Boys and girls are cared equally                | 194   | 81,9 | 43       | 18,1 |
| 4  | Boys must be inherited more assets              | 38    | 16,1 | 199      | 84,0 |
| 5  | Girls must be inherited more assets             | 38    | 16,0 | 199      | 84,0 |
| 6  | Boys and girls must be equally inherited assets | 149   | 62,9 | 88       | 37,1 |

Source: author\*.

In today's families, the responsibility to take care of parents no longer weighs on the shoulders of the eldest son, but all children in the family have the same responsibility, regardless of son or daughter. Any child who lives with parents, near parents takes more care of parents. Moreover, in the urban areas nowadays, there is a growing trend that the elderly prefer not living with their children, so children do not need to take care of their parents every day. When parents are sick, children take care of them together. Behavior of parents with daughter-in-law and son-in-law in the family is now more balanced. If parents often valued their daughter-in-law more in the traditional families, today they value and love them both, regardless of daughter-in-law, son-in-law, all are children in the family, are treated in the same way.

### **Thirdly, it is the change in behavioral culture among brothers in a family**

Traditional Vietnamese families attach great importance to hierarchy, so in sibling relationship, the eldest brother was often more responsible than the younger brother. Our forefathers taught that elder brothers should be kind-hearted, younger brothers should respect elder brothers and the superiors. In traditional families, the eldest brother has an important role to his younger brothers; teach them on behalf of his father. When parents passed away, the eldest brother and sister-in-law had to take care of younger brothers until they grew up and got married. On the contrary, younger brothers respected and followed the eldest brother and sister-in-law. When the family had a big

\* The author distributed a survey of 237/300 married couples with children about the behavioral culture of parents and children in young families in Hanoi in 2016.

affair, the eldest brother had responsibility to contribute more than the younger brothers in the family, the younger brothers contribute voluntarily. The ancestor worship in the family was also the main responsibility of the eldest brother, the younger brothers had to contribute a part.

Behavior in sibling relationship in Vietnamese families today is changing in a more equal direction, all responsibilities and interests of siblings in the family are equally divided among each other. Basically, siblings in the family are always close, love each other, but the eldest brother no longer has to shoulder the biggest responsibility in all the family's affairs. Nowadays, especially in urban families, in case of family affair, those who have more economic conditions, they often contribute more, regardless of the eldest or the second son. Due to the current process of urbanization, especially in big cities in Vietnam, the sibling relationship in the families is somewhat looser than before. Due to the living, studying conditions and getting married, the siblings rarely live close to each other, they meet and share with each other less than traditional families.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, it can be seen that behavior in Vietnamese families today has changed a lot in comparison with traditional families. This is an inevitable change stemming from the impact of economic, cultural and social factors. If in the traditional families, the influence of Confucian ideology and hierarchy was always emphasized by feudal society, making the relationship of husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters always respect men and the elderly in the families: wives had to listen to husbands, children had to obey parents, younger brothers had to follow elder brothers, so far the democratic thought has crept into the life of each family. Behavior between husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters become more democratic and equal. This shows the progress in the life of Vietnamese families today. However, we also need to be alert to expressions that go against the good values in traditional families such as promoting the ego that husband and wife do not value each other, brothers do not love each other, and children disregard parents... It is these negative behaviors that create the instability of Vietnamese families today. Change is a continuous process that both preserves and inherits the values of traditional families while acquiring values of modern families such as equality, democracy and personal respect. It is important for Vietnam today that we should not be worried by the change in behavior in today's families compared to traditional ones, but take the best opportunities of the process of modernization and international integration to create a positive change to build a model of Vietnamese families full of prosperity, progress and happiness.

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### **Change in behavioral culture in vietnamese families today**

**Summary:** The process of innovation and international integration in Vietnam has significantly impacted on all aspects of human life, including family life. It has created a dramatic change, including a change in family behavior. Study on the changes in family behavior through the three relationships of husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters will provide us an objective view of the changes in today's families compared to traditional ones. Any change does not mean complete change, it is not completely bad, but there are positive changes that we need to consider and create conditions for Vietnamese families today to have the opportunity to inherit good values of traditional family behavior and receive positive values from modern society to contribute to comprehensive development of Vietnamese families.

**Key words:** family, behavioral culture, traditional family, change

### **Zmiany w kulturze zachowań we współczesnych rodzinach wietnamskich**

**Streszczenie:** Proces wprowadzania innowacji i integracji międzynarodowej w Wietnamie znacząco wpłynął na wszystkie aspekty życia człowieka, w tym na życie rodzinne. Spowodował on znaczące zmiany, w tym zmiany w zachowaniach rodzin. Badanie zmian w zachowaniach rodzinnych na przykładzie trzech relacji: mąż i żona, rodzice i dzieci, bracia i siostry, pozwoliło nam obiektywnie spojrzeć na zmiany, jakie zachodzą we współczesnych rodzinach w porównaniu z rodzinami tradycyjnymi. Każda zmiana nie oznacza całkowitego odejścia od poprzednich zachowań, nie jest też całkowicie zła, ale istnieją pozytywne zmiany, które musimy przeanalizować i stworzyć warunki, by dzisiejsze wietnamskie rodziny miały szansę odziedziczyć dobre wartości tradycyjnych zachowań rodzinnych i jednocześnie wykorzystać pozytywne wartości wynikające z procesu rozwoju społeczeństwa. Sytuacja taka przyczyni się do wszechstronnego rozwoju wietnamskich rodzin.

**Słowa kluczowe:** rodzina, kultura zachowań, tradycyjna rodzina, zmiana